Featuring 435 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

Sarah Thankam Mathews
The author of the novel
*All This Could Be Different*
makes a resplendent debut

Also in the issue:
Marianne Wiggins, Catherine Ceniza Choy,
Jose Pimienta, Lane Clarke
When you walk into Manhattan’s Tony Kiser Theater to see the new off-Broadway production of Between the Lines, the first things to greet you are the enormous bookshelves lining the stage set, creating the feeling of a cozy library that you just want to get lost in.

For book lovers, it’s a promising sign.

The musical is adapted from the YA novel of the same name written by bestselling adult novelist Jodi Picoult and her daughter, Samantha Van Leer. Picoult and Van Leer tell the story of nerdy teen girl Delilah, an outcast at her new high school who always has her nose in a book. When she stumbles across a self-published fairy tale in the school library—that’s only one copy in existence, the librarian informs her—she discovers that the book’s prince has written her a message on Page 43: “Help!” Soon Prince Oliver is talking to and romancing her, and it won’t be long before Delilah escapes into the book itself. Kirkus called Between the Lines “fizzy fairy-tale fun” when it was originally published back in 2012.

Now the team of Elyssa Samsel and Kate Anderson (music and lyrics), Timothy Allen McDonald (book), and Tony Award nominee Jeff Calhoun (director) have reimagined the story as a feel-good musical with a pulsing score, colorful costumes and sets, and even a tap-dancing “dog.” (You’ll just have to see the show.) Delilah is played by the accomplished and appealing Arielle Jacobs (Aladdin, In the Heights), and the supporting cast all do double duty as characters in the real world and from the storybook. One standout is Vicky Lewis (familiar from TV’s NewsRadio as the school librarian, who belts out a memorable ode to literary lust: “Mr. Darcy and Me”; Austenites will relate. (Lewis also appears toward the end of the show as Jessamyn Jacobs, the author of the storybook, a Jodi Picoult stand-in in a long red wig.)

Between the Lines may run a little long and have a few too many musical numbers, but it’s a winning show with some genuine laughs and a hardworking cast that really sells it. (I’m still chucking over the wacky line “Mean girls are an inevitability, like how a strapless bra will eventually become a belt.”) Bibliophiles of all ages will take a special pleasure in the show’s depiction of their favorite pastime, but unsurprisingly, it will appeal most to teen readers—for whom the original novel was intended.

Between the Lines is the latest in a series of high-profile stage shows adapted from books. Around the corner, Matthew Spangler’s The Kite Runner is playing at the Hayes Theater after a successful run in London’s West End. The drama is adapted, of course, from Khaled Hosseini’s bestselling 2003 novel, already the basis for a feature film. It joins the ranks of Wicked, Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, and Hamilton, all currently running on Broadway and inspired by literary source material. Along with the endless stream of book-to-screen projects, they’re proof that books still offer the best entertainment around and that adaptation is the sincerest form of flattery.
The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

Scholars Yohuru Williams and Michael G. Long team up in this groundbreaking biography for teens that goes beyond baseball to shine a light on Jackie Robinson’s role as a civil rights activist. Read the review on p. 173.
A family of WASPs becomes entangled with a reckless young artist who forever changes their wealthy Connecticut suburb.

Louisa Rader has everything: a handsome architect husband named Richard, a shy but ambitious 12-year-old daughter named Sylvie, and a career directing the local art museum. Still, something is missing. Before Louisa returned to her sleepy hometown of Nearwater, Connecticut, she was a glamorous model and would-be photographer. Together with her erratic boyfriend, an artistic genius who would eventually show work in the Whitney Biennial, she prowled the streets of New York City. Those days are long behind Louisa when she impulsively attends the gallery opening of a former rival. The sudden proximity to her old life—and her old lover—sends her into a tailspin.

Meanwhile, Sylvie begins a secretive friendship with Gabriel, the 18-year-old son of Richard’s most recent clients. Flattered by Sylvie’s attention, Gabriel draws her into a series of increasingly dramatic pieces of performance art. The unlikely collaborators baffle local police by leaving large-scale plywood animals scattered across the country club golf course. They cover an outbuilding of the art museum with pieces of turf. They even paint a horse white and cover its face with a gas mask, loosing it on the paddle courts. What effect will Gabriel’s radical politics have on Sylvie? And why can’t Louisa stop thinking about this unsettling, arrogant teenager? Acampora weaves a tale of artistic ambition, climate activism, and the seductive allure of extravagant wealth. Told in the author’s signature lush prose, the sections following Sylvie and Gabriel read almost like a fairy tale: “The horse walks a slow circle and breaks into a trot. It approaches the net and stops short. They watch for a long time before finally turning and leaving it there, aglow in the night.” Unfortunately, like the novel’s privileged characters, Acampora’s storytelling skitters across glittering surfaces rather than plumbing its own depths. Louisa moves through her life as if “inside a dream,” and Gabriel remains a combative cipher never asked to confront his own relationships to money and power—even though, like a true teenager, he judges everyone else’s. At its best moments, this novel is as unsettling and unpredictable as Acampora’s wonderfully creepy debut, The Paper Wasp (2019), but it never quite reaches that novel’s same, fevered heights.

Eerie and a little uneven, this is an enchanting pool worth sticking your toe into.
Someone—or something—is hunting Black girls in this Appalachia-set debut.

In 2017, Liz Rocher—32, Black, and newly single—reluctantly revisits her hometown of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, for the wedding of her White best friend, Melissa Parker. Though Melissa’s racist family tolerates Liz, they oppose Melissa marrying Garrett Washington, who is Black, though the couple has a 9-year-old daughter, Caroline. After the ceremony, Liz takes a break from watching Caroline and her cousins play outside to get a drink and flirt with the bartender. When she returns, Caroline is gone. Liz combs the surrounding woods but finds only a bloody scrap of Caroline’s dress. The reception becomes a search party, which also turns up nothing. Some assume Caroline wandered off and got lost, but Liz can’t help but remember Keisha Woodson—a Black classmate who vanished 15 years ago and was then found with her heart missing and her guts strewn about. Authorities claimed Keisha died from “a very bad fall compounded by animal activity,” but according to Keisha’s mother, each June for the past three decades a Black girl has disappeared, with little attention paid by the media or police. Every recovered corpse is absent a heart. Determined to stop the cycle, Liz launches her own investigation, unwittingly making herself a target. Chapters narrated by an initially unidentified being memorialize previous victims. Paranoia mounts and suspects multiply as Liz realizes the depth and breadth of Johnstown’s bigotry. The tale’s crime and supernatural elements don’t quite mesh, but plentiful twists, keenly rendered characters, and atmospheric prose keep the pages turning.

Harrowing horror with a side of searing social commentary.
In late February 2020, I posted a request on Twitter for audiobook recommendations; I'd never listened to any but wanted to start. What timing! Audiobooks have kept me company through these long pandemic years, and some of their narrators have started to feel like friends. Julia Whelan, for one. Twenty years ago, I watched her in the TV drama Once and Again, and it was a pleasure to rediscover her as an audiobook narrator who's won many awards, including the Audie for Best Female Narrator of 2019. Her voice is warm and confiding, drawing you deep into books as various as Book Lovers by Emily Henry and My Year of Rest and Relaxation by Ottessa Moshfegh. Whelan has also written two novels of her own, and, of course, narrated the audiobooks: First there was My Oxford Year (Morrow, 2018), about a Rhodes scholar who falls in love with her English professor—who turns out to have cancer. As our review said, “Ella is an engaging narrator...and her friends are fun, wacky characters who trade quips as quickly as if they were on Gilmore Girls. Ella and Jamie’s relationship, which could so easily turn saccharine, always feels genuine....Whelan has created a beautiful, romantic story that focuses on big ideas—love, death, poetry, and what really matters in the end.”

Now comes Thank You for Listening (Avon, Aug. 2), a novel about... a former actress who’s now an audiobook narrator. Sewanee Chester started off performing romance novels, but she doesn’t do them anymore because she’s too cynical to believe in happily-ever-afters. She does agree to do a posthumous romance from a writer she’s worked with before, who’s requested her specifically and offered so much money that Sewanee, who’s paying for her ailing grandmother’s care, can’t turn it down. She’ll be doing the female voices while the sexy and mysterious Brock McNight will be voicing the men—and of course they slide into their own delightful romance, allowing Whelan to have fun with a whole raft of beloved tropes.

Whelan packs a lot of behind-the-scenes information about audiobook narration into the story; we watch Sewanee get ready to start a new project by “making word lists and finding the correct pronunciations, identifying the emotional arc of the story, marking breath points in syntactically challenging passages, mapping relationships between the characters, and developing voices and accents.” It’s acting, not just reading a bedtime story. And when I listened to Whelan performing her book, it felt like she had written it with narration in mind—giving herself all kinds of timbres and accents to voice, playing both the male and female narrators of the book within the book that’s supposed to have one of each gender, creating an alluring voice for Brock McNight, who makes listeners fall in love with him just by opening his mouth. It sounds like Whelan had fun writing the book and even more turning it into an audiobook.

Whelan also narrated Linda Holmes’ two novels, Evvie Drake Starts Over (Ballantine, 2019) and Flying Solo (Ballantine, June 14). Holmes is one of the co-hosts of NPR’s Pop Culture Happy Hour podcast, so it was funny to hear someone else reading her words, but Whelan captures Holmes’ friendly, matter-of-fact tone perfectly.

I’m currently listening to The Maid by Nita Prose (Ballantine, Jan. 4), narrated by Lauren Ambrose of Six Feet Under. The tone couldn’t be more different than Whelan’s books; the narrator, Molly, is a hotel maid who has a hard time understanding social cues but loves creating order out of chaos as she cleans the guest rooms. When she finds a dead man in one of the suites, she becomes a suspect in his death. Prose’s tone is deadpan, and so is Ambrose’s: a perfect example of a narrator bringing the writer’s intention to light.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
HUMAN BLUES
Albert, Elisa
Avid Reader Press (416 pp.)
$28.00 | July 5, 2022
978-1-982167-86-8

As her creative powers ripen around the release of her fourth album, Womb Service, alt-folk-punk-blues anti-darling Aviva Rosner is consumed by the frustrated need to have a baby twinned with a spiraling obsession with the late Amy Winehouse.

Embarking on tour for what’s hoped to be her breakout album, Aviva grapples with the eternal quandary of having it all and of keeping what’s expected of her in balance with what she desires: She wants a successful music career while maintaining creative control; she wants to come home to her almost-textbook-perfect husband while indulging the occasional boundary-pushing dalliance; she wants a baby born of her own body without the intrusion of conventional medicine; veneration without the destruction of runaway fame; leaving a legacy without it being twisted to others’ purposes. Albert catalogs the nitty-gritty rise and fall of each menstrual cycle, each recurring anxiety, each lapse into rumination on the death and, Aviva believes, widespread misunderstanding of the iconic Winehouse, each yoni steam and psychedelic journey undertaken in service of a dream that feels like a birthright denied, and traveling alongside Aviva on the long, fraught road of infertility can induce in the reader a feeling of claustrophobic recrudescence, like you’re trapped in it all in real time. Aviva is someone many have known—or been—a version of, barreling through nuance with a dubiously informed politics and worldview yet a (nearly) unshakeable conviction in her own rectitude and righteousness, embodying that well-worn saying, “I was a perfect parent before I had children” (sub parent with any number of other occupations prone to abuse by the public), talented yet simultaneously under- and overconfident. Still, as often as Aviva’s anxieties and flaws—and they are considerable (and not always handled with the narrative berth needed to avoid a creeping sense of complicity in the reader)—are fed by various lopsided satellites in her orbit, they’re also checked by moments of real insight from wiser (and often ignored) figures in her life who attempt to insulate her against fully self-obliterating in a monomaniacal blaze.

Albert offers much to mull on the ethics of reproduction and the many permutations of inheritance.

ALINDARKA’S CHILDREN
Bacharevič, Alhierd
Trans. by Jim Dingley & Petra Reid
New Directions (352 pp.)
$19.95 paper | June 7, 2022
978-0-8112-3196-1

Two children wander through the forest in this fairy tale and manifesto.

In a Camp deep inside a forest, there is a Doctor who trains children to lose their native languages and to speak “correctly. After all,” the Doctor thinks, “speaking correctly means that you think correctly. And live correctly.” Alicia and Avi, sister and brother, are at the Camp until their father frees them—not long after, they’re separated from him and wander through the forest, Hansel and Gretel–style, on their own. Bacharevič’s novel blends the magic and darkness of a fairy tale with what is implicitly a manifesto on language and national identity. The Doctor’s “pure” language is Russian.
While what Alicia's father wants her to speak—proudly and unadulterated—is Belarusian. Bacharevič, a Belarusian writer (and former musician), wrote the novel in a blend of Russian and Belarusian, which are about as mutually intelligible as English is to, say, Scots. That apparently informed the translators' decision to render the Russian portions of the book into English and the Belarusian portions into—yes—Scots. So when Avi talks to Alicia, he says things like, "Ah'm wunnerin whare we are?...If Faither waur tae phone us the noo, whit wad we tell tae him?" This was a bold decision on the part of the translators, and an intrusive one—so intrusive, in fact, it's difficult to assess the novel on its own. It's also a decision that seems in part to have missed the point—that every language has its own subtleties, nuances, and flavors inseparable from a distinct, and utterly individual, national identity. Because they speak in Scots, Alicia and Avi seem, unsurprisingly, distinctly Scottish. But they aren't meant to be in Scotland; they are of course in Belarus. In itself, the rendering into Scots is beautiful, and there is a case to be made that the translators' task was an impossible one. Still, the result doesn't quite cohere. In the original, Bacharevič might very well be brilliant—but rendering his work into English and Scots draws a false equivalence among all the languages involved.

The translators' bold approach to their task overshadows the novel itself.

THE WINNERS

Backman, Fredrik
Trans. by Neil Smith
Atria (688 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-982-11279-0

Life continues haltingly for the inhabitants of Beartown and its rival borough, Hed. As in the two earlier books in this series (Beartown, 2017; Us Against You, 2018), things are never settled between these two hockey-obsessed towns in the forests of Sweden. Only one can seemingly do well at a time—resourcewise or hockeywise; the two are interchangeable—and their residents share a mutual, pathologically hatred. Beloved characters return, new ones are introduced, tragedy is promised. Backman repeatedly tells the reader about his characters' overwhelming love for each other, but their ability to actually care for one another comes and goes with the demands of the unwieldy plot. He wants to assure readers that this makes his characters complex, but it really renders them pawns. To stoke the conflict between the towns, he includes not only the pregnancy-ending factory accident of a nameless woman (ushering in a suspiciously out-of-place anti-abortion sentiment), but also the murder of a beloved dog. These machinations are not alone in being soppy and unearned. The book is almost 700 pages long and covers only a two-week span. Backman writes with wit and sincerity and is a talented web-spinner, but with a tale this long, the lack of nuance becomes grating.

There's also a brief "not all men" message that, given the toxic nature of the narrative, is hard to ignore.

A moralistic noir masquerading as a heart-winner.

ELIZABETH FINCH

Barnes, Julian
Knopf (192 pp.)
$26.00 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-593-53543-1

A man processes his crush on a former teacher and the impact of what she taught.

Late-period Barnes novels have either been tales of doomed love (The Only Story, 2018) or intellectual persecution (The Noise of Time, 2016). This slim, contemplative, modestly successful novel blends those two themes. The Elizabeth of the title is a professor teaching a continuing education class called Culture and Civilisation, with a particular focus on the conflict between Greco-Roman and Christian philosophy. Neil, the narrator, is her eager pupil, entranced by her intellectual rigor and self-possession. What kind of past and inner life produced, as he puts it, "the most grown-up person I have known"? Upon her death nearly two decades after the course, he has an opportunity to find out: Though their relationship since the class was limited to occasional lunches, she's bequeathed him her library and papers to puzzle through. Neil's investigations send him deep into the life of the Roman emperor Julian, a fierce critic of nascent Christianity, and the book's middle section is consumed by a somewhat drowsy contemplation of Julian's life. Whether all this philosophy makes Neil a better person is an open question; he mentions two divorces, but the exes, and the reasons for the splits, are entirely off-screen. But Barnes plainly wishes to elevate Elizabeth to a moral leadership role he feels British society is sorely lacking. (She causes a brief furor when anti-intellectual conservatives seize on a lecture she delivers on Julian's critique of Christianity.) Barnes renders all this with his trademark grace and equipoise but at a low boil; the story has few of the fireworks or twists of The Only Story and The Sense of an Ending. Elizabeth is an intriguing character, but one is left wondering if Barnes, like Neil, has saddled her with more import than she deserves.

An engaging if slight tale of intellectual romance.
A LONG SHADOW
Beckler, David
Thomas & Mercer (409 pp.)
$11.99 paper  |  Oct. 1, 2022
978-1-5420-3468-5

A sprawling, dystopian tale of undercover journalism at its most violently fraught.

Sometime in the very near future, Antonia Conti works as a reporter for The Electric Investigator, a London news service founded and run by her adoptive mother, Eleanor Curtis. In connection with the service’s investigation of zillionaire Gustav Reed-Mayhew’s serpentine corporation GRM Partners’ questionable handling of government contracts, she’s gone undercover as Patience Okoye, a cleaner at GRM, befriended fellow employee Sabirah Fadil, and persuaded her to purloin some potentially damning papers and hand them over. How many ways could this go wrong? Sabirah is pinched before she can complete the handoff and threatened with deportation and separation from her preteen children if she doesn’t turn against Patience. As she’s leaving the gym where she trains in martial arts, Antonia’s attacked by a member of Arkady Demchuk’s gang who’s later found dead, covered in her DNA. Several women, including Antonia’s friend Monika Hogan, disappear from their jobs at GRM. Arkady’s gang targets Eleanor and Alan Turner, her nephew and editor. And DS Russell Chapman, who’s assigned to the case, makes such a mess of it that he’s suspended from his job. But that last bit may actually be good news, since Antonia and Chapman overcome their mutual distrust enough to start snooping around together. And a good thing too, since in lieu of any serious mystery, Beckler intends to put his hero-ine through enough sequences of bruising physical punishment by a variety of assailants for a whole comic-book franchise. She turns out to have Chapman’s back more often than he has hers.

Fans of not-quite-superhuman heroes will eagerly embrace this series kickoff. Pow!

PRETEND IT’S MY BODY
Blue, Luke Dani
Amethyst Editions (256 pp.)
$17.95 paper  |  Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-952177-03-3

A debut collection of stories about characters on the brink of claiming new genders, sexualities, lifestyles, and even forms.

In “Certain Disasters,” a girl survives a tornado only to feel a “negative space” suddenly crack open in her that fills with masculine imagery and makes her crave a male body; while in the futuristic “Suzuki in Limbo,” the protagonist returns to see her family one final time before she plans to give up her “meatsuit” and have her consciousness uploaded as computer code into an alternate reality. Not quite magical realist yet filled with magic, these stories perform groundbreaking work in their search for apt metaphors to describe moments of revelation for trans and queer people. Mind-reading is the magic in “Other People’s Points of View,” a story about Ted, a teenager with the niche ability to sense peoples’ thoughts as they wrestle with decisions. It also perfectly conveys why it’s hard for Ted to come out as a girl. In “Crush Me,” a slightly less successful story, the sudden magical appearance of a growing number of boulders in a riverbed brings to life the narrator’s consuming crush on her best friend, another woman. Blue writes with nuance, empathy, and wit about the complexity of gender and sexual orientation. The middle-aged narrator of “My Mother’s Bottomless Hole,” who realizes too late (from her perspective) that she wants to be a man, tells the high school students she advises in the Gay-Straight Alliance that bodies are like tattoos: “Yours mean a lot to you now because they’re perfect, but eventually they’ll be worn out and falling apart…Every adult has dysphoria. It’s called aging.” Blue’s bigheartedness extends to all of their characters, even the mothers who struggle to understand their

"The suspense, endearing characters, thrilling scenes, and great laughs continue to take center stage in David Gittlin’s sequel.”
—Readers’ Favorite for Promise of the Visitor

"...packed with drama, tension, and fine characterization spiced with a sense of dry humor.”
—Midwest Book Review for Promise of the Visitor

“A delightful romp with spaceships, suspense, and assorted aliens.”
—Kirkus Reviews for Promise of the Visitor

For Information on Film Rights, Email dave.gittlin@gmail.com • davidgittlin.net/novels/
children’s desires. That’s the case in “Bad Things That Happen to Girls,” a sneakily devastating story.

Original work intent on creating new ways to imagine transformations.

THE HOUSE IN THE ORCHARD
Brooks, Elizabeth
Tin House (224 pp.)
$27.95 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-953534-39-2

A series of tragedies throw a young girl’s life into turmoil.

When Maude Gower dies in 1945, she leaves her estate, Orchard House, to her late nephew’s wife, Peggy, and their son, Laurie. Peggy should be delighted by this windfall, but her father-in-law Frank’s enigmatic misgivings about the dangers of the estate give her pause. Nevertheless, Peggy decides she will spend a night in Orchard House. There, she uncovers Maude’s childhood diaries—which turn out to make up the bulk of the book—and reads about the deaths of Maude’s parents and her subsequent move from London to Orchard House at age 13 in 1876. Maude has been put under care of the mysterious Kitty Greenaway, or “The Feline,” as she’s called by the girl’s remaining relatives. As Maude adjusts to her new life in the countryside, she must decide if she’s going to put her faith in Kitty, whom she’s growing to love, or heed her brother’s urgent warnings: “Miss Greenaway is all charm and witchery, but whose judgement do you choose to trust, Maude? The brother whom you’ve known and loved all your life? Or a woman of dubious reputation, with whom you’ve been acquainted for less than a month?” Historically inclined readers will delight in Brooks’ attention to detail as Maude reaches for the cookbooks and thesaurus that would have been present in a Victorian household. But it is Brooks’ exceptional ability to create a wealth of characters who are at once innocent and manipulative, trustworthy and unwholesome, that is most notable.

Readers will scramble to decide whom to trust, as misplaced faith leads to deadly outcomes.

REWARD SYSTEM
Calder, Jem
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (304 pp.)
$27.00 | July 19, 2022
978-0-3746-0242-0

In six interwoven stories, young millennials navigate the gap between their overconnected digital identities and the yawning loneliness of their real lives.

In the first story, “A Restaurant Someplace Else,” Julia has started a new job as a sous chef at an upscale restaurant. She likes the work, particularly the way focusing on a single repetitive task, or “deep monotasking,” makes the “hours [pass] easily, like minutes...her body all but detached from the experience of time.” She also likes her boss, the enigmatic ex-junkie Ellery, whose No. 1 rule is “no smartphones in the kitchen” but whose online activities betray a reality both triter and more disturbing than Julia had imagined. Meanwhile, in “Better Off Alone,” aspiring novelist Nick—Julia’s ex-boyfriend—has a drinking problem that is really a living problem. At a party, he spends much of his time in the bathroom scrolling through his friends’ social media feeds in search of identities that feel more authentic when displayed on the phone than they do when encountered in real time. Some months later, in the highly sympathetic “Search Engine Optimisation,” a freshly sober Nick is working as a copywriter at a marketing firm where every employee’s internal monologue reveals the same frustrated disenfranchisement from the stakes of their own lives. The stories work best when they’re performing their own deep monotasking, exploring the lexicons of their various workplaces in compelling detail. In each, however, space is taken away from the relatable banality of the characters’ struggles with careers, sex, and paying the rent to critique the anonymizing effect of their various apps and algorithms. While this social commentary rings true, the insistence with which it is centered as the stories’ guiding philosophy and the relative lack of character development outside this central tenet render the book’s grim loneliness as something more like a trope about millennials than a truth about humanity in its multifaceted and surprising whole.

Relatable and entertaining but ultimately too preoccupied by its message.

THE HOUSE PARTY
Cameron, Rita
Morrow/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-06-321806-2

April 2008: The restless teenagers of picturesque New Falls, Pennsylvania, decide to throw a party at a house that’s under construction.

Perhaps expectedly, the party spirals out of control—but to the tune of hundreds of thousands in damages. The bewildered out-of-town owners go through the thankless runaround with their insurance company, while the local police try to provide some answers, or maybe some scapegoats, for the destruction, and the local DA tries to press charges. The town is firmly divided along economic lines, and it quickly becomes clear that the “rich kids” with connected parents will not bear the brunt of the punishment, but a few “local yokels” will. Familiar character types—small-town DA; hardworking local teen made good; rich, entitled screw-up; emotionally wounded teenage girl; woman longing to be a mother; husband with a secret—are granted grace and complexity. Despite some early narrative setup, this is not a legal thriller. It’s a novel about choices and consequences, compassion, and the limits of forgiveness. It’s
“A fictionalized telling of the troubled life and storied film career of Rita Hayworth and her marriage to Orson Welles.”

**BIG RED**

also a novel of reparation, and as the 2008 financial collapse looms in the background, there seems to be a particularly poignant hindsight offered: What if, Cameron asks, we could go back and unwork our mistakes, our bad choices, not just as individual humans, but as an entire timeline? What if we could be a little more cautious and a little less focused on our own gratification? What wonder could be wrought—or at least, what destruction and tragedy avoided? Of course, in the end, we all must face up to the missteps, as all of these characters do, and learn to live in a world where happiness is a little more fragile, love a little more tempered by disappointment.

An unflinching look at the dysfunction of a “nice town”; a resonant morality tale.

**BIG RED**

Charyn, Jerome
Liveright/Norton (256 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-324-09133-2

A fictionalized telling of the troubled life and storied film career of Rita Hayworth and her marriage to Orson Welles, as seen through the eyes of a sympathetic outsider.

Film-smart and street-smart—if that street happens to be Hollywood Boulevard—the made-up witness, Rusty Redburn, is an Illinois farm girl who dropped out of college to test her fortunes in Tinseltown. She gets a job with Columbia Pictures’ publicity department digging up dirt on celebrities. She’s so good at it that she’s hired by repugnant Columbia head Harry Cohn to spy on the uncontrollable Welles and his wife, Hayworth, whom Cohn lusts after. In her guise as Hayworth’s gal Friday, Redburn, a lesbian, comes to care for the...
actress, whose “crippling fear of her own unworthiness” can be traced back to abuse by her father, her childhood dance partner. But though Redburn idolizes Welles for Citizen Kane, she quickly discovers he’s better at acting the role of charmer than actually caring for anyone, including Hayworth, as much as himself—and is physically clumsy to boot. Tracing Hayworth’s sad decline through films including Cover Girl, Gilda, and The Lady From Shanghai, the novel has a good time with cutthroat gossip columnists; the ego-driven female film editor who chopped Lady; and crass hustlers including Eddie Judson, Hayworth’s Lady DeSmedt, a Los Angeles resident, hopes to honor her hometown of Brussels, which recently bore the kaiser’s devastating onslaught. French singer Marie Miossec has only been in America for two years because of her father’s transfer to the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, and she dashes a career in opera and strives for perfection. I have been waiting for a girl with your features since he’d been plucked straight off a Nazi propaganda poster.” But she has actually only had sex with Leo Solomon, and if the baby Gundi had sex with a Jew; Hilde wants to be an actress; Irma Binz is a nurse. Basing her novel on a real Nazi program, Coburn skillfully intertwines the stories of distinctly different personalities: Gundi secretly distributes anti-Nazi flyers; Hilde is a true Hitler Girl; Irma just wants to do her job and stay out of trouble. Secrets abound: Gundi had sex with a Jew; Hilde wants to be an actress; Irma treats injured resistance fighters. Gundi carries the most weight in this carefully researched story, and she is the most sympathetic. A leering doctor rhapso- dies to her, “You, my dear, are perfection. I have been waiting for a girl with your features since we started the program four years ago.” And the man everyone presumes to be the father, her friend Erich Meyer, looks “as if he’d been plucked straight off a Nazi propaganda poster.” But it will only have sex with Leo Solomon, and if the baby looks like she could pull a plow and has a figure that “looks[s] like a can of evaporated milk,” seems aimless and shallow. The 18-year-old miscarries the baby of her married Obergruppenfuehrer lover but hopes to get pregnant by him again when he returns to Heim Hochland. She certainly isn’t making the “productive contributions to Germany” that her mother and SS officer father want. She feebly attempts to impress Propaganda Minister Goebbels when he pays a visit, pitching a movie idea: All is pro ductive contributions to Germany” that her mother and SS officer father want. She feebly attempts to impress Propaganda Minister Goebbels when he pays a visit, pitching a movie idea: All is good until a Jew comes to town. It’s an old idea, he says dismissively. On one level, this compelling story is about women and babies; on another, it portends a dark future of concentration camps and war.

A deep well of discussion topics for book-club readers.
Still, the Sky,
a new collection of
poetry, artifacts, ecofacts, & art, from
Tom Pearson, author of
The Sandpiper’s Spell,
Kirkus Reviews Best Indie Books of 2019

“Above all, Pearson demonstrates a mastery of imagery.”
—BookLife Reviews for The Sandpiper’s Spell

“Both vastly panoramic and deeply introspective, Pearson’s writing explores both the wonders of nature and the shifting landscape of the human mind. A startlingly intuitive new poet—one to watch.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) for The Sandpiper’s Spell

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In Sarah Thankam Mathews’ debut novel, *All This Could Be Different* (Viking, Aug. 2), Sneha, the daughter of Indian immigrants to the United States, moves to Milwaukee to begin her first job. For a time, things seem to go well: Sneha works hard, eats out, dates. Then her paychecks stop coming. Her relationship with Marina, her girlfriend, grows tense.

Mathews has a luminous prose style, both rhapsodic and deeply grounded in the mundanities of daily life. The novel traces Sneha’s emotional and psychological growth; it also describes, in exacting detail, her deteriorating financial situation. In a starred review, a Kirkus critic writes that “Mathews achieves what so often seems to be impossible: a deeply felt ‘novel of ideas,’ for lack of a better phrase,” calling the book “r[esplendent] with intelligence, wit, and feeling.”

Mathews recently spoke with Kirkus over Zoom from her home in Brooklyn. “If there is an overarching gesture within the novel,” she says, “it is toward this idea that the world as it is is a thing that is made—and thus can be unmade.” Our conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

One of the things I like about the book was the way you include precise details about Sneha’s work and her financial reality. Those kinds of details are pretty rare in a lot of contemporary fiction, but they’re pretty central to our actual daily lives. Could you talk about your decision to write about paychecks, rent, being able to afford groceries?

I wanted to write a novel that could hold a few different types of politics within it. It mattered to me at a political level, for example, that the novel felt juicy and accessible. In some ways I wrote it for the version of myself that worked hard and long days, and the only time I had to read was on my commute after work, and I needed books that could hold my attention. So it mattered to me to create a narrative that was suspenseful. One way in which *All This Could Be Different* does that is through suspense around love. So you have what I hope reads as a hot, will-they, won’t-they queer romance and love story. But I also wanted to talk explicitly about money and the material realities of the protagonist’s life—and all the characters’ lives, really—to form part of the ticking clock of the novel. I wanted the reader to feel the sort of false sense of security that Sneha herself does. I wanted money to become a source of suspense. The simple reason for that is it mirrors how I and most ordinary people experience the world.

Sneha’s fortunes seem to be reflected in the food she eats. When she’s doing well, she eats out, dates. When she’s doing well, she eats out, dates. Then her paychecks stop coming. Her relationship with Marina, her girlfriend, grows tense.

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about but also can function as this agent of othering. I felt conscious of that, and I also feel that food is one way in which, for almost anyone, our material realities and the political issues that circle around us become concrete—and become something that we literally consume. So I wanted food to be an integral part of Sneha’s life. I wanted it to signal her false ascent and then her descent.

At one point, Sneha thinks, “I’d realized that it was the great desire of my heart to have the trappings of a bourgeois life, soft and warm as a cashmere sweater. I wanted this, and I wanted this because it had been relentlessly sold to me with the aggressiveness of a Bangalore street hawker.” Could you talk more about that idea of being sold a certain idea of success and what that means for Sneha as a young queer immigrant woman?

I really did not want to single out the “right” viewpoint and give it to one character—and certainly not give it to my main character. I wanted the main characters to disagree. Throughout the novel, there are moments where, for example, one of Sneha’s best friends might say, “Here is this leftist principle,” or, “Here is a way I believe the world should work”—and Sneha will often push against it, because there are ways in which she is a very cautious and pragmatic person who doesn’t have very grandiose ambitions for herself. What she wants more than anything is safety—for herself and the people she loves.

I really wish for readers to think about what different life experiences make people susceptible, or not, to different schools of politics. Sneha’s not very primed for any kind of utopian ideas about community and a communitarian future. I also think that it’s just true that people who are marginalized along different axes are promised, again and again and again, that if you work hard enough, if you shore up all your individual defenses, you get to be one of the pardoned turkeys. You get to be separated from the rest of your fellow marginalized community and spirited away to a place of safety. That’s what, ultimately, Sneha’s talking about. She’s not conscious of that larger dynamic at this point in the novel, but she is in this moment responding with resentment, saying, “I was promised this all along, and why shouldn’t I have it?” That’s very reasonable, but the book also does its best to poke some holes in her thinking.

Sneha’s relationship with Marina is pretty central to the novel, and it’s a complicated relationship, partly because Sneha hasn’t been entirely honest. She avoids telling her parents about her sexuality, and she lets Marina think that she doesn’t have any parents. At one point you write, “real wild desire is braided tightly with foolishness, with all that is awkward and stilted.” Could you talk more about that?

This is a novel that writes very frank and lucid queer sex. There isn’t a cutting away to darkness. There’s definitely an attempt made at revealing the characters of both these people through the sex that they’re having. That particular line about desire and foolishness is really central to how Sneha thinks and who she is. She’s intensely prideful, you know; she is certainly often very top-y and confident in sex in a way that she’s not in large parts of her life—certainly not when she’s being an eager office drone. But it is a confidence—and I might even say a masculinity—that is easily punctured, like most masculinity can be. I think that that sense of something that could be punctured at any moment, something that’s intensely fragile, permeates this young relationship between Sneha and Marina. They come from incredibly different backgrounds, and I think Marina approaches their relationship with more sincerity and, frankly, integrity, for a long time, than Sneha does. And part of it is that Sneha’s younger and hasn’t internalized certain crucial life lessons—like, if you lie to people that you care about so deeply, you become unknowable. And Sneha, whether she knows it or not, really deeply desires to be known—and to be loved.

Natalia Holtzman’s writing has appeared in the Los Angeles Review of Books, Bookforum, the Minneapolis Star Tribune, and elsewhere. All This Could Be Different received a starred review in the July 15, 2022, issue.
A BALLET OF LEPERS
A Novel and Stories
Cohen, Leonard
Grove Press (356 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-8021-6047-8

Previously unpublished early fiction by the iconic singer/songwriter, mostly domestic tales of love and loss.

Composed between 1956 and ’61, the stories in this collection by Cohen (1934-2016) showcase a writer heavily under the sway of the Beats and existentialists, usually with young male protagonists heavily under the sway of others. The narrator of the short title novel is compelled to clear space in his Montreal apartment for his grandfather, a boorish man prone to spitting, physical assault, and other bodily offenses. Rather than be repulsed by this behavior, the narrator finds it oddly liberating and pursues a series of humiliations and abasements. The mood is one of warmed-over Sartre, with proclamations of life as a theater of cruelty (“How sad and beautiful we were, we humans with our suffering and our torturing”), topped off with a facile comic plot twist. The 16 additional stories are generally miniatures, curiosity pieces, and linguistic experiments featuring prostitutes, jazz musicians, sullen lovers, another boorish grandfather, and other hard-luck types; a series of stories feature Mister Euemer a milquetoast suburbanite who is alternately humiliated by a neighborhood boy and by his wife, who in one story is oddly obsessive about shaving. There are flickers of the wry, sensitive tone that marks Cohen’s song lyrics, as in “Lullaby,” a Bellovian story about Euemer’s impending fatherhood. “Short Story on Greek Island,” about a relationship between a pair of expats, and “Trade,” about a young man and woman sharing stories about their stints in a psychiatric ward. Still, had these pieces appeared in their time, they likely would’ve been seen as also-rans compared to Kerouac, Selby, and Bukowski. Today, they largely read like the juvenilia of a writer whose best work is still ahead of him.

Cohen’s greatness is largely obscured in these atmospheric, derivative early drafts.

RECKONING
Coulter, Catherine
Morrow/HarperCollins (432 pp.)
$26.09 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-06-300413-9

Dillon Savich and Lacey Sherlock, Coulter’s famous pair of married FBI agents, take on two cases that have roots buried deep in the past.

After the murder of her parents in Virginia, 12-year-old Allison Rendahl barely escaped by climbing out a window and hiding in a cave. Her Uncle Leo took her back to his home in Australia and raised her to be a strong woman who helped him lead extreme adventures, but her mental scars remain. Now, under the name Kirra Mandarian and after attending law school at the University of Virginia, she’s returned to her hometown as a prosecuting attorney, hoping to solve the murder of her parents. Finding a painting by her father, who was an artist, with photos taped to the back gives her the clues she needs, and using the name Eliot Ness, she gathers and sends incriminating information to Agent Dillon Savich. On the other side of the country, 12-year-old piano virtuoso Emma Hunt, who was traumatized at age 6 when she was kidnapped by a troubled priest, becomes the target of another predator. Savich and Sherlock, his partner and wife, were involved in the original case, and the Hunt family is flying to D.C. both to attend Emma’s concert at the Kennedy Center and to get her into a safer environment. Emma’s grandfather, a sophisticated crime boss, could well be the reason Emma is targeted for kidnapping. At any rate, the people involved in both cases are stone-cold killers who will use any means to achieve their goals. Savich and Sherlock must identify those goals or die trying.

Pulse-pounding terror mixed with romance makes for page-turning pleasure.
PRESS CAMPAIGNS | SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING | AUTHOR TOURS
LIVE-STREAM/HYBRID EVENTS | VIDEO PRODUCTION

“HOW CAN YOU CUT THROUGH THE NOISE OF THE CULTURE AND GET ATTENTION FOR DESERVING WORK? HIRE WILDBOUND, FOR STARTERS.”
STEVE WASSERMAN, PUBLISHER OF HEYDAY

“WILDBOUND TOOK THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARDS TEAM FROM VIRTUAL PRODUCTION NEWBIES TO A SUPERB VIRTUAL AWARDS EVENT. WE’LL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL TO OUR WILDBOUND ANGELS.”
JANE CIABATTARI, NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE

“WORKING WITH WILDBOUND IS A DREAM! THEY’VE TAKEN OUR BOOK FESTIVAL TO NEW HEIGHTS.”
CHERILYN PARSONS, BAY AREA BOOK FESTIVAL

“WILDBOUND” REFLECTS WHAT WE’VE COME TO LOVE ABOUT WORKING WITH TALENTED STORYTELLERS: THEIR TIRELESS DRIVE TO VENTURE INTO THE WILDERNESS OF THE MIND, ALWAYS ON THE PRECIPICE OF THE UNKNOWN, ALWAYS DARING TO MEET THEIR LIMITS IN WORLDS BOTH REAL AND IMAGINARY.
Multiple shady characters spring into action when a Secret Service agent is murdered.

Jonathan Finch is shot dead just outside the Crystal City apartments in Arlington, Virginia, while in the middle of an apparently felonious exchange involving cash and a satchel. Tenant Jesse Cooper, a student at nearby American University, cradles the dying Jonathan and hears his final words: “Tell Ethel the secret.” When she learns of the shooting, Crystal City landlady Ethel Fiona Crestwater immediately calls Cory Bradshaw, the head of the Secret Service, with the news that he’s lost an agent. One of the chief delights of de Castrique’s loopy crime yarn is that Ethel isn’t the frail, distracted septuagenarian she pretends to be but a whip-smart operator preeminent among the title characters. Det. Frank Mancini of the Arlington Police Department, who knows Ethel well, decides to investigate further with her and Bradshaw while trying to keep Jesse in the dark. Ethel does, however, give Jesse a gun for protection. 

When FBI Director Rudy Hauser learns of the identity of the dead man, he remembers him as “the key to cracking the case.” Bradshaw’s visit to Finch’s widow, Susan, muddies the water even further when she speculates that her husband may have committed suicide. An attack on Jesse brings FBI special agent Lisa Draper, yet another secretive soul, into action when a Secret Service agent is murdered.

Octavio believes his jealous neighbor, Emiliano Contreras, is set on Fire Island. They buy a home and set up a painting and drywall business while dreaming of the good future their children will have—how these things will be their inheritance. But life isn’t always easy for the family. After discovering a goat hoof and a rooster foot buried in the yard, Octavio believes his jealous neighbor, Emiliano Contreras, has put a curse on the family. Ordinary disasters like miscarriages, accidents, and sadness are attributed to it. Years later, in declining health, Octavio is consumed by his belief in the curse, and he bounces around from nursing home to nursing home because none of the orderlies can keep him calm. His adult children aren’t sure if it really is a curse or a genetic predisposition to anxiety and suxto. However, Dina, one of his daughters, refuses to leave her house after having what she believes is a prophetic nightmare showing Emiliano Contreras working with the devil to use grackles to put the evil eye on the Izquierdos.

This gloriously rich epic, we get to see a full picture of the family. Each interlocking chapter is told by a different character, unifying into a thoughtfully crafted history spanning decades. The characters, who are complex and tightly linked to one another, are enlivened by their belief in a mix of superstition, brujería, and Catholicism that feels both familiar and playful. Family celebrations like a Posada, a quinceañera, and the Fourth of July particularly highlight family dynamics. Though most of the stories focus on the Izquierdo family as a whole, there’s one called “La Milagrosa Selena” that is less a story and more a letter to the Diocese of Brownsville that advocates canonizing the queen of Tejano music, Selena Quintanilla-Pérez; it’s a surprising delight.

An instant Tejano classic.

Book 8 in DeMille’s John Corey series unlocks a complex murder mystery set on Fire Island.

The jokes start right away: “You can’t drink all day unless you start in the morning.” Corey is a former NYPD homicide detective, and he’s currently “NYU—New York Unemployed.” He has plenty of enemies, like the Russian SVR intelligence service, which wants him dead—but waiting for that plotline to develop is like waiting for Godot. Ex-lover Det. Beth Penrose conveys an offer that he become a consultant to Security Solutions Investigative Services, “a very tacky private investigative agency” located on Suffolk County farmland with a giant hedge maze as a neighbor. Though Basel doesn’t say so, the plan seems to be that Corey will be her confidential informant, getting inside Security Solutions to learn if it has any connection to the killings of nine young Long Island women. Security Solutions is a fun-loving outfit, with after-hours parties like Thirsty Thursdays. You’ve got your booze, your broads with names like Tiffany, your cops both present and ex, your politicians, a disbarred lawyer—fertile and dangerous grounds for Corey’s snooping. Like the maze, the plot has “twisting paths with lots of dead ends,” but “you have to wake up real early to pull one over on John Corey.” But before the guns start blasting, he fires his “pocket rocket” into a willing woman, a suspect named Amy. “Emission accomplished,” he later muses. Ah yes, Corey has a million sex jokes that would have teenagers TikTok-ing “ROFL-MAO.” Are there nude beaches in Bermuda? He’d love to check.
out the Bermuda triangles. Is tonight “poker night? Or poke her night?” And why do strippers have names like Tiffany and not Best Buy? Anyway, Corey hasn’t settled down with a woman: “Ospreys mate for life,” he states. “But are they happy?” Oh yes, again with the plot: There’s a tough, unsolved murder case with interlocking crimes and suspects that ends in a fiery finish.

A well-done crime yarn but not for the straight-laced or those prone to fantods.
Marianne Wiggins’ ninth novel was nearly done when she suffered a stroke. This is how it finally came to be published

BY AMY REITER

As compelling as Marianne Wiggins’ novel Properties of Thirst (Simon & Schuster, Aug. 2) is, the story behind its completion may be even more so. In June 2016, when Wiggins was chapters away from finishing the book—which Kirkus describes as a “sweeping, cinematic story of love and family set against the dramatic backdrop of World War II and the American West”—she suffered a massive stroke.

“It affected my whole fabric of reality: walking, centering myself in a landscape,” Wiggins, now 74, says over Zoom. She is sitting beside her daughter, photographer Lara Porzak, 55, in the home they now share in Venice, California—its decor the epitome of literary-artistic bohemian cool.

Wiggins, who was a tenured professor at the University of Southern California, despite never having attended college, speaks clearly and thoughtfully. At one point, she pauses to consider whether an adverb or adjective is correct and then rewords her sentence entirely. But at other moments she can’t remember, for instance, the order in which events occurred, and Porzak fills in the gaps.

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“Together, we make one memory,” Porzak says.

Following the stroke, Wiggins says, “I don’t think I had an active imagination because so much of my brain power was being utilized by a conscious effort to recover my physical control. You have to exercise imaginative muscles, and I let those atrophy.”

As Wiggins shifted from hospital to hospital, beginning that recovery, Porzak read to her, eventually turning to her mother’s own words, the unfinished manuscript that would become Properties of Thirst.

“Sheer words healed her,” Porzak says.

They also strengthened Porzak’s resolve. Although the book had been more than a decade in the making and reflected Wiggins’ strong, supple command of language, plot, and character and her facility for exquisitely limning landscapes both external and internal, its prospects for publication suddenly dimmed. Porzak couldn’t bear to see her mother’s work go unread.

Wiggins’ 2003 novel, Evidence of Things Unseen, was a finalist for a National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize, but in Porzak’s estimation, Properties of Thirst contained some of Wiggins’ most beautiful work, including one chapter, bringing nuance and empathy to a previously unsympathetic character, that Porzak calls “a perfect thing.”

“There was no way I was not going to get this out in the world for other people to read,” Porzak says.

So the daughter set about sorting through her mother’s many notebooks.

Wiggins, the author of eight previous novels over five decades, has always written longhand. Describing herself as “not a very good typist,” she began the practice before the computer era, carrying a notebook everywhere, jotting down notes. An extensive traveler, Wiggins enjoys “the mobility of being a longhand writer,” she says. “I am my own writing machine.”

Wiggins, who has been married three times, including to author Salman Rushdie, also kept a pen and paper by her bed-
side, pre-stroke, because, she says, scenes sometimes come to her in dreams.

“When I’m writing, if I come up against an impenetrable wall, I will dream a solution and wake up and write it,” she says. Of course, she allows, “Sometimes in the morning I can’t read my handwriting.”

Along with Wiggins’ written notes, Porzak parsed the recollections of the handful of friends with whom her mother had discussed the book’s ending, grilling each for details. Mercifully, Porzak also had a brief “Dear Reader” message, in which Wiggins had laid out her intentions, to guide her.

When, during the height of the pandemic, Porzak’s photography work slowed down, mother and daughter put their time at home into the arduous work they had already begun: painstakingly piecing together the book’s final chapters.

“We would talk about an adjective for three days,” Porzak recalls.

Porzak chronicles the process in the short, unflinchingly honest documentary film Marianne, co-directed with Rebecca Ressler, which recently won an award at Visions du Réel film festival in Nyon, Switzerland. In it, the effects of Wiggins’ stroke are apparent (she must be reminded to brush her teeth), as are her hard-earned wisdom (“Identity really coheres to memory, and when memory goes, it affects identity,” she muses), her stinging wit (“Have you looked at Lara’s nose, really?” she asks, to prompt a halt in filming), earthy sensuality (she shimmies, bare-bottomed, to Ray Charles’ “Mary Ann”), and writer’s vanity (“I’m the genius…me, me, me,” she declares, eliciting Porzak’s lovingly amused disgust).

So, too, is Porzak’s dedication to her mother and her work. Witness this exchange from the film:

**Wiggins:** Lara, you can’t save what I never wrote….I never wrote it. So you can’t save it.

**Porzak:** But… I’m trying to save the ending. I’m looking in all your notebooks. I’m marking things. I’ve spent years searching for the ending. And now you’re telling me—

**Wiggins:** —I never wrote it.

**Porzak:** We’ve done so many edits. I think we edited something really beautiful out unfortunately…. [She reads from her mother’s notes] “You can’t save what you don’t love. He knew that. But when you love something. The only thing worth doing with your life is to try to save it.”

**Wiggins [considering]:** Well, I don’t think it’s the only thing worth doing.

Also on candid display are Porzak’s understandable moments of frustration.

After a protracted session struggling over the wording of a single line, Wiggins begins to lose focus: “I want to tell you something” Porzak says, her voice full of emotion. “This is your book. I’m trying to [effing] help you finish the [effing] book. It’s been three [effing] years, day in and day out, of me doing this. I need you to rally.”

Clearly, Wiggins rallied enough to complete the novel, although one planned chapter—in which she’d intended to depict Schiff, one of the novel’s main characters, helping to write the Japanese constitution—was omitted.

“We are not a writer. It was too hard for me. We just didn’t put that chapter in,” Porzak says.

Ultimately, Properties of Thirst stands as a testament to not only the considerable talent of a writer, but also the devotion of her daughter. Helping her mother complete her work, Porzak says, tearing up, “is the greatest thing I ever did.”

Wiggins, for her part, acknowledges her exceptional good fortune in having her daughter “step into” her professional life. “It’s such a bonus that my child actually knows what I’m up against,” the author says.

Asked whether she hopes to write again, Wiggins displays the resolve distinct to both mother and daughter. “Yes, of course,” she says. “I will.”

Amy Reiter is a writer based in Brooklyn, New York. Properties of Thirst received a starred review in the July 15, 2022, issue.

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*Properties of Thirst* received a starred review in the July 15, 2022, issue.
resentments and disappointments simmer and lead to minor crimes and cruelties, George is called to Florida to take care of his father. As soon as he leaves, wildfires break out near the family’s home and winery. Evacuation, disaster, homelessness, and flight ensue. Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, Pippa has made only one friend, her zoology professor; is a #MeToo story also in the works? But wait, because the biggest twist is yet to come, with an extremely unexpected lurch into the surreal. It feels like the author was riding this plot like a wave; as she says in an author’s note in which she reveals that she developed ALS while working on the book, this work “poured out like an opium-induced dream” and “took shape as if [her] conscious mind were not involved.” These insights are useful for appreciating this unusual and disconcerting book.

From dreary domestic drama to climate apocalypse to fabulist transcendence...it’s quite a trip.

Cruz
Ferraro, Nicolás
Trans. by Mallory N. Craig-Kuhn
Soho Crime (312 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-641-29396-9

Ferraro’s first novel to be translated into English shows the disastrous costs a favor for his older brother exacts on an Argentine innocent. Arrested for the possession of marijuana with clear intent to sell, Sebastian Cruz has just one request of his brother, Tomás: keep his family safe. Of course he will, volunteers Tommy. But since Seba’s wife and schoolgirl daughter have been taken hostage by the drug lord whose deal the arrest disrupted, that turns out to be a monstrous responsibility. Tom’s always prided himself on being “a different kind of Cruz.” Now he’ll have to get his hands dirty with exactly the sort of dangerous and illegal transactions that made him turn away from his father, Samuel, when he was sent to jail himself half Tommy’s lifetime ago. And when complications prevent him from completing the deal as planned, he’ll have to improvise in ways that make him horrified of himself. As he finds himself shockingly immersed in the dealing, pimping, and betrayals that have been a way of life for the other men in his family, Tommy has to ask himself whether he really is such a different kind of Cruz. With every step he takes further into the conflict between Aníbal Di Pietro, the gang leader who worked with Seba, and his rival Centurión, Tommy, who’s amazed “how much you can lie to yourself,” must confront ugly truths about his father, his brother, and the Cruz in the mirror.

Strong stuff for readers who think Don Winslow’s portrayals of drug cartels didn’t cut deep enough.

THE MEANS
Fusselman, Amy
Mariner Books (256 pp.)
$27.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-324871-7

You, too, can have a beach house in the Hamptons...sort of.

“I used to think aliveness was a binary: a person was either alive or dead. But now I know that aliveness is more like something on a continuum, like the pain scale. And I want to be more alive. I want to be as alive as possible. My beach house would help me do that.” Shelly Means, nonworking mother of two, wife of a struggling voice-over narrator, denizen of a part of Manhattan she calls the “discount cat-tan and incense district,” is obsessed. Lucky for her, the woman who is providing online cognitive behavior therapy for her anger issues (Shelly threw her water bottle at the school board president) is also a real estate broker and knows just the tick-infested, nonwaterfront piece of land in a part of the Hamptons she and George can afford, once they sell their raccoon-infested lake house. And if they construct the house out of used shipping containers, give up all but the most basic amenities, and take out a loan, they may even be able to build on it. With its deadpan absurdity, pithy prose, and moral je ne sais quoi, Fusselman’s latest will appeal to fans of Marcy Dermansky. With its satirical talking dog, readers of Susan Coll. And with its satire of the particular hypocrisy of the Hamptons, including homeowners associations, graft, and garbage and recycling practices, Maria Semple. Running jokes abound, involving, among other things, raccoons, Japanese toilets, nutrition bars called Generosity, Vulnerability, and Caring, and seltzer called Loving. We may be entering a golden age of the comic novel, surely one of the best possible outcomes of this desperate moment in history. Take it from Shelly’s teenage son: “If you need money, you should write fiction. That’s what Roberto Bolaño did after he had a family and wanted to make money: he turned to fiction.”

A trenchant comedy of class and the way we live now.

LUNGFISH
Gilliss, Meghan
Catapult (320 pp.)
$26.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-64622-091-5

A young family in crisis returns to an isolated family property in an attempt to survive.

Tuck’s grandmother is dead, and Tuck knows she left her house—“halfway out to sea” on a tiny island in the Gulf of Maine—to Tuck’s father in her will. The problem is that Tuck’s father is missing and has been for years, having struck out for Mexico when Tuck and her brother were just teens growing up in Indiana. The other problem is that Tuck’s life in Pittsburgh has
fallen apart. She’s disoriented by new motherhood, and, worse, her husband, Paul, is disappearing for long stretches at a time and draining their finances. Soon, they have no choice but to load up their Volvo with their toddler daughter, Agnes, and the meager possessions remaining to them and squat at the Maine property, hoping to stay one step ahead of the executor of Tuck’s grandmother’s will, who is searching for the rightful next of kin, Tuck’s dad. Soon after arriving on the island, Tuck learns Paul’s secret: He is addicted to kratom, an herbal extract that mimics opioids. While Tuck does everything she can think of to keep herself and Agnes alive, including foraging seaweed, mushrooms, and mussels from the beach, the threads of her past and present tangle in increasingly dire ways. Gilliss is an extraordinary writer; passages of the novel read like poetry, and others read like a lyric essay, making use of surprising juxtaposition and associations, especially ones—lobster, lungfish—that derive from the harsh setting in which Tuck finds herself. With some writers, such style can disguise plot weaknesses, but Gilliss sidesteps that, too: The peril the family is in keeps the pages flying.

As startling and intense as the windswept landscape the book depicts.

“Sharp as glass shards and lush as the desert after the rain, the writing is the true magic here.”

RIVER WOMAN, RIVER DEMON

Noora, a 22-year-old Iranian-American lifestyle blogger, lands her big break when she’s hired as assistant to the editor-in-chief of Vinyl magazine—Vinyl, her political compass, her guiding light, her everything since she was a kid.

She quickly learns, however, that sometimes things are too good to be true. Loretta James, her boss, is a chaotic nightmare, rather than sensational ones. Eva embodies these complexities as well; she’s a memorable and multifaceted heroine.

Sharp as glass shards and lush as the desert after the rain, the writing is the true magic here.

A HUNDRED OTHER GIRLS
Hariri-Kia, Iman
Sourcebooks Landmark (320 pp.)
$16.99 paper | July 26, 2022
978-1-72824-795-3

Noora, a 22-year-old Iranian-American lifestyle blogger, lands her big break when she’s hired as assistant to the editor-in-chief of Vinyl magazine—Vinyl, her political compass, her guiding light, her everything since she was a kid.

She quickly learns, however, that sometimes things are too good to be true. Loretta James, her boss, is a chaotic nightmare,
and the staff of Vinyl is caught up in an all-out turf war between Print and Digital. Between her fast affinity with the Digital team, her desire to write, and her reluctance to leave behind the woman she once idolized, Noora finds her loyalties fractured. Pulling from a mix of real-world scandals and pop-cultural cues, Hariri-Kia has created a cast of characters who are vibrant yet grounded in their moral grayness while conjuring up the media-industry allure that’s needed to keep Noora, along with the reader, pushing through an otherwise toxic environment. When Digital Editor Jade Aki gets canceled and freelancers start dropping off, Noora’s second opportunity of a lifetime arises: She’s asked to write a column for Vinyl Digital. “For the reader” is Noora’s mantra as she navigates the tension between her goals and loyalties, consistently reaching for justification for everything she’s going through. Her energetic and self-reflective voice elevates the book from a classic “old guard vs. new guard” tale into a sophisticated meditation on the function of audience. Noora learns there is nothing fulfilling in sacrificing your morals for an institution and that the most important reader can be someone who sees herself in you. The ultimate decentering of legacy institutions makes this debut the perfect reflection of contemporary attitudes toward the media industry.

A refreshing take on the classic media-insider novel, championing the value of passion and thoughtfulness over career.

As Tenetkee grows to seem more ominous than laid back, Loni finds solace in canoeing its waterways—and in a growing friendship with Adlai Brinkert, the handsome fellow who owns the canoe rental shop. The book’s lyrical evocations of natural Florida, beautiful but perilous, ring true, as does its depiction of the entanglements of small-town life. Family dynamics are a strong point, and the author builds suspense skillfully as Loni unearth connections between past and present that could be lethal.

This debut novel, set in rural Florida, deftly combines family drama and tense thriller.

**THE MARSH QUEEN**

***Hartman, Virginia***

Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster (384 pp.)

$27.99  |  Sept. 6, 2022

978-1-982171-60-5

A dutiful family visit propels a young woman into the dark mysteries of her past.

Loni Murrow loves her job as an ornithological illustrator for the Smithsonian, where she has dreamed of working since girlhood. Raised in the tiny Florida Panhandle town of Tenetkee, she high-tailed out of there as soon as she was old enough. She and her mother, Ruth, never got along, especially after Loni’s father, Boyd, died. She looks for answers from his former boss, the kindly Print and Digital. Between her fast affinity with the Digital team, her desire to write, and her reluctance to leave behind the woman she once idolized, Noora finds her loyalties fractured. Pulling from a mix of real-world scandals and pop-cultural cues, Hariri-Kia has created a cast of characters who are vibrant yet grounded in their moral grayness while conjuring up the media-industry allure that’s needed to keep Noora, along with the reader, pushing through an otherwise toxic environment. When Digital Editor Jade Aki gets canceled and freelancers start dropping off, Noora’s second opportunity of a lifetime arises: She’s asked to write a column for Vinyl Digital. “For the reader” is Noora’s mantra as she navigates the tension between her goals and loyalties, consistently reaching for justification for everything she’s going through. Her energetic and self-reflective voice elevates the book from a classic “old guard vs. new guard” tale into a sophisticated meditation on the function of audience. Noora learns there is nothing fulfilling in sacrificing your morals for an institution and that the most important reader can be someone who sees herself in you. The ultimate decentering of legacy institutions makes this debut the perfect reflection of contemporary attitudes toward the media industry.

A refreshing take on the classic media-insider novel, championing the value of passion and thoughtfulness over career.

**GANGLAND**

***Hogan, Chuck***

Grand Central Publishing (352 pp.)

$28.00  |  Aug. 2, 2022

978-1-5387-5175-6

A sticky yarn of paranoia and semi-organized crime, ready for the multiplex.

The real-life burglary of Chicago mob boss Tony Accardo’s suburban home in 1978 provides a marvelously hooky backdrop for Hogan’s lowdown tale, which fictionalizes the event and the subsequent assassinations of parties directly and tangentially involved with the incident. “Nicky Pins” Passero, a bowling alley proprietor and midlevel member of Accardo’s outfit, is our point-of-view character and an ideal guide through the horrific events set in motion by the resentful thief and the increasingly paranoid Accardo. Nicky, a closeted gay family man adrift after separating from his wife, is intelligent, sensitive, and discreet, operating under the radar as an effective survival strategy. Ironically, his superb people skills win him the confidence of Accardo, which first feels like an honor but quickly devolves into a bloody nightmare as the crime lord tasks him with catching the thieves who invaded his home. Further complicating matters is Nicky’s status as an FBI informant dominated and abused by his handler, who entrapped Nicky via a humiliating staged seduction scenario. Hogan expertly tightens the screws as Nicky desperately scrambles to please his superiors, underlings, handlers, and estranged family as the body count mounts in increasingly gruesome fashion. Nicky is a fascinating character, sympathetic yet complicated, an aware and articulate person who has drifted into hell incrementally, trying in his way to do the right thing when he can. The satisfying thriller structure, vivid dialogue and characterizations, and tragicomic tone are reminiscent of the Coen brothers’ best film work, and the historical underpinning provides the pleasures of a first-rate true-crime tale.

Colorful, engaging, and bloody; a richly satisfying crime story and character study.
Two sisters and their husbands set out on a hike in the Alps that ends in multiple calamities, some of them highly predictable, others not so much.

Catherine and Paul Baxendale were the perfect couple until Paul left his job as a commodities trader over an accusation of assaulting a colleague. Now he works part time as a delivery driver, and Cat, a successful event planner, must depend on the largesse of her younger sister, Ginny, for big-ticket items. That largesse is considerable, since Ginny, who inherited the entire trust fund their late parents had originally planned to split between their two daughters, has multiplied her wealth by marrying banker Tristan Lytham. Despite the friction between the two sisters, friction that runs deeper than Ginny suspects, they’re vacationing together in a Swiss village in the shadow of the Argentine, a mountain that invites a day’s vigorous walk. But an unidentified man who “couldn’t wait to see [Cat] again” is stalking the party, of whom a flash-forward prologue has already hinted only two will remain alive. Holliday keeps up a steady stream of reversals, betrayals, and revelations. Though the cast is so small and the possible permutations in their relationships so limited that savvy readers will see many of the twists coming, most of them land with a satisfying, if not exactly surprising, impact.

Shock and awe among the privileged.


At some point during the latter half of his reign, Byzantine emperor Leo VI banned the production of blood sausage. “This edict,” an omniscient—or maybe “omniscient”—narrator tells us, “is thought to be the earliest written evidence of an outbreak of botulism.” Several pages later, we are introduced to Faith Ewer, a university professor who avails herself of Botox injections and has, thanks to a departmental scandal, been roped into co-teaching a class with Isobel Childe, a colleague she despises. Doctoral candidate Erin Adamo makes her first appearance—unnamed—on Page 33, and it takes a while to realize that she is not only the protagonist of this text, but also the author of several of its precariously connected parts. Erin’s early invisibility makes sense when we realize that she is a woman in the process of falling apart and—through reading and writing—re-creating herself. Erin has a history of trauma that makes her connection to reality rather tenuous, and the discovery that her husband, Ben, has been prodigiously unfaithful is one more emotional blow than she can easily absorb. Late in the text, there’s a rejection letter from an agent who doesn’t feel like she can sell Erin’s novel or novella—both of which are part of Ives’ novel. “As observant and unique and refreshingly strange as these narratives are, they are still difficult for the reader to connect to on an emotional level, in part because the protagonists’ troubling lack of agency is never fully explained.” Erin herself understands that readers want protagonists who overcome conflict. Her protagonists do not, and neither does she. This is to say that the agent’s critique of Erin’s work—and Erin’s own critique of her work—is a critique of Ives’ work. To invoke the word metanarrative doesn’t really begin to describe what the author is doing here—at least in part because readers might reasonably debate what the “narrative” is. Ives has created a novel in which the main character finds release, if not catharsis, in a novella written by another author who is also Ives’ creation. Erin decides to read the novella after reading a
A novel—in the loosest sense of the term—for people who love footnotes.

YOU’RE INVITED

Jayatissa, Amanda
Berkley (384 pp.)
$27.00 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-593-33512-3

When a Sri Lankan woman now living in LA learns that her former best friend is marrying her ex-boyfriend, she will do anything to stop the wedding.

Amaya Bloom exercises complete control over her life while also looking to number symbolism to guide most of her actions and decisions. When she learns, via Instagram, that her former best friend, Kaavindi Fonseka, a glamorous influencer who runs a successful charity, is engaged to marry Amaya’s ex-boyfriend Matthew Spencer, and when an invitation to the wedding arrives, this could be Amaya’s chance to bury the hatchet—literally. For Amaya will fly back to Sri Lanka to attend the days of wedding festivities with a Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C in hand, determined not to let Kaavi and Spencer tie the knot. The novel actually begins on the day of the ceremony, when it seems like Kaavi has been attacked in her hotel room and is now missing. Jayatissa then provides Amaya’s story, beginning at that same time but also flashing back to three months earlier, when the engagement is announced. Then it does the same for Kaavi, interspersing various “interview transcripts” from friends and family members as Kaavi’s disappearance is investigated. The twists, after they are revealed, may feel a little familiar to readers of thrillers, but the pacing is expert; in the moment, each is surprising and creates a need to recalibrate what is known about these characters. In addition to offering unapologetically strong, vividly imperfect female characters, the novel offers commentary on social privilege in Sri Lanka and on the gaudy, illusion-filled world of social media influencers.

Jones’ mercurial, often inescrutable body of work delivers yet another change-up to readers’ expectations.
“Come for the promise of mystery, stay for the long goodbye.”

**THE HUNT**

*Kellerman, Faye*

Morrow/HarperCollins (496 pp.)

$28.99 | Aug. 23, 2022

978-0-062-91049-3

Peter Decker and Rina Lazarus’ 27th outing is also their last.

Peter, who’s already retired from LAPD Homicide, doesn’t want to step down from the Greenbury, New York, police until he’s closed one last case: the murder of Pauline Corbett, found in the woods not far from where disabled Loving Care client Bertram Lanz disappeared three weeks earlier along with his caretaker, Elsie Schulung, who was Pauline’s lover. But this assignment is upstaged by a crisis closer to home even though it’s taken place in California. Emergency room physician Teresa McLaughlin, the mother of Peter and Rina’s foster son, Gabe Whitman, has been attacked and seriously wounded by villains who’ve kidnapped her 5-year-old boy, Sanjay. The obvious suspects are Terry’s estranged husband, Devek, a cardiac surgeon whose gambling has left him owing $2.5 million to the mob, and Devek’s impatient creditors. When Terry’s transcontinental phone call to Gabe ends in a cliffhanger, Peter advises him to call his father, Christopher, and rapes her repeatedly. Kellerman cuts conscientiously back and forth between the two stories, but Peter’s murder case, which is never all that mysterious, can’t hold a candle to Terry’s even less mysterious but shockingly toxic tango with her abusive ex, and Rina is left standing on the sidelines with nothing to do but hug her children.

**BILLIE STARR’S BOOK OF SORRIES**

*Kendalls, Deborah E.*

Flatiron Books (320 pp.)

$27.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-1-250-13843-9

A down-on-her-luck single mom takes a job that ends up changing her life—and endangering her family—in this funny yet bitingly realistic look at small-town life.

In the town of Benson, Indiana, Jenny Newberg is having a hard time. She can’t pay her bills, her ex (and the father of her daughter) won’t leave her alone, her mother criticizes every choice she makes, and she’s always disappointing her daughter, Billie Starr, a second grader. So when mysterious men in black suits approach and ask her to do one simple job—seduce a man running for governor so they can take down his campaign—she agrees. The job isn’t as easy as she’d expected, though. The men never pay her, and the man running for governor asks her to work as his receptionist. With no better job prospects on the horizon and a debt collector knocking on her door, Jenny agrees. Soon, she finds herself fielding mysterious phone calls, getting threatening faxes, and wondering what, exactly, she’s been caught up in. At the same time, Jenny has to deal with the eccentric characters in her life—her newly engaged mother, the neighbor who’s known for wielding a crossbow in public, the annoyingly perfect moms at school, and everyone else who seems out to get her. But it’s when the mysterious callers threaten what Jenny loves most that her life really starts to spiral out of control. Kellerman excels at writing quirky characters and entertaining dialogue, but what sets the story apart is the shimmering thread of dread that runs through all of Jenny’s thoughts and interactions. Although Kennedy imbues Jenny’s life with the sparkle of humor, the quiet desperation of her sometimes-bleak existence grounds the story in reality.

A grim literary mystery and a hopeful family story, this genre-blending novel manages to be both charming and heartbreaking.

**CONCERNING MY DAUGHTER**

*Kim Hye-jin*

Trans. by Jamie Chang

Restless Books (176 pp.)

$18.00 paper | Sept. 6, 2022

978-1-63206-349-6

A Korean elder-care worker navigates a troubled relationship with her gay daughter and the expectations of her workplace in this challenging novella.

“I was born and raised in this culture where the polite thing to do is to turn a blind eye and keep your mouth shut, and now I’ve grown old in it,” explains the unnamed protagonist of Kim’s English-language debut. A widow in her early 70s, the narrator earns a modest income by caring for a dementia patient named Jen, a journalist and activist who never married or had children and has no relatives to care for her in her old age. Despite the pressure from her boss to cut corners and the suspicion that her co-workers are able to successfully “leave all sentiment and anything like it at home,” she is deeply troubled by the societal belief that the elderly—especially those who are alone—are disposable. She is less successful at challenging the societal beliefs that affect her own child. Green, a college lecturer in her 30s, has become involved in a labor dispute at the local university and is struggling to pay her bills. When Green and her long-time girlfriend, Lane, accept the narrator’s invitation to come live with her for a while, the narrator is forced to confront her self-imposed ignorance about her daughter’s sexuality. Kim is unsparing in her depictions of the indignities of old age, the corrosiveness of homophobia, and the piercing loneliness that comes from living in a culture of silence.

A heavy but tentatively hopeful look at the struggle for intergenerational understanding through one mother’s eyes.

It’s not necessary to have read Dickens’ famous novel to appreciate Kingsolver’s absorbing tale, but those who have will savor the tough-minded changes she rings on his Victorian sentimentality while affirming his stinging critique of a heartless society. Our soon-to-be orphaned narrator’s mother is a substance-abusing teenage single mom who checks out via OD on his 11th birthday, and Demon’s cynical, wise-up voice is light-years removed from David Copperfield’s earnest tone. Yet readers also see the yearning for love and wells of compassion hidden beneath his self-protective exterior. Like pretty much everyone else in Lee County, Virginia, hollowed out economically by the coal and tobacco industries, he sees himself as someone with no prospects and little worth. One of Kingsolver’s major themes, hit a little too insistently, is the contempt felt by participants in the modern capitalist economy for those rooted in older ways of life. More nuanced and emotionally engaging is Demon’s fierce attachment to his home ground, a place where he is known and supported, tested to the breaking point as the opiate epidemic engulfs it. Kingsolver’s ferocious indictment of the pharmaceutical industry, angrily stated by a local girl who has become a nurse, is in the best Dickensian tradition, and Demon gives his knowledge. Her “autobiographical fiction,” *Tour Lies About Me*, is about a disreputable character who resembles Hanjo, and it upends his foundational suppositions about his childhood, marriage, and artistic abilities, reflecting the precarious nature of what people take, and make, to be true. “Some kinds of love have the power to reconstruct the past, the ability to restore a broken life,” Lee writes, and in this novel, some kinds of love also have the power to destroy every aspect of what one imagines one’s identity, and life, to be. The introduction of each new angle of Jang Jisoo’s death more than 20 summers ago both adds to our knowledge and blurs the exact truth of what occurred. The abstract art world in which Hanjo’s success fluctuates is equally a metaphor for how closely we examine or understand what isn’t concretely factual in “an era when images define reality.” Though relatively new to English-speaking audiences, Lee has sold millions of books in Korea, with adaptations into television series.

A subtle psychological thriller.

An angry, powerful book seething with love and outrage for a community too often stereotyped or ignored.

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**DEMON COPPERHEAD**

*Kingsolver, Barbara*  
Harper (560 pp.)  
$32.50 | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-0-06-325-1922

**BROKEN SUMMER**

*Lee, J.M.*  
*Trans. by An Seon Jae*  
Amazon Crossing (276 pp.)  
$19.00 | Sept. 1, 2022  
978-1-6625-0528-7

A woman writes a damning novel about a character who closely resembles her husband, forcing him to face his culpability in a decades-old death.

What is the statute of limitations on betrayal? How long can a secret be buried before it turns into an earthquake? And will revealing the truth—that slippery concept—provide resolution or peace? Skillfully rendered into English by translator An, the novel contemplates these issues in a murder mystery notable for its nuanced storytelling. Lee Hanjo is a renowned artist whose heretofore-devoted wife decamps from their home the night of his 43rd birthday, leaving behind a copy of a forthcoming book she has written without his knowledge. Her “autobiographical fiction,” *Tour Lies About Me*, is about a disreputable character who resembles Hanjo, and it upends his foundational suppositions about his childhood, marriage, and artistic abilities, reflecting the precarious nature of what people take, and make, to be true. “Some kinds of love have the power to reconstruct the past, the ability to restore a broken life,” Lee writes, and in this novel, some kinds of love also have the power to destroy every aspect of what one imagines one’s identity, and life, to be. The introduction of each new angle of Jang Jisoo’s death more than 20 summers ago both adds to our knowledge and blurs the exact truth of what occurred. The abstract art world in which Hanjo’s success fluctuates is equally a metaphor for how closely we examine or understand what isn’t concretely factual in “an era when images define reality.” Though relatively new to English-speaking audiences, Lee has sold millions of books in Korea, with adaptations into television series.

A subtle psychological thriller.

**WITCHES**

*Lozano, Brenda*  
*Trans. by Heather Cleary*  
Catapult (240 pp.)  
$26.00 | Aug. 16, 2022  
978-1-64622-068-7

An aging faith healer recounts practicing her calling amid gender-based violence, loss, celebrity, and murder.

In Feliciana’s poor, hardworking family, the gift of healing is passed from fathers to sons, not daughters. It’s her cousin Paloma who teaches her the art, shot through with Christian faith, and the herbs and mushrooms to use. Born male, Paloma is Muxe—a third gender accepted among the Zapotec people.
since pre-colonial times. Once she began to identify this way, changed her name, and began to sleep with men, she gave up being a curandero and began to train Feliciana, who goes on to achieve worldwide renown. Narrated from the alternating points of view of Feliciana and Zoe, a journalist who’s interviewing her, the stories weave around both women’s struggles to find their voices and make their own ways. Feliciana endures a hardscrabble childhood and an alcoholic husband, then other people’s jealousy at her success. Zoe grieves her late father and deferred dreams. But the most vibrant character is Paloma, a concentration camp survivor, and her host sister, who may or may not be a spy. Mah, who clearly loves Paris and all the details of French living, affectionately and precisely captures life in the post–World War II city, with many deprivations but a spirit of hope. Her Jacqueline—bright, observant, and a little naïve—is an engaging and believable character, and it’s easy to imagine how her experiences during this year will shape her future life. While Jackie runs into people the reader will recognize, Mah doesn’t overstate their importance in her life: Novelist James Baldwin, for example, appears and quickly disappears as Jimmy, one of several writers she runs into in a nightclub. Staying within the consciousness of Jacqueline as she is at this point, Mah smoothly walks the line between biography and fiction.

Fans of the former first lady and Paris should be beguiled.

A magical tale about finding yourself and making a found family that will leave the reader enchanted.

THE VERY SECRET SOCIETY OF IRREGULAR WITCHES
Mandanna, Sangu
Berkley (336 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-593-43935-7

A British witch takes a job as a magic tutor and finds the place she belongs. Mika Moon’s parents died when she was a child, and she’s spent her entire adult life moving every few months, never staying in one place for long or getting attached to anyone. At 31, she’s been raised to keep magic secret; her sole contact with other witches is a small group she sees every three months, and she can’t even text with them in between, as the group’s leader thinks having too much magic in one place will draw unwanted attention. Mika does, however, do one thing that skates the edges of propriety: She posts online videos in which she “pretends” to be a witch: “Witchcore....Not quite as popular as cottagecore or fairycore, but it’s up there.” Then she gets an interesting request in her DMs, and Mika finds herself at Nowhere House, an old country estate, teaching three orphaned children how to control their magic. Suddenly surrounded by people who not only know her secret, but accept her for it, Mika is dangerously close to getting attached, both to the girls she’s teaching and to their caretakers, including Jamie, the cute librarian who didn’t want to send for her. But with the clock ticking until an upcoming visit from a lawyer who’s suspicious about the “unconventional household” and the witch rules Mika’s been raised with ringing in her ears, is this all just a bomb waiting to explode? The world Mandanna has created is exceedingly cozy and heartfelt, full of people bursting with love who have trouble expressing it due to trauma in their pasts. From the three magical girls to the elderly gay caretakers to the hot, young Irish librarian, each resident of Nowhere House is a lovingly crafted outcast reaching for family. Various threads laid out seemingly haphazardly through the story all come together in surprising ways in the last 30 pages for a finale worthy of the tale that preceded it.

A magical tale about finding yourself and making a found family that will leave the reader enchanted.

A delightful and surprisingly insightful novel follows the junior year abroad of Jacqueline Bouvier, a few years before she became Jackie Kennedy.

Telling the story from the perspective of the young Jacqueline, with only a few flashes forward to her future life, Mah moves season by season through her year, beginning in the fall of 1949 and ending in the summer of 1950. Making good use of historical and biographical details, but not strictly bound by them, Mah follows her heroine from the ocean-liner journey where, as the sole Vassar student in the group, she gets to know the rowdy Smith students with whom she will be studying at the Sorbonne, on through her stay with a host family and her meetings with various French natives of whom her socially conscious mother would definitely not approve. Mah convincingly depicts this year as a pivotal one in Bouvier’s life, both a sentimental and a political education. Jacqueline has her first real romantic and sexual affair with—and has her heart broken by—aspiring novelist John Marquand. And, after having been raised to view communism as strictly evil, she has her eyes opened to the complexities of international politics by her host mother, a concentration camp survivor, and her host sister, who may or may
A boutique fitness studio promises life-changing wellness but hides a dark secret.

When Anita, an Indian American woman in her early 30s, decides to uproot her life and leave her stable job in New York City to move to Los Angeles, she’s positive she knows what she’s doing—or at least that what she tells everyone. Lying about a guaranteed job opportunity at news outlet Gonzo, Anita says goodbye to her overbearing mother and moves into the Gig, a collective housing community: “I had this wild idea that if I changed my surroundings, maybe I’d become a different person, a better person, a success, how if I put three thousand miles between myself and my mom, maybe I wouldn’t care so much about disappointing her, about not being a dutiful Indian daughter.” Anita tells herself that as soon as she gets a fitness studio that the Goddess Effect and its elusive founder, Venus von Turnen. But, of course, the promises of wellness are not all they’re cracked up to be, and with a little probing Anita begins to uncover the Goddess Effect’s seedy underbelly. Marikar successfully provides larger-than-life caricatures of wellness industry denizens and LA residents at large as well as an outrageous mystery waiting to be exposed.

An exploration of how far a person will go for self-actualization.

There’s nothing quite like a David Means story. Jangly, elliptical, apparently autobiographical in some sense (but maybe not), his work functions like a series of Russian nesting dolls, one layer leading inexorably to the next. The 10 pieces in his sixth collection—he is also the author of the novel *Hystopia* (2016)—begin with small scenes, anecdotal encounters: the hospital workers in the title story, “somewhat lonely-looking figures, taking a smoke break, back behind a trailer, leaning toward each other as they talked softly beside a row of neatly trimmed bushes”, the man in the grief encounter group “who lost his teenage daughter two years ago, chasing after a Frisbee into the road.” Means is a genius of the fragment. Some of the narratives here include subtitled sections, a strategy that recalls “Two Ruminations on a Homeless Brother,” which appeared in *Instructions for a Funeral* (2016). But even those that don’t work this way build their effects incrementally, moving back and forth from the action to the reflective eye of the narrator, who bears a striking resemblance to the author himself. Means makes this clear from the opening story, “Clementine, Carmelita, Dog,” which he narrates from the perspective of a canine even as he acknowledges the challenges of doing so. “I wish I could make words be dog,” he writes, “...find the way to inhabit the true dynamic, to imagine a world not defined by notions of power, or morality, or memory, or sentiment, but instead by pure instinct.” What he’s addressing are the limitations of literature as well as its possibilities. This conundrum sits at the center of this remarkable set of stories, which seek to destabilize the illusions of fiction even as they embrace and heighten them. How does he do it? Let’s call it presence, both of the characters and of the writer, whose language lives and grows by such an interplay. “Do your best to be as specific as possible while also bending around the truth so as to protect the living,” he implores in “The Depletion Prompts.”

These brilliant stories exist in the space between desire and complication.
Grounded in the turmoil of recent political, military, and economic life in the Philippines, Melvin's characters grapple with moral dilemmas that grow increasingly complex as their story unfolds. Themes of poverty, exploitation of women, and inhumane wartime brutality underlie the narrative, which unfolds against a backdrop of scenic beauty and rural poverty. Melvin's storyline mines recent (and not-so-recent) Philippine history and is delivered with a healthy dose of drama, conveying a milieu where superstition and folklore can be as controlling as the gaze of television cameras. Peppered with moments of cinematic violence, the account of a family in flux also challenges readers to determine how everything changed in the family's dynamics. As the girls' father once observed, life is determined by a series of subtle, perhaps imperceptible ruptures that can have enormous consequences.

Melvin deftly illustrates that family alliances may be as complicated as political ones.

**THE SLOWWORM’S SONG**

Miller, Andrew

Europa Editions (320 pp.)

$18.00 paper | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-60945-800-3

When a former soldier in the British Army receives a letter inviting him to testify before a Belfast tribunal about a fatal incident that happened 30 years ago, during his tour of duty in Northern Ireland, the reawakened past threatens to destroy not only his hard-won sobriety, but also his newfound—and equally delicate—reconnection with his adult daughter.

Stephen Rose, at the age of 51, has a precarious hold on a quiet existence in Somerset, England. A recovering alcoholic with a wrecked marriage behind him, he is sustained by the reappearance of his life of his daughter, Maggie; by his doctor; and by the unobtrusive support of his Quaker brethren. Stephen knows, however, “how fragile it all is, how we have nothing under our feet, nothing that can be depended on.” A letter requesting his appearance before a Belfast tribunal investigating crimes committed during the Troubles reminds him of this, prompting him to begin the epistle to Maggie that constitutes this moving and insightful narrative. “My head is so crammed with the past,” he writes, “I sometimes have to hang on to things...to stop myself sliding down into it.” Stephen doesn’t slide; he plummets back into the memory of a summer day in Belfast in 1982 when a house search by the British Army turned deadly. The novel’s evocation of that time and place is cinematically clear, and the narrative revolves around that single dread-filled moment. But Stephen’s daily life, in all its middle-aged dreariness and incidental sweetness, is just as sharply drawn, as is his sojourn in the rehab center that sets him on his unsteady feet again and heading back to Belfast. “For a minute or two time circled,” he observes of his first night there.

“I was a fifty-something-year-old lying in the filtered air of the hotel room, and a twenty-something sprawled post-patrol on the black plastic of an army mattress.” This immensely skillful novel suspends the reader, too, in that mysterious midway state.

**A moving drama of trauma and recovery.**

**LUDA**

Morrison, Grant

Del Rey (448 pp.)

$28.00 | Sept. 6, 2022

978-0-593-35530-5

A middle-aged drag queen spins a phantasmagorical yarn about an ill-fated theatrical production and her uncanny protégé in this debut novel. Luci LaBang is hoping for a comeback. Estranged from the band mates who accompanied her original rise to fame and done with reality TV competitions, the nonbinary performer is coaxed out of retirement by the prospect of performing The Phantom of the Pantomime. The show takes the traditional, Orientalist panto play Aladdin and makes it a gothic play within a play, with the titular phantom picking off actors one by one. The inaugural production is a smash hit, but what is meant to be a victory lap remount becomes plagued by eerie mishaps. After the original Principal Boy is hospitalized, the radiant and completely unknown Luda becomes the Aladdin to Luci’s Widow Twankey. Drugs, sex, dubious magic, and mysteries of gender and identity ensue. Morrison has created a captivating and unforgettable narrator in Luci, and every page is thick with bons mots and appealingly lurid descriptions of Glasgow and its denizens. Whether there is too much of a good thing in the novel’s 448 pages depends on the reader’s stamina. Also challenging is Luci’s fat phobia: perhaps unsurprising, given Luci’s preoccupation with her age and appearance, the repeated digs at director Dominick Float’s weight become both tiresome and cruel.

**A sparkling, self-indulgent novel that revels in the transformative and grotesque.**

**KIBOGO**

Mukasonga, Scholastique

Trans. by Mark Polizzotti

Archipelago (160 pp.)

$16.00 paper | Sept. 13, 2022

978-1953861-36-8

A searing tale of contending gods, religions, and economies in colonial Rwanda.

As Mukasonga’s story opens, a village subchief, bribed by a “Colonial” with “a watch, a pair of sunglasses, a bottle of port wine, two Jerry cans of gasoline, [and] a swath of fabric for his wife and daughters,” rounds up the children to serve in the war effort against Germany by harvesting...
anti-malarial flowers. Other agents of change follow: There are the European agronomists who come in to demand that the villagers replace their formerly diverse crops with beans and coffee, then the priests who come in to demand that they give up their “pagan” religious practices in favor of “Yezu.” Drought ensues, and with it the people starve, and with that they recall the old ways, when their king would sacrifice himself or one of his family. Thus Kibogo, the legendary son of a king, offers himself up in one such sacrifice, volunteering in a long-ago time to climb a nearby mountain and call down the clouds in the face of sure death. That high country harbors others who are convinced of their magical powers. One is Akayezu, or “Little Jesus,” who enters a French seminary only to decide that he has divine powers of his own and, without waiting for ordination, preaches a gospel that “compared Kibogo rising to Heaven to Yezu’s ascension, Maria’s Assumption, and the abduction of the Dao Archipelago, the company not only will kill any outsiders who attempt to set foot there, but also has ordered Ha’s death should she attempt to leave. Not that she has any inclination to do so. Once exposed to the octopuses, she is determined to uncover the great mysteries of extrahuman intelligence. In spite of their hostile reputation, these are creatures of transcendent beauty, communicating through glowing visual symbols that move on their skin in complex patterns and sequences.

In a world of robot-operated slave ships, bee-size drones, and AI automonks with three-fingered hands and light receptors for pupils, her main ally is Evrim, the world’s first and possibly last true android, which not only thinks like a human being, but also believes it is conscious. Ha’s benefactor and adversary is Dr. Arnkatla Minervudottir-Chan, the Icelandic brains of the corporation, whose ultimate goal is to create a mind “wiped clean of its limitations.” A prolific writer of SF stories making his debut as a novelist, Nayler maintains a cool, cerebral tone that matches up with the story’s eerie underpinnings. Less an SF adventure than a meditation on consciousness and self-awareness, the limitations of human language, and the reasons for those limitations, the novel teaches as it engages.

An intriguing unlocking of underwater secrets, with the occasional thrill.

As young American adults, Isaac Yaga, busker and pickpocket, and his sister, Bellatine, find themselves in possession of Thistlefoot, a magical house that moves on chicken legs. With their last name as a clue, the house opens a key to their past. They descend from Baba Yaga, the sinister witch of Russian folklore who inhabited such a house. The siblings’ quest will be to defeat the Longshadow Man, a murderous, shape-shifting supernatural enemy. In poetic language, the author leads readers to her definition of evil—the silencing of the brutality of the past. “The body remembers. The soured air remembers. We cannot forget.” Through both humorous and violent ups and downs, Isaac and Bellatine learn to deploy the contents of their strange, fantastical house in pursuit of justice. They bond with other bedeviled young people and revive ghosts through Bellatine’s power of Embering; heat emanates from her hands and wakes the dead. With echoes of Isaac Bashevis Singer and Sholem Aleichem, as well as Buddhist and Christian overtones, the Yasgars unearth their past. They learn they come from people who dreamed and believed, who brought with them to America “languages, folded into the suitcases of their tongues.” They realize they must tell the story of Gedenkova, Russia, where a pogrom destroyed its Jewish inhabitants. Despite its serious subject matter, this novel contains delights on every page. The author displays a capacious imagination, providing an entertaining, colorful read while grappling with subjects of utmost importance to today’s turbulent world.

This book blooms from a fairy tale to a panoptic story that defies space and time, brimming with creativity, wisdom, and love.
The Wire, between religious, political, and judicial institutions.

That’s the predicament facing 12-year-old Emilia Ventura and Rosenthal learns. Even more alarmingly, some of those babies dating another woman named Verónica—Rosenthal hasn’t written of many babies from struggling families in northern Argentina that their father, and uncle in America. Mamá Lochi was a curandera (healer). When she was young, a lightning bolt struck her and left a scar “like a fern with little red branches.” It also gave her the “power of vision and her ability to cure people.” Emilia also has visions, “the seeing thing,” always accompanied by “an insect or a full swarm of them filling [her] vision.” And she can hear voices of her family as she and Gregorio make their journey northward. The topic of border crossings is important, so it’s a pity Osorio Gumá took a simplistic approach. The story relies more on action than introspection. Chapters that alternate between flashbacks of Mamá Lochi’s life and present-day scenes of Emilia and Gregorio’s journey don’t quite reinforce each other. Many of Osorio Gumá’s characters feel imagined but not understood, with hard-boiled lines such as, “As sure as my name is Gregorio Ventura, I’m gonna bust us the hell out of here ASAP.” Readers interested in a more nuanced treatment of curanderas and oppression should turn to Ingrid Rojas Contreras’ memoir, The Man Who Could Move Clouds. Osorio Gumá’s flashbacks are strong and sensitively rendered, however, and rich with memorable details, as when Emilia recalls watching Mamá Lochi make perfect homemade tortillas, which she’d done so often “she didn’t feel anything with her fingertips anymore.”

A sincere attempt to fuse the supernatural with the plight of migrants.

MAD HONEY
Jodi Picoult, Jodi & Jennifer Finney Boylan
Ballantine (464 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-9848-1838-6

The shocking murder of a teenager thrusts a small town into the headlines and destabilizes the lives of everyone who knew her.

Olivia McAfee, a professional beekeeper and single mother, fled Boston and an abusive husband to try to give her son, Asher, a better life in small-town New Hampshire. Things go well for their first 12 years in Adams. Asher is a well-liked senior and captain of the high school hockey team; he barely remembers his abusive father; he and his mother have a great relationship; and he’s preparing to go off to college. Then he meets Lily Campanello, a new girl who, like his mother, has fled a troubled past. Things get very serious quickly; then, one afternoon after they’ve had a fight, Asher finds Lily dead at the bottom of her basement stairs. Before he even has time to grieve, he’s arrested and charged with her murder. What follows is a long and public courtroom trial in which everyone’s secrets are exposed and even his own mother begins to question his innocence. Told in two storylines—one Olivia’s, in the present, and one Lily’s, going backward from the day of her murder—the novel is well plotted but sometimes feels long-winded, including characters who don’t have much

THERE ARE NO HAPPY LOVES
Olguín, Sergio
Trans. by Miranda France
Bitter Lemon Press (352 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-93394-71-4

Brash Buenos Aires journalist Verónica Rosenthal investigates the licensing of adoptions through the Catholic Church—a story with possible ties to the discovery of a truckful of human body parts being investigated by prosecutor Federico Córdova.

Depressed and physically a wreck, still torn over her breakup with Federico—who has stoked her jealous anger by dating another woman named Verónica—Rosenthal hasn’t written anything of substance in months. She manages to pull herself out of her rut when Darío, the cousin of another former lover (who was killed in a previous book), beseeches her to help find his young daughter, Jazmín. Though authorities have ruled the girl and her mother died in a fiery auto crash that Darío barely survived, no remains were found. He is convinced his wife, with whom he was at odds, fled the scene with Jazmín and went into hiding. Jazmín, it turns out, was adopted—one of many babies from struggling families in northern Argentina who were illicitly placed by the church with well-off families, Rosenthal learns. Even more alarmingly, some of those babies were the result of sexual abuse by church officials. Teamming up with María Magdalena, a good nun who became an influential journalist, Rosenthal gets a taste of what bad nuns can be like.

A solid entry in an impressive series.

WHEN YOU GET TO THE OTHER SIDE
Osorio Gumá, Mariana
Trans. by Cecilia Weddell
Cinco Puntos Press (304 pp.)
$20.95 paper | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-94762-761-1

Borders, both territorial and familial, can be hard to cross.

All forms of unwanted separation are painful, with the deaths of beloved family members being the most devastating. Couple that with having to leave one’s homeland, and the suffering is even greater. That’s the predicament facing 12-year-old Emilia Ventura and her 15-year-old brother, Gregorio, who depart their home in Amatlán, Mexico, after their abuela Mamá Lochi dies. Their goal: to be reunited with their father and uncle in America. Mamá Lochi was a curandera (healer). When she was young, a lightning bolt struck her and left a scar “like a fern with little red branches.” It also gave her the “power of vision and her ability to cure people.” Emilia also has visions, “the seeing thing,” always accompanied by “an insect or a full swarm of them filling [her] vision.” And she can hear voices of her family as she and Gregorio make their journey northward. The topic of border crossings is important, so it’s a pity Osorio Gumá took a simplistic approach. The story relies more on action than introspection. Chapters that alternate between flashbacks of Mamá Lochi’s life and present-day scenes of Emilia and Gregorio’s journey don’t quite reinforce each other. Many of Osorio Gumá’s characters feel imagined but not understood, with hard-boiled lines such as, “As sure as my name is Gregorio Ventura, I’m gonna bust us the hell out of here ASAP.” Readers interested in a more nuanced treatment of curanderas and oppression should turn to Ingrid Rojas Contreras’ memoir, The Man Who Could Move Clouds. Osorio Gumá’s flashbacks are strong and sensitively rendered, however, and rich with memorable details, as when Emilia recalls watching Mamá Lochi make perfect homemade tortillas, which she’d done so often “she didn’t feel anything with her fingertips anymore.”

A sincere attempt to fuse the supernatural with the plight of migrants.
A woman adrift in her late 30s contends with a complex constellation of romantic relationships and their effects on her internal and bodily identity.

The unnamed narrator, a 38-year-old Ecuadorian woman, is at something of a crossroads: married quietly, mysterious, and has a small daughter—the protagonist's all-consuming, meticulously described relationship. Though adrenaline-fueled haze, drinking with friends at bars and warehouses, and atmosphere, and almost every scene operates on multiple emotional layers; this makes the narrator fully palpable despite the writing shines brightest. The characters aren't as well developed as they should be, though, often feeling wooden or monochromatic—some always say the right thing while others always say or do the wrong thing—and the ending is predictable.

A well-paced story that highlights several timely issues, with a stimulating courtroom trial that makes it worth reading.

**BLOOD RED**
Ponce, Gabriela
Trans. by Sarah Booker
Restless Books (192 pp.)
$18.00 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-63206-330-4

A profound sibling bond gets the Seagrave children through their dysfunctional childhood and shapes their experiences during World War II.

Cristabel is 4 years old when her widowed father, Jasper Seagrave, remarries. The only redeeming thing about her stepmother, Rosalind, who clearly hates her off the bat, is the prospect that she might produce a brother. Instead, there's a sister, Flossie—but following her father's accidental death and the comfort offered Rosalind by his younger brother, there's a boy cousin, Digby, as well. The three children are raised together in the unusual household at Chilcombe, with Cristabel leading their adventures. These take an exciting turn in 1928, the year Cristabel turns 12, when a dead whale washes up on the beach. The household creates a proscenium stage using its bones, and she becomes the director of a quirky theater company that includes all the adults at Chilcombe, with Cristabel leading their adventures. These take an exciting turn in 1928, the year Cristabel turns 12, when a dead whale washes up on the beach. The household creates a proscenium stage using its bones, and she becomes the director of a quirky theater company that includes all the adults at Chilcombe, among them an avant-garde Russian painter and his girlfriend, Hilly and Philly. But the clock is ticking on this magical world. The war that begins just as the children enter adulthood sweeps them apart and turns Quinn's debut into what feels almost like a different book entirely, driven by fear and suspense rather than whimsy and humor, with scenes of espionage and violence careening toward what one suspects is inevitable tragedy. Which, to be fair, is exactly the sort of thing war does in real life. Told partly with letters, lists, and scrapbook cuttings, there's something old-fashioned about this novel, even in its handling of its sturdy, independent female lead, a Jo March type, if Jo March joined the British special forces and became a secret agent in France.

This big, old-fashioned, seriocomic “crumbling estate” family saga works best before the war comes along.

**KILLERS OF A CERTAIN AGE**
Raybourn, Deanna
Berkley (368 pp.)
$27.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-20068-1

Four female assassins on the brink of retirement are brought back into the game by a surprising assassination attempt—on them.

Since they were recruited in their 20s, Billie, Mary Alice, Helen, and Natalie have been working as secret assassins for a clandestine international organization originally created to hunt Nazis. Now they’re in their mid-60s, and the Museum—as its denizens call the elite group—has sent them on an all-expenses-paid cruise to celebrate their
A unique examination of womanhood as well as a compelling, complex mystery.

**PAINTING BEYOND WALLS**

*Rhodes, David*

*Milkweed (440 pp.)*  
$28.00 | Sept. 13, 2022  
978-1-57131-1-412

A thought-provoking meditation on human relationships at the cellular level as well as our relationship to Earth, the cosmos, and life itself.

Midwestern novelist Rhodes’ latest work is a return to the fictional town of Words, Wisconsin, the setting for *Driftless* (2008) and its sequel, *Jewelweed* (2014). The novel opens in the near-future Chicago of 2027, where the reader is introduced to August Helm, a 30-year-old biochemist working in a research facility at the University of Chicago. After having his position eliminated due to budget cuts and enduring a devastating breakup, August impulsively abandons the big city to return to his hometown in rural Wisconsin, a home he last saw years ago. Although much remains the same (as things do in small Midwestern towns), a new luxury housing development called Forest Gate has been built practically on top of Words, and the locals tolerate the wealthy, gentrifying “Gaters” with varying degrees of grace, suspicion, and resentment. Despite this, August ends up house-sitting for Forest Gate resident April Lux and promptly falls in love with her. A pervasive strangeness begins to permeate the narrative at about the halfway mark; the final third incorporates elements of science fiction and mystery, and what may have seemed to be a meandering narrative picks up steam and accelerates toward a satisfying—and never-the-less surprising—conclusion. Rhodes has a knack for writing acute psychological realism; these characters live and breathe, and by the time the novel ends we feel like we know them. Additionally, several story arcs reveal a humanistic, righteous indignation regarding the violence toward women so endemic to Western civilization, and characters frequently engage in thought-provoking discussions of everything from cellular science to sexual politics and world economies. The epilogue recalls Michel Houellebecq’s *The Elementary Particles* (2000), albeit much more optimistic. Although elements of the novel are adjacent to the near-future SF of writers like Kim Stanley Robinson, Rhodes is primarily concerned with the timeless human phenomena of love, loss, origins, family, and community.

**DESPERATION IN DEATH**

*Robb, J.D.*

*St. Martin’s (368 pp.)*  
$26.09 | Sept. 6, 2022  
978-1-2502-7823-4

The latest update from 2061 pits Lt. Eve Dallas against a crew of professional-grade child traffickers.

All too soon after Dorian Gregg is taken under the wing of Mina Cabot, another 13-year-old Pretty One who’s been snatched from the street and imprisoned in the malignant Academy, their friendship ends when Dorian hurts herself during their nocturnal escape attempt and Mina heroically sacrifices herself and ends up dead. Terrified of every stranger she meets, Dorian falls in with a bunch of street kids who show her more kindness than she’s seen in years. Meanwhile, Dallas and her partner, Det. Delia Peabody, identify the dead girl as Mina, realize that she’s been held captive in luxurious servitude for months (who’d have the interest or the resources for that?), get wind of her vanished companion, and begin a frantic search that will harness the full resources of the NYPSD; Dallas’ billionaire husband, Roarke; and those street kids. Locating Dorian, who was criminally neglected by both her mother and the who-cares Child Services employee assigned to her case, turns out to be less trouble than returning her to something like a normal life, a transition for which Dallas draws freely on her own traumatic history. Robb strains to generate suspense from Dallas’ duel with an illegal organization as formidable in its way as her own legal one, and a good deal better organized. For better or worse, though, this is a full-throated but not especially original indictment of child trafficking wrapped up in a futuristic procedural.

Target audience: readers interested in the differences between Pretty Ones, Servants, Breeders, and Pets.
BEFORE ALL THE WORLD
Rothman-Zecher, Moriel
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)
$27.00  |  Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-374-23166-8

An account of a genocide written by a fictional character named Gittl, translated by a fictional character named Charles into a wildly Yiddishized and jabberwocked version of English.

The premise of Rothman-Zecher’s experimental second novel is that there was a town called Zatelsk where all but two people were taken into the woods and shot in a single afternoon. One of the survivors was a boy named Leyb, the other a girl named Gittl who lost a large family of siblings. Both wind up in 1930s Philadelphia, where Leyb meets an urbane Black man named Charles in a gay bar. Charles introduces young Leyb to the ways of the world and becomes close to Gittl as well. Included in the story are accounts of meetings between Charles and Gittl to discuss the particulars of his translation of her “mayseh,” such as what words should be capitalized, and whether “Kuren Smerti” (list of the dead) can be “oversat” (an anglification of berzetzen, Yiddish for translated) or should be left in the original Ukrainian. There’s also quite a bit of passionate sex, communism, and a long section recording Gittl’s burial prayers for each of her 296 murdered townspeople. (With so many children among them, this has a particularly powerful resonance in the summer of 2022.) Part of a sentence describing Gittl’s life in the “beforemayseh” gives a sense of Rothman-Zecher’s invented language: “Hendl was halfawake—"With so many children among them, this has a particularly powerful resonance in the summer of 2022." Part of a sentence describing Gittl’s life in the “beforemayseh” gives a sense of Rothman-Zecher’s invented language: “Hendl was halfawake—become with Gittl’s upisiting, what served her almost right for the way she had murmured in her sleep nearly the whole night, as in almost every and each night, spoiling and unspoiling phantasmagoric psalms as the moon glimpted over the dustvil-lage, trying vainishly to plug its earholes, yoh, but it could not for it was as though the moon’s hands, wrought from stretches of nightsky, were tightfastened under a blanket of darkness, its starsiblings murmursome and blithely snorish all around it, no bowing or prostrating soever, and this is a good kind of badfeel-ing, how it is to be pinned by one’s siblings’ snorbreathing and sleep-speaking....”

Those who have the patience and receptivity required will be impressed and moved by this one-of-a-kind creation.

VICTORIOUS
Sarid, Yishai
Trans. by Tardene Greenspan
Restless Books (288 pp.)
$22.00  |  Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-63206-312-0

A new novel by a celebrated Israeli writer.

Abigail is a military psychologist. As she treats patients and leads workshops for Israel Defense Forces personnel, she contends also with romantic liaisons, her father’s illness, and her only son’s imminent enlistment. As the novel goes on, it becomes clear that Abigail is not a very good therapist: She sleeps with a former patient, gives up on treating a troubled young man at the nadir of his mental health, and checks her text messages during a session. Moreover, we quickly learn that Abigail’s position is less noble than we might assume. She sees patients with PTSD, but rather than helping them deal with their trauma, Abigail believes her role is to make soldiers into the best and most efficient killers possible. In other words, her labor is for the benefit of the IDF, not the individuals that comprise it. This difference in philosophy causes friction with her father, also a psychologist, and ultimately (and unsurprisingly) comes to a crisis point when Abigail’s son joins the paratroopers and Abigail is forced to approach military psychology not just as an assistant to the army or as the one-time lover of a high-ranking general, but as a mother. As in his previous works, Sarid exposes a troubling element of Israeli culture in an oblique and clever manner. Sarid’s portrayal shows how even the humanity built into these systems intentionally (through the presence of mental health officers, for instance) and implicitly (through a mother-son relationship) cannot redeem the fundamentally inhumane institution of war. By focusing on an element of military culture that is supposedly intended to mitigate harm and showing how it fails to alleviate — and often even worsens — that harm, Sarid’s novel reveals the hollowness of the oft-touted claim that Israel has the “most moral army in the world.” The novel moves slowly and rather predictably, and as a result it sometimes struggles to maintain momentum, but Sarid’s incisive and unflinching social critique makes it worth reading. Though it’s hard to finish this novel feeling positive about war or militaries, make no mistake: This is no screed and Sarid is no ideologue, and though his critique is bold, it is also fairly subtle.

A quietly scathing indictment of military culture.

SOME OF THEM WILL CARRY ME
Scodellaro, Giada
Dorothy (184 pp.)
$16.95 paper  |  Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-948980-15-9

A debut collection of three dozen stories with the logic of dreams. Like dreams, Scodellaro’s stories can feel like a jumble of puzzle pieces that are hard to put together. Take, for example, “Freedom of White Boys in the Sand,” which opens with a girl shouting obscenities at a group of White men, who enjoy a kind of privileged obliviousness while also being on the verge of extinction. Meanwhile, other people dressed in secondhand suits watch her, speculating about why she’s there: Is she a widow looking for a new partner? Or a ghost in search of her murderer? Later, she reveals she’s trying to find her sister, who went off to buy a helicopter. Instead of featuring conventional plots, these pieces, whose protagonists are often Black
women, map physical spaces, focus on characters' bodies and gestures, and inventory objects. All this detail, however, is the opposite of grounding; instead, it creates a profound feeling of dislocation and disconnection, one of the collection's themes. In "YYYY," the narrator prides himself on being observant but fails to see the important things—like his companion's tears. Another character notes that while objects can "tether us," they also "can be meaningless garbage." While some of the longer stories feel wandering, Scedellaro's shorter ones often land with striking intensity. "Cabbage, The Highest Arch" paints an incisive portrait of a woman in two pages, while "The Foot of the Tan Building" contemplates our indifference to tragedy by examining the body of a woman who jumped to her death, "her running shoes exposed, her childlike ankles exposed," and "Forty-Seven Days Ago" uses a grocery list's worth of liquids—"vegetable broth, apple cider vinegar, low sodium soy sauce, extra virgin olive oil..."—to evoke the narrator's heartbrokenness.

**Singular stories that will reward patient readers.**

**THE FURROWS**

**An Elegy**

Serpell, Namwali

Hogarth (288 pp.)

$27.00 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-0-593-44891-5

A woman reckons with her brother's loss in ways that blur reality and memory.

Serpell's brilliant second novel—following *The Old Drift* (2019)—is initially narrated by Cassandra Williams, who recalls being 12 and trying to save her 7-year-old brother, Wayne, from drowning off the shore of a Delaware beach. Did Wayne die after she hauled him to the beach and then blacked out, or did he disappear? Her recollection is fuzzy, as is her entire identity. As the narrative progresses, Cassandra's mind moves forward, as she works for the missing children foundation her mother founded, and back, as she recalls the trauma that consumed her parents and herself. But more engagingly, her mind also moves sideways, reprocessing and rewriting the moment in various ways. (Perhaps Wayne was struck by a car instead?) The second half of the novel is dedicated to the question of Wayne's possible survival, and the storytelling is engrossing on the plot level, featuring terrorist attacks, homelessness, identity theft, racial code-switching (Cassandra's mother is White and her father, Black), seduction—all of which Serpell is expert at capturing. But each drama she describes also speaks to the trauma Cassandra suffers, which makes the novel engrossing on a psychological level as well. It opens questions of how we define ourselves after loss, how broken families find closure, and the multiple painful emotions that spring out of the process. "I don't want to tell you what happened. I want to tell you how it felt," Cassandra says in the novel's first line, and repeatedly after, and Serpell means it. Rather than telling the story straight, the elliptical narrative keeps revisiting the wounds that a tragedy won't stop delivering. If *The Old Drift* was an epic effort to outdo Marquez and Rushdie, this slippery yet admirably controlled novel aspires to outdo Toni Morrison, and it earns the comparison. It's deeply worthy of rereading and debate. Stylistically refreshing and emotionally intense, cementing Serpell's place among the best writers going.

**SIGNAL FIRES**

Shapiro, Dani

Knopf (240 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-0-593-53472-4

Two families in suburban New York weather crisscrossing births and deaths, losses and rebounds.

Shapiro, who made a splash with her gripping genealogy memoir, *Inheritance* (2019), returns to fiction with this moody, meditative novel, her 11th book. The story opens in 1985, Fifteen-year-old Theo Wilf is driving the family car; his older sister, Sarah, riding shotgun, has been drinking; their friend in the back seat is killed in a wreck right in front of their house. To protect her brother, Sarah claims she was at the wheel. Surprisingly, considering it gets our attention with this super-plotty device, the book is actually more concerned with character development and metaphysical questions than event-driven storytelling. To understand the effects of the tragedy on the siblings, their parents, and the universe, we are guided by an omniscient narrator to moments in 2010, 1999, 2020, 2014, and 1970; Sarah becomes a screenwriter with addiction problems; Theo, a tortured master chef. The book's anti-chronological structure reflects the yearning, felt by both the characters and their rather insistent narrator, toward the epiphanic idea that everything is connected; nothing and no one is ever truly lost. Across the street from the Wilfs are the Shenkmans—and it's a good thing for them, since paterfamilias Dr. Wilf will deliver baby Waldo, premature and wrapped in his cord, on the kitchen floor on New Year's Eve of YzK. Theo and Waldo will share a lifelong connection; at 9, Waldo will show him an app he loves that charts constellations and geography. This app becomes a literal bridge between the loneliness of modern suburban living and the book's dream of connectivity. "The stars, rather than appearing distant and implacable, seemed to be signal fires in the dark, mysterious fellow travelers lighting a path; one hundred thousand million luminous presences beckoning from worlds away. See us. We are here. We have always been here. We will always be here."

Wears its philosophical intentions on its sleeve; well-developed characters and their interesting careers seal the deal.
In John’s case, that happened when he traveled to the United States as a young man after having survived the Holocaust; for Katya, it was for professional reasons. Their paths first cross in Paris; John sees Katya dance and is immediately captivated by her. He sees her again in New York, where they live, and experiences a kind of revelation: “He was awash in a mysterious sensation: she was a song being born.” Eventually, they embark on a relationship. Complicating matters is Katya’s ongoing personal and professional relationship with the choreographer with whom she’s worked since her teens—and yes, at least one supporting character comments on the troubles inherent to this dynamic. But for Katya, the importance of art is paramount: “Mr. Yanakov was her means to dance. She needed dance in order to be. How could she imagine that she could date John with the insouciance of an ingenue?” As John grapples with his own experience of childhood trauma, Toll creates a sense of mystery as to whether the bond between these two people will solidify or end in a rupture—and throughout, these flawed characters facing complex decisions are given their due.

An affecting chamber piece with plenty to say about art, trauma, and healing.

A dancer and a doctor embark on a tentative romance in 1960s New York. The parallels between Katya Symanova and John Curtin, the two central characters in this empathetic novel, are clear from its early pages. Both have dedicated themselves to their work—Katya to her achievements as a dancer, John to his career as a psychiatrist. Both have experienced a renaming process of sorts. In John’s case, that happened when he traveled to the United States as a young man after having survived the Holocaust; for Katya, it was for professional reasons. Their paths first cross in Paris; John sees Katya dance and is immediately captivated by her. He sees her again in New York, where they live, and experiences a kind of revelation: “He was awash in a mysterious sensation: she was a song being born.” Eventually, they embark on a relationship. Complicating matters is Katya’s ongoing personal and professional relationship with the choreographer with whom she’s worked since her teens—and yes, at least one supporting character comments on the troubles inherent to this dynamic. But for Katya, the importance of art is paramount: “Mr. Yanakov was her means to dance. She needed dance in order to be. How could she imagine that she could date John with the insouciance of an ingenue?” As John grapples with his own experience of childhood trauma, Toll creates a sense of mystery as to whether the bond between these two people will solidify or end in a rupture—and throughout, these flawed characters facing complex decisions are given their due.

An affecting chamber piece with plenty to say about art, trauma, and healing.
a formidable command of physical and emotional detail. Her more intimate set pieces deliver sensual, erotic vibrations, and, most crucially for a novel that takes its title from Jelly Roll Morton, she knows how to write about the way it feels to deliver jazz—and receive it.

A captivating modern romance evoking love, loss, recovery, and redemption.

**PERISH**
Watkins, LaToya
Tiny Reparations (336 pp.)
$27.00 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-593-18591-9

A Texas family deals with a long history of abuse.

“We give up easy,” says one character to her cousin. “Something killed the fight in us.” That’s an understatement. Watkins’ debut follows four members of a family who reunite in their hometown of Jerusalem, Texas, to say goodbye—or something like it—to their ailing matriarch, Helen Jean, who’s hospitalized and not expected to make it out. There’s Julie B., Helen Jean’s only surviving child, who’s 61 and of its own melancholy—the characters are as unlucky as any this side of Hanya Yanagihara’s *A Little Life* (2015). But despite a melodramatic climactic scene, the novel is saved from total oblivion by Watkins’ writing, which is strong, and her gift for realistic dialogue. It’s not a bad novel, but one gets the feeling that Watkins is capable of much more.

**Suffocatingly sad.**

**WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON**
Wong, Ryan Lee
Catapult (336 pp.)
$24.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-64622-148-6

A young Asian American aspiring radical returns home to Los Angeles for a few history lessons.

Reed, the hero of Wong’s debut, is the child of activists. His Chinese father is a labor organizer, while his Korean mother worked to unify LA’s Black and Korean communities in the 1980s. Returning home from a semester at Columbia, he wants to do his bit as well: Inspired by a case involving a Chinese NYPD officer, Reed is preparing to quit school and become a full-time activist. His experiences in LA, from a Brentwood yoga studio to a Koreatown dance club to a South Central chicken-and-waffles joint and a climactic downtown street protest, serve as a challenge to his easy Twitter-born outrage and idealism; determined to learn more about his mother’s Black-Korean coalition and apply its lessons to his own work, he mostly runs into dead ends. Wong does a nice job of framing Reed’s experience around some compelling characters: Reed’s witty and brash mother; his sage dad; and his best friend, CJ, who’s eager to pour some cold water on Reed’s idealism. (A fine set piece in the Koreatown dance club leaves the story while underscoring the persistent racism in the community.)

But Reed, for his part, is something of an empty vessel, buffeted by the rhetoric of his leftist organizer friends at Columbia and his progressive but more earthbound parents. (“All I’m saying, my son, is to not take your precious theories so seriously,” Reed’s mom tells him, one of a number of similarly patronizing lectures.) Indeed, between Reed’s blankness and the brief, brisk story, the novel feels like an updated, more socially aware *Less Than Zero*. The tale of Reed’s reckoning is compelling, and Wong thoughtfully questions various activist practices without rejecting them. But a stronger novel might better weave in the characters along with the back-and-forths on social justice.

**A promising coming-of-(political)-age debut.**

**SPELLS FOR FORGETTING**
Young, Adrienne
Delacorte (368 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-593-35851-1

Debut adult novel from the bestselling author of *The Last Legacy* (2021) and *Namesake* (2021).

August Salt was 18 when he was accused of murdering his friend Lily Morgan. No longer welcome on Saoirse, the tiny Pacific Northwest island where they lived, he and his mother moved to the mainland, changed their last name, and started a new life. Fourteen years later, his mother’s insistence
that her ashes he buried on her ancestral home sends him back to a place he didn’t expect to see again. For most of Saoirse’s residents, his return is unwelcome. For Emery Blackwood, it stirs up feelings she’s spent her whole adult life trying to suppress. An isolated community, an unsolved mystery, long-buried secrets coming to light: This is a classic setup for psychological suspense or gothic horror, and this story offers a bit of both. But it also offers a little something extra: The women of Saoirse are witches. You have written several young adult novels full of invention, adventure, and sorcery. By the end of this novel, though, it’s hard to escape the conclusion that she decided writing for grown-ups means combining a dour, lifeless tone with a plot that barely moves. And there’s something almost perverse about a narrative with a witch protagonist being so miserly with magic. The central tensions driving the story are pretty simple. Neither Emery nor August has ever recovered from the abrupt end of their youthful romance. August and Emery only end of their youthful romance. Lily’s murderer has never been found. The people of Saoirse are worried that August will try to reclaim the orchard that his grandfather left to the community. Saoirse is a place unlike any other. The most compelling of these—the mystery surrounding Lily’s death, the unique nature of the island—get the least attention. August and Emery only decide to investigate their friend’s murder late in the novel. And, despite every first-person narrator here assuring us that Saoirse is a singular place with its own rules, the island comes across like any other small, insular place that depends on a seasonal tourism industry—sporadic acts of witchcraft notwithstanding.

Hovers awkwardly between YA fantasy/romance and magical realism for grown-ups.

MURDER ON THE POET’S WALK

Adams, Ellery
Kensington (304 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-4967-2948-4

Storyton Hall hosts a poetry contest someone may be willing to kill to win. Jane Steward is not only the manager of Storyton, the mansion-turned-high-end book-themed resort, but also a member of the family that owns the country estate. Secretly, Storyton is also the repository for a library of extremely valuable books and artifacts that have long been guarded by a secret society whose members include Jane’s boyfriend. Now a card company has brought together a number of poets competing to write short poems for a new series of greeting cards. Jane’s staff has everything well in hand, but she has personal worries about her Uncle Aloysius, who seems to be losing his memory, and her Aunt Octavia, who’s ignoring the problem. There are three favorites to win the competition, and when Jane discovers one of them dead in a canoe, posed to look like Tennyson’s Lady of Shalott, she knows she has yet another tricky murder to handle. Luckily, plenty of friends have helped her solve other crimes, especially her butler, Mr. Butterworth, and her librarian, Mr. Sinclair. Even her twin sons pitch in, discovering hidden passages that riddle the house and provide clues. The contest’s two other front-runners are certainly suspects, but when another of them is murdered and posed to look like the drowned Ophelia from Hamlet, the remaining woman seems more petrified than guilty. Someone has found a way into the secret repository and stolen several items, putting even more pressure on Jane to solve the crimes.

A literary mystery with a puckish hint of Nancy Drew.

SECRETS OF THE NILE

Alexander, Tasha
Minotaur (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-2508-1969-7

In 1904, an Egyptian vacation turns into a quest to solve several mysteries. Lady Emily and her husband, Colin Hargreaves, a former agent of the British Crown, accompany his mother, Ann, who’s been invited by her lifelong friend Lord Bertram Deeley to visit his home in Luxor. Also in their party is Colin’s daughter, Katarina von Lange, a product of his rocky relationship with Emily. Even so, the trip up the Nile by boat is delightful. Colin and Emily remain onboard in Luxor rather than stay at Lord Deeley’s home, but they do dine there and meet the other houseguests Deeley has been so happy to bring together: Caspian Troubridge; the politician Inigo Grannard and his wife, Adelaide; Lady Wilona Bestwick and companion Pandora Evans; and Dr. Oliver Rockley. The first night’s dinner guest is archaeologist Tristan McLeod. When Deeley offers a toast and then collapses and dies—the smell of almonds in his glass—cracks immediately appear in the relationships among the guests. The police are convinced the poisoner was a servant, but Emily and Colin’s long experience of solving murders suggests otherwise. As it turns out, Deeley was not as beloved as he first appeared, but tracking down possible motives and winnowing out the truth will not be easy.

The unusual background and Agatha Christie twist make for an enjoyable and informative read.
Aunt Liliana’s house, but she does want to honor her memory. Never fear; enough suspects will remain.

Then There Were None

Mind you, she knows pride is a sin, but she’s determined to let

12 days of Christmas and a dozen hidden references to earlier

Murder. As Christmas passes into New Year’s and beyond, the

age-Feathers, whom she doesn’t much like at all and suspects of

able circumstances on Boxing Day 21 years ago, doesn’t want her

are hidden in 12 sonnets, each one of which will be made avail-

appropriate legacy is to hide anagrammatic clues to 12 possible

and Rachel Armitage, whom she rather likes, and Sara Armit-

and the Timber Lake police may

dead in a bowl of the cobbler, and the Timber Lake police may

Murder by peach cobbler implicates

of Books & Biscuits, a soul food bookstore and cafe. But Mama

But as carefully as Tim measured the storage space the couple

A standard cozy soaked in soul food.

And Then There Were None. Never fear; enough suspects will remain at the end to make the big reveal moderately surprising, though

The twin sister he was reunited with as an adult, can’t help but

tease her about the excitement surrounding the day, especially

because they’re usually the ones running around as the owners of

Of Books & Biscuits, a soul food bookstore and cafe. But Mama

MURDER IN A CAPE COTTAGE
Day, Maddie
Kensington (288 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-4967-3567-6

A home improvement project goes ghoulishly wrong for a soon-to-be-wed couple.

Murder by peach cobbler implicates the chosen family of the twin owners of a Pacific Northwest bookstore and cafe.

It’s showtime for Mama Zola, who wants to impress with her cooking for the Annual Founder’s Day Potluck at her new church home, Everlasting Missionary Baptist Church, now that she’s moved to Timber Lake. Mind you, she knows pride is a sin, but she’s determined to let everyone know that her peach cobbler is next to godliness, or not far off. Her foster son, Koby Hill, and Keaton Rutledge, the twin sister he was reunited with as an adult, can’t help but

MURDER IN A CAPE COTTAGE

MURDER GAME

A courtier returns to her late aunt’s home in Yorkshire for one last Christ-

mas reunion that promises more sorrow than joy.

Liliana Armitage-Feathers was always an incorrigible game player. Now that she’d dead, her idea of an appropriate legacy is to hide anagrammatic clues to 12 possible keys to an unknown place where the deeds to Endgame House are hidden in 12 sonnets, each one of which will be made available to her prospective heirs on one of the 12 days of Christ-

A home improvement project goes ghoulishly wrong for a soon-to-be-wed couple.

SOUL OF A KILLER
Collette, Abby
Berkley (320 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-33620-5

Murder by peach cobbler implicates the chosen family of the twin owners of a Pacific Northwest bookstore and cafe.

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A standard cozy soaked in soul food.

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**A RELUCTANT SAINT**

**Fields, Tricia**  
Severn House (240 pp.)  
$29.99 | Sept. 6, 2022  
978-1-44830-687-9  

The promise of new commercial development in a West Texas town turns to ashes.

Granted, not everyone in Artemis is excited about the new greyhound racing track Mike Striker wants to open. Lots of townsfolk just don’t see the point, and Police Chief Josie Gray isn’t even sure that it’s legal. But Mike is so convinced the idea is brilliant that instead of running for reelection in the state senate, he announces that he’s challenging Simon O’Kane, the town’s mayor. Though it’s more than a little embarrassing for Josie, who’s been discreetly seeing Simon on and off for several months, it seems like a brass ring for Jezebel Black. Fired from her job as a river tour guide after an unfortunate fatality, Jezebel’s approached by Mike to breed greyhounds for the track. Then it all goes bad. Two of Jezebel’s canine charges go missing, and Jezebel herself is found dead in a ravine. Even worse, Officer Marta Cruz is shot to death in the basement of a firehouse to which she’s been lured, reducing the number of officers Josie supervises to one. Fields scatters suspicion generously. Mike is feuding with his brother, Morey, over his questionable methods in general and the track in particular, and Marta’s alcoholic ex-husband, Javier, might well be capable of killing her if he could rouse himself to return from Mexico. In the end, the guilt is distributed over a surprising number of suspects, at least one of whom seems to pop up from nowhere.

A warm, empathetic, but not very mysterious dispatch from America’s heartland.

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**BEST PRACTICES**

**Florio, Gwen**  
Severn House (240 pp.)  
$29.99 | Sept. 6, 2022  
978-0-72785-072-0  

Dark doings at a rehab facility.

After a self-described “summer from hell” marked by her husband’s infidelity, his subsequent murder, a kidnapping, and a disquieting sojourn at her childhood home on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, Nora Best is ready for a change. She hopes to find it with a job at Serendipity Ranch, a facility in remote northwestern Montana catering to what Charlie Ennis, its director, calls “troubled” teenage girls. Charlie, an affable older gentleman, somehow manages to convince Nora that the ranch’s draconian behavior management system, which includes public shaming, isolation, and food deprivation, is actually therapeutic. Immediately on arrival, Nora faces a crisis: Irene Bell, one of the ranch’s charges, has been found dead at the bottom of a ravine. Although it isn’t clear whether her fall was an accident or suicide, what is clear is that Ennis expects Nora, a former communications expert, to handle the public face of the tragedy. Florio focuses her energy on Nora’s internal struggles with her situation, giving the reader so little information about Irene that it’s almost impossible to be drawn in to the puzzle of her demise. Even after a second death, Nora’s painfully long effort to separate the good guys from the bad guys forces the mystery to a near standstill. Hopefully not a harbinger of a new genre: the child abuse cozy.

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**THE SOCIALITE’S GUIDE TO MURDER**

**Golden, S.K.**  
Crooked Lane (320 pp.)  
$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-1-63910-176-4  

Golden’s debut dives back into 1958 Manhattan in pursuit of a killer who’s stalking the Pinnacle Hotel.

Maybe *lounging around* would be more exact than *stalking*, since the leisurely felonies kick off with the head-scratching theft of painter Billie Bell’s hefty latest canvas during a crowded reception where nobody notices a thing. Evelyn Elizabeth Grace Murphy, daughter of the Pinnacle’s absent owner, is concerned when suspicion falls on Henry Fox, an old movie-star friend whose official story is that he’s in love with her. She needn’t worry, though, since Billie’s fatal stabbing with a knife inscribed with head security guard Phil Hall’s initials leads to Phil’s arrest instead. Convinced that neither of them could possibly be guilty, Evelyn, a shameless clotheshorse who artlessly observes, “I wore whatever Marilyn Monroe was wearing,” joins forces with bellhop Mac Cooper, her secret love, and Amelia, the precocious 8-year-old stepdaughter of a visiting French diplomat, to discover the truth. For her pains, her room is broken into and ransacked and the brakes on her Rolls tampered with. But Evelyn, who’s always been good at finding things even though she realizes midway through her first case that she’s clinically agoraphobic, unmasks the killer at a climactic gathering at which she exults, “Poirot always does this,” en route to a nifty final twist that’s the high point of the so-so plot. When the heroine’s father scolds her at the end for spending so much money, you have to sympathize. A catty yet decorous whodunit festooned with period trappings.
“The Seaside Knitters become enmeshed in a murder whose suspects are mostly their friends and neighbors.”

A DARK AND SNOWY NIGHT
Goldbaum, Sally
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-4967-2940-8

The Seaside Knitters become enmeshed in a murder whose suspects are mostly their friends and neighbors.

The wise Birdie Favazza leads a group of friends and amateur sleuths that includes lobster company owner Cass Halloran Brandley, yarn studio maven Izzy Perry, and Nell’s dearest college friend, who died from cancer, comes to for the low-key comfort of Hideaway Grove, California. Though they’re breaking out every minute. After Nell discovers Lidia dead in a snowdrift in the mayor’s yard, a little snooping into her background reveals a long list of people who may have wished her dead. Sadly, most of them are liked and respected by the sleuths, who nevertheless resolve to track down every clue necessary to find the culprit.

Good friends, good food, and a murder combine in a delightful holiday cozy.

SEAMS LIKE MURDER
Howell, Dorothy
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-4967-2940-8

A 20-something looking for respite in a new town finds herself in trouble when she becomes the obvious suspect in a surprising murder.

Call it keeping a low profile or hiding out: Abbey Chandler’s left Los Angeles for the low-key comfort of Hideaway Grove, California. Though she’d been in LA for less than a year, Abbey hadn’t been prepared for the way work drama took over her life, and memories of summers with her Aunt Sarah in Hideaway Grove make her think that this could be the perfect opportunity to restore and rebuild. Sarah converts a room in her shop, Sarah’s Sweets, so that Abbey can take over some sewing projects and craft a niche for herself. Abbey’s no sewing whiz, but she can learn, right? Sarah’s connected to a charity project that turns old pillowcases into dresses for African girls, and though the idea might seem to come from a bygone generation, the author’s notes and appended sewing directions link it to ongoing real-world charities. Abbey’s limited sewing skills are eclipsed when she sees the town’s latest librarian, Iris Duncan, mowed down by a car. And not just any car, but a car that looks just like Abbey’s—at least, according to the local sheriff’s department. Hideaway Grove isn’t the sort of place to have a murder, or is it? Abbey starts to wonder. To retrieve her car and clear her name, Abbey must get to know the community and find out if there’s something hiding under the surface of Hideaway Grove.

A new series launch with Howell’s signature spunk still sinks under a premise that’s not up to the challenge.

BLACKMAIL AND BIBINGKA
Manansala, Mia P
Berkley (288 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-20171-8

Lila Macapagal and the gang at and around Tita Rosie’s Kitchen return for a third round of murder most savory.

Even before he left the home of his mother, Lila’s Tita Rosie—the most celebrated Filipina restaurateur in Shady Palms, Illinois—Ronnie Flores was nothing but trouble. Now that he’s breezed back into town with plans to open a winery specializing in Filipino vintages, he promises more of the same, as an anonymous note about “Ronnie Flores and Co.” demands $50,000 from Tita Rosie “or the world will know what they did in Florida” darkly hints. This time, though, the trouble seems to be centered on the “they” Ronnie’s gathered around him: his engaged partners, charming Isabel “Izzy” Ramos-Garcia and taciturn Pete Miller; his principal backers, Xander Cruz and his fiancee, Denise Sutton; and their assistants, Olivia and Quentin March, who also happen to be Denise’s stepchildren. Wasting no time after their arrival, Denise concludes a welcome party by collapsing with a dose of alcohol poisoning that Det. Jonathan Park suspects is something even worse. He’s right, of course: Denise has been treated to a fatal dose of methanol, and it’s up to Lila to take time out from her nonstop baking for her Brew-ha Café to mingle with the suspects, ask nosy questions, and figure out which of them most wanted Denise defunct before anyone else follows. The mystery, as in Lila’s first two cases, is upstaged by a parade of food and drink so exquisite that most readers, even before pecking at the four sumptuous recipes that are the real climax of this drama, would happily share Denise’s last libation even if it meant risking her fate.

Hands down the tastiest whodunit you’ll consume this year.
Irish helmsman who replaced William Schmidt, Capt. Thomas Harrison’s usual pilot aboard fiancé’s death. Then a fire at a munitions factory kills dozens and crew members. Suspicion quickly falls on John Conway, the sailor’s weapon from the local armory. Despite scheduling hours on the bullet is not in the system, and a search for army sharpshooters reveals that all of them were sent home from the front mentally and physically unfit. Still, someone has stolen a sniper’s weapon from the local armory. Despite scheduling hours of extra manpower and calling in every favor, Harper’s force is getting nowhere. They identify one marksman with mental problems in a local hospital, but he seems harmless. When his boss dies and Harper is made acting chief constable, his problems only increase. There’s more paperwork, attempted bribes and his unsavory lieutenant, Seamus O’Hagan. The cost will be too high, but eventually Mickey will uncover a plot whose instigators Odden has shielded from suspicion by the simple expedient of omitting them from the “Select Character List” that introduces the tale. The appended “Reading Group Questions,” by contrast, are uncommonly provocative.

A densely imagined anatomy of Victorian skulduggery with a heaping side of Irish troubles.
scenes such as “three old men...the gangster, the KGB colonel and the trades union official” playing snooker, drinking whiskey, and thinking maybe this is all they really need in life. The mysteries are complex, the characters vivid, and the whole thing is laced with warm humor and—remarkably, considering the body count—good feeling.

Your next must-read mystery series.

**MURDER AT THE SERPENTINE BRIDGE**
Penrose, Andrea
Kensington (304 pp.)
$27.00 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-4967-3253-8

An aristocratic sleuthing duo seeks a killer in Regency London’s back alleys and drawing rooms.

The Earl of Wrexford and his wife, Charlotte, have had a great deal of experience with mysteries, and their wards, Raven and Hawk, former street urchins with a scientific bent, are always up for a new adventure. So when their dog turns up a body floating in Hyde Park’s lake, the Serpentine, their curiosity is piqued. The late Jeremiah Willis—whose father was a formerly enslaved man from Virginia and mother a White Englishwoman—was an inventor of note, and Wrexford and Charlotte soon learn that his orphaned nephew, young Peregrine, stands to inherit a large estate from the other side of his family. But Peregrine’s Uncle Belmont, who turns out to be married to Charlotte’s brother’s sister-in-law, resents the fact that his older brother’s late-in-life son will inherit the estate he’d long regarded as his. The boys soon become friends, and Peregrine joins the Wrexfords in London, where a government representative asks Wrexford to find the person who killed Willis and stole the design for a revolutionary rifle and, of course, to recover the papers setting forth that design. The representative, who’s not above a little blackmail, hints that his higher-ups know that Charlotte is the gadfly illustrator A.J. Quill, who often criticizes government policy. In honor of a celebration of peace, London is awash in visiting leaders and royals, including the czar of Russia. Once Wrexford learns that there’s to be a secret auction for the papers, he determines with the help of his family and friends to find them first and uncover a killer.

A charming, action-packed mix of historical mystery and Regency romance.

**SINISTER GRAVES**
Rendon, Marcie R.
Soho Crime (240 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-641-29383-9

The discovery of a nameless corpse gives Ojibwe college student Renee “Cash” Blackbear another excuse to slack off from her studies.

Norman County Sheriff Dave Wheaton may have rescued Cash from the car crash that claimed her mother’s life and taken her under his wing years ago, but that doesn’t mean she has to like every one of his ideas for her life. When North Dakota’s spring floods lead to the discovery on Little Lake of a pregnant woman who’s been bashed and smothered to death, it’s a godsend for Cash, because Wheaton once again calls on her for unofficial aid. Soon after the victim is identified as Edie Birch, a second body is washed up by the floodwaters: that of Lori White Eagle, from Devils Lake. Cash, who sees portents and feels emotional vibrations that pass other people by, is convinced that the two women can be traced to the church led by Pastor John Steene, whose wife, Lillian, is the organist. The Steenes are more than receptive to her appearance at the church, inviting her for meals and urging her to return. But her questions about the two child-sized graves on the church grounds are met with a stony silence that convinces her their cordial hospitality is only one aspect of their relationship with local young women. Rendon’s clipped style perfectly complements the laconic dialogue of Cash and her cavalier indifference to her schoolwork, her friends, her neighbors, and virtually everything else except for those two graves.

Not much mystery but lots of menace in this hyperunderstated character piece.

**A DEATH IN DOOR COUNTY**
Ryan, Annelise
Berkley (336 pp.)
$27.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-44157-2

An outdoor paradise turns deadly. Door County, along Lake Michigan, offers recreational boaters and sport fishermen a “tiny slice of bliss.” But something beneath the water’s tranquil surface is leaving a trial of death. It starts with animals, a fish and a deer whose bodies appear to have been mauled by a giant creature on the scale of the Loch Ness monster. Later there are human victims with distinctive, disturbing bite marks: kayaker Oliver Sykes and salmon fisher Will Stokstad. Jon Flanders, chief of police on Washington Island, is concerned enough to hire Morgan Carter, who owns Odds and Ends, a shop filled with examples of nature gone wrong. Morgan, who spent her formative years traveling the world with her cryptozoologist parents in search of monsters including Nessie herself, has a healthy respect
for the supernatural. So she’s more than sympathetic to Flanders’ concern that there may be some fantastical creature in the lake preying on unsuspecting tourists. But she’s enough of a pragmatist to realize that there are many possible reasons for humans to kill other humans. As she investigates, she begins to form a bond with Flanders, but memories of toxic past relationships limit her ability to trust him. A terrifying encounter on the lake urges her onward to get quite literally to the bottom of the mystery.

A satisfying adventure cozy.

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY

NOTORIOUS SORCERER
Evans, Davinia
Orbit (448 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-316-39803-9

An untrained magician assumes the mantle of unlikely hero. Siyon makes his living delving into magical planes to harvest rare materials for the alchemists of Bezim, the only city in the world where interplanar travel is possible. After he trades away a phoenix feather to a well-connected young man who promptly disappears, Siyon must find a way to recover the missing boy or face banishment or execution. Meddling with the planes in this way carries the risk of shifting them dangerously out of alignment, which might have set Evans’ novel up for an intense climax were it not for a dearth of information about the story’s most vital aspects, including magic, local laws, international politics, race, and class. Centuries of esoteric laws and theorems govern alchemy and sorcery, but the novel does not explain how these magical systems function or the ways in which they differ, both in law and in practice. Bezim’s biased legal system favors the azatani and oppresses both foreigners and the bravi, but we never learn whether azatani and bravi refer to races or social classes. In fact, azatani seems to mean both a race and a social class, although we’re left in the dark regarding how the oft-referenced “tiers” of azatani—with their names all ending in -uni—organize themselves. Furthermore, it is possible to be both azatani and bravi without being mixed-race. That Evans leaves these concepts obfuscated via glaring omissions precludes readers’ basic understanding of how Siyon’s world works. The novel’s most interesting subplots are two romances—one hinted at, one consummated, and both queer—but neither reaches a satisfying conclusion.

Half-explained political dynamics and magical laws mar an otherwise passable fantasy outing.

BABEL
Kuang, R.F.
Harper Voyager (560 pp.)
$28.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-06-302142-6

Can the British Empire, built on the power of foreign languages and magic, maintain its grip on the globe? In 1829, professor Richard Lovell brings a young Chinese boy now known as Robin Swift from his home in Canton to England. Saved from the cholera outbreak that claimed the rest of his family, Robin has the chance to begin a new, comfortable life at professor Lovell’s estate. In exchange for food and lodging, he will spend years studying Latin, Greek, and Mandarin to prepare himself to enter Oxford’s Royal Institute of Translation, known as Babel. In Oxford, Robin meets other students who are not so different from him: young people brought to England from other countries to maintain the empire. Britain has built its power upon silver bars and the magical powers imparted to them by translation, but in order to maintain that power, Britain needs foreigners and their languages. Though Robin and his friends are met with racism, they also find true joy in their studies and the heady business of translation. Soon, Robin learns of the secretive Hermes Society, a group working against the hegemony of the Royal Institute of Translation. As Robin’s studies continue, he begins to question the colonial machine from which he can’t seem to break free. Kuang draws a keen parallel between extracting knowledge and extracting resources, examining the terrible power of systems built on inequality and the uncomfortable experiences of the marginalized within those systems, whether due to race or gender. While occasionally hampered by rather self-aware critiques of colonialism, in general this is an expansive, sympathetic, and nevertheless scathing critique of Western imperialism and how individuals are forced to make their peace with the system and survive or to fight back and face the consequences. It’s ambitious and powerful while displaying a deep love of language and literature.

Dark academia as it should be.

NONA THE NINTH
Muir, Tamsyn
Tordotcom (480 pp.)
$28.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-25-085411-7

The third installment of a necromantic science-fantasy series continues working at puzzles of identity and the meaning of loyalty. Previously (Gideon the Ninth, 2019; Harrow the Ninth, 2020), sullen but
brilliant necromancer Harrowhark consumed the soul of Gideon, her foulmouthed cavalier, to become a Lyctor, a semi-immortal officer in the Emperor Undying’s court. In a desperate attempt to preserve Gideon's identity, Harrow deliberately erased the other woman from her memories, leaving herself confused to the point of delusion, unable to access her full powers, and vulnerable to enemies both within and without the Emperor's court. This novel introduces Nona, a sweet but extraordinarily naive young woman who appears to be in Harrowhark's body but with Gideon's golden eyes, lacking both necromantic abilities and any memories prior to six months ago. Nona's been happy despite her precarious living situation in a war-torn city threatened by the necromantic Houses and their foe, the Blood of Eden. Unfortunately, what fragile peace she has cannot last, and everything depends on recovering Nona's memories and returning to Harrowhark's home in the Ninth House, there to finally release the deadly threat lurking in the Locked Tomb. But who is Nona, really: Harrowhark, Gideon, a blend of both?

A deceptively quiet beginning rockets to a thrilling finale, preparing us for the next volume's undoubtedly explosive finish.

**DUKE MOST WICKED**

*Bell, Lenora*

Avon/HarperCollins (400 pp.)

$8.99 paper | Sept. 27, 2022

A musician plays her way into the heart of a duke.

Miss Viola Beaton has an unusual name, but it’s a good fit for the spinster daughter of a world-renowned (and now shunned) composer. She herself is an excellent composer but shields her work behind a male pseudonym and, to keep her small family from penury, focuses most of her energy on being a music instructor to the five sisters of the Duke of Westbury. Well, and maybe a little energy on peeking at the duke himself, Brandon Delamar. He’s attractive but entirely off-limits; in any event, he’s also known as “Wicked Westbury” and known to deliberately avoid his noble obligations after a lifetime of shame and cruelty from his father. But when he discovers that his neglect and family debt have ruined his sisters’ chances at decent marriages, he pledges to reform. His obtuse early attempts to make amends earn him a stern talking-to from Viola, and their first clash brings their chemistry into view. He realizes she’s crucial to a happy household, and they work together more closely as he searches for a proper duchess with a proper fortune and she helps prepare the girls for their season. A series of dramatic incidents heighten the passion between them, but both have serious debts that loom over their budding love and might crush it entirely. The third Wallflowers vs. Rogues title focuses on another member of London’s proto-feminist Boadicea Club but doesn’t have quite the spark of earlier entries. Though the intimate scenes between Viola and Brandon are steamy, and there are the usual humorous moments readers expect from Bell, the plot is bland, and the frequent musical metaphors can be distracting. Brandon isn’t quite as wicked as his nickname would suggest, though he’s a serviceable rake archetype. But fans of the series will still find moments to love, including a first-class proposal, and the relationships between Viola and Brandon’s sisters are a particular high point.

A bland historical romance with occasional grace notes.

**LIZZIE BLAKE’S BEST MISTAKE**

*Eddings, Mazey*

St. Martin’s Griffin (310 pp.)

$16.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022

978-1-2508-0600-0

A delightfully scatterbrained baker prefers one-night stands to relationships—until a sexy Australian marketing executive visits her city and turns her life upside down.

Lizzie Blake is relatively happy in spite of a lonely childhood. She has a tightknit group of friends and loves working as a baker, although she has a hard time holding down a steady job due to chronic lateness. Thanks to dating apps, she has all the sex partners she wants. Lizzie likes to keep ‘em and leave ‘em. As usual, she expects to forget all about her latest paramour, a business traveler named Rake Thompson. But after Rake goes home to Australia, Lizzie discovers that her disorganized brain has really messed things up this time. She and Rake used an expired condom, and Lizzie is pregnant. She wants to keep the baby, but when she calls Rake as a courtesy to let him know, he shocks her by deciding to move to Philadelphia to be near Lizzie and their child. The two are determined to be friendly,
platonic co-parents, but their attraction to each other causes delicious complications. Lizzie is unusual for a romance novel character. She’s even more commitment-phobic than Rake, defying gender stereotypes. And Lizzie has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Her need for sensory input makes regular sex an important part of her self-care. Eddings writes with compassion about Lizzie’s difficulties keeping on top of things, and her sex-positive attitude toward Lizzie’s love life is a win for feminism. Reading about a neurodiverse heroine like Lizzie is refreshing. This is a funny, tumultuous novel that will inspire readers to think about how different kinds of brains shape our human need for love and sex.

A quirky and engaging second novel from an up-and-coming author.

**THE SCOUNDREL FALLS HARD**

*Jordan, Sophie*

Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)

$8.99 paper | Aug. 23, 2022

978-0-06-303571-3

Kellan Fox learned to be a swindler and a thief from his father. Most recently, Da posed as the Duke of Penning and Kellan as his eligible heir. When the real duke appears and their ruse is discovered, the villagers of Shropshire call for Kellan’s hanging. He’s saved by local blacksmith Gwen Cully. Gwen doesn’t condone the scoundrel’s actions, but she thinks death is an extreme punishment. On impulse, as the mob is about to hang him, she calls out that they can’t kill him because she loves him, even though he’s actually a stranger. To save face, the pair secretly agree to marry for one year. They’ll be platonic, and he’ll help at the smithy. The sham wedding is only three weeks away, but as time ticks closer, they both find themselves wanting for ever instead.

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**VANESSA JARED’S GOT A MAN**

*L. A. Quette*

St. Martin’s Griffin (256 pp.)

$16.99 paper | Sept. 20, 2022

978-1-250-77339-5

Two years after her divorce, a woman who finds love with a small-town sheriff.

Vanessa Jared spent 20 years married to Karl Scott, a controlling and emotionally abusive man. Vanessa has moved on—made new friends, spent years in therapy, invested her divorce settlement wisely—but she still isn’t ready to dip her toe into the dating pool. One day, she’s approached by Michael Park, a handsome man with a big ask. His sister Cindy is newly engaged to Karl, and Michael can tell Karl is trouble. Michael asks Vanessa to share the story of her marriage with Cindy. He is aware his meddling might cause a rift with his sister, but he’ll do anything to save her from an unhappy future. Vanessa agrees to help only if Michael will recover her grandmother’s engagement ring, which Karl stole from her after their divorce was final. A confluence of mishaps leaves Vanessa stranded in town with literally no room at the inn, so Michael offers her spare room while they wait for his sister to return from a business trip. The complicated setup then goes on hiatus while the story focuses on Vanessa’s journey of self-renewal as she discovers the joys of small-town life while falling in love with Michael. This is a novel that promotes empowerment for women: Vanessa is a likable character who has learned to take care of herself, while Michael has to learn to let go and let his sister be in charge of her own life. Even though the external emotional stakes are high for both Vanessa and Michael, the novel is warm and comforting with very little conflict between them.

Smooth and competent.

**A MERRY LITTLE MEET CUTE**

*M. Murphy & S. Simone*

Avon/HarperCollins (432 pp.)

$21.99 | Sept. 20, 2022

978-0-06-322257-1

An adult film actress and a bad-boy pop star are cast in a wholesome, made-for-TV Christmas movie. What could go wrong?

Teddy Ray Fletcher is a bit of an anomaly in the film business. On one hand, he’s the producer of Fletcher Productions’ holiday films, which run on the Hope Channel; on the other, he’s the owner of Uncle Ray-Ray’s porn studio. When Teddy’s golden starlet falls ill, he’s hard-pressed to find a new Felicity before the filming of *Duke the Halls* starts in Christmas Notch, Vermont. When the Duke director spots a nude headshot Teddy accidentally placed in the wrong folder, she’s convinced they’ve found their new, edgier star. Against Teddy’s better judgment, they hire Bee
Hobbes, aka plus-size porn star Bianca von Honey, who’s “gorgeous and filthy and great for business.” While Bee loves the freedom and power of sex work, she hopes this movie will finally be her big break...even if she has to follow Teddy’s rule about staying “above reproach” while filming and praying that “chaste-as-hell” Hope Channel fans and Uncle Ray-Ray viewers don’t align. Added to the mix is former boy band member Nolan Shaw, the actor playing the duke, who’s in need of major image rehab after photos of him at an orgy during the Duluth Olympics spread around the world. Following his career downfall, Nolan will do anything to support his bipolar mother and teenage sister, like be contractually bound to good behavior for the two weeks of shooting. It turns out, however, that a fortnight of celibacy will be easier said than done for Bee and Nolan, especially when Nolan recognizes Bee as Bianca and they have mouthwatering chemistry on a set with heaving corsets and tight breeches.

A sexy holiday romp that’s the perfect combination of naughty and nice.

MISTAKES WERE MADE
Wilsner, Meryl
St. Martin’s Griffin (352 pp.)
$15.29 paper | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-250-84100-1

A college senior sleeps with an older woman she meets at a bar only to learn the next morning that the woman is her new friend’s mom.

When Cassie Klein, a future aerospace engineer, and Erin Bennett, a doctor and mother of a freshman, hook up, it was meant to just be a hot one-night fling between strangers. Erin, in town for Family Weekend, didn’t even know Cassie was a student, let alone the new best friend of her daughter, Parker. But when Parker invites them both to breakfast the next morning, they each learn who the other is and agree that Parker can never find out what happened. Still, the two can’t keep their hands off each other, and what starts as a series of stolen physical moments turns into a genuine connection. They both try to deny the very real feelings developing, but eventually they have to admit the truth not just to the other people in their lives, but to themselves and each other. Wilsner’s second Sapphic romance is the opposite of their slow-burn debut, Something To Talk About (2020): The heat is turned high in numerous spicy scenes. While their physical chemistry is never lacking, Cassie and Erin’s romantic journey takes them toward emotional connection as they fall in love despite their worry about other people’s judgment, and they decide to pursue what makes them happy. Although the pacing is uneven—some parts of the book lag while some actions or emotions feel too abrupt—strong character development enables readers to understand that Cassie and Erin fall for each other and fit well together despite the taboo nature of their relationship.

A sexy and empowering romance.

COURT OF THE VAMPIRE QUEEN
Robert, Katee
Sourcebooks Casablanca (496 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-72826-469-1

A woman who’s half human and half vampire is offered as a sacrifice to a trio of powerful vampires in this dark, erotic paranormal romance.

Mina’s father, Cornelius, is the head of one of seven powerful vampire bloodlines. His goal is to restore the vampires to their rightful place at the top of the food chain, and he needs more progeny and bloodlines under his control to enact his plans. He has no fond feelings for his dhampir daughter, as half-vampire, half-humans are known. She possesses neither the godly strength of his kind nor the magical affinity that humans have, so he sends her off to be a sacrifice to Malachi, a vampire of another bloodline. Confined to a Gothic mansion, Malachi knows why Mina was sent to him. Her father hopes he’ll either kill her or impregnate her, adding the heir of Malachi’s bloodline to his own. Malachi’s home quickly becomes more crowded as Wolf and Rylan, two other vampires from his past, arrive. All three take an interest in Mina, whose blood tastes different than other dhampirs’, and they begin to unravel Mina’s mysterious heritage and the deadly power play in which her father has involved them. Readers unaccustomed to dark romances may want to steer clear of this one, as there is dubious consent and graphically described violence. The sex is steamy, a nonstop carousel that sometime buries the plot. For a mindless sexual romp with seductive vampires and a woman who begins to recognize her own worth, it can be a fun read, though seeing women used as political pawns and broodmares can be distasteful, especially now. A smutfest of epic proportions.

“A sexy and empowering romance.”

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AMERICAN REFUGE
True Stories of the Refugee Experience
Abdo, Diya
Steerforth (176 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
979-1-58642-342-1

A collection of stories of refugees in America from the founder of the Every Campus a Refuge organization.

Jordan-born Abdo, a professor of English at Guilford College, where she founded ECAR, begins with her own experience as the daughter and granddaughter of Palestinian refugees. She then introduces readers to seven refugees from around the world—Palestine, Burma, Uganda, Iraq, Syria—who have started new lives near where the author lives in North Carolina. Stressing repeatedly that anyone can become a refugee, Abdo effectively demonstrates what many in the U.S. fail to grasp: “All refugees have lived lives that are distinct and individual—complicated, rich, layered. Something happens in their lives that fractures them from their souls, their homes. A fracture that threatens their safety. And it is a fracture they are not allowed to forget. Their future depends on forever remembering their persecution.” By following the unique journeys of these courageous individuals, the author reveals the often terrifying and overwhelming process of resettlement. These biographical portraits are thorough and compassionate, covering the initial reason for escape, life in refugee camps, endless questioning by various government agencies, and countless obstacles to putting down roots in a strange land. Abdo ends with an in-depth examination of the politicized and sometimes racist terms used to describe refugees, nearly all of whom merely seek a better life. Unfortunately, most don’t find it. Even with organizations like ECAR, writes the author, “less than 1 percent of the world’s refugees are ever resettled. The majority of refugees remain, sometimes for generations, in camps a bomb-sound away from the towns they fled, across a relatively recently created national border.” By humanizing and contextualizing the refugee experience, Abdo forces readers to confront their own preconceived notions about a global crisis that will only become more widespread in the years to come.

A moving and timely book that strips away misleading politics to reveal the complexities of real human lives.
The renowned scholar of comparative religions explores how we can use religion to meet global challenges. Armstrong taps into her encyclopedic knowledge to offer a way forward for a hurting world. Though the author primarily addresses environmental concerns, she delves deeper to investigate how the world's religions have treated the entirety of what is beyond the self. The author examines the ways in which faith traditions are grounded in an understanding and appreciation for the natural world, but the moral lessons involved are broader and more consequential. First, however, Armstrong seeks to convince readers to view nature through nonmodern eyes. “Unlike in our modern environmental discourse,” she writes, “nature was presented and experienced imaginatively and aesthetically rather than scientifically, and this involved the emotions and the body.” In numerous ancient cultures, religious ceremonies “not only expressed a deep anxiety about the sustainability of our world but made great demands on participants, who were expected not just to honor the divine in nature but also to reform themselves.” Throughout the book, the author reminds readers of one of the fundamental differences between modern perceptions of nature as something separate and that of ancient cultures, which sought a close unity with the created world. Tying together dramatic creation tales, complex moral systems, and scriptural musings on the natural world, Armstrong argues for gratitude, mutual caregiving, and stewardship of resources, among other practices, to help bring us closer to our environment and, ultimately, to each other. “We simply need to recognize the sacrality of everything around us and observe how the myriad things tirelessly support one another,” she writes. This concept of interconnectedness permeates many faith traditions as well as this text. While not one of Armstrong’s most original or brilliant works, this book still is worth contemplating and discussing, and it serves as a fitting companion to the author’s earlier work, Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life. Thought-provoking wisdom regarding the natural world.

UNCHECKED
The Untold Story Behind Congress’s Botched Impeachments of Donald Trump
Bade, Rachael & Karoun Demirjian
Morrow/HarperCollins (704 pp.)
$35.00  |  Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-06-304079-3

A scorching exposé of the inner workings of the two impeachments of Donald Trump, driven less by constitutional principle than by political calculation.

At every moment of the first Trump impeachment, veteran political reporters Bade and Demirjian, the principal players in both parties gamed outcomes in an effort to inflict maximal damage on each other. “While Democrats said they wanted bipartisanship,” they write, “when presented with ways to achieve it, they chose paths that guaranteed the opposite.” GOP figures from Mitch McConnell on down forgot their scruples and closed ranks to defend the indefensible. Nancy Pelosi took dangerous procedural shortcuts and effectively hamstrung the House prosecutors’ ability to present an airtight case—and never properly responded to Trump’s refusal to hand over subpoenaed documents. Moderate Republicans such as Jaime Herrera Beutler, who might have voted to impeach, were pushed away by the determination of Democrats to go it alone, lending the proceedings an air of secrecy. If a moderate were rebuffed, then Republican House leader Kevin McCarthy had no problem steering the rest of the conference into opposition. The second impeachment, against the backdrop of the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol, was even less well managed. Most Republicans argued that Trump won the 2020 election, while ace Democratic prosecutor Adam Schiff pressed for recourse to the 25th amendment rather than a slower impeachment trial. “At the speaker’s personal request,” write the authors, “he’d been making the case...that if they went after the president in his waning days in office, it would look like they were just trying to keep him from running again.” In the end, Bade and Demirjian argue in this comprehensive narrative, both sides of the aisle compromised and devalued the constitutional power of impeachment, opening the door to its future use as “an everyday vehicle to express the heights of partisan rage.”

A must-read for students of the Trump years and their dreary denouement.
This month, we celebrate the lives of two important Southern writers—Randall Kenan (1963-2020) and Julia Reed (1960-2020), both of whom died far too young—with new collections of their work. Though Kenan and Reed explored distinctly different literary terrain, their books and essays are worthy entries in the canon of modern Southern lit.

In his obituary, the New York Times described Kenan as “an award-winning gay Black writer whose fiction, set largely in a North Carolina hamlet similar to the one in which he grew up, blended myth, magic, mysticism and realism.” Of Reed, the Times wrote, “in reporting for Newsweek, Vogue, the New York Times Magazine and other publications, Ms. Reed covered presidents and their spouses, notably both Bushes and the Clintons, along with powerful women, country music, Southern rogues and Southern food. Her canvas was the foibles of power, and even though (or perhaps because) she was the daughter of a Nixon-era Republican grandee, she was cleareyed about the vices and virtues of both parties.”

Kenan’s Black Folk Could Fly: Selected Writings (Norton, Aug. 9) is “a superb introduction to a writer deserving much greater recognition,” according to our starred review. Over a series of potent essays, the author examines race, sexual identity, Black culture, family, and food, and he is consistently well attuned to racial injustice while celebrating his Blackness. As our critic noted, “Even as Kenan asserts that the color of the future will be a rainbow, not Black or White, he writes with deep intelligence and a discerning palate about the one thing that perhaps shapes Southern Black culture most definitively: its food, picked fresh from overflowing gardens, cooked to perfection, and served up on groaning boards to enjoy in good company.” After digging into this collection, readers should turn to Kenan’s 2020 story collection, If I Had Two Wings, and his 1999 nonfiction book, Walking on Water.

In Dispatches From the Gilded Age: A Few More Interesting Thoughts on Interesting People, Far-Flung Places, and the Joys of Southern Comforts (St. Martin’s, Aug. 23), Reed offers “a selection of sparkling essays by a great Southern wit, foodie, fashionista, and prose stylist.” Though the Times didn’t mention it, Reed’s work in Garden and Gun, in which she had a long-running column, provides an illuminating window onto her interests and thought processes. One particular essay, noted our critic, “recalls Nora Ephron, another seemingly candid but actually quite reserved personal essayist always ready with the bright, deflecting wisecrack.” Reed was always quick-witted, honest, and, as the Times noted, “deeply imprinted by the Mississippi Delta traditions she grew up with.”

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
HYSTERICAL
A Memoir
Bassist, Elissa
Hachette (256 pp.)
$29.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-306-82737-2

A sharp examination of life in “a culture where men speak and women shut up.”

In her impassioned debut memoir, essayist and humor writer Bassist rails against the systemic misogyny and patriarchy that silence women’s voices and, for her, became embodied as pain. For more than a year, she searched for medical help for a persistent headache and backache, blurred vision, and stomach problems only to be told repeatedly that nothing was wrong with her. “I had what millions of American women had,” she writes, “pain that didn’t make sense to doctors, a body that didn’t make sense to science, a psyche that didn’t make sense to mankind in general.” Like many women throughout history, she was deemed hysterical, and she was prescribed sedatives and mood stabilizers, some of which made her symptoms worse. When an acupuncturist suggested that her pain was caused by “caged fury,” Bassist felt a sudden sense of clarity. She examines many sources of her anger, including her overbearing father, emotionally and physically violent boyfriends, and a culture that defines outspoken women as “crazy psycho bitches.” In TV and movies, women are victims of extreme violence; in the media, and in her writing classes, men’s voices and opinions dominate. “Men’s writing was ‘writing,’ ” she learned when working in publishing, “and women’s writing was ‘women’s writing,’” or “chick lit.” Instead of learning to stand up for herself, she admits, she got better “at acclimating. At expecting abuse.” “To cope with being silenced in my twenties,” she writes, “I choose silence in my thirties.” Obsessively fearful of saying the wrong thing or of being retaliated against, she refused to share her experiences on social media, and she plummeted into self-doubt. “I hated myself and other women as much as the world hated us,” she writes, “because when hatred is environmental, anyone can catch it, then perpetuate it, until women are misogynistic masochists with toxic masculinity.” Her memoir stands as proof of an arduous process of healing.

A fiery cultural critique.

RUSSIA
Revolution and Civil War, 1917-1921
Beevor, Antony
Viking (592 pp.)
$35.00 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-593-49387-8

The acclaimed British historian tackles the Russian civil war. Despite current events, Russia is not the colossus that frightened other great powers during much of the 20th century. Although its revolution is no longer a scholarly obsession, Beevor, the winner of the Samuel Johnson and Wolfson prizes, among others, masterfully recounts the violent events that seemed to change everything. When Russia declared war on Germany in 1914, it fielded the identical titanic but shambling army defeated by Japan in 1905, overseen by the same autocratic but dimwitted Czar Nicholas II and a dysfunctional civil government. Sustained by grit and Allied aid, it held together for nearly three years despite catastrophic losses. However, by March 1917, increasing desertion, indiscipline, and violence against officers combined with widespread civilian suffering persuaded the still clueless czar to abdicate. Beevor’s account of what followed is both authoritative and disheartening. No one could correct Russia’s crumbling infrastructure. Hungry city dwellers blamed the new leaders, and crime and violence flourished. Their worst decision was to continue the war, which increased insubordination at the front and perhaps even more so behind the lines. Lenin arrived in April to command the small Bolshevik Party, which grew and ultimately seized power that October.

“A definitive account.”

RUSSIA

From Navy SPEC/WAR bomb disposal frogman to John DeLorean’s Codefendant, to inmate, to chief diver and expedition leader for Captain Jacques Yves Cousteau.

• ISBN-10: 978957567
• ISBN-13: 978-0-9799575-6-7

“For Information on Film Rights, Email drugs58te@gmail.com

“A very few lives feature stories of swimming with sharks of the narco-syndicates and swimming with sharks below Cousteau’s Odyssey.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“An eventful and turbulent saga that makes for compelling reading.”
Historians have long stopped portraying him as the good guy in contrast to Stalin and agree that he succeeded as all tyrants succeeded: murderous ruthlessness, crushing rivals, and incessantly repeating promises that appealed to his supporters (“all power to the Soviets,” “peace to the peasants”) and then not keeping them. This is a vivid description of a revolution that featured as much mass murder as military action. Readers know the outcome, but the Red triumph was not universal. A few Baltic states won independence, and in the final and perhaps largest campaign, Polish forces routed the Red Army. Always a meticulous researcher, Beevor has done his homework in an era when everyone recorded their thoughts (even the czar kept a diary), delivering a detailed yet unedifying story through the eyes of many participants.

A definitive account.

WILD
The Life of Peter Beard: Photographer, Adventurer, Lover
Boynton, Graham
St. Martin’s (352 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-250-27499-1

The over-the-top life of a famed wilderness photographer, conservationist, and enigmatic adventurer.

An artist’s life and work are often intertwined; in the case of Peter Beard (1918-2020), the distinction was especially blurred. Boynton, a journalist and longtime friend, valiantly attempts a balanced perspective, yet the scale often tips in favor of his contrast to Stalin and agree that he succeeded as all tyrants succeeded: murderous ruthlessness, crushing rivals, and incessantly repeating promises that appealed to his supporters (“all power to the Soviets,” “peace to the peasants”) and then not keeping them. This is a vivid description of a revolution that featured as much mass murder as military action. Readers know the outcome, but the Red triumph was not universal. A few Baltic states won independence, and in the final and perhaps largest campaign, Polish forces routed the Red Army. Always a meticulous researcher, Beevor has done his homework in an era when everyone recorded their thoughts (even the czar kept a diary), delivering a detailed yet unedifying story through the eyes of many participants.

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When Boris Nayfeld was born in 1947 in Gomel, Belarus, his father was thousands of miles away “doing time in a Soviet gulag for black marketeering.” His mother abandoned him and his brother three years later, leaving them in the care of their grandmother. “I never loved [my mother],” he said later in life. “To be honest, I’m only grateful for one thing: she didn’t have an abortion.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, it wasn’t long before he was hanging out with gang members, on his way to his own first experience with Soviet prisons. Century, the author of Hunting El Chapo and other bestselling true-crime books, thrillingly chronicles Nayfeld’s criminal career in the Soviet Union, where stealing from the state was a main source of illicit income. However, living visibly beyond one’s nominal means was a good way to earn unwelcome attention, and in 1979, Nayfeld and his family took part in a general exodus of Jews to the U.S. It wasn’t long before he found himself in Brighton Beach, where “bilk ing the system was widely admired, a demonstration of intelligence and adaptability.” Nayfeld quickly allied himself with those who could ease his path, especially Evsei Agron, a pickpocket from Leningrad who’d become a kingpin in Brooklyn. Under Agron’s mentorship, Nayfeld took part in a stunning variety of scams, from passing counterfeit Russian coins to recent immigrants to insurance fraud, eventually hitting a real jackpot with fuel-tax evasion. Century wisely lets his subject tell most of the story in his own vivid words, painting his career in crime as a regular job, with prison just a cost of doing business and violence one useful item in the toolbox. True-crime fans will find this one irresistible, and the lengthy glossary of terms is a welcome addition.

A fascinating, page-turning story of a genuine scoundrel.

I ALWAYS KNEW
A Memoir
Chase-Riboud, Barbara
Princeton Univ (472 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-691-23427-4

An acclaimed Black artist and writer’s memoir of her life and education, told in a series of letters to her mother.

While awaiting the results of the 2008 election—which yielded the first Black president, Barack Obama, a turn of history that in 1983 the author deemed “an impossibility”—Chase-Riboud (b. 1939) read through more than 600 letters that she had written to her mother from Europe between 1957 and 1991. Those letters mark her interesting journey from an ingénue who marveled at the groaning-board meals aboard the ocean liner to a world-renowned artist. Soon after her arrival, she wrote, “What about this Russian satellite? I didn’t know anything about it until it had circled the globe for about three days. America must be hysterical….Most of the French seem rather pleased. They really believe in this balance of power idea and they are just as afraid of the U.S. as they are of Russia.” It wasn’t long until Chase-Riboud, a graduate of Yale’s School of Design and Architecture, was showing her paintings and sculptures in galleries and competitions and beginning to travel around the world. In 1958, the Middle East director of the Coca-Cola Corporation asked, “what was a lone American girl doing wandering around the Middle East without guide or chaperone in the midst of the Suez Canal War?” The author’s travels took her to China, Mongolia, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere. At the same time, she was blossoming as a writer, and she went on to publish numerous books of poetry and fiction, closely observing the places
she visited and sharing her enthusiasms and successes with her mother. “Our landscape really resembles a kind of 18th-century English landscape painting—flat, beautiful light dotted here and there with huge oak trees,” she exulted from a sojourn in the French countryside as she prepared to go to Senegal to exhibit her artwork.

A charming epistolary record of a life of art and discovery, well and fully lived.

IF THIS WERE FICTION

A Love Story in Essays
Christman, Jill
Univ. of Nebraska (226 pp.)
$22.00 paper | Sept. 1, 2022
978-1-4962-3235-9

A memoirist and creative writing instructor reflects on transcending personal loss and trauma to embrace the healing love of a successful family life. “Here are the facts,” writes Christman at the beginning. “As close as I can align the memories and the photographs with the markers of time—birthdays, moves, my mother’s sequential boyfriends and waitressing jobs—Chad [her teenage neighbor] molested me, regularly and sometimes violently, from the time I was six or seven to age twelve.” Memories of those encounters eventually became the basis for a memoir she first submitted as a series of stories to an MFA short fiction class. Yet her catharsis remained incomplete even after the manuscript was published. In this collection, Christman revisits her past to understand how terrible events shaped her attitude toward love and relationships. She begins with a recollection of how the dreams she had about Chad’s abuse continued long after her life, which included a detour into “bulimia and binge drinking,” settled into happier rhythms. But rather than recall his violence, the dreams manifested as terrifying scenarios that involved Chad going after Christman’s own daughter. Her own successful marriage did not come without its own share of twists and turns, including relationships with others, separations, and comic reversals of fortune. Through it all, she writes about the persistent, irrational fear of “the death of those I love.” She attributes her phobia to the death of another man she loved as a young woman, Colin, to whom she had been engaged and who haunted her still. His horrific car crash death brought her into painful awareness that while she could “love a breathing someone...like that, he could be gone.” Eloquent and probing, Christman’s essays examine the profound ways relationships can—for better or worse—transform an individual life and provide glimpses into the complexities the human heart.

A warmly wise, intimate memoir.

BELONGING

The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides
Cohen, Geoffrey L.
Norton (448 pp.)
$30.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-324-00618-3

An intriguing investigation of our need to belong and how to make that process easier for the bashful among us.

Stanford psychology and business professor Cohen offers a learned tour of experimental and social psychology, connecting science to real life in meaningful ways. On the issue of the pitched politics of our time, he observes that there’s an evolutionary reason for not deviating from group beliefs, no matter how ridiculous or dangerous: “Being outcast from our tribe,” he writes, “would once have presented a physical threat to survival, and our brains still seem to see it that way. To venture dissent is to risk expulsion.” The tribe element is important, for being a member of a group is an essential part of identity, and being outside of a group is, writes Cohen, as bad for one’s health as a pack-a-day smoking habit. Throw race into the mix, and things get more complicated. Drawing on a variety of disciplines, the author observes that White people are often visibly stressed when in the company of Black people, fearing that they may be called out for racism. “The accumulation of mortifications can put people in a constant state of alert, ready for the possibility of demeaning treatment,” he adds, and while those mortifications apply to oppressed minorities more often than to the dominant majority, everyone has plenty of shame-inducing incidents. The ticket out? Cohen suggests that it’s as simple as kindness, judging less and listening more, and being polite: “Not interrupting; saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you’; apologizing when we do harm, whether intended or not, and even if others seem oversensitive about the harm caused, are signs that we see other selves as belonging in the circle of those to whom we should show respect.” Cohen is to the point and unsentimental even as he points the way to a nicer way to live.

A well-written, inviting treatise to be a better person.

BLACK SKINHEAD

Reflections on Blackness and Our Political Future
Collins-Dexter, Brandi
Celadon Books (304 pp.)
$28.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-250-82407-3

An influential media commentator on racial justice explores politics and Black voters in this sharp blend of memoir and cultural criticism.

In her debut book, Collins-Dexter, a visiting fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Shorenstein Center on Media,
Politics and Public Policy, chronicles her “journey to get to the heart of Black political identity, a process that involved extensive interviews with Black people from all across the ideological spectrum.” She narrates a powerful story “about a Black America that had become disillusioned with the failed promises of their country.” In the 1960s, before it became known for White nationalism, the skinhead movement was a political movement comprised of the British working class, most of whom felt “left behind” and disillusioned by economic and political infrastructures. The author uses this idea as a launching pad to deconstruct a host of cultural frameworks involving politics and place in communities around the U.S., and she offers a well-rendered critique of the implicit attitude that Black voters prefer Democrats or Black candidates. Through the lens of Black voters, Collins-Dexter examines often complex political concepts in an accessible way—Kanye West’s troubling persona is a recurring topic—but the rigor of her scholarship is never in question. In the section on populism, the author employs wrestling lingo and characters from the World Wrestling Federation to describe political ideology from the left and right. “With its exaggerated narratives of good, evil, and the struggle of the everyman,” she writes, “[wrestling] is the perfect way to understand populism—its pitfalls and its undeniable draw.” Reminiscent of Notes From No Man’s Land, by Eula Biss, this collection is well constructed and incisively argued. Collins-Dexter begins and ends with poignant memories of her father, effectively tying the personal to the universal. Featuring a vivid mix of hard data, anecdotal details, and scholarly research, this book is a must-read for anyone interested in politics and Black lives in America.

A remarkable work that leaves us feeling hopeful for change.

CALIFORNIA SOUL
An American Epic of Cooking and Survival
Corbin, Keith with Kevin Alexander
Random House (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-0-593-24382-4

How a Watts gang member escaped doom and ascended to the helm of a nationally acclaimed restaurant.

“The book you’re about to read,” writes Corbin in the prologue, “isn’t a gangland morality tale or a prisoner-makes-good drama or a chef memoir that paints my life as a ‘uniquely American’ success story.” However, it offers all of those elements and more. The author also presents a loving history of the Watts neighborhood; a tribute to a beloved grandmother who fed a whole community; a mouthwatering account of the evolution of Corbin’s style of soul-food cooking, now featured at Alta in West Adams, Los Angeles; and a candid story about long-term drug dependency. Among the many interesting points made by this modern version of a Horatio Alger story is that for Black youth in America’s poor communities, the story is not necessarily rags to riches. If you’re in the drug game in your early teens (Corbin started cooking crack at 13), access to piles of cash is never a problem. Ultimately, it’s not about money; it’s about social mobility. Too often, many doors lead to prison, which is where Corbin spent most of his 20s. Some of the most intriguing parts of the book are the details on the operation, genealogy, and grammar of gangs. For example, Crips will spell the word back as bacc: “No Crip sets use the letters c and l together,” writes Corbin, because that formulation, in that context, means “Crip killer.” There are two primary heroes of this story, capably preserved and shaped by James Beard Award–winning journalist Alexander: Corbin himself and his mentor, the restaurateur Daniel Patterson, whose commitment to actually doing something for Corbin—and many others coming out of incarceration and looking for direction—is rare indeed.

A personable account of hard-won success, heartening in some ways, sobering in others, and served with tasty sides.
Fortunately for his would-be victims among the Protestant police in Britain—a truce that, he makes clear, he’d be more than willing to violate even today. Much of the text is well-rehearsed propaganda街头的—of the Irish Republican Army—of the “political culture of colonial squatters with its simmering supremacist, sectarian, and siege mentalities.” Thus, he recounts, he joined the IRA and conducted nefarious business on its behalf—spending much time, for instance, in the presence of the gangster Whitey Bulger in Boston acquiring gear with which to commit further murders back home. Fortunately for his would-be victims among the Protestant police and British army, Crawley was captured before he could deliver these weapons to the front. For his participation in the chaotic events of the Troubles, he served 14 years in prison, freed under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement between Ireland and Britain—a truce that, he makes clear, he’d be more than willing to violate even today. Much of the text is well-rehearsed propaganda best countered by a salutary reading of Patrick Radden Keefe’s Say Nothing. Still, it’s useful to have an in-the-trenches story of life as an ordinary soldier in a complicated set of circumstances.

For those who grow misty at hearing “The Foggy Dew.” Others may tire of Crawley’s intransigence.
to be carried to the stage, but even there he hid himself behind the curtain and made his way to the lectern on his own. This was both deceptive and close to heroic, and “Franklin never let on how grueling it all was simply to make it through the day.” The torments continued throughout his four terms as president, during which he was often a visitor to the curative waters of Warm Springs, Georgia, where he died. Usefully, Darman writes that even though FDR was “a privileged child of the American aristocracy…years of illness and convalescence had taught him what it felt like to be forgotten, humiliated, and overlooked as unimportant.”

A welcome, insightful addition to the literature surrounding FDR.

THE ACADEMY AND THE AWARD
The Coming of Age of Oscar and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
Davis, Bruce
Brandeis Univ. Press (512 pp.)
$40.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-68458-119-1

A history of the world’s most famous movie awards and the organization that controls them.

The Oscar is “the single best-known work of twentieth-century sculpture,” yet “the organization that dispenses those awards—the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences—has never been well understood,” writes Davis, who was the Academy’s executive director for more than 20 years. He aims to improve that understanding with this book. The author focuses on the Academy’s first 30 years, from its founding in

The Photographer of the Homeless

“This is a hauntingly sad book, complex and gorgeous, and deeply moving. Very highly recommended.”
—Readers’ Favorite

“A gripping combination of haunting photos and plangent stories full of almost unbearably raw humanity.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)
Over the past two years, the United States has experienced an enormous surge of anti-Asian violence. According to a new report from the Brookings Institute, 1 in 6 Asian Americans reported personally experiencing a hate crime in 2021. In the first half of 2022, 1 in 3 Asian Americans have been told to “go back to your country.” As a result, the Pew Research Center reports, 1 in 5 Asian Americans now fear for their safety so severely that they have made substantial changes to their daily routines.

In her new book, *Asian American Histories of the United States* (Beacon, Aug. 2), scholar Catherine Ceniza Choy argues that this surge in violence derives from the erasure of Asian American lives over centuries. This erasure has resulted, according to the Brookings report, in over half of the American population being unable to name a single “prominent” Asian American and in Asian American history being unavailable to students in 48 states. Choy’s text addresses this gap in a comprehensive and conversational manner. Covering topics as diverse as the role of Chinese workers in the construction of the Western railroads; the leadership of Filipinos in the Delano, California, grape strike (1965-1970); and the gendered nature of anti-Asian immigration legislation, Choy’s work treats history not as an artifact of the past but as an urgent source of knowledge—and empathy—for the present.

Choy, who is a professor in the department of ethnic studies at UC Berkeley, answered our questions by email; the exchange has been edited for length and clarity.

**Your first book was a history of Filipino American nurses, while this book covers a much larger population. What was it like to go from writing about a specific history to a much broader one?**

One of the major challenges of writing an overview of nearly 200 years of Asian American experience is that Asian Americans are such a large, growing, and heterogeneous group with many distinctive as well as shared histories. (This is why the book’s title emphasizes the multiplicity of “Asian American histories.”) How does one write such an overview and include every Asian American group and their experiences? It’s a problem that I tried to confront with honesty and humility in the book’s preface, in which I acknowledge the impossibility of this task and the problems of marginalization in a broader history. In the face of these challenges, I seized the opportunity to feature less well-known and less well-integrated histories of mixed-race, South Asian, and Southeast Asian Americans and to tell the more familiar narratives—for example, of Japanese American internment during World War II—in new ways that relate to the existential crises of the present moment.

**Rather than write this book chronologically, you wrote about events thematically, always connecting them to the present. How and why did you decide to use this structure?**

The book’s thematic and nonlinear structure highlights specific years that serve as touchstones for many histories, including histories of the present day, that overlap and intersect in unforeseen ways. For example, Chapter 3 features 1968 and the history of how the name *Asian American* came to be and why it was meaningful for different groups of Asian Americans at that moment to embrace a panethnic identity. That history is an outcome of Asian American solidarity with the Third World
Liberation Front and Black, Chicana, and American Indian student movements. However, the year 1968 did not mark the first expression of Black and Asian American solidarity: That history is over a century long, going as far back as Frederick Douglass’ 1869 lecture in support of Chinese immigration. It’s important for us to remember and reflect upon these histories in the present moment, because Black and Asian Americans continue to be pitted against one another.

This structure gave me the opportunity to document what Asian Americans, including my family and I, have been experiencing since 2020: racial stereotyping as forever foreigners, medical scapegoating as disease carriers, and [acts] of anti-Asian hate. Anti-Asian hate is so omnipresent that it can numb and terrify us to the point that we try to forget what is happening in order to survive. But what kind of life will we have if we don’t confront our fear and grief? Our shared Asian American histories illuminate that we are not alone. The history of anti-Asian violence is a long-standing one, but so too are histories of Asian American reckoning and resistance.

**In your introduction, you say you wrote this book as an attempt to combat the dehumanization of Asian Americans.**

**Was this always your goal with this project? How, if at all, did your goal change over time?**

Major themes in Asian American history include racism, imperialism, labor exploitation, and sexual objectification, which contribute to the dehumanization of Asian Americans. So, yes, trying to combat dehumanization by portraying the Asian American experience with more complexity and nuance was always my goal. However, the questions that haunted me about this project since 2020, were: Why is anti-Asian hate on the rise? And how is it that Asian Americans continue to be racialized as non-Americans, disease carriers, and objects of fantasy in the 21st century despite their multigenerational presence in the United States and their contributions to virtually every industry, from agriculture to health care? So, my approach to my writing changed over time. I wrote with personal urgency because I am deeply concerned about what kind of world we are leaving future generations.

**The book is full of information that will be new even to Asian American history buffs. What were some of the most exciting pieces of history you uncovered? What would you like to see explored further?**

One of the most exciting and meaningful aspects of writing this book was to include many stories of Asian American women, from Filipino nurses who have been serving on the front lines of U.S. hospitals during this Covid-19 pandemic to Asian American Rosie the Riveters who worked in San Francisco Bay Area shipyards during World War II to Korean independence activists in Hawaii and California who organized against early-20th-century Japanese colonization of Korea. These are histories that have been uncovered not solely by myself, but by a community of Asian American scholars, librarians, archivists, and community organizers. I would love to see every history in the book explored further, especially by K-12 students and their families. One of my greatest hopes is that readers who identify as Asian American will tell and share their stories.

**What was the most joyful part of writing this book, and why?**

Thank you for asking this question about joy! In my book, it appears in the act of a Filipino nurse instructing a mother to soothe her baby by gently touching the baby’s feet, in a Nepalese immigrant girl’s story of learning English from watching Bob Ross’ *The Joy of Painting*, in photographer Corky Lee’s recreation of a historic photograph of the completion of the first transcontinental railroad with the descendants of Chinese railroad workers who had previously been excluded from that celebratory moment. It was emotionally and psychologically difficult for me to research and write this book because its major themes include anti-Asian violence and the erasure of Asian American history. And, yet, in this process, I was also reminded that so many Asian Americans before me have confronted both egregious and mundane acts of hate and omission with courage and grace. In documenting these moments in the book, I learned that joy is an essential part of the Asian American experience.

Mathangi Subramanian’s latest novel, *A People’s History of Heaven*, was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award and was longlisted for the PEN/Faulkner Award. Asian American Histories of the United States received a starred review in the April 15 issue.
1927 at the instigation of Louis B. Mayer, who saw the nascent Academy “as a means of elevating the public perception of film to the level of long-acknowledged art forms,” through the mid-1950s, when Academy governors worried about the threat from “the just-stirring young giant of television.” Davis covers a variety of significant events in the organization’s history, including battles with unions and guilds, the appointment of Postmaster General Will Hays to bring “wholesomeness” to the industry after its 1920s scandals, and the period in 1933 when the Academy “was essentially broke.” Technical and financial details will seem dry to anyone uninterested in dues and expenses, bylaws, building refurbishments, and the like. The best sections are those pertaining to celebrities and the Oscar itself. Davis cites competing stories of how the Oscar got its name, the most entertaining of which is Bette Davis’ claim (no relation) that she gave it her husband’s middle name because the statuette and her husband had similar backsides. Many stories are satisfactorily ribald, as when Davis notes the irony of Hays being set up in a building that had “pointedly erotic postures and the full-frontal nudity of both sexes” on the fire-escape frieze, with figures that are clearly making a film. “There is no way,” writes the author, “for a modern viewer to avoid the impression that the subject is a porn shoot in the Valley.”

A fond look at the genesis and growing pains of the world’s foremost film organization. GOP closed ranks, and Obama became more cynical in his remaining time in office. “If a heart-shredding national tragedy—twenty little kids murdered—wasn’t going to jar the GOP into cooperation, they were never going to get serious and work with him on anything, were they?” If Obama is now seen as a senior statesman, Biden is president—and not because Obama went out of his way to help during the primaries, when, Debenedetti writes, he was bent on being “free to candidate-surf.” The Obama-Biden alliance is healthier now, and while differences remain, both know that they speak to each other as “the only other person who could possibly begin to understand.”

A readable portrait of a political partnership that may be seen as one of the most productive in U.S. history.
AN ARAB SCHOLAR AND POLITICIAN FROM THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY ADDRESSES A QUESTION THAT HAS PLAGUED THE ISLAMIC WORLD FOR CENTURIES.

“Muslim conservatives are rigidly backward looking and timid about adapting to the modern world, the author argues, while Muslim progressives thoughtlessly imitate European culture, conflating modern sophistication with an abandonment of their religious identity.”

—Kirkus Reviews
“A well-researched, cleareyed deconstruction of highly flawed conventional wisdom about Africa.”

AFRICA IS NOT A COUNTRY

SERVANTS OF THE DAMNED
Giant Law Firms, Donald Trump, and the Corruption of Justice
Enrich, David
Mariner Books (416 pp.)
$32.50 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-063-14217-6

Why isn’t Donald Trump in prison? Perhaps because he has one of the country’s foremost law firms at his back.

Longtime Trump-watcher Enrich, the New York Times business investigations editor and author of Dark Towers: Deutsche Bank, Donald Trump, and an Epic Trail of Destruction, moves from finance to law in this account of Jones Day, a legal firm that expanded in D.C. over the last few decades in order to weave itself into “the fabric of the capital’s conservative firmament.” Founded in the 1890s in Cleveland, the company had always been conservative. However, under the guidance of principal Steve Brogan, it has turned increasingly hard right, “a champion of right-wing politics, organizing legal challenges to Obama’s health care program, white-collar prosecutions, government regulations, and voting rights laws.” Much of this turn involved Don McGahn, who was Trump’s in-house counsel for a couple of years until falling out over the Mueller Report. McGahn and his mentor, Ben Ginsberg, had not expected Trump to win, and they believed that Trump would convert his campaign into “an influence-buying PAC” that Jones Day would manage. “More than five years later,” when Trump lost decisively in the 2020 election, “the PACs were all that was left, and Jones Day was their law firm,” still exercising tremendous influence over Republican politics. The firm bought into Trump’s claims of electoral fraud, though not without some internal dissent. As the author shows, Jones Day—which had previously represented massive pharmaceutical and tobacco companies and the sex scandal–ridden Catholic Church—was vigorous in “trying to stop votes from being counted—not because they thought there was something improper underway (there was zero evidence of that), but because they detected an opportunity to use the law to give their side a political edge.” There are plenty of other shameful episodes, and Enrich is unblinking in reporting them, yielding a fast-moving, damning book.

Essential reading for students of the Trump corruption machine.

WOLF HUSTLE
A Black Woman on Wall Street
Fabré, Cin
Henry Holt (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-250-81685-6

The daughter of Haitian immigrants lands on Wall Street.

Born in the South Bronx and raised in Queens, Fabré styled herself as a brash, street-smart hustler, traits that served her well when she found herself working on Wall Street. In her zesty debut memoir, the author recounts her surprising journey from roach-filled public housing to becoming one of the “youngest Black female stockbrokers.” At the age of 19, she was an ace salesperson for an optical shop when she met a recruiter for VTR Capital, an offshoot of the notorious investment firm portrayed in Wolf of Wall Street. Although she would be working as a cold caller for a low salary, she saw the job as an investment in her future. After three months as a cold caller, she learned, your firm could sponsor you for a test to earn a broker’s license. Fabré had no doubt that she would excel, get sponsored, and pass the challenging test. “Whenever I set out to do something,” she asserts, with no false modesty, “I was confident it would work out for me.” VTR certainly tested her conviction: Like all the Black and Latine cold callers, she was brutally belittled by the White brokers. “All callers were made to feel inferior,” writes the author, “had it hammered into them that they were lowly dialers, good for punching numbers into a phone and uttering words from a script, nothing more. Verbal—and sometimes physical—abuse was hurled at us.” But there was big money to be made, and Fabré admits to wanting “the cars, the houses in the Hamptons, the Gucci and the Versace.” At the age of 20, “without knowing a single thing about investing,” she became a broker. With disarming candor, Fabré recounts her heady infatuation with Wall Street, her timely escape from VTR, and her dawning realization of what she and her colleagues were really doing.

A stark exposé of Wall Street’s corrupt underside and an inspiring story of overcoming adversity.

AFRICA IS NOT A COUNTRY
Notes on a Bright Continent
Faloyin, Dipo
Norton (400 pp.)
$30.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-393-88153-0

A trenchant study demolishes stereotypes about Africans as a product of colonial history.

Faloyin—a senior editor at VICE who was born in Chicago and raised in Lagos until age 10, when he moved to the U.K.—opens his stern and vibrant narrative with the secret 1884 “Scramble for
Africa” meeting in Berlin by European powers. “In an attempt to avoid all-out war over who got to wage war on Africa,” writes the author, “the mighty colonialists decided to meet and hash it all out, to come to a communal understanding as to how they could perfectly calculate their siege.” While many nations had already embarked on expeditions into the continent to seize natural resources and quell Indigenous uprisings, by the beginning of World War I, “90 per cent of Africa would be controlled by Europe.” The establishment of arbitrary borders often divided ethnic groups, some of whom later went to war with each other. Throughout the book, Faloyin diligently chronicles the inherited tropes that many in the West harbor about African nations. “The narrative,” he writes, “suggests there is something fundamentally ungovernable about this place and its people; something extremely uncivilized about their unhealthy relationship with power.” This “silent bigotry” involves the concept of White savior syndrome—yet another form of paternalism—as evinced by the Invisible Children project in Uganda and such celebrity charity campaigns as We Are the World and Live Aid. The author examines a series of dictatorships that resulted from colonial systems of divide and rule and forcefully calls out glaring cultural stereotypes about Africans in popular culture. He also addresses the alarming fact that “90 per cent of Africa’s material cultural legacy is being kept outside of the continent.” Faloyin weaves in his personal story as a Nigerian, using the making of Jollof rice as a unifying theme, and ends the book with forward-looking ways that African countries are managing gender and sexual violence, climate change, and other pressing matters.

A well-researched, cleareyed deconstruction of highly flawed conventional wisdom about Africa.
“A thoughtful consideration of how and why to protect the vote—and, with it, American democracy.”

THE BIG TRUTH

AMERICA MADE ME
A BLACK MAN
A Memoir
Farah, Boyah J.
Harper/HarperCollins (256 pp.)
$26.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-307335-7

Somalian refugee and writer Farah recounts a long record of dehumanization and racism in his adoptive country.

“I was living in the belly of America; it was she who made me a black man, relegated me to her black tribe,” writes Farah, who arrived in the U.S. after fleeing the civil war in his homeland. He came without a birth certificate and no certain knowledge of his birthday; but, as he writes, he possessed a precisely drawn family history in his mind. His father encouraged him to become a doctor, but his high school guidance counselor had other ideas. Though smart and academically gifted, Farah was steered to manual labor, while his brother was told to learn to drive a truck, and his sister was told to be a mother. Instead, the author went to college, then took a dead-end clerical job, going to the same tiny cubicle day after day for more than 10 years even as vastly less qualified White colleagues were promoted over him. When he expressed hope for a better future, a Black co-worker told him, “You and that hope of yours…. The hope you’re talking about is in the hands of white people.” The hands of White people were always reaching for Farah, occasionally to help, more often to threaten, as his several run-ins with the police attest. A Black police officer quietly offered advice when his younger brother got into trouble with the law. They should send the youth back to his homeland. “US democracy was more threatening to black skin than Somalia,” writes the author. Finally he snapped, calling a macho atmosphere, far from being open and welcoming, was toxic. Still, he wanted to prove that she could excel. Diagnosed with scoliosis as a child, she was used to being underestimated. “All I ever wanted to do,” she admits, “was break out of the boxes of limitations that others put me into.” She worked hard and received praise, promotions, and bonuses beyond her expectations. After the first year, expecting a bonus of $40,000, she got $80,000. Another year, her total compensation went from $500,000 to $1 million. But it came at great moral cost, as Fiore Higgins neglected her husband and children, failed to support women colleagues, and reveled in her power. “Like the long-bullied kid on the playground who becomes the bully,” she realizes, “I had become a part of the cycle of abuse.” Longing to quit, she and her husband devised a “Spreadsheet of Freedom” to indicate when they would have enough money for her to walk away. The author never reveals the sum, but despite a seven-figure salary and bonuses, she felt compelled to stay for nearly 20 years. A disturbing portrait of power and greed.

THE BIG TRUTH
Upholding Democracy in the Age of “The Big Lie”
Garrett, Major & David Becker
Diversion Books (288 pp.)
$29.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-63576-784-1

A pertinent study of the possibility of “our next civil war,” which “is stalking us” after the 2020 election chaos and the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection.

“We believe many who cling to grievances about the 2020 election know, deep down, they are wrong,” write Garrett, chief Washington correspondent for CBS, and Becker, founder of the Center for Election Innovation & Research. “They know lies are masquerading as truths. They rationalize both as tools in a large enterprise—defeating Democrats, reversing socialism, wokeness, radicalism, and the like.” Under the terms of the Trumpian big lie, Republican legislators are doing everything they can to redistrict, gerrymander, suppress, and otherwise alter the vote so that their minority party will always win, which shows which side of the “power or principle” argument they’re on. However, as the authors demonstrate, the big lie is about more than politics; it’s a moneymaking machine, practically a printing press, for Trump and company, who have raised hundreds of millions on the premise that they were wronged but will return. “Every big con needs its bagmen, and the attempted
coup had a rogues’ gallery,” they write of Jan. 6 and its aftermath. “Some wore MAGA hats and carried Gadsden flags. Some wore suits or possessed law degrees and, in some cases, worked inside the White House.” The biggest con man of all remains diligent in his attacks on the democratic process and bloviating attempts to maintain his relevance and possibly regain power, even though he’s lost every legal challenge he’s mounted. But as his former aide Mick Mulvaney noted, “When you are taking your legal advice from My Pillow guy, what do you expect?” Unfortunately for the U.S., despite their bright, vigorous narrative, the authors seem to suggest that things are likely to get worse before they get better.

A thoughtful consideration of how and why to protect the vote—and, with it, American democracy.

THERE’S JUST ONE PROBLEM...

**True Tales From the Former, One-Time, 7th Most Powerful Person in WWE**

Brian Gewirtz

Twelve (288 pp.)

$30.00 | Aug. 16, 2022

978-1-5387-1053-1

A longtime scriptwriter for pro wrestling takes us behind the scenes.

Gewirtz grew up a wrestling nerd, with action figures of Rowdy Roddy Piper and other accoutrements of a teendom spent in the rec room. The knowledge came in handy when, after a start-and-stop early career writing Hollywood TV comedies, he landed a job writing for pro wrestling. "WWE is unlike any other form of entertainment with its mix of the verbal and physical, the fact that it’s on fifty-two weeks a year from a different city every week, has a cast of over sixty characters, and a history/backstory that spans decades," he writes, adding that this makes a semischolarly approach to the genre necessary. That history and backstory can be spun in novel directions, and Gewirtz writes brightly of scripting elaborate contests between, say, the Rock and John Cena, both crossover stars now busily employed in Hollywood. Though fans of pro wrestling will get the most out of Gewirtz’s memoir, the business-inclined can take away many valuable lessons from his in-the-trenches moments with wrestling entrepreneur and boss Vince McMahon, who pounded into his head countless rules to live by. For example, if you’re driving from place to place and have the passenger seat, don’t dare fall asleep, since it’s your duty to keep the driver company; or if you’re in business, you have to accept the bad with the good, or, as McMahon intones, “Sometimes you need to learn to eat a shit sandwich and like the taste of it.” The book is perfect for devotees of Hulk Hogan, the Undertaker, the improbable Kane (“a scarred mute monster secretly living in a mental institution probably would not have gone to high school,” Gewirtz writes about a storyline gone awry), and other ring legends.

An entertaining look at life backstage beyond the ropes.

**THE LOVE PRESCRIPTION**

*Seven Days to More Intimacy, Connection, and Joy*

John & Julie Schwartz Gottman

Penguin Life (208 pp.)

$15.00 paper | Sept. 27, 2022

978-0-143-13663-7

A road map toward a better marriage.

The Gottmans, couples therapists and founders of the Gottman Institute to research and support healthy relationships, draw on their experience studying more than 40,000 couples to offer “a bite-sized, seven-day action plan” for taking a marriage in a new direction. From their work with newly partnered same-sex couples, long-married pairs with children and grandchildren, partners overwhelmed by busy careers and young children, couples trapped in poverty, and even some experiencing “mild to moderate domestic violence, where both partners can become violent during an escalated conflict, but no injuries
are inflicted and both want to change,” the authors have devised simple practices designed to teach partners how to relate to each other in productive ways. They invented their strategies, many of which are fairly obvious, in response to their clients’ problems and by observing the behavior of happy couples. “What we see in happy, thriving relationships,” they write, “is that people do genuinely admire each other for all the wonderful qualities they each possess, and when it comes to the inevitable not-so-wonderful qualities, they’re able to have compassion for each other’s enduring vulnerabilities.” They identify attitudes they call “the Four Horsemen—criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling,” which act as destructive forces. They can be overcome, however, through such practices as checking in with your partner for 10 minutes each day, expressing gratitude, giving genuine compliments, and, simply, touching. It’s also vital to express one’s needs and not expect a partner to be a mind reader: “We all have needs. We all have valid desires. But we don’t say them.” For couples who seem to be living parallel lives, roommates rather than loving partners, they recommend setting aside a weekly date night. “The ‘sex-starved marriage,’ they’ve observed, ‘really isn’t only about sex, fundamentally. It’s one where people have, over time, shut down all forms of openness: to sensuality; to adventure, to play and silliness, to learning together.”

Warm encouragement for healing troubled relationships.

A vigorous, provocative study of Native American history by one of its most accomplished practitioners.

Finnish historian Hämäläinen, professor of American history at Oxford, is a noted student of Native American systems of governance and commerce. In this follow-up to *Lakota America*, the author focuses on the long war between Indigenous peoples and alliances with the European colonial powers. “By 1776,” he writes, “various European colonial powers together claimed nearly all of the continent for themselves, but Indigenous peoples and powers controlled it.” That changed following the Revolutionary War, when Americans began to spill over the Appalachians, spreading the American empire at the expense of empires maintained by such various peoples as the Comanche, Lakota, and Shoshone. Hämäläinen uses the idea of Indigenous empires advisedly. With solid archaeological support, he ventures that the great Ancestral Puebloan stone building called Pueblo Bonito could very well have been built by slave labor, while at Cahokia, near present-day St. Louis, the “commercial hinterland extended from the Great Lakes to the Gulf coast and the Appalachians,” constituting a vast, complex trade network. Against roadrails and repeating rifles, such empires tumbled; against miscomprehension and assumption, peace was out of the question from the very beginning. The table was barely cleared at the first Thanksgiving when the newly arrived Puritans “thought that the sachem”—the hereditary leader of the Wampanoag Confederacy—“could be reduced to a subject of the king of England.” It didn’t help that these Native empires were often pitted against each other until reservations and small corners of the continent were all that was left—those and the Canadian subarctic, which long after “endured as an Indigenous world.” Even then, however, “it was not an Indigenous paradise; the contest for furs, guns, and merchandise fueled chronic animosities, collisions, and open wars.” Throughout, the author resurrects important yet often obscured history, creating a masterful narrative that demands close consideration.

An essential work of Indigenous studies that calls for rethinking North American history generally.

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**PARTISANS**

The Conservative Revolutionaries Who Remade American Politics in the 1990s

Hemmer, Nicole

Basic Books (368 pp.)

$30.00 | Aug. 30, 2022

978-1-5416-4688-9

A study of the political figures who “worked to develop a politics that was not just conservative but antiliberal, that leaned into the coarseness of American culture and brought it into politics.”

Hemmer is the founding director of the Carolyn T. and Robert M. Rogers Center for the Study of the Presidency at Vanderbilt and a researcher at the Obama Presidency Oral History project at Columbia. “In the 1980s,” she writes, “Reagan embodied a conservatism that was optimistic and popular, two things the American right had not been for most of the twentieth century.” Reagan was also a master of compromise, saving threatened social welfare programs and advocating new nuclear arms treaties—things not hard-line enough for true right-wingers, who had already had fits over the moderate Eisenhower presidency. For that reason, Hemmer writes, the bulk of the right abandoned Reaganism and moved “toward a more pessimistic, angrier, and even more revolutionary conservatism not long after his presidency.” It had many avatars, but foremost among them was Pat Buchanan, who campaigned for the presidency in the three races between 1992 and 2000, decrying immigrants, affirmative action, civil rights for minorities, homosexuality, and other bugaboos of the radical right—precisely the stuff that Donald Trump, “a cynical demagogue,” revived in 2016. Hemmer names other forerunners of Trump and Trumpism. In politics, there were Ross Perot and Pat Robertson, in the media, Roger Ailes and Fox News along with Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, and Dinesh D’Souza. All fueled the tea party movement, which supposed that Barack Obama hated White people, among other conspiratorial matters. “The tea
party was not just about rallies and radio shows," writes Hemmer. "It was also about elections. And there, the movement's antiestablishment streak would have profound consequences for the Republican Party." Fast-forward a dozen years, and you have our present chaos, with worse likely on the way.

A sobering analysis of a slowly unfolding political movement that may one day spell the end of American democracy.

THE FAMILY OUTING
A Memoir
Hemmer, Jessi
HarperOne (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-06-307901-4

A business and technology journalist's account of how revealing—and making peace with—painful secrets made her family whole.

As Hempel, a senior editor at large at LinkedIn, reports, her parents kept secrets that, though unspoken, "worked their way into the fabric of my being." Those secrets—of her shy mother's proximity to an alleged murderer of women and her deeply religious father's closeted homosexuality—first manifested as terrifying childhood nightmares of bodily endangerment that continued into young adulthood. A therapist helped her banish the dreams by talking through her feelings, and Hempel embarked on a successful media career. However, by the time she reached 30, she could only feel a "big hole where I felt a family should be." She had been living as a lesbian since college and had long been out to her parents. Yet it was that same openness about her sexuality that she believed triggered the implosion of her family, starting with her parents' marriage. Her father pulled away from her mother to explore online gay relationships, while her mother fell into depression and had the first of several breakdowns. Her trans brother began experimenting with meticulous dance routines and limits on food intake to exercise control over a life that seemed to be falling apart. The author and her sister, Katje, became involved in a cultlike organization called World Works and then became estranged when Hempel left the organization. Slowly, they found their way back to a decent relationship, at which time Katje revealed she was bisexual. But it would take a worldwide pandemic and forced isolation from each other before all family members could finally reconnect and learn to fully accept each other. As she explores how her family healed from the secrets it kept, Hempel also offers provocative glimpses into the complexities of what it truly means to forgive and love.

A thoughtful, compelling, unique memoir.

UPHILL
A Memoir
Hill, Jemele
Henry Holt (256 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-250-62437-6

An accomplished Black sports journalist tells her story.

Atlantic contributing writer Hill, who rose to fame partly due to her online conflicts with Donald Trump, recounts the ups and downs of her early life as well as her successful career at ESPN and beyond. The author grew up in Detroit with a mother who battled a drug addiction and a grandmother who was "a highly functioning alcoholic." Despite their struggles, however, both worked hard to provide for her. Hill writes about how she was determined to escape the poverty that constricted her childhood, a desire that led to an intense work ethic and a life filled with achievements. As a freshman at Michigan State, she
got a job as a sportswriter with the State News, an accomplishment that was partially possible because Hill had already written for a professional publication in high school. She continued her diligent work even in the face of widespread bigotry and “racist hate mail.” During an internship at the Lima News, she took pitches and wrote a series on domestic violence to accompany coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial. In 2006, she reluctantly took a job at ESPN (“I wanted to be a respected journalist, not some flashy television personality”). She stayed for 11 years, serving as co-host of the network’s flagship program, SportsCenter, and developing and co-hosting the groundbreaking show His & Hers, which Hill describes as “unapologetically Black.” Unfortunately, the author felt unsupported at ESPN, often due to her race. She left the network after Trump personally attacked her on Twitter. “Trump didn’t hurt me, but ESPN’s lack of response did,” she writes. “A government official had come after one of its employees and it did nothing.” Hill is relentless but fair, and she is equally comfortable parsing out instances of institutional racism and admitting to her own mistakes. She balances humor, vulnerability, and passion, creating a text that is both exciting and emotionally satisfying.

A frank, fearless, and entertaining memoir.

WISE GALS
The Spies Who Built the CIA and Changed the Future of Espionage
Holt, Nathalia
Putnam (400 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-32848-4

The hidden lives of pathbreaking women.

Drawing on considerable archival material—diaries, letters, interviews, reports, memos, scrapbooks, and photographs—cultural historian Holt, author of Rise of the Rocket Girls and The Queens of Animation, creates a vivid group biography of five strong-willed women who held significant positions in the early years of the CIA: Adelaide Hawkins, a divorced mother of three; Mary Hutchison, married to a CIA staff officer; Eloise Page, adoringly known as the “Iron Butterfly”; Elizabeth Sudmeier, who had begun her career as secretary to Gen. William “Wild Bill” Donovan; and Jane Burrell, “the model of a tough, successful CIA officer” whose short-lived career ended in a plane crash in 1948. The women had joined the agency during World War II, when it was known as the Office of Strategic Services. Led by Donovan, it served as the source of vital military intelligence. After the war, President Harry Truman quashed Donovan’s vision of a global web of intelligence-gathering agents, but as the threat of communism grew, Truman reinstated the agency as the Central Intelligence Group. With expanded powers, in 1947, it evolved into the Central Intelligence Agency. Holt reveals the frustration these women felt surrounded by misogynist “male, pale, and Yale” co-workers who were paid more, promoted to higher positions, and allowed privileges—to marry a non-American, for example—denied to women. In the 1950s, Allen Dulles, the new CIA director, set up a panel to address women’s concerns, but the detailed report by what some derisively called the “Peticoat Panel” was ignored. The author traces each woman’s challenging career, which involved recruiting and training foreign agents, designing a secure system for their communications, handling spies, engaging in counterintelligence, and heading operations around the world—Baghdad, London, Frankfurt, Paris, Brussels, and Rome—as the CIA’s focus shifted from containing communism to monitoring nuclear weaponry to tracing
In focusing on training a dog to behave, though, we mostly miss the development of Quid through the first year of his life while also exploring our complex relationship with our animal companions. With her characteristic sharp eye for detail and vast knowledge of canine-related scientific research, the author expertly guides us through Quid’s critical early development, from newborn pup to teenager. “The quick development of the dog…happens while their person is simply trying to both acclimate the dog and be acclimated to them,” she writes. “We get caught up in the housetraining, walk training, bite training, don’t-chew-everything training that is the typical contemporary approach to a dog’s first months of life with a new family. In focusing on training a dog to behave, though, we mostly miss the radical development of puppies into themselves—through the equivalent of infancy, childhood, young adolescence, and teenagerhood—until it’s already happened.” Both pet owners and animal enthusiasts will discover a wide variety of compelling information, whether the author is discussing the hidden meaning conveyed through the movement of a dog’s ears, chronicling the process of artificially inseminating a wolf, or describing how dogs are trained to be rescue animals. One of the author’s primary points of emphasis is that dogs, just like humans, possess unique individual characteristics that make them stand out from one another. Unlike dog-training manuals, which often give unrealistic and/or obvious advice about canine behavior, this book provides a science-based, honest look at the ups and downs of raising a puppy. Significantly, the author reminds readers about the importance of treating your dog as an individual and not just a member of a specific breed. “Expect that your puppy will not be who you think,” writes Horowitz, wisely, “nor act as you hope.”

A detailed, highly illuminating portrait of puppies and our relationships with them.

A stunning, intricate memoir about friendship, grief, and memory.

**STAY TRUE**

Horowitz, Alexandra

**THE YEAR OF THE PUPPY How Dogs Become Themselves**

Viking (304 pp.)

$28.00 | Sept. 20, 2022

978-0-593-29800-8

The bestselling author of *Being a Dog* and *Inside a Dog* chronicles the cognitive development of her new puppy.

Horowitz, who runs the Dog Cognition Lab at Barnard College, presents a keenly observed record of the development of Quid through the first year of his life while also exploring our complex relationship with our animal companions. With her characteristic sharp eye for detail and vast knowledge of canine-related scientific research, the author expertly guides us through Quid’s critical early development, from newborn pup to teenager. “The quick development of the dog…happens while their person is simply trying to both acclimate the dog and be acclimated to them,” she writes. “We get caught up in the housetraining, walk training, bite training, don’t-chew-everything training that is the typical contemporary approach to a dog’s first months of life with a new family. In focusing on training a dog to behave, though, we mostly miss the radical development of puppies into themselves—through the equivalent of infancy, childhood, young adolescence, and teenagerhood—until it’s already happened.” Both pet owners and animal enthusiasts will discover a wide variety of compelling information, whether the author is discussing the hidden meaning conveyed through the movement of a dog’s ears, chronicling the process of artificially inseminating a wolf, or describing how dogs are trained to be rescue animals. One of the author’s primary points of emphasis is that dogs, just like humans, possess unique individual characteristics that make them stand out from one another. Unlike dog-training manuals, which often give unrealistic and/or obvious advice about canine behavior, this book provides a science-based, honest look at the ups and downs of raising a puppy. Significantly, the author reminds readers about the importance of treating your dog as an individual and not just a member of a specific breed. “Expect that your puppy will not be who you think,” writes Horowitz, wisely, “nor act as you hope.”

A detailed, highly illuminating portrait of puppies and our relationships with them.

**NINETEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT CONSCIOUSNESS**

House, Patrick

St. Martin’s (336 pp.)

$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-250-15117-9

An exploration of the possibilities of consciousness.

House, a neuroscientist whose research focuses on the nature of free will, tackles a knotty subject in a series of essays on the latest science in the field. He also uses extended anecdotes that put complex concepts into accessible terms even while acknowledging that there are no easy answers in the study of consciousness. Consider different translations of a poem: Each has something relevant to say, but none can entirely capture the essence. House repeatedly returns to a case in which a woman was undergoing brain surgery to address epilepsy. At one point, the surgeons touched a part of the brain that made her laugh. Did this indicate that emotional responses are simply an aspect of the physical matter inside our skulls? In another essay, House discusses his interviews with a man who had a substantial part of his brain removed to get to a tumor; yet he seemed unaffected aside from finding it more difficult to play the piano. The author, whose investigations recall Oliver Sacks, also digs into processes of learning: Is the human mind a learning machine, and did the learning process begin when a certain level of environmental awareness was necessary for survival? Did it develop through stages to its current level? Does it simply absorb sensory inputs, editing out useless or redundant material? House makes an interesting detour to wonder if a society of blind people could deduce the existence of the moon, while other essays look at the functioning of memory and prediction, which takes up a remarkable amount of the brain’s capacity. There is also a theory that consciousness links to movement, which is one of the most essential, if often unconscious, aspects of brain function. Though the author occasionally gets lost in his own musings, he offers readers plenty of fascinating questions about the brain, the mind, and the soul.

Mixing science, metaphors, and philosophy, House provides elegant frameworks for ways to think about thinking.

**STAY TRUE**

Hsu, Hua

Doubleday (208 pp.)

$26.00 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-0-385-54777-2

A Taiwanese American writer remembers an intimate but unexpected college friendship cut short by tragedy.

Hsu, an English professor and staff writer at the *New Yorker*, began his undergraduate years at Berkeley with the intention of cultivating...
an alternative, punk persona consistent with his love of indie bands and his obsession with creating zines. “I saw coolness,” he writes, “as a quality primarily expressed through erudite discernment, and I defined who I was by what I rejected, a kitchen sink approach to negation that resulted in essays decrying Beverly Hills, 90210, hippies, private school, George Bush...and, after they became trendy, Pearl Jam.” Consequently, when he first met Japanese American fraternity brother Ken, he wrote him off as “a genre of person I actively avoided—mainstream.” As they got to know each other, to Hsu’s surprise, he and Ken grew very close. The two spent hours “debating the subversive subtext of movies” and penning a screenplay inspired by the cult classic film The Last Dragon, an experience that led them to long conversations about the nature of Black and Asian solidarity. Over time, their relationship grew increasingly personal. For example, Hsu sought out Ken for advice the night Hsu planned to lose his virginity, and, years later, Hsu tentatively referred to Ken as his best friend. Then, one night, Ken was killed in a carjacking, abruptly truncating a relationship that Hsu thought would last forever and sending him into a spiral of grief and self-blame that lasted for years. This memoir is masterfully structured and exquisitely written. Hsu’s voice shimmers with tenderness and vulnerability as he meticulously reconstructs his memories of a nurturing, compassionate friendship. The protagonists’ Asian American identities are nuanced, never serving as the defining element of the story, and the author creates a cast of gorgeously balanced characters.

A stunning, intricate memoir about friendship, grief, and memory.

**WE TAKE OUR CITIES WITH US**

Khan, Sorayya

Mad Creek/Ohio State Univ. Press

(160 pp.)

$19.95 paper | Oct. 10, 2022

978-0-8142-5848-4

A Pakistani Dutch novelist tells both her own life story and those of her parents and grandparents through the lens of cities where her family has lived.

Khan begins this memoir in essays in 2001 in Ithaca, New York, soon after the tragedy of 9/11. At her elementary school, a few fellow students called her family “terrorists” and threatened them with violence. This terrifying incident sets the stage for a series of essays describing seminal moments in the author’s life, including her Dutch mother’s and her Pakistani father’s deaths in Vienna. In one essay, which begins in Denver, where she met her husband, Naeem, years after their shared childhood in Pakistan, Khan recounts the aftermath of Naeem’s undiagnosed heart attack in Syracuse, New York, marveling at the fact that he lived and cringing that she attended a Ravi Shankar concert he lived and for “knowing too much” came from Bernie Sanders supporters. When the WikiLeaks dump of stolen DNC documents revealed that the organization was working against Sanders, the theory took a sadly predictable turn: Hillary Clinton had ordered Rich’s killing. Soon the #IAmSethRich meme took a hard right turn. When Donald Trump entered the White House, he “represented a new style of conspiracy theorist. Unlike those of Alex Jones or the Birchers, his theories didn’t attempt to explain the world. They didn’t connect any dots or try to make sense of seemingly disparate events.” The buzz around Rich’s death intensified, soon to fall down the rabbit hole of the Trump internet cult, the Pizzagate set, and, far worse, Fox News, with Laura Ingraham decrying the “aggressive lack of curiosity” of the mainstream media in the case and Sean Hannity acting as a one-man amplifier of a matter that quickly became QAnon gospel. All ignored the plea of Rich’s parents: “Stop politicizing our son’s murder.” Kroll singles out Fox as the worst offender, but he doesn’t spare Julian Assange, either, for missing an “opportunity to issue a clarification that could provide a semblance of solace and resolution for a grieving family.” Lawsuits were filed, judgments rendered, apologies and retractions issued—but still,
as the author writes in this thoroughgoing, riveting narrative, the lies continue to this day.

An exemplary investigation, exactly as the author describes it: “a true-crime story for the post-truth era.”

Skilled historians attempt to refute the myths and misstatements about the American past that add to the confusions and bitterness of today’s politics.

Edited by well-known Princeton historians Kruse and Zelizer, the collection includes an impressive roster of contributors, including Michael Kazin, Erika Lee, Ari Kelman, Akhil Reed Amar, Carol Anderson, Naomi Oreskes, and Eric M. Conway. Among the targets are a host of flawed yet widespread beliefs: that Native Americans have played no significant role in American history; the Southern border has been a sieve allowing the entry of dangerous immigrants; socialism is a foreign import; the New Deal and Great Society failed; voter fraud has been commonplace; feminism has aimed to destroy the American family.

Some essays are especially compelling. Drawing from his recent book, Daniel Immerwahr analyzes the mistaken belief that the U.S. is not an empire. Lawrence W. Glickman’s exemplary contribution on White backlash shows how myths originate and kernels of fact and, more importantly, what human needs they satisfy, and the myths they evaluate are mostly those of today’s right wing—as if the left doesn’t possess its own set of myths that require deconstruction. Furthermore, too many contributors display more scorn than sober analysis, often engaging in mere dismissal of other arguments or ideological stances—e.g., “the really staunch Right wacko vote.” In some essays, the contributors don’t offer enough context or sufficient explanation for their decision to examine a particular myth. The result is a work that, lacking careful editorial oversight, is less coherent and credible than its serious purpose warrants—or as incisive as we would expect from its esteemed contributors.

A book whose worthy aim remains unfulfilled.

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MYTH AMERICA
Historians Take on the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past
Ed. by Kruse, Kevin M. & Julian E. Zelizer
Basic Books (400 pp.)
$32.00  |  Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-4464-0139-0

A leading art critic examines the lives of artists who started down a new path in their later years.

In these six illuminating portraits—of Titian, Goya, Monet, Matisse, Edward Hopper, and Louise Nevelson—Lacayo, the former longtime art and architecture critic for Time, pays particular attention to the influences that their later work exerted. “Old age can be no less liberating, if it brings with it the confidence to try new things,” writes the author. “Young artists may experiment because they have nothing to lose. More established ones can do the same because they have nothing to fear.” Titian abandoned the polished surfaces of his classic style and adopted a free-flowing method, with heavy pigment used to inject texture and dynamism. Goya’s series of late works, known as the Black Paintings because of their psychological, nightmarish intensity, opened the way for the imaginary to be used as subject matter. Monet’s massive panels of water lilies emphasized color and tone over structure and perspective, influencing a generation of abstractionists. Matisse, who struggled with mobility issues caused by complications from surgery for abdominal cancer, embarked on a new style of drawing and created a remarkable series of works using cut-out colored paper, showing how simple forms could yield complex meanings. In his final decade, Hopper created surreal paintings, moving decidedly away from his earlier emphasis on realism. His landscapes became simplified and dislocated, and one of his most interesting late works depicts only columns of sunlight in an empty room. Nevelson had built her reputation on complex pieces for gallery spaces before making a radical shift toward large-scale works for urban landscapes. Lacayo provides a biography of each artist and reproductions of crucial works, showing how they arrived at their late-life transition. Through these vivid minibios, the author shows that it is never too late to find a different way of looking at the world.

A fascinating book written with the authority that comes with a great depth of knowledge.

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DOWN AND OUT IN PARADISE
The Life of Anthony Bourdain
Leerhsen, Charles
Simon & Schuster (320 pp.)
$28.99  |  Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-982-14044-1

Like its subject, this razzmatazz biography zips along nicely.

After writing successful biographies on such colorful personages as Ty Cobb
and Butch Cassidy, Leerhsen takes on “crash test dummy extraordinaire Anthony Bourdain (1956-2018), who “didn’t hide his scars and other imperfections as most celebrities do.” With zesty verve and material from more than 80 interviews, the author dramatically unfolds an entertaining, ultimately tragic tale. A “comic book obsessed nudnik,” Bourdain was born in Manhattan on his literary hero’s birthday (George Orwell) and grew up in New Jersey. Deeply influenced by Hunter S. Thompson, “Angry Anthony” was raised in a household under TV shows, which “would get richer, more nuanced, and also sad as time passed.” Pair this with Tom Vitale’s In the Weeds and Laurie Wohlever’s Bourdain. A chatty, quick-witted portrait of a complicated, tormented man.

THE INTERPRETER’S DAUGHTER
A Family Memoir
Lim, Teresa
Pegasus (356 pp.)
$27.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-63936-268-4

A British-based Singaporean journalist probes family silences surrounding her beautiful and mysterious great-aunt. Lim began researching her Chinese great-grandfather soon after she arrived in England in 1992 with her British husband. Over time, the one family member who came to intrigue her most was her great-grandfather’s youngest daughter, Fanny, who chose not to marry and “built a bridge between the orthodox and the modern for the later generations of women in her family.” A single family photograph dated from 1935 marked the beginning of Lim’s journey into her family’s past. She combed the archives of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies and the British Library for clues about the great-grandfather who had left a crisis-ridden, unstable China to work as an interpreter for British colonial administrators in Singapore. Piecing together family stories, Lim describes how her liberal-minded great-grandfather allowed Fanny—who rejected all Chinese anti-feminist traditions—to take a public oath of celibacy. Her “sworn spinster” status allowed her the freedom to learn English, study at Hong Kong University, and pursue a career as a schoolteacher. It also gave her the means to support her older sister when she left her husband for taking a concubine. Still, Chinese tradition still held power over Fanny. When the Japanese army marched into Singapore in 1942, she killed herself in what her family believed was an act of self-protection from the dishonor of rape. Yet Lim believed Fanny’s suicide could not be so simply explained. The Japanese arrested and executed thousands of Chinese men during their brief reign of terror, among them Fanny’s brother. Her death was meant as a symbolic expression of anguish for a family member she loved. Rich in the little-discussed history of Singaporean Chinese, this multigenerational memoir offers a timeless tale of the quest for identity, wholeness, and truth.

An eloquently enlightening family history.

SISTER NOVELISTS
The Trailblazing Porter Sisters, Who Paved the Way for Austen and the Brontës
Looser, Devoney
Bloomsbury (576 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-63557-529-3

Buried for 200 years, the story of the indomitable Porter sisters comes to light. Household names in their time, these forgotten Regency novelists have gained an effective champion in Jane Austen biographer and scholar Looser, who points out that Jane and Anna Maria’s “real-life adventures read like funhouse-mirror versions of Austen’s famous characters and plots.” The author sets a tale of talent, relentless hard work, and a profound sisterly bond against gripping physical privation, financial insecurity, disappointments in love, and betrayals by family. While one sister sat scribbling at home to produce the every-other-year novels that allowed them to barely support themselves and their mother, the other would cobble together a string of houseguest opportunities with friends of the family. Their brother, Robert, was a successful historical painter and married into the Russian royal family, but he was such a spendthrift that Jane spent most of her life and much of her income dealing with his debts. Though Looser doesn’t claim that the sisters’ oeuvre would interest modern readers, she argues that they pioneered the historical novel and that their achievement was pirated by their childhood friend Sir Walter Scott. Jane stewed about this for years, ultimately speaking out via a sharp parody. Anna Maria’s temperament was more placid. “To be happy, not celebrated, is my aim,” she wrote to Jane, “whether I become so by making a pudding or making a Book, it is all one to me.” Looser has ferreted out many wonderful lines from the vast
correspondence between the sisters, which was lost to history for a century when purchased by a “literary hoard[er]” shortly after Jane’s death, an act that “had the effect of shutting up the sisters’ larger-than-life stories in a dusty castle, like a Gothic novel’s captive heroines.” From the 1950s to the ’70s, the manuscripts were exhumed, divided into lots and sold around the world. Looser puts it all together at last.

A triumph of literary detective work and storytelling, this is a must-read for the Austen and Brontë crowd.

**WATCH AND LEARN**

**How I Turned Hollywood Upside Down With Netflix, Redbox, and MoviePass**

**Lowe, Mitch**

Hachette Go (288 pp.)

$29.00 | Sept. 6, 2022

978-0-306-82726-6

Lessons from an inventive career. Identifying himself as a disruptor, Lowe, co-founder of Netflix and now a busy public speaker, enthusiastically shares business advice gleaned from his many successes, failures, and challenges. An adherent of Buddhist teachings—Buddhist principles serve as epigraphs for each chapter—he explains that “like drops of water wearing away at stone, a zen disruptor’s approach generates success slowly but inexorably, creating a long-term triumph over the rigid thinking of traditional companies in sclerotic industries.” The sclerotic industry that Lowe battled most strongly was dominated by a handful of powerful movie studios. As a high school dropout, Lowe felt driven by “calculated reckless abandon.” By the age of 18, he had “visited a dozen different countries and done jobs from disco club DJ to smuggling currency behind the Iron Curtain to stealing bananas and grapefruit from Arabs in a war zone.” He had bought ethnic clothes in Romania and sold them on Rodeo Drive “for a hundred times what I paid.” In Monaco, he hung out with Andy Warhol, who gifted him “a signed Marilyn Monroe lithograph.” In the 1980s, back in California, with 500 DVDs from a store that went out of business, he decided to rent videos from kiosks. First, he realized that he needed to figure out how to design and manufacture the vending machines, and his facility for problem-solving earned him the nickname Tinkerbell. “Tinkering,” he writes, “was the way to find the magical formula for success, I thought.” By 1996, the successful kiosk business led to an offer to join Netflix. After departing from that company, he worked on another concept: Redbox. For all his accomplishments, Lowe’s most recent venture, the subscription service MoviePass, proved disastrous, beset by unexpected costs and customer fraud. “Forgetting all the lessons and techniques you have learned,” he reminds readers, “is a path that can lead to failure.” A lively memoir from a tireless and fearless businessman.

**PRISONERS OF THE CASTLE**

**An Epic Story of Survival and Escape From Colditz, the Nazis’ Fortress Prison**

Macintyre, Ben

Crown (368 pp.)

$28.99 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-0-593-13633-1

Macintyre’s latest nonfiction thriller takes us inside a notorious Nazi prison. World War II buffs know that Colditz was a castle deep inside Germany that housed Allied officer POWs who had tried repeatedly to escape. Numerous fictional portrayals of heroic prisoners outsmarting dastardly Nazis bear little relation to reality, but Macintyre tells an equally entertaining story that sticks to the facts. The author reminds readers that POW camps were run by the Wehrmacht, which mostly abided by the dictates of the Geneva Conventions. Prisoner abuse was rare, and escape attempts were punished by solitary confinement, not execution, although conditions deteriorated in the war’s final year. Guards tended to be older noncombatants or World War I veterans whose enthusiasm for Nazism varied. As for the POWs, assignment to Colditz was a sloppy process; many were not escapees and never joined escape plots. Courage was plentiful, but there were also plenty of negative elements among the prison population. British prisoners, almost all upper class, treated the enlisted men who served them shabbily. Antisemitism was common among the French, many of whom preferred Pétain to de Gaulle. Macintyre emphasizes that Colditz was a titanic castle but a poor prison, replete with passages, drains, cells, abandoned sections, and locks that could be easily picked. Having set the scene, he devotes most of the narrative to escape attempts in which spectacularly creative prisoners vied with increasingly skilled guards, who learned from their mistakes. At any given time, several tunnels were in progress because prisoners from each nation had their own projects. Although dazzling technical achievements, almost all failed. The only successful operations involved individuals or small groups. Unlike many fictional portrayals, Macintyre chronicles what happened once the men were outside the walls. The Swiss border was 400 miles away, and almost every escapee was caught before reaching it. Perhaps 30 made it out of Germany.

A mixture of derring-do and a vivid, warts-and-all portrayal of the iconic castle.
A potent investigation into how elite colleges and universities in the U.S. perpetuate economic inequalities and fail to properly address the country’s ongoing racial divide.

Many people believe that private, elite colleges reward merit and hard work, and while that may be true, there are countless other factors at play. Mandery—a Harvard graduate, Emmy and Peabody winner, and author of *A Wild Justice: The Death and Resurrection of Capital Punishment in America*, among other books—plainly shows how “elite colleges are guilty of cementing, reproducing, and exacerbating inequality in America.” Ivy League colleges, and others of their ilk, open their doors mainly to those least in need. “For the overwhelming majority,” the author notes, “they take children who have been the beneficiary of a lifetime of privilege, convert that privilege into a degree of value, steer these students into careers in finance, cultivate disdain for those who work for the common good, [and] systematically disadvantage the handful of poor students of color who manage to make it through their gates.” On the other hand, public universities are “producing the lion’s share of upward mobility” and encouraging public service careers. The trend of excluding talented, low-income students from elite colleges is exacerbated by standardized testing biases, tax exemptions for higher education, the hoarding of endowments, and admissions criteria privileging legacy students and accomplishments (science fair awards, volunteering, expensive extracurricular activities, etc.) that favor affluent applicants. Mandery offers a variety of strategies to counter this problem—e.g., basing admissions decisions on high school rank and increasing the sizes of entering classes. Of course, students attend college for reasons other than status: gaining access to specific occupations, transitioning to adulthood, or just the sheer joy of learning. Living a decent and satisfying life, as Mandery shows, hardly depends on a degree from Harvard or Princeton.

A convincing indictment of elite colleges for reproducing inequality while hiding behind their historical clout.

A lively account of heroism after the tumultuous U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

Americans celebrated when the Soviet military evacuated Afghanistan in 1989, leaving the government and its supporters to the cruel mercies of the victorious Taliban. Few cheered when America did the same last year, as U.S. leaders failed to keep their promises that they would not abandon their allies. Among those caught up in the chaos of the final months were interpreters, civil servants, and elite members of Afghan Special Forces, who worked closely with their American counterparts. Mann, a retired Green Beret with more than 20 years of international combat experience, builds his story around Nezamuddin Nezami, an Afghan commando who found himself trapped in the increasing chaos. Frightened for his family’s fate once the Taliban regained control of the country, he applied for a Special Immigrant Visa to the U.S., which never came. He appealed frantically to former comrades, including the author, all safely in America, often retired, and none highly placed. Stirred to action, they assembled an ad hoc collection of Afghan vets, CIA officers, USAID advisers, and congressional aides dubbed the Pineapple Express, and the group planned tactics, bypassed red tape to talk directly to overwhelmed officials under siege at the Kabul airport, and succeeded in extracting Nezami and his family. By this time, aware of appeals from other trapped Afghans, they managed to guide hundreds to safety before a terrorist bomb at the airport abruptly ended their work, leaving thousands behind. Mann delivers gripping accounts of a few successful rescues and admiring portraits of his Pineapple Express colleagues, but he is also careful to point out that America dishonored itself. In hastily abandoning Afghanistan, neither Presidents Trump nor Biden displayed more than token sympathy for the Afghan people. Particularly helpful for general readers are the timeline, cast of characters, and acronyms list.

A worthy account of a valiant operation.

A memoir from the first Black woman to be named the CEO of an NBA franchise.

Marshall has a history of being first. She was the first Black president of her high school, the first

“A convincing indictment of elite colleges for reproducing inequality while hiding behind their historical clout.”

*Poison Ivy*
Black cheerleader at Berkeley, the first Black female officer at AT&T, and the first Black CEO of the Dallas Mavericks. She is also a cancer survivor. The author attributes her many blessings to her strong Christian faith and the love and support of her family. Marshall shares her career journey as well as intimate details of her battle with cancer and memories from her early life growing up poor in Richmond, California, where she and her family endured her father’s violent temper. However, even though her mother was “a victim of terrible domestic abuse for more than twenty years,” she provided Marshall and her siblings love and structure. Her mother always stressed the importance of school and church, places that provided the safety they lacked at home. “All six of us went to school, no matter what, just as we went to church. Structure and routine were our ways of handling my father's unpredictable outbursts,” she writes. “Education and faith were our paths out of the projects.” Throughout, Marshall is candid about the many hardships she has endured in her life, and she shows how her faith has helped her find opportunities for growth. She also shares Bible verses that have encouraged her to continue her fight and entries from the journal she kept during her cancer treatment. Reading Marshall’s story, it is apparent that her confidence and strong will have been primary contributing factors to her success. On several occasions, the author describes times when she would seemingly forego the feelings and concerns of others in order to meet her needs or to stick to her plans. Hers is truly a story of survival.

Regardless of religious affiliation, readers facing adversity will find Marshall's story encouraging.

**FIVE FLOORS UP**
**The Heroic Family Story of Four Generations in the FDNY**
Brian McDonald

An affecting, fast-paced portrait of four generations of FDNY firefighters and the many dangers they have faced—some to the very end.

“William Feehan’s last moments on earth were spent helping the direct recovery effort for firefighters trapped in the Marriott hotel adjacent to the south tower.” So writes journalist McDonald, author of *My Father’s Gun and Last Call at Elaine’s*, who tracks the Feehan connection to firefighting in New York to a patriarch who stumbled into the job in the 1920s, mostly by virtue of being Irish and having a brother-in-law in the FDNY. He served as an ordinary firefighter for 30 years, seeking no further promotions: “William loved facing a raging fire with a nozzle in his hands and saw no reason to do anything else.” His son and namesake was of similar mind, but, as the author chronicles, he moved up the chain of command until he was a captain, a chief, then commissioner. He was the highest-ranking casualty of 9/11, the cause of death listed as homicide, “the first issued to a member of the FDNY killed in the attack.” McDonald writes with all the vividness of firefighting genre master Dennis Smith, but his story isn’t all hooks and ladders. Much of the narrative involves the complex politics of the FDNY vis-a-vis other emergency departments and the city government. In one extensive passage, McDonald describes a history of budgetary neglect that ended in the 1970s with a demoralized, understaffed department. They faced mortal danger every day, and “in return, they received little thanks from the communities they served and layoffs and pay freezes from the city. The anger was palpable.” The story continues with the achievements of Bill Feehan’s son-in-law and grandson within the FDNY, which, after 9/11, is held in much higher regard—even if the pay still isn’t adequate.

A closely observed study of ordinary heroes and the thousands more like them whose lives are always on the line.

**CATHOLICISM**
**A Global History From the French Revolution to Pope Francis**
John T. McGreevy

A sweeping history of modern Catholicism. McGreevy, a professor of history at Notre Dame and author of three books on Catholicism, examines the past two centuries. The author begins his authoritative survey with the French Revolution, noting that no series of events since the Reformation had so thoroughly rocked the Catholic landscape. The excesses of the Revolution and the upending of Catholic authority in France led to the global “ultramontane revival” movement. “At the revival’s core,” writes McGreevy, “was a deepening attachment to the institution of the church.” This attachment would add significantly to the powers of the pope and the Roman ecclesiastical structure. The revival’s “triumph” was the First Vatican Council, in 1869-1870, which confirmed the doctrine of papal infallibility and severed voices of dissent, modernism, and reform. “To signal church independence,” writes the author, “Pius IX decided against inviting any monarchs or heads of state, a decision that for the first time eliminated lay participation in an ecumenical council.” However, the church was already fighting nationalist movements around the world. As nationalism bumped up against the interests of the church, a new infrastructure was created to safeguard Catholic society and culture: “the Milieu,” an undying series of social welfare organizations, movements, missions, and other initiatives. The Milieu spread across the 19th and 20th centuries and became a public and sometimes-pugnacious face for Catholicism. After decades of social upheaval, Pope John XXIII changed the course of Catholicism by calling the Second Vatican Council in 1959. The ensuing decades were marked by liberation theology; the monumental papacy of John Paul II; and, of course, the destructive onslaught of sexual
abuse scandals, to which the author appropriately devotes an entire chapter. Throughout the text, McGreevy, a skilled historian and storyteller, provides a wealth of detail about the church and the changing world to which it has been reacting for the past 200 years. A must-read for practicing Catholics and anyone interested in religious studies.

**BLOOD FROM A STONE**

*A Memoir of How Wine Brought Me Back From the Dead*

McHugh, Adam  
IVP (264 pp.)  
$20.00 paper | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-1-5140-0088-5

The memoir of a hospice chaplain and grief counselor who switched gears and became a sommelier.

After years in the ministry, McHugh began questioning his career choice. While working as a hospice chaplain in Los Angeles, he was inspired by Peter Mayle’s *A Year in Provence* and took a much-needed vacation to France, where he discovered his new calling: wine. While in Provence, writes McHugh, “my soul was coming alive through my senses.” Further, he admits, “Surrounded by these people who had such a sense of place, I felt my own absence of place. Some sort of primal homesickness was awakening in me.” However, making the career change was not something he took lightly. Knowing the importance of his hospice work, the author recalls asking himself a significant question: “How can I possibly live when others are dying?” Although his story began in France, McHugh was eventually drawn to his hospice work, writes McHugh. “Despite the healing effects he felt in the Santa Ynez Valley of California. Throughout, the author charmingly writes details of the wine regions he has visited in France and California along with intriguing local wine history. Albeit limited, he also shares intimate details of his separation and divorce from his wife. The movie *Sideways*, which takes place in the Santa Ynez Valley, also comes up numerous times during the narrative. Admittedly feeling a little like the character Miles, played by Paul Giamatti, McHugh discusses the effect the movie had on his life, including a personal encounter with Giamatti. While the portions of the text regarding each region’s terroir are captivating, almost lyrical at times, the sections about the dissolution of his marriage and the frequent job changes he made within the wine industry create shifts in tone that detract from the primary narrative. Despite this shortcoming, however, oenophiles are certain to appreciate the book.

An appealingly inspiring journey.

**BARRED**

*Why the Innocent Can’t Get Out of Prison*

Medwed, Daniel S.  
Basic Books (336 pp.)  
$30.00 | Sept. 20, 2022  
978-1-5416-7591-9

Exacting examination of the challenges involved in exonerating the wrongfully convicted.

Law professor Medwed, a founder of Brooklyn Law School’s Second Look Program, writes with passion and expertise regarding the Kafkaesque universe of those incarcerated for serious crimes who later establish “actual innocence.” While public perception focuses on scientific advances and some success stories, the author rightly sees this as an acknowledged crisis. The system, he writes, “is stacked against the innocent, contrary to the popular belief that the post-conviction process is full of escape hatches from the prison cell.” In four sections, the author fleshes out the complex legal elements at play, examining the appeals process, formal post-conviction remedies including habeas corpus petitions and the Supreme Court, and parole and executive clemency. In his sharp investigation, Medwed finds widespread procedural barriers, “the wide range of rules that govern the practice of litigation after conviction.” Essentially, many wrongfully convicted individuals are barred from seeking post-trial relief due to factors ranging from the labyrinthine appeals process to the cognitive biases of judges who are asked to reexamine prior cases. Similarly, notwithstanding some embrace of a “progressive prosecution movement,” including internal conviction review units, Medwed sees continued reluctance on the part of many prosecutors to unearth such miscarriages of justice. “Convictions,” he writes, “have become a metric by which an individual prosecutor and an office as a whole can be assessed.” The author illustrates these disheartening assertions with a variety of often shocking case studies, including some he pursued with the Second Look Project and other innocence-focused groups, and he ends each chapter with policy prescriptions. In the final chapters, Medwed proposes an evolutionary “new model” for addressing such challenging claims, in the vein of England’s independent Criminal Cases Review Commission, which reviews innocence claims for the appeal process. Though legal jargon occasionally intrudes, Medwed’s narrative is both informative and poignant.

*A disturbing, important addition to the literature on America’s addiction to incarceration.*
A scholarly account of the musical icon's impact on rock.

Morrison, a professor of music history at Princeton and author specializing in 20th-century Russian and Soviet music, shows how writing about pop culture is not as easy as it may seem. He does well with the early part of Nicks' life, using a framework of biographical details and previously published interviews to flesh out how and why she became a singer. Morrison also skillfully handles deep dives into the imagery of Nicks' lyrics, providing more information about the legend of Rhiannon than most fans will want to know. "The main character in the First Branch of the Mabinogi, Rhiannon is an otherworldly woman who marries Pwyll, the mortal prince of Dyfed (South Wales)," writes the author. "Rhiannon is associated with three songbirds who accompany her; mythographers have also associated her with the Gaulish horse goddess, Epona." Unfortunately, throughout the narrative, Morrison drops in long asides about subjects that are tangential to the book's overall themes.

Mukherjee also emphasizes that there is still a great deal we do not know about cells, especially the interactions between types. Understanding the mechanics is one thing, he notes; hearing "the song of the cell" is something else. This poignant idea serves as a suitable coda for a fascinating story related with clarity and common sense.

Another outstanding addition to the author's oeuvre, which we hope will continue to grow for years to come.

THE SONG OF THE CELL
An Exploration of Medicine and the New Human
Mukherjee, Siddhartha
Scribner (480 pp.)
$32.50 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-982-11735-1

A luminous journey into cellular biology.

Mukherjee, a physician, professor of medicine, and Pulitzer Prize–winning author (The Emperor of All Maladies), has a knack for explaining difficult ideas in terms that are both straightforward and interesting. In his latest, he punctuates his scientific explanations with touching, illustrative stories of people coping with cell-based illnesses, tracking how the knowledge gleaned from those cases contributed to further scientific advancement. In the early chapters, the author traces the discovery of cells as the building blocks of animal and plant life, with the invention of the microscope making analysis possible. With this development, researchers could better understand the roles of cells in human physiology, including the illnesses that rogue cells could cause. In the middle section, Mukherjee investigates how scientists then moved on to study the processes through which cells become specialized by function and how some turn cancerous. The identification of the phases of cell division and the discovery of DNA were crucial breakthroughs, opening the way for a new generation of treatments. Mukherjee occasionally digresses from the historical story to provide vivid portraits of key researchers, with recollections about his own work. The final section of the book deals with emerging areas of research such as cell manipulation and gene editing as well as new technologies like transplantation. It’s all unquestionably exciting, but the author is careful to acknowledge the knotty ethical considerations. Treating embryos for cellular abnormalities makes medical sense, but the idea of altered human beings has worrying implications. Mukherjee also emphasizes that there is still a great deal we do not know about cells, especially the interactions between types. Understanding the mechanics is one thing, he notes; hearing "the song of the cell" is something else. This poignant idea serves as a suitable coda for a fascinating story related with clarity and common sense.

A glancing account of women’s roles in the making of the Italian underworld. There are few women with the polish of Carmela Soprano in Rome-based journalist Nadeau’s account of their role in the Camorra, the Naples-centered branch of the organized crime system that thrives on “fear and complacency” and infiltrates “every layer of Italian life.” Hundreds of such women are involved, some in central positions of power but most relegated to subsidiary roles in an old-fashioned, patriarchal business. The author focuses, a little too much, on one character, Assunta Maresca (1935-2021). Known as Pupetta, or “little doll,” Maresca evinced a murderous streak and, at the end of her long life, a fierce lack of repentance for any of her crimes. Indeed, she was a pioneer in the criminal world. Now, writes
the author, “in the Camorra especially, where Pupetta thrived, women are making far more progress climbing the ladder and being treated as equals than their law-abiding peers.” Most of them were born into the business, and those who were not tend to serve in lesser roles as drug mules or street hustlers. Some of those whom Nadeau interviews are knowing—one warns her not to take the elevator in a recently built structure since the Camorra-riddled construction trade takes many shortcuts in building safety—while others feign ignorance. A problem with the book is that Nadeau’s data set is much too small, sociologically speaking. It’s more anecdotal than empirical, though she does produce some useful statistics—e.g., more than 150 women are now in Italy’s prisons for Mafia-related crimes, “the highest number ever recorded.” Also valuable are Nadeau’s accounts of mob wives and daughters who have cashed in on “mafia chic.” But those are the lucky ones, as “hundreds of women in mafia families have been brutally murdered over the years.”

A good choice for Mafia completists and students of international crime.

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speculates that the future of feces reclamation should include household- or neighborhood-scale plants, and the chapter on new-generation composting toilets is particularly interesting. It all adds up to a fascinating book punctuated with humor and imbued with optimism about the future. “Sometimes,” writes the author, “hope arrives in surprising packages.”

**An authoritative, informative, and entertaining book that will change the thinking about what comes out of our bodies.**

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Patterson, Juliet
Milkweed (288 pp.)
$25.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-57131-176-4

A pensive memoir about mental illness, suicide, and the quest to uncover often hidden family secrets.

Death by suicide may bring an end to a person’s psychic and/or physical woes, but it reverberates among those left behind, sometimes in the form of shame or regret that one could not do more for the deceased, sometimes in the form of getting rid of every reminder that that person ever existed. In Patterson’s sometimes-overwritten but forceful account, the suicide that set her on a yearslong quest for understanding was her father’s. He died by hanging himself from a Minneapolis bridge on a frozen night. Her grandfather also ended his own life. “Even before my father’s death,” writes the author, “I felt keenly the psychological burden of such an inheritance.” Since her father rarely spoke of her grandmother, Patterson had much to uncover, visiting his hometown of Pittsburg, Kansas, in a region where, in a profound metaphor, sinkholes abound. One in particular, near her grandparents’ home, “was frighteningly deep. From where I stood, it looked as if the lawn had been punched with a massive awl, exposing the ground’s secret interior.” Both father and son, it seems, had been methodical in preparing their own deaths while staring into their own abysses. Once inside her grandmother’s home, Patterson retrieved a wristwatch that, though its wearer was long dead, had been regularly cleaned though its wearer was long dead, had been regularly cleaned ever since. This served as a sign that while the dead sometimes go unmentioned, they live on in things. Although her own mother removed almost all her father’s possessions from their home, Patterson writes, she kept a few things, including the suicide note. Apart from the personal, the author weaves in results from her research in thanatology and suicide, including the provocative thought from psychologist Edwin Shneidman that “the person who commits suicide puts his psychological skeleton in the survivor’s emotional closet.”

A searching, often elegant meditation on loneliness, pain, and redemption.
BOY FRIENDS
Pedersen, Michael
Faber & Faber (240 pp.)
$23.95 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-571-38005-3

Heartache fuels a young Scotsman’s poetry.
Pedersen wrote this book in memory of Scott Hutchison, whose friendship was “an express train” halted by Hutchison’s suicide in 2018, at age 36. Hutchison, the frontman for the Scottish indie band Frightened Rabbit, illustrated Pedersen’s 2017 poetry collection, Oyster. After the tragedy, the author “needed a way to keep talking to you,” and so wrote his memoir entirely in second-person address, recalling their shared adventures. From there, the project “grew into a celebration of many friendships, perhaps all friendship.” Pedersen’s closeness with childhood friend Daniel prompted rumors that they were “poofs,” but he “felt like my first love in many respects.” About his fellow law student David Sparrow: “Mostly kind but sometimes cruel, he thumbed me like a trashy magazine, I read him like a clever comic.” Partners in a “substance-addled romp,” Pedersen and his buddy Rowley “would love each other publicly, kiss frequently, share beds, tears and dreams.” Jake, another friend, facilitated the author’s venture into and out of heroin addiction. Even though he catalogs these “most seminal friendships [that are] in some way lost to me,” the heart of the narrative remains his relationship with Hutchison. This examination into “male grief” is flavored by the author’s clear love of language, and comprehending his ruminations requires negotiating Scottish idioms—some of them annotated, though not all. For example: “I was labelled a rough yin rather than softie, a complete turn turtle in the expectation others might have of me”; “I unfanked like an old man napping on a park bench.” Ultimately, Pedersen offers an extended reverie on the dynamics of male friendship, an underexplored literary landscape. He reminds us that “the boldest love alive in The Lord of the Rings is the friendship between Frodo and Sam.” What begins as an elegy for Hutchison becomes a “celebration of your life rather than a lament of your death.”

A consistently intimate and often moving memoir of friendship.

SEEING LIKE AN ARTIST
What Artists Perceive in the Art of Others
Perry, Lincoln
Godine (322 pp.)
$28.95 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-56792-699-6

A push for casual museumgoers to explore a deeper engagement with the art they experience.

With an unabashed focus on the Renaissance, Perry’s collection of short essays encourages readers to look beyond a painting’s depiction for what makes a masterpiece. He meticulously reveals the interplay of light, color, and spatial planes hidden beneath a wealth of important paintings, and he steers viewers toward contemplating “how an artist thought as he painted.” Exemplifying the importance of seeing and interpretation, Perry, himself an accomplished artist, illustrates the book with his own sketches in lieu of traditional reproductions. “That’s what a good painting enables us to do,” he writes. “We can become not passive recipients, but instead participants.” The author is best when he lectures like a professor, effortlessly floating between scholarly citations and visual references. The more personal moments are less interesting. Perry relentlessly touts the importance of seeing art in situ and frequently recounts his extensive travels throughout Europe. Now in his 70s, he occasionally shows his weariness with the younger generation. In one essay, he recalls a “very sour student” who pointed out that a “Grand Tour” of Europe is cost-prohibitive for most people today. “It was never a matter of money,” he later insists, believing that “a bit of [Gustave] Courbet’s passion for life” was all a true art lover (like him) needed to get out there. Later, an aside about “the way kids devour the latest movie in the Marvel multiverse” feels unnecessary. Ultimately, Perry’s lessons are revelatory, but his insistence that viewers “use [their] eyes first” is too dismissive, particularly to those who might find enrichment in a book like this one. When we read how, in order to truly understand frescoes “one really has to be there to have a non-verbal and purely spatial experience,” it’s a perplexing sentiment to process, particularly in a book that’s so passionately verbose and full of such well-researched, meandering tangents.

Thoughtful investigations in art history for an unintentionally narrow audience.

SWERVE OR DIE
Life at My Speed in the First Family of NASCAR Racing
Petty, Kyle & Ellis Henican
St. Martin’s (288 pp.)
$29.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-1-250-27781-7

The NASCAR legend looks back on his life on the racetrack.

“From the highest highs to the lowest lows, no one has lived the NASCAR life quite the way I have.” So writes Petty, now 62, old enough to have grown up in a time when muscle cars were made not just of Malibus and Barracudas, but also Monte Carlos and even Buicks. The conventional wisdom, he writes, is that NASCAR grew out of jocular contests between bootleggers after outrunning the revenuers. In fact, the races began as a pastime by soldiers who, having returned from the battlefronts of World War II, didn’t have much else in the way of entertainment in the South. Petty’s grandfather was one such racer, as was his father, and Petty’s son—who was killed on the track in 2000, when he
Fans of literature will relish Pinsky’s jocular recollections and infectious love of poetry.

**JERSEY BREAKS**

Becoming an American Poet

Pinsky, Robert

Norton (536 pp.)

$26.95 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-393-88204-9

The acclaimed poet takes an affectionate look back.

The U.S. poet laureate from 1997 to 2000 and “an expert at nothing except the sounds of sentences in the English language,” Pinsky (b. 1940) moves back and forth in time, narrating his life in crisp, self-deprecating prose. “If I have a story to tell,” he writes, “it’s how the failures and aspirations of a certain time and place led to poetry.” That place was Long Branch, New Jersey, where the author grew up in an Orthodox, lower-middle-class family in a neighborhood that was both poor and segregated. In the “sounds of Hebrew,” Pinsky heard Milton, Blake, and Whitman. He recalls reading stories and poems in the glossy magazines in his optician father’s waiting room as well as the “exact moment when I became a writer,” thanks to *Through the Looking Glass*. As an “ambitious, pseudo-intellectual freshman” at Rutgers University, he encountered and enjoyed *Ulysses* and the poetry of William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot, and Allen Ginsberg. Pinsky confesses that his way of writing a poem stems from getting a “tune in my head…like noodling on the piano,” and his approach fostered his popular Favorite Poem Project, which combined the “appeal of gossip with the appeal of art.” Though the author loved playing music, poetry came first in college, and he explains how his “habit of thinking about names was essential to my work as a poet.” He lavishes praise on two cantankerous college teachers—Paul Fussell and “relentless dictator” Yvor Winters—as well as his friend and mentor Thom Gunn. When teaching at Wellesley in 1970, Pinsky attended Robert Lowell’s “erratic writing workshop,” and Lowell gave him a blurb for his first collection, *Sadness and Happiness*. Throughout, the author sharply dissects a variety of poems, including his own, and he excitedly explains the welcome challenge of translating Dante’s *Inferno*.

Fans of literature will relish Pinsky’s jocular recollections and infectious love of poetry.

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**SHANDA**

A Memoir of Shame and Secrecy

Pogrebin, Letty Cottin

Post Hill Press (288 pp.)

$28.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-63758-396-8

Of family secrets, roads not taken, private failings, and other incidents that induce shanda, the Yiddish word for shame.

Pogrebin, a prolific author and co-founder of *Ms.* magazine, begins this lively memoir with her four grandparents, who “produced a combined fourteen offspring, who, in turn, birthed twenty-five children, including me, a cast of characters with enough secrets to fill this book twice over.” Once is plenty, as the author’s family dammed up a flood of scandalous secrets that have kept her guessing for decades. The sense of shame that propels her stories is amplified by the idea that Jews are often expected to live “morally upright, socially useful, and professionally exemplary” lives, and its effects are far-reaching. When Bernie Madoff went to prison for fraud, destroying the financial lives of some 37,000 people, one son killed himself, another died of shanda-born lymphoma, another went to prison, and Madoff’s widow went into hiding and tried to kill herself. “I didn’t lose a penny with him, but I, too, felt his swindle to be a blight on the Jewish collective,” writes the author. Though not nearly as venal, Pogrebin’s family skeletons in the closet are real. She hid a brain tumor from old friend Alan Alda out of shame for being ill, for example, and a grandmother was self, another died of shanda-born lymphoma, another went to prison, and Madoff’s widow went into hiding and tried to kill herself. “I didn’t lose a penny with him, but I, too, felt his swindle to be a blight on the Jewish collective,” writes the author.

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A wise, funny look behind the curtains of a family that, it would seem, has little to be ashamed of.
THE EVOLUTION OF CHARLES DARWIN
The Epic Voyage of the Beagle That Forever Changed Our View of Life on Earth
Preston, Diana
Atlantic Monthly (448 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-8021-6018-8

An exciting biography of the immortal naturalist’s legendary journey.

The son of a wealthy, authoritarian father, Charles Darwin (1809-1882) had an agreeable temperament and obediently studied medicine and theology. However, he performed poorly due to his fascination with natural history. In 1831, he was asked to join the Beagle as both a naturalist and companion to its captain, Robert FitzRoy, and he had little trouble overcoming his father’s veto. Prizewinning historian Preston mines the massive existing documentation, including firsthand accounts by Darwin and FitzRoy, to create a compelling account of the five-year voyage, during which Darwin observed, collected, preserved, and packed thousands of plants and animals and tons of fossils and rocks to send back to England. Spending more than half his time on shore, he traveled thousands of miles by horse, mule, or foot, often suffering intensely and relying for protection, food, and hospitality on horsemen, ranchers, soldiers, and local officials. Unlike most world travelers who wrote their books and got on with their lives, Darwin thought deeply about his observations and, unhappily, concluded that they contradicted the traditional account of Creation, which almost everyone took for granted. Species varied from place to place, and differences grew when creatures better adapted to an environment thrived at the expense of those less adapted. He called this natural selection. Preston rightly points out that Darwin did not discover evolution. Thinkers throughout history speculated that life was ever changing, but no one explained how. Natural selection was the first testable explanation, and Darwin’s On the Origin of Species delivered the evidence. This determination to persevere after a major setback—whether it was another blow from her struggle against addiction or a disappointing run-in with an industry insider—is a recurring theme in this engaging and beautifully narrated quest for personal fulfillment and musical recognition. The author takes us from her humble beginnings in Aledo, Illinois (pop. 3,600), to the stage of Saturday Night Live and details all of the gigs, concerts, campfire jam sessions, dive-bar escapades, love affairs, struggles with alcohol and drugs, grief, and heartache in between. Through all the highs and lows, Price has remained loyal to her craft, refusing to compromise her artistry despite industry pressure to conform. Like many great artists, she is able to transform her most challenging experiences into art, and she grants readers deep insight into the stories behind some of her most powerful songs. This is a fast-paced tale in which music and love always take center stage. In Price’s world, her talent takes precedence over commercial success, and people are far more important than material possessions. “Looking back, there was a romanticism in knowing that we might be failures but we were talented failures in a business that championed mediocrity,” writes the author. “Even in the lonely shadows of the burning spotlight, beyond the endless roads to the sprawling cities and trash towns, between the empty gas tank and the underattended gigs, we were spreading the true gospel of meaningful music and the lost art of poetry and songs. We would not sell out.” A truly gifted musician, Price writes about her journey with refreshing candor.

A brutally honest and at times heart-wrenching account of one musician’s struggle to make it in a challenging industry.

BAD CITY
Peril and Power in the City of Angels
Pringle, Paul
Celadon Books (304 pp.)
$29.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-250-82408-0

The salacious tale of a major university mired in scandal.

In 2016, Pulitzer Prize winner Pringle, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times...
since 2001, received a disturbing news tip. A young woman had overdosed in a Pasadena hotel, where she was staying with Dr. Carmen Puliafito, the well-known dean of the Keck Medical School at the University of Southern California. The police and fire departments arrived, and the woman was taken away, but there had been no reporting about the event, no charges filed about the drugs and paraphernalia found in the hotel room, and no information about whether the woman survived. Pringle recounts in vivid detail his months-long investigation into the coverup and the obfuscation, stonewalling, and power dynamics that threatened to stop him. He and his colleagues documented, finally, a sordid story of corruption and duplicity that involved not only Puliafito, but also the police, prosecutors, USC administrators, and his own newspaper. “Arrogant, egomaniacal, and quick to anger,” Puliafito had pried his young lover with drugs—bringing them to her even when she was in rehab programs—in order to keep his hold on her. As medical school dean, he hobnobbed with the rich and famous, including USC’s “bloated board of trustees,” which included “ultrarich industrialists, sports and entertainment moguls, bankers, construction barons, real estate investors, and financiers.” The author also discovered that he was surrounded by a “circle of addicts and criminals.” After Pringle wrote his story, he faced repeated frustration from his editors, who refused to publish a piece that would upset the imperious president of USC. The newsroom drama is as juicy as the dramas at the university. Besides the Puliafito affair, Pringle found out about a longtime gynecologist in the university’s health services who sexually abused patients and, in an episode known as “Varsity Blues,” how wealthy parents paid huge sums to have their children admitted as star athletes.

A brisk chronicle of sex, lies, and betrayal.

The real problem was that once the flow of cheap money started, it was difficult to stop it without causing another crisis. Prins explains how all this worked, looking at the mechanisms of quantitative easing and bond buybacks. The recovery and the subsequent boom were built on an ever growing mountain of debt, but that was a problem for another generation. The author sees a similar reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, as the economy was flooded with money as economic stimulus. “What started as an emergency response to two crises,” she writes, “became a permanent power grab...and while people and small businesses received some fiscal support on the fringes, the bulk of manufactured money Zoomed into financial assets.” Prins is understandably worried about the future of the economy, with emerging disintermediation avenues and an increasing recognition of the widening gap between the mega-rich and the rest of us. The big banks might be flush with the largesse of their central bank sponsors, but, as the author clearly demonstrates, they should expect turbulent times ahead.

Prins effectively dismantles the machinery of financial markets and explains how they operate in a secret world of their own.

I DREAM WITH OPEN EYES
A Memoir About Reimagining Home
Prochnik, George
Counterpoint (288 pp.)
$26.00 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-64009-547-2

A chronicle of a family’s fraught decision to leave America.
In 2016, shock and dismay over Donald Trump’s election incited for Prochnik several years of intense deliberation about whether to leave the U.S. with his wife and son. Although Trump “was indubitably the match to the fuse” and the “symbol that signified an actual, irreplaceable loss,” his discontent had begun earlier and had deep roots, which he explores in an erudite examination of heritage, home, the meaning of his life’s work, and his place in the world. Living in upscale Fort Greene, Brooklyn, the author became disillusioned both with the fraying social fabric and “the self-involvement” and “entitlement” that he saw around him. Furthermore, his job was unsatisfying. For nearly 20 years, he had worked at a public relations agency, promoting “lies and deceit. I allowed myself to become the voice of people I despised, or who had money enough not to have to speak for themselves. I sold the aspect of myself I cared for most deeply.” He had long felt torn between two strands of his intellectual inheritance: one, the “idealistic faith in human nature” held by psychologist and neurologist James Jackson Putnam, the author’s great-grandfather; the other, “the tidal tug of Freud’s dark, worldly view which despaired of humanity en masse and its respective experiments in civilization.” His mother’s family had come over on the Mayflower, linking him “to the country’s founding fantasy: the creation of a holy nation in the wilderness.” His
father’s prosperous Viennese Jewish family “had barely escaped the Nazis.” From Titian to the surrealists, Stefan Zweig to Walter Benjamin, H.D. to Elizabeth Bishop, Prochnik draws on art, philosophy, literature, and heavily on Freud as he contemplates his “longing to move to a different moment in history” and to change his life—and his son’s—“instead of just being forced to submit to the ways the world was changing so alarmingly around us.”

A dark, brooding, and highly literate meditation.

BREATHELESS
The Scientific Race To Defeat a Deadly Virus
Quammen, David
Simon & Schuster (448 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-982-16436-2


Prolific, award-winning science writer David Quammen bring his story up to 2022, as the pandemic enters its third year with no end in sight. Authors who begin with 2019 events in the Wuhan meat market are fated to end with an anticlimax, but Quammen, casting his net more widely, does not have this problem. In addition to a hair-raising account of the ongoing pandemic, the author delivers an insightful education on public health and an introduction to numerous deadly epidemics over the past 50 years. He also educates readers about the centurylong history of the coronavirus, which produced two nasty epidemics before the current one. Once known as a mundane cause of the common cold, the first “killer coronavirus” emerged from a Chinese food market in 2003, killing about 800 of 8,000 victims across the world before disappearing. SARS-CoV didn’t spread until symptoms developed, so it was not difficult to identify cases, trace contacts, and set effective quarantine guidelines. This was also true of the MERS-CoV epidemic that began in 2012 and killed 76 of 178 people, mostly on the Arabian Peninsula. The current pandemic remains horrendously difficult to control because asymptomatic individuals can still spread the virus. Having delivered this bad news, Quammen chronicles his tours around the world (often via Zoom due to lockdowns), grilling a Greek chorus of nearly 100 scientists and health officials whose extensive biographies fill a 43-page appendix. Skirting the mostly dispassionate biographies fill a 43-page appendix. Skirting the mostly dispassionate expert. The concept of the series—four smart but socially inept guys meet one ditzy wannabe actress—did not fit the Hollywood formula. However, because the creators, Lorre and Bill Prady, had launched numerous successful TV shows, CBS allowed them room to experiment. When the series finally aired, the viewer numbers were average, but there was a steady increase. More importantly, the show built a strong group of loyalists. Though it was an ensemble show, Sheldon (played by Jim Parsons), brilliant and neurotic, emerged as the protagonist. Radloff acknowledges that much of the action was driven by the Leonard-Penny relationship (Johnny Galecki and Kaley Cuoco), but she believes that it was the connection between Sheldon and Penny that provided the emotional heart, at least during the early seasons. The writing staff and directing crew changed over time, which kept the ideas fresh. By the fifth season, the series had become enormously popular, and the risky introduction of new characters worked out well. Radloff ties the success of the series to its willingness to challenge the boundaries of the sitcom form, but the quality could not have been maintained without talented writing and direction as well as actors willing to commit to their roles. There was a sense that it ended at an appropriate time, leaving on a high note. As a bonus, the author reveals Penny’s maiden name.

Entertaining in its own right, this book examines the how and why behind the success of a landmark series.

LIVE WIRE
Long-Winded Short Stories
Ripa, Kelly
Dey Street/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$28.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-06-307330-2

Inside the TV personality’s career, marriage, cosmetic procedures, and countless other personal matters.

You can only make so many jokes about how bad your book is and what a lousy writer you are and how you don’t know how to use a
seldom rises to anger, the mood of anti-Hispanic racism that the previous occupant of the White House (never named in the text) stirred up moves her to righteous indignation: “It would be more honest if we called our country the United States of Who the Fuck Are You?” Ronstadt is more often inclined, though, to fond remembrances of her ancestral town of Banámichi, Sonora, and her Tucson hometown, with all the massive tortillas and lovely horses to be found there. Interwoven between stories of growing up in a musical, multicultural family are recipes that wouldn’t be out of place in a collection by Rick Bayless or Diana Kennedy (both cited and lauded): Mexican cuisine, writing, for instance, “Carne seca is a vivid personal reflection and useful documentation of Texas political history and its big personalities.

FEELS LIKE HOME
A Song for the Sonoran Borderlands
Ronstadt, Linda & Laurence Downes
Photos by Bill Steen
Heyday (248 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-9774-579-4

The renowned musician digs deep for her roots—familial, cultural, musical, and culinary.

A native of Tucson, Arizona, with a family tree that extends to Germany by way of northern Mexico, Ronstadt celebrates the Sonoran Desert, which lies on both sides of the border. “It is amazing that a place so roasted by sunlight and heat can summon life in such variety and abundance,” she writes in collaboration with journalist Downes. That variety includes people as well as plants and animals; to live in such a challenging environment, she adds, people must learn to cooperate. Small wonder that Ronstadt detests the border wall, “a scar and an abomination.” Though she seldom rises to anger, the mood of anti-Hispanic racism that the previous occupant of the White House (never named in the text) stirred up moves her to righteous indignation: “It would be more honest if we called our country the United States of Who the Fuck Are You?” Ronstadt is more often inclined, though, to fond remembrances of her ancestral town of Banámichi, Sonora, and her Tucson hometown, with all the massive tortillas and lovely horses to be found there. Interwoven between stories of growing up in a musical, multicultural family are recipes that wouldn’t be out of place in a collection by Rick Bayless or Diana Kennedy (both cited and lauded): Mexican cuisine, writing, for instance, “Carne seca is a vivid reminder of the way history in the borderlands remains close to the surface—the seventeenth century is still as near as any Food City grocery in Tucson or tienda in Sonora.” True enough, and...
lovers of Mexican food and desert places, to say nothing of fans of Ronstadt’s music, will find much to cherish here.

A lively, lovely exaltation of the dry, cactus-studded, indelible Sonoran Desert.

**THE BONOBO SISTERHOOD**

Revolution Through Female Alliance

Rosenfeld, Diane L.

Harper Wave (320 pp.)

$28.99 | Sept. 20, 2022

978-0-06-308507-7

How to fight patriarchy.

In her debut book, legal scholar and lawyer Rosenfeld, founding director of Harvard Law School’s Gender and Violence Program, paints a dark and dispiriting picture of a patriarchal society that subjects women to abuse and coercion, denying them recourse to protection under the law. In contrast, she celebrates the female alliances demonstrated by bonobos, humans’ close cousins, who successfully thwart male sexual aggression. By emulating what she calls a Bonobo Sisterhood, Rosenfeld argues, women can undermine patriarchy. Drawing on myriad consequences of hook-up culture, which normalizes compliance sex, “in which verbal and nonverbal cues go ignored and abusers easily evade.” Under US law, she points out, “you have no right to enforcement of your order of protection, even if you live in a state that has a specific law mandating such enforcement.” Too often, a woman cannot find a way to hide from her aggressor; battered women’s shelters, even when available, are inadequate and disruptive. “When a woman leaves her abuser,” the author writes, “we know that he will stalk her, reassault her, and do everything in his power to bring her back under his control.” Rosenfeld examines the history of marriage and rape laws, crafted by and favoring men. For centuries, women could not bring charges of marital rape because wives were deemed the property of their husbands. The author also considers the consequences of hook-up culture, which normalizes compliance sex, “in which verbal and nonverbal cues go ignored and the woman acquiesces” and which often follow sexual scripts—including choking—that men have gleaned from pornography. Self-defense training, Rosenfeld asserts, should be part of an inclusive, empowering sisterhood in which women will stand up for and with one another.

Well-informed, insightful, and, sadly, timely.

**ZELENSKY**

A Biography

Rudenko, Serhii

Polity (220 pp.)

$25.00 | July 25, 2022

978-1-509-55638-0

A fast-paced biography of an unexpected world leader.

In 38 short, zingy “episodes” that play on Zelensky’s TV career before winning the presidency of Ukraine in April 2019, Ukrainian journalist and political commentator Rudenko explores his subject’s life and important influences on the brash new leader, mostly before Russia’s invasion in February 2022. A popular actor prior to his candidacy—he was especially beloved for his role as history teacher Vasily Horoborodko, who becomes head of state in the film and TV series Servant of the People—Zelensky was elected by a landslide largely due to his youthful charisma, promises to upend the corrupt, Soviet-style oligarchy of incumbent Petro Poroshenko, and desire “to become the president of peace.” Before his decision to join the campaign, the former comedian was not taken seriously. However, with help from his loyal backers at his TV production company, Kvartal 95 Studio, Zelensky proved to be an earnest, witty opponent who sounded themes of anti-corruption and pledges to find resolution in the Donbas war, concepts that resonated with the Ukrainian people. Although vowing not to get mired in the nepotism that plagued his predecessor, Zelensky surrounded himself with his trusted assistants from Kvartal 95 Studio, and as the author shows, during his rough first six months in office, he showed few signs of becoming a household name on the world stage for his bravery and dedication to his people. He had to navigate the entrenched bureaucracy of the prickly Ukrainian parliament, clean house, manage staff turnover, and survive extortion by then-President Donald Trump to dig up dirt on Hunter Biden. Though many of the people and events will be unfamiliar to non-Ukrainian readers, the author capably shows how Zelensky has displayed an astonishing transformation in the face of continued Russian aggression.

An admiring but not uncritical first look for English-language readers.

**IF WALLS COULD SPEAK**

My Life in Architecture

Safdie, Moshe

Atlantic Monthly (368 pp.)

$35.00 | Sept. 20, 2022

978-0-8021-5832-1

The internationally renowned architect chronicles his life and describes the evolution of his ideas and major projects.

Safdie was born in 1938 in Haifa, in what is now Israel, where the iconic
“Baha’i Gardens, which almost functioned as my backyard, instilled a deep and enduring love of gardens and landscape.” In 1953, his family moved to Montreal, where Safdie graduated from McGill with a bachelor’s degree in architecture. From the beginning of his career, the author was interested in issues of housing, especially how to provide a suburban quality of life, with access to nature and gardens, in urban, high-rise living. An apprenticeship with master architect Louis Kahn taught him the value of internal systems. “We don’t have to sneak these systems in—we can make an architecture that gives all these systems their rightful expression,” writes Safdie.

For Montreal’s Expo 67, the author created Habitat ’67, comprised of modules prefabricated in an onsite factory: Habitat’s slopes of stacked houses, stepping back from floor to floor, create spaces for open gardens on the roofs of the units below. Safdie’s later projects, such as planning new districts in Jerusalem and Cambridge, Massachusetts, considered social ideals. For the author, as for the modernists before him, urbanism and architecture are inseparable. In this engaging narrative, he offers intriguing details of design and construction, as well as photos and drawings, for a variety of major projects, including the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa; the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas; the Holocaust History Museum at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, “the most challenging and symbolically demanding project I’ve ever undertaken”; and the “Jewel” environment in Singapore’s Changi airport. The author’s main point is that architecture has a responsibility to consider human rights and the needs of an entire society, not just the wealthy—to remain true to “principles that guide communal life.”

A thoughtful, appealing memoir of architecture, creativity, and purpose.

**ALWAYS FAITHFUL**

*A Story of the War in Afghanistan, the Fall of Kabul, and the Unshakable Bond Between a Marine and an Interpreter*

Schueman, Thomas & Zainullah Zaki with Russell Wörth Parker

Morrow/HarperCollins (336 pp.)

$29.99 | Aug. 9, 2022

A Marine officer moves heaven and earth to bring his interpreter to the U.S. from Afghanistan.

Schueman’s memoir, jointly written with in-country interpreter Zaki, opens with a death threat, as a Taliban militant threatens Zaki: “We are coming for you, infidel.” He had good reason to take the threat seriously, for, as Schueman notes, the statistics are grim. “Advocates for Afghan interpreters,” he writes, “put the number assassinated by the Taliban over the course of the war somewhere between 300 and 1,000.” For all his faithful service, which saved the lives of many Americans in the field, Zaki faced formidable bureaucratic hurdles. For one thing, his term as what is called “mission essential personnel” was supposed to last for a year, but he fell short by a couple of months even though he worked as an interpreter for three years. The recommendation for a visa also had to come from a general officer, though Schueman, working every angle, found a workaround. Still, it took some potentially career-ending skulduggery, recruiting high-powered allies and building a strong network among the brass, to move Zaki ahead in line. The Taliban threat continued to the very end as he and his family tried to get inside the gates of the Kabul airport. Schueman makes a strong case in support of the argument that finally won Zaki his deliverance. “Zak was another attachment with a capability I needed, like a machine gunner or a sniper,” he writes in the utilitarian way of a war fighter. For his part, Zaki wanted to go to the U.S. less to save his own life than to be able to make a living. “In Afghan culture,” he writes, “a man’s value is tied to how he provides for his family. If I could not do that in Afghanistan, I would have to try to do it somewhere else.”

An affecting memoir that weaves its way through bullets, explosives, and red tape.

**BOLDLY GO**

*Reflections on a Life of Awe and Wonder*

Shatner, William with Joshua Brandon Atria (256 pp.)

$28.00 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-1-66800-732-7

The latest collection of essays from an actor who has lived well and prospered. It’s clear that Shatner (b. 1931) takes himself and his work seriously, but he knows that much of his appeal to younger generations is ironic, that his often exaggerated oratory has an element of self-caricature in it. Even in his 90s, he shows few signs of backing off or slowing down, and he ends this book with the lyric to a spoken-word song he has written for his next album, a piece with funeral instructions: “I Want To Be A Tree.” Despite the more-misses-than-hits nature of the author’s many attempts at humor, he has somehow found a way to be in on the joke rather than an object of derision—for the most part, at least—making this book very much in the same vein as *Live Long And...*, his previous middling collection. Here, the author writes about his plans to extend his legacy as a hologram, taking and answering questions from beyond the grave, and he mixes innocence and pompous profundity when he intones, “I am never so thrilled as when the word awe escapes my mouth.” Much of the text conveys the author’s fairly shallow viewpoints on the marvel of existence, how everything is connected, and how the universe has taken care of a man who has no clear sense of the divine but who has his finger on the pulse of something cosmic. “We are often reminded to stop and smell the roses,” he writes. “I have to go further. Stop and smell everything.” These essays sometimes loosely connect in the fashion of a memoir, covering plenty of the Star Trek oeuvre (which he treats as if it were Shakespeare)
and the multidimensional career that has followed, as well as his four marriages and his love of dogs, horses, and all living things.

A series of pieces that are not only all over the map, but all over the galaxy.

**CONSPIRACY**

*Why the Rational Believe the Irrational*
Shermer, Michael
Johns Hopkins Univ. (336 pp.)
$29.95 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-4214-4445-1

The bestselling author and publisher of *Skeptic* magazine investigates why people believe conspiracy theories.

For many contemporary Americans, QAnon is an alluring explanation for the unexplainable. Technically, writes Shermer, “it’s not even wrong” because its claims are so broad that it resists being proven wrong. There may be such a thing as a “deep state”—even if, as the author points out, most people aren’t good enough at keeping secrets or carrying out their part in conspiracies to make them work. As evidence, he cites two assassinations. The plot to kill Abraham Lincoln also included multiple other targets, but only John Wilkes Booth succeeded in his assignment. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand almost happened by accident, since Gavrilo Princip lost sight of his target and only stumbled on the car because of a driver’s error. The conspiracy theory that evolved led to catastrophe: Austro-Hungarians assumed that the Serbian government was in on the plot, and World War I ensued. “Imagine how differently the twentieth century would have unfolded without the Great War,” writes Shermer, “sparing the lives of tens of millions of people...and almost certainly...no Hitler, no Nazis, no World War II, and no Holocaust.” The author writes that while the conspiracy theories surrounding John F. Kennedy’s death are understandable, given that governments, spy agencies, and the CIA harbor secrets, there’s no good evidence to support any postulate other than that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. Noting that there are degrees of belief in conspiracy theory—36% of people Shermer surveyed believe that the government is hiding information about the JFK assassination, while only 11% believe that 5G towers increase the risk of Covid-19 infection—the author suggests that perhaps the best thing to do with the QAnon believer at the dinner table is to try to listen sympathetically while pushing back respectfully. Better still is to stop the spread of misinformation in the first place, which is far more difficult.

A fascinating tour of oddball wrongheadedness, with gentle but firm prescriptions for combating it.

**ABOMINATIONS**

*Selected Essays From a Career of Courting Self-Destruction*
Shriver, Lionel
Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-06-309429-1

Sharp, witty contrarian views.
Journalist and novelist Shriver gathers 35 pieces from her copious output of essays, columns, talks, and opinion pieces, many from the *Spectator*, where she has been a columnist since 2017, and *Harper’s*, where she inhabited the “Easy Chair” for a year. A preacher’s daughter born in the U.S., Shriver has lived in the U.K. for more than 30 years, 12 of them in Belfast, and has strong, cranky, shrewd opinions on culture and politics on both sides of the Atlantic. A supporter of Brexit, she “dislikes affirmative action, opposes lockdowns for the suppression of disease, abhors soaring national debts, defends free speech even when people use it to say something unpleasant, and resists uncontrolled mass immigration.” Describing herself as a “socially liberal economic conservative,” her views on issues such as cultural appropriation, #MeToo, and the left’s “preening sanctimony” have generated vehement criticism and led, she admits proudly, to her being canceled three different times. Her wide range of topics includes tennis, urban cycling, fitness, the quality of Ikea furniture, happiness, friendship, and the use—or not—of quotation marks in fiction. In a sermon about her alienation from religious faith, she characterizes religion as “flattening and anthropocentric; it makes the world too known and so too small.” In a memorial tribute, she praises her older brother for having been an iconoclast, “naturally disobedient, defiant, and headstrong.” Many pieces reflect Shriver’s dismay at the “weaponized sensitivity” that has created “an oppressively gendered world, in which identity is more bound up in one’s sex than ever before.” As a straight, White, female novelist, she rails against the idea that creating characters of different ethnicity, race, disability, sexual identity, religion, or class opens her work “to forensic examination” and derision. “The contrived taboo of so-called cultural appropriation,” she asserts, “means we can safely write only autobiography.”

Spirited, incendiary, entertaining, and sure to ruffle some feathers.
NEVER RIDE A ROLLERCOASTER UPSIDE DOWN
The Ups, Downs, and Reinvention of an Entrepreneur
Smulyan, Jeff
BenBella (330 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-63774-222-8

A successful entrepreneur tells his story and provides guidance for others seeking a similar path.

Smulyan, founder and CEO of Indianapolis-based Emmis Communications Corporation, offers a pleasing amalgam of business guide and memoir. The author begins by chronicling his humble beginnings in a Midwest Jewish family in which entrepreneurial roots ran deep. Though he developed an early passion for radio, his father steered him toward a law degree for the “instant credibility a master’s degree won’t give you.” After operating WNTS, a small Indianapolis radio station (“These days, WNTS is known for its original midday host, David Letterman”), Smulyan branched out to own stations in other markets, experimented with diversified formats like religious and all-sports broadcasting, and eventually founded Emmis Communications, a company that expanded to include TV stations and magazines. In 1989, Smulyan led a group of investors in the acquisition of the Seattle Mariners, a problematic proposition that the author recounts candidly. Sprinkled throughout the shrewd text are accounts of impressive ratings for Emmis’ top radio stations and anecdotes about the personal and professional sacrifices that became necessary to keep Emmis profitable amid dot-com crashes and recessions. Smulyan fairly and mindingly contrasts his major successes against his failures and near misses, some of which nearly cost him everything. He takes readers on a largely entertaining behind-the-scenes tour of the tumultuous nature of a struggling business and illuminates the uniquely challenging economics involved in the media and sports worlds. Smulyan, now 74 and still working, clearly believes in the classic principles of hard work and lifelong learning as well as the understanding that “to succeed, you absolutely have to know how to handle failure.” He dispenses sage advice on the power of effective leadership, business ethics, and integrity, and the rewarding benefits of fostering a collaborative corporate culture.


COFFEE WITH HITLER
The Story of the Amateur Spies Who Tried To Civilize the Nazis
Spicer, Charles
Pegasus (400 pp.)
$29.95 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-63936-226-4

A lively study of the “amateur British intelligence agents who...hoped to avert a second war in Europe by building rapport with the Third Reich politically, economically and socially.”

Throughout the 1930s, a clique of British aristocrats, scholars, and businessmen maintained friendly social contacts with prominent Nazis, including Hitler. Dismissed for decades as Nazi sympathizers, they have finally found a defender. That this book began as Spicer’s doctoral thesis should not discourage readers; the result of intense research, it’s a page-turner. Known mostly to history buffs, Spicer’s Germanophiles included Thomas Conwell-Evans, a Welsh political secretary and historian; Philip Kerr, a liberal politician, writer, and aristocrat; and Ernest Tennant, a wealthy businessman. Few in their circle sympathized with British Nazism; most denounced antisemitic outrages; all were horrified by the carnage of World War I and felt guilty about the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles. In their eyes, however, Hitler was a fervent nationalist whose goal of returning his suffering nation to prosperity and global status deserved a measure of sympathy. Nowadays, scholars display a more nuanced view of Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement, but popular histories continue to deplore the word, and politicians employ it to justify wars from Suez to Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan. Spicer emphasizes that his subjects did not aim to appease the Nazis but to civilize them. This was no secret. Many senior British officials dismissed these amateur agents, but the foreign service, starved for intelligence on Germany, took them seriously and often encouraged them. The author engagingly recounts a steady stream of social events, banquets, conferences, cultural exchanges, and semi-official visits among well-known British political figures and top-level Nazis. Although not fellow travelers, Spicer’s subjects bent over backward to see reason in Nazi policies and take advantage of Germany’s long-standing admiration of British culture, but they ultimately grew exasperated, concluded that Hitler was irrational, and supported war when it broke out.

A captivating and convincing revisionist history.

AMERICAN DEMON
Eliot Ness and the Hunt for America’s Jack the Ripper
Stashower, Daniel
Minotaur (352 pp.)
$29.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-250-04116-6

How a serial killer flummoxed one of America’s most celebrated law enforcement officers.
In his latest true-crime thriller, bestselling popular historian Stashower turns his attention to the so-called “Mad Butcher of Kingsbury Run,” aka the “Cleveland Torso Murderer,” a still-unidentified maniac seemingly responsible for a dozen or more murders in Depression-era Cleveland. The author’s focus falls on the investigative role played by Eliot Ness, who was named the city’s safety director after his success in Chicago as the charismatic leader of a mob-busting brigade. Stashower begins with a summary of Ness’ exploits in helping to apprehend Al Capone, then moves on to examine his extraordinary influence in Cleveland as a police reformer and his response, over several years, to the sensation created by a series of grisly murders targeting the homeless. With characteristic skill, the author documents Ness’ involvement in the case and, more broadly, his work combatting systemic corruption as he manipulated newspaper coverage and marshalled political support. Though he did not crack the case of the titular “American demon,” Ness was, as Stashower makes clear, undeniably heroic in confronting injustice. “Ness made a particular specialty of taking down crooked precinct captains,” writes the author, “an effort he likened to cutting off the head of a snake. The campaign climaxed with the shocking downfall of...a captain said to be so powerful that ‘nobody went to the bathroom’ without his permission.” The author deftly sets Ness’ battles against institutional antagonists against an engagingly told, suspenseful account of the search for a notorious killer. Stashower is particularly incisive in his explorations of Ness’ lapses as an investigator and his portrait of the crime fighter’s personal and professional decline. Rather than a simple idealization of Ness’ often uncanny efficiency, we get a nuanced text about a deeply principled and exceptionally accomplished—though all-too-human—reformer.

A riveting and illuminating account of an iconic figure’s involvement in a notorious murder investigation.

THE BIG BANG OF NUMBERS
How To Build the Universe Using Only Math
Suri, Manil
Norton (432 pp.)
$32.50 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-324-00703-6

In-depth analysis of “math as the life force of the universe, a top-down driving power that fashions everything that exists.” Suri, a novelist and mathematics professor, notes that while physics and religion can offer some answers to many big questions—“Why is the universe the way it is? How do we fit in? The two camps have been duking it out over the answers for centuries”—mathematics offers concrete solutions. In the popular mind, math equals calculation: very useful, very dull. By contrast, writes the author, “we will view mathematics as the fundamental source of creation, with reality trying to follow its dictates as best it can.” Religions have explained the origin and evolution of the universe since the dawn of history; during the last century, physicists chimed in with the Big Bang and other theories. Suri proposes to do the same with math, and readers who pay attention will agree that he is on to something. The essence of math is not counting but measuring, and nothing measurable existed before the Big Bang. You can’t determine where the Big Bang occurred because that was also when space began. In the beginning were numbers, and all were created equal, which turns out to be less simple than it sounds. Numbers can be natural (1, 2, 3...), rational (including some fractions), or irrational (pi, one the square root of 2). All these are real, but unreal (i.e. imaginary) numbers like the square root of -1 also exist, and they’re genuinely useful in many areas of science and engineering. Although Suri does not fully construct the universe, he successfully explores many areas of seemingly pure math that explain the natural world, from the shapes of galaxies and living creatures to weather, gravity, beauty, and even art. He also sheds light on abstruse subjects (fractals, infinity, curved space) that puzzle humans more than they should, creating a text that is deeper than most popular writing on math but worth the effort.

A successful contribution to the math-isn’t-boring genre.
in the story—readers will wish for deeper revelation from an author who has clearly been through hell and come out on the other side.

Though the subject is intriguing and Sward has a good eye for detail, the book is short on insight.

**NINE QUARTERS OF JERUSALEM**
*A New Biography of the Old City*
*Teller, Matthew*
Other Press (400 pp.)
$27.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-63542-334-1

A vigorous tour of Jerusalem in all its complexity.

In the three monotheist traditions, Jerusalem is a dreamlike place “of heavenly perfection, our city of joy”; it is also a distinctly physical entity that has endured enormous fracturing over the centuries. BBC journalist and travel writer Teller describes the lives of many of the city’s inhabitants as he attempts to reveal its contemporary essence. He ably investigates a crucial dichotomy: the “physical Jerusalem and [the] moral, spiritual one; an old, corrupted message and a new, clear one.” For ages, he writes, “it didn’t matter that the city had no river, no strategic value and no natural sources of commercial wealth. It had God.” Though accepted as the way it has always been, the division of the city into four quarters—Christian, Muslim, Armenian, and Jewish—actually occurred fairly arbitrarily in the mid-19th century thanks to British Protestant missionaries. Moving back and forth in time, Teller uses a frame of reference the sequence of walls and gates implemented by Suleiman the Magnificent in the 16th century, taking readers through the labyrinthine neighborhoods that have grown up around those gates. The author chronicles his in-depth conversations with a wide, diverse swath of the population: Sufi mystics and religious figures of all kinds, of course, but also Palestinian, Indian, African, and Jewish shopkeepers; members of the Dom community (“socially, politically and economically these people are at the bottom of every heap”); and even “quadrilingual” Armenian rock star Apo Sahagian, who grew up in the Old City. Since the Six-Day War of 1967, citizen displacement has been widespread, and while Teller doesn’t delve deeply into this animus, the epilogue explores Palestinian restrictions and the toll of Partition. Overall, the author delivers an illuminating reexamination of an enduring city, a book that makes a satisfying complement to Andrew Lawler’s *Under Jerusalem*.

A deft, engaging portrait of a teeming, shape-shifting city.

**THE MIDDLE OUT**
*The Rise of Progressive Economics and a Return to Shared Prosperity*
*Tomasky, Michael*
Doubleday (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-385-54716-1

Political journalist and *Democracy* editor-in-chief Tomasky delivers a strong argument for Democrats to take the lead in articulating middle-class–boosting economics.

Democracy, freedom, and economic justice are the hallmarks of America’s conception of itself. “They are inseparable,” writes the author. “It is up to the Democrats to defend all three. And they must see this as not three fights but one. It’s Republican doctrine that the market must be free and unregulated, which works supremely well “for those with the means to eat at high-end locavore restaurants or purchase the right to skip the lines at Disney World.” For the rest of society, the market goes hand in hand with Republican resistance to social spending programs such as the American Rescue Plan, which, though carrying a staggering $1.9 trillion price tag, came in at a lower percentage of GDP than Franklin Roosevelt’s “broadly popular” New Deal programs. Tomasky notes that public investment grows the economy, and it addresses both aspects of ordinary economic thought, which has both a fiscal and a moral dimension. Chalk the Republican program up to the likes of Milton Friedman, whose influence over economics Tomasky calls “deeply unfortunate” and who had strange ideas that continue to hold sway over a certain element of the political class (including the fact that “he was against national parks”). Whereas some level of inequality is inevitable in a non-command economy, the current fiscal structure rewards the rich at the expense of the rest. The author urges that a Democratic brand of economics requires a good name, one that doesn’t include the prefix *post-* (“if you’re still using ‘post,’ you don’t have a movement”) and that advances the idea that “prosperity is built from the middle out”—i.e., founded on a strong middle and working class, repudiating the false notions that taxes are bad and greed is good.

A provocative, welcome platform for wresting economic conversations away from the moneyed class.

**ESPAÑA**
*A Brief History of Spain*
*Tremlett, Giles*
Bloomsbury (320 pp.)
$35.00 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-63973-057-5

The British-born Madrid correspondent for the *Guardian* offers an enthusiastic history of the country he has called home for 20 years.

“A recently naturalized ‘new’ Spaniard,” Tremlett employs as a unifying theme Spanish philosopher
Miguel de Unamuno’s “four winds” theory to illustrate the fertile mixing of diverse peoples who have swept across the Iberian Peninsula for centuries. As long as those winds have been allowed to blow through—Romans, Visigoths, Moors, and beyond—the country has flourished. However, when the winds have been stifled—e.g., by Isabella and Ferdinand when they expelled the Moors and instigated the Inquisition, or during Franco’s years of totalitarian rule—the country has “withered.” Tremlett is concise yet thorough in his historical journey, which he wisely begins by discussing Spain’s geography. The Iberian Peninsula’s proximity to the coast of Africa and to significant trade hubs in the Mediterranean has dictated much of its geopolitics over the centuries, and the tug of war between the Christian north and Muslim south has resulted in some of Spain’s most treasured cultural legacies. “The always porous frontier across which Muslims and Christians had traded and raided for centuries allowed for the import of cultural riches,” writes the author. “Toledo was awash with ancient manuscripts of the kind that had filled the magnificent libraries of Córdoba, many of which had been smuggled north before or after the city was twice sacked by Berbers in the four years after 1009.” During the early years of the Age of Exploration, Spain became one of the primary European traffickers of enslaved people from the African continent. Following the nation’s golden age of arts and culture, which Tremlett explores in appealing detail, it experienced a protracted period of absolutism, revolution, and civil unrest, culminating in Franco’s dictatorship. The author then brings us up to the present, which includes ongoing insurgencies in Catalonia and the Basque Country. The many bright photos are a welcome bonus to the well-researched narrative.

A fresh, accessible take on a rich history; ideal reading for anyone planning a trip to Spain.

ALL THE LIES THEY DID NOT TELL
The True Story of Satanic Panic in an Italian Community
Trincia, Pablo
Trans. by Elettra Pauletto
Amazon Crossing (356 pp.)
$24.95 | Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-542-03911-6

A true-crime book set in late-1990s Italy focuses on the phenomenon of “Satanic Panic.”

Italian journalist Trincia introduces readers to “the Devils of the Bassa Modenese,” a series of criminal cases in the Bassa region of Italy centered on alleged ritual acts of pedophilia and terror against at least 16 children. The author narrates a complex tale of children—mainly from poor and/or troubled families—who were forcibly removed from their homes by the regional bureaucracy. These removals, which seemed to occur like falling dominoes, began with the testimony of Dario, one boy who shared truly horrific tales of “ritual satanic abuse and sexual violence.” In addition to his stories of sexual abuse, Dario described how young victims were threatened, beaten, tortured, and forced to take part in acts of violence, including the murders of other children. Due to his testimonies—and then those of other children—several families were broken apart, many parents were imprisoned, and various suspected pedophiles were also charged, often on little evidence aside from the words of the children. Trincia explores the local view that, in many cases, what was at stake was an ideological battle between church-influenced families and the communist-influenced state, which often subverted traditional family values. Indeed, Trincia explains how most accused individuals were acquitted due to the questionable nature of much of the evidence, including physical exams that failed to prove abuse despite initial reports. Though Trincia deftly avoids making his own judgement, it is clear that most questioning of the children was highly unprofessional, at best, and aggressively interrogative, at worst. The well-researched narrative is choppy in certain sections, and readers must deal with an onslaught of names and facts. Given the disturbing nature of the content, this one is not for the faint of heart.

A difficult read but an eye-opening story best suited for die-hard true-crime fans.

NONE OF THIS ROCKS
Trohman, Joe
Hachette (272 pp.)
$24.95 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-306-84735-6

A debut memoir from the lead guitarist for Fall Out Boy.

Trohman’s first book feels less like a traditional memoir and more like a surprising confessional from the guy sitting next to you on a cross-country flight. Even at 37, the author already has a fascinating life story. When he was 15, he went on his first punk-rock tour, following a few years of therapy prompted by his struggles with antisemitism in his elementary school and his tumultuous relationship with his mother, who was coping with brain cancer. Stunningly honest about his depression, low self-esteem, and drug addiction, Trohman also has a charming literary voice of his own, using self-deprecation and clever quips to keep things moving briskly. He writes fondly of a friend who was able to “pull me out from my tightly wrapped burrito comprising seven layers of beans, cheese, and shredded self-hatred” and how his inner voice nagged him into speaking to the woman who would become his wife. The author’s storytelling is sometimes uneven, straying off into odd asides about Corona commercials or his vasectomy while quickly glossing over stories about the formation of Fall Out Boy or its little-discussed hiatus.

Though Trohman has been in two bands each with bassist Pete Wentz and drummer Andy Hurley, he offers little about what they are like offstage or how fame has affected them. Instead, he provides more about his work composing music for TV shows and commercials, which didn’t really work out, and his recent interest in writing and producing his own comedies. Ultimately,
“Trohman’s tales are thoughtful and interesting enough to keep most readers engaged. “Looking back at old footage of myself,” he writes, “it was as if I were the physical manifestation of full-blown hypermania, though it’s clear now that this acting out was my way of releasing all the negative energy I had stored up from years of trauma.”

A rock star’s intriguing memoir ends up revealing way more about his compelling life than his famous music.

### EMPATHY ECONOMICS

Janet Yellen’s Remarkable Rise to Power and Her Drive To Spread Prosperity to All

Ullmann, Owen

PublicAffairs (480 pp.)

$32.00 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-1-5417-0102-1

The life of a dedicated public figure in the often dismal world of economics.

Veteran journalist and news editor Ullmann draws on 150 interviews with Yellen; her husband, economist and Nobel laureate George Akerlof; their son, economics professor Robert Akerlof; and Yellen’s many friends and colleagues to create an admiring portrait of a woman that he—and many others—compares to Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Born in 1946, Yellen is the daughter of a physician whose caring and generosity made a lasting impact on her. “Thinking about the plight of the unemployed, their pain, their economic insecurity, and how they must feel,” Ullmann writes, “has been part of Yellen’s makeup since her father treated so many down-on-their-luck patients.” As the author demonstrates throughout, empathy informs her thinking about issues such as interest rates, banking regulations, unemployment, inequality, and gender bias. In a field dominated by men, Yellen encountered sexism most overtly in her six years teaching at Harvard. After graduate school at Yale, mentored by the like-minded James Tobin, Yellen found Harvard cold and hostile. She left happily in 1977 for a position as staff economist in the international division of the Federal Reserve. After marrying Akerlof the following year, the couple taught at Trohman’s tales are thoughtful and interesting enough to keep most readers engaged. “Looking back at old footage of myself,” he writes, “it was as if I were the physical manifestation of full-blown hypermania, though it’s clear now that this acting out was my way of releasing all the negative energy I had stored up from years of trauma.”

A rock star’s intriguing memoir ends up revealing way more about his compelling life than his famous music.

### EMPATHY ECONOMICS

Janet Yellen’s Remarkable Rise to Power and Her Drive To Spread Prosperity to All

Ullmann, Owen

PublicAffairs (480 pp.)

$32.00 | Sept. 27, 2022

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Wilhelm Schlegel wrote in a letter to a friend, “People hate us—arguably because his pals played snarky games behind his back, one calling him an “old worn-out demigod,” and because his real home was nearby Weimar, not Jena. “The Jena Set” would do their squabbling English romances, Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling, a local “translator, literary critic and more,” called “the Kingdom of Philosophy.” The reigning spirit of that circle was, perhaps arguably, the eminent writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe—arguably because his pals played snarky games behind his back, one calling him an “old worn-out demigod,” and because his real home was nearby Weimar, not Jena. “The Jena Set” would do their squabbling English romantic successors proud: A new argument or schism was always brewing, sometimes over matters of philosophy and sometimes over personality, as with the split between the Schlegel and Schiller clans. “As her dislike grew, Charlotte Schiller began to advise others to fumigate their rooms once Caroline Schlegel had left,” writes Wulf of one episode in the feud, while August Wilhelm Schlegel wrote in a letter to a friend, “People hate us—good! They curse us—even better! They make the sign of the cross to ward us off like blasphemers, Jacobins, and corrupters of youth—God be praised!” For all the rancor, Wulf notes, the productivity of the Jena circle was astounding: dozens of philosophical tomes (especially Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit), natural-history treatises, poems, and, from Goethe, long-in-the-making works such as Faust. Indeed, “The Jena Set’s ideas rippled out from the small town in the Duchy of Saxe-Weimar to the wider world,” championed in Britain by Coleridge and Carlyle and by Thoreau and Emerson in the U.S. Many of their fruitful ideas remain: nature as a living thing, art as a way of uniting humans with nature, and, against the background of the Napoleonic Wars, their insistence on individual rights.

An illuminating exploration of the life of the mind and the sometimes-fraught production of art.

**WALKING GENTRY HOME**

* A Memoir of My Foremothers in Verse

Young, Alora

Hogarth (240 pp.)

$17.99 paper | Aug. 2, 2022

978-0-593-49800-2

A poet’s homage to her family’s past. Swarthmore College student Young, Youth Poet Laureate of the Southern United States, revives her family’s “long-forgotten history,” from its unrecorded beginnings in Africa to the present, in a multigenerational memoir delicately crafted in verse. “The only way to tell this story is through poetry,” writes the author, “because Black girlhood is eternally laced with rhythm, from the Negro hymns Amy Coleman whispered as she bore her enslaver’s child to the rhythm of the gospel my mother sang at fifteen when she was hailed a child prodigy.” Central to Young’s history is Nannie Pearl, born in 1898 in West Tennessee, the first girl among her forebears to attend the local one-room schoolhouse. At 22, Nannie became pregnant and married; Gentry was one of Nannie’s 11 children and was Young’s great-grandmother. Most women in Young’s family found themselves pregnant as teenagers, marrying in haste to a boy who rarely stayed around. “I am from five generations of shotgun weddings / Of women with stronger wombs than wits,” Young notes, and of mothers who warned their daughters about repeating their mistakes. In an expanding family, Gentry became a “second mother” to her many sisters and brothers instead of enjoying the innocent pleasures of childhood. She was “terrified” when, pregnant, she married at 14. Her daughter Yvonne became pregnant when she was a high school freshman. Yvonne’s daughter, Young’s mother, was engaged at the age of 16. “My family,” writes the author, “has spent centuries in search of girlhood / Even when it came only in the form of running from being a / woman.” With lyrical precision, Young refracts Black history through her family’s experiences of racism and “deferred dreams”—“And if you have enough color / just living shatters fantasies.” Near the end, she writes, “Everywhere in this world I walk, I’ll walk with Gentry. Because this is my legacy.”

A moving debut from a young writer with great promise.

**SOLITO**

A Memoir

Zamora, Javier

Hogarth (400 pp.)

$28.00 | Sept. 6, 2022

978-0-593-49806-4

The harrowing journey of a 9-year-old Salvadoran boy through Guatemala and Mexico to rejoin his parents in the U.S.

Being the child of migrants is not unusual in the small town of La Herradura, El Salvador, where Zamora’s relatives regularly disappeared with the local coyote, Don Dago, to try their luck gaining entry into the U.S. When Zamora was 5, his mother left to join his father, who had left when he was 1, in America. The author opens his engaging narrative in 1999: Don Dago has agreed that the boy is ready for the trip to join his family. At the time, Zamora was living with his grandparents and aunts and excelling in school. He was overjoyed at the prospect of reuniting with his parents yet unaware of the many dangers of the arduous trek. Zamora traveled within a small, tightknit group of migrants through Guatemala, Mexico, and the Sonoran Desert. The author, now a poet who has been both a Stegner and Radcliffe fellow, meticulously re-creates his tense, traumatic journey, creating a page-turning narrative that reads like fiction. Sprinkling Spanish words and phrases throughout, Zamora fashionfully fleshed portraits of his fellow travelers—e.g., a protective mother and her daughter and a variety of men who assumed leadership responsibilities—as they navigated buses and boats, packing into a single room in motels, passing through checkpoints (not always successfully), and walking for days in the desert with little food or water. Along the way, the migrants, most of them desperately trying to reach their families in the U.S., also had to learn Mexican words and change their accents in order to remain inconspicuous and avoid the dreaded La Migra, which “has helicopters. They have trucks. They have binoculars that can see in the dark. I want our own helicopter to fight against La Migra. To shoot those bad gringos making us scared.”

Beautifully wrought work that renders the migrant experience into a vivid, immediately accessible portrayal.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

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**VÁMONOS** by Cynthia Weill; illus. by Martin Melchor,
Agustín Tinoco Cruz, Ávalino Pérez & Maximino Santiago;
photos by Otto Piron ........................................................................154
Eleven-year-old Frank must solve a supernatural mystery to save his new home.

As fifth grade comes to an end, Frank Fernández is looking forward to finally staying put in Alabama for a second year, as promised, after a childhood spent following his parents’ home renovation work all across the country. Frequent relocation has made Frank wary of forming friendships or making plans, but his hopes for more stability are temporarily dashed when his parents announce plans to renovate a lighthouse in the Florida Keys, near where his mother grew up and his father’s home country of Cuba.

Papi promises this will be their last move, though: The lighthouse will be theirs. But from their first day on Spectacle Key, near where the author suggests.

Supernatural mystery meets generational drama with hopeful endings for all. (Supernatural. 8-12)

A trained structural engineer offers an insider’s view on how renowned skyscrapers and other large constructions on seven continents were designed and built.

In the wake of 2018’s Built: The Hidden Stories Behind Our Structures, Agrawal, whose background includes work on London’s Shard, presents younger audiences with specific and clearly explained issues and techniques associated with more than a dozen projects—from preserving Mexico City’s Metropolitan Cathedral, which was built over a former lake and is sinking both unevenly and at the rate of 2 to 3 inches a year, to the challenges of creating a sewer system for London, a movable natural grass soccer pitch for the Sapporo Dome, and foundations in deep salt water for Mumbai’s Bandra-Worli Sea Link bridge. The author also offers a look at Antarctica’s Halley VI research station, which is jointed and built on skis, and explains how New Zealand’s Te Matau ā Pohe bridge was inspired by Maori legends. Along with galleries of modern skyscrapers and types of bridges, Agrawal pays tribute to traditional materials like bricks and reinforced concrete as well as more modern ones such as aluminum foam and carbon nanotubes, adds side features on elevators and cranes, and, with a particular focus on women and people of color, directs appreciative nods to select colleagues of past and present. Hickey mixes informally drawn portraits and occasional fanciful images with aerial and underwater views, simplified but revealing cutaway diagrams, and small illustrations for the occasional hands-on demonstrations the author suggests.

A particularly engaging survey, both for its variety and its unusually expert perspectives. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 7-10)

Pirate-loving Stephen’s dreams are about to come true—in a ghostly way.

Despite his mother’s disapproval, 12-year-old Stephen Oh-O’Driscoll, who is of Korean and Irish descent, wants to be a pirate. With his bandanna and eye patch, he and best friend Brandon are ready for adventure, specifically becoming pivexiturates, a portmanteau term for pirate adventurers that Stephen coined himself. And one day, adventure comes, but not in the form of a pirate, or at least not really. Instead, it turns out Stephen is a baksu mudang, a Korean term for someone who can communicate with ghosts. Some of the ghosts he meets are friendly, some are scary—and one may or may not have been a pirate. Stephen’s mother thinks he should have nothing to do with these spirits, but Stephen doesn’t agree. Halmeoni, his late maternal grandmother (who is also a ghost), has been kidnaped, and to save her he will have to help the maybe-pirate ghost. But he isn’t really complaining: This is what the Piriventurates’ Oath is all about! Stephen and friends new and old travel between the worlds of the living and dead, finding self-confidence and the truth about a few family secrets along the way. Full of swashbuckling and supernatural fun, this book touches but never dwells upon serious subjects for too long.

Light, appealing, nonstop adventure. (Paranormal. 9-12)
Some things are better in person—it’s hard to imagine a virtual version of the rabbit pen on the exhibit floor at this year’s American Library Association annual meeting, held in Washington, D.C., June 23-28. The bunnies, in training to provide support to the people of Uvalde, Texas, were an especially welcome distraction. This year’s conference was a fraught one. This was the first time ALA had held an in-person conference since 2019, just before the pandemic made virtual events the norm, and while it was thrilling to bump into friends and colleagues I hadn’t seen face to face in years, it was tough to fully throw myself into the festivities; I had arrived in D.C. just a day after the Supreme Court announced its decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, and the news weighed heavily on me and nearly everyone I spoke to.

Librarians expressed exhaustion at the overwhelming wave of censorship; I heard countless librarians swap stories about book challenges, with titles on LGBTQ+ themes bearing the brunt. Given that books centering the experiences of marginalized people are especially vulnerable, many attendees were disturbed and angered to hear librarian and author Nancy Pearl, speaking on a panel on censorship Saturday afternoon, state that even Holocaust denial literature had a place in libraries—words that Pearl walked back on Twitter several days later.

But a fighting spirit permeated the air, too, and I spoke with many publishers, librarians, and advocates seeking ways to use their platforms for good. I connected with colleagues at other review journals who are eager to find a way to support librarians facing censorship attempts—conversations we plan to continue in the coming months. One of my good friends, a public librarian, made time in her bustling schedule to protest outside the Supreme Court. At the Coretta Scott King Awards breakfast, Simon & Schuster and author Jason Reynolds announced a yearly travel grant to allow five African American librarians for youth or teens to attend the conference; Reynolds noted that Black librarians had championed his work early on and emphasized his own commitment to inclusivity.

At that breakfast, I was also heartened to meet Angela Joy and Janelle Washington, the author and illustrator, respectively, of Choosing Brave: How Mamie Till-Mobley and Emmett Till Sparked the Civil Rights Movement (Roaring Brook Press, Aug. 9); when I interviewed them in June over Zoom for our Aug. 15 issue, both noted that despite the threat of book bannings, they want children to know the truth about American history. I’m confident that I’ll see Joy and Washington at next year’s CSK Awards—this time accepting their own awards.

Throughout the conference, joy intertwined with sorrow. Accepting his Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor for Nina: A Story of Nina Simone (2021), written by Traci N. Todd, Christian Robinson opened by singing Simone’s “Feeling Good” before discussing how he felt the singer’s spirit as he and his brother made a road trip in 2020, during the height of the pandemic, in search of their mother, who was unhoused and grappling with mental illness. And the late Floyd Cooper’s son Dayton offered poignant remembrances as he accepted, on his father’s behalf, the award for Best Illustrator for Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre (2021), written by Carole Boston Weatherford.

The Newbery-Caldecott-Legacy Award Banquet—which marked the Newbery’s centennial—felt similarly bittersweet. Before dinner, I ran into Jerry Craft, who was excited to attend his first in-person Newbery banquet; the world shut down just a few months after his Newbery win for New Kid (2019). Jason Chin, accepting the Caldecott for Watercress (2021) by Andrea Wang, invited the audience to applaud winners from the previous two years, who had missed out on the chance to hear that sound themselves. Still, the joy was pervasive; Wang, who received a Newbery Honor, and Chin wore cloth-
How do our bodies work?

This intriguing Czech import describes seven of the systems that make our bodies work: the skeletal, muscular, digestive and excretory, circulatory, respiratory, nervous, and reproductive systems. There are two spreads devoted to each system. The first describes the system in humans. Gatefolds on either side show eight other animals from around the world. Opening these full-length panels reveals variations of the system in each of these animals. Color-coded tags helpfully indicate the animal’s basic group, such as bird, reptile, or mollusk. The second spread offers further details about the system, such as various types of muscles, how the shape of an animal’s teeth depends on the kind of food they eat, how the heart works, cutaneous respiration (skin breathing), and more. Most information is conveyed in short paragraphs, often with a topic title, and each page includes an additional factoid in a “Did You Know?” box. The illustrations are stylized, colorful, and gently humorous; arrows connecting explanatory text to the relevant body part make the information easy to digest. Pink-hued human silhouettes have no details beyond the system being described. The chosen facts are accurate and appropriate to elementary school readers with inquiring minds. Anatomy titles for this age group are usually focused on the human body or specific body parts. The comparative approach makes this one stand out.

An appealing and enlightening, hands-on, full-bodied approach. (Nonfiction. 7-10)
“Sweet as pie!”

NOODLEHEADS TAKE IT EASY

Arnold, Tedd, Martha Hamilton & Mitch Weiss
Illus. by Tedd Arnold
Holiday House (48 pp.)
$15.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
Series: Noodleheads, 7

Reading about Noodleheads is easy as pie.

The Noodleheads are back for another series of logically illogical tales rooted in international folklore. In this seventh outing of the series, protagonists Mac and Mac, anthropomorphic pieces of macaroni pasta, are trying to make it easy on a nice summer day but their naïveté and cheery ability to take things literally (if not logically) eventually lead them into town, where they need to purchase ingredients for pies that their mother wants to make. Along the way, they consider idioms related to the word easy (“easy as pie,” “easy as falling off a log”), eventually returning with the ingredients—and eager for pie. Although the pies eventually get made, some pie-related tomfoolery ensues as their friend Meatball helps them pass the time as the desserts cool, but everything works out for the best. Young readers unfamiliar with the titular characters’ previous exploits will have no problem understanding the zany humor, and mature readers will love the backmatter, which traces the history of each story’s inspirations. Arnold’s bold artwork, depicting characters with bulging eyes and oversized bodies on tiny legs, remains a classic vehicle for capturing the wackiness of the tales, and fans of this pair’s adventures will welcome this latest addition with giggles galore. Names signal ethnic diversity in the supporting cast. Art not seen.

Sweet as pie! (Graphic early reader 6-8)

MONSTER CLUB

Aronofsky, Darren & Ari Handel
Illus. by Ronald Kurniawan
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-06-313663-2
Series: Monster Club, 1

A boy fights to protect his family’s Coney Island amusement park from developers and save his parents’ marriage using magic ink that allows drawings to come to life.

Two years ago, sixth graders Eric “Doodles” King and his best friend, Alan “Yoo-hoo” Yoo, created Monster Club, in which members draw monsters and pit them against each other in battle, but the other club members are beginning to lose interest. At home, Eric worries that his arguing parents will separate and that King’s Wonderland, the amusement park that’s been in his dad’s family for generations, will have to close. When Eric discovers some smelly old ink and uses it to create a “literal magic marker” that allows the monsters he draws to come to life, he believes he’s found a way to save King’s: by having a real-life monster battle. Matters get wildly out of hand, however, when Eric brings the magic ink to school and bully Darren Naggio uses it to create an army of monsters, leading to an exciting, sustained action sequence. A prologue and a tale from King Neptune, an eccentric old man who wanders the Coney Island boardwalk, provide some family history for Eric that is rooted in early-20th-century Eastern European pogroms. An epilogue offers an origin story for the magic ink and a surprise twist, setting things up for the sequel. Names signal ethnic diversity in the supporting cast. Art not seen.

Action packed and wildly creative. (Fiction. 9-13)

MEOWSTERPIECES

A Cat’s Guide to Art . . . and Life!

Bailey, Jenn
Illus. by Nyangsongi
Magic Cat (32 pp.)
$19.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-4197-6051-8

What can kittens learn from great art?

“Come walk along with Mama Cat / and tour the works of art. / Inside each frame you’re sure to find / your own creative heart.” Mama Cat has some lessons for her kittens (and young humans), and she imparts them in rhyme as she describes 13 great works of visual art reproduced on double-page spreads with felines in place of the original humans. On a spread depicting Sandro Botticelli’s Birth of Venus (in which an orange-and-white cat stands on a shell covered in strands of yarn), Mama Cat urges her kittens to embrace the praise and adoration of humans. On a spread portraying Rembrandt van Rijn’s Night Watch, she tells young cats to be bold and have great adventures.
And Edward Hopper’s Nighthawks spurs her to encourage the youngsters to tell tall tales of their adventures. In her first foray into children’s book illustration, artist Nyangsongi inserts her plump, adorable, happy felines into the great works. She doesn’t mimic the brushwork of Vincent van Gogh or Georges Seurat, but the inspiration of each spread will be obvious (to adult readers). Bailey’s rhyme bounces along through each lesson with the tone of a loving, reassuring mama cat. This attractive volume has just one misstep; out of 13 works, only three are by artists of color—Laura Wheeler Waring, Katsushika Hokusai, and Henry Ossawa Turner—and only one is by a woman (Waring). (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Certain to spark a love of art (and giggles) in feline aficionados. (further information on the original works) (Picture book. 4-8)

ISAIAH DUNN SAVES THE DAY
Baptist, Kelly J.
Crown (192 pp.)
978-0-593-42921-1
978-0-593-42922-8 PLB

After experiencing homelessness, a boy and his family continue to find their footing.

In this sequel to Isaiah Dunn Is My Hero (2021), the titular protagonist, his mother, and his younger sister, Charlie, are settled into Miz Rita’s apartment. Isaiah’s musings, divided into brief chapters, each headed by a date, reflect how he settles into a more stable, though still unhoused, life as Mama, Charlie, and he start college, kindergarten, and middle school, respectively. Isaiah and his friend and business partner Angel scale up their poetry-writing business as well as participate in the Rockets Reach Back, a conflict-resolution program in which the middle school...
graduates of the parent program, Rocket ReStore—where Isaiah and Angel settled their own antagonism toward each other—mentor elementary school students. At first reluctant and then with Mama’s encouragement, Isaiah agrees to serve as a guide for Kobe Love, a third grader who loves basketball and bragging about his father (who he says is playing basketball overseas) and who often disrupts class. For all the encouraging words Isaiah has received and given to adults and to his contemporaries, will his words reach Kobe, who, like Isaiah, has his own struggles? While the first novel felt more like a list of issues Isaiah faced, the plot in this story moves along at a better pace. Isaiah’s voice rings true, and his conflicts will resonate with readers, as will his efforts to support those around him. Characters present as Black.

A gentle journey of community love. (Fiction. 11-13)

STARRING STEVEN SPIELBERG
The Making of a Young Filmmaker
Barretta, Gene
Illus. by Craig Orback
Christy Ottaviano Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-316-33898-1

Scenes from a famous director’s childhood.

A young boy watches a train wreck on the big screen in 1921, and it inspires a life of “movie magic.” Steven Spielberg’s story moves from New Jersey to Arizona and then California as he deals with bullies, antisemitism, and his parents’ divorce. Through all these hardships, he found solace in storytelling, whether selling his sisters with creepy stories or using his dad’s handheld camera to record original scenes. The director once said that “hardly a single one of my films isn’t based on something that happened in my childhood” (one of several quotes from Spielberg incorporated in the text), and many iconic scenes from his movies are situated in the context of his life, like when young Steven let out the science-class frogs before they could be dissected or his father’s recounting of stories from World War II. Panoramic, colorful, action-packed spreads show these details and more, giving the book a cinematic feel. This would be challenging to read aloud—it’s on the longer end, and the prose uses the more complex writing style common for picture-book biographies. It would be ideal for a slightly older audience who want to sink their teeth into a biography but aren’t quite up for a chapter book. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Educational and entertaining. (fun facts, recommended viewing, quote sources) (Picture-book biography. 7-10)

THE VANQUISHERS
Bayron, Kalynn
Bloomsbury (288 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-5476-0977-2

A middle schooler and her friends spring into action when their new friend goes missing in Bayron’s middle-grade series opener.

Malika “Boog” Wilson and friends Cedrick and Jules are students at Victor Garcia Middle School. They’re looking forward to Vanquisher Appreciation Week, a celebration of the defeat of the last hive of vampires. However, Boog’s parents are among the few who still take precautions against a vampire return, something that embarrasses her. When Aaron, a new student from Colorado, moves to their neighborhood, the three friends open their circle to include him. The sixth graders become suspicious of Mr. Rupert, the new guidance counselor, who seems to be overly interested in their little group. Then a fun school fundraising event at the Royal Roller Rink takes a dramatic turn when Aaron disappears from the venue. As days go by with no word, fears increase that something ominous has occurred—and Boog suspects Mr. Rupert knows more than he’s letting on. The search for Aaron ultimately reveals how much Boog’s folks were involved the last time vampires were a threat to their community. This warm, witty friendship story with a healthy dose of vampire adventure is a page-turning read. The main cast of characters is cued as Black and Latine; Jules uses they/them pronouns, and Cedrick has two dads.

A lively, appealing addition to the genre. (Fantasy. 9-13)

A BEAR, A BEE, AND A HONEY TREE
Bernstrom, Daniel
Illus. by Brandon James Scott
Hippo Park/Astra Books for Young Readers (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-66264-008-7

It isn’t hard to tell that an animator worked on this book. Someone is moving on nearly every page of this picture book. A bear is eagerly pursuing honey or a swarm of bees is chasing after the bear. Even the endpapers show the path of a bee in flight. Scott has a background in animation, and his illustrations of the bear climbing a tree or tumbling through the air feel incredibly vivid. The images of objects are just as marvelous; a beehive, in the middle of a tree, seems to glow. The text is simple, like an itemized list, pairing well with the visuals: “a bear / a bee / a honey tree.” As the list continues, the action builds one line at a time: “a running bear / a patch of weeds / a million bees up in the air.” The cloud of bees looks so dense that it’s almost possible to believe the artist has painted a million of them, and they’re blurred just slightly, so they appear to be in
constant motion. The ending isn’t difficult to predict—the bees manage to defend their hive from the interloper—but the bear, having gone home hungry, looks dejected enough to earn some readers’ sympathies. And while the story is slight, the rhythm of the words is captivating enough to keep readers turning pages. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

With popcorn, this book would make a pretty great animated short. (Picture book. 3-5)

STARLET RIVALS
Bhandal, Puneet
Illus. by Jen Khatun
Lantana (264 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-913747-90-9
Series: The Bollywood Academy, 1

Can an outsider make it in Bollywood?

When 12-year-old Bela Khanna, who dreams of being a movie star, submits her video and is accepted as a contestant for the popular TV talent show Dance Starz, she and her family are thrilled. Bela wins and is given a scholarship to train with celebrities’ kids at Bollywood Academy on Kohimoo Island, just outside her home city of Mumbai. Bela hits the ground running, with an audition and photoshoot—but when a story about nepotism in the industry breaks, the dynamics among the star kids and the others start to change.

Will Bela be able to cope with the mounting pressure? Throughout her journey, Bela finds comfort and support in her family, her best friends from her old life, and some trusted folks within the school who also come from outside the film world. She learns to navigate the roller-coaster world of show business with aplomb, modeling how to seek support through healthy friendships. Readers will empathize with Bela, but her characterization would have benefited from more exploration of how dance became her happy place, and her lengthy internal monologues might cause their attention to waver. While the ending feels abrupt, this series opener sets the stage for more glamorous adventures. Opening and closing illustrations convey the story’s essence.

An uneven take on Bollywood fame. (Fiction. 8-12)

PIG THE REBEL
Blabey, Aaron
Scholastic (32 pp.)
$13.49 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-338-85919-5

You got schooled!

Pig the Pug is back for another off-kilter adventure, and this time he’s a doggie school dropout. After off-page antics that leave his owner’s home a mess, Pig is shipped off to Big Jean’s Dog Obedience School, where the institution’s “No job too tough” motto finally meets its match. Pig joins a cohort of equally uncouth pups but doesn’t advance further than the first lesson before he organizes a revolt. Mayhem ensues, and Pig ends up looking like his namesake after an accident with a few pink cakes and a tank of flammable gas. Thankfully, though, some lessons were learned and the book ends on a positive note. The story and the illustrations—rendered in acrylic with pens and pencils—are just as zany as readers would expect, and educators and librarians will revel in reading the book aloud. The plot moves at a breakneck pace; as a result, Big Jean, a stern, light-skinned woman with a heap of purple curls, isn’t developed, which is unfortunate as the character radiates interest and seems like a funny foil for the mischievous pug. Instead, the focus stays solely on Pig, whose reaction shots and bug-eyed horror at the thought of behaving will have readers giggling long after the book is finished. One sour spot is a visual joke that implies cultural insensitivity among Pig’s bad dog behaviors; it appears to be a reference to a previous title in the series, but without context it may confuse readers unfamiliar with the series. This issue aside, Pig is a bad pug whom children will want to read about again and again. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Another hilarious outing with this deliciously naughty dog. (Picture book. 4-8)
Set in the intertwined sister cities of Calexico and Mexicali along the U.S.–Mexico border, the slice-of-life *Twin Cities* (Random House Graphic, July 19) chronicles the home and middle school lives of twins Teresa and Fernando. When Teresa decides to continue school across the border in Calexico while Fernando commits to staying at school in Mexicali, the resulting separation of these twins—once inseparable—marks the start of the siblings’ pursuit of individual identities. For author and illustrator Jose Pimienta, this book—their second solo graphic novel—is a continuation. Whereas *Suncatcher* also features the city of Mexicali, wrapping up that project left Pimienta with a seed of doubt: “I had this gnawing feeling [that I didn’t get] to talk about Mexicali as much as I wanted to.”

Flavored by Pimienta’s own experiences growing up in Mexicali, Teresa’s and Fernando’s respective journeys echo and retrace one another in surprising ways. Siblinghood, after all, is complicated.

Carried out via Zoom, our conversation with Pimienta broached numerous topics, from gender expectations to the graphic novel as a format. Below are some highlights, edited for length and clarity.

As young twins, Teresa and Fernando seem more different than alike. Teresa wants to go “above and beyond” (i.e., across the border to an American school). Fernando is shy and inward, retreating into himself. This difference is mirrored in how the parents treat each kid.

It was a very deliberate choice. One of the obvious differences between these twins is that one is a boy and one is a girl. In an ideal world, kids would be treated equally, but unfortunately, that’s not really [the case]. In Mexican culture, gender roles are very set. There are these expectations for girls, for instance, that they have to be multitasking at all times, they have to be juggling multiple things, and they just have to be “ready.” Whereas with boys, they tend to have a little bit more freedom. There’s more of an inclination to accommodate to boys, unfortunately. [While working on *Twin Cities,*] I would think, *How do I even write about this? Am I endorsing this? Am I commodifying this? Am I saying this is OK?* Whether or not Teresa and Fernando verbalize it, it is what they’re experiencing. This is why Fernando has a room to himself while Teresa is dealing with not having a room. Those were very, very conscious choices in [creating] their environment.

During the first few pages, there are a couple of introductory panels where readers get different views of Mexicali. Later, the festival that Fernando and his dad attend leads to more detailed views of Mexicali. Was this depiction of the city something you wanted to ensure that you captured accurately?
I wanted to make both Mexicali and Calexico characters in the story, because it matters where this story is happening and why these cities are so important to these kids. For those opening panels, for instance, I wanted to just showcase my hometown, almost working from what comes across as a love letter to it: Like, *this is what I remember; this is why I liked Mexicali so much*.

I’m interested in the way you place the panels of the comic to tell two simultaneous stories. You depict one twin going about their day on one page, and the other twin doing the same on the opposing page. These passages compare the education each twin is receiving and the way they’re navigating their respective schools on their own. Is your use of panels one reason why you prefer the graphic novel format?

When you’re opening the spreads, you’re getting both stories simultaneously. That was kind of the angle for this approach. But also, it fits in with the theme of two cities, two characters. One of the other reasons why I was going with that approach is because there’s no narration throughout the book. Everything is just directly through dialogue, or whatever the main characters are saying. And the reason for that was very deliberate. If there’s going to be narration, how do you know which twin is speaking? If you throw in caption boxes, if you were to just make one single narrator, that’s an omnipresent character. So, I figured we’re going to get the story directly from the characters themselves, and it’s going to be what they are experiencing as they’re going along. I wanted to be fair to both characters. And I wanted to be as equally caring about what they’re both going through.

What three words would you use to describe *Twin Cities*?

I want to call it sweet. I want to call it transborderist, because it does talk about transborderism. That’s what the focus is. And I’m going to go with sibling-esque, because it is about the dynamics of siblinghood. It is about the complications of being a sibling and how that can look at a very important time in your life.

Is there anything else that you would like to mention about *Twin Cities*?

I tried to depict as much food as I could. Mexicali has a very specific local cuisine. While I was working on the novel, there were moments when I realized that I was drawing a lot of kids eating. In case anyone is curious, drawing someone eating is a little more difficult than you might expect! So, practice your hand gestures, and what amount of food, and what kind of food you’re drawing.

Lastly, what do you hope young readers will take away from Teresa’s and Fernando’s stories?

Middle school is hard. It’s definitely one of the most difficult times in a person’s life, or at least it was in my life. So, I hope that what readers take away is that whatever you’re experiencing is very valid, very real. And it’s OK if you don’t know how to talk about it yet. Because the book is about these two kids growing up in a border town, they’re experiencing a schism and they’re growing. They’re in this very transitory part of their lives. Teresa is going through her thing, and Fernando makes an interesting friend. There are all these elements that are happening. I don’t think either of them are having necessarily the easiest time on multiple things. But the way that I tried to depict it is that it is happening to them, and they’re navigating it to the best of their abilities. So, that’s what I hope that readers take away: Real life is what it is. You do your best.

J. Alejandro Mazariegos is a writer and nonprofit advocate in California. *Twin Cities received a starred review in the May 1, 2022, issue.*
Who thought a bathtub could be so bad after all. Dry, understated text that underscores the topsy-turvy situation is accompanied by giggle-inducing illustrations rendered in loose lines. One image of a child peeing in the bath might make adults cringe but will delight young ones seeking to avoid their own bathtimes. Depicted in bright yellow, Scaredy Bath shows a remarkable range of facial expressions—wide-eyed, cringing, sad, afraid—especially on a spread in which the tub is seen waiting all day for bathtime. This is a funny tale in a long line of narrative twists designed to encourage children to engage in and enjoy a necessary part of childhood life, among them Mitchell Sharmat's Terrrible Eater (1980), illustrated by Jose Aruego and Ariane Green and his famous Green Book for Black travelers.

A compelling tale laced with an important message. This retelling of a traditional Lumbee origin story begins with Turtle Island, which “rest[s] on the back of a gigantic snapping turtle.” The turtle’s shell is divided into sections, one for each of the moons and for the days between each moon. The turtle has several hatchlings, one of which grows into a giant, selfish creature. The Great Snapping Turtle, as it is known, lives by the mouth of the great mother spring, which provides water for the other animals; the selfish turtle blocks the spring from flowing into the creek below. Summer comes, and all the animals on Turtle Island are thirsty. Rabbit travels the island to investigate. Even when other animals won’t help him, Rabbit does not give up. He discovers that there is no water because the giant turtle is sitting on the mouth of the mother spring. Though the turtle refuses to move, the rabbit tricks the turtle, and finally spring water gushes out, forming gullies. “Then the gullies became streams, and the streams came together to form the Lumbee River.” Relying on accessible language, Boughman’s well-paced story will leave readers with a relevant takeaway: All living things have the right to water. Vivid oil paintings illustrate landscapes of Turtle Island and tell a story of their own. (This book was reviewed digitally.)
**The New Guard**
Bradley, Jess M.
Illus. by Jeff Hartner
Pixel+Ink (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-64595-046-2
Series: Booker the Library Bat, 1

*It’s not often that the answer to a book’s problem is poop.*

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**They Call Her Fregona: A Border Kid’s Poems**
Bowles, David
Kokila (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-46257-7

In Bowles’ superb companion novel to *They Call Me Güero* (2018), young poet Güero’s social consciousness unfolds as he navigates his first romantic relationship with the fiercely intelligent Joanna.

Seventh grade is ending, and Güero’s budding romance with Joanna is getting serious. From sharing their first kiss to meeting her parents during an awkward dinner, Güero commits to being the best boyfriend he can be. As summer unfurls, there are hangouts between Güero y los Bobbys and Joanna y las Morras, and Joanna carefully opens up to Güero. Güero even starts a band with los Bobbys! Eventually, fall arrives, and with it, eighth grade—and a drastic change as Joanna’s father falls victim to a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid. As her father’s fate takes a toll on Joanna, Güero grapples with dealing with his new teachers. Tensions flare between Güero and Joanna and even among Güero’s friends. Wanting to use his privilege for good, Güero organizes a protest on behalf of Joanna’s father, but the ensuing scrutiny tests Güero, his relationship with Joanna, and his community. This rich verse novel utilizes Güero’s humorous, witty voice to the fullest via varied poetic forms. The author’s deep consideration of Joanna and the other characters is a real delight and results in a story that feels rich in scope. The inclusion of topics like the justice system, detention centers, and changes in language adds further intriguing material for discussion.

**Sublime. (glossary)** (Verse novel. 10-14)

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**Something Great**
Bradley, Jeanette
Levine Querido (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-64014-171-5

A young maker finds a new friend and collaborator. Quinn, a light-skinned child, spends the morning in their workshop and makes “Something Great” with string, tape, and an upcycled jug. The contraption can “tick-tock” like a clock and “orbit around, and around, and around, like the moon.” It can even “sing!” Despite its many impressive functions, the Something Great fails to impress Quinn’s big sister and mother. Even Isis the cat is “only interested in the string.” Frustrated, Quinn flops onto the grass. The sun makes the Something Great even more magical as it “glow[s] with all the colors of the rainbow.” A “hi” from above introduces Quinn to a brown-skinned tree climber who is curious about the project. Together, the two kids’ imaginations run wild: The Something Great could be an “elevator,” a “beat keeper,” and more! Best of all, though, the Something Great turns out to be “a friend finder.” Bradley’s latest, an everyday story of a nonbinary child, fits neatly alongside similar STEAM-focused titles. The mixed-media digital collages combine text, images of musical notes, and graph paper for a fitting DIY aesthetic. Spreads are filled with movement and emotion. Front endpapers depict Quinn’s workshop table; back endpapers add small details to show the pair’s future creative endeavors. (This book was reviewed digitally)

**Collaboration + boundless imagination = one bright idea. (Picture book. 4-8)**

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**Cocoa Magic**
Bradley, Sandra
Illus. by Gabrielle Grimard
Pajama Press (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-77278-264-6

Chocolates bring togetherness—and magic—to a 1920s Prince Edward Island school.

It was magic when Daniel made his first batch of chocolates at age 4, with his Great-Uncle Lewis—“the Cocoa King of Charlotte-town”—keeping his hands steady as Daniel poured the chocolate into the mold. Four years later, the duo’s chocolate-making has become routine as they melt, pour, scrape, and mold together for “one precious hour every morning” before Daniel goes to school. A new classmate’s loneliness prompts Daniel to hide a beautifully wrapped chocolate caramel in her desk to cheer her up. The magic of chocolate does just that, so Daniel—in cahoots with Great-Uncle Lewis—keeps secretly bringing more for her day after day. Other students notice, so Daniel begins hiding chocolates for them, too. When Great-Uncle Lewis goes off to a chocolatiers’ conference for five days, Daniel frets about the “cocoa magic” fading. His classmates surprise him with their own act of kindness. Drawing inspiration from her background as a clinical social worker, Bradley crafts a story laced with empathy and kindness. Grimard’s soft, mixed-media illustrations evoke a sense of coziness as well as the historical Charlottetown setting. Daniel and Great-Uncle Lewis present White; the schoolchildren are diverse in skin tone. Endpapers mimic a box of chocolates—a delicious touch. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**Sweet as sugar. (author’s note)** (Picture book. 4-8)

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**Booker the Library Bat: The New Guard**
Bradley, Jess M.
Illus. by Jeff Hartner
Pixel+Ink (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-64595-046-2
Series: Booker the Library Bat, 1

*It’s not often that the answer to a book’s problem is poop.*
Audiobooks continue to surge in popularity for good reason. A strong narrator can elevate a book through their skillful reading, adding texture through regional accents or the way they infuse emotion into their deliveries. Many audiobook aficionados have favorite narrators and seek out their next books on the basis of who reads them. Below are some great middle-grade titles out this year that are equally successful in print and audio. In keeping with the broad developmental and age ranges covered by this category, their audiences range from early elementary through early high school. Many would be ideal for family listening and discussion.

*Raisin in the Sun* by Lisa Yee, narrated by Yu-Li Alice Shen (Listening Library, 4 hours and 41 minutes): Visiting the Midwestern grandparents she barely knows leads 11-year-old Maizy to delve into the history of Chinese immigration to the U.S. and help heal family relationships.

*Dream, Annie, Dream* by Waka T. Brown, narrated by Sophie Oda (Harper Audio, 8 hours and 6 minutes): In 1980s Topeka, Aoi Inoue, a 12-year-old girl who loves basketball and theater, tries to make sense of peers’ and adults’ confusing messages and expectations.

*The School for Whatnots* by Margaret Peterson Haddix, narrated by Lillie Ricciardi (Harper Audio, 6 hours and 12 minutes): Kids discover they are pawns in an elaborate, exploitative ruse created by a shadowy corporation and grapple with their own parents’ roles within it.

*Zara’s Rules for Record-Breaking Fun* by Hena Khan, narrated by Subhadra Newton (Simon & Schuster Audio, 2 hours and 7 minutes): 10-year-old’s social circle is upended when a new family moves into the neighborhood and friendship dynamics shift. Will her plan to make everything right succeed?

*In the Key of Us* by Mariama J. Lockington, narrated by Yinka Ladeinde and Imani Jade Powers (Listening Library, 8 hours and 2 minutes): Music camp plus two Black girls from very different walks of life makes for a memorable summer of growth, vulnerability, connection, and giving voice to your truths.

*The Secret Diary of Mona Hasan* by Salma Hussain, narrated by Asia Mattu (Tundra Books, 7 hours and 36 minutes): Teachers, friends, relatives in Pakistan, a move from Dubai to Nova Scotia: Nothing escapes Mona’s observant eye, and it’s all immortalized in her hysterically funny diary entries.

*Unfadeable* by Maurice Broaddus, narrated by Jordan Cobb (Harper Audio, 6 hours and 9 minutes): Thirteen-year-old Bella Fades is an unhoused graffiti artist trying to protect her beloved Indianapolis neighborhood from corrupt forces pushing gentrification at the expense of longtime residents.

*Caprice* by Coe Booth, narrated by Bahni Turpin (OrangeSky Audio, 7 hours and 17 minutes): Caprice wrestles with whether to accept a private school scholarship and leave behind her close-knit Newark neighborhood; she’s also haunted by the legacy of childhood sexual abuse.

*Singing With Elephants* by Margarita Engle, narrated by Carla Corvo (Listening Library, 2 hours and 21 minutes): A Cuban American immigrant girl in 1940s California bonds with her elderly neighbor, Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, and works to reunite a baby elephant with its family.

*The Summer of June* by Jamie Sumner, narrated by Lillie Ricciardi (Simon & Schuster Audio, 4 hours and 36 minutes): Extreme anxiety casts a shadow over every part of June’s life, but this is the summer when she stops letting her fears hold her back.

*In the Beautiful Country* by Jane Kuo, narrated by Sura Siu (Harper Audio, 2 hours and 45 minutes): Moving from Taiwan to America in 1980 was supposed to make Ai Shi the lucky one, but their new life brings more challenges than they ever imagined.

*The Kaya Girl* by Mamle Woło, narrated by Ekua Ekeme (Hachette Audio, 6 hours and 49 minutes): Ghanaian 14-year-olds Abena and Faiza cross paths in a market and form a fast friendship that bridges a multitude of differences, enriching each other’s lives.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
“A teamwork tale that is the cat’s meow.”

MIND CONTROL!

Booker the bat is the newest guard at the library, eating bugs to protect the books. He’s nervous about his first day and hopes to fit in with the other guards, who gather before each shift to share the previous night’s adventures. Booker uses his first night to acquaint himself with the library, and he’s in the perfect place to spy a burglar, but how to stop him? Luckily, Booker’s learned from the other guards’ tales and enacts a plan to get the man caught. Children in the anything-potty-related-is-hysterical phase will love Booker’s solution. Harter’s illustrations give each bat their own personality, their every emotion clear. The burglar is light-skinned; the person wielding a mop the next morning has darker skin. An opening “Bats and Books” note tells about the library in Portugal where bats really do protect the rare book collection from insects. But by anthropomorphizing the bats and giving them a problem to solve, the author minimizes the real-life history and also muddies the facts. For instance, the book makes it seem as if the bats are trained not to poop in the library. Though the opening note does say that eating that many bugs does lead to a lot of bat poop, it doesn’t say how it’s truly addressed (librarians cover the antique tables nightly and clean the floors each morning). (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A humorous tale that will appeal to the poop-obsessed but that trivializes the amazing real-life facts. (Picture book. 3-8)

SERWA BOATENG’S GUIDE TO VAMPIRE HUNTING

Brown, Roseanne A.
Rick Riordan Presents/Disney (400 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-368-06636-5

Serwa Boateng’s parents are a big deal in the Abomofuo, a secret organization of hunters of dangerous, magical creatures of Ghanaian lore like the adze—dangerous, vampiric shape-shifters.

Serwa, who comes from an Akan immigrant family, has trained to be a Slayer, a magical hunter imbued with power directly from the gods. When an adze attack leads to a near-fatal confrontation with her parents’ longtime black magic rival, Serwa is hurried away to live with her aunt in an idyllic Maryland, and enter nonmagical middle school while her Slayer parents pursue the perpetrator. Rocky Gorge, however, has a history of supernatural secrets that are directly tied to Serwa and her parents in ways that can’t remain hidden much longer, especially as an adze threat starts wreaking havoc upon her arrival. Luckily, Serwa makes friends and immediately enlists an army of four charming, complicated 12-year-olds into her battle against the adze, who could be masquerading as anyone. Rosy, Mateo, Eunju, Gavín, and Serwa—alongside a plucky, gnomelike Slayer partner—form a powerful team thanks to their quintessentially middle school bond based on bad jokes, fun sleepovers, and much-needed emotional support. It’s a bond so impressive the gods take notice, and although there are some unforeseen obstacles to defeating the adze, Serwa discovers more about herself than she could’ve imagined. This textured, richly mythological story will keep the pages turning as readers are drawn into Serwa’s world.

A superb, action-packed series starter. (author’s note, glossary, Adinkra dictionary) (Adventure. 10-13)

MIND CONTROL!

Burks, James
Razorbill/Penguin (192 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-593-20299-9 paper
978-0-593-20297-5
Series: Agent 9

A spotlight-seeking spy does not want to share the limelight.

In this follow-up to Agent 9: Flood-Geddon! (2021), Agent 9, a pep-filled (but often impetuous) feline spy with the Super-Secret Spy Service, is back with a new goal: to be recognized as Spy of the Month. When she is called in to save the world from a wicked wolf seeking a mind-control device, Agent 9 is positive she’s got the award in the bag. However, she learns she’ll have to work together with another agent named Traps, a mouse who is an expert tracker, trapper, and knitter. Annoyed and dismayed by the prospect of teamwork, will Agent 9 be able to work together with Traps to take down the wolf, or will her impulsivity get in her way once again? Burks’ sophomore offering is zippier than her way once again? Burks’ sophomore offering is zippier than Agent 9: Flood-Geddon! but often impetuous) feline spy with the Super-Secret Spy Service, is back with a new goal: to be recognized as Spy of the Month. When she is called in to save the world from a wicked wolf seeking a mind-control device, Agent 9 is positive she’s got the award in the bag. However, she learns she’ll have to work together with another agent named Traps, a mouse who is an expert tracker, trapper, and knitter. Annoyed and dismayed by the prospect of teamwork, will Agent 9 be able to work together with Traps to take down the wolf, or will her impulsivity get in her way once again? Burks’ sophomore offering is zippier than fast-paced, full-color wordless sequences. Her flaws on full display, Agent 9 is relatable; her desire to work independently and her subsequent realizations regarding teamwork and compromise will hit home for many readers. This is a fully self-contained adventure with a smile-inducing resolution, but a tantalizing cliffhanger will leave readers running for the next installment like a cat who hears a can opener.

A teamwork tale that is the cat’s meow. (Graphic thriller. 7-10)

DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

Calonita, Jen
Disney-Hyperion (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-368-04861-3
Series: Disney’s Lost Legends

You thought you knew Aladdin?

Forget flying carpets, lamps with resident genies, princesses, and singing. Readers first meet the legendary character as an infant. His parents flee across the desert, desperately seeking refuge for their very special son. His mother slips a necklace—bearing a charm shaped like half of a beetle—around her child’s neck, hoping the amulet will protect him. When readers next meet Aladdin, he’s 12 and
“Grist for thoughtful readers about two visionaries with very different sorts of visions.”

OF WALDEN POND

A philosopher and a businessman both take advantage of nature’s bounty. “Oddball / tax dodger / nature lover” Henry David Thoreau watches from his small cabin as “Bankrupt / disgrace / good for nothing” Frederic Tudor and his crew methodically saw the ice of frozen Walden Pond into blocks and pile them up—not for local use but to be shipped across the world to India. Calling both men dreamers, Cline-Ransome employs spare free verse as she follows each of them. In her carefully detailed paintings, Yazdani offers views from elevated perspectives of the pond’s

HEAR ME

Carolrhoda (344 pp.)

$19.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-72842-074-5

Florida seventh grader Rayne is losing her hearing, and neither she nor her parents know how to handle it. Rayne, an implied White girl, wears hearing aids that she is self-conscious about. It’s getting harder and harder to hear, and now her parents want her to get cochlear implants, which she is desperate to avoid. The dialogue is written with many omitted words replaced with asterisks to represent what Rayne misses, and it is an effective choice. Readers may get just frustrated enough to develop insight into Rayne’s experiences, a well-realized, relatable protagonist, discovers his extraordinary true identity as the “Diamond in the Rough” and finds true friends. The Middle Eastern setting is evoked well, with references to food and clothing.

If not a carpet ride, an entertaining journey readers will appreciate. (Fiction. 9-12)

THE LORDS OF NIGHT

Rick Riordan Presents/Disney (320 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-368-06656-3

In this companion to Cervantes’ Storm Runner trilogy, powerful godborn Renata Santiago must unearth a way to prevent the resurrection of the Lords of Night. Grappling with her return to relative normality, 14-year-old Ren—daughter of Pacific, the Mayan goddess of time, and heir of the most powerful shadow brujxs on her father’s side—pursues a tip emailed to her alien-sighting blog, Eyes in the Sky. Ren’s search for alien life leads her to an unsettling discovery: a strange symbol etched into a cornfield, where a sinister voice fills her head. It references the mysterious Lords of Night, nine powerful Aztec gods who were linked to fates both good and bad. Worse yet, the cinco, a rogue band of godborns, could be involved. Aided (somewhat) by her bestie Ah-Puch—the Mayan god of death and destruction, now mostly powerless from a recent misadventure—Ren teams up with Edison, a teen demon hybrid, and 11-year-old Aztec hunter Montero. Their mission: to hunt the cinco and stop their ungodly alliance with the Lords of Night even as shadows inexplicably pull Ren closer to an unforeseen fate. This volume sizzles with madcap fun, interweaving icons and figures from Mayan and Aztec mythology with dizzying results. The author excels at making these gods and goddesses cool and familiar. In the second half, many truths kept from Ren fall into fabulous place, spiraling into an exciting cliffhanger. This duology opener is accessible to readers who are new to this world.

An engaging, god-filled delight. (glossary) (Fantasy. 8-12)

AN INTERESTING STORY OF A PARTICULAR DEAF EXPERIENCE

(author’s note, discussion questions) (Fiction. 10-14)
changes through each season, Thoreau’s cozy cabin, and ice that is first swathed in hay and sawdust, then loaded aboard the ship Delhi for its monthslong voyage. As back in Concord, Thoreau marvels at how “The pure Walden water / is mingled with / The sacred water / of the Ganges,” on the other side of the world, Indian workers rush the precious ice through sweltering Calcutta streets to the homes of wealthy White residents. The pond has offered “an inspiration for Thoreau / a harvest for Tudor / a bounty for both.” In her afterword, the poet explains how Tudor’s visionary venture, which (plainly) involved inventive new methods of ice storage, reversed his flagging fortunes and why it seems likely that his customers were not native Indians but their British exploiters. Readers are left to ponder which man profited most from their association with a natural resource. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Grist for thoughtful readers about two visionaries with very different sorts of visions. (Informational picture book. 7-9)

RAIN RISING
Comrie, Courtnie
Harper/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-06-315973-0

In the aftermath of a brutal attack, a Black girl and her family discover that healing is progress, not perfection, as they strive to replace their sorrow with things they love.

Eighth grader Rain Washington lives with persistent sadness she can’t seem to escape. Even the doting attention of her beloved older brother, Xander, who goes by X, only offers brief reprieves from the unhappiness that consumes her. She wishes her name were more creative, believes her skin is too dark, and wants her body to be smaller. Her struggles are compounded by her father’s absence and her single mother’s work schedule. It seems that the worst is yet to come after X becomes the victim of a brutal attack by White fraternity members while visiting a college with a football teammate from his elite prep school. The attack’s aftermath challenges Rain’s limited coping mechanisms. New friendships and a healing circle facilitated by the school counselor provide Rain and her family the opportunity to confront generational trauma, develop healthy coping responses, and forge a new path forward with the tools to heal from current and past hurts and depression that may be genetic. The clear writing is authentic, gentle, and smooth, successfully exploring complex emotions and weighty topics, including poverty, self-harm, and racism. The even pacing is perfection. As Rain rises, readers are left rooting for her and others walking her journey.

A gorgeous debut: a necessary, cathartic, immersive healing experience. (Verse novel. 10-14)

WHY HUMANS BUILD UP
The Rise of Towers, Temples and Skyscrapers
Craigie, Gregor
Illus. by Kathleen Fu
Orca (96 pp.)
$29.95 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-4598-2188-0
Series: Orca Timeline, 1

An atypically ruminative survey of tall buildings and structures worldwide.

“There are some good reasons for building up, and a few bad ones as well.” Going for a thematic rather than chronological approach, Craigie groups his several dozen examples by common needs or qualities—beginning with “Security” (the tower of Jericho, the lighthouse at Alexandria, and castles from Edinburg to Osaka) and going on to celebrate architectural expressions of “Beauty,” “Utility,” and even “Spirituality” as well as “Rivalry” and conspicuous “Luxury.” Along with mixing customary monuments, from the Great Pyramid of Giza to the Burj Khalifa, with distinctive but potentially less familiar constructions like the Tokyo Skytree and Djamaâ El Djazaïr in Algiers, the world’s tallest minaret (not to mention some humongous smokestacks and no fewer than three leaning towers in Italy), he tucks in topic-expanding sidebars on, for instance, totem poles, women architects such as South Africa’s Malika Walele, and ways in which those from marginalized groups are impacted by safety issues in public housing. Following a final roundup of environmentally sustainable towers that includes a profile of Harare’s Eastgate Centre, which is modeled after African termite mounds and, he notes, “uses only 10 percent of the electricity of a similar building with air-conditioning,” he closes with select but appropriate resources for budding tourists or architects. Fu’s finely detailed inside and outside views greatly enhance the generous suite of grand, sharply reproduced color photos.

Broad in scope, perceptively organized, and enriched with fascinating entries. (glossary) (Nonfiction. 11-13)

I HAVE A SUPERPOWER
Curry, Stephen
Illus. by Geneva Bowers
Penguin Workshop (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-38604-0

NBA legend Curry draws from his own childhood experiences to tell the story of an aspiring basketball player with a hidden ability.

Eight-year-old Hughes isn’t going to tell everyone what his superpower is—he’s going to show them, and he wants to teach readers how to use theirs, too. On his way to the basketball court, Hughes discusses how he discovered his power: First,
his mom told him about it, and then his coach told him, too. Dressed in his tank top and shorts, Hughes arrives at the basketball court ready for action. He watches the tallest kids and the fastest kids get picked first for teams. But Hughes’ superpower isn’t one that he was born with, nor is it one that he picked up quickly—it took months of practice. His is a power that can be applied to any passion: his heart. Bowers’ energetic, cartoonlike illustrations work well with the comic-style narration: A Black television announcer on a screen appears on each page, prompting Hughes to share his story, which appears in speech bubbles. This dual narration makes for a dynamic presentation of the overt message, which many children need to hear. A diverse cast of characters surround Hughes, who is brown-skinned (one of his parents presents Black; the other is tan-skinned). Curry appears on the final spread, telling readers that he didn’t let discouraging comments stop him from playing the game that he loves. He invites readers to go back through the book and find a list of his favorite things hidden in the images throughout. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A positive boost from a strong role model. (Picture book. 4-7)

ME AND MY DYSPHORIA MONSTER
An Empowering Story To Help Children Cope With Gender Dysphoria

Dale, Laura Kate
Illus. by Hui Qing Ang
Jessica Kingsley Publishers (40 pp.)
$17.95 | Aug. 18, 2022
978-1-83997-092-4

Nisha, a young trans girl, discusses her experience living with gender dysphoria.

A floating monster that resembles outer space is the visual metaphor for the protagonist’s nebulous but crushing feeling of gender dysphoria. Nisha, who is brown-skinned, is not sure exactly what is going on, but she knows she hates being called a boy. In a heartbreakingly authentic moment, she laments that the monster only listens to other people, not her own pleas for it to go away. Her mother, who is brown-skinned, and her father, who is light-skinned, introduce her to Jack, an Asian-presenting trans man with his own dysphoria monster—except his, a cute little frog sitting on his shoulder, doesn’t cause him too much trouble. After getting some guidance from Jack and then talking to her parents, Nisha begins using she/they/Them pronouns and using the girls’ restroom at school; soon, her monster shrinks to a little squidlike creature that is still present but is much easier to manage. This book will speak to and delight trans children of various experiences, though it does rely somewhat on the visual shorthand of gender stereotypes (flouncy dresses being associated with girlhood, for instance), and at one point, Nisha is told she seems much taller and has a much deeper voice than most girls—traits that wouldn’t apply to a child her age. Still, the lesson is uplifting while still being realistic, and the text flows easily except for an awkward tense change at one point. The illustrations are cute and colorful, with a high-contrast cartoony style. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A charming book for trans kids and those seeking to build understanding. (explanation of terminology and information on gender identity for adults) (Picture book. 4-8)

WOMBAT SAID COME IN

Deedy, Carmen Agra
Illus. by Brian Lies
Peachtree (36 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-68263-321-2

Wombat’s sense of hospitality is hard-pressed as other animal residents of the burning Australian bush seek refuge in his cool, safe, underground home.

From the start, the text seems made for a read-aloud: “Wombat was not worried. No, not a tittle. Fire had passed over his burrow before.” A delightful, full-bleed double-page spread depicts a cutaway of Wombat in his orange-toned burrow, while outside and above, readers see a pale sky and a drift of smoke. The mannerly marsupial—his patterned quilt wrapped over his collared, khaki shirt—settles in to have tea and wait out the fire. Immediately, he hears the first of many interruptions at his door. Wallaby is begging for shelter, and Wombat invites him in with a welcoming verse that becomes his standard reply each time another refugee arrives (“Wombat said, ‘Come in!’ / Wombat said, ‘Come in!’ / From smoke and din / and howling wind / come in, my friend, come in!”). The charming, easily learned mantra changes only when the crisis ends. Each succeeding guest is more demanding, from Kookaburra, Platypus, and Koala to tiny Sugar Glider. The dry wit of the text is matched by the art that is both detailed in illustrating each animal and hilarious in showing poor Wombat’s trials. One of many funny touches is the fact that only Wombat wears clothing. Beneath the fun, however, lies the grim reality of climate change, tempered by lessons in zoology and, especially, practical altruism. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A superb read-aloud balancing messages about the environment and generosity with humor and heart. (Picture book. 4-8)

NINE COLOR DEER

Duan, Kailin
Trans. by Jeremy Tiang
Levine Querido (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-64614-178-4

In this picture book based on an ancient Buddhist tale and translated from Chinese, a magical deer shows humans the power of compassion and integrity.

In this tale set long ago, deep within a secret forest in the Kunlun Hills—a mountain range from Chinese mythology—there
“Attractive and brimming with intriguing facts.”

**OPERATION PANGOLIN**

A look at this scaled mammal, illustrated with full-color photos.

Spotlighting Thai Van Nguyen, who as a small child in Vietnam witnessed hunters taking a mother pangolin and her baby and vowed to spend his life trying to save them, this well-designed book is full of clear, fascinating facts about the pangolin and the efforts to save them from extinction. Van Nguyen founded Save Vietnam’s Wildlife, which rescues and cares for injured pangolins and disseminates information about Vietnam’s mammals. Readers will learn that there are eight species of pangolin, that they can be found in Africa and Asia, and that their diet primarily consists of ants and other insects. To that end, pangolins’ tongues can be up to 16 inches long—longer than their bodies. They’re also the only mammals to have scales, end, pangolins’ tongues can be up to 16 inches long—longer than their bodies. They’re also the only mammals to have scales, and they curl up when threatened to protect their vulnerable bellies. The information is simplified for younger readers, with words like *nocturnal* and *rheumatism* defined within the text. A section about what readers can do to help includes ideas like becoming a species ambassador—finding out more about pangolins and telling family and friends. Readers will come away feeling empowered to help and more knowledgeable about this amazing creature. Humans pictured are Asian.

**ATTRACTION AND BRILLIANCE WITH INTRIGUING FACTS.**

**Glossary, further sources, index** (Nonfiction. 7-10)

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**I’M OGRE IT**

Ebbeler, Jeffrey

Holiday House (40 pp.)

$14.99 | Sept. 27, 2022

Series: I Like To Read Comics

You’re never too old to be “ogre” having some fun.

Izzie’s amazement that older brother Ollie threw away most of his toys is quickly diverted upon meeting Tim, a lumbering, green-skinned ogre who has recently moved into the neighborhood—specifically, into a previously unnoticed cave in Izzie’s backyard. Unperturbed by this sudden change in local real estate, Izzie brings Tim to meet Ollie, who has become so consumed with a new video game that he considers his toys babyish. Engrossed in the game, Ollie doesn’t notice for several hours that Tim and Izzie took him up on his offer to take his old stuff and have stripped his room bare. Once he emerges, Ollie follows a piece of yarn through the house and into the yard to find that Izzie and Tim have, using Ollie’s “baby” toys, built a video game–like world that requires Ollie’s imagination to play. The game rekindles his love of imaginative play, and Ollie is more than willing to join Izzie and Tim on future adventures.

The story is gorgeously captured in digital illustrations mimicking the texture of cave paintings, bringing visual Morrison, one of the many artists associated with the book, is known for his work in the field of graphic novels, which lends a unique flair to the illustrations. The book is full of clear, fascinating facts about the pangolin, and the efforts to save them from extinction. Van Nguyen founded Save Vietnam’s Wildlife, which rescues and cares for injured pangolins and disseminates information about Vietnam’s mammals. Readers will learn that there are eight species of pangolin, that they can be found in Africa and Asia, and that their diet primarily consists of ants and other insects. To that end, pangolins’ tongues can be up to 16 inches long—longer than their bodies. They’re also the only mammals to have scales, and they curl up when threatened to protect their vulnerable bellies. The information is simplified for younger readers, with words like *nocturnal* and *rheumatism* defined within the text. A section about what readers can do to help includes ideas like becoming a species ambassador—finding out more about pangolins and telling family and friends. Readers will come away feeling empowered to help and more knowledgeable about this amazing creature. Humans pictured are Asian.

**ATTRACTION AND BRILLIANCE WITH INTRIGUING FACTS.**

**Glossary, further sources, index** (Nonfiction. 7-10)

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**ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT**

Important Jobs That Get Done at Night

Faber, Polly

Illus. by Harriet Hobday

Nosy Crow/Candlewick (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-5362-2731-2

This book won’t put an end to children’s fear of the dark, but it’s a good start.

Nighttime looks almost joyous in this picture book devoted to the work that happens when the sun goes down. The sky is a different color on every page—sometimes blue-green, like the sea, other times a duskier blue, dotted with birds and stars. The city streets are filled with diverse workers performing acts of kindness. Luigi, a light-skinned baker, is making warm pastries for people’s breakfasts; Fiona, a light-skinned midwife, helps deliver babies. This reassuring tale also calls attention to people who might be overlooked. Dylan and Ruby, brown-skinned and light-skinned, stock the shelves at the supermarket. Eva, light-skinned, sells groceries, doughnuts, and coffee all night long. Brown-skinned Lem “plays their saxophone in a band.”

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**OPERATION PANGOLIN**

Saving the World’s Only Scaled Mammal

Ezterber, Suzi

Millbrook/Lerner (40 pp.)

$30.65 PLB | Oct. 4, 2022

978-1-7284-295-2

An elegant retelling of a timeless story of humility and conservation. (translator’s note) (Picture book/folktale. 5-9)
However, an especially rosy depiction of law enforcement—Hassan and Amina, a brown-skinned pair of police officers, are called about a noise in the street but find it’s only a family of foxes—may raise eyebrows. The book is narrated by a brown-skinned child whose brown-skinned mother, readers learn, is a late-night bus driver. If the story has a fault, it’s that it may be too gentle. There’s so little conflict that, at times, there’s almost no story. But children who get anxious at bedtime—especially those affected by the news—may appreciate the calmness of the text and the wonderfully busy paintings, with a worker in every corner. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A comforting bedtime story, especially if parents are heading out to work. (Picture book. 3-6)

MARYA KHAN AND THE INCREDIBLE HENNA PARTY
Faruqi, Saadia
Amulet/Abrams (144 pp.)
$14.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
Series: Marya Khan, 1

A soon-to-be tween has big plans for her eighth birthday. Marya Khan can’t stand that Alexa R. was born two days before her. Alexa, her rich neighbor who wears gorgeous outfits (“Who even wears fancy dresses to school?”) and carries a glittery unicorn backpack, always has a big party for her birthday. Marya, on the other hand, observes the day by having pizza and cake with her family and her best friend, Hanna. Jealousy rears its ugly yet understandable head, and after seeing a girl on TV with henna on her hands, Marya decides she wants to throw an epic henna party. But her plan of buttering up her family with Operation Help the Khans keeps getting messed up, leading to mayhem, fun, and lots of shadowed hopes, which make up for the slightly predictable ending. There’s so much to love about Marya. She’s spunky, persistent, and resourceful. Her best friend is supportive, her family exasperatingly adorable, and Alexa a worthy nemesis—though Faruqi makes clear that much of what makes her irritating is in Marya’s head. Each chapter is prefaced with an excerpt from Marya’s “Word of the Day” diary, offering a glimpse of what’s going to unfold next. Bushry’s charming black-and-white illustrations enhance this breezy read. Marya and her family are Pakistani American and Muslim; Alexa appears light-skinned. A delightful story of friendship, family, and upended expectations. (Chapter book. 6-9)

LITTLE DRAGON
Fielding, Rhiannon
Ilus. by Chris Chatterton
Ladybird (32 pp.)
$12.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
Series: Ten Minutes to Bed

Two sibling dragons count down to bedtime. There are just 10 minutes left until bedtime, and all of the other dragons fly home to their caves, ready to snuggle in for the night. But pink-hued Flicker and purple Flash are having too much fun. They don’t want to go to sleep yet. The two swoop and soar through the sky, racing each other and marveling at rainbows. When Flicker spies a lost dragon egg that has rolled down the mountain, returning home takes on a new sense of urgency as the siblings try to get the egg back before it hatches. References to time are woven into the text: “Three minutes to bed: the sky had grown dark, / but Flash lit their way / with a shower / of sparks.” A bright, lively cadence matches the two dragons’ high spirits and boundless energy. The two cut adorable figures, with large, round eyes and heads. Rescuing the egg shows a sense of responsibility and maturity that contrasts with the duo’s flighty bedtime avoidance (although that’s not to say they won’t do it again the next night). Endpaper maps of the Land of Nod highlight the many other creatures in this series who also excel at bedtime procrastination. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sneaky counting practice mixed in with dragon fun. (Picture book. 3-6)

BAD DRAWER
Fishman, Seth
Penguin Workshop (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 25, 2022

Even if you can’t draw, you can still tell a good story—with a little help. Told as a doleful and humorous monologue that often directly engages readers, the book begins with several unillustrated pages and a lament that the unseen narrator is very bad at drawing despite lots of practice. The narrator includes a stick figure animal drawn with markers as well as a forest of pine trees (“The only thing I know how to draw...but that’s because it’s basically a scribble”) as evidence of their poor artistic ability. The narrator does have other skills, such as making the best cookies. But being bad at drawing means the narrator can’t bring to life their imagined adventure about “a mouse named Bailey who rides a half-cat half-bird named Carbird, and how they save the mouse kingdom from invading wand-wielding dragons!” What’s worse, the narrator has several talented friends who can draw hot air balloons, cats, birds, and dragons—wait! Perhaps the narrator can exchange cookies for illustrations. This artwork begins with basic, childlike drawings, then shifts to monochromatic,
No creature should be locked up for life.

After then-President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (who is unnamed in the text) arranged for the delivery of an elephant to Pakistan in the mid-1980s, the year-old calf, Kaavan, was kept chained in the Marghazar Zoo for 35 years. For 22 of those years, Kaavan was kept with Saheli, a female elephant, but after her death, Kaavan was left alone. Thankfully, there is a happy end -dumpfounded as she joyously surfs ahead of them. Maya and her

William Stanley Merwin (1927-2019) grew up in a town where everything was “straightened out” by the boundaries of homes and roads. Even as a boy, he yearned for wilderness and was fortunate to spend summers vacationing in a cabin in the woods. Merwin also enjoyed composing poems; he found that “writing poetry was like visiting a wild place...[with] language growing wherever it pleased.” Fountain omits the years Merwin spent with his first two wives in Spain and London and fast-forwards to Hawaii. There, instead of the wild land he sought, he purchased a “wounded” space, “stripped of all its rich, dark soil.” He lived in a sustainable home with his third wife and started growing palm trees, eventually planting almost 3,000, including endangered varieties sent from around the world. Fountain leans toward longer sentences, layering ideas with metaphors to effectively convey Merwin’s hope and curiosity. The digital illustrations are reminiscent of Aaron Douglas paintings; many of the compositions contain purple and green silhouettes of people and overlapping branches with varying degrees of saturation to create a sense of depth. Darker, leafy branches border many of the compositions. The White poet/gardener stayed involved with both passions, ultimately donating his land to a conservancy and becoming the United States Poet Laureate. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sensitive exploration of an untidy, meaningful existence. (author’s note, poem) (Picture book/biography 5-8)

**THE POEM FOREST**

**Poem W.S. Merwin and the Palm Tree Forest He Grew From Scratch**

Fountain, Carrie
Illus. by Chris Turnham
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-5362-1126-9

A portrait of a man whose life comprised a love of nature and poetry.
and, in 2007, setting a Guinness record for the largest wave ever surfed at Praia de Norte in Nazaré. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A rallying cry for anyone looking for a strong example of perseverance. *(Picture book. 7-10)*

**GRANDMA’S FARM**
Garland, Michael
Astra Young Readers (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-63592-583-8

A young boy learns about a beloved family farm.

In this sequel to *Grandpa’s Tractor* (2011), Grandma and Timmy take a sentimental journey to the old farm, now abandoned and in disrepair, where his mother grew up, and Grandma shares stories and notes from her diary while Timmy imagines his mother’s early life. As the pair walk around the farm, they talk about all the chores, such as feeding the pigs—and catching them when they escaped—planting, picking, and selling vegetables, gathering and candling eggs, and shearing sheep. But farm life isn’t all work. Grandma recalls how the family had fun fishing, playing family baseball and board games, watching TV, reading, and visiting the library each week. The trip is a success, and the book closes with Timmy feeling closer to both Grandma and his mother and eager to plant a garden of his own. Full-color digital illustrations have the realistic feel of scrapbook photos—they may have faded a bit, but the important details are in clear focus. In fact, reading the book feels like peering over Grandma’s shoulder as she shares her scrapbook and stories with Timmy. The story is alive with farm life details that young readers will appreciate. Timmy and his extended family present as White. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A warm tale of passing the love of the family farm from one generation to the next. *(author’s note) (Picture book. 3-6)*

**WHERE YOU’VE GOT TO BE**
Gertler, Caroline
Greenwillow Books (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-06-302705-3

Eleven-year-old Nolie struggles to cope with changes in her life.

Her older sister, Linden, is consumed with her starring role as Marie in a Lincoln Center performance of *The Nutcracker*. Nolie’s parents and even her beloved Grandma cater to Linden’s demands, affecting their close-knit family’s lives. Nolie’s relationship with best friend Jessa is also undergoing radical changes: Nolie has never used her given name, Magnolia, feeling it’s not quite right for a Jewish New York City girl, but Jessa now insists on using it and even gives Nolie a list of improvements for being cool and socially accepted. As incidents at school and home escalate, she begins to self-destruct, picking her skin raw and stealing objects that comfort her. The third-person narration delves deeply into Nolie’s thoughts and reactions, as readers understand events as she sees them. Because she feels inferior, with no special talents or passions, and has no idea what she’s meant to be, Nolie is often muddled, questioning outcomes but unable to act or making matters worse. She wants to ask for help but instead withdraws and lets opportunities pass. A new quirky friend provides fun and thoughtful insights, and Linden, who is dealing with hurtful antisemitism from fellow dancers, forcefully pushes Nolie to confess her thefts and make amends. Nolie’s tale is rich with references to her family’s history and Judaism. Gertler handles middle-grade angst, family dynamics, and serious issues with candor and compassion.

Readers will commiserate and root for this story’s sympathetic protagonist. *(Fiction. 9-13)*

**FETCH, CAT. FETCH!**
Ghigna, Charles
Illus. by Michelle Hazelwood Hyde
Schiffer (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sept. 28, 2022
978-0-7643-6460-0

Kitty cat cooperation is never an easy get.

A light-skinned, brown-haired child is determined to teach their fat, lazy black-and-white kitty a trick—or at least get the feline to do SOMETHING. “Fetch, Cat. Fetch!” The child throws a tennis ball, but the cat merely watches it with one open eye. The cat thinks they have found a great place to nap at the top of a slide, but the child is at the bottom, urging the animal to have a go at sliding down. The cat won’t play with a mouse (even a real one!), shake paws, or jump rope. The cat won’t heel or stand or dance. Even a barking dog can’t make the cat run. Then the child has a stroke of genius, telling the cat to stay and snuggling with them. Of course that gets the feline to run. Prolific author Ghigna presents a simple reader with plenty of repetition of sight words. The plain text will encourage new readers to read along or at least to memorize the text. Hyde’s feathery illustrations that show the persistent child and her stubborn puss are inviting despite the muted palette. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A fun and easy fable of feline friendship. *(Picture book. 2-5)*
A lighter-than-air blend of knightly exploits and rib-tickling twists.

**THE LABYRINTH OF DOOM**

Gibbs, Stuart  
Illus. by Stacy Curtis  
Simon & Schuster (160 pp.)  
$12.99 | Nov 1, 2022  
Series: Once Upon a Tim, 2

Princess Grace of Merryland needs rescuing again, forcing two young knights-in-training to face a series of challenges, from hungry cave sharks to a minotaur named Chad.

Actually, Princess Grace is perfectly capable of rescuing herself—again: see *Once Upon a Tim* (2022)—except that this time, kidnappers have stashed her in a room that’s locked and bolted on the outside...and in the middle of a maze billed, supposedly, as “the most complex and dastardly labyrinth in the world.” So it is that former peasants Tim and his more capable friend Bull—otherwise known as Belinda when she’s not disguised as a boy—plunge into a mess of dark and bewildering tunnels, armed with a ball of twine provided by the surprisingly sapient village idiot Ferkle, to face a series of deadly threats...though the most legendary of all turns out to be an amiable monster with the body of a bull and the head of, well, a dude. Throughout Gibbs’ lighthearted, laugh-out-loud tale, Curtis supplies proper notes of farce or stark terror as appropriate in flurries of line drawings that present most of the humans and the monsters with human features as White, though Belinda appears to present as Black. Along the way, Tim adds educational value to his narrative by flagging and then pausing to define vocabulary-building words like *laborious* and *exacting*.

A lighter-than-air blend of knightly exploits and rib-tickling twists. (Fantasy. 10-12)

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**CELEBRATE WITH ME! Recipes, Crafts, and Holiday Fun From Around the World**

Ed. by Gladwin, Laura  
Illus. by Dawn M. Cardona  
Magic Cat (64 pp.)  
$22.99 | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-4197-6301-4

This illustrated treasury of holidays shares personal stories, recipes, and crafts for families along with birthday celebration ideas from around the world.

This compact yet expansive, scrapbook-style compendium starts with an overview of celebrations. A general note advises that the “recipes and activities in this book are designed for children and adults to do together,” and contributors—among them authors S.K. Ali and Lesléa Newman, TV presenter Sonali Shah, and fashion designer Saeed Al-Rubeyi—are further outlined in the backmatter. The pages move mostly chronologically through the calendar year. Secular International Women’s Day on March 8 is followed by the Hindu celebration of Holi, marked as taking place in “February or March,” for example. Each entry includes a personal reflection from a contributor, a recipe, and an activity. The book offers opportunities for career exploration, as the contributors discuss their work in, for instance, garden design, basketry, and music. Use of cursive text may be difficult for some to read, though it is mixed in with typewriter font. The information is presented in an organized and welcoming manner. Some recipes have quick prep times, while others demand a larger investment. Among the activities, the open-ended “Make Your Own Altar” for Day of the Dead is balanced by exacting instructions for creating a woven heart for Valentine’s Day. Bright, appealing illustrations feature a diverse group of people observing holidays. The ending suggests new beginnings, as questions are offered for kids to ask the people around them about the holidays they enjoy. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Builds curiosity through stories, activities, and questions. (Informational picture/activity book. 5-11)

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**KID CONFIDENT #2 How to Master YOUR MOOD in Middle School**

Glassman, Lenka  
Illus. by DeAndra Hodge  
Magination/American Psychological Association (304 pp.)  
$16.99 | Aug. 1, 2022  
978-1-4338-3858-7  
Series: Kid Confident, 2

This second volume in the Kid Confident series is a guide to the intense emotions many middle schoolers experience.

Designed for young people to explore independently in bite-sized chunks, the book contains graphics, comics, sidebars, and prompts to vary its format and sustain reader interest. The first half details why mood struggles are more intense in middle school, empowering tweens and teens by letting them know they are not alone. Next, the author explores the impacts of thoughts, mindset, perfectionism, and actions on mood and includes concrete suggestions on how to feel better. The book features intriguing facts, self-reflection activities and questions related to key concepts, strategies for self-regulation, writing exercises, and chapter summaries as well as anecdotes about diverse middle schoolers who worked through the struggles illustrated. Simple illustrations and diagrams support the text, making subjects like the structure of the limbic system or yoga poses that calm or energize more accessible. Importantly, the final chapter helps readers understand when and how to ask for professional help for themselves and their friends. Packed with valuable material, this volume is an informative read for middle schoolers who struggle with their emotions.

An excellent mental health resource for adolescents and those who support them. (resources, bibliography) (Nonfiction. 11-14)
Miami, Héctor doesn’t want to go. Despite the toll of living
Héctor is ambivalent about leaving. He’s a math whiz on track
fully wait for their exit visas. What comes next is a suspenseful,
tragedy, nothing is left for Héctor and his family but to pain-
sent to the U.S. as part of a political exchange. But when his
mother floats the possibility of reuniting with his father in
Miami, Héctor doesn’t want to go. Despite the toll of living
with constant fear and the uncomfortable need to keep up pub-
licity appearance of support for Fidel Castro’s repressive policies,
Héctor is ambivalent about leaving. He’s a math whiz on track
to represent Cuba at the International Math Olympiad and
wants to remain close to his friends and Abuela—whose status
as a delegate to Cuba’s National Assembly enables her to con-
fer privileges on Héctor’s family, from Swiss chocolate to sup-
plies beyond the meager government rations afforded everyone
else. But everything changes when a betrayal leads to an act of
repudiation in which a mob of neighbors go to Héctor’s house
to accuse the family of being gusanos, or traitors. Following a
tragedy, nothing is left for Héctor and his family but to pain-
fully wait for their exit visas. What comes next is a suspenseful,
emotional quest for freedom, fraught with danger and decep-
tion, that will keep pages turning.

Heartbreaking, riveting, beautifully written. (Historical
fiction. 10-13)

A sixth grader struggles with leaving
the life he knows under Cuba’s oppres-
sive communist regime. In 1980, the Cuban government
opened the port of Mariel, permitting
those who could obtain visas and arrange for boat passage to
emigrate. When Héctor was 5, his father was jailed for speak-
ing out about the lack of freedom in Cuba; recently he was
sent to the U.S. as part of a political exchange. But when his
mother floats the possibility of reuniting with his father in
Miami, Héctor doesn’t want to go. Despite the toll of living
with constant fear and the uncomfortable need to keep up pub-
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fully wait for their exit visas. What comes next is a suspenseful,
emotional quest for freedom, fraught with danger and deception,
that will keep pages turning.

Heartbreaking, riveting, beautifully written. (Historical
fiction. 10-13)

The sounds of returning coquí frogs bring hope after a dev-
astating hurricane in Puerto Rico.

Elena, a child, lives with their abuela, papí, and younger
brother in an idyllic tropical home. The mango tree in the yard
provides sweet fruit and shade, and the coquíes sing their song
in the garden every night. Disaster comes in the form of Hur-
ricane María, which makes landfall on Elena’s island. Howling
winds and rain pummel the family’s home and devastate the
landscape. The storm is harrowing, but the family makes it
through. Elena’s beloved mango tree has been severely dam-
gaged, and “the coquíes’ song is silent.” Elena and their neighbors
work to rebuild their homes and community. Elena processes
the numerous losses they have experienced and waits patiently
for the coquíes to return. When the mango tree begins to
sprout new buds, Abuela reminds Elena how strong they are.
When the coquí song again rings out, Elena knows that even
though their home is forever changed, some things will always
remain the same. This is a poignant family story that details a
real-life tragic event and the courage of its survivors. González’s
melodic text sings, like Elena’s beloved coquíes, while Quiles’
gouache and acrylic artwork pops with vibrant hues and tex-
tures. Elena has brown skin and wavy brown hair. (This book was
reviewed digitally.)

A heartfelt reminder that even in the most difficult times,
dreaming of a better tomorrow strengthens family and com-
munity. (glossary, information on Hurricane María, author’s
and illustrator’s notes, list of organizations devoted to conser-
vation and biodiversity efforts) (Picture book. 6-10)

Being the new kid isn’t easy.
Shu Lin, in her bright yellow rain
boots and pink coat, arrives at school. “She didn’t speak Eng-
lish very well,” readers are informed. At recess, she stands at
the edge of the playground despite an invite to jump rope. At
lunch, stares continue as Shu Lin unpacks her lunch. Narrator
Dylan, who was also the new kid once, remembers that feeling
of not being at home while observing the interactions between
Shu Lin and the other kids. When Shu Lin’s grandpa arrives in
class one day to share his paintings, some students are skepti-
cal. Barney, who throughout offers especially pointed remarks
about Shu Lin, asks, “What’s the point if he can’t even speak
English?” But Shu Lin’s grandpa’s art speaks volumes. When he
leaves, the students try their hands at their own ink drawings.
Here, Shu Lin opens up, showing her inexperienced classmates
how to hold a brush properly and how to make smooth strokes.
By the end of the school day, classmates share smiles and laughs.
This is a simple narrative that leaves a quiet impression. Yu’s
selective use of solid colors and pattern-blocking among the
sketched-drawing style brings focus to specific characters and
their expressions. A gatefold of Shu Lin’s grandpa’s ink landscape
painting invites readers into the classroom alongside
the characters. Shu Lin and her grandfather are cued Chinese;
other students, including Dylan and Barney, are depicted as
light-skinned.

Empathetic but subtle storytelling. (Picture book. 4-8)
Being chosen to go to the Secondary Training Institute for Lifelong Employment is a good thing, right? Milo’s mam and dad are thrilled—times are tough, but with his entrance to the Institute, the top school in Ireland, Milo knows he has a bright future ahead of him, and as a first-year student, he’s ready to shine. It is a little unnerving that the prefects walk in military formation, look through Milo rather than at him, and speak in a monotone, but Milo’s parents are impressed by the school and the “mastermind” behind it, Dr Pummelcrush. However, Milo and his friends Katie and Sarah-Louise learn very quickly that they are expected to surrender to the system and that they will be watched closely by the prefects, known as the Disciplods. Things get worse as Milo sees Katie taken away and brainwashed and then returned to the classroom, where she follows Dr Pummelcrush’s every command. Luckily, Milo meets a woman named Ursula, who used to teach philosophy at the school and whose lessons are literally lifesaving. The writing, unfortunately, is stilted, and the messages—that rote learning and an overemphasis on grades and productivity are harmful—feel heavy-handed, as do names such as STIFLE (the acronym for the Institute) and Digitally Unique Personalised Education Database (Du-Ped). The discussions among the students are at times interesting and thought-provoking, but the message, rather than character development or story, is the focus here. Characters are cued White.

Delivers preachy lessons but not much of a plot. (Fiction. 9-12)

A raucous, rhyming homage to a child who uses they/them pronouns and their outrageous personality. The titular Katerina is a light-skinned kid with dark pigtails that stick up straight like antennae. Throughout author/illustrator Gray-Barnett’s latest picture book, Katerina’s gender is refreshingly presented without commentary. Instead, Katerina’s boisterous personality and larger-than-life antics are the center of the story. Depicted alongside children of various skin tones, Katerina’s proclivities for “barking at the postman” and wearing “astonishing” hats are beloved by their many friends. Even those who are theatrically clobbered in the line of Katerina’s fire seem surprised rather than angry—until the mischievous child’s pranks go too far and everyone gets in trouble. Katerina is summarily ousted from their disgruntled group, and for a little while, “it’s all nice and quiet.” Predictably, the silence turns boring, and Katerina’s friends issue them a handwritten apology: “Life just isn’t the same without you.” Some young readers will be tickled by the kooky protagonist, rendered in scribbly, joyfully colored illustrations, but many will tire of the sometimes-uneven rhyming and long-winded text. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Like the main character themselves, this book will resonate with some but will grate on many. (Picture book. 4-6)

A text-heavy, joke-filled monograph about a dreaded bestowal.

In this meta text, an unseen narrator gripes about everything they wish they had received as a present, including a dog and a skateboard. “Now I feel like I have to read it,” the narrator grumps about their book gift. In subsequent spreads, they express their frustration. Sensitive bibliophiles beware: The narrator is ruthless in their scorn of giving books as presents. Some may tire of the message, repeated page after page in different ways: “Look, I’m a doer, not a reader,” one page reads, accompanied by an image of a muscled arm. The narrator makes references to clogging the toilet with homemade slime (“I told them it most definitely wasn’t me”)—a moment that will appeal to older kids who can grasp and revel in the humor. Human skin is shown as printer paper white, tan, and blue. Layouts are boisterous yet uncluttered, using text in various sizes, colors, and fonts. Pleasant near-pastel yellow, blue, and purple back up goofy illustrations, sure to draw interest even if the quips go over younger kids’ heads. Some elements, like the desire to receive X-ray vision as a present, will resonate widely with the target audience, though the story largely treads similar ground as Greenfield and Lowery’s I Don’t Want To Read This Book (2021). (This book was reviewed digitally)

A potential gift for fans of the contributors’ earlier work. (Picture book. 5-8)
Mommy tells this story in second person to the child—"You'd Off To See the Sea from Grimes and Zunon's assistance—and when Danny realizes Francie is gone, she comes accidents—Francie, her dad, and Danny, her grandmother. But elements following an accident. Francie finds two surviving pas-
ing hurricanes, but it's unusually heavy rain that causes a massive flood and blows her estranged father back into her life. After rescuing an elderly woman's old photographs from her flood-
ing house, 13-year-old Jillian doesn't recognize some places in the pictures, despite her hometown's being a keystone of her identity. Investigating further, she learns how much of her town has ended up underwater over the past half-century. Worse, the state doesn't want to repair the damaged bridges or schools has ended up underwater over the past half-century. W orse, the state doesn't want to repair the damaged bridges or schools (instead shuttling kids to a larger town's schools), devastating Boutin's chances for recovery.Stubborn Jillian teams up with her brainy cousin and an artistic activist friend from her new school for a three-pronged approach to the disaster: a video and photographic oral history project to preserve locals' memories, a petition to save the school, and service helping ecological groups plant marsh grass to combat coastal erosion. The proj-
projects' trajectories manage to balance optimism, empowerment, and realistic ideas of what success looks like—the last causing emotional struggles for Jillian. Most characters are Cajun; there are two prominent Black characters, and southern Louisiana's Vietnamese community is acknowledged. Fictional Boutin's dilemmas are inspired by real climate change events.

Come for gumbo and jambalaya; stay for the phenomenal hero with a powerful growth story. (author's note) (Fiction. 8-13)
“A tender tale of love and traditions.”

THE STARS WILL BE MY NIGHTLIGHT

A Sukkot Story

Halpern, Jen
Illus. by Chiara Fedele
Kar-Ben (24 pp.)
$8.09 paper / Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-72843-904-4

A young boy and his mom prepare to celebrate the harvest holiday of Sukkot. “Do you know why we sit in the sukkah?” a mother asks her child. The boy states simply, “To remind us we are part of the Jewish people.” The mom and the boy, clutching his toy lion, head across the autumn-hued backyard to the tented sukkah, which has an open roof of woven branches and a string of overhead lights. As they hang decorations and fruit among the lights? Can we read my bedtime story here? Of course they can, but Mom is reluctant to grant his request to sleep in the sukkah, offering several reasons against it. This wise child has answers for all her doubts, expressed in lovely, metaphorical language, including the charming title phrase, sure to appeal to little ones. Snuggles, giggles, and the promised story ensue, but the rain comes, causing tears and fears. Mom whispers of how the sukkah will protect them as it did the ancient Jews wandering in the desert. They recite the evening prayer together, the Sh’ma, and all is peaceful. Halpern mixes simple, descriptive syntax with striking imagery, providing young readers with a clear understanding of the characters’ loving relationship and their Jewish identity. Fedele presents the characters in large-scale close-ups with lush landscapes surrounding them and incorporates details not in the text that enlarge and enhance the tale. Both the mother and the boy are light-skinned and dark-haired. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A tender tale of love and traditions. (about Sukkot) (Picture book/religion, 4-8)

TELL ME A STORY, PLEASE

Harra, Kyoko
Illus. by Kazue Takabashi
Trans. by Alexandrea Mallia
Museyon (80 pp.)
$15.99 / Sept. 1, 2022
978-1-940842-66-0
Series: Forest Friends

Under a tall maple tree, a young Japanese girl reading stories attracts some animal companions. Though Yuka can read on her own now that she’s in first grade, she loves listening to her mother tell stories in different voices. When her new baby brother arrives, her mother is too busy to read her stories, so Yuka tries to find someone else to read to her. When no one is willing or able, Yuka rests under a large maple tree in the little forest growing in her neighborhood. Though Yuka usually dislikes the sound of her voice, there’s no one around, so she starts to read a story aloud. Soon, a squirrel, a rabbit, a monkey, and other creatures come to listen to her stories and request more stories that feature animals like them. Inspired by different folk and fairy tales, Yuka starts to write her own stories and even enjoys reading aloud to her new animal friends. This latest in the Forest Friends series is another charming tale about talking animals and unexpected friendships. The animals’ opinions and commentary are fun and add a comedic element. Readers may be spurred to read aloud and create their own stories. The cute, whimsical illustrations switch from black and white to color, adding a touch of playfulness. This Japanese import highlights a couple of Japanese folktales and other folk and fairy tales from around the world.

A lovely, funny story about friendship and finding confidence. (Fantasy, 5-8)
GOOD NIGHT STORIES
FOR REBEL GIRLS
100 Inspiring Young Changemakers
Ed. by Harriton, Jess & Maithy Vu
Rebel Girls (240 pp.)
$27.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-953424-34-1
Series: Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls

Brief profiles of young changemakers working toward a better future.

A foreword by young conservationist Bindi Irwin opens the latest entry in this series of inspiring collective biographies of women and girls. This volume, written by 13 authors and with full-color illustrations by 80 artists, focuses on young people following their passions toward innovation and success. A few are widely recognized names, such as Jazz Jennings, Taylor Swift, Billie Eilish, and Greta Thunberg. The rest are less well-known young women who are diverse in age, race, ability, sexual identity, country of origin, and field of expertise, from Dewmini, a Sri Lankan teen whose home garden helped her impoverished family, to Judit Giró Benet, a Spanish biomedical engineer in her 20s working on early breast cancer detection. What they all have in common is a belief in their own strength and ability to bring about change. The profiles include a good balance of subjects from the sciences, arts, sports, business, and activism; for example, Bulgarian anti-bullying activist Milena Radoytseva, Māori artist and mental health advocate Te Manaia Jennings, and Canadian wheelchair basketball player Puisand Lai. Each one-page biography is accompanied by a full-page portrait that captures the subject’s energy and determination. Fans of motivational vignettes will enjoy browsing through this title. Those interested in learning more are directed to the app and QR codes linking to longer audio stories.

Inclusive and inspirational. (minibiographies, glossary, prompts, about the authors and illustrators) (Nonfiction. 8-12)

THANK YOU FOR THE LITTLE THINGS
Hart, Caryl
Illus. by Emily Hamilton
Bloomsbury (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-5476-1029-7

A child manages difficult emotions by focusing on small things that bring smiles.

A brown child with curly hair runs ahead of parents—one light-skinned, one brown-skinned—who push a stroller with their unleashed pet dog running alongside. “Whenever I am feeling sad,” the child narrates, or tired or worried, “I tell myself...say thank you for the little things.” As the child plays at the park, winds down at home, and falls asleep, the little things that brighten the day range from ladybugs and daisies to swings and puddles; noodles and ice cream to bubble baths, stories, and a teddy bear. On a final spread, the text addresses readers, encouraging them to “look around” and “see...how lovely little things can be.” The text is written in rhyming stanzas that detail the fun and comfort of each little thing mentioned, inspiring gratitude and close observation. The illustrations use a crayon-style texture with busy strokes that convey a childlike energy against spare backgrounds. Multicolored hearts and stars follow the child through the spreads. The child’s facial expressions are somewhat limited, leaving readers to infer emotions from the text and situations.

A cute introduction to a gratitude practice that children can understand. (Picture book. 3-7)

WELL DONE, MOMMY PENGUIN
Haughton, Chris
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5362-2865-6

Where is Mommy Penguin off to? “I think she’s going to get dinner,” Daddy Penguin explains to his wide-eyed, curious chick. They both stand atop an icy peak to watch Mommy—with a group of other penguins—as she hunts. First she must swim quickly to catch the darting fish (“swoosh / swish / swoosh”). Then she leaps back onto the ice (“whoosh / whoosh / whoosh”) and climbs a slippery slope (“cu-crunch / cu-crunch / cu-crunch”). Oh-oh. She must also sneak past the sleeping seals (“tiptoe / tiptoe / tiptoe”). But one wakes up! Startled, Mommy Penguin falls all the way back into the sea. Oh dear. But Mommy Penguin perseveres—and returns with a fish and a warm hug. The book opens with the Arabic saying “Heaven is at the feet of mothers”—a fitting quote for this celebration of a parent who nourishes her child in every sense of the word. Haughton’s signature blocky style works well to capture the squat, waddling seabirds. Icy blues and crisp whites saturate the chilly landscape. Playful sound effects add levity and make for a fun read-aloud, but it is Daddy Penguin’s repeated calm assurance that Mommy Penguin will come back (“She sure will”) that grounds and steadies the book even when Mommy is faced with a brief moment of danger. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Female empowerment and penguin parenting at its best. (Picture book. 3-6)
RATTY’S BIG ADVENTURE
Hawthorne, Lara
Big Picture Press (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-5362-2670-6

It’s a big, beautiful—sometimes dangerous—world out there.

Exploring the themes of “the grass is always greener” and “big fish in small ponds,” this book follows a Bosavi woolly rat who climbs a tree to eat a piece of fruit and inadvertently spots the jungle landscape beyond his home inside the volcano crater in Papua New Guinea’s Mount Bosavi. Suddenly dissatisfied with his usual homegrown meals, Ratty comes to the realization that, “There must be BIGGER, BETTER, FRUITIER things out there!” and sets off to find them. The journey, which involves a long trip along a stream and into a river, is less enjoyable than Ratty thought it would be, and he’s repeatedly rebuked by various unfamiliar animals—until he meets a crocodile, who is only too happy to invite the naïve rat to dinner. Thanks to a deus ex machina in the form of a group of friendly bats, Ratty survives the dinner-party-for-one and makes it home, where he reflects on the value of his home. The story treads familiar ground, but it does it well, and the illustrations—a mix of gouache and watercolor with digital tweaks—enhance the tale. Additional backmatter provides more information on Mount Bosavi and the species that call it home. This is an enjoyable and entertaining tale, and readers will love welcoming Ratty from his home to theirs. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Genial jungle joy! (Picture book. 6-8)

OH, SAL
Henkes, Kevin
Greenwillow Books (144 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-06-324492-4

Henkes’ third book centered on the Miller family—after the Newbery Honor The Year of Billy Miller (2014) and Billy Miller Makes a Wish (2021)—follows Billy’s 4-year-old sister, Sal.

Sal’s New Year’s Day has plenty of big moments of misunderstanding—and understanding. She is full of feelings today and sheds more than a few tears. Two people in her household seem like interlopers—the new baby, just over a week old, who doesn’t yet have a name, and Papa’s younger brother, Uncle Jake, whose exuberance and habit of calling her Salamander are extremely irritating. Plus, she’s misplaced a treasured gift from Santa—her favorite pair of a set of seven flower-themed underpants. Henkes’ keen awareness of the ways it is hard and constantly revelatory to be a child gives this simple family story a sense of heart and happiness. Endearing spot drawings—Sal imagining elves making underwear, for example—convey whimsy and cheer. The third-person narrative sticks close to Sal, observing this close, loving household from her perspective. Though Sal knows that Uncle Jack and Papa are brothers, her surprise when she realizes that her uncle is her father’s younger brother (“…she never thought of them as kids. And she never thought about who was older. All adults seemed generally the same age to her”) is a realistic example of how children make sense of family relationships and the world. Henkes channels the inner lives of his protagonists with sensitivity and respect—his audience will feel seen. Characters are cued White.

Quietly, delightfully superb. (Fiction. 5-9)

BILLY AND ROSE
Forever Friends
Hest, Amy
Illus. by Kady MacDonald Denton
Candlewick (48 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5362-1419-2

Good friends can find a way to be together.

Rose, a pig, and Billy, a goat, are two delightful friends and neighbors who work through their differences and difficulties in four distinct vignettes about everyday life. In the first, Rose is ready for a day of play, but all her favorite clothes need washing. After procrastinating as long as she can, she gathers her dirty clothes and goes outside to wash them only to greet Billy, who has just hung his clothes on the line but can’t face practicing the cello. Rose gently chastises Billy for not practicing just as Billy reminds Rose of the importance of doing laundry. They both have a eureka moment, and Rose does her laundry to “the glorious sound of Billy’s cello.” Other tales see the friends playing catch (each blames the other for missing the ball), running an ice cream stand in the middle of a snowstorm, and planning a sleepover. The stories quietly model ways of dealing with disagreement—when the pals are at odds, they separate and regroup but then meet again to find a mutually agreeable solution. Plentiful watercolor-and-ink illustrations show the friends dealing with their problems and enjoying themselves.

Gentle words and calming illustrations subtly provide strong examples of conflict resolution. (Early chapter book. 4-8)
WE ARE HERE
30 Inspiring Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Who Have Shaped the United States
Hirahara, Naomi
Illus. by Illi Ferandez
Running Press Kids (128 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-7624-7965-8

“No one is powerless when we come together. No one can make us invisible when we demand to be seen.”

Following an introduction and a foreword, this collective biography opens with a display of portraits of its subjects, a striking array of multi-toned, uplifted faces with proud expressions. Concise, informative entries, written clearly and thoughtfully, cover a diverse group of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, among them Lebanese painter Etel Adnan; surfer Eddie Aikau, who fought for Hawaiian people to be included in the sport they developed; Korean American swimmer Schuyler Miwon Hong Bailar, the first openly transgender college athlete; and Laotian anti-war activist Channapha Khamvongsa. Themes of exclusion, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and appropriation manifest clearly and thoughtfully in evocative accounts that weave together Asian American and Pacific Islander history and personal experiences. An introduction from Lisa S. Sasaki, director of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, touches on Asian American histories but laudably included here.

An excellent introduction that makes clear the richness and diversity of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. (reflection guide) (Collective biography. 6-11)

YEAR OF THE CAT
Ho, Richard
Illus. by Jocelyn Li Langrand
Greenwillow Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov 1, 2022
978-0-06-297682-6

Rat and the 11 other animals in the Chinese zodiac embark on a quest to find Cat and apologize.

In the ancient Chinese tale of the Great Race, Cat did not win a spot in the zodiac because Rat pushed her into the river right before the finish line. Now, Rat is feeling guilty. He enlists the other animals in the zodiac to “find the one they left behind.” At Rat’s suggestion, the charmingly illustrated animals agree to travel together to the edge of the kingdom, where Cat lives. It’s a colorful and daring adventure, making dynamic use of perspective, and along the way, each animal uses their special skill to help the others...while getting left behind themselves. As their number dwindles (in the opposite order of the zodiac), Rat and Ox alone reach the base of the cliff where Cat lives. Rat leaps up without Ox to present himself as the only animal to seek Cat out. But perhaps a rat visiting a cat alone isn’t the best plan after all....Ho and Langrand have created a whimsical sequel to the Chinese folktale, and while the premise and artwork are appealing, some elements of the story are confusing. Was it Rat’s plan all along to leave the others behind? Is Cat’s licking her chops as foreboding as it looks? Still, readers will enjoy the journey even if the ending raises some questions. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An enjoyable twist on the timeless Chinese zodiac tale. (author’s note) (Picture book. 3-8)

JORDAN J AND THE TRUTH ABOUT JORDAN J
Holt, K.A.
Chronicle Books (296 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-79720-609-7
Series: The Kids Under the Stairs, 3

Who would’ve thought sweet dance moves and passion weren’t enough for some people?

In this third series entry, seventh grader Jordan J is obsessed with televised dance competition Fierce Across America, and auditions are coming to his Florida town! After his two-minute performance in front of the cameras, the fabulous host labels his choreography exceptional but his actual dancing abilities only so-so. Jordan is devastated, but Casey Price, another student at his school and the dance team captain, has made it to callbacks, and she asks Jordan to help her plan out an impressive routine. Meanwhile, Jordan is dealing with a few other issues, like getting his articles for newspaper club turned in on time, carving out “bro time” for himself and his friend Javier in their art class, and his family’s financial struggles after his mom is unexpectedly laid off. There’s the typical awkwardness of being Jordan J, dance maniac who can’t go see his therapist for now because of money issues. Holt excels at keeping Jordan’s neurodivergent behaviors and thoughts functionally realistic while he navigates a world where other characters casually acknowledge and support them. Rather than focusing on limitations, this work centers positive representation. Presented in varied formats, including online chats, news articles, notes, lists, brief scenes, and footnotes, the story will sustain readers’ interest. Two characters are cued as Latine; others are minimally described.

A delightful school story that brings some booyah! (Fiction. 8-12)
“An artfully rendered tale of life and love that also conveys an essential but often overlooked chapter in U.S. history.”

**MAGNOLIA FLOWER**

Scholar Kendi adapts a short story published by Hurston in the *Spokesman* in 1925.

The Mighty River tells the whimsical, mischievous Brook the story of Bentley, who flees slavery for a Florida forest where Black and Native people live free together as Maroons. Bentley marries Swift Deer, a Cherokee woman who escapes the Trail of Tears, and they have a daughter named Magnolia Flower. When the Civil War ends, Magnolia falls in love with John, a Black man whom Bentley dislikes because he is poor. Bentley locks John up in their house to keep him away from Magnolia, but one night, Magnolia frees John and escapes with him by boat, making the Mighty River a part of their story. The tale comes full circle when Magnolia and John return 47 years later to reflect on and affirm their love. Deeply committed to sharing Hurston’s writing with young readers, Kendi writes in his author’s note about the elements of Black folklore in the story, such as making nature a speaking character. And, as he stresses in a historical note, the tale is a powerful example of Black and Native resistance—an aspect of history that far too often goes undiscussed. Wise’s earth-toned, opalescent illustrations make the trees, water, and flowers feel just as key to the tale as the humans. The excellent marriage between lyrical text and stunning visuals makes for a moving, memorable story. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An artfully rendered tale of life and love that also conveys an essential but often overlooked chapter in U.S. history. (Picture book. 5-10)

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**BROTHERS IN ARMS**

A True World War II Story of Wojtek the Bear and the Soldiers Who Loved Him

Hood, Susan
Illus. by Jamie Green
Harper/HarperCollins (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-06-306476-8

A true and colorful account of how an orphaned bear and a unit of Polish soldiers—many of them also orphaned or missing family members—adopted one another.

Drawing from interviews with one living veteran and descendants of others, as well as published sources, Hood tells an affecting tale of how Wojtek (Polish for happy warrior), a Syrian brown bear, came as a cub to the soldiers of the 22nd Artillery Supply Company, a unit training in Persia (now Iran)—and not only served as a morale booster, but actually caught a spy and later provided materiel aid in the battle for Monte Cassino. That he was also, along with a Dalmatian named Kirkuk who was his “polka-dotted partner in crime,” something of a force for chaos in camp adds to his charm, and before the war’s end, he was not only formally enlisted, paybook and all, but promoted to corporal. While many war stories have sad endings, backmatter explains that Wojtek went on to spend a long retirement in the Edinburgh Zoo. Green’s charming, humorous depictions of a sociable, teddy bear-ish cub growing to shaggy adulthood surrounded by uniformed admirers (all White) are echoed in a set of photos in the backmatter, which includes maps, a timeline, and other useful additions. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet, sometimes funny tale, context and setting notwithstanding, (afterword, facts, source list, film and websites, recommended reading) (Informational picture book. 7-9)

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**AMERICAN MURDERER**

The Parasite That Haunted the South

Jarrow, Gail
Calkins Creek/Astra Books for Young Readers (160 pp.)
$24.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-68437-815-9
Series: Medical Fiascoes, 3

A case study of a public health campaign that attempted to control a debilitating disease, with only partially successful results—sound familiar?

The title is a literal translation of the hookworm’s scientific name *Necator americanus*, but the lurid details don’t stop there as Jarrow goes on to expand her 2003 title *Hookworms* with accounts of the creepy creature’s life cycle and the discovery of just how disturbingly prevalent “America’s bloodsucking murderer” was in the South in the 19th and early 20th centuries. She chronicles canny efforts, which began in 1909 as an initiative of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission, first to galvanize those who were afflicted with hookworms to accept treatment and then to educate them about the necessity of proper human waste disposal to prevent reinfection—attempts that were initially met with skepticism. With portraits of prominent researchers and images of the toothy terror mixed in, the illustrations also include period photos of victims, many with symptomatically wasted bodies and bulging eyes. These last give powerful visual dimension to the story, but sharper viewers will notice that images of White individuals predominate. Though the author acknowledges the reality of segregation and discrimination—including the assumption that African Americans were not as susceptible to hookworm—she does not fully unpack the issue, implied by the illustrations, that the campaign leaned more toward White populations. Still, if reading that the infection rate dropped from an estimated 37% overall to 11% by 1940 may look like failure to readers expecting another tidy wipeout like the (supposed) eradication of smallpox, that’s many thousands of lives...
saved or improved. And if today, in many parts of the world, as she claims at the end, “the worms are winning,” here at least is a partial victory to celebrate.

Despite the odd blink, a searching look at the borders between science and society (timeline, glossary, websites, author’s note, source notes, bibliography, index) (Nonfiction 11-15)

THE ANTIRACIST KID
A Book About Identity, Justice, and Activism
Jewell, Tiffany
Illus. by Nicole Miles
Versify/HarperCollins (128 pp.)
$14.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-358-62939-9

Jewell builds upon the foundation of her bestselling This Book Is Anti-Racist (2020) with a primer on antiracism, intersectionality, and ways of effecting change.

Defining antiracism as “the act of making a choice to be active and resist racism,” the author discusses racial identity, power, and activism, covering important vocabulary and concepts along the way. She incorporates age-appropriate language in rendering complex topics—such as privilege, intersectionality, and colonization—with clarity and precision, aided by buoyant graphics depicting a diverse group of children. “Putting It All Together” summaries at the end of each chapter reinforce key takeaways. The lessons highlight youth agency, awareness, and autonomy. Jewell makes it clear that she believes in readers: “You are a really good problem solver, and you can help us adults find ways to make the world a much better place to live in for everyone.” Her book offers a way for young people to learn about themselves and their communities, make careful distinctions between how they define themselves and how society may see them, and become champions for change as they combat prejudice and discrimination. Most importantly, she shows young people that this work is not meant to be done alone and encourages them to join a community of others working toward a more free and just world. Adults might just learn something, too—there are gems for everyone.

An instructive textbook for our time, illuminating the questions and community actions youth need to transform the world. (glossary, recommended reading) (Nonfiction 8-12)

THIS JOY!
Johannes, Shelley
Abrams (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-4197-4182-1

Make this day a joyful one.
A tan-skinned child with dark brown hair in pigtails proclaims that their happiness is too great to be expressed (“My arms aren’t big enough // to hold the whole world... but when I feel this happy, it’s all I want to do”). Images almost leap off the page: The child is depicted with arms open wide, reaching for a hug, splashing in the water on a summer day, climbing a tree, and swinging. Although the text is written in loose rhyme, each couplet stretches over several pages so the rhyme isn’t always obvious, though the bouncy rhythm of the text is. Illustrations rendered in pencil, pastel, crayon, marker, and Photoshop capture a child’s world full of barefoot outdoor adventures, finger puppets, magnetic alphabet letters on the refrigerator, and music. A diverse group of friends, including a howling dog, join the narrator for a singalong. Tagging along and facilitating this day’s adventure is an older character with the same skin tone and hair color as the child; readers will often just see this character’s hands as they toss the little one into the air and push them on a tire swing. In the end, this adventure is all about the arms and the hugs that reflect the child’s immeasurable happiness and loving relationship with the older person in their life. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A huge dose of joy and a clear reminder to celebrate each day and each other. (Picture book 3-8)

KAY’S ANATOMY
A Complete (and Completely Disgusting) Guide to the Human Body
Kay, Adam
Illus. by Henry Paker
Delacorte (416 pp.)
$14.99 | $17.99 PLB | July 26, 2022
978-0-593-48340-4
978-0-593-48343-5 PLB

A doctor-guided tour of our “weird” human body and some of its maladies, aimed at readers who’ll giggle over the suggestion that gluteus maximus was a Roman emperor.

Leaving the titular riff on the classic reference work Gray’s Anatomy unacknowledged, Kay moves from skin-side to inside and back—beginning with the cloud of germs, dead cells, and “farticles” that surround us all, covering anatomical features from internal organs to hair and nails, and closing with a frank, if sometimes giddy, description of the reproductive system (“the male one is mostly on the outside, dangling there like a chandelier”), brisk and sensible remarks about death, and a final sweep past the immune system, allergies, and select good, bad, and “pukey” microbes. Though his coverage is so catch-as-catch-can that he identifies each layer in a tooth and all eight wrist bones but neglects to mention the pituitary or thyroid glands, he does include basic personal hygiene and nutritional guidelines, reassuring comments about acne (“face art”) and other signs of puberty, and strong opinions about smoking, hand-washing, and anti-vaxxers. He also tucks in descriptions of common conditions and diseases, from anxiety and depression to diabetes. Along with labeled cutaway views, Paker’s cartoons pick up on the droll tone with expressive faces on many body parts and
A broad and entertaining (if less than encyclopedic) new definition for gross anatomy. (glossary, index, further information) (Nonfiction. 10-14)

**Omega Morales and the Legend of La Lechuza**
*Kemp, Laekan Zea*
Little, Brown (316 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-316-30416-0

Deep empathy is a special power but a double-edged sword for a Mexican American girl in this middle-grade debut from Kemp.

The town of Noche Buena is precariously divided between families with magic and those without. Omega Morales, whose best friend is a ghost from Venezuela, is a descendant of a long line of magic practitioners who use their abilities to empathize in a variety of ways to assist others, but Omega feels out of place as she struggles with her burgeoning empathic abilities to empathize in a variety of ways to assist others, but Omega feels out of place as she struggles with her burgeoning empathic abilities.

Kemp weaves a page-turning plot while executing a satisfyingly slow reveal of the story's core secret and the characters surrounding it. Readers will be eager to discover what Omega does next and to unveil more of the magical world of Noche Buena.

A satisfying mystery with depths to plumb. (Paranormal. 9-12)

**The Shadows of Rookhaven**
*Kenny, Pádraig*
Illus. by Annie Carboneau-Leclerc
Henry Holt (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-250-62396-6

After *The Monsters of Rookhaven* (2021), a special event reveals the Family's vulnerabilities to outside threats. Every hundred years, the nonhuman Family gathers at a sanctuary house for the Great Configuration. Mirabelle's first Configuration will be at Rookhaven. With all of the eerie beings coming and going, a mysterious foe takes the opportunity to send in Billy, under threat to his sister's life, on a mission to obtain something from Rookhaven. Billy, Mirabelle learns, is like her—of mixed parentage, half-Family and half-human. From the extended Family, Mirabelle learns that the two of them are Misbegotten, outcasts—from both sides of their heritage—who are discriminated against outside Rookhaven. Woven into the intrigue of what the new threat's goal is, there are meditations on family, mortality, and forgiveness. The young protagonists face mortal dangers not so much toward themselves as toward their loved ones; the pacing picks up once the threats move beyond being theoretical and emotional to the point when the plot against Rookhaven is set into irreversible motion. The heroes, who strive to understand and love one another, humanize even the most monstrous among them, finding beauty, tragedy, and cautionary tales. Having added to both the expanded mythos and the web of character relationships in surprising twists, this story leaves plenty of room for more entries set in its charming, magical world. Characters, when human (or human-shaped), default to White. Final art not seen.

Atmospheric and gothic in a bighearted way. (Fantasy. 8-14)

**A Room of Your Own**
*A Story Inspired by Virginia Woolf’s Famous Essay*
*Kephart, Beth*
Illus. by Julia Breckenreid
Cameron Kids (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-1-951836-38-2

Kephart uses Virginia Woolf's essay to inspire children to find their own creative spaces.

In the opening spread of this picture book, Woolf, referenced only as “she,” steps out of her house, reduced to the size of a dollhouse, and appears in different spots in the garden. Lyrical text explains that “on and on and on she goes, / to that room she calls her own.” In the next scene—a soft, surreal one with the roof peeled back from her tiny house, with an oversized Woolf sitting up and sticking out of it and books flying away like birds—Kephart continues to explain that Woolf’s room is “her place to think. / Her place to dream. Her place to be.” From here, the author encourages readers to find their own rooms or creative spaces. Colorful watercolors in spot art and larger scenes depict diverse children under a tree, on a neighborhood sidewalk, at the kitchen table, under a bedsheets fort, and in more spaces. Serving as a guide, Woolf continues to make appearances along with the children until the last spread, which shows her beginning to write her influential feminist essay. A concluding author’s note finally alleviates potential confusion and vague references by identifying Woolf and her essay in text and a photograph. Still, though both the text and visuals are beautiful, the concept is a bit heady for the target audience, and the overall sentiment likely won’t connect with them. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A well-intentioned but superficial take on Woolf's famous piece. (Picture book. 4-8)
Zara is apprehensive when a family with two kids moves into his house, potentially upsetting the delicate social balance. Readers familiar with Khan’s Zayd Saleem, Chasing the Dream books, set a few years after this series opener, will recognize the bustling Pakistani American Muslim household. Assertive, organized Zara and rambunctious 7-year-old Zayd live with their Mama and Baba; the siblings’ grandparents and uncle are integral parts of their daily lives. Zara and Zayd enjoy playing outside with their friends—Black sisters Jade and Gloria, White Alan, and Chinese American Melvin. Mr. Chapman always said that Zara knew how to “rule with grace and fairness,” but new arrivals Naomi and Michael, Jewish kids who are eager to engage socially, put this to the test. When Jamal Mamoo, Mama’s brother, brings over his Guinness World Records book, Zara decides that becoming a world-record holder is the boost she needs to assert herself and take charge. With the help of the bunny, who is in constant motion, dancing around the dishes of food with the bunny. They bring it all to a close dressed in a traditional hanbok, surrounded by kimchi jars while they once more express their love for the food. The book is accompanied by an album of pipa music on CD (and downloadable) from musician Fang. While the music plays, each page can be savored moment by moment, as the book is accompanied by an immersive experience for those willing to look, listen, and dream. (Information on the pipa, the accompanying music, and Fang) (Picture book. 3-6)

Kimchi, Kimchi Every Day
Kim, Erica
Soaring Kite Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-935859-27-3

A child eats their way through the week. Accompanied by a small gray bunny, a Korean child with pig-tails throws their hands in the air, declaring, “I eat kimchi every day! I like kimchi every way!” An eye-catching spread depicts a table with the child’s Sunday meal: various dishes, including green onions, tofu, cucumber, and napa cabbage, flavored with kimchi. Illustrations created using colored paper, hanji, and digital art rely on textured layers and bright colors. The spare, rhyming narrative uses popping onomatopoeia and culinary descriptors as it weaves in waves across the spread. Each day progresses with a different popular Korean dish made with kimchi. Monday brings kimchi pancakes, while Tuesday shows the child pinching closed plump white dumplings. Korean words are incorporated in describing a boiling pot of kimchi stew on Wednesday, while Thursday rolls in with a full plate of kimchi kimbap. On Friday it’s time for a crackling pot of kimchi fried rice topped with an egg, and finally it’s Saturday, with ramyun complete with toppings including, of course, kimchi. The child narrator is in constant motion, dancing around the dishes of food with the bunny. They bring it all to a close dressed in a traditional hanbok, surrounded by kimchi jars while they once more express their love for the food. Appended are additional facts and a pictorial glossary explaining each dish. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Bright and joyful; just like kimchi, this tale has a delectable kick. (Picture book. 3-6)
“A cosmic blend of magical monsters and scary science as frightening as it is fun.”

**RECKONING**

Freddy finds and confronts the perpetrator. It takes teamwork to overwhelm the prankster in a slightly underwhelming conclusion. However, a loose end from one prank, in tying itself up, circles back neatly to the opening, making for a more satisfying story shape. Freddy is biracial (Victor presents White; his mother, Shan, is Chinese), Riya is Indian, and F.M. is a Frankenstein's monster-esque figure.

An amusing enough diversion. (Fantasy 6-8)

**THE LINE IN THE SAND**

Lam, Thao
Owlkids Books (40 pp.)
$18.95 | Sept. 15, 2022
978-1-77147-570-9

Divisions are as arbitrary as you want them to be.

When an oblivious monster walks down the beach trailing a stick in one of their tentacles, they leave behind a line in the sand. It’s a line that doesn’t mean a lot to many of the other colorful monsters on the beach, but its existence suddenly divides a green, aquatic-looking monster hunting for shells and an orange monster with eyes attached to antennae. Their attempts to cross the line seem initially to be blocked; each takes umbrage at the other’s behavior, and the literal line in the sand takes on metaphorical qualities. Their frustration leads to fighting, and the line deepens—until efforts to swat away a bee cause a sand-kicking tussle that ultimately removes the divide. With the line gone, the two monsters at last acknowledge their foolishness and share a laugh and a hug. Although it’s told wordlessly, the story speaks volumes of imagined differences and the negative impact of imposed divisions. With the right guidance from savvy educators or caregivers, this one will be a valuable springboard for real-world conversations. The artwork uses bold pops of color and geometric designs to tell an elegant, profound story.

A monstrously important message. (Picture book 4-6)

**THE PALACE PRANKSTER**

Lane, Cort
Illus. by Ankitha Kini
Little Bee Books (112 pp.)
$16.99 | July 5, 2022
978-1-4998-1296-1
Series: Monster and Me, 2

Stopping a prankster results in a science-versus-magic showdown.

Freddy, the son of Victor von Frankenstein, and his family live in a palace above a Nepalese village. Having sneaked away to the village for the Biska Jatra festival celebrating the new year, Freddy is busted skipping chores; the sindoorn, the red-orange powder that’s a part of the celebration, on his face gives him away. But when a disaster in the lab leaves Freddy’s parents covered in orange goo, it’s Freddy (already in hot water) who takes the blame—and who has to help clean the mess. After another messy prank, Freddy decides to clear his name by finding the real culprit. He uses logic to exclude some members of the family and teams with his brother, F.M. (Frankenstein’s creation), and his adopted sister, Riya (a werecat with supersenses), to follow clues. But when superscience fails, Freddy must concede that it’s the work of another magic-using “fantastical.” The hunt—and Freddy’s opponent’s traps—provide tension through the mystery and age-appropriate mild danger. Finally,
Willis, introduced in *Willis Wilbur Wows the World* (2022), has found his destiny in helping other kids work through issues and identify their passions. Now he’s ready to expand and has ideas such as creating his own life coaching app. He’s even confident it will win the school’s Passion Fair competition. Willis lacks technology skills and can’t design it himself, but he’s sure his smart friends will partner with him to make his dream reality. To his absolute shock, they have other projects they want to pursue—separate from him! One even wants to do her project with the new kid whom Willis has declared his business competitor. This stand-alone story perfectly captures tween self-absorption. First-person narrator Willis would be unlikely if he didn’t reveal his insecurities so sensitively and often with humor. Happily, he’s open to feedback and gains in emotional intelligence. Willis does, after all, genuinely care about his friends and support them. This is a quick read with great tips for readers about friendship, the pitfalls of jealousy, and developing insight and confidence. Amusing black-and-white spot art enhances the narrative and shows Willis, who reads as White, and his racially diverse peers.

**Humorously over-the-top fare that will make a positive impact and inspire readers.**

*Fiction. 8-12*

**ALCATOE AND THE TURNIP CHILD**

*Lenkiewicz, Isaac*  
Flying Eye Books (64 pp.)  
$12.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022  
978-1-38574-014-6

A misanthropic witch helps three children take revenge.  
Alcatoe, a witch who lives in the Plum Woods, isn’t *exactly* bad. But she does like a fair amount of mischief, especially if it means creating chaos for Goonwartha, a witch who runs the local witches’ Social Club and who organizes the club’s annual Harvest Feast. So when a trio of children come to her looking for help upstaging grumpy gardener Mr. Pokeweed in the harvest festival vegetable pageant by magically growing a mega-turnip, Alcatoe is in. She sends the children—Emma, Chris, and Holly—on a hunt for magical ingredients. Alcatoe’s magic works but creates a turnip child that impresses Goonwartha a little too much. Realizing her macabre machinations didn’t go quite as planned, Alcatoe has to swoop in and save the day—without zany results. This graphic novel won’t be a story for everyone, but for that niche group of readers who appreciate bone-dry humor—and who can often be found cheering on the big bad in any story—Alcatoe will be as welcome as a cooling breeze on a scorching hot day. Those readers will also be begging to know when the next Alcatoe story will be told—hopefully very soon, because this witch is a short-tempered delight. Lenkiewicz’s art features a warm, autumnal palette and appealing cartoon characters, many with round, oversize heads. Alcatoe is tan-skinned and white-haired, Emma and Holly have brown skin and straight black hair, Chris has brown skin and cropped black hair, and Goonwartha is light-skinned and brown-haired.

**This witch is odd, offbeat, and awfully good.** *(Although she’d never admit to the last.)*  
*Graphic fantasy. 8-12*

**AWOL**

*Lesage, Marla*  
Orca (224 pp.)  
$16.95 paper | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-4598-2839-1

Moving is hard, but so is staying still while others move on.  
Middle schooler Leah lives in an Army neighborhood, where one of the signs of spring near the base is the appearance of for-sale signs in front of houses. Eleven-year-old Leah has already moved five times, but this year, she gets to stay put. Instead her best friend, Sam, is leaving for Edmonton, and Leah’s summer and upcoming birthday look bleak. Her father has come back on leave, but the family knows to tread carefully when he’s around. His moods are unpredictable. Sometimes he seems fine, sometimes he’s withdrawn, and sometimes his temper is explosive. Leah is nervous since her mom and older sister will both be...
away—her sister working as a camp counselor and her mom in Army Reserve training. The only interesting thing to occur is when Tiny Spoon recounts Dad’s Reserve training. The only interesting thing to occur is a camperBlack, and Cecilia and her mom are Wolastoqiyik. Baby, and Tiny Spoon’s first solid food meal. Baby has light brown skin and seems unaware of the feud, scooping up both gadgets while chewing on a pink bunny stuffy. True to life, Baby tosses the tools “shimmy” and “climb” their way to a launching position. Most but may not gravitate to a book centering on a baby. Oppor-

Thoughtful slice-of-life realness. (Graphic fiction. 8-12)

A utensil showdown mixes rivalry with teamwork.

“Wait a minute! Who are you?” Tiny Spoon and Little Fork demand of each other in a shared speech bubble. The expressive, anthropomorphized objects compete for Baby’s attention. Pastel yellow Tiny Spoon and lavender Little Fork each boast about their great lineages in separate spreads that mimic photo albums. The only time an adult is seen is when Tiny Spoon recounts Dad, Baby, and Tiny Spoon’s first solid food meal. Baby has light brown skin and seems unaware of the feud, scooping up both gadgets while chewing on a pink bunny stuffy. True to life, Baby tosses the trio across the room, and they must work together to get back to Baby for breakfast time. Large cartoon panels make this picture book an introduction to the graphic-novel format for younger children. Older children will appreciate the humor of this story most but may not gravitate to a book centering on a baby. Opportunities abound to build vocabulary related to movement as the tools “shimmy” and “climb” their way to a launching position. There are no hulls in action, but there is little to make this one stand out from the rest. (This book was reviewed digitally.) Fine as an appetizer but not the main course. (Picture book. 3-5)

The Wolf in Underpants Breaks Free
Lupano, Wilfrid
Illus. by Mayana Itoïz & Paul Cauuet
Graphic Universe (40 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-72846-296-7
Series: Wolf in Underpants

Wolf falls afoul of a pair of overzealous vigilantes, who arrest him on the theory that he’s not working, he must be a criminal.

The latest entry in a hybrid picture book/graphic novel series given to sharp social commentary takes particular aim at the notion that anyone who doesn’t work must be either lazy or a thief. Because he refuses to explain where he got the coins to pay for his daily noodles, Wolf is hustled off to jail by two badgers in military dress—but when they try to uncover evidence of his supposed crimes, all they learn is that he does lots of good deeds, like helping out at the clinic and chaperoning schoolchildren without asking for reward (“Money? Please, we don’t have any money. We’re teachers!” “Oh. Right”). Meanwhile, a self-righteous local tycoon’s claim that “work builds character!” gets a skewering as someone points out that they inherited their factory, and after responding to a guard’s notion that everyone has to work to earn a living with “I don’t need to EARN a life. I’ve already got one!” Wolf borrows a shovel to dig his way out. He’s immediately surrounded by a crowd of admirers. The money, it turns out, is simply a redistribution of wealth as grateful mice return a favor by stealing money from the tycoon and tucking it into the gaily striped underwear Wolf sports in the cartoon illustrations while he’s sleeping. As the badgers slink off to

With only 13 students aboard the space station, you might think returning a favor by stealing money from the tycoon and tucking it into the gaily striped underwear Wolf sports in the cartoon illustrations while he’s sleeping. As the badgers slink off to
“waste time...I mean...patrol...,” a varied cast of woodland creatures offers background chatter and additional commentary. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A clear message that there’s more to life than making a living. (Graphic/picture-book hybrid, 5-9)

IF YOU WERE A CITY
Maclear, Kyo
Illus. by Francesca Sanna
Chronicle Books (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-4521-5519-7

Take a tour of the cities of the world without leaving your home.

Kyo, the author’s first name, means “capital city,” and she begins and ends this story with the question: “If you were a city, how would you be?” Each spread contains a short rhyming verse and bold illustrations of cities and diverse people as readers are taken around the world to help answer that question. Perhaps the city would be “bookish, proud, but slightly leaning (paired with an image of a light-skinned person standing against the Leaning Tower of Pisa) or maybe it would be “shiny, glassy, sleek, and tall.” It could even be a new city, “a dream city,” in the imagination of architects or one that leaves “room for nest and lair” for animals. Both words and visuals work to create positive energy, the one exception being people leaving a “broken city.” The other characters look cheerful, shown in both quiet activities like stargazing as well as “biking, scooter, walking,” and enjoying a nighttime wheelchair basketball game. The detailed illustrations vary—some spreads contain multiple panels with bright white borders, while others feature a single scene that bleeds to the page’s edge. The image of a brown-skinned child creating a literal safe harbor with their arms is particularly powerful, so the two get creative to figure out a solution. In the final story, Owl wants to fly, just like Owl, so the two get creative to figure out a solution. In the final story, Owl wants to fly outside with Penguin, but it’s raining; once again, the two manage to find a way to have fun. The three stories in this graphic novel are told with minimal text; Owl and Penguin communicate with word balloons, using only illustrations and emojis. Some of the panels contain simple narration in boxes; if children are still learning, however, they can deduce meaning based on the illustrations. Reminiscent of the strong bond between Arnold Lobel’s Frog and Toad, Owl and Penguin’s friendship is deep and delightful, and this easy reader makes the story comprehensible as it addresses themes of envy, sadness, and problem-solving in an accessible and entertaining way. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Engaging vignettes in the lives of two adorable friends. (Graphic early reader, 3-6)

OWL AND PENGUIN
Madan, Vikram
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$14.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-8234-5150-0
Series: I Like To Read Comics

Birds of a feather—and flipper—flock together.

In the first of several stories about two avian pals, Owl purchases ice cream for themself and Penguin, but disaster ensues when the ice cream falls off Penguin’s cone. Penguin is unhappy, so Owl is unhappy, and a second cone is purchased. When that one falls, the friends go from sad to laughing at the absurdity of it all. The following two tales highlight the different abilities the two have. Penguin wants to fly, just like Owl, so the two get creative to figure out a solution. In the final story, Owl wants to play outside with Penguin, but it’s raining; once again, the two manage to find a way to have fun. The three stories in this graphic novel are told with minimal text; Owl and Penguin communicate with word balloons, using only illustrations and emojis. Some of the panels contain simple narration in boxes; if children are still learning, however, they can deduce meaning based on the illustrations. Reminiscent of the strong bond between Arnold Lobel’s Frog and Toad, Owl and Penguin’s friendship is deep and delightful, and this easy reader makes the story comprehensible as it addresses themes of envy, sadness, and problem-solving in an accessible and entertaining way. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A joyful and thoughtful exploration of the world and its communities, threaded with hope for the future. (Picture book, 4-8)

BUZZKILL
Maloney, Brenna
Illus. by Dave Mottram
Henry Holt (384 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-250-80103-6

Insects: the why, what, where, and how.

Nearly every page of this volume has a fabulous fact or story to relate. The tone is informatively jocular, with a waggishness sure to appeal to middle-grade readers but content sophisticated enough to intrigue and educate teens. In addition to relaying scientific information on fascinating insect behavior (fire beetles lay their eggs in the midst of forest fires) and physiology (a cockroach can live without its head for 168 hours), the author relays her own insect adventures. She gleefully embarks on an experiment to observe Madagascar hissing cockroaches—a bit of curiosity that gets out of hand—and shares her phobia of grasshoppers, thereby tacitly giving readers permission to be skeedeed out by insects while still being interested in them. As entertaining as these stories are, scientific research is the foundation of this superb book. It explores insects’ vital role as pollinators, describes their potential as human food, humorously relates their important role in decomposing dead things, and much more. The examination of the human-caused sixth extinction (as well as a bit about the previous five) and what that means for insects and people strikes a more somber note. Occasional sprinkles of appealing, anthropomorphic, black-and-white insect illustrations add fun visual interest and will encourage readers to look up photos to receive the full effect.

Fresh, lively, funny, and very, very informative. (Reading list, works cited, index) (Nonfiction, 10-18)
“Close your eyes, listen to the music, and experience the joy of family with this buoyant tale.”

**MUSIC IS IN EVERYTHING**

_A sweet look at what familia can mean._ (Picture book. 4-8)

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**MARIANA AND HER FAMILIA**

*Marcillas, Mónica*

_Illus. by Erika Meza_

Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-06-296246-1

A Mexican American child meets her whole extended family for the first time.

In Mami’s small pink car, Mariana moves across the frontera and into “a jumble of mismatched buildings of all shapes and sizes” as she takes in the sights and sounds of México. Finally, the two of them arrive at Abuelita’s door, and Mariana grabs onto Mami as a shadow looms behind some drapes and a couple of other children peek out. Inside, Mariana’s whole family greets her, but not even Abuelita’s hug and kisses soothe Mariana’s worries. After all, who wouldn’t feel shy standing in “this house filled with brand-new people”? When Mariana hands out presents to her familia, she missespeaks and calls her Abuelita “agualita,” spurring the other children to start giggling. Embarrassed, Mariana retreats into herself until Abuelita comes to her aid with a storybook full of pictures, crispy quesadillas, and creamy frijoles and arroz, subtly teaching the girl Spanish words. By book’s end, Abuelita and Mariana—and everyone else—come together as familia. Measured in its empathy, this tale admirably explores a familial scenario that many readers will understand all too well. Kudos also to Meza’s eclectic, vibrant standouts, a visual cue of shared affection.

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**SECRETS OF THE LOST CITY**

*Markle, Sandra*

Millbrook/Lerner (36 pp.)

$31.99 PLB | Sept. 6, 2022

978-1-72843-659-3

Scientific treasure hunts in an inaccessible Central American rainforest yield surprises.

Veteran science writer Markle describes the efforts of two types of expeditions to reveal secrets of La Mosquitia rainforest in Honduras. First, in 2015, documentary filmmaker Steve Elkins led a team deep into this wild, uninhabited world, prompted by persistent legends of a lost city and images on maps he’d commissioned using a technology known as lidar (light detection and ranging). They found boulders that might have been the foundations for buildings as well as statues and stone stools; there was no treasure but also no plastic trash. A year later, a second expedition, led by archaeologist Chris Fisher, one of the team members, found more artifacts; team members’ ensuing health problems ended further efforts. In 2017, a group of 12 scientists from the U.S. nonprofit organization Conservation International, aided by Honduran soldiers, also explored the forest, investigating its ecology and later retrieving camera traps left behind. Throughout this engaging account, photos, mostly from these expeditions and the camera traps, reveal the remarkable finds of these teams, among them a giant carved boulder, a stool with “the carved head of a supernatural-looking jaguar,” and a sculpted vulture. Photographs also document a variety of living plants and animals, including a live jaguar, and emphasize the inaccessibility and density of this “pristine” wilderness. Markle provides clear explanations of the lidar mapping process, the camera traps, and the systematic exploration of the conservation team as well as a smoothly flowing story that carries readers along on these adventures. Team members present as White and Latine.

An inviting introduction to an amazing place. (author’s note, glossary, sources, books and websites, index) (Nonfiction. 9-13)

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**MUSIC IS IN EVERYTHING**

_Marley, Ziggy_

_Illus. by Ag Jatkowska_

Akashic (24 pp.)

$16.95 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-61775-943-7

Readers are encouraged to find the music in everything in this picture-book adaptation of Marley’s exuberant song.

Before reading this book, take a moment to find a YouTube video of Marley and company singing “Music Is in Everything.” Those who try to force this story into standard meter and rhyme will find that the text falls flat. But if readers can find the groove and hear the music in the words, the text becomes a playful read accompanied by illustrations of a multigenerational, multietnic extended family gathering one Saturday afternoon to make music. Some bring instruments with them, while others create percussion instruments from pots, pans, jars, and, most importantly, hands. The illustration of the family’s large and small clapping hands in a spectrum of skin tones sends a powerful, uplifting message about the universality of music. The words and engaging illustrations alternately send readers out into nature to find and listen to the music of the ocean, the wind, a river, and a beehive and then pull them back to the house, where the family joyously plays instruments, sings, dances, and laughs. Instructions in the backmatter show readers how to make a shaker and join in the musical fun, though no score to the song is included. Children will enjoy listening to this story and creating their own music, complete with homemade instruments. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Close your eyes, listen to the music, and experience the joy of family with this buoyant tale. (Picture book. 3-8)
Mia McKenna lives in Nubis in the kingdom of Lunis, where the elite look out for themselves, leaving ordinary people with limited resources to stave off the Darkness. Mia is training to become an umbra tamer when the soul-devouring Reaper King’s elite minions attack her community, taking her parents and nearly everyone else with the skills to fight back. Leaving behind the protection of their city walls, Mia traverses the Nightmare Plains to Stella, the high-tech City of Light, with little brother Lucas and friend TJ. They’re joined by 17-year-old rising star umbra tamer Jada as they desperately seek help from Queen Katiya, a ruler with a history of doing little for her people. Relationships drive the narrative: Mia’s friendships, closeness with Lucas, and bond with her two umbra (furry, horned beings who resemble fox-deer hybrids) are enjoyable. Unfortunately, key background information is frequently dropped haphazardly into the middle of action scenes, disrupting readers’ focus and lessening the tension. This fractured style of world-building breaks up the narrative and makes it difficult to retain readers’ attention. Mia reads as Black, and names and physical descriptions signal a broadly diverse world; TJ has two mums.

An uneven fantasy story focusing on the power of family and friendship. (map) (Adventure. 8-12)

Avi the avocado copes with his anxiety. When Avi hears a loud “THUMP! THUD!” outside his window, his fear immediately begins to grow: “What if something fell from the sky? What if something is broken? What if I never know what happened?” From his window, he notices a large brown object; days pass, and finally, he braves the outdoors and decides to bury the object. After it rains and some time passes, Avi hears another “THUMP! THUD!” and meets an avocado who fell from the tree he didn’t realize he’d planted. And just like that, Avi meets avocado after avocado, who all invite him to hang out with chips and dip!, a model of what it means to take a risk is well worth it.

A reassuring story that doubles as a fantastic teaching and parenting tool. (Picture book. 2-5)
STRANGEVILLE SCHOOL IS DEFINITELY NOT CURSED
Miller, Darcy
Illus. by Brett Helquist
Random House (240 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-30993-3
978-0-593-30994-0 PLB
Series: Strangeville School, 2

Three friends explore the uncharted depths of their school to investigate peculiar happenings.

Fifth grader Harvey Hill is still not used to Strangeville School. Thankfully Stella Cho, his fearless best friend, is around to help Harvey push past his overly cautious nature and embrace the bizarre. The complementary duo embarks on another adventure when the school’s lost-and-found box mysteriously reappears after a decadeslong absence. Coach Johnson believes the box to be cursed, and Stella pulls Harvey and genius classmate Nevaeh into an investigation of the claims. True to its name, Strangeville School soon experiences a deluge of weird events like impromptu performances of sea chanteys, sharks in the hallways, and an attack by a kraken named Fluffy. The zany and madcap tone is consistent with the series opener. Also returning are the numerous believe-it-or-not type asides from the narrator. Harvey’s journey of self-acceptance continues as he forges a new path that is truly his own. The growing friendship among Harvey, Stella, and Nevaeh develops authentically and, along with details like characters with names from diverse ethnic backgrounds, offers readers something realistic and relatable. Harvey is cued as White, Stella as Korean names from diverse ethnic backgrounds, offers readers something realistic and relatable. Harvey is cued as White, Stella as Korean American, and Nevaeh as Black. Final art not seen.

Playfully odd and outlandish; equally fun for returning fans and those new to the series. (Adventure. 8-12)

IZZY PAINTS
Miller, Tim
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-06-311975-8

Izzy the koala loves life in the big city, where there is so much to see and do.

The city is bustling; on the corner of Bruegel Avenue and Dürrer Street, there’s an art supply store, a florist, and a tattoo parlor, fittingly named Bauhaus Tattoos—just one of several hat tips to artists and artistic movements. When Izzy and their constant companion, a little yellow cat, discover the art museum, another world opens up for them. All the other animals in Izzy’s world, other than Izzy (gray) and their cat, are illustrated in blue, while the art within the museum is in full color. Even so, there’s plenty of fun to be had in looking at spreads featuring the background characters: a giraffe holding an art book upside down, a fish with legs, a dog with a T-shirt that reads “Who let this dog out?” Izzy is fully immersed and inspired by the art; a wall of art reminiscent of Wayne Thiebaud’s paintings of desserts even makes them hungry. Children will identify with Izzy, who after their visit wants to create their own work but then feels overwhelmed by the blank canvas. They break through, covering the canvas with splashes and drips, eventually creating a vibrant self-portrait. Izzy’s happiness at creating something of their own and the simple but lively text make for a delightful and engaging read-aloud. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A charming stroll through the imagination and a testament to the joys of creativity. (Picture book. 3-6)

MY DIWALI LIGHT
Mirchandani, Raakhee
Illus. by Supriya Kelkar
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-316-33933-9

An Indian American girl and her family prepare to celebrate a beloved holiday.

For Devi, Diwali is one of the best times of the year. She loves the colors, decorations, and food; Diwali is her “time to shine.” But as her family notes, before she can celebrate, she has to clean her room in preparation for the arrival of the goddess Lakshmi. After Devi is done, she watches her Nani (grandmother) and her father make puris and besan ladoos for the whole family to enjoy during the holiday. She’s particularly excited that she gets to try on all of the new clothes Nani brought for her from India for the days of celebration. Everyone celebrates Diwali in different ways, Devi notes, and she explains that she and her family “wrap up our ladoos in fancy boxes and deliver them to people we love” before throwing a party in their apartment. Neighbors stop by, curious about the festivities, and the family invites them to join in. Mirchandani’s simple, elegant text explains the holiday, vividly bringing to life a family that loves coming together to share traditions, while Kelkar’s bold use of color (particularly shades of purple, blue, and green) makes the illustrations pop. Characters—diverse in skin tone—are cartoonish, placed against backdrops that use attractive textures and patterns. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A warm, heartfelt ode to Diwali and the joys of family. (author’s and illustrator’s notes) (Picture book. 3-6)

TALES OF THE PREHISTORIC WORLD
Adventures From the Land of the Dinosaurs
Moors, Kallie
Illus. by Becky Thorns
Neon Squid/Macmillan (160 pp.)
$21.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-68449-254-1

Landmark discoveries in paleontology, from multibillion-year-old stromatolites to a woolly mammoth tooth no more ancient than the Egyptian pyramids.
After a general timeline and a rundown of the “big five” extinction events, paleontologist Moore covers the story of prehistoric life in roughly chronological single topic spreads. She focuses mainly on lesser known tales of discovery, such as the Precambrian fossils found by 19th-century schoolchildren in England’s Charnwood Forest, and also highlights spectacular finds at unusually rich sites like Angeac-Charente in France, where 73,000 specimens have been recovered, and Oregon’s Turtle Cove Assemblage. Thorns tucks an occasional light- or dark-skinned human figure in for scale but fills up most pages differently. While facial expressions aren’t especially enhanced with the help of her clever family members—and a few crafty, sparkly additions of her own. Bonnie and Emilia are able, usually brightly colored naturalism. Readers curious about the deep history of microbes, plants, and fungi will have to look elsewhere, and our hominin story is limited to three skimpy spreads. Still, along with extinct stars like Titanoboa and Megalodon, special features such as a lineup comparing the very different original and modern concepts of what certain dinosaurs looked like and a gallery of wildly shaped and hued ceratopsian heads will please both fledgling and confirmed dinophiles. And the named and depicted paleontologists here include nearly as many women as men. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An insider’s view of exciting sites and finds, with prehistoric portraits aplenty to match. (index) (Informational picture book. 7-10)

**BONNIE’S NEW OLD OUTFIT**

Moore, Madison
Illus. by Danielle Bennett
Whitman (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 1, 2022
978-0-8075-1010-0

With the help of her resourceful family, Bonnie embellishes used clothing to create a perfect first-day-of-school outfit.

Whether from the attic, the thrift store, or her own closet, the clothes Bonnie assembles are stained, worn out, or too big or small. Her older sister, Emilia, sympathizes and leads her to her own closet to demonstrate how she’s revamped older clothes with blueberries and onion skins. Bonnie asks her grandfather, a knitter, for help, and after a couple of days of tutelage, the pair have two new patches, “one neat and tidy and one new and scraggly.” As Mom prepares to alter Bonnie’s “too-big and too-small” clothing, Bonnie notices Mom’s embroidered shirt and soon learns to thread a needle and stitch simple patterns on socks and T-shirts. Finally, Bonnie’s back-to-school wardrobe is ready, each piece enhanced with the help of her clever family members—and a few crafty, sparkly additions of her own. Bonnie and Emilia are brown-skinned, their mother presents as Black, and their grandfather is light-skinned. While facial expressions aren’t especially detailed, familial scenes of collaborative work cheerfully extend the story. Final pages briefly discuss natural dyes, embroidery, knitting, and accessorizing. By highlighting one child’s personal expression, Moore removes the stigma from secondhand clothing. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**WE WERE THE FIRE**

**Birmingham 1963**

Moses, Shelia P.
Nancy Paulsen Books (176 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-40748-6

An African American tween finds a way to contribute to his community’s struggle for an end to segregation.

Eleven-year-old Rufus Jackson Jones Jr. lives in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. Following the death of his father, his mother struggles to provide for their family. Life improves when his mother marries Paul Joe Peele. Daddy Paul, as Rufus and his sister call him, insists that they find a better home than their run-down house. So the family rents a home on the property of Miss Boone, the owner of the mill that employs most of the town—a move that angers some White people in the community, as the other families living on the property are mostly White. The civil rights movement is a major topic of conversation for young and old alike, and Rufus wants to learn all he can. Plans for a march involving Dr. Martin Luther King and the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth are in the works, and for the first time, students will march. The first marches result in jail for many but continue to grow until the protestors face police dogs and fire hoses. Moses takes readers inside the movement that saw its youngest become effective challengers to the segregation status quo. Her narrative seamlessly weaves a personal family story with the larger one of the fight for change. Rufus is an engaging, thoughtful narrator whose voice and perspective ring true as he works to make a difference, even disobeying his mother, who is terrified about what might happen. The love and determination of his community are realistically and richly portrayed.

A stirring, cleareyed look at the young people who risked much for social change as they fought for their civil rights. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 9-12)

**I WISH**

Niemann, Christoph
Greenwillow Books (80 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-321979-3

Oh, the possibilities!

This wordless tale begins with a child discovering a wrapped present. Thrilled, they pause in anticipation, as if praying for something good. Then they tear off the paper only to find another wrapped box inside the first. They repeat the process,
“An exquisite excavation of hair politics, family dynamics, and self-love.”

FRIZZY

Once more discovering another wrapped present! Perplexed, they try again, and this time the gift seems to take on a life of its own. First, it covers the child’s hand, then their feet, making for a pair of excellent running shoes. Next, the present takes on the appearance of a smartphone, a book, a dog, a dinosaur, a superhero cape, and more. Frustrated, the child gives up unwrapping and makes a stack of the boxes, which have apparently multiplied. They fall, get injured, and kick the present, causing it to roll up into a huge globe that then becomes the world. The child unwraps the package one more time and ends up with just what they need. Though a few moments may confuse readers, this book serves as a strong allegory for the immense satisfaction of daydreaming about possibilities. Relying on a limited palette dominated by black, white, blue, and red, the Spartan, cartoon-style art lets the manifestations of the wrapped present really pop. The child, with skin the color of the page and animated pigtails that emote like rabbit ears, is extremely expressive and effectively carries this silent narrative. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Fairly intriguing. (Picture book: 3-7)

TEDDY, LET’S GO!

Nott, Michelle
Illus. by Nahid Kazemi
Enchanted Lion Books (72 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-49270-368-5

The ever relevant tale of a beloved stuffed animal.

Teddy is a soft-looking orange bear with striped trousers and little suspenders. Made with love by Grandma, the bear grows up with a little girl they call “My” because it’s her “favorite word.” Readers watch as My grows up through Teddy’s eyes. The two share birthdays and baths together. Teddy has tea parties with the other stuffed animals while My goes to school; later, Teddy accompanies My to camp. But My starts to outgrow her companion, and soon Teddy is often forgotten, left in the car or on the dresser, though they are still a treasured friend to be cuddled when needed. Eventually, illustrations reveal a new family member is expected, and when the baby boy arrives, Teddy is lovingly passed along—after a bath and a few small repairs. Presented in straightforward prose, Nott’s simple story about the unconditional love of a stuffed animal will provide reassurance for anyone outgrowing a comfort object. Kazemi’s illustrations are tenderly rendered in pencil and soft, smudgy pastel and rely on a mix of panels and spreads; these cozy scenes will hold the attention of even the youngest readers. My and her family have pale skin and dark hair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Comforting as hugging a beloved stuffed animal. (Picture book: 1-6)

FRIZZY

Ortega, Claribel A.
Illus. by Rose Bousamra
First Second (224 pp.)
978-1-250-25962-2
978-1-250-25963-9 paper

Marlene, a young Dominican American girl, seeks to embrace her natural hair. Sundays are the worst—they’re the day each week when Marlene’s mom brings her to get her hair straightened at the salon. It’s a painful, arduous process, but Mami insists it’s the only way to look your best in front of others and be presentable at events like her cousin’s quinceañera. Marlene is constantly bombarded with ideas about “good hair” and critical comments about her looks. Thankfully, Tía Ruby, with her abundance of natural, bouncy curls, reassures Marlene that straightening her hair isn’t a requirement for looking beautiful, which sets a fire in Marlene’s heart. With the guidance and support of Tía Ruby and best friend Camilla, Marlene embarks on a natural hair journey with her head held high. Ortega masterfully navigates topics like anti-Blackness and oppressive beauty standards passed down through generations. Bousamra’s eye-catching color scheme, dominated by soft shades of pink and blue, and expressive illustrations showing Marlene’s vibrant community are the perfect vessel for this story. An especially tender scene in which Marlene finally experiences a pain-free wash day speaks volumes about the healing themes present throughout this graphic novel. Marlene’s journey of personal growth will evoke catharsis and joy.

An exquisite excavation of hair politics, family dynamics, and self-love. (Graphic fiction: 8-12)

SEEN AND UNSEEN

What Dorothea Lange, Toyo Miyatake, and Ansel Adams’s Photographs Reveal About the Japanese American Incarceration

Partridge, Elizabeth
Illus. by Lauren Tamaki
Chronicle Books (132 pp.)
$21.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-4521-6510-3

The incarceration of Japanese Americans through a different lens.

Partridge and Tamaki spotlight three photographers who documented the experiences of those of Japanese descent who were imprisoned at Manzanar, California, during World War II. Though Dorothea Lange was commissioned by the government to show that the imprisonment was humane, she was adamantly opposed to the incarceration and instead captured images that showed that “what the government was doing was unfair and
A marvelous heroic journey in miniature.

VIOLET AND JOBIE IN THE WILD

THE WHY-WHY’S GONE BYE-BYE
Pastis, Stephan
Aladdin (288 pp.)
$22.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-5344-9614-9
Series: Trubble Town, 2

Trouble comes to Trubble Town even before all the grown-ups are abducted by alien Berrymanalows.

Sharing with its predecessor, Squirrel Do Bad (2021), a decidedly free-associational style of plotting, cartoonist Pastis’ newest pits young Wendy the Wanderer and silent orphan Milo against numerous foes, from evil tycoon Moneybags McGibbons to a bunch of opportunistic children who elect themselves town bosses after their empty-headed parents vanish thanks to not one but two rival sets of lounge singers from the stars (the other being the Wayneneootonians). In a random (if increasingly destructive) series of mishaps and catastrophes featuring, for example, a wrestling match between costumed ex-civil servant Nutman and town propagandist Scribbly Von Scrivener atop a giant banana, the town ends up leveled…but at least both the useless grown-ups and the bad kids are sent away together on a long trip, the aliens are driven off before they can perform, and Milo and Wendy are left to rebuild with the few remaining residents, mostly animals. In the appropriately manic art, the aliens resemble vegetables dressed, in some of the more frightening panels, as Elvis impersonators, while Wendy, flaunting a mop of purple hair, and the rest of the dot-eyed human cast present in a subtle range of skin colors.

Free-wheeling follies with satiric digs aplenty. (Graphic humor 9-12)

LUNA’S GREEN PET
Pendreigh, Kirsten
Illus. by Carmen Mok
Sleeping Bear Press (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-06-249969-1

A child nurtures a houseplant as a beloved pet.

Luna’s red brick apartment building on a tree-lined urban street doesn’t allow pets, so she and two friends brainstorm and reject ideas, like a pet rock and an ant farm. Luna eventually decides to adopt a plant she finds in a trash can. The rest of the story centers, without much drama, on Luna’s activities with Stephanie, which is short for the plant’s scientific name, Stephanotis floribunda. Luna matter-of-factly takes Stephanie for walks in a wagon and reads her bedtime stories—which could inspire children to expand their notion of caring beyond furry animals, family members, and friends. Luna’s deep love for Stephanie may also spur readers to focus less on the flashy perks of a pet, like whether they can do tricks, and more on their love for their pet (fauna or flora). The text is thoughtfully and efficiently used, working fabulously with gentle illustrations, which appear to be rendered in colored pencil. Most importantly, kids growing up in cities and apartment buildings and who, like Luna, can’t keep pets will emerge with some creative ideas about how to find companionship. Backmatter discusses the benefits of houseplants and offers additional background about the Stephanotis plant. Luna is brown-skinned, one of her friends is light-skinned, and the other is darker-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Blooms quickly and keeps growing on you. (Picture book 4-6)

VIOLET AND JOBIE IN THE WILD
Perkins, Lynne Rae
Greenwillow Books (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-06-249969-1

Can losing the life they knew turn out well for a pair of mice?

When mouse siblings Violet and Jobie are trapped and rehomed from their comfortable human habitat to the state park (“It’s like paradise for them,” says the human mom, reassuring her son), they are completely out of their element. The pair are slightly acquainted with the outside world, having seen some episodes of Nature Magnificent when the human family watched television. Fortunately, older, wiser mouse Zolian offers key advice and expands their appreciation of the wild world with a sense of fun. Newly aware of dangers they had never before faced, Violet is overwhelmed until Zolian offers some perspective: “There’s always an owl,” he says, “but there are ways to live so that you’re not always afraid of the owl.” As with all good survival stories, the mice learn by trial and error and by paying attention to their subtle range of skin colors.

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When mouse siblings Violet and Jobie are trapped and rehomed from their comfortable human habitat to the state park (“It’s like paradise for them,” says the human mom, reassuring her son), they are completely out of their element. The pair are slightly acquainted with the outside world, having seen some episodes of Nature Magnificent when the human family watched television. Fortunately, older, wiser mouse Zolian offers key advice and expands their appreciation of the wild world with a sense of fun. Newly aware of dangers they had never before faced, Violet is overwhelmed until Zolian offers some perspective: “There’s always an owl,” he says, “but there are ways to live so that you’re not always afraid of the owl.” As with all good survival stories, the mice learn by trial and error and by paying attention to their subtle range of skin colors.

“A marvelous heroic journey in miniature.”
environment. There’s the sourcing of food, recognizing dangers, and beginning to find connection and pleasure in what is now home. Perkins handles her unique blend of mouseness and anthropomorphism well, occasionally addressing readers with humor. Her art throughout is filled with lighthearted depictions of expressive mice. By the time Violet is carried off on an adventure all her own, the gentle lesson and expectation have been conveyed: Change is the norm, going “home” is an internal rather than external journey, and cherished connections may be impermanent yet nevertheless lasting.

A marvelous heroic journey in miniature. (Animal fantasy. 7-11)

PARADISE SANDS
Pinfold, Levi
Candlewick Studio (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov 8, 2022
978-1-5362-1282-2

On a car trip to visit their mother, three brothers and a sister are lured into a mysterious palace.

The initial, stark white page includes a small illustration of a wizened tree with white blossoms. An ominous, prophetic rhyme warns of Teller’s Hollow (“A sip from the chalice, we enter his palace / Break bread for the Keeper, now we descend deeper…”). Three ensuing pages of wordless, hyper-realistic illustrating rely on a palette of Dust Bowl colors, deeper…”). Three ensuing pages of wordless, hyper-realistic, sepia-tinged tones warm the palette of this already heartwarming story. Translated from Spanish, the lyrical text is by turns poignant and triumphant. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An unselfish gift given from the biggest heart. (Picture book. 4-7)

MADANI’S BEST GAME
Pintadera, Fran
Illus. by Raquel Catalina
Trans. by Lawrence Schimel
Eerdmans (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-8028-5597-8

A celebration of a neighborhood soccer team’s star player.

“Our whole neighborhood knows it: No one plays soccer like Madani does.” Though he may not be the tallest or the fastest, he definitely stands out—because he doesn’t wear any shoes when he plays and because there’s nothing he can’t do with the ball. “Madani makes the ball twirl and passes it from one side to the other. He hides it between his legs, shrugs it over his shoulders, catches it on his head….” Madani’s mother is unable to come watch the games because she is a seamstress and must finish her work. But as she sews, she hears the game’s cheers. Madani’s teammates imagine how much better Madani could play with a pair of cleats. When he hints that he is saving money for something that will improve his game, they hope his cleats come in time before their match against a rival team. But instead, he buys something else—something that allows his mother to hear the cheers firsthand and joyfully join in. Pintadera’s author’s note mentions that working with immigrant families—including a boy named Madani—inspired this story. Madani has dark hair and light skin; most characters are light-skinned. Smudgy, sepia-tinged tones warm the palette of this already heartwarming story. Translated from Spanish, the lyrical text is by turns poignant and triumphant. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An unselfish gift given from the biggest heart. (Picture book. 4-7)

LITTLE BOOK OF CARING
Pirrone, Francesca
Clavis (56 pp.)
$12.95 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-60537-785-8
Series: Piggy, 2

Evidence that the best advice is the simple, straightforward variety, modeled by a caring pig.

“It’s easy to show you care….” In this uncredited translation from Dutch, small acts of ordinary kindness have their moment to shine in the sun. A line-drawn piggy in a sharp yellow sweater embodies this sound advice. Whether it’s tidying up at the end of the day, listening to others, or even looking after a sick friend, such recommendations go down a bit smoother when accompanied by cheerful, occasionally meditative images. Some admonishments fall into the realm of platitudes (“Care for the little things…and they’ll grow big”). Others (“Practice self-care,” accompanying our piggy protagonist looking particularly disheveled) come as pleasant surprises. Though in some cases
the advice is strong, the images go in questionable directions (“Think of someone else’s feelings” is followed by an image of the pig dumping a goldfish into a fountain; “Say I’m sorry” is paired with an illustration of the pig kissing the foot of a turtle they trod on while in a hurry). Yet there’s no denying the tone’s ineffable quality, charming even as it instructs. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down, and this piggy makes these words of wisdom worth returning to. (Picture book. 2-5)

THE MUSEUM OF ODD BODY LEFTOVERS
A Tour of Your Useless Parts, Flaws, and Other Weird Bits
Poliquin, Rachel
Illus. by Clayton Hatmer
Greystone Kids (88 pp.)
$17.95 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-77164-745-8

What remnants of our human evolution do we still carry around?

Wisdom Tooth, the bespectacled guide to this entertaining tour of a fictional museum devoted to vestigial phenomena, provides breezy and accessible explanations of natural selection, adaptation, and evolution. The text is amusingly “edited” as if in red pencil, offering lighthearted editorial commentary and occasional expansion of information at key points. Hamner’s lively cartoon art includes labeled exhibits, diagrams, and round-eyed caricatures of creatures (microscopic animals, fish, early mammals, hominids, etc.) along the evolutionary path that produced humans and that left the usefulness of some traits behind: wisdom teeth, goosebumps, the palmar reflex, the coccyx, the little bump in the corner of the eye that was once a nictitating membrane, and even hiccups. Poliquin also speculates on possible reasons for humans’ relative hairlessness. A few experiments (picking up a pencil with toes and writing one’s name, timing how long it takes for wet fingers to become wrinkly) encourage self-observation. Though the discussion of evolution and its related processes and the overall attention to detail are precise and sophisticated, Poliquin refers to embryos and fetuses only as “babies” in discussing even the earliest weeks of human ontogeny. A glossary revisits and defines some of the museum exhibits and concepts from the tour.

An appealingly distinctive approach to understanding evolution. (Further reading, index) (Nonfiction. 7-12)

HITHER & NIGH
Potter, Ellen
McElderry (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-66591-038-5

Magic isn’t just for the good students.

Three years after seventh grader Nell’s brother, River, disappeared from Washington Square Park in Manhattan, her class-cutting and gambling on chess games in the park land her in the Last Chance Club at school. It’s a group designed for students who are close to being expelled and is populated by a motley crew. There’s good-looking bully Annika, a former neighbor and friend of River’s, who moved after her mother married a wealthy man. They’re joined by Crud, a mountain of a kid rumored to be guilty of heinous acts, and Tom—or as Nell thinks of him, The Viking—a cute boy with fingers sticky from the constant supply of Twizzlers. The mismatched foursome wouldn’t normally associate, but when Mr. Boot, the club’s leader, informs them that they will be learning magic as a way to become literal angels, they’re forced to get along and work together. But the more they learn, the more Nell questions Mr. Boot’s motives, especially as hints arise that River’s disappearance may be linked to the magical world. The book tries to do a lot and largely succeeds. Readers hoping to become ensnared in conspiracies with links to folklore, mythology, and literature will be in heaven and will readily forgive a few plot holes. Main characters read White.

A thrilling page-turner. (Fantasy. 9-13)

THE MOONLIGHT ZOO
Powell-Tuck, Maudie
Illus. by Karl James Mountford
Tiger Tales (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-68010-291-8

Eva is getting ready to sleep but can’t stop thinking about her cat, Luna, who has been missing for two days. A strange noise causes Eva to peer under her bed, and suddenly, a whole new world opens up—the Moonlight Zoo. A wolf escort kindly explains that the zoo appears every night to keep lost animals safe and then disappears in the morning. The duo dash through the intricately designed door (with a lattice cutout pattern), hoping to find Luna. Conventional pets (dogs, guinea pigs) mix with wild animals (elephants, penguins, eagles, and more), all set within the mystical landscape of this unusual zoo. Eva bounds from one kingdom to the next, desperately searching. Readers may wonder why the wolf guide saves the obvious stop, Big Cat Kingdom, for last, but the resulting fantastical tour makes up for the misstep. A palette dominated by purples, pinks, greens, and blues, along with die-cut designs and scalloped corners that
An enchanting romp through the imagination. (Picture book. 3-7)

I AM QUIET
A Story for the Introvert in All of Us
Powers, Andie
Illus. by Betsy Petersen
Bala Kids/Shambhala (32 pp.)
$16.95 | April 12, 2022
978-1-61180-984-8

“Grown-ups tell me, Don’t be shy. But I am not shy. I AM QUIET.”

Powers explains and advocates for introverted children in this picture book. A boy named Emile explains how wild his imagination is “on the inside,” how he explores and creates “on the outside,” and what it’s like to be around other children at school and on the playground. This is a picture of a child who is not lonely or shy (as is assumed by most of the adults around him) but who leads a rich, full, quietly lived existence. Compelling lines like “Strength can be quiet” give readers much to ponder. Petersen’s appealingly childlike illustrations bring to life Emile’s world, one full of color, creatures, mazes, and discoveries. This story reassures and empowers introverted children and conveys their strengths to extroverted children and adults. It’s also a much-needed counter to similar titles that encourage quieter children to adapt. In a meaningful author’s note, Powers discusses being both “a former quiet kid” and the parent of a quiet child. Emile is tan-skinned and brown-haired; the other children and adults he encounters are diverse in skin tone. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A refreshing, inspiring voice for young readers. (Picture book. 4-7)

LIGHTFALL
Shadow of the Bird
Pobert, Tim
HarperAlley (256 pp.)
$22.99 | April 26, 2022
978-0-06-299050-1
Series: Lightfall, 2

Bea, Cad, and friends continue their quest to protect the remaining light in their world.

This engaging second installment picks up shortly after the revelation that Alfirid, Bea’s forgetful grandfather, failed in his task to guard the Restless Sleeper, who was imprisoned by the mysterious Galdurians 500 years ago but is awake and roaming Irpa once more. Kest, a massive black bird whose strength increases with every piece of light he consumes, poses both a physical and existential threat to the communities that now rely on artificial floating Lights. While Alfirid travels to warn Irpa’s leaders, Bea and Cad—along with Bea’s faithful cat, Nimm—set off to seek aid from Lorgon, the mythical Spirit of Water. In a welcome and intriguing twist, Bea hesitates to accept Cad’s conviction that Kest is simply evil, laying the groundwork for critical exploration of past events. The scope and epic stakes are heightened and extended through secondary narrative threads: Porcine wizard Alfirid counsels courageous young ruler Karru, to the dismay of her advisers, while jaded Kipp, a vaguely capybaralike rogue, reluctantly fulfills a favor to one of the enigmatic, prescient Arsai. The deliberate pacing and paneling of action sequences contrast nicely with generous spreads of intricately detailed, vibrantly colorful settings. Purple-haired Bea, whose anxiety is skillfully depicted through dark ribbons of color, reads White; brown-skinned Karru has puffs of natural hair. Cad resembles a large, bipedal axolotl.

An invigorating, original fantasy that’s entertaining and reflective in equal measure. (map) (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)

MAPMAKER
Ramée, Lisa Moore
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-06-303942-1

A young Black boy has the power to create worlds from maps he draws. Walt is a Black seventh grader whose family recently, to his dismay, left Los Angeles for rural Blackbird Bay in Northern California. While his father pressures him to play football, Walt’s passion is maps—he even draws his own intricate map of Djaruba, the world he’s made up. This passion leads to Walt discovering he has the magical power to create real worlds from the maps he makes. When Djaruba springs to life, Walt is able to escape his dull and frustrating life in Blackbird Bay and visit his invented world filled with colorful landscapes and entities bloomed from his imagination, including dragons he can ride. Walt brings his twin sister, Van, and new friend, Dylan, along. But he has to be cautious because using his magic has a cost each time. On top of that, Walt learns that rather than create worlds, mapmaker Statica has been using his powers to destroy them, eliminating one world every year until he gets what he wants. It turns out that what Statica wants is influence over Walt. With the full extent of Statica’s power unknown, it’s now up to Walt to figure out how to save Djaruba—and even his real world—from destruction. Walt is an appealing hero to root for. Readers will be absorbed as they explore fantastical worlds through his curious and enthusiastic eyes.

An exciting and imaginative read. (map) (Fantasy. 8-12)
A visual feast that packs a punch.

TEAM UP

Raúl the Third
Colors by Elaine Bay
Versify/HarperCollins (66 pp.)
$9.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-358-39471-6
Series: El Toro & Friends

Find out how El Toro and his friends became “un equipo maravilloso!”

The ragtag team of luchadores first meet as rambunctious kids—untrained and unfocused—heading to Ricky Ratón’s School of Lucha for one purpose: “to learn how to WRESTLE!” Under the tutelage of the muscular Ricky Ratón and his chicken sidekick, the real training for El Toro and his friends begins. The luchadores-in-training learn many, many skills, including acrobatics, discipline, and patience. Best of all, they each hone “their very own special move!” In a series of humorous panels that mimic a training montage, readers see the cast of anthropomorphized animals in action, with zany moves that seem to bounce off the page. Unitalized words and phrases in Spanish pop up among the predominantly English text to echo certain lines and action words, providing translations that slip in with ease. After the stupendous training, a proud Ricky Ratón reveals one final surprise test: The young luchadores must beat their maestro in a battle. One by one, El Toro and his friends lose against their powerful teacher until the luchadores-in-training realize that teaming up brings its own rewards. Author/illustrator Raúl the Third and colorist Bay’s latest retains the series’ use of short, punchy sentences, kaleidoscopic artwork, and comic book–style panels and speech bubbles; this one is sure to be a can’t-miss read-aloud. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A visual feast that packs a punch. (Early reader: 4–7)

THE LITTLEST ELEPHANT

Read, Kate
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-68263-494-3

The titular elephant’s self-absorption causes problems for other animals.

Having just learned to swim, Ellie the littlest elephant wants to be the first to reach the water. As she rushes past other animals, shouting about all that she will do when she gets there, she knocks over the chameleon, interrupts the monkeys’ mango-picking, and jostles the butterflies. After she steps on the tiger’s tail and the big cat roars, Ellie pauses. A little voice responds, “Just in time!” Ellie glances down and realizes she was about to step on a mouse, who reminds her to watch where she’s going as all the animals look on. Ellie apologizes for her carelessness and then shows extraordinary concern and helpfulness as she and the others approach the pool together. The book offers a solid message, but the text feels didactic—less a story and more a lesson in respecting others. However, the artwork is compelling. The endpapers show a sophisticated pattern of trees. Mixed-media collages, in a colorful, soothing palette, depict animals with generally sweet expressions (the roaring tiger is a dramatic, slightly frightening exception); their exaggerated unhappy countenances when the mouse confronts Ellie will elicit giggles. Speech bubbles are sprinkled throughout as the creatures warn Ellie to slow down or call out in excitement. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sweet, though preachy. (Picture book: 3–5)

BORED NO MORE!

The ABCs of What To Do When There’s Nothing To Do

Reiters, Julie
Abrams Appleseed (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-4197-6077-8

Banish the “I’m bored” days!

Y is for “yawn.” “Yes, yawn! It can get boring at home.” But this book offers a variety of un-boring suggestions for individual children or groups. Some are active: “act out a play,” “dance down the hall,” “explore the basement,” “invent something,” or “volunteer in some way.” Others are more restful: “grow a plant,” “knit a hat,” or “nestle down with a book” (or lots of them). A few are more cerebral: “face your fear” or “question things.” Some are quiet: “send a note” or “write a poem”; others are loud: “howl and cheer” or “rock and roll.” But all are fun and motivating. Each page or spread features just one letter described with a simple phrase, and although many ABC books stretch to finding the perfect word for each letter, the choices here are apt. A simple ABCB rhyme scheme—subtle, as it is spread over many pages—adds a comforting pattern. Uncluttered illustrations with bold, contrasting colors make this a good group read-aloud, but the illustrations are so self-explanatory that young nonreaders will be able to understand the book without help. The illustrations depict a racially diverse cast of characters, including a brown-skinned child who uses a wheelchair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An excellent resource for those days when there’s “nothing to do.” (Picture book: 3–7)

THE BIRTHDAY OF THE WORLD

A Story About Finding Light in Everyone and Everything

Remen, Rachel Naomi
Illus. by Rachell Sumpter
Cameron Kids (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-951836-34-4

On a child’s fourth birthday, their favorite person in the world, their grandfather, tells them what happened when the world was born.
As the grandfather tells the story, a page turn takes readers from a mainly dark page with a picture of a birthday cake to a stunning kaleidoscope of color. “A great ray of light” brings darkness to an end, and sparks fall into the world and into everything in it. A multicolored spread showing a diverse collection of living beings, each with their own spark, conveys the grandfather’s story in dazzling colors and engaging details. Unfortunately, the text does not have the same charm. The phrasing doesn’t flow; rather, beings are listed: boys, girls, dogs, rabbits, plants, trees, etc. The grandfather then explains that these sparks are still within us, but “We can’t see them with our eyes / We can only see them with our hearts”—a line that feels too similar to the famous quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s The Little Prince (1943). Though the painterly images are beautiful, making stunning use of color and light, the text is preachy as it details what people can do to make their sparks and the sparks of others shine more brightly. The child and their grandfather are light-skinned and cued Jewish; other characters are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally)

This visually stirring but heavy-handed attempt to teach children empathy and awareness falls flat. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)

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**FIONA THE FRUIT BAT**

*Riskin, Dan*

*Illus. by Rachel Qiuqi*

*Greystone Kids (40 pp.)*

$17.95 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-1-77164-785-4

A young bat takes her first few flaps of independence.

It’s time for Fiona’s first flight. But she doesn’t feel ready. Her mother offers a few words of advice—“remember…LISTEN”—before flying out of the cave, leaving Fiona alone. The familiar sounds Fiona hears in her immediate environment (“Bibble-babble-bubble,” “SPLAT SPLAT SPLAT,” “takka-takka-tik”) make her feel safe. But she’s still reluctant to let go and fly. Her friend Cassie shows up, smelling of an intriguing fruit, and her mother returns for a quick cuddle, but Fiona still feels too frightened to fly. When a frustrated Fiona lets out a cry, its echo begins to make “a shape appear in her mind.” Soon she is able to recognize shapes as the sounds return to her, and she confidently takes flight. The full-bleed art depicts the sounds as squiggles at first and then bubbles that bounce back to Fiona, informing her about her surroundings. Biologist Riskin imbues Fiona with human feelings of confusion, worry, fear, and grumpiness; still, the anthropomorphism encourages an empathetic connection with the wild creature, helps young readers to understand echolocation, and buoy other little ones encountering their own obstacles.

A more extensive explanation of echolocation follows the story along with a brief introduction to short-tailed fruit bats (Fiona’s species). (This book was reviewed digitally)

A simple explanation of how bats use reflected sound—plus a reassuring take on navigating new challenges. (Informational picture book. 3-7)

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**I’LL BE YOUR POLAR BEAR**

*Roberts, Justin*

*Illus. by Chuck Groenink*

*Putnam (32 pp.)*

$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-0-525-51639-2

As they move through a dark wintry landscape, a parent promises to protect their child in every way.

Together, the tan-skinned pair count the stars, “tiptoe over ice / tumble through the snow,” and push through the winds. Through it all, the adult promises, “I’ll be your polar bear.” The two humans seem to morph into an adult polar bear and a young cub. The bears skate on the ice, crunch through the snow, and cuddle in ice caves, with the adult bear draping a paw over the little one. The parent bear echoes the human: “I promise and I swear / that I’ll be your polar bear.” If the little one is alone in the sea on an ice patch, the parent promises to rescue them, and if the cub is too tired to walk, then a piggyback ride will be the way home. As the story draws to a close, the figures are seen approaching their house and then safe and warm inside. The parent’s voice narrates the tale in gentle, first-person rhyming verses. Groenink’s beautiful, wintry, blue-lit illustrations bring the action to life in a variety of illustrations. Some images are full-page, while some pages are made up of horizontal panels; vignettes framed in white are also included as well as several text-free pages. At one moment, toward the end, as the parent and child enter the house, shadows make it unclear if the figures are humans or bears; what’s never uncertain, however, is the duo’s love for each other. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Unconditional love and security abound. (Picture book. 4-8)

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**KRAZYLAND**

*Romasco-Moore, Mar*

*Delacorte (272 pp.)*

$16.99 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-0-593-43115-3

Beneath the colorful surface of Krazyland Kids Indoor Playplace is a dangerous alternate universe.

Nathan, who narrates in a snarky first-person voice, would much rather stay at home playing on his computer, but he gets roped into attending a birthday party for his younger cousin Jenny at Krazyland. At 13, he’s too old for this kid stuff! In short order, Nathan has his face shoved into the birthday cake by his mean older cousin Jake, is chased by flying eyeballs, and loses his phone. On the upside, he meets a vulnerable girl named Mercy, and they become fast friends. When one of the guests goes missing, the party’s abruptly over, and Krazyland is shut down for the day. All that’s left are Nathan, his relatives, and Mercy, who fortunately knows much about the krazy history of Krazyland. Their labyrinthine journey through its chambers includes giant spiders, a twisted life-size Whac-A-Mole
game, and a boat made of pizza. Since this all feels a lot like one of Nathan’s computer games, why isn’t he having a great time? Romasco-Moore plunges readers right into the action, folding bits of backstory and exposition in along the way. Each of her short, punchy chapters ends on a cliffhanger, keeping pacing strong and comic suspense high. The chief charm of her wacky episodic adventure is the transformation of recognizably benign fixtures of kid fun into menacing foes. Characters follow a White default.

A brisk and lively comic thriller full of surprises. (Horror. 9-12)

**STILL THIS LOVE GOES ON**

Sainte-Marie, Buffy  
Illus. by Julie Flett  
Greystone Kids (40 pp.)  
$18.95 | Sept. 27, 2022  
978-1-77164-807-3

A love letter to family, home, and Indigenous traditions.

Cree singer/songwriter Sainte-Marie offers a glimpse of her people, their land, and their traditions in this picture book based on the lyrics to one of her songs. Through the eyes of a young child, the book brings to life the cold winter days, the awe of looking up at the nighttime sky, the freedom of running through fields of fragrant summer flowers, and the changing of the seasons. Most of all, with the refrain “Still this love goes on,” the story reminds readers of the joy we experience upon returning to those whom we love and who love us. The soothing cadence of the words, along with heartwarming illustrations by Flett, conjures up images, smells, sounds, and touch as silhouetted buffalo race across the plains and a child with eyes closed smells the burning of sweetgrass. Both the words and the bold artwork, rendered in pencil and pastel and composed digitally, evoke emotional memories of friends and family and of the place we call home. Flat colors contrast with intricate textures, making for an immersive experience. Readers will want to celebrate their own family stories with their children and share knowledge to be passed on. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

This story will remain in readers’ hearts long after this book is shelved. (Sheet music, author’s note) (Picture book. 3-7)

**A SEED IN THE SUN**

Salazar, Aida  
Dial Books (272 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022  
978-0-593-40660-1

Twelve-year-old Mexican American Lula longs to speak out and stand up against oppression in 1960s Delano, California.

Lula lives with her migrant farm-worker family in bedbug-infested barracks. Her older sister, Concha, loves school just like Lula does; big brother Rafa works the fields with Mamá and Papá while youngest siblings Gabi and Martín tag along. Papá drinks, has an unpredictable temper, and only shows love to the littlest ones. Lula dreams of being able to make Papá smile. When Mamá becomes gravely ill, she’s turned away from the emergency room due to lack of money. A local curandera thinks she’s been poisoned by pesticides used in the fields and treats her with herbs. At school, Lula befriends Leonor, a Filipina and Mexican American girl, and is inspired by her powerful voice and grit. Leonor’s family is involved with the Filipino strikers’ union, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee. The AWOC are recruiting the Mexican National Farm Worker’s Association, led by Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chávez, to join them in striking for better wages and conditions. This introspective novel with a well-developed sense of place features free verse in varied layouts that maintain visual interest. The character development is strong; as Papá is influenced by Chávez, who speaks of nonviolence, his behaviors change. Lula shows tenacity as her seeds of potential are nourished.

Compelling and atmospheric. (Author’s note, further reading) (Verse historical fiction. 9-13)

**SAVE THE...WHALE SHARKS**

Sanchez, Anita & Chelsea Clinton  
Philomel (96 pp.)  
$15.99 | Sept. 13, 2022  
978-0-593-40426-3  
Series: Save the...

An invitation to learn more about the largest living fish and to help in efforts to keep them from becoming extinct.

“They’re the biggest fish in the world, but they eat the smallest things in the sea.” In an appeal aimed largely at fledgling chapter-book readers, Sanchez begins with distinctive basic facts about whale sharks’ feeding habits (though “the size of a school bus,” they eat only plankton and “teeny minnows and sardines”), their need to travel far in search of food, and their ovoviviparous reproduction. She then explains how, between becoming disposable “bycatch” in commercial fishing and being harvested for their own meat, oil, and fins (for soup), their populations have dropped 50% over the past 75 years to the point that they have been designated as endangered. Another major threat, Sanchez notes, is
floating plastic...and perhaps the most affecting passage here is her account of the 2019 discovery of a young whale shark that starved to death after a plastic bag clogged its digestive tract. Following this buildup, the author offers 11 helpful activities and measures for eco-activists, including, in a sign that this is not addressed just to younger audiences, a strong suggestion to register and vote for candidates who support environmental protections. In the book’s introduction, Clinton stresses that even small actions can make a real difference when it comes to helping the environment. The speckled giants, mouths agape, pose in a sparse assortment of murky black-and-white photos.

Eloquent and informative. (bibliography) (Nonfiction. 7-10)

SHOHAM’S BANGLE
Sassoon, Sarah
Illus. by Noa Kelner
Kar-Ben (32 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-72843-902-0

The bangles that Shoham and their grandmother wear may be small, but they mean so very much.

Shoham and Nana Aziza have a special and loving relationship. They gaze at the stars together, cook and bake together, and pick figs from their tree in the garden. Shoham wears one bangle; Nana Aziza wears many. Nana Aziza teaches Shoham how to cut round cookies using a bangle or to move a bangle from one wrist to the other to help remember something important. Shoham is told that the family will be emigrating from Iraq to Israel, which Shoham’s father has been praying for (in an author’s note, Sassoon states that in 1951 her own grandmother, her grandfather, and their children—along with 120,000 other Iraqi Jews—were airlifted to Israel under Operation Ezra & Nehemiah). An overhead view of the very small suitcase that must hold the belongings of eight people signifies, simply and poignantly, what the family values as they move to their new lives. No jewelry is allowed, however, and Shoham is told that the bangles must be left behind. But Nana Aziza finds a way to put things right, and eventually Shoham settles into their new home while never forgetting their old one. Passengers on the plane are crowded into their seats; the thoughtfully drawn faces reflect a variety of emotions: fear, worry, happiness, hope, and love. Shoham and their family are brown-skinned and Jewish. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A moving and authentic story of love, family, and home. (Picture book 5-8)

OH, WHAT A SHOW!
Schaefer, Lola M.
Illus. by Savannah Allen
Simon Spotlight (64 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-66691-795-7
Series: Sprinkles and Swirls, 3

Two anthropomorphic cupcakes participate in a talent show.

In their third outing—following A Fun Day at Fun Park (2021) and A Cool Day at the Pool (2022)—Sprinkles and Swirls take the bus from their bakery to a talent show at the park. Swirls signs up right away, but Sprinkles insists they don’t have a talent. Swirls encourages Sprinkles to try a few things—the two of them even help build the stage—but Sprinkles repeats that they don’t have a talent. Swirls advises, “You have talent. Just follow your heart.” Sprinkles agrees to help Swirls practice dancing and then signs up to be their dance partner. The first spread is a helpful guide on reading a graphic novel, in which Sprinkles and Swirls explain speech and thought bubbles and how panels flow. There are only one or two panels per page, and the language is simple, with short sentences and no contractions. Cutesy and high-energy and featuring simple illustrations with bright colors and lots of stars and hearts in the background, this story of one friend encouraging another is more sugar than substance, though it’s just the thing for those new to the format. Sprinkles’ body is brown, with darker brown hair/frosting resembling Afro puffs; Swirls’ body is pinkish-tan, with brighter pink hair/frosting with a cherry on top.

Fun, easy fare to help graphic-novel readers build their skills en route to more exciting fare. (Graphic early reader 5-7)

THE SCIENCE OF BOYS
Seo, Emily
Illus. by Gracey Zhang
Tradewind Books (256 pp.)
$18.95 | Sept. 1, 2022
978-1-926890-40-1

Hoping to fit in, Emma writes a book about how to get a boy’s attention.

As a scientist’s daughter, 12-year-old Emma Sakamoto loves science and knows—and freely shares—a lot of facts. This quirk, plus her flat chest and ragged clothes, draws negative attention from mean girls at school. When Emma meets Cole, her friend George’s cousin who is a teen actor with a large social media following, the opportunity to change her image arises. Emma makes a deal with fashionable new girl Poppy: Emma will share her book on the science of boys to help Poppy get Cole’s attention, and Poppy will help Emma with her image. The only problem is that Emma isn’t actually writing a book, and she can’t stop lying about herself to try to fit in. George agrees to help, but figuring out the formula for attracting boys
won’t be easy. Incorporating real science principles, this funny, clever coming-of-age story examines friendship, acceptance, adolescent concerns, and societal messages. Emma also has family troubles: Her mother left them eight months ago, and her father seems depressed. Being lactose intolerant plays a considerable role in Emma’s daily life; many readers will find the dietary restriction relatable. Black-and-white drawings are scattered throughout the book, adding pleasing visual representation and humor. Contextual clues indicate that Canadian Emma has some Japanese heritage; the illustrations show racial diversity in the supporting cast.

A delightful mix of science and relationships. (Fiction. 11-14)

THE WOLF SUIT
Sharp, Sid
Annick Press (120 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-77321-720-8

A sheep learns that he is not alone in his fears.

Bellwether Riggweller dreams about flowers, but he lives, dances, and crafts alone, his dark cabin’s curtains closed and the door firmly shut. Although he puts on a brave face, Bellwether is terrified of the forest and its wolves. When he enters the forest to pick blackberries, his imagination runs wild, but later, in a series of ominous, nearly wordless pages, he actually faces off with a wolf before racing home safely. Still, Bellwether longs to pick berries, smell flowers, and listen to birds without becoming a wolf’s supper, so he uses his crafting skills to create a realistic wolf costume—he’ll be a sheep in wolf’s clothing. Although he does blend in with local wolves, his costume dulls the sounds of birdsong and blocks the scents of flowers, and the costume rips at the seams, is torn when he gets it caught on brambles, is raveled, and is greeted with a few surprises, including several new friends. Illustrations in dark, rich jewel-tone colors, often set against a black background, create a folkloric look fitting for this well-written, if perhaps overly optimistic, allegory about being yourself. The last image, rendered in a lighter, softer palette, offers a promising glimpse of the future.

Poignant affirmation that friendships can blossom when we are brave enough to reveal our true selves. (Graphic novel. 6-10)

BILLION DOLLAR GIRL
Shull, Megan
Razorbill/Penguin (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-52457-2

River’s bad day leads to a life-changing summer and brighter future.

Near the end of seventh grade, River has a terrible day. Her best friend, Emi, dumps her because of their socio-economic differences: Sunny, River’s single mom, is a bar waitress who often works nights, and River can’t afford to pay her way when she’s with Emi’s wealthy family. Then Principal Martinez, worried about River’s frequent absences, makes a home visit—but unreliable Sunny is a no-show. Fed up, River runs away. Although Sunny never discusses her family, she’s kept a letter sent from Great Bear Island, so River heads there. By unbelievable chance, when she arrives, she’s mistaken for Liv, a high school student who had accepted, then rejected, a job at the Great Bear Lodge run by Sunny’s sister, Jemma. To give herself time to assess her newfound family, River assumes Liv’s identity, saying she changed her mind about working there. No sooner has River come to love her relatives, their Norwegian and Tsimshian heritage, and the island, than Sunny shows up to drag her home. All seems lost until a lottery ticket given to River by a stranger wins! Descriptions of island life are captivating, and likable River narrates with spirit and honesty. Wishful thinkers will buy into her story despite the many times they must suspend disbelief, including the unconvincing change in Sunny after the windfall. Names cue some diversity in the cast.

Implausible but dreamy. (Fiction. 10-14)

ABOUT WATERFOWL
A Guide for Children
Sill, Cathryn
Illus. by John Sill
Peachtree (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-68263-234-5
Series: About…

The Sills add to their About… series with this look at birds that live near or on water.

The text introduces readers to waterfowl, including a look at where they live (ocean versus rivers, lakes, and ponds), some common features (webbed feet, waterproof feathers, bills), what and how they eat (plants, insects, fish, grains, etc.), their nests and babies, and the fact that some migrate. As with the other About… series entries, the strengths and weaknesses are the same. John Sill’s realistic watercolors, labeled with the animals’ common names, are a highlight. Cathryn Sill’s simple sentences make the topic approachable for even the youngest nature lover, though to get the most out of the book, children and/or their adult partners will have to flip back and forth between the book’s spreads and the afterword, which presents
a thumbnail version of each watercolor plate and a paragraph of text, including information on the birds’ habitats (no map, though). Opposite a picture of several Toulouse geese in front of a stone cottage, the text reads “Waterfowl have been useful to people for thousands of years.” The artwork does not show how, which will leave readers unsatisfied until they read in the back about eggs and meat, down, and eating harmful pests. Similarly, a page with text reading “It is important to protect waterfowl and the places where they live” lacks information on the same page to truly grab readers. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An introduction that could be so much better. *(glossary, bibliography, resources)* *(Nonfiction. 3-8)*

**THE PAPER MUSEUM**
*Simpson, Kate S.*
Union Square Kids (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-4549-4383-9

Hoping to find her missing parents, a young girl desperately searches for clues in the museum where they worked.

Twelve-year-old Lydia lives in a world where books and paper are obsolete, and everyone relies on personal devices called aer readers. The Paper Museum her family operates houses the few existing books, paper artifacts, and typewriters, but it rarely has any visitors. Since her parents vanished 3 months ago, Lydia’s been living at the museum with her Uncle Lem, searching for the book her mother was holding before she disappeared, which may provide some answers. When Lem goes away, leaving his strange brother, Renald, in charge, Lydia makes the mistake of filing a missing persons report on her parents, which means the museum could be confiscated within 30 days unless they return. Trusting neither Renald nor the interns, Lydia continues searching for clues and discovers a hidden chamber and well beneath the museum. When artifacts disappear, aer readers fail, and the mayor threatens to confiscate the museum, Lydia relies on old technology to unleash vital magic the museum has concealed. Lydia’s suspenseful first-person narration effectively conveys her distrust, confusion, and amazement as well as her determination to find answers while creating a rich subtext focusing on the old world of books and paper and raising timely questions about the technology replacing them. Characters default to White.

An absorbing, complex debut. *(Fantasy. 9-12)*

**DREAM, MY CHILD**
*Sin, r.h.*
Illus. by Janie Secker
Andrews McMeel Publishing (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5248-6786-7

Inside the mystical dream world of a sleeping infant.

Perfect for bedtime, this story is narrated by a gentle, loving parent lulling their little one to sleep. It’s 7:22 p.m., according to a nearby clock, and the parent holds the baby and a toy sloth on their lap, reading a story. Nearby, a globe sits on the floor. The simple, repetitive text encourages the baby to close their eyes: “Dream, my child / You’ll sleep tonight.” Though the text is rhythmic and soothing, the illustrations are the star of the show. Readers get a look into the baby’s whimsical fantasy; illustrated evocatively by Secker, who juxtaposes brightly hued characters against a dark gray background. The baby dreams of floating off into the sky with the sloth, who comes to life. They meet other little ones and travel all over the world, floating by the Eiffel Tower and the pyramids in a hot air balloon, observing sea life in a boat, ice-skating with a group of animals, and stopping by the Taj Mahal. At one point, the narrator says, “Good night stars / Good night, moon”—a sweet nod to Margaret Wise Brown’s classic. “When you awake // I’ll be right here,” assures the parent, the final page depicts both parents embracing the child. The baby and their parents are Black; other characters are racially diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A charming bedtime story sure to have little ones sleeping in no time—and dreaming up adventures of their own. *(Picture book. 0-3)*

**BLACK PANTHER Uprising**
*Smith, Ronald L.*
Marvel Press (272 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-368-07300-4
Series: Young Prince, 3

T’Challa is forced to ponder how a people can focus on progress without losing sight of their history.

In the third book of the series, 13-year-old Prince T’Challa and Chicago friends Zeke and Sheila are in Wakanda and faced with a new challenge and foe. Tafari, another Wakandan tween, seems to think that the nation’s citizens have lost touch with what’s really important—their connection to the past—and he is bent on reminding them of what came before. Tafari comes from the isolationist Jabari Tribe that shuns technology, and he thinks Wakanda’s best era as a society was the time before the discovery of Vibranium, a precious metal and source of power. In an effort to bring that period back, Tafari decides to strike at the Festival of the Ancestors: While giving praise to the Originators, Tafari uses creatures
T'Phen and forces unknown to T'Challa to send the king, queen, and other influential W'akandans to the Nether-Realsms, which exist in another dimension. T'Challa must work with his friends and sister Shuri to bring everyone home before they are stuck there forever. Interweaving themes of social justice and equity into the story, the novel gives readers much to contemplate. While journeying with T'Challa, readers will experience the angst, uncertainty, and anxiety that come with growing awareness and responsibilities. Series fans and new readers alike are sure to enjoy this installment.

An exciting adventure weaving present-day threats with knowledge of the past. (Fantasy. 8-13)

A LIFE OF SERVICE
The Story of Senator Tammy Duckworth
Sootornvat, Christina
Illus. by Dow Phumiruk
Candlewick (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-5362-2205-0

A look into the formative years of Sen. Tammy Duckworth. Duckworth is introduced as a young schoolgirl curiously examining a globe. An American citizen who was born in Bangkok, Thailand, she traveled “all over Southeast Asia with her family.” Tammy’s father worked for the United Nations, and she accompanied him as he helped refugees; while observing, young Tammy decided to dedicate herself to helping others. After bouts of homelessness and food insecurity while growing up, with Tammy supporting the family at one point by selling flowers by the roadside, she attended college and graduate school, then joined the Army National Guard. The evenly paced, thorough narrative reveals that after many years of service, Tammy nearly died in a helicopter crash in Iraq in 2004, leaving her with severe chronic pain and prosthetic legs. Phumiruk uses cooler muted colors to portray the physical and emotional obstacles Duckworth overcame during her long recovery and rehabilitation. Brighter and warmer colors are slowly incorporated onto each page as Duckworth, with the encouragement of a local senator, campaigned, lost one race, but eventually was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Duckworth continued to break down even more barriers after becoming a senator. With the birth of her second daughter, she was able to change chamber rules so that she could bring her infant daughter with her to vote. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A comprehensive look at an extraordinary life and continuing legacy. (timeline, information on Duckworth’s achievements, books and websites) (Picture book biography. 5-9)

FRIENDS
Sosa, Daniela
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-66591-147-4

Friendship has many faces.

What’s a friend? This sweet, gentle look at friendships describes how they’re formed, developed, maintained, and/or lost. What’s interesting about friendships is how different they are: There are almost as many ways to describe friendships as there are people to create them. Friendships may be fleeting, but they can also “last a lifetime.” They can endure when friends are near or far apart. You can make friends with a sibling or even, wordlessly, with a pet. Friendships can end through words hurled at another in anger. Friendships evoke and test emotions, and they teach. The story, narrated in simple, warm, easily comprehended prose, speaks to children where they are and may provoke further discussions about friendship. The notions of imaginary friends and finding new pals because of shared, mutual interests will especially resonate. Children may also be intrigued by the possibility of friendships that might have been but never were, as in the illustration depicting two children staring at each other, one in a subway car, the other standing outside on the station platform. The final message is most reassuring: A new friend may arrive when you least expect it; just wait and “look closer.” The charming, colorful illustrations depict children who are diverse in terms of race and ability. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A delightful springboard to stimulate creative ideas and spark conversations about interpersonal relationships. (Picture book 4-8)

THE LADY AND THE OCTOPUS
How Jeanne Villepreux-Power Invented Aquariums and Revolutionized Marine Biology
Staaf, Danna
Carolrhoda (136 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-72841-577-2

An account of the life of the pioneering Frenchwoman who invented the aquarium.

While she is not a household name today, Jeanne Villepreux-Power’s influence can still be felt. Born in 1794, Villepreux-Power was famed for her study of sea creatures, particularly a type of octopus called the argonaut. The book argues convincingly that sexism and a tragic shipwreck that sank 16 cases of her specimens, drawings, and notes made the brilliant scientist less well known than she should have been. Overcoming those obstacles, as well as the primitive state of life science study in the 1800s—in particular the limited ability to study sea creatures in their habitats—and aided by the privilege of being a White woman
“A loving testament to light and hope and the vision of a remarkable woman.”

THE TOWER OF LIFE

A Jewish Polish woman resurrects her hometown through photographs.

Yaffa Eliach (1935-2016) grew up in the shtetl town of Eishyshok, Poland. She and her family lived there contentedly until the Germans occupied the town in 1941 and murdered most of its Jewish population. Yaffa and her family escaped and hid until the war ended. Before, one of Yaffa’s favorite childhood activities was assisting her grandmother, the town photographer, who documented weddings, bar mitzvahs, and other celebrations; these photos were mailed to relatives around the world. Years later, Yaffa, now a married history professor and Holocaust scholar residing in America, was tasked by President Jimmy Carter with creating an exhibit for Washington, D.C.’s new United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Determined to celebrate life instead of destruction, Yaffa spent years tracking down thousands of photos of Eishyshok’s residents and descendants, traveling around America and the world. The result: the Tower of Life, depicted in a 90-degree book turn. One of the actual photos contained in the memorial—including herein—shows Yaffa herself as a child in Eishyshok in her father’s arms; another childhood photo of Yaffa is also included in the book. Though it tackles dark themes, this heartfelt story is ultimately uplifting. The illustrations, rendered in ink, watercolor, and digital collage, brim with warm, colorful details. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A loving testament to light and hope and the vision of a remarkable woman. (timeline, bibliography, author’s note) (Informational picture book. 6-9)

THE DESCRIPTIONS

A loving testament to light and hope and the vision of a remarkable woman.

of means, Villepreux-Power invented the first glass aquariums to observe sea life and discovered that argonauts build their shells rather than find them at sea, as was believed at the time. Marine biologist, science writer, and fellow cephalopod expert Staaf details Villepreux-Power’s life using a mix of existing research about the woman and more recent scientific findings. The book takes plenty of detours into history and culture to better explain thorny issues, such as the treatment of animals, full-page takes on the metric system, and the effects of oil on water. It feels like a few too many asides for a straightforward biography, but as a broader look at the life of a scientist in the 1800s, it’s well researched and expertly explained.

A seaworthy bio of a revolutionary scientist. (author’s note, timeline, glossary, source notes, bibliography, further reading, index) (Biography. 11-15)

Animal friends pull together in another collaboration from the Steads.

A disruption in routine prompts a worried group of animals to work together, just as the zoo animals rallied together when Amos McGee fell ill in the Steads’ first joint picture book, A Sick Day for Amos McGee (2010). As in that Caldecott-winning title, Philip Stead’s artful text employs repetition and just-right word choices to result in a pleasing aurality. A mule, a milk cow, and a miniature horse wonder why the farmer hasn’t arisen yet and then decide to venture forth to awaken her. Leaving the barn is daunting; as Milk Cow says, “We will have to find courage.” Erin Stead’s illustration style closely resembles that which she employed in Sick Day, though the palette here is attuned to the darkness of pre-dawn hours, ultimately giving way to the warmth of the sunrise. Before that happy ending, a whimsical reference to a “sleeping giant” is accompanied by a picture of enormous stocking feet, toes pointing to the sky; which offers a visual echo of Amos’ feet poking out of his bedclothes as he sleeps. And yet, this is a farm setting, not a zoo, and the light-skinned farmer is a woman, not a man. The plot is also slightly more complex, with dream references that may prompt discussion about what happens in the reality of the story world and what is all a dream. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Waste no time in adding this gem to the storytime shelf.

(Picture book. 2-7)
to make the best airplane that will fly straight and far. They set up an experiment and learn about drag, thrust, lift, and weight. Using leftover Fun Fair flyers (reuse is appreciated), the group creates a multitude of colorful, carefully crafted planes that fly their cheery messages directly to Victor. The plot is slight, merely a vehicle to introduce the technical aspects of flight. But for young readers curious about flight, it is a start. Readers may wish to follow the characters' examples and make their own airplanes, but there are no folding instructions other than a basic design on a small computer screen on one of the spreads. Rosa's illustrations are pedestrian but cheery. Gracie is light-skinned, Victor is brown-skinned, and their friends are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A primer on flight that doesn't quite take off. (Informational picture book. 4-7)

**THE DARK WAS DONE**

Stringer, Lauren

Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)

$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-1-5344-6292-2

After being snubbed by the public, the Dark leaves.

It’s hard enough being the Dark without having to constantly hide from the general populace. After all, everyone’s afraid of the Dark, even a little red-haired boy who loves the sounds the crickets make. Taking the hint, the Dark leaves the world, and initially everyone rejoices. But soon, the boy misses the Dark’s songs, the owls, the bats, and the stars—which, his parents explain, were “gifts of the Dark.” So the boy takes off to find the Dark. Along the way he collects others who also wish to bring back the velvety blue-black darkness and the canary yellow of daytime.

Bedtime fears? Meet your match in this tale of a cuddly, anthropomorphized darkness. (Picture book. 4-6)

**SHE SANG FOR INDIA**

How M.S. Subbulakshmi Used Her Voice for Change

Subramaniam, Suma

Illus. by Shreya Gupta

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)

$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022

978-0-374-38874-4

A lyrical commemoration of the power and legacy of a renowned South Indian activist and performer.

Readers who know little about M.S. Subbulakshmi’s Carnatic music or traditional Indian instruments will come away none the wiser, but the general storyline of a gifted singer who goes from “small-town devadasi girl” to international fame by performing and persisting until barriers of gender prejudice fall away is easy enough to follow and applaud. Aside from identifying Subbulakshmi as the first woman and youngest person ever to perform at the Madras Music Academy and ending with her 1966 performance before the United Nations, Subramaniam largely skips past seven decades of biographical and career highlights (never mentioning her film work, for instance, except in the backmatter). What stands out instead are tributes to her spirit and the spiritual power of her singing in support of India’s independence movement and through the heartbreaks of the new country’s religious division and Gandhi’s assassination. Capped by a beautiful portrait composed of flowers and musical instruments, Gupta’s harmonious illustrations follow Subbulakshmi from intimate childhood family concerts to larger stages. The closing notes and definitions are cursory at best, but along with an eloquent summation at the end, the author tucks in snatches of lyrics in Tamil, Hindi, and Sanskrit (as script, transliterations, and English translations) throughout. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A loving invitation to read, and hear, more. (timeline, bibliography) (Picture-book biography. 7-10)

**THE SUMMER OF JUNE**

Sumner, Jamie

Atheneum (208 pp.)

$17.99 | May 31, 2022

978-1-5344-8602-7

Eleven-year-old June Delancey is determined to be more lion than mouse. June and her mom, Corinne, live in tiny Franklin, Tennessee. June’s father has never been in the picture, and her mom, who effortlessly attracts male attention, has had some unfortunate boyfriends. The little family barely scrapes by on Corinne’s salary as a librarian for teens; talented Corinne never finished culinary school but sometimes sells her delicious creations for extra income. June, who takes medication and is in therapy, struggles with anxiety, and her compulsive hair-pulling has made her a target for bullies. The
summer before middle school, she impulsively shaves her head, hoping to silence the “whatifs” constantly swirling in her mind. It doesn’t work. However, she meets new friends: Homer Juarez, a friendly, poetry-quoting boy, wants June to teach him chess, and lonely widower Luis Silva, a keen gardener, sparks in June a love for flowers. June makes assumptions about Homer based on his soccer playing and private school attendance, while he—unaware of her outcast social status—perceives June differently than she’s used to. When a little garden on library property that Luis helps June create is threatened by the misanthropic head librarian, June must speak up despite her fears. The novel offers a compassionate portrayal of anxiety’s toll and a sweetly supportive mother-daughter relationship. Secondary characters are less well developed. June and her mom are assumed White; some of the supporting cast is cued Latine and Black.

An encouraging portrait of living with anxiety. (author’s note) (Fiction. 9-13)

SUPERMOUSE AND THE VOLCANO OF DOOM
Tahil, M.N.
Illus. by Mark Chambers
Tiger Tales (28 pp.)
$17.99 Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-68010-282-6

True to his calling, Supermouse is prepared to save the world, but he might need help with the Volcano of Doom.

Supermouse is swamped with day-to-day rescues in the city of Mouseopolis, so when a nearby volcano threatens to erupt, he holds auditions for the League of Remarkable Rodents. “But were these rodents all that remarkable?” It turns out that Inflato-Girl, Daring Digger, and Speed Eater have just the right combination of skills to help Supermouse save Mouseopolis when a “molten mass of melted cheese…ooze[es] toward the city.” Brightly colored illustrations packed with fun details are worth poring over, especially since some of the book’s flaps easily blend into the larger illustrations. These sturdy flaps, which will likely withstand multiple readings, often create multipage booklets, some with cutouts, some that creatively extend the page beyond the book’s edges—all are critical to the storytelling. Wordplay shines. There’s alliteration aplenty, from the names of the main characters—Peter Parmesan (Supermouse’s true identity) and villains Mischief McMouse and Sally the Sly—to descriptions like “treacherous tumbles” and “perilous pitfalls” as well as delightful tongue-twisting strings such as “He fought fearlessly to fend off the flow of the fiery fondue.” Both adults and children will giggle at the puns—workplace signs (“BRIE SAFE BRIE SEEN,” “DANGER HAZARDOUS TASTE”), a classified ad for “Rock band FLEETWOOD MAC ‘n’ CHEESE”—and spectator comments like “We’re all fondoomed!” There is also a smattering of onomatopoeia for storytime fun.

A creativity told story sure to tickle readers. (Picture book. 4-8)

SAVE THE...TIGERS
Taylor-Butler, Christine & Chelsea Clinton
Philomel (112 pp.)
$15.99 Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-40420-1
Series: Save the...

An introduction to these endangered big cats and current efforts to protect them from illegal traffickers and other hazards.

With an eye to the sorts of claims that will wow young readers—tigers can roar louder than a motorcycle, their urine smells like buttered popcorn, and they will eat termites if larger prey is elusive—Taylor-Butler opens with quick profiles of the predator’s six distinct living subspecies. She then segues to the human causes of their major population decline in the wild, including habitat loss fueled at least in part by the rising demand for palm oil and poaching, and highlights conservation efforts such as legislation and protective organizations. A close-up of a toothy mouth and an image of a circus tiger forced to jump through flaming hoops are impressively dramatic, but in general the black-and-white photos are too small and scant to make a strong impression. Still, along with basic background information, budding eco-warriors will find both the author’s suggestions for activities (which include cutting out foods that use palm oil and not patronizing roadside zoos along with the predictable fundraisers and letters to government officials) and the robust closing list of online reference sources helpful. An introduction from Clinton encourages readers that even small actions can make a difference.

A solid addition to the chorus of appeals to preserve a rare and magnificent creature. (Nonfiction. 7-10)

SAVE THE...ELEPHANTS
Thomson, Sarah L. & Chelsea Clinton
Philomel (112 pp.)
$15.99 Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-40423-2
Series: Save the...

Meet the largest living land animal and join efforts to keep it from going extinct.

“No one wants to live in a world without elephants,” Thomson justly writes, and if her tone is more casual than urgent—considering that African forest elephants, one of the three species, are already designated “critically endangered”—still she offers an array of engaging facts about their characteristics and behavior along with alarming ones about their declining populations. Though she acknowledges that elephants are killed for their ivory tusks and often mistreated in captivity, she gives more weight to positive observations about elephant social behavior in the wild and to supportive human interactions such as the work of researcher and conservationist Cynthia Moss or the way farmers (their location unspecified)
have found a clever way to coexist nonviolently with foraging elephants by stringing beehives on fences to deter the animals from eating crops. Following a section of “Fun Facts” (“Elephants can only sweat on their toes”), the author closes with suggestions for proactive readers, ranging from generic strategies for reducing global warming and raising money for conservation efforts through bake sales to refusing to buy jewelry made with “new ivory” or patronize circuses or shows that use elephants. Her list of sources is long, if all secondary material, but her list of audience-appropriate further reading comprises a paltry four titles. A few small black-and-white photos offer no more than rare, dark breaks for the simply phrased narrative. An introduction from Clinton opens the book by encouraging readers that even small actions can help the environment. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Not a front-runner in the herd, though worthy both of topic and cause. (Nonfiction. 7-10)

FINDING MY DANCE
Thundercloud, Ria
Illus. by Kalika J. Fuller
Penguin Workshop (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-09389-4

A renowned Indigenous dancer tells her story.

At 4 years old, author Thundercloud, of the Ho-Chunk Nation and Sandia Pueblo, received her first jingle dress—an intricate, hand-sewn garment worn by Indigenous dancers. When she performed for the first time at a powwow, her spirit soared. This feeling never left Thundercloud, and as she grew up, she began dancing in the Native “fancy shawl” tradition as well as in contemporary, jazz, tap, ballet, and modern styles. Despite her meteoric rise in numerous dance communities (which eventually led to her becoming an internationally renowned professional dancer), Thundercloud was a “shy” kid who “didn’t fit in.” She was perpetually “the only Indigenous girl in class,” no one pronounced her name—Wakaja haja pijiwiga, or “Beautiful Thunder Woman”—correctly, and the timid girl “never corrected them.” As Thundercloud reached adulthood, she found strength through her ancestral dance and the birth of her daughter. Empowered by her heritage, Thundercloud now corrects those who mispronounce her daughter Yelihwahawíhta’s name (“She Brings Good Energy”), lifting up “a language that still exists, and a culture that we still honor, despite many attempts to wipe it out forever.” Accompanied by Fuller’s evocative illustrations that fill pages with bright colors and dynamic figures, Thundercloud’s rousing story of an uncertain child who grows to take pride in her identity will resonate with readers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A moving picture book about the resilience one can find in one's cultural inheritance. (Picture-book autobiography. 5-10)

AIRI SANO, PRANKMASTER GENERAL
New School Skirmish
Tokushige, Zoe
Illus. by Jennifer Naalchigar
Philomel (304 pp.)
$14.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-593-46578-3
Series: Airi Sano, Prankmaster General, 1

Airi uses every trick she knows to test her new teacher’s limits.

Airi Sano often gets in trouble with adults because she likes to pull pranks, but she just wants to make people laugh. As part of an Army family, Japanese American Airi’s moved around a lot, and she’s always felt misunderstood and left out. Now that they’re settling in Hawaii, where her dad is from (her mom is from Japan), she’s excited at the prospect of making real friends but less thrilled about starting sixth grade. Airi tries to get her teacher to see that she’s a lost cause, but Mrs. Ashton never gets angry with her. A prank war ensues—documented through Airi’s Official Personal Personnel File as well as incident reports, situation reports, maps, and footnotes—and Airi enlist the help of her new friends to get Mrs. Ashton to snap. Airi’s feisty attitude and love for joking around lightens this clever story that is full of laughs, family, and friendship. Her difficulties in school and diagnosis of dyslexia touch on struggles and feelings many readers experience. Numerous sweet black-and-white illustrations add to the fun, showing lively scenes, food, and more. The supporting cast represents the diversity of Honolulu.

A hilarious, charming story full of humor and mischief. (Fiction. 8-12)

THE DECOMPOSITION OF JACK
Tubb, Kristin O’Donnell
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(208 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-321226-8

A parent-child duo collect and research roadkill.

Tennessee middle schooler Jack Acosta can handle maggots, blood, and intestines. But the “stench of decay” involved in transporting carcasses (his scientist mother studies decomposition) is a big nope. Between being called “Roadkill Kid,” his mom and dad’s divorce, and extra-curricular “roadkill undertaking,” Jack has a lot going on. In spite of the “work, work, work,” Jack finds time to hang out with his best friend, André, and fret over his budding friendship with his crush, Zoe. A live cougar’s surprise appearance in the backyard “Roadkill Garden” inspires Jack to research the species—one that has been declared extinct in the state—for a school report. His mom sees the cougar as a “data nightmare,” but to Jack, it’s a call to action. Tubb, known for humorous dog books,
delves from the oeuvre to deliver a moving narrative with a distinct point of view. Jack’s references to the stages of the decomposition process as he grapples with his parents’ divorce offer unique parallels to grieving. Laugh-out-loud moments balance the heavy with the humorous. The strong conservationist message and assignment-based structure, however, make the story a bit bloated. Race and ethnicity aren’t explicitly stated; some cues suggest possible diversity (e.g., Zoe’s mom wears a headscarf).

Niche but surprisingly fascinating. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

A ROVER’S STORY
Warga, Jasmine
Illus. by Matt Rockefeller
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-06-311392-3

A Mars rover discovers that it has a heart to go with its two brains.

Warga follows her cybernetic narrator from first awareness to final resting place—and stony indeed will be any readers who remain unmoved by the journey. Though unable to ask questions of the hazmats (named for their suits) assembling it in a NASA lab, the rover, dubbed Resilience by an Ohio sixth grader, gets its first inklings of human feelings from two workers who talk to it, play it music, and write its pleasingly bug-free code. Other machines (even chatty cellphones) reject the notion that there’s any real value to emotions. But the longer those conversations go, the more human many start sounding, and in various settings and helps communicate to young readers the experiences that distinguish Abrams’ life as well as the social situations and power dynamics that inform her priorities. Mikai’s art faithfully represents Abrams at different ages and in various settings and helps communicate to young readers the experiences that distinguish Abrams’ life as well as the social situations and power dynamics that inform her priorities. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An important, uplifting biography with historical and contemporary significance. (timeline, bibliography, sources) (Picture-book biography. 6-9)

STACEY ABRAMS
Lift Every Voice
Warren, Sarah
Illus. by Monica Mikai
Lee & Low Books (40 pp.)
$20.95 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-64379-497-6

This biography of Black Georgian politician Stacey Abrams emphasizes her commitment to public service.

Abrams’ work to ensure that the people have a voice in who their leaders are started many years ago. As a child, she heard her parents’ stories of fighting for Black people’s right to vote during the civil rights movement. From an early age, she learned to ask, “How can I help?”—something readers see her asking herself throughout the book. As a high school valedictorian invited to the governor’s mansion, she was initially turned away by a White guard at the front gate, but her parents pushed for her to be let in. Readers also see her attending Spelman College, participating in student demonstrations after the verdict exonerating the policemen who beat Rodney King, and speaking to the media and the mayor of Atlanta about the protests and the needs of young Black people. Generous text details Abrams’ achievements, including her work as a lawyer, her election to the Georgia House of Representatives, her unsuccessful campaign for governor in an unfair election (a lack of polling places and functioning voting machines resulted in long waits for Black voters), and her extensive efforts getting voters registered and challenging unjust election laws. This is a comprehensive, inspiring biography of a leader whose moral compass guides her work. Mikai’s art faithfully represents Abrams at different ages and in various settings and helps communicate to young readers the experiences that distinguish Abrams’ life as well as the social situations and power dynamics that inform her priorities. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A loving tribute in free verse to a writer who found her home, and herself, in her words.

“Once you start speaking again, / ain’t nobody gonna be able to shut you up.” Filling out a biographical framework that begins in 1928 with the birth of Marguerite Annie Johnson into a loving family and ends in 1993 with her reading at President Bill Clinton’s first inauguration, Watson chronicles poet Maya Angelou’s travels from St. Louis to California, Ghana to Harlem and links with friends like...
“Jimmy” Baldwin, as well as the way she gathered “word-seeds” even through the years of silence after “her mother’s boyfriend / hurt her body, hurt her soul.” In his painted collages, Collier alludes to that silence with a broad, striped ribbon across closed lips in the course of portraying his subject with the same look of dignified reserve throughout her growth from infancy to adulthood. Using a slowly brightening palette, he surrounds her throughout with similarly brown faces until closing with a final bright, smiling solo close-up: “No holding her head down, no hiding. No more silence. / She didn’t have the pitch-perfect voice others had, / but she had her songs, her stories.” In their notes, Watson and Collier both speak to the inspirational power of Angelou’s persistence and courage. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A soaring portrait of a “Black girl whose voice / chased away darkness, ushered in light.” (timeline) (Picture-book biography. 7-10)

WAYS TO SHARE JOY
Watson, Renée
Illus. by Andrew Grey
Bloomsbury (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
Series: Ryan Hart, 3

More adventures in the life of Ryan Hart.

Ryan is in the middle, “stuck” between her baby sister, Rose, who needs her help, and her older brother, Ray, who has more freedom and enjoys telling her what to do. Sometimes being in the middle gets hard, like when she’s not so sure about the family’s plan to surprise Grandma, who says she just wants to rest, with a birthday party or when she grapples with the difficulties of having two best friends. But with the help of her loving family and time spent on her favorite things, like baking, Ryan manages her child-sized troubles, including being teased about her name and for wearing clearance-sale shoes to school, trading pranks with her brother, and maintaining friendships with care. Inspired by her wise Grandma, she learns life lessons along the way, such as the difference between a “true friend” and a “best friend” and how a person can be full of joy even when they aren’t happy (“Joy is something deep, deep down”). Ryan’s African American family has fallen on somewhat hard times, but they find ways to share what they have. Watson immerses readers in the world of a girl on the cusp of middle school. Her book features a lovely cast of characters, delightfully relatable dilemmas and solutions, and a character with an authentic voice.

A tale of family and friendship that exudes pure joy. (Realistic fiction. 7-12)

ALL THAT GLITTERS
Wells, Tina
Illus. by Mike Segawa
West Margin Press (152 pp.)
$12.99 | July 12, 2022
978-1-5132-0959-3
Series: The Zee Files, 2

Mackenzie “Zee” Blue Carmichael is back.

In this second installment of the Zee Files, a spinoff of the Mackenzie Blue series, Zee is preparing a song for her school’s art festival. Year nine has proven to be difficult as she adjusts to her new life in the U.K. and being the new student at a posh British boarding school. Zee’s classmates proffer coping tips: meditation, yoga, affirmations. Then Zee begins to see a therapist who encourages journaling. Unsurprisingly, her festival performance is successful. Zee is definitely a girl of the 21st century: She knows about social distancing, riding in Ubers, influencers, and self-care. Though characters appear to be in their early teens, they behave much older, with Archie—Zee’s crush—jetting off with his parents to Sweden and Zee zooming off to Paris for a day trip. Enmeshed in their upper-class milieu, characters seem removed from reality, and the story feels thin. Zee becomes Archie’s girlfriend at the end, although they barely talk throughout the narrative. Written in third person, the book focuses on Zee’s point of view, but, confusingly, the second half switches to some of her classmates’ perspectives for short periods. Zee is described as having “curly hair, freckles, and wide eyes,” and the cover depicts her as light-skinned. Illustrations depict her fellow classmates as racially diverse.

All that glitters isn’t gold. (Realistic fiction. 11-13)

VÁMONOS
Mexican Folk Art
Transport in English and Spanish
Weill, Cynthia
Illus. by Martin Melchor, Agustin Tinoco, Avelino Perez & Maximino Santiago
Photos by Otto Piron
Cinco Puntos Press (32 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-94762-760-4
Series: First Concepts in Mexican Folk Art

A trip to the library via various forms of transportation. This is one extraordinary picture-book journey to the library: by boat, by plane, even on a skateboard. Clear, simple side-by-side sentences in English and Spanish make for a digestible text for young readers of either language and even adults with a basic handle on each. What really makes this book worth picking up, however, are Piron’s photographs of wooden sculptures carved by Oaxacan craftsmen Melchor, Cruz, Perez, and...
Santiago. Many spreads appear to show the same sculpture shot from two different angles, allowing the craftsmanship to be fully appreciated. Beyond the incredibly intricate carvings, the detailed paint work shows everything from titles on book spines to individual spots on dogs to the fine-line, rich floral patterns of these folk-art pieces. Readers are exposed to many different types of transportation aside from the more obvious car and bus, like the horse cart and the pedicab. The artisans depict the library as a destination for community and story, one worth traveling to by almost every mode of transportation.

Gorgeous, unique art makes this an illustrative standout. (Picture book 0-4)

BUSY BETTY
Witherspoon, Reese
Illus. by Xindi Yan
Flamingo Books (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-46588-2

Actor and author Witherspoon makes her picture-book debut. Betty, a light-skinned, bespectacled child with blond pigtails, was born busy. Constantly in motion, Betty builds big block towers, cartwheels around the house (underfoot, of course), and plays with the family’s “fantabulous” dog. Frank, who is stinky and dirty. That leads to a big, busy, bright idea that, predictably, caroms toward calamity yet drags along enough hilarity to be entertaining. With a little help from best friend Mae (light-skinned with dark hair), the catastrophe turns into a lucrative dog-washing business. Busy Betty is once again ready to rush off to the next big thing. Wyatt isn’t alone in centering one of the illustrations effectively convey a sense of perpetual motion and heighten the story’s tension, drawing readers in. An especially effective, glitter-strewn spread portrays Frank looming large and seemingly running off the page while Betty looks on, stricken at the ensuing mess. Though it’s a familiar and easily resolved story, Witherspoon’s rollicking text never holds back, replete with amusing phrases such as “sweet cinnamon biscuits,” “bouncing biscuits,” and “busted biscuits.” As Betty says, “Being busy is a great way to be.” Young readers are sure to agree. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An entertaining, if light, addition to the growing shelf of celebrity-authored picture books. (Picture book 0-7)

TISH
Wyatt, Edwina
Illus. by Odette Barberousse
Berbay Publishing (200 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-922610-52-2

An imaginary friend passes from one child to another as each one outgrows him. Tish starts life as a spark: an idea dreamed up by Charles Dimple as he writes a list labeled “The Perfect Friend.” When Tish, a brown-furred elephantlike creature with wings and a long tail, accompanies Charles to school, he sees other kids with Perfect friends. But after a while, the other Perfects start disappearing, and one day Charles Dimple cannot see Tish. Tish leaves and is dreamed up again by Annabeth Arch, who gives him a makeover: purple polka dots, pockets, and a new name. But when Annabeth makes up with her best friend, Tish needs to find a new Someone—again. Fortunately, 3-year-old Isabella Applebee—Izzy for short—is right next door, longing for a Perfect friend. Inevitably, Izzy grows older, too, but Tish finds a novel solution, ensuring he won’t be alone or the last of his kind. Imaginary friends are a staple of childhood, and Wyatt isn’t alone in centering one in a story—as Lee Bacon does in Imaginary (2021), illustrated by Katy Wu—but she does so with charm and a quaint style; the occasional use of capital letters is reminiscent of A.A. Milne, and the illustrations are black and white with effective use of spot color. Though Tish’s plight is explored with tenderness, the overall tone is lighthearted. Characters present as White.

A poignant, enchanting tale of an imaginary friend who develops an imagination of his own. (Fiction. 9-12)

THE MARVELOUS LAND OF SNERGS
Wyke-Smith, E.A.
Retold by Veronica Cossanteli
Illus. by Melissa Castrillón
Europa Editions (307 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-60945-808-9

A reworked version of a classic 1927 British fairy story by E.A. Wyke-Smith that strongly influenced J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit.

Cossanteli takes two wayward orphans from the rule-bound confines of the Sunny Bay Home for Superfluous and Accidentally Parentless Children (presided over by Miss Watkyns, a spin-spot mistress distinctly akin to Mary Poppins) into a magic land of goblin-infested swamps and tunnels, armored knights, giant crocopotami, and like terrifying threats. There are also witches good and evil and, most prominently, Snergs, who are a race of short, merry, food- and story-loving folk with names like Wilmus and Pompo. Punctuated by the occasional feast (and sharp comments about the shortcomings of bad parents), the
round of exciting chases, captures, and narrow escapes culminate in multiple transformations, from a physical one for fiendishly clever and scary witch Malicia and inner ones for electively mute orphan Flora and her unschooled friend Pip to their Snerg guardian Gorbo’s makeover from bumbling scatterbrain to hero, loyal and true. Castrillón supplies elegantly antique montages and spot art, with occasional views of the light-skinned central characters. This story, with clever wordplay and echoes of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and *Peter Pan*, will delight.

A breezy refresh for a little-known story with all sorts of intriguing associations. (Light fantasy 7-11)

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**CITY UNDER THE CITY**

Yaccarino, Dan

minedition (72 pp.)

$17.99 | Nov. 15, 2022

978-1-66265-089-5

A child living in a surveillance state uncovers another way of life.

Bix and her family live under the constant supervision of the Eyes, floating yellow orbs with robotic arms and complete control over the daily lives of the inhabitants of this futuristic, unnamed abstract city. Through short, straightforward prose and comic panels depicting a space age–esque setting, readers learn that Bix dislikes the Eyes’ assistance and surveillance, occasionally feels lonely, and hates her Eye-assigned reading. One day, she follows a rat underground and discovers the ruins of a very different city—one that appears much like one in which readers may live, albeit abandoned. There, she finds a library, a museum, and a grocery store—and evidence of a life before the Eyes, even the idea that once not everyone liked the Eyes. After a few days, she misses her family and returns to the city above with her new rat companion and a mountain of books. Everyone but the Eyes rejoices, and Bix begins a reading revolution that ends with the destruction of the Eyes. In this half-baked *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—meets–*City of Ember* for kids, Yaccarino’s choppy writing leaves much to be desired. Though the text is simple, the concepts seem to be aimed at an older age range; the result is hardly the life-changing reading Bix finds underground. Bix and most of the city’s inhabitants are purple-skinned; other characters have skin the white of the page. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Uninspiring. (Picture book 6-8)

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**KID CONFIDENT #1 How to Master SOCIAL POWER in Middle School**

Zucker, Bonnie

Illus. by DeAndra Hodge

Magination/American Psychological Association (224 pp.)

$16.99 | Aug. 1, 2022

978-1-4338-3814-9

Series: Kid Confident, 1

Advice for tweens and teens on building healthy relationships and avoiding toxic ones. Zucker uses brief stories involving middle school students to illustrate social power, or the dynamic between peers. When this becomes unbalanced, the resulting shift in power can be mild or extreme, resulting in stress, belittling, and even bullying. However, when it’s balanced there’s mutual respect and generosity. With this foundation in place, the author moves on to offer examples of balanced and unbalanced interactions told in dialogue bubbles and from there, advice and examples. Individual chapters tackle concepts like assertiveness, self-confidence, self-control, the unique problems presented by social media, and strategies for repairing unhealthy interactions. These often include concise checklists. In the penultimate chapter, readers are reminded to nurture positive thinking, which takes practice, and are given concrete strategies. Finally, the book wraps up with information about cultivating resilience. Zucker’s advice lands best when accompanied by dramatizations or by the stories of individual teens who have succeeded by following her guidelines. The lively design, including helpful illustrations, makes for accessible reading, with ideas unpacked into digestible pieces. Some concepts may be too abstract for younger readers, who may require help from adults to understand and implement them. The extensive list of resources that concludes the book has recommended reading lists for both caregivers and young people.

A breezy guide for fostering a happy adolescence by maneuvering its challenges and pitfalls. (Nonfiction. 11-14)
Though intending to grow closer in their devotions, Adam Chen’s and Zayneb Malik’s insecurities and the fractures in their relationship are amplified in this follow-up to *Love From A to Z* (2019).

Islamically married but living apart—Adam’s in Doha and Zayneb’s in Chicago—the couple meet for short international getaways while Zayneb finishes law school. They’re both hiding internal stressors: Adam’s art gigs and income have dried up, and Zayneb faces unstable housing, and old scandals linked to the undergraduate Muslim Student Association’s leadership threaten her future in international human rights.

Eagerly awaiting a romantic reprieve in an English cottage, Zayneb is disappointed when Adam, who’s in a period of remission from multiple sclerosis, suggests they instead make Umrah, a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Zayneb is sorely tested when Adam’s old crush is a leader of their Umrah group who seemingly tries to keep the couple apart. The novel’s dual narrative structure references a curated selection of artifacts as it considers faith and emotion in ways that are unapologetically Muslim and entirely human. Adam and Zayneb draw from prophetic examples and Quranic stories to strengthen their faith and interrogate injustices—both Western democracies’ double standards and intragroup oppression. The examinations of their inner selves, vulnerabilities, feelings of self-worth, and growing codependence are religiously framed and skillfully navigated. Rich descriptive details immerse readers in the landscape of Islamic history.

A contemplative exploration of faith, love, and the human condition. (author’s note) (Fiction. 14-18)

Aleksander, the boy who will grow up to be the Darkling, and his mother are Grisha—humans who practice magic, or “small science.” They’re on the run from witch-hunting drüskelle, but they must also be wary of fellow Grisha, who don’t always react well to the duo’s shadow-summoning powers. The storyline is tightly focused on a short period of time in Aleksander’s life. When his mother finds a Grisha camp with a strong leader, they see the chance to stay from Imperial magebreakers and struggles with survivor’s guilt. Arian, his twin sister, is a master thief, braving the city’s heights as she steals from the Empire and helps the Leitho- rebels struggle to free their occupied city from the Aelrian Empire. Four years ago, Leithon fell to Ael- rian rule through betrayal. Now Liam, once a gifted student in the Arcanum, the center of all magic, hides his power from Imperial magebreakers and struggles with survivor’s guilt. Arian, his twin sister, is a master thief, braving the city’s heights as she steals from the Empire and helps the Leitho-
“A triumphant tale about finding home.”

WE ARE ALL WE HAVE

Budhos, Marina

Wendy Lamb/Random (256 pp.)

$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Oct. 25, 2022

978-0-593-12020-0

978-0-593-12021-7 PLB

An undocumented Pakistani teen has to grow up very quickly after her mother is suddenly detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

High school senior Rania’s life changes forever when she abruptly wakes up to the news that ICE agents have arrived to arrest her mother. It’s 2019, and she, her mother, and her brother, Kamal, are living in Brooklyn as they wait to see if they will be granted asylum due to the fact that Rania’s father—a journalist in Pakistan—has gone missing. Ammi brought them to America on her own, and they’ve lived as if they might have to take off at any time. Still, gifted writer Rania has done well in school. After Kamal and Rania are taken to a shelter for unaccompanied minors, she’s horrified by the conditions around them and decides that escaping to Connecticut and getting a long-estranged uncle to care for them is their only hope. With the vital assistance of Carlos, a fellow teen and shelter resident, the siblings sneak away for the road trip of a lifetime. Budhos vividly portrays the fear and confusion many undocumented families experienced after the implementation of Trump-era asylum and immigration policies while also unflinchingly detailing the tensions and secrets within Rania’s family. As Rania learns more about her mother’s mysterious past, she realizes that solidarity and community are both essential tools for freedom as vulnerable people seek the right to a safe haven.

A triumphant tale about finding home. (author’s note, ghazal lyrics) (Fiction. 12-18)

HOW TO SUCCEED IN WITCHCRAFT

Brophy, Aislinn

Putnam (416 pp.)

$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-0-593-35452-0

Determined to win a scholarship, a teenage witch auditions for the school musical.

At T.K. Anderson Magical Magnet School, one junior is awarded the annual Brockton Scholarship, granting them a full ride to the university of their choice. Talented biracial (Black and assumed White) Shayna Johnson, who has an impressive resume, is one of this year’s contenders, but she’ll have to beat fellow overachiever and sworn enemy, Cuban American Ana Álvarez. When drama teacher and scholarship committee head Mr. B (short for Brockton, of the wealthy family whose foundation funds the scholarship) encourages her to audition for Bronstown Brooms—a Jane Austen–inspired musical with a predominantly Latine cast—Shay is confident the scholarship will be hers. Unfortunately, being in the play means spending time with Ana, who is cast as the other female lead. But through rehearsals, Shay starts to see Ana in a new light: Not only is Ana an amazing dancer, she’s also attractive—an unexpected realization that may lead Shay to stray from her goals. The lightly magical world with two queer leads that debut author Brophy creates closely mirrors ours, from social issues regarding race and gender to the dilemmas teenagers face in planning their futures. Shay is so focused on pleasing Mr. B that she nearly fails to recognize his unwanted advances as wrong; this subject is explored in the narrative. Many readers will also appreciate the humor woven throughout.

#MeToo with a magical twist. (Fantasy. 12-18)

SHOT CLOCK

Butler, Caron & Justin A. Reynolds

Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (304 pp.)

$16.99 | Sept. 6, 2022

978-0-06-306959-6

After a promising young talent is shot dead on a neighborhood basketball court, the game takes on new meaning for a community in mourning.

Middle schooler Tony “Tone” Washington lost a close friend when a police officer opened fire on honor student Dante Jones, cutting the nationally ranked basketball player’s life short. The working-class Milwaukee neighborhood Tone and his family live in is no stranger to injustice, so in the aftermath, a rally, protest, and candlelight vigil are organized in tragically routine fashion. All the while, Tone’s focus is on making an elite local AAU basketball team, partially in commemoration of his late friend but also because—despite recognizing some of the disconcerting aspects of so much of your future being determined as a young teen—the sport takes up a significant space in the lives and dreams of the boys in his neighborhood. But the overlap of hoop dreams and police brutality ultimately makes for some uncomfortable and uneven narrative beats. As Tone narrates his interactions with Dante’s younger brother, Terry, the latter boy is obviously and justifiably angry and hurt because of his very personal loss, making Tone’s dogged focus on basketball strike a hollow note. Despite some compelling reflections on community and emotional health, sports clichés abound on the way to the national championship, and the impact of Dante’s death only three months earlier is not fully explored. Most characters are assumed Black.

A provocative shot but far from a slam-dunk. (Fiction. 12-16)
AFTERLOVE
Byrne, Tanya
Henry Holt (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-250-86561-8

Not even death can stop the love between two 16-year-old girls in Brighton, England, when one becomes a grim reaper.

Ashana Persaud, an Indo-Guyanese British girl, attends Whitehawk, a state school with a bad reputation. White redhead Poppy Morgan goes to posh Roedean. They meet when both are on school trips and hit it off right away, falling in love and planning their future. But when Ash dies on New Year’s Eve, she transforms into a grim reaper, working alongside two other teenage grim reapers to lead newly departed souls to Charon and his boat. They must avoid anyone they knew when they were alive, and they can only be seen in their previous, living forms by people who are about to die. Ash desperately wants to see Poppy again, but when she finally does, Poppy recognizes her. Ash’s new goal becomes to save Poppy from her impending fate even as the pair relish this second chance. The novel is split into two main sections, “Before” and “After.” Both are compelling, although they feel disjointed as readers meet several new characters in the latter half while Ash’s friends and family from the first part are sidelined. Still, it’s the romance that drives the story, and Ash and Poppy are so full of heart. Their feelings for each other are big and overwhelming, and this is an endearing and realistic representation of first love.

A heartfelt and emotional queer romance with a fresh paranormal twist. (Paranormal romance. 14-18)

TASTING LIGHT
Ten Science Fiction Stories To Rewire Your Perceptions
Ed. by Capetta, A.R. & Wade Roush
MITeen Press/Candlewick (272 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-5362-1938-8

A diverse anthology showing hopeful futures imagined through the lens of technology.

Capetta and Roush introduce engaging, thoughtful, beautifully written entries about identity and agency, all unfolding within the bounds of real science. The 10 fully realized stories, many by popular young adult authors, cover a range of topics and include Junauda Petrus-Nash’s satirical look at White privilege, William Alexander’s romantic interlude in a decrepit space station, and E.C. Myers’ fun take on true crime and the two teens who may or may not have crossed into another dimension. Capetta’s fantastic epistolary tale unfolds across time and space, and there’s even a melancholy graphic short story from Wendy Xu about robots and memory. Friendship, family, and human connection play a role in Elizabeth Bear’s thought-provoking take on avatars. K. Ancrum’s moving story about the relationship between a young teen and an older woman hacker, and Nasuŋraq Rainey Hopson’s skillful weaving of elders into a work of Inuit futurism. The anthology celebrates queerness, a variety of gender identities, and the freedom to be oneself, delving into how technology can influence and transform reality as well as be used for the greater good—or to oppress. The modification industry helps a nonbinary teen find their voice in Charlotte Nicole Davis’s poignant opening act, but the same industry is used to subjugate women into losing their voices in A.S. King’s ultimately empowering closing story.

A top-notch hard science fiction collection. (Science fiction. 14-adult)

UNION
Cassidy, Sara
Orca (96 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-4598-3447-7

Ninth grader Tuck grapples with trauma from his past while crushing on Grace and trying to enroll co-workers in a union.

Tuck takes a job in a fast-food joint to get out of his house, where he feels shame and self-loathing. As he begins dating longtime classmate Grace, readers access glimpses into Tuck’s memories of sexual abuse from his mother’s old boyfriend. He feels unworthy of Grace’s love at first, putting off telling her his history. His background also seems to give him a sense of imposter syndrome, resulting in self-harm. When a woman named Trix approaches him at the drive-thru window and talks to him about unionizing, Tuck feels empowered and decides to recruit co-workers to fight for their rights. This brief verse novel packs a punch: The poems are concise yet robust and convey a change in tone from sobering and intense to hopeful. Trix is a mother figure of sorts, picking up on Tuck’s anxiety and helping him find counseling. Tuck’s subsequent evolution—both in his relationship with Grace and as a harbinger for advancement in work conditions—makes him a sympathetic, courageous character worthy of kudos. Other characters are primarily in the background, as the character-driven story centers Tuck. Cast members are minimally described and largely default to White.

Moving and accessible. (content warning) (Fiction. 13-17)
When startling visions begin appearing—first in her dreams and then in her waking hours—Blake turns to the aunt and uncle who raised her after her parents’ deaths for answers. She learns the truth about a family curse and a lost magic heirloom: her telekinetic maternal grandmother, Zora, introduced in Dhonielle Clayton’s Shattered Midnight (2022), or her healer abuela, the biracial (Black and White), and her father was Mexican.

In 1965 San Francisco, high school senior Blake Estancia is plagued by cryptic visions. Magic runs in Blake’s family, but it has barely manifested in her. Unlike her telekinetic maternal grandmother, Zora, introduced in Dhonielle Clayton’s Shattered Midnight (2022), or her healer abuela, the teen’s power is relatively unimpressive: She receives abstract impressions when touching an object. Resigned to this, Blake focuses on becoming a professional artist, but it’s not easy for a young woman to break into the male-dominated art world.

Getting back at bullies gets a little out of hand. Before he moves away, Mason has plans for making one more great movie, starring his best friend, Maya. But when Denise and Cole, two of the biggest bullies in the whole middle school, start interfering with the shoot and making fun of them, Mason decides to take matters into his own hands. With some clever editing, he transforms his footage of the bullies into a funny—and also humiliating—video clip that quickly makes the pages turning as Mason sticks it to the bullies. Things take a turn when he confronts the realization that the bullies may not be as one-dimensional as they seem. Maya is Vietnamese Canadian; other characters are not explicitly described, though Mason is depicted as Asian in the cover art.

A meandering story lacking momentum. (Historical fantasy. 13-18)

In this sequel to Lakesedge (2021), red-haired Violeta Graceling has bargained away her life Above to save her beloved Rowan Sylvanan. Now living in the Below with the enigmatic Lord Under, she finds this world just as fraught as the one she left. Still tethered by magic (and passion) to Rowan, Leta soon finds herself having unexpectedly complicated feelings for the Lord Under. She soon meets his sister sisters, who wish to take the Lord Under’s power and cast Leta out of the Below. When both the Above and the Below find themselves caught in the balance, Leta is pressured to make a terrible choice: Could she destroy the Lord Under to be with Rowan? Clipstone’s gothic slow-burn has all the right romantic dark fantasy elements—shadowy magic and a tortuous love triangle—set against sensuous repetition (lots of sighs, shivers, rasps, and lip-biting), making for prose that reads like a hypnotic incantation and love scenes that are positively incendiary. While love-triangle tropes are well-trodden ground, Leta resolves things cleverly, exploring different boundaries; those seeking a fresh take on romance will find much to enjoy here. Main characters present White.

An inventive and unconventional duology closer certain to spark discussion. (Dark fantasy. 14-adult)

Two sisters take a murder investigation into their own hands in this story set in small-town Indiana.

Roxie crafts wildly creative ghost-story tours for the public about Whistler’s...
THE WIND RISES

de Fombelle, Timothée
Illus. by François Place
Europa Editions (410 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-1-69045-787-7
Series: Alma, 1

Pirates and enslavers traverse the 18th-century seas in this novel spanning the disparate corners of the triangular trade.

In a West African valley, 13-year-old Alma; her brothers, Lam and Soum; and their parents, Nao and Mosi, live in isolation for reasons unknown to the children. The appearance of a creature the young people take for a solid-white zebra draws their attention to the outside world, threatening the family’s serenity. The kidnapping, enslavement, and commerce of African peoples is intimately familiar to Nao, who escaped capture with the help of Mosi, a former slave trader himself. Thirteen-year-old Joseph Mars, an orphan secretly seeking a mysterious fortune, learns of the slave trade’s terror and brutality aboard The Sweet Amélie, a vessel with a callous, greedy captain that he sneaked onto in Lisbon. Lam’s pursuit of the white horse, Alma’s pursuit of her brother, and Mosi’s attempts to save his family from enslavers are interwoven with Joseph’s clandestine search for gold and the account of a 14-year-old French heiress who has inherited tremendous debts alongside ownership of The Sweet Amélie. While forming compelling threads of an adventure, the plot relies on horrors and trauma that contrast the witty, humorous, and immersive writing with the very different stakes for the European and African characters. The author’s attention to historical detail and Place’s striking line drawings add charm and romance to a story that sometimes struggles to justify either.

A well-written series opener uncomfortably built upon real historical tragedies. (Historical fiction. 13-18)

DON’T LOOK BACK

A Memoir of War, Survival, and My Journey From Sudan to America

Deng, Achut & Keely Hutton
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-374-38972-7

A refugee who survived the Second Sudanese Civil War tells her story. Co-authors Hutton and Deng open with historical and political context for the brutal civil war that wracked Sudan from 1983 to 2005 before recounting Deng’s harrowing tale. This compelling first-person narrative moves swiftly through short and often suspenseful chapters that chronicle Deng’s life from 1988 through 2010, mostly focusing on the horrors she endured between November 1991, when she was 6 and fled a rebel soldiers’ attack on her village, through her August 1992 arrival at the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya after an arduous 1,000-mile trek. Deng grew up at the camp, enduring ongoing deprivation and loss but also receiving some education and making deep friendships. At age 16 she resettled in Texas in a situation that brought its own challenges. Woven throughout are themes of unresolved grief (she does not know if her parents are alive), her Christian faith (where is God in all the atrocities she has witnessed?), patriarchy (she must cede to older male relatives’ wishes), and hope (modeled for her by loving adults). Deng is now a mother who has built a life in the U.S., working in human relations in a South Dakota meatpacking plant. This is a gripping account of an extraordinary journey.

A powerful read for this time of unprecedented refugee movement across the globe. (authors’ note, family tree, Deng’s letter to readers) (Memoir. 12-18)

SNITCHERS

Dunn, Stephane
Cinco Puntos Press (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-94762-763-5

An Indiana teen and her friends try to make sense of the violence in their predominantly African American community. Rising ninth grader Nia has been trying to find some sense of normality after her paramedic father was murdered during a routine assignment three years ago. Her once-expansive world now myopically circles around her beloved Nancy Drew mysteries, church, best friends Dontay and Miracle Ruth, and Alma, her Palestinian pen pal. Nia is running late to babysit 5-year-old Little Petey when shooting erupts, and he is killed while playing in front of his grandmother’s house. Nia’s guilt—she thinks if she’d arrived on time to watch him, Little Petey might still be alive—leads her to persuade Dontay and Miracle Ruth to help her find the
culprit for his murder. Their investigation takes an unexpected turn with the reappearance of Fernando, their Puerto Rican school friend, and his brother. Nia processes her feelings about the neighborhood violence in her letters to Alima, who has also been touched by death and whose experiences parallel hers. The story explores the impact on young people of living with a constant awareness of violence, for example, through Miracle Ruth’s recitations of gun violence statistics and Nia’s desire to get justice for Little Petey, tempered by her fear of being labeled a snitch. Authentic, complex, and compelling friendships lie at the heart of this timely novel.

A thrilling story grounded in a thoughtful exploration of social themes. (Fiction. 12-16)

MORE THAN MONEY
How Economic Inequality Affects...Everything
Dyer, Hadley & Mitchell Bernard
Illus. by Paul Gill
Annick Press (128 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-77321-700-0

Economic inequality unpacked and explained for teen readers.
Pointing out that economic inequality has an impact on everyone in society, Dyer and Bernard define it, explain how it’s measured, and show how other factors—for example, social status, gender, health, race, and nationality—contribute to it. They focus on the 38 countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Examples, drawn from many of these nations, include some scenarios that will feel familiar to North American readers and others that will broaden their global awareness. The writers argue that...

“The first installment of a YA fantasy trilogy revolves around a 16-year-old boy who, with the help of some good friends, embarks on a quest to a magical realm to find his mother, who has been missing since he was a toddler.”

“Boucher excels at capturing the YA tone—the dialogue is appropriately witty…”

“...the preponderance of genuinely jaw-dropping plot twists (particularly at the tale’s end) will have readers looking forward to the next installment of the saga.”

“A bracing adventure—fun, fast, and with themes like love, friendship, and the power of family.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

For All Inquiries, Please Email jonsterthemonster@yahoo.com
while inequality has been a perennial problem since humans developed agriculture, recent trends—automation, globalization, and the financialization of economies—have exacerbated things. Today’s more egalitarian countries, they say, have governments that support middle-class people and assist poorer citizens, resulting in societies that are healthier and safer. Finally, they encourage readers to use what they’ve learned to take action. Each topic is clearly identified with a headline, covered clearly and concisely, and summarized at the end of the chapter. Further sources are incorporated throughout. Though the subject is complex, the physical layout and design of this title are accessible and inviting, with relatively short chunks of text and plentiful drawings, charts, graphs, and white space. While most graphs are sourced, individual facts and figures in context are not.

A solid, thorough introduction to haves and have-nots—and why it matters. (glossary, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

THE SUMMER BETWEEN US
Fenton, Andre
Formac (200 pp.)
$8.99 paper | $27.99 PLB | Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-4595-0681-7
978-1-4595-0694-7 PLB

A Canadian high school senior grapples with life after graduation and his nuanced identity.

Eighteen-year-old Adrian Carter is on the brink of greatness. He’s graduating high school with honors; he earned a coveted scholarship; he’s a youth mentor at the library; his multiracial friend group is supportive; and his punk rocker girlfriend, Melody Woods, loves him unconditionally. These are undisputed blessings in Adrian’s life, so why does the future—and all its infinite possibilities—freak him out? Not only is Adrian struggling with how to talk to his parents about his past eating disorder, but he’s hiding his decision to apply to Cape Breton University’s community studies program, which he prefers to the business administration degree his father is pushing. When Mel asks Adrian to join her band on a national tour, he’s torn. Although he’s unsure about looming adulthood, the punk scene hasn’t been welcoming to a sensitive Black introvert. As the summer surges ahead, Adrian begins to realize the quiet, radical power of letting go. Adrian’s life, so why does the future—and all its infinite possibilities—freak him out? Not only is Adrian struggling with how to talk to his parents about his past eating disorder, but he’s hiding his decision to apply to Cape Breton University’s community studies program, which he prefers to the business administration degree his father is pushing. When Mel asks Adrian to join her band on a national tour, he’s torn. Although he’s unsure about looming adulthood, the punk scene hasn’t been welcoming to a sensitive Black introvert. As the summer surges ahead, Adrian begins to realize the quiet, radical power of letting go.

THE FIRST THING ABOUT YOU
Hayden, Chaz
Candlewick (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5362-2311-8

A teen with spinal muscular atrophy navigates a new school and a new crush.

Fifteen-year-old Harris Jacobs is determined that his family’s move from California to New Jersey will be a fresh start. When he was growing up, frequent hospitalizations and wheelchair-inaccessible hangouts made it difficult to make friends. But now he vows to experience being a typical teenager, which includes finding a girlfriend, someone like the enigmatic Nory Fischer, who’s both beautiful and refreshingly chill about his disability. But how can he get to know someone who won’t reveal her favorite color, which he considers a crucial requirement for determining compatibility? Fortunately, Miranda, the hot, outgoing aide who accompanies Harris at school, is happy to play matchmaker. But soon, Harris finds himself falling for Miranda—and her unprofessional, impulsive influence—in ways that could backfire spectacularly. Readers will root for Harris even while wincing at his reckless decisions; Hayden, who has SMA himself, vividly captures Harris’ desire to belong and the pressure to transcend disability stereotypes. Melding wry wit, awkwardness, and introspection, Harris’ frank narration keeps the pages turning as he grapples with the uncomfortable, conflicting feelings of his romantic dilemma. The ending is a delightful pop of realism. Harris’ family is wonderfully supportive though occasionally realistically strained. Details of life with SMA, such as breathing treatments and feeding routines, are informative. Most characters default to White; Nory is Mexican American.

A witty, candid take on love, friendship, belonging, and disability. (Fiction. 14-18)

SHADES OF RUST AND RUIN
Howard, A.G.
Bloomsbury (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5476-0808-9

Steampunk goblins, family secrets, and the lure of forbidden fruit.

This modern (think: a vinyl dress, facial piercings, and Astoria, Oregon, of The Goonies fame) fairy tale straddles a line somewhere between Christina Rossetti’s Goblin Market (which is cited throughout) and Jim Henson’s Labyrinth (never explicitly mentioned but visual and linguistic homages abound). Seventeen-year-old Phoenix “Nix” Loring, a White girl with partial albinism, has tortured herself ever since Lark, her identical twin, died three years ago. She’s been filled with guilt at having been a bad sister—and now feels even more guilt due to her growing feelings for Clarey, Lark’s
brown-skinned boyfriend who has Waardenburg syndrome and suffers from panic attacks. This is enough material for a book all by itself but is mostly background for a Halloween adventure into Mystiquiel, a magical world Nix has drawn since Lark's death, where cyborg faeries and goblins are ruled by the Goblin King, who is locked in a power struggle with an entity known as the Motherboard. The drawn-out adventure takes only a day in the protagonist's world, with plenty of lush description and endless overthinking surrounding some whimsical set pieces as Nix navigates riddles and mind games. Nix holds her grief and guilt tightly until her magical adventure gives her perspective; a final twist changes the stakes and sets up at least one sequel.

Fairy fruit this ain't. (Fantasy. 12-16)

RUST IN THE ROOT
Ireland, Justina
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins
(448 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-06-303822-6

A queer Black mage with a simple dream learns she is destined for far greater adventures.

Laura Ann Langston just wants to be an influential baker. However, 1937 America cares little about her sweet ambitions or that she traveled from a country town in Pennsylvania to New York City to make it happen. Several months in, Laura is flat broke with nowhere to call home, leading her to join the Bureau of the Arcane’s Conservation Corps. Laura is recruited by the formidable agent Skylark, head of the Colored Auxiliary’s regional Floramancy Division. After other areas’ teams go missing, Laura and Skylark set out on an ominous mission to the Ohio Deep Blight, a zone experiencing unnatural phenomena that have disastrous effects on people and animals. There, they use their capacity to control the Dynamism, an energy field that mages pull from. It’s there that Laura also uncovers a conspiracy and gains insight into the depths of her power. Readers are thrust into complex worldbuilding with familiar parallels to our world. Ireland makes advanced concepts accessible, and old photos, articles, and investigative reports bolster her uncanny ability to weave painful, real history into this new world. The bold narrative, told through Laura’s first-person and Skylark’s third-person perspectives, culminates in a captivating ending that eerily echoes many of the issues that presently plague the country, describing the destructive nature of capitalism and the impact its oppression wreaks on a nation.

Insightful, admirable, and well executed. (author’s note, photo credits) (Historical fantasy. 14-18)

DIVISION, INTOLERANCE, AND CONFLICT
Can Public Civility Ever Be Restored?
Kallen, Stuart A.
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$32.95 | Sept. 15, 2022
978-1-67820-330-6

A clear introduction to the climate around recent U.S. dissension.

Kallen thoughtfully elucidates multiple causes—including the Covid-19 pandemic, cable news shows, social media, and racism—that have contributed to negative shifts in Americans’ behavior. He also offers advice on preserving mental health and avoiding becoming addicted to feelings of anger. In a chapter on media, the author shows how Rush Limbaugh, whose talk radio show normalized incivility; Rupert Murdoch, who founded Fox News; and Donald Trump, who routinely used name-calling and other reality TV...
In her warm, thoughtful debut, Lane Clarke explores the experiences of a teen born of sexual assault. Michie, a junior in high school, is struggling to define herself in a college essay when an opportunity to reconnect with her estranged mother arises. With the help of her best friend Jojo, and her possibly-more-than-a-friend Derek, Michie navigates heavy feelings about her mother and her own existence. Love Times Infinity (Poppy/Little, Brown, July 26) is a story built of honesty, heart, and appreciation for good friends in a world that doesn't always know how to make space for complexity.

We spoke to Clarke via Zoom from her home in Northern Virginia. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

When did you start writing this book?
I think I started it in July 2019—God, time, what is it? [laughs]—and I didn’t intend for it to become what it has. I was writing for myself, so it’s like trying to figure out when you wrote a journal entry. It was a pretty fast process: The first draft only took a couple of weeks. So, that’s when it started, but it’s become my whole life. I’ve gotten to watch it get bigger and bigger.

Do you find that it has lived different lives, or was your first draft a lot like what readers will see?
It’s always looked a lot like what’s being published. I write short first drafts, so pretty much everything that was in that very first draft has survived. I look at it now as an expanded version of what it was but still very much exactly what I always envisioned it to be.

The book feels like a time capsule of this moment—you engage with a lot of popular culture throughout.
I wanted to make these characters’ lives feel real and give them real interests. I also think that’s what makes a friendship so full—having those shared connections that are so ingrained in language and culture. These kids are multifaceted people; they’re online, they’re in tune, and it was fun to explore.

Derek, for example, is an athlete and a popular guy, but he’s also a nerd. All the popular kids I knew in high school were dorks! Everyone comments, “All the kids in Michie’s school are so nice.” Well, everyone in my high school was pretty nice! I didn’t see, at least, any bullying. I think that’s how we think of high school because it was a big part of the media for a while, but some kids are just nice.

It’s true, you don’t really have antagonists on the page. Even when characters hurt one another it’s not from a cruel place.
When I was a teenager, it was really—you know, “hurt people hurt people.” Friendships ended and relationships ended, a lot of times because you were seeing the other person as the enemy and operating from a place of “guilty until proven innocent.” I think with hindsight, it was important to me to depict that relationship with friends and family where you love them, but you don’t quite know how to express yourself in healthy ways.

At first Renée, Michie’s mom, was going to be more of a villain. But I didn’t want to take away her story, and I wanted to show how sometimes decisions are made in the moment that you later on wouldn’t make. That’s all tied to people’s personal traumas, and I wanted to give Michie the chance to see, this person never set out to hurt you, that’s just what happens when people are hurt.

You create a real atmosphere of love and listening in this book. Are there conversations you hope to start?

Gosh, there are so many! Definitely one is mental health, especially in teens, especially in Black teens. I think there is still stigma in seeking therapy and getting medication. I want to show these processes are here for you—and of course, there are conversations to be had about health care and whether it’s provided. We have to prioritize our mental health because it affects every single aspect of our lives and our relationships. It permeates everything.

And there’s the conversation around abortion and access to abortion. Michie starts the story a lot like I did, thinking, How could I possibly be pro-choice when that choice was almost made for me? Do I deserve to be here or not? And I think people on both sides are saying, Well, what about these kids who are born of these situations? Well, these kids exist, so maybe we can give them a chance to speak their side. What I’ve learned from my own experience and from others’ is that ultimately we need choices. I think that’s one of Michie’s main journeys throughout, when she’s thinking about her mother and her classmate who had an abortion; it’s about people being able to heal from their trauma in whichever ways they can. If that results in abortion or if it doesn’t, it’s always about choice. My hope is that it opens people’s minds to what happens when birthing people don’t have choices. Michie has a strained relationship with her mother because of this background, and that’s very real; it causes a lot of trauma for children and their parents. I want that conversation to acknowledge a new perspective and for people to hear each other out and to lean toward what’s going to give people their best futures.

Can you speak more on Michie’s journey and the choices you made around the outcome with Renée?

Being 16, turning 17, it’s so messy. Michie doesn’t really know what she wants. She knows she wants to go to college, maybe be successful. She’s at those ages where it’s like, I’m just trying to survive here. I think clean wrap-ups are great for escapism, but they’re not always realistic. Sometimes, the best closure you can get is walking away and leaving the door open. I wanted it to feel real and to build that love and compassion. And for teen readers, to say, just because something doesn’t turn out perfectly doesn’t mean it wasn’t worth the time you spent on it. Not everything has to happen right now. You have so much life left to live.

Speaking of life left to live—can you tell us about any upcoming projects?

I don’t know how much I can say about project specifics. I’m working on a second book, which is exciting. It’s a new format I’m really eager to work in. I love the main character, and I think people are gonna love her just as much as Michie. And of course she has a great friend group—you can’t do life without some ridiculous friends!

I want to tell more stories like Michie’s. Or maybe not like Michie—just Black teens, and some of them are nerdy and some of them like sports and all these other avenues that Black kids don’t always get to explore.

Anything I haven’t asked about?

Something I haven’t seen a lot of people talk about is Michie’s grandmother. I hope people connect with her and her quirks. A lot of us were raised by our grandparents, and they have their very specific way of living. I hope that brings some laughs and some recognition.

Ilana Bensussen Epstein is a writer and filmmaker in Boston. Love Times Infinity was reviewed in the May 15, 2022, issue.
strategies, all promoted attention-seeking as a supreme goal. Citing experts’ analyses and including anecdotes about ordinary people, Kallen shows how tribalism and a lack of perspective, often stemming from partial awareness of issues and consumption of biased media, increase misunderstandings and political division. The final chapter, “Stepping Back From Anger,” covers topics such as book bans and school board battles over curriculum as well as de-escalating and civility-enhancing initiatives like workshops and podcasts. Threats targeting women and the unfair application of anti-protest laws to communities of color are mentioned. Unfortunately, despite citing a study showing that 96% of Black Lives Matter protests were peaceful, the photo illustrating a protest against the police killing of George Floyd shows a police car on fire. Sidebars with quotes and useful background information supplement the accessible text, making this a useful overview of a timely subject.

Contextual and informative, with positive suggestions to reduce vitriol and preserve American pluralism. (picture credits, source notes, further research, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

AS LONG AS THE LEMON TREES GROW
Katouh, Zoulfa
Little, Brown (416 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-316-35137-9

When her city of Homs comes under fire in the Syrian revolution, an 18-year-old pharmacy student faces a gut-wrenching decision.

Salama, an avid horticulturalist, is living a nightmare: Her father and older brother were captured by government forces during a protest; her mother died in a bombing. Salama’s left with Layla, her pregnant sister-in-law and best friend—and Khawf, Arabic for fear. Khawf is the personification of her trauma who pushes her to attempt the treacherous journey by sea to seek refuge in Germany. Starving and exhausted, Salama nevertheless wavers. Wracked with guilt over what might happen to Layla and her baby if they delay, she finds meaning in helping her beloved homeland by volunteering at a hospital. But the burden of treating streams of victims, many of them children who die in agonizing ways, takes a toll on her fragile mental health. Salama meets 19-year-old Kenan, who is caring for his orphaned younger siblings and is committed to doing his part by uploading videos of protests to YouTube. Their blossoming love is an act of hopeful defiance, but as the Free Syrian Army’s hold on Homs becomes increasingly tenuous, the reality of their dire fate should they be captured heightens the urgency. Harrowing moments are juxtaposed against painfully beautiful memories of peaceful times, and readers will linger over the many exquisite sentences in this memorable novel that honors the stories of countless Syrians.

Searing in its intensity. (author’s note) (Fiction. 14-18)

BIG LIES
From Socrates to Social Media
Kurlansky, Mark
Illus. by Eric Zelz
Tilbury House (320 pp.)
$22.95 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-88448-912-2

A book about public lies, the kind that “can destabilize the world.”

Deceit, says noted nonfiction writer Kurlansky, is practiced throughout the living world, often conferring evolutionary advantages, and certainly many social ones—consider the white lie. Three hundred years ago, the rise of the Enlightenment ushered in both a new era of scientific reason and a corresponding rise in lies and conspiracy theories promulgated by power-hungry individuals attempting to dupe the masses. Today’s social media makes this ever more prevalent but also gives those who pay attention tools they can use to broadcast the truth. From murderous clowns to lizard people in government, burning women as witches to persistent scapegoating of Jews, Kurlansky covers the types, tools, targets, tactics, and motives of liars as well as arms readers with defensive techniques such as searching for sources and the classic advice to “follow the money.” Supplemental stories are told in sidebars set off in orange type. Blocks of larger, colorful type break up the pages, as do occasional illustrations and photographs. Short comic-strip segments enliven the ends of each chapter, illustrating Soviet spies sowing anti-vaccine disinformation and showing a dishonest, bankrupt real estate investor denying climate change. This book takes on a dense and complicated subject; Kurlansky’s genius is to embrace the complexity and urge readers to question everything they read, including this book.

Impassioned, thorough, and brilliant: describes the struggle for truth that “keeps the world from descending into chaos.” (photo credits, author’s note, sources, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

DOUGHNUTS AND DOOM
Lorinczi, Balázs
Top Shelf Productions (136 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-60309-513-6

A fluffy, feel-good story about a witch and a guitarist who cross paths and make sparks fly. Literally.

Margot Grapes is a witch who just can’t seem to pass the test to obtain her spell license. Until then she’s stuck making potions to earn a living. On the day she fails the test yet again, Margot, in need of cheering up, goes with her snake familiar, Stanley, to buy some chocolate doughnuts. But moments before their arrival, all the chocolate ones were dropped on the floor by shop employee Elena Rogers, who is a punk rock guitarist in the band.
“This bloodcurdling anthology soars.”

OUR SHADOWS HAVE CLAWS

Fifteen tales full of the macabre and creatures that roam at twilight offer plenty of chills and thrills in this anthology inspired by Latin American folklore and legends.

“The be warned, this story is both a lesson and a curse. Most stories are.” So begins Chantel Acevedo’s strong opener, “The Nightingale and the Lark,” a dreamy tale of star-crossed lovers from families who are at odds over how best to handle monsters in Cuba. Love and loss intertwine across several stories, often superbly dissected through the lenses of gender, sexuality, and, crucially, gender-based violence. In Gabriela Martins’ stellar “Bloodstained Hands Like Yours,” 18-year-old Olivia survives on the streets of Brazil, where the rotten Corpo-seco targets and kills other unhoused people. To save the girl she loves, Olivia must brave her fears and traumas. In Racquel Marie’s “La Patasola,” a queer girl’s coming out turns deadly when her boyfriend’s aggression leads to the appearance of La Patasola, a blood-soaked spirit from Colombia. Colorism and racism thread through numerous tales. The horrors of modern U.S.–led capitalism and the consequences of environmental destruction—see Julia Alvarez’s poignant “Leave No Tracks,” featuring a more-than-human family of ciguapas in the Dominican Republic—round out a few more emergent themes. Dramatic black-and-white art enhances the suspense. The combination of recognizable names from young adult literature and superlative stories on a range of themes makes this collection a winner.

This bloodcurdling anthology soars. (Horror anthology. 14-18)

INAGURAL BALLERS
The True Story of the First US Women’s Olympic Basketball Team
Maraniss, Andrew
Viking (352 pp.)
$18.99  |  Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-35124-6

The underdog story of America’s first women’s Olympic basketball team plays out in this thoughtful exploration of social change.

Soon after James Naismith invented basketball in 1891, girls and women began enthusiastically playing the sport. However, it wasn’t until the passage of Title IX in 1972 that American schools were required to provide equal opportunities, allowing female athletes to compete at the same level (though not with the same funding) as their male counterparts. In 1973, the International Olympic Committee added women’s basketball to the 1976 Games in Montreal. Building the squad from the 1973 World University Games team and open tryouts, basketball pioneer Mildred Barnes enabled coaches Billie Moore and Sue Gunter to assemble a scrappy team capable of medaling when no one (not even USA Basketball executive director Bill Wall) thought it possible. Maraniss explores decades of misogyny and sexism, generations of systemic racism, and White feminists’ shortcomings when it came to race that surrounded the humble beginnings of what became a true Olympic powerhouse: As of 2021, the U.S. women’s team has won seven straight gold medals. Interviews with athletes from the 1976 Olympics enhance the invigorating narrative, enriching a book that will stick with readers long after they put it down. Weaving women’s basketball into a textured account of a society in flux, Maraniss’ latest will appeal to a broad audience.

A winning story full of heart, camaraderie, and power. (photo credits, source notes, bibliography, rosters, statistics, box scores, timeline) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
start having feelings for each other. Alternating point-of-view chapters shift between Frances' and Jesse's perspectives. Sonny also gets a few chapters, but her portrayal is stereotypical and problematic: She is treated like a mascot by Frances and her friends, who call her Caterpillar as her utterances consist of one gay (and stereotypical) are complex and believable, woven seamlessly into the story. Point-of-view chapters from several characters allow readers to see different perspectives and become invested in the complex relationships. A satisfying, high-stakes trilogy closer. (Fantasy. 14-18)

FURYSONG
Munda, Rosaria
Putnam (496 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-525-51827-3
Series: The Aurelian Cycle, 3

With Callipolis newly fallen to Ixion Stormscourge, can the Guardians save what is left of their home and create something better for everyone?

Picking up midaction immediately where Flamefall (2021) ended, we find our heroes separated and facing a losing battle. While Annie was busy sparking a revolution in New Pythos, Lee has remained in Callipolis. Now he’s trying to play the part of returning lord long enough to figure out what to do. There are limited options thanks to Ixion’s violent crackdowns on dissenters and Princess Freyda’s circling the city with her goliathan dragon to maintain order. However, when Freyda approaches Lee in secret with a plan to overthrow Ixion and take power for themselves, he has difficult choices to make. Will he marry Freyda and become the leader he was born to be or throw himself into exile with Annie and the other Guardians and brace for a war they are woefully unprepared for?

The strong pacing balances aerial dragon battles and political machinations. The characters are well developed, growing as they face war’s moral dilemmas. The love stories (one straight, one gay) are complex and believable, woven seamlessly into the story. Point-of-view chapters from several characters allow readers to see different perspectives and become invested in multiple characters (and their dragons). The text includes some reminders to help readers track the cast and their various complex relationships.

A satisfying, high-stakes trilogy closer. (Fantasy. 14-18)
the past three years seem like a constant flow of utterly pointless thoughts and prayers. She finds no closure at the March for Our Lives, but she works up the courage to seek counseling through student services only to find there are no available therapists. But in writing this very graphic novel, she at last finds some catharsis. An author’s note discusses her recovery from suicidal depression with unsentimental, pragmatic hope. Pale, freckled, redheaded Neely’s charming illustrations featuring soothing pastels with occasional pops of bright color help balance the heaviness of the subject matter.

This exploration of a gun-violence survivor’s raw pain amid ever repeating disasters will resonate with far too many.

(resources) (Graphic memoir 13-18)

DENIAL
Nicholson, Lorna Schultz
James Lorimer (176 pp.)
$27.99 | $9.99 paper | Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-4594-1674-1
978-1-4594-1671-0 paper

A high school senior navigating her first serious relationship finds herself in unknown waters.

Readers first meet panicked narrator Nova in May. She’s covered in blood, setting a tense stage before the novel quickly flashes back to the beginning of the school year when everything was going her way. She was blissfully happy, in love with her star swimmer boyfriend, Leo, and at the top of her class with potential to become valedictorian. Eventually Nova quit swimming to focus on her studies. While balancing school and sports, she also debated when and where to lose her virginity. But shortly after they slept together for the first time, Nova sensed that Leo was pulling away, leading her down increasingly more desperate paths to keep him in her life. Moving through the course of the school year, the book flashes forward to scenes of Nova’s emergency, offering chilling glimpses of her plight. Unfortunately, the tone of the novel is forced and didactic. The stiff narrative is peppered with cringey slang terms, and the main characters’ dialogue feeds into dumb-jock and egghead stereotypes. Main characters are White; there is some ethnic diversity in the supporting cast.

A lackluster story that fails to deliver on its dramatic promise. (Fiction. 14-18)

BONE WEAVER
Polydoros, Aden
Inkyard Press (416 pp.)
$19.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-335-91582-5

A rescue mission embroils a young woman in political conflict.

Dwelling in the wilderness with her adoptive family, who are upyri, or living dead, Toma has not seen another living human in years until an airship crash brings civilization violently to her door. Nursing the sole survivor back to health, Toma discovers he is the recently deposed Tsar Mikhail Vladimirovich of House Morev. Fraktsiya rebels attempt to capture Mikhail, but when this fails, they take Toma’s sister, Galina, to placate their leader, Koschei. Toma leaves with Mikhail on a race against time to find and rescue Galina before she is used in an experiment or killed. On their journey, they meet Vanya, who is a member of the Strannik religious minority. He offers them a stark glimpse into the dark side of Mikhail’s empire, a country where Strannik are scapegoated for societal ills and executed on trumped up charges of witchcraft. Vanya joins Toma in her quest while attempting to convince Mikhail to enact real societal change once he regains his throne. In this fascinating world filled with supernatural creatures and an entrancing magic system, Toma serves as an excellent main character, her years of isolation with only the dead for company giving her a sense of wonder at the places and cultures that have long become mundane for the others. Most characters in this Russian-inspired fantasy world read White; queer identities are mentioned in passing.

A dark and thrilling tale. (author’s note, glossary) (Fantasy. 13-18)

SECRETS SO DEEP
Sain, Ginny Myers
Razorbill/Penguin (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-593-40399-0

A teen returns to the site of her mother’s drowning looking for clues and memories.

Seventeen-year-old Avril is in Whisper Cove on the Long Island Sound for a prestigious one-month acting camp. It’s no coincidence that she sought out this particular location, where her mother drowned 12 years ago and Avril herself nearly died. All she remembers is waking up in the hospital. Whisper Cove proves to be a place unlike any other, its thick fog enveloping the night and swirling through Avril’s clouded memories of her past. When she meets Cole Culver, the son of her mother’s college friend Willa, their connection is instant and electric. The pair become inseparable, eventually untangling the terrifying truth about what happened to Avril’s mother. The
atmosphere of Whisper Cove is palpable, the fog-laden shore haunting and heavy at night. Sain deftly writes Avril’s confusion, desperation, and fear so that readers experience everything alongside her. Her friendships with fellow campers Val and Lex in particular are close in that way that only short-term shared experiences provide, and their connections are incredibly touching. What truly anchors the story, however, is the intense chemistry between Avril and Cole: Some of Sain’s best writing comes from their charged interactions. Most characters are presumed White; some cast members are queer.

Sorrowful, haunting, and romantic; a true page-turner. (Mystery. 14-18)

THE FIRST TO DIE AT THE END
Silvera, Adam
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(416 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-06-324080-3

Crowds gather across the United States for the launch of Death-Cast, a company that promises to change the world by predicting the deaths of everyone who subscribes in this prequel to They Both Die at the End (2017).

Orion Pagan, an aspiring author with a heart condition, hopes his phone won’t ring at midnight, but he knows Death-Cast’s call is coming soon. Unlike Orion, Valentin Prince, a model on the verge of his national debut, has no reason to anticipate Death-Cast’s call and isn’t sure if he believes the company’s claims. By coincidence or fate, their lives collide at a party in Times Square, and a single, historic phone call alters the courses of their futures. This heart-pounding story follows the final day of the first Decker, or person who is going to die, and the national chaos of Death-Cast’s premiere. Silvera crafts a web of intricately interconnected character perspectives and conflicts around Orion and Valentin. Apart from Valentin and his twin sister, who are presumed White, most of the characters are Latine, including White-passing Orion, whose family is Puerto Rican. The story confronts heavy topics like grief, abuse, and religious faith with complexity and care. Despite the presumed inevitability of a fatal end to the central romance between Orion and Valentin, Silvera subverts the trope of punishing gay characters with violent tragedy. Familiarity with the original book provides additional context and depth but isn’t essential to understanding the plot.

A rush of emotion and suspense. (Speculative fiction. 13-18)

IF NOT US
Smith, Mark
Text (272 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-922330-79-6

An Australian boy passionate about surfing is drawn into community activism in this contemporary work with a strong sense of place.

Seventeen-year-old Hesse Templetown lives with his mum in rural Shebbourne on Victoria’s west coast. He works at the surf shop owned by Theo Turnbull, a father figure and old friend of his dad’s. Seven years ago, Hesse’s father drowned in a surfing accident, but this tragedy hasn’t dampened Hesse’s enthusiasm for the sport. His quiet life changes when enigmatic Dutch exchange student Fenna De Vries arrives, and Hadron, a powerful local employer, announces they are selling the coal mine and power station. Despite his shyness with girls, Hesse forms a tentative bond with Fenna, drawing jealous attention from aggressive alpha male Jago Crothers. Meanwhile, Shelbourne Action, a grassroots environmental group his mother is involved with, is controversially campaigning to have the power plant closed. As Hesse grows increasingly educated—and concerned—about the harmful impact of fossil fuels, he becomes a youthful spokesperson (albeit a self-conscious and nervous one) for the movement. He also must reckon with the effect the closure would have on two of his best mates, Muslim refugees whose families are among many residents financially dependent on the plant. This quietly powerful novel explores the inner growth and external impact of a teen on the cusp of adulthood. Hesse’s uncertainty as he navigates his expanding awareness of life’s complications will resonate with many readers. Main characters are White.

A textured, thoughtful work grounded in timely and enduring themes. (Fiction. 12-18)

ASYLUM SEEKERS
Hope and Disappointment on the Border
Sutton, Patricia
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$32.95 | Sept. 15, 2022
978-1-67820-324-5

Accounts of Western Hemisphere individuals and families seeking asylum exemplify the varied situations that drive people to try to enter the United States via the U.S.–Mexico border.

While facts and figures are also provided, it is the stories of these children, youths, and adults that will resonate with readers. The book particularly focuses on the Trump and Biden administrations and makes some distinctions between changing governmental policies. Opening by explaining the reasons many contemporary asylum seekers are escaping their home
“An essential addition to the body of literature about a well-known figure.”

CALL HIM JACK

ANNE OF GREENVILLE

Tamaki, Mariko
Melissa de la Cruz Studio (304 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-368-07840-5

A plucky, disco-loving teen and her moms are met with small-town prejudice upon moving to their new home. With her dyed orange hair and vibrant, retro wardrobe, high schooler Anne Shirley is used to standing out from the crowd just by being herself. But when Anne, who likes girls and is of Japanese and Welsh descent, moves with her White moms to Greenville, they quickly catch the attention of residents who view the new family as a threat to the town’s conservative values. At school, Anne is the target of openly racist and homophobic comments, while her mom Lucy, the new vice principal at Greenville High, faces intense scrutiny and criticism from parents. Green-haired, artistic Berry is Anne’s only friend, and though she offers support and encouragement, the constant provocation is almost enough to dull Anne’s shine. When auditions for the school play are announced, Anne sees an opportunity to participate in a Greenville tradition without compromising who she is, but outcry against the chosen play, Peter Pan, in which Anne is cast as the lead, threatens to end the production before it even begins. Anne recounts these first few weeks in Greenville in bright, conversational prose that bursts with personality and frequently veers into enthusiastic tangents. Unfortunately, secondary characters aren’t developed quite as well, particularly Anne’s bullies, who have little substance beneath their casual cruelty.

Overall, an upbeat story inspired by a classic about staying positive and resilient in the face of adversity. (content warning) (Fiction. 13-18)

RAISING THE HORSEMAN

Valentino, Serena
Disney-Hyperion (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-368-05461-4

There are more charms than terrors in this reimagining of a supernatural tale. Valentino’s eye for lavish detail focuses on Kat Van Tassel, an 18-year-old at Ichabod Crane High, named after Sleepy Hollow’s most infamous figure. Trapped in a life that feels all too planned out and a skeptic surrounded by those who believe in ghosts, Kat chafes at the way she’s fated to marry childhood sweetheart Blake, help run the family estate, and fulfill townspeople’s expectations. Kat has other aspirations, and her modern-day story mirrors the past she uncovers while reading Katrina Van Tassel’s diary entries, which are presented in chapters interspersed with the contemporary timeline. Katrina is a distant relative whose life was the source for many of the town’s myths and rituals. Blake attempts a spell with his friends, pushing Kat to participate against her wishes. Increasingly frustrated with him, Kat becomes fast friends with Isadora Crow, a mysterious, dark-haired classmate whom Blake dislikes. As Isadora and Kat explore Katrina’s diary, they begin to have feelings that are stronger than friendship. The young women’s curiosity about the diary grows—alongside their romance, which becomes more than a crush. Mild chills and dual timelines drive the plot; the latter at times are too neatly mirrored. Horror readers hungry for a retelling will find few scares, but the same-sex relationship breathes some new life into the legend. Most characters default to White.

A sweet retelling of a spooky classic. (Paranormal romance. 12-18)
King Jr. and Muhammad Ali for their anti-war stances and harsh debates with Malcolm X, he comes across here as anything but the patient, controlled figure typically found in biographies for young readers. To judge from the copious endnotes and their own professional and publishing histories, the authors have plainly done their research and make a convincing case that while their subject had his bullheaded moments, he operated from consistent and worthy principles. On-field photos, family snapshots, pictures of marching protesters, and news clippings accompany side-boxed comments on historical context and questions for readers to ponder, the latter supplemented in the backmatter with a page of discussion topics. This thorough, expansive, and readable work is an essential addition to the body of literature about a well-known figure.

**Adds provocative nuances to the usual portrayals of a heroic American. (additional facts, timeline, index)** *(Biography. 12-16)*

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**CREEBOY**

Wouters, Teresa

James Lorimer (128 pp.)

$27.99 | $9.99 paper | Aug. 1, 2022

978-1-4594-1681-9

978-1-4594-1678-9 paper

A novel for reluctant readers about gang violence set on a First Nations reserve in Canada.

Sixteen-year-old Josh has dropped out of school. He lives with his family in Alberta on the fictional Pâ-ko-sey-i-mo-min reserve where his father was the head of the Warrior gang until he went to jail nearly a year ago. Josh's older brother, Darion, who goes by the gang name Razor, takes him under his wing: Josh is a Warrior initiate, dubbed Creeboy for his knowledge of Indigenous traditions. In this story of self-discovery, Creeboy needs to discover who he wants to be, choosing between his family in the gang and his family outside it, with costs on both sides. The story is written in the first-person perspective, allowing readers to understand Josh's inner thoughts. However, the characters feel like underdeveloped types playing out a predictable storyline involving an angry teenager, an incarcerated father, a gang member brother, and a worried mother. The book is filled with Cree vocabulary and knowledge, but these elements are not incorporated organically into the story or characterization. Readers seeking more nuanced representation of the impact of gangs on Indigenous communities would be better served by the graphic novel *The Outside Circle* by Patti LaBoucane-Benson and Kelly Mellings.

**Readers looking to understand the complexities of gang violence should look elsewhere. (Fiction. 14-18)*
A computer security expert with a troubling past works with an FBI hostage rescue team to find an elusive, sadistic killer in this novel.

Yael Brooks has relocated to Houston, where she works in a satellite office for a security firm run by Alex Parker. Her top-flight computer skills are needed by the FBI in the hunt for Evi1Genius, a twisted murderer. He has kidnapped, tortured, and is now killing his hostage, Anya Baker, “a brilliant young chemist.” Yael watches the horrific online broadcast along with colleagues and FBI agent Shane Livingstone. The team has managed to track down the location of the crime, but Yael and Shane watch in shock as they figure out the perpetrator has booby-trapped the place. A bomb detonates when the FBI rescue team enters the site. The serial killer has already fled the scene, leading to the realization that the livestream was from a recording; Baker is already dead; and the murderer could be anywhere. As Shane reels from the loss of a colleague, Yael learns that Evi1Genius has kidnapped another woman. His sickening livestream broadcasts have generated a fortune for him in crypto, and Yael starts thinking of ways to connect the dots. While she and Shane grow closer personally and professionally, a dark secret from Yael’s past may ruin everything while providing the key to cracking the case. Anderson’s charged cyberthriller is packed with explosive elements that deftly propel the story forward. The action scenes pulse with the necessary tension as more personal elements are slowly added to this series opener. Yael is a convincing protagonist, a hard-nosed hacker who doesn’t give too much away but is haunted by her past and what that means for the case. Shane and Yael, both dynamic investigators, are dealing with trauma and loss. Their relationship, playing out against the backdrop of the hunt for the serial killer, is electrifying in its own right.

A heady, tech-infused thriller with an exciting murder investigation and a steamy relationship.
**DONKEY SHOW**
Baker, Stephen
Atmosphere Press (348 pp.)
$18.99 paper | $7.99 e-book
March 31, 2022
978-1-63988-299-1

A newspaper reporter faces a literal deadline when his editor assigns him to investigate a Mexican drug lord.

One fateful evening in 1993, *El Paso Tribune* photographer Eddie Stevenson walks into his editor Ken Perry’s office, his face a bloody mess. When the editor asks what happened, the photog says thugs, sent by wealthy Mexican drug lord Gustavo Jiménez, beat him up, smashed his cameras, and told him to deliver a message to crime reporter Tom Harley, telling him that he’s “dead meat.” The beating becomes front-page news and emboldens Perry: “We’re going to expose that señor and his whole rotten business,” he tells the Associated Press, “even if it takes us to the president of Mexico.” But is Harley the right reporter for the assignment? “Harley was lazy, an anthropologist” is the office scuttlebutt, so, in order to “light a fire under the story,” the editors put reporter Hank Klinger on it—and to light a fire under him, they mention the story’s Pulitzer Prize possibilities. The assault and the national press attention it draws set in motion a twisty, suspenseful thriller in which players on both sides of the border act on increasingly suspect motives. Baker, author of *The Boost* (2014), cannily sets his story in the early 1990s, when newspapers, big and small, could topple governments and reporters weren’t dismissed as purveyors of “fake news.” The author, a former journalist for the *El Paso Herald-Post* during the same time period, not only knows the lay of the land, but also the ins and outs of news reporting. At one point, a journalist realizes that he’d neglected to report a major crime: “He’d played detective and forgotten about his job. Burying a story like that could get him fired.” It’s a densely populated narrative, but some characters stand out, such as banker Diana Clements, Stevenson’s unlikely girlfriend, in whom savvy readers will sense a bit of danger.

A thriller with fine worldbuilding that lays the foundation for further adventures in a dangerous and ethically ambiguous milieu.

**DARCY’S EDUCATION OF MISS ELIZABETH BENNET**
Bishop, AJ
Self (260 pp.)
March 15, 2022
979-8-796317-63-1

The main characters of Jane Austen’s classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* navigate sexual politics and frustrations in the lead-up to their marriage in Bishop’s novel.

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**INDIE | Karen Schechner**

**PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT LONELINESS**

Little children can have adult-sized fears—especially about being alone. To help kids cope, these recommended titles—starring engaging, unusual leads—offer creative strategies for managing overwhelming feelings.

Spike, a happy-go-lucky tumbleweed, rolls down a road while being plagued by bad weather and unfriendly characters (a harried clock, an angry pie), and he starts to feel down. Finding a kindred spirit saves the day. Author/illustrator T.C. Bartlett depicts the rewards of optimism and perseverance in *The Lost and Lonely Tumbleweed*. Our reviewer calls it an “offbeat, heartfelt tale of finding companionship.”

In Donna Neumann’s *I Don’t Celebrate Anything!* Annie, a porcupine, worries about not celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa like her friends do. When “the holiday zeal becomes oppressive,” Annie feels annoyed and lonely. She wonders: “Is her porcupine family weird?” Alexandra Rusu’s warm watercolors add appeal to this necessary book, which “affirms that meaningful experiences exist outside holiday festivities.”

Some kids experience profound isolation. *Dandelion Child* notes that “children in every society experience harassment, homelessness, and neglect; some go to bed and school hungry and aren’t taught to read, and when they’re sick, no one cares for them.” Kimberly Mehman-Orozco and Jennifer Lowery-Keith’s words depict the world of Dandelion children, neglected but nevertheless able to thrive. Ana Rodic’s exquisite, precise paintings resemble botanical illustrations. Our review says, “Overall, this is a valuable, if often sad, work; however, it ends on an upbeat note that Dandelions can indeed flourish.”

*Karen Schechner is the president of Kirkus Indie.*
Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy are now engaged, but they’ve not yet found their happy ending together at Pemberley. Before setting a date, they visit gaudy Rosings Park, owned by Darcy’s pompous aunt, the Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and his sickly, mousy cousin Anne. Darcy has agreed to let his aunt educate his bride-to-be on managing a large estate as both he and Elizabeth stay at Rosings. The betrothed couple’s close proximity before marriage flies in the face of the conventions of the time—as does Darcy’s late uncle’s hidden library of lewd books and pamphlets on the premises. Lady Catherine wrongly believes Elizabeth has already seduced her nephew and hopes that she can be bribe into leaving him. Elizabeth’s sister and chaperone, Mary, is caught kissing Anne, and the latter falls in love hard despite her society’s taboo surrounding same-sex relationships. Further complications arise as rumors of Darcy’s womanizing past—and of the existence of a daughter, conceived out of wedlock—threaten the happiness of one of literature’s most famous couples. Bishop’s debut relies heavily on delaying readers’ gratification, introducing more overtly erotic elements into the world of an acclaimed novel of manners, but also keeping characters from indulging such impulses for as long as possible. The additions aren’t excessively spicy, however; indeed, even calling them titillating may be a bit too strong. Despite some obvious creative license, most of the characters effectively resemble their Austen-created counterparts—save for the protagonists; Elizabeth has lost some of the spirited cheek which made her so memorable, particularly in her dealings with the domineering Catherine, and Darcy’s new, checkered past doesn’t comfortably line up with the socially uneasy figure of the original novel. Still, readers willing to overlook these differences will be hard-pressed not to have fun here, particularly with such offbeat, unexpected additions as the de Bourgh library of the bawdy.

A well-played touch of the ribald opens up a new continuation of a classic.

**THE SCEPTRE**

_A Jonster the Monster and the Bear Adventure_

Boucher, B.E.

Mindstir Media (358 pp.)

$15.99 paper | $0.99 e-book

March 22, 2021

978-1-73652-247-9

This first installment of a YA fantasy trilogy revolves around a 16-year-old boy who, with the help of some good friends, embarks on a quest to a magical realm to find his mother, who has been missing since he was a toddler.

Geof—nicknamed the Bear because of his 6-foot, 4-inch frame—and his best friend, Jon, aka Jonster the Monster, are looking forward to starting another year at their Sheridan, Wyoming, high school. The area is described as “ground zero for some of the best Native American culture in the country.”

When Geof and Jon locate a revered, older Native American storyteller named Donald Deernose who knew Geof’s mother, his revelations change the course of the boys’ lives forever. Deernose tells the teens that Geof’s mother was suffering from a terminal illness and escaped into a magical pond with healing properties and also that she may still be alive. Geof and Jon—along with high school crushes Debbie Marshall and Patricia Chamness—follow Deernose’s instructions and travel to the Medicine Wheel in the Big Horn Mountains. There, after a powerful ritual, they are inexplicably transported to a magical world inhabited by nightmarish monstrosities and wondrous creatures—like a talking cocker spaniel named Uriah, who happens to be a prince. But the quest to find Geof’s mother is temporarily sidelined, as he is identified by the inhabitants as a prophesied hero known as Searcher—“one who can defeat the undefeatable.” In the realm, the evil King Bu-usah has decimated entire regions and starved populations and plans on attacking an idyllic, awe-inspiring place known as the Secret City. With the help of a massive two-headed snake and a magical artifact called the Sceptre, the tyrannical Bu-usah is on the brink of subjugating the entire world. With the group of teens from Wyoming the magical realm’s only hope, Geof and company attempt to steal the Sceptre and stop Bu-usah and his nefarious scheme.

Boucher excels at capturing the YA tone—the dialogue is appropriately witty; the teen angst regarding budding relationships and finding one’s place in the world is authentic; and the insightful description of the high school setting at the beginning of the novel is spot-on: “The bell rang for lunch. Teacher grades were fine for parents, but the lunchroom was where kids received their crucial peer grades. A good peer grade was far more important to any high school student than an A in Biology. Lunch was truth serum, where every kid’s place in the pecking order was either earned or assigned.” But the real power here lies in the action-packed storyline, which is not only chock-full of fantastical creatures and locales, but also includes more than a few bombshell plot twists. The author creates a character-driven narrative filled with so many thrills and adventures that fantasy fans will find it difficult to simply stop reading. And although some storyline revelations are a bit predictable, the preponderance of genuinely jaw-dropping plot twists (particularly at the tale’s end) will have readers looking forward to the next installment of the saga.

A bracing adventure—fun, fast, and with themes like love, friendship, and the power of family.
MOBILIZE FOOD!
Wartime Inspiration for Environmental Victory Today
Boyle, Eleanor
FriesenPress (294 pp.)
April 20, 2022
978-1-03-912367-0
978-1-03-912366-3 paper

Canadian journalist and college instructor Boyle’s nonfiction work seeks a way to combat climate change by taking a lesson from European history.

The first half of this book delineates the United Kingdom’s approach to food-supply problems during the turbulent years leading up to and during the Second World War. At the time, the U.K. depended greatly on food importation, which would certainly be threatened by a military conflict. Led by Lord Woolton, the newly appointed Minister of Food, the government instigated a bold campaign to change citizens’ expectations and approaches to farming and eating. A rationing system was implemented, and government intervention aimed to make agricultural practices more productive. The government also made use of the media to encourage more food production in home gardens or allotments and discourage food waste, among other actions. Interestingly, despite the restrictions, this system resulted in better nutrition for poorer people in the nation and led to an overall healthier citizenry with better morale. Boyle argues that our modern war is against climate change, to which our current food production system contributes. In order to face this threat, she asserts, humankind must “fundamentally change the way we grow and consume food.” She talks about current projects and programs that are making positive change, such as private companies committing to ethically sourced produce, apps for finding farmers markets, and farmers and ranchers aiming to “produce healthy food that is affordable and kinder to animals, local environments, and climate.” In this informative book, Boyle effectively outlines applicable lessons from the U.K.’s WWII-era food-supply approach to problems of today, noting that change can occur in systems as well as individual choices; that strong public leadership is a necessity; and that nations need to come together in common cause. Overall, this thoroughly researched and referenced book is compelling, and many readers’ eyes will be opened to a large-scale problem and the potential for addressing it through concerted, deliberate action. Throughout, Boyle argues her points convincingly, and many will find a sense of hope in her ideas.

An optimistic yet realistic look at the problems and possibilities of global food production.

AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE UNIVERSE
Bruno, T.A.
Tom Bruno Author (494 pp.)
May 31, 2022
978-1-73464-709-9
978-1-73464-708-2 paper

Humankind fled to a mysterious planet to escape hideous cyborgs, but now they find themselves confronting the monstrous machine-creatures again in this SF series installment.

Bruno concludes a trilogy with this volume, begun with In the Orbit of Sirens (2020). In a spacegoing future, human refugees fled their home system to avoid the Undriel, a shape-shifting cyborg race determined to assimilate all humanoids. A generation later, on the distant world of Kamaria, the settlers assume the danger is behind them—but then an Undriel dreadnought, hundreds of years old, rises from hibernation in the sea. Kamaria already has a native population of technologically advanced bird-people, the auk’nai, who’ve suffered grievously due to the actions of the new human arrivals. The relationship between humans and the auk’nai are at a low point as the new Undriel threat dawns, but a few key colonists from the science-minded family of resourceful Denton Castus have tapped into Kamaria’s primordial forces and may hold keys to fighting back. Bruno has infused the material with massive amounts of extraterrestrial mythology, alien (and avian) metaphysics, and seemingly supernatural events that may puzzle even regular readers of SF/fantasy. However, these same fans will have no problem grokking the horrific, engaging Undriel, who are reminiscent of the Borg from the Star Trek franchise as well as the Decepticons from the Transformers films; they’ll also appreciate the wily strategies to probe the weaknesses of this relentless, grotesque foe. The hefty book features a storm of kinetic battles that should satisfy readers who enjoy video game boss fights. In the hands of a lesser storyteller, the mayhem might have become a dizzying maelstrom, but Bruno manages to efficiently pull all the narrative strands together, thanks in part to scenes involving a psychic power called “Shade walking,” which provides exposition and breathing space.

A satisfying, action-packed climax to a sprawling space epic.

“An optimistic yet realistic look at the problems and possibilities of global food production.”
One thing I know for sure, / And please believe it's true. / There's
mesmerized, totally unaware of what's around me." Although
Emperor's Planet." One character gazes at Venus in the sky,
Great Lady of Rome revels in all the decadence her surround-
Carcirieri's vivid descriptions work best during chaotic scenes;
None of the locals, including the narrator, Chronikulos, can
following pages emphasize the daughter's strengths: her talent,
qualities of a daughter. The narrator's love is evident early on:
for instance, an account of events at the Roman Colosseum
in ancient Rome, a cunning woman known popularly as the
Goddess Venus." In "Da Foist Men on Venus," set in 1922,
she reflects on things that endure "year after year, just like the
mobsters on the lam wind up at the house of a professor who
happens to have a working spaceship. All the stories in this col-
lection relate in some way to the second planet from the sun,
fhappen, the narrator recommends resilience during hard times.
With the exception of a stand-alone first line, Chin's poem scans
smoothly with consistent rhymes. Emergent readers will find few
words to stumble over in the simple vocabulary selection, and the
picture cues and rhymes provide a solid context for newly inde-
pendent readers working on their own. The large font plays well
against solid backgrounds, and Karabach's well-blended digital
paintings, focusing on a brown-eyed, brown-haired girl and her
similarly featured mother, will hold the attention of lap listeners.
The cadence and encouraging words make the text perfect to end
the night or start the day. While the praise may border on effu-
vive, young children needing self-esteem boosters will find them
here, especially if voiced by a parent.

A sweet poem crafted for parent-child sharing.

**DEAR DAUGHTER**

Chin, Jamie
Illus. by Alena Karabach
Self (26 pp.)
March 23, 2022
978-1-977747-03-3
978-1-977747-02-6 paper

A mother celebrates her love for her daughter in this rhym-
ing poem of affirmation.

In the voice of a parent, the poem weaves through the beloved
qualities of a daughter. The narrator's love is evident early on:
"One thing I know for sure, / And please believe it's true. / There's
just nobody on this planet, / Who is as amazing as you!" The
following pages emphasize the daughter's strengths: her talent,
kindness, voice, and dreams. Acknowledging that bad things may

**STAR BRIGHT**

Carcirieri Jr., A.F.
Page Publishing (798 pp.)
$29.57 paper | $9.49 e-book | May 25, 2022
978-1-66244-116-5

Debut author Carcirieri presents a collection of stories, all loosely con-
ected to the planet Venus.

These tales tell of many journeys, set in time periods that range from the days
of Creation to the year 2023. In "Colossus Is Falling," set in 226 B.C.E., the Colossus (who's actually
the patron god Helios) stands watch over the island of Rhodes.
None of the locals, including the narrator, Chronikulos, can
predict that the great statue's days are numbered—as are those
of another statue known as the Marine Venus. In another story,
set in ancient Rome, a cunning woman known popularly as the
Great Lady of Rome revels in all the decadence her surround-
ings have to offer. When she becomes the victim of violence,
she reflects on things that endure "year after year, just like the
star of goddess Venus." In "Da Foist Men on Venus," set in 1922,
mobsters on the lam wind up at the house of a professor who
happens to have a working spaceship. All the stories in this col-
lection relate in some way to the second planet from the sun,
even if it simply proves to be the name of a warhorse, as in "The
Emperor’s Planet." One character gazes at Venus in the sky,
"mesmerized, totally unaware of what’s around me." Although
the lengths of the stories vary in this massive collection, span-
ning more than 750 pages, all are abundantly detailed. However,
Carcirieri's vivid descriptions work best during chaotic scenes;
for instance, an account of events at the Roman Colosseum
paints a clear picture of violence, fear, and the "boiling energy
that consumed the spirit." The ambitious swath of geographi-
cal settings and time periods paints a wide-ranging portrait of
human history; from Napoleon to a hangman in the Old West,
all told under the indifferent stars.

A verbose but often powerful set of tales that span the ages.

**WESTBOUND**

Conner, K. Patrick
NaCl Press (318 pp.)
978-0-9856312-2-2

A saga by a former California newspaper editor spans more than 200 years
and events ranging from horrific Civil War action to a romance in present-day
San Francisco.

Conner, a sixth-generation Californian, weaves together several stories in an absorbing novel
rooted in a deep knowledge of his native state. Elliott Madison, an editor who has retired from the San Francisco Chronicle, is
writing an account of his great-grandparents William Henry Madison and Amelia Snyder Madison, who met and prospered in California after hard beginnings in Mendocino County: Will-
iam had come west by sea, around Cape Horn, and Amelia made a cross-country wagon journey. In 2005 Madison gets a
letter from a Phoebe Crighton in New York whose great-grand-
mother was the niece of Civil War veteran Benjamin Harrigan,
who appears to have eventually gone west and worked on the
Madisons’ ranch for the last 30 years of his life. Much of the
book is taken up with those stories: the horrendous sea passage
around the Horn and William’s failed gold mining attempts,
Amelia’s arduous wagon journey and the loss of her father on
the trail. But the story also sweeps in Benjamin’s terrifying
engagements in the war and his worse time in a Confederate
POW camp. Phoebe, a romantic, is convinced that Benjamin and Amelia were lovers (William died early on). Elliott agrees
to travel with her to Mendocino County to investigate. Some
readers may find the denouement a bit much, but Elliott’s char-
acterizations are spot-on, especially the classic pairing of the
quirky Phoebe and the reserved Elliott, who is quite ready to
case into a solitary old age until Phoebe arrives, and Elliott’s
granddaughter Alissa, a resentful piece of work and a drummer
in a grunge-rock trio. Near the end of the book comes, in effect,
a wonderful scenic postcard celebrating San Francisco, a city
Conner clearly loves.

A well-plotted story likely to entrance all but the most cynical.
WARRIOR’S PRIZE
Douglas, Elena
Penmore Press (410 pp.)
$19.98 paper | $5.50 e-book | April 7, 2022
979-8-985529-86-9

A minor character in the Trojan War becomes the hero of this historical novel.

In the Iliad, Briseis finds herself the prize of Achilles when the famed warrior kills her husband, King Mynes. Achilles’ surrendering her to King Agamemnon is a turning point in the Trojan War, but her appearances are fleeting in Homer’s epic. Medieval poets will develop her character further, and the resulting romances will inspire Shakespeare, for whom Briseis becomes Cressida. Douglas goes back to the source while creating a distinctive hero. Here, Briseis accepts a loveless arranged marriage as her lot but discovers a sense of loyalty to Mynes when she’s treated as the spoils of war. Her beauty—and fiery spirit—attracts the attention of the “fair and honorable” Achilleus (the author uses the alternative spelling) after he kills Mynes. Accepting the role of Achilleus’ favorite would give her freedoms and luxuries other captives are denied, but to do so would dishonor her husband’s memory and herself. It’s only after she has prayed for release from Achilleus that she falls in love with him. By then, the gods have already intervened—or is she just playing a part decreed by the Fates?

In making Briseis the hero of her story, Douglas skillfully gives center stage to women who are mostly silent pawns or invisible in the Iliad and most texts inspired by it. Briseis finds friends—and enemies—among the women captured by the Greeks. She forges alliances with Andromache—the wife of Achilleus’ greatest rival—and Helen of Troy. Whichever sides their husbands or lovers are on, these women must look out for themselves. But unless Douglas chooses to break with Homer—and the laws of Greek drama—an unhappy ending is ordained. Briseis begs Achilleus to forget about his honor and take her to his home so they can live in peace. This is where the narrative starts to strain credulity. Briseis’ desires are understandable, but her apparent ignorance of the roles of honor and a heroic death in her universe doesn’t make much sense—especially given her commitment to protecting her husband’s honor by not giving herself to Achilleus. That said, Douglas adds emotional heft to the bare bones of a foundational work of Western literature.

A carefully crafted tale that offers a fresh, woman-centered reevaluation of an ancient story.

LEARN PYTHON THROUGH NURSERY RHymes AND FAIRY TALES
Classic Stories Translated Into Python Programs
Eskenas, Shari
Illus. by Ana Quintero Villafraz
Sundae Electronics (80 pp.)
May 24, 2022
978-1-73590-796-3
978-1-73590-798-7 paper

An illustrated book that aims to teach kids the basics of the Python programming language.

In this short work for elementary school–age kids, colorfully illustrated by Villafraz and other uncredited artists, Eskenas, the founder and CEO of Redondo Beach, California–based Sundae Electronics, crafts a simple narrative about a faraway land where an enchanted computer generates nursery rhymes using Python programs. “A program is a collection of code that can be run by a computer,” the narration notes, starting with introductory definitions. “Every programming language has its own set of rules for how the code is written, which is called the syntax.” In small, gradual steps, Eskenas deepens the complexity of the terms and concepts that her young readers will need in order to master this language, always offered in direct, easy-to-understand terms: “You assign a value to a variable with an equal sign (=), which is called an assignment operator,” goes one such passage. “The value on the right side of the equal sign is assigned to the variable on the left side of the equal sign.” The text uses different typeface colors to give different operations a clear visual element, and it’s all done in the context of well-known nursery rhymes that many kids will already know, such as “Rain, Rain, Go Away” (rendered as a program that begins “if weather == ‘rain’”), and more complex fairy tales, such as “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” (whose program features the line “if large_porridge == ‘too hot’ or large_porridge == ‘too cold’”).

The combination of the fairy tale–style narration and boisterous artwork works extremely well, as it completely removes the tedium that often accompanies computer programming instruction for kids. There’s no denying the importance of getting across the basics of coding to youngsters, and it’s hard to imagine a more engaging, and therefore effective, vehicle for that education.

A brightly inventive children’s introduction to a widely used programming language.
THE ALPHABET FROM AAARRGH! TO ZZZZZZ...

Ford, Adam B.
Illus. by Len Peralta
H Bar Press (38 pp.)
$17.95 | $9.95 paper | $3.99 e-book
July 11, 2022
979–8–986152–20–2
979–8–986152–21–9 paper

Sound effects span the alphabet in Ford’s comedic concept book. This book describes each letter of the alphabet—and a few diagraphs, such as “th” and “gh”—using familiar and unusual sound effects. A few sounds are words readers might find in the dictionary (clank, glitch), but many are invented; “E is for ERT!” for example—the sound that a car’s brakes make. In each case, the spelling emphasizes how a person might sound out the strange sound effect, helped along by chosen fonts: “SKLORSH!” the sound of wet sneakers, is depicted in a gooey, dripping typeface, while the “VVVIP!” of an alien vessel has an appropriately science-fictional look. Ford’s rhymes are rhythmic and fun to read aloud, and the inclusion of diagraphs makes this a good choice for emergent readers despite some challenging vocabulary. For instance, the book effectively highlights the difference in sounds between “th” and “bh.” “THOK! When you’re chopping a log and you give it a whock.” Each page features a humorous black-and-white cartoon from illustrator Peralta; their sharp contrast, precise linework, and vivid humor will grab young readers’ attention. The overall effect is reminiscent of Shel Silverstein’s works, offering adults a sense of nostalgia while sharing the book with kids.

A delightfully clever read-aloud that will elicit noisy giggles.

DEAD CAT BOUNCE

A C.T. Ferguson Crime Novel

Fowler, Tom

 Widening Gyre Media (260 pp.)
Dec. 18, 2021
978–1–953603–44–8
978–1–953603–43–1 paper

To catch the killer of a database administrator at a Baltimore company, a tech-savvy private investigator goes undercover as the dead man’s replacement. When Jason Napier turns up dead, his wife, Amy, hires private investigator C.T. Ferguson to poke around. “The coroner told me he froze to death,” Amy tells C.T. in Fowler’s 11th crime novel about the PI. “It doesn’t make any sense.” She adds that her husband told her he thought co-workers might be “double dipping,” which C.T. presumes “didn’t mean with the chips and salsa.” Jason had worked at Research and Technology Partners, an outfit that helps companies in pretty dire straits have a brief resurgence known as a “dead cat bounce.” RTP operates out of a former meatpacking plant that has a freezer in the basement. Devon Knott, company CEO, backs Amy’s suspicions and hires C.T. to pose as Jason’s replacement in order to infiltrate the company. Louie Eckert, head of mergers and acquisitions, and his “two meathead subordinates” quickly tangle with the private eye. Also on the detective’s case are goons hired by Gabriella Rizzo, whose father had dealings with C.T. in an earlier novel in the series. And the PI’s affluent parents—especially his mother, who only calls him by his given name, Coningsby—worry that his job is too dangerous after he was shot during an earlier misadventure. But the many perks of being C.T. include his wealthy girlfriend, Gloria, and his physical attractiveness. Although his undercover appearance includes a platinum wig and colored contact lenses, Gloria notes, “You can’t hide handsome.” Some readers may be put off by C.T.’s snarkiness, macho attributes, and unconventional tactics. Others may wonder why the police closed the case on Jason Napier’s death so early (and so conveniently for the plot). But the novel has an appealingly quick pace, and people familiar with Baltimore will enjoy the many references to the city’s sites.

A welcome further adventure by an audacious, attractive investigator.

ALICE AND JACK HIKE THE GRAND CANYON

Graves, Amy & Pam Schweitzer
Illus. by McKenzie Robinson
Opalave Publishing (48 pp.)
$24.99 | April 25, 2022
978–1–73631–060–1

Two children enjoy a challenging hiking adventure with their parents. In this informative and entertaining debut picture book for elementary school students, Alice (the story’s first-person narrator) and her younger brother, Jack, learn that their parents intend to take them on a hiking trip into the Grand Canyon. During four months of preparation, Mom and Dad enlist them in the planning. To help acclimate the group for the arduous climb, the White family takes daytime “practice hikes.” The four also go on a local overnight hiking trip to experience using their new gear and setting up camp. The rest of the tale focuses on the Grand Canyon adventure through Alice’s eyes. She learns about its history and culture, stargazes, crosses over the rushing Colorado River, meets other campers and a mule train, and traverses steep switchbacks to the bottom of the canyon and back up again. A notably polished collaboration between mother-and-daughter authors Schweitzer and Graves and illustrator Robinson, this simple but well-conceived story is framed around useful tips for safe, fun family outdoor trips, from the importance of planning and practice hikes to the value of protective gear for sudden changes in weather and “one step at a time” encouragement if a young adventurer becomes anxious. Robinson’s deft illustrations are colorful, illuminating, and lively, and the large, clear text is perfect for young readers. The aftermatter includes facts about Grand Canyon National Park and a resource bibliography.

Appealing storytelling conveys the importance of preparation and awareness for young hikers.
“The book has a gratifyingly funky 20th-century look with a mix of line drawings, simple color washes, and doodlelike fills.”

**OBSTREPEROUS**

_Greenwood, Ted_

Anthology Editions (48 pp.)

$19.99  |  Nov. 15, 2022

978-1-944860-47-9

In author/illustrator Greenwood’s picture-book reissue, a little boy creates a wild, willful toy.

One morning, a child (called only “the Maker”) wakes up and decides to craft a kite. When it’s finished, there’s no wind, and the boy must wait. After waiting several days, the wind picks up and the kite is airborne. It first lands in the blackberries, then in the pond. Mrs. Pinch, a neighbor, disapproves, but Mr. Crinkle, another local, offers a new word to describe the kite: “Obstreperous….It means naughty and hard to manage.” But Mr. Crinkle’s solution comes with a warning: “Everybody’s repeatedly told to “Stay on the trails.”

Quietly insightful speculative fiction that will appeal to fans of Westworld and Black Mirror.

**THE GHOST OF DANNY MCGEE**

_Grim, Quinlan_

California Coldblood Books (278 pp.)

$9.99  |  Nov. 15, 2022

A high-tech, remote summer camp provides the setting for two women’s explorations of their humanity in Grim’s debut SF novel.

The mysterious, mountainous Camp Phoenix is open for the season with a high-priced, exclusive program that offers the chance for the superrich to experience a summer as children again. Proprietary technology transfers each adult’s consciousness into an ultimately disposable clone of themself as a child with no memory of their future life; each camper chooses their age prior to arrival. Among this year’s campers is middle-aged Logan Adler, who attends with her husband, Max Gill, as 12-year-olds in an attempt to rekindle their relationship. On the other side of camp, 20-year-old Sam is returning for a second stint as a counselor, leaving her life in Paris behind along with her misgivings about her previous Camp Phoenix experience. As Logan navigates puberty and new friendships, she develops a crush on the wrong boy—one who stands accused of a crime as an adult, outside camp. Meanwhile, Sam experiences her own ups and downs as a counselor but receives more responsibility from higher-ups. As she gains more knowledge about the ins and outs of what they do there, she starts to question not only the morality of her work, but also the boundary between reality and illusion. Grim’s novel is mostly quiet, slow-moving reflection on second chances, the ethics of cloning, the privileges of the rich, and what it means to be human. The story’s perspective alternates between those of Sam and Logan, exploring the experiences of the campers and the counselors, by turns. There’s a tinge of unreliability to their narration that gives the tale a compelling, evocative, and uneasy feel. The author also cleverly weaves in the ever changing story of a ghost who supposedly haunts the camp—the eponymous Danny McGee—adding an extra layer to the story in which everybody’s repeatedly told to “Stay on the trails.”

A delightful (re)discovery.

**THE LIGHT AFTER THE ORANGE**

_Hall, Beverly J._

Leirnins Publishing (339 pp.)

$4.99  |  July 19, 2022

Survivors of an apocalypse discover a new world in this YA fantasy.

Alex Chegasa turns 18 years old today. She’s one of the few who lived through “the Orange,” a world-destroying event involving bombs. She lives in Danvers, Massachusetts, in an old school with her adoptive guardians, Danny and Calesta. While rummaging through abandoned homes for “trinkets,” Alex uses her power of detecting auras to sense a presence nearby. The entity is a dog, whom Alex names Jen, after her dead mother. Later, Alex, her guardians, and friends Roberto and Abi venture into the town of Salem. When they meet another band of survivors who are armed, tragedy strikes. Alex goes home and uses her Firestone, a gift from her mother, to burn down her past and start fresh. She decides to search for Jericho, a benevolent community. Meanwhile, in the distant Bearaig, a teen named Billey NicNevin lives with her “State-sponsored” family. She suffers an abiding loneliness that’s only lessened by her bond with trees. One day, she meets a “beautiful young woman” named Geilis, who comes and goes like a spirit. Neither Billey nor Alex fathoms that each one shares a hidden connection to the fae King Arthanius Chegasa, ruler of a place called Spirismus. Can Alex and her new companion, Iggy Dragonrider Thrumblar, escape Jericho to learn more? Hall begins a new series with ambitious worldbuilding and a tantalizing narrative structure. Alex’s and Billey’s chapters alternate with first-person perspectives, keeping events intimate and on parallel tracks. Many genre tropes entwine, including apocalyptic survivors developing powers and a scandal happening in the fae courts. A deep exploration of character emotions ensures careful pacing, so casual fantasy
fans may need patience as the separate arcs build toward each other. Alex’s romance with the equally powerful Iggy is intriguing, as “his feelings confused me, and I wanted to read him but knew he would know, would repel my energy.” Throughout, nature is lauded as a healing power, and the message that society should be more than just “a group of people living in the same place” is excellent.

The author plays the long game in this engaging, layered, slow-burning fantasy series opener.

DESIRE LINES
Johnson, Cary Alan
Querelle Press (284 pp.)
$21.00 paper | $9.99 e-book | Sept. 6, 2022
979-8-9850341-0-3
979-8-9850341-1-0 e-book

In this novel set in 1980s New York City, on the cusp of the AIDS crisis, an African American gay man explores the raptures and dangers of his complicated identity.

Slipping away from his job to indulge in anonymous lunch-hour sex in one of Central Park’s gay cruising areas, the narrator, who is only given the nickname Deep Thoughts, notices a sign admonishing pedestrians to “Stay on Paths Avoid Desire Lines.” But Deep Thoughts’ life has already taken him far from the prescribed path of a working-class Black youth growing up in a 1970s Brooklyn housing project and yearning for the sexy sophistication of Manhattan. His first deviation came when a school desegregation lottery provided entrance to a mostly White school and the superior education it offered while driving “a wedge into my life that would forever separate me from my origins.” His second desire line was his gay identity, which transformed from subconscious longing to physical reality when he was 15 years old. By 1982, he had achieved his Manhattan dreams, living in a tenement in Hell’s Kitchen and inhabiting “a country where convention no longer matters.”

Now, his life is fueled by drugs, easily available moments of intense physical release, and the exhilaration of being part of a newly awakening community in which pride still battles with shame. On the fringes of his awareness, newspapers begin to report a new disease with the bleakly ironic acronym AIDS, though “nothing about it promises to be the least bit helpful.” The precision and honesty of Johnson’s writing bring an immediacy and universality to a narrative that is firmly anchored in its historical time and its particular set of marginalized identities. The narrator’s gay world combines hard-boiled hipster coolness with an easily wounded sensitivity. The exultant freedom of the dance club and even the first anonymous sexual experience in a subway bathroom are portrayed with a poetic sensuality that invites empathy. Explorations of the Black experience are similarly nuanced and varied, from a description of the protagonist’s mother’s “proper family,” with “good hair” and paper-bag tested complexities, to the contradictions of African nations’ emerging from colonization, learned during Deep Thoughts’ Peace Corps stint in Zaire.

A riveting, lyrical tale about a Black gay man’s unflinching odyssey during a cultural upheaval.

ARTIST
Awakening the Spirit Within
Jones, Jocelyn
Goodspeed Press (286 pp.)
Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-5445-2830-4
978-1-5445-2829-8 paper

Jones’ debut motivational memoir encourages readers to find their inner thespians.

As the daughter of actor Henry Jones (who won a Tony Award in 1958 for his performance in Sunrise at Campobello), the author was able to observe performers up close from a young age. She realized something about the most successful ones: “They seemed to have made themselves up out of thin air, manifesting an image and personality that resided somewhere in their imaginations.” Jones eventually grew up to be an actor and acting coach herself, developing an approach to the craft grounded in intentionality and internal inspiration. With this book, she seeks to share her method with artists of all stripes, including readers who simply want to access their creative sides. She blends stories from her life in creative communities—spending time in art colonies in her youth in the 1950s, studying acting in New York and Los Angeles in the ’60s and ’70s, and serving as a creative consultant in Hollywood starting in the ’80s— with advice and exercises meant to unlock one’s artistic abilities. She coaches readers on how to meditate, observe, be in the moment, set goals, and employ other valuable skills. Jones’ teaching experience comes through in her prose, which is concise, insightful, and often funny. Here, for instance, she riffs on the importance of maintaining the proper attitude: “I don’t want to be an actor. I am an actor because every day, I do the things actors do….I don’t want to be an organ grinder. I am an organ grinder because I grind the organ every chance I get. Plus, I bought a monkey and named him Marcel.” Much of the material is familiar, with its references to the Law of Attraction, manifesting, intentionality, and so on, but Jones packages it all in a way that manages to feel practical but delightfully low-stakes at the same time. Aspiring actors will likely get the most from this work, but creatives of all types are likely to benefit from the advice here.

A sometimes-familiar but often appealing guide to living a more creative life.
A comatose 20-something finds himself in a purgatory-esque realm in this dark urban fantasy debut.

A bridge collapse drops David Dolan and numerous other upstate New York drivers into the ice-cold river below. David winds up in a coma at a local hospital. Though he’s very much alive, he awakens in a world seemingly between life and death. A ferryman takes him to Jacob, a kindhearted angel, who guides him to an unknown destination. According to Jacob, David is “important,” but the angel otherwise remains cryptic. This realm teems with lost souls and various entities, from chimeras to archangels and monsters. Some of these have made their ways to Earth, like the vicious demon that attacks and eats diners at the Hooters-style restaurant where David’s girlfriend, Rose, works. Such unexplained assaults overwhelm the state of New York, and Rose and David’s mother, Chelsea, take it upon themselves to investigate. They’re capable women who align with Chelsea’s romantic interest, Department of Homeland Security Det. Brendan Dodd, who looked into the bridge collapse. Back in “the macabre purgatory,” David’s meandering journey leads him to Valhalla, where he mingles with dead warriors from different countries and eras. Some train David in weapons and combat, as the young man harvests a “fighting spirit.” He joins others in battling monsters to make it past Valhalla, where David believes his destiny awaits. But if David dies on the battlefield, will he be “reborn” like the warrior souls of Valhalla? And will he ever return to his reality and see Rose and Chelsea again?

Kearns deftly introduces an epic and avoids cramming this engaging series opener with characters and plot. David’s odyssey, for example, consists of a relatively quiet hike with Jacob, and his time in Valhalla zeroes in on only the few warriors he befriends. Similarly, the author keeps the real-world action primarily in New York and, despite hordes of murderous beasts, ensures that one memorable, scheming baddie stands out. The narrative aptly fuses mythologies. Alongside Norse myths, there are Islamic jinns (spirits) as well as the ferocious, water-dwelling bunyip of Aboriginal Australian folklore. Theologies, too, share the spotlight. Jacob describes earthly religions as alternative versions of the same story. While the varied beliefs spark copyous scenes of characters explaining things (courtesy of Jacob or a demonologist friend of Chelsea’s), action intermittently bursts in New York and Valhalla. These kinetic sequences feature Kearns’ tightly paced battles and training episodes: “Without thinking, David flipped his weapon to the other hand, stepped back from the snare of the spearhead, and ran down the length of its shaft. The pikeman’s head rolled through the sand before David could take the measure of his own actions.” Valhalla boasts a diverse batch of warriors, including a katana-wielding samurai and a Russian soldier who was killed by a Nazi sniper. Throughout the story, David questions why he’s in this ostensible purgatory, and the novel’s ambiguity may confuse readers as much as it does the hero. But the frenzied final act hints at David’s purpose and makes it clear where the sequel is headed.

This intriguing tale of mythological beings introduces what promises to be an exhilarating saga.
GLAMORELLA'S DAUGHTER

Martin, Charles J.
Illus. by Jerry Bennett
Literati Press Comics and Novels
(104 pp.)
$14.99 paper | June 15, 2022
978-1-943988-34-1

A brilliant, misunderstood girl with autism uses her impressive intelligence to protect her home from interdimensional intruders in Bennett and Martin's debut YA comic collection.

Glamorella is a much-commercialized superhero whose powers include flight and superstrength. But this volume, collecting the first four issues of the L.P. Comics title of the same name, isn't about her; instead, the star is her young daughter, Comet, who has autism. She's unfazed by her mother's fame and spends time with her exuberant friend Isaac (who has superheroic aspirations of his own). Her challenges include social events, such as dances and birthday parties. In this story, Comet helps her father, “interspace” researcher Emmett Emeagwali, fix his computer code to shut down an interdimensional portal after Steve, one of his scientists, is yanked inside it. Steve is pulled into the dimension from which Emmett rescued Glamorella 13 years prior; it turns out that Glamorella's father, the king, wants Steve's assistance in bringing her back. Steve manages to reopen the portal, and the king's squirrel-shaped minion goes through it, captures Emmett, and takes him back to the faraway dimension. As Comet's only remaining parent, Glamorella refuses to go through the portal to rescue Emmett. So Comet sneaks out and, aided by Isaac and her frenemy Betsy, breaks into Emmett's facility in a bid to save him. Bennett and Martin subtly weave Comet's autism into the story and intriguingly make her a latchkey kid of divorced parents, with a mom who can be called into action at any time and a dad who's lost in his work. The book points out that having a superhero for a parent isn't always what it's cracked up to be, and Bennett is unafraid to tackle other difficult subjects, as when Glamorella's vile publicist warns her to keep Comet's activities with Isaac, who's undocumented, off of social media because “the optics are bad.” While gleefully employing such comic-book staples as monsters and other dimensions, Bennett gives plenty of substance to Comet's everyday life.

An exciting and thought-provoking compilation.

ATTRIBUTION

Moors, Linda
She Writes Press (320 pp.)
$17.95 paper | $9.49 e-book | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-64742-253-0

An art history student stumbles on a hidden treasure in this literary novel.

Catherine “Cate” Adamson is trying to make her way in New York City's prestigious art world. The Michigan transplant, who relocated after the tragic death of her teenage brother, Matty, is the only woman in her doctoral program at the fictional New York City University. Her adviser, academic bigwig professor Herant Jones, keeps nixing her dissertation proposals. But everything changes on a cold December day on campus when Cate uncovers a scroll of canvas in a forgotten storage room—and trusts her intuition not to tell Jones. It's a small but stunning painting that may be from the Baroque period ("The composition seemed to be an allegory, perhaps from mythology"). It strongly resembles the work of renowned 17th-century Spanish Golden Age artist Velázquez, but nothing like it exists on record. Cate decides to embark on a trip to Spain, the center of the Golden Age and now home to the famed Prado Museum, armed with the painting she has nicknamed La Gloria, to try to solve the mystery of the canvas and who created it. Was the artist actually Velázquez himself or a mistress? An enslaved person perhaps? On a train in Spain, Cate meets the handsome Antonio de Olivares, who may have a personal connection to the mysterious painting. Once the Prado gets involved with an agenda of its own, Cate must choose between attaining love and academic stardom and finally giving credit to an artist with no voice. Moore is a Prado alum and former gallery owner. Her passion and extensive knowledge of art history show on every page as readers follow Cate from the tiny, drafty room stateside where the puzzling canvas is found to the vibrant, colorful environment that is Spain at Christmas-time. As a love interest, Antonio is attractive, intelligent, and supportive, offering his apartment and ancestral family home to Cate as she needs it as well as the potential for a romantic future. But their conflicts when it comes to the painting and Cate’s professional life are realistic. La Gloria itself, a beautifully described and ever enigmatic artwork, is an intriguing character all on its own.

A captivating journey to a specialized world full of drama.
Advanced aliens studying humans—in addition to researching several other species—suffer an epidemic of local serial killings somehow tied to their xenobiological mission.

Mumford’s debut SF novel is set on the home world of the Sel, an inquisitive, spacegoing race. The aliens examine other intelligent life in the universe, specifically sentient beings who have not yet developed faster-than-light travel. Via their own superscience, the Sel observe and sometimes abduct and return specimens to their own planets, now the routine for six species—readers will probably guess that humans are the seventh. But an initial Sel foray to Earth 400 “cycles” (years) ago resulted in the sudden cardiac-arrest death of the abductee, presumably some luckless individual from the 1700s. Now, with human technology becoming more advanced and the internet making Sel information-gathering easier, the aliens send a fresh expedition to try live-capture again. But there is a second, ominous narrative thread. Ever since that first human’s demise, an outbreak of serial murders has taken place among Sel tangential to the space project. The killers, once caught, cannot explain their motivations, and whenever one perishes in prison, the crimes resume, like some sinister contagion. Asuun, a Sel security technician, tries to narrow a field of suspects in the latest slayings (“This case had gone from high-profile to the most talked about topic at the security section”). Meanwhile, researchers Liuani and Rysal feel their extraterrestrial experiments are verging on an unresolved ending.

Mumford’s ingenious gambit—besides setting up a provocative series of questions with literally no answers—is relating the yarn entirely via the Sel, fascinated watchers of humankind. While they speak, act, and behave in relatable, everyday ways, hints and clues gradually reveal the Sel to be nothing remotely resembling Homo sapiens. That is a nice touch. Still, the wordy, formal narrative, longer on discussion than action, takes time to get where it’s going before arriving at that open ending. Chapters are set off by creation myths of the several nonhuman cultures, a portentous theme of how notions of lurking evil pervade every society that falls under Sel scrutiny.

A cleverly constructed SF tale—entirely from an extraterrestrial perspective—that delivers an unresolved ending.

A debut volume of short stories features individuals in realistic, if uncompromising, situations. The 11 tales in Nagler’s collection encompass the kinds of relatable themes readers will recognize, like survival, longing, connection, grief, and the bonds of family, with each playing out across America’s wind-swept dairy landscape and beyond. The tender, intimate opener, “Ponty Bayswater,” chronicles the beautifully fluid love life of a war veteran and insurance salesman who learned about the mechanics of sexuality at age 12 from his “loopy Aunt Violet.” Readers will get a sense of the author’s uncanny knack for intriguing characterization from her description of Violet, who spoke with a “nicotine bark” and sported “pink cat-eye glasses with fake diamonds, had a head of tightly curled gray and black hair and wore bright red lipstick, even at home.” The evolution of families forms the framework for other stories, like “Asa at the Foundry,” in which passion and pain bloom amid “stupid summer heat.” In “Maximus,” a Mexican son transcends cultures when he immigrates to America by car trunk. The pain of parental loss is brilliantly captured in “Fishing,” as a daughter’s grief is only soothed by her desire to remember her father by fishing in the Wolf River. The most moving stories encapsulate the epiphany felt by characters who discover love in unexpected places. The callousness of a perfume journalist’s mean boyfriend in “Leaving Lefty” forces him to reevaluate how he recovers from broken relationships to better appreciate “who is there to love me and let me love them back.” Among the collection’s shorter, more potent tales is the unforgettably gritty, nine-page yarn “Claire Rose,” which portrays how a traumatized wife processes a horrific ordeal involving her child. Nagler sketches in the difficult details of healing and the grief and anger that eventually yield to places where “pink flowers come up year after year without being asked, in a place they’re not supposed to grow.” Whether the stories concern age, death, cruelty, or love, the author creates bold, authentic characters with no choice but to adapt to circumstances they’d never expected in order to proceed with strength and grace. Orbitied by players who are bound by mortality, ancestry, paths, and perseverance, this emotionally satisfying volume becomes a sublime, interconnected wonder.

An outstanding collection of tales with delightfully diverse and memorable characters.
“Frequent twists complicate the heroes’ journey and will leave readers enthralled and eager for the sequel.”

**THE LAND OF THE PINES**

*Nilsson, Summer*  
*Illus. by Blayne Fox*  
*Looodor Publishing*  
*276 pp.*  
*978-1-954401-00-6*

In this debut fantasy, a kitten searches for her place in life while facing malevolent adversaries on a farm.

Grey is born in a barn on Black Mountain Farm. She’s barely a few weeks old when her mother leaves to live in the nearby woods, with Grey’s brother and sister not far behind. But the farm overflows with vibrant animals, some of whom believe the striking kitten is special (“The kitten’s gray fur, with its black- and sand-colored stripes, was spectacular”). Miss Jay the Bird becomes Grey’s guardian and convinces her to flaunt her feline pipes at “the Phoenix Club,” the farm’s monthly talent show. But at the same time, a sinister presence emerges. A Black Widow surrenders to the red Hourglass on her back, which develops an awareness and a voice all its own. This wicked duo obsesses over control and manipulates animals into spying on others in the mountainous region. When the two rope Grey into their scheme, the kitten seeks help from Miss Jay and some wise, magical wildlife. As Grey plans an inevitable confrontation with the Widow and the Hourglass, she learns a lot about who she is and where she wishes to be. Nilsson’s brisk, charming series opener boasts a memorable, mostly animal cast. She lovingly describes each character, such as Biggie the Deer, who likes moonshine perhaps a bit too much, and well-meaning but naïve Jack the Donkey, the Widow’s first “recruit.” Fox’s stunning illustrations further elevate these characters; highlights include Grey’s ride in a cup atop Biggie’s antlers and the recurring image of the Widow’s huge, ominous shadow. While magic permeates the narrative, from talking trees to the Hourglass’ terrifying ability, the story primarily centers on zealous Grey. She yearns to be more than a barn cat and discovers she’s capable of great deeds. Her journey not only carries this story, but also ends with a perfect setup for the sequel.

*Irresistible animals star in this sublime coming-of-age tale.*

**DANCE STANCE**

*Beginning Ballet for Young Dancers With Ballerina Konora*  
*Once Upon a Dance*  
*Illus. by Stella Maris Mongodi*  
*Once Upon a Dance*  
*64 pp.*  
*May 3, 2022*  
*978-1-955555-24-1*  
*978-1-955555-22-7 paper*

Dancer Konora, Teacher Terrel, and Mongodi, the team behind the *Once Upon a Dance* books, launch a series of illustrated how-to chapter books for kids.

This book introduces the idea of the “dance stance”—a way to stand that becomes the launching pad for all movement in ballet. The authors ably describe the visualizations one needs to form the correct posture, including weight distribution and positioning. The idea that simply standing can be hard work is introduced with a sense of encouragement: “that means you were working your muscles in a new way.” From the beginning stance, the authors introduce turning out with toe rotation into first position, shifting balance to prepare to lift one leg, and assuming relevé, or tiptoe, positions. The chapters end with more personal notes from Konora, such as an acknowledgement that ballet can be overwhelming at first but that hard work and practice make things easier. Interspersed between the dance instructions are accounts drawn from Konora’s personal experiences; some showcase ideas about dance and stillness, and others offer helpful practice tips or notes on how good posture can serve a dancer beyond ballet. The authors use accessible vocabulary in a conversational manner, as if one is receiving instruction from a good friend. Mongodi’s realistic full-color illustrations picture the adult Konora as a girl, which may give young readers a greater feeling of kinship with her. The character’s adorable, tutu-wearing feline companion, Kittina, is a furry attention-grabber, performing ballet antics on nearly every page. The balanced use of illustrations and text keeps the content from ever feeling intimidating, and the straightforward instructions make it easy to try the postures. The authors also helpfully encourage readers to find a healthy balance between dance and other activities. The book is most suitable for those who already have some knowledge of dance, but it also offers tips that beginners may find useful.

*A strong instructional guide for young dancers.*

**LIFECAST**

*Opal, Marc*  
*Goldshif Publishing*  
*392 pp.*  
*$25.99 | $9.99 e-book*  
*Feb. 2, 2022*  
*978-1-735554-95-1*

Teen lovers battle against the economic caste system that separates them in this debut dystopian YA novel.

In The City, Noble Valet Bear is 19 years old and works for the Telladyne family. Bertram Telladyne’s pharmaceutical company provides drugs to citizens who have been neurologically enhanced with cerebral “Neurogems” and wrist “docks” for the injections. People in The City’s wealthy Highland are virtually connected and perpetually distracted. Their primary thrill in life is following the Idol, a young woman who is, according to announcer Dahlia Delachort, “our mirror, our voice, and our emissary to the future.” When Idol Vox Aslanian dies tragically, a new emissary must be chosen. The competition is held among Young Ladies from the Noble families. Among them is Lady Aleks Yukita, whom Bear has known since he was a Valet-in-training as a boy with her family. Bear adores Aleks because she is curious, passionate, and empathetic—traits the
Idols tend not to possess. Aleks secretly spends time with Bear, originally a lowlander, as friends, and one night they sneak into the Monarch Estate’s archives, a trove of objects from the past. After the daring escapade, the two share their first kiss. They’ve also stolen film reels, which they’ll need help from citizens of the dangerous lowland to play. As the Idol competition heats up, Bear makes a new ally in Young Lady Marena Vexhall, who isn’t what she seems. She says that “Aleks doesn’t deserve to be the Idol. None of us do.” The sinister nature of the Idol slowly unfolds, and Bear wonders if escape from The City is possible.

Opsal’s series opener skews today’s shallow, capitalist society by pointing to the dystopia on the horizon. While smaller in scale than the Panem of Suzanne Collins’ Hunger Games series, The City features superb worldbuilding that will rattle modern audiences. The LifeCast technology, for example, puts users in the Idol’s viewpoint, which the vapid may find entertaining, at least until “you plummet straight down” after jumping from a building ledge, as Vox did. Another captivating element is the NApp personal downloads, augmented reality tutorials that take individuals through activities such as walking, cooking, and dancing. This is a fun yet terrifying exploration of technology catering to people’s desire to split their attention into ever smaller pieces. The casual deadliness of the class divide is least until “you plummet straight down” after jumping from a building ledge, as Vox did. Another captivating element is the NApp personal downloads, augmented reality tutorials that take individuals through activities such as walking, cooking, and dancing. This is a fun yet terrifying exploration of technology catering to people’s desire to split their attention into ever smaller pieces. The casual deadliness of the class divide is revealed when Bear must drive Bertram through the advertisement-saturated lowlands. The car is armored against fire from “radicals,” and cinematic prose has Bear “pop the BT-27 into reverse and drive backward down the highway while thin, pink slices of meat cascade down the tunnel walls.” Fans of reality TV will recognize characters like Chef Casper Fieri—who has “bright orange hair” and an “aggressive handshake.” Even more biting is Young Lady Kallista Telladyne’s idea for a LifeCast in which 10 lowlanders receive makeovers and “go ‘from garbage to glam.” Immersed in such a cringe-inducing world of apps, readers will root for outcasts like Bear and Aleks to tear it all down. Frequent twists complicate the heroes’ journey and will leave readers enthralled and eager for the sequel.

A clever and cutting fantasy that takes modern society to task for its corruption.

**NATURE LIVES WITHIN ME**

*Parisian, Tarina Anne*  
*Illus. by Carl Fontaine*  
*Tellwell Talent (24 pp.)*  
*978-0-228-86546-9*  
*$17.99 | $13.99 paper | Oct. 26, 2021*  

A First Nations child learns important lessons from wildlife in this debut illustrated children’s book.

This thoughtful tale, inspired by the Canadian author’s First Nations heritage, follows an Ojibway child on a journey of discovery through the forest, encountering animals and absorbing what they have to teach about the way they live. Soulful in tone, the rhyming, first-person narrative begins with a glimpse of a majestic eagle soaring overhead, the warmth of Grandfather Sun, and a nap in Mother Earth’s embrace. The kid’s respectful encounters with a bear, a beaver, a buffalo, a gray wolf, a turtle, and a gentle “sabe” (sasquatch or Bigfoot in the Ojibway language) bring key lessons in courage, wisdom, respect, humility, truth, and honesty. In the evening, the child returns home under Grandmother Moon, protected by the sabe (“He walked with me almost all the way, so I was not alone”). Genuine emotional resonance comes through in the text despite some unevenness in Parisian’s rhyming cadence (“Suddenly a Bear peered through the trees. / It made me feel weak in my knees…Watching the Beaver, I almost missed what stood behind the trees. / There stood an animal, again I felt weak in my knees”). The author’s uplifting message is enhanced by the story’s full-color, mixed-media illustrations of the animals, scenes of the forest and the changing sky, and the Ojibway child in traditional dress. Rendered in watercolor, chalk, and pencil by First Nations artist Fontaine, these dreamlike images alternate with pages of clear, black text. The somewhat murky picture on the book’s cover doesn’t do the beautiful interior illustrations justice.

A meaningful and visually lovely nature tale despite a few bumps in the rhyme scheme.

**TRIALS OF FIRE AND REBIRTH**

*Pawlicki, Edith*  
*Self (345 pp.)*  
*978-0-228-86547-6*  
*$6.99 e-book | June 14, 2022*  

In this third volume of the Immortal Beings fantasy series, deities inhabit human bodies, fall in love, and strive against bigotry.

Three thousand years ago, in a region called Zhongtu, An Ning awakes in a field of ash, inhabiting a man’s body. She has no other memories of her identity prior to waking other than her name and gender, but she has the magical power to shape clothing from soot. She learns that the village of Xiling has been burned by the God of Destruction and befriends Lady Guiying, a courtesan. When An Ning explains the circumstances of her awakening, Guiying declares her a new god. Soon, An Ning is known as “the Peace Bringer” in the village of Ningjingcun. One day, Karana—who’s the God of Destruction but chooses not to use the title—approaches the village. When he sees someone who reminds him of An Ning, whom he knew millennia ago, he calls her name. Startled, An Ning uses divine magic to teleport to Karana’s side, then faints from the exertion. Karana carries An Ning to her house and remains until she wakes. So begins an unconventional and magical romance that feels like destiny at work—yet Karana keeps his past from An Ning, including her role in it. The truth emerges as the Sundered Cult, seeking vengeance for their deceased Sun God, attacks female monks and deities. Pawlicki’s third series installment is emotionally resonant as both a fantasy and as an exploration of transgender identity. The chapters often shift between An Ning’s and Karana’s third-person perspectives, and when following An Ning’s actions, the narration uses the pronouns she/her/hers. When following Karana’s, An Ning’s pronouns become
he/she/him/his, portraying Karana’s inaccurate perception. Magical elements, such as Bulgae fire dogs, are well integrated into the narrative. Bits of wisdom weave through the story in lines such as “You cannot control what another believes.” The work’s tragic portrayals of body dysmorphia will be familiar to many readers and may create clarity for others. A magical plot development toward the end reveals how one’s viewpoint on gender is informed by society and also changeable with an open heart.

A vibrant, elucidating LGBTQ+ fantasy.

**A COAT DYED BLACK**

*A Novel of the Norwegian Resistance*

Pugnetti Jr., Don

Legacy House Press (310 pp.)

$24.95 | $14.95 paper | $5.99 e-book

Feb. 1, 2022

978-1-73759-530-4 paper

978-1-73759-531-1 paper

In Pugnetti’s historical WWII novel, Bjorn Erliksen goes from being a quiet, solitary farmer to a tough commando in the Norwegian resistance force.

It seems possible in 1940 that the looming war will spare Norway. Then the Germans do show up, and Bjorn vows to defend his homeland. After a rocky start, he escapes to England to become a proper commando. This will be a scary, clandestine life. One of his contacts back home turns out to be Truni Sonnesen, an old love and an emotional complication. But they are a good team and manage to sabotage a fuel depot and to assassinate a Norwegian police officer–turned-Nazi in Bergen. At length, Bjorn is arrested. Does the Gestapo really know that he is part of the resistance, or are they guessing? It doesn’t matter because he is interrogated and brutally tortured for six months. He finds reserves of stoic bravery that he never imagined. It’s a credit to Pugnetti’s imagination and research that the reader may often forget this is largely fiction and that Bjorn and Truni and others are products of the author’s imagination. And although there are many other characters, he was wise to focus so strongly on Bjorn, making it a linear narrative. There are some great and gripping scenes, as when they ride out a fierce storm in the North Sea: “Winds whistled like a hot tea kettle, rattling the wheelhouse door and demanding to be let in.” The descriptions of torture and deprivation—such as eating salted herring, head, guts, and all—are almost too much to bear, and though we hear so much (and rightly) about the Greatest Generation, readers will still be awestruck at their bravery. An afterward separates fact and fiction, an interesting, helpful perspective.

An exciting, high-stakes story skillfully told.

**CHILD OF ETHERCLAW**

Roberts, Matty

Twilight Fox (348 pp.)

$18.95 | $9.95 paper | $2.99 e-book

May 4, 2022

979-8-986065-80-9 e-book

978-0-578-39416-9 paper

A teenage girl and her adopted brother inherit alien powers and find themselves hunted by authorities in Roberts’ YA SF debut.

Sixteen-year-old Fenlee and 14-year-old Elliot Harper live in New Cascadia, one of many city-states that arose on Earth two centuries ago when alien biomechanical creatures intervened to save the planet from global warming. In the city’s upper tiers reside a rich elite whose power is based on the religious worship of these now-dormant aliens. The midtier residents are working professionals, and the lower tiers are home to everyone else. Before her mother’s death and Elliot’s adoption by her dad, Fenlee’s family was midtier. Now she and Elliot subsist in the lower tiers, scavenging for electrical parts in the abandoned undercity while their father’s work frequently takes him away from home. During a run-in with a security drone, Fenlee learns that a black opal that her mother left her is, in fact, an alien artifact that affords her telekinetic powers. Her abilities bring her to the attention of Dr. Seth Arkamis, an unscrupulous upper-tier scientist and member of the all-powerful Divine Council. Fenlee’s life is very much in danger, but it’s Elliot who’s taken. Can Fenlee and her friends rescue him from a high-security research lab? Roberts writes mostly from Fenlee’s third-person point of view but occasionally from Elliot’s or Arkamis’; the dialogue is naturalistic and the prose simple but polished. New Cascadia emerges as a compelling, flawed world, and in Fenlee, Roberts presents a well-rounded character who’s headstrong but fallible, compassionate, and relatable. Readers will also appreciate that her use of a prosthetic leg is simply presented as part of who she is rather than as a source of angst. The book’s portrayal of a found family is also engaging; Fenlee’s bond with Elliot, and their relationship with a ragamuffin named Nico and a cat named Kavi, contrasts poignantly with the neglectful behavior of Fenlee’s father, and their connection gives the plot additional urgency. Although the story ultimately pulls back in preparation for a sequel, readers will be well satisfied.

An absorbing adventure with astute worldbuilding and plucky heroes.
When a moose arrives, Mother Fox calls them home. The two fox kits learn the sounds, sights, and smells of their habitat in this woodland adventure for emergent readers.

Scoot and Scamper are eager to explore the things they see and hear from their fox den. When they’re big enough to emerge, they happily splash in a nearby stream, taste grass, smell flowers, and play: “They romped and stomped, wrestled and rolled until all the flowers were tattered and torn.”

Eventually, Casey calls “Lights! It will help you sleep if you turn the lights off.” This is the first hint in Rossmassler’s narrative that Kirby the King’s dreams are about to begin. Kirby’s dreams are intriguing for young wheelchair users working with service dogs, but readers may be disappointed that they do not see Kirby turning off lights, closing drawers, or retrieving items. Instead, they glimpse the fantasy pursuits that he dreams about, like painting and snowboarding.

The author’s watercolor paintings accurately and lovingly capture the movement of a pooch at rest. The vocabulary will be accessible for emergent readers, with plenty of sounds (gurgle-gurgle, croak-croak) to enhance read-alouds. The only consequence of crushing the flowers is that the foxes can no longer smell them, but it’s central enough that young readers may linger on what happens when youngsters behave carelessly. The author leaves plenty of room for her painted illustrations; several spreads feature no text, allowing readers to interpret art cues.

A playful, gentle tale of new experiences.
Twin brothers reflect on their careers working to improve health care in the United States.

In this dual memoir, identical twins Fred and Blair Sadler, authors of *Emergency Medical Care: The Neglected Public Service* (1977), recount the years they spent crafting aspects of the American medical system and related laws during the 1960s and '70s. Fred, a physician, and Blair, an attorney, began working together as a “medical-legal team” shortly after finishing their graduate programs, serving at the National Institutes of Health, the Yale University School of Medicine, and other institutions. Their first project, beginning in 1967 and continuing into the early 1970s, was streamlining organ donation, working to establish a unified national system of managing donors and recipients and helping state legislatures to follow a common framework for organ donation laws. They later helped to develop the role of the physician’s assistant and establish training programs and certification standards, an important tool in meeting the growing need for primary care providers. The brothers’ final joint project, spanning the early-to-mid-1970s, involved modernization of emergency medical care, in partnership with Yale University and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Their careers diverged after nearly two decades of partnership, as Fred completed his clinical training and became a practicing physician, while Blair moved into health care administration and oversaw the growth of Rady Children’s Hospital in San Diego, California, among other projects. The book concludes with a quiz—and notes about which parts of the poem are strictly rhyming, it seems there are more spiders than before. Luckily, she’s not afraid: “They are my constant visitors of every shape and kind— / Because they’re mostly harmless, I never really mind.” She is curious, though, and she imagines spiders parachuting down her chimney, coming in the mail, and riding in on the cat. She describes all the places spiders appear before affirming that outdoors is their natural habitat. Schechter’s delightful rhymes capture the voice of a child. Some entertaining features before and after the poem, told in the voice of Freddie, the cellar spider (a daddy longlegs), offer further insights into the creatures. Illustrator Kalla makes her spiders cheerful and un-intimidating for those who fear the arachnids. While at times the rooms seem overwhelmed by the creatures, the girl’s confident expression is likely to help readers keep their cool. The lovely mixed-media images also depict Freddie hiding on each page (the spider wears yellow rain gear to make him easy to identify), giving young readers a seek-and-find opportunity. The facts in a quiz—and notes about which parts of the poem are strictly imaginative—make this a useful resource for students hoping to learn more about these constant companions.

An inventive, fun, and beautifully illustrated celebration of spiders and all their virtues.
Among them are American President Morton Buchanan, slowly losing his mind in the ruins of the White House, and reclusive SF writer Ira Hunter, who lives on Gall Island, off the coast of Maine, and whose only company is his older dog, Eve. (“One huge benefit of living a solitary life on a deserted island was the unintentional preparation for any impending apocalypse…the huge benefit of living a solitary life on a deserted island was the unintentional preparation for any impending apocalypse…”)

Then Zen Buddhist nun Sarah Pretlusky unexpectedly knocks on Ira’s door to say—to his dismay and utter surprise—that she has not only read all of his books, but has found the answer to humankind’s survival in them as well. Her startling statements have more potency than he ever knew.

“Now Mr. Hunter, if you think I’m going to be acting like the Shaolin monk Kwai Chang Caine from the television show, Kung Fu, you’re in for some disappointments. Nope, I am still a living, breathing woman, not some kind of a superhero. And, right now, I’m as cold as shit. Can I please come in?” This slightly nonsensical but fun romp is as wacky as Douglas Adams’ The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, as ineffable as Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett’s Good Omens, and as American-centric as the film Independence Day.

A delectably zany SF tale.

This novel is ostensibly written by mysterious SF writer Sumac, who supposedly disappeared in the 1980s, leaving behind nothing but disorganized, handwritten manuscripts that are slowly being put together by his fans in the Sumac Association. The group also presents readers with the author’s playlist of mostly blues songs for this story. The result here is an over-the-top, funny narrative full of zingers. The tale offers a hodgepodge of characters and threads that include Buddhist sayings, courageous seabirds and dogs, lots of tantric sex, a glacier in Iceland, Mary Shelley, and a couple of effective love stories. The book examines the power of storytelling in an oddball way that somehow works in the end. In addition, the cast is intriguing and often amusing. During Sarah’s first meeting with Ira, she asserts: “Now Mr. Hunter, if you think I’m going to be acting like the Shaolin monk Kwai Chang Caine from the television show, Kung Fu, you’re in for some disappointments. Nope, I am still a living, breathing woman, not some kind of a superhero. And, right now, I’m as cold as shit. Can I please come in?” This slightly nonsensical but fun romp is as wacky as Douglas Adams’ The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, as ineffable as Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett’s Good Omens, and as American-centric as the film Independence Day.

A delectably zany SF tale.
in this story, she does an excellent job of bringing the setting to life with vivid language (Cassie’s “arched brow was a signal shot across the damask tablecloth and bone china plates with our host’s newly minted coat-of-arms”). Readers who prefer their historical fiction draped in satin, governed by strict rules of behavior, and blessed with fabulous wealth will enjoy the period-piece accuracy of the tale, while cocktail enthusiasts will appreciate Roddy’s recipes, which appear throughout the work. The mystery itself is a fresh twist on a genre trope, and the story as a whole is solid despite some uneven pacing.

A richly detailed, engaging whodunit set amid the glitter of 19th-century Newport.

**The Admiral’s Wife**

Ted, M.K.

Heath Street Publishing (384 pp.)


978-0-9919670-7-0

Two women, separated by time, grapple with love and family in this historical novel.

Li Mingyu has preferred to use her American name, Patricia Findlay, ever since she married her husband, Andrew. Though born in Hong Kong, Patricia has spent most of her life in the United States and has lost much of her Cantonese. Now, in 2016, she and Andrew have left their American lives behind—including Patricia’s successful career in finance—and moved to Hong Kong in order to be closer to her parents and her native culture. But the transition has proved more difficult than Patricia anticipated, not least because her father, a powerful Chinese banker, is demanding that she give him an heir to inherit the family business even though she and Andrew have had difficulty conceiving. Intercut with Patricia’s story is that of Isabel Taylor, who moves to Hong Kong with her admiral husband, Henry, in 1912. There, she reconnects with Li Tao-Kai, also known as Teddy, a man she met a decade earlier when he was a university student attending a dinner at her family’s home. She finds herself drawn to Teddy, who moves effortlessly between worlds, but how close will she allow herself to get? As the two stories unfold one century apart, two women in a bustling city are caught between the demands of family and those of the heart. What’s more, their tales are more closely intertwined than they first appear to be. Ted’s observant prose captures Hong Kong, past and present, in evocative detail. Here, Patricia examines photographs from Isabel’s time period: “The contrast between those photos and the Hong Kong of today was remarkable. No glamorous high-rises or ultra-modern skyscrapers. No high-end stores offering designer brands. No smartly dressed women on their way to work. No red taxies or Porsches or Jaguars. She imagined the sounds and smells would also have been different.” The parallel narrative structure is a familiar one, but the author employs it well, slowly introducing elements that bind the two timelines together. Isabel’s story is perhaps more intriguing, but Patricia is a richly imagined character whose contemporary predicaments are illuminated via her investigations into the past.

A well-crafted tale of two women eking out new identities in Hong Kong.

**The Glovemaker’s War**

Williams, Katherine

Atmosphere Press (222 pp.)

$15.00 paper | $6.99 e-book | April 25, 2022

978-1-63988-352-3

In this novel, a directionless woman finds a relative and an identity in her grandmother’s World War II story.

Georgina Smytheson is living a glamorous life in Manhattan in 2016 when her mother asks her to visit her grandmother Eve in England. Georgina decides to leave immediately. Shortly after she arrives, her grandmother remarks that Georgina has her grandfather’s eyes, which inspires Eve to tell a story. In 1943, Eve’s family owned a glove shop in Worcester. Eve intended to train as a nurse, but because she was fluent in French, she was recruited by the Royal Air Force for a special mission as an undercover agent in France. She used her skills as a glovemaker to send packages with messages to London during the war. In 2016, Georgina unearths such a package, which contains a single pink glove that triggers important memories about Eve’s wartime experiences. As Eve’s recollections unfold, she tells Georgina about Luc Gaspard, a young man she met while working undercover in France (“His deep blue eyes reminded her of the sea on a summer’s day”). Eve and Luc had an affair, and he is Georgina’s grandfather. Although Eve believes he died in the war, she isn’t certain, and Georgina attempts to track him down. She ultimately discovers more than she ever thought possible. Williams’ engaging story bounces back and forth between past and present, showing Eve’s life during the war and in 2016, when she tells Georgina secrets she’s never revealed to anyone. For Georgina, the disclosures lead to new clues about her own past and identity. Eve’s tale explains why Georgina’s mother, Angela, is so difficult. The war story turns out to be a lot more intriguing than the contemporary tale; Georgina has led a charmed life, and readers will find it a bit difficult to sympathize with her. In contrast, Eve’s story is sad, full of danger, and speaks to the horrors of war even for those not fighting on the front. The novel’s ending is a little convenient but very poignant. Still, the book almost feels truncated; readers may find themselves wanting more drama at the end.

A sweet tale of love in wartime.
JESMYN WARD WINS LIBRARY OF CONGRESS FICTION PRIZE

Novelist Jesmyn Ward has become the youngest person ever to win the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction.

Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden announced that Ward, 45, has been named the winner of the award, which “honors an American literary writer whose body of work is distinguished not only for its mastery of the art but also for its originality of thought and imagination.”

Ward made her literary debut in 2008 with Where the Line Bleeds and won National Book Awards for her novels Salvage the Bones and Sing, Unburied, Sing; the latter was a Kirkus Prize finalist. She is also the author of the acclaimed memoir Men We Reaped, which was shortlisted for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

“Jesmyn Ward’s literary vision continues to become more expansive and piercing, addressing urgent questions about racism and social injustice being voiced by Americans,” Hayden said in a statement. “Jesmyn’s writing is precise yet magical, and I am pleased to recognize her contributions to literature with this prize.”

Ward said she was honored to be named the winner of the prize “not only because it aligns my work with legendary company, but because it also recognizes the difficulty and rigor of meeting America on the page, of appraising her as a lover would: clear-eyed, open-hearted, keen to empathize and connect.”

The Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction was established in 2008 as the Library of Congress Lifetime Achievement Award for the Writing of Fiction. Previous winners include Louise Erdrich, Denis Johnson, and Colson Whitehead.

WILLIE NELSON TO PUBLISH NEW BOOK THIS SUMMER

Willie Nelson will tell the story of his friendship with longtime drummer Paul English in a new book, Rolling Stone reports.

Harper Horizon will publish Me and Paul: Untold Stories of a Fabled Friendship this summer. The book is co-written with David Ritz, who has collaborated on autobiographies by Etta James, Lenny Kravitz, and Joe Perry as well as two earlier books with Nelson.

Nelson and English began playing together in 1955. “Together, the two men roamed the country, putting on shows, getting into a few scrapes, raising money for good causes, and bringing the joy of their music to fans worldwide,” Harper says on a webpage for the book. “Stories of Willie and Paul’s misadventures became legendary, but many have gone untold—until now.”

Nelson paid tribute to English in 1985 with the song “Me and Paul,” which recounted their adventures (and misadventures). The song featured lyrics like “Almost busted in Laredo / But for reasons that I’d rather not disclose,” and “And at the airport in Milwaukee / They refused to let us board the plane at all.”

English died of pneumonia in 2020. He was 87.

“There’s something about my friendship with Paul that reminds me of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn,” Nelson said in a statement to Rolling Stone. “Tom was more civilized and Huck was wilder. Although I was plenty wild at age 22, I’d have to say Paul was wilder. Like Tom and Huck, though, we became a team. Nothing could or would ever separate us.”

Me and Paul is slated for publication on Sept. 20.
A thesis, though not one elevated enough to merit nailing to a cathedral door: Without Martin Luther, there would be no rock 'n' roll.

One of the more divisive characters in the history of Christianity, and inarguably one of the most influential, Luther was a brilliant student of literature and the law who, in 1505, quit those studies to enter a monastic order in Erfurt, in what is now Germany. He did so, he later wrote, after experiencing a terrifying thunderstorm that caused him to promise God that he would become a priest if he lived through it.

Luther and his fellow Augustinians, writes Luther biographer Martin E. Marty, “inhabited a universe in which they thought a threatening God kept a suspicious eye on every human act” and was quick to punish transgressions with damnation and hellfire. Torn by doubts, haunted by fears of demons and the deity alike, pained by constant illness, Luther nonetheless summoned up enough courage to launch a vigorous protest against the priestly tradition of selling indulgences that would supposedly save a sinner’s soul for a hefty fee. Given that the Catholic Church made enough money from the practice to build cathedrals all over Europe, Luther’s protest was not well met. Neither were his Ninety-Five Theses, which held, among other things, that salvation comes from divine grace alone, and in 1520 Luther found himself condemned as a heretic.

Pope Leo X ordered him to recant, but Luther did not comply. Instead, he went into hiding. He passed his days, sequestered in a castle not far from Erfurt, by translating the New Testament into German—a translation, first published 500 years ago on Johann Gutenberg’s new printing press, that would circulate throughout the German-speaking world. When he came out of his fortress, Luther discovered that he had touched off a much more radical wave of protests against the church, a movement now known as the Reformation, than the doctrinal issues he had raised.

Luther was far more conservative than all that, and the church that would bear his name shunned the anti-statist views of the Anabaptists and other dissenters. Indeed, it became the state religion in many parts of Germany, its tenets advanced by services that, like Luther’s Bible, were conducted in ordinary German and not Latin. Luther’s reforms had a powerful effect on not just theology, but also education, for now ordinary people, having access to a text they could understand, were inspired to learn to read and to teach everyone in the family to do so. The Protestant states of Germany were soon the most literate in Europe. Reformers in other nations followed suit, and the first English-language Bible appeared in 1525.

But back to rock ‘n’ roll. Rock was born largely out of the Black church and its gospel traditions (see the lively documentary How They Got Over: Gospel Quartets and the Road to Rock & Roll for more). Rock songs may or may not be directed heavenward, but, like gospel tunes, they’re sung in the vernacular. Martin Luther, the pioneer of secular language put to sacral uses, would surely approve. After all, you can’t dance to a Gregorian chant.

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