Honorée Fanonne Jeffers
The author of The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois in conversation with Deesha Philyaw about her epic debut novel

Also in the issue: Courtney Cook, Diana López, and Yvonne Woon
Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, who appears on the cover of this issue, says she didn’t intend to write a novel that runs more than 800 pages. In a conversation on Page 14, the author of The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois (Harper/HarperCollins, July 27) tells writer Deesa Philyaw (The Secret Lives of Church Ladies) that she began with a tight focus on the narrator, Ailey Pearl Garfield, a young Black woman growing up in the 1970s and ’80s, not unlike the author herself. Then Ailey’s enslaved ancestors from 19th-century Georgia began appearing to Jeffers in dreams. Soon, a straightforward coming-of-age tale—“not super deep” Jeffers claims—had transformed into a sprawling multigenerational epic of Black family and legacy. “If this isn’t the Great American Novel,” says our starred review, “it’s a mighty attempt at achieving one.”

A big book can be as daunting for the author as it is for the reader. When Jeffers turned in the first draft to her editor at Harper, she was obsessed with finding things to cut. Her editor said no: “This is a magisterial epic,” she told Jeffers, “get into it.” Jeffers, a published poet accustomed to more compact forms, was reluctant. But glowing early reviews and feedback from readers changed her thinking: “There have been a few people who DM’d me, and they said, ‘Real talk—I was scared when I saw the length. But then after I finished, I didn’t want it to end. I was just so deep into this family, and this place, this world that you had created.’” That kind of response allayed many of Jeffers’ fears.

“She didn’t want it to end.” That special feeling—all too elusive but magical when it strikes—is one of the reasons readers crave long, immersive books. The gold standard, of course, is Tolstoy’s War and Peace; the translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky weighs in at 1,273 pages. That sort of doormat novel would keep a reader occupied and absorbed all through a long Russian winter. But contemporary readers are more likely to seek out lengthy, all-consuming reads for a summer vacation. After all, who wants to pack multiple books for a week at the beach? (Those of you who prefer e-readers—knock yourselves out.)

Hanya Yanagihara’s A Little Life (720 pages), winner of the Kirkus Prize for fiction, was just that sort of book for me when I flew from New York to Seattle in the summer of 2015. Not only did it keep me rapt—and horrified—on the long plane ride, it was a constant companion as I drove down the Oregon coast, camping at night along the way. Yes—I experienced Jude’s many trials and tribulations by flashlight in a tent, completely traumatized. Donna Tartt’s The Goldfinch served a similar function a couple of years before that; I know many readers who feel that the section with Boris in Las Vegas goes on too long. Not me. I was along for the ride with Theo, wherever and however long it took (771 pages, as it happens).

One of our most dependable producers of tomes is Jonathan Franzen. Though rather svelt by the standards of Jeffers, Yanagihara, and Tartt, his novels The Corrections (576 pages), Freedom (562 pages), and Purity (563 pages) satisfy the urge to lose oneself in a family’s complicated history across many years. An advance copy of the author’s upcoming novel, Crossroads, coming from Farrar, Straus and Giroux on Oct. 5, recently landed on my desk. At 580 pages it promises a deep dive into the various dramas of the Hildebrandts, a suburban Chicago family navigating the countercultural winds of the early 1970s. But Franzen one-ups himself here—this is just the first volume in a trilogy, A Key to All Mythologies, that will follow the Hildebrandts across five decades. I’m all in.
The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

2021 inaugural poet Amanda Gorman teams with illustrator Loren Long for a powerfully affirmative picture-book celebration of change. Read the review on p.102.

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A journalist and single mom unexpectedly connects with her ex-husband’s new wife and begins a duplicitous friendship.

Liz, a journalist in her late 40s, has built a pretty amazing life out of the ashes her husband created years ago when he left her for another woman. She’s moved on with her life, becoming the editor of a national newspaper column called “My Turn,” in which regular people share their touching and hilarious personal stories. She has a healthy social life, goes on lots of dates, and maintains a close relationship with her college student son. On the outside, everything looks great…but secretly, Liz’s life is a bit messy. She’s sleeping with her married boss, Seamus, despite the fact that she still can’t quite get over how her own husband betrayed her in a similar fashion. And then one day, she gets a “My Turn” submission from a familiar name—it’s Nicole Szabo, otherwise known as her ex’s current wife and the reason Liz’s family was torn apart. Without revealing her identity, Liz correspondes with Nicole, making editorial changes while also slyly finding out details about Nicole’s marriage (and even offering some advice). Liz knows that what she’s doing with Nicole and Seamus is wrong, and she tries to fix things by buying tons of self-help books with titles like Forgiveness Is a Gift You Give Yourself. But books alone can’t solve her problems, and Liz’s inability to open up to the people in her life makes her push everyone away—including friends, potential romantic prospects, and her son. When Liz reaches a breaking point, can she truly put the past behind her so she can focus on the life in front of her? Ashenburg writes candidly about a complex character who’s allowed to screw up in big ways. Liz is never shamed for wanting love, sex, or companionship, although she often goes about it the wrong way. None of the characters are written off as easy “bad guys,” not even Liz’s ex-husband or his new wife. Many of Liz’s misadventures on her journey are comically cringeworthy, such as a visit to a “cuddle party” or the dates with a poet who won’t stop talking about his bowels.

A look at betrayal and forgiveness that nicely balances humor and depth.
HOW TO WRESTLE A GIRL
Stories
Blackburn, Venita
MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux
(224 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-374-60279-6

Short stories—many linked—about the fraught and fiery rituals of girl- and womanhood.

Blackburn’s second collection—following Black Jesus and Other Superheroes (2017)—is divided into two parts. In the first, stories that largely clock in at a handful of pages give us lightning-quick glimpses of familial and romantic relationships. The opening story investigates the link between growing up female and social media attention (“Fam”). A struggling couple visit a dog trainer thinking that the key to their problems lies in improving their dogs’ behavior (“Thirteen Porcelain Schnauzers”). A biology teacher and her female student have their relationship scrutinized (“Biology Class”). In the book’s second part, a clear narrative emerges over the course of the stories, as a series of disasters, minor and major, befalls a high school protagonist in Southern California. Her father dies unexpectedly of sleep apnea (“Fat”); her elbow is crushed by an errant softball pitch (“Grief Log”). Her mother goes off the rails, having an affair with a local pastor (“Black Communion”) and subsequently attempting suicide (“Ambien and Brown Liquor”). The protagonist must deal with her broken family, her domineering older sister, and her burgeoning romantic feelings for her best friend, Esperanza. Ultimately, these are stories about the chaos of bodies, from menstruation to athletics, from sex to movie makeup. Rather than tell an overarching narrative, each story acts as a fragment of a wildly patterned mosaic, and through accumulation, patterns come clear, if not exactly a single picture. This structural inventiveness mirrors the formally inventive stories. There are tales structured as crossword puzzles (“In the Counselor’s Waiting Room With No Wi-Fi”), as quizzes (“Quiz”), and as instructions, as in the title story. With brash humor and
Robert Moses, the influential city planner of mid-20th-century New York, had a moment in the limelight last spring. As the pandemic began and we were invited into the homes of television talking heads, the one thing they all seemed to have in common was a copy of The Power Broker—Robert Caro’s tremendous Moses biography—on their bookshelves. After listening to The Power Broker on audio book last summer, I was recently thrilled to discover a novel about a man you could call the Robert Moses of the 19th century: Andrew Haswell Green, the protagonist of Jonathan Lee’s The Great Mistake (Knopf, June 15). Among other things, Green was instrumental in the creation of Central Park, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the New York Public Library, and he headed the committee that led to the incorporation of Brooklyn and Staten Island into New York City.

Not only was Green a genuinely important person, he had an operatic life—killed, at age 83, by a man who shot him in front of his own Park Avenue home. How could he have been forgotten? Lee has resurrected him in a historical novel with a twist: On the very first page, the narrator tells us a marble bench was dedicated to Green’s memory in Central Park and that it “can still be found overlooking the open greenery of Fort Fish.”

Historical novels are generally told from within the time period in which they’re set—even if, as in Wolf Hall, the prose has a contemporary feel—but Lee’s narrator is telling this story from the present day, though this seemingly throwaway line is one of the only places this fact asserts itself. With his elastic prose and eye for detail, Lee has written a captivating book, and the subtle reminders that it’s being framed with a 21st-century audience in mind add an extra level of interest. I felt like Lee was talking to me when he described Green’s walks through the city: “He loved the press of cold air against his face. The way it seemed to tighten the skin. Only the skyline upset him as he moved through the city. The showy mess of buildings of different heights which stood, he felt, in increasingly incoherent argument with one another.” “He would have hated the new sliver buildings!” I scrawled in the margin.

Lee isn’t the only writer taking the historical novel in interesting directions. In Light Perpetual (Scribner, May 18), Francis Spufford kills off five London children during a World War II bombing raid—and then brings them back to life, following them at 15-year intervals, like a literary Michael Apted, as they live out the lives they might have had. Spufford based his novel on the real-life bombing of a London Woolworth’s in 1944, thus managing to combine actual history, traditional fiction, and a touch of fantasy into an “entertaining and unconventional” novel, according to our starred review.

In The Final Revival of Opal & Nev (37 Ink, March 30), Dawnie Walton looks back at the life of a (fictional) Black rock singer in the early 1970s through the medium of an oral history being written in 2015. Journalist Sunny Shelton is no neutral observer: Her father was the drummer in Opal Jewel’s band—and he was having an affair with her—when he was killed by a racist mob during a concert. “Walton wields the oral history form with easy skill,” said our review, “using its suggestion of conversation and potential for humor to give her characters personality.” I’ve had several inconclusive discussions with fellow book people about whether stories set in the 1960s or ’70s count as historical novels, but I think they do, and I look forward to reading more of them in the years ahead.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
inventive energy, Blackburn sets her stories “on the edge of disorder” and sustains that tension throughout. Boldly styled and deeply original.

THE MANNINGTREE WITCHES
Blakemore, A.K.
Catapult (320 pp.)
$21.99 | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-64622-064-9

A young woman and her mother become targets of the witch hunts of 17th-century England.

Rebecca West and her mother are working to make ends meet as seamstresses in poverty-stricken Manningtree, England, a village filled with women who gossip, bicker, and attempt to care for their families as the men are away fighting in the country's numerous wars. Rebecca is quietly in love with the town clerk, John Edes, whom she meets with regularly to study Scripture and learn to read. But once Matthew Hopkins, a man who comes to be known as the Witchfinder, arrives, suspicion brews between neighbors, especially when a child is taken ill and Hopkins suspects witches are consorting with the devil. Rebecca, her mother, and numerous other village women are arrested and jailed for more than a year before their trials as Hopkins works to shore up witnesses, including John Edes, in Blakemore’s debut novel, her background as a poet is clear. The language is striking, full of distinctive insights regarding gender, truth, and religious devotion even as the narrative perspective shifts from Rebecca to Hopkins to varying townspeople. Rebecca’s voice as she narrates the fates of the women on trial for witchcraft is unapologetic and luminous, and her mother’s defiance and love for her daughter are fierce; as she tells Rebecca, “Witch is just their nasty word for anyone who makes things happen, who moves the story along.” The sections in which Hopkins contemplates his manipulative investigations are duller and slow the plot’s momentum, especially toward the end. Still, historical fiction has rarely felt so immediate.

An immersive story with striking prose.

DANTE’S INDIANA
Boyagoda, Randy
Biblioasis (224 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-77196-427-2

The second novel of a projected trilogy (after Original Prin, 2018) is a satire set behind the scenes of a Middle American theme park based on The Divine Comedy.

Prin, a Sri Lankan Canadian professor of English and a devout Catholic, finds himself in a personal purgatory: semi-estranged from wife and kids, semi-jobless. Hungry for money and purpose, he accepts an invitation to Terre-Haute, where he lectures handfuls of auditors at community centers and big-box stores on The Divine Comedy. Afterwards, Prin is recruited as a consultant for Dante’s Indiana, a Christian amusement park that’s the “retirement project” of a wealthy packaging-company owner named Charlie Tracker; he’s also enlisted as an informant by Charlie’s son, Hugh, who’s recently taken over the company. One of Prin’s innovations is to base the park’s central roller coaster on Geryon, the monster who in the Comedy is the very face of fraud. (His visage is that of an innocent man, but his body is part reptile and part hairy beast, with a scorpion’s stinging tail.) This goes horrendously awry after a young Black man coincidentally named Geryon is killed by an off-duty police officer. When an employee leaves the park project—they’ve recently partnered with an evangelical ministry that runs a Kentucky Bible park in which humans and dinosaurs frolic together, a literalism too far—she informs the press that the park’s centerpiece will be a black-faced homophonic monster from the jaws of hell, and protests begin. Meanwhile, another controversy brews; Hugh Tracker is trying to save his business by making blister packs for the opioid

“An imaginative dog’s-eye view of the human-canine connection...”

“Fegley has created a charmingly lovable character who combines human-level wisdom with canine instincts and amusing antics.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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painkillers that are ravaging the Midwest. The novel’s comedy can be overbroad or scattershot, but Boyagoda keeps things moving quickly and imaginatively. He skewers hosts of sinners along the way, but the wit has a winsome empathy behind it.

A rollicking, inventive, mostly successful satire—with a vein of seriousness and sadness underneath.

SPIRITS ABROAD
Stories
Cho, Zen
Small Beer Press (288 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-61873-186-9

A collection of speculative stories that play on Malaysian folklore and fantasy tropes with humor and compassion.

Split into three sections—Here, There, and Elsewhere—this expanded edition of Cho’s 2014 collection takes readers from present-day Malaysia to a boarding school in Britain to Earth thousands of years in the future, showcasing the author’s broad storytelling range. Stories in the first section, Here, are set primarily in Malaysia and explore themes as mundane as teenage love, intergenerational family tensions, and school pressures through the prism of the fantastical. The collection opens with “The First Witch of Damansara,” in which Vivian—a young Malaysian woman who has immigrated to a “modern Western country”—returns to Malaysia after the death of her grandmother, a witch whose powers Vivian has not inherited. When Vivian begins to receive visits from her grandmother in her dreams, she experiences a change of heart about the cultural traditions she had formerly disavowed. Other stories in this section similarly combine folklore with the mundane: A schoolgirl allows an enchanted koi fish to brutalize her in exchange for good grades in “The Fish Bowl,” while in “The House of Aunts,” a young vampire falls in love with a Muslim boy at school, much against the advice of the aunts who have raised her. While stories in the There section are set primarily in the U.K. and those in Elsewhere, in more otherworldly settings, both sections explore more fantastical terrains.
“Stories that serve as unvarnished, even fond, testaments to a tough, queer life.”

GORDO

Cortez, Jaime
Black Cat/Grove (208 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Aug. 17, 2021
978-0-8021-5808-6

The pudgy, queer kid at the heart of these stories must navigate the harsh but loving community of migrant farm workers in rural California in the mid-1970s. “I get picked on all the time for being fat, cuz I can’t throw a ball, for speaking English all wrong,” Gordo confesses in “Fandango,” in which he confronts the rare phenomenon of an apparent gringo coming to work at the garlic fields. It’s an indication of how baffling Gordo finds the adult world that he doesn’t understand that someone with red hair can be a Mexican named Juan Diego. The redhead encourages young Gordo to down some tequila at a boisterous Saturday night fandango that Gordo would prefer to observe, sitting on an upturned bucket just outside the circle of men who are drinking and listening to a Vicente Fernández record. “It tasted awful, but now everybody likes me,” Gordo says. “For once, all the guys like me!” That party ends in two brothers having a violent brawl, one of them rushed to the emergency room by some of the other men even though they’re furious at the brothers for fighting so intensely. In “Raymundo the Fag,” Raymundo is by now the most talented hairstylist in Watsonville, such a star that Olga, his colleague, urges him to move to San Francisco or even just Salinas, which is at least a bigger town than Watsonville. “Half the culeros in this town have harassed or beat me, when they weren’t trying to get into my pants,” Ray tells her. “But I’m still here and taking their money to make their wives and girlfriends look foxy. That’s home, Olga. I’m not going nowhere.” Raygay, as he was known by his bullies when young, is asked to make one of his middle school tormentors look good in death; one side of Shy Boy’s head is punctured by a bullet and only Ray can make the wig look stunning. These stories are elemental and unfussy, their emotional hearts affecting and memorable.

Stories that serve as unvarnished, even fond, testaments to a tough, queer life.
Brooks with Auntie Maryam, a former slave who escapes north via the Underground Railroad. Theo is present for many major events, like Illinois Rep. Abraham Lincoln’s Cooper Institute speech, and discusses everything she misses with her hypereru-dite relatives, who are as informed about politics and current events as any internet-era journalist could dream of being. The novel relies heavily on contemporaneous newspaper articles, scores of which are partially reprinted, quoted from memory, read aloud, or teased by newsboys shouting from street corners. And while these and other recitations of historical fact, about Tammany Hall, the Dred Scott case, the Hall Carbine Affair, and so much more, are unquestionably informative, characters who speak like Wikipedia entries don’t necessarily make for engaging fiction. Theo has the outlines of a truly memorable character, but it feels as if Corthron chose the comprehensiveness of a textbook—there is a 20-page bibliography—over a narrative that would catalyze an absorbing novel.

An ambitious, educational novel that tries to do too much.

SIEGE OF COMEDIANS
Daitch, Susan
Dzanc (336 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-950539-33-8

A century-spanning murder mystery that focuses more on the identities of the victims than the killers.

Iridia is a forensic sculptor in Brooklyn working for the Missing Persons bureau. Her job is to reconstruct the faces of unidentified skeletal remains in order to help identify them. The functionally orphaned child of two imprisoned, weed-growing anarchists, Iridia is used to a life of isolation, but when a seemingly innocuous cold case lands in her lap, she’s drawn into a conspiracy involving arson, murder, exotic animal smuggling, and, eventually, threats on her life. In a bid to disappear as permanently as the still anonymous owners of the skulls in her studio, Iridia winds up in Vienna, where she attempts to

“...Pearl manages to create two compelling characters in Samberg and My Hahn, atmospherically convey the social and political feel of Vietnam in 1990, and steadily ratchet up the tempo of the plot. The novel succeeds as both a time capsule and an absorbing love story.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“A historical novel with a heartwarming conclusion, Mission in Paris 1990 is about letting go of the past in order to forge a stronger, healthier future.”
—Foreword Reviews

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“An ancient Greek manuscript connects humanity’s past, present, and future.”

*CLOUD CUCKOO LAND*

An ancient Greek manuscript connects humanity’s past, present, and future. “Stranger, whoever you are, open this to learn what will amaze you” wrote Anto-nius Diogenes at the end of the first century C.E.—and millennia later, Pulitzer Prize winner Doerr is his fitting heir. Around Diogenes’ manuscript, “Cloud Cuckoo Land”—the author did exist, but the text is invented—Doerr builds a community of readers and nature lovers that transcends the boundaries of time and space. The protagonist of the original story is Aethon, a shepherd whose dream of escaping to a paradise in the sky leads to a wild series of adventures in the bodies of beast, fish, and fowl. Aethon’s story is first found by Anna in 15th-century Constantinople; though a failure as an apprentice seamstress, she’s learned ancient Greek from an elderly scholar. Omeir, a country boy of the same period, is rejected by the world for his cleft lip—but forms the deepest of connections with his beautiful oxen, Moonlight and Tree. In the 1950s, Zeno Ninis, a troubled ex-GI in Lakeport, Idaho, finds peace in working on a translation of Diogenes’ recently recovered manuscript. In 2020, 86-year-old Zeno helps a group of youngsters put the story on as a play at the Lakeport Public Library—unaware that an eco-terrorist is planting a bomb in the building during dress rehearsal. (This happens in the first pages of the book and continues ticking away throughout.) On a spaceship called the *Argo* bound for Beta Oph2 in Mission Year 65, a teenage girl named Konstance is sequestered in a sealed room with a computer named Sybil. How could she possibly encounter Zeno’s translation? This is just one of the many narrative miracles worked by the author as he brings a first-century story to its conclusion in 2146.

As the pieces of this magical literary puzzle snap together, a flicker of hope is sparked for our benighted world.
The world keeps supplying Eisler’s franchise heroes with real-life prototypes of serial child rapists.

Wealthy financier/predator Andrew Schrader was caught seven years ago importing young girls for sex to his South Carolina compound on an industrial scale. But his success in capturing so many high-level government types on video disporting themselves on the premises allowed him to grab a plea bargain to a single misdemeanor, with no jail time. Now that he’s moved to a Washington island and is back to his old tricks, assistant U.S. Attorney Alondra Diaz intends to drag him over the coals. She has the unstinting support of Seattle PD Detective Livia Lone, who has excellent reasons for going after men who prey on underage victims, and the logistical assistance of retired assassin John Rain, nonretired assassin Marvin Manus, the CIA’s Tom Kanezaki, and his helpers, tech whiz Maya and sniper Dox. It’s a formidable lineup, and it needs to be, because the same insiders who kept Schrader out of jail to save their own faces last time are even more firmly ensconced in the seats of power. U.S. Attorney General Uriah Hobbs, Director of National Intelligence Pierce Devereaux, and CIA director Lisa Rispel can command endless squads of tech-busters and hit men to keep Schrader from talking or activating the dead man’s switch that would release all those compromising videos posthumously. The heroes with the white hats would seem to be hopelessly outgunned and outspent—unless the forces arrayed against them should turn on each other.

Another high-fatality, high-spirited revenge fantasy in which most of the casualties don’t even have names.

Twelve pivotal months in the life of a Jewish and Catholic Mexican American family in West Los Angeles.

It’s 2016. Three-year-old twins miraculously survive drowning in the first scene, setting the tone of melodrama cut with comedy that Escandón maintains throughout her homage to Mexican telenovelas. Expect financial and medical catastrophes, marital discord, sexual passion, brand name dropping, and mouthwatering meals. At center are the Alvarados. Oscar’s ancestors became landowners in California while it was still part of Mexico; artist Keila’s Jewish parents escaped the Holocaust by fleeing to Mexico as children. Their heritages have merged into a seemingly idyllic marriage for almost 40 years. But recently, Oscar has retreated from involvement with his family, becoming obsessed with The Weather Channel instead. Frustrated and furious, Keila announces she wants a divorce, but the grown Alvarado daughters convince their parents to work on the marriage for one year. Meanwhile, all three daughters hide their own private problems and marital issues. Celebrity chef Claudia has a little stealing habit. Architect Olivia, who conceived her twins through in vitro fertilization, is fighting with her cartoonishly awful husband about the remaining embryos. Despite a husband in San Francisco, social media maven Patricia still lives with her parents along with the son who was conceived when she was raped at 14. As the Alvarados fight and unite repeatedly, the plot incorporates broader issues including climate change, gender politics, immigration, and a presidential election.

A warmhearted domestic drama with political undercurrents makes for fun reading.
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A conversation about writing and ancestral journeys with the author of *The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois*

BY DEESHA PHILYAW

Honorée Fanonne Jeffers was my first writing sister. I have many cherished Black women writer friends, but Honorée was the first to call me “sister.” And if you’ve ever had the pleasure of hearing Honorée’s honeyed voice, you know she bestows sister with all the love and care you could hope for. Honorée gave me my first fiction credit in a national publication when she guest-edited a special Black women’s issue of *PMS poemmemoirstory* in 2008. I don’t recall how I landed on her radar, but when she, a renowned poet, asked if I would send her a story, I leapt at the chance.

When my contributor copy of *PMS* arrived, I gawked at the contributor list. Honorée had published me among literary stars including Nikki Giovanni, Edwidge Danticat, and Honorée’s beloved mentor and friend, the poet Lucille Clifton.

As writers, as humans, we need someone to give us a chance, someone to claim us as family, to really see us. I’m continually struck by Honorée’s generosity toward fellow writers and her candor about her professional life, which has been no crystal stair, as Langston Hughes’ mama would say. But with grace and gratitude in the face of this past year’s successes, Honorée observes, “It’s only taken me 24 years of publishing to become an overnight sensation.”

As we awaited the publication of her first novel, *The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Harper/HarperCollins, July 27), I spoke with my dear sister about writing unapologetically Black feminist fiction and the ancestral journeys that brought her most recent works (including the National Book Award–longlisted poetry collection *The Age of Phillis*) to fruition. Our conversation, conducted over Zoom, has been edited for length and clarity.

*The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois* is an epic, in every sense of the word. It’s grand in scope, and it’s magnificent. Did you know at the outset that it would be a big novel, or did it evolve?

When I began the book—late 2011, early 2012—it was supposed to be a book about Ailey’s coming-of-age, and it was going to have some serious parts, like Lydia’s drug addiction. With Ailey, I knew that she was going to be a child of the 1970s and ’80s, close to my age. I really loved her personality; she has a take-no-prisoners view of life and this hardcore sense of humor. That was the initial tone of the book. To be honest, one of my favorite books is [Melissa Bank’s] *The Girls’ Guide to Hunting and Fishing*.

Around two years into writing the book, I started having these dreams about people who lived in the 19th century. I knew immediately they were Ailey’s ancestors. At first, I was trying to make them into stories. Then I said, maybe that’s another novel. And they just kept intruding in my head. That’s when I began to try to weave the two stories together. It was really messy, and I didn’t know where I was going. Toni Morrison said she never let her characters have a life of their own. I tried not to let my characters have a life of their own, but they do.
One of the things I love about your novel is that we get to see the interior lives of multiple generations of women, sometimes at odds with one another. Were there particular myths about women’s inner lives or about intergenerational dynamics that you wanted to dispel?

This is a Black feminist book, OK? I’m unashamed about that. I was very intentional about dispelling the myth that there’s such a thing as a universal woman. That doesn’t mean that women-identified individuals can’t share particular experiences. But I think that culture makes experiences very specific. Black and woman are a crossroads—what Kimberlé Crenshaw calls intersectionality.

In terms of the intergenerational dynamics, I’m really glad you noticed that. I grew up in a circle of women. I know so many other Black women that grew up in a circle of women, and that shapes us. One of the reasons that I love Belle so much is that she’s Ailey’s mother, and we see her from Ailey’s point of view. When you’re young, and you see your mom, you’re thinking she’s always been a mom. You can’t ever imagine her as a young girl, with her own dreams. You can’t understand the sort of sacrifices that she’s made. And it’s only when you get to be an older woman that you can look back and say, *Oh yeah, OK*. You can only really understand that when you have an intergenerational story.

The process of writing is, at its best, a process of discovery. What did you learn about yourself in writing your novel and in writing *The Age of Phillis*?

Both of these books are ancestral journeys. I realized—probably around 2016, I was about three years out from finishing *The Age of Phillis* and about four years out from finishing *Love Songs*—that this was going to be my life’s work, attending ancestral altars. When you study the history of Black folks in this country, there’s a lot of pain. That was frightening. When I finished editing *Love Songs*, in the middle of the pandemic, there was a joy that I felt that I never expected to feel. There was a joy in having told the stories of these people, even as terrible as some of these stories are, because there is joy in memory. There is joy in telling what hasn’t been told before.

We’re in the middle of this whole fracas, if you will, about critical race theory. Just about every day on social media, someone’s saying, “I’m tired of reading about slavery. I’m tired of slavery movies.” It’s one thing if you decide you don’t want to hear these stories anymore. But when somebody outside of your community says you cannot know these stories, your children cannot know these stories, you get your back up, you get defensive. I feel so immensely gratified seeing younger Black people—some of whom, even six months ago, would say, “I don’t want to hear about this. Why can’t we hear about Black joy?”—rallying around the stories of our ancestors.

I’m still thinking about process. When it comes to writing prose, do you outline?

[Laughs.]

Oh, gosh, well, that’s my answer. Do you have a daily writing routine?

I’m working on two new book projects. Whether I want to write daily or not, I have to. I say to my students, “The more you write, the more ideas come to you. It’s like a relationship.” I tell my students this, and they can’t—you know, they’re young folks. They laugh when I say “You’ve got to keep it fresh, like a relationship. You can’t just have a day or two and then disappear for six months. You’ve got to attend to the relationship, you’ve got to buy dinner.”

You’ve got to court your writing.

Exactly. And then, if I may, prayer is very much a part of my writing process. I always thank my Creator for giving me new words. What we have learned, particularly in this time, is that you never know the hour or the day. I want to be writing up until the moment I leave this Earth, the way that my mentor, Lucille Clifton, was writing up until she went into the hospital for the last time.

“You never know the hour or the day.” You took me back to church with that.

I’ve turned into an old Black church lady prematurely, you know?

*Deesha Philyaw is the author of* *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies*, *which won the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction and other prizes. The Love Songs of W.E.B Du Bois received a starred review in the May 15, 2021, issue.*

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**The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois**

A Novel

HONOREE FANONNE JEFFERS
A CALLING FOR CHARLIE BARNES
Ferris, Joshua
Little, Brown (352 pp.)
$22.49 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-31633-353-5

The near death of a would-be salesman, as told by his fabulist son.

“If my father was something of a joke, he was also a fucking colossus,” maintains our narrator, Jake Barnes, son of Charlie Barnes, a man once known as Steady Boy. By the time Ferris’ fourth novel opens in the fall of 2008, on the day Charlie receives a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, the man has seen a lot of great business ideas go down in flames. The flying toupee, the herbicide, the clown franchise, the art school—not even the investment firm for retirees has panned out for this one-time employee of Bear Stearns. Though his son Jake, a successful novelist who pals around with the McEwans in the Cotswolds, claims he “promised the old man to tell it straight this time, to stick to the facts for once,” the reader may have their doubts. And why? Well, among the mothers of Charlie’s several children are wives named Sue Starter, Barbara LeFurst, Charley Profitt, Barbara Ledoux, and Evangeline—though Barbara Ledoux claims the first Barbara was invented only to torture her, and as the layers of myth and embellishment are peeled away in successive sections labeled Farce, Fiction, and The Facts, we have less and less reason to doubt her. And what about this Jake Barnes? After a while we notice he’s told us very little about himself.

“You’ve known you were a writer since you read Hemingway,” says his dad. “It was Dostoyevsky…and I was twelve,” replies the possibly misnamed Jake Barnes. Ferris’ own award-winning debut, Then We Came to the End (2007), gets name-checked in the novel’s final section: “Then we came to the end of another dull and lurid book.” But that’s Jake talking, not Joshua, and DeLillo said it first in American, and anyway, he’s just kidding.

Good old-fashioned faux metafiction about death and family, full of panic and glee.

CROSSROADS
Franzen, Jonathan
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (592 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-374-18117-8

This first novel in an ambitious trilogy tracks a suburban Chicago family in a time of personal and societal turmoil.

It says a lot that, at almost 600 pages, Franzen’s latest novel leaves you wanting more. That it does so is also very good news: It’s the first in what promises to be a sprawling trilogy, continuing to the present day, which the author has titled A Key to All Mythologies in what is presumably a wink at its far-from-modest ambitions—yes, à la Middlemarch. That reference is classic Franzen, who imbues his books with big ideas, in this case about responsibility to family, self, God, country, and one’s fellow man, among other matters, all the while digging deep into his characters’ emotions, experiences, desires, and doubts in a way that will please readers seeking to connect to books heart-first. Here, the story follows two generations of the Hildebrandt family, headed by Russ, the associate pastor of a church in the fictional town of New Prospect, Illinois, who, when we first meet him in the lead-up to Christmas 1971, is nursing a crush on a recently widowed parishioner and a grudge against the groovily charismatic leader of the church’s popular youth group, Crossroads, in which three of Russ’ four children are variously involved. Russ’ wife, Marion, who has gained weight over the years and lost her pre-maternal intensity and with it her husband’s sexual interest, is nursing a few secret preoccupations of her own, as are the couple’s three oldest children, Clem, Becky, and Perry. Each of the five characters, among whose perspectives Franzen adroitly toggles, is struggling with matters of morality and integrity, privilege and

“An intriguing portrait of a smart man tucked inside a well-crafted thriller.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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purpose, driven in part by the dueling desires for independence and connection. Their internal battles—to fight in an unjust war or unjustly let others fight in your stead, to fight their way out of a marriage or fight to stay in it, to fight for sanity or surrender to madness, to fight to define themselves and determine their paths or to cede that control to others, to name a few—are set against the backdrop of an era in which “love” is everywhere but empathy is in short supply, where hugs are liberally dispensed but real connection’s harder to come by.

Franzen’s intensely absorbing novel is amusing, excruciating, and at times unexpectedly uplifting—in a word, exquisite.

**WHAT ISN’T REMEMBERED**

*Stories*

Gorcheva-Newberry, Kristina

Univ. of Nebraska (276 pp.)

$19.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2021

978-1-4962-2913-7

A collection of short, melancholy stories focusing on Russian immigrants to the United States.

The short stories in this debut collection chronicle the lives of characters beset by persistent regrets and dissatisfaction.

Most of the central figures are Russian, and many have immigrated or are considering immigrating to the United States. Gorcheva-Newberry, herself a Russian émigré, displays a keen understanding of her home country’s cultural particularities in some of her collection’s finest stories: In “Heroes of Our Time,” a teenage boy ventures into Moscow in the spring of 1991 to attempt to recruit a sex worker on behalf of his ailing grandfather only to accidentally find himself entangled with a militant pro-aristocracy group. In “Boys on the Moskva River,” the narrator remembers the life and violent death of his brother, Konstantin, whom their mother preferred and who was involved with organized crime. Gorcheva-Newberry’s prose is clear and can quickly cut to the marrow of a complex emotional experience: In “The Suicide Note,” a Russian immigrant reflects, “I thought how hard it was to make someone laugh in a foreign language. And if you couldn’t laugh together, how could you live together? In that sense America remained a mystery to me.” For all its strengths, however, this collection is a frustrating experience. Gorcheva-Newberry’s skills as a prose stylist do not extend to dialogue, and many of her characters state their feelings in an unrealistically straightforward way.

The collection’s weakest stories lack the cultural and psychological specificity of its strongest and detract from the reading experience. Gorcheva-Newberry’s prose is clear and can quickly cut to the marrow of a complex emotional experience: In “The Suicide Note,” a Russian immigrant reflects, “I thought how hard it was to make someone laugh in a foreign language. And if you couldn’t laugh together, how could you live together? In that sense America remained a mystery to me.” For all its strengths, however, this collection is a frustrating experience. Gorcheva-Newberry’s skills as a prose stylist do not extend to dialogue, and many of her characters state their feelings in an unrealistically straightforward way.

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A mixed effort with some real high points.

**THE GUIDE**

*Heller, Peter*

Knopf (272 pp.)

$26.99 | Aug. 24, 2021

978-0-525-65776-7

A fishing adventure turns dark as night.

Fisherman’s noir isn’t a genre, but maybe it should be. The high-end Colorado resort at the heart of this soulful mystery offers some of the best angling in the country, with waters seemingly carved out of Eden. It’s a nice getaway from the persistent strains of Covid-19. But something’s not right. The neighbor upstream likes to shoot at visitors who get too close to his property. Guests disappear for stretches at a time and return acting as if they’ve survived a horrific trauma. And the manager seems to have a fast-and-loose relationship with the truth. The new guide, a grief-stricken 25-year-old named Jack, happens to be a keen observer with an
“A new heavenly body sends the lives of a handful of Norwegians off-kilter.”

**THE MORNING STAR**

eye for the out of the ordinary. He also happens to be falling in love with Alison K., the famous but effortlessly earthy singer he's been assigned to guide through a week of good fishing. This is an unconventional mystery, an unconventional romance, and an unconventional adventure, creepy and spiritual in equal measure. Jack has a thing for eighth-century Chinese poetry. He describes one of his favorite poets as “an aficionado of loss and also of nature, which Jack could relate to.” Jack has lost both his mother and his best friend, and he blames himself for both deaths. He escapes through reading and fishing. But this is no escape, unless you’re the reader. The author clearly knows his way around a river; the long, descriptive passages create a vivid sense of place and action even if they may puzzle those of us who don’t know a mayfly from a riffle. By the time Jack and Alison encounter a young woman running down the road in a hospital gown in a scene right out of the sinister noir *Kiss Me Deadly*, they’re in too deep, and they’re too curious, to quit the dangerous puzzle before them. You might feel the same. There’s danger at the end of the line in this unconventional mystery.

**ISLAND**

Jacobsen, Siri Ransø Hjelm

Trans. by Waight, Caroline

Pushkin Press (160 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Sep. 7, 2021

A young woman searches for home on a remote island.

Making her literary debut, Jacobsen, a third-generation Faroese-Dane, fashions a spare, lyrical novel, translated by Waight, tracing the fortunes and migrations of a Faroese family: some who spent their lives on the islands, others—like the narrator’s grandparents—who immigrated to Denmark. “Who were we?” asks the narrator. “The Faroese, those who stayed, and us, the blood guests, biological seeds sown by migrants?” On visits to the islands with her parents, the narrator teases out the family's tangled history and her own ancestry. “In old photographs,” she observes, “eyes are always bright. Hands are meticulously placed,” but real life is messy: marred by failed dreams, mysterious disappearances, and secret longings. Jacobsen’s finely wrought cast of characters includes the narrator’s grandfather Fritz, whose dream of becoming an electrical engineer was thwarted for lack of money; her grandmother Marita, a spirited woman who followed Fritz to Denmark bearing a secret; her imperious—and wealthy—great-aunt Ingrún; and her grandfather’s brother, Ragnar, the island’s sole communist. War swirls in the background as Germans occupy Denmark and the British and then Danes occupy the Faroes. Even during the Cold War, the islands’ strategic location made it a site of intrigue: Informants swarmed, including the CIA. Home, exile, and belonging are overarching themes as the narrator considers the effects of migration over three generations: “Assimilation,” she reflects, “is a methodical loss of memory.” The first generation of immigrants, she realizes, feels inexorably compelled to seek a larger world; the next generation “maybe straddles the gap, until something cracks, and becomes doubly bad, non-lingual, doubly alone. Or it grinds twice as hard, expands the business, buys the carport, gets the medical degree.” The third generation, though, to which the narrator and Jacobsen belong, “carries the crossing within it like a loss.”

A sensitive meditation on belonging.

**THE CRIMSON WRATH**

Legacy of the Hood

J. Griffin Hughes

ISBN: 979-8680660485

“This volume chronicles the fictional history of a superhero and the motley individuals who have donned the red hood.”

“The author’s engrossing book comprises four previously released novellas.”

“An enthralling crime-fighting saga that focuses on the people behind the mask.” —Kirkus Reviews

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**THE MORNING STAR**

Knausgaard, Karl Ove

Trans. by Aitken, Martin

Penguin Press (688 pp.)

$30.00 | Sep. 28, 2021

A new heavenly body sends the lives of a handful of Norwegians off-kilter.

Nobody’s sure what to make of the emergence of a new bright light in the sky. A star? A sign of a miracle? A distant
supernova? Regardless, Knausgaard’s cast of characters soon faces domestic disruptions to match the astral one. A man despairs of helping his wife, so racked with madness she’s seemingly torn the head off a cat. A pastor presides over the funeral of a reclusive man who bears an uncanny resemblance to one she’s recently met. Members of a death-metal band are found massacred; a boorish, arrogant journalist tries to cover the story while his wife, a caretaker in a prison, tries to locate an escapee. A nurse starts helping with an autopsy only to discover the corpse isn’t dead. Knausgaard circulates through these characters and a handful more, not to connect them plotwise so much as to achieve a symphonic effect: Everybody is experiencing a sense of both fear and wonder, though some are better at dealing with those emotions than others. Each character is rendered with a detail-rich but cool, plainspoken register that’s Knausgaard’s trademark. And, much as he did in the final volume of his autofiction epic, *My Struggle*, he concludes with a philosophical longueur, here a contemplation about how myth, religion, and folklore address a porous boundary between life and death. (The abundance of religious references throughout the book, from Bible quotes to tree of knowledge references, sets the table for that somewhat.) For Knausgaard fans, this mix of pointillistic domestic drama and New Age woo-woo will feel familiar, though the lack of a strong narrative arc feels more ungainly in an explicitly fictional setting.

A sui generis metaphysical yarn, engrossing in its particulars if broadly rambling.

**LITANI**

Lourey, Jess

Thomas & Mercer (293 pp.)

$15.95 paper | Oct. 19, 2021

978-1-5420-2701-4

Lourey serves up another terrifying reality-based thriller.

When Frankie Jubilee’s parents divorced, she stayed in California with her botanist father while her mother, Linda, returned to their hometown in Minnesota, where Frankie made only one brief, disastrous visit before her father died. At 14 she returns to Litani to live with Linda, a prosecutor, and is dropped into the poisonous atmosphere created by the town children, who play something they call The Game. Her mother, deeply involved with crime and criminals, pushes her out the door to go make some friends, telling her not to leave the nearby playground (what 14-year-olds go to the playground?!) or talk to any adults. Frankie’s attracted to the woods, though, where she spent many happy hours with her father and became a plant expert herself, until she’s set upon by three tough little girls who beat her up and take her shoes while taunting her about The Game. They’re about to steal her most precious possession, a book of her drawings of plants with faces, when she’s rescued by Crane, an older teen who becomes her friend. Frankie slowly discovers that her mother is working to take down a ring of pedophiles preying on local children, an organization at least partially based in the trailer park where Crane lives. At the same time, Frankie begins to learn about her parents’ pasts, especially that of her father, who forever blamed himself for the drowning of his younger brother. With only a stray kitten to comfort her, she does her best to investigate past and present crimes while trying to escape becoming a victim of The Game.

Several real-life cases provide the impetus for a tale of horror, grit, and, ultimately, hope.

“Swire does an excellent job of sustaining readers’ interest in both sides of this trans-Atlantic tale. She particularly excels at small character details that make the players feel genuine...”

—Kirkus Reviews

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“A storm, a stroke, a death—this Antarctic expedition leaves a traumatic aftermath.”

LEAN FALL STAND

TENDERNESS
MacLeod, Alison
Bloomsbury (624 pp.)
$24.49  |  Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-63557-610-8

D.H. Lawrence, Jackie Kennedy, J. Edgar Hoover, Lionel Trilling, Lady Constance Chatterley, and a host of others meet in an inspired fusion of fact and fiction.

To appreciate the delights of MacLeod’s masterful novel, which takes its title from the original title of Lady Chatterley’s Lover, one must have the patience to let it emerge from some dubious decisions about where to begin and how to unfold. These miscalculations recede as the full measure of the book becomes clear, about halfway through its more than 600 pages; MacLeod’s material might have provided another author with several novels, a few stories, and an essay or two. One plotline—“The Exile”—unfolds in Lawrence’s time, exploring the “ever-expanding ‘club’ of the aggrieved” he created by modeling his characters on life. Another—“The Subversive”—tracks Jackie Kennedy in the run-up to the 1960 election. A fictional FBI agent photographs Jackie at the New York obscenity trial over Chatterley; he becomes entangled in Hoover’s plot to take down JFK while she meets Lionel Trilling to discuss the book. A third plotline covers the British obscenity trial in 1960; this section includes some lively fourth-wall-breaking and manages to nearly morph into a page-turner. But how closely is it based on the transcripts? Again and again, one feels eager to know where fact meets fiction—did the novelist Barbara Wall really write this wonderful, long letter to the defense attorney?—but the author is not inclined to tell us. “I have included letters and documents that have been faithfully reproduced; other such items have been invented, condensed, added to or modified for clarity,” she writes at the end of the book. If you want more, she continues, go back to the original sources. Call us lazy, but we might prefer more detailed notes. Nevertheless, there is much to enjoy here. At a time when sex is so often linked with exploitation and abuse, Lawrence’s central equation between physical passion and profound emotional connection is moving and nearly exotic. MacLeod’s interpretation of this gospel includes a lovely Lawrentian scene of sex in a library and a thought, attributed to Jackie Kennedy, about the power derived from sex: “the secret act of beholding the public, daily person—the lover, sanctioned or illicit—transformed in one’s presence into a private, raw spirit.”

Seriously brilliant, seriously flawed, ambitious, and delicious.

LEAN FALL STAND
McGregor, Jon
Catapult (288 pp.)
$26.00  |  Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-64622-099-1

A storm, a stroke, a death—this Antarctic expedition leaves a traumatic aftermath.

Robert “Doc” Wright, a 33-year veteran of Antarctic expeditions, couldn’t have picked a worse time and place to have a stroke. Not only is he at a remote research station in Antarctica—“the nearest humans are about three hundred miles away. And they’re Russian”—he and his two inexperienced teammates are outside, far from shelter, and physically separate from one another when the storm begins. Why? Because one of the researchers wants to take some pictures, and they’ve separated in order to get the right shots: “Without someone in the frame there was no way to capture the scale of this place.” Confused, debilitated, embarrassed to call for help and admit that he’s let such a dangerous situation arise, Doc finds himself ultimately unable to save the life of one of the young researchers for whom he’s responsible. Another writer might have kept us in Antarctica, in the storm, sitting with these slender humans as they shiver and grimace against the enormity of nature. But not McGregor. In
previous books like *Reservoir 13* (2017) and *The Reservoir Tapes* (2018), McGregor has shown himself less interested in the immediate participants of tragedy than in the ripples such tragedies sew across the communities in which they transpire. Here, though McGregor relates much of the gripping event in question, he ultimately leaves Antarctica behind, turning his attention to Doc's wife, Anna, a climate change researcher who has long since tired of her husband's passion for the Antarctic and the annual absences that come with it. With Robert incapacitated by his stroke, Anna is suddenly thrust into the role of reluctant caregiver, helping him stand up, helping him dress himself, and ultimately trying to help him tell the story—to himself and to her—of what exactly happened down there, in Antarctica, in the blowing snow. Though its ending is only moderately successful (for some readers it may feel a bit too neat), this is nonetheless a quiet, beautiful novel that’s at once deeply sad and wryly funny.

Lyrical and terse, funny and tragic—a marvelous addition to the McGregor canon.

**THE BODY SCOUT**

*Michel, Lincoln*

Orbit (304 pp.)

$27.00 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-0-316-62872-3

In a future where body hackers and bio-genetic juicers are at cross purposes, a brother mourning his baseball-playing sibling tries to even the odds.

Take the real-life biohacking aesthetics in self-described “future-y reporter” Kara Platoni’s *We Have the Technology* (2015) and the plethora of books about the gene-editing technology known as CRISPR (an acronym for extreme gene-modification technologies too complicated to explain in short order) and apply them to a weird and hopefully not prescient techno-thriller and you have a cocktail that’s one part William Gibson, one part Cory Doctorow, and a dash of generic but propulsive future noir. Our narrator, Kobo, is pretty much a bionic man with implants, new organs, and lots of cybernetic upgrades, none of which mean that much for his job as a scout for whatever Major League Baseball has morphed into. Living in the shadow of his adopted brother, JJ Zunz, the superjuiced star slugger for the “Monsanto Mets,” Kobo is doing his best. “Baseball was a nasty business,” he admits. “I told myself all the usual things. How it would be some other asshole doing the job if it wasn’t me.” When his brother dies on the field of some mysterious engineered illness, Kobo turns detective, diving into the dark ends of this future landscape to find a little truth. Like most cyberpunk that evolved over the last decades, it’s weird and sometimes gross and endlessly fascinating. In Michel’s version of the future, Neanderthals have been resurrected, cloning is routine, and playing a private dick gains all kinds of unwanted attention for Kobo, not least from Dereck T. Mouth, the malevolent owner of the Mets. Did we mention that Kobo owes millions in debt for his miraculous modifications to his medical-loan company, which badly wants its money back? It’s a dizzying world but catnip for cyberpunk fans. How do you navigate a world in which everyone is altered? In this scenario, everyone and everything might be Chekhov’s gun. Everybody duck.

A fun-to-read addition to the cyberpunk canon.

**THE SPIRES**

*Moretti, Kate*

Thomas & Mercer (333 pp.)

$15.95 paper | Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-5420-2171-5

A grim trauma from 20 years ago returns in the person of an old friend who survived it to wreak vengeance on a strong heroine who turns out to be surprisingly vulnerable.

Penelope Ritter Cox used to have it all—congenial job, successful husband, perfect children,
established New Jersey home—but her yield went down to maybe 70% when Brett Cox’s insurance firm went bankrupt and he lost his job. Now things are getting worse on a daily basis. The slide begins the day Willamina Blaine turns up uninvited on Penelope’s doorstep, pleading for Pip (a nickname Penelope loathes) to take her in because she’s fled her abusive husband, Trent, and has nowhere else to go. Penelope hasn’t seen Willa since their gap year after graduating from the University of Pennsylvania, which they spent sharing a disused church with charming, abrasive Jack Avila, asexual virgin Bree Haren, and Bree’s male friend Flynn Lockhart. The year ended badly when a fire in Church House claimed the life of one of its tenants, an incident Penelope secretly has good reason to feel guilty about. Once she’s grudgingly allowed Willa into her house, her old buddy wastes no time in poking around among her belongings, wearing her jewelry, encouraging Penelope’s children to confide in her, and seducing Jaime Heller, the widowed neighbor and friend Penelope’s developed a crush on. Moretti, who’s plowed this territory before, amps up the betrayals inch by inch until you’re wondering if things can possibly get worse. They absolutely can, and not just because of that anticlimactic secret Moretti reveals in a carefully calibrated series of flashbacks.

Reliable suburban creepiness for some night when you already can’t sleep.

**DOG PARK**

Oksanen, Sofi

Trans. by Witesman, Owen F.

Knopf (368 pp.)

$27.95 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-0-525-65947-1

A Ukrainian woman strives to rise to the top of the international fertility racket but miscalculates how close she can skirt criminality without becoming either a target or a criminal herself.

We first see Olenka, the narrator, in 2016 in a Helsinki dog park, where she’s observing a certain young family. The timeline pleats and folds in on itself according to Olenka’s memories and fears. Olenka is from Snizhne, a polluted town in eastern Ukraine, where most inhabitants earn a subsistence living. Many work in illegal, unregulated coal mines known as kopankas, where accidents run rampant, which is ostensibly how her beloved father died. Olenka and her widowed mother were reduced from relatively comfortable circumstances to living with relatives engaged in the lower echelons of opium farming. Now, Daria, a former colleague, has joined Olenka in Helsinki, much to Olenka’s chagrin. The two were involved in an outwardly legitimate, extremely profitable fertility institute which furnished egg donors and surrogates to the exacting specifications of wealthy clients—including the dog park family. Both women—whose fathers were friends in Snizhne days—saw fertility work as their main chance to escape poverty. Olenka is in Finland under an assumed name, and Daria’s arrival poses a threat: If Olenka’s whereabouts were known, she would be in mortal danger, even from the man she loves, whom she addresses as “you” in incessant mental conversations. The thriller aspect sneaks up on the reader as information is tortuously eked out about Olenka’s at-first unwitting ties to a clan of ruthless oligarchs. Oksanen subtly but viscerally depicts jeopardy and romance without resorting to graphic descriptions. As suspense mounts, occasionally at the expense of coherence, we learn much about the precarious state of post-Soviet Ukraine and its chaotic economy, in which gangsterism rules, violence is celebrated, and exploitation of women is big business.

A dystopian novel that seems all too real.
A boy who hears objects talking and his mother, who can’t stop hoarding things, work out their destinies in a meditative tribute to books, libraries, and Zen wisdom.

Everything starts going awry for Benny Oh the year he turns 12, “the same year his father died and his mother started putting on weight.” It’s not just pounds that Annabelle adds; she obsessively accumulates things—kitchenware, snow globes, it doesn’t really matter what—to fill the void left by her husband’s death. Meanwhile, the voices Benny hears in everything from coffee cups to windowpanes become so insistent that he unwisely reveals his unwelcome ability at school and winds up in a pediatric psychiatry ward. There he meets a girl called The Aleph, whose enigmatic notes lead him post-hospital to the local library and a quest for meaning directed by The Aleph and a homeless hobo who was “a super famous poet back in Slovenia.” As she did in A Tale for the Time Being (2013), Ozeki counterpoints faultless contemporary teenspeak with an adult third-person voice—in this case, intriguingly, the voice of Benny’s Book. “You do your job, and I’ll do mine,” Benny tells the Book, and their interaction drives the story. The Book connects Annabelle’s hoarding to the looming ecological catastrophe slowly being triggered by human beings’ carelessness and waste; the voices Benny hears, it suggests, are calls to recognize our kinship with the other beings on our planet. Annabelle is getting a similar message from a book that jumps into her shopping cart: Tidy Magic, “written by a real Zen monk.” Ozeki’s insertion of Zen teachings into the narrative is slightly contrived, but she underscores the urgency of her spiritual message by ratcheting up the physical-world tension for her characters, as Annabelle’s stockpiling puts her at risk of being evicted from her home and having Benny placed in foster care. Benny’s final assertion of agency provides a moving, albeit hasty, wrap-up for a novel that staggers somewhat under the weight of everything the author wants to say.

Overstuffed, but serious readers will appreciate Ozeki’s passionate engagement with important ideas.
just glance off each other like two molecules in a heated system. They would stick.” As he tracks that time, Passaro crafts a novel that’s very Manhattan in its particulars, with fine-grained descriptions of the World Trade Center and people lining up to buy the Village Voice to get a jump on apartment listings. But he’s also big-theme hunting, exploring the ways money shapes character, how sex binds or wrecks relationships, and how we endure and survive grief. (The mention of the twin towers on Page 1 all but sounds an airhorn to let us know that theme is surely coming.) Passaro writes exquisitely at every turn, narrating with an engaging worldly-wise tone. But the novel is also curiously centerless; its leads march through sexual abuse, breakups, bad jobs, and even 9/11 so implacably that the novel feels less about human beings than victims (or beneficiaries) of fickle fate. The novel’s epic sweep is ambitious, but the emotional intensity of the characters gets somewhat smothered amid it.

Passaro’s widescreen storytelling strives to cover everything, almost to a fault.

**IN THE FIELD**

*Pastan, Rachel*

Delphinium (240 pp.)

$22.95 | Aug. 10, 2021

978-1-953002-03-7

A female geneticist makes her way through the scientific world of the mid-20th century.

Even before her first brush with cytogenetics in college, Kate has always known she was different—alienated by her appearance-focused mother and sister; “stifled and out of place” in the small Brooklyn house where she’d grown up. Shaped by the memory of her father, a physician who’d died in World War II when she was a child, Kate has “always been interested in where things came from and how they worked...in what was going on under the rubbery skin of the visible world.” But it’s only when Kate takes an introductory biology course at Cornell that her lifelong preoccupation with genetics begins to blossom. As a research assistant in the school’s greenhouses, Kate is taught to study the inherited characteristics of hybrid plant crosses; while there, she meets mellow-natured John Thatcher, a fellow RA who becomes a collaborator and lifelong friend. As the two progress first through Cornell’s botany Ph.D. program and then the bureaucratic labyrinth of research academia, Kate must learn to carve her way through the male-dominated scientific world—pursuing her own experiments without external support; fending off romantic advances from colleagues; contending with theft of her discoveries. In a career that takes Kate from Cornell to the prestigious Cold Spring Harbor laboratory to, eventually, the Nobel Prize for her discovery of genetic transposition at the apex of her career—showing that DNA sequences can change their positions in a genome, creating or reversing genetic mutations—Kate learns that a life of the mind is not always compatible with romantic relationships or even comprehensible to the people around her, even those she loves most. This novel, whose protagonist is modeled after Barbara McClintock, the first and only woman to win the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine alone, offers a compelling journey through the frustrating, stymied, yet often fascinating world of scientific innovation. Kate is a satisfying character to root for—stubborn, tender, and occasionally myopic—though some supporting characters are underdeveloped or slot into predictable subplots. Still, Pastan’s ability to display the distinctly human side of scientific discovery—its many pitfalls, thrills, and missteps—keeps the novel’s heart alive.

Engaging and heartfelt.
“A touching novel that offers a vital message with uncommon sympathy and intelligence.”

BEWILDERMENT
Powers, Richard
Norton (288 pp.)
$22.49 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-393-88114-1

A widower pursues an unusual form of neurological therapy for his son in this affecting story.

Astrobiologist Theo Byrne, 45, looks for life in outer space while his 9-year-old son, Robin, seeks to protect endangered animals on Earth. Both are still grieving for the boy’s mother, Alyssa, an animal rights activist who died in a car accident two years ago as she swerved to avoid hitting an opossum. Since then, Robin has been subject to tantrums and violence and variously diagnosed with Asperger’s, OCD, and ADHD. Theo has resisted medication and turns to a university colleague who is experimenting with a neurological therapy. Powers has followed his award-winning, bestselling *The Overstory* (2018), a busy eco-epic featuring nine main characters, with this taut ecological parable borne by a small cast. It’s a darker tale, starting with an author’s note about *Flowers for Algernon* and continuing through Robin’s emotional maelstrom, Theo’s parental terrors, and, not far in the background, environmental and political challenges under a Trump-like president. Yet there are also shared moments of wonder and joy for a father and son attuned to science and nature and each other, as well as flashbacks that make Alyssa a vibrant presence. The empathy that holds this nuclear family together also informs Robin’s ceaseless concern and efforts on behalf of threatened species, just as the absence of empathy fuels the threat. As always, there’s a danger of preachiness in such stories. Powers generally avoids it by nurturing empathy for Robin. While the boy’s obsession with the fate of the planet’s nonhuman life can seem like religious fervor, it has none of the cant or self-interest. He is himself a rare and endangered species.

A touching novel that offers a vital message with uncommon sympathy and intelligence.

THE GREAT GLORIOUS GODDAMN OF IT ALL
Ritter, Josh
Hanover Square Press (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-355-52253-5

Irascible Weldon Applegate, 99 years old “but still I was in my prime,” relives his tumultuous days as an orphan among hard-bitten lumberjacks in this free-wheeling folktale by singer/songwriter Ritter.

The novel is set in the Idaho town of Cordelia, where Weldon’s widowed father, part of a famous family of “jacks,” came to run a general store and raise his son. Ignoring the Witch, a Finnish fortuneteller who says he’ll die if he returns to jacking, he meets his maker in the form of “two hundred feet of white pine in [his] face.” Inheriting the Lost Lot, a treacherous stretch of forest that Weldon’s grandfather won in a card game, the 13-year-old boy becomes a thorn in the side of 7-foot terror Linden Laughlin, who wants it for himself. Though Laughlin is known as “the best jack that had ever lived,” his co-workers have a way of dying in suspicious accidents. Will young Weldon be next? Spanning Prohibition, the Great Depression, World War II, and the dreaded modern world of flat-screen TVs, Ritter’s follow-up to *Bright’s Passage* (2011) is a scenic, phrase-spinning account that delights in detailing the perilous life of a lumberjack—the difficulty, for example, of getting gigantic trees to fall right and the daunting odds against transporting these “monster logs” to the river bank via a rickety chute. Even accepting the exaggerated reality of a yarn like this, it’s not always easy to believe a 13-year-old could do and say the things Weldon does. And a framing story involving a calculating frenzy of the aged protagonist bogs down. But like the song without an ending that one character after another can’t get out of their head, the novel has its own infectious quality.

In the broad shadow of Johnny Appleseed, this lumberjack’s adventures captivate.
HER PERFECT LIFE
Ryan, Hank Phillippi
Forge Books (336 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-250-25888-5

A successful TV journalist and doting mom fights threats from the past and in the present in this fleet mystery.
Lily Atwood seems to have it all—a thriving career as a crusading TV reporter, a throng of Emmys, a darling little daughter, and an adoring fan base that has dubbed her #PerfectLily. But Lily has secrets, the most haunting among them the disappearance of her sister when Cassie was a college freshman and Lily just 7 years old. Cassie vanished in the aftermath of a fire on her college campus that injured one of her professors and might have resulted in another student’s death. After an intensive search, law enforcement interest in Cassie dwindled, but Lily never believed her sister was dead. Despite her reporting skills, she hasn’t been able to find a trace of Cassie—until an anonymous source who’s given her several legitimate tips about unrelated stories drops a bomb. The source claims he (or she; Lily isn’t sure about the voice) knows Cassie is alive and where to find her. Lily’s producer, a workaholic woman named Greer Whitfield, is soon in on the secret thanks to Walt Banning, a detective who seems to know a lot about the cold case. Lily is torn between wanting to find her sister and wanting to protect her own flawless public persona—if Cassie has stayed in hiding for so long, perhaps there’s a very unpleasant reason. Lily is also reflexively protective of Rowen, her 7-year-old daughter and the center of her life. And there’s another secret connected to Rowen—the girl has never met her father, and Lily wants to keep it that way. Ryan deftly switches points of view among Lily, Greer, and, in chapters set just before her disappearance, Cassie, keeping the reader guessing about characters’ identities and different versions of events as the tension mounts.
A well-crafted plot and strong female characters drive a satisfying psychological thriller.

THE LAST CHANCE LIBRARY
Sampson, Freya
Berkley (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Aug. 31, 2021
978-0-593-20137-4

Eight years after her mother passed away, a young Englishwoman who’s been living comfortably in the small routines of her solo life faces the closure of her beloved local library.
Without her realizing it, 28-year-old June Jones has spent almost a decade of her life without changing. She works as a library assistant in the tiny village of Chalcot, lives amid the ornaments and books and mismatched furniture in the house where she grew up, and spends her evenings and weekends with her old friends—that is, books. June is quiet, shy, and happy. She delights in helping the patrons who spend their days with her: Jackson Fletcher, the home-schooled 8-year-old eagerly seeking new books to read; Stanley Phelps, the dapper, tweed-suited elderly man who spends his days in the library; Vera Cox, the constantly complaining 80-year-old; Chantal, the teenager seeking a quiet space to do her school work; and others. The library is the heart of the community and the heart of June’s days and, indeed, her life since she began going there with her mother when she was young. But the council is making cuts, and six libraries are up for closure. The regulars, and the community as a whole, band together to try to save the library. Among them is Alex Chen, a kind, bookish solicitor from London who’s returned to work at his family’s takeaway as his father heals from hip surgery, and who befriends June. Author Sampson has created a gem of a book populated by vivid personalities and a story that weaves together heroes and villains, love and loss, mourning and growth as it follows June and the Chalcot
community as they seek to save their library—which offers so much more than books. A delightful exploration of personal growth, inner strength, and the importance of family, friends, and love.

**LASERWRITER II**

*Shopsin, Tamara*

MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (224 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-0-374-60257-4

Dispatches from Mac world.

In the 1990s, before the Genius Bar, even before Apple stores, there was Tekserve, a repair shop for Mac computers and printers, the brainchild of David Lerner and Dick Demenus, who had started their tech careers in the 1980s and found they loved fixing Macs. Illustrator, memoirist, and graphic designer Shopsin makes her fiction debut with a delightfully wry tale set at Tekserve and featuring David, Dick, their motley crew, and the newly hired Claire, a 19-year-old with no technological experience whatsoever. Nevertheless, Claire feels instantly at home at Tekserve, drawn as she is “to the type of anarchy that believed in small communities and held the promise of a just society. Everyone had said, ‘life is not fair,’ but maybe it could be.” That sentiment could have been Tekserve’s motto; instead, its employee handbook advised, “If you are ever in doubt, do the right thing.” Claire is first assigned to intake, where she processes the anxious, needy customers who find at Tekserve “a space that was as if Santa’s workshop had made love to a Rube Goldberg machine, complete with mutated elves.” The staff benefits from sumptuous Wednesday lunch buffets and Thursday breakfasts, health care coverage, and unexpected raises. With no qualifications, Claire is promoted to printer technician and, at the repair bench, encounters the formidable LaserWriter II, “one of the most solid printers Apple ever made.” Learning to repair its rare design flaw, Claire decides she “has found her calling. One that draws on her full mind and body. A noble calling that helps people make poetry and do their taxes.” Illustrated with Shopsin’s whimsical chapter icons and punctuated with animated—and admittedly silly—conversations between parts of computers and printers, the novel bounces through the history of digital technology, the fey atmosphere of geekdom, and Claire’s shrewd, serene observations.

Fresh and charmingly quirky.

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**CHRONICLES FROM THE LAND OF THE HAPPIEST PEOPLE ON EARTH**

*Soyinka, Wole*

Pantheon (464 pp.)

$28.00 | Sep. 28, 2021

978-0-59-332016-7

A richly satirical novel, his first since 1973, by the Nigerian Nobel Prize winner. “The timing could not have been more thoughtfully ordained. Indeed—and he leant over to whisper confidentially to the surgeon during one of their meals together...’It was I who set fire to Hilltop Mansion, just to get you down in Badagry.’” There’s a lot going on in Soyinka’s shaggy dog yarn, its plot dense enough to rival anything by Günter Grass. The speaker here is an engineer who has fallen afoul of the nation’s prime minister, a propagandist wedded to the ironic slogan of Soyinka’s title. His lifelong friend, a surgeon

**MATT JONES 4 IS FINALLY HERE!**

“...rapid-fire dialogue...”

“A moody, white-knuckle murder tale with an incisive, blunt hero.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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who specializes in amputations, now has rivals in child soldiers and Boko Haram terrorists, given to lopping off the limbs of presumed infidels out in the countryside. They’re not the only bad actors. As Soyinka writes, the police and the Nigerian army are not shy themselves about relieving their victims of body parts, and then there are the usual grisly accidents and freelance acts of violence. Dr. Kighare Menka sighs, “I am only a surgeon. My specialization is to cut people up, after others have recommended a telephone line goes down. At Windy Point, a crucial highway aide who wonders “why widows, widowers, and orphans did not and big dreams and no fear of stepping on others, such as one chutzpah! Dr. Kighare Menka sighs, “The trouble with you...is difference, that illegitimate child of memory. Go for chutzpah!). Everyone you’ll encounter in these pages, including someone who just might be the devil himself, has ardent hopes and big dreams and no fear of stepping on others, such as one aide who wonders “why widows, widowers, and orphans did not simply lick their wounds and adopt appeasing attitudes towards their violators for the privilege of staying alive.”

Dazzling wordplay and subtle allusion mark this most welcome return to fiction.

STORM
Stewart, George R.
New York Review Books
(304 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Aug. 17, 2021
978-1-68137-518-2

A massive winter storm brings destruction, peril, and death to drought-plagued California.

The Chief Meteorologist at the U.S. Weather Bureau in San Francisco feels a tug of disappointment as the local weather remains, day after day, fair and unchanged. Meanwhile, the Junior Meteorologist, preparing a map of weather data over the Pacific Ocean, notices the birth of a charming new baby. The storm moves eastward, growing in size and, within a few days, bringing torrential rain and snowfall. Managers, and maintenance workers responsible for major roads, long-distance telephone lines, railroads, airports, and Sacramento’s flood gates are mobilized. A coyote, an owl, and a huge bear named Blue Boy are caught in the storm along with ordinary citizens. In the notorious Donner Pass, a telephone line goes down. At Windy Point, a crucial highway is blocked. Motorists Max and Jen go missing. Panicked farmers telephone the flood gates’ manager, begging him not to inundate their fields as the rivers rise. A pilot flies a plane full of passengers into the storm. Within her life span of just 11 days, Maria puts all of them in jeopardy. Some survive; others don’t. A new introduction by Nathaniel Rich provides historical context for Stewart’s reissued classic, first published in 1941.

Pure excitement for eco-fiction fans.

THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY
Towles, Amor
Viking (592 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-641-29167-5

Newly released from a work farm in 1950s Kansas, where he served 18 months for involuntary manslaughter, 18-year-old Emmett Watson hits the road with his little brother, Billy, following the death of their father and the foreclosure of their Nebraska farm.

They leave to escape angry townspeople who believe Emmett got off easy, having caused the fatal fall of a taunting local boy by punching him in the nose. The whip-smart Billy, who exhibits OCD-like symptoms, convinces Emmett to drive them to San Francisco to reunite with their mother, who left town eight years ago. He insists she’s there, based on postcards she sent before completely disappearing from their lives. But when Emmett’s prized red Studebaker is “borrowed” by two rambunctious, New York-bound escapees from the juvenile facility he just left, Emmett takes after them via freight train with Billy in tow. Billy befriends a Black veteran named Ulysses who’s been riding the rails nonstop since returning home from World War II to find his wife and baby boy gone. A modern picaraohue with a host of characters, competing points of view, wandering narratives, and teasing chapter endings, Towles’ third novel is even more entertaining than his much-acclaimed A Gentleman in Moscow (2016). You can quibble with one or two plot turns, but there’s no resisting moments such as Billy’s encounter, high up in the Empire State Building in the middle of the night, with professor Abacus Abernathé, whose Compendium of Heroes, Adventurers, and Other Intrepid Travelers he’s read 24 times. A remarkable blend of sweetness and doom, Towles’ novel is packed with revelations about the American myth, the art of storytelling, and the unrelenting pull of history.

An exhilarating ride through Americana.

AN ELDERLY LADY MUST NOT BE CROSSED
Stories
Tursten, Helene
Trans. by Delargy, Marlaine
Soho Crime (272 pp.)
$14.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-641-29167-5

Six more adventures of Maud, the retired language teacher who meets life’s vicissitudes with a refreshingly homicidal approach.

En route to a luxury vacation in South Africa, Maud recalls half a dozen earlier times when her generally untroubled life was threatened by someone who ended up coming to grief. “An Elderly Lady Begins To Remember Her Past” rehashes her latest foray into criminal violence and her satisfying escape from
Tursten’s franchise detective, Inspector Irene Huss. “Little Maud Sets a Trap” takes her back to her childhood, when she sticks up for her neurotic older sister, Charlotte. “Lancing a Boil” shows how Maud, now a substitute teacher, deals with her demotion when the regular teacher she’s replaced seeks to return to the classroom. “The Truth About Charlotte” recalls Charlotte’s sad demise, which leaves Maud much wealthier and freeer to accrue an even larger income and begin her world travels. Maud smartly relieves her longtime neighbor, seamstress Elsa Petrén, of the problems her wastrel son has stuck her with in “The Peter Pan Problem.” And when she finally arrives at her destination in “An Elderly Lady Takes a Trip to Africa,” the longest and most deliberately plotted of these stories, she gets to display an unaccustomed generosity, even magnanimity, to an impoverished family brought even lower by a crime Maud is more than happy to avenge. Readers may want to think twice before sampling the appended naughty-and-nice cookie recipes.

A guidebook to growing old without a single regret for victims who deserved just what they got.

THE STRUDLHOF STEPS
or, Melzer and the Depth of the Years
von Doderer, Heimito
Trans. by Kling, Vincent
New York Review Books (872 pp.)
$24.95 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-68137-527-4

Evocative novel of manners set in the 1920s Vienna of the shattered Habsburg Empire, originally published in 1951 and now translated into English for the first time.

“Much is now past and gone, to our dismay / And beauty shows the frailest power to stay.” So writes von Doderer in a poem that opens his sprawling novel—and that adorns the actual Strudlhof Steps, as central to Vienna as the Spanish Steps are to Rome. The protagonist is a former lieutenant named Melzer who might have been happier being a brewer—nomen est omen, writes von Doderer, the name is a sign, Melz being German for malt—than as a soldier tucked away in the Balkans. Returning to Vienna, Melzer falls into a circle of shattered souls: From the first sentence, we know that one woman is going to walk into a streetcar and lose one of her legs. Others chase after chimerical affairs, still others die by suicide. Melzer becomes increasingly entranced by those belle époque steps, walking them, sitting at their feet, a passive observer of his own life. Von Doderer’s novel is both neurasthenic and darkly humorous, with some fine philosophical passages: “So it is that the organic fluidity of our physical existence will always detour around schemes hatched by every conclusive, now-and-forever organizer or visionary, implementation-to-the-last-detail politico, whose ambitions would long since...have brought the world to a standstill.” He is foreshadowing the rise of a different politics, one that, though only hinted at, will find Melzer on the Russian front in another couple of decades. Von Doderer himself was a member of the Nazi Party, and while he became disillusioned while serving in the Wehrmacht, there are a few uncomfortable passages that reveal a sometimes-disapproving fascination with the many non-German peoples who inhabited Vienna: the Romanians and Bulgarians with “their fondness for always living in the choicest residential neighborhoods,” for instance. Still, von Doderer ably captures a lost world in a book that belongs alongside the works of Stefan Zweig and Karl Kraus.

A swirl of complicated characters and plot turns makes this a rewarding if sometimes demanding read.
THE SPECTACULAR
Whittall, Zoe
Ballantine (568 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-64622-060-1

Three generations of women struggle to build their identities while shunning society's gender-based expectations.

At 22, Missy Alamo is an indie rock star. She made it big despite her tumultuous upbringing. Ten years ago, when her mother deserted the commune where they were living, Missy was dropped on her grandmother's doorstep. The book opens in 1997 as Missy tries to find a doctor who will tie her tubes—none are willing to perform the procedure on such a young woman. Missy is about to leave on tour, and she would like to have all the sex she pleases without worrying about getting pregnant. All these years later, Missy still doesn't know where her mother is, and she's certain she never wants children of her own. Missy's mother, Carola, has been living at a yoga retreat since leaving the commune. She ended up falling in love with the yoga guru and staying for years. Finally, halfway through the book, we meet Carola's mother-in-law, Ruth, and we see that she shares many traits with her daughter-in-law and granddaughter. Ruth has just received devastating news, and she's determined to reunite Missy and Carola before it's too late. As the book toggles among the first-person perspectives of the three women, the narrative voice deftly changes to reflect each woman's distinct personality. In a narrative that is gritty, raw, and unapologetic, the author builds strong female protagonists who seem largely unconcerned with how others expect them to behave. There is a strong focus on sexuality, gender fluidity, and free love, but the book also explores themes of motherhood and family responsibility. The author plays with time, weaving past and present in a way that sometimes works beautifully but at other times creates confusion. Even so, the characters and their unabashed determination to live life on their own terms are sufficiently compelling to keep readers turning the page.

An entertaining story that is equal parts family saga and cultural indictment.

TODAY A WOMAN WENT MAD IN THE SUPERMARKET
Stories
Wolitzer, Hilma
Bloomsbury (208 pp.)
$22.99 | Aug. 31, 2021
978-1-63557-762-4

Thirteen timeless stories of what goes on between men and women, grounded in an optimism that is no stranger to sorrow.

Ninety-one-year-old Wolitzer, author of five novels and mother of Meg, collects for the first time her stories from the 1960s and ’70s, many first published in Esquire, Ms., and elsewhere, and adds a brand new one from 2020. A foreword by Elizabeth Strout alerts us to the particular joys of Wolitzer’s prose style and storytelling—how she “leaves enough space between the lines” for us to “enter the story with our own experiences and therefore make it our own.” After the crystalline title story zips us straight back to the mad housewife era and a second introduces the centrality of female desire in Wolitzer’s work, there’s a run of seven narrated by Paulette, or Paulie as her husband, Howard, calls her. Full of the pleasures of intimacy, these are unusually happy stories about a complicated marriage. No matter that it begins with an unplanned pregnancy; weathers infidelity, an extended visit from Howard’s first wife, and the appearance of a sex maniac in the building (“about time,” thinks Paulie); and tackles her insomnia and his depression (usually responsive to a day spent driving around to visit model homes). “Why am I so happy?” wonders Paulie. “I know the same bad things Howard knows.” Spoiled as we are by the tonic power of Paulie’s worldview, it’s an adjustment to embrace three grimmer stories that follow. But wait—in an amazing grand finale, Wolitzer brings Paulie and Howard back a half-century later, reckoning with the usual dirty tricks of age. “Howard, who had once been so gorgeous,” is now “grizzled and paunchy and gray,” but Paulie is still Paulie: Where she used to check her husband’s side of the bed upon waking for “a promising rise in the bedclothes,” she now rejoices in the simple evidence of breath. It seemed like the world “would all go on forever in that exquisitely boring and beautiful way. But of course it wouldn’t.” And along comes the novel coronavirus to do its worst.

Completing the trajectory of her early triumphs with a pandemic masterpiece, Wolitzer takes our breath away.

HAO
Ye Chun
Catapult (208 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-64622-060-1

A ribbon of frustration unfurls through this collection of 12 short stories that chronicle the efforts of Chinese and Chinese American women seeking to speak the truth about their lives.

The experiences of Ye’s heroines—and one hero of legend, Cangjie—run from the court of the Yellow Emperor to the era of internet dating, but an inability to communicate marks all the tales. In the first story, “Stars,” Luyao, a graduate student in economics who’s also a wife and mother, is rendered mute by a stroke; though she’s bilingual, she struggles to regain language, any language, beyond the only phrase she can utter: “hao.” (Hao, the most common word in Chinese, can be translated as good and is symbolized traditionally by a kneeling woman holding a child.) In the title story, Qingxin, another young mother, tortured during the Cultural Revolution, literally eats some of her words to avoid further persecution while attempting to create the semblance of normalcy
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

New episode every Tuesday
Izzie’s friend Megan, are acting very oddly. Even Izzie refuses to

...Pushcart Prizes, but all of these sensitive tales amplify voices...pushcart...told voices...silenced.

These battles are fought with pens, stick figures, tender drawings on a child’s back; silent screams are in the background.

**Mystery**

**A Brush with Murder**

*Abbott, Bailee*

Crooked Lane (320 pp.)

$26.99 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-64385-774-9

Abbott’s novel features one dead woman and two sisters whose...New York.

Chloe Abbington has ditched her boyfriend and her life in New York City to return home to Whisper Cove, a charming town on Chautauqua Lake, to help her sister, Izzie, get her shop on Artisan Alley up and running. Both women are talented members of an artistic family who have yet to make it on their own in the highly competitive art world. The opening of Paint Your Shop is marred by murder when unpopular reporter Fiona Gimble is stabbed with a painting knife after insulting a number of local business owners. Chloe, who's unlucky enough to find the body in an alley behind the store, feels she's being targeted by Detective Hunter Barrett even though Fiona had many enemies. Many of the business owners are old school friends of the sisters, and some, especially Izzie’s friend Megan, are acting very oddly. Even Izzie refuses to provide Chloe with an alibi. But after Chloe gets a warning to stay away from the police, she discovers that Fiona Gimble was stabbed with a painting knife after insulting a number of local business owners.

**The Cure for What Ales You**

*Alexander, Ellie*

Minotaur (288 pp.)

$26.99 | Oct. 5, 2021

978-1-2507-8145-1

In a thorny tale of hidden secrets, a brewer with a complicated past uncovers a murderer.

Sloan Krause grew up in foster homes with little memory of her early childhood. When she married Mac Krause, she became part of a close-knit family of brewers in the German-themed destination town of Leavenworth, Washington. After Mac cheated on her, Sloan took a job at Nitro, a microbrewery where she and her brew partner, Garrett Strong, make a great team. But she and her son, Alex, are still involved with Der Keller, the Krause family brewery. Although Sloan recently heard a devastating rumor about Otto and Ursula Krause from her former foster care caseworker, her ex-in-laws have finally been exonerated of having Nazi ties. Now Sloan has to deal with the arrival of the elusive Marianne, the woman who dropped her into foster care and who may be either her protector or her enemy. The town is packed for the Maipole festival, and Sloan and Garrett have brewed a special citrusy beer for the occasion. Marianne appears at Sloan’s house, reveals that she’s her aunt, and warns her of danger. An old enemy is bent on killing Sloan, who witnesses her mother’s murder but remembers nothing. Now Sloan must prove that Marianne didn’t kill a hotel housekeeper while protecting her family from a dangerous killer.

A touch of humor and plenty of brew lore and tasty food suggestions add to the determined heroine’s charm.

**Betrayal on the Bowery**

*Belli, Kate*

Crooked Lane (336 pp.)

$27.99 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-64385-758-9

Belli follows up *Deception by Gaslight* (2020), her exciting Gilded Gotham debut, with another perilous adventure.

Reporter Genevieve Stewart first met wealthy Daniel McCaffery while investigating the jewel thief known as Robin Hood. All that safely behind them, they’re at the docks seeing off his friend Rupert, a titled Englishman, and his bride, Esmie, on a honeymoon trip when one of Esmie’s former suitors appears, acting crazed, and drops dead in the newlyweds’ cabin. Forced to stay in New York, Rupert is targeted by the police, but Daniel, who grew up with the gangs of the notorious Five Points before he came into money, finds a sinister and dangerous connection with a Lower East Side bar and possibly one of his own enemies. Genevieve, who loves Daniel even though she turned down his proposal, is determined to stay by his side as
he investigates another case of a wealthy young man jumping to his death—an incident eerily similar to the death on the ship. After a sugar baron begs Daniel to find his missing daughter, who seems to have run off with an unsuitable man, the couple realize that many of these society youths have made trips to a deserted mansion rumored to be haunted by demons. When Daniel and Genevieve venture into the place, they find a cache of weapons. Lucky to escape with their lives, they vow to continue their hunt.

Strong characters bolster an excellent mystery brimming with danger, romance, and historical tidbits.

**DOUBLE TAKE**

*Breck, Elizabeth*

Crooked Lane (336 pp.)

$27.99 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-64385-766-4

A second case for San Diego shamus Madison Kelly finds her suddenly awash in job offers. The one she picks is a doozy. Pharmaceutical sales rep Travis Moore’s girlfriend, *Hillcrest Holler* reporter Barrett Anna Brown, disappeared five days ago. The police have limited interest in something that happens all the time, and Travis is willing to advance Madison $5,000 to spend a week looking for her. Within hours, Madison has a lead: half a dozen death certificates Barrett requested copies of. Greg and Isabel Thomas, Jason and Rebecca Brady, and Rex and Tammy Hacks all died in accidents that claimed the lives of both members of each couple. The same person, Crystal Ladessa, is listed as handling the paperwork on all three of their estates, and Joseph L. Viceroy, the lawyer Crystal works for, has set up charitable trusts as secondary legatees for each of the childless couples. *Holler* editor Cornell Jones says he knew Barrett only professionally even though a telltale photo shows the two of them together in a restaurant in Mexico. Madison, who notices early on that she’s being followed everywhere she goes, clearly thinks she’d be a superhero if she had more upper-body strength. But she’s too busy itemizing dates, addresses, architectural details, and the brand names of her boots and flak jacket to consider why her client might be lying to her over apparently innocent details or, once the case heats up, to return calls and texts from surfer Dave Rich, her maybe boyfriend, and married SDPD Detective Thomas Clark, who’d like to be more than her buddy. The upshot is as predictable as the solution.

The single best thing about this flawed, likable mystery is the sly clue buried in its title.

**THE ENEMY YOU GNOCCHI**

*Bruns, Catherine*

Poisoned Pen (336 pp.)

$8.99 paper | Oct. 26, 2021

978-1-4926-8431-2

A young widow seeks the killer of a fellow restaurateur.

Tessa Esposito is slowly adjusting to the loss of her husband, Dylan, murdered 14 months ago. With the help of her assistant, Stephanie Beaudry; and her cousins Gabby and Gino, she’s focused on making her Italian place, Anything’s Pastable, the best dining spot in Harvest Park, New York. She has the full support of her handsome landlord, Vince Falducci, who intervenes when customers like Mario Russo get too friendly. Tessa dislikes Mario not only for being a letch, but for opening The Espresso Lane in direct competition with her old friend Archie Fenton’s Java Time. So it would hardly have rocked Tessa’s busy world to have Mario stabbed to death during Harvest Park’s annual Festival of Lights if the police—meaning her cousin Gino, who’s the local chief—didn’t focus on Archie as the prime suspect. Desperate to help her friend, Tessa looks for alternatives and finds many: jilted lovers, shady loan sharks, and Archie’s hotheaded son. There’s also an old girlfriend in Mario’s past who died after their last date. With all this sleuthing to do, you’d think Tessa would hardly have time for the obligatory romantic complications, but in addition to the attentions of hunky Vince, there’s Justin, a firefighter with a sense of humor who’s looking for a promotion from Dylan’s best friend to Tessa’s best squeeze.

Beneath all the red sauce, Bruns offers standard cozy fare with a dash of detection on the side.

**UNDER COLOR OF LAW**

*Clark, Aaron Philip*

Thomas & Mercer (302 pp.)

$15.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2021

978-1-5420-3018-2

The bill comes shockingly due for the serious moral compromises a rookie LAPD detective made to get his plum assignment.

Detective Trevor Finnegan is called to an Altadena hiking trail where the body of police recruit Brandon Soledad has been discovered. Like Finn, Brandon was one of the few Black candidates to be accepted into the police academy; now his death has ended his career before it’s even begun. Finn decides on the spot that the young man was killed elsewhere and dumped in the wild. The autopsy that confirms his judgment indicates that Brandon was frozen to death. Before Finn can even begin to make a list of likely suspects, he’s warned off the case by anonymous threats that almost certainly come from within his own department. Eyed with suspicion by colleagues certain that the fix was in
when Finn was elevated to Robbery-Homicide and even by his old school friend Sarada Rao, whose rapist Finn beat within an inch of his life because he felt responsible for leaving her in an unsafe position, Finn is forced to work the case alone. His hard-nosed confrontations with his former training officer, Joey Garcia, and the visibly activist role his father, retired LAPD Sgt. Shaun Finnegan, has taken against the police make every cop Finn meets brush him off or worse, and his rage and guilt don’t bode well for his affair with dress designer Tori Krause. The corruption in the force is so widespread, and the hero so deeply flawed, that it’s something of a miracle when Clark finally manages to ring down the curtain.

Harrowing evidence for Spike Lee’s famous claim that everything that happens in America is about race.

**THE GLITTER END**  
*Conroy, Vivian*  
Poisoned Pen (384 pp.)  
$8.99 paper | Sep. 28, 2021  
978-1-4926-8409-1

The co-owner of a stationery shop who’s always looking to entice customers has a brainstorm that may spell the death of all her dreams.

Delta Douglas, who’s settled in the old gold-mining town of Tundish, Montana, has partnered with her college roommate, Hazel, to open Wanted, a store offering paper-related items. She’s invited artist Tilly Tanya to set up her incredible exhibit of a miniature town, lit with the murder of a Grinch-like reviewer spawns a few suspects too many.

**DIGGING UP TROUBLE**  
*Crowe, Kitt*  
Crooked Lane (336 pp.)  
$26.99 | Oct. 12, 2021  
978-1-64385-776-8

A bookstore manager and her reading group use their years of experience with fictional mysteries to help solve a real one in Crowe’s debut. Lexi Jones is already in trouble with Detective Chad Berg over her dog Cookie’s digging habits. The Oregon town of Confection is not only a sweet place to visit, but one that’s famous for its inhabitants’ gardening skills. When Cookie, who’s smarter than the average dog, digs up Gil Cloutier’s body, Lexi is high on the list of candidates for the title of who killed the most hated man in town. Gil, a very grouchy neighbor to Lexi, had been the leading contender to win a large cash prize in a gardening contest, a status that earned him plenty of enemies. But he also had three sons he often argued with and was rumored to know where a lot of his family’s hidden stash of money that his victims still hope to claim, even though Berg can’t help suspecting Lexi, there are romantic undertones to their relationship: He wants her to stop sleuthing even as she and Cookie continue to hunt for the killer.

**SLASHING THROUGH THE SNOW**  
*Frost, Jacqueline*  
Crooked Lane (304 pp.)  
$26.99 | Oct. 12, 2021  
978-1-64385-777-5

In a town fueled by holiday spirit, the murder of a Grinch-like reviewer spaws a few suspects too many.

**THE YULE**  
*Crowe, Kitt*  
Crooked Lane (336 pp.)  
$26.99 | Oct. 12, 2021  
978-1-64385-776-8

In a town fueled by holiday spirit, the murder of a Grinch-like reviewer spaws a few suspects too many.

**THE HEARTH**  
*Conroy, Vivian*  
Poisoned Pen (384 pp.)  
$8.99 paper | Sep. 28, 2021  
978-1-4926-8409-1

The determined heroine and her pals solve two mysteries and still have time for romance.

**THE SNOW**  
*Frost, Jacqueline*  
Crooked Lane (304 pp.)  
$26.99 | Oct. 12, 2021  
978-1-64385-777-5

In a town fueled by holiday spirit, the murder of a Grinch-like reviewer spaws a few suspects too many.

The Yule-centric town of Mistletoe, Maine, is in the holiday spirit as Holly White’s family works to make The Hearth, the new café offshoot of their Christmas Tree Farm, a hit. What they really need is a killer review from Karen Moody of New England Magazine. The trouble is that Karen is, well, a real Karen who seems determined to find all sorts of things wrong with her experience. Sure, she can have a horse-drawn carriage drive her from the main hall to dinner, but it seems so inefficient: What if her dinner gets cold in the meantime? Instead of giving Karen the eye roll she so rightly deserves, Holly resolves to play good hostess while hoping her efforts can translate into positive vibes from
"The seamy side of California dreaming."

GATED PREY

Goldberg, Lee

Thomas & Mercer (268 pp.)

$24.95 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-5420-2934-6

A rash of cases sends Detective Eve Ronin, of the LA Sheriff’s Department, into the gated communities of Calabasas, which trap the homeowners with all the evils they were meant to protect them from.

The tale begins with a string of home invasion robberies Eve and her partner, almost-retired Duncan Pavone, have gone undercover to solve. Masquerading as a wealthy couple in order to lure the thieves into targeting them, they succeed all too well, and soon they have three dead bodies to answer for. The LASD gives a medal to Grayson Mumford, the young grocery store guard who shot runaway thief Paul Colter, but makes it clear to Eve that her stock among her colleagues has plummeted even as her flashy style has encouraged scriptwriter Simone Harper to write the pilot for a TV series based on her exploits. Before Eve can get too preoccupied with either shunning she doesn’t deserve or fame she doesn’t want, a routine call to the home of Anna McCaig, who’s just delivered a stillborn child, swiftly escalates to a case of murder. Just to keep the plot boiling, Eve learns that she’s being sued for $10 million by the family of a bent deputy who claims she drove him to suicide at the end of her last case. Will the department, which is also named in the suit, have her back, or will they cut her loose and let her twist slowly in the wind? Against all odds, Goldberg not only ties up most of the loose ends, leaving just a few deliberately dangling, but links some of Eve’s investigations in ways as disturbing as they are surprising.

The seamy side of California dreaming.

A LINE TO KILL

Horowitz, Anthony

Harper/HarperCollins (384 pp.)

$27.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-0-06-293-816-9

Except for the atrocities of World War II, there hasn’t been a murder on the Channel Island of Alderney from time immemorial. The staging of the Alderney Lit Fest brings that streak to a decided end.

The powers that be at Penguin Random House want to send retired DI Daniel Hawthorne and Anthony Horowitz, the writer who fictionalizes the mysteries Hawthorne’s solved, to Alderney. Anthony, always grouching at being treated like a second-class collaborator, is willing to go, and so, surprisingly, is the reclusive Hawthorne. The other luminaries invited to the tiny island include blind psychic Elizabeth Lovell, TV chef Marc Bellamy, war historian George Elkin, children’s franchiser Anne Cleary, and French performance poet Maïssa Lamar. No sooner have the festivities begun than Charles le Mesurier, whose online gambling company is sponsoring them, is taped to a chair, with only his right hand left free, and stabbed to death. The limited resources and competence of the local police make the case a natural for Hawthorne, who obligingly circulates among his counterparts long enough to rattle every one of the many skeletons in their closets. But he faces a serious setback when a second murder spurs Deputy Chief Officer Jonathan Toorde of Guernsey Crime Services to identify a culprit Hawthorne agrees is highly plausible. How will the great detective cope with being beaten to the punch? Fans of the author’s formidable brain teasers, certain that the devil is in the details, will be a lot more confident than he is.

The most conventional of Horowitz’s mysteries to date still reads like a golden-age whodunit on steroids.

MRS. CLAUS AND THE HALLOWEEN HOMICIDE

Ireland, Liz

Kensington (304 pp.)

$15.95 paper | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-4967-2661-2

Ghosties and goblins invade the North Pole.

Only in Santaland would April Claus, wife of the big man himself, be considered a Southerner. The owner of a bed-and-breakfast in Cloudberry Bay, April has an agreement with Nick to spend four months of each year in Oregon. Now, as October rolls around, the tourist season in the Pacific Northwest is winding down. So the couple returns to their northern home, Castle Kringle, to prepare for the upcoming holiday season—which in Santaland means nothing but Christmas. April, who misses her hometown traditions, persuades Salty, the
palace gardener, to grow pumpkins for jack-o-lanterns in the royal greenhouse. She gets her friend Juniper, Christmas town’s librarian, to read scary stories to the local children. She plans a costume parade and even trick-or-treating. Not everyone is happy with April’s innovations. Juniper gets threatening messages on the library’s Eibook page. Cobbler Tiny Sparkletoe circulates a petition to ban April’s Southern festivities. And someone smashes every one of Salty’s Pumpkins. The protests escalate until Tiny is found flattened facedown inside a giant snow monster footprint. Constable Crinkles and his deputy, Ollie, are flummoxed. It isn’t until Nick calls on snowshoe gumshoe Jake Frost that Tiny’s killer is brought to justice.

Brings the Christmas cozy to dizzying new heights of cuteness.

**IN HOT WATER**

*Kingsbury, Kate*

_Crooked Lane (304 pp.)_

$26.99 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-64385-270-1

Kingsbury introduces a new series set on the Oregon coast.

With the assistance of her two stalwart workers, Jenna and Gracie, widowed Vivian Wainwright has relied on her mother’s English background to make the Willow Pattern Tearoom into a purveyor of all things British in Misty Bay. When Jenna becomes the leading suspect in the murder of her former husband, Dean, Vivian uses her love of detective fiction and the experience she gained as a prosecutor’s wife to start her own investigation. Detective Lt. Tony Messina seems certain that Jenna’s the culprit but secretly admires Vivian’s grit and finds himself attracted to a woman for the first time since having tragically lost his family. His investigation uses all the tried and true methods, but Vivian, Gracie, and Jenna, who have tapped into the town’s gossip network, quickly identify a wider array of suspects. Dean, naked except for a pink negligee, was apparently pushed off the balcony of the hotel where he worked. The sleuths discover that he was involved in running an escort service using empty hotel rooms and numbered some of the best-known men in town, including the police chief, among his clients. Though Jenna’s discouraged by the suspicious looks she gets, Vivian refuses to give up. Apparently she and her friends hit a nerve, since they start to get threatening messages from someone resolved to keep the truth concealed.

A bright new sleuth of a certain age and an interesting cadre of sidekicks brighten the mediocre mystery.

**ECHOES OF THE DEAD**

*Kope, Spencer*

_Minotaur (320 pp.)_

$28.99 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-2501-7940-1

The disappearances of a California congressman and three of his college buddies cue another manhunt for Magnus “Steps” Craig, the nonpareil agent of the FBI’s Special Tracking Unit.

Marco Perez was a successful oncologist before the citizens of Bakersfield elected him to Congress. Wade Winchell, the Major Crimes deputy district attorney for Los Angeles County, has tangled with Mexican drug lords. Jason Norris is a well-heeled accountant; and hedge fund manager Noah Long’s wealth leaves Norris in the dust. So they’ve all acquired scads of enemies along the way, and it’s anyone’s guess why they vanished from their annual fishing trip on the Upper Kern River or who the kidnapper’s primary target was. As usual, though, Steps, who can see the shine that identifies the unique aura of every human being, and his more earthbound partner, Jimmy Donovan, are confronted by crime scenes far more arresting than the humdrum details of the criminal’s motive or identity. Norris is seemingly discovered propped up on a park bench—except that the corpse in his clothing isn’t his but that of a man a generation older than him, the killer having snatched the corpse from its recent grave and substituted Norris’ still-living body. A Polaroid photo in the dead man’s pocket identifies the likely next victim as Winchell and suggests that the clock is ticking before his time is up. An episode that interjects human smugger Abel Moya into the mix dramatizes the killer’s sadistic sense of humor. The killings are so ghoulish, in fact, that the final confrontation comes as a distinct and probably inevitable anticlimax.

The most conventional of the gifted hero’s four cases still has plenty to keep fans glued to their seats.

**MURDER GETS A MAKEOVER**

*Levine, Laura*

_Kensington (304 pp.)_

$26.00 | Sep. 28, 2021

978-1-4967-2813-5

An unwanted makeover gets a freelance writer into a world of trouble.

Maybe it’s her messy curls. Maybe it’s her favorite CUCKOO FOR COCOA PUFFS T-shirt. Whatever the reason, shoe salesman Lance Venable is convinced that his neighbor Jaine Austen would be the perfect guinea pig for his Neiman Marcus customer Bebe Braddock’s proposed fashion transformation. Jaine agrees, however grudgingly, to take time from working on her ad campaign for Tip Top DryCleaners to go for a tryout to the stylist’s posh Brentwood digs, where Bebe is predictably patronizing. But she has limited
time to torment Jaine for her frumpiness because on a follow-up visit, Jaine finds Bebe’s corpse with a wire hanger wrapped around her throat. Since Bebe was a bitch to everyone, there are suspects aplenty; Anna, her seamstress; Heidi, her hairstylist; even Miles, her husband. But the police zero in on Jaine, probably because her fingerprints are all over the murder weapon. (Well, she had to check for a pulse, didn’t she?) Now not even Bebe, her next statement outfit will be an orange jumpsuit. But it’s too late to escape. If she doesn’t find out who killed her, her husband. But the police zero in on Jaine, probably because her fingerprints are all over the murder weapon. (Well, she had to check for a pulse, didn’t she?) Now not even Bebe, her next statement outfit will be an orange jumpsuit. But it’s too late to escape. If she doesn’t find out who killed Bebe, her next statement outfit will be an orange jumpsuit.

As always, Levine’s spunky heroine gets the last laugh.

DIAMOND AND THE EYE
Lovesey, Peter
Soho Crime (336 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-641-29312-9

Move over, Detective Superintendent Peter Diamond. The Avon and Somerset CID is about to be joined, jostled, and decentered by two other parties interested in an otherwise ordinary burglary.

Just because Johnny Getz—probably not his real name—is a private eye doesn’t mean he doesn’t think Pete, as he insists on calling Diamond, should work with him. Johnny’s client, fashion designer Ruby Hubbard, is worried sick because her father, Septimus Hubbard, has been missing ever since his antiques shop was robbed. Ruby can’t even get access to the storefront to find out what’s missing and what clues to her whereabouts Seppy might have left behind. Diamond reluctantly agrees to let Ruby look over the place and share a bit of information with Johnny, and in no time at all there are dramatic new developments: Duran and in no time at all there are dramatic new developments: Duran and in no time at all there are dramatic new developments:

A mundane plot juiced by those unwelcome hangers-on.

A veteran K-9 cop hunts a serial killer in the rugged mountains of Colorado.

The unsolved murder of her father, Douglas Wray, has haunted Deputy Mattie Cobb for decades. San Diego cold case detective Jim Hauck, who’s been investigating the crime, meets her and her K-9 partner, Robo, at a Colorado prison to question inmate John Cobb, a prime suspect as well as a villain so prominent in Mattie’s early life that, until recently, she’d thought he was her uncle. Cole Parker, Mattie’s veterinarian boyfriend, can’t be on hand to lend his support because he’s back home in Timber Creek delivering Sassy’s German shepherd puppies, sired by Robo. The delivery goes well; Mattie’s visit, not so much. Cobb’s been found dead in his cell, leaving behind a book with dog-eared pages as well as maps with markings. The sweeter happenings at Cole’s clinic play out in counterpoint to Mattie’s quest; Hauck suspects there’s a link between Cobb’s death and that of Mattie’s father, and Mattie sees the things Cobb has left behind as so many potential clues. While exploring a cave that Cobb’s map led her to, Mattie gets a call about the discovery of a body nearby. Mizushima’s subdued voice perfectly matches her heroine’s methodical, unruffled approach, building suspense as it presents the complex backstory with clarity. Forensics and the wilderness setting figure prominently in the probe. The identity of the victim will surprise many readers as the determined sleuth chases someone now identified as a serial killer.

The subtlety of this seventh Timber Creek K-9 mystery suggests the best of Scandinavian noir, with a nod to animal lovers.
and Lydia’s friend Hugh Gaveston, who funds his interests in magazine collecting and taxidermy from his late parents’ estate. When the new footman finds Campbell-Scott shot to death early Christmas morning and the local constable, whose only talents are for obfuscation and malapropism, pronounces the death a suicide despite some obviously dodgy footprints in the snow around the corpse, Hugh decides to launch his own investigation. In the process, characters are not so much developed as denuded of their self-protective layers until the climactic secret is revealed. The presentation throughout is insufferably arch, as when debut novelist Moncrieff invokes a hypothetical observer: “not for our spectator the uncouth sport of loitering to steal any conversational crumbs.” Fans of the period will be left yearning for Moncrieff’s golden-age models—Christie, Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers—who’s smarter plot and dialogue come off as far more effortless.

As Lord Westbury wearily reflects: “There was really no escaping it: this Christmas was a catastrophe.” Amen.

**THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE**

Osman, Richard

Pamela Dorman/Viking (368 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 28, 2021

978-1-98-488099-4

Osman follows *The Thursday Murder Club* (2020), his supremely entertaining debut, with an even better second installment.

Coopers Chase, an upscale retirement village in the British countryside, is home to the Thursday Murder Club, which consists of shrewd, deadly former spy Elizabeth Best, retired nurse Joyce Meadowcroft, psychiatrist Ibrahim Arif, political activist Ron Ritchie, and three honorary members, fixer Bogdan Jankowski, DCI Chris Hudson, and Police Constable Donna De Freitas. A letter from a dead man plunges Elizabeth and her friends into a dangerous case involving local crooks, the Mafia, and MI6. The letter is signed by Marcus Carmichael, whose corpse Elizabeth had seen pulled from the Thames years earlier, but it turns out to have been written by Elizabeth’s ex-husband, Douglas Middlemiss, who knew that name would get her attention. Douglas isn’t dead, but he’s still in a spot of trouble involving stolen diamonds and an angry go-between who holds valuable items for a variety of crooks. When a group of teenagers steal Ibrahim’s phone and then kick him in the head after he falls down, the group plots revenge, little knowing that the two problems may soon become one. When Douglas and his handler, Poppy, are shot dead, the group must race MI6 and several vicious crooks to neutralize a number of killers and find the diamonds. Elizabeth, who knows so much about Douglas, is assigned to decode the clues he left behind, but each of her seemingly innocuous friends has skills that enhance the group’s ability to survive and place blame where it belongs while covering up a myriad of minor offenses.

A clever, funny mystery peopled with captivating characters that enhance the story at every quirky turn.

**MURDER AT THE ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS**

Penrose, Andrea

Kensington (304 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 28, 2021

978-1-4967-3250-7

The fast-approaching nuptials of a couple with many secrets are threatened with delay by yet another murder in Penrose’s latest Regency mystery.

Although Lady Charlotte Sloane’s relationship with the Earl of Wrexford has been fraught with problems, they’re finally preparing to marry when a well-known scientist dies at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew. Wrexford is called to the scene by Dr. Hosack, an American friend of the deceased who suspects that it was poison and not a weak heart that killed Mr. Becton, who was about to announce a great advance in anti-malarial medicines. One of Charlotte’s wards observed the killer’s departure, but his inability to identify him leaves the witness in possible danger. After the sleuthing pair discover that one of their most vicious enemies may be involved, they decide to investigate despite the bad timing. Becton had planned to offer his cure for free, but others are eager to steal the formula and sample in order to turn a profit. Luckily, many friends who have helped the couple in past cases are willing to pitch in again to investigate a complicated puzzle that features more than one group of villains. The fact that Great Britain and the United States are on the brink of war drags politics into the mix as well.

A bit of Regency-period romance and history enhance a convoluted mystery with plenty of derring-do.

**MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER**

Reyes, Raquel V.

Crooked Lane (336 pp.)

$26.99 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-64385-784-8

A food anthropologist discovers that even a bland repast can be deadly. Miriam Quiñones-Smith finds herself at loose ends when she leaves her job teaching about Caribbean food culture in New York to relocate with her husband to Miami. Although she grew up in nearby Hialeah, snobby, sterile Coral Shores is nothing like the bustling Cuban enclave of her youth. Aside from her mother-in-law, Marjory, who misses no opportunity to put Miriam down for speaking to her son in Spanish, her only contact in her new home is her old schoolmate Alma Diaz, a busy realtor who focuses on events like the Women’s Club luncheon, where she can network with prospective clients. Miriam finds Alma’s lunch mates as unappealing as the food. They seem unmoved even when Sunny Weatherman keels over dead at their table without finishing her chicken salad. Suddenly
“A librarian’s guilty secret is imperiled when murder stalks the library.”

A PERFECT BIND

A librarian’s guilty secret is imperiled when murder stalks the library.

Upon learning that the town library in Cypress, South Carolina, will be turned into a high-tech center with no physical books, Trudell Becket and a band of like-minded friends manage to save many of the discarded books from the dump and open a library in the basement that they keep hidden from stern library director Lida Farnsworth. When heavy drinker Owen Maynard is found murdered in his truck behind the library, Tru, who’s already solved one murder, and her besties, Tori and Flossie, decide to use the knowledge they gained from all those years of reading mysteries to solve the case before the authorities stumble on the secret library. Tru also has another, perhaps unrelated, problem with someone getting into the room at night and tossing books around. Meanwhile, police detective Jace Bailey, who broke Tru’s heart in high school, keeps asking her out. Unable to believe that he’s really attracted to her, she puts him off despite the gossip that has them practically engaged and Tru pregnant. Delving into gossip and town history reveals that there used to be a speak-easy in the library, and Tru wonders if that’s what the intruder is searching for. But there are plenty of suspects who might have killed Maynard, who’s rumored to have stolen money from a local church and cheated his garage clients by overcharging.

It’s not easy to guess the killer in this amusing cozy filled with romantic angst and peculiar characters.

IN THE COMPANY OF WITCHES

Everyone in the New England town of Evenfall knows there’s something odd about the Warren family, but few suspect that they’re witches.

Brynn Warren and her aunts, Nora and Izzy, plus uncle Gideon, who lives in the attic, are good witches who have used their powers for the welfare of the townspeople for 400 years. The only guest currently staying in the home they run as a B&B is Constance Graves, who’s paying for all the rooms and acting in a way that justifies every penny. Everyone knows Constance’s reputation for being demanding, but this time she’s outdoing herself, driving Nora to start using spells to get some peace. When Constance is found dead, the police decide that her decease was no accident, making the Warrens, especially Nora, prime suspects.
Since the devastating death of her husband, Brynn’s been forgoing her powers and moping about the house, shrugging off her family’s efforts to engage her. Though her powers have grown rusty from disuse, Brynn realizes she must do her best to prove her relatives innocent. The members of the Graves family, for their part, have been at odds ever since their father died, leaving everything to Constance, who ignored his wishes to help her siblings in various ways. Forced out of her comfort zone to investigate, Brynn finds many unhappy secrets that could well have led to Constance’s murder.

Fans of the paranormal will enjoy the series debut of the Warrens, who go way beyond quirky.

CITY ON FIRE
Winslow, Don
Morrow/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-06-285119-2

A blistering novel filled with anger and bite. Danny Ryan is a dockworker in Providence, Rhode Island, who’s “faithful like a dog” to his wife, Terri, of the rival Murphy clan, and sometimes does some less-than-legal errands for his father-in-law, John. He wants more out of his life and wants to “not owe nobody nothing,” but nobody ever leaves Dogtown. One day at the beach, he sees “the goddess who came out of the sea” and who “has a voice like sex.” Terri’s brother Liam Murphy accidentally-on-purpose touches the woman’s breast, which sets off a chain reaction of events in which bullets fly and f-bombs and their ilk swarm like cicadas on nearly every page. You know, you just don’t touch a made guy’s woman, and the goddess is going out with Paulie Moretti. The Providence press gleefully reports the other-side-of-the-tracks bloodletting among men who supplement their wages with hijacking trucks and boosting heroin. So Danny wants out with his wife and son, but—well, it’s complicated. Chances are they’ll have to live and die in Dogtown. And, oh yeah, Danny loathes his rich mother, who tries so hard to make amends for abandoning him. The characters are as vividly described as some of them are vile: One guy “never met a job he couldn’t lose.” John Murphy is “the king of an empire that died a long time ago. The light of a long-dead star.” At the ocean, Danny observes that the “whitecaps look like the beards of sad old men.” A Murphy declares, “That Ryan blood….It’s cursed.” But the Murphy blood isn’t exactly touched by angels either. And then there are the Morettis, all of them trapped in a cycle of crime and violence, just looking for an excuse to go to war. One difference between Danny and some of the others is he’s never killed anybody. Yet. Meanwhile, a planned heist might just solve some financial problems for whomever survives all the betrayals.

Plenty of pain for the characters, plenty of thrills for the reader.

STARLIGHT ENCLAVE
Salvatore, R.A.
Harper Voyager (464 pp.)
$27.99 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-0-06-302977-4

The first installment of Salvatore’s new fantasy trilogy returns readers to the Forgotten Realms with an adventure revolving around Catti-brie, the wife of the author’s signature character, the dark elf Drizzt Do’Urden.

After the birth of their daughter, Brienne, Drizzt is markedly changed—spending more time contemplating deep existential questions and trying to rediscover the clarity and purpose in his life. To those ends, he decides to travel with his toddler daughter to the Monastery of the Yellow Rose to train with the monks and introduce Brienne to Grandmaster Kane. As Drizzt embarks on his own spiritual quest, his wife joins forces with smooth-talking drow mercenary Jarlaxle, human assassin Artemis Enteri, and weapons master Zaknafein, Drizzt’s father. At Jarlaxle’s request, the quartet of adventurers (via magic portal) travel to the top of the world searching for a person who, if found, could stop the drow city-state of Menzoberranzan from destroying itself in a civil war. But aside from almost dying multiple times over in the strange world without true night—the killing cold, frost giants, polar worms, etc.—the group finds something completely unexpected, a revelation that will change the way they look at the world, and themselves, forever. Longtime fans of Drizzt Do’Urden will surely enjoy the novel’s breakneck pacing, nonstop action, cast of familiar and beloved characters, and deep philosophical exploration throughout. This storyline, in particular, packs a thematic wallop that is both timely and timeless. “We’re never to see peace—none of us—until we come to recognize that a child of a culture that is not our own is as precious as one who is.” And although the transitions between the two story threads aren’t exactly smooth, some fight scenes are a bit flat, and the conclusion is little more than a respite until the next installment, readers should embrace Salvatore’s newest adventure with Drizzt and company.

Fantasy that entertains and enlightens.
“A sparkling holiday romance told with both honesty and heart.”

THE MATZAH BALL
Meltzer, Jean
Harlequin MIRA (336 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-7783-1158-4

A holiday romance author desperate to find inspiration for her next book reluctantly reaches out to her former summer camp nemesis. Rachel Rubenstein-Goldblatt is Jewish, but she’s keeping a secret from her whole family: She’s obsessed with Christmas, and not just in terms of wanting to collect every Santa figurine in existence. She’s been writing Christmas romance novels under a pen name, creating worlds where happy endings are possible. But when her publisher says it’s time for a change—and they want a Hanukkah romance instead—Rachel panics, then finds herself leaning on the last person she ever expected to ask for help. Jacob Greenberg, Rachel’s childhood crush and No. 1 enemy from Jewish summer camp, may have broken her heart all those years ago, but his company is hosting the biggest social event of the holiday season, and Rachel’s certain she can find the inspiration she needs for her next book at the Matzah Ball. Volunteering to assist in the week leading up to the event is a way of securing herself a ticket, but she’s not anticipating how seeing Jacob again will remind her of all her old feelings, especially when she’s also shoving down the truth of her chronic fatigue syndrome so she can work hard to save her writing contract. Meltzer’s debut romance is a reminder of the genre’s ability to tell a wide variety of stories from different perspectives—it presents Rachel’s lived experience with religion and chronic illness while being wrapped in the most comforting of familiar tropes. Every subject is handled with care, from the main characters’ Judaism to the heroine’s chronic (and often seemingly invisible) illness, and the end result is a very satisfying addition to the holiday romance subgenre that will be enjoyed at any time of year.

A sparkling holiday romance told with both honesty and heart.

THE WRONG MARQUESS
Lorret, Vivienne
Avon/HarperCollins (400 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Jun. 29, 2021
978-0-06-297662-8

One too many marquesses for a near spinster.
Ellie Parrish has known her entire life that she’s destined to marry a marquess. One in particular, actually: her childhood friend George, Marquess of Nethersole. He’s certain to settle down and propose any day now, she keeps telling herself, even though she’s already 25. So he’s the only marquess she cares to think about, even after she runs into another one accidentally. But Brandon, Marquess of Hullworth, is sure their collision is no accident. As the most eligible bachelor in London, he can’t walk through a park without half a dozen women dropping their handkerchiefs or turning their ankles to get his attention. Ellie has no interest in Brandon beyond being friends with his sister, though, and by the time he finally believes that, he realizes that he might actually be interested in her. Anxious by nature, Ellie is drawn to Brandon’s gentle ways and actual interest in her, and the two begin a powerful and clandestine courtship, but even their intense chemistry might not be enough to pull her away from the certainty of having the life she’s always expected with the thoughtless, inconsistent George. Her ongoing indecision is a weak spot in an otherwise charming Regency. Lorret’s writing sparkles, as ever, with delicious banter between Ellie and Brandon and clever writing throughout. But with their attraction so strong and George such an obvious cad, it’s hard to fathom why it takes Ellie the entire book to figure out which one of her marquesses is the wrong one. Though Ellie and her friends are still working on The Marriage Habits of the Native Aristocrat, the guidebook introduced earlier in the Mating Habits of Scoundrels series, she is surprisingly naïve about George’s behavior. Nevertheless, this is an enjoyable entry, with slightly purple intimate scenes heightened by Ellie’s intense physical reactions to the unexpected and a cliffhanger ending setting up the fourth book in the series nicely.

A witty, classic Regency romance.
A scholarly critique of the difficulties encountered by those who file formal complaints in the world of higher education.

In an era of Black Lives Matter, MeToo, and a host of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, you might think that there would be more transparency in dealing with charges of discrimination and harassment, particularly at the university level. Not so, writes Ahmed, an independent feminist scholar who left her post at a British university over its treatment of sexual harassment. “To be heard as complaining is not to be heard,” she writes. “To hear someone as complaining is an effective way of dismissing someone. You do not have to listen to the content of what she is saying if she is just complaining or always complaining.” The author, who has gained notoriety in academic circles for *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) and other books, presents a strong argument that power in higher education tends to protect itself, that diversity initiatives are often nothing more than window dressing, and that those who file complaints about a hostile work environment often face accusations of disloyalty or troublemaking. Charges of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, Ahmed argues, are similar from institution to institution and ubiquitous because the conditions that spark them don’t change. Those who wish to file formal complaints often find it difficult to navigate the complex procedures, only to find their paperwork buried in some cabinet or their cases adjudicated behind closed doors. Those who go public, meanwhile, face withdrawal of funding, lack of institutional support, and being passed over for promotion. In most cases, the bureaucrats who run universities are more concerned with protecting the institution than with correcting transgressions. Most of the charges here are broad and general, but anyone who has worked in higher education will recognize much of what Ahmed brings to light.

Sharp criticism of an overlooked systemic problem in higher education.
Rainbows, depicted in the author’s color photographs, had various meanings: for some, a gesture of support for health workers; for others, a symbol of hope. One woman told him that “people who experience a miscarriage often describe the first baby they have after the miscarriage as a rainbow baby—it’s what you get after the storm.” A gay artist was disturbed because rainbows, representing pride for queer communities, “had been ‘recoded.’ ” Others resented that the rainbow became appropriated into corporate branding and by self-serving politicians who boasted rainbow badges. With its meaning mutating, the rainbow, Attlee decided, was behaving “more like a virus than a flag.” Among those Attlee talked with were a cafe owner, a pub owner, and food service workers, who revealed devastating challenges; angry protestors against systemic racism, inequalities in access to health care, and increasing stress tests. Most players live in poverty-ridden, dangerous neighborhoods, so Brown is constantly looking out for their well-being. Babb explains the psychogeography of New Orleans and especially how Hurricane Katerina impacted the students’ sense of place and their insecurities. He also investigates the burgeoning gentrification of the city, an ongoing process with dire consequences. “Displaced residents aren’t just physically uprooted from their homes, neighborhood, and comfort zones,” writes the author. “They often carry harsh emotional burdens that, in particular for children, can lead to higher risk of anxiety and depression.” At the same time, Babb wrestles with an existential element that attends the sport of football in most marginalized communities: the physical dangers of the game versus the opportunity to rise out of poverty—not just via college scholarships or (rarely) being drafted in the NFL, but by providing a transformative atmosphere that fosters independence, self-worth, and discipline. The author also probes the New Orleans police department through the lens of investigations into the shootings of players and the impact that violence has on all members of the community.

A penetrating, wide-screen story of what it means to mentor under the toughest of circumstances.

Washington Post reporter Babb isn’t interested in delivering a play-by-play analysis of Edna Karr High School’s 2019 season. More significantly, he offers well-rounded portraits of the personalities involved with the team: the coaches, players, fans, and the city as a whole. The primary character is head coach Brice Brown, who displays a sharp football mind and exudes grace and generosity, creatively treating his players as distinct individuals who respond to varying treatment. If needed, he will provide for his players: clothes, shelter, food, transportation, life advice, etc. He also conducts uncomfortable discussions, creating “challenging, often uncomfortable, social scenarios that fluster kids by design. These are meant as psychological stress tests.” Most players live in poverty-ridden, dangerous neighborhoods, so Brown is constantly looking out for their well-being. Babb explains the psychogeography of New Orleans and especially how Hurricane Katerina impacted the students’ sense of place and their insecurities. He also investigates the burgeoning gentrification of the city, an ongoing process with dire consequences. “Displaced residents aren’t just physically uprooted from their homes, neighborhood, and comfort zones,” writes the author. “They often carry harsh emotional burdens that, in particular for children, can lead to higher risk of anxiety and depression.” At the same time, Babb wrestles with an existential element that attends the sport of football in most marginalized communities: the physical dangers of the game versus the opportunity to rise out of poverty—not just via college scholarships or (rarely) being drafted in the NFL, but by providing a transformative atmosphere that fosters independence, self-worth, and discipline. The author also probes the New Orleans police department through the lens of investigations into the shootings of players and the impact that violence has on all members of the community.

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A penetrating, wide-screen story of what it means to mentor under the toughest of circumstances.
Summer is always an appropriate time for lighthearted reading, but I prefer summer reads that aren’t just pleasurable, but also have real substance. Enter David Steinberg. Though perhaps less well known to those outside of the world of comedy, Steinberg is a giant in the industry—a comedian, actor, writer, director, and more. He is second only to Bob Hope in number of appearances on The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson (he also guest-hosted 12 times), and he has written for Friends, Seinfeld, and Curb Your Enthusiasm, among other TV shows and films. He’s beloved by countless comedians and entertainers; Jerry Seinfeld called him “one of my favorite comedians.”

Now in his late 70s, he gives us a treasure trove of comedic gold in his book Inside Comedy: The Soul, Wit, and Bite of Comedy and Comedians of the Last Five Decades (Knopf, July 13), which Kirkus calls “a lifelong story of comedy and its brilliant careers, told by a consummate insider.” In addition to chronicling his fascinating personal story—born in Winnipeg; abandoned pre-rabbinical studies; fell in love with the comedy of Lenny Bruce; joined the Second City troupe alongside Elaine May, Mike Nichols, Joan Rivers, and other luminaries—Steinberg provides a fun, anecdotal history of American comedy since he began his career.

As our critic notes, “the author charts a throughline of comics from the Borscht Belt to the Ed Sullivan Show to the Tonight Show, highlighting the work of Milton Berle, Sid Caesar, Don Rickles, and countless others. As a writer on The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour in the late 1960s, Steinberg saw how CBS censors tried to shut down political humor.”

In the mid-2000s, Steinberg hosted an interview show, Sit Down Comedy With David Steinberg, followed by Inside Comedy, which ran on Showtime from 2012 to 2015. The book includes memories of his friends and colleagues and hilarious excerpts from those interviews. The roll call is top-notch: Seinfeld, Robin Williams, Ray Romano, Martin Short, Bob Newhart on Sit Down; Ellen DeGeneres, Chris Rock, Tiny Fey, Ben Stiller, Betty White, Stephen Colbert, Wanda Sykes, and dozens of others on Inside (check out the absurdly loaded guest list from the show’s four seasons)—including Drew Carey, the current host of The Price Is Right and future host of a “new incarnation” of the show.

Throughout the book, the author digs into the mechanics of comedy, trying to figure out how it all works—what’s funny, what’s not, what’s off-limits (anything?). There’s no definitive answer, of course, but there is plenty of sound advice for aspiring comedians and an intriguing analysis of the craft. Steinberg hits the ground running from the first page. “Insecurity combined with arrogance is good DNA for a comedian,” he writes. “So is anger, aggression, and sadness. If you’ve had a great life and a wonderful bar mitzvah and you’ve been given a lot of money, you’d make a lousy comedian. You’re better off being the comedian’s lawyer....I spent my life in and outside the comedy world, and it is a world, a universe unto itself.”

If you’re in need of a hearty laugh—and who isn’t, these days?—enter Steinberg’s world and prepare to be entertained. And if you’re still thirsty for more, check out Andrew Hankinson’s Don’t Applaud. Either Laugh or Don’t. (Scribe, May 31), which offers a unique look at the Comedy Cellar in New York City, a venue that many of Steinberg’s subjects considered their home base.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
denied any connection. In the context of a “reverse biography,” Berlinerblau analyzes Roth’s books in relation to his “obsessional themes” in order to gain a better understanding of the artist as a whole. In addition to sex, Berlinerblau explores the theme of race in Roth’s fiction, noting that his representations of African Americans and Jews were often presented in “thoughtless and occasionally quite disturbing” ways. The author also explores what he deems “Roth Unsexed,” focusing on his obsession with how men and women change, noting that Roth also had strong opinions regarding the ideal self. “The literary challenge for scholars,” he writes, “is to break down the methods he used to transpose raw experience in exquisite literature.” Berlinerblau recommends assuming that an author’s fiction provides clues to his life “unless proven otherwise,” suggesting that proof exists otherwise in Roth’s case. Drawing from opposing criticism of scholars as well as his own observations, the author demonstrates revealing methods for viewing Roth and his body of work. Although Berlinerblau’s conclusions are plausible, the method in which he articulates them is not always straightforward. He frequently sidetracks his own discussions and repeatedly states the intentions of his book and the direction he will be taking before making his points.

“Intriguing new perspectives on a contentious writer.”

HAIFA REPUBLIC

“A Democratic Future for Israel”
Boehm, Omri
New York Review Books (136 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Aug. 31, 2021
978-1-68137-393-5

An Israeli philosopher gives a convincing argument for a return to the Zionist founders’ earliest binational one-state solution to attaining peace in Israel, as the two-state dream has long been abandoned. With dreams of peace shattered yet again by recent violence between Palestinians and Jews—and before that, “Trump’s so-called Deal of the Century”—Boehm puts forth a bold solution of universal citizenship in Israel and Palestinian sovereignty. The former president baldly supported Benjamin Netanyahu in what his right-wing Likud Party wanted all along yet could not openly espouse—namely, to prevent a Palestinian state and encourage the annexation of territories. The author does not see today’s liberals, even the Biden-Harris team, paying “lip service” any longer to a two-state solution in the wake of the right-wing calls for annexation, apartheid, and expulsion. Even so, Boehm urges a return to Zionism’s original binational tenets, espoused by founders like Ze’ev Jabotinski and David Ben-Gurion and later codified by Menachem Begin. In this concise, elegant study, the author examines some of the early language calling for a binational state (“the Jews’ state was envisaged as a sub-sovereign political entity existing under a multinational political sovereignty”) and the reasons why the Zionist agenda changed from a binational one to that of an ethnic nation-state—specifically, the horrors of the Holocaust, which resulted in the expulsion of the Palestinian population, the Nakba. Boehm proposes forgetting these traumas as a way of mutual accord, which is certainly a controversial notion. It’s important to note that by “forgetting,” the author doesn’t mean erasure from memory but rather not allowing the traumas of each side to be used as a cudgel in negotiations. He returns to Begin’s “autonomy plan” of the 1970s as a way of establishing what he calls a Haifa Republic, which would recognize the right of both Jews and Palestinians to national self-determination in their own states, separated along the 1967 Green Line.

Boehm elegantly synthesizes a tortuous history and offers an imaginative model for Israel’s political future.

“Boehm elegantly synthesizes a tortuous history and offers an imaginative model for Israel’s political future.”

HAIFA REPUBLIC
RACE AGAINST TIME
The Politics of a Darkening America
Boykin, Keith
Bold Type Books (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-64503-726-2

Prominent journalist and author Boykin, co-founder of the National Black Justice Coalition, looks deeply into our dangerous era and the unraveling social order by which Whites feel threatened by Black progress. Four “cataclysmic crises” have faced America in the recent past: the pandemic, the ensuing economic shutdown, the emergence of a formidable racial justice movement, and the crisis of democracy produced by the Trump administration and its retrograde supporters. All four crises came together, Boykin writes in a spot-on analysis, in the murder of George Floyd, who was found by autopsy to have been infected with Covid-19, had been laid off when the restaurant in which he worked closed, and was inarguably a victim of a racist regime led by a president motivated by “a repudiation and attempted erasure of the nation’s first Black president.” Floyd’s death, writes the author, “would provide the pretext for the president to instigate a new crisis of democracy,” one that led to widespread efforts on the part of the police to suppress dissent—at least on the left, since no such effort was made to suppress the disaffected Whites who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Trump was despicable, but Bill Clinton, in some ways his moral opposite and in others a kindred spirit, wasn’t much of a prize, either. In Boykin’s view, his assault on the rapper Sister Souljah was unquestionably racist. “For the vast majority of Black people at the time, Clinton…was the best we thought we could do under the circumstances,” he writes. “Reexamining the Clinton administration some decades later, it seems we were wrong.” What remains to be done, Boykin suggests, is to surmount the four crises and force White constituencies at last to recognize that “ignoring the pleas of Black and brown voices” is a threat to the social structure that can no longer be tolerated.

A troubling, provocative book that raises essential questions about our path forward.

THE SPECKLED BEAUTY
A Dog and His People, Lost and Found
Bragg, Rick
Knopf (256 pp.)
$25.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-525-65881-8

The Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist and bestselling author puts a fresh spin on a classic theme: A wounded man rescues a wounded pet that in turn rescues him. Bragg’s engaging tale of his life with an unruly Australian shepherd is the latest of his tragicomic memoirs of his family, which began with All Over but the Shoutin’ and continued with Ava’s Man and The Prince of Frogtown. Together, these books comprise one of the finest—and certainly the most comprehensive—group portraits of a poor, White Southern clan to appear in the past quarter-century. This installment finds the 60-year-old author back in Calhoun County, living in his mother’s basement (working “exactly eleven steps from where I go to sleep”) after bouts with pneumonia, heart and kidney failure, and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma that led to “chemo brain.” Lonely and depressed, Bragg took in an anarchic, one-eyed, badly injured dog named Speck that had run wild in woods and pastures but stuck with him. With typically deadpan wit, the author writes, “This did not mean I was his master, merely his alibi, coconspirator, bailsman, and the driver of his ambulance.” Speck tried to herd a one-ton truck, picked a fight with a cottonmouth, and acted as if “every wayward possum was a sign of the end times.” But when Speck revealed in simple joys on his mother’s farm, Bragg found that “to see a living thing that happy” was worth
the difficulties. Their story ends with a few narrative threads dropped—one involving Bragg's brother Sam, who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer during the writing of this book and died after its completion—but the abrupt conclusion doesn't diminish an estimable cycle of books. Let's hope they will someday appear in uniform editions with an introduction that would help readers see them all in context.

A celebrated Southern memoirist delivers a spirited book about a hell-raising dog and his effect on the author's life.

Many disadvantaged students and students with disabilities continue to fall through the cracks. O’Neal’s book offers an inspiring alternative path to success.

“A debut memoir about overcoming educational challenges.”

“...a lucid and revealing work that may be inspiring for students, teachers, and parents.”

“An honest and straightforward success story.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email JeremiahOnealb@gmail.com • sufficientlyeducated.com
legal tradition, precedents, the statute’s purposes (or the values that underlie it), and the relevant consequences.” Although Breyer maintains that all try to avoid the influence of ideology or political philosophy, he acknowledges that suggesting “a total and clean divorce between the Court and politics is not quite right either,” since a justice’s background, education, and experiences surely affect their views, especially when considering the consequences of a decision. The judicial process, Breyer explains, begins as a conference held once or twice each week where substantive discussion leads to preliminary conclusions. Sometimes, in order to find a majority, the court will take a minimalistic perspective, allowing those who differ “on the broader legal questions to come together in answering narrower ones.” Noting that, in 2016, only 1 in 4 Americans could name the three branches of federal government, Breyer suggests a revival of civics education in schools so that students can learn how government works and what the rule of law is. He believes that confidence in government will result from citizens’ participation in public life: by voting, taking part in local governance as school boards, and resolving their differences through argument, debate, cooperation, and compromise, all of which are “the embodiment of the democratic ideal.”

A cogent overview of the court’s crucial role, the application of which is sure to be discussed among scholars.

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A new urban studies text offers a thorough, well-researched history of inner-city blight as the inevitable legacy of segregation and racism.

Georgetown law professor Cashin, the author of Loving, Place Not Race and other notable books on racial issues, shows how so many of today’s “descendants” of American slavery are trapped in high-poverty neighborhoods because of deliberate state and federal policy decisions that “construct ghettos” and perpetuate inequality. She illustrates how anti-Black processes of sorting out the “residential caste”—boundary maintenance, opportunity hoarding, and stereotype-driven surveillance—led to overinvestment in affluent areas (“white space”) and disinvestment from Black neighborhoods. Using the urban history of Baltimore as an example, Cashin describes how “redlining” codified a two-tier system of home loans; “blockbusting” enticed panic selling by White homeowners; and intrusive road-building cleared out inner-city “blight” (read: “undesired people”). “Urban renewal” effectively contained descendants in high-poverty, high-crime areas. Ghettoization, in turn, defined Black space, allowing bigots to attribute bleak living conditions to Blacks’ allegedly “innate character.” Even the word ghetto became an adjective describing inner-city style, dress, speech, and social codes. All of these hold today: “The past is not past.” Segregation, fear, and racism are mutually reinforcing. The implicit racism in the redlining process often led to D ratings for Black neighborhoods, marking them as “hazardous,” while the Federal Housing Administration’s 30-year mortgage plan, a path to the middle class, has always been offered primarily to Whites. Meanwhile, interstate highways facilitate White flight, effectively creating walls around Black neighborhoods. While extensively documented and amply footnoted, Cashin’s survey remains compelling and accessible to a general readership. She
clearly presents the effects of concentrated poverty on a populace—how, for example, segregated schools affect educational outcomes—and shows how the work is never done. “While we must stop the bleeding at its source and prioritize poor Black neighborhoods,” she writes, “broader systems work is never finished in America.”

A resonant, important argument that White supremacy and racial division poison life in our cities.

**CONQUISTADORES**
*A New History of Spanish Discovery and Conquest*
Cervantes, Fernando
Viking (496 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-101-98126-9

Broad-ranging survey of Spain’s campaigns of conquest in the Americas. Cervantes opens with a provocation, asking that the Spanish conquistadors be considered with a touch less “revulsion” and in the context of an era during which religious conversion was a key goal. As he notes, the year Columbus set sail on his first voyage was the year that the last outposts of Moorish rule surrendered and Muslims and Jews who did not convert to Christianity were exiled. Soldiers such as Cortés and Pizarro were given to conversion by force and not in the least bit shy about killing anyone who opposed the process and their subsequent rule. However, writes the author, they faced considerable criticism from the Spanish crown and clergy, the former promulgating policies that forbade slavery, the latter holding that forced conversion was sinful. Columbus may have overlooked such niceties to enslave the inhabitants of Hispaniola far from royal oversight and “without fearing any objections from moral theologians back in Spain.” Even so, enslavement, Queen Isabel feared, was “a hurdle to effective evangelization,” and that evangelization was, in the end, as important to Spain’s rulers as the wealth that began to flow into their treasury from Mexico and Peru. The soldiers of Spain have dominated the literature, but it’s often forgotten that their violence not only censured, but also inspired rivals to resist them. Columbus died without the honors he felt he deserved, Pizarro was stabbed to death by rebellious lieutenants, and Cortés was put under the watchful eye of royal overseers who enjoyed salaries far higher than his. In the end, the business of the conquista was complex, for all the military might of the “brutally pragmatic enemy” that Native peoples faced, and one effect of the conquistadors’ behavior was for the Spanish royals to withdraw support from further campaigns of conquest in favor of conversion by missionaries.

A worthy if somewhat contrarian addition to the history of colonialism and European expansion.

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“A Chinese American writer reflects on the profound loss of her mother to cancer and how it informed her adulthood.”

**SEEING GHOSTS**
*A Memoir*
Chow, Kat
Grand Central Publishing (304 pp.)
$27.00 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-5387-1632-8

A Chinese American writer reflects on the profound loss of her mother to cancer and how it informed her adulthood.

The poignancy of journalist Chow’s debut memoir can be felt instantly when she confesses that she still struggles to comprehend her mother’s death in 2004 and finds herself often rushing to glimpse her memorial. The author, a founding member of NPR’s Code Switch team, considers herself unique in a traditional Chinese family that refused to openly grieve. As a loving tribute, Chow vibrantly tells the story of her mother’s life with great dexterity and in luminous detail. Born in China, Chow’s mother immigrated to America to attend

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**TRUSTED EYE**
*Post-World War II Adventures of a Fearless Art Advocate*
By Claudia Fontaine Chidester

“...her life in post-World War II Germany comes into clear focus....I wish I could have been along for the ride.”
—C.F. Yetmen, Author of *That Which Remains*

“Virginia Fontaine’s voice draws the threads....to tell a history that we all need to hear.”
—Ann Reynolds, Author of *Robert Smithson: Learning From New Jersey and Elsewhere*
An author and illustrator sheds light on borderline personality disorder in a lively graphic memoir

BY ERIC LIEBETRAU

“Borderline personality disorder explained in 20 candid and endearing illustrated essays.” That’s how our starred review described Courtney Cook’s debut graphic memoir, *The Way She Feels: My Life on the Borderline in Pictures + Pieces* (Tin House, June 29). It’s an apt assessment of the book, a lively mixture of narration, illustrations, sidebars, lists, and cartoons that treats a difficult subject with just the right amount of humor and pathos. Cook creates a portrait of a mental health issue that is ignored, poorly understood, and improperly diagnosed—even though it affects more than 4 million people in the U.S. “In addition to a moving personal story,” wrote our reviewer, “Cook provides a funny, heartfelt guide to borderline personality disorder and a distillation of adolescent tortures many readers will recognize.” I spoke to the author via Zoom from her home in Chicago; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Tell me about the genesis of the book.
I didn’t necessarily sit down with the intention of writing any book, much less the book I did. It really came in the form of essays. Over the course of a few years, I realized I was navigating similar subjects or subjects that were in the same thematic universe. When I was contemplating what I wanted to do for my MFA thesis, I realized these were all in conversation with one another, and I thought, *I have a book here.*

What about the format?
I’m drawn to unconventional or alternative forms. I think it would have felt stifling to me to try and maintain a specific form [for] the entire book, just because a lot of my experiences are fragmented. A symptom of borderline is an unclear sense of self and unstable emotions. I think it lends itself to different forms, depending on what I want to speak about. This may sound hokey, but I wanted the pieces to tell me what they needed or how they wanted it to be written.

Near the end, you write that “in order to be an advocate, I’d have to be vulnerable.” Could you discuss the challenge of finding the right voice to be so candid and open about your life experiences?
In making the decision to be as vulnerable as I was, or maintain the sense of intimacy that I wanted to, I had to disregard any expectations. I have always been a person that people have either really liked or really disliked, and for a period of my life that was upsetting, because it’s not fun to be hated by anyone, especially if you have problems with disliking yourself or feeling like a burden or [feeling] annoying. But as I’ve grown older, I’ve tried to reframe that idea. If someone meets me and the only thing they could say about me is that I was kind, that means I’m boring. I want to be kind but also creative and spunky and funny—all these other things.

Another passage that resonated strongly with me that I’d like you to discuss: “It’s not that I don’t find small
moments beautiful. I’m stopped by them all of the time. I just have the tendency to wish they were louder.”

For years, I struggled with my emotional regulation. I was feeling things in extremes, like I never existed in a neutral place. I was always either ecstatic and thought everything was beautiful and perfect, or everything was hopeless and awful. So appreciating small moments of beauty was important, as well as being able to find an emotional space within myself where things can be just OK. And often that’s actually better than feeling a sort of overwhelming sense of everything is perfect, because I can’t keep up that facade, and the second that it’s broken, then nothing is right in the world and I swing to the awful place.

I had to work very hard to get to that [OK] place. I had to reframe the way I viewed being in love, too. Prior to feeling like I was in a more stable space, I confused what I believed to be love with perhaps idealization or obsession. It was refreshing to realize that I was able to just be with a partner and exist comfortably—without thinking, I’ll die if they don’t text me back! If they don’t text me for a few hours, it’s not that they’ve run away, or hate me, or died; they could just be napping.

Where are we today in regard to the larger landscape of mental health?
I definitely feel like we are making strides. At least in the U.S., I have seen a cultural shift in recent years, especially with the vulnerability of certain celebrities who speak out. That’s remarkable, because there’s this mistaken notion that if you have depression, or something else, that you are very identifiable that. I’m not a walking symptom; I don’t like to think of myself that way. I do think that having more open conversations about mental health is beneficial. Particularly in the time of Covid, there’s been a lot of public discourse about self-care. There are still certain disorders that have a lot more stigma than others, and the stigmatization of mental illness isn’t a straight line. I think it’s harder for people to understand something like self-harm or schizophrenia, and I think borderline falls in that category of being scary or misunderstood. It comes down to this idea that you can struggle with something, but you are still very much human and have a million other things going on. You might struggle with X, Y, or Z, but that doesn’t mean you don’t like playing piano or watching HGTV or maybe have a strained relationship with your father. It’s all valid.

I’ve read that women have a difficult time convincing doctors of their illnesses or getting properly diagnosed. Have you found that to be true?
I don’t believe in the strict gender binary, but I do think femme-presenting individuals may have their pain taken less seriously—especially women of color. I try to address

privileged in my book. I’ve been very privileged to have all the treatment options and the ability to pay out of pocket when insurance wouldn’t cover treatment. And having advocates as vocal as my parents and, perhaps, coming from my background, I think that probably helped people believe me. I have an autoimmune disease. For a long time I told doctors that I was not well. They would run tests and tell me everything is normal. But I’m in the body, and the body is telling me that something’s off. They might say, you probably have anxiety. Well, I know that I have anxiety—all the time.

Any advice for readers in similar circumstances?
I know this is obviously a privileged position to say, but if one provider isn’t giving you the attention or understanding you deserve, find another one. If you can tweak the resources, do it, and also reach out to online communities for help. You have to be a self-advocate, especially when you’re in a place where everything’s exhausting. Ultimately, if at all possible, I would encourage people to seek out providers that believe you and don’t try to minimize your issues based on how they perceive you.

The Way She Feels received a starred review in the April 15, 2021, issue.

“Audaciously human and raw. The Way She Feels is a rainbow during the rain.”
—MARA ALTMAN
college and ended up charming her father at a tag sale, which led to a problematic marriage riddled with bickering, unrest, and money problems. Honoring her family’s ghosts, the author also writes movingly about the crushing death of her brother just an hour after his premature birth, the steady decline of her mother’s health as cancer ravaged her, and how the early deaths of the women in her family give her both pause and cause for concern. Chow fondly recalls how her mother looked while dressing in her closet for work each morning and “how our bodies were similar, that I was an extension of you.” Her mother hid internal aches she blamed on age but were later revealed as symptoms of her terminal disease. There is levity braided into the memories, as well: Chow’s mother telling her, at age 9, that she wanted to be stuffed after her death so she could “sit in your apartment and watch you all the time,” fun family road trips, and her mother’s penchant for practical jokes. By uniting family memories, elements of Chinese culture, and an intimate perspective, Chow wraps tragedy and history into an affecting memorial.

A powerful remembrance of a family unmoored by the loss of its matriarch.

Exemplary gathering of writings on Black history, arts, politics, and culture in America.

Not all the writers in this New Yorker compilation are Black—e.g., Renata Adler, Calvin Trillin, Malcolm Gladwell—but the most compelling of the pieces are drawn from lived experience. As Cobb writes, “in its early decades, [the magazine] largely kept the subject of race at a distinct remove from its readers.” However, in 1962, as the civil rights movement grew in strength and intensity, the New Yorker published an essay that resounds throughout this book. Called “Letter From a Region in My Mind,” James Baldwin’s piece angrily denounced a system in which “the social treatment accorded even the most successful Negroes proved that one needed, in order to be free, something more than a bank account,” one in which Black people “are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world.” In the following essay, Toni Morrison recounts an attempt to write about race in such a way as “to defang cheap racism, annihilate and discredit the routine, easy, available color fetish, which is reminiscent of slavery itself.” Politicians come in for close scrutiny, with Barack Obama called into question for avoiding overt questions of race while addressing Black audiences with “veiled dispatches and surreptitious winks,” while forgotten heroes get their due. For example, Kathryn Schulz praises Pauli Murray, whose “law-school peers were accustomed to being startled by her,” both for her brilliance and foresight: In 1944, she propounded that within 25 years, Plessy v. Ferguson would be overturned (it took a decade). Rappers, artists, curators, and scholars all get their say. Most urgently, the final section of the book addresses the emergence of an ever more organized Black resistance following the murder of George Floyd. Other contributors include Jamaica Kincaid, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Hilton Als, Stanley Crouch, Zadie Smith, and Edwidge Danticat.

An essential volume for readers interested in the Black past and present, as all readers should be.
The complicated and surprising ways that waste occurs in our lives

Byron Reese & Scott Hoffman

Wasted

How we squander time, money, and natural resources—and what we can do about it

Available now
THE AUSCHWITZ PHOTOGRAPHER
The Forgotten Story of the WWII Prisoner Who Documented Thousands of Lost Souls
Crippa, Luca & Onnis, Maurizio
Trans. by Higgins, Jennifer
Sourcebooks (352 pp.)

A biography of Wilhelm Brasse (1917-2012), a Polish prisoner at Auschwitz who survived by becoming an official photographer for the Germans.

Translated from the Italian by Higgins, the book draws from a BBC interview with Brasse, interviews with his two children, and material in several Holocaust museums. Crippa and Onnis take a quasi-novelistic approach to their subject, presenting detailed descriptions and passages of dialogue evoked by Brasse’s stark photos of fellow prisoners and of the German guards and other prison staff, including the infamous camp doctor, Josef Mengele.

At first, the authors suggest, Brasse was simply doing whatever it took to avoid being sent to the gas chambers. His photographic skill, honed before the war in his uncle’s studio, made him useful to the camp administration, who enlisted him to document the incoming prisoners. Brasse also ingratiated himself with the Nazis by taking or developing their personal photos and, at one point, by producing a run of cheery postcards to be sent to family members to show how pleasant camp duty was for the staff.

Eventually, Brasse took the considerable risk of helping fellow prisoners carry out various forms of resistance, such as smuggling out evidence of the horrific conditions inside the camp. When news of the Russian advance through Poland arrived, he disobeyed his orders to destroy the photographic evidence, leaving it for the Russians to find when they liberated the camp. “A tide of memories broke over him in an instant,” write the authors of the moment he decided not to burn the photos. “Years of imprisonment and servitude passed before his eyes. There they all were, right in front of him. He realized he could tell the story behind every single picture, and this awareness filled him with an energy and resolve he’d never felt before.”

The prose is functional yet unexceptional, but the authors provide another sharp reminder of the extent of Nazi evil, enhanced by the black-and-white photo insert.

A moving story of one man’s endurance in the worst imaginable conditions.

THE SECRET BODY
How the New Science of the Human Body Is Changing the Way We Live
Davis, Daniel M.
Princeton Univ. (240 pp.)

An exciting update on human biology in the years since the initial description of the double helix structure of DNA in 1953.

This is not a subject that popular writers have ignored, but Davis, a professor of immunology, refreshingly avoids the low-hanging fruit (life extension, designer babies) and digs into the actual science. While acknowledging the many miracles this new science will lead to (most of which will not occur in the immediate future), the author explores what contemporary scientists have learned and how they learned it. Davis emphasizes that many breakthroughs followed the development of new technology. For centuries, scientists could only examine living cells through the familiar light microscope, the magnification of which reached a limit in the 1870s before breakthroughs in the 20th century vastly increased its power. Years of work determined the structure of a single protein, insulin, and won Frederick Sanger a Nobel Prize in 1958. Today, machines do this in minutes. “It once took years and hundreds of millions of dollars to sequence a human genome,” writes Davis. “Now it takes a few hundred dollars, or less, and can be done in a single day.”

The tedious process of counting and identifying living cells became much smoother with the invention of the flow cytometer. It’s easy to understand how the heart or kidney works by watching it in action but not the brain. Enter optogenetics, by which a genetically altered neuron fires when exposed to light. Following its tortuous path became easier with another advance that allowed scientists to give a cell a bright color without killing it. Davis, who writes accessibly and concisely, also examines a fairly new fascination, the gut: “There’s scarcely any state of human health or disease that hasn’t been linked with the [microbiome]. Variations have been associated with diseases as diverse as autism, asthma, multiple sclerosis, cancer and inflammatory bowel disease.” Further current research is revealing new ways that we can manipulate our resident bacteria for our benefit.

Dazzling discoveries in expert hands.
“A portrait of eventful lives in Hollywood’s golden age.”

**COMPETING WITH IDIOTS**

**Herman and Joe Mankiewicz, a Dual Portrait**  
Davis, Nick  
Knopf (384 pp.)  
$32.50 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-1-4000-4183-1

Sibling rivalry in the movie world.  
The grandson of Herman Mankiewicz (1887-1953) and great-nephew of Joe Mankiewicz (1909-1993), Davis creates a lively, anecdote-filled chronicle of the two men’s lives as Hollywood movers and shakers. Although he aims to probe the mysteries of the “titanic figures” in his family’s history, his portraits are likely to be familiar to readers of Richard Meryman’s biography of Herman, *Mank*, the basis for a recent movie, and Ken Geist’s biography of Joe, *Pictures Will Talk*, books on which Davis draws heavily. Herman’s career began in New York, where he was the *New Yorker*’s first drama critic and socialized with the Algonquin Round Table crowd. Lured to Hollywood by MGM, he became an acclaimed screenwriter, best remembered for his work with Orson Welles on *Citizen Kane*. Brash and outspoken, he was an alcoholic, womanizer, and gambler who spent his life “thumbing his nose at authority.” Although he tried to be Joe’s protector when the two were growing up, he came to resent him once Joe arrived in Hollywood, at Herman’s invitation, to take a job as junior writer. Joe was young, handsome, fresh, and optimistic; Herman became bitter, disdaining movies that he thought were trite. His philandering was so widely known that his wife came to be dubbed “poor Sara.” Joe, considered “virgin,” was an alcoholic, womanizer, and gambler who spent his life “thumbing his nose at authority.” Although he tried to be Joe’s protector when the two were growing up, he came to resent him once Joe arrived in Hollywood, at Herman’s invitation, to take a job as junior writer. Joe was young, handsome, fresh, and optimistic; Herman became bitter, disdaining movies that he thought were trite. His philandering was so widely known that his wife came to be dubbed “poor Sara.”

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A portrait of eventful lives in Hollywood’s golden age.

**FLIGHT 149**  
A Hostage Crisis, a Secret Special Forces Unit, and the Origins of the War in the Gulf  
Davis, Stephen  
PublicAffairs (288 pp.)  
$28.00 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-1-5417-0005-5

An investigative reporter digs into the fate of British Airways Flight 149 and its passengers and crew, whom Saddam Hussein used as “human shields” during the Gulf War.

Davis has written the closest we are likely to have to a definitive account of Britain’s calamitous decision to allow a flight from London to land in Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990, hours after Iraq had invaded. After the plane touched down, Iraq took as hostages its 367 passengers and 18 crew, including British and American citizens and 11 children. Until the last were released four months later, the hostages were split up and moved repeatedly to thwart allied air attacks. In a thorough and well-paced exposé, the author convincingly rebuts Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s claims that her government failed to order the flight to divert because the invasion didn’t start until after the plane arrived in Kuwait. Drawing on more than 300 interviews with sources ranging from Flight 149’s crew and passengers to a penitent former MI6 officer, Davis offers strong evidence that the flight was instead allowed to proceed because it carried a British black-ops team mostly drawn from an ultrasecret group called the Increment or “Inc.,” which Thatcher’s government wanted to have on the ground before the invasion and whose involvement was covered up in London and Washington. Davis shows vividly the cost of the official missteps in close-ups of the horrific plight of the “human shields,” some of whom were kept in squalid conditions. One group was forced to dig a trench they were told was for them; they were to be shot and buried if the invasion reached them. Britain’s blunders may have been less significant in the Gulf War than Hussein’s threat to disputed Kuwaiti oil fields, but they provide a fascinating window onto black ops’ work and hostages’ lives.

A skillfully reconstructed account of a hostage crisis and the bungling that caused it.

**THE TRAIL TO KANJIROBA**  
Rediscovering Earth in an Age of Loss  
deBuys, William  
Illus. by Gaal, Rebecca  
Seven Stories (272 pp.)  
$25.95 | Aug. 17, 2021  
978-1-64421-064-2

A self-reflective journey from despair that the Earth is dying to the realization that even a world irrevocably changed by humanity is beautiful and worth protecting.

It is easy to fear the future when the air is heating up, the seas are rising, and species are disappearing in the ongoing sixth extinction. But where there is hope—not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that it makes sense, regardless of the outcome—there is a reason to care. In his latest, Pulitzer Prize finalist deBuys brings many of the most appealing attributes of memoir and travel and nature writing to bear on humanity’s most significant existential crisis. In 61 brief chapters, which read like travel journal entries, deBuys weaves together geological and evolutionary histories and studies of the planet’s peoples and biodiversity within the context of his participation with the Nomads Clinic, which provides medical care to communities in Nepal’s remote Upper Dolpo.
region. The author makes a convincing case that even if we cannot cure the ills we have wrought on the Earth, we should still care for it—and for ourselves—as best we can. In the shadow of the Himalayas and its rapidly melting glaciers, the clinic’s medical team brings hope, care, and the rare antibiotic to people living otherwise happy and rewarding lives. While climate change is dire and possibly even irreversible, deBuys finds beauty and solace nonetheless. “My work has taken me to badly disturbed environments where losses are high and prospects for improvement slim,” he writes. “But most of these places have also overflowed with beauty. They have fundamentally changed how I see the world. Studying the climate system has had a similar effect, revealing the complexity of the natural world in new and deeper ways.” The author includes a helpful glossary of terms that may be unfamiliar to many readers.

A pleasing ray of positivity regarding the planet’s present and future.

A WOVEN WORLD

On Fashion, Fishermen, and the Sardine Dress

Deming, Alison Hawthorne

Counterpoint (256 pp.)

$26.00 | Aug. 24, 2021

978-1-64009-482-6

Essays in celebration of artisans.
At first glance, the worlds of fashion and fishing may appear to be disparate topics, but using poetic language, childhood experiences, and knowledge of cultural history, Deming captivatingly weaves together these communities. Inspired by a 2016 exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art featuring Yves Saint Laurent’s “sardine dress,” the author set out to learn more about the artisans who have made an impact on her life. Among them are her maternal ancestors, who ran a couture dressmaking business “in Manhattan from the Gilded Age to the Great Depression,” and the herring fishermen on Grand Manan Island, where she spent her childhood summers. Deming laments “the world’s dismissal of makers in favor of manufacturers,” which has “driven such small-scale artistry into obsolescence.” In a fascinating journey, she takes us around the world, from New Brunswick to New York to Paris and beyond, chasing leads and sifting through archives and sharing her family’s history and her own quest for continuity and belonging. Deming lovingly describes her grandmother’s skills cutting fabric and sewing together an elegant dress without a pattern. The author’s grandmother’s being buried in an unmarked grave and listed as a missing body.

A charming, heartfelt homage to the makers, past and present, who have defined lives and communities across the world.

HERO OF TWO WORLDS

The Marquis de Lafayette in the Age of Revolution

Duncan, Mike

PublicAffairs (512 pp.)

$30.00 | Aug. 24, 2021

978-1-5417-3035-5

A new biography of the giant of both European and American history. The Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834) did not fade away after the American Revolution. Instead, he loomed large on the world stage for decades after the war, and history podcaster Duncan does a fine job of filling out his subject’s life. Among the richest men in France, Lafayette sailed to America in 1777 at age 19 to join the rebellion, seeking mostly adventure. Anxious to smite France’s traditional enemy or simply find work, many Frenchmen did the same, but Lafayette didn’t exaggerate his military experience and made no demands on George Washington, who was charmed. Lafayette became a trusted lieutenant who fought the British, lobbied French leaders to support the rebellion, and entered the pantheon of Revolutionary heroes. Duncan tells this story in the first third of the book. Only 24 when the British surrendered, Lafayette returned to France to participate in efforts to reform the crumbling French economy. As commander general of the National Guard, he was a leading figure early in the French Revolution. When the Terror began in 1792, he fled to Austrian territory to escape arrest but was treated as a dangerous revolutionary and imprisoned for five years. Although freed by Napoleon, Lafayette disapproved of the military leader’s autocracy and retired from politics—until the monarchy’s restoration in 1814, when he again became a voice for liberal ideals. He opposed the Bourbons’ increasingly reactionary policies and supported the 1830 revolution that placed Louis-Philippe on the throne, but Lafayette found him a disappointment. Duncan displays impressive skill in keeping his Lafayette an admirable figure despite painful limitations. More energetic than intelligent, he was not ahead of his time. Popular histories extol his abolitionism, but this developed later; he had no objection to slavery while serving under Washington. His lack of personal ambition was unaccompanied by proficiency in France’s cutthroat politics, so his influence never matched his popularity.

An outstanding account of an almost impossibly eventful life.
“Can we survive climate change? This learned book suggests that we can, but it won’t be easy.”

**CLIMATE CHAOS**

**BLACK NERD PROBLEMS**

*Essays*

Evans, William & Holmon, Omar

Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster

(304 pp.)

$27.00 | Sep. 14, 2021

978-1-982150-23-5

The first book from the creators of the popular Black Nerd Problems website.

In their literary debut, Evans and Holmon examine a broad swath of the popular-culture landscape, from anime and video games to comic books and movies, mixing social commentary and insight with the sheer love of the true fan. In the introduction, the authors introduce nerd culture and the joy of connecting over shared passions, with Holmon offering a solid encapsulation of both the content and the voice: “That feeling of excitement and passion for a show, book, or character that fucks with you and then wanting to share that amongst friends or even strangers, hoping they feel the same thing you do….Isn’t that worth fighting for, for Black nerds and nerds of color to come together and share that joy?” The essays include breakdowns of particular shows and characters—ranging from an in-depth analysis of Simba ("It’s Time We Stop Pretending That Simba Wasn’t Garbage in The Lion King") to the Black superhero in *Into the Spider-Verse*—along with musings on the representation of people of color in comics, the shifting definitions of nerd and nerd culture, and the reflection of social issues in popular-culture texts. The book’s format, switching between the two authors and including essays that work as dialogues, offers the sense of hearing conversations between best friends. The authors provide lighthearted material, such as an excel

**CLIMATE CHAOS**

*Lessons on Survival From Our Ancestors*

Fagan, Brian & Durrani, Nadia

PublicAffairs (352 pp.)

$30.00 | Sep. 21, 2021

978-1-5417-5087-6

A long look back at human interactions with changing climate issues in the past.

Archaeologists Fagan and Durrani, the former of whom has written about climate and natural resources in several popular books, survey the “story of how our ancestors adapted to…myriad shifts, large and small,” as portions of the world alternately heated and cooled. One adaptation of long standing is simply to move, as Ancestral Puebloan people did when a centurylong drought settled over what is now the southwestern U.S. Ecological refugees who are leaving present-day drought-stricken zones in places such as the Sahel are evidence of “the ancient survival strategy of mobility on a truly massive scale.” The massive drought that has settled over the present-day Southwest does not afford the same ability. As exploding population in the region, the authors write, has "placed major stresses on groundwater and other scarce water supplies as global warming intensifies." Given that mass migration “is no longer a viable option in our time,” it’s up to modern planners to figure out a way to ensure the chances of our survival. While questioning our near-religious faith in the thought that technology can somehow save us, the authors allow that it will help, even as we continue to wreak catastrophic damage. Megadroughts in places such as the Southwest and India are not our only concern; the authors write of climate change–induced flooding and plagues, noting that the difference between present and past is that the natural alterations of old are now human-caused. What we do have going for us, the authors conclude in this accessible survey, is our ability to think problems through. “In planning adaptations to future climate change,” they write, “we need to maximize those enduring qualities that will sustain us as we plan decisive adaptations for the future.” That includes local leadership to address local effects.

Can we survive climate change? This learned book suggests that we can, but it won’t be easy.

**EXODUS, REVISITED**

*My Unorthodox Journey to Berlin*

Feldman, Deborah

Plume (368 pp.)

$18.00 paper | Aug. 31, 2021

978-0-593-18526-1

A Hasidic woman delivers a deeper explanation of why she left her Orthodox community.

Following the unexpected success of Feldman’s first memoir, *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of*
My Hasidic Roots (2012), which was the basis for a Netflix series, the author delves into the reasons behind her decision to leave a life she had always known. She became a refugee of sorts in the U.S., uncomfortable in mainstream culture and rejected by the Jewish community she left. “I soon realized becoming American was impossible,” she writes. “I had been raised in a world resembling an eighteenth-century European shtetl, where I had spoken a different language, consumed a different culture, and was subjected to religious law instead of civil law...the United States could never be the country I knew and trusted; it could therefore never be home.” Eventually, however, she earned her independence the hard way, with one small triumph or setback after another. Feldman spends long passages contemplating what it means to be Jewish as well as to be a mother who wants her son to grow up with an awareness of his Jewish ancestry yet not be tied to it as she had been. On multiple occasions, her voyage of self-discovery took her to Europe, where she can trace some of her family’s flight from the impending Holocaust. The author also discusses her deep ties to her grandmother, who showed unexpected strength during her years as a slave laborer in a Nazi concentration camp. Given that horrific history, readers might be surprised to learn that Feldman finally settled in Berlin. For those who read the first book, this one will offer answers to questions that she raised there. Readers who have not read Unorthodox, however, won’t have all of the background that underlies this sequel even though Feldman combines some material from the first book into this one.


CUBA
An American History
Ferrer, Ada
Scribner (480 pp.)
$32.00 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-5011-5455-3

A fluid, consistently informative history of the long, inextricable link between Cuba and the U.S., well rendered by a veteran Cuban American historian.

Ferrer, a Guggenheim fellow and professor of Latin American studies at NYU, explains that her chronicle is quintessentially “American” because to know Cuba is to grapple with the “sometimes intimate, sometimes explosive, always uneven relationship between the two countries.” The author begins with the “origin myth” of Columbus, who, of course, never even landed in what is now the U.S. Coming ashore in Cuba, he and his men wiped out most of the Indigenous population and inaugurated a slave-based economy of sugar, tobacco, and rum that would decimate the islands for centuries. Later, the fledgling U.S. profited enormously from that economy, and Ferrer reminds readers how Cuba supported the Colonial cause against Britain. President John Adams had his eye on annexing Cuba, but he did not want to provoke the British or Spanish; instead, the Monroe Doctrine was enacted in 1823 to keep European powers out of what the U.S. considered its domain. “Cuba—its sugar, its slavery, its slave trade—is part of the history of American capitalism,” notes the author. Such proprietary zeal led the U.S. to help Cuba expel the Spanish, although Ferrer considers it a myth that the Americans won the island its independence from Spain. Indeed, the Americans wouldn’t leave gracefully; forcing the new republic to accept the Platt Amendment. This only exacerbated tensions among revolutionary Cubans, who had grown sick of American exploitation and manipulation, especially since Americans owned so much Cuban land. Ferrer is an endlessly knowledgeable guide, and she is evenhanded in describing Fidel Castro’s revolution and the fervid nationalism and periods of economic hardship after the American embargo. She is especially good in delineating how a distinct Cuban identity was forged over the centuries.

A wonderfully nuanced history of the island nation and its often troubled dealings with its gigantic and voracious neighbor.

REFUGEE HIGH
Coming of Age in America
Fishman, Elly
The New Press (288 pp.)
$25.99 | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-62097-508-4

A chronicle of one academic year at Sullivan High School in Chicago, where refugee teens from all over the world struggle to acclimate to the U.S. while processing personal and inherited trauma.

Throughout the book, Fishman, a journalism professor and award-winning former senior staff editor and writer for Chicago magazine, delivers sharp individual portraits: Mariah, a sophomore from Basra, Iraq, who transferred to Sullivan from another school, struggles with her deteriorating relationship with her sister, who moved to Atlanta to get married at 17. Belenge, a Congolese teen who was born in a refugee camp in Tanzania, struggles with secondhand trauma after his close friend was shot during a possible gang recruitment exercise. Shaina copes with the stress of fleeing a marriage arranged by her Burmese parents, leaving the family $2,000 in debt to the fiancé she refuses to wed. Other teens battle court cases to determine their petitions for asylum and endure persistent xenophobia and racism. Through it all, Sarah Quintenz, the beleaguered director of Sullivan’s recently created Newcomer Center, and Chad Adams and Matt Fasana, the school’s principal and assistant principal, watch over the students, working diligently to help them overcome their challenges through one-on-one interventions and by exposing them to American traditions like Thanksgiving and Halloween. The book is well researched and compassionate, particularly regarding the embattled educators at Sullivan, who often seem as traumatized as their students. Although Fishman is a sympathetic narrator, the emphasis is on struggle and tribulation rather than on the strength of character that her subjects exhibit and their occasional moments of
levity and triumph. Additionally, many of them disappear for chapters at a time, leaving large gaps that detract from the narrative cohesion (the list of characters at the beginning helps somewhat). The strength of the book lies at the level of each individual student and educator.

A diligently researched and moving yet disjointed story of young refugees and their guardians.

**BEING A HUMAN**

Adventures in Forty Thousand Years of Consciousness

Foster, Charles

Metropolitan/Henry Holt (400 pp.)

$28.99 | Aug. 24, 2021

978-1-250-78371-4

British scholar and writer Foster delivers a spirited romp through human history and finds our time wanting in many ways.

Building on *Being a Beast* (2016), in which he looked at the world through the viewpoints of badgers, a fox, and other critters, Foster imagines a humdrum deep past in which not much happened until around the Stone Age, when some mysterious spark fired our imaginations. As he writes, “God is good and favours the Upper Palaeolithic,” and its inhabitants responded to that goodness by painting glorious works of art in hard-to-get-to places, placing their dead in carefully constructed graves, and building cultures. That age of metaphor and creation, of “self-creation and self-knowing,” came crashing down in the Neolithic, which brought us agriculture and urbanization. “In the Neolithic,” Foster laments, “we started to get boring and miserable,” controlled in all sorts of ways. Instead of moving through the land, knowing what to hunt and what to gather and paying close attention to our surroundings, we became machines of creation and self-knowing,” came crashing down in the Neolithic, “controlled in all sorts of ways. Instead of moving through the land, knowing what to hunt and what to gather and paying close attention to our surroundings, we became machines of labor. The author offers a provocative, pleasing meditation on the different ways in which the two stages of human evolution made use of fire—one to create, one to destroy—and he cleverly links the Neolithic world of overcrowding, forced labor, taxation, epidemic disease, and other woes to our time: “Continue synergistically for 12,000 years or so, and you have us.” This is a magpie book full of intriguing anthropological sketches. On one page, Foster notes that a circular house “is an intrinsically democratic space,” and on another, that the Romans were more interested in nature than were the Greeks. Throughout, the author makes connections between minds past and present and the “more-than-human world.” It’s a book that fits neatly into the growing library of modern British natural history writing, alongside the best of Nan Shepherd, Robert Macfarlane, and Roger Deakin.

A splendid assessment of the many ways there are to be a person, for good and ill.

**CRANIAL FRACKING**

Frazier, Ian

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (192 pp.)

$25.00 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-0-374-60307-6

A short, bumpy ride through the humorist’s dry, deadpan sensibilities.

Perhaps it’s comparing almonds to walnuts, but Frazier’s latest, a hit-and-miss foray into absurdist humor, is not in the class of his much-admired travel books. The author makes a few penetrating satirical stabs at contemporary follies and offers spams of cleverness, yet too many of the three-page ditties are like underinflated balloons that fizzle out, and the savagely funny pieces only serve to underscore the collection’s overall unevenness. However, the idea of climate change in Hades (“The Temperature of Hell: A Colloquium”) is certainly delicious, and “In My Defense,” a survey of assorted heresies perpetrated by a scoutmaster who has lost his faith, is amusingly clever. There’s also a wry Shakespearean parody on the rigors of parking thy horse and some chuckles to be had with the title piece, in which Frazier sells the extraction rights to vast reserves of natural gas found in his head. When he is critiquing artificial intelligence or advocating for mummies in what is otherwise a golden age of zombies, the theater of the absurd is taken to brave new worlds—consider Jane Austen, “who featured zombies in all her exquisitely wrought nineteenth-century comedies of manners.” One can’t deny that great opening lines like, “I was walking down the street one afternoon, when I suddenly lost funding” belong in a pantheon of sorts, and the idea of Victor Laszlo writing a blog is amusing. Some may cock an eyebrow at the slyly witty “The British Museum of Your Stuff,” wherein larceny and scholarship go hand in hand, or enjoy Frazier’s exercise in anti-travel planning. But there are also plenty of misses, including “Etymology of Some Common Typos,” making this a minor work in the author’s oeuvre. For more substantial essay-length pieces, check out *Hogs Wild* (2017).

For Frazier fans. His style of badinage remains an acquired taste that not everyone may wish to acquire.

**SURVIVAL OF THE CITY**

Living and Thriving in an Age of Isolation

Glaeser, Edward & Cutler, David

Penguin Press (480 pp.)

$30.00 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-0-593-29768-1

A sweeping investigation of threats to urban life.

Harvard economists Glaeser, who specializes in urban economics, and Cutler, who focuses on health care, believe that cities offer unequaled settings for creativity, commerce, entrepreneurship,
and enjoyment. “Humanity crafted itself an urban world because proximity is valuable,” they write, even though proximity also allows illnesses to spread easily. The authors examine incidences of contagion throughout history, including plague in medieval Europe; yellow fever in 18th-century Philadelphia; waves of cholera, which surged globally before reaching the New World in the spring of 1832; the influenza pandemic of 1918; and, of course, Covid-19 (some of the data on this virus is unavoidably outdated). “A central theme of this book,” write the authors, “is that the vulnerability of large, dense, interconnected cities requires an effective, proactive public sector: a shared strength that serves everyone.” They suggest ways to effectively enact quarantine, such as an international early warning system, cooperation to shut down international travel, and sequestration of impacted regions. Because the World Health Organization is hobbled by an unwieldy structure, they propose a NATO-like organization to respond to global health challenges. They critique the U.S. health care industry, which rations care through high prices. “The failure to fund public health,” they assert, “is part of the larger problem that our private and public insurance programs are set up primarily to cover acute illness costs, not to prevent disease.” Besides analyzing health issues, the authors look at other urban challenges, such as “overly expensive housing, violent conflict over gentrification, persistently low levels of upward mobility, and outrage over brutal and racially targeted policing and long prison sentences for minor drug crimes.” Among their proposals for measures that would enhance city life are extensive reforms to business and land use regulations, the strengthening of schools, and policing that would “both prevent crime and respect every citizen.”

A thoughtful and useful consideration of the fate of cities in the age of Covid-19.

POET WARRIOR
A Memoir
Harjo, Joy
Norton (240 pp.)
$25.00 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-393-24852-4

In this hybrid memoir, the acclaimed Muscogee Nation writer combines poetry and prose to trace her journey from avid word collector to seasoned wordsmith. As a child, Harjo hid under the kitchen table, eavesdropping on her elders. She later found out that her mother knew about and tolerated this habit because she, too, was a lover of words. The author’s mother would routinely recite poems by writers like William Blake, a practice that Harjo credits with sparking her interest in poetry and songs. In contrast, her father’s violence filled her with the instinct to hide herself and her literary journey. This pattern continued when Harjo’s mother married another abusive man, forcing Harjo to leave home when she was just a teenager. Built on this solid foundation, the remainder of the story details the author’s evolution from a shy, scared child to a driven writer and educator dedicated to nurturing her students in a way that she had never been. Critical to this journey was the time she spent studying at the University of New Mexico, where she formed community with other Native students and discovered much-needed healing. In 2019, she was named the U.S. poet laureate, the first Native American to hold that honor in U.S. history. The book is the perfect companion to Harjo’s previous memoir, Crazy Brave, adding depth and new meaning to familiar characters and personal milestones. Despite having a difficult life, the author’s capacity for compassion is astonishing. In one passage, she calls her abusive stepfather one of her “greatest teachers” because his abuse forced her into a life of the mind and “to find myself in the spiritual world.” She masterfully holds both her past self and her abusers accountable while layering their characters with details that render them sympathetic in spite of their often horrifying behavior. On the line level, Harjo’s words blaze with honesty and lyricism, and nearly every sentence is a delight.

A gorgeous, compassionate memoir from one of America’s greatest living writers.

THE RAGE OF INNOCENCE
How America Criminalizes Black Youth
Henning, Kristin
Pantheon (512 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-5447-4690-6

A sobering assessment of the separate and decidedly unequal legal regimes that govern the juvenile justice system. “Our nation’s obsession with policing and incarcerating Black America begins with Black children.” So writes Henning, a law professor who served as lead attorney with the District of Columbia public defender’s office, specializing in youth crime. Rarely did any of the cases put before her involve White defendants. As she writes, where one young Black student was accused of bringing a Molotov cocktail to school and went through a hellish legal ordeal, a White student who confessed to the same crime was barely punished. “Black children are accorded all over the nation for the most ordinary adolescent activities,” she writes, whether hanging out in a park or shopping at the mall. When those children do commit infractions, mostly involving underage drinking or minor acts of vandalism, they are punished far more severely than their White peers. Henning serves up numerous (and sometimes repetitive) cases from her legal files, documenting this unequal administration of justice with statistics and anecdotes alike. On the latter point, she gamely notes, “I could write this entire chapter in anecdotes, but then you wouldn’t believe me when I say that White kids are treated differently than Black kids for committing the same kinds of crimes all over the country. So let’s look at the history, the science, and the data.” She does, and deeply. The author observes that White adolescents, particularly in groups, are far more likely than Black youth to use drugs, drink alcohol, and carry weapons to school. Yet arrest rates for Blacks are
proportionally higher, as are bail and punishment. “Every state actor who does not take an active stance against racial inequities is at least complicit—and at worst active—in perpetuating the criminalization and over policing of Black youth,” Henning concludes, insisting that all involved examine their biases and combat them in favor of equitable treatment.

A powerful argument that the legal and social oppression of Black Americans begins at birth.

PEOPLE LOVE DEAD JEWS
Reports From a Haunted Present
Horn, Dana
Norton (224 pp.)
$25.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-393-53156-5

A guided tour of the hypocrisy that serves as the mechanism by which antisemitism rages on unchecked.

The cold fury and in-your-face phrasing of the title of acclaimed novelist Horn’s essay collection sets the tone for this brilliant and readable yet purposefully disturbing book. In the first chapter, “Everyone’s (Second) Favorite Dead Jew”—presumably Jesus Christ is No. 1—Horn looks at Anne Frank, who the author believes would never have been so beloved had she survived. At the heart of Frank’s myth is a passage from her diary that reads, “I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.” As Horn points out, Frank was less than a month from meeting people who surely convinced her that she was wrong. The author ranges widely: the mythology of Ellis Island; the marketing of the Jewish history of Harbin, China (why call it “Property Seized from Dead or Expelled Jews”); and the problematic elements of Holocaust museums and exhibits. Since these museums have not stopped people hating or killing Jews, wonders the author, what is the point of recalling the operation of the genocide at a “granular” level? Readers will be enthralled throughout by the fierce logic of Horn’s arguments, novelty of research, black humor, and sharp phrasing. Particularly affecting is “Commuting With Shylock,” in which Horn describes how she listened to an audio version of The Merchant of Venice with her precocious 10-year-old son, stopping frequently to explain key points. His clarity about the meaning of the “prick us, do we not bleed” speech is a revelation. Though Horn briefly mentions Zionism as a key aspect of Jewish heritage, one subject not discussed here is how the complex situation in the Middle East—characterized by dead Jews and dead Palestinians—fits into her analysis.

A riveting, radical, essential revision of the stories we all know—and some we don’t.

THE PRISONER
A Memoir
Hwang Sok-yong
Trans. by Kim-Russell, Sora & Hur, Anton
Verso (688 pp.)
$34.95 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-1-83976-083-9

A captivating depiction of a Korean novelist’s time as a political prisoner and the belief in humanity that sustained him throughout the ordeal.

Hwang (b. 1943) is known for his elegant, philosophically self-reflective writing. In this sprawling, detailed chronicle of his life and various imprisonments, he delivers a vivid depiction of some of the historical currents that shaped Korea in the 20th century. Hwang was imprisoned in Seoul after visiting North Korea, which he fled with his family as a child. Upon returning to South Korea, he was accused of espionage and imprisoned via the National Security Act. Many literary figures and activists relentlessly argued for his release, seeing the act as a facade to suppress free speech and imprison activists unjustly. Hwang’s extraordinary life is so dense with history and characters that his lengthy account can be difficult to follow, but the descriptions of his time as a prisoner will move readers. The story oscillates among Hwang’s imprisonment, life outside prison, exile, time as a soldier in the Vietnam War, and recollections from his childhood. The author recounts eating noodles with the former North Korean dictator Kim Il-sung; how the “bobby cars of the East mingled with the sleek sedans of the West amid echoing cheers” as the Berlin Wall fell in front of him; and how his story, among others, made Susan Sontag “shed tears of anger.” Hwang peppers the narrative with prescriptive visions for relations between North Korea and the rest of the world. He is a consummate storyteller, and even those unfamiliar with the topic will find well-written historical exposition and nuanced characterizations. Hwang clearly appreciates the humanity of those he encounters, including prisoners on death row and even Kim Il-sung, contending that no one is beyond moral repair. Such considerations underscore how penal systems are often designed to dehumanize incarcerated individuals—but not Hwang.

A potent history of a remarkable life.

BABY GIRL
Better Known as Aaliyah
Iandoli, Kathy
Atria (288 pp.)
$27.00 | Aug. 17, 2021
978-1-982156-84-8

A posthumous biography of a young musical powerhouse.

Aaliyah’s rapid ascension in the contemporary R&B ranks ended tragically at age 22 when an overloaded Cessna crash-landed in the Bahamas in 2001. Music journalist Iandoli, a
professor-in-residence of music business at NYU, culls together archival research and interviews with music industry insiders to re-create her dramatic life story. Aaliyah Dana Haughton was born in Brooklyn in 1979; after her family relocated to Detroit, she began dominating talent shows and musical productions by the age of 10. A few years later, her uncle and producer, Barry Hankerson, introduced her to R. Kelly, and together they produced Aaliyah’s first album, Age Ain’t Nothing but a Number, which has sold more than 3 million copies. Her agile sound was considered a fusion of hip-hop and “R&B without being too niche.” She recorded two more studio albums and received acting roles and awards alongside Missy Elliott, Timbaland, Lil’ Kim, and others. Just like God Save the Queens: The Essential History of Women in Hip-Hop (2019), this book amply displays the author’s impressive knowledge of her subject and ability to capture telling details. This unauthorized chronicle is richly detailed and thoroughly researched but also carefully edited to avoid tarnishing her subject’s reputation and enduring legacy, particularly concerning the “shockingly palpable” romantic chemistry between Aaliyah and R. Kelly, who is currently on trial for sex trafficking. Iandoli writes about why she chose to chronicle Kelly’s abusive role in Aaliyah’s life: not to give him any credit but to show Aaliyah as a “survivor.” Readers unfamiliar with the R&B industry—or Aaliyah’s impact on it—are in for an immersive read as the author covers all the insider particulars of her red-hot career. Iandoli dutifully honors the life and the indelible imprint and influence Aaliyah left on the music industry.

A fond tribute to the enduring legacy of R&B’s greatly missed “Queen of Urban Pop.”

TO RULE THE WAVES
How Control of the World’s Oceans Determines the Fate of the Superpowers
Jones, Bruce D.
Scribner (384 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-982127-25-1

The director of the Brookings Institution project on international order revives an old strategic tenet: Who rules the oceans rules the world.

Four basic facts come into play here: The world’s oceans are increasingly zones of contention, particularly between the U.S. and China; most of what we call globalization is an ocean phenomenon, since, as Jones writes, “more than 85 percent of all global commerce is a function of sea-based trade”; the oceans are the epicenter of global communications, thanks to the underwater cables that carry data; and the oceans are the sources of a tremendous amount of mineral wealth. Small wonder they’re the object of so much attention on the part of the superpowers, sometimes forging unlikely alliances—Muslim Malaysia, for instance, with China, despite China’s aggressive anti-Muslim policies. Traveling around the world to visit such centers as Singapore’s Changi Naval Base and China’s Yangshan Port, the world’s largest container port, and boarding vessels such as the Madrid Maersk, “the world’s largest trading ship” in 2019, Jones examines the geopolitics of ocean power. Along the way, he looks into the history of standardized shipping, courtesy of the multimodal container, and delves into what are likely to be future patterns of energy use—with India, for instance, joining Japan and China in becoming dependent on oil shipped via the Straits of Hormuz, another sharply contested zone. The book is marred by small errors—Malcom, not Marshall, McLean was the innovator behind the metal container; the Arctic, not Antarctic, lies above Maine; the weather current that alternates with El Niño is not El Niña but La Niña, etc.—but the author’s points are well taken, especially when he warns that China “is fast becoming a fuller maritime power than the United States,” with implications for political relations in years to come.

Knowledgeable and wonky, largely of interest to policy planners.

WHITE BORDERS
The History of Race and Immigration in the United States From Chinese Exclusion to the Border Wall
Jones, Reece
Beacon Press (272 pp.)
$26.95 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-8070-5406-2

A critical examination of U.S. immigration policies across the centuries as instruments of racism.

Jones, a professor of geography and environment in Hawaii, reveals that that island state, as well as Puerto Rico, was long excluded from allowing immigrants precisely because both “had large nonwhite citizen populations.” This exclusion followed from a 19th-century policy, born of Jeffersonian tenets at the birth of the republic, that held that the notion of all men being equal applied to White men only, with only “a free white person” eligible for citizenship. Such convictions were common in Jefferson’s day—and in Trump’s. As Jones writes, Reince Priebus, then serving as Republican National Committee chair, warned Trump to tone down his racism during the 2016 campaign “because it could tarnish all of the Republicans running for president,” to which Trump responded by doubling down on his anti-Mexican and then anti-Muslim rhetoric. Jones engages in good investigative journalism to chase down the sources of Trumpthink, given that Trump has never had an original idea of his own, in a complex and “carefully orchestrated effort” to place the racist, exclusionary politics of a century past (pitched largely at excluding Asians from coming to the U.S.) at the center of a new sort of mainstream politics feeding a fearful base. This effort involved the feeding of millions of dollars to anti-immigration groups—$61 million from one donor alone. These groups exalted ideas by the likes of a Michigan ophthalmologist named John Tanton, who asserted that “for European-American
society and culture to persist requires a European-American majority.” By this incisive account, that concept was red meat for the likes of Steve Bannon and Stephen Miller, the latter of whom cut his teeth on the racist politics of former Trump ally Jeff Sessions.

The author’s ability to connect the dots is impressive—and depressing, since the politics of ethnic hatred persist.

**THE ISOLATION ARTIST**

**Scandal, Deception, and the Last Days of Robert Indiana**

Keyes, Bob

Godine (248 pp.)

$21.95 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-1-56792-689-7

A sad and thorny tale of lawyers, egos, and art.

Those who follow the machinations of the art world know that the estate of Robert Indiana (1928-2018) has settled its ongoing lawsuit with the artist’s former caretaker. If you want a deeper dive into the story, you’re in luck. *Portland Press Herald* and *Maine Sunday Telegram* journalist Keyes, who logged many hours of interview time with Indiana before the artist’s death at the age of 89, chronicles the complicated maneuverings behind the dispute. Indiana, best known as the man behind the famous LOVE sculpture—which inspired the HOPE sculpture that became a symbol of Barack Obama’s presidency—was reclusive in his later years. He spent most of his time holed up in Vinalhaven, Maine, in a sprawling building called the Star of Hope (“a dilapidated Victorian structure built for gatherings of men”), as various parties tried to claw out a piece of him. The irony, of course, is that all this talk of love and hope presaged some truly nasty legal grappling over Indiana’s work and legacy.

“It’s a tragedy of Shakespearean mechanizations,” writes Keyes, “involving a failing king, full of rage, who rarely emerged from his castle; the plotting manipulative knights who fought over his crown and jewels; and the loyal and innocent pawns on either side of a widening moat filled with chaos and acrimony.” The author has a firm grasp of his material, so much so that the details—who said what when, which agreements were brokered and violated, etc.—may overwhelm general readers. This is a book that grinds out its facts and its disputes methodically, and though richly detailed, it seems intended for readers with some knowledge of the case rather than someone curious about a story they’ve not heard before.

A labored reconstruction of the fight for an artist’s legacy that will appeal to certain modern art devotees.

**WALK WITH ME**

A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer

Larson, Kate Clifford

Oxford Univ. (384 pp.)

$27.95 | Sep. 1, 2021

978-0-19-009684-7

A social justice pioneer gets her due in this inspiring story of toil and spirit. A must-stock for libraries.
An excellent, opinionated, and discouraging dual biography of a dreadful president and a determined fighter for human rights.

Levine writes that Andrew Johnson (1808-1875), a fiercely ambitious populist who became “the absolutely wrong president for his times,” despised the South’s aristocracy but was otherwise a garden-variety Southern Democrat with no objection to slavery. It was only after Lincoln’s election that he achieved fame as the only Southern senator opposing secession. Lincoln appointed him military governor of Tennessee, where his anti-slavery rhetoric made him popular among Tennessee Blacks as well as abolitionists, who preferred him to Lincoln. Making “War Democrat” Johnson vice-presidential candidate was a gesture to win votes in the 1864 elections, which observers considered a toss-up. Although horrified at Lincoln’s murder, the new president was an improvement according to Radical Republicans. Sharing their delusion was Frederick Douglass (1817-1895), the charismatic Black speaker and writer who had been fighting slavery for two decades. Historians dutifully explain why Johnson discarded his hatred of slave owners in favor of White supremacy. Levine contributes an unobjectionable, intriguing theory, but mostly he recounts the dismal events that followed. Soon after assuming office, Johnson began pardoning Rebels in exchange for a mild loyalty oath and recognizing all-White Southern state governments. He vetoed legislation securing rights for ex-slaves, made violently racist speeches and statements, and blamed horrific White atrocities on Northern agitators. Talk of impeachment began, but Congress was reluctant to indict him for racist behavior, aware that most White voters had little objection. Taking advantage of his effort to fire the secretary of war in February 1868, the House charged him with violating the Tenure of Office Act, which forbade dismissing anyone approved by the Senate. The two-month impeachment trial bored the sellout audience, but readers will appreciate Levine’s many significant insights. Douglass, who did not attend, put aside his disappointment at the acquittal and continued to speak and write as Reconstruction failed and conditions for Blacks steadily deteriorated.

Outstanding as both a biography and a work of Reconstruction-era history.
possessions both real and imagined, including a pomegranate tree in the garden, horses, a small rowing boat, e-bikes, and a fireplace shaped like an ostrich egg. Having recently left her husband of more than 20 years, the author also investigates the idea of women being treated as real estate. “Never again did I want to sit at a table with heterosexual couples and feel that women were borrowing the space,” she writes. Levy’s story initially begins as a stream of consciousness but soon evolves into a beautifully written interconnected piece featuring eloquent descriptions of her surroundings and quotes from writers that infiltrate her thoughts: James Baldwin, Gabriel García Márquez, Simone de Beauvoir, Katherine Mansfield, Louisa May Alcott, and W.E.B. Du Bois. Levy takes readers along on her travels to a literary festival in Mumbai, her deceased stepmother’s apartment in Manhattan, a writing fellowship in Paris, a friend’s birthday in Berlin, her childhood house in Johannesburg, and a summer rental home in Greece. Each destination offers a different concept of home. With her youngest daughter leaving for college and her 60th birthday rapidly approaching, Levy also contemplates her feelings of loneliness and solitude, aging, and notions of patriarchy as she comes to terms with her new identity. “In every phase of living we do not have to conform to the way our life has been written for us,” she writes. In closing, as Levy inventories her possessions, she is able to find fresh meaning among her belongings.

A captivating journey to find a sense of place.

“Feel the wide cultural reverberations of the decade’s lyrical legend from those who felt, wrote, and listened.”

**PROMISE THAT YOU WILL SING ABOUT ME**

The Power and Poetry of Kendrick Lamar

Lewis, Miles Marshall

St. Martin’s (256 pp.)

$29.99 | Aug. 17, 2021

978-1-250-23168-0

An in-depth biographical and historical contextualization of one of the decade’s most heralded rappers. “Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst” was the heartfelt testimony standout track from Kendrick Lamar’s debut studio album, good kid, m.A.A.d city, a massive success upon its release in 2012. The album cemented Lamar as one of the new “top dawgs” in the game, much like the record label that incubated his talent, Top Dawg Entertainment. Lewis introduces Lamar via his first interactions with the musician, composing a promotional interview for his second album, the jazz-influenced To Pimp a Butterfly (2015). That award-winning album’s biggest hit, “Alright,” organically synced with the growing Black Lives Matter protests unfolding across the country. Joining Marcus Moore’s The Butterfly Effect (2020), this book uncovers avenues for understanding Lamar’s craft, which potently reveals the upheaval within Black communities and the music industry. A respected intergenerational chorus of Black cultural voices—Ta-Nehisi Coates, Ivie Ani, Greg Tate, Farrah Jasmine Griffin, Jay Smooth, Alicia Garza, and Kris ex—offer illuminating commentary, while original artwork and reprinted photography reinforce the magazine-profile aesthetics of the text. Like all good hip-hop fans, Lewis recounts how his own life experiences are enmeshed with the music, and the biography lovingly challenges Lamar, as needed, on themes of political ideology and gender relations. All fans of Lamar recognize that he is incredibly honest, transparent, and vulnerable on his records, all of which so far could be defined as classic for the genre. Yet at the same time, his increasing unavailability to media outlets has created the conditions for veteran cultural insiders to fill in the gaps. Lewis does that well and also creates a shadow historiography of an entire generation of Black urban culture while leaving room for Lamar to remain the master lyricist of his own life.

Feel the wide cultural reverberations of the decade’s lyrical legend from those who felt, wrote, and listened.

**SWALLOWED BY A WHALE**

How To Survive the Writing Life

Ed. by Lewis-Jones, Huw

British Library Publishing (224 pp.)

$24.95 | Sep. 1, 2021

978-0-7123-5303-8

Nearly 70 writers, mostly British, weigh in with their favorite tips for aspiring writers.

Stay positive. Persist. Revise. Read your work aloud. Take risks. Learn the rules, then break them. The wisdom assembled by this book’s editor, Lewis-Jones, won’t be surprising for anyone who has read a few writing guides. But it has the virtue of featuring well-regarded authors in a host of genres, from literary fiction to picture books, including David Mitchell, Kwame Alexander, Irvine Welsh, Lev Grossman, Jan Morris, A.M. Homes, Gregory Maguire, Anthony McGowan, Simon Garfield, and Tracy Chevalier. It also mixes up formats, ranging from top 10 lists to personal essays to lively illustrations. (Lorna Scobie’s “Write Like an Animal” charmingly likens elements of the creative process to a variety of creatures.) There are also bits of unusual advice. Children’s book author Andy Riley recommends dictating your drafts while walking into an iPhone, which Siri will transcribe; illustrator Emma Yarlett suggests making a map of your story before getting words down; novelist Paraic O’Donnell advises thinking of your entire story as a dream sequence. This book is distinguished by its offering of familiar advice in a host of registers. If you need the tough love of a daily word count, Wyl Menmuir makes the case for it; if you want license to daydream, Helen Stephens has your back (“Spend time washing up or staring out of windows. Get rid of the dishwasher”); if you need a sense of humor to get through the Sisyphean task of novel-writing, Benjamin Myers has the perfect metaphor: “Watch Werner Herzog’s Fitzcarraldo. Your book is the boat. You are Klaus Kinski. You’re covered in mud and everyone hates you. Now push.” Practical advice about landing agents and publishers is scarcer, but everybody assembled is cheering you to get there.

A cozy, browsing-friendly selection of writerly pep talks.
Makari, a psychiatrist whose previous books probed the concept of mind and the origins of psychoanalysis, now turns to the vexed notion of xenophobia, “a word filled with sea-tossed exiles, dreams of welcome, and the flashing specter of violence.” Tied to debates over “nationalism, globalization, race, and immigration,” in 2016, with the ascent of Trump and his followers, an online dictionary cited xenophobia as the word of the year. Makari acknowledges that fear of strangers may be an innate response to encountering anyone outside of one’s familiar group, although some evolutionary biologists argue that such a response would have prevented smaller bands of humans from merging to create diverse, cooperative societies. In this illuminating, significant historical study, the author focuses less on its origins than on when the concept was labeled “phobic”—that is, when it became widely condemned. He examines xenophobic behavior in 15th-century Spain, when the Catholic monarchs expelled Muslims and Jews; in European expansion into the Americas, when Native peoples were killed or enslaved; as central to the eugenics movement in the 19th century; during the influx of immigration in the early 20th century; and in the perpetration of genocides later in the century and into the next. After 1945, the term became taboo, but even earlier, Makari found, it caused disquiet. In 1923, the New York Times called xenophobia “a disease more dangerous to a free people than a physical plague.” Influential journalist Walter Lippmann noted that xenophobia was inherent in stereotypes, “commonly held distortions of ethnic and national kinds.” Makari sees xenophobia erupting in the U.S. and across Europe that “economic competition and cultural invasion” are unable to explain. The grandson and child of immigrants, the author is not a detached academic. He clearly demonstrates his emotional connection to the material: How extreme will xenophobia become, and “who will stand to oppose it?”

A timely and thorough investigation of a cultural plague.

Meditations on belonging, alienation, and the power of words.

In 15 thoughtful and impassioned essays, prizewinning Jamaican novelist, poet, and essayist Miller reflects on race, gender, family, language, and, most pointedly, the body: “these soft houses in which we live and in which we move and from which we can never migrate, except by dying.” As a queer Black man, Miller considers ways that bodies “can variously assume privilege or victimhood from their conflicting identities” and from the visceral reactions others have toward them. “Too often,” he writes, “the meaning that my black, male body produces is ‘guilty’ and ‘predator’ and ‘worthy of death’”—responses that he has encountered in the U.K., where he now lives and works as a university professor. But on visits to Kenya, Ethiopia, and Ghana, where he thinks his body “should make a kind of sense,” he is frustrated to find that “it doesn’t make as much sense as I would like.” In his home country of Jamaica, color—Black, White, and subtle gradations of brown—inflects daily life and self-perception. “When I talk about a place where our bodies make sense,” Miller writes, “what I really mean is a place where our bodies are not seen, where they raise no questions, where they are not worth pondering.” For Miller, though, race is not his only identifier: Immersed in the celebration of Carnival, he realizes that Jamaica is the place where he feels “most comfortably gay” because he knows “the language and the mannerisms of queerness. In Jamaica, I do not have to constantly translate my sexuality into mannerisms and speech and dances that sometimes feel to me, profoundly British.” Many of these powerful appraisals of the body come in the form of letters to James Baldwin and Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina, but Miller also offers musings on his family’s secrets, portrayals of homeless gay and transgender boys, and questions of literary appropriation.

A spirited collection from a significant voice of both fiction and nonfiction.
A thrillingly good blend of sportswriting, pop culture, and history and a must-read for roundball fans.

TALL MEN, SHORT SHORTS

The 1969 NBA Finals: Wilt, Russ, Lakers, Celtics, and a Very Young Sports Reporter

Montville, Leigh

Doubleday (336 pp.)
$29.00 | Jul. 13, 2021
978-0-385-54519-8

A firsthand account of the 1969 NBA finals, pitting the Lakers against the Celtics.

The 1969 playoffs should have been lopsided. Montville, a prolific author and former reporter for the Boston Globe and Sports Illustrated who was on the scene for the games, notes that there had been only 12 NBA Finals preceding it, and Boston had won 10 of them. But the 1960 Lakers were a force, thanks in large part to new addition Wilt Chamberlain. Against them were Bill Russell, who was then serving two roles: “As a young coach at thirty-five,” writes the author, “he knew the limits of an old player at thirty-five.” Montville’s deep dive into the storied series is much more than the usual color commentary. Self-deprecatingly, he digs up a word that old-school sportswriters applied to writers of a fast-receding time: “A thrillingly good blend of sportswriting, pop culture, and history and a must-read for roundball fans.”

HUMANE

How the United States Abandoned Peace and Reinvented War

Moyn, Samuel

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (416 pp.)
$30.00 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-374-17370-8

A searching look at the rise of the “endless war” the U.S. is now waging.

“Endless war” may seem an oxymoron, but Moyn’s book will be of interest to war fighters and peacemakers alike.

IMAGE CONTROL

Art, Fascism, and the Right To Resist

Nathan, Patrick

Counterpoint (240 pp.)
$26.00 | Aug. 17, 2021
978-1-64009-453-6

A lively investigation of the numerous connections among fascism, imagery, media, and politics.

Books about fascism are rarely unpredictable, and social science nonfiction is rarely a wild thrill ride. But when Nathan applies the style and imagination he demonstrated in his debut novel, Some Hell (2018), that’s what we get. Though the author is upfront about his lack of expertise with the mechanics of fascism and photographs, his originality of thought drives this impressive nonfiction debut. He leans on Susan Sontag and Bertrand Russell to make some points early on, but it’s the way he weaves together the deaths of Matthew Shepard, the Columbine High School massacre, and 9/11 with the rise of Donald Trump and Survivor that makes readers wonder what twist is coming next. “If Marilyn Manson played America’s antichrist, Trump seems to be it—the American monster par excellence,” Nathan writes. Not all his pronouncements hold up intellectually, as he sometimes exaggerates to make a
A fascinating view of mind that mingles culture with biology, creating a richly embroidered, albeit difficult, world.

An unexpectedly entertaining scholarly warning about fascism’s spread through imagery.

SOME KIDS LEFT BEHIND
A Survivor’s Fight for Health Care in the Wake of 9/11
Nordstrom, Lila
Apollo Publishers (360 pp.)
$24.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-94862-02-6

A memoir from a student who witnessed the 9/11 attacks and her subsequent fight for survivor health care services.

On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Nordstrom was sitting in her classroom at Stuyvesant High School, located a few blocks from ground zero. Following the attacks on the twin towers, she and her fellow classmates escaped lower Manhattan. However, one month later, students in the area were ushered back to school on assurance from the Environmental Protection Agency that the air and water quality in the area were safe. According to Nordstrom, returning to school was a major controversy among the student body. Smelling the acrid air as fires continued to burn and witnessing countless loads of debris being removed from the area with trails of dust following, the students knew something wasn’t right, but they felt powerless to do anything. Before long, there were reports of cancer and respiratory illnesses among Stuyvesant’s teachers, staff, and students. The EPA would later admit they did not have sufficient data at the time to support their initial statement regarding the area’s air and water quality. “For us the deaths came later, all from illness,” writes the author. Nordstrom candidly chronicles the events she witnessed on 9/11 and her ongoing struggle with PTSD as well as her quest for normalcy and purpose. The author shares moving details about her own and other survivors’ struggles, including problems obtaining insurance and differences in services offered to them versus those given to first responders. She discusses her advocacy work bringing to light the survivors’ plight, including starting the StuyHealth group, attending Victim Compensation Fund events, and testifying at a House Judiciary hearing alongside Jon Stewart, Hillary Clinton, and Nancy Pelosi. Regarding her reason for becoming an advocate, the author writes, “this was the only way to exercise agency in a situation in which I had none.” Nordstrom also provides helpful information and resources for others interested in pursuing advocacy and community work.

A powerful story of dedication and determination.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTIES
And Other Stories of Mystery Illness
O’Sullivan, Suzanne
Pantheon (336 pp.)
$27.50 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-5247-4837-1

A neurologist investigates psychosomatic disorders, characterized by complex, holistic sets of symptoms that take root in a particular culture and time.

Psychosomatic suffering—“real physical symptoms that are disabling, but which are not due to disease and are understood to have a psychological or behavioural cause”—is no longer considered purely hysterical, framed in Freudian interpretation, or dismissed as simply mysterious. O’Sullivan, a London-based Irish neurologist, marches straight into this deep, strange pocket of experience. A pleasing storyteller, she puts to good use her neurological background while melding it with a closely observed appreciation of environmental, social, and cultural elements in the dissociative process. She introduces a variety of psychosomatic disturbances, beginning with resignation syndrome in Sweden, “a disorder that exclusively affects children of asylum-seeking families,” rendering them in a sleep-like state that is indecipherable with today’s instrumentation. Sadly, explanations “come with the inevitable need to apportion blame, passing judgement on the child and…family.” The author also investigates the aggressive hallucinations experienced by members of the Miskitos peoples of Nicaragua, a foreboding sleeping sickness in Kazakhstan, and many more. All lead the author to the idea of “a cultural concept of distress,” with the body intimately involved in cognition, responding to the environment, the specific circumstances of the moment “and the socially constructed ways of responding to illness.” O’Sullivan keenly explains illness templates that are coded in our brains by our sociocultural environment, so that “when you look for symptoms, you find them.” As the author connects dot after dot, she discusses the role of induced illnesses as a language of distress, in which the members of a specific community understand symptoms as metaphors of personal suffering or a way of exteriorizing a conflict. Doctors, she writes, “still struggle to appreciate the magnitude and reality of the interaction between mind, body, and the environment.”
The National Book Award–winning journalist examines the ideological gaps that have widened between 9/11 and the Jan. 6, 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol.

After years of reporting from China, the longtime New Yorker staffer returned to find that America had lost its gift for “the rational approach, reason, the meeting of minds in honorable agreement after open argument” that John Gunther described in his 1947 bestseller, Inside U.S.A. “If American history is a story of constant rebalancing—between greed and generosity, industry and nature, identity and assimilation—the country had spun so far out of balance it had lost its center of gravity,” writes Osnos. He explores how it happened through stellar reporting that blends a high-altitude view of national changes with close-ups of private citizens in three places he’s lived in the U.S. Osnos is at his best in his superb portrait of Greenwich, Connecticut, where he grew up in the “Golden Triangle,” who believed, fundamentally, in the duty of government for “the rational approach, reason, the meeting of minds in honorable agreement after open argument” that John Gunther described in his 1947 bestseller, Inside U.S.A. “If American history is a story of constant rebalancing—between greed and generosity, industry and nature, identity and assimilation—the country had spun so far out of balance it had lost its center of gravity,” writes Osnos. He explores how it happened through stellar reporting that blends a high-altitude view of national changes with close-ups of private citizens in three places he’s lived in the U.S. Osnos is at his best in his superb portrait of Greenwich, Connecticut, where he grew up in the “Golden Triangle” that “represented the highest concentration of wealth in America” and where values shifted along with an influx of hedge fund money. Greenwich grandees once included people like Prescott Bush, the father and grandfather of future presidents, “who believed, fundamentally, in the duty of government to help people who did not enjoy his considerable advantages.” Conversely, the current generation tends to see its wealth as self-justifying and to prefer “targeted private philanthropy” to activities like serving on “local charity boards.” Osnos is slightly less insightful about Chicago, where Black residents have felt stung by the gap between their Obama-era hopes and the persistence of bigotry, and West Virginia, where predatory tactics by so-called vulture investors and others have robbed miners of precious benefits. Other recent books have dealt more astutely with some of his subjects—Chris McGreal’s American Overdose with West Virginia’s opioid epidemic and John Woodrow Cox’s Children Under Fire with gun violence—but as an overview of a fractious ideological landscape, this skillful treatment is hard to beat.

An elegant survey of the causes and effects of polarization in America.

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RATIONALITY
What It Is, Why It Seems Scarce, Why It Matters
Pinker, Steven
Viking (400 pp.)
$32.00 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-525-50999-6

Much-published psychologist Pinker looks at the not-so-common roots of common-sensical thinking.

Rationality, writes the author, “emerges from a community of reasoners who spot each other’s fallacies.” In
other words, it has a social dimension, and it invites good company in order to wrestle with big problems such as climate change. Unfortunately, “among our fiercest problems today is convincing people to accept the solutions when we do find them.” That’s because so many people are so—well, irrational, or at least encumbered by bad habits of thinking and presuppositions. Discussing beliefs in ghosts and haunted houses, the author wryly points out that 5% more people believe in the latter than in the former, which means “that some people believe in houses haunted by ghosts without believing in ghosts.” Rationality is not the same thing as logic, Pinker argues, though there are points in common. Along the way, he examines the differences between propensity and probability, the maddening habit of failing victim to confirmation bias (believing what we want to believe and never mind contrary evidence), the workings of the conjunction rule (by which we conflate suppositions about people and events based on little or no factuality), and our tendency to mistake coincidence for pattern. Pinker serves up plenty of mental exercises that are intended to help us overcome the tricks our minds play on us—e.g., Prisoner’s Dilemma game-theoretic scenarios that help expose the reasons so many people are content to be “free riders” in using public goods; or stupid conspiracy theories advanced by people who believe they’re being suppressed, which, as Pinker notes, is “not the strategy you see from dissidents in undeniably repressive regimes like North Korea or Saudi Arabia.” The author can be heady and geeky, but seldom to the point that his discussions shade off into inaccessibility. 

A reader-friendly primer in better thinking through the cultivation of that rarest of rarities: a sound argument.
for everyone, even for those who keep voting to make life less safe and less fair for everyone else.”

A wide-ranging look at the realities of the South.

**FUZZ**

*When Nature Breaks the Law*

Roach, Mary  
Norton (336 pp.)  
$26.95 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-1-324-00193-5

Tracing the line between wildlife and the law, the acclaimed science writer examines how humans interact with the natural world.

“What is the proper course when wild animals break laws intended for people?” So asks Roach in a book that, in the author’s characteristic style, ranges widely, from wild animal attacks to the inherent dangers of certain plants to ways in which we have treated animals that most humans consider vermin. The author begins by examining “the intractable nature of human-wildlife conflict—as it is known today by those who grapple with it professionally.” Roach discusses well-known conflicts such as bear attacks before moving on to an account of her visit to a tea plantation in West Bengal, India, “a place where ‘the elephant in the room’ is not a metaphor.” As in her previous bestsellers such as *Grunt* and *Stiff*, the author has clearly done her homework, speaking to professionals across a variety of disciplines, including members of the military; nuns, priests, guards, and other workers at the Vatican; and those with job titles that sound “like something you’d hear if you asked an animal-besotted ten-year-old, What do you want to be when you grow up?” (The lucky fellow in question, who has a doctorate in wildlife biology, researches mountain lions and gray wolves, two apex predators.) Traveling from a bear seminar in Reno to a bird-infested island in the Pacific that plagued the American military during World War II, among many other venues, Roach joyfully explores how human culture and wildlife, including plant life, have either found ways to coexist or are constantly at odds. Throughout, Roach highlights people who are genuinely passionate about the work, and she also includes suggestions for readers on how to deal ethically (and effectively) with their own wildlife issues, wherever they live.

From the terrifying to the frustrating, a great starting point for understanding the animal world.

**THE RAGING 2020s**

*Companies, Countries, People—and the Fight for Our Future*

Ross, Alec  
Henry Holt (336 pp.)  
$28.99 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-1-250-77092-9

In serious disarray, the social contract requires a significant overhaul.

Early on in this manifesto, Ross, the senior adviser for innovation for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, makes a stark observation: “If the level of inequality in the United States had stayed at a constant level over the last forty years instead of widening to its current Mad Max–like state, it would have meant that $50 trillion would have gone to workers earning below the 90th percentile. That is an additional $1,100 every single month for every single worker.” Instead, we now squabble over raising the absurdly low minimum wage to only slightly less pathetic levels. A large part of the problem, notes the author, is that government has ceded authority to corporations, which naturally act in their own interest rather than for the common good. Furthermore, there is no effective labor movement to counter them. Corporations also evade taxes at such a level that if they paid their share, “of the people reading this book, 99 percent would pay less.” Ross examines scenarios on both macro and micro levels. In writing of the corporatization of agriculture, for example, he focuses on his native state of West Virginia, where the population has shrunk dramatically as rural jobs disappear. Even as this occurs, what should have been a strong union response has become an exercise in rural politics that is increasingly “nativist as [West Virginia] has grown poorer and sicker.” There are numerous alternative models for a social contract besides that of predatory capitalism. One is that of China, which “seeks to build a surveillance state so total that it becomes impossible for citizens to organize meaningful opposition,” and another is the cradle-to-grave welfare state of the Scandinavian nations. At the end of this evenhanded but decidedly liberal argument, the author advocates “killing off shareholder capitalism” and strengthening social safety nets.

A provocative, well-made case for remaking the American way of doing business—and way of life.
on the board of many arts, medical, educational, and historical associations (Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Council on Foreign Relations, the National Gallery of Art, and the Brooking Institution), follows a volume of conversations with noted historians with a similar collection featuring prominent intellectuals and cultural figures, including Walter Isaacson, Jill Lepore, David McCullough, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Philip Deloria; sports figures Billie Jean King and Cal Ripken; filmmaker Ken Burns; musician Wynton Marsalis; and Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. These conversations—warm, engaging, and informative—help Rubenstein point up America’s particular qualities (“America’s Thirteen Key Genes”) that “have made the whole American Experiment work” even though, facing significant challenges, the country has fallen short. Among these genes are democracy itself, voting, equality (which, he admits, is still aspirational), freedom of speech, rule of law, separation of powers, peaceful transfer of power, capitalism and entrepreneurship, immigration, diversity, the enduring American dream, and a culture in which individuals must be allowed “to pursue their talents and ambitions, largely unfettered by central control or government interference, with merit and skill prevailing to the greatest extent possible.” When Rubenstein asked acclaimed actor Rita Moreno, a Puerto Rican immigrant, to define her legacy, she responded, “I would like people to think of me only in one way: she never gave up. Perseverance.” Likewise, according to Sotomayor, “People only follow those they think are passionate. So you have to possess passion and, second, commitment driven by dedication and hard work. You do not get anywhere unless you work hard.” Rubenstein offers a largely uncritical, celebratory view of America, as did most respondents to Rubenstein’s survey. She correctly notes that if women were the principal change agents in 2018 and 2020, Black women were at the absolute center of the movement. A sleeping giant thus awakened, Rubin holds that no one should imagine that women will now sit back and allow Trump to return, since, after all, he “taught us the unacceptable price of passivity.”

An excellent contribution to the literature of contemporary electoral politics.

RESISTANCE
How Women Saved Democracy From Donald Trump
Rubin, Jennifer
Morrow/HarperCollins (320 pp.) $27.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-06-298213-1

Washington Post writer Rubin delivers a thoughtful study of the critical role of women in containing and defeating Donald Trump.

There were plenty of Republican women who supported Trump’s nationalistic, White supremacist regime. Upon his election in 2016, writes the author, “I steered myself for the likelihood that Republicans would countenance reckless and even illegal behavior.” Which they did, to destructive effect. But there were plenty of others who were determined to fight Trump’s policies. Many left the Republican Party as a result of his election since the signals were strong that women would have little in the way of a meaningful role in the new administration—unless their name was Ivanka. Many more organized, ran for office, joined grassroots organizations, and donated time and money. Rubin ponders numerous questions that may in fact be imponderable, including the central one of the moment: Why wasn’t Hillary Clinton elected? The answer may hinge in part on her weakness as a campaigner; more likely, writes the author, it was simple misogyny at work. Whatever the case, the resistance of women had an immediate effect, proven in the 2018 midterm elections, when, in formerly Republican Virginia the Democrats fielded a record number of women candidates at all levels of government, including a transgender woman, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and a self-identified lesbian. All won. Even in Alabama, “every single county swung left compared to 2016,” while in Georgia, Stacey Abrams, foreseeing legislation that would attempt to suppress the minority vote, enrolled more than 1 million Black voters. Rubin correctly notes that if women were the principal change agents in 2018 and 2020, Black women were at the absolute center of the movement. A sleeping giant thus awakened, Rubin holds that no one should imagine that women will now sit back and allow Trump to return, since, after all, he “taught us the unacceptable price of passivity.”

A Hong Kong–raised entrepreneur, Shum has spent his career in China, where he is known for his high-flying life of wealth and political connections, eclipsed in harrowing fashion by a new wave of Chinese Communist Party authoritarianism. In September 2017, Shum’s ex-wife and business partner, Whitney Duan, disappeared without a trace from Beijing, most certainly among the countless victims of trumped-up corruption charges by the relentless arm of Xi Jinping’s Communist Party apparatus. Together, Shum and Duan had built a vast fortune from real estate dealings in China, from the late 1990s through the global recession of 2008, a span of time during which China fully embraced private entrepreneurial energy in order to jump-start the economy. Around 1997, sensing the “go-energy” of the new boom, in which “stories of instant millionaires and financial sensations” abounded, the couple leapt at the opportunity to enrich themselves, their families, and associates. However, the same intricate political connections that Duan had assiduously cultivated through the years, such as with Zheng (“Auntie Zhang”) Peili, the wife of former premier Wen Jiabao, would prove the couple’s undoing as the political winds began to shift with the accession of Xi in 2013. Through
a deliberative, slow-building, suspenseful narrative that reveals numerous insights about the mechanics of power and greed, Shum chronicles his humble early beginnings in Shanghai, then Hong Kong, where his family moved for more opportunity and he excelled as a swimmer, through college at the University of Wisconsin and attempts at trying his hand in the fledgling field of private equity. He effectively shows how Duan, a boldly calculating investor from a humble background, helped mold him into a highly successful entrepreneur. While Shum insists that they both fervently believed their wealth could foster social changes, he learned early on that what the party gives, the party can take away. Observers of contemporary Chinese affairs, consistently intriguing and murky territory, will find much to interest them here.

A riveting look inside “the roulette-like political environment of the New China.”

THE BREAKS
An Essay
Singh, Julietta
Coffee House (168 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-56689-616-0

In this epistolary memoir, a queer, biracial scholar writes to her daughter about what it’s like “to mother at the end of the world.”

Born in Canada to a Punjabi immigrant father and a White mother, Singh, a professor of English and women’s, gender, and sexuality studies, simultaneously celebrates her child’s ability to embrace her own “Brownness” and decries the “whitewashed” education she receives in the American public school system. Recalling her daughter’s drawing of a Thanksgiving scene, she writes, “I admired the craft of your book, a swell of parental pride coursing through me as I witnessed the evidence of my progeny doing and making things in the world beyond me. And I relished that you had colored all four children brown like you.” The author recalls meeting her Punjabi relatives in India much later in life, a trip that helped her come to terms with her heritage, running “from every other hand, was impatient, sour, and angry.” “My mother’s anger,” writes the author, “was the latent condition of our household, awaiting its moment to jet, boiling, from the place where she kept it ready.” Anyone and anything could enraged her: neighbors, her son’s friends, an object misplaced, a digression from the detailed daily schedule she posted (including “the time of day [she] had set aside for my bowel movement”), and Christopher’s attitudes and behavior. At 16, the therapist he saw each week pointed out to him “the tone of voice I apparently habitually use—hostile, suspicious, mocking.” He sounded like his mother, and he fears, even now, that he has inherited her “eerie fatalism” and “need to blame.” Venting about his mother’s abuse—and, he came to realize, his father’s complicity—Sorrentino tries to understand the woman who was “unfathomable” to him: “now beacon, now sea.” Identified as Black on her birth certificate, she had rejected her heritage, running “from every implication that might attach to being a Puerto Rican girl from the South Bronx.” She felt her life had ended at 25, when Christopher was born, and she isolated herself from family and made no friends. As the author writes, trapped “inside my father’s particular neediness, her refusal to refuse him even as she showed him contempt and anger, will remain a mystery.” Neither parent emerges as sympathetic in a well-written memoir that betrays enduring resentment.

A sharp, sad tale of bitterness and regret.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF MOTION
From The Wheel, to the Car, to What Comes Next
Standage, Tom
Bloomsbury (272 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 17, 2021
978-1-63557-361-9

A 5,000-year-long road trip.
Economist deputy editor Standage’s previous books have a wry quirkiness about them, and his latest fits nicely alongside A History of the World in 6 Glasses and An Edible History of Humanity. The author’s methodology involves statistics and facts in moderation, leavened with humorous trivia in the service of entertaining and informing readers. Here, the author offers a witty, expansive, evolutionary look at transportation history. “It all starts with the wheel,” he writes. The wheel’s origin has been debated for centuries but was likely first made in the Carpathian Mountains during the Copper Age, and it found wide use with the invention of the horse-drawn chariot. “The adoption of the wheel,” however, hit a “bump in the historical road” with the rise of cavalries. Carts and wagons were already in use, and the horse was the way to go, but in the 16th century, the four-wheeled coach became popular. They could create barriers and carry small cannons. As road conditions improved, stagecoaches and the larger omnibus gained favor. The steam engine led to the first powered vehicle and the locomotive, and “trickster” archetype in Everdeen and Salander. Of this lineage, among the shared interesting traits not traditionally associated with women characters is a prodigious appetite. “Like Gretel, Pippi Longstocking, and Lisbeth Salander before her,” writes Tatar, “Katniss gorges on rich food yet her hunger never ceases.”

From Penelope and Pandora to Katniss Everdeen and Lisbeth Salander, the “hero’s journey” gets a much-needed makeover.

In her latest, Tatar—the Harvard professor of folklore and mythology and Germanic languages and literature who has annotated collections of classic fairy tales, Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, among others—begins by pointing out that all of the faces of heroism discussed in Joseph Campbell’s influential book, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (1949), are male. To correct this requires a revision of the concept of heroism itself, rooted in numerous foundational texts. Starting with Greek mythology and Scheherezade and moving through the centuries all the way to the Game of Thrones series and The Queen’s Gambit, Tatar incisively explores women’s reinvention of heroism to embrace empathy, compassion, and care, often to pursue social justice. Among the many high points in this engaging study: an analysis of Little Women and Anne of Green Gables as autofiction, Jurassic Park as a reimagining of “Hansel and Gretel,” Harriet the Spy as an antiheroine, and a deep dive into the backstory of Wonder Woman. Receiving their own chapters are female sleuths such as Nancy Drew, Miss Marple, and the less well-known characters of Kate Fansler, an academic, and Blanche White, who is Black. The book really takes off when it gets to contemporary culture, particularly in a section that identifies a female version of the “trickster” archetype in Everdeen and Salander. Of this lineage, among the shared interesting traits not traditionally associated with women characters is a prodigious appetite. “Like Gretel, Pippi Longstocking, and Lisbeth Salander before her,” writes Tatar, “Katniss gorges on rich food yet her hunger never ceases.”

The text is illustrated with many reproductions of paintings and other artwork—including a postcard-worthy panel from the original Wonder Woman—that add much to the text.

As Wonder Woman might say, Suffering Sappho! This book is fascinating, fun, and consistently enlightening.
of interventions that effectively backstopped a large part of the private credit system. It did not help that the “fascistoid” Trump administration was so inept, though it did help that Steven Mnuchin, “the least ‘Trump’ of the Trump loyalists,” led those Treasury efforts. Other economies suffered in even greater proportion, especially that of the U.K., whose structural shortcomings were exposed at just the time the country was departing the EU. Unlike in the crisis of 2008, though, British far rightists, like their American counterparts, had cut their ties with the business community, and the business community responded by rejecting austerity. So it was, Tooze observes, that when Joe Biden assumed the presidency, he pushed for big-dollar measures, which corporations supported, to jump-start the economy—with the proviso, Tooze notes, that Biden drop his push for a $15 minimum wage. Even so, he concludes, it is in the U.S. that “the disharmony between politics and economic and social development is at its most extreme and consequential.”

As the pandemic hopefully continues to fade, other crises remain. This book is a valuable forecast of future problems.

**THREE GIRLS FROM BRONZEVILLE**

*A Uniquely American Memoir of Race, Fate, and Sisterhood*

Turner, Dawn

Simon & Schuster (336 pp.)

$26.00 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-1-982107-70-3

Journalist and novelist Turner tells a story of second chances, lost and found, in a memoir centered on the decline of Chicago’s once-storied Bronzeville section.

The author is a former *Chicago Tribune* reporter who grew up in Bronzeville in the 1970s, when Chicago seemed poised to offer its Black residents opportunities it had denied them since her great-grandparents had moved to the city from Mississippi during the Great Migration. But Turner and her younger sister, Kim, and best friend, Debra, stumbled frequently as they worked toward college or other goals amid drug- and gang-related crimes and a decaying infrastructure. In this heartfelt and well-informed but overlong memoir, the author entwines their stories with those of the three strong women who were “the original three girls from Bronzeville”: her mother, Aunt Doris, and her maternal grandmother, who said, “Low-income people don’t have to be low-ceilinged people.” Turner eventually found professional fulfillment in a high-flying journalism career, but her life remained profoundly marked by tragedies involving Kim, an alcoholic and teenage mother, and Debra, who smoked crack and went to prison for murder. Drawing on hundreds of hours of interviews, Turner reconstructs decades-old scenes and verbatim dialogue that build on stories she first told in the *Tribune* and on NPR. The high point of her narrative comes in an extended account of Debra’s successful reconciliation meeting in prison with relatives of the man she killed. Some of the potential impact of the book leaches away in repetitive or overwritten accounts of the author’s conversations with sources, which often include needless details or pleasantries such as, “Thank you for making time for me.” Nonetheless, this book offers hope to anyone who wonders whether, after a terrible crime, attempts at reconciliation are worth it. Turner doesn’t sugarcoat the difficulties, but she leaves no doubt that—when the process works—the gains are vast.

**A sensitive tale of tragedy and redemption against formidable odds.**

**INTER STATE**

*Essays From California*

Vadi, Joseph

Soft Skull Press (224 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Sep. 14, 2021

978-1-59376-695-5

A native Californian of Mexican descent mourns the ways in which his home state has been rendered inaccessible and unrecognizable to those who remain.

A self-described “Mexi-Rican,” essayist and playwright Vadi begins his journey by attempting to retrace his grandfather’s life as a migrant worker in Southern California, uncovering a history he is not sure his grandfather ever wanted him to know. The author then takes readers to the Bay Area, introducing us to Suzy’s, a San Francisco bar where he has fond memories of playing the jukebox every Monday after work. Vadi describes meeting friends on Market Street, avoiding arrest at a 2009 Oakland protest against the murder of a detained young Black man named Oscar Grant, skateboarding at a park colloquially known as “Hubba Hideout,” and encountering racism at a performance of the *Nutcracker*. The narrative ultimately returns to Southern California, and the author introduces his mother and father, who still live in Pomona, where the author grew up. Regardless of setting, every essay in this sharp collection addresses a different aspect of California’s gentrification, but the thread that holds the pieces together is Vadi’s own confusion, anger, and bitterness at watching the state that he knows and loves fade away before his eyes, providing a modern rejoinder to Richard Rodriguez’s kindred memoir *Brown*. At a line level, the book is outstanding, filled with long, breathless sentences, innovative syntax, and precise diction. Vadi’s talent shines in his descriptions of characters like his beloved but abused father or when he is raging against economic and social injustices, which are especially acute for “the broad swath of citizens and undocumented workers alike at the bottom of the wage-for-existence economic hierarchy.” Unfortunately, these characters, whom the narrator has lovingly shaped, disappear for pages at a time, resulting in sections bogged down by detail and a lack of momentum.

**A stunningly written, unevenly paced series of essays about California.**
THE SISTERS OF AUSCHWITZ
The True Story of Two Jewish Sisters’ Resistance in the Heart of Nazi Territory
van Iperen, Roxane
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Aug. 31, 2021
978-0-06-309762-9

Moving true story of two sisters who survived—and resisted—the Holocaust.
Van Iperen’s narrative revolves around the house that she and her family restored, the High Nest, a remarkable Dutch country home that served as a nerve center of anti-Nazi resistance and housed several Jews during the frightening years of German occupation. At the center of the story of their home is the tale of Jewish sisters Janny and Lien Brilleslijper, whose courage, resilience, and strong sense of hope touched many lives during a time of atrocity. The author captures this important piece of Holocaust history with exceptional skill and nuance, allowing readers to feel a personal kinship with the individuals that populate the narrative. The author takes readers on a journey from one moving chapter to another as the Nazi grip on Holland’s Jews grew tighter and tighter. While Jewish rights were stripped away and increasing numbers of families were shipped to ghettos or deported to camps, the Brilleslijper sisters provided significant aid to the Dutch resistance, overseeing an underground press, organizing a black market of necessary goods and lifesaving documentation, and hiding those on the run. Eventually, the residents of the High Nest were discovered and shipped to the Westerbork Transit Camp, followed by Auschwitz, where “almost all” of them were “killed upon arrival.” As the Soviet army approached, the sisters were moved to Bergen-Belsen, where they came extraordinarily close to meeting the same fate as another pair of sisters they befriended, Margot and Anne Frank. The author’s attention to detail makes the horrors of the Holocaust come to life—not only the physical horrors of the camps, but also the emotional and mental torment of life spent in fear and hiding. The ending, though happy, proves bittersweet in contrast to the incomprehensible scale of torment and death of the era.

A truly worthwhile addition to the body of Holocaust studies.

UNREQUITED INFATUATIONS
A Memoir
Van Zandt, Stevie
Ed. by Ben Greenman
Hachette (256 pp.)
$30.00 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-306-92542-9

The amiable musician delivers a suitably good-natured account of a long life in show business.
“Contrary to popular scientific rumor, the Big Bang that gave birth to the universe did not happen ten million years ago. It happened on February 9, 1964.” So writes Van Zandt, who, like so many others of his generation, picked up a guitar after the Beatles made their U.S. debut on the Ed Sullivan Show. He had been priming himself for the moment, after which he became a connoisseur of all the things that led him to switch religions from Christianity to “Rock and Roll Pagan.” That devotion brought him into the orbit of a tough kid named Bruce Springsteen, to whom he became a Sancho Panza, always on hand to deliver opinions that, the author admits, weren’t always spot-on. For example, he hated “Dancing in the Dark” and its “terrible video,” but he allows that it sparked a new superstar phase in Springsteen’s career that would “pay my rent for quite a while.” It’s not the only disagreement with Springsteen that he recounts, but it’s clear that while not always being in concord, the two are blood brothers. Of interest to fans of The Sopranos are Van Zandt’s behind-the-screen notes on how the series came about despite the long odds and, in particular, how he came to occupy the role of Silvio Dante, which he had written independently. Of the stereotypical Mafia tropes and the controversy surrounding them, the author is of the fuggedaboudit mold: “Other than the obvious jail-and-death part, I never really had a problem with Mob stuff.” Van Zandt seldom has an unkind word, and when he does, it’s usually about inflated rock-star egotism. Otherwise, his spry autobiography reveals him to be a politically committed music lover who can’t get enough of the British Invasion and the blues.

A pleasure for music fans and one of the best entertainment memoirs in recent years.

BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY
A Memoir
Wang, Qian Julie
Doubleday (320 pp.)
$28.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-385-54721-5

How one little girl found her way through the terror, hunger, exhaustion, and cruelty of an undocumented childhood in New York’s Chinatown.
Since the absolute necessity of going through the world unnoticed was drummed into her from the
moment she arrived in the U.S. in 1994, perhaps it is no surprise that Wang, a graduate of Yale Law School on her way up as a litigator, had deeply buried the memories of the 7-year-old girl who came with her Ma Ma to Mei Guo—America, or “beautiful country.” There they joined her father, whose life had been brutalized by the Cultural Revolution (“he would happily eat America’s shit before feasting on China’s fruits”). The family lived off trash-picking and working in sweatshops and frigid sushi processing plants, even though both parents had been professors in China. As a child, Wang snipped threads and shivered in a huge plastic bodysuit right alongside them. She taught herself English in a public school that sent her to a special needs classroom and forgot about her. She lied and blistered her way through the humiliating social network of elementary school, often with poor results. Her only friend at times was a kitten she fed off her own tiny plate until her father blamed it for their bad luck and drove it away. When she left this life behind, she spoke not a word of it until the xenophobia that crescendoed during the 2016 election cycle made her break her silence. Engaging readers through all five senses and the heart, Wang’s debut memoir is a critical addition to the literature on America’s shit before feasting on China’s fruits”). The family

Whiteside (b. 1984) narrates his journey. In 1996, his dance teachers brought 12-year-old James to see ABT’s spring gala show at the American Ballet Theatre. After realizing his childhood dream to become a professional dancer, White-side narratives his journey. In 1996, his dance teachers brought 12-year-old James to see ABT’s spring gala show at the American Ballet Theatre. After realizing his childhood dream to become a professional dancer, Whiteside thought that he was doing something super gay,” ballet proved to be “just another heteronormative endeavor.” Because he “wasn’t able to express my true self in my art,” he created his own gay roles, acting out his alter egos JbDubs, a pop musician, and Ühu Betch, “the drag queen with a flair for nonsense.” The author, who clearly worked tirelessly to reach his goal, is an elite athlete and an expressive actor, blessed with both musicality and physical grace. However, readers seeking details about his artistic training or technique are out of luck. There are few backstage stories or descriptions of favorite partners, roles, or performances. Whiteside does delve deeply and often movingly into his mother’s tragic life trajectory. He devotes less-engaging chapters to his dating history and his beloved pets, and a missed flight and overnight stay at the “Casablanca Roach Motel” serve as the basis for a comic script for a Pussycat Dolls-themed musical (40 pages, included in full). Whiteside tells his story candidly and with occasional humor, delivering a requiem for his youth (“The end has already come—the end of wild youth. Any wildness now is just bad choices”), but he fails to provide any exciting scenes about opening nights or standout performances. To borrow the title of the last chapter, “Why Not?” An energetic yet disjointed coming-of-age story; readers seeking insight into the world of ballet should look elsewhere.

An over stuffed collection of the conservative columnist’s reviews and rarified reflections from the Washington Post, geared toward his enduring “intellectually upscale” readers.

Organized by themes—American history, politics, baseball, obituaries, and books by favorite authors such as Max Hastings, Ron Chernow, and Rick Atkinson—this latest gathering of Will’s writing aspires to what he calls “trenchant elegance.” More often than not, he attains it. Railing against big government and the overreach of the executive branch, the author, well known for his old-school, small-L libertarianism and arch mannerisms, often returns to definitive moments in the ongoing story of America, such as the Cold War, the moon landing, and the JFK assassination. Regarding Hastings’ excellent recent book, Vietnam, Will writes, “Vietnam remains an American sorrow of squandered valor….U.S. statesmen and commanders, Hastings writes, lied too much to the nation and the world but most calamitously to themselves.” Some of Will’s irritations include the modern lack of civil discourse; presidential “proximity” (the former president appears by name sparingly: “this low-rent Lear raging on his Twitter-heath has proven that the phrase malignant buffoon is not an oxymoron”), the “scandal” of mass incarceration and the overcriminalization of American life; and emotional support animals in airplanes. A deeply erudite, always opinionated commentator, Will laments the erosion of literacy and advocates for binge-reading rather than binge-watching, and he parses the intricacies of recent Supreme Court cases with authority. The author concludes this volume with tributes to some of his fallen heroes, such as Margaret Thatcher (“She had the smooth, cold surface of a porcelain figurine, but
her decisiveness made her the most formidable woman in twentieth-century politics, and England’s most formidable woman since its greatest sovereign, Elizabeth I”), Ronald Reagan, and, of course, National Review founder William F. Buckley, “the 20th century’s most consequential journalist.”

A gentleman scholar and scold, Will continues to wield his sharp, discerning prose.

**WHY RELIGION IS GOOD FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY**

Wuthnow, Robert
Princeton Univ. (330 pp.)
$29.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-691-22263-9

How the diversity of religion in America has furthered democratic ideals throughout the past century.

Wuthnow, former director of the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton, offers a detailed look at religion’s role in American democracy, particularly from the New Deal era onward. The author asserts that, despite many challenges, the varied contours of the American religious landscape have been beneficial overall to democracy. He structures his argument around a handful of wide-ranging historical issues and corresponding movements. First is the New Deal and the long-running Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. Wuthnow explores the level of resistance many religious leaders and communities raised against Roosevelt’s social policy, balanced by the support of urban faith leaders who influenced policy and politics in significant ways. Wuthnow then examines issues of conscience, with a focus on World War II-era pacifism, expressed by a vocal minority of American faith communities and leadership. Then he moves on to freedom of assembly, describing how the conformist religious and social organizations of the 1950s set the groundwork for the organized activism of the following decade. Finally, the author explores human dignity, welfare, and wealth distribution, demonstrating the politicization of religious communities in recent decades and the widening rift between right and left. Wuthnow praises the role of diversity in allowing voices of dissent to find outlets amid transformative social and cultural issues. He warns, however, that “while diversity is present, it is overshadowed by polarization,” which “hasn’t been healthy either for religion or democracy.” The text is dense with evident scholarship and plenty of historical examples, but Wuthnow’s thesis is strained. In declaring diversity in religion good for democracy, the author seems mainly to argue that dissent in religion is good for democracy. The book is largely a history of dissent, and Wuthnow champions those religious traditions that spurn convention and the status quo.

A learned academic study whose appeal will be limited to fellow scholars.

**A DUTIFUL BOY**

A Memoir of a Gay Muslim’s Journey to Acceptance
Zaidi, Mohsin
Vintage (288 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2021
978-1-5291-1220-7

A prominent British barrister’s account of growing up gay in an immigrant Pakistani family in which their Shia Muslim religion “was an all-encompassing world.”

Though he was “an English-born child,” Zaidi realized early on he “did not live in the England I saw on TV.” His corner of London was “overrun with fried chicken takeaways, halal butchers and Asian clothes shops.” His mother pushed him to excel academically and win scholarships to the private schools that would ensure success in the family’s adopted country. Zaidi threw himself into his studies, less to please his parents and more to avoid ruminating on his sexuality and the fact he was a living in a world rife with anti-Muslim sentiment. He applied to Oxford and, against his expectations, was admitted into a highly competitive jurisprudence program. Though he was overjoyed to be accepted to such a prestigious institution, Zaidi prayed to Allah to trade his place at Oxford for a “cure for my homosexuality,” which he believed would bring his parents shame. His student days at Oxford were as much a revelation intellectually as they were socially. While hoodies made his White friends look “sporty,” they made the brown-skinned author look “threatening.” At the same time, the freedom of college life helped Zaidi embrace his sexuality and loosen ties to his faith and its proscriptions. When the author tried to come out to his parents, his father attempted to “cure” him with visits from a healer who was “no real doctor but a man who peddled stories of black magic and jinn possession.” Zaidi went on to become a successful barrister and fall in love with a White Irishman who forced him to confront his own prejudices about loving across lines of color and culture. Both moving and thoughtful, this debut memoir engagingly explores the meaning of belonging and celebrates how love and acceptance can transcend race, class, and sexuality.

A fulfilling reading experience about relevant topics.
The year 2016 witnessed the rise of Donald Trump, “unrepentantly divisive and proudly bigoted,” who would go on to reveal his true racist colors the following year at Charlottesville; with Trump, a flood tide of White resentment and anti-Black acts would overwhelm the country. In response, as Zirin chronicles, players and protestors of many ethnicities emulated Kaepernick, sometimes courting significant trouble in doing so. These included a high school class of student athletes who collectively decided to take the knee in racially troubled Minneapolis, a cheerleader who acted alone in doing so, a Black student athlete in a mostly White community in New York who, appalled that the Confederate flag was being flown “as an all-purpose symbol of white supremacy,” launched a protest that caught on among young people: “I’m getting recognized for football,” he reasoned, “why can’t I get recognized for speaking?” Zirin closes his account, which is more in the way of vivid character sketches than anything driven by a governing thesis, with a conversation with John Carlos, who famously raised a fist in a Black Power salute at the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games and who sagely counsels, “Love thyself. Love thy neighbor. Set a precedent and let them know that we are not the negative force in society. We are the positive force.”

A thoughtful anecdotal study of protest in our time.
CHILDREN’S

These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

MY HEART FLIES OPEN by Omileye Achikeobi-Lewis.................. 81
SUNNY DAYS INSIDE by Caroline Adderson .............................. 81
THE UGLIEST MONSTER IN THE WORLD by Luis Amavisca; illus. by Erica Salcedo .......................... 84
MOON POPS by Hena Baek; trans. by Jieun Kiaer .................. 86
MY TWO BORDER TOWNS by David Bowles; illus. by Erika Meza ..................... 90
SHAPES AND COLORS by John Canty .................................. 93
A QUEEN TO THE RESCUE by Nancy Churnin; illus. by Evgenia Nayberg ......................... 94
WHEN WE SAY BLACK LIVES MATTER by Maxine Beneba Clarke ........................................ 94
MAGIC LIKE THAT by Samara Cole Doyon; illus. by Geneva Bowers ..................... 97
THE YOUNG CYCLIST’S COMPANION by Peter Drinkell; illus. by Thomas Slater ...................... 98
BEAR WANTS TO SING by Cary Fagan; illus. by Dena Seiferling ........................................... 100
I CAN HELP by Reem Faruqi; illus. by Mikela Prevost .................. 100
CAT DOG by Mem Fox; illus. by Mark Teague ...................... 101
THE LITTLE WOODEN ROBOT AND THE LOG PRINCESS by Tom Gauld ...................................... 101
CHANGE SINGS by Amanda Gorman; illus. by Loren Long ........ 102
RECOGNIZE! ed. by Wade Hudson & Cheryl Willis Hudson ........ 104
THE SHAPE OF HOME by Rashin Kheiriyeh ......................... 106
PENGUIN JOURNEY by Angela Burke Kunkel; illus. by Catherine Lazar Odell .......................... 107
THE EDGE OF THE OCEAN by L.D. Lapinski ......................... 107
TÉO’S TUTU by Maryann Jacob Macias; illus. by Alea Marley ....... 108

FLUFFY MCWHISKERS CUTENESS EXPLOSION by Stephen W. Martin; illus. by Dan Tavis ........................................... 110
SCHOOL OF PHANTOMS by Kory Merritt ................................ 111
LITTLE BIRD’S DAY by Sally Morgan; illus. by Johnny Warrkatja Malibirr ........................................... 113
TIME IS A FLOWER by Julie Morstad .................................. 113
ALMOST NOTHING, YET EVERYTHING by Hiroshi Osada; illus. by Ryōji Arai; trans. by David Boyd .................. 115
THE WORDY BOOK by Julie Paschkis .................................. 116
MY WORDS FLEW AWAY LIKE BIRDS by Debora Pearson; illus. by Shrija Jain ........................................... 117
PAX, JOURNEY HOME by Sara Pennypacker; illus. by Jon Klassen ........................................... 117
NOBODY OWNS THE MOON by Tobby Riddle .................................. 118
THE SECRET OF THE MAGIC PEARL by Elisa Sabatinelli; illus. by Iacopo Bruno; trans. by Christopher Turner .......................... 120
RED by Laura Vaccaro Seeger ........................................... 121
THE HOMEWORK SQUAD’S ADHD GUIDE TO SCHOOL SUCCESS by Joshua Shifrin; illus. by Tracy Nishimura Bishop ........................................... 122
THE UNIVERSE AND YOU by Suzanne Slade; illus. by Stephanie Fizer Coleman ...................... 123
BORN BEHIND BARS by Padma Venkatraman ...................... 128
LITTLE WITCH HAZEL by Phoebe Wahl .................................. 129
FROM THE TOPS OF THE TREES by Kao Kalia Yang; illus. by Rachel Wada ........................................... 131

LITTLE BIRD’S DAY
Morgan, Sally
Illus. by Malibirr, Johnny Warrkatja
Blue Dot Kids Press (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-73622-646-9
“Lyrical prose and visual art combine to offer a beautiful experience of mindfulness and movement.”

MY HEART FLIES OPEN

Achikeobi-Lewis, Omileye
Illus. by the author
North Atlantic (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-62317-613-6

Mindfulness, affirmations, and yoga instructions form the text of this uplifting, “fantastical trip.”

Beginning with the breath, the confident, first-person narrator knows “I am love” and sits resting in Easy Pose. From there, each page turn introduces ways to manage feelings and use the breath, the mind, and affirmations to know “I am stillness,” “I am life,” “I am bold,” and “I am grateful.” All the while, the text moves readers through yoga poses that embody the thoughts expressed. Facing each page of text is a colorful illustration of a Black child in the yoga pose described, floating in space, creating a wave, releasing butterflies, nose to nose with a dolphin, or surrounded by hearts. The child’s contented face, with eyes closed and smiling slightly, and the energy that emanates from the simple lines, shapes, and colors will attract young readers to the pages. The affirmations, set apart with a larger, colored display type, will become familiar, comforting refrains taking up space for positivity and setting a standard of self-care for readers. Achikeobi-Lewis’ lyrical prose and visual art combine to offer a beautiful experience of mindfulness and movement perfect for meaningful time between children and caregivers that will feed the spirits of both.

Breathe, get comfortable, give and take the gift of time with this journey. (Picture book. 3–9)

SUNNY DAYS INSIDE

And Other Stories

Adderson, Caroline
Groundwood (144 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-1-77306-572-4

A kaleidoscopic view of how the kids in one urban apartment building experience Covid-19.

A compelling montage of stories that will leave readers wanting to know more about each character. (author’s note) (Fiction. 10-14)

Benji’s Doll

Acosta, Alicia & Amavisca, Luis
Illus. by Graux, Amélie
Trans. by Sinclair, Robin
nubeOCHO (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 11, 2021
978-84-18133-40-4
Series: Égalité

More than anything, a little boy wants a doll.

Freckle-faced, buck-toothed Benji (a little White boy who bears a curious resemblance to Howdy Doody) has made birthday wishes, Christmas lists, and even tossed all of his coins from his piggy bank into a fountain, desperately hoping for a toy doll. His best friend, Jenny, has one (the doll has the same dark brown skin tone as Jenny), and Benji loves to care for it. One day, Mom and Dad give him a large present. An aptly placed page turn keeps readers in suspense, wondering what choice the parents have made. It’s a doll! Benji rushes to the park to show it off. Unfortunately, a bully, a brown-skinned boy named Pablo, grabs the doll and squeezes it so hard one of the eyeballs pops out (a dramatic scene). All seems hopeless, but Pablo (who feels remorse and, it turns out, just didn’t have the social skills to enter the group’s play) comes up with a clever reparation.

Facial features are exaggerated in this Spanish import—eyes are large, noses upturned, ears stick out—but no one exudes a more toothy joy than Benji when his wish for a doll finally comes true. Some readers may wonder what took Mom and Dad so long since they are clearly not opposed to giving their son a doll. Still, though slight on story, it’s big on heart and makes for a long-overdue replacement for the venerable William’s Doll, by Charlotte Zolotow and illustrated by William Péne Du Bois (1972). The original, Spanish edition, La muñeca de Lucas, publishes simultaneously.

Friendship trumps gender norms. (Picture book. 3-6) (La muñeca de Lucas: 978-84-18133-39-8)

MY HEART FLIES OPEN

Admission, 2021
North Atlantic (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-62317-613-6

Achikeobi-Lewis’ lyrical prose and visual art combine to offer a beautiful experience of mindfulness and movement.

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Illus. by the author
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$16.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-62317-613-6

Mindfulness, affirmations, and yoga instructions form the text of this uplifting, “fantastical trip.”

Beginning with the breath, the confident, first-person narrator knows “I am love” and sits resting in Easy Pose. From there, each page turn introduces ways to manage feelings and use the breath, the mind, and affirmations to know “I am stillness,” “I am life,” “I am bold,” and “I am grateful.” All the while, the text moves readers through yoga poses that embody the thoughts expressed. Facing each page of text is a colorful illustration of a Black child in the yoga pose described, floating in space, creating a wave, releasing butterflies, nose to nose with a dolphin, or surrounded by hearts. The child’s contented face, with eyes closed and smiling slightly, and the energy that emanates from the simple lines, shapes, and colors will attract young readers to the pages. The affirmations, set apart with a larger, colored display type, will become familiar, comforting refrains taking up space for positivity and setting a standard of self-care for readers. Achikeobi-Lewis’ lyrical prose and visual art combine to offer a beautiful experience of mindfulness and movement perfect for meaningful time between children and caregivers that will feed the spirits of both.

Breathe, get comfortable, give and take the gift of time with this journey. (Picture book. 3–9)
PICTURE BOOKS | Vicky Smith

**Reading the Outdoors**

Here in the North, we are in the very middle of summer; in the Southern states, students and teachers are looking at returning to school in just a few weeks. But even for those kids, there is still time to squeeze in a bit more time outdoors. This year we saw an abundance of great books about kids and the outdoors, so there’s something for just about everyone, from the avid explorer to those who may need an extra nudge.

Topping the list of titles for kids eager to get out and get doing is a trio of books from the new series Outdoor School. Designed with flexible bindings, water-resistant covers, and corners cunningly reinforced with metal, they are meant to stand up to the wear and tear of day hikes and camping trips. All sharing the same confident subtitle, “The Definitive Interactive Nature Guide,” *Animal Watching*, by Mary K. Carson and illustrated by Emily Dahl, *Rock, Fossil, and Shell Hunting*, by Jennifer Swan-son and illustrated by John D. Dawson, and *Hiking and Camping*, by Jennifer Pharr Davis and Haley Blevins, illustrated by Aliki Karkoulia (all Odd Dot, April 27), offer clear explanations, photos and illustrations designed for maximum clarity, and lots of places for readers to record their discoveries and notes.

Distinctly less portable but alluringly eye-catching, *The Fungarium*, by Ester Gaya and illustrated by Katie Scott (Candlewick, April 6), the latest in the Welcome to the Museum series, gives mushroom and other fungi the coffee-table–book treatment. The fascinating facts offered vie with the luscious illustrations for readers’ attention; the combination may send a new generation of mycologists into the woods. (Don’t worry; the lethal nature of many mushrooms is directly addressed.)

Three titles aimed at somewhat younger kids concentrate on encouraging them to pay attention to the world around them. *Outside, You Notice*, by Erin Aladdin and illustrated by Andrea Blinick (Pajama Press, April 13), opens up nature to readers, offering different scenes (parks, backyards, forests, etc.) and describing the sensory experiences children will find in them. *Listen*, by Gabi Snyder and illustrated by Stephanie Graegin (Paula Wiseman/Simon & Shuster, July 13), focuses on what children might hear in different settings. In contrast to *Outside, You Notice*, it stays within a city environment, giving urban readers with less access to nature the same kind of mindfulness experience. And in *Percy’s Museum*, by Sara O’Leary and illustrated by Carmen Mok (Groundwood, April 6), a young brown-skinned boy copes with his move from the bustling city to the country by exploring his backyard and the nature beyond it, recording his observations and assembling them to create the titular exhibit.

Two other picture books take children deep into nature. In *On the Trapline*, by David A. Robertson and illustrated by Julie Flett (Tundra Books, May 4), a young Swampy Cree child travels with his grandfather to the family’s homelands, starting “where we lived after we left the trapline” and journeying past the school where Moshom and his friends were forced to speak English to the island where the family lived off the land and flourished. Text and art, by creators who share the characters’ Cree heritage, are spare and beautiful. And in *If I Were a Tree*, by Andrea Zimmerman and illustrated by Jing Jing Tsong (Lee & Low Books, April 6), a family of color goes camping. Repeating the titular phrase, the children imagine their lives as trees with rich, sensory language. Perspectives zoom in and out, giving readers breathtaking views of the forest they’re wandering through.

Summertime is for reading and going outdoors; these books encourage both.

*Vicky Smith is a young readers’ editor.*
FAIRY TALE SCIENCE
Explore 25 Classic Tales Through Hands-On Experiments
Albee, Sarah
Illus. by Robinson, Bill
Odd Dot (240 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-250-25760-1

Readers are invited to approach fairy tales with scientific curiosity.

This collection includes summaries of 25 fairy tales, 22 of which are European, although the full-color, cartoon-style illustrations feature ethnically diverse children. For each, information regarding the story’s origin and variations is provided. Following each summary, the author discusses related scientific concepts and provides detailed steps for performing one or more experiments or activities, complete with scientific terms, definitions, diagrams, and reflective questions. Following “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” the author includes a discussion of vital signs. Also included are steps for readers to determine their heart rates. Following “The Three Little Pigs,” the author provides a discussion of forces, including how the wind can cause structural failure. Readers are encouraged to test this using a ping-pong ball and blow-dryer. The author’s humorous and satirical retelling of each tale is key, offering a fresh perspective on these classics and encouraging readers to begin thinking like scientists. The rich heritages of Africa, Indigenous North America, Oceania, and Latin America are entirely absent, while a story set in China by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen is included; alongside the story of Ali Baba, the two other non-Western tales are about possibly real Asian historical figures—Mulan and Vikramaditya—choices out of keeping with the European stories. The cursory explanation of past societies’ timekeeping abilities and fear of witches feel ahistorical.

A lively and captivating book weakened by its narrow cultural focus. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 8-12)

ONLY IN AMERICA
The Weird and Wonderful 50 States
Alexander, Heather
Illus. by Rhys, Alan Berry
Wide Eyed Editions (112 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-7112-6884-3
Series: The 50 States

An abundance of unusual facts highlighting what makes each state weird and wonderful.

With all 50 of the states and the District of Columbia each getting a two-page spread, this book has room for some unusual and strange facts. Listed for each state are both its official and unofficial nicknames, often with a brief explanation behind their origins. Each page bristles with clumps of fun facts, including bizarre festivals, weird laws, world records, and more. Readers can learn about bathtubs races in Iowa or the International Banana Museum in California. State favorites, like snacks, pizza toppings, desserts, etc., are listed as well. There is a fast facts section for each state: state capital, humorous place names, state slang, “fantastic foods” (not always phrased as locals would), and interesting inventions. Readers also learn what is pictured on the state quarter and a couple of books for ages 7 through 12 set in the state. Facts about Indigenous, African American, and immigrant connections are included for a few states. The inclusion of some of the names gathered under the rubric “Funny Place Names” could be considered culturally insensitive, as with Aiea, Hawaii, and Eek, Arkansas, which stem from Indigenous cultures. The highlight of the book is the vintage America-style graphics. The vibrant, bold colors are captivating, and many of the graphics add fun context to the text.

A quirky fact book sure to spark interest and further discovery. (index) (Nonfiction. 7-10)

STAR STRIKER
Game On!
Amato, Mary
Holiday House (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-8234-5032-9

Albert Kinney is a seventh grader with a lot on his mind.

He’s concerned about not making the soccer team, trying to understand why his former best friend hates him, and has been abducted by aliens who need him to play striker in an intergalactic tournament. Seventy-five years ago, in the Füigor Solar System, the planet Zeeno was occupied by inhabitants from the planet Tex. The Zeenods plan to use their success in the next tournament of Füigor johka—the most popular sport in the Milky Way and the precursor to Earth’s soccer—to draw attention to their cause and eventually regain their planet. They need Albert to do it. If being sworn to secrecy and traveling to another solar system for practices using time-folding technology weren’t enough, several attempts on Albert’s life threaten his resolve. Luckily, the dog next door has been observing everything and has his own plan to protect Albert. This ambitious series opener starts out strong: Readers will instantly connect with Albert and his struggles at home, school, and with the sport he loves. Unfortunately, some will lose steam as the complex storyline unfolds; while there is a great deal of science fiction action, Albert spends more time on thought awareness preparation and cultivating his energy control than playing actual johka. An absence of physical descriptions makes the races of human characters difficult to determine.

Middle school soccer meets Space Jam in this uneven adventure. (Science fiction. 9-12)
Three differently colored and shaped monsters, each claiming to be the ugliest in the world, finally look in a mirror to help them decide how to settle the claim.

An exuberantly hairy blue monster with bright yellow eyes, so lanky it has to bend over and spread out across the book gutter and onto the next page, declares, “HELLO! I’m the UGLIEST MONSTER in the WORLD!” Another monster, this one quite round and covered in red fur with dashes of teal, begs to differ: “NO WAY! I’m the UGLIEST MONSTER in the WORLD!” As they dress up with hats and wigs and clothes in wonderful shapes, colors, and styles, each trying to look even uglier, a third monster—with yellow fur, a cute unibrow, and an interesting appendage that could be a nose or an ear—makes an appearance: “[A]ctually…I’M the UGLIEST MONSTER in the WORLD!” Perhaps looking in a mirror will help them decide who is the ugliest. The humorous answer and resulting reaction as all three faint dead away will have children squealing with laughter. Salcedo’s highly expressive and lighthearted illustrations keep the focus squarely on these more-lovable-than-ugly monsters, depicting them against a plain beige background.

The story hails from Spain, and a Spanish edition, El monstruo más feo del mundo, publishes simultaneously.

Delightful proof that there is strength in numbers. (Picture book/5-8) (El monstruo más feo del mundo: 978-84-17673-75-8)

Learn about the Lincoln family through the life of their youngest child.

Thomas “Tad” Lincoln was by all accounts rambunctious. The nickname came with his birth, when his wiggling body reminded his father of a tadpole, and his high energy continued throughout his childhood. This energy, paired with a partial cleft palate that left a hole in the roof of his mouth, made Tad a high-maintenance child who was hard to understand but also one who delighted the president and brought levity to a troubled White House. Readers will learn about a few of these adventures, including Tad’s moneymaking schemes to support the war effort, his romps through the White House, and his role in the pardoning of the first turkey, Jack, which became one of his menagerie of pets. The story’s strength lies in its quiet depictions of Abraham Lincoln and his wry humor that many children’s history books ignore. The fine-lined and delicately colored illustrations capture the energy of the day and don’t sugarcoat the Whiteness of Lincoln’s world; most of the Black characters depicted are servants. Readers fascinated by this glimpse into Tad’s story will want to know more, and caregivers and educators will delight in the extensive bibliography and source notes that will aid that exploration. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A lively glimpse into the Lincoln home. (author’s note) (Picture book/biography. 5-12)

How does one entertain two baby kestrels in the middle of a West Texas dust storm? With camel stories, of course.

Like her namesake Scheherazade, elderly camel Zada has many stories to tell from her adventurous life. It’s 1910, and she has charge of Wims and Beulah, two baby kestrels whose parents have vanished in a vicious dust storm. The threesome shelter in an empty mountain lion’s cave, waiting for safety. Zada hopes to get the chicks to the safe meeting place chosen by their parents just before a dust devil snatched them away. The evocative language is spellbinding as tales from Zada’s life calm the baby birds—and capture the interest of readers as well. The fledglings learn that Zada was raised by a Turkish pasha and gifted with eight other prized racing camels to the U.S. Army in 1856, ending up in Texas (events inspired by actual history). A delight to the senses, Zada’s stories are a descriptive wonder, featuring rolling dust, howling winds, fresh figs, and cool water, bolstering the emotions shown in Rohmann’s grayscale oil paintings. Readers will revel in both the vivid stories of Zada’s past and the rich vocabulary of Texas desert life. Appelt’s voice and pacing demonstrate her fine storytelling skills. Hearts will grow fond of this wise old camel; she is a bright star.

For the curious, the listeners, the adventurers, the caregivers, the young, and the old. (glossary, author’s note, sources) (Fiction. 8-12)
MEENA’S MINDFUL MOMENT
Athaide, Tina
Illus. by Gilland, Åsa
Page Street (32 pp.)
$17.99  |  Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-64567-286-9

When Meena goes to visit her grandfather in his South Asian village, she is followed by her “hurly-burly hullabaloo”—an imaginary being that incites Meena to create chaos wherever she goes.

Meena and her hullabaloo (depicted as a wispy-edged, blue-green blob with striped arms and legs) try to calm down by doing yoga with Dada. But no matter how hard she works to hold Tree Pose, Meena can’t seem to stop her throat from singing or her legs and toes from wiggling and waggling. On the beach, Meena and the hullabaloo wreak havoc, tangling the fishermen’s nets and splashing everyone with a huge wave. Before long, the villagers can’t take it anymore, and they scold Meena before Dada placates them. Meena is saddened by this anger but is unsure what to do. Then her Dada introduces her to his very own hullabaloo (who’s very similar to Meena’s, except it’s white, like Dada’s hair). Meena now feels less alone and is ultimately able to force her hullabaloo into a state of calm. The book’s bright and busy illustrations pulse with life, and the text is simple, clear, and easy to read. While the mindfulness message is a positive one, in practice, this is essentially a story about a girl being punished for being loud and full of life: Meena’s transformation is sparked by the villagers’ anger at her being her loud, unadulterated self, and her triumphant self-control comes at the expense of her expansive personality.

Sweet and well intentioned but misses the mark. (Picture book. 3-6)

BABY, SLEEPY BABY
Atinuke
Illus. by Brooksbank, Angela
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99  |  Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-5362-1986-9

A picture-book lullaby.

Nothing in Atinuke’s text dictates that the family depicted in this book must be interracial, but Brooksbank’s illustrations depict the mother as White, the father and a grandmother as Black, and the two children with light-brown skin and curly, black hair. The titular baby has an older sibling who interacts with the tot in a loving, gentle way throughout. All of the family members are introduced on the full title page, each person cradling the baby in a sequence of pictures. The mother and baby appear at the far right of the spread, walking toward the page turn, and successive spreads show scenes of play and nurture with dreamy, saturated backgrounds and soft visual textures. The text does not rhyme but is nevertheless poetic, each sentence leading off with the titular refrain or a variation on it: “Baby, sleepy baby, I’ll call on the winds / and you’ll sail like a ship through the sky. / Baby, funny baby, I will gather all the clouds / to cuddle you, cozy and close.” It’s not entirely clear who is speaking—possibly each family member in turn, possibly just one of them; readers can discuss and decide. Regardless, the lyrical text matches the soothing visuals as each family member interacts with the baby in turn, until the parents drift off to sleep with their little one dozing between them.

Don’t sleep on this sweet bedtime book: It’s as cozy as can be. (Picture book. 6 mos.-3)
MOON POPS
Baek, Heena
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Kiaer, Jieun
Owlkids Books (36 pp.)
$18.95 | Aug. 15, 2021
978-1-77147-429-0

A charming bedtime story sure to prompt sweet dreams. One “very, very hot night in the middle of summer,” the moon begins to melt. Trying in vain to get to sleep, the residents of a cramped apartment building turn on their air conditioners and fans, and leave their refrigerators open, causing a power outage! Granny, in Apt. 503, is the only resident to have noticed the moon dripping away to nothing, and she races outside to catch the drops to mix up a frozen treat: the titular moon pops, which are icy and sweet, melt away the heat. All is finally quiet, until two rabbits come knocking at the door—they have come from the moon, which has melted away. But no worries, Granny has just the solution. 2020 Astrid Lindgren Award winner Baek draws gently on Korean folklore while keeping her feet firmly planted in the modern day, with some delicious visual texture. Dreamy illustrations are crafted from dioramas and cut-paper charcoal drawings, with a softly glowing candle-flame-colored moon and friends and neighbors who are a variety of creatures but all wearing summery human pajamas. Whimsically varied perspectives and the unusual depth of field offered by Baek’s technique make for an entrancing display. Granny is a bespectacled wolf.

A sweet, icy treat that will warm your heart. (Picture book. 4-6)

THE SPOTS AND THE DOTS
Baugh, Helen
Illus. by Deuchars, Marion
Andersen Press USA (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-72843-890-0

Unexpected things happen when you meet those others that you’ve feared for so long. Depending on which way readers hold this dos-à-dos-bound book, the protagonists might be either the Spots, red circles with large expressive eyes, or the Dots, blue circles with the same features. In both cases, the elders of both groups remind their young, “Don’t go over the hill!” The Spots know the Dots live over the hill (and vice versa), and both groups have avoided each other for generations…until today. A baby from each group ascends the hill to meet and learn “the bad ones were not bad at all. They were good!” The unexpected answer gets Crow and Quail on the road to friendship—and that unexpected behavior makes the other birds uncomfortable until they realize they too would prefer the pleasant quietness brought on by friendship. The book ends by spelling out the moral of the story, likely unnecessarily for many readers. The real star of this book is to be found not in the text but in the illustrations. Artist and ecologist Labinger knows birds, and it shows. Though rendering them realistically and true to life, he has also managed to imbue each with expressive faces that clearly reveal their feelings. The birds are not Burmese, as might be expected, but rather birds that children in the United States might be familiar with, including a peacock, an owl, an American robin, a magpie, a pigeon, a starling, and a falcon, in addition to Crow and Quail. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

The moral of the story, though not new, still bears reminding. (Picture book. 4-8)
THE SECOND LIFE OF TREES
Bissonette, Aimée M.
Illus. by Jones, Nic
Whitman (32 pp.)
$17.99  |  Sep. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-7281-8
Series: Imagine This!

The premise: “Trees—both living and dead—are microhabitats where all sorts of activity takes place.”

Most of the vibrant, mixed-media art is laid out in double-page spreads. The initial one describes a boreal forest. It also introduces a mature balsam tree, about 24 inches in diameter, that will be followed, loosely, from its current, upright status all the way to the decayed state of “nurse log.” The conversational text is both informative and verbose. In general, the text uses larger type for the trajectory of the tree’s life and for general facts about forest life, with further details displayed in smaller font. The first pages note the tree’s importance for shelter, food, soil stabilization, and oxygen. There is one early mention of one role of dead trees, but it is after the previously identified balsam is uprooted by weather that the text firmly asserts that the tree’s downing signifies a crucially important “second life.” Bacteria, fungi, and insects work on decomposition; earthworms eat bacteria and fungi and create humus. The colorful pages that follow are full of facts about flora and fauna availing themselves of fallen-tree benefits during up to 125 years of seasonal cycles. The final page before the author’s note reiterates an idea that is still controversial in forest-management circles: that dead and dying trees are necessary to healthy forests. To appreciate the text, it should be read sequentially but not in one sitting.

Timely. (author’s note, activity, bibliography) (Informational picture book. 6-9)
The author’s first picture-book biography celebrates the life, music, and spirit of Selena
BY ANA GRİLO

What inspired you to write about Selena?
I grew up here in Corpus Christi. It’s also my current hometown. I was inspired to write the book because in 2017, I was in Hollywood at the time that Selena was getting her Hollywood star, and there was a lot of buzz and a lot of talk about her. In my little part of the world, Selena is ever present, but there I was in another state, and seeing all the excitement about Selena really brought home to me just how broad her reach was. She had such an appeal to people beyond my part of South Texas, and I thought I should write a book about her. But I wasn’t quite sure what this was going to be. I do a lot of school visits because I write for young people and I see young people with Selena T-shirts. I go to the local hamburger place and there are Selena’s pictures. Her appeal is still very strong, and I felt that I would just love to be able to go around my community and talk to young people about her life.

This is your first time writing a picture book: What was the process like? Did you and illustrator Teresa Martínez work together?
It takes a long time to get a picture book out. There’s so much to the process, and then the illustrator comes in and the book must be written and reviewed twice, because you’ve got the writer and then you’ve got the illustrator. There was a learning curve for me about how to write my first picture book—and it’s my first biography as well. My first draft was long, and the publisher asked me to remember that a picture book is a collaboration between an author and illustrator—a lot of the information I had in the text was going to be carried by the illustrations. And Teresa Martínez is so very talented. I love her color palette and the way that she creates movement in her art. There was a lot of back and forth between us and through our editor, who also had some input.

Collaboration also fits with the book’s themes and with Selena’s life.
I played with a lot of themes that I thought were important in Selena’s life, the themes of her family being together and of following your own path. But the theme that finally settled in my heart was the idea of how she was always inviting the audience to sing with her. She would start a line, hold the mic out to the audience, and then the audience would finish it. That kind of collaborative connection that she had with her audience was a very powerful part of why she was so loved; people felt like she included them. They felt like they were singing with her, so I went with the theme of “sing with me.”

In terms of research, what kind of preparation did you do?
The thing about research is, you have primary sources and secondary sources. I saw the Selena film when it came out many years ago, and I did not want to watch it again while I was working on this book. Even though we call it a biography, what I wrote is an interpretation, so I didn’t want to see the film, someone else’s interpretation. I didn’t want to read other biographies of Selena, as everybody has their slant in the selection of details. I relied a lot on interviews, and there have been several commemorative magazine issues. *Newsweek* and *Texas Monthly* each had one, and they included interviews with people who knew her, including her family, people that were involved in her music creation. I watched a lot of her concerts and her performances—I probably have her Houston Astrodome concert memorized, I’ve watched it so many times.

There is a Selena museum in Corpus Christi, and it’s located on the site of Q Productions, where her father’s music production company was. It is a small museum, but it has a wealth of information and a lot of her outfits. She loved fashion designing, and they had sketches of her drawings and her little notes about her outfits. One of the things I love is that she sewed and she designed her clothes, and she did this with her family. I connect with her as an individual more for that than for her music, because I would sew with my mother. I don’t know if this ever happened, but Selena and I were pretty much the same age, so I imagine that we were at some point in the same fabric store. I really think sewing has given me a lot as an author, because you have to imagine what you’re going to do and you have to revise the patterns and adjust them to fit the body. The same process applies to writing.

Speaking of fitting in, you show how Selena braved a field to make room for herself in the Tejano music world dominated by men at the time.
It was a very male-dominated world, and breaking into that world didn’t happen overnight. Selena presented on small stages for years, doing the grassroots work by gaining her audience, gaining the respect that she knew she deserved, and finding her voice in music by blending her love for pop with rock and Tejano music. She is a wonderful symbol of women’s empowerment because she seemed to have a lot of confidence in her image, and she presented herself in a way that was celebratory of her body. I think that’s a wonderful message, because everybody has their style and what they are comfortable with. She’s a good example of just being true to yourself, whatever that self is. As a writer and educator, I want to be able to tell a really good story, but I am also thinking, how can I make this valuable to teachers, to librarians, so that they can have conversations with students about the book? I don’t want to be didactic, but I do want my books to serve as a springboard for conversations, and I’ve been thinking about that with Selena’s story. What are the takeaways that young people will have when they read the story? I hope one of them is to really be true to your image of yourself.

Ana Grilo is co-editor of the Hugo Award–winning blog *The Book Smugglers* and co-host of the *Fangirl Happy Hour* podcast. *Sing With Me* received a starred review in the March 1, 2021, issue.
The life of fashion editor Diana Vreeland is explored in an imagined first-person voice.

This story of Vreeland’s rise to fame in the fashion industry begins with an anecdote from when she was 13. Her mother objects to her use of red fingernail polish, applied in an attempt to look like “an exotic princess.” (“What precisely she meant by exotic is not explained.”) Vreeland loves dressing up and dancing, and “things [aren’t always rosy] with her mother, a fact that’s fleshed out a bit more in the book’s backmatter. In an abrupt turn, readers learn that Vreeland becomes an “Empress of Fashion.” The narration continues, relating her preferences for eccentricity, “radiant colors” and their tones, and the color red; followed by her job at Harper’s Bazaar magazine; her Harper’s “Why Don’t You?” column; and her work at Vogue and the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute. The text captures Vreeland’s unique vision, though it’s not clear if the text includes invented dialogue or exact quotes or a combination.

Every image of Vreeland in these pages depicts her with the same stylized grin, and the palette lacks spark for such a fashion iconoclast: A spread, for instance, devoted to Vreeland’s love of the “right green—a spring green” is dominated by a dull olive-green shade. Backmatter includes resources for further reading.

Katstaller includes women of color as models and other background characters in this story of the White fashion icon.

Not quite “violet” enough. (Informational picture book. 4-10)

**MY TWO BORDER TOWNS**

Borules, David
Illus. by Meza, Erika
Kokila (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-0-393-31104-8

A father and son run errands across the U.S.–Mexico border. Early on Saturday, the boy (who’s never named) prepares his “special bag” to bring to Mexico for his friends. Crossing from Texas to Tamaulipas, the duo drives across town and over the bridge into a twin town where Spanish is just as frequently heard, but English is spoken less. Before tackling their errands, Borules seamlessly weaves in some of the complexities of living on the border. He fearlessly introduces the complex issues surrounding the presence of refugees waiting to be admitted into the United States and candidly portrays the everyday lives of families who span the border, creating a unique cosmos in this space. Meza’s background illustrations around town imbue the pages with Mexico’s vibrance. Borules translates his own text into Spanish in a simultaneously publishing edition. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Beautiful, honest, complex. (Picture book. 4-8) (Mis dos pueblos fronterizos: 978-0-593-32507-0)

**VIOLET VELVET MITTENS WITH EVERYTHING**

The Fabulous Life of Diana Vreeland
Blumenthal, Deborah
Illus. by Katstaller, Rachel
Princeton Architectural Press (48 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-64896-063-5

The life of fashion editor Diana Vreeland is explored in an imagined first-person voice.

This story of Vreeland’s rise to fame in the fashion industry begins with an anecdote from when she was 13. Her mother objects to her use of red fingernail polish, applied in an attempt to look like “an exotic princess.” (“What precisely she meant by exotic is not explained.”) Vreeland loves dressing up and dancing, and “things [aren’t always rosy] with her mother, a fact that’s fleshed out a bit more in the book’s backmatter. In an abrupt turn, readers learn that Vreeland becomes an “Empress of Fashion.” The narration continues, relating her preferences for eccentricity, “radiant colors” and their tones, and the color red; followed by her job at Harper’s Bazaar magazine; her Harper’s “Why Don’t You?” column; and her work at Vogue and the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute. The text captures Vreeland’s unique vision, though it’s not clear if the text includes invented dialogue or exact quotes or a combination.

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Katstaller includes women of color as models and other background characters in this story of the White fashion icon.

Not quite “violet” enough. (Informational picture book. 4-10)

**A SEAT AT THE TABLE**

The Nancy Pelosi Story
Boxer, Elisa
Illus. by Freeman, Laura
Crown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-593-37301-7

Nancy Pelosi has broken through ceiling after ceiling to ensure everyone has a seat at the table.

Born Nancy D’Alesandro, Nancy Pelosi grew up watching her father, the first Italian American mayor of Baltimore, host constituents at their home to hear their stories and let them voice their concerns. While he was working, Nancy’s mother gave them her ear, fed them, and helped as she could. Nancy also watched her mother work, unpaid, to help Nancy’s father get reelected; Nancy always knew the hard work that goes into being a public servant, and that it involves the entire family. After moving to San Francisco and years of organizing and doing community work herself, Nancy was asked to run in a special election to fill her ailing friend Rep. Sala Burton’s seat. Boxer writes how Nancy jumped wholeheartedly into her campaign, and in 1987, she was elected to Congress. It’s a frankly admirable account, highlighting Speaker Pelosi’s many achievements and how she travels the country helping to inspire women to run for government office. The book is current enough to record how, in early 2020, rioters mobbed the U.S. Capitol and stormed Pelosi’s office, stealing many items, before it closes on an inspirational note. Freeman creates images that bear an uncanny resemblance to her subjects, filling some backgrounds with images of multiracial groups of constituents and supporters to remind readers that no work is done alone. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Pays due homage to its subject. (Author’s note, interview, bibliography) (Picture book/biography. 4-8)

**“Bowles fearlessly introduces complex issues and candidly portrays the everyday lives of families who span the border.”**

MY TWO BORDER TOWNS
RUN LIKE A GIRL
50 Extraordinary and Inspiring Sportswomen
Brown, Danielle
Illus. by Shields, Robin
Button Books (112 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-78708-108-6

How lucky it is to be told you run like a girl!

This collection, written by a multimedalist Paralympic athlete, presents 50 portraits of strong, resilient, and influential athletes from every reach of the sporting world. Each profile contains two columns of narrative information, biographical details, and a callout box with a smattering of facts; these work together to remind readers that all success comes with its share of struggle. The athletes spotlighted in this book span socioeconomic levels, races, ethnicities, abilities, and ages, showing that passion and perseverance are what matter most. Most importantly, maybe, is that the collection demonstrates that small achievements are just as worthy of celebration as the big shining moments. Being an athlete encompasses many lifestyles: Some have day jobs, some have advanced educational degrees, some are ambassadors for the United Nations, and many have been given honors by the leaders of their countries. Given that there are illustrations on every page, it is a shame that Shields’ name is buried on the copyright page. There is no bibliography that indicates Brown’s sources, nor any suggestions for further reading. The colored backgrounds of the pages combined with white text may pose difficulty for readers with dyslexia. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A guide to following dreams and exceeding goals. (index)
(Collective biography. 8-14)

SMALL BUT MIGHTY
Why Earth’s Tiny Creatures Matter
Brown, Kendra
Illus. by Oliveira, Catarina
Owlkids Books (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Sep. 15, 2021
978-1-77147-431-3

A little call to action.

Common critters like fireflies are presented alongside more-obscure critters like tardigrades in this informational picture book. Illustrations of anthropomorphic animals energetically introduce each topical double-page spread along with eye-catching chunky black headings. The visual composition of each spread is consistent, a design choice that will help younger readers navigate the information but that may also lead to interest loss. Two callout circles anchored in the bottom left and top right corners offer a fun fact and an “actual size” comparison, respectively. Choices of common items like a crayon to describe the actual size of a millipede offer an opportunity for children and their grown-ups to gather the objects for further understanding. The bottom-left fun fact threatens to compete with the brief introduction of each animal. Several paragraphs of information on each recto are paired with a realistic graphic of each animal. The information about honeybees, krill, and reticulated glass frogs calls out climate change as a challenge, while least weasels and termites are connected to their larger ecosystems as helpers. The take-home message reminds children that they and their actions matter even if the world makes them feel small. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A climate-conscious celebration of some small, helpful creatures of the world. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 7-10)

WHERE THU’O’NG KEEPS LOVE
Buu, Thu
Illus. by Luu, Bao
West Margin Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-5132-8943-4

A young Vietnamese girl discovers the varied ways in which her friends and family express their love for one another.

Looking for a special place to keep her feelings, Thuong asks her friends where they keep their love for their parents. Her friends, a diverse array of children, share the ways they convey affection. These include a vocalized declaration like “I love you” as well as nonverbal actions that demonstrate appreciation and respect. Each of these examples is symbolically linked to a body part. One friend keeps it in his head and explains that trying his best and learning new things make his parents happy. Another friend keeps it in her heart, as doing fun things with her parents makes her happy. Thuong also observes members of her family listening carefully, gardening, and cooking her favorite meal. This exploration of expressing familial devotion provides opportunities for social-emotional learning by connecting actions, both physical and emotional, with love. The gentle and affirming tone doesn’t prioritize one form over another and subtly introduces the ways culture can influence our expressions and how we reciprocate affection. The friendly cartoon illustrations are done in a cheery mix of bright pastel colors, which reinforces the soothing comfort of unconditional love. Thuong is Vietnamese, and her friends have a range of skin tones and hair colors. A Vietnamese rhyme reflecting the story’s theme is reproduced in the backmatter along with an English translation.

A sweet and charming tale that validates different ways of expressing love. (author’s note, Vietnamese glossary) (Picture book. 4-8)
A common question parents ask me is, how can I encourage my child to read more broadly? While I am a big believer in letting kids read whatever they want without shame or judgment, acceptance is not incompatible with encouraging exploration, as with deliberate exposure to new foods, cultures, and other experiences. Sometimes young readers get stuck in ruts because they aren’t sure what else is out there or are overwhelmed by all their options. Often there are so many other things happening in their lives—changing friendships, challenging math problems, the awkwardness of growing bodies—that the benefit of comfort reads cannot be overstated.

As adults, it’s also easy to forget how much mental effort it can take to be a young reader: decoding unfamiliar words, assimilating new vocabulary, grappling with various narrative structures, interpreting allusions, and making inferences are all skills that fluent adult readers are used to taking in stride. But even in the upper-elementary grades and middle school, young people are still actively learning how to read. Books that seem predictable or formulaic to adults serve an important purpose in introducing young people to the way literature works in different cultures. You can’t appreciate originality unless you understand and have internalized conventions, after all.

So, when it comes to nudging your middle grader outside their comfort zone, books that defy easy categorization can be a great starting point because they often overlap with something the young reader already knows and loves. These books can therefore serve as a bridge or scaffold from well-worn favorites, opening up new reading vistas. Below is an assortment of recent summer releases to try, each combining strong reader appeal and literary merit with plot elements that bring together the beloved and familiar with the novel and exciting.

Josephine Against the Sea by Shakirah Bourne (Scholastic, July 6): This story set in Barbados combines the deep emotional pull of a family relationship story with spine-tingling suspense and the thrills of mythology-inspired fantasy. Jo is grieving the loss of her mother and suspicious of her father’s new girlfriend, who seems to have supernatural powers.

A Discovery of Dragons by Lindsay Galvin (Chicken House/Scholastic, July 1): High-seas adventure, the wonders of natural history, and a wilderness survival story come together in this original novel that combines true facts about Charles Darwin’s Galápagos visit with, yes, dragons. The tale is narrated from the perspective of a boy who is the ship’s fiddler on the Beagle.

How To Be Brave by Daisy May Johnson (Henry Holt, July 6): The perennial charm of an English boarding school story is combined with a plucky young heroine, a kidnapped mother, a rare species of duck, and lots and lots of cake. The droll narrator keeps this creative story—both cozy and suspenseful—moving along. Readers will be captivated.

Temple Alley Summer by Sachiko Kashiwaba, translated by Avery Fischer Udagawa, illustrated by Miho Satake (Restless Books, July 6): A what-should-I-do-over-summer-vacation story meets a ghost mystery in this novel about a boy, his funny best friend who’s always on the lookout for the next delicious snack, a strange girl and her even stranger mom, a grumpy old lady who’s definitely hiding something, and a most unnerving cat.

Sisters of the Neversea by Cynthia Leitich Smith (Heartdrum, June 1): This book places beloved characters from Peter Pan inside a fresh, new storyline. The magical framework of the original becomes the foundation for a contemporary story about love in a blended family, the diversity and inclusivity of Indigenous heritage, respect for the environment, and girl power.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
“Canty’s illustrations are exquisitely clear, drawing children to linger over the beautifully painted images.”

SHAPES AND COLORS

FREDDY VS. SCHOOL
Cameron, Neill
Illus. by the author
David Fickling/Scholastic (224 pp.)
978-1-338-68682-1 PLB
978-1-338-68681-4
Series: Freddy vs. School, 1

Robot Freddy must figure out how to behave in the human world.

In a futuristic London, Freddy Sharma, who along with his brother is the world’s only sentient robot, must attend school. Unfortunately, this really gets in the way of being the super awesome robot he knows he can be. After using his rocket boosters during a game of catch and crashing into the teachers’ lounge, Freddy is now on probation: no superstrength, no lasers, and no rocket boosters, or he’ll be expelled. His inability to use his powers causes him some feelings of insecurity, especially around his best friends, Fernando and Anisha. Freddy compensates in all the wrong ways, like having a Dare-Off Deathmatch with Fernando that ends disastrously. Despite his good intentions to use his powers to help others—like saving newcomer Riyad from Henrik, the school bully—he just can’t seem to win when everyone is waiting for him to fail. But for Freddy, embracing his differences might just save the day. This hilarious novel is perfect for readers who enjoy fast-paced journal-style stories. There’s plenty of action, the text’s varied appearance adds excitement, and the lively line drawings will grab and maintain readers’ attention as they breeze through Freddy’s misadventures. Both characters’ names and the illustrations reflect the diversity of multicultural London.

The funny, page-turning, madcap exploits of a robot boy. (Graphic/fiction hybrid. 8-12)

SHAPES AND COLORS
Canty, John
Illus. by the author
Berbay Publishing (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-6450696-8-6

Australian author/illustrator Canty builds a conceptual guessing game around the rainbow’s seven colors.

Beginning with red, a double spread presents silhouettes of solid-color shapes against white space, text asking “What’s red?” Children are invited to guess the identities of these scarlet-hued images—some familiar, others mysterious—based on their shapes and contours. A page turn reveals the same images, now labelled and lushly painted, set against a bright red background: twin cherries with adjoining stems; a ladybug; a fire truck with hose and ladder; and more. This pattern holds through the succeeding six rainbow hues. Scale is irrelevant here—a banana dwarfs both a honeybee and a taxi cab. Some pictures are solidly aligned with their colors: an orange orange, green peas, violet violets. Other items (a balloon, boots, a shirt, a comb) have perhaps been selected more for their daily familiarity for preschoolers than their affinity with specific colors. Two later spreads beckon readers to ponder colors in the city and countryside, imbuing both landscapes with brilliant color and verve. The rainbow is introduced last, its colors labeled. Canty’s illustrations are exquisitely clear, drawing children in first to guess at the silhouetted mystery images, then to linger over the beautifully painted ones.

A stellar concept title and a fine choice for both one-on-one and group sharing. (Picture book. 2-5)

DANNY CHUNG SUMS IT UP
Chan, Maisie
Illus. by Quek, Natelle
Amulet/Abrams (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-4197-4821-9

Eleven-year-old Danny is surprised by his parents with a new bunk bed—and a roommate—when his grandmother from China comes to England and moves in with them.

While he’d rather spend time with his friends, Danny’s tasked with showing his paternal grandmother, Nai Nai, around. Nai Nai doesn’t speak English, and her lack of familiarity with the local culture continually embarrasses Danny. But the more time he spends with her, the more Danny finds to admire. The intergenerational relationship between grandmother and grandson shows the power of love to connect across ages, cultures, and language barriers, as Danny doesn’t speak Nai Nai’s dialect. Told with humor and authenticity, this refreshingly sweet story also touches on the challenges Danny and his family face as British Chinese people: Although Danny was born in England, he is still subjected to stereotypes about his race (contrary to others’ beliefs, he struggles with math) and witnesses xenophobia toward his grandmother. Despite their limited verbal communication, Nai Nai’s actions show the lengths she’ll go to protect and stand up for her grandson. Her strength inspires Danny in multiple ways and their bond helps bridge the cultural gap between Danny’s artistic passion and his parents’ ambitions for him. Danny’s detailed drawings appear throughout the book and reinforce his cheeky, irreverent sense of humor and dedication to his art.

Funny and heartwarming; a balanced equation of family, culture, and being true to yourself. (Fiction. 8-12)
“The art is truly outstanding, gripping the heart from the very first spread and not letting go.”

**WHEN WE SAY BLACK LIVES MATTER**

**THANK YOU, NEIGHBOR!**
Chan, Ruth
Illus. by the author
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-06-290953-4

Walking through the streets of a low-rise urban community, an Asian kid with a friendly dog greets neighbors and community workers, thanking them for their contributions.

The detailed line-and-color illustrations beg for close inspection and practically tell the simple story by themselves, although there is also a limited amount of text and some dialogue in cartoon bubbles. The kid and the dog, who performs his normal bodily functions along the way, talk to lots of people, both adults and children. As they go through the streets and the library (the dog stuffed into the kid’s backpack) and peek in on the crowded grocery store, the protagonist talks to the sanitation workers, the letter carrier, people cleaning in front of their shops, some firefighters rescuing a cat, and others opening the hydrant for children to cool off in its water. The child hails neighbors and friends, all enjoying an ideal city day. At the end, kid and dog return home to their apartment, proudly showing the library book (appropriately, *Last Stop on Market Street*, a book about a grandchild and grandmother) they checked out to be Chinese dumplings. The community’s inhabitants are robustly diverse, including different ages, racial presentations, and abilities. In a note, the author/illustrator writes fondly about her Brooklyn neighborhood. (This book was reviewed digitally)

This sweet book will encourage storytelling about readers’ own local neighborhoods. (Picture book. 4–6)

**A QUEEN TO THE RESCUE**
*The Story of Henrietta Szold, Founder of Hadassah*
Churnin, Nancy
Illus. by Nayberg, Yevgenia
Creston (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-939547-95-8

Henrietta Szold dedicated her entire life to aiding the most vulnerable.

As a young child she saw her mother and rabbi father helping escaped slaves in Civil War-era Baltimore. She felt a connection to the Purim holiday and a kinship with Queen Esther, who bravely saved the Jews from the evil Haman. Although women had few opportunities to be heard, Henrietta was determined to emulate Esther and make a difference in the world. She saw Jewish immigrants facing dire poverty and discrimination and took the first of many giant leaps. She opened a night school for immigrants to learn English, and she became the first editor of the Jewish Publication Society. She founded Hadassah—using Queen Esther’s Hebrew name—a women’s organization dedicated to raising funds to address hunger and disease among people of every faith in British-controlled Palestine, and established her own residence there. When Hitler came to power she worked tirelessly to rescue as many Jewish children as possible and, with the support of Hadassah, saved thousands. Churnin presents Szold’s accomplishments with careful attention to historical accuracy. The explanation of Hitler’s extreme actions to destroy all Jews is informative, cogent, and accessible to young readers. The author’s tone is admiring, stressing Szold’s determination, courage, and endless compassion and reiterating her connection to the lessons of Purim. Nayberg employs light and shadow with elongated figures to illustrate the events and express the entire range of emotions felt by Szold, the people with whom she worked, and those whose lives she affected.

A powerful introduction to a little-known, very brave woman. (author’s notes, timeline, bibliography, photo) (Picture book/biography. 8-13)

**WHEN WE SAY BLACK LIVES MATTER**
Clarke, Maxine Beneba
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-5362-2238-8

The author of *The Patchwork Bike* (illustrated by Van Thanh Rudd, 2016) writes to children about the meaning of the phrase Black Lives Matter.

Pastel illustrations, also by Clarke, on dark, textured paper are paired with oversized text. Contrasting text addressed to “Little one.” In the visuals, a family that begins as a couple expecting a baby grows into a family with a child and then becomes part of a community in protest, marching for Black lives, before a final page shows a jubilant Black boy in a cap and gown. The adult narrator explains that “when we say Black Lives Matter, / we’re saying Black people are wonderful-strong.” Other meanings of the rallying cry, when it is called out, screamed, sung, laughed, and known, include a demand for respect, a defiant joy, a channeling of ancestors, an acknowledgment of trouble, and knowing one’s worth. Clarke’s text is poignant and mesmerizing, with design elements that raise the text to an artistic level, shaping it around the art and highlighting active and emotional words in color: *enough, dancing, radiant, precious.* The art is truly outstanding, gripping the heart from the very first spread and not letting go. With colored shapes and stained-glass motifs, these Black figures feel real and weighty. Within this deep dive are tragedy, fear, anger, and mourning alongside hope, comfort, strength, and triumph. This slim book contains a necessary and healing exploration of our current moment that will remain relevant for decades to come.

An astonishing work of art and a crucial addition to every bookshelf. (Picture book. 4–10)
A cat and dog who live together explore opposites.

A red cat and a blue dog tell a story that, on each spread, features pairs of opposites, usually one word each. On the first spread, the cat watches the dog sleep on a rug: “Awake” and “Asleep.” The book’s type colors match the protagonists’ coloring: red for the cat and blue for the dog. The cat—sly, mischievous, and usually annoyed—likes to antagonize the dog, starting on a spread where it attacks the resting dog (“Brave” and “Afraid”). While the dog is “upset” after the cat topples a potted plant onto its head, the cat is “unconcerned.” They head outside, unsuccessfully chase a bird, and end up hugging (“Friends!”), though the cat still looks bothered by the affection. Readers can remove the book’s dust jacket to see the cat looking over his shoulders at readers on the “Front” cover; on the “Back” cover, the cat is now fully turned away. The pairings of opposites are straightforward, though one is unexpected: “Oops!” as the cat falls off a tree branch while stalking the bird, who says, “Phew!” Though individual moments can be amusing, both dog and cat are rendered in ways that convey little to no expression or character, which hinders engagement. The story, translated from French, is scant, and plenty more concept books about opposites exist that offer more substance.

**Stylish, but its story doesn’t stand out.** *(Picture book. 3-8)*

Pugtato finds his inner child when he babysits a trio of young mischief-makers.

Pugtato—who has the face of a pug, two tiny arms, and a spud body—agrees to watch three little Brussels snouts, who resemble green piglets, while their parents shop. He has little idea how energetic and creative these wee ones are. When Pugtato tries to carry them, they declare that they’re not babies and carry him instead. All set to work painting potted plants with some artichicks; the snouts add adornments like pompoms and sequins. When a yellow bell pupper passes by, skipping rope with a length of twine, the snouts declare they need to try it, too. With a long piece of twine, they fashion a tightrope; Pugtato cycles across it on a bicycle with the snouts holding on. Next comes a splashfest, triggered by the antics of some baby croccolis. One of the snouts finds a hose and turns a bucket into a nifty pool. Pugtato doesn’t want to swim without a bathing suit, so the snouts fashion him a big diaper. After so much activity, Pugtato falls asleep. When he wakes, the snout parents are back, and the little snouts want to know if they can babysit Pugtato again. Corrigan’s text, relayed in rhyming couplets, is a funny delight, and her cute pictures have a childlike feel. Children who may never have imagined that veggies could be made so adorable might well find themselves looking at their dinner plates with new eyes. Pugtato is ridiculously appealing. *(This book was reviewed digitally)*

**Wordplay and antics geared to the very young funny bone.** *(Picture book. 4-7)*

It’s 1997, and 12-year-old Alice’s regular life is in turmoil; a move to the countryside leads to supernatural adventure. Alice has an overactive, vivid imagination—at least, according to her mother. But is what she sees always imaginary? After telling her emotionally absent, workaholic husband that she’s leaving him, Alice’s mother takes her daughter to Blackwood House, where she has a live-in nursing job caring for a wealthy old woman while she recovers from a fall. Alice is befriended by teenage Lily, the housekeeper’s daughter, who informs her that her bedroom is haunted. As Lily and Alice explore the house, they find a dollhouse in a locked room that becomes real in Alice’s dreams. Who are Fizz and Bubble—the sisters who also appear in her dreams—and what is her purpose in their lives? In her everyday world, Alice hopes her parents will reunite, worries about her mother’s flirtation with the local doctor, and tries to stay out of the way of her mother’s cranky patient. This is a twisty tale that goes in many different directions but never loses the main thread. The author carefully lays out clues for readers who like to solve mysteries themselves. Both Lily and Bubble are developmentally delayed; they are described respectfully and are fleshed-out characters. The cast members default to White.

**A time-traveling mystery that will keep readers involved and guessing up to the very end.** *(Paranormal mystery. 9-13)*

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**CAT & DOG**

**A Tale of Opposites**

Corrigan, Sophie

Illus. by the author

Trans. by Gaines, Taylor Barrett

Red Comet Press (36 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-0-310-73411-6

A cat and dog who live together explore opposites.

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**THE DOLLHOUSE**

**A Ghost Story**

Corrigan, Sophie

Tundra Books (360 pp.)

$17.99 | Aug. 31, 2021

978-0-7352-6906-4

It’s 1997, and 12-year-old Alice’s regular life is in turmoil; a move to the countryside leads to supernatural adventure. Alice has an overactive, vivid imagination—at least, according to her mother. But is what she sees always imaginary? After telling her emotionally absent, workaholic husband that she’s leaving him, Alice’s mother takes her daughter to Blackwood House, where she has a live-in nursing job caring for a wealthy old woman while she recovers from a fall. Alice is befriended by teenage Lily, the housekeeper’s daughter, who informs her that her bedroom is haunted. As Lily and Alice explore the house, they find a dollhouse in a locked room that becomes real in Alice’s dreams. Who are Fizz and Bubble—the sisters who also appear in her dreams—and what is her purpose in their lives? In her everyday world, Alice hopes her parents will reunite, worries about her mother’s flirtation with the local doctor, and tries to stay out of the way of her mother’s cranky patient. This is a twisty tale that goes in many different directions but never loses the main thread. The author carefully lays out clues for readers who like to solve mysteries themselves. Both Lily and Bubble are developmentally delayed; they are described respectfully and are fleshed-out characters. The cast members default to White.

**A time-traveling mystery that will keep readers involved and guessing up to the very end.** *(Paranormal mystery. 9-13)*

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**THE SNOUTS**

**PUGTATO BABYSITS**

Corrigan, Sophie

Illus. by the author

Zonderkidz (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-0-310-73411-6

Pugtato finds his inner child when he babysits a trio of young mischief-makers.
SYDNEY & TAYLOR TAKE A FLYING LEAP
Davies, Jacqueline
Illus. by Hocking, Deborah
HMH Books (80 pp.)
$14.99 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-0-358-10635-7
Series: Sydney and Taylor, 2

Despite best intentions, Taylor has been unable to achieve his dream of exploring the world, as described in series opener Sydney & Taylor Explore the Whole Wide World (2021).

Taylor is a hedgehog with many Big Ideas; his best friend, Sydney, is a skunk who much prefers a quiet existence in their well-appointed burrow. Taylor is brave, until he isn’t, while calm, supportive Sydney is usually the one who rescues him from his follies. This time Taylor’s Big Idea is so outrageous that Sydney laughs at him, deeply hurting his feelings. Taylor has decided that he is going to fly. A plan promulgated by some friendly birds works for a while, but Taylor hits panic position and Sydney breaks the fall. Deer send him to a bat, a mammal that flies. Taylor is pulled up on the roof with an umbrella tied to him for webbing. But he panics again, and Sydney breaks this fall also. A flying toy buzzes over and lands near them, giving Sydney an idea. Taylor and Sydney are genuine friends who accept each other’s idiosyncrasies. Bright illustrations appear along the way. The kid presents White. Despite best intentions, Taylor has been unable to achieve his dream of exploring the world, as described in series opener Sydney & Taylor Explore the Whole Wide World (2021).

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Friendship is enduring in this hilarious adventure just right for independent young readers. (Animal fantasy. 6-9)

UP & DOWN
Delessert, Etienne
Illus. by the author
Creative Editions/Creative Company
(16 pp.)
$15.99 | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-6846-380-3

A kid takes a unique elevator ride. A young child presses an elevator button to summon it. Accompanied by some unusual-looking animals, the kid ascends. The text is almost entirely composed of idiomatic expressions that include the word up (“What’s up?” “Fired up!” “Jazzed up!” etc.). Beginning on the ground floor, the kid encounters a different expression (and animal companions) on each floor, depicted in a quirky, imaginative fashion. If the point is to help readers clearly understand what the expressions mean, it doesn’t generally succeed. Wrapped up is illustrated with a picture of the kid paddling a canoe, joined by a rabbit and a bird, for instance. Some interpretations fare very slightly better. What’s up? features multiple rabbits carefully listening to their cellphones; Spruced up! shows the kid, a trio of mice, and three extremely large rats playing music; Spruced up! depicts the kid painting white birds with bright colors. As the elevator reaches the sixth floor, nighttime has fallen, and the kid goes “back down,” the only departure from phrases with up. Since none of the up expressions connote actual levitation, the elevator conceit feels irrelevant; a playground swing or seesaw might have worked as well (or poorly) to represent up-and-down movement. Readers will likely have no better grasp of the expressions after perusing this book than before. However, the charmingly surreal and brightly colored illustrations may garner attention. The kid presents White.

Pass this up or turn it down, as you will. (Picture book 5-8)

ANTONIA A JOURNEY TO A NEW HOME
Dipachco
Illus. by the author
Maria Russo/Minedition (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-6626-5045-1

When a family in Colombia has to leave their home behind, their pet dog, Antonia, is also lost. It is estimated there are close to 6 million people in Colombia who have fled their homes because of conflict, violence, or disasters. Having not crossed international borders, they have no legal status as refugees and more often than not become invisible. This wordless picture book attempts to shine a light on one such group of people. Whimsical illustrations show a dog heading to the water’s edge, presently joined by a child, then another leading a bird, and then two more with a bird in a cage. Soon there are also adults carrying packages. They board a boat that carries them across the water, and when they disembark, they now traverse a jungle. It is here that the dog becomes lost and also here where the only word in the book appears: “Antonia,” as the children call the name of the dog. Seeing the distress caused by the loss, the children with the caged bird release it, though it is hard to see how that helps. The book ends on a less-than-uplifting note as the migrants reach the gray, smoky city—a stark contrast to the lush vegetation of the journey. Without the brief explanation given by the author at the beginning, it would be impossible for readers to discern just from the illustrations why these people are on the move.

A baffling story with an obscure message. (Picture book 5-8)
“A fine addition to an expanding body of hair-affirming books that exude Black girl self-love and confidence.”

MAGIC LIKE THAT

Doyon, Samara Cole
Illus. by Bowers, Geneva
Lee & Low Books (40 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
970-1-64379-070-1

A 20-some–years-later companion to Natasha Tarpley’s I Love My Hair (1998).

A young, dark-skinned, brown-eyed Black girl declares, “My hair is magic,” as she smiles at her own image in a mirror while her puffy, freshly shampooed hair drips. While she cringes when her mother combs out her tangles to style her hair, she admires and appreciates the results. She then describes a plethora of hairstyles she wears that show the versatility of her Afro-textured hair. On each double-page spread, she likens her hair to something in nature: When she wears it loose, her hair resembles ocean currents; she compares her Bantu knots to the wind-swept desert; with colorful barrettes in it, her hair is “a cloudless sky on a winter night”; and her braids are “like long vines tumbling from a garden trellis.” After each simile comes the refrain: “My hair is [adjective] like that”—majestic, mischievous, stunning, elegant, etc. Haitian American author Doyon creates an affirming story, enhanced by Black illustrator Bowers’ use of bright colors, lots of bold, face-front images, and beautiful natural settings to positively portray dark skin, African physical features, and highly textured hair. Readers who enjoy Yesenia Moises’ Stella’s Stellar Hair (2021) and M.L. Marroquin and Tonya Engel’s My Hair Is Magic (2020) will find just as much to love in this book.

A fine addition to an expanding body of hair-affirming books that exude Black girl self-love and confidence. (Picture book 3–7)

MISTY THE CLOUD
A Very Stormy Day
Dreyer, Dylan with Katz, Alan
Illus. by Butcher, Rosie
Random House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-593-18038-9

When too many negative experiences pile up on the same day, a young cloud’s mood bursts into a storm.

Misty’s day starts with a rude awakening by a passing airplane and continues to go downhill. With news of each friend who is too busy to play (Wispy has schoolwork, Scud’s babysitting, and Kelvin’s getting new eyeglasses), Misty’s bad mood worsens until she just has to yell, resulting in flashes of lightning, crashes of thunder, and a downpour, which rains on the parade, or in this case, baseball game, of a human girl named Clare. Clare expresses her displeasure by stamping her feet and kicking over a block tower. In a contrived ending, Misty’s mom points out her daughter’s favorite sight—hot air balloons—Misty calms down and her friends come to watch, too, and Clare and her mom are able to get in some baseball practice outside. The animation-inspired illustrations are delightfully imaginative. The ethereal, fluffy white cloud characters have clothes, skin, and hair tinted in light shades of pink, blue, and purple. Clare and her mother are White; teammates are diverse. Backmatter includes three weather-related activities, a brief verse about getting over a bad mood, and some weather facts from the Today show meteorologist author. These seem rather scattershot, however, and will likely go over the heads of children young enough to enjoy the story. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

The illustrations are cute, but the book doesn’t work as a lesson on either the weather or regulating bad moods. (Picture book 4–8)
“Provides readers with pretty much all the information they need to be confident and competent cyclists.”

THE YOUNG CYCLIST’S COMPANION

Drinkell, Peter
Ilus. by Slater, Thomas
Cicada Books (72 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-908714-96-1

A comprehensive guide geared to the young cyclist.

With its perky design and friendly tone, this manual provides readers with pretty much all the information they need to be confident and competent cyclists. The copious cartoon illustrations are mostly inclusive—cyclists of various ethnicities and skin color are depicted, though none are visibly disabled—while their light-hearted quality keeps the tone unintimidating. The four main chapters (“The Right Bike for You”; “Maintaining Your Bike”; “Cycling Technique”; and “Stepping It Up a Gear”) are laid out in easily understood pockets of information that include the anatomy of a bike, how to choose a bike for your needs, how to take care of it, how to ride safely and efficiently, and riding with a club. The information, with its practical delivery and fun, confident approach, obviously comes from direct experience. Kids will learn how to fix a flat, keep their bike in good shape, brake properly, and cycling safely on roadways, among many others, and the whole is sprinkled with quirky quotes from professional cyclists. The book is directed toward both boys and girls (and is commendable aside). While the measurements in this U.K. import are usually given in metric and some spelling is British, this shouldn’t make any appreciable difference to American readers. The British hand signaling, however, differs from U.S. custom. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A clear, fun, accessible, accurate, and encouraging guide for kids who love to bike. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 8-14)

THE GREAT GHOST HOAX

Ecton, Emily
Ilus. by Mottram, David
Atheneum (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-5344-7991-3
Series: The Great Pet Heist, 2

The Strathmore Building’s pets and other residents, human or otherwise, are literally suckered into investigating rumors of a poltergeist in vacant 5B. Sodden towels and other signs of intrusion in 5B may reduce the landlady to hysterics, but the multispecies team members assembled in Ecton’s The Great Pet Heist (2020) are made of sterner stuff (mostly) and are ready for new exploits. The discovery that the culprit is not in fact a ghost but a celebrity on the lam—to wit, the local zoo’s camouflage artist and popular performer, Jerome (“Mr. Wiggles” to use his stage name)—leads to a series of challenges ranging from persuading the arrogant octopus to slither back to his adoring public to foiling a slimy pair of scam artist ghostbusters. Though the animal cast is unusually diverse (Jerome isn’t even the only octopus hanging around), the human one, a Black police officer aside, presents the text-plus-songs or reading the book aloud is unlikely to keep a child engaged. Ironically, some of the best writing is in the lyrics. Disappointing. (Picture book/music. 4-6)

A PICNIC IN THE SUN

Bertie and Friends Hit the Road

Duchene, Christine & Minière, Jérôme
Ilus. by Ferrer, Marianne
Trans. by Perkes, Carolyn
The Secret Mountain (48 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 1, 2021
978-2-925108-69-6

Four cohabiting friends take a journey to escape 100 days of rain.

The gentle creatures dress, act, and talk like kind, friendly people—and sport antlers and vaguely mouselike silhouettes. Their light-brown, white-freckled faces blend harmoniously with the muted, dreamlike landscapes. The plot is episodic; after the smallest friend, Minnie, has “the most fabulous idea in her whole life,” the friends go through a variety of adventures as they pursue a sunny picnic on top of the Blue Mountain. They initially ride horses that resemble unicorns, after which they use tools to turn a shipwrecked pirate ship into a veritable ark, collecting animals as they go. The story is long and tedious, crowded with hyperbolic words, exclamation points, and breathlessly patronizing expressions such as “Oh my” and “Oh yes.” The whimsical illustrations cannot save the verbose text. Reading the story is further complicated by the 19 interspersed sets of song lyrics from the accompanying CD. The CD includes a male voice reading the story along with mostly original ditties incorporating various styles of world music, including instruments plus several different, pleasant voices, into short, often hypnotic, songs. Single song tracks can be useful for encouraging movement or naptime with little ones; playing the text-plus-songs or reading the book aloud is unlikely to keep a child engaged. Ironically, some of the best writing is in the lyrics.
The prose is serviceable, while the breadth of the brief collection necessitates biographies so shallow that nearly every recorded incident can be found in Wikipedia. The selection contains little diversity; of the post-ancient subjects, all but the three Sephardic figures indicate their relevance to the modern world, most contain platitudes, and one appropriates for its subject—Yocheva, the mother of Moses, whose sexuality is unknown—a modern tradition aimed at incorporating queer Jews into Jewish ritual. The pictures show comics fans of many races, cultures, and body types. Fans of the artist have argued for years that Lee gave him (and other artists, including Steve Ditko) too little credit for coming up with the ideas behind Marvel characters. But this book mainly credits Lee for those ideas. Kirby and Ditko were superheroes, too. Nearly all of the sources in the bibliography are interviews with Lee or books and articles he wrote. Still, the frenetic pace is often genuinely thrilling, and the illustrations are enormously appealing, stretching and squashing anatomy as though Gatlin had taken Silly Putty to the funny pages. The comic-book creators are, as they were in life, generally White and Jewish, but the pictures show comics artists of many races, cultures, and body types.

This high-speed origin story, appropriately enough, is larger than life and almost impossible to believe. (historical note) (Picture book/biography. 4-8)

A humorous, magical romp about a modern-day apprentice witch who is struggling to be a good friend.

Effie, a young apprentice witch, is back in the sequel to Witches of Brooklyn (2020). In her first outing, Effie learned she was a witch and began figuring out her magical powers. Now Effie learns more about the caring witching community and helps them create a clever solution to a cursed neighborhood intersection. Effie also works through friendship woes, kicked off by the appearance of Garance, a new French girl at school. Is Garance the source of all Effie’s problems, or could she possibly be a part of the solution? At its heart a relationship story, this modern fantasy with a realistic setting is lighthearted and whimsical. Humor and emotion are conveyed through dialogue using a wide variety of typefaces. The comedic timing of sequential panels is especially strong, creating mini-episodes within larger chapters. The characters’ specificity, from their facial expressions to apparel, adds even more humor, and the witches are delightfully diverse in body shape, skin color, gender presentation, profession, and more. While this title works as a stand-alone, the story is much richer when experienced as a sequel. In the previous title, visual elements hinted at Effie’s Asian/White heritage. Garance is Black; Effie’s lesbian aunts read as White, and secondary characters represent the diversity of New York City.

Stellar comedic timing and whimsy galore combine in this magical friendship story. (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)
BEAR WANTS TO SING

Egan, Cary
Illus. by Seiferling, Dena
Tundra Books (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-7352-6803-6

From the author-illustrator duo of the effervescent King Mouse (2019) comes another sparkling whimsy. Portrayed in the same delicate brown-and-white graphite illustrative style, the troupe of delightfully expressive animals—fox, bear, mouse, crow, snake, and tortoise—returns. This time, it’s the bear who has the featured spot. The story opens wordlessly: A double-page spread shows a human child pedaling a tricycle cart in a forest, but the musical instruments the child has been transporting have bounced out. The page turn shows the bear discovering the ukulele. He plinks it and tells the mouse that he wants to sing a song. “I’m all ears,” the mouse replies. But before he can start, the crow flies in, discovering the tambourine. She grabs it and bursts into a clever song. “That is a good song,” the mouse admits, preparing to sing his own. But he is interrupted by the snake, who, finding the drum, bursts into song. And so on. The bear finally gets to sing his song, but the polite, tepid response of the others hurts his feelings, sending him off on his own. The mouse follows and gently eases the bear’s wounded pride. The evocative illustrations, skilfully portraying the emotive faces and gestures of the anthropomorphistic animals, paired with the humorous (the read-aloud will be lots of fun) and compassionate narrative harkens comfortingly to a softer, gentler world. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A delicate story full of humor and friendship. (Picture book. 3-7)

I CAN HELP

Faruqi, Reem
Illus. by Prevost, Mikela
Eerdmans (44 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 10, 2021
978-0-8028-5504-6

Learning to be kind to others can be a bumpy journey. Among Zahra’s 17 very diverse classmates, Kyle is great at drawing, drumming, and other things. However, he needs help to do some others, like writing, sound out words, and working scissors. Ms. Underwood, the teacher, chooses other students to help him every day. Zahra always holds her hand up, volunteering to be Kyle’s helper, because she thinks he is generous, funny, and kind. Today she’s picked and, at the end of school, is very proud to be called “a super helper” by the teacher. However, things change after two classmates tease and pressure her to stop helping the kid who “looks weird” and acts like “a baby.” Although she is conflicted about her feelings and thoughts about Kyle, her new, brusque demeanor makes him say to her, “You’re mean now.” Beautiful and delicate details in both text and illustration situate readers physically in the school’s art classroom and autumnal playground, mentally in Zahra’s world full of special cooking spices like cumin and turmeric, and emotionally in her hesitation and growth. Zahra does not get to change her behavior toward Kyle or to say sorry to him. However, when she moves to a new school, she finds her truth and acts in a way she can be proud of. Zahra has brown skin, Ms. Underwood presents Black, and Kyle presents White.

An illuminating glimpse into how a young child learns to trust her instinct and be kind to others. (Picture book. 4-8)

THE CURSE OF THE MUMMY

Uncovering Tutankhamun’s Tomb

Fleming, Candace
Scholastic Focus (304 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-338-59661-8

The oft-told story of the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb is framed around the purported curse of the pharaohs. In 1906, in British-occupied Egypt, the wealthy, occult-loving Earl of Carnarvon hunted treasure in the Valley of the Kings. He met Howard Carter, a mildly disregraced archaeologist, and the two began a long partnership that started with the meager excavation of picked-over sites and culminated with the most glamorous discovery in all of Egyptology. The two Englishmen who dug up the people of ancient Egypt were professionals and aristocrats who dined in luxury on crystal and china while their Egyptian workers remained unnamed, their opinions unheard. But the 1922 discovery of the lush treasures of King Tut’s tomb, described in loving, fascinating particulars and illustrated in well-chosen photographs, is situated here amid something Carter and Carnarvon barely noticed: the nationalism of interwar Egypt and rising anger toward the colonial British occupiers who allowed them access to the tomb. Unfortunately, each chapter concludes with a section that opens with “it was said” and proceeds to detail bad omens and terrible events that befell people who had even tangential connections to the tomb or its treasures. A final chapter states that the mummy’s curse doesn’t exist, but the earlier maunderings feed into Orientalist tropes and don’t fit with the overall historical narrative—a straightforward telling of Carter’s excavations.

A solid retread of familiar ground marred by the frequent evocation of a tired trope. (author’s note, map, timeline, bibliography, source notes, photo and illustration credits, index) (Nonfiction. 8-12)
“Gauld’s crisp, clear art, with captivating small details in backgrounds and endpapers, adds richness to the narrative.”

THE LITTLE WOODEN ROBOT AND THE LOG PRINCESS

CAT DOG
Fox, Mem
Illus. by Teague, Mark
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-4169-8688-1

A cat and a dog’s lazy day on the couch is interrupted by the appearance of a bold mouse.

What actually happens is related through a series of questions to which the cat responds, correcting certain assumptions that did not occur. The possible scenarios are depicted in the fully expressive acrylic paintings integral to the imaginative (though sometimes incorrect) narrative, as one version is outlined within the questions and then the correct perspective is presented. “So there was a scary dog, right?” Here readers see an orange cat with eyes wide open partially hiding behind the couch where a large white dog is sitting wearing a spiked collar and with an angry, alert expression on its face. “No!” is the response, and the dog is revealed to be mild-mannered and plain-collared. “But there was a cat, right?” Both dog and cat look utterly astonished. “Yes” is the response. “And the dog was wide awake, right?” The dog, sitting upright, is pondering the situation while the cat snoozes. “No!” is the response. “But the cat saw a mouse, right?” This exchange continues until the story’s tangible outcome is eventually told. Fox’s intriguing call-and-response storytelling approach allows readers to surmise what might have happened against what really took place. The mouse is chased into a hole, and Fox gives kids another opportunity to continue the story. “And then the mouse came out to say hi, right?” The mouse stands before a bewildered dog and cat holding a violin and bow. “Hmmm, what do you think?” (This book was reviewed digitally)

The clever supposition will keep kids imagining the amusing possibilities of one common story. (Picture book: 3-6)

THE LITTLE WOODEN ROBOT AND THE LOG PRINCESS
Gauld, Tom
Illus. by the author
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-0-8234-4698-8

A brother and sister must overcome obstacles to rescue each other in a marvelous journey.

“There once lived,” the tale begins, and it ends quite satisfactorily with “happily ever after.” In between, two heroic adventures are linked together, each complete with difficulties, brave rescues, kindnesses, and magical coincidences. The little wooden robot and the log princess are gifts from the royal inventor and a clever witch, respectively, for “a king and queen who happily ruled a pleasant land” but had no children. Everyone in the family loves one another, and the siblings play together all day. But when, calamitously, the princess becomes fixed in her log form one night, the little robot doesn’t hesitate to board a ship for the far north to save his sister, and when his parts fail on the way back, the princess steps up courageously. The additional myriad escapades of each young hero are captured in charming graphic montages. Gauld’s crisp, clear art, with captivating small details in backgrounds and endpapers, adds richness to the narrative. The amiable faces of each of his human and humanoid characters, along with those of birds, bugs, and forest creatures, give a feel of intimacy and familiarity. The queen appears Black and the king White, and the princess has brown skin. Gauld’s fairy tale feels both timeless and completely new; utterly fresh, yet like a story heard long ago and finally found again.

Enchanting. (Picture book: 3-7)

BAT WINGS! CAT WINGS?
Gebl, Laura
Illus. by Felix, Monique
Creative Editions/Creative Company (16 pp.)
$15.99 | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-56846-374-2

Why do animals have the physical attributes they have—and not others?

Everyone knows that a moose has antlers, but a goose does not. It’s the same with the rest of Gebl’s rhyming animal pairs: Clams have shells, but lambs don’t; an eagle has a beak, but a beagle doesn’t; bats have wings, but cats don’t; a hog has a snout, but a frog doesn’t; a grouse has feathers, but a mouse does not. The final set breaks the pattern: A kangaroo has a pouch, but you and I don’t...except “maybe sometimes.” The turn of the page reveals a baby sweetly tucked inside their parent’s cozy sweater-cum-pouch (both present White). The text is terse and patterned: “Moose antlers? Yes! / Goose antlers? No!” Each pair is positioned on a double-page spread, the silly one always appearing on recto. The animals are done in what looks like watercolors and pastels, realistic except for the absurd appendages on the second animal in each pair. The artwork belies the reductivism of the concept. Several of these animals will not be familiar to very young children, and they are unlikely to understand the weirdness of showing antlers on a goose’s back instead of wings, or the lamb’s shell ears. Aside from a response of wonder or incredulity—and the thrill of yelling No at the book—it is hard to imagine what a child would glean from reading this or how a caregiver would attempt to meaningfully explain the concept.

Mildly humorous, attractively illustrated, but too slight to be of significant value. (Picture book: 3-5)
In rich language and vivid art, this hopeful celebration of the life-affirming power of change is irresistible.

**CHANGE SINGS**

Gorman, Amanda
Illus. by Long, Loren
Viking (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-593-20322-4

Great expectations of wordsmith Gorman are not disappointed in this “children’s anthem” to change. In rhyming verses, a first-person narrator sings along, telling readers, “I can hear change coming / In its loudest, proudest song.” The poem does become a kind of song, as the child, a Black girl with glowing brown skin and textured hair, carries a guitar. As she joins with others, she hands them instruments, and together they change the world in large and small ways—delivering groceries and meals, cleaning up outdoor spaces, and making literal and figurative music with their deeds and their instruments. Long’s illustrations offer an interpretation of the anthem that expands upon the text and becomes its own rhythm. A quiet opening and a stunning second spread one could gaze at for days are followed by spreads that alternate between white space and full color, climaxing with a crescendo and then ending on a soft, steady note, when the narrator looks out to readers, offering them an invitation to carry the song on into the world. In rich language and vivid art, this hopeful celebration of the life-affirming power of change to ripple out into a better future is irresistible. Text and poetry work together to regulate a careful reading of this beautiful work. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

One to keep, to read, and to reread. (Picture book 4-8)

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**THEY’RE SO FLAMBOYANT**

Genhart, Michael
Illus. by Neal, Tony
Magination/American Psychological Association (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-4338-3278-9

Feathered friends are flustered when flamingos move into the neighborhood.

*Flamboyance* describes a group of flamingos, just like a waddle of penguins or a brood of chickens. But these flamingos aren’t just flamingantly bright pink—they also wear tiaras and feather boas, and one sports a rainbow mohawk. The long-time residents are all atwitter, often alliteratively. A “gaggle of geese gathered to gab. ‘Flamingos! Really? In our backyard?’ ” Every bird family seems to have an opinion, and it’s a negative list is in the backmatter—and clever wordplay and alliteration flock together to march on the flamingos’ new home. Luckily, for the new neighbors. “The flamingos then reveal a surprise—a “welcome to our home” party—with all their new neighbors and the wisdom of owls has brought “a heaping plate of algae and feather boas, and one sports a rainbow mohawk. The long

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**LOVE IS EVERYTHING**

Ghigna, Charles
Illus. by East, Jacqueline
Schiffer (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 28, 2021
978-0-7643-6223-1

An eloquent, lyrical love song from caring adult to child.

Uncluttered scenes in nature at various times of day and through the seasons show a joyful adult-child pair of bears working, playing, and musing. Eye-catching illustrations that often silhouette the bears against neutral backgrounds make this a good group read. The rhyming text’s brevity and rhythm are calming, and the adult bear shares simply worded affirmations of love with the child, with key words highlighted in text of a different color. “Love is everything. / I believe in love”. “I believe in me. / I believe in you”. “I believe that all we need is love to get along.” The adult bear’s words also embrace individual interests, talents, and expression through the arts as the child beats on a metal pot, creates a flower mosaic, and recites a poem to the tearfully proud adult. “I believe in music. / I believe in art. // I believe in poetry / that speaks from the heart.” These universal, positive messages make this a powerful snuggle-time book that will be read time and again to celebrate loving relationships and to recenter in difficult times. Details in the illustrations, like sweeping sunset murmurations, background observers, and birds, mammals, insects, and seeds that fly, also make close viewing of each page a treat. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Make room on the shelf for this book’s effusion of love and affirmation that everyone needs from time to time. (Picture book 5-8)
HOME OF THE WILD
Greig, Louise
Illus. by Moscardó, Júlia
Floris (52 pp.)
978-1-78250-713-0
$17.95 | Oct. 18, 2021
A timeless story about being one with nature.
Although set in Scotland, this story could occur anywhere with tree-covered hills and valleys, deer, and humans with caring hearts. In the rural home of an unnamed boy and his mother, both with ginger hair and pale complexions, drawings of the animals the boy has helped and a bookcase full of field guides dominate a wall. The boy is clearly at home in the wild, and when he finds an abandoned fawn, naturally he brings her home to care for. His mother sets the limits: “She can stay till she is strong, / but the wild is where fawns belong.” While spring turns to summer, then to fall, the boy and deer, named Alba, are happy and inseparable. When the fawn returns to the wild, the dejected “boy sits silent, alone as the moon” beneath a pine tree, his head bowed on his arms. A sudden storm, gently but effectively evoked in both text and delicate line-and-color illustrations, sends the boy racing through the woods, “for he knows roaring storms / do not care about gentle fawns.” The boy is soon lost, but his once-helpless fawn “leaps, / from fallen tree to slippery stone” to become the boy’s rescuer and comforter.
Terms specific to the Scottish countryside, like burn and glen, will prompt discussion, as should the caution to leave actual wild animals undisturbed.
Lyrical language and realistic illustrations honor the natural world and a loving relationship. (Picture book. 4–7)

CHASING BATS AND TRACKING RATS
Urban Ecology, Community Science, and How We Share Our Cities
Guy, Cylita
Illus. by Li, Cornelia
Annick Press (108 pp.)
978-1-77321-538-9
$19.95 | $12.95 paper | Oct. 12, 2021
An ecologist offers glimpses of scientists at work exploring the “urban jungle.”
Guy kicks off her set of episodic profiles with a description of her own studies of brown bats in Toronto’s High Park. She then introduces fellow researchers tracking city-dwelling creatures, from rats and native beets to bears and coyotes, mapping microclimates in different city neighborhoods, or organizing censuses—in locales ranging from Vancouver to South Africa. Though it’s a swiftly moving survey, the discourse digs down deep enough to suggest that, counterintuitively, some species seem to do better in urban than natural environments, to call attention to potential ecological effects of redlining and gentrification, and to describe an encounter between a Black bird counter and a hostile White woman in North Carolina as a prelude to a discussion of racial bias. Better yet, nearly all of the scientists here are women and at least three, including the author, people of color. For both specific portraits and certain scenes like a gallery of urban animal butts readers are challenged to identify, photographs would have done better service, but Li’s substantial mix of naturalistic animal silhouettes and silk-screen–style scenes of scientists engaged in outdoorsy tasks does add some visual detail as well as bright notes of color. The closing resource list is substantial, though light on material for younger audiences.
An uneven but wide-angled look at our closest neighbors... welcome and otherwise. (Index, glossary) (Nonfiction. 9-11)

THE THIRTEENTH CAT
Hahn, Mary Downing
Clarion (240 pp.)
978-0-358-39408-2
$16.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
Cats, friendship, magic, and mystery form the core of this eerie tale.
Zoey is looking forward to a relaxing summer at her aunt’s home, away from the city. She’s intrigued by the woods and the house next door, but Aunt Alice tells Zoey to stay away from the mean Miss Dupree and her horde of wicked black cats. When Zoey encounters the cats, though, one of them is very friendly and seems to be in desperate need of love and care. Zoey and her new friend, Lila, may be scared of Miss Dupree and think she’s a witch, but that won’t stop them from rescuing the poor, sweet creature from the neighbor’s apparently neglectful clutches. Miss Dupree is enraged, and her wrath comes down upon Zoey and Lila in evil, magical ways that put the friends in grave danger while revealing the horrifying truth about her cats. The straightforward narrative and simple yet spooky worldbuilding quickly draw in readers, and the story maintains a brisk pace. The friendship and family drama are fairly superficially developed but still nicely balanced within the paranormal mystery, and the magical elements provide enough intrigue to keep the story interesting. Readers who want everything explained and fleshed out should look elsewhere, but those seeking a quick, chilling tale will be satisfied. Main characters are assumed White.
Easy, entertaining horror fluff with just enough sharp claws. (Horror. 8-12)
And WHO is THAT?!” Seeing his best friend drifting away
They are: ask first, open arms wide, and wrap the other person
Teddy Bear Tim shares the “three simple steps” to giving a hug.
(figuratively), Norman is soon driven by anger and insecurity to
dig up his leafy rival in the dead of night and cart it very, very
cartoon characters and energetic hugging sequences show his
in a hug (“tight, but not too tight”). Once the instructions are
given, Teddy Bear Tim describes some hugging scenarios and
acts them out with the monkeys. From running full-bore into
each other’s arms to a 5-second “quick hug,” the hugs all point
back to Teddy Bear Tim’s key precept: “The LOVE is the most
important part.” Motivational speaker and disability advocate
Harris’ debut picture book affirms the joy of hugs while
highlighting the importance of consent. Astrella’s expressive
cartoon characters and energetic hugging sequences show his
animation background. But the constant shifts in perspective
from below to above in the first few pages are jarring. Simple
white backgrounds allow readers to focus mostly on the text,
which varies in complexity from one to five sentences per page.
Banana endpapers bookend the story.

Promising content swaddled by iffy presentation. (Picture
book. 4-6)

NORMAN DIDN’T DO IT!
(Yes, He Did)
Higgins, Ryan T.
Illus. by the author
Disney-Hyperion (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-368-02623-9
Series: Mother Bruce

A newcomer tests the friendship between a porcupine and
his beloved tree, Mildred.
Being well used to playing games with his silent, leafy part-
ner, conducting one-sided conversations, and having her all to
himself, Norman is outraged when a sapling springs up nearby:
“And WHO is THAT?!” Seeing his best friend drifting away
(figuratively), Norman is soon driven by anger and insecurity to
dig up his leafy rival in the dead of night and cart it very, very
far away—only to be wracked by both fear of being found out
and, more worthily, guilt a little later. “I have hit rock bottom!”
he declares, falling into the still-open hole next to Mildred,
and so hastens off to fetch back the new tree and accommo-
date himself to being one of three...or, as Higgins suggests in

THE BOOK OF HUGS
Harris, Tim
Illus. by Astrella, Charlie
Flowerpot Press (32 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-4867-2104-7

With the help of some monkeys, a
teddy bear teaches readers all about hugs.
Teddy Bear Tim (the author’s teddy-
bear persona) waves to readers and declares, “I LOVE hugs!”
His upbeat narration continues as Teddy Bear Tim meets up
with a trio of cuddly monkeys who share the love for hugs—and bananas. The four characters list many different kinds of
hugs (like “happy hugs,” “slow hugs,” or “monkey hugs”) before
Teddy Bear Tim shares the “three simple steps” to giving a hug. They are: ask first, open arms wide, and wrap the other person
in a hug (“tight, but not too tight”). Once the instructions are
given, Teddy Bear Tim describes some hugging scenarios and
acts them out with the monkeys. From running full-bore into
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Banana endpapers bookend the story.

Promising content swaddled by iffy presentation. (Picture
book. 4-6)

RECOGNIZE!
An Anthology Honoring and Amplifying Black Life
Ed. By Hudson, Wade & Hudson, Cheryl Willis
Crown (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-593-38159-5

A multifaceted, sometimes disheartening, yet consistently enriching primer on the unyielding necessity of those three words: Black Lives Matter.
Husband-wife duo Wade and Cheryl Willis Hudson curate and contribute to this collection of varied perspectives on the mattering of Black lives and how the fact of the infamous three-word call to action has been most put into question by America’s long White supremacist history, traumatic present, and potential future. Award-winning poets such as Carole Boson Weatherford and Nikki Grimes, children’s-book authors including Kelly Starling Lyons and Ibi Zoboi, visual artists like Keith Knight and Don Tate, and historic Black American figures like Frederick Douglass and Daisy Bates provide potent responses to incidents of anti-Black violence, mis- or under-representation of Black identities, and personal challenges in parenting or just existing while Black. They also reflect on the movement for Black lives that activists have codified recently with #BLM but nonetheless has an extensive, hard-fought history. When, for example, kid journalist Adedayo Perkovich recounts her learning about Seneca Village, the community of mostly Black Americans that were displaced to make way for New York’s Central Park, the threads that link the 19th-century village, a coastal Ghanaian site of centuries of enslavement and commerce of Black bodies, and the contemporary reminders that Black Lives Matter are poignantly presented for readers of all ages.

Both brilliant and bristling in its purpose. (artists’ notes, contributor biographies, editors' note) (Anthology. 10-18)
Forget personal jet packs, flying cars, and food pills—welcome to a coming world of robot servants, gene splicing, really long life spans, and fusion power.

In what is more a set of speculative thought pieces than specific predictions, Hulick gathers sound-bite quotes from dozens of researchers and embeds them in general ruminations on the directions that new technology seems to be taking us in fields from cybernetics and space colonization to the search for better energy sources. A focus on the positive leads her to mention but downplay troubling issues such as the already-scary hackability of the internet of things and the near possibility (more likely probability) of “designer babies.” She also argues that artificial intelligence will never trump the human sort because it intrinsically lacks “common sense” and lays out a broadly brushed future scenario in which robots will do all the work while people, on universal basic incomes, enjoy a “never-ending vacation.”

Sure. She also regards the use of wind and other renewable power sources as just placeholders until atomic fusion becomes practical, and looks to next-generation 3-D printers she calls “maker machines” to feed the world. Wolski’s blocky paintings, more retro than futuristic, add unimaginative images of generic gizmos or human figures of diverse racial presentations playing with a pet robo-dog, strolling among dinosaurs, climbing out of a White adult in a teal sheath dress and pumps admonishes the butterfly, / If you do, it will fly away / and…” (cue page turn). Borrowing some of its if/then logic from the now-classic If You Give a Mouse a Cookie and its successors, the narrative thereby launches into a series of conjunctive contingencies linked by that cliffhanging “and…” on each right-hand page’s lower corner. The butterfly will dislodge a petal, which will fall on a dung beetle, causing its dung ball to fall into a river, blocking the flow and engendering the failure of a dam. The funniest what-if sequence involves a flooded-out mole biting the butt of a bear napping at the exit of the mole’s burrow. The funniest what-if sequence involves a flooded-out mole biting the butt of a bear napping at the exit of the mole’s burrow.

This French import by way of Australia explores the potential consequences of disturbing a butterfly from its perch on a flower. A White adult in a teal sheath dress and pumps admonishes a White child: “No! Don’t touch the butterfly! / If you do, it will fly away / and…” (cue page turn). Borrowing some of its if/then logic from the now-classic If You Give a Mouse a Cookie and its successors, the narrative thereby launches into a series of conjunctive contingencies linked by that cliffhanging “and…” on each right-hand page’s lower corner. The butterfly will dislodge a petal, which will fall on a dung beetle, causing its dung ball to fall into a river, blocking the flow and engendering the failure of a dam. The funniest what-if sequence involves a flooded-out mole biting the butt of a bear napping at the exit of the mole’s burrow. As the cautionary narrative enlarges its hyperbolic suppositions, the child cries “STOP! // I promise // I won’t touch the butterfly, / and… // this flower is for you…” As the child offers the picked flower, a petal detaches just above a dung beetle pushing its ball. A final close-up of the petal hurtling toward the dung beetle offers a look at its impending predicament, inviting children to reimagine the tale’s predicted events.

Wacky physics, appealing critters, and crisp, retro illustrations combine for a solid outing.
When Sparkles, the last unicorn on Earth, has a fatal accident, her friends Death and Sparks are lured into compensation for her death, the trio are as lured into compensation for her death, the trio are lured into understanding of the use of shapes. They use their understanding of shapes to educate humanity about proper citizenship and planetary care. With Sparkles’ death, the characters rearticulate the power of shapes in the face of fame, the fickle nature of celebrity, and the connection between consumerism and ecology. But still, that’s a lot! When Sparkles, the last unicorn on Earth, has a fatal accident while promoting a sponsored product, he comes into contact with Death, an otherworldly employee of the claims department who is armed with the “powers of bureaucracy.” (I.e., he kills creatures by touching them, but only if their paperwork is in order.) At the same time, a trio of sentient extraterrestrial lizards are trying to educate humanity about proper citizenship and planetary care. With Sparkles’ death, the trio are lured into being a substitute act by Sparkles’ manager. How will the influencer lifestyle pair with their values of personal responsibility and conservation? And what happens if Sparkles comes back to life? The story jumbles a lot, but it manages to deftly keep all the balls in the air and packs several compelling messages into one very funny graphic novel. The memorable digital illustrations in soft pastels evoke watercolors and colored pencil and complement the text with flair. Readers will be enchanted and ponder for some time the ideas presented here.

Powerful and fun. (Graphic science fiction. 8-12)

DEATH & SPARKLES
Justus, Rob
Illus. by the author
Chronicle Books (368 pp.)
$22.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-79720-635-6
Series: Death & Sparkles, 1

Death and Sparkles are ready to take on the world!

And by world, we mean social media consumption, the temptations of fame, the fickle nature of celebrity, and the connection between consumerism and ecology. But still, that’s a lot! When Sparkles, the last unicorn on Earth, has a fatal accident while promoting a sponsored product, he comes into contact with Death, an otherworldly employee of the claims department who is armed with the “powers of bureaucracy.” (I.e., he kills creatures by touching them, but only if their paperwork is in order.) At the same time, a trio of sentient extraterrestrial lizards are trying to educate humanity about proper citizenship and planetary care. With Sparkles’ death, the trio are lured into being a substitute act by Sparkles’ manager. How will the influencer lifestyle pair with their values of personal responsibility and conservation? And what happens if Sparkles comes back to life? The story jumbles a lot, but it manages to deftly keep all the balls in the air and packs several compelling messages into one very funny graphic novel. The memorable digital illustrations in soft pastels evoke watercolors and colored pencil and complement the text with flair. Readers will be enchanted and will ponder for some time the ideas presented here.

Powerful and fun. (Graphic science fiction. 8-12)

THE SHAPE OF HOME
Kheiriyeh, Rashin
Illus. by the author
Levine Querido (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-64614-098-5

Iranian immigrant Rashin is getting ready for her first day of school in the United States.

She begins her day with a series of cheerful shapes or memories of shapes that brought her happiness in Iran. For breakfast, her mother makes her a circular pancake shaped like a smiley face for good luck. When she walks to school in the rain, she uses an umbrella that is shaped like a cat, and she passes bicycle and car wheels shaped like circles. She starts to miss the shapes and their memories of shapes: Japan is shaped like a seahorse; Italy is shaped like a boot. And, of course, there’s Rashin’s own country, Iran, which she says is shaped like a cat. By the end of the day, Rashin is feeling a little better about going to school—and about calling America her home. This ebulliently illustrated, frankly told immigration story glows with good cheer and artfully balances homesickness, excitement, and fear. The author’s thematic use of shapes is an organic, child-friendly way to drive a plot that is both emotionally layered and fun to read. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A creative, child-centered picture book about finding a new home after immigration. (Picture book 3-7)

THE GHOULS’ GUIDE TO GOOD GRAMMAR
Kimmelman, Leslie
Illus. by Sullivan, Mary
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 15, 2021
978-1-5341-1095-3

Monsters, witches, and zombies add importance to the grammar and spelling rules in this guide. Starting with end-of-sentence punctuation, the rules are straightforward, and the example is a soft punchline: A monster asks a group of trembling human children, “What’s shaking?” to demonstrate the use of a question mark. The examples get more interesting as different versions of sentences are compared, with their meanings changed by variations in punctuation and spelling choices. A human child says, “Time to eat, Sylvester” to a cat, but a monster says, “Time to eat Sylvester.” Commas, contractions, capitalization, word pairs like than/then, and homophones that fit the theme (hair-raising versus hare-raising) all get straightforward explanations along with illustrated examples. Sections are clearly marked with yellow titles on black banners for easy skimming, and comparisons are laid out in side-by-side panels with speech and thought bubbles. The words being taught are printed in red. The colorful, cartoon illustrations are gross and humorous enough to hold children’s attention over multiple readings as the grammar and spelling rules sink in. The power of grammar and spelling to turn loved ones into meals conveys the importance of detail in proper writing; the playful touches of the ghoul theme make these rules more memorable than the standard textbook guide can. The human characters are racially diverse. A ghoul grammar quiz at the end tests readers’ memories of the rules.

A scarily fun addition to the reference shelf. (Informational picture book. 3-9)
Young gearheads, rejoice! It’s time to take a deep dive into the history of the automobile.

Professor Wooford McPaw may go on a bit when excited, but that’s because the scholar cannot wait to introduce young readers to the past, present, and future of cars. Going back as far as a spring-loaded creation invented by Leonardo da Vinci, the book moves at a trot, exploring not just the history of the contraption, but also individual models of different cars. In the breezy survey, illustrated with bright cartoons, Professor McPaw takes time to acknowledge the contributions of women, including Berthe Benz and how her inventions were incorporated into cars’ future designs. The book also takes care to present both the good and bad about automobiles. Introductions to gasoline alternatives like biofuels, hydrogen fuel cells, and battery power list both the advantages and potential complications of each resource. (The estimated range of a modern electric car is, sadly, out of date.) The “clean diesel” lie propagated by car companies makes an appearance, as does Hitler’s role in the creation of the Volkswagen Beetle. Here occurs perhaps the most significant of the book’s missteps, when three factory workers, two White and one Black, cheerily mention that they must also be ready to convert kilometers to miles throughout the text. An interactive spread with a maze interrupts the informational content and may deter library purchasers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A broad history, ideal for car lovers. (index) (Informational picture book 4-9)

Spare words and images illustrate the creation of a penguin family for readers of all ages.

With a dramatic moonlit image and just seven well-chosen words (“Pack snow. / Moon glow. / Windblown. // All alone.”), the book pulls readers into the icy and isolated polar life of a lone emperor penguin. Luckily, other penguins soon pop out of the ocean and onto the ice to begin the annual mating process. “Swing, sway. / Call, play. // Beaks in air. / Now a pair.” Words and images celebrate the Antarctic setting, the perfectly adapted penguins (“Waves glitter. / Flippers flitter”; “Mamas stand, / edge of land. // Into sea, diving free”—complete with bubble trails for each dive), and the joint efforts of mother and father penguin to raise their chick. The critical transfer of the pair’s sole egg from the mother’s feet to the father’s is described with stunning simplicity: “Feet kiss. Near miss.” Perfect for group storytime and discussion, rhyming phrases with just one to four words dramatically summarize each step in the mating scene—instructions for penguins undergoing their (no penguin sex depicted) and parenting process. The familiar black and white of emperor penguins contrast well with the scenes of rich winter blues of Antarctic ice, sea, and sky and, later, the warm pastels of the spring skies as time passes, the temperatures warm, and the penguin family unit basks in their success: “No matter the weather, // a family together.” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An object lesson in less is more. (author’s note) (Informational picture book 3-6)

Flick Hudson and Jonathan Mercator are back, responding to another crisis of magic in the multiverse.

Flick hasn’t been in the Strange worlds Travel Agency, where members travel between worlds via suitcase, since the adventure that revealed her uncommon powers—and kept her out overnight, to her parents’ dismay. Fortunately, college student Jonathan, Strangeworlds’ custodian since the disappearance of his father, sweet-talks Flick’s mother—and just in time, as a letter from a watery world of mer-folk and pirates alerts them to an emergency. The two of them, plus Jonathan’s cousin Avery, who is visiting from her own world, set off to help. These books, like Jonathan himself, are both firmly old-fashioned and thoroughly modern. Flick helps navigate tense politics, pushes herself to face new challenges (both magical and practical), and reflects on the ways in which her world is inclined to waste and pollution; all of this flows naturally from her character, because Flick—like many readers—has worries about family, finances, and the state of the planet. Meanwhile, a larger mystery continues to simmer. Jonathan is cued as queer, while Flick and Avery navigate a mutual attraction, elements that are woven seamlessly into the story. There are limited physical descriptions; Avery has black hair and light brown skin.

Fantastic, from start to (the zinger of a) finish. (map) (Fantasy 9-14)
Vibrant illustrations teem with playful details and portray the ever larger tools; a hummingbird gardener explains pollination. Long doesn’t disappoint with these hand-drawn, digitally tinted delineations like “Do you have a special place where you like reading?”: “And at exactly the same time…” and in the next scene a new child in a different country takes center stage. At noon, Esther eats her outdoor school lunch in Ghana; James gets his guitar lesson in Scotland at 1 p.m.; Yusuf checks a book out from a library in Turkey at 3 p.m. Other places visited include Dubai, Thailand, and Australia. Each double-page spread invites readers to look closely at the places, objects, and people pictured. The text engages kids in considering questions about geography. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Ably illustrating the concept of time zones, this will start conversations about geography. (author’s note) (Informational picture book. 6-8)

FROM SEASON TO SEASON
Long, Ethan
Illus. by Straathof, Alette
Christy Ottaviano/Henry Holt (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-250-76599-4
Series: Happy County, 4

Visit Happy County again for a year of fun. Readers are invited back to the action-packed adventures found in Happy County in this fourth installment of the series. These titles are designed for readers who love spending hours poring over a book’s pages to spot all the wacky hijinks, and Long doesn’t disappoint with these hand-drawn, digitally tinted illustrations. The characters are a brightly colored menagerie of animal citizens waiting to usher readers into their lives. An octopus wearing a backpack and a red fez uses a crosswalk to get to school; a beaver struggles to keep up with the snow using ever larger tools; a hummingbird gardener explains pollination. Savvy caregivers will use the book’s colorful style and open-ended questions to engage their kiddos by turning this title into a multiuse tool to encourage conversation, deductive reasoning, and vocabulary building. The book bounces from topic to topic and activity to activity with a carefree brio that high-energy readers will enjoy. The range of spread design is diverse, including picture dictionary, seek-and-find, and comics panels. While some activities fall flat, there’s so much happening most readers will be amused and challenged. The seasonal approach is organizational rather than scientific, and the buoyant, Muppet-like energy will carry readers through all four of them. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Zany fun well worth repeat reads. (Picture book. 4-6)

TÉO’S TUTU
Macias, Maryann Jacob
Illus. by Marley, Alea
Dial Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-9848-1552-1

Téo loves to dance, but ballet class makes him nervous. While he and his parents practice their moves to both bhangra and cumbia, both of which are very different from ballet. In the studio, Téo nervously takes his place on the floor. During stretches, a boy makes fun of Téo’s tutu, but their teacher, Ms. Lila, immediately comes to Téo’s defense. For the rest of his first class and during the classes that follow, Téo loses himself in the joy of learning a new skill. The more he practices, the more confident and talented he feels. As the recital approaches, Téo is more and more excited to get on stage—until the costumes arrive. Téo picks out a shirt and pants, just like all the other boys. But he also takes home a lavender tutu, which is the costume he really wants to wear. On recital day, when he has to make a decision, Téo’s family encourages him to wear the clothes that he likes best, emphasizing that at times, being our authentic selves requires us all to be brave. This lyrical book bursts with sincerity without ever feeling preachy or forced. Téo’s parents and his teacher embrace Téo exactly as he is, infusing the story with love and triumph and ensuring that Téo is never reduced to the oppression he faces. Brown-skinned, curly-haired Téo is biracial, with a South Asian mom and Latinx dad, and his enthusiasm leaps from Marley’s artwork on every page. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A gender-affirming picture book with a lovable, indomitable star. (Picture book. 3-7)
While there is a clearly Sikh character shown on the platform, there are no characters who are obviously Muslim. Based on the mother's bindi, the main characters appear to be Hindu. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A simple counting tale with a revolutionary style. (Picture book 3-5)

Three young teens are hunted by a supernatural being and her minions in this sequel to Thirteen (2020). Months after narrowly escaping, Mr. January, friends Eleanor, Pip, and Otto pretend to lead normal lives. But, secretly, the three 13-year-olds are hard at work researching a way to break their magical curse for good. A new season brings new danger when mud creatures called mucks start mysteriously taking people from the town. Mr. January's sister, Mrs. Prosper, worms her way into the town's adult social circle through her multilevel marketing company, SixSeed. As the clock ticks toward the fast-approaching spring equinox and a new planet, the teens seek outside help and race to come up with a plan. Eleanor and Pip find Jack—the Jack from the stories in Thirteen Tales of the Gray that, so far, have all turned out to be true. But will Jack be enough to help them stop Mrs. Prosper? This novel effectively builds upon the previously introduced lore while simultaneously rewriting it as new characters take on (and brilliantly subvert) archetypal roles. With glowing mushrooms and muddy, woody settings, Marshall's descriptions ooze eeriness with a Pacific Northwest flair. Each character, no matter how small, is sharply drawn. The story—within-a-story worldbuilding gets more complex and tightly intertwined with each new detail, and the smart commentary on beauty, femininity, and female power adds depth. Eleanor and Pip are White; Otto has light-brown skin.

This series just gets better. (Suspense 9-12)
“A seriously funny and delightfully nonlethal outing.”

**FLUFFY MCWHISKERS CUTENESS EXPLOSION**

*Fluffy McWhiskers Cuteness Explosion*

Martin, Stephen W.
Illus. by Tavis, Dan
McElderry (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-5344-4145-3

What can Fluffy do? Her cuteness is lethal!

“Fluffy McWhiskers is so cute that if you saw her... you’d explode.” A lion, two snakes, an elephant, a koala all gaze upon her and... Kaboom! Because of this, she’s quite sad and lonely and determines to make herself less cute. She makes herself an ugly sweater. She gives herself a bad haircut. She even puts a scary bag on her head... “but that was ridiculously cute!” (Her goldfish explodes.) When the newspaper publishes her photo, animals everywhere explode; she hops a rocket to outer space—the aliens in a passing UFO explode. Next, she moves to a remote tropical island. No one explodes, but pizza delivery takes forever, and tummy scratches are nearly impossible. She makes some fruit friends... but then she gets hungry. One day she bears a bark, and she can’t find a place to hide—but when she’s face to face with a so-ugly-it’s-cute pug, the dog doesn’t explode! Moreover, the pug is confused that Fluffy doesn’t explode. They’re the perfect match... but passing cruise ships should beware! Martin’s foolish tale of a killer cutie-pie cat will have readers old and young exploding with laughter with its deadpan humor. Newcomer Tavis’ artwork with its rainbow of exploding animals, all killed by cuteness overload, will multiply the laughs exponentially. Fluffy really is cute, resembling a purple powder puff with enormous eyes more than a cat. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A seriously funny and delightfully nonlethal outing. *(Picture book: 3-8)*

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**PRISONERS OF GEOGRAPHY**

*Our World Explained in 12 Simple Maps (Illustrated Young Readers Edition)*

Marshall, Tim
Illus. by Easton, Grace & Smith, Jessica
The Experiment (80 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-61519-847-4

Condensed from an adult series, a big-picture overview of how geography has influenced the development of modern nations and international trade.

Marshall’s fat *Prisoners of Geography* (2015) and select chapters (on Australia and Canada) from his upcoming *Power of Geography* (Nov. 2021) have been transformed into a dozen large infographic maps with follow-up commentary. It’s all designed to highlight the roles geophysical features, or the lack thereof, have played in shaping trade and politics. Readers will find both broad-brush accounts of historical incidents and themes and closer looks at cases in point. The point, for instance, that ignoring natural borders to lay out arbitrarily drawn ones (like those created in the Middle East after World War I) inevitably leads to long-term states of conflict is convincingly made. The maps themselves, many designed to demonstrate a specific point, are a patchy mix of single countries, whole continents, and general regions like Latin America (depicted as Mexico to Cape Horn).

Some visuals, such as an outline of Africa with silhouettes of the U.S., China, and several other large countries fitted within like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, will make a larger impression on young viewers than, for instance, a schematic map of Europe festooned with pie charts showing the percentage of natural gas select countries import from Russia. Human figures are rare, generic, and used largely as decorative elements. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Persuasive, if distinctly rushed and slanted more toward economic than cultural history. *(Informational picture book: 8-11)*

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**AS LARGE AS LIFE**

*The Scale of Creatures Great and Small, Short and Tall*

Marx, Jonny
Illus. by Prabhat, Sandhya
McElderry (64 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-944530-54-1

A menagerie of wild animals from diverse locales and habitats, drawn to scale within each spread. Gadding about seemingly arbitrarily from the Galápagos Islands to the Black Forest, ocean deeps to coral reefs, this lapsized worldwide tour gathers around 250 creatures (or, rarely, plants) from anophèles mosquito to blue whale. They appear, about a dozen or so per spread, with human figures, hands, or footprints visible in each scene for comparison. Prabhat’s painted portraits, stylized but recognizable, share space in their natural settings with pithy comments from Marx—mostly on point, though one claim that “without flies, our planet would be covered in rotting waste!” is more histrionic than strictly accurate, and another that phytoplankton eat krill is exactly backward (possibly due to a typo). Still, all the animals are identified, and the author’s many references to predation, poisons, and poop (“jackrabbits,” readers learn, “are coprophagic”), not to mention memorable details like the “hardened buttocks” of wombats, make it really hard to skip the commentary... even the occasional passages semilegibly printed black on purple. There’s no index, but a foldout poster (not seen) offers a complete group shot, including one of the racially diverse cast of young naturalists who put in appearances throughout.

Browsers will come away with plenty of rousing facts to share plus a better sense of the relative sizes of many animals. *(Informational picture book: 6-9)*
**THIS BOOK IS NOT A BEDTIME STORY!**

McLaughlin, Eoin  
Illus. by Starling, Robert  
Pavilion Children’s (32 pp.)  
$16.95 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-1-84365-506-0

No one wants to be scared just before bed; better avoid this one. (Not!)

"Bedtime stories / make you sleepy / This book won’t. / It’s much too CREEPY." The horned, red-furred narrator, aka the World’s Scariest Monster, says they’ve got umpteen scary faces and their middle name is “Terror” (but their Scary Monster Society license reads: “Fluffy Terry McFluff”). The woodland animals the monster is trying to scare are a bit skeptical. The monster’s roars are loud but sound a bit like sneezes. No matter: “My monster gang / are a horrible bunch. / They’ll spread you on toast / and have you for lunch,” the monster goes on. The wide-eyed and extremely cuddly gang will indeed be happy to have the animals for lunch (as guests). The monster keeps trying, taking the gang to a haunted house (where they can’t even scare a mouse), a ghost pirate ship (where the scariest thing is a seal’s shadow), and a cave (where the gang are terrified). How about if they hide under your bed? But when the moon points out that the little monster looks sleepy, the tale does end in snores. McLaughlin’s boastful monster narrates the primary text in rhyme, with speech bubbles conveying both the forest creatures’ doubts and the monster gang members’ dialogue, which comically undermines the narrator at just about every turn. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

The Scariest Monster might be right; this might incite too many giggles for a bedtime story. (Picture book. 3-6)

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**SCHOOL OF PHANTOMS**

Merritt, Kory  
Illus. by the author  
HMH Books (368 pp.)  
$14.99 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-0-358-19332-6  
Series: No Place for Monsters, 2

Kat and Levi return to battle another evil foe.

It’s been a few months since Levi and Kat rescued Cowslip Grove’s lost children from the wicked being known as the Boojum. Unfortunately, peculiar goings-on have resumed: Dozens of creepy snowmen have been popping up all over town, seemingly overnight. To make matters worse, a freak blizzard hits during the school day, forcing the students and teachers to shelter in place and wait out the storm. Power outages, howling wind, annoying classmates, and creepy snowmen soon become the least of Kat and Levi’s worries: Something is stalking the dark halls, something hungry for children. Levi and Kat band together with new allies to fight off this malevolent force in a sequel that smartly maintains every winning element of its predecessor. The spooky, inked illustrations set the perfect mood for intrigue, suspense, and flashes of true terror. Levi and Kat’s friendship remains charming, and the new characters add just enough to the dynamics to feel earned rather than like obligatory add-ons. This is a smart sequel, one that organically evolves the characters and their peculiar world, dropping breadcrumbs and hints that set up for a third entry while maintaining focus on the monsters at hand. Levi and Kat are White; sixth grade science teacher Ms. Padilla and new friend Dante read as Black.

A better message than delivery. (Picture book. 4-8)

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**DESMOND GETS FREE**

Meyer, Matt  
Illus. by Fam, Khim  
Skinner House (40 pp.)  
$16.00 | Sep. 1, 2021  
978-1-55896-866-0

A mouse gets his tail caught and asks for help.

In “the most beautiful meadow in all the land,” mouse Desmond follows the same daily routine. He wakes in the morning, plays all day, and goes to sleep in the evening. But one night, Desmond’s schedule is thrown for a loop when he wakes early to find his tail stuck under a "HUGE boulder." He tries to push on the boulder. He tries to tug on his tail. Neither effort frees him, so Desmond reaches out to nearby animals. The giraffe reveals that it’s not a boulder but a sleeping elephant. Yet rather than help, the giraffe lets “sleeping elephants lie” and refuses to get into it. When a gazelle walks by, Desmond receives the same, neutral response. Desmond finally gets the help he needs when another mouse comes by, and that mouse brings more mice. The mouse collective eventually gets the elephant to budge, setting Desmond free. Inspired by a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, this parable presents a situation of injustice and demonstrates that neutrality actually takes the side of the oppressor. Meyer embellishes Tutu’s metaphor, adding lengthy dialogue and description as well as the syrupy opening. Fam’s child-friendly watercolors make the best of the small trim size, though the level of detail is somewhat inconsistent, nature scenes appearing more accomplished than some of the character stylings.

A better message than delivery. (Picture book. 4-8)
Third grader Boogie Bass isn't good at anything until he starts a sign language program, where he finally gets a chance to shine.

During a four-week after-school program, Boogie and his friends begin learning American Sign Language and prepare to put on a show for students from a school for the Deaf as a final project. Also, Boogie needs to fix his baby brother's stuffed dog, which he accidentally allowed their real dog to chew. This subplot does not intersect significantly with the sign language plot except as a means to make Boogie feel bad about himself. Unfortunately, his lack of confidence does not make him an approachable character; instead, Boogie comes off as a sad sack, that dark cloud of a friend who can't let a conversation pass without mentioning their shortcomings, though readers might blame this on his hypercritical mother. The author has clearly been exposed to Deaf culture and makes a valiant effort to educate readers. In fact, the text has the preachy tone of an after-school program. As such, the Deaf characters ultimately exist as props to support the hearing characters' growth. Their language is praised for its usefulness to hearing people. Boogie is White; his best friend, Nolan, is Indian American; and his two other friends are Vera, who's Black, and Nixie, who's White.

A skillfully presented tale of the sea and beyond. (Picture book 5-8)

A story about the joy of sharing stories. Moose is a storyteller. Each evening, with his family seated comfortably around a roaring fireplace in a cozy home, he regales them with a tale. But one evening he runs out of stories and must go around to his neighbors to borrow one. None of the critters—Bear, Badger, Hare, or Mole—has one, so Moose drives into town to visit the library the next day. There, the very helpful librarian, a goose wearing eyeglasses, fills his arms with classic fairy tales, arms that dark cloud of a friend who can't let a conversation pass without mentioning their shortcomings, though readers might blame this on his hypercritical mother. The author has clearly been exposed to Deaf culture and makes a valiant effort to educate readers. In fact, the text has the preachy tone of an after-school program. As such, the Deaf characters ultimately exist as props to support the hearing characters' growth. Their language is praised for its usefulness to hearing people. Boogie is White; his best friend, Nolan, is Indian American; and his two other friends are Vera, who's Black, and Nixie, who's White.

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A skillfully presented tale of the sea and beyond. (Picture book 5-8)
“Assorted colors, sizes, and patterns create visual pleasure and make the abstract concrete.”

**TIME IS A FLOWER**

**LITTLE BIRD’S DAY**
Morgan, Sally
Illus. by Malibirr, Johnny Warrkatja
Blue Dot Kids Press (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-73622-646-9

Little Bird responds to cues from Sun, Dusk, Moon, and others as natural elements guide a day of activities.

Aboriginal author Morgan, a member of the Paluku people in Western Australia, presents a beautifully cadenced call-and-response narrative voiced by Little Bird and the natural forces that propel its behavior. “Here comes Rain, / falling and splashing, / Time to bathe, Little Bird, / time to sparkle with freshness.” / I flutter with Rain to wash my fuzzy feathers.” Little Bird, rising with Sun, sings “to wake the lazy sleepers.” It soars with Wind to reach and feed on a tree’s “crimson blossoms.” Dusk, “gliding and sighing,” induces Little Bird “to join a nightfall roost.” And full Moon, “glowing and whispering,” signals that it’s “Time to rest, Little Bird, / time to settle with your family.” Illustrator Malibirr, a Yolgu artist from the Aboriginal Ganalbingu clan, uses traditional earth tones, crosshatching, and elements from clan songlines and stories to distinguish his engrossing illustrations, worked in acrylic paint on toned paper. He depicts animals from his native Arnhem Land region, from water buffalo and dingo to echidna and freshwater prawn; an illustrated key challenges readers to find all 10. As Little Bird roosts with its family, it dreams of “flying among the stars.” The dark sky, spattered with thousands of starlit specks, reveals Little Bird’s shadowy silhouette in its dreamed flight.

Pairing a lilting text and culturally resonant illustrations, this striking work soars. (Editorial note) (Picture book 4-7)

**TIME IS A FLOWER**
Morstad, Julie
Illus. by the author
Tundra Books (56 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-7352-6754-1

A series of thoughtful metaphors and diverse characters takes viewers through the manifold dimensions of time.

In bow to (2013), Morstad playfully portrays concepts both invisible (the breeze, bravery) and discernible (washing socks). In this companion volume, she tackles time. Like a spiderweb, time is difficult to see; like cut hair, it disappears after growth. Minutes move slowly at school and speed by as a wave knocks over a sand castle. Morstad’s lyrical language is perfectly paced: “Time is a song. / Dancing you quick!” These lines are paired with three solitary figures in dresses, each superimposed on itself several times in variations of movement and tonality. Across the gutter, the text reads: “Or pulling you, / long and stretching, / slow and low, / to the sound of a cello.” Here a Black child is shown in an interlocking sequence of nine steps, each iteration contributing to a rainbow effect. Assorted colors (with a cheerful magenta playing a prominent role), sizes, and patterns create visual pleasure and make the abstract concrete, while solid, spacious backgrounds prompt contemplation. The spread showing that “Time is a sunbeam...” contrasts a sleeping cat in the warm shadows cast by plants at a sunlit window with the facing page’s black silhouettes and a repositioned animal absorbing changed light.

This exuberant vehicle will expand the thinking of those just beginning to comprehend clocks and calendars. (Picture book 4-7)

**AN ADVENTURE THROUGH THE WATER CYCLE WITH DRIP THE RAINDROP**
Moyers, Cara
Illus. by Astrella, Charlie
Flowerpot Press (36 pp.)
$12.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-4867-2108-5

An anthropomorphized raindrop leads readers on a simplified trip through the water cycle.

On the first page, narrator Drip’s pictured as a raindrop with big eyes, smiling mouth, and skinny arms; their journey begins on the next spread in a puddle as they wait for the sun to come out and warm the water. Ghostlike, Drip rises into the air, looking down on all the activity below. Drip joins other “H2O friends” in a cloud as they all form raindrops again and fall during a storm. Drip falls into a mountain stream and then lands back in their puddle before the whole thing starts over again. Moyers’ format and subject don’t always mesh, the cutesy rhyming verses and bouncy meter sometimes forcing word choices that oversimplify the process and/or make it difficult to use solid scientific terms: “Just as I thought, / the puddle gets hot / and up into the air I go! // Now I’m water vapor! / I’m lighter than paper / in a process called evaporation.” Astrella’s animation-inspired scenes look three-dimensional, Drip especially standing out against the backdrop. Backmatter includes a prose summary of other adventures Drip might have within the water cycle (for example, transpiration, groundwater flow), a glossary, and two activities (cloud in a bottle and an evaporation experiment).

Not a solid choice for science learning. (Informational picture book 5-8)
“Vivid colors and enchanting, emotive characters work seamlessly with the text.”

**DRAGONBOY**

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<tr>
<th><strong>UNICORN NIGHT</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sleep Tight</strong></td>
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<td>Murray, Diana</td>
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<td>Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (32 pp.)</td>
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<td>978-1-72822-298-1</td>
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A cheery nighttime routine.
The duo behind *Unicorn Day* (2019) tackles the next logical question: What do unicorns do at night? After nonstop rainbow-sliding, cupcake-eating, and, of course, twirling, drowsy unicorns wind down. They don’t brush their teeth, but they do need to shine their horns before bed. They also “brush their manes, / as soft as silk, / and have a sip / of moonbeam milk.” Bedtime stories are shared and cloud pillows are fluffed as eyelids slowly close. But wait! The unicorns startle awake. They forgot to sing their song! Unlike the energetic previous outing, which promotes fun, fun, fun, this lullaby is filled with moonlight, fairies, and lulling sounds. “Neigh, neigh, neigh, played all day, / time to sleep the night away!” The music drifts down to the forest floor, soothing all the woodland creatures as they prepare for bed too. Flowers employs deep purples and blues for a dusk setting, but the unicorns’ blankets, sleep masks, hair, and horns are all still bright and colorful, keeping the joviality intact. Eagle-eyed readers will spot the tiny, purple dragon arms. This bedtime book doesn’t bring much new to the genre, except...unicorns! **Mythical-creature aficionados won’t be able to resist.** *(Picture book. 3-6)*

**D IS FOR DROOL**

<table>
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<th><strong>My Monster Alphabet</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Noll, Amanda &amp; Greenspan, Shari Dab</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flashlight Press (32 pp.)</td>
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<td>978-1-947277-49-6</td>
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Why count sheep when an alphabetical array of monsters is queued up to crawl under the bed? Lying wakeful in his moonlit bedroom, the pale-skinned lad from the I Need My Monster series begins with “A…is for Arms.” This cues the entry of a multilimbed, popeyed, purple-striped yellow creature at the head of a parade of blobby, slobbery boojums as wildly diverse of shape as they are saturated of hue. It’s almost a pity this book is codex bound instead of concertina folded, as careful design finds elements from the right edge of one double-page spread continuing on to the left edge of the next. The green-furred, horned monster on an early spread is revealed to have a long, spiked tail after the turn of the page, for instance, and the substance dripping from the many noses of a blue, finned creature makes quite the trail of bright pink ooze across the following spread. Readers will enjoy flipping back and forth to see the contiguity. Being all smiles and more likely to elicit snorts of amusement than screams of terror, the monstrous marchers crawling, oozing, slithering, or strolling into and out of view with each page turn have the intended soporific effect. As the alphabet progresses, the lines of narrative become more and more...stretched...out...until a final “Y...is...for...Yawn...and...Z……is for...” signal mission accomplished. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A monstrously effective lid-dropper.** *(Picture book. 3-5)*

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**DRAGONBOY**

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<th><strong>Napoleoni, Fabio</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Little, Brown (40 pp.)</td>
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<td>978-0-316-46216-7</td>
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A young, White, perfectly bald boy wakes up and happily announces, “Rise and shine, everyone,” as his stuffed animal friends rouse from their slumber.

He quickly dresses in a green dragon costume, and, anticipating adventure, they all travel to a fantastical world. Discoveries unfold agreeably until they meet someone new, a rainbow-horned white unicorn named Karley. She is too sad to play, as Karley isn’t magical and can’t fly like other unicorns. Everyone empathizes with Karley and shares how they are different than expected too. Dragonboy declares, “We are already who we are supposed to be,” which brings forth joy and dancing. After a great day, Dragonboy and friends fall back to sleep as Karley heads down a different hall, back to her room. She falls asleep, content with acceptance. In this first of a new picture-book series, debut author and illustrator Napoleoni uses acrylic paints on wood panels to create a vibrant world. Vivid colors and enchanting, emotive characters work seamlessly with the text to take readers on a journey of empathy and compassion. Hearts are hidden throughout the illustrations, culminating in the final spread with Karley sleeping in bed with a pale, black-haired child named Molly. Molly’s headboard is rainbow colored, and a sign hangs above, reading “One L♥ve, L♥ve all,” opening the door for thoughtful discussion and eager anticipation for Molly’s adventure. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A charming journey of discovery, friendship, and acceptance.** *(Picture book. 4-8)*
Newly arrived in Singapore from Denmark, a girl meets a hungry ghost who may be connected to her own family.

Twelve-year-old Freja’s mother hasn’t been well, so Freja moves in for a year with her father and stepmother in Singapore. Freja isn’t certain she wants to be a part of her father’s new family, complete with twin toddler brothers. Then she meets a strange girl wearing white who keeps disappearing into the nearby Chinese cemetery. Could the girl be a ghost? And if so, why is she attracted to Freja’s family? As Freja is drawn into a supernatural world of Singaporean ghosts and spirits, she uncovers deeply buried secrets in a narrative that explores family, trauma, and memory. Freja’s father is English, her mother is Danish, and her stepmother is English and Hong Kong Chinese. The friends she makes in school are also mostly mixed-race and third culture kids, with the exception of a Singaporean girl and a boy of Chinese and German ancestry, raised by his Singaporean grandmother, who serve as Chinese cultural informants for Freja. Freja’s struggles adjusting to her family’s changing dynamics and coping with her mother’s mental illness and her own past traumas are compelling. The ghost’s past, rooted in Singapore’s history, however, is not dealt with in as much depth, with some past and present power differentials left underexamined.

Explores lost family histories and expat life, with a taste of Singaporean myth and folk tradition. (glossary) (Paranormal. 8-12)

In a spare text, this Japanese import explores the functions, properties, and inherent contradictions of water.

Two small humans leave home and set out in a rowboat. Water, reads the narration of this follow-up to Every Color of Light (2020), is “only oxygen and hydrogen, simple as can be,” yet it sustains life. This statement is accompanied by a full-bleed spread in which readers see the two humans row along a wave of stars next to the Earth. Water, however, is also paradoxical in nature: “It has no color, but can be any color,” for instance. It has no shape but can take on various shapes, and you can touch it but not actually hold it. The musings are sometimes metaphorical (“like the mother of us all, it creates life”) and often ethereal. In a dramatic shift in tone, the narration then states: “It is the pee of life.” Here, the voice, which has hitherto spoken of you and we, shifts to a first-person-singular one, and the narrator acknowledges a child asking if water is the “pee-pee of the gods.” (This will undoubtedly delight the youngest of readers.) Dense textures, a palette with a stunning use of light, and panoramic landscapes establish a sweeping, grandiose tone that pays its respects to Mother Nature. Resplendent yellows and rich shades of blues and greens are the stars of the show. The book closes on a metafictive note: After referencing the child who asks about gods, the narrator states on the final page: “And then, I wrote this poem.” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Wondrous. (Picture book. 4-8)
LUNCH EVERY DAY
Otoshi, Kathryn
Illus. by the author
KO Kids Books (40 pp.)
$17.99  |  Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-73434-820-0

A boy befriends his bully and, with the help of his mother, keeps the bully fed daily at school.

Based on a true story, this is dedicated to educator Jim Perez and to “the lady who kept making all those lunches for him, day after day.” In the first spread, readers stand right behind Jimmy, who daily targets the same kid, a boy eating lunch alone. Instead of standing in the line for free and reduced lunches, Jimmy steals the boy’s bagged meals. Jimmy’s first-person narration reveals abuse at home at the hands of his older brothers. When the bullied boy invites his classmates, including Jimmy, to a birthday party, Jimmy learns his target has his own losses. He also has an unexpected encounter with the boy’s mother, who promises she’ll have her son take “a second lunch... for you, every day.” Illustrations with smudgy, relaxed lines—faces are often indistinct and in shadow—and vivid, emotionally charged colors (Jimmy in dark purples and greens and the other boy and his mother in warm oranges and pinks) animate this tale. Jimmy’s inner thoughts occasionally surround his head in hand-lettering (“don’t yell” when the boy’s mother approaches him), and the use of numbers to count the bagged lunches stolen—and, later, given—are effective. The abrupt ending hints at a lifelong friendship between the boys. The races of the protagonists are unclear due to Otoshi’s emotive palette, which paints all characters in blues, reds, greens, and so forth, but they have straight hair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sensitively told conversation starter for children about abuse, power dynamics, and compassion. (Picture book. 4-10)

THE BARKING BALLAD
A Bark-Along Meow-Along Book
Paschkis, Julie
Illus. by the author
Athenaeum (32 pp.)
$17.99  |  Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-5344-9260-8

An interactive, melodic adventure involving an unlikely pair.

Following instructions at the start, readers are requested to participate by making a barking sound anytime a red circle appears and meowing anywhere there is a yellow diamond. It is, after all, a “bark-along, meow-along book.” Inspired by Oliver Goldsmith’s “An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog” (from which it lifts one complete stanza and also the poem’s rhythm), the tale begins with a stray cat in a neighborhood of many dogs. The cat is hiding, stealthy, until one dog sniffs her out. This black pup, whose fur, rendered in Paschkis’ characteristic folk-art style, resembles a Renaissance ruff collar, just wants to play. In an abrupt turn of events (that takes its lead from its elegiac form), “One day a rock fell from above / and knocked the dog near dead. // With tender tongue and gentle love / the cat repaired his head.” After that, the duo becomes inseparable (the barking and meowing prompts, which were at first individual, are now combined). In a rousing cacophonous finale, “A hundred barks ring through the park” (red circles cover the page) “and one small stray meow” (a tiny yellow diamond conclusion). A large storyline crowd may not be able to see the symbols, but a clever leader can still orchestrate the group, and it will be great fun in a lap with pre-readers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Anything but ruff. (Picture book. 3-8)

THE WORDY BOOK
Paschkis, Julie
Illus. by the author
Enchanted Lion Books (48 pp.)
$18.95  |  Jul. 13, 2021
978-1-59270-353-1

Words and pictures connect in surprising, stimulating ways.

Talk about painting with words. Author/illustrator Paschkis plays with them, too, and encourages readers to do likewise. In the process, she explores the elasticity and seemingly endless possibilities of language. The vividly colored, Wittily detailed, folk-style paintings on double-page spreads organically incorporate words into the artwork in wondrous, creative ways. Words frequently repeat in different sizes and colors; illustrated images include words that sound or are shaped like them, are variations of them, rhyme or nearly rhyme with them, sort of resemble them, are sort of spelled like them, etc. A bouquet of flowers in a vase exuding the scents of stamens, stamens, stamens (and knocked the dog near dead) / the cat repaired his head.” After that, the duo becomes inseparable (the barking and meowing prompts, which were at first individual, are now combined). In a rousing cacophonous finale, “A hundred barks ring through the park” (red circles cover the page) “and one small stray meow” (a tiny yellow diamond conclusion). A large storyline crowd may not be able to see the symbols, but a clever leader can still orchestrate the group, and it will be great fun in a lap with pre-readers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Anything but ruff. (Picture book. 3-8)

In a word, a feast for the eyes, brain, and artistic imagination. (author’s note) (Picture book. 6-10)
“Watercolor-and-ink drawings evoke a world that feels simultaneously diffuse and sharply defined.”

MY WORDS FLEW AWAY LIKE BIRDS
Pearson, Deborah
Illus. by Jain, Shrija
Kids Can (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-5253-0318-0

When an unnamed protagonist leaves her home country for an English-speaking one, the words she’s always relied on fly away, leaving her silent and a little bit lonely. Practicing English in her original home left her unprepared for both how quickly people speak and how much slang they use. From the teacher’s lecture to the voice on the intercom, everything feels impossible to understand. Words, however, are not the only source of her confusion. When she gets lost at school, the teacher calls the protagonist the “new girl,” even though she is who she’s always been—it’s everything else that’s new. The girl misses her friends, wishing she could tell them about all the new things she’s seen, like snow, and dogs wearing boots. Eventually, she is able to make a new friend—and when she does, her words slowly, come back. This warmly illustrated picture book adeptly captures the experience of moving to a new country and learning a new language. The narrator’s struggle and her slow but steady adjustment to her new home perfectly balance optimism and realism. The book’s watercolor-and-ink drawings evoke a world that feels simultaneously diffuse and sharply defined, thereby serving as a wonderful parallel for the narrator’s experience. All characters have paper-white skin and black hair; the narrator captures the experience of moving to a new country and learning a new language.

A frank and optimistic picture book about learning to live in a new language. (Picture book: 3-8)

PAX, JOURNEY HOME
Pennypacker, Sara
Illus. by Klassen, Jon
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (356 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-06-293034-7

Boy and fox follow separate paths in postwar rebuilding. A year after Peter finds refuge with former soldier Vola, he prepares to leave to return to his childhood home. He plans to join the Junior Water Warriors, young people repurposing the machines and structures of war to reclaim reservoirs and rivers poisoned in the conflict, and then to set out on his own to live apart from others. At 13, Peter is competent and self-contained. Vola marvels at the construction of the floor of the cabin he’s built on her land, but the losses he’s sustained have left a mark. He imposes a penance on himself, reimagining the story of rescuing the orphaned kit Pax as one in which he follows his father’s counsel to kill the animal before he could form a connection. He thinks of his heart as having a stone inside it. Pax, meanwhile, has fathered three kits who claim his attention and devotion. Alternating chapters from the fox’s point of view demonstrate Pax’s care for his family—his mate, Bristle; her brother; and the three kits. Pax becomes especially attached to his daughter, who accompanies him on a journey that intersects with Peter’s and allows Peter to not only redeem his past, but imagine a future. This is a deftly nuanced look at the fragility and strength of the human heart. All the human characters read as White. Illustrations not seen.

An impressive sequel. (Fiction: 10-14)

SWEATER WEATHER
Phelan, Matt
Illus. by the author
Greenwillow Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-06-293414-7

A warm read for the fall. Phelan’s text is remarkably spare, with just a few precise phrases to knit together a narrative about an adult bear and their seven cubs. Frontmatter shows the grown-up bear clad in a bathrobe and looking out a kitchen window. The palette is dominated by warm red, gold, and brown tones, and the bear’s brief directive to the cubs on the next page suggests an autumnal chill in the air. "Sweaters on!” the bear exclaims to the PJ-clad little ones. A basket of yarn sits off to the side, and on the next spread the big bear is seen sitting and knitting calmly while awaiting the cubs’ descent from upstairs. “Sweaters on?” calls the big bear. “Not yet,” is the reply. After hearing a clatter, the big bear goes upstairs to investigate and finds the cubs struggling to get dressed. Humorous watercolors show their little round bodies packed like sausages into a rainbow array of sweaters—including one sweater with two cubs stuffed inside. The struggle continues for several pages, with the patient grown-up bear attempting to help without much luck. Night has fallen by the time they finally go outside all bundled up, but they make the most of their time there before returning indoors for “Pajamas on!” time. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Cozy up with this picture book. (Picture book: 2-4)

AN ILLUSTRATED COLLECTION OF FAIRY TALES FOR BRAVE CHILDREN
Phillips, Scott
Floris (88 pp.)
$22.95 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-78250-671-3

Pretty illustrations accompany seven tales from Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, Oscar Wilde, and other European writers. Though all but Wilde’s “The Selfish Giant” do revolve around brave young people, the stories are significantly abridged.
and have been edited with a distinct lack of courage. They are so stripped of religious references, for instance, that the “Three Golden Hairs” are plucked from the chin of Hades rather than the devil, and Wilde’s giant is promised Paradise by a “child of love” with unmarked palms. On the other hand, “Vassilissa” still allows the flaming skull from Baba Yaga to burn her cruel stepfamily to death, and the stripped-down version of Andersen’s “The Wild Swans” actually improves on the original by switching out the walnut oil the evil stepmother uses in the original to transform Princess Elisa into a brown-skinned outcast for a generic “foul ointment” that just makes her unrecognizable. But Hades is the only member of Plumbe’s otherwise all-White cast with broad features and dark skin, and the artist’s tidy tableaux of stolid figures in medieval garb follow the overall lead of the stories by going for the safely bland. In the cursory author bios at the end Wilde is tagged as “controversial” without explanation, presumably embedded as a code word for adults with parochial values. But the attached ribbon bookmark is pretty.

Children, brave or otherwise, in search of classic stories have plenty of other choices. (Folk & fairy tales. 9-11)

HOW THE BIG BAD WOLF GOT HIS COMMEUPPANCE
Pope, Lisa Wilke
Illus. by Geisert, Arthur
Enchanted Lion Books (40 pp.)
$17.95 | Aug. 31, 2021
978-1-59270-314-2
Series: Clayton County Trilogy

The three little pigs creatively take on the Big Bad Wolf. Struggling to keep her family afloat, a mother pig tells her three children that they have to seek their own fortunes. The classic narrative framework is here: The wolf tries to eat each pig at a house made out of grass bundles, a house made of “a large pile of construction materials,” and one that is a “stately castle.” But each pig has a calculated plan for thwarting the wolf, who eventually slinks back home. The pigs’ clever constructions, conveyed in Geisert’s trademark detailed illustrations, will enthral children who love to build things (or take them apart): There’s a complicated mechanism for blasting the wolf with flour; a house under construction that puts itself together when the wolf huffs on it; and one that releases an “intrinsic alarm system of horns and whistles” when the wolf puffs on it. The illustrations, hand-colored copperplate etchings, have a distinct and inviting texture. Some of the illustrations, blurry and slightly out of focus, mimic the shaking of big blasts, though at least one that does not involve destruction is also blurry and, therefore, hard on the eyes. Vivid descriptors are used to bring the wolf’s exertions to the page: “Famished and desperate, the Big Bad Wolf huffed and puffed and blew mightily.” The world-building in the illustrations is thoughtful and elaborate and will have readers poring over the pages.

An entertaining delight for (nonpig) budding engineers everywhere. (Picture book. 4-8)

OWN YOUR PERIOD
Quint, Chella
Illus. by Medeiros, Giovana
QEB Publishing (96 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-7112-5664-4

A bright, informative guide to period positivity.

Quint, a menstruation educator, wants to enable her audience to destigmatize periods through knowledge and makes sure to explain that her work isn’t intended only for “period owners.” Her illustrated offering is broken down into three sections: “The Basics,” “Managing Periods,” and “Period Positivity.” “The Basics” explains the anatomy (both internal and external) of people who have periods and the phases of the menstrual cycle. The second section discusses the mechanics of having a period, from charting to choosing menstrual supplies (with an emphasis on sustainability). There is no discussion of how trans and nonbinary kids may face particular challenges in schools or other public places, however. “Period Positivity” goes a step further, relating menstruation to the world at large, breaking down taboos, overcoming shame, and examining media depictions of periods over time. Throughout, Quint adds personal anecdotes and reflections about her own past period perceptions. Some activities may not be for everyone (like making vulva cupcakes), but Quint’s guide is conversational, accessible, and, with its linguistic emphasis on all people who have periods, inclusive. Medeiros’ bold, full-color illustrations show a diverse spectrum of kids with a range of skin tones, gender presentations, sexual orientations, ability, and body sizes. A glossary and index are included. The skimpy list of resources enumerates only three websites (one of which is the author’s).

An inclusive and timely guide. (Nonfiction. 8-12)

NOBODY OWNS THE MOON
Riddle, Toby
Illus. by the author
Berbay Publishing (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 20, 2021
978-0-9943841-9-5

First published in Australia in 2008, the story of a fox who successfully makes a life in the city.

The fox goes by the name of Clive Prendergast and leads a quiet, understated life. He fits in by using a name that can be pronounced (only foxes can say his real name) and being “quick-witted... and able to eat a variety of foods.” By day, he works on an assembly line. By night, he explores the city and enjoys the “interesting goings-on.” He has one or two friends; the one he sees the most is Humphrey, a donkey. Humphrey often has no fixed address and has difficulty keeping a job. Riddle describes the friendship between Clive and Humphrey as one of tranquil acceptance. One day, Humphrey invites Clive to the premiere of the play Nobody Owns the Moon. After a wonderful evening...
out, the friends agree, “This is our town!” and they part with a big hug. There is a lovely gentleness to the whole narration that readers will find very appealing. Riddle’s artwork weaves together painting and drawings with collage, often incorporating photographs; evident in the illustrations but unremarked in the text, Clive and Humphrey are the only animals in the city mostly inhabited by White humans. Respectful of children’s intelligence, the book presents topics such as friendship, acceptance, belonging, and otherness that will challenge them to think further.

A gentle, understated story that invites reflection. (Picture book. 4-8)

THE POPCORN SPY
Rinck, Maranke
Illus. by van der Linden, Martijn
Trans. by Forest-Flier, Nancy
Levine Querido (192 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-64614-095-4
Series: Popcorn Bob, 2

Kidnappers from the United States and other challenges face young Ellis and her poppable companion in this Dutch import’s second episode.

The kidnappers, Farmer Bill and cold-eyed corporate executive Coraline Corn, aren’t after popcorn-loving Ellis but her tantrum-prone buddy Bob, an illegally enhanced kernel the size of a kiwi (fruit) that was exported to the Netherlands by mistake. Distracted by both the need to keep Bob’s existence a secret from her dads and everyone else and her efforts to sneak popcorn into school where it has been unjustly banned as an unhealthy food, Ellis has no idea that Bob’s in danger. But then he’s suddenly snatched in the middle of a school field day sponsored by wildly popular internet nutrition guru Holly Jolly. What to do? Rinck seems so enamored of her premise (which was already well developed in the 2021 opener, Popcorn Bob) that she has trouble spinning out an actual plotline or moving it along. Still, there’s a lot of random scrambling about and gloriously muddy foolishness—much of it carried on silently or nearly so in the graphite drawings that share every page with the short lines of generously sized narrative. She brings it to a happy close that’s expedited by some unexpected help from one of the supposed bad guys. Ellis and her dads are White, but her friend Dante and some of her schoolmates are depicted with shaded skin.

Patchy but farcical and, occasionally, explosive. (Fantasy. 7-10)

BETTER TOGETHER!
Robach, Amy & Shue, Andrew
Illus. by Wen, Lenny
Flamingo Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-593-20569-3

When a thunderstorm throws two families into a tight shared space, they learn that being together can be fun.

The howling wind and shaking trees prompt Mrs. Squirrelly to rush her children, Beck and Fern, from their high branch to an oak tree with a hollow trunk. Meanwhile, Mr. McMunk is leading his two kids, Peanut and Sam, from their earthbound home to what turns out to be the same refuge. The children are shy at first but become friends when they begin to play together. The storm rages on, and everyone begins to experience a bit of cabin fever. The next morning, over breakfast, “the grumping got worse.” Complaints center on excessive chatter and on not sharing; everyone just wants to be back home. But when the families are restored to their respective homes, neither one is as idyllic as either the Squirrellys or the McMunks remember. They pine for the togetherness they experienced in the hollow tree. Each decides to visit the other; luckily, they meet outside the hole in the oak tree where they sheltered during the storm. Their reunion is joyous, and the two families decide to merge. Meet the McSquirrellies! Robach and Shue’s message has value—the broadcast journalist and actor, respectively, had their own blended family—but with no “before” glimpses of the separate families, the premise is somewhat murky and the resolution abrupt, at best. Wen’s cartoon animals, lightly anthropomorphized with accessories such as hats and glasses, are definitely cute. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Simple and sweet. (Picture book. 4-7)

BRILLIANT BEA
Rudolph, Shaina & Vukadinovich, Mary
Illus. by Lee, Fiona
Magination/American Psychological Association (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Nov. 16, 2021
978-1-4338-3741-8

A child with dyslexia gains confidence in herself.

First-person text reveals at the outset that the narrator, Bea, is dyslexic. Appropriately, said text is set in a readable, sans-serif type to support dyslexic readers who might encounter her story, and she presents as a Black girl with big, red glasses, brown skin, and tightly curled black hair in Lee’s bright and engaging cartoon-style illustrations. Bea struggles to complete her work, drifts into daydreams, and finds ways to avoid reading aloud. She’s also fortunate to have a compassionate teacher, Ms. Bloom (who presents as White with lighter skin and cropped light-brown hair), who sees her challenges and offers accommodations. Rather than presenting Bea with common voice-to-text
WE GIVE THANKS  
Rylant, Cynthia  
Illus. by Ruzzier, Sergio  
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-1-4424-6507-7  

A gentle reminder to give thanks for all that you have.  

One day, a rabbit and a frog ramble around their rural community with two purposes in mind. First, they share their thanks for their world filled with comfort, friends, food, family, nature, and affection. “We give thanks for cousins / and for fathers and for mothers. / We give thanks for grandpas / and for sisters and for brothers.” One couplet bobbles the scansion but is charming nevertheless. Another, scent-filled verse hints at “noses” and creatively rhymes “roses” with “toeses.” And as they make their way, the rabbit and the frog also seem to issue invitations to everyone in the community, resulting in a friend-filled feast and their final message of inclusion: “Bless our nights and bless our days / and bless all those we meet. // We give thanks for everything, / and now... // it’s time to EAT!” In places, illustrations with pops of neon blue, pink, green, and purple against a generally pastel palette play whimsically with the gentle text. However, the bright green frog in a fluorescent pink, feathered hat is gigglesworthy, as is his creative yellow portrait of a brown dog and the studio cat dripping with yellow paint in a picture where literal readers will appreciate snow-capped mountains in neon blue and shocking pink and the creative, but perhaps out of control, vehicles. (This book was reviewed digitally.)  

This cozy duo shows why every day should be Thanksgiving. (Picture book 3-6)

WE'RE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT!  
Saltzberg, Barney  
Illus. by the author  
Creston (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-1-939547-96-5  

Sit down; you're rocking the boat.  

When a dog, a cat, a pig, and a goat get into a rowboat together and each picks up an oar, they are faced with several scenarios that could spell disaster. If they can’t agree on a direction, they can’t move at all. A splashing episode would get them uncomfortably wet. Rocking the boat would make them sick. But sometimes they can choose to operate as a team, fixing a leak, sharing an umbrella, riding the waves, and rescuing a colleague who falls in the water. When faced with danger of any kind, they vow never to give up, because they are “all in the same boat” and must work together. Each scenario is introduced by

Hector wants to be a deep-sea diver, just like his father and grandfather.  

He has internalized all his grandfather’s tales, especially the story of the “rarest, whitest, and purist pearl in the world,” said to live on the seabed offshore near the Marina, their family business. But the greedy Amedeo Limonta has set up a competitive business that’s forced the Marina to close. When Hector turns 8, everything changes. On his very first dive, he discovers the magical Pearl and brings it home…and complications ensue. Hector heeds his memories and dreams of his grandfather and courageously makes it all right. Hector narrates his adventures in meticulously organized chapters, carefully introducing each character, providing detailed information about relationships and events, and sharing credit for his successes. At the conclusion Hector presents readers with vivid descriptions of his beloved village and its inhabitants. Sabatinelli provides Hector with a voice that soars with lilting, expressive language, losing nothing in Turner’s translation from Italian. Bruno’s intensely bright, sharply hued illustrations are a tour de force. A chart of semaphore flags and diagrams that detail the parts of a diving suit fill the opening pages, and those flags head each chapter. The sea is evoked with glorious dreamlike color and movement, and characters’ features and expressions immediately announce their nature, emotions, and quirks. All present White. Hector is wise, kind, and readers will take him to their hearts.  

Beautiful, remarkable, amazing, and wonderful in every way. (Adventure 6-12)
a query in clear, direct language that is posed to the animals in simple, large-print typeface set within a double-page spread: “What happens when we don't agree on which direction to go?” The animals’ response appears in a white speech balloon in block capital letters in a subsequent double-page spread that illustrates the possible outcome: “WE GO NOWHERE FAST!” The cartoon animals are full of personality, displaying all their emotions up front, with a goofiness that will get lots of laughs from young readers. It is a cautionary tale that could have turned preachy, but Saltzberg’s light touch gets an important message across with great, good humor.

**Lots of fun and a well-taught life lesson.** *(Picture book 3-9)*

**THE LOUDEST BARK**
**Schwartz, Gail Marlene & Gagnon, Lucie**
Illus. by Ayotte, Amélie
Rebel Mountain Press (36 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 15, 2021
978-1-989996-03-4

With the support of a caring babysitter, a child longing for connection and self-expression fulfills their dream of owning a puppy.

Quiet fills the house where Simone lives with their busy parents. It’s the complete opposite of the noisy house across the street, where Simone’s new babysitter, Chloe, lives with her pregnant dog, Piano. Amid the color and bright energy at Chloe’s, Simone has a blast playing dress-up in the costumes she designs for TV and theater productions. When Simone falls in love with a “dazzling” silk dress, they dream of wearing it to the street, where Simone’s new babysitter, Chloe, lives with her pregnant dog, Piano. Amid the color and bright energy at Chloe’s, Simone has a blast playing dress-up in the costumes she designs for TV and theater productions. When Simone falls in love with a “dazzling” silk dress, they dream of wearing it. Narrated by Simone, the text never indicates pronouns for Simone or explicitly discusses their gender identity. However, sharing their true name plays a significant role in the story’s positive resolution. Characters use Simone’s old name several times before Simone introduces their true name, but once they know it, neither Chloe nor Simone’s parents hesitate to use it. Illustrations depict Simone, their dad, and Chloe with brown skin and dark hair, and Simone’s mom with pale skin and blond hair. The use of color in Simone’s surroundings matches their shifting emotions, capturing sadness with muted shades and happiness with bright, contrasting ones. Ultimately Simone’s feelings are centered in the narrative, and the resolution emphasizes the joy of belonging and self-expression.

A sweet and upbeat celebration. *(Picture book 4-7)*

**RED**
**Seeger, Laura Vaccaro**
Illus. by the author
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-8234-4712-1

This companion to Caldecott Honor book *Green* (2012) and its sequel, *Blue* (2018), explores the color red as symbol of our conflicted responses to nature.

A fox family travels; one young member falls behind. This fox—“lost red”—sleeps alone, then wanders. A blue pickup, an ominously large box in its bed, stops at a railroad crossing, headlights spotlighting the fox. A red-haired White girl plays in a fenced yard as the fox peers in. As in previous volumes, two-word, occasionally rhyming phrases and small die cuts characterize this work. The die cuts operate less interactively here than in the earlier titles, often simply picking out a shape or bits of color in previous or succeeding spreads. A notable exception is “rust red”: die cuts delineate three ominous nails poking from an a board. A page turn reimagines those die cuts as seed heads, but text—“blood red”—and the fox’s cut paw will evoke readers’ empathetic pangs. Gorgeous, autumnal red-golds visually narrate the fox’s unwitting incursions into a rural landscape studded with human-made barriers: a chain-link fence bordering a lush illustrations, sensitive interconnections, and subtle visual clues unite all three outstanding volumes. *(Picture book 3-7)*

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ORDINARY THINGS**
**Sekaninová, Štěpánka**
Illus. by Chupíková, Eva
Aalbatros Media (96 pp.)
$16.95 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-80-00-06128-3

A highlight-reel history of shoes, skates, toilets, toothbrushes, and other common household items.

In a breezy style reflective of this Czech import’s slapdash approach, Sekaninová offers a mix of basic facts, debatable factoids (“The first ever double bed was made in Ancient Rome”), and not-so-buried assumptions: “But what did the first perfume look like? And who was the first woman to use it?” Not to mention a Eurocentric focus that only rarely widens to include other cultures or continents, and outright errors like a shoutout to eyeglass-lens maker “Alexander Spinosa” (actually Alessandro della Spina, who’s not definitively their inventor) and a present-tense reference to an 18-karat-gold toilet that hasn’t actually been available to view (and use!) in New York’s Guggenheim
Museum for a few years. Except that everyone in her human cast, from prehistoric squatters on, has pale skin, Chupiková does better with galleries of small but exactly detailed images of archaeological artifacts, dolls, umbrellas, related inventions like zippers and coat hangers that expand the general scope beyond the main 11 items, and historical costume (mostly European) of diverse eras. Surveys of inventions are hardly rare, but by sticking to the everyday, this is worth note as a natural companion to more technology-oriented flyovers. There is not a bibliography or even any scrap of sourcing to indicate where Sekaninová found her information.  

*Has a certain appeal for its art and premise, but it's sloppy in both research and assumptions.*  

**(Nonfiction. 9-11)**

**A SNAKE, A FLOOD, A HIDDEN BABY**

*Bible Stories for Children*

Shalev, Meir  
Illus. by Luzzati, Emanuele  
Trans. by Kursban, Ilana  
Kalaniot Books (48 pp.)  
$21.99 | Sep. 21, 2021  
978-0-9988527-9-9

Almost every picture in this Israeli import looks like a celebration.

The animals on Noah’s Ark could be having a wild rum- 
pus. In fact, all the animals in this collection of Bible stories smile more often than they do in nature. Even when Eve is plucking fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, a crowd of beasts gathers around enthusiastically to watch. The darkest scenes in the book tend to be accompanied by moments of joy. The chapter about Joseph climaxes with Joseph presumed dead and his father weeping, but the final paragraph begins: “This is all very important and all very interesting. But what is far more important and interesting is that after many years, Joseph and his brothers met again.” Shalev seems to have selected the six stories for their drama and left out anything that isn’t brisk and entertaining. The story of Noah, for example, omits the raven. But he sometimes adds tiny, enchanting details. His description of the abandoned Tower of Babel says that “the angels would play hide-and-seek in it, and birds built their nests inside.” Luzzati’s illustrations use so many bright colors that even Joseph’s sale into slavery looks faintly joyous, with the merchants, at least, smiling. Both the author and the artist seem to take delight from the simple power of the stories. Most human characters have paper-white skin and rosy cheeks.

*This book is less a religious experience than a celebration of storytelling.*  

**(Cosmology. 6-11)**

Meet the Homework Squad, four very different and racially diverse students with one thing in common: their ADHD diagnosis.

In this how-to book for elementary students, the squad learns that while ADHD makes them more creative and spontaneous, it also causes them to struggle in class and stay focused. Sick of struggling, the kids research and test over 100 study skills to help their ADHD and write an ultra-official guidebook to help others. Divided into 11 easy-to-follow chapters, the book covers different areas of school and learning like reading, math, note-taking, and procrastination. Within each area, the book breaks down common challenges students with ADHD face and gives readers multiple tricks for managing each challenge. The tips and tricks, appropriately, are not one size fits all, so readers are encouraged to try them all and keep track of what works. Author and neuroscientist Shifrin breaks down the importance of these learning tools in a concise format with Bishop’s colorful pops of illustrations adding to its accessibility. By learning the pros and cons of their diagnosis early, readers will appreciate the importance of these learning tools and apply them to all aspects of their lives. All adults working with children should have a copy of this book, not only for their students, but to understand how they can put strategies and accommodations in place to provide an equitable environment for all.

*An important, affirming, and beneficial resource.*  

**(Nonfiction. 8-12)**

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*All adults working with children should have a copy of this book.*

*THE HOMEWORK SQUAD’S ADHD GUIDE TO SCHOOL SUCCESS*

Shifrin, Joshua  
Illus. by Bishop, Tracey Nishimura  
Magination/American Psychological Association (128 pp.)  
$14.99 | Aug. 3, 2021  
978-1-4338-3375-5

What do animals do when children are sleeping?

Featuring creatures young children are likely to know, this book has the answers. Each spread’s left-hand page describes the animal’s daytime activities, while the right focuses on nighttime behaviors. Realistic watercolor illustrations highlight the animals and, for the night scenes, incorporate the midnight blue introduced on the endpapers. Golden moonlight encircles sleeping creatures, including a frog, ducks, and horses. Young readers will easily recognize the brilliant fluttering daytime butterflies and see children feeding a pet goldfish or playing with another pet. The three or four couplets on each spread end...
in rhyme (with a fun bush/shushbb pair) or near rhyme (down/ found, sleep/feet, line/eye, safe/llate). Given the couplets and rhyme, readers may expect a rhythmic read, but the lack of consistent meter makes smooth reading a challenge. However, unusual nighttime facts are a plus. “With tiny clawed feet, [a butterfly] hangs upside-down, / making it difficult to be found.” Goldfish sleep with their eyes open since they have no eyelids; ducks sometimes sleep in a line, with the first and last guarding the rest; bees’ antennae droop. (Unfortunately, both illustration and text incorrectly imply that bees’ comb is aligned horizontally instead of vertically) Although the story ends with a bedtime message, most listeners will probably not be sleepy at the end. Recurring child characters present White, with one scene including racially diverse friends.

This may not encourage sleep, but it probably will prompt more questions about animals after dark. (author’s note)  

*Informational picture book. 3-6*

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**I SAW A BEAUTIFUL WOODPECKER**  
Skibinski, Michal  
*Illus. by Bankroft, Ala*  
*Trans. by Marciniak, Eliza*  
*Prestel (128 pp.)*  
*$16.95 | Oct. 5, 2021*  
*978-3-7913-7486-4*

Summer homework at the outbreak of war, beautifully illustrated.

In 1939, 8-year-old Michal is assigned to write one sentence a day during a summer vacation he spends in various locations around Warsaw. On July 16, he writes, “I went to church,” and on July 23, “I found a big caterpillar.” Each sentence is illustrated with a painting that spans a double-page spread showing the unpeopled scenery of Michal’s observations: a church window peeping over a shadowed stone wall; a caterpillar settled on a thick green stem. Greens (dark, dappled, or neon-bright) dominate in this initially idyllic summer. Between paintings, the complete pages of Michal’s notebook are photographically reproduced in Polish, with translations repeated below. Adult readers will know that Michal’s summer in 1939 Poland is about to go horribly wrong, but context for the shocking changes in his sentences (with the green forest now illustrated backlit with hellish flames) is provided only in a closing historical note. Michal’s notebook—a simple composition book, assigned as a school project—is immediately familiar, making the shock of war immediate. A schoolboy dutifully practices his handwriting on alternate-thickness ruled paper, recording the mundane observations of life: catching a wasp, the arrival of the housekeeper, hiding from planes, the sound of artillery. English text is small and low contrast. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

*If adults assist with historical context, an artistic and not-too-scary introduction to war’s onset. (Memoir. 7-10)*

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**THE UNIVERSE AND YOU**  
Slade, Suzanne  
*Illus. by Coleman, Stephanie Fizer*  
*Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)*  
*$16.99 | Aug. 5, 2021*  
*978-1-5341-1108-0*

While “you” sleep, the Earth spins and travels through space.

After a wordless spread showing the Earth in deep space, the story cuts to a brown-skinned child with puffy hair in bed hugging a stuffed astronaut toy. The bedroom is decorated in a planetary theme, and a caregiver smiles over the child as “Day-light dims. / Darkness tiptoes in. / You’re tucked in tight / for a warm, cozy night.” The next spread shows the house from the outside, with the starry night behind it, and the text zooms out as well, to the spinning of the Earth. As the pages turn, the Earth circles our sun, our sun swirls around the Milky Way, and the universe expands. Throughout these spreads, the universe is related to the child with reminders that all of this activity happens “while you still sleep, / dreaming even bigger dreams.” Finally, the sun peeks above the horizon, warming the Earth’s creatures, and “you” stir and rise, ready to play. Nicely textured, layered illustrations give an almost 3-D feel to the Earth floating in deep space. The text is composed of succinct verse that, from the beginning, effortlessly conveys the magical bedtime tone, though it ends on a relatively active note. Cozy, thought-provoking, and hypnotizing, this poetic pleaser will pair well with other soothing bedtime books but can also be read and discussed during an active time of day.

*Lovely and versatile. (notes) (Picture book. 3-8)*

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**MISS MEOW**  
Smith, Jane  
*Illus. by the author*  
*West Margin Press (32 pp.)*  
*$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021*  
*978-1-5132-8945-8*

A young girl plays pretend cat until someone breaks her favorite mouse toy.

Miss Meow, a young girl in a cat costume, believes she is a cat. She loves to cuddle and even purrs when scratched between her ears. As a hunter, she is swift at chasing her wheeled mouse toy. She hates to get wet and would rather lick herself clean than take a bath. Miss Meow even eats her snacks from a food bowl on the floor. She scratches when Felix, her little brother, pulls her tail, and she protects her things. When Miss Meow discovers her favorite toy mouse is destroyed, she yowls at Felix in anger, throwing a tantrum. But Felix notices a mysterious trail of paw prints that are not Miss Meow’s, and soon the whole family works together to make a new furry friend. This is a sweet book about the joys of play, imagination, and animal friendship. It also touches on familiar social-emotional experiences, like getting angry, sharing, and getting along with siblings.
The illustrations are bold and expressive, adding clues to how the mystery intruder came in. Miss Meow and her family have fair skin and different shades of brown hair.

**A sweet story for cat lovers.** *(Picture book. 3-5)*

**THE DEEPEST DIG**

*Smith, Mark David*

*Illus. by Snowden-Fine, Lily*

*Owlkids Books (32 pp.)*

$18.95 | Aug. 15, 2021

978-1-77147-419-1

Undeterred by scoffing grown-ups, a child unearths a prehistoric treasure in his backyard.

His parents laugh at Caden’s news that he’s found a treasure sticking out of the ground. In front of Caden’s whole class, his teacher rashly vows to eat his hat if there’s anything there. But with help from his neighbor Martha and the winch on her truck, Caden astounds the skeptics by determinedly pulling a pile of big bones out of the ground and, with a little guesswork, assembling a fossil mammoth: “Surprise!” Several extra and out-of-place bones in the climactic reveal will raise chuckles, as will closing news stories about how, while the skeleton, which has been sold to a museum for a “record price,” will be going on tour with Caden’s family, a certain teacher will be sponsoring a hat-eating contest to raise funds for a paleontology club. The sparsely told tale, inspired by a similar actual discovery, may in turn inspire young readers to use light and shadow to convey mood. The messaging around domestic violence is straightforward and plainspoken, while Billy’s emotional arc leans into the magical; another family storyline is wrapped up tidily.

**Score one for quiet persistence.** *(Picture book. 6-8)*

**THE HIDEAWAY**

*Smy, Pam*

*Illus. by the author*

*Pavilion Children’s (256 pp.)*

$19.95 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-1-84-365479-7

Thirteen-year-old Billy finds an unexpected refuge in this can’t-handle witnessing his mother’s abusive relationship with her boyfriend, with whom they live. Doing his best to be unseen—something he has far too much practice in—Billy escapes in the night to All Souls’ graveyard, where he’d found a tiny concrete hut from World War II. When he’s discovered the next day by an old man who has come to clean up the cemetery in preparation for a mysterious event, they strike a deal—if Billy helps, the man will stay quiet for a couple of days, but then Billy must go home. Billy loves and misses his mother and hates to cause her suffering. His emotions are juxtaposed with the empathy he feels for the individuals each gravestone represents. The text switches from the old-fashioned serif typeface of Billy’s post-departure chapters to modern, sans serif for those following his mother. The frantic need to find her son breaks her out of abuse-imposed isolation, gaining her the support of neighbors and (in contrast to her previous call for help for herself) the police. Love, loneliness, and grief are portrayed in grayscale illustrations, many full-page spreads, that expertly use light and shadow to convey mood. The messaging around domestic violence is straightforward and plainspoken, while Billy’s emotional arc leans into the magical; another family storyline is wrapped up tidily.

**Atmospherically heartfelt and cathartic.** *(Fabulism. 9-13)*

**SONGS ON THE VANILLA TRAIL**

*African Lullabies and Nursery Rhymes From East and Southern Africa*

*Soussana, Nathalie*

*Illus. by Attiogbé, Magali*

*Trans. by Lytle, David & Roulston, Hélène*

*The Secret Mountain (80 pp.)*

$16.95 | Oct. 1, 2021

978-2-925108-70-2

A collection of 25 lullabies and nursery rhymes from countries and island nations in southeastern Africa is captured on CD and in print.

The book is more of a companion guide to the audio renditions of the songs than a stand-alone read. The first part simply introduces the songs’ titles in the language of origin, the country or countries from which they hail, and, in English, a dominant verse or chorus from the song. These spreads are illustrated with scenes reflecting the song’s themes, using bold primary colors as well as white, black, and green. On these pages, brown-skinned people dance, swim, cuddle babies, work, play, and sleep, while stylized animals, countryside, and plant life adorn other spreads. A second section of the book, with white text set against a rich blue background, explains the unique history and cultures of the region of the world stretching from Kenya to South Africa and including the so-called Vanilla Islands. A final section, on yellow paper, offers detailed background on each song in the collection and includes more of the lyrics in the original languages alongside English translations. Readers are sure to learn new facts about this part of the world while appreciating its mix of global cultures. The book is beautifully produced on thick, matte paper, and the diversity of musical styles produced is impressive.

**A valuable and thorough resource.** *(Picture book/music. 2-7)*
“Scenes of Africa emphasize the vast savannas that giraffes call home.”

**THE GIRL WHO LOVED GIRAFFES**

No girls allowed is a phrase Anne Innis Dagg has heard her whole life.

As a child, Dagg, a White Canadian, was told that a girl’s future was to be a good wife and mother. She could not play hockey with her brothers, and she was discouraged from studying science. When, as a young woman, she had saved up enough money to travel to Africa to study giraffes, her lifelong love, people from all over the globe told her they would not support her. Determined, Dagg left everything she knew to undertake a two-month journey to South Africa to document her beloved animals. Back in Canada, married and with her doctorate, Dagg couldn’t find a job as a full-time professor because men said she was unqualified and that married women should not work out of their homes. Dagg sued. She began writing about the inequality women faced, both in academia and in life in general. Over 50 years later, Dagg returned to Africa to help conservationists prevent the extinction of giraffes. The text is spare and straightforward, and each double-page spread features a footnote with further and explained facts and definitions. Several pages include letters to and from Dagg; unfortunately, nothing in the backmatter indicates whether these are real or imagined. Scenes of Africa emphasize the vast savannas that giraffes call home. Thisdale’s exquisite and detailed illustrations are so clear they almost seem like photographs. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A reminder that many appreciate you even if those in charge do not. (author’s note, glossary, further reading) (Picture book/biography. 8-12)

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**LITTLE BEE’S FLOWER**

A little bee has an important job to do.

It is the first day of spring, and Queen Bee instructs the hive to find some pollen and nectar. Little Bee wants to do the very best, but there is one problem: She doesn’t know what a flower is. She’s too nervous to ask the queen, so she sets off with a notebook on a fact-finding mission. Baby birds chirp that flowers smell sweet. Having jotted all that information down (“many colorz…smellz like a fruit salad”), Little Bee is confident she can find a flower. She buzzes straight to the park. Alas, all she finds is a swatting hand. But something soft cushions her fall. Little Bee just may be victorious after all. Young readers will recognize Little Bee’s initial fear of confessing her ignorance. New situations can be daunting, and youngsters are thrown into many. But Little Bee forges her own path to complete the task and provides a model. Souva’s textured nature renderings and softened tones complement this little bee’s determined journey. A squat trim mirrors Little Bee’s size, reminding readers that she is small but mighty.

Gently models finding courage and asking for help. (additional facts) (Picture book. 3-6)
“Water activist Tenasco (Anishinabe) effectively uses Nibi’s dilemma to illustrate a larger point.”

*Nibi’s Water Song*

*Bear is a Bear*

*Stutzman, Jonathan*

*Illus. by Santat, Dan*

*Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (48 pp.)*

*$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021*

*978-0-06-288051-2*

In this ode to the timeless pleasures of cherished playthings, a toy bear accompanies a child through myriad experiences.

Bear is not just a bear. Bear is a warm, soft pillow, a tissue when necessary, and a willing and equal partner in play. Bear takes on these various roles with gusto, depicted, through the eyes of a child, as a real, large bear with expressive features and anthropomorphic body language. Humor and sentiment abound as Bear’s reactions elevate the simple yet touching text. Throughout the scenes, the mutual adoration between Bear and child is apparent, and their bond sees them through all kinds of moments, from energetic pirate play to snuggling together during a scary storm. As the child ages, Bear’s necessity fades, and it is relegated to an old trunk and forgotten. Some time later, remembered once more, Bear starts a new friendship after being introduced to the next generation, making its journey come full circle. The repetitive beginning of each sentence—“Bear is…”—reinforces the soothing, reassuring tone of this gentle story. Bear’s rich, golden brown fur exudes warmth and comfort while embodying the repeating refrain: “Bear is a bear full of love.” The heavy use of white space on several pages puts the focus on the pair’s relationship and reflects how they are content in a world of their own. Both the original child and Bear’s new human friend have straight, black hair and pale skin. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Will have adults and young readers alike reflecting on the indispensable natures of their own favorite stuffies. (Picture book. 4-8)

*We Want Snow! A Wintry Chant*

*Swenson, Jamie A.*

*Illus. by Boon, Emilie*

*Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)*

*$16.99 | Sep. 15, 2021*

*978-1-53411-075-5*

A trio of children describe the delights of winter...all they need is snow:

A brown-skinned child with close-cropped black hair joins two tights-clad children in long coats, one with olive skin and black braids, the other with pink skin and reddish hair, on a fallen log in a park outside their apartment building. The glut of wintertime play, both outdoors (sledding, snowmen, ice skating, snowballs) and in- (cocoa, a cozy fire, comforters on a bed, stories). The pictures on these pages show the three enjoying time together, with the added magic of some friendly wildlife and fanciful background details that include a castle and an igloo. Back on the log, faces even longer and unneeded winter gear strewn about, the three are startled by sudden flakes. They have snow up to their ankles, shins, knees, and chin (their dachshund’s, at least)! But now: “Snow in our hats / Snow in our hair / Snow in our socks and underwear!” And so the chant for spring begins, the rear copyright page hinting at a possible sequel. Though the meter isn’t consistent, the repeated chorus is catchy, and everyone reading this will recognize kids’ fickle attitudes toward the weather and seasons.

A bouncy celebration of winter. (Picture book. 3-7)

*Nibi’s Water Song*

*Tenasco, Sunshine*

*Illus. by Chief Lady Bird*

*Lee & Low Books (32 pp.)*

*$18.95 | Oct. 12, 2021*

*978-1-64379-482-2*

An enthusiastic but thirsty Anishinabe girl and her French bulldog search everywhere looking for clean water to drink.

After playing outside, Nibi and her dog go inside for a nice, cool drink of water. Brown, sludgy water pours from the tap. They run to the river, but even the fish says, “You can’t drink this dirty water!” Nibi and the dog go to the next town and run along a street with “big, shiny houses.” She knocks on doors until a lady hands Nibi a small bottle of water. But the water’s gone too quickly! She tries again, at that house and the others. “KNock, KNOck, KNOck, KNOck, KNOck!” But no one answers. She paints a sign: “Water Is Life / I Am Thirsty.” Soon, her friends join her. They make their own signs, and Nibi’s quest becomes a peaceful protest. (Even her dog carries a sign: “WooF!”) They march in the town with the big, shiny houses, and its people join in, and finally, lawmakers listen. Before long, the river is clean, and clean water runs from the taps. Water activist Tenasco (Anishinabe) effectively uses Nibi’s dilemma to illustrate a larger point. Nibi’s song—“I am thirsty, thirsty Nibi / and I need water!”—acts as an urgent refrain. Lively, colorful illustrations from Chief Lady Bird (Chippewa and Potawatomi) add to the energy of the story, incorporating stylized fish and flower motifs into the clean-lined illustrations of the brown-skinned, pigtailed girl.

One gutsy girl leads the way. (author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book. 3-6)
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL STORY

Tjønn, Brynjulf Jung
Illus. by Torseter, Øyvind
Trans. by Dickson, Kari
Enchanted Lion Books (48 pp.)
$17.95 | Jul. 20, 2021
978-1-59270-350-0

A girl flies through the night sky to bring her dead brother back to life.

“Who is that running in the middle of the night? / Oh, it’s Vera.” Vera steps out a window, eyes closed, into the snow. She glides forward, airborne, ethereal in her “light and billowy” nightgown. Her long hair flows out behind her, ensnaring a boy in pajamas from a tree branch. His eyes, like Vera’s, are closed. Vera’s hair, still flowing behind her, cradles and carries him as they fly through landscapes of folklore and ghouls. Torseter’s fine-lined drawings are loose-handed, minimalist, and eerie. Tree roots in underground caves reach out; skeletons nestle; fine-lined drawings are loose-handed, minimalist, and eerie.

A delicate, unnerving meditation. (Picture book. 5-10)

STEALING HOME

Torres, J.
Illus. by Namisato, David
Kids Can (112 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-4231-5334-0

Sandy and his family, Japanese Canadians, experience hatred and incarceration during World War II.

Sandy Saito loves baseball, and the Vancouver Asahi ballplayers are his heroes. But when they lose in the 1941 semifinals, Sandy’s dad calls it a bad omen. Sure enough, in December 1941, Japan bombs Pearl Harbor in the U.S. The Canadian government begins to ban Japanese people from certain areas, moving them to “dormitories” and setting a curfew. Sandy wants to spend time with his father, but as a doctor, his dad is busy, often sneaking out past curfew to work. One night Papa is taken to “where he [is] needed most,” and the family is forced into an internment camp. Life at the camp isn’t easy, and even with some of the Asahi players playing ball there, it just isn’t the same. Trying to understand and find joy again, Sandy struggles with his new reality and relationship with his father. Based on the true experiences of Japanese Canadians and the Vancouver Asahi team, this graphic novel is a glimpse of how their lives were affected by WWII. The end is a bit abrupt, but it’s still an inspiring and sweet look at how baseball helped them through hardship. The illustrations are all in a sepia tone, giving it an antique look and conveying the emotions and struggles. None of the illustrations of their experiences are overly graphic, making it a good introduction to this upsetting topic for middle-grade readers.

An emotional, much-needed historical graphic novel. (afterword, further resources) (Graphic historical fiction. 9-12)

HOOKY

Tur, Miriam Bonastre
Illus. by the author
Etch/HMH (384 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-358-46830-1

Twin witches and their friends encounter magic and mishaps in this story based on a popular WEBTOON series.

When 12-year-old witch twins Dorian and Dani Wytte miss the bus on the first day of school, it’s only the beginning of their troubles; the bus has teleported to a secret location. Not wanting to fess up to the mishap, the siblings head to their Aunt Hilde’s in hopes that she’ll be their tutor for the year and not tell their parents what happened. Instead, they uncover a plot by a community of evil witches to take power. Together with new friends, including a soothsayer, a princess, and some town kids, the twins—now suspected of being traitors—must prove their innocence and get to the bottom of everything. The central conflict plays with the ideas of good and evil as well as biases and assumptions. Many of the large cast of characters grapple with self-doubts and questions of self-worth. All the young protagonists have something to prove, and together they begin to grow. Tur’s episodic and fast-paced plotting plus a cliffhanger ending will keep readers engaged and itching for the next volume. The energetic, manga-style art matches the energy of the characters, and the dramatic color palette adds to the strong sense of this witchy world. The panel-breaking compositions are fun and support the pacing. All major characters present White.

Full of magical adventure and heart. (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)
BORN BEHIND BARS
Venkatraman, Padma
Nancy Paulsen Books (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-593-11247-2

A young boy is forced to leave the Chennai jail that is the only home he’s ever known.

When Kabir is deemed too old to stay and is sent out into the world all alone, separated from his wrongfully imprisoned mother, he decides to search for the family of the father he has never met to try to save his mother from her unjustly long sentence. Armed with faith, instinctive wits, and the ability to run fast, Kabir escapes danger and meets Rani, a teenage girl from the marginalized Kurava, or Roma, people who is traveling with her parrot. She teaches Kabir, who has a Hindu mother and a Muslim father, about caste dynamics and survival on the streets. She accompanies him to Bengaluru, where Kabir eventually meets his paternal grandparents. Along the way, their experiences reveal the invisibility of low-caste people in Indian society, tensions between neighboring states over water supplies, and the unexpected kindness of helpful strangers. Kabir’s longing for freedom and justice underscores bittersweet twists and turns that resolve in an upbeat conclusion, celebrating his namesake, a saint who sought to unify Muslims and Hindus.

Kabir engages readers by voicing his thoughts, vulnerability, and optimism: While his early physical environment was confined within prison walls, his imagination was nourished by stories and songs. This compelling novel develops at a brisk pace, advanced by evocative details and short chapters full of action.

A gritty story filled with hope and idealism. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

THE WOLF’S CURSE
Vitalis, Jessica
Greenwillow Books (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-06-306741-7

A soul-ferrying Wolf tries to convince a boy to take up her mantle.

In the France-inspired town of Bouge-by-the-Sea, 12-year-old White boy Gauge is forced to leave the village. Fleeing his pursuers, Gauge stumbles upon unlikely allies in the form of a sickly blacksmith, who suffers from a lung ailment brought about by his occupation, and his daughter, Roux, both of whom are cued as Black. As Roux and Gauge become friends and bond over their experiences with grief, they begin to suspect that neither the Wolf nor their town’s death rituals are quite what they seem—and they are determined to unearth some answers. The Wolf’s present-tense, first-person omniscient narration is filled with snark (as well as parenthetical asides and occasional footnotes directly addressing readers) that provides a grim sort of levity. Accessible and intriguing worldbuilding, particularly around the Wolf’s backstory, will pique readers’ interests, as will larger questions about life, death, truth, and tradition.

Thoughtful, creative, and engaging. (Fantasy. 8-12)

BEAR WITH ME
Vola, Noemi
Illus. by the author
Eerdmans (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-0-8028-5578-7

An unnamed narrator describes the experience of an unwanted visitor that arrives in the form of a large black bear.

A bear enters a home and wreaks havoc. Politely asking him to leave; attempting to run away (even to another planet); and surrendering and offering to become his lunch: Nothing works. Sleeping, commonplace activities, and spending time with friends are disrupted and become challenging, since the bear “never leaves me alone.” The grayscale line drawings feature heavily saturated black paint for the bear, who dominates most spreads, and an exaggerated scale: Most of the time, the bear looms massively over everything but, in one illustration, is small enough to fit in a sink. The text also leans on hyperbole to make its point, describing the bear with “his super stupid fur” as “the very worst bear on the whole entire planet” and, in the next sentence, the most odious presence by using a series of 19 adjectives in a row (fat, naughty, party-pooping, and so forth). The book, an Italian import, presents the bear as a metaphor for troubling feelings; despair or grief are likely, though it’s never explicitly named. The story’s only resolution is a spread showing that many people have an unwanted bear to bear. All humans are depicted as White.

More concept piece than story, this book will likely resonate with readers living with their own bears. (Picture book. 4-10)
“The writing is lush and lyrical, and the textured, earth-toned illustrations expertly capture Hazel’s world.”

LITTLE WITCH HAZEL

A Year in the Forest
Wahl, Phoebe
Illus. by the author
Tundra Books (96 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-7352-6489-2

A miniature witch tends to a forest over the course of a year.

Little Witch Hazel lives in Mosswood Forest in a home at the base of a tree trunk. Her distinctive personality is fleshed out vividly throughout this thoroughly satisfying set of four stories, one for each season. Stoic, diligent, and giving, Hazel nurtures an orphaned owl egg in spring; is convinced by friends to take a day off in summer; helps a lonely troll in autumn; and is saved from a storm in winter by Otis, the owl she once mothered. The detailed, evocative worldbuilding will have readers lingering. They’ll meet a friendly and funny (especially the chipmunk with the toothache) community of anthropomorphic creatures, such as Wendell the sailing frog and Mousepappa (who wears the apron and takes care of the babies). Many creatures are fantastical (dryads, goblins). Refreshingly, nothing is sanitized: Little Witch Hazel is not gaunt and whimsical; she’s curvaceous, sturdy, and strong. She even has hairy legs; she has more important things to do than shave, such as serve as midwife to Mrs. Rabbit. The writing is lush and lyrical (“milky clouds...hung low”), and the textured, earth-toned illustrations expertly capture Hazel’s world, both cozy (her tiny home) and gloriously wild (the forest she tends to). Hazel is White; the beasts of all shapes and sizes” readers meet include fantastical creatures of color and one who uses a wheelchair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

More Mosswood, please. (Picture book. 4-10)

BETWEEN THE LINES
Ward, Lindsay
Illus. by the author
Two Lions (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-4420-2690-1

A vibrant neighborhood loses its color, literally, as the community becomes fractured.

Color is not a subtle metaphor in this story of a time when “the colors were swept from our street,” told by an unnamed boy with pale skin. Initially, loose-lined illustrations depict a lively city block in bright hues, but as the “sounds became quieter,” the colors begin to fade. Then, after a violent storm of jagged yellow streaks and bursts of fiery sparks, the color is completely gone. Not only are the city and its residents now composed only of cartoony black lines, but on the ground there is a dark rupture (another line) that divides the neighborhood. In one illustration, the boy stands on one side of the split while a girl with dark skin stands on the other. Is the rift a racial one? The next illustration shows the same children indoors, waving at each other through their windows. Does this “empty sadness” that lasts a year represent the Covid-19 pandemic? Is the emphasis on lines a commentary on society’s disconnectedness? Unfortunately, this year any of these interpretations could be true, and the myriad possibilities dilute a clear message. Nevertheless, the boy decides to do the hard work of clearing the rubble the storm left behind, and as neighbors join in to help, smiles and laughter return, bringing predictably the color back.

Mixed metaphors cloud the power of this familiar message. (Picture book. 4-8)

LIBERTY’S CIVIL RIGHTS ROAD TRIP
Waters, Michael W.
Illus. by Tadgell, Nicole
Flyaway Books (32 pp.)
$18.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-947888-19-7

On an interfaith, family-based road trip, a young Black girl visits important landmarks of the civil rights movement.

Liberty is looking forward to seeing the Edmund Pettus Bridge, but there are many stops before Selma. During the hours on the bus, Liberty plays with her friend Abdullah. The first stop is in Jackson, Mississippi, at the home of voting rights activist Medgar Evers. In Glendora, Mississippi, the group stops to remember Emmett Till. The next day, the group quietly remembers Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the site of his assassination at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. Finally, after stops at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham and Dr. King’s Montgomery home, the group reaches the bridge in Selma, Alabama, where they march and remember those who marched from Selma to Montgomery decades ago. Based on a true story of road trips organized by the author and attended by faith leaders and their families, this story highlights the relationship that links present generations and past. Though the dialogue between the children and adults feels a bit contrived, the focus on Liberty’s perspective during the tour of discovery allows readers to imagine the courage and sacrifice of those who came before. Each site introduction is necessarily brief and somewhat superficial; endnotes offer more details. Tadgell’s delicate illustrations capture warm relationships and diverse identities and personalities, juxtaposing light color in the present with black-and-white images of the past.

A unique and valuable perspective. (Picture book. 4-8)
The Rabbi and the Painter

Two distinguished Venetians, one a rabbi and one a painter of Christian images, might have been friends.

Rabbi Judah Areyeh, also known as Rabbi Leon of Modena, and Jacobo Robusti, famous as Tintoretto, were contemporaries in late-16th-century Venice. In a story that imagines their chance encounter and friendship, Rabbi Leon is depicted as atypically curious about the world outside the Jewish ghetto and learns to speak Italian. Tintoretto, who paints with an emphasis on emotion rather than the conventional rules of perspective, has been commissioned to paint a scene of the Last Supper for a church. In this imagined relationship, the rabbi shares his knowledge of the Passover Seder with the receptive painter. The 1594 painting that results is accepted by the church as a masterpiece. The text focuses more on Tintoretto’s techniques than on the learned Rabbi Leon, and the cartoon illustrations are only a simplistic view of Venice, with blues and reds predominating. Readers may ponder the possibilities or the probabilities of the story. The subject matter—Jewish-Christian friendship—is certainly of historical and current importance. However, the picture-book format aims for too young an audience for a substantive treatment. Readers wishing to see an accurate reproduction of Tintoretto’s painting will need to seek elsewhere.

Jew and Christian work together in this superficial imagined story. (historical notes, sources) (Picture book 6-9)

Hungry for the Arts

Poems To Chomp On

Are you hungry for the arts? “Choose buffets or a-la-carte. / Music, / dance, / drama, / art!”

Although many of the poems herein really encompass several arts, a color-coded circle at the beginning of each poem identifies the featured topic. Poems with a green dot for drama include the (very busy) jungle-, pirate-, and alien-themed “When I’m...,” with plenty of Rs to roll and rhymes to play; “A Dramatic Ride” reenactment of a “ride [on] the Loop-de-Loop, the curviest coaster”; and “Move Into Drama,” which offers movement exercises to “make... / roles seem real.” One dance poem creates silly rhymes to bring sports moves to the dance floor by suggesting “basketball with a teacup pup,” “hockey with a mallard duck,” and “soccer with a lone star tick,” and readers will giggle their way through “The Whammy-Roo,” a new dance demonstrated by two White kids, one nondisabled and one who uses a wheelchair. Creative poetry formats include an acrostic, one all about the rhythm written with musical quarter and eighth notes, another defining musical terms using creative font manipulation, and an ode to shapes in art. “Circle, where would I be... / If you left me? Where would I even start...?” Bright cartoon illustrations starring animals, robots, dinosaurs, and a multiracial ensemble of children fairly scream fun and encourage active, creative participation in the arts. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A creative invitation to sample (and cook up) a smorgasbord of art, drama, dance, and music. (glossary) (Picture book/poetry 5-10)

On the Line

To be a team player, sometimes you need to think creatively.

Young Jackson Moore comes from a family of hockey players who swap goal stories at dinner. Grandpa tells Jackson, “You’ve got Moore in your blood. You’ll be great!” But Jackson isn’t so sure, and his first efforts leave him flat on the ice. The other kids think he’s too big and uncoordinated for their team. But they have problems of their own—their mismatched gear won’t prevent them from competing in the Winterfest Tournament. Jackson, it seems, is good at making plans. His first effort to become a better skater doesn’t pan out, but then he puts his talents toward supporting the team with the gear they need. He finds his true calling and acceptance by the team. Scratchy, bright cartoon illustrations portray a diverse cast of characters, from the team to the audience in the stands. Jackson and his family present White; the coach has brown skin. Bright swathes of greens and blues are punctuated by oranges and yellows, power- ing a vibrant, eye-catching palette. While it’s not entirely clear why matching gear is needed for the tournament, the plotdevice facilitates Jackson’s character development and sets the stage for an encouraging story for young readers who struggle with shyness and anxiety. An author’s note offers additional insight to the origin of Jackson’s story.

Believe in yourself, trust your talents, and find resilience in stories. (Picture book 4-7)
A new perspective combats a common childhood fear: the dark.

A young unnamed child greet the dark in the bedroom, personified by a rotund shadow with three hairs at the top of its head and droopy eyes. The child lists the many ways the dark brings uncertainty. “You keep me wide awake and worrying; what will you do once I’m asleep? / I hear the creaks you make around the house. It makes me feel helpless and alone.” The spare text gently narrates as the kid declares, “I’m tired of being afraid of you. Tonight, can we talk?” Dark purple and blue hues saturate each detailed illustration as the child acknowledges the “good things” the dark also provides. A menagerie of animals playing in the twilight and dreamy scenes of the sky attest to how the dark facilitates life for nocturnal creatures and rest for others. The child then offers a hand to the shadow with an invitation: “Let’s be friends.” In subsequent pages, the child models ways readers can interact with the dark: “play imaginary games”; “count sheep”; “practice breathing”; and “listen to music.” Eventually, and with the help of a night light, the child concludes, “I’m sure we can be friends,” and watches Dark, no longer an object of fear, head back into the closet. The young child presents as East Asian.

This tale compassionately guides young readers to face their fears. (author’s note) (Picture book. 3-5)

a story within a story, this third installment brings the penguin caretaker’s tale to a downbeat resolution. An all-White human cast lessens the impact of the story’s message that everyone is “chosen” in some way. While the silly humor has moments of charm, it loses appeal when it relies upon mocking foreign accents and perpetuating cultural stereotypes, as with the fortuneteller who lives in a caravan and reads nonsensical, made-up tarot cards. Intermittent illustrations appear throughout the text to depict moments of drama.

A hit-and-miss trilogy closer. (Fantasy. 8-12)

The author recounts a formative childhood experience that continues to inspire her today. Born to Hmong refugees, Kalia has only ever known the confines of the Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand. Even while playing with her cousins, reminders of the hardships of their life are always present. She overhears the aunties sharing their uncertainty and fear of the future. They are a people with no home country and are still trying to find peace. Kalia asks her father why they live behind a gate and wonders what lies beyond the fences that surround the camp. The next day they climb a tall tree, and he shows her the vast expanse around them, from familiar camp landmarks to distant mountains “where the sky meets earth.” This story of resilience and generational hope is told in an expressive, straightforward narrative style. The simplicity of the text adds a level of poignancy that moves readers to reflection. The layered and heavily textured illustrations complement the text while highlighting the humanity of the refugees and providing a quiet dignity to camp life. The military-like color palette of olive greens, golden yellows, and rich browns reinforces the guarded atmosphere but also represents the transitional period from winter to spring, a time ripe with anticipation and promise.

A visually striking, compelling recollection. (author’s note, glossary, map.) (Picture book/memoir. 5-9)
A family from another country moves into Evie’s neighborhood. Everyone warmly welcomes them except for one person who has a different perspective.

Evie, whose family is White and Jewish, is very curious about the Saids. The parents and child have dark brown skin and are Muslim. Evie’s parents confirm that the newcomers, refugees or immigrants, are similar to her own Jewish grandparents. Bimi, the kid in the Said family, is timid the first time he meets Evie. However, they quickly become friends. On moving day, Evie’s father, who wears a kippah, helps with carrying boxes, then everyone in the neighborhood contributes items to the new home. The neighbors, diverse in skin color, dress, age, and religion, gather around the Saids’ table for a festive meal that weekend. But Mrs. Monroe, a White woman, is missing. Both sets of parents, independently, try to explain to Evie and Bimi what may be behind the neighbor’s strange looks and behavior toward the Saids. Throughout the story, the Saids, albeit mostly on the receiving end of help, actively participate in shaping their world, including eventually winning over Mrs. Monroe with kindness and humor. Nayberg’s jewel-toned paintings play with perspective and angle, compositions and figuring emphasizing emotion rather than strict realism. An author’s note and instructions for making a stuffed bear conclude the book.

A lovely story about friendship, welcoming the other, and winning people’s hearts with kindness. (Picture book. 4–8)

WHERE’S BABY ELEPHANT?
Khodai, Ali
Illus. by the author
Tiny Owl (24 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 1, 2021
978-1-910328-68-2

Twice-folded illustrations hide multiple surprises in this very simple animal-themed search. Each recto opens out not once, but twice to reveal three separate scenes of animals with their young. Thanks to some clever use of shapes and colors in the folded illustrations, opening each flap works a magical-seeming transformation into a larger picture of an entirely different animal family. Thus a lion’s shaggy mane in one scene suddenly becomes the back half of a hedgehog in the next and then, lifting the last flap, most of an orangutan. Likewise, the inner curve of a shark’s mouth turns into the tip of a toucan’s beak and, when fully opened, a fox’s long tail. Dappled illustrations depict more or less realistic-looking animals, with the exception of genial smiles. The text—being the titular question followed by variations on “We don’t know!” and finally “She’s with her mommy!”—is really just along for the ride. The art is printed on sturdy stock, so the creases will survive plenty of the back-and-forth flexing they’re sure to receive.

An interactive thrill ride for young fans of now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t. (Picture book/novelty. 2–4)
“Balloons and confetti on almost every page evoke a festive party atmosphere.”

PIGS AT A PARTY
Wilhelm, Hans
Illus. by Salcedo, Erica
Chronicle Books (14 pp.)
$9.99 | Jun. 15, 2021
978-1-7972-0375-1

A birthday board book wrapped up with a big, pink polka-dot bow.
Embedded magnets seal with a satisfying click when the bow wraps around the lower half of the book. Within, the titular pigs act as stand-ins for exceedingly well-behaved children. They wear clothes; one has green-rimmed glasses; one has pigtails. Their only porcine features are their pointy ears, pink hides, and snouts. The other partygoers are an assortment of cartoon animals, with Bunny as the guest of honor. Rhyming text describes the party preparations (dressing in party clothes, wrapping presents) and party etiquette: “Three polite piggies greet each friend with care, / and no one plays rough at musical chairs.” When, inevitably, green punch is spilled, “cleaning up is a breeze.” Games are played; they dance, sing “Happy Birthday, dear Bunny” and then, “of course, eat cake!” The bright illustrations add details (pizza and pin the tail on the donkey) not mentioned in the text. Balloons and confetti on almost every page evoke a festive party atmosphere. The book is useful preparation for very young children who may need to know what to expect at a birthday party; or it can also be used to start conversations about party protocol.

Instructive but not preachy—a good model of polite manners and appropriate behavior. (Board book: 1-4)

LOTTERIA
More First Words / Más primeras palabras
Rodriguez, Patty & Stein, Ariana
Illus. by Reyes, Citlali
Lil’ Libros (22 pp.)
$9.99 | May 11, 2021
978-1-947971-56-1

A Spanish/English primer infused with an element of fun and games reinforces both language and visual skills.

The follow-up to Loteria: First Words (2018) brings even more vocabulary to young readers. Bright, clean graphics and easy-to-read labels adorn the double-page spreads. Each of the 10 vocabulary words that appear in the book are taken from the traditional Mexican lotería card game. The Spanish term (including the article, to indicate gender) is printed in bold type above the English translation against a colorful background on verso. On recto, the classic lotería cards have each been given a cute makeover that will appeal to young audiences—from the vibrant red ketchup bottle representing “la botella” to the fanged but friendly-looking black spider, or “la araña.” Readers who have enjoyed playing the lotería game will appreciate the cultural connection, and those who aren’t familiar with it yet will still delight in the appealing illustrations and novel vocabulary. Children will be engaged with the opportunity to learn words in two languages. The mermaid and musician are depicted with pale and very light brown skin, dark brown hair, and blue and green eyes, respectively.

This simple and sweet bilingual vocabulary book is a winner. (Board book: 6 mos.-4)

FAMILIES CAN
Saks, Dan
Illus. by Smart, Brooke
Rise x Penguin Workshop (24 pp.)
$7.99 | Apr. 6, 2021
978-0-593-22365-9

A celebration of the myriad permutations of the all-American family.

The book is similar in tone, design, and message to Saks and Smart’s earlier Families Belong (2020). The many families shown combine to represent a range of racial, ethnic, and gender configurations. The accompanying rhyming verses recognize each family’s circumstances, interests, and activities as unique strengths—not either right nor wrong, just different. In one family, the father lying on the floor to play a board game wears a turban. In another, the blond-bearded man has a pale complexion, the woman is dark-skinned with straight black hair, and the child looks like the woman. The accompanying text reads: “A family can look / The same or maybe not. / Dad’s from somewhere cold. / Mom’s from somewhere hot.” Another verse hints at a family’s refugee status: “Some families were born / In places far away / And traveled all together / To where it’s safe to play.” Single, same-gender, and separated or divorced parents are depicted as well as a multigenerational family. Children familiar with the Noodle Loaf podcast version of the song may be initially confused by the added verses and minor word changes, but the new verses fit the original song’s cadence. Playful, clear, uncluttered graphic illustrations match the text while adding details not mentioned in the verses.

“Your family’s a story / That’s unique and true. // A family is beautiful, / As beautiful as you.” Can’t argue with that! (Board book: 1-3)

PIGS AT A PARTY
Wilhelm, Hans
Ilus. by Salcedo, Erica
Chronicle Books (14 pp.)
$9.99 | Jun. 15, 2021
978-1-7972-0375-1

A birthday board book wrapped up with a big, pink polka-dot bow.

Embedded magnets seal with a satisfying click when the bow wraps around the lower half of the book. Within, the titular pigs act as stand-ins for exceedingly well-behaved children. They wear clothes; one has green-rimmed glasses; one has pigtails. Their only porcine features are their pointy ears, pink hides, and snouts. The other partygoers are an assortment of cartoon animals, with Bunny as the guest of honor. Rhyming text describes the party preparations (dressing in party clothes, wrapping presents) and party etiquette: “Three polite piggies greet each friend with care, / and no one plays rough at musical chairs.” When, inevitably, green punch is spilled, “cleaning up is a breeze.” Games are played; they dance, sing “Happy Birthday, dear Bunny” and then, “of course, eat cake!” The bright illustrations add details (pizza and pin the tail on the donkey) not mentioned in the text. Balloons and confetti on almost every page evoke a festive party atmosphere. The book is useful preparation for very young children who may need to know what to expect at a birthday party; or it can also be used to start conversations about party protocol.

Instructive but not preachy—a good model of polite manners and appropriate behavior. (Board book: 1-4)
OKSI
Abokoivu, Mari
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Aronpuro, Silja-Maria
Levine Querido (400 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-64614-113-5

This graphic adaptation of a story from Finnish folklore introduces Umi, a mother bear who is living in the woods with her brood: three male cubs and a girl they call Poorling. Poorling is a magical creature with a small body and an oversized flame-shaped head who desperately wants to be a bear. She is quite curious and shamelessly eager to please her mother. Umi has defied her mother, Emuu, a celestial being who wants Umi to return home to the heavens. Emuu, in turn, enlists an enchanted waterbird named Scaup to work with Poorling in hopes of bringing Umi back. When Poorling commits a shocking act of violence, events are set in motion that perpetuate a cycle of brutal savagery. Ahokoivu brings the tale to life through digital art and a mix of ink and dreamy watercolors. The primarily black-and-white palette is punctuated with bursts of dazzling color. Populated by animals and magical creatures, the storyline meanders whimsically but then quickly shocks with its sudden eruptions of violence, a stark reminder of the harshness of the natural world and the powerful universality of wanting to belong. With its ethereal fairy-tale quality, this quietly challenging story of parents and children translated from the original Finnish is visually powerful and emotionally compelling.

Dark, complex, and gratifying. (note on names) (Graphic fiction. 12-18)

LIES LIKE WILDFIRE
Alvarez, Jennifer Lynn
Delacorte (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-593-30963-6

A summer hangout turns into tragedy when a group of friends accidently start a wildfire.

Mo, Luke, Violet, Drummer, and Hannah have been best friends since they were 7-year-olds in a small forest town near Yosemite in California, all of them locals apart from wealthy, beautiful
A how-to book to encourage and empower Black teenage girls.

Co-authored by a professor of psychology, a nonprofit CEO, and an educator, this is a comprehensive guide to help Black girls learn to assert their fullest selves in a world designed to oppress them. The text provides anecdotes and activities to ensure that as readers embark on their journey through the workbook, they will achieve three stated goals, namely that they will be seen, they will be knowledgeable, and they will be empowered. The book is divided into four sections—Identity, Body Image, Relationships, and Institutions—each of which has multiple activities for readers to engage with. The individual sections begin with anecdotes to help frame conversations about intersectionality and conclude with activities like designing a T-shirt to express positive feelings about their racial identity or suggesting readers map out, via a tree illustration, the roots of their insecurities about colorism. The images are cute and relatable: A picture of a Black girl in a bonnet has lines for readers to write reflections on their hair; a heart shape is drawn like a puzzle for readers to fill in and explore their most salient identities, showcasing their multifaceted experiences. Although the book does give definitions for many of the sociological terms used, some concepts could have been developed with greater nuance.

An insightful look at our morbid curiosity about murderers.

FINDING HER VOICE
How Black Girls in White Spaces Can Speak Up and Live Their Truth
Belgrave, Faye Z. & Belgrave, Ivy & Patton, Angela
Instant Help Books (144 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2021
978-1-68403-740-7

A gripping page-turner.

(Thriller. 14-18)

ALMA PRESSES PLAY
Cane, Tina
Make Me a World (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-06-297716-8

1982 is a year of change for 13-year-old New Yorker Alma Rosen. Her parents seem destined for divorce, and her friend group is changing. Her body and mind are changing too; she gets her period and her first kiss. Alma's “truths,” the full story may never be known. Main characters read as White.

An insightful look at our morbid curiosity about murderers.

(Nonfiction. 14-18)

ALL THESE BODIES
Blake, Kendare
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(304 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-06-297716-8

A “nobody from nowhere” gets the scoop of a lifetime.

A paperboy and aspiring journalist in 1959 Black Deer Falls, Minnesota, 17-year-old Michael Jensen's heard about the previous summer's killings known as the Bloodless Murders or Dracula Murders. The body count so far is 12 blood-drained corpses found across the Midwest. Then blood-drenched 15-year-old Marie Catherine Hale is discovered at the scene of the Carlson triple homicide in Michael's hometown. Ultimately unknowable Marie—cast as something of a femme fatale in contrast to Michael's bland, Everyman foil—doesn't deny her involvement but won't identify her much-mythologized accomplice. Infuriating an ambitious district attorney, the police, and national news reporters, Marie chooses to tell her slippery, shifting, and allegedly supernatural story solely to Michael. More of a sympathetic confessor than a callous interrogator, Michael works to tease out Marie's motives even as his community and the world question his entanglement with the case. Although she inserts a supernatural element, Blake otherwise grounds the true-crime-style tale—which acknowledges the influence of Truman Capote's In Cold Blood—in real-life issues like domestic abuse, poverty, privilege, and sexism. Paradoxically, even as the book scrutinizes the darker human appetite for serial killers, criminal escapades, and vengeance, it caters to these same urges. The enigmatic ending might leave readers without resolution, but like Marie’s “truths,” the full story may never be known. Main characters read as White by default.

An insightful look at our morbid curiosity about murderers.

(Thriller. 14-adult)

offers a necessary opportunity for Black girls to reflect and breathe.

((Nonfiction. 14-18))

incomer Violet, who comes from Santa Barbara to visit her grandmother every summer. During one of their outings to the local lake, they accidentally start a fire while smoking weed, but, scared of the consequences and guided by sheriff’s daughter Hannah's knowledge of the law, the teens lie about their involvement. The fire spreads, devastating their community with vast losses in property and life. Their relationships—already frayed at the edges due to their imminent post–high school separation and Hannah's unrequited love for Drummer—start to crumble when one bad decision leads to another, and the lies spread just like the tragic wildfire. And then Violet goes missing. Alvarez’s young adult debut is a twisty, fast-paced thriller about Hannah's viewpoint, the story focuses on the friends’ complex dynamics, seamlessly intertwined with each character's personal stories, which include domestic abuse, financial strain, and the close yet toxic friendship between Hannah and Drummer that guides most of Hannah's actions toward a fittingly dark climax. Olive-skinned Violet’s surname cues her as Latina; the other teens are assumed White.

A how-to book to encourage and empower Black teenage girls.

Co-authored by a professor of psychology, a nonprofit CEO, and an educator, this is a comprehensive guide to help Black girls learn to assert their fullest selves in a world designed to oppress them. The text provides anecdotes and activities to ensure that as readers embark on their journey through the workbook, they will achieve three stated goals, namely that they will be seen, they will be knowledgeable, and they will be empowered. The book is divided into four sections—Identity, Body Image, Relationships, and Institutions—each of which has multiple activities for readers to engage with. The individual sections begin with anecdotes to help frame conversations about intersectionality and conclude with activities like designing a T-shirt to express positive feelings about their racial identity or suggesting readers map out, via a tree illustration, the roots of their insecurities about colorism. The images are cute and relatable: A picture of a Black girl in a bonnet has lines for readers to write reflections on their hair; a heart shape is drawn like a puzzle for readers to fill in and explore their most salient identities, showcasing their multifaceted experiences. Although the book does give definitions for many of the sociological terms used, some concepts could have been developed with greater nuance.
Although the backgrounds of Alma’s latchkey kid friend group are described with specific racial and cultural markers, socio-economic situations, and family dynamics, at times their voices lack distinction. A coming-of-age story for readers who appreciate a strong sense of place. (Verse novel. 12-14)

**DUPLEX**
Card, Orson Scott
Blackstone (300 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-79990-317-8
Series: Micropowers, 2

In the same world as *Lost and Found* (2019), another micropowered teen finds his life in upheaval. One morning Ryan Burke wakes up to find his father—who’s left the family—back home, walling the house off down the middle and converting it into a duplex so they can rent out half of it for income. Ryan falls hard for Bizzy Horvat, a witty new girl at school who is the daughter of Slovenian immigrants, before learning that she’s moving into the other side of his house. Mrs. Horvat is paranoid that people are watching them and are after Bizzy in particular; Ryan at first thinks it’s a general pretty-girl concern, until he notices the same people watching Bizzy over multiple days. One of these watchers notices Ryan engage in odd behavior as he’s defending Bizzy from a bee, and he recruits him for a micropowers support group run by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga. Bizzy’s mother disapproves—she believes they are being stalked by Slovenian witch hunters, or by a certain Dr. Withunga.

An intriguing, adventure-filled series opener. (character designs) (Graphic fiction. 12-16)

**THE ORPHAN KING**
Chin-Tanner, Tyler
Illus. by Boyle, James
A W ave Blue World (144 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-949518-14-6

A young prince returns home to find his kingdom destroyed. In this graphic offering, the first in a proposed series, readers meet Prince Kaidan, who left his homeland, Aesolan, to train at the Isle of Woman. When he arrives back home, he discovers Aesolan destroyed and its people gone. All Kaidan has left is Taliburn, a special sword bequeathed to him by his father. Meanwhile, Aesolan and the surrounding lands have fallen under the control of the sovereign Scathelocke, who wants to capture the young prince. Confronted and pursued by dangerous men and beasts, Kaidan soon meets up with three people who seem kind—Anne, Sir Robert, and Sturdy Jon—but who have ulterior motives. As the story alternates between flashbacks and the present, Chin-Tanner builds this medieval-flavored tale that mixes together monsters and men, ample battle scenes, and nods to Arthurian legend and Robin Hood. Falling somewhere between original and familiar, this will be a comfort read where between original and familiar, this will be a comfort read. Boyle’s full-color illustrations are highly stylized and tidily arranged, with cinematic flourishes emphasizing action and close-ups. Each chapter ends with a tantalizing cliffhanger, keeping pages flying as Kaidan overcomes each new obstacle. The majority of characters present White; Sturdy Jon has locs and brown skin.

An often overlooked era in American history comes alive for a 16-year-old boy with the help of his ancestor. Malcolm has been sent to his family’s farm in Natchez, Mississippi, for the summer following a traumatic interaction with the police in his hometown of Washington, D.C. Shortly after arriving, he discovers that what land remains is in jeopardy of being stolen by the state to expand the highway, a repeat of an earlier injustice that privileged land belonging to White people. Malcolm doesn’t fully understand the significance of this until he finds an old diary written by a certain Cedric Johnson. Through Cedric’s words, Malcolm is transported back in time to the Reconstruction era—not just that, during these episodes, he actually becomes Cedric. Malcolm witnesses the strides made
A young woman takes great risks in an effort to bring about a more just society.

This sequel to A Gentle Tyranny (2021) finds Reina haunted by choices she made in trying to secure the Apprenticeship, in particular the one that robbed her of her best friend. Though her attempt proved unsuccessful, Reina is still determined to achieve her end goal: preventing and reversing the practice of involuntarily gentling males in society, instead allowing them to mature into Brutes. Brutes—and the violent, often fatal threat they posed to womankind of yesteryear—are the reason her foremothers chose to create Nedé. Despite feeling torn about the possible consequences of co-existing with Brutes, she ultimately decides to act, believing that gentling is not truly justified by the greater good. As the stakes get higher and her connections to Brutes are revealed to run deeper than she expected, how much is Reina willing to sacrifice to do what she feels is right? Corban’s prose and inviting premise balance out the impulsive protagonist, whose thoughts and actions could otherwise be grating. The novel highlights themes surrounding inequality between the binary genders, justice, and abuse of power. Readers are best served by starting with the first volume. Characters have a range of skin tones.

Will leave readers evaluating their own views on gender equality and governmental powers. (map, glossary, the constitution of Nedé, author’s note) (Dystopian. 14-18)
HUNTING BY STARS
Dimaline, Cherie
Amulet/Abrams (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-4197-5347-3
Series: The Marrow Thieves, 2

Indigenous people continue to fight for survival in the face of environmental devastation and a predatory government. This follow-up to 2017’s acclaimed The Marrow Thieves picks up in the middle of the action. Miig’s joyful reunion with his husband, Isaac, is followed by Frenchie’s tragic capture by the Recruiters. Seventeen-year-old Frenchie has been taken to a residential school, a macabre institution where Native people’s bone marrow is harvested to treat the dreamless non-Indian population. Frenchie tries to avoid complete mental and physical breakdown—and must decide what price is too high to pay to achieve freedom. Rose, 16, is unwilling to wait around for further intelligence from inside sources; desperately and impulsively, she sets out to rescue Frenchie—accompanied by Derrick, who still hopes she’ll choose him instead. Meanwhile, the family receives disturbing intelligence that threatens the baby Wab and Chi Boy are expecting, leading to a decision to separate, with one group heading south toward the States. This lush, devastating, and hope-filled novel, which unfolds in chapters that shift perspectives among major cast members, provides some recap of earlier events but will be better appreciated by those who have read the first one. The action never lets up and is inextricably intertwined with the personal and community histories of the diverse characters who band together from various nations. Dimaline (Métis) paints a nightmarish world that is too easy to imagine; it will haunt readers long after they turn the final page.

A spellbinding sequel. (author’s note) (Dystopian. 14-adult)

ZERO O’CLOCK
Farley, C.J.
Black Sheep Press (288 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-525-70805-6 PLB

Already reeling from loss, a Black high school senior brings her OCD, anxiety, and depression into March 2020. In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, Gethsemene Montego is a musical-theater-loving, BTS–fangirling, 16-year-old senior at New Rochelle High School. She and her two best friends—Jewish Korean valedictorian Towah and Cuban American star quarterback Diego—attend the same high school where Geth’s security guard father died tragically three years ago during a shooting. Geth resents how quickly her mother has moved on—with a White man, at that—but, as best they can, her friends help her manage the increases in her anxiety and compulsions as well as her stffing grief. Awaiting admission results from Columbia is an added stressor, but as the coronavirus case numbers quickly shoot up, Geth faces multiple burdens and traumas. Police violence, racial inequity, hyperpartisanship, immigration, economic anxieties, and a complicated coming-out story all pile on top of the pandemic’s hefty body count. Geth is a likable, smart Gen Z protagonist in this modern epistolary work that combines diary entries, text messages, news reports, emails, and English lit essays to immerse the reader and highlight the complexities of dealing with the crisis. Wringing so much content, so much hurt, into a YA novel is a tall order that yields very mixed results. Still, whether through cutting humor or disparate political perspectives, Farley offers readers undeniable value in this retelling of recent, unforgettable history.

Commendable ambition that may help readers look forward. (Fiction. 14-adult)

YOU’D BE HOME NOW
Glasgow, Kathleen
Delacorte (400 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-525-70804-9
978-0-525-70805-6 PLB

A gut-wrenching look at how addiction affects a family and a town. Emory Ward, 16, has long been invisible. Everyone in the town of Mill Haven knows her as the rich girl; her workaholic parents see her as their good child. Then Emory and her 17-year-old brother, Joey, are in a car accident in which a girl dies. Joey wasn’t driving, but he had nearly overdosed on heroin. When Joey returns from rehab, his parents make Emory his keeper and try to corral his addictions with a punitive list of rules. Emory rebels in secret, stealing small items and hooking up with hot neighbor Gage, but her drama class and the friends she gradually begins to be honest with help her reach her own truth.
Glasgow, who has personal experience with substance abuse, bases this story on the classic play *Our Town* but with a twist: The characters learn to see and reach out to each other. The cast members, especially Emory and Joey, are exceptionally well drawn in both their struggles and their joys. Joey’s addiction is horrifying and dark, but it doesn’t define who he is. The portrayal of small-town life and its interconnectedness also rings true. Emory’s family is White; there is racial diversity in the supporting cast, and an important adult mentor is gay. Glasgow mentions in her author’s note that over 20 million Americans struggle with substance abuse; she includes resources for teens seeking help.

*Necessary, important, honest, loving, and true.* *(Fiction. 14-18)*

**UNDERSTANDING CORONAVIRUSES**  
*SARS, MERS, and the COVID-19 Pandemic*  
Goldsmith, Connie  
Twenty-First Century/Lerner (144 pp.)  
$37.32 | Sep. 7, 2021  
978-1-72842-888-8


Despite the title, the primary focus here is on the global pandemic that began in late 2019 rather than the science of this class of viruses. Medical professional Goldsmith opens with an account of Dr. Li Wenliang’s realization in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, that he was seeing patients with a respiratory virus similar to SARS. A discussion of the comparative construction of bacteria and viruses offers little to help readers understand how viruses work, and the explanation of the difference between RNA and DNA viruses is cursory. The bases this story on the classic play *Our Town* but with a twist: The characters learn to see and reach out to each other. The cast members, especially Emory and Joey, are exceptionally well drawn in both their struggles and their joys. Joey’s addiction is horrifying and dark, but it doesn’t define who he is. The portrayal of small-town life and its interconnectedness also rings true. Emory’s family is White; there is racial diversity in the supporting cast, and an important adult mentor is gay. Glasgow mentions in her author’s note that over 20 million Americans struggle with substance abuse; she includes resources for teens seeking help.

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Mostly useful as a historical snapshot of the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. *(Nonfiction. 12-16)*

**THE LOST GIRLS**  
*A Vampire Revenge Story*  
Hartl, Sonia  
Page Street (256 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-1-64567-314-9

Three women vampires seek revenge against their mutual ex, the man who turned them when they were teens.

Holly became a vampire in 1987 when she fell in love with Elton, believing she was the only one he loved and had made immortal like himself. Now, 34 years later, she’s been abandoned by him and works at Taco Bell, the only job her permanently 16-year-old self can find, which barely pays for the roach-infested motel where she’s living. When she meets Ida and Rose, vampires turned in 1921 and 1954, respectively, she discovers she wasn’t Elton’s first—and that they are back in their Michigan hometown because he’s looking to create a fourth. The trio band together with aspirations to end Elton once and for all and protect his latest prey, high school student Parker, whom Holly develops feelings for.
In Woon’s latest, a teen girl coder discovers love—and tech startup culture’s hidden secrets
BY LAURA SIMEON

In Yvonne Woon’s If You, Then Me (Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins, July 6), Xia Chan, the Worcester, Massachusetts, daughter of a Taiwanese immigrant single mom, is one of 20 teen app designers chosen from thousands of applicants to attend the Foundry. This exclusive Silicon Valley high school program, run by legendary game company founder Lars Lang, grants one winning coder $1 million in seed money. For lonely, introverted Xia, whose mother works long hours to (barely) keep them afloat, this is an unimaginable opportunity. She’s invented Wisper, an AI app that harvests an individual’s data to advice them in the guise of their older self. Her only other confidant is ObjectPermanence, an anonymous boy she’s fallen for online.

Xia is at first overwhelmed by the Foundry’s luxuries, her wealthy classmates’ poise, and California’s Technicolor pleasures. Things get more complicated for Xia when tech bigwig Mitzy Erst discovers her. She also starts to suspect that ObjectPermanence is attending the Foundry, too: But which boy is he? Sleuthing to uncover his identity and keeping up with glamorous Mitzy throw her off kilter. The blend of romance, intrigue, social commentary, and high-tech themes makes this novel an absorbing, thought-provoking, and timely read. Woon spoke with us over Zoom from her home in Atlanta, Georgia; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

This is your fourth book for teens following your Dead Beautiful paranormal romance series. What do you enjoy about writing YA?
I got an MFA thinking I would write for adults; I still want to, but here I am, and I like it. When I was a teen, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out who I was. It’s such a formative time in a person’s life: You’re trying on different personalities and trying to figure out what kind of person you want to be. I like writing for teens because they’re in that stage, but I also like writing about teens [because] they are both the most confident people in the world and the least confident. I had way more confidence [as a teen] than I will ever have in the rest of my life, but I also was so scared and didn’t know my place in the world.

Teenage girls are fascinating because we attribute so much power to them. We oversexualize them, we put all these pressures on [them]—it’s totally inappropriate—but then we give them no power. I find that dichotomy really interesting. Also, teenage girls [are] the ones who are playing with language; they’re the consumers and the fans of art; they’re the makers and the consumers of music; they are what drives popular culture. Teenage boys
are interesting to me in a different way, in that we police [them] in ways that are less talked about. What is the appropriate way to be a man? What is an appropriate way to be masculine? So much of how we treat teens leads to what adults become.

I understand you were a dog walker in Silicon Valley. Did that experience plant the seeds for this book?

Dog walking got me in people’s houses and [in] their lives—not that I was doing any kind of investigative undercover reporting, but it was an interesting way to get to know a place. I moved with my boyfriend, now husband, who got into law school there. I was writing on the side, and dog walking was one of many jobs I had, but it was by far the best. I knew when I moved to Silicon Valley that I wanted to write about it in some way, but I wasn’t sure how. I wasn’t working for Mark Zuckerberg, but I was working down the street. It was fun to see the tech executives’ houses, to meet them, to see how they lived. I had never spent any time on the West Coast. It really felt like entering a portal to a different dimension: the weather, the optimism, how everyone was just about to sell an app. It felt like money grew on trees, like a man-made paradise. Everyone [there] is trying to save the world, but you can tell who they are by what they think is important to fix and save; so many are White, male, wealthy people. As in every field, women aren’t in positions of power and controlling money. Tokenism creates this competitiveness where you feel like there’s only one space for a bunch of you; especially [for] women of color, the tokenism is extreme.

Did you start with a character or the concept? Xia is such a vivid, unexpectedly hilarious, and truly memorable personality.

I started with the concept: You always hear the story of a person who dropped out of school and made it big in Silicon Valley, but if you really think about it, it’s a teenager who’s given vast amounts of money and responsibility and expected to know what to do. I was trying to think about what character would be most interesting to see in that setting. Part of the allure of tech is this sort-of lie that anyone can enter based on merit: If you have a good idea, if you’re a young genius, you can make it there—and it isn’t untrue, but as [with] the idea of meritocracy in America, it’s not completely honest. I thought it would be most interesting to explore someone the tech world wasn’t built for: a woman and, also, a non-White wom-

an. I’m Chinese American, so it just felt natural to write about an experience that was close to my interior life; she’s not me, but there’s overlap.

The Wiser app is so compelling. If it really existed, what would older Yvonne tell her younger self?

As a teenager, I spent a lot of time trying to be and wishing I were someone else. I grew up in a very White community. There was one other Asian American person, and we were always getting mistaken for each other even though we looked nothing alike. I grew up trying to be more White, less Asian—trying to be someone that I could not ever be. If I had Wiser, I hope that she would tell me that trying to please other people is never going to work. Trying to create a version of yourself that fits with what other people want you to be is not going to be an authentic version of who you are. I would also hope that she would tell me that lots of people try on different versions of themselves, and it’s OK to not get it right the first time; keep trying to find the best version of yourself even if you stumble on the way and make some mistakes. [In] a lot of books that I read about teenagers, it seems that the characters are so fully formed, and that never seems true to my experience. I never felt that I had a strong sense of who I was and my place in the world, and so I would hope that Wiser would tell me that was normal, to keep trying.

If You, Then Me was reviewed in the May 15, 2021, issue.
This action-packed, revenge-fueled story is a fun and fresh vampire tale. The characterization is thin; the Sapphic romance isn’t entirely successful, with love developing so quickly that it’s hard to completely buy into. However, the emphasis on female friendships and found family is gratifying, the pacing is quick throughout, the campy body horror and violence are delightfully disturbing, and the twists at the end make for a satisfying conclusion. Characters are implied White.

Exhilarating high-stakes action with plenty of bite. (Paranormal. 14-up)

**BEFORE WE DISAPPEAR**

*Hutchinson, Shaun David*

HarperTeen (312 pp.)

$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021

978-0-06-302522-6

When magic and illusion collide, anything is possible.

Sixteen-year-old Jack, magician’s assistant and pickpocket, is ready to steal the show—and anything else he can get his hands on—when the Enchantress, aka Evangeline Dubois, magician, con artist, and his guardian, sets her eyes on the 1909 Seattle World’s Fair. At the same time, 16-year-old Wilhelm, a boy with the ability to magically transport himself and others, is forced to perform there by Teddy, his abusive captor. Teddy has plans to use Wil’s gifts to pull off the ultimate heist, and his desire for notoriety results in a plan in which the two masquerade as a magician and his assistant, causing Jack’s and Wil’s worlds to collide. With the help of street-smart dancer Ruth and clever Jessamy, the boys examine the abuses they suffer and work to build a stable life together. Like all good magic acts, the novel will keep readers on the edges of their seats as they follow the twists and double-crosses that fill the lives of con artists and magicians. The book flawlessly combines magic and suspense in a well-crafted heist story that’s sweetly sprinkled with queer romances. A final unanswered question hints at a sequel and will have readers shouting for an encore. Ruth is Black, and Sallie Walls, who is White, describe the events leading up to a school shooting on inauguration day. While acting in a school play, the two bond over their love of the movie *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* and slowly begin a romantic relationship. Sallie has had a crush on Uly since their English class the previous year; Uly, on the other hand, is surprised he even likes Sallie because he has never been attracted to White girls and had misinterpreted her behavior, believing her to be racist. When Sallie’s sister, Leona, begins campaigning for president on a platform calling for an end to school busing from neighboring communities that are predominantly of color, Uly’s sister, Regina, decides to run against her, call out the coded racist language Leona is using, and advocate for students of color. A third candidate enters the field—a White athlete with a divisive past—and the race escalates dangerously. Uly and Sallie are well-crafted characters; the interracial relationship is portrayed with honesty and humor, and their love is palpable. With excellent pacing, Ivery explores the impact White supremacy and patriarchal norms have on our lives and the dangers of not holding people accountable.

A timely exploration of the state of American politics. (Fiction. 12-up)

**WHITE SMOKE**

*Jackson, Tiffany D.*

Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (184 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021

978-0-06-302909-5

A family already at odds tries to survive the whims of a haunted house.

Jackson, who penned thrillers *Allegedly* (2017) and *Monday’s Not Coming* (2018), proves that her skills in suspense carry over to the horror genre. Anxiety-ridden Mari, recovering from substance abuse, tries to start anew when her family leaves California and moves into a newly renovated home in the Midwestern town of Cedarville. She’s relocating with brother Sammy, stepsister Piper, stepfather Alec, and her mother, whose acceptance into a 3-year artist residency lets them stay rent-free in a new house that looks perfect on the outside. However, certain things ring alarm bells: a basement they’re instructed never to enter, construction workers who refuse to continue working, Mari’s sister Leona’s histrionic cries about what happened there. As Mari unravels the mysteries around her, she must try to avoid relapsing into bad habits; contain her dizzying, trauma-born phobia of bedbugs; and avoid the wrath of entities who wish her harm. Jackson conjures horrors both supernatural and otherwise in a masterful juxtaposition of searing social commentary and genuinely creepy haunts, as well as providing an authentic portrayal of tensions within a blended family. Mari, Sammy, and her mother are Black; Alec and Piper are White.

Begs to be finished in one sitting, though maybe with the lights kept on. (Horror. 14-up)

**THE PROBLEM WITH THE OTHER SIDE**

*Ivery, Kwame*

Soho Teen (336 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021

978-1-641-29205-4

New Jersey teens fall in love while managing their sisters’ opposing presidential campaigns.

In this novel told in alternating points of view, Ulysses Gates, who is
CHASING THE TRUTH
A Young Journalist's Guide to Investigative Reporting
Kantor, Jodi & Twohey, Megan
Adapt. by Shamir, Ruby
Philomel (256 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-593-32699-2

In this adaptation of their bestselling *She Said* (2019), two journalists for the *New York Times* describe the reporting process that led to their breaking the story of Harvey Weinstein's serial sexual harassment.

In 2017, journalist Kantor, who had spent some years unearthing and reporting on corporate gender bias, convinced actress Rose McGowan to talk to her about mistreatment of women in the entertainment industry and, specifically, about an incident with the noted producer. This was the beginning of a month-long investigation by Kantor and fellow reporter Twohey that culminated in a series of stories that fanned the flames of the #MeToo movement and led to the loss of Weinstein's job, reputation, and freedom following a court conviction. Adapter Shamir has tightened the narrative in the adult original and focused it more sharply on the reporting of that particular story. This version introduces more background information about the reporters and the reasons behind their methods; removes stories about Donald Trump, Christine Blasey Ford, and Brett Kavanaugh; and includes a final section containing solid advice for aspiring teen journalists. Throughout this fast-paced and gripping account, they show how the process of carrying out this type of groundbreaking investigative work is accomplished. Their eye-opening revelations will inspire and leave an indelible mark on readers.

A timely, critical read about the ways power and privilege work in our society. (note to readers, endnotes) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

DEFY THE NIGHT
Kemmerer, Brigid
Bloomsbury (406 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-5476-0466-1

The only effective treatment for the lethal fever that plagues Kandala is a potion derived from the rare Moonflower. Medicine is allocated to each sector of the kingdom by the decree of King Harristan, but the supply is limited. Thieves, smugglers, and black marketeers are subject to punishment and execution overseen by the cruel Prince Corrick in his role as the King’s Justice. Like many in Kandala, Tessa Cade loathes the king and his younger brother for ignoring the plight of those who cannot afford treatment. With the help of her close friend Weston, the 18-year-old apothecary’s assistant steals Moonflower petals from the wealthy and makes potions to distribute among the poor. Soon after Wes is caught by the night patrol, Tessa is presented with an opportunity to sneak into the palace. She enters with the intention of taking a sample of the palace’s potent Moonflower elixir only to be captured and brought before Prince Corrick, who, Tessa discovers, might not be as heartless as she originally believed. The slow-burn romance—between an idealist with straightforward moral beliefs and a pragmatist trapped by duty—will keep the pages turning, as will the scheming of the king’s consuls and the rebellion brewing in the background. Tessa and Corrick are cued White; other characters’ skin colors range from beige to deep brown.

The personal and the political intertwine in this engaging series opener. (map, cast of characters) (Fantasy. 13-18)

THE PICK-UP
Kenneally, Miranda
Sourcebooks Fire (250 pp.)
$10.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2021
978-1-4926-8416-9

Two skittish teenagers discover true love through a chance encounter on a ride share.

Seventeen-year-old Mari is a Southerner from Tennessee, visiting Chicago and staying with her dad, stepmother, and stepsisister, Sierra. On their way to the Lollapalooza music festival, the girls share a ride with two brothers, and Mari unexpectedly falls for the hunky T.J. The couple hang out together at the concert, and their attraction grows intense as they dance together, but they lose each other in the mosh pit. After a humorous and highly public Twitter search, they come together again—somewhat diffidently, as Mari distrusts romance. T.J.'s natural shyness (he is self-conscious about being an 18-year-old virgin) and Mari's unwillingness to commit to relationships (the result of anxiety provoked by her parents’ recent divorce, which her emotionally volatile mother is not coping well with) set up a constant game of advance and retreat. The story traces Mari’s personal growth from a place of distrust to a desire to be her own person and follow her gut. Although she resents her father’s betrayal, she warms to her stepsisister, whom she describes as one of the best things in her life. The narrative is highly contemporary, with many current pop-culture references, and the sexual content is interlaced with the need for consent. Most characters present White; Sierra is openly bisexual, and her partner is a Black girl.

Edgy, exciting, and grounded in respect. (Fiction. 14-18)
WALKING IN TWO WORLDS

Kinew, Wab
Penguin Teen (396 pp.)
$17.99  |  Sep. 14, 2021
978-0-7352-6900-2

A teen navigates different worlds: real and virtual, colonized and Indigenous.

In the near-future real world, Bugz's family has clout in the community—her mom is their first modern-day woman chief, her father's a highly admired man, and her older brother is handsome and accomplished. Socially awkward Bugz, by contrast, feels more successful in the virtual gaming world of the Floraverse, where she has amassed tremendous power. Yes, her 'Versona has a slimmed-down figure—but Bugz harnesses her passion for the natural world and her Anishinaabe heritage to build seemingly unbeatable defenses, especially her devoted, lovingly crafted Thunderbird and snake/panther Mishi-pizhiw. Cheered on by legions of fans, she battles against Clan:LESS, a group of angry, misogynistic male gamers. One of them, Feng, ends up leaving China under a cloud of government suspicion and moving to her reservation to live with his aunt, the new doctor; they are Muslim Uighurs whose economy is reliant on a local gun manufacturer.

TELL IT TRUE

Lockette, Tim
Triangle Square Books for Young Readers (208 pp.)
$18.95  |  Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-64421-082-6

A 15-year-old journalist gets a school ing in the power—and responsibility—of the press.

Setting up and then deftly tweaking expectations the way he did in his debut, Atty at Law (2020), Lockette pitches self-styled “brainy rebel” Lisa Rives into a whirl of hard choices and gut checks after she takes over editorship of her school's paper as, mostly, a favor to her bestie (and the paper’s only other employee), Preethy Narend. Her first (but far from last) lesson in journalism’s hazards and rewards comes after she asks the two candidates for class president to identify with a political party. Her question recasts the election as a contest between a dedicated do-gooder focused on sexual equality in school sports and a Donald Trump mini-me—who, this being red-state Alabama—wins in a landslide. But Lisa has much bigger fish to fry after discovering that state law seemingly gives her the right to attend a convicted killer’s upcoming execution. Could she go? Should she? The blowback both in and beyond school when news of her formal request gets out includes national attention, a quick suspension, and, toughest of all, conflict with Preethy. But Lisa finds some unexpected allies, notably her mom, who turns out to be far more than the shallow stereotype her Southern belle persona suggests. The cast defaults to White, excepting Preethy's Indian family and a minor Black character.

WE CAN BE HEROES

McCaughey, Kyrie
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$17.99  |  Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-06-288505-0

Friends of a young woman shot to death by her boyfriend are visited by her ghost in this novel set in a small town whose economy is reliant on a local gun manufacturer.

Told in effective alternating third-person narration, one of which is in verse form, this powerful story of the friendship between Beck, Vivian, and Cassie is at once an intensely personal tale of traumatic grief and an examination of domestic violence and the sociopolitical forces of the gun lobby. Distinct voices are established for each of the three young women. Both Beck, an artist and boundary pusher, and Vivian, determined and practical, have been forever changed by the murder-suicide that killed Cassie and also injured Vivian. Their grief drives them to illegally stage and paint murals of Cassie based on various Greek mythological characters all over their town. That Cassie's murderer was the privileged son of the owner of Bell Firearms accelerates the tension as Beck and Vivian struggle to draw attention to the horror of what happened to their friend. Transcripts of a podcast about domestic violence are also mixed into the narrative, impressively augmenting the already varied structure. Though the auspicious end seems somewhat aspirational, it fits with the fierce search for justice undertaken by its characters. All main characters seem to be White.

A heartbreaking, intelligent exploration of an all-too-real menace. (Fiction. 12-15)
“Full of thought-provoking conversations, messy answers, and lots of heart, this novel’s a quiet knockout.”

WHERE I BELONG
Mickelson, Marcia Argueta
Carolrhoda Lab (264 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-5415-9797-6

Cast into the political firestorm of an aspiring U.S. senator’s campaign, a Guatemalan immigrant teen grapples with her newfound notoriety. It’s the end of Milagros Vargas’ senior year of high school in Corpus Christi, Texas. So far, aspiring marine biologist Millie’s accepted a spot at Stanford, although her mom doesn’t yet know this. As Millie became the second caretaker of her family after her father’s death, her mom expanded her housekeeping job for the Wheelers, an affluent White family. For Millie, Mr. Wheeler’s campaign for the U.S. Senate means her mom will be away from her family more, caring for the Wheelers’ young daughter. Then, the senatorial candidate highlights Millie and her family as examples of exemplary immigrants during a campaign speech, resulting in public support as well as hostility from internet trolls and anonymous haters. When someone sets the Vargas home on fire, they have no choice but to accept the offer to temporarily move in with the Wheelers, even as Millie finds herself inexplicably drawn toward their son, Charlie. Setting her story against the backdrop of a nameless, anti-immigrant White House administration, Mickelson does a remarkable job of plunging into complex issues with tremendous nuance. Millie’s acquired U.S. citizenship, after arriving as an undocumented asylum seeker, further complicates the discourse, raising stark questions around common debates about which immigrants “deserve” to be welcomed. Full of thought-provoking conversations, messy answers, and lots of heart, this novel’s a quiet knockout.

Utterly compelling. (Fiction. 12-18)

FOR ALL TIME
Miles, Shanna
Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-5344-8597-6

Soul mates fight to be together over centuries. The pandemic brought unspeakable tragedy to Tamar and her family—her mother died, Tamar survived but now has a deteriorating lung condition, and her sister, Aabidah, was forced to make personal sacrifices in order to serve as family caretaker. Aabidah finally convinces Tamar to pursue her last option—cryogenics. As Tamar and her love, Fayard, spend their last minutes together before she sets off for the overseas cryogenics center, an explosion goes off at the airport, killing everyone but the two of them. They wake up in the hospital with no memory of who they were and what happened, but they recognize a deep connection with one another. As they struggle to remember their present life, they dream of the other lives they spent together. Time, space, and place are important pieces of the storytelling, and Miles expertly provides enough details about contemporary Columbia, South Carolina; Gao, Mali, in 1325; 1920s Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Alpha 9, Lunar Base in 2260 to truly transport readers. The main characters are Black, and their identities are central to fully understanding each time period; historical details, such as information about the Pullman porters, add layers of depth. Tamar and Fay’s relationships throughout the ages and the mystery behind how their story ends are revealed with a satisfying slow burn.

This genre-bending novel is for the true romantics at heart. (discussion questions) (Fiction. 14-18)
“Spooky and fun, with substance as well.”

WITCH FOR HIRE

Naifeh, Ted
Illus. by the author
Amulet/Abrams (128 pp.)
$21.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-4197-4810-3

Witches face many obstacles in life: fear, prejudice, and sitting at the unpopular table in high school are just a few.

Witches aren’t part of the A squad, as new high schooler Cody learns when her popular upperclassman sister, Bryce, dismisses her to the cafeteria table that is a lunchroom waystation for people who haven’t yet found their place in the social hierarchy. It’s there she meets Faye, the table’s only permanent resident and the school’s resident witch. Cody’s desire to move on brings her into digital contact with shy_shelbi, a social media account that promises to make your dreams come true. Most of those dreams, however, turn out to be nightmares, and it’s up to Faye to begrudgingly save her classmates’ lives. Faye is a mysterious character who brings a lot of baggage with her, some of which is addressed in the book and some of which is hopefully being saved for future stories. The ending hints at a new path for the young witch, and readers who identify with feeling a little out of place in school or life will be begging to learn when the adventure continues. Many will appreciate the messages centered around popularity, acceptance, self-confidence, and the influence of social media. The expressive artwork enhances the mood through heavy use of black and shades of glowing orange and atmospheric teal. Main characters are White-presenting; there is diversity in the background cast.

Spooky and fun, with substance as well. (Graphic fiction. 14-18)

SISTERS OF THE WOLF
Miller-Schroder, Patricia
Dundurn (336 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-4597-4752-4

Two prehistoric girls from different clans must band together to escape a common enemy.

Shinoni, an early modern human, or Cro-Magnon, and Keena, a Neanderthal, both 13, are separated from their respective clans by a ruthless Neanderthal hunter. Recognizing that their only chance at survival lies in each other, they reluctantly join forces to hatch an escape plan. On their own in the wilderness, they must use their wits and knowledge learned from their people to evade the dangers of the Ice Age landscape, from natural predators who cross their paths, like lions and hyenas, to other humans and the perilous landscape itself. Initially hesitant to trust one another and quick to insult each other’s cultural ways as inferior, the girls nevertheless form a bond. They are joined on their journey by a wolf who accepts them as a member of her pack and whom Shinoni names Tewa. The action in this fast-paced survival story moves quickly as the girls come across one fearful predator and pitfall after another, and the novel is sure to pique an interest in prehistoric people and places. Unfortunately, at times the dialogue borders on caricature; the characters use turns of phrase to signal that they live in a different time, yet overall their speech patterns follow those of modern teenagers.

This survival tale set in the Ice Age will be an unusual draw for adventure fans. (cast of characters, author’s note) (Historical adventure. 12-15)

DARK RISE
Pacat, C.S.
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (464 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-06-294614-0
Series: Dark Rise, 1

A long-gone evil power threatens to once again rise and conquer all in its path.

In 1821 London, teenage Will mingle among the crowds on the docks of the Thames. He’s been on the run for months, ever since his mother was killed in their home. Finally, his pursuers catch up with him, and Will is taken in the name of the enigmatic Simon. Meanwhile, 16-year-old Violet wants nothing more than to join Simon’s inner crew. While guarding the hold during an attack on one of Simon’s boats, Violet discovers Will chained below deck. Afterward, the two find themselves under the protection of the Stewards, an ancient order whose sole mission is to prevent the very goal that Simon pursues—and both Will and Violet discover they have deep connections to this fight. What follows is a series of events that are by turns mystical, bewildering, hopeful, and terrifying. Pacat’s writing is atmospheric and full of intriguing, complex characters. However, an overwhelming sense of uncertainty pervades the book, intensified by the rotating points of view as well as the withholding of some characters’ major revelations until very late in the story. These factors leave readers in a state of perpetual unknowing, making it harder to connect with the story. The Stewards hail from all around the world; Will is White, and Violet is biracial, with a White English father and Indian mother.

Classic good-versus-evil fare. (map) (Historical fantasy. 14-18)
Panin's debut features rich, complex teen characters, all fighting to reshape the new world. Adam, for his part, promises to help his champion in the Tournament of Freak, a contest to decide which Enlightenment Committee member will wield the power to reshape the new world. Adam's cold and calculating, Iris's searching and daring. The author builds a delicious tension that will have readers putting the pieces together as the end of the world nears and wanting more after the finish on behalf of the rich and powerful alongside other supernaturally gifted champions. This cryptic, enticing journey will change her future. Iris has spent the last 10 years hiding out in the circus, performing as an African tightrope dancer—a so-called “Nubian Princess”—with no memories of her old life. One day, a mysterious stranger in the crowd triggers something long forgotten, causing her to publicly reveal her ability to recover from seemingly fatal accidents. Now her secret has been revealed, she is forced to flee, and she agrees to assist the stranger, a White man called Adam Temple, with finding his father and unlocking his champion in the Tournament of Freak. Iris—along with her brood of Mark men who won’t be missed during Ama’s monthly transitions and others from her increasingly hungry sister. Marie offers her services to the remaining LaClaire family members—young Lucien, who suffers from consumption, and Lucien’s handsome older brother, Sebastian, who’s struggling to manage the townpeople’s gossip after his parents’ mysterious deaths during Ama’s tenure as a servant—in hopes of finding Madame LaClaire’s spell book and curing Ama once and for all. Though the story tends to get bogged down in details and backstory, the core of the narrative. Readers will become immersed in Alter’s world, rooting for his survival, hoping for his reunion with his family, and wishing for him to find the love that he deserves. An author’s note and glossary add valuable context. Main characters are White and Jewish.

A slow-moving but compelling tale of a queer Jewish boy battling antisemitism and the supernatural. (Historical thriller 13-18)

In Victorian London, a girl with an unknown past embarks on a mission that will change her future. Iris has spent the last 10 years hiding out in the circus, performing as an African tightrope dancer—a so-called “Nubian Princess”—with no memories of her old life. One day, a mysterious stranger in the crowd triggers something long forgotten, causing her to publicly reveal her ability to recover from seemingly fatal accidents. Now her secret has been revealed, she is forced to flee, and she agrees to assist the stranger, a White man called Adam Temple, with finding his father and unlocking the mystery that will end the world. She also will fight as his champion in the Tournament of Freak, a contest to decide which Enlightenment Committee member will wield the power to reshape the new world. Adam, for his part, promises to help her unlock her past and potential. Iris—along with her brood of Mark men who won’t be missed during Ama’s monthly transitions and others from her increasingly hungry sister. Marie offers her services to the remaining LaClaire family members—young Lucien, who suffers from consumption, and Lucien’s handsome older brother, Sebastian, who’s struggling to manage the townpeople’s gossip after his parents’ mysterious deaths during Ama’s tenure as a servant—in hopes of finding Madame LaClaire’s spell book and curing Ama once and for all. Though the story tends to get bogged down in details and backstory, the core of the narrative. Readers will become immersed in Alter’s world, rooting for his survival, hoping for his reunion with his family, and wishing for him to find the love that he deserves. An author’s note and glossary add valuable context. Main characters are White and Jewish.

A slow-moving but compelling tale of a queer Jewish boy battling antisemitism and the supernatural. (Historical thriller 13-18)

Alter’s own roommate and secret crush, Yakov—Alter knows he has to find out the truth about their fates. A highly detailed historical landscape paired with the fantastical element of the dyb-buk from ancient Jewish folklore, one of whom possesses Alter, provide a solid base for the book’s leisurely paced and original narrative. Readers will become immersed in Alter’s world, rooting for his survival, hoping for his reunion with his family, and wishing for him to find the love that he deserves. An author’s note and glossary add valuable context. Main characters are White and Jewish.

A slow-moving but compelling tale of a queer Jewish boy battling antisemitism and the supernatural. (Historical thriller 13-18)
MARY, WILL I DIE?
Sarles, Shawn
Scholastic (304 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-338-67927-4

Teens endure fallout from a game of Bloody Mary.

Everybody’s done it at some point: You look in the mirror and repeat the name Bloody Mary. Sometimes, the legend says, you’ll see your true love. Sometimes they say you’ll see the ghost’s face, and it means you will die young. But these four fourth grade friends—Grace, Calvin, Elena, and Steph—didn’t count on their little game’s still affecting them five years later. They were just having some spooky fun in Elena’s deceased grandmother’s room, after all. But now, even after all these years have passed, each of them still sees a shape behind them whenever they look in a mirror. But the frights really begin when a new girl arrives at school. Her name is Mary. The author effectively and slowly ratchets the tension and dread, crafting some cleverly frightening sequences that fans of the genre will love. Less effective is the characterization: The teens are all presumed White. A deliciously disturbing, twisted tale. (Horror 12-15)

FALLOUT
Spies, Superbombs, and the Ultimate Cold War Showdown
Sheinkin, Steve
Roaring Brook (352 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-250-14901-5

A heated account of the Cold War. Sheinkin, known for his accessible, narrative-styled history books for young readers, tackles the arms race during the Cold War era. Opening with a James Bond–style introduction to spies’ tradecraft—hollow nickels, dead drops, and secret codes—it moves through the Eisenhower and Stalin administrations to focus on John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev; culminating in an hour-by-hour breakdown of the Cuban missile crisis. Thoroughly sourced, this fast-moving history provides a good overview of massively complex topics, lighting on the science behind hydrogen bombs, Duck and Cover drills, a bit of cryptography, and a compelling account of Kennedy’s exploits during World War II. There’s not enough exploration, however, of why America was so opposed to communism, no discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of global capitalism, and insufficient exploration of whether America was morally equipped for its superpower status, leaving gaps in the narrative that would help readers gain a deeper understanding of these issues in context. Whipping back and forth between times, places, and people may make it hard for some readers to follow at times, but the adventurous tone will capture and sustain their interest.

An account of a gripping real-life adventure that isn’t over yet. (source notes, bibliography, photo credits, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

THE SPLENDOR
Shields, Breeana
Page Street (330 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-64567-322-4

Welcome to The Splendor, where your every fantasy becomes reality—if only for your stay.

Sisters Clare and Juliette grew up in a children’s home where they learned to depend only on one another. They dream of a better life, but mostly they look toward The Splendor, the elegant hotel on the hill. After Clare stays at The Splendor, thanks to a gift from her sister, who worked and saved to afford it, she returns cold and distant and asks Juliette to move out. Juliette takes their savings and goes there herself to try to find out what happened. She finds polished marble floors; food that makes you feel things like nostalgia, love, and joy; gardens that change seasons in an instant; and trees full of sweets. After a meeting with the clothier, she looks in the mirror and sees an idealized version of herself. The Splendor is like a filter for your life, run by a team of illusionists, the best of which is Henri. Henri is an orphan too, adopted by the hotel’s owners, and he may just have the answers Juliette is looking for. Readers will get swept away from the very first page thanks to the immersive and realistic worldbuilding, convincing characters, and compelling mystery. Chapters switch perspective between Juliette and Henri, showing readers both the shiny outside and the behind-the-scenes machinations. Main characters are cued as White.

Original, exciting, and magical. (Fantasy. 14-18)

traitors among us
Skrypuch, Marsha Forchuk
Scholastic (328 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-338-75429-2

Two sisters try to make their way back to an Allied zone after World War II.

Told in alternating chapters narrated in the first person by Ukrainian sisters Krystia, 16, and Maria, 14, this gripping novel tells a lesser-known story of the
war's horror. It is June 1945, and Germany has surrendered: The war on the Western Front has ended. Krystia and Maria travel on foot to an American refugee camp in occupied Germany, hoping to eventually reach their aunt and uncle in Toronto. But just after they arrive to what they think is safety following, in Maria's case, forced labor on a German farm, and, in Krystia's case, hiding Jews and watching their mother get hanged for being part of the resistance, they are abducted by Soviet soldiers and accused of being Nazi collaborators. Taken to an interrogation house in the Soviet-controlled zone of occupied Germany, they are tortured but refuse to sign a false confession. The depictions of starvation, torture, and executions are drawn from actual accounts of prisoners who lived to talk about what happened in Soviet interrogation houses. Although some scenes can be difficult to read, this is ultimately a story of the strength of the human spirit. Krystia and Maria are survivors, and they never give up, drawing strength from remembering their parents' belief in them as they struggle to stay alive.

Gripping, harsh, and superbly written. (author's note, map) (Historical fiction. 13-18)
mother transform from wolf to human before her eyes. Soon after, her powers show themselves, and her own wolf training begins. Artie's mother reaches out to a community of Black werewolves who are old friends for help. As Artie trains with them, she develops ties to those like her—and something more with her friend and crush, Maya. She also learns about the origins and culture of werewolves and the history of her parents' relationship. But danger lurks nearby, and Artie must stay alert. Stephens' art leaps off the page, from the beautiful scenery to the celebration of characters' Black features. Throughout, the panels are expertly used to create tension in dramatic moments and excitement that showcases the joyous ones. Readers looking for a story of discovery and healing wrapped in the paranormal will hit the jackpot.

A stirring, eye-catching portrayal of growth. (Graphic paranormal. 12-16)

SMALL TOWN MONSTERS
Wallach, Diana Rodriguez
Underlined (336 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-593-42751-4

When sinister influences threaten to take over, two teens stand in the way of evil destruction.

Vera Martinez is a regular, introverted high school junior. She has a part-time job, struggles to fit in, and dreams of escaping her small town after graduation. Not-so-typical, however, is the fact that her parents fight demons on behalf of the Catholic Church and keep a catalog of possessed relics in their off-limits basement. Vera's family has a reputation for being creepy, and being the daughter of demon hunters hasn't done much for her social standing. When popular athlete Maxwell Oliver appeals for her help in ridding his mom of a strange new affliction, Vera isn't sure she shares her parents' supernatural gifts and doubts that she can be of much help. The pair begin to notice that their small town has had much more than its fair share of tragedy in the years since a gas explosion killed 18 community members. Is this horrible accident connected to the subsequent rash of suicides and casualties? Vera and Max must confront the evil forces closing in on their community while navigating their own feelings of grief and self-doubt. Themes of religious faith, personal identity, and perseverance are woven throughout. The strong writing, ghoulish details, and brisk plot give this work reader appeal. Vera is Irish and Puerto Rican, and Max has Jamaican, Dominican, and European ancestry.

An eerie thriller emphasizing the power of inner strength. (author's note, sources) (Paranormal. 12-18)

SPELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT
Williams, Kate
Delacorte (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-593-30482-2
Series: The Babysitters Coven, 3

Following For Better or Cursed (2020), the demon-fighting Sitters tackle new magic threats and face a cringey rock band.

While Esme and her friends are out trying to remove the curse on Esme's mother, Cassandra and Dion's house is broken into by culprits who leave behind clues—most notably a flyer for a rock band that looks like it came out of the early 2000s. Investigating the Myspace-using band turns up oddities that set Esme's Sitter senses tingling, so they amp up their investigation (and gain access to its members) by manipulating their school's Valentine's Day dance committee to hire the band. This also gives their friends from the Summit—Ji-A; Amirah; Mallory; and Ruby, Cassandra's girlfriend—something to do when they visit Esme, Cassandra, and Janis for a girls' weekend. As in earlier installments, there are zingers and jokes aplenty and delightful, copious descriptions of the creative fashionistas' ensembles. Some moments seem padded—such as the extensive recapping of plot points that are relatively straightforward—but by the time this gives way to the silly action (which relishes in chaotic and humorous large set pieces), readers likely won't mind. Along with filling in information about Red Magic and Esme's and Cassandra's mothers' histories, both families' storylines make varying degrees of progress. While the band members are all White, the Sitters (and Janis) are a multiethnic crew.

A fittingly entertaining end to a fun trilogy. (Fantasy. 12-18)
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**STARGAZING IN SOLITUDE**

Samples, Suzanne

Running Wild Press (338 pp.)
978-1-94-704192-9

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**HAINT BLUE**

**A Tipsy Collins Novel**

Alexander, Stephanie

Bublish (362 pp.)
Apr. 19, 2021
978-1-64-704326-1

Charleston's favorite ghost-talking divorcée returns in Alexander's latest supernatural mystery, the second in a series.

Reluctant clairvoyant Tipsy Collins is still trying to figure out life as a single mother of three. She's (mostly) quieted the ghosts that haunt her home, though one, Henry Mott, has decided to hang around and work on his memoir. Tipsy's relationship with her boyfriend, Will Garrison, is beginning to sour, and though she's gotten back into painting, she's still close to broke. That's why she drives out to Sullivan's Island to meet with the slightly kooky Pamella Brewton about a possible commission. The cottage, painted from fence to shutters in that unmistakable Southern shade called haint blue, is haunted by Pamella's deceased grandmother, Ivy More Brewton. Ivy, the story goes, fell off a dock in 1944, but Tipsy suspects it wasn't that simple. Tipsy doesn't want to get involved—she's furious Will told Pamella about her psychic abilities—but when Pamella offers $50,000 for exorcising “Meemaw,” how can Tipsy refuse? She makes contact with Ivy, who insists she can't leave the house without her “true love,” and she isn't talking about Pamella's grandfather. As Tipsy's own romantic life crumbles, can she learn something about love and loss from this stubborn ghost? Alexander's prose is precise and evocative, particularly when she's describing the environments of coastal South Carolina: “Tipsy is on a dune on one of those random fall afternoons in the Lowcountry that feel like summer's hangover. The tall grass around her is brownish. The remaining yellow and white flowers droop like the tongues of panting dogs.” The novel unfolds at a leisurely pace, driven by Tipsy and her relationships as much as by the haunting plot. Alexander, as in her previous installment, *Charleston Green* (2020), works in the tradition of Southern women's fiction as much as in supernatural mystery, and she blends the two genres together into a seamless, not-too-heavy exploration of how difficult it can be to act once a relationship has run its course.

A well-told, deeply felt addition to a ghostly mystery series.
INDIE | David Rapp

Kids’ Best Friend

Young readers love stories about animals of all kinds, but one could argue that dog tales lead the pack. After all, nearly everyone’s familiar with such classics as Janette Sebring Lowry’s *The Poky Little Puppy*, Beverly Cleary’s *Ribsy*, and Norman Bridwell’s *Clifford the Big Red Dog*. Here are a few other page-turners about pooches that Kirkus indie can recommend for kids:

In Kim Messina’s 2020 rhyming picture book, *If You Could Ask Your Dog One Question…*, illustrated by Natalia Pavliuk, a young girl ponders the many mysteries of her large, amiable black dog, such as, “Why do you have to howl, / every time I start to sing?” and “What’s with all that scratching?” Our reviewer notes that “Messina skillfully captures both the voice of a dog owner and the perspective of a child.”

One of the narrator’s questions for her canine friend in the previous book is “Does the cat boss you around?” In Lis Bensley’s 2020 kids’ book, *The Adventures of Milo and Flea*, illustrated by Miki Harder, feline Milo does just that to puppy Flea, who’s a new arrival in the household. Eventually, though, the eager-to-please dog manages to win the cat over. Kirkus’ review calls the book a “delightfully absurd tale with an affectionate understanding of the truth about cats and dogs.”

In 2019’s *Dogversations: Conversations With My Dogs*, David Leswick imagines fun exchanges with his pets—Brittany spaniel Eva and golden retriever Bruno—and provides plenty of charming color photos of each. At one point, Bruno tells the author that “there are a few striking pieces of evidence contrary to your flip-flops-are-not-meant-to-be-chewed position.” (In the accompanying photo, the dog is, in fact, chewing said sandal.) Kirkus’ reviewer calls it a “cute, fun frolic” for the whole family.

David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.

THE SPACE BETWEEN
Bastian, Troy
Self (235 pp.)
979-8-51585310-5

Rehab for a young woman with a drug addiction becomes a never-ending struggle for both herself and her father in this novel.

Todd Mahoney has fought to help his daughter for years. Misha was only 7 years old when she lost her alcoholic mother in a car accident. The girl turned to drugs as a teen, often disappearing for days from her Las Vegas home. By the time she’s 20, after numerous run-ins with the law, Todd agrees to send Misha to the Juvenile Drug Offender Program. It lasts 18 to 24 months but seems a much better choice than prison. The strict judge overseeing J-DOP demands a lot from participants to ensure they stay clean. But the program is for parents as well, and Todd isn’t quite prepared for all his required court dates and Nar-Anon meetings. Neglecting those could extend Misha’s time at J-DOP or even get her booted. Todd must learn that he has a type of addiction, too; he’s enabling his daughter every time he gives her money or support when she’s in trouble. As the pressure builds, Todd’s work suffers, which may cost him his job or lose Misha the help she needs. Nothing is easy in Bastian’s unflinchingly realistic tale. The unembellished prose is as blunt as Misha’s sponsor, who says recovery doesn’t mean “things will just go back to the way they were.” Todd is sympathetic but flawed; he makes understandable mistakes but stubbornly argues with the J-DOP judge as well. Todd’s gloomy history bolsters the uncompromising story, as his father was an alcoholic and his mother, he believes, abandoned the family. But the moving tale is not all dour; the program holds a 1950s-themed talent show, in which Misha performs “Summer Nights” from *Grease*.

A somber, convincing, and stirring tale about the impact of drug dependency on a family.

THE SULPHUR PRIEST
Boas, Adrian
Wheatmark (341 pp.)
$18.95 paper  |  $9.99 e-book
Mar. 8, 2021
978-1-62787869-2

A historical novel concerning 20th-century archaeology and the Crusades. Boas presents two intertwining stories that take place more than 600 years apart. One is set in the 1920s as an archaeological team led by a man named John Riley excavates Montfort castle in what was then British Mandate Palestine. The excavation comes across a major point of interest: a
An informative primer on gardening tasks cloaked in appealingly lush descriptions.

GNOMER’S CORNER

Rhyming verse celebrates a gnome king’s fruit-and-vegetable bounty in this debut illustrated children’s book.

King Jerome Gnomer—who looks like a typical gnome statue in a photograph—gets word that it’s the right moment to plant a garden, and he wastes no time. First, he plans his beds and rows so that each kind of plant will get the right sun, shade, water, and compatible neighbors, and then he purchases seeds. Generally pagelong stanzas of rhyming couplets describe each step of the process, including planting, weeding, getting rid of pests, and inspecting the final harvest. The king gets some help from garden-tending fairies and Boots, a cat who gets rid of intruders; she’s said to relocate them, but ominously, “Baby bunnies did not stand a chance.” The garden’s crops feature a huge variety of fruits and vegetables: winter and summer squashes, herbs like cilantro and mint, onions and garlic, greens, five kinds of peppers and six types of tomatoes, various beans and peas, broccoli, watermelons, berries, and more. The king appreciates the wonder of his garden, giving praise “to water, sun, soil, dreams, and belief.” Once a year, Gnomer shares his cornucopia with the hungry, throwing them a free feast and sleeping soundly after his labors. In her book, Cromer provides an informative primer on gardening tasks cloaked in appealingly lush descriptions: “Growing red under the ground, balling up big, round, and bright. / The radishes Gnomer tasted bit his tongue with a bite.” The verse often has a charming, fairy-tale ring, but some lines can become prosaic, and the meter is frequently irregular, as in “Catching and imprisoning trespassers, safely kept under his control. / Gnomer was observant and took care of destructive weeds and slugs.” Stock photos help readers picture garden animals, bugs, and plants.

An introduction to gardening for kids that’s both practical and entertaining.

ELECTRIC TREES

Bobo, Melissa

Self (286 pp.)

$15.99 paper | Apr. 13, 2021
979-8-72-937577-6

Bobo’s motley collection of short stories delivers drama, weird creatures, and horrors.

In the opening story, “Fins,” a woman gradually develops gills and a tail every time she’s in water. She’s becoming something else, but a full transformation could mean leaving behind the life she knows. This is just one of a handful of genres that Bobo expertly tackles. The heartfelt “All of His Loved Ones” stars a funeral director struggling to accommodate a family that wants a beloved elephant at their uncle’s outdoor service. The disconcerting “Husband” follows Delila Ryan, whose husband, Henry, insists he’s named Scott Ryan and that she’s confusing details of their marriage. The author excels at driving readers toward unexpected turns. “The Tuesday Murders,” for example, is a potenct take on the familiar Groundhog Day scenario in which a woman takes drastic measures against a potential stalker, her apathetic boss, and her harassing co-workers. Other stories’ unpredictability fuels an obscure but ominous horror. In the standout “The Hum,” Maria starts working at a small-town library. As if locals’ discussions of an incessant “hum” Maria can’t hear isn’t unnerving enough, there’s also the previous employee who has mysteriously disappeared. It all culminates in a doozy of an ending. Bobe’s vibrant metaphors (“Her voice is a twist of green tendrils, bright like poison, alluring like spindles or a locked box.” This house, with its clocks out of sync and no screens on the windows, might as well be a flowering vine”) only strengthen this inventive, creepy collection.

Eclectic tales take readers through jolts, inspired moments, and endless awe.

ECLECTIC TREES

Bobo, Melissa

AuthorHouse (66 pp.)

Oct. 10, 2019
978-1-72-832952-9 paper
978-1-72-832954-3

Subterranean chamber that may hold secrets about the castle dwellers who built it. The team, however, is plagued by disgruntled employee Larry Walker, who later becomes a disgruntled former employee with a dangerous penchant for explosives and whiskey. The second narrative is set in the year 1271, in which a young man named Hermann escorts the elderly Albert of Ulm, who’s set off to the East in search of his son, who, when he disappeared, was attempting to retrieve the arm of St. John the Baptist. Hermann and Albert have picked a poor time for their expedition, however; the threat of a Saracen attack on Montfort draws near. If push comes to shove, will the castle hold? As the story alternates between the 1920s and the 13th century, readers learn much about both eras; Riley’s team wants to understand what happened in Herman’s time by piecing together the past, when men apparently risked their lives in search of bizarre treasures. The 1920s team must deal with an unpredictable foe and, in the case of one of the characters, a love interest with a local woman named Bel. Still, the 13th-century plot generates more excitement; relatively modern concerns pale in comparison to the sheer wild danger of a castle under attack, and Boas puts readers in the midst of all the “cracking of wood and the crash of stone” with little promise of help for the main characters. Yet, the overall narrative manages to maintain interest with the question of how the two tales will overlap—and what exactly was going on in that subterranean chamber.

An engagingly illustrative intersection of two distinct time periods.
Michigan litigator Burr Lafayette defends a husband accused of murdering his wife.

In 1977, Brian Dunn's rifle discharged and killed his wife, Claudia. Police and the coroner ruled it an accident, as Brian had claimed. But now, six years later, he's arrested for murder. Burr, though not a criminal lawyer, reluctantly agrees to help since his old flame Suzanne Fairchild is Brian's sister-in-law. It only takes a bail hearing for Burr to realize the judge and the prosecutor on the case are both pigheaded and shady. New evidence, however, suggests that Brian, on the night in question, intentionally pointed and fired the rife at Claudia. Burr can try to dispute that, but he isn't prepared for surprise witnesses and a judge who incessantly overrules his objections. The fact that Brian—and possibly Suzanne as well—is withholding pertinent info makes Burr's work even harder. The litigator must rely on his legal skills and wit to keep his client out of prison. As in earlier Burr-centric novels, Cutter, whose last book was Bear Bones (2020), turns a relatively simple legal case into a gleefully complex mystery. The story's abundant courtroom scenes give the story gravitas. Burr doesn't dramatically extract confessions on the stand; rather, his courtroom examinations and cross-examinations work in his favor as often as they damage his case. The dialogue pops even outside the court, as in Burr's rapid-fire questioning of a man who borrowed Brian's rifle not long before Claudia's death. Cutter's narrative maintains a relentless edge; numerous characters lie; and an unsettling ambiguity hangs over everything.

Another superb, realistic installment of this Midwestern legal thriller series.

The Master of the night sky, the wizened older man create Earth from a castle in the clouds. But the Master has a problem; during the day, he watches the people of Earth, but the darkness of night makes him miss looking at them. Sam promises to think of something, but the route is circuitous. Sam is the inventor of the Mini Moon, which uses leftover Sun Bits; his wife, Clem, is the creator of the rainbow and designs a sky tapestry for sunrise and sunset. When Sam fashions the Mega Moon to solve the Master's night vision problem, he's devastated to realize he's ripped holes in Clem's sky weavings. But then the Master shows Sam that the holes have created the stars, calling them “your best invention yet.” This charming tale is light on logic and high on whimsy, and the fairy-tale flavor makes it feel like a much older, familiar story. Davis uses accessible language for independent readers and a comforting tone to encourage nighttime lap reading with an adult. The text switches between present and past tense, which may irk some readers. Xi’s illustrations, featuring an all-White, round-faced cast, are full of fancy, and the depictions of acts of creation—Clem's rainbow weaving and Sam's Sun Dust sprinkling—are particularly well done.

For fairy-tale lovers, this appealing story adds a dash of magic to the night sky.

Two old college friends get more than they bargained for when they revive a youthful marriage pact in this debut novel about millennial self-discovery.

As Hannah Abbott celebrates her 30th birthday in the office of Deafening Silence New York, the indie music magazine where she works, she is overwhelmed by complex emotions. Social media posts spark nostalgia with pictures of her with college friends Kate Novack and Will Thorne, “three musketeers” navigating the challenges of young adulthood. The mysterious delivery of white carnations stirs her curiosity, as she’s pretty sure her boyfriend, Brian, would have no clue they are her favorite. Overwinding everything is a vague but constant sense of dissatisfaction that interferes with her sense of accomplishment. She loves her job, but it offers no medical benefits to help her deal with a worrying knee injury. Her relationship with Brian feels distant and unfulfilling, though she can't put her finger on exactly why. Into this emotional turmoil comes Will, returning to Hannah's life to make good on a pact the two best friends made in college to marry each other if neither had found a mate by the age of 30. Will's life is also in free fall, triggered by the discovery that his girlfriend, Madison, was cheating on him with his older brother, Jon. Diving into a rabbit hole of depression and alcohol has not improved Will's position at the family firm, run with an iron hand by his father, Jonathan. Marriage to each other could provide both Hannah and Will with the stability they need, but will it strengthen or destroy their friendship? Writing within a sometimes-formulaic genre, Dembowski has created genuinely appealing characters in Hannah and Will, and she succeeds in making their unusual relationship journey absorbing and satisfying. She has a sure hand with millennial vernacular, including texting and the ever present
social media, as in Hannah’s sister’s succinct text response to the protagonist’s announcement of her sudden marriage: “Ruh-roh—preggo?” If some of the obstacles to romance seem a bit forced (Hannah’s obliviousness to Will’s discomfort around Madison and Jon is hard to believe), the novel’s grounding in its era never is.

A convincing tale about the evolution of a friendship and a romance.

**ALEX AND HIS MAGICAL COLORS: An Autism Discovery Story**  
Denham, Dr. Joe  
Illus. by Haley, Denise  
Citation Media (36 pp.)  
$16.95 | Mar. 30, 2021  
978-1-73414292-1

A young boy with autism enriches his neighborhood with a mural in Denham’s picture book.

Diverse children scream and cheer as they play baseball but feel sad afterward because of the field’s “old, gray, gloomy” walls. Small Alex, who’s White, is sad too, because the playtime noise (symbolized by red, spiky triangles and colored circles) is too much for him. Alex loves to draw bright, Lisa Frank–esque pictures of animals and family members. “Alex doesn’t smile often,” says the narrator, “but his paintings always make him happy.”

After a walk with his grandmother through the baseball field, Alex decides to paint a bright mural to make the space better—and be part of the games even if he can’t be there in person. As he paints, children compliment his art and invite him to create more murals elsewhere. Refreshingly, this narrative about autism and sensory processing disorder makes space for children to excuse themselves from situations that distress them and find alternate ways to participate; there’s no mandate that Alex play sports or tolerate noise. Simple text in an easy-to-read typeface and Haley’s clean, lineless art make this accessible to developing readers.

The storyline emphasizes Alex’s agency and creativity, and an ending questionnaire prompts parents to engage in open-ended conversations with kids about managing overwhelming stimuli.

An affirming, progressive approach to sensory issues and autism.

**WITCH HUNTER Volume One: Hunt the Hunters**  
Ferrante, Vincent  
Monarch Comics (145 pp.)  
$15.99 paper | Sep. 25, 2020  
978-1-73583680-5

In Ferrante’s debut graphic novel, a 17th-century man uses magical powers and weapons to battle evil witches and creatures in the modern day.

In 1692, Jon Redmont’s mother, knowing her Coven of Light will burn at the stake, casts a spell to preserve her son’s soul in a crystal. Three hundred years later, Jon awakens imbued with the coven’s combined power. He’s essentially a superhero, complete with enchanted cloak, mask, and weaponry. Jon vows to combat the Scarlet Circle, a fiendish group of witches and other creatures, such as dark elves, threatening the contemporary world. He first retrieves a stolen witch watch—a device that allows him to open portals to “almost anywhere”—and after settling in “New York City,” he offers his services to the general public in a magic-infused advertisement. His rescue of a kidnapped girl ultimately dredges up someone with a connection to the Scarlet Circle: Elesar Monmorte, who sets his sights, and minions, on Jon. Elesar was the mastermind of the Coven of Light’s massacre and now wants the man whom somehow escaped death all those years ago. Ferrante’s graphic novel, which collects four comic-book issues, features a bevy of vibrant characters. For example, Jon’s mysterious aide, Kitty Allen, dons Venetian masks that allow her to see others “true nature,” and Elesar gets a lengthy, absorbing origin story. But although that villain and an assortment of henchmen provide a sense of menace, Ferrante keeps the tone light with one-liners, visual gags, and even a mock ad for Scarlet Circle Cookies. Some of the violence, too, is played for laughs; in one memorable scene, Jon chops and shoots his way through countless monsters—and one of them, post-beheading, asks to see a doctor. Although several different artists provided illustrations, the artwork is consistent, particularly when portraying Jon’s bright purple costume and perpetual smirk.

A spirited cast propels a wonderfully entertaining comic-book series.

**THE MAN WHO BEAT DEATH VALLEY**  
Based on the True Story of William Lewis Manly  
Fox, Deborah A.  
Illus. by the author  
Deb Fox Design Co. (106 pp.)  
$19.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2020  
978-0-578-72022-7

This children’s historical graphic novel recounts a perilous 19th-century journey through Death Valley.

In 1849, William Lewis Manly embarks on a 2,500-mile trip from Mineral Point, Wisconsin, to California, bent on joining the Gold Rush. He is supposed to set out with his friends Asahel and Sarah Bennett, but after returning from an expedition, he finds they have already left and taken his equipment with them. Lewis joins a group going west, finally catching up (after several difficult and dangerous episodes) with the Bennetts and their party in October near Springville, Utah. Along with a few others, Lewis and the Bennetts decide to follow a map promising to shave weeks from the journey. It leads them through a harsh land of canyons and desert until, already near starvation, they
Alongside this main tale, Frimmer works in subplots involving Alison's experiences with recovery and rehabilitation. Dur

in her second graphic novel, Fox tells an action-packed story

The patient claims he was harmed during exactly the kind of

Her sister's husband, Grant Kaplan, is an expert neurosurgeon

and has a good deal of experience with cases like hers. The

drill as it tunneled through the bone,” readers are told at one

point, “the sharp pop as the scalpel pierced the dura, and the

familiar smell of bone dust in the air.” Far more appealing and

intriguing is Alison's transformation, both medical and per-

sonal, as the narrative progresses. Frimmer chronicles this mul-

tipart drama with warmth and a sharp narrative intelligence,

and although Sadie's plot strand is noticeably weaker than the

others, even there the story's tender humanity saves the day.

A thoughtful and multifaceted tale of recuperation and

reinvention.

**THE LAST SPEAKER
OF SKALWEGIAN**

Gardner, David

Encircle Publications (308 pp.)

$17.99 paper | Sep. 8, 2021

978-1-64599-239-4

A comic novel focuses on a dying lan-
guage and the last chance to save it.

In this tale, Gardner presents Leon-

ard Thorson, an assistant professor at a

“fourth-rate” school called Ghurkin Col-
lege. Ghurkin, whose mascot is a gerbil, is not exactly known

for excellence in anything. Thanks to a corrupt dean, the school

nevertheless boasts a grand football stadium. Lenny is a lin-

guist who teaches French, lives in an apartment that used to

be a rotating restaurant (that still occasionally revolves), and

loves nothing more than diving deep into etymology. Lenny

also works on a project with an Army veteran named Charlie.

Charlie is said to be the last living speaker of a language called

Skalwegian that comes from the now vacant island of Skalvik,

located some 80 miles north of Norway. The two men hope to

preserve the language, which is in danger of being lost forever.

But Lenny soon learns that Charlie's project is not quite on the

altruistic level he was led to believe. It also doesn't help that

professional hit men are actively trying to assassinate Lenny.

Or that many on campus hate Lenny for flunking two football

players who never went to class. This wacky tale comes straight

from left field. A nice-guy linguist who lives in a former res-

taurant and fails to realize that people are trying to kill him is

unlike most heroes readers would expect to encounter. But the

setup works. When Lenny is not providing the background on a

word like idiot (“descended through middle English from the

Old French word idiote,” readers are told), he is accidentally

fending off assassins and wooing a sexy TV broadcaster. But

even for such a fanciful tale, some aspects stretch credulity.
The dean, for one, is so woefully incompetent that he runs afoot of

a bad guy named Luther Skammer. (Yes, Skammer.) Still, Lenny

is the type of hero worth rooting for. Tough but not arrogant,

smart but not stuffy, he will stir readers' curiosity, making them

wonder where his rollicking adventure will ultimately land him.

A genial protagonist will keep readers enticed throughout

this amusing romp.
**“A quiet book whose tales offer quiet revelations.”**

**EXPECT SOME DELAYS**

*Short Stories About Detours in Life*

Gaye, Carolyn

Archway (256 pp.)


Feb. 1, 2021

978-1-66-570040-5

Gaye’s short story collection explores the lives of a range of aging characters.

In this set of tales, the author shows herself to be particularly attuned to the feelings of people in transience or a liminal state; in one case, a single character ages decades over the course of a single story. Indeed, it’s the aged that are her primary focus; as she states in her introduction, “This book is for older people, anyone who knows older people, or anyone who contemplates becoming older.” This also describes many of her characters, who reflect back on long lives and are often uncomfortable with the irrevocable changes that come with getting on in years. In the opening work, “To Clown or Not To Clown,” Jack Wilder is a washed-up thespian who “yearned to be an actor with gravitas, to be taken seriously,” but is unable to fathom his current place in the industry. In “The Oasis,” a man starts to question his unrealized dreams as years pass by: “did his old plans fit into his future, or was he just muddling along with no real purpose?” Food columnist Robert Caruso in “The Critic” is also at a crossroads as his story opens: He writes an incredibly acerbic column, but his unpleasant manner has led to divorce. Yet, as the story progresses, he attempts to overcome his limitations with time.

A low-key but relatable book about late-in-life change and the importance of connection.

**BEYOND FEAR**

*How I Fought the Feds For Six Years—and Won*

Giovannis, Ted

Amplify Publishing (216 pp.)


978-1-64-543511-2

The story of a lawsuit that highlighted bureaucratic errors in the health care field.

In his debut nonfiction book, Giovannis recounts his multiyear quest to get the federal government to correct a calculation issue involving hospital reimbursement rates that ended in a multimillion-dollar settlement in favor of the hospitals. The author, a hospital administrator-turned-consultant, opens the book with an overview of his personal history, then moves on to the central issue: He discovered an error in the formula being used to determine the amount of Medicare payments to hospitals, and when he notified Medicare administrators about the problem, they quietly updated the formula but refused to discuss making good on past miscalculations. Giovannis and his colleagues filed suit against the federal government and recruited hospitals to join the action, hoping to gather more than 100 plaintiffs; they ended up with more than 700 hospitals signing on, with Giovannis as the leader and decision-maker. As the lawsuit proceeded, the author’s wife, Jayne, was dying of cancer; this book is both a tribute to her and a celebration of a wrong righted. The author does a good job of highlighting the key elements of a complex, obscure topic with significant financial implications, providing calculation details for readers who may be interested but effectively aiming the majority of the text at a general audience. Although Giovannis is the hero of the narrative, he acknowledges the contributions of his colleagues; as a result, this is the story of a team effort rather than an individual crusade. The lawsuit’s outcome is evident from the book’s subtitle, but the author still manages to maintain tension throughout as he describes the many challenges and setbacks that the plaintiffs encountered. The book also offers some intriguing big-picture insights into the roles of career bureaucrats, the for-profit companies that make money from government programs, and the relationship between them. Overall, it’s a well-written story on a niche topic for an audience of nonspecialists and a compelling look at modern governance.

**UNSTOPPABLE**

*Sigi B. Wilzig’s Astonishing Journey From Auschwitz Survivor and Penniless Immigrant to Wall Street Legend*

Greene, Joshua M.

Insight Editions (352 pp.)


978-1-64-722215-4

A biography traces the odyssey of a Holocaust survivor who became a CEO.

Holocaust scholar and filmmaker Greene, whose acclaimed work includes the book *Witness* (2001), offers readers the extraordinary story of Sigi B. Wilzig. Born in Prussia’s contested Polish Corridor in 1926, Wilzig began his lifelong battle with antisemitism as a 6-year-old child when he was held head-first over a meat grinder by a local farmer who threatened to make “chopped Jew meat.” By his 19th birthday, “nearly dead from exhaustion, malnutrition, and pneumonia,” Wilzig was among the few survivors of the Auschwitz-Birkenau and Mauthausen concentration camps. While the first third of the volume recounts the gruesome, brutal details of the horrors Wilzig
confronted during the 1910s and ’40s, the rest tells the Horatio Alger story of his postwar immigration to the United States. With nothing more than a grammar school education, Wilzig found a job shoveling snow from a New York City sidewalk. The work shows how he eventually forged a multibillion-dollar oil and commercial banking empire. As president, chairman, and CEO of the Wilshire Oil Company of Texas and the Trust Company of New Jersey, he continued to face anti-Jewish sentiment “in two of postwar America’s most antisemitic industries.” Greene’s concise, approachable narrative successfully brings Wilzig’s “volcano” of a personality and “inspired voice” to the fore. The author recounts the entrepreneur’s interactions with presidents, celebrities, and CEOs and presents anecdotes of his business prowess and tenacity. Wilzig was, for instance, “the first person in history to sue the Federal Reserve.” In addition to chronicling his Wall Street acumen, the book relates Wilzig’s fight against Holocaust deniers, including his role in establishing the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, a further testimony to his legacy. This well-researched biography is largely based on original interviews with Wilzig’s business partners, rivals, and contemporaries (including his longtime chauffeur), which—supplemented with ample family photographs—help provide an intimate portrait of a complex man. Like many rags-to-riches tales, the work leans heavily toward hagiography, though this may indeed be difficult to avoid given Wilzig’s remarkable life.

A gripping account that takes readers from Nazi concentration camps to Wall Street boardrooms.

LADY BE GOOD
The Life and Times of Dorothy Hale
Hamilton, Pamela
Koehler Books (298 pp.)
$29.95 | $18.95 paper | $7.99 e-book
Mar. 31, 2021
978-1-64-663272-5
978-1-64-663270-1 paper

A historical novel about the once-famous American socialite Dorothy Hale. Former NBC News producer Hamilton has chosen a subject of her debut novel who’s likely best remembered today as the focus of a famous 1939 painting by Frida Kahlo. In the 1920s and ‘30s, the intelligent, attractive, and sophisticated Hale ran in glamorous circles that included future member of Congress and ambassador Clare Boothe Brokaw (later Luce). Hale tried to break into a career in show business, and history has largely judged her as a thwarted figure—one whose lack of success in entertainment or in love (she was divorced once and had several ill-starred affairs) eventually drove her to leap from her Central Park South apartment window to her death—the very act that Kahlo immortalized in her aforementioned work, The Suicide of Dorothy Hale. In this novel, Hamilton sets out to tell a much fuller story, taking readers on a lightly fictionalized tour of Hale’s upbringing and spending a satisfying amount of time on her complex, loving second marriage to artist Gardner Hale. The narrative also lavishes attention on Dorothy’s increasingly deep friendship with Clare, who manages to do in this novel what she always managed to do in real life—get all the best lines: “Courage is the ladder on which all other virtues mount," she writes to Dorothy at one point. At another moment that showcases Hamilton’s ear for conversation and talent for pacing, Gardner tells Dorothy, “You know of course that I am happier than I’ve ever been and will remain so if it’s just the two of us forevermore,” which prompts Dorothy to remember one of Luce’s remarks: “For evermore is shorter than you think.” Overall, the author’s narrative is smooth and invitingly readable, wearing its clearly considerable research lightly; her version of Dorothy’s doomed relationship with President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s adviser and Works Progress Administration administrator Harry Hopkins is surprisingly gripping. The narrative never stoops to easy renditions, and as a result, Dorothy emerges as both a charismatic and vulnerable figure.

A smart and touchingly sympathetic fictional portrayal of an enigmatic woman.

THE HAZE
Hawkes, Burnaby
Athena Book Tavern (428 pp.)
$34.99 | $26.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
Jan. 7, 2021
978-1-77-726969-2
978-1-77-720242-2 paper

A weathered CIA agent takes on a new mission in this debut spy novel featuring multinational intrigue. Hawkes’ intricate tale is set in 2013, when Hector Kane, a CIA operative masquerading as a college professor, is leading a class trip to Pulau, an island nation in the Middle East. Even the university trip to Pulau, ostensibly for academic purposes, is a sham—an excuse for Kane to get close to Fatima Noman, one of the students. Fatima is the dean’s niece—but more importantly, her father, Ibrahim Noman, holds tremendous political sway in Egypt. In 2011, his organization, Haram, was a platform for political activism, earning him the sobriquet “Godfather of the Revolution.” Now, Ibrahim runs Tamarod, a political venture to depose the Muslim Brotherhood and redo the last election. Kane’s mission is called Operation C.O.R.O.N.A., the purpose of which is “to abort the Egyptian anti-democratic movement known as Tamarod.” Fatima is a key piece of the plan. Kane, working with Pulau operatives, has been instructed to inject Fatima with KV-19, a coronavirus that causes severe respiratory symptoms. With Fatima infected, the CIA’s Cairo office will use her health as a bargaining chip to force Ibrahim to abort Tamarod. But it’s uncertain if this is the true mission, and Kane must wade through the waters of intrigue and a throng of geopolitical jostling to make sense of the situation. Like a good spy, he knows there’s no one to trust—least of all, his CIA handlers and associates.
Hawkes is a wonderfully vivid writer, using striking descriptions to illustrate character and place. “Her cheeks were stamped by butterfly freckles,” he writes of Fatima. The author’s passages about Pulau bring to life the island with its “yacht-gorged harbor.” “Despite the tyranny of the haze,” Hawkes writes, “the city lived up to its reputation. Dazzling lights enlivening its streets and adorning its billion trees.” Given the author’s facility to make a story lively and urgent with clarity and details, the tale’s frequent digressions into the past become distracting, even frustrating. Hawkes is eager to establish Kane’s trajectory through the agency, rife with failures and frustrations. When Kane encounters a new character, the event often launches a backstory that tends to be too lengthy. With some characters, like Ibrahim, this backtracking is meant to lend the tale’s present the proper stakes. With others, it seems that Hawkes enjoys shading in the past even if it threatens the momentum of the fictional present. The novel’s swift and excellent prelude, for instance, shows what the author is capable of when his foot stays on the gas. Still, the story is enjoyably twisty, full of duplicity and deception, and portrays complicated characters who have competing allegiances and motives. The book also deftly depicts the frighteningly labyrinthine bureaucracy of the intelligence community.

A knotty and satisfying tale of action, drama, and secrets.
Absorbing poems that capture the majesty of nature and the complexity of women’s inner worlds.

ALL MORNING THE CROWS

Kearney, Meg

WordWorks (102 pp.)

$18.00 paper | Apr. 1, 2021

978-1-94-458544-0

A collection offers avian-themed poetry.

three starts with two definitions of the word bird, which can mean the winged animal or, in British slang, a girl. A bird lover since childhood, the author delivers 51 poems, many inspired by

SHADOWS AMONG US

Kane, Ellery

Self (440 pp.)


Aug. 23, 2019

978-1-73-367015-9

A mother hunts for her daughter's killer in Kane's latest psychological thriller in a series.

Dr. Mollie Roar was once a successful psychologist working at Napa State Hospital in California. However, the kidnapping and murder of her 15-year-old daughter, Dakota, two years ago led to the dissolution of Mollie's marriage to Dakota's father, Cole, and now Mollie spends much of her time drinking or going to a support group for grieving parents. There, she finds solace in her friend and occasional lover, Grant Sawyer. Dakota's murder is still unsolved, but rumor has it that the perpetrator is the Shadow Man, a prolific serial killer who's local to Napa. When terminally ill Vietnam veteran Wendall Grady begins seeing Mollie as a therapy client to confess his past sins, he reveals information that fuels her desire to further investigate her daughter's murder. A parallel plotline set before the teen's death shows Dakota's increasing interest in serial killers—the Shadow Man works very well and effectively develops a sense of intrigue. The teenager isn't merely a murder victim, but a well-developed character, without ever feeling formulaic. Mollie's chapters, in particular, are filled with anguish: "The drawer stays shut, but I know the past is alive inside it. It's unburied now. And it may as well be a hand clawing up from its shallow grave to seize me by the throat." The juxtaposition of Dakota's investigations into the Shadow Man works very well and effectively develops a sense of intrigue. The teenager isn't merely a murder victim, but a well-developed character; she reluctantly learns that her parents are imperfect, deals with boys who want too much too soon, and has disagreements with her best friend. Mollie is also a fully realized figure who's both unlikeable and sympathetic, by turns.

An absorbing tale and an adept examination of grief.

YARA AND PURR

The Rescue of a Purring Monkey

Lapid, Yossi

Illus. by Pasek, Joanna

Lapid Children's Books (34 pp.)


A purring monkey is reunited with his father in this picture-book series entry by author Lapid and illustrator Pasek.

In the Amazonian rainforest, a baby monkey named Purr eats berries and seeds as he waits for his Pa. He imagines the fun things they'll do together, such as swinging from tree to tree. Hours pass and the father doesn't return, so Purr becomes afraid and begins to cry. Meanwhile, a human girl, Yara, finds Pa ensnared in wires. She frees him and takes him to her mother, who tends his wounds. Pa, who can talk, alerts Yara about his son, Purr, and Yara sets out to find him. At first, Purr hides, but the monkeys are eventually reunited. Backmatter includes a photo and description of the endangered Caquetá titi monkey, known as the "purring monkey." Lapid writes rhyming couplets that feel confident, and their rigid structure creates a consistent rhythm that's both comforting and predictable: "Purr sat on a rock / and licked his thick fur // He was very content, / so he started to purr." Artist Pasek captures the vibrancy of the Amazon rainforest with watery greens and lush flora and fauna, drawn with precise yet fluid brush strokes. Yara and her mother both have brown skin.

A cozy, charming story of a family reunion.
As an adult in London, she experiences failed relationships and first boyfriends expose her to predictable teenage heartache despite its rich multicultural settings. The adulthood chapters, devoutly religious grandmother after her American father abandoned them. The girl recounts the first “tiny invasions” of her body when she was young, including the stares of creepy men and a swimming instructor’s unwelcome touch. She experiments with sex and alcohol as a teen, which causes some of her peers to label her “the ‘cool chick’ ” while others call her a “slag” or “frigid.” After she moves with her mother to Paris, she quickly gets caught up in a world of wealthy, international teenagers who party without consequence or supervision. Her peers to label her “the ‘cool chick’ ” while others call her a “slag” or “frigid.” After she moves with her mother to Paris, she quickly gets caught up in a world of wealthy, international teenagers who party without consequence or supervision. Her first boyfriends expose her to predictable teenage heartache before “The Incident”—a devastating sexual assault that she struggles to name and that had a profound effect on her psyche. As an adult in London, she experiences failed relationships and encounters with men who try to convince her that she deserves abuse for being a “tease” or a “psycho.” It takes a while for Lebowitz’s work to find its rhythm, but when it does, it delivers emotional, thoughtful insights about male aggression. The first half of the book feels like a somber but unremarkable memoir despite its rich multicultural settings. The adulthood chapters, however, are more intriguing, as they often skip years at a time, throwing readers in the middle of the narrator’s struggle and making her painful memories feel universal. At one point, for example, Lebowitz describes the end of a marriage with little ceremony, to her friends, is a sparrow whose species is tasked with the conveyance of souls who haven’t yet crossed over to the world beyond. When Spiz is assigned to retrieve the soul of William Eduardo Compostela Estes, a philosophy professor who died in pursuit of his daughter’s killer, Spiz finds herself emotionally connected to him, to her surprise. Empathizing with William’s desire to avenge his child, yet fearing for the fate of his soul should he succeed, she allows him to remain in the mortal realm and even assumes a human form to assist him. But her growing, mutual love for William has a price, marking her as an enemy of her own avian society and ultimately drawing her into a war between free and enslaved birds. Meanwhile, with every passing moment in the mortal realm, William’s soul grows weaker and threatens to fade away for good. When Spiz is presented with a magical path that
could prolong William’s soul-life by giving him part of her own, she faces an impossible decision: protect the person she loves and confine him to her world or risk losing her connection with him to the ravages of time. Mayo’s work is full of heart, and readers will quickly find themselves immersed in its vivid, magical landscape. It also has some clever details, such as the aviaries’ use of famous fast-food arches as the passage between two worlds “because they [are] plentiful.” However, it’s not the differences between the realms of the living world and the avian-centered afterlife but the similarities between them that will resonate with readers. Love, pride, courage, and unity reverberate throughout both worlds, positing that humans aren’t so different from their animal, or even otherworldly, brethren. The tale ends with an inspiring revelation about the future of one of its endearing characters that will leave readers eager for the next installment in the Hidden Aviaries series.

A compelling, imaginative story about the transformative power of love.

**THE HERALDING**
*Mccarthy, Ashley*

Self (228 pp.)
Feb. 23, 2021

Disease, freezing cold, unrelenting rain, and a beast lurking in the woods threaten the inhabitants of a small English village in the 14th century in McCarthy’s medieval fantasy novel.

In April 1316, Matilda’s husband of but two years, Galeran, succumbs to “a pestilence.” It’s a time of widespread famine, brought about by a year of horrible weather. Hunger now rules the lives of the villagers, and with starvation come suspicion and madness. Death and purgatory burial are daily occurrences. The author describes in gruesome detail the deterioration of one young man whom Matilda cared for after he sank into delirium: “[H]is mind had soon departed and he screamed at the monsters that were only in his head. His fingers began to darken until they turned black, and one by one, fell off.” In September, a monstrous beast that’s been living in a nearby black pit emerges, shakes himself, and becomes a man. Into the plagued village walks the shape-shifter with mystical powers: Finn, who seems young and charming with a gentle temperament. But after storehouses are raided and animals disappear, villagers eye Finn as the source of their misery. The novel tells a supernatural horror story that’s dominated by a persistent tone of danger and bleakness; indeed, the only source of optimism is in the budding romance between Finn and Matilda. She’s a likable lead character who gradually finds her strength even as she faces the condemnation of her friends and neighbors. Overall, McCarthy is a fine wordsmith, and she builds tension with each image of misery and impending doom: “the dark began to press against her door and windows. And the fog’s tendrils sneaked through the spaces in the walls. Maybe there was more than cold and hunger lurking in the fog.” The tale is consistently shrouded in dark mystery, and it will be best appreciated by readers who savor supernatural stories about prowling demons in the dark.

**AMONG THE BEAUTIFUL BEASTS**
*Mcmullen, Lori*

She Writes Press (328 pp.)


A chilling campfire-style thriller.

**AMONG THE BEAUTIFUL BEASTS**

In 1896 in Providence, Rhode Island, 5-year-old Marjory Stoneman lives in a home filled with her mother Lillian’s singing; her father, Frank, sometimes reads to her from volumes such as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. But when Frank can’t keep steady work, Lillian leaves, with Marjory in tow. They move to Marjory’s grandparents’ home in Taunton, Massachusetts. Soon after, Lillian suffers a breakdown and ends up in Butler’s Sanitarium; she returns home not quite the same, and Marjory takes refuge in literature and the hope that her father will someday visit her. Years later, her grandmother helps her attend Wellesley College; there, Marjory discovers her passions for nature and writing. After graduation, she marries Kenneth Douglas, a much-older grifter whose inability to procure honest work renders them destitute. Thankfully, Marjory’s uncle, Dr. Edward Stoneman, finds her and reveals that her father’s in Florida, running the *Miami Herald*. Marjory soon becomes the society editor of that paper. When Lilla, Frank’s new wife, suggests that the capable young writer ask for more serious work, she does so, which leads to her writing about women’s suffrage and a decadeslong interest in the Florida Everglades. McMullen crafts a masterful portrait of a women’s suffrage and conservation icon, showing how Marjory’s life is characterized by the line, “Sustaining the soul of another means starving my own.” Her generous heart and intelligence seemingly conspire to place others in her care who are far less capable than she is, including Lillian and Kenneth. This tragic streak ends after she meets fellow newspaper writer Andy Walker of the *Miami Metropolis*, whose “ideas had been gifts, not expenses.” The magic of the not-yet-urbanized swampland and Marjory’s flowering into womanhood merge in McMullen’s prose: “The phosphorescent sea rolled on and on, over our toes...until we were standing together in liquid stardust.” Later, World War I raffles the life she and Andy plan together; by the end, however, the author effectively shows how Marjory’s belief in her own powers helps her build a life of her own choosing.

A fantastic debut that showcases an important figure and the landscape she worked to preserve.
QUEEN OF TEETH
Piper, Hailey
Strangehouse Books (196 pp.)

The intersection of two women falling in love, a newly born entity, and a corrupt big pharma company set the stage for this horror story.

Decades ago, AlphaBeta Pharmaceutical unleashed a virus on the world that affected thousands. The children of infected are chimera—they contain the DNA of two or more individuals—and they’re closely monitored by the company during mandatory monthly checkups. So when chimera Yolanda “Yaya” Betancourt wakes up one day after a sex romp with a woman named Docia “Doc” Hall, an AlphaBeta Pharmaceutical agent, and discovers teeth between her thighs, she thinks the vagina dentata is nothing to worry about and probably related to her medical history. But the teeth are only the start; they’re followed by horns and tentacles that spring out of Yaya’s vagina in a slow metamorphosis that turns her into something else altogether, something that shares a mind with an inner being called Magenta whose cravings for peanut butter (and other forms of protein) take Yaya to strange places. Meanwhile, Doc experiences a transformation of her own. Her encounters with Yaya (and Magenta) lead her to complete the dedication to discussion of more “appropriate” subjects, such as “education, child labor, and library creation.” However, men in town form their own club to fight the amendment, and the community atmosphere becomes confrontational, especially during a July parade in which suffragists are met by hecklers. After Kansas voters approve the amendment, Kathryn, Mary, and her growing group of suffragists turn their attention to Washington, D.C., joining the March 1913 walk for voting rights during Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration. Reynolds parallels her primary narrative with Yaya’s personal struggle: She was injured in a fall several years ago, which left her with a limp, and she’s determined to one day reach the summit of Sugar Loaf Hill. The author also effectively provides additional drama in a disturbing side plot about the marriage of one of Kathryn’s friends, which is scarred by infidelity and domestic violence. The overall character development is minimal, however, and the pace ambles a bit too casually. The most engaging section covers Kathryn’s yearlong participation in the picket line outside the White House fence, beginning in February 1917. Here, Reynolds’ prose becomes more impassioned as he describes the increasing violence the women faced; in November 1917, for instance, Kathryn is sentenced to two months in the Occoquan Workhouse, a hellhole where she is dragged, beaten, and handcuffed to a bar above her head: “Cries and moans echoed through the corridors into the night.”

An often compelling historical overview but an uneven drama.

THE PLAYMAKER MINDSET
Rogers, Jeff
Best Seller Publishing (130 pp.)
$0.99 e-book | May 16, 2021

A frustrated marketer finds motivation through improvisational acting. In this debut business fable, Rogers uses marketing executive Jerry, who is not loving his job and is on the verge of quitting after his boss assigns yet another impossible project, as a corporate Everyman. When Jerry meets his son’s kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Lauren, he is initially skeptical about her plans to focus on play in the classroom since the students will eventually end up in work environments as frustrating and fun-free as his own. Mrs. Lauren, who has a Ph.D. in psychology, offers Jerry some food for thought on the value of play and encourages him to join her at the improv workshop she runs. Jerry observes and then participates in the improv exercises, learning how to collaborate and cultivate creativity while enjoying himself. After embracing the improv techniques, which Mrs. Lauren calls the
“PLAYmaker Mindset,” Jerry returns to work with a new enthusiasm. He gets the team collaborating on the impossible project to go through its own improv training and creates a play-positive space in the office. There, they are able to develop and implement a new marketing plan in record time. Rogers, who draws on decades of experience acting and teaching improv techniques, skillfully turns the in-person stage exercises into well-organized scenes that allow readers to follow the concepts on the page and do not demand any prior knowledge of improv terminology or practices. Mrs. Lauren effectively details the psychology of creativity, though her dialogue does verge on the didactic as she gives one explanation after another. Each chapter concludes with “Jerry’s Journal,” a bulleted list of the key takeaways (“Making others look good is the fastest way to start building a team or ensemble mindset”). While Jerry’s story is not particularly compelling, the book does its job as a business resource, providing readable prose and a substantial number of actionable takeaways that readers can easily implement in their own professional lives. The volume delivers a well-reasoned case for incorporating play into work habits.

A solid, useful business book about creativity and play.

**STARGAZING IN SOLITUDE**

Samples, Suzanne

Running Wild Press (338 pp.)


978-1-94-704192-9

A writer continues to explore life after a terminal diagnosis in her second memoir.

After Frontal Matter: Glue Gone Wild (2018), writer and Appalachian State University professor Samples has returned to the short, potent essays that recount her experience of terminal glioblastoma multiforme, a type of aggressive brain cancer. While her previous book examined the more immediate and physical implications of cancer, Samples now turns to the fallout in her personal life as treatments start to span years. (“You’re saying I might have to do this for 12 more years?” she hilariously asked a doctor trying to give her hopeful life span predictions.)

The different anecdotes are set in Boone, North Carolina, and various locations where she traveled with her family. Samples stumbled after her hard-partying sister, Sarah, in Brooklyn and followed her mother, Jenifer, on Alaskan and Caribbean cruises (“Suzanne + Brain Cancer = Jenifer Buys Cruises”). There is a loose chronology covering her return to work, the publication of her first memoir, her move to live with her parents in West Virginia, and finally, the rise of Covid-19, which introduced the rest of the world to the isolation she had known for years. But it’s that very sense of isolation that serves as the real glue holding her narratives together. “It’s funny how everyone is your friend until you get brain cancer,” Samples posts on social media, inadvertently creating comments that end a yearslong friendship. Her attempt at a one-night stand with a younger woman created a volatile relationship that she refused to put above her art. Several friends disappeared, some following her own outbursts. It all reinforced Samples’ sense that she lived alone in a “purgatory,” somewhere between recovered and still terminally ill. (She nails this unsettling sentiment in one of the book’s standout stories featuring a dreamlike support group that takes place “nowhere.”) Samples guides us through perhaps even more troubling, existential territory; but she has yet to lose her caustic, playful wit. Her asides are sharp and laugh-out-loud funny, making her grim purgatory a fascinating, strangely entertaining place to visit.

A follow-up that tackles loneliness and isolation with remarkable candor and biting comedy.

**THE RISING**

Seitz, L.F

Self (427 pp.) | Sep. 1, 2021

$2.99 e-book

A teenager’s special abilities and hazy origin put her in the midst of an impending angel-demon clash in this debut fantasy. Lamia Relictus is a loner by choice, an orphan who has bounced around foster families. One night on her way home to her Kenosha, Wisconsin, apartment, a stranger assaults her. This man, who she later learns is Micah Anderson, initially believed Lamia was a Cambion—the spawn of a demon and a human. This may be true, as Lamia doesn’t know her birthparents. But Micah, an angel-human Nephilim, assures her she’s unique, ostensibly more in tune with her human side than her demon one. Mutual trust unexpectedly grows, and together they scour for information on “The Rising,” an event demons seem to be plotting. Micah trains Lamia to battle halflings using incantations and her dormant abilities, like healing. Lamia proves capable and, as it turns out, may be even more special than a benevolent Cambion. As The Rising virtually guarantees a confrontation between angels and demons, Lamia must choose a side and overcome her fear—can she be a hero, or is she destined to be a villain? Seitz’s series opener deftly introduces the protagonist and her story. Perpetually confident Lamia braves endless obstacles but still worries Micah will ultimately decide to kill her. Readers moreover get a glimpse of her intriguing backstory, including an ability she displayed when she was merely 13 years old. Taut scenes with Cambions (possibly harboring details on The Rising) soon give way to romantic tension, as Micah’s jealous Nephilim ex-girlfriend becomes one of Lamia’s adversaries. But the author doesn’t allow romance to overshadow Lamia’s self-discovery; her first-person narrative persistently debates her outcast status, as she’s not quite a Cambion or a Nephilim. The story picks up steam for a frenzied final act and a predictable but unforgettable twist that sets up the sequel.

A diverting paranormal tale with a first-rate protagonist.

“A follow-up that tackles loneliness and isolation with remarkable candor and biting comedy.”

**STARGAZING IN SOLITUDE**
In this illustrated children’s story, animals seek safer habitats in reaction to climate change.

This book takes a frankly sobering approach to the topic of climate change. In it, various species of animals travel over land and sea to find refuge from their disappearing habitats. Broken ice sheets convey Antarctic penguins to a woody town on the south coast of Australia; polar bears end up in the Mongolian desert; elephants sail from the Serengeti to Hawaii on a boat of branches; koalas hitch a ride with the elephants and find a prickly home among Arizona’s Joshua trees. Sea lions head inland to live under the oaks at California’s Descanso Garden, relying on “the sympathy of strangers to serve them seafood.” Cows become seaweed-munching beach dwellers, and an orangutan clings to a palm tree rooted in a patch of ice in the Bering Sea. The author, a landscape architect, photographer, and designer of “nature-based play and learning environments for children,” weaves the story of each animal species’ plight into a fantastical narrative grounded in real environmental threats—rising sea levels, melting ice, droughts, floods, fires. Each story sums up what the displaced animals miss about their homes, and each ends with the slightly awkward refrain: “but it’s sad to say” their habitats “may not be there anymore anyway.” The surreal effect of the author’s illustrations—photographic images of real animals incorporated within varied landscapes—makes the stories even more unnerving. The scenarios include the possibility of humans retreating underground to escape rising temperatures, but thankfully, the author doesn’t end on that apocalyptic note. Instead, the realization that the planet is in peril galvanizes billions of people to work together to heal the Earth. The author smartly grounds the fantasy in clear, comprehensive backmatter, which includes a list of story-related questions for children, further information for adults, websites and additional reading material for all ages, and ways to fight climate change.

A thought-provoking blend of fantasy and unusual imagery and an urgent call to environmental action.
An anthology offers short stories about breaking cultural and family rules. The editors of this collection—Smith, Neville, and Laskar—gained their inspiration from the fourth lesson, titled “Ideas: Exploring Taboo and Darkness,” in Joyce Carol Oates’s MasterClass lecture on the art of the short story. Tales about the overall theme, breaking taboos, were in some cases solicited directly from contributors, while others were selected from entries by authors responding to an open call for stories. Many of these were previously published in other collections or literary journals. The anthology also reprints “Gargoyle” by Oates. Unsurprisingly one of the strongest tales in the collection, the story is narrated by a woman who is driving the streets in the wee hours, her thoughts directed at her lover’s wife. Adultery, though, isn’t her chief transgression; it’s loneliness, something that can’t be talked about and has twisted her sensibility toward the grotesque. The narrator’s memory and imagination, especially of her lover’s wife’s pregnancy, are haunted by the sinister, grotesque. The true crime is Vicky, an enthusiastic girl with warm brown skin, dark brown eyes, and curly puffs of hair, loves being outdoors and playing in mud and dirt with her friends. The rhyming narrative endorses this messiness but points out that this behavior is only OK if Vicky would be willing to take a bath each night: “But no, this is not her way.” Vicky’s fear of water keeps her from bathing more than once a week—and leaves her out of the pool. The narrator’s story keeps her from bathing more than once a week—and leaves her out of the pool. The narrator’s memory and imagination, especially of her lover’s wife’s pregnancy, are haunted by the sinister, grotesque. The narrator’s story keeps her from bathing more than once a week—and leaves her out of the pool.
friend invites Vicky to a birthday party at a water park, Vicky determines that the time to overcome her fears has arrived. The Ssentamus, a married Australian team, introduce internal voices—Negative Ned and Positive Ted—to help readers understand how self-talk—and the voice Vicky chooses to listen to—influences Vicky’s ability to overcome her fears. The rhyming stanzas flow well throughout and only occasionally introduce an unfamiliar term (fortnight) that might cause young American readers to stumble. Ashalabi’s warm, digital, cartoonlike illustrations capture both Vicky’s exuberance and her fear, and Vicky’s diverse friends and family (her mother has peach-toned skin with blue eyes and blond hair; her father, a deeper sepia skin tone and curly brown hair like Vicky’s) offer many young readers a chance to see themselves represented on the page. An afterword offers conversation starters for families to discuss fear and courage.

An encouraging tale for young readers with their own fears to face.

RITA LEVI-MONTALCINI
Pioneer & Ambassador of Science
Valente, Francesca
Barbera Foundation (278 pp.)
May 19, 2021
978-1-947431-36-2

Valente details the life, struggles, and revolutionary research of Nobel Prize-winning Italian scientist Rita Levi-Montalcini (1909-2012).

Born in Turin to a prominent Jewish family, Levi-Montalcini began life as a painfully shy child in a stringently patriarchal society. She studied medicine at the University of Turin against her father’s wishes, under the tutelage of histologist Giuseppe Levi (no relation). She showed determination and skill as a neurobiologist, but her life was upended, like those of so many other Italian Jews, by the rise of fascism and World War II. As antisemitic laws banned Jewish people from nearly all aspects of public life and the Nazis occupied Northern Italy, Levi-Montalcini carried out her research precariously and in secret. Conducting experiments in a bedroom lab on chicken eggs, she began her study of a neuropeptide that would eventually be called nerve growth factor—the co-discovery of which won her a 1986 Nobel Prize. After the war, she accepted a research position at Washington University of St. Louis, eventually joining forces with biochemist Stanley Cohen. Together, they broke new ground regarding nerve growth factor, proving to the scientific community that the nervous system could be influenced by external factors. This discovery facilitated breakthroughs in developmental neurobiology and disease and wound treatments. Levi-Montalcini was also a lifelong advocate for women’s equality, education, human rights, and the use of science as a force for good. Over the course of this book, Valente’s prose can feel dry or clinical at times, particularly when it’s discussing scientific research: “Their main objective was to understand the role of the intrinsic, genetic factors vis-à-vis the extrinsic or environmental ones in the differentiation of the nervous centers.” However, the book’s style is otherwise straightforward, which makes it a good fit for young readers, and Levi-Montalcini’s remarkable life is nothing short of inspiring. Valente’s attention to detail and immense admiration for her subject shine through on every page of this work, which also includes such backmatter as Levi-Montalcini’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech and an excerpt from her memoir.

A thorough, glowing biography that sheds light on the achievements of an extraordinary scientist.
loves caught up in a cultural transformation that is both fertile and tragic.

Rich, elegiac meditations on art, sex, and death.

**THE IMPOSSIBLE SHORE**

*Zasada, Marc Porter*

Upper Story Press (255 pp.)

$14.00 paper | $5.00 e-book | Jun. 15, 2021 978-0-578-88585-8

Grand visions intrude into banal lives in this sometimes-hangdog, sometimes-luminous debut story collection.

Zasada’s tales foreground mostly under-achieving protagonists whose disappointments are heightened by an uneasy feeling of unfulfilled purpose. A New York deli manager eating a sandwich in Central Park has an enigmatic vision of a mountain, a river, and raging horses; a rock star who finds his life increasingly frenetic but hollow puts off his suicide plan only to accidentally overdose and fall into a coma filled with dreams of heaven and hell; a young couple whose lives are a blithe, nonmaterialistic idyll break up when the man starts to feel stirrings of ambition; a closeted gay political operative in Portland rescues a vagrant injured in a bike crash who turns out to be the golden boy he had a crush on in high school; a dismissed Pakistani government functionary who thinks of California as a paradise of honesty and nubile women gets a chance at a lucrative new berth in the bureaucracy, but only if he cooperates with sleazy bribery schemes; a middle-class man comes into a fortune but struggles to translate it into a happy or meaningful life; a professor communes with the shade of a long-dead Jewish philosopher who teaches her that death is more productive than life; an 18th-century Native American in California who has seen his world collapse with the arrival of Spanish conquerors goes in search of the mythic source of the world’s water; an American greenhorn in Australia sets out on a yacht voyage into fearsome Pacific waters and takes on a crew of chatty ghosts; and a Jewish man saved from certain death by his mother’s magical incantation spends his life wondering if his survival was mere luck or a sign of a higher destiny.

Zasada’s stories form a connected cycle, with characters and motifs popping up in several narratives in a common fictive world centered on a few resonant themes. The stories are capacious and sweeping, often taking characters from childhood to old age to fit their seemingly haphazard experiences into a larger arc. Zasada combines pitch-perfect renditions of small, dejected lives (“That night, alone, Mickey drank tequila from a shot glass and sat by a window, looking out at the sleepless street below his apartment. He felt all wrong—just all wrong”) with evocations of the cosmic sublime that they feel is looming just beyond their reach (“He lay on his back for a full hour looking up through a small opening in a stand of tall straight pines as the sky became star-filled and infinite...he was conscious of the mountain beneath his body pressing toward a secret and jagged hole leading into a greater universe”). Spanning these two registers are his characters’ clumsy but penetrating stabs at philosophizing: “As for the Incantation, it’s all just coincidence. Some old mumbo jumbo and selective observation….I don’t like the boys hearing any of that crap. Like religion, it confuses them. And it makes them think there’s like, some way out of things, when there’s not. There’s no way out of things.” By turns funny, touching, and bleakly ruminative, Zasada’s yarns captivate as their characters struggle to reconcile their vast yearnings with the meager victories that the world begrudges them.

Darkly entertaining yarns about people trying to bridge the gap between shabby reality and improbable dreams.
INDIE

Books of the Month

A MEMORY OF LIGHT
Allyson S. Barkley
An understated and atmospheric tale from a strong new voice in the genre.

STELLA ATLANTIS
Susan Perly
A deeply felt work that shows the magical alchemy of art.

ONLY SOFIA-ELISABETE
Elizabeth Kobayashi
A rich, original, and engrossing drama featuring a remarkably engaging hero.

SEMIOTIC LOVE [STORIES]
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BY MEGAN LABRISE

EPISODE 218: CLINT SMITH, AUTHOR OF *HOW THE WORD IS PASSED: A RECKONING WITH THE HISTORY OF SLAVERY ACROSS AMERICA* (LITTLE, BROWN), ON GIVING READERS A DIFFERENT SENSE OF OUR PROXIMITY TO SLAVERY:

“I think all the time about how the woman who opened the National Museum of African American History and Culture, in 2015, who stood alongside the Obama family to ring the bell that opens the museum, was the daughter of an enslaved person. Not the granddaughter, not the great-great-granddaughter, but was the daughter of someone who was enslaved. I think about my own family. And I think about my grandfather….I think about my 4-year-old, sitting on my grandfather’s lap. And I imagine my grandfather sitting on his grandfather’s lap. And I am reminded that my grandfather’s grandfather is someone who was born into bondage. And so this history that we tell ourselves was a long time ago was not, in fact, that long ago at all.”

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EPISODE 216: ANJALI ENJETI, AUTHOR OF *THE PARTED EARTH* (HUB CITY PRESS), ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTING SURVIVORS’ STORIES OF THE 1947 PARTITION OF INDIA:

“What is interesting about Partition is that there was no formal widespread effort to document survivors’ stories until almost 60—six-zero—years after 1947. There was an archive that was started in Pakistan, and that was the first effort, and it happened around 2007. Certainly, there were other smaller efforts, but for it to take that long—when we think about, for example, the Holocaust and World War II, there were efforts that started much earlier than 60 years later. [Part of what] I wanted to tackle in the novel is what happens when we don’t know our history, our own history of our ancestors, especially when it’s such an important world event? How do we approach survivors, and how do we encourage them and provide safe spaces to tell their stories? One of the most interesting things I learned…was a lot of the survivors talked about how they didn’t want to tell their family members what they had gone through during Partition. It was easier for them to tell complete strangers.”

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EPISODE 211: TRACI SORELL, AUTHOR OF *WE ARE STILL HERE! NATIVE AMERICAN TRUTHS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW* (CHARLESBRIDGE), ON WRITING HER LATEST NATIVE HISTORY BOOK FOR YOUNG READERS:

“I was writing it from the perspective of Native Nations, in looking at each of these topics throughout—like I say, ‘our national history that hasn’t been shared with us.’ The book starts with 1871: Reservations have been established. The U.S. has said we’re not going to sign more treaties with tribes. Diplomacy continues; it takes different forms. What I wanted to show is, while we may disappear from popular culture [about] that time, in terms of movies and TV shows, as well as curricula, we exist post-1900….Sometimes it’s merely about survival…[sometimes] it’s a more emphatic ‘We are still here!’—there’s a lot more empowerment. But all along, what I wanted to show was agency.”

*Editor at large Megan Labrise is the host of the Fully Booked podcast. Find new episodes every Tuesday on Apple Podcasts and Spotify or at kirkusreviews.com/podcast.*
“I’m sort of glad they’ve got the atomic bomb invented. If there’s ever another war, I’m going to sit right the hell on top of it.”

If Holden Caulfield, who muttered those bitter words in J.D. Salinger’s breakthrough book, *The Catcher in the Rye*, were real and alive today, he would be 86 years old—exactly the age of Elvis Presley, were he alive too. Caulfield would surely let us know about it, give us an earful about the indignities of growing old, from medical intrusions to Social Security checks gone astray in the mail.

As it is, Caulfield is an eternal 16-year-old inside Salinger’s novel. Like all 16-year-olds, he is full of self-doubt. He is also full of contempt and anomie. He doesn’t feel like telling the reader, he announces on the first page, about his birth and early years and “all that David Copperfield kind of crap.” It’s not out of any reticence, to be sure, but only because “my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them.”

His parents lurk in the background, and one day they will call Holden to account for some very costly bad behavior. We learn at the outset that he has been expelled from his fancy, expensive prep school for relentlessly, willfully failing his classes. “It has a pretty good academic rating, Pencey,” he allows, a touch ruefully. “It really does.”

Disaffected, Holden sets out for the territory—the wilds of Manhattan, that is. The adventures and misadventures he has there are both revealing and, for the time, sometimes a little shocking. He visits the American Museum of Natural History and reveals that he likes the place because the exhibits never change; the rest of his world may be falling to pieces, but at least there’s that one constant. By way of a seedy elevator operator—there were once people who did that job—he orders up a prostitute to his hotel who turns out to be even more cynical than he is, and about the same age. She scares him silly.

Above all, Holden is full of self-loathing: He calls himself “the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life,” berates himself for being illiterate even though he loves to read. He calls most things “funny,” but he finds no humor in them. And he is wounded: He has endured the terrible death of a younger brother to leukemia, the central fact behind his estrangement. He adores an older brother who, having served in the European theater, is even more distant than Holden. Only his 10-year-old sister, a wondrous creation named Phoebe, can get through to the boy, and she does her best.

There was never anything like Holden Caulfield before *Catcher in the Rye*, which came into the world on July 16, 1951. There have been only a few sightings thereafter; perhaps the closest approximation is Kevin Bacon’s character in Barry Levinson’s 1982 film, *Diner*. Profane, uncertain, angry, and indignant, the eternal 16-year-old remains one of American literature’s most memorable figures, well worth revisiting.
Emotionally gripping and endearingly hopeful, *A Hundred Silent Ways* examines the many different paths people take to obtain a second chance at happiness while asking the most heartrending question of all:

*How much are we willing to endure to keep love alive?*

“Mari Jojie has written a moving debut that explores the utterly isolating depths of loss and what happens next in the unknown. It’s a story of healing, of redemption.”

—Arielle Avila, Journalist & Magazine Writer, *The Strategist*

“Jojie’s bittersweet romance offers up some clever spins on the classic meet-cute while also effectively tackling themes of communication, place, and family.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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