Raven Leilani
The novelist makes a shining debut with *Luster*, a mesmerizing story of race, sex, and power
p. 14

Also in the issue:
Raquel Vasquez Gilliland,
Rebecca Giggs,
Adrian Tomine,
and more
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK:

The Dysfunctional Family Sweepstakes

BY TOM BEER

As this issue went to press, the nation was riveted by the publication of Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World’s Most Dangerous Man (Simon & Schuster, July 14), the scathing family memoir by the president’s niece. For the past four years, nearly every inhabitant of the planet has been affected by Donald Trump, from the impact of Trump administration policies—on climate change, immigration, policing, and more—to the continuous feed of Trump-related news that we never seem to escape. Now, thanks to Mary Trump, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, we understand the impact of Donald Trump up close, on his family members.

It’s not a pretty picture.

The book describes the Trumps as a clan headed by a “high-functioning sociopath,” patriarch Fred Trump Sr., father to Donald and the author’s own father, Fred Jr. “None of the Trump siblings emerged unscathed from my grandfather’s sociopathy and my grandmother’s illnesses, both physical and psychological, but my uncle Donald and my father, Freddy, suffered more than the rest,” she writes. “In order to get a complete picture of Donald, his psychopathologies, and the meaning of his dysfunctional behavior, we need a thorough family history.”

Too Much and Never Enough offers just that, including the shameful treatment of Fred Jr., who lost his father’s favor, developed a drinking problem, and was left to die alone. The author’s aunt struggled to survive, feeding herself with coins collected from the washers and dryers in Trump buildings and brought to her by her mother. Greed and human disregard are refrains throughout. Our reviewer writes, “Dripping with snideness, vibrating with rage, and gleaming with clarity—a deeply satisfying read.”

If Too Much and Never Enough is the ne plus ultra of dysfunctional family memoirs, it joins a crowded field. Published the same week as the Mary Trump book, Kirkland Hamill’s Filthy Beasts (Avid Reader Press, July 14) tells the story of a blue-blood New York childhood turned upside down when the author’s parents divorced and he and his brothers found themselves, financially insolvent, with their alcoholic mother in Bermuda. Hamill, our reviewer writes, “explores in visceral detail how children of addicted caregivers struggle to construct meaning, establish their own identities, and simply survive while living in the wake of a family illness.”

On the subject of mothers: One of the most memorable in recent memory is Adrienne Brodeur’s mother, Malabar, who looms larger than life in Brodeur’s childhood, as she does in her memoir, Wild Game: My Mother, Her Lover, and Me (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019). When the author was 14, Malabar came into her bedroom one night and confided that she had kissed her family friend, Ben—thus making her teenage daughter an accomplice in her yearslong extramarital affair. Our reviewer called it a “vivid chronicle of a daughter’s struggle to find herself.”

Some other recent standouts in the genre: Tara Westover’s Educated (Random House, 2018), about growing up in—and escaping from—a reclusive fundamentalist Mormon family; Lisa Brennan-Jobs’ Small Fry (Grove, 2018), by the daughter of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, who first denied paternity and then dropped mercurially in and out of her life; Blake Bailey’s The Splendid Things We Planned (Norton, 2014), in which a troubled, drug-addicted brother wreaks as much havoc in a young man’s life as any narcissistic parent could.

To write a family memoir like these is to invite readers into that charged space to become bystanders, almost silent partners. For her part, Mary Trump recalls election night 2016 in almost exactly those terms. “It felt,” she writes, “as though 62,979,636 voters had chosen to turn this country into a macro version of my malignantly dysfunctional family.” It’s all in the family now.
The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

Paola Mendoza and Abby Sher write about a dystopian America in which a Colombian immigrant family flees cross-country from Vermont to a seceding California, seeking sanctuary from the ever harsher policies of an authoritarian government. Read the review on p. 161.

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Amis surveys a long, productive life in a deeply engaging “novelised autobiography” that focuses on love and death. “The book,” he writes in a long preface, “is about a life, my own, so it won’t read like a novel.” So, prepare to wonder what is fact and what is “novelised.” The new volume, which runs from the 1970s to 2019, overlaps Amis’ memoir, Experience (2000), which went up to late 1999. It resembles Sebald’s influential genre-straddlers with the inclusion of photos, like those of its “three principals,” Saul Bellow, Philip Larkin, and Christopher Hitchens, whose talents are celebrated and whose deaths are touchingly portrayed. Amis marks historical events and makes “essayistic detours.” He encapsulates “the erotic picaresque of [his] early adulthood” in the apparently fictional Phoebe Phelps, one of several strong women in a male-heavy work. Her saga runs from a first meeting in 1976 through a four-year relationship with less sex and more tedium than one might expect, several sly narrative twists, and a last visit more than 40 years later. Amis writes with admiration and affection of encounters with Bellow, including the onset and deepening of the older writer’s dementia. The material on Larkin, an intimate of Kingsley Amis’, delights in the poetry without ignoring the man’s complex and sometimes unpleasant personal life. The remaining principal, Hitchens, is a constant presence and comes to dominate the book after he’s diagnosed with cancer. The eloquence Amis displays here, the understated play of the two men’s attachment, makes it possible to forgive the boys-clubbiness that often colors scenes with his closest friend. The book is almost everywhere wonderfully readable, rich in the familiar Amis pleasures of wit, insight, and well-formed anecdotes. As for how much those pleasures derive from real life or fiction, let’s award the benefit of the doubt to the artist behind both.

An intriguing, often brilliant addition to a storied career.
CUYAHOGA

Beatty, Pete
Scribner (272 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-982155-55-1

A rambling shaggy dog tale of the frontier that, 200-odd years ago, lay just across the Appalachians.

In the winter of 1828, chronicles native son Beatty, Cleveland lay on the eastern shore of the Cuyahoga River while on the bluff opposite lay the wild territory called Ohio City. Its champion is a Paul Bunyan-esque character called Big Son, “his shoulders wide as ox yokes,” who “drank a barrel of whiskey and belched fire...ate a thousand pan cakes and asked for seconds. Drained swamps and cut roads etc. More feats than I have got numbers to count up.” So relates his younger brother, Medium Son, who lives in Big’s shadow and recounts his many adventures and misadventures while living some of his own, unfolding in a narrative reminiscent of Thomas Berger’s Little Big Man and Charles Portis’ The Dog of the South, both parodic and earnest. The other residents of Ohio City are legendary in their own rights, including grizzled Revolutionary War veterans, swaggerers and swindlers, rival titans, and a certain John Appleseed Chapman, who “dressed in such rags that you could see through to his privates” and is exceedingly careless of both personal hygiene and ordinary decency. Meed, as the younger brother is known, records his brother’s Herculean deeds in every weather—“He somehow took sick with the hog cholera himself and puked enough to drown a horse,” he relates, which he allows is a lesser feat than the usual boulder-tossing and element-wrassling that fills his pages. The lighthearted tale takes a serious turn when Big builds a messy bridge across a river that, says Meed, “is mostly water with some dirt and fishes mixed in,” a bridge that lets settlers swarm like fleas on the far shore and sets a plot in motion to undo Big’s creation, adding mayhem to a narrative that constantly threatens to spin out of control but that Beatty guides to a satisfying, surprising end.

An improbable, downright preposterous yarn ably spun and a great entertainment for a time in need of laughter.

THE COMEBACK

Berman, Ella
Berkley (384 pp.)
$18.29 | Aug. 3, 2020
978-0-593099-51-3

A 22-year-old Hollywood star—discovered in London as a young teen—tries to come to terms with the molestation and bullying she experienced early in her acting career.

Grace Turner seems to have it all—beauty, wit, acting chops, and a reputation as the muse for famous Hollywood director Able Yorke. However, behind that public facade, she is spiraling out of control as she uses alcohol and drugs to escape her life. And then, on the cusp of awards season, she disappears from the public eye. She spends the year quietly—and soberly—going through the routine that life at her parents’ house in Anaheim allows. She has a complicated relationship with everyone and everything: her parents, whom she distanced herself from as her star was rising; her sister, who was too young when she left home to be a friend; her husband, whom she holds up as a saint; the various women who try to become her friends but might only be pretending; and the drugs and alcohol that allowed her to distance herself from Able and the ugliness behind the glossy, picture-perfect scenes. When Grace returns to Los Angeles after her year away, she struggles with her future. Able and his wife, Emilia, loom large in her psyche—he as her tormentor and benefactor, and she as the woman who was supposed to look over her, but didn’t. Is Grace seeking revenge and an opportunity to destroy Able completely? A comeback? She isn’t sure herself. Readers familiar with the downfall of film producer Harvey Weinstein will see the influence of current events on this story, which is filled with
After the third book in Karl Ove Knausgaard’s epic My Struggle, our reviewer said, “Halfway through, this series is starting to look like an early-21st-century masterpiece.” Would reading that in 2014 have made you want to run out and get the first three volumes, or would you have waited until the whole series was available so you wouldn’t be left hanging between installments? Did you read Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan novels as they arrived, or did you wait until they’d all been translated so you could swallow them in one big gulp? I’m not crazy about suspense, so I tend to be a waiter—which in the case of Knausgaard means I’ve never gotten around to reading him at all, and in the case of Ferrante means I devoured all the books in a white heat and had one of the best reading experiences of my life.

This summer, another great series has reached completion, so if you haven’t read Ali Smith’s Seasonal Quartet yet, now’s the time. Beginning with Autumn (2017), which came out in Britain only four months after the Brexit referendum that colors its pages, and finishing with this summer’s Summer (Pantheon, Aug. 18), which includes references to the coronavirus pandemic and George Floyd, Smith puts her elliptical, mischievous mark on our current predicament with books that are as up-to-the-minute as a newspaper but designed to last much longer.

I read Autumn when it came out because I loved Smith’s earlier work, particularly There but for the (2011), a playful novel about a man who goes to a dinner party at the home of a couple he barely knows, locks himself in the guest room, and refuses to leave. When I searched for Kirkus’ review of the book in our editorial database, I got what felt like a lingering joke from Smith: Though the book is distinctive and delights in wordplay, the four words in the title are so generic—as are the two words in Smith’s name—that it was almost impossible to find. After Autumn, I decided to keep Winter (2018) and Spring (2019) in reserve to read with Summer, the better to catch the fleeting links between the books, which mostly stand alone. As our review of Summer says, “This volume sounds the quartet’s recurrent klaxons about injustice, dereliction, and the perennial problem of how too few people step up....As always, the narrative zigs and zags, skimps on segues, demands attention and effort. The reward is a novel that is wonderfully entertaining—for its humor, allusions, deft use of time and memory, sharply realized characters, and delightfully relevant digressions—and a reminder, brought home by the pandemic, that everything and everyone truly is connected and the suffering of suffering hurts us all.”

If you’re not a romance fan, you might not realize that many romance novels come in series, too. Sarah MacLean, one of the best romance writers around, has just completed her Bareknuckle Bastards trilogy with Daring and the Duke (Avon, June 30), and it won’t take you long to catch up with the earlier Wicked and the Wallflower (2018) and Brazen and the Beast (2019). Set during the Regency period but not in the country houses and London ballrooms you might expect, this series revolves around a club in darkest Covent Garden where women can explore their secret desires. MacLean likes creating powerful women, and Grace Condry, who runs the club, is her best yet. Our review calls the book “visceral, gritty, and full of passion and angst,” just the thing for the dog days of August.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
tension and stress as the reader tries to predict what will happen next. Not all readers will be pleased with the ending.

A raw look at the toll that molestation takes on victims.

EACH OF US KILLERS
Bhatt, Jenny
7:13 Books (180 pp.)
$18.99 paper | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-73336-726-4

A slim debut full of nuanced, clear-eyed tales of unvarnished humanity.

In these 15 stories, Bhatt’s characters struggle against the barriers imposed on them by gender, race, class, caste, location, and familial expectations. Creating a rich array of Indian immigrants, students abroad, repatriates, and people who have never left their villages, Bhatt skillfully probes the fault lines where desire shears against limitation, revealing the complex mix of luck, history, circumstance, and grit that determines which side will dominate. In “Pros and Cons,” Urmi, a 45-year-old yoga instructor who has drifted through a series of semifulfilling careers, is considering moving on from yoga, never having led a class of her own. When she makes a bid at feeling in control by having an end-of-retreat affair with a fellow teacher, she begins to trust again “in the one precious sanctuary that is ours alone, ours forever.” In “Life Spring,” a woman who returned to Mumbai after divorcing her husband is rehydrated by a passionate encounter, which feeds her inspiration as a baker and catalyzes her determination to create her own recipe for a successful life. In “Journey to a Stepwell,” newly engaged Vidya and her mother travel to her mother's ancestral home to fulfill a prenuptial tradition. Throughout the long, crowded bus ride, Vidya badgers her mother to tell her once again the story of four beautiful, unmarried sisters; as she listens to the elegantly told legend, to which her mother appends a new ending, Vidya tries to envision the shape her future will take. And in the title story, a group of Dalit men in the tiny village of Saakarpada discuss a series of local
tragedies with a journalist from Mumbai. Though he’s one of their low-caste brothers, they believe the writer from the city can’t comprehend the indignities, rigidity, injustices, and dangers they regularly face, and they reveal only certain details, determined to manage their affairs in the same way they always have. Though, as in most collections, not every story stands at the same level, there are more than enough gems of polish and depth to satisfy.

A formally diverse collection with exquisitely crafted stories about longing, striving, and learning what we can control.
A deep plunge into a haunted psyche slowly stretched to the breaking point.

**ONLY TRUTH**

Cameron, Julie

Scarlet (312 pp.)

$25.95 | Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-61316-183-8

Cameron’s debut follows a London painter whose husband insists on moving to the country as she realizes that “there’s something not right with this place.” Talk about understatements. Despite her modest professional success, Isabel Dryland-Weir had plenty of problems of her own before Tom Dryland fell in love with The Lodge. Ever since she suffered a traumatic brain injury more than 20 years ago, she’s been prone to spells of disorientation and self-doubt, and she doesn't entirely trust her resistance to moving so far outside her comfort zone. The Lodge may have good bones, but it’s in sore need of the renovation its former owner, Richard Connor, didn’t undertake before he was moved to a care home with dementia.

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A historical novel for those more interested in the setting than the plot.

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**THE CANDLELIT MENAGERIE**

Brown, Caroline

Arcade (288 pp.)

$24.99 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-950691-55-5

A unique woman finds her place caring for wild animals in 18th-century London.

Lillian has never quite fit in as a lady’s maid: She’s extremely tall, would rather wear trousers than skirts, and always feels slightly out of place. Every night, out her window, she can hear a lion roaring from the Strand, and one day she decides to go see it for herself: Touring Grady’s Menagerie, the exotic animal emporium, she’s drawn to the animals and they to her. Grady offers her a job, and soon she’s practically running the place; she has a rapport with the animals that seems almost magical. As time goes on, she marries John Button, the veterinarian’s protégé, and communes with the lion, a baby rhino, and other creatures—but then a terrible accident begins her extremely close companionship with a chimp, which might change everything. Brown has done her research, and each page of her debut novel is full of interesting details about living in London in the late 18th century. Every character is interesting in their own way, from Lillian, Grady, and Button, with whom we spend the most time, to the one-offs Lillian meets along the way. The only thing missing is a driving plot. The novel is more a series of events than a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Luckily, Lillian’s life is fascinating enough that it keeps the reader involved anyway.

A historical novel for those more interested in the setting than the plot.
Even as she continues to wrestle with the demons from her past, Izzy unwillingly amasses evidence that the coach house of her new home may have been used to imprison someone years ago. When that evidence doesn't move the local police to action, she begins to make inquiries on her own, stirring up bad feelings among locals who have different but equally compelling reasons to let sleeping dogs lie and provoking one of them to kill her cat and a magpie in preparation for a shattering third act. In the meantime, Tom's infatuation with married neighbor Madeline Armstrong leaves Izzy alone just when she most needs a trusted companion. No wonder she reflects, “This place hates us, I can feel it.”

A deep plunge into a haunted psyche slowly stretched to the breaking point. More, please.
misdeeds at the heart of “Menlo Park” and “Northeast Regional” are never revealed. There’s a sameness to these stories, and a few read as if the moments in time they depict were chosen at random. The selections that have young female protagonists are more engaging. The main character in “Los Angeles” endures the atmosphere of sexual harassment that’s just part of the job for women in service industries; her attempt to reclaim some agency has its own risks. Twenty-four-year-old Kayla is hiding out from the paparazzi in “The Nanny.” She has no remorse for her sexual dalliance with the famous-actor father of the child in her care. Her feelings about the affair are primarily shaped by how the scandal is playing out on social media. “She came across a new photo—she looked only okay. A certain pair of jeans she loved was not, she saw, as flattering as she’d imagined it to be. She saved the photo to her phone so she could zoom in on it later.” The old men in the other stories gathered here would no doubt find this reaction cynical and self-absorbed—an example of the superficiality inherent in growing up online. Kayla’s peers, however, might note that these old men grew up shaped by the privilege of thinking that the world owed them something.

Well-crafted depictions of people at crisis points in their lives. Some crises depicted are more compelling than others.

THE NESTING
Cooke, C.J.
Berkley (368 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-593-19766-0

A British woman in crisis borrows the identity of a stranger to get a job as a nanny, but she and the children she cares for could be in danger.

After Lexi Ellis’ failed suicide attempt, her boyfriend breaks up with her and she finds herself without a home or a plan. But after hearing a woman on a train discussing a job working as a nanny in Norway, Lexi hatches a plan to hijack her job application and credentials to land the position for herself. Posing as Sophie, Lexi is offered the job of watching over two girls, Gaia and Coco, while their father finishes building a high-concept home, a project he began prior to the sudden death of his wife. Lexi loves the job and the girls—but soon the kids start talking about a Sad Lady they see around the house. As strange happenings pile up, Lexi suspects their mother was murdered, and she becomes concerned for all of their safety. Very little about this book rings true. The plotting is rushed and relies on unexplained, sudden twists, such as Lexi’s staying at a women’s shelter for a week or being able to bluff her way through an interview without having read the job description. Entire months are omitted from the story, including Lexi’s first as a nanny, which she describes only as “pretty hazy.” These issues, along with wooden dialogue and a first-person narration that reads more like a diary than a thriller, obscure any sense of mystery that could engage the reader.

This gothic thriller doesn’t offer enough intrigue to overcome its weaknesses.
the pages of his book. That's a tricky point to make because fiction needs to succeed or fail on its own terms, but DeLillo has always had his finger on a more collective pulse. In *Players* (1977) and *Mao II* (1993), he explored the aesthetic possibilities of terror; in *Underworld* (1997), he reimagined history through an individual, as well as a collective, lens. This book doesn't have that sort of scope or ambition; at just over 100 pages, it's more novella than full-length work. Still, in its account of five characters—Jim and Tessa, who survive the jetliner's crash landing; Max and Diane, their hosts in New York; and Martin, a former student of Diane's—this brief, disturbing story gets the sudden breakdown of society exactly right. The date is Super Bowl Sunday 2022, but when the grid goes down, the game is rendered moot. In its place, DeLillo investigates the disconnect between characters who claim to care for one another until disaster hits. The writing is spare and almost playlike, especially in the second section, which concludes with a series of monologues.

This is a small but vivid book, and in its evocation of people in the throes of social crisis, it feels deeply resonant.
player, doubt surfaces that he was suicidal, and Dr. Samina Pierce, head of the psychology department, begins to look for patterns in the past deaths. This doesn’t stop Scarlett, however, from planning one of her most personal murders yet. Scarlett’s story unfolds in parallel to a second tale: Chapters from Scarlett’s point of view alternate with chapters from the perspective of Carly Schiller, a Gorman freshman who witnesses an assault against her roommate and becomes obsessed with exposing the guilty student. In this novel, everything is black or white: Male behavior is always predatory while female response is always justified. While author Fargo may have intended her vigilante to be the embodiment of independent, enlightened womanhood, a hero for the #MeToo era, it’s clear that Scarlett is actually a sociopath. Those who deem themselves an arm of justice often have to live in the gray area, but there’s little evidence that Scarlett feels guilt or inner conflict, as the most compelling vigilante heroes in literature usually do. Instead, the argument that murder is always justified, and even admirable, might make for a good thriller, but it rejects the opportunity to explore accountability and inspire true cultural change.

Disarms its own argument for woman power by simply equating revenge to justice.

PEACE TALKS

Finch, Tim
Europa Editions (192 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-60945-616-0

The delicate work of the negotiating table frames a quietly intense novel of sudden grief and its aftermath. Novelist and journalist Finch brings eloquent control to the story of Edvard Behrends, who leads a team of diplomats trying to resolve a wrenching conflict in an unnamed country via talks at a serene Austrian ski resort and who recalls the beauties of his surroundings and the Sisyphean nature of his task in a narrative addressed to his absent partner, Anna. Though Finch’s
Raven Leilani is a painter as well as a writer, and her riveting first novel, *Luster* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Aug. 4), introduces a 23-year-old artist named Edie who loses her job in publishing and winds up moving in with her older lover, Eric; his wife, Rebecca, an autopsist; and their adopted preteen daughter, Akila, at their home in suburban New Jersey. Edie and Akila are Black, Eric and Rebecca are White; Rebecca and Edie fascinate each other; Edie and Eric have sex but can’t decide if they like each other; and Akila needs a friend. As our starred review says, “The dynamics among the four of them keep shifting, an unstable ballet of race, sex, and power. Leilani’s characters act in ways that often defy explanation, and that is part of what makes them so alive and so mesmerizing.” Leilani recently spoke about the novel from her apartment in Brooklyn, where she’s sheltering in place; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

There’s been a discussion in the past few years about whether fictional characters, particularly women, should be likable. It’s hard to ask an author about that because what if she says, “You mean you didn’t like my characters?” It’s funny, we’re deep in that unlikable women moment, and I love it. It’s overdue. I actually prefer that my characters—or any characters I’m watching on TV or reading about—I prefer they be unlikable because I think unlikable is often shorthand for getting to see the nitty-gritty interior of a woman’s mind. You get to see past the curation, and so it’s not necessarily that they’re unlikable—they’re honest. And that’s the freedom that I really, really wanted for Edie, for Rebecca, and for Akila.

There was a scene when Edie was still working at the publishing company when she tried to summon the spirit of the “grateful diversity hire,” to present this front where she’s just nice and grateful and happy, and she doesn’t want to do that. That’s right. Because you’re privy to Edie’s mind, and also privy to the way the outside world perceives her, you have the advantage of seeing her calculation, which is the regular way of being for a lot of Black women, a constant guard and calculation and curation depending on the room you’re in. But she still understands her privilege, she understands the people that came before her have fought harder. She is thankful that she caught a break to be employed at all. But you can’t discount the sort of distortion that happens when you have to play those games, especially if you’re an artist and your art depends on being able to put an honest depiction down on the canvas or on the page.
When Edie moves into Eric and Rebecca’s house, she’s amazed at the abundance of food and towels and all kinds of comfort. In addition to having to support herself, she’s been trying to make art, and painting materials are very expensive.

To make art you need means, whether it’s money or time. A lot of this book is dedicated to the work Edie does—the work at the publisher, the work with a delivery service. And there’s a reason that takes up so much space. I have some personal experience with the adversarial and also symbiotic relationship between art and survival, with the concrete things you need to do to earn a living that make it so that you have less time to create but also, ideally, give you the resources to create. For a young Black woman who’s navigating racism and sexism and her own hunger and id and fallibility, it’s almost an impossible situation, to have the means to create art.

It’s unusual to read a book that spends so much time in the workplace, and you really capture office life. Have you worked in publishing yourself? I did work in trade publishing and scientific publishing. I was working at Macmillan, actually, before they acquired my book, so I’ve seen both sides of the equation. It was important for me to talk about that component of living. Even though I wouldn’t say this is autofiction, I always, always had a full-time job in college and during my MFA. Writing was the thing that happened after I clocked out—I’d come home and then I’d write until it was time to go to bed. And I wanted to talk about that reality, the kind of faith you have to sustain because it’s a private thing you do outside of work.

The scenes of Rebecca working in the morgue are so vivid. How did you research those? My mom was a medical examiner. When I was in high school, she went back to college for mortuary science—she started as a seamstress, so it was a perfect transition. I went to see her work the year before I started college, and I remember this feeling of “Oh my God, what if I can’t handle this?” But I went in there and watched her work, and she was so careful and tender and meticulous, and the body is miraculous. It really affected me. So I drew that from my life directly, but also because there’s so much art in the book, it was a really easy tie-in, because the book is extremely bodily.

Akila is such a great character. I enjoyed watching her bond with Edie by playing video games and making costumes for Comic-Con. I pulled a lot from my own childhood and from some of my own preoccupations for the things Akila loves. I wanted to be able to talk about a union between two Black women who are at very different points in their lives but also need each other. But I also wanted to talk about geekery—like I needed to write about Comic-Con [laughs]. And so in a book that is a lot about loneliness, a lot about isolation and what we do to cope with that, it was important to me that there would be points of joy—and with Akila, that joy was her fandom.

What writers have influenced you? I started in poetry, so the thing that feeds me, is most nourishing even now, is poetry. I really, really love Morgan Parker’s stuff, and she has a poem I would use as almost the thesis of what I was writing during my MFA. She says—and I might get this wrong—I do what I want because I could die at any time. I don’t mean YOLO, I mean the precarity of living as a Black woman. It means that you go for it, and that ethos was really important for me, to just put it all on the page. Then there’s Morrison, of course, and Nabokov, the big ones who just, on a sentence level, there’s beauty and desire and it’s not spare. I love abundance. As far as peers, I love Ottessa Moshfegh. I think that she has a beautiful meanness about her prose. I love Brit Bennett. I feel like we’re very close on the spectrum. She writes so tenderly about Black womanhood.

Luster received a starred review in the June 15, 2020, issue.
experience as an activist for refugee rights lends the negotiation convincing realism, the real peace talks here are internal—and one-sided, for Anna, we soon learn, is dead, and the brilliance that has put Behrends at the pinnacle of his profession is nearly overmatched by the forces unleashed by a titanic loss. As work in the conference rooms threatens to founder, Behrends dances ever closer to a confrontation with the devastating certainty of death, quoting Larkin: “Most things may never happen: this one will.” A man who enjoys the finer things, including fine things that come in a bottle, Behrends wears his literary influences, from Rebecca West to Thomas Mann, proudly. While this dialogue with books makes for intellectually bracing passages, the novel at moments feels like an essay on love and mortality in the guise of a tale that knows its way around a good Riesling. But as the full story of Anna’s death is unspooled, chilliness gives way to the potent voice of a man whose vital self is being hollowed out by drink and grief. Behrends leaps back into focus even as his world threatens to recede into an alcoholic blur.

A lucid work carefully balanced between the terrors and consolations that fiction can provide.

THE WONDER BOY OF WHISTLE STOP
Flagg, Fannie
Random House (304 pp.)
$20.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-593-13384-2

Back to the Whistle Stop Cafe, in a story ranging from the 1930s to the present day.

The setting of Flagg’s Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe (1987), beloved both in print and on film, returns in a sweet ol’ novel which could not possibly be less of the moment. That sound you hear? A gazillion fans rejoicing. The update includes several of the original characters—largely a bunch of good-hearted White people and a couple of meanies—from a small town outside Birmingham, Alabama. By the 1990s, it turns out, the whole town is in ruins and its denizens in diaspora throughout the South, mostly kept in touch by Dot Weems, who eventually replaced her long-running newsletter, The Weems Weekly, with Christmas letters and occasional bulletins. The titular wonder boy is the one-armed prince Bud Threadgoode, son of the late Ruth Jamison, who owned the cafe in the 1930s with her partner, Idgie Threadgoode (sadly, no new lesbian romances this time around). In 2013, Bud is retired from his veterinary practice and living at Briarwood Manor in Atlanta, where he moved when his ailing wife, Peggy, became too hard to care for without help. Though healthy himself, he decided to stay on after her death even though his daughter, Ruthie, has begged him to move in with her. Unfortunately, she lives next door to her awful mother-in-law, Martha Lee Caldwell, and Bud ain’t goin’ there. Martha Lee is a horrible rich old Southern lady; one of the funniest moments in the book occurs when she gets her 23andMe results. Homesick for the good old days, Bud sneaks out of Briarwood to take one last glance at his hometown, and here the ambling narrative finally gets moving. Though you don’t have to read the first book to understand the new one, it wouldn’t hurt, either, since there’s a lot of backstory filled in clumps and you’ll catch on sooner if you know who’s who. Or watch the movie; Flagg was nominated for an Oscar for the screenplay.

Reading this novel is like entering a second childhood. You have our permission.
A murder exacerbates apocalyptic angst among a group of Brazilian millennials.

TWENTY AFTER MIDNIGHT

Galera, Daniel
Penguin Press (224 pp.)
$16.00 paper  | Aug. 11, 2020
978-0-7352-2479-7

A murder exacerbates apocalyptic angst among a group of Brazilian millennials.

And though millennials are its focus, the fifth novel by Brazilian author Galera, and third in English translation, will feel temperamentally familiar to any devoted reader of smart but jaded Gen X writers like Bret Easton Ellis or Douglas Coupland. “These days were simply the gateway to a slow and irreversible catastrophe,” says Aurora, one of the three narrators reckoning with the death of Andrei, a cult writer stabbed in Porto Alegre. In the late 1990s, Aurora, along with Emiliano and Antero, collaborated with Andrei on a popular online e-zine that made them budding cultural critics with seemingly bright futures. But two decades have taken a toll: Aurora is a biologist whose path to a Ph.D. has been waylaid by a malicious colleague; Emiliano’s career as a journalist has fizzled along with the industry, and Antero’s success as a marketer is undercut by his sense that his job cynically manipulates the masses. (“Dishonesty at its purest was the aesthetics of the future,” he intones.) If they’ve all fallen short of their ambitions, is that a cultural problem or an individual one? Part of the appeal of the novel is that it leaves the question open: All three characters are bright, engaging, occasionally provocative (Antero shocks a TED Talk crowd with an extended riff on the Marquis de Sade), and legitimately questioning their places in the world. Facts won’t save them. When Emiliano is solicited to write Andrei’s biography, his catastrophic anxiety only intensifies. No question, the mood is persistently sour: Antero bemoans a future world “where resources were scarce and the few jobs still available involved designing and supervising the machines that would look after the rest of the world.” But like a well-made song in a minor key, Galera darkens his narrative with an honesty that feels cleansing.

A downhearted but strangely vibrant tale of a generation in crisis.
HYSTERIA
Gross, Jessica
Unnamed Press (144 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-951213-12-1

A young woman tries to find her footing in this trippy and hypnotic debut. The unnamed millennial narrator in Gross’ novel is in trouble: She can’t move away from the large shadow her parents cast over her life. It doesn’t help that the parents might have played a key role in their daughter’s obtaining a teaching job at the very school she once attended. Worse, the protagonist lives in Brooklyn, not far enough away to escape her parents’ orbit, an apartment close to Central Park. She is addicted to sex, constantly moving from one encounter to another in a haze of alcohol and shame. Such damaging behavior seems to be just a cover for her many insecurities. “I wanted to throw myself on my mother, beg her to give me her blessing to leave, promise she would still love me,” the narrator says when she wants to leave a party and, more important, her parents’ smothering judgment. As luck would have it, she runs into a sympathetic local bartender who looks like Sigmund Freud’s double. With or without his help, there are plenty of personality quirks, including Oedipal issues, to take apart here. Gross expertly dissects the lasting damage a suffocating parent-child relationship can inflict. The narrator’s constant anxiety—“I wanted to be flattened. I wanted to be small. I wanted my parents, I wanted to curl up in my mother’s closet alone. Only they understood me”—might be unsettling or even frustrating for some readers, but it is to Gross’ credit that her protagonist cuts a sympathetic and believable figure.

A riveting novel that won’t let you look away even as the narrator careens from one disaster to another.

A LOVER’S DISCOURSE
Guo, Xiaolu
Grove (288 pp.)
$19.49 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-0-8021-4952-7

Two lovers merge their lives, but not their identities, across boundaries of culture, nationality, and ideology.

The unnamed narrator of this novel in epistolary fragments is a young woman from a rural town in Southern China who has come to London to pursue a Ph.D. in visual anthropology in the winter of 2015, just prior to the Brexit referendum. Both her parents have recently died, and she doesn’t know whether to attribute her loneliness to her identity as a foreigner in Britain, to her newly orphaned status, or to another more essential part of her nature she comes to understand as “distance pain, an ache or a lust for a place where you want to belong.” Her desolation is somewhat ameliorated when she meets the you to whom these fragments are addressed—a landscape architect she meets picking elderflowers on a picnic organized by mutual friends. “The elderflower picker,” as she terms him, turns out to be another culturally displaced person, the child of an Englishwoman and a German man who grew up on the east coast of Australia before moving to Germany in his late teens and to England as an adult. Their relationship quickly develops from this chance meeting to a full-blown love affair, co-habitation on a houseboat in the London canals, parenthood, and travel to German farmland. Australian tourist towns, and an enclave of tradesmen in Southern China whose job is to reproduce great works of art for sale on the open market. Modeled after Roland Barthes’ structuralist masterpiece, also titled A Lover’s Discourse, Guo’s latest meditation on the nature of belonging asks many of the same questions as her earlier works: Can language create identity? Can love create a home? Are the differences between cultures, genders, nationalities, and personal ideologies what pull us apart, or are lifelong conversations, even arguments, about these things what help us understand what it means to truly be together?

A whimsically intelligent book whose exploration of the philosophy of identity is trenchant and moving.

THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY
Haig, Matt
Viking (336 pp.)
$19.49 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-525-55794-7

An unhappy woman who tries to commit suicide finds herself in a mysterious library that allows her to choose new lives. How far would you go to address every regret you ever had? That’s the question at the heart of Haig’s latest novel, which imagines the plane between life and death as a vast library filled with books detailing every existence a person could have. Thrust into this mysterious way station is Nora Seed, a depressed and desperate woman estranged from her family and friends. Nora has just lost her job, and her cat is dead. Believing she has no reason to go on, she writes a farewell note and takes an overdose of antidepressants. But instead of waking up in heaven, hell, or eternal nothingness, she finds herself in a library filled with books that offer her a chance to experience an infinite number of new lives. Guided by Mrs. Elm, her former school librarian, she can pull a book from the shelf and enter a new existence—as a country pub owner with her ex-boyfriend, as a researcher on an Arctic island, as a rock star singing in stadiums full of screaming fans. But how will she know which life will make her happy? This book isn’t heavy on hows; you won’t need an advanced degree in quantum physics or string theory to follow its simple yet fantastical logic. Predicting the path Nora will ultimately choose isn’t difficult, either. Haig treats the subject of suicide with a light touch, and the book’s playful tone will be welcome to readers who like their fantasies sweet if a little too forgettable.

A whimsical fantasy about learning what’s important in life.
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

New episode every Tuesday

Podcast Available on iTunes
This exuberant elegy for Florida’s paved-over paradise performs the near miracle of making us laugh even as we despair.
an expensive bottle of cabernet pulled from the cellar of some annoying rich people, reviving the old joke about wine descriptions one last time: “Notes of fire coral, DEET and the Tide Pod challenge.” Just like everything else in 2020, this is not quite what you had hoped for, but, on the other hand, the comfort of a Hilderbrand novel is never something to sneer at.

Like your third serving of a delicious meal—still very good, but not much excitement left.

GIRLS AGAINST GOD
Hval, Jenny
Verso (240 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-78873-895-8


It’s almost impossible to say what Hval’s latest novel is about. It’s not even clear that it is a novel. An unnamed narrator delivers a monologue that touches on, among other things, Norwegian black metal, Edvard Munch’s painting Puberty, porn, avant-garde film, and witchcraft. The narrator grew up in the 1990s in southern Norway, where she found herself nearly stifled by religious and social conservatism. The best parts of the book are her extended analyses of these topics, as when she writes that “Maybe the only way an artist can escape capitalism and patriarchy today is to use art to disappear as an individual.” But there
It’s not just that it’s difficult to follow her thought processes; it’s following Roan and spying on his wife, Cate, and two teenage features an array of characters set in a posh London neighbor - disappearance. The themes of sexual assault and incel culture are only marginally developed despite the key part each plays across the street from Roan’s house, Owen Pick, one of Roan’s neighbors, is arrested and jailed based on his history of visiting incel websites after having been placed on leave from his job following sexual misconduct complaints. At the same time, Cate becomes suspicious of Roan’s lies and where their son, Josh, is sneaking out to. She learns Roan is having an affair but also that multiple sexual assaults are taking place in his neighborhood. When Roan suggests Saffyre is ready to move on, she feels betrayed and begins following Roan and spying on his wife, Cate, and two teenage children. 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The reasons aren’t quite clear for that, but Kingsnorth reserves points for the hat trick of writing the three novels in the series in distinct linguistic registers that suggest past, present, and future. K. instructs Lorenzo in the error of human ways: “Man was tempted, Man took power over all life. This is your fragmentary, mythologised version of what happened more than a millennium ago. You have now seen a little of what the exercise of that power amounted to.” He promises the rewards that the celestial city of Alexandria and its divine ruler, Wayland, offer, but alas, that god appears to be dead or just not listening, and the shape-shifting, quick-thinking K. finds himself stuck with the rest of what has survived of the tribe, moored in the muck and mire, but to oddly optimistic ends. Imaginative, moody, brilliantly written—vintage Kingsnorth, that is, and a boon for readers of speculative fiction.

ALEXANDRIA
Kingsnorth, Paul
Graywolf (408 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64445-035-2

Kingsnorth completes his quirky trilogy of novels set in the Norfolk fens with apost-apocalyptic story of the far future. As The Wake (2015) opened with events of a thousand years ago, so Kingsnorth’s latest opens a millennium from now, “nine hunnerd years since Atlantis fell, since Alexandria was built.” His protagonists are part tribe, part religious community who survive in the marshes after civilization’s collapse and remember the distant past in chants and invocations: “Now World shall be as it should / For Machine is come” they sing of “the reign of Man.” They are not alone in the fens: A “Catt”—the hidden, dangerous figure that lurks in both The Wake and Beast (2017)—has been spotted, scaring some but not all; says an awestruck character named El, “every day now i am goin to Tree and lookin for him.” Kingsnorth’s characters speak in patois, blending prose poem and verse, calling to mind Russell Hoban. When the young acolyte named Lorenzo comes into contact with another lurker, though, a red-cloaked figure of monstrous visage called K., the language shifts into the sturdy standard English of the present. The reasons aren’t quite clear for that, but Kingsnorth reserves points for the hat trick of writing the three novels in the series in distinct linguistic registers that suggest past, present, and future. K. instructs Lorenzo in the error of human ways: “Man was tempted, Man took power over all life. This is your fragmentary, mythologised version of what happened more than a millennium ago. You have now seen a little of what the exercise of that power amounted to.” He promises the rewards that the celestial city of Alexandria and its divine ruler, Wayland, offer, but alas, that god appears to be dead or just not listening, and the shape-shifting, quick-thinking K. finds himself stuck with the rest of what has survived of the tribe, moored in the muck and mire, but to oddly optimistic ends. Imaginative, moody, brilliantly written—vintage Kingsnorth, that is, and a boon for readers of speculative fiction.

MISSIONARIES
Klay, Phil
Penguin Press (416 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-984880-65-9

A host of journalists, mercenaries, soldiers, and well-meaning innocents are thrust into a quagmire in Colombia. Klay’s first novel, the follow-up to Redeployment, his stellar 2014 story collection about U.S. soldiers in Iraq, gives his concerns about intractable violence a broader scope. Early on, he introduces characters in alternating chapters: Among them
are Abel, a young foot soldier in the gruesome battles among drug cartels, soldiers, and guerrillas in northern Colombia circa 1999; Lisette, a jaded journalist covering the war in Afghanistan; Juan Pablo, a Colombian military officer hoping to shepherd his country to a deal ending decades of conflict; and Mason, a former medic in Afghanistan now serving as a Special Forces Liaison in Colombia. By 2016 these people's lives will intertwine, but not before Klay has gone deep into the violence and fogs of confusion they witness and sometimes create. In Colombia, Abel witnesses a defiant mayor get strapped to a piano and chainsawed in half; Mason hastily patches up the wounded in similarly visceral scenes. So it's clear things will be messy when Lisette requests to be transferred to "any wars right now where we're not losing" and is sent to Colombia. The challenge before any serious war novelist is to bring order to chaos without succumbing to a tidy narrative. It's to Klay's credit that he creates ambiguity not through atmospheric language or irony (Redeployment had its share of Heller-esque gallows humor) but through careful psychological portraits that reveal how readily relationships grow complicated and how even good intentions come undone in the face of humanity's urge to violence. That means plotlines get convoluted in the late stages, but the dispiriting conclusion is crystal clear: It's not just that war is hell, but that war brings hellishness to everything.

An unflinching and engrossing exploration of violence's agonizing persistence.

LONE JACK TRAIL
Laukkanen, Owen
Mulholland Books/Little, Brown
(336 pp.)
$28.00  |  Aug. 11, 2020
978-0-316-44875-8

Second in a series set in Deception Cove, Washington, featuring two damaged people and the dog they love.

Mason Burke, who's living in Deception Cove after having served 15 years for...
murder in Michigan, is pummeled by local celebrity Brock “Bad” Boyd, who doesn’t like his attitude. A few days later, Boyd’s crab-chomped corpse washes ashore at Shipwreck Point with a bullet in the head. Too bad, because the former hockey star had been one of the town’s only sources of pride, never mind that he’d gone into the dogfighting business. It’s a small, down-on-its-luck town where rumors “traveled in whispers, blooming as fast as moss in the rainforest,” so police receive an anonymous tip that the doer is the nearly friendless Burke. “Somebody’s got to hang for this murder,” says one bad guy to another. And what better fall guy than an outsider with a known prison record? Then a witness comes forward to accuse Burke, who later finds the woman with her throat slashed. Burke is a suspect, but the sheriff won’t arrest him without hard evidence. Burke is romantically involved with local cop Jess Winslow, brought together by Lucy, a gentle pit bull mix that had been rescued from a dogfighting ring. Burke had worked with the dog as part of an experimental program that earned him early release from prison, and Winslow is a traumatized Marine combat veteran who later received Lucy as a companion animal. She’s a tough, upright cop, and he tries hard to avoid violence. At one point, Jess seems to face a stark choice: Your career, or the man you love. All three, Lucy included, face mortal danger. They complement each other perfectly: the veteran’s toughness, the ex-con’s humanity, and the dog’s unconditional adoration of both. All of Canadian author Laukkanen’s crime novels have tense action and layered characters—except in this case, Lucy isn’t that complex.

High-quality crime fiction with the protagonists brought together by a dog.

Shelter in Place
Leavitt, David
Bloomsbury (224 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-62040-487-4

Members of the New York elite we’ve been hearing so much about catch a sudden case of agita the weekend after Donald Trump is elected president.

Eva Lindquist, who’s hosting a weekend getaway at her country home in rural Connecticut, kicks things off on Page 1 by asking everyone whether they’d be willing to ask Siri how to assassinate Trump. None of them—a magazine editor, an interior designer, two book editors, a choreographer, and a burgeoning writer—take her up on it. Eva, who showed academic promise as an undergraduate, hasn’t worked on her biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner since she married Bruce, a wealth management adviser “rich enough that I can’t really say how rich I am”, the names of their three Bedlington terriers are Caspar, Isabel, and Ralph, after characters from Henry James novels (this is a WASPy crew). Eva sees herself as a “saloniste,” gathering intriguing, ambitious people together. But she also embodies the traits Republicans deplore in smug liberals, like a certain superciliousness, as when she orders her Latinx housekeeper, Amalia, to change the channel anytime Trump pops up, supposedly for Amalia’s own good. An avowed Republican lives across the hall from the couple in Manhattan, one reason Eva decides to nab an apartment in Venice to spend more time away from America. Eva’s obsession with the “demon” Trump eats away at her marriage while the labyrinthine process of purchasing property in Venice becomes crushing. Bruce is pondering a secret, hefty financial gift to his longtime secretary, who has cancer, and letting his eye wander toward one of Eva’s acquaintances. None of the main characters gets a pass in this dark comedy, and it’s a lot of fun: Democrats, Republicans, writers, and even one magazine editor who binges on sugar-dusted sticks of butter—Leavitt skewers them all in this delectable novel.

A humane, knowing comedy perfect for a moment when no one in America seems to like one another.

Shades of the Deep Blue Sea
London, Jack Woodville
Vire Press, LLC (235 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 3, 2020
978-0-9821207-0-5

The author obviously had fun with this oddball, imaginative South Pacific war tale.

In 1944 Hawaii, Seaman 2nd Class Bart Sullivan is a coward who counterfeits orders to leave his troop ship, the Renegade, and return stateside. “No combat for me,” he brags to Chief Petty Officer Olafson. “I’ve got my orders.” Olafson is an illiterate (an illiterate CPO—really?) and a brute who clubs Sullivan to death during a training exercise. But, nothing if not resilient, Sullivan isn’t really dead—he sees a “white light” and becomes a shade, or a spirit, and winds up in sick bay, where eventually someone realizes, “This corpse ain’t dead!” The experience has worked out well for him, and now he’s no longer a coward, so he is “about to begin the do-over of his life.” But wait, there’s more! He’s become clairvoyant: As his battle convoy heads west, he foretells the typhoon that fails to avoid. Sullivan and Olafson go overboard. Part 2 contains rich visual detail as Olafson washes ashore on an Indone- sian island abounding with dangers such as cannibals and a nasty Komodo dragon. A local woman saves his life but numbs him with toxin from pitohui feathers, intending to keep him for barter. When cannibals catch him, they show him a strange object Olafson knows is a crank-powered field radio. They hear singing from it and think the box contains the voice of a god—and Olafson is their connection. Using the “god box” he teaches them to sing “Don’t Fence Me In” and “White Christmas.” The story has a few minor annoyances such as occasionally hokey dialogue and overenthusiastic use of caps—mercifully, “RRRRRAAAAR
RGHHHHOOOOAAAARRRRAARRGHHHHH!!!!!!!!!” appears only once. But it’s fun and often funny—one character thinks the Andrews Sisters are the god box’s best messengers.

A World War II novel that will make you smile—who knew?
A troubled young man in search of his lost love finds himself involved with White supremacists in this novel set in the uncertain days leading up to Y2K.

Lucien, the unappealing hero, has been withdrawn ever since recovering from a car accident, spending his days pretending to still be a college student. An offer to act as a winter caretaker for a house whose owners have left for warmer climes becomes an opportunity to investigate a nearby Christian Identity church whose pastor is the husband of Maura, the woman he loved. Lucien met her when the two of them worked at a bank, and he has not seen her since she disappeared at the same time the bank found $5,000 missing. If that weren’t enough, the novel features mysterious religious visions that seem more inspired by the covers of Christian metal LPs than anything else. In addition, there’s the mysterious long-lost daughter of the couple Lucien is caretaking for and a collection of books containing art looted by the Nazis, none of these anything but distractions from the main plot. At times, the book seems to be about how easy it is to be seduced into racism, but Lucien’s flirtations feel too naïve to be believable or for the reader to have a stake in his going astray. A speech toward the end rebuking the White supremacists for perverting Christ’s true message is the final mawkish touch.

There’s nothing solid in the foundation of this book.

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WHERE THE WILDLADIES ARE
Matsuda, Aoko
Trans. by Barton, Polly
Soft Skull Press (288 pp.)
$13.61 paper | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-59376-690-0

Women find more freedom in death than in life as Matsuda reimagines traditional Japanese ghost stories and folktales for modern times.

In “Smartening Up,” the opening story of this linked collection, a woman who lives alone and has embarked on an elaborate self-improvement agenda that includes affirmations, fine foods, decorating with pink that maximizes her romantic potential,” and hair removal is visited by the ghost of an abrasive dead aunt who convinces her to unleash the raw power of her body rather than harness it. In the next story, “The Jealous Type,” a woman whose husband is gaslighting her has jealous tantrums that rise to the level of performance art, a hilarious but also layered commentary on violence, rage, and domestic strife. Almost all the narrators play stereotypes of women like the jealous wife or “the Middle-Aged Woman Who Wouldn’t Shut Up.” The narrator of “My Superpower,” a columnist with severe eczema and allergies, says, “My eczema has given me...keen observational skills....Those who see others as monsters don’t notice that those monsters are looking back at them in turn.” This sentiment reverberates throughout the book, which is conversational in tone but not without wisdom and insight about human nature, mortality, and the ways in which family and society repress the spirit.

One narrator exclaims, “The very idea that you have to rein in your heat even as love’s passion sets you ablaze...how restrictive life as a functional adult is!” The title story does allude to the children’s book Where the Wild Things Are and shares the same universe of characters as the first story. Indeed many of the stories connect through characters, time, and dimensions, and the way Matsuda executes these links is a highlight. The author has a light but lasting touch.

A delightful, daring collection.

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GIRLS OF BRACKENHILL
Moretti, Kate
Thomas & Mercer (332 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Nov. 1, 2020
978-1-5420-0008-6

Seventeen years after her sister vanished from a family estate in the Catskills, Hannah Maloney is pulled back to the place by another calamity and then finds herself buried neck-deep in crimes past and present.

While they were tweens and teens, Hannah and her older sister, Julia, spent five consecutive summers with their Aunt Fae and Uncle Stuart in Brackenhill, a neogothic castle high on a hill. They were the best times of Hannah’s young life, partly because they got her away from Wes, the alcoholic, abusive man Trina Maloney married after her husband died. But they ended horribly with Julia’s still-unexplained disappearance from the place. Now the plunging of Aunt Fae’s car from the twisting access road into a ravine has brought Hannah back to Brackenhill along with her fiancé, Huck. Upon arriving, they’re greeted with the news of Fae’s death. Stuart, long stricken with cancer, clearly hasn’t long to live. Brackenhill seems to exert an unhealthy power over everyone who enters its orbit. Julia’s best friend, Ellie, vanished the year before Julia did. During one of his rare lucid moments, Stuart mutters something about an accident involving someone named Ruby. Fae’s best friend, Jinny Fekete, practices witchcraft and makes it clear that Fae did as well. And Detective Wyatt McCarran, whom both sisters were in love with during their enchanted summers, is becoming more and more convinced that Fae’s accidental death was no accident.

Link by link, Moretti hypnotically reveals “a tragic, violent daisy chain.”

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THE LAND
Maltman, Thomas
Soho (356 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-641-29220-7

A speech toward the end rebuking the White supremacists for perverting Christ’s true message is the final mawkish touch.
The Woman in the Moonlight
Patricia Morrisroe

Little A (380 pp.)
$24.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-5039-0375-3

Julie Guicciardi, a young, pretty countess in early-19th-century Vienna, meets a magnetic, mercurial genius and begins the relationship that will set the mood music of her life.

Twenty-eight and single, short and stocky with no title or money but a piano virtuoso and one of the world’s most brilliant composers, Ludwig van Beethoven is not obvious marriage material. But 17-year-old Julie finds his charisma irresistible, and soon his piano lessons lead to a mutual declaration of love. The relationship, however, is unlikely to meet the approval of Julie’s society-conscious mother and remains secret, as does Julie’s pregnancy, which ends in a miscarriage that Beethoven commemorates in a piano composition to become known as the Moonlight Sonata, which he dedicates to Julie. The couple’s plans to marry are thwarted by unscrupulous Prince Lichnowsky, who may be titled but is also poor, impotent, and, worse, has invited Lichnowsky to be his stand-in on their honeymoon, to provide the couple with a child. Later, Julie has children with another, more appealing substitute, Count Friedrich von der Schulenburg, and later still she becomes the mistress of the king of Naples. Morrisroe’s fiction debut, a long, gossipy, frictionless romp through European gatherings, and poetic moments twirl by with minimal impact. But 17-year-old Julie finds his charisma irresistible, and soon his piano lessons lead to a mutual declaration of love. Then she makes a disastrous marriage to Count Wenzel Robert von Gallenberg, who may be titled but is also poor, impotent, and, worse, has invited Lichnowsky to be his stand-in on their honeymoon, to provide the couple with a child. Later, Julie has children with another, more appealing substitute, Count Friedrich von der Schulenburg, and later still she becomes the mistress of the king of Naples. Morrisroe’s fiction debut, a long, gossipy, frictionless romp through European history during the Napoleonic era, recounts Julie’s relationships without conveying much character or emotional depth. Similarly, personal tragedies, historic events, wars, gilded social gatherings, and poetic moments twirl by with minimal impact. Beethoven’s and Julie’s paths cross periodically through the years. He becomes a success, though deaf, unkempt, and alone. She eventually finds happiness thanks to a Beethoven coda.

More Fantasia than Appassionata.

Earthlings
Sayaka Murata

Trans. by Takemori, Ginny Tapley
Grove (240 pp.)
$25.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-8021-5700-3

A dark coming-of-age story from the author of Convenience Store Woman (2018). Murata made her English-language debut with the story of a 36-year-old woman who defies norms by embracing a life without a husband, children, or any hope of career advancement. This novel was a bestseller in Japan, and reviewers and other readers appreciated Murata’s oddball heroine and deadpan wit. The protagonist of this book is another outsider. One of the first things 11-year-old Natsuki explains about herself is that she has magical powers and that her best friend—a plush hedgehog—is an emissary from the planet Popinpobopia. This is why she is not surprised when her cousin Yuu reveals that he’s an alien. The sense of whimsy Murata creates is quickly crushed beneath the weight of the depravity Natsuki endures and the very unpleasant places her escape into fantasy takes her. Like Convenience Store Woman, this new novel is a critique of cultural expectations that limit what women can be and what they can do. Both as a child and as an adult, Natsuki resists being part of the “factory”—the system that will consign her to life as a wife and mother, a sex object and a good worker—and her desire to escape the Earth altogether persists. Like many an author before her, Murata uses surrealism and the tropes of horror and science fiction to explore real-world problems. But, here, she writes without subtlety or depth. Shocking scenes follow one after the other in a way that ultimately feels more pornographic than enlightening.

Simultaneously too much and not enough.

That Time of Year
Marie NDiaye

Trans. by Stump, Jordan
Two Lines Press (128 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-931883-91-7

A Parisian family that summers each year in a small village learns the hard way they have overstayed their welcome in this deeply unsettling and slippery novella.

On Sept. 1, Herman embarks on a search for his wife, Rose, and their son, who had gone to the neighboring farmhouse to pick up eggs and not returned. Never having stayed past the end of August before, he is shocked by the sudden turn in the weather from sunny and temperate to cold and rainy literally overnight, a pathetic faltering. When he seeks out the village’s mayor to tell him what’s going on, he meets Alfred, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, who turns out to be a former Parisian who also once stayed past summer’s end. Alfred takes Herman on as a project, vowing to turn him into a local, and sets Herman on a path where he must find a way to withstand the unending gray, stormy landscape or simply melt away. As he attempts to navigate the village’s internal politics and strangely archaic rituals with Alfred’s help, he falls helplessly into its life as if tumbling down a rabbit hole into Wonderland, his urgency slowly transforming to inert apathy. When he finally learns what happened to his wife and child, he ends up with more questions than answers. Utterly compelling in tone, plot, and style, this slim, sleek story has a veneer of sly
The illusions of a family and its close-knit town constructed and demolished on a truly epic scale.

THE KINGDOM

Nesbo, Jo

Knopf (560 pp.)

$27.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-525-65541-1

The latest stand-alone from the chronicler of Inspector Harry Hole puts all the murky, violent twists on brotherly love that you’d expect from this leading exponent of Nordic noir.

Roy Calvin Opgard has always been joined at the hip to his kid brother, Carl Abel Opgard, though not in the ways you’d expect. Carl was clearly his father’s favorite, and years ago he left Norway for Canada, where he made quite the reputation as an entrepreneur, while Roy stayed behind to run a petrol station on land the brothers inherited when their parents plunged to their deaths in the prized Cadillac Raymond Opgard bought from conniving Wilum Willumsen. But there’s more to Carl’s noble-sounding scheme to finance the project by distributing ownership shares among the townsfolk than he lets on. And Carl’s return to his hometown unearths long-simmering tensions between the brothers and threatens to reveal long-buried secrets about the deaths of their parents, the disappearance long ago of sheriff Sigmund Olsen, whose son, Kurt, now holds the sheriff’s job, and the checkered sexual histories of both Carl and Roy. Nesbo peels away the secrets surrounding Carl’s project, his backstory, and his connections to his old neighbors so methodically that most readers, like frogs in a gradually warming pan of water, will take quite a while to realize just how extensive, wholesale, and disturbing those secrets really are.

The illusions of a family and its close-knit town constructed and demolished on a truly epic scale.

CARDIFF, BY THE SEA

Oates, Joyce Carol

Mysterious Press (288 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-8201-5799-7

Creeping dread and dark violence haunt parents and children in four novellas of suspense.

In her latest collection, the indefatigable Oates returns to the theme of parents and what they will—or won’t—do to protect their children. The title novella is the story of Clare Seidel, an art historian in her 30s. Adopted as a toddler, she’s never been curious about her birth family until, out of the blue, she receives a call from a lawyer in the (fictional) Maine town of Cardiff, informing her that a grandmother she’s never heard of has died and left her a bequest. Soon she has discovered an eccentric trio of living relatives as well as the terrifying story of her long-dead immediate family. But every answer she gets about her past only raises new questions, and dangers. In Mia Dao, 12-year-old Mia is having a rough year. After her parents divorce, her mother finds a new man who makes the girl uneasy. Mia is also disturbed by the physical changes that adolescence brings. Her only solace is a nearby colony of feral cats, from which she rescues a tiny white kitten with strange black eyes that might or might not be her savior. Phantomswise: 1972 is the story of Alyce, a bright but naïve college student. She becomes involved with both her ambitious young philosophy professor and her kindly, older writing professor, a famous poet who tells her she reminds him of the girl in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. When she becomes pregnant, she goes down a very bad rabbit hole. The literary allusion that haunts The Surviving Child is the life and death of poet Sylvia Plath. In Oates’ fictional take, the poet is N.K., a brilliant, successful, but troubled woman. The story takes place several years after the murder-suicide that killed N.K. and her toddler daughter but left her young son alive. Told from the point of view of Elisabeth, who becomes the second wife of N.K.’s formidable husband, it’s a twisted tale of toxic patriarchy.

Family secrets bloom into nightmares in these skillful, chilling stories.

ZERO ZONE

O’Connor, Scott

Counterpoint (320 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64009-373-7

The aftermath of an uncanny art installation entangles the artist and her audience with unintended consequences. Jess Shepard creates art out of experiences. First, she created The Way Out, a room for young women to smash objects in anger, as a response to a college hazing ritual called the weigh-in. Then she assembled the Rainbow Rooms, a sequence of adjacent chambers flooded with singular hues of light so intense that lines of return visitors formed around the block. But these interactive exhibits pale in comparison to Jess’ masterpiece, Zero Zone, a concrete cube constructed in the New Mexico desert at a site formerly used for nuclear bomb tests. Due to lingering radiation in the air, “you see things sometimes,” as the owner of the land puts it. The novel revolves around a group of haphazard travelers who wind up inside Zero Zone together: Marta, a cocktail waitress at a Las Vegas casino; Tanner, a mailroom clerk with disfiguring neurofibromatosis; Danny, a “muscle-bound, baby-faced Latino kid” fresh out of county jail;
and Izzy, a wayward teen nicknamed Señorita Shake by mean-spirited kids at school after suffering a seizure. The four share an otherworldly experience in the room, and they decide to barricade themselves inside. When sheriff’s deputies arrive, the standoff turns into a shootout, ending with one unfortunate fatality. Shortly thereafter, Izzy attacks Jess at a gallery show, leading to her incarceration. Upon Izzy’s early release, her mother, Madeline, contacts Jess to solicit her help in locating her daughter, which reopens the wound. While each character’s narrative should compel readers to invest in the backstory and tragedy of the lethal intersection between life and art, the novel never finds its footing, succeeding only in revealing a completed puzzle and asking readers to pick apart the pieces.

A novel about experiential art based in light and space loses focus along the way.

**IN THE CLEARING**

Pomare, J.P.

Little, Brown (336 pp.)

$28.00 | Sep. 8, 2020

978-0-31646-294-5

A girl trapped in a cult and a mother with a tragic past are set on a collision course.

Freya Heywood lives about an hour outside of Melbourne with her young son, Billy. She can fit in with the other school moms well enough: She teaches yoga, drives a Land Rover. But nearly 20 years ago, Freya was involved in an incident that caused her to permanently lose custody of her first child. And this isn’t her only secret, either. Freya manages to keep her past at bay with panic buttons and top-notch security, but there are signs that danger is encroaching on her life with Billy: strangers near her house, tokens left on her doorstep. Near Freya’s property, Amy is one of almost a dozen children and teens living at the Clearing as part of a New Age group modeled closely on the chilling case of The Family, a cult active in Australia in the 1960s and ’70s. Amy and her “siblings” are given a doll stroked the back of Marshall’s fingers with her plastic hand. Her mouth was dry like his and he could hear her clearly in his thoughts.” Twelve-year-old Marshall has autism spectrum disorder; when the novel opens, he’s been separated from his family and is living in a juvenile center. His life there is a hard one, including regular bouts of abuse from the other children, some of which prompt him to violently retaliate. While on a drive away from the center, Marshall is involved in a car wreck which strands him on a nearby mountain. There, he uses the skills he learned from his father, Jace, to survive. Jace, working nearby, goes about searching for his son and mulling over the events that led to their separation. This is, at its core, a primal story of two people struggling to survive. And when Raschke describes the hostile landscape around son and father, his novel reaches its most powerful heights: “The rock was cold and the tips of his fingers were becoming numb. He was moving too fast. He knew it. He still had at least two hundred feet to go.”

At its peak, this novel of a parent and child in trouble is a harrowing and engaging tale of survival.

**TO THE MOUNTAIN**

Raschke, Erik

Torrey House Press (175 pp.)

$15.95 paper | Nov. 10, 2020

978-1-948814-32-4

In this taut novel, a father and son grapple with emotional trauma and a hazardous mountain landscape.

The first word that comes to mind when describing Raschke’s novel is lean. That’s intended as a compliment: In telling the story of the fraught bond between a father and his son, Raschke could easily have tipped overboard into sentimentality. And while this novel does feature some moving scenes, it also includes quietly unnerving moments like this one, when the novel’s young protagonist retreats into his own mind: “The doll stroked the back of Marshall’s fingers with her plastic hand. Her mouth was dry like his and he could hear her clearly in his thoughts.”

**STORIES FROM SUFFRAGETTE CITY**

Ed. by Rose, M.J. & Davis, Fiona

Henry Holt (320 pp.)

$25.99 | Oct. 27, 2020

978-1-250-24133-7

A landmark 1915 protest for women’s suffrage is the setting for the dozen short stories in this rousing anthology.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which guaranteed women’s right to vote. These stories by writers known for historical fiction focus on an event five years before, a march in New York City by 25,000 supporters of suffrage, “a three-mile-long argument for women’s rights.” Several of them bring to life real people; among the strongest is Jamie Ford’s “Boundless, We Ride.” Its protagonist is Mabel Ping-Hua Lee, a Chinese-born suffragist who would become the first woman to
Wise, wry, and witty—theses stories in all their stylistic variations are perfect.

TRUTHTELLING

RAMIFICATIONS
Saldaña Paris, Daniel
Trans. by MacSweeney, Christina
Coffee House (376 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-56689-596-5

A Dostoyevskian tale set in the Mexico City of today, marking a young man’s slide into not meanness but torpor. Saldaña Paris’ nameless narrator “never leaves his bed.” He has complicated reasons for this that would keep a psychiatrist busy for a couple of decades, especially since it’s his mother’s side of the bed that he sleeps on. His mother, Teresa, is absent from the first page on, which begins in the year 1994, when the narrator was 10 years old: She has written a letter to the boy’s father whose contents the author releases to the reader bit by bit until we learn that she’s abandoning their bourgeois existence in the little Mexico City neighborhood called Educación and heading for Chiapas to try to find Teresa; he does not succeed, and only late in the story does Saldaña Paris reveal the most tantalizing hint as to her fate. After their father dies, Mariana continues to look after the narrator, who slides into inertia while replicating his father’s bedridden end of life: “Two and a half years on, my existence is, like his during those months, restricted to the width of a bed….I’m able to understand the infinite pleasure my father must have experienced on discovering, after a whole life of work, the sweet honey of immobility.” That sweet honey soon turns acrid, and even though at the end the narrator thinks he might eventually get up, the reader might imagine that he’s lying there still.

A claustrophobic, depressive story that goes from bleak to bleaker.

TRUTHTELLING
Stories, Fables, Glimpses
Schwartz, Lynne Sharon
Delphinium (240 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-883285-92-0

A grab bag of realist and experimental stories, each one a treasure. Subtitled “Stories, Fables, Glimpses,” Schwartz’s collection is mostly populated by New Yorkers firmly rooted in their lives—for better and for worse. The realistic stories chronicle the sweetness of long marriages and the lingering pain of death and divorce. In “A Taste of Dust,” selected for The Best American Short Stories 2005, a woman spends the day with her ex-husband and his wife. She wants to believe her husband is miserable, with his teenage daughters and younger wife who mock him, but her feelings of pity abruptly turn to self-pity as she leaves. In “Truthelling,” a long-married couple rekindles their desire when they reveal their lies and indiscretions over the years. And in “The Golden Rule,” an O. Henry Prize winner, a widow contemplates whether she’s helping an unlikely elderly neighbor out of kindness or simply acquiescing to the “cunning tyranny of the weak” and whether this difference even matters. In the experimental stories, or fables, which evoke Lydia Davis loosened from logical precision, Schwartz, who’s 81, dissect the human condition. These forays into fabulist situations—a minor actress is mistaken for a concert pianist and whisked off to a performance, a cabaret singer gives away her babies because they aren’t perfect—delicately absurd while also building to startling revelations. In “The Middle Child,” a woman suffering from depression forgets about her daughter, adopted while she was in the darkest hours of her illness. “Can you ever forgive me?” the narrator asks her child. “I’ve been waiting for you for so long,” the daughter answers, “and we wept.” Though the situations are unbelievable, the emotions are not.

Wise, wry, and witty—theses stories in all their stylistic variations are perfect.
A cobbled-together family of money launderers is in big trouble after their newly hired runner disappears with $250,000.

The Brooklyn-based operation is headed by seasoned schemer Shecky Keenan. It includes two orphans: Henry Vek, 21, whom “Uncle Shecky” took in at age 9 after the boy’s boozing mother (Shecky’s cousin) died in a car crash, and Kerasha Brown, 23, the daughter of another of Shecky’s ill-fated cousins. A brilliant thief and break-in artist, Kerasha recently joined the household after having served six years in prison. Though all the members of this makeshift family are “mixed race, Henry and Shecky look white, and Kerasha, black.” When the runner, Emil, a talented artist friend of Henry’s, goes missing, Shecky must answer to the intimidating client whose money was lost. Meanwhile, Kerasha, who like her late mother is drawn to heroin, becomes obsessed with a contentious, court-appointed psychologist with the power to send her back into custody. Written in a jumpy, time-hopping, and sometimes hallucinatory style, this first novel is loaded with damaged characters. Shecky is haunted by the rape and murder of his sister and a squadrus upbringing by three vicious uncles. Zeta, a cop on the trail of human traffickers, was herself bought and sold as an orphan child in her native Montenegro.

A seasoned legal investigator, Selfon has firsthand knowledge of laundering schemes and the people who devise them. More importantly, he is attuned to questions of identity and belonging. Not all of the characters click, and the book contains more narrative noise than it needs, but the poetry-loving, sharply reflective Kerasha alone makes the book worth reading. She deserves a sequel all her own.

**A sharp, surprisingly affecting debut.**

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**NEVER WALK BACK**

**Shafer, Adam J.**

Allium Press (294 pp.)

$18.99 paper | Oct. 13, 2020

978-0-9996882-9-7

Impoverished and dejected after surviving the Civil War, Ruth Casper is desperate to leave her name somewhere in the annals of history. When she and her husband, Henry, invent a new brake for railroad trains, she sees her opportunity, but a villain may crush her dreams.

Ruth is the first to envision the air brake when she witnesses a train brutally destroy a herd of elk who’ve wandered onto the tracks. The brakeman himself dies from the physical trauma of trying to engage the brake, a process requiring brute strength to stop the speeding train. Walking home, she considers the bear trap Henry has laid in front of their Tennessee home and convinces Henry to have the bear trap become the prototype for the train brake—make it hard to set but easy to release, which is the reverse of the current brakes. Determined to gain a patent for the invention, Ruth bullies passive Henry into a long, crime-riddled journey to Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, where she hopes to convince Augustus Windom, owner of the Windom train empire, to buy the rights to use their invention. What she doesn’t know is that Augustus is a ruthless businessman who’s not above bending the law or trampling other people’s rights (not to mention bodies) to get what he wants, and what he wants is to cut Henry and Ruth out of the picture, gaining the fame for inventing the air brake himself. In his debut novel, Shafer deftly sets Ruth and Augustus on a collision course, each aiming for glory; Augustus may marshal the machinery of wealth and power against Ruth, but she will use her wits to restage that battle.

**A compelling showdown between honor and ambition set against an exciting historical moment.**

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**THREE LITTLE TRUTHS**

**Shortall, Eithne**

Putnam (416 pp.)

$27.00 | Oct. 13, 2020

978-0-525-53788-5

Three women from a suburban development in Ireland find surprising connections to each other as they attempt to move forward from mistakes they’ve each made in the past.

A hodgepodge group of neighbors from Pine Road, Dublin, uses WhatsApp to manage their poker group. When a new family moves into No. 8, the poker group is in a tizzy trying to collect information about the new neighbors. Edie Rice is particularly intrigued, not only because she loves a good mystery, but also because the new arrivals solidify Edie’s status as a longer-standing member of the neighborhood group. When Edie runs into the woman from No. 8, Martha Rigby, outside the market, she’s thrilled she will be able to report to WhatsApp with details about the sophisticated mystery woman. As the residents of Pine Road get to know Martha, she reveals that she relocated from Limerick with her husband and children because of some sort of trauma. Unable to stop herself, Edie investigates Martha’s past and discovers that her family fell victim to a crime before they moved. Edie confides this information to Robin Dwyer, another neighbor, and Robin begins to develop her own theories about what happened to send Martha running from Limerick.

Meanwhile, Edie, Robin, and Martha confront complex personal issues within their own families relating to parenting and partnership, all while at the mercy of the neighborhood yentas. Despite a few too many slapstick moments and clichés of neighborhood
A young resident at a Philadelphia hospital learns what it takes to be a medical professional.

THE WHITE COAT DIARIES

Sinha, Madi
Berkley (368 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-399-19819-6

A young resident at a Philadelphia hospital learns what it takes to be a medical professional in this debut novel by Sinha, who’s a physician herself.

When the story begins, Norah Kapadia is a newly minted doctor from New Jersey who is just beginning as an intern at Philadelphia General Hospital. It’s a prestigious residency placement, and as she starts her three-year stint she must scramble to transform her stellar academic credentials into real-world medical skills. Her father, a pediatrician, died when she was 10, and her longing to better understand him has driven her hyperfocus on academics and becoming a doctor ever since. Thus, Norah unexpectedly finds herself a woman in her mid-20s who has been kissed precisely once; she’s spread too thin as she tries to take care of herself and her career, defend her choices against her aging mother’s cultural expectations about Indian womanhood, and help her brother with their family obligations. The story follows Norah and the ins- and outs of the personal and professional lives of the doctors she works with. As in the TV shows ER and Scrubs, the hospital is a soap opera of life, death, friendships, casual sex, love, mistakes, and humor. However, in this thoughtful, well-written story, those elements are simply the backdrop to Norah’s self-exploration as she works to turn herself into a confident woman and an ethical doctor.

An absorbing novel that follows the maturation of a strong, determined woman who—despite missteps—becomes who she wants to be.

THE PIANO STUDENT

Singer, Lea
New Vessel Press (230 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-939931-86-3

An aging musician revisits the love affair he had nearly 50 years earlier with the illustrious pianist Vladimir Horowitz. Midnight in a Zurich cabaret, April 1986, and the piano player, Nico Kaufmann, gets an odd request: play Robert Schumann’s Träumerei. The three-minute miniature is an auditory madeleine for the customer, Reto Donati, a high-profile lawyer who earlier that day skipped out on his dubious appointment to be euthanized after a recording of the song triggered a poignant youthful memory. He has sought out the piano bar “to thank the piece” for saving his life. Träumerei also resonates with Kaufmann because of his association with Horowitz, for whom the piece was a cherished encore. This clavier coincidence is enough that the 70-year-old Kaufmann leaves with the 45-year-old Donati, who takes up residence in Kaufmann’s guest room. For the next two weeks, the duo tour in and around Zurich while Kaufmann relates how he, as a 21-year-old “gigolo,” met the 33-year-old Horowitz in 1937 and became his student and lover. The affair persisted more than two years—against the wishes of Kaufmann’s father, Horowitz’s wife, even Horowitz’s own neuroses. Singer, the pen name of German cultural historian Eva Gesine Baur, had access to the real Kaufmann’s unpublished archives, including letters from Horowitz, which perhaps explains why her book never settles into either a conventional retelling of Kaufmann’s life or the novel enticingly introduced in the first two chapters. Donati’s story is relegated to infrequent, often jarring, intrusions, mostly in the form of one-note expository characters, like his jilted, golf club–wielding fiancee; or facile verbal proddings, à la “What were you thinking that whole time?” This short shrift is a shame, because Donati’s tale of suppressed love, what little is dribbled out, seems much more fertile ground for compelling fiction.

Constricted storytelling outweighs the book’s scattered historical insights.
Linton realized it half an hour after the police came on the scene and that after Lena sent Leslie Truong, the fellow student who found Beckey's body, walking back to campus, Leslie was raped and murdered before she arrived. Not only are there horrors aplenty along the trail of what looks like a serial killer who may still be notching two victims a year, but revisiting the earlier crimes gives Slaughter, through a series of extended flashbacks, a chance to relitigate the breakup of Sara's marriage to late Grant County chief of police Jeffrey Tolliver, who headed the investigation that sent Daryl Nesbitt to jail. Slaughter, renowned for her shocking opening sequences, this time reserves the horrors for her unflinching descriptions of the multiple assaults, some of which result in fates worse than death for the victims, and for Sara's confrontation with a killer who’s both monstrous and all too human.

More slow-burning than most of Slaughter's shockers, this one will still rattle you down to your bones.

WE GERMANS
Starritt, Alexander
Little, Brown (208 pp.)
$27.00 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-31642-980-1

An elderly German tells his grandson about his World War II experiences on the Eastern Front in this flawed but thoughtful work.

Hitler’s disastrous invasion of the Soviet Union led to the deaths of millions of soldiers and civilians. Starritt views the war through the eyes of elderly survivor Meissner, a German artillery soldier. His memories of those days, his thoughts about guilt and shame, have been reawakened by questions from his grandson, Callum, who grew up in Scotland but feels “an odd sensation of connectedness” to Germany and a shame that “has gathered, like a mulchy spot on an apple.” In a long letter to Callum occasionally interrupted by the younger man’s comments, Meissner says he wants to explain something about his war. “I can’t quite articulate it myself,” he says, but “it’s to do with courage.” In autumn 1944, after fighting and retreating in Russia and Ukraine, he’s in Poland, near the German border. Meissner and four others get separated from their unit after being ordered to go looking for a rumored food depot. They see Polish villagers hung by unidentifiable men from a single tree “in bunches, like swollen plums.” They kill German soldiers guarding the food depot (the rumors were true) who refuse to share. When they later see other German troops rape and crucify women, Meissner wonders if it’s in retaliation for his group’s action against the food depot. They steal a tank and use it against the Russians. These episodes are well drawn; the brief time inside the tank is a small masterpiece. But it’s not entirely clear where courage comes in as Meissner’s theme despite a few brave actions. Elsewhere he struggles to define his views on the Holocaust. He stresses that he didn’t see the camps and doesn’t feel any collective guilt. “What I do feel, ineradicably, is shame.” That at least is clear, the legacy of shame. It hasn’t diminished for an old man many years after the war’s end, and it remains inescapable for his grandson born in the 1980s in a different country. Starritt himself shows courage in his approach to one facet of the war’s legacy and may offer solace to Germans like Callum who also suffer from their “connectedness” and to those close to them.

A risky, provocative novel with some exceptional writing.

THE DEVIL AND THE DARK WATER
Turton, Stuart
Sourcebooks Landmark (480 pp.)
$20.01 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-72820-602-8

After an outbreak of ghastly events aboard the Saardam, a merchant vessel returning from the East Indies to Amsterdam in 1634, fear spreads that an evil spirit is responsible.

Before the ship’s departure, a leper issued a stark warning about the “merciless ruin” that awaited it—and then burst into flames. Only prisoner Sammy Pripps, an alleged British spy with uncanny powers of deduction, took the threat seriously. Soon enough at sea, on a vessel populated by “murderers, cutpurses and malcontents,” throats are slit, bodies are stashed, and dark secrets are exposed. Ultimately, a monster storm upends the Saardam and destroys two other ships in the fleet. Amid the evil doings, human decency is largely limited to Sammy’s bodyguard, Arent Hayes, a physically imposing specimen with a kind soul and a “poisoned” past, and healer Sara Wessel, abused wife of soulless Governor General Jan Haan, who happens to be Arent’s uncle. With their congenial Holmes and Watson act, Sammy and Arent seem on track to emerge as the heroes of this perpetually revealing tale. But Turton, who brings a pointed social conscience to bear in his commentary on the ill treatment of women and the exploitation of the lower class, has something else in mind. With all its characters, hidden identities, and backstories, this epic sometimes sags. As one character declares, “There are too many damn secrets on this ship, and I swear all of them are marching toward him with swords in their hands.” But Turton, whose brain-twisting first novel, The 7½ Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle (2018), posed knotty challenges for readers, has a colorful tale to tell and does so in highly entertaining fashion.

A devilish sea saga that never runs out of cutthroat conspiracies.
Yokoyama knows his way around a police station.

**PREFECTURE D**

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**THE AENEID**

Virgil

*Trans. by Bartsch, Shadi*

Random House (464 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 27, 2020

978-1-98454-10-0

Blending solid scholarship with poetic sensibility, classicist Bartsch delivers a new version of the foundational poem of Imperial Rome.

**THE MIDNIGHT CIRCUS**

Yolen, Jane

Trans. by Lloyd-Davies, Jonathan

MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)

$17.00 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-374-3704-2

Linked novellas from the dean of Japanese noir.

Yokoyama knows his way around a police station, as these linked novellas, reminiscent of Janwillem van de Wetering's Amsterdam Cops series, suggest. Yet a Japanese police station is a place that’s thoroughly politicized and bureaucratic. A constant presence in each of the stories is a personnel director named Shinti Futawatari, whom everyone fears because he has unusually broad powers to reassign people to different jobs, elevating some and demoting others. “Fortunately,” writes Yokoyama, “it was a particular strength of Personnel to nurture posts that were both impenetrable and obscure, enabling transfers that were recognizable from the inside as punitive yet justifiable to the outside as existing to ‘strengthen Department X or Y.’” Futawatari’s life is made miserable by a 42-year veteran detective who refuses to be shuffled from his post for reasons that, a detective ventures, have something to do with “all that other shit.” The veteran cop, who could teach Bartleby the Scrivener a thing or two, won’t talk about it or consider a transfer, leaving Futawatari frustrated and powerless. In the next story, Futawatari—who’d been named a superintendent at the age of 40 and is nicknamed the “ace,” not for his skills but as “a reference to the trump card he held”—is a peripheral player in a cat-and-mouse game in which an anonymous cop is blackmailing a senior officer. The same threat plays in the fourth story, with a politician threatening to expose another top cop, sending the prefecture scrambling to dig up dirt. When Masaki Tsuge, who works in the Prefectural Police Headquarters, pleads on his boss’s behalf, the politico answers, smugly, “If you’re this good at kowtowing, you might want to consider running for election.” The story that precedes it is the most elusive, in which a promising woman sergeant in a deeply sexist enterprise—as Yokoyama writes, “Questions of gender aside, she was exactly the type of officer the force needed”—simply disappears from her station one day.

There’s more politics than mayhem here, but fans of hard-boiled fiction will enjoy seeing how Japanese cop shops work.

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**PREFECTURE D**

Four Novellas

Yokoyama, Hide

*Trans. by Lloyd-Davies, Jonathan*

MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)

$17.00 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-374-3704-2

A new collection of dark tales from an endlessly inventive writer.

A girl uses magic to call her love but not to keep him. A child born in winter hears voices calling to him in the cold wind. A lonely man falls for a selkie who sings an enticing song. Yolen uses the language and imagery of fairy tales to weave her original, spellbinding stories, which make a cohesive collection. They’re all dark, though in most cases, that darkness encompasses loss but doesn’t revel in it. As Yolen puts it in her introduction, there’s “a frisson of terror rather than massive amounts of spilt blood.” A couple of stories veer closer to true horror. The main character of “Great Gray” is drawn to the rare owls of the title because of his own predatory instincts, and the narrator of “Little Red” endures...
hinted-at torments because the alternative of returning home to her grandmother is somehow worse. But, as promised, there’s very little blood in these pages—just glimpses of the darkness of human nature. Some stories, like “Inscription,” read like Celtic folktales while “Requiem Antarctica” is a Jamesian tale of creeping madness at the ends of the Earth, and “An Infestation of Angels” is a retelling of the book of Exodus. And if the stories themselves somehow aren’t enough, each is accompanied by a poem that extends its themes into evocative verse.

Haunting stories from a modern master.

COBBLE HILL
von Ziegesar, Cecily
Atria (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-982147-03-7


In Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, four seemingly happy couples are each dealing with secret dissatisfactions. There’s Roy, a British novelist who’s struggling to write his next novel, and his wife, Wendy, a big-shot magazine editor who’s hiding her recent demotion. There’s former punk rocker Stuart Little and his wife, Mandy, who’s lying about the real reason she stays in bed all day. There’s the school nurse, Peaches, whom every man seems to have a crush on, and her pretty much ignored husband, Greg. And then there’s the strangest couple of all, a designer/inventor named Tupper and his mysterious artist wife, Elizabeth. Unlike von Ziegesar’s previous work for teens, this isn’t full of drama, sex, and scandal—instead, readers are treated to a surprisingly tender, detailed, and quiet study of eccentric characters who are thoroughly interesting even when making bad decisions. There are so many characters, and the point of view shifts so rapidly, that following along can sometimes be confusing. Also, every character displays an obnoxious obsession with Mandy’s weight (have none of them ever met an overweight person before?). But von Ziegesar’s writing style is breezy, witty, and compulsively fun to read, making this an entertaining distraction full of laughable moments and realistically awkward dialogue.

A pleasantly diverting escape that will make readers long for the human connection of a tight-knit neighborhood.

Mystery

WITHOUT A BREW
Alexander, Ellie
Minotaur (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-250-20577-3

Sloan Krause, a beer maven with a nose for brews, is torn between her personal problems and murder in a Washington ski town devoted to all things German.

After years in foster care, Sloan has finally found a home with the Krause family—though no longer with their son, Mac, whom she left over his cheating in Beyond A Reasonable Stout (2019). Otto and Ursula Krause have given Sloan a share in their beer business even though she’s taken a job with Nitro, a rival craft brewery. Her boss, Garrett, who inherited the building that houses Nitro, has just added a beer-based B&B. Unfortunately, some of his first guests spell trouble, especially entitled executive Kevin Malcolm and his friends, who are desperate for the only available rooms in town. The other guests include Ali and Brad and enigmatic Liv Paxton, another last-minute booking who disses Kevin, earning his enmity and that of his girlfriend, Jenny. Next morning, Liv’s room is found trashed, and Chief Meyers retrieves her body from the river. Sloan hears that Ali and Brad have gone through hell trying to conceive and that Ali suspects that Brad had an affair with Liv, whom he interviewed as a possible surrogate. A local mechanic knew Liv from high school when they were involved in a tragic death, and Kevin’s hair-trigger temper could have led to murder. Distracted by news from her longtime social worker that Otto and Ursula may have been Nazi sympathizers, Sloan must work up the courage to confront them while searching for a killer.

A delight for foodies, craft beer fans, and lovers of twisty mysteries with a bit of humor.

VEILED IN DEATH
Blackmoore, Stephanie
Kensington (304 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-1755-9

A priceless veil, a disastrous battlefield reenactment, a wedding fraught with problems—it’s just another day in the life of a bridal planner.

Mallory Shepard’s given scant thought to her own nuptials, planned for the coming autumn, until she and a client visit the Antique Emporium, run by mother-daughter team Claudia and June with some help from granddaughter Pia. Bev Mitchell is making purchases there for her own big day, but she and Mallory
A white-hot case reunites old friends who’d been estranged for years.

THE SICILIAN METHOD
Camilleri, Andrea
Trans. by Sartarelli, Stephen
Penguin (288 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-14-313497-8

A thespian is stabbed in the heart. Was the killer sending a message?

Curmudgeonly Inspector Montalbano is awakened in the middle of the night by Detective Mimi Augello, in great distress because his tryst with beautiful Genoveffa Recchia was ruined by the surprise return of her husband, Martino. Escaping onto the balcony, Mimi lowered himself to the apartment below and sneaked into the bedroom, where he discovered a corpse. Montalbano scolds Mimi for hastily leaving the scene. The dead man, Carmelo Catalanotti, seemed, according to his Montalbano in a surprising direction. Then Helene Pierce, at one time Mallory’s future mother-in-law, rushes into the store to berate Claudia over her plans to join a Revolutionary War reenactment the town has planned and goes ballistic when she sees the veil, which she claims is a stolen family heirloom made by Betsy Ross. The police decide that Mallory can keep the veil in her safe at Thistle Park until the matter is investigated, but it’s stolen anyway. Worn out by her mother, who is suddenly pressuring Mallory for grandchildren, Mallory still has high hopes for the reenactment, but when the site is covered with heavy fog, Claudia is shot dead, and both Mallory’s fiancé’s father and Bev’s intended are wounded, Mallory’s problems increase to the point of chaos despite her attempts at sleuthing.

A plucky heroine is overwhelmed by too many mysteries and too many stressful situations.

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The late Camilleri’s antepenultimate novel again combines divinely deadpan drollery with a clever puzzle.

OUTSIDER
Castillo, Linda
Minotaur (320 pp.)
$20.71 | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-250-14289-4

A white-hot case reunites old friends who’d been estranged for years.

Leaving the Amish community behind, Kate Burkholder was struggling to survive in Columbus, Ohio, when she met ambitious Gina Colorosa. They became friends, shared an apartment, and graduated from the police academy together. But when Gina started accepting freebies and bribes, their friendship foundered, and Kate eventually left to take a job as police chief in Painters Mill. Now Gina’s in trouble with fellow vice squad officers who think she stole a pot of drug money they were supposed to share. She barely escapes with her life when a no-knock warrant brings them to her house in the dead of night. The only person she can trust even after 10 years of silence is Kate. In the middle of a blizzard, Gina crashes her truck and almost freezes before she’s found by Amish widower Adam Lengacher, a childhood friend of Kate’s. When Kate arrives, Gina tells a sordid story of corruption at the highest levels and coverups concerning innocent civilians killed in a raid. The warrant out for Gina’s arrest and her own problems increase to the point of chaos despite her attempts at sleuthing.

A pulse-pounding Amish thriller (really?) that’s all too relevant to our time.
of her intended, Jeff Vanderhaven. She throws herself so hard at Merry's brother, Chris, her high school squeeze, that he barely manages to escape her clutches. The wealthy Vanderhavens are working on a business deal with Luanne's father, who's desperate for money. So when Jeff is found dead at the wedding venue after he punches Chris and accuses him of trying to steal his fiancee, the deal is in even greater peril than Chris. Merry, who recently saved her father from a murder charge, goes into full sleuthing mode on behalf of her brother, who's duly warned not to leave town. She has plenty of friends who keep her clued in to town gossip, but it won't be easy to decide if the reason for this murder was love or money.

Plenty of suspects, likable characters, and lots of possible motives add up to a cheery holiday cozy.

MRS. CLAUS AND THE SANTALAND SLAYINGS
Ireland, Liz
Kensington (304 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2658-2

An Oregon innkeeper marries Santa Claus and probes killings at the North Pole.

After a whirlwind three-month courtship, April Claus finds herself in the frozen expanses with her husband, Nick, who recently replaced his older brother as the world's one-and-only Santa after Chris died in a hunting accident. Since Santaland is a monarchy, Nick will serve as Santa only until Chris' son Christopher turns 18, then Nick and April will be free to retire to Cloudberry Bay and run her hotel, the Coast Inn, full-time. In the meantime, they must live in Santaland's castle with Nick's older sister, Lucia; his younger brother, Martin; Chris' widow, Tiffany; and Pamela, the dowager Mrs. Claus, during the six-month run-up to Christmas before returning to the Coast Inn for April's busy tourist season. While in Santaland, the Claus family is attended by a host of scurrying elves and talking reindeer whose job is to meet their every need. Irascible elf Giblet Hollyberry is killed early on, leaving April a mystery to solve. Aside from chronicling her heroine's quest for Giblet's killer, Ireland spends most of her time describing April's myriad duties as Mrs. Claus, from presiding over the annual Reindeer Bell Choir concert to helping Pamela create a croquembouche replica of the castle. What she ignores, though, is exactly what would pique most readers' curiosity most. How did April and Nick fall in love? How did he persuade her he was really Santa? Ireland doesn't even give many physical details. Nick has a beard, but is he tall, dark, handsome? Does he shake when he laughs like a bowl full of jelly?

Readers who want to know what it's like to get frisky with Santa will have to wait for the sequel.

MISTLETOE, MOUSSAKA, & MURDER
Kashian, Tina
Kensington (336 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2607-0

A reluctant bride-to-be swaps wedding planning for sleuthing.

Lucy Berberian couldn't be happier to have traded her job at a high-powered Philly law firm to manage her parents’ Jersey Shore restaurant. She loves working in Kebab Kitchen, a longtime fixture in Ocean Crest. And she loves the Kitchen's chef, Azad Zakarian, her prospective bridegroom. So why does she keep dragging her feet as her best friend, Katie Watson, tries to get her to look at bridal gowns and wedding venues? Maybe because local banquet facilities
A Texas transplant can’t stop tripping over bodies in Ireland.

DEATH ON THE GREEN

Murphy, Catie
Kensington (332 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2420-5

A Texas transplant can’t stop tripping over bodies in Ireland.

Megan Malone’s grandfather was Irish, and she retired from Austin to Dublin after 20 years in the U.S. Army. As a driver for the Leprechaun Limousine Service, she’s on assignment with PGA champion Martin Walsh at the Royal Dublin Golf Club when he invites her to watch him play a casual game of golf. That’s when she and Walsh find his best friend and longtime competitor, Lou MacDonald, floating in the pond at the 15th hole. Trained as a medic, Megan splashes into the water to try to save MacDonald, but she’s too late, and the blood on his head makes her realize he didn’t accidentally drown. She calls Detective Paul Bourke, who worked with her in Dead in Dublin (2019). Walsh thinks the blow on the back of MacDonald’s head could have come from a hard-hit golf ball. But he doesn’t know who’d want to kill Lou, a big, gentle man everyone liked. Walsh’s wife, Heather, another pro golfer, takes Lou’s death hard. Lou’s daughter, Saoirse, feels incapable of arranging a wake and a funeral while she’s trying to stop a developer from building on the same island as the golf club. So Megan steps in to help her. The more Megan learns, the less ideal the Walshes’ marriage seems and the more Saoirse understands her resentment toward them both. And the more Megan entangles herself—even finding another body at the Royal Dublin—the greater her own hazard.

Cleverly blends rivalries on and off the golf course with colorful characters as a plucky limo driver takes the wheel again.

HAUNTED HOMICIDE

Ness, Lucy
Berkley (304 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-984806-77-2

Her new role running an old-fashioned lady’s club puts a woman in touch with two niche domains: the spirit world and the world of old money.

Avery Morgan may be passing up a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to manage her Aunt Rosemary’s retreat center in Lily Dale, New York, but she’s never been into all that woo-woo, communing-with-the-dead stuff that Rosemary’s new business is all about, even though Rosemary insists Avery has a natural gift for it. Instead, Avery’s leaving home for a position managing the faltering Portage Path Women’s Club in Ohio, living in the gorgeous mansion that houses the club and working to return it to its glory days. On arriving at her new home, Avery
is “welcomed” by club president Muriel Sadler—a formidable grand dame who’s the only board member who voted against her appointment. Avery’s sure she can win Muriel over even though the other women on the board clearly gave up trying to influence her years ago. Ness limns Muriel’s dreadful qualities so efficiently that Avery’s considerably more shocked by her murder than most readers will be. Avery’s certain that none of the other women would do Muriel harm, but she wonders whether the mysterious girl in 1920s garb she saw in the mansion’s basement might know more. Unfortunately, Avery’s the only person who can see the girl. The board insists that Avery look into the circumstances of Muriel’s death, which are more entertaining than murder has a right to be because Avery gets to know Sgt. Oscar Alterman while navigating the world of the too-rich, who have some surprises of their own.

A series debut with fun and flair.

**MURDER AT QUEEN’S LANDING**
Penrose, Andrea
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2284-3

A quarrelsome pair of sleuths share danger and romance in Regency England. Encouraged by her great aunt Alison and the enigmatic Earl of Wrexford, her partner in several murder investigations, Lady Charlotte Sloane is finally resuming the place in society she’d cast off in a runaway marriage. The secret that she’s the satirical cartoonist A.J. Quill is safe with Wrexford and several other people, including the street urchins Raven and Hawk, whom she’s taken in to raise as gentlemen. Asked by his friend Christopher Sheffield for a loan to start a business enterprise, Wrexford agrees even though Sheffield has no experience and Landing who died whispering “argentum.” Wrexford’s Bow Street Runner friend asks for his help, but only after Cordelia and her brother vanishes does Sheffield reveal that she was his partner. More investigations uncover pieces of the problem, but because someone high in the powerful East India Company may be blackmailing Cordelia and her brother in order to run a dastardly scheme that could affect Britain’s standing in the world, they must proceed with caution in their most thorny, dangerous case to date.

Scientific discoveries combine with a complex mystery to provide an action-packed brainteaser.

**THE CORPSE WHO KNEW TOO MUCH**
Sennefelder, Debra
Kensington (368 pp.)
$8.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2891-3

A food blogger investigates a years-old disappearance.

Life is good for Hope Early. Her food blog is increasingly popular. She’s teaching a course in blog design at her local library in Jefferson, Connecticut. Her New York agent is working on two potentially lucrative sponsorships with regional food vendors. And her relationship with Jefferson police chief Ethan Cahill is moving ahead nicely. So why would she want to disrupt things by reopening the search for Joyce Markham, who vanished nearly 20 years ago? Partly it’s her own stubborn curiosity. But what sets her quest in motion is the return of Joyce’s daughter Devon, who went to school with Hope and her sister, Claire, and who now hosts the podcast *Search for the Missing*. Devon has never believed that her mother would walk out on her family without a trace. She suspects foul play and wants to find out who’s responsible. Hope agrees, especially after Devon’s found dead in her car. Claire discourages her to influence her years ago. Ness limns Muriel’s dreadful qualities so efficiently that Avery’s considerably more shocked by her murder than most readers will be. Avery’s certain that none of the other women would do Muriel harm, but she wonders whether the mysterious girl in 1920s garb she saw in the mansion’s basement might know more. Unfortunately, Avery’s the only person who can see the girl. The board insists that Avery look into the circumstances of Muriel’s death, which are more entertaining than murder has a right to be because Avery gets to know Sgt. Oscar Alterman while navigating the world of the too-rich, who have some surprises of their own.

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978-1-4967-2891-3

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Life is good for Hope Early. Her food blog is increasingly popular. She’s teaching a course in blog design at her local library in Jefferson, Connecticut. Her New York agent is working on two potentially lucrative sponsorships with regional food vendors. And her relationship with Jefferson police chief Ethan Cahill is moving ahead nicely. So why would she want to disrupt things by reopening the search for Joyce Markham, who vanished nearly 20 years ago? Partly it’s her own stubborn curiosity. But what sets her quest in motion is the return of Joyce’s daughter Devon, who went to school with Hope and her sister, Claire, and who now hosts the podcast *Search for the Missing*. Devon has never believed that her mother would walk out on her family without a trace. She suspects foul play and wants to find out who’s responsible. Hope agrees, especially after Devon’s found dead in her car. Claire discourages her to influence her years ago. Ness limns Muriel’s dreadful qualities so efficiently that Avery’s considerably more shocked by her murder than most readers will be. Avery’s certain that none of the other women would do Muriel harm, but she wonders whether the mysterious girl in 1920s garb she saw in the mansion’s basement might know more. Unfortunately, Avery’s the only person who can see the girl. The board insists that Avery look into the circumstances of Muriel’s death, which are more entertaining than murder has a right to be because Avery gets to know Sgt. Oscar Alterman while navigating the world of the too-rich, who have some surprises of their own.

A series debut with fun and flair.

**MURDER AT QUEEN’S LANDING**
Penrose, Andrea
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2284-3

A quarrelsome pair of sleuths share danger and romance in Regency England. Encouraged by her great aunt Alison and the enigmatic Earl of Wrexford, her partner in several murder investigations, Lady Charlotte Sloane is finally resuming the place in society she’d cast off in a runaway marriage. The secret that she’s the satirical cartoonist A.J. Quill is safe with Wrexford and several other people, including the street urchins Raven and Hawk, whom she’s taken in to raise as gentlemen. Asked by his friend Christopher Sheffield for a loan to start a business enterprise, Wrexford agrees even though Sheffield has no experience and refuses to reveal his partners. Thus begins Charlotte and Wrexford’s involvement in another round of murder and malfeasance. But there’s much, much more. Jameson, the brother of Lady Cordelia Mansfield, Charlotte’s math-genius friend, is a suspect in the murder of an East India Company clerk at Queen’s Landing who died whispering “argentum.” Wrexford’s Bow Street Runner friend asks for his help, but only after Cordelia and her brother vanish does Sheffield reveal that she was his partner. More investigations uncover pieces of the problem, but because someone high in the powerful East India Company may be blackmailing Cordelia and her brother in order to run a dastardly scheme that could affect Britain’s standing in the world, they must proceed with caution in their most thorny, dangerous case to date.

Scientific discoveries combine with a complex mystery to provide an action-packed brainteaser.

**THE CORPSE WHO KNEW TOO MUCH**
Sennefelder, Debra
Kensington (368 pp.)
$8.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4967-2891-3

A food blogger investigates a years-old disappearance.

Life is good for Hope Early. Her food blog is increasingly popular. She’s teaching a course in blog design at her local library in Jefferson, Connecticut. Her New York agent is working on two potentially lucrative sponsorships with regional food vendors. And her relationship with Jefferson police chief Ethan Cahill is moving ahead nicely. So why would she want to disrupt things by reopening the search for Joyce Markham, who vanished nearly 20 years ago? Partly it’s her own stubborn curiosity. But what sets her quest in motion is the return of Joyce’s daughter Devon, who went to school with Hope and her sister, Claire, and who now hosts the podcast *Search for the Missing*. Devon has never believed that her mother would walk out on her family without a trace. She suspects foul play and wants to find out who’s responsible. Hope agrees, especially after Devon’s found dead in her car. Claire discourages her to influence her years ago. Ness limns Muriel’s dreadful qualities so efficiently that Avery’s considerably more shocked by her murder than most readers will be. Avery’s certain that none of the other women would do Muriel harm, but she wonders whether the mysterious girl in 1920s garb she saw in the mansion’s basement might know more. Unfortunately, Avery’s the only person who can see the girl. The board insists that Avery look into the circumstances of Muriel’s death, which are more entertaining than murder has a right to be because Avery gets to know Sgt. Oscar Alterman while navigating the world of the too-rich, who have some surprises of their own.

A series debut with fun and flair.
An intricate puzzle in a lively setting.

REVENGE IN RUBIES

Stuart, A.M.
Berkley (368 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-984802-66-8

Amateur sleuth Harriet Gordon investigates the death of a military officer’s wife in 1910 Singapore.

The murder of Sylvie Nolan, the young wife of Lt. Col. John Nolan of the South Sussex Regiment, rocks the British expatriate community of colonial Singapore. Despite the difference in their ages, the Nolans seemed a loving couple. Both were military brats with long family histories of service to the South Sussex. And despite her youth, vivacious Sylvie filled the role of the colonel’s lady admirably. Her abrupt arrival may have been a little hard on Jack, Nolan’s son from a previous marriage, and on Nolan’s sister, Priscilla, who kept house for the colonel before Sylvie’s arrival. But the residents of the Blenheim Road neighborhood that surrounds the regiment’s barracks are unanimous in their praise of Sylvie’s social graces. No one can give Inspector Robert Curran, of the Straits Settlements Police Force, any reason why someone would have bashed in Sylvie’s head with a candlestick while she slept. Still, Curran must find a suitable suspect quickly, since Maj. Percival Goff is champing at the bit to snatch the investigation away from the civilian police and turn it over to the military. Fortunately, Harriet, a widow who works for the police as a typist, is only too willing to help. Although Curran reminds Harriet repeatedly that she works for the police, not as a police officer, her agile mind, relentless curiosity, and understanding of the human heart are assets he can’t easily dismiss as he battles to preserve the sovereignty of the civil authority.

An intricate puzzle in a lively setting.

MURDER IS A MUST

Wingate, Marty
Berkley (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-984804-13-6

The curator of a private book collection in Bath finds her outreach to the public marred by murder.

Buoyed by the success of the First Edition Society’s detective-themed literary salons, Hayley Burke wants to expand the group’s reach beyond its headquarters in Middlebank House, former home to the late Lady Georgiana Fowling and her extraordinary library of golden-age detective mysteries and current home to Hayley, the society’s curator, and Mrs. Glynnis Woolgar, its secretary. Hayley’s proposed exhibition, “Lady Georgiana Fowling: A Life in Words,” would give the public a glimpse of both the collection and the lively mind of its collector. And a letter left by Lady Fowling hints that there may be length Violet reveals that Tinsley has access to $2 million of her trust fund. In between interviews with Tinsley’s circle, Ashe has time to check in with his retired father, Wendell, and monitor the movements of pedophile priest Mark Stanton. When Ashe finally meets Chopper, the young man convinces him that he’s broken away from his criminal clan. Two shocking developments change the complexion of the case: Tinsley’s physician’s receptionist confirms that she was pregnant; and one of the witnesses is murdered.

With its huge, entertaining cast and smooth sleuth, this series kickoff recalls vintage Chandler or Hammett.

FORTUNE FAVORS THE DEAD

Spotswood, Stephen
Doubleday (336 pp.)
$26.95 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-385-54655-3

A sprightly period debut that shows New York’s preeminent female detective and her assistant plying their trade in 1945.

When the matriarch of the well-to-do Collins family is bashed to death by a crystal ball in a locked room, her relatives ask Lillian Pentecost to look into the case. Despite its wealth, the family has already seen its share of troubles. Abigail Collins’ husband, steel magnate Alistair Collins, shot himself a year ago. Before her own death, Abigail was consulting psychic Ariel Belestrade, whose practices are so questionable that she’s being investigated by skeptical anthropology professor Olivia Waterhouse. And problems continue without missing a beat. Shortly after Harrison Wallace, the acting CEO of Collins Steelworks and Manufacturing, hires Lillian, Rebecca Collins, Abigail’s saucy daughter and Wallace’s goddaughter, starts hitting on Willowjean Parker, the assistant Lillian hired away from a circus and trained as her assistant and successor. Will is both responsive to and disconcerted by Becca’s overtures; certainly she’d rather get kissed by Becca than beaten by the unseen enemy who attacks her moments after their most recent tête-à-tête. Spotswood supplies scattershot period detail (Will presciently calls Lillian “Ms. Pentecost” in 1945), mild wisecracks, an anticlimactic solution to that locked-room puzzle, and a Chinese box of denouements: If your chosen suspect isn’t pronounced guilty, just wait a few pages.

The most striking feature is the provocative gender-flipping of Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin.
hidden in her collection a volume fit to serve as the showpiece of the exhibition: a first edition of Dorothy L. Sayers’s *Murder Must Advertise* signed by all the members of the Detection Club in 1933. But finding an appropriate venue and a sufficiently talented exhibition manager for the show prove daunting tasks. After several false starts, Hayley settles on Oona Atherton, whose organizational skills are matched only by her persnickety temperament. Oona is a monster of efficiency, so detail-oriented that Hayley can’t believe it’s an accident when she falls from the steep spiral staircase to her office and plunges to her death. Hayley’s struggles to keep the exhibition afloat in a sea of setbacks, with the ever present threat of a killer still on the loose, make Middlebank House the place to go for puzzles past and present.

Lively and engaging.

**SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY**

**MACHINE**

Bear, Elizabeth
Saga/Simon & Schuster (496 pp.)
$25.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5344-0301-7

The second novel set in Bear’s sprawling White Space universe—after *Ancestral Night* (2018)—is an intricately plotted fusion of science-fiction adventure and conspiratorial mystery that revolves around a space station that begins to experience critical mishaps after a rescue mission returns with humans who have been in cryogenic suspension for centuries.

When rescue specialist Dr. Brooklyn Jens—who has dedicated her life to saving and treating any and all species of beings—finds more than 10,000 humans in cryo-containers onboard a derelict generation ship that has been in space for 600 years, she is faced with numerous unanswered questions. How did the ship get to its current location? Why were the passengers turned into “corpsicles”? Why was an android named Helen Alloy left to protect them? Why is a modern vessel docked on the generation ship, and where is the methane-breathing crew? What is the purpose of the crablike machine in the vessel? With these mysteries, and more, unsolved, Jens returns as many rescued passengers as she can to Core General, a state-of-the-art hospital and largest constructed biosphere in the galaxy. Once there, however, Jens begins uncovering some chilling revelations about the purpose of the frozen passengers, the strange craboid walker, and a mysterious virus impacting shipmind AIs. While there are a few sequences in which the momentum flags, Bear’s ability to keep the reader immersed in the various characters’ individual stories and the dynamism among the human and alien characters of the Synarche (the interstellar government that joins together multiple alien races for a collective good) more than compensates. The character arc of Jens—who has a debilitating pain syndrome and is struggling to come to grips with her lack of connection with her daughter—is done with insight and sensitivity.

A page-turning fusion of science fiction and mystery—hopefully Bear will revisit her White Space universe soon.

**BRIGHT AND DANGEROUS OBJECTS**

Mackintosh, Anneliese
Tin House (240 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-951142-10-0

A commercial diver is torn between embracing her life on Earth and the opportunity to be one of the first humans to live on Mars.

Thirty-seven-year-old Solvig Dean appears to have all she could want: a successful and exciting career as a saturation diver who travels deep into the North Sea to tend to the oil pipelines and wells that network the sea floor, a house in a Cornish beachside town, an Irish wolfhound named Cola, and a loving tattoo-artist partner, James. Even so, she continues to feel trapped. She can’t choose a direction for her life and struggles to process her mother’s death, which occurred when she was 2, leaving her with only a few photographs and her father’s stories about a brilliant woman who escaped her own life’s pressures through 15-hour days working in IT and bottles of Smirnoff vodka. Solvig distracts herself from the growing distance in her relationship with James and her ambivalence about starting a family by taking monthlong dive jobs and applying to the Mars Project, which aims to put the first colony of humans on the Red Planet by 2030. She keeps her application a secret from those closest to her—even though the mission would likely mean never returning to Earth. Will joining the Mars mission satisfy her ambition, or is it just an attempt to escape her earthly life? Mackintosh’s detailed prose sensitively animates the worlds of the novel—from the tough commercial diving industry to the quirky community of Mars-colonist hopefuls—as well as the internal complexities of navigating middle age while torn between the contending desires for belonging and freedom.

A perceptive and nuanced study of a woman’s search for self-fulfillment, reaching from the ocean floor to outer space.
A curious scientist stumbles on mysterious ruins in the opening chapters of this science fiction epic.

Things are really turning around for Kira Navárez. A xenobiologist, she's finishing up a stint doing research on the large moon Adrasteia with a small team of other scientists, and her boyfriend, Alan, has just proposed to her. Instead of continuing to spend months apart, working on different planets and waiting until they can be together, they'll be able to ask their employers to make them part of a colony as a couple. As Kira performs a few routine last-minute checks before their team leaves the system, something strange catches her eye. She decides to check it out, just to be thorough, and finds herself in the middle of an ancient structure. When her curiosity gets the better of her and she touches a pedestal covered in dust, a bizarre black material flows out and covers her entire body. She passes out as she's being rescued by her team, and when she wakes up, she's being rescued by her team, and when she wakes up, she's helping her pregnant mother make ends meet in Eres, a poor town ravaged by her stepfather's drug-dealing business. It's the need for extra income that brings her to Big Paw, the town's pseudo-godfather. He's in need of a ranch hand, and she's determined to get the job. Sadly, the person in charge of training her is Ian Parker, Big Paw's grandson, a known playboy and former high school heartthrob. Hazel's situation becomes more dire once her stepfather's drug operation gets shut down and both he and Hazel's mother are arrested. It was Hazel who called the cops, and now she's the one left dealing with the consequences. Hazel's situation becomes more dire once her stepfather's drug operation gets shut down and both he and Hazel's mother are arrested. It was Hazel who called the cops, and now she's the one left dealing with the consequences. Nowhere to stay and an infant sibling to support once it's born. Her temporary solution is to squat in a sea of stars with the people of Carrion Crow and ordered his heresy among the people of Carrion Crow and ordered his Sun Priest. But unrest is brewing in Carrion Crow, one of the clans. Years ago, a previous Sun Priest feared enemies are much closer than any resurrected god. Meanwhile, a young sailor named Xiala has been outcast from her home and spends much of her time drowning her sorrows in alcohol in the city of Cuecola. Xiala is Teek, a heritage that brings with it some mysterious magical abilities and deep knowledge of seafaring but often attracts suspicion and fear. A strange nobleman hires Xiala to sail a ship from Cuecola to Tova. Her cargo? A single passenger, Serapio, a strange young man with an affinity for crows and a score to settle with the Sun Priest. Roanhorse's fantasy world based on pre-Columbian cultures is rich, detailed, and expertly constructed. Between the political complications in Tova, Serapio's struggle with a great destiny he never asked for, and Xiala's discovery of abilities she never knew she had, the pages turn themselves. A beautifully crafted setting with complex character dynamics and layers of political intrigue? Perfection.

Mark your calendars, this is the next big thing.
lets her stay with him. Depressing doesn't begin to describe all the ways Hazel is let down by the people around her. This isn't a fluffy romance, and it sometimes seems like a positive outcome will be impossible given all the problems that arise. While there are elements of soapy melodramatics here, the pleasure of reading about them quickly disappears with a slut-shaming comment here or misogynist thought there. The book is so steeped in hatred for women other than Hazel, even those Ian fooled around with years ago in high school, that it's hard to feel good about it. It also lacks nuance in examining poverty and substance abuse in rural communities. Sure, there's a happy ending, but it barely makes a dent in the litany of Hazel's personal tragedies.

Don't expect to feel good after the emotional whiplash.

**THE ROOMMATE**

*Danan, Rosie*

Berkley (336 pp.)

$16.00 paper | Sep. 15, 2020

978-0-593-10160-5

A woman from a staid Connecticut society family moves to LA and falls in love with her roommate.

Clara Wheaton grew up in a household beset by scandal, and it turned her into a creature of habit and duty. As a young girl, Clara vowed to live quietly and never cause anxiety for her long-suffering mother. Now she’s 27 with a Ph.D. in art history and no idea what to do with it, so she moves to LA in a last-ditch attempt to win over the friend she’s had a crush on since they were teenagers. But when she arrives in California, her friend reveals he will be touring with his band for the summer, leaving Clara with an unexpected roommate, Josh Darling. Feeling too humiliated to return home, she decides to spend the summer in LA after being offered a temporary job at her aunt’s PR firm. Josh is a porn star, and he firmly corrects Clara’s misconceptions—and those of readers—about the adult entertainment industry. Clara is worried that her association with Josh will cause a scandal, but she loves the freedom of her new life too much to worry. They develop a close friendship but agree to ignore the sizzling attraction between them. Clara is outraged when she discovers that the powerful porn company Josh works for, Black Hat, is trying to blackmail him into a new contract. They decide to strike back at the company by creating a website with unabashedly sex-positive video tutorials that center women’s pleasure. Clara and Josh are likable characters trying to make the world a better place. Danan’s debut is a staunch personal tragedies.

A deliciously fresh romance with strong characters and feminist themes.

**YOU HAD ME AT HOLA**

*Danan, Rosie*

Berkley (336 pp.)

$16.00 paper | Sep. 15, 2020

978-0-593-10160-5

An actress on an upward career trajectory falls in love with her leading man.

Jasmine Lin Rodriguez moves home to New York for an unbelievable chance: After years as a soap opera actress, she is offered the lead role in *Carmen in Charge*, which will air on a popular streaming service. The timing couldn’t be better—after she was painfully and publicly dumped by her musician boyfriend, the tabloids have painted her as a loser in love. Jasmine promises herself that she’ll avoid romantic entanglements and focus on her career, but that proves difficult since she’s wildly attracted to her new co-star, telenovela heartthrob Ashton Suarez. Ashton has two goals: achieving mainstream Hollywood stardom and keeping the paparazzi from discovering his 8-year-old son, Yadiel, who lives with Ashton’s family in Puerto Rico. When Yadiel was just a baby, a stalker broke into their home; Ashton was so terrified for his son’s safety that he moved the boy to live with his parents and cut himself off from the press. He studiously avoids his attraction to Jasmine—a paparazzi magnet, and he will do anything to avoid the spotlight. However, as work on the show continues, they give in to their undeniable attraction. Ashton and Jasmine are imperfect but fully realized characters, and their differences aren’t easily solved. Daria makes the unusual narrative choice of writing some chapters from the point of view of the *Carmen in Charge* characters, but it pays off by cleverly illuminating the emotional journey of Jasmine and Ashton’s own romance.

Sexy, compelling, and complex—a terrific romance from a rising star of the genre.

**EIGHTY DAYS TO ELSEWHERE**

*dyer, kc*

Berkley (480 pp.)

$16.00 paper | Aug. 11, 2020

978-0-593-10204-6

A reticent homebody finds herself thrust into an adventure that takes her around the world alongside a man she considers her enemy.

Ramona Keene is deeply attached to her uncle’s New York City bookstore, where she works. So when their new landlord, accompanied by a dapper young man he calls his nephew, threatens eviction if they don’t cough up triple the rent, she starts looking for a well-paying job to help save the shop. In her quest, Romy stumbles upon an opportunity from ExLibris Expeditions, a company that recreates literary travel experiences: She must retrace the steps of the character Phileas Fogg from Jules Verne’s classic *Around the World in Eighty Days*. If she completes the task—without
traveling by commercial airlines—she’ll receive a bonus and get hired by the company. She accepts the offer with equal parts trepidation and excitement. On the trip, Romy discovers that the new landlord’s supposed nephew, Dominic Madison, is on the same journey, and she must beat him if she is to get the job. As circumstances and accidents require the two to join forces, Romy not only comes to understand Dominic, but is also forced to become better acquainted with herself. Dyer takes readers on a journey of self-discovery that spans several continents, engages with various cultures, and touches on urgent sociopolitical issues. Narrated in the first person, Romy’s experiences are able to hint at the wide gamut of emotions that travel can inspire. But while Romy’s evolving relationship with herself and the world around her is sketched in intricate detail, her dynamic with Dominic, an extremely compelling character, receives little attention.

A charming story detailing a woman’s self-discovery through travel.

BEAUTY TEMPTS THE BEAST
Heath, Lorraine
Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-06-295192-2

The last unmatched Trewlove finally finds his true love.

Benedict Trewlove, known as Beast, didn’t intend to become the owner of a brothel, but now he refuses to leave it until all the women under his care have found other employment. When he meets Althea Stanwick, his immediate thought is that she doesn’t belong here in Whitechapel serving drinks in a tavern; she’s too posh and refined. Three months ago, Althea was cast out from society when it was uncovered that her father, a duke, was a traitor to the crown. When Beast proposes Althea become a tutor to the ladies at his brothel, she agrees under the condition that he in turn teaches her to be a seductress. Becoming a courtesan will allow her to return to society on her own terms and give her protection and some freedom. Although the attraction between Beast and Althea is instantaneous, it’s when friendship blossoms that Althea questions her chosen path and instead desires a future with him. There’s struggle and there’s steam, but the core of this story is human goodness and familial love. This is especially on display during an endearing, abundantly sweet Trewlove family Christmas. However, though the brothel ladies are charming, Beast’s whole notion of changing them sometimes comes across as holier-than-thou, which doesn’t jibe with the story’s otherwise lovely overarching theme of everyone’s inherent right to be loved and respected, regardless of class or situation.

This Sins for All Seasons series finale is full of heart.

KISS MY CUPCAKE
Hunting, Helena
Forever (383 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-5387-3467-4

It’s swanky cocktails and cupcakes versus no-frills pub food in this opposites-attract romantic comedy.

Buttercream and Booze is Blaire Calloway’s baby, and she has big dreams to turn her bar-and-bakery hybrid into a dining destination. It’s the success she needs to prove to her wealthy parents that she can make it on her own after several professional failures. Blaire’s largest obstacle, though, doesn’t seem to be of the financial variety. Instead, it comes wrapped in flannel and wielding an ax. Ronan Knight is nearly ready to open The Knight Cap, a neighboring bar with cold beer, greasy food, and an ax-throwing range. It’s exactly the opposite of Buttercream and Booze and is about to become Blaire’s biggest competition for being named the best bar in the Pacific Northwest. Blaire and Ronan butt heads frequently, leading to scenarios that quickly get out of hand and usually quite messy. The comedic timing delivers with its slapstick, physical humor, and rapid-fire banter, but unfortunately, there’s nothing terribly new here. The gendered stereotypes of men liking meat and big mugs of beer and women preferring delicate bites and dainty glasses is what’s most disappointing; things would have been far more interesting if the roles were flipped in some way. At a time when romance authors are doing such interesting things with the genre and finding new ways to use beloved tropes, this feels like a missed opportunity. Hunting does, however, know how to balance all the moving parts of a satisfying romance rather well. The hero and heroine’s attraction is front and center, the emotional layers are real and earnestly felt, and the hilarious, awkward moments always land with a laugh.

Cute and serviceable but pretty standard.

TIES THAT TETHER
Igharo, Jane
Berkley (320 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-593-10194-0

Two Canadian immigrants struggling with the past have a one-night stand with long-term consequences.

Azere has been a good Nigerian Canadian girl all her life and can’t let a steamy encounter with a stranger derail her commitment to preserving her birth culture. But when Spanish Canadian Rafael Castellano reenters her life, she weakens in her resolve to marry a fellow Nigerian, one selected by her obnoxious, widowed mom. Yet the habit of family obedience is hard to break, and Rafael’s secrets make her wonder if choosing heart over heritage is a mistake. Igharo’s debut has
A woman offers to help her landlord out of a jam by pretending to be his girlfriend during a vacation.  

**LIKE LOVERS DO**  
**Livesay, Tracey**  
Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)  
$7.99 paper | Aug. 25, 2020  
978-0-06-297956-8

A woman offers to help her landlord out of a jam by pretending to be his girlfriend during a vacation.  

Dr. Nicole Allen is about to complete her tenure as chief resident at Johns Hopkins before heading off to Duke for a fellowship in orthopedic surgery. After disciplining a well-connected intern at her job, Nic is put on administrative leave and the future of her fellowship is threatened. She cries on the shoulder of her landlord and best friend, Ben Van Mont. Ben has just learned that his ex-fiancee will be arriving on Martha's Vineyard, their firmly platonic relationship forged during a childhood of neglect, and Ben, who's White, sees the professional and personal challenges Nic faces as a Black woman. Their romance is sexy and emotionally satisfying, and Livesay's portrayal of their journey from friends to lovers is perfectly paced and plotted.  

An exemplary friends-to-lovers romance with characters who grow and change to find happiness with themselves and each other.

EVIL GENIUSES
The Unmaking of America: A Recent History
Andersen, Kurt
Random House (464 pp.)
$30.00 | Aug. 11, 2020
978-1-984801-34-0

How inequality happened in America. Journalist, editor, magazine founder (Spy, Inside), and host of the public radio broadcast “Studio 360,” Andersen builds on the political and cultural critique he offered in his last book with a timely, hard-hitting analysis of America’s “hijacked, screwed-up political economy.” “Whereas Fantasyland concerned Americans’ centuries-old weakness for the untrue and irrational, and its spontaneous and dangerous flowering since the 1960s,” he writes, “Evil Geniuses chronicles the quite deliberate reengineering of our economy and society since the 1960s by a highly rational confederacy of the rich, the right, and big business.” Synthesizing many works on capitalism, inequality, greed, and corruption, Andersen focuses on the “hyperselfish-ness” that took hold in the 1970s, when economic equality was “at its peak.” What Tom Wolfe called the “Me Decade” extended beyond personal behavior to infect the nation’s economy, leading to “strategizing, funding, propagandizing, mobilizing, lobbying, and institution-building” by big business, turning the U.S. political economy “into a winner-take-all casino economy.” The author sees the ’70s as a turning point in American life that gave rise to neoliberalism, a move toward deregulation of business, and a glorification of a culture of greed. “The anti-establishment subjectivity and freedom to ignore experts and believe in make-believe that exploded in the ’60s was normalized and spread during the ’70s and beyond,” he writes (especially during Reagan’s presidency) and is in evidence today in a mistrust of government—regulations, taxes, oversight—and a nostalgia for some imagined, stable past. Andersen believes that change can occur, unrelated to partisan politics: He urges Americans to push for “goals that can seem radical—lots more power for workers and average citizens, optimizing the economy for all Americans rather than maximizing it for rich ones and corporations—but then being nondoctrinaire about how we achieve the goals.”

A rousing call for desperately needed systemic transformation.
While it’s always satisfying to read about places I have visited, reliving my experiences and indulging my sizable nostalgic streak, I find greater fulfillment in books about areas of the world that are completely unfamiliar to me. Because this August provides a bounty of such books, I wanted to recommend as many as I could; each entry notes the place in question and quotes from the review.

**A Voyage Across an Ancient Ocean** by David Goodrich (Pegasus, Aug. 4): “Goodrich chronicles his 1,100-mile bicycle ride from Alberta, Canada, to the northern plains of the U.S., intent on seeing where carbon comes out of the ground.”

**To the Lake** by Kapka Kassabova (Graywolf, Aug. 4): In this worthy follow-up to the award-winning *Border*, Bulgarian writer Kassabova explores the “Balkan region around lakes Ohrid and Prespa, encompassing North Macedonia and Albania....Through the many people she met—many, in fact, relatives—Kassabova chronicles the region’s history and culture, evoking songs, folktales, poetry, myths, and superstitions....A haunting, captivating memoir of homecoming.”

**Two Trees Make a Forest** by Jessica J. Lee (Catapult, Aug. 4): Lee, a Berlin-based British Canadian Taiwanese author, excavates her family history across Taiwan. “This elegiac book, which smoothly incorporates historical and travel threads, was born from the desire to embrace her heritage. With a doctorate in environmental history and an impressive grasp of botany and geology, Lee takes readers on a fascinating tour of the island and its past.”

**Vesper Flights** by Helen Macdonald (Grove, Aug. 25): The award-winning author of *H Is for Hawk* delivers a series of enchanting nature essays, covering territory from Hungary to New York to the pastoral English countryside. We called it “exemplary writing about the intersection of the animal and human worlds.”

**Forgotten Peoples of the Ancient World** by Philip Matyszak (Thames & Hudson, Aug. 18): “Lightly worn but rich scholarship” informs this fascinating journey into the ancient world, encompassing civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, and elsewhere: “Each entry for peoples ranging in time from deep prehistory to the early Middle Ages includes handsome illustrations and maps, and the author’s text is accessible, sometimes playful, and never dumbed down.”

**The Book of Unconformities** by Hugh Raffles (Pantheon, Aug. 25): In this geological adventure through Greenland, Iceland, the Outer Hebrides, and the Svalbard archipelago, among other far-flung locations, the author “uses stones as jumping-off points to create poetic portraits of various times and places....The text shimmers with rangy curiosity, precise pictorial descriptions, well-narrated history, a sympathetic eye for the natural world, and a deft, light scholarly touch....As panoptic and sparkling as the crystals contained in many of the author’s objects of study.”
**FRIENDLY FIRE**

*How Israel Became Its Own Worst Enemy and Its Hope for the Future*

Ayalon, Ami with David, Anthony Steerforth (300 pp.)

$27.00  |  Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-58642-258-5

A military, intelligence, and political veteran rehearses his life and career in Israel.

Ayalon has had a distinguished career, serving as the head of the Shin Bet, the Israeli security agency; commander in chief of the navy; and member of the Knesset. In his latest book—written with the assistance of David, who has published widely on Israeli and Palestinian issues—Ayalon discusses his dawning realization that no progress can occur in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict until both sides develop empathy for one another. This position did not make him popular with regional hard-liners. The author has several stories to tell: his autobiography, the history of that sanguinary conflict, the process of writing this book. Some chapters include interviews with key players on both sides. Ayalon notes that, early in his career, his life was kill-or-be-killed, and he writes about his military encounters with candor and, sometimes, gory detail—which also accompanies his multiple descriptions of terrorist attacks by Hamas and others and the harsh Israeli military reactions. After leaving the military for intelligence work, he began to meet with Palestinian leaders (including Yasser Arafat) and with the leaders of his own country. Ayalon has nothing but disdain for Ariel Sharon and others who believed that war and revenge were essential. The author also became a prominent peace activist, even creating a peace proposal with Sari Nuseibeh, a Palestinian professor and activist. They promoted their plan widely, but hawkish politicians (in the region and elsewhere, including the U.S.) remained dominant. There is a bit of self-flattery here: Ayalon continually notes that he tells the truth, no matter what—while others, by implication and action, do not. Still, his aims and accomplishments are so undeniably impressive that open-minded readers will quickly forgive him these light trespasses. Dennis Ross provides the foreword.

Hope finds a prominent presence in what so many think is a hopeless, endless conflict.

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**Owls of the Eastern Ice** by Jonathan C. Slaght (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Aug. 4): Chronicling his “travels through remote Russian landscapes...Slaght, the Russia and Northeast Asian Coordinator for the Wildlife Conservation Society, grips readers with vivid language and tight storytelling. His many months trekking through the icy wilderness to find and track rare fish owls—the largest owl on Earth—inform a narrative that blends field research, personal journey, and adventure writing.”

**Dopeworld** by Niko Vorobyov (St. Martin’s, Aug. 18): This “entertaining excursion into the narcotics trade by a one-time practitioner” will appeal to anyone interested in the catastrophic failure of the ongoing war on drugs, but it also serves as a kind of a dope-trade travelogue, with stops in 15 countries, including Russia, China, Colombia, and Afghanistan.

**Tales From the Ant World** by Edward O. Wilson (Liveright/Norton, Aug. 25): “The world-renowned ant expert cleans out his desk, which—no surprise—contains many gems.” Travel with him from Brazil to New Guinea and numerous teeming places in between.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
A gimlet-eyed critique of the notion of the “socially responsible” corporation. In April 2019, recounts University of British Columbia law professor Bakan, JP Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon led a drive with 200-odd other CEOs to declare that corporations were committed not to maximizing returns for their shareholders, but also to serving “workers, communities, and the environment.” It was an unexpected repudiation of the dog-eat-dog capitalist ethic. As the author argues, it is also misplaced; even with this declaration, born of Davos conferences and economic think tanks, the corporation really hasn’t changed, “at least not fundamentally.” Bakan views the “psychopathic institution” with jaundiced disdain, and clearly he does not trust the Dimon declaration. Instead, he expects, the corporation will simply take the occasion of being seen for once as good guys to “cajole governments to free them from the regulations designed to protect public interests and citizens’ well-being,” pushing for further deregulation and privatization. “Visit the website of any major corporation and you’ll wonder whether you’ve accidentally clicked on that of an NGO or activist group,” writes the author—but then read between the lines. Quoting Joseph Stiglitz, Bakan predicts that the drive to deregulate and allow corporations to self-regulate is a recipe for further financial crises, and the supposed transformation of the corporation into a “caring, publicly minded” entity is a false front that disguises the voracious wish of the corporation to take control of every aspect of the economy. This includes the public sector and such services as delivering drinking water to municipalities, which leads to disasters like Flint. Writing clearly and with minimal pleading to economic authority, the author closes by invoking the lessons of the pandemic, which tells us that corporate values are not those of ordinary people: “Unbridled self-interest, individualism, competition, and commoditization cannot be the values that guide us.”

A rigorously argued manifesto against corporate capitalism, even with its supposedly friendly face.

DEAD DOUBLES
The Extraordinary Worldwide Hunt for One of the Cold War’s Most Notorious Spy Rings
Barnes, Trevor
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-06285-699-9

An eye-opening look at the mechanics of espionage, Soviet-style.

In 1960, an age of abundant cocktails and government offices whose “air was often fuggy from cigarettes,” British and American intelligence cracked a ring of spies operating in the U.K. The chief operative was a British citizen named Harry Houghton, who had been sent home from a post in Poland because of his pattern of heavy drinking. He was assigned to an office that oversaw British submarine activities, handling sensitive information that he handed on to his Soviet handler for the oldest of reasons: After having served time in prison, he “confessed that he had spied for money,” but refused to disclose how much he had been paid.” Divorced from a wife who tipped off intelligence agents to the fact that Houghton “was divulging secret information to people who ought not to get it,” Houghton recruited a paramour and worked with another couple who, it turns out, were American Communists who had fled the U.S. a step ahead of the FBI, though they had long managed to evade capture. As Barnes writes in this entertaining thriller, the members of the so-called Portland Spy Ring “were arrested at a pivotal moment in the Cold War,” a time marked by the quickening space race and, soon, the Cuban missile crisis and other moments when hot war nearly broke out. The American agents and their Soviet handler were exchanged, though, for British spies the Russians had captured. On his death, that handler was declared a hero—and not by the Soviets but instead by Boris Yeltsin, the first president of supposedly democratic Russia. The author does a good job of showing how Soviet intelligence used death records, stolen passports, and other instruments to plant spies throughout the West, and fans of Furst, Ludlum, and their kind will find this real-world exploration of old-school espionage suitably intriguing.

The fraught spy game ably viewed as historical artifact and—thanks to Russia, China, and others—ongoing concern.

RETARGETING IRAN
Barsamian, David
City Lights (200 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-87286-804-5

The follow-up to Targeting Iran (2007).

In a Q&A format about the continued demonization of Iran by the U.S., Barsamian enlists the expertise of five longtime observers: Noam Chomsky,
INSPIRATION FOR THE SAVVY INVESTOR

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New York Times bestselling Author of Wealth-Cat’s War
In 16 dense, erudite, and surprisingly intimate essays, Bloom offers a sweeping overview of major Western poets.

**TAKE ARMS AGAINST A SEA OF TROUBLES**

The eminent scholar revisits his literary passions.

In 16 dense, erudite, and surprisingly intimate essays, Bloom (1930-2019) offers a sweeping overview of major Western poets, from Homer to contemporary African American Jay Wright, whom Bloom praises as “among the best American poets of whatever origin or complexion.” As well as celebrating beloved writers, Bloom also reassesses his own work. “If you live ninety years,” he admits, “you will be a battered survivor. Your own mistakes, accidents, failures at otherness beat you down.” To assuage those feelings, he advises, “Rise up at dawn and read something that matters as soon as you can.” He reconsiders his argument in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), analyzing ways in which writers respond to their predecessors. Now, he reveals, the anxiety of influence “seems to me literary love tempered by ambivalence, as all love is.” Throughout, Freud looms large as a “major essayist in the tradition of Montaigne and Emerson, and not as a supposed scientist”; not as “the master of dream interpretation (where I doubt him) and certainly not the would-be therapist (talking cures) but the pessimistic seer of the human condition.” Bloom’s visceral connection to poems results in vivid, vigorous portraits, whether of poets he knew—Auden, Frost—or those he has read for so long that “it scarcely seems reading anymore.” As he writes of Wallace Stevens, “I am now perpetually on oxygen yet still have the sensation that I breathe the clear air of Stevens.” Early on in this astute collection, the author marks his terrain: “What you read and how deeply you read matters almost as much as how you love, work, exercise, vote, practice charity, strive for social justice, cultivate

Azadeh Moaveni, Trita Parsi, Ervand Abrahamian, and Nader Hashemi. In the wake of the Trump administration’s canceling of Obama’s Iran nuclear deal (aka the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, adopted in 2015) as well as the recent U.S. assassination of a prominent Iranian general, Barsamian gets at the key to the deterioration of the relationship between the two nations. His expert contributors dig into a variety of topics: the general breakdown in relations since Iran’s Islamic Revolution of 1979; the failure of U.S. sanctions; the gains in education and civil rights for women in Iran even as censorship and repression have tightened; and the outsized role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Parsi, who advised Obama on the JCPOA deal, notes the role Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had in unwittingly pushing the agreement along: “He thought that he could force the U.S. to take military action, but he underestimated Obama and he misread the American public, which has been adamantly against another war.” Abrahamian, author and professor emeritus of Iran and Middle Eastern history and politics, offers a wise overview of Iran, its history, and political makeup. Longtime MIT professor Chomsky argues that the U.S. has no right to impose sanctions on Iran or force it to “capitulate” in any way. Furthermore, he notes, the U.S. under Trump is now “the world’s leading rogue state.” Moaveni, a journalist, writer (*Lipstick Jihad*, etc.), and academic, speaks on women and society, and Hashemi, director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver, discusses Islamic politics and the reform movement, noting that “we are now witnessing the worst moment in U.S.-Iran relations in over forty years.”

The myriad topics sometimes blur together, but the discussion is astute and relevant.

_Army of the Night_ by William Dalrymple

_Amy Tan’s “Chinese Mother”_, a review by Michael Levenson

_In 16 dense, erudite, and surprisingly intimate essays, Bloom offers a sweeping overview of major Western poets._

**EVERYTHING IS SPIRITUAL**

_Who We Are and What We’re Doing Here_

Bell, Rob

St. Martin’s Essentials (320 pp.)

$27.99 | Sep. 15, 2020

978-1-250-62056-9

A former megachurch pastor’s stab at sagacity.

In his latest, Christian speaker and writer Bell, the founder of Mars Hill Bible Church, offers a hybrid work of autobiography and exploration of “big ideas.” The author sets himself up as something of a mystic; indeed, he fondly recounts how a woman in his congregation “pulled me aside and said, “You’re a mystic.” As he writes, “the mystic doesn’t need an authority figure to validate what they know is true. I was never interested in religion…I was after an experience.” Bell makes it clear that through much of his career, he has strayed against, or simply ignored, the authority of church traditions, denominationalism, and established theology. In this brief work, he attempts to distill lessons from his own life and from his grappling with questions of faith and existence, all in a nearly stream-of-consciousness, poetic format. Unfortunately, the author’s halting, fragmented style makes the text difficult to read, and his conclusions are hardly groundbreaking. Among his insights: “We’re made of thingness, / we have life, / we have minds, / and we also have / soul / And soul is real, / just as real as your skin and bones. / The mind thinks, / the soul knows.” As a memoir, the narrative is scattered and saturated with Bell’s feelings of loss, confusion, and anxiety. Throughout, the author is unsure about his next steps despite his massive successes in ministry, books (*Love Wins, What Is the Bible?* etc.), and public speaking. Dipping his toe into quantum physics, Bell sees in the Big Bang and the structure of molecules deep life lessons about belonging and growing. Yet even these ideas don’t convey smoothly, as the author unnecessarily camouflages them within a garden of chopped-up phrases.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Bell could have done better.
kindness and courtesy, worship if you are capable of worship. The mind is an activity and will decay into dark inertia if not sustained by the sustenance of reading.”

Reading, this stirring collection testifies, “helps in staying alive.”

THE ZEALOT AND THE EMANCIPATOR
John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, and the Struggle for American Freedom
Brands, H.W.
Doubleday (448 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-385-54400-9

The veteran historian maintains his high standards in this study of two of 19th-century America’s most significant figures.

Although still controversial, John Brown (1800-1859) needs no rehabilitation. Brands, the chair of the history department at the University of Texas, reminds readers that Brown was not only an abolitionist (an extremist position for the time); he considered Blacks equal to Whites, an extraordinary belief shared by few contemporaries. He was also deeply religious, obsessed with freeing the slaves—even by violence, which seemed the only way—and charismatic enough to convince many establishment abolitionists to finance his campaigns. With his sons, he traveled to Kansas to participate in the nasty 1850s conflict between free-state and pro-slavery settlers, where he severely damaged his reputation with the 1856 Pottawatomie massacre, during which his band dragged five pro-slavery men from their beds and murdered them. Brands delivers a gripping account of his 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry but succeeds no more than colleagues in explaining its utter incompetence. Capturing the nearly undefended armory was simple; clumsy efforts to provoke a slave rebellion failed, and Brown dithered when escape was easy. Severely injured during his capture, he was tried and hanged. The author rocks no boats by affirming that the raid
Each day, it seems, brings more distressing news about the environment, whether it’s the rapidly rising global temperatures, wildly unpredictable weather patterns, or ceaseless degradation of the habitats of animal species of all varieties. That’s why books such as Rebecca Giggs’ *Fathoms: The World in the Whale* (Simon & Schuster, July 28) are so important. In this beautifully written and enchanting debut book, which will remind many readers of both Robert Macfarlane and Rachels Carson, Australian science and nature writer Giggs opens our eyes to the epic biological and mythical proportions and potential of the largest animal on the planet. *Fathoms* is not just an urgent plea for whales and the oceans; it’s a necessary reminder, rendered in luminous prose, of the interconnectedness of all the flora and fauna on Earth. As our reviewer wrote in a starred review, “Giggs presents the bounty of [her] scholarship in crisp, creatively written chapters addressing the many layers of the whale population’s unique physiology and evolutionary history; sociality, above-water balletic athleticism, and enigmatic ‘biophony’ of their vocalizations. Most importantly, she analyzes how their behavior can be predictive for the Earth's future.” I spoke with the author via Zoom from the U.K.; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Why whales?
Some years ago, I was at a whale beaching near my home in Perth. There was a huge crowd, and everybody had different explanations for why the whale was stranded. Some people thought it was sick; some had an idea that it had been attacked by predators like sharks or killer whales; one person even had a theory that beachings were somehow connected to falling stars. I thought there was something interesting about the way people understand events and causation in the natural world. Later, I read about a sperm whale washed up in Spain with a stupendous medley of objects in its stomach. There was an itemized list, including a flattened greenhouse and a bunch of ropes and flowerpots. It’s not just that there’s something inherently visceral and upsetting about that image—the physicality of all that plastic inside this amazingly symbolic animal—but also that the greenhouse is the metaphor, the allegorical trope, that we use to describe the warming climate. So here was this icon of the 1980s environmental movement [“Save the Whales,” etc.] literally consuming the icon of climate crisis.

Throughout, you put such metaphors to great use, resulting in clear yet never heavy-handed advocacy. Talk more about your approach.
A lot of those issues can seem vast and bodiless and abstract, but I had this creature through which I could tell
I'm always drawn to the uncanny. How does a whale come to consume pairs of jeans and golf balls? I don't want my writing to be didactic. I feel like you engage a broader set of people if you stick to story.

Do you have a favorite whale?
The strap-toothed beaked whale, which we rarely see. It has markings like a panda bear and a long beak like a porpoise even though it's much larger than a porpoise. The male also has two tusks that grow out of the lower jaw, and as it ages, these tusks wrap around the upper jaw. So as the whale grows older, it has to become much more agile in hunting because it literally can't open its mouth as wide as it could when it was younger. That's the other aspect of the story that really drew me to it initially—that whales are these incredibly mysterious animals. Even in an age of Google Earth, there are still huge animals that we very rarely encounter. At the same time, they're washing up with plastic not just from commercial fisheries, but from our domestic spaces as well. That dissonance between the strange and the familiar was very much at the top of my thinking.

Mystery and hope are two of the central motifs of the book. Are there pieces of nature that are irretrievable? Where do you find your hope?
At the core of this book is the question of how we stay open to hope in a natural world that seems to be so haunted by human problems. After having looked at what happened in the 1980s anti-whaling movement, I found strands of resilience in that narrative. Although it may be humiliating to discover that our lives affect stupendous wildlife in even the most remote environments, we should see that to some extent, being intertwined in the lives of those animals indicates that we can also take small actions to restrain ourselves from those effects. And it gives you a way to imagine what you do here has an impact all the way out there, because of course we can empathize with whales in a way that we can't empathize with things like icebergs melting or the ozone layer depleting.

What should we be doing on a daily basis?
Let me take one step back, which is to point to the fact that the 1980s anti-whaling movements really were the emergence of a global environmental citizenry, one of the first occasions where people were called to take responsibility for something that they may never see in a place on the globe that they may never visit. I think that's a model of citizenry to hold on to. I also didn't want to provide a prescriptive list of actions, because I really believe that for people to be engaged with their environment, it requires them to do an accounting of what their talents are, what their means are, and what communities they belong to. It's important for people to find a meaningful way for them where they are in that moment, because I really think that you get more hopeful as you make yourself useful. And there's no point in me prescribing people a very systematic way of making change. I think everyone does that in their own way.

I think your impulse is right on, because once you start prescribing things, you're going to lose attention quickly, or get push back, even from people with good intentions.
I do think that's another significant way to kind of get into people's hearts—that mystery and enchantment. I think we all love to imagine that the world is wilder than we've met it, and it gives us hope, even just thinking about the senses in the animals that we do know. With whales, think about their ability to be sensitized to Earth's magnetic forces. What is it like to have a sense like that? It's barely imaginable to us, that powerful sense. And this is part of the reason that people's connections to animals are so strong. They open up different ways of experiencing the world we know and suggest that our understanding is limited—but limited in a really haunting and magical way.

Fathoms: The World in a Whale received a starred review in the May 15, 2020, issue.
Although the author pays attention to conditions in America, he writes for a British audience, so Britain is the source of most examples, anecdotes, and government regulation. But plenty of meat remains for American readers.

A useful primer on the science of air pollution.

The award-winning author and illustrator delivers the long-awaited sequel to her 2013 bestseller, Hyperbole and a Half.

During the past decade-plus, Brosh has amassed a devoted fan base, most of whom first fell in love with the Hyperbole blog she began in 2009. Much of that material, which consisted of random musings, hilarious stories, and colorful, primitive drawings, ended up in her first book, a bestseller that earned glowing reviews from Elizabeth Gilbert and Bill Gates. Then Brosh, who has been open about her battles with depression, seemingly disappeared, much to the consternation and concern of her devotees. Originally slated for release in 2016, Solutions and Other Problems was perpetually postponed without explanation. The author covers some of the backstory here, which includes her divorce and her sister’s tragic death. “We’d always had a strange relationship, and I wasn’t prepared for it to be over,” she writes. “I don’t think either of us understood how much I loved her. It seemed like there’d be enough time to sort it out.” Thankfully, Brosh’s storytelling is so distinctive and compelling it’s like suddenly running into a friend you feared was lost forever. The important thing is that she’s back, with fresh material and more than 1,600 pieces of art. Like her last book, this one draws heavily from her unconventional childhood. She recounts stories about getting stuck in a bucket and stalking her neighbor, and, of course, there are plenty of dog stories. Brosh also hilariously describes an experiment with drugs that reads like a budget-friendly version of an Ayahuasca ritual. She contemplates daydreams, wars with technology, and her efforts to befriend herself. The author reliably channels the simplicity of a child or the innocence of an animal and tells raucous, heartbreaking stories that reflect the hidden parts of us all. The existential kaleidoscope occasionally gets trippy, but the majority of the book is nourishing and warmly satisfying.

For Brosh’s millions of fans, this is well worth the wait.

The author reliably channels the simplicity of a child or the innocence of an animal and tells raucous, heartbreaking stories that reflect the hidden parts of us all.

SOLUTIONS AND OTHER PROBLEMS

Brosh, Allie
Illus. by the author
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
(528 pp.)
$30.00 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-982156-94-7

Every Breath You Take Exploring the Science of Our Changing Atmosphere
Broomfield, Mark
Pegasus (320 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64313-334-8

An explanation of the atmosphere with an emphasis on the parts that don’t belong.

Broomfield, a British chemist specializing in air quality, reminds readers that before global warming caused by greenhouse gases became a universal preoccupation, scientists studying the atmosphere worried about air pollution. Most greenhouse gases are not poisonous. This is definitely not the case with pollutants, which cause as many premature deaths as smoking. The good news is that, unlike the case with global warming, the battle against air pollution has seen genuine progress. The oldest pollutant is probably sulfur dioxide from burning fuels, mostly coal. It produced the famous toxic London fogs that peaked during the 1950s and produced the first effective anti-pollution laws, which have reduced levels by 95% in nations where laws are effective. In the 1920s, when leaded gas was introduced, everyone knew that burning it released poisonous lead, but burning unleaded gas produces equally toxic byproducts. The solution was the catalytic converter, which also eliminated another pollutant: carbon monoxide. Many readers remember the 1980s, when experts warned that chlorofluorocarbons in refrigerants were destroying ozone in the upper atmosphere, which protects us from the sun’s ultraviolet radiation. An unprecedented episode of international cooperation banned the chemicals, and ozone should recover in about 70 years. Two persistent pollutants today are oxides of nitrogen and ultrafine particulate matter, both from burning fuels. Many readers may be surprised to learn that the greatest source of particulate matter is wood burning. Anyone using it indoors for heating or cooking need not worry about outside air pollution, however; their inside air is far more toxic. Although the author pays attention to conditions in America,
MY LIFE IN THE PURPLE KINGDOM  
BrownMark with Uhrich, Cynthia M.  
Univ. of Minnesota (144 pp.)  
$22.95 | Sep. 22, 2020  
978-1-5179-0927-7

The bassist for Prince during the Purple Rain era provides glimpses into the kingdom.

BrownMark—who was born Mark Brown in 1962—describes his rise from a single-parent home in a city of racial discrimination (Minneapolis) to success with the musical supernova. Yet there were plenty of bumps along the way. For example, in 1982, even a big raise only brought his salary to $425 per week; later, he quit after discovering that his Purple Rain Tour bonus that he’d imagined might be $1.5 million was in fact only $15,000. Those looking for a memoir awash in sex, drugs, and the seamier sides of Prince’s private life will instead discover hard work and rigid discipline under a stern taskmaster, an artist who became what he was through minute attention to detail as well as genius. The author ably chronicles his own life growing up Black in a city so White he thought of it as a “Scandinavian Mecca.” As a boy, his family didn’t have a TV, and his early experiences playing music involved a makeshift guitar constructed out of a shoe box and rubber bands. Before he auditioned for Prince, he had never been to the suburbs, and before he joined the band, he had never been on a plane. His life changed dramatically at a time when the world of music was changing, as well. Disco was breaking down walls between Black and White, and punk was bringing a new edge and urgency. As Prince’s star was ascending, he demanded the full spotlight and resented any response his young bassist was generating. The author left the band in the mid-1980s feeling that he lived “in a world of filth, greed, and deception.” Still, the connections and impressions he made as a member of The Revolution launched his career, and he notes that “working with Prince was like going to the finest music school in the land.”

A memoir of vivid detail and understandable ambivalence.
The book is also about a specific time and place—late-1970s to early-1980s Homosassa—and the colorful fishing culture that thrived within it. Burke brings readers to this infamous hot spot, where the biggest names in fly-fishing—including baseball star Ted Williams and a cadre of other tough characters—would converge to try and out-angle each other. But it wasn’t only about the purity of fishing. “The egos involved made the atmosphere electric,” writes the author. “The difficulty of the quest made it legitimate. And the drugs and the women that were swept in with the tide made it all veer out of control.” By the mid-1990s, the Homosassa tarpon craze began to peter out. Climate-unfriendly governance in Florida led to an ecological crisis that helped drive the tarpon from Florida’s coastal waters. Burke constructs the rise and fall of this unique fishing tale with impressive narrative control and an obvious reverence for its vivid characters.

Ably captures the swagger, attitudes, and angling derring-do of a golden age of fishing history.

LORDS OF THE FLY
Madness, Obsession, and the Hunt for the World Record Tarpon
Burke, Monte
Pegasus (304 pp.)
$26.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-64313-558-8

A fascinating look at the narrow but wild world of tarpon fishing.

Forbes and Garden & Gun contributing editor Burke indulges in his boundless enthusiasm for fishing, showing how storytelling is an important part of the fishing experience. “In angling, as in life,” writes the author, “it is the ones that get away that haunt our dreams, that push us over the brink into a lustful madness. And Homosassa [Florida] was the first place in these anglers’ lives where, hot damn, those dreams just might come true.” In Sowbelly (2005), Burke chronicled the search for a record largemouth bass. Here, he focuses on the less-known arena of tarpon fishing, discussing its most prominent practitioners as well as the extraordinary fish itself, a behemoth that can weigh more than 250 pounds and live to be 80.

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Ably captures the swagger, attitudes, and angling derring-do of a golden age of fishing history.

GOD IN GOTHAM
The Miracle of Religion in Modern Manhattan
Butler, Jon
Belknap/Harvard Univ. (304 pp.)
$29.95 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-674-04568-2

A history of the practice of religion in New York City from the 1880s to the 1960s.

Historian Butler focuses on the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish populations of Manhattan during a time when the city was a vibrant, growing center for these major religions—despite fears of the minimalization of faith in the face of modernity. “New York may not have been a sacred city like Mecca or the Vatican,” writes the author, “but it was not for lack of trying. Religion resonated throughout the world’s most populous place, sacralizing every kind of space and linking faith to the press of modern life.” Butler reveals NYC as a microcosm of the nation’s religious life, teeming with energy and vitality even in the midst of cultural secularization and urban troubles. The author deftly tracks how broad social changes and demographic trends came together to shape the role of faith in NYC. For example, he notes how modern, industrial-era thought

THE POLYMATH
A Cultural History From Leonardo da Vinci to Susan Sontag
Burke, Peter
Yale Univ. (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-300-25002-2

In this survey of polymaths, Burke offers “an approach to the social and cultural history of knowledge.”

The author, an emeritus professor of cultural history at Cambridge, delivers a collective biography of polymaths active primarily from the 15th to the 21st centuries—though Burke does occasionally journey further back, as in the cases of Hypatia of Alexandria, Hui Shi, Boethius, Hildegard of Bingen, and Ibn Khaldun. In concise and revealing vignettes, the author profiles dozens of “monsters of erudition,” proceeding chronologically in order to provide the context of intellectual and social trends that either fertilized or quashed the polymathic impulse. At times, Burke gets too absorbed in complete coverage of individuals and groups, at the expense of insight into the connections they made. Many of these intellectual giants sought to break down the barriers of communication between a growing group of specialists; they were “individuals and small groups concerned with the big picture as well as with detail and often engaged in the transfer or ‘translation’ of ideas and practices from one discipline to another.” Mostly, however, Burke provides well-rounded pictures of the polymaths, and his precisely observed anecdotes aptly range across disciplines, approaches, and contributions, covering motivations such as curiosity and the ordering and unification of knowledge as well as the reconciliation of ideas. By the late 17th and early 18th centuries, polymaths aroused suspicions of triviality, superficiality, and a confused mass of useless knowledge, and specialization became the dominant mode of inquiry. In the current digital age, which is characterized by “hyper-specialization,” polymaths are not nearly as relevant as they have been in the past, but, the author writes, “an elegy for the species is still premature.” In an appendix, Burke chronologically lists 500 significant Western polymaths along with their birth and death dates, ethnicity, and primary disciplines.

An absorbing group portrait and intellectual history.

about management, efficiency, organization, and advertising made a great impact on the ethnically diverse faith communities of Manhattan. Butler also provides a welcome examination of how the Black church developed in NYC. “While European immigrants...were more or less assimilated into the white world, race prejudice against blacks in New York has endured since Africans’ first appearance in the city....Across the period of our concern, the culture of Jim Crow—if not the law—pervaded New York, forcing urban blacks to adapt and follow unique paths to salvation, civic and spiritual.” Throughout, the author acknowledges the contributions of the many thinkers, writers, teachers, and activists who shaped the religious world of the 20th century—among others, Reinhold Niebuhr, Jacques Maritain, Norman Vincent Peale, and Abraham Joshua Heschel. In the latter sections of the narrative, Butler examines the migration of New Yorkers to the suburbs and notes the ways their faith lives survived that change.

An intriguing study of urban faith in the modern age.

THE LENIN PLOT
The Untold Story of America’s Midnight War Against Russia
Carr, Barnes
Pegasus (400 pp.)
$29.95  |  Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64313-317-1

Deep dive into an episode of history that is little known but deserves more exposure.

In 1918, Lenin withdrew Russia from the war against the Triple Entente, having agreed secretly with Germany to do so. U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing, “a bored pacifist who doodled and daydreamed in Cabinet meetings until Lenin seized power,” concocted a plot to overthrow Lenin, install a leader friendly to the Allies, and bring Russia back into the war. Woodrow Wilson, writes journalist Carr, overcame his scruples about self-determination and signed off on the plan. Soon, Allied spies were in Moscow gathering information and concocting schemes; one of them, the author suggests, served as the model for Ian Fleming’s James Bond. At the same time, an Allied expeditionary force landed in Archangel, in the Russian Arctic, and engaged with Bolshevik forces, who fought vigorously across a broad front. On the military front, the author shows, the Allied effort was doomed for many reasons: Americans were under British command, never a good formula given national resentments; Allied soldiers of all nations questioned what they were doing in Russia, a former ally, especially when Germany and its allies surrendered; mutinies sprang up along the Allied lines; and when the soldiers finally returned, the U.S. and U.K. governments took pains to sweep the whole thing under the table, undervaluing the efforts of the blameless fighters. Carr’s cast of characters includes some improbable figures: a prison interrogator who later moved to France and invented Chanel No. 5 “to capture the essence of snow melting on black earth”; an American journalist who served two separate prison terms in Russia and then teamed up with filmmaker Merian C. Cooper to make the vaunted documentary Grass; and a “hardened terrorist” named Fanny Kaplan who resisted first the czar and then the Bolsheviks, plotting an almost successful assassination of Lenin. Some reads like history, some like a spy novel, and it’s always eye-opening.

A well-crafted exposé that suggests that the Cold War began half a century earlier than we’ve been told.

To be fair, Tomine, 46, has won ample acclaim for his graphic books, including *Killing and Dying,* *Shortcomings,* and *Summer Blonde,* and for his long-running comic book series, Optic Nerve. His muted but expressive artwork will be instantly recognizable to readers of the *New Yorker* magazine, where he has contributed illustrations and covers since 1999, collected in the volume *New York Drawings.* Zadie Smith, Chris Ware, Junot Díaz, and Jonathan Lethem are fans.

Still, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Cartoonist* presents Tomine’s progress through the comics world as a series of mortifying episodes in which the “boy wonder of mini-comics” finds his high self-regard challenged by bad reviews, dismissive peers, indifferent elders, prickly stalkers, sparsely attended book signings, attitudinal booksellers, and overheard restaurant conversations. It’s both endearing and comical—but it couldn’t have been very enjoyable for the artist to revisit these humiliations, could it?

“This was the most fun I’ve had making a book in my whole career,” Tomine counters in a Zoom call from his Brooklyn apartment in late June. “Maybe it says something about my personality, or maybe there’s just been enough distance, but there were times when I’d actually start laughing to myself at my drawing board as I was working on some of these strips.”

The design of *Long-Distance Cartoonist* suggests an artist’s sketchbook, with an “If found, please return to” inscription and graph-paper pages. There is no color work. Tomine says he employed a looser style than usual: “I didn’t want to have a long, arduous prep period where I’m planning it out and figuring everything out to the nth degree. I was hoping that this book, as much as possible, would be like my cartooning version of handwriting—in other words, spontaneous and direct from my hand.”

The story opens with Tomine in front of his third grade class in Fresno, California, announc-
ing his plan to become a “famous cartoonist” and geeking out big-time. (The serial humiliations start here.) It follows him as he attends Comic-Con, where he is nominated for an Eisner Award only to have presenter Frank Miller skip over his last name: “I’m not even gonna try to pronounce that one!” (Tome is Japanese American, making him a sometimes-uncomfortable fit in the predominantly White comics world at the time he was starting out.) He goes on book tour, does duty as a “celebrity guest” on a comic book cruise, is interviewed by Terry Gross for “Fresh Air,” gets married, has kids. Along the way he nurses his grudges, behaves awkwardly, endures fresh slights, and...just keeps at it. Even a health scare—and the attendant self-reflection—doesn’t deter him from a single-minded pursuit of his career.

“What I tried to capture—and what making this book made clear to me—is just how much the process [of drawing cartoons] is really an embedded part of my brain,” says Tome, who began publishing Optic Nerve when he was 16. “For the last two or three books, every time I finish, I have this feeling of, ‘I’m done. I’m never going to do another comic, I’m going to find some other job, I’ll find some way to make money.’ And then I always end up doing it again.”

The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Cartoonist received a starred review in the June 15, 2020, issue.
A lawyer and mental health advocate describes recent skirmishes in her decades-long battle with bipolar disorder and offers advice on managing the condition.

After two memoirs, Cheney offers 65 swiftly moving personal essays that suggest the rapid cycling through moods that her disorder causes. Her reflections recap and update the story of the disasters she described in *Manic* and *The Dark Side of Innocence*: “serious run-ins with the law, immense amounts of alcohol, multiple suicide attempts, demolished relationships, financial ruin (mania’s costly gift),” and, eventually, a mental hospital where she spent “three unimaginably long years and multiple rounds of electroshock therapy.” The author describes how she has learned to manage her condition with therapy and medication, especially so-called “atypical anti-psychotics,” along with tactics of her own devising. To subdue problems like mania-induced lust, she carries a list of “ten sacred rules” to follow when a manic episode nears, the first of which is: “Don’t change into something sexier. Wear granny panties and flats.” Vivid as such material is, the impact is undercut by the disjointed, nonchronological structure of the book.

A dozen or so pages after feeling enraged by the “cluelessness” of an internist who questioned whether she needed all of her medicines, Cheney tries in another essay to go off an antidepressant. Was the doctor right? Were the incidents related? The author doesn’t say. She also blurs the line between reminiscence, self-help, and advocacy as she explores topics such as hypomania and mental health stigma in brief sections that serve up, mostly uncritically, the kind of health boilerplate found on websites for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other agencies. Cheney can’t have anticipated the criticism the CDC has faced during the pandemic, but her too-easy acceptance of medical-establishment orthodoxies is at odds with the original voice heard elsewhere in the book. The author includes a helpful resource list.

Old and new ideas commingling as a writer comes to terms with her bipolar disorder.
ELWAY
A Relentless Life
Cole, Jason
Hachette (368 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-316-45577-0

Vigorous biography of the hard-driven football star.

As Cole notes in this admiring narrative, there have been statistically better quarterbacks in the history of the NFL: Tom Brady, Joe Montana, and Brett Favre, to name a few. However, the author convincingly shows that no other quarterback has combined his drive, intelligence, willpower, and athleticism, and none has been so relentless in seeking self-improvement and gridiron glory. Cole traces some of John Elway’s skill to the instructions provided by his father, Jack, who coached for San Jose State University and Stanford and who provided postgame analyses while Elway was playing high school and college ball—analyses that focused less on individual plays than on Elway’s leadership skills and attitude. Elway later brought his father to Denver to coach for the Broncos, where Elway enjoyed a distinguished career that took off after he figured out how to apply those leadership skills to a sometimes recalcitrant team. “After ten years of playing statistically ugly football,” writes Cole, “Elway began a run many athletes and sports experts would consider strange,” with the QB putting up his best numbers in his last six years of playing, which doesn’t often occur. Cole is a fluent interpreter of the game of football and its arcana, and he has a considered appreciation for what it is that makes a great leader; as he notes, the quarterback is “an extension of management,” to say nothing of being the “highest-paid player on the team.” Elway’s skills as a team builder made management strong-arming needless, and when he became a general manager himself, he saw to it that his successor, Peyton Manning, developed the same abilities—even though Elway’s haggling over money nearly caused Manning to leave the team more than once.

Fans of the Broncos—and football in general—will enjoy this portrait of one of the game’s greatest players.

Someone, somewhere is always hungry.
A great way to show love is through the gift of food.
Written with a huge heart,
and an even bigger appetite.

“Recognizing that soup kitchens need help 365 days a year, Henderson continued to travel the world to spread kindness.”
—People Magazine

“...Henderson felt guilty about eating well in a hungry world. Unlike most of us, he did something about it. This fascinating tale is incredibly inspiring.”
—Ruth Reichl, chef, food writer, and host of PBS-TV’s “Gourmet’s Adventures with Ruth”

“Honest, colorful, and at times even humorous. I highly recommend it.”
—Gregory E. Sterling, Dean of Yale Divinity School

“An inspiring philanthropic account that deftly displays the author’s affability, knowledge, and passion.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For more information, email stephen@the24hoursoupkitchen.com • www.the24hoursoupkitchen.com
A concise study of how free speech has changed throughout America’s history.

Cose has had a remarkably distinguished career: Newsweek columnist and contributing editor, New York Daily News editorial page chief, fellow at the Gannett Center for Media Studies at Columbia University, and inaugural writer-in-residence at the ACLU, among other positions. His latest book is a cogent, well-informed analysis of the vexed problem of free speech. The freedom of speech protected by the First Amendment, writes the author, was crafted by “frustrated and exhausted men” who believed that “in the competition of ideas, good ideas generally crowd out bad.” Within a decade, however, the Alien and Sedition Act curtailed speech attacking the government; Cose cites many more subsequent cases when courts have ruled on “the question of what is acceptable and what is not, what speech merits protection and what speech deserves punishment.” There has never been a time, he writes, without constraints on speech. The author examines many impediments to free speech, such as voter suppression; the Citizens United decision; and the Electoral College and the Senate, both resulting from the founders’ suspicion of direct democracy. Cose also considers free speech protests on college campuses, suggesting that students need instruction in critical thinking in order to evaluate information and misinformation. The author is deeply troubled by dialogue “dominated by the likes of Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and other apps that specialize in bursts of short, superficial communication.” The nation’s founders had no foresight to know that the First Amendment, “which was designed to enable the people to speak truth to power—would be hijacked by hatemongers, propagandists, and opportunists more interested in despoiling democracy and degrading debate than in ensuring that a diverse nation speaks in harmony.” When “lies swaddled in bigotry” dominate political dialogue, the fantasy of free speech, and our “absolutist illusions” about the founders’ intentions, has become pernicious.

A knowledgeable and timely perspective on the current fraught state of democracy.

With guidance and encouragement, children can participate as effective citizens.

Psychiatrist Earls and neurobiologist Carlson bring decades of research in child development and experience with at-risk children to their persuasive plea for young people’s inclusion in active citizenship. Organizing their book into four themes—nurture, voice, choice, and action—the authors examine the influences on children of their earliest attachments, citing in particular Romanian orphans who, from birth to age 3, were deprived of loving contact and Brazilian street children, whose care for one another reflected early nurturing by adults. The authors reveal how young people were inspired by the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child “to assemble, to find common cause, and to speak up about their concerns.” Working with two groups in Chicago’s urban neighborhoods demonstrated to the authors how children’s participation helped communities make choices “about how to monitor stress in the context of out-of-home care and urban violence.” In Tanzania, children conceived of and conducted “a massive public education campaign, showing their parents and neighbors the reality of HIV and how to combat it.” Reflecting their years of research and dedication to an action-based, participatory approach, the authors provide specific guidelines for parents, teachers, police, and other authority figures in setting up a Young Citizens program, aimed at children ages 10 to 14, in their own communities. They recommend, for example, that children should be selected randomly, ensuring equal opportunity for all, and that adult facilitators “have some grounding in child development and complete a two-week, full-day training in a standardized but highly participatory curriculum.” Drawing on Amartya Sen’s writings on human development and Jürgen Habermas’ theories of social justice, the authors underscore that “when members of a community come together to identify and freely discuss their common problems, their discussion is not ‘just words’ but rather the first step toward consensual, rational, shared social action.”

An inspiring vision of a newly inclusive democracy.
DO YOU FEEL LIKE I DO?
A Memoir
Frampton, Peter with Light, Alan
Hachette (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-316-42531-5

The British guitar legend looks back on a long ride in rock ‘n’ roll.

“I never really wanted to be the front man; I just wanted to get in a band that was successful and be the lead guitarist.” So writes Frampton, a professional musician since his early teen years—and, to hear Charlie Watts tell it, a good drummer as well. The author’s by-the-numbers story, told with the assistance of music journalist Light, is like many a British rocker’s: He fell in love with the Beatles and set out to become a star—or at least the lead guitarist in a decent band. He went to art school, where his teacher father had an especially promising student named David Jones. “Later, of course, everyone called him David Bowie, but I always called him Dave, because I knew him as Dave at school,” Frampton recalls in a datum that probably didn’t need to be committed to print. Armed with a battery of guitars, one of which figures as a framing device for his memoir, Frampton played in a series of bands and almost wound up in the Small Faces. Instead, Steve Marriott left the group to form Humble Pie with him. A couple of years later, that band broke up, and Frampton found teen idol-dom with radio-friendly songs such as the one that lends its title to this book. Success came at a cost: The author gamely looks at the sexual politics of going from rocker to rock star, with the girls up front and the resentful original fans, the guys, in the back of the room, glowering. Frampton has few regrets apart from appearing with the Bee Gees in the film Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band (though, ever the fan, he notes that “meeting George Burns was a thrill”), posing shirtless for Rolling Stone, and falling prey to substance abuse.

Middling, as rock memoirs go, but a pleasure for die-hard fans.

“By mapping the client’s reality and then altering it, Jaxon-Bear shows us how to then take away the map and reveal reality.”

-Dr. Murray Kornfeld
(Founder of Los Angeles Society of Clinical Psychologists)

“...meant for serious students who are committed to expanding their professional wisdom.”

“Jaxon-Bear’s consistent encouragement and passion for the work shines on every page.”

“An insightful treatise on the transformative power of self-reflection.”

-Kirkus Reviews

A TRAITOR TO HIS SPECIES
Henry Bergh and the Birth of the Animal Rights Movement
Freeberg, Ernest
Basic (336 pp.)
$30.00 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-465-09386-1


Humans have always exploited animals for energy, food, companionship, and entertainment. By the 19th century, American cities teemed with their numbers, diseases, and smells, and they continued to be treated as insensible entities to be eaten or exploited. After discussing these issues in the preface, Freeberg, who heads the history department at the University of Tennessee, begins his vivid, often gruesome account of Henry Bergh (1813-1888), a wealthy New Yorker who accomplished little of note until, at age 52 (according to his own account), he found his life’s mission: ending animal cruelty. In 1866, he persuaded New York to incorporate his American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. With no money appropriated, it seemed a harmless gesture to legislators, but Bergh had included a feature absent from previous, unenforceable state laws: The society could arrest and prosecute offenders. No shrinking violet, Bergh went into action and soon became a wildly popular and reviled media figure. With few exceptions, readers will support his crusades, well-delineated by Freeberg, but Bergh faced an avalanche of abuse and lost as many prosecutions as he won. Most readers will quail at the casual cruelty that Freeberg describes and that Victorians took for granted: Cattle shipped from the Midwest spent a week packed into freight cars with no food, water, or room to lie down. Slaughterhouse workers began work while the animals were still alive, and children gathered to watch. Stray dogs were often drowned. Healthy horses worked until feeble and were then sold to people too poor to afford a healthy horse, so they worked them to death. Dogfights and cockfights entertained the poor, and the rich slaughtered and crippled thousands of birds in live pigeon-shooting contests. Upon Bergh’s death, most states were enforcing ASPCA-backed anti-cruelty laws, and universal feeling that animals did not suffer had become a minority view.

A successful effort to make a splendid American crusader better known.

CATCHING THE WIND
Edward Kennedy and the Liberal Hour, 1932-1975
Gabler, Neal
Crown (928 pp.)
$40.00 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-307-40544-9

A vigorous, highly readable life of Edward Kennedy (1932-2009), taking him from birth through the Watergate era.

Ted Kennedy was the last of nine children born to Joseph and Rose Kennedy. “Few families were as class-conscious,” writes Gabler, whose previous books have centered on popular culture, “and for all the animus Joe felt toward his Protestant social superiors, he assiduously emulated them and forced his children into the mold.” After Joe Jr.’s death in World War II, it fell on John F. Kennedy to become president—all part of Joe Sr.’s plan, mapping out the lives of his children when they were still in diapers. “Joe Kennedy,” writes the author, “had already decided that Bobby was going to be Jack’s attorney general...because he felt that Jack needed the protection of having a family member close by.” And Ted? Much as the Kennedys stuck together, nothing tremendous was expected of the baby of the family, though he was still expected to enter politics. Gabler carefully charts the course of his 1962 run for Senate, just barely at the constitutionally required age of 30, a race marred by bitter opposition by the Boston elite and by the resurrection of a long-buried cheating scandal when Ted was at Harvard. He overcame both to win 55% of the vote and immediately set to work to prove that those who dismissed him as having bought his way into office were wrong. As Gabler tabulates, Ted Kennedy “sponsored 2,552 pieces of legislation, just under seven hundred of which became law.” During a career marked by the assassinations of his older brothers, the Chappaquiddick incident (which, Gabler notes, was less politically damaging than one might expect), and turmoil over such issues as affirmative action and school integration, Kennedy achieved remarkable things. The author ends with nearly 35 years of Kennedy’s political career to come, leaving plenty of material for the second volume.”

A book full of triumph and tragedy and an exemplary study in electoral politics.

HOW TO THEY/THEM
A Visual Guide to Nonbinary Pronouns and the World of Gender Fluidity
Getty, Stuart
Illus. by Thyng, Brooke
Sasquatch (240 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-63217-313-3

Well-rounded guidelines for considerately traversing the ever-evolving gender spectrum.
In their insightful manual, genderqueer author and filmmaker Getty and queer designer and illustrator Thyng educate readers on the particulars of gender and grammatically correct pronoun selection. They also simulate what life presents for “GNC folks” (Gender Nonconforming) and the challenges they may face. Getty begins by sharing their own unique history, an opener that sets the humorously educative tone for the remainder of the book. Raised in Kentucky, they were born Kate, who was constantly aware of feeling “not quite female, not quite male.” In adulthood, Getty adopted their middle name, Stuart, as a proper name. As Getty “grew into knowing myself, the less I used Kate,” embracing being “weird” as a display of personal growth and expressive liberty. The author briskly and perceptively reviews the basics of nonbinary gender pronouns, describing their evolutionary timeline, meanings, and the often complex concepts of sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Getty also examines the specificities of social appropriateness and the importance of polite consideration for both adults and children. They address how to avoid “gender-clocking” and inappropriate curiosity about someone’s “junk,” hints on recognizing contextual clues, recovering from a conversational “slip,” how to calmly discuss preferences with loved ones, and public bathroom etiquette. Getty’s pleasantly entertaining instruction is complemented by Thyng’s simple, effective pen-and-ink illustrations. Together, the text and illustrations cleverly accentuate themes spanning the gender spectrum, including methods of immediate support for the trans movement. Readers shouldn’t let the narrative’s lighthearted take on the subject belie its significance nor its urgency within the context of contemporary society. Focused on transparency and honesty, Getty and Thyng dispense critical information on identity and promote understanding and acceptance for those seeking freedom of expression and personal presentation.

Straightforward, practical, relevant navigation through the radiant world of gender fluidity.

**America and Iran: A History, 1720 to the Present**

Ghazvinian, John
Knopf (688 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-307-27181-5

An expert on Iran delineates the massive rift between the erstwhile “closest of allies.”

In this relevant, highly elucidating work, Ghazvinian employs the poetic theme of the changing of seasons as he moves through the evolving relationship between the U.S. and Iran—from “spring,” when American colonists indulged in “Persophilia” (a romantic idealization of Persian culture and society) to “winter,” the current season, begun when the Islamic Revolution of 1979 brought chants of “death to America.” Even before the founding of the U.S., the American colonists were deeply sympathetic to the Persian Empire, for reasons both religious (where Cyrus the Great liberated the Jews from the Babylonian captivity) and political, as the counterweight to the dreaded Ottoman Empire. Ghazvinian shows how the fascination was mutual, and the Founding Fathers even derived some of their ideas from ancient Persian rule. During the second half of the 19th century, the “empire’s carcass” was “picked clean” by imperial powers like Russia and the British Empire, and Iran looked to the dynamic U.S. for help repelling colonial plunder and political interference. The defining moment in the relationship came in 1953, with the coup d’état, engineered by the CIA and MI6, of the popular reformist Mohammad Mosaddeq. Unfortunately, the coup occurred just when Iranians desperately needed the U.S. to help bolster an educated, liberal-minded generation. After that, “Iran would swing violently back down the path of dictatorship, and over the next twenty-five years, the energetic political culture of the 1940s would disappear as activists struggled under the constant surveillance of the shah’s secret police.” Ghazvinian systematically shows how the revolution and hostage crisis served as payback. Though he left Iran at age 1 and hadn’t returned before he...
A thoughtful, commanding analysis that applauds essential workers and cognitive diversity.

**HEAD, HAND, HEART**

**PHILIP AND ALEXANDER**
Kings and Conquerors
Goldsworthy, Adrian
Basic (624 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-4416-4669-8

Superb biographies of royalty’s greatest father-son combination.

Countless books have covered the lives of Alexander the Great and his energetic father, Philip of Macedon, but this dual biography, one of the first for a popular audience, not only gives them equal weight, but emphasizes that “both men were able, and Alexander won the war planned and prepared by Philip.” Prolific British historian Goldsworthy reminds readers that Macedonia, north of the classical Greek cities, was long viewed as a nation of uncultured barbarians. When not warring against neighbors, kings fought off rivals and were frequently murdered. No one held great hopes for the 22-year-old Philip, who took over leadership in 359 B.C.E. after his uncle died in battle. Yet, during a 23-year reign, he secured his throne and turned his army into a trained, professional fighting force that made him the de facto leader of all Greece. Few objected to Philip’s plan to invade Persia, still a wealthy superpower, although his murder interrupted the project, which was already underway. Goldsworthy’s Alexander spent two years dealing with rivals and the usual rebellions before marching off in 334, never to return. Despite the plethora of accounts of Alexander’s campaign, readers will still enjoy this riveting one. His army enjoyed dazzling victories accompanied by the accepted mass murder, looting, and rape. They grumbled over their hardships and disliked Alexander’s increasing love of foreign customs and ceremonies. As paranoid as most ancient rulers, he regularly discovered plots and executed friends and subordinates, not all of whom were guilty. Most scholars deplore his neglect of a succession plan, and his empire fell apart following his death. Goldsworthy is the best sort of writer on ancient times. He eschews psychohistory, explains the wildly unfamiliar culture of that era, and speculates carefully. Because so few sources survive and most are untrustworthy, the author, who includes a chronology and maps, also keeps readers informed of the probability that a historical event actually happened.

An outstandingly fresh look at well-trodden ground.

**HEAD, HAND, HEART**
Why Intelligence Is Over-Rewarded, Manual Workers Matter, and Caregivers Deserve More Respect
Goodhart, David
Free Press (352 pp.)
$27.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-982128-44-9

How overlooked and underappreciated workforces are gaining significance and essentiality.

In a book that offers an entertaining and educative amalgam of political and sociocultural insight, statistical data, and crisp opinion, the author digs deeply into the different capacities of human intelligence and how, in global societies, the perception of intellect has mutated into a hierarchical plateau with differing levels of status and influence. Following *The Road to Somewhere*, in which he explored political and moral identity in the era of Brexit and Donald Trump, British journalist Goodhart scrutinizes the contemporary workforce, dividing it into those who work with their hands (surgeon, artist), their heads, and their hearts (social care), and he argues that “today’s American, British, and indeed European ‘dreams’ have become too narrowly defined as going to university and into a professional job.” Throughout a narrative that highlights labor disparity trends and workplace sacrifices to technological innovation, the author effectively reveals how those with high analytical abilities are considered the “gold standard of human esteem” while skilled trade professions remain undervalued. Goodhart believes it’s too early to know whether the pandemic will have a significant effect on these scales of meritocratic and income inequality, but he rightly celebrates the “care economy” and workers who operate within the critical heart-head-hand triumvirate. The author insists that the ultimate goal should be the achievement of balance and mutual respect, and he also offers a discussion of his own evolution “from a leftish journalist who saw politics mainly through the prism of utilitarian and economic motivations — and for whom data was key — to my growing sense, in the last decade or so, of people’s need for meaning and recognition, and the power of emotion and storytelling, in our politics and daily lives.” Featuring intersecting themes of wealth disparity and social and cultural perceptions of what constitutes a profession, Goodhart’s study bestows much-needed attention on an important topic.

A thoughtful, commanding analysis that applauds essential workers and cognitive diversity.
When he was diagnosed with stage 4 lymphoma in 1993 at age 37, Greenland feared that he wouldn't live to accomplish as much as he has in his career. He had barely been married for three years at the time, with a daughter who was 2 and his wife pregnant with their second child. After the diagnosis, he was worried that he wouldn't survive until the birth. Thus, there is plenty of drama in the middle sections of this memoir, but readers know that there’s a happy enough ending. Greenland has lived to tell the tale, and he explains why he is now writing about the cancer that he was afraid would kill him. At the time, he was searching for a book that might help him provide context or even some hope. “Where is the first-person account,” he asked himself, “written in a loose, amusing yet informative style by someone who has been through this terrifying experience and (big caveat) lived to write about it? How am I supposed to cope without a book? There is no other way for me to frame my situation. I vow to write that book if I survive.” Initially, he was told that a cure was impossible and that remission would not last. Via chemotherapy and, later, holistic medicine, meditation, and other alternative methods (“four coffee enemas a day”), he beat the odds. Greenland is not prescriptive about his approach. Rather, he provides genial, engaging, humorous company throughout the narrative, showing how one can gain a new appreciation for life at its most mundane as well as miraculous. A survivor’s tale provides solace for those facing similar challenges.
A quartet of penetrating interviews that draw the famously reserved creator of “Peanuts” out of his shell.

Fantagraphics founder Groth has long promoted Charles M. Schulz (1922-2000) as the premier artist in an underappreciated genre, most famously through bespoke collections of every “Peanuts” strip from its 1950 debut to its end one day after Schulz’s death. Groth’s lengthy interview, first published in 1997, demonstrates the depth of that interest, addressing the cartoonist’s childhood (uneventful, but he never forgot a slight), war service, technique (a hard-fought simplicity), success, religion, politics (he was a Reagan conservative), and more. For the most part, Schulz is studiously humble about his accomplishments—“the only thing I’m proud of is that I think I’ve done the best with what ability I have. I haven’t wasted my ability”—and he is a defender of the comic strip as a place of genuine creativity. That point is supported by the book’s thoughtful view with Rick Marschall and Leonard Maltin fill out details of his stylistic development and thoughts about animation, but the true find here is a previously unpublished 1982 interview with the novelist Laurie Colwin, who presses Schulz to go deep into the nature of his character and the source of his creativity. Schulz is charmingly game for the interrogation, likening his process to that of an athlete and discussing his shyness and egotism. Though mostly even-keeled, he also says, “I seem to be living what you might call the feeling of impending doom.” Colwin’s interview offers the clearest sense of how Schulz could create a strip at once free-wheeling and melancholy.

Made for serious “Peanuts” fans but insightful for anyone interested in the creative process.
interesting always beats beautiful”), Stonehenge (which “has long attracted alluring, brilliant, and whack-job theories”), an African burial ground uncovered in New York City, the significance of archaeological artifacts, and homes, including her own, where she has settled with her husband and son. “Sometimes a house wants to be your mother,” she writes. “Sometimes a house wants to hide the evidence. Some houses would smother you with good tastefulness, a claustrophobic need to impress. Some houses would like you to calm down already. Some houses want you to get the hell out. Some houses get silly with nostalgia. Some houses are destined for the aftermaths of true love. Some houses couldn’t care less: you might as well be living in generic anywhere. But no one ever is.”

Sharply observed forays into the mazes of the past.

THE QUEENS NOBODY KNOWS
An Urban Walking Guide
Helmreich, William B.
Princeton Univ. (488 pp.)
$24.95 paper | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-691-16688-9

An eminent walker in the city digs deep into New York’s largest borough, a place full of surprises.

Sociologist Helmreich (1945-2020) had an unusual passion: He walked every block of New York’s five boroughs, collecting stories and finding hidden treasures. Here, he does a second take on Queens, which, though the largest of the quintet, “might not be of particular interest” to visitors and residents alike. Although it’s home to the city’s two major airports, it’s a place people gallop through in order to reach Manhattan. All unfair, by Helmreich’s lights—2.3 million people live in the borough, which “contains fifty-seven distinct communities spread out over about 109 square miles.” Once a haven for Jewish, Polish, and Irish immigrants, many of those communities are now flourishing with newcomers from Africa, Central America, South Asia, and other venues, to say nothing of farms, parks, and “the city’s tallest tree.” The Corona area was Madonna’s first home in the city—and in a former synagogue at that—while Steinway Place was the site for a huge piano manufacturing plant. East Elmhurst was home to Malcolm X, Dizzy Gillespie, Eric Holder, and other notable African Americans while, back in Corona, Louis Armstrong’s home is “all that’s left of the black heritage” of old in a community that “is overwhelmingly Hispanic—with Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Mexicans predominating, and augmented by immigrants from many other Latin American lands.” Helmreich walks and walks, talking with street vendors, retirees watering their gardens, newcomers, and, it seems, thousands of other voices. He paints a vibrant portrait of a place constantly on the go yet at a far less hectic pace than Manhattan—and with better pizza, too, in venues like Howard Beach, “where the presence of Mafia members...[has] given the area a somewhat unsavory reputation.”

New York fans will devour Helmreich’s genial, rich, and constantly illuminating travelogue.

POWER ON THE PRECIPICE
The Six Choices America Faces in a Turbulent World
Imbrie, Andrew
Yale Univ. (272 pp.)
$27.50 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-0-300-24350-5

America must make crucial policy choices if it is to overcome significant problems.

Like many other recent political analysts, Imbrie—a senior fellow at Georgetown’s Center for Security and Emerging Technology and former speechwriter and adviser for John Kerry—sees America at a decisive crossroads. Drawing on abundant scholarship and citing authors...
Highly charged, absorbing reading and most timely in the era of renewed advocacy for civil rights.

VANGUARD

How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All
Jones, Martha S.
Basic (352 pp.)
$32.00 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-5416-1860-2

Johns Hopkins history professor Jones turns in a searching portrait of African American women who agitated for voting rights over generations.

Born into slavery in 1840 in Kentucky, Susan Davis—the author’s great-great-grandmother—learned a valuable truth: “without the vote, Black Americans had to build other routes to political power.” During the Reconstruction Era, in Davis’ case, this involved building women’s clubs to consolidate political power. She lived to see passage of the 19th Amendment, but that constitutional guarantee did not stop White Kentuckians from attempting to suppress the Black vote. Other activists adopted various tactics to press their cases, from Rosa Parks’ refusal to move to the back of a bus to the sit-ins at lunch counters throughout the South. As Jones writes, the truth of Davis’ conviction endured: “The women of my family, like so many Black women, constructed their political power with one eye on the polls and the other on organizing, lobbying, and institution building.” Naturally, they met opposition from Whites—and often from Black men, who, notes the author, were glad to accept women as helpmeets in political situations but expected them to hold subsidiary roles. In many instances, Black women neatly sidestepped racism; in the case of her great-grandmother, Jones writes, “she would link arms with white women when they shared her sense that American women, even after the Nineteenth Amendment, had a distance to go before they realized their full influence on politics and policy.” In the end, though, many of the voting rights and civil rights activists realized that they had to build their own movement, cultivating a strong emergent leadership that included lawyers, politicians, and the
first Black woman to serve as a priest in the Episcopal Church. The work continues today: Jones’ sharp chronicle closes with Stacey Abrams, the Georgia politician who wages a constant campaign against voter suppression meant to keep Black voters away from the ballot box.

Highly charged, absorbing reading and most timely in the era of renewed advocacy for civil rights.

**ISOLATIONISM**
* A History of America’s Efforts To Shield Itself From the World

Kupchan, Charles A.
Oxford Univ. (456 pp.)
$29.95 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-0-19-939302-2

Isolationism, long in the doghouse, gets a reprieve.

Enshrined by George Washington’s iconic farewell address, isolationism enjoyed a long and dignified history until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. For the remainder of the 20th century, “isolationist” became a synonym for “simpleton.” Then, seemingly overnight, “America First,” the rallying cry of a disgraced 1930s anti-war movement, became a campaign slogan and helped elect the current president. Kupchan, professor of international affairs at Georgetown, writes that isolationism dominated American foreign relations until 1898, when the country dipped a toe in internationalism. President William McKinley’s realistic version in the Spanish-American War was too much about projecting power. Woodrow Wilson’s idealistic internationalism was too much about spreading freedom. However, unlike the unhappy post-mortem after 1918, Americans emerged from World War II with a surge of national confidence in what seemed like an ideal combination of both realism and idealism. Galvanized by anti-communism, both political parties embraced what Kupchan calls liberal internationalism: projecting power throughout the world but aiming at preserving democratic ideals. He maintains that, despite glitches, America performed tolerably at leading the “free world” until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, after which the U.S. lost its sense of proportion. What Kupchan terms “overreach” led to “888 military interventions, a four-fold increase over the Cold War era” that included multi-trillion dollar debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Barack Obama’s 2008 election introduced “liberal internationalism lite,” which encouraged American allies to share the burden, but this failed to obtain bipartisan support. The author concludes that isolationism was growing well before the 2016 election. America can never withdraw to the solitude it enjoyed during the 19th century, but there’s no denying that the modern version is a movement whose time has come. Histories of ideas are often boring, but Kupchan writes well and occasionally falls into the academic mode, mostly when he delivers an opinion and then follows it with a quote from another scholar who backs him up.

A stute political history.

**WELCOME TO THE UNITED STATES OF ANXIETY**
* Observations From a Reforming Neurotic

Lancaster, Jen
Little A (288 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-5420-0794-8

The bestselling author looks at why we have become a nation plagued by anxiety.

According to a 2018 Gallup Poll, writes Lancaster, most Americans experience stress on a daily basis. In fact, “we are more likely to be stressed out than the residents of almost every country in the world.” Overwhelmed by her own skyrocketing anxiety, the author was determined to understand why. Through her research, comparing conditions of today with those of prior generations, she found, unsurprisingly, that one of the main culprits is social media, which “gives us real-time metrics about our popularity, vis-à-vis likes, follows, retweets, et cetera.” Eventually, this “leads us to compare everyone’s highlight reel to our day-to-day reality, and it’s a drain on our mental well-being.” Looking at Maslow’s hierarchy, she writes that “the abundance of and access to [food], particularly when consumed in the company of others, should be what decreases our collective anxiety.” However, due to diets and unhealthy body-image expectations, “we’ve replaced the stress of not having enough to eat with the need to demonstrate how much better we eat than our peers.” Additionally, with the advent of TV shows dedicated to renovations and interior decorating, the “idea of shelter as the most basic need has morphed into a tangible demonstration of our value as people and an important expression of our souls, greatly upping the ante in terms of stress.” Thankfully, the book is not all doom and gloom, as the author includes enough humor to keep the pages turning. Despite the constant need to remain plugged in—and to maintain the polished sheen of our online identities—Lancaster explores how social media can also make us feel connected. Armed with wit and insight, she plots a simple, easy-to-follow course to navigate our anxieties and better manage our levels of stress.

Though not groundbreaking, this is sound advice we all should heed.
Background becomes foreground in this take on actors with memorable faces and forgotten names.

As a young man in the 1970s gazing up at the silver screens of the Thalia, the Art, and the Bleeker Street—Manhattan’s film classic revival cinemas—Lazar learned about the importance of supporting actors—e.g., Edward Everett Horton and Ruth Donnelly in the comedy Holiday, who upstaged the film’s stars, Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn. In personal, insightful essays, the author defines the brilliance of second-billed players such as Horton and Donnelly as well as many others (Eric Blore, Jessie Royce Landis, Franklin Pangborn) in Hollywood films from the 1930s through the 1960s. Lazar divides his subjects into two categories: actors whose quirks, mannerisms, and attitudes remained constant in all of their films and actors who created a gallery of completely different characters. Among the former group, the titular Holm, along with Eleanor Parker, Nina Foch, and Eve Arden, played chic, mature, canny women whom male leads ultimately threw over for bland, unthreatening leading ladies. At the time, Hollywood’s version of patriarchy ruled. Throughout, Lazar limns his subjects with wit. Holm’s voice in All About Eve, he writes, was “tonic to [Bette] Davis’s gin.” But his essays transcend reminiscence. A look at the difficult Oscar Levant reflects on the broader nature of character itself, and, inevitably, the observations on the performers reflect on the author. A perceptive chapter on actors notable for playing mothers leads to Lazar’s sensitive memories of his own mother. Most entertaining, though, is the penultimate chapter, about Martin Balsam. The actor was a close friend of Lazar’s father, a successful travel agent who himself knew a bit about acting: He impersonated VIPs on the phone to get “unavailable” rooms and plane reservations, and he once foiled a robbery by feigning a faint.

Well-observed reflections for true fans of the silver screen.

The New Yorker staff writer and journalism professor gathers historical texts he hopes will “serve as a spur to political reflection and action” on enduring problems of American democracy.

Lemann argues that democracy isn’t an outcome but a process—and one that was contentious from the beginning—so it makes more sense to refine it than to pine for a lost halcyon era. Toward that end, his anthology rounds up 21 texts produced over more than 200 years and divided thematically into five sections on “citizenship, equality, governance, money in politics, and protest,” each of which deals with an issue that remains pertinent, such as racial injustice, immigration reform, or nuclear proliferation. Most contributors are well-known historical figures who represent diverse perspectives on democracy: Jane Addams, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Henry Cabot Lodge, James Madison, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Alexis de Tocqueville, and George Washington. The book as a whole, however, is slanted toward the liberal end of the spectrum. Lemann offers an excerpt from Justice John Paul Stevens’ dissent in the Citizens United case without the counterweight of a concurring opinion from a more conservative jurist, and he makes his anti-Trump stance clear on the first page, which faults the president for “spending money without congressional approval, selectively enforcing immigration laws, undermining the independence of federal agencies and unilaterally ordering assassinations overseas, even of American citizens.” That uneasy mix of ageless texts and pointed topical commentary makes it difficult to envision a broad readership for this anthology. The book should find a natural home in lower-level college courses on American democracy, but the 2020 presidential election could make some of the material sound dated. Oddly enough, Lemann leaves the impression that he would love to have to revise parts of his work before the metaphorical ink has dried on the first edition.

A solid, left-leaning collection of pieces by thought leaders of yesteryear on how democracy works—or doesn’t.
MEMPHIS MAYHEM
A Story of the Music That Shook Up the World
Less, David A.
ECW Press (200 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-77041-508-9

A Memphis musical insider chronicles a signature chapter in the city’s history.

For most of the 20th century, Memphis was a cauldron of creativity for the most vibrant strains of American music, including blues, jazz, country, gospel, soul, and rock ‘n’ roll. In his debut, musical historian Less captures it all, combining social and musical history into a coherent narrative. The author discusses the city’s beginnings as a rambunctious river port; the achievements of the musician W.C. Handy, who first annotated the blues of the Deep South; and the contributions of Memphis’ Black high schools, which, from the 1920s through the 1950s, burned with the beats of virtuoso teachers and talented jazz and blues musicians. Bluesmen roamed the city’s streets and squares, and nightclubs packed in mixed-race crowds. In 1954, Sam Phillips of Sun Records, who had already recorded numerous Black musicians, persuaded Elvis Presley to record Arthur Crudup’s “That’s All Right.” Black music and White musicians converged, and Phillips launched the careers of blues-influenced musicians like Presley, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, and others. Meanwhile, an astonishing array of talent emerged from the city’s studios: Isaac Hayes, Carla Thomas, Al Green, Otis Redding, and Booker T. and the M.G.s, whose mixed-race makeup made its members the “poster children for racial harmony in Memphis in the turbulent 1960s.” It was a glorious time, but as Less notes, it didn’t last, as the region’s network of record stores, radio stations, music producers, and musicians crumbled, undone by the tragic deaths of signature musicians, industry consolidation, the rise of disco, and racial estrangement after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The author is an engaging writer, but he indulges in many digressions. It’s the dilemma of the regional historian—who to include or leave out? Most readers will conclude that more is better, and the book will fill in the blanks for anyone interested in this unique period.

A lively combination of personal observation, scholarship, and insider knowledge of an important era of American music.

FAULT LINES IN THE CONSTITUTION
The Graphic Novel
Levinson, Cynthia & Levinson, Sanford
Illus. by Shwed, Ally
First Second (288 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-250-21161-3

A thorough examination of the Constitution, its promises and problems, in the form of a graphic novel.

The latest entry in the publisher’s World Citizen Comics series isn’t a patriotic celebration but rather an engagingly readable and well-researched analysis of how the Constitution came about and what its decisions and compromises have meant for the U.S. ever since. Featuring text by the Levinsons, who collaborated on a children’s title of the same name in 2017, and illustrations by cartoonist Shwed, the book offers a “report card” for the Constitution, giving it a C overall (it fares better on defense and poorer on promoting the general welfare). If the Constitution aims to form “a more perfect union,” we might well need a more perfect document. This could be accomplished via a considerable revision of a document that has proven singularly difficult to amend or through the calling of a new Constitutional Convention, all in the effort to deal with issues that the framers couldn’t have foreseen in 1787 or problems that were inherent flaws in the original compromise at a time when the country seemed less like a truly united country and more like a confederation of independent states, to which citizens owed their first allegiance. Fears that more populous states would exert their will over smaller ones have resulted in processes that the authors suggest are undemocratic, including the Electoral College, the makeup of the Senate, the filibuster, gerrymandering, and all sorts of political finagling that runs counter to the wishes of the majority. They provide numerous examples of how issues we face now are the result of decisions made by the framers when the concerns were very different. Perhaps a better Constitution would inspire a better country.

A provocative illumination of the nooks and crannies of a document that citizens have come to take for granted.

THE VIRUS IN THE AGE OF MADNESS
Lévy, Bernard-Henri
Yale Univ. (128 pp.)
$14.00 paper | Jul. 28, 2020
978-0-300-25737-3

A pointed book-length essay about how the pandemic may lead to insidious societal changes.

French philosopher Lévy invokes scores of eminent thinkers, including Foucault, Lacan, Plato, Pascal, Sartre, Camus, Genet, and Latour, among many others, to mount a
strong, sometimes strident warning about the social, moral, and political consequences of the pandemic. Calling his book "a midpoint review," he claims that "First World Fear" is causing a rejection of globalization and retreat into isolation, ignoring worldwide famine, poverty, and oppression. Although he concedes that sheltering in place, wearing masks, and following hygienic measures are needed to contain the virus, he advocates "examining concretely, precisely, and in detail the complexity of the measures that need to be taken, in the world now, to combine the health emergency with the protection of people’s livelihoods." Even though he condemns those who deny science—Donald Trump, et al.—Lévy is skeptical of placing "blind confidence" in doctors. However, rather than raising questions about physicians' current claims, he weakens his argument by citing historical instances in which doctors promoted eugenics and other "harebrained" ideas. His concern here seems, as he suggests, "far-fetched." The author scorns those who insist that the virus is sending a message—nature’s warning against environmental exploitation or God's wrath to humanity led astray—and similarly chides romantic narcissists who see confinement as a path to self-knowledge. "More than most," he writes, "I am a partisan of repairing the world." However, he sees a dark future where autocrats use the virus to enact authoritarian agendas—as is occurring in Brazil, Turkey, China, and elsewhere—and where there is "the transformation of the welfare state into the surveillance state, with health replacing security," and the social contract replaced by "a new life contract...where you abdicate a little, or a lot, of your core freedoms, in return for an antivirus guarantee."

A stirring alarm addressed to an unsettled world.

an agile approach to world affairs that requires that American diplomats "work with mixed regimes whose interests align with America's on distinct issues, like freedom of navigation or high-standards free trade, and occasionally cooperate with illiberal rivals like Russia and China in discrete areas." This fluid, "open-system" approach to the international order, argue the authors, will better position a post-Trump America to take the lead once again—even if it is unlikely that Russia and China will easily cede that leadership position, especially given all the losses that Trump has inflicted on American suzerainty. Lissner and Rapp-Hooper look forward to a "day after Trump," in which, "as with post–natural disaster recovery," the U.S. can build a better system, international and domestic alike. This system would include educational reform, efforts to combat economic inequality, and diligent work toward cooperative agreements on climate change, immigration, health care, global trade, and other pressing concerns.

Wonky but of considerable interest to those who follow geopolitics and global economics.

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The groundbreaking Black lesbian writer and activist chronicles her experience with cancer.

In her mid-40s, Lorde (1934-1992) was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a radical mastectomy. Through prose, poems, and selected journal entries beginning six months after the surgery, the author explores the anger, pain, and fear that her illness wrought. Her recovery was characterized by resistance and learning to love her body again. She envisioned herself as a powerful fighter while also examining the connection between her illness and her activism. "There is no room around me in which to be still," she writes, "to examine and explore what pain is mine alone—no device to separate my struggle within from my fury at the outside world’s viciousness, the stupid brutal lack of consciousness or concern that passes for the way things are. The arrogant blindness of comfortable white women. What is this work all for? What does it matter if I ever speak again or not?" Lorde confronts other tough questions, including the role of holistic and alternative treatments and whether her cancer was preventable. She writes of eschewing "superficial spirituality" and repeatedly rejecting the use of prosthesis because it felt like "a lie" at precisely the time she was "seeking new ways of strength and trying to find the courage to tell the truth." Forty years after its initial publication and with a new foreword by Tracy K. Smith, the collection remains a raw reckoning with illness and death as well as a challenge to the conventional expectations of women with cancer. More universally, Lorde’s rage and the clarity that follows offer us a blueprint for action.
They had no access to the guns that other gangs carried. "These empowering compilation is heartbreaking, beautiful, and timeless. Lorde's big heart and fierce mind are at full strength on each page of this deeply personal and deeply political collection.

UNFORGETTING
A Memoir of Family, Migration, Gangs, and Revolution in the Americas
Lovato, Roberto
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$26.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-06-293847-3

Journalist and activist Lovato delivers a memorable indictment of the civil war in Central America that drove a wave of migration to the U.S.—and spawned gang warfare in the new country.

In the 1980s, gangs of young Salvadorans who called themselves "maras"—a name that derives, improbably, from the Spanish title of a Charlton Heston movie—became infamous for fighting with machetes in the streets of Los Angeles. It was not macho posturing, writes the author, whose family fled the U.S.-backed authoritarian regime, but instead desperation: They had no access to the guns that other gangs carried. "These skinny kids came together out of immigrant loneliness and their love of Ronnie James Dio and Metallica," Lovato writes. "Their hardcore violence is a relatively recent development. Even today, most gang members aren't killers." As the Salvadorans became better organized and better armed, they formed the infamous MS-13: "The mara violence that escalated following the LA riots of April 1992 reminded us that time is cyclical, and that violence moves in spirals as the innocent choose between becoming the violent or the violated—or both." Before that, writes Lovato, the Salvadoran kids were longhaired metal heads who hung out at convenience stores. Lovato's meaningful title draws from the Greek word for truth, its literal meaning not forgetting, which is essential, since so many Salvadorans are trying to forget the violence that destroyed their homeland and continues to rage today. Lovato traveled throughout both the U.S. and El Salvador to study this violence, some of which he dismisses as overblown if politically useful propaganda—though its government-sponsored versions, such as the Chalatenango massacre of civilians by elite Salvadoran troops, have proven very real. Lovato identifies a logical chain: Against the machete-bearing kids, the LA police became militarized, bringing the war back home and establishing a pattern that persists today.

A provocative, revealing work of journalism that explains gang behavior but does not idealize it.

FIRE IN THE STRAW
Notes on Inventing a Life
Lyons, Nick
Arcade (240 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-951627-49-5

An emotional chronicle of a life spent fishing, studying, teaching, writing, publishing, and loving.

Lyons, who founded Lyons Books and has published multiple titles about fishing and the outdoor life, returns with a generally chronological memoir. The author first writes about his stressful childhood and his life-altering discovery of fishing. "Standing alone for hours...I was mesmerized," he writes, "by the way the lines and planes of light angled down toward some strange matrix near the sandy bottom, a region numinous and wild." The author then moves through the evolution of what would become a lifetime passion for reading and writing, his determined efforts to acquire an education (he earned a doctorate from and taught at Hunter College), and his entrance to the world of publishing. Before starting his own publishing firm, he worked as a consultant for Crown, Doubleday, Norton, and others. We also learn that he was a fairly talented basketball player; in one section, we see Lyons, now older and out of shape, participating in a pickup game—and suffering the consequences. "I was the dud," he writes. "The lemon. I knew it now and so did everyone else on my team. And the other team." The author also discusses his long marriage, home life with his children, as well as how, after some early-life financial struggles, he entered a phase of financial security. He bought a house in Montana, where he would write and fish and where his wife would paint. All seemed perfect—until suffering and death entered his life; the final chapter is especially poignant. Despite the author's success, he is mostly modest about his achievements, and he comments unfavorably about his late-life appearance and weight. Overall, he keeps his (justifiable) pride in check as he relates this engaging version of his own Horatio Alger story.

A moving account of a life of loves and accomplishment.

ANYTHING WILL BE EASY
A Western Identity Crisis
Maile, Bethany
Univ. of Nebraska (234 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4962-2021-9

An essayist examines the meaning of her identity as a woman born, raised, and rooted in the mythologized lands of the American West.

Maile, a writing professor at Boise State University, left rural Idaho as a young woman to attend college in Boston and experience the urban life of her dreams. Instead, she writes, "the
West found me in the East.” Inspired by a book about Montana ranch life, she returned home six months later. In this collection of essays, the latest in the publisher’s American Lives series, the author examines her lifelong connection to the West while probing the nature of Western identity. Many view the West as a land of romantic “escape,” but for the author, it is also a place where mythology and modernity collide, often with negative consequences. In “Anytown, USA,” Maile muses on how her hometown developed into a mecca for out-of-state developers and lost its identity. In the ensuing “land battles,” a distinctive rural culture was replaced by “the faceless homogeneity of suburbia.” A lifelong Westerner, Maile admits to living—and propagating—Western clichés: pickup truck, cowboy boots, etc. While she does not align with current conservative Idaho politics, she still professes an abiding affection for “dirty bars, pastel prairies, cracked boots, whiny singers…and rodeo queens.” Country music speaks to that love in the way it helps her “gain entry to an inaccessible world [the Western past].” Yet much as she would like to believe in Western stereotypes—e.g., the “tough-as-nails” pioneer woman portrayed in True Grit—Maile also knows that her vision of the West relies on a romanticism that overlooks how “depression, laudanum addiction [and] psychosis” were the lot of most female pioneers. Blending personal insight with sharp-eyed cultural analysis, the author celebrates the West and Western identity without ever losing sight of the myriad complexities that underlie both.

An eloquent and perceptive memoir in essays.

LEARNING FROM LOSS
The Democrats, 2016-2020
Masket, Seth
Cambridge Univ. (300 pp.)
$24.95 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-108-48212-7

Why did Hillary Clinton lose the 2016 presidential election? This book deconstructs the many competing explanations—and shows why they matter in 2020.

Early on, political scientist Masket writes that the book was supposed to be about the Republicans’ shattering loss in the 2016 election, asking “how a patently unelectable candidate like Donald Trump somehow got the nomination and cost them an election that was obviously theirs to win.” It didn’t work out that way, leaving the Democrats to wonder how their eminently well-suited candidate failed to capture the White House. Many narratives were offered: The American public is sexist at the core. Clinton was out of touch with ordinary people. Voters rejected insider politics. Trump’s victory was a fluke. Then—though Masket doesn’t belabor the point—there were Comey, WikiLeaks, and the Russians. All these competing narratives have merited serious conversation. Analyzing them—while saying that the narratives themselves are less important than the interpretations—Masket examines how party politics work. The candidate is usually decided on well before the primaries ever begin, the

colity is so polarized that landslides no longer occur, and campaigns are steadily less important than other vehicles of messaging. One critique is that Clinton should have campaigned harder in swing states, but, the author counters, she went all out in Pennsylvania and wound up losing by about a point all the same. “If all that campaign effort couldn’t save her in Pennsylvania, why would we think it would matter in Wisconsin?” he asks. In short, he notes, “there was no consensus explanation of 2016.” Looking at identity politics, messaging, coalition-building, the representation of minority and women voters, and the power of party elites, Masket concludes that by all measures, the Democratic Party is “actually a stronger party than the GOP.”

Catnip for election watchers and politics junkies, who will want to reread the book when the dust of 2020 settles.

SIDELINES AND BLOODLINES
A Father, His Sons, and Our Life in College Football
McGee, Ryan
Triumph Books (288 pp.)
$26.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-62937-787-2

ESPN writer McGee enlists his father and brother to describe a side of college football that few spectators consider.

When it’s a family affair, football, writes the author, is “a childhood of Xs and Os, watching fathers spend their summers dissecting game film, knowing that every autumn weekend will never be free for other activities.” Moreover, in his particular family, he and his brother, Sam, learned that there were not two sides in a game but three, the third being the one that “doesn’t arrive in a chartered jet”—namely, the referees and umpires. The author’s father, Jerry, enrolled in East Carolina College (now University) with an eye to becoming a coach, but he was steered into officiating early on, working as a referee until 2009. As the author maps out, there are eight officials in a major college game: the referee, the only one of the officiating staff who wears a white hat and, usually, a microphone to announce a decision to the usually ungrateful crowd, as well as a squad of judges distributed around the field to monitor particular matters. The line judge keeps the game clock, for example, and watches the line of scrimmage, while the back judge also has game-clock responsibilities while keeping an eye out on the deep zone. (Those two judges, McGee adds, are the ones who stand below the goal posts and declare whether a field goal was good or not.) Jerry, his son writes, keeps a few rooms in his home as a personal museum of his time on the field, which added up to more than 400 games in different conferences, one standout exhibit being a photograph depicting a coach screaming at him with the understated caption, “Coach Joe Morrison explains his point of view to a less than interested official.”

Able sportswriting that, due to its focus on a little-known aspect of the game, will be illuminating even for die-hard fans.
AND IN THE END
The Last Days of the Beatles
McNab, Ken
Dunne/St. Martin's (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-250-75875-0

A look at the downfall of the Beatles. In this dutiful but not particularly revealing biography of the band's final year, Scottish journalist McNab delivers some entertaining stories but fails to bring much new to the discussion. Although he wisely chooses to focus on a single year—1969, the Beatles' last as a cohesive unit—his book operates too much in the shadow of Peter Doggett's You Never Give Me Your Money (2010), a history of the band's finances. Doggett sees 1969 as important for a host of reasons, not least as a precursor for what one might call the Beatles' afterlife, which continued for decades in the form of the business the four members shared. McNab is far less wide-ranging in his analysis, and the division of the text into 12 chapters, one for each month, constrains the narrative chronologically. Certainly, there's logic in the decision: 1969 was a key year for the Beatles, not just because it marked their dissolution, but also because they continued to make superior music, culminating with Abbey Road. Throughout, the author tracks events that have been recorded elsewhere. To be fair, this is not without its charms; no matter how many times we have heard these stories, it's always fun to read about, say, how the rooftop concert at the Beatles' offices took shape. "Researching a subject like The Beatles requires you to combine the dexterity of a rock 'n' roll detective with the patience of a jigsaw compiler," writes the author. "It is a layer cake of intrigue, complexities and contradictions—one where stories have become myths, and myths have become legend. And quite frankly, it's a massive undertaking to piece together the overall picture, even for a fan like myself." The author's patience is clear, but the final product is a middling contribution to Beatles scholarship.

A book that feels warmed over, dependent on material that any serious fan will already know.

WOLF ISLAND
Discovering the Secrets of a Mythic Animal
Mech, L. David with Breining, Greg
Univ. of Minnesota (184 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-4179-0825-6

A naturalist's memoir of seasons spent over many decades studying the ways of wolves.

No one knows more about wolves than Mech, a Minnesota-based researcher for the U.S. Geological Survey. As he writes in this engaging narrative, he started off working with bears, but, "while I was interested in weasels and mink, their wilderness relative the fisher fascinated me even more. Among the dog family, I was fond of working with foxes, but I much preferred snowshoeing through the Adirondack Mountains in search of their larger, wilder cousin, the coyote, or brush wolf." An almost-chance encounter with a scholar who would become a mentor took him to Purdue University for graduate study, and there he was posted to Isle Royale National Park, a remote outpost in Lake Superior closer to Canada than the U.S. Moose had swum to the island long before, and in pursuit came a small squad of wolves. "It had no roads, so visitors arrived by boat and traveled on foot on its trails, or by water along the shoreline," writes Mech. "No one lived there for most of the year." That was just fine by him. In time, a wife and child joined him, but the author had much of the island to himself, commanding great views from a granite ridgeline on one hand and getting down to ground level to study wolf scat on the other. It was wild country with no end of danger, but "I learned that patience was the most important ingredient of safety." Apart from a few odd interludes, including nearly becoming a John Bircher, he kept his eye on wolf-moose interactions and the fluctuating populations of both species. Given that he started at Isle Royale in 1958, his project "is the longest continuous study of any predator-prey system in the world," a model for other studies that still raises fresh questions with every season.

Fans of wolves, field biology, and good natural history writing will welcome Mech's long-overdue reminiscences.

SID MEIER'S MEMOIR!
A Life in Computer Games
Meier, Sid
Norton (320 pp.)
$27.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-324-00587-2

A nostalgic trip down gamer Memory Lane with one of the forefathers of computer game design.

Canadian American programmer Meier, founder of MicroProse and designer of such games as "Spitfire Ace" and the Civilization series, takes readers on a journey to the fledgling gaming industry in the 1980s and early '90s, when video games were transitioning from simple “Donkey Kong”–like amusements to more intellectually immersive pixelated worlds. Nongamers may not remember many of Meier's battle-focused titles—e.g., "NATO Commander," "Conflict in Vietnam," "F-15 Strike Eagle"—but they were undoubtedly popular before the gaming industry began to embrace Hollywood-style hyperviolence. The author tells the story of how he helped build an international game design business from scratch with parentally friendly concepts for his games. Readers looking for behind-the-scenes dirt on the gaming industry should look elsewhere, as Meier doesn't dig into anything particularly controversial or salacious. The author does offer some interesting technical insight into an age when video game design was in its infancy and there were few standards or restrictions holding designers back; much of it was seat-of-the-pants innovation, of
which the author was a major part. Meier is sometimes long-winded—especially in a tangential meditation on his love for classical music, Bach in particular (his music seemed “simultaneously surprising and inevitable”), but he is a genial narrator of the highs and lows of his decades-long career. The primary issue with the memoir is that unless a reader has firsthand experience with the games that Meier created, they may have a difficult time understanding what these electronic artifacts were actually like and the impact his creations had on the gaming world in general. For readers who miss the video games of the 1980s, though, the narrative is heartfelt and informative enough to maintain interest.

Not for general readers but will appeal to old-school gamers with an appreciation for the history of video games.

THE TRIALS OF PORTNOY
How Penguin Brought Down Australia’s Censorship System
Mullins, Patrick
Scribe (336 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-925849-44-8

An illuminating tale about book censorship in Australia.

Canberra-based writer Mullins begins dramatically with two anonymous men entering a Sydney bookstore to purchase a book. We learn later they were policemen. This “simple purchase,” writes the author, “helped to set in train events that would lead to the collapse of a system that was, for many Australians, a simple and immutable fact of life.” He first provides a wealth of historical background about book censorship in Australia. In 1941, Ulysses was banned because it ridiculed no less than the “whole of moral standards of civilisation, citizenship, and decency.” The furor over Lady Chatterley’s Lover resulted in some loosening of restrictions, and Lolita and The Ginger Man became available in 1965 and 1967, respectively. “Defying censorship,” writes Mullins, “would require courage, boldness, and skill—and a good bit of ammunition.” Enter Philip Roth’s Portnoy’s Complaint, a “radical piece of literature” about a boy’s “adolescent compulsion to masturbate.” The novel was a huge success, and its popularity “spread like the cold.” Jonathan Cape, the U.K. publisher, sent the book to Australian censors, who prohibited its distribution. Graham C. Greene, Cape’s managing director, was “determined to see it published in Australia.” John Michie, the alternately “charming” and “ruthless” managing director of Penguin Books Australia, was able to secure the rights to the book and find a printer willing to risk arrest. In 1970, thousands of copies were printed and distributed to stores. They sold quickly, and numerous copies were seized. In excessive detail, too much for some readers, Mullins chronicles the many censorship trials that took place, beginning in October 1970 in Melbourne. Despite Patrick White’s witty defense of the book, Penguin lost and was fined $100. In a later trial in Western Australia, they were victorious. After two years of more trials, the government relented. The book had finally won.

Publishers and bookstores are the heroes in this overlong but entertaining account of a “hard-won” battle.

ME AND SISTER BOBBIE
True Tales of the Family Band
Nelson, Willie & Nelson, Bobbie with Ritz, David
Random House (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-984854-13-1

A brother-and-sister memoir celebrates more than eight decades of love, family, and music.

Willie and his older sister, Bobbie, are clearly grateful for each other, and readers will be almost as grateful that they decided to share their story together. Most of the details are already familiar for fans of Willie and country music in general, and some are legend. Far less is known about Bobbie, the keyboard player who says little onstage but who has long provided the backbone of Willie’s band, which he has dubbed the Family ever since she joined. The chapters attributed to “Brother” and “Sister” alternate, showing how their lives and destinies have intertwined, even during the extended stretches when they weren’t playing music together. Willie builds a strong case that Bobbie is the musical virtuoso in the family, that her range has allowed him to extend and expand his own, and that she was the “missing piece of my musical puzzle” that made him a beloved institution as a recording and touring artist rather than just a songwriter. Bobbie testifies to how Willie’s innate poetic sensibility and irrepressible likability were present from childhood and how his determination to follow his own instincts eventually paid dividends. Their split narrative covers their many marriages (four for Willie, three for Bobbie) as well as the challenges and heartbreak that Bobbie has faced, information that will be new to most readers. For example, she discusses how she lost custody of her children because of the belief that women shouldn’t be playing music where alcohol was sold; how she was abused by husbands and lovers; and how racism, sexism, and depression would have tragic consequences for her. She also shows how forgiveness, faith, and personal resilience carried her through. Early on, Willie calls her a “heroine,” and readers will agree with that assessment.

A shift in perspective makes a familiar story seem fresh all over again.
The thought that liberals are more committed to law and order and of France through the story of the great edifice, a task she executes masterfully. The narrative is necessarily bookended by both the conflagration, which nearly destroyed the cathedral, and by the controversial plans for restoring Notre-Dame to a lasting landmark. The author begins with a detailed, emotional account of the day of the fire, describing heroic efforts to control it as well as the public shock and dismay over the unfolding tragedy. She carries the story through to the point at which the fire was under control, with President Emmanuel Macron promising that it would be rebuilt. From here, Poirier takes readers back to the origins of Notre-Dame in the 12th century, examining what is known about its design, construction, and financing while also describing life in Paris at the time. The author also examines other eras in French history—e.g., the Bourbon kings, the Revolution, the era of Napoleon—showing how the cathedral has acted as a solid background, a site of calm and reverence even in the most chaotic moments of France's national story. Poirier then moves on to modern reformers and restorers, especially Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), “a rebel against the academics [who] also belonged to those lovers of old stones who tirelessly campaigned to restore and treat medieval monuments with dignity.” In conclusion, the author considers the plans to rebuild Notre-Dame, noting the controversies over design and funding, all set against the backdrop of a race against time. The timing of the book—before the restoration—is also noteworthy, as Poirier captures a poignant moment in history: Paris without her Lady.

An evocative, emotionally satisfying look at one of the world’s great architectural treasures.

IN DEFENSE OF LOOTING
A Riotous History of Uncivil Action
Osterweil, Vicky
Bold Type Books (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-64503-669-2

A charged, controversial manifesto in support of rioting and looting as instruments of rebellion.

Rioting and looting, writes Osterweil, bring liberals and conservatives into agreement: Conservatives root for the police while liberals, “because their love for law and order is much greater than their belief in freedom,” dismiss looters as bringing destruction on their own community. The thought that liberals are more committed to law and order than to freedom seems inapposite, the kind of thing radicals say to denigrate those less fervently committed to the cause. However, Osterweil scores points by noting, with particular respect to the weekslong riots in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, that the inner-city proletariat seldom owns any real property in their own communities and that “the same white liberals who inveigh against corporations for destroying local communities are aghast when rioters take their critique to its actual material result in being ignored, and regardless, “there is no such thing as peace under current conditions. Social peace is just the condition under which patriarchal white supremacist violence is acting most fluidly and most thoroughly and is distributed most invisibly. When the white supremacist violence appears in the streets, it is not an aberration or a dramatic change of direction: it is a continuation of the world as it is in more direct, open terms.” The author’s long disquisitions on the history of slavery and lynching are accurate but not entirely necessary to her argument that nonviolence plays into the hands of the powerful.

An argument that, while debatable and occasionally strident, is worth hearing out.

NOTRE DAME
The Soul of France
Poirier, Agnès
Oneworld Publications (240 pp.)
$26.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-78607-799-8

The great cathedral’s history as seen through the lens of its near destruction by fire in April 2019.

Poirier is commended for not setting out to write a history of Notre-Dame itself. Rather, she seeks to contextualize the history of Paris and of France through the story of the great edifice, a task she executes masterfully. The narrative is necessarily bookended by both the conflagration, which nearly destroyed the cathedral, and by the controversial plans for restoring Notre-Dame to a lasting landmark. The author begins with a detailed, emotional account of the day of the fire, describing heroic efforts to control it as well as the public shock and dismay over the unfolding tragedy. She carries the story through to the point at which the fire was under control, with President Emmanuel Macron promising that it would be rebuilt. From here, Poirier takes readers back to the origins of Notre-Dame in the 12th century, examining what is known about its design, construction, and financing while also describing life in Paris at the time. The author also examines other eras in French history—e.g., the Bourbon kings, the Revolution, the era of Napoleon—showing how the cathedral has acted as a solid background, a site of calm and reverence even in the most chaotic moments of France’s national story. Poirier then moves on to modern reformers and restorers, especially Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), “a rebel against the academics [who] also belonged to those lovers of old stones who tirelessly campaigned to restore and treat medieval monuments with dignity.” In conclusion, the author considers the plans to rebuild Notre-Dame, noting the controversies over design and funding, all set against the backdrop of a race against time. The timing of the book—before the restoration—is also noteworthy, as Poirier captures a poignant moment in history: Paris without her Lady.

An evocative, emotionally satisfying look at one of the world’s great architectural treasures.

OVERSTATED
A Coast-to-Coast Roast of the 50 States
Quinn, Colin
St. Martin’s (256 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-250-26844-0

The comedian writes that “all state jokes used to be about New Jersey and now half the jokes are about Florida.” Then he disproves it by sending up each of the states in turn.

Quinn returns to and elaborates on a theme of his solo off-Broadway show Red State Blue State: the geopolitical rifts that divide America in the age of social media, Donald Trump, and a polarized citizenry. As the author sees it, everyone’s fair game. And now half the jokes are about Florida.” Then he disproves it by sending up each of the states in turn.

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Tobacco-rich North Carolina is “America’s Ashtray,” beer-and-bratwurst-loving Wisconsin is “The Diet Starts
"Tomorrow" state, and filmmaker-friendly Georgia is "Hollywood's Booty Call." The author lands his punches when he lampoons topics he knows well, such as U.S. elections: "They're always held in an elementary school that brings back weird memories for everybody. Why not put them in bars?...Instead of stupid 'I Voted!' buttons, they give you a drink ticket or rewards points at CVS." Elsewhere, Quinn displays a too-shaky grip on states to satirize them convincingly—he researched North Dakota partly by looking at "some pictures on Trip Advisor"—and overuses devices like fat jokes, which helobst at nine states. The problem isn't that such jokes are unwelcome; it's that many don't ring true. For example, government studies show that at least two targets of his fat jokes—Hawaii and Massachusetts—rank among the nation's 10 thinnest states.

A hot-and-cold roast of the 50 states that spares neither right- nor left-leaning terrain.

**HOW I BUILT THIS**

**The Unexpected Paths to Success From the World's Most Inspiring Entrepreneurs**

Raz, Guy

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (320 pp.)

$28.00 | Sep. 15, 2020

978-0-358-21676-6

The book version of the popular NPR podcast.

As Raz explains it, his titular radio show, which features in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs from across the business landscape, is less a how-to-succeed-in-business program than a storytelling hour. Lectures have their place, but a good story will keep listeners tuned in. Featuring his probing yet welcoming narrative voice, Raz presents stories that serve as solid lessons in entrepreneurship. While the syntheses of the lessons are useful, it is the learning curve—the story-by-story building of business acumen—that imparts the most wisdom. The comments from the entrepreneurs are consistently candid and practical. For example, begin with a concrete, unique idea that lies "at the intersection of personal passion and problem solving." From dozens of on-the-ground stories, Raz gathers countless business pearls: Don't quit your day job; do your homework; find a co-founder since humans thrive when we work together; prioritize the funding of the business, whether through bootstrapping or other people’s money, such as a relative’s or venture capitalist’s. The narrative then moves on to business-building—all the tests that you will have to confront and overcome with a new business—and Raz introduces new characters and continues to follow entrepreneurs we have met in the earlier chapters, thus enabling readers to grasp the path to their success. In the concluding part of the book, the author tackles what he feels most profoundly about: passion and decency. Kindness, generosity, and respect are critical to a long-lasting business (plus a shared purpose and values); without passion—"it's about finding and fulfilling a deeper purpose"—look forward to a lifetime of disgruntlement. Among the businesses included in the book: Dell Computer Corporation, Boston Beer Company, FUBU, Method cleaning products, Chicken Salad Chick, Allbirds, Stacy’s Pita Chips, and Carol’s Daughters.

Years of business wisdom distilled into an entertaining and useful narrative.

**TOTAL PROPAGANDA**

Basic Marxist Brainwashing for the Angry and the Young

Razer, Helen

Dundurn (240 pp.)

$18.99 paper | Sep. 5, 2020

978-1-4597-4773-9

Acerbic exegesis of Marx’s relevance as “capitalism’s constant shadow,” directed toward younger readers.

Australian journalist and radio presenter Razer takes the unapologetically Marxist perspective that capitalism’s self-destructive tendencies are fueling social chaos. “If you want to learn about a capitalist’s morals, follow his money,” writes the author. “If you want to learn about the inevitable decline of capitalism, and the morals that sustain it, read Marx.” Calling her book “a basic introduction to the language developed by Marx and related thinkers like Walter Benjamin, and she connects her discussion to such ugly crisis markers as the rise of Donald Trump and White nationalism. “Trump was not, regrettably, too stupid to intuit one basic tenet of Marxism: changed material conditions force a change in political opinion,” she writes. “If you listen to some of Trump's campaign speeches, you'll see that he echoed, albeit quite feebly, the anti–big bank sentiments of Bernie Sanders.” Razer constructs a bleak panorama of late-stage capitalism’s failings, ranging from Uber’s planned move toward driverless cars to Bill Gates’ self-interested philanthropy. The author finds cause for hope in Sanders’ movement, seeing “rallies and political parties full of kids united by one crucial understanding: capitalism cannot be trusted to determine our future.” Razer provides a reassuringly irascible presence, energetic, humorous, and cheerfully vulgar (“this is some heavy shit”), even if her colloquial overtures to young readers are sometimes forced.

A relevant, approachable guide to socialism’s continued value as “largely a tool for understanding capitalism.”
A premier scholar of American culture and literature tackles the vast, seething currents that make up the life and times of Abraham Lincoln.

The winner of the Bancroft Prize, among many other honors, Reynolds is one of our most significant historians, and he is up to the enormous task of creating a cultural biography of the man who would become America’s most recognizable president. As the author engagingly shows, Lincoln’s character was greatly influenced by the many “roiling” conflicts of the mid-19th century. Unlike David Herbert Donald’s *Lincoln* (1995), among numerous other biographies, in which Lincoln is portrayed as the “quintessential self-made man,” Reynolds offers a different take, one that is consistently fun to read. “Lincoln, far from distanced from his time, was thoroughly immersed in it,” he writes. “When he entered the presidency, he was neither inexperienced nor unprepared. To the contrary, he redefined democracy precisely because he had experienced culture in all its dimensions—from high to low, sacred to profane, conservative to radical, sentimental to subversive.” The author moves fluidly through the eras of Lincoln’s life, providing countless telling details that help readers understand how his surroundings shaped his extraordinary character—e.g., his frontier roots, voracious reading, love of mimicry, phenomenal memory, and delight in language, from rough jokes to Shakespeare. According to Reynolds, whose research is staggering, Lincoln was an intellectual sponge, and he made use of his broad knowledge and experiences to help his law clients; in his speeches, which were often met with uproarious laughter; and in his basic respect for and honesty in dealing with people of different backgrounds.

Reynolds believes that Lincoln was fully prepared for the presidency—his life’s ambition, as well as his wife’s—and due to his immersion in contemporary culture (“navigating the isms” of his time), he was able to take on the many conflicts of his day and unite the nation.

Long but never boring. A fine cultural history and biography that is accessible to all readers, especially students.

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**THE BIG LIFE OF LITTLE RICHARD**

Ribowsky, Mark

Diversion Books (256 pp.)

$26.99 | Aug. 25, 2020

978-1-63576-722-3

A breezy biography of one of rock’s most flamboyant founders.

Richard Penniman (1932-2020) was born in Macon, Georgia, a city with a lively music scene. His father, Bud, was a mason, bootlegger, bar owner, and sometime preacher. His mother, Leva Mae, was a churchgoing woman with whom her son identified at an early age, “painting his face with her makeup and dousing himself with her rosewater perfume. He would imitate her speech, in a girlish, high-pitched voice.” Richard was singing at an early age, at first in church and gospel groups. One of his first influences was Sister Rosetta Tharpe, an important precursor of rock music. Ribowsky goes on to trace how Richard paid his dues in local R&B clubs and on the “chitlin’ circuit” of venues catering to Black artists, sometimes wearing drag. A relentless self-promoter, he pushed his way into a couple of small record deals—with disappointing results—before finding his way to Specialty Records in New Orleans, where he recorded his first hits in 1955. The author follows Richard’s career through a succession of hits, his surprise decision to quit his music career to become a preacher (a move repeated several times), and his latter-day status as a celebrity/provocateur on talk shows and in 1950s rock revivals. Ribowsky effectively conveys the ambiance of the era, bringing in many of the stars and other public figures with whom Richard interacted over the decades. His task was undoubtedly complicated by his subject’s lifelong habits of embellishing facts and contradicting himself, and the musical analysis is not on par with some of Ribowsky’s previous books. In the final chapter, the author summarizes Richard’s impact on the many who came after him—a fitting tribute to a unique figure.

An easy, bright read about a seminal figure in the soundtrack of modern music.

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**HEART FULL OF RHYTHM**

The Big Band Years of Louis Armstrong

Riccardi, Ricky

Oxford Univ. (400 pp.)

$34.95 | Sep. 15, 2020

978-0-19-091411-0

An account of the famed trumpeter’s rise to superstardom in the 1930s and ’40s. Drawing on interviews, oral histories, and archival sources from the Louis Armstrong House Museum, where he is Director of Research Collections, Riccardi creates a vibrant portrait of Armstrong (1901-1971) focused on his career from 1929 to 1947, when he
had a decisive impact on both jazz and popular music. In the 1920s, writes the author, Armstrong's style of improvisation and jazz singing freed singers "from the shackles of the written melody, showing them how to interpret a song in an original manner while popularizing scat singing along the way." Riccardi details Armstrong's relationships with his many agents and wives; his recordings, movie appearances, and performances throughout the U.S. (in 1931, on a Southern tour, he hired a bodyguard) and, beginning with a much-anticipated appearance in London in 1932, throughout Europe. Although he garnered huge audience acclaim, some critics were less enthusiastic—or even overtly racist. In London in 1933, one reviewer panned what he heard as "incoherent, ecstatic, rhythmical jungle noises." That view was decidedly in the minority, however, as Armstrong's ebullient stage presence catapulted him to popularity. In 1936, besides "record-breaking" performances, he produced hit records, "the first published autobiography by an African American musician, and a buzzworthy performance in a major motion film." But by the late 1940s, some—notably Dizzy Gillespie—criticized Armstrong's "natural comedic ability" for being too much like a "plantation character." The two men ended as friends, however, with Gillespie recognizing "what I had considered Pops's grinning in the face of racism as his absolute refusal to let anything, even anger about racism, steal the joy from his life and erase his fantastic smile." Riccardi, whose previous book covered Armstrong's later years, brings the same erudition and enthusiasm to his latest.

An appreciative, deeply informed biography.

**CUBED**

**The Puzzle of Us All**

Rubik, Erno

Flatiron Books (208 pp.)

$25.99 | Sep. 15, 2020

978-1-25021-777-6

The Hungarian inventor of the Rubik's Cube cheerfully recounts his history as well as his own.

"I hate to write," admits Rubik (b. 1944) early on, and what he's written here is far from a conventional memoir. Readers will glean some of the basic facts of the author's biography, at least up until the point in the narrative about his hiring as a professor of design and architecture. He only provides glimpses of his wife and kids, but he lovingly details the houses he has designed and occupied. The Budapest native was raised by a stern engineer father “obsessed with creating the perfect glider” and a sweet, poetically inclined mother. Though school “was not able to capture his attention,” he did like drawing and figuring out puzzles. His best-known invention was conceived in his spare time in 1974, and the most fascinating sections of the book describe the various challenges he faced and surmounted in creating the object he considers “my boy, my son” as well as the problems he had in solving the puzzle after it was created. (Those who have been stumped by it will be happy to learn that it took Rubik a month to figure out how to get the pieces back into their original pattern.) As the creator of the puzzle, he has some intriguing insights about what has made it so endearingly popular, suggesting that it creates “a harmony in the mind, the heart, and the hands” and invites the player to “start a dialogue with it.” Reflecting on the particulars of his life often leads him on long, sometimes generic tangents about more abstract subjects, such as creativity, curiosity, the “art of asking questions,” and artificial intelligence. But he always pulls the story back to his namesake.

A playful examination of the process of invention.

**DEEPFAKES**

**The Coming Infocalypse**

Schick, Nina

Twelve (160 pp.)

$22.00 | Aug. 25, 2020

978-1-5387-5430-6

If you think election interference and internet fakery are bad now, give it a couple of years.

Artificial intelligence, writes journalist and activist Schick, is growing in sophistication to the point that it is attaining the ability to generate images depicting things that never happened. In the pornography industry, this is already manifest in “nonconsensual porn” or “faceswapping,” in which the faces of celebrities are grafted onto the bodies of porn actors. Another hacker tactic is to graft voice-overs onto images of, say, Barack Obama uttering statements that he never made in order to sway opinion. “When used maliciously as disinformation, or when used as misinformation, a piece of synthetic media is called a ‘deepfake,’ ” writes the author; when deepfakes pile up, the result is “Infocalypse.” In this brief survey, Schick examines current uses of false media, much of which comes from labs in Russia in order to seed Western sources with misinformation—the rape of a German woman by refugees, for instance, an event that never occurred. This sowing of misinformation is rendered especially easy in polarized electorates in which citizens are prepared to believe the worst of their opponents. It was rampant in 2016—and, as Schick writes, “The fact that this matter has become a partisan political issue in the United States, with one side paranoid about Russia and the other denying that Russia is a threat at all, shows that the Kremlin’s strategy is working beautifully”—and it’s likely to get far worse in 2020, with not just Russia, but also Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China attempting to influence the outcome of the presidential election. The filmflampery is not just political, writes the author, who notes that Interpol has intercepted campaigns to promote some 34,000 “fake coronavirus products.”

Those concerned with the criminal side of technology will learn from Schick’s well-mounted argument.
RISE UP
Confronting a Country at the Crossroads
Sharpton, Al
Hanover Square Press (304 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-335-96662-9

The outspoken civil rights leader sees a nation in peril. Baptist minister, former presidential candidate, and founder of the National Action Network, Sharpton mounts an impassioned call for activism. “The hardest job of being a preacher,” Sharpton writes, “is to eulogize the life of someone who did nothing. And so I say, give me something to work with.” The author believes that the U.S. is “at a historical turning point that’s testing our moral character and endangering all we have fought to gain.” A host of issues need bold solutions, he writes, including the criminal justice system, police brutality, health care, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, immigration, climate change, and environmental racism. He derides those he calls latte liberals, “a form of liberalism that smacks of privilege and cocoons itself by staying out of touch with the messiness that often accompanies real hardship”; the Christian right (“not right Christians”); and those who seek only to hold onto power: “the higher up they are in the chain, the more they want to keep things quiet lest they lose the power that got them to that position in the first place.” Sharpton unapologetically portrays himself as a showman who uses his personality as “a lightning bolt for good,” and he cites James Brown, Jesse Jackson, Bishop Frederick Douglass Washington, Adam Clayton Powell, Shirley Chisholm, and, not least, his mother, who nurtured his belief in faith, activism, and responsibility. “If I walk over to you and knock you off your chair, that’s on me,” he writes. “But if I come back next week and you’re still on the floor, that’s on you.” For potential activists, Sharpton offers practical advice: Identify priorities, start small, do your homework, and understand your opposition. As Chisholm once told him, “If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”

A fervent message in hard times.

YOU CAN KEEP THAT TO YOURSELF
A Comprehensive List of What Not To Say to Black People, for Well-Intentioned People of Pallor
Smyer, Adam
Akashic (136 pp.)
$15.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-61775-896-6

A slim, sharp, satirical guide to preventing racial microaggressions against Black people at work, written by a fictional Black colleague. Daquan, “the Black coworker you are referring to when you claim to have Black friends,” has something to say. He can always spot the moment when a White person becomes aware they are interacting with a “full-on BLACK PERSON.” Their eyes “take on a mad gleam,” and both revulsion and attraction play on their faces. They simply cannot help themselves; they must speak about it, abandoning appropriate topics like work, weather, and sports for dicier conversation peppered with African American vernacular. Microaggressions ensue. Fed up, Daquan offers a list of slyly disrespectful comments he would rather “people of pallor” kept to themselves. Organized from A to Z and presented with no filter, entries include “articulate” (not a compliment); “dark” (stop using it as a synonym for bad or evil); “ghetto” (“sits next to ‘urban’ in the dog-whistle drawer”); “hair” (don’t touch it without consent); “quiet” (Black people have a right not to be); “voted for Obama” (“if the last time you respected a Black person was 2012, probably you should keep that to yourself”); “you’re different” (no, but White people often have limited understanding and experience with Blackness); and all manner of subtle discrimination and affronts in between. Smyer delivers the directives with heaping sarcasm, cutting humor, and some web lingo. Best avoided by would-be White allies who demand to be treated gingerly, this book lets loose the frustration of being Black in majority White spaces. Less a guide for White people than a palliative for the daily indignities suffered by real-life Daquans, the book is a balm for tongues bitten and comments swallowed that is guaranteed to leave some Black folks chuckling in recognition while White colleagues cringe in embarrassment.

A bitingly humorous compendium of the absurd subtle racism of the American workplace.
An impassioned indictment of a broken system and its enablers and necessary reading as the pandemic intensifies.

**OUR MALADY**

*Lessons in Liberty From a Hospital Diary*

Snyder, Timothy  
Crown (192 pp.)  
$12.00 paper | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-0-593-23889-9

The award-winning Yale historian launches a broadside against the American health care system.

“The day that had just begun, December 20, 2019, could have been my last.” So writes Snyder about his hospitalization and subsequent poor treatment over the next few months, experiences that left him enraged at the state of health care in America. “In five hospitals over three months,” the author found himself with a front-row seat to the beginnings of the coronavirus pandemic. He took detailed notes during his time as a patient, and he clearly shows a health care system far more interested in profits than health, a system that follows the dictates of computers and algorithms rather than any one-to-one relationship between doctor and patient. Snyder delivers a scathing critique of this “grotesque” and “ludicrous” system as well as a government response to the pandemic that he dismisses as “magical thinking.” Indeed, the Trump administration’s “unwillingness to test did not mean that we were healthy, only that we were ignorant,” and the “focus on a foreign source of ‘fault’ meant that no one here was to blame. When no one bears responsibility, no one has to do anything.”

The author meticulously documents the health problems he suffered—among many others, a burst appendix, tremors, and an “abcess the size of a baseball in my liver”—seemingly all of which were ignored or misdiagnosed by doctors. Snyder compares the impersonalized, economy-driven care he received in American hospitals with the far more nurturing treatment he received in a foreign source of “fault” meant that no one here was to blame. When no one bears responsibility, no one has to do anything.

Amid the prison theatrics, the author also delivers eye-opening facts (“many inmates are homeless upon release”), well-considered personal reflection, and the kind of intensive growth that entered group therapy to save her life.

A writer’s agonizing journey through “four different New York State prisons over the span of nearly two years.”

**THE FIVE PEOPLE YOU’LL MEET IN PRISON**

*A Memoir of Addiction, Mania & Hope*

Stickney, Brandon  
Bancroft Press (336 pp.)  
$28.95 | Sep. 22, 2020  
978-1-61088-196-8

A writer’s agonizing journey through “four different New York State prisons over the span of nearly two years.”

**GROUP**

*How One Therapist and a Circle of Strangers Saved My Life*

Tate, Christie  
Avid Reader Press (304 pp.)  
$27.00 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-982154-61-5

A young lawyer who wants to die enters group therapy to save her life.

People who knew Tate probably didn’t see her as the sort who hoped that “someone would shoot me in the head.” Growing up in Texas, she excelled in school; at 26, she was first in her law school class. Yet she never fit in as an “oddball” who “voted Democratic, liked poetry, and settled north of the Mason-Dixon line” for a law career in Chicago. Her long struggle with bulimia—by fourth grade she had “been marinating in body hatred for a few years”—and the trauma from seeing a childhood friend’s father drown during a holiday in Hawaii had sapped her confidence. At the suggestion of a friend,
Tate signed up for group therapy with Dr. Rosen, a middle-aged man “slightly reminiscent of Einstein,” who encouraged her to be open about every aspect of her life. This chatty memoir, punctuated with beautifully rendered sections, chronicles the years she spent in Chicago in Rosen’s groups. Tate documents her alternately loving and confrontational encounters with fellow group members, but most of the book focuses on her many attempts to find the perfect man. Consequently, it often reads like a romance novel, with lines like, “When he pressed his perfect lips against mine, I swallowed starlight.” Tate’s sarcastic attempts to find the perfect man. Consequently, it often reads like a romance novel, with lines like, “When he pressed his perfect lips against mine, I swallowed starlight.” Tate’s sarcastic style can be entertaining—when Rosen told her not to use any three-syllable words to describe her feelings, she thought, “My top choice: adios”—but the narrative would have been stronger if the author more deeply explored the complexities of group therapy, body shame, loneliness, and more. Much of the writing is memorable, however, as when she describes one lover, a married man and recovering alcoholic, as “a category-six hurricane about to make landfall.” Many readers will sympathize with Tate, especially in passages where she thinks she’s finally found the right man only to have her heart broken yet again.

A moving account of one woman’s attempts to find love and stability.

DIABETES
A History of Race and Disease
Tuchman, Arleen Marcia
Yale Univ. (288 pp.)
$32.50 | Aug. 5, 2020
978-0-300-22899-1

A history of diabetes over the past 150 years, less as a disease than a mark of racial stereotyping.

Vanderbilt professor Tuchman, a specialist in the history of medicine in the U.S. and Europe, begins in the late 19th century, when scientists had learned enough about germs, hygiene, nutrition, and physiology to give doctors confidence that they understood disease. Using diabetes as her example, the author delivers a well-researched, lucidly written, and often unnerving account of how doctors have explained their disease, “masks the structural inequalities that produce poor health.”

Unsettling but insightful social history.

AS THE WORLD BURNS
The New Generation of Activists and the Landmark Legal Fight Against Climate Change
van der Voo, Lee
Timber (284 pp.)
$27.95 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-60469-998-2

The story of the Juliana v. United States case regarding climate change.

In 2015, three years before Greta Thunberg became a household name, 21 young plaintiffs filed a lawsuit against the U.S. government demanding the “constitutional right to a stable climate.” Its charge is that the government’s actions to cause climate change violate their civil rights to life, liberty, and property. Not only that, but also that the government has known about the risks of climate change for decades and persisted in helping to cause it anyway, failing to implement its own plans to regulate greenhouse gases while subsidizing, authorizing, and permitting a fossil fuel energy system that worsens global warming every day.” Environmental journalist van der Voo spent more than a year researching and interviewing these young adults, many of whom are too young to vote, getting the behind-the-scenes moments that explain what they hope to achieve and why they continue to fight despite facing adversity at almost every turn. In this well-paced, conversational narrative, the author shares the youths’ small triumphs and their vast disappointments as the case progressed toward the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and a potential ruling. Throughout, van der Voo includes examples of the variety of issues that drove the diligent work of the plaintiffs and their legal team—e.g., the extreme heat and drought that led to vast forest fires such as the one that destroyed Paradise, California, or the rising sea levels that are affecting residents of the Marshall Islands. For those eager to learn the backstory of the case, the author delivers a solid synopsis, and she also includes enough meaningful human-interest stories to keep the pages turning even when the outcome of the situation is already known.

A comprehensive look at the motivating factors that caused young adults to sue the government for a better future.
The bestselling author recalls her childhood and her family's wartime experiences.

Readers of Winspear's popular Maisie Dobbs mystery series appreciate the London investigator's canny resourcefulness and underlying humanity as she solves her many cases. Yet Dobbs had to overcome plenty of hardships in her ascent from her working-class roots. Part of the appeal of Winspear's Dobbs series are the lovely descriptions of London and the English countryside, featuring vividly drawn particulars that feel like they were written with firsthand knowledge of that era. In her first book of nonfiction, the author sheds light on the inspiration for Dobbs and her stories as she reflects on her upbringing during the 1950s and '60s. She focuses much attention on her parents' lives and their struggles supporting a family, as they chose to live far removed from their London pasts. “My parents left the bombsites and memories of wartime London for an openness they found in the country and on the land,” writes Winspear. As she recounts, each of her parents often had to work multiple jobs, which inspired the author's own initiative, a trait she would apply to the Dobbs character. Her parents recalled grueling wartime experiences as well as stories of the severe battlefield injuries that left her grandfather shell-shocked. “My mother’s history,” she writes, “became my history—probably because I was young when she began telling me….Looking back, her stories—of war, of abuse at the hands of the people to whom she and her sisters had been billeted when evacuated from London, of seeing the dead following a bombing—were probably too graphic for a child. But I liked listening to them.” Winspear also draws distinctive portraits of postwar England, altogether different from the U.S., where she has since settled, and her unsettling struggles within the rigid British class system.

An engaging childhood memoir and a deeply affectionate tribute to the author's parents.

**This Time Next Year We’ll Be Laughing**

*Winspear, Jacqueline*

Soho (314 pp.)

$27.95 | Nov 10, 2020

978-1-64129-269-6

Essayists reflect on the current state of the nation.

In keeping with the *Atlantic*’s goal of “debating and illuminating America’s meaning and purpose,” editor at large Murphy gathers 40 incisive essays from an impressive roster of contributors. “How did we get here?” editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg asks in his introduction. “How did our politics become so appalling and dispiritng? How did a system meant to elevate the most qualified among us instead place a grifter in Lincoln’s house? How did the gaps between rich and poor, men and women, black and white, immigrant and American-born, become so profound?” The essays are grouped into four sections: the first looks at “underlying conditions of society as a whole that have been deteriorating for decades.” The second examines the failure of politics; the third covers the disastrous Trump presidency; and the last focuses on the possibility for the nation’s reinvention. Contributors consider issues such as racial inequality, cultural divides and polarization, climate change, voter suppression, the plight of undocumented immigrants, and evangelical Christians, who regard themselves, “hysterically and with self-pity, as an oppressed minority that requires a strongman to rescue it.” Former Harvard president Drew Gilpin Faust melds history with a memoir of her childhood in Virginia, “a world in which silences distorted lives, and falsehoods perpetuated structures of power rooted in centuries of injustice.” In a moving portrait of a Baltimore resident struggling with health problems, staff writer Olga Khazan sees that “America’s racist and segregationist history continues to harm black people in the most intimate of ways—seeping into their lungs, their blood, even their DNA.” Caitlin Flanagan rails against rich parents’ sense of entitlement, which she experienced firsthand as a guidance counselor at a tony prep school. Among many unsettling pieces are profiles of Newt Gingrich, Paul Manafort, Ivanka Trump, and, most disturbingly, conspiracy theorists enaptured with QAnon. Other top-notch contributors include Anne Applebaum, George Packer, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Ibram X. Kendi, and Yuval Noah Harari.

An illuminating collection of perceptive, well-argued, and compelling essays.

**The American Crisis**

*What Went Wrong. How We Recover.*

*Writers of the Atlantic*  
Ed. by Cullen Murphy  
Simon & Schuster (576 pp.)  
$30.00 | Sep. 15, 2020  
978-1-982157-03-6
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

THE MAPS OF MEMORY by Marjorie Agosín; illus. by Lee White; trans. by Alison Ridley .............................. 89

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A POLAR BEAR IN THE SNOW by Mac Barnett; illus. by Shawn Harris ........................................................................ 92

THERE’S A SKELETON INSIDE YOU! by Idan Ben-Barak; illus. by Julian Frost ...................................................... 93

PERKIN’S PERFECT PURPLE by Tami Lewis Brown & Debbie Loren Dunn; illus. by Francesca Sanna.................. 96

CAT NINJA by Matthew Cody; illus. by Yebudi Mercado .................. 99

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CROSSINGS by Katy S. Duffield; illus. by Mike Orodan .............. 104

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YOU’LL FIND ME by Amanda Rasouz Hill; illus. by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff .............................................................. 112

BLOOD AND GERMS by Gail Jarrow ....................................... 115

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THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING by Kao Kalia Yang; illus. by Khoa Le .............................................. 137

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COOKIE BOO by Ruth Paul .......................................................... 146

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING
Yang, Kao Kalia
Illus. by Le, Khoa
Carolrhoda (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5415-6191-5
Kirkus Reviews has recently changed a long-standing element of our style by deciding to capitalize the word Black when referring to people of the African diaspora. It’s a change that we began discussing some years ago and, like many other publications, were finally spurred to make by the Black Lives Matter protests over the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many others.

It was, in the end, an easy decision and one that I welcomed. For years, I’ve been dutifully lower-casing Black in reviews, following the Associated Press Stylebook we use at Kirkus. Most of these reviews were submitted by Black reviewers, and every time I saw Black, I heard James Brown in my head: “Say it loud! I’m Black and I’m proud.” Every time I lowercased one of those Blacks, I apologized in my head.

Like other media outlets, we also discussed the elephant left in the room by our decision: Do we use white or White? In looking at the statements issued by other outlets, we noticed a common theme: They have in the main elected to continue their use of white. One frequently cited reason is that, as the Seattle Times pointed out, “capitalized white is often used by the white nationalist/white supremacist movement.” Ugh.

But it is also used by Ibram X. Kendi in his triad of books on racism and anti-racism: the National Book Award–winning Stamped From the Beginning (Nation Books, 2016), How To Be an Antiracist (One World/Random House, 2019), and Stamped, Jason Reynolds’ young readers “remix” of Kendi’s NBA winner (Little, Brown, 2020). James Baldwin used it in his preface to the 1984 edition of Notes of a Native Son (Beacon Press). Baldwin wrote, “The conundrum of color is the inheritance of every American, be he/she legally or actually Black or White. It is a fearful inheritance....”

Americans’ racial and gender identities range far beyond the binaries Baldwin adduces, but that does not dim the fundamental truth of his insight into this fearful, inescapable inheritance. Just as George Floyd’s Blackness gave that White Minneapolis cop twisted permission to kneel on his neck for nearly nine fatal minutes, my Whiteness is a large part of what lets me off with only a warning after being justifiably stopped for speeding. American society is racialized inside and out, but only White Americans have the luxury of pretending it is not. Eve L. Ewing brilliantly captures this fact in her recent piece for Zora. For me, capitalizing White acknowledges this, and that is why I was a proponent of the practice in our internal discussions.

However, there is no James Brown lyric that sustains me every time I turn white to White, which I do a lot now.

In 2016, Kirkus began naming the race of all human or humanoid characters mentioned in our reviews of books for children and teens. I explored our rationale in a column then, and I stand behind that reasoning today. It rejects the racist assumption that Whiteness is somehow the norm among both our readership and the readership of the books we review.

But publishing for young readers being what it is—despite the efforts of We Need Diverse Books and allies and activists in the industry—there are far too many books published these days whose reviews include statements like, “Philemona and her family all seem to be white”—or, under our new formulation, “all seem to be White.”

For our print readers, that means lots and lots of reviews with White standing alone with no other capitalized racial descriptor to balance it. At least most of our print subscribers, particularly the librarians, probably know why they’re there. But for browsers of our website or readers following links or web searches, they leap out in their isolation, particularly since there is very little reinforcement of the practice in mainstream media.

It is a discomfiting sight for many of our readers, and truth be told, it makes me uncomfortable, too. But I’m not so sure that’s a bad thing. Even before White people made landfall on the North American continent, racist thought has been used to justify White people’s horrific crimes against fellow human beings. In my little corner of the world, the kids’ book corner, one of those crimes has been the bland, unthinking prioritization of both White characters and White creators over characters and creators who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color. If an uppercase W will help us all to think about and correct it, well then, let’s do it.

Vicky Smith is the children’s editor.
IZZY IN THE DOGHOUSE
Adderson, Caroline
Illus. by Collier, Kelly
Kids Can (688 pp.)
$15.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-77138-732-3
Series: Izzy

If your favorite friend was annoyed at you while your single mom was on a business trip, wouldn’t a new puppy make everything feel all right again?

Isabel and Zoë are such favorite friends at school that even their coats, intertwined in their side-by-side cubbies, are best buddies. Izzy and Zoë also share a madcap sense of humor that includes toilet-paper tails and pretend-dirt sandwiches. Sometimes this lands them in the principal’s office, which Zoë hates. Luckily, Izzy’s caring, live-in nanny and loving, adoptive mom determine that Izzy’s exuberant impulsiveness suggests that she has “a lot of love” to spread for just a three-person family, so they get a puppy for her to baby. The dog-adoption process echoes Izzy’s own experience of being adopted, as told to her by her mom. With this title, Adderson, author of the Jasper John Dooley chapter-book series, introduces another series for the age group with a character reminiscent of such icons as Ruby Lu and Clementine. Izzy’s mom presents White, and gap-toothed Izzy has pale skin, straight, black hair, and freckles. Best friend Zoë is a child of color, the school principal is Asian, and Izzy’s nanny is Latinx (cued stereotypically in part by her extreme fondness for the telenovela Love at First Sight). The short and pithy chapters, believable and specific kid language, and Collier’s spunky illustrations make this a promising kickoff to a new series.

An endearing, energetic take on chapter books for transitioning readers. (Fiction. 6-9)

WAY PAST WORRIED
Adelman, Hallee
Illus. by de la Prada, Sandra
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-0-8075-8686-0

Brock may be dressed like a superhero, but he sure doesn’t feel like one, as social anxieties threaten to rain on his fun.

Juan’s superhero-themed birthday party is about to start, but Brock is feeling trepidatious about attending without his brother as his trusty sidekick. His costume does not fit quite right, and he is already running late, and soon Brock is “way past worried.” When he arrives at the party he takes some deep breaths but is still afraid to jump in and so hides behind a tree. Hiding in the same tree is the similarly nervous Nelly, who’s new to the neighborhood. Through the simple act of sharing their anxieties, the children find themselves ready to face their fears. This true-to-life depiction of social anxiety is simply but effectively rendered. While both Nelly and Brock try taking deep breathes to calm their anxieties without success, it is the act of sharing their worries in a safe space with someone who understands that ultimately brings relief. With similar themes, Brock’s tale would make a lovely companion for Tom Percival’s Ruby Finds a Worry (2019) on social-emotional-development bookshelves. Brock is depicted with black hair and tan skin, Nelly presents White, and peers at the party appear fairly diverse.

Though books on childhood anxiety are numerous, it is worth making space on the shelf for this one. (Picture book. 4-6)

THE MAPS OF MEMORY
Agosín, Marjorie
Illus. by White, Lee
Trans. by Ridley, Alison
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (464 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-4814-6901-2
Series: Butterfly Hill, 2

Following the events in Pura Belpré Award–winning I Lived on Butterfly Hill (2014), 14-year-old Celeste Marconi reckons with the repercussions of a regime of terror.

Life in Valparaíso, Chile, is both familiar and disorienting. After sheltering for three years in Maine with her Tía Graciela while her country suffered at the hands of a dictator reminiscent of Augusto Pinochet, Celeste is eager to return to normal. But how can life be normal when her best friend, Lucila, is among the disappeared? As Celeste learns of the torture her mother and others endured as well as the deprivation many residents of her jewellike city beside the sea live in, she sheds her innocence, expressing anger, grief, survivor’s guilt, and, ultimately, determination to act. With old friends Cristóbal and Marisol and new arrival from France Genevieve, Celeste organizes a literacy program for the city’s poorest residents. A school assignment to interview loved ones of disappeared classmates becomes the inspiration for creating memory maps—physical reminders to keep their spirits alive. But Celeste hopes for more: She and Cristóbal found Papá, after all—perhaps Lucila is alive and maybe even Natalia, the little girl she’s been assigned to research? Charming prose and cheerful pen-and-ink illustrations soften details of a painful and divisive history. Celeste—loving, impetuous, and fiercely loyal—and her family and community are quirky and appealing. Richly textured elements creating a deep and magical sense of place are woven unobtrusively throughout.

Captivating and exquisite. (Fiction. 11-15)
Lake’s paintings bloom with life.

**WAA’AKA’**

**SOMETIMES PEOPLE MARCH**

*Allen, Tessa*
Illus. by the author
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-06-299118-8

Simple, direct statements are paired with watercolor illustrations to highlight some of the rallying causes for organized marches throughout the history of the United States.

The text and art begin with two marches that will reemerge as metaphor later in the book: a long line of ants marching to and from a piece of watermelon, and members of a blue-and-gold-clad marching band following their leader’s baton. As the band recedes on the verso, across the gutter an extremely diverse group of people similar to the crowds marching across the book’s cover advances toward readers on recto. Here the text repeats the book’s title. Next, negative space surrounds a small group of women and children—obviously from an earlier time—holding a protest sign. The text explains that sometimes people march “to resist injustice.” The facing page shows a contemporary family gazing with chagrin at a polluted beach; they will march because they “notice a need for change.” The text continues to offer simple explanations of why people march, eventually moving to other peaceful means of resistance, including signs, boycotts, strikes, sit-ins, and “taking a knee.”

Hardship in the form of physical and psychic exhaustion is mentioned, but police and other legally sanctioned violence against protest is not—the general mood is uplifting encouragement to young, potential activists. This timely book combines rudimentary facts about peaceful resistance with art that depicts historic figures represented.

Effectively argues that “People are more powerful together.” (Informational picture book. 4-8)

**BOYS DANCE!**

*Allman, John Robert*
Illus. by Lozano, Luciano
Doubleday (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-385-39114-0
978-0-385-39115-7 PLB
Series: American Ballet Theatre

Boys at the American Ballet Theatre school practice, observe, and show off their ballet skills.

A multiracial group of young male students attends class, where they stretch at the barre, demonstrate the five basic positions, and land jumps with “flair” during floor routines. In one double-page spread, they are showcased artfully imitating current ABT dancers seen on posters behind them. Another colorful scene shows men in various costumes from classic ballets executing steps onstage. Still another visually powerful spread shows the boys duplicating moves from famous dancers of other genres, including Savion Glover, Paul Taylor, Bob Fosse, Gregory Hines, and Gene Kelly. Finally, and making a strong statement, the boys are depicted reading and playing the violin, basketball, and tennis while using ballet techniques. Related in rhyming couplets, this is a happy and spirited view of dance in the studio, onstage, and in everyday life. In an afterward, current male dancers briefly describe why they dance. Each is accompanied by two photographs, one from childhood and one in performance. Children of all genders who are drawn to dance will appreciate the positive reinforcement. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 275% of actual size.)*

**Boys and ballet—a happy and upbeat combo.** (Picture book. 5-8)

**WAA’AKA’ THE BIRD WHO FELL IN LOVE WITH THE SUN**

*Alvitre, Cindi*
Illus. by Lake, Carly
Heyday (32 pp.)
$17.00 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-59714-509-1

An #ownvoices creation story of the Indigenous people of Southern California, brimming with vivid imagery.

This stunning picture book weaves gorgeous prose from Tongva author Alvitre with the evocative watercolors of illustrator Lake to convey an ancient story: first, how sacred plants brought forth the sun; second, how the sun came to be in the heavens; Waa’aka’ turns out to be quite self-centered. As the narrative unfolds, a wide range of young readers will be enthralled by the tension between Waa’aka’ and her fellow birds, who work together to heave the sun into the cosmos while, secretly, Waa’aka’ attempts to sabotage the project in order to keep the sun for herself. The plan eventually succeeds; when Tamet is flung into the heavens, Waa’aka’ ascends with him, her pearly feathers accidentally burned by Tamet’s fire. With her ulterior motives exposed, Wiyot, the creator, relegates Waa’aka’ to a nocturnal existence, never to see the sun again. Lake’s paintings bloom with life, modulating between symbolic and realistic representation to convey the tale. Wiyot’s russet-colored hands appear throughout, emphasizing his role in creation.

**Tongva cultural memory is alive and well in Alvitre’s skillful storytelling.** (foreword) (Picture book/cosmology. 5-10)
A tribute to the New York City subway’s first official “leak detective.”

Gifted with a literal nose for trouble, James Kelly arrived in New York from Ireland “with nothing but a suitcase and a keen sense of smell”—and leveraged the latter into a long career over the first half of the 20th century sniffing out dangerous gas, water, steam, and other leaks in the subway system and elsewhere. Along the way he solved mysteries (“the most nauseating, nose-scrunching stench ever to hit the subway,” detected at the 42nd Street station, turned out to be caused by a buried deposit of circus-elephant dung beneath the site of the old Hippodrome) and averted several potential disasters. Anderson casts him in a heroic mold, as he had not only a special ability, but the inner motivation to use it in service to public safety: “With such an honor came great responsibility.” (Shades of Spider-Man.) Depicted with a confident smile and a mop of bright orange hair, Kelly shines as he goes after suggestive twists and turns of his investigations’ succession of antique-looking street scenes and cross-sectional views of underground pipes and tunnels. Harney tucks a dark-skinned lemur and a penguin as his constant companions as he makes himself available for hugs to his friends. “I need a hug,” says the skunk, approaching while apparently wafting a stinky smell. “OK, Skunk. Let’s have a hug,” says Mr. Panda. But it turns out that Skunk was speaking to the crocodile. Croc (wearing a clothespin on its nose) and Skunk exchange hugs and “I love you’s as Mr. Panda looks on in some confusion. The rebuff is repeated with Elephant and Mouse, some sheep and Ostrich, and Sloth (who can hug itself). Lemur and Penguin are Mr. Panda’s constant companions as he rides a bike, drives a minibus, and flies a small plane, all without success in delivering hugs. The animals, most gray or black and white, stand out against a solid red background, the doughnut-shaped balloon Mr. Panda totes the only pops of other colors. When he gives up with an “I guess nobody wants my hugs,” the lemur and penguin offer Mr. Panda a hug, which he accepts, followed by the others in a big group hug: “We love you, Mr. Panda.” Mr. Panda’s reserve, large size, and lumpish dignity make his mission seem endearing, and his willingness to give up is a somewhat positive one for nonhuggers. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.2-by-20.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 72% of actual size.)

Silly, of course, and pretty sweet. (Picture book. 2-5)

In another easy-reading graphic novel told in three loosely connected stories, the well-meaning but naïve pasta noodles Lenny, Orange, and Chicken are the central characters, with other pasta characters like Meatball, Spaghetti, and Noodle the Ostrich adding flavor to the mix. The stories, the well-meaning but naïve pasta, are told in three loosely connected chapters: "Wise, of course, and pretty sweet. (Picture book. 2-5)"
KAH-LAN AND THE STINK INK
Autoio, Karen
Illus. by Pedersen, Emma
Crwth Press (128 pp.)
$8.95 paper | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-989724-07-1

A young male sea otter leaves his original raft to strike out on his own, encountering environmental dangers created by humans.

The present-tense narrative stays with Kah-Lan’s viewpoint as he ventures away from his mother and other female otters and pups. He is eager for adventure and to find his own companions. Hyphenated words describe much of what Kah-Lan sees and experiences: sea-trees and land-trees; stink-ink for the dark cloud of oil in the water; sea-meat for what he’d be if an orca caught him as well as his own prey; dive-and-dig and roll-and-rin for otter actions; drift-trees for paddleboards. He recognizes the relative ages—Elders and pups—of “the strange furless ones that walk on their hind legs”; their human speech is shown in italics. Marine creatures are named in ways readers will find familiar: octopus, sea gull, seal, shark, and the orcas that would eat him. Otter habits of storing food in fur pouches, using rocks to pound shells, and meticulously grooming are all introduced. Kah-Lan’s reactions are described in terms of human emotion: he is “giddy with adventure”; he feels “prickles of concern.” When Kah-Lan and another two young male otters swim into an oil spill, he becomes very ill. The otters are taken to a marine mammal rescue center where one otter dies, but Kah-Lan is healed. An extensive author’s note offers facts and context. The mostly declarative sentences have an authoritative rhythm that makes for somewhat ponderous reading, but Autoio’s empathy and Kah-Lan’s intriguing perspective help to make up for this. Children who have some familiarity with marine mammal rescue centers may be its most likely readership. (Illustrations not seen.)

A sympathetic adventure starring a beloved sea mammal. (Fiction. 7-10)

WILLA THE WISP
Auxier, Jonathan
Illus. by Demidova, Olga
Amulet/Abrams (96 pp.)
$12.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-5362-0396-7
Series: The Fabled Stables, 1

A series opener about a caretaker of stables for magical and odd creatures.

Auggie is the caretaker of the mysterious Professor Cake’s Fabled Stables, home to one-of-a-kind creatures of all sorts. As the only boy on Professor Cake’s private island, Auggie’s lonely—the closest thing he has to friends are Miss Bundt (who he suspects was once a pirate) and Fen, a literal stick in the mud (who transforms to aid Auggie in his jobs and is not keen on friendship). One day, a new stall suddenly appears in the stables, meaning a soon-to-arrive creature is in trouble and needs rescue. Auggie must use his cleverness and resources to rescue Willa—a playful, shape-shifting, newborn wisp—from three robed hunters. When the hunters catch them and threaten Willa to try to get at a nonexistent treasure, Auggie cleverly tricks them and summons a rescue from a not-as-apathetic-as-he-pretends Fen. But back at the stables, Willa’s still not out of danger—wisps are moon creatures that only last for one night. Again, Auggie thinks fast for a solution. The straightforward plot never allows tension to simmer too long without relief for the young audience; add in the comically inventive creatures, and this book is calibrated to please. The full-color artwork throughout is vibrant in its shading and dreamy in execution, physically grounding the story while enhancing its fantastical otherworldliness. Auggie is depicted with beige skin and brown, curly hair and Mrs. Bundt with blue skin and hair; the hunters are diverse both racially and in gender.

Whimsical fantasy with exactly the right amount of speed and cleverness for the audience. (Fantasy. 5-9)

A POLAR BEAR IN THE SNOW
Barnett, Mac
Illus. by Harris, Shawn
Candlewick (41 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-5362-0396-7

Follow a polar bear in the snow to see where he’s going.

Readers are thus invited into this beautifully poetic story as the bear wends his way toward a destination that soon becomes apparent. Against a backdrop of white, grays, and smudgy touches of black, the majestic animal awakens from a nap in a snowy landscape and glides along, seeking neither food nor shelter—and definitely not a human. The refrain “There is a polar bear in the snow” and the question “Where is he going?” are repeated over the course of the bear’s journey, capturing readers’ attention and building suspense. Then…the background changes to shades of glistening turquoise, clarifying exactly where he was headed—and it all makes perfect sense. Afterward, sheer whiteness reclaims the bear and the scene, and he leaves his footprints and readers behind. This lovely tale is simply and gently told in a hushed tone with minimal text per page and offers up a tantalizing air of mystery about this much-loved creature. The captivating cut-paper–and-ink illustrations are appropriately atmospheric, offering varied perspectives. They perfectly suit the prose’s quiet grandeur, and occasional blank or nearly blank pages suggest a completely snow-blanked bear. The art reflects the peace, solitude, and colors of the Arctic habitat and depicts other wildlife that reside there, such as seals on which polar bears prey and arctic foxes.

Charming, scenic, and a winning must for the youngest polar bear lovers. (Picture book. 3-7)
A final tongue-in-cheek spread offers instructions for growing your own extra hands.

**THERE'S A SKELETON INSIDE YOU!**

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**IGGY IS BETTER THAN EVER**

Barrows, Annie  
Illus. by Ricks, Sam  
Putnam (160 pp.)  
978-1-984813-33-6  
Series: Iggy

Iggy finds that trying to be good is a possible recipe for disaster.

Iggy Frangi, a 9-year-old fourth grader first introduced in *The Best of Iggy* (2020), is not particularly adept at anticipating adverse outcomes, and his analysis after things go wrong is not especially accurate. He’s more of a doer than a dreamer. “Mostly Iggy gets in trouble. He does Thing 1, and then Thing 2 happens, and then, unfortunately, Thing 3 happens too.” In a wry direct address, the narrator/apologist affirms that Iggy will not be transformed, that this is not about a kid who is “better at the end than he was in the beginning”—not “about a kid who plants flowers by the side of the road.” Thing 1: Iggy, who appears White, and two of his best friends, Diego, who has brown skin, and Arch, who appears Black, discover a creative use for gardening tape. As a result of Thing 1, Thing 2 happens: Iggy accidentally clobbers (but doesn’t permanently damage) an elderly White teacher with a basketball. Thing 2 leads to Thing 3: a spectacular and, as it turns out, literal face-plant, “one of the best things that ever happened” in Iggy’s life. Iggy wouldn’t hesitate to do it all over again, and his fans will be the richer for it. Ricks’ sketch illustrations feature lighthearted diagrams and cartoon interpretations of Iggy’s thoughts and misadventures.

*Very, very funny.* (Fiction. 7-10)

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**PUPPY PROBLEMS**

Braddock, Paige  
Illus. by the author with Efird, Kat  
Viking (96 pp.)  
978-0-593-11743-9  
Series: Peanut, Butter, and Crackers, 1

Squirrel wars, furballs, and a new family member are just a few of the problems pets face in this humorous graphic novel for younger readers.

Crackers, a dog with a big to-do list—barking, napping, peeing outside, barking again, and sniffing stuff—lives with Butter, a wise cat who fantasizes about boxes and can openers. The two live in harmony until their human (seen only as a pair of light-brown hands) brings home Peanut, a panting puppy who pees on the floor, eats Crackers’ food, interrupts nap time, and keeps both Crackers and Butter up at night. After their human leaves them alone with Peanut and a disastrous mess of garbage, strewn toilet paper, and chewed shoes, books, and furniture results, they think that this will end Peanut’s stay. When Peanut receives only a finger-wagging, Butter devises a plan that ends with Peanut lost and alone. Readers, especially those with pets, will find comedic recognition in the antics of these three furry friends and pleased satisfaction when Butter’s and Crackers’ moral compasses kick in, Peanut’s rescue creating a bond that brings the three together. With humor that is observant and good-natured, Braddock’s engaging comic-book paneling and pacing are an ideal match for early readers ready to delve into something a little longer. (Efird contributes the colors.) The banter between Crackers and Butter reveals genuine affection between the two, and Peanut’s puppy earnestness is endearing.

*An easy handoff to animal lovers.* (Graphic fiction. 6-9)
The Talk. It happens in families of color all across the country, as caring adults prepare their children for a world that doesn't love them the way it should. In their anthology The Talk: Conversations About Race, Love & Truth (Crown, Aug. 11), Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson gather together some of today's top writers and illustrators for children—including Shadra Strickland, Traci Sorell, Minh Lê, and others—for a series of tough, honest conversations. The Hudsons are also founders of Just Us Books, an independent press dedicated to creating “positive, vibrant, Black-interest” children's books since 1987. We talked with the couple via Zoom from their home in East Orange, New Jersey. The conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

This anthology is full of love and lessons. Can you talk about striking the right balance?

Wade Hudson: I think it has a lot to do with the way that we were raised, growing up in the South. Both of us grew up in Jim Crow segregation. We both went to segregated schools, lived in all-Black communities. [But] there was so much love around us. So it was, on one hand, love and support and nurturing from our community, and then, obviously, having to deal with the challenges of racism and being seen as less-than by the White portion of the town.

Cheryl Willis Hudson: They were literally two different worlds. So when you were in your own community and surrounded by your church and the Girl Scouts and the band, it was just a regular world. And then on the other side were these people that somehow were discriminating against you and you didn't understand why.

WH: It's so important that the love be lifted up.

CWH: The thing about racism is that it's a part of the world. It's built in. So when you talk The Talk, it's very relevant today. How do you raise a child with love and truth about what's happening in their surroundings, what's happening in the streets, what's happening in schools, what's happening in institutions? And in spite of the harshness of the truths, they can navigate the world, and here are some tools to do it.

WH: You have to do it in such a way that your son or your daughter does not feel less-than. You still want to promote positive self-esteem while at the same time equipping them with as many tools as possible so that they can come back home after an encounter with a police officer. So it is indeed a balancing act.

In your introduction, you talk about how you were so determined that your two children feel safe and loved. But your entire life mission has been to bring that same feeling to other Black children.

WH: That's [also] the way we grew up. The tightness of the community is important. I think oftentimes those from the outside don't really see or understand that sense of community.

CWH: It’s the same kind of principle as “It takes a village to raise a child.” And that was not the Hillary Clinton version [laughs]. That goes back to Du Bois and the Talented Tenth and lifting as we climb.
I was interested in the variety of voices that you included in The Talk.

CWH: Having The Talk is something that we know as Black parents. You know that at some point in time your son is going to be profiled by the cops or somebody is going to accuse your daughter of being fresh even though she’s 11 years old. But we realized that the same kinds of stereotypes happen in [other] communities. So we just started asking our friends in the kid-lit community to share their experiences. For example, Duncan Tonatiuh has encountered the same kinds of situations as a Mexican American that we do as Black Americans.

WH: We felt that to not have a White author involved in this anthology would render it incomplete. I think this conversation needs to include all of us. If people of color could have solved the problem, we would have solved it a long time ago. White people need to be a part of the solution too, and [to do that] they have to also be a part of the conversation. So it was important that we include a White voice, and Adam [Gidwitz] did a fantastic job, I think.

CWH: Meg Medina’s piece is “Habla,” and that’s the whole issue of [people] being offended because you speak another language. So again, it’s not a single story. It’s not a single talk. It’s not a single conversation. There are multiple conversations.

WH: Yeah, different kinds of talks. This is a period that’s ripe with possibilities because of what’s happening in response to the murder of George Floyd from the White community—obviously, Black people have been dealing with this forever. So we are hopeful that The Talk is a part of this movement to get us to a better place as a nation.

The Talk: Conversations About Race, Love & Truth received a starred review in the July 15, 2020, issue.

GOING ROGUE
(At Hebrew School)
Breton, Casey
Green Bean Books (224 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Sep. 19, 2020
978-1-78438-539-2

It’s Hebrew school vs. Star Wars, football, and science.

Ten-year-old Avery, who narrates his story, has three passions in life: Star Wars, science, and football. Unfortunately, he must attend Hebrew school, which interferes with playing football. He hates studying Torah because what he reads doesn’t always align with scientific evidence. Then the times for football practice change and he can join a team—a participation achieved by winning over his concussion-fearful parents. Hebrew school takes on a different dimension when a new rabbi arrives who amazingly like Yoda talks. He also plays music from the movies and owns a red lightsaber. Rabbi Bob even seemingly equates the Shema prayer with the Force. But Avery still grapples with what it means to be Jewish. Then, injuries on the football field, one to a bully and one to a friend, lead to a discussion of the mitzvah called bikkur cholim, which refers to visiting those who are sick. Avery now considers the possibility that religion and science can coexist, as the rabbi explains that Judaism values the process of questioning more than the certainty of answers. Still, Avery questions his attendance at Hebrew school, an obligation his parents never fully explain or discuss with him. Readers may be drawn to the detailed football plays and the Star Wars references while those in Hebrew school may find a kindred spirit.

Best appreciated by reluctant Hebrew school attendees. (notes about Judaism) (Fiction. 10-12)
with several patients, including Mrs. Alred's aging dog, a cow stuck in a tree, and a bloated kitty. Charlie reluctantly begins to appreciate Amy's ability to comfort both the patients and their owners. Eventually the pair collaborate for better outcomes for a neglected puppy and an aging bound. The solid writing delivers a straightforward and charming plot, ideal for young readers transitioning to chapter books. Gendron's illustrations are interspersed throughout chapters and give plenty of life and emotion to the characters. Charlie and his mom present as White while Amy presents as Asian; secondary characters are diverse.

A pleasant read for lovers of pet stories. (author's note) (Fiction. 6-8)

PERKIN'S PERFECT PURPLE
How a Boy Created Color With Chemistry
Brown, Tami Lewis & Dunn, Debbie Loren
Illus. by Sanna, Francesca
Little, Brown (60 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-368-03284-1

An introduction to the life and innovations of William Henry Perkin (1838-1907), an English chemist who tried to find a cure for malaria but instead produced “purple for the people.”

Brown and Dunn establish context by showing a cloth maker’s dismay when Queen Victoria demands a crown of purple velvet: The challenge of producing it was one of the reasons the color was reserved for the rich and royalties. Phoenicians had extracted the mucus of mollusks while the English soaked fabric in bark and berries, then urine to make it colorfast. Enter Perkin, son of a London carpenter. His professor at the Royal College of Chemistry, searching for an antidote during a malaria epidemic, gave Perkin a formula to attempt synthesizing quinine from coal tar. While the experiment failed, Perkin refined the scientific methodology and documentation and created—in a last-minute do-over—a gorgeous new color. The narrative is brisk, alliterative, and full of well-chosen details. Children will be intrigued at the ingenious and sometimes gross aspects of dye-making. In compositions brimming with pattern, Sanna controls an orderly palette, allowing the new hue to pop. Bright droplets are a design element throughout, framing key words, emanating from Perkin’s attic laboratory, swirling off the page to celebrate his lasting impact. The conclusion and extraordinary rich author’s note and period visuals emphasize the White Englishman’s contributions to the fashion, medical, and scientific communities.

Perfect for STEAM-infused reading and for grasping the value of serendipity. (Bibliography, experiment) (Picture book/biography. 6-12)

PEACEMAKER
Bruchac, Joseph
Dial Books (360 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-1-984815-37-8

Bruchac takes readers to the dawn of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Weary of continued war under the warrior chief Atatarho, Okwaho’s family and a few others have made the decision to leave the big village of the Onontaka. But despite their decision to live peacefully apart, they cannot seem to escape the continued warfare among the five nations in the region: Okwaho’s best friend, Tawis, is kidnapped by the Standing Stone warriors of the Oneida while the pair is fishing for trout. Hoping to return to the protection of the big village, Okwaho’s community sends a delegation to negotiate with Atatarho, Okwaho sneaking after to watch and witnessing the chief’s promise of more fighting and death. Then a man called Carries, from the Ganiekehaongo Nation, arrives in Okwaho’s tiny village to tell them stories of a Peacemaker who will come to confront Atatarho. Basing his tale on the real-life story of the forming of the Iroquois Confederacy, as told to him by Haude-noosanne elders, Bruchac relates it through the eyes of Okwaho. This is a vital story to tell, but by positioning Okwaho primarily as an observer, he hobbles the development of a dynamic protagonist. Still, readers who persist to hear the nested stories told by Carries and Okwaho’s clan elders will come away with a new understanding of this moment in history.

An important story told too remotely to connect. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 9-12)

THE BOOKSTORE CAT
Busby, Cylin
Illus. by Santoso, Charles
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-06-289434-2

An alphabetical celebration of the venerable bookstore cat. Inspired by the Victorian party game The Minister’s Cat, in which players take turns describing the minister’s cat with adjectives all in alphabetical order, Busby describes a slightly chubby marmalade cat in a bow tie who lives, of course, in a bookstore. “The bookstore cat is an adorable cat. / The bookstore cat is a Bossy / (very bossy) / but cuddly cat.” He is also darting, excited, friendly, and gorgeous (but bumble). In Santoso’s illustrations—one or more for each letter—the bookstore pussycat displays the cited characteristic, often interacting with the shop owner and customers. As a jealous cat, he glares angrily out the store window as the owner pets a puppy. As a mysterious cat, he hides in the shadows of the mystery section. He crouches, waiting, before pouncing on a Xenops (somehow this Central American bird has made it to this quaint, diverse North American commercial district). “By closing time, he’s a...”
Hello Booklovers. What to Add to your Bookshelves This Fall:

What to Give Babies and Toddlers

- Mommy and Daddy and Me 978-0-8431-07-9
- Dinosaur Surprise 978-0-8431-05-3
- Who's Hiding in This Box 978-0-8431-06-2
- Sharing 978-0-662-63000-0
- Masquerade Party 978-0-8431-06-8

What to Read for Storytime

- A Sheep Out of Water 978-0-8431-02-6
- The Forgotten Crayon 978-0-8431-08-6
- The Sharing Party 978-0-662-65007-9
- A Sky Without Lines 978-0-8431-09-4
- One Boy's Choice 978-0-662-65003-1

What to Read to Get Kids Thinking

- Eugene and the Sounds of the City 978-0-662-63004-8
- School is Coming 978-0-8431-04-6
- Little Bird Visits the Big City 978-0-8431-03-7
- Reynard the Fox 978-0-662-65006-2

An extra special gift from Hans Christian Andersen Medalist Robert Ingpen

- The Magic Bookcase 978-0-662-63001-7

A note from Maria Russo:

“It’s more important than ever to give our children the very best picture books and board books — like these beautiful ones, created and published with the care that has made minedition books beloved around the world. That’s why I’m truly proud to be starting a new role as Editorial Director of minedition U.S. Please enjoy, and I’ll see you soon with more outstanding titles.”

Maria Russo
Zigzag cat,” racing back and forth across the store...only to end up in his loving owner’s arms. Whether they know their ABCs or not, both cat and book lovers will appreciate this and may take up the Victorian game. Santoso’s delicate illustrations look like colored pencil and are a perfect match for the playful text. The shop owner has beige skin and dark, curly hair.

All Bookish Cat Devotees Enjoy! (Picture book. 2-6)

THE WEIRD IN THE WILDS
Caletti, Deb
Illus. by Nickel, Adam
Putnam (272 pp.)
$13.99 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-984813-08-4
Series: True Tales of Triumph and Disaster, 2

This follow-up to A Flicker of Courage (2020) features four kids who inhabit a fantastical, yet familiar, universe.

Henry, Apollo, Pirate Girl, and Jo now know they are spell breakers and can help fight narcissistic villain Vlad Luxor, the Horrible Ruler with Magic, who boasts of his plans to build a border wall. Luxor changes their bullying classmate Jason, who teases Jo about her mom’s relationship with a woman, into a smelly gerenuk, a species of gazelle, and with the help of Henry’s grandfather, they realize that despite their dislike of Jason, they must help him. This turns into a madcap quest through the terrifying forest known as the Wilds. The heavily message-driven presentation of a world in the throes of a battle between good and evil doesn’t always blend well with the goofy, lighthearted tone. Readers who enjoyed the first may appreciate this one, which raises the question already raised by the knowing, often quirky, vintage-styled illustrations of who exactly the intended readers are. Most of the characters assume a White default; Jo is the descendental of a South American revolutionary.

This blend of hero quest and political allegory ultimately misses its mark. (Fantasy. 8-12)

POPPY & SAM AND THE SEARCH FOR SLEEP
Catton
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Ouriou, Susan
Owlkids Books (48 pp.)
$16.95 | Oct. 15, 2020
978-1-77147-418-4
Series: Poppy & Sam

Light-brown skin, and Sam, an even more diminutive panda, go to their respective homes made of gourds and snuggle into their own beds. Sam dreams of honey, but Poppy tosses and turns. Poppy wakes Sam, horrified at having forgotten how to hibernate. Poppy pulls Sam out of bed, and the two wander the garden visiting friends for tips on how to fall asleep. They try counting honey pots like the bees and say no thank you to warm fly milk from the frog. The ants welcome them to read in bed, but the only book left on the ants’ shelf is the dictionary. Just when they’ve given up—Sam’s lullaby has failed, and the dutiful sidekick has offered to stay awake with Poppy—they come across Simone, who informs them that mice don’t hibernate. They’re cozy in their den playing cards, doing puzzles, and eating snacks. They welcome Poppy and Sam to join them and stay awake all winter...and suddenly, Poppy and Sam are very tired. The comic-style design with spacious, colorful panels, cherubic characters, speech bubbles, and clever use of page turns make this a fun read for independent young readers but also works as a humorous read-aloud for the sleep-resistant.

Another win for this adorable series. (Graphic fantasy. 4-10)

TURNING POINT
Chase, Paula
Greenwillow Books (384 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-06-296566-0

Two 13-year-old girls figure out what’s really important to them during a transitional summer.

Best friends Monique Jenkins and Rasheeda Tate are facing unfamiliar situations without each other to lean on over the last summer before freshman year. Monique is attending a competitive three-week summer intensive at Ballet America—where she hopes to land a full-year scholarship. Upon arrival, she’s quickly faced with her differences: She and her friend from home, Mila, are the only Black people there. Unlike Mila and the White girls, Monique isn’t tall and thin, and she doesn’t know the nuances of ballet culture. Monique navigates micro-aggressions as she tries to fit in, with hopes of her talent’s being recognized. Meanwhile, Rasheeda is facing a lonely summer at home, afraid Mo will forget about her. Thrust into nonstop church activities by her pious aunt, Rasheeda spends her time wallowing, feeling the pressure to be a “good girl,” and being consoled by a flirtatious Lennie, Monique’s brother. Rasheeda starts to give church a chance and deepens her relationship with Lennie, which leads to a deeply upsetting event. Writing from the girls’ alternating third-person viewpoints, Chase lends authenticity to the characters’ distinct voices. She delves into the unique pressures of ballet and church cultures with empathetic understanding while also referencing difficulties faced by the Black working-class communities to which the main characters belong.

An insightful look at unintentional pressures placed upon children. (Fiction. 12-15)
A man loses his horse and gains wisdom to share in this import from China.

Inspired by a millennia-old Chinese folktale that gave rise to an enduring proverb, this picture book retells the story of Sion (pronounced “Sai Ong” and meaning “Old Man Sai”), a fortune-teller whose horse wanders across the border into enemy territory. Rather than dwelling on his loss, Sion ponders it as possibly “a very good thing!” When enemy armies attack and his horse returns some time later with more horses in tow, Sion’s characteristic openness to alternative interpretations of events and his tendency to reserve judgment baffle those around him, especially as he muses on his own son’s serious fall from a horse as possibly “a very good thing!” When enemy armies attack and most other young people are drafted into battle, Sion’s son is spared due to his broken leg, once again demonstrating that misfortunes—like blessings—are not always fixed or immutable. The lively illustrations use a mixture of Chinese painting styles and techniques in depicting characters, scenes, and landscapes. The varying layouts of spreads reinforce the story’s underlying concept of change-as-constant and help to pace the page turns for a stimulating read-aloud.

A philosophical tale cleverly highlighting the shifting nature of perspectives as they evolve over time. (Picture book. 6-9)

Who can save the city and meme his way into the hearts of all? Cat Ninja!

Metro City has no idea that its adorable yet deadly protector Cat Ninja is but a humble house cat by day. Leon’s cat, Claude, appears ordinary enough, but when Master Hamster threatens everyone’s bank accounts from his hamster-ball–headed super robot body, Claude becomes Cat Ninja, using the skills he learned as a kitten watching ninja movies with a kindly old lady—who became a ninja crime fighter when attacked. Yes, there are villains everywhere for Cat Ninja to fight, but Leon has a rough time too. His parents are just beginning divorce proceedings; he and his sister, Marcie, hate having two houses and the way their parents separately vie for their attention. While the family drama plays out, Cat Ninja is busy keeping the city safe from the Raccoon Bros and Chat Noir, but is our kitty hero up to beating a supervillian menace who’s arming the city’s baddies? Cody’s hyperbolic superhero-movie narration and Mercado’s vibrant, dynamic panels hit the sweet spot, marrying humor and heroics. Leon, Marcie, and their mom all have beige skin; the kids’ dad presents White. A short comic featuring villain Fury Roach penned by Colleen AF Venable and a humorous quiz close what readers will hope is but the first outing for Cat Ninja.

Powerful pussycat perfection! (Graphic fantasy. 7-14)

Counting down one by one, 10 birds fall off a branch.

The concept of this picture book is simple enough: 10 birds topple, slip, and dive their way off the titular twig until there is one left. The text itself echoes familiar singsong-y children’s rhymes like “Five Little Pumpkins.” While it mostly succeeds, there are some awkward spots: “5 on a twig, there used to be more… / SNAP! Don’t say a word, now there are four.” (On each page the number is both spelled out and represented as a numeral). The real scene stealer, however, is the book’s interplay between Cole’s illustrations and the physical pages themselves. In much the same way Eric Carle utilizes the pages in The Very Hungry Caterpillar to show the little critter eating its way through the week, Cole uses pages of increasing width to show how the twig grows shorter as each bird falls and marches off purposefully with the others, all headed toward verso with pieces of twig in their beaks. Stylistically, the book is captivating. The very colorful, egg-shaped birds appear on a single, thin black line on a stark white background. This backdrop stands in powerful contrast to the book’s final two pages, which are set against black negative space, a theme echoed in the book’s feather-print endpapers. The heavy, thick pages make it easy for little hands to participate. The text takes a back seat to the playful and compelling design, which is sure to delight readers.

Who knew that turning the pages could be the best part of a book? (Picture book. 2-4)

The animals of Sunnyville—and preschool readers—learn how one animal’s action can snowball into something bad or good.

The opening double-page spread shows over a dozen vividly colorful anthropomorphic cartoon animals happily engaged in
various activities against a low-detail background of a pale blue village. Bold black print on the verso declares: “Sunnyville was perfect. Friendly and fun. It twinkled with perfect loveliness!” Yellow speech bubbles from animals affirm the collective happiness with cheerful or kind comments. The text at the bottom of the recto warns, “But then, without thinking…” On the next spread, there is excellent contrast in the art: A field of aquamarine backgrounds a large rhinoceros—clad in a red-and-white shirt and blue overalls—who tosses a candy wrapper behind its bulky shoulder. Rhino’s assertion that “It’s only one” is the beginning of Sunnyville’s quick downward trend from lovely to most unpleasant. Other animals follow Rhino’s bad example until the village is trashed. After Giraffe has picked “only one” flower and Penguin blasts out “only one” song on a portable Victrola, Sunnyville has plummeted dangerously. Can Mouse turn things around with one small, kind action? Giraffe is male, Mouse female, others unassigned. Repetition, onomatopoeia, short phrases, and excellent art and design make this a great read-aloud for the very young. The story is followed by sweet (but probably not attention-holding) tips on being a good neighbor.

Who says morality tales can’t be fun? (author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book. 3-5)

BRICKS
Cotton, Katie
Illus. by Freeman, Tor
Andersen Press USA (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-72841-578-9

A greedy pig gets a big comeuppance after shortchanging artisans building his new home.

After coming into a fortune, Pig makes plans for a home that befits his new wealth. He enlists a cat, a dog, and a hen to do the work, enthusiastically promising four gold coins for the build-out. Pig’s modest brick home (echoing, of course, “The Three Little Pigs”) is not enough; he demands more and more until the hardworking animals have built a huge mansion. When Pig is finally happy, he gives them four gold coins to share, not four coins each, throwing in another two as a bonus. The unhappy crew returns at night to take half of the home, literally (“Fair is fair,” is an ongoing refrain), leaving the structure to wobble and fall on Pig, all 7,000 bricks of it. Most surprising: The collapse kills Pig. The End.

The chickens need a night light, but they are ready to sleep. Farmer Brown sings to him, reads to him, does yoga with him, turns out the “cow light,” and the sheep light, and the “sheep light,” and they start snoozing. Most surprising: The collapse kills Pig. The End.

A book to teach kindergartners not to swindle home-building contractors, in case they need that. (Picture book. 4-9)

THE ENDANGEREDS
Cousteau, Philippe & Aslan, Austin
Illus. by Madsen, James
HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-06-289416-8

Join the Endangereds, a team of hyperintelligent mammals, as they protect animals around the world. When Nukilik, a polar bear, is captured by humans and taken to the Ark, a facility dedicated to protecting the planet’s most endangered species, all she can think about is reuniting with her lost mother. But when her body and mind go “hyper,” Nukilik is faced with a dilemma: Should she pursue her wish to return to her mother or work with the Endangereds, who use technology along with their extreme intellect and physical prowess? Told in the third person, the narrative shifts between Nukilik and other members of the Endangereds, including a wisecracking, tech-hacking narwhal; a scrappy, agile African pangolin; and their leader, a wise orangutan. Exaggerated, character traits and a complex plot contribute to the appealing concept of hyperintelligent animals engaging in heistlike rescues. However, frequent, lengthy, overly complex action sequences slow rather than accelerate the narrative. Heaps of information about geography, climate change, humanity’s impact on animals, and species reintroduction is shared, appealing to readers who are interested in these subjects but possibly not engaging others. The introduction of an unnamed villain in the final chapter hints at future entries. A handful of grayscale illustrations highlight moments of high drama. Human characters are primarily described in terms of sex and height, making ethnicity difficult to determine.

Readers committed to animal rights may find solidarity in this educational adventure. (Fiction. 8-12)

CLICK, CLACK, GOOD NIGHT
Cronin, Doreen
Illus. by Lewin, Betsy
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5344-5108-7

Series: Click Clack Book

Will Duck ever get some shut-eye? “It is nighttime on the farm. / Everyone is tired. / It is time to relax, / unwind, and unplug.” Farmer Brown turns out the “cow light,” and the cows nestle down to sleep in the dark. He gives the sheep a brush, turns out the “sheep light,” and they start snoozing. The chickens need a night light, but they are ready to sleep too. Ever the contrarian, Duck, of course, needs some coaxing. Farmer Brown sings to him, reads to him, does yoga with him, even reads and discusses the top news stories of the day… but when Duck’s light goes out, Duck can’t sleep. (Farmer Brown is zonked in his rocker.) Duck tries sleeping with each of the
other groups of farm animals, but no situation is exactly right. Duck finds a nice place under a tree—but “Chit, chat, chitter”. The bats keep him awake. By the pond, the frogs keep him up. Duck knows a good place to sleep...so when the elderly White farmer finally makes his way to bed, he finds he has a bunkmate. Some may be surprised this duo hasn’t done a good-night book before now; this will satisfy fans and work as a bedtime story for anyone who doesn’t know the series (if such exists). (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-15.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 71.3% of actual size.)

Bucolic bedtime done right. (Picture book. 2-6)

Various animal species affirm that no one is better than another. “We are all equal,” each page of this simple book proclaims; three lines follow, rhyming in an abc pattern and reflecting the differences between the two kinds of animals on the page, the second one of which segues to the next double-page spread. A panda speaks to a monkey, the monkey to penguins, and so on. The text makes explicit references to human differences that are often judged. Immigration is addressed: “You’ve crossed land and sea. / This country’s your home now, / it’s for you and me.” So are marriage equality (two un-antlered deer rub noses: “Our love we decide. / We can get married, / no love is denied”), body shaming, and income inequality; among others. The illustrations feature smiling, friendly animals getting along with different species; all join together on the last page, declaring joyously, “We share hopes and dreams. / We’re equal and proud.” The cadence stumbles in some places, making it slightly awkward to read aloud. The expressive illustrations make up for the lackluster text; as a whole, the book is engaging enough to confirm messages of equality for very young children. However, the use of animal characters in this indirect didacticism dilutes the importance of acknowledging power dynamics among different human groups and cannot replace wide and varied exposure to human characters of all kinds. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-15.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 74.1% of actual size.)

Reach for books that show the people being referenced instead. (Picture book. 3-6)

Juan is really nervous. Field day is different from other days—it is too loud, and there are too many people.

What should he do when he gets the jitters? Count? Sort? Clap them away? His teacher has a solution; instead of a strictly athletic event, it will be the “Mathletic Games,” since math is Juan’s favorite subject. Also, Juan will be the judge. His classmates organize geometric manipulatives by shape and color, and Juan gets to judge who advances to the next challenge. As the day progresses, he claps when he is unsure of himself. After the awards ceremony, everyone cheers Juan as being the real winner, and Juan joins in the clapping. While the story is commendably respectful of Juan and his challenges, Cruz’s tale of autism and inclusivity, expressed in the marketing, falls short of expectations. Whereas a good deal of effort is expended to highlight the protagonist’s coping mechanisms, there is no mention of autism itself within the story. Many people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder exhibit repetitive behaviors that overlap with OCD, and without pointing out these shared behaviors, the result is confusion rather than clarification. The complete absence of backmatter or even resource links compounds this. Yamamoto’s bright, straightforward illustrations portray racially and culturally diverse students and a teacher who presents as Asian; Juan has brown skin. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8-by-16-inch double-page spreads viewed at actual size.)

A well-intentioned but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to encouraging inclusion and understanding of neurodiversity. (Picture book. 4-8)

Two tweens face down interdimensional interlopers. In the 31st century, Phineas T. Fogg, heir to the Fogg-Bolus Hypergate and Baked Beans Corporation, lives a luxurious, exceedingly safe, and totally isolated life. While his overprotective parents gallivant around the known universe, Phin sits alone in a skyscraper atop the radioactive remnants of Newark, New Jersey. Back in 21st-century Newark, Lola Ray has been taking care of her Momma and two younger sisters and stanning Dimension Y, her favorite TV show, since
Fun rhyming text and bright, easily decoded, whimsical illustrations with plenty of white space make it a winning read-aloud.

IF I HAD A UNICORN

Snow is falling. Oscar the dog is ready for Matt, the White boy he lives with, to take him on a walk. Matt promises to do so later, but Oscar runs off. At a pond thick with ice, he meets Daisy, another dog so excited to be outside that she runs from the brown-skinned girl who had been holding her leash. With the action often divided into panels to accelerate the book’s pace, the dogs run and play vigorously in the snow. When Matt—now out of the house, looking for Oscar—and the girl finally locate their pets, they become fast friends, like their two dogs. The story is a pet-centric one: The dogs take the focus, and they don’t have owners. Instead, Matt is referred to as “[Oscar’s] boy,” and Daisy yelps, “My girl!” as she licks the girl’s face. Dog lovers may get a kick out of the way in which the dialogue is written: The dogs’ barks are translated, if you will, into English: “Let’s ice-skate!” yelps Daisy, and “Let’s build an igloo!” barks Oscar (a task they accomplish with ease with neither tools nor thumbs).

The story is a pet-centric one: The dogs take the focus, and they don’t have owners. Instead, Matt is referred to as “[Oscar’s] boy,” and Daisy yelps, “My girl!” as she licks the girl’s face. Dog lovers may get a kick out of the way in which the dialogue is written: “Let’s ice-skate!” yelps Daisy, and “Let’s build an igloo!” barks Oscar (a task they accomplish with ease with neither tools nor thumbs).

More style than substance. (Informational picture book. 6-10)

A Joyous, Wintry Read. (Picture book. 3-7)


A Promising Series Debut. (Science fiction. 9-13)

SNOW FRIENDS

Caylor, Margery
Illus. by Hillenbrand, Will
Christy Ottaviano/Henry Holt (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-250-17131-3

When boisterous pet dogs inadvertently play matchmaker for two children, a friendship is forged.

The skater’s (actually a skateboarder, a light-skinned woman) character approaches a STEM trade is the “nerd” hunched over a laptop and carrying a bag of comic books.

More Style Than Substance. (Informational picture book. 6-10)

THE WHO’S WHO OF GROWN-UPS

Jobs, Hobbies and the Tools It Takes
Davey, Owen
Illus. by the author
Little Gestalten (96 pp.)
$24.95 | Nov. 24, 2020
978-3-89955-149-5

Learn (some of) the tools of (some of) the trade(s).

Bold poster-like illustrations work in tandem across each oversized double-page spread to define a selection of tools used by a variety of professions and hobbies, both real and fantastical. The verso page highlights from three to eight items commonly used by each profession while the recto page presents a practitioner accoutered with the depicted items and accessories. The people represent a range of skin tones, ages, and sizes, and the jobs and hobbies are equally diverse, ranging from astronaut to superhero. The professions are not arranged in any apparent order, which makes each page turn a bit of a surprise. Equally surprising are the tools selected for each profession: The skater’s (actually a skateboarder, a light-skinned woman) do not include a helmet but do include other safety gear while the fisherman (a White, bearded old salt) is depicted with no actual tools at all. It certainly is visually interesting, but it’s disappointingly reliant on the stereotype and will probably do little to encourage creative thought. Although there is gender and racial diversity on display, Davey disrupts too few preconceived roles: The pilot looks like a White man, as do the scientist and the conductor; the boxer is a hulking Black man. The only Black character approaching a STEM trade is the “nerd” hunched over a laptop and carrying a bag of comic books.

More Style Than Substance. (Informational picture book. 6-10)
recognize from other fairy tales and stories, and they will have fun with some of the very clever rhymes in which the illustrations do double duty as rebuses by representing missing text.

Readers learn that unicorns “favorite food is ice cream, / vanilla just one scoop. / I think they do a multicolored, / unicorny...”, a turn of the page reveals the missing rhyming word. Hint: It starts with the letter P and will have preschoolers in gales of giggles. This story is an excellent lap read, and the fun rhyming text and bright, easily decoded, whimsical illustrations with plenty of white space also make it a winning read-aloud. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.5-by-18.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 75% of actual size.)

Children will enjoy the experience of reading this book again and again, noticing something new each time. (Picture book. 4-8)

**THE JOY IN YOU**

Deeley, Cat with Baker, Laura
Illus. by Butcher, Rosie
Random House (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-593-18141-6

A parent koala encourages its child to engage in every pursuit, and so do several other animals.

The British celebrity author, host of both children’s and adult TV programs, has a very positive message to spread, but there is nothing original in the lightweight text. The many animal characters pictured in diverting, fuzzy-edged illustrations engage in various activities as the text encourages them. “You can sing! If you love to sing, sing. / Shout at the top of your lungs, or whisper soft and sweet.” On verso, a frog quartet harmonizes while, across the gutter, a lion is shown with open mouth roaring as a small bird presumably whispers. Using rhyme and alliteration but without real poetic consistency, lines such as these appear: “You can share. You can care. You can create. You can appear as children of color in a timeless setting; as constellations, their human silhouettes are filled in with shimmering blue, purple, and black, shot through with glittering stars. The visual pacing of the illustrations contrasts spreads bursting with jewel-toned colors and exuberant movement with pages featuring speech-bubble dialogue spotlighted in a sea of black. As humans, the friends appear as children of color in a timeless setting; as constellations, their human silhouettes are filled in with shimmering blue, purple, and black, shot through with glittering stars. Readers will be thrilled to learn from the author’s note that Acamar really is a star within the constellation Eridanus, and Denos provides some resources for those who want to learn more.

Get lost in the stars in this gorgeous tale of friendship and astronomy. (Picture book. 5-10)

**STARCROSSED**

Denos, Julia
Illus. by the author
HMH Books (64 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 27, 2020
978-0-358-15395-5

Stars and wishes intertwine in this celestial friendship tale.

Eridani, a human girl, loves to look up at the night sky to see and talk to her best friend, Acamar, a constellation of a boy. During the day, Eridani poros over sky maps and star plots as she works on celestial school projects. But studying the stars will never be the same as being up in the stars like Acamar. Eridani silently wishes she could trade her blood and bones for space and stars. At the same time, Acamar quietly yearns to feel his feet on the sand. The expertly paced, lyrical third-person narration creates an otherworldly atmosphere for this long-form picture book. The texts of the first and second halves of the story mirror each other, further highlighting the special connection between the friends. Illustrations are awash in textures, some splattered, some brushed, some drawn, visually expanding the ethereal world created by the text. The visual pacing of the illustrations contrasts spreads bursting with jewel-toned colors and exuberant movement with pages featuring speech-bubble dialogue spotlighted in a sea of black. As humans, the friends appear as children of color in a timeless setting; as constellations, their human silhouettes are filled in with shimmering blue, purple, and black, shot through with glittering stars. Readers will be thrilled to learn from the author’s note that Acamar really is a star within the constellation Eridanus, and Denos provides some resources for those who want to learn more.

Kindness is delicious.

Dexter and twin sister Leah are often at odds, with Leah frequently trying to one-up him. Their parents are preparing a dinner party, and Papa asks them to get eggs from Ms. Marvis, their neighbor. When she invites them in, Dexter observes her house is quiet, empty. Returning home, Dexter mentions this, and the siblings agree Ms. Marvis should come to the party. She regales guests with tales of her long-ago life in Poland and the tradition of making jelly doughnuts there. The next day, the twins help make the luscious pastries and deposit a bag at their neighbor’s door. Additionally, Dexter and Leah build a “snow family” in Ms.
Marvis’ yard as “company.” These acts of kindness also serve to disrupt the twins’ squabbling habits. Ms. Marvis’ thank-you letter to the kids for all their kindness follows. In a rushed ending, her missive makes them grateful for their relationship and their doughnut-making skills. This well-meaning tale imparts valuable messages about concern for others, but the writing is stiff and expository. The serviceable, flat, cartoonish illustrations feature mostly White protagonists—there are two Black party guests. Ms. Marvis is depicted as an older, gray-haired, bespectacled woman with a cane. Guided-reading ideas for adults to use with kids precede the story; the backmatter includes kindness-sharing tips.

A merely so-so story about thoughtfulness; not as sweet as the titular treats. (Picture book. 4-8)

**THE LEGEND OF THE FIRST UNICORN**

*Don, Lari*  
*Illus. by Ilinic, Nataša*  
*Kelpies (36 pp.)*  
*$17.95 | Sep. 29, 2020  
978-1-78250-647-8*

A clever girl’s efforts to win the smile of a Scottish prince lead to the origin of the unicorn.

When Prince Donald loses his smile, everyone in Scotland tries to help, but not one of the parties held, cakes baked, songs written, or fountains carved in his honor coaxes a smile. Hoping to amuse the prince with a new magical creature, the court magician mixes “fur and feathers, scales and claws,” but the resulting beast proves too frightening. Meanwhile, the magician’s granddaughter Hana invents her own special creature with a horse’s body, goat’s hooves, and a gazelle’s horn. She calls her creature a “unicorn.” When Prince Donald sees the beautiful unicorn, he can’t resist following it into the woods, where he and Hana eventually discover the magician’s banished beast, a winged lion with a scaly tail, fiercely attacking the gentle unicorn. As Donald helps the unicorn fight the beast, Hana relies on magic to transform the creature into a cat, a wren, and a lizard, saving the day. But will this earn her a smile from Prince Donald?

A likely pick for ubiquitous unicorn fans. (author’s note)  
(Picture book. 5-8)

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**CROSSINGS**

*Extraordinary Structures for Extraordinary Animals*  
*Duffield, Katy S.*  
*Illus. by Orodan, Mike*  
*Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)*  
*$18.99 | Oct. 13, 2020  
978-1-5344-6579-4*

All over the world, humans build crossings to allow wildlife to pass freely over, under, across, and through busy highways.

Overpasses, underpasses, even rope bridges are the focus of this intriguing informational picture book. Duffield offers 12 examples of animal passages built for regular use or seasonal migration. A particularly nice touch is the map at the end, a shadowy map of continents with each animal appropriately placed and a few more facts about their situations. Elephants, pangolins, red crabs, koalas, squirrel gliders, and blue penguins come from the Eastern Hemisphere; elk, black bears, spotted salamanders, coyotes, panthers, and titi monkeys from the Western. Clean, crisp illustrations on double-page spreads show well, making this a good choice for a group read-aloud. There’s a two-level text, a simple sentence in a large font stating animal, crossing technology, and location, the smaller paragraphs providing further information about planning, specialized building, and uses. One early spread focuses on construction, showing a gender- and racially diverse human team and several big machines—drawing in readers and listeners more interested in equipment than animals. The story in pictures is nicely rounded, beginning with a question about the fate of a mother panther and her cub facing a car on a highway and ending with mother and cub safe on a cliff high above it. Readers can see the arching bridge that made that possible. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-22-inch double-page spreads viewed at 85.5% of actual size.)

An unusual focus on one way humans and animals can coexist in our world. (bibliography) (Informational picture book. 3-7)

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**A GARDEN IN YOUR BELLY**

*Meet the Microbes in Your Gut*  
*D’yans, Masha*  
*Illus. by the author*  
*Millbrook/Lerner (32 pp.)*  
*$19.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-5415-7840-1*

An attractive primer about the human microbiome.

The nature metaphor begins with the “river” flowing—one’s intestine. This river has tight “folds and turns,” but if it were stretched out “it would be ten times as tall as you are!” It feeds and supports the “garden in your belly.” Tiny, glee-
ful, googly-eyed microorganisms fill the page. But as one partic-
ularly astute microbe asks, “Where does your garden come from?” D’yans explains how humans collect new microbes
with everything they touch or eat. The blobby, kaleidoscopic creatures with wide, inviting eyes appear sweet and safe. Then they settle in to become a garden, blooming and growing (and yes, even sleeping). D’Yans stresses the importance of having a variety in one’s garden—the microbes all have different shapes and hues, swaying amid the intestinal river. The actual job of a microbe is tricky to explain: “Your garden microorganisms put out fires and take the garbage out. Sometimes they have adventures and strange encounters. / They can even influence your thoughts and feelings.” D’Yans encourages healthy habits: exercise, fresh air, water, and healthy foods to keep one’s garden strong. If bad microbes take over, the river becomes polluted—sickly greens and purples bubble up in the illustrations, and the microbes turn darker with large teeth and pointed features. Further exploration into the microbiome is appended. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.875-inch double-page spreads viewed at 22.5% of actual size.)

A gentle look deep inside. (glossary, facts) (Informational picture book. 3-7)

**LOST IN THE COCKPIT COUNTRY**
Elm, Billy
Blouse & Skirt Books (148 pp.)

$8.99 paper | Oct. 15, 2020
978-976-8267-31-3

A young boy gets lost and then kidnapped on a school trip to Jamaica’s Cockpit Country.

High schooler Kemar McBayne is looking forward to the school’s Ecology Club trip, along with his older brother, Oshane, and his younger brother, Tyrik, who’s only 10. His contentious relationship with his little brother causes trouble when an act of mischief on Tyrik’s part almost immediately leads to Kemar’s separation from the group. Unable to make his way back to them, he is later found and befriended by a stranger who turns out to have ulterior motives and holds Kemar hostage in the notoriously difficult-to-navigate Cockpit Country. Kemar decides to try to figure out a way to escape his captor and return to his family. At the same time, Oshane is determined to find his brother despite the others’ support, eventually enlisting the help of one of the region’s Maroon communities in order to track him down. Elm includes interesting, detailed aspects of Jamaican geography and culture that help readers visualize the characters’ experiences. However, this aspect of the novel is not enough to make up for jumpy pacing and storytelling that fails to build suspense or create attachment to the characters or plot. Characters are mostly Black, with some secondary characters mentioned as having pale skin and foreign accents.

**Rushed pacing and ineffective character development keep the story from living up to its potential. (Adventure 8-12)**

**FOR WHICH WE STAND: How Our Government Works and Why It Matters**
Foster, Jeff
Illus. by McLaughlin, Julie
Scholastic (176 pp.)

$12.99 paper | $24.99 PLB | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-338-64308-4
978-1-338-64309-1 PLB

Seekers of essential information about the basics of government and political processes will find this handbook informative.

Foster, an AP government teacher at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, explains the functions and branches of the federal government, political parties, the electoral process, and the different responsibilities of city, state, and federal governments. Brief explanations of the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation follow along with a thorough description of the Constitution. Foster explains in simple, accessible language each article, the Bill of Rights, and other amendments. Informative discussions of the pros and cons of the Electoral College, how interest groups affect legislation, voter suppression, and gerrymandering further deepen readers’ understanding. In the chapter on the Supreme Court, Foster lists only five significant cases, which can’t help but give this section an arbitrary feel. Brown v. Board of Education is included but not Plessy v. Ferguson; Miranda v. Arizona is listed but not Gideon v. Wainwright; and Roe v. Wade is surprisingly absent. The final chapter encourages civic engagement and offers advice on how to become involved in the political process, using the March for Our Lives campaign as an example. Each spread features an appealing mix of black-and-white and full-color art, and infographics, charts, maps, and political caricatures provide further design variation. Glossary terms are highlighted in yellow. There are no suggestions for further reading—an unfortunate oversight.

An appealing, accessible civics primer. (timeline, glossary) (Nonfiction. 8-12)

**PRINCESS ARABELLA AT THE MUSEUM**
Freeman, Mylo
Illus. by the author
Cassava Republic Press (32 pp.)

$16.95 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-913175-06-1

In Freeman’s latest Princess Arabella book, this young Black princess gives her royal friends a tour of her very own museum.

Unlike the Louvre, Princess Arabella’s museum seems to attract more children than adults, features many hands-on exhibits, and displays art that relates to the princess’s family. Portraits of Princess Arabella and her mother attract the attention of her regal friends because both have blue faces.

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An appealing, accessible civics primer. (timeline, glossary) (Nonfiction. 8-12)
A refreshing and timely reminder that disagreement can—and should—be productive.

**SMALL HISTORY OF A DISAGREEMENT**

Fuentes S., Claudia  
Illus. by Lyon, Gabriela  
Trans. by Amado, Elisa  
Aldana Libros/Greystone Kids (56 pp.)  
$19.95 | Oct. 27, 2020  
978-1-77164-797-6

How to disagree effectively, courtesy of Chile by way of Canada.

When a group of upper-elementary-aged students comes back to school after a holiday, they are surprised to see the beginnings of construction in their schoolyard. Then they find out that the 300-year-old monkey puzzle tree (a species native to Chile and Argentina) in the schoolyard is slated to be cut down to make way for a new school building that will house new classrooms, a computer lab, and science laboratories. Some of the kids begin to advocate for the protection of the tree, saying it is a protected species and a link to the Indigenous people of the region; others argue for the development and the improvements it will bring to the school. After back-and-forth protests, the history teacher suggests holding a debate. The students agree and prepare and present their arguments. After the debate they decide the next step is to hold a vote. After vigorous campaigning, voting day comes and…it's a tie. Now what? The answer is a relevant lesson in these divisive times. This well-told story, translated from Spanish, takes a forthright look at disagreement and resolution while empowering its readership by featuring school-age children (illustrated with various skin tones and hairstyles) as its protagonists. The illustrations work effectively in a supporting role with their low-key, muted palette, clear settings, and contemporary, consistently rendered youngsters.

**SHORT & SWEET**

Funk, Josh  
Illus. by Kearney, Brendan  
Sterling Children’s Books (40 pp.)  
$16.95 | Sep. 1, 2020  
978-1-4549-3427-1  
Series: Lady Pancake & Sir French Toast, 4

A technological treatment goes awry for these fan favorites, creating monstrously good fun.

When Sir French Toast and Lady Pancake start to turn green with decay (gasp!), a new treatment offered by Professor Biscotti malfunctions, turning them into children. Baron von Waffle, their enemy-turned-friend from previous episodes, is struck with remorse for recommending the procedure and turns tampering with nature. But the shrunken versions of Toast and Pancake do not remember him. Thinking he is a monster, they run away over various obstacles made of other foods. In this fourth installment of the adventures of these clever fridge friends, the syncopated text shines, building the suspense and pace with rhyming couplets. The illustrations continue their gastronomic creativity, with Fjords of Farfalle and Brains and buildings created out of everyday foodstuffs for each picture. In the end, Waffle cooks up a sweet solution for returning the shrunken Toast and Pancake to normal. The underlying theme about fixing problems one has created is subtle, and forgiveness reigns among the entire royal cast. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.3-by-16.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 57.1% of actual size.)

**NOW I’M A BIRD**

Ganz-Schmitt, Sue  
Illus. by Metallinou, Renia  
Whitman (32 pp.)  
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2020  
978-0-8075-2329-2

It starts with a few feathers, but by summer’s end Julianna has full body plumage.

Her parents support her, love her, and tell her she’s beautiful and unique. They even contact other parents, telling them of Julianna’s “rare and beautiful condition” and asking them to discuss it with their children. But there are stares, endless questions, avoidance, and outright bullying. Even children who had been her friends isolate her. She feels better when she flies, but soon she realizes that she is still alone. When she speaks...
SNOOZAPALOOZA
Gard, Kimberlee
Illus. by Mineker, Vivian
Familius (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-64170-255-3

Ten forest critters hibernate in the same winter den, producing one massive “snoozapalooza.”

A mouse curls up in a “wee-sized heap” in a cozy winter den, snoring, sleeping, dozing, and dreaming in a “snoozapalooza.” He’s joined by a snail, and the two snuggle in a “tiny heap,” snoring, sleeping, dozing, and dreaming. A mole tunnels into the den, becoming the third creature in the “little heap.” A weary chipmunk appears as the fourth snoring, sleeping animal in the “bigger heap.” A hedgehog makes it a “growing heap” of seven. The arrival of a skunk settles into the “mighty heap” of eight, and a badger increases the “giant heap” to nine. Finally, a bear squeezes into the now “massive heap” of snoring, sleeping, dozing, and dreaming denizens. Their combined, prodigious snoring eventually frightens and bewilders 10 other woodland critters, prompting them to mount a massive wake-up chorus. Relying on repetition—but for the number (rendered as a numeral) and the adjective, many stanzas are identical—and rhyme, the text of this clever counting book gradually builds into a “snoozapalooza” as each new creature joins the snoring heap. Working with simple, readily identifiable shapes, the fancifully colorful, comic illustrations visually reinforce the growth concept, with the increasing size of each creature added to the expanding mass of hilariously intertwined, hibernating bodies.

Guaranteed to tickle and delight while reinforcing counting skills. (Picture book 3-7)
inches wide—gives a sense of sweeping panoramas. One particularly effective spread demands a 90-degree turn of the book to fully appreciate the staircase the girls ascend. Veda and Doma’s journey is punctuated with recognizable landmarks (e.g., the Bandra-Worli Sea Link bridge), making this an excellent book for the armchair traveler as well.

Readers who’ve never been to Mumbai will want to visit while those who love it will smile. (Picture book. 4-6)

GINGER AND CHRYSANTHEMUM
Giang, Kristen Mai
Illus. by Chan, Shirley
Levine Querido (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-64614-001-5

Cousins with opposite temperaments learn to work together to celebrate Grandma’s birthday.

In this picture book, Ginger and Chrysanthemum are “as close as two beans in a pod,” even as they diverge in their preparations for Grandma’s party, to be held at her restaurant. Excitable Ginger is spontaneous in getting dressed and in her shopping impulses. Calm Chrysanthemum’s planning is so comprehensive and precise that she itemizes “give present” and “have fun!” on her to-do list. Upon arriving at Grandma’s New Asian Kitchen and volunteering to make her birthday cake, the girls nearly fail at their joint task because Ginger dismisses Grandma’s recipe as “just a fancy list.” Her mishaps inspire quick thinking and a green-tea substitute, and together, the cousins create a surprising cake that Grandma loves. Plot, setting, and context suggest the girls and Grandma are of Chinese descent. Describing the warm-versus-cool essences of foods according to Chinese traditional belief, the author demonstrates complementary forces striking a balance, as personified by protagonists named after edible plants. Reminiscent of poster art and comic sketches from another era, the illustrations embody a hint of nostalgia. Readers familiar with Chinese cultural motifs will recognize a twist in the design of the jade pendant the girls select as a gift: Instead of its traditional association with weddings, here it may reference the “double happiness” the two girls bring Grandma.

A sweet story spiced with cultural humor and life lessons. (author’s note) (Picture book. 5-8)

FLORENCE AND HER FANTASTIC FAMILY TREE
Gilliam, Judy
Illus. by Addari, Laura
Familius (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-64170-250-8

A child in a large, blended family worries about a family-tree assignment.

Florence’s narration clearly conveys her anxiety when her teacher tells the class to “just create a family tree.” Florence’s family once included only her mom, dad, and brother (who, like Florence, appear White in Addari’s muted, low-contrast illustrations), but not anymore. She explains that her parents divorced and remarried, after which new siblings, including an adoptive sibling who appears Asian, enter the fold. Some readers may balk at the frequent, unquestioning use of the term “half-brothers” to refer to Florence’s siblings (who seem to be children of color) born to her father and his wife and “half-sister” to refer to the child her mother and her second husband adopted, since it can be seen as diminishing sibling relationships. Undiminished, however, are stepparent roles. When Florence’s dad divorces his second wife and they both remarry, Florence affirms her connection to her first stepmother by sharing whom she remarries. “If you’re still counting, that’s six parents,” says Florence, still trying to complete her assignment. The solution is just to make an enormous tree that uses up lots of paper and takes up lots of classroom wall space. It’s an anticlimactic, if affirming, conclusion that frustratingly leaves open the question of whether any of Florence’s classmates had similar concerns about the assignment.

A needed topic but not a fantastic treatment, title notwithstanding. (Picture book. 5-8)

RISE OF THE SLUGS
Gilligan, Paul
Illus. by the author
Henry Holt (288 pp.)
$13.99 | Aug. 25, 2020
978-1-250-17136-8
Series: King of the Mole People, 2

Can underachiever Doug Underbelly save his school’s Springtime in Paris dance from a thorough sliming by giant slugs? Should he?

Reflecting with superfluous (nigh on monotonous) regularity that his life is weird, Doug not only finds himself still stuck being King of the Mole People (2019) who dwell beneath the spooky old house he shares with his single dad, but somehow put in charge of the dance committee along with drooly, burned-out teacher Miss Chips. The latter gig rapidly devolves into a slippery slope—both literally, after an army of subterranean Slug People in search of eggs stolen by a pretentious STEM-winding bully convert the school’s gymnasium to a
Deceptively simple, this graphic novel’s straightforward sentences, limited color scheme, and thick black outlines make this a perfect match for newly independent readers.

KING OF THE BIRDS

“gym-nausium,” and figuratively, as Doug winds up at the end in a slow dance with “licorice-haired, ping-pong–eyed” sidekick Magda. Fortunately, Doug can enlist not only eager Mole People, but slime- (and ice cream–) eating Mushroom Folk to help with a rapid cleanup. Along with plenty of muck and ooey-gooey characters with monikers like “Hurk” and “Burf” (“Your names all really do sound like bodily function sounds,” comments Doug with characteristic lack of forethought), Gilligan plugs in plenty of Wimpy Kid–style ink-and-fill drawings with punching and wordless reaction shots. The human figures are all paper white in the illustrations and, from clueless adults to cliquey students, typecast.

Labored but successful effort to echo the opener’s low-bar appeal. (Fantasy. 7-12)

THESAURUS HAS A SECRET

Glazer, Anya
Illus. by the author
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-06-291605-1

What’s this dinosaur’s guilty pleasure? Mum’s the word.

Though he acts like a regular dinosaur (“just with a wider vocabulary”), what Thesaurus—a blunt-nosed, turquoise sauropod in Glazer’s simple cartoon illustrations—likes best is to sneak off into the bushes…with a book. He actually has stacks of them, which is odd because (believe it or not) dinosaurs really aren’t natural readers. But his long-held secret is revealed when he suddenly realizes that he’s been unconsciously reading Pterosaur Pan—aloud—and drawn, instead of general mockery, a fascinated audience: “What happens next?” “Carry on!” “I like the part with the crocodile.” Dovetailing nicely with its salutary messages about the pleasures of words and reading (and reading aloud), the art is festooned with appropriate or playfully altered classics, from The Phantom Tollbooth and Where the Wild Things Are to Allosaurus’s Adventures in Wonderland, Five Children and Itchyboyosaur, Make Way for Hatchlings, and (adding at least a whiff of diversity to the mix) One Hundred and Fifty Million Years of Solitude. If Thesaurus’ literary appetites aren’t exactly broad, diverse, or expansive, his trove does offer at least a starter list with wide age appeal for reading alone or aloud.

A wash of wordplay: jaunty, jolly, jocund, not to mention Jurassic. (Picture book. 6-8)

KING OF THE BIRDS

Gravel, Elise
Illus. by the author
HarperAlley (64 pp.)
$12.99 | $7.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-06-298221-6
978-0-06-298222-3 paper
Series: Arlo & Pips, 1

Two birds become fine feathered friends in this early graphic novel.

Arlo is a cocky crow confident that there is “no greater bird than... / ME. THE CROW, king of the feathered world.” Pips is a small yellow bird who poses questioning holes in Arlo’s bravado. Arlo doesn’t mind Pips’ frank queries, seeing them as an opportunity to show off his skills, and throughout the book the two maintain an amicable relationship. There is a thin plotline in which Pips shows Arlo around the city where Pips lives, and the two take a trip to the beach, but the real driving energy is the relationship between the two and the opportunities for gentle humor their interactions provide. Through Pips’ inquisitiveness and Arlo’s desire to prove himself, readers also learn much about the intelligence, diet, and behavior of crows. Relevant fun facts about crows are interwoven throughout the book, often in casual and easily accessible footnotes that provide informational context to Arlo’s self-aggrandizing claims. Deceptively simple, this graphic novel’s straightforward sentences, limited color scheme, and thick black outlines make this a perfect match for newly independent readers. Both fans of Gravel’s previous work and newcomers alike will be delighted.

A charming treasure. (Graphic fiction. 6-10)

RED FOX ROAD

Greenslade, Frances
Puffin/Penguin Random House Canada (248 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-7352-6781-7

A hazardous choice on a family trip generates cascading events that leave a teen struggling to survive in the Oregon wilderness.

Unlike her father, 13-year-old Francie and her mother enjoy hiking. During the family’s drive from Penticton, British Columbia, to the Grand Canyon, Dad opts for a shortcut that his new GPS indicates should cut 100 miles from their trip. Mom’s doubts—his road’s not on her paper map—prove justified as the road grows rougher and night approaches. Francie reads her survival guidebook and maps until a rock takes out their truck. Making the best of things—they’ve got camping gear, though little food and no cellphone (her parents don’t like them)—they spend a night in the vast, beautiful forest. The next morning, Dad sets off on a re-scramble of their tent and the GPS. As days of waiting pass, Mom—mentally unstable since Francie’s twin sister died from a congenital heart...
defect—starts behaving erratically. Francie copes with her own fear by planning and preparing for contingencies. She’ll need all her hard-won knowledge as challenges mount. Resourceful, doggedly careful, courageous Francie brightens this often somber tale. As she’s recovering from a scary bear encounter, the clear night sky enchants her. Her love and respect for the wilderness, its plants and denizens who are simply trying—like her—to survive, shine. Francie and her parents are White.

Rendered with exquisite sensory detail, this hero’s journey is a resonant read for unsettling times. (Fiction. 10-14)

**BIONIC BEASTS**

*Saving Animal Lives With Artificial Flippers, Legs, and Beaks*

Gutiérrez, Jolene

Millbrook/Lerner (48 pp.)

$31.99 paper | $31.99 PLB | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-5415-8940-7

Gutiérrez profiles five “bionic beasts,” animals whose prosthetic body parts help them to function.

Matter-of-factly, she introduces three animals that each have only three legs: Lola, a Kemp’s ridley sea turtle from Texas; Mosha, an Asian elephant from Myanmar; and Cassidy, a German shepherd from New York. Pirate, a Berkshire-Tamworth pig from Vancouver Island, has a deformed leg; Vitória, a greylag goose from Brazil, lacks a beak. The animals struggled to move or eat until veterinarians, designers, and doctors teamed up to create innovative prostheses and orthoses. The prostheses’ complex design processes are clearly described. Sidebars provide animal facts and highlight various rescue organizations; the book’s bright yellow and green color scheme complements the accompanying color photos. Though technology is the primary focus, the author acknowledges political and environmental issues in the animals’ habitats, such as ongoing civil wars in Myanmar and oceans cluttered with plastic waste. Activities follow each profile. Some attempt to mimic the teams’ challenges by constructing mock prostheses from household items and exploring strengths and weaknesses of various designs. Others edge problematically into disability simulation, such as imitating Pirate’s walk “to understand how Pirate feels” without his orthosis; though well-meaning, the exercise risks encouraging pity for similarly disabled humans and feels incongruous with other, inclusive instructions: “if you are able”; “or observe a friend.” (This book was reviewed digitally with 10- by 16-inch double-page spreads viewed at 69.1% of actual size.)

Scientifically inclined readers will enjoy this in-depth application of STEM to disabled animals. (glossary, notes, bibliography, resources, index) (Nonfiction. 10-12)

**50 MAPS OF THE WORLD**

*Explore the Globe With 50 Fact-Filled Maps!*

Handicott, Ben & Ryan, Katya

Illus. by Linero, Sol

Wide Eyed Editions (112 pp.)

$30.00 | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-78603-640-7

A new atlas for a new generation.

Trivia and cartography lovers should prepare for an explosion of facts and geography as they armchair-travel through 50 different countries. Sprinkled liberally across each page is a plethora of notable moments, monuments, people who lived in that region, and key facts. The opening pages remind readers

Louisa May Alcott would approve.
Deep in an Indian jungle, a lonely tiger longs for friends. Although he claims to be friendly, Tiger's sharp claws, huge teeth, and fearsome growl scare off his fellow creatures. All this changes when Tiger discovers a drum left beneath a sal tree. Tiger doesn't know what the drum is—it's a human invention, after all—but notices that when he taps it with his tail, it makes a delightful rum pum pum sound. Carrying his new, rhythmic "friend" with him, Tiger wanders through the forest. Before long, the drum's rum pum pum attracts a monkey, a rhinoceros, a parrot, a chameleon, and an elephant, all of whom layer their own, distinctive sounds over the beat of Tiger's drum. The group walks along happily for a time, but the company threatens to disintegrate when the animals fight over Tiger's drum. Luckily, at just the right moment, a young boy steps into the fray, with the help of some drumming, saves the day. The book's earth-toned illustrations are stunning. Each page is packed with movement and atmosphere, and the characters' faces are wonderfully expressive. The text is poetic, rhythmic, and, at times, humorous. While the story arc feels underdeveloped—it is not clear how the animals walking together created the deep friendship referenced on the book's final page or how the Tiger's drumming cured the animals' fear of him—the language is a pleasure to read aloud. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8 by 21-inch double-page spreads viewed at 71% of actual size.)

Illustrations make this lyrical tale of the Indian jungle really shine. (authors' note, websites) (Picture book. 2-5)

The story of groundbreaking animator Lotte Reiniger.
"Long before a cartoon mouse, / Or Snow White found a little house, / There was a girl named Charlotte." No geography or dates are noted—this White girl named Lotte could be growing up anywhere. Lotte loves cinema; it's magic to her. She wants to create it herself. Using scissors, paper, and string, she snips out fairy-tale puppets—"Cinderella, always sweeping. / A beauty in a castle, sleeping"—and, with a camera, a lamp, and a pane of glass, she invents a form of stop-motion animation. Reiniger becomes a groundbreaking artist and filmmaker. Carr's artwork echoes Reiniger's style, highlighting crisp, black silhouettes. Hartman tucks rhyming verse between unrhymed lines, making
A mischievous chameleon learns it’s important not only to change colors, but also one’s ways.

Chameleon is a trickster and proud of it. Narrating this lively romp in first—er, lizard, Chameleon gleefully boasts of its playfully sneaky antics. Whenever it wants to get away with some wily shenanigans—which is always—it simply plays the camouflage card and hides in plain sight. Pretty cool that Chameleon can switch from gray to red—or purple, silver, or whatever shade suits its purpose. It’s also a clever means of shirking responsibilities or bedtime and of literally stealing food out from under a pal’s nose. But everyone gets a comeuppance eventually. When Chameleon unwittingly causes a chain reaction that could land a neighbor in trouble if not danger, Frog, in a giggle-inducing scene, comically turns the tables. In an ending that feels rushed, a contrite Chameleon owns up to its mistakes and apologizes. Harmony and friendship are restored. This jaunty tale is presented in bouncy rhymes that match smiles and chuckles. Illustrations are colorful, lush, and vegetation-filled, appropriate to the jungle setting; animals typical of this backdrop are depicted: an elephant, a jaguar, a sloth, an orangutan, and toucans. Ample white space helps readers focus on Chameleon, its friends, and the humorous goings-on. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11.3 by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 61.4% of actual size.)

A fun exploration of recognizing the error of one’s ways and making and keeping friends. (Picture book, 3-7)
“I will not always be…” and the ellipsis take on a double meaning, a gentle reminder that one day this person the child loves “will not always be.” The book does not mention an afterlife or make ecclesiastical references; however, birds, butterflies, and candle flames in the illustrations are known to symbolize those who have died in some cultures. As there is no significance given to their presence in the text, this book is beneficial for both children of varying faiths and those who come from homes without a faith tradition. The illustrations are done in a palette of bright but calming pastels, and the children in the illustrations have skin ranging from white to light brown and varying hair types and colors. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-16-inch double-page spreads viewed at 75% of actual size.)

An excellent choice for children who are dealing with the loss of a loved one or just learning about death. (Picture book 4-8)

NOTHING IN COMMON
Hoefler, Kate
Illus. by Luyken, Corinna
HMH Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-0-544-77478-0

Two children who live separate but seemingly parallel lives reunite a lost dog with its owner and, in doing so, discover the marvelousness in each other.

Two apartment buildings—one blue, one red—stand apart, a void of white in between. In each edifice, a child sits in a window. Neither acknowledges their counterpart, assuming they have nothing in common. But they both find joy in watching an old man walk his dog every day; and both feel heartache when the dog is lost; and both search for the dog, charting the same course. In finding the pup, the two find each other—kindred spirits who share more than just a view. The last spread emphasizes this connection, as the children wave to each other from their apartment-building windows, this time not over a white chasm but across a shared, star-filled sky. Luyken distinguishes the beige-complexioned children with color blocking, from one child’s blue overalls and waterfall of midnight-blue tresses to the other’s tuft of black-red hair and red clothes. The pale palette of assigned colors allows each character to be distinguishable even as a silhouetted shadow. Rough-textured paper is used to create additional layers. At times, both text and art feel labored in their search for whimsy; however, many readers may still delight in the connection these two apparent preteens find.

A quiet adventure for youth searching for human connection and kindness. (Picture book 6-8)

GHOSTS UNVEILED!
Hollihan, Kerrie Logan
Abrams (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-4197-4679-6
Series: Creepy and True, 2

The author of Mummies Exposed! (2019) digs up an array of spectral encounters, from the Flying Dutchman to personal brushes with the paranormal.

Though not quite able to abandon her own skepticism (“For the people who see them, ghosts are true. Very true”), Hollihan takes a respectful approach in this anecdotal ramble. Uncritically stirring in spirit photos, trailing a thick section of source notes, and brushing in broad historical contexts for each incident, her thematic chapters get underway with a list of no fewer than 193 Anglo-Saxon synonyms for ghosts or fairies. She then goes on to record apparitions, including the 15 “well-authenticated ghosts [that] infest” the U.S. Capitol; “vanishing hitchhiker[s]” met in Indiana and Somalia; “creepy and delicious” reports of spectral trains and ships; post-mortem appearances by Australia’s Ned Kelly and Alabama’s “Railroad Bill,” both seen as Robin Hood figures (the former White, the latter biracial Black/White); and angry or hungry ghosts in India, Korea, and Japan. She carefully acknowledges that different cultures regard their dead in different ways and links both modern Día de Muertos celebrations and La Llorona to Aztec beliefs and practices. The accounts are lively, and by closing with her own glimpse of two ghostly children, she makes common cause with readers eager to believe: “It’s all left me shaking my head in wonder.”

Mild chills for fans of all things “creepy and delicious.” (bibliography, index) (Nonfiction 10-13)

BENBEE AND THE TEACHER GRIEFER
Holt, K.A.
Chronicle (344 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-4521-8251-3
Series: The Kids Under the Stairs, 1

A foursome of rising seventh graders, three boys and one girl, are sentenced to summer school.

Three of them failed a Florida academic assessment test and the other has no scores since he was home-schooled and recently moved to the state. All share a love of the online game Sandbox that, à la Minecraft, promotes creative exploration. While playing, they feel successful and competent, unencumbered by their individual diagnoses of dysgraphia, dyslexia, ADHD, and dysfluency. Their teacher, Ms. J, continually reminds them that they are divergent learners, the kind of people who can change the world. The four strike a deal with her: In exchange for reading out loud in class, Ms. J will...
Jewel tones offer a soothing, subdued nighttime backdrop, as does the flat perspective. **NIGHT WISHES**

**NIGHT WISHES**  
Ed. by Hopkins, Lee Bennett  
Illus. by Corace, Jen  
Eerdmans (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 15, 2020  
978-0-8028-5496-4

Thirteen poets contribute to a collection that buoys sleepy readers into dreamland.

Hopkins organizes the thematic anthology of 14 short poems (Rebecca Kai Dotlich contributes two), each told from the perspective of something in a child’s room. Accompanying double-page spreads expand each poem. The illustrations start with imaginative scenes starring a child of color and gently shift back to reality as day breaks and the child wakes up. The first two poems, “Bed” and “Pillow,” urge action, with phrases like “Climb in, child. / Climb in” and “Eyes closed, set sail!” Next “Blanket” wraps the child in love as they drift off. “Cat” and “Dog” each elicit a sense of wonder as the titular animals pose curious questions. Remaining poems such as “Rocking Horse” and “Pillow” urge action, with phrases like “No need to hurry— / we listen all night” of the wait until morning. “Bed Again,” the final poem, encourages the child to “Step out and into day. / Get dressed, be on your way.”

A gentle, comforting ticket to beddy-bye—and good dreams. (Picture book/poetry. 4-8)

**THE EXPLORER’S CODE**  
Hymas, Allison K.  
Imprint (288 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sep. 29, 2020  
978-1-250-25885-4

Deep in the Shenandoah forest stands Idlewood Manor, where deep-rooted secrets await. The newly reopened historical mansion now serves as a weekend getaway for a select number of lucky visitors. Among these guests are the Hendersons, thanks to gifted 12-year-old Charlie’s winning a contest. His exuberant 13-year-old sister, Anna, whose parents continually chastise her, can’t wait to explore the manor’s nooks and crannies. Following in the footsteps of her idol, famous early-20th-century explorer Virginia Maines, Anna uncovers a secret passageway to a hidden third floor and, further along, an abandoned tower. Charlie’s exploits lead him to notice hidden numerical codes among the manor’s walls and rooms. Meanwhile, 12-year-old Emily Shaughnessy plans on helping her historian parents on a critical mission to preserve Idlewood Manor as a historical site. All three explorers begin at odds with each other: Emily’s suspicious of anyone derailing her task while Charlie and Anna struggle over the loss of their once-close bond. Soon though, the trio must rely on one another to untangle the mysteries of Idlewood Manor and its ties to Maines’ disappearance. Full of puzzles and intrigue, this is a delectable treat for readers wanting a brainteaser or two in an intricately paced package. Equally amusing is the three young explorers’ implicit battle with the adult guests, who range from bemused roadblocks to the trio’s progress to stealthy thieves. Main characters follow a White default.

A worthy call to unravel a mystery. (Mystery. 8-12)

**SUPERPOWERED**  
Transform Anxiety Into Courage, Confidence, and Resilience  
Jain, Renee & Tsabary, Shefali  
Illus. by GoStrengths Inc.  
Random House (336 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020  
978-0-593-12639-4

A celebrity psychologist and the founder of a company that sells emotional learning programs team up for a workbook about managing anxiety.

How should kids manage the discomfort and panic that accompany anxiety? Worksheets and exercises teach readers the basics of many common anxiety management techniques in use today, drawing heavily from behavioral therapies for managing anxiety’s cognitive distortions. Fictionalized case studies populate each lesson, illustrated with dynamic, cartoonlike young people drawn with a variety of skin colors and hair textures.
The problems the sample kids face are straightforward: Will I fail my math test? Will I fit in at this new school? Their anxieties are usually unfounded, which they learn through following the techniques. The overly tidy framing doesn’t do readers any favors. Adolescence can be scary and dangerous, and contemporary tweens and teens often face serious crises. While the exercises may be helpful for many anxiety sufferers, case studies focusing on self-esteem and perfectionism won’t speak to readers worried about serious illness, coming out, violence, or deportation. The use of Jackie Robinson to convey the idea that inner strength can defeat racism feels tone-deaf. Exercises hoping from concept to concept, too heavily packed with acronyms, coinages, and techniques. Global statements addressed directly at “you” may make some readers feel seen while alienating those to whom these generalizations do not apply.

A cutely illustrated, chaotically disorganized, and jargon-heavy repackaging of behavioral therapies for anxiety. (endnotes, glossary, resources, index) (Self-help. 11-13)

BLOOD AND GERMS
The Civil War Battle Against Wounds and Disease
Jarrow, Gail
Calkins Creek/Boyds Mills (176 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-68437-176-1
Series: Medical Fiascoes

For those interested in the history of medicine or fascinated by the Civil War, Jarrow’s latest offering astutely combines both topics.

The Civil War (1861-1865) was a bloodbath of epic size. Beyond the battlefield toll, boys who had never traveled far from home were gathered into huge armies and exposed to numerous diseases for which they had no immunity, leading to lethal epidemics and a huge further cost in young lives lost. Making outstanding use of period photographs, in-depth research, and firsthand accounts, this effort chronicles the inadequate, sometimes almost farcically deficient medical care delivered during the war. Highlighting primary topics in a series of brief chapters, it follows soldiers through the typical responses to being wounded (or falling ill), from frontline interventions through field hospitals, then, via tortuous ambulance journeys, to immense pavilion hospitals that both Union and Confederate sides were forced to establish. Medical training, nursing care, the Union’s Sanitary Commission, types of infections, prisoner-of-war mistreatment, and a discussion of medical advances that resulted from the war are also covered. The descriptions are sometimes graphic, connecting tragic statistics to individual soldiers. Sidebars neatly fit into the presentation, never interrupting the flow but enhancing the story with valuable additional information. Outstanding backmatter, more typical of what might be found in fine adult nonfiction, rounds out this stellar presentation.

A fascinating example of excellence in juvenile nonfiction. (glossary, multiple source lists, detailed index) (Nonfiction. 10-15)

MY FIRST BOOK OF THE COSMOS
Kaid-Salah Ferrón, Sheddad
Illus. by Altarriba, Eduard
Button Books (56 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-78708-077-5
Series: My First Book of Science

Take a deep dive into the creation, arrangement, and composition of the universe.

This book covers a wide range of material, including gravity, the Big Bang, the shape and age of the universe, stars, planetary bodies, black holes, dark matter, and the cosmic calendar. Less-common topics include space-time, gravitational lenses, wormholes, and dark energy. The narrative style is conversational and makes sure to include logical steps and multiple references for readers to follow. Altarriba’s early–Space Age design is the book’s real strength, however. It visually conveys the information in supereffective ways, promoting interest without ever growing too busy. The pages show great compositional diversity, utilizing illustrations, graphs, diagrams, sidebars, and more. Perhaps surprisingly, the book contains only one photo (of cosmic background radiation). Although many terms are defined when introduced and there are some cross-references, there is no readily accessible glossary, and the text presupposes a certain level of conceptualization and theoretical thinking, belying the “First” in the title. Readers with an established general understanding of scientific and/or cosmological concepts, such as mass and revolution, as well as good reading comprehension skills and/or a more knowledgeable co-reader to work through the pages with them will find plenty to hold their interest. In addition, there is no bibliography or further reading, so curious thinkers will need to do their own outside research.

A practical survey of cosmic undertaking. (Nonfiction. 8-13)
teamwork is required. Oscar is delighted to be fully included at last. Ophelia adjusts to working with a partner, confuses and defeats her canine foes, faces her fear of water, exposes her cousin’s shenanigans, and, after a close call, wins the competition to keep her top spot. The story feels unwieldy at times with its many plot threads, but Kent manages to tie everything together by the end. Half-page cartoonlike illustrations with speech bubbles break up the text, and full-page panels of comic strips are integral to the story. Ophelia, a strong, smart female character, here provides readers with another fun contribution to chapter-book series shelves.

Entertaining for fans of cats, adventures, and wordplay. (Fiction, 7-11)

THE INKBERG ENIGMA
King, Jonathan
Illus. by the author
Gecko Press (128 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-77657-266-3

Bookworm Miro and new friend Zia unravel their seaside town’s greatest mystery.

The story begins when Miro is set upon by bullies upon leaving his favorite bookstore, to be rescued by Zia. Almost immediately, the two new friends stumble upon a mysterious, otherworldly happening that sets in motion a chain of events that will lead to the discovery of the titular enigma and so much more. There is something strange afoot in this book is beautifully inclusive. However, women are often peripheral to male action despite their diversity and presence: Villains, magical books, and creatures from the deep

SPECIAL DELIVERY
Kruszynski, Elliott
Illus. by the author
Cicada Books (32 pp.)
$15.95 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-908714-79-4

A duckling becomes overwhelmed when a turtle delivers a new baby to the house. The baby is a mouse, and the duckling says, “I’m sorry, there’s been a mistake. That’s not my brother.” The turtle insists: “No, no, I’m afraid I don’t make mistakes. This is the right house.” The duckling’s confusion increases as the turtle returns with more babies—a puppy, a kitten, a hippo, a giraffe, and a walrus. Bright illustrations with animal figures that wouldn’t look out of place on pediatrician-office wallpaper show increasingly chaotic scenes devoid of parents as the duckling assumes sole responsibility for their care. When the duckling opens the door for the last time, it’s with a mood of utter exasperation, which changes to surprise at seeing a veritable Noah’s Ark of animal pairs looking for their “deliveries.” Dogs, cats, hippos, giraffes, walruses, mice, and (finally) duck parents stand behind a chagrined

A sibling pair adores their gran and all the fun she shares with them.

The fun of spending a day with grandma becomes pure magic when it’s Superhero Gran. Her home is full of games, toys, and unlimited sweet treats. Playing dress-up with her clothes and makeup table makes the children a “superhero team.” As Gran gardens, the children can play hide-and-seek. And, best of all, when it’s time to go home, Gran has a plan: She explains she can’t bear to let them go—it’s time for a super sleepover instead! Even the cats are happy to learn this. The rhyming text is easy and fun (and quick) to read aloud, turning this fairly mundane story into one that families will turn to repeatedly, especially at grandma’s house. The illustrations portray a joyful Black family with a stylish grandma wearing a short gray Afro, light makeup, and a flared dress; Dad, wearing a hoodie, waves goodbye on the first spread. Patterns, vibrant colors, and background graphics highlight the fantastical element of the children’s play. While the story feels familiar, the relationships are irresistible; anyone without a Superhero Gran will desperately want one after reading this. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.6- by 21.2-inch double-page spreads viewed at 54.5% of actual size.)

Children blessed with fun grandparents will love this celebration of that very special relationship. (Picture book: 3-8)
Sardonic cartoon drawings and the play on words cleverly elevate the repetitive, Dick-and-Jane pattern to include humor and suspense.

SEE THE CAT

A grim tale of loss that may itself be lost on young readers. In a running argument with the author, Max the dog feels he must rectify each narrative statement as he perceives it applies to him. Story No. 1 begins, “See the cat.” There is no cat in the illustration, only the dog, who states with certitude, “I am not a cat. I am a dog.” The author continues, “See the blue cat.” The dog retorts, “I am NOT blue and I am NOT a cat.” This continues with additional descriptions of the cat that isn’t there—until the conclusion trots in a blue cat riding a unicorn. “See the red dog,” Max admits, “I am so embarrassed.” Story No. 2 has a similar beginning: “See the snake.” “Here we go again,” sighs Max. The narrator blandly records the snake’s increasing anger, informing readers: “The mad snake is going to bite the dog.” Thinking quickly, Max grabs a pencil and smartly makes an edit, inserting “not” between “is” and “going.” Whew. In Story No. 3, Max takes control when confronted with an impossible choice: fly or be squashed by a large hippo. Sardonic cartoon drawings and the play on words cleverly elevate the repetitive, Dick-and-Jane pattern to include humor and suspense. Children, who are frequently subject to the control of others, will delight in seeing Max mirror their emotions and turn the tables. Kids will cheer for the affronted Max in this well-crafted early reader with surprising outcomes. (Early reader . 4-8)

HOW JACK LOST TIME

From Canada, a picture book, originally published in French, for older readers that tells a story of decisions made and the consequences thereof.

Jack, a grizzled sea captain, lives on his boat, even planting a garden on it, because he is obsessed with finding his son, Julos. On a father-son outing years ago, Julos disappeared, and Jack last saw him in the jaws of a distinctly scarred gray whale. Torn by grief and rage, Jack made the decision not to go home to his waiting wife until he could track down the whale. Despite, or perhaps because of, these allusions to Moby-Dick and the biblical Jonah story, this tale fails to reach their depths. Years have passed, and Jack has searched, turning into a “mean, dark” man. His reckoning. It’s a grim, unrequited story of loss, and it seems the consequences thereof.

A grim tale of loss that may itself be lost on young readers. (Picture book. 10-14)
Unanswered questions are included in the text, showing that science is an ongoing investigation.

**EYE BY EYE**

“mouse / squeaks.” The invitations to think metaphorically and to discover poetry that might be right at hand are friendly and clear: “The Power of Imagination.” “turtle tucked in moonlight / makes cathedral / inside” The repetition of words becomes an echo of a familiar melody running throughout the collection as they become the molecules of new poems and become fresh again. Latham's note explaining the process for this collection mentions a few other kinds of found poetry. Wright's art in full-page section-introducing illustrations, along with spot illustration and margin art, gives a warm and lighthearted dimension to the pages.

Delightful. (introduction, index) (Poetry 7-10)

**EYE BY EYE**

**Comparing How Animals See**

Levine, Sara
Illus. by Spookytooth, T.S.
Millbrook/Lerner (32 pp.)
978-1-5415-3838-2 paper
Series: Animal by Animal

This picture book asks readers to imagine having the eyes of various different animals.

“What kind of animal would you be if you had eight eyes?” Turn the page to find out: a jumping spider. What if you had rectangular pupils? Brown-skinned children, one wearing hijab, are pictured modeling the imagined eye structures, interacting with animals and insects, and learning from books and charts. The pattern of asking a question and answering it on the next page works to keep readers engaged, guessing, and turning pages. The pictures of children with extra eyes, moving eyes, antennae, and animalistic pupils are intriguingly bizarre to look at and will likely keep children coming back to this book for scares and giggles. The text is fairly lengthy for a picture book and offers profound scientific information; though it is easy to understand, the spidery, thin, cursivelike type that conveys it is a little daunting for youngsters. Unanswered questions are included in the text, showing that science is an ongoing investigation. The backmatter includes simple activities, more about pupils, a glossary, and further reading. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.5 by 19-inch double-page spreads viewed at 82.8% of actual size.)

A fascinating and (mostly) well-formatted exploration. (Informational picture book 4-10)

**MOO-MOO, I LOVE YOU!**

Lichtenheld, Tom & Rosenthal, Amy Krouse
Illus. by Lichtenheld, Tom
Abrams (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020 978-0-358-35953-1

Cowabunga! Love is surely the cow’s moo-ow!

In this brief, adorable lovefest, a black-and-white adult bovine caregiver expresses heartfelt adoration for its little one using delightful, comical plays on the word moo. Some of the puns are obvious, though they’ll be no less chuckle-inducing to young readers/listeners. Take, for instance, the words moo-d, moo-zies, moo-sic, and moo-se. (A delicious, winking nod to a very famous children’s-book title also appears near the end.) Some puns are trickier, with moo’s occurring midword—bu-moo-r; marsh-moo-lows—and/or appearing in less familiar words, such as moo-zarella, com-moo-nicator, and sb-cow-zing. In every case, moo is depicted with the o’s filled in so it stands out in sharp relief whenever it appears. This helps youngsters identify targeted words both visually andaurally. Aside from its value as a very simply told, sweet, humorous, reassuring charmer, this book develops vocabulary creatively. After children have listened to the story, they should have an utterly grand time vounteering their own word lists that might include plays on moo and other cow-related words. Even the calf in the story gets into the act with its own moo pun at the end. Simple illustrations feature bold outlines; a basic tan, black, and white palette with touches of red; and occasional changes in lettering and font for emphasis. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.5 by 19-inch double-page spreads viewed at 82.8% of actual size.)

A moo-ve-lous, moo-ving tribute to love for a child. (Picture book 3-7)

**LIGHTS ON WONDER ROCK**

Litchfield, David
Illus. by the author
Clarion (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 8, 2020 978-0-358-35953-1

An alien encounter keeps a woman hoping to recapture a magical moment all her life.

One night Heather sneaks off into the woods with a flashlight, sitting on Wonder Rock and “hoping that someone out there would see her light.” When something arrives, it comes in an explosion of bright colors, flashing lights, and glowing particles. From a flying saucer emerges a friendly creature who looks like a giant spoon. Heather draws a picture for it before she retreats to her family. For the rest of her life, Heather returns to Wonder Rock, hoping for a reunion but growing disenchantment. It’s not until she is “an old lady” who has “nearly lost all hope, as people do,” that the ship returns to predictably, teach her that the family she has raised is the magic she
was always seeking. Litchfield’s slightly mournful story is punctuated by moments of thrilling escape, none more lovely than a single page of Heather’s “off / and on” flashlight vigil, laid out as nine panels that go from giddy anticipation to disappointment to sudden fear, a technique deployed again when Heather is old. But the text does not rise to the level of enchanting artwork, falling flat with tired clichés and concluding with a thud. As with the crayon pictures that Heather uses to communicate with the ET, some ideas don’t need words. Heather presents White; her family is interracial.

These close encounters are better seen than read. (Picture book. 4–7)

**PLAYTIME & MEALTIME**
Macdonald, Maryann  
Illus. by Fernibough, Jo  
Whitman (48 pp.)  
$12.99 | Oct. 1, 2020  
978-0-8075-3642-1  
Series: Iggy Iguanodon

A little dinosaur navigates friendships and new foods in this early reader. In “Playtime,” the first of this volume’s two stories, Mama tells Iggy that he’s to have a play date with Murka Macrosaur. Iggy’s afraid that she’ll be into girly things like princesses, but instead the two try a variety of different outdoor activities before settling on a ring toss that utilizes Triceratops Murka’s pointy nose. “Mealtime” sees Iggy eyeing a dinner of ferns with great suspicion. He’d much rather eat flowers, but even after Papa says he can’t have them until he tries his ferns, it takes Grandpa’s subtle intervention to convince the young dino to attempt something new. An opening key ranks the text as Level 2, defined as “Reading With Help.” With such words as Iguanodon, tagalong, Macrosaur, and triceratops on the first nine pages alone, that help will be sorely needed, especially for young readers who don’t already know their dinosaur names. Elegant writing does not mitigate this problem (“But Murka gets stuck in somersaults, the same as all triceratops”). Meanwhile, cumbersome, inexpressive art does little to distract from the text, and the absence of outlines around the uniformly green dinos makes compositions where bodies overlap particularly confusing. Finally, this may be set in the Cretaceous, but what really feels ancient are elements like an apron-wearing mom, a father as disciplinarian, and a grandfather who smokes a pipe. Companion title Bath Time & Bedtime publishes simultaneously.

Iguano-don’t bother. (Early reader. 5–7) (Bath Time & Bedtime: 978-0-8075-3641-4)

**JUST A STORY**
Mack, Jeff  
Illus. by the author  
Neal Porter/Holiday House (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-0-8234-4663-6

Is a story ever just a story? A small boy with pale skin and a mop of messy, brown hair sits on the floor of the library, reading, when suddenly, pirates climb out of a floor tile and are about to capture him. Luckily, before that can happen, a lion appears and scares the pirates. Unfortunately, the lion is poised to eat the little boy, but then “a herd of wild elephants” (on scooters and wearing helmets, naturally) comes careening through, scattering both the pirates and the lion. Mack’s expressive cartoon illustrations heighten the drama as the little boy (seemingly unfazed, still reading) is put in more and more danger. A giant, green foot stamps down, narrowly missing the boy—does it belong to a dinosaur? No, it’s a big, drooling baby dragon’s. And of course, in keeping with the absurd humor, a “belly-flopping blue whale” comes next. However, what is the scariest thing in this litany of ever increasing peril? A possible kiss! The little boy slams the book shut, instantly restoring order to the library. But when a new reader, a young brown-skinned tot, opens it, all of the characters crowd back into the frame, ready for their parts.

The imaginative power of a story brought to life. (Picture book. 3–6)

**LOOKY LOOKY**
Magsamen, Sandra  
Illus. by the author  
Sourcebooks Wonderland (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Aug. 4, 2020  
978-1-72821-408-5  
Series: Looky Looky Little One

From the prolific board-book creator, a picture book that teaches young preschoolers to notice details. Two double-page spreads introduce each section’s theme. A third (and in one case fourth) spread is devoted to a specific object: pigs for the farm, seahorses for the sea, and airplanes for things that go. Nine animals appear on the first spread of the baby-animals section before spreads focusing on giraffes and elephants. The seek-and-find activities grow increasingly challenging, as the differences become ever more subtle. Instructions set in white text within one large, colored dot on each spread begin “looky looky.” Clues in four smaller dots per spread point to sometimes silly features in the illustrations, such as a pig with a mustache. Occasional clues challenge emergent readers to find words printed on the page. The generous square format allows plenty of room for details in the pictures to stand out. Animals and objects outlined in Magsamen’s trademark applique-style faux stitching are clear against solid backgrounds. Cloying and clunky rhymes that open and close the book come...
across as unnecessary filler given the self-explanatory nature of the seek-and-find activity.
Neatly bridges the gap between board books and more complex seek-and-find titles. (Picture book. 3-6)

MY HAIR IS MAGIC!
Marroquin, M.L.
Illus. by Engel, Tonya
Page Street (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-62414-981-8

If hair could talk, this little brown-skinned girl’s exuberant Afro would have a lot to say.

This picture book’s unnamed first-person protagonist is constantly asked, “Why is your hair so BIG?” To which she answers, “Why isn’t yours?” Centering her own beauty and the uniqueness of her hair, she recounts, in verse, how people touch her hair and ask her other persistent, microaggressive questions. Appearing differently on every page—an accurate reflection of the versatility of highly textured hair—her magical locks are never the same color twice, exhibiting as much verve and life as the wearer does herself. In some illustrations, the little girl’s hair dominates the page; sometimes her curls emit music; sometimes they are composed of stylized, multicolored clouds or resemble rolling ocean waves in blues and greens. Engel’s rich, sometimes surreal illustrations abound with textures and colors—deep purples, royal blues, sunny yellows—that embody the protagonist’s unique personality. The creators’ notes indicate that both Marroquin and Engel have personal connections or resemble rolling ocean waves in blues and greens. Engel’s rich, sometimes surreal illustrations abound with textures and colors—deep purples, royal blues, sunny yellows—that embody the protagonist’s unique personality. The creators’ notes indicate that both Marroquin and Engel have personal connections with hair that attracts a lot of attention. Engel even notes that, in her childhood, school bylaws required straightened hair. An excellent addition to a growing genre.

This uplifting, body-positive story will empower kids with highly textured hair to take pride in every inch of it. (Picture book. 3-7)

ANNE FRANK
The Girl Heard Around the World
Marshall, Linda Elovitz
Illus. by Lewis, Aura
Orchard/Scholastic (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-338-31229-4

Anne Frank’s story of confinement for several years after the Nazi takeover of the Netherlands, including her tragic death, is simply but accessibly told.

Marshall introduces Anne as an individual. “As a baby, Anne cried. LOUD. As a toddler, she was silly and made everyone laugh. And as a little girl, she spoke her mind.” Marshall intersperses this account with brief historical interludes. An image of Anne and her friend throwing water on people from a balcony is indicative of her happy early childhood, but by 1940 the Nazis invaded the Netherlands. When she receives her diary for her 13th birthday, the text notes that Anne “wrote about new rules that stopped her—and all Jews—from riding bikes, going to movies, playing in public parks, and attending public schools.” Children will understand how these restrictions would change life immeasurably. Marshall chronicles the Franks’ time in the Secret Annex with short, poetic sentences about what Anne wrote. The flat illustrations show Anne with her dark hair and intense eyes in happy and sad times, the lack of depth emphasizing Anne’s confinement. History is reflected on several pages with darker palettes that include maps to help readers understand the proximity of Germany to the countries it conquered. The last spread celebrates Anne’s legacy.

This brief biography makes Frank’s writing an effective introductory focus for young readers. (afterword, timeline, author’s note, sources, bibliography, websites) (Picture book/ biography. 7-9)

PEPPER’S RULES FOR SECRET SLEUTHING
McDonald, Briana
Simon & Schuster (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-5344-5343-2

A giant mansion is perfect for an amateur sleuth’s investigations, especially when its owner has recently died under possibly suspicious circumstances. Fresh out of sixth grade, Pepper Blouse travels with her dad to deceased Great-Aunt Florence’s mansion to stay while they wait to learn the official cause of death and contents of the will. Pepper immediately becomes suspicious of her paternal Aunt Wendy, who is also at the mansion. With a mysterious landscaper, a sneaky tutor, and an owl-obsessed neighbor added to the mix, Pepper is sure something foul is afoot. Luckily, she has her mom’s Detective Rulebook to guide her as well as help from her new friend, Jacob Buckley, a trans boy who lives nearby. While the mystery of a possible murder is the driving force of the story, themes of dealing with loss and living one’s truth are strongly woven throughout. Pepper’s mom, a cop, died over five years ago, and sleuthing is how Pepper maintains her connection. Meanwhile, she’s dealing with the personal mystery of what it means that she had a crush on a girl at school. Jacob worries that when his little sister is born, he’ll be replaced by the daughter his parents always wanted. Though some elements pertaining to the mystery occur too conveniently, the overall story is exciting and fast-paced. Main characters are assumed White.

A fun debut that is notable for its thematic depth and queer characters. (Mystery. 9-12)
British words and spellings add an international flavor that sophisticated readers will enjoy.

**BOY MEETS HAMSTER**

In a rip-roaring series opener, Lion and Tiger square off in a battle to see who is “ultimate king of the animals.”

Disingenuously billed as an “educational comic,” this Chinese import divides a group of spiky-haired, manga-eyed young explorers into two teams, then sends them off to gather facts about their respective creatures. Along the way both teams meet—and are sometimes stalked by—various members of the cat family, which occasions breaks for pages of basic facts and behavioral notes. The tiger team has the better run, as it adds Tazen, a “little native” who can talk to animals, in Sumatra and foils a pair of big-cat poachers in Siberia. After rejoining their friends Charlie and former bully Daniel help fundraise by doing chores, selling cookies and crafts to other students, and getting permission from the school to hold a fundraising talent show.

Though their efforts are praised by all, Omar’s sister, Maryam, is hostile to him for reasons he can’t figure out, and when the money from the talent show goes missing, Omar and his friends need to find the culprit and the money in time to save the mosque. This sequel to *Accidental Trouble Magnet* (2020) retains the lighthearted humor of the first and continues to seamlessly weave Islamic and Pakistani cultures and Arabic and Urdu terms into the everyday lives and practices of Omar’s British Pakistani family. With the transformation of former antagonists into friends, this volume does not address Islamophobia and casual racism as in the previous book but rather focuses on the importance of community and the spaces that foster identity, growth, and love.

**A charming follow-up for an endearing hero.** *(Fiction. 8-12)*

**THE KINGDOM OF ANIMALS**

*Rage of the Kings*

Meng & Slatam

Illus. by Black Ink Team

Trans. by Kiat

Papercutz (160 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-5458-0549-7

Series: X-Venture Xplorers, 1

In a rip-roaring series opener, Lion and Tiger square off in a battle to see who is “ultimate king of the animals.”

**BOY MEETS HAMSTER**

Milano, Birdie

Pan Macmillan (336 pp.)

$9.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-5098-4865-2

Series: Boy Meets, 1

Self-discovery can happen anywhere, even in a hamster-themed holiday park.

Dylan, a gay British 14-year-old, is on a weeklong caravan vacation (think RV park) in Cornwall with his parents; his 4-year-old brother, Jude; and his no-nonsense best friend, Kayla. Dylan’s dreams of a more sophisticated destination—say, Paris?—far away from the park and its ever present hamster mascot, Nibles, evaporate when he sees his hunky caravan neighbor, Jayden-Lee. Sure, Jayden-Lee is a raucous jerk, making fun of Jude’s cerebral palsy, Kayla’s facial birthmark, and practically everything else, but Dylan knows he can change him! That’s what love does, right? Random encounters with flirty 15-year-old Leo, a park employee, distract Dylan from his boyfriend mission, as do awkward moments with Nibles, the hamster mascot who repeatedly saves him from hilariously awful moments. Themes of body-positivity, friendship, and authenticity are interwoven into an engaging plotline. The British words and spellings add an international flavor that sophisticated readers will enjoy, and the overall humor is broad enough to attract a wide audience. The Leo/Nibles connection will be obvious to most readers, generating additional chuckles at Dylan’s single-minded oblivion. Kayla is cued as biracial (Filipina and White), Leo is Black, and Dylan and his family are assumed White.

**Not to be missed!** *(Fiction. 10-14)*

**UNEXPECTED SUPER SPY**

Mian, Zanib

Illus. by Mafaridik, Nasaya

Putnam (224 pp.)

$13.99 | Sep. 29, 2020

978-0-593-10924-3

Series: Planet Omar, 2

Omar, his friends and family, and his big imagination return, this time in a united effort to save their local mosque.

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**A charming follow-up for an endearing hero.** *(Fiction. 8-12)*

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Omar, his friends and family, and his big imagination return, this time in a united effort to save their local mosque.
Green’s visually pleasing illustrations have an uncomplicated design that effectively complements the story’s wise, authentic narrative.

**BECOMING A GOOD CREATURE**

*Montgomery, Sy*
*Illus. by Green, Rebecca*
*HMH Books (40 pp.)*
*$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2020*
*978-0-358-25210-8*

Life lessons for young humans gleaned from a lifetime living with other creatures.

Reprinted for young readers from Montgomery’s memoir (for adults) *How To Be a Good Creature*, this picture book’s message is concise and clear: Humans are only one of many creatures to inhabit the Earth, and knowing, respecting, and learning from other creatures will help humans become better creatures themselves. The organization of the story is also clear and concise: A short piece of advice is augmented by a brief story relayed in accessible, direct language from the author’s personal experiences in a lifetime of observing and being around other creatures. “Make Your Own Family” describes the author’s family of hens, a dog, a pig, a husband, and neighbors; the poignant “Trust Tomorrow” relates a dark period that lightened with the unexpected arrival of a dog; and “See For Yourself” relays the author’s observations of the gentleness of the oft-reviled hyena. Other topics include seeking similarity, forgiveness, and the importance of small creatures. Avoiding triteness, the narrative establishes a connection between humans and other creatures as it teaches that respect for the animal world is a good way to become a good human, too. Green’s visually pleasing illustrations are rendered in a warm, earth-hued palette, and they have an uncomplicated design that effectively complements the story’s wise, authentic narrative. Montgomery presents White.

**Full of conviction, wisdom, and essential truths. (Picture book/memoir 3-10)**

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**MRS. NOAH’S GARDEN**

*Morris, Jackie*
*Illus. by Mayhew, James*
*Otter-Barry (40 pp.)*
*$18.99 | Sep. 8, 2020*
*978-1-91095-946-6*

As Mr. Noah converts the Ark into a home after making landfall, Mrs. Noah finds a place to create a new garden.

Gazing at a blue, stony landscape, Mrs. Noah misses her home’s garden. She looks around the land and finds a place where some trees had hung on through the flood. Her children, whose skin tones vary between Mrs. Noah’s dark brown skin and Mr. Noah’s pale skin, help her to clear space and build stone walls and terraces. Some mythical creatures help too. Mrs. Noah plants seeds from her pockets and “trees, shrubs, bushes and bulbs” that were carried on the Ark. She works on the garden all day long and does homemaking chores at night (“Curtains. At last,” Mr. Noah thinks). As she continues shaping the garden and “the earth blossom[s] under her touch,” the rains fall gently, and the pictures show her belly growing. On Midsummer’s Eve, Mrs. Noah sleeps in the garden, and the next morning, the children find a world in blossom, loud with bird song and buzzing bees. The text is thick with lush, lovely description and symbolic imagery of life and regeneration. With densely colored, busy collage illustrations, this distinctive story evokes a combination of the fantastical, the religious (both Biblical and pagan), the ancient, the modern, and the timeless. A few surprising details (like the use of a sewing machine) call unnecessary attention to themselves, but these quirks are easily forgiven.

**An imagination well worth walking through. (Picture book 4-9)**

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**THE SORCERER’S APPRENTICE**

*Muller, Gerda*
*Illus. by the author*
*Trans. by Lawson, Polly*
*Floris (24 pp.)*
*$17.95 | Sep. 29, 2020*
*978-1-78250-628-7*

A handsomely illustrated retelling of the classic cautionary tale, brooms and all.

Muller fleshes out Goethe’s sketchy ballad so that it follows the familiar course of Mickey Mouse’s adventure in Disney’s Fantasia but with a named and all-human cast. Having fetched up hungry and homeless at the door of kindly old sorcerer Alfred, Oliver, a young country lad, is kept busy with chores while learning how to make potions and, after some begging, a few words of magic that he promises never to use when his master is absent. When he breaks that promise and animates the brooms to fetch water, he floods the village. Alfred, returning from a sorcerer’s convention, sets all to rights and, seeing that Oliver is genuinely sorry, makes him help with the cleanup but lets him stay. Striking more conventional notes then Leo and Diane Dillon’s sumptuous art for Nancy Willard’s 1993 retelling or Ted Dewan’s science-fictional take (1998), dress and details in these finely detailed illustrations set the tale in a small, tidy, seemingly all-White Renaissance-era European village. Aside from sporting tiny heads, the busy brooms look very much like the ones in the film; a skeleton coat rack is just one of several humorous visual touches, and a climactic elevated view of villagers sloshing and playing in the muddy street has a festive Bruegel-esque air.

**A benign, low-key rendition with art that repays second looks. (Picture book 6-9)**
LUBAYA’S QUIET ROAR
_Nelson, Marilyn_  
_ILLUS. BY WILLIAMSON, PHILEMONA_  
_DIAL BOOKS (32 PP.)_  
$17.99 | OCT. 27, 2020  
978-0-525-55555-4

Activism comes in many forms. Lubaya prefers sitting quietly to speaking up in class, even when she knows the answer. She's often picked last for soccer, but she doesn't mind because before the game ends, Lubaya has wandered off, absorbed in daydreaming. This might be the story of a neurodivergent child, or Lubaya might just be introverted and introspective. She plays well with her brother, Jelani, but even he cannot hold her attention through a video game. One thing Lubaya spends time on, though, is creating artwork on the back sides of her family’s protest signs, saved from a march and bearing messages like “We Are One Earth” and “Peace.” When alarming events air on the TV news, Lubaya’s parents hold her and Jelani close and tell them it’s time to march again, giving Lubaya’s posters a second life. At the march, Lubaya—whose Swahili name means “young lioness” according to a closing note—adds her voice and her artwork to the protest, amplifying the power of the marchers’ messages with her hand-drawn images. Williamson’s textured illustrations, created in oil paint and crayon, feature bright colors and vibrant backgrounds and represent well the visible diversity of people of color, even for members of the same family. (_This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-21-inch double-page spreads viewed at 27.6% of actual size._)

This quietly powerful family story encourages children to use both voices and hands to advocate for change. (_Picture book 4-8_)

EVERYTHING COMES NEXT
_Collected and New Poems_  
_Nye, Naomi Shihab_  
_ILLUS. BY LÓPEZ, RAFAEL_  
_GREENWILLow BOOKS (356 PP.)_  
$17.99 | SEp. 29, 2020  
978-0-06-301345-2

Young People’s Poet Laureate Nye explores childhood, conflict, and connectivity through over 100 of her poems, both new and classic.

In the opening section, “The Holy Land of Childhood,” she draws from her childhood and those of others, often speaking from the child’s perspective, striking notes of loneliness, fear, and playfulness. Writing was her refuge from desperately boring early readers while a school assignment to write from the perspective of a kitchen implement turned her into “a sweet sifter in time.” Sad vignettes of her childhood home sit alongside humorous memories. Personal images of war, displacement, and loss pepper the second section, “The Holy Land That Isn’t,” in which Nye focuses on her Palestinian immigrant father’s loss of his Jerusalem home, crystallized in his longing for the figs of his childhood. In a poem dedicated to the great Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, she pleads for peace for “every ancient space” and, in another, observes “red poppies sleep beneath / dirt and stones” beside the homes of fearful Arab and Jewish children living only “one mile apart.” The final section, “People Are the Only Holy Land,” stresses similarities between diverse peoples, invoking a vision of a world where “it is only kindness that makes sense anymore.” López’s evocative art perfectly captures and enhances the mood of dreaming and yearning. Emotionally resonant and stirring, this is a must-have title.

_This quietly powerful family story encourages children to use both voices and hands to advocate for change._

_A family wordlessly paddles, camps, and wanders their way through the Boundary Waters between Minnesota and Canada._

_A double-page spread depicts an interracial family in a station wagon, small in scale against the vastness of the surrounding forest._

_A canoe sits atop the vehicle, a pop of red against the greenery._

_The page turn takes the passengers further down a dirt road._

_A sign declares the land the B.W.C.A Wilderness of the Superior National Forest._

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Pikas, tiny rabbit relatives living in high altitudes, serve as an entry point toward understanding the consequences of a warming world.

Following *At Home With the Beaver*, with photos by Michael Runtz (2019), Patent, with co-author Garnsworthy, returns to the idea of the interconnectedness of species with this welcome new title. Hartman's photographs dramatically illustrate a clear, well-organized text that opens with descriptions of the mountainous “pika country” near Yellowstone National Park and the feisty pikas. Readers first see a pika “scurry, scurry, hurry,” gathering food for the day and for its winter hay pile. There’s a helpful map and photos of the scenery in several seasons. The writers introduce the idea of climate change (printed in boldface and defined, like other important words, in a glossary) and other animals sharing this gradually warming habitat. Not only is the pika’s livable world shrinking as the snowline moves up the mountains, there’s less of an insulating snowpack in winter and fewer hours with appropriate temperatures for foraging in summer. Photos, diagrams (by Garnsworthy), and words work together to demonstrate the food web that includes this tiny mammal and other plants and animals, also threatened by the changing climate, whose lives connect with theirs. In conclusion, final essays explain today’s climate change causes and suggest some personal actions in the realms of transportation, living and eating habits, and sharing information, but no sources or further resources are offered.

**An effective demonstration of the reverberations of climate change.** (Nonfiction. 6-9)

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**MEGA REX**

A *Tyrannosaurus Named Scotty*

Persons IV; W. Scott

Illus. by Zaiken, Beth

Harbour Publishing (128 pp.)

$13.95 paper | Oct. 6, 2020

978-1-55017-905-7

A paleontologist introduces the largest *T. rex* fossil ever found along with some of its relatives and neighbors.

Discovered by an amateur dinosaur hunter (and named “Scotty” after what some of the excavators were drinking in celebration), the assembled monster now resides in Saskatchewan, where it was found. Persons surrounds the story of how it was discovered and conserved with imagined reconstructions of the beast’s Cretaceous-era setting, anatomical descriptions of tyrannosaurids and tyrannosauroids (including an observation that no one has yet found a way to tell a “He-Rex” from a “She-Rex” from fossilized evidence), and a gallery of other notable dinos found in Canada, from fleet *Struthiomimus* to “Power Muncher” *Edmontosaurus* (“a shrub’s worst nightmare”). As he goes, he adds nods to several associated museum workers and researchers. Paleoartist Zaiken fleshes out the prehistoric cast in realistic detail, giving some predators and prey flashy feathers, and, along with the customary views of a toothy *T. rex* on the prowl, includes a tender parent-hatchling moment. Her painted scenes are interspersed with generous arrays of field and specimen photos, maps, diagrams, and charts. Chapters are subdivided into one- or two-page topical segments, clearly demarcated by frequently amusing headings (“Lizard Lips”). Human figures all appear to be White.

**Regional in focus but lively, authoritative, and fun.** (index, glossary) (Nonfiction. 8-12)

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**NATALIE PORTMAN’S FABLES**

Portman, Natalie

Illus. by Mattia, Janna

Feiwel & Friends (64 pp.)

$19.99 | Oct. 20, 2020

978-1-250-24686-8

A trio of tales to educate and entertain. Updated versions of “The Tortoise and the Hare,” “The Three Little Pigs,” and “Country Mouse and City Mouse” guide readers through three classic tales. The stories are updated with amusing modern twists, such as how one little piggie uses the leftover chopsticks from a plethora of takeout orders to build a house of sticks, and kid-friendly details include a flatulent hare. Related in verse (mostly rhyming couplets with the occasional inexplicable variation), the stories suffer from labored syntax and shoehorned rhymes: “Planning and thinking out how to build cleanly / Makes your house sturdy / And keeps our Earth looking greenly.” The internal logic of some of the tales may baffle discerning readers; in “Country Mouse and City Mouse,” for instance, a rhinoceros is terrified by a house cat, and a rattlesnake attends a mouse’s dinner party as an invited guest. The cheery, colorful illustrations populated by smiling anthropomorphic animals do a lot of heavy lifting, and the balance of white space keeps the nostalgia-tinged compositions looking fresh and crisp. The art may not be enough to make this a family favorite, however. (*This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-13.2-inch double-page spreads viewed at 100% of actual size.*)

**Pretty but forgettable.** (Picture book/folktales. 5-8)
Landscapes are alluringly tranquil, and Arlo’s own yellows and browns harmonize with dusk’s burnt oranges.

**ARLO THE LION WHO Couldn’T SLEEP**

Rayner, Catherine  
Illus. by the author  
Peachtree (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 1, 2020  
978-1-68265-006-2  

An overtired lion can’t fall asleep.  
Arlo’s lids droop. His eyes sag. He flops over a tree branch. But sleep eludes him no matter where he lies down. “The grass was too prickly, and the earth was too hard... the sun was too hot, but the night was too cold.” Arlo’s downright exhausted—and then an owl sings him a quieting meditation. “Think about absence, and when summoned to the defense, he concocts new mischievous manipulations. Alternating between spreads of text that feature choice spot illustrations and lush, full-colored double-page spreads depicting Reynard’s crimes, the tales can be taken in bite-sized pieces but are ultimately woven into a satisfying overarching and cohesive book. Lauströer’s skill for visual storytelling shines through in masterful illustrations, which read as classical while remaining cleverly modern, with stroke economy in pen and gouache giving a sketchy—but not unfinished—feel. The illustrations match the pacing of the text, which vary dramatically, always with purpose. The whiskers and eyelids of the sleeping lions of Arlo’s pride show, via the most delicate lines, that sleep is bliss. Pair with Deborah Freedman’s **Shy (2016).**

**Gentle and gorgeous.** (Picture book. 3-7)
The worldbuilding is accessible and instantly engaging.

DUNGEON CRITTERS

EVEN MORE FANTASTIC FAILURES
True Stories of People Who Changed the World by Falling Down First
Reynolds, Luke
Illus. by Corley, M.S.
Beyond Words/Aladdin (304 pp.)
$21.99 | Sep. 15, 2020
978-1-4598-2136-1

In this follow-up to Fantastic Failures (2018), Reynolds shares stories of more people who found their way to success after failure.

The names are famous—Barack Obama, Beyoncé Knowles, Greta Thunberg—and not so famous—like social worker and philanthropist Alan Naiman, and inventor of Kevlar, Stephanie Kwolek. They are diverse in age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and the areas of their passions, but they all have one thing in common: They achieved and excelled only after intense, often prolonged, rejection, pain, confusion, difficulty, and/or discouragement. Reynolds uses the engaging technique of hooking readers by opening each profile with a paragraph that describes an easy, predictable climb to the top, written in the familiar tone of many puff pieces. He then follows this fictional, idealistic story with the real one. This pattern helps readers see that stories of easy success are much less interesting and impressive than tales of hard-won glory. Toward the end of each story, Reynolds addresses readers with thoughtful advice based on the life in question, encouraging them to see difficulties and detours as steppingstones on their paths to their purposes. The chapters are adorned with black-and-white portraits of each individual, tiny sidebars highlighting additional personalities, and separate, pagelong sections called “The Flop Files” with still more examples. A list of questions at the end encourages readers to think deeply about intrinsic motivation, core values, and big dreams.

Directly and humorously written, this volume will cultivate a growth mindset. (Nonfiction. 8-14)

RETURN FROM EXTINCTION
The Triumph of the Elephant Seal
Richards, Linda L.
Orca (96 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-4598-2136-1
Series: Orca Wild

Once thought to be extinct, northern elephant seals have returned by the thousands to rest and recoup, breed and give birth on beaches up and down North America’s Pacific coast.

Prompted by her unforgettable first sight of hundreds of elephant seals resting on a beach near San Simeon, California, and learning that these seals had been reported extinct at the end of the 19th century, journalist and novelist Richards tells this “good-news story” as if she were sharing her excited discoveries with a friend. Her narrative is loosely organized into four sections: a physical and social description; a history of the species; what their lives are like over a year that includes two migrations; and, more generally, threats, research, and where readers might see them themselves. Elephant seals, named for the male’s large and mobile nose, are astonishing creatures. They’re really, really big—a male might weigh up to 5,000 pounds. And, they can be really, really loud, louder than a plane taking off. There are plenty of facts, but some seem arbitrarily selected, appear out of the expected context, or are plain wrong (how a fish uses its tail). A nice mix of photographs, many her own, enlivens the pages. Each is labeled by source, and most are captioned.

This first effort at natural-history nonfiction endearingly reflects the author’s enthusiasm. (glossary, resources, acknowledgments, index [not seen]) (Nonfiction. 9-14)

DUNGEON CRITTERS
Riess, Natalie & Goetter, Sara
Illus. by the author
First Second (256 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-5250-19547-0

A group of animal friends investigates a pernicious plant.

Set within a vaguely medieval landscape, friends Goro, a hulking snake-like creature with legs; golden retriever and plant expert June; pun-loving arsonist cat Rose; and hot-tempered royal frog Prince Chirp are known as the Dungeon Critters. The Devil’s Thorn, a villainous vine, has appeared in their kingdom, and their investigation leads them to Chirp’s archnemesis, Baron Foxworthy, and his daughter, Verona. When Prince Chirp’s dad is gravely injured by the plant, June is implicated and the group is divided. Will they be able to find the source of the plant and save the king? Riess and Goetter’s brightly hued graphic novel is not only an inventively wrought fantasy, but also features queer characters; male Goro has a boyfriend; next in line to be king, Prince Chirp uses she/her pronouns; and Rose and June have a budding romance. The worldbuilding is accessible and instantly engaging, consisting of not only an approachable setting, but also emphasizing the importance of friendship and communication. Though primarily a fantasy, the fast-paced adventure, romance, and humor make for easy crowd appeal that traverses genre boundaries. The first in a proposed series (a cliffhanger teases subsequent adventures to save Goro’s boyfriend, horseboy), anticipate demand and expect rereads. Aftermatter offers a fascinating glimpse into the creators’ collaborative process of writing, drawing, and coloring the work. A delightful middle-grade tale that is inclusive, imaginative, and complex. (Graphic fantasy. 8-13)
An ode to friendship. Two siblings, presumed twins since they are in the same class and (spoiler alert) share a birthday in the end, go about their day and meet all kinds of friends. An animated tempo carries them through. With a yawn and stretch in the morning (“Our friends, best friends / those who wake us up friends!”); playful classroom antics in between (“Singing friends, dancing friends / hopping, skipping, jumping friends“); and a stop in the park after school (“Furry friends, feathered friends / lots of very hungry friends”); these two tots have a busy day. True to life, not all aspects of friendship are positive: A recess spread shows one child snatching the ball from another (“Funny friends, silly friends / sometimes not so kind friends”), but the rhythm bounces merrily along past any small squabbles. While not discrediting the good intentions of the text, the laundry list of friendship doesn’t add much to the conversation. The illustrations, however, show a peek into a truly varied and diverse set of friends. Children of many races are represented, along with one child of color in a wheelchair (throughout the entire story) and another child of color using a white cane. Even the adults, in various teacher and parent roles, show a wide representation. The protagonist pair have olive skin and straight, black hair, in contrast with their White-appearing dad. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.8-by-19.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 19.4% of actual size.)

A fun read-aloud beat, but the illustrations shine. (Picture book: 7-12)

**BEST FRIENDS, BUSY FRIENDS**

Rollings, Susan
Illus. by Cowdery, Nichola
Child’s Play (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-78628-466-2

An ode to friendship. Two siblings, presumed twins since they are in the same class and (spoiler alert) share a birthday in the end, go about their day and meet all kinds of friends. An animated tempo carries them through. With a yawn and stretch in the morning (“Our friends, best friends / those who wake us up friends!”); playful classroom antics in between (“Singing friends, dancing friends / hopping, skipping, jumping friends“); and a stop in the park after school (“Furry friends, feathered friends / lots of very hungry friends”), these two tots have a busy day. True to life, not all aspects of friendship are positive: A recess spread shows one child snatching the ball from another (“Funny friends, silly friends / sometimes not so kind friends”), but the rhythm bounces merrily along past any small squabbles. While not discrediting the good intentions of the text, the laundry list of friendship doesn’t add much to the conversation. The illustrations, however, show a peek into a truly varied and diverse set of friends. Children of many races are represented, along with one child of color in a wheelchair (throughout the entire story) and another child of color using a white cane. Even the adults, in various teacher and parent roles, show a wide representation. The protagonist pair have olive skin and straight, black hair, in contrast with their White-appearing dad. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.8-by-19.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 19.4% of actual size.)

A fun read-aloud beat, but the illustrations shine. (Picture book: 7-12)

**TELEPHONE TALES**

Rodari, Gianni
Illus. by Vidati, Valerio
Trans. by Shugaar, Antony
Enchanted Lion Books (212 pp.)
$18.29 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-59270-284-8

An Italian traveling salesman has promised his daughter regular bedtime stories, so he calls her nightly from a pay phone. To save money, he must keep his stories short. Whimsical in tone, many of these 67 short stories involve language play, such as tales about inventing numbers (“a triclyclon of squintillions”) and a boy who asks impossible questions (“Why do whiskers have cats?”). Some stories are philosophical in nature, questioning war (in one story, a “festy concert of bells” rings from a cannon) and power (a child who is literally transparent alters everyone’s views of a tyrant). A string of closing stories centers on other planets, including one about a chick from Eighth Mars who tells everyone that “the word ‘enemy’ is nonexistent outside of Earth.” Each story is accompanied by an illustration, many inventive and done in highly saturated colors; most humans are depicted with magenta skin. Many stories include gatefold illustrations; others are illustrations on inset small pages, attached to the recto of a spread. Virtually all playfully ask readers to stop and think. Originally written 40 years ago by an Italian author, the stories hold up, though during a time in the United States in which monkey imagery is being reconsidered in children’s books, readers may bristle at a story about dimwitted anthropomorphic monkeys walking in circles in a cage at the zoo.

Offbeat tales for readers in the mood for something whimsically contemplative. (Picture book/short stories: 7-12)

**ASTRONAUTS ZOOM!**

An Astronaut Alphabet

Rose, Deborah Lee
Persnickety Press (36 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 5, 2020
978-1-943978-90-2

An alphabet of activities inside and outside the International Space Station.

In big, bright photographs, a cast of astronauts—39 all told, identified at the end, nearly half women, and diverse of race and national origin—“awake,” “brush” their teeth, and then go about their business until it’s time to be “zipped in for the night.” That business has a distinctly playful cast, as glimpses of astronauts exercising, using scientific instruments, or floating out in space are interspersed with views of one juggling 16 pieces of fruit, another giving a soccer ball a kick that sends him head over heels, two playing guitars, three sitting around a table with floating pizzas, and other signs that it’s not all noses to the grindstone all the time. Big letters that look a bit like refrigerator magnets accompany each photo, set against contrasting backgrounds. Despite this, the alphabetic bit is really just a pre-text, as closing notes explaining the tasks and instruments on display, an illustrated appendix about astronaut training, and a final list of home or classroom enrichment activities confirm. Everyone in sight is plainly having a grand time, though, so the pedagogical ballast puts no heavy load on a high-spirited picture of daily life in low-Earth orbit. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9.8-by-19.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 68% of actual size.)

A fizzy mix of space fun and science. (Informational picture book: 6-8)
A CROWDED FARMHOUSE FOLKTALE
Rostoker-Gruber, Karen
 Illus. by Swarner, Kristina
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-0-8075-5692-4

A wise woman offers advice to a farmer whose home is too noisy and too crowded.

A little house with a human or animal face in every window sits solidly in the meadow as a cock welcomes the morning. It is an “itty-bitty house” in every detail. Farmer Earl strides out the doorway of his too-crowded and too-noisy house, leaving behind his wife and several children to ask a neighbor for help. The answer, to bring his ducks into the house, confuses him, but he follows her advice. The ducks do as ducks do—“flapp[ing]” and “snack[ing]” and “waddl[ing]” and “quack[ing]”—so the farmer returns to the wise woman. Housing the horses and goats are her next words of wisdom, resulting in even more mayhem. Finally, the outdoor animals are returned to the outdoors, and Farmer Earl at last finds peace “AND extra space!” The author credits the Yiddish folktale “It Could Always Be Worse” as her source, but the flavor of the original is gone. With the answer, to bring his ducks into the house, confuses him, but he follows her advice. The ducks do as ducks do—“flapp[ing]” and “snack[ing]” and “waddl[ing]” and “quack[ing]”—so the farmer returns to the wise woman. Housing the horses and goats are her next words of wisdom, resulting in even more mayhem. Finally, the outdoor animals are returned to the outdoors, and Farmer Earl at last finds peace “AND extra space!” The author credits the Yiddish folktale “It Could Always Be Worse” as her source, but the flavor of the original is gone. With the answer, to bring his ducks into the house, confuses him, but he follows her advice. The ducks do as ducks do—“flapp[ing]” and “snack[ing]” and “waddl[ing]” and “quack[ing]”—so the farmer returns to the wise woman. Housing the horses and goats are her next words of wisdom, resulting in even more mayhem. Finally, the outdoor animals are returned to the outdoors, and Farmer Earl at last finds peace “AND extra space!”

A Yiddish folktale retold without the oy vey. (Picture book. 6-8)

White actress, their reveries culminate in thoughts about what their lives would be in the spotlight as well as a tale of becoming superheroes. Those familiar with the series should heartily enjoy this fantasy that calls upon the predictable tropes and touchstones within the decades-long franchise. With a yester-year, sitcom-esque vibe, readers new to this world should be fine starting with this volume, though they may be a bit put off by the hokey, canned-laughter feel to the pair’s exploits. Williams’ full-colored art keeps its point of view centrally on the characters, creating a cinematic approach. Betty and Veronica are both White, conventionally attractive, and slim; secondary characters present with more diversity but none truly make it into the spotlight.

A fanciful “what if” for die-hard fans. (Graphic fiction. 9-14)

ATTACK OF THE UNDERWEAR DRAGON
Rothman, Scott
 Illus. by Oswald, Pete
Random House (40 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-593-11989-1
978-0-593-11990-7 PLB

When the dreaded Underwear Dragon attacks the kingdom, only young Cole can rise to the fire-breathing challenge.

Hoping to join his favorite knight, Sir Percival, as his assistant, Cole writes a heartfelt letter to the famed warrior. Cole’s letter moves Sir Percival to tears (“That’s right. Knights cry”), and Cole gets his wish. Soon enough, the assistant knight is learning to ride horses, swing swords, and calm Sir Percival’s fears of the Underwear Dragon. It’s a rough training for Cole, full of knocks from horses, princesses, and other knights. Nevertheless, Cole finds his knighthood education worthwhile, and he quickly becomes Sir Percival’s greatest supporter. Then the Underwear Dragon arrives and lays waste to the kingdom. One by one, the knights fall to the dragon’s wrath until Cole’s the last brave hero standing in its way. Full of amusing asides, dry wit, and droll pacing, Rothman’s tale of a knight-in-training piles on giggles induced by the dragon’s underwear will abate after a few pages. Still, the author sneaks in a refreshing deconstruction of knighthood that peels back the impenetrable facade for something that’s altogether comical and, thus, empathetic. Oswald’s frenetic artwork—appropriately grand and splashy—provides lots of gags, particularly via exaggerated facial expressions. Cole and Sir Percival present White; the kingdom is a diverse one.

A tiny knight’s tale that’s hard not to like. (Picture book. 4-8)
Florence Nightingale turned her away too, but Seacole knew England in debt. Her service was at last acknowledged and her finances saved by contributions made by the English people and friends and most teachers seem to dislike her—and dreams of as an army nurse in the Crimean War (the basics of the war are arrived sick with cholera, she would nurse them. Wherever outbreaks in Kingston. Finally, she went to London to volunteer cholera in Panama when she visited her brother; yellow fever of the boardinghouse her mother left behind. When soldiers arrived sick with cholera, she would nurse them. Wherever she went, her medical knowledge was needed: an outbreak of cholera in Panama when she visited her brother; yellow fever outbreaks in Kingston. Finally, she went to London to volunteer as an army nurse in the Crimean War (the basics of the war are described for context). She was turned away due to her color, but she packed her treatments and headed to Turkey on her own. Florence Nightingale turned her away too, but Seacole knew her services were needed, and she went elsewhere, ultimately spending years treating soldiers on the battlefield. She became famous when a British war journalist praised her, and she eventually wrote a book about her experiences—but she returned to England in debt. Her service was at last acknowledged and her finances saved by contributions made by the English people and the crown. This slim book features full-page, color illustrations throughout, and the text quotes Seacole’s memoir to give the narrative the flavor of her era, personality, and experiences. It is a riveting story that deserves attention.

Both biography and subject are unique and inspiring. (source notes, bibliography) (Picture book/biography. 8-12)

A detailed biography of a Jamaican woman who nursed soldiers in battle during the Crimean War.

Maddie is ready to enact change. There are just two problems: She can’t legally run for mayor and her preoccupied, noncommittal parents aren’t nearly as worked up about this as she is. But Janet, her recent college graduate nanny, is a viable option. Janet accepts Maddie unconditionally and encourages her activism. They register Janet as a mayoral candidate just under the deadline, kicking off Maddie’s crash course in democratic processes. After a minor scandal, the campaign looks hopeless, forcing Maddie to seek out help from an unlikely source: her classmates. Maddie—who believes it’s her quirks, not her lack of a filter, that keep her from connecting with others—guides the long-shot team in hopes of improving society. This energetic, mindful book reinforces the agency of children and will inspire them to take action. Black-and-white cartoon-like illustrations throughout are often humorous and reinforce Maddie’s uncensored opinions. Maddie is White, Janet is brown-skinned, and there is diversity throughout.

A timely book encouraging youth to get involved. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

A young boy tells of his friendship with his neighbor Frankie, who’s “kind of old and walks with a stoop.”

In this sweet story, originally published in Spain, the young narrator describes all the things that make his neighbor Frankie special. Frankie has lived a life full of adventure and excitement. Originally from South America, Frankie has “traveled across half the world” on all modes of transportation, and he’s worked in the circus and also the theater. But best of all, Frankie tells stories that leave young David sitting still and amazed. And sometimes, as Frankie sits at home, with his years and his memories and his many pets out of control, he says “all sorts of colorful things. From our house, we can hear just how mad he gets.” And whereas his mother seeks to reassure the boy Frankie is “just a crazy old guy,” the boy makes no judgment and accepts Frankie just as he is, showing a true understanding of the meaning of friendship. The stylized and playful artwork in saturated colors against mostly white backgrounds tends toward the surreal, full of playful angles, patterns, and details (such as the “colorful things” emanating from Frankie’s house). They depict the characters as White; David has blond hair, and Frankie has a prominent jaw and a bald head.

A charming story of intergenerational friendship. (Picture book. 5-8)
With giant spiders, zombies, and a satisfyingly stinky solution, the adventure is packed with creepy, disgusting action.

**THE MUTANT MUSHROOM TAKEOVER**

Short, Summer Rachel
Simon & Schuster (256 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-1-338-46865-8

A budding scientist battles an insidious, glowing fungus. When friends Maggie and Nate decide to investigate paranormal activity in Old Man Bell’s woods, Maggie hopes to take the perfect photo so she can win a contest that would allow her to meet with the board of the company that pretty much runs the small town of Shady Pines and convince them to rehire her father. The two friends have been through a lot together, but neither one is prepared for giant, neon bioluminescent mushrooms. Beautiful at first, deadly on further inspection, Maggie and Nate’s fungal discovery leads them on a hair-raising race against time to save Maggie’s brother, everyone in Raccoon Creek Trailer Park, all of Texas—heck, maybe even the world—from the mutant mushroom takeover! Written from Maggie’s first-person perspective, with exaggerated characters and occasionally gross humor, this tale is reminiscent of a larger-than-life monster movie. With giant spiders, zombies, and a satisfyingly stinky solution, Maggie’s adventure is packed with creepy, disgusting action. Some characters lack dimension, but Maggie herself is compellingly complex. The small-town setting allows for a contained cast, with White main characters. An author’s note separates content, this book could easily springboard classroom discussion or library programming.

**Packed to the gills with fun.** (Science fiction. 10-13)

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**THE DESERT PRINCE**

Sevigny, Alisha
Dundurn (376 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Sep. 19, 2020
978-1-4597-4432-5
Series: Secrets of the Sands, 2

In this sequel to The Lost Scroll of the Physician (2020), the spy they’ve freed leads the young scribes across the Egyptian desert to rescue pharaoh’s daughter from the Hyksos chieftain’s stronghold. If freeing and following Pepi is risky, remaining in Thebes spells certain death for Sessa, Paser, and Reb. Pepi earns their trust on the hazardous journey where dandelions fly in the sky, and poop on our cars? does its job.

If the previously disparaging Thebans are shocked to find Hyksos Reb. Pepi earns their trust on the hazardous journey where dandelions fly in the sky, and poop on our cars? does its job.

A richly detailed, immersive read. (Historical adventure. 9-13)

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**DINOSAURS ARE NOT EXTINCT**

Real Facts About Real Dinosaurs

Sheneman, Drew
Illus. by the author
Harper/HarperCollins (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 20, 2020
978-0-06-297234-7

Can it be that dinosaurs still actually live in our backyards, fly in the sky, and poop on our cars?

Indeed. Though it’s not exactly news anymore, Sheneman here gives the bird-dino connection fresh jolts of wonder and hilarity. He traces it from the Jurassic Era to today—explaining how an asteroid brought the age of dinosaurs to a sudden end (allowing, the mammalian author rashly claims, mammals to become “the dominant form of life”) but left one branch of feathered theropods to evolve, diversify, and spread to nearly every corner of our planet. The illustrations follow suit, beginning with mildly caricatured, dot- or googly-eyed dinosaurs posing in idyllic settings and making dim-bulb side comments. These give way in stages to views of modern (equally verbal) penguins, pigeons, peacocks, and other avian species in various habitats before gathering with their (even more) prehistoric forbears for a stroll revealing group portrait and then perching around the closing timeline. “I still don’t get the resemblance,” mutters a fuddled-looking T. rex at the end, looking down at a chicken. Viewers, though, well might. A trollish caveman, a lumpy White descendant in a lab coat (identified as “your dad”) joking about the fried dinosaur on his plate, and a dinner companion politely telling him to cut it out are the only human figures in sight. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-22-inch double-page spreads viewed at 68% of actual size.)

Why pine for prehistoric predators when their direct descendants are perching on the nearest birdbath? (Informational picture book. 5-9)
Imogene has many peculiarities, but she carries them with great aplomb. She has a long history of growing, albeit temporarily, animal appendages. Her most famous animal accoutrements were a huge rack of antlers and a lovely display of peacock feathers, as seen in Imogene’s Antlers (1985). She is a curious child, always eager to see what the day brings, perhaps more antlers or something new and different. When she wakes up with a giraffe’s long neck and horns, her family is “stupified,” but she is delighted. In fact, she uses her new height to find her brother’s football and helps her neighbor’s kitten down from a tree. Another day she sports an elephant head and trunk, happily helping one of the servants water flowers. When she flies about on her butterfly wings, her mother reacts in anger and embarrassment to her daughter’s multiple transformations. Imogene relishes her uniqueness and uses it wisely and kindly. But then something amazing and totally unexpected happens.

Callie sits by a palm tree with the family dog and watches the departing bus. One page, “$ is for Nothing,” is utterly empty. Depicting a different set of commuters hustling toward the edge of the page, a cloud of exhaust and zoom lines indicating the other side of that particular experience, “$ is for Just missed it” depicts a different set of commuters hustling toward the edge of the page, a cloud of exhaust and zoom lines indicating the departure bus. One page, “N is for Nothing,” is utterly empty except for the text, which recalls the “Goodnight nobody” page of the depart book—lend cohesion to the book as a whole, except for the text, which recalls the “Goodnight nobody” page.

Charming Imogene is one of a kind, but the original is still the better work. (Picture book. 4-8)

A move from one coast to another stirs up plenty of emotion for a young child.

Callie sits by a palm tree with the family dog and watches as furniture and boxes are piled into a bright yellow moving van. “Goodbye, house.” Tears dot Callie’s brown face and brown hair as goodbyes are exchanged with friends. The family arrives in a new neighborhood, near a different ocean. Page after page of brightly colored images with clean outlines float past readers’ eyes. The words “same” or “new” label every item readers spot in Callie’s new world, crystalizing the mixture of emotion a move brings. “New bathroom. / Same towel.” The hardest part for the only child is nighttime, with new shadows and new sounds. Smith captures the kernel of truth that it’s family that makes a home, showing the comfort of the same kisses and hugs from Mama and Papa. Callie is a sweet mix of the two, with the hairstyle of darker-skinned Mama and the lighter skin tone of spiky-haired Papa. Through the skilled pacing, simple wording, and bright images, readers will sense the whirlwind of feelings in Callie’s new world while anchored in the security of a loving family.

A simple capture of the complex emotions of moving that will resonate with many. (Picture book. 4-8)
ZOMBIE, OR NOT TO BE
Sullivan, Kyle
Illus. by Sullivan, Derek
Hazy Dell Press (220 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-948931-13-7

There’s something rotten in Deadmark, and it’s not the zombies—it’s a science-denial conspiracy!

The humans of Ignorway destroyed the environment so badly that viruses ran rampant. One was a zombie virus, and eventually, the zombies abandoned the ruined land to create Deadmark, their rational, science-positive democracy. In this *Hamlet*-meets-zombies story, when Edda’s mother, the elected Lead Scientist, mysteriously goes missing, Agonista, Edda’s environmental lawbreaking businesswoman aunt, is selected to replace her. Greed-driven Agonista immediately starts dismantling sustainable energy sources in favor of oil. With the help of allies—vampire bat Bram, the enchanted floating skull Rick (of the Glob Theater)—Edda discovers her mother’s dark, humanized fate. The heroes quickly stage a production of the scheme and turn—exile, a naval battle, Zombies for the Ethical Treatment of Humans and their development of cruelty-free, lab-grown meat—into further detail about each subject’s life. Some of the women included from long ago include Empress Theodora, Queen Nefertiti, and poet Rabia al Adawiyya. Among the present-day women are Manahel Thabet from Yemen, a scientist, economist, and mathematician; Maha al Balushi, an Omani pilot and activist; May Ziadeh, an Egyptian writer and feminist; and Amal Clooney, a Lebanese British human rights lawyer. A variety of different accomplishments and careers are introduced, particularly for present-day women. Tarnowska defines terms, identifies present-day areas where some of these women live or lived, and writes about how each woman succeeded and what she has done to change the world. Many, ranging from Cleopatra to Zahra Lari, an ice skater from Abu Dhabi, followed their dreams, whether or not they were supported by family, friends, and community. These biographies will both inspire readers and correct misconceptions and stereotypes about women from the Middle East. There is a glossary but no bibliography or list of resources. A map serves to define the region.

Courageous leaders, activists, creators, and pioneers guaranteed to inspire. (map, glossary) (Collective biography 9-13)

AMAZING WOMEN OF THE MIDDLE EAST
25 Stories From Ancient Times to Present Day
Tarnowska, Wafa
Illus. by Esteves, Margarida & Hadadi, Hoda & Habgou, Sahar & Halal, Cristelle & Meza, Estefi
Crocodile/Interlink (112 pp.)
$19.95 | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-62371-870-1

A compilation of short biographies of 25 Middle Eastern women, all trailblazers in their fields, and their achievements, from ancient times to the modern day.

Each chapter (about four pages long) introduces one woman, highlighting her achievements on the first page, which faces an illustration in a range of styles but with saturated colors that complement the page backgrounds. The second spread goes into further detail about each subject’s life. Some of the women included from long ago include Empress Theodora, Queen Nefertiti, and poet Rabia al Adawiyya. Among the present-day women are Manahel Thabet from Yemen, a scientist, economist, and mathematician; Maha al Balushi, an Omani pilot and activist; May Ziadeh, an Egyptian writer and feminist; and Amal Clooney, a Lebanese British human rights lawyer. A variety of different accomplishments and careers are introduced, particularly for present-day women. Tarnowska defines terms, identifies present-day areas where some of these women live or lived, and writes about how each woman succeeded and what she has done to change the world. Many, ranging from Cleopatra to Zahra Lari, an ice skater from Abu Dhabi, followed their dreams, whether or not they were supported by family, friends, and community. These biographies will both inspire readers and correct misconceptions and stereotypes about women from the Middle East. There is a glossary but no bibliography or list of resources. A map serves to define the region.

Courageous leaders, activists, creators, and pioneers guaranteed to inspire. (map, glossary) (Collective biography 9-13)

SACRED SONG OF THE HERMIT THRUSH
A Native American Legend
Tehanetorens
Illus. by Fadden, David
7th Generation (40 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Aug. 27, 2020
978-1-939053-26-8

A Mohawk pourquoi tale explains how the hermit thrush and other birds got their songs.

“Long ago, the Birds had no songs,” the story opens; only humans sang. On a visit to Earth, the Good Spirit notices the silence until he hears chanting coming from “an Indian village,” depicted as several longhouses, smoke rising gently above them. The Good Spirit decides to give song to the birds, calling them together and telling them, “You are to fly as high as you can…. The Bird that flies the highest will have the most beautiful song.” Hermit Thrush knows he has no chance against stronger flyers such as Akweks, the bald eagle, so he sneaks under the eagle’s feathers and rides up till even Akweks can fly no higher. Thus only Hermit Thrush is able to reach the Spirit World, from which he descends with the most beautiful song—and sudden, crushing shame at his trickery. “That is why Hermit Thrush is so shy.” Illustrator Fadden (Akwesasne Mohawk) is the grandson of the author, a teacher at the St. Regis Mohawk School who was adopted into the Mohawk Wolf Clan and given the name Tehanetorens. (He died in 2008.) The telling is stately, with a steady, oral cadence. The dappled paintings offer field-guide–worthy images of the bird characters and depict the Good Spirit with brown skin and long, straight black hair.

Lovely. (Picture book/religion 4-8)
By highlighting the children’s classroom diary, Tunnell gives today’s young readers a primary source from the perspectives of their peers.

**DESSERT DIARY**

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**THE CHICKEN WHO COULDN’T**

Thomas, Jon  
Illus. by the author  
Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (56 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-4169-9699-6

A chicken who cannot discovers that, in fact, he can.

On the way home from a fair, after failing to win a single ribbon, Chicken’s cage is jolted out of the back of a pickup truck, leaving him to find his own way home to the farm. A comical cast of animals try to help. A bird suggests that he fly home; a frog who consults a manual claiming that chickens can only fly short distances, is less helpful. When Chicken tries to hide in a hole, a bespectacled mole and enthusiastic turtle try to instill in him the confidence he needs to overcome his fears. By repeating “I am a STRONG and POWERFUL and NICE-LOOKING chicken,” Chicken manages to intimidate a hungry fox, make it back home to the friendly farmer (a beige-skinned figure with overalls and hair in a braid), and even win more ribbons at next year’s fair before the whole ordeal starts over again. The comically heavy-handed message of self-confidence is predictably executed, with Chicken serving as a chaotic antihero. Thomas’ trademark goofy illustrations arranged in comic-style panels hold a great deal of energy, and the Looney Tunes-style humor will get a lot of laughs from young audiences. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 18.5% of actual size.)

Like popcorn chicken, this book’s got a nugget of protein at its center. (Picture book. 3-7)

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**THE BOOK OF SECRETS**

Tonti, Mat  
Illus. by the author  
Kar-Ben (208 pp.)  
978-1-5415-7825-8  
978-1-5415-7826-5 paper

Tonti seems not to be afraid to mix genres.

Readers who open this graphic novel to a random page might find a forbidden romance, a philosophical story about the delicacy of life, or an epic fight scene. Most of the stories are traditional Jewish folktales, but, disconcertingly, one chapter of the book is adapted from a bleak, cryptic section of Franz Kafka’s The Trial. It’s even more surprising when one of Kafka’s characters shows up in the middle of an apparently unrelated fight sequence. But every sequence is inventive. Ben, one of the main characters, uses a cup-and-ball game to fight off attackers. And the two siblings at the heart of the story are protected by the “Doughlem,” a golem baked from flour and other household ingredients. Remarkably, the story only rarely feels episodic or disjointed. It’s held together by a compelling, conventional fantasy plotline about the quest for the titular Book of Secrets. The artwork is less traditional. Perspective and anatomy are often distorted, as though the pictures had been drawn while the artist was looking at the page in a mirror. The character design is wonderfully odd, though. A pair of angels resembles the sea monkeys from ads in old comic books. Almost all of the human characters are White, though King Solomon and his daughter are light brown.

Readers will be happily confounded by every secret in this book. (Graphic adventure. 8-11)

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**THE KNIGHT WHO MIGHT**

Trelaven, Lou  
Illus. by Beckett, Kyle  
Maverick Publishing (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-84886-644-7

Move over Little Engine That Could and get ready to share the bookshelf with The Knight Who Might.

This knight’s mantra is: “One day, I might be a knight.” But in repeated refrains, his magic horse, sword, and helmet each proclaim, “You might not” after the knight falls off his horse with an “Oof,” gets his sword stuck in a tree, and falls into a mud puddle when he tries to put his helmet on. The horse, sword, and helmet even hide when the knight enters “ye olde tournament,” reasoning, “He can’t be a knight without us.” But when the ever positive knight journeys to the tournament alone, the three show concern. “He’ll be exhausted,” said the horse. “He’ll be cut to pieces,” said the sword. “He’ll lose his head,” said the helmet.” And when the knight is scheduled to battle The Lord With the Scary Looking Sword, the three doubters come to the aid of the knight when he declares, “For the first time in my life, I’m The Knight Who Might Not.” Tension builds the knight, now with his horse, helmet, and sword, gallops closer and closer to the scary-looking sword-wielding lord until…“DONK!” Beckett emphasizes the slapstick in his cartoons. The protagonist’s magic objects all have googly eyes and eyebrows, which is a little unsettling when the helmet is on the knight’s head but does add to the silliness.

Puns, humor, and onomatopoeia emphasize the value of trying. (Picture book. 4-7)

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**DESERT DIARY**

Japanese American Kids Behind Barbed Wire  
Tunnell, Michael O.  
Charlesbridge (144 pp.)  
$19.99 | Oct. 6, 2020  
978-1-58089-789-1

A look into a third grade class’s daily diary while imprisoned.

In December 1941, one year after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, those of Japanese ancestry, or Nikkei, living on the West
Coast were torn from their homes and sent to prison camps. By 1943, 8-year-old Mae Yanagi and other Japanese American children were starting school in Topaz Internment Camp in Utah. Mae’s third grade class started an illustrated diary of their daily life at camp. Diary entries included details about positive things, like schoolwork, sports, pets, and holidays. Often entries also mentioned injuries, illnesses, and farewells experienced by the students and the other captives. Quotes from prisoners of all ages are interlaced throughout, allowing their voices to come through. By highlighting the children’s classroom diary, Tunell gives today’s young readers a primary source from the perspectives of their peers. Images of diary pages fill in the gaps of the archival photos that too often hid the injustice. One entry notes that several blocks lost their running water; another records the loss of a roof to a storm. The selections throughout carefully balance harsh experiences with incredible resilience. An author’s note shares the heartwarming story of how he was able to meet and interview many of the children who wrote the diary; an editor’s note discusses the decision not to use the terms internment camps or internes.”

Informative, moving nonfiction that allows the Topaz detainees to share their story. (glossary, source notes, selected bibliography, index) (Nonfiction. 9-12)

MY NAME IS HELEN KELLER
Uhlberg, Myron
Illus. by Kocsmiersky, Jenn
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2020
978-0-8075-5322-0

Uhlberg tells the story of Helen Keller using her own words.

As it tells the story of Keller’s childhood and, more briefly, her adult life, the narrative alternates between Keller’s imagined perspective, enhanced with quotes from her book The Story of My Life, and that of a third-person narrator. The two narratives are distinguished by distinct typefaces. The illustrations support the text well, and the best of them are depictions of young Keller with a joyful smile. All the well-known events of her childhood appear in the text. Though this book would be a suitable introduction and is interesting in its use of quotes, it is disappointing in its failure to say anything new about her life. Like far too many Keller biographies for children, it shies away from discussing her political and social achievements or the complex intersections of privilege in her life, offering platitudes about love and hope. In 2020, why settle for anything less than a full account of her greatest achievements? Keller was getting an education, petting a tiger, and giving inspirational talks? Why relegate her disability advocacy to a single sentence in the narrative (the only page that introduces characters of color to the otherwise all-White cast) and a few bullet points in the timeline? Why not discuss her feminism, political activism, or the founding of the ACLU?

A charming exemplar of a type of book we don’t need. (author’s note, timeline, manual sign alphabet, source notes) (Picture book/biography. 4-8)

DOUBLE THE DANGER AND ZERO ZUCCHINI
Ubrig, Betty
McElderry (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-5344-6765-1

A reluctant reader reveals the enigmatic author behind a hit book series.

From C.S. Lewis to N.K. Jemisin, fantastic fiction is littered with authors known by their initials—but there’s none as mysterious as R.R. Knight, author of Gerald in the Warlocks’ Weir. With quick-witted, fast-paced narration, Alex Harmon reveals the real-world story behind the literary sensation. Although Aunt Caroline and her wife, Lulu, are expecting, Caroline hopes to bring another bundle of joy to the world: her debut children’s book. When she offers Alex $10 to beat it to a pulp, he finds the story dull (despite featuring a prizewinning zucchini), suggests Caroline liven it up, and accidentally begins contributing ideas. Due to a self-perceived paucity of imagination, he comes to rely on a series of stunts that inform his continued suggestions. These antics spark a creative partnership that soon includes his best friends, Javier, keen cinematographer, and Marta, who is always up for a stunt; precocious but trouble-prone little brother, Alvin; a merry band of elders at the local senior center; and a mysterious, potentially spectral “ghost writer” who begins writing Alex and his friends into the story. Can Alex coax Caroline into creating the sort of book he would want to read without hurting himself—or anybody else? Most characters default to White; Javier’s and Marta’s names cue them as Latinx.

A daring dose of humor, metafiction, and pardonable pandering to nonreaders and librarians alike. (Humorous fiction. 8-12)

THE WANDERER
Van den Ende, Peter
Illus. by the author
Levine Querido (96 pp.)
$21.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64614-017-6

A paper boat navigates an intercontinental voyage, meeting fantastic creatures, industrial ships, and surprising allies.

In this mind-blowing debut, Belgian author Van den Ende presents over 60 intricately rendered drawings, depicting everything from Escher-esque schools of fish to vast expanses of ocean and sky. The wordless tale begins near the Aleutians, where industrial ships, and surprising allies.

In this mind-blowing debut, Belgian author Van den Ende presents over 60 intricately rendered drawings, depicting everything from Escher-esque schools of fish to vast expanses of ocean and sky. The wordless tale begins near the Aleutians, where
above meticulously detailed underwater tableaux. The conflicted interplay between humans and ocean habitats is portrayed throughout. Juxtaposed with a doleful, pipe-smoking baleen whale is a surreal anglerfish/crustacean hybrid with a broadcasting TV as bait perched atop a sunken trove of boats (including a paper one). More whimsically, a giant squid trades Karner blue butterflies are “silvery blue”; mating male Quitobaquito pupfish turn “iridescent blue”; eastern indigo snakes have “midnight blue” scales; blue whales appear “turquoise blue” underwater; male cerulean warblers boast “electric blue” feathers; an occasional lobster trapped in North Atlantic coastal waters is “sapphire blue;” the coats of some Alaskan black bears look “pearly blue;” and the big bluestem prairie grass formerly covering much of central North America manifests as “steely blue.” In terms of rarity, the text mentions ecological factors causing Karner blue butterflies, Quitobaquito pupfish, eastern indigo snakes, blue whales, and big bluestem prairie grass to be officially listed as endangered while cerulean butterflies, Quitobaquito pupfish, eastern indigo snakes, blue whales, and big bluestem prairie grass are considered a species of concern.” In contrast, blue lobsters and blue black bears are “naturally rare” rather than threatened. Delicate, realistic illustrations steal this show with splendid double-page paintings of the natural habitats and close-up portraits of each species discussed. Arresting perspectives add interest while use of a full-spectrum blue palette appropriately reinforces the blue theme, including endpapers featuring each subject washed in blue. Additional facts on each species, a glossary of terms, categories of species, and a selected bibliography flesh out the text for further study or discussion.

A visually appealing, informative peek at some of nature’s rare treasures, with a strong ecological subtext. (Informational picture book. 6-12)

**THE SECRET LIFE OF SAM**
Ventrella, Kim
HarperCollins (272 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-06-294118-3

A grieving boy is given a way to see his dead father again.

After Pa dies in a car accident, seventh-grader Sam is taken away from Bayou St. George, Louisiana, by Aunt Jo—now a virtual stranger whom he hasn’t seen in four years—to middle-of-nowhere Holler, Oklahoma. In Holler, he starts seeing an ugly, scarred gray cat, who leads him through the hollow of an eerie tree that transports him to a dreamy version of Bayou St. George. There, the cat turns into the Boy, a guide of sorts, and Sam’s reunited with his father and the Colonel, an alligator that’s a Bayou St. George legend. Too soon, Sam’s sucked back through the portal—but it will open again, the Boy tells him, same time each day, though not indefinitely. Sam’s pulled between the visits with his father (sometimes witnessing Pa’s memories and trying to bring his father back with him), the budding connections he builds with Aunt Jo as he gains a new understanding for who she is as a person (a veteran amputee and Narcotics Anonymous leader), and the first kid to befriend him, kindred spirit Edie. The magic’s rooted in evocative descriptions and strong emotions, perfectly suited to interplaying themes of truth and stories, just as Sam’s grief-and-letting-go storyline echoes both Jo’s and Edie’s grounded-in-reality subplots. Lacking racial descriptors, characters default to White. 

Magically mesmerizing and moving. (Fantasy. 9-13)

**JACOB’S FANTASTIC FLIGHT**
Waechter, Philip
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Lauffer, Elisabeth
Blue Dot Kids Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 13, 2020
978-1-73312-126-2

Young Jacob, uniquely able to fly, has a big adventure with birds on his way to join his parents on a Mediterranean vacation. Jacob’s peculiarity is introduced with humor and warmth: His parents hoped their baby would start crawling, but “he just flew off instead.” The text then assures readers that the parents quickly overcame anxiety over Jacob’s difference, loving him because that is what parents do. The lightheartedness continues as the mother and father easily agree to let their child fly alone for their upcoming vacation while the parents fly by airplane. Jacob bonds with various animals during his solo flight, eventually joining a flock of 83 birds. When Hubert—one of those birds—is nabbed by “a notorious birdcatcher,” Jacob and the birds become partners in avian heroics. Extra fun: Children will enjoy counting 15 “cranky cows,” 31 “snacky squirrels,” and,
of course, those 83 “birds on their way to Africa.” The translated text is full of understated humor and funny words, such as *themanigans* and *bamboozled*. The comical cartoon art matches the high quality and whimsy of the text. There is a magical double-page spread that shows Jacob mostly submerged in a woodland pond and surrounded by many varieties of happy, celebrating birds. The story comes full circle as Jacob and a new companion reunite with Jacob’s parents. Jacob and his parents are White, probably middle-class Germans.

**Highflying humor and heart.** *(Picture book. 4-8)*

A classics scholar presents select mythical episodes as tales meant to teach life lessons.

She doesn’t make much of a case. In a frame story, the myths are retold by an old owl to his granddaughter as a means of demonstrating the importance of keeping promises, being kind to others, thinking ahead, not being arrogant, and battling injustice. How the tales of Cronus’ eating his children and Zeus’ eating his wife Metis, Prometheus’ having his liver torn out daily, the evils bestowed on humanity from Pandora’s jar, Oedipus’ unsuspectingly marrying his mother, the Trojan Horse, the labors of Heracles, and at least most of the rest connect with these values is anybody’s guess. The storytelling leaves something to be desired. A thunderstorm strikes. The perfect shelter. The sea proves itself cruel, obliterating the travelers’ vessel, and those that can swim to shore do so. Not everyone makes it. More fall behind the further the journey goes on, and all along, Death lingers nearby, accompanied by its ibis. It’s a lengthy march disrupted with loss and grief until the migrants finally arrive at a landscape of blossoming shrubbery. Originally released in Mexico and imported via New Zealand, Peruvian creator Watanabe’s depiction of migration and its often harrowing trials shares no words but plenty of images that ask readers to consider. It’s a rare feat: a wordless picture book in which the absence of text intensifies the stories it tells. With its stark dearth of color, seen only where necessary, and evocative imagery, the artist’s pictures make the migrant’s journey—distinct yet everyday—feel palpable. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 9 by 18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 96.4% of actual size.)*

**A raw, startling portrait of migration.** *(Picture book. 5-9)*

The travelers—a group of anthropomorphic animals carrying just the clothes on their backs and what little else possible—stand out against the black background. There’s the unyielding deep green of the ground and the stark trees that line the path ahead. But wait, here comes Death with lively flowers pressed upon its black robe and a giant blue ibis at its side. Together the travelers set off, sharing food and company and camping when fatigue sets in. Once at the coast, everyone climbs aboard the boat, a modest wooden scrap against the turbulent sea. The sea proves itself cruel, obliterating the travelers’ vessel, and those that can swim to shore do so. Not everyone makes it. More fall behind the further the journey goes on, and all along, Death lingers nearby, accompanied by its ibis. It’s a lengthy march disrupted with loss and grief until the migrants finally arrive at a landscape of blossoming shrubbery. Originally released in Mexico and imported via New Zealand, Peruvian creator Watanabe’s depiction of migration and its often harrowing trials shares no words but plenty of images that ask readers to consider. It’s a rare feat: a wordless picture book in which the absence of text intensifies the stories it tells. With its stark dearth of color, seen only where necessary, and evocative imagery, the artist’s pictures make the migrant’s journey—distinct yet everyday—feel palpable. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 9 by 18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 96.4% of actual size.)*

**A raw, startling portrait of migration.** *(Picture book. 5-9)*

**Sketchy in logic as well as content—look elsewhere for more robust retellings.** *(map, genealogical table, afterword)* *(Cosmology. 10-13)*

**MIGRANTS**

Watanabe, Issa
Illus. by the author
Gecko Press (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-77657-313-4

Bear witness to a long, arduous journey across forests and seas for those searching for renewed hope.

The travelers—a group of anthropomorphic animals carrying just the clothes on their backs and what little else possible—stand out against the black background. There’s the unyielding deep green of the ground and the stark trees that line the path ahead. But wait, here comes Death with lively flowers pressed upon its black robe and a giant blue ibis at its side. Together the travelers set off, sharing food and company and camping when fatigue sets in. Once at the coast, everyone climbs aboard the boat, a modest wooden scrap against the turbulent sea. The sea proves itself cruel, obliterating the travelers’ vessel, and those that can swim to shore do so. Not everyone makes it. More fall behind the further the journey goes on, and all along, Death lingers nearby, accompanied by its ibis. It’s a lengthy march disrupted with loss and grief until the migrants finally arrive at a landscape of blossoming shrubbery. Originally released in Mexico and imported via New Zealand, Peruvian creator Watanabe’s depiction of migration and its often harrowing trials shares no words but plenty of images that ask readers to consider. It’s a rare feat: a wordless picture book in which the absence of text intensifies the stories it tells. With its stark dearth of color, seen only where necessary, and evocative imagery, the artist’s pictures make the migrant’s journey—distinct yet everyday—feel palpable. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 9 by 18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 96.4% of actual size.)*

**A raw, startling portrait of migration.** *(Picture book. 5-9)*

**The perfect shelter**

Welsh, Clare Helen
Illus. by Gilland, Åsa
Kane Miller (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-68464-050-8

A young child in an interracial family copes with an older sister’s illness and hospital stay.

Two children lie happily in the woods with their parents, among grass, trees, and flowers in hues of yellow, white, red, and blue. “At first nobody knew. It was the perfect day, it was the perfect weather… / ...to build a shelter in the woods.” The children sing as they work and build “the perfect, perfect shelter!” But soon things change. Big sister is tired. The weather reflects its ibis. It’s a lengthy march disrupted with loss and grief until the migrants finally arrive at a landscape of blossoming shrubbery. Originally released in Mexico and imported via New Zealand, Peruvian creator Watanabe’s depiction of migration and its often harrowing trials shares no words but plenty of images that ask readers to consider. It’s a rare feat: a wordless picture book in which the absence of text intensifies the stories it tells. With its stark dearth of color, seen only where necessary, and evocative imagery, the artist’s pictures make the migrant’s journey—distinct yet everyday—feel palpable. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 9 by 18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 96.4% of actual size.)*

**A raw, startling portrait of migration.** *(Picture book. 5-9)*
Hartas’ magical, delicate illustrations balance steadfast scientific accuracy with the slightest possible anthropomorphic exaggerations.

SLOW DOWN

50 Mindful Moments in Nature
Williams, Rachel
Illus. by Hartas, Freya
Magic Cat (128 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4197-4838-7

An enchanting exploration of everyday miracles.

Young readers have long delighted in anthologies of natural extremes—but what if they found equal enjoyment in processes slightly more sluggish but no less majestic? Somewhere between a picture book and a comics compendium, this immaculately illustrated tome intended for elementary-age naturalists is sure to charm observers outside that audience as well. Inside, the authors suspend 50 “moments” from the natural world—from falling meteors to metamorphosis in frogs and butterflies, cloud formation to salmon spawning—in time, allowing readers to review each occasion at their leisure. In each section, several paragraphs of preamble provide a bit of context for the examined event; image-based sequential storytelling then breaks the occurrence down into constituent steps. Williams’ concise, melodic captions impart essential information in easy-to-digest portions: chewier than mere tidbits but nothing that would overwhelm one’s appetite. The feast is found in Hartas’ magical, delicate illustrations, which balance steadfast scientific accuracy with the slightest possible anthropomorphic exaggerations. All told, the format appropriately encourages gradual consumption: This is not a single-sitting read! Throughout, the book urges readers to get out, slow down, and take the world in; at the end, it even provides sample practices for engaged observation. A list of further reading presents a curated list of conservation- and mindfulness-related nonprofits and organizations while a selected bibliography directs readers hoping to take a deeper dive into a topic of interest.

(The book was reviewed digitally with 9.2-by-23-inch double-page spreads viewed at 75% of actual size.)

Splendiferous! (Informational picture book. 4-10)

A MAGIC SPARK
Young, Jessica
Illus. by Vanderbemden, Marie
Acorn/Scholastic (64 pp.)
$4.99 paper | $23.99 PLB | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-338-59652-6
978-1-338-59653-3 PLB
Series: Fairylight Friends, 1

Three young fairies have short adventures in this early chapter-book series opener.

Artistic Ruby, speedster Iris, and nurturing Pip go on a fairy school field trip, visiting the Crystal Pool, where each glimpses a hint of their special magic. In the second story, Pip drops by as Ruby bakes a cake (discovering her artistic magic at the decorating stage), with excuses for why he can’t help her with each task—before being comedically cornered into doing the dishes in order to get to eat some. In the third, Iris attempts to fly to space to catch a star—using her speedy magic—before tiring out and using her coat to parachute back to her friends. In the fourth, Iris struggles to find patience as Pip waits for a seed to sprout only for Pip’s plant-magic to kick in big. Finally, the trio plans a surprise party for their teacher to show off their new magic. Short, simple sentences make up the brief narration (never more than three sentences of exposition per page), complemented by short dialogue in speech balloons. The equally simple plots are easily digested by emerging independent readers hoping to take a deeper dive into a topic of interest.

(The book was reviewed digitally with a 9.2-by-23-inch double-page spread viewed at 75% of actual size.)

Gentle fun that prioritizes its readers’ needs. (Guide to drawing Ruby, story prompt) (Graphic/fantasy hybrid. 5-7)
Even a vampire’s skills need prop-up.

In Transylvania, a diminutive young vampire is distressed when his puny shadow fails to frighten a little girl. He tells her that if he can’t scare anyone, he won’t pass his upcoming “text.” (This vamp substitutes “z” for “s” and “th.”) His fate if that happens? He’ll go to “banana peeled zchool.” Pitying him, the girl offers to help. The next evening, she encounters a gigantic shadow cast by the vampire, greatly enlarged from what it would be naturally thanks to interesting props. The girl faints in mock terror. The vampire’s cronies congratulate him on his success, and he receives a medal for “biggest scare.” The wee ghoul thanks his friend for her assistance and boost to his self-confidence. In a concluding twist, the girl thanks him for helping her overcome her fear of vampires! This odd, unfunny Portuguese import has glaring problems: The vampire explained he could fail his exam next day but didn’t manage his “scare” until the next evening. What happened at the exam? More mysterious. The vampire’s skills need prop-up.

I'M A ZCARY VAMPIRE

Andrés, José Carlos
Illus. by Gómez
Trans. by Sirs, Céline & Figueiredo, Salvador
nubeOCHO (40 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-84-17673-85-7

This isn’t a Halloween treat to savor; skip it. (Picture book. 4-7) (Un vampiro peligrozo: 978-84-17673-84-0)

LATE FALL HOLIDAY PICTURE BOOKS

MONSTERS 101

Atkinson, Cale
Illus. by the author
Doubleday (32 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Aug. 4, 2020
978-0-593-12280-8
978-0-593-12281-5 PLB

If readers think they know everything about monsters, they can guess again.

By checking out this zany field guide–like offering, monster mavens will learn lots about these creatures or enlarge their store of knowledge about them. Under the expert tutelage of professors Batula McFang, Blobbins, and Howlsworth and abetted by brains-loving Tina the Zombie, all of whom gamely escort readers through these pages, kids will pick up salient facts about monsters. These include types, diet, biology, habitats, history, and more—including tidbits about what monsters themselves fear the most and what they get up to under some people’s beds! The text’s silly conversational tone is comically tongue-in-cheek and should convince skittish younger readers that the book is meant to evoke chuckles, not shrieks. However, some slightly gross references may elicit an eww or two and/or, perhaps, a mild frisson of delighted shivers. Actual text is kept to a minimum per page, with charts, sidebars, and diagrams breaking up wordiness and heightening visual appeal. The lively, very colorful illustrations are imaginative and filled with racy details that kids will love poring over. This title’s use in libraries may be limited by a full-page chart that resembles a checklist for kids to fill in and a removable “Monstronomy Diploma” at the end of the book.

Readers can have a monstrous good time, and not just at Halloween. (Picture book. 4-8)

RUNAWAY PUMPKINS

Bateman, Teresa
Illus. by Coleman, Stephanie Fizer
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-58089-681-8

Let’s hear it for smashed pumpkins!

Excitement’s running high when students take a field trip to a pumpkin patch. Each child will pick a pumpkin, then return to school and decorate it. The trip is filled with cheery anticipation; the pumpkin patch offers many choices. On the ride back, however, the latches on the bus’s exterior storage bins loosen, and, unbeknownst to riders, the gathered gourds roll out onto streets, lawns, and everywhere; most are ruined. All’s not lost, however. Residents witness the fiasco and devise a plan to save the day. Back at school, the kids and teachers finally realize what happened and observe that only the enormous pumpkin strapped to the bus’s roof survived. Students collaborate to decorate it. But the best is yet to come. The kindly neighbors turn up with a bounty of treats they prepared from the salvaged pumpkin bits. This sweet, upbeat charm’s bouncy rhymes roll along merrily and are thus nicely suited to the story’s theme—and satisfying conclusion: If life hands you smashed pumpkins, turn them into pumpkin pie, cake, cookies, etc. Illustrations are lively, childlike, and suffused with bright shades of autumnal orange. Both kids and adults are racially diverse; some children and adults wear glasses. A pumpkin cookie recipe appears in the backmatter.

A jolly story that readers can appreciate during the Halloween and harvest seasons. (Picture book. 4-8)
What can a ghost do when she’s lost her boo?

Little Ghost has a dilemma. Attempting to frighten an unsuspecting human (who presents White), she finds to her dismay that, instead of her signature sound, only “a rush of cold air” escapes her mouth. Mama Ghost sympathizes but fears her child’s “fright nights are done.” Not one to give up easily, Little Ghost launches a search. She encounters her friends Owl, Pigeon, and Rooster, whose sounds are all similar to “Boo”; unable to join Little Ghost in her search for her boo, they offer to lend her their cries. She declines, explaining that, while the calls are perfect for them, they aren’t as scary as hers. She finally heads home, despondent, and meets another pal whose voice resembles her own. In an unexpected concluding twist, Little Ghost locates the friend she most needs, the one who will assuredly help reclaim her boo-tiful sound. This cute but thin read will appeal to ghost fans; they’ll find the idiom with which the story concludes is likely to go over young kids’ heads. However, readers will giggle at and savor the very colorful photographed dioramas filled with witty, inventive details composed of common household objects, gadgets, and other items that create “realistic” backgrounds. The three protagonists and doctor are bespectacled and have limbs fashioned from bent paper clips. (This book was reviewed digitally with 10.3-by-18.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 74.4% of actual size.)

Readers will want to think twice the next time they reach for a snack. (Picture book. 3-6)

Poesy has been put to bed, but she’s got monsters to fight. Brown-skinned Poesy has her toys and her snack. Daddy has read the monster book with her and tucked her into bed, asking her to “PLEASE stay in bed,” to which she responds sweetly, “Good night, Daddy.” The lights are out, and the battle begins. She knows the monsters are coming, and she has a plan. First, the werewolf appears. No problem. Poesy keeps fighting the monsters that keep appearing out of the shadows, fearlessly and with all the right tools, to the great delight of her parents, a Black-appearing woman and a White-appearing man, who are oblivious to the monsters and clearly fed up and exhausted but used to this routine. Poesy is clearly fed up and exhausted but used to this routine. Poesy wins, of course, and the ruckus causes a “cross” Daddy to appear at her door, telling her to stop playing with toys and go back to bed. She dutifully lets him tuck her back in. But on the next page, her eyes are open. “Daddy was scared of monsters. Let DADDY stay in bed.”

Poesy keeps fighting the monsters that keep appearing out of the shadows, fearlessly and with all the right tools, to the growing consternation of her parents, a Black-appearing woman and a White-appearing man, who are oblivious to the monsters and clearly fed up and exhausted but used to this routine. Poesy is irresistible with her brave, two-sided personality. Her foes don’t stand a chance (and neither do her parents). Rockefeller’s gently colored cartoon art enhances her bravery with creepily drawn night creatures and lively, expressive faces.

This nighttime mischief is not for the faint of heart. (Picture book. 4-8)
GUSTAVO, THE SHY GHOST
Drago, Flavia Z.
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-5362-1114-6

Poor Gustavo—everyone looks right through him.

Whether he shows up as a paint canvas or a soccer ball, no one seems to notice. Of course, it doesn't help that he's timid—or a ghost. He literally blends into the background. He can't even get up the courage to buy an “eye-scream,” much less approach his crush. What's a shy, violin-playing ghost in love supposed to do? Finally tired of feeling left out, Gustavo decides to invite all the monsters to a violin concert at the annual Day of the Dead party in the cemetery. Surrounded by decorated altars, Gustavo sadly realizes that no one is coming. He picks up his instrument anyway and lets the music carry him away. As he plays, he begins glowing brightly with happiness and confidence, eventually noticing that the graveyard is filled with all his invited guests from the neighborhood, who can see him for the first time. Mexican-born author/illustrator Drago sweetly captures the angst-y little ghost's perpetual perturbation. His true love, Alma, is a bespectacled invisible girl—appropriately named, as “Alma” means soul or spirit in Spanish. Iconic images of Mexican culture cleverly pepper the scenery. With the papel picado banners, panes de muerto, and Catrinas, Drago provides a festive environment for Gustavo's laments. Decorated skulls peek out from around every corner; even the family goldfish is smiling skeleton.

This ghostly tale proves that anyone can have a happily-ever-after. (Picture book. 4-9)

PEARL AND SQUIRREL GIVE THANKS
Ehrenberg, Cassie & Ehrenberg, Ryan
Illus. by Ehrenberg, Ryan
Orchard/Scholastic (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-338-59209-2

When Pearl the pup and friend Squirrel learn about Thanksgiving, they find out just how much they have to appreciate.

Unlikely friends and cardboard-box roommates Pearl and Squirrel are opposites in many ways. Squirrel prefers the finer things in life, and Pearl is a little less fussy. After Stan the food cart man explains Thanksgiving as “when you share what you’re thankful for with family and friends,” they decide to count up everything they are thankful for. A sudden rainstorm makes them less than thankful, though. After Stan (who has brown skin and curly dark hair) comes to the rescue with an abrupt adoption, they realize they’re most grateful for their “new family and their own place to belong.” Ryan Ehrenberg’s cartoon illustrations—the real heart of the book—envelop readers in a sense of season and place. There are lovely scenes of city skylines and bridges, and the feeling of fall is tucked away on nearly every page in piles of leaves at the park and vibrant orange trees and bushes. Darling touches like a string of soda can tabs that decorate Pearl and Squirrel’s cardboard-box home give the book a nice richness. The story is sweet and insubstantial, a fairly conventional approach to presenting the concept of Thanksgiving to very young readers, emphasizing practicing gratitude while entirely avoiding the holiday’s complicated origins. (This book was reviewed digitally with 9-by-18-inch double-page spreads viewed at 89.2% of actual size.)

The immersive illustrations and cute critters make up for the pat lesson on giving thanks. (Picture book. 4-6)
This rhyming story is certainly an unusual take on the finding-oneself trope.

**SHE WANTED TO BE HAUNTED**
Ewert, Marcus  
Illus. by Ghahremani, Susie  
Bloomsbury (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Jul. 7, 2020  
978-1-68119-791-3

Which cottage would stand out more in a real estate ad: cute or...haunted? Clarissa the sentient cottage dislikes cuteness; as a pink, adorable haven for flowers and squirrels, she's bored. She yearns to be scary and haunted like her father, a gloomy castle, and her mother, a smelly, vermin-infested witch's hut. Dad gladly donates clouds but tells Clarissa it's OK to be herself. The clouds are a bust because they bring rain, which brings forth...a rainbow, plants, and birds. Mom supplies a reeking bottle whose contents allegedly repel living things. Clarissa opens it but...attracts playful dogs. Finally abandoning her desire for a ghostly boarder, Clarissa invites her animals to remain. At the end, a particular creature's unexpected arrival—and its most uncharacteristic behavior—reveal Clarissa's true nature: horrible and cute. And she's just fine with that. This rhyming story is certainly an unusual take on the finding-oneself trope. The bouncy verses mostly read and scan well, include sophisticated vocabulary, and provide Clarissa with a spunky, appealing personality. Different typefaces represent the voices of Clarissa, each parent, and the narrator. The cheerful, lively illustrations are very colorful but a trifle twee; Clarissa and her parents are endowed with large, expressive eyes; as the story proceeds, its personality shifts. Some art is set in colored panels; plenty of white space focuses attention on the sweet characters. The engaging dialogue is set in white type within colored speech balloons. As LEGO fans will recognize, the minifigure is a small, smiling, brown-haired, yellow-skinned toy garbed in red shirt and blue slacks. The monster is taller, composed of various bricks, and endowed with large, expressive eyes; as the story proceeds, its eyes reveal its personality shifts.

A gentle monster story for the very young, appropriate for Halloween or any time. (**Picture book. 3-6**)

**A NOT-SO-SCARY MONSTER!**
Fenske, Jonathan  
Illus. by the author  
Scholastic (32 pp.)  
$14.99 | Aug. 4, 2020  
978-1-338-36082-0

Happiness is being exactly who you are. The monster in this breezy LEGO tale would agree. Its plight, as it admits to a passing human minifigure, is that it fears it's "an embarrassment to monsters everywhere" because it doesn't always want to be scary. Sometimes it wants to be happy, sad, grumpy, silly, or funny, but it believes it must always be frightening. As its new pal explains succinctly, it's perfectly fine for it to be any kind of monster and express all sides of its personality when it feels like it—including the fearsome side. After all, the human toy reasons, “You are a MONSTER. Who is going to stop you?” This cute, humorous story aims to reassure readers that emotions aren't one-dimensional; it's OK to display one's varied, true feelings. Aside from the positive, empowering message, readers’ attention will be captured by vividly colored illustrations featuring bold outlines and onomatopoeic sound effects. Some art is set in colored panels; plenty of white space focuses attention on the sweet characters. The engaging dialogue is set in white type within colored speech balloons. As LEGO fans will recognize, the minifigure is a small, smiling, brown-haired, yellow-skinned toy garbed in red shirt and blue slacks. The monster is taller, composed of various bricks, and endowed with large, expressive eyes; as the story proceeds, its eyes reveal its personality shifts.

This entertaining tale about making new friends may also help readers conquer their fear of clowns. (**Picture book. 4-7**)

**THAT MONSTER ON THE BLOCK**
Ganz-Schmitt, Sue  
Illus. by Flowers, Luke  
Two Lions (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 1, 2020  
978-1-5420-0533-3

You never know about neighbors. Monster wonders who's moving in next door. The new neighbor might be an ogre, goblin, or dragon, so he practices his best welcoming growl. Then, the new owner turns out to be...a clown. Monster calls pals Zombie, Mummy, and Yeti with the news. All steadfastly ignore Clown—because he's not a monster. Undeterred, Clown introduces himself around to no avail. Clown leaves notes and gifts; still, no one responds. Monster determines to scare him away. Unwittingly, Clown endears himself to the neighbors in the meantime. When Monster confronts his nemesis, he discovers his friends cavorting at Clown's impromptu circus—and decides to cultivate an open mind. In an unsurprising ending that feels rushed and tacked on, Monster has fun at the circus and invites Clown to a party. During the festivities, a new nonmonster moves into the neighborhood. This time, the newcomer is heartily welcomed, its obvious differences now accepted by everyone. This humorous, fast-paced story, narrated with clipped sentences, conveys an important, unsubtle message about the importance of accepting diversity: The “monster” is one who thinks friends must be similar to them. Type is set in various fonts and colors, heightening visual appeal; lots of onomatopoeic sound effects are incorporated into the text. Highly expressive characters feature in the colorful, comically silly, frenetic illustrations.

This entertaining tale about making new friends may also help readers conquer their fear of clowns. (**Picture book. 4-7**)
At her first sleepover, Willa is afraid of showing her friends her true self.

Willa, Val, and Fiona love to play Ninja Club at school. They even have the same ninja T-shirts and backpacks. For her birthday, Val is having a Ninja Club sleepover at her house, but Willa has a problem. Willa is a werewolf, and the party is on the night of a full moon. If she exposes herself to the moonlight and becomes a werewolf, Willa thinks she'll scare her friends away. She devises a plan to stay out of the moonlight, but it is more difficult than she imagined. Then, when they're going through an obstacle course, Fiona falls and reveals a secret of her own. Willa must decide whether to be brave or keep her secret hidden. Ninjas and the supernatural make for a fun fusion in this story about friendship, acceptance, and first sleepovers. All three girls learn how to be brave and to trust one another while also discovering how their unique qualities make them awesome. The colorful and lively illustrations also hold secrets in the small details. The three girls are diverse; Willa has beige skin and brown curly hair, Fiona has medium-brown skin and black hair, and Val has pale skin and blond hair.

**A sweet, supernatural acceptance story.** *(Picture book. 4-8)*

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Even monsters have their off days sometimes and need expert help.

In this humorous rhyming book that acts as a simple explanation of EMTs’ important work and their equipment, Gus, an EMT and “amboolance” driver, is blue and has three eyes, two yellow horns, and fangs—a monster, in other words. Sally, Gus’ paramedic partner, is a White-presenting human. This duo caters to monsters, whom they ferry on their “Monster Squad bus.” Readers are cautioned never to say “quiet” around them. That’s because an ambulance has urgent work to do and needs to sound its siren—LOUDLY—as it hurries patients to the hospital. Afterward, the otherworldly creatures acknowledge the EMTs as heroes. The book does double duty. While it aims to be somewhat straightforward about EMTs’ duties, it’s packaged as a light monster story—appealing to child audiences, especially around Halloween. It provides some useful information; numerous items (some tongue-in-cheek) are labeled throughout (the lack of a pronunciation guide for such terms as defibrillator and kraken may prove challenging); and there’s even a glossary, though some terms are included for comic effect. The rhymes are bouncy and witty, and onomatopoeic sound effects are included in large capitals where needed to add drama. The comical, energetic illustrations are attention grabbers; the monsters are laughably weird and nonfrightening. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 8.875 by 14.375-inch double-page spreads viewed at 83% of actual size.)*

**Here’s one to have fun with as we cheer for essential medical personnel.** *(Picture book. 4-7)*

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**THE NINJA CLUB SLEEPOVER**

**Gebh, Laura**

*Illus. by Haley, Mackenzie*

Page Street (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Jul. 21, 2020

978-1-6414-940-5

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**IT’S HALLOWEEN, LITTLE MONSTER**

**Ketteman, Helen**

*Illus. by Leick, Bonnie*

Two Lions (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Jul. 7, 2020

978-1-5420-9208-1

Series: Little Monsters

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It can be a spooky thrill to go trick-or-treating for the first time.

Little Monster is excited to experience this Halloween rite of passage; the green Martian costume fits perfectly. Yet, as Little Monster and Papa venture out, the young one is leery. Scary things are all around: a pirate, witch, and ghost. On Little Monster’s street, it’s less the costumes than the wearers that look strange, given that residents are monsters themselves, albeit cute, smiling ones with big eyes. As they walk about, Little Monster begins to feel braver with Papa’s help. The pair’s final stop—a scary house with a graveyard for a front lawn—ushers in a surprise ending. This cute addition to the holiday shelf is by the creators of *Go to School, Little Monster* (2016) and the third in the Little Monster series. Told in rollicking rhymes, the story delivers humorous, not-too-scary chills for the youngest readers. The portrayal of a warm, patient relationship between child and father is welcome, as is the sight of a parent accompanying a child on nighttime trick-or-treating rounds, not universally presented in Halloween books. The delightful, expressive, atmospheric illustrations depict adorable, multicolored monsters—it’s definitely a diverse neighborhood. Winsome, lavender Little Monster, befanged, wide-eyed, noiseless, and bearing a spearlike tail, subs for kids who anticipate and feel wary on their own first Halloween forays. Papa is blue and also has large eyes, fangs, a tail, and no nose.

**Treat little ones to this sweet, entertaining holiday story.** *(Picture book. 3-7)*
**THE LITTLE KITTEN**

*Killen, Nicola*

*Illus. by the author*

Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster  
(32 pp.)  
$16.99 | Jul. 21, 2020  
978-1-5344-6696-8  
Series: My Little Animal Friend

Cats and loving homes make for a perfect fall or anytime story.

On an autumn morning, cat-suited Ollie goes outside to play with her cat, Pumpkin. Just as she’s about to jump into a pile of leaves, the wind blows them everywhere. Hiding underneath is a small, shivering kitten, whom Ollie picks up. She, Pumpkin, and the newcomer play, then rest. When the kitten wants to resume frolicking, Ollie runs into the woods with him, forgetting sleeping Pumpkin. Posters on trees tell Ollie that someone’s lost the kitten. Suddenly, another gust of wind reveals a hidden path that leads the little kitten safely home. Tearfully, Ollie now remembers Pumpkin but is herself lost. All ends extremely well, however, and a marvelous surprise conclusion results in happiness for all on this very special night that might have seen coming—and an unexpected gift the next morning! The simplest of premises brings great rewards in this sweet, heartwarming charmer, narrated with economic, beautiful language. Matching the lovely story is simple, pleasing art, presented in a palette of shades of gray and orange, black, and white. Adding magic to the simple scenes are flashes of shiny orange foil in some illustrations and on the dust jacket. Cutouts on a few pages open up clever new perspectives on following pages. Ollie presents White.

**Lucky kitten, lucky readers: a sweet, special Halloween story.** *(Picture book. 3-7)*

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**WHEN PUMPKINS FLY**

*Lawrence, Margaret*

*Illus. by Sandland, Amanda & the author*

Inhabit Media  
(32 pp.)  
$16.95 | Sep. 8, 2020  
978-1-77227-249-9

When Halloween comes to an Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic, some “passengers” arrive concurrently on the last cargo flight in October.

After the school principal hears that plane’s engines, she requests some of its cargo for her pupils: pumpkins, the first ones local kids have seen. The young narrator wonders about this thing in the classroom and what to do with it, but pretty soon the children are carving a face and placing a candle in the pumpkin; afterward, they snack on its insides. The narrator imagines the tunnaat, “ancient and wise beings” that “live out on the land,” taking his pumpkin that night on one of their regular visits. In the art, Sandland and Lawrence depict a smiling, shadowy being who is clearly thrilled to see the pumpkins. This brief, upbeat Canadian import sets a familiar holiday against a cultural backdrop that rarely sees such fare in books. Young readers south of the Arctic will enjoy seeing how the holiday plays out in the far north, where pumpkins do not grow; those for whom Arctic Halloweens are commonplace will appreciate a story that includes their own customs in the celebration. A guide to the pronunciation of two Inuktitut words used and a website for language resources are included, but there is no glossary. Illustrations feature vivid colors; children’s skin tones are light brown. *(This book was reviewed digitally with 8.5-by-11-inch double-page spreads viewed at 87.2% of actual size.)*

**Far from your everyday Halloween tale.** *(Picture book. 4-7)*

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**FRANKENSTEIN DOESN’T WEAR EARMUFFS!**

*Loren, John*

*Illus. by the author*

Harper/HarperCollins  
(40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Jul. 21, 2020  
978-0-06-294114-5

Even monsters need help in nasty weather.

It’s Halloween; a boy dons his Frankenstein’s-monster get-up. But whenever he tries to step outside, his parents stop him to hand over inclement-weather duds: galoshes, scarf, parka, earmuffs. By his third attempt, he’s burdened with a camping lamp, fanny pack, and snack. The kid finally roars, “FRANKENSTEIN DOESN’T WEAR EARMUFFS!” and exasperatedly shakes everything. Finally outdoors, he sees costumed kids bundled up. Conceding his parents were right, the kid gratefully accepts the warm clothes, then joins fellow tricksters. This humorous tale establishes a rollicking pattern, juxtaposing opening atmospheric, holiday-themed rhymes accompanied by spooky, painterly illustrations with a more cartoony style for the rhyming admonitions from the boy’s parents when adding to his wardrobe. The dark verses are interrupted strategically with page turns introduced by capitalized grown-up warnings in speech balloons: “HOLD IT!” When the spooky rhymes/illustrations resume, they comically depict/describe Frankenstein wearing his newly acquired garb, then eventually cease altogether when the verses describe only kid, accoutrements, and his unprotected misery outdoors. Fortunately, his parents have followed with the necessary gear. Neither they nor other adults join the trick-or-treaters, however, a depiction of adult concern that some may wish had been included. The bouncy verses read and scan well; the humorous, energetic artwork very ably serves the text. The boy and parents (the grown-ups are faceless) have brown skin; other youngsters are diverse.

**An unusual, funny take on the typical Halloween story—and a reminder to dress appropriately.** *(Picture book. 4-7)*
PUMPKIN MAGIC
Masessa, Ed
Illus. by Wragg, Nate
Cartwheel/Scholastic (32 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Jul. 7, 2020
978-1-338-56332-0

Magical moonbeams awaken a pumpkin patch to raucous Halloween-season revelry.

A moonbeam illuminates and energizes a smiley-faced pumpkin sitting alone on a stair; it promptly takes off to find a friend with whom to have a good time. An entire pumpkin patch, also sparked by the magical moon, instantly comes alive. And what merriment all the grinning gourds get up to! Their playful shenanigans include piling high on top of one another, bouncing on a trampoline, dancing, marching, and drumming, wearing costumes, and competing in games. They even engage in activities usually reserved for other holiday-themed icons—flying on brooms and making magic, for instance. As dawn approaches, the pumpkin leader escorts the cavalcade back home. At sunrise, each one takes up residence on a different house’s front porch and awaits that evening’s moonbeams to work their magic again. Liveliness and good cheer abound in this frisky rhyming tale in which the perennial holiday symbols naturally take center stage. Perky couplets that read and scan very well appear on most pages and are accompanied by energetic, expressive illustrations that highlight vivid oranges, yellows, blues, purples, and greens with touches of other bright shades.

Readers will delight in discovering the joyous time pumpkins have when it’s Halloween. (Picture book. 3-6)

IT’S A PUMPKIN!
McClure, Wendy
Illus. by Kromrej, Kate
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-8075-1216-6

A group of animals discovers a large, round, orange object with a green stem and begins to question and surmise its usefulness and possibilities.

Squirrel and Field Mouse push it out of the way, and it rolls to a stop where Opossum is napping. Opossum thinks it makes a rather comfortable chair. Raccoon is sure it is a table to support a plate of cookies. Soon others join in to enjoy the cookies and cider, which Opossum contributes. While the impromptu party is in full swing, Woodchuck explains the object would make a good doorstop. As day turns to night, Skunk professes that it’s really a lamp and demonstrates how to carve it out and place a candle inside the now-smiling face. The pulp and seeds are then used for pie and roasting, which everyone snacks on till they hunker down for winter. When they emerge in the newly verdant spring, they discover a plant that produces a flower, which then becomes an orange, round object and...it’s party time again. These unclothed but otherwise anthropomorphic cartoon creatures never actually say the name of this autumn gourd, leaving it to kids to express the obvious, only acknowledged in the title. The somewhat lengthy text spins out its premise deliberately, and kids who know very well that it’s a pumpkin and what a pumpkin is for may tire of the speculation, but the community interactions are charming to watch.

Curiosity and ingenuity in a mild fall mystery. (Picture book. 3-5)

I LOVE MY FANGS!
Miller, Kelly Leigh
Illus. by the author
Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-1-5344-5210-7

You’ve got tooth problems? What should Dracula do?

Young Dracula loves his pointy, sharp fangs. They’re his heritage. He brushes and flosses regularly, and a wiggly fang worries him. When it falls out, he’s horrified! He resorts to fix-it measures: taping, tying, and sticking it with gum. One night he catches the Tooth Fairy in the act of "stealing" the fang. Mom and dad gently explain the truth and help Drac relinquish his prize. Eventually, a new fang grows in. Guess who shows it off—and can’t wait for the other fang to fall out? For leery kids at the wiggly-tooth stage and just in time for Halloween, here’s a fun take on the I’m-afraid-to-lose-my-baby-teeth trope. Using very simple language, Dracula clearly conveys his and many kids’ fears. The parents helpfully make their point comprehensible, too: It’s the Tooth Fairy’s job to take fangs so strong adult teeth can grow; understanding the Tooth Fairy’s sadness at not being able to do her job makes it easier to let it go. And a new tooth does emerge. Happily, good oral hygiene is stressed. Text is set in all capitals; different types are sometimes incorporated to funny, emphatic effect. Humorous, expressive illustrations appeal with strong lines and colors. Widow-peaked Dracula is winsome, as are his monster pals. He and his parents are ghastly white, but their family portraits have diverse skin and hair colors.

A diverting, nonfrightening vampire story with a message. (Picture book. 4-7)
The rhymes read and scan deliciously well and develop vocabulary wonderfully.

THE GHOSTS WENT FLOATING

THE LITTLE GHOST WHO WAS A QUILT
Nason, Riel
Illus. by Eggenschwiler, Byron
Tundra (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-7352-6447-2

A ghost learns to appreciate his differences.

The little ghost protagonist of this title is unusual. He’s a quilt, not a lightweight sheet like his parents and friends. He dislikes being different despite his mom’s reassurance that his ancestors also had unconventional appearances. Halloween makes the little ghost happy, though. He decides to watch trick-or-treaters by draping over a porch chair—but lands on a porch rail instead. A mom accompanying her daughter picks him up, wraps him around her chilly daughter, and brings him home with them! The family likes his looks and comforting warmth, and the little ghost immediately feels better about himself. As soon as he’s able to, he flies out an identical experience. The soft, pleasing illustrations’ palette and type of covering; a blanket, for instance, might have enjoyed the trick-or-treating mom and daughter, have beige skin. The delivery of this positive message has something of a heavy-handed feel and is rushed besides. It also isn’t entirely logical: The protagonist could have been a different type of covering; a blanket, for instance, might have enjoyed an identical experience. The soft, pleasing illustrations’ palette of tans, grays, white, black, some touches of color, and, occasionally, white text against black backgrounds suggest isolation, such as the ghost feels about himself. Most humans, including the trick-or-treating mom and daughter, have beige skin. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-by-16.6-inch double-page spreads viewed at 66.2% of actual size.)

Halloween is used merely as a backdrop; better holiday titles for young readers are available. (Picture book. 4-7)

THE GHOSTS WENT FLOATING
Norman, Kim
Illus. by Fleck, Jay
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-374-31213-8

Various fearsome but playful beings wend their ways toward a secret destination on Halloween night. Ghosts, vampires, mummies, zombies, witches, skeletons, and others utilize various styles of locomotion to navigate “up the hill, / in the chill, / by the light of the moon, / moon, moon, moon.” And they do so very rhythmically in this winner of a holiday-themed counting book. Those adult readers who are familiar with the bouncy song “The Ants Go Marching” will happily trot that tune out to sing to listeners, rather than read, the rollicking verses herein, inspired by the rhyme schemes and rhythms of that jaunty ditty. The rhymes read and scan deliciously well and develop vocabulary wonderfully by utilizing nifty words to describe the characters’ movements and behaviors as the creatures and count-along proceed. Witches “cackle” and “crank their motors” (their brooms have outboards); mummies “stumble,…murmurs echoing frightfully”; zombies “lumber” and “lurch”; and vampires “hover.” The humorous, extremely child-appealing illustrations are set against mostly dark red, blue, and purple backgrounds lit by a full moon, as befits the occasion. Cheery, dapperly attired protagonists move inexorably through the atmospheric evening—until the final spread makes it delightfully clear why the motley crew’s trek up that hill was well worth the trip. A hevy of smily ghosts float gracefully across front and back endpapers.

No trick: Count this one as a real Halloween treat. (Picture book. 3-6)

BEARS AND BOOS
Parenteau, Shirley
Illus. by Walker, David
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Jul. 14, 2020
978-1-5362-0837-5
Series: Bears on Chairs

Does the box of Halloween costumes contain enough to clothe a passel of bears?

There’s a lot inside that carton: “hats, capes, and bats,” for example, and much more besides. And here come the four excited little bears, eager to comb through the contents to find the right trick-or-treat get-ups. At first, they find just what they want. Then, they simultaneously shout and pull at one another’s pickings as well, each desperately needing what another one has. The hubbub causes poor little Floppy to fall on her rear, so she tells Big Brown Bear she’ll wait until the others are done. Unfortunately, by the time everyone else has grabbed their stash, there’s nothing left in the box but a crumpled-up sash. Contrite, all the other bears willingly share their largesse with Floppy, turning her into the “holiday queen.” She leads the parade outdoors, all the bears dressed in their Halloween finest. This latest in Parenteau and Walker’s Bears on Chairs series is a sweet, brief rhyming tale for very young children that emphasizes kindness and sharing—a fine message for Halloween or any time. The lilting verses move smoothly and rhythmically and express a familiar scenario. The colorful, expressive illustrations are endearing; minimal text and lots of white space per page focus attention on the characters and goings-on.

Enjoyable holiday fare for the littlest trick-or-treaters. (Picture book. 3-5)
IF ANIMALS GAVE THANKS
Paul, Ann Whitford
Illus. by Walker, David
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-374-31341-8
Series: If Animals...

As summer turns to fall, adorable forest animals count their blessings in Paul and Walker’s newest addition to the If Animals... series.

Rabbit and Squirrel are each thankful for things that keep them warm—Rabbit for his thick fur and Squirrel for her puffy tail. Crow’s thankful for the “great bowl of sky,” and “Raccoon would chir-chirrrrr / thanks for her cub / and nuz-nuzzle him / and rub rubbi-rub.” Frog’s grateful for her “bug-catching tongue and her lily-pad boat”; Beaver, for his oarlike tail. A bit oddly, Coyote howls “thanks for the / bright, sunny day.” Bear makes appearances throughout the pages, collecting clover, round out the thankful friends who all gather round Bear’s laden table. After their feast, they lounge in the grass together, their contented looks saying everything. Paul’s rhyming verses here emphasize some of the sounds forest animals make, the typeset changing color and alignment to suit, and no doubt their contented looks saying everything. Walker’s cuddly creatures are like stuffed animals come to life, all gentle smiles and dot eyes. The softly colored palette and rounded edges in the illustrations further add to the sweet mood.

A nature-themed lead-in to Thanksgiving and, for the science-minded, a beginning lesson in adaptations. (Picture book. 2-6)

COOKIE BOO
Paul, Ruth
Illus. by the author
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$10.99 | Jul. 21, 2020
978-0-06-286956-2

Ghosts and monsters are known to scare folks at Halloween, but...cookies?

After being touched by a stream of magical moonlight, seven very mischievous, colorful, decorated-for-Halloween biscuits escape their tin and make their way out into the street, having already frightened Little Monster and Doggy. They shout “BOO!” at everything they meet. Lamppost? Check. Car? Check. Fireflies in a jar? Yep, them, too. And so it goes, the cookies BOO-ing at all the creatures they encounter, including a witch’s black cat. After a too-close brush with a hungry predator, the cookies manage to effect a quick escape—no crumbling here—and all ends boo-tifully in their favor. This adorable story is conveyed in lilting, rollicking rhymes that zing along with minimal text per page. Its original take on a Halloween theme and its cute “Gingerbread Man” vibe will entertain and delight young readers. The scenes on the final pages will keep kids guessing about what might happen next for Little Monster and the cookies. The delicious (in more ways than one) illustrations are charming, comical, and inventive, the cookies’ decorations providing clever inspiration for holiday-themed baking. Strong, crisp lines and colors encourage readers’ focus on characters and actions. Shiny colored foil on the book’s cover enhances visual excitement.

Very flavorful; young readers will savor every crumb. (Picture book. 4-7)

WE’RE GOING ON A GOON HUNT
Rex, Michael
Illus. by the author
Putnam (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 18, 2020
978-1-984813-62-6

Hunt for a bear? That’s so yesterday.

On a spooky Halloween night, we’re hunting for...a green GOON. We’re not really scared. Let’s start in a pumpkin patch. We can’t go over or under it, so we’ll just go through it. We’ll do the same in other likely goon hideouts: a swamp, a tunnel, a forest, a graveyard, and, finally, a haunted house. In this atmospheric “petrifying parody” of We’re Going on a Bear Hunt, a dad and his four kids, dressed in Halloween finery and accompanied by their costumed pup, search for the elusive quarry. They become more frightened (particularly dad and pooch, even from the outset) as they proceed along the increasingly murky path—except for the youngest, unicorn-outfitted child, who squeals a delighted welcome to whatever creature unexpectedly materializes. As in the classic original, evocative sound effects (“Gurgle hiss, gurgle hiss, gurgle hiss!”) ring out as the quintet moves through each hazard. Unsurprisingly, the group locates the goon, forcing them to retrace their steps home in a frenzied hurry, odd noises and all. They reach safety to discover...uh-oh! Meanwhile, someone’s missing but having a ball! Even readers who’ve never read or heard about the bear expedition will appreciate this clever, comical, fast-paced take. The colorful line illustrations are humorously brooding and sweetly endearing, with the family (all members present White) portrayed as growing steadily apprehensive. (This book was reviewed digitally with 8.5-by-20.8-inch double-page spreads viewed at 74.6% of actual size.)

Young readers will hunt out this enjoyable crowd pleaser again and again. (Picture book. 3-7)
An autumnal celebration of friends and gratitude, minus story and historical context.

Siscoe's text follows a group of anthropomorphic animals who are enjoying the fall season. As time passes and their numbers grow, they decide to get together for a meal. Although this gathering includes overt offerings of thanks and the menu has some hallmarks of the traditional American Thanksgiving feast (a pumpkin pie, roasted squash, cranberry sauce), the centerpiece of a roasted turkey is not there (there is no flesh of any kind). Also missing are any references to particular historical context, and any whitewashed references to Pilgrims and Indians are mercifully absent from words and pictures. Ultimately, however, there's little to sink one's teeth into in terms of story. Gibson's illustrations, which are photographed dioramas with intricate settings, are more engaging, with the animal-doll characters positioned against hazy autumnal settings of a hill's summit, a farmers market, an orchard, a garden, and then interior scenes of the titular “Friendsgiving” gathering. Children will likely enjoy them more than they will engage with the plot, which mostly involves bland conversations about foodstuffs, including one spread in which the characters marvel at the variety of apples they pick and another in which a mild debate over the superiority of apple pie versus apple crisp is resolved with the chipper agreement that both are delicious.

Entertaining and enjoyable for building and critter lovers. (Picture book. 4-7)

A lonely middle schooler literally makes a friend.

Watkins pairs miserable young Angus with Frank, a science-class frog who, upon being taken home for the weekend, dies on the family dinner table. Angus gets to work, and next morning Frank wakes up with a bolt through his neck…and a grouchy disposition: “You’ve brought me back, but who gave you permission? / My body was old, I’d lost most of my vision. / Now everything hurts even more than it did. / I was not in the mood to wake up to you, kid.” Still, Frank agrees to stick around as a permanent houseguest (being apparently unmissed back at school), and the stage is set for a final family gathering featuring a grown-up Angus and another frog topped (natch) by a tall hairpiece with a wavy white stripe. Readers who sucked up *Giracula* (2019) and found it wanting aren’t going to leap to embrace this second nonsensical, poorly written outing either, Watkins having forcibly wrenched many of the lines into verses: “The laughter started at table five, / And reached poor Angus, who started to cry. / His parents were wrong—this school was no different / Than those in the previous cities he’d lived in.” Angus and his parents register as White, but in his cartoon illustrations, Tuchman does vary skin tones slightly in class and crowd scenes. (This book was reviewed digitally with 11-inch double-page spreads viewed at 77% of actual size.)

A frankenfailure. (Picture book. 6-8)
WE'RE GOING ON A PUMPKIN HUNT
Wilcox, Mary
Illus. by Munsinger, Lynn
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$16.99  |  Aug. 4, 2020
978-1-62354-118-7

Going on a pumpkin hunt isn’t for scaredy-cats. No, it’s for six costumed animal pals, on the prowl for the “biggest pumpkin in town” on a dark night. Inspired by the classic We’re Going on a Bear Hunt, this peppy tale also stars an intrepid, adventurous band trekking through a who-knows-what-we’ll-find? landscape. As in that story, some odd noises punctuate the journey past various obstacles. “Are you scared?” asks one or another of the bigger animals of the little mouse along the way, but it professes bravery each time. This hunt is quite the enterprise, involving mountain climbing, walking through grass, tree climbing, rowing, and trumping through a pumpkin patch—where the group encounters...never mind. Beating a hasty retreat, the pals race past all their previous hurdles until they reach home—without stopping to hear something really important a now-laughing mouse wants to tell them. After all their travails, the friends decide the best pumpkin in town is “the yummiest”—in the pie they bake together. This comical, rollicking story is delicious, too, filled with sweetness and autumnal good cheer, buoyed by the pals’ camaraderie. The charming, delicate line illustrations exude good spirits, and they feature lots of activity, nighttime ambiance, and white space. Readers will want to join these good-natured, adorable animals—pig, mole, duck, mouse, rabbit, and squirrel—on their pumpkin-hunting exploits.

Even without pumpkin pie, readers will hunt down this delightful Halloween offering. (Picture book. 3-7)

A UNICORN NAMED SPARKLE AND THE PUMPKIN MONSTER
Young, Amy
Illus. by the author
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
$17.99  |  Jul. 14, 2020
978-0-374-30850-6
Series: A Unicorn Named Sparkle

Who knew a unicorn could be a scaredy-cat? Lucy and her unicorn, Sparkle, anticipate fun at a pumpkin farm. They play games; eat treats, which Sparkle loves; and have spooky encounters, which Sparkle doesn’t. Decorating pumpkins is the unicorn’s least fun activity of all: His (carved with his horn) looks happy, but Lucy’s is scary, frightening him so much that he races into the darkened pumpkin patch, a worried Lucy calling after him. Sparkle hides; hearing a terrifying wail, he concludes it’s a “pumpkin monster.” Opening a large pumpkin, Sparkle steps inside, creating a perfect new hideaway. It’s perfect—except he still hears the monster’s fearsome cry and quakes in terror so much the pumpkin detaches from its vine and careens down a hill. Just then, Lucy spies a large pumpkin hurtling toward her and believes she’s within a monster’s clutches—until the pumpkin breaks open and...all ends well. Children will enjoy this cute but thin Halloween story that offers some thrills, sweet good cheer, and reassurances that loyal friendship rises above all. Illustrations are lively, humorous, and expressive; onomatopoeic sounds in large capitals are incorporated into text and art to dramatic effect. Lucy has dark, curly hair and pale beige skin. Sparkle is white with a pink heart on his rump; his blue horn resembles a party hat. Holiday-themed endpapers feature Sparkle.

A unicorn, a pumpkin, and a monster make for light and entertaining Halloween fare. (Picture book. 3-6)
HOW IT ALL BLEW UP
Ahmadi, Arvin
Viking (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-593-20287-6

As an Iranian American Muslim teen, Amir Azadi has long pondered what it would be like to come out to his parents.
In fact, he keeps a mental tally of all the positive and negative comments his parents make about gay people. But everything comes crashing down when school bullies photograph Amir kissing Jackson, the football player he's been secretly dating. They give Amir an ultimatum: $1,000 in hush money or they will show his parents the photo. On the brink of emotional collapse, Amir runs away, landing in Rome, where he meets Jahan, a proudly gay Iranian/Dominican man, and his eclectic friends. Amir embraces the newfound freedom to be himself and experience the joys of gay culture and community. But as his family desperately searches for him and relationships with his new friends become complicated, he finds himself missing home and feels the fear of being out ebb away. The story moves back and forth in time between these events and the airport interrogation room where, following a family altercation on the plane home, Amir tells his coming-out story to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer. The narrative structure will keep readers riveted as they try to piece together events. Ahmadi's writing is gripping, taking readers through the myriad emotions a gay Muslim teen experiences growing up in a country whose government is looking for an excuse to demonize Muslims.

A story of coming out and coming-of-age in a post–9/11 world. (Fiction. 14-18)

GENERATION BRAVE
The Gen Z Kids Who Are Changing the World
Alexander, Kate
Illus. by Orlando, Jade
Andrews McMeel (128 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-5248-6068-4

More than two dozen individual and collective profiles sing the praises of young activists in the U.S. along with a handful from around the world.
Well-known activists like Greta Thunberg and the Parkland Survivors join names worthy of more recognition, like...
The Coretta Scott King Book Award was established to honor outstanding books for young people by African American creators. First bestowed in 1970, the author award has since expanded to recognize illustrators, new talent, and lifetime achievement. Viewed within the context of this year’s movements for social justice, the 2020 acceptance speeches feel especially meaningful. Here are some words of wisdom from the middle-grade and YA fiction winners.

Jerry Craft, who won the Coretta Scott King Author Award for his middle-grade graphic novel, *New Kid* (Harper/HarperCollins, 2019)—also the 2019 Kirkus Prize for Young Readers’ Literature winner—spoke about being a reluctant reader when he was young: “I was never exposed to stories about African American kids with the same hopes and dreams as everyone else.” His goal is to give African American kids books with “characters who expose them to a life that they can aspire to as opposed to always showing them ways to live without the things—material and immaterial—that other kids are always allowed to enjoy.”


Reynolds says his collection of middle-grade short stories was an attempt to “show the whole world that exists within Black childhood.” He points out, “I could have written this book forever” and still not included every possibility. “Yet all we seem to do is pigeonhole [Black kids] as the coolest kid in the room or the toughest kid in the room, when they should be able to be whatever they want. I think that’s where freedom truly is….Freedom to me is the autonomy of identity.”

Mbalia spoke about “writing a story that asks, how do we move through the world with grief and happiness, with horror and joy, with pain and healing?” He reminisced about a childhood in which his parents fed him a diet of stories reflecting African and African American heritage that inspired his own middle-grade fantasy: “I am a river. I carry the blood, I carry the history, I carry the legacy...as I try to find my way to the sea where my people have long emptied the burdens they carry.”

Petrus’ YA novel is a love story between two Black girls as well as a reflection on spirituality and mortality. In her acceptance speech she thanked the many young people she’s met in person and over social media who have described being affected by her book. Knowing the obstacles many face, she says, “I want to create spaces of healing and witness for them.” Petrus also credits the work of Whitney Houston for inspiring her as she wrote about “Blackness, queerness, [and] getting to be in the world as women in ways that are of our own agency and empowerment.”

John Steptoe Award for New Talent Author winner Alicia D. Williams, who wrote *Genesis Begins Again* (Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum, 2019), a Kirkus Prize finalist, says many people called her “brave” for writing this middle-grade novel because “colorism is a topic that we swept under the rug—we’re guilty of it, every colonized country—yet we don’t correct it, kill it or change it. We pass it down, generation to generation, like an heirloom.” She feared criticism for writing about this difficult subject but thought about the impact on children who might “question what beautiful is and define it on their own.”

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
menstrual equality campaigner and author Nadya Okamoto and transgender activist Sage Grace Dolan-Sandrino, in this collection of short biographies. Each four-page treatment features a bold, bright portrait and enthusiastic text exhorting readers to take action in areas that matter to them. The subjects all belong to Generation Z, people between the ages of 12 and 22, and the work of those like gun reform advocate Thandiwe Abdullah and Helena Gualinga (Kichwa), who rallies people to protect Indigenous rights and fight climate change, makes for inspiring reading, especially alongside well-chosen quotes from the subjects themselves. The group is diverse in race and sexuality, though the narrative assumes a White middle-class reader with ready internet access, directly addressed as someone who finds it easy to take their rights for granted. It's refreshing to see corporate actions blamed for climate change instead of individual choices—but frustrating that a facing paragraph then recommends only individual, not collective, responses. One chapter discusses mental illness, but physical disability is notably missing. The absence of Mari Copeny, Little Miss Flint, is jarring considering the paragraphs spent on Jaden Smith’s activism for Flint.

A hopeful call to action. (about the author and illustrator)
(Nonfiction. 12-16)
has retreated into the escapist fantasy of a Dungeons and Dragons–like game. This book shines in certain areas while stumbling in others. The characters are real and likable, and their trauma is honest and raw. Bliss raises unanswerable questions that will allow teenage readers room to reflect and debate. He offers no trite solutions yet does not feign political neutrality. An element of the story having to do with zero-tolerance rhetoric that promotes criminalizing and expelling troubled kids instead of helping them may not be sufficiently contextualized for some readers. And though the characters and their trauma feel real, the depictions of their respective subcultures of skateboarding, basketball, and tabletop role-playing have the distinct flavor of an adult trying too hard to be hip. Ultimately, the book may leave some readers wanting a stronger thesis or at least a conclusive end to the kids’ stories. But as in trauma and life, sometimes there is no neat ending. Characters default to White.

An affecting story of trauma and healing. (Fiction. 14-18)

**FENCE**

**Striking Distance**

Brennan, Sarah Rees
Illus. by Johanna The Mad
Little, Brown (368 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Sep. 29, 2020
978-0-316-45667-8

Fencers face a challenge from their coach—learning to work as a team—in this novelized continuation of a sports romance comic series.

Kings Row, once underdogs despite being from an elite Connecticut boarding school with a long history of fencing, have won their first match of the year. Despite their potential, they are falling at bonding as a team. Nationally ranked prodigy Seiji doesn’t know the first thing about making friends. His roommate, Nicholas, a White scholar student, feels like an outsider surrounded by his wealthy classmates. White playboy Aiden couldn’t care less about anyone on the team except their captain, Harvard, who (according to their coach) needs to learn to prioritize himself once in a while. In the midst of their teamwork training, Harvard awakens to his sexuality, and Aiden battles jealousy to preserve their friendship. Although the romantic subplot includes a contrived scenario of dating lessons, the tension between Harvard and Aiden adds urgency to the story. The queer-affirming bubble of Kings Row drifts between fluffy escapism and realism. While the world imagines a place without hate for queer people, it withholds the same treatment for other differences. Harvard, who is Black, and Seiji, who is Japanese, remark on their experiences with racism. Bullies harass Nicholas for his socio-economic status. After a high-intensity buildup, readers may wish for a clearer resolution of the central romantic drama.

Fans of C.S. Pacat’s graphic series Fence may wish to reenter this world in novel form. (Romance. 14-18)

**THE CODE FOR LOVE AND HEARTBREAK**

Cantor, Jillian
Inkyard Press (304 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-335-09059-1

High school senior Emma Woodhouse, co-president of the coding club, is all about the numbers.

After Emma’s outgoing sister leaves for college on the other side of the country, Emma is forced to survive high school without her. She doesn’t have any friends besides George—who also happens to be her coding club co-president. Numbers make sense to Emma but not people, and her inexperience with relationships leads her to react insensitively to others, making her come off at times as dense and unfeeling. Emma is the last person one would suspect to create a dating app, as she’s never had a boyfriend and has no interest in one. So she surprises everyone when she writes The Code for Love to enter in the New Jersey state coding competition. While Emma thinks she can quantify love, other members of the coding club aren’t so sure she’ll succeed. At times dismissive toward those around her, Emma experiences growth throughout the novel by making friends and learning to stand up for herself. But when the couples the app matches start breaking up and she begins developing romantic feelings herself, Emma must come to terms with how complicated love can be no matter what her algorithm says. Insufficient character development leaves readers longing for greater depth and feeling a lack of investment in the outcomes of the pairings. Most characters are White. Two love matches, mentioned briefly, are same-sex couples.

A middle-of-the-road retelling of Jane Austen’s Emma. (Romance. 14-18)

**THE LOST BOOK OF THE WHITE**

Clare, Cassandra & Chu, Wesley
McElderry (384 pp.)
$24.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4814-9512-7
Series: Eldest Curses, 2

“The male” and friends go to Shanghai in this spinoff series sequel.

A peaceful night (infant son asleep, sailor pajamas on, book in lap) turns rowdy when intruders break into Magnus Bane’s Brooklyn apartment. Shinyun Jung appears with Ragnor Fell, Magnus’ old friend whom he thought to be dead. The two warlocks are working on a project together—something involving Sammael (the Father of Demons) and the Book of the White (which they’ve just stolen from baby Max’s room). Before departing nearly scratch-free, Shinyun “gifts” Magnus by stabbing him with a weapon called the Svefnthorn and leaving a glowing hole in his
Likewise, Julie’s insider view as a local who works for her family’s monster exterminator business gives the mystery an extra layer. Each side of the twins’ family is represented, including a gay family member who is addicted, it’s a real challenge. A few others, including the gay quarterback of their high-powered football team, decide to join them. With ample spare time, Annie begins volunteering at the local animal shelter, where she cares for a needy dog and develops an interest in a kind boy who works there. But ChitChat has a hold on Annie, and she cheats behind her friends’ backs.

Elements of supernatural horror and an idyllic, rural summer ratchet up the tension. **FORGET THIS EVER HAPPENED**

Clarke, Cassandra Rose

Holiday House (336 pp.)

$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020

978-0-8234-4608-7

Claire’s summer becomes a mind-bending, life-changing mystery. It’s 1993, and Claire is trapped in small-town Indianola, Texas, spending the summer caring for her ailing Grammy. Homesick and missing her new boyfriend, Claire is eager to leave harsh, critical Grammy’s sweltering house and get to know her new friends better: charismatic Julie, whom Claire just can’t stop thinking about, and the perky, old-fashioned, and sometimes unnerving Audrey. When a strange monster appears—a small, alligatorlike creature covered in fur that speaks to Claire and turns out to be just the first of many monsters that inhabit the town—and her memory starts slipping, Claire realizes Indianola has hidden, dangerous secrets woven in its history. Alternating between Claire’s and Julie’s perspectives, the mystery is slow to unveil itself, intermingling elements of supernatural horror and an idyllic, rural summer to ratchet up the tension. Likewise, Julie’s insider view as a local who works for her family’s monster exterminator business gives the mystery an extra twist. As Claire delves deeper into Indianola’s past, new family secrets emerge and change everything. The slow-burn lesbian romance, convoluted family mysteries, and the paranormal aspects of memory loss and the nature of reality will hook readers. Claire and Audrey are cued as White; Julie and her family are Latinx.

**Will send readers through a twisty labyrinth to a satisfying conclusion. (Paranormal mystery. 12-adult)**

**TWIN DAGGERS**

Connolly, MarcyKate

Blink (368 pp.)

$18.99 | Aug. 25, 2020

978-0-310-76814-2

By day, Aissa and Zandria are hardworking citizens of the Technocrat city of Palinor; by night, they are Magi spies and assassins-in-training. Their mission: to find and kill the Technocrat heir, a hidden child who is one of the Heartless—people born without a heart. Aro, an attractive young Technocrat researcher, tasks Aissa with helping find a cure for the Heartless, but not everything is as it seems: Old friends cannot be trusted, new emotions cannot be ignored. When Zandria is captured by the Technocrats, Aissa must weigh loyalty to her mission against her sister’s life and her own burgeoning love in the ultimate moral quandary. Each side views the other as unequivocally evil. Connolly, however, undermines these perceptions, depicting both underhanded Magi plots and Technocrat compassion: a subtle take on the current expectation of moral ambiguity in fantasy. The book’s strengths lie in its well-crafted prose, worldbuilding, and richly drawn supporting characters: the leads, however, feel a bit more inaccessible. Emotionally repressed Aissa’s confidence in her intelligence and abilities approaches arrogance; the better-humored Zandria plays a much smaller role, and her absence in the latter half of the book goes almost unnoticed. The stakes, too, sometimes feel too low to drive the depth of the twins’ hatred. Main characters default to White; there is some diversity of skin tone in secondary characters.

A taut, emotionally arresting fantasy. (Fantasy. 13-18)

**OFFLINE**

Cooner, Donna

Point/Scholastic (304 pp.)

$3.99 e-book | Sep. 1, 2020

978-1-338-67824-6

Annie’s boyfriend very publicly dumps her on a social media platform. After hunky Jameson confirms his rejection of Annie in the high school courtyard, with nearly everyone watching, plenty of people jump on social media bandwagon ChitChat to criticize her weight gain and add to her misery. Luna and Caitlin, her BFFs, vow with her to give up social media for a month, but since they’re all but addicted, it’s a real challenge. A few others, including the gay quarterback of their high-powered football team, decide to join them. With ample spare time, Annie begins volunteering at the local animal shelter, where she cares for a needy dog and develops an interest in a kind boy who works there. But ChitChat has a hold on Annie, and she cheats behind her friends’ backs,
A LOVE LETTER TO HER TEEN SELF: WRITING A BROWN GIRL SUPERHERO
By Laura Simeon

*Sia Martinez and the Moonlit Beginning of Everything* (Simon Pulse, Aug. 11) is, in the words of author Raquel Vasquez Gilliland, a book “about a girl whose mother was deported, and one day when she's in the desert, a spacecraft crashes and her mom's inside.” This magical book, optioned by Annapurna TV, sets elements of science fiction and romance against a backdrop of ordinary life. Sia lives in Arizona with her dad; her mother disappeared while attempting to cross the Sonoran Desert back into the U.S. after the town's racist White sheriff learned she was undocumented. Vasquez Gilliland spoke with me from her home in Tennessee about her debut novel; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

The book evokes the desert setting so vividly. The idea for *Sia Martinez* came really suddenly: I just knew it was set in a desert, and because of the alien and extraterrestrial lore of the Southwest, that’s where I had seen it happening in my mind’s eye. I had been to Phoenix. It was just so, so big—the sky is just so massive and clear—and the saguaros look like people holding their hands up. The lore of the cacti came very fluidly when I was writing the book.

I enjoyed reading your poetry through your website and was charmed by the relationship between poetry skeptical Sia and poetry-loving Noah.

My high school was the Dreyfoos School of the Arts in West Palm Beach, Florida. You can major in visual art or dance or creative writing, and so I grew up with a lot of poetry-writing boys. Noah is definitely inspired by some people I have known. I was first really introduced to poetry via Jewel’s first album [Pieces of You, 1995]. It came out when I was in fifth grade, and she has poetry in among the album art, and I was like, “Oh my gosh, you can do that with words?” and that's what got me started.

*Sia is remarkable for her strong sense of self: She has experienced trauma but clearly understands that the perpetrators are the ones to blame. Her tangible connection to her late abuela seems like a critical part of that.*

Sia comes from a part of myself that I wish were stronger when I was a teenager. I gave Sia a lot of things that I wish I had growing up, including an abuela who guides you from the other side. I grew up with a grandmother who's still with us. She speaks with ghosts, my mother speaks with ghosts, and so I’ve always thought that you can just talk with the dead, that they’re there and they’re not scary. They can give you advice and point you the way. When I found that I was having a boy, I called my grandmother, and she pulled the phone away. I could hear her voice getting distant as she was like, “Hey, it's a boy!” to someone. I found out that she was home alone, so I’m assuming that she was telling my grandfather, who had just passed.

Mainstream YA often ignores faith, but Sia’s best friend—queer, Haitian American Rose—is secure in her deep love for Catholicism while Sia is steeped in that as well as her family’s traditional Mexican spirituality. I grew up in the Catholic Church. My sister and I joke that we have gone to church enough for our whole lives because we were there for Sunday service, we were in the choir, we taught Sunday school, and we taught communion classes. When I was about Sia’s age, I started really questioning some of the more dogmatic parts of the church, and I do have sort of a conflict in myself. I love certain parts of
the church, such as the community, and there are other parts that don’t resonate, such as the conservativism.

Rose is based on the young people I grew up with in church who were confident in it—they love Jesus, and their hearts are in that spiritual part of their religion. The other part, Sia’s spirituality, is based on what we grew up with; some of these rituals have probably come from pre-Columbian traditions. My grandmother and my mother perform Cleansings and things like that. That really opened me up to wanting to understand how to balance this strict, dogmatic religion, with its very set rules, against my mom blessing us with an egg or taking a knife to the sky to cut the storm away. My mom and her friend, both Mexican American women, after some bad hurricanes came and we needed our roof fixed, went to cut the sky so the rain wouldn’t come—and it didn’t.

From poetry for adults to writing YA—why did you make that leap?

My teenagerhood is such a huge part of who I am even now. Things that I experienced back then have impacted me to this day because the emotions are new and so full and encompassing. I would love to give young brown girls stories that I wish I had when I was a young brown girl, particularly seeing Mexican American teenagers as really strong, not just psychologically but also physically. I want people to see a Mexican American superhero. So, a lot of it is love letters to my teen self. I actually have another book coming out next year for young adults, How Moon Fuentez Fell in Love With the Universe. It’s a romantic comedy, an enemies-to-lovers foodie road-trip romance.

Sia Martinez and the Moonlit Beginning of Everything received a starred review in the June 15, 2020, issue.

all the while wracked with guilt. All three girls are dealing with hard issues that they describe in journal entries: Caitlin wants to become a kicker for the football team, and Luna is trying to become the new editor of the school newspaper. A feel-good ending wraps up all the unhappy threads, perhaps diminishing the impact. Still, as it plausibly depicts the all-too-common hold that social media has on teens’ lives, Annie’s aching first-person narrative will strike a chord with many readers. Annie and Caitlin are White, Luna is Latinx, and there is diversity in other secondary characters.

A mostly believable, thought-provoking journey. (Fiction. 12-18)

VAMPIRES NEVER GET OLD Tales With Fresh Bite
Ed. by Córdova, Zoraida & Parker, Natalie
Imprint (272 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-1-250-23001-0

Fresh takes on a perennial paranormal favorite from leading YA authors.

The classic vampire archetype—“White, cisgender, straight, and able-bodied”—makes way for a diverse reimagining of the blood-drinking immortals in this anthology. In Tessa Gratton’s “Seven Nights for Dying,” an anonymous narrator is given a week to consider an offer while grappling with furious grief. A lonely teenage Latinx vampire makes an unexpected connection through his blog in Mark Oshiro’s “Mirrors, Windows & Selfies”—makes way for a diverse reimagining of the blood-drinking immortals in this anthology. In Tessa Gratton’s “Seven Nights for Dying,” an anonymous narrator is given a week to consider an offer while grappling with furious grief. A lonely teenage Latinx vampire makes an unexpected connection through his blog in Mark Oshiro’s “Mirrors, Windows & Selfies.” An Eternal woman and a Shadow Baron make a wager in Dhonielle Clayton’s “The House of Black Sapphires,” set in a dazzling alternate version of New Orleans. A gay Native teen summons an urban legend in Rebecca Roanhorse’s “The Boys From Blood River” but gets more than he bargained for. Themes of power, transformation, and agency weave through these 11 tales, which also feature a 19th-century grave robber, a cheerleading vampire slayer, and an Instagram-savvy elder vampire. The tone of the stories ranges from the playful narration of Samira Ahmed’s “A Guidebook for the Newly Sired Desi Vampire” to the simmering rage of Kayla Whaley’s disabled protagonist in “In Kind.” The cast, living and (un)dead, includes characters who represent multiple dimensions of diversity. Each story is followed by a brief commentary and thought-provoking questions from the editors.

Vampire fans, sink your teeth into this satisfying collection. (editors’ note, author bios) (Paranormal fantasy. 14-18)
“We all rescue each other on the Camino.”

Each of the six teens walking together with their guides on the Spanish portion of the Camino de Santiago has a different reason for being there—and each will test the limits of their bodies, hearts, and spirits during their once-in-a-lifetime journey. Manny, Claire, Shania, Troy, Diego, and Greg are an unlikely sextet who have committed crimes back home in Toronto but have qualified for a diversion program in lieu of spending time in juvenile detention. To pass the program, they must spend a week and a half walking a portion of the Camino, journaling, and attending mandatory daily group sessions. When they first meet, Diego compares them to the crew of The Breakfast Club—and like the movie characters, they go on to complete their punishment with fellow offenders, learning to care deeply for each other, and themselves, along the way. Alternating chapters are told from three of the peregrinos’, or pilgrims’, points of view: Shania’s, Troy’s, and Diego’s. The teens soon learn that everyone has their own complicated reasons for ending up there, and the author doesn’t shy away from difficult topics, including gay conversion therapy and grief. The group is ethnically diverse and includes gay and lesbian characters; each faces personal challenges that will help many readers feel seen.

A vivid Spanish countryside setting and captivating journey bring new depth to a classic architecture. (Fiction. 14-18)

Lira and Reyker face endless hardships as they search for a way to take down the Dragon.

After the fall of Stony Harbor, Lira mourns the supposed death of Reyker and rejects her new powers from the blood of the Fallen Ones. All she knows is that she wants to kill Draki, the half-god known as the Dragon who’s bent on conquering all. Now Veronis, the god who saved her from drowning, demands she free him, showing her visions of villages burning and her loved ones dying if she refuses. This propels Lira on a quest to find the serpent-goddess Idja, Draki’s mother, deep in the Dragon’s kingdom. The sooner she frees Veronis, the sooner she can focus on the Dragon. Meanwhile, Reyker toils under Draki, having made a bargain that he’ll be his Sword if he’ll release captives after each raid. He’s also certain Lira is dead. The two unknowingly orbit each other as the Dragon and the Fallen Gods skilfully manipulate them. If they can reunite and work together, maybe they can figure out the Dragon’s weakness. Fueled by frustrating missed connections and a seemingly undefeatable antagonist, Lira’s and Reyker’s stories drag. Training and battle scenes trump character development, making the dramatic turns fall flat. The next installment hints at more of the same.

Deep in lore but hollow in heart. (map) (Fantasy. 14-18)

A modern-day fairy tale about two teenagers suffering from loss who find healing in one another.

Despite the ups and downs in their relationship, Kyle and Kimberly have always made up, and Kyle looks forward to attending college together after graduation. But on the night they should be celebrating, Kimberly confesses that she has committed to a different college and breaks up with him. As they argue, their car crashes, and Kyle later wakes up in the hospital and learns that Kimberly is dead. In his grief, Kyle blames himself for her death. He struggles to leave his bed most days, ignores calls from his and Kimberly’s best friend, Sam, and has visions of Kimberly and life before the accident. One day, while visiting Kimberly’s grave, he meets Marley, a girl who likes telling stories and is mourning the death of her twin sister. Predictably, their natural affinity for one another evolves into romance. It is unfortunate that Kyle essentially moves from one romantic relationship to another on his journey to better understanding himself and his co-dependence on those closest to him, although his gradual development into a more considerate person redeems him. The pacing remains even until the critical plot disruption, resulting in the rest of the story feeling disjointed and rushed. All characters are White.

For readers in need of a happy ending but not much else. (Fiction. 12-16)

A studious, if salacious, retelling of young Mary Shelley’s life, pre-Frankenstein.

Idolizing her deceased, feminist mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and scanning her siblings and stepmother, Mary Godwin wants to be a respected writer.
Explores survival, hope, and the meaning of kinship.

**WALK TOWARD THE RISING SUN**

*From Child Soldier to Peace Activist*

Duany, Ger with Thomas, Garen Eileen

Make Me a World (320 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-1-5247-1940-1

Actor, model, and activist Duany's tale of going from being a Sudanese child soldier to becoming an activist for Sudan.

Trying to survive in a time of constant war in southern Sudan, exposed to monumental trauma and loss, Duany became a child soldier. After facing death in more ways than one could cope with, Duany made it to a Kenyan refugee camp and then to America, where he found that things were harder than he anticipated. He encountered embedded racism and learned that PTSD meant he could not escape his ghosts by running away. Eventually, Duany became a model and later an actor. Despite having known constant instability and many years as a refugee with no sense of permanence, Duany has never forgotten his homeland and gives back to his family and home country in part by sharing his childhood experiences and talking about the realities of life for many in what is now South Sudan. With co-author Thomas, Duany tells his life story, naming many of the folks who impacted him along the way through honest, detailed, straightforward prose. The book explores survival, hope, and the meaning of kinship—whether forged by blood, friendship, or shared experiences of war.

An intimate look from a refugee's perspective at the toll war takes. (Memoir. 12-18)

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**WHITE FOX**

Faring, Sara

Imprint (416 pp.)

$18.99 | Sep. 22, 2020

978-1-250-30452-0

Ten years ago, enigmatic film star Mireille Foix disappeared from Viloxin, her Mediterranean island home, leaving her father and two young daughters bereft.

Eighteen-year-old Manon and 17-year-old Thaïs have lived with their aunt in New York City ever since, and their father's death the previous summer still stings. Tai is puckish and effervescent, with “beautiful gemstones of stories that she's sharpened to points” and musical laughter that hides deep insecurity. Noni, on the other hand, is a bookish and unashamedly melancholy young woman. When they get an invitation to return to Viloxin, the “Eden” of their childhood, as guests of honor at a retrospective of their mother's work, they can't pass it up. Soon after their arrival, Tai discovers *White Fox*, a legendary unfinished script penned by her mother. The screenplay, which is nestled in between Tai's and Manon's narratives as well as that of Boy, a darkly mysterious third narrator, may hold the key to Mireille's fate. Desperate for the truth, Tai and Noni are enticed into an eerie and seductively puzzle box of enigmatic clues, revelations, and danger. Faring, an imaginative, tactile, and immensely quotable wordsmith, explores the complexities of sisterhood and grief with a deft hand, and her unusual island setting, with its futuristic touches, draws readers in with a sensuous warmth that belies the sharp teeth beneath its surface. Most main characters seem to be White.

A lush and hypnotic modern fairy tale. (Mystery. 14-18)

**TEEN TITANS Beast Boy**

Garfield Logan is a self-deprecating 17-year-old with green-streaked hair and an obsession with working out and eating so he can bulk his way up to becoming popular with girls. It's almost the end of the school year, and nothing on his bucket list has been accomplished: He doesn't have the girl, he doesn't have the income from the pizza job he wants, and he is very much on the outside of the in crowd. Fed up with being alternately ignored and bullied by the cool kids, Gar completes an outrageous dare that instantly gains him a following and new nickname, Beast Boy. Precariously balancing his new popularity...
 Captivating, sometimes heartbreaking, yet ultimately hopeful.

EVERY BODY LOOKING

Iloh, Candice
Dutton (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-525-55620-6

A Black girl’s journey from a stifled life to self-discovery through dance.

Seventeen-year-old Ada grew up in Chicago with a Nigerian immigrant father who raised her in line with his strict, traditional Christian values. Her mother struggled with addiction and was mostly absent, both physically and emotionally. Ada was indoctrinated to be submissive to her elders and learned to suppress vital parts of herself, from her opinions to her love of dance. Brought up to keep so much of her life a secret, Ada has even kept quiet about a tragic sexual assault at the hands of her older male cousin. She is finally given the physical freedom she had been denied her whole life when she graduates high school and heads to college in Washington, D.C. There, she starts to unpack what she has been taught by her dysfunctional family and begins to bloom and unlock those guarded parts of herself. In the end, Ada reclaims her body and her life through dance, exploring her own beliefs and values and finding her voice. Iloh uses verse beautifully to show readers the world through Ada’s eyes, incorporating flashbacks and time jumps to piece the whole picture together. With complex relationship dynamics and heavy-hitting issues like rape, overbearing and neglectful parents, and addiction, this book will leave readers deeply affected.

A young woman’s captivating, sometimes heartbreaking, yet ultimately hopeful story about coming into her own. (Verse novel. 14-18)

CRYPTOCURRENCIES AND THE BLOCKCHAIN REVOLUTION

Bitcoin and Beyond
January, Brendan
Lerner (96 pp.)
$35.45 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5415-7877-7

An introduction to the history, functionality, pitfalls, and potentials of internet-based currencies.

After explaining the basics—that bitcoin is the most well-known cryptocurrency, a digital asset used like money, that relies on blockchain (a decentralized online ledger that tracks and verifies ownership to validate transactions)—Wall Street financial writer January takes readers to the financial crisis of 2007-2008 to show the problems bitcoin was devised to solve (lack of trust in government and the banking industry as well as the weaknesses of human intermediaries). Blockchain’s complicated verification system is the answer to preventing online counterfeiting. Chapters cover cryptocurrency’s nuts and bolts as well as its struggles: its initial bad reputation for use by malefactors on the Silk Road Dark Web, the get-rich bubbles, and other vulnerabilities. The initial divide—old, White, rich establishment versus the cryptocurrency innovators—becomes blurred as banks start to use blockchain for their own ends. Despite the intriguing topic, the prose tends toward dry. Because the philosophies and motives of cryptocurrency founders and early players shaped the way the technology was used—and will be used—there are reoccurring themes of conflict between utopian and capitalistic ideals. These intriguing moments lay the groundwork for a speculative take that blockchain can disrupt present-day technological risks in the form of monopolies and data abuses from certain large companies.

A balanced, reputable reference. (timeline, glossary, source notes, further information, index, image credits) (Nonfiction. 13-18)

GIRL ON THE RUN

Johnson, Abigail
Underlined (272 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-593-17981-9

The opening scenes set the pace for this stomach-clencher of a chase.

Katelyn’s mother, Melissa, doesn’t want anyone to know her business, and they move often. Why is not clear. Katelyn, ignorant of her mother’s motives, creates an online dating profile for Melissa, blowing their cover. Melissa’s words as she hectically starts packing bags are ominous: “They found us.” Katelyn knows things are serious when Melissa steals their elderly neighbor’s vehicle to use as a getaway car. Narrated in the first person by Katelyn, the story keeps
readers as much in the dark as she is. To keep her safe, Melissa leaves Katelyn in a motel room while she goes off to deal with things, leaving Katelyn to untangle a somewhat overblown tale of thwarted love and a cold-case murder. Her first clue appears along with a brutal bounty hunter who busts into her room. Katelyn escapes and, in the process, rescues computer whiz Malcolm, whom the bounty hunter has kidnapped for his tech skills. Malcolm, who is Black in a default White cast, is able to tell Katelyn why Melissa is being sought. Together, the duo enters a cat-and-mouse game, trying to locate Melissa while staying one step ahead of the bounty hunter. The chapters are short, featuring terse chapter titles—“Flee,” “Evade,” “Hostage”—and each ends with a cliffhanger, making this page-turner appealing and accessible for reluctant readers.

Fast and intense, this is a galloping thriller with something extra for romantics. (Thriller. 12-16)

**HOW TO DO IT NOW BECAUSE IT’S NOT GOING AWAY**
*An Expert Guide To Getting Stuff Done*

Joel, Leslie
Zest Books (152 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-5415-8161-6

A breezy entry in the evergreen genre of student self-help guides.

Organized around the nigh-universal experience of academic procrastination, this practical vademecum dives into any number of related topics: time management, homework, study skills, planning, creating routines, organizing, avoiding distractions, and motivation. Aimed explicitly at high school and college students, the text pays scant attention to psychological or scientific aspects—despite multiple offhand references to “research,” no citations are provided—instead concentrating on practical tips. First-person prose addressed directly to “you” sports a chatty, nonjudgmental, even occasionally vulgar tone, with the earnest, slightly strained hipness of an adult eager to be perceived as cool. Every short chapter is packed to bursting with sample charts, worksheets, questionnaires, suggested playlists, recommended products, supplies, and apps along with personal anecdotes (some of dubious relevance) drawn from the author’s career as an academic and life coach. The relentlessly peppy “just do it” approach treats procrastination, disorganization, and similar difficulties as simple matters of technique, practice, and willpower, which many will find inspiring; unfortunately, only the briefest of nods is given to potential mental health issues or other possible explanations, such as non-neurotypical patterns of thought. Like similar titles, this will probably be most helpful when paired with sustained personal support and encouragement.

Exactly the sort of thing hopeful parents and counselors will press upon struggling students. (resources, index) (Non-fiction. 12-adult)

**SHINE**
Jung, Jessica
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-5344-6251-9

Korean American teen Rachel Kim has spent six years in Seoul as a K-pop trainee for one of the city’s biggest entertainment agencies.

Many will hone their talents, spending 24/7 invested in K-pop, but only a handful will make it. It’s been years since DB Entertainment has debuted a girl group, and as a senior trainee, this is Rachel’s last shot. When she felt the sting of racism as a young girl in the U.S., she turned for solace to K-pop. And despite the viciousness of trainee life—with its uber-talented teens, nonstop gossip, and the reality that she is seen as an American outsider in Korea—Rachel is determined to make it and hold onto the joy music brings. After a disastrous audition with Jason Lee, DB’s golden boy, Rachel will need some bold moves to redeem herself. Further conflict arises as the double standards female stars face in contrast to their male counterparts become hard to ignore. Debut author Jung’s background as a former Korean American K-pop star informs this world of catty, sabotaging antagonists; elite private school classmates; and parental pressure. An embarrassing, banter-filled meet-cute adds to this fast-paced, entertaining romp. Local details and the integration of Korean—both romanized and in Hangul—smoothly immerse readers in Rachel’s world. While most of the supporting characters are Korean, Jason is biracial (Korean/White Canadian), and Rachel’s best friend and fellow trainee, Akari, is Japanese.

Shimmering. (Fiction. 14-18)

**I AM THUNDER**
Khan, Muhammed
Pan Macmillan (320 pp.)
$13.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-5098-7405-7

Muzna Saleem is a North London teen who struggles with low self-esteem.

The daughter of Pakistani immigrants, she considers herself ugly and is taunted by peers. Muzna dreams of being a novelist, but she feels obliged to fulfill her money-strapped parents’ desire for her to become a doctor. When Muzna’s best friend is caught with a boyfriend, her parents force her to sever their ties to avoid shame by association. After her family moves for a new job, a friendless Muzna looks to reinvent herself, taking hormone pills to regulate her facial hair. She is instantly attracted to Arif, a hunky, brooding fellow Muslim student who is surprisingly kind to her. This leads to a romance with a twist: Arif’s older brother appears to be sympathetic to violent extremism. Muzna is portrayed as a naïve victim of her own self-loathing and insecurities who is lured into a dangerous situation. Despite Muzna’s first-person narration, readers might struggle to
understand her internal thought processes or believe the degree of her awareness of others’ attempts to influence her thoughts and actions. Secondary characters represent the diversity of the British Muslim population, such as a Nigerian British classmate, a service-oriented hijabi medical student, and Muzna’s own traditional yet anti-hijab parents, but they are insufficiently fleshed out given the delicacy and ambition of the central premise, and a theatrical ending does not redeem the overall lack of nuance.

Fails to do justice to the complexity of the subject matter.

(Fiction. 14-18)

SOMETHING HAPPENED TO ALI GREENLEAF
Krischer, Hayley
Razorbill/Penguin (332 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-593-11411-7

A young woman is raped and then must find her way through an attempt to silence her made by one of her attacker’s friends, who is herself a survivor of sexual violence.

Alternating first-person narration from junior Ali and popular senior Blythe presents an anguishing picture of a high school hierarchy in which revered athletes behave with impunity and Blythe and three other girls are actually known by the moniker the Core Four. Beginning at a house party, Ali is initially thrilled that her long-standing crush, Sean, is paying attention to her; her sexual assault that same night is described with heart-wrenching realism. Yet Blythe’s efforts, at Sean’s impetus, to manage the fallout from Ali’s rape shift the focus of Krischer’s debut, which sprawls out into a realistically messy look at the power dynamics at play in a toxic school environment and into the shared painful experiences of Ali and Blythe, whose mothers are emotionally unavailable to them due to their respective struggles with substance use disorder and bipolar disorder. Ali and Sean are White, Blythe is Ashkenazi Jewish and Swedish; there is significant ethnic diversity among their friends. An appendix with resources for sexual assault survivors and those struggling with substance abuse and mental health along with a deeply personal and moving author’s note enhance the novel.

A harrowing read that tells a complicated story with nuance.

(Fiction. 14-18)

WHERE WE ARE
McGee, Alison
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (272 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-4197-8462-0

Two teens demonstrate loyalty and resilience in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

A week before winter break, the Prophet of the Living Lights cult whisks 17-year-old Micah Stone and his parents away to a secret compound. The Minneapolis high school junior has been worried about his parents’ involvement with the group and has a plan in place to notify his girlfriend, Sesame, should something like this happen. But, forced to leave cellphones behind, all he can do is scribble a cryptic note for her before being loaded into the van. Sesame, who recently turned 18, has lived alone since her grandmother passed away. Only Micah knows that her home is an abandoned garage in an alley. Sesame and Micah have shared dreams for their future—traveling, fire spinning, and opening a café highlighting Micah’s cooking. When Sesame realizes that Micah has been taken, she files a missing person report and begins her search. Micah, meanwhile, is trapped belowground with 16 cult members, singled out for punishment for insubordination, and with ample time to reflect. Alternating first-person chapters follow the teens’ dueling experiences of intimacy and loss. Sesame’s passion for poetry and Micah’s will to endure are rendered with depth and precision. Ultimately, this is a celebration of growing up and finding one’s voice in the face of hardship and societal expectation. Limited physical descriptions point to a White default for most characters.

A thoughtful, realistic story of survival.

(Fiction. 14-18)

OUT!
How To Be Your Authentic Self
McKenna, Miles
Abrams (224 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-4197-3994-1

This coming-out guide for the next generation hits all the right notes.

McKenna, a queer, White, trans YouTube personality, presents a new generation of tween and teen readers with an updated coming-out guide that’s fun, fresh, and incredibly useful. Celebrity-authored books can be hit or miss, but this one will be a hit thanks to the warmth and personality that infuse it. Along the way, readers will learn about McKenna’s story of coming out as queer, then as trans. But although sections of the book discuss his life, the focus remains on providing solid real-world advice. McKenna tackles a laundry list of common (and less common) aspects of coming out, from the role and changing nature of self-labeling to finding or making safe spaces to therapy to maintaining a healthy mental state throughout the process. It’s on this point that the book truly shines; McKenna consistently and effectively reminds readers to value their mental health. Links in the text and in the backmatter will supply readers with plenty of places to turn for help. Superfans will be ecstatic because the book is peppered with photo-shoot images of McKenna, sometimes alone, sometimes with friends. The pictures tell the best story of all: that of a young man who’s comfortable in his own skin.

A worthy read for teens, tweens, and their parents. Activity guide, resource list, glossary, fan art) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
Passion for sports and personal growth intersect in Camila’s powerful, feminist first-person narrative.

MISS METEOR
Mejía, Tehtoh Kay & McLemore, Anna-Marie
HarperTeen (400 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-06-286991-3

Can a small town embrace the whole-ness of four teens: a self-proclaimed tomboy, a transgender athlete, a brilliant artist, and a girl born from stardust?

In Meteor, New Mexico, the annual Meteor Regional Pageant and Talent Competition Showcase is a major attraction for Miss Meteor contestants and the local businesses that depend on tourism to survive. The Quintanilla family runs a diner with their four daughters. Chicky, the youngest, could not care less about the pageant while her ex–best friend, Lita, has always dreamed of such an honor—even though thin, blond, White girls always seem to win. The estranged friends team up and, with help from their friends Junior and Cole and the Quintanilla sisters, hatch a plan to upset the town’s social hierarchy by helping Lita compete in the pageant. Drama ensues that characterizes the best telenovelas: unrequited love, bullies and popular mean girls, town gossips, and, of course, a curandera. Underneath there lies a heartfelt response to White supremacy, especially as it relates to brown bodies. Extended metaphors of stardust and space magic could grow tired in less capable hands, but they work powerfully in Mejía and McLemore’s descriptions of teenage emotional urgency when courage can be as a fleeting star. Most main characters are Latinx; Cole is White.

A love letter to misfits who have been scared to let their stardust shine. (Magical realism. 12-18)

FURIA
Méndez, Yamile Saied
Algonquin (368 pp.)
$17.95 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-61620-991-9

An Argentine girl’s journey to fulfill her ambitions against all odds.

Seventeen-year-old Camila “la Furia” Hassan is a talented soccer player from a traditional working-class family in Rosario, Argentina, who aspires to be a professional futbolera. Her life as a player is a secret she keeps from her parents, especially from her abusive father, but her support system includes her brother, Pablo, a professional soccer player himself, and her best friend and teammate, Roxana. After her team wins the local league and qualifies for a South American tournament, Camila finally has a chance to show her talent to scouts and hopefully fulfill her dream to join a North American team. Camila needs parental permission to join the tournament, but coming clean is hard—and then things get worse when the boy she loves is back in town. Diego left to play for Juventus FC in Italy and has come to win her back, but Camila is torn between her two loves. In this stirring novel by Argentine American author Méndez, passion for sports and personal growth intersect in Camila’s powerful, feminist first-person narrative about her experiences as an ambitious athlete, a teenager deeply in love, the daughter of an abusive father at the point of taking charge of her own life, and a young woman finding her voice in a deeply sexist, patriarchal society. Camila’s Argentine family is multicultural with Black, Indigenous, European, and Palestinian ancestors. Roxana is Chinese Argentine.

A riveting coming-of-age story. (Fiction. 14-adult)

SANCTUARY
Mendoza, Paola & Sher, Abby
Putnam (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-1-984815-71-2

An immigrant family travels across the country to escape persecution.

Valentina González Ramírez, a teenage Colombian immigrant living in Southboro, Vermont, still remembers when the president won his third term and started building the Great American Wall between California and Mexico, implanting ID chips in people, and increasing deportation raids. It was in one of those raids that her father was captured and returned to Colombia, where he was murdered. After years of living in relative calm in Vermont, Vuli and her family see a live-feed of a land mine exploding under the feet of a skinny girl in a worn Mickey Mouse T-shirt as she tries to cross the heavily guarded territory between Mexico and the U.S. Soon Vuli’s world changes forever. Violent raids, increased security measures on ID chips, and California’s seceding to become a sanctuary push Vuli, her mother, and her 8-year-old brother, Ernie, to embark on a journey to California and freedom. Mendoza and Sher’s novel is set in a not-so-distant dystopian future in which the government controls the broadcasting system and censors the media. In their portrayal of Vuli’s family’s quest for safety, the authors beautifully mirror the treacherous, painful, and terrifying treks involving natural and human threats that migrants to the U.S. undertake as they traverse continents and oceans. Gruesome at times and always honest, Vuli’s journey depicts immigrants’ desire for a safe and dignified life.

Wrenching and unmissable. (authors’ note) (Dystopian. 13-18)

WE WERE RESTLESS THINGS
Nagamatsu, Cole
Sourcebooks Fire (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-72821-659-1

Turbulent teens flirt and fight in a Midwest town.

Sixteen-year-old Jonas Lake reluctantly relocates from his mom’s house in the Twin Cities to small-town Shivery,
Minnesota, to live with his dad, his dad's girlfriend, and her daughter, the oh-so-artistic, often angry Noemi. Jonas first fights with, then falls for Manic Pixie Dream Girl Noemi; florid, fevered, forbidden romance, not always reciprocated, ensues. Noemi's aloofness and self-alienation read as being in part due to grief as she mourns the death of friend-but-not-boyfriend Link, whose drowning death on dry forest land mystified everyone but her. Meanwhile, another romance blooms between Noemi's female friends Lyle and Amberlyn. An abused and abusive bully and mysterious, ghostly texts complicate the quartet's relationships, but despite their self-absorption and overly articulate narration, Jonas and Noemi remain frustratingly opaque. Noemi is a melancholic, moody artiste, often aloof and alienated, as is the broody Jonas. Identifying as asexual and working through the entanglement of romance with sexuality, Noemi offers one perspective for a population often underrepresented in literature. Debut author Nagamatsu's fantasy elements of a spooky forest and its disappearing lake are tantalizing but underdeveloped while the meandering, sluggish pacing pairs with an insubstantial plot to deliver an overlong yet flimsy tale of teenage self-exploration. Clunky analogies and Bulwer-Lytton-worthy phrasing also abound. All main characters read as White.

Thin on enchantment, long on angst, an atmospheric but amorphous coming-of-age. (Romance. 14-18)

BREATHELESS
Niven, Jennifer
Knopf (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-5247-0196-3

An 18-year-old girl experiences a summer of self-discovery. At the end of her senior year of high school, Claudine “Claude” Henry is ready to lose her virginity to Wyatt Jones (who’s unaware of this plan)—and then hopes to go on a road trip before college with her best friend, Suzanne “Saz” Bakshi. But when her parents reveal they’re separating, Claude is devastated by her father’s statement that he can’t cope anymore with his life. So Claude goes with her mother for the summer to a small island off the coast of Georgia, where she befriends some of the locals. She’s drawn to Jeremiah “Miah” Crew, a summer resident, and they agree that since they’re both leaving the island in a month, they won’t take their fling for anything serious. Claude and her friends share smart, candid thoughts about safe sex, consent, and pleasure, woven seamlessly into the emotional first-person narrative along with touching meditations on friendship and family. A storyline exploring Claude’s great-aunt’s history on the island ends up convoluted and uninspired, but overall Claude’s journey is intriguing. Claude and Miah are White, Wyatt is biracial (White/Black), and brown-skinned Saz is a lesbian.

A sex-positive summer romance that’s worth reading. (Romance. 14-18)

THE LEFT-HANDED BOOKSELLERS OF LONDON
Nix, Garth
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(416 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-06-268325-0

A girl searching for her father finds a whole secret world in 1980s London. Eighteen-year-old Susan Arkshaw goes up to London ahead of her studies so she’ll have time to hunt down the identity of the father she’s never met. Her first night in London, dangerous encounters pull her into the wild world of the booksellers—in between selling books, they’re tasked with policing interactions between what we know as reality and the more mythic levels of existence. Her guide is Merlin, an attractive gender-questioning boy (for now). As the Old World of magic seems to be targeting Susan, Merlin and the booksellers take interest in her as well, especially in helping to solve her mysterious parentage. The worldbuilding is exquisite, hopping from an ’80s punk aesthetic and Margaret Thatcher references to wide-ranging supernatural threats and the customs they uphold; the bookstores themselves are sure to please readers. While certain plot elements may be somewhat expected—Susan’s special by way of birth; Merlin has a personal mystery that eventually ties in to the main plot; and there’s a conspiracy storyline that becomes quickly apparent—the broad, immersive world and the specific rules for types of booksellers maintain a sense of discovery, and Susan and Merlin, the heroic protagonists, have vibrant, entertaining personalities (and a realistic romantic storyline). Susan and Merlin are White; the booksellers are ethnically diverse.

Readers will beg for more adventures in this London. (Fantasy. 12-adult)

BLAZEWRATH GAMES
Ortiz, Amparo
Page Street (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-1-64567-079-7

There is nothing quite like Blazewrath because no other sport is played on the backs of dragons. Seventeen-year-old Floridian Lana Torres has one dream in life: to become the Runner for Team Puerto Rico in the Blazewrath Games. Runners are the only players without dragons, but they are no less important for that. Unfortunately, Lana’s dreams may be dashed by the Sire, a former dragon cursed by his rider into human form in order to contain his murderous rampage. Now, after 20 years, he is back, seeking revenge and freeing Un-Bonded dragons all over the world. Lana’s quick thinking and cool head during an attack on Waxbyrne, a wand shop, starts her down a path to Blazewrath...
They were almost inseparable: always at each other's homes, but Mrs. Barrantes and Jamal now have the opportunity for a forces him to confront why he allowed the breach in their rela-
tionship as well as his ability to focus in school. Despite his sis-
ter's efforts and the love of his girlfriend, Autumn, he is drifting
until the night Quincy dies trying to save someone's life. When
a mysterious man offers Quincy's mother a chance to bring him
home. However, snarled traffic forces them to resort to risky side routes, Mira feels like she's being watched,
and the group's belongings keep disappearing. As their situa-
tion becomes more dire they make reckless decisions, leading
readers to wonder if anyone will get home alive. Richards does
a serviceable job of building tension, but aside from Mira, who
narrates, the other characters are thinly drawn. Letters to Mira
from a menacing stranger are sprinkled throughout, but their
melodramatic nature detracts from the threat, and last-min-
ute revelations stretch credulity. Everyone seems to be White
except for Harper, who is Chinese American.

This chilly road trip is woefully short on thrills. (Thriller.
14-18)

FIVE TOTAL STRANGERS
Richards, Natalie D.
Sourcebooks Fire (320 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Oct. 1, 2020
978-1-4926-5721-7

Getting home for the holidays turns into a nightmare for five strangers.
High school student Mira Hayes has been living in San Diego with her
dad while attending a prestigious art school. Now it’s Christmas Eve, and all
she wants to do is get home to Pittsburgh and her mom, who, like Mira, is grieving the death of her twin sister, Mira's aunt
Phoebe. But a blizzard may thwart her plans. During a layover
in Newark airport, Mira learns that every flight out has been
canceled. Luckily, Mira's seatmate Harper offers her a ride
in her rental car along with three other stranded passengers: Brecken, Kayla, and Josh, but Mira is uneasy from the start. Accepting a ride with strangers usually isn't her thing, but she's
desperate to get home. However, snarled traffic forces them to
resort to risky side routes, Mira feels like she's being watched,
and the group's belongings keep disappearing. As their situa-
tion becomes more dire they make reckless decisions, leading
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This chilly road trip is woefully short on thrills. (Thriller.
14-18)

I HOPE YOU'RE LISTENING
Ryan, Tom
AWTeen (368 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 6, 2020
978-0-8075-3508-0

A small town erupts when a child

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in which a still-unsolved kidnapping
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It's been 10 years, but 17-year-old

DEE is still haunted by the day her best
friend, Sibby, was kidnapped as they played together in the
woods. Anxious and risk-averse, she leads a double life as the
anonymous host of a viral true-crime podcast that highlights
missing person cases. Her ardent listeners, who call themselves
the "Laptop Detective Agency," have successfully used tips she’s
received to solve several cases across North America, but Dee’s
never wanted to put Sibby—and herself—under their scrutiny.
Navigating high school and her budding romance with edgy
new girl Sarah is complicated enough. But after a young girl goes
missing, the media makes a connection between the incidents,
and an LDA tipster suggests that Sibby is still alive, Dee is forced to face the past. Dee’s authentic, engaging perspective alternates between the day of Sibby’s kidnapping and the present, layered between episode transcripts that demonstrate her strengths as a storyteller and investigator. In her unspecified location, a White default is assumed, although the podcast’s current case centers Latinx and Black residents of Houston, with mention of the ways women of color are often let down by law enforcement.

A compelling, satisfyingly queer mystery that explores human connection amid the pressures and pace of today’s news cycle. (Mystery. 12-18)

**A NEON DARKNESS**

*Shippen, Lauren*

Tor Teen (256 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-250-29754-9
Series: Bright Sessions, 2

Robert can manipulate others—but he doesn’t know if that’s a blessing or a curse.

Following *The Infinite Noise* (2019), this *Bright Sessions* book tells the origin story of Damien, ne Robert, one of the podcast’s antagonists. When the book opens, Robert is an 18-year-old high school dropout and White boy with no family but all the material resources he could ever need. He has the power to make people do what he wants, or more accurately, to want the same things he wants. After arriving in Los Angeles, he falls in with a slightly older group of Unusuals with various powers who take him under their wing. Shippen combines an exciting plot with diverse characters—such as Neon, who is Black and queer, and Indah, who is Indonesian, Muslim, and lesbian—who defy stereotypes. As the group tangles with a shady organization that has kidnapped their friend, they also realize that the affection they feel for Robert might not be real. Robert’s emotional arc is interesting and unusual—he wants to be a good person, but he is selfish, manipulative, and unwilling to change. He is sympathetic while also being pitiful and contemptible and far too uncool to be an antihero. This may be the best *Bright Sessions* content yet as well as an excellent starting point for those unfamiliar with this world.

A creative and compelling read. (Fantasy. 14-18)

**BARRY SQUIRES, FULL TILT**

*Smith, Heather T.*

Penguin Teen (232 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 22, 2020
978-0-7352-6746-6

An acerbic preteen finds tenderness amid tension, tumult, and tap dancing.

Set in Newfoundland, possibly the most Irish place beyond the Emerald Isle, this novel explores the quirky, crushing world of St. John’s. Readers have the pleasure of 12-year-old Finbar “Barry” Turlough Squires’ company. Known for his short fuse and tendency to succumb to malapropisms, Barry longs for a reputation founded on something—anything—other than the port-wine birthmark on his cheek. When the Full Tilt Dancers, an Irish step dance group, perform at a bingo hall, he decides he’s destined to jig his way to renown—but his terpsichorean efforts fall far short of his verbal prowess. The unintentionally humorous narration and luminous wit contrast with Barry’s stark realities, from his mother’s crippling depression to his teenage sister’s unexpected pregnancy and, finally, an unimaginable tragedy that shakes his family to its core. Buoyed by adorable baby brother, Gord; best friend, Saibal, the son of two doctors who is often mistaken for a refugee; Uneven Steven, a homeless Cockney who claims to have played with the Beatles and Rolling Stones; and residents of the One Step Closer to God nursing home, Barry’s quest for footloose fame instead takes him on a grand tour of humanity. Excepting Saibal’s Indian Canadian family, all characters are White.

Offbeat, quirky, and full of heart. (Realistic fiction. 12-18)

**MY RIOT**

*Spear, Rick*

Illus. by Helen, Emmett
Oni Press (184 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-62010-776-8

A teenage girl embarks on a dynamic journey of self-discovery in the 1990s feminist punk scene.

Seventeen-year-old Valerie Simmons feels trapped in her suburban neighborhood with her traditional parents; ballet class is the only place she can escape the otherwise stifling expectations thrust upon her. But now, even ballet adds pressure; a strict instructor insists she lose weight in order to keep performing. Driven to extreme measures, Valerie resorts to smoking to suppress her appetite, inducing vomiting, and refusing to eat. During this crisis of self, Valerie befriends Kat, a free-spirited girl who introduces her to a new community of people and ideas in the local punk scene. Inspired by this environment of freedom and self-expression, the two young White women start a band with Rudie, a self-described SHARP (Skinhead Against Racial Prejudice) who is Black. As Valerie’s band takes off, she develops healthier habits and better
A powerful, raw must-read.

DEAR JUSTYCE

Stone, Nic
Crown (288 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 29, 2020
978-1-984829-66-5

The deck is stacked against incarcerated 16-year-old Quan as he faces up to 20 years in prison in this sequel to the New York Times bestseller Dear Martin (2017).

With his father in prison, Quan works hard to excel in school, avoid his mother’s abusive boyfriend, and keep his siblings from going hungry. Bright but burdened, Quan eventually begins committing petty crimes and lands in a youth detention center. Through Quan, Stone brilliantly portrays the voices of incarcerated Black youth, their trauma, hopelessness, and awareness of how fraught and fragile their futures are due to racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Quan sees a 12-year-old Black boy locked up for a year for merely associating with gang members while a 17-year-old White boy who stabbed his father eight times serves only 60 days. But Quan isn’t left to fight for his freedom alone; his best friend, Justyce, makes sure he gets his time beside his ex-girlfriend, Tilda, who dumped him in favor of experiencing life before their final day arrives. Simon, however, can’t seem to let go while Tilda sheds her old self more than ever, indulging in drugs and random hookups, like most of their doom-conscious peers. Things are strained at home, where Simon tries to avoid the rising tensions between himself and his moms, exacerbated by the return of his pregnant older sister. Then Tilda turns up dead and everyone suspects Simon, including Tilda’s former best friend, Lucinda. Lucinda chronicles the chaos around her, as well as memories of her deceased friend, via an app. But as Simon and Lucinda uncover secrets from Tilda’s life, they become obsessed with solving her murder. A sprawling, at times meandering tale, bestselling author Strandberg’s latest moves a day at a time, an uneasy crawl toward the inevitable. Set in Sweden, the novel offers glimpses of turmoil abroad through pointed sociopolitical commentary and oblique observations on race. Although the trite murder mystery threatens to derail the narrative’s emotional impetus, strong character development brings it all together in the end. Most characters are White; Simon is biracial (his biological mother is Black from Dominica and his moms chose a White sperm donor).

Messy, flawed, but utterly brilliant in its humanity. (Fiction. 14-18)

MICAH

The Good Girl
Woodfolk, Ashley
Penguin Workshop (144 pp.)
$15.99 | Sep. 1, 2020
978-0-593-09605-5
Series: Flyy Girls, 2

A grieving teen begins to question everything she believes.

The Flyy Girls return with Micah Dupree, who is known to be a rule-following “good girl” who tries to live up to her parents’ high standards and follow the word of God. Until last summer, that was fine by her—but as the anniversary of the day she lost her brother approaches, Micah has started to wonder if living up to everyone else’s expectations outweighs the personal toll it takes. With the help of her therapist, Micah tries to manage her anxiety and unpack her feelings about religion, grief, and losing her virginity to the serious boyfriend she’s been secretly dating. Micah begins to find solace in her brother’s artwork when she notices the messages hidden within it and learns he may not have been as “perfect” as she thought. Micah’s realizations culminate in a beautiful senior project, giving readers a satisfying end with an expectation of more to come. Woodfolk’s ability to create compelling characters shines in this follow-up to Lux: The New Girl (2020). In straightforward language, the author normalizes having anxiety and seeing a therapist as a personal toll it takes. With the help of her therapist, Micah tries to manage her anxiety and unpack her feelings about religion, grief, and losing her virginity to the serious boyfriend she’s been secretly dating. Micah begins to find solace in her brother’s artwork when she notices the messages hidden within it and learns he may not have been as “perfect” as she thought. Micah’s realizations culminate in a beautiful senior project, giving readers a satisfying end with an expectation of more to come. Woodfolk’s ability to create compelling characters shines in this follow-up to Lux: The New Girl (2020). In straightforward language, the author normalizes having anxiety and seeing a therapist as a
This guide for teens provides tools for living a creative life.

Teenagers receive sympathetic inspiration and practical how-to advice on living a creative life and being productive in one's work. The chapters, each of which is further broken down into focused sections, follow the cycle of developing and executing projects, guiding readers through five steps: "Play," "Plan," "Make," "Share," and "Play Again." In each, the author addresses topics such as exploration, setting up your creative space, brainstorming and freewriting, and how and why to pay attention. Readers can learn challenging lessons in setting intentions and planning, dealing with failure, procrastination, self-doubt, and critical feedback. Zarr balances stories from her own life with concrete exercises to put these lessons into practice. The book combines you-can-do-it cheerleading with straight talk about sitting down and getting the work done. With her accessible, confessional tone and hands-on exercises, the author defangs many young artists' deepest and most immobilizing fears while also giving them tools for success. Most importantly, she affirms these feelings and lets teenagers know they are not alone. Notably, Zarr directly addresses readers' different personal circumstances when it comes to the money to fund projects or experience the arts, family encouragement, and access to private space in which to create. Black-and-white illustrations and design elements enhance the text. This inspirational and powerful work affirms readers with the underlying message: Fear not!

Inspiring and honest, this smart book offers both compassion and practical instruction. (further reading) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

Reviving a friendship that goes back almost 20 years, Zoboi writes with Exonerated Five member Salaam, exploring racial tensions, criminal injustice, and radical hope for a new day.

Ava DuVernay's critically acclaimed When They See Us tells the story of Salaam's wrongful conviction as a boy, a story that found its way back into the national conversation when, after nearly 7 years in prison, DNA evidence cleared his name. Although it highlights many of the same unjust systemic problems Salaam faced, this story is not a biographical rendering of his experiences. Rather, Zoboi offers readers her brilliance and precision within this novel in verse that centers on the fictional account of 16-year-old Amal Shahid. He's an art student and poet whose life dramatically shifts after he is accused of assaulting a White boy one intense night, drawing out serious questions around the treatment of Black youth and the harsh limitations of America's investment in punitive forms of justice. The writing allows many readers to see their internal voices affirmed as it uplifts street slang, Muslim faith, and hip-hop cadences, showcasing poetry's power in language rarely seen in YA literature. The physical forms of the first-person poems add depth to the text, providing a necessary calling-in to issues central to the national discourse in reimagining our relationship to police and prisons. Readers will ask: Where do we go from here?

A devout member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church remembers his time in the military during the Vietnam War.

Debut author Beaven opens his story with an in-depth account of his training at Fort Bragg in North Carolina and his subsequent deployment to Vietnam. Right away, he notes how his service differed from that of most other young men in the 1960s, as he was a noncombatant Army medic who swore on religious principles never to carry or fire a weapon: “I went to Nam with religious goals and standards that were far different than most,” he writes. “I still have them.” The book’s latter parts tell the story of his time at war, and thanks to the author’s simple, accessible prose style, these memories have a more appealing immediacy than what one might find in a broader-sweep narrative history of wartime. Beaven is a natural storyteller, and some of his anecdotes show the polish that comes from frequent repetition over the years. He also offers a big-picture view of events with a blunt sense of humor that’s very appealing: “There was a great deal of fatalism in the service. ‘When my number comes up, I’m going to go.’ Needless to say, this is all hogwash….I never saw anyone stand up in the middle of a firefight and say, ‘Nyah, nyah, you can’t hit me.’ ” As he presents an insider’s view of what mucking through the hostile countryside was like, he often reveals small, engaging details; he mentions, for example, how troops were issued baseball-style caps but wore floppy slouch hats instead, both for their functionality and because they “made you look like a combat veteran instead of some camp jockey.” Beaven received decorations for his service, but his memoir benefits greatly from his just-one-of-the-guys humility.

A highly readable, boots-on-the-ground war memoir by a noncombatant.
A Goan Holiday by Anitha Perinchery: In Perinchery’s romantic mystery, Dr. Anjali Joshi is back in Vagator in the coastal Indian state of Goa, with its glorious, world-renowned beaches. Our reviewer says, “The reappearance of an old boyfriend complicates the failed marriage of two physicians—and raises many ghosts from the past—in this romantic mystery....An engaging tale about a love triangle.”

Tailwinds Past Florence by Doug Walsh: A global cycling trek might save a troubled marriage. “With the settings ranging from Washington state and Canada to London, Belgium, Paris, and, eventually, Italy, the novel captures the intense details of the trip, including the couple’s...emotionally heightened fights and sniping and their moments of romantic rejuvenation in new, exotic surroundings,” notes our review. “The book boasts an impressive knowledge of cycling as well as the history it draws from, be it Renaissance Italy or the time of the French Canadian voyageurs....Travel, both conventional and through time, brings rousing action, romance, and unorthodox marriage counseling.”

The Nun’s Betrothal by Ida Curtis: Curtis’ romance takes place in ninth-century France and stars an inexperienced nun and a worldly aristocrat who have the hots for each other. “Curtis paints a historically authentic tableau of the period in France, deftly explaining the religious and cultural context of the plot without didactic commentary....An engaging love story, historically captivating and romantically gripping.”

Karen Schechner is the vice president of Kirkus Indie.

THE OTHER RICHARD III
John Birney
Self (152 pp.)
May 13, 2020
978-1-73459-900-8

A debut play provides a new take on the life of Richard III.

“The work at hand presents the ‘other’ Richard III—the real one, possibly,” writes Birney in the preface to this five-act tragedy written in “old Elizabethan blank verse.” The author suggests that perceptions of the last Plantagenet king of England are greatly influenced by the dramatic character presented by Shakespeare in his history play Richard III. This new offering aims to “stay faithful to what is known to be true about Richard (with only a bit of poetic license).” The play opens with Richard, then Duke of Gloucester, as an 18-year-old adolescent and concludes with his defeat as king by the Tudor forces at the Battle of Bosworth Field. Whereas Shakespeare depicted Richard as a Machiavellian villain, Birney shows him as a victim of circumstances—not flawless but also “not always the driving force of events.” In particular, the author draws attention to historical details instrumental to Richard’s becoming king, such as Robert Stillington, the bishop of Bath and Wells, casting doubt on the legitimacy of Edward IV’s offspring. Richard’s opening line (as Gloucester) reads: “Now is our long darkness dispers’d at last”—which does not have the same thrust as the Shakespearean equivalent: “Now is the winter of our discontent.” It is of course difficult to compare Birney’s writing to that of arguably the greatest dramatist of all time. But it is evident that although Birney lacks Shakespeare’s pithiness, he does capture something of the tenor of Elizabethan blank verse. This comes in part from his detailed linguistic knowledge, revealed in one of Richard’s soliloquies: “We holp each other navigate this life; Each for the other was a sail and a tiller.” In these elegantly fashioned lines, the author employs the word “holp,” past tense of help, which is featured sparingly in 12 of Shakespeare’s 37 plays.

Unfortunately, stage directions can prove tediously prescriptive: “(PEERS, from center stage, move diagonally to downstage left, get seated, and occasionally point down at audience)” Still, the plot is plausible and founded on careful historical research—Shakespeare scholars may squabble over minutiae, but for most readers this will prove a refreshing and illuminating reconsideration of Richard III.

A cultivated rethinking of one of Shakespeare’s history plays.
A nerdy but swashbuckling reporter crisscrosses Florida to identify his college friend's mysterious stalker in this second novel in Bruce's thriller series. Former Phoenix Daily Sun columnist Alexander Strange sets out with his papillon dog through the Deep South to spend some time on his Uncle Leo's trawler, which is moored in Goodland, Florida. As a professional aficionado of all things bizarre, Alexander anticipates the Sunshine State will provide ample fodder for his "weird news reports." Little does he know how odd his journey will become. His first peculiar encounter is with Madam Jazzabelle, a palm reader—or "Licensed Chirologist," if you ask her—in New Orleans. After she foresees death in his hand, she abandons her practice and insists on accompanying Alexander on his journey. When the flirtatious Tess Winkler, Alexander's old college flame who lives in Gainesville, reaches out to him, he agrees to help her uncover who's been sending her threatening messages—although Amy Duffy, Tess' spurned would-be lover and former roommate, is the prime suspect. The investigation eventually involves hush money, blackmail, abortion, and a conservative politician. The trio of self-appointed investigators are joined by Bristol Kreuger, a "full-on goth." Together, they conclude that the disturbing messages correspond to physical locations on a Weird Tour of Florida that Tess once published. Bruce's choice to structure the book as visits to these real-life sites, whose diversions range from the paranormal to the divine, is an amusing way to gain insight into the Southern state's oddest nooks and crannies. Indeed, the situation comes to a head at The Devil's Millhopper, described as "one of the largest sinkholes in Florida." Overall, the book's substance does not go much deeper than an average airport read. However, Alexander's one-liners are certainly worthy of a chuckle, Bruce's prose is consistently crisp and controlled, and the tension between the various characters is genuinely entertaining throughout.

A charming and suspenseful page-turner punctuated by dashes of the surreal.
THE MONA LISA SISTERS
Cramer, George
Russian Hill Press (301 pp.)
Aug. 14, 2020
978-1-73412-206-0

A young widow travels to Paris and ends up caring for two recently orphaned American girls in this historical novel.

Lura Grisham is born into wealth and privilege in the late 1800s in Connecticut, but her socio-economic status does not protect her from heartbreak. After marrying her father’s business associate Walter Myer, she conceives a child. But their happiness is cut short when the couple are involved in a carriage accident and Walter and the unborn baby are killed. During her mourning period, Lura decides to take the trip to Paris that she and Walter had always talked about. While sightseeing at the Louvre, Lura notices two young girls without adult supervision and learns that they have been abandoned by their father. With little forethought, Lura takes full responsibility for the children. As she tries to find their father, she meets Joseph Myer, the half brother of her dead husband. Walter had never known about this brother. With help from friends back home and a detective, Lura learns that the girls’ father was a mobster killed in France. She brings the girls back to the United States with the intent to adopt them. Unfortunately, she makes many mistakes while traveling, such as failing to alert the French authorities to their circumstances. As the story unfolds, Lura’s feelings toward Joseph grow complicated, and she also seems increasingly likely to lose custody of the girls. When a representative of the French government shows up at her home in Connecticut, Lura worries the girls may be lost to her forever.

Told alternately from the perspectives of Lura and Joseph, Myer, the half brother of her dead husband. Walter had never known about this brother. With help from friends back home and a detective, Lura learns that the girls’ father was a mobster killed in France. She brings the girls back to the United States with the intent to adopt them. Unfortunately, she makes many mistakes while traveling, such as failing to alert the French authorities to their circumstances. As the story unfolds, Lura’s feelings toward Joseph grow complicated, and she also seems increasingly likely to lose custody of the girls. When a representative of the French government shows up at her home in Connecticut, Lura worries the girls may be lost to her forever.

A refined and entertaining tale about one determined woman exploring both motherly and romantic love.

NELLIE THE NARWHAL
Cullen, Sarah & Ellis, Carmen
Illus. by theillustrators.com.au
Bowker (26 pp.)
$9.60 paper | $3.8 e-book | May 7, 2020
978-0-648-84980-3

A narwhal cavorts with different sea creatures in this rhyming picture book.

Nellie, a narwhal, seeks friends and adventure. But her fellow sea creatures rebuke her requests to play. Harper, a whale, tells Nellie she is too small to splash her tail. Bill, a juggling octopus, says: “You’re a nice narwhal. I do think you’re great. / But you have no arms, and you see I have eight.” Tommy, a turtle, remarks that Nellie lacks the shell necessary for playing hide-and-seek. Disappointed, Nellie thinks of new ways the others might enjoy playing with her. She explains to Harper that they can splash their tails regardless of size. When she visits Bill, he uses his extra arms to play a tickling game. Finally, Nellie shares a game idea with Tommy: “You see this seaweed I’ve tied in a loop? You can throw it onto my tusk like a hoop.” The upbeat text asserts: “Nellie and all her friends could now see / It’s alright when you do things differently.” Cullen and Ellis’ message underscoring the celebration of differences is evident, if didactic. Still, it is appropriate for young readers. The images by theillustrators.com.au feature graphic, cartoonlike creatures with large eyes and an appealing backdrop of undersea activity in aquatic hues. The enjoyable book includes “Nellie’s Ocean Trivia,” offering five multiple-choice questions relevant to the story, such as “What kind of animal is a turtle?”

A lively and approachable animal tale about creative solutions and friendship.

HOMOAMERICAN
The Secret Society
Dane, Michael
HomoAmerican
$24.95 | $7.99 e-book | Jan. 1, 2019
978-0-578-46328-5

A gay man recounts his struggle to define himself while trying to find success as a dancer and singer in this debut memoir. After a hardscrabble boyhood in San Francisco, 20-year-old Dane moved to New York City on a Juilliard ballet scholarship in 1975—the beginning of a long odyssey on the fringes of the arts and entertainment industry. He was a gifted dancer, he writes, but not quite superstar material; when his hopes of getting a spot in the storied American Ballet Theater company fizzled, he scrounged for other gigs. These included a contract with an Iranian ballet company in Tehran, which ended with his having to flee across the border to Turkey, and a stint with the all-male Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo troupe back in the United States. He lost both jobs because of poisonous office politics, he asserts, after his superior skills upstaged other, more powerful ensemble members.
Seeking new horizons, Dane tried to launch a singing career with a Franco-Belgian record label that eventually went bankrupt; played the lover of then-unknown actor Madonna Ciccione in the low-budget indie film *A Certain Sacrifice*; produced his own play, which closed after three weeks; and made it through rough patches as a sex worker. He finally found steady employment in film and television as an extra in crowd scenes and in small parts as tough guys and waiters. Dane also had his share of romantic drama: His longtime boyfriend Gerard introduced him to the subculture of anonymous sex on the Hudson River waterfront and later succumbed to AIDS; and Bernard, another longtime boyfriend, made repeated suicide threats.

Dane relates his misadventures in vivid prose with piquant character sketches—"Her bleached and permed locks and gruff demeanor create... a comical and fearsome impression of an aged peroxide abusing Shirley Temple doing her best Martha ."

DicKard, Shirley
*Heart Wood*
Sierra Muses Press (440 pp.)
$17.99 paper | $3.99 e-book
Mar. 14, 2020
978-1-73453-640-9

DicKard’s debut novel tells the story of multiple generations of female activists, environmentalists, and community organizers.

The author chronicles the lives of Eliza, who comes of age in the 1800s; Harmony, who lives in the present day; and Amisha, whose narrative begins in 2075. Eliza is the matriarch of the family and the owner of a special desk made of an oak’s “heart wood.” The desk imbues its owners with a love of the land and a calling to protect the Earth from ecological destruction.

Harmony, the only character’s voice rendered in first person, witnesses firsthand the rapid environmental destruction caused by corporate manipulation and greed. She refuses to sell, or even leave, her homestead in Luna Valley, Northern California, as many of her neighbors have, and she commits to growing her own food and working with local environmental activists to offset a seemingly inevitable disaster. Decades later, Amisha will find her way back to this homestead in an effort to try to reconnect to the Earth. The desk inexplicably “call[s]” her back to her family’s property, where she pores through Harmony’s journals and communes with nature. She heeds Eliza’s warning from almost 200 years ago: “If we don't make protecting our earth the heart of everything we do... then everything else we do will be in vain.” Over the course of this book, DicKard deftly oscillates among three time periods, which keeps the narrative moving forward at a brisk pace. Although the book can be polemical in tone, the author peppers her prose with lyricism; for example, like the women before her, Amisha finds solace in the forest’s “silence...like soft moss” or the scent of tomato: “old and earthy, touched with a tinge of long ago.” Striking metaphors (“Night closed its blanket of darkness”) paint a vivid portrait of the world and ominously show what could become of it if people don’t take the necessary steps to save it. Occasional moments, as when Harmony humorously calls email an “electronic phone tree,” provide a necessary levity in an otherwise sobering story.

A prescient, sometimes-lyrical book about memory, genealogy, and destiny.

*THE LAST MOON BEFORE HOME*
Dzikowski, Barbara J.
WiaRa Books (302 pp.)
$13.95 paper | $2.99 e-book
Jun. 15, 2020
978-0-9840305-6-9

This sequel revisits a troubled family as it wrestles with love in all its beautiful and terrible forms.

The novel begins in 1973. Noël Trudeau, ex-wife of Leon Ziemny, is pregnant. Against her doctor’s dire warning, she gives birth to a daughter, Willow, and dies. Fast-forward to the late ’90s. Armed with her mother’s diary, Willow is determined to probe her past. She embarks on a trip that takes her to her mother’s grave in Willow, Ohio, and then to the Ziennys, still in the steel town of Langston, Indiana. Old Walt Ziemny is in the early stages of Alzheimer’s, but the disease soon starts moving fast. His son Ricky, an artist, never married after Noël wed Leon instead of him. That union imploded, and Leon and his second wife, Stella, have, for over 25 years, been in a marriage that died long ago. Then Willow shows up, claiming that Noël was her aunt while she tries to figure things out, test the waters. Slowly, she becomes accepted even if she is still a mystery. Eventually, an important family secret is revealed. Like the author’s previous novel, *The Moonstoners* (2019), this second volume of a trilogy shows Dzikowski to be a very sensitive
At one point, for instance, he notes that “Boredom emphasizes Mazurka Inn. There are no missteps here, and there are wonder-ful character studies, especially of Walt and Leon. Walt was the only one to accept Noël from the get-go. Now, his Alzheimer’s is painful for the whole family (and clearly Dzikowski knows a lot about the condition). Leon has always been locked up tight, pushing people away, and readers will want to scream at him, shake him. Willow could be his salvation. He ultimately begins a new life—a better life for a better man. Because everything has been so hard won, the final peace is all the sweeter. Readers will be eagerly awaiting the author’s next installment.

A complex and engrossing family tale with strong characters.

University of Louisville associate philosophy professor Elpidorou’s intriguing new book looks at not only the inevitability of so-called negative emotions—such as boredom, frustration, and anticipation—but also their worth and even the advantages that they can bestow. Human existence involves both ups and downs, he says, and temporary negative emotions are a necessary part of leading a meaningful life: “Life requires failures and pains just as much as it demands successes and pleasures,” he writes. Elpidorou takes readers through comprehensive breakdowns of what boredom and frustration truly are, using clear examples and an open, engaging prose style to show how they’ve been viewed by various philosophers, psychologists, and authors over the years. He also effectively addresses how such emotions alter how people experience the passage of time. This latter aspect turns out to be a key element of the book’s analysis, because this time-warping effect also helps to foster a feeling of stagnation. Even so, the author argues, such states “contain the potential to liberate us.” In every section of every chapter, Elpidorou is rigorously thoughtful and quotably readable as he discusses unpalatable emotions that most people want to avoid. At one point, for instance, he notes that “Boredom emphasizes what it disrupts or takes away. It forces us to see things anew.” The cumulative effect is a strong and ultimately persuasive case that when life gives you lemons, you should simply value the lemons—a counterintuitive argument, to be sure, but one that the author convincingly backs up over the course of his book.

PROPELLED
How Boredom, Frustration, and Anticipation Lead Us to the Good Life
Elpidorou, Andreas
Oxford University Press (224 pp.)
978-0-19-091206-3

A look at the possible upsides of negative emotional states.

In Ferrendelli’s fifth mystery-series installment, 30-something reporter Samantha Church battles alcoholism as she searches for a missing man and confronts dangerous criminals.

Sam was devastated by her sister’s murder, and her resultant drinking caused her to lose her job as a reporter at the Denver Post. After she temporarily lost custody of her 11-year-old daughter, April, she became determined to conquer her addiction. She and April moved to their idyllic 280-acre family ranch in the Denver suburb of Grandview. Now, nearly a year after taking her last drink, Sam works as a reporter at the Grandview Perspective, a community newspaper, and aside from low self-esteem due to weight gain, she’s at peace with herself. Enter 23-year-old reporter Hunter John Hollingsworth, a handsome younger man who admires her intelligence and tells her stories about his beloved late mother. At the behest of her boss, Sam takes Hunter under her wing, and the two find themselves involved in a missing person case that leads them to a dangerous fraud ring. Mystery fans will find enough action here to keep them turning pages; for example, in an exciting, climactic scene, Sam and Hunter try to flee on foot as a villain tries to run them over with a truck. Ferrendelli’s prose flows easily, and her descriptions are often lovely in how they quietly hint at deeper emotions. While strolling on the ranch, for example, Sam and Hunter “stood next to each other, their arms crossed, as silent as a country road, the landscape, a mirror of sagebrush and trees giving way to a gentle slope of a hill toward an open meadow, reflecting back at them.”

An engaging mystery with a genuine, likable protagonist.

WHO WILL HEAR BEGONIA?
Gable, Bonny
Illus. by Stephenson, Cleo
White Orchard Press (32 pp.)
Jul. 1, 2020
978-1-73471-760-0

Two sisters learn an important lesson from their dog about how love can transcend illness in this debut picture book.

Begonia the dachshund just wants to go with her human family to visit Nana. But Begonia is too dirty because she was digging for flowers for Nana. The pooch is left at home when Kara and Emma’s best efforts fail,
they realize that maybe what they need is exactly what Begonia is offering: a little canine love. The dog and the girls succeed, and even though Nana is still lost in memories, her love shines through. Coping with a grandparent with memory loss or a mental illness can be very difficult, and Gable captures that situation in the frustration of the girls and in their determination to reach their grandparent. Debut illustrator Stephenson's soft-hued images in ink and watercolor evoke the book's subdued tone while also showing Begonia's exuberance. The repeated phrase, "But no one hears Begonia," gives lap readers a moment to chime in during the touching story.

A sweet tale of two girls growing to understand their grandmother's illness.

**UNFLAPPABLE**

**Gilbert, Suzie**
Perch Press (326 pp.)
Feb. 22, 2020
978-0-578-61200-3

A tycoon's young wife and an injured bald eagle take flight in this eco-woke suspense story.

In Gilbert's novel, graying billionaire Adam Matheson believes only his mesmerizingly beautiful young wife sets him apart from other men in his class. Adam became besotted with Luna when she managed his small private zoo, and following a brief courtship, she became his fourth wife. But after six months of marriage, bird-loving Luna wants a divorce from Adam and an exit from his high-end lifestyle. To woo her into staying, Adam presents her with an eagle stolen from a wildlife center. Luna, appalled at the theft, vows to deliver the bird, named Mars, from Adam's Florida estate across the international boundary line to an eagle sanctuary in Ontario. Ned, a 26-year-old wildlife center volunteer, abets Luna and Mars on their clandestine wild ride north. En route first in a classic Caddy and later in a red '57 Chevy rag-top, they go "rehabber-hopping"—only staying at animal rehab centers that have a flight cage big enough for an eagle. Hot on their tail feathers are the police, a federal wildlife officer, and even though Nana is still lost in memories, her love shines through. Excitement, adventure, romance, and even though Nana is still lost in memories, her love shines through. Coping with a grandparent with memory loss or a mental illness can be very difficult, and Gable captures that situation in the frustration of the girls and in their determination to reach their grandparent. Debut illustrator Stephenson's soft-hued images in ink and watercolor evoke the book's subdued tone while also showing Begonia's exuberance. The repeated phrase, "But no one hears Begonia," gives lap readers a moment to chime in during the touching story.

**THE APPLE AND THE SHADY TREE**

**A Memoir of the Mafia, My Dad, and Me**

**Goldberg, Lisa Novick**
O'Possum Press (277 pp.)
$14.95 paper | $8.99 e-book
Dec. 2, 2019
978-0-578-58513-0

In this memoir, a woman recounts her New York upbringing and investigates her father's mob ties.

Goldberg's book begins in 1987. One night, she and her then-husband, Mark, were in their New York City apartment, watching the local news. The lead story was about the murder of Irwin Schiff, who was shot in the head while dining at an Italian restaurant in Manhattan. Schiff had ties to the mob, but the author knew him for another reason: "Irwin Schiff was one of my father's best friends du jour." Soon, the FBI was at her door, and Goldberg was subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury. "How the hell did I get to this point?" she asks incredulously. In the subsequent chapters, she jumps back in time to find out, sketching portraits of her parents and tracing her own upbringing. Her parents met in Brooklyn, fell in love, got married. Her father ran a sports-betting operation for Funzi Tieri, a notorious loan shark and "eventual capo of the Genovese family." The author was born in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in 1958; six years later, the family moved to the Five Towns on Long Island. Soon, Goldberg had a sibling: "My sister was conceived after a night of drinking champagne at the Copacabana." The memoir is full of details, anecdotes, and short profiles of colorful characters, but the author's parents remain shrouded in lingering wisps of mystery. She can only speculate as to the scope and severity of her mother's mental health struggles, and her father's various business activities are never fully illuminated. For instance, Goldberg asserts that he was involved in the record industry for decades, but she didn't learn about it until the 1980s. His work made him secretive, but the author sensed a resistance to settling down: "My dad did make a few attempts to fulfill my vision of suburban family life, but let's just say, he wasn't cut out for the part."

Goldberg is a steady chronicler of her family history and the years of her childhood and adolescence. As one would expect from a mob-focused memoir, the names of fringe characters are delightful and might be hard to believe if not for the American familiarity, through film and television, with Mafia nomenclature. In these pages, readers meet Dom, Funzi, Tony Lunch, Johnny Sausage, and Benny Eggs. Though the author's memoir delivers on its promise to present a realistic look at her father's ties to the Genovese crime family, the true success of the work is how well it encapsulates a time and place: New York of the '60s, '70s, and '80s. Goldberg peppers the lively book, which includes family photographs, with mentions of bygone places: Schrafft's; the Jade Cockatoo in Greenwich Village; the 1964 World's Fair in Flushing, Queens; Lundy's Restaurant in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. She also powerfully evokes her suburban childhood,
Greene’s debut novel tackles big questions about life, death, and the future of the planet.

I CALL MYSELF EARTH GIRL

which, despite her father’s dealings, occasionally seems idyllic, as when she and some neighborhood kids played in the Valley Stream dump on Long Island: “We climbed on hills of dirt scattered with junk that included old bottles, rebar, shoes, and an occasional appliance.” Throughout the memoir, the author’s fondness for the past helps her soberly assess a sometimes chaotic, sometimes comical, and sometimes painful family life.

An honest, funny, and thorough reflection on a complicated family.

I CALL MYSELF EARTH GIRL
Greene, Jan Krause
Soul Rocks Books (273 pp.)
$18.95 paper | $7.99 e-book
Aug. 16, 2013 978-1-78279-049-5

An unexpected—and unexplained—pregnancy upends the life of a 40-something woman.

Gloria isn’t prepared to become a mother again at 46. With her only daughter expecting her first baby, she’s “come to terms with being a grandmother before she was ready,” but she hasn’t accepted “being a pregnant grandmother.” Yet pregnant she is—and in very mysterious circumstances. It’s clear her husband isn’t the baby’s father, but Gloria is equally sure she hasn’t had sex outside of her marriage. The answer to her mysterious pregnancy appears to lie in a series of troubling dreams featuring a person who identifies herself as Earth Girl, a celestial being who has returned to Earth and lives in a famine-stricken, war-torn country at an unidentified time in history. In these vivid dreams, Gloria experiences Earth Girl’s rape (in passages that might be triggering for some readers) and subsequent pregnancy. But dreams invade reality when she herself becomes pregnant. Unsurprisingly, her husband and daughter (both lightly sketched) greet Gloria’s explanation for her pregnancy with skepticism and anger, but once baby Ella is born, they quickly come around. Ella is no ordinary child. And Gloria continues to experience strange dreams that suggest that her daughter has a higher purpose that could involve the fate of humanity. Greene’s debut novel tackles big questions about life, death, and the future of the planet. As Earth Girl tells Gloria, “Life on earth can never be fully understood. Life and all it holds is too big for humans to understand.” Suffering happens because “humans have embraced pain and sorrow much more fully than they have embraced joy.” It’s also a moving portrait of a family under stress, with Gloria and her husband, Jared, facing the challenges of raising a unique child, dealing with health scares, and confronting tensions with their adult daughter, Melanie. Greene makes a strong case for embracing nonviolence and protecting the planet, as Ella predicts “a future more bleak and disastrous for society than you can imagine” if we do not “pay attention to important things.”

A creative, thoughtful exploration of the interconnectedness of human relationships.

BIRD IN A SNARE
Holmes, N.L.
Self (425 pp.)
Apr. 29, 2020

In this historical mystery, a murder tests an Egyptian diplomat’s loyalties—to his family, those he serves, and allies he’s made throughout his career.

In the 1300s B.C.E., Abdi-ashirta is a leader in multiple territories that border the Egyptian empire, and his presence there has maintained a fragile peace. His mysterious murder creates regional instability, mistrust, and no shortage of work for diplomat Hani and his scribe, Maya, who are tasked with the investigation. Together, the pair travel extensively to question implicated parties only to uncover deeper scandals, lies, and a distinct unwillingness to incriminate others. A collection of suspects emerges along the way: Aziru, Abdi-ashirta’s son, ascends to power because of his father’s murder; Commissioner Yanakh-amu and Lord Yapakh-addi both have political and monetary motivations to eliminate Abdi-ashirta, but they also have alibis. Complicating matters further is the death of the king of Egypt and his replacement by his son, Akh-en-aten, who immediately begins imposing significant cultural reforms and casting aside long-held alliances; he also has a possible motive for ordering Abdi-ashirta’s murder. Still, Hani’s steadfast loyalty to his family, to his work, and to the kingdom are his constants — until the new reforms put his family at risk. Meanwhile, his eldest son and heir becomes enchanted with Hani’s rival, who works for the new king. Hani’s growing internal struggle is a recurring theme throughout the novel, which is precisely what makes him useful as a diplomat; Holmes succinctly describes his mindset: “You make the mistake of actually caring about the people you deal with.” The author’s background as an archaeologist results in vivid descriptions of the ancient settings, customs, and characters, and he provides a helpful glossary of terms for readers unfamiliar with the setting. He also includes a character list, which is necessary, as the story introduces new players at a sometimes-dizzying pace. The book could have also benefited from more descriptions of the threats that the new king’s cultural reforms pose to his citizens. However, the central mystery contains abundant twists, which lead to a satisfying and surprising conclusion.

A fine mystery tale that explores the relatable troubles of a conflicted investigator.
In Jayaraj’s debut fantasy novel, a young orphan trains to be a dragon slayer and soon questions where his loyalties lie.

The peoples of the world of Adijari are waging war against the dragons. Many different species of dragons have gathered at the Zipacna Mountains, and the elves have constructed the nearby military base of Delthurk. Although it’s elven, other peoples, such as amesha, dev, and qui-lahk, reside at Delthurk as they prepare to fight the dragons into extinction. Twelve-year-old elf Gradni lives at an orphanage, having lost his dragon-slayer father, Yorn, to the reptilian creatures. After Gradni defeats a bully, Delthurk senator Mogurn recruits him to undergo training to become a dragon slayer with the belief that Gradni has what it takes to lead warriors in the final battle against dragons.

The young man is in competition, of sorts, with Erdūn, an amesha with whom the Fire Spirit, Ta’ar, has chosen to share his power. Ta’ar hopes that the skilled Erdūn, who’s younger than Gradni, will turn out to be the world’s greatest slayer of dragons. Gradni, meanwhile, trains with Yagura, who’s one of the Disciples of Gaorda, a group of devs that reputedly wiped out the entire species of sesha dragons. The boy hopes to prove his worth on his first mission to the Zipacna Mountains. But he quickly learns why some slayers don’t return from those mountains—and that his loyalties may lie with the wrong side.

Over the course of this book, Jayaraj packs the tale with numerous characters, some of whom are only touched upon, such as the qui-lahk people, who are seen relatively rarely. Despite the narrative’s epic scale, it still moves at a rapid pace, which the author achieves, at least in part, with modest descriptions. The diverse peoples, for example, are distinguished primarily by their skin color: The devs are blue-skinned, for example, while the elves are frequently described as “pale.” Similarly, the differences between dragon species seem fairly minute. This does, however, lead to a pronounced, well-incorporated theme of “fear of difference”; the dragons, it seems, are truly united while the four peoples have a common enemy but often differing motivations. The story largely centers on Gradni, but a few subplots effectively expand Jayaraj’s world. One of the more notable storylines involves the amesha nation of Aristahl, where Ta’ar rules. Aristahl has made weapons and armor for other nations to fight the war against the dragons, causing its own resources to dwindle to a modest description. The diverse peoples, for example, are preoccupied with a block party, they’ll dress in black and practice stealthy outdoor maneuvers. But they get mistaken for burglars and draw police attention, which would be all good fun—except for Nate’s parents’ deciding such hijinks are “not the future we want for our son,” and private school is the answer. Over the summer, while the Dudes pursue ninja-ad ja rent activities, they’ll need all their ingenuity to hatch schemes for keeping Nate in public school. With one priceless, laugh-out-loud scenario after another, the mother-and-son team of Johnson and Reynolds delivers a fine tale in this Dudes Adventure series opener. For example, the friends build a homemade obstacle course with tests like the “Rain of Blows”—where the ninja-in-training must safely jump through spinning badminton rackets (which are duct-taped to poles on a rotating wheel). At the same time, the story is given depth by emotional challenges each friend must face, described with subtlety. Tyler, for example, has a new baby brother grabbing his mom’s attention while the Maguire twins’ parents have recently divorced. Readers will likely be eager to read the next adventure.

Hilarious comic mayhem rounded out by affection and insight.

**THE DUDES SAVE THE DUDES**
Johnson, Emily Kay & Reynolds, Tyler
Epic Spiel Press (203 pp.)
$7.99 paper | $2.99 e-book | Aug. 3, 2018
978-1-949212-01-3

Five friends create an elaborate plan to prevent private school from separating them in this debut middle-grade novel.

In the summer after fourth grade, the Dudes—Tyler Reynolds, twins Ryan and Connor Maguire, Nate Howe, and Deven Singh—have big plans to continue their mission of doing “stuff that’s great and memorable.” They’re an assorted bunch: Tyler, the story’s narrator, chronicles the Dude adventures; Ryan, the leader, comes up with cool plans; and Connor throws himself into physical challenges. They’re White while Nate, the brainiac, is African American and Deven, the joker, is Indian American. All five are obsessed with the TV show *Ninja W ars*, which inspires “Operation Ninja Prowl”; while the neighborhood is preoccupied with a block party, they’ll dress in black and practice stealthy outdoor maneuvers. But they get mistaken for burglars and draw police attention, which would be all good fun—except for Nate’s parents’ deciding such hijinks are “not the future we want for our son,” and private school is the answer. Over the summer, while the Dudes pursue ninja-ad ja rent activities, they’ll need all their ingenuity to hatch schemes for keeping Nate in public school. With one priceless, laugh-out-loud scenario after another, the mother-and-son team of Johnson and Reynolds delivers a fine tale in this Dudes Adventure series opener. For example, the friends build a homemade obstacle course with tests like the “Rain of Blows”—where the ninja-in-training must safely jump through spinning badminton rackets (which are duct-taped to poles on a rotating wheel). At the same time, the story is given depth by emotional challenges each friend must face, described with subtlety. Tyler, for example, has a new baby brother grabbing his mom’s attention while the Maguire twins’ parents have recently divorced. Readers will likely be eager to read the next adventure.

Hilarious comic mayhem rounded out by affection and insight.
MISADVENTURES OF A MAGICIAN’S SON
Kutscera, Laurie Smollett
Illus. by the author
Blue Whale Press (177 pp.)
$16.99 | $10.99 paper | Apr. 1, 2020
978-1-73289-354-2
978-1-73289-353-5 paper

Helped by a deck of cards that comes to life, a boy learns to cope with loss, displacement, and bullying in this debut middle-grade novel.

Twelve-year-old Alexander Finn lives in Ridge Park, New York. He is a star lacrosse player and learns magic tricks from his father—a famous magician. Life is good. But when his dad is killed during a performance, Alex and his mom have to relocate to Orchard, a small town in Maine. Still grieving, Alex is plunged into a new and miserable life. He hates his new house and the apple-obsessed Orchard with its small-town ways. Most of all, he hates his new school—a hotbed of bullying and football (no lacrosse). Just when Orchard seems truly unbearable, Alex discovers a pack of cards his father left him. These are no ordinary cards. In Alex's presence, they come to life. He meets King Anton and Queen Olivia (the King and Queen of Hearts); their nervous son, Jack; and the mischievous Joker as well as all the Spade, Club, and Diamond families. Only Alex can see them—to anyone else, they appear as ordinary cards—but they lift his spirits and encourage him to pursue magic. Alex even wins a magic contest. But when criminals steal his cards, Alex's life goes from bad to worse. Can he save his new friends and make a home for himself in Orchard? Whereas the book's title might suggest a lighthearted, invented-world fantasy, Kutscera has written a serious work of magic realism exploring relevant and contemporary themes. The prose and dialogue are polished, and the plot, though straightforward, builds steadily toward an age-suitable climax. Though the bullying Alex suffers is of the endemic, senseless variety, it is not too distressing. Young readers are invited to relate to Alex—to his troubles and feelings—and yet allowed to delight in the courtly good nature and whimsy of the cards. The minor characters (particularly Alex's mom and his classmate Lindsay) are given deft touches of individuality. The author's full-page pencil drawings effectively capture Alex's washed-out despair.

A heartfelt, somber story skillfully infused with magic and adventure.

THE MEMORY OF AN ELEPHANT
Lasker, Alex
Manuscript

An aged African elephant bull travels from Zambia to his homeland in Kenya's Tsavo West National Park to say his final goodbyes in a debut novel that melds reality and fantasy.

It is 1964, and Kamau Matiba, a young teenage Kenyan, is taking his rite-of-passage walkabout when he hears gunshots. A local band of especially vicious ivory poachers has just slaughtered an entire herd of elephants. When Kamau investigates, he discovers a 2-year-old elephant calf lying beside the body of his mother. The detached blade of a machete is protruding from the wounded animal's forehead. When Kamau gently strokes him, the calf opens his eyes and looks at him. He is the lone survivor of the massacre. Kamau knows of a place where he can find help, Salisbury Hill Farm, just outside the refuge park. There he enlists the aid of Russell Hathaway, a hunting guide, and his wife, Jean, who runs a small, wild-animal orphanage for helpless offspring. Together, they nurse the calf back to health and name him Anaishi, or “Ishi,” for “He lives.” So begins a tender, sometimes heartbreaking saga that spans three continents, five decades, and a more than 1,000-mile journey by the elephant back to the Tsavo wildlife refuge, his birthplace. The narrative consists of two parallel tales, one tracing the lives of the Hathaway family (Russell, Jean, daughter Amanda, and son Terence) and the other tracking the events in Ishi's life. They are told through two distinct voices—one, a third-person narrator, the other the “voice” of Ishi, the narrative's only fully developed character. The book follows the major events in the lives of the “two-leggers,” as Ishi calls them, but never quite makes you feel them. Ishi, however, expresses a depth of love and emotion that is sure to bring more than a few tears. He describes the pain the herd feels when they lose clan members to the poachers: “Every season we would return to the places where our friends had fallen and visit their bones, turning them over and over, remembering their owner, and hoping to find a life force in there somewhere.”

A vivid and timely depiction of the sentience of elephants and the cruelty of ivory poaching.

INTO THE WIND
Loizeaux, William
Illus. by Jacobsen, Laura
One Elm Books (186 pp.)
Mar. 1, 2021
978-1-947159-42-6

A middle-grade boy finds comfort and emotional growth in his friendship with an older woman in this novel.

Summer vacation isn't starting out well for Russell, called Rusty. He failed
Matthews’ themes are underscored by compact, powerful language, skillful technique, and striking images of sinewy beauty.

**UNEARTH [THE FLOWERS]**

Matthews, Thea

Red Light Lit Press (102 pp.)

$16.00 paper  |  Jun. 20, 2020

978-0-9998895-1-0

Poems that speak of suffering, resilience, and flourishing.

In her debut book, Matthews titles each piece with both a common and Latin flower name; an appended glossary provides more information. She groups the poems, some of which have been previously published in literary journals and anthologies, into two sections: “Perennial” and “Annual.” A prefatory poem, “PRELUDE | Praeludium,” gives context for the collection. In it, the speaker remembers childhood violations: “UNEARTH the abuse : repetition of bruising the spirit / ... / the time said once more / ssbbbb ... don’t tell no body.” Disbelief from others injures the speaker’s psyche and, for a time, silences her, “the cries trapped in my teeth.” But a reclaimed voice speaks in the last lines: “the tongue clipped now regrown / UNEARTH [THE FLOWERS].” The “now regrown” phrase suddenly gives the poem a different perspective, implying that what’s buried can also be a source of renewal. Many other poems in this collection explore this theme, such as “RAIN LILY | Zephyranthes grandiflora,” in which the speaker acknowledges lacerating pain but sees richness and power in it:

“the scars of finding gold. You’ll see me shine / like a glass case of knives.” Similarly, “LILAC | Syringa vulgaris,” dedicated to the poet’s grandfather, begins “Take your filthy hands off me.” But as the poem continues, the speaker’s powerful negation transforms into breathtakingly defiant joy in lines that step boldly across the page: “I sow I weep I sow I weep / for many moons I renew / an ethereal field of Lilacs!” Throughout, Matthews’ themes are underscored by compact, powerful language, skillful technique, and striking images of sinewy beauty: “I yawn my limbs to five corners,” says one speaker, and in another work, a female subject “cracks windchimes with her teeth.”

A fine collection of works that are rooted in darkness but open in sunlight.

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**GATES OF MARS**

McFall, Kathleen & Hays, Clark

Pumpjack Press (303 pp.)

$15.95 paper  |  $4.99 e-book

Jun. 16, 2020

978-1-73451-970-9

A 22nd-century cop’s search for his missing sister on Mars entangles him in a conspiracy in this SF series opener. Crucial Larsen opted to stay on Earth while his younger sister, Essential, took a job on colonized yet not fully terraformed Mars. But the cop bravely takes on space travel upon learning that Essential has disappeared. Things get instantly awkward on the red planet, as his initial contact is Mars’ deputy chief of security, Jynks Martine. Jynks is engaged to Crucial’s botanist ex-girlfriend, Melinda “Mel” Hopwire. But there’s a general sense of unease on both Mars and Earth, as citizens are somehow armed in defiance of the advanced artificial intelligence Halo that monitors the two planets. Complicating matters are the governing Five Families. Years ago, the Consolidation Wars whittled corporation-owning families down to five, but there may be dissension among them once again. Trying to find his sister puts Crucial near the Variance, a resistance group that opposes the Five Families. The Variance has a plan underway that includes subverting ostensibly omniscient Halo. As Crucial is immersed in this scheme, whether he likes it or not, the generally indifferent, law-enforcing “Earther” will have to choose which side he’s on. McFall and Hays flavor this SF tale with noir: Halo is interrogating Crucial, the world-weary detective (of sorts), as the story unfolds in flashbacks. This style is effective in multiple ways, especially as it playfully teases future narrative events, like certain characters’ fates. Smartly detailed SF components are equally strong: Glitter guns grow and discharge crystal ammo while lowly Earth’s backstory is rife with global devastation. The cast, meanwhile, is predominantly and refreshingly female, and many, from Jynks to Singhroy Able (from one of the Five Families), are delightfully fully vague regarding their motivations. Though a sequel will follow, the ending offers considerable resolution.

An indelible introduction to an interplanetary saga and its sublime characters.
In this debut memoir, a woman recounts growing up with a mother confined to her bed because of multiple sclerosis. Raised in Northern Michigan in the 1960s and ‘70s, Menara was one of 10 siblings living in a two-bedroom, tin-roofed hut. The author was born in 1963 to parents who were recently divorced. In the mid-’60s, her mother, Shirley, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, which led to her being bedridden and cared for by her children. The memoir recalls how, as a child, Menara coped with emptying bedpans, assisting with sanitary towels, and giving enemas. The book also portrays a challenging relationship with a mother who showed moments of tenderness but also ordered her kids to dish out punishments on her behalf, which included administering severe beatings with a pancake turner and starving one brother. One particularly nightmarish moment details Shirley’s demand that newly born puppies be flushed down the toilet. Despite such traumas, visits from social services instilled a genuine fear in the author of being taken away. Menara is a keenly observant writer, particularly with regard to recognizing the rare, simple pleasures of her childhood: “I shoved my face in the fresh sweetness of the purple buds then continued on my walk as I gazed at the sun filtering through the towering trees.” Similarly, she never shies away from describing the horrors of her mother’s terminal illness: “Her backside was saddled with bedsores; the stench was unbearable. In one section the flesh was stripped to the bone.” This can make for an upsetting read, but the author’s inner strength and positivity prove sufficient to lighten the ordeal: “I savored those affectionate moments; like a banana turning bad, there were bits I cut off, salvaged, and treasured.” This is an eloquently recounted and heartbreaking story—readers will find it a fine diversion, and readers who may be looking for something more straightforward will find it gratingly ridiculous. However, the murder mystery itself is a fine diversion, and readers may be looking for some very
Readers will come away with a better understanding of startup myths.

THE UNICORN’S SHADOW
Combating the Dangerous Myths That Hold Back Startups, Founders, and Investors
Mollick, Ethan
Wharton School Press (116 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Jun. 23, 2020
978-1-61363-096-9

Everything you think you know about startups is wrong, according to this business book.

Not every successful startup was created by a hoodie-wearing genius spending long nights working out of his garage, argues Mollick, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School who specializes in innovation and entrepreneurship. Many startup founders and investors cling to a “startup monomyth,” he says, influenced by “legendary unicorns” such as Google, Amazon, and Facebook, which have “an outsized influence over the imagination of founders and the public at large.” Yet when one looks beyond the hype and analyzes the actual data on what contributes to a new company’s success or failure, a new reality emerges. By examining a wealth of evidence and academic studies, the author moves beyond jargon and accepted wisdom to highlight the issues that startup founders need to consider and the obstacles they may have to overcome. For example, he illustrates why having a youthful founder can sometimes hinder, rather than help, a company’s chances of success; puts paid to the notion that there’s one specific entrepreneurial personality type; shows why chasing venture capital cash may not be the right choice for every startup; and explains how a company’s culture can be set (for better or for worse) in its earliest days. Along the way, he offers concrete, evidence-based advice that will help would-be founders achieve their goals. There’s useful information here for readers at all stages of the startup journey, including those who are struggling to find an “it” idea that will wow both customers and investors. Mollick includes a nuanced dissection of the idea-generation process, showing how to come up with business concepts by looking at “the means at their disposal”—what knowledge or connections they already have—rather than focusing on where they want to end up. Readers will come away with a better understanding of startup myths as well as a framework that they can use to “match the expectations of the monomyth where you can, while pushing the boundaries in areas that matter to you.”

A book that convincingly punctures some pervasive misconceptions about startup success.

THE MYTHICAL
Oravec, Nathan
Bloodline Publishers (292 pp.)
978-1-73391-850-3

In this novel, a country sheriff, his eclectic family, and a boisterous deputy find themselves cast as the protectors of a centaur who appears in Kentucky’s horse country. The wail of a dying panther in the woods behind their property is a dark portent for the Tolls. Sheriff Marshall Toll; his photographer son, Lucas; and their dopey but lovable 94-pound dog, Wayne Newton, investigate but find only questions about whether it was a human or beast who managed to fell the vicious creature. In a stall among their horses, an unexpected answer surfaces in the form of an injured centaur, her equine features joined with a haunting human beauty that reminds Marshall of his dead wife. To further complicate matters, the centaur is pregnant and being pursued by a perverse and murderous member of her own kind. Nicknamed Sugar by the family’s Southern matriarch, Grandma Eve, the centaur pulls her new caregivers close around her, aided by Lucas’s childhood friend, the beautiful yet rowdy Claire Lewis, a sheriff’s deputy. But Claire’s help brings complications: her washed-out ex-fiance, Lyle Gorris, who wants to expose Sugar to the world at the Kentucky Derby for fame and riches. Oravec’s entry into the low-fantasy genre uses the timeless, distinctive atmosphere of the rural South and Kentucky horse country—a world of TV reruns, aging farms, and Derby culture—to seamlessly integrate a Greek myth in a way that feels wondrous but not anachronistic. The centaur’s caretakers are the best kind of heroes—oddballs—Marshall’s country manliness a stark contrast to his son’s artistic sensitivity, with the men at the whim of the somehow both lively and lethargic Grandma Eve, who at one point bakes the centaur a pie. The attraction between Lucas and Claire adds humor and romance, their teasing laced with numerous pop-culture references. The novel occasionally leans a little too hard on stereotypes, such as uninterestingly characterized foreigners or Claire’s self-doubts tied to her failure to have children. That said, the book is superb at ramping up the suspense and consistent in its insightful central theme, expressed early on by Claire, that those “who don’t belong generally don’t stray too far.”

An ardently Southern fantasy thriller perfect for those looking for different kinds of heroes.
THE OBITUARY WRITER

Oster, Patrick
Self (316 pp.)
Jun. 17, 2020
978-0-9916437-7-6

A disgraced investigative reporter gets a chance to reclaim his reputation while stuck writing obituaries for the famous.

Oster’s titular character is Wallace “Mack” McRae. Mack used to be an award-winning reporter for the Journal. Then his wife, Helen, began a long, slow decline while battling ALS, and Mack started drinking to cope, eventually getting fired. Now he writes slimy advance obituaries of celebrities for the sleazy website dead.com, mainly because he gets a health insurance package that keeps pace with Helen’s medical bills. Then one day, Mack’s luck changes. One of his longtime obit subjects is Dieter von Gehlen, a German-born doctor, organic chemist, and perennial Nobel Prize hopeful best known for his contribution to well-known weight-loss drug LytheEZ. Von Gehlen calls, wanting to meet with Mack. Then the chemist is found dead by apparent suicide. This makes no sense to Mack, so he begins to investigate von Gehlen’s death. The writer discovers that the doctor’s laptop and file cabinet are missing. Mack later determines that von Gehlen had doubts about the drug trials for LytheEZ. By using his reporter skills to dig deeper, Mack gets on the radar of the rich and powerful who don’t want LytheEZ’s safety questioned or his investigation into von Gehlen’s death published. So Mack ends up in danger as well. Oster closed out his long journalism career dabbling as an obit writer, which, he explains in his author’s note, inspired this mystery. The author is familiar with the underbelly of journalism, and that shows in his caustic descriptions of dead.com and its weaselly owner, Anton Teufel. It’s an ugly, new world of information gathering and dispersal. Mack is a sympathetic character, exhibiting a strong work ethic despite the turmoil in his personal life, as he tries to stay on the wagon while Helen is slowly dying. He deftly employs many of the contacts he’s acquired through the years to compile his comeback article. Oster also provides Mack with a plethora of potential overlords behind a dim Russian hit man pursuing him. The result is a layered, fast-paced thriller featuring a captivating protagonist.

An engrossing mystery that delivers a rich character study and a tale of redemption.

THE SECOND CHANCE HOME FOR GIRLS

Ostman, Heather
Manuscript (265 pp.)

A troublemaking teenager roils a rehab center in this novel of redemption.

It’s 1986, and the Second Chance Home for Girls in Texas imposes a 12-step doctrine and Christian exhortation on a dozen teens with histories of substance abuse and other failures to conform. The proprietor, Miss Sallyanne, presides over a regimen of chores, self-affirmation chants—“God loves me, and so do I!”—and group therapy sessions in which she pressures girls to reveal their sinful experiences with drugs and (usually abusive) sex. Those who don’t get with her program are sentenced to kneel in gravel or sleep chained in a doghouse. Into the snake pit comes Lorilee, around 17 years old, who is preternaturally self-possessed despite the needle tracks on her arms and her claim to have borne a son by her own brother. She breaks rules with impunity, knows secrets that she shouldn’t, flummoxes everyone with her blunt questions and unfilching gaze, and impudently corrects the Reverend, Sallyanne’s father, when his fire-and-brimstone sermon misstates the Bible. The braided narrative unwinds in the point-of-view voices of several residents of Second Chance. A chorus of girls condemns Lorilee as a stuck-up bitch; the seen-it-all cook, Starlene, thinks the teen is the devil; Summer, a quiet girl who writes everything in her diary, is both unnerved and inspired by Lorilee’s promise of forgiveness and freedom from her past, a vow that leads to violence. With its satire of a therapeutic culture that’s designed to subdue the victims of an inescapable patriarchy, Ostman’s yarn feels a bit like a distaff version of Ken Kesey’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, with a touch of Southern gothic. Ostman leavens the claustrophobic tension and air of eerie expectation at Second Chance with subtle humor and psychological insights—the chorus’s giddy encounter with an elusive pack of boys is a gem—all conveyed in pungent writing that’s good to chew on.

In this passage, Starlene describes a run-in with Tad, Sallyanne’s brother: “His hand went to his chin, but then he swung fast at me. I ducked. So much for that Jesus talk, I see now. Just takes a woman saying no and the cussing starts. Right before the fists.”

The result is an atmospheric yet entertaining read with an enigmatic, charismatic hero that will keep readers riveted.

This beguiling, slyly subversive tale puts a spiritual mystery at the heart of gritty truths.
Pamela and Charlie flirt with each other, which leads to Charlie's dependence on unreliable men and make hard choices that the protagonist gets back on track. As a result, this is a beguiling volume—one that offers readers a journey that's painful but ultimately educational.

An engaging novel featuring a winning character who struggles to find her path.

As the story opens, a “golden seed” drops from the sky and embeds itself into the bark of a tree, which, over time, grows roots and overtakes its host, becoming its own adult plant. This new fig tree goes on to bear fruit, and special fig wasps burrow and bury their eggs inside the figs. Those eggs will later hatch, and the spawn will go off and pollinate more fig trees in an interconnected cycle. Meanwhile, a chestnut-mandibled toucan eats a ripened fruit, deposits new seeds from a great height, and the cycle of life continues. On each page, a red-eyed tree frog plays a concurrent game of hide-and-seek. Fully illustrated backmatter further explains the life cycle of fig wasps and offers encyclopedic information about fig-tree species, red-eyed tree frogs, and, of course, the spectacular, aforementioned toucan.

Ritter’s narrative offers condensed but informative text, sometimes from the point of view of the seed and, at other times, from that of the wasp. It’s as if one is watching a documentary narrated by English nature historian David Attenborough, to whom this book is dedicated. That said, the writing does perhaps rely too heavily on the refrain, “Something wonderful was about to happen,” which appears four times. However, debut illustrator Gonzalez’s immersive and meticulously detailed drawings elevate the rainforest story and will reward multiple readings. Each page is executed with scientific precision, and an entire canopy of forest greens and brown tree bark are shown in panoramic spreads. It’s a captivating amalgam of color and information that will keep young readers guessing and exploring. STEM advocates will also be very pleased to share this book with future plant lovers.

A gorgeous-looking lesson that will satisfy kids and parents alike.

SOMETHING WONDERFUL
Ritter, Matt
Illus. by Gonzalez, Nayl
Pacific Street Publishing (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 2, 2021
978-0-9989660-1-3


In Perry’s debut novel, a young woman discovers that her beloved books haven’t prepared her for real life. In 1963, Pamela Carey is following her late mother Alice’s dream of self-sufficiency. The young woman is an English major at UCLA who hopes to become a professor. Her boyfriend, Warren, is a superior student and a subpar third baseman who acts as her stabilizing influence. However, she finds herself pursuing the boy who got away—Charlie Fain, on whom she’s had a crush since Catholic school. Charlie is now the star of their school’s baseball team and Warren’s teammate. Pamela must also watch over her father, Mickey, a punch-drunk former boxer who’s also a womanizing alcoholic. Pamela and Charlie flirt with each other, which leads to Charlie’s mother’s catching them in his room, semiclothed. Charlie soon invites Pamela to his first game in Single-A pro baseball. They later marry, and Pamela must learn how to find fulfillment as a ballplayer’s wife. This becomes harder after Charlie is injured and his career stalls. In Pamela, Perry has created a character who, in part, follows the expectations of her time; women in the early 1960s were often seen, especially by men, as nurturers, first and foremost. The author depicts Pamela as going a step further, becoming an enabler to both Mickey and Charlie—and her own, separate ambitions suffer as a result. The protagonist seems to learn little from Alice’s lectures or the cautionary tales of Jane Austen and the Brontës, as she ends up having to choose between milquetoast Warren and roguish Charlie when neither one will suffice. It isn’t until the author has Pamela abandon her dependence on unreliable men and make hard choices that the character gets back on track. As a result, this is a beguiling volume—one that offers readers a journey that’s painful but ultimately educational.

An engaging novel featuring a winning character who struggles to find her path.
me and fingered the tulle of the overdress. ‘Lovely. Where did you find this?’ ‘At a little shop in London.’ ‘You must give me its name.’ She gestured with her glass at Sebastian. ‘He’s always telling me to cut the flounces and flourishes, but I do love them.’

The author lovingly evokes the world à la Agatha Christie while focusing the action firmly on the women. Olive gets some help from an old crush and a police inspector, but these men primarily play foil to the protagonist and the many female suspects who surround her. With several sequels already published, satisfied readers can happily dive right into the next tale.

A thoughtfully constructed and elegantly executed murder mystery in the classic style.

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THE BOOK OF OLD LADIES
Celebrating Women of a Certain Age in Fiction
Saxton, Ruth O.
She Writes Press (304 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.95 e-book
Sep. 8, 2020
978-1-63152-797-5

A literary critique examines portrayals of older women in fiction. Throughout her life, Saxton has known many strong older women, like her mother, aunts, and grandmothers, who—despite the physical challenges of aging—possessed a lifetime of spirit and energy. As a professor of English at Mills College in Oakland, California, the author attempted to introduce her students to fiction that celebrated the vibrancy of real-life women, but she was often disappointed. Instead of stories about positive aging, in which women over 60 years old became their “truest selves,” Saxton noted that much fiction about older women was structured like “Deathbed Bookends”—in other words, the tales opened and closed with the memory of a youthful (often romantic) past, and the protagonist’s glory days were sadly over. In this well-organized presentation, the author lays out a thoughtful analysis of works of fiction from the 20th and 21st centuries, like Tillie Olsen's powerful short story “Tell Me a Riddle” and Catharina Ingelman-Sundberg's comedy-of-errors novel, The Little Old Lady Who Broke All the Rules. Thirty stories are examined in five categories—“Romancing the Past,” “Sex After Sixty,” “Altered Realities,” “It’s Never Too Late,” and “Defying Expectations”—and each segment contains illuminating critiques of six tales grouped into pairs. Saxton’s conclusions are memorable; for example, in Chapter 1, she writes that Katherine Anne Porter’s short story “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” and Susan Minot’s novel Evening both use Deathbed Bookends for their structures. The comprehensive work concludes with a compelling analysis of Margaret Drabble’s complex 2016 novel, The Dark Flood Rises. Though the chapters feel like individual essays that could be used in the classroom, Saxton’s beautifully fluid prose would be a pleasure to read while relaxing at the beach. A thought-provoking, informative, and valuable literary analysis.

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DIVISIBLE MAN
The Third Lie
Seabrook, Howard
Trans World Data (414 pp.)
May 4, 2020
978-1-73368-345-6

In Seabrook’s sixth series adventure, a pilot who can turn invisible and fly tackles a tangle of crimes, including serial killing and extortion.
Tonia Shimin says that she intended the book as a “tribute to the work of my father”; it is, and it also underscores the skills of its editor.

THE ART OF SYMEON SHIMIN

Editor Tonia Shimin assembles essays and images that span the rich career of her late father, the painter Symeon Shimin. The book’s opening section is a brief autobiographical essay that Symeon Shimin wrote before his death in 1984. In it, he spends little time on the subject of painting, focusing instead on his family life. He was born in Astrakhan, Russia, in 1902 and wanted to be a musician as a child; he idolized his uncle Eli, who was a composer. In 1912, the family moved to New York City. As he pursued his art, representational drawing came to him easily, and his first studies were on paper bags from his father’s new delicatessen. The second essay, by critic Josef Woodard, provides a fine portrait of Shimin’s artistic life and takes time to appreciate the artist’s illustrations for movie posters and children’s books. But to Woodard, these finely executed projects prevented Shimin from pursuing more worthwhile works like his Contemporary Justice and the Child, “a landmark mural” in the U.S. Department of Justice building. In the final essay, arts journalist Charles Donelan fastidiously moves through Shimin’s oeuvre, presenting a notion of the artist as a “passionate observer” and “humanist” whose representational paintings were underappreciated when abstract works dominated art markets. Together, the three essays achieve an edifying balance with Shimin’s intimate reflection, Woodard’s steady survey, and Donelan’s academic appreciation. The rest of the book consists of reproductions, ably arranged to showcase Shimin’s virtuosity and beautifully highlight his career-spanning fascination with the human form. The reprints of studies for Contemporary Justice are a highlight, revealing the minute strokes of brilliance that contributed to a coherent whole. A glowing reprint of Shimin’s later painting The Back shows the artist’s knack for chaotic ensemble, as does Discussion Group (I), reprinted across two facing pages. In her acknowledgments, Tonia Shimin says that she intended the book as a “tribute to the work of my father”; it is, and it also underscores the skills of its editor.

A gripping, timely, and twisty thriller.

THE ART OF SYMEON SHIMIN
Ed. by Shimin, Tonia
Mercury Press International (156 pp.)
$40.00 | Nov. 1, 2019
978-0-9990342-2-4

PUGS WEARING PARKAS

Stevenson, Deborah
Illus. by Spicer, Morgan
Pigs Fly Books (34 pp.)
$18.95 | $12.95 paper | $3.99 e-book
Jul. 29, 2020
978-1-73482-420-9
978-1-73482-421-6 paper

A pair of pugs in parkas parades through the seasons in this picture book.

“It’s the first day of spring! / Flowers stretch toward the sun / as a couple of pugs venture out for a run.” In this jaunty rhyming...
tale from Stevenson and Spicer—whose picture book collaborations include Oy, Elephants! (2019) and An Armadillo on My Pillow (2020)—two irrepressible pugs proudly set out through the seasons to show off their matching, hooded parkas. A flouney dachshund and a “studious hound” question whether spring is an appropriate time to be wearing parkas. The pugs meet similar disapproval in the summer from sea gulls and a little girl at the beach; in the autumn, a bunny and a raccoon are unimpressed. But in the winter, the pugs’ new friends, a boy with brown skin and the now-appreciative girl with light skin from the beach, compliment the canines for their choice of cold-weather attire. Children will enjoy hearing Stevenson’s bouncy rhymes and picking out verbs and nouns in each verse that are enlarged in the text and set in different colors for emphasis. Spicer’s full-color depictions of the seasons provide attractive settings for the amusing pugs and the other expressive animal and human characters. A fun touch: The penultimate page switches from the book’s horizontal format, requiring children to turn the work for a dynamic vertical image of the pugs and their friends sledding downhill.

An introduction to the seasons with well-paced rhyming text, gentle humor, and visual charm.

Nelly: The Turtle That Went to School and Found a Home
Stoddard, Martha
Photos by Stoddard, David H.
Memories Publishing (40 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Dec. 9, 2019
978-0-9997622-5-7

A turtle finds a new home with a caring teacher in this debut children’s book.

Mrs. M., a substitute teacher for the ninth grade, loves to study turtles. So when a student worries about the well-being of a turtle the girl brought to school in a shoe box, a counselor offers the creature, called a red-eared slider, to Mrs. M. At a pet store, Mrs. M gets all the proper supplies, such as special food, vitamins, and an aquarium with hood, lights, and water filter. Though shy and scared at first, Nelly—as Mrs. M names her new pet—soon comes out of her shell, swimming around or basking on her rock. Mrs. M researches how to best take care of sliders, such as making sure they get sunshine with shade and giving them treats like bits of apple. This concern comes naturally to Mrs. M, who believes “that all people are caretakers of the world’s creatures, one rescue at a time.” When Nelly outgrows her aquarium, Mrs. M realizes that it’s time to release her into the wild. In her book, based on her own experiences, Martha Stoddard deftly communicates how a love of animals translates into the practical details of caring for them. Through Mrs. M, readers can learn how to examine sources like care sheets provided by state parks; additional information includes a glossary, list of resources, and a bibliography. At times, the work strays into concerns more likely to interest adults than children, as with the details of Mrs. M’s extensive collection of turtle replicas: “My fist-sized stone tortoise was carved from hard, red soapstone, which is like marble. This particular artifact came from a Texas Hill Country market.” Color photographs by David H. Stoddard, the author’s husband, illuminate turtles in the wild and at home.

While occasionally dry, this tale delivers an affectionate introduction to looking after turtles.

Floating Twigs
Tabb, Charles
CreateSpace (996 pp.)
Jul. 31, 2018
978-1-72210-439-9

A boy encounters hostility and hope in Tabb’s debut coming-of-age novel. It’s 1990 when Jack Turner returns, after a long absence, to his coastal hometown of Denton, Florida, to attend a funeral. He reflects on pivotal events in the summer of 1968, just before he turned 13. As the younger son of two alcoholics, Jack was mostly resigned to the fact that his parents neglected him. When Jack and two friends found a starving dog, he decided to adopt him on the spot, calling him Bones. He convinced his dad to let him keep the pet, but there was a high price, as his dad demanded the boy pay him rent to do so. Jack’s determined efforts to care for Bones brought him into conflict with local boys, who beat Jack up after he undercut the going rate for cleaning fish for tourist anglers. Jack was befriended by troubled World War II veteran Hank Pittman, who lived in a broken-down school bus and offered him work fixing up the bus. Hank also urged eccentric local widow Mary Jane Dawson to hire Jack to do some yardwork. Soon, however,
malevolent gossips wrongfully accused Hank of abusing the boy, which led to a suspenseful trial. Tabb, a former middle and high school English teacher, grew up in the Florida Panhandle, and his depiction of that landscape lends authenticity to the small-town setting. The shadow of war lingers in the background, both in Hank’s past and in the present of Jack’s older brother, who’s away in military training. At times, the novel pits its heroes against one-dimensional villains, but Jack’s voice feels authentic throughout. Although the character’s devotion to Bones propels the action, Tabb never allows the narrative to become a sentimental boy-loves-dog story. The scenes between Jack and his father are particularly effective in revealing the desperate nature of the protagonist’s family situation. The expressive prose shines brightest, however, when it focuses on Jack’s determination to live up to the trust that Hank and Mary have placed in him.

A poignant and compelling narrative of a boy’s search for connection and meaning.

**CŒUR DE LION**

*Tate, Ida*

Self (417 pp.)

$12.29 paper | $2.99 e-book

May 13, 2020

In this historical novel, Tate envisions the many triumphs and passions of Richard the Lionheart.

The author frames her story as six volumes of the polarizing king’s journal, concluding with his last letter to his queen, Berengaria. Richard narrates throughout, beginning with his early status as Duke of Aquitaine, the tensions between his father, Henry II, and Thomas Becket, the adviser whom Henry would infamously murder, and his own lengthy rebellion against his father. In early adulthood, Richard asserts his authority by engaging in jousting tournaments, exacting vengeance on rapists and mercenaries, and mounting his first military campaign against Henry in Paris, with King Louis VII of France. Although Richard eventually acknowledges the supremacy of his father’s rule, he also does what Henry could not, capturing the “unsailable” fortress at Taillebourg in France. Tate’s book is as much a romance as a thriller, particularly when Richard speaks of Berengaria; when they first meet, he reflects, “I am not sure how long we stood there, staring at each other.” His dedication to her is constant, and when she becomes pregnant with their child, the knowledge buoyed Richard’s resolve to maintain his hold on the crown. Richard captures the French commune of Gisors, defeats Isaac Comnenus of Cyprus, and forges a memorable truce with the sultan Saladin, ultimately emerging victorious in the Third Crusade. In the gritty conclusion, Richard meets his prolonged death at the hands of a mocking archer when gangrene from a crossbow-bolt wound spreads; he recounts in the final entry that he knows his death approaches and that “we cannot amputate my back.” A postscript describes the later lives of several main characters, adding depth to an already rich narrative. In thoroughly detailed prose, Tate pays careful attention to Richard’s personality and perspective, dwelling on both his thunderous moods and softer emotional connections. Overall, he crafts the king as a sympathetic character whom readers will root for—a classic figure with a somewhat modernist twist.

An adroit depiction of an adventurous life.

**BAD KARMA**

*Wilson, Paul*

Self (250 pp.)

$22.95 | $13.95 paper | $2.99 e-book

Oct. 9, 2019

978-0-578-57906-1 paper

A surfer recalls a calamitous road trip to Mexico with two cohorts in this debut memoir.

“There were two classes of residents: Those who had surfed mainland Mexico, and those who wanted to,” remarks Wilson regarding “The Manor,” a San Diego, California, surfing community. In the summer of 1978, the author snatched the opportunity to take a road trip to do just that. A self-confessed “hanger-on,” Wilson, nicknamed Paul E. Opters, was roped into the trip by Moose and Jelly, two esteemed surfers, because he owned a vehicle. The three 20-somethings packed the author’s Volkswagen bus to the brim and headed south for the border, but not before it was revealed that Moose was skipping bail to go to Mexico. The bus took the travelers through Tijuana before following the Baja Norte coastline to La Paz, where a perilous ferry crossing to Puerto Vallarta brought them closer to the surf paradise of La Tica on the Mexican mainland. The trip was punctuated with disaster, mostly linked to Wilson’s unreliable and ironically nicknamed “Wonderbus.” The author also recalls a chance meeting with the infamous drug cartel leader El Chapo. On arrival at La Tica, the author evocatively describes the group’s time spent surfing and living in a palm frond beach shelter called a palapa. The location is observed distinctly through a surfer’s eye: “La Tica is a classic point break, a bulge in the coastline formed by countless cycles of muddy storm water pouring into the ocean via the arroyo, the debris settling to the bottom.” Surfing enthusiasts may be disappointed to find that only a fraction of the memoir captures the joy of the sport, preferring to focus on the minutiae of the road trip. Moments of extreme tension are recounted with high energy, but this approach is occasionally overused: “How can my mouth be so dry and my skin so wet? Damn, it’s quiet. I don’t remember the fluorescent lights humming before. Check my watch again. 12:43. You’ve got to be kidding me.” Illustrated with Wilson’s photographs throughout, this fun read captures a bygone age of surfing life and will be of interest to anyone who loves the West Coast scene.

A lively and enthusiastic surfing account.
MOTHERING SUNDAY FILM TO STAR COLMAN, FIRTH
Academy Award–winning actors Olivia Colman and Colin Firth are set to co-star in an upcoming movie version of Graham Swift’s Kirkus-starred 2016 novel, *Mothering Sunday*, according to Deadline.

In the novel, 22-year-old English housemaid Jane Fairchild is having a secret affair with 23-year-old Paul Sheringham, the son of her employers, who’s engaged to be married to another woman. Much of the story takes place on Mothering Sunday, a holiday when servants traditionally visit their mothers; instead, Jane and Paul take advantage of the fact that his house is empty to carry on a final tryst.


MAGIC SCHOOL BUS FILM IN WORKS
Elizabeth Banks is set to star as eccentric elementary school teacher Valerie Frizzle in an as-yet-untitled live-action/animated film based on the Magic School Bus children’s book series by Joanna Cole and illustrator Bruce Degen, according to Deadline.

In the books, Ms. Frizzle drives a sentient school bus on which she takes her students (and her pet lizard) to various offbeat locations, including outer space, inside a beehive, and through time to the age of the dinosaurs. The first book, *The Magic School Bus at the Waterworks*, was published in 1986 and was followed by numerous sequels.


David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.
On July 13, 1944, T.S. Eliot, then editorial director of the London publishing house Faber & Faber, wrote to George Orwell to reject a manuscript he had submitted. “We agree that it is a distinguished piece of writing,” Eliot hastened to say of Orwell’s fable of talking animals who take over an English farm. Yet, he continued, he doubted “that this is the right point of view from which to criticise the political situation at the present time.”

In other words, Eliot, who was the consummate Tory, did not want to upset Britain’s Soviet allies. Besides, he added, the pigs of the fable, being the smartest of the critters on the farm, were really the best qualified to run the place, which gives us some idea of where Eliot’s politics lay.

The pigs of Animal Farm are smart indeed. They see to it that the communist idyll that the animals in their collectivity inaugurate after throwing abusive farmer Jones off his property degenerates into a swineocracy that benefits only their kind, employing the purges, assassinations, and side deals of Josef Stalin’s real-world Soviet Union. On the surface, Animal Farm is a simple fable of geese and rabbits and ponies and such in the manner of Beatrix Potter’s stories. Look closer, and in it we find an unmistakable Stalin in the pig Napoleon, Leon Trotsky in his rival Snowball, and a world of oppressed and befuddled creatures in the echelons below, some blindly loyal to the pigs’ regime, some questioning, most happy enough to join in the bleated chant of the simple-minded sheep: “Four legs good, two legs bad.” By the end of the book, after the pigs’ counterrevolution takes place, the sheep have a different chant: “Four legs good, two legs better.” Naturally—or, rather, unnaturally—the pigs have by then learned to walk upright, and now they carry whips by which to command such homage.

Animal Farm was published in 1945. As Eliot feared, it offended Stalin, though Orwell’s real objects of contempt were all political systems in which one class of human (or barnyard animal) is privileged over another, which describes capitalism just as much as it does communism. That didn’t keep the CIA from putting it to work in the Cold War, funding an animated, for-kiddies film version in 1954, a project that involved a certain E. Howard Hunt (of Watergate fame). Ever since, the political right has tried to claim Orwell as one of its own, an irony given Orwell’s resolutely leftist views.

The totalitarian impulse is as strong around the world now as it was a century ago, when the events began to brew that would find their ways into Orwell’s books, including the one in which all animals are equal on paper but more equal than others in reality. Animal Farm is a classic of English literature. The 75th anniversary of its publication may be a modest footnote in literary history, but it seems a good occasion to reread Animal Farm and consider all the horrors that have taken place in the years since in the name of the boss hogs, old and new.

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
Jen’s Staff Pick

Yaa Gyasi’s Transcendent Kingdom: A Novel

"Yaa Gyasi’s stunning follow-up to her acclaimed national bestseller Homegoing is a powerful, raw, intimate, deeply layered novel about a Ghanaian family in Alabama ravaged by depression and addiction and grief—a novel about faith, science, religion, and love. Perfect for readers of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Jesmyn Ward, Tayari Jones, Toni Morrison, Celeste Ng, and Colson Whitehead—as well as an ideal selection for book clubs."  
978-0-525-65813-4 $27.95 200,000 Knopf HC September 978-0-385-35917-6 $32.95C Bond Street Books eBook 978-0-525-65819-1 AD: 978-0-593-21532-6 LP: 978-0-593-21533-3

Elizabeth’s Staff Pick

Keisha Bush’s No Heaven for Good Boys: A Novel

"Set in Senegal, this modern-day Oliver Twist is a meditation on the power of love, and the strength that can emerge when we have no other choice but to survive. This is an evocative and redemptive debut novel for fans of Ayobami Adefarati’s Stay with Me, Gabriel Tallent’s My Absolute Darling, and Karan Mahajan’s The Association of Small Bombs."
978-0-399-59196-9 $27.00/£36.00C 20,000 Random House HC October 978-0-399-59197-6 AD: 978-0-593-28884-5 LP: 978-0-593-28885-2

Erica’s Staff Pick

Bryan Washington’s Memorial: A Novel

“A funny, sexy, profound dramedy about two young people in Houston at a crossroads in their relationship and the limits of love. Benson, a black day care teacher, and Mike, a Japanese American chef, aren’t quite sure why they’re still a couple. What happens when their love story collides with the limits of love—and everyone has an opinion? A rom-com with teeth and perfect for readers of The Mothers by Brit Bennett and White Teeth by Zadie Smith."
978-0-593-08727-5 $27.00/£36.00C 75,000 Riverhead HC October 978-0-593-08728-2 AD: 978-0-593-28878-8 LP: 978-0-593-28879-5

Chelsea’s Staff Pick

Jedidiah Jenkins’s Like Streams to the Ocean: Notes on Ego, Love, and the Thing That Makes Us Who We Are

“The New York Times bestselling author of To Shake the Sleeping Self delivers a moving reflection on the hidden, sometimes difficult topics we must consider in order to live an authentic life—ego, love, family, work—for anyone seeking a companion on the road to understanding. For readers of Kelly Corrigan and Marina Keegan.”  
978-0-593-13723-8 $26.00/£35.00C 100,000 Convergent Books HC September 978-0-593-13724-6 AD: 978-0-593-28926-6

Miriam’s Staff Pick

Cass R. Sunstein’s Too Much Information: Understanding What You Don’t Want to Know

“Does “knowledge is power” capture the instrumental value of information? While policymakers emphasize “the right to know,” Sunstein adopts a different perspective, arguing that the focus should be on human well-being and what information contributes to it. This book is for readers of psychology, political philosophy, and business.”  
978-0-262-04416-5 $27.95/£38.95C 50,000 The MIT Press HC September 978-0-262-35801-6

Maureen’s Staff Pick

Max Seeck’s The Witch Hunter

“A shocking murder in an affluent Helsinki suburb has ties to the occult in this thrilling U.S. debut from Finnish author Max Seeck. Perfect for fans of Jo Nesbø and Sara Blaedel.”  
978-0-593-19966-4 $17.00/£22.00C 50,000 Berkley TR November 978-0-593-19967-1 AD: 978-0-593-29087-3 LP: 978-0-593-29088-0

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