Featuring 365 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

150 Books That Will Add Color to the Fall Season

150 Books That Will Add Color to the Fall Season

Plus interviews with Richard Osman, Nina Totenberg, Ruby Bridges, Meg Medina, Chloe Gong, and more
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK  |  Tom Beer

A MAP TO THE MAZE

SUMMER IS JUST GETTING STARTED when we at Kirkus begin to plan our Fall Preview issue. It can be hard, in the carefree season of sun and sand, to cast our minds ahead to the chillier days of autumn. But the consolation—and it’s a major one for book lovers—is the profusion of riches on publishers’ fall lists. Alongside the promising debuts are new works by old favorites. Ian McEwan? Celeste Ng? Cormac McCarthy? Check, check, check. There’s almost too much to read.

That’s one reason we publish this issue: to help overwhelmed (but voracious) readers chart a course through the maze of new releases. Our editors have selected 150 titles—fiction, nonfiction, children’s, middle-grade, and young adult—that we feel are especially worthy of your time. We’ve also spoken with a range of authors, including Richard Osman, Nina Totenberg, Ruby Bridges, and Chloe Gong, about their new books and their own fall reading picks, among other things.

To kick things off, here are five titles (fiction and nonfiction) I’m eagerly anticipating.

*Didn’t Nobody Give a Shit What Happened to Carlotta* by James Hannaham (Little, Brown, Aug. 30): Already blessed with the best title of the fall season, this novel by the author of *Delicious Foods* has a gloriously outsized protagonist, too—a trans woman paroled from an upstate New York prison, returning to her Brooklyn neighborhood after two decades. “A brash, ambitious novel carried by an unforgettable narrator,” says our reviewer.

*The Story of Russia* by Orlando Figes (Metropolitan/Henry Holt, Sept. 20): Russian history is vast. So a concise narrative history, weighing in at just over 350 pages, is a welcome introduction for the generalist like me. Our reviewer calls this latest nonfiction work from the author of *The Europeans* a “lucid, astute text that unpacks the myths of Russian history to help explain present-day motivations and actions.”

*Shrines of Gaiety* by Kate Atkinson (Doubleday, Sept. 27): “Already one of the best writers working,” says our reviewer, “Atkinson just gets better and better.” No argument here. The latest from the author of *Life After Life* and other titles features a “Dickensian” cast of characters in the seamy world of 1920s London nightclubs. It sounds exactly like—I’d say my cup of tea, but perhaps gin is more apropos?

*Stay True: A Memoir* by Hua Hsu (Doubleday, Sept. 27): A New Yorker staff writer, the son of Taiwanese immigrants, recounts a formative friendship of his Bay Area youth, cut short by his friend’s death in a carjacking not quite three years after they meet. Our reviewer calls the book a “stunning, intricate memoir about friendship, grief, and memory.”

*The Hero of This Book* by Elizabeth McCracken (Ecco/HarperCollins, Oct. 4): “Novel? Memoir? Who cares. It’s a great story, beautifully told,” says our review of this slender book from the author of *The Souvenir Museum* and other books. The hero of the title is the narrator’s mother, a character our reviewer calls “brilliant, stubborn, bad with money, secretive, and oppositional. Yet she was more fun than anyone else her daughter knew.”
## CONTENTS

### FALL PREVIEW SPECIAL ISSUE

#### FICTION
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .......................................................... 4
- REVIEWS ................................................................................. 4
- EDITOR’S NOTE ................................................................. 4
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: ERNESTO MESTRE-REED ...................... 10
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: LAURA WARRELL .................................. 14
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: RICHARD OSMAN .................................. 18

#### NONFICTION
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .............................................. 22
- REVIEWS ............................................................................. 22
- EDITOR’S NOTE ................................................................. 24
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE ...................... 26
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: NINA TOTENBERG .................................. 30
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: AMBER RUFFIN & LACEY LAMAR .......... 34

#### PICTURE BOOKS
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .............................................. 39
- REVIEWS ............................................................................. 39
- EDITOR’S NOTE ................................................................. 40
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: RUBY BRIDGES ...................................... 44
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: JASON CHIN ........................................... 48
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE ......................... 52

#### MIDDLE GRADE
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .............................................. 55
- REVIEWS ............................................................................. 55
- EDITOR’S NOTE ................................................................. 56
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: MEG MEDINA ......................................... 60
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: RENÉE WATSON ................................... 64
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: C.C. HARRINGTON ................................. 68

#### YOUNG ADULT
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .............................................. 71
- REVIEWS ............................................................................. 71
- EDITOR’S NOTE ................................................................. 72
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: COURTNEY SUMMERS ......................... 76
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: CHLOE GONG ........................................ 80
- FALL SPOTLIGHT: JAS HAMMONDS .................................. 84

### 15 AUGUST 2022 ISSUE

#### FICTION
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .............................................. 87
- REVIEWS ............................................................................. 87
- INTERVIEW: ABDULRAZAK GURNAH .................................. 96
- MYSTERY ........................................................................... 120
- SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY ........................................... 124
- ROMANCE ........................................................................... 126

#### NONFICTION
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .............................................. 128
- REVIEWS ............................................................................. 128
- INTERVIEW: RINKER BUCK .................................................. 136

#### CHILDREN’S
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .............................................. 160
- REVIEWS ............................................................................. 160
- INTERVIEW: ANGELA JOY & JANELLE WASHINGTON .......... 168
- BOARD & NOVELTY BOOKS ................................................... 205

#### YOUNG ADULT
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .............................................. 209
- REVIEWS ............................................................................. 209
- INTERVIEW: RIMMA ONOSETA ............................................ 216

#### INDIE
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS .............................................. 228
- REVIEWS ............................................................................. 228
- EDITOR’S NOTE ................................................................. 230
- INDIE BOOKS OF THE MONTH .......................................... 249
- BOOK TO SCREEN .............................................................. 250
- AUDIOBOOKS ................................................................... 251
SHRINES OF GAIETY

Atkinson, Kate
Doubleday (400 pp.)
$25.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-385-54797-0


It’s 1926. Nellie Coker presides over an empire of five nightclubs catering to a diverse clientele and a brood of six children of various talents and aptitudes. Just released from prison, she finds herself beset on all sides. Would-be usurpers have infiltrated her inner circle. DCI John Frobisher is determined to bring her to justice. And Gwendolen Kelling—currently on leave from her job as a librarian in York, lately a nurse serving in the Great War—has just emerged as something of a wild card.

While the story unfolds over a period of weeks and is almost entirely contained to London, it sprawls across social classes and gives voice to a glorious miscellany of characters. The tone is set by Nellie, a woman who had the will and the smarts to create herself, and two veterans of the trenches—Gwendolen and Nellie’s son Niven, who survived deployment to the Somme. These three are hard to shock and difficult to take unawares, and they have all endured experiences that make them want to live. Like all of Atkinson’s novels, her latest defies easy categorization. It’s historical fiction, but there’s a sense of knowingness that feels contemporary, and if this irony may feel anachronistic, it also feels spiritually correct. Intertwined mysteries drive the plot, but this is not a mystery in any conventional sense. The adjective Dickensian feels too clichéd to be meaningful, but Atkinson does excel at creating a big, bustling universe fully inhabited by vivid characters. And, like Dickens, Atkinson is obviously fond of her characters—even the ones who do horrible things. Sometimes this means that she lets us know the fate of a character with a walk-on part. Sometimes her care manifests in giving a character the sort of perfect ending that seldom exists outside of Greek tragedy or screwball comedy. And, in one exquisite moment, the author shows her love by releasing characters from the confines of the narrative altogether—a choice she seems to offer as a gift to both her creations and her readers.

Already one of the best writers working, Atkinson just gets better and better.
Henrietta Atkins and one Marburg sister return from *Ship Fever* (1996), Barrett’s National Book Award winner, in interlinked stories ranging across half a century. Henrietta occupies center stage in the first three stories. “Wonders of the Shore” takes her to an island off the New Hampshire coast for an 1885 summer vacation with her friend Daphne. Barrett delicately contrasts Henrietta’s life as a high school biology teacher in Crooked Lake, her central New York hometown, with Daphne’s profitable career as a science writer and pseudonymous cookbook author; she plumbs the women’s complex relationship and provides a surprise ending that reveals Henrietta making an unexpected decision about herself and her future. In “The Regimental History,” she is a bright, inquisitive 10-year-old fascinated by the letters of a Union soldier, later learning of the soldier’s sad decline from his nephew, who’s one of her students. In fewer than 50 pages, Barrett considers the cost of war, the duplicity of leaders, and the nurturing bond between a young person and an inspired teacher. “Henrietta and Her Moths” also ranges through time to trace Henrietta’s efforts to help her sister, Hester, through pregnancy and motherhood and to provide a vivid glimpse of Henrietta’s ability to convey the excitement of scientific observation to her charges, including Caroline, her tempestuous niece. Caroline has become an aviator in “The Accident,” which captures both the joy of flight and the cruelty of class privilege with Barrett’s characteristic subtlety and cleareyed compassion. In “Open House,” another of Henrietta’s students faces a conflict that underpins the entire collection: 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 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.

Three generations of Izquierdos tell the story of their family and the misfortunes believed to be caused by a curse. In 1958, Octavio Izquierdo and his wife, Guadalupe, begin building their life in McAllen, Texas. 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 susto. 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.
This fall, as always, the fiction shelves will be full of treats, ranging from surefire blockbusters to books that will need a boost to find their readers (those are the ones I love to push). For a start, check out some debut books from independent presses. Luke Dani Blue’s *Pretend It’s My Body* (Feminist Press, Oct. 18) is a highly original collection of stories about “characters on the brink of claiming new genders, sexualities, lifestyles, and even forms,” according to our review. In Meghan Gilliss’ *Lungfish* (Catapult, Sept. 13), a family in crisis sets off for an island in the Gulf of Maine; according to our review, “Gilliss is an extraordinary writer; passages...read like poetry, and others read like a lyric essay, making use of surprising juxtapositions and associations.”

Two debuts have music in their prose: Laura Warrell’s *Sweet, Soft, Plen­ty Rhythm* (Pantheon, Sept. 20) circles around jazz trumpeter Cyrus “Circus” Palmer and the women in his life. Our review says that “crucially, for a novel that takes its title from Jelly Roll Morton, [Warrell] knows how to write about the way it feels to deliver jazz—and receive it.” The *Family Izquierdo* (Norton, Sept. 6), Rubén Degollado’s first book for adults, is a series of interlocking stories beginning in 1958 in McAllen, Texas, each told by a different character. Though most focus on the Izquierdo family, our review says that one 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.”

Following the success of *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017), Celeste Ng “conjures a dystopian near future in which art battles back against fear” in *Our Missing Hearts* (Penguin Press, Oct. 4), according to our review. Ernesto Mestre-Reed’s *Sacrificio* (Soho Press, Sept. 6) is a “compelling, melancholy novel” about Cuba in the 1990s. *The Book of Goose* by Yiyun Li (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Sept. 20) is an Elena Ferrante–esque story of teenage girls in post–World War II France, one of whom is educated and the other unschooled. Our review says, “Stunners: Li’s memorable duo, their lives, their losses.”

Moving back to 1926, we find Kate Atkinson’s *Shrines of Gaiety* (Double­day, Sept. 27), set mostly in London’s Soho demimonde. At the center is Nellie Coker, who has six children and runs five nightclubs. Our review says, “The adjective Dickensian feels too clichéd to be meaningful, but Atkinson does excel at creating a big, bustling universe fully inhabited by vivid characters....Already one of the best writers working, Atkinson just gets better and better.” Speaking of great British writers, Ian McEwan is back with *Lessons* (Knopf, Sept. 13), a decades­spanning story about a boy-then-man who lives what our review calls his “richly observed” life against the backdrop of the Suez Canal crisis, Chernobyl, 9/11, and Covid.

Ling Ma, who won the 2018 Kirkus Prize for fiction for her last book, *Severance*, returns with *Bliss Montage* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Sept. 13), a collection of “haunting and artful” short stories. “Ma uses elements of the fantastic but grounds them in a reality that is...recognizably our own,” according to our review.

Last but not least, and in perhaps the biggest literary news of the year, Cormac McCarthy will be publishing two new books this season. First up is *The Passenger* (Knopf, Oct. 25), which our review calls “a beguiling, surpassingly strange novel” about a man named Bob­by Western who’s working as a salvage diver near New Orleans. *Stella Maris* (Knopf, Dec. 6) follows six weeks later and tells the story from the perspective of Bobby’s sister, Alicia, a mathematical genius who’s in a psychiatric hospital. “A grand puzzle, and grandly written at that, about shattered psyches and illicit dreams,” according to our review.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
to use grackles to put the evil eye on the Izquierdos. In 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.

IF I SURVIVE YOU
Escoffery, Jonathan
MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (272 pp.)
$27.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-374-60598-8

A collection of linked stories focused on one family’s tempest-tossed journeys in Jamaica and Florida.

Escoffery’s sharp and inventive debut largely focuses on Trelawny, the bookish son of Jamaican parents whose place in the world is complex both physically (he’s homeless for a time) and ethnically. In Jamaica, his light-skinned, mixed-race parents feel superior to those with darker skin; growing up in Miami, he’s mistaken as Dominican; in college in the Midwest, he becomes “unquestionably Black.” In the finely tuned opening story, “In Flux,” Trelawny’s efforts to nail down an identity frustrates both himself and others; he’s at the center of a question he has a hard time answering and few others want to face. That uncertainty follows him throughout the book as he squabbles with his father and older brother for their esteem. He’s also forced to take peculiar and/or degrading jobs to make ends meet: He answers Craigslist ads for a woman who wants a stereotypically Black man to watch them having sex. Not that the rest of his family has it much better—his older brother, Delano, is a struggling musician working on the side in a shady landscape business, and the much-fought-for family home in Miami is sinking through its foundation. (Delano’s thoughts capture the mood of futility: “You try to make a situation better, only to make it worse. Better to do nothing.”) But if Escoffery’s characters are ambivalent, his writing is clever, commanding, and flexible—he’s comfortable in first and second person, standard English and Jamaican patois, Miami ethnic enclaves and white-bread high rises. And he writes thoughtfully about how the exterior forces that have knocked Trelawny’s family sideways—Hurricane Andrew, poverty, racism—intersect with and stoke interior fears and bouts of self-loathing.

A fine debut that looks at the complexities of cultural identity with humor, savvy, and a rich sense of place.

THE OLD PLACE
Finger, Bobby
Putnam (336 pp.)
$27.00 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-593-42234-2

In his first novel, New York-based journalist and podcaster Finger delves into the intricate entanglements of a small Texas town with flinty, sharply observed affection.

Yes, everyone knows everybody’s business in Billington, where gossip is the currency; yes, much of the town’s social life during the week in August 2014 when this novel takes place revolves around the annual church picnic; and yes, outsiders are the exception in Billington, where traditional values hold sway. But do not expect cowboy swagger or cartoonish hayseeds from Finger, who grew up in Texas. At the novel’s center, unwillingly retired math teacher Mary Alice Roth is a jigsaw puzzle of a character, as complicated as any Henry James hero. She initially comes across as an overbearing busybody, showing up at the high school to unnerv her successor—a young transplant from Brooklyn refreshingly unafraid to confront urban-bubble prejudices. Mary Alice thinks she intimidates everyone around her, even the principal, but her often obnoxious bristle is a defensive front that doesn’t fool anyone. Locals put up with her out of pity. Twenty-four years ago her husband drowned in what she hopes everyone assumes was an accident, not suicide. (They don’t.) In 2002 her son, Michael, died suddenly under mysterious circumstances; an obituary appeared, but there was no funeral. Mary Alice has never discussed Michael’s death, even with her best friend, Ellie, though they are bound by grief. Ellie’s son, Kenny—Michael’s best friend—died weeks before Michael in a car crash the morning after their high school graduation. Finger handles the nature of Kenny and Michael’s friendship and the town’s reaction with unexpected nuance, showing the problematic confusion in how people see themselves, see others, and assume they are seen by others. What could have turned melodramatic becomes an exploration of the danger of unnecessary secrets.

A surprising page-turner—homey, funny, yet with dark corners of anger and grief.

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 her debut 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.

**CANCIÓN**

Halfon, Eduardo  
Trans. by Lisa Dillman & Daniel Hahn  
Bellevue Literary Press (160 pp.)  
$17.99 paper | Sept. 20, 2022  
978-1-954276-07-9

Fiction coats reality—or is it the other way around?—in Halfon’s brief but eventful account of life during Guatemala’s bloody civil war.

The book opens with Halfon, a Guatemalan Jew, attending a Lebanese writers conference in Tokyo “disguised as an Arab.” He knows only a few words of Arabic and has negligible ties to Lebanon but accepts a rather curious invitation to the confab because he has never been to Japan. Thus begins an unusual family saga centered on his paternal grandfather, who was born in Beirut when it was still part of Syria and fled the city with his family as a teenager. Eduardo Halfon (same name as his grandson) becomes a wealthy textile manufacturer in Guatemala, where he is kidnapped in 1967 by a leftist guerrilla (and former butcher) known as Canción, held for ransom for 35 days, and released. All in all, not the worst outcome in a country where government commando forces were dropping innocents, including a living 3-month-old baby, into a dry well and sledgehammering or shooting children who were told they were being taken out of church to get vaccinated. “I wanted to put my fingers in my ears and be deaf and so not have to hear those voices,” writes Halfon, who is referring to the intrusive noise of soldiers bursting into his grandfather’s house but could be referring to any number of traumatizing moments. As in previous works of autobiographical fiction, including _The Polish Boxer_ (2012) and _Mourning_ (2018), Halfon, who spent much of his childhood in Florida and attended college in the U.S., draws us into this nightmarish world with his understated conversational style. “Everybody knows that Guatemala is a surreal country,” his grandfather wrote in a letter to a local newspaper, but the younger Halfon makes the horrors all too real.

Another minimasterpiece by a master of the form.

_A trans woman returns home after spending half her life in a men’s prison. She has a lot to say._

The title character of Hannaham’s superb third novel is a Black Colombian woman who’s just been paroled after spending nearly 22 years in prison. She was an accomplice in her cousin’s robbery of a Brooklyn liquor store that led to a shopkeeper’s murder; she transitioned during her incarceration, leading to routine abuses by inmates and correctional officers, including rape in solitary confinement. Upon her release, though, her demeanor is indefatigable and stubbornly irrepressible: Hannaham often starts paragraphs with omniscient third-person descriptions followed by abrupt, unpunctuated interruptions by Carlotta. (“Carlotta turned on her heel and rushed back to the subway Yo this shit’s too much! It’s an effective rhetorical technique, showing her urge to take control of the narrative while counteracting the kinds of “official” narratives that get the story wrong about women like her. It also simply makes Carlotta’s story engrossing reading. Carlotta’s travels through Fort Greene, Brooklyn, during the day or so the novel tracks are only moderately eventful—finding her parole officer, applying for a job, visiting family, attempting to drive a car, attending a wake—but all of it is enlivened with her commentary. Much of her sass is a survival instinct—eventually we learn just how traumatized she is, and she’s enduring what proves to be a difficult read into society. In parts the book reads like a time-travel story, as Carlotta observes changes in technology, manners, and her old stomping grounds. And in its day-in-the-life framing, hyperlocality, and rhetorical invention, it’s also an homage to _Ulysses_, whose ending is flagrantly echoed here. Carlotta deserves a lot of things society rarely provides to women like her—among them, a role in great fiction. Hannaham gives Carlotta her due.

_A brash, ambitious novel carried by an unforgettable narrator._

**DIDN’T NOBODY GIVE A SHIT WHAT HAPPENED TO CARLOTTA**

Hannaham, James  
Little, Brown (352 pp.)  
$28.00 | Aug. 30, 2022  
978-0-316-28527-8
"A ray of hope in a dark time."

THE WORLD WE MAKE
Jemisin, N.K.
Orbit (448 pp.)
$27.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-316-50989-3

In this follow-up to The City We Became (2020), the human avatars of New York City battle an extradimensional threat to the multiverse.

As New York attempts to persuade the other living cities of the world to join them in the fight for all humanity against R'lyeh, the alien city housing genocidal Lovecraftian horrors and represented by the sinister Woman in White, the city's avatars confront new challenges. Padmini, the avatar of Queens, faces deportation to India. Savvy city councilwoman Brooklyn campaigns for mayor against Sen. Panfilo, a xenophobic White man who promises a band of violent skinheads. Manny is being pressured by his powerful family to abandon his role as Manhattan's avatar and become the emerging city of Chicago's primary avatar instead, a decision that would also mean abandoning New York’s primary avatar, Neek, with whom Manny is in love. Meanwhile, Aislyn, Staten Island's avatar, discovers the downsides of turning her back on the rest of the city and allying herself with the Woman in White. As in the previous book, this is a fantasy inspired by the very real division between those who embrace difference (and are only intolerant of intolerance) and those who seek a creativity-killing homogeneity, seeing it as a return to a supposedly moral past that never existed. The story also explores how perceptions about a place imposed on it by outsiders—who have only the most distorted views about it from popular culture—can have genuinely damaging effects. It’s cathartic to imagine fighting these slippery, inimical forces with magic, to believe for a moment that some complex problems have direct solutions—that passion, faith, and the will to fight can make miracles happen. Perhaps the possibility of confronting those problems head-on might serve as inspiration for all of us facing variants of this issue in the real world and help us model ourselves after Jemisin’s characterization of New Yorkers: tough, nasty, but ultimately kind people who defend their own while embracing newcomers into their midst.

A ray of hope in a dark time. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THE BIRDCATCHER
Jones, Gayl
Beacon Press (216 pp.)
$24.95 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-8070-2994-7

A drolly insinuating chamber piece about a trio of Black American expatriates.

First published in Germany in 1986, this novel would be considered an anomaly for almost anybody except Jones, whose legendary stature among African American novelists was established almost 50 years ago by such provocative inquiries into Black women’s psyches as Corregidora (1975) and Eva’s Man (1976). Her new spate of publications that began last year with the historical epic Palkmares continues with this predictably unpredictable first-person account by Amanda Wordlaw (“Wonderful name for a writer, isn’t it?”), a lapsed author of racy novels like The Other Broad’ s Story who has forsaken writing fiction for travel books. As the novel opens, she is living on “the white-washed island of Ibiza” with her longtime friend Catherine Shuger, a prominent sculptor, and Catherine’s husband, Ernest, who writes articles for popular science magazines. Amanda wastes no time telling you what’s whack about two-thirds of this triad: Catherine keeps trying to kill Ernest, who in turns puts her into an asylum, from which she is released by Ernest, whom she tries to kill again. And again. It’s all outrageous enough at the outset to make readers anticipate an absurdist-modernist slapstick farce. Yet the icy, deadpan tone of Amanda’s leisurely narrative voice, though seasoned with sneaky wordplay and impish irony, helps make this a quirkier, more reflective kind of comedy. The repartee, as with the rest of the story, can drift and meld into side tangents and back, complete with literary references, art criticism, and coy innuendo. Jones’ impulse to keep her readers alternately off balance and in the weeds threatens to upend the novel altogether, especially at the end, as shifts in tone and locale make you question almost everything that came before. Whether this was intended or not, its effect seems perfunctory, even abrupt. It may not be the most powerful or best realized of Jones’ novels, but it may be the closest she’s come to making us laugh as much as wince. Her vaunted blend of ambiguity and disquiet comes across here as a sly, even smirky dance. And her inquiries into how Black women live now are present throughout. Not just “present,” in fact, but “prescient,” as Amanda herself likely couldn’t keep herself from saying.

Jones’ mercurial, often inscrutable body of work delivers yet another change-up to readers’ expectations.
Set in 1990s Cuba, Ernesto Mestre-Reed’s new novel, *Sacrificio* (Soho, Sept. 6), explores the impact of political uncertainty and the AIDS crisis on that country and its people to great effect. In a starred review, a critic for Kirkus calls the book a “compelling, melancholy novel that explores the beautiful rise and often violent breakdown of dreams, ideals, and love.” Mestre-Reed answered our questions by email.

**What inspired you to write this book, and why now? How long did you spend working on it?**

I wanted to write this story for several reasons. One is I wanted to complete a trilogy about my birth country dealing with its queer community directly during one of its most troubled periods. Cuba was the only country in the world that quarantined its HIV-positive patients in sanitariums, which led to worldwide condemnation and was part of a long list of events in which it became obvious that the socialist experiment had begun to crumble. Rafa, the young protagonist, is a guajiro from the more rural eastern part of the country where I was born, and he comes of age hard in the capital during a dangerous period of scarcity and violence. Through many revisions and advice from an amazing group of close readers—I worked on the book for long over a decade—I was able to bring together a narrative that, while it is very particular about the tumult in Havana during this period, I hope...resonates with how we are all—no matter in what society we live in—forever entangled in that search for an ideal of personal liberty that is too often just out of reach.

**Is there a book you’ve read that made you think to yourself, I wish I had written that? What was it, and why?**

A classic I wish I had written and that I have read and taught dozens of times is Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*, an almost impossibly perfect novel written by a very imperfect man. I first read it right after high school and could barely understand it—or I should say the first couple of times I tried to read it I couldn’t get past Quentin’s visit to the magnificently bitter Rosa Coldfield. The fire of that prose burned me because it made me want to just dive into it, both be consumed by it and learn how to ignite my own prose like that someday. In the many subsequent readings, it has taught me more about the art of storytelling, the power of how narrative is controlled and surrendered, than any other novel. It is also unflinching and brutally candid in its confrontation with our troubled history, something I try hard to emulate. Similarly, a contemporary work like Francisco Goldman’s *The Ordinary Seaman*, Faulkner-ian in its dominating...
THE BOOK OF GOOSE
Li, Yiyun
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (368 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-374-60634-3

Who lives, who dies, who tells your story—and is it your story to tell? (Apologies to Lin-Manuel Miranda.)

Inseparable young teens Agnès and Fabienne share a world they've created for themselves in rural, ruined, post–World War II France. Fabienne is unschooled and rebellious, while the more passive Agnès is disenfranchised from her schoolmates and family members. A "game" concocted by the girls—that of writing stories so the world will (ostensibly) know how they lived—launches a series of events that propels Agnès to Paris and London and into the publishing world and a finishing school, while Fabienne remains at home in their rural village, tending to farm animals. The arc of their intense adolescent friendship comes under Agnès' critical lens when she learns of Fabienne's death after years of emotional and geographic distance between the two. Now freed to write her own story, Agnès narrates the course of events which thrust her into the world as a teen prodigy at the same time she was removed, reluctantly, from Fabienne's orbit. Li's measured and exquisite delivery of Agnès' revelations conveys the balance and rebalance of the girls' relationship over time but also illuminates the motivations of writers (fame, revenge, escape) and how power within a relationship mutates and exploits. The combination the girls bring to their intimate relationship and endeavors (one seeking to experience things she could not achieve alone, the other providing the experiences) leads Agnès first to believe they were two halves of a whole. Knives, minerals, oranges, and the game of Rock Paper Scissors sneak into Agnès' narrative as she relates the trajectory of a once-unbreakable union. The relative hardness of those substances is a clue to understanding it all.

Stunners: Li's memorable duo, their lives, their losses.

NO ONE LEFT TO COME LOOKING FOR YOU
Lipsyte, Sam
Simon & Schuster (224 pp.)
$26.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-5011-4612-1

A portrait of the young bass player in 1990s New York, with a mystery to solve. Just as Jonathan Liptak changes his name to Jack Shit, because what could be more perfect for a member of a band called the Shits, he discovers that his frontman and roommate, the Banished Earl, has stolen his bass, undoubtedly to raise funds to purchase heroin. No sooner does Jack take in the situation than he receives a call from his friend at the pawn

Stunners: Li's memorable duo, their lives, their losses.
shop—the bass has been spotted. But before he can lay hands on either his vanished instrument or his struggling friend, the situation becomes categorically more complex. There’s a murder. There’s a prospective girlfriend and a potential gig. There’s a visit from a couple of New York’s finest, a run-in with Donald Trump, and a brief retreat to the Liptak homestead in New Jersey. But most importantly, there’s a flaming truckload of New York. What begins as a tale about two young women engaging in low-key mayhem because no one can see them turns into a story about two girls who were pressured to become friends because they were both Chinese immigrants—although with very dissimilar experiences of life in the United States. What they want from invisibility is different, and what Bonnie wants from the friend who is about to leave her is everything. The ideas of home and belonging recur throughout the collection. In “Returning,” the narrator meets the man who will become her husband when they are both on a panel for immigrant authors. A trip to his native country to participate in a festival—a trip that is an attempt to salvage their marriage—ends in a macabre, desperate rite. Ma also writes about motherhood and academic life and abusive relationships. These are rich themes, and the author explores them with the logic of dreams. 

Haunting and artful.

**BLISS MONTAGE**

Ma, Ling

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (240 pp.)

$25.00 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-0-374-29351-2

Short stories from the author of *Sevance*, winner of the 2018 Kirkus Prize for fiction.

The narrator of “Los Angeles” lives with her husband, their children, and the children’s au-pairs in the east and west wings of their home. Her hundred ex-boyfriends live in the “largest but ugliest wing.” While the narrator takes these past lovers on outings to Moon Juice and LACMA, the husband works at an investment firm. The husband’s dialogue is rendered in dollar signs. This piece feels uncanny in the Freudian sense—as if it is peopled not by actual humans but by ghosts or automatons. (There are echoes of Ma’s debut novel, in which a pandemic turns people into zombies that repeat the same everyday action over and over.) In the stories that follow, Ma uses elements of the fantastic but grounds them in a reality that is more recognizably our own. “Without question, the best part of taking G is the beginning. The sensation of invisibility is one of floating. You walk around with a lesser gravity, a low-helium balloon the day after a birthday party.” “G” is the name of a story and the name of the drug the narrator of the story takes with her best friend, Bonnie, on her last night in New York. What begins as a tale about two young women engaging in low-key mayhem because no one can see them turns into a story about two girls who were pressured to become friends.

**THE PASSENGER**

McCarthy, Cormac

Knopf (400 pp.)

$30.00 | Oct. 25, 2022

978-0-307-26899-0


“He’s in love with his sister and she’s dead.” He is Bobby Western, as described by college friend and counterfeiter John Sheddan. Western doesn’t much like the murky depths, but he’s taken a job as a salvage diver in the waters around New Orleans, where all kinds of strange things lie below the surface—including, at the beginning of McCarthy’s looping saga, an airplane complete with nine bloated bodies: “The people sitting in their seats, their hair floating. Their mouths open, their eyes devoid of speculation.” Ah, but there were supposed to be 10 aboard, and now mysterious agents are after Western, sure that he spirited away the 10th—or, failing that, some undisclosed treasure within the aircraft. Bobby is a mathematical genius, though less so than his sister, whom readers will learn more about in the companion novel, *Stella Maris*. Alicia, in the last year of her life, is in a distant asylum, while Western is evading those agents and pondering not just mathematical conundrums, but also a tortured personal history as the child of an atomic scientist who worked at Oak Ridge to build the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It’s all vintage McCarthy, if less bloody than much of his work: Having logged time among scientists as a trustee at the Santa Fe Institute, he’s now more interested in darting quarks than exploding heads. Still, plenty of his trademark themes and techniques are in evidence, from conspiracy theories (Robert Kennedy had JFK killed?) and shocking behavior (incest being just one category) to flights of beautiful language, as with Bobby’s closing valediction: “He knew that on the day of his death he would see her face and he could hope to carry that beauty into the darkness with him, the last pagan on earth, singing softly upon his pallet in an unknown tongue.”

Enigmatic, elegant, extraordinary: a welcome return after a too-long absence. (This review is printed here for the first time.)
Alicia suggests that Bobby may still be lying in a coma following an auto-racing accident in Italy. For Alicia, just 20 years old, mathematics is both a defense and a curse, something she’s given up—"I think maybe it’s harder to lose one thing than to lose everything." One thing that does seem to be uncomfortably real is her incestuous relationship with Bobby, which she reveals to Dr. Cohen in small, enigmatic bits seeded with defiant assertions that her conscience is untroubled: “I knew that I would love him forever. In spite of the laws of Heaven.”

Yet she was more fun than anyone else her daughter knew. Challenged by daunting physical limitations due to an injury with forceps when she was born, the older woman expended efforts to lead an active and successful life that could be considered heroic. (The achievement of “fun” seems superheroric.) Braided into McCracken’s gorgously spiraling narrative is an expansive meditation on the act of writing and, intriguingly, the art of writing memoir. Beginning with the dedication page (a photograph of an inscription—written in McCracken’s first book—to her mother, in which McCracken promises her she’d never appear as a character in her daughter’s work), the novel assumes a hybrid quality that could be called autofiction but really is an homage to the art of great storytelling. The meta-dilemma caused by one character’s hatred of memoir and books "blaming" parents and another’s need to tell a story provides a broad stage upon which McCracken’s characters (whoever they may be) can deliver their frustrations, realizations, and appreciations. Though bereaved, McCracken’s narrator unfolds her journey through London, and the story of her sometimes-maddening relationship with her parents as they aged, with attention to specific human detail. There is no danger here of any character becoming the disembodied “sentient, anguished helium balloons” McCracken’s narrator warns her writing students against creating.


"Your family is the first novel that you know.”

Meandering about London in the summer of 2019, 10 months after the death of her mother, McCracken’s nameless (maybe!) narrator recounts episodes from her mother’s extraordinary life and their quirk-filled family. Like all good stories, it’s complicated, and the mother in question was brilliant, stubborn, bad with money, secretive, and oppositional.

"Only a minuscule faction, credulous and cruel, believed that the failed nuclear generator at Chernobyl is emitting radioactive toxins that threaten the world. Other formative moments include the Suez Canal crisis, Covid, and 9/11, which causes Roland more than his usual angst: “Only a minuscule faction, credulous and cruel, believed that the New York hijackers reeled in paradise and should be followed."
Laura Warrell's first novel, *Sweet, Soft, Plenty Rhythm* (Pantheon, Sept. 20), follows jazz trumpeter Cyrus “Circus” Palmer as he turns 40 and reckons with a pregnant lover, a teenage daughter, and an assortment of other women “who are dazzled, confounded, exasperated, or obsessed with him,” as our starred review says, calling the book “a captivating modern romance evoking love, loss, recovery, and redemption.” Warrell answered our questions by email.

**What kind of research did you do for *Sweet, Soft*? Are you a musician yourself?**

One of my regrets is not taking my piano lessons more seriously. (My mother was right!) I know my way around the keys, but I’m by no means a musician, so I wanted to unlock what I see as the mystery of the musician’s creative process. How does the muse come to musicians? What’s happening inside of them as they compose and play? What do the instruments feel like in their hands? How are they able to translate whatever they’re feeling or thinking into a language the rest of us can experience on a deeply visceral level?

My primary sources were books by authors who spoke directly to jazz musicians, like Coltrane or Armstrong. I also talked to the musicians in my own life. For instance, a friend of mine is a drummer, and I watched him play one day and kept stopping him to ask questions: What words would you use to describe the sound of the snare, what are you thinking about as you play, are you hearing the other instruments accompanying you in your head?

**Do you listen to music while you’re writing?**

Absolutely! Usually, I can’t listen to music with lyrics, and when I listen to jazz I get caught up in the intricacies of the sound, so my playlists include lots of downtempo music and acid jazz, which I like because many of the tunes follow a groove that keeps the creative juices flowing but doesn’t distract me.

For *Sweet, Soft*, I had playlists for each character, so when I worked on an individual chapter, I’d listen to those songs to get into that character’s headspace. Sometimes the lists were made up of music I thought the characters would like. For instance, Pia, Circus’ ex-wife, likes The Cranberries, Jewel, and other ‘90s-era female crooners. Other times, I listened to music that, to my mind, “sounded” like the characters.

**What books were formative for you when you were young?**

As a teenager, I went through simultaneous phases with Toni Morrison and Jack Kerouac, which might sound strange but which I think makes sense. What I loved about both of them, and my love for Morrison endures, was the musicality of their prose, the diction, the abstraction grounded...
in the concrete. I found both of them to be poets as well as superb storytellers, and I aspired to their greatness.

What book do you absolutely love that is not as well-known as it deserves to be?
Rather than a specific book, I have a writer for whom I’d love to go to bat. I discovered Javier Marías when I was living in Spain. His work is incredibly dense and profoundly intellectual—intimidatingly so—but he’s a master storyteller who’s able to weave tantalizingly bizarre plots with deeper meditations on the human experience. Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me is a great place to start. It’s about a man who hopes to start an affair with a woman, but when he goes to her house, she dies in his arms. For the first 40 or so pages, we watch him experience this bizarre, heavy situation, which is a long time to linger in one moment. This is what makes Marías so amazing to me; those 40 pages are riveting.

Interview by Laurie Muchnick

Violence and chicanery, love and survival, poverty and careless opulence: Everything’s in play in Melvin’s sprawling family saga set in the Philippines—her U.S. debut.

Lali and Pilar—two daughters of a political dissident who, with his family, fled their homeland for California—have fundamentally different temperaments. Outgoing Lali seeks attention and experience, while the more reserved Pilar is devoted to her family’s honor and preserving its legacy. More importantly, Lali is in a relationship with Arturo, the godson of an authoritarian strongman, their father’s rival, who shares characteristics with former Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos. After the girls’ father is assassinated, Arturo whisks the family to Manila and the safety that will be afforded to them as part of his family. Lali (now married to Arturo), Pilar, and their mother return to a fraught political situation, and their private lives become enmeshed in a political web of shifting alliances and byzantine dealmaking. When Lali becomes pregnant, subtle shifts occur in the balance of power (emotional and sexual) between the sisters, and both young women embark on paths unimaginable to them earlier. 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.

THE BETRAYED
Melvin, Reine Arcache
Europa Editions (464 pp.)
$28.00  |  Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-60945-773-0

Interview by Laurie Muchnick
Melvin deftly illustrates that family alliances may be as complicated as political ones.

**SACRIFICIO**
*Mestre-Reed, Ernesto*
Soho (436 pp.)
$27.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-641-29364-8

Mestre-Reed combines elements of a spy novel and political thriller with bleak, steely-eyed realism about Cuba in the 1990s.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of Soviet support, Cuba entered the “special period,” which was marked by a sharp increase in poverty; a lack of basic goods and services; and deep uncertainty about the future of the country and the socialist dreams it was built on. Mestre-Reed explores this uncertain time while also telling a story about Cuba’s underground gay and HIV-positive population. Rafa, who’s come to Havana from rural eastern Cuba, goes home one night with a man named Nicolás, becoming entwined with him, his brother, Renato, and their mother, Cecilia. The family runs a high-dollar but semilegal restaurant, or paladar, out of their home, catering to rich tourists who seek an “authentic” Cuban meal, and Rafa helps them wait tables. Soon, he falls into a passionate and tormented affair with Nicolás that’s intimate and yet hard to define for both parties. During the peak of the AIDS epidemic, Cuba established sidatorios, or sanitariums, which were mandatory for people who were HIV-positive. The novel opens after Nicolás has been sent to a sidatorio and died, though no one knows where his body is. Renato also tests positive for HIV and is sent to the sidatorio but is allowed to leave on the weekends. Rafa and Renato are united in their grief for Nicolás but also in their aimlessness; they spend their weekends together, wandering the city, looking for tourists to pick up, and roaming without much of a purpose. After a fateful encounter with an enigmatic German tourist, Rafa learns that Nicolás and Renato had more secrets than he realized. Nicolás was a member of “los injected ones,” people so disillusioned with their country and their future that they purposefully infected themselves with HIV in a self-destructive act of protest. Now, this group is determined to overthrow the Castro government during Pope John Paul II’s upcoming visit to Cuba. Rafa becomes a hesitant detective, more interested in learning about Nicolás, Renato, and himself than in stopping the violent uprising. In this way, the book itself reflects the slow decay of ideals Mestre-Reed is exploring in the story. The novel’s Cuba is full of dreaming, even delusional, idealists—whether it’s the bureaucrats running the state, foreign tourists determined to overlook what’s in front of them to see the picturesque Cuba of the mind, or erstwhile revolutionaries committed to any kind of change at any price.

A compelling, melancholy novel that explores the beautiful rise and often violent breakdown of dreams, ideals, and love.

**THE CONSEQUENCES**
*Muñoz, Manuel*
Graywolf (224 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-593-49254-3

From three-time O. Henry winner Muñoz, a new and often luminous collection, his third.

Many of the stories gathered here are set in the 1980s and ’90s and feature people living in severely straitened and threatened circumstances: the families of Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers in California’s Central Valley who are routinely rounded up by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, repatriated, and then return, again and again; gay men in an age of AIDS and widespread homophobia; trapped and housebound teens. In “The Reason Is Because,” we meet a high school girl forced by pregnancy to drop out of school. She lives with her mother and her newborn in near isolation, and the only hope for change anyone seems able even to imagine is a marriage to the swaggering, not-very-bright, and mostly uninterested father. In “Anyone Can Do It,” the wife of a fruit picker who (though American-born) has been hauled away with his co-workers by La Migra is swindled out of her chief asset by a neighbor she’d thought an ally. Another standout is the moving title story, in which Mark, a water-company clerk, falls in love with Teddy, a sweet-tempered, beautiful young man who’s been hustling in LA, and is surprised when Teddy seems not only willing, but eager to leave the glitz of the city to settle with him in Fresno. Eventually it’s revealed that Teddy is dying of AIDS. Mark kicks him out and then—tortured—drives all the way to the small Texas town where Teddy was born and where, it turns out, he has just died. Perhaps best of all is the closer, “What Kind of Fool Am I?” Here we meet a rule-following Texas teen who bristles at the strictures of home and the narrowness of her prospects but sees little way to escape velocity for her, too.

**OUR MISSING HEARTS**
*Ng Celeste*
Penguin Press (352 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-49254-3

In a dystopian near future, art battles back against fear.

Ng’s first two novels—her arresting debut, Everything I Never Told You (2014), and devastating follow-up, Little Fires Everywhere (2017)—provided an insightful,
Empathetic perspective on America as it is. Her equally sensitive, nuanced, and vividly drawn latest effort, set in a dystopian near future in which Asian Americans are regarded with scorn and mistrust by the government and their neighbors, offers a frightening portrait of what it might become. The novel’s young protagonist, Bird, was 9 when his mother—without explanation—left him and his father; his father destroyed every sign of her. Now, when Bird is 12, a letter arrives. Because it is addressed to “Bird,” he knows it’s from his mother. For three years, he has had to answer to his given name, Noah; repeat that he and his father no longer have anything to do with his mother; try not to attract attention; and endure classmates calling his mother a traitor. None of it makes sense to Bird until his one friend, Sadie, fills him in: His mother, the child of Chinese immigrants, wrote a poem that had improbably become a rallying cry for those protesting PACT—the Preserving American Culture and Traditions Act—a law that had helped end the Crisis 10 years before, ushering in an era in which violent economic protests had become vanishingly rare, but fear and suspicion, especially for persons of Asian origin, reigned. One of the Pillars of PACT—“Protects children from environments espousing harmful views”—had been the pretext for Sadie’s removal from her parents, who had sought to expose PACT’s cruelties and, Bird begins to understand, had prompted his own mother’s decision to leave. His mother’s letter launches him on an odyssey to locate her, to listen and to learn. From the very first page of this thoroughly engrossing and deeply moving novel, Bird’s story takes wing. Taut and terrifying, Ng’s cautionary tale transports us into an American tomorrow that is all too easy to imagine—and persuasively posits that the antidotes to fear and suspicion are empathy and love.

Underscores that the stories we tell about our lives and those of others can change hearts, minds, and history. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**TI AMO**

**Orstavik, Hanne**

*Trans. by Martin Aitken*

Archipelago (200 pp.)

$18.00 paper | Sept. 13, 2022

978-1-938601-44-3

A husband and wife living in Italy confront the man’s imminent death from cancer in a meditation on relationships, loss, and identity in every facet of existence.

Noted Norwegian writer Orstavik’s new, novella-length work hints at autobiography, introducing an unnamed narrator who is a Norwegian novelist relocated to Milan, as the author has done, with an oeuvre that includes *Love*, one of Orstavik’s own books. The narrator is deferring her next novel to write this penetrating chronicle of her partner’s decline. When did her cancer begin, she wonders, tracing their four years together, the trips, the timing of his proposal (after his diagnosis), and settling on spring 2018 when “the energy went out of you.” Now, in 2020, he is dealing with rapidly advancing illness and extreme pain while she is tending him, writing (her way of existing), and confronting their differences at a crucial junction. Why does he choose not to discuss his death, less than 12 months away? How much strength is he using to avoid knowing? Throughout the brief text, the statement “I love you/Ti amo” is repeated and exchanged like a tolling bell as the couple both unites and divides in the face of inevitable extremis. Meanwhile, Orstavik maintains a brutally tender, hyperprecise gaze: “For a long time just looking at you was painful to me, I couldn’t look at you without the knowledge that you’re going to die....And even though it’s not that acute anymore, it still won’t pass, now it’s quieter in a way, normal almost, death has become an attendant presence.” Yet, dark though its central topic undeniably is, the novel shares a compassionate vision, bridging the gulf between the one who will go on and the one who will not: “What I’ve been writing is the most truthful way I’ve been able to be with you, with all that cannot be said between us in our days together.”

A remarkably frank and finely sieved account of two people approaching the ultimate parting of the ways.
Though Richard Osman has had a long career on British television, he was relatively unknown in the U.S. when he published his first novel, *The Thursday Murder Club*, in 2020. Now all that has changed. His first two books were *New York Times* bestsellers, and the third, *The Bullet That Missed* (Pamela Dorman/Viking, Sept. 20) is poised to be the biggest yet. Set in a deceptively bucolic English retirement village, the books feature a group of elderly sleuths who solve cases both cold and hot, making friends wherever they go. Osman answered our questions by email.

Why do you think your group of octogenarians is such a hit with readers?
We all love a gang, don’t we? A gang of unlikely friends is even better, and a gang who makes us laugh and cry and solve mysteries seems to be compelling for lots of people, whether it’s in the U.S., the U.K., or even China. We also love the idea that we can all continue to have new adventures and new friendships however old we might be. And, best of all, the Thursday Murder Club gang has a lifetime of wisdom behind them, but they are always underestimated, which makes them amazing detectives. Also, everyone would like to live in a community like Coopers Chase, with plenty of gossip, plenty of time, and plenty of wine.

What kind of research did you do for the Thursday Murder Club books? Do you belong to any clubs of your own?
My mum lives in a retirement community very much like Coopers Chase, and I visit often. So far there haven’t been any actual murders (that I know of), but there are so many great characters and so many amazing life stories. In terms of other research, I love reading about spies and criminals, but so far I haven’t joined any clubs for Mafia gangsters, diamond thieves, or cryptocurrency fraudsters (one of the bad guys in *The Bullet That Missed*).

Were you a big reader as a kid? Are there any formative books you remember from your youth or any adults who influenced you as a reader or writer?
By law, everyone in Britain has to read Enid Blyton’s Famous Five adventures. They’re about a gang of kids solving mysteries, and, now I think about it, they are like a non–senior citizen version of the Thursday Murder Club. They even had a dog, Timmy, and I’ve just introduced a dog, Alan, to *The Bullet That Missed*. After reading the Famous Five stories, all British children then read Agatha Christie. We train our crime readers, and our murderers, very young over here.

What book do you absolutely love that is not as well known as it deserves to be? And/or what are some of your favorite mystery series?
I always love this question, because so many wonderful books go overlooked. I adore a book called *Towards the End of the Morning* by Michael Frayn. It's a comic novel set in the fading British newspaper industry of the 1960s and contains a great deal of wisdom and some excellent jokes. I'm so happy when people say the Thursday Murder Club books make them laugh, because the world can always use more laughter.

**Who is your ideal reader for this book, and where would they be reading it?**
People love to send me pictures of themselves reading the Thursday Murder Club books around the world, usually on beaches or with a glass of wine in the garden but lots of unusual places too. My favorites so far have been overlooking the Grand Canyon, on top of Mount Fuji, and, best of all, on the Orient Express!

*Interview by Laurie Muchnick*

---

A competitor-turned-friend who, when he worked for the KGB, was known as the Bullet. All of this enables Osman to engineer 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.*

---

**CARRIE SOTO IS BACK**

*Reid, Taylor Jenkins*

Ballantine (384 pp.)

$19.69 | Aug. 30, 2022

978-0-593-15868-5

A retired tennis player returns to the game to defend her Grand Slam record. Carrie Soto is the best tennis player in the world, and she knows it. Her father, Javier, is a former tennis champion himself, and he’s dedicated his life to coaching her. By the time she retires in 1989, she holds the record for winning 20 Grand Slam singles titles. But then, in 1994, Nicki Chan comes along. Nicki is on the verge of breaking Carrie’s record, and Carrie decides she can’t let that happen: She’s coming out of retirement, with her father coaching her, to defend her record...and her reputation. Carrie was never a friendly player, preferring to focus on both a brutal game and brutal honesty, and now the media has a field day with her return to the sport as a 37-year-old. At times, it seems like everyone is waiting for her to fail, but when Carrie wants something, she doesn’t give up easily. Along the way, she reconnects with Bowe Huntley, a 39-year-old tennis player she once had a fling with. Now they need to help each other train, but Carrie quickly realizes she might need him for more than just tennis—if she can let herself be vulnerable for the first time in her life.

Reid writes about the game with suspense, transforming a tennis match into a page-turner even for readers who don’t care about sports. Will Carrie win? And, more importantly, will she finally make time for a life outside of winning? Reid has scored another victory and created another memorable heroine with Carrie Soto, a brash, often unlikable character whose complexity makes her leap off the page. Sports commentators may call her “The Battle Axe” or worse, but readers will root for her both on and off the court.

*A compulsively readable look at female ambition.*
“Stylistically refreshing and emotionally intense, cementing Serpell’s place among the best writers going.”

THE FURROWS

LIBERATION DAY
Saunders, George
Random House (256 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-525-50999-2

What can’t George Saunders do? On the basis of his work since Tenth of December (2011), the answer seems to be nothing at all. The stories in that collection marked a turning point in a career that already seemed remarkable, a deepening of empathy and scope. In the works that followed—the astonishing novel Lincoln in the Bardo (2017) and last year’s A Swim in the Pond in the Rain, which, among other things, may be the greatest craft book ever assembled—Saunders has revealed himself to be nothing less than an American Gogol: funny, pointed, full of nuance, and always writing with a moral heart. This, his first book of short fiction in nearly a decade, further cements the validity of such a point of view. The nine pieces here are smart and funny, speculative yet at the same time written on a human scale, narratives full of love and loss and longing the necessity of trying to connect. Dedicated readers will recognize five stories from the New Yorker, but they only grow upon rereading, revealing new depths. “Ghoul” recalls Saunders’ magnificent CivilWarLand in Bad Decline, taking place in a subterranean amusement park where employees wait for visitors who never come. Brutally punished for the slightest infractions, the narrator, Brian, comes to a radical decision: “Though I will not live to see it,” he tells us, “...may these words play some part in bringing the old world down.” This notion of upheaval, or collapse, also motivates “Elliott Spencer,” about an elderly man who, after their mother’s death, gathers five stories from the missing children foundation her husband 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.

THE FURROWS

An Elegy
Serpell, Namwali
Hogarth (288 pp.)
$27.00 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-399-54489-1

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.

FLIGHT
Strong, Lynn Steger
Mariner Books (240 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-06-313514-7

Three siblings bring their families together to celebrate the first Christmas after their mother’s death.

When Helen, their strong, opinionated, bighearted mother, dies suddenly, siblings Henry, Kate, and Martin and their spouses are left unmoored by her absence. Gathering at Henry and Alice’s home in upstate New York, the family hopes to keep Helen’s traditions alive while navigating holiday stress, interpersonal drama, and the unsettled nature of their inheritance: their childhood home in Florida. The house, however, is not the only tension within the group. Henry, an artist, spends long days constructing a flock of clay birds and fretting over climate change, while Alice, a social worker, ruminates on their childless life after years of fertility treatments. Struggling with their differing opinions about ambition and parenting, Martin and Tess live in New York City with their two kids. Kate and Josh, who have found themselves on the wrong end of bad financial investments, hope to move into Helen’s house with their
three children. Despite being set over just three days, Strong’s book manages to distill the essences of not only the characters, but of their decades of shared history and the complicated, complex relationships among them. Above all else, the family loved Helen, and in the wake of her death, they must navigate the new dynamic and learn how to love one another again. Across town, Quinn and her daughter, Madeleine — Alice’s clients — are relearning how to be a family, too, after Quinn temporarily lost custody of the girl. When Madeleine goes missing, the siblings spring into action to find her — and, in the process, begin to gain perspective about their own lives and relationships. With deft, discerning prose, Strong writes beautifully about mothers and the struggles, fears, and joys of motherhood. At one point, Kate confesses the depth of her grief to Tess: “But she’s the only person in the world who ever saw me the way she saw me, who loved me like that, who remembered me as all the things I’d ever been and also thought of me as all the things she still thought I might become.” As the novel comes to a close, Strong offers moments of connection among the family members that feel genuine and earned.

A quiet domestic novel that soars. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**SWEET, SOFT, PLENTY RHYTHM**
Warrell, Laura
Pantheon (368 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-593-31644-3

An impressive debut novel weaves storylines of lost love, coming-of-age, and midlife crisis to chronicle a Boston-based jazz musician’s reckoning with the untidy spoils of his myriad affairs.

Trumpeter Cyrus Palmer — better known to family, friends, and fans as Circus — seems irresistible to just about every woman who crosses his path. The spring of 2013 finds him turning 40 and wondering whether this magnetism has been more a curse than a blessing. He has just found out, for instance, that Maggie Swan, a feisty percussionist he digs the most at the warmhearted neighborhood bartender; Angela, a drama professor who sees Circus as “a beautiful, beautiful failure”; and assorted others who are dazzled, confounded, exasperated, or obsessed with him. Vivid, poignant portraits of these women are interspersed with the separate struggles of both Circus and Koko to get through transitions that have little in common with each other except pain and shame. Though this is her first novel, Warrell displays delicately wrought characterization and 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.

**WHITE HORSE**
Wurth, Erika T.
Flatiron Books (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-250-84765-2

An Indigenous woman encounters the supernatural when she touches her missing mother’s old bracelet and raises a monster.

Kari James would be the first to tell you she’s not a traditional Indigenous woman. “I was more of a work at the bar, go to the bar, thrash at a heavy metal concert kind of Indian than a powwow Indian,” she admits. In her mid-30s, Kari lives a disorderly life. She cares for her disabled father but still revels in late nights drinking and smoking at her favorite dive bar, White Horse, and enjoying the music of headbanger Dave Mustaine, the horror novels of Stephen King, and the occasional random hookup. She’s mostly ignored the spiritual aspects of her Apache and Chickasaw ancestors, preferring a good party instead. Then her cousin Deby finds an old family bracelet that once belonged to Kari’s mother, who’d vanished when Kari was a baby. Kari has always assumed her mother abandoned her, but when she touches the bracelet, she experiences violent, troubling visions about the past and her family, and a dangerous monster is unleashed. Set in and around Denver and its neighboring communities, this is a unique, dark twist on the modern ghost story that deftly blends an understanding of the mysticism of Indigenous culture with the horrors of poverty, abuse, and addiction. Sometimes the plot feels a bit chaotic, but the tumult mirrors Kari’s roiling emotions. She’s haunted not only by her mother’s disappearance, but also by the death of her best friend from an overdose, a tragedy Kari believes she could have prevented. As Kari fumbles toward the truth about her family and faces off against a nightmarish entity, Wurth — who is of Apache/Chickasaw/Cherokee descent — paints a compelling portrait of friendship, love, and the quest for self-respect, offering a fierce and generous vision of contemporary Native American life.

An engrossing modern horror story that blends the power of Indigenous spiritualism with earthly terrors. (This review is printed here for the first time.)
In her debut, Aviv illuminates the shortcomings of modern psychiatry through four profiles of people whose states of being are ill-defined by current medical practice—particularly by those diagnoses laid out in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Throughout, the author interweaves these vivid profiles with her own experiences. When she was 6, in the wake of her parents’ divorce, Aviv was diagnosed with anorexia despite her abiding sense that that label was inaccurate. Later, the author writes about taking Lexapro. “To some degree, Lexapro had been a social drug, a collective experience,” she writes. “After a sense of uncanny flourishing for several months, my friends and I began wondering if we should quit.” Aviv applies her signature conscientiousness and probing intellect to every section of this eye-opening book. Her profiles are memorable and empathetic: a once-successful American physician who sued the psychiatric hospital where he was treated; Bapu, an Indian woman whose intense devotion to a mystical branch of Hinduism was classified against her will as mental illness; Naomi, a young Black mother whose sense of personal and political oppression cannot be disentangled from her psychosis; and Laura, a privileged Harvard graduate and model patient whose diagnosis shifted over the years from bipolar disorder to borderline personality disorder. Aviv treats her subjects with both scholarly interest and genuine compassion, particularly in the case of Naomi, who was incarcerated for killing one of her twin sons. In the epilogue, the author revisits her childhood hospitalization for anorexia and chronicles the friendship she cultivated with a girl named Hava. They shared some biographical similarities, and the author recalls how she wanted to be just like Hava. However, for Aviv, her childhood disorder was merely a blip; for Hava, her illness became a lifelong “career.”

A perceptive and intelligent work about mental illness from the *New Yorker* staff writer.

A moving, meticulously researched, elegantly constructed work of nonfiction.
LIKE, COMMENT, SUBSCRIBE
Inside YouTube’s Chaotic Rise to World Domination
Bergen, Mark
Viking (464 pp.)
$30.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-29634-9

A tech journalist traces how YouTube works—or fails to.
Bloomberg reporter Bergen seeks to bring the behemoth into the light.
Though YouTube has billions of users and countless hours of content, the founders of the company—Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim—are largely unknown outside of the tech industry. YouTube’s current CEO, Susan Wojcicki, has a low profile by the standards of the social media business. When it started in 2005, the concept of having users provide content was simple, but the mechanics were complex. Once the site was operational, the growth rate was astonishing. Videos about games, music, fashion, celebrities, and, of course, cats: There seemed to be something by—and for—everyone. When Google paid $1.65 billion for YouTube 10 months after its launch, it seemed like an incredible amount. Of course, it turned out to be an excellent investment. The massive size of YouTube, however, presents a host of managerial problems. “It’s a tanker, an enormous business steered with small, careful turns,” writes Bergen. “Even if she wanted to, Wojcicki probably couldn’t steer it entirely in a chosen direction. She is a steward of a platform with a life of its own.” A central issue has always been the proliferation of posts that were unsuitable, including fake news, pornography, conspiracy theories, and terrorist videos. They appear faster than the algorithms and moderators can deal with them.

Powerful insight into a ubiquitous yet still shadowy company.

THE MOSQUITO BOWL
A Game of Life and Death in World War II
Bissinger, Buzz
Harper/HarperCollins (480 pp.)
$32.50 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-06-287992-9

A uniquely focused World War II history interweaving military heroics and college football.
Many books describe the consequential Battle of Okinawa in 1945, but this one deserves serious attention. Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Bissinger, author of Friday Night Lights, makes good use of his sports expertise to deliver a vivid portrait of college football before and during WWII, when it was a national obsession far more popular then professional leagues. He recounts the lives and families of a group of outstanding players who made their marks before joining the Marines to endure brutal training followed by a series of island battles culminating in Okinawa, which many did not survive. The author, whose father served at Okinawa, offers illuminating diversions into Marine history, the birth of amphibious tactics between the wars (they did not exist before), the course of the Pacific war, and the often unedifying politics that guided its course. To readers expecting another paean to the Greatest Generation, Bissinger delivers several painful jolts. Often racist but ordered to accept Black recruits, Marine leaders made sure they were segregated and treated poorly. Though many of the athletes yearned to serve, some took advantage of a notorious draft-dodging institution: West Point. Eagerly welcomed by its coaching staff, which fielded the best Army teams in its history, they played throughout the war and then deliberately flunked out (thus avoiding compulsory service) in order to join the NFL. In December 1944 on Guadalcanal (conquered two years earlier), two bored Marine regiments suffered and trained for the upcoming invasion. Between them, they contained 64 former football players. Inevitably, they chose sides and played a bruising, long-remembered game, dubbed the Mosquito Bowl. In the final third of the book, Bissinger provides a capable account of the battle, a brutal slog led by an inexperienced general who vastly underestimated his job. The author emphasizes the experience and tenacity of his subjects, most of whom were among the 14 killed.

College football and World War II: not an obvious combination, but Bissinger handles it brilliantly.
Every year, we get hundreds of submissions for the Fall Preview issue, and each editor must trim that list to a mere 30 to highlight. It’s simultaneously one of the most difficult and rewarding tasks of the year. Of course, there were dozens of worthy books that didn’t make the list, but I believe strongly in the value of each of the 30 titles on our list. Of those, here are seven that I have been discussing with and recommending most to family and friends. (All quotes are from the Kirkus reviews.)

*Year of the Tiger: An Activist’s Life* by Alice Wong (Vintage, Sept. 6): “A mixed-media collection of prose and other work by Asian American disability activist Wong. In the introduction, the author, who was born with a form of muscular dystrophy, claims that she never intended to be an activist. On the contrary, she writes, ‘Ableism conscripted me into activism’...A stunningly innovative, compulsively readable hybrid of memoir, cultural criticism, and social activism.”

*Profiles in Ignorance: How America's Politicians Got Dumb and Dumber* by Andy Borowitz (Avid Reader Press, Sept. 13): “A celebrated political satirist eviscerates know-nothing politicians, mostly Republicans...Ravaging this seemingly endless rogues’ gallery of buffoonery and corruption, Borowitz marshals mind-boggling, breathtaking evidence.”

*Teaching White Supremacy: America's Democratic Ordeal and the Forging of Our National Identity* by Donald Yacovone (Pantheon, Sept. 13): “Beginning with the founding of the republic, writes Yacovone, textbooks have been primary instruments for transmitting ‘ideas of white American identity,’ even asserting that this identity is definitively White and that, as one 1896 textbook stated, ‘to the Caucasian race by reason of its physical and mental superiority has been assigned the task of civilizing and enlightening the world.’ Current textbooks have plenty of problems, as well. An outstanding contribution to the historical literature of American racism and racist ideologies.”

*The Petroleum Papers: Inside the Far-Right Conspiracy To Cover Up Climate Change* by Geoff Dembicki (Greystone Books, Sept. 20): “Big oil knew about greenhouse gas-related climate change more than half a century ago—and did nothing but lie about it...Even as one Exxon oil scientist warned 40 years ago that climate change would be catastrophic for people around the world...the company still is ‘trying to convince people the emergency wasn’t real.’ A damning, necessary exposé of corporate malfeasance with lethal consequences.”

*Stay True* by Hua Hsu (Doubleday, Sept. 27): “A Taiwanese American writer remembers an intimate but unexpected college friendship cut short by tragedy...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.”

*Folk Music: A Bob Dylan Biography in Seven Songs* by Greil Marcus (Yale Univ., Oct. 11): “Casual Dylan fans will know at least a couple of the author’s seven chosen songs...but his explorations of lesser-known tunes...with all their allusions to the lost history of America, should inspire them to dive deeper into the discography. Marcus delivers yet another essential work of music journalism.”

*The World Record Book of Racist Stories* by Amber Ruffin and Lacey Lamar (Grand Central Publishing, Nov. 22): “A perfect follow-up to the authors’ You’ll Never Believe What Happened to Lacey...Ultimately, Ruffin and Lamar provide a much-needed wake-up call for anyone who still doesn’t believe the severity of anti-Black racism in America...An excellent look at lived experiences of Black Americans that should be required reading for all Americans.”

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
“Top-notch political satire from a practiced pen.”

**PROFILES IN IGNORANCE**

SURRENDER 40 Songs, One Story
Bono
Knopf (376 pp.)
$34.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-525-52104-4

The U2 frontman considers his life through the lenses of faith, family, activism, and, occasionally, music.

It’s not that Bono avoids discussing his world-famous band. He writes wittily about meeting future band mates (and wife) in school in Dublin and how he first encountered guitarist The Edge watching him play music from Yes’ album Close to the Edge. “Progressive rock remains one of the few things that divide us,” he writes. Bono is candid about the band’s missteps, both musical (the 1997 album, Pop) and ethical (force-feeding its 2014 album, Songs of Innocence, to every Apple iTunes customer). At nearly every turn, the author spends less time on band details than he does wrestling with the ethical implications of his successes and failures. Dedicating each chapter to a U2 song, he offers the . . .

Profiles in Ignorance
How America’s Politicians Got Dumb and Dumber
Borowitz, Andy
Avid Reader Press (320 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-66800-388-6

A celebrated political satirist eviscerates know-nothing politicians, mostly Republicans.

Over the past 50 years, the Republican Party has continuously nominated incurious, poorly read, and laughably unprepared candidates for public office, with puppet masters in the wings to minimize the damage. Such is the all-too-convincing premise of Borowitz’s exhaustively detailed, devastatingly funny takedown of a veritable Mount Rushmore of incompetence: “People sometimes call our nation ‘the American experiment.’ Recently, though, we’ve been lab rats in another, perverse American experiment, seemingly designed to answer this question: Who’s the most ignorant person the United States is willing to elect?” If this parade of intellectual lightweightsthis seemingly endless rogues’ gallery of buffoonery and corruption, Borowitz marshals mind-boggling, breathtaking evidence. In pillorying Trump, he’s shooting fish in a barrel, but even worse are the unprincipled “handlers” behind the scenes: Roy Cohn, Stu Spencer, Roger Ailes, Lee Atwater, Karl Rove, et al. Democrats don’t get a pass, but Borowitz clearly demonstrates that Republicans are unrivaled in behaving as if stupidity was a virtue. While there are countless laughs in the book, they have a rueful edge given that we are all affected by such widespread ignorance. “In this book,” he writes, “I’ve made nothing up. All the events I’m about to describe actually happened. They’re a part of American history. Unfortunately.”

Top-notch political satire from a practiced pen.

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
Even in a relatively short career publishing books for a general audience, Siddhartha Mukherjee has proven himself to be an indispensable science writer, the author of the modern classics *The Emperor of All Maladies* and *The Gene*. In a starred review, we call his latest, *The Song of the Cell* (Scribner, Oct. 25), “another outstanding addition to the author’s oeuvre, which we hope will continue to grow for years to come.” The author answered our questions via email.

**You have had a successful academic and clinical career. What was the impetus for writing books for a general audience?**

I wanted to bring my readers into the world that I inhabit—a world imbued with the excitement of science and medicine as well as its failures and flaws. Medicine and science are human professions, and all things human—aspiration, ambition, greed, envy, hope, passion, love—are embodied within it. I want my readers to understand how we came about discovering the deepest secrets of nature: Where exactly was Rosalind Franklin when she performed her crucial experiments on DNA? Why did the highly touted breast cancer trials in the 1990s go wrong? What are we made of? Why does anyone need to know about cells and cellular therapy?

**What were some of the most formative books for you as a child?**

I read a lot and had many favorites; it would be hard to list them all. As a child, I loved fantasy and science fiction—and so The Ring Trilogy (Tolkien), *Dune* (Herbert) and Asimov’s and Heinlein’s books loomed large. As I grew older, I began to discover more fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Primo Levi’s *Life in Auschwitz* was a touchstone. *Midnight’s Children* by Rushdie, Suketu Mehta’s mesmerizing *Maximum City*, Kate Boo’s *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, and any of Murakami’s and Borges’ books taught me to read and write. Lewis Thomas’ *The Lives of a Cell* and Atul Gawande’s *Being Mortal*. Oh, and fiction and poetry: Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* sent a joy and chill up my undergraduate spine. There was Sylvia Plath, of course; I read her in my moody teens and still come back to her. And finally, all I can remember now is a visit to Emily Dickinson’s house in Amherst, Massachusetts, with a miniscule desk overlooking a window in a tiny room. She reinvented modern poetry in this space, I often remind myself: How can one fathom it?

If someone were going to write the story of your life, who would you want it to be (and why)?

Tough question. I guess I’d choose Lewis Thomas because he was so familiar with the intricacies and intimacies of being a scientist.

You are one of the most acclaimed contemporary science writers. For fans of your books, who else would you recommend?

The list goes on and on from above. Over and beyond those I have already mentioned, I loved Jenny Egan’s *A Visit From the Goon Squad*. It’s not about science, but it raises a lot of questions about psychiatry and personality. Borges’ *Labyrinths*, which contain some of his best essays, and any book by Oliver Sacks, say, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat.*

**Interview by Eric Liebetrau**
In the section on populism, the author employs wrestling lingo, by Eula Biss, this collection is well constructed. 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.

THE PETROLEUM PAPERS Inside the Far-Right Conspiracy To Cover Up Climate Change Dembicki, Geoff Greystone Books (256 pp.) $27.95 | Sept. 20, 2022 978-1-77164-891-2

Big oil knew about greenhouse gas-related climate change more than half a century ago—and did nothing but lie about it.

In November 1959, writes investigative climate change reporter Dembicki, a prominent oil executive named Robert Dunlop “received a credible warning that his industry could cause death and suffering for large numbers of the planet’s inhabitants.” That warning came from physicist Edward Teller, one of the fathers of the atomic bomb and “no back-to-nature romantic,” who prophesied that his invention was a toy next to the consequences of fossil fuel–caused climate change. Moreover, added Teller, when the climate warmed, the ice caps would melt, the oceans would rise, and large swaths of the world would become uninhabitable. Even at the time, the facts were not hidden: So bad was the smog in Los Angeles in 1943 that “many assumed that it was a chemical warfare attack by the Japanese army.” Still, Dunlop and others in the petroleum business covered up those inconvenient truths, and decades later, players such as Koch Industries remain heavily invested in the fossil fuel economy, backed by media outlets such as Fox News, whose minions have steadfastly insisted that climate change is a natural phenomenon. The situation, though, is different in the courts, and renewable-energy warriors are waging combat against big oil that draws on many of the same tactics as the fight against big tobacco in the 1990s. One recent case, for instance, contests the extraction of Canadian oil sands, while another links typhoon damage in the Philippines to the international energy industry. Yet, even as one Exxon oil scientist warned 40 years ago that climate change would be catastrophic for people around the world, the Philippines included, the company still is “trying to convince people the emergency wasn’t real.” A damning, necessary exposé of corporate malfeasance with lethal consequences.
MEMORIES OF A GAY CATHOLIC BOYHOOD

Coming of Age in the Sixties
D’Emilio, John
Duke Univ. (248 pp.)
$29.95 | Sept. 9, 2022
978-1-4780-1592-5

Unusual among today’s memoirs, this one is upbeat and generous spirited about its author’s early life and challenges.

In sparkling fashion, D’Emilio enters company with Alfred Kazin and A Walker in the City, the classic work that, in Polish Jewish immigrant tones, evoked the early years of a Bronx boyhood. D’Emilio, a Guggenheim fellow and noted historian of gay history in the U.S., writes about his early years as a son of the Bronx, but in Italian Catholic hues. Like Kazin’s book, this one sings a hymn to that particular borough and to the city as a whole. This is also a son’s tale of a close-knit family adapting to a new world with a mixture of love, aspiration, loss, and tension. In D’Emilio’s case, the emergence of his sexuality in a particularly repressive era made growing up and adapting to American life even more complicated. While the author depicts his burgeoning gay sexuality with unusual ease, this part of him is by no means the only subject of this appealing book. He brings his Catholic family’s religiosity, the priests who taught and mentored him, and his own Catholic elementary schooling richly alive. He also offers a particularly affecting portrayal of one of Manhattan’s great Jesuit institutions, Regis High School, where D’Emilio’s intelligence caught the attention of his teachers to the point where he considered becoming a Jesuit priest. Columbia University also takes center stage as the site of his maturation as a scholar. During his undergraduate years in the tumultuous late 1960s, D’Emilio counseled fellow students about avoiding the draft and sought a conscientious objector deferment while working as an assistant to Margaret Mead. The author’s compassionate spirit suffuses the text to such a degree that one hopes for a future continuation into his years as a professional historian.

A warm, humane coming-of-age memoir that delivers much more than its title suggests.

THE STORY OF RUSSIA

Figes, Orlando
Metropolitan/Henry Holt (352 pp.)
$29.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-2507-9689-9

An expert on Russia delivers a crucially relevant study of a country that has been continuously “subjected to the vicissitudes of ruling ideologies.”

Wolfson History Prize winner Figes, one of the world’s leading authorities on Russian history and culture, shows how, over centuries, Russian autocrats have manipulated intertwined layers of mythology and history to suit their political and imperial purposes. Regarding current affairs, the author argues convincingly that to understand Putin’s aggressive behavior toward Ukraine and other neighboring nations, it is essential to grasp how Russia has come to see itself within the global order, especially in Asia and Europe. Figes emphasizes the intensive push and pull between concepts of East and West since the dubious founding of Kiev Rus, “the first Russian state,” circa 980. Russia’s geography meant it had few natural boundaries and was vulnerable to invasion—e.g., by the Mongols—and its mere size often required strong, central military control. It was in Moscow’s interests to increase its territorial boundaries and keep its neighbors weak, a strategy still seen today. Figes explores the growth of the “patrimonial autocracy” and examines how much of the mechanics of the country’s autocracy, bureaucracy, military structure, oligarchy, and corruption were inherited from three centuries of Mongol rule. From Peter the Great to Catherine the Great to Alexander II (the reformer who freed the serfs) and through the Bolsheviks to Stalin: In most cases, everything belonged to the state, and there were few societal institutions to check that power. “This imbalance—between a dominating state and a weak society—has shaped the course of Russian history,” writes the author in a meaningful, definitive statement. Today, Putin repudiates any hint of Westernizing influences (Peter the Great) while elevating the Eastern (Kievan Rus, the Orthodox Church). In that, he is reminiscent of Stalin, who recognized the need for patriotic fervor and national myths and symbols to unite and ensure the oppression of the masses.

A lucid, astute text that unpacks the myths of Russian history to help explain present-day motivations and actions.

INCITING JOY

Essays
Gay, Ross
Algonquin (556 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-643-75304-1

A prizewinning poet’s thoughts about grief, gratitude, and happiness.

In a natural follow-up to his previous collection, The Book of Delights, Gay, winner of the 2015 National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry for Catalogue of Unabashed Gratitude, ruminates about joy in a warm, candid memoir composed of 12 essays. In prose that veers between breezy and soulful, the author reflects on a wide range of topics, including basketball, dancing, skateboarding, couples’ therapy, music, masculinity, and his father’s cancer. As a biracial man, he has much to say about race and racism. For Gay, cultivating joy involves mindful observation. Once, watching a chipmunk’s antics, he wondered, “among other things, how many real-life chipmunks scaling sheer limestone walls do we miss when we’re watching videos on our cellular telephones of chipmunks falling off walls?” Joy also emerges from “the mycelial threads connecting...
us, the lustrous web.” The author praises a community orchard, which has created “a matrix of connection, of care, that exists not only in the here and now, but comes to us from the past and extends forward into the future.” As a creative writing teacher, Gay rejects the workshop format, where students try to “fix” a classmate’s poem. His teaching encourages “unfixing work together—where we hold each other, and witness each other, through our unfixing,” sensitive to each student’s reality. He seeks to break through academic “conventions and boundaries” to make a human—and humane—connection: “you ask, after someone shares a sort of upsetting and nervous-making poem, are you ok? Or someone, missing class sends a doctor’s note and an x-ray of their broken bone as double proof, to which you reply: no need, I believe you.” For Gay, community opens a path to joy. Even in grief, “grieving, or the griever, consciously or not, connects to all of grief, and to all griever.”

A pleasingly digressive and intimate memoir in essays. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**STAY TRUE**

A Memoir

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.

**THE THIRD RECONSTRUCTION**

America’s Struggle for Racial Justice in the Twenty-First Century

Joseph, Peniel E.

Basic Books (272 pp.)

$27.00 | Sept. 6, 2022

978-1-541-60074-4

A noted scholar of political history offers a hopeful vision of a future in which Black Americans take their places as full, equal citizens of the U.S.

Joseph, founding director of the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy at the University of Texas, provocatively links the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection to the anti-Black violence of the Reconstruction era, a time of entrenched Jim Crow policies, which, he reminds readers, was not confined to the South. That first Reconstruction period was followed by a second, in his reckoning, which expanded from *Brown v. Board of Education* to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The third, which began with the election of Barack Obama, is “the most volatile yet.” By Joseph’s account, the White nationalism espoused by Donald Trump and those rioters hinges on two lies: “The first is that Black people are not human beings. The second is that the first lie never happened.” One need not be a far right-winger to embrace “redemptionist” rhetoric that imposes school segregation in the name of “parental choice” and voter suppression in the name of election security. Of course, the Trumpian backlash against the Obama years was grounded in “white nostalgia over the nation’s regime of racial slavery and grievance over that system’s demise.” Each era of reconstruction has brought renewed violence by those who insist on White supremacy, most recently as exemplified by the police murder of George Floyd and countless other Black Americans. Through joint actions with feminists, gay rights activists, other oppressed minorities, and allies, Black people have been able to assert their rights anew with the Black Lives Matter movement, bringing new vigor to the dismantling of redemptionist racism and resistance against “racial segregation, exploitation, and death”—a cause that, the author argues, can reach its goals within our lifetime.

Joseph successfully links episodes in the struggle for civil rights to form a continuum of injustice and resolution.

In 2020, we lost a legendary figure with the passing of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. What do you remember most about your interactions with her?

She was at once traditional and radical, warm and cool, and, above all, an amazing friend. She was traditional in her approach and her dedication to her work but radical in her willingness to consider almost any idea. She was a devoted wife and mother, but she managed to marry a man who promoted her more than himself—and did all the cooking, in part out of self-preservation (Ruth had many strengths, but cooking wasn’t one of them). I interviewed her so many times that I lost count, and while these performative interviews, of necessity, had a great deal of repetition, there always seemed to be something new I learned. Ruth was not from a professional generation, and she was not easy to really know. But once you were her friend, her attention to that friendship was very special.

Most importantly, our friendship of almost 50 years began when we were both very young and not well known (especially me). As we each grew in our professional lives, I never imagined that I would be covering her on a daily basis. When that happened, we tried, and succeeded, I think, in keeping each to our own lanes. So much so that just hours after undergoing surgery for lung cancer, Ruth called me from the ICU to explain that she had forbidden my doctor-husband to tell me in advance about what was going on, because she didn’t want to do anything that would force me to choose between my friendship for her and my professional obligation to report the news.

The Supreme Court is on everyone’s mind right now. As one of the premier SCOTUS correspondents, what would you say is the biggest misconception about the court?

In any other year, I could have easily answered this question, but the court has taken such a dramatic and pronounced turn to the right that it is very difficult to say where this institution is going and what will happen to it in the long run.

Were you a big reader as a kid? Are there any formative books you remember from your youth or any adults who influenced you as a reader or writer?

The most formative books I read as a kid were probably the Nancy Drew books, which I devoured. They were books that made me feel that women could do anything a man could. Besides which, Nancy had a car and a cute boyfriend, both of which I wanted, too. As I think about the books that had a formative influence in my childhood, they all were about women, or girls, and centered on the idea that we could be powerful personalities and fight for equality. So, in addition to Nancy Drew, there was *Little Women*, *Jane Eyre*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and my mom read me *Charlotte’s Web*. There was also a very small string of women’s biographies in the school library on figures such as Madame [Marie] Curie and Dolly Madison—the few that I found among the very long string of biographies about men. And of course, there was Theodore White’s *The Making of the President 1960*, which I read in my teens. It opened my eyes to the profession I really wanted to join—journalism—a place where I could be a witness to history.

*Interview by Eric Liebetrau*
“Marcus delivers yet another essential work of music journalism.”

FOLK MUSIC

A Bob Dylan Biography in Seven Songs
Marcus, Greil
Yale Univ. (288 pp.)
$27.50 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-300-25531-7

Splendid biographical essays on that most elusive of subjects, the shape-shifter once known as Bobby Zimmerman.

On Jan. 24, 1961, Bob Dylan, “now the archivist of what he once called ‘historical-traditional music,’ then a highman whispering about leaving bodies on the road,” arrived as if by magic carpet in New York City and took the booming folk music scene by storm. “Blowing in the Wind,” released 15 months later, became the best-known modern folk song of the day. Having conquered folk, Dylan refused to sit still, plugged in, dropped out for a while, and has taken to multiyear tours that transport him to every continent. He has also shaped himself as an enigma over the last seven decades, remarking, “I write songs, I play on stage, and I make records. That’s it. The rest is not anybody’s business.” It’s a fair statement, but Marcus looks at the rest even as he’s limning the musical periods in the artist’s life, from the heyday of the 1960s to the nadir of the ’80s (“For Bob Dylan the entire decade would be a continuing series of bad hair-dos and bad albums”) and on to his rebirth as an elder statesman of popular music who ushered in his profoundly productive late period, beginning 30 years ago, with a revisitation of folk standards from centuries past. Marcus is both shrewd and appreciative, and he delivers rousing apothegms, as when he writes of “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” written in the summer of 1963, “We heard the ambition to write a history that will last as long as Antigone.” Casual Dylan fans will know at least a couple of the author’s seven chosen songs (of course, he mentions many more), but his explorations of lesser-known tunes such as “Ain’t Talkin’ ” and the extraordinary epic “Murder Most Foul,” with all their allusions to the lost history of America, should inspire them to dive deeper into the discography.

Marcus delivers yet another essential work of music journalism.

AND THERE WAS LIGHT
Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle
Meacham, Jon
Random House (720 pp.)
$34.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-553-39396-5

A deeply researched look at Lincoln's moral evolution on the issue of slavery.

Pulitzer Prize–winning historian Meacham follows Lincoln from his rural Kentucky roots to his assassination in 1865, paying close attention to the many influences on his ideas and values. As a young boy, the future president would memorize and repeat the sermons of local pastors, and he read voraciously even though, other than the Bible, not many books were readily available on the frontier. At the time, writes the author, Lincoln was “far more attracted to reading, thinking, and talking than he was to farming, rail-splitting, and hunting.” Meacham astutely examines the contents of some of those books we know he read, showing their influence on his thinking. Allusions to some of them cropped up in famous speeches later in his career. The author also traces Lincoln’s evolution from bookish farm boy to trial lawyer to politician, a progression aided by the rise of the new Republican Party, whose views largely matched his own. Meacham sets Lincoln’s development against the growing crisis of the slave states’ determination to maintain and expand the scope of slavery, a fight culminating in Lincoln’s election and the Civil War. The author provides in-depth analysis of Lincoln’s career as president and on how his thoughts on the issues of slavery and the status of African Americans changed during the course of the war, right up to the Union victory. Where those thoughts might have led him—and the nation—became immaterial in the wake of his assassination and the subsequent accession to power of those who did not share his experiences or vision—most notably, Andrew Johnson. While there are countless books on Lincoln, one of the most studied and written-about figures in history, Meacham’s latest will undoubtedly become one of the most widely read and consulted.

An essential, eminently readable volume for anyone interested in Lincoln and his era. (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES
My Time With Zelenskyy, Ukraine’s Battle for Democracy, and What It Means for the World
Mendel, Iuliia
Trans. by Madeline G. Levine
One Signal/Atria (240 pp.)
$27.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-66801-271-0

The former press secretary to Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy lays out the stakes of the current war.

“Perhaps he had not always been a perfect leader,” writes Mendel. “There had been difficulty in mustering the necessary support around his initiatives, managing his staff, and navigating the shoals of partisan politics. But in the chaos of war he knew exactly what to do. He became our national protector.” Indeed, Zelenskyy came into his own as a wartime leader of unflinching courage and a deeply wrought conviction that Ukraine is a bulwark of Western democracy and a nation that belongs in the 21st century. By contrast, Mendel writes in a closely observed portrait, “there is only one way to describe Putin: ‘old age.’ No
matter how much I looked at him and his delegation, no matter how much I listened, everything about them conveyed old age: old ideology, old principles, old behavior, old thoughts.” Readers will find a generally admiring but not entirely uncritical depiction of Zelenskyy as well. He is a masterful negotiator who understands that peace is preferable to war, for “only with peace can he focus on rebuilding his nation.” That rebuilding involves guiding Ukraine to forward-looking economic, social, and cultural standards and shaking off the power of oligarchs, but it also acknowledges that Ukraine is a multicultural society that includes ethnic Russians—who, in the course of the current war, have discovered that their language is now associated with “inhumanity and cruel aggression,” so much so that they’re switching to speaking Ukrainian as an expression of solidarity. Readers will also find a cleareyed look at both the reasons for Russia’s intransigence and the countervailing force of Ukrainian resistance in a war that “has burned away all that was artificial and superficial in our lives.”

A nuanced portrait of a leader in a time of crisis who has definitely risen to the occasion.

**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.

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

**WHAT IF? 2**

*Additional Serious Scientific Answers To Absurd Hypothetical Questions*

Munroe, Randall

Riverhead (368 pp.)

$24.99 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-0-525-53711-3

Former NASA roboticist Munroe continues his quest to answer the world’s unlikeliest questions.

Assuming you had enough fuel, how long would it take you to drive to the edge of the observable universe? If you traveled at 65 mph, writes the author, “it will take you 480,000,000,000,000,000 years...to get there, or 3.5 million times the current age of the universe.” How Munroe arrives at such calculations isn’t always clear, and his math doesn’t always show the work, but roll with it. He estimates that a hungry *T. rex* set loose on the streets of New York might be placated with 80 hamburgers—and if the dinosaur decides to devour a friend of yours instead of the proffered treat, “anyway, hey, you have 80 burgers.” Speaking of eating, can a person eat a cloud? No, writes the author, not unless you can squeeze the air out of it, and never mind whether the water within the cloud is potable. Munroe takes clear delight in his odd investigations—e.g., whether a person—or a vampire, maybe—can get drunk drinking a drunk person’s blood. The answer has to do with the dilution of ethanol, but Munroe pauses to counsel that it’s a very bad idea to drink someone else’s blood in the first instance: “I’m not a doctor, and I try not to give medical advice in my books. However, I will confidently say that you shouldn’t drink the blood of someone with a viral hemorrhagic fever.” You’ve got to like a book that blends deep dives into such matters as the nature of black holes and the mathematics of genealogy with handy pop-culture references—as when Munroe brightly likens the unfortunate Greek king Sisyphus to Hollywood stalwart Dwayne Johnson, because, of course, rocks are involved in both cases.

A delight for science geeks with a penchant for oddball thought experiments.
Throughout the text, the author exhibits an impeccable clarity of thought, drawing thoughtful and original connections between institutionalized racism and her personal experience. Her voice is frank, vulnerable, and witty, and she has a talent for using humor to poke fun at her past self while simultaneously underscoring the depth of the systemic violence she was forced to endure.

A trenchant, honest, and unique memoir about body image, fashion, and Blackness.

**TOKEN BLACK GIRL**

* Token Black Girl
  * Prescod, Danielle
  * Little A (286 pp.)
  * $24.95 | Oct. 1, 2022
  * 978-1-5420-3516-3

A Black fashion reporter describes how White supremacy led to her crippling perfectionism and subsequent eating disorder.

Growing up in Connecticut, from a young age, Prescod assumed the role of the “token Black girl” in her mostly White group of friends. Sometimes she was forced to play the role of Scary Spice, the only Black Spice Girl, during pretend play. Other times she discovered her classmates’ racist attitudes on three-way phone calls. Years of being teased about her alleged tendency to act White made her jumpy around her Black peers, eliminating the possibility of a safe haven away from her school friends. Due to this isolation, she “became manipulative, calculating, and mean. I was desperate to gain some modicum of control, and to do that, I constantly doled out criticisms, gossip, and stirred up petty drama. I developed a haughty affect that I employed for both passing judgment and my own protection.”

Her sharpness turned out to be an invaluable weapon not only for hiding her internalized racism from her peers, but also for her professional success in the fashion industry. Eventually, though, her ambition and self-hatred morphed into debilitating depression and an eating disorder. “I was in dogged pursuit of an imagined sense of power,” she writes, “and was very mean in doing so... But I wonder now if I was always meanest to myself.”

Prescod left the fashion industry for a job at the TV network BET, doing so... “But I wonder now if I was always meanest to myself.”

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. The book appeared at a critical historical moment, becoming an international sensation and bestseller—though not everyone saw the light. It was well into the 20th century before essentially all scientists agreed that Darwin was on the right track. Since then, biographies have poured off the presses, but readers cannot go wrong with this expert account.

An irresistible scientific biography and adventure story with a happy ending.

MAYBE WE’LL MAKE IT

* A Memoir
  * Price, Margo
  * Univ. of Texas (256 pp.)
  * $27.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
  * 978-1-4773-2350-2

A Grammy-nominated musician chronicles her long struggle to make it as a musician while refusing to sacrifice her artistic integrity.

“I picked up the shattered pieces and started again,” writes Price (b. 1983) after chronicling yet another moment of crushing defeat on her journey to a successful career. 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,
In *The World Record Book of Racist Stories* (Grand Central Publishing, Nov. 22), sisters Amber Ruffin and Lacey Lamar follow up their 2021 debut, *You'll Never Guess What Happened to Lacey*, with an outrageously funny collection of anecdotes about their everyday experiences with racism as well as stories from family members. Kirkus’ starred review deems it “required reading in today’s America.” Ruffin and Lamar answered our questions by email.

What did you find surprising about your creative process while writing as a duo?

**Ruffin:** Since everything in the book actually happened, writing as a duo was easier than you think. We really weren’t “writing” as much as we were just remembering.

**Lamar:** It was surprising how easy the writing process felt because of the number of stories we had to tell. We actually left some stories out.

Who is your ideal reader for *The World Record Book of Racist Stories*?

**Ruffin:** Our ideal reader is the type of person who is comforted by hearing they aren’t the only one with two books full of racist stories. Also, it’s always great when people tell us that they read the book and changed their behavior. Then you feel like your silly stories made a difference.

**Lamar:** My ideal reader would be the people who are going through the same things that are happening in the book. I’ve heard many times how [our story] has given people the courage to speak up for themselves, and I love that!

What book do you absolutely love that is not as well known as it deserves to be? Or, what book released in the past few years deserved more attention?

**Ruffin:** *Black Buck* by Mateo Askaripour!

**Lamar:** *The Deep* by Rivers Solomon [with Daveed Diggs, William Hutson, and Jonathan Snipes]. A book about Black mermaids, need I say more?

If someone were going to write the story of your life, who would you want it to be, and why?

**Ruffin:** If someone was going to write the story of my life, it would be me! I love me the most, and I think I would do me justice.

**Lamar:** I would want it to be Quinta Brunson; we are both Black nerds!
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.

**FEELS LIKE HOME**

*A Song for the Sonoran Borderlands*

Ronstadt, Linda & Laurence Downes

Heyday (248 pp.)

$35.00 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-1-59714-579-4

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): A foodie could do worse than her family formula for albondigas. Ronstadt finds connections between past and present in Sonoran 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 WORLD RECORD BOOK OF RACIST STORIES**

Ruffin, Amber & Lacey Lamar

Grand Central Publishing (240 pp.)

$29.00 | Nov. 22, 2022

978-1-5387-2455-2

A perfect follow-up to the authors’ *You’ll Never Believe What Happened to Lacey*.

Ruffin and her sister, Lamar, describe their second collaboration as a collection of stories not just about the two of them, as in their previous book, but “about our whole family, all our siblings and even some friends.” Here, the tone is heavier than *You’ll Never Believe*; the authors note that the text is roughly “50/50 silly/scary racist stories.” Their tales range widely—someone using a ridiculous racist phrase at work that required research to understand; a jaw-dropping example of “why we need diversity training at diversity training”; and a heartbreaking yet poignant account of Lamar leading a Zoom-based Q&A session regarding the first book with several “boys and girls homes across the US”—and offer a pleasingly diverse array of different generations, occupations, and environments. As in the previous book, the banter between the sisters is consistently funny, but the underlying social commentary remains incisive. Among countless others, standout pieces include Lamar’s description of an incredibly awkward first date and a story about a Black mother who was informed that when her children registered at a new school, they would need their pictures taken and “show it to all the students so they don’t get scared.” Though obviously upset, the mother made the pictures because, as the authors write, “if these people need to see Black people in order to not feel scared, then there’s no telling what the fuck these little monsters are capable of.” Ultimately, Ruffin and Lamar provide a much-needed wake-up call for anyone who still doesn’t believe the severity of anti-Black racism in America. “What is a racist?” they ask at the beginning. “Is it just a confused person who means well but blah blah blah? No. A racist is a turd.” Well said.

An excellent look at lived experiences of Black Americans that should be required reading for all Americans. (This review is printed here for the first time.)
The idea that technology can remedy the ills that technology fix our problems.” Rushkoff describes an interesting connection between tech billionaires and the prominence of psyche-delics in tech culture, further illustrating the need of the tech worship. A media theorist dismantles the tech-centric fantasies of the wealthiest people in the world.

In this scathing book, Rushkoff opens with an account of a meeting he attended with five of the world’s richest men, who sought his opinions on their strategies to survive an “Event” that would render the world as we know it unlivable. These men and the rest of their technocrat counterparts suffer from what Rushkoff calls “The Mindset,” a worldview marked by a staunch bias toward quantifiable data and “a faith in technology to solve problems,” especially the problems that those billionaires’ own technologies have wrought. While digital technologies initially offered opportunities for more meaningfully connected and innovative ways of life, Rushkoff argues that the hopes were corrupted by market forces. As a result, new technologies were designed less for consumer satisfaction and more for investor profit. Another major detriment is the winner-take-all attitude among tech “innovators,” who aren’t interested in incremental progress as much as creating a singular invention for which they can take all the credit. However, notes the author, “these totalizing solutions perpetuate the myth that only a technocratic elite can possibly fix our problems.” Rushkoff describes an interesting connection between tech billionaires and the prominence of psychedelics in tech culture, further illustrating the need of the tech elite to believe that they are singularly capable of providing the solutions humankind needs—while getting rich in the process. The idea that technology can remedy the ills that technology created is founded on a faulty belief that only what’s quantifiable has value, but the “squishier” subjects and ways of thinking that explore our dignity and humanity are still important, and it is imperative we don’t leave them behind. Though Rushkoff occasionally displays too evident a disdain for his subjects, he writes with knowledge and authority. The text conveys an appropriately urgent and serious message, while the closing section offers sound reason for hope and reasonable steps to take for a better future.

A dense but thorough and authoritative condemnation of tech worship.

SURVIVAL OF THE RICHEST
Escape Fantasies of the Tech Billionaires
Rushkoff, Douglas
Norton (224 pp.)
$26.95 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-393-88106-6

A Palestinian activist recounts her arrest and detention in an Israeli prison when she was just 16.

Tamimi grew up in the village of Nabi Saleh in the West Bank, where her family organized weekly marches to protest Israel’s illegal seizure of a local water source. She grew up terrified by the Israeli army’s brutal tactics, which included nighttime raids, home demolitions, attacks with pepper spray, and murder. As a child, the author “dreaded” the weekly demonstrations until an Israeli soldier shot her in the hand with a rubber-coated bullet while she was trying to escape tear gas that soldiers had launched into her home. At this moment, she writes, she experienced a “numbness” that motivated her to soothe her accumulated trauma through protesting. Unwittingly, Tamimi rose to international fame when she pushed an Israeli soldier after his army shot at a group of children in her village, critically injuring her cousin. At the time, her mother streamed Tamimi’s confrontation on Facebook Live, a decision that later led to Tamimi’s arrest, interrogation, and detention at Hasharon Prison in Israel. The video went viral, launching Tamimi into the international spotlight, a phenomenon the author partly attributes to her light-skinned privilege. Although the attention plunged her into fatigue and depression, she writes, “as worn down as I began to feel, I knew that staying silent wasn’t an option. I had been given a rare platform to advocate for Palestine and its prisoners, and I intended to use it….If educating the world about our nation’s struggle was my mission in this life, I vowed to carry it out as honorably and as effectively as possible.” Writing with journalist Tahriri, Tamimi delivers a passionately argued, profoundly empathetic, and deeply informed examination of her country’s occupation. Her circumspection and clarity of thought are matched only by her vulnerability.

An expertly crafted, trenchant memoir from a formidable activist.

THEY CALLED ME A LIONESS
A Palestinian Girl’s Fight for Freedom
Tamimi, Ahed & Dena Tahriri
One World/Random House (288 pp.)
$27.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-13458-0

DINNERS WITH RUTH
A Memoir on the Power of Friendships
Totenberg, Nina
Simon & Schuster (256 pp.)
$27.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-982188-08-5

Longtime NPR correspondent Totenberg recounts her friendship with the late Supreme Court justice.

Many readers may not know that Ruth Bader Ginsburg (1933-2020) studied literature with the
noted (and notorious) Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov at Cornell, “where she truly came alive.” What Totenberg and Ginsburg shared over a half-century friendship, much spent over bowls of bouillabaisse, was a profound love of conversation and learning, to say nothing of the law, to which Totenberg had a sort of trial by fire, covering, among many other events, the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings. “For understandable reasons,” she writes, “he’s never granted me an interview, and when we attend the same social events, I keep my distance.” Ginsburg was a devoted student and thoughtful interpreter of the law, which made her invaluable as a member of the court. As the author writes, she also had a gift for being “able to separate fierce intellectual disagreements from personal animus,” which helps explain why the aforementioned Thomas, with whom she often disagreed, paid deeply felt tribute to her after her death. Indeed, counseled Ginsburg, “It helps, sometimes, to be a little deaf when unkind or thoughtless words are spoken.” She has been honored and eulogized countless times since her death in 2020, but, Totenberg reminds us, while Ginsburg sought points of common ground in developing arguments and dissents, she was still the victim of partisan politics. In a typically nasty move, Mitch McConnell denied her a place lying in state in the Capitol Rotunda, which the Senate controls, and she was honored in Statuary Hall, the purview of the House. McConnell did not attend. “Even as many conservatives will welcome a far more centrist Court, as they will miss a more centrist Court, as they will miss RGB.” An affectionate, revealing portrait of an important figure in American history.

STARRY MESSENGER
Cosmic Perspectives on Civilization
Tyson, Neil deGrasse
Henry Holt (288 pp.)
$28.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-328-9050-4

The well-known astrophysicist argues in favor of science. Tyson, popular TV commentator and director of the Hayden Planetarium, points out that until a few centuries ago, all cultures explained natural phenomena through words from wise men (i.e., “authority”), sacred texts, and myths. Life was short, disease-ridden, and violent, and few claimed that important questions remained unanswered or that progress was possible. After the 17th-century Enlightenment, scientific inquiry began delivering explanations that “are true even when you don’t believe in them,” and there followed significant improvements to our quality of life as a species. Even though science has delivered the goods for centuries, Tyson warns against two alternatives. The first, deeply held personal beliefs, are not susceptible to argument and range from the literal truth of the Bible to the superiority of the Dodgers over the Yankees. Personal beliefs are benign unless they become coercive political beliefs, and the intensity of this coercion continues to increase in today’s political climate, sometimes culminating in violence. Tyson urges readers to base their actions on accurate observation—evidence rather than feeling—and a willingness to discard ideas that don’t work. “To deny objective truths is to be scientifically illiterate,” he writes, “not to be ideologically principled.” Among the best sections of the book is an essay in which the author, taking a page from early racist anthropology, delivers a tongue-in-cheek but strictly fact-based argument that Whites resemble chimpanzees far more closely than Blacks do. Marshalling his evidence, he shows “how easy it is to be racist.” Since it’s been proven (scientifically) that humans are terrible at assessing risks, flummoxed by statistics, impervious to facts that contradict their prejudices, and murderously attached to their tribe, Tyson may be fighting a losing battle. Still, he’s a welcome voice in the escalating fight with the array of forces aligned against science and rational thought.

Good sense for those who value good sense.

LIKE A ROLLING STONE
A Memoir
Wenner, Jann S.
Little, Brown (592 pp.)
$35.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-316-41519-4

The Rolling Stone founder and publisher recounts a golden age of sex, drugs, rock ‘n’ roll, and cash flow. As Wenner (b. 1947) admits, he grew up in privilege: His first car was a Jaguar, and he got his first editing gig with the yearbook of his private school. He was swayed from preppiedom with the advent of rock, which he correctly deems a form of “soft power.” Though he missed the Beatles’ legendary performance on The Ed Sullivan Show, he became a devotee after seeing A Hard Day’s Night. This long narrative is bracketed by his 2017 sale of the magazine he founded in 1967, its title borrowed from the Dylan song and not the British band. Soon enough, though, Wenner became friendly with both the Beatles and the Stones. The magazine was revolutionary, especially early on. As the author notes, it “introduced black music to an expanding white audience—not as music for white people created by black people, but as black music in and of itself.” Staffed by the likes of Ben Fong-Torres, Joe Eszterhas, Hunter S. Thompson, and Annie Leibovitz, it also soon became an outlet of choice for musical acts around the world. In fact, John Lennon’s first extensive interview ran in 16 pages. (Wenner does allow that there were bands that hated the magazine, notably Led Zeppelin.) In time, Wenner decided to abandon the “fading hippie orthodoxy” of San Francisco for the bright lights of New York, where—with the madcap Thompson in tow—Rolling Stone became a journal of politics as much as music, cheering on Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. The author writes frankly about money, sex (including his own long years in the closet), and his regret at selling his creation: “The
new mantra was clear: What counted was not the printed word but the number of ‘hits’ on the website.”

A frank, sharp memoir by a zeitgeist-savvy entrepreneur who ranks among the earliest of modern influencers.

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

A mixed-media collection of prose and other work by Asian American disability activist Wong.

In the introduction, the author, who was born with a form of muscular dystrophy, claims that she never intended to be an activist. On the contrary, she writes, “Ableism conscripted me into activism.” Throughout the book, Wong supports this claim in a series of pieces that describe what it is like for her—and members of the disability community in general—to navigate an ableist world.

In one essay, she combines traditional prose with screenshots of text-message chains to recount how she had to drop out of her dream college because changes to Medicaid made it impossible for her to retain the health aides she needed to survive on campus. In another essay peppered with screenshots and newspaper headlines, Wong describes the injustices she faced in trying to access a Covid-19 vaccine as a high-risk individual. The essays are not just limited to writing about disability, though: The author also includes a StoryCorps conversation she recorded with her mother about Lunar New Year traditions, a guide to conducting interviews for radio and other media, and an illustrated ode to cats. As a result, Wong’s collection provides a truly multidimensional portrait of a disabled writer effectively fighting the tendency of able-bodied people to treat the disability community as a monolith, an idea the author effectively deconstructs throughout the book.

A stunningly innovative, compulsively readable hybrid of memoir, cultural criticism, and social activism.

TEACHING WHITE SUPREMACY
America’s Democratic Ordeal and the Forging of Our National Identity
Yacovone, Donald
Pantheon (480 pp.)
$32.50 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-31663-4

Education can be liberating. However, as this provocative survey demonstrates, it can also uphold the worst of the status quo.

“As for Sambo, whose wrongs moved the abolitionists to wrath and tears...there is some reason to believe that he suffered less than any class in the South from its ‘peculiar institution.’ ” The authors of that statement were Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, two eminent historians whose work is still studied today. As Yacovone, an associate at Harvard’s Hutchins Center for African American Research, observes, the textbook in which that spectacularly racist—and incorrect—statement occurs was a standard for many years.

Beginning with the founding of the republic, writes Yacovone, textbooks have been primary instruments for transmitting “ideas of white American identity,” even asserting that this identity is definitively White and that, as one 1896 textbook stated, “to the Caucasian race by reason of its physical and mental superiority has been assigned the task of civilizing and enlightening the world.” Current textbooks have plenty of problems, as well. Yacovone points out that only in the last decade have Texas history textbooks acknowledged slavery, and not states’ rights, as the primary cause of the Civil War. It is from history textbooks, he adds, that the terms White supremacy and master race entered the lexicon, and it has been from textbooks that excuses for the subjugation of some peoples and extermination of others have found learned justification. Even textbooks—and Yacovone has poured over hundreds—that condemned the secessionist movement were often inclined to consider the enslaved population as “a degraded and inferior people.” Interestingly, the author links some of the worst excesses to the anti-communist fervor of the Cold War era, when textbook publishers and authors were averse to erase differences between North and South—White differences, anyway.

An outstanding contribution to the historical literature of American racism and racist ideologies.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

FARMHOUSE by Sophie Blackall........................................................41
GOING PLACES by Tonya Bolden; illus. by Eric Velasquez..............41
THE UNIVERSE IN YOU by Jason Chin ............................................42
WOMBAT SAID COME IN by Carmen Agra Deedy; illus. by Brian Lies .............................................................. 42
MAYBE YOU MIGHT by Imogen Foxell; illus. by Anna Cunha ..........43
PLAYTIME FOR RESTLESS RASCALS by Nikki Grimes; illus. by Elizabeth Zunon .....................................................................43
MAGNOLIA FLOWER by Zora Neale Hurston; adapt. by Ibram X. Kendi; illus. by Loveis Wise .......................................................46
THE LINE IN THE SAND by Thao Lam ............................................46
A RIVER'S GIFTS by Patricia Newman; illus. by Natasha Donovan .......................................................................................47
PARADISE SANDS by Levi Pinfold ...................................................47
DIGESTION! THE MUSICAL by Adam Rex; illus. by Laura Park ....49
STILL THIS LOVE GOES ON by Buffy Sainte-Marie; illus. by Julie Flett .................................................................49
THE SUN IS LATE AND SO IS THE FARMER by Philip C. Stead; illus. by Erin E. Stead .........................................................49
A LAND OF BOOKS by Duncan Tonatiuh..........................................50
VÁMONOS by Cynthia Weill; illus. by Martin Melchor, Agustin Timoco Cruz, Avelino Pérez & Maximino Santiago; photos by Otto Piron ............................................................... 51

ME AND MUHAMMAD ALI
Asim, Jabari
Illus. by A. G. Ford
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-5247-3988-1

A child named Langston anticipates his hero's visit to his hometown.
On the Wall of Respect, a mural of Black heroes, Langston, a Black boy, notices a flyer announcing that boxing champion Muhammad Ali is coming to town. Langston admires Ali not only for his athleticism, but also for his poetry. Ali's boastful rhymes delight Langston, who tries out his own rhymes on the playground at school. Langston's mom loves Ali's commitment to justice: "He is never afraid to tell the truth." Finally, the big day arrives. Langston gets his hair cut just like Ali's while listening to elders' stories about the champ. With his mom, he rushes over to the high school. But at the door, a guard stops them, saying the event is for students only. Langston and his mom plead with the guard to let them in, but they are unsuccessful until a legend steps in on their behalf. From the Wall of Respect to the joyful schoolyard to the barbershop full of people, this is a delightful depiction of a close-knit African American community finding inspiration in one of its greatest legends. The poetic text is an enjoyable read-aloud, and Ford generates excitement on each page with a combination of movement-based portraits, community scenes, and expressive faces. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

This bundle of Black joy belongs on every bookshelf.

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

The regular day on Tai Yuen Street in Hong Kong, full of “beeping,ickering, and bartering,” as a child’s parents set up their hawker stand. Suddenly, the usual bustle is interrupted by a THWUMP! as a man who has traveled “a thousand miles” by foot and boat to cross the border into Hong Kong falls to
Whether I’m compiling books about man-eating tigers or deciding on the best kid-lit bears of all time, I love making lists, though somehow I never have enough room for everything. Looking over the riches of books this season, it was hard to winnow it down to 30, but I’m nevertheless delighted with our Fall Preview picture books. Here are some I’m especially anticipating.

Rustic life has never looked as enchanting as it does in Sophie Blackall’s Farmhouse (Little, Brown, Sept. 13) and The Sun Is Late and So Is the Farmer by Philip C. Stead, illustrated by Erin E. Stead (Neal Porter/Holiday House, Nov. 8). Both are sumptuous, lyrical, and tender—just what we’ve come to expect from these acclaimed creators.

Two familiar avian faces make appearances this season. In the two decades since his debut, Mo Willems’ Pigeon has kept us in stitches, and his latest outing, The Pigeon Will Ride the Roller Coaster! (Union Square Kids, Sept. 6), is no exception. A decade after Salina Yoon’s Penguin and Pinecone, Penguin proves he still has a knack for cementing strong bonds; Penguin and Penelope (Bloomsbury, Sept. 6) finds him helping a lost elephant reunite with her herd.

More than two years into the pandemic, many are finding that their social skills are a bit rusty. Thao Lam’s The Line in the Sand (Owlkids Books, Sept. 13) and Sung Mi Kim’s Say Hello! (Berbay Publishing, Sept. 6), translated from Korean by Clare Richards, are ideal for little ones needing a refresher course; both center on characters who butt heads but eventually learn to coexist. Forever Cousins by Laurel Goodluck, illustrated by Jonathan Nelson (Charlesbridge, Sept. 20), about two Native American relatives who are separated when one moves to the Rez, is a reminder that relationships can endure even over distance.

Fantastic voyages are at the center of several upcoming books. Digestion! The Musical by Adam Rex, illustrated by Laura Park (Chronicle, Oct. 25), follows an intrepid piece of candy down the esophagus, into the stomach, and, well...beyond (as Rex puts it, “LET’S. GET. THIS. POTTY. STARTED”). Levi Pinfold’s strangely mesmerizing Paradise Sands: A Story of Enchantment (Candlewick Studio, Nov. 8) involves four siblings who, while traveling to visit their mother, are put to the test when they venture off the beaten path. Not everyone has had the freedom to journey where they like, however, as Going Places: Victor Hugo Green and His Glorious Book by Tonya Bolden, illustrated by Eric Velasquez (Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins, Oct. 4), makes clear. This compelling work centers on Green, whose guide helped Black motorists in the 1930s through the ’60s find safe lodging.

Many books on this season’s list are by authors well known to those outside the kid-lit sphere. With I Am Ruby Bridges, illustrated by Nikkolas Smith (Orchard/Scholastic, Sept. 6), the civil rights icon describes how, at 6, she integrated an all-White school. NBA legend Stephen Curry’s I Have a Superpower (Penguin Workshop, Sept. 6), illustrated by Geneva Bowers, offers words of wisdom to aspiring athletes and the sports averse alike. And actor Reese Witherspoon, whose book club picks have made her a favorite among bibliophiles, makes her picture-book debut. Illustrated by Xindi Yan, Busy Betty (Flamingo Books, Oct. 4) is the story of a child always on the go.

Finally, among my favorites are several soaring explorations of the natural world—Evan Turk’s Hello, Moon (Atheneum, Sept. 20), Carmen Agra Deedy’s Wombat Said Come In (Peachtree, Oct. 4), illustrated by Brian Lies, and Jason Chin’s The Universe in You: A Microscopic Journey (Neal Porter/Holiday House, Oct. 18) will have kids mulling the lunar cycle, the impact of Australian bushfires, and the infinitesimally tiny but crucial components that make up our world.

Mahnaz Dar is a young readers’ editor.
his knees. Bystanders turn away, “uninterested in hearing their own stories retold to them.” However, the protagonist’s mother hears the grumbles of the man’s stomach, and her kids watch horror-struck as she pulls out the special mooncake they were saving—the kind with the double-yolk center (“the best kind!”)—and asks the narrator to bring it to the hungry man. It takes two pages to slowly and sadly walk the treat over and only one gulp for the man to devour the entire cake. However, this single act of kindness unleashes a torrent of generosity from the nearby hawkers. Sepia and cool colors give this tale a historical feel, while delicate cartoon renderings of the bustling market street and crowds of people lighten the tone. In the backmatter, AuYeung notes that this story was based on an incident from her childhood, explains the historical significance of the refugee’s flight to Hong Kong, and shares family photos. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

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

**FARMHOUSE**

Blackall, Sophie

Little, Brown (48 pp.)

$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-0-316-52894-8

A large white house situated in farm fields and gardens is home to a large, loving family.

Twelve active, light-skinned children play, do their chores, and occasionally make mischief. Their growth is measured with marks on a wall for all to see. They sleep, read, giggle, and share secrets and dreams in dormitorylike rooms. The children grow up and leave for school and jobs and families of their own. When the youngest child, now quite old, leaves for the last time, the farmhouse is abandoned and sinks into disrepair. But the tale doesn’t end there. Brief rhythmic lines and a bit of playful rhyme list the day-to-day events and describe the children’s imaginings and dreams. The text is set within light beige panels amid double-page spreads of bright, colorful, layered illustrations that add depth, detail, and emotional connection. In a delightful surprise twist, Blackall becomes part of the tale, addressing readers directly, telling how she discovered this derelict farmhouse, collected the bits and pieces left behind, and used them to create the illustrations for the book they are holding in the hope that not only will the family’s story live on, but so might the stories these young readers will tell someday. Information about the actual family, as well as photos of the house and further details regarding Blackall’s process, appears in an author’s note. (This picture book was reviewed digitally.)

A lovely, tender reimagining of people in a long-past time and place. (Picture book. 4–9)

**GOING PLACES**

Victor Hugo Green and His Glorious Book

Bolden, Tonya

Illus. by Eric Velasquez

Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (40 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-06-296740-4

Enter the world of Victor Hugo Green and his famous **Green Book** for Black travelers.

Green delivered mail in Leonia, New Jersey, even after moving to Harlem with his wife, Alma. During the Great Depression, new highways and turnpikes and newly inexpensive car models were driving more families to own cars. Black travelers had extra stress and danger to worry about when traveling through unfamiliar, often hostile terrain. Black-owned newspapers and word of mouth kept them informed on how to stay safe. Green “got busy problem-solving,” gathering information from people and publications into one guide, the **Green Book**, which started in 1936 as a pamphlet covering New York City and neighboring towns and grew steadily to cover the entire nation. The story extends beyond Green’s death in 1960 to end on the hopeful note of the civil rights legislation Green had hoped for, when, with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, discrimination related to transportation services was outlawed. Bolden’s bold, strong, conversational prose sets the scene, representing courageous, talented Black people strategizing to keep their dignity in an unfair world. With his signature painterly art, Velasquez beautifully brings to life settings, families, and communities through varied compositions and scrapbook-style pages. Text and illustrations incorporate primary source documents—maps, advertisements, excerpts from newspapers—that add to the authentic feel. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A richly layered, powerful introduction to an entrepreneur and the problems he solved. (Timeline, more information on Victor Hugo Green, notes, selected sources, websites) (Picture-book biography. 4–9)

**I AM RUBY BRIDGES**

Bridges, Ruby

Illus. by Nikkiola Smith

Orchard/Scholastic (48 pp.)

$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022

978-1-338-75388-2

The New Orleans school child who famously broke the color line in 1960 while surrounded by federal marshals describes the early days of her experience from a 6-year-old’s perspective.

Bridges told her tale to younger children in 2009’s **Ruby Bridges Goes to School**, but here the sensibility is more personal, and the sometimes-shocking historical photos have been replaced by uplifting painted scenes. “I didn’t find out what being ‘the first’ really meant until the day I arrived at this new
tiny. It's a giant, though, next to the Western Pygmy Blue butterfly (smaller than a penny), which towers over a less than 30 microns across, on the child's skin, and so on down to the point where size and location lose their meanings.

A unique angle on a watershed moment in the civil rights era. (author and illustrator notes, glossary) (Autobiographical picture book. 6-8)

THE UNIVERSE IN YOU: A Microscopic Journey
Chin, Jason
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-8234-5070-1

The author of the cosmic Your Place in the Universe (2020) takes a similarly expansive thought journey in the opposite direction. Once again Chin goes in scale-changing stages. The 8-centimeter-long Calliope hummingbird that lights on the finder of a delighted brown-skinned child who uses a wheelchair seems tiny. It's a giant, though, next to the Western Pygmy Blue butterfly (smaller than a penny), which towers over a less than 2-millimeter-long bee...which lands next to a vellus hair, less than 30 microns across, on the child's skin, and so on down to and into cells, past DNA and its constituent molecules to quarks and gluons—which, Chin writes with some understatement, "aren't like any objects we are familiar with." But, he concludes, those same elementary particles make up all the physical matter in the universe, from galaxies to hummingbirds to humans. Particularly in the microbial realms but really throughout, the♾️️ particles and the periodic table of elements.

Asking questions and then back around to the wide-eyed young observer. Retracing part of his route in the backmatter, the author enriches a summary discussion of life's building blocks with a chart of elementary particles and the periodic table of elements. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A superb read-aloud balancing messages about the environment and generosity with humor and heart.

WOMBAT SAID COME IN
Deedy, Carmen Agra
Illus. by Brian Lies
Peachtree (36 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 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 wombat—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 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)

**FOREVER COUSINS**
Goodluck, Laurel
Illus. by Jonathan Nelson
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-62354-292-4

Two Native American cousins find their friendship tested when one moves from the city to the Rez. Amanda loves purple, while Kara’s favorite is pink, but “they agree that sunflowers are beautiful, powwow dancing is fun, and chokecherry jam on toast is the best.” When the time comes for Kara’s family to leave, both girls’ parents assure them that the family will be together again next summer at the reunion. A year passes, and the cousins miss each other very much but keep in touch by phone and through letters. When it’s time for the reunion on the reservation, the families make preparations: Amanda’s family packs and gets the GPS set for the two-day drive; Kara’s family makes welcoming signs, and her dad hangs a picture of the family tree. But the girls are nervous: Will they still be friends? In an author’s note, Goodluck explains that in the past, many Native families have faced separations; she cites the Indian Relocation Act of 1956 as one cause. Nevertheless, she emphasizes that they still maintain close relationships due to shared family and tribal values. This matter-of-fact yet poignant story brings that bond to vivid life as the girls realize that no matter what, they are “forever cousins.” The illustrations rely on a muted palette and feature appealing characters with large heads. Cultural references are scattered throughout, like the dolls made by the girls’ magúu (grandmother), powwow dancing, and a Hidatsa naming ceremony. Children facing separations of their own will find this reassuring. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet story of friendship, family, and community. (Picture book. 4-7) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

**PLAYTIME FOR RESTLESS RASCALS**
Grimes, Nikki
Illus. by Elizabeth Zunon
Sourcebooks Jabberwocky (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-72823-893-7

It’s time to get to work having fun. A brown-skinned child awakens to Mommy’s command “get to work”—adding, “Your job is called play.” As narrator, Mommy tells this story in second person to the child—“You’d play all day / if I let you”—and talks as if this conversation about work is an oft-repeated ritual between herself and her child. In matter-of-fact text that exudes tenderness, Mommy recounts how her little one plays in the rain, in the sun, and in the snow; in the fall leaves, at the duck pond, and in many other places, indoors and out. Readers might recognize this mother-child pair from Grimes and Zunon’s *Bedtime for Sweet Creatures* (2020) and

**MAYBE YOU MIGHT**
Foxell, Imogen
Illus. by Anna Cunha
Lantana (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-93747-86-2

Think of what you might do!
A brown-skinned child finds a seed. Imbued with conviction that maybe something can come of it, the child plants it in ostensibly hostile growing conditions, lovingly tends it, and then...the protagonist’s hope is realized, and the world flourishes. The child’s tender stewardship of the seed results in a tree that lays down roots and bears fruit to feed community residents and birds that now, with the promise of a renewed food source, return to the area. The seeds from these fruits are, in turn, planted and become new trees. In a very simple description of the water cycle, readers learn how, over time, abundant trees in an area can produce a river where once was parched soil. Narrated in beautiful, uplifting, lyrical verse by the child, this lovely British import is about the glo-
At 6, Ruby Bridges integrated a previously all-White school—an act of courage that still reverberates today. Though the activist has told her story before, with the picture book *I Am Ruby Bridges* (Orchard/Scholastic, Sept. 6), illustrated by Nikkolas Smith, she addresses a younger audience. Our review calls it “a unique angle on a watershed moment in the civil rights era.” Bridges answered our questions by email.

You’ve told your story before. Why was it important to tell it for younger readers, and how did you approach it this time?

History is so important to learn so that we hope-fully never repeat the mistakes of the past. The earlier we learn those life lessons, the better; therefore, my approach for this younger audience was to talk about my story from the perspective of my 6-year-old self, with a bit of my humorous side included. And working with Nikkolas Smith, whose beautiful images bring these words to life, was a joy.

Your book publishes at a time when we’re seeing push back against books that confront racism. Was it a different experience writing this book compared with earlier titles?

No, but the recent banning of books—especially those that reflect the truth about our history—made this book even more important for me to write.

When you were a young child, what books resonated with you?

Dr. Seuss books were those that I cherished the most, because growing up they were sent anonymously to me every month, from the age of 6 until I was 9. My parents couldn’t afford to buy us books; therefore I was grateful to get them and start my very own collection and library!

*Interview by Mahnaz Dar*
Off To See the Sea (2021), making this story feel like a continuation of a larger narrative that offers an insider’s view of one Black family. Zunon’s highly textured collage illustrations emphasize the importance of imagination: The child hosts a tea party with two dolls and a bear, who sit around a table with “yummy invisible cakes”; later, the child also builds “trains and trucks” from various and sundry household objects. In every spread, Zunon’s illustrations highlight this family’s bonds. When Daddy comes home, he plays tic-tac-toe in sock feet with his child on the floor while Mommy finishes napping on the couch after telling Daddy, “Your turn.” (This book was reviewed digitally)

A stunning, warm story about the many ways that play sparks joy. (Picture book. 3-7)

HANA’S HUNDREDS OF HIJABS
Gutta, Razeena Omar
Illus. by Manal Mirza
Barefoot Books (24 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-64686-620-5

Hana’s overflowing collection of scarves and accessories have led to endless clutter.

Hana finds fabulous hijabs everywhere, from malls to thrift shops; she even repurposes her mother’s old skirts. Combinations of colorful scarves, dresses, accessories, and jewelry result in ensembles in a variety of styles and earn her the praise of her friends and relatives, who ask for her fashion advice. But soon her amassed collection overflows into the rest of her home, and her punctilious styling results in her constantly being late to school. Hana reflects on the importance of hijab and how it makes her feel special. After observing her aunt styling a customer’s hair and the positive and powerful effect it has, Hana is inspired to think of how she can channel her creativity in a more productive way and provide a service to the community. Simple text is paired with warm-colored illustrations of flowing fabric in a multitude of patterns, colors, and textures and accessories that work to showcase the range of variations in hijabi fashion as well as how Hana celebrates and expresses the endless possibilities of her individual style. In the backmatter, the author and the illustrator answer questions about what hijab means to them as well as their own styling preferences. Hana and her family are tan-skinned and Muslim; her friends are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A fun and charming introduction to the beauty of hijab. (Picture book. 4-8)

MARVELOUS MABEL
Hubbard, Crystal
Illus. by Alleanna Harris
Lee & Low Books (40 pp.)
$20.95 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-62014-956-0

A long-overdue spotlight on a trailblazing athlete.

Hubbard tells the story of Mabel Fairbanks, the first Black woman to join the United States Figure Skating Hall of Fame. Mabel was born in Florida in 1915 and orphaned at age 8. After moving to New York City to live with relatives, she was briefly homeless before landing a job as a live-in nanny. When the family no longer required Mabel’s services, she was taken in by Wally Hunter (known as Uncle Wally), a part-time handyman who lived in the family’s building and was the first person who really took care of her. Mabel had always longed to learn to skate, but she was denied admission to the skating rink because she was Black. Uncle Wally, who worked in an ice cream factory, used his knowledge of dry ice to build an in-home skating rink.
in their apartment, launching a storied career—Mabel would go on to become a legendary athlete and coach who trained Olympians Tai Babilonia, Scott Hamilton, Kristi Yamaguchi, Debi Thomas, Rudy Galindo, and Tiffany Chin. Depicting Mabel’s frustrations, loneliness, and joy as well as her athletic prowess, Harris’ warm, expressive digital illustrations pair well with Hubbard’s straightforward yet inspiring text. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An account of a sports pioneer that should be widely read and shared. (afterword, bibliography) (Picture-book biography. 6-9)

MAGNOLIA FLOWER
Hurston, Zora Neale
Adapt. by Ibram X. Kendi
Illus. by Loveis Wise
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$19.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-309831-2

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 escaped the Trail of Tears, and they have a daughter named Magnolia Flower, who ‘came at the time of the flowers opening.’ 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)

SAY HELLO?
Kim, Sung Mi
Trans. by Clare Richards
Berbay Publishing (44 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-922610-49-2

Kim captures those awkward moments when someone moves in next door and reaching out to say hello becomes difficult. When the Fox family moves next door to Mr. Wolf, both Little Fox and Mr. Wolf know saying hello would be the neighborly thing to do. But when they first meet, both are in a bad mood, and they silently pass each other by. As days pass, saying hello becomes even harder, especially after a series of inadvertent missteps and hurt feelings. Soon, the pair begin to cast side-eyes at each other, and they are locked in a battle of wills. Who will say hello first? Neither does, and both rejoice when Mr. Wolf eventually moves away. As fate would have it, they later meet while crossing a street, recognize each other, say hello, and realize that greeting each other wasn’t so hard. In contrast to the black-and-white outlined illustrations of urban scenes, each character is drawn in a distinct color, pink for Little Fox and blue for Mr. Wolf. Although most illustrations place the two in large city scenes, full-page close-ups of Little Fox and contrasting close-ups of the two protagonists make their emotions clear. This simple Korean import is told primarily through the characters’ dialogue and thoughts, making it a perfect choice for dramatic read-alouds and role-playing to help children empathize with others and polish their social graces. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Though the protagonists miss what could have been a wonderful friendship, readers can learn from their mistakes. (Picture book. 3-6)

THE LINE IN THE SAND
Kim, Sung Mi
Owlkids Books (40 pp.)
$18.95 | Sept. 13, 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
“Close your eyes, listen to the music, and experience the joy of family with this buoyant tale.”

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, multiethnic 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 handmade 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)

A monstrously important message. (Picture book. 4-6)

A RIVER’S GIFTS
The Mighty Elwha River Reborn

Newman, Patricia
Illus. by Natasha Donovan
Millbrook/Lerner (48 pp.)
$31.99 PLB | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5415-9870-6


Writing in stirring verse, Newman explains that in what is now Washington state, the Elwha River flowed north to the sea, nourishing the salmon that came each year to lay eggs. There were enough salmon to feed the birds, the animals, and the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, the Strong People, for thousands of years. But when Europeans arrived in the 1790s, they cut down ancient trees to build houses near the river and wrote laws declaring that the Strong People couldn’t fish or own land. In 1890, dams for generating electricity were built, effectively destroying the river and keeping the salmon from returning. In 1940, Olympic National Park expanded its boundaries to include the dams, and the Strong People worked together to restore the lost river and its habitat. The removal of two dams—the Glines Canyon Dam and Elwha Dam—took years of perseverance and cooperation among the Strong People, the National Park Service, and scientists. It was 2011 when the dams were finally removed; several years later, the rushing river called the salmon home again. Donovan’s illustrations, rendered in pencil and ink and digitally, are dynamic, with thick black outlines that pop off the page. Sidebars elaborate on elements introduced in the main text. Beautifully illustrated and informative, this story conveys the fragility of our environment and the need to protect it. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An illuminating glimpse at the Elwha River and its gifts. (author’s and illustrator’s notes, timeline, sources, further reading, maps, photographs) (Informational picture book. 8-12) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

PARADISE SANDS
A Story of Enchantment

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, full-page illustrations rely on a palette of Dust Bowl colors, showing, first, a slight young girl exiting a dreary stucco house and entering an equally dreary, occupied whitish car; the car then winds its way through a desolate desert. As the car pulls...
Caldecott winner Jason Chin is ready for his close-up—a close-up on the tiniest things imaginable, from a Calliope hummingbird to quarks and gluons. Kirkus calls his newest picture book, *The Universe in You: A Microscopic Journey* (Neal Porter/Holiday House, Oct. 18), a “fantastic voyage from an accomplished author/illustrator.” He answered our questions via email.

In *Grand Canyon* (2017), you wrote about an incredibly vast space. How did you approach this book, which looks at the most minuscule things?

I tried to imagine myself at each scale and to show what the world would look like if one were, say, the size of a hair or inside a cell. At first it wasn’t so hard, but it became more and more challenging the smaller I went. Matter behaves very differently at the scale of molecules and below, and it is impossible to accurately envision the world at the scale of quantum particles. And yet they are there at the foundation of all the matter in the universe. Figuring out how best to depict them was a fascinating challenge.

Your illustrations are, as always, striking. Do you have a favorite page or spread?

I like the way that the image of the interior of the cell came out. I hope it makes kids feel like the inside of their own cells is a place they’d want to explore.

I am also fond of the three spreads that show particles combining to make atoms, then molecules, and on up the chain to make our bodies and our world. These three images actually connect to each other, so if you were to cut them out of the book (I’m not suggesting you do!) and line them up, they would form a single image.

Were you a big reader as a kid? Are there any formative books you remember from your youth or any adults who influenced you as a reader or an artist?

I read a fair amount as a kid, but I was more interested in drawing, and there were a lot of artists that were important to me. David Macaulay’s books fascinated me. They revealed the inner structures and the hidden stories of buildings and machines. I loved them, especially *Castle* (1977) and *The Way Things Work* (1988). Ed Young’s books really meant a lot to me, because they gave me a way to connect to my Chinese heritage. I was and still am captivated by his color and design sense. Most important, however was Trina Schart Hyman.

I grew up in Trina’s town, and she visited our elementary school every year. What an impression she made! Her visits showed me that books and art were important. Everyone admired her, and she hung her artwork in our town library. I got to see the original paintings for *Canterbury Tales* (1988), [adapted by Barbara Cohen], *Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins* (1989), [written by Eric Kimmel], *The Fortune-Tellers* (1992), [written by Lloyd Alexander], and many more. I treasured her books and emulated her art.

Then, when I was in high school, I met her, and she became my mentor. She never gave me art lessons. What she gave me was attention. She listened to me and talked to me about my life and my art. She believed in me, and that gave me the confidence to pursue a career in the arts. It was the greatest gift, and I would not be here without her help.

Interview by Mahnaz Dar
over, the brothers spot flowers and pick some for their mother. When they come upon a fantastical palace, the brothers, hungry and thirsty, eat and drink the food they find; the girl alone resists temptations in this odd realm ruled by a lion called the Teller and populated by dozens of other animals. At last, the girl safely shepherds her brothers to the stark institution housing their mother; more mysteries arise. This is a strange tale, laden with ambiguities. However, herein lies the appeal; succinct, carefully chosen text and hauntingly beautiful artwork create a story that demands that its readers return to each page, trying to figure out answers to questions whose answers exist only in readers’ imaginations. This mesmerizing work offers potential jumping-off points to discuss many topics, including magical realism, symbolism, family relationships and roles, and mental health. Characters are light-skinned and dark-haired. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

DIGESTION! THE MUSICAL
Rex, Adam
Illus. by Laura Park
Chronicle Books (76 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-4521-8386-2

Will sweet, nutty Li’l Candy’s plunge to stardom prove transformational? Every time.

On a dark stage lit by neon bright flashes of dazzle and dominated by a towering, cutaway human body, a round, pink ingénue takes a leap of faith to the Broadway rhythms of a chorus of little carrots: “Past the teeth now! Past the tongue now! Past the palate to the pharynx! She could end up in the lung now if she blunders down the esophagus, where all the foodstuff goes.” Proving along the way that she’s not just empty calories but has a nutritional heart of gold—or, more precisely, peanut—and pausing only for the occasional production number (“My name’s Platelet! / If you’re hurtin’ / I make plugs to stop / the spurtin’”), she, or her remains, arrive at the purposes and processes of digestion the lavish, giltzy production they deserve, from teeth to toilet. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

As “gross and amazing” as its topic, certain to receive thunderous ovations—standing or otherwise. (Informational picture book. 5-8)

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, the delight of children who dance and sing, 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. Flar 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)

THE SUN IS LATE AND SO IS THE FARMER
Stead, Philip C.
Illus. by Erin E. Stead
Neal Porter/Holiday House (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-8234-4428-1

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
**HELLO, MOON**

Turk, Evan
Atheneum (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-5344-0080-1

A look at the many faces and phases of the moon and a child’s understanding of the natural world.

A child with beige skin and curly dark hair points out the window at the full moon, eager to go say hello. Together, the child and a caregiver bundle up against the wintry chill and head out on the first of many nocturnal jaunts to explore the various shapes and phases of the moon. One night, the child expresses concern about the disappearing moon. The caregiver reassures the child that all is well (“It sounds like the Moon is feeling shy. Should we go out and say hello?”), and the two sit with and comfort the moon as it slowly disappears over a period of two weeks, a process depicted in graphic novel–like panels. In an unexpected surprise, the child and caregiver appear etched white against a moonless blue-purple sky. Loose lines and expressive faces convey the closeness between the child and caregiver. Though the text is quiet and fairly straightforward, striking angles and perspectives keep each spread vibrant and eye-catching. Orblike shapes echo throughout the book—for instance, the child’s head. Warm reds, yellows, and purples used to portray indoor scenes transform into thinner, flatter hues in the cold moonlight, and a marbleized texture lends depth and movement to each illustration. This one pairs well with Jane Yolen’s *Owl Moon* (1987), illustrated by John Schoenherr, with a unique art style perfect for bedtime and library storytime alike, with age-appropriate STEM opportunities as well. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Learning, empathy, and wonder in an ever shifting luminous landscape. (Picture book 3-7)

---

**A LAND OF BOOKS**

Dreams of Young Mexihcah Word Painters
Tonatiuh, Duncan
Abrams (48 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-4197-4942-1

Explore how intricate storytelling and painted books arose in Mesoamerica before the arrival of the Europeans.

“Told from the perspective of a child speaking to a brother, this trip through Mesoamerican bookmaking begins with a summoning: “Our world, my brother, is an amoxtalpan”—a “land of books.” There are nods to other Mesoamerican civilizations—the Chontaltin, the Mixtecah—before the narrator proclaims, “And we, the mighty Mexihcah who dwell in the valley of the volcanoes, make books too.” From there, readers follow along through a breakdown of how the Mexihcah (referred to as Aztecs in English) created books. The child explains how their parents, tlachuiloquheh (“painters of words”), work in the amoxtcalli (“house of books”). Tonatiuh deftly outlines the lengthy processes devoted to the creation of the multipaged, colorfully rendered amoxtin, from decorating book covers with feathers and precious stones to making paint out of insects. Tonatiuh probes deeper into Mexihcagh culture as the narrator discusses education, literacy, and religion, describing how the four T ezcatlipocah, or gods, created the world and the god Blue Hummingbird sparked a great migration. Throughout each shift in focus, Tonatiuh’s respect and reverence for the subject shine through loud and clear as he shares knowledge of Mesoamerican books almost lost to the past (a detailed author’s note states that, following the Spanish conquest, many of the books were destroyed). As always, the author/illustrator brilliantly conveys emotions and atmosphere with his colorful visuals—an inspired offspring of pre-Columbian art. A glossary defines the Nahuatl words used throughout. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Utterly indispensable. (Bibliography, websites) (Informational picture book 4-10) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

---

**A SONG FOR THE UNSUNG**

Bayard Rustin, the Man Behind the 1963 March on Washington
Weatherford, Carole Boston & Rob Sanders Illus. by Byron McCray
Henry Holt (40 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-250-77950-2

A rare tribute to a heroic figure of the civil rights movement. Distinctly underrecognized in books aimed at younger audiences (in large part because he was gay—which the authors note repeatedly), Bayard Rustin well merits the credit he gets here not only for organizing the renowned March on Washington (and speaking at it, too), but for actually introducing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to the principles of nonviolent protest after learning pacifism at his Quaker grandmother’s knee, being imprisoned as a conscientious objector during World War II, and traveling to India to learn from Gandhi’s followers. As a
VÁMONOS

Mexican Folk Art
Transport in English and Spanish

Weill, Cynthia
Illus. by Martin Melchor, Agustín Tinoco Cruz, Avelino Pérez & 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, Pérez, 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. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Gorgeous, unique art makes this an illustrative standout. (Picture book. 0-4)

**THE PIGEON WILL RIDE THE ROLLER COASTER!**

Willems, Mo

Union Square Kids (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-4549-4686-1

The Pigeon is on an emotional—and physical—roller coaster.

Since learning about the existence of roller coasters, he’s become giddy with excitement. The Pigeon prepares mentally: He’ll need a ticket and “exemplary patience” to wait in line. He envisions zooming up and down and careening through dizzying turns and loops. Then, he imagines his emotions afterward: exhilaration, post-ride blues, pride at having accomplished such a feat, and enthusiasm at the prospect of riding again. (He’ll also feel dizzy and nauseous.) All this before the Pigeon ever sets claw on an actual coaster. So...will he really try it? Are roller coasters fun? When the moment comes, everything seems to go according to plan: waiting in line, settling into the little car, THEN—off he goes! Though the ride itself isn’t quite what the Pigeon expected, it will delight readers. Wearing his feelings on his wing and speaking directly to the audience in first person, the Pigeon describes realistic thoughts and emotions about waiting and guessing about the unknown—common childhood experiences. No sentiment is misplaced; kids will relate to Pigeon’s eagerness and apprehension. The ending falls somewhat flat, but the whole humorous point is that an underwhelming adventure can still be thrilling enough to warrant repeating. Willems’ trademark droll illustrations will have readers giggling. The roller-coaster attendant is light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Roller-coaster enthusiasts or not, children will eagerly join our intrepid hero on this entertaining ride. (Picture book. 3-6)

**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. Yan uses vivid, pastel colors for a spread of a group of diverse kids bringing their dogs to be washed, helping out, and having fun, while the
Buffy Sainte-Marie has had a long, trailblazing career as a musician, performer, and activist. The Indigenous Canadian American artist won an Oscar for her song “Up Where We Belong,” from An Officer and a Gentleman and received a string of other awards; TV viewers of a certain age will remember her from a stint on Sesame Street. In recent years she added author to her varied resume, publishing books for children. Her latest is Still This Love Goes On (Greystone Kids, Sept. 27), illustrated by Julie Flett. Sainte-Marie answered a few questions by email.

After a long and varied career in music and activism, what inspired you to start creating books for children?

I had been on Sesame Street from 1975 to 1981, and when it was time for my son, Cody, to go to school, I began writing a full-length children’s book, Tâp-wê and the Magic Hat, which I held back and only released this past June, also from Greystone Kids [with illustrations by the author and Michelle Al- ynn Clement]. I wrote the story out of love for Cree culture and the fun we have just being kids on a reserve. I wanted other kids beyond the reserve to feel that special “Cree something.” And Greystone has made my dream come true in releasing a separate edition of the book in the Cree language! (It was translated by Cree linguist Solomon Ratt of First Nations University, Regina, Saskatchewan.)

Hey Little Rockabye actually started out as a song about pet adoption. Previously, I had only sung it to my animals, and I wanted to turn it into a book. For me, the right three-minute song can tell a story that’s as satisfying as a novel but more succinct, simple, and easy for everyone else to learn. The pictures by Ben Hodson illustrate the words perfectly. And I’m very grateful to Greystone Kids and Humane Canada, who used the book and song in their campaign and helped lots of pets find their forever homes.

The illustrations for the new book are by Julie Flett, a Cree–Métis artist. Was it important to you to have an Indigenous collaborator on this book?

Very important. The sentiments in Still This Love could be about anywhere, but the details are definitely set in an Indigenous reserve community. The jingle dancers, the little tracks in the snow, the geese, the beaver dam, the smell of the sweetgrass all share a certain feeling I wanted to give to readers everywhere, and I knew that Julie Flett was familiar with those settings, those people, those experiences. Her other books are just as gorgeous.
Were you a big reader as a kid? Are there any formative books you remember from your youth or any adults who influenced you as a reader or writer?

I’ve always been a biblio-holic, for both print and audiobooks. My mother read to me and loved books, was a proofreader at a newspaper, and we both loved to play with words. I read all the Nancy Drew mysteries and haunted the local library. I’ve always loved making up songs and stories that pop into my head, but the only writing book I’ve ever read is Stephen King’s *On Writing*—wonderful. My list of favorite books is really long; it’s at my website. Present classic book crush is *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

What book released in the past few years deserved more attention?

Andrés Reséndez’s book *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (2016) is the most impressive book I’ve read in years, with original research about the enslavement of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. A tough but beautifully written, essential read.

An entertaining, if light, addition to the growing shelf of celebrity-authored picture books. *(Picture book. 4–7)*

---

grown-ups are muted and relegated to the background. Extreme angles in several 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. 4–7)*

---

A loving profile of Minoru “Yama” Yamasaki, a pioneering Japanese American architect whose buildings became cultural symbols across America.

When Yama was young, there were places he felt seen and those that did not welcome him. In this chronicle, his author/illustrator granddaughter shares how Yama overcame discrimination to become one of the great 20th-century architects. Lovely, lyrical prose begins Yama’s story as the world makes assumptions about his family—and how despite these degradations, he believes in the truth of his potential. Through the Great Depression and World War II as anti-Japanese sentiment rises, Yama strives to bring light and serenity to the places he creates. The artist’s painted illustrations layer elements of the architect’s stylings into each spread. The complicated renderings are earnest in their effort to convey a complex narrative. Not mentioned by name, the World Trade Center is referenced, offering a fuller view of what happened to some of Yama’s creations. While this transition is a bit abrupt, the author offers a more comprehensive look at Yama’s life and his masterpieces in the backmatter along with illustrations of his most famous buildings. Despite this change in tone, the author successfully captures the longing to fulfill the American dream and Yama’s patience and courage as he pursued that dream in the face of racism. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An American story of beating the odds and overcoming bigotry to create something greater than oneself. Inspiring. *(Picture book biography. 6–8)*
PENGUIN AND PENEOPE
Yoong, Salina
Bloomsbury (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-68119-344-1

When Penguin discovers a lost elephant, he vows to help her get home.

Marking the 10th anniversary of Yoong’s Penguin and Pinecone (2012), this tale sees the popular character return for another story of friendship. After freeing Penelope the elephant from the mud, Penguin tries to help her find her herd. They eventually swim their way across a body of water, following tracks on the other side back to Penelope’s family. The message—about the importance of trust in friendship and the value of staying connected despite distance—rings true. Adults sharing the story with children will feel a pang at Penguin’s words to Penelope, “I’ll never forget you either, because you’re unforgettable.” Penguin’s scarf, ever the symbol of the gift of friendship, becomes Penelope’s, tying the two together. Yoong’s signature illustrative style is on display; with thick black outlines reminiscent of block-printed art, each page feels simultaneously simple and detailed. The shift of perspective to a bird’s-eye view of Penguin and Penelope and depictions of interlocking elephant trunks “hugging” add richness to the storytelling. In the same vein as the other Penguin tales, this one is sweet and earnest and sure to resonate with fans and newcomers.

Darling illustrations and a gentle storyline combine for a lovely tale about the bonds of friendship. (Picture book 3-6)
PIECE BY PIECE
How I Built My Life (No Instructions Required)
Aguilar, David & Ferran Aguilar
Trans. by Lawrence Schimel
Amazon Crossing Kids (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-66250-427-3

A young man from Andorra recounts how he became the first person to build a functional prosthetic arm using LEGO bricks in this memoir translated from Spanish and co-authored with his father.

Due to Poland syndrome, David was born with half a right arm. In a clever introduction, he asks readers to count their fingers, then remarks that they possess no 11th digit, just as he has five rather than 10 fingers. But neither he nor they are missing a thing, he declares. For him, the word disability connotes limitations, while his preferred term, diff­ability, highlights adaptability and possibility. However, his path to acceptance wasn’t easy. With humor and candor, he describes contending with pity, bullying, and romantic heartbreak as a result of his limb difference.

Readers will sympathize with his desire to fit in, his frustration at encountering setbacks, and his struggles with high school academics after his beloved abuela’s death. Fortunately, his family’s support was constant; his father was even able to construct devices that enabled him to swim and ride a bike. David quickly discovered his own knack for inventing via LEGO sets, a hobby that culminated in building a prosthetic arm that would make him famous worldwide. Though his stream-of-consciousness narration is occasionally difficult to follow, his wit is engaging, and his interactions with his family are heartwarming. While readers needn’t be LEGO fans to admire David’s ingenuity, fellow builders may be inspired to dream up their own inventions.

Humorous and uplifting. (Memoir . 9­14) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
Given the abundance of riches out this season, getting our Fall Preview middle-grade selections down to a paltry 30 involved some tough choices; suffice to say, every title here is a winner.

_Tell Me a Story, Please_ by Kyoko Hara, illustrated by Kazue Takahashi, translated by Alexandrea Mallia (Museyon, Sept. 1): In this Japanese import, first grader Yuka can’t find anyone to read to her, so she reads to herself—and attracts the attention of several curious animals. Like others in the Forest Friends series, this one exudes whimsy and joy.

_The Door of No Return_ by Kwame Alexander (Little, Brown, Sept. 27): This stirring verse novel opens in the Asante Kingdom in 1860 when it’s a British colony. Eleven-year-old Kofi loves swimming and his grandfather’s storytelling. But unimaginable changes are coming. Kofi wonders, “what am I supposed to do / when my dreams drown? // When the door / to the last sliver of hope / is sealed?”

_Oh, Sal_ by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow Books, Sept. 27): With his latest tale centered on the Miller family, Henkes follows 4-year-old Sal as she copes with a new baby, an irritating visiting uncle, and a lost Christmas present. With respect and empathy for his young audience, the author keenly understands that seemingly low-stakes drama can feel overwhelming to children.

_Ways To Share Joy_ by Renée Watson, illustrated by Andrew Grey (Bloomsbury, Sept. 27): Ryan Hart has enchanted tweens since readers met her in _Ways To Make Sunshine_ (2020), and her many fans will adore her newest outing, which sees her dealing with a host of problems, from taking part in a prank war with her brother to juggling friendships to being teased—all of which she manages with the support of those who care about her.

_Undercover Latina_ by Aya de León (Candlewick, Oct. 11): This gripping page-turner follows Andréa Hernández-Baldoquin, who might be only 14 but has been tapped for her first solo undercover mission for the Factory, which helps people of color worldwide. Able to pass as White, Latina Andréa must befriend the son of a White supremacist who has gone into hiding and is plotting violence.

_Buzzkill: A Wild Wander Through the Weird and Threatened World of Bugs_ by Brenna Maloney, illustrated by Dave Mottram (Henry Holt, Oct. 11): In an entertaining guide to the insect kingdom, Maloney instills in readers an appreciation for and curiosity about these varied and important—but largely underappreciated—creatures. Enhanced with eye-catching illustrations, this comprehensive overview written in a chatty and conversational style is filled with fascinating information and details the critical roles insects play in our ecosystem.

_Marya Khan and the Incredible Henna Party_ by Saadia Faruqi, illustrated by Ani Bushry (Amulet/Abrams, Oct. 18): Marya’s parents have never let her have a birthday party, but this year she’s set on hosting a henna party that will rival the shindig thrown by her wealthy neighbor Alexa. Marya is an intensely relatable tween coming into her own while coping with family drama and frenemy angst.

_Piece by Piece: How I Built My Life (No Instructions Required)_ by David Aguilar and Ferran Aguilar, translated by Lawrence Schimel (Amazon Crossing Kids, Oct. 23): David, a young man from Andorra, used LEGO bricks to build a prosthetic arm, achieving fame for his ingenuity. In this frank, engaging work, co-authored by David and his father and translated from Spanish, readers learn about what it was like growing up with a limb difference and the impact of his family’s support.

Mahnaz Dar and Laura Simeon are young readers’ editors.
A boy's life is turned upside down following a wrestling match in West Africa's Asante Kingdom in 1860. Eleven-year-old Kofi Offin loves his family, admires his friend Ama, and tries to avoid his bully of a cousin. Kofi's teacher, Mr. Goodluck Phillip, who canes him for speaking Twi, is convinced the students must learn the Queen's English, but Kofi prefers the stories of Nana Mosi, his grandfather and the village storyteller. The place he truly feels at home is the river, where he practices swimming and dreams of defeating his cousin in a race. But before that can happen, all attention turns to the Kings Festival, which features highly anticipated wrestling contests against representatives from their rival village. This year, Kofi's older brother, Kwasi, has been chosen to compete. During the match, Kwasi accidentally kills Prince Yaw Boateng, his opponent and the nephew of the King of Lower Kwanta, changing the direction of their lives when the king retaliates. The immediacy of this verse novel places readers alongside Kofi, thriving as a young boy surrounded by family love and legacy before being abruptly snatched from all he has known. Alexander's rich language is lyrical and haunting as the water, long a source of comfort for Kofi, becomes full of uncertainty and danger.

A riveting, not-to-be-missed trilogy opener that will leave readers invested in what is to come. (glossary) (Verse historical fiction. 10-18)
Linus has his security blanket, and Kevin used to tote around a toy rabbit named Crumbs. More important, the characters are always playing tricks on each other, much like Lucy pulling away the football just before Charlie Brown kicks it. One incident involves firecrackers inside a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich. Bondia also has some of Bill Watterson’s gift for dynamic movement and expressions. And a few moments are as poignant and bittersweet as scenes from “Calvin and Hobbes” and “Peanuts.” When Kevin’s distant father leaves his family, Miles asks, “Is it bad that I didn’t notice?” And Kevin responds, “Nah. Hardly anyone did.”

The author has learned exactly the right lessons from the history of comics. (Graphic humor. 8-12)
RUBY FINLEY VS. THE INTERSTELLAR INVASION
Bradford, K. Tempest
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-374-38879-9

Eleven-year-old Ruby Finley is a gifted science student who loves bugs.
Ruby, who presents as Black on the book’s cover, often stores insects in mason jars under her bed, but the latest one she finds has her stumped, especially when it melts holes in its jar and then the window screen to escape. Ruby posts pictures online and asks for help identifying the bug, but the pictures are deleted, and several White men calling themselves “agents” show up asking questions. They claim to have captured the bug, but strange things occur, including metal thefts. The town’s recluse goes missing, and on a Discord channel, Ruby picks up chatter about aliens and government coverups. In an underlying story, tension escalates between Ruby and her White science teacher, who deems Ruby’s proposed science fair project too ambitious and tries to punish her for not agreeing to an easier project. Luckily, Ruby’s parents, the principal, and her former science teacher have her back. Ruby, with the help of her friends, applies the scientific method and figures out what’s going on. Bradford challenges readers to keep up with Ruby to solve this intriguing and absorbing mystery. Bradford also addresses, with sensitivity and nuance, the ways in which Black students are marginalized in STEM fields. The author depicts a tightly knit, supportive community of color, where kids roam freely and an older neighbor is always outside to keep an eye on things.

A page-turning mix of science, science fiction, and mystery that will empower readers to pursue their own STEM passions. (Fiction. 9-12) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THE LORDS OF NIGHT
A Shadow Bruja Novel
Cervantes, J.C.
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 engrossing, god-filled delight. (glossary) (Adventure. 8-12)

UNDERCOVER LATINA
de León, Aya
Candlewick (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5362-2374-3

A teen spy is on her way to take down a White supremacist terrorist. Andréa Hernández-Baldoquí is well aware that teenage girls are frequently underestimated, which is why at 14 she’s the perfect spy to uncover a White supremacist plot. Alongside her family—Puerto Rican mom, Mexican dad, and little brother Carlos—she works for the Factory, an intelligence organization that serves people of color, and now’s the time for her first complex mission: moving to Arizona and befriending Kyle Summer, the estranged son of a White supremacist who may be planning an attack in the Southwest. The catch, however, is why she was chosen: Among all their teen agents, she can best pass as White, and until she discovers intel on their target, Andréa will be posing as Andrea Burke. This fast-paced adventure, de León’s first for younger readers, takes audiences on the ride of a lifetime. Andréa spotlights racism, discovers friendship (after years of home schooling and constantly moving), develops her first crush, and deeply explores what it means to be Latina and a person of color. Social criticism is woven into a fun read centered on kids of color; the narrative is accessible and engaging, never shying away from difficult conversations about race and privilege or the many forms White supremacy can take. The cast of characters is rounded and three-dimensional, making Andréa’s story all the more believable.

An engaging, insightful adventure with a heartfelt conclusion. (author’s note) (Adventure. 10-14) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
Merci Suárez Plays It Cool (Candlewick, Sept. 13) is the hotly anticipated, heartwarming conclusion to Meg Medina’s award-winning Merci Suárez series. Readers first fell in love with the bold, brainy Florida sixth grader and her close-knit Cuban American family in Merci Suárez Changes Gears. Now entering eighth grade at Seward Pines Academy, Merci must contend with shifting friendships, first love, and profound loss. Medina answered our questions by email.

Kirkus calls Merci Suárez Plays It Cool “a fabulous finale to a memorable trilogy.” What were you interested in exploring from Merci’s perspective this time around?

For the third book, I wanted to continue exploring the many faces of friendship as we grow up. Friends feel so important to our sense of self when we’re Merci’s age. But what makes a good friend? Are there different kinds of friends? How can we be friends with people from divergent groups?

I also used Merci Suárez Plays It Cool to drill down into grief and loss when we’re young. It was a tough topic, but I wrote it with an eye to how our friends at school, our trusted school adults, and our families can help us survive it.

What have been the pleasures and/or challenges of writing this unforgettable character over the course of three books?

The greatest pleasure has been drawing Merci and her family as they evolved and faced difficult circumstances together. The trick, of course, has been in showing Merci’s growth in maturity and perspective while still keeping the story squarely in the middle-grade space. The other challenge was making sure that the third book could not only stand on its own, but also land the many storylines from earlier books. Not everything ends well, of course, but I hope her middle school years end in a way that is realistic and satisfying to readers.

Would you ever consider expanding the series?

For now, the story feels complete, although it’s never wise to say never, especially with a big cast like the one in “the Merciverse.” The pesky twins, Axel and Tomás, would make a wonderful duo for a chapter-book series. (Can you imagine what their poor teachers would be put through?) At the other end of the spectrum, we have Roli, Merci’s “genius” older brother. I’d be lying if I said I haven’t wondered about what has been going on for him at college and otherwise. He is such a pensive character, so brilliant and so duty-bound. I’d love to be inside his mind for a while.

What project(s) are you working on now?

I’m working on a chapter book about Pura Belpré, and I’m writing a middle-grade fantasy set in the deep ocean. The worldbuilding and research on that one has been fascinating!

What fall release(s) are you most looking forward to reading?

One that just pubbed is Tumble by Celia C. Pérez [Kokila, Aug. 6]. I’m also eyeing the galley for Undercover Latina by Aya de León [Candlewick Press, Oct. 11].

What kind of reader are you: digital or physical books? Audio or print? All of the above?

I’m an old-school, ravenous reader: physical books and print. Books take up too much room in my house, but I love the whole tactile experience. That said, I do think that audiobooks are an asset when you’re taking long walks or drives.

Interview by Megan Labrise
MARYA KHAN AND THE INCREDIBLE HENNA PARTY
Faruqi, Saadia
Illus. by Ani Bushry
Amulet/Abrams (144 pp.)
$14.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-4197-6116-4
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 shattered hopes, which make up for the slightly predictable ending.

A delightful story of friendship, family, and upended expectations. (Chapter book. 6-9)

THE LABYRINTH OF DOOM
Gibbs, Stuart
Illus. by Stacy Curtis
Simon & Schuster (160 pp.)
$12.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-5344-9928-7
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 vexing.

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

TELL ME A STORY, PLEASE
Hara, Kyoko
Illus. by Kazue Takabaishi
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)
**WILDOAK**
Harrington, C.C.
Scholastic (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-338-80386-0

In 1963, a child finds both a snow leopard cub and a way to live with her stutter in the Cornish woods.

For aptly named Rumpus, the old forest in which he is abandoned is a harsh replacement for the cage at Harrods or the flat he tore up after being purchased as an ill-~advised~ birthday gift. For 11-year-old Maggie, visiting her long-estranged grandfather, who lives near Wildoak Forest, provides welcome relief from her parents’ quarrels over her schooling and others’ humiliating mockery and impatience when she tries to speak. Grandpa Fred, a country doctor and amateur naturalist, turns out to be a perceptive sort. Still, he rejects her claim to have seen a leopard—until he helps her rescue Rumpus from shotgun-wielding locals and stands beside her as she overcomes her fears to deliver a halting but stout defense to those frightened by rumors of his ferocity. The author adds a wisp of magic in the woods that whispers “Be gentle with yourself. It is hard to be human,” to Maggie and helps Rumpus survive wounds inflicted by an illegal trap. In an epilogue, an adult Maggie wraps events up neatly while confidently owning her communication differences. Harrington packs her memorably atmospheric debut with compelling issues, but her sharply felt portrayals of two vulnerable youngsters of different species bonding as they find their ways in hostile worlds will make the deepest impression. The human cast presents White.

**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.

**WE ARE HERE**
30 Inspiring Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Who Have Shaped the United States
Hirahara, Naomi
Illus. by Illi Fernandez
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 to take part in a Division I sport; Manny Cristomo, a Pulitzer Prize–winning photojournalist from Guam; 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 the hate crimes against Asian Americans since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and discusses the importance of covering Arab Americans and Pacific Islanders—voices often left out of 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)
“Fresh, lively, funny, and very, very informative.”

BUZZKILL
A Wild Wander Through the Weird and Threatened World of Bugs
Maloney, Brenna
Illus. by Dave Mottram
Henry Holt (384 pp.)
$19.99  |  Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-250-80103-6

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 tactfully giving readers permission to be skeeved out by insects while still being interested in them.

Insects: the why, what, where, and how.

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, hilariously 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. 10­18)

GHOSTCLOUD
Mann, Michael
Peachtree (320 pp.)
$17.99  |  Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-68263-518-6

A supernatural story of one boy’s survival in the darkest of times, set in a dystopian London.

It has been two years since Luke Smith-Sharma last saw his family. Kidnapped along with thousands of other children, he spends his days shoveling coal in Battersea Power Station, hidden away from the world. The setting is palpably Dickensian, covered in steam and soot, and controlled by Cruella de Vil-like villain Tabatha Margate. White and Indian Luke is also half-ghost, able to see things others cannot. Aiding Luke in his efforts to escape are richly developed supporting characters: his best friend and bunkmate, Ravi; plucky new girl and plumber’s niece Jess; and Alma, a ghost girl yearning for closure. Along with Luke’s newfound ghosting skills, Alma teaches him how to leave the physical world and fly above steampunk London, where he gains a larger perspective on their predicament.

The situation becomes harrowing as he learns of Margate’s despicable plans. Some of the content is quite gritty and dark as the novel critiques social inequities; it feels like Charles Dickens, Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials, and Neil Gaiman’s The Graveyard Book rolled into one. Mann creates empathy for Luke, who shows clear hope and compassion for others during this evil time. The quick-witted humor and fast pace keep the entertainment factor high.

Thrilling. (Fantasy. 8-12)

MERCI SUÁREZ PLAYS IT COOL
Medina, Meg
Candlewick (352 pp.)
$18.99  |  Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-5362-1946-3
Series: Merci Suárez, 3

Eighth grade brings Merci more challenges at home and school. Merci Suárez is about to start her last year of middle school at Seaward Pines Academy in Florida. The family is on high alert, as Merci’s grandfather Lolo, who has Alzheimer’s, has declined considerably. Briliant big brother Roli is back home to work at Walgreens, attend community college for a semester, and save money before returning to university. When school starts, Merci—who has a stylish new haircut—must balance her core group of best friends, Hannah, Lena, and former rival-turned-pal Edna, with new attention from popular soccer teammate Avery. Then there’s Wilson, the boy Merci can’t stop texting and feeling fluttery around, even though these new feelings about her friend confuse her. Like the previous two installments, this is a story that focuses on characterization, self-discovery, and growth. There’s also an in-depth exploration of grief and the differences between forever and fair-weather friends. Although it’s accessible to new readers, the story’s conclusion will particularly resonate with existing fans of Merci and her Cuban American family. Medina finishes the heartwarming story arc of her plucky, curious, strong-willed young protagonist with the same well-crafted dialogue, humor, and cultural exploration readers expect.

A fabulous finale to a memorable trilogy. (Fiction. 9-13)
Fans of Renée Watson’s Ryan Hart series, centering on the life and times of a talented young baker from Portland, Oregon, are in for another treat. Picking up where Ways To Grow Love left off, Ways To Share Joy (Bloomsbury, Sept. 27) sees Ryan navigating new responsibilities, expanding her appreciation of what it means to be a sister and a friend, and baking the cake for an extra-special surprise party. Watson answered some questions over email.

Kirkus calls Ways To Share Joy “a tale of family and friendship that exudes pure joy.” What’s Ryan up to in the new book?
Ryan is still cooking, baking, and pulling pranks on her brother. She is adjusting to being the middle child and takes pride in knowing what it is like to be both a big sister and a little sister. She is also navigating friendship and understanding that it’s more important to have a true friend than a best friend.

Among the lessons Ryan learns in Ways To Share Joy is that joy doesn’t necessarily equate to happiness. How does she come to understand the distinction between the two?
The lesson about joy being something deeper than happiness comes from Ryan’s grandmother. She explains to Ryan that happiness is based on circumstances, but joy is connected to an inner peace, a lasting contentment. Ultimately, she is learning how even when things don’t go her way and when life gets tough, there is always something to be grateful for.

Is writing a joyful practice for you?
Absolutely. Joy is a pillar of my work, and I find a lot of purpose and pleasure in writing. There are times, of course, when the writing is slow or when the business side to publishing is discouraging, but even in those moments, my faith and resolve that this is what I am called to do keeps me grounded, keeps me going.

Were you a big reader as a kid? Were there any adults who influenced you as a reader or writer?
I loved reading as a child, and I also loved writing. The more I read, the more I wanted to tell my own stories and be in conversation with the characters in the books I was reading.

Reading was normalized in my family. I would often see my mother reading her Bible before going to bed, and she didn’t just read it—she highlighted passages, read Scriptures out loud, memorized them. She was my first example of how to engage with a text, how to slow down when reading and ponder the meaning, how to hold words dear to your heart. If you open a book from my bookshelf, you’ll quickly be able to tell which ones I have read over and over again, which ones I love and meditate on—they are the books with notes scribbled in the margins, underlined paragraphs, and sticky notes poking out. I am always so tickled when a parent proudly holds up a book I just signed for their young reader, all pristine and in mint condition.

What fall release(s) are you most looking forward to reading?
I’m really excited about On Her Wings by Jerdine Nolen, illustrated by James Ransome, and A Library by Nikki Giovanni, illustrated by Erin K. Robinson.

Interview by Megan Labrise
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)

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 “what the government was doing was unfair and undemocratic.” Many of her images were impounded only to be released years later. Toyo Miyatake, who was imprisoned with his family, took great personal risk to build his own camera and documented the experiences of those of Japanese descent who were imprisoned at Manzanar, California, during World War II. He largely took portraits and posed photos. Aside from Adams’s Photographs of the Manzanar Riot and the loyalty questionnaire. Powerful visuals blend photographs, reproduced primary source documents, and smudgy, paint-lined illustrations and make dynamic use of color. Partridge and Tamaki examine Ansel Adams, who “had not been against the incarceration” and “wanted to photograph mostly loyal Nisei” (those of Japanese descent born in the United States). He largely took portraits and posed photos. Aside from the work of the photographers, the book also touches on the Manzanar Riot and the loyalty questionnaire. Powerful visuals blend photographs, reproduced primary source documents, and smudgy, paint-lined illustrations and make dynamic use of color. Accompanied by clear, straightforward text, this arresting work brings history to vivid life.

A bold combination of art, media, and records create a compelling read. (map, further information on the period and on civil liberties, biographies of the photographers, discussion of the model minority myth) (Nonfiction. 9-12)
For years Ziva bat Leah's quest to cure her twin brother Pesah's leprosy has consumed their lives. When his health worsens, their parents arrange for him to be taken to a colony. But after Pesah has a celestial vision at their birthday party indicating that he will die on Rosh Hashanah, Ziva decides they must run away. Along with Almas, a sheydim, or demon, they rescue, they travel to the city of Luz, the only place the Angel of Death can't go. Pasternack's story is rich in the rhythms, values, and deep magic of Jewish culture and life in the Turkic Jewish empire of Khazaria. It reveals in an often overlooked mythology, deploying exciting fantasy elements with ease. Ziva struggles with her fiery nature—stubbornness that is also an intense desire for justice. Her single-minded focus on saving Pesah blinks her to the inevitability of death and the complexities of both their own fears and needs as she comes to understand them. Pesah is brilliant and gentle, kindhearted Almas faces prejudice for his demon nature, and the three form a charming traveling trio even amid fear and pain. More than simply an adventure, this is a story about grief and illness and arguing with the rules of the world, enduring and enjoying the living that happens between now and the end, threaded through with the profound, unshakeable love of two brave siblings.

**Propulsive, wise, and heartbreaking.** (afterword, glossary) *(Historical fantasy. 9-12)*

An unlikely hero embarks on a quest to find her missing sisters. In Tagalong’s world, youngers under 15 are not allowed Outside their homes to avoid being swept away by snow squalls. The Powers-That-Be preserve the status quo while outlawing books and fairy tales as dangerous. Seven years ago, Tag’s three sisters—Lily, Rose, and Iris—vanished in a squall. Tag, now 13, has never been Outside until the day she receives an invitation to a meeting. Discovering a book of fairy tales hidden in an attic wardrobe, Tag takes it with her as she escapes Outside to meet Finn, the boy who invited her, and three younger boys. They’re poised to journey into the Unknown to find their windswept siblings. Not sure she really belongs with them, Tag nevertheless joins along and, after Finn vanishes, distracts and inspires them with remarkable stories from her book. Aided by three spellcasting sisters, various magical objects, and some trickery, Tag emerges as a determined and creative hero as she confronts treacherous danger alone in a dramatic climax. Inspired primarily by the Norwegian fairy tale “The Three Princesses in the Mountain Blue,” this edgy, somewhat dystopian tale set in a world where race holds no significance masterfully blends European fairy-tale motifs with timely warnings about human greed, waste, and destructiveness while extoling the power of storytelling. Richly descriptive prose and delicate, atmospheric black-and-white illustrations enhance the fairy-tale flavor.

**An inventive, memorable must-read.** (map, author’s note, list of fairy tales, bibliography) *(Fantasy. 10-14)*
LOLO’S LIGHT
Scallon, Liz Garton
Chronicle Books (232 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-79721-294-4

Millie is a genuinely happy person; she’s a comedian who loves making other people laugh—until the day she cannot laugh anymore.

Twelve-year-old Millie Donally feels so mature when their neighbors the Acostas ask her to watch their baby daughter, Lolo, when they go out to dinner. Millie’s older sister is their usual sitter, but she can’t make it. Everything goes well, and Millie goes home happy and proud of herself only to wake in the morning to find out that Lolo passed away during the night. Even though the sudden infant death syndrome is not her fault, Millie is transformed overnight from carefree to guilt-ridden and depressed. The only bright spot (figuratively and literally) is the warm yellow light shining from Lolo’s room. Millie swears she feels a warm electrical hum as well, although no one else seems to notice it. Millie attempts to move forward, but how do you go on after something like this? How can she be with her friends, who can’t truly understand what she’s feeling? Even the class project she had looked forward to, incubating chicken eggs, is now in Millie’s eyes rife with potential for disastrous failure.

Millie’s slow process through grief and guilt—with help from a family therapist—is extraordinarily well written, taking readers on the heartbreaking, difficult, and necessary journey that follows unthinkable loss. Characters are minimally described and read White.

A poignant coming-of-age story that explores the ripple effects of death, loss, and forgiveness. (Fiction. 10-14) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THE TRYOUT
Soontornwat, Christina
Illus. by Joanna Cacao
Graphix/Scholastic (272 pp.)
$24.99 | $12.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-338-74126-1 paper

Christina tries to become a cheerleader in hopes of being popular. Christina—a her best friend, Megan, love the Lord of the Rings and playing pretend, but now that they’re starting middle school, there are more important things to worry about, like homework, sports, and popularity. Fitting in in their small Texas town isn’t easy, especially when Christina has a Thai dad and White American mom, and Megan is Iranian American; both girls experience constant racist comments. Admiring the confidence and popularity of the cheerleaders, they try out for the squad. The cheers, moves, stunts, and training are challenging, but Christina finds it all fun until the final tryout: This one will take place in front of the whole seventh grade, and their classmates’ votes will determine who makes the squad, a system designed to bring about humiliation and embarrassment. Determined Christina gives it everything she’s got, but Megan’s decision not to be her partner for tryouts causes a rift as they confront difficult truths about being outsiders. This superlative graphic memoir is a funny, relatable, and genuine story of friendship and belonging. Christina struggles with identity in many areas of her life, for example, can she be both Buddhist and Presbyterian? The jokes, daydreams, and quips are delightful without overshadowing or diminishing the impact of her experiences with racism and exclusion. The attractive, expressive illustrations feature clean lines and bright colors.

A funny, painfully honest look at a middle schooler finding her way. (author’s note, photos) (Graphic memoir 8-12) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

ALWAYS, CLEMENTINE
Sorosiak, Carlie
Walker US/Candlewick (304 pp.)
$24.99 | $12.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-338-74130-8 paper

Letters from a super-intelligent mouse to the beloved chimpanzee she leaves behind when she escapes a research lab. Poignant, loving, and threaded through with the joy of discovery, the letters that Clementine mentally composes to her gentle simian friend tell a tale that takes suspenseful turns while affirming tolerance and self-expression. Thanks to tweaked DNA, she’s thinking about prime numbers the day she is born, helps other mice navigate mazes, and figures out how to escape her cage at night and sign with the lab’s sad, affectionate chimp, Rosie. When a guilt-ridden research assistant spirits her and another mouse subject out of the lab, leaving them in a nearby mailbox, she begins a series of reports to Rosie about the wonders of the outside world. Eleven-year-old Gus and his grandfather welcome the fugitives rather than turn them in for the large reward offered by the lab when the mousenapping is discovered. They create a storm of public protest against animal experimentation by televising a chess match in which Clementine beats five experienced human players simultaneously. Along with offering an optimistic, aspirational view of human nature as she winds the story to a joyous conclusion, Sorosiak tucks in a subplot around nonverbal Hamlet, the other mouse escapee, who constructs a model of Notre Dame out of wood chips, as food for further thought about different intelligences. The human cast seems to be mostly White.

Serious themes lightened by comedic touches; the strong emotional attachments will linger with readers. (Fiction. 8-12)
C.C. Harrington’s debut, *Wildoak* (Scholastic, Sept. 20), tells the intersecting stories of two vulnerable beings in 1960s Cornwall: Maggie, a London 11-year-old staying with her grandfather in hopes it will help her stuttering, and Rumpus, a young snow leopard sold by Harrods as an exotic pet and abandoned when he is clearly unsuited to urban living. A threat to the existence of Wildoak Forest, where they both find refuge, leads to a dramatic climax. This enchanting, deeply affecting work is vivid and fresh while also reading like an enduring classic. Harrington answered some questions over email.

**What do you hope readers will take from *Wildoak***?

I struggle with this question because reading is by nature so subjective. In general, my hope is that readers leave this book feeling a deep sense of belonging and interconnectedness to the whole of the natural world. It’s in caring for ourselves and one another—humans, plants, and animals alike—that we stand the best chance of protecting the planet. My hope is that *Wildoak* is the kind of book that can pull you into a whole other world of story. As a child I always loved that feeling, of stepping through a portal, losing track of time, and wrapping myself in the lives of characters. It’s part of what makes reading for pleasure so magical. So I hope it’s a book that invites broader and thoughtful questions, but I also hope it’s a book readers simply enjoy.

**Thinking about environmental destruction can feel overwhelming.**

Dr. Jane Goodall talks about the importance of hope when it comes to tackling climate change. Without it, we are left with despair, which in turn leads to apathy and inaction. It was a conscious decision on my part to write a story that is truthful but also hopeful. Your actions count, however imperfect or patchy. In time, individual choices have the potential to become collective choices.

One of my favorite picture books is *The Lost Words* by Robert Macfarlane, illustrated by Jackie Morris. You cannot help but fall in love with the plants and animals he writes about and the way she paints them. The idea being that when you know the name of something, when you pause to pay attention for a moment, noticing details, you are more likely to care for it and therefore be moved to protect it. In some ways *Wildoak* is a love letter to the beauty of the natural world and everything in it.

**Writing from an animal’s perspective must be quite tricky. How did you approach Rumpus’ chapters?**

This was tricky for me. I did a lot of research [and] worked directly with a snow-leopard keeper...
at a conservation-based zoo. I thought long and hard about how to convey his sentience and intelligence with just enough closeness to pull the reader in tight but not so close as to fully anthropomorphize him. Ultimately, I didn’t want the emotional impact of his presence to be limited, so it was often a gut decision as to what to keep and what to leave out.

What formative books do you remember from childhood?
I grew up in the countryside, my brothers were much older, and I was alone quite a bit of the time, so the characters I read about were very much my friends. Many of the books I loved most featured animals—*Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, *Paddington Bear*, *Redwall*, *Charlotte’s Web*, and *Watership Down*. I think what spoke to me, shaped me even, was the presentation of a world in which empathy and compassion stood strong in the face of adversity. I think that’s also partly why I write the kind of stories I write.

*Interview by Laura Simeon*
Guardian, sets off on twin missions to look for evidence of life and see if an older, silenced rover can be brought back online. Along with giving her characters, human and otherwise, distinct voices and engaging personalities, the author quietly builds solid relationships (it’s hardly a surprise when, after Fly is downed in a dust storm, Res trundles heroically to the rescue in defiance of orders) on the way to rest and joyful reunions years later. A subplot involving brown-skinned, Arabic-speaking NASA coder Rania unfolds through her daughter Sophia’s letters to Res.

The intelligences here may be (mostly) artificial, but the feelings are genuine and deep. (afterword, resources) (Science fiction. 9-13)

WAYS TO SHARE JOY
Watson, Renee
Illus. by Andrew Grey
Bloomsbury (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5476-0909-3
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)

LOTUS BLOOM AND THE AFRO REVOLUTION
Winston, Sherri
Bloomsbury (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5476-0846-1

A seventh grade girl learns to speak up for equity, community, and freedom of expression.
Lotus Bloom is not your typical tween: She wears vintage ’70s clothes, proudly rocks an Afro, and is a gifted violinist. Music is her escape, and she needs it more than ever between her parents’ divorce, her father’s relocation to Paris, a mother who doesn’t understand her, and a strained relationship with her best friend, Rebel Mitchell. Atlantis School of the Arts, Lotus’ new magnet school, allows her to focus on her passion, but Rebel is staying behind in a regular public school. When Lotus is made first-chair violin, she catches the attention of Adolpho Cortez, a ninth grade bully who believes the honor is rightfully his. Having learned to tamp down her feelings, Lotus ignores him despite her friends’ urging her to take action. But when a school administrator cites her Afro as a dress-code violation, Lotus is done with keeping quiet. Ignoring her Granny’s pessimism and her mother’s admonition not to make waves, she speaks up for herself and also joins Rebel’s protest against Miami-Dade County’s inequitable funding of schools in their historically Black neighborhood. Winston employs rich descriptions through Lotus’ first-person narration, conveying her love of music. The text brings themes of racism and protest to the forefront, making it a solid conversation starter. Lotus and Rebel are Black; the rest of the cast is broadly diverse.

A relatable novel that will encourage readers to fight for their rights. (Fiction. 8-12)
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- **LOVE FROM MECCA TO MEDINA** by S.K. Ali ........................................ 71
- **NOTES FROM A SICKBED** by Tessa Brunton ........................................ 73
- **CHILDREN OF RAGNAROK** by Cinda Williams Chima .......................... 74
- **MY GOOD MAN** by Eric Gansworth .......................................................... 77
- **THE GETAWAY** by Lamar Giles ................................................................. 78
- **WE DESERVE MONUMENTS** by Jas Hammonds ...................................... 79
- **THE WEIGHT OF BLOOD** by Tiffany D. Jackson ........................................ 79
- **BRAIDING SWEETGRASS FOR YOUNG ADULTS** by Robin Wall Kimmerer; adapt. by Monique Gray Smith; illus. by Nicole Neidhardt ........................................ 79
- **BIG LIES** by Mark Kurlansky; illus. by Eric Zelz ....................................... 81
- **IF ANYTHING HAPPENS I LOVE YOU** by Will McCormack & Michael Govier; illus. by Younggran Nho .......................................................... 81
- **OUR SHADOWS HAVE CLAWS** ed. by Yamile Saied Méndez & Amparo Ortiz; illus. by Ricardo López Ortiz .................................................. 82
- **TORCH** by Lyn Miller-Lachmann ................................................................. 82
- **SHUNA’S JOURNEY** by Hayao Miyazaki; trans. by Alex Dudok de Wit .................................................................................................................. 82
- **THE SILENT STARS GO BY** by Sally Nicholls ............................................ 83
- **MAN MADE MONSTERS** by Andrea L. Rogers; illus. by Jeff Edwards .................................................................................................................. 85
- **VICTORY. STAND!** by Tommie Smith & Derrick Barnes; illus. by Darwud Anyabwile .................................................................................................. 86
- **I’M THE GIRL** by Courtney Summers ......................................................... 86

**YOU CAN’T KILL SNOW WHITE**
Alemagna, Beatrice
Trans. by Karin Snelson & Emilie Robert Wong
Unruly (66 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-59270-381-4

What was Snow White’s stepmother really thinking?
A retelling of “Snow White” from the queen’s perspective, this picture-book for young adults more closely follows the plot of the original Brothers Grimm story than the sanitized Disney version. It asks readers to understand and sympathize with the desperation and desire that drive villainy. The layered paintings capture emotions in ways that go beyond what is evoked by the text, making the more violent and dark aspects of the tale hit home. Immediately recognizable while reflecting things beyond our world, this fairy-tale universe contains figures, objects, and landscapes that push at the bounds of the familiar. The queen's anguish is depicted through close-up images of her stricken face that dare readers to look directly at her. The book's greatest strength lies in its portrayal of the queen's fear and rage and the disproportionate cruelty of her punishment. Her treatment by the characters usually considered sympathetic is called into question without attempting to soften or excuse her own behavior. The art captivates: The beauty depicted in the story is almost sinister, and jewel tones are mixed with sickly greens and blacks. Collage and comic-style sequences enhance and add variety to the illustrations. The characters are depicted in a somewhat abstract manner and appear racially ambiguous.

**LOVE FROM MECCA TO MEDINA**
Ali, S.K.
Salaam Reads/Simon & Schuster
(352 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-66591-607-3

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).
With so many stellar titles being released in the next few months, readers might not know where to begin. Here is a brief sampling of books that are not to be missed.

Thrillers are perennially popular, and fans of the genre are sure to enjoy *Aces Wild: A Heist* by Amanda DeWitt (Peachtree Teen, Sept. 6) and *The Getaway* by Lamar Giles (Scholastic, Sept. 20). DeWitt’s Las Vegas casino heist pits a group of teens—friends from an online asexual community—against a corrupt hotel magnate. In Giles’ latest, a powerful rural Virginia family runs a resort for the wealthy, exerting undue control over employees as natural disasters loom.

Both *If Not Us* by Mark Smith (Text, Oct. 11) and *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, adapted by Monique Gray Smith and illustrated by Nicole Neidhardt (Zest Books, Nov. 1), offer critical visions of hope amid a discouraging barrage of environmental news. A teen surfer speaks out against the impact of fossil fuels on his Australian hometown, and a Potawatomi botanist outlines a sustainable path for integrating Western science with Indigenous approaches to the natural world.

If you enjoy an immersive love story, look for *The Silent Stars Go By* by Sally Nicholls (Walker US/Candlewick, Sept. 20) and *Love From Mecca to Medina* by S.K. Ali (Salaam Reads/Simon & Schuster, Oct. 18). A boy called off to war, an unplanned pregnancy, and a global pandemic: Two young people in love are swept up in overwhelming events in Nicholls’ novel. Ali reunites readers with Adam and Zayneb from 2019’s *Love From A to Z* as the couple’s relationship is tested by distance and external forces, and they must find their ways back to one another.

No U.S. student has been left untouched by the looming threat of gun violence. For many families, the unthinkable happens and lives are forever changed. Two memorable, heartbreaking graphic novels explore different scenarios:

*If Anything Happens I Love You* by Will McCormack and Michael Govier, illustrated by Youngran Nho (Andrews McMeel Publishing, Sept. 6), follows parents who lose their daughter, and *Numb to This: Memoir of a Mass Shooting*, written and illustrated by Kindra Neely (Little, Brown, Oct. 11), reveals the lasting mental health impact on a survivor.

Youth and protest are inextricably intertwined. This fall, readers can dive into powerful books that show events that echo today: *Victory. Stand!: Raising My Fist for Justice* by Tommie Smith and Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Dawud Anyabwile (Norton Young Readers, Sept. 27), and *Torch* by Lyn Miller-Lachmann (Carolrhoda, Nov. 1). Smith achieved fame for his courageous public stand for racial justice, along with fellow medalist John Carlos, at the 1968 Olympics. Miller-Lachmann’s novel, set in 1969 Czechoslovakia, introduces readers to a time of unrest as forces of liberalization clashed with those of authoritarianism.

The incomparable value of art to elevate and extend well-crafted text is on full display in two works that adapt folktales for teens: *You Can’t Kill Snow White*, written and illustrated by Beatrice Alemagna, and translated by Karin Snelson and Emilie Robert Wong (Unruly, Oct. 25), and *Shuna’s Journey*, written and illustrated by Hayao Miyazaki, and translated by Alex Dudok de Wit (First Second, Nov. 1). Alemagna’s large-format picture book, which our review calls “visceral and surreal,” challenges readers to consider the story of Snow White from the point of view of the wicked stepmother. Miyazaki, beloved founder of Studio Ghibli, presents a Tibetan folk tale in which fans of his anime will recognize his sweeping imagination.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
Islamically married but living apart—Adam's in Doha and Zayneb 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)

MONSTERS BORN AND MADE

Berwah, Tanvi

Sourcebooks Fire (352 pp.)

$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022 978-1-72824-762-5

A young woman defies the caste system by entering a competition reserved for the elite.

In Sollonia, a world where the line between upper-caste Landers and lower-caste Renters is strictly defined, Koral's family is condemned to fall in between. As a Hunter, a member of a Renter subcaste, she captures and trains maristags—deadly, temperamental sea monsters—for Landers participating in the Glory Race, a lethal chariot competition in which only one Champion is crowned. Forced to serve Landers but shunned by Renters as sellouts, her family's crippling debt worsens when they fail to capture a maristag and can't afford the medicine for Koral's ailing younger sister. Driven by desperation and rage, Koral risks it all to sneak into the Glory Race. While other competitors have spent their lives training, Koral must rely on pure grit and her knowledge of maristags to stand a chance of surviving and saving her family. The Landers are determined to destroy her, but the Freedom's Ark, a fractionist and riotous band of rebels, may prove to be her downfall. Berwah's worldbuilding is intense, depicting a cruel society in which the power-hungry elite are just as monstrous as the terrifying oceanic beasts. Readers will feel the rawness of Koral's suffering, beg for a reprieve for her, and question how she can possibly still be alive after being ridiculed, chased, and attacked at every turn. Characters are diverse in physical appearance.

For dystopian fantasy fans seeking something fresh and savage. (Fantasy. 12-18)

NOTES FROM A SICKBED

Brunton, Tessa

Graphic Universe (152 pp.)

$14.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2022 978-1-72846-293-6

In imaginative, often funny autobiographical vignettes, a comics creator depicts life with myalgic encephalomyelitis, or chronic fatigue syndrome.

Years before she's diagnosed with ME, Brunton is forced to take to her couch, miserable and in pain. The vignettes take place over several years, as readers see Brunton,
who reads White, go through multiple hair colors and styles. Some episodes are fully-realistic depictions of a creative young woman learning to live with a life-altering illness, and others are fantastic visions of her imagined worlds. Lovingly detailed, black-and-white cartoons of idealized mobile beds and homes include a snail shell, a giant cake, and a multipage spread of a tower home with a bed flume, talking goats, and a room dedicated to Halloween costumes. Brunton rarely offers medicalizing details about the symptoms she experiences, with only brief mentions of headaches, fevers, and brain fog. Instead, she focuses on some of the infuriating aspects of ME, including its unpredictability, post-exertional malaise, and the exhausting grind of despair and grief. She falls for a few wellness scams and is gaslit by labor-intensive diets that can't possibly be implemented by anyone who needs their claimed benefits. The final comic ends with Brunton, in bed long enough for her hair to grow, pondering the fantasy and science-fiction comics she wants the energy to write. This honest work depicts a bleak but not comfortless world familiar to many readers with chronic illness and disability.

Painfully real. (Graphic memoir. 13­18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

CHILDMREN OF RAGNAROK

Chima, Cinda Williams
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (560 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-06-301868-6
Series: Runestone Saga, 1

This first entry in the Runestone Saga series introduces readers to a world of witches, gods, demons, and humans.

Drawing on Norse mythology, this ambitious, original story captivates from beginning to end. Eiric Halvorsen and his mysterious half sister, Liv, are fighting to maintain ownership of Sundgard, their unusually prosperous farm located in the depressed land of Muckeholm; Sten, their drunken stepfather, has designs on it himself. When their mother, Sylvi, dies of exposure while protecting the infant son they had rejected and left out to die, Liv and Eiric know they will be the next victims. Instead, they kill Sten and, for protection, make a deal with Jarl Harald, the regional leader, to search out a group of mythical islands, where the volur, or witches, live. A bittersweet, honest look at loss and trauma. (Fantasy. 13­18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

THINGS I KNOW

Close, Helena
Little Island (288 pp.)
$11.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-250-19404-6
Series: Luminaries, 1

A young woman struggles with anxiety and grief in a coastal Irish town in this contemporary novel.

Saoirse’s father moved their family from Limerick to the small town of Cloughmore after the death of her mother two years before. While her awful, image-conscious younger sister, Eva, has blended in, Saoirse and her younger brother, Aran, find their new town narrow-minded and claustrophobic; 18-year-old Saoirse is glad to be taking her final secondary school exams before returning to Limerick for college. However, it doesn't come soon enough for her to escape being ostracized by the crowd that her ex-boyfriend, Finn, is part of. When he dies by suicide, Saoirse’s mental health is stressed to the point of breaking. The unrelenting pressure Saoirse experiences is vividly depicted in her first-person narration, realistically manifesting itself in stomach upset, breathing difficulties, and blackouts. A large cast of secondary characters, including grieving Dylan, who was Finn's best friend but with whom Saoirse is also involved, and Jade, her outspoken, complicated, bisexual best friend, are sketched in broad strokes that flesh out Saoirse’s world, grimly but poignantly illustrating how difficult it can be for people to find support. An auspicious ending to this story is both surprising and welcome. Most characters are White.

A bittersweet, honest look at loss and trauma. (Fiction. 13­18)

THE LUMINARIES

Dennard, Susan
Tor Teen (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-250-19404-6
Series: Luminaries, 1

A family of monster hunters seeks redemption amid danger and mysteries.

Sixteen-year-old Winnie Wednesday is devoted to her hometown of Hemlock Falls and its local branch of nightmare-hunting Luminaries. The international organization trains hunters from a young age to deal with all sorts of mythological beasts, such as basilisks and manticores, that emerge from the nightly mist. Luminary members are sorted into clans named after the days of the week, each of which has an associated motto. Winnie hopes to heal some of the damage from an infamous incident involving her father, which resulted in her family’s being made outcasts, by passing the hunter trials like three generations of women before her. Anything to avoid life among the oblivious nons who live outside Luminary culture. The Wednesday family’s arc is satisfyingly earnest, from dealing
with classroom taunting and falls from grace to navigating overnight popularity. A slow-burn romance with a bassist who reeks of cigarettes and weed leads to plenty of ogling during training and a motorcycle ride. The pace rolls steadily along with its gradual buildup of supernatural action and personal stakes before culminating with a tease to the sequel: Readers will want to don a motorcycle jacket and join the nightmare hunt. Main characters read White; the supporting cast includes some diversity in race, religion, and nationality.

An entertaining addition to the tradition of young adult adventures in finding oneself. (Fantasy. 13-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
Courtney Summers, a bestselling author known for gripping thrillers like *Sadie* (2018) and *The Project* (2021) that unflinchingly explore social issues, returns with *I'm the Girl* (Wednesday Books, Sept. 13). She again centers young women finding ways to survive a culture in which powerful, corrupt forces; systemic misogynistic violence; and contradictory norms present them with impossible choices. Sixteen-year-old Georgia dreams of something beyond her small town; despite her late mother’s warnings, she’s sure that working at exclusive resort Aspera, where the whims of wealthy men are catered to, is her ticket out. When Georgia finds the battered body of Ashley, a young teen victim of sexual assault abandoned on the road to Aspera, she’s drawn into a world of secrets and danger—and a relationship with Nora, Ashley’s sister. Summers answered questions over email about her latest.

*I’m the Girl* deals with heavy, gut-wrenching subjects, but at its heart there’s a deep current of love and triumphant sisterhood. My writing confronts the ways the patriarchy threatens young women’s bodily autonomy and impacts how they move through the world as well as our own complicity in upholding and enabling patriarchal power structures. My work is often defined by how brutally it portrays different expressions of violence against women and girls, but I believe its impact and emotional resonance stem from my deep commitment to believing women and taking their voices seriously. *I’m the Girl* is no exception.

Georgia is a character meant to challenge the type of reader who wouldn’t consider themselves a misogynist but [who] reaches for victim-blaming rhetoric to justify the response they’re having to her actions throughout the book—because it’s easier to victim-blame than to admit you haven’t completely escaped the influence of a society that actively conditions you to hate women. That might mean you still have some inner work to do, behaviors to unlearn. Part of that work is accessing a level of empathy we’re taught to deny victims and survivors, which is why it was important for me to reflect that empathy in the text. You see it in Georgia and Nora’s relationship, in Georgia’s mother’s fierce, though misguided, protectiveness of her daughter. These acts of solidarity and support might seem inconsequential compared to the systems they’re up against, but they aren’t. They become pathways to greater change.

**How do you choose new projects?**

I go where my anger leads me. I have yet to write a book that wasn’t informed, in some way, by it. *I’m the Girl* is based loosely on the [Jeffrey] Epstein case and the fury I felt about the systems protecting him and enabling his abuse of girls.

**There’s a growing movement to restrict access to necessary books like yours.**

It’s horrific. We must meet censorship with resistance, [continue] to tell stories that need to be
never met in person—and a backpack full of poker chips, Jack sneaks into a secret gambling club in search of evidence to save his family and take down Carlevaro. The self-aware, conversational style of the first-person narration balances astute, snarky critique and a flair for drama. Each time Jack makes a move, the stakes increase. Honesty, accountability, and family stand out as significant themes in Jack’s character development. His all-ace friend group highlights the diversity of identities within the spectrum of asexuality and affirms the fluidity of sexuality. As well as Jack, who reads as White, the central characters include an aromantic, Latinx, gender-nonconforming boy; a Vietnamese American and German nonbinary teen; and an implied Black girl who is a hacker prodigy.

A fast-paced, thrilling diversion. (Thriller. 14­18)

MY GOOD MAN
Gansworth, Eric
Levine Querido (384 pp.)
$21.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-64614-183-8

A Native son comes of age, tackling race, class, and masculinity.

It’s 1992, and 25-year-old Brian is the only Indigenous journalist on staff at the Niagara Cascade, a small city newspaper. After failing to successfully pitch an article on the Love Canal toxic waste dump, Brian is told to stick to his beat by writing stories about life on the Tuscarora Indian Reservation where he grew up. Pressured to report on crimes committed by Indigenous people, Brian hears via the police blotter about a man who was severely assaulted on Moon Road, the center of the Rez. Through Eee-ogg, or gossip, Brian learns that the victim was Tim, a White man who is the brother of Gihh-rhaggs, his mom’s old boyfriend. No one on the Rez could understand Brian’s relationship with Tim. Spanning over two decades, the novel flashes back to Brian as a boy navigating a fraught adolescence in a house without heat, electricity, or gas. Enhanced with art by Gansworth (Onondaga, Eel Clan) as well as poetry and Brian’s newspaper articles, this masterwork of historical fiction asks whether peaceably straddling the realms of White and Indigenous people is possible. Rich, luxurious, densely layered prose immerses readers in heartbreaking scenes and poignant dialogue as complex characters explore the confines and joys of male friendship.

Riveting, timeless, and indispensable. (author’s note)
(Historical fiction. 14-adult) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
Trapped in an apocalyptic theme park, teens fight back.

Jay has it pretty good, all things considered, in a not-too-distant future absolutely ravaged by droughts, fires, floods, and powder-keg instability. He and his family are live-in employees of Karloff Country, a mountaintop in Virginia taken over by a billionaire family who created their own version of Disneyland as a refuge for their similarly wealthy peers to cavort away from the destruction they helped create. But when the end times loom, Jay realizes that the new guests, the Trustees, are privileged to the point of sociopathy, torturing staff over perceived slights with impunity. Jay rebels along with fellow Karloff Academy seniors Zeke and Connie and Sey-chelle, his crush and an heir to the Karloff fortune (Chelle’s racist grandfather, Franklin Karloff, hasn’t gotten over her White mom’s having had a biracial Black baby). They’re all fast friends; “the Black kids always find each other.” Narrated through multiple points of view, the novel features Jay’s perspective most prominently, with some interludes from his friends, all presented in Giles’ signature strong, accessible voice. With hints of Cory Doctorow, Jordan Peele, and Richard Matheson, this book stands on its own as a dystopian adventure, but the deeper metaphors around servitude, privilege, class, and solidarity mean that there’s a lot to think about as the characters reckon with their proximity to and complicity in violence both local and far-flung.

Hold tight: You’ll want to stay on this nightmarish roller coaster till the end. (Horror. 13-18)

Foul Lady Fortune

Gong, Chloe

McElderry (528 pp.)

$19.99 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-1-66590-558-9

Her code name: Fortune. Her purpose: atonement.

Four years ago, in 1927, Rosalind Lang betrayed her gang. Her actions nearly led to Shanghai’s destruction. When scarlet fever swept through the city soon after, Rosalind was saved by a mysterious serum that left her with a nearly indestructible body trapped at age 19. Now, as penance, she hunts rogue White Flowers for the Nationalists who are embroiled in a civil war with the Communists and face a potential invasion by the Imperial Japanese Army. When the Nationalists connect a string of murders in Shanghai to a local newspaper published by the Japanese government–funded Seagreen Press, Rosalind is given a new mission and a partner: Orion Hong, the younger son of a Nationalist general. Posing as newlyweds, they infiltrate Seagreen and discover a web of false identities, undercover agents, and national traitors. Heart-pounding action and intrigue fill the pages of this thriller, set in a time when people’s allegiances are questioned at every turn and families are divided along stark political lines; Orion’s brother and Rosalind’s trans sister both serve the Communist cause. Friction between the grimly determined Rosalind and carefree Orion shifts into mutual understanding and then something more as demisexual Rosalind allows herself to see past Orion’s facade. An enjoyable cast of supporting characters adds levity and surprising twists. This series opener set in the world of Gong’s These Violent Delights duology is accessible to new readers.

Thrilling from start to finish. (Historical fantasy. 13-18)

WE DESERVE MONUMENTS

Hammonds, Jas

Roaring Brook Press (384 pp.)

$18.99 | Nov. 29, 2022

978-1-250-81655-9

Avery and her parents move to her mom’s hometown to care for her ailing grandma. Lately 17-year-old Avery feels like she needs a change of scenery, a break from Washington, D.C., and her singular focus on early admittance to Georgetown. When Avery’s mom, Zora, learns her mother is dying from cancer, she decides to move back home. After more than a decade away, Zora is not wholeheartedly embraced by Mama Letty. As a queer, biracial teen—Avery’s mom is Black, and her dad is White—Avery’s welcome in rural Bardell County, Georgia, population 9,127, is just as cold. Avery tries to understand what caused the rift between her mom and Mama Letty and what happened to her grandma, but both women are reluctant to share. Avery befriends the pretty Black girl next door and the rich White girl whose family runs everything, and she discovers Bardell County is full of buried secrets. As in most small towns, everything and everyone is connected, and debut author Hammonds skillfully unpeels each layer of intrigue, keeping readers engaged until the last page. The tension between Mama Letty and Zora is complex and deep-seated, and the generational trauma revealed throughout is beautifully explored. Hammonds seamlessly weaves together mystery, romance, and a town’s racist history, crafting a gripping and emotional story.

A love story—romantic and familial—that is a must-read. (Fiction. 14-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
“An urgent, essential call to action and an uplifting love letter.”

**BRAIDING SWEETGRASS FOR YOUNG ADULTS**

An Indigenous botanist offers powerful guidance and inspiration for a sustainable—and sustaining—future in this young readers’ adaptation of her 2015 adult bestseller.

Sweetgrass—its planting, tending, picking, braiding, and burning—forms the organizing structure for this work in which scientific discovery and traditional wisdom form a harmonious, interconnected whole. Sweetgrass is important to many Indigenous nations as well as a potent example of the limitations of traditional Western notions of people existing in opposition to the natural world, as evidenced by the fascinating results of the graduate research project Kimmerer (Potawatomi) oversaw. Rather than humans’ presence inherently threatening nonhuman living beings, the Indigenous worldview persuasively and vividly offered is one in which we live by the guiding principles of the Honorable Harvest, enumerated here as: never take the first, ask permission, listen for the answer, take only what you need, minimize harm, use everything you take, share, be grateful, and reciprocate the gift. Smith (Cree, Lakota) skilfully adapts the original, including text boxes with definitions, thoughtful prompts for reflection and discussion, and pithy quotes featured within exquisite images of a circle of braided sweetgrass by illustrator Neidhardt (Diné). Additional art beautifully enhances teachings and tales from many nations, personal reminiscences, fascinating natural history, and other enriching content. Readers will feel as if they are in conversation with a caring, respected expert guide who offers a hopeful, nourishing vision.

Both an urgent, essential call to action and an uplifting love letter. (author’s note, notes, bibliography, index, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

—Kirkus Reviews

**THE WEIGHT OF BLOOD**

Jackson, Tiffany D.
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(416 pp.)
$18.99  |  Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-302914-9

Jackson’s latest retells Stephen King’s *Carrie* with electric social commentary.

Springville, inspired by real towns in the United States that still have segregated proms, has a lot of learning to do. No one knows this better than Madison Washington, a light-skinned biracial girl who has grown up with her White father and has been passing for White her entire life. At least, until a surprise rainy day during gym class exposes her hair’s natural texture and her Black ancestry and she’s outed against her will. Her White classmates react by throwing pencils at her hair, and a video of the incident goes viral. White senior Wendy, concerned about looking good to potential colleges, decides to try to reverse the negative press by advocating for Springville’s first ever integrated prom. Feeling guilty about her role in Maddy’s bullying, she also convinces Kendrick Scott, her Black boyfriend, to ask Maddy to the prom as an act of goodwill. Fans of King’s novel and its film adaptations will know this doesn’t end well for anyone. Jackson’s expert reshaping of this tale highlights the genuine horrors of both internalized and externalized anti-Blackness, as with the way she weaponizes Maddy’s father’s hot comb as a symbol of terror and subjugation. In this masterwork novel, a teen girl—mistreated from birth by a racist society—finally gets her revenge.

Horror done right. (Horror. 13-18)
FALL SPOTLIGHT

Chloe Gong

Chloe Gong is the bestselling author of *These Violent Delights* (2020) and *Our Violent Ends* (2021). For her latest YA fantasy blockbuster, *Foul Lady Fortune* (McElderry, Sept. 27), Gong returns to the fantastical world of her previous books and crafts a captivating new story of alliances, political turmoil, and self-discovery that a reviewer for Kirkus calls “thrilling from start to finish.” Gong answered our questions by email.

What made you return to the world of *These Violent Delights* for this book?

When I wrote the first draft of *These Violent Delights*, it was very different to how it is now, but there was one thing that carried through every iteration: Rosalind Lang was Juliette Cai’s narrative foil. I changed storylines, I merged and cut characters, I deleted entire chapters, but I always kept the plot thread about both Juliette and Rosalind betraying their families—except Juliette trusted the right person and Rosalind trusted the wrong person, which drastically changed their outcomes. As *These Violent Delights* was falling together, I knew that, if given the chance, I would love to do a Rosalind-centric duology where she was the protagonist instead of Juliette. I wanted to see how things would change when she was given support and love instead of lies and manipulation… so the seeds of *Foul Lady Fortune* were planted from the very beginning! Besides, I’ve always loved spinoffs for giving readers glimpses into what familiar characters are up to even if the main story has left them alone. It makes me feel like we never really say goodbye to the characters we love; they’re still just existing off in the periphery.

Did you read a lot when you were young? Are there any books or authors that influenced you as a reader and/or writer?

I was *such* a big reader. I was browsing my school libraries right when YA was having its boom, and there was a period of time when I was going through almost a book a day, no exaggeration. The series that kick-started my love for reading was Cassandra Clare’s *The Mortal Instruments*, which took me down the wonderful rabbit hole of seeking out every YA paranormal that was being published in the 2010s. Kelley Armstrong’s *The Darkest Powers* series, Lauren Kate’s *Fallen* series, Kiersten White’s *Paranormalcy* series—you name it, I probably read it. Other authors like Laini Taylor, Maggie Stiefvater, and Libba Bray were incredibly influential on me as a writer too, because I adored the way they could tell such great stories while also maintaining such lyrical, beautiful prose. I kept that at the forefront of my mind as I started developing my own voice: I wanted the larger story to be great, of course, but I also wanted to craft each individual sentence in a way that had impact.

What are some books coming out this fall that you look forward to reading?

This is a sneaky answer because technically I have already read it, but *If You Could See the Sun* by Ann Liang is releasing this fall, and it catapulted itself to the top of my list of favorite books when I read an advanced copy. I’m also very excited for *The Dragon’s Promise* by Elizabeth Lim because I adored *Six Crimson Cranes*, and I can’t wait to read the conclusion.

Interview by Nina Palattella
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 reasoning 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)

THE DEPTHS
Lesperance, Nicole
Razorbill/Penguin (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-46536-3

A tropical paradise is haunted by a dangerous secret.

After elite athlete Addie’s horrific free-diving accident—she’s dead for eight and a half minutes—her mother brings Addie along on her honeymoon so Addie won’t be alone as her injured lungs recover. Their destination’s Eulalie Island, a private Caribbean island. Apart from the island’s caretakers (and their two sons), they have the island to themselves. So why does it sound like the birds are calling Addie’s name—and who’s the giggling child she keeps hearing?

As more strange things happen—the white flowers turn pink and then darken, vines behave strangely—Addie digs deeper into the history of the island, from its 1700s castaway namesake to a doomed Bostonian family from 1843. (The brutal colonialism of the region is mentioned, but Eulalie explicitly has no history of Indigenous peoples or European settlement.) Addie grows closer to the son of one of the caretakers and is introduced to a deep freshwater sinkhole where she feels no pain and can hold her breath long enough to free dive again. But being favored by the island and its supernatural inhabitants proves dangerous to more than just Addie. The tropical setting is refreshing for its Victorian ghost-story vibe, the characters are likable, and the story’s mystery threads weave together into a delightfully eerie tapestry. Characters default to White.

Readers will dive in so deep they might forget to come up for air. (Horror. 13-18)

IF ANYTHING HAPPENS I LOVE YOU
McCormack, Will & Michael Govier
Illus. by Youngran Nho
Andrews McMeel Publishing (64 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5248-7125-3

Grieving parents find their ways back together.

A companion to the Oscar-winning short film of the same name, this graphic novel brings new elements to a story that has, horribly, become a familiar narrative in American life. In the aftermath of a school shooting that takes their daughter’s life, a father and mother must rediscover love in a world that’s been leached of color. Their daughter’s soul—“the part of you that is really you”—helps them along, bringing forth memories of her joyful life and enabling them to process her tragic—and tragically preventable—death together. With any exercise in adaptation, there is the question of harnessing medium specificity; this work more than rises to the challenge. McCormack, Govier, and Nho, the animated movie’s co-creators, take their successful cinematic story concept and give it new life with the addition of a carefully written text that explicates the philosophy at the heart of the original. Scenes are reordered to relate to one another in new ways, and characters are endowed with enriched backstories. The cat, an adorable fixture of the film, takes on a moving new role. The result is a book that holds its own, settling comfortably into its own niche, ready to welcome a new audience. Shadows, silhouettes, and occasional washes of color are expertly used to increase the emotional impact. Main characters have paper-white skin and straight, dark hair.

Heavy pain exquisitely rendered. (Graphic fiction. 12-18)
“Presents an unflinching look at the toll of authoritarianism.”

TORCH
Miller-Lachmann, Lyn
Carolrhoda (328 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-72841-568-0

The brightest torches burn quickly.

Readers barely have a chance to get to know 17-year-old Pavol Bartoš, a young man whose bright future was extinguished when the oppressive Czechoslovak Communist Party or KSČ, government denied his application to attend university and instead directed him to report for duty as a miner. Fueled by a desire to confront the unfair, authoritarian regime and guided by altruistic (if innocent) ideals, Pavol and his friends draft a letter that they plan to present to the government office in Prague Castle. When this plan falls apart, Pavol is resigned to what he believes is his last, terrible option: death. Pavol follows the example of real-life activist Jan Palach, a student who set himself ablaze in 1969 as an act of political protest against the KSČ. Pavol’s untimely death has unforeseen consequences for his friends—gay former school bully Štěpán; bookish neurodiverse Tomáš; and Pavol’s newly pregnant girlfriend, Lída. Readers will be on the edges of their seats with fear as they follow the social, psychological, and physical fallout for this trio as they deal with the consequences of Pavol’s actions while fighting for their own brief moments of happiness and hope. The story presents an unflinching look at the toll of authoritarianism; it’s a tale that will inspire readers to examine modern politics and the need for people to stand up for personal rights before human torches are once again lit.

Equally terrifying and captivating. (discussion questions, author’s note, historical note) (Historical fiction. 14-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

SHUNA’S JOURNEY
Miyazaki, Hayao
Trans. by Alex Dudok de Wit
First Second (160 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-250-84652-5

A dangerous quest to feed an impoverished land leads to chance encounters and awe-inspiring sights.

Shuna, the prince of a humble, struggling country, acts on the advice of a dying traveler from an Eastern land to seek out seeds that will grow bountiful grains. What he finds is a hostile city built on greed with an active slave trade. After meeting Thea and her little sister, Shuna fights to free them from enslavers. Every scene in this cinematic work stands apart with breathtaking watercolors aided by expert staging and blocking. The sights along Shuna’s journey range from a derelict ship in a treacherous desert to supernatural creatures and settings. The certainty and simplicity of Shuna’s motivations along with Thea’s own narrative arc allow the story to move nimbly from one larger-than-life spectacle to another. The pages read right-to-left manga style, while large panels and minimal dialogue create an immediate, immersive experience for readers. The narration sits outside or along the edges of panels, allowing the lush visuals maximum room to impress. Afterwords from the author and translator describe the story’s roots in a Tibetan folktale as well as comparisons to Miyazaki’s later animated works; this story, translated from Japanese, was originally published in Japan in 1985 before Miyazaki rose to fame with Studio Ghibli. The story’s cultural origins are cued through characters’ garb and other visual elements.

A reimagined folktale as grand as its painted visuals are sublime. (Graphic fiction. 12-18) (This review is printed here for the first time.)
After a 2015 shooting rocks an Oregon community college, one survivor grapples with PTSD. Neely never even sees him. Hiding, she experiences the attack as a mix of terror, confusion, misinformation, bravery, and a horrific kind of boredom. Post-attack, she swings between despair and constant panic triggered by journalists, her fellow students, and even her friends. She doesn't tell her loved ones about her suicide attempt, and, determined to move on, she goes to art school in Savannah, Georgia. But how can Kindra heal? Her phone is constantly lit with alerts: the massacres at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, the Las Vegas music festival, Parkland, and the Thousand Oaks bar shooting, whose victims included a survivor of the Las Vegas incident just a year before. For Neely 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 feature the alienation that victims of domestic violence endure and the heavy toll it takes on a survivor's family. The experiences of Margot's older brother, Stephen, show the lasting impact of the war on someone who survived many months in the trenches. At the heart of this story lies a tale of young love interrupted by the realities of war and life's complications.

**A textured historical romance that is far more than the sum of its parts. (historical note)**  
**(Historical fiction. 13-18)**

A 14-year-old girl discovers a dangerous secret that puts her relationships to the test. Avielle LeBeau has dreamed of carrying on her family's legacy of attending Historically Black Boarding Schools at Briarcliff Preparatory School for Girls, especially since it means being with her older sister, Belle, and near her twin brothers, who attend all-boys Preston Academy. Despite her excitement, Avi worries about landing a spot on the prestigious school paper and adjusting to life away from home. Her hectic schedule fills her with extracurriculars, homework, a budding romance, and social events—but it doesn't escape her notice that Belle's boyfriend seems off. Avi notices how controlling he is, telling Belle how to dress and who to be friends with, and after witnessing an explosive argument between them, she knows something is wrong. Suddenly Avi's problems seem small as this larger crisis unfolds. Debut author Peppins' insightful, realistic writing shows the alienation that victims of domestic violence endure along with the impact it can have on those who love them but have a limited ability to bring about real change. Through limited omniscient narration, readers enjoy a detailed account of Avi's life at an HBBS; however, the author doesn't skimp on the characterizations of members of Avi's core support system. Many people and subjects significant to Black culture are woven into the story and will spark recognition for many readers.

**A necessary story, full of emotion and with a hopeful ending. (author's note)**  
**(Fiction. 14-18)**  
**(This review is printed here for the first time.)**
Who is your ideal reader for *We Deserve Monuments*?
*We Deserve Monuments* is ultimately a love story for queer Black girls, biracial girls, and Black families, so I hope my novel finds its way to them first. But ideally, this book is for anyone who has ever felt like an outsider in their own family. It’s for the ones who attempt to isolate themselves because they think they’re not worthy of friendship or love. It’s for anyone who has experienced the anticipatory grief of knowing you have limited time with a loved one left—the ones who anxiously keep glancing at the clock ticking away.

Were you a big reader as a kid? Are there any formative books you remember from your youth or any adults who influenced you as a reader or writer?
I was a huge reader as a kid. My mom would set a one-book limit whenever we went inside a bookstore, but I’d always find a way to bargain for more! My most formative books were always the contemporary novels of regular teens falling in love, navigating high school, and balancing family, friendship, and growing pains. Sharon M. Draper’s *November Blues*, Jodi Lynn Anderson’s Peaches series, *Jason & Kyra* by Dana Davidson, and the Alice McKinley series by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor were all books I read over and over and still have on my shelves.

What fall release(s) are you most looking forward to reading?
There are so many! Britney S. Lewis’ debut, *The Undead Truth of Us*, is a beautiful story about grief and zombies. I’m excited for Aislinn Brophy’s *How To Succeed in Witchcraft* because Sapphic witches? Yes, please! Also, *Lark & Kasim Start a Revolution* by Kacen Callender. I’ve been a fan of Kacen’s work for years, so all of their books are auto-buys for me.

How did you land on the title for your book?
This book had several different working titles that I always knew deep down weren’t right. None of them encapsulated the bittersweet feelings that thread my main character’s journey of getting to know the horrible and beautiful truths rooted in her family history. *We Deserve Monuments* does. The title can be taken literally. Yes, there are so many important people who will never see the pages of a history book, but it’s also a nod to the way we as Black people often have to give ourselves flowers and recognition because other folks won’t do it for us. And also recognizing how certain physical places can hold more significance than a simple statue, such as the patch of wildflowers where you first fell in love. Or that rickety swing on your grandma’s front porch. A treehouse hidden deep in the woods for only you and your friends. Those places matter, as do the people who inhabited them.

Interview by Francesca Vultaggio
A chilling story collection following a sprawling Cherokee family through many generations. Starting with Ama Wilson in 1839 and ending in 2039, this spooky speculative assortment features stories from times historical, present, and yet to come. Although each of Cherokee author Rogers’ stories could stand alone (and versions of some were previously published individually), placing them in chronological order and thus in dialogue with each other results in a thematically richer read and allows readers the delight of tracing the family trees in the frontend to situate the characters in relation to other protagonists. Ama’s opening story, set during a forcible relocation to Indian Territory, sets the tone: Ama thinks her family’s main worries are Texas Rangers and disease; she also faces a supernatural nightmare. The tight focus on families and the specificity of their experiences, along with the matter-of-fact text, directly address the way persecution of the Cherokee faces a supernatural nightmare. The always accommodating, straightforward writing is at its best when it moves away from the larger Scythe-Thunderhead politics and instead focuses on humanity, art, and love in a world without natural or accidental death. Standouts include “The Mortal Canvas,” focused on the first (and maybe last) post-mortal artist, and the slyly humorous “Meet Cute and Die,” about the niece of a domineering and needy Scythe in Britannia.

One for the legions of fans of this world. (Science fiction. 14-adult) (This review is printed here for the first time.)

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 to 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, Valentino 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 Valentino. Apart from Valentino 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 Valentino, 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)
“Extends histories of 20th-century Black struggles for new generations.”

**VICTORY. STAND!**

*Raising My Fist for Justice*

Smith, Tommie & Derrick Barnes

Illus. by Dawud Anyabwile

Norton Young Readers (208 pp.)

$19.95 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-1-324-00390-8

“A bold, unflinching, and utterly enthralling novel. (Thriller. 14+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 Templeton lives with his mum in rural Shelbourne 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)**

**I'M THE GIRL**

Summers, Courtney

Wednesday Books (352 pp.)

$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-1-250-80836-3

All 16-year-old Georgia Avis ever wanted was to be an Aspera girl.

It's during the summer that Georgia's dream of working at members-only resort Aspera comes true—but at a terrible cost and against the wishes of her late mother. After she finds the body of 13-year-old Ashley James, raped and dumped by the roadside, Georgia becomes entangled with Matthew and Cleo Hayes, Aspera's impossibly beautiful and rich owners, who take her under their wing. Although her first job there seems to be run-of-the-mill admin work and not quite what Georgia knows she deserves, she believes it is only a matter of time until her beauty takes her places. But even while she navigates this world of privilege and power, glamour and deceit, trying to carve a place for herself, she joins forces with Nora, Aspera's charismatic older sister, to find the culprit. Summers' latest masterful thriller takes on the world of wealth and privilege to examine questions of power, predatory behavior, and, ultimately, complicity, and agency. Readers are witnesses to a long process of grooming and to what Georgia—a naïve, earnest kid—instead believes she is experiencing. This dissonance in perspective makes for a heartbreaking, brutal, and devastatingly realistic novel. Hopeful notes come with the budding romance between Nora and Georgia. Most characters are White.

**Authentic and inspiring. (Graphic nonfiction. 12-18)**

**EXTENDS HISTORIES OF 20TH-CENTURY BLACK STRUGGLES FOR NEW GENERATIONS.”
**
WHEN WE WERE SISTERS
Asghar, Fatimah
One World/Random House (352 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-593-13346-0

Sisterhood is the power that gets three young Muslim American girls through a neglected childhood in this debut novel.

Their mother died years ago; when their beloved father is murdered, young sisters Noreen, Aisha, and Kausar are orphaned. Their parents were immigrants from Pakistan, so they are “familyless in America” except for one uncle, their mother’s brother, whom they don’t know. Noreen, the oldest sister, is smart, pretty, and responsible; Aisha is assertive and angry. Kausar, the book’s narrator, is the youngest. She’s frightened and confused, but she worships her sisters fiercely.

The girls are taken in by the man Kausar calls Uncle, the term always followed by a black bar, as if his name were redacted in an official document. He picks them up in Philadelphia and takes them to a city a “five-hour car ride” away. He promises them a new home with plenty of room and a zoo; what they get is a cramped apartment with a hallway full of caged birds and three bedrooms, to one of which all of them are confined. Uncle gives them strict rules of behavior and isolates them from everything but school. He’s dealing with his own problems—he’s separated from his American wife (who wants nothing to do with his nieces) and two sons, whom he maintains in suburban splendor. He lives in his own apartment near the girls, where his hoarding is out of control. So he often neglects them, leaving them without food or money. He rents out the other bedrooms in their apartment to immigrants in transit, and sometimes the sisters get lucky, as with a kindly couple who parent them for a while. But much of the time they are on their own. Caught between American culture and their family’s Pakistani background with little guidance, the girls turn to each other for support. But as they grow up and become teenagers, cracks develop in their bonds of love. Kausar’s compelling voice, sometimes lyrical, sometimes heartbreaking, is skillfully crafted, changing subtly as she grows. The book’s ending, a jump forward in time, seems tacked on and less convincing than what went before, but the sisters’ story is a moving journey.

An assured first novel explores the bonds and divides among three orphaned sisters.
Irish writer Banville once again mines past work for characters and a challenging narrative.

It begins with a released prisoner and a pun on sentence. The man adopts the new name Felix Mordaunt and travels to his family's home in Ireland, but he finds it transformed, occupied by other people. Still, they take him in, and soon it becomes clear that he is Freddie Montgomery, who inhabited a trilogy by Banville starting with The Book of Evidence (1990). His hosts are Helen and Adam Godley, son of the Adam Godley who lay dying in The Infinities (2010) and whose work as a theoretical mathematician posited, inter alia, alternative universes. The household expands yet again when Adam Jr. hires a professor named William Jaybey (William John Banville is the author's full name) to write a biography of Adam Sr. with the stipulation that he work in the Godley house. The extended ménage exhibits a meandering busyness, with couplings and hoped-for couplings, spying and pilfering, and frequent excursions to the past. Felix/Freddie revisits the death of his wife and only son. He reconnects with an old lover who has an odd request and who also is tied to Adam Sr. The latter is seen with a lover in Venice. Banville doesn't offer a conventional plot or clear theme, but he does fashion alternative universes with his recurring, repurposed characters, and all his players find in the past an alternative world they can't help dwelling on. To a great extent, Banville seems simply to revel in the delights of creativity, piling up wordplay and allusions (to Joyce, Flaubert, Lewis Carroll, Nabokov), playing the god of his literary realm, and all this with constant flashes of exquisite writing.

An intriguing puzzle box that is variously enchanting and frustrating.

A provocative, dense novel of ideas that will reward a careful reader.
(“The Great Interruption”) in which a boy falls from a tree while spying on an amorous couple is notable mainly for its retelling afterward by the area’s better yarn spinners until it becomes for Port William “a part of its self-knowledge.” Berry has that gift for entertaining amid serious intent, and the many lighter, very human moments in his elegiac, cautionary, wistful stories keep them from sinking into jeremiad without diminishing his message.

A fine collection by an enduring, endearing master.

**HER PERFECT TWIN**
Bonner, Sarah
Grand Central Publishing (336 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5387-1001-2

An identical twin’s obsession turns deadly.

When Megan discovers scandalous photos of Leah, her estranged twin sister, on her husband’s phone, she immediately goes searching for answers, using Leah’s popular Instagram feed to find her in their beloved former childhood cabin. They’ve hardly finished their first conversation in years before Megan impulsively murders Leah in cold blood. Leaving her body in a freezer, Megan immediately decides to take on her sister’s identity despite Leah’s fame and outgoing personality, which Megan does not share. Leah’s friends seem wary of her newly tamed nature but do not suspect much of anything, and before Megan is forced to impersonate her sister in a more public fashion, Covid leaves England in lockdown, and Megan is stuck at home with her psychopathic, cheating husband. The point of view begins to alternate between Megan and her husband, Chris, who admits right away that he only ever married Megan to get a hold of Leah’s fortune, and once he reveals he knows what Megan did, he begins to keep her prisoner until she’s able to retrieve all of her sister’s money. Chris is controlling and jealous of Megan (despite not loving her at all) as well as a violent and self-described con man, and he spent much of his adult life before marrying Megan as an escort who stole from his rich female clients. He is not only immediately unlikable, he is not very well developed, coming off more like a clichéd villain than a real person. The same can be said for Leah, whose only goal in life seems to have been taking things away from Megan—even things she didn’t really want, like Chris. The fact that Megan murdered Leah over a man she was terrified of and didn’t want to be with anymore doesn’t totally make sense, nor does the immediacy with which she gets over the murder itself. She spends most of the book preoccupied with a romantic interest named Tom and doesn’t give much thought to killing her own twin. Leah’s grotesque motivations are never very clear, and Megan gets away with things far too easily to be believable.

An interesting idea for a story taking place during Covid lockdowns, but it falls flat.

**THE LEMON**
Boyd, S.E.
Viking (288 pp.)
$27.00 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-593-49044-0

After a beloved chef/author/TV star dies, his reputation hangs by a thread. They say writing is a lonely business, but the three people behind the nom de plume S.E. Boyd—journalists Kevin Alexander and Joe Keohane and book editor Alessandra Lusardi—prove with their debut that a group can write a helluva novel. Hip-deep in knowing detail from the worlds of food, media, and Hollywood, they pull off a saucy spin on the death of Anthony Bourdain—only in this version, his name is John Doe, he dies while filming in Ireland, and his asphyxiation is not the result of despair but the accidental outcome of a certain sexual practice. If your Bourdain-loving hackles go up in response to this ploy, know that the book manages...
to artfully defang that reaction, both because the whole thing is actually about the potential effect of a salacious detail on a posthumous reputation and because in every other way John Doe is an embodiment of everything great about Bourdain. As in life, his body is discovered by a friend who’s a renowned chef. “There were three chefs in the world more famous than Paolo Cabrini, all of whom were French and two of whom were dead. Paolo had cooked for five presidents, four kings, three prime ministers, two chancellors, and One Direction, which he learned was a pop band.” Unfortunately, a loutish Irish bellhop named Smilin’ Charlie McCree (not the strongest character in the book but a necessary one) manages to get an embarrassing photo of Paolo with his friend’s corpse. Unfortunately, a desperate content provider at a trashy website makes up a fake anecdote about Doe that goes viral. Unfortunately, Nia Greene, the agent who has devoted her whole life to Doe’s career, must now devote her life to controlling these problems. Meanwhile, those details! Honey-baked ham, Substack, secret rooms within secret rooms, Asian-Irish fusion cuisine, high-end interior design as a front for contract killing. They are as good as they can possibly be. Or better.

A hilarious, brilliant, cynical (and maybe even a little sad) takedown of the moral vacuum that is celebrity culture.

CASE STUDY
Burnet, Graeme Macrae
Biblioasis (288 pp.)
$16.95 paper  |  Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-77196-520-0

A provocative send-up of midcentury British mores and the roots of modern psychotherapy.

Toward the end of 2019, GMB, a character with the author’s initials, receives an email from one Martin Grey, who has in his possession several notebooks he believes GMB might find of interest. Mr. Grey asserts that the notebooks were written by his cousin about Collins Braithwaite, the notorious and now largely forgotten “enfant terrible of the
so-called anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s,” on whom GMB has recently published a blog post. According to Grey, the notebooks contain evidence of near-criminal misconduct concerning Braithwaite’s involvement in the suicide of the diarist’s older sister, Veronica. GMB’s research assures him of the notebooks’ authenticity, if not their veracity, and he presents their contents verbatim, interspersed with sections of his own outline of Braithwaite’s salacious life and ignoble death. From the plinth of this metatextual introduction, the book dives into the “kooky élan” of a thoroughly middle-class young woman—the diarist—as she infiltrates Braithwaite’s office under the nom de guerre Rebecca Smyth. Rebecca is bent on uncovering the truth about Braithwaite’s therapeutic practice though she’s unsure what purpose this truth would serve. However, over the course of the five notebooks, Rebecca’s rapid descent into true depression coupled with her increasing difficulty in keeping her original identity separate from her assumed self become the driving narrative. As the novel progresses, the author’s layering of his fictional characters’ unverifiable testimony, frank deception, and self-aggrandizing half-truths with significant historical figures of the time—like R.D. Laing and Dirk Bogarde—and GMB’s omnipresent frame narrative overlap to the extent that it’s hard to tell not just whose perception to trust, but which among all these counterfeit identities is real. As beguiling as Rebecca’s wry domestic critique can be, the book’s star is clearly the carefully constructed unreliability Burnet imbues at every level of his writing. This results in a novel that strives toward the biggest of questions—in the absence of the Cartesian ego Braithwaite seeks to slay, is there anything at all underneath our masks?—but lacks the character-driven empathy that would encourage us to care about the answer.

A brisk and engaging novel that wears itself thin on the grindstone of its own conceit.

“A math genius figures out how to communicate with Martians but not with the earthlings who love her.”

SINGER DISTANCE
Chatagnier, Ethan
Tin House (288 pp.)
$26.95 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-953-53443-9

A math genius figures out how to communicate with Martians but not with the earthlings who love her.

In Chatagnier’s debut novel, humans have been exchanging messages with Martians since 1894 by carving giant symbols into the Earth’s surface, filling the grooves with petroleum, and setting them on fire at the exact moment of Mars’ opposition. The first message earthlings sent was three parallel lines, which the Martians answered with four parallel lines of their own. In subsequent oppositions, the Martians used a Socratic system of quizzes to teach humans the Martian notational system and increasingly sophisticated mathematics until nobody alive on Earth was smart enough to solve the extraterrestrial puzzles except Einstein, and finally not even he could. Then the Martians fell silent for decades, ignoring our puny attempts at communication. As the novel begins, in the winter of 1960, five MIT grad students are driving west to dig Martian notation into the Arizona desert in time for the next opposition. The group comprises the narrator, Rick Hayworth; his girlfriend, Crystal Singer, the genius whose formula they’re planning to beam to Mars; and two other men and one other woman. Chatagnier describes the scenery of the American past with lyrical zest, but he doesn’t seem to have devoted much effort to imagining or researching what people’s lives were like back then. In his fantasy version of the novel’s timeline, unlike the same period on actual Earth, women, including women of color, are allowed to be mathematicians and scientists just like men. Women in his novel run telescopes and are professors at prestigious universities in more than token numbers. (In contrast, for example, in the real world it wasn’t until 1959 that MIT appointed the first woman to its science faculty; and from 1965 to 1975, less than 5% of the graduate students in the MIT physics department were women.) After the Martians respond to Crystal’s message, she buries herself deeper and deeper in her research, ultimately vanishing from Rick’s life and public view. Her disappearance sets the scene for the novel’s

“Evocative and compelling. This novel draws you into the lives of those unsung heroes all around us, everyday, who come to us in times of need and recede into the background when danger lifts.”
—Rita Cosby, Emmy-Winning TV Host & Best-selling Author of Quiet Hero: Secrets from My Father’s Past

“An engrossing tale that serves as a poignant reminder of the lives lost on 9/11.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email fnauthor@mail.com - fnauthor.com
exploration of the difficulties of truly understanding the self and others. Chatagnier expresses this theme in descriptions of Crystal’s research: “Her voice came into my mind…I heard her say: Light-years of distance separate us even from ourselves.” For all the charm of these wistful musings, the plot makes little sense. (How has Crystal been supporting herself? Why hasn’t some reporter found her long ago?) And the novel’s ultimate revelation, when it comes, is a cliché.

Lyrical writing and a suspenseful story fall apart when anachronisms and lazy plotting undermine them.

SOJOURN
Chaudhuri, Amit
New York Review Books (140 pp.)
$15.95 paper  |  Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-68137-708-7

A professor’s Berlin sojourn finds him meandering through its streets and storied past.

As in his two most recent novels, Chaudhuri places his main character in a city and lets him wander physically and mentally. The narrator is a 43-year-old academic on a four-month stint as a visiting professor at an unnamed Berlin university. In his flat, once occupied by Kenzaburo Oe, he’s bemused by the German toilet’s landing platform and realizes that the Nobelist once sat on the same throne. This is typical of Chaudhuri, the intersections of present and past and an understated humor, even when there’s a butt in the joke. The narrator meets a Bangladeshi poet who shows him around Berlin and then disappears for a while, to be replaced by a woman who brings him to a venue where people have been coming for decades to dance to older songs. Also constantly present with punctuating artifacts is the city’s sense of history: the site of the Berlin Wall; the World War II “rotten tooth” relic of a church’s bombed tower; a spot from which Jews were sent to the camps. These are “spaces in which you sense time, but also inhabit the viewpoint of those who’ve already been there”—leading to perspectives that are “intense but momentary.” Many points in this drifting chronicle are briefly intense, a product of the narrator’s close observation and glinting insights. A mere 140 pages, with some holding just one or two paragraphs, the book is only physically slight. It grips the mind, as much with appreciation as with frustration, and teases one into parsing what is real or autofiction, what is changeless or transient. A reader may even enjoy feeling a bit at sea, like the narrator: “I’ve lost my bearings—not in the city; in its history.”

A masterful writer in his own subtle, thoughtful, demanding genre.

THE FURIES
Connolly, John
Emily Bestler/Atria (512 pp.)
$28.00  |  Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-98217700-3

PI Charlie Parker is back in a pair of short novels with a ghostly twist.

Parker, as his fans know, is an ex-cop and a PI whose wife, Susan, and daughter Jennifer were murdered, and Jennifer’s ghost still haunts him. The characters in both these tales range from the offbeat to the literally Strange: The sisters Dolors and Ambar Strange run Strange Brews, a coffee shop in Portland, Maine, in the first novel, The Sisters Strange. Each yields her bed to a lowlife named Raum Buker, of whom
Parker notes, “Gradually, like fecal matter falling down a drain, gravity brought Raum to Portland.” Buker once had a mouth that “resembled the ruins of Dresden” but now has “installment-plan teeth” with what Parker calls a puppy-killing grin. Back in Pennsylvania, a “poisonous” old man named Edwin Ellerkamp is found choked to death, his mouth and throat engorged with coins dating as far back as the seventh and eighth centuries. The killer is a man of indeterminate age (Generations? Centuries?) named Kepler, who desperately seeks one particular coin—“with the right coin,” he believes, “even gods could be bought.” Kepler sees and feels himself rotting away as he reads decades-old newspapers, so maybe finding that precious coin will cure what ails him. In the second novel, The Furies, Parker reluctantly takes on the case of Sarah Abelli, the socially shunned widow of a femicidal killer. Meanwhile, Lyle Pantuff and Gilman Veale stay at Braycott Arms, a “shithole” hotel suitable for their ilk. The woman-hating Pantuff has “one of those faces that couldn’t have drawn more cops if it were shaped like a donut and covered with sprinkles.” At one point, he’s “crouched like a gargoyle at the end of his bed.” Veale keeps hearing a child, although none are allowed at Braycott Arms, and it creeps him out. No one can find any child, not even in the basement, so readers will be creeped out too. Maybe it’s a ghost, because someone gets the shock of a lifetime. Connolly skillfully hints at the occult while keeping Parker grounded and sane. The author imbues both stories with melancholy and deft touches of dark humor.

As with all the Charlie Parker books, this is fine fodder for crime fans.

BEFORE I DO
Cousens, Sophie
Putnam (384 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-593-53987-3

A bride-to-be has her wedding derailed when the man who got away shows up at her rehearsal dinner.

Audrey and Josh are a case of opposites attract. Audrey has always been dreamy, creative, and unsettled, still searching for her ideal career. Josh, meanwhile, is a practical planner with a responsible job. She loves winging it, while he never met a spreadsheet he didn’t love. He’s just what Audrey needs. Or so she thinks, until Josh’s sister shows up to their rehearsal dinner with Fred, a man Audrey had an exhilarating day with six years ago. Fred was fun and spontaneous, and Audrey fell for him instantly—but he didn’t show up for their next date, and she never heard from him again. Audrey starts to wonder if Fred’s appearance at her wedding is merely a coincidence or a sign from the universe that she shouldn’t get married. When things keep going wrong, it seems like Josh’s Granny Parker might be right when she insists that they’re bad omens. Alternating between a present-day countdown to the wedding and significant moments from Audrey’s past, Cousens explores the moments, meet-cutes, and mistakes that led Audrey to her wedding day. Cousens puts a clever spin on the standard romance trope of the love triangle featuring a steady, predictable man versus an exciting, unpredictable man. Although the plot hinges on Audrey’s wedding, the true heart of the story is about her struggle with her past and whether she’s willing to create a new, more honest future for herself.

A charming and surprising take on a classic love-triangle formula.
A young woman races through an alternate Philadelphia on a night of revelry in this bewitching sophomore novel.

Nina used to be a member of the Saturn Club, an elite social club with rumored interests in alchemy. But three years ago, she left it and her best friends behind to forge a path alone. She’s been able to make ends meet telling fortunes with her divination deck, but money is tight enough that when Max, the one friend she’s kept in touch with, offers her cash to sneak into the club on Saturnalia to steal a package from her ex-lover, she accepts. That this one-night mission comes with untold wonders and terrors is a surprise for Nina and a thrill for readers. Feldman conjures a near-future version of the U.S. entranced by mutual aid organizations–turned–secret societies and caught in a slow-burn environmental catastrophe that’s unsettlingly plausible, and her depiction of the aftermath of sexual assault is complicated in its rage and compassion. The novel’s pacing is electric, its worldbuilding seamless, and the magic that slowly reveals itself feels truly strange and captivating—a considerable feat. Only the slow unspooling of Nina’s backstory and the reason why she left the Saturn Club in the first place pose stumbling blocks to the reader; it’s hard to feel the desired shock of changing loyalties or the longing for healed relationships when the reader doesn’t have the full picture of one character’s ties to another.

A propulsive fantasy thriller about fortune-seeking at the end of the world that will leave you wanting more.

A German classic about the Nazis’ escalating campaign against the Jewish people, in a translation newly revised by Joshua Cohen.

Written in 1933, the year Hitler was appointed German chancellor, the Bavarian Jewish Feuchtwanger’s five-alarm warning of a novel focuses on the well-off Oppermann family, of which three brothers run a family chain of furniture stores in Berlin. With their history of achievement and as proud Germans, the siblings think they’re safe from the oppressive actions they’re hearing about. The first inkling that they are at risk comes via the persecution of 17-year-old Berthold Oppermann, a good student and self-possessed soul, by a Nationalism-embracing teacher who loves hearing his students sing “When Jewish blood spurts from the knife, / Then all goes well again.” Soon enough, the weight of state-mandated hatred falls on the Oppermanns in spite of their painful decision to change the name of their business to a non-Jewish–sounding name, as other Jewish firms had done. But as the scourge of discrimination against Jewish businessmen, doctors, and others intensifies, leading to suicides and purges (“Who was shameless enough to allow himself to be operated on by a Jew today?” it is asked), the notion among self-deluding Jews that “the disease that ails this country, man, is acute, not chronic” dims. The novel never raises its voice. Its power builds from its methodical telling of day-to-day reality, how the characters respond to increasingly frightening events, and what their future, if there is one, holds. News of concentration camps—the horrors of which even Feuchtwanger, writing as a French exile, couldn’t imagine—is heard from a distance. Readers will be struck by how little the language about White supremacy, antisemitism, the swapping of lies for facts, the discrediting of the press, and the embrace of violence over reason have changed. It’s hard to imagine a 90-year-old book being more timely.

An unsettling but page-turning novel about 20th-century evil.
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

STILL, THE SKY
TOM PEARSON

ISBN: 979-8-4308954-7-1 [paperback]
ISBN: 978-0-9995951-8-3 [eBook]

“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*

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights,
Email tom@ransompoet.com • tompearsonnyc.com
Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah discusses the latest of his novels to reach U.S. readers

BY GREGORY MCNAMEE

“IT WAS NEVER MY AMBITION or intention to make a career of writing.”

So Abdulrazak Gurnah, the Zanzibar-born author of novels such as *Memory of Departure* (1987) and *By the Sea* (2001), tells Kirkus.

Speaking from his home in southeastern England, Gurnah continues, “I think that’s partly because there was no role model, no adult around who did that. So I didn’t think of writing as a career or a life. It was [after] coming to England more than 50 years ago, reading, and especially reading books that overlapped with my own experiences—my estrangement, my sense of being an alien, what I’d left behind—that I began to write, thinking that I had something to say. I kept it to myself, but then there comes a moment when one says not just ‘I want to do this,’ but ‘I have to do this.’ My ideas about writing changed enormously, certainly after the novels began to be published. You gain confidence, open up more, and in the end you’re absolutely fearless and say, ‘I’m going to write what I want.’”

Gurnah’s perseverance over half a century of living and writing among the descendants of his country’s former colonizers was rewarded last year with the Nobel Prize in literature. When the news arrived, Gurnah at first thought it was a practical joke, but the prize committee was earnest in honoring “his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents.”

That was all well and good, but, Gurnah insists, “I write about other themes as well.” Indeed, in his Nobel lecture, when he accepted the award, he mentioned writing about love and tenderness alongside alienation and poverty, noting that “writing cannot be just about battling and politics….I believe that writing also has to show what can be otherwise, what it is that the hard domineering eye cannot see, what makes people, apparently small in stature, feel assured in themselves regardless of the disdain of others.”

The latest of Gurnah’s 10 novels, *Afterlives* (Riverhead, Aug. 23), speaks to such matters. Much of the novel concerns the last days of the “scramble for Africa,” when, during World War I, Britain wrested what was then Tanganyika from its German colonizers in a war largely fought by proxy—that is, with African soldiers. A young man named Hamza, one of those soldiers, des-
erts from the German forces after being brutalized by an officer and, returning to his home village, falls in love with a young refugee named Afiya, who assures him that his poverty is nothing compared with their destiny together. “I have nothing,” he tells her, to which she replies, “We’ll have nothing together.”

Another character in Afterlives, though, speaks more pointedly to the novel’s title. Ilyas Hassan has gone off with the Schutztruppe to fight the British. He becomes a true believer, leaving his homeland to live among the people he served—and earning little but their disdain in return. Gurnah modeled the character after a Zanzibari soldier he discovered in the historical literature who worked his way to Germany as a waiter aboard an ocean liner, finally arriving there in the 1920s and enjoying a brief career as an actor before the rise of the Nazis. They repaid his loyalty by placing him in a concentration camp, where he died.

“Just three of my novels are historical,” says Gurnah. Afterlives can be thought of as a kind of continuation of Paradise (1994), in which the German conscription of African soldiers presents the protagonist, Yusuf, with an opportunity to escape ordinary life. That book was born, the author says, of a trip to Zanzibar that yielded not the tale he meant to write but instead one that, as he puts it, reflects his “being full of the location and full of the stories people told me of that time.” Yusuf is only 17 as Paradise opens, and Gurnah found himself pondering how such a young man would want to leave home to become a colonial soldier.

“This is the great thing about writing,” Gurnah tells Kirkus. “That story stayed with me, turning around in my mind. I know more, all these years later, and have thought more and have read more, and the time seemed right to return to that period. I wanted to tell a story with many ideas—about colonialism, about power, about the lives of people in those quiet seaside villages that didn’t see much directly of the war but felt it all the same. These are historical stories that aren’t often told, so our history is incomplete, and it seemed to me necessary to tell the story to include that point of view.”

Asked to describe a typical day of writing, Gurnah smiles good-naturedly and says, “Lately I’m talking with people like you, not writing.” Still, he says, having retired from university teaching five years ago, with Afterlives he was able for the first time to write a novel without interruption. “It’s quite nice to have no responsibilities other than the usual responsibilities of life, the cooking and shopping and gardening, dropping someone at the station,” he says. “I love being able to go to my desk in the morning and write until I get a headache.”

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor. Afterlives received a starred review in the June 15, 2022, issue.
THE DARK ROOM
Gray, Lisa
Thomas & Mercer (287 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-5420-3535-4

A reporter who buys undeveloped rolls of film online gets the shock of his life when he develops his latest purchase. It's already horrifying that one of the photos Leonard Blaylock has bought shows a woman who's been stabbed to death. What makes it much worse is that Leonard recognizes the woman as a bar pickup he'd left for dead five years ago. His meeting with that woman, whom he'd known only as Red, ended with her collapsing in the bathroom of her apartment after he'd persuaded her to try some cocaine to get her in the mood. After fleeing the scene, he'd been panting with gratitude that the police knew nothing about him when his fiancee, radio and TV host Caroline Cooper, abruptly called off their engagement, sent him packing, and married someone else. Now, confronted with evidence that Red waited five years to die, Leonard swings into action to figure out what really happened the night his life went sideways, and why. Joining forces with Martha Weaver, a photographer who shares his odd hobby, he identifies Red not as Erin Hayward, whose funeral he checked out thinking it was hers, but as Anna Bianco, who worked as a honeytrap for Ron Kincaid, a professional photographer with a profitable sideline in choreographing and documenting adulterous scenarios for suspicious romantic partners. Cutting briskly between past and present and among different characters' viewpoints, Gray exploits every possible angle of her irresistible hook before bringing down the curtain.

Revenge piled on revenge, all of it served ice cold.

THE PEOPLE IMMORTAL
Grossman, Vasily
Trans. by Robert Chandler & Elizabeth Chandler
NYRB Classics (352 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Sept. 27, 2022
978-168137-678-3

A colorful depiction of Russian soldiers in World War II at a critical moment in the German invasion.

Grossman (1905-1964) was a correspondent for the Soviet army's Red Star when he knocked out this novel in two months in 1942 for serialization in the newspaper. It covers a brief period in the late summer of 1941 when Russia was enduring heavy losses after German troops invaded in June of that year. Grossman reported on the action firsthand, and his knowledge is reflected in the novel's details of military life, the cruelty of firebombing, the impact of an order forbidding surrender or retreat. The narrative focuses on a group of encircled Russian troops and their efforts to break through enemy lines. The frontline soldier is represented by the hearty, cheerful farmer Ignatiev. Higher up the ranks is the thoughtful, stern Bogariov, a former academic whose reading of classic military texts leads him to question official strategy. As an introduction notes, this novel was Grossman's contribution to the war effort, and the well-crafted, smoothly translated prose is occasionally marred by the clanking phrases of propaganda: "There were no people closer to him than those who had fought beside him in defence of the people's freedom." But for the most part it's clear that the journalist in Grossman cannot drift far from the plain truth, including criticism of the high command. More important, this hastily drawn picture laid the groundwork for the author's sprawling wartime canvases, Stalingrad (1953) and Life and Fate (1980). The publisher has made a significant commitment to Grossman, and this novel, though a lesser work, reflects those efforts. It includes not only an introduction, but a timeline, an afterward, unusual documents, additional reading, and extensive notes that clarify arcane and help explain editorial and translation decisions.

An essential part of Grossman's vital body of work.
“Guibert is the consummate poet of obsession: the way it unravels the self, and gives it substance, too.”

MY MANSERVANT AND ME

Guibert, Hervé
Trans. by Jeffrey Zuckerman
Nightboat Books (104 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-64362-152-4

“I never imagined that my manservant might like me”: So begins the late French writer Guibert’s darkly humorous short novel.

The narrator is an ailing octogenarian, a man of means cushioned by his great-grandfather’s “colossal fortune.” In his youth he attempted to forge a career as a playwright, but his efforts never yielded “a true work of art.” “Maybe someday I’ll make something that will hold up if I’m able to simply describe the relationship binding me to my manservant,” he says ruefully. His first-person chronicle of their turbulent relationship, furtively scrawled in a notebook in his manservant’s absence, furnishes this book with its narrative. The manservant, Jim, is a “lazy young man,” a luckless actor who’s struggled to find success after a leading role in a serviceable film. And so he insinuates himself into a drama of Sadean proportions. Cast opposite the narrator, he plays his role with a frightening, self-abnegating obsession to the lurid, bitter end. In their battle of wills, the manservant wields a manipulative force unlike any the narrator could’ve imagined for the inchoate characters that passed through his plays. He refuses the subservience prescribed by his title, usurping his master’s life with a slew of deranged tactics: He bullies his staff, commandeers his finances, siphons off his wealth. “My manservant wants to take care of everything himself,” says the narrator flatly. Jim’s contempt for his master grows increasingly explicit, even violent, as the novel progresses. The narrator records this humiliation with sobering lucidity: “He never looks at my emaciated body, it’s as if I don’t have one, his eyes might pass over it but they never land on anything, they slide right past, like an ectoplasm.” Yet nothing can displace their need for each other; their debasing
codependency makes them appear “as if we were a single person now doubled.” It’s material well suited for a Fassbinder film. The novel was published in France in 1991, the year Guibert died of AIDS. His final years were marked by a bleak isolation akin to the one that engulfs the narrator. The narrator is, in James Schuyler’s phrase, a “victim of the other side of love.” And as his manservant reminds him, “Creatures need love, too, Sir.”

Guibert is the consummate poet of obsession: the way it unravels the self, and gives it substance, too.

WELCOME TO THE GAME
Henderson, Craig
Atlantic Monthly (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-0-8021-5970-0

A down-on-his-luck Englishman who drives expensive cars really fast hooks up with a ruthless Detroit mobster and his violent crew.

The Brit is one-time rally driver Spencer Burnham, whose fortunes and mental state have been sliding since his wife, a Detroit native, died in a car accident following their move back to the U.S. His foreign car dealership faces foreclosure, and child protective services threatens to take his 11-year-old daughter, whom he raises with his late wife’s uncle. After passing what proves to be a driving audition for the mobster, McGrath, who is impressed by Spencer’s ability to move fast “without getting noticed,” he lands both a high-paying job and a source of relief. Having grown weary of competitive driving, he reclaims his relationship with speed: “There wasn’t winning or losing. There was just moving.” But once people around him start getting hurt or killed, he tries to extricate himself from the gig. Standing in his way are McGrath, whose fondness for him would not preempt his murder; McGrath’s right-hand man, Johnny Boy, a former Chicago mob lawyer; and the Yo-Yo, a bulky ex-con whose specialty is punching someone in the head “hard enough to fracture but not kill.” The action rarely stops. When it does, it’s for Spencer to deal with CPS case workers—first Lonnie, his bedmate from their second meeting, and then Caitlyn, a harder case who softens for him. Henderson is better at situational descriptions than advancing the plot—endgames are vague. But the first-time novelist brings a fresh, hardscrabble voice to Elmore Leonard land, albeit with more sentimentality.

A corrosive debut that makes you look forward to a sequel.

IS MOTHER DEAD
Hjorth, Vigdis
Trans. by Charlotte Barslund
Verso (352 pp.)
$26.95 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-83976-431-8

A Norwegian artist probes the rift between her mother and herself.

Johanna is a widowed painter nearly 60 years old, her son grown and with a child of his own, who’s been estranged from her mother and sister for nearly three decades. When asked to prepare a retrospective of her work in Oslo, her hometown, Johanna uproots her life and moves back there. Rather than focus on painting, however, Johanna dwells on how she once again lives in the same city as her mother and sister. One night, after a few glasses of wine, Johanna calls her mother; when she doesn’t pick up, Johanna begins to fill the silence between
“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.
them with her own best guesses of her mother’s thoughts. “I use words to create my image of you,” she thinks. The novel follows Johanna as she recalls her childhood and catalogs the events that culminated in her estrangement—such as her decision to leave her first husband, Thorleif, and abandon her family-sanctioned legal studies to marry her art teacher, Mark, and pursue painting in America. Johanna’s obsession quickly escalates from that phone call to full-blown stalking. As she sifts through her mother’s garbage and lurks on the stairs of her mother’s apartment building, she’s compelling in her desire to understand what it means to be a fully grown woman and yet still need your mother. The novel’s strength lies in its deft use of psychological analysis as it looks at this relationship through one lens after another. While it’s full of metaphorical hauntings, it’s most plaintive in Johanna’s desire to have a conversation with her mother. The novel falters in its resolution, but Johanna’s intelligence and emotion still captivate. Like a wounded animal in her need and grief, Johanna cries, “I made myself homeless and homeless I am, and my anguish will not be stilled. Hailstones lash the window and teeth gnaw at the walls, steel knuckles bang on doors, paws maul, creatures sigh, wanting to get in, the terror arrives, the great darkness rises from the forest and the sky hangs low over me like a stone.”

A darkly insightful examination of mother-daughter relationships that captivates with the suspense of a thriller.

THE HALF-LIFE OF SNAILS
Holloway, Philippa
Parthian Books (376 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 7, 2022
978-1-913640-57-6

A woman’s 2014 research trip to Chernobyl has unintended consequences. Holloway’s debut novel centers on Helen, a single mom whose home in Wales is under threat by the planned construction of a new nuclear power plant to replace an old one. She fears the loss of not just her home, but her rural way of life, which she’s trying to pass down to her 5-year-old son, Jack. (The snails of the title refer to a pair Jack keeps as pets.) Her sister, Jennifer, works at the current plant and is more ambivalent about the land buyouts, though she’s under threat of losing her home as well. To better make the case for nuclear power’s dangers, Helen heads to Ukraine to join a tourist group visiting the catastrophically failed Soviet-era plant there. Soon enough, complications escalate. Helen is separated from the group and then injured without means to send word back home. Jack, staying with Jennifer and her husband, begins acting oddly. And Russia annexes Crimea, setting roadblocks in Helen’s path out of the country. Holloway’s descriptions of the Welsh landscape and the isolation zone around Chernobyl are richly detailed, starkly contrasting lushness and degradation. And she’s meticulous in describing Helen’s relationships with her family and her acquaintances on the tour. All that consideration gives the narrative a certain stodginess that feels ungainly in the latter chapters, which should be more propulsive storytelling about peril and escape. (Subplots involving the sisters’ ailing mother and a highly symbolic orphaned lamb add some additional drag.) But the details persuasively explain Helen’s concerns, and Holloway is expert at capturing the fear, verging on paranoia, generated by them. A savvy if somewhat dense tale of good intentions gone awry.
When you’re the Big Guy, life is good. Sharp wife, devoted daughter, friends in high places, and (obvs) lots of money, he inhabits his privilege and prestige with presumption and ease. But when Obama is elected president, his comfortable perch at the top of the pecking order suddenly feels more precarious than preordained. A nation’s progress is the Big Guy’s existential crisis—and call to action.

Set entirely during the weeks between Election Day 2008 and Inauguration Day 2009, Homes’ new novel chronicles the Big Guy’s dual missions: to right the courses of both his country and his marriage. (One of these tasks will be easier than the other.) In the early morning hours of Nov. 5, 2008, stricken, enraged, and reeling from the “Hindenburg” election results, the Big Guy decides to put together an A-Team, a cabal of haves—“members of the good fortune club”—that convenes to shoot guns and go ballooning and plot a deep elite counter-mine to “reclaim our America.” While this happy plan is coming together, the Big Guy’s personal life is unraveling, and his tightly wound wife, Charlotte, is having a crisis of her own: “I forgot to have my life,” she tells him. “I’ve been having your life for a quarter of a century.” Set in relief to the jejune and tedious primary storyline, this complicated relationship is devastatingly articulated, far more nuanced and engaging. “Nine p.m. is prime time for bed, to be alone, to have themselves to themselves, to have finished the business of being a couple,” Homes writes, deftly explaining their early dinner habit and so much more. Alas, the blowhards in the how-we-got-here wannabe satire prequel keep bigfooting the B side: “Someone needs to grab this country by the balls and wake it the hell up,” the Big Guy tells his uninspired co-conspirators. Big words, but not nearly big enough to out-outrageous the footage, quotes, testimony, and exposés that have dominated American life since 2015. It
must be noted: The reality of how we got here has already been extensively reported elsewhere to eye-popping effect and is far more shocking than anything here.

If truth is stranger than fiction, this makes a strong case that it’s also a better read. Stick with the news.

**IT STARTS WITH US**
*Hoover, Colleen*
Atria (352 pp.)
$15.00 paper | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-668-00122-6

The sequel to *It Ends With Us* (2016) shows the aftermath of domestic violence through the eyes of a single mother.

Lily Bloom is still running a flower shop; her abusive ex-husband, Ryle Kincaid, is still a surgeon. But now they’re co-parenting a daughter, Emerson, who’s almost a year old. Lily won’t send Emerson to her father’s house overnight until she’s old enough to talk—“So she can tell me if something happens”—but she doesn’t want to fight for full custody lest it become an expensive legal drama or, worse, a physical fight. When Lily runs into Atlas Corrigan, a childhood friend who also came from an abusive family, she hopes their friendship can blossom into love. (For new readers, their history unfolds in heartfelt diary entries that Lily addresses to *Finding Nemo* star Ellen DeGeneres as she considers how Atlas was a calming presence during her turbulent childhood.) Atlas, who is single and running a restaurant, feels the same way. But even though she’s divorced, Lily isn’t exactly free. Behind Ryle’s veneer of civility are his jealousy and resentment. Lily has to plan her dates carefully to avoid a confrontation. Meanwhile, Atlas’ mother returns with shocking news. In between, Lily and Atlas steal away for romantic moments that are even sweeter for their authenticity as Lily struggles with child care, breastfeeding, and running a business while trying to find time for herself.

Through palpable tension balanced with glimmers of hope, Hoover beautifully captures the heartbreak and joy of starting over.

**THE LAST CHAIRLIFT**
*Irving, John*
Simon & Schuster (912 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-5011-8927-2

Familiar Irving themes and autobiographical points mark this sprawling family tale.

Narrator Adam Brewster is a lucky bastard. His short and unwed mother, Ray, is gay but marries even shorter Elliot, an English teacher and wrestler at Adam’s New Hampshire school, who’s fine with Ray living part of the year elsewhere with her female partner, Molly, and will eventually transition genders. At the wedding, Adam hears the epic orgasms experienced by Em, the partner of his cousin Nora. They perform, in some of the novel’s best moments, at a comedy club as *Two Dykes, One Who Talks*, with Nora interpreting Em’s pantomime.

Adam, seen from childhood to old age, is lucky to be raised and surrounded by women who are smart, loving, and supportive. Still, he spends most of the book trying to find out more about his father, someone Ray met in 1941 when she was a teenager at a hotel in Aspen, Colorado. The likely candidate is an actor whose noir films and off-screen life become a major sidebar. The lost paternity that haunts Adam is reflected in actual ghosts that appear haphazardly throughout the novel, sparking a few comic moments but mainly serving to personify his preoccupation with family history. Like Irving, Adam writes three novels before gaining broad fame with his fourth. Also like Irving, he writes for the movies, and twice the narrative switches to lengthy stretches of screenplay format, bringing a welcome briskness to the generally slow pace. Irving’s writing can be painfully plain, short on imagery or elegance and long,
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

Scan the QR Code to listen now:

New episode every Tuesday
oh so long, on repetition. But his imagination and empathy often work to charm a reader when the prose falls short. Here the consistent pleasure is an extended family whose distinctive voices deliver thoughtful messages of tolerance, understanding, and affection for those who are different.

A book that will try a reader’s patience but may also reward it.

**RANDOM**
Jillette, Penn
Akashic (288 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-63614-071-1

After a near miss with a vicious Las Vegas gangster leads to good fortune, a truck driver abandons his fate to chance. Jillette is one of our weirder national treasures, having graduated from MTV-era oddball to perpetual residency in Vegas, but he’s also written delightful mongrels like his 2004 comic noir So6. Here, the writer turns to that which he knows, specifically the bizarre fishbowl that is Sin City, the weird science of percentages, and games of chance. Our unironic hero is Bobby Ingersoll, a nobody who makes his living driving strip club ads up and down the Strip. Bobby might have remained a nobody if his pops hadn’t gotten in deep with gangster Fraser Ruphart to the tune of $2.5 million and some change. After accidentally ripping off some gangbangers during a botched robbery, Bobby drops it all on a roll of the dice and suddenly finds himself a multimillionaire with an epiphany: “The Dice now owned Bobby. He owed his life to Chance. He had a superpower under our yellow sun. Bobby knew and accepted that life was Random. Bobby was enlightened. Siddhartha was dead. Bobby was Buddha.” Rolling the dice to make all of life’s extraneous decisions gives Bobby some much-needed joy but also inevitably gets him into trouble. Not that he doesn’t have a lot of fun first, although whether it’s to readers’ amusement or dismay may depend on their personal appetites for vice and folly. Among other misadventures, all punctuated by Jillette’s sardonic cultural asides and math lessons, Bobby gets a full-body tattoo, learns a few lessons in sexual fluidity, romances a gold-digging grifter, and buys a private detective agency so he can become a wealthy crime fighter. You know, like Batman. But even Batman probably didn’t count on a client whose case is rattling the cage of a dangerous casino heist crew, the unlikely return of Ruphart, and a showdown at the Trump International Hotel. An average joe’s free-spirited, madcap romp through the last days of American empire.

**HELL AND BACK**
Johnson, Craig
Viking (352 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-59-329728-5

Nightmare, out-of-body experience, time travel, and mental illness are all possibilities for a man who awakens knowing neither his name nor where he is. Sheriff Walt Longmire of Absaroka County, Wyoming, wakes up in a heavy snowstorm frozen to the street. At first his only reality is snow, the sound of bells, and two silver dollars in his lap. Then he sees a sign for the Fort Pratt Industrial Indian Boarding School. His period of hell on earth starts with a visit to a restaurant staffed by a stunning blond woman who looks familiar. She tells him his name, which is written in his hat’s sweatband, and identifies their locale as Fort Pratt, Montana. His next interaction is with an enormous man whom the waitress can’t see, a man dressed in the clothes of a Mountain Crow, who departs with an enigmatic comment. The two meet again while Walt, who’s looking for a policeman, discovers a woman in a movie theater who again seems familiar and a priest who claims to be researching a book on the Indian boarding school where 31 children reportedly perished in a fire. In the
meantime, Walt’s best friend, Henry Standing Bear, and his deputy, Vic Moretti, come looking for him. Just like Walt, they keep running into the same people whose lives make no sense in a town where the time is always 8:17 p.m. After Walt manages to save the children from that fire, which took place many years before the time he seems to be living in, he gets locked in a desperate battle with a shape-shifting monster whose name just might be death.

A mystical thriller that offers a wild ride through a thoroughly altered reality.

**COMING DAWN**

Konkoly, Steven

Thomas & Mercer (383 pp.)

$15.95 paper | Oct. 25, 2022

978-1-5420-3662-7

An FBI countersurveillance expert continues his mission against a generation of Russian agents secretly working in the U.S.

While software engineer George McDonald sends valuable intel on missile tests to Russia before disappearing, Karl Berg attempts to pull off a deadly collaboration with Israel that he hopes will get him back into the good graces of Russian crime lord Yuri Pichugin, a Putin puppet. Pichugin operative Felix Orlov is meanwhile tracking the movements of FBI agent Devin Gray, whose team is on the trail of a nest of deeply embedded Russian agents in Baltimore and elsewhere. Gray has inherited his mission from his mother, Helen, a deceased CIA agent, and, yes, it’s personal. These are
the major chess pieces in Konkoly’s elaborate thriller, unfolded at a brisk pace and built on regular twists and questions of allegiance. Chief among them: Why is Berg collaborating with Devin…or is he? Though readers would certainly benefit from having read *Deep Sleep* (2022), the previous Devin Gray adventure, the author effectively weaves in the backstory as he thrusts the action forward from the get-go. His knowledge of technology and weapons adds authenticity. Drone strikes and the tracking of them figure prominently. The operation begins in Baltimore but takes Devin and his gritty sidekick and old pal, fighter pilot Marnie Young, to Russia and Ukraine. Konkoly’s basic premise—that a network of Russian agents has lived here for decades, thus attracting no suspicion—is frighteningly believable, giving his story extra juice.

*A deft cat-and-mouse novel that keeps the action moving and the reader guessing.*
roughly once a month to have lunch together. Over one lunch, while complaining about how difficult their lives are and how neither of them have found a woman to marry yet, they decide to switch places for a week, swapping back for Christmas Eve so Pete can run his church service. For that week, however, Hank will perform all the pastoral duties that fill Pete’s days and Pete will run the tavern that takes all Hank’s time and energy. Since this is also a story told through the eyes of a grandmother to two of her grandchildren—seen only in snippets, à la The Princess Bride—it is also a story with kissing in it, much to her grandson’s horror. Pete’s sister, Grace Ann, is the church secretary, caught up in her holier-than-thou worldview, and Millie, a lunchtime waitress in the diner where Hank and Pete meet, is also a bartender at the local strip club. Macomber has written a story that’s heavy-handed in its belief in the importance—and redemptive qualities—of Christianity for individuals and communities. Gender stereotypes define each character. Women are helpmates. Men are portrayed as knowing best about everything: the Bible; love; romance; whether or not a woman’s name should be shortened in a way she explicitly says she doesn’t like; and the idea that if she clearly dislikes someone, what she really needs is a kiss. A book that seeks to be a meet-cute for two couples while reinforcing traditional Christian gender roles and partnerships.

In this disquieting novel, two siblings are forced to take part in an uncanny ceremony. Where does the line between art and ritual lie? Over the course of the last decade, the Hudson River Valley has emerged as a setting for a host of inventive works of horror.
from writers like John Langan, Sam J. Miller, and Laird Barron. Marino’s latest novel, set in the fictional town of Wofford Falls, is a solid addition to their number. Peter “Lark” Larkin and his sister, Betsy, both in their 30s, grew up there; Lark spent some years in New York City before returning to his hometown with a degree of art-world success under his belt. It’s Betsy who is the more gifted of the siblings, though her skills veer into the paranormal, as this glimpse of one of her creations demonstrates: “The object’s doing something prismatic with the air, with the space that surrounds it. He tilts the box, half expecting a staggered trail of after-image, a holographic stutter.” Then Betsy is abducted and the Larkins are forced to take part in a bizarre occult ceremony by another brother and sister—Helena and Griffin Belmont, who are both impossibly long-lived and hope to return their father to full life and health. As Lark works on building strange sculptures at the Belmonts’ compound, the effects on the larger world—including distortions of space and reality—become clearer, and the full scope of the Belmonts’ plan becomes more and more apparent. There’s a lived-in sensibility to much of this novel that makes the horrific elements stand out even more, and Marino has a good eye for genuinely disturbing imagery. At times things can feel a little too crowded—the Belmonts’ centuries of plotting could support a novel all its own—but this novel hums with a terrifying momentum.

A memorably visceral take on art, family, and power.

**TELL ME I’M AN ARTIST**

**Martin, Chelsea**

Soft Skull Press (368 pp.)

$27.00 | Sept. 20, 2022

978-1-593-76721-1

An art student wrestles with creative and family trouble in this empathetic novel. Martin’s latest novel accomplishes an impressive feat of misdirection. It follows several months in the life of Joey, an art student living in San Francisco who’s in regular contact with her family in Lodi, California. At first glance, the book can seem like a series of episodes about art school life—beginning with the first line, in which Joey mentions a certain Wes Anderson movie that she’s using as the basis for her own project in a film class: “I hadn’t seen *Rushmore*. That was the premise.” Joey’s narrative is interspersed with things like Craigslist posts, Google searches, and Venn diagrams. In the wrong hands, all this could feel overly twee, but Martin counterbalances Joey’s art school days with updates from her mother in Lodi. Most of these updates are about Joey’s sister, Jenny, who has struggled with addiction and whose young child creates a wedge within the family. Or, as Joey says about a tense moment between her and her mother, “We hadn’t talked since a few days before when I refused to quit college to watch my nephew while my sister screwed someone from GameStop.” The familial and economic pressures Joey finds herself under put her in a constant state of thinking about money and the ways she should or should not be spending it: “We walked three blocks to Blue Bottle Coffee. I reasoned it would be okay to spend $2.25 on a small cup this one time.” While the allusions to *Rushmore* persist, the art school comedy of manners gives way to a deeper story about navigating disparate worlds and struggling with situations without easy answers.

An unconventional and subtly powerful coming-of-age story.

---

**Highlander Meets City of Angels**

“For Agent Representation, Email pbnwriter@gmail.com · peter-benedict.com”

ISBN: 978-8985350906

**FORBIDDEN**
THE SLEEPING CAR PORTER
Mayr, Suzette
Coach House Books (244 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-55245-445-9

In 1929, being a passenger train porter was fraught with challenges.
R.T. Baxter greets you at the train, loads your luggage, escorts you to your compartment and your berth, gets you water, gets you liquor, gets you a sandwich, tells you the train’s schedule, shines your shoes, offers comfort, watches your child, cleans your toilet, makes your bed, and generally doesn’t sleep. He is a train porter. His duties run around the clock and offer few sympathies for missteps. Baxter aims for more. Eight years ago, he found a textbook on dentistry on the train that inspired him to become a dentist. Now, he’s saved $967 of the $1,068 he’ll need for four years of dentistry school. His goal seems in reach, but the odds are against him. The same passengers who offer him the means to reach his goals—tips—stand to get him fired through their complaints. If Baxter is said by passengers to be disloyal, dishonest, immoral, insubordinate, incompetent, careless, or untruthful, he’ll earn demerits, and with enough demerits he’ll be fired. Baxter is judged for being Black, judged for being gay, and the train’s passengers can say anything they like to earn him these demerits or even worse, like jail time. The system is rigged. The porters must buy their meals from their employers, are financially liable for lost or stolen train goods like linens and towels, and are at the mercy of their clientele. To top it off, these multiday train runs are heavy on work and light on sleep. Baxter’s own sleep deprivation is perhaps the most intriguing character of the book. It leads to hallucinations, questionable decisions, and borderline supernatural suggestions.

You’ll probably be more generous with tips, and train rides will never be the same.

A BOOK OF REBIRTH AND TRYING ON SELVES

“Lee Woodman also explores other thoughtful and relatable themes, including geopolitics, the social effects of Covid-19, financial problems, dating, health issues, and more.”
—Manhattan Book Review
Scottish journalist Allie Burns reports on—and becomes entangled with—various gloomy events of 1989.

It was the year between the Lockerbie bombing and the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was a year of increasing AIDS deaths and no progress on treatment. A year when nearly a hundred fans were trampled at a football match in Sheffield. It was the year of many depressing developments, and McDermid has made poor Allie Burns slog through many of them, with very little of the suspense that made 1979 (2021), the first installment of her series, a page-turner. Back in ’79, Allie met a lovely woman and realized that she was gay, which was fun. In ’89, Allie and Rona are living together in cozy domesticity, eating a lot of rolls and processed cheese. The villain of this book, whose murder we see orchestrated in a prologue, is Allie’s boss, media mogul Ace Lockhart. Lockhart has bought the news organization Allie works for and fired everyone but her, but this is only the least of his many crimes. This character is so uniformly bad that it’s almost funny. “That evening, there was a letter from a philanthropist he’d met a few times, seeking a donation to his charity supporting Ethiopian Jews still recovering from the famine. Lockhart screwed it into a ball and tossed it in the bin. He was choosy about the charities he supported; he couldn’t see the point unless there was a way of finessing something in it for him.” Of course he couldn’t. He is a man who “seizes life by the throat,” “snatches opportunity from the jaws of defeat,” and has many other clichés to embody, so don’t waste his time with feeble famine victims. (The author will likely side with her character Rona here; when accused by Allie of mixing metaphors, she retorts “Oh, fuck off, Margaret Atwood.”) The book’s action climax takes place in East Germany, a setting so colorless and dull that two separate kidnappings can’t raise the pulse of the narrative. Plodding mechanically and at undue length through her well-researched historical plot points, McDermid seems to have phoned this one in.

When the playlist at the end of the book is the highlight, you know you’ve got problems.
“Delightful and fast-paced, a fascinating narrative of queer activism during the AIDS epidemic.”

MY GOVERNMENT MEANS TO KILL ME

metaphorical—what’s the meaning of a fisherman hooking a cat at the end of his line or the role of a pterodactyl in a dispute between two archaeologists? But usually the eeriness of the prose is additive, not disruptive: In stories featuring couples fraying, like “But Herr Hitler,” “House Full of Feasting,” and the harrowing, closing “Alpha,” she suggests that the shared humanity that’s supposed to connect us can fall apart easily and that collapse is just as likely a fate as progress.

Sharp, noirish, thought-provoking stories of lives out of joint.

MY GOVERNMENT MEANS TO KILL ME
Newson, Rasheed
Flatiron Books (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-250-83352-5

A gay Black man’s personal transformation and political awakening in mid-1980s New York City.

In his engrossing debut, Newson, television writer and producer of Narcos and Bel-Air, introduces readers to Earl “Trey” Singleton III, a young Black man born into an affluent family of political speechwriters in Indianapolis. Stifled by his parents’ lofty expectations and the narrow-mindedness of his community, Trey flees to New York City at 17 with $2,327 that doesn’t last long. The year is 1985, and New York is rife with tension: Jobs are few, racism and homophobia rampant, and corruption unbridled. Struggling to find work and housing, Trey meets Gregory, who makes ends meet by

CHANCE RENOUNCED AND CHALLENGES MET LIMNED WITH SUSPENSE.

Rio Los Angeles
Diego Kent

ISBN: 979-8-88679-019-1

**CHANCE RENOUNCED AND CHALLENGES MET LIMNED WITH SUSPENSE.**

“Globe-trotting Judah Goodwin’s latest destination is the United States...Judah, a kind, capable man, quickly befriends the islanders, especially when he helps prevent a house from tipping and sliding into the ocean.”

“Sadly...three strangers...seem dead set on ransacking underwater quahog pens.”

“Many of the details...give the narrative color...This is moreover indicative of the author’s sharp prose.”

“Scenes at sea are particularly strong...certain moments pack a punch...potential romance between Judah and Lee is sublimely understated...”

“...engrossing tale of a tightknit community’s strength.”

—Kirkus Reviews
catering to the needs of a host of older White (usually closeted) men (or daddies, as Trey calls them). Together, Trey and Gregory rent a derelict studio apartment and wander through Mt. Morris in Harlem, one of the few remaining gay bathhouses, where Trey finally finds some form of queer community. “Mt. Morris wasn’t only about sex,” says Trey, as he develops a close friendship with activist and social justice advocate Bayard Rustin, who attempts to politicize the young man. Rustin’s mentorship becomes critical to Trey as he organizes a strike against his negligent landlord, Fred Trump, and becomes increasingly involved in AIDS activism, volunteering at an AIDS home hospice and becoming an active member of ACT UP. A fictional memoir, the novel is divided into chapters titled after a lesson Trey learns within (“Lesson #6: Romantic Notions Are Delusions”). The chapters often conclude with an explanation of their thematic content, which, while an interesting device, is frequently too on-the-nose. Nevertheless, footnotes provide context and compelling detail for readers who are not familiar with queer history.

Delightful and fast-paced, a fascinating narrative of queer activism during the AIDS epidemic.

THE RESEMBLANCE
Nossett, Lauren
Flatiron Books (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-250-84324-1

A homicide detective uncovers dark secrets about a local fraternity as she investigates a hit-and-run.

Detective Marlitt Kaplan happens to be on the University of Georgia campus when an unknown driver hits and kills a student. The victim, Jay Kemp, is a member of the Kappa Phi Omicron fraternity. While his fellow Kap-Os insist that they are shocked and grief-stricken, Marlitt is convinced they have something to hide. The ensuing story is part police procedural, part general critique of the Greek system. Marlitt has a long-standing grudge against fraternities and all the avoidable tragedies that happen under their watch. “I collect them,” Marlitt says early on, “these horrendously sad and never-ending accounts all across the nation, pile them up in my memory, so I can bury the thing at its core.” Her obsession keeps the investigation, and the plot, progressing at a fair clip even as her fellow police begin to discourage her persistence. This obsession can also, however, veer into didacticism. She has such a vendetta against the frat brothers, for example—from the “golden boy” chapter president, Tripp Holmes, to Michael Williams, the charming but ruthless son of the university’s president—that her narration tends to flatten them into caricatures. Still, suspense-filled scenes, like an ill-conceived undercover mission at a “Hawaiian nights” party, keep the pages turning, and there are many gripping questions that will keep readers glued to the page. Why did the driver look exactly like the victim? And why was he driving the victim’s car? Why, during the novel’s shocking midway point, does Marlitt wake in the night screaming a language she doesn’t speak? The answers are genuinely surprising, if at times unsatisfying. Overall, it’s a fun read with some surprising twists that will keep readers on their toes.

A competent detective thriller with an overly moralizing narrator.

WE ARE THE LIGHT
Quick, Matthew
Avid Reader Press (256 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-668005-42-2


Lucas Goodgame is dealing with a lot. He’s a high school counselor in Majestic, Pennsylvania, who survived a mass shooting in the town’s historic theater. His wife, Darcy, was killed and has been transformed into an angel; his analyst, whose own wife
was killed in the shooting, won't answer his desperate letters; all there's a kid camped in his yard who might hold the key to helping the town heal. Quick became a household name thanks to his debut novel and the 2012 Oscar-winning movie adaptation, and he's conjured a similar feeling of community and tender family affection here, with plenty of people helping Lucas cope with the unimaginable. That includes Jill, owner of the local coffee shop and his late wife's best friend. Jill feeds and cares for Lucas, and it's clear she wants more from him, but he's not ready—not when the angelic Darcy is visiting him at night, wrapping her wings around him and leaving feathers on his bed in the morning. But it's Eli, the shooter's younger brother, who has the greatest impact on Lucas' recovery. Eli is struggling with guilt—he saw his brother's behavior take a sinister turn and didn't warn anyone—and he pitches a tent behind his former counselor's house. Soon, inspired by Darcy's enigmatic words—"the boy is the way forward"—Lucas realizes that helping Eli make a monster movie for his senior class project just might help the teen, the traumatized survivors, and the town find meaning in the senseless deaths of 17 of its citizens. The novel is timely in light of what's taking place in the U.S. now, and some characters turn their grief into political activism, but that's not Quick's focus. He doesn't delve into issues like gun control or the shooter's motivations, which makes the story feel superficial at times. Instead, his focus is on Lucas' healing journey, the people who love him (we should all be so lucky), and how the mind makes "valiant attempts to protect us" until we're ready to deal with our losses. When it comes to facing tragedy and trauma, Quick's novel shows us that it definitely takes a village to heal and move on.

MURDER IN WESTMINSTER
Riley, Vanessa
Kensington (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-4967-3866-0

A mixed-race woman investigates murder while stoking the stalled abolition movement in this 1806 London–set series launch.

Twenty-two-year-old Abigail Carrington Monroe—the half-Jamaican, half-Scottish Baroness of Worthing—should be making plans to celebrate her second wedding anniversary with James Monroe, renowned explorer and Baron of Worthing. Instead, her much older husband is off on a high seas adventure while Abbie is stuck at home in Westminster, feuding with naval hero Stapleton Henderson, her ill-tempered neighbor. Abbie and Stapleton are bickering in Abbie's yard one night when Abbie's terrier gets loose. The dog leads the duo to the strangled corpse of Stapleton's estranged, flagrantly adulterous wife, which is slumped on Abbie's property and strung to Stapleton's partially constructed fence. The magistrate questions their earlier whereabouts, causing Abbie to panic: She left the theater early to attend a secret meeting of abolitionists. To her surprise, however, Stapleton alibis them both, swearing they watched the entirety of Ali Baba from their respective boxes, which are in sight of each other. This lie all but convinces Abigail of Stapleton's guilt, but she can't call him out without causing problems for herself. Further, who would believe a young female "Blackamoor" over a White man? Abbie resolves to uncover the truth even if she must feign cooperation with Stapleton to do so. Riley's inclusive, keenly drawn cast shines a light on the role of people of color in the Regency era. Abbie's backstory is overly complicated, and a plot thread involving her alleged second sight feels superfluous, but snappy dialogue, abundant intrigue, and Abbie and Stapleton's increasingly flirtatious antagonism keep the tension high and the narrative drive strong.

Smart, fun, and full of moxie.
A bookstore's closing takes on deeper meaning in the latest novel by Galician author Rivas.

Rivas’ scrupulous prose eddies around a host of silences: silences inherent in a family, a nation, and a man hoping to contend with his memories. Vicenzo Fontana is the bookstore owner and intrepid narrator—the reader moves rapidly and arbitrarily through time via his bibliographic mind, which seems to be searching for an understanding it never fully achieves. We meet Fontana as he’s preparing to close down his store, then follow him backward: into childhood and into Spanish history, which looms over the novel like a fog. Fontana’s family bookstore acts as one of history’s quiet stages; most memorably, it serves as a sanctuary for a young woman as she hides from the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance. Fontana, who as a youth spent time in an iron lung due to polio, can’t help but reach toward his shelves again and again, searching for the literature that might settle his heart and keep the many brutalities of the larger world at bay. Fontana’s father (nicknamed Polytropos) and uncle Eliseo are significant figures in the narrative, men whose lives shape Fontana’s understanding of the world. Silence and emptiness could be considered two other central characters, the way they work and their ever present nature in any place where freedom is not total. The book itself feels constantly aware of language’s many shortcomings as well as its necessity. Rivas’ sentences are aflame with philosophy and well-wrought beauty; beauty that, at times, supersedes the narrative itself. Rogers’ translation from the original Galician is lucid and musical. Some readers might feel unsatisfied with the novel’s lack of cohesion, but it might also make them consider what undergirds the expectation of cohesion in a text.

As beautifully incongruous as a human mind.

Ten years after a sinister government collapsed, a young woman searches for a girl who was kidnapped by that regime.

For most people, life under the Delegation meant oppressive surveillance by the Insight, a mandatory biotech implant that monitored their every move and rewarded or punished them based on a strict code of conduct. But Sonya Kantor, whose father was an important Delegation official, reveled in perfecting her behavior based on the Delegation’s requirements, even posing for a propaganda poster. When the Delegation is replaced by the Triumverate, a supposedly humane new democracy, Sonya and all the other remaining Delegation loyalists are locked away in the Aperture—a walled-off section of the city where people aren’t locked in cells but don’t have much in the way of creature comforts, either. One day, 10 years after the uprising, an old friend comes to find Sonya and offers her a deal from the Triumverate: If she can find a girl who was kidnapped by the Delegation, she’ll be allowed to move out of the Aperture and rejoin society. One could imagine a dystopian novel set during the uprising that toppled the Delegation in which someone like Sonya is a villain, righteously imprisoned when a new government is formed. But Roth isn’t interested in easy victories or happily-ever-afters. Instead, Sonya grapples with the inevitable failure of even the most optimistic governments, the risk that exciting and helpful new technologies can be used for evil, and the responsibility she still bears for who she was and what she did during the Delegation’s heyday. The novel manages to be an elegant social commentary without resorting to preaching, and even the most cynical readers will be as
surprised as Sonya when they reach Roth's big reveals about the depths of the Delegation's depravity.

A wonderfully complex and nuanced book, perfect for readers who grew up on dystopian YA.

**A TOUCH OF MOONLIGHT**

_Santos, Yaffa S._

Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)

$17.00 paper | Oct. 25, 2022

978-0-06-315-903-7

A Dominican American woman tries to navigate a career, romance, and self-love while living with a supernatural ancestral secret.

Larimar Cintrón is just like any other “totally average” 34-year-old. She loves ska music, and she’s gunning for a promotion at Beacon Foods, the corporate bakery chain where she works. Yet there’s one small factor that sets the Cintrón women apart from other residents of Roselle Park, New Jersey—on the full moon, they transform into ciguapas. Straight out of Dominican folklore, Larimar, her mother, and grandmother bear backward-facing feet, long, straight hair, and impossible speed. In order to maintain a “normal” life, Larimar opts for floor-length skirts and minimal dating, especially since her last boyfriend ran away screaming after witnessing her transformation. But when her best friend, Brynne, introduces Larimar to the gentle-hearted Army vet Raymond Antonio Concepción, Larimar immediately feels weak in the knees. Ray owns a local mom-and-pop bakery called Borrachitos, which is slightly problematic given that Larimar is supposed to be breaking ground on a new Beacon location across from his small business. As Larimar begins to fall for Ray, she concocts a lie about her job in order to find more time to save his bakery and still score her promotion. However, Larimar soon realizes that in more ways than one, she may never be able to fully reveal her true self. Santos’ second novel offers a unique spin on a Dominican myth, presenting a ciguapa as someone who longs for love and security rather than a “siren-like” creature who lures men to their deaths. Although the concept of a modern-day ciguapa is intriguing, Santos’ story lacks excitement and often spends too much time on mundane details such as descriptions of clothing, food orders, or Larimar’s visit to South Jersey Stone and Tile. Pages of cupcake recipes also feel unnecessary, and at times Larimar’s work troubles and the semisupernatural ciguapa storyline feel like two disconnected novels.

A promising novel that’s hampered by banal details.

---

**THE WILD HUNT**

_Seckel, Emma_

Tin House (351 pp.)

$16.95 paper | Aug. 2, 2022

978-1-953534-22-4

Scottish islanders are haunted by repressed memories of sons recently lost in World War II, while a flock of birds grows ever more powerful.

When Leigh Welles gets the phone call that her father has been in a fatal accident, she returns to her Scottish island home from the mainland. Leigh’s homecoming coincides with the annual Oct. 1 return of the crows, who always fly in threes and whom the locals call sluagh—harbingers of death: “They come every October….They look like crows but they carry the dead’s souls.” On the night of a local ritual where town elders present offerings of earth to a bonfire, Hugo McClare grabs one of the sluagh and kills it, much to the horror of the onlookers. That same night, Hugo goes missing.

“An emotionally astute portrayal of the terrible wages of war.”

**KIRKUS REVIEWS**

_in this reflection on the risks that still exist for gay soldiers in the contemporary military, author K.A. KRON, a nominee for both the Golden Crown Literary and Lambda Literary awards, has written a compelling military thriller._

Army Psychiatrist Jennifer Stevens struggles to find answers when her ex-husband, a medic, dies violently in front of her after a disastrous rescue mission.

As she defends her decision to have returned him to active duty, Jennifer begins investigating the circumstances of Kevin’s death. Her own combat trauma becomes an obstacle, as she is put on trial for what happened to her ex-husband. And though she has the support of her wife and daughter, her life in the service may soon end in disaster and prison if she can’t prove her innocence.
Leigh and Iain MacTavish, a young widower and World War II fighter pilot, desperately search for Hugo long after everyone else has given up. All the while the pair are battling their own demons. Leigh is plagued by memories of her absentminded mother and struggles with her tempestuous relationship with her brother who lives on the mainland. Iain is drowning under the weight of the guilt of being one of the only local boys to come home from the war when so many did not, including Hugo’s older brother, Matthew. As the crows become increasingly threatening and destructive, Hugo’s enigmatic disappearance brings a host of new questions as well as tender moments of connection. Treading deftly into the worlds of folklore and magical realism, Seckel keenly captures a tone that echoes the eerie moor scenery of the island: hazy, haunting, and teeming with misgivings.

**A foreboding mystery with surprising glimmers of hope.**

---

**PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN WOMAN**

*Silva, Daniel*

Harper (448 pp.)

$20.99 | July 19, 2022

978-0-06-283485-0

Silva’s latest Gabriel Allon novel is a bit of a throwback—in the best possible way.

One-time assassin and legendary spy-master Gabriel Allon has finally retired. After saying farewell to his friends and colleagues in Israel, he moves with his wife, Chiara, and their two young children to a piano nobile overlooking Venice’s Grand Canal. His plan is to return to the workshop where he learned to restore paintings as an employee—but only after he spends several weeks recovering from the bullet wound that left him dead for several minutes in *The Cellist* (2021). Of course, no one expects Gabriel to entirely withdraw from the field, and, sure enough, a call from his friend and occasional asset Julian Isherwood sends him racing around the globe on the trail of art forgers who are willing to kill to protect their extremely lucrative enterprise. Silva provides plenty of thrills and, as usual, offers a glimpse into the lifestyles of the outrageously wealthy. In the early books in this series, it was Gabriel’s work as an art restorer that set him apart from other action heroes, and his return to that world is the most rewarding part of this installment. It is true that, at this point in his storied career, Gabriel has become a nearly mythical figure. And Silva is counting on a lot of love—and willing suspension of disbelief—when Gabriel whips up four old master canvases that fool the world’s leading art experts as a lure for the syndicate selling fake paintings. That said, as Silva explains in an author’s note, the art market is rife with secrecy, subterfuge, and wishful thinking, in no small part because it is almost entirely unregulated. And, if anyone can crank out a Titian, a Tintoretto, a Gentileschi, and a Veronese in a matter of days, it’s Gabriel Allon. The author’s long-time fans may breathe a sigh of relief that this entry is relatively free of politics and the pandemic is nowhere in sight.

**A smart summer escape.**

---

**LADY JOKER, VOLUME 2**

*Takamura, Kaoru*

Trans. by Marie Iida & Allison Markin Powell

Soho Crime (600 pp.)

$28.95 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-64129-0-296

The second half of Takamura’s compelling crime epic—following *Lady Joker, Volume 1* (2021)—plumbs the connections between corporate malfeasance and social immorality.

There’s no attempt to pretend that Volume 2 stands alone. The opening section—Part 4, “The Threat”—opens in medias res during the summer of 1995. Chief Inspector of First Investigation Hidetsugu Kanzaki has just briefed the press about a poison gas attack on the subway perpetrated by a religious cult and evasively parried questions about Lady Joker, the crime group that had earlier kidnapped and released Kyosuke Shiroyama, president and CEO of the unscrupulous Hinode Beer. Lady Joker is now demanding 600 million yen in used bills from Shiroyama. Takamura’s explosive novel, based on actual events that are well known in Japan, persuasively depicts corruption at the heart of Japanese society in the late 20th century. The ethical center isn’t holding. Volume 1 highlighted the backstories of the five aggrieved men at the core of the kidnapping; Volume 2 also follows the police and the press corps, both closely monitoring Lady Joker. An extensive “Dramatis Personae” is invaluable in keeping track of the large cast of characters. At the center is a moral reckoning for Shiroyama, who’s forced to reevaluate his life and corporate tenure, eventually seeing the synergy in the personal, social, and political. Like Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*, Takamura’s sprawling saga situates its crime plot in the context of corruption. As it draws to a close, courtesy of multiple murders, abductions, fraud, blackmail, suicides, upheaval within law enforcement, and the inevitable coverup, city desk reporter Haruisha Kubo, who’s documented it all on his Tokyo police beat, falls violently ill from this virus of societal decay.

**A complex work of stunning breadth and depth by a master of the genre.**

---

**SUSPECT**

*Turow, Scott*

Grand Central Publishing (448 pp.)

$29.00 | Sept. 20, 2022

978-1-5-387-0632-9

A private eye aids a police chief whose knickers may be in a twist.

In Highland Isle, Chief Lucia “Lucy” Gomez is accused of forcing a subordinate to have sex with her in exchange for his promotion to sergeant before his retirement. Unfortunately for the chief, there is a lurid photograph. But wait, she says, it must be Photoshopped. That can’t
be her. Well, we’ll see about that. She’s a “good police chief,” an attorney says. “But power corrupts. And she’s turned her offi-
cers into her pool boys.” If a civil hearing determines that she’s
been “bringing home guys who were under [her] command,”
those knickers are well and truly twisted. Doing research on her
behalf is the narrator, Clarice “Pinky” Granum, a 33-year-old ace investigator who works for the chief’s lawyer, Rik Dudek.

Gomez is a strong character, but she’s nothing like Pinky, the
granddaughter of Sandy Stern, who has been a recurring charac-
ter in Turow’s novels. Sandy is now in his mid-80s and in assisted
living, where Pinky comes to visit. Pinky is a bisexual “inked-up chick” with a nail in her nose, and her ex-girlfriend is a “lum-
bersexual” cop named Tonya. Sandy is cool with all that as long
as Pinky takes out the nail and wears long sleeves when neces-
sary. She’s very athletic, was once a police cadet, and is happy
to be a “queerdo.” And wouldn’t you know; she lives next door
to a guy she calls The Weird One, or TWO, who she becomes
convinced is a spy. Anyway, she’s skeptical about the chief forc-
ing sex on a guy. “She’s a woman, Boss. Men still hate it when a
female does what she wants with her body. These dudes’ stories
make no sense.” And then a witness named Blanco dies, raising
the stakes. Did the chief have him whacked? Or maybe it was
TWO, who is a Hmong guy named Koob, or a superrich ex-cop
real estate mogul nicknamed the Ritz. Pinky and her colorful
cohorts are the book’s main appeal, but readers wanting gun-
play won’t be disappointed.

Turow clearly had fun writing this one, and his fans will
have fun reading it.

THE SILVERBERG BUSINESS
Wexler, Robert Freeman
Small Beer Press (120 pp.)
$17.00 paper  |  Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-61873-201-9

In 1888, a Jewish PI from Chicago
who goes by the name Shannon is hired
to find Nathan Silverberg, a missing
developer behind the creation of a Texas
colony for Romanian Jewish refugees.

Shannon quickly discovers that Sil-
verberg was swindled out of his money and murdered, but track-
ing down the killers, including a gambler with white hair and
red eyes named Stephens, proves an epic undertaking. With his
special onyx ring, Stephens sends the detective off into a bizarro
alternate world where people with skull heads and “tonguelets”
flit around and play epic games of poker. Shannon, who gets hit
in the head a lot, has difficulty enough separating dreams from
reality, but he’s hardly prepared for the scenarios that unfold
in this dimension. They include his seduction by a scantily
clad skullhead called “the saloon girl.” Ultimately, his success
at poker will determine not only his own survival, but also that
of people in the “actual” world faced with sandstorms “power-
ful enough to sink a civilization.” As in real life, the book’s set-
ting of Indianola was twice destroyed by hurricanes in the late
1800s. Other aspects of the book are drawn from Texas history
by Wexler, a relaxed surrealist who is less interested in big, scary
effects than subtle underpinnings and intellectual concepts—
“determinism in modern thought,” for example. Ultimately, the
Jewish component is underdeveloped and Wexler’s “inside” nar-
native game can bog down for stretches. But any book with a
guitar-playing sheriff, an ex-con named Slack-Face Jake, and a
giant in a bowler hat is worth a spin.

A weird but oddly convincing creature feature.
DEAD-END MEMORIES
Yoshimoto, Banana
Trans. by Asa Yoneda
Counterpoint (240 pp.)
$26.00 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-64009-369-0

A new short story collection from one of Japan’s most beloved authors features five women seeking peace in the face of uncertainty.

All the main characters in Yoshimoto’s newest volume are similar enough that you might find them all at the same neighborhood cafe, dreamily gazing out a window and contemplating the nature of fate or the vastness of the universe. They are young Japanese women, all professionals, who are often forced, by some precipitating event, to reckon with heartache in their pasts or worry in their presents. In the long opening story, “House of Ghosts,” two college friends try to define their relationship over a shared love of food and the presence of two ghosts in the apartment where they gather together. In “‘Mama!’” Matsuoka, an editor, is the victim of a shocking criminal act at her workplace and in the aftermath must deal with unpleasant childhood memories. In “Tomo-chan’s Happiness,” the titular main character gathers her courage to forge a connection with a co-worker in spite of past traumas that have rendered her passive. The shortest story, “Not Warm at All,” features the narrator, a writer, contemplating the difficult life of her first childhood best friend and what her loss taught her about true humanity. One of the things that separates Yoshimoto from many contemporary writers is her refusal to linger on her characters’ dark nights of the soul: All her protagonists are ultimately changed irrevocably by kindnesses—from others, from the natural world, from themselves—that leads them on paths toward the light. This, coupled with Yoshimoto’s gentle prose (translated here by Yoneda), makes the collection perfect for readers looking for stories that will leave a sweet taste in their mouths without sacrificing depth or intelligence.

An uncommonly warmhearted set of tales.

KILL THEM WITH CANVAS
Abbott, Bailee
Crooked Lane (320 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-63910-104-7

The Abbington sisters continue to display a talent for art and murder in western New York.

Chloe and Izzie have opened a paint party shop in their hometown of Whisper Cove, on beautiful Chautauqua Lake, and they’ve run several successful workshops there. Unfortunately, the one they’re running for their aunt Constance, president of the local chapter of the Chautauqua Sisterhood, goes awry with the announcement by Viola Finnwinkle, director of the Sisterhood’s northern district, that Constance’s chapter is being merged with two others; a heated discussion follows. When Viola’s body is soon found floating near the ferry dock, Constance is the No. 1 suspect. Flushed with their success in solving a previous murder, the sisters set out to prove her innocence even though it means butting heads with the attractive Det. Hunter Barrett, who may have a romantic interest in Chloe. The amatory side of her life becomes more complicated when she calls on a once-and-maybe-future boyfriend, a top-notch criminal attorney, to represent her aunt, who refuses to account for her time between leaving the painting class and arriving home. Constance’s self-involved daughter, Spencer, who turns up looking for money for a new investment, clearly has her eye on the family trust fund and thinks getting her mother declared unfit will be good for both of them. Miraculously, Constance avoids arrest, but if she’s to stay out of jail, the sisters need to find some other suspects pronto.

A middling mystery with pleasant characters and a light romantic touch.

THE SHADOW MURDERS
Adler-Olsen, Jussi
Trans. by William Frost
Dutton (448 pp.)
$24.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5247-4258-4

Department Q, the cold case division of the Copenhagen Police, races to prevent the latest in a series of vigilante killings of seriously bad people.

Have you ever watched your fellow citizens casually flout laws designed for the common good and wished you could take revenge? Someone’s assembled a crack team of female avengers whose mission is to execute “due diligence” on your behalf. Reading about the recent suicide of Maja
Petersen reminds Chief of Homicide Marcus Jacobsen of the 1988 explosion that leveled Ove Wilder’s Auto, a repair shop that routinely cheated its unwitting clients, and killed Maja’s son, Max—not to mention the owner and three employees who were discovered inside. The body count may seem high, but it’s only the beginning, for news that a sharp-eyed technician spotted a pile of table salt outside the shop’s entrance gate all those years ago moves Chief Inspector Carl Morck to ask Rose Knudsen to search the records for other salt-seasoned killings no one has thought to link together, and his team ultimately unearths a total of 16 candidates, one every other year, each of them perpetrated on the birthday of a notorious dictator. As the anniversary of Mao Zedong’s birth looms on Dec. 26, the members of Department Q struggle to identify not only potential suspects, but potential victims, unaware that exploitative reality TV show producer Maurits van Bierbek has already been kidnapped and hidden in a secret lair in preparation for the big day. Just to make matters more interesting, newly discovered evidence suddenly implicates Carl in a 15-year-old drug case, and Jacobsen himself leads the charge for his arrest.

Proof that there are indeed tsunamis in Denmark.

DASHING THROUGH THE SNOWBIRDS
Andrews, Donna
Minotaur (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-2507-6022-7

The run-up to Meg Langslow’s latest holiday celebration is complicated by a houseguest who behaves badly, a series of stalkers on her tail, and the fear that Caerphilly, Virginia, won’t have a white Christmas.

While Mutant Wizards, the tech firm founded by Meg’s brother, Rob, is working on the software they’re supplying AcerGen, a genealogy-tracing firm founded by Gordon Meredith, several AcerGeners have taken up residence in the house Meg already shares with her husband, drama professor Michael Waterston, their twin sons, and what seems like every relative they’ve ever known—though it’s hard to imagine anyone being surprised when Ian, unwittingly one-upping Mutant Wizards’ decision to sever its ties with AcerGen, gets fatally attacked on the newly opened ice rink with a hockey stick containing the fingerprints of Cyrus Runk. The few and obvious suspects have to fight for attention with the regulars who vastly outnumber them. Despite the avian title, the seasonal guest of honor is the very pregnant ginger tabby cat who’s taken up residence in a local church’s creche.

Andrews’ sturdy formula shows distinct signs of wear. Merry Christmas anyway.

A DOOMFUL OF SUGAR
Bruns, Catherine
Poisoned Pen (336 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-72825-393-0

The owner of a Vermont maple farm seeks her father’s killer.

Leila Khoury’s life isn’t going exactly according to plan. Her arranged marriage to fellow Lebanese American Mark Salem was called off by the groom a month before the wedding. Her move to Florida, where she’d hoped to find comfort teaching a class full of bright, eager Orlando kindergarteners, was a bust: The job was filled before she arrived, leaving her only a position teaching mouthy, privileged ninth graders at a private school. A brief trip home following her father’s murder provides an unexpected twist. Instead of the anticipated 50-50 division of her father’s asserts between Leila and her younger brother, Simon is left only Victor Khoury’s personal property, while Leila, always her father’s favorite, is put in charge of Sappy Endings, the farm’s cafe. Jessica Fowler, who runs the farm’s cafe, seems helpful enough, but Noah Rivers is another story. Apart from Jessica, Noah is the farm’s sole employee, handling the tapping, sugaring, and sales. He’d hoped to buy the business, but Victor refused to sell. Now Noah’s set on showing Leila that he’s much better positioned than she is to run the business. To hell with the Sunshine State: Leila needs to stay on and prove to the handsome jack-of-all-trades that she knows as much about Sappy Endings as he does. She also needs to do a little sleuthing to find out who killed her much-loved and respected dad.

Follows the formula to a T. The farm’s name says it all.

THE GHOST AND THE STOLEN TEARS
Coyle, Cleo
Berkley (288 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-425255-48-3

A ghostly gumshoe and a bookshop owner team up to solve crimes across time.

After her husband died, 30-something Penny Thornton-McClure returned to her Rhode Island hometown, taking over her family’s failing bookstore and making a success of it. Back in the 1940s, Jack Shepard was a tough private eye who was killed...
in the store. Now he appears to Penny, and they've had some fine times together. Norma Stanton, who works part time in the bookstore, is a bit of a puzzle, a rover who travels the country in a van taking odd jobs and moving on. She also works part time as a housekeeper at a local inn, where she's accused of stealing a valuable diamond necklace and earrings from a visiting actress who'd inherited them from an aunt. Then Norma vanishes. Jack warns Penny that the distinctive gems are known as the Tears of Valentino and that they bring murder and mayhem in their wake. He'd been searching for them himself before he died. No one in town can believe that Norma's guilty, but in her absence, the state police are brought in to investigate. Penny and Jack time travel in her dreams between past and present, where the necklace is a motive for murder. Even with the help of Jack's contacts in the past and Penny's present-day friends, they don't find it easy or safe to find the gems or the killer.

Engaging characters, historical backgrounds, and plenty of red herrings add up to a gem of a story.

THE MEDICI MURDERS
Hewson, David
Severn House (288 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-4483-0656-5

An English archivist retired to Venice gets sucked into a 500-year-old murder case.

TV historian Sir Marmaduke Godolphin, who hasn't had a hit series in years, doesn't think 75 is too old for a comeback. So he leaps at the news that Grigor Wolff, an antiquarian who's followed him appreciatively for years, has died and left him the Wolff Bequest, 13 trunks of papers that may throw dazzling new light on the assassinations of Duke Alessandro de' Medici in 1537 and Lorenzino de’ Medici, the cousin long presumed to be his killer, 11 years later. Puffed up with anticipatory pride, Godolphin supplements the family circle including his wife, producer and former student, Lady Felicity, and his son, Jolyon, by gathering once more the Gilded Circle of academics he taught at Cambridge—Caroline Fitzroy, Bernard Hauptmann, and George Bourne—and he commissions Luca Volpetti of the State Archives and his recently widowed friend Arnold Clover to sift through the Wolff Bequest looking for two telltale papers that implicate Lodovico Buonarroti, better known as Michelangelo, in the killings. Are the letters describing the dagger the artist fashioned as a murder weapon and his participation in one of the murders genuine? Are they clever forgeries designed to fool modern readers? Or are they even more devious forgeries designed to be seen through? Before he can confront these questions, Godolphin himself is killed, leaving Clover and Capitano Valentina Fabbri to get to the bottom of a very deep well that promises surprising confessions about crimes long past and present.

Not for dilettantes, but serious history buffs are in for a treat.

MURDER AFTER CHRISTMAS
Latimer, Rupert
Poisoned Pen (352 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-72826-121-8

This pseudonymous novel from 1944, one of the most obscure entries in the British Library Crime Classics, is also one of the most rewarding.

Wartime needs have turned Sir Wiloughby Keene-Cotton out of his hotel, and Rhoda Redpath, his stepdaughter by his late wife, thinks it's too dangerous for him to join his ailing current wife, Lady Josephine, in London. So she talks her husband, Frank, into inviting him to their country home, Four Corners, for the holiday; Frank's aunt, Paulina Redpath, has already come to live with them, and they invite lots of other people to round out the party. Rhoda and Frank's son, John, and his intended, Margery Dore, will stay for the duration along with Josephine's daughter, Angelina, and her husband, Puffy Freer; the neighboring Crosbies and Coulterds will stop by for a party featuring not one but two Father Christmases. His exorbitant wealth, complicated family relations, ambiguous will, and habit of confusing his wives with each other make it obvious from the get-go that Uncle Willie, as Rhoda calls him, will be murdered, but that's about all that will be obvious. Even after Willie's old friend Maj. Smythe, now Chief Constable of Blandshire, and Superintendent Culley establish that he's been fed a lethal dose of laudanum, there are riddles upon riddles about how it got into him (medicine? chocolates? mince pies?) and how his body came to end up outdoors next to a ruined snowman. Latimer, a pen name for Algernon Victor Mills (1905-1953), supplies cheerfully calculating relatives, decorously brutal dialogue, and a fiendishly intricate set of Chinese boxes before the surprising reveal.

No, they don't make them like this anymore—so golden-age fans should welcome this rediscovery with open arms.

LIVE AND LET GRIND
Lush, Tara
Crooked Lane (320 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-39010-112-2

A Florida coffee shop manager investigates the murder of her neighbor.

Things are going pretty well between Lana Lewis and her boyfriend. When she's not supervising the baristas at Perkatory, where residents of Devil's Beach go for a quick caffeine fix, she and Police Chief Noah Garcia spend many pleasant evenings together, sharing tasty meals and watching fabulous Gulf Coast sunsets. Lana even has hopes that Noah will bring her to Tampa to meet the rest of his Cuban relatives. So naturally something has to mess up all this boring comity. In
“A bibliocentric mystery with a spooky touch.”

**THE PLOT AND THE PENDULUM**

McKinlay, Jenn
Berkeley (304 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-593-10180-3

An ice-cold case suddenly heats up. Lindsey Norris, the director of the Briar Creek Public Library, has a bit of a reputation as a sleuth. But when the notorious William Dorchester asks to see her, she never imagines it will lead to a murder investigation. Before she meets him, Lindsey’s friends at the library give her a short history of his involvement in the 1989 case of the runaway bride. Dorchester himself tells her that because his mother’s health is failing, he plans to sell her mansion to finance her assisted care. In addition to alienating his young wife, Honey, and wanting to donate all their books to the library: about 12,000 volumes, some of them very valuable. Since Dorchester’s in a hurry to return to his home in Florida, Lindsey quickly pulls together a group of volunteers to pack and remove the books. In the meantime, she learns more about the disappearance of Grace Little, whom Dorchester had once sought to marry until his mother forbade it. Instead, Grace married Tim Little, who remarried and became a sterling citizen of the town. The man-wanted to rule Erica out as his prime suspect; he wants her to stop trying to prove her bestie’s innocence. After the standard behind-the-scenes sleuthing, sly confrontations with witnesses, and requisite acts of mayhem, Lana succeeds in doing just that.

Romance spices up an otherwise tepid whodunit.

---

**MR CAMPION’S MOSAIC**

Ripley, Mike
Severn House (256 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-7278-5098-0

Albert Campion’s speech commemorating the life of (fictional) mystery writer Evadne Childe, who died seven years ago in 1965, rapidly immerses him in multiple puzzles that have outlived her. Though the only film based on any of Childe’s golden-age detective stories, *The Mosaic*, bombed in 1952, the BBC is working on a new TV version. But the road to remaking it is strewn with difficulties. Location scout Don Chapman has come down with food poisoning, and actor Peyton Spruce, who starred in the 1952 film, has been struck by a car. Would Campion, already recruited as a last-minute speaker in place of Spruce, please look into the apparent coincidence? Of course he would, along with his longtime bagman, Magersfontein Lugg, his old friend Cmdr. Charles Luke of Scotland Yard, and his actor son, Rupert Campion, who wonders if there might be a part in the new telefilm for him. Instead of imposing order, Campion’s inquiries reveal, maybe even provoke, more chaos, from the invasion of the film shoot at a Roman ruin by The Prophetics, spiritualists looking for some sign of Childe’s ghost, to the theft of an ancient mosaic floor to the murder of entertainment attorney Tania Smith, whose marital career links otherwise wildly divergent plotlines. With so many performers on and offscreen jostling for attention, it’s a mercy that Campion, who insists, “I really do not mind staying out of the limelight,” is so self-effacing. As is the whodunit: blink and you’ll miss the deft unmasking of the guilty party.

One of Campion’s most waggish adventures, just as you’d expect when he meets all those divas.

---

**SANTA’S LITTLE YELPERS**

Rosenfelt, David
Minotaur (304 pp.)
$22.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-2508-2881-1

Andy Carpenter, that ornament of the Paterson bar, is dragged out of semi-retirement yet again by a friend’s formidable legal troubles. Before he joined the Tara Foundation, Andy’s dog-rescue organization, disbarred attorney Chris Myers served 14 months for killing Joey Bonaventura in a bar fight he was too drunk to remember. No sooner has Charlie Burgess, the star witness against Chris, admitted he was lying than he recants his admission and is found shot to death under circumstances that broadly hint that Chris killed him. Andy, of course, never wants to work, but he can’t say no to Chris. So he siccs the members of the K Team on the case. A preliminary review of the legal matters Chris
worked on before his law firm let him go produces four cases that might have motivated a double frame-up. The most promising of them is also the most puzzling: Chris’ work on behalf of the citizens of Metuska, Pennsylvania, whose properties were being seized by the local government under the rules of eminent domain. Since the city paid top dollar for the properties and seemed to make no use of them once they were confiscated, Andy can find no reason for the municipal misbehavior. It’s a good thing that his mystification redoubles his commitment to the case, because Chris needs all the help he can get. The climactic revelation, as in all of Andy’s best cases, is both head-shakingly incredible and deeply satisfying.

Not many dogs, even less about Christmas, but this holiday package still delivers the goods.

**THE STRANGER VANISHES**

Staub, Wendy Corsi
Severn House (224 pp.)
$29.99  |  Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-7278-5017-1

An innkeeper in a Spirit-filled little New York town hopes a 19th-century diary will help her find the whereabouts of a missing guest. Juneteenth marks a year since Bella Jordan came to Lily Dale with her young son, Max. The cottage community isn’t the sort of place she thought she’d end up after the sudden death of her husband, Sam, but it turns out to be the perfect spot to heal and renew herself. While most of the community is involved in the woo-woo—think clairvoyance and natural healing—Bella’s job as the local innkeeper keeps her engaged in the community without obliging her to draw on a connection to the town’s capital-S Spirit. Not that she doesn’t feel some sort of connection to Spirit, but she’s not yet ready to open herself to it. When Max spends his first night away from home at a sleepover with mischievous neighbor Jiffy, Bella’s left alone to welcome an unanticipated visitor to the inn. Lemuel is a soft-spoken Black man whom Bella implicitly trusts when she sees his gentleness with her cats, Chance and Spidey. Even though her boyfriend, local vet Drew Bailey, has discouraged Bella from opening the place to guests when she’s alone, she’s not worried when she offers Lemuel the Seaside Room for the night. But the next day, Lemuel has vanished without a trace except for the satchel he’s left behind. Worrying overnight about Lemuel’s disappearance, Bella wonders if the old diary in his bag might have clues. As Bella reads the diary, the thoughts of a young woman in the 1800s, she begins to wonder if a link to the past may provide answers about her missing guest.

While the mystery of the moment suffices, the real treat is the slow-growing development of the characters.

**S C I E N C E  F I C T I O N  &  F A N T A S Y**

**THE ATLAS PARADOX**

Blake, Olivie
Tor Books (416 pp.)
$27.99  |  Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-25-085509-1

In the second of a series of fantasy thrillers that began with *The Atlas Six* (2022), new initiates of a secret magical society confront a web of dangerous conspiracies.

Atlas Blakely, Caretaker of the Alexandrian Society, collected his latest crop of initiates with the secret intention of using their magical talents to create a wormhole into the multiverse in search of a better world. His former ally, the time traveler Ezra Fowler, believes that Atlas’ quest will destroy their current world, and in an effort to stop him, he has kidnapped one of Atlas’ prospective initiates (and Ezra’s ex-girlfriend), Libby Rhodes, trapping her 30 years in the past. Meanwhile, the initiation ritual intended to unite the remaining group has only succeeded in driving the already contentious initiates further apart. As Ezra embarks on an uneasy alliance with the Society’s rivals and a furious Libby struggles for the knowledge and resources she needs to return to her present, the initiates pursue various arcane researches, try to understand why the library archives are denying them certain books, fight among themselves, and confront a number of threats from both inside and outside the Society headquarters. Although all of this sounds thrilling (and it is), the series is still primarily concerned with the interior of the characters’ heads (a situation complicated by the presence of two telepaths and an empath). These are broken, self-obsessed people who can’t stop either ruminating over their perceived flaws or pretending they aren’t there while simultaneously being annoyed by, poking at, and/or exploiting the flaws of their compatriots. The author highlights the dangerous selfishness of these behaviors with minor character Belen Jiménez, a Filipina undergraduate whom Libby meets and takes considerable advantage of in 1989 Los Angeles. Belen believes Libby (who’s supposed to be the most moral member of the Atlas Six) is a sympathetic friend who can boost her academic career; that misapprehension brutally alters the course of Belen’s life. The success of the book hinges on whether or not the reader finds these often unlikable protagonists sympathetic in spite of themselves, or at least interesting specimens of psychological damage.

An often riveting yarn if you buy into the premise.
One bruja—a witch—takes on the underbelly of 1920s Kansas City.

Luna Alvarado leads a double life; when she visits her family's boxcar, she's Luna, half-bruja with only the gift of charm, but in the city, she's Rose Lane, reporter by day and proprietress of the speak-easy the River Rose by night. Luna's abuela has powerful earth magic, and some of that power has passed down to Luna—enough to influence men through a kiss, but nothing more, possibly because of her White father. If his blood has diluted her Mexican magic, it has also granted her the ability to pass as White, an opportunity her mother insists she seize, even if it means growing apart from her family. Luna also has ambitions of her own: She wants to manage a thriving jazz club, no husband necessary. As Luna takes chance after chance in pursuing her dreams, she becomes ever more entangled with mob factions, rich men who keep secrets, and even the Ku Klux Klan. Tense action and scheming inside and outside the bedroom are interspersed with reflections on Luna's identity and the inequities of the time that leave so many in the shadows. While the plot and characters are engaging, some dialogue is hampered by overwritten accents that, rather than establishing the setting, verge instead toward parody. Clunky voices aside, the friends and family surrounding Luna are a joy to meet—if she can find it within herself to let them in.

**Good flapper fun, if a bit rough around the edges.**

**THE GOLDEN ENCLAVES**  
Novik, Naomi  
Del Rey (432 pp.)  
$23.99 | Sept. 27, 2022  
978-0-593-15835-7

After graduating from her monster-infested high school, a young witch determined to overcome her inclinations toward dark magic finds that she alone can stave off wizarding society's collapse. After spending the last four years of her life locked up in the Scholomance—a school carved from interstitial space where mages' children go to hone their craft—Galadriel "El" Higgins returns to the real world heartbroken. Following their run through a gauntlet of monsters in a grisly graduation rite, her fake boyfriend—turned—true love, Orion, shoved her through the Scholomance's magical exit and did not follow. Fearing that Orion has been eaten by a maw-mouth—a creature that hopelessly traps its victims in a painful, never-ending dying process—El sets out to end his suffering forever. Getting back into the fallen Scholomance requires a huge supply of mana, as does killing a maw-mouth, and so El must first journey to the world's most powerful wizard enclaves in search of allies. This globe-trotting adventure quickly turns into a slog, however, as triumphs and tribulations flatten under the weight of exposition and poor pacing. Much of Novik's attention here feels severely misplaced. Rare moments of tension resolve too quickly for readers to feel their impacts, and the novel founders as El continues the info-dumping habit previously seen in *A Deadly Education* (2020) and *The Last Graduate* (2021), sucking the narrative pacing dry with long-winded explanations that touch on everything from other characters' motives to her own powers. We learn a lot about one interesting character only to have her promptly disappear from the story for good. El's two sexual encounters with a female frenemy serve no purpose in developing either the characters' individual stories or the narrative as a whole. An enemy El assures us is “an evil monster” earns her redemption with little to no explanation, and everything readers already know—from the way El memorized her friends' phone numbers to the purpose and value of mana—is bound to be reiterated again and again.

A high-concept adventure that doesn't think its readers are clever enough to get it.

**THE STARS UNDYING**  
Robin, Emery  
Orbit (528 pp.)  
$28.00 | Nov. 8, 2022  
978-0-316-39139-9

Love, politics, and immortality set against a backdrop of interstellar empire. Altagracia Cavito Patramata is out to take her sister's throne. Of course, Gracia believes the throne is hers, or ought to be—her twin sister, Arcelia, has never been pious or political enough to appear interested in becoming the Oracle of Alekso and bearing the Pearl, the supercomputer that grants the ability to hear the voice of their planet's God. But Arcelia seized the throne after their father's death, and now Gracia has no choice but to throw herself on the mercy of the commander of a staunchly anti-religious empire who's arrived on her planet chasing a rival from the empire's civil war. When the would-be queen meets the commander, the attraction is immediate, and their affair begins just as quickly. But for Gracia, the aspiring leader of a religion, to become involved with the commander of a staunchly anti-religious empire is no simple matter, and their relationship will ultimately change the fates of both their worlds. There's a grand, bloody, romantic, complicated story here, but the reader is often missing information that would elucidate the characters' goals and motivations. Gracia in particular is an interestingly tricky narrator, confessing to lies and withholding information. When the shape of the story does become clear, it's epic, posing interesting philosophical questions and including many well-drawn, complex characters. Clearer stakes from the start could
have made the opening more engaging, but ultimately, the story pays off for the patient reader.

This dense and subtle political drama will reward attentive readers with an epic tale of love and conquest.

BAD GIRL REPUTATION

Kennedy, Elle
St. Martin's Griffin (320 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-2507-9675-2

Kennedy returns to Avalon Bay as a reformed bad girl and her bad-boy ex decide if they should follow the rules or chase the rush. When former bad girl Genevieve West returns to Avalon Bay after spending a year in Charleston, she discovers that her mother is dying. Within the week, she's attending Laurie's funeral, and her plans to return to her new life are dashed when her father asks her to manage their family stone business while he sets their affairs in order. She soon realizes that not much has changed in the Bay since she left: Her friends still drunkenly party through the night, her five brothers still wreak havoc when they can, and her tattooed ex, Evan Hartley, is still as devastatingly handsome as she remembers. Years of passionate, jealous, and raucous on-and-off dating led them into more trouble than they could count—sometimes even with the law—and although it's been a year since she left town without saying goodbye, Gen knows she can't stay away from Evan for long. The problem is, Evan's hot temper and bad-boy ways, along with looming threats of arrest from Deputy Rusty Randall, threaten to disturb her carefully curated sobriety, reminding her of the real reason she bid farewell to Avalon Bay. But when Evan begins to prove that he's a changed man, Gen finds the energy between them harder and harder to resist, and she wonders whether she lost herself on the way to becoming good.

A steamy tale of first loves and second chances.

THE DUKE IN QUESTION

Howard, Amalie
Sourcebooks Casablanca (384 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-72826-263-5

A top-secret mission leads to danger and love.

Lady Bronwyn Chase may appear to be a spoiled, flirtatious heiress, but it’s a facade to hide the truth: She's traveling to Philadelphia with sensitive documents that will aid the Northern states in the American Civil War. Her haughty mother thinks Bronwyn's only aspiration should be to marry someone with wealth and a title, but Bronwyn has a "goal of helping the oppressed to lift the yoke of subjugation." When she discovers Lord Valentine Medford, the Duke of Thornbury, is also aboard the ship, her ruse becomes riskier. Not only is he a friend of her brother, but he's also a former British undercover agent. Valentine has his own secret agenda: He's looking for a rogue operative known as the Kestrel. He does not at all suspect the aggravating and all too attractive Bronwyn and is blindsided when the truth comes out. Even then, she still keeps secrets. Pursued by nefarious men from Philadelphia to Paris to London, the pair may be at odds, but that doesn’t prevent their fiery chemistry. Although an intriguing premise, the plot feels muddled and the characters aren’t developed beyond their archetypes. There are some fun action scenes of both the perilous and sexual varieties, but it fails to coalesce into a captivating whole. Howard succeeds in incorporating elements of racial prejudice and examples of allyship relevant to the modern reader into the historical story, but the core romance is humdrum.

Falls flat.

PARTNERS IN CRIME

Rai, Alisha
Avon/HarperCollins (400 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-06-321273-2

A staid accountant is swept into a night of adventure after a mysterious inheritance.

Mira Patel grew up in a family of low-level Las Vegas grifters. Desperate to leave that part of her life behind, she moved to Los Angeles at 18 and has been on a straight and narrow path ever since. Now 35, Mira is unlucky in love even though she’s a client of the most exclusive Indian matchmaker in the city. After learning of her aunt Rhea’s sudden death, Mira is shocked to discover that her aunt’s lawyer is Naveen Desai, the ex-boyfriend she unceremoniously dumped a few years earlier. Naveen has moved on since Mira, leaving his big corporate job behind to help keep his
grandfather's small law firm afloat. As part of the will, Mira receives a cryptic note and a familiar key. As she leaves his office, Mira and Naveen are kidnapped at gunpoint and transported to Las Vegas. The bad guys think Mira knows the location of a priceless diamond necklace her father stole. When Naveen and Mira escape and follow the clues from her aunt's will, they unlock an epic one-night adventure. Naveen has always been bitter about how Mira left him, but as the night goes on, he learns why she was afraid of their intense chemistry. Meanwhile, Mira learns that hiding her real self is preventing her from finding a true partner. Naveen and Mira's perfunctory romance takes a back seat to their search for the necklace. They eventually drift back into a relationship, but it feels underdeveloped compared to the high-energy escapades that drive the rest of the story.

The second-chance romance is overshadowed by a hearty dose of action and adventure.
A brief collection of essays in search of solace in a time of global upheaval.

The “bright unbearable reality” of the title comes from a translation of the Greek word *enargeia*, which poet Alice Oswald uses to describe “when gods come to earth not in disguise but as themselves.” Badkhen explores this idea in her preface, asking, “Why do we find it unbearable to acknowledge what truly is?” Via a series of ethereal scholarly essays, the author aims to find a better way to see and understand grief, especially as embodied in the world’s migrant crisis. Badkhen recounts her travels around the globe and bolsters her experiences with a dizzying wealth of literary and artistic touchstones. Hazily poetic, she constructs her essays like a collagist, in search of the untapped resonance that can be channeled when seemingly incongruous ideas are placed in proximity. In “Landscape With Icarus,” she presents facts about children seeking asylum next to vignettes about the Pied Piper, who, according to some legends, lured children into exodus. Badkhen later invokes Auden’s poem on Brueghel’s painting “Landscape With the Fall of Icarus,” a busy seaside scene in which Icarus is barely discernible, having crashed into the surf. “Where is the child, where is Icarus?” she asks. “Only the faint plunging legs twitch their last dance beneath the slim-crescent drift of feathers, and fingers grasp uselessly at a wave, and a vague splash forever rends your heart.” Another essay superimposes a trumpet player in the “pogromed neighborhood” of Greenwood, Tulsa, with tales of horns found in Tutankhamen’s tomb and the falling walls of Jericho. When these layers stack up, an ominous feeling creeps in: Could our contemporary traumas be simply the continuation of a millennia-old, ineffable trajectory? Perhaps, but Badkhen offers glimmers of hope: “Imagine the other ways in which the Anthropocene connects us: the polythreaded, shimmering veil of yearning and missing and care and love.”

A soulful, ambitious quest for a path through centuries of loss and displacement.
A noted biographer attempts to tell the story of an elusive pioneer of modern dance.

When Martha Graham (1894-1991) was growing up in Pittsburgh, her physician father encouraged her to look closely at a drop of water under a microscope. She discovered wriggles in the seemingly pure droplet. “Just remember this all your life, Martha,” he told her. “You must look for the truth,” adding, “movement never lies.” It’s unlikely he expected his daughter would pursue that truth in the nascent world of modern dance. Baldwin, who has written bios of Man Ray and William Carlos Williams, among others, covers the first five decades of Graham’s long life and career, including her “small-town origins [and] dogged quest for artistic integrity”; her early years as a member of the Denishawn dance company; her notable collaborators, from Louis Horst, her “first dedicated accompanist,” to composers like Henry Cowell and Samuel Barber; and “her tumultuous marriage and tragic romance with a young dancer, Erick Hawkins.” Baldwin astutely analyzes Graham’s major dances, among them *Primitive Mysteries*, influenced by “American Indian life and rituals,” and, most famously, Aaron Copland’s *Appalachian Spring*. The author acknowledges that Graham, “my provocative angel,” is a difficult subject. She burned letters, left behind few notebooks, and “vigorously discouraged” Don McDonagh’s 1973 bio. This book suffers as a result, with much of it devoted to backstories of other figures in Graham’s life. The narrative is at its best when Graham is in the spotlight and Baldwin shows how mercurial she could be. She was so prone to anger that she “was known to tear a pay phone from the wall or jump out of a moving cab.” The night before the opening performance of *Ceremonials* in 1932, Graham decided the girls’ costumes weren’t right, so “she ripped the garments to shreds, pinning and refitting them on the dancers while the seamstress stood by trembling and the clock ticked.” The book features a generous selection of photos.

A passionate yet patchy biography of one of the 20th century’s greatest artists.
An intriguing new history of the largest nation on Earth.

Although no longer a superpower, Russia has the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons and holds tightly to the conviction that enemies surround it. There is no shortage of histories, but this one is a useful addition to the shelves. Braithwaite, the British ambassador to Russia from 1988 to 1992, begins after 800 C.E., when Vikings from Scandinavia moved east, mixing with Slavs and warring against Persia and Byzantium. The capital was Kiev; and Kievan Rus, not a coherent state but a collection of princely domains bound by loyalty to the Grand Prince of Kiev, occupied a huge area and distanced itself from Catholic Europe. After 1200, the Mongols emerged from Asia and annihilated everything in sight. When their influence declined by 1400, numerous principalities emerged. Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Catherine the Great aggressively expanded the territory, and 18th-century Russia became a European power. The French Revolution and Napoleon traumatized its rulers, who mercilessly suppressed 19th-century reformers. By 1900, industrialization produced some prosperity, but the antediluvian autocracy refused to adapt and then made the disastrous decision to declare war on Germany in 1914. Braithwaite authoritatively describes the following century, during which very little went right, from the revolution to Stalin. At the expense of unspeakable suffering, much of it unnecessary, Stalin strengthened the Soviets enough to fend off Hitler's invasion in 1945. Victory was glorious, but the economy remained dysfunctional. As the author notes, "Russian history for the next four decades was a story of inadequate attempts to fix the system." Many Russians cheered the Soviet Union's collapse, but there followed a decade of misery before another autocrat took over. Putin's vision to regain superpower status requires winning wars. Braithwaite emphasizes that this is a risky tactic, and he warns that, despite our hopes, no one knows how his efforts will turn out.

An expert account of Russia through sympathetic—if not optimistic—eyes.
I once felt, when the world seemed entirely open, and utterly beautiful.” How, she wonders, will these changes—and changes in the world, too, including climate change and the pandemic—affect the novel she is working on now? “I want to be able to write about loneliness, humiliation, and shame, things I never would have written about before, that would have embarrassed me,” she notes. “For a long time I didn’t want to write ‘emotionally’...there has been something valuable for me in exploring the emotionless.” Cain ties her development as a writer to her engagement in zazen meditation; in stillness, she was able to listen for her voice.

An intimate recounting of a literary life.
who find Tolstoy or Melville exhausting, short novels prove that brevity can be the soul of not only wit, but also drama, mystery, and poignancy. Many of the books are well known—e.g., The Old Man and the Sea, The Great Gatsby, Charlotte’s Web, Lord of the Flies—and acknowledged as classics. Others—including Yu Miri’s Tokyo Ueno Station and Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy—deserve wider recognition. James M. Cain’s The Postman Always Rings Twice retains its wham-bam quality despite appearing in 1934, Jeanette Winterson’s Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit is as tasty as the day it was published in 1985, James Baldwin’s If Beale Street Could Talk might even mean more now than when it was first published in 1954. Davis also highlights some excellent novels from recent years—among them, Another Brooklyn by Jacqueline Woodson, The Perfect Nanny by Leïla Slimani, and Dept. of Speculation by Jenny Offill. Davis admits that there are many good novels that he did not include (he provides a supplementary list of titles in an appendix), but his love of books and reading shines through. From 1759 (Candide) to 2019 (The Nickel Boys), he’s got you covered.

An entertaining journey with a fun, knowledgeable guide.

### All That Is Wicked

A Gilded-Age Story of Murder and the Race To Decode the Criminal Mind

Dawson, Kate Winkler
Putnam (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-42006-5


By all outward appearances, Edward Rulloff (1819-1871) was highly intelligent and cultured. When he died, his enormous brain—which scientists preserved for study—earned notoriety as belonging to a killer whose gruesome exploits put him in the same league as Jack the Ripper. In her latest page-turning book of historical true crime, Dawson, the author of American Sherlock and Death Is in the Air, examines the life of this “once-lauded scholar, a nineteenth-century polymath who charmed his way to the upper echelons of intellectual society,” all while living the secret, violent life of a serial murderer. After an introductory section, the author begins in 1871, a few weeks before Rulloff’s death, which found him in jail awaiting final word on his proposed execution. Writers, scholars, and alienists (psychiatrists) fascinated with the murderer’s story came to visit him, each for different reasons. “After his past was unmasked,” writes the author, “Rulloff was tantalizing fodder for journalists—a murderer cloaked as an intellectual savant anonymously roaming the streets of 1800s Manhattan.” Journalist Ham Freeman empathized with Rulloff’s hardscrabble past and approached the killer with hopes of gaining “a career-making opportunity” for himself. Greek and Latin scholar George Sawyer sought to disprove Rulloff’s work as a philologist and reveal the killer as nothing more than a clever phony. Many experts believe Rulloff was a high-level psychopath like Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy. As Dawson chillingly demonstrates, he was remarkably skilled at manipulating people into getting what he wanted; he was able to convince many scholars, for example, that he was completely innocent of his crimes. As the author memorably portrays an unrepentant killer, she engagingly grapples with the still-unresolved question of whether psychopathic evil emerges from brain anomalies or nurture and the environment—or some combination thereof.

Another darkly compelling work from an engrossing storyteller.

### Twelve-Minute Risk Management

Failing to have a plan to address risk in your business is the equivalent of planning for your business to fail.

“...wholly recommend it for all small business owners...”
—The International Review of Books

“Ivy Walker

ISBN: 979-8-9856406-0-1

“Walker’s work delivers value from the first page, as it’s thoughtfully organized and easy to follow...A well-organized, straightforward read for small-business owners.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation, Email
ivy@ivy-walker.com * twelve-minute.com
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

For All Inquiries, Please Email marketing@austinmacauley.com
THE LION HOUSE
The Coming of a King
de Bellaigue, Christopher
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-374-27918-9

An eloquent historical investigation of a legendary ruler.
Suleyman I (the Magnificent), sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 until his death in 1566, enjoyed a long and opulent reign during a time of much turmoil in 16th-century Europe. Known to the Turks as “the law-giver,” he engaged in numerous military campaigns and expanded the borders of the empire considerably, though his ambitions in this regard were secondary to the security of the realm. De Bellaigue, a noted historian, linguist, and journalist with a background in Islamic studies and Middle East reportage, does not render a scholarly biography of Suleyman but rather a series of interwoven character studies that set him against the two greatest ministers in the formative portion of his reign: Ibrahim Pasha, who became the sultan’s intimate friend, grand vizier, and commander of his armies; and Alvise Gritti, son of the Doge of Venice, an opportunistic Christian whose Machiavellian dealings catapulted him to the No. 3 position of power in the empire. The narrative is dominated by personal relationships, shifting alliances, intrigues, ambitions, betrayals, meteoric ascents, and precipitous falls. While the author offers sumptuous detail on the vast wealth and extravagance of the “Golden Age” Ottoman court and its beneficiaries, he devotes comparatively little space to Suleyman’s notable political and judicial reforms—not to the specifics of the sultan’s patronage of the arts and culture apart from individual artisanship and grandiose display. But these would develop over time and seem almost incidental to de Bellaigue’s successful narrative approach. He is often writing as if in real time, and it is fitting that the sections of the book are called “acts,” for the writing has the quality and immediacy (if not the structure) of a Shakespearean play. The author includes a few hand-drawn maps and a section entitled “Persons of the drama,” both of which help orient readers.

A vivid, you-are-there re-creation of time and place populated with well-delineated characters.

HALF AMERICAN
The Epic Story of African Americans Fighting World War II at Home and Abroad
Delmont, Matthew F.
Viking (400 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-984880-39-0

Black Americans played crucial roles in nearly every theater of World War II, but they have been largely ignored in historical accounts. Delmont sets the record straight.

Delmont, a professor of history at Dartmouth who has written numerous books on civil rights and Black history, notes that he was surprised when his initial research revealed the number of Black men and women who served during the war: more than 1 million. Due to prejudice among White military leaders, most Black soldiers were assigned roles in construction, transport, supply, and maintenance. Even under appalling conditions, they served courageously, and the final victories in Europe and the Pacific would not have been possible without them. Once they were allowed to serve on the battlefield, they were indispensable. “The trailblazing Tuskegee Airmen, 92nd Infantry Division, Montford Point Marines, and the 761st ‘Black Panther’ Tank Battalion served bravely in combat,” writes Delmont, “and Black troops shed blood in the iconic battles at Normandy and Iwo Jima, and the Battle of the Bulge.” As the author shows in this illuminating history, military training camps were brutally segregated, and civilian Black Americans faced obstacles when applying for jobs in war factories. One reason was the belief that
military service would help fight discrimination within the U.S.,
a concept encapsulated in the “Double V” campaign promoted
by Black leaders: victory over fascism abroad and victory over
racism at home. Even after the war, little changed for the Black
community. Black veterans often found themselves ineligible
for the benefits available to their White counterparts, and even
Black men in uniform faced harassment. Delmont suggests
that the wartime contributions of Black Americans planted the
seeds for later progress, although it would be a long, difficult
path—and one not yet finished. The narrative is disturbing and
painful, but it provides important pages that have been missing
from American history.
A vital story well rendered, recounting a legacy that should
be recognized, remembered, and applauded.

TAKING BERLIN
The Bloody Race To Defeat
the Third Reich
Dugard, Martin
Dutton Caliber (400 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-593-18742-5

The author of Taking Paris returns
with a look at how World War II pro-
gressed in Europe after the D-Day
landings.

Unquestionably, the fight for the Nazi capital was an epic
confrontation and a crucial element of the ending of the war.
Yet popular historian Dugard, co-author of Bill O’Reilly's
Killing series, examines that part of the story only glancingly,
offering a brief, desultory section near the end. Instead, the
author focuses on the Allied push across Western Europe,
starting with D-Day and including the disastrous Operation
Market Garden and the Ardennes Offensive. All of these
For his latest book, *Life on the Mississippi*, the intrepid author traveled America’s great river on a flatboat

**BY ERIC LIEBETRAU**

*Rinker Buck enjoys challenging himself*. Though he spent years as a journalist for a variety of publications, from the *Berkshire Eagle* to *Life*, Buck is, above all, an adventurer. In two previous books, he recounted a coast-to-coast journey with his brother via tiny prop plane (*Flight of Passage*) and an extremely demanding trek from Missouri to Oregon in a 19th-century covered wagon pulled by three mules (*The Oregon Trail*).

In his latest book, *Life on the Mississippi: An Epic American Adventure* (Avid Reader Press, Aug. 9), the author chronicles his voyage down the Mississippi River to New Orleans in *Patience*, a 19th-century flatboat he built with the help of friends and an eccentric boat-builder. As our starred review notes, “Besides being a willing and intrepid traveler, Buck is also an able interpreter of history, and it’s clear that he’s devoured a library of Mississippiana. It all makes for an entertaining journey in the manner of William Least Heat-Moon, John McPhee, and other traveler-explainers. For armchair-travel aficionados and frontier-history buffs, it doesn’t get much better.” I spoke with the author via Zoom from his home outside of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

This book is a natural follow-up to *The Oregon Trail*. Can you discuss your motivation for taking this next adventure?

There were a number of motivations. I’m interested in the idea that we don’t always receive the true history from our teachers, our university professors, and even the writers of important popular books. Take Andrew Jackson: How could he be depicted as the man who revolutionized American politics by steering things toward the common man? He signed the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and he spent the last 10 years of his career engaging in Indian slaughter. Another motivation was that we never learned about the flatboat era in school, and it was significant. The frontier is an important idea in American culture, and while the depiction of pioneers crossing the dusty plains in wagons is fine, it’s incomplete. We were a river culture first. The frontier culture wasn’t just everybody going out on the Oregon and California trails.

I think you could write a very good book about the flatboat era, and I covered a lot of that in the historical sections of the book. I’ve always put history into my books, and the adventure itself creates a narrative spine. The process of getting there delivers you to unexpected places. There’s something about actually inhabiting a place in a way that people did in a different era that connects you to history. As I said, I could write an interesting book about the importance of the flatboat era, but maybe 20,000 or 30,000 people would read it, and it’s not as compelling as an adventure. It’s also just a part of who I am: I’ve always expanded the boundaries of normal experiences.

How did this journey compare to your overland trip in the previous book?

The Oregon Trail journey was a little bit more arduous, physically. It’s hard without refreshing river breezes, and it was almost an hour’s worth of work every day putting the
wagon back together and harnessing the mules and all that. The Mississippi River trip was more mentally and emotionally challenging because I never considered myself a boat guy, and I had to learn a lot on the job. I guess the other way to describe it is: On the Oregon Trail trip I lost 30 pounds. On the Mississippi trip, I probably gained 10 pounds, because you’re basically just sitting there. That’s not to say there weren’t challenging times—in one incident, of course, I broke my ribs—but in general, you’re sitting on a boat and cruising down a waterway.

Was it difficult to adjust to so-called “normal life” after spending so many months “enraptured by the rhythms of river life,” as you put it?
It was, but I think I’m happiest when I’m not living a practical life. I’m happy when I’m challenged. So many people told me that I couldn’t do it, that I was going to die—even my brothers were telling me. But I have a desire to escape the bounds of conventionality and social acceptance—to see what’s really out there, to find out what I’m really capable of. It was all an education. You teach yourself that the extremes of human experience you need for a trip like this are actually things that are already within you. You just have to be willing to learn and develop yourself. A lot of people comment on the bravery and adventure, but in the end, it was really about modesty and humility.

And patience, right? The name you chose for your boat turned out to be perfect.
A lot of patience. I had a lot to learn about leadership, and I made some mistakes about who I brought along with me, including one guy I should have shut down much earlier. Basically, though, I had the luck to accumulate some pretty good people, and I just let them be good. Let them use their skills and learn, if you can. You don’t have to be a micromanager in every situation. My friend Danny was obviously indispensable to the trip, very smart and useful in so many situations, but 30% of the time he was a pain in the butt. I like writing candidly about those kinds of things because it’s what real life is like for people. It sounds contradictory to say that your best friend is also your biggest pain in the ass, but I don’t think so.

Do you have a favorite or least favorite part of the river?
The most spectacular parts of the Mississippi are the stretches where you come around a bend and see no development for a hundred miles. It’s gorgeous because a lot of it is not developed right along the river. After the 1927 flood, people didn’t want to be that close to the river. Also: looking out and seeing 600,000 American white pelicans—a unique species, one of the biggest birds in the country, and totally different from the brown pelican.
Most of it is beautiful, but you also see a lot of environmental degradation, like abandoned factories and submerged barges, sandpits and gravel beds along the shore—a lot of remnants of industry. The compass would spin crazily around if you got close to shore because there were so many old transformers and engines and everything dumped in there. So that was disappointing, but in the main, it’s the spectacular beauty along the river that you remember most.

Life on the Mississippi received a starred review in the June 1, 2022, issue.

LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI
AN EPIC AMERICAN ADVENTURE

RINKER BUCK
#1 NEW YORK TIMES bestselling author of THE OREGON TRAIL
events, significant as they are, have been covered better before, whether as official history, memoir, or analytical commentary. Dugard reiterates the antagonism between Montgomery and Patton, a conflict that ran so deep it almost derailed the entire Allied effort. But this is also well-traveled territory. Dugard seeks to inject new material via colorful figures like journalist Martha Gellhorn, but her wartime adventures have already been recounted extensively—not least by her. The author also notes that there was an Allied plan to beat the Russians to Berlin with an airborne troop drop, although it never came to fruition. This is hardly a secret: There is a reference to it in Stephen Ambrose's *Band of Brothers*, among other works. One waits for Dugard to spring a surprise, in the form of new documents or a fresh perspective, but it never comes. He barely mentions the Russian army that actually took Berlin, and the eventual move by American and British forces into the western part of the city, the real start of the Cold War, receives no coverage. The postwar fate of Berlin was settled largely at the Yalta Conference, not by Patton or Montgomery. Anyone interested in more rigorous histories of this period have plenty of other options, including those of Antony Beevor, Peter Caddick-Adams, and Rick Atkinson.

*THE BLACK PERIOD*

**On Personhood, Race, and Origin**

Geter, Hafizah Augustus

Random House (448 pp.)

$27.00 | Sept. 20, 2022

978-0-593-44864-9

In this elegiac text, a Nigerian American poet pays homage to her family while considering Black origin stories. “I’d been living inside the story begotten by white America,” writes Geter, “but I’d been born into something else—*what was it*?” She names this the Black Period, in which “we were the default.” Born in Nigeria, the author grew up in Ohio and South Carolina. Having parents who “centered Blackness and art,” she explains, “meant my sister and I were reared in a world that reflected our image—a world where Blackness was a world of possibility.” Geter grapples with chronic pain and history (“that thing that white people had gotten to write, but we had to live”) and culture in the U.S., “where I had so much in common with the enemy’s face America painted—African/Black, queer, a woman, child of a Muslim mother.” The author compares herself to Atlas, the Greek Titan condemned to support the whole sky: “My body holding up the burden of a country made of myth and lies.” She qualifies the Black Period created by her parents as “one where, if not our bodies, then our minds could be free.” Organized by theme, the narrative meanders yet remains fiery. In details, the author’s poetic sensibilities dazzle: “My father thinks I am innately lucky. Even in our grieving, he’s believed me to be a queen in the land of the damned, a winning lottery ticket in a field of beggars.” Of a dream about her mother, who died suddenly when Geter was 19, she writes, “Black folks, we be. We be the whole verb of the wor(l)d.” The book contains two inserts and 50 pages of monochromatic portraits by her father, artist Tyrone Geter. These add another dimension of humanity as well as demonstrate her father’s profound influence on her life.

A resonant collage of memories, soulfulness, and elective, electrifying solidarity.
drinking
&
knowing
things

BY MICHAEL AMON


“A brash but charming and fact-filled book for increasing one’s wine knowledge.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“The Most Interesting Man in the World of Wine.”
—The Black Wine Guy Experience

“Mike brings an enormous slice of personality and cheeky, sardonic and sometimes laugh out loud humour to this work, and there is no stuffy pretentiousness you might expect from a book about wine…”
—Matt McAvoy, Author of The Black Line

“The Ernest Hemingway of the wine world…”
—Grape Encounters Radio

“…demystifies wine with a punk rock approach…”
—Pairs With Life Podcast

For All Inquiries, Please Email
mike@drinkingandknowingthings.com • drinkingandknowingthings.com
It was so dangerous, in fact, that her father forbade her from attending school, a directive she ignored until she found herself in the path of a suicide bomber while sneaking to school against her father’s orders. Despite this traumatizing experience, which also included a skull injury caused by shrapnel from the explosion, she continued to secretly attend school. She was only able to finish her schooling through a scholarship to Chandigarh, India, where, after intense study, she learned enough to return to Afghanistan and pass a rigorous examination process that resulted in her appointment as the mayor of Wardak. In that role, Ghafari diligently battled corruption until her father’s murder made her fear for her family’s safety and forced her to transfer to the defense ministry in Kabul. Soon after, the Taliban invaded, forcing Ghafari and her loved ones to flee the country. This harrowing journey plunged her into depression but also spurred her into activism. The author tells her inspiring life story with sincerity and passion, providing a nuanced and, at times, horrifying glimpse into Afghanistan’s devastating history. The last two chapters are particularly gripping, as Ghafari chronicles the physical and emotional chaos that enveloped the country after the withdrawal of American troops in 2021.

A searingly honest, profoundly courageous memoir of one fearless woman’s fight for her homeland.
for instance, that “we womenfolk today are faced with a decision: Salem or Barbie”—i.e., a stark choice between stridently asserting one’s independence or submissively appealing to others as a sexual object. The writing comes alive, however, when the author digs into the specific indignities she endured during her journey through the gauntlet of endless auditions and the merciless whims of those who orchestrated them.

A quirky tale of lessons learned from the world of acting.

EVERYTHING I NEVER DREAMED
My Life Surviving and Standing Up to Domestic Violence
Glenn, Ruth M.
Atria (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-982196-00-4

The president and CEO of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence tells the story of how she became a champion for domestic abuse survivors.

Early on in her life, Glenn learned what it meant to live with interpersonal violence. When she was a child, she writes, her father mistreated the entire family and sexually abused her. “When you’re abused within your own home,” she writes, “you are always kept off-kilter; you never know what the day will bring, or what your abuser will do from one minute to the next.”

“A heartbreaking but forthright, informative, and ultimately forward-looking cancer account.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“Lisk uses her pain to help others in this conversational, accessible memoir.”
—Zibby Owens, Moms Don’t Have Time to Read Books Podcast

“Frank, tender, real, and ultimately optimistic…”

“This isn’t just a story of surviving—it’s also a story of thriving.”
—Gina Warner, Badass Women’s Book Club

“Stunning.”
—Leslie Gray Streeter, Author of Black Widow

ISBN: 978-1735613611

FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL JENNY@JENNYLISK.COM • JENNYLISK.COM
When the author was 16, she met Cedric, another domestic abuse victim who became the father of her child. Cedric went to jail for armed robbery; when he was released, they got married, and “the physical abuse began...just weeks after the wedding.” Glenn attempted to leave only to return to Cedric, whose violence and maniacal possessiveness escalated even after she moved out. In 1992, Cedric “abducted me at gunpoint” and later shot her in the head. Yet Glenn could not make use of the resources available to her because she lived in fear that her husband was “watching my every move.” Though distressing, Cedric’s suicide not long after the shooting freed her, and though it took years to recover from the trauma, Glenn found some peace in volunteering for domestic violence organizations. That work gave her insight into the way victims needed support to heal and speak out, and she began her journey on the national level with NCADV. Interwoven with stories and statics of the thousands of other women who have suffered and sometimes died at the hands of their abusers, the book sheds light on a profoundly tragic issue while also offering hope that “we can change cultural attitudes and behaviors around domestic violence. We need education, collaboration, and infinite persistence. Domestic violence is a solvable problem, but we have to want to solve it.”

Inspiring and courageous.

A HARD KICK IN THE NUTS
What I’ve Learned From a Lifetime of Terrible Decisions
Glover, Stephen “Steve-O” with David Peisner
Hachette (272 pp.)
$22.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-306-82675-7

The Jackass star and author of Professional Idiot returns with a healthy dose of self-help advice.

“The very idea that I would be writing a book to impart my wisdom to others, that people would be coming to me—a recovering alcoholic drug addict who once willingly tried to cross a pit full of alligators on a tightrope while wearing a jockstrap—for advice about anything is clearly absurd,” writes Glover at the beginning. “Surely, if you’re looking to Steve-O for help with your life, you are well and truly fucked, right.” The guy who became famous for setting himself on fire and stapling parts of his body to other parts is remarkably blunt about his addictive personality, fear of growing older, professional jealousy, and being an “attention whore.” Glover also discusses how he has tried to balance these issues, engaging in meditation, veganism, celibacy, philanthropy, and surfing, with varying results. He also has an unorthodox love of calendars and scheduling that, like pretty much everything else in the book, he reveals in meticulous detail and with self-deprecating humor—and plenty of profanity. “My calendar is one way I manage that existential anxiety,” he writes, as he explains his color-coding system and how he wishes he could create a physical manifestation of the calendar app on his iPhone. The author’s worldview is singular and weird, but it has certainly resonated with millions of Jackass fans as well as those who made his previous book a bestseller. For them, his ideas on political polarization and economic inequality—or advice like, “Controlling how you’re feeling on a day-to-day basis is impossible, but what is actually doable is to control the way you act”—may actually connect in a way that wouldn’t work from a more conventional source.

A disarmingly direct memoir of mistakes and course corrections studded with some useful advice.
An evolutionary biologist mixes his life story with an attack on bigotry.

Graves, professor of biological sciences and the first African American to receive a doctorate in evolutionary biology, is candid about the racism he has experienced during his life. Born in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1955, he attended integrated schools in which “it seemed that all the children of African descent were assigned to the slow group.” The author praises a few teachers but is unafraid to call out those who ignored or denigrated him. Graves received a scholarship to Oberlin, but he performed poorly until his final years, when he became fascinated by evolutionary biology and buckled down. Entering an overwhelmingly White scientific discipline, he regularly heard that he had been forced on the department to meet affirmative action quotas, accusations that continued even when test scores placed him near the top. Now a leading figure in his field, Graves continues to devote much energy to encouraging Black students’ interest in science and to opposing pseudoscience, including eugenics and similar movements. “Racializing a genetic predisposition for intelligence,” he writes, “creates in persons of Eurasian descent a pride in their genetic heritage.” Such scientific racism thrived in the 19th century, but the evidence proved so spurious that it disappeared from the mainstream by the middle of the 1900s. Still, the recent rightward swing in politics in recent decades has energized these ideas; in 1994, the publication of *The Bell Curve* proved to be “a powerful tool buttressing anti-affirmative action arguments.” Along with other scientists and educators, Graves works hard to disprove these harmful—and scientifically unsound—concepts, but they refuse to go away completely. The author is inspiring in his arguments for human
equality, but readers with no background in genetics and population studies may find some chapters difficult to navigate. Convincing arguments against scientific racism from an acclaimed researcher and scholar.

**BIBLICAL**

*Rob Halford's Heavy Metal Scriptures*

*Halford, Rob*

Hachette (320 pp.)

$24.99 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-0-306-82824-9

The amiable lead singer of Judas Priest serves up a heavy metal liturgy. “You don’t go fifty years as a metal god without getting to know every last thing about what it’s like to be in a band,” writes Halford (b. 1951). To that end, he ventures commandments, parables, proscriptions, and occasional curses. The key to getting to Madison Square Garden, or, for that matter, the local pub? “When you’re starting out in a band,” he writes, “there are three things that are so crucial that you do them every single minute that you can: rehearsals, rehearsals, rehearsals.” Not that MSG is a be-all and end-all. Just getting in front of a crowd is payback enough, and thanks to the overly exuberant behavior of some fans, Judas Priest has been banned from MSG since 1984. These days, his post-gig routine involves a cup of tea rather than vodka and cocaine. Blending choice bits from his earlier memoir, *Confess*, Halford discusses the pitfalls and pleasures of life on the road. One cardinal rule: “YOU. NEVER. SHIT. ON. THE. TOUR. BUS....You don’t want to spend the morning speeding down a US freeway with your nostrils full of the drummer’s breakfast dump.” (As for drummers and bassists, so often the brunt of rock jokes, Halford counsels that they’re indispensable.) Rock is like religion in that schisms are inevitable, requiring either Spinal Tap–ish moments of free jazz or hiring some kid a third your age. The author is a grizzled—literally, sporting a “big fuck-off Gandalf beard”—veteran whose bad-boy youth is well past him. Even so, in his sermons on groupies, Halford, one of the few openly gay metal singers, allows that every now and again some young woman gropes him, which is good for a laugh. Aspiring metal gods, or even rhythm section players, will enjoy these sermons from the mic.

**AMERICAN SIRENS**

*The Incredible Story of the Black Men Who Became America's First Paramedics*

*Hazzard, Kevin*

Hachette (336 pp.)

$30.00 | Sept. 20, 2022

978-0-306-92607-5

A mostly inspiring account of the early days of American emergency services and the Black men who advanced the level of care and attention. As journalist and former paramedic Hazzard points out, until the 1970s, if someone suffered a medical crisis, a call for help brought the police or perhaps a hearse from the local mortuary. If the victim was bleeding, struggling to breath, or in cardiac arrest, the untrained attendants did nothing; their job was transportation to a hospital. Critics maintained that this “swoop and scoop” process led to thousands of preventable deaths each year. Central to reform was Peter Safar, a fiercely dedicated anesthesiologist who tried to establish an emergency ambulance service, a plan killed by police and doctor opposition. In 1967, a breakthrough arrived in the form of the Freedom House, a tiny nonprofit “with the long-term goal of fostering Black-owned businesses.” Galvanized after receiving a federal grant, Safar organized an intense, nine-month course to teach emergency procedures. Forty-four Black men joined the first class; 24 emerged in early 1968 and went to work. Hazzard recounts many dramatic rescues along with the lives of individual volunteers, often high school dropouts with difficult
past, who became skilled paramedics. Within years, cities throughout the nation established their own emergency services. Yet this is not a story with a happy ending. Peter Flaherty, the newly elected White mayor, cut the Freedom House budget and inflicted petty aggravations—e.g., forbidding ambulances from operating sirens downtown. Stubbornly uncooperative, police continued to respond to calls and, if they arrived first, carried the victims away without emergency treatment. In 1974, Flaherty announced expansion of city emergency services, but it would be run by the police. As a result, Freedom House disbanded. Faced with vigorous opposition, Flaherty agreed to hire every employee who wanted to join, but those who transferred were harassed and given subordinate positions under men with less training.

Good history and an admirable effort to document the achievements of a pioneering Black organization.

BEFORE WE WERE TRANS
A New History of Gender
Heyam, Kit
Seal Press (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-5416-0308-0

An eye-opening study of the history of gender nonconformity.

In this highly informative text, Heyam, a U.K.–based queer history activist and trans awareness trainer, tells a wide variety of pertinent stories that are often left out of the trans narrative. Many of the ideas that the author explores don’t fit cleanly inside our contemporary notions of trans identity, which is usually able to be verbally confirmed and often includes medical, social, and cultural transitions. Heyam makes the compelling argument that just because people in the past may not have had access to medical transition procedures or modern vocabulary to adequately discuss gender doesn’t mean their experiences outside the gender binary should be ignored.
“To say sex and gender are both socially constructed,” writes the author, “isn’t to say they’re not real—like other social constructs, including race, money and crime, they have material and life-changing consequences for all of us—but it is to say there’s no innate reason we have to think about them in the way we do.” The author draws from a remarkable array of historical examples, expanding the definition of what we should consider transgender history along the way. Among other eras and locales, Heyam takes us to ancient Egypt, the Edo period in Japan, and a World War II prisoner camp on the British Isles. With great sensitivity and care, they discuss the deleterious effects of European colonization over hundreds of years, the modern Western desire to separate gender and sexuality, and the intersex community. While clearly the work of a diligent historian, the text avoids feeling too dry and is a relatively accessible read. The author’s historical and topical range is impressive, and only a few of the sections are disjointed. Overall, the book will fascinate anyone interested in a subject that many readers likely misunderstand.

A capable, worthy demonstration of how the history of disrupting the gender binary is as long as human history itself.

“Farcical guide for the aspiring autocrat during a time of democratic decline... An amusing, cathartic political satire.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email cjacks5@gmail.com

“American Midnight:
The Great War, a Violent Peace, and Democracy’s Forgotten Crisis
Hochschild, Adam
Mariner Books (384 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-358-45546-2

A riveting, resonant account of the fragility of freedom in one of many shameful periods in U.S. history.”

American Midnight
The Great War, a Violent Peace, and Democracy’s Forgotten Crisis
Hochschild, Adam
Mariner Books (384 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-358-45546-2

A history of the early-20th-century assault on civil rights and those the federal government deemed un-American.
For Hochschild—the winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and Dayton Literary Peace Prize, among many other honors—one of America’s darkest periods was between 1917 and 1921. “Never was [the] raw underside of our national life more revealingly on display.” Those years, he writes, were rife with “the toxic currents of racism, nativism, Red-baiting, and contempt for the rule of law [that] have long flowed through American life”—and clearly still do today. From the country’s entry into World War I until Warren Harding became president, the federal government and law enforcement agencies joined with the civilian-staffed American Protective League and union-busting industrialists to censor newspapers and magazines; fabricate communist conspiracies; surveil and imprison conscientious objectors and labor leaders (particularly the Wobblies); harass socialists, German immigrants, pacifists, and Jews; deport foreigners without due process; and stand aside as police and vigilantes killed labor activists and destroyed Black communities and formed lynch mobs. Among numerous others, those who benefitted most politically were J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Woodrow Wilson presided over the entire toxic political and social landscape. Ultimately, writes the author, “a war supposedly fought to make the world safe for democracy became the excuse for a war against democracy at home.” Labor leaders, socialists, and anti-war activists such as Eugene Debs and Emma Goldman, along with government officials such as Sen. Robert La Follette and Secretary of Labor Louis Post, resisted but with little success. Although these threats to civil liberties were subsequently deflected, “almost all of the tensions that roiled the country during and after the First World War still linger today.” The book is exceptionally well written, impeccably organized, and filled with colorful, fully developed historical characters.

A riveting, resonant account of the fragility of freedom in one of many shameful periods in U.S. history.

**DISCIPLINE IS DESTINY**

*The Power of Self-Control*

Holiday, Ryan

Portfolio (304 pp.)

$26.00 | Sept. 27, 2022

A path to success through restraint. In the second of four proposed books on the Stoic virtues of courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom, Holiday focuses on self-discipline as crucial to achieving temperance. The author argues that controlling emotions, thoughts, and actions can benefit everyone, even those who face obstacles and hardships. Pithy chapters extol the “restraint and dedication” evidenced by a host of individuals whom Holiday admires, including Lou Gehrig (among many other high-achieving sportsmen); political figures such as Angela Merkel, George Washington, Dwight Eisenhower, Winston Churchill, and—one of Holiday’s favorites—Queen Elizabeth; writer Toni Morrison; inventor Thomas Edison; Beethoven; and leaders, military figures, and philosophers from ancient Greece. As an example of successful time management and dedication, he praises Morrison’s practice of focusing on her writing in the early-morning hours. As an example of physical self-discipline, he points to Theodore Roosevelt’s efforts to remake his weak and asthmatic body and Franklin Roosevelt’s determination to overcome the limitations of paralysis from polio. “If greatness is our aim, if we want to be productive, courageous members of society,” Holiday asserts, “we need to take care of our bodies.” Challenging one’s body might involve “seeking out discomfort,” which Holiday believes will “toughen ourselves up.” Hoping to motivate readers to make changes in their lives, he advises being neat and organized, devoting oneself to practice, managing time well, pacing oneself judiciously, and avoiding addictions—including an addiction to power. “Of all the addictions in the world,” he points out, “the most intoxicating, and the hardest to control, is ambition. Because unlike drinking, society rewards it. We look up to the successful.” Self-discipline involves “pushing through frustrations. Pushing through criticisms and loneliness. Pushing through pain.” But it
also involves self-affirmation. “It is an act of self-discipline to be kind to the self,” Holiday assures readers. “To be a good friend.”

Well-meant advice for making positive life choices.

**Young Man, Muddled**

_**A Memoir**_

Kanigel, Robert

Bancroft Press (242 pp.)

$25.95 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-61088-562-1

An account of crucial years in the author’s life.

In his sensitive debut memoir, essayist, biographer, and nonfiction writer Kanigel (b. 1946) recounts his life in the 1960s, when the Vietnam War roiled the country and he confronted his unsettled future. He had grown up in a working- and middle-class Brooklyn neighborhood with parents who valued books, education, the arts, and ideas. He was a bright student, and at his mother’s behest, he skipped third grade and, later, seventh in an accelerated program. He commuted for hours to attend academically rigorous Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan. At 16, he began college at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where most of his classmates “were careerist, conventional, and hard-working, as was I.” As the author remembers, his future seemed ordained: He would find a good engineering job, marry, have children, buy a house, and settle down to a conventional life. His first job was designing bullets, “a new, more destructive kind intended to tear through the sides of Russian tanks, destroy them, and kill everyone inside.” His next job had less lethal implications: producing an automatic speed control system at Bendix Automotive Electronics. At 21, he got engaged, but a year later, suddenly feeling overwhelmed by a “cold, constrained” image of his future, he broke it off. “The Sixties inched up on me,” he writes, “my eyes gradually widening to change and possibility, more slowly than for others, I think—but made all the sweeter by having come up through those earlier, flatter Fifties.” He soon followed a brilliant, volatile girlfriend to Paris, returning with the impulse to write. When his mother read some early “raw rants,” she recommended Strunk and White. Reflecting on his intense love affair and surprising decision to become a writer, he sees them arising from the same impulse—“the wish, and need, long tamped down, to venture beyond all I’d known as a boy within the embrace of my parents,” and to dive into “the big world beyond theirs.”

Thoughtful, candid reminiscences from a veteran writer.

---

**States of Plague**

_Reading Albert Camus in a Pandemic_

Kaplan, Alice & Laura Marris

Univ. of Chicago (152 pp.)

$20.00 | Oct. 6, 2022

978-0-226-81553-4

Through the work of Camus, two scholars present “a guide to...moments where the written and the real collide.”

In this mélange of history, literary analysis, and memoir, the authors explore the intersection between a celebrated novel, current realities, scholarship, language, and the tricks that time and circumstance play on all of them. Seasoned literary historian Kaplan and poet and translator Marris, whose new translation of _The Plague_ was published in 2021, team up to cultivate a deeper understanding of Camus’ classic novel. In alternating short essays, they braid together their distinct sensibilities to offer fresh insight and added significance to a canonical mid-20th-century book. They examine the process of seeking out new evidence and making a new English translation of an accepted masterpiece amid a plague reminiscent of the one in Camus’ novel. Enlarging the significance of a work long understood only as an allegory for Nazi occupation, Kaplan and Marris cast it as a more encompassing parable about all kinds of plagues, political as well as viral, and how people, they included, confront them. They also unearth interesting information about the novel’s Algerian setting and, in keeping with Kaplan’s previous studies of 20th-century French fiction and writers, about its conceptualization and realization. Throughout, the authors offer deft textual analyses of all aspects of _The Plague_, and Marris lets us in on the challenges a translator faces, many of them extending beyond the texts they struggle with to the places where they were written and where their stories take place. Some of the alternating short chapters don’t sit easily with each other, and others possess a touch of idolatry in their approach to Camus. Nevertheless, this is a notable addition to the literature about an indispensable French author.

A reflective set of short essays that will appeal to Camus fans and literary scholars.

**Grace**

_President Obama and Ten Days in the Battle for America_

Keenan, Cody

Mariner Books (320 pp.)

$29.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-358-65189-5

A pertinent chronicle of the making of a president’s messages.

Keenan, who served as Barack Obama’s chief speechwriter, makes an absorbing book debut
with an insider’s view of the pressured, often “fucking terrifying” workings within the White House, where he and his staff routinely put in 12-hour days, holed up in the basement “Speechcave,” crafting the president’s public statements. While focusing on 10 days in June 2015, when he worked on several high-stakes speeches, Keenan recounts his entire career, beginning in 2002, when he became an intern for Sen. Ted Kennedy, through to his promotion to Obama’s chief speechwriter in 2013. The author’s first chance at speechwriting came with Kennedy, whom Keenan praises as a public servant “of the old breed who saw politics as a noble calling, an effort that kept differences of philosophy from becoming barriers to cooperation.” When Obama entered the 2008 presidential race, Keenan’s speeches for Kennedy earned him a place in the campaign—and on Obama’s staff. In 2011, assigned to write Obama’s eulogy for those killed in the shooting that wounded Gabby Giffords, Keenan admits, “I was terrified. It would be my first prime-time, nationally televised speech” and one that “needed to stand as a surprising, hopeful, and even joyous celebration of the way the people who died had lived their lives.” The speeches that occupied him in June 2015 were equally significant: responses to the Supreme Court decision on the Affordable Care Act, same-sex marriage, and the shooting at Charleston’s Mother Emanuel Church that killed nine people, including the pastor, Clementa Pinckney. Keenan portrays Obama as a perfectionist with clear aims for tone and content. Multiple drafts, edits, and rewrites resulted in the soaring rhetoric for which the former president was noted. In his eulogy for Pinckney, “Grace was what Obama wanted to talk about… the quiet grace that sets a louder example than any shout of hatred.”

A moving portrait of a presidency and its top speechwriter.
IT’S NOT ME, IT’S YOU
Break the Blame Cycle. Relationship Better.
Kim, John & Vanessa Bennett
HarperOne (288 pp.)
$24.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-320631-1

An exploration of the complex psychology of relationships.
Kim and Bennett have more in common than just being therapists and self-admitted “flawed and complicated humans.” They are also a committed, unmarried couple. With a smooth balance of advice and affable humor, the authors present the keys to a proactive, durable relationship, reiterating the lessons they’ve learned from their own time together. While the authors accept that people crave finding “the one,” the procession of simmering romance, marriage, family, and career growth can be a challenge. Kim and Bennett dig into a variety of barriers that hinder the development and maintenance of successful relationships—e.g., intimacy ambivalence and the pressures of familial upbringing (Kim’s parents, who “are old school Korean, taught him to “push feelings down”)—and the ways couples can break down these barricades both separately and together. In addition to candid stories about their own ongoing learning curve, the authors relate client experiences that reflect common challenges for anyone in a committed relationship. Their advice ranges from obvious (“passion and intensity aren’t enough to build and sustain a relationship”) to more nuanced, like how to navigate the emotional contours of mutual intimacy and suppressed “anger, resentment, or eggshells.” Alternating narration, the authors provide unique opinions and philosophies on a variety of relationship topics, including attachment styles, effective communication strategies, the ever present pitfalls of codependency, jealousy, and unhealthy behavioral patterns. The authors end each chapter with “Questions To Ask Yourself” and a section called “The Practice,” which challenges readers to apply what they have learned. Consistently encouraging, the authors are convincing in their assertion that a healthy, productive, mutually gratifying love connection is achievable with the proper tools and a willingness to look inward and put in the work. “You can only be responsible for yourself and how you show up,” they write. “How your partner shows up and the amount of effort they put in is entirely on them.”

A solid compendium of love, lessons, and constructive homework.

THE INTIMATE CITY
Walking New York
Kimmelman, Michael
Penguin Press (272 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 29, 2022
978-0-593-29841-1

Twenty tours through New York City reveal a rich tapestry of architecture, urban living, and civic resilience.

New York Times architecture critic Kimmelman originally published 17 of these 20 essays in the Times between March and December 2020. “The walks would become my own way of coping with those first months of the pandemic,” he writes at the beginning of this lively book, which includes excellent photos. His tours around the city were led by architects, historians, and preservationists. Many were conducted virtually, but all can be strolled in person, book in hand. We get street-level views of the culturally diverse neighborhoods of Jackson Heights and Forest Hills; “America’s first commuter suburb,” Brooklyn Heights; and “the fountainhead of American bohemia,” Greenwich Village. Kimmelman also devotes tours to specific streets (42nd Street) and buildings (Rockefeller Center, “New York’s Depression-era version of the pyramids...the largest private construction project in America between the World Wars”). Throughout, the author and his guides never lose sight of the people who live and work in these communities. Fascinating historical facts abound. In each one of New York’s Chinatowns, for example, there is a park where the elderly can go for “fresh air and ‘san san bu,’ leisurely walks.” The East Village still shows signs of the Yiddish Theatre District of the early 20th century. The National Registry listing for the Stonewall Inn, site of a famous gay uprising, was achieved using criteria drawn for Civil War battlefields. In Harlem, architect David Adjaye demonstrates how to read the district’s layers of history, architecturally: “If we walk north, through Marcus Garvey Park, along 127th Street, you’ll see what I mean—houses from the 1870s to the early 1920s, which go from Romantic Classicism to Art Deco, brownstone to stucco.” Adjaye’s words about Harlem apply to this entire book: “Architecture is about more than shelter, after all. It’s about doing something that gives people dignity, hope, a belief in the future.”

An important book for readers interested in understanding New York through its architecture.
King and Wilson team up again, this time to chronicle the notorious 1924 murder case dubbed the “crime of the century.”

On May 21, 1924, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, two wealthy University of Chicago students, picked up their neighbor, 14-year-old Bobby Frank, while he was walking home from school. They proceeded to bind, gag, and bludgeon him to death and demand a ransom from his parents. Although meticulously planned over months—they wanted “to see if they could commit the perfect crime as if it was some childish game pitting their wits against the police”—their plan soon unraveled when Frank’s body was found in a nearby forest where Loeb frequently went birding. Further incriminating details included bloodstains in a rented car, the typewriter on which the ransom letter was likely composed, and bottles of ether and strychnine and two loaded guns at the Leopold house. The authors’ meticulous research is apparent throughout this thrilling narrative, as they reveal crucial aspects of the boys’ lives and families, especially their codependent relationship and interests in grim Nietzschean philosophy, sadism, and other dark subjects. Observers attributed the crime to a variety of factors, including the “corrupting modern influences” of the Roaring ’20s; “perversion,” which was “the common and unmistakable code for homosexuality”; or the idea that the perpetrators had strayed from their Jewish roots. The authors show that while Leopold was probably the mastermind, Loeb was the actual murderer. “Individually, Richard and Nathan were damaged but probably not dangerous,” they write. “It was their coming together that proved deadly.” Clarence Darrow took up the case in order to argue against the death penalty. The defendants pled guilty to avoid a jury trial, although Darrow did enlist psychiatrists to suggest that the pair were “mentally diseased” rather than insane or evil. This defense brought another massive wave of media frenzy, which the authors capture in colorful detail.

An absorbing, psychological work of historical true crime.

Libertarianism and the common good.

Law professor Koppelman, identifying himself as a “pro-capitalism leftist,” offers a thorough examination of libertarianism and a vigorous critique of thinkers who have corrupted it into “an infantile fantasy of godlike self-sufficiency.” As the author notes, “investigating philosophical debates in the law is what I do. I soon found that libertarianism comes in flavors, some more bitter than others.” Koppelman defines libertarianism as “a mutated form of liberalism,” which “holds the purpose of government to be guaranteeing to individuals the freedom to live as they like.” Founded by Nobel laureate economist Friedrich Hayek, libertarianism proposed that unregulated markets “promise a better life for everyone.” Hayek believed that “if you want more for the poor, you shouldn’t try to equalize. You should make the economy grow, and that means letting the rich keep quite a lot of what they have.” However, as interpreted by economist Murray Rothbard, philosopher Robert Nozick, and novelist Ayn Rand (“a hot ball of rage”), libertarianism has become a justification for “crass predation.” Of the three, Koppelman sees Rothbard—who has influenced “America’s most powerful libertarian, Charles Koch”—as the most noxious. “Nozick and Rand are minimal-state libertarians,” writes the author. “They want the state to prevent force and fraud but do nothing else. Rothbard is an anarcho-capitalist. He wants to do away with the state altogether.” Koppelman makes a persuasive case for the need for state regulation and protection in areas such as workplace safety, consumer protection, drug laws, anti-discrimination laws, and financial protection. “Rejecting paternalistic regulation, because you hate the idea that your competence is limited,” Koppelman asserts, “is like attacking the practice of medicine because you hate the idea of being vulnerable to illness.” Because the individual is embalmed within and supported by society, freedom is nothing less than “a collective achievement.”

A cogent analysis of a misunderstood political philosophy.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVITUDE
Donald Trump’s Washington and the Price of Submission
Leibovich, Mark
Penguin Press (352 pp.)
$29.00 | July 12, 2022
978-0-593-29631-8

Relive the Trump administration from the perspectives of the toadies who enabled it.

Veteran New York Times Washington reporter Leibovich focuses on “the Sean Spicers, Kellyanne Conways, [and] any of the other Washington C-listers who were bumped temporarily up to B-list status by their proximity to Donald J. Trump.” Everywhere he looks, he finds White House aides and GOP leaders privately bemoaning the president while publicly defending him. It doesn’t take deep political acumen to figure out the root of this hypocrisy: Playing nice with a demonstrably inept, petty, and heartless leader was a path to power. As a result, the author’s chronicle of the Trump era, from the early debates through the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the Capitol, is light on analysis and heavier on portraits of the cowards. For example, a panicky Spicer, Trump’s first lie-peddling press secretary, demanded that Leibovich not write that he puts on makeup before going on TV. Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions steps into the attorney general role “terrified and shaken, like a beagle in a thunderstorm.” Former House Speaker Paul Ryan recalls sobbing over the Capitol insurrection while dodging his complicity in Trump’s rise. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham proves the most craven of all, if more honest about his consistent aspiration to “try to be relevant.” GOP pushback, when it existed, came from those who had little to lose politically (Mitt Romney), were near death (John McCain), or principled enough to jump ship (Liz Cheney). Leibovich ably captures this milieu, and he’s clear-eyed about Trump’s dangers. However, that awareness sometimes clashes with his breezy, Twitter-dunk-style delivery, which emphasizes the sideshow at the expense of the crisis. Now that the GOP is more cult than political party, one former Republican congressman noted that its main approach to Trump is “just waiting for him to die,” a strategy more pathetic than funny.

A thorough if sometimes glib account of a disastrous presidency.

LADY JUSTICE
Women, the Law, and the Battle To Save America
Lithwick, Dahlia
Penguin Press (368 pp.)
$29.00 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-525-56138-5

The senior legal correspondent for Slate looks at the responses of women lawyers to the Trump era.

“That something extraordinary happens when female anger and lawyering meet,” writes Lithwick, who begins with oral arguments in the 2016 case Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt before three female justices. She closes, of course, with the June 24, 2022, decision in Dobbs v. Jackson’s Women’s Health Organization. In the author’s telling, that span represents not only the nation’s six-year slide into an abyss, but also a time when women lawyers mounted dogged, directed resistance. Between starry-eyed opening and grim conclusion, she profiles women lawyers whose stories provide a contextualizing capsule tour of the era and offer some bracing hope. Readers will reconnect with Sally Yates, the acting attorney general who almost immediately found herself standing up to her new boss when he executed his first travel ban, and learn that the Democrats’ success in Georgia in 2020 and 2021 was mostly due to Stacey Abrams’ methodical, 10-year plan to mobilize Georgia’s Democratic vote. We also meet Nina Perales of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, who successfully litigated against adding a citizenship question to the 2020 census; and the ACLU’s Brigitte Amiri, who defended the right of a pregnant 17-year-old refugee in U.S. custody to get an abortion—ultimately winning a case in which then–Judge Brett Kavanaugh’s preliminary opinion arguably paved his way to the Supreme Court. In this same profile, the author reveals that the same Office of Refugee Resettlement apparatchik who directed his staff to stop keeping track of the children separated from their families at the border also scrupulously maintained his own records of the menstrual cycles of the girls in custody. Though the text is necessarily bristling with names of court cases, Lithwick’s writing is friendly to lay readers and marked by her trademark pithy wit and an endearing faith in the promise of the legal system. “Women plus law equals magic,” she concludes.

Required reading for this post-Dobbs world.


“Macchio’s sweet, nostalgic memoir is as family-friendly and instructive as its inspiration.”

WAXING ON

ADAM SMITH’S AMERICA
How a Scottish Philosopher Became an Icon of American Capitalism
Liu, Glory M.
Princeton Univ. (384 pp.)
$35.00 | Nov. 29, 2022
978-0-691-20381-2

The iconic economist has become all things to all people over time, from Friedman-esque libertarian to anti-capitalist crusader.

Adam Smith (1723-1790), writes Harvard fellow Liu, was one of the brightest stars of the Scottish Enlightenment, with broad interests that ranged from law and rhetoric to philosophy and economics. Today, scholars are more inclined to link his notion of “moral sentiments”—that is to say, the bonds of social contract that make people want to conduct themselves honestly in business—to developments that he would spell out in The Wealth of Nations. The “invisible hand” evoked therein is one complexity. Another involves what Smith deemed self-interest, which, Liu suggests, does not mean dog-eat-dog but instead something approaching the golden rule: Trade fairly and freely with me, and I will do so with you. Yet his name has been hijacked as “shorthand for the virtues of free markets and the vices of government intervention in economic affairs.” The Founding Fathers put Smith’s ideas to work in constructing federalism precisely because they “appealed to enlightenment sensibilities about how to understand the governing dynamics of man in society.” For reasons of his own, Thomas Jefferson seems to have preferred French economists such as Jean-Baptiste Say, while Smith’s near-contemporary Alexander Hamilton “borrowed Smith’s distinction between ‘dead’ and ‘live’ stock to illustrate how banks did more than circulate precious metals.” Liu argues that Smith’s largely laissez faire attitudes did not mean a complete lack of government intervention, but the Chicago school of economics distorted his message in order to prove that self-interest meant, above all else, the “narrow desire for wealth.” Even if Chicago, the Heritage Foundation, and other right-leaning entities have tried to seize him for their cause, Liu examines the possibility that he may be “closer to the values of the contemporary left”—thus are the many ambiguities in his work.

A bracing study not just of Smith’s ideas, but also of how scholars and activists have used (and misused) them.

WAXING ON
The Karate Kid and Me
Macchio, Ralph
Dutton (256 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-593-18583-4

The original Karate Kid tells his story. Few underdog tales can compete with The Karate Kid franchise in terms of impact on popular culture, but Macchio’s real-life success in bringing it to life may come close. The author’s love for his fans is abundantly clear. “The Karate Kid and all of its gifts belong to you, the fans,” he writes. “It is you who have created the longevity. And I pay tribute to each and every one of you, without whom I would not have this book to write. You continue to uphold this legacy and share it with future generations.” Macchio narrates his life primarily through his connection to the movie and the successful spinoff series, Cobra Kai. His wife, Phyllis, was his girlfriend when he first started work on the first movie, and we learn about their children because they were the ones who convinced him to appear on How I Met Your Mother as a heightened version of himself. As forthcoming as Macchio is about the process of becoming Daniel LaRusso and the lessons he learned from his rapid rise to celebrity, he is also guarded about his personal life. “I don’t have the crash-and-burn-to-redemption story many of these types of memoirs produce,” he writes. “Any fall from grace I experienced was not due to drug addiction, crime, or flagrant misbehavior. Nope. Sorry. Wrong guy here. I skew more toward the anti—Television’s Younger Years.” He also skewers more toward the king of a guy who wants to be proud of his work rather than being proud of the lifestyle it provides. His down-to-earth writing style suits the behind-the-scenes tales and his heartwarming meetings with fans well—though if you’re looking for anything deeper or edgier than that, it’s not here.

Macchio’s sweet, nostalgic memoir is as family-friendly and instructive as its inspiration.

MY FIRST POPSICLE
An Anthology of Food and Feelings
Ed. by Mamet, Zosia
Penguin (304 pp.)
$24.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-143-13729-0

A collection of essays about our emotional connections to food.

Inspired by the video of a friend’s son enjoying a Popsicle for the first time, actor Mamet sought to create a book about a topic “ripe with associations.” She enlisted the help of contributors from diverse backgrounds in art and culture. Most of the essays capture an isolated moment in time, making the book perfect for reading in short, leisurely spurts. Unsurprisingly, grandmothers are prominent characters in several of...
the pieces. Katie Holmes reminisces about making peanut butter cookies with her grandmother; Clara Vivier writes about her Gramma Guerrero’s fresh flour tortillas; Naomi Fry recalls her grandmother’s flavorful roast chicken. At the beginning, Mamet states her goal: “to show that our relationship to food is varied and complicated and can span myriad emotions, and sometimes those emotions lead us to dark places.” Some of the essays are certainly serious in tone. Several writers contribute intimate stories of eating disorders, including Mamet herself. Ted Danson shares his first experience with bigotry; Rosie Perez shares the memory of her mother putting her in an orphanage; and Anita Lo offers her thoughts on eating and identity in light of the anti-Asian rhetoric of the Trump administration. Others take a decidedly lighter approach to the material. Jia Tolentino provides a recipe for chicken to be consumed after an acid trip; Andrew Rannells celebrates his mother’s Jell-O cake; Jess Rona discusses her simple morning coffee ritual; and John Leguizamo exalts the power of sancocho, a soup that will transport you “to a magical setting straight out of a Gabriel García Márquez novel.” It’s not all gustatory magic, but the book is an appealing reminder of the power of food. Other contributors include Patti Smith, Stephanie Danler, Gabourey Sidibe, Tony Hale, David Sedaris, and, perhaps inevitably, Ruth Reichl.

A good gift for foodies.

**MORGENTHAU**

*Power, Privilege, and the Rise of an American Dynasty*

Meier, Andrew

Random House (1,072 pp.)

$42.00 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-4000-6885-2

A family’s history chronicles the history of the nation. Journalist and biographer Meier draws on hundreds of hours of interviews and prodigious archival research to craft an absorbing narrative following four generations of one of America’s most prominent families. Men take the center stage: Patriarch Lazarus Morgenthau (1815–1897), a German Jew who arrived in New York in 1866; his formidable son Henry; a man with “outsized ambition” and a “drive for self-perfection”; Henry Jr., secretary of the treasury under Franklin Roosevelt; and finally eminent lawyer Robert, who died in 2019. Lazarus’ many financial failings and mental instability proved to be burdens on his family, most heavily on Henry, the middle of his seven sons. Hardworking and determined, Henry graduated from Columbia Law School and set up a law firm with friends. He proceeded to make a series of astute real estate investments—buying and flipping properties in Manhattan—and became one of the wealthiest men in Gilded Age America. Wealth bought him influence, as well. A supporter of Woodrow Wilson, he was appointed ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, where, Meier writes, he witnessed with alarm the Armenian massacre, “mass murder on a scale the world had never seen.” Henry’s only son was unlike his father. Probably dyslexic, he struggled in school. “Burdened by an indecisive nature and weak self-esteem, he desperately wanted to prove himself,” which he did, amply, in his service to FDR. For 30 years, the New York Times noted at his death, “Mr. Morgenthau was Mr. Roosevelt’s confidant, cranky conscience, intensely loyal colleague, and unabashed, but occasionally outraged, admirer.” Robert, appointed by John F. Kennedy as the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, became “the most powerful federal prosecutor in New York City.” Meier recounts his challenges, losses, and successes as he worked to “redraw the boundaries of power in New York” during a career “without precedent in the history of American law enforcement.”

A majestic, authoritative multigenerational saga.

**SLOW COOKED**

*An Unexpected Life in Food Politics*

Nestle, Marion

Univ. of California (294 pp.)

$29.95 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-520-38435-6

A memoir from the distinguished food policy expert and public health advocate. Nestle (b. 1936), the author of *Food Politics, Safe Food, What To Eat*, and other important books about the often shady mechanics of the food industry, began her chosen career late in life. Attempting to conform to social norms, she quit college and married when she was 19. Ten years later, divorced with two children, she decided to resume her undergraduate studies. She became a professor in biology and nutrition science and served as a nutrition adviser for the Department of Health and Human Services, but she still felt unfulfilled. Although she had a “vegetable epiphany” during summer camp as a child, her life-changing career moment didn’t arrive until she was hired by New York University in 1988. “Until NYU hired me,” she writes, “I had never thought about what kind of work I might want to do if I had choices,” and she began her career as “a critical analyst of the food industry.” The negative tone of the first half of the book, in which Nestle describes her “bleak” childhood and the challenges she faced during early adulthood, makes for tedious reading. However, as the author shows how she found her calling, her passion translates to the page. She clearly relishes the fact that her position at NYU afforded her the ability to write more freely about topics that interested her. Another life-changing event was the release of *Food Politics*, which Nestle published at age 66. Upon publication, she received numerous invitations to write articles and attend conferences to share her expertise. The author also discusses her interactions and friendships with influential members of the food community, including Julia Child and Alice Waters. On the whole, Nestle effectively addresses a wide range of topics related to her impressive career in food politics and nutrition science.

An impassioned reminder to never stop pursuing your interests.
A professor of sociology explores details of his life as a queer Filipino American and the long-overlooked stories of gay immigrant men like him. Told through stories that redefine what it means to be a gay person of color at the intersection of homophobia, sexism, and racism, Ocampo’s text “chronicles the life experiences of young adult men who have roots in the Philippines, Mexico, and Latin America. All of the men I interviewed are cisgender, meaning they identify with the sex they were assigned at birth: male. They are sons of immigrants. Most were born and all were raised primarily in the United States, which means they are ‘second generation’ Americans.” Following in the tradition of scholars of intersectionality and performative gender and sexual identity, these coming-of-age narratives reveal how pathways of education and socio-economic status are influenced by “the need for independence from the heteronormative family and friend circles [these men] felt trapped by.” He also shows “how gay people of color can grow exhausted of the identities they have meticulously curated. Ocampo effectively explores the “value systems of the gay community and the immigrant family and its community” in the context of belonging and incompatibility with the dreams that many immigrant parents have for their American-born children. Cultural expectations can lead to volatile relationships between parents and their gay children, leaving children with limited options. Some experience homelessness or commit suicide. Organized into chapters with titles such as “Lessons in Manhood and Morality,” “Escaping to College,” “Not That Gay,” the text smoothly combines personal anecdotes with thorough sociological research, spotlighting those who feel they don’t fit the archetype of the ideal gay man within predominantly White queer spaces, both virtual and in-person. Ocampo should be commended for presenting the lives of queer people of color in a humane, compassionate, and informative way.

An important book that showcases different models for gay men of color.

---

Another top-notch collection from the author of *Am I Alone Here?* Orner—a legitimate triple-threat: novelist, short story master, and prolific essayist—returns with an addictive collection of more than 100 buoyant essays organized around a single day and a wide range of emotions. “Preaching the gospel of fiction”—and literature in general—the author roves around freely, exploring the work of Virginia Woolf, John Cheever, Primo Levi, Shirley Hazzard, Gina Berriault, Robert Hayden Marilyne Robinson, Yoel Hoffmann, Stacy Doris, Juan Rulfo, and numerous others. The lyrical chapters unwind from noisy “Morning” to melancholy “Night.” Orner begins with vivid memories of his “loud, cackling” family members—mother, father, uncles, Grandpa Freddy in Fall River, Massachusetts—and growing up in Highland Park near Lake Michigan, a “tear rolling down the face of the Midwest,” and he recounts the sadness a “dumb Jewish kid” felt watching Larry Holmes beat Muhammad Ali in 1980. Later, the author confesses, while reflecting on the more than 4,000 haiku that Richard Wright composed during his career, “like so many of my stories, nonstories, there’s no movement, no forward momentum.” By “Mid-Morning,” Orner is wistful that fellow Midwestern author Wright Morris is “forgotten, yes, but still among us.” Orner also ponders his grandfather’s World War II letters to his “showgirl wife,” Lorraine, often begging her to write him back. The author tells us why he “permanently borrowed” James Alan McPherson’s *Hue and Cry* from the library, a book that contains “Gold Coast,” a story he wishes he could memorize and recite “like a prayer.” Ella Leffland’s *Mrs. Munck*, which he left unfinished on a train, is one of those rare books “you go on reading whether you are reading them or not.” As Orner inches toward “Night,” readers will be lamenting the end of his wise, welcoming, heartfelt book.
behind German lines. Many missed their drop zones, including two companies that landed 15 miles away in the marshes of the Cotentin Peninsula. After dawn, the soldiers noticed a village atop a nearby hill, and about 180 men drifted in during the following days. Historians have described the resulting Battle of Graignes in passing, but Rabe, a Marine Corps veteran, emeritus professor of history at the University of Texas at Dallas, and son of one of the paratroopers, gives it his full attention. The story is particularly inspiring because the townspeople and surrounding farmers universally welcomed the soldiers, fed and sheltered them, gathered intelligence, and sent boats into the waterways to recover supplies. Unable to accomplish their original goal, the paratroopers hoped to delay German forces racing toward the invasion beaches 20 miles away. Lightly armed with no artillery, tanks, or antitank weapons, they could not hope to do so for long. They drove off initial attacks by an SS division but were soon devastated by superior numbers and artillery fire. Survivors abandoned the city, approximately 110 eventually reaching Allied lines. After accepting the surrender of a doctor, two medics, and 14 wounded left behind, German soldiers shot them. They also killed 44 French civilians and burned Graignes to the ground after an orgy of pillaging and looting. Overwhelmed by surrounding events, this defense of an obscure village did not attract attention until decades had passed and memories became spotty and perhaps idealized. Rabe does a fine resurrection job, assembling his material and filling out the text with mostly engaging diversions, including the history of American airborne forces, biographies of its two leading generals (who were preoccupied elsewhere), details of the Normandy landings, and subsequent battles across France.

Good niche military history.

BLACK WOMEN WILL SAVE THE WORLD
An Anthem
Ryan, April
Amistad/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-06-321019-6

A veteran journalist honors the contributions of Black women in America. In this “anthem” or “love letter,” Ryan, the Washington, D.C., bureau chief for the Grio, combines an account of her struggles and triumphs as a person of color with a survey of representative Black women who epitomize “our history, our heroism, our hurt, and our Hope.” First, the author looks at the characteristics and motivations of Black leadership; second, the intersection of race and gender as they play out in the efforts of Black women to claim agency in social and political spheres; and finally, speculations on the coming ascendency of such women in positions of power. Though she moves fluidly across eras, Ryan focuses primarily on her role as a top White House correspondent during the Trump era and her reporting of—and sometimes personal involvement in—a range of stories prompted by his incendiary reign. Among the most memorable sections of the book are her response to the White supremacist terrorist attack in Charlottesville and her own often caustic exchanges with Trump and his representatives during press conferences. Ryan is particularly effective in evocatively setting forth the terms of her calling as a journalist. She argues convincingly that her career has been dedicated to posing questions too often slighted or silenced: “Questions about civil rights. Policing. Migration. Sex trafficking. Poverty. Fairness and equality before the law.” Also cogent are her accounts of recent efforts at voter suppression and the resistance being organized by formidably committed activists. A little more nuance might have been helpful in the author’s assessments of the status of a leader such as Kamala Harris, whose reputation among Black voters seems more complicated than Ryan implies. Overall, though, the author offers compelling commentary on the significance of Black women in contemporary America.

An impassioned celebration of Black women and their roles in transforming the nation.

WHEN THEY TELL YOU TO BE GOOD
A Memoir
Shakur, Prince
Tin House (292 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-953534-42-2

A Jamaican poet and activist debuts with an unflinching memoir. “To be Black is to weather pain,” writes Shakur. “To use some of the same devices used against us in the plantation fields. Our families must break some part of us to make us less breakable when the world, hungry for Black flesh, tries to break us too.” By age 15, the author had already lost five close male relatives to murder, and he dedicates much of the book to reckoning with their violence (“the men of my family and of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora are products of masculinities crafted by an unjust society”) and chronicling the forging of his own path. Facing relentless homophobia, he recognized early that being gay meant that he must be prepared to die. He found solace in writing, where he channeled his wounds, and he became an activist in the aftermath of the death of Michael Brown in 2014. Protesting in Ferguson, he realized, “If we fought together, then our Blackness could mean far more than what we had been told it was our entire lives.” Like early adulthood itself, some of the text lacks a coherent structure. The author writes about his extensive travels during and after college, during which he experienced prejudice like he often did at home. Born in 1994, Shakur attempts to create in-the-moment art in relation to his traumas, but the narrative would have benefited from further reflection. In the standout sections, focusing on his childhood, he demonstrates that he has enough distance from the events to create more nuanced perspectives.
In reconciling the anguish he experienced after an uncle was killed by police, Shakur writes, “the lesson is not about our ability to fantasize about self-actualization. The lesson is, instead, what we are willing to face to actualize the deepest and hidden parts of ourselves.”

A scorching, nonlinear journey through a Black man’s search for self.

**OVERREACH**

*How China Derailed Its Peaceful Rise*

Shirk, Susan L.

Oxford Univ (320 pp.)

$29.95 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-0-19-006851-6

A key observer of China provides a detailed account of that nation’s political transformation under its current leaders.

Shirk, who has been studying China for several decades, served as deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs during the Clinton administration, and her 2007 book, *China: Fragile Superpower,* was highly influential. The author builds on the earlier volume but focuses on how China has changed in the past decade. The key player has been Xi Jinping, who replaced the mild-mannered Hu Jintao and has exploited leadership divisions to dispense with the tradition of collective rule and entrench himself as leader-for-life. The governing class enthusiastically backed Xi, concluding that democracy, even if only at the local level, would eventually be a threat to their power and privileges. There has long been a stream of Chinese thinking that envisions the country’s destiny as being the preeminent global power, but it was the economic boom that provided the strength to effectively shape its foreign policy. Under Xi, China began to throw its weight around, especially over Hong Kong and the South China Sea. This was the point of overreach, writes Shirk, as Xi and his administration failed to realize that the rest of the world was not going to accept Chinese dominance—at least not without significant push back. To improve China’s reputation, Shirk offers advice to Xi, such as opening a dialogue with Taiwan and closing the internment camps in Xinjiang. Given the current state of the Chinese government, these moves are highly unlikely, making them odd inclusions in a text about how China’s leaders are intent on gathering ever more power into their hands. Perhaps Shirk simply wanted the book to end on a hopeful note. While dauntingly detailed in spots, the book is the work of an expert on the subject and should be useful for policymakers.

An authoritative account of how China is seeking to become the world’s dominant power.

**THE WEST WING**

*And Beyond: What I Saw Inside the Presidency*

Souza, Pete

Voracious/Little, Brown (256 pp.)

$45.00 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-0-316-38337-0

An official White House photographer gives an insider’s tour of the West Wing and its key personnel.

Distinguished photo journalist Souza—chief photographer during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama as well as the longtime director of White House Photography—presents valuable documentation in the form of vivid, full-color photos and accompanying explanatory text. Souza’s job covering the president and his team required long days “inside the presidential bubble,” whether in the White House or on the road (more than 25,000 hours during Obama’s tenure). He begins his tour of “The People’s House” with photos from the Oval Office, where, because of the room’s many windows, the light constantly changed. He chronicles numerous brief yet indelible moments—e.g., when a member of the press knocked over a glass of water on the Resolute Desk—and we learn that Obama always edited his speeches with a black Uni-ball Vision Elite pen. Souza takes readers into the Outer Oval, the Cabinet Room, the Roosevelt Room, the Situation Room, the Brady Press Briefing Room, the Rose Garden, and the State Floor. But Souza’s focus is always on the people who inhabit these spaces. We meet the White House butler and chefs. We see a variety of performances and events on the South Lawn and Beyoncé performing inside a tent at a state dinner for the president of Mexico in 2010. The “On the Road” section includes many trips foreign and domestic aboard Air Force One; during the Reagan years, it was a Boeing 707, but since 1989, there have been two identical 747-200Bs. Souza offers candid portraits of the traveling White House staff, including the military aide who carries the presidential “football” and the president’s personal aide, his “body man.” Throughout, the author uses his unprecedented access to create up-close and personal studies, informal moments dressed up in formal clothes, of the powerful people who populate the presidential bubble.

Fascinating, in-depth portraits within the halls of power.
As the author shows, the other side of the coin, manias, or compulsions, are equally engaging book. Phobias are more common than one might think, with surveys suggesting that more than 7% of people will experience a phobia at some point. Phobias are often hard to define, although most medical researchers characterize it as an irrational fear that affects a person’s daily life. Some phobias have an evolutionary component. The fear of snakes, called ophidiophobia, makes sense given that many are poisonous. Much the same can be said for spiders and rats. However, the fears of feathers, popcorn, and balloons are odd. The fear of losing one’s mobile phone—but she is clearly aware of the compulsion to act, can be just as disturbing. Hoardingsound like the word four, tetraphobia, is so deeply embedded in various Asian cultures that some hotels do not have floors or rooms with the number, apparently because in some of the region’s languages the word sounds like the word death.

As the author shows, the other side of the coin, manias, or the compulsion to act, can be just as disturbing. Hoarding falls into this category, but there are also communal manias. For example, Summerscale recounts the tale of “tulip mania” in Holland in the 1630s, when a collective obsession with tulip bulbs sent prices soaring to insane levels before crashing and ruining the economy. The author sometimes writes with her tongue in her cheek—e.g., in her descriptions of aibilophobia, the fear of palindromes, and nomophobia, the fear of losing one’s mobile phone—but she is clearly aware that phobias and manias can be serious psychological conditions. The author carefully treads the line between the oddness of her subject and sympathy for the people affected, and she notes that many phobias can be treated, usually by controlled doses of exposure.

An informative, witty, and unique perspective on human psychology.
the Missionaries of Charity made on him throughout his life. In a short amount of time, after having witnessed and taken part in the work of the nuns, the author began to feel his goals and direction changing. “I could feel the sisters setting a new trajectory for my life, and I liked where I was heading,” he writes. “They were making me a better man.” Though T owey’s personal, transformative relationship with Mother Teresa forms the central theme, he also offers a fascinating inside look into Mother Teresa’s daily life. He paints a picture of an aging woman who has survived tremendous ordeals, ranging from hunger and disease to revolution and warfare. Despite this, the Mother Teresa he knew was unfailingly kind, loving, and—in a theme he returns to throughout the text—maternal.

Critics may read T owey’s work as a hagiography, but it is nonetheless inspiring and joyful.

**MAKING A SCENE**

Wu, Constance

Scribner (336 pp.)

$29.00 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-1-982188-54-2

An acclaimed actor “taught not to make scenes” as a young girl explores how “scenes” from her life have made her into the woman she became. In her first book, Wu, best known for her roles in the TV show *Fresh Off the Boat* and the film *Crazy Rich Asians*, reflects on the experiences that transformed her from a shy girl into a self-confident performer able to create meaningful, stereotype-defying characters. The American-born daughter of Taiwanese immigrants, Wu, who dreamed of a professional acting career, assimilated well into the conservative White Virginia suburb where she grew up. Yet the Asian actors she saw often made her want to cringe for the way they brought attention to the “Asian-ness” Wu could not entirely accept in herself. It wasn’t until she began studying drama in college that the author began to dig within herself to find what could truly make her characters come alive.

In her personal life, Wu deepened her emotional maturity with lessons in love while also experiencing the turmoil caused by a traumatic sexual experience. “I didn’t feel attacked or assaulted or coerced and I certainly didn’t feel raped,” she writes. “Strange as it sounds, the word ‘rape’ didn’t even occur to me.” After moving to California for her acting career, she began to educate herself on rape culture. Her awakening, however, could not protect her from Hollywood anti-feminism or her own desire to be a “cool girl” who could brush off casual misogyny. As she gained professional visibility and acclaim, Wu found herself at the mercy of an Asian American producer who intimidated and sexually harassed her. The essays—parts of which she cleverly imagines as stage scenes—are intimate and rich in emotional detail. However, the time shifts and occasional lack of thematic connection sometimes limit the impact of the author’s message.

Disjointed in spots but thoughtful and often inspirational.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

CHILDREN OF STARDUST by Edudzi Adodo; illus. by Abelle Hayford .................................................................160

UNBREAKABLE by Rebecca E.F. Barone ....................................................................................................................162

CAVES by Nell Cross Beckerman; illus. by Kalen Chock ..........................................................163

OUTSIDE NOWHERE by Adam Borba; illus. by Sam Kalda ........................................................................166

IN MYRTLE PERIL by Elizabeth C. Bunce ........................................................................................................170

WILL IT BE OKAY? by Crescent Dragonwagon; illus. by Jessica Love .............................................................176

YELLOW DOG BLUES by Alice Faye Duncan; illus. by Chris Raschka ..............................................................176

I DID IT! by Michael Emberley .................................................................................................................176

FREESTYLE by Gale Galligan; colors by K Czap ...........................................................................................178

ZERO ZEBRAS by Bruce Goldstone; illus. by Julien Chung ........................................................................180

HAZEL HILL IS GONNA WIN THIS ONE by Maggie Horne ........................................................................183

PLAYING THROUGH THE TURNAROUND by Mylisa Larsen ...........................................................................186

SPARROWS IN THE WIND by Gail Carson Levine .........................................................................................186

FEATHERS TOGETHER by Caron Levis; illus. by Charles Santoso ........................................................................187

WHAT THE JAGUAR TOLD HER by Alexandra V. Méndez ........................................................................189

NIKHIL OUT LOUD by Maulik Pancholy .....................................................................................................192

SO MUCH SNOW by Hyunmin Park .............................................................................................................193

AGENT MOST WANTED by Sonia Purnell ...........................................................................................................194

MY UNCLE IS COMING TOMORROW by Sebastián Santana Camargo; trans. by Elisa Amado .........................195

THE REAL DADA MOTHER GOOSE by Jon Scieszka; illus. by Julia Rothman .................................................196

A MILLION VIEWS by Aaron Starmer .........................................................................................................198

THE TALK by Alicia D. Williams; illus. by Briana Mukodiri Uchendu ..........................................................204

An orphan is chosen for an intergalactic mission beyond his wildest dreams. Zero Adedji always dreamed of becoming a Saba, or licensed adventurer who harnesses Koba magic using Kobastickers. Zero lives alone in Céolim, the City of Children, helping stranded travelers through his company, Zero Worries. When he touches a mysterious object one day, it turns out to be the sought-after Jupiter Kobasticker—and it chooses him to possess it. When bounty hunters try to kill him to get it, he’s saved by members of the Shango Heart Guild and invited to join them. Zero works hard to master the Jupiter, which is rumored to grant immortality to every 13th user—and he’s the 25th. Zoe Sitso, Zero’s mentor, asks him, along with guild members Camih and Ladi Hyung, to retrieve the Mask of the Shaman King so its rightful owner can destroy it. The mask grants wishes—but at a steep price, and it could release powerful villain Zomon the Dark King from the Oblong Dimension. The trio fights alongside unlikely allies to retrieve it. Unfortunately, the Space Mafia, who wouldn’t flinch at sacrificing others for their own gain, are also out to possess the mask. Togolese debut author Adodo’s debut bursts forth with wonderful worldbuilding drawing from African mythology and culture. Nail-biting scenes are balanced by comedic moments. In a fantasy-diverse galaxy, Zero and Camih read Black; their relationship is founded on respect, avoiding common sexist tropes.

Brimming with adventure, tenacity, and magic. (character sketches) (Science fiction. 9-12)
THE WOMAN WHO TURNED CHILDREN INTO BIRDS

Almond, David
Illus. by Laura Carlin
Candlewick Studio (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-5362-1996-8

Children and adults have wildly different reactions to a magical woman's gift.

The rumors are true. In a small village, a woman named Nanty Solo arrives, claiming to be able to turn children into birds. The adults call it “balderdash” but warn their kids away from Nanty Solo anyway. Young Dorothy Carr (pale-skinned with dark hair) is the first to disobey and swoops “into the blue” as a swallow for a few minutes before turning back into a girl. As Nanty Solo whispers the words, “Go on. Be happy. Up you go,” more children become birds until the grown-ups tell Nanty Solo to leave. She agrees but asks, “But what on earth are you frightened of?” The grown-ups fly last of all and have a marvelous time as Nanty Solo leaves to visit more towns. With the cadence of a Nanty Solo whispers the words, “Go on. Be happy . Up you go,” Nanty Solo arrives, claiming to be able to turn children into the Arctic unicorn (tuskless narwhals have no teeth at all).

“Go on. Be happy . Up you go,” Nanty Solo whispers the words, “Go on. Be happy . Up you go,” Nanty Solo arrives, claiming to be able to turn children into

A timeless message with modern meaning to spare. (Picture book. 3-6)

NARWHAL

The Arctic Unicorn

Anderson, Justin
Illus. by Jo W eaver
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-5362-2512-9

A pod of narwhals making its annual migration is the frame for this introduction to a most unusual sea mammal.

Anderson, who produced a BBC program on the spring-time melting of Arctic ice that marked the first time narwhal migration was captured on film, draws from that experience to create this intriguing nature title. Narwhals are unique members of the whale family; males (and a few females) have a single tooth, a tusk that grows out like a 6-foot spear, hence the sobriquet the Arctic unicorn (tuskless narwhals have no teeth at all). Anderson's story follows a pod from their deep sea winter home as they travel north to the high Arctic islands, where they will spend their summer, and back (a map in the backmatter traces the route along Canada's Baffin Island), focusing on its leader, an older male. There's suspense, as the open path through the ice closes up and the narwhals, which breathe air, must find another hole. Predators appear. A baby is born. Additional facts about the species appear in a smaller font on each spread. The text is set directly on striking full-bleed images, contrasting the dark depths with surprising colors in the sky and the summer light. Weaver works in charcoal, a medium particularly suited for the shadowy underwater pictures, but the blue skies and white ice of her Arctic vistas are equally appealing. An afterword touches on threats to the species from climate change. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A gentle counter to traditional notions of masculinity and grit that breaks little new ground. (Picture book. 4-7)
Knights” focuses a realistic lens on love and romance. The book Baldoni assures readers that there is no such thing as the perfect funny and earnest student of the nature of masculinity. He has quotes, relevant research, personal anecdotes, and advice—all doing what’s right, uncouples it from a pervasive ideal of brash and hostile masculinity . He lively entwined with notions of masculinity .

Helpful advice and humorous myth-busting; will draw readers in and encourage reflection. (sources, further reading) (Nonfiction. 11-16)

The Covid-19 lockdown brings changes to nearly every part of Cymbeline Igloo’s life and London neighborhood. Minor triumphs like scoring the last bottle of ketchup from the grocery’s half-empty shelves notwithstanding, most of those changes are for the worse—Cym’s prospective stepsisters and stepdad are stranded in New Zealand; suddenly he’s distance schooling and can’t even meet his friends just to kick a ball around; and in a disastrous fit of housecleaning, his mum has thrown out his priceless signed soccer jersey. Worst of all, though, is the news that octogenarian school lunch lady Mrs. Stebbings has been taken to the ICU. Cym is a lad of deep feelings and sharp sensations, traits that both lighten the load (describing the taste of Mrs. Stebbings’ sticky toffee pudding: “like a thousand very small angels climbing into your mouth and setting off a million golden explosions on your tongue”) and prime readers for the heartfelt and emotionally climactic get-well video he goes on to orchestrate. But along with yet another near-death experience for the resilient protagonist of Boy Underwater (2022), Baron tucks in a subplot involving newly arrived refugees from Syria and Eritrea on the way to an upbeat, if not tragedy-free, ending. The refugees and some established characters add diversity to the largely White-presenting cast.

An appealing early entry for the pandemic fiction list: light in tone but grounded in serious incidents and themes. (Fiction. 9-12)

A riveting true-life adventure story combining brains, courage, and heart. (author’s note, map, timeline, bibliography, endnotes) (Nonfiction. 10-16)
“Tantalizing glimpses of hidden natural treasures, with breathtaking art.”

CAVES

I AM NOT A TIN CAN!
Barroux
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5253-0554-2

An off-kilter message of friendship.
When a robot named Number 808 meets a light-skinned child, the bot’s query of “Can we be friends?” is met with a dismissive response: “I don’t think so. You are a tin can.” Number 808 continues their quest to make a friend by demonstrating skills such as playing music and completing complex mathematical formulas. Although impressed each time, the child still reminds Number 808 that they are merely a tin can and points out that the robot is brainless and heartless. With the gift of a cake and a hug, Number 808 sways the child enough to admit that they were incorrect, and the two begin a friendship and formally introduce themselves: the child as Robert and the robot as Number 808—BOB for short. Emotionally intelligent readers will be quick to notice that Robert never apologizes for their initial assessment of BOB, and savvy readers may wonder why BOB is working so hard to obtain this one-sided friendship. The expressive illustrations—a combination of watercolor, ink, and collage—do a lot of heavy lifting in an attempt to save the book, but the shallow story is in need of an upgrade. Friendships require mutual respect from both directions; BOB and readers deserve better. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Does not compute. (Picture book. 6-8)

CAVES
Beckerman, Nell Cross
Illus. by Kalen Chock
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-338-72662-6

An invitation to share some of the world’s speleological wonders.
Lit by the flashlights of small visitors, huge, rugged, shadowy spaces beckon in Chock’s powerfully atmospheric illustrations as Beckerman’s accompanying mix of free-verse commentary and blocks of explanations in smaller type turn general impressions into specific sites and sights. Among the latter are the dazzling tangle of giant selenite crystals in Mexico’s Cueva de los Cristales, ancient cave paintings at Lascaux in France, an immense underwater cave system in Florida, and (for truly courageous adventurers) the “silently squirming ceiling” of glowworms in New Zealand’s Waitomo Caves. The author also pays particular tribute to the group of women who ventured into the constricted reaches (judged too narrow for men) of South Africa’s Rising Star cave system to uncover fossils of a new prehistoric cousin, Homo naledi. All around the world caves are waiting “for / wondering, / wandering / explorers / like you,” she concludes. “Do you dare?” For those who might, the book closes with lists of safety rules and recommended caving gear. Tiny spelunkers in the art are nearly all bundled up and facing away from viewers, but some at least are plainly children, and an observation that the floors of some lava tubes in Australia are flat enough for wheelchairs makes Beckerman’s invitation even more inclusive. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Tantalizing glimpses of hidden natural treasures, with breathtaking art. (cave facts, author’s and illustrator’s notes, photos) (Informational picture book. 7-9)
THE TOTALLY NOT WICKED STEPMOTHER
Berger, Samantha
Illus. by Neha Rawat
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-0-06-304336-7

Perhaps stepmothers aren’t as cruel as folklore has led us to believe.

When a child learns that their family is getting a new stepmother, they are skeptical. After all, Cinderella, Snow White, and Hansel and Gretel all had stepmothers who were “TOTALLY wicked” and “B-A-D.” Surely the new stepmother, Holly, will be assigning arduous chores. But instead, she helps renovate the protagonist’s bedroom, painting the ceiling blue to resemble the sky. And while fairy-tale stepmothers abandon their kids in the woods, Holly saves the day when the family is lost on a hiking trip. Though the child isn’t entirely convinced of Holly’s benevolence, the new stepmother continues to score points through gestures of affection, like putting notes in lunches, saving school artwork, and offering support after the protagonist sustains an injury. As the protagonist’s trust in their stepmother grows, they try out new names for her, such as Step-ster and Steppypants, before settling on Holly. Layouts alternate between full-page spreads and vignettes, creating plenty of visual movement along with bright and welcoming colors. This is a simple lesson, shared humorously and earnestly, about how fears and pre-judgments can shift with experience. Holly, the narrator, and the rest of the family are light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Totally genuine and fills a gap by showcasing positive outcomes in blended families. (Picture book 4-7)

SUMOPUPPY
Biedrzycki, David
Charlesbridge (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-62354-301-3

A new fur baby attempts to earn her place in the heya.

Following the misadventures of SumoKitty (2019), the black-and-white feline diligently watches over the heya, or training center, alongside Kuma, the yokozuna, or grand champion. While they both have grown in skill—Kuma in sumo, the cat in hunting for mice—the friends are older now and want to pass down their knowledge. While Kuma is already busy teaching, SumoKitty longs for a student, lamenting that kittens live too far away, “on the other side of the river.” Surprisingly, a pug puppy dubbed Chanko-chan is brought to the heya. Chanko-chan quickly chooses SumoKitty as her target of affection; a montage of the annoyances the kitty endures ensues. SumoKitty attempts to teach the pup to catch mice, with disastrous results, and Chanko-chan is kicked out. But the little dog’s dedication and bravery are unmatched, and she finds a way to prove herself to the sumo wrestlers. The spare narrative leaves most of the humor and emotional arc of the story to the detailed illustrations. Cool colors are juxtaposed with warmer tones, and while the humans are depicted realistically, the animals have a more cartoonish look, especially bug-eyed Chanko-chan. The tale is set in Japan, and Japanese terms are interspersed throughout, along with definitions. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet and silly tale of a raucous yet deeply courageous pup. (Picture book 5-7)

A tribute to terror.

Readers who are looking to add a few more ooky-spooky vibes to their lives will be excited to read this petite but potent poetry anthology. Contemporary poets, including Kenn Nesbitt and Richard Jones, share the pages with historical powerhouse like Edgar Allan Poe and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Each of the 12 poems gets its own double-page spread—except for “The Raven,” which needs three double-page spreads to contain it—and all the pages feature bold, expressive artwork. It’s hard to judge if the text or the illustrations are working harder to impress (and scare) readers, and combined they create an impressive poetry collection that will entertain and educate. Many characters, both supernatural and human, are depicted with vibrant skin tones; a group of terrified people gazing at “Mr. Macklin’s Jack O’Lantern” (by David McCord) have bright yellow skin, while a pair of undead creatures are green-skinned. Others appear to be White-presenting, like the narrator of “The Raven” or the protagonist of Walter de la Mare’s “Some One.” Caregivers should expect young readers to wiggle and giggle with horrific glee, and educators and librarians should prepare for this to be a popular choice in the autumn. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Solidly spooky fun that will have readers screaming with joy. (Poetry 8-12)
If we want to create critical thinkers, we must create environments during early development where reading is both educational and enjoyable.

While *Miranda's Green Hair* is enjoyable, the book's readability is noteworthy!

ISBN: 978-1-7358547-0-0

“Miranda, a light-brown–skinned girl with green hair, is unhappy when her mother wants to wash and style her tresses before visiting Grandma. The girl runs into the woods to escape the dreaded chore.”

“In Whyatt’s engaging tale, Miranda is a relatable protagonist. Her predicament will be significant to many young readers, especially those who also struggle with hair-care tasks. The overarching message here, emphasizing kindness, understanding, and collaboration during difficult times, is laudable.”

“A thoughtful and important tale of teamwork, self-advocacy, and compassionate friends.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

For All Inquiries, Please Email
whynkpublishing@gmail.com • Mirandasgreenhair.com
“Poignant and sublime.”

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Bonilla, Rocio
**Trans. by Maya Faye Lethem**
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-62354-360-0

What’s the difference between a neighborhood and a community?

“Once upon a time there was a neighborhood like so many others. It had houses, streetlights, trees, and neighbors who had never met one another.” Although the neighbors all have different reasons for keeping to themselves, those reasons stem from the same thing: assumptions. Because there’s so much noise coming from Camila the chicken’s house, everyone assumes she’s hard of hearing and has to turn up the TV, but the noise is actually 10 rambunctious children. Camila Belvedere, a dragon, is unfriendly. But the “dragon” is a mouse who has his own assumptions, and so on. Finally, a chance meeting of neighbors inspires everyone to reconsider their preconceived notions and gives each in turn the courage to step outside of their own suburban footprint to meet the people around them. When they do, the neighborhood finally becomes a community. The story, translated from Spanish, is fantastic, supported by expressive illustrations that blend fantastical elements into a traditional-looking suburban environment that will be recognized by many young readers. This is a story suited for young children everywhere—as well as a gentle reminder to many adults. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Poignant and sublime. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

RIDE, ROLL, RUN
**Time for Fun!**

Bolling, Valerie
**Illus. by Sabrena Khadija**
Abrams Appleseed (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-4197-5629-0
Series: Fun in the City Book

School’s out!

It’s 3 p.m., and a group of friends have pent-up energy to release as they slowly head home. Brief rhyming couplets, consisting almost solely of action phrases with a dose of onomatopoeia for fun, capture kids riding skateboards (“Step, push, / Glide, whoosh!”), biking, swinging across monkey bars, playing a variety of games, forming a street band (“Clap, clang, / Bam, bang! / Boom, bop. / Rhythms drop!”), and finally getting drenched in the spray of a hydrant. The kids also turn a blank sidewalk into a canvas for beautiful chalk art with positive messages. Illustrations with vibrant colors and bold contrasts intensify the action on each page. Crisp, stencil-like figures with minimal details are depicted with a range of skin tones and a variety of hairstyles. One child wears a hijab, characters wear glasses, and an actively involved friend uses a wheelchair. Although the digital illustrations suggest an urban setting with geometric architecture, children growing up in the country or suburbs will easily relate—the delight experienced as the school day draws to a close is, after all, sure to resonate with many. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Pure joy. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

OUTSIDE NOWHERE

Borba, Adam
**Illus. by Sam Kalda**
Little, Brown (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-316-54264-7

A job on a remote Midwestern farm is definitely not in glib slacker Parker Kelbrook’s summer plans.

The first thing Parker loses is his belief that he can argue his widowed dad into letting him go to the beach instead. The second is his luggage when the train from Pittsburgh drops him off in the midst of cornfields and chugs away. And the third is his blithe assumption that roguish charm will win over his four new dormmates or Molly, a tough-minded girl who lives with the enigmatic farmer in the big house and has “the perfect amount of freckles.” What he discovers, along with a new appreciation for the pains and rewards of hard outdoor work, is a mystery: Why are he and his co-workers strictly forbidden to eat the radishes they’re cultivating? “Embrace the extraordinary,” says Molly in response to his questions…and that turns out to be not only good advice for Parker, but a cue for readers, as the farm grows both crops of a very special sort (and Molly again) “hope and second chances” for the strayed and wounded souls gathered to cultivate them. The roots of that mystery lead to experiences, mundane and decidedly otherwise, that leaf out into a magical summer for Parker and profound changes in course and spirit besides. Kalda supplies liberal quantities of full-page and spot art, with slender, stylized figures representing a White default.

A memorable season of mystery, mischief, and marvels. *(Fantasy. 10-13)*

LEO’S LAVENDER SKIRT

Borges, Irma
**Illus. by Francesco Fagnani**
**Trans. by Cecilia Ross**
nubeOCHO (36 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-84-18599-74-3
Series: Égalité

The tale of a young boy and his beloved skirt. Leo, a brown-skinned boy with close-cropped black hair, enjoys dressing up in all manner of costumes; he especially loves
to wear his skirt, a lavender, midi-length garment. While he’s out one day with his mother, who has peach skin and orange hair, a well-meaning stranger misgenders him, resulting in a tantrum back at home and a declaration that he will never again wear his skirt. His father, brown-skinned and dark-haired, calmly reassures Leo that there have always been places where men wear dresses and skirts, prompting Leo to picture peaceful scenes of him and his dad wearing hanbok under cherry blossom trees and kilts while listening to a bagpiper. Heartened, Leo prepares for school the next day wearing his skirt, armed with confidence (“If they say I’m a girl, I’ll tell them I’m a boy”). Mom tells him about times when women were not allowed to wear trousers and about some of the individuals who “defied the rules.” Without going into heavier discussions of gender presentation versus identity, this sweet, simple story, translated from Spanish, encourages children to dress as they like without being burdened by societal expectations about gender. Readers don’t get to find out how Leo’s day at school goes, but the love and support of his family may be the most important thing in this case. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Warmly empowering. (Picture book 3-5)

WHERE THE LOST ONES GO
Bowman, Akemi Dawn
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-374-31377-7

A lonely girl embarks on a quest to help her late grandmother.

When 12-year-old Eliot Katayama’s family moves from California to Roseheart, Maine, her parents want a fresh start, but Eliot is still grieving the death of Babung, her beloved paternal grandmother, and struggling with the dementia that stole Babung’s memories before she died. Although her parents urge her to move on, Eliot fears Babung is lonely and confused in the afterlife without her memories; she hopes to prove ghosts are real and reconnect with her. Meeting neighbor Mrs. Delvaux and her granddaughter, Hazel, is the opportunity she’s been waiting for: Their home is rumored to be haunted, and local kids believe Mrs. Delvaux is a soul-stealing witch. Indeed, Eliot soon discovers ghosts in the house, but why are they stuck there? Why have they lost their memories, preventing them from crossing to the other side? As she attempts to help these ghosts recall who they are, Eliot juggles growing romantic feelings for Hazel, parents who don’t take her seriously, and encounters with a fearsome monster, all while continuing to try to reach Babung. Although the novel ends on a satisfactory note, the plot is disjointed at times, and some characters feel flat. Richer details about Babung and Eliot’s relationship would have made Eliot’s obsessive quest more understandable for readers. Eliot’s father and grandmother are Japanese American from Hawaii; her mother is racially ambiguous.

An engrossing but somewhat uneven tale about grief, ghosts, and the power of memory. (Paranormal. 8-12)
For many elementary school students, learning about the civil rights movement means lessons devoted to Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks; far fewer learn about Mamie Till-Mobley. Author Angela Joy and illustrator Janelle Washington hope that will change with the publication of their picture-book biography, *Choosing Brave: How Mamie Till-Mobley and Emmett Till Sparked the Civil Rights Movement* (Roaring Brook, Aug. 9).

Joy already knew the story of Emmett Till, the Black teenager who, in 1955, was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered after accusations that he flirted with or whistled at Carolyn Bryant Donham, a White grocery store proprietor. However, she knew little about his mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, until she happened to listen to a podcast. Till-Mobley’s insistence on an open casket at her son’s funeral and on speaking to the press inspired Rosa Parks and helped set into motion the civil rights movement. “I thought that was a really important part of history that I was missing personally,” Joy tells Kirkus via a Zoom call from Minneapolis. “I thought the story needed to be told.”

As she researched—and read Till-Mobley’s book, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America* (2003), co-written by Christopher Benson—she was struck by the woman’s strength. Till-Mobley’s father left when she was a child, and she was abused by her first two husbands before enduring the loss of her son. Yet she went on to raise money for the NAACP, become a teacher, and create the Emmett Till Players, a speech and theater group.
group, before her death in 2003. “What was it in this woman that made her so strong, so brave, that she would stand up in front of the press and ask for help for her son? What made her demand that her son’s body be sent back when the sheriff was going to bury him that day?” Joy asks.

Joy discovered that Till-Mobley had taught Emmett to whistle to help him overcome a stutter. “Knowing that maybe that wolf whistle was him just trying to get out words is devastating,” says Joy.

Depicting the fateful encounter was a challenge for Washington. She started brainstorming and wound up focusing on the whistle, she says on a Zoom call from Alexandria, Virginia. She eventually decided to represent it as a sound wave—an image echoed on the next page by a cloud of smoke emanating from the train that took Emmett’s body back home to his mother. “It worked because...that whistle is connected to the train. That train is now moving his body,” she says. “I wanted to show that continuation of movement.”

Both Washington and Joy agree that Washington’s medium—paper-cut art—was ideal for the story. Created by cutting out images from paper and gluing them against tissue paper of different colors, Washington’s art is abstract, which allowed her to tell the story accurately but without disturbing young readers. “I think we’ve been able to avoid some of the harder parts while still communicating that something bad did happen,” says Joy.

The courtroom scenes focus on Till-Mobley; Washington’s goal was to “illustrate it without giving those that did it power...and keeping it really focused on giving Mamie that power back.” She drew inspiration from a photograph of Till-Mobley walking into the courthouse as a group of White people stared. “You could tell that she was nervous, a little scared, but she had to keep moving.” Washington portrayed the White onlookers as a menacing, silhouetted mass of shadows, with Till-Mobley taking center stage.

Though Choosing Brave is concerned with history, the themes it tackles feel all too immediate. Referring to the acquittal of the killers, Joy writes, “A second murder mourned— / the death of decency.” “When you believe in something like the legal system, and it fails you, that feels like a death,” Joy says. “For so many years, we felt that things were getting better for Black and brown people. And then we wake up, and Trayvon Martin happens. Freddie Gray happens. Tamir Rice happens.”

In 2020, Washington created a paper-cut image of Breonna Taylor—who had been shot by police in March of that year—for Oprah magazine. It was an emotionally draining experience but an important one, she says. “These things need to be told.” At a time when children’s books that grapple with racism are increasingly under fire, both Joy and Washington know how important—and vulnerable—their work is. Joy admires the authors who continue to write despite their books being banned. “Because that shows that they’ve chosen to be brave. And I think that’s what we’re doing. The publisher, the editor, the illustrator, myself, we’re choosing to be right, we’re choosing to tell the story and to weather whatever comes our way.”

Choosing Brave was reviewed in the June 1, 2022, issue.
“Enthusiastically, chaotically delightful.”

IN MYRTLE PERIL

A little girl named Esther, who lives in the Peru of a century ago, paints a map of South America that features her favorite color, turquoise, which she uses for “the color of rivers and lakes and the blue morpho butterflies that lived in the rain forest.” When she grows up and has a daughter of her own, Isabel, Esther paints the girl’s room turquoise, inspiring her to dream of flying across the world. Isabel finds a home in the United States and becomes an artist. The urge to dream big is passed on again, this time to Monica, Isabel’s daughter and the book’s author, who grows up to write stories for children and to raise two daughters of her own. This autobiographical, multigenerational tale is proof that a loving parent can encourage a child not only to embrace art, but also to view the world as a place of limitless opportunities. The book is bilingual, with Spanish first, English second, though some Spanish words and phrases such as mantas (blankets) and linda (beautiful) are retained in the English text. With illustrations that place realistic images of characters’ faces against deeply saturated greens and purples and the titular turquoise, the book feels like a whirlwind journey through 100 years of family history. In fact, it could stand to be a little longer; as beautiful as it is, it’s over as quickly as an elusive dream. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A rich portrayal of the passage of a family’s artistic talents across generations. (author’s note, map, photo) (Picture book. 4-7)
in the hospital, is it real or a delusion? Only Myrtle and Miss Judson, ably assisted by Sally and Peony, Myrtle’s talkative cat, can expose the truth. Myriad secrets all come back to the central mystery, and though some tertiary subplots are lightly developed, the mystery as a whole is charming. How can it be otherwise when solved by “a cat, a dog, two doctors, a journalist on crutches, an unemployed law clerk, a solicitor in pyjamas, a nurse with a cricket bat, a governess, an off-duty housekeeper, and one small frantic Investigator”? Myrtle’s family is White; multiple characters of color are present, including biracial French Guianese Miss Judson.

Enthusiastically, chaotically delightful. (Historical mystery 9-12)

WE ARE MANY
Cameron, Dave
Illus. by Suharu Ogawa
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-5253-0466-8

A pile of people is about to topple.
It all starts with one ball. Children in the park chase it and end up in a giggly heap. Adults hear their laughter and run to join in the fun. What appears to be an absurd counting book at first (“A pair of tourists jumped from a hot-air / balloon, and the pile grew by two. / A string quartet hopped on, / and the pile grew by four”) takes a deeper, sociological turn as the pile becomes unwieldy, and those stuck in the middle or at the bottom feel frustrated. The pile becomes as large as a mountain (confirmed by the mountain climber who climbs up to the top). Everyone cheers: They created a mountain—together! But then the mountain begins to fall, and

What if teaching your children emotional intelligence was as easy as reading them a bedtime story?

“A story of mastering ones own feelings and how to overcome obstacles in the way of your goals.”
—The Momma Spot Blog for Bella Santini in the Troll War

“Bella is a relatable and engaging protagonist whose determination and independence make her a fantastic role model for readers.”
—The Children’s Book Review for Bella Santini in the Land of Everlasting Change

“A colorfully written work in a fantastical world that young and old readers will enjoy.”
—Kirkus Reviews for Bella Santini in the Troll War

For Information on Film Rights, Email angela@angelaalegh.com • angelaalegh.com
two piles are formed. Should they form one big pile or stay as two? As some people leave one pile for another, one pile ends up bigger. Some people prefer the smaller pile; it is safer. The kids chastise the adults for ruining their fun; they want to go back to simply chasing the ball. Their renewed game results in a new pile, which in turn, creates many more. The rushed ending seems off for the heavy lifting required to fully understand this complex commentary on group dynamics, but it is definitely food for thought. Busy cartoon artwork depicts a diverse crowd of children and adults. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A bizarre yet intriguing look at human behavior. (Picture book, 5-8)

**THE WOLVES AND MOOSE OF ISLE ROYALE**

**Restoring an Island Ecosystem**

Castaldo, Nancy F.  
Photos by Morgan Heim  
Clarion/HarperCollins (96 pp.)  
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022  
978-0-358-27423-0  
Series: Scientists in the Field

A visit to a remote national park that is the site of the longest uninterrupted predator-prey study in history.

Following the pattern of other entries in the much-honored Scientists in the Field series, Castaldo and Heim introduce several biologists and other researchers working at Isle Royale, a group of islands on Lake Superior, with portraits and short descriptions of their work and interests. Castaldo adds historical context and observations gleaned from a decadeslong study of how rising and falling populations of local wolves and their main prey, moose, affect the unusually isolated area’s entire ecosystem. She also offers an evenhanded view of a controversial recent project: After the wolf population nearly went extinct, scientists imported wolves from outside in the hopes that they would breed. Castaldo leaves it for reflective readers to decide whether that is responsible conservation or unscientific meddling with natural patterns. As in other titles in the series, the kids chastise the adults for ruining their fun; they want to go back to simply chasing the ball. Their renewed game results in a new pile, which in turn, creates many more. The rushed ending seems off for the heavy lifting required to fully understand this complex commentary on group dynamics, but it is definitely food for thought. Busy cartoon artwork depicts a diverse crowd of children and adults. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A bizarre yet intriguing look at human behavior. (Picture book, 5-8)

**NICO BRAVO AND THE TRIAL OF VULCAN**

Cavallaro, Mike  
First Second (102 pp.)  
$16.99 paper | Aug. 9, 2022  
978-1-250-21887-2  
Series: Nico Bravo, 3

A young boy and his friends face a familiar foe. This third installment after *Nico Bravo and the Cellar Dwellers* (2020) jumps right back in, following Nico and his friends Lula the sphinx and Buck the unicorn, who were sent by Vulcan, Nico’s de facto caregiver, to save the unicorn colony. The unicorns are ensorcelled by a strange domed machine controlling their minds. Vulcan seems to have his own mysterious motives for sending the trio away. He is on trial for using the enigmatic substance Aether and is sent on a quest to retrieve five mystical artifacts; if he fails, he’ll be found “in violation of the cosmic code.” Nico and Vulcan quickly discover that their missions are not what they seem. The pernicious god Ahriman reappears at Vulcan’s trial—could he be behind Nico and Vulcan’s collective troubles? While the plot rockets along, those seeking a richer experience won’t find much information about myriad gods name-dropped, nor will readers who are looking for deeper character development. Still, Cavallaro’s romp delightfully ties together its multiple narrative threads with its blazingly hued full-color art, zippy wordless sequences, and high-octane action. Nico and Vulcan appear White, and a group shot of humans shows a range of skin tones; deities represented are culturally diverse and include representatives from ancient Mesopotamia, Iran, and Mesoamerica.

A satisfying installment. (Graphic fantasy, 8-12)

**THE EXTRADIMENSIONAL REAPPEARANCE OF MARS PATEL**

Chari, Sheela  
Walker US/Candlewick (352 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-1-5362-0958-7  
Series: Mars Patel, 3

Saving the world as well as all of its grown-ups sends middle schooler Mars and his buddies between planets as well as dimensions in this podcast-novelization wrap-up. In a plotline that has a strong sense of “making this stuff up as we go,” Mars completes his escape from the all-child Mars Colony—with a folded-in side venture to an alternate world where everyone he knows has turned creepy and staring—but returns to an Earth that has been set on the path to environmental recovery and worldwide democracy by kids because (not creepy at all) the adults have disappeared. What with plenty of
‘LAUNCHING PAD FOR ALL MOVEMENT IN BALLET’
—KIRKUS REVIEWS (STARRED REVIEW)

‘HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!’
‘A TRULY EXCELLENT BOOK’
‘SUPERBLY ILLUSTRATED’
—A WISHING SHELF

LCCN: 2022904395
E-BOOK: 978-1-955555-23-4
HARDCOVER: 978-1-955555-24-1
PAPERBACK: 978-1-955555-22-7

Series Spans 3-8
August

www.CreativeMovementStories.com
A school day turns into a surprise.

Early in the morning, as a group of diverse children gather to wait for their school bus, a small scattering of snowflakes begin to fall. The children, who arrive in alphabetical order by name, each have a different morning preoccupation: “Beatrice burrows” (in a book), “Carlos catches” (snowflakes), “Divya drifts” (back to sleep). Although the alliteration doesn’t continue throughout the book, each new child’s activity offers room for educators and caregivers to pause for discussion. “Hannah stomps. Isaiah romps” is an ideal place to ponder the difference between a stomp and a romp. The sentences are brief, but they pack a powerful punch when it comes to vocabulary-building. Many of the children are reproduced in a double-page spread that allows readers to play a seek-and-find game as the characters romp through a now-snowy scene. Backgrounds have the appearance of a child’s drawing, with buildings that look as though they were scrawled in black marker. Together, the text and illustrations create an energetic and idealized urban landscape that readers would love to visit, especially when the reason why the bus isn’t showing up is revealed: It’s a snow day! Young fans of Ezra Jack Keats’ *The Snowy Day* (1962) will find this an enjoyable companion book, and this title will likely see heavy rotation in libraries during the colder months of the year. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Simple, snowy fun with a vocabulary-building boost. (Picture book. 4-6)
otherwise as he is seen lying to readers about this adventure. This lack of a lesson may frustrate caregivers and educators hoping to use the book to show self-aggrandizing readers the folly of flaunted claims and lies, but the real problem is that Bragalot is not a sympathetic character. Readers may be as disgusted with the tiny rabbit as the menagerie of animals in his kingdom. The colorful illustrations do a lot of heavy lifting in an attempt to elevate the book, but they can’t overcome the problem that this bunny is not likable. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An irritating protagonist and a misdelivered moral make for a disappointing tale. (Picture book. 4-8)

OUR WORLD OF DUMPLINGS
Dekker, Francie
Illus. by Sarah Jung
Little Bee Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-4998-1234-3

It’s dumpling day, and Sylvia goes from apartment to apartment to help make dumplings from different cultures.

The first stop is Sylvia’s friend Prisha’s apartment, where they make Indian momos. From there, the two friends continue on to Moria’s home to make Jamaican johnnycakes. Then the three kids visit Aaron’s to make his Jewish grandmother’s kreples. This pattern continues until nine children are squeezed into the final kitchen to make Polish pierogi with Sylvia’s busha.

A total of nine dumplings from families of varying skin tones are described and pictured along the way, culminating in a rooftop party. Readers will enjoy learning about different cultures’ dumpling traditions, and this book certainly celebrates culinary diversity. Illustrations featuring muted colors that tend toward warm sepia tones and a classic drawing style give the feeling of a throwback to an earlier time, but the human figures come across stiffly, with static poses and fixed expressions. Small inconsistencies in the story may trip up readers, such as the description of eating hot Georgian khinkali right after filling them with meat and spices, with no mention of cooking. This straightforward tale showcases some great food but is not as complex or emotionally satisfying as Dumplings for Lili (2021) by Melissa Iwai, which covers very similar territory. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Tasty but doesn’t quite hit the spot. (Information on other kinds of dumplings) (Picture book. 4-8)
a poor, predominantly Mexican neighborhood in San Antonio. Though she believes at first that being a hard, loyal worker will yield rewards, Petra quickly discovers that the American dream may not be all it is cracked up to be. She must reorient herself to her own values in order to get ahead while maintaining her integrity. The stakes feel lower in this sequel; there are fewer threats of violence, and struggles are resolved relatively easily. The novel highlights the barriers and abuses faced by many new immigrants both historically and today through short chapters that keep the pace moving toward a happy ending.

Readable historical fiction with themes that resonate. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 10-14)

**WILL IT BE OKAY?**
Dragonwagon, Crescent
Illus. by Jessica Love
Cameron Kids (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-951836-50-4

An updated version of Dragonwagon’s 1977 release, originally illustrated by Ben Shecter, with new artwork by Love.

Written entirely in dialogue between a parent and a child, the text addresses childhood fears ranging from the small (“But what if there is thunder and lightning?”) to the profound (“But what if you die?”). The latter worry arises toward the end of the book, after the child has received matter-of-fact, loving reassurance about many other fears (“You sit at your window and watch the rain beating down over the houses…”). The parent does not seem visibly ill, which suggests that this is a general query about mortality rather than a pressing concern. Throughout, Love’s illustrations brim with vitality and emotion, evoking a style akin to some of Trina Schart Hyman’s earlier work in the characters’ design, with spare backgrounds that offer expressive, decorative embellishments to help set mood and tone. This tender tale is a balm for worried children in troubled times and a model of comfort for caregivers to offer them. The main characters have light skin, dark eyes, and curly, black hair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

More than OK. Much more. (Picture book. 3-8)

**YELLOW DOG BLUES**
Duncan, Alice Faye
Illus. by Chris Raschka
Eerdmans (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-8028-5553-4

A Black child takes readers on a Mississippi blues tour in search of a four-legged friend.

Bo Willie can’t find his dog anywhere. After asking around and consulting a map, he realizes that Yellow Dog, bit by the blues bug, is heading for Beale Street in Memphis, where “he sings all day and night.” Along the way, Bo Willie stops by several sites that figure prominently in blues history, among them the Merigold Blues Club, Hicks’ Tamales, and the intersection of Highway 8 and Highway 1, one of several locations mentioned in the many legends about Robert Johnson, who is said to have sold his soul to the devil in exchange for the gift of blues music. Raschka’s illustrations, created with fabric paint and embroidery on canvas, provide layers of texture and energy that give this book a soulful, country feel. The book is genius in its simplicity; instead of offering a factual account of the blues, it invites readers to feel the music—and readers absolutely will. Duncan playfully weaves in references to the blues; her text exudes the tone of a blues song yet remains cheerfully child-friendly (“Then we drove toward Merigold / to shimmy, shake, and boogie”). The backmatter includes information on the Mississippi Delta and the sites that Bo Willie visits. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Like listening to a blues record while wrapped up in a homemade quilt sipping sweet tea. (Picture book. 3-8)

**I DID IT!**
Emberley, Michael
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$14.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-8234-4651-3
Series: I Like to Read Comics

You can do it, too. An adorable creature with catlike ears, a tail, and a big red nose wants to do things! Dressed in a pink and green striped onesie (complete with matching ear covers), they set out to experience life, from building block towers to playing catch to climbing trees. But although they try their best with each new activity, they ultimately conclude that “I can’t do it!” That changes, though, when it comes to riding a bike. With the support of their friends—small animals and little robots—they try, fail, but then try again. And although the first long-term ride ultimately ends in a crash, the little protagonist has gained the confidence to proudly proclaim, “I did it!” It’s a quiet story but one that will speak volumes to young readers experiencing new challenges. Emberley masterfully balances colorful characters and the use of white space, keeping the focus on the action and the emotions associated with trying and failing. This title will be cherished by librarians, educators, and caregivers for its simple yet direct message but also by young readers, who will see themselves reflected in the main character. When it comes to excellent books, Emberley does it! (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Joyfully encouraging—just what uncertain little ones need as they make their first forays into independence. (Picture book. 3-6)
THE THREE LITTLE SUPERPIGS AND THE GINGERBREAD MAN
Evans, Claire
Scholastic (40 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-338-77622-9

Why have fairy tales lasted so long? Maybe it’s because they change with every teller.

It takes surprisingly little effort to turn the Three Little Pigs into superheroes. The Big Bad Wolf basically started out as a supervillain, with the ability to blow a house down, and the pigs had to perform spectacular feats to outwit him. In this picture book, the wolf, locked in the Happily Never After tower, devises a plot to escape. Using rotten eggs and spicy ginger, he creates the Gingerbread Man, who makes his way to the city. The Gingerbread Man grabs the key, and not even superhero pigs are fast enough to catch him, but with their secret weapon—mustard (which one of the pigs also uses to bake cookies)—they save the day. The morals: Evil never triumphs, and mustard cookies are delicious.

The book’s charm is in the details. There are splotches of mustard on the cookies featured on the endpapers, and a sly-looking mouse is hiding on many of the pages. The story even manages to include more than a dozen fairy-tale figures without seeming frenzied. Evans’ use of shading is so skillful that it almost seems possible to reach out and touch the characters. Most of the human characters are light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Superheroes, and readers, will live happily-ever-after. (Picture book. 3-5)

MY NEST OF SILENCE
Faulkner, Matt
Atheneum (348 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-344-7762-9

A Japanese American family is split between an incarceration camp and the battlefield.

It’s 1944, and Mak, Mari’s 18-year-old brother, has gone away to fight in World War II. Mari has vowed not to speak again until he comes back, no matter how strange her father or anyone else at Manzanar finds it. Mari spends her time drawing and waiting for letters from her brother, who experiences first basic training and then combat. Mak is forced to face the fact that the same government that locked his family up for being Japanese is happy enough to send him to the front—and racism from White fellow Americans continues overseas, of course. As Mak tries to protect his family from the uglier side of war, Mari contends with her quarreling parents, dismal life at camp, and her own volatile moods. Told through prose and black-and-white comic panels, Mari’s and Mak’s stories come to life. Mari’s sections are sometimes hampered by a disjointed narrative style that leaves her age and perception of events unclear and that is a mismatch for the relatively more brutal sections detailing Mak’s wartime experiences. Even so, the stark inequities that Japanese Americans faced as well as the quieter struggle of parents and children trying to understand each other and grow together both shine through.

A Japanese American incarceration narrative told through an original and effective blend of prose and illustration. (author’s note, bibliography) (Historical fiction. 10-13)

CRASH FROM OUTER SPACE Unraveling the Mystery of Flying Saucers, Alien Beings, and Roswell
Fleming, Candace
Scholastic Focus (288 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-338-82946-4
Series: Scholastic Focus

Separating the facts from the fallacies concerning aliens and UFOs, from the 1940s to today.

The spectacular crash of an unidentified flying object in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947 triggers national interest. Local rancher Mack Brazel checks out the strange-looking debris with his two kids, later talking with reporters. In the following years, public interest as well as investigations from the military accelerate. Rampant speculation, intense research, and plain hysteria follow, with books, movies, and the forming of UFO groups. Are little green men from Venus preparing to attack our country? Decades later, supposed proof of an alien invasion refers back to the testimony of original Roswell witnesses and reexamined documents. There is an ebb and flow to the discovery of information. In 1997, the Air Force admits to a coverup of a secret operation from the 1940s called Project Mogul. In 2006, the makers of a documentary that purported to show an alien autopsy admit that it was a fake. Research continues up to the present day; readers must decide for themselves. Fleming presents an impressive volume of information in a crisp and concise manner, helping readers grasp the big picture. The real stars of the book, though, are her carefully chosen visuals: Dozens of black-and-white photographs as well as reproductions of official documents, newspaper pages, cartoons, and more add both atmosphere and authenticity.

A vivid, comprehensive account of the Roswell mystery and its aftermath. (author’s note, bibliography, source notes, image credits, index) (Nonfiction. 9-13)
A BEAR FAR FROM HOME
Fletcher, Susan
Illus. by Rebecca Green
Anne Schwartz/Random (40 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-593-18189-8
978-0-593-18190-4 PLB

In this reconstruction of a historical incident, a captive polar bear travels from the frozen north to a menagerie on the Thames.

Building on scanty records of a gift sent from Haakon IV of Norway to Henry III of England in the 13th century, Fletcher focuses less on such specifics as how the bear was captured or kept under control (while, apparently, being allowed to dive at will into the Thames for fish!) and more on how it might have felt to be snatched from the icy waters of her native clime, transported on a ship, and caged among other captive animals in the Tower of London. In compositions that generally echo those of medieval manuscript pages, Green likewise takes an anthropomorphic slant on the tale—skipping fussy realism (the visuals don’t depict, for instance, how the bear was caught) but explaining in a note that she wanted to capture the bear’s feelings at each stage of the journey and depicting her actions encountering similar experiences. The author separates elements and facts from fancy at the end, allowing that the bear’s gender and even species are speculations, and closes with quick histories of the Tower of London and the menagerie. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sweet, artfully conjured, and likely to elicit strong reactions on several levels. (bibliography) (Informational picture book. 7-9)

IT’S NOT THE THREE LITTLE PIGS
Funk, Josh
Illus. by Edwardian Taylor
Two Lions (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-422-0-3243-8
Series: It’s Not a Fairy Tale, 4

It’s good to embrace change. Although an unseen narrator attempts to tell an accustomed version of “The Three Little Pigs”—here named Alan, Alfred, and Alvin Albert—their younger sister, Alison, wants to get in on the action because she’s a natural storyteller. The narrator grudgingly allows Alison to tag along, but her added bits of flavor and the unexpected personalities of her brothers soon send the story off its traditional tracks and into hilarious hijinks. For example, Alan’s love of building allows him to design a functional house made of plastic drinking straws, Alfred’s stick house is actually constructed by Alan because Alfred’s clearly a star and not stage crew, and Alvin’s shacking up in a pumpkin behind Cinderella’s castle because he’s…not the crispiest piece of bacon on the plate. Alison’s quick thinking leads the brothers to be one step ahead of the wandering wolf. When the narrator hits their limit, a conversation with Alison proves that collaboration can lead to unexpected but wonderful results. The story flows well, accompanied by energetic cartoon art, and the choice to color-code the speech bubbles of each character (and the text of the narrator vs. Alison) ensures readers will be able to follow the snappy dialogue. Those who love to make up their own stories will be inspired, and readers who march to the beats of their own drums will be delighted. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Will leave readers as happy as a pig in mud. (Picture book. 6-10)

FREESTYLE
Galigan, Gale
Colors by K Czap
Graphix/Scholastic (272 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-338-04580-2

Two kinds of performance arts are better than one in this feel-good comedy. The eighth grade dance crew known as Eight Bitz are stuck between styles. Their captain, Tess Reyes, runs a strict routine with an eye toward the upcoming Bronx Battle tournament. Cory Tan, a skilled improviser, wants to play fast and loose for maximum style. High school looms over the dancers. Cory’s parents recruit his classmate Sunna Ahmad to tutor him in hopes of his getting into an elite school. Sunna becomes a friend and confidante once Cory discovers her secret talent, and he learns yo-yo throwing tricks from her. The cartooning instincts on display are superb, always making room for setting, emotion, movement, and color for great visual variety. Welcoming urban community spaces are highlighted throughout, including parks and public transit. Middle school emotional turmoil is expressed more than once in the form of written and deleted texts. At the same time, mutual appreciation between friends and love from family form positive, affirming bonds. While the story focuses most on Cory and Sunna, everyone gets moments to shine. The cast is cued as broadly diverse through names, physical appearance, and other contextual clues.

This inviting, heartfelt story will get readers into the groove of self-expression and lasting friendships. (Bonus comics) (Graphic fiction. 10-13)
First, her indignation at a set of wealthy parents scheming with Ollie has been identified as Latine in previous episodes; the decking for fun. Each section contains descriptions of the creation of objects as disparate as foosball tables, solar panels, electric guitars, and high-end motorcycles, in one or two double-page spreads. The photographs, stills from the episodes, can't supply as much information as the series does. Since even the text is summary, it may leave readers confused at times. Steps are skipped in the crayon-making and saxophone construction processes, for example. And for the entry on sundae cups, an image described as “the chocolate mixture being blended before it is poured into the tote” is actually the crumbled chocolate that tops the sundaes. On the other hand, the text includes clear definitions of specific words pertinent to each process, some ancillary information, and occasional do-it-yourself activities. The lively design is inviting, and the choice of subjects includes something for everyone. The photos are accompanied by cartoon illustrations; humans depicted are diverse.

An intriguing, behind-the-scenes look at the creation of common objects. (Nonfiction 9-14)

**How It's Made**

*The Creation of Everyday Items*

Geencer, Thomas

Illus. by Muti

Abrams (176 pp.)

$19.99 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-4197-5375-6

From sundae cups to gemstones, descriptions of the making of 54 items.

This collection begins with an explanation of some common manufacturing processes: molding, milling, soldering, assembly, and two types of welding. What follows is a selection of summarized episodes of a long-running Science Channel series, grouped by category: food, sports, science and technology, music, art, vehicles, and a catchall chapter entitled “just for fun.” Each section contains descriptions of the creation of objects as disparate as foosball tables, solar panels, electric guitars, and high-end motorcycles, in one or two double-page spreads. The text basically comes from the scripts of the relevant episodes, which are clearly aimed at a general audience.
“Another heady foray into math’s conceptual reaches, with zero chance of failing to entertain.”

ZERO ZEBRAS
A Counting Book About What’s Not There
Goldstone, Bruce
Illus. by Julien Chung
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-74224-4

A counting book cleverly designed to raise awareness about nothing.
“Zero is a big nothing,” Goldstone rightly writes, “but it’s also a big deal.” Younger audiences will definitely get a sense of what he means from this effervescent animal count, which begins with “I see one wallaby...” and goes on from “Two tuna splish / and splash / and splash...” to “Twelve turtles / wallow in mud”—each verse ending with a refrain that is some variant on “and zero zebras.” Zero zebras are indeed what viewers will find in the cheery illustrations, too, as Chung employs bright colors and precisely drawn geometric shapes in neat but lively compositions that feature arrays of (other) creatures, inconspicuously placed numerals, and, for sharper eyes to spot, glimpses of the odd foxtail, beach ball, or other visual reference to scenes just past. Then, after closing with a veritable litany (“When the stars come out tonight, / zero zebras do, too. / Along with zero pandas / eating zero bamboo”), the author eases in the mind-blowing notion that zero isn’t really a number at all but more of an idea, not unlike a different but adjacent concept: infinity. For an author who has already introduced picture-book readers to probability, pattern recognition, and estimation theory, it hardly seems a stretch. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Another heady foray into math’s conceptual reaches, with zero chance of failing to entertain. (Math picture book. 6-9)

TWO DEGREES
Gratz, Alan
Scholastic (384 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-338-73567-3

In parallel narratives, four young people simultaneously experience the harrowing effects of climate change. If terrifying readers is an effective way to spur them to take the climate crisis seriously, Gratz does an admirable job, as he plunges his middle schoolers into desperate, life-threatening straits in three wildly dangerous scenarios. For Akira Kristiansen, a peaceful visit to a treasured grove of Sierra Nevada giant sequoias turns into a frantic scramble to outrace a roaring megafire. In Churchill, Manitoba, eighth grade dudes Owen Mackenzie, a White boy, and George Gruyère (Mushkegon-Nevada giant sequoias) are viciously mauled and then stalked by polar bears. At the same time, Puerto Rican Florida resident Natalie Torres is whisked off in the storm surge when a Category 5 hurricane hits Miami. Along with acknowledging in his afterword that the specific incidents portrayed are fictional but are inspired by actual events happening around the world, not just in North America, the author pulls his characters—dedicated climate activists all in the wake of their narrow escapes from death—together to deliver speeches at an international climate rally at the end. “It’s your world,” Gratz finishes in his author’s note, “your future. It’s up to you to decide what you want that future world to look like, and what you can do to make it happen.”

Lecture-y toward the end, but the scary message is delivered with wrenching, dramatic urgency. (Fiction. 9-13)

ANNE AND HER TOWER OF GIRAFFES
The Adventurous Life of the First Giraffologist
Gray, Karlin
Illus. by Aparna Varma
Kids Can (44 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5253-0495-8

Although readers young and old will likely recognize the name Jane Goodall from her work with chimpanzees, giraffologist Anne Innis Dagg has been less well known—until now. Born in 1933, Anne was introduced to giraffes on a trip to the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago. Readers learn that the experience sparked a lifetime of love for the tallest herbivore and propelled Anne to seek out everything she could about giraffes when she was back home in Toronto. Sadly, the public library had no materials on giraffes, and the animals weren’t covered in her school lessons. That was just the beginning of many educational hurdles, as giraffes were not part of many college zoology areas of study, either. So in 1956, Anne traveled to South Africa to study giraffes at Fleur de Lys Ranch. Although her studies were fruitful, educational disappointments continued as universities at that time were reluctant to hire women professors. Undeterred, Anne forged her own path as an author of numerous books. The story is compelling, and detailed backmatter—including an interview with Dagg, a thorough bibliography, and an author’s note with information on apartheid that contextualizes the scientist’s time in South Africa—makes this book a strong choice for those doing reports or curious to learn more. Upbeat artwork rendered in colored pencil and Photoshop uses earth tones to depict the giraffes in their natural setting. Anne presents as White; background characters are racially diverse. (Picture book biography. 6-8)
THE DOORS TO NOWHERE
Grine, Chris
Oni Press (224 pp.)
$17.99 paper | June 7, 2022
978-1-6715-036-8
Series: Secrets of Camp Whatever, 2

Things take a dark turn for a tween in a magical world.

Willow and her friends from summer camp return in this sequel to Secrets of Camp Whatever (2021), and the stakes are even higher. With a new enemy, a spell book, and a revealed connection to a family lineage, Willow has much more on her plate in this installment. Picking up after her otherworldly experiences at camp, readers meet blue-haired Willow as she is pulled even further into the paranormal world of Nowhere thanks to a century-old prophecy. Along the way, she comes face to face with supernatural creatures, some of whom turn out to be friendly, while others are foes. Thankfully, her friends, each with their own powers and passions, become a major help to Willow as she tries to unravel the mysteries. Grine's dialogue is as accessible as before, with panels and speech bubbles that are easy for readers to follow while maintaining interest through pleasing variety. The illustrations are clean, vibrantly colorful, and appealing. Though there is a more menacing tone this time around, it is balanced by touches of humor and the soft pastel color palette. Willow is deaf and uses hearing aids; the first volume cued her as White and Latine. Most characters read White, and one of Willow's friends is Black.

An engaging, spooky adventure for existing fans and new readers alike. (Graphic paranormal mystery. 8-12)

COPYCAT
Nature-Inspired Design Around the World
Hale, Christy
Lee & Low Books (40 pp.)
$20.95 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-64379-230-9

Some of the best ideas in the world have their origins in nature.

This delicious picture book pairs attractive illustrations of natural phenomena—such as a honeycomb or the way a desert beetle condenses water on its shell to store it for later—with photographs of the human-made creations inspired by them (a hexagonal low-income housing project in Slovenia, a water bottle). Innovative ideas from around the world are showcased: A Chilean park installation that took inspiration from stalactites and stalagmites; smaller, quieter Tunisian wind converters based on the figure-eight motion of a hummingbird's wings in flight; and a Zimbabwean office building that borrows its heating and cooling arrangement from termite mounds are some of the intriguing innovations humans have adapted from nature (backmatter explains that this is called biomimicry). The text is in the tanka format, a Japanese form of poetry usually without punctuation or capitalization, with a set number of lines and syllables per line—a dynamic choice that underscores the observation and free-association thinking necessary to see the possibilities of the natural world. Two appended double-page spreads offer more in-depth explanations of the topics explored. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Inspiring, lovely to look at, and well presented. (sources, photo credits) (Informational picture book/poetry. 5-9)

THE RAT QUEEN
Hautman, Pete
Candlewick (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5362-1858-9

Annie has always wanted to visit Lithuania, but the trip, when she finally goes, reveals a sordid family history and a need for reparations.

Motherless, home-schooled Annike Klimas was raised in America on Lithuanian folklore, which features lots of rats. When she turns 10, Papa tells her that it’s a family tradition—and secret—that she begin feeding the nuodeema burna, or eater of sins. Writing down her bad deeds and dropping the notes into the burna, a hole in the floor, will help relieve her conscience. Papa does it and is rejuvenated afterward, but Annie resists—it deadens her experiences, and she wants to feel both the good and the bad. Also, she stops growing taller every time she feeds the burna. Slowly revealed hints about Papa’s questionable character combined with unsettling fairy tales embedded throughout the story create a menacing atmosphere and foreshadow events. Annie, trying to discover the source of the burna’s magic, finds a plague of rats—and accidentally burns down their home. Now her father seems to be dying. He demands they travel to Lithuania to petition Queen Zurka to extend his life. There, Annie discovers the depth of her father’s betrayals, leading to a moral quandary: Does Papa deserve a second chance? Remorse, honor, and forgiveness are just some of the themes in this creepy, symbolically rich saga featuring a default White cast from a fictional Baltic nation.

Complex and provocative. (author’s note, glossary) (Fantasy. 9-13)
A STORY IS TO SHARE
How Ruth Krauss Found
Another Way To Tell a Tale
Higgins, Carter
Illus. by Isabelle Arsenault
Abrams (40 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-497-4993-3

A biography of Ruth Krauss, doyen of children’s literature, told, aptly, in picture-book format. Higgins chronicles Krauss’ life from childhood to early adulthood, covering the illnesses she endured, her experiences at summer camp, and her forays into painting and writing. For Krauss fans, the book may be heralded as a welcome acknowledgement of her work. However, for those less familiar with her and her canon, the title does little to introduce or discuss her creativity in a meaningful way; the book repeatedly states that she was a free thinker but only vaguely addresses how that was channeled into her writing. It’s not clear why others initially said “No that’s not good” about her work or how interacting with a young neighbor and other small children (depicted as racially diverse) helped her “[find] another way to tell a tale.” At times, the poetic language works against the biographical elements, such as when the book discusses Krauss’ childhood: “But sickness sticks around a lot / and steals her voice away— / so she wiggles-wiggles little fingers / that’s how she says hi / Like this.” The verse is elegant—as is Arsenault’s graceful, scribbly artwork—but implies a physical loss of voice and a sign-language skill that is not explained in the book’s author’s note (though her illnesses are briefly discussed there). The author’s note, a bibliography, and a list of Krauss’ work attempt to provide more substance but fall short. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Doesn’t quite do its subject justice. (Picture-book biography, 6-8)

ALPHABEDTIME
Hill, Susanna Leonard
Illus. by Betsy Snyder
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-399-16841-3

Twenty-six Alphababies prepare for bedtime. Putting A, B, C, and 23 other little ones to bed for the night is a daunting task. The bespectacled Alpha Mom needs a megaphone to call the kids to attention: “TIME FOR BED!” From there, in a style reminiscent of Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault’s Chicka Chicka Boom Boom (1980), illustrated by Lois Ehlert, each child romps, rolls, and races to bed. Despite lights out, the kids have an “alpha pillow fight!” after which Mommy and Daddy finally get them to sleep with a kiss and one last tuck into bed. This spirited family is full of personality, each child with a different stuffed animal and pajama set and a unique journey to bedtime. The illustrations capture the bustle of a house bursting with children, from the chaos of the dinner table and children slipping on carpets and overturning houseplants in their haste to a series of bathtubs full of activity. A particularly effective string of illustrations shows the progression of lights out, from the line of light from a cracked bedroom door through the pillow fight and right into the appearance of two perturbed parents. The rhyming text bounces along, an easy read-aloud, with rich vocabulary like impish, jazzy, and scramble making for a fun, silly, relatable read with detailed, appealing illustrations. The Alphababies are diverse in skin tone, their mother is brown-skinned, and their father is light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A playful approach to teaching kids the alphabet. (Picture book 2-5)

CARVED IN EBONY, YOUNG READER’S EDITION
Lessons From the Black Women Who Shape Us
Holmes, Jasmine L.
Bethany House (128 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Aug. 1, 2022
978-0-7642-3886-4

A look at key African American women from history and the faith that fueled their activism.

Educator Holmes’ work, a young readers’ edition of her book for adults, starts with an introduction in which she describes her love of history. A note for adults explains that the book offers questions after each chapter and that the accounts are arranged chronologically rather than thematically as in the original. Holmes also notes that she hopes children will try their own hand at researching the people and topics explored here. The book features short biographies of African American women who lived during the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries and who leaned on their faith as they stood up for what was right. Each chapter starts with a quote from the subject followed by a synopsis of her life, her achievements, and how her work furthered the cause of racial freedom. Among the women profiled are educator and orator Sara Griffith Stanley; Sarah Mapps Douglass, a gifted speaker and Quaker woman who struggled with the fact that some Quaker assemblies practiced segregation; and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a lecturer on the anti-slavery circuit. The women in the book come from various backgrounds, but all shared a strength of purpose that comes through clearly in the excerpts from their eloquent speeches and letters. Readers will come away with a solid grounding in the roles these African American women, enslaved and free, played in promoting an end to slavery and advocating for equality.

A strong introduction into the lives of African American Christian activists. (Nonfiction, 9-14)
“Cleareyed, empowering, and hopeful.”

HAZEL HILL IS GONNA WIN THIS ONE

IF YOU WERE A PRINCESS
True Stories of Brave Leaders From Around the World
Homzie, Hillary
Illus. by Udayana Lugo
Aladdin (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-358-66470-3

An inspirational ode to princess power.

A trio of children explore the question “If you were a princess, what would you do?” Alongside the ideas introduced in the main text (“If you were a princess, you would be remembered for marvelous deeds”), Homzie offers tidbits, in a smaller font, about nearly 30 real princesses. The subjects are celebrated for their skills and strengths, from princesses who work to rescue and protect animals, such as Princess Alia of Jordan and Princess Stephanie of Monaco, to royals who defended their lands, including Princess Pingyang of the Tang dynasty in China and Princess Lakshmi Bai, who lived in the 19th century in what is now northern India. The jewel-toned illustrations show the children helping their community, energized by the mountain-climbing, rapping, law-practicing real-life princesses surrounding them. The book ends as it began, with a question: “How can you become a princess in your own way?” Like a BuzzFeed listicle in picture-book format, this title offers fiction-to-nonfiction-bridging potential that makes it an attractive gift for a princess-obsessed child. Backmatter includes short princess biographies. Featured princesses are from a wide range of countries and cultures throughout history, a diversity that is mirrored in the characters’ community. The main children include one with brown skin and brown curly hair; another who has light skin and long dark braids, who presents as Asian and who uses a prosthetic leg; and one with straight brown hair and light tan skin. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An uplifting option for children curious about jumping from princess fairy tales to princess biographies. (works cited)
(Informational picture book: 5-9)

HAZEL HILL IS GONNA WIN THIS ONE

Horne, Maggie
Clarion/HarperCollins (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-358-66470-3

A group of middle school girls take on harassment despite facing challenges.

Twelve-year-old Hazel Hill has spent seventh grade focusing on how to win the speech contest and how best to ignore Tyler Harris’ incessant talking, until the day Tyler tells her that Ella Quinn, her speech contest nemesis, has a crush on her. No one knows Hazel likes girls, and she doesn’t know what to do with this information about Ella. As it turns out, there’s more Hazel doesn’t know: Tyler has been harassing Ella online. Based on everything Tyler tells Hazel, the two girls, along with Riley Beckett, Ella’s best friend, realize that he’s probably harassed many other girls. When the three try to report Tyler, they find that the adults they approach don’t listen or don’t care. Left with no other options, the girls decide to take matters into their own hands. The serious subject matter this novel covers is mediated well through Hazel’s wry narration: She is funny, smart, and well adjusted even if she hasn’t managed to make friends in middle school. The portrayal of the girls’ concerns is also remarkably realistic, from their own reactions and considerations about when to speak up or remain silent to the varied and sometimes-disappointing responses of their parents and teachers. All main characters are assumed to be White.

Cleareyed, empowering, and hopeful while still frankly tackling sexual harassment. (notes) (Fiction: 10-13)

WITCH HAZEL

Idle, Molly
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-316-54113-8

Two friends tell stories and say goodbye.

Hazel, an older woman, and Hilda, a girl, share their lives—chores, tales, and more. In heavily sepia-tinted spreads, showers of glittery white illustrate the different stories that Hazel, clad in a pointy black hat, tells Hilda. As they sweep the steps and play piano, Hazel talks about her cat, her bird, and her youth as the “belle of the ball,” while these yarns are unraveled through white sparkles that coalesce into visions. Portraits on the wall of the ivy-covered house offer more clues. Eventually, Hazel takes to bed and then dies—a moment that is handled subtly, a story told “to the end” as a window goes from light to dark. Wiser readers will understand what is being conveyed, while younger or less experienced audiences may need that transition explained to them. The sentences aim for open-ended but too often land on vague, with ellipses carrying a bit too much weight. There are a lot of questions left: Is Hazel a witch, as the title implies, and if so, what, besides the hat, makes her one? Are Hazel and Hilda family or friends or neighbors? Will Hilda make a young friend of her own? Read aloud, this will invoke a quiet, peaceful mood but leave readers with some degree of dissatisfaction. Both characters have skin the color of the sepia pages. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Calming yet unfinished. (Picture book: 4-8)
Shad Hadid plans to learn everything about being an alchemist—if necromancers don’t get him first.

After things didn’t work out with his hostile stepfather and stepsiblings, Shad left Lebanon with his father and grandparents to start over in Maine. Since his father and grandfather were killed in a car crash, it’s been just him and Teta, his grandmother. Eleven-year-old Shad spends his time baking new concoctions, staring in the windows of the only Arabic bakery in town, and dodging his bully (and one-time friend), Sarah Decker, a White girl with xenophobic parents. When he stumbles into an alley behind the bakery that he shouldn’t have been able to see, Shad learns that he is descended from alchemists. Eager to learn more, he enrolls in the Alexandria Academy only to find that they dismiss him.

The power of creating new recipes.

Shad Hadid and the Alchemists of Alexandria
Freije, George
Harper/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$16.99 I Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-06-309481-9

A refreshing adventure featuring family, friendship, and the power of creating new recipes. (Fantasy. 8-12)

Until Someone Listens
A Story About Borders, Family, and One Girl’s Mission
Juarez, Estela with Lissette Norman
Illus. by Teresa Martinez
Roaring Brook Press (40 pp.)
$18.99 I Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-5250-83212-2

One family’s fight to stay together.

When Juarez’s mom was 18, she traveled across the Mexican border into the United States to attend school, work, and live. She met and married a U.S. Marine, and they had two daughters. But when Juarez was 8, her mom was deported to Mexico. The girl was devastated by the loss of her mom, and her mother’s absence left the family confused and distraught. Desperate to reunite her family, Juarez wrote letters to Congress and the president, among others. When these letters received media exposure, lawyers were able to help Juarez’s mother return to the country. Juarez, now a teen, with co-author Norman, tells the story of her family’s struggle to reunite and underscores the importance of speaking out against injustice. This sincerely told story conveys the difficulties and heartbreak that families of undocumented immigrants encounter as well as the complexity of the pathways to citizenship in the United States. Martinez’s illustrations use color to depict the devastating effects on the family; a close-up of a young Juarez huddled on the floor is especially poignant. Yet the gentle artwork tempers the sadness. Both Spanish and English editions of the story are available; the message is powerful in any language. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An inspirational and heartfelt story that will resonate with young activists. (Author’s note, photos) (Picture-book memoir. 5-9)

Ozzie & Prince Zebedee
Kalaitzidis, Gela
Flamingo Books (40 pp.)
$18.99 I Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-593-46418-2

The friendship of a dragon and a boy is tested by an act of anger.

Ozzie, a big green dragon, and Prince Zebedee, a tan-skinned boy with curly dark hair, are great friends who “made beautiful music together” and “kept each other’s feet warm” cuddling at night. But a card game at the edge of a forest creates a rift in the relationship when the prince accuses Ozzie of cheating. Ozzie, angered, eats the prince. The prince is safely, stubbornly inside the dragon’s huge belly, but he still refuses to speak to Ozzie. Ozzie, saddened, eats up chunks of a village, because “sometimes when dragons are lonely, they make bad choices.” Of course, the two eventually reconcile; the town and Ozzie are regurgitated but not before both friends learn a little about anger management and forgiveness. Digital artist Kalaitzidis’ debut picture book is most notable for the expressiveness of its characters. Whether they are furious or blissfully at play, Ozzie and Zebedee make a charming pair against detail-filled, clever backgrounds. An older, tan-skinned character seen knitting in the backgrounds of many pages, for instance, appears to be Kalaitzidis herself, judging from the cover-flap author picture. While the text never quite soars, the illustrations and the overall story feel true and relatable even if most friends don’t eat each other. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A fun pair of characters and a good friendship lesson make for a worthy dragon tale. (Picture book. 3-7)
VACCINES CHANGE THE WORLD
King-Cargile, Gillian
Illus. by Sandie Sonke
Whitman (192 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 1, 2022
978-0-8075-8481-1
Series: Science in Action, 1

From variolation to today’s mRNA vaccines, the story of one of modern medicine’s great triumphs over viral diseases.

King-Cargile begins and ends with smallpox as a case study in how to eradicate a viral scourge and in between retraces a triumphal march of medical research that—notwithstanding choruses of skeptics from the 18th century on—resulted in millions of lives being saved. In clear, simple language, King-Cargile describes many types of vaccines and how they work, but her focus is on the human and historical sides of their stories (Maurice Hilleman’s development of vaccines for measles and other maladies, the rivalry between Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin)—until the end, at least, where she covers the rise of Covid-19. Here, she suddenly stops naming names and offers more generalized accounts of the Pfizer and other vaccines and the CRISPR techniques that made their quick production possible. In keeping with the positive tone of her message, she acknowledges but downplays the ominous way many viruses continually adapt to antiviral measures and, by cutting off her narrative at the end of 2020, leaves readers to look elsewhere for information about Covid variants, more recent vaccines, and ongoing anti-vax arguments and disruptions. Still, if her account is more Eurocentric than Don Brown’s A Shot in the Arm! (2021), it does offer both strong encouragement to “use your shot” and warm tributes to the dedication of researchers from Edward Jenner on. Sonke’s cartoon illustrations are more decorative than informative; group scenes include some racial diversity.

Solid background on what has become, for better or worse, a hot topic. (glossary, recommended reading) (Nonfiction. 10-13)

A PERSON CAN BE...
Kokia, Kerri
Illus. by Carey Sookocheff
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-5253-0487-3

People can be complicated.

How can one be both “naughty and nice?” Or “unlucky and lucky” at the same time? Kokia poses various dichotomies, and Sookocheff portrays them with uncluttered simplicity. “Small and strong,” for example, is accompanied by an image of a tiny, determined, brown-skinned child pulling an overstuffed wagon down the street. “Brave and afraid” is paired with an illustration of a light-skinned youngster climbing a tree to retrieve a stuck kite. An opening spread with a wide-shot street view of houses introduces readers to a diverse group of children, seen in the windows or outside, as the narrator muses, “A person can be...” Envisioning pages zoom in on each of the characters. Sookocheff plants tiny clues to delight readers: A youngster releases a butterfly in the park, which is then seen flying in future spreads. Everything is interconnected, and the children end up meeting at a playground, each “different and...// the same.” Youngsters often have many emotions swirling around inside them—sometimes ones that contradict others; this lesson in apparent opposites shows them how complex human beings really are. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Simple and intricate. (Picture book. 4-8)

AND I THINK ABOUT YOU
Kurstedt, Rosanne L.
Illus. by Ya-Ling Huang
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5253-0459-0

Even on the busiest of days, parents find time to think about their children.

An anthropomorphic bear readies their cub for school—making sure the little one eats breakfast and gets dressed and giving the cub a big hug before leaving for work. A page turn offers a glimpse into each bear’s day, complete with onomatopoeic descriptions. The parent looks over their to-do list, sends emails (“Click-i-ty, Clack-a-ty”), and gives a presentation; the cub reads to stuffed friends, paints pictures (“DAB! SWIPE!”), and shares at circle time. The busy days are depicted in split panels that alternate between classic pastel colors and, when the parent stops to think about the cub at various points, soft hues of mint green, warm rose, shadowy purple, aquamarine, or light amber. Moments of humor in which the parent discovers a missing button (“Whoops!”) and makes a mess at lunch (“Chit-chat. Splat!”) demonstrate that grown-ups can make mistakes, too, and keep the story from being too precious. Furthermore, this side-by-side storytelling places equal emphasis on each bear’s day, validating the cub’s play as their work. Young readers anticipating the start of school will benefit from both the introduction to daily events and the reminder that they are in their parents’ thoughts all day long. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Warm and reassuring, sure to be especially appreciated by families with working parents and apprehensive children. (Picture book. 3-6)
NEVER MAKE A GIANT MAD
Laperla, Artur
Graphic Universe (48 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-72846-291-2
Series: Felix and Calcite, 2

A kid and his purple friend reunite for another trip to the Land of the Trolls. Felix, a redheaded White boy, has a portal to a world of trolls in his bedroom toy box. As he searches his messy room for Robocan, his remote-controlled dog, he falls into the other world. But we’ve been here before. In this sequel, Felix is soon paired back up with Calcite the troll on a quest to find the robot. They meet Tourmaline, the great troll witch; ride a flying Rockadactyl (a pterodactyl made of stone), and escape the laser eye beams of Garganto, a giant guardian blocking the way through a gorge. Unsurprisingly, Robocan shows up to help, and Felix ends up back home with another this-happened-then-this-happened story under his belt. In its attempt to widen the world of Felix and Calcite from the first volume, this book instead repeats most of the beats and tries to make up for its thin story with fantasy elements that never feel particularly clever, original, or visually interesting. Felix has no personality, and in this book, at least, Calcite doesn’t do much but tag along on Felix’s quest. Games such as an invitation to search the cartoon artwork for a hidden spider begin and end the book.

An uninspired installment in an equally uninteresting graphic-fantasy series. (Graphic early reader. 7-9)

PLAYING THROUGH THE TURNAROUND
Larsen, Mylisa
Clarion/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-358-64549-8

In an effort to get grown-ups to listen to them, middle schoolers do something extraordinary.

So does Larsen, in her debut—by introducing characters so distinct and alive that each sparkles and yet becomes much more as they together tackle the challenging task of asserting their right to a say in their own educations. Drawn together by their common devotion to twice-weekly Jazz Lab, five eighth grade musicians are dismayed when grizzled, legendary adviser Mr. Lewis is replaced by random subs as rumors of budget cuts swirl. Popular efforts to drum up signatures for a petition lead to disturbing revelations that cuts have been quietly paring away elective activities for years. But finding a bundle of signed petitions chucked in the garbage unread and seeing students’ concerns waved off by the school board really motivate the quintet. Enter professional problem student Quentin “Quagmire” Tiarello, bringing his gift for alienating powers that be, a wonderful ongoing duel with a certain English teacher who (to his discomfort) really sees him, and a surprising level of technical savvy with light and sound boards—all of which prove invaluable in setting up an inspired, foot-stomping, showstopping, thoroughly unauthorized musical climax. Does it create magically sweeping changes? Maybe not...but more people join the youths in listening to one another, and that’s a worthy result. Mr. Lewis’ reappearance adds a final sweet, poignant note. Main characters read White; names cue ethnic diversity in the supporting cast.

A magnificent medley of cogent themes and memorable moments. (Fiction. 10-14)

SPARROWS IN THE WIND
Levine, Gail Carson
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-06-303907-0

Inspired by the saga of Cassandra and the Trojan War, this retelling takes a fresh, female-centered view of events.

All 14-year-old Cassandra wants is to perform well as the kanephoros, leading a procession to the altar in the sacred grove for the upcoming festival honoring Zeus. Well, she would also like the god Apollo to give her the ability to foretell the future. All goes well until she rejects Apollo’s advances and he attaches a curse to his gift of prophecy: She will be able to see what is to come, but no one will believe her pronouncements. Not only that, he also bestows the gift of prophecy on Helenus, her twin brother. Helenus foresees the conflict over beautiful Helen and pursues her even though he knows her kidnapping will have dire consequences for their family. Meanwhile, Cassandra is befriended by Eurus, the god of the east wind, but between her curse and the culture’s limits on women’s lives, her efforts to save her family, her people, and her city seem doomed. Enter Amazon Princess Rin, whose life is the opposite of Cassandra’s—Amazons hunt, fight, serve as mercenaries, and govern themselves. Cassandra and Rin’s friendship and their attempts to change Troy’s destiny make for a compelling read, weaving history, legend, and imagined possibilities. This welcome addition to Greek mythology-inspired stories centers multidimensional female characters often lacking in traditional tales.

An original, superbly executed reimagining of a story with enduring appeal. (cast of characters, author’s note) (Adventure. 10-14)
“A touching true-life tale with much wisdom for people who face similar situations.”

FEATHERS TOGETHER

Lewi, Caron
Illus. by Charles Santoso
Abrams (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-4197-6545-6
Series: Feeling Friends

Best friends must learn to enjoy life apart until they can be reunited.

Bonded stork pair Klepetan and Malena do everything together, Klepetan inspecting the world around him, and Malena enthusiastically jumping in, each taking turns to tell jokes and a bedtime story. But then Malena is injured. A “kind featherheaded man” cares for her, building the pair a nest on his roof and a ramp so Malena can access it. But when fall—and migration time—arrives, the pair decide that “Being apart will be a new part of our together.” They exchange feathers (the title is their catchphrase), and the man helps them through their final awful day: “Friendship survives all kinds of goodbyes.” Slowly, the two learn how to be apart and eventually start sending jokes and stories to the clouds and stars as they’d promised. The author draws out the tension in the most delicious way, and readers rushing to the end so that the birds can be reunited, and likely there will be no dry eyes in the house when the duo are finally once again nestled next to one another, feathers together. The digital illustrations give marvelous personality to each stork, their every emotion evident and so relatable for readers.

The artwork—featuring shades of deep blues and pastel yellows and greens in contrast to Abuela’s and the child’s dark brown skin—is lush and graceful, full of whimsical touches and lovely movement, with text that’s both playful and wholehearted.

A touching true-life tale with much wisdom for people who face similar situations. (Picture book. 4-8)

THE SEA MONSTER

Lukoff, Kyle
Illus. by Kat Uno
Scholastic (64 pp.)
$4.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-338-79465-6
Series: Mermaid Days, 2

Aquatic adventures lead to unexpected friendships.

Readers return to Tidal Grove, an aquatic classroom for half-human, half-sea-creature students in this second installment of the Mermaid Days series. In this book, they’re reintroduced to characters such as Vera, a tan-skinned, brown-haired mermaid, and Beaker, a pale-skinned, dark-haired half-octopus whose legs have a mind of their own. The story, set across three chapters, follows Vera and Beaker as they discover how to be patient in a tide pool; discuss the Kraken, a fabled giant sea monster; and learn make friends when the Kraken follows them to the library. The uneven story, full of bland dialogue, moves erratically, and

the lessons are as shallow as the tide pool itself. The diversity of the characters’ skin tones and hair should be commended, but the illustrations are flat. Biology-minded readers will be quick to note that Mr. Burbles, the pale-skinned, blond-haired librarian, has frog legs, and amphibians make their homes in freshwater not the sea. Mermaid-obsessed readers will undoubtedly give this book a go but will be left unsatisfied.

Throw this one overboard. (Early reader. 6-8)

MY LIFE BEGINS!

MacLachlan, Patricia
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (128 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-06-311601-6

New babies mean a big change for an older brother.

Jacob is 9 years old when he and his parents welcome some new additions to their family—triplets! Jacob calls them the “Trips,” although they of course each have their own name, and Mom dresses each in a different color to make it easier to tell them apart. Jacob wishes the family could have gotten a puppy instead. But one night, when
his parents are too exhausted to wake up, one of the babies starts crying, and Jacob tends to her. It’s Liz, the “most friendly” Trip. In the moonlight, she even smiles just for him—though he knows it might just be a reflex. So when Jacob’s class is tasked with finding a topic for a research project, he chooses the Trips. As time passes, and the family hires an extra set of hands to help with the little ones, the Trips show more of their individual personalities. MacLachlan’s calm, measured writing focuses on moments of everyday magic and charm, and Jacob’s observational notes read almost like poetry. This family is loving and oh-so pleasant, often becoming emotional at the simple but significant beauty of the babies’ growth milestones. Mimi, the hired nanny, is French, but there are no textual indicators of race; the occasional illustrations show most characters as light-skinned.

Precious. (Fiction. 5-9)

JUST WILD ENOUGH

Mireya Mayor, Primatologist
Magellan, Marta
Illus. by Clémentine Rocheron
Whitman (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 1, 2022
978-0-8075-4085-5
Series: She Made History

From pompons to Ph.D.!

Mireya Mayor, a Cuban American primatologist who grew up in Miami, was interested in wild animals from a young age—her childhood home teemed with animals, from dogs to snapping turtles to a chicken and everything in between. Although her interest in nature hit a speed bump when her mother sent her to ballet class instead of letting her join the Girl Scouts, Mireya discovered a talent for dance that led to her becoming an NFL cheerleader while she attended college. Her desire to work with animals—particularly primates—led her to international fieldwork in the jungles of South America as well as struggles with colleagues who judged Mireya based on her looks and not her accomplishments. Her continued work in far-off places caught the attention of National Geographic, which made her its first woman wildlife TV reporter, and on an expedition to Madagascar, Mireya discovered a new species of lemur. With this discovery, Mireya successfully petitioned the prime minister of Madagascar to create a national park to ensure the lemur’s survival. The story effectively documents Mireya’s career path, and attentive readers and caregivers will have moments to consider themes of prejudice and how everyone has unlimited capability for divergent interests. The backmatter, which contains additional information about mouse lemurs and the lemur reserve and an author’s note with more details about Mireya’s career path, including how she obtained her doctorate, will help direct curious readers to learn more.

(This book was reviewed digitally.)

Pleasing and stimulating. (glossary, further reading) (Picture-book biography. 6-8)

BOO! HISS!

Marks, Cyndi
Aladdin (80 pp.)
$19.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-5344-5545-3

Phyllis and Sheldon live in a ramshackle Victorian house, but they are no ordinary roommates.

Phyllis, a ghost, and Sheldon, a green and orange rattlesnake, are great friends, enjoying books and playing Snakes and Ladders and catch (somewhat difficult for armless Sheldon). Life goes smoothly until a human family buys the house. The father is a musician, the mother is an artist, oldest son Charlie is a great reader, and Bebe, an infant, wails all night long. (Dad is light-skinned, Mom is brown-skinned, and the little ones are tan-skinned.) These humans disturb the original inhabitants in every way, and the two become determined to scare the people off, but either the ghost and the snake aren’t really scary, or the family members are just too blasé to notice their efforts. There’s a lot to pay attention to here—the main text, panels full of details and visual humor, and the speech bubbles. The cartoonish, digital art is appealing. The snake and the ghost make lots of onomatopoetic noises (hence the title), and the humans do, too. Kids who read this aloud to themselves will chuckle, although occasionally a joke may elude the intended audience, like “When does a joke become a ‘dad’ joke?” “When it becomes apparent.” Some what sophisticated, able young readers are the best audience, as the format makes it a difficult read-aloud.

A funny scary story in a graphic chapter book format. (Graphic chapter book. 6-8)

TEN LITTLE SQUIRRELS

Martin, Bill & Michael Sampson
Illus. by Nathalie Beaucous
Brown Books Kids (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-61254-600-1

A counting rhyme updated for our times.

Ten little squirrels are playing by a tree. The first asks, “Look what I see!” The second responds with “A man with a dog.” (In the original 1970 book of the rhyme adapted by Martin, the man had a gun instead.) Squirrels three through nine are full of advice about what to do: “The fourth one said, ‘No, let’s hide in the shade.’” “The fifth one said, ‘I’m not afraid.’” “The rolling verses, similar in bounce to Martin’s famous Brown Bear: Brown Bear, What Do You See? (1967), keep the pages turning to the climactic 10th squirrel and his gigantic full-spread sneeze, which gains the delighted dog’s attention (“Time for some fun!”) and sends the squirrels off in a flurry of fur, each a distinct color. While the delightful colors and textures of the collaged illustrations will attract readers’ eyes, the counting part leaves a bit to be desired, especially since there are no numerals, and there’s
little story to amuse. The 10 squirrels appear all together only at the end, and even then, we see only the arm and the tail of one squirrel, so readers may count only nine. Backmatter includes a web of squirrel facts, each with a question for readers. “Squirrels live on every continent except for Australia and Antarctica. Do squirrels live near you?” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

The illustrations outshine the weak story and counting practice. (Picture book: 3-6)

**RUFFLES AND THE TINY, TEENY, TINY KITTENS**

Melling, David  
Nosy Crow/Candlewick (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022  
978-1-334-38770-8

Will Ruffles ever escape his mob of feline fans?

Ruffles the dog is back—without the garment he sported in *Ruffles and the Red Coat* (2021)—and he knows what he loves: things like howling, scratching, chewing, and digging. “But Ruffles does not love the tiny, teeny kittens.” The five mar-malade kittens lick and stare and pounce…and poop. Worst of all, they follow Ruffles wherever he goes. Ruffles dislikes sharing—especially his snugly blue blanket. The kittens love the blanket, and when Ruffles tries to take it from them, the five teeny, tiny felines think it is a game. The tug of war ends with a “Rip!!” Ruffles takes his torn blanket to his basket, but it’s too small to cover him and keep him cozy. Turns out a pile of kittens can keep a canine cozy. The next day, Ruffles decides playing is more fun when you share. Now, he loves the kittens…most of the time (there is still that pooping problem). Melling’s second outing with Ruffles is as charming as the first. The white pup with a big gray circle around his eye is as expressive as ever, and he is joined by an adorable cadre of kitties. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet, funny lesson in interspecies friendship and sharing. (Picture book: 2-6)

**WHAT THE JAGUAR TOLD HER**

Méndez, Alexandra V.  
Levine Querido (336 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-1-64614-175-3

In many ways, Jade is a typical middle schooler. She loves running and art and is working hard to make friends at her new Catholic school after a move to Atlanta from Chicago for her mom’s new job as a CNN anchorwoman. In a magical departure from the expected, Jade discovers a jaguar living in the woods behind her home who takes the shape of Itztli, an amiable elder who shares with her art and incredible oral history reaching back to Mesoamerican civilizations just when she needs it the most. Jade is astounded to find that the challenges that Itztli describes in his stories mirror the difficulties she is facing in 2001, from getting her first period to making a home in a new place. Jade’s maternal heritage is Mexican, and her dad has Irish ancestry; Jade’s light skin, blond hair, and green eyes bring intricacy to her Latina experience, especially since her sister’s complexion is darker. The novel explores themes of identity, friendship, crushes, loss, and looking for answers to life’s toughest questions in sumptuous detail. A coming-of-age story with parallels to Judy Blume’s classic *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret.*, this work captures the complexities of being a tween girl seeking to find her place in the world and connections to ancestors through a Latine cultural lens.

A thoughtful, richly woven tapestry illuminating the pains and joys of growing up. (research notes) (Fiction: 10-14)

**A ROCK IN THE OCEAN**

Montagnana, Alessandro  
Trans. by Cecilia Ross  
nubeOCHO (40 pp.)  
$16.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-84-18599-56-9  
Series: Somos8

Clearly, a little poop and a lot of water can’t come between friends destined to be together.

When Mila, an adventurous seal, finds the perfect lounging rock, she climbs to the top of her new haven. “Everything looked so much smaller from up there, and that made her feel very big,” at least until a gigantic ocean liner sails past. After being lulled to sleep by the sound of the waves, she is rudely awakened by Charlie the sea gull, who accidentally poops on her head. Both burst out laughing, and a new friendship begins. After Charlie goes home, Mila is scared by a big storm that sweeps her into the turbulent ocean. Luckily, Mila’s hat, a present from Charlie, goes “sailing off on the wind…almost like a distress signal or a cry for help” that Charlie notices. Charlie searches and finally finds Mila hidden in a shipwrecked boat on the rock where they first met. The message is clear: “From that day on, their friendship was even bigger than the biggest ship, and even stronger than the storm.” Illustrations bring Mila and Charlie to life with facial expressions that display their joy at being reunited. The palette—which uses a mix of playful blue, stormy gray and black, and rose and lavender—also underscores the emotional arc of this poignant story, translated from Italian into Spanish and then English. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A rock-solid tale of friendship. (Picture book: 4-7)
Are we alone in the universe?

Morancy tackles that seemingly simple question, and why it’s a difficult one to answer definitively, with scientific rigor, thoroughly exploring what we know about the potential for life on other planets as well as the different theories as to why alien life has yet to be discovered. The book touches briefly on our fascination with aliens through pop culture and conspiracy theories (Area 51, of course, is mentioned), but the bulk is focused on what we know about planets in our solar system and beyond and their suitability for sustaining life. Both the text and the detailed illustrations offer a sense of the huge scale of the universe: “When it comes to the grand scheme of things, we are just a tiny dot in the apparent nothingness of outer space.” Noting that, according to estimates, there are more than 100 billion galaxies making up the universe, Morancy suggests that the search for ETs is just beginning even as we try to understand our own planet’s origins and how unique it is in its ability to host complex life-forms. For those who are in the dark about how scientists are searching for aliens, there’s information about the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute (SETI) and other outreach efforts, but there is a surprising lack of follow-through on providing resources for young scientists seeking to get involved in the search. Humans depicted in the vibrant, shimmering art are racially diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A well-constructed, fact-filled look at the ongoing search for outer-space life. *(glossary, index) (Informational picture book. 8-10)*

**A BILLION BALLOONS OF QUESTIONS**

*Moreno, Amy B.*  
*Illus. by Carlos Vélez*  
*Floris (28 pp.)*  
$17.95  |  Sept. 13, 2022  
978-1-78250-776-5

A bilingual child progresses through the world surrounded by balloons. Questions bursting to be asked float over Eva’s head, tethered by everything from the bedposts to the child’s wrists. Questions that can’t always be answered right now hide their time: “Who named all the colours?” “¿Qué vamos a comer mañana?” Sometimes Eva’s parents are too busy to respond; sometimes Eva’s exuberance bursts and questions POP OUT! But, eventually, the adults in Eva’s life—Mama, Papá, Eva’s teacher Mrs. McGregor—help the child find the answers, or Eva dreams them up. Supported by a loving family, the irrepressible Eva knows how much they are loved, that Abuelita (“on-the-screen in Peru”) is glad Eva’s eating sopita, and that tomorrow will bring more questions. With a deft touch, Moreno tackles childhood curiosity, emotional learning, and a bit of science (outer space figures prominently in some of Eva’s questions) and shows that within a safe, loving environment, young people can flourish. The text is primarily in English, with some questions in English and others in Spanish, and some hard-hitting topics are introduced: “Why do some people have no home?” Vélez’s creative portrayal of Eva’s accumulation of questions adds visual humor. The colorful, whimsical balloons bob and weave from frame to frame, mirroring Eva’s enduring impatience. Mama is light-skinned; Papá, who is Peruvian, is brown-skinned; Eva is brown-skinned, and Mrs. McGregor presents as Black. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A buoyant tribute to a child’s inquisitiveness and the family that encourages it. *(glossary of Spanish words) (Picture book. 4-8)*
“Will inspire readers to find—and follow—their dreams.”

IF YOU CAN DREAM IT, YOU CAN DO IT
How 25 Inspiring Individuals Found Their Dream Jobs
Nelson, Colleen & Kathie MacIsaac
Illus. by Scot Ritchie
Pajama Press (64 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-77278-228-8

When you do what you love, you never work a day in your life!
The professional lives of 25 diverse individuals are documented in this fascinating title that will spur readers to consider how their own passions may shape their futures. The people profiled likely won’t be well known to most readers, but they represent a variety of career paths. From human rights lawyer to marine biologist to cake designer to professional game player, there’s something here to catch most readers’ eyes. All individuals profiled express pride and fulfillment with their careers. Each entry spans a double-page spread with added bubbles of additional information, such as “Fun Facts,” “Spin-Off Jobs,” or a brief summary of a similar individual in a connected field. Photos of the subjects are included; Ritchie’s graceful illustrations of the individuals in action round out the book. Frontmatter explains the different forms of education required for these jobs, such as college or university, technical schools, and on-the-job training; the authors use measured vocabulary that does not assign a hierarchical value to any of these paths. The backmatter discusses the difference between technical and soft skills and offers musings on future jobs that might exist when readers are older, such as commercial drone pilot and extinct species revivalist. Readers will delight in learning more about the range of professions available, and adults looking for a career change may be tempted to pick up the book as well.

Will inspire readers to find—and follow—their dreams.
(photo credits, glossary, index) (Nonfiction. 11-13)

DEAR WILD CHILD
You Carry Your Home Inside You
Nichols, Wallace J. & Wallace Grayce Nichols
Illus. by Drew Beckmeyer
Cameron Kids (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-1-951836-46-7

A letter of loss leads to profound realizations.
In this picture book inspired by real events, a father narrates the story of his daughter, a “wild child” born and raised in a newly constructed home in a redwood forest, an environment that played a large role in helping her become the person she is today. The letter describes joyful times—from exploring nature to hosting parties—before informing the wild child that the house was destroyed in a forest fire. But the father urges his child not to despair, because “Your house served its original purpose. / You are healthy and strong because of your home. It grew you…. // Your house might be gone, / but you will carry your home with you wherever you go.” It’s a touching sentiment that reminds readers of all ages that our lives are defined not by our material possessions but by the memories we make. The text is enhanced with illustrations that make use of crayon- and markerlike textures and suggest childhood drawings of happy memories. Caregivers may find this a helpful tool to remind young readers that our lives are more than just “stuff,” and the complexity of the emotional impact of the fire will resonate with children who have also lost homes due to climate change and other disasters. The family is light-skinned; visitors to their home are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Intricate and emotional. (author’s note, photo) (Picture book. 6-10)

ON HER WINGS
The Story of Toni Morrison
Nolen, Jerdine
Illus. by James E. Ransome
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5344-7852-7

Childhood experiences and stories work together to influence one of America’s most important writers.
Born in 1931, Toni Morrison began life as Chloe Ardelia Wofford. Growing up in Lorain, Ohio, a poor, segregated town, she enjoyed listening to stories told by her parents and grandparents. She became an excellent reader who loved the music and rhythm of words and language. At 12, she converted to Catholicism, choosing Anthony as her baptismal name. A top student, she attended Howard University, where she asked her friends, who had trouble with her name, to call her Toni. When she married Harold Morrison, an architect, she became Toni Morrison. Work as an editor stirred her desire to tell stories, especially those centering the African American experience. Her first novel, The Bluest Eye, launched her writing career, and over the years, she was recognized with many awards, including the Nobel Prize in literature. Her work always reflected the stories and language of her first storytellers. This introduction to Morrison’s life and influences demonstrates how much she was shaped by the experiences of her childhood. As an author of both adult titles and books for younger readers, her path will be of interest to readers of picture-book biographies. Nolen uses evocative language, while Ransome’s watercolor-and-collage illustrations complement and enhance the text with fluidity and a warm palette. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An uplifting glimpse into the life of one of America’s most distinguished writers. (author’s note, list of books by Morrison, important quotes, resources, list of achievements) (Picture-book biography. 4-8)
“A timely affirmation that hate has no place in school.”

NIKHIL OUT LOUD

Pancholy, Maulik
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins
(320 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-309192-4

Eighth grade theater kids rise up against homophobia in their community.

A grandparent’s sickness brings 13-year-old Indian American voice acting star Nikhil Shah and his family from Los Angeles to Ohio. Starting eighth grade in a new school gives Nikhil anxiety, but he quickly befriends a crew: DeSean (who is Black), Monica (who is Korean American), and Mateo (who is Mexican American). Once his celebrity identity is discovered, Nikhil doesn’t just sign autographs and repeat, to his classmates’ delight, a catchphrase appended) and leaving readers breathless in the wake of her narrative rush, this budding force of nature pinballs through a lively practice ninja kicks, while Dazzle, a butterfly, is too involved in tinkering with an invention. Flicker launches into a quick peachy joy alongside more difficult moments. The sweet, peck-on-the-cheek-level romance is delightfully middle school—as is the squeewerly joy alongside more difficult moments.

A timely affirmation that hate has no place in school. (Fiction. 9-13)

SQUAD GOALS

Parachini, Jodie
Whitman (32 pp.)
$9.99 | Oct. 1, 2022
978-0-8075-2517-3
Series: The Grand Bug Hotel, 4

At the Grand Bug Hotel, blooming flowers must be pollinated to reap a crop of fruits and vegetables for everyone to enjoy at the Garden Party. 

Queen Bee has terrible allergies, and her sneezing is preventing her from orchestrating the annual pollination event. Flicker, an earnest and helpful firefly, offers to coordinate the effort and begins to enlist her fellow bugs. Everyone, however, seems uninterested or is too busy. Roly Poly would rather practice ninja kicks, while Dazzle, a butterfly, is too involved in tinkering with an invention. Flicker launches into a quick plea about the necessity of pollination for the plants to produce good food, and her friends quickly agree to share the hard, messy work of pollination while singing a work song. The story arc’s conflict and resolution are depicted in bright, bold spring colors in scenes of a vibrant garden infused with golden yellow clusters of pollen. While Queen Bee gives a very loose explanation of the scientific concept—“Every year, the bugs and butterflies must gather pollen from the flowers…and carry it to the fruit and vegetable plants in the garden”—the book lacks back matter with more information on pollinators. Still, overall, it’s a rousing and upbeat tale of cooperation that also sheds some light on a scientific process. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An unabashedly heartwarming tale of teamwork and community. (Picture book. 4-6)

Pakistani Americans led by promisingly unattached next-door neighbor Zane. Sheera Mirza, Zane’s niece and a classmate who joins Mackenzie in an unorthodox after-school arts club, proves a loyal ally when Mackenzie finally admits that in trying to set up the looming fundraiser single-handedly, she’s bitten off more than she can chew. The transformative insight that it’s OK to ask for help leads not only to a spectacularly successful fundraiser, but, by the end, patched-up relations with Johanna and another alienated friend, capped by exciting hints that her mom and Zane might be turning into an item. Mackenzie reads White and has some Greek ancestry.

With this flying start, a young maker makes a strong bid for attention. (Fiction. 9-13)
What do you do when there's snow on top of snow on top of snow? You have a (snow)ball!

Designed to be held vertically, this nearly wordless picture book challenges readers to reexamine the white space of the page as two humanoid figures dressed in bright yellow and deep blue emerge from their completely covered home into a snow-white world. The artistic choice of blanketing the page in white means that the protagonists’ actions are often obscured. Their bodies disappear behind snowballs and snow boulders, and the white-on-white design means that readers must interpret some movements and actions, much like a person watching a mime show. This one will have children shivering with delight as they try to figure out the movements of a snowball fight or the act of building a colossal snow person—a well-placed gatefold proves just how colossal as what appears to be a yellow mountain is revealed as a mammoth carrot. Larger storytime groups may find the mostly spare illustrations difficult to see, but this one appealing look that will draw in curious readers.

Characters’ skin is blueish-gray.

Brisk fun for everyone! (Picture book. 4-6)

Drake’s life at stake, but also the survival of the last Inkwell in the world. Action-packed and full of imaginative worldbuilding, the story’s stakes are palpable. Readers will enjoy spotting literary references to works such as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *A Wrinkle in Time*. Whiteness is clearly the default; Trey’s father is from India, and his mother’s Englishness is equated with Whiteness. Despite the presence of some complex Western names in the work, Trey’s real given name, Purushottam, is described as too difficult and cause for sympathy.

A high-stakes literary adventure that falls short in representation. (map) (Fantasy. 8-12)

Disney characters appear in new tales with a spooky edge.

With their school closed because of nearby wildfires, Billie and Tim are spending their day at the Walt Disney Archives in Burbank, California. The book uses what Disney fan Billie is reading as a springboard, weaving the action that takes place in present-day Burbank is typeset in white against a solid black background. When Billie and Tim are in the world of Disney tales, there are ornate, themed borders surrounding each page along with a smattering of illustrations. One especially stunning full-page illustration depicts a skull with a brilliant diamond eye. The story gets a bit murky toward the end, becoming a confusing fumble through mirrors and timelines. One illustration shows Billie as a Black girl; most other characters are assumed White.

Not just for fans of Disney; chilling and compelling despite a puzzling plotline. (Paranormal. 8-12)

Nate Wright returns in a new format. Spiky-haired sixth grader Nate Wright is back for three new adventures adapted
from his recently animated show. The first, “The Legend of the Gunting,” tells the legend of Brad Gunter, an infamous student who purportedly got five detentions in one week and then disappeared. When a prank-loving new student tips Nate toward a feared fifth detention, can Nate stop him before it’s too late?

In the second tale, “Go Nate! It’s Your Birthday,” Nate mischievously interprets his dad’s birthday offer, maxing out his credit card and finding himself in thousands of dollars of debt. “CATastrophe,” the final story, pits Nate against his crush—and his long-standing fear of cats. Unlike its predecessors, this nearly full-color offering (there are some black-and-white panels as throwbacks to Peirce’s comic strips) may have some visual appeal, but for those who have seen the show, this volume is simply a collection of screenshots from the first few episodes. This long-running and well-loved series has seen many iterations, from chapter books to graphic novels, and while an animated counterpart makes sense, further adapting that medium back into print feels utterly unnecessary; even devout fans may roll their eyes at this. Nate is White; his friends portray a mix of skin tones and body sizes. Redundant. (Graphic adaptation. 7-11)

### AGENT MOST WANTED

**The Never-Before-Told Story of the Most Dangerous Spy of World War II**

Purnell, Sonia

Viking (208 pp.)

$18.99 | Aug. 9, 2022

978-0-593-35054-6

An essential player in the French Resistance was an American woman.

In this young readers’ edition of *A Woman of No Importance* (2019), Purnell relates how Virginia Hall, from a once-mowed Baltimore family, was a natural leader among her peers who was fond of riding and hunting. Hall found herself thwarted in pursuing a career that didn’t sideline her because of gender. In a civilian assignment with the British Special Operations Executive, she trained as a spy and went to France in 1941. There, she gathered and relayed intelligence about the occupying Nazis and identified, organized, trained, and outfitted French citizens opposed to the complicit Vichy government. The narrative, pitched to middle-grade readers, follows Hall closely, providing just enough fully documented, concisely delivered information about the settings and circumstances of the Resistance to deliver a real sense of the danger and isolation faced by its subject. Well-chosen, key moments convey Hall’s reliance on both luck and her own instincts, her quick thinking, her immense skill at assessing perilous situations, and her frank courage. A timeline and maps might have been useful, but this close-up look at the Nazi occupation of France—and the Resistance—will undoubtedly encourage further exploration. That Hall had a prosthetic lower leg she called Cuthbert makes even more dramatic her hike over the Pyrenees to escape from Nazi pursuers.

### STRANGER TIDES

**Spider-Man, aka Afro-Latine teenager Miles Morales, is excited to be a celebrity’s plus-one to a new video game launch, but when the party is interrupted by Trinity and Vex, two potential teenage supervillains-in-training, Spider-Man is soon tangled in a web of plans created by the Stranger, a superstrong, superintelligent extraterrestrial with plans to kill half of Earth’s population in the name of justice.**
“A hard truth for hard times.”
MY UNCLE IS COMING TOMORROW

The Stranger plans to freeze people in a state of unexplained hibernation and then turn half the population against the other half. The book’s basic plot seems lifted from Avengers: Infinity War. Sure, there are some personal stakes added to this story, as Spider-Man’s friends and family are frozen, and a subplot develops where Miles’ Uncle Aaron is hospitalized after being frozen while driving, but the graphic novel suffers from the blink-and-you’ll-miss-it emotional ways in which these (temporary) losses affect Miles. The exposition in place of plot and fast-paced character development also won’t help readers turn into mega-fans. Miles Morales became incredibly popular because he was a breath of fresh air, adding nuance and depth to Marvel, and affecting Miles. The exposition in place of plot and fast-paced character development also won’t help readers turn into mega-fans. Though Paloma still thinks of Emily Rose, now she’s not alone; she has Noah and more new friends. Ruff’s simple, endearing tale is filled with relatable characters, brought to life with dark skin and curly, dark hair; Noah, light-skinned, brown-haired, and cued as Orthodox Jewish; Jasmine, who has tan skin and a brown ponytail; and a neighborhood of diverse people. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A warm portrayal of the life of an autistic child who is supported by a loving family. (Picture book 4-8)

CHARLIE MAKES A SPLASH!
Robinson Peete, Holly, R.J. Peete & Shane W. Evans
Illus. by Shane W. Evans
Scholastic (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-68726-2

An autistic boy shares his love of the water.

Charlie has a twin sister named Callie. The two share a lot, but they are different. For one thing, Charlie is autistic, while Callie isn’t. Callie supports Charlie, mostly by simply letting her brother be himself. Another thing that helps Charlie is water; he loves going out in the rain or to the lakeside or pool. “Water makes my heart smile.” Callie is by his side through it all. When the twins and their parents go to the aquarium, Charlie shares his extensive fish-related knowledge and savors the feeling of being wrapped up in comforting, swirling waterscapes. His family lets him feel like he’s “swimming in an ocean of love.” Evans’ illustrations give lovely texture and color to the many water incarnations and appropriately reveal wonder through Charlie’s big brown eyes. This honest, affirming book was co-written by Robinson Peete, of My Brother Charlie (2010), and her son, Peete, who is autistic and whose sister, Ryan Elizabeth Peete, helped write the previous book. An extensive author’s note from Robinson Peete describes the personal inspiration for this story along with some sage advice for families of autistic individuals. In a separate note, Peete discusses being on the autism spectrum and, in Autism 101, lists helpful tips aimed at people who aren’t autistic. Charlie and his family, like their real-life authorial counterparts, are Black. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A lackluster outing for a beloved Marvel character. (Graphic novel 8-10)

NOAH AND HIS WAGON
Ruff, Jerry
Illus. by Katrijn Jacobs
Clavis (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-60537-710-0

How will Paloma cope when her best friend, Emily Rose, moves away?

Mamá goes to work and leaves Paloma in the care of boring babysitter Jasmine. But a walk with Paloma’s dog, Bucket, will soon change everything. Jasmine, Paloma, and Bucket spot a boy pulling a wagon with a sleeping cat. Paloma greets him in Spanish. The boy introduces the cat as Mitzvah and asks if the dog wants a ride, and Bucket jumps right into the wagon and curls up next to the cat. The boy, Noah, tells Paloma that his cat is named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah. Paloma tells him how her dog was named for the Hebrew word for commandment and about his headgear, a kippah.

A message about the importance of community, gently imparted with love. (Picture book 4-8)
War, many governments began using the practice as a “systematic instrument of terror.” Though, according to the backmatter, this story takes place in South America, Santana Camargo notes that people have been disappeared in other places, such as Indonesia. The protagonist has few facial figures and skin the color of the page. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A hard truth for hard times. (Picture book. 6-9)

TELL ME A STORY BABUSHKA
Schmidt, Carola
Illus. by Anita Barghigiani
Reycraft Books (24 pp.)
$16.95 | Oct. 1, 2022
978-1-4788-7581-9

A child learns of her Ukrainian grandmother’s terrifying escape as a child.

Baba kneads dough for bread and tells her granddaughter, Karina, light-skinned and brown-haired, the story of a little girl living in a Ukrainian village. The soldiers of the Soviet army, portrayed as monsters, invade, first taking the villagers’ grain (a note at the beginning describes Holodomor, a famine caused by the Soviet Communist Party that resulted in 14.5 million deaths), then imprisoning families, including the little girl’s, in a camp in Siberia, where children are separated from their parents. One day the children discover matryoshka dolls beneath their mattresses; the fifth dolls contain messages of a rescue plan. At dawn, while their captors are at a campwide meeting, the children are ushered away through the forest, then onto a waiting train. Baba reveals that she was the little girl—and is now “a happy old lady, kneading bread dough and telling a true story to her granddaughter.” Beautiful, detailed illustrations bring to life an old-world village with a thatched roof cottage. As the invasion approaches, dark, foreboding scenes dominate with frightening depictions of soldiers with sharp-angled faces in silhouette, holding spearlike rifles. The matryoshka dolls are colorfully limned, a bright source in the darkness. This is an ugly historical moment of destruction told expeditiously, concluding with a decisive and constructive outcome for an earlier generation of Ukrainian children. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Timely, with relevance to today’s difficult Ukrainian struggle as history is repeated. (Historical picture book. 6-9)

THE REAL DADA MOTHER GOOSE
A Treasury of Complete Nonsense
Scieszka, Jon
Illus. by Julia Rothman
Candlewick (80 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-7636-9434-0

Deconstructed nursery rhymes entertain and delight in this mischievous endeavor.

It’s not every nursery-rhyme collection that pays homage to the Oulipo school of thought (more specifically, Raymond Queneau’s Exercises in Style (1947)), but then again, few have Scieszka’s keen eye for the absurd. Here, he applies a Dada sensibility to Blanche Fisher Wright’s classic 1916 publication The Real Mother Goose. Taking six of Wright’s original nursery rhymes, illustrations and all, Scieszka and partner in crime Rothman reimagine each poem in six different ways. From haiku and recipes to N+7 codes, pop quizzes to plays on Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” and much more, the rhymes are inventive and laugh-out-loud funny. Rothman plays with the original Wright illustrations, stretching, cutting, and reworking them in countless ways. This one is squarely aimed at an audience of older kids, and teachers and parents will revel at the extensive backmatter that includes everything from histories (of Morse code, Esperanto, spoonerisms, and more) to explanations of anagrams, hieroglyphics, rebuses, and Dadaism itself. All told this book is a marvelous anarchic celebration of “re-telling, re-illustrating, and re-mixing.” (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Stand aside, fractured fairy tales; neoist nursery rhymes are the new name of the game. Creativity incarnate. (bibliography) (Poetry. 9-12)

LEVIATHAN
Shiga, Jason
Amulet/Abrams (144 pp.)
$14.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-4197-5779-2

Series: Adventuregame Comics, 1

A clever story requiring investigation, diligence, and the ability to think outside the box.

This “choose your own adventure”-style graphic novel uses a unique navigation system that invites readers to decide between panels as well as pages to find clues to several endings. An introductory page explains how to navigate, and the opening scene’s basic decision tree acts as a tutorial before the real exploration begins. Cartoon illustrations in a gray and blue palette are spare yet highlight crucial details such as the difference between day and night (players can navigate in daytime and nighttime modes, resulting in different interactions in the same places). The story, involving a legendary sea creature that enforces morality among a medieval island community, is the
REVENGE OF THE RACCOONS
Sbray, Vivek
Illus. by Juliana Neufeld
Owlkids Books (40 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-77147-438-2

They’re not coming for you...because they’re already here!

With the palette of a 1990s laser tag arena and the menace of an 80s horror movie, a nursery of raccoons (yes, that is the collective name) descends on a diverse community to perform acts of devilment like taking doughnuts, raiding trash cans, and pooping in the grass. The horror vibe ramps up as dark silhouettes with neon highlights scurry across the pages, scrubby claws destroy screen doors, and house cats are shown in moments of abject terror. But, as the colors of the book soften, the raccoons are seen less as threats and more as furry animals until terrified humans ask what the raccoons want. The answer is surprising if logical: The raccoons were here first and are just adapting as best they can to the new landscape of their homes. Readers will immediately be drawn to the strong art style and funny, rhythmic text. Savvy educators and caregivers will take this tale to new heights as a springboard to discussions of urban sprawl, deforestation, and the effects of humans on the ecosystem. While the book does not include a bibliography for curious readers to learn more, its message still provides enough of an oomph—to linger with readers. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An instant favorite for horror fans and ecological warriors. (Picture book 6-10)

DAZZLIN’ DOLLY
The Songwriting, Hit-Singing, Guitar-Picking Dolly Parton
Slade, Suzanne
Illus. by Edwin Fotheringham
Calkins Creek/Astra Books for Young Readers (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-63592-841-9

A title brimming with love for a favorite country music star. Given Dolly Parton’s philanthropic efforts with Imagination Library, it’s especially fitting to see her profiled by a writer and an illustrator who have ample experience creating picture-book biographies for young readers. Slade’s text includes quotes from Parton and adopts a down-home voice for the narration as she returns to Dolly’s Tennessee roots to tell her rags-to-riches coming-of-age story. Throughout, Fotheringham’s digital illustrations ground the text with a realistic style that never caricatures the singer, who has frequently been subjected to mockery over her appearance. While the book focuses mainly on Parton’s youth and the very beginnings of her career with her early radio performances and an appearance at the Grand Ole Opry at 13, backmatter gives more detail about her successes and discusses how Parton has used her fame and fortune to help others. Fotheringham incorporates symbols and motifs (butterflies and red shoes, for example) that are important to Parton’s career or figure prominently in her lyrics, which will delight those familiar with her catalog. Background characters are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A new generation will understand why we will always love this iconic singer/songwriter. (Picture book 3-7)

I HOPE / NIPAKOSÉYIMON
Smith, Monique Gray
Trans. by Dolores Greyeyes Sand
Illus. by Gabrielle Grimard
Orca (32 pp.)
$21.95 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-4598-3325-8

Written in English and Cree, this book conveys an unseen adult’s wishes for a child.

The hopes expressed have a reassuring and universal nature: “I hope you know beautiful happiness.” “I hope that when sad tears leave your eyes someone is there to catch them.” Many books of this nature tend to hope for wonderful things to happen to the child; refreshingly, this one expresses the hope that the child will also make wonderful things happen: “I hope you are helpful.” “I hope you are a caretaker of Mother Earth.” “I hope you are respectful.” Grimard translates these feelings into luminous artwork that often expands upon the sentiment in question. On a page with the words, “I hope you are courageous,” several children are shown holding placards that read “Every Child Matters,” “We Are One,” and “Equal.” Every double-page spread expresses a hope, first in English, then followed by its
Cree equivalent: “I hope that you are kind / nipakosêyimon kakisewâtiyan.” Fittingly, given that this is a book addressed to children, the book ends, “I have lots of hopes, for you and for me, / but I wonder….What are your hopes?” The people portrayed are diverse in terms of ethnicity, skin color, and age. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Comforting, encouraging sentiments that adult readers and their little ones will appreciate. (Picture book. 3-5)

**MY TOWN / MI PUEBLO**

**Solis, Nicholas**

*Illus. by Luisa Uribe*

Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Aug. 16, 2022

978-0-593-10991-5

Two cousins live in a pair of towns divided by the U.S.–Mexico border in this bilingual ode to cross-border kinship.

A light-skinned, redheaded girl and a brown-skinned, dark-haired boy start the day in their respective homes. “This is my house,” she says in a front yard full of green plants and trees and a white house with orange trim. “Esta es mi casa,” he says on a sidewalk in front of colorful houses. Both kids prepare for a trek across a bridge over a river into the other’s town. On each double-page spread, her adventures happen on the verso, while his unfold on the recto, cleverly echoing the same border that separates their towns. Similarly, the girl narrates her visit to her cousin’s Mexican hometown in English, and the boy shares his escapades with his prima on the U.S. side in Spanish. Solis’ amiable English and Spanish texts serve as one-to-one translations of each other (the sole difference being the use of the pronoun ella for the girl and él for the boy), featuring similar content in differing contexts. In both towns, each cousin shows the other a colorful market with “comida deliciosa” and people speaking “idiomas diferentes,” festive holiday celebrations, and family dinners where “food and stories and laughs” flow. Each pueblo’s idiosyncrasies mainly arise through the vibrant, cozy artwork, where each pueblo features bustling, distinct neighborhoods. Heading back home at the end of the day, each cousin crosses back through the guarded border walls, wishing for simpler crossings. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sweet, good-natured musings on border life. (Picture book. 4-8)

---

**A MILLION VIEWS**

**Starmer, Aaron**

Penguin Workshop (304 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-593-38693-4

A tween filmmaker rallies classmates to create the next viral sensation.

Brewster Gaines loves movies. He may not have friends or an attentive teacher or even loving parents who are home every night, but at least Brewster has the movies. His quest to create a viral sensation dominates his every waking moment. When Brewster enlists energetic, photogenic new kid Carly for his latest 10-second video, he sets in motion a chain of events that lead the pair of tween filmmakers to join forces with a quintet of fellow young artists who band together to produce a trailer for an epic fantasy film. A simple day shoot turns into a weeklong endeavor with a budget, method actors, special effects, and craft services. They evolve into a group of friends, and as Brewster observes his new buddies relate to their families, he comes to understand his own has a handful of shortcomings he never before considered. Starmer skillfully explores his band of misfits: Every one of the seven tweens gets subtle character shadings that make for a memorably engaging group of characters. The humor is sharp, the story is well paced, and any reader who ever hoped to go viral will find plenty to enjoy here. The characters read as default White in the text; the cover art indicates some racial diversity.

A well-rounded, heartfelt tale of creativity and family. (Fiction. 9-14)

**LITTLE GOOD WOLF**

**Stevens, Janet & Susan Stevens Crummel**

*Illus. by Janet Stevens*

Clarion/HarperCollins (48 pp.)

$17.99 | Aug. 23, 2022

978-0-358-56188-0

What to do when your kid can’t help but be good?

Papa Wolf and Mama Wolf are concerned for their son. They’ve tried everything, but he still keeps doing good things, like taking baths and playing nicely with pigs! Determined to have him carry on the family legacy of being a Big Bad Wolf, his parents send Little Good Wolf off to Bad School. But the lessons don’t go as planned. When instructor Giant threatens to “whomp” him with his club, Little Good Wolf suggests he whomp a ball instead; turns out Giant is a natural at baseball. When instructor Troll tries to teach him bad manners, Little Good Wolf suggests Troll savor each bite to really enjoy his meal. Eventually expelled, Little Good Wolf walks home in shame, just wishing his parents could love him as he is. In the forest, he meets Old Hag, who presents him with an apple that will turn good to bad (or the other way around). What will Little Good Wolf do? This fun inversion on several classic Western fairy-tale characters is full of laughs at all the ironic turns of events, with
“An extraordinary story that brings a new perspective to the human toll of war and the capacity for healing.”

PEACE IS A CHAIN REACTION

Succinct narration interspersed with photographs, notes, and quotes explains the events leading to the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States entering World War II. Stone takes great pains to convey the blatant discrimination against people of Japanese descent, who were stripped of their rights and imprisoned in camps. Yuzuru Takeshita, born and raised in California and who also lived in Japan for some time, struggled with the injustice of being unlawfully imprisoned. Meanwhile, in Japan, thousands of high school girls, including Toshiko Inoue, were tasked with a secret mission; they endured long hours and harsh conditions to make balloon bombs designed to attack the United States. Though many balloons made it to American soil, for the most part, they did limited damage; however, six civilians were killed, including children. Years after the war, a chance meeting between Takeshita and Inoue eventually led to correspondence between the U.S. victims’ families and several balloon workers. Stone artfully weaves these stories together as several of the workers and the American families eventually meet to explore their collective trauma and forgiveness.

An extraordinary story that brings a new perspective to the human toll of war and the capacity for healing. (author’s note, source notes, bibliography, reading list, image credits, index) (Nonfiction. 10-14)

ONCE UPON A SCREAM
Strange, Vera
Disney-Hyperion (256 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-368-07591-6
Series: Disney Chills

A drop of blood unleashes an evil fairy in this installment in a middle-grade series featuring Disney villains. Maleficent features in this updated retelling of “Sleeping Beauty” in which readers meet Dawn Flores, who’s been sent to live for six months in rural Castletown after getting in trouble for helping her best friends shoplift. Sixth grader Dawn is staying in the Deep South with her married aunts, Fleur and Merry, and she dislikes everything about the countryside and misses her family, friends, and city life. Dawn soon finds herself at odds with popular classmate Leah, the mayor’s daughter. Leah socially excludes and publicly humiliates Dawn, stoking her desire for revenge. While helping her aunts clean out a dusty shed of estate-sale acquisitions for Spindles ‘N’ Things, their antiques shop, Dawn accidentally pricks her finger on the spindle of an old spinning wheel, unleashing a frightening, evil magical force. Maleficent wants to reclaim her stolen spinning wheel, and she ensnares gullible Dawn in a scheme to help her amplify her powers. The magical tricks deployed by Maleficent include bewitching animals, casting sleeping curses, and possessing people—all while Dawn and her new friend, Phillipa, attempt to maintain control of a losing situation. Despite some tense moments, the predictable plot spins mechanically, bogged down by heavy-handed descriptive language that tells more than it shows. Dawn’s
shoplifting friends are brown-skinned; other cast members follow a White default.

Mild scares woven from well-worn threads. (Horror . 8-12)

**YOU CAN!**
*Kids Empowering Kids*
Strick, Alexandra  
Illus. by Steve Antony  
Candlewick (40 pp.)  
$18.99  |  Oct. 11, 2022  
978-1-5362-2543-3

Follow 14 children as they grow, learn, and become their authentic selves.

Beginning as babies, this diverse group of youngsters share toys and form close bonds. As readers turn pages, the children grow to young adulthood. There is no explicit narrative that follows these tots on their journeys; instead, Strick offers statements, starting with the titular phrase. Some spreads are rousing affirmations: "You can... / be brave, / be beautiful, // be inventive, / be strong." Others take the form of advice: "You can... / make new resolutions / whenever you like, / make mistakes and learn from them, // forgive others / and yourself." Backmatter explains that Strick and Antony spoke to many young people, asking for words of wisdom and what they wished they'd known. Those answers directly informed these thoughtful phrases. Though the children wear different clothes as the warm pencil illustrations progress, Antony makes the inspired choice to have each child wear the same color, so readers can also follow individual pathways and observe many stories told without any words at all. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Inclusive and empowering. (Picture book. 4-8)

**TIMOTHY DINOMAN SAVES THE CAT**
Thueson, Steve  
Graphic Universe (192 pp.)  
$19.99 paper  |  Oct. 4, 2022  
978-1-72846-309-4  
Series: Timothy Dinoman, 1

Can a villain use a weather satellite to hold the world captive? Not on this dinosaur’s watch.

When Mr. Bowman and his henchmen, Brans and Quaid—all light-skinned—steal and launch the satellite, agents Timothy Dinoman, an iguanodon who wears an eyepatch, and Jen Robins, a light-skinned human, work to foil the plot. They’re helped by Abraham, Bowman’s white cat (a nod to the feline petted by the Bond villain in *From Russia With Love*), whom good-hearted Timothy saves when Bowman’s lair goes up in flames. In an underlying plot thread, the release of *Space Beam*, a so-bad-it’s-good movie, foreshadows the real impending danger. Bursting with visual energy that leaps off the page, the artwork brings to life vivid action scenes, including an elaborate fight sequence in and then on top of a speeding train and an extended footrace and vehicular chase that would impress even Wile E. Coyote. There are laugh-out-loud moments aplenty: Timothy and a henchman pause midnight after knocking over a shelf of first-edition books (Timothy even stops to browse). Readers will enjoy the James Bond–esque gadgets, like a data transmitter hidden inside a container of dental floss. This tale has heart, too: Timothy and Jen’s bond is a strong one, and Timothy’s kindness toward Abraham is repaid at critical moments, leading to a satisfying conclusion.

Action-packed, save-the-world drama mixed with humor and heart. (Graphic novel. 10-14)

**JO BRIGHT AND THE SEVEN BOTS**
Underwood, Deborah  
Illus. by Meg Hunt  
Chronicle Books (44 pp.)  
$17.99  |  Sept. 20, 2022  
978-1-4521-7130-2

*A “Snow White”–inspired tale of a kind, intelligent bot-builder, from the creators of *Interstellar Cinderella* (2015) and *Reading Beauty* (2019).*

“Once upon a planetoid,” Jo Bright, a green-haired, tan-skinned girl clad in overalls, builds bots from found items, improvising with odds and ends because the “jealous, robot-building queen” (depicted with light skin) won’t let her use her tools and supplies. When the queen’s mirror-bot announces that Jo Bright is the best bot-builder, the queen banishes Jo, leaving her near the dragon’s lair. Sparky, the misunderstood and lonely dragon, invites Jo in for tea, and Jo uses items in the dragon’s home to make seven bots to keep the creature company. Back at the castle, the mirror-bot still confirms Jo is the best bot-builder, so the queen attempts to kill Jo with an evil apple-bot, which zaps the smallest dragon-bot instead. To repair him, Jo must sneak into the queen’s workshop. Sparky and the bots go with her, prepared for trouble, and together they defeat the queen. Underwood’s narrative moves quickly in rhyming stanzas, with only occasionally unnatural constructions to serve the rhyme. Hunt’s quirky illustrations offer diverse creatures, colorful landscapes, and whimsical looking bots, though images of the queen smashing the mirror-bot and the little bot crumpled on the ground may unsettle younger readers, especially those not familiar with the original story. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A fun read, though perhaps not a favorite. (Fairy tale. 4-8)
A FEW BICYCLES MORE
Uss, Christina
Margaret Ferguson/Holiday House
(272 pp.)
$17.99  |  Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-8234-5087-9

Revelations, rescues, and family issues challenge 12-year-old Bicycle and her unusually gifted wheels.

Only a month after the life-changing cross-country spin detailed in The Adventures of a Girl Called Bicycle (2018), a chance encounter leads to new exploits for the pedal-pushing preteen—starting with the stunning discovery that she is one of a set of identical quintuplets. Having been misplaced years before and raised as a solitary foundling by clerics of the Mostly Silent Monastery and the Nearly Silent Nunnery, Bicycle (or, now, Euphemia) finds herself struggling with family life, particularly as her mom, already overprotective in the wake of losing one child, has turned even more helicopter-y. This becomes a problem when Bicycle's beloved bike, Wheels of Fortune 713-J, which has enough features to give high-tech a whole new dimension, announces that four kindred two-wheelers developed by the same maverick inventor are about to be scrapped and need rescuing now. Fortunately, Bicycle's sibs turn out to be kindred (if stifled) spirits who are used to working as a team, so the stage is set for a bumpy, exhilarating race against time and, ultimately, a liberating journey. Uss again assembles a cast of terrifically engaging human characters, mostly defaulting to White. Others are just as distinctly individual despite getting about on wheels or even, in the case of an enigmatic but surprisingly helpful tuxedo cat, paws.

A heady rush of girl power paced by the delights both of biking and bringing out the best in oneself and others. (Fiction. 9-12)

THE WORST TEDDY EVER
Verdad, Marcelo
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
$17.99  |  Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-316-33045-9

An unusual teddy-child relationship. Noa, a brown-skinned child with scribbled black hair, loves taking Teddy to the breakfast table, the playground, and everywhere else, in the tradition of children with their favorite stuffed animals. But Noa is frustrated—the small, brown, round-eared bear is always sleepy, shown with line eyes drawn in the classic “asleep” curve. It’s somewhat unclear if this is in Noa’s imagination or if Teddy is actually sentient enough to be exhausted, but after an abrupt transition, the bright-yellow day scenes turn to dark-blue night. A ghost, the Boogeyman, the Tooth Fairy, and the Tickle Monster all drop by, just to visit, but Teddy doesn’t let them interrupt Noa’s sleep and sends them all kindly on their ways. Noa never discovers that Teddy is sleepy because of this nightly defense. There are some minor hiccups in the story’s pacing, and a reliance on all uppercase words to indicate emphasis (“Or at least they TRY to….Teddy is ALWAYS tired!”) points toward a blunter storytelling style. But this is more than made up for by the delightful, childlike illustrations, created with paper cutouts, acrylics, crayons, and digital collage, that brim with deep emotion and barely contained energy and will immediately appeal to young children. The plot is a fun, reassuring twist on several common themes. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Great for bedtime or anytime. (Picture book. 4-7)

ALEX CAN’T SLEEP
A Bedtime Yoga Story
Vitale, Brooke
Illus. by Junissa Bianda
Penguin Young Readers (32 pp.)
$12.99  |  Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-593-38685-9
Series: Cosmic Kids

This picture-book tie-in with the Cosmic Kids Yoga YouTube channel offers children some guidance on coping with stress.

After a bad day at school, Alex worries that tomorrow might be worse. With these thoughts swirling around his mind, he can’t sleep, so he heads to the kitchen for a snack. His mother comes in and offers him a glass of warm milk. Back in his room, Alex tells his mother what has been troubling him, and she suggests “deep, centering breaths.” After a couple of tries, he gets the hang of it and finally drops off to sleep. Throughout the story, the illustrations show Alex assuming different yoga poses that will be easily missed if readers are not familiar with the practice. But not to worry—the book closes by showing all of the poses and their names. Young readers may enjoy going back over the story to identify each pose. Caregivers will appreciate the suggestion of centered breathing as an easy but effective way to help their young charges relax. Colorful, kid-friendly, cartoonish illustrations depict Alex and his mother with light skin, pink cheeks, and red hair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An easy introduction to yoga for the very young. (Picture book. 4-6)
A poignant account of the 1909 Cherry, Illinois, coal mine disaster, one of the worst in U.S. history.

Walker cites Karen Tintori’s 2002 adult nonfiction title, *Trapped: The 1909 Cherry Mine Disaster*, as a major source of inspiration, but in recounting the tragedy’s course for young readers, she piles on names and numbers without capturing that book’s dramatic storytelling or its sharp sense of outrage at the unsafe practices and conditions that led to 259 deaths. She also seldom connects her narrative to the many affecting period photos she has gathered, nor even mentions who took them, so although they are labeled, the portraits of victims and their families, along with scenes of the town of Cherry and of anxious crowds clustered around the mine’s entrance waiting for news, seem oddly disconnected from the actual people and events. She does offer meticulously detailed descriptions of how coal was mined at that time, how the accidental fire started and spread, how the trapped miners struggled, and the protracted, often disorganized rescue efforts. She also develops significant overall themes—that there was much national and ethnic, if not racial, diversity in the devastated community (most of the dead were European immigrants; only 11 were U.S.-born) and that both during and after the tragedy there was a great outpouring of volunteer and charitable assistance.

Numbers and pictures tell a tragic tale even if the writing never quite catches fire. (author’s note, source notes, bibliography, image credits, index) (Nonfiction. 10-14)

*UNDERGROUND FIRE*  
Hope, Sacrifice, and Courage in the Cherry Mine Disaster  
Walker, Sally M.  
Candlewick (224 pp.)  
$24.99 | Oct. 1, 2022  
978-1-5362-1240-2

*THE CAPITOL*  
Ward, Lindsay  
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)  
$14.99 | Aug. 16, 2022  
978-0-06-320380-8  
Series: Meet the Nation

An introduction to the U.S. Capitol and all the people who work there.  
Well, not all— but interspersed with glimpses of the public halls and chambers, Ward lines up gallery after gallery of tiny, individualized, racially diverse people. Each of the dozens of figures, from vice president to speaker of the house, sergeant at arms to plumber, comes with a job title; for some, brief explanations of their duties are provided. A plotline involving three brown-skinned children (whose parents work at the Capitol as a mason, a U.S. senator, and a tour guide) pursuing an elusive kitty provides a pretext for the tour and is linked in the backmatter to a note about a ghostly cat long said to haunt the building. A list of additional facts at the end supplements those scattered throughout, and the author invites young viewers to take closer looks at the carefully drawn scenes to spot the cat and other features, such as the compass stone on the floor of the Crypt. Readers tantalized by the much quicker tour in Lynn Curlee’s *Capital* (2003) will pore over this series opener. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An informative guide for future young visitors as well as armchair tourists. (search & find, sources, glossary) (Informational picture book. 7-9)

*PUT YOUR SHOES ON & GET READY!*  
Warnock, Raphael G.  
Illus. by TelMika Grooms  
Philomel (40 pp.)  
$19.99 | Nov. 15, 2022  
978-0-593-52887-7

Georgia’s first Black senator urges readers to get up, get dressed, and find the right shoes for what they’re going to do.

Warnock offers a shoe-based view of his own experiences—dressing up that summer to help his dad haul old cars and church shoes on Sundays to hear him preach, high-tops to play basketball, and pastor and activist shoes as a grown-up. Though he became a pastor at the same Baptist church where Martin Luther King Jr. preached, he notes with humility that he “never thought it was [his] job to walk in” those shoes but to find his own, and now, after his election, he wears lace-ups for his job of helping people. Fondly watching his own children clomping around in his shoes, he tells them what his father told him: “You have to put on shoes that fit your feet—shoes for the job you’re meant to do.” Often taking ground-level perspectives to focus attention on the footwear, Grooms depicts the author recognizably in uncrowded settings that usually include racially and ethnically diverse company. A final scene of the senator sitting with a group of diverse but not individualized children does skate close to blandness, but overall the art’s clean hues and smiling faces create an atmosphere more buoyant than stale for the lightly delivered message. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Good-humored inspiration from heel to toe. (Picture-book autobiography. 6-8)

*THE MOON IS MORE THAN A NIGHT-LIGHT*  
Wells, Robert E.  
Illus. by Patrick Corrigan  
Whitman (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 1, 2022  
978-0-8075-5275-9  
Series: Tell Me Why, 2

A nighttime hike offers an opportunity to learn more about the moon.
Within the framework of a parent-and-child outing, Wells introduces all kinds of moon-related information: its gravity pulls Earth’s tides; it’s been visited by both crewed and uncrewed missions; a collision between an asteroid and the Earth is thought to have formed the moon. Wells, the author of numerous science-related titles for primary-grade readers, also discusses the reasons why seasons occur, Earth’s metal core and magnetic shield, and tectonic plates as statements of scientific fact. Corrigan’s cheery, animation-style illustrations show a happy, brown-skinned parent and child walking with their dog through the woods to their destination, a beach bonfire where they roast marshmallows. Along the way, there are illustrations of the Earth and moon orbiting the sun, changing moon phases, the asteroid collision, and the tectonic plates of Earth’s crust. In some images, the child reappears, watching Galileo looking at the moon; appropriately suited, the child is seen exploring the moon, too. The science gets a little lost at times: The crescent moon is shown both waxing and waning in the course of the evening walk, and the frozen water molecules found on the moon are signified by a snowflake. While the pictures will appeal to younger children, the vocabulary is challenging; this might work best as a read-aloud by a scientifically literate caregiver. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**A solid introduction to some complicated science.** *(Glossary, selected sources) (Informational picture book. 3-9)*

**LEO + LEA**

Wesolowska, Monica

*Illus. by Kenard Pak*

Scholastic (40 pp.)

$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022

978-1-338-30287-5

A child who likes to count meets a new classmate who likes to draw. What could they possibly have in common?

In this sparsely told and illustrated episode, Leo, depicted with Asian features, walks to school counting: one flower, two trees, three squirrels, five steps, eight new classmates, 13 raindrops on the window, and so on. One day, he meets Lea, a dark-skinned classmate who sits next to him drawing. Later, upset by his inability to count all the daisies he sees outside (the loud playground noises overwhelm him), Leo takes off across grassy fields to a peaceful glade, where he finds Lea and excitedly discovers that she’s drawn 21 leaves and 13 flowers. “I love / patterns / Want to / see more?” she asks. As Wesolowska explains in her author’s note, these numbers—echoed in the changing number of words on the pages of her narrative—represent the Fibonacci sequence: a progression of sums beginning 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21 that mathematically generate what is known as the golden ratio and also reflect patterns of leaves, flower petals, and other features often found in nature. Aside from framing a warm portrayal of a friendship sparked by an unexpected connection, the plot and the device don’t seem to have all that much to do with each other, but the two don’t get in each other’s way either. For clearer and more direct views of the sequence and its inventor, steer younger readers to Sarah C. Campbell’s *Growing Patterns* (2010), with photographs by Richard P. Campbell, or Joseph D’Agnese’s *Blockhead* (2010), illustrated by John O’Brien. Leo and Lea’s classmates are racially diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Maybe a little forced, but the mathematical wonder is creatively incorporated. *(Illustrator’s note) (Picture book: 6-8)*

**ONLY THE TREES KNOW**

Whittingham, Jane

*Illus. by Cinyee Chiu*

Kids Can (32 pp.)

$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022

978-1-5253-0492-7

A small rabbit tired of the loneliness of winter wants to know when spring will finally arrive. Little Rabbit is hungry without meadow grass to eat and run through and his friends to play with; they’re either down south or hibernating. When will it be spring? Unsatisfied with his parents’ answers—wait and be patient—Little Rabbit seeks out wise Grandmama Rabbit. Her advice is to ask the trees, for only they will know when spring will come. But Little Rabbit fears he is too little to attract the trees’ attention, his voice too small for them to hear, and his ears too weak to hear their answer. Tucked from his attempts to gain an answer, he falls asleep among a tree’s roots, waking up when a familiar but long-unsmelled odor tickles his nose and a song he hasn't heard in a while fills the air. And when he opens his eyes, he spies the first bits of green signaling spring. The gouache, pastel, and digital illustrations are smudgy and full of the whites, blues, and browns of a wintertime forest, and the rabbits’ fur is alight with patches of pastel blue, pink, and yellow. Young readers who are similarly tired of all the indoor play and loneliness of winter will eagerly turn to the trees to see their own signs of spring. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Here’s to spring green, togetherness, and looking to the trees.** *(Picture book: 3-8)*

**BOBBY**

A Story of Robert F. Kennedy

Wiles, Deborah

*Illus. by Tatjana Fazlalizadeh*

Scholastic (48 pp.)

$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022

978-0-545-17123-6

A reverent tribute to Robert F. Kennedy’s spirit and legacy. The muted hues and grim, downcast faces in Fazlalizadeh’s atmospheric graphite art set a valedictory tone, but Wiles writes to connect living readers with Kennedy’s character and dedication to public service—framing her biographical overview as a tale told to a brown-skinned child by a lighter-skinned grandparent who ends with a present-tense challenge: “We know we have work to do.” Though the author humanizes her...
subject by informing readers that Kennedy loved “ice cream and big dogs. Just like you do,” offering anecdotes from his early years in a large and competitive family, and discussing his work to help his older—and more well-known—brother John be elected president, ensuing passages focus less on what he did than on his words as attorney general in support of voting and other civil rights along with his opposition to the war in Vietnam and statements of principle during his presidential candidacy (most cogently: “We can do better than this”). Wiles continues to address readers directly in her afterward, urging them to learn more about, and be inspired by, what he stood for and providing leads to recommended print and online sources. Faces and hands in group scenes are depicted in a range of skin tones. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Gives a Kennedy often lost in his older brother’s dazzle a glow of his own. (Picture-book biography. 7-9)

Cabby’s family are homesteaders in Kansas; fires and grasshoppers destroy their crops, but Cabby is determined to continue farming.

Twelve-year-old Catherine “Cabby” Potts isn’t aware that her parents may lose their claim until they force her to go work in Lady Ashford’s prairie manor. With no crops to sell, the family needs her wages. Independent-minded Cabby hates servitude and resents the classism of snooty Londoner Lady Ashford and her youngest son, Nigel. But that doesn’t stop her from matching her sister, Emmeline, with Nigel, thinking the marriage will solve the family’s financial woes. To Cabby’s shock, although Nigel initially seemed interested in Emmeline, he in fact looks down on her. Cabby also discovers that Nigel and his associates are tricking her family and other homesteaders out of land they claimed for themselves. This storyline is juxtaposed with Cabby’s growing understanding of how these families acquired their land at the cost of Kiowa, Cheyenne, Kansa, and Wichita people. She becomes aware of the way her White neighbors disdain the town’s remaining Kiowa residents. With each episodic adventure narrated in Cabby’s first-person voice, Cabby earns the grudging respect of Lady Ashford and the trust of her Kiowa and White friend, Eli Lewis, a boy who works as the Ashfords’ groom. Throughout, she questions the nature of love and partnership, and, with new self-confidence, she ultimately exposes the fraudsters. Despite life’s uncertainties, one thing is clear: Cabby will determine her own path.

A rousing read. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 8-12)

A loving approach to sharing painful realities with children, this book strikes a chord. (Picture book. 5-10)

As Jay moves from childhood to preadolescence, loving adults prepare him for what that means for him as a Black boy.

Jay, who loves superheroes and racing his friends, is thrilled that he’s grown two inches—he’s no longer a “shrimp.” But Mom hugs him sadly, looking over his head at the news, and says, “They won’t see you as a young boy anymore, either.” And when Jay and his friends skateboard up the street, they get indignant looks from White passersby. Grandpa tells them not to gather in groups of four or more, Mom instructs Jay how to behave in stores, and Dad tells him how to act when pulled over by police. When Jay starts to leave the house in his hoodie and earphones, his parents call him back in for a talk, depicted in a wordless spread of shadowy vignettes showing scenes of the struggles young Black people face—being stopped by police or treated with hostility by White people. After, Jay’s parents and grandparents envelop him in a loving embrace, assuring him that he has done nothing wrong. Williams’ narration is shaped by a convincing, youthful first-person voice, and Uchendu’s powerful art conveys both the joyful energy of childhood and the pain of adults who can’t shield children from a racist world. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A loving approach to sharing painful realities with children, this book strikes a chord. (Picture book. 5-10)

Children celebrate their abundant bodies, from their hair to their feet.

Prolific author Yolen joins forces with her grandchild Stemple-Piatt to create a simple, rhyming picture book about the beauty and power of large bodies. Depicting kids with a variety of skin tones, the story employs a gentle formula to uplift physical features that children may feel self-conscious of, including wide feet, thick thighs, and long arms. Each child describes a body part that often attracts attention (a Black youth notes, “Some friends mention my very broad shoulders / Say I’d make small work of mighty big boulders”), followed by a positive framing of the part in question (“But I pull my shoulders back, and I walk with pride”). Each segment concludes with the titular affirmation: “Then I look in the mirror—and what do I see? / BIG and BOLD and BEAUTIFUL me!” As each child repeats the celebratory refrain, Burgett’s cheerful illustrations portray them alongside kids from previous spreads, emphasizing
connection and belonging. Disability isn’t discussed in the text, though characters with disabilities (including a child with a limb difference and another child who uses a hearing aid) are depicted. In a growing landscape of body-positive children’s literature, this book’s overworked rhymes keep it from shining, but those looking for a gentle introduction to body acceptance will find it a solid option. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An upbeat, uncomplicated ode to bodies that are big, thick, broad, and boundless. (Picture book 4-7)

**JUST LIKE JESSE OWENS**

*Young, Andrew & Paula Young Shelton*  
*Illus. by Gordon C. James*

Scholastic (40 pp.)  
$16.99 | Aug. 2, 2022  
978-0-545-55465-7

Before growing up to become a major figure in the civil rights movement, a boy finds a role model.

Buffing up a childhood tale told by her renowned father, Young Shelton describes how young Andrew saw scary men marching in his New Orleans neighborhood (“It sounded like they were yelling ‘Hi, Hitler!’”). In response to his questions, his father took him to see a newsreel of Jesse Owens (“a runner who looked like me”) triumphing in the 1936 Olympics. “Racism is a sickness,” his father tells him. “We’ve got to help folks like that.” How? “Well, you can start by just being the best person you can be,” his father replies. “It’s what you do that counts.” In James’ hazy chalk pastels, Andrew joins racially diverse playmates (including a White child with an Irish accent proudly displaying the nickel he got from his aunt as a bribe to stop playing with “those Colored boys”) in tag and other games, playing catch with his dad, sitting in the midst of a cheering crowd in the local theater’s segregated balcony, and finally visualizing himself pelting down a track alongside his new hero—“head up, back straight, eyes focused,” as a thematically repeated line has it, on the finish line. An afterword by Young Shelton explains that she retold this story, told to her many times growing up, drawing from conversations with Young and from her own research; family photos are also included. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A pivotal moment in a child’s life, at once stirring and authentically personal. (Illustrator’s note) (Autobiographical picture book 7-9)

---

**BUS BUDDIES**

*A Lift-the-Page Truck Book*

*Coyle, Finn*  
*Illus. by Srimalie Bassani*

Flowerpot Press (44 pp.)  
$8.99 | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-4867-2405-5

Series: Finn’s Fun Trucks

An overview of five different buses and what they do.

This lift-the-page board book describes a monster-truck bus, a double-decker bus, a mass transit bus, a tram, and a road trolley. Each driver introduces their bus; an image offers labeled details of various parts. Lifting the page flap reveals the vehicle’s purpose. For example, the mass transit bus is shown dropping people off at the Bean in Chicago with the explanation that it “picks up and drops off passengers on a planned route throughout the city.” The text and illustrations are accessible for young readers and include just enough information to satisfy curious kids without overwhelming them. One small quibble: The buses are described as “taking people where they need to go” but monster-truck buses don’t actually transport people (they “compete and entertain fans”)—a slightly confusing inclusion. The illustrations are well done, showcasing drivers of different skin tones. Some of the busy cityscapes feature iconic places like Chicago and London, a possible jumping-off point for introducing readers to different locations.

Will delight little lovers of things with wheels. (Board book 2-4)

---

**FOREST FRIENDS**

*Hart, Curt*

Flowerpot Press (20 pp.)  
$7.99 | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-4867-2405-5

Up-close with five different North American forest animals.

This board book spotlights bald eagles, rabbits, white-tailed deer, bullfrogs, and eastern screech owls. Each animal is accompanied by close-up photographs and a related and not-too-obvious fact. “Eastern screech owls avoid predators by stretching their bodies and swooping back and forth like a tree branch.” It’s possible that even adults sharing the book with children might learn something new. The stunning photographs put the animals on full display; the bullfrog’s eye is presented in great detail, down to the ring around its pupil, and readers can even make out the veins in the rabbit’s ears. This makes for a lot of visual interest without being overly busy. Overall, the concise information and images are toddler-friendly, though some of the factoids assume knowledge of topics such as hibernation.
A day in the life of Bébé and Doudou in France.

This board book opens on a busy day when Bébé wakes up. From there, it's on to breakfast, a walk, and a trip to the park, among other activities. Each page features a different child and their lovey (doudou) along with a sprinkle of French and accompanying helpful phonetic spellings. Words and phrases like bonjour, bon appetit, and bonne nuit are woven into the text in such a way that non-native speakers can manage them. The phonetic spellings encourage correct pronunciation and familiarize little readers with new words. The book concludes with a section called "A Day in France," which translates all of the French from the text into English. While this is certainly helpful, from the delicate bathtub bubbles to the fleecy snuggle of Leo tenderly, and in another, the other parent draws him close. All of the steps in this bedtime routine are reassuring, and Leo looks content throughout; this is a helpful read to get little ones ready—and even eager—for bedtime. Leo and his parents present as Black. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

FRANCE
Holingue, Evelyne
Illus. by Margaux Carpentier
Barefoot Books (20 pp.)
$9.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
Series: Our World
(Board book. 2-4)

A lovely bedtime read. (Board book. 0-2)

WHO BIT MY BOOK?
Mrziewicz, Elisa
Minedition (16 pp.)
$11.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-66265-135-9

Different animals leave their marks on this lift-the-flap board book. Each page starts with an inquiry ("Who bit my book?" “Who crumpled up my book?"). The accompanying flap covers most of the animal, showing only a peek at a body part such as a tail or arm and the damage they've done to the book (a chomp, for example). A lift of the flap reveals the full animal: The cat has scratched the book, the snail has "slobbered" on it, and the mouse has nibbled it. This pattern offers little readers a chance to guess which creature is responsible for making mischief. Kids will surely giggle at the scatological messes that two animals make. Some critters leave behind jagged cutouts, giving the book a checky, realistic touch that's sure to delight little ones and keep them coming back for repeat reads. And by the story’s end, a snake appears to have swallowed the book whole—an amusing and appropriate conclusion. The illustrations are simple, featuring the animals and, in some cases, their pawprints against white space. The art makes effective use of textures; tiny dots and lines give the monkey soft fur, while the snail has an attractive, patterned shell. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Silly playfulness perfect for both children and their grown-ups. (Board book. 1-3)

LEO, SLEEP TIGHT!
McQuinn, Anna
Illus. by Ruth Hearson
Charlesbridge (18 pp.)
$8.09 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-64686-718-9
Series: Leo Can!
(Brand book. 1-3)

A baby gets ready for bed.

After a play-filled day, it’s time for Leo to wind down and go to sleep. He drinks warm milk, takes a bath, snuggles up with his parents to hear a story, and dozes off. McQuinn’s text is appropriate for young toddlers, with just a few words per page. The descriptions are short and make use of alliteration, while Hearson’s soft, warm illustrations exude a feeling of comfort, from the delicate bathtub bubbles to the fleecy snuggle of Leo’s pajamas. What sets the artwork apart is how it makes an ordinary experience feel like the precious, magical time that it is. The family’s love and trust for one another are evident as they cuddle together while reading, in one image, a parent holds Leo tenderly, and in another, the other parent draws him close. All of the steps in this bedtime routine are reassuring, and Leo looks content throughout; this is a helpful read to get little ones ready—and even eager—for bedtime. Leo and his parents present as Black. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A lovely bedtime read. (Board book. 0-2)

LOVE IS A BALL
Novesky, Amy
Illus. by Sara Gillingham
Cameron Kids (24 pp.)
$13.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-951836-35-1

From baseballs to gum balls, a list of round objects.

This rhyming board book showcases balls that appear in childhood games, from the obvious, like a basketball, to those less common in childhood play, such as pinballs, comparing each of them to love (“Love is a baseball, snug in a glove”). Other balls include a balloon, a bubble, and the moon. Overall, the rhyme scheme works well thanks to onomatopoeia like
 revis无论是题材还是插图，都受到高度评价。插图依靠有限的调色板，大部分由黄色、鲑鱼色、蓝色和绿色带有的黑色作为点缀色。大多数角色拥有不同肤色的皮肤，尽管他们的头发都是黑色的。他们脸上只有一条细长的黑色眉毛。总的来说，这一创意读物是儿童读物的一个不同视角。
BATHTIME AND BEDTIME
Slegers, Liesbet
Clavis (24 pp.)
$9.95 | July 12, 2022
978-1-60537-750-6

A child takes a bath and gets ready for bed.

The tot, who has light skin and short dark hair, directly addresses readers, explaining each step of the process, from soaping up in the tub to drinking a bottle of milk to falling asleep for the night in their crib. Each page has concise, direct explanations (“This is the bathtub. Look! Water comes out of the faucet. The bath fills up with water”) that proceed step by step—like a visual checklist. The verso illustrates the object the child is discussing (it’s also bolded in the text), while the recto shows the resulting action. One page depicts a pair of yellow-checked pajamas, while the facing page features an image of the little one wearing the jammies. The illustrations are simple, boldly outlined, and mostly set against a stark white background. Even if this story feels like familiar board-book territory, young readers who are buoyed by repetition and clear expectations will find it reassuring and welcoming. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A comforting, step-by-step guide to a well-trod topic. (Board book. 0-2)

THE THANK YOU BOOK
Smith, Danna
Illus. by Juliana Perdomo
Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (24 pp.)
$7.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-66590-292-2

“All over the world, if you look, you will find / there are all kinds of thank-yous for all kinds of kind.”

This chipper board book offers ways to express gratitude, from saying thank you to giving a hug to drawing a picture. The rhyming text keeps the pages turning, and the concise explanations make the book appropriate for little ones. The illustrations depict children and adults with a wide range of skin tones, hair colors and textures, and abilities. Characters thank a crossing guard for helping them make their way across the street, a child thanks a veterinarian for treating their cat, and another little one thanks a grown-up for braiding their hair. All of the people are drawn with simple faces, two dark circles for the eyes, a single-line nose, and sometimes rosy cheeks. While the art doesn’t make room for a detailed range of expressions, it does the job. The message that a thank you comes from inside and can be shared in many forms is straightforward yet incredibly important. This one will work well in the hands of a young child but also as a tool for educators and caregivers. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A clear message with a developmentally appropriate approach. (Board book. 2-4)
A guide to the life and career of pop star Eilish suitable for projects and reports or casual perusal by the young singer’s fans.

In an introduction and four short chapters, this concise volume accompanied by color photographs and helpful sidebars covers the performer’s life and cultural factors influencing why and how she connects with fans. The introduction explores her notable youthful achievements; at 18 she was the youngest person and the first woman to win the four most prestigious honors at the Grammys (best new artist, album of the year, record of the year, and song of the year).

The first chapter explores the beginnings of Eilish’s life as the daughter of actors, growing up in the Los Angeles area, where she was involved with singing and dancing from an early age. She and her older brother, musician Finneas O’Connell, have collaborated extensively. Later chapters touch upon challenges Eilish has faced, including self-harm, suicidal ideation, sleep disturbances, depression, and Tourette’s syndrome, as well as controversies over her lyrics and behavior; the difficulties of living in the public eye; the impact of her fashion sense and personal style; and her activism. The fluorescent pink-and-green design scheme will catch the attention of young readers, and the work’s uncritically laudatory tone will speak to fans. Those looking for an in-depth biography will need to go elsewhere, but this volume is an accessible overview.

An informative, colorful celebration of a musical celebrity. (source notes, timeline, further information, index, picture credits) (Biography. 12-18)
University, where the interdimensional travel program is mostly White, old-money kids who’ve been training for this their whole lives. Between the school’s lack of accommodations and her own internalized ableism, she is struggling, and her cochlear implant doesn’t help enough for her to keep up. Laney’s grateful for assistance from her (hot, muscular, rude) TA, Colton Price, but he hates her for some reason. Little does Laney know that Colton’s part of an occult boys’ club which plays with the boundary of death itself—a boundary Colton’s already crossed once. Laney, a girl with an extremely deliberate goth-adorable aesthetic, is well served by the purple prose (“the shadow-bitten arch of the doorway,” “suckling on the teat of decay”) and dialogue that wobbles between angst and snark in the style of teen paranormal television. Her unusual necromantic powers make her an irresistible target for the power players at Howe (where every figure with power and authority is male, and her peers and allies are all female), but at least Colton is sexy while he deceives and manipulates her. The worldbuilding is shaky but the romantic agita and ironic wit are present in spades. Most characters default to White.

For fans of brooding bad boys and the pastel goth accidental necromancers who love them. (Paranormal romance. 14-18)
Strange environment. Adopted by a new, quirky friend group, she's then swept up in Shakespeare's familiar love quadrangle. This retelling closely follows the beats of the original Twelfth Night, and it's solidly grounded as it tackles the often retold tale. The surprises lie mostly in the effervescent and goofy tone. Although Vi grapples with real issues—trying out a less feminine gender presentation, grieving the loss of her father, and navigating her changing relationship with Sebastian—the focus is on fun. Green's buoyant art effectively augments this tone, with extremely appealing and expressive character designs and settings full of lush detail. Clever updates to the source material include the cliques to which the characters belong and the use of social media to facilitate mistaken identities. This playing to strengths helps readers overlook a breakneck timeline and less emotional complexity in some storylines. The cast is heavily queer and racially diverse; Vi reads White.

Endearing, magically infused, romantic comedy hijinks. (Graphic fantasy. 12-18)

**THE EDGE OF BEING**

Brandon, James  
Nancy Paulsen Books (304 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-0-525-51767-2

A young person goes on a quest for his other parent.

High school senior Isaac “Fig” Griffin is lost. He feels like his best friend, Charlie, and his boyfriend, Christopher, have their desired paths charted out for him, but the White, pansexual teen can't move on until he finds the truth about the other half of his genetic makeup. His single mother had told him that he was the result of an anonymous sperm donor, but a hidden box of memories leads him to San Francisco, an aging hippie's home for transient youth, and the connection between his family and the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria Riots, during which trans women, sex workers, and gay men fought back against police oppression three years before Stonewall. Told in baroque prose and over-the-top dialogue, the story—as evidenced by the lengthy author's note—clearly came out of Brandon's desire to share this undeniably pivotal and important piece of history. Unfortunately, however, these educational goals drive the plot in such a way that at many points the novel comes off as more of a lesson than a natural exploration of Fig's journey. The plot also moves forward via a series of majorly helpful coincidences. Self-injury, sexual assault, and racism are explored through underdeveloped supporting characters.

Sentimental and overloaded. (Fiction. 14-18)

**ETERNALLY YOURS**

Ed. by Caldwell, Patrice  
Viking (400 pp.)  
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022  
978-0-593-20687-4

Fantastical romances are as diverse as their protagonists in this collection of 15 stories by YA favorites. Maria has finally found Ethan, the ghoul who turned her into an undead creature. When the moment comes to take her revenge, she instead finds herself taking his disembodied head on one last walk around the city in “Undead Ghoul Meet-Cute” by Kendare Blake. Tally Qiu, the protagonist of “A Thousand More” by Chloe Gong, is confronted by Nate Zhou, a new student from Shanghai who claims that they are soul mates, destined to find each other in every reincarnation. Despite her lack of past-life memories, she finds herself growing closer to him as they are partnered for a history project. In Julian Winter's “Who Will Save Me,” guardian angel Micah struggles to choose between his duty to his 13-year-old charge, Eli, and his love for Eli’s older brother, Zion. Meanwhile, Eli has his own struggles with his identity in the wake of his parents’ negative response to Zion's coming out. Featuring mystical beings galore, this volume is filled to the brim with enchanting fantasy backdrops and romances both straight and queer and is perfect for sampling or reading straight through. The tone ranges from soft and sweet to terrifying and thrilling, ensuring there is something for nearly every reader and mood. Additional contributors like Sandhya Menon, Adib Khorram, Melissa de la Cruz, and Anna-Marie McLemore add to the appeal.

A delightful addition to the shelf of any romantic. (author biographies) (Paranormal romance anthology. 13-18)

**A PATH TO THE WORLD**

Becoming You  
Ed. by Carlson-Hijuelos, Lori Marie  
Atheneum (128 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-4814-1975-8

A gathering of reflections, meant to inspire and challenge teen readers, by a broad range of authors who address how the choices you make affect your humanity. Editor Carlson-Hijuelos has selected short pieces by 30 contributors, including Joseph Bruchac, Pat Conroy, Gary Soto, Alexandra Stoddard, George Washington, Mario Cuomo, Anna Quindlen, and Timothy Egan. The introductory author's note details Carlson-Hijuelos’ goals in selecting writings that speak to the challenges of being human given life’s uncertainties. Most of the brief entries are a couple of pages in length, but some are as short as a single paragraph. In some, identity—race, gender, culture, sexuality—is present as a subject for reflection. Even for an anthology, where variability...
in quality is to be expected, there is remarkable inconsistency here; some of the writing is strong and correlates closely with the stated themes, while other works are weaker, and their inclusion is puzzling. (The majority of entries are excerpts from previously published works.) This collection also includes very few authors who write for young adults or whose names will be instantly recognizable to teen readers, which may lessen the appeal for its intended audience, particularly given the array of similar works available.

A weak offering whose readership is unclear. (contributor bios, editor's note) (Anthology. 12-18)

THE SACRIFICE
Chupeco, Rin
Sourcebooks Fire (332 pp.)
$10.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-72825-591-0

A Hollywood TV crew descends upon Kisapmata, a cursed island in the Philippines, to film a show. Even though the locals will not go there, the cast and crew remain greedily determined to make a blockbuster series focused on the Godseye, a haunted cave at the center of the island where murders have been documented. Reuben Hemslock, a pompous survivalist actor, leads the effort, doggedly bent on the presumed success it will bring to his reputation, which has been tainted by abuse accusations from a number of women. Also present are two executive producers (one with his teen son in tow) and an extensive crew who impose their infrastructure and their cultural chauvinism—"This island is almost perfect….Add a Panera and I'd be all set,"—on the deserted locale. Well, almost deserted. Alon, a local teen known as a "ghost whisperer," cautiously agrees to be their tour guide in exchange for $10,000 to help his ailing father. Alon warns them that they should not be there, but the crew persists even as danger inevitably strikes. Chupeco creates an environment thick with mystery, full of haunting balete trees and eerie ghost sightings coupled with a legend that dates to Spanish colonization of the Philippines. However, the story remains frustratingly flat due to one-dimensional characterization; the story features deplorable adult characters and a forced chemistry between the two teens. Excepting Alon, all characters are presumed White; Alon is nonbinary.

A strong premise that does not deliver the expected punch. (Horror. 14-18)

BOOK OF DREAMS
Craig Kevin
Interlude Press (290 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-973754-19-2

A bookshop of dreams fuels nightmarish possibilities.

Struggling with listening to his arguing parents, 17-year-old Gaige goes for a walk in downtown Toronto and is irresistibly drawn into a bookstore. Though put off by the unusual atmosphere, creepy shopkeeper (who somehow knows his name), and a nippy cat, he also finds himself drawn to a weird, foul-smelling book. A stern warning from the bookseller backfires and piques his interest; Gaige handles the book, thus sealing his fate. He quickly learns that each time he opens it he visits a surreal place, and he loses time in the real world. While on the Other Side Gaige meets nonbinary goth Mael, who was tricked and trapped in this hidden realm. Gaige continues to return, seeking information about the connections among a bookstore that doesn't always exist, a book no one else can see that leads to another world, and the increasingly threatening bookstore proprietor, Jack Chalek. Even though every visit risks his own safety and brings a chance that Chalek's power may grow stronger, Gaige brings others to the mysterious place, including his boyfriend and best friend. These retraced steps dilute the story, and several pauses for romantic interludes weaken the mounting tension, resulting in a faltering pace. Gaige's inner monologue also at times undercuts the intensity in this work that may please romance readers more than horror buffs. The cast is largely implied White.

An uneven story that crosses genres. (Horror. 13-18)

SOMEbody THAT I USED TO KNOW
Davis, Dana L.
Skyscape (364 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-5420-3874-4

Two musicians find their ways back to each other.

As a Black girl adopted by a White family, Dylan has always felt like an outsider in her small town. She feels like a piece of her is missing but thinks she will find her place when she is accepted into Juilliard's music program. When her ex-best friend, who ghosted her six years ago, temporarily moves into the family basement—her practice room—for unknown reasons, Dylan's perfectly planned senior year gets hijacked. Langston, who now goes by Legend, has become an R&B superstar, but lately he has been in the tabloids for all the wrong reasons—parties, fights, and a car accident. His mom now has a conservatorship and will only agree to his upcoming world tour if he proves to her that he has his life under control. Legend
hopes that returning to Iowa and fixing things with Dylan will show that he has changed his ways. He wants them to complete their childhood bucket list, but between practicing the violin for three hours a day and not trusting him, Dylan struggles with taking a chance. Davis meaningfully explores the complexities around transracial adoption in ways specific to the Black community. Dylan's friends are well developed and contribute to the storyline and growth of both main characters. The evolution of Dylan and Legend's relationship is a nice, slow burn.

A textured story of going from friends to something more, complete with a happily-ever-after. (Fiction. 14-18)

---

"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."

"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
and mixed-race presence in a town founded on racial exclusion and violence (her mother's ancestors were White settlers who arrived a few centuries ago). The slow pace means the plot picks up very slowly, and the truly creepy moments are tempered by the caring natures of two of the ghosts. There are plenty of metaphors to be mulled over, though one—“This place is...haunted with whiteness”—is pulled out explicitly for readers, and many other moments are laid out in ways that unfortunately feel more like arguments the author makes to readers rather than richly realized characters organically coming to their own conclusions.

An atmospheric story let down by more telling than showing. (Paranormal. 13-17)

**THE BONES OF ME**

*Duckhouse, Kel*

Flying Eye Books (200 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-91434-303-2

In the boxing ring, “unlike in real life, / no matter where you / was born, / who you are / what dolla' you got, / you can actually / win.”

Molly Levine rages against a world that tells her people like her can't make it, can't dream. Growing up in poverty on a council estate in London's East End, her older brother Denny's the only one in her corner, teaching her to box, to stand up and make something of herself. When Denny disappears on the day of her first fight, sought by the police on suspicion of assaulting a man, she's beyond shattered. With help from her best friend, Kwaku, Molly vows to find Denny and clear his name, in the process unravelling a mystery older than she is. The triumphant underdog arc isn't surprising; more interesting are the plotline surrounding Denny's disappearance and the gradual reveal of supporting characters' inner nuances as Molly comes to understand that she's not the only person with problems. While she adores Kwaku, who also boxes at her gym, Molly's resentful of his family's relative wealth. The Levines are proper Cockneys, and gentrification is explored but not racism or immigration. Molly comes off as realistically belligerent, self-absorbed, and distraught in ways that may resonate with many teens. The combination of verse and prose keeps the pace moving, and colloquialisms add to the sense of place.

A textured coming-of-age story deeply rooted in a working-class community. (Fiction. 12-18)

**THE TRUTH ABOUT EVERYTHING**

*Farr, Bridget*

North Star Editions (288 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-63583-080-4

A young woman being raised by parents who are anti-government survivalists faces difficult decisions.

Lark’s father’s conspiracy theories and mistrust of the government have informed all of the limited home-school education she has received. As an undernourished 15-year-old, she struggles with reading comprehension, and she has no knowledge of basic facts of biology: When she begins her period, she is terrified it means she’s miscarrying (like her mother did with many pregnancies) though she’s never had sex. Set in rural Montana, this thoughtful novel sees Lark grapple with realistic fear and confusion as she secretly enrolls at a nearby Christian school and begins to learn that some of her father’s teachings—like 9/11’s being an inside job—are not true. She’s further horrified when she learns from her friend Alex Marshall that the Montana Freemen, a group her father has described to her as heroes, were in fact racists. The precarious path that stretches out before thoughtful, curious Lark is vividly described and will easily evoke readers’ sympathies. She recognizes that her parents love her but have neglected her education and health, and she wants more for herself. As her relationship with patient, kind Alex deepens into a romance, she also finds needed support. Lark and her family read as White; Alex is described as being part Native American, but there is no mention of his specific tribal affiliation.

An engrossing, poignant tale of a difficult journey. (Fiction. 12-18)

**THE BALLAD OF NEVER AFTER**

*Garber, Stephanie*

Flatiron Books (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-250-26842-6
Series: Once Upon a Broken Heart

Evangeline faces new dangers in her quest for happiness in this follow-up to 2021’s *Once Upon a Broken Heart*.

As Evangeline Fox seeks a cure for her poisoned husband, Prince Apollo, the enticing and infuriating Fate Jacks reappears, offering to save Apollo if she unlocks the Valory Arch. Remembering the long list of ills brought upon her by the Fate, Evangeline refuses. When the new heir arrives and Apollo wakes with a new curse and glowing red eyes, she is forced to delve into the mysteries of the Valors and find the arch’s four missing magical stones whose powers are luck, truth, mirth, and youth. The inclusion of expanded Valor lore alongside the preexisting blend of fairy-tale and paranormal creatures is intriguing and fits the overarching
theme of storytelling as history. The ongoing use of emotions as a scale for displaying and determining one’s humanity, especially by Fates, is equally interesting. Unfortunately, the impact of Evangeline’s often amusing narration and numerous surprising plot twists is diluted by the meandering pacing, convoluted sensory descriptions, and close focus on Evangeline’s fluctuating attraction toward her potential love interests. Despite the positive emphasis on hope and happily-ever-afters, Evangeline’s romantic relationship with Jacks borders on manipulative and toxic. Evangeline reads White; side characters are fantasy diverse.

A disappointing delivery on a potentially gripping second volume. (map) (Fantasy. 13-18)

An ambitious young strategist risks death in a bid to turn the tides of war in an alternate historical China.

The odds are against the honorable warlordess Xin Ren, who seeks to liberate the child empress Xin Bao from her ruthless regent, Miasma. Ren’s warriors, led by her swornsisters, Cloud and Lotus, are no match for the size and resources of the imperial force. They rely instead on the clever tactics of 18-year-old Rising Zephyr, Ren’s strategist, to outmaneuver their opponents while they gather support. Few dare to directly challenge Miasma, however, and Zephyr is forced to make a gamble. She presents herself to Miasma as a defector, hoping that Miasma’s rumored greed to acquire talent and Zephyr’s own brilliant reputation will not only preserve her life, but give her the opportunity to secure for Ren a much-needed alliance with the Southlands and Cicada, its new warlordess. Zephyr’s narration, colored by dry wit and a powerful sense of self-assurance, takes readers with her deep into the imperial camp, where her allegiance is questioned by Miasma’s enigmatic strategist, Crow, and to Cicada’s court, where Zephyr makes a shocking discovery. Military stratagems, qi-infused zither duets, and divine interference come together in this tightly crafted reimagining of the Chinese classic Three Kingdoms. Themes of fate and identity appear throughout, tightening around Zephyr, who must weigh duty against heart as the stakes continue to rise.

A riveting series opener. (major figures, character illustrations, map, author’s note) (Fantasy. 13-adult)
Nigerian writer Rimma Onoseta gives her classic coming-of-age story a contemporary spin

BY MARION WINIK

Adult readers in the U.S. have recently been treated to a wave of groundbreaking novels from Nigerian women writers—among them Stay With Me, by Ayobami Adebayo, The Girl With the Louding Voice, by Abi Daré, and Dele Weds Destiny, by Tomi Obaro. The latest of these is How You Grow Wings (Algonquin, Aug. 9), a debut by 27-year-old Rimma Onoseta meant for young adult readers.

“When I read the synopsis of Stay With Me, about a wife being forced out of her family because she can’t get pregnant, I’m like, This reads like every Nollywood movie ever made. Then I picked it up, and it was one of the best things I’ve read!” says Onoseta in a recent interview conducted by Zoom and email. Flipping the perspective to the woman at the story’s center and highlighting the limited set of choices available to her made all the difference.

How You Grow Wings carries this approach into the young adult category—Onoseta takes classic Nigerian storylines about family and class, marriage and child-rearing, the village versus the city, and regrounds them in the current realities of life for Nigerian teenage girls, struggling to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.

As a starred Kirkus review put it, this is “a universal story: girls striving to find their way in a patriarchal society...a stunning and emotional debut.”

Onoseta was born in Benin City and raised in Lagos, but at the time she read Stay With Me, she was living and working in Tempe, Arizona, putting her undergraduate degree in finance and her MBA to use at a marketing job. The year before, while still in grad school, she had penned a first-person story in the voice of Zam, a young teen in Alihame. Though Zam’s background is nothing like Onoseta’s privileged upbringing, the author shares with her character the yearning for a sister. The difference is—Zam actually has one. Her name is Cheta, and they can’t stand each other.

“I grew up with three brothers, and, as a young girl, I was convinced that a sister would be a lifelong best friend and confidante,” she explains. “But what if having a sister isn't what I always imagined it to be?”

The pages sat untouched for a year as Onoseta graduated and moved to Arizona for her job. “It paid the bills,” she says, “but I didn’t feel like I was doing what I was meant to be doing. And around this time—early 2017—I read Stay With Me. Between that book and the successes of Yaa Gyasi and Tomi Adeyemi, it was a catalyst. Young African women were writing their stories. If they’re doing it, I told myself, I can, too!”

To get her story down, Onoseta turned the fact that she didn’t own a car to her advantage. “After work, I...
would take the bus to the Tempe Public Library, and because the bus only came once an hour, I forced myself to sit there and write for an hour. By the end of the year, I had a draft of a book.”

In the first draft, she recalls, Cheta was the villain of the story. A proud girl constantly at war with her physically and emotionally abusive mother, she has no affection or understanding for the little sister she sees as their mother’s toady. But having grown up in the shadow of the tension and violence between Mama and Cheta, Zam is just doing everything she can to stay out of the crossfire.

In an opening scene of the book, a first cousin is being brutally beaten by an uncle for her involvement with a married older man; the rest of the family cheers him on, or at least stands by and does not interfere.

“A lot of us grew up thinking that this type of treatment was normal, but the push back has begun,” says Onoseta. Feeling that millennial and Gen Z Nigerians have the insight to see this intergenerational trauma for what it is, she has made that theme central to *How You Grow Wings*.

Mama is not the only damaged maternal figure in the novel. Aunt Sophie is married to Zam’s paternal uncle, a wealthy man upon whom the extended family relies for handouts. Though Aunt Sophie is an important mentor for Zam, she is cold and distant with her own daughter, Kaira. “Zam is able to come to understand the reasons for Aunt Sophie’s behavior, but for her own mother, empathy is much harder to find,” Onoseta explains.

Among other factors, Mama has been emotionally damaged by colorism—“which rages in Nigeria despite the fact that we’re all West Africans here,” Onoseta points out. Nicknamed Blackie in her youth, Mama is now devoted to the daily use of bleaching creams, burning her skin, leaving her splotchy.

Cheta, her darker daughter, seems to feel none of this inferiority, and even her confidence is part of what Mama resents about her. In the second draft of the book, Onoseta changed Cheta to a first-person narrator, giving her equal time in chapters alternating with Zam’s. In the process, “I discovered she was not the villain at all,” says Onoseta. “In fact, I found a bit of myself in her, in her willingness to call things out and name them for what they are.”

The book tracks both girls as they escape from the toxic environment of their childhood—Zam on a red carpet unrolled by Aunt Sophie; Cheta taking a much rougher route, involving choices rarely seen in YA literature and ending in a way that challenges readers to examine their own attitudes.

“The ending changed many times before I found the one that was right. I was going back and forth with my agents and my editor. I didn’t want it to be a case where the reader becomes judge, jury, and executioner—I didn’t want to support that by punishing Cheta with a bad outcome. As I wrote this ending, I cried—that’s how I knew it was right. This is the ending that the girls deserve.

“*How You Grow Wings* is a story about trying to be seen,” she says, “about what happens when your village fails you, and about difficult life choices. If you make a bad decision, does that mean you are a bad person?”

Though she didn’t write the book with the YA market in mind, Onoseta feels passionately about the importance for young people of “reading outside their culture.” *How You Grow Wings* is filled with Ika words and expressions and culturally specific details that could inspire further research and discussion. “I’d love to have the chance to meet with teen readers,” she says. “So far I’ve mostly heard from adults about the book.”

She’ll be back in the States and available for such opportunities this fall, moving to Boston to start an MFA program in screenwriting. Does she imagine *How You Grow Wings* on the big screen? “Of course,” she says, “there’s nothing I’d love more.”

Watch out, Nollywood!

*Marion Winik’s most recent book is The Big Book of the Dead. How You Grow Wings received a starred review in the June 15, 2022, issue.*
A road trip with her rival becomes a journey of self-discovery for Kelsie Miller. Kelsie hasn’t heard from her best friend, Brianna Hoffman, for 30 days, not since Brianna left upstate New York and moved to Seattle to live with her mom. Brianna has been posting on social media, so Kelsie knows she’s OK but not what went wrong with their friendship. When Kelsie literally crashes into Eric Mulvaney Ortiz, quarterback of their elite private school’s football team and her rival for valedictorian, at a party, they start chatting. They realize that Brianna and Jessica Lovelace, the girlfriend of their friends interspersed with historical and political context. Each chapter ends with interviews with famous people involved in the different issues, for example, Julián Castro on housing security, Chelsea Clinton on disinformation, and Mari Copeny on water access. The issues are all crucial, but despite the emphasis on change, the text feels more overwhelming than inspiring. Each chapter encourages readers to go to an online tool kit (unavailable at the time of review); the actions named in the book are largely on an individual scale and focus heavily on language and social media posts. The chapters that hew closely to the authors’ own experiences are stronger than those that don’t; for example, the chapters on student debt and the military-industrial complex are fascinating and thorough, while the one on homophobia focuses exclusively on cis gay men, and the one about gender identity features two trans women and one cis man. The broad range of topics covered makes what is missing or given only glancing mention (e.g., antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Asian racism, and reproductive rights) more glaring.

A mostly useful resource. (Interview with the authors, glossary, source notes, index) (Nonfiction. 12-16)

During the summer before college, Aria discovers her sexuality. It is 2013, and Aria West is in Woodacre, California, a small town in Marin County, staying with her widowed paternal grandmother, Joan, an artist who reads White. Aria’s opera singer mom is a Chinese immigrant. This wasn’t the summer Aria had in mind: Her plans were derailed after a boy took topless photos of her at a party and posted them online. Instead of staying on Martha’s Vineyard with her best friends, she is now under the care of her grandma. On her first day in town, Aria meets Steph Nichols, her grandma’s gardener, a heavily tattooed, gender-nonconforming singer/songwriter who reads White. From the Dyke March to the Queer Music Festival
in Golden Gate Park, Aria explores the Bay Area queer scene along with Steph, Steph's girlfriend, Lisa; and their friend Mel. Over the course of the summer, Aria finds her attraction to Steph deepening, a mutual feeling complicated by Steph's relationship with Lisa. In this stand-alone companion to Last Night at the Telegraph Club (2021), Lo updates readers on Lily and Kath's love story through an email from Aria's mom, who is related to Lily, and a news article on the legalization of same-sex marriage in California. The plot and setting are richly detailed, but readers will wish for deeper exploration of the characters' emotional lives, which would have strengthened the romance and family drama.

A contemporary queer coming-of-age story steeped in pivotal events. (Fiction. 14-18)

THE WOLVES ARE WATCHING
Lund, Natalie
Viking (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-35109-3

The disappearance of a child unveils what lies hiding in the woods at the edge of a small town.

There are all sorts of stories about Picnic, Illinois, but it's not until her toddler cousin, Madison, goes missing from her crib one night that 15-year-old Luce starts to believe them—and especially when she notices a pair of glowing, wolflike eyes through the windows of her house. To everybody's relief, Madison is returned to her crib, seemingly safe and sound, soon after she vanished, but Luce and the child's mother notice discomfiting differences in the 2-year-old. And yet, no one else seems to give credence to their concerns. Luce, prompted by a teacher, starts to research Picnic's history and the many disappearances—and sudden reappearances—of baby girls, going back decades. Meanwhile, deep in the woods, Fanya, who narrates alternating chapters, tends to the baby girl and prepares for the ritual to welcome her as part of her pack when the full moon comes. As Luce's and Fanya's stories converge, so do past and present in Lund's atmospheric novel. The story borrows elements from South Slavic lore about women who turn into animals to tell an affecting tale about small-town secrets, wronged people, and the bravery of two girls bent on getting to the truth in order to save lives. All characters are assumed White.

An affecting supernatural mystery with a pair of brave protagonists. (Paranormal thriller. 14-18)

TRESPASSERS
McFall, Claire
Walker US/Candlewick (320 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5362-1846-6

The fateful love story between a teen girl and a boy from the afterlife continues in this follow-up to Ferryman (2021).

Dylan and Tristan crossed over to the land of the living, inhabiting borrowed bodies on borrowed time. Dylan should have died in the train accident that sent her to the wasteland, and Tristan should have kept to his mission there as a ferryman of souls. Now, as Tristan adjusts to modern living and Dylan recovers from her injuries, they discover their actions have dire consequences. Not only did they leave a gap behind that allows wraiths to follow them into the living world, causing havoc wherever they go, but they are also now physically bound to one another, and if they are separated for too long, they will...
die. Unbeknownst to them both, another ferryman is following Tristan's and Dylan's tracks. This time around, the pair’s tale focuses on the very real, very dull world of school, dances, and petty jealousies—in between fighting deadly creatures and the otherworldly forces that wish to keep them apart. The contrast is as stark as the age difference between Dylan and Tristan (she is 15; he has been around for centuries) and as jarring as their love, which is lacking in chemistry. The narrative also follows the more interesting ferryman Susanna as she pines for a different life. Main characters are cued White.

A sequel for existing fans only. (Fantasy. 12-16)

SELF-MADE BOYS
A Great Gatsby Remix
McLemore, Anna-Marie
Feiwel & Friends (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-250-77493-4
Series: Remixed Classics, 5

A reimagining of The Great Gatsby that counters Fitzgerald's tale of hegemonic power, centering people with marginalized identities.

Seventeen-year-old trans boy Nicholas Caraveo is ready to start his career as a Wall Street analyst, hoping to provide financial security for his beet-farming family in Wisconsin. He's excited to live near his cousin Daisy in West Egg, where she's promised to set him up for success, but is shocked to discover that Daisy has lightened her skin and hair to pass as White and promised to help Jay win over Daisy. The duo teams up with Jay and Daisy's friend Jordan to give Daisy a dazzling débutante season. The tightly structured plot twists are compelling and satisfying for Gatsby fans, critics, and neophytes alike, avoiding and subverting tropes and giving the main quartet the happy endings they deserve. In this absolutely stunning work, McLemore delivers their signature lyrical prose and rich symbolism. The exquisite presentation of queer lives in the 1920s.

Richly imagined, fiercely tender, and achingly beautiful. (content warning, author's note) (Historical fiction. 13-18)

NIGHT OF THE RAVEN, DAWN OF THE DOVE
Mehrotra, Rati
Wednesday Books (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-250-82368-7

A young warrior seeks revenge after suffering terrible loss.

As a child, Katyani was saved by Queen Hemlata of the Chandela kingdom, who used soulbinding magic that grants her control over Katyani’s actions. But Katyani, now 18, loves the queen, who raised her alongside the Crown Prince Ayan and his royal cousins, Bhairav and Revaa. She willingly obeys Hemlata’s commands, even if it means accompanying Ayan and Bhairav to be taught by the Acharya Mahavir, a reclusive spiritual warrior known for his monster-fighting abilities. Though Katyani dislikes the guru’s strict rules, she finds enjoyment in honing her combat skills and in teasing 19-year-old Daksh, Acharya Mahavir’s younger son, who is as handsome as he is uptight. When war threatens to break out between Chandela and the kingdom of Paramara, Katyani and the two princes are summoned back home only for disaster to strike the royal palace, revealing a long-hidden secret about Katyani’s identity. Betrayal and false accusations set Katyani on the path of vengeance, but in the process, she must face her fear of losing the few remaining people she loves. The book is set in the country of Bharat, an India-inspired world, where fearsome creatures from Hindu folklore lurk in forests and shadows. Mehrotra smoothly incorporates worldbuilding into the atmospheric narrative, highlighting themes of family and justice with a timeless blend of adventure, mystery, and romance.

A satisfying stand-alone with classic appeal. (glossary, tree descriptions) (Fantasy. 13-18)

PRINCE OF SONG & SEA
Miller, Linsey
Disney Press (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-368-06911-3
Series: Princes, 1

Revisits a beloved fairy-tale classic from another perspective.

Prince Eric of Vellona is in a precarious situation: inheriting the crown amid growing civil conflicts, erratic coastal storms, and pressure to marry. Eric finds a secret, hidden letter from his mother, who was lost in a shipwreck two years ago, detailing more information about her last voyage and his curse. He can only ever kiss his true love or he will die instantly. Determined to help his people and free himself from his restrictive circumstances, Eric sets out to locate an uncharted island. Along the way, he encounters pirates, ghosts, and a powerful witch. Meanwhile, he thinks he might have met his true love, but he
Montague opens her graphic memoir as an adult working through a creative block by remembering how she came to be an artist. On Sept. 11, 2001, she was only 5 and living in New Jersey. In the following years her dyslexia felt invisible and overwhelmed as she grew to understand both the pressures of being a racial minority in her suburban community and the expectations to make the most of the opportunities provided by her parents’ sacrifices. In college on a track scholarship, Montague took an art class and found a fulfilling and successful direction for her life, breaking through as a published New Yorker cartoonist at age 22. The author maintains a youthful voice throughout: Her descriptions of school and social struggles are well done and will resonate with readers. Her growing self-awareness is handled with insight and wit. The lively, expressive drawing style combined with a soft color palette and clean white background works perfectly with the tone of the narrative.

A Black cartoonist looks back at her school years and her path to career success.

A delightful combination of text and images delivered with humor and heart. (Graphic memoir. 12-18)
It also takes her, a White English child, to rescue a Bangladeshi family in the face of a crisis. Unfortunately, the prose feels jerky and personal stakes feel less even. A heavy drinker. While her sleep is filled with nightmares, her temper is soothed by the positives. While the book picks up toward the event: A subplot about a national youth photography competition sees her discovering her artistic voice. Peter's character development and personal stakes feel less even. A fun rivalry-to-romance romp. (Romance. 13-18)

**THE PUKUR**

Powell, D.K.
Addison & Highsmith (326 pp.)
$29.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-59211-144-2

An English girl discovers the meaning of family in a new place. At the age of 12, Sophie Shepherd loses both her parents in a terrible car accident, ending up with her maternal aunt, uncle, and cousin. Sophie's fiery side reveals itself when her uncle turns out to be abusive and a heavy drinker. While her sleep is filled with nightmares, her waking life turns into one when her horrid uncle abandons her in rural Bangladesh with Joshua, her estranged paternal uncle. Sophie finds life with her taciturn uncle, who clearly doesn't want her there, unbearable, not to mention entering a strange school in a strange country. But she begins to look beyond her discomfort, tentatively making friends and understanding, despite her grief, that home can mean many things. There are productive ways to write about cultures—exploring problems while celebrating positives—and the novel attempts this but falls short in its portrayal of Bangladesh. As well as being framed as a backward country, sweeping, stereotypical statements about Bangladeshi people's shortcomings are barely tempered by the positives. While the book picks up toward the middle, allowing Sophie to gradually grow in her perspective on her adopted country, there's still a lot of predictable melodrama. It also takes her, a White English child, to rescue a Bangladeshi family in the face of a crisis. Unfortunately, the prose feels jerky when it intercuts between Sophie's thoughts, which feel more adultlike than teen, and her reality.

An ambitious story that falls flat. (glossary) (Fiction. 13-18)

**DRIZZLE, DREAMS, AND LOVESTRUCK THINGS**

Prasad, Maya
Disney-Hyperion (464 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-368-07580-0

A breezy read that's full of lavender-scented dreams.

Throw in four sisters plus four seasons on the Pacific Northwest’s Orcas Island, and it’s a recipe for romance. Or a Bollywood plot with most of the classic trappings. This is the story of the Singh family: First there’s Nidhi, who is about to start her senior year; sandwiched in the middle are twins Rani and Avani; and then there’s Sirisha, the youngest at 15. The Singh siblings help their dad at the Songbird, which has been officially awarded the title of Most Romantic Inn in America, even as they’re each nursing their private griefs. The girls’ mother died when Sirisha was a baby, and their father fell in love again with his stepfather, Pop, but he died of a stroke several years ago. Now the sisters are questing for love in their own unique ways: There are dishy crushes, male and female; broken and mended hearts; lots of song and dance—and yes, a tempting array of North Indian food. The sisterhood is warm and poignant and the teenage romances sweet, but the poetic meanderings often feel a bit over-the-top, like the gulab jamun with lavender and cumin that their father makes. Although the book centers around the four sisters, the most heartwarming character is Dad, with his resilience in the face of multiple losses: his homeland, his family back in India, and his partners.

A romantic, Bollywood-like story. (Romance. 12-18)

**DARK ROOM ETIQUETTE**

Roe, Robin
HarperTeen (512 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-305173-7

A teen's sense of self is unsettled by a kidnapping.

After a prologue reveals the hero’s captive status, the story introduces Sayers Wayte as he was before—an uber-wealthy, hard-partying, privilege-flaunting Texas teen who’s falling in with a meeker crowd (including a friendship with a bully who ridicules Sayers’ best friend for his bisexuality and targets a vulnerable nerd in encounters that rapidly escalate to disturbing levels off-page). The first act balances Sayers’ charm and potential with his character failings while keeping readers guessing who the kidnapper will be (and what their motivations are). Once he’s been kidnapped, Sayers must attempt to manipulate his kidnapper by playing along with who the kidnapper wants him to be—at first, it’s a ruse to create chances to try to escape, but eventually Sayers’ identity and feelings toward his kidnapper begin to blur.
A dangerous discovery pushes his mind to the brink to protect him and keep him alive. Unlike hostage stories that end with the rescue, Roe digs deep into what happens in the aftermath as Sayers tries to learn how to be a functioning individual again and struggles with rebuilding his entire self. There are no easy answers for Sayers’ issues, but with determination and help from key friends, he finds hope. Aside from a character with a Guatemalan father, most characters default to White.

A deep dive into trauma, with light at the end of the tunnel. (Thriller. 15-18)

I MISS YOU, I HATE THIS
Saedi, Sara
Poppy/Little, Brown (352 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-316-62982-9

Two best friends navigate life and love as the world teeters on the brink of disaster.

Parisa Naficy—a well-off, Harvard-bound, Iranian American valedictorian—has a privileged life, but she’s consumed by extreme anxiety that she unsuccessfully attempts to hide. Beautiful, cool Mexican American Gabriela Gonzales leads a financially precarious existence with her lesbian moms and is haunted by their pasts; both women are estranged from their families due to their sexuality. Their unlikely friendship withstood years of high school drama, but when the fictional ademavirus becomes a global pandemic disproportionately affecting young people, life as they know it is put on indefinite hold. The isolation brings out the best and worst in people, forcing both girls to reexamine themselves, their relationships, and what they value most as they work toward a new normal. Saedi’s sensitive, witty writing style, both personable and deeply personal, makes this work more than yet another Covid fictionalization. The narration includes text message and email threads, reflecting the breakdowns of time and communication experienced in lockdown. The heavy subject matter is masterfully handled, juxtaposing raw episodes of sickness, loss, grief, and strained bonds with heartwarming conversations and budding relationships that shine a welcome light of hope into the darkness of uncertainty.

Memorable and beautifully vulnerable. (Fiction. 14-18)

THE WITCH HUNT
Smith, Sasha Peyton
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5344-5441-5

Trapped between guilt and honesty, how can one find redemption?

Two years ago, in 1911, Frances Hal-lowell, whom readers met in The Witch Haven (2021), experienced a harrowing night in Manhattan during which she and a boy she once thought she loved opened a rift into the afterlife. Despite her magic’s not working reliably since, Frances has found a place for herself teaching at the magical academy of Haxahaven. She and her dearest friends, Maxine and Lena, set off on a trip across the sea to Paris, where Maxine’s family resides. It’s also where Oliver, Frances’ childhood friend and blossoming sweetheart, is studying. The holiday is set to be a grand time for them all, but it seems the repercussions of that fateful night have sent ripples across the magical world, opening a door to the veil in the Paris catacombs. There are also ancient organizations of male magic users eager to take advantage of its potential power—no matter the cost. Frances knows that she must help put things right again. In this sweeping adventure across high-society Paris, Smith’s descriptions evoke the magic and beauty of the city. Frances is an earnest protagonist who desperately wants to do good despite what she feels are deep personal failings—offering all the more reason for readers to root for her. The cast is predominantly White; the previous volume established Lena as Onondaga. There is also some queer representation.

Sparkles with magic but remains decidedly human. (Fiction. 14-18)

BERLINERS
Stamper, Vesper
Knopf (320 pp.)
978-0-593-42836-8
978-0-593-42837-5 PLB

Fifteen-year-old twin brothers Rudi and Peter Möser-Fleischmann come of age in a divided Berlin. Short, dark-haired, stocky Rudi is a loyal follower of the East German communist government. Peter, who cleverly sees through the lies and longs for freedom, is tall, slender, and blond, the golden boy of both the family and the narrative. Politics and personal lives intertwine for the brothers as their family is split by the wall and by personal conflict, ideological differences, and mental illness. The author ambitiously attempts to tackle many issues, but the result is largely unsatisfying: The plot lags in the first half, the tone is unfortunately judgmental toward those who struggle with ideological brainwashing, and none of the characters grow
significantly over the course of the story. Some of the lessons are impactful, such as not believing a government’s words without the actions to back them up and that life is complex, with many gray areas. A minor but effective plotline is the twins’ father’s struggle with his past as an enthusiastic Hitler Youth member. Readers will recognize contemporary commentary in the author’s criticism of anti-fascism. Yet, while East Germany is rightly criticized, Western capitalism, a subject that would have benefited from additional context and nuance, is presented as an obvious positive. Scattered full-page black-and-white illustrations give a sense of the 1961 setting.

Does not stand out in the crowded field of Cold War stories. (historical note, map) (Historical fiction. 12-16)

Helps readers understand the threats of the cyberworld and ways to defend against them.

The book opens with a chilling overview of cybercrime, including a photo of a wanted poster of three Russian cybercriminals. Additional news and (mostly) stock photos are peppered throughout the book. Each chapter explains its specific cybercrime in accessible language, with a tangible recent episode or two. For example, the chapter entitled “Ransomware Attacks” describes the infamous 2018 attack on the city of Atlanta, which paralyzed municipal government and led to a multimillion-dollar upgrade of the city’s security systems. Other chapters include “Cyberscams,” which breaks down multiple types of fraud, from employment fraud to romance and online shopping scams to identity theft; and “Nation-State Attacks”—the Department of Defense considers cyberspace one of the critical domains, along with land, sea, air, and space, where nations struggle for control. The closing chapter outlines current strategies for proactively defending against cyberattacks and what can be done to improve protection. The author’s answer to the question she poses in the book’s subtitle is a definite “no,” but there’s reason for hope. Each chapter includes sidebars that offer further analysis. At first glance, the book might seem perfunctory, but with such a dense and complex subject, lucid economy is a wise choice.

A crisp, concise, and coherent guide. (picture credits, source notes, organizations and websites, further research, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

Adapted for teen readers from the 2019 original, Treuer’s seminal account offers a fresh, distinct historical reconsideration.

The author’s purpose is clear from the outset: to present a deliberate counternarrative to mainstream assumptions and push back against the constrictive specter of the framing of the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890 as a turning point representing the end of Native American cultures. In seven chapters spanning prehistorical times to the present, this chronicle of Indigenous communities and peoples in North America is a
A BLANKET OF BUTTERFLIES
Van Camp, Richard
Illus. by Scott B. Henderson
Colors by Donovan Yaciuk
HighWater Press (56 pp.)
$21.95 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-77492-040-4
Series: The Spirit of Denendeh, 1

When a Japanese man comes to Canada to claim his family’s samurai armor, he finds healing and peace with a Thcho Dene family.

In a museum in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, Shinobu, a man from Nagasaki, has arrived to take a suit of samurai armor back to his family. Unfortunately, the museum’s old manager gambled the sword away to a man known as Benny the Bank. With the guidance of Sonny, a Thcho boy, he finds Benny’s place but is attacked and knocked unconscious. Sonny brings him back to his grandmother’s house, and together, with the help of a spirit, he and Ehtsi heal Shinobu’s wounds. After getting to know each other and sharing stories of their respective cultures and connected histories, Ehtsi suggests going together to retrieve the sword peacefully. Van Camp (Dogrib Thcho) was inspired by an actual suit of samurai armor of mysterious provenance at the Northern Life Museum. This is a striking, colorized version of his 2015 original. The story and messages of honor, respect, peace, and human connection are powerful and moving. Touching on the impacts of the Second World War on First Nations communities and their link to the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an author’s note and two notes from experts in the fields of history and museum education add valuable cultural and historical insights to support the story.

A powerful, visually impactful story of cross-cultural relations. (Graphic fiction. 14-adult)

THE RESTLESS DARK
Waters, Erica
HarperTeen (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-06-311590-3

Two years after narrowly escaping becoming a serial killer’s next victim while camping with her family, a 17-year-old returns to the site determined to prove the man who haunts her is dead. When cornered, Joseph Kincaid, dubbed the Cloudkiss Killer, chose the depths of Georgia’s Cloudkiss Canyon rather than face arrest—but his body was never found, inspiring the hosts of a popular true-crime podcast to organize Killer Quest, a weeklong search for his remains with a $20,000 reward. The contest attracts a variety of entrants including 17-year-old Lucy, hiding behind a pseudonym; 18-year-old Carolina, an artist with a traumatic past; and...
Lucy’s new crush, Maggie, a charismatic psychology student. Carolina’s and Lucy’s alternating perspectives engage with and ultimately critique true-crime subculture. It can inspire feelings of empowerment but also normalize toxic masculinity, romanticize perpetrators, and exploit and objectify victims. Soon, Killer Quest becomes its own real-time whodunit after one contestant is found near death at the canyon’s edge and others experience frightening hallucinations. Creeping, atmospheric tension builds as the remaining participants become aggressive and suspicious, half believing local legends that the fog-shrouded canyon has supernatural qualities. Lucy wonders if Kincaid is still out there, and Carolina, who experiences disturbing intrusive thoughts, is terrified that she has an uncontrollable propensity for violence. Lucy, Carolina, and Maggie hatch a risky plan to expose the threat in their midst, resulting in an explosive, devastating denouement. Main characters read White.

A satisfyingly twisty and refreshingly self-aware examination of human desires for self-knowledge and survival. (Thriller. 13-18)

**HOLLOW**

Watters, Shannon & Branden Boyer-White
Illus. by Berenice Nelle
BOOM! Box (176 pp.)
$19.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-68415-852-2

This graphic novel brings contemporary queer romance to a gothic classic. Isabel Crane doesn’t think much of her new town at first, as Sleepy Hollow is a bit too preoccupied with the Headless Horseman legend that it’s known for. But at least there’s a super cute boy who goes to her high school. Enter Victoria Van Tassel, a descendant of one of the original stars of the legend. Due to her ancestry, she’s been roped into leading a bunch of events celebrating Sleepy Hollow’s history, and the pressure is beginning to take its toll. But neither Vicky nor Izzy is prepared for the reality that “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” might be rooted more in truth than fiction: After being paired together for math tutoring, the girls stumble upon their town’s greatest mystery, and sparks start to fly. Joined by their energetic classmate Croc Byun, Vicky and Izzy must outsmart an ancient foe in order to save lives. Cute, sharply illustrated artwork accompanies clever dialogue and a wholesome plot as this spooky adventure unravels. Brown-skinned Izzy is coded Latine; she has short hair and favors gender-neutral clothing. Vicky has long blond hair and appears White, and athletic Croc reads East Asian.

A sweet story jump-starts an old tale for a new generation. (Graphic fiction. 12-18)

**THE ART OF INSANITY**

Webb, Christine
Peachtree Teen (352 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5344-4887-2

A senior in high school learns to live—and live well—with bipolar disorder. It’s autumn, and the new school year presents a challenge to 18-year-old Natalie Cordova. She has to navigate the college admissions crush and withstand the tireless grind of the gossip mill at school. She also must hide the truth about the near-catastrophic car accident she got into at the beginning of the summer: namely, that it wasn’t really an accident. If anyone at school learns about her bipolar diagnosis or the suicide attempt that precipitated it—well, it would spoil her mother’s picture-perfect Christmas card narrative, for one thing. As the pressures of the year mount, the secret grows heavier. There’s the prestigious art show, an opportunity for Natalie to show off her talent and open up the path to art school, and there’s Ella, a classmate who knows too much, says what she thinks, and sticks to Natalie like glue. Worst of all is Ty, a beautiful boy in a baseball cap and Birkenstocks who makes her light up. Achingly truthful, the book sees Natalie through the quagmire of the journey to self-acceptance with humor and insight. Webb works with intelligence and candor to chip away at the stigma that surrounds mental illness. Alongside Natalie, other characters living with differences also find full, loving, and safe lives. Main characters default to White.

Kind, buoyant, and cleareyed. (resources) (Fiction. 13-18)

**SPELLS FOR LOST THINGS**

Welsh, Jenna Evans
Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)
$19.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5344-4887-2

A magical romance with a strong sense of place and a focus on family. Willow Haverford dreams of traveling the world, hoping to someday find a place that feels like home to her. Mason Greer is obsessed with studying the stars, but his primary goal is reuniting with his mother, whose struggles with addiction left her unable to take care of him. Willow and Mason both end up in Salem, Massachusetts, when Mason gets a new foster placement with an old friend of his mom’s and Willow tags along while her mother settles an inheritance from a family member she’s kept secret from Willow. Her mother refuses to talk about her past, so after the two teens meet and feel instant mutual attraction, Willow asks for Mason’s help investigating a generations-old family curse. As they spend time together exploring Salem and attempting to find a series of hidden letters that are connected by a string of clues, they begin to realize that their definitions of home could extend to each other.
While the romance is strong and believable, the bulk of Mason’s and Willow’s attention is focused on negotiating their relationships with their respective mothers, a subject that will resonate with many teens. Willow and Mason read as White by default. Readers will fall under the spell of this lightly magical, thoroughly enjoyable romance. (Romance. 12-18)

HENRY HAMLET’S HEART
Wilde, Rhiannon
Charlesbridge Teen (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-62354-369-3

Teen boys fall in love in this friends-to-lovers romance. It’s 2008, and best friends Henry Hamlet and Lennon Cane, both cued White, are in the graduating class at Nor- tholm Grammar School for Boys. Henry was elected school captain, and he’s active in debate, but he doesn’t know what he wants to do after school is finished. In the meantime, his group of friends wants to make the most of their last semester together. When a game of Truth or Dare at a party leads to Henry and Len kissing, Henry’s world is forever changed. He realizes his feelings for Len go beyond friendship, but Len is cool and casual and has dated around, not limited by gender in his attraction. Even when Len returns Henry’s affec-
don’t know what he wants to do after school is finished. In the meantime, his group of friends wants to make the most of their last semester together. When a game of Truth or Dare at a party leads to Henry and Len kissing, Henry’s world is forever changed. He realizes his feelings for Len go beyond friendship, but Len is cool and casual and has dated around, not limited by gender in his attraction. Even when Len returns Henry’s affection, Henry remains uncertain of what their relationship really means. This slice-of-life story set in Brisbane is slow to start but becomes more enticing once Henry grows aware of his feelings. The developing romance becomes the driving force, but there’s also friendship, school stress, and family drama. Henry’s narration captures the range of emotions that come with new love, evolving identity, and anxieties about being on the cusp of adulthood. There are several endearing side characters, like Henry’s bisexual Gran, but some of his friends aren’t as distinctly drawn. Still, this warm tale is bursting with heart, and Henry is easy to cheer for. A charming queer romance. (Romance. 14-18)

WILDLORD
Womack, Philip
Little Island (264 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-95071-22-4

An orphaned boy has a chance to spend the school holidays with an unknown and sinister relative. Seventeen-year-old Tom can’t bear the thought of spending the next eight weeks of summer holidays under surveil-

SPACE TRASH
Woodall, Jenn
Oni Press (96 pp.)
$21.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-63715-040-5
Series: Space Trash, 1

A group of teenage girls tries to survive in a neglected high school on the moon. In this future world, the prevailing narrative is that Earth was clearly becoming uninhabitable by the year 2091. Having terraformed Mars and the moon, however, humans still persist. Hypatia Secondary School is a run-down, graffiti-covered high school on the moon that best friends Yuki Goro, Agatha “Stab” Cleary, and Una Nichols attend. Yuki, a champion wrestler, dreams of forming a girl gang as formidable as the urban legends the Trash Queens. Meanwhile, Agatha must get through the detention she’s received as a consequence for dozing off in her robot-instructed class, and Una is sneaking time on one of the school computers for reasons that remain unspecified. Life at Hypatia has its quirks, but it’s mostly predictable—that is, until a rival girl gang violates the trio’s hangout spot and steals their things. From there, discoveries are made that will change the friends’ trajectories forever. Woodall’s knack for snappy dialogue and colorful palettes make this first volume a treat, though it feels more like a setup than a solid entry on its own. Characters with a range of skin colors, body types, and sexualities populate the main cast and background characters. This series opener is an intriguing introduction to a new science-fiction world. (character designs) (Graphic science fiction. 12-18)
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

**THE TRANSPARENT SALES LEADER** by Todd Caponi .............. 231

**48 STATES** by Evette Davis ............................................................. 231

**ARRIBADA** by Estela González .................................................. 234

**EMAIL MARKETING THAT DOESN’T SUCK** by Bobby Klinck ...... 236

**THE EVERYBODY CLUB** by Nancy Loewen; illus. by Yana Zybina ............................................................................................................. 237

**ROTTEN FRUIT IN UNKEMPT GARDEN** by Michael Nanfsto ...... 241

**SHADOWLANDS** by Polly Schattel ............................................... 243

**GENESIS ROAD** by Susan O’Dell Underwood ......................... 245

---

**ARRIBADA**

*González, Estela*

Cynren Press (236 pp.)

$30.00 | $5.99 e-book | May 10, 2022

978-1-947976-31-3

---

**THE VIRTUEPOPS How To Value Virtue Amid Covid-19, Stress, and Suffering**

*Angelina, Frances*

Story Merchant Books (369 pp.)

978-1-970157-31-4

Kids learn about virtuous behavior through a magical cartoon in author/illustrator Angelina’s children’s fantasy series entry.

This yarn finds young Michael and his 4-year-old brother, Walker, visiting Grandma and Uncle Steveo and looking for something to watch on TV on a snowy day. They hit upon the show *Virtuepops Adventures in Virtueland*, whose eponymous characters embody prominent virtues and frolic in a rainbow-colored, diamond-dusted realm. They include *Believing B*, who represents the virtues of faith, cleanliness, and exercise; *Persevering Philip*, who promotes courage and diligence; *Sharing Stephen*; *Patient Peter*; *Loving Lucy*; *Respectful Ruth*; *Humble Helena*; and *Truthful Therese*. They each have nemeses with whom to tussle, including *Selfish Susie*, *Lazy Lobble*, and *Liar Lester*, but the King of Virtueland, resplendent atop his Spirit Bird, is always ready to swoop in to ensure that virtue triumphs. Michael and company are mesmerized by the show, and when they fall asleep, they traverse a rainbow tunnel into Virtueland, where they sprout wings and participate in mild adventures; for example, when *Selfish Susie* snatches Grandma’s beloved golden cross necklace, Uncle Steveo defeats her with green snowballs.

The book’s main purpose is to instruct kids in various virtues, such as following the Food Octagon as a guide to balanced meals. These lessons are conveyed through poems, songs, homilies, and very simple games. The narrative’s darkest moment comes when Grandma is stricken with an anxiety attack, occasioned by her prophetic vision of the Covid-19 pandemic; once she recovers, she uses the incident to teach the value of hand-washing, stifling sneezes and coughs, and masking, among other things.

Angelina, a former educator, elaborates Virtueland at great length, filling the story with plenty of bright hues—she includes many beguiling black-and-white line drawings for kids to color—along with fanciful figures, talking animals, tasty treats, and sparkling landscapes where wish-fulfillment reigns. Her fictional world feels a bit like *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* with the spiritual symbolism of the Chronicles of Narnia and couched in the gentle cheerfulness of *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*. Her writing is usually calibrated to a very young audience that likes repetitive motifs and isn’t fussy about meter, whether
McKnight to take the fall for a drug deal gone wrong. In the forces Bentley and his wife to read the book, which McKnight skillfully plays a game of cat and mouse with Bentley, dubious former best friend and partner in crime, who left focus younger children on ethical precepts.

The topic is humility (“Help me, please, to be humble. To ask for help, give thankful steps, so I don’t crumble”), table manners (“remember to share your Divine bread and your Sacred juice”), or funny animals (“Croak, croak, croak says the frog, as he sits in the lake floating on a log”). Occasionally, the text veers jarringly into advanced subjects; Believing B’s poem “Heart-wise Exercise Pulse Check,” for instance, instructs readers to “place the index and middle finger just to the side of the Adam’s apple, in the soft, hollow area.” Angelina intends the book as a resource for teaching virtues to kids in pre-K through eighth grade, but most of it is so simplistic that some may consider it cloying. Still, parents and teachers will find a browsable wealth of material to focus younger children on ethical precepts.

A sprawling, imaginative tale that makes basic moral concepts seem like wizardry.

**THE PROS & CONS OF DESIRE**

*Marcus Baldwin*

BookBaby (646 pp.)


978-1-66784-153-3

A dangerous man is determined to extract revenge on the person who abandoned him at the scene of a crime in Baldwin’s thriller.

It’s 1991, and tall, imposing small-time criminal Darren “Spanky” McKnight is just out of prison on parole after serving a 17-year sentence. However, the story isn’t narrated by McKnight but by Merv Bentley, the ex-con’s dubious former best friend and partner in crime, who left McKnight to take the fall for a drug deal gone wrong. In the years since his friend’s imprisonment, Bentley has enjoyed a spirited life as a college professor with his corporate executive wife, Mary, and their young twin daughters. Bentley is not at all pleased when McKnight unexpectedly gate-crashes his happy home life, intent on sticking around with “his harrowing voice, his bugled laughter, [and] his false cheer.” Thriller fans will be able to predict what’s to come, but that’s the gruesome fun of this novel, which seems to delight in ramping up suspense. McKnight skillfully plays a game of cat and mouse with Bentley, intent on terrorizing his former partner and systematically taking away everything he treasures most in the world. He enrolls in one of Bentley’s classes, obtains a house key, and, perhaps most disturbingly, insinuates himself into every aspect of his former best friend’s private life. Among the most damaging weapons in McKnight’s revenge arsenal is his prison-penned tell-all titled Exhaust, which intimately profiles Bentley’s pre-marital life as a sketchy, unfaithful, drug-dealing car salesman. McKnight forces Bentley and his wife to read the book, which reveals his animosity toward Bentley and the serpentine machinations of their criminal dealings together.

Baldwin’s gritty debut, *An Uprising of Angels* (2011), graphically depicted the 1992 Los Angeles riots through a series of compelling characters. His character work is similarly skillful here as he develops McKnight, a hulking, imposing bully, and his shrinking-violet target, Bentley, who’s hidden his entire nefarious history from his spouse. The revelation of his past, through McKnight’s book, is explosive, but the novel-within-a-novel treatment wears thin as more excerpts are revealed. Despite some slushy, extraneous dialogue, the book has an edgy, free-flowing cadence, and it’s clear that Baldwin enjoyed crafting all of the story’s sinful details. He also populates the novel with uniquely devious peripheral characters, such as McKnight’s conniving girlfriend, Barbara, who owns a local country bar, and Joe Baxter, the “notorious bachelor playboy of the western world,” who add plenty of treachery and spite to a novel that’s already brimming with them. A subplot involving the aggrieved brother of an inmate McKnight murdered in prison provides fodder for a bloody conclusion. Baldwin deftly explores themes of morality, vigilante justice, sexual fluidity, and retribution. However, despite the novel’s compelling premise and commanding delivery, it feels overlong at more than 600 pages and would probably have benefited from a healthy edit. Still, patient suspense fans are likely to enjoy this story of con artists and those who love them unconditionally.

A lengthy but often thrilling tale of betrayal and deadly vengeance.

**THE EVOLUTIONARY IMPERATIVE**

*Baldwin, Marcus*

BookBaby (646 pp.)

978-1-66784-153-3

Where It Leads, and How We Might Survive

Beck, Charles H.M. & Louis Neal Irwin

Xlibris US (162 pp.)


978-1-66418-675-0

A compact work offers a new scientific explanation of the nature of change and its direction, including a consideration of the broader implications for society.

According to Beck and Irwin, ever since the universe came into existence, change has been constant but occurring “simultaneously in opposite directions at different levels of resolution.” In other words, evolution has been characterized by an “inverse relationship between entropy and organization.” While energy continuously dissipates entropically, the “granularity” of the world increases, observable in “local pockets of complexity.”

The authors propose to understand change as the result of two basic laws: the “Second Law of Thermodynamics,” which necessitates that energy is released from labor, thereby increasing disorder, and the lesser-known “Principle of Least Action,” which essentially states that the most efficient use of energy is undertaken for a particular measure of work. Beck and Irwin contend that they can account for this apparent contradiction—a generally rising disorder and snippets of local organization—since the energy demands of the former law are channeled or directed by the informational demands of the latter. This combination explains all manner of evolution, abiotic and living: “Regardless of the time-scale or magnitude of changes in the physical...
Legions of baseball aficionados remember that Ray Liotta, who died in May, played Shoeless Joe Jackson in the heartwarming film Field of Dreams. That movie inevitably comes to mind when fans enjoy America’s national pastime, along with peanuts, fireworks, and seventh-inning stretches. But when they’re not visiting the clamorous ballpark, devotees can read books about bleacher bums and the boys of summer. Kirkus Indie recently reviewed three bracing baseball novels.

Steve Hermanos’ Going Going Gone focuses on three San Francisco Giants teammates who travel back in time to 1906 and end up with the New York Giants. But this timeline features New Glory, a Cuban slave empire founded by Confederates who now want an atomic bomb. They propose a “Solar Series” between their league and the Giants. Our reviewer calls the work “a rau-cously entertaining, richly atmospheric SF tinged sports fable.”

In The Baseball Widow by Suzanne Kamata, an American named Christine Kamata lives in Japan with her husband, Hideki Yamada, a high school baseball coach, and their two children, one of whom is disabled. The determined Hideki wants to see his team compete in the national championship, turning Christine into “a baseball widow.” The depiction “of Japanese baseball will be fun for those who are unfamiliar” with that world, our critic writes.

A former college baseball phenomenon gets hit by a car in Roland Colton’s Baseball Immortal. Then a disfigured John Doe wakes up in a hospital and claims to be the legendary player Ty Cobb, who died in 1961. Eventually, Cobb must deal with a radically different sport: “The game had changed from a contest of cunning.... It was now ‘boom or bust’ as nearly every batter, it seemed, was swinging from their heels.” According to our reviewer, Colton delivers an “enjoyable yarn about Ty Cobb confronting modern-day baseball.”

Myra Forsberg is an Indie editor.

INDIE | Myra Forsberg
THE OLD BALL GAME

world, all of them can be traced to the fundamental forces of nature, which create gradients of mass and potential energy, then resolve those gradients in accordance with the SLT, along the specific pathways that the PLA demands.” The authors not only furnish a surprisingly accessible account of the theory they propose—of course, this intellectual terrain is forbiddingly difficult to navigate by nature—but also lucidly outline the implications for human society, including a consideration of ecological issues. The discussions of human behavior, in particular morality, are predictably less sophisticated (and less empirical, for that matter). Beck and Irwin try to avoid a thorough reduction of human actions to physical phenomena—they concede that human experiences, especially emotions, “do not derive in any obvious way from thermodynamics.” Still, the discussions of cultural and moral life have a leaden quality to them—at one point, they suggest that the development of a “scientific calculus of ethical behavior” is forthcoming, a nonsensical notion. Nevertheless, this is an intriguing and concise introduction to a challenging theory.

An absorbing and readable synopsis of a comprehensive theory of change.

PURPOSEFUL MEMOIR AS A QUEST FOR A THRIVING FUTURE
Inspiration for Writers & Seekers

Browdy, Jennifer
BookBaby (126 pp.)
$29.99 paper \ Nov. 15, 2021
978-1-73284-149-9

A brief, illustrated book about finding personal clarity through writing memoir.

In her latest book on coaching writing, Browdy states her aim of providing “thought-provoking, open-ended starting points, provocations and stimulations, rather than instructions” for her readers as they embark on a process of self-improvement through writing. “This is your journey,” she reminds her readers, “and you can’t get it wrong as long as you undertake your Quest with an open heart and the sincere intention to probe your life experience deeply and honestly through the medium of purposeful memoir.” This “Quest” is the process of delving deeper into the past and rendering it honestly in order to find greater clarity in the present moment. Browdy illustrates her book with several of her own beautiful color photos and provides prompts and questions to help her readers shape their compositions. She also includes quotes from a wide array of authors, including Mary Oliver and Joy Harjo, along with quick descriptions of their lessons (“Jane Goodall’s great heart taught us that our love must be big enough to embrace the whole world, not just our own species or our own backyard”). There’s also advice on self-help topics not directly connected to memoir (“It’s important to take care of what you put into your body and mind,” and so on). Browdy herself is a fine writer, well experienced in the tactics of encouraging nonwriters to commit to
the writing process. “Let your heart sing as you write!” she urges her readers, and her writing exercises and effervescent personality combine to help direct the process. Even the most writing-averse reader will be tempted to give it a try.

A lovely, ultimately uplifting book about improving your life through writing it down.

THE TRANSPARENT SALES LEADER
How the Power of Sincerity, Science and Structure Can Transform Your Sales Team’s Results
Caponi, Todd
Ideapress Publishing (179 pp.)
$24.95 | $22.95 paper | $9.99 e-book
Sept. 14, 2022
978-1-64087-064-6
978-1-64087-111-7 paper

A business professional lobbies for a different kind of sales management.

In his previous book, The Transparency Sale (2018), Caponi made a case for selling that had an element of unexpected honesty; or, as he called it, “transparency.” Here, Caponi essentially extends that argument into the realm of sales leadership. Citing research to validate his claim early in the book, Caponi writes: “Transparent leadership, when done correctly, has the most significant correlation to building, maintaining, and growing a team.” His suggestion that leaders be more transparent—which can require showing vulnerability—may be a hard sell to ego-driven sales pros who have risen up the ranks and have the battle scars to prove it. But Caponi is equal to the task as he leads the reader through three well-constructed parts of the book.

He first defines transparency and presents a comprehensive five-part framework for it, goes on to show how “the behavioral science of intrinsic inspiration” can help, and closes by debunking sales-motivation myths and suggesting how to keep moving up the sales career ladder.

Caponi convincingly suggests that a new sales leader must build “trust through transparency, then use that same transparency to set proper expectations.” He wisely leaves nothing to chance, proposing an alliterative “Five F’s framework” that is easy to understand and meaningful (“Focus, Field, Fundamentals, Forecast, Fun”). Caponi first summarizes his five key elements and then devotes a chapter to each. Every chapter is richly detailed with clear explanations, expert guidance, and pertinent examples. A few highlights from these chapters include: useful definitions of ideal customer profile, firmographics, and demographics; 10 on-target questions Caponi asks when interviewing people for sales positions; a handy chart for assessing five sales fundamentals; and a refreshingly sensible redefinition of sales forecasting with insight into how best to create “a forecast with incredible 90-day visibility and accuracy.” Part 2 of the book, which focuses on intrinsic inspiration, may hold the most interest for sales managers. In this part, Caponi constructs the acronym PRAISE to represent six “primary categories of feelings that drive us intrinsically”: Predictability, Recognition, Aim, Independence, Security, and Equitability. These elements are summarized and then eloquently described in separate chapters. In an especially strong section, Caponi identifies some aspirational elements of sales leadership rarely addressed with such insight and precision. In each chapter, Caponi offers advice and illustrations well attuned to the salesperson’s psyche. All chapters draw on Caponi’s considerable knowledge of the sales process; his ability to understand what every salesperson experiences is invaluable. In Part 3, Caponi argues that it’s a mistake for sales leaders to try to motivate their teams with purely “coin-operated” financial incentives or other extrinsic rewards. He then offers an excellent template for creating a “30/60/90-day plan” for your first (and second and third) month as a sales leader. Caponi ends by evaluating the impact of the “Great Resignation” and why hanging out on Zoom “can never replace the feeling of security” that workers get from being physically together.

An outstanding sales leadership manual that counters conventional wisdom.

48 STATES
Davis, Evette
Flesh & Bone Publishing (236 pp.)
979-8-9858133-0-2

Blending elements of apocalyptic fiction, dystopian thriller, and timely political drama, this novel is set in an America on the brink of collapse. After much of the country’s leadership is assassinated by terrorists in a coordinated attack at the White House, Secretary of State Elizabeth Cunningham reluctantly becomes the American president. In an effort to not have to rely on Middle Eastern oil, Cunningham evacuates millions of people from North Dakota and Wyoming in order to turn them into oil-producing “Energy Territories.” These territories, run by a ruthless security firm, quickly become lawless areas where anything goes. Army veteran and widow Jennifer “River” Petersen is a trucker in the territories. Her goal is to make enough money to pay off her debts so that she can get back to her young daughter and mother back in Idaho. When she helps a man bleeding in the middle of the road one night, she inadvertently entangles herself in a grand-scale conspiracy where nothing short of the future of America—and its very soul—is at stake. Powered by impeccably deep character development (every major player is insightfully explored, particularly River) and a storyline that may not seem so far-fetched after recent political events—book bans, federal curfews, and digital identity chips—Davis creates a terrifying near future. In this world, fear, hatred, and intolerance are irrevocably redefining the country and what it means to be an American: “We don’t allow anarchists and women with headscarves to roam our streets.” With a breakneck pace from the
first page to the last, this book is so much more than just a well-written dystopian thriller. The questions that the author raises should resonate with readers long after the novel is finished.

An adept and chilling cautionary tale—the narrative equivalent of brass knuckles to the skull.

**CLUES FROM THE CANINES**  
*A Lily Dreyfus Mystery*  
Dziomba, Darlene  
Bowser (259 pp.)  
979-8-9850655-0-3

In Dziomba’s cozy mystery series starter, an animal shelter worker looks into the sudden and mysterious death of a shelter volunteer with whom she was romantically involved.

Lily Dreyfus has two rescue pups, Boone and Crockett, at home, and she loves working at Bassetville, New Jersey’s Forever Friends Animal Shelter. She’s a bit socially awkward and more comfortable chatting with the shelter dogs and cats than she is with many of the humans in her life. When she receives a request from the state police to take in Burrow, a beautiful German shepherd, she’s stunned; she arranged the adoption of Burrow by ex-Marine Pete Russo, who volunteered at the shelter and with whom she’d just started dating. Now, police have found Pete dead, and the cause of his demise is initially a mystery. Lily arranges for Mickey Sterling, her friend and fellow dog owner, to take Burrow until the police can release him for adoption. Several days later, while Lily and Mickey are walking the four dogs in the park, Burrow leads them to the dead body of a young woman. Is there a connection between the two deaths? In a bit of imaginative whimsy, Dziomba has Mickey’s dog, Nero, narrate several chapters, and the gentle giant’s cheerful tone is a welcome change from the staccato voice of the narrator, who relates the bulk of the tale. Although Dziomba provides enjoyably snarky dialogue between Lily and other characters, her prose frequently has the cadence of stage direction (“The boys [Lily’s dogs] saunter to the living room for naps. Lily completes the Saturday chores”). Still, the author’s experience as a rescue volunteer gives an air of authenticity to her descriptions of shelter work and the sensitive attention given to animals in a well-run no-kill facility. And, of course, readers will find the pups entertaining.

A whodunit with a promising premise and likable characters.

**JUST A DREAMER**  
*A Memoir*  
Estill, Diana  
Totally Skewed Productions (226 pp.)  
978-0-9906442-5-3

A woman describes her attempts to better know her neurotic younger brother in this family memoir.

Estill always felt like an alien in her rural Texas family, especially after she moved out of the house pregnant at the age of 16. The sibling who came closest to matching her outsider energy, though, was her brother Kerry. Six years the author’s junior, the sensitive Kerry reacted to his transient childhood by staying firmly rooted in place in adulthood—even after his wife left him, he just built a new house on a nearby property. As he grew older, Kerry became increasingly agoraphobic: “He was terrified of sprawling cities, big rigs, and highway traffic. His pulse quickened, palms sweated, and limbs twitched anytime he ventured into unfamiliar surroundings.” Post-divorce, Kerry began an online relationship with a woman named Barbara, though they had never met in person. They discussed getting married and moving in together, but Kerry was too apprehensive to drive from Texas to New Orleans alone. Seeing an opportunity to finally bond with her brother and help him find happiness, Estill agreed to go with him. It was the start of a new period of intimacy between the siblings, but was closeness with the peculiar Kerry all that the author hoped it would be? Estill’s prose is sharp and conversational, capturing her complex interpersonal relationships in elucidating language: “Truth be told, I hadn’t been Kerry’s sister any more than I’d been my father’s daughter. In my younger years, I had been a third parent, a spare wife, and a personal valet, a child actor forced into vacated adult roles. I’d been set up to fail.” The book makes for an empathetic portrait of family dysfunction. None of the lives within it are neat and clean, but the author withholds judgment, preferring to offer readers nuanced illustrations of all the figures. Estill’s relationship with the fairly enigmatic Kerry sits at the heart of the memoir (though she occasionally drifts off-topic into other areas), and she plays it out past the obvious “happy ending” into later, more difficult territory.

An affecting account about what people owe their relatives and themselves.
help" established by white women didn’t produce equality for Y et, in Fierro’s convincing analysis, Parrish’s career is defined 1492 through 2020, from Pope Alexander VI’s institutionalization of the "Doctrine of Discovery" and Europe’s embrace of race-based slavery to Jim Crow and the racist persecution of the war on drugs. The figures most often associated with American racism certainly make appearances, including enslavers, the Ku Klux Klan, and Southern sheriffs. However, the book also emphasizes the ways in which some White activists have historically perpetuated White supremacy. Helen Parrish, a White woman from Philadelphia whose activism centered on housing reform, for instance, has traditionally been portrayed as a hero of the nascent progressive movement in the late 19th century. Yet, in Fierro’s convincing analysis, Parrish’s career is defined by her “condescending saviorism,” as seen in her private diaries, which are rife with examples of her belief in her superiority to non-White tenants and her judgmental intrusion into their lives. The book’s retellings of the stories of such icons are the book’s strong suit, as is Fierro’s emphasis on the historic phenomenon of “White Women Myopia,” demonstrating how “systems of ‘help’ established by white women didn’t produce equality for people of color.”

Fierro, who has a doctorate in African American studies from Temple University, has a firm command of this history, and she supports her work with more than 500 citations. Although academic historians won’t find much that’s new in the book’s analysis, which does not fully and methodologically engage with archival research, it more than accomplishes the author’s goal of providing an accessible history for general readers. This effort toward engagement is accompanied by a down-to-earth writing style and an ample assortment of full-color original art by Fierro and illustrator Sgueglia as well as diagrams, charts, and other visual aids. The book will likely show many White readers the ways in which America’s racist history resonates in their present-day lives. Along the way, it provides actionable agendas for change, which tracks well with Fierro’s career as a consultant whose work centers on ethics, leadership, and social justice and with her own willingness to address her own “internalized racism.” Oddly, though, the book accepts a common right-wing trope that oversrates the prevalence of leftist “cancel culture” that allegedly targets the nonwoke and, in doing so, uses some of the same talking points that people opposed to anti-racist work often use.

An often nuanced analysis of the prevalence of American racism.

DIGGING UP THE SEEDS OF WHITE SUPREMACY
Fierro, Rita Sinorita
Illus. by Iride Paola Sgueglia
Collective Power Media (384 pp.)
May 24, 2022
978-0-578-37863-3
978-8-9858796-1-2 paper
An independent scholar and consultant explores the roots of White supremacy in the United States.

As a White woman with “a relatively comfortable life,” Fierro notes that this survey of racist ideology “wasn’t an easy book to write” and that she doesn’t “expect it to be an easy read” for other middle-class White people. Taking the advice of Black activists since the 1960s, she focuses on challenging White people’s beliefs, and her intended audience is specifically progressive young people who are at a loss for how to address systemic racism. The bulk of the book provides a historical overview of the roots of White supremacy, covering major events from 1492 through 2020, from Pope Alexander VI’s institutionalization of the “Doctrine of Discovery” and Europe’s embrace of race-based slavery to Jim Crow and the racist persecution of the war on drugs. The figures most often associated with American racism certainly make appearances, including enslavers, the Ku Klux Klan, and Southern sheriffs. However, the book also emphasizes the ways in which some White activists have historically perpetuated White supremacy. Helen Parrish, a White woman from Philadelphia whose activism centered on housing reform, for instance, has traditionally been portrayed as a hero of the nascent progressive movement in the late 19th century. Yet, in Fierro’s convincing analysis, Parrish’s career is defined by her “condescending saviorism,” as seen in her private diaries, which are rife with examples of her belief in her superiority to non-White tenants and her judgmental intrusion into their lives. The book’s retellings of the stories of such icons are the book’s strong suit, as is Fierro’s emphasis on the historic phenomenon of “White Women Myopia,” demonstrating how “systems of ‘help’ established by white women didn’t produce equality for people of color.”

Fierro, who has a doctorate in African American studies from Temple University, has a firm command of this history, and she supports her work with more than 500 citations. Although academic historians won’t find much that’s new in the book’s analysis, which does not fully and methodologically engage with archival research, it more than accomplishes the author’s goal of providing an accessible history for general readers. This effort toward engagement is accompanied by a down-to-earth writing style and an ample assortment of full-color original art by Fierro and illustrator Sgueglia as well as diagrams, charts, and other visual aids. The book will likely show many White readers the ways in which America’s racist history resonates in their present-day lives. Along the way, it provides actionable agendas for change, which tracks well with Fierro’s career as a consultant whose work centers on ethics, leadership, and social justice and with her own willingness to address her own “internalized racism.” Oddly, though, the book accepts a common right-wing trope that oversrates the prevalence of leftist “cancel culture” that allegedly targets the nonwoke and, in doing so, uses some of the same talking points that people opposed to anti-racist work often use.

An often nuanced analysis of the prevalence of American racism.

ON LONESOME ROADS
A Peter O’Keefe Novel
Flanigan, Dan
Arjuna Books (376 pp.)
$24.95 | $14.95 paper | $2.99 e-book
May 19, 2022
978-8-9855014-3-2
978-8-9855014-1-8 paper
In this third installment of a mystery series, a private eye takes on another dangerous case.

After battling drug-smuggling operations and Mafia kingpins, the Vietnam veteran–turned–divorced gumshoe Peter O’Keefe returns to fight for his personal safety. Novelist and litigator Flanigan’s latest mystery picks up after the cliffhanger ending in The Big Tilt (2020), when the investigator was nearly blown to bits by a car bomb in late 1987. The action resumes three months later as a PTSD–saddled O’Keefe slowly heals from extensive “flash-fried” burns with no leads on a suspect, though the local Mafioso faction, the “Outfit,” “a nest of vicious killers and thieves,” seems like the plausible perpetrator. After media coverage of the bombing, folks from O’Keefe’s ex-wife to his landlord fear for their safety when he’s nearby, joined by his investigative firm partner, George Novak, and a bomb-sniffing dog, O’Keefe pieces together minor clues but becomes “idiotically determined to poke his stick around in the Outfit snake pit.” The detective insinuates himself into the crosshairs of mob boss Paul Marcone, hoping to call a truce. But O’Keefe only stirs up a hornets’ nest of nefarious henchmen. Also hot on the Outfit’s trail is determined United States attorney and Senate hopeful Russell Lord, who’s dedicated to rooting out the faction after putting former crime boss Carmine Jagoda in jail. But after Jagoda’s sudden death and his likely successor’s mysterious disappearance, Lord fears a Mafia “dynastic succession” reshuffling could spur more violence. As O’Keefe draws closer to tailing the Outfit, Flanigan pumps up the suspenseful action, which has become a reliable facet of the series. Though the author’s mobster plot has more convoluted complexities than in previous mysteries, the story accelerates at a decent clip thanks to a wealth of well-developed characters, like Jagoda’s daughter, Rose, who is also the wife of the missing mobster; Marcone; and a bevy of crooked thugs. A murder, a shootout, and an incriminating audio recording ramp up the action, and despite a deadly snake bite, O’Keefe remains in top investigative form. An integral subplot involves his young daughter, Kelly, who morphs into a fierce,
preteen supersleuth investigating her mother’s shady fiancé. By the novel’s conclusion, Flanigan will capture readers’ hearts with hopes for a future O’Keeffe family reunion.

The further exhilarating adventures of an unbeatable detective, packed with tantalizing loose ends.

FLAME AT DOOR AND RAISIN And Other Stories
Frankel, Alex M.
Self (175 pp.)
$12.00 paper | $10.00 e-book
May 13, 2022
979-8-4133-4968-7

A brisk volume of stories populated by lonely characters drifting through Spain and North Africa. Southern California–based author, playwright, and poet Frankel’s short collection of eight tales resonates with themes of loneliness, desire, and restlessness in the 1980s and ’90s. Set against the backdrop of Anita Hill’s testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in 1991, the titular opening story portrays the life of Angie Leventhal, an American mother suffering the sudden loss of her beloved 22-year-old daughter, Brooke, who was living in Barcelona when she died tragically. A variety of perspectives from friends and family incrementally unfurl through transcribed answering machine messages, which, by turns, impart senses of urgency, guilt, and paranoid suspicion on the parts of the callers and depressed detachment from Angie. The parents of a mysteriously ill daughter in “Demons of the River” attempt to heal her while quarantined in an Asian hotel that’s come under strict military control by a tyrannical rebel general. The resolving scene in the early years of the AIDS epidemic.

ARRIBADA
González, Estela
Cynren Press (236 pp.)
$30.00 | $5.99 e-book | May 10, 2022
978-1-947976-31-3

Themes of environmental justice, queer love, and Indigenous rights intersect in González’s mystery. Mariana and Luisa Sánchez Celis grew up in a household with a mother disabled by a stroke, their uncle Alonso, and caretaker Amalia. The novel, set in 1990 and 1991, filters the events of the story through the colorism, racism, and patriarchy of their society as 22-year-old Mariana falls in love with Fernanda, an Indigenous Seri woman who’s passionate about protecting the turtles of the Sinaloa coast from extinction. After leaving Mexico to attend Juilliard, Mariana returns to find that Alonso has gone missing, and anti-poaching laws are harming local fisherman while industrial development hurts the wildlife and beaches. She, Luisa, Fernanda, and others start a business to preserve the livelihoods of locals while speaking up against powerful family friends. As the mystery of Alonso’s disappearance is resolved, a truth about Mariana is revealed. The second part of the novel focuses on Clavel Celis Coulson, Luisa and Mariana’s mother, as a high-society 16-year-old forced to marry a man twice her age; Amalia’s dark past also comes to light. The final part ties up a mystery while exploring themes of family conflict and queer relationships.

Also excellent is Frankel’s story of Don, a gay New Yorker who impulsively relocates to Barcelona to reunite with his new lover, Victor, after spending less than a week with him in the memorable “The Life Don’t Easy With You”; after Don realizes the folly of his premature decision, he navigates the dating scene in the early years of the AIDS epidemic. Another brokenhearted character is Seth Birnbaum, the “energetic, inspired, prodigiously gifted” American painter in “An Artist and His Palette” who embarks on a cruise from Spain back to New York, attempting to get over a career-hijacking relationship with “two-timing Thelma.” Although Frankel’s narratives flow seamlessly, it’s his searching characters that readers will remember. They live in worlds of despair and disappointment but still encounter shimmers of hope. Many suffer the cruelties of aging and loneliness, and some frequent the same dark rooms and underground nightclubs, yearning for connection. Others are sadly vulnerable to physical criticisms by potential partners. Frankel can be hilariously callous in his own descriptions of his players, as when portraying a revolutionary in the closing tale as having “a long nose and an unfortunate snaggletooth and permed hair that tends to get too long before it has to be touched up.” In the book’s preface, the author shares that he wrote 17 autobiographical stories in total while living in Barcelona in the late 1980s; the eight here mostly appeared in literary journals and ably represent Frankel’s impressive creativity and talent.

Powerfully haunting tales of love, betrayal, and heartbreak in the Europe of decades past.
of beauty. If only music could bend life to its rules." González’s closing notes provide the story’s critical real-world origins.

A suspenseful but tender tale that exemplifies the power of intersectionality.

**NENETL OF THE FORGOTTEN SPIRITS**

Greentea, Vera

Illus. by Laura Müller

Greentea Publishing (88 pp.)

$30.00 | May 11, 2021

978-0-9996112-6-5

Mexican children try to help a forgotten spirit reunite with her family in this middle-grade graphic novel.

In Mexico, the Day of the Dead celebrates the notion that "a person hasn't truly died until that person is forgotten." As the festival begins, a woman in skull makeup finds a boy sleeping in an alley among the trash. This is Jonah, whom she challenges to learn the difference between the living and the dead. She leaves him with the cryptic phrase "Wednesday's child is full of woe." Elsewhere in the city, a young woman named Nena plays hide-and-seek with a young man named Bastian. When he finds her, she offers to show him a secret. She leads him to a crypt full of skulls. By candlelight, he soon sees that she is also one of the dead. Earlier, a girl named Violetta tells her friends Daphne and Marguerite that on the Day of the Dead, the shroud between the worlds of the living and the dead is at its thinnest. The trio sneaks into a graveyard to light a candle and invite a forgotten spirit across the shroud. When they succeed, the spirit—who turns out to be Nena—says: "I find myself in requirement of a soul to continue building the rest of my body." With the help of local priest Father Eduardo and Violetta’s brother, Eli, can the children discover who might remember the spirit of Nena? Greentea, with vibrant art by Müller, offers a spooky but emotionally bright middle-grade adventure. Fun motifs, like abandoned doll factories and single red balloons, pay homage to the horror genre. Witty moments that will shine for adult readers include Eli calling the skull-painted woman a "crackpot" only to receive her glare. Warm art, with almost no hard, black outlines, feels like a bridge to Disney films from the *Lilo & Stitch* (2002) era, prior to fully digital animation. Sharp-eyed readers should see clever narrative clues along the way, as when Nena’s foot briefly appears skeletal. Her red dress, like the balloon, spurs the audience toward a delightful solution to the problem faced by more than one character. Middle-grade readers will likely want to learn more about other cultures after this romp.

This exuberant, beautifully crafted tale introduces Mexico’s Day of the Dead to young adventure fans.

**LAST OF THE TALONS**

Kim, Sophie

Entangled Teen (416 pp.)


978-1-64937-280-2

In this debut YA fantasy, a teenage assassin braves a ruthless crime lord and powerful immortals to save her sister.

Eighteen-year-old Shin Lina is the Reaper, the Kingdom of Sunpo’s greatest assassin. But a year ago, her gang, the Talons, died at the hands of rivals, and now Lina works for her enemy, Konrarnd Kalmin. She has no choice, as Kalmin incessantly threatens the life of her sister, Eunbi. During Lina’s latest gig, she snatches a jewel-embedded tapestry from a long-abandoned temple in the dilapidated kingdom. That theft sparks unexpected retaliation, and both Lina and Kalmin, against their will, end up in Gyeulcheon, the hidden realm of Dokkaebi, or immortals. It’s Haneul Rui (better known as the Pied Piper) who’s brought them there, and he offers a chance for Lina to escape. All she has to do is kill Gyeulcheon’s emperor—Rui himself. She agrees to this twisted “game,” as Kalmin’s cronies back in the mortal realm still pose a threat to Eunbi. But Rui proves awfully hard to kill, and his handsome-ness doesn’t make her lethal objective any easier. Kim’s retelling of Korean mythologies delivers a diverse cast and excels at character development. For example, Lina continually worries about getting back to Eunbi, and periodic flashbacks lead up to the Talons’ final day. At the same time, romantic moments between Lina and her captor are well earned, while a backstory reveals glimpses into Rui’s past. Although the skills of highly trained Lina are without question, the leisurely narrative primarily unfolds in luxurious Gyeulcheon, where her punishments (for failed assassination attempts) are no harsher than palace kitchen duties. Nonetheless, the Dokkaebi who surround Lina raise the stakes, from a brewing rebellion to a few immortals more dangerous than Rui. Kim may have a series in the works, as she closes her book with a subplot or two unresolved.

A stellar, mythical hero whose prowess and tenacity could easily drive her own series.
EMAIL MARKETING THAT DOESN’T SUCK
Have Fun Writing
Emails Your Subscribers Will Want to Read (and That Will Actually Make You Money!)
Klinck, Bobby
Lioncrest Publishing (266 pp.)
978-1-4445-2737-6

A plan to transform newsletter emails from annoying to alluring.

For his nonfiction debut, lawyer and entrepreneur Klinck sets himself a seemingly impossible task: to change marketing and business-related mass emails from an unpleasant part of a person’s workday to something that will actually generate results—and maybe even prompt a smile. The author, an entrepreneur and Harvard Law School graduate, wants to remodel his readers’ email marketing habits in order to teach them “how to find and cultivate raving fans, the kind of fans who will buy anything you have to sell.” The key understanding, according to Klinck, is that email marketing is just like any other kind of marketing, which explains the author’s decision to spend time on explaining the basics of that field before applying those basics to a new medium. One problem with the conventional wisdom surrounding email marketing, the author claims, is that the people offering it don’t understand the difference between marketing and selling. He describes marketing as “offering the right product to the right person at the right time, with the right message.” Selling isn’t about the customer’s needs, he asserts, whereas marketing is “relentlessly interested in the needs of the buyer.” After clarifying this key difference, Klinck dispenses practical tips; for instance, although he grants that an email marketer’s goal is to generate responses, he advises that one shouldn’t track reply statistics, so as to avoid becoming obsessed with such numbers. In short chapters, enlivened by occasional black-and-white personal photos to make specific points, he presents many insights into the new world of marketing.

The author’s main point is that email marketing practices can only be effectively improved by infusing routine business emails with genuine personality, even if it means expressing opinions that part of your audience may not share. Klinck presents positive feedback for his approach that he’s received from others, but the best possible illustrations of his main point are the readability and approachability of this book. The author is a funny, vigorous writer, always ready with a cultural reference to back up her claims, and she deftly and seamlessly integrates her suggested nutritional approach into stories of her dog’s life around. Along the way, Krol discovered what she characterizes as the deficiencies of the American pet food industry and medication-oriented veterinarians who, she says, “are not in the business of restoring health.” The author carefully cites scientific studies and sources and includes comprehensive references to back up her claims, and she deftly and seamlessly weaves her suggested nutritional approach into stories of her dog’s journey to better health. Early chapters lay out the basis for the author’s wellness plan; she clearly describes her dog’s illness and the details she learned about commercial dog food, and she explains why she believes that holistic veterinarians are preferable to others. She also provides a sobering evaluation of the content of dog food, noting that pets “become the recipient of all the byproducts humans will not or cannot eat.” The book offers readers a cogent overview of canine diseases while frankly discussing current veterinary practices, especially regarding vaccinations; on this subject, she cites research that suggests “Vaccinations can hinder and hurt your dog’s natural life-giving state of being.”

Most of the book centers on Krol’s belief that dogs should be fed a raw food diet of meat and plant-based material. However, although she passionately supports this position, she acknowledges that some veterinarians and pet owners may not be raw food enthusiasts. While exploring the diet, Krol candidly concludes that the positives outweigh the negatives, advocating a method she calls “Single Category Rotational Feeding,” which involves alternating meals of meat and plants with periods of fasting. Portions of the plan may meet with resistance readers to record some of their own conversation, transcribe it, and look at “the cadence of how you actually talk when you’re talking to a friend. Try to adopt that in your writing.” Readers involved in any kind of marketing will also appreciate Klinck’s breezy optimism and insistence on viewing email recipients as real human beings: “They’re your friends, the people you serve.”

A book of lively and relatable marketing advice.

WHAT THE PET FOOD INDUSTRY IS NOT TELLING YOU
Developing Good Practices for a Healthier Dog
Krol, Stephanie
Riley Publishing (254 pp.)
$29.95 | $24.95 paper | $9.99 e-book
May 24, 2021
978-1-73732-011-1
978-1-73732-010-4 paper

A wellness plan for dogs featuring a raw food diet.
or even skepticism from some dog owners; for example, the author endorses feeding dogs raw bones, which, she writes, “are needed for proper nutrition”; despite the inclusion of citations to support this, some dog owners may still be hesitant. The plan calls for creating a menu of raw meats, including fish, cooked vegetables, and fruit. Krol helpfully provides “feeding options,” including daily schedules and “recipe samples and bone details.” She also helpfully includes a chapter on how to modify the plan for puppies and even explains how to adapt it for cats. For pet owners who are interested in administering such a raw food diet, Krol provides justification and sufficient information for anyone to easily execute the plan. At times, however, one may feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of detail as well as the additional preparation associated with the author’s dietary method. A diligently researched pet-care manual, but some readers may balk at the considerable commitment required.

**THE EVERYBODY CLUB**

Loewen, Nancy & Linda Hayen
Illus. by Yana Zybina
Self (28 pp.)
March 1, 2021
978-1-73652-870-9
978-1-73652-871-6 paper

A youngsters founds a club that aims to include everyone in Loewen and Hayen's picture book.

An unnamed girl invites some friends (and the reader) to join her Everybody Club. She gives them all a simple badge and encourages them to invite others. "Tell them all: / You're a member. / It's official. / The Everybody Club is beneficial!"

There are images of a boy using a motorized wheelchair, several girls wearing headscarves, and another boy wearing a kufi cap. Multiple same-sex couples are shown, some with their kids. (The narrator is depicted as White, and other characters have a variety of skin tones.) The group gathers to build a float, which they enter in a parade. Finally, everyone in town joins the procession in a spread showcasing Zybina's soft, warm, and appealing pastel illustrations. The story, based on a real world of the Griot of Xhogwana, the “best storyteller in the whole region,” whose name is Ndabazabantu. He often spins his tales to men loitering around the Matiwana Native General Dealers Store in the township of uMasizakhe. He tells of a family who relies on superstitions to determine the doubtful paternity of a child; of a local pickpocket whose ghost continues to bother people long after his death; and of two former convicts who embark on new crimes under the cover of the local church. He also recounts local histories relating to droughts, the adoption of Christianity, and other traditions and curiosities. Whether voicing his griot stand-in or narrating in the third person, Maqetuka presents prose that’s conversational and digressive. Here, for example, he effectively mixes tragedy and comedy in a story about a grief-stricken woman whose child drowned: “Aunt Mary was like a zombie….Even when people greeted and waved at her, she would not respond. ‘But why does God punish Mary so much? Has she been bewitched?’ Ndabazabantu asked his friend Mzobe….”

Some Western readers may be slightly confused by the storytelling style of the vignettes, which rarely have sharp endings or deeply developed characters. Still, Maqetuka manages to capture the richness and drama of South African town life.

A varied but often engaging collection of short sketches and parables.
RETRATO DE LA PATAGONIA/
PORTRAIT OF PATAGONIA
Futaleufú, Chile
McGregor, Liz & Alex Nicks
BoonDocs (194 pp.)
978-0-692-14901-0

A collection of photographs focuses on a region of Chile. This debut coffee-table book introduces readers to the Futaleufú River and region through a combination of words and pictures. The photos make up the bulk of the volume, with full-page images showing the landscape, the built environment, and the people who live in the rural area near the river. Introductions at the beginning of each section provide some background information. Interspersed throughout are short, first-person accounts from Futaleufú residents who describe aspects of their lives, from celebrations and agriculture (“Here, we do it all together with everyone helping out. It has always been a communal thing”) to daily activities and hobbies. The region’s dramatic scenery makes for compelling photos, and McGregor’s and Nicks’ images bring it to life. There are pictures of the river, sometimes nestled in the surrounding mountains and at other times saddled with tourists rafting their way through substantial rapids. Local residents display their homes and businesses, show off their riding skills, and share their favorite foods. A few historic photos accompany the brief discussion of the region’s settlement and growth. The photos appear without captions, although the book concludes with a short description of each image. All the text appears in English and Spanish and is well written and informative in both languages. Armchair travelers will appreciate the detailed and vibrant images along with the intimate portraits of life in an isolated but apparently thriving region. The pictures introduce readers to a place where farmers rely on draft animals to work their fields, but they do so without exoticizing the residents, who are clearly part of 21st-century Chile. Through their anecdotes, locals explain how to train oxen (“You start taming them when they are a very young age, around three years”), weave blankets, and make empanadas, and they tell stories of their families’ migrations to the area. The photo descriptions are brief but clear, so readers will not be left wondering what is depicted in the images.

An attractive and informative introduction to a remote area in South America.

THE GUNSLINGER’S GUIDE TO AVOIDING MATRIMONY
McLean, Michelle
Entangled: Amara (368 pp.)
978-1-64937-212-3

In this Western romantic comedy, an outlaw and entrepreneur unexpectedly wed. Adam Brady is on the run. The gunfighter and gambler would like to live more respectably, but the first order of business is avoiding the eye—and firearm—of sadistic lawmaker Marshal Spurlock. When Adam and his horse, Barnaby, stumble into Desolation, Colorado, things get complicated quickly. First, Adam recognizes the tiny town’s sheriff as Gray “Quick Shot” Woodson, who nurses an old grievance against Adam. Second, while trying to hide from Sheriff Woodson, Adam butts heads with the formidable Nora Schumacher…in the middle of what turns out to be a group wedding ceremony. Because Desolation is filled with ne’er-do-wells, the sheriff has instituted a new rule: Marry and get a job within 30 days, or get out and take your trouble with you. Nora’s not eager to get hitched, but she’s not opposed to it either. The daughter of the town drunk is fighting to save her beloved home before her father gambles it away, but as a woman under the age of 30, Nora can’t have the deed in her own name. If she has a husband, however… As Adam and Nora navigate a new marriage that may or may not be legal, their verbal barbs evolve into words of love. But what will happen if the law comes calling? This is the second novel in McLean’s Gunslingers series, with alternating perspectives from Adam and Nora, who are equally stubborn, resourceful, and hardhearted. Adam’s attempts to get a job result in hilarious mishaps involving bent nails and burned apple pies. A goat named Lucille who loves raiding Nora’s garden provides genuine comic relief. Nora is a formidable hero—a Renaissance woman who grows herbs, makes dresses, and builds furniture, supporting herself and her father and respected by everyone in Desolation—but is hesitant to ask for help until Adam teases out her vulnerabilities.

Chock full of witty banter, sizzling chemistry, and exciting twists.
THE DIVINITY THAT SHAPES OUR LIFE
Epiphany on the Path of Karma
Menon, C.B.K.
FriesenPress (450 pp.)
Feb. 16, 2022
978-1-03-911584-2
978-1-0391-1583-5 paper

One man describes an awakening to life’s mystical forces in this debut spiritual nonfiction work.

“If we look back upon our life realistically,” writes retired high school English teacher and school administrator Menon, “we will be surprised to realize that more of the events of our life just happened, seemingly miraculously, than were shaped by our intent or effort.” This is one of the many lessons Menon imparts in this memoir, which he says that he wrote to chronicle his life from birth to “a vital point in my life when I became fully aware of the mystical forces that governed my experiences.” Born in Tamil Nadu in 1936 to an Irish Catholic mother and an Indian Hindu father, Menon spent his childhood living in India in what he calls “bucolic splendor” with his parents and four siblings. Things began to change for the author once his father left the family, leaving his mother to take care of the kids alone, sometimes without enough money to feed the family. But despite the hardships, he carried on, remembering that “every dank swamp nurtures its own beauty of flora and fauna.” A voracious reader, Menon eventually moved to Canada in adulthood to pursue a doctorate in literature at the University of New Brunswick. When he married a medical student and became a young father, it set in motion a chain of events that eventually led to his spiritual “epiphany.” Over the course of this work, Menon presents his life story with poetic and vivid imagery, as when he tells of how memories “rekindle and crystallize the past that lies nestled within the alcove of time.” Along the way, he offers frequent references to English and Greek literature to illustrate his later revelations, which involve, among other things, his interpretation of the concept of karma, his interrogation of whether there is “a divinity that shapes our ends,” and a “certitude that everything that happens in one’s life has a good purpose.” Overall, it’s a well-crafted and often convincing chronicle.

A vividly written and often compelling philosophical remembrance.

THE NEWLYWED’S WINDOW
Stories
Ed. by Mukana Press
Mukana Press (212 pp.)
July 5, 2022
978-0-578-29798-9
978-0-578-39714-6 paper

Mukana Press collects a dozen stories by contemporary African writers in this new anthology.

Some of these 12 stories effectively address the shifting natures of identity and understanding across cultures; for example, a maid competes with her wealthy employer for the affection of the rich woman’s baby (who calls the maid “mama”) in “Black Paw Paw” by Obinna Ezeodili. Others play with their characters’ (and readers’) perceptions in order to reveal the deeper tensions of modern life. In the title story by Husnha Mad-hy, for example, a woman with a passion for people-watching becomes entranced by a couple in the house opposite hers, who present a vision of marriage that is much more appealing than the traditional one to which she feels resigned: “She could see the outline of their bodies as they connected, as she danced for him, as he placed kisses all over her, white teeth glistening in the dark; the sound of old Taarab music, a cacophony of drums, violins, Oud guitar, and other Swahili instruments, would drift into her room.” Unsurprisingly, the marriage turns out to be less romantic than it appears. These and other tales are uniformly lean and precise, and the prose is exuberant or mordant, depending on the story. Some manage both registers at the same time, including the final work, Victor Ehikhamenor’s “A Letter From Ireland,” in which a boy takes his grandmother—who’s been suffering from nightmares—to visit a village physician to learn the fate of her son, the boy’s uncle, in distant Dublin: “I readied my pen and paper to write down the prophecy of the gods as revealed to the native doctor. The old man was the privileged intermediary between the gods, my grandmother, and Uncle Sunday in faraway Ireland.” By the end, readers will come away anxious to see more from these authors.

A varied but consistently satisfying sampler of emerging artists.
**THE MERMAID OF AMARVIN ISLAND**
Müller, Eric G.
Illus. by Martina A. Müller
Alkion Press (282 pp.)
$24.50 | $18.50 paper | May 16, 2022
978-1-73668-292-0
978-1-7366829-1-3 paper

While missing her father, a girl discovers her own surprising secret in this middle-grade fantasy.

Young Swannie Wynstan lives near the seaside village of Nammig with her mother, Sarika. One year ago to the day, her father, Thomas, vanished on his fishing boat during a storm. Swannie plans to enjoy the day at Chepi’s Grotto, her favorite place. But near Finn’s Cove, she hears someone call, “Help me please.” To her surprise, it’s a dolphin trapped on the beach. Swannie can speak with the dolphin, whose name is Matmaka, because, as he tells her, “there is more to you than you can imagine.” After she helps him back into the water, Swannie agrees to meet Matmaka on the beach in one month. In the meantime, he sets her on a magical quest by instructing her to shout into a certain hole in the earth: “Wake up and show me the Golden Secret.” Swannie meets a series of elemental beings, including the Fay of the Big Mist, who leads her to a special coin with a snake wrapped around it. Later, after waking up on the beach, Swannie wonders if her adventures were real. Back in school, she befriends a girl named Feliciana, who has cancer. When Swannie reunites with Matmaka, she discovers a secret ability that may help heal her own life and the lives of those around her. Eric G. Müller’s middle-grade fantasy gives audiences, regardless of age, a wider view of the world. Swannie’s quest eventually takes her to an intriguing place called Amarvin Island. The elaborate narrative unfolds in hypnotic layers, frequently depicting ways to aid the environment, such as collecting beach trash. Exceptional twists keep the story engaging even after dramatic peaks. Younger readers will adore characters like Skwee and Skew, talking squirrels who later, along with the entire cast, become integral to the plot. The author’s exceptional central theme, that environmental protection is a holistic effort that requires everyone’s participation, arrives in the line “Whatever happens to Amarvin happens to the rest of the world.” Friendship, loyalty, and dedication sweeten the final passages. Black-and-white illustrations by Martina A. Müller are gorgeous and evocative.

A remarkable fantasy that features life-affirming themes for both kids and adults.

---

**REASONS WHY NOT TO DATE PUBLIC ENEMY CEO**
Munton, Melanie
Self (320 pp.)
$16.99 paper | $0.99 e-book | May 24, 2022
979-8-8158-0102-8

In this small town, two colleagues butt heads and hearts.

Mia Sparks loves Shell Grove, South Carolina, almost too much. She grew up there, has deep ties to the community, and found respite in her hometown after her divorce from her high school sweetheart. But Mia is restless; despite a college degree, she’s never had a career that sticks, and so far, her guest-relations position at The Sapphire, Shell Grove’s new resort, has involved fishing dead squirrels out of the pool. Enter sexy-as-sin Aiden Beaumont, with whom Mia has an eventful first meeting and can’t stop thinking about. The only problems? Aiden is Mia’s boss’s boss, and, as owner of The Sapphire, he’s public enemy No. 1 among the Shell Grove old guard, who are convinced a high-profile resort will ruin the simplicity of their beloved beach town. When Mia sees the potential in increased tourism and proposes creative solutions to get the entire town onboard, Aiden sees the potential in her—in both the boardroom and the bedroom. But for a small-town girl and a high-powered businessman, love can be complicated—even more so when a burgeoning new venture is also on the line. Can Mia and Aiden truly have it all? This is the first in the Shell Grove romance series from prolific author Munton, and there’s lot of potential here. Quirky characters abound, from a trio of 60-something gossips who run the Southern Sisters Salon to Mia’s pals Maggie and Finn, best friends with romantic tension that everyone but them can sense. Shell Grove is a character in and of itself, with beautiful beach settings, Southern charm, and a clear sense of community. It’s no wonder businessmen like Aiden want to capitalize on the locale and why its loyal residents are so resistant to a big resort. Finally, Mia and Aiden have sizzling-hot chemistry, demonstrated many times over the course of the book, as well as their own believable personal and relationship obstacles to overcome.

Sweet and sexy; an ideal beach read.
“Nanfito’s writing is a blend of philosophical meditation and a rapt, evocative attention to gritty impressions.”

ROTTEN FRUIT IN AN UNKEMPT GARDEN
A Memoir in Poetry and Prose
Nanfito, Michael
Self (199 pp.)
$12.99 paper | $0.99 e-book | Nov 23, 2021
979-8-7686-4472-7

Violence, drugs, and women on the edge heighten the chaos of this memoir. Nanfito looks back on his picaresque life from 1970 to 1981, encompassing his teens and early 20s, when he left home to escape his father, bounced around California as a journeyman metal worker, and transported drugs up and down the West Coast. His ripe book unfolds in loose-jointed, episodic chapters that read like short stories, most of them centered on pivotal moments and relationships with various people. They include a Roman Catholic priest who spent four years trying to groom the adolescent author for the clergy by cultivating his love of literature and art (Nanfito’s piquant pencil drawings grace the memoir); a youth who tried to rape him at the age of 14; and a Vietnam veteran he befriended who was haunted by Plato’s speculations on the soul keep cropping up—and a rapt, dynamic prose. (Stopping for gas during an urgent drug run, he delivered; a sex worker whom he rescued from an assault, getting a knife wound in the process; an aging stripper who took sitting on the table top lounging in the sun, smoking, drinking a beer. All smiles and eyes as I pass by. Plan already running off the rails.) Sprinkled in are the author’s poems, by turns searing and lyrical, which ambivalently convey pain and the strength that comes from it. (“I hate that you hit me but / I love how you release that venom.”) The result is a captivating account full of stark incidents with shaded, nuanced meanings. A richly textured vision of life that’s pungent and disorderly but vibrant all the same.

STILL, THE SKY
Pearson, Tom
Self (680 pp.)
979-8-4308-9547-1

Pearson’s latest collection of poetry explores popular Greek myths and the unexplored spaces between the written word and visual art. A short excerpt from Ovid’s Metamorphoses is a fitting thematic precursor from which to leap into Pearson’s evocatively described, immersive reimagining of Greek myth—namely Thesen’s pursuit of the Minotaur and the fall of Icarus: “Homesick for homeland, Daedalus despised Crete / And his long exile there, but the sea held him. / ‘Though Minos blocks escape by land or water,’ / Daedalus said, ‘still, the sky is before us, / And that’s the way we’ll go. Minos’ dominion / Does not include the air.’ He turned his thinking / Toward unknown arts, changing the laws of nature.” The many symbols and themes explored within are powerful and work on an almost subliminal level as the reader travels further into the book. The labyrinth, for example, in all of its “winding disorientation,” is an apt metaphor for life—and perception. For some—like the seven young men and seven maidens sacrificed every year—the labyrinth meant a brutal death, but it could also be seen as a sanctuary: “The entrance to the labyrinth was a marvel / Of construction. The middle maze, our playground, / Wrapped around the corners of the palace where / We swept our secrets.” The fall of Icarus, like the Minotaur and the labyrinth, explores several themes: balance, greed, ambition, etc. “Inside a tower of rain’s impressions, seeping / Through stone, drip stalactite instructions / Plans of escape on waxen wings, feathers / From the birds he loved— / Mineral-rich in remembrance, gathered / In puddles on the floor, only this advice: / A warning not to go too high or low, not to / Touch the sun or sea.” Pearson’s writing, filled with rich description and striking imagery, suits the subject: “Moving in an arid desert full of bones, / Sinking in a quenchless ocean, felled to bones, / Calcifying in the ruins of our prison palace, / Your maze built of bones.” Additionally, his subtle use of varied sensory descriptors throughout makes the reading experience mesmeric and enveloping. In the following excerpt, Pearson uses sound and smell brilliantly to deepen the power of the sequence: “Putrid peaches rotting on rain-damp ground, / Relishing the squish of their acrid smell while / Ravens caw to each other across the hills of / The Acropolis.” And shortly thereafter: “A deep-throated resonance of the sonic world / Of cicadas and cocks and seagulls, mingling / Their voices through the late morning, go silent / As we pass by.” Pearson’s meticulous choice of words and his innate sense of narrative rhythm—coupled with his sublime use of multimedia art, like Seed of Minos, which features a scorpion in amber; and Gardener’s Choice, in which a half-opened milkweed pod is entrapped in some kind of compartment—make for an unarguably unique experience. The strength of this release, however, is also a potential weakness. While the fluid poetry and stunning
visual multimedia pieces may resonate powerfully with some readers, the esoteric nature and deep symbolism of the writing may be lost on others.

The fusion of poetry and art makes this speculative trip through Greek myth a highly memorable experience.

**MILLIE THE MAGICAL STONE SKIPPER**

*Polk, Olivia*  
*Illus. by Vanya Liang*  
*Bird Upstairs Books (32 pp.)*  
*$17.95 | $9.99 e-book | June 14, 2022  
*978-1-954854-39-0*

A young sister discovers that with hard work, an unexpected talent can save the day in this Wild West retelling of a Brothers Grimm fairy tale.

A rancher tells his four children that it’s time for them to learn what they’ll do for a living. While the three older brothers have adventurous aspirations—they want to be a mountain climber, a fisherman, and a cowboy—their younger sister, Millie, isn’t sure what she wants. When the brothers leave, Millie wanders down to skip stones at the creek, where a friendly frog notices her talent and offers to coach her. Millie puts in the hard work to hone her talent into skill, and when a bandit threatens her brothers with his magical slingshot, it’s only Millie’s skipped stones that can save the day. Using the less familiar fairy tale “The Four Skillful Brothers” as the framework, Polk creates an adventure that feels like a familiar folk story placed against a gorgeous Western mountain setting. Millie’s stone-skipping skill and her desire to be “independent while still caring for others” have a fresh feel that also comments on gender roles. Liang captures the beauty of the West in both small scenes and larger scale images; the landscape as the brothers leave the ranch soars across the page, while Millie’s quiet reflection in the pond resonates with peace. With aphorisms about future hopes for each of the four children, this tale encourages following dreams, grand or modest.

A retold tale set against a beautiful landscape, well suited for modern audiences.

**FIND YOUR FINANCIAL FREEDOM**

*Let Go of Fear, Gain Control, & Achieve Lifelong Wealth*  
*Rankin, Logan*  
*Lioncrest Publishing (230 pp.)*  
*$29.99 | $15.99 paper | $4.99 e-book*  
*May 10, 2022  
*978-1-5445-2643-0  
978-1-5445-2641-6 paper*

A real estate entrepreneur proposes a path to financial freedom.

Like many self-improvement books, this one follows a familiar pattern. The author recounts how he struggled to achieve financial independence and shares his “secret formula.” In Rankin’s case, he built real estate investing and property management businesses, parlaying them into lending money and coaching. The author’s impressive accomplishments ensure the advice he doles out is credible, yet that counsel is standard fare, as evidenced in “The Three-Step Financial Freedom Process” he lays out in the guide. It involves setting a vision, increasing cash, and investing wisely. Early on, Rankin discusses the need to reach a high “intensity level,” develop a routine, and maintain focus—concepts that could generally apply to any successful endeavor. He covers the basics of cash flow and encourages using a “Scoreboard” to track net worth. He stresses the importance of “financial literacy” in understanding how to invest and appropriately cautions, “If you save, inflation erodes the value of your money.” Perhaps most intriguing is the manner in which the author resists commonly held beliefs. For example, he asserts that his 401(k) plan “was not aligning with my vision for Financial Freedom”; financial advisers “cannot always give you great advice”; and “there are several ways to make debt useful.” The heart of the book centers on real estate, an investment enthusiastically endorsed by Rankin. The author writes passionately about this area, pointing out that “87 percent of the wealthiest people have real estate investments.” He demonstrates an unbending willingness to be an aggressive real estate investor and therefore assume financial risks: “You’re going to take all the chips that you’re making and plow them in so that you have no chips left over.” While he doesn’t suggest recklessness, some readers may find this winner-take-all philosophy a bit unsettling. Still, Rankin’s narrative is filled with reflections that demonstrate his own learning and growth along the way. He does an admirable job of combining his personal progression with counsel based on experience, and he generously shares his own quest for financial freedom.

Genuine and inspirational financial advice, if somewhat rudimentary.
“Rawls knits together a wealth of sophisticated medical ideas, supported by citations from the scientific literature and his own case studies.”

THE CELLULAR WELLNESS SOLUTION
Tap Into Your Full Health Potential With the Science-Backed Power of Herbs
Rawls, Bill
Vital Plan (594 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.95 e-book | June 18, 2022
978-0-9823225-6-7

Herbs can help alleviate chronic illnesses and much else that ails you, according to this sprawling primer.

Rawls, a physician, bases his account of the medicinal action of herbs on an analysis of processes that can sicken and kill cells called “glycation,” which is the tendency of glucose molecules to stick to proteins, caused by eating too many carbs; the buildup of free radicals; the wearing out of mitochondria that supply cells with energy; the corrosive effects of constant physical and mental stress; trace environmental toxins that poison cells; the pervasive presence of microbes that infest and kill cells. To ameliorate these problems, Rawls recommends a diet heavy in vegetables and low in starch, plenty of sleep and exercise, water and air filters to remove toxic contaminants, social distancing, masking and condom usage to avoid microbes, and a low-stress lifestyle. Most of all, he suggests herbal supplements—powdered extracts are his preferred form—with antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and other properties. (Among the dozens of herbs he covers, from achyranthes to yohimbe, his personal favorites include the rhodiola herb, a Siberian “adaptogen” taken by Vikings to enhance endurance; reishi mushrooms; the herbal “brain revitalizer” gotu kola; and shilajit, a mixture of phytochemicals and minerals collected from Himalayan crevices.) Rawls lays out the medicinal uses of each herb along with recommended dosages, contraindications (many herbs are blood thinners, for example), and the occasional smoothie recipe. He goes on to prescribe herbal regimens for specific ailments from loss of bone density to low testosterone levels. Rawls knits together a wealth of sophisticated medical ideas, supported by citations from the scientific literature and his own case studies, in prose that’s lucid and down-to-earth.

A well-written guide to medicinal herbs full of illuminating theory and practical information.

SHADOWDAYS
Schattel, Polly
JournalStone (322 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $6.95 e-book | Jan. 28, 2022
978-1-8823225-6-7

A nurse, seeking revenge against those who have wronged her, may be slowly losing her mind in this psychological thriller.

Three years ago, Melissa Sweet’s devastating mistake at a Birmingham, Alabama, hospital cost a life and ended her nursing career. Now, she’s back in North Carolina, where her mother and her brother, Noah, live. Though she blames herself for the death that relentlessly haunts her, Melissa struggles to move on. She’s on the right track, in the arms of a soft-hearted, charming fiancé and with a new job at a methadone clinic lined up. Then tragedy strikes, as masked men suddenly introduce violence into her world. In the days that follow, she’s an understandable wreck, likely suffering from PTSD, until Melissa happens upon one assailant’s identity: This ignites her thirst for vengeance, as she hunts down this man and his cohorts, armed with resilience and whatever weapon she can find. But as she metes out her punishment, Melissa may be cracking up—she’s hearing voices and losing her sense of reality.

The story moves from scene to scene with glorious transitions, from crashing thunder to voices that wake up a blacked-out Melissa. A convincing backstory (which includes Noah’s history of schizophrenia) along with stunning descriptive passages elevate this tale of apparent mental collapse. For example, the author equates Melissa’s unstable state to being underwater—“everything in dreamy half-motion and submerged by cold rolling waves of shock.” Some readers will guess later plot turns, though that doesn’t dampen their impact on this unforgettable grim tale.

An exhilarating, sorrowful, and terrifying descent into retribution and possible madness.

THE DOUGLAS BASTARD
A Historical Novel of Scotland
Tomlin, J.R.
Self (192 pp.)
May 4, 2022
979-8-8172-1447-5
979-8-8167-1201-9 paper

The title character of this historical novel about the Wars of Scottish Independence in the 14th century is determined to earn respect—not to mention renown—and to become legitimate after a fashion.
In this fourth installment of a series, readers meet Archie Douglas, the Black Douglass’ bastard son, at the age of 9. David, the young king of Scotland, is scarcely older, and the court is in France in exile. Archie believes that some people think he is “unimportant” because he is a bastard and vows to “prove them wrong. They would see what a bastard could do.” He is put under the care of Sir William Douglas, Lord Liddesdale, a cousin of Archie’s deceased father. Eventually, Archie will become Sir William's squire and later much more. The story’s action comprises a series of clashes, mostly victorious for Archie’s side, until the fateful Battle of Neville’s Cross. King David and Sir William are captured, and Archie and his friend Will Ramsay make a daring escape. Things could hardly look worse, but Tomlin assures readers that there will be another volume. The author has a slew of books to her credit, and this one does not disappoint. Archie, who narrates, is a strong character, alternately fearless and terrified (as one would be in his situation), and proud Sir William, his mentor, is not even afraid to stand up to the king if he feels he has been ill-used. Descriptions are vibrant and violence is a given. These people play for keeps. Historical details are accurate, including the accounts of a tournament that the English host during a temporary truce and the joyful welcoming of King David on his return to Scotland. The rich backmatter features the sources researched (very impressive) and a discussion that separates the historical facts from the liberties that Tomlin has taken. This is much appreciated, but even so, the plethora of characters and often similar names invite confusion. There is an odd trio of scarecrows. The sibling then discovers a pumpkin at midnight, something magical happens in the woods; one of the scarecrows comes alive, realizes that the pumpkin is missing, sees the teddy bear, and tracks the children to their home. Illustrator Meaghan Tosi ups the scares in this section; although the scarecrow won’t be too creepy for middle graders, the images of its angry eyes and clenched fists ratchet up the tension as its inevitable meeting with the children approaches. The result, however, is unexpected, with a sweet plot twist that’s reminiscent of other monster-subverting tales, such as Jorge Aguirre and Rafael Rosado’s Giants Beware (2012). The illustrator uses a subdued color palette to effectively communicate the different seasons (and, later, the spooky Halloween night). The story was originally the basis of a film written by author Thomas Tosi, and it translates beautifully to paneled storytelling; the illustrations capture the pacing perfectly, creating consistent suspense. The limited text requires readers to follow the art to understand the story, but Meaghan’s clear, straightforward panel work flows cleanly across the pages. The simple vocabulary and brief dialogue exchanges make it accessible in a way that denser comics aren’t, making it a good selection for reluctant readers who like eerie adventures.

A shiveringly good tale for ghost-story enthusiasts who like happy endings.

“Turner’s fantasy world is well realized, with clear attention having been paid to its logistical underpinnings.”

**TREE SINGER**

*Turner, Jacci*

Lucky Bat Books (244 pp.)
978-1-943588-91-6

A teenager learning to communicate with trees must search for the blight that threatens them in this YA fantasy. Fifteen-year-old Mayten is an apprentice tree singer. While she has previously only chatted with trees—confiding in them as if to a sympathetic aunt—when she completes the Leveling Ceremony, she will be expected to take her profession more seriously. Mayten has started to feel distress emanating from the oaks and pines. Something is amiss in the forests surrounding her village and farther afield in the kingdom. The teen and her best friends, Tray (an apprentice traveler) and Cather (an apprentice healer), along with the surly Adven (a master traveler), good-natured Hunter (a woodsman), and Mayten’s loyal dog, Anatolian, must journey to the king’s castle and then onward to discover what is ailing the land. Mayten feels out of her depth (“She was expected to do a job she wasn’t qualified for”). Surely her mother—a master tree singer—should have gone in her place. Making matters worse, Adven’s attitude toward her is positively hostile, and people outside of her village seem to distrust and even loathe tree singers. Can Mayten uncover the dark history of her craft and save her beloved trees?

Turner writes in the third person, past tense, from Mayten’s point of view, delivering a polished blend of inner thoughts, dialogue, and narrative descriptions. The fantasy world is well realized, with clear attention having been paid to its logistical underpinnings. At the same time, this information is imparted naturally and never in quantities that might overwhelm readers.

**SQUASHED A Graphic Novel**

*Tosi, Meaghan & Thomas Tosi*

Illus. by Meaghan Tosi
Dooney Press (78 pp.)
$8.99 e-book | Sept. 20, 2022

Two siblings experience spooky consequences after taking a strange pumpkin home from the woods in this text-light, Halloween-themed graphic novel for middle-grade readers.

A young girl is playing Poohsticks on a bridge when her older sibling and their friend steal her teddy bear out of her backpack. She chases the pair into the nearby woods, where they encounter an odd trio of scarecrows. The sibling then discovers a pumpkin that shakes, is covered in goo, and is warm to the touch. The friend leaves, deciding that the situation’s too weird, but the siblings decide to take the pumpkin home. Teddy bear forgotten, the two siblings lug the pumpkin back to their house and find a warm spot for it atop the clothes dryer. Halloween is the next day, and at midnight, something magical happens in the woods; one of the scarecrows comes alive, realizes that the pumpkin is missing, sees the teddy bear, and tracks the children to their home. Illustrator Meaghan Tosi ups the scares in this section; although the scarecrow won’t be too creepy for middle graders, the images of its angry eyes and clenched fists ratchet up the tension as its inevitable meeting with the children approaches. The result, however, is unexpected, with a sweet plot twist that’s reminiscent of other monster-subverting tales, such as Jorge Aguirre and Rafael Rosado’s Giants Beware (2012). The illustrator uses a subdued color palette to effectively communicate the different seasons (and, later, the spooky Halloween night). The story was originally the basis of a film written by author Thomas Tosi, and it translates beautifully to paneled storytelling; the illustrations capture the pacing perfectly, creating consistent suspense. The limited text requires readers to follow the art to understand the story, but Meaghan’s clear, straightforward panel work flows cleanly across the pages. The simple vocabulary and brief dialogue exchanges make it accessible in a way that denser comics aren’t, making it a good selection for reluctant readers who like eerie adventures.

A shiveringly good tale for ghost-story enthusiasts who like happy endings.

Turner’s fantasy world is well realized, with clear attention having been paid to its logistical underpinnings. At the same time, this information is imparted naturally and never in quantities that might overwhelm readers.
Mayten is a relatable protagonist. She displays inner strength and determination but also suffers from common teen anxieties. Her quest functions as an allegory for growth and coming-of-age yet is perfectly enjoyable in its own right and pleasingly self-contained. The story moves swiftly and holds nothing back, not yoking itself to a sequel (although one would be welcome). The other characters have depth and personality, and Turner’s depictions of families—both Mayten’s and the king’s—prove a highlight. While the quest and its resolution turn out to be relatively slight, the human element is such that readers will fully immerse themselves in the story.

A direct and engaging quest tale with a delightful focus on family.

**GENESIS ROAD**

Underwood, Susan O’Dell
Madville Publishing (342 pp.)
978-1-948692-84-7

A novel explores whether a road trip across America with a gay friend will put a troubled woman’s life back together. Glenna Daniels’ life is a big mess. Three times married and with a third divorce pending, she has a miscarriage after trying hard to get pregnant. Then her father—and what a piece of work he is—accidentally burns her house down and perishes in the fire. Desperate, she gets in touch with her old friend Carey, a gay history professor. She is in Eastern Tennessee; he is in Atlanta. They met in the third grade and became fast friends and allies. Off they go on a road trip to the West Coast and back. Carey is carrying his own grief: His husband, Stan, died a couple of years ago. What follows is a travelogue (Yosemite, Yellowstone, Canyon de Chelly, the Gateway Arch) with wide-ranging commentary. They visit gay friends of Carey’s in San Francisco. Along the way, Glenna tortures herself with the secret of the miscarriage, which she finally confesses to Carey, allowing her healing to begin. Glenna and Carey start searching for happiness, and the details of their journey are both intriguing and believable. Underwood is a first-rate writer with a collection of poetry, The Book of Awe (2018), to her credit. One mark of a superb novelist is a dogged digging into characters and events, seeing things from all sides. In short, she is thoughtful and not afraid to spend four or five pages on an important scene, which she does time and again. And she gives readers arresting phrases, such as “the brain’s hot little terrarium of regret” and “Carey pushed out of the tent like a hatchling.” In fact, she has a poet’s love for words and the grounding of a moralist without being oppressively moralistic. The audience will find Glenna and Carey immensely appealing and will be convinced that they will remain lifelong pals.

A luminous tale of friendship; readers will be excited to travel with these complex characters.

**FALL OF TIME**

**Sequel to One Second Per Second**

Unwin, S.D.
Self (248 pp.)
979-8-8195-3607-0

After a surprisingly accessible time-travel method is discovered, agents of the Time Management Agency try to thwart a conspiracy of meddlers who get their thrills from changing human history.

Author Unwin, trained as a theoretical physicist, offers a sequel to his time-travel antic One Second Per Second (2021). In an increasingly rare virtue for this type of SF, close familiarity with the first novel is not absolutely necessary to follow its tale of a semisecret government facility called the Time Management Agency. Back in the 20th century, generating faster-than-light tachyon particles—resulting in time travel—was achieved via chemical means, not vast supercolliders. Now a subculture of miscreants (similar to anarchist computer hackers) know the secret and proceed to vandalize the eons, breaking Lee Harvey Oswald’s trigger finger, thwarting John Lennon’s murder, and generally delivering wish-fulfillment vigilante space/time justice. They rationalize that any historical damage is automatically fixed. A conspiracy of meddlers who get their thrills from changing human history. A direct and engaging quest tale with a delightful focus on family.

A luminous tale of friendship; readers will be excited to travel with these complex characters.
The Value Equation
A Business Guide to Wealth Creation for Entrepreneurs, Leaders & Investors
Volk, Christopher H.
Wiley (272 pp.)
$29.95 | $18.00 e-book | May 10, 2022
978-1-119-87564-2

In this financial guide, an investment entrepreneur offers a framework for business wealth creation.

Volk began in banking and took three companies, two of which he co-founded, public. Correctly observing that “shareholder wealth creation is the single most important corporate financial performance metric,” he explores a model that helps entrepreneurs and business leaders learn how to produce that wealth. In what amounts to a polished financial textbook, the author provides historical context regarding monetary concepts as well as specifics for how to proceed, ultimately revealing a useful “Value Equation” that takes into account six key variables. Volk begins with the compelling tale of Larry Page and Sergey Brin, the founders of Google, to illustrate the wealth creation possibilities of a business based on a winning idea. Volk employs contemporary business cases that dramatize how a strong model can overcome even the most stunning deficiencies. One captivating story, for example, is FUBU, a maker of branded clothing established in Daymond John’s home. Denied a bank loan 26 times, John and his mother used a house mortgage to fund the business. When his company had plenty of orders but was almost broke due to cash flow issues, John was finally able to secure financing, and 25 years later, he turned the operation into a $6 billion business. Compelling anecdotes such as FUBU’s add relevancy and liveliness to a book that otherwise concentrates on financial principles.

In pondering what makes a successful business model, Volk proposes that it basically involves “just Six Variables.” They are: “1. Sales 2. Business investment 3. Operating profit margin 4. Amount of interest costing proceeds (other people’s money) 5. Cost of other people’s money 6. Annual maintenance capital expense.” These variables are discussed in considerable detail in the remainder of the volume. With authority and clarity, the author walks readers through each of them, citing business cases as well as examples from his own experience and offering explanations in the lucid text. The variables are most often accompanied by financial formulas that are more engaging than one might imagine. For instance, “Mort’s Model,” which illustrates cost of capital versus cost of equity; was created by Mort Fleischer, Volk’s business partner; it humorously incorporates a Yiddish term that represents “Other People’s Money.” The author wisely converts the generalized formulas into specifics; he uses a restaurant case study throughout the book because, he says, this type of business model is relatively uncomplicated. The heart of the work is “The V-Formula,” the Value Equation developed by Volk in 1999. He deftly demonstrates the applicability and flexibility of this formula in numerous iterations, using the restaurant case study as well as the example of a real estate financing company he co-founded. The accompanying data tables make it easy to comprehend the formula in action. Volk also includes sound background material, providing a general discussion of how public companies function financially, differences in stock markets, and mergers and acquisitions, liberally referencing experts on these subjects. But this work is primarily an in-depth financial examination of business wealth creation.

A comprehensive and cogent exploration of financial principles.
Wat, the author of *The Making of a Gay Asian Community* (2002), bases his history on interviews with 36 mainly Asian American activists, mostly connected with the Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team—a group that did feisty, innovative work in AIDS education and organizing in LA in the 1980s and ’90s. Their activities included distributing safer-sex kits, staging explicit sex education sessions with simulated sex acts, and launching an ad campaign to promote HIV testing with images of gay and lesbian Asian people embracing above the slogan “Love Your Asian Body.” Wat takes a deep dive into APAIT’s history and its challenges, such as trying to connect in culturally appropriate ways with Asian immigrants who didn’t speak English; confronting homophobia in conservative immigrant communities that prevented gay Asians from discussing their needs or seeking medical treatment; and debunking a widespread impression that Asians didn’t get AIDS and were possibly immune to it—or that gay Asians didn’t exist. In this loose-limbed narrative, Wat’s interviewees, starting with Gil Mangaoang, one of APAIT’s managers on staff in the ’90s, discuss their journeys toward activism, the difficulties of gaining acceptance from older and stodgier gay organizations, the surprisingly cutthroat office politics of the nonprofit sector, and intersectional issues. At one APAIT fundraiser, for instance, the ill-advised entertainment was a drag skit that spoofed domestic violence between pop stars Ike and Tina Turner for laughs, which elicited fervent denunciations of gay male sexism from lesbian attendees.

Much of the book is a saga of institutional development that delves into budgeting, hiring personnel, management structures, employee relations, and complying with the paperwork demanded by government funding agencies. Poignantly, it climaxes in APAIT’s transformation into a well-funded, impeccably credentialed professional agency that jettisons the scrappy, anti-establishment activist ethos that put it on the map. It’s an unusually detailed look at the nuts and bolts of the nonprofit sector, and readers interested in the business and culture of the social work industry will find it valuable. However, Wat’s recap bogs down in thickets of minutiae and organizational acronyms, written in prose that sometimes feels as perfunctory as a newsletter: ‘APAIT, LAAPIS, and GAPSN would often cosponsor social events like dances and screenings of films with LGBTQ and Asian’ content for “the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival (organized by Visual Communications around late April and early May).” More compelling are the interviewees’ intimate observations as they relate coming-out dramas, grieving remembrances of loved ones, defiant paeans to sexual fulfillment, and brash, in-your-face riffs on their determination to explode bourgeois propriety: “We were the ones that were boldly talking about sex in the Asian American community when no one wanted to talk about it,” says Lisa Hasegawa, a former administrative assistant at the Asian Pacific Heath Care Venture organization. In these voices, readers will hear the exuberant energy that powered the movement.

A mix of illuminating, though often dry, organizational lore and vibrant personal reflections on the war against AIDS.
A girl seeks justice for her dead sister against the puritanical culture that killed her in Withycombe's debut novel.

In a small New England town in 1745, 13-year-old Rebecca Grosvenor knocks on the front door of the home of the justice of the peace for three days in a row before she is finally let in to see him—a courtesy never extended to women, let alone young girls. Rebecca has a reason for her urgency: She’s come to report a murder. To be sure, the murder occurred three years ago. The victim, Rebecca's older sister, Sarah, had died shrouded in scandal, and the people of the town—even her own parents—had been all too happy to bury the truth along with poor Sarah. In the three years since, Rebecca has developed a passionate sense of justice and learned secrets that implicate certain men in her sister’s death. She’s finally developed a plan to force the justice of the peace’s hand or else throw their rumor-driven town into turmoil. Can Rebecca finally achieve justice for Sarah and for all women oppressed by the town's patriarchy? Or will the system that tolerated young Rebecca as well? Withycombe’s prose perfectly captures not only the texture of the period, but the pugnacity of her protagonist: “I have lived my life as an agitator and a disgrace....Sadly, one who chooses to make absolutely everything a conflict often denudes their most important messages in the end.” Based on the true story of one of America's earliest abortion cases, the short novel could not be more relevant in the aftermath of Roe v. Wade. Withycombe’s novel resonates because it captures so well a community of neighbors and what happens when those neighbors are forced to reckon with the society they’ve built together.

A striking bit of fiction that proves a historical novel can be as timely as any other.
INDIE

Books of the Month

WOMEN WISE
Eleanor Blayney & Marjorie L. Fox
A practical and compassionate handbook designed to help women envision their lives after work.

GOING, GOING, GONE!
Steve Hermanos
A raucously entertaining, richly atmospheric SF–tinged sports fable.

SHADOWS HOLD THEIR BREATH
Sherry Robinson
An impressive and thoughtful exploration of the mistakes good people make.

BLUE LAKE
Jeffrey D. Boldt
An impressive, wonderfully detailed legal thriller showing the best and worst of humanity.

WESTERN SKIES
Darden Smith
A luminous, haunting panorama of an austere yet rich environment.

JACKIE DOES IT ALL
Fabian E. Ferguson
Illus. by Alisa Aryutova
A timely, vibrant, and cheerfully illustrated reminder about the importance of balance.
Jonathan Franzen's Freedom is headed to the small screen, Variety reports.

Tomorrow Studios and Scott Free Productions will adapt Franzen's novel as a television series, which will be written by Melanie Marnich, known for her work on shows including Big Love, The Big C, and The Affair.

Freedom, published in 2010 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, follows a Midwestern married couple with seemingly perfect lives but who are facing a series of challenges that threaten to tear them apart.

The novel was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. A critic for Kirkus didn't care for the book, however, writing, “If ‘freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose’ (as Kris Kristofferson wrote), this book uses too many words to convey too much of nothing.”

Franzen and Marnich are among the series’ executive producers, along with British filmmaker Ridley Scott.

“Jonathan Franzen’s Freedom is a laugh-out-loud, emotional knockout of a novel, and we couldn’t have conjured a better writer to adapt this material than the brilliant Melanie Marnich,” Scott told Variety.

Franzen praised Marnich as “a perfect choice” to adapt his novel.

“Of all my novels, Freedom seems to me the most directly pertinent to our current social and political moment—globally the fragile Earth, nationally the great red/blue divide,” he said.

JOYCE CAROL OATES APPROVES BLONDE ADAPTATION

Joyce Carol Oates has given her imprimatur to Blonde, the upcoming film based on her novel about Marilyn Monroe, Variety reports.

The prolific novelist spoke at the Neuchâtel International Fantastic Film Festival about the movie, directed by Andrew Dominik (Killing Them Softly) and starring actor Ana de Armas as the legendary movie star.

“Andrew Dominik is a very brilliant director,” Oates said. “I think he succeeded in showing the experience of Norma Jeane Baker from her perspective rather than see it from the outside, the male gaze looking at a woman. He immersed himself in her perspective.”

Oates’ novel, published by Ecco in 2000, is a fictionalized account of Monroe’s life. A critic for Kirkus gave the book a scathing review, calling it “one of the worst she (or any other contemporary ‘serious’ author, for that matter) has ever committed to paper” and writing, “Whatever Monroe’s sins and limitations were, they didn’t merit this contemptible insult to her memory. Oates should be ashamed of herself.”

The novel has been adapted previously for the screen as a 2001 miniseries for CBS.

The NC-17–rated Blonde, which also features actors Bobby Cannavale, Adrien Brody, and Julianne Nicholson, is slated for release on Netflix on Sept. 23.

Michael Schaub, a journalist and regular contributor to NPR, lives near Austin, Texas.
AUDIODESKS | Connie Ogle

Confronting Loss

Allegory, gritty realism, arch humor: These audiobooks tackle the subject of loss in different yet equally powerful ways.

If you harbor reservations about listening to a literary novel, the terrific production of Julie Otsuka's *The Swimmers* (Random House Audio, 4 hours and 6 minutes) should quell your fears. It will also break your heart. Narrated with incredible range by Traci Kato-Kiriyama, who captures every nuance of the changing narrative voice, *The Swimmers* uses a public pool as an allegory for life, a universal stage to highlight deeply personal loss. In the first segment, for which Kato-Kiriyama employs a satirical tone, swimmers visit an underground community pool to escape aboveground problems. They follow the rules and the painted black line with equal attention. But when a crack develops and the pool is closed for good, everything changes, especially for Alice, whose laps kept her dementia at bay. A cold, officious, second-person voice replaces the genial collective “we,” detailing the limitations of Alice’s new existence with callous precision. In the final section, the point of view shifts again, as we view Alice’s decline through the eyes of her daughter. Kato-Kiriyama’s subtle vocal fluctuations and tones resonate, particularly the rueful observation of one elderly swimmer who could be any of us: “It all went by so fast.”

Two distinct voices shine a light on separate sides of a racial chasm in Steph Cha’s tense, riveting *Your House Will Pay* (HarperAudio, 9 hours and 50 minutes). Inspired by a real-life shooting, the novel focuses on two Los Angeles families shattered by violence, one Black, the other Korean. In the early 1990s, Shawn Matthews’ sister, Ava, was shot and killed by a grocery store owner who thought Ava was stealing. Growing up in the wake of such tragedy unmoored young Shawn, but almost 30 years later, after a stint in prison, he has finally gotten his life together, with a job he likes and a serious girlfriend far from his old neighborhood. Grace Park, on the other hand, has lived a more sheltered existence, working in the Korean pharmacy owned by her parents. When her mother is shot in a drive-by, Grace is forced to confront ugly secrets and her own prejudices. Glenn Davis and Greta Jung share narrating duties as Shawn and Grace. Davis enhances Cha’s moving portrait of Shawn, a man working hard to move on from his loss, while Jung gives an empathetic reading of Grace’s careening emotions and eventual understanding of how she must end the cycle of violence.

Novelists always aren’t the best readers of their own material, but Steven Rowley’s hilarious narration of his engaging comic novel *The Guncle* (Penguin Audio, 11 hours and 23 minutes) is a delight. Rowley is so good you can’t imagine anyone else as gay Uncle Patrick, a former sitcom star who takes in his young niece and nephew for the summer after their mother dies. But the story is deeper than you might initially think. Rowley’s arch inflection perfectly captures Patrick’s skills of deflection, which is crucial to the story: Witty banter and jokes are the armor Patrick uses to keep his own terrible loss at arm’s length. He has exiled himself to the desert, but the summer forces him to remember why opening one’s heart is always worth the trouble.

*Connie Ogle is a writer in Florida.*
WHAT’S MORE IMPORTANT, KNOWING THE TRUTH OR KEEPING THE PEACE?

★“A must-read.”
—KIRKUS REVIEWS, STARRED REVIEW

“A pull-your-heart-out-with-its-teeth novel . . . Queer kids, Black kids, biracial kids—and everyone else—will find so much of themselves in [this character].”
—CHICAGO REVIEW OF BOOKS

DON’T MISS THIS FALL’S MOST POWERFUL CONTEMPORARY YA DEBUT