ON WORK SPECIAL ISSUE

We spend one-third of our lives on the job. These books illuminate the power and meaning of work.

Featuring interviews with Gabrielle Zevin, W. David Marx, Duncan Tonatiuh, and Eric Gansworth

Plus an appreciation of Studs Terkel’s Working
“I WANT TO FIND A JOB, that’s why I’m here! Please write that down: Cara Romero wants to work.”

So announces the 56-year-old protagonist of Angie Cruz’s How Not To Drown in a Glass of Water (Flatiron, Sept. 13) as she meets with a counselor from the senior workforce program. The year is 2009, and the Dominican American matron has spent two years living on unemployment benefits (“El Obama has been very generous”) after being laid off from the factory where she worked for decades; now she is determined to find employment.

Cruz’s new novel is cleverly framed as a series of sessions with that career counselor, at which Cara narrates her colorful life story. As our reviewer notes, “Cruz intersperses the 12 sessions with documents like rent notices from Cara’s building and job application materials she must complete...all of which work together to demonstrate both the power of bureaucracy to complicate a person’s life and the ability of paperwork to tell one version of a person’s story while often hiding what makes a life truly rich.”

How Not To Drown in a Glass of Water is also a potent reflection of what work means—and doesn’t mean—for those at the margins of society, not unlike another recent novel: Didn’t Nobody Give a Shit What Happened to Carlotta (Little, Brown, Aug. 31). In James Hannaham’s hilarious and moving story, a trans woman who has been incarcerated for two decades returns to Brooklyn, and priority No. 1, according to her parole officer, is finding a job. Carlotta knows that will be easier said than done. “Can’t nobody walk out the joint after twenty-two years an grab a job on no first day out. That would be stealing!”

In this, Kirkus’ first Work Issue, we explore the power and significance of work as reflected in a range of books—fiction and nonfiction, for both adults and young readers—published this year. We speak with Gabrielle Zevin, whose hot new novel, Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow (Knopf, July 5), is about video game inventors—an unlikely subject that reveals the very special relationship that forms between creative collaborators. Elsewhere, W. David Marx, author of Status and Culture (Viking, Aug. 30), discusses the value society attaches to certain professions and how it shifts over time.

YA author Eric Gansworth tells us how he decided to make the protagonist of his upcoming novel, My Good Man (Levine Querido, Nov. 1), a journalist and how Brian reconciles that calling with his Indigenous identity while reporting on an assault on the Tuscarora reservation in New York state. Children’s author/illustrator Duncan Tonatiuh talks about an ancient form of work near and dear to all of us at Kirkus: bookmaking. Tonatiuh’s next project, A Land of Books (Abrams, Nov. 15), looks at how the craft was practiced by the ancient Mexihcah people of Central America.

Finally, be sure to listen to the episode of the Fully Booked podcast that drops Tuesday, Sept. 6, when host Megan Labrèse talks with Ellyn Gaydos, author of Pig Years (Knopf, June 14). Gaydos has been a farm worker since the age of 18; her memoir is a beautifully written meditation on the practical and philosophical dimensions of making one’s living, often precariously, off the land.
The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

Anthony Sattin tells a history of human wandering in a fascinating book brimming with literary, historical, and anthropological references. Read the starred review on p. 97.

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TRAITOR'S DANCE
Abbott, Jeff
Grand Central Publishing (448 pp.)
$28.00 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-5387-0874-3

After a six-year hiatus since The First Order (2016), Sam Capra returns to help capture a traitor in this fast-paced thriller.

Capra knows treason and betrayal on a personal level. He is a conscientious dad raising 13-year-old Daniel in Austin, alone (but for a nanny), while managing a multinational network of bars and working for the Federal Intelligence Analysis Office. Said feds ask him to keep an eye on Amanda Bolt, the daughter of Markus Bolt, a “traitorous piece of garbage” who “gutted a dozen operations at the CIA” and defected to Russia 13 years ago. Now the Russians can’t find him either. Maybe he’s back in the U.S. trying to reunite with abandoned Amanda. The Russians believe he’s stolen a map detailing President Morozov’s secret overseas financial accounts, so of course they want him dead. Bolt is trying to do a “traitor’s dance” to find a safe haven and leave no trace behind. (Of course if he knew all the steps, there would be no story.) Meanwhile and much to Capra’s shame, Lucy, his dead ex-wife and former CIA colleague, also betrayed the United States. Innocent Daniel knows nothing of mom’s culpability or dad’s secret work for the government, and Sam hopes to keep it that way. Good luck with that, because the lad is soon drawn into the mess without knowing how or why. “Daniel was worth all the pain in the world,” Capra correctly muses—his son has character and guts, and he proves to be no pushover. There’s plenty of gunplay, although nothing gory. Capra must beware the dreaded German hit woman Marianne, who even has trainee hit persons under her wing. There are a couple of curious questions of paternity that don’t quite ring true, but no matter—it’s still fast-paced entertainment.

Plenty of twists and excitement all the way to the last line.
THE IMPATIENT
Amal, Djaïli Amadou
Trans. by Emma Ramadan
HarperVia (276 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-314162-9

Two Cameroonian sisters navigate the trials of arranged marriages.
According to the customs of their Fulani Muslim household, teenage sisters Ramla and Hindou—who live in a massive compound with their father’s four wives and 28 other children—have always known their fates rest with their family’s patriarchs, eager to “finally offload their responsibilities by entrusting us, still virgins, to other men.” Though Ramla and Hindou anticipate this eventuality, it’s no less distressing when the two are unceremoniously promised to, respectively, a much older businessman and a perpetually drunk cousin. “Patience, my girls! Munyal! That is the most valuable component of marriage and of life,” the two are instructed as their weddings approach, and a highly specific marital code emerges from family’s whispers and warnings—rules range from “Do not be scatter-brained” to “Valorize him so that he will honor you.” Intelligent and strong-willed Ramla, who dreams of becoming a pharmacist, is set to marry Alhadji Issa, a respected businessman with a beautiful and possessive wife; meanwhile, Hindou dreads a union with her drink- and drug-fueled cousin, Moubarak. As the weddings approach, the sisters mourn the lives they’d envisioned for themselves; and once they’re living with their husbands, they must contend with entirely new issues of power, autonomy, and social propriety. When one girl begins to encounter abuse, she must decide between upholding familial respectability and saving herself, bringing the family’s delicate equilibrium to a crisis point. In this English-language debut—broken into sections narrated by Ramla, Hindou, and Ramla’s co-wife, Safira—Amal burrows deeply into the immensely private Fulani world of girls and women. Though the girls’ relationships with their husbands are sometimes flatly rendered, the book’s real complexity lies in its finely textured depictions of

Bloodroot; The beauty and the horrors of Jamestown 1609.

“In this engaging novel, Meier depicts, with rigorous historical authenticity and rich period details, the difficulties and dangers of Jamestown in the early 17th century...A thoughtful and historically exacting tale of a treacherous New World.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“Meier effectively juggles historical detail and sense of place, story arc, characterizations, and artistic imagination to create an atmospheric, theatrical study of humanity’s best and worst traits and the unwieldy juxtaposition between them.”

—The US Review of Books

“History and fiction blend perfectly in this vivid account of early settlement in an unforgiving new land where morals are tested and sins are committed.”

—Booklife Reviews

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FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL DVMEIERJR@GMAIL.COM • DANIELMEIERAUTHOR.COM
LIKE MANY BOOKISH PEOPLE, I LOVE reading fiction about the bookish life—novels about writers, about bookstores, about publishing. If you haven’t read Olivia Goldsmith’s *The Bestseller* (1996), please do; Kirkus’ review called it “a meaty send-up of publishing told with intelligence, wit, and shameless enthusiasm,” and I heartily agree. But sometimes you want to read about jobs that don’t involve the word *stet*, and it’s surprising how rare they are.

Bonnie Garmus’ debut novel, *Lessons in Chemistry* (Doubleday, April 5), is set in a laboratory and a television studio in the 1950s and early ’60s, but even more than the specifics of chemistry and broadcasting, the book lays bare the mechanics of bad jobs everywhere, particularly for women; the protagonist, Elizabeth Zott, has to deal with “a writhing pile of sexists, liars, rapists, dopes, and arrogant assholes,” as our review said. She’s a brilliant chemist whose boss steals her work, and when she starts a new job hosting a TV cooking program, she has another boss who keeps trying to get her to dumb it down. She meets her match in Calvin Evans, a Nobel Prize–nominated chemist, when she strides into his lab to commandeer a box of beakers she needs because she can’t procure them through the usual channels. Elizabeth sees the world in terms of chemistry, approaching everything from talking to her dog to cooking dinner like an experiment, and it’s a triumph of the book that Garmus not only illuminates the details of Elizabeth’s jobs, but shows the way a scientist’s brain works.

Everyone wants to have a best friend at work, but you wouldn’t necessarily want your actual job to be as the work wife of a temperamental Hollywood producer. That’s the position Zanne Klein finds herself in in Alison B. Hart’s debut novel, *The Work Wife* (Graydon House, July 19). As our review said, “This book flies on a magic carpet of seamless, intricate detail, much of it from work experience the author acknowledges in an afterword. Whether we’re dropping in on [the director’s actual wife] with her glam squad or watching in wonder as headset-wearing assistants track the movements of their bosses like world leaders, there’s never a moment’s slip in authenticity or momentum.”

Stacey D’Erasmo’s *The Complicities* (Algonquin, Sept. 20) introduces Suzanne, a middle-aged Boston woman whose husband is in jail, a minor-league Bernie Madoff, as she tries to figure out how to live the rest of her life. Perhaps surprisingly, her answer is to move to a working-class Cape Cod town and teach herself to be a massage therapist. When she finishes work on her first client, Suzanne is exhilarated: “For the first time in my life, I knew exactly what I was doing. I had never felt so competent.” Soon, a whale has beached not far from her rented house, and Suzanne joins the volunteer effort to try to keep it alive, another kind of physical labor.

In *Sinking Bell* (Graywolf, Sept. 27), a debut collection of short stories set around Flagstaff, Arizona, Bojan Louis “writes of electricians and day laborers, custodians and aspiring writers, many of them Navajo, their lives constrained by poor pay and bad bosses, parole agreements and addiction, cultural expectations and racism,” according to our review. “The unrelenting grind of work, sometimes absent from fiction, takes center stage here, as Louis’ characters dig holes, fix engines, mop hallways, plaster walls, and taxi people around. Though the circumstances are often exploitative, this labor is also so closely described that Louis imbues it with beauty and worth—bestowing dignity on his characters.”

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
relationships between women—mother and daughter, co-wives, sisters—full of jealousy, compassion, and emotional energy. Though it never takes any particularly original twists or turns, its excavation of characters’ emotional states and of a specific marital culture is engaging.

Revealing if sometimes predictable.

THE MAGIC KINGDOM
Banks, Russell
Knopf (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-593-53515-8

An old man records key moments in his early life, centered on the betrayal that defined his later years.

Banks’ previous novel, Foregone (2021), had a dying filmmaker trying to set his life’s record straight as former students videotape him for a tribute. In the new work, his main character, 81-year-old Harley Mann, is recalling his adolescence, when he made a life-changing choice. His is the voice behind a box of audiotapes found in a library basement and here being “edited and shaped...into a more or less coherent narrative” by Russell Banks, according to the foreword. Early in the narrative, Harley’s recently widowed mother moves her four boys in 1902 to the New Bethany Shaker community on 7,000 acres in Florida. It’s a small, close-knit group defined by hard work, honesty, equal rights for women, and celibacy. Harley finds a mentor in the group’s male leader, Elder John, and falls in love with Sadie Pratt, a consumptive young woman who comes to live in the community when her nearby sanitarium closes. While New Bethany seems like an idyllic, even magical, place, there’s also discord and envy, natural calamities, and foreshadowing of a “national scandal” for the community. After a long buildup, the scandal itself fills some 70 pages of solid crime and courtroom drama. Harley went on to work in Florida real estate, including buying the 7,000 acres of New Bethany, which he eventually sold, in possibly questionable deals, to Walt Disney. Behind any latter-day Eden or utopia or Magic Kingdom lurks some unoriginal sins. That’s one of several themes at work here, but the core is the emotional mirror of memory, a construct of events and their recall, or, for a writer wondering how he will be remembered, a construct of his books and readers, for whom Banks may well be a prized piece of gray matter.

A multilayered tale of innocence and guilt from a gifted storyteller.

SMALL GAME
Braverman, Blair
Ecco/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-06-306617-5

Contestants on a survival reality show face unforeseen challenges.

Like her main character, Braverman used to work for an adventure camping outfit, described in her debut memoir, Welcome to the Goddamn Ice Cube (2016), and her wilderness know-how is put to good use in her first novel. Mara is pretty sure she has what it takes to make it through six weeks in the great outdoors—she grew up off the grid, she teaches survival skills, she lives in a dilapidated trailer deep in the woods—and the $100,000 purse waiting at the end of the season is just what she needs to leave her boyfriend and start fresh. She’s one of five people cast in Civilization, dropped by helicopter into a lake in the middle of the wilderness—they...
don’t know where—wearing clothes that could be described as “fast-fashion prehistoric, canvas tunics and matching shorts, all dyed a dusty brown. And sandals made of thin leather, so they had to walk delicately, toe first, like girls playing fairies. The idea was that they’d find one another in the wilderness, this group of strangers, and over the course of six weeks would be tasked with building a new kind of community, something pure and sustainable and right.” But before community, there’s food, shelter, warmth, and wild animals to worry about—along with some unexpected elements thrown into the mix by the producer, who’s a real jerk, and the crew, one of whom is sweet on Mara. Mara is willing to play that game, for what it’s worth, but finds herself intensely drawn to Ashley, the only other woman in the group, clearly chosen for her magazine-worthy looks rather than any scoutworthy aptitude. Braverman does a great job of developing the characters, building suspense and raising the stakes, but leaves the reader unhappily perplexed about some critical matters.

A propulsive read marred by unanswered questions.

THE STRANGE INHERITANCE OF LEAH FERN
Chin, Rita Zoey
Melville House (400 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-612-19986-3

An unexpected inheritance leads a young woman on a trip across the U.S. and Canada.

Leah Fern and her magician mother, Jeannie Starr, were part of the Blazing Calyx Carnival up until her mother left her with a friend and never returned. Fifteen years later, on her 21st birthday, Leah feels “penned in by the impenetrable wires of solitude, weighted by the kind of shapeless helplessness only the abandoned know,” and has decided to end her life. A knock interrupts her plans, however, and she receives news that her neighbor Essie East has died and left her an inheritance. After some initial reluctance due to not knowing the woman well, Leah is given a box...
containing a letter, a check, and an obelisk-shaped urn inlaid with gemstones containing Essie’s ashes. The letter explains that Essie knew Leah’s mother and that if Leah follows her instructions to scatter her ashes, more information about her mother will be revealed. The letter also has the address for the post office where she’ll find the next letter. With each letter Leah learns more about her mother and Essie’s life. Essie describes how she befriended four kindred spirits at an artists’ colony, and they decided to perform nine full moon ceremonies across North America together—the same route Leah discovers she is following to scatter Essie’s ashes. Though this plot feels familiar, there is much to admire about the author’s glittering imagination. Descriptive writing is both a strength and a weakness for Chin. The pacing is unbalanced because she spends too much time on vivid descriptions of very minor things. While beautiful, these meandering moments often untether the plot, which eventually becomes hard to recover. Nevertheless, traveling with Leah Fern and seeing the world through the eyes of an empath are enjoyable. And Chin’s final piece of insight—“What we know is that even the most lost people can find their way”—reverberates through the pages.

Glowing moments of wisdom but imperfect prose.

THE HOLLOW KIND
Davidson, Andy
MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (448 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-374-53856-9

A woman fleeing an abusive relationship carries her 11-year-old son to an even more dangerous place: home. Greed, trespass, revenge, and obsession provide the emotional palette for this breathless, wide-eyed horror fable that chronicles the unforgivable trespasses that cost multiple generations their souls. The prime narrative finds Nellie Gardiner in 1989 nursing wounds both fresh and long calloused as she shepherds her son, Max, to Georgia, well away from her abusive husband, Wade Gardner, an academic with an ill temper. In the same place circa 1917, Nellie’s grandfather August Redfern and his wife, Euphemia, launch a turpentine enterprise in the southern wilds and soon bear twins Charlie and Hank—Hank is Nellie’s father. But Redfern soon learns that the land he’s defiling in the name of profits demands more sacrifice than mere greed can satisfy. Settling into her grandfather’s creepy Gothic mansion, Nellie is soon confronted by local snake oil salesman Lonnie Baxter, who considers her property his birthright. But while a reunion with a newly sober Hank leads to an uneasy détente between father and daughter, Nellie and Max are also menaced by unpredictable phantoms, including the specter of a young girl, a dead bear who won’t seem to stay put, and the resurrected Dr. Gardner. Let’s face it, if you hang out in dusty old estates populated by long-kept secrets, guilt, remorse, and madness, something “squelching wetly,” as Stranger Things would put it, is bound to come slithering out of a hole. This version of the hot, wet South isn’t a far stretch from Daniel Woodrell’s twig-snap rustic dread but is a closer cousin to the wetwork terror of John Hornor Jacobs or Joe Hill. The way Davidson deftly pirouettes his way between bated-breath anticipation and a denouement that owes as much to John Carpenter as H.P. Lovecraft is impressive, especially given a staccato storytelling style that, much like a good horror movie, conceals as much as it reveals.

A folksy novel about bad country people, tentacles and all.

“Evocative and compelling. This novel draws you into the lives of those unborn 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
Imagination meets biography in this novel about Cary Grant.

Young Archibald Alec Leach grows up a poor young lad in Bristol, England, with a father who drinks too much and a mother who suddenly and permanently disappears. He joins the Pender Troupe at age 14, working stage lights at the Hippodrome. When he comes to America, he quickly earns money by stilt walking and running a brief scam. Throughout much of the story the narrator calls him the Acrobat, and Leach himself may not know who he really is. He’s incredibly handsome and fit for the movies. “The stage had only edged him up by inches,” the narrator writes, “but the movies paintbrushed him across the sky.” With his cleft chin and aren’t-you-glad-I’m-here smile, he is an instant hit on the big screen. There are those nasty rumors, of course, spawned by “the execrable” gossip columnist Hedda Hopper. What’s this about him living with a man? Doesn’t he like women? So on the advice of a producer, he finds a wife so they don’t think he’s “queer,” but she doesn’t stay around long, and he eventually marries five times, with multiple extramarital tumbles in between. He likes women, all right, and men aren’t so bad either. The story moves back and forth in time, often with the aid of a psychiatrist’s couch and prescribed LSD, a “wonderful medication.” So who is this man, balanced on stilts and tumbling through life, landing on his feet, and dazzling with his grin? It can’t be Archibald Leach—that name falls flat. How about Cary Lockwood? Nah, too many syllables. How about Cary Grant? Yes, that will do. But his persona is a mask covering the insecurities and pain of his youth; he could easily have become like his hard-drinking father who pressed clothes for a living. Grant’s life is not the happily-ever-after film where hero and heroine kiss as the credits roll. Instead he is alone and frightened, desperate to be seen, to be heard, to be loved. On a journey with no destination, the Acrobat tumbles on.

A beautifully imagined, sympathetic portrait of a flawed icon.
“A gentle, funny, heartbreaking indictment of the naïve excesses of the 1960s.”

TOAD

Dunn, Katherine
MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (352 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-374-60232-1


Dunn’s magnum opus—the tale of a family of carnival freaks—is a true cult classic, but the year it was published, it was also a finalist for the thoroughly mainstream National Book Award. Geek Love has never been out of print, and it continues to be a solid backlist performer. Few authors with one bestseller get an obituary in the New York Times, but Dunn achieved that distinction in 2016. She’s an author who wrote a book about outsiders who has been embraced by insiders. This newly published novel suggests that this counterculture hero had a complicated relationship with the counterculture of her youth. The narrator is Sally Gunnar, a woman who has chosen to live alone except for the goldfish she keeps in a jar on her kitchen table, the toad that lives in her yard, and the handful of visitors she invites into her house. When her sister-in-law asks, “Remember Sam and Carlotta? Whatever became of them?” Sally drifts back to Portland in the 1960s. A student at a small liberal arts school—Dunn attended Reed—Sam is, in Sally’s words, a “spunky little character with an intellectual air.” He’s also a jerk. In his desire to outgrow his middle-class New York upbringing, Sam tries on a variety of names and ethnicities. He falls in love with Carlotta, an ethereal hippy who seems to find him as profound as he finds himself. Together with a narcissistic psychology student named Rennel, these misfits form something close to a family. Sally is part of this unit—she even starts taking classes at their fancy college—but she never loses an outsider’s perspective. She recognizes that her friends are ridiculous, and she loves them anyway. As the narrative moves back and forth in time, it takes a dark turn. Sam and Carlotta’s belief that they are equipped to live off the land leads to tragedy. Sally’s self-deprecation—which at first seems like her viewing herself with the same irony with which she regards her friends—turns out to be a mask for clinical depression. But Sally endures to find a fragile peace, carefully tended day by day.

A gentle, funny, heartbreaking indictment of the naïve excesses of the 1960s and the testament of a woman who survived them.

MARIGOLD AND ROSE

A Fiction

Glück, Louise
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (64 pp.)
$18.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-374-60758-6

An unusual offering from a celebrated poet.

Poet Laureate of the United States in 2003-2004 and winner of the 2020 Nobel Prize in literature, Glück is known for—among other things—choosing her words with exquisite care. She uses everyday language to create a background for an unexpected word, and she uses context to give everyday language unexpected weight. In her latest work, she explores the acquisition of language and how it shapes our realities. Marigold and Rose are babies. They are also twins. The limits of their world would be entirely defined by Mother, Father, and Grandmother if Marigold didn’t like to read. Rose is not, herself, very interested...
in books, but she has a ready retort for the narrator who says, “Marigold was still reading. Of course she wasn’t reading; neither of the twins could read; they were babies. But we have inner lives, Rose thought.” In addition to being an avid reader—even though she obviously can’t read—Marigold is also a writer. “Marigold was writing a book. That she couldn’t read was an impediment. Nevertheless, the book was forming in her head. The words would come later.” Like all babies, Marigold and Rose understand more than they can easily express, and the author imbues her protagonists with a rationalism that feels as true as it is funny. Glück calls this new book “a fiction,” and that is a precisely vague choice. It’s too short to be a novel and too long to be a short story. The word novella tends to suggest plot, which this text lacks. It’s tempting to suggest that it’s a fable, and it’s true that some readers might find a straightforward meaning in how Glück differentiates her characters. Rose—the sociable one, the pretty one—is the “good baby.” Marigold turns to books because—like animals—they don’t judge her. But life is weird. Words are magic. And the moral of the story is seldom as simple as it might seem.

Wise, funny, and wonderfully odd.

**ACT OF OBLIVION**

*Harris, Robert*

Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)

$28.99 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-0-06-324-800-7

This gripping historical thriller reimagines the manhunt of two killers of an English king.

In 1660, two fugitives arrive in New England. Years earlier, they had helped plot the trial and execution of King Charles I on charges of high treason. Oliver Cromwell had subsequently taken power as Lord Protector, but now he and most of the regicides have been tracked down and executed, and a new king is on the throne. The remaining fugitives are Col. Edward Whalley and his son-in-law Col. William Goffe, and Richard Nayler’s job is to hunt them down. Nayler, says the author, is the only important fictional character in the book, and his obsession with the hunt drives the story. This is an era when all misfortune is put down to God’s will, and folks clearly believe in a vengeful creator. England suffers plague, war with the Dutch, famine, and a horrible fire in London almost contemporaneously—surely they are the four horsemen foretold in the book of Revelation. Condemned prisoners who are lucky are merely beheaded—the unlucky are subjected to deaths so ghastly that it takes 11 lines to describe. Think red-hot tongs. And if you think escaping to America is easy, remember that red worms infest the ship’s biscuits—and just try to ignore the slop and slime and stink you’ll be slipping and sliding in. Nayler is relentless in tracking down the traitors to his beloved king—are they still in England? In France? In New England? He is clever in finding clues that finally point him in the right direction. Meanwhile, Whalley and Goffe are separated from their families across the ocean. Will they ever be able to see them again? Or will Nayler find both men and kill them? The deeply researched story is the author’s brilliant reimagining of real historical events, with sympathetic characters and a compelling plot.

Thoroughly enjoyable with some cringeworthy descriptions. Readers will not pine for days of yore.

**ENDLESS SUMMER**

*Hilderbrand, Elin*

Little, Brown (320 pp.)

$29.00 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-316-46091-0

Presquels, sequels, and bonus tracks for favorite Hilderbrand novels.

One wonders what the author of 28 novels, sometimes appearing at the rate of two per year, does in her spare time. It turns out she writes what might almost be called Elin Hilderbrand fan fiction, creating short stories piggybacking off already-developed characters.
Painting Light in Polio’s Shadow: One Artist’s Struggles
Sharon White Richardson
This memoir reveals how the author met challenges to her right-handed painting abilities as post-polio syndrome diminished her muscle strength and control, forcing her to paint left-handed.
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The Living Art of Chi Kung
Lizzie Slowe
The Living Art of Chi Kung is an accessible manual taking the reader through how, what and why to practise Chi Kung. Essential guide for mental and emotional health empowerment.
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Janet Stuart
The animal children of Cloverville face a possible disaster when Penny forgets to bring eggs to paint. Easter is the very next day! How can this situation be saved?
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Real Authors, Real Impact
For the protagonists of Zevin’s *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow*, video games are both work and pleasure

BY LAURIE MUCHNICK

Sadie Green, Sam Masur, and Marx Watanabe live to work, and their work is games. In Gabrielle Zevin’s immersive new novel, *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* (Knopf, July 5), these three come together as undergraduates in a frenzy of creativity to produce a wildly successful video game—or, rather, Sadie and Sam create the game, and Marx, their producer, creates the atmosphere that lets his two friends blossom. Zevin gets deep into the details of her characters’ work, everything from creating a storyline for their first game to deciding who should go on the road to promote it to making compromises over what to do next. Zevin recently spoke to us by Zoom from her home in Los Angeles; our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

I love books about work, and there aren’t that many of them.

One of my favorite novels of all time is *And Then We Came to the End* [by Joshua Ferris], which is a perfect novel about work. It captures the sort of family one has in work that isn’t actually a family. Even terms like *work wife* fascinate me, the idea of someone like a spouse that you might spend more hours with every day than your actual spouse, that you do these really intimate things with.

As somebody who’s published many books over the last 17 years, I’ve had a lot of work wives—they’re editors. I’m not somebody who came from a writers’ program, not somebody who shares work, so when I dig into it with an editor, that’s as intimate as I can get. So that’s something I wanted to write about. And Marx represents for me all the people whose names are not on the front cover of a book. I think when you’re starting out, you don’t realize how many people there are between you and the reader. I wanted to write about that, about how much of the creative process is really, really creative and how much of it is also business and working with all these people.

For the characters in your book, video games are both their work and their pleasure.

I always say that publishing my first novel was a calamity, because it changes your relationship to writing, it changes your relationship to books. I wouldn’t be a good writer if I didn’t acknowledge that change had occurred and, over the years, learned to integrate the realities of commerce into the creative act of writing. The first time you publish a book, that’s when you become aware, hey, there are some books in stores that are sitting on tables, and yours is not one of them. When go I into bookstores, it’s not quite the pure pleasure it was. After a while, that fades, but for me, one of the results was doing things other than reading, because reading could not be my sole activity and comfort all the time. I became much more into games, art, food, life, in certain ways. I think it made me a more rounded person, as crazy as that is, to be published when I was quite young.

I’m not a gamer, and I love this book. Is there anything you’d like nongamers to know going into it or to take away from it?
Secretly, I think everyone’s a gamer. If you’re using Facebook, if you’re using Instagram, you’re playing a game. It’s not necessarily a good game, and it has no ending, but it has currency, it has a reward system, so I think everyone understands games on some level. And I think it’s natural for humans to play, whether they’re playing video games or not. I think there are a lot of productive things that can happen from play.

I think the thing people don’t understand about gaming is that games are another form of storytelling. They’re not as foreign and different as I think people understand them to be. I think games are fascinating because they sit at the intersection of art and technology, and I would argue that no matter what you do, you’re going to bump up against tech, and games end up being a way to look at that.

I think it’s really funny, just as an aside—I’ve never written a book where so many people felt the need to state their relationship to the subject at the head of everything. Nobody reads All the Light We Cannot See and says, “I was not in World War II.”

It feels to me like people are trying to sell your book for you, telling other people they don’t have to be gamers to love the book.

It’s a very empathetic act; it’s like they’re saying, “I know why you might not like this, but I want to explain it to you.” It’s really interesting, though, I see it with almost every single person that writes anything about the book, from Tom Bissell in the New York Times to Ron Charles in the Washington Post—two men with entirely different relationships to games, by the way—to just a person writing on Goodreads. And the funny thing is, the book is not about video games, it’s about people who make things. And I think if people like the book, one of the reasons is because many of us do make things and have put our work out for consumption and review these days.

What kind of research did you do for the book?
Part of the fun of being a novelist is that at a certain point, the well that is you is only so deep, and so I get to try out other professions and imagine what they might be like. Obviously, I’m not a video game designer, but my dad was a computer programmer, and both my parents worked at IBM for a combined 60 years or something. So I was raised in a tech household, and I have a good grasp of computer things in general. The funny thing is, I published my last book in 2017, so it’s five years between these two novels. And I had made—it’s inelegant to talk about money, but I had made enough where I didn’t have to write quite as quickly, and that was a big advantage. What I wanted to do was take on a subject that felt like a big canvas, and I wanted to use the fact that I had more time to my advantage. So the way I did research was just by reading everything I could on the subject, watching everything I could on the subject, and also, again, 40 years of game play and interest in this subject.

Who are some writers who’ve influenced you?
There are so many. One book that I found myself drawn to when I was writing was The Age of Innocence, because of the way Wharton writes third person. I’ve found over the years that it’s quite easy to get to a voicey first person, there are a lot more tools you can use, but I find it quite challenging to get to a true, very voicey third person, so that’s a book I returned to over and over.

A book that I loved when I was young, probably the first book that made me think, I want to write literary fiction, is Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison. That, alongside Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, were two books that, when I was young, opened up the possibilities of books for me. And in the last couple of years, we’ve seen some really big books by women. I’m thinking of Meg Wolitzer’s The Interestings, or either of Hanya Yanagihara’s books, or Pachinko, or The Goldfinch, or even Elena Ferrante. And I remember reading all of those books with a huge sense of jealousy—and jealousy, when I’m reading, is an emotion that I find positive because it tells me this is something I want for myself. When I read those books, what I wanted for myself was a big canvas. I want it to be the Jackson Pollock in the room.

Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow received a starred review in the May 1, 2022, issue.
and plots. Brief introductions to each of the nine stories presented in this collection explain which book it goes with and the circumstances of its creation (most were digital or limited-edition publications; three were unpublished until now).

Though it certainly would be best to read each story with its progenitor, as suggested, some can also work on their own. Both “The Surfing Lesson” (which goes with Beautiful Day) and “The Tailgate” (The Matchmaker) have the tight narrative focus and limited character set that make the short form shine. Less successful are the add-on stories “Summer of ’79” and “Summer of ’89,” because if you haven’t come fresh from Summer of ’69, the large, multigenerational cast and intricate tapestry of the backstories are a little challenging. Fans of Golden Girl, in which Nantucket novelist Vivi Howe dies in the first chapter, will be pleased to see her resurrected here in “The Workshop.” Vivi’s experiences at the Bread Loaf Writer’s Conference in Vermont are based on Hilderbrand’s famously terrible time at the University of Iowa graduate writing program. Also fun is “Barbie’s Wedding,” in which realtor Fast Eddie Pancik’s little sister, a bit player from The Rumor, marries the competition, shaking off any latent bad jujù from the prostitution ring she helped run.

A generous gift to the fans.

**MOTHERTHING**
Hogarth, Ainslie
Vintage (288 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-593-46702-2

She’s dead but she still won’t leave: a mother-in-law horror story.

Abby and Ralph Lamb were just a sweet, ordinary couple getting ready to start a family when Ralph’s mother, Laura, turned their world into a living hell, first by insisting they move in with her, then by slitting her wrists in the basement. Even the resources Ralph downloaded from the Borderline Parent website can’t help them with the version of Laura they have to deal with now—a vengeful ghost, a rampaging motherthing. Abby knows all too well about motherthings, having read the research on orphaned lab monkeys who need maternal affection so badly that a rolled-up pair of socks can do the trick and having resolved for herself that her worthless fuckhole of a parent was busy paying attention to “Todd or Doug or Randy.” Though Abby tried desperately to please her, Laura is as cruel in death as she was in life, and now the usually adoring Ralph is withdrawing into his own fog of hallucinatory despair. The only person who’s still giving Laura any love at all is Mrs. Bondy, a nonverbal patient at the nursing home where she works—and if Mrs. Bondy’s horrible daughter goes through with her plan to move her to a different facility, Abby will just have to kill her and serve Janet à la king for dinner. Hogarth’s way with words enlivens every page of this psycho romp, whether describing its unlikely hero, Cud, “a fourteen-year-old Pomeranian, which hung from her hip like a colostomy bag and always had a look on his face like you’d forgotten to wish him a happy birthday,” or a drawer full of plastic bags: “when one is pulled, they must sing the crackling songs of their ancestors.” Her fearlessness and utter lack of inhibition animate the desperate longing and bitter trauma at the heart of this ghost story, administered with a steady drip of comic relief.

Profane, insane, hilarious, disgusting—and unexpectedly moving.
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JANE GIABATTARI, NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE

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GODMERSHAM PARK
A Novel of the Austen Family
Hornby, Gill
Pegasus Books (416 pp.)
$23.50 | Nov 1, 2022
978-1-63936-258-5

This pastiche, peopled with actual historical figures, follows the trials of a new governess whose charge is Fanny Austen, the eldest daughter of Edward, Jane’s wealthy brother.

It’s 1804, and Anne Sharp has just arrived at Godmersham Park, a fine country house in Kent, to take up her first paid position, working for the Austens. Anne is absolutely alone: Her mother has recently died, and her largely absent father has inexplicably cast her adrift with an inadequate stipend. Although attractive, at 31, Anne is viewed as a spinster, which is fine by her since she has “no intention of marrying any man, ever.” But, as neither servant nor “family,” she’s left without a place in the social order. Struggling to adapt to these strange and lonely circumstances, and to crippling nighttime migraines, Anne finds a couple of allies: Mr. Whitfield, the local vicar; and another Austen brother, the charismatic Henry, who visits the house often and charms all but is married. Hornby’s long, deft narrative is not her first trip into Austen territory, following Miss Austen (2020). Her style takes its cue from Austen's irony and tone, but her pacing is loose, occasionally attending to the plot hooks of Anne’s mysterious father and Henry's ceaseless flirtations yet devoting more attention to life at Godmersham—the seasons, the ups and downs of life above- and belowstairs, Anne’s popularity and state of mind. When Jane herself arrives for a visit, new vistas open up as the two women become close friends. Later, time spent with Jane and the family on the coast—“to enjoy long weeks of freedom, among friends, at the seaside? Surely, this could not be real?”—helps Anne own herself as a “passionate woman, with her liberal ideas and disdain of convention.” There is no tidy conclusion. Anne will spend only two years of a long life at Godmersham Park, but her love and admiration for Jane will remain constant.

Neither biography nor full-formed fiction, this lengthy factual animation works best as an immersive excursion to Austenland.

THEY’RE GOING TO LOVE YOU
Howrey, Meg
Doubleday (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov 15, 2022
978-0-385-54877-9

With her father dying, a choreographer must face the betrayal that caused their estrangement nearly two decades earlier.

Carlisle Martin is in her early 40s, scratching out an uncertain living as a choreographer in Los Angeles. (“I can’t, at my age, still be becoming a person, can I?” Carlisle wonders.) One day, an unexpected call comes from James, her father’s partner. James tells Carlisle that her father, Robert, does not have long to live. Despite the fact that Carlisle has been estranged from both men for nearly 19 years, she feels compelled to visit their Bank Street apartment in Greenwich Village to say goodbye. Bank Street plays an outsized role in Carlisle’s imagination. She spent summers there in the 1980s and ’90s, ensconced in the world of ballet—where Robert, James, and her mother were fixtures in the 1950s and ’60s—and witnessing the impact of the AIDS epidemic on James and Robert’s large circle of friends. But a shocking turn of events when Carlisle is 24 changes her relationship not just with Robert and James, but with her own dreams and ambitions to be a dancer and with her sense of how her life will unfold. Howrey goes back and forth between Carlisle’s present and her past, risking tear-jerking sentiment but landing, like a flawless jeté, on the side of pitch-perfect poignancy. Howrey, a former dancer who joined the Joffrey Ballet when she was just a teenager, writes as
movingly about the world of dance as any living author. Even better is her incisive and effortless writing about relationships—between parent and child, between queer lovers—in all their complex mess and beauty. “Agony is ordinary,” thinks Carlisle—this novel is anything but.

Production companies take note: We need a fully choreographed miniseries on a major streaming service ASAP.

THE ISLANDS
Irving, Dionne
Catapult (272 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-64622-066-3

An expansive collection of stories chronicling the Jamaican diaspora.

In this assured collection, Canadian writer Irving follows the threads of colonialism, exile, and immigration throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. “Canal” connects Jamaica, Panama, postwar Germany, and Canada through the figure of a girl forced to flee as a result of American intervention. In “The Gifts,” the book’s moving penultimate installment, a young woman named Peaches moves to “Foreign” (England) to find work and winds up serving as both maid and mistress in the same family. Irving’s writing is most effective when she homes in on a smaller domestic scene—for instance, the mismatched married couple in “The Cape” is divided by age and a sudden injury—but the international range and scope of her collection give it breadth and freshness. Despite the book’s wide range of locales, Irving’s writing of place always feels assured. Her prose is smooth and unfussy despite occasional clunky sentences (“When he gets home she will be broken. Not by him, but in spite of him”). Although the collection is enjoyable, Irving’s construction of narrative can sometimes feel predictable: In several stories, characters are first presented one way—racist hicks; an earnest but clueless White mother; a long-lost parent—only for Irving to introduce a shift in perspective that encourages the reader not to judge so hastily. But a careful reader (or

IF YOU LIVE FOREVER, WHAT DO YOU FEAR?

“Smith tells a fast-paced story with occasional Christian elements, populated by well-developed, three-dimensional characters. Exciting action scenes and unexpected twists...”

“An often engaging adventure with paranormal elements.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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a frequent reader of short story collections) will soon become familiar with this convention, and instead of leading to a feeling of real enlightenment, the stories will feel tired. Irving is at her best in odd, harsh moments: a gruesome fireworks injury in “The Cape”; an estranged father stealing a pig for his daughter in “Weaving.”

A first collection that hints at bigger things to come.

FOSTER
Keegan, Claire
Grove Press (96 pp.)
$20.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-8021-6014-0

A modern Irish classic, first published in 2010, finally makes its way to America. At the beginning of this pristine novella, a young, unnamed girl is sent to stay with childless relatives at their farm in County Wexford, Ireland, for the summer. Her parents have temporarily disposed of her due to her mother’s latest pregnancy and the strain of feeding their large family. Despite having been unceremoniously abandoned with relatives she barely knows, Keegan’s narrator quickly warms to Mr. and Mrs. Kinsella and blossoms under their care. While her father views her as little more than a burden and a potential tool—“She’ll ate,” he tells the Kinsellas, “but ye can work her”—and her mother is eager to get rid of her, her foster parents not only bathe, clothe, and feed her, but also provide her with enough care and attention to expand her conception of what family and love can be. Sadly, though, her golden summer cannot last forever. Like all of Keegan’s work, including last year’s Booker Prize–longlisted Small Things Like These, this novella is both concise and gut-wrenching. Her superficially simple prose persuasively conveys a child’s sometimes-innocent but always careful and insightful observations of the world. Keegan suggests that children see and understand more than adults might like to think without turning her narrator into a miniature grown-up. “Walking back along the path and through the fields, holding her hand, I feel...
I have her balanced,” the narrator reflects, thinking of Mrs. Kinsella. “I try to remember another time when I felt like this and am sad because I can’t remember a time, and happy, too, because I cannot.” The novella crescendos in a final scene that will inspire many to call their fathers—once they’ve finished weeping.

A heartbreaking but deeply humane story about parents and children.

**TRESPASSES**
*Kennedy, Louise*  
Riverhead (304 pp.)  
$27.00 | Nov. 1, 2022  
978-0-593-54089-3

A clandestine affair unfolds with tragic inevitability during the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

Cushla Lavery, in her 20s, lives with her mother on the outskirts of the battleground that was Belfast in the 1970s. Her days are spent teaching young children in a Catholic school, and her evenings are spent tending to her mother’s alcohol-fueled and increasingly erratic behavior as well as helping out in the family’s pub. An encounter with Michael Agnew, an older, married, Protestant—three strikes in Cushla’s world!—barrister who frequents the bar, leads her to a romantic entanglement with unplanned repercussions. Cushla is also drawn into the embattled and miserable family circumstances of spirited Davy, one of her beloved students. Davy’s parents (and by unfortunate extension, their children) are almost universally loathed due to their mixed Protestant-Catholic union. Cushla’s efforts to provide aid and comfort to them after Davy’s father is the victim of a savage partisan attack also lead to unintended, devastating consequences. Kennedy’s debut novel captures the odd ability of war-zone residents to be simultaneously adrenalized by and resigned to their environment. She also, nonchalantly, delivers the mundane details of generations of terrorism gone amok: The fire brigade may be warned in advance of a fire bombing, because what is the use of destroying a perfectly good house when sending a warning message to its residents? The incremental and corrosive effects of constant violence, and the vigilance required in its face, are keenly felt by Kennedy’s characters as she explores the roles of violence and chance in their complicated lives in a circumstance where it’s “not about what you do” but whether you’re one of “us” or one of “them.”

Kennedy’s characters are born and live under dark stars; she illuminates the unescapable harms that occur in that darkness.

**THE NIGHT SHIP**  
*Kidd, Jess*  
Atria (400 pp.)  
$28.00 | Oct. 4, 2022  
978-1-9821-8081-2

The lives of two 9-year-olds—one in 1628 and the other in 1989—intersect across time in this moving examination of the real-life wreck of the Batavia.

Mayken sets sail from Haarlem with her nursemaid, Imke, to join a father she’s never met following her mother’s untimely death. The ship they book passage on is loaded with riches and named for their destination: Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies. Lonely and precocious, Mayken quickly becomes fascinated by the parts of the ship hidden from rich passengers, which she dubbs “the Below World.” She begins a secret, second life as the cabin boy Obbe, befriending a soldier, a sailor, a kitchen boy, and the ship’s barber-surgeon while trying to hunt down the
eel-like monster Ballebak, whom she believes is making Imke sick. Almost four centuries later, the newly orphaned Gil moves to Beacon Island, the fishing community off the coast of Australia where his grandmother Joss lives and the archaeological site of the Batavia shipwreck. Gil’s unusual upbringing has left him alienated from his peers, but, like Mayken, his kindness slowly earns him adult friends and protectors, and his curiosity drives him to uncover the island’s secrets. Kidd shows a keen understanding of how thin the boundary between the magic and the mundane is for children and treats their understanding of the world with seriousness and compassion. Her prose has an arresting simplicity that evokes fairy tales, and the echoes between Mayken’s and Gil’s experiences are treats for the reader to discover.

An ambitious, melancholy work of historical fiction that offers two wondrous young protagonists for the price of one.

BARON BAGGE
Lernet-Holenia, Alexander
Trans. by Richard Winston & Clara Winston
New Directions (80 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-8112-3445-0

A World War I soldier navigates a war zone, and more otherworldly spaces, in this reissued modernist novella.

This eerie, affecting tale, first published in German in 1935 and published in English translation a year later, is narrated by the title character, a lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian army fighting off Russians near the Carpathian Mountains in 1915. The opening pages exhibit the familiar tropes of a war story—spies hanged from a tree, brutal (but eventually successful) combat with the Russians, internal squabbles among his fellow commissioned officers. (The narrator fumes at a pair of colleagues who seem to share a private joke about him.) But soon the plot takes on a peculiar, more surrealistic cast, even while the prose remains firmly realistic. The narrator and a young woman become enchanted with each other, to the point of rushing to marriage; the dreaded Russian forces are apparently not just defeated, but vanished; the locals in the town where the soldiers are billeted are blithe in the face of threats, even “throwing money by the handfuls out of the window.” Something’s off, and readers of Ambrose Bierce’s story “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” may have a good sense of what. But much as in his novel Count Luna, published the same year (also recently reissued), Lernet-Holenia has a knack for capturing the melancholic, paranoid mood that pollutes minds in wartime. This reissued edition includes a brief, admiring foreword by Patti Smith and a handful of letters between the author and fellow Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig, who writes that it is “positively magical the way dream and reality glide seamlessly into one another.” Fog-of-war tales are always abundant, but this one conjures a unique spell. An unsettling tale of war trauma, cleanly and uniquely told.

HEAT 2
Mann, Michael & Meg Gardiner
Morrow/HarperCollins (480 pp.)
$24.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-06-265331-4

A combination prequel and sequel to the much-admired Mann film that brought together Robert De Niro and Al Pacino. The movie climaxed in 1995, with Pacino’s intense LA cop, Vincent Hanna, shooting and killing De Niro’s fatalistic bank thief Neil McCauley, his nemesis and alter ego. In the “before” sections of the novel, set in 1988, Hanna pursues a sadistic home-invading gang of killers and rapists while McCauley plans the heist of millions in cartel money from a truck bound for Mexico. Following McCauley’s death and a massive shootout,
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his wounded right-hand man, Chris Shiherlis (the Val Kilmer character), escapes to South America, where he goes to work for a Taiwanese Paraguayan crime boss. Women figure in the plots: McCauley has an affair in Mexico with Elisa, a “seventh-generation smuggler,” and Chris sleeps with the crime boss’s daughter, Ana, even as he pines for his estranged wife and son. Minus the film’s psychological mano a mano between Hanna and McCauley, this nearly 500-page novel, Mann’s first, lacks a compelling center. And in Chris, it lacks a compelling protagonist—once a sidekick, always a sidekick. Hanna’s fierce efforts to save Elisa’s daughter from a mad killer 12 years after her single mother was killed energize the book, leading to an explosive highway chase. But with its unwieldy structure, the novel keeps getting in its own way. And despite the collaboration of seasoned pro Gardiner, the descriptive writing is weak: “Looking into his vacant blue eyes is like staring into the black ocean at night.” Ultimately, Mann has written not a self-contained novel, but a novelization of the film sequel the 79-year-old director envisions.

A book hardcore fans of Mann’s film may enjoy but others will dismiss as unneeded.

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**GILDED MOUNTAIN**

*Manning, Kate*

*Scribner (464 pp.)

$28.00 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-982160-94-4

Everything old is (unfortunately) new again.

Echoes of current social problems resonate throughout Manning’s extensively researched saga of a young woman’s life in a Colorado mining town at the turn of the 20th century. Teenage Sylvie Pelletier’s family is forced to relocate from Vermont to Colorado after her father runs afoul of anti-union sentiments at his marble quarrying job. Naïvely, Sylvie looks forward to a more unfettered existence in Colorado, a thought which is quashed almost from the outset of her life there. The economic realities of working-class life in a company town are harsh, and winters in that setting are almost unendurable. After finishing school, Sylvie obtains a job as a jack-of-all-trades at the town’s newspaper, an opportunity which allows her a small measure of independence and income while opening her eyes to the value of an uncensored press. Soon, she is hired as a secretary by the dilettantish trophy wife of the mining company’s owner, a position which allows her an insider’s view of the family’s opulent lifestyle and deplorable labor and social practices. As the mine’s workers become increasingly militant about union organization in the face of their exploitation, Sylvie must reconcile her infatuation with the whimsical yet troubled heir to the mining fortune with her familial obligations (and an attraction to a labor organizer!). Issues of race relations and the toxic legacy of slavery figure prominently in the narrative, as do questions about the legitimacy of unions, corporate and workplace regulation, and the privatization of police functions (via the employment of murderous Pinkerton guards by the mine owners). Manning’s bildungsroman not only provides a clear portrait of her young heroine; it captures the intensity of an unsettled time and place in American history.

Manning’s historical fiction entertains and instructs.

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**ILLUMINATIONS**

*Moore, Alan*

*Bloomsbury (464 pp.)

$26.49 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-63557-880-5

The first short story collection from the author of several iconic graphic novels and comic-book series.

When a comic-book writer switches to prose only, they might have trouble conjuring the fleshed-out descriptions usually provided by pictures. But Moore, creator of such legendary graphic works as *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta*, has never had this problem. His works typically include several picture-light text extracts, and if Moore’s debut novel—the sprawling
Jerusalem (2016)—is anything to go by, the difficulty is getting him to stop his flow of words. One might hope, then, that the restrictive length of a short story would provide some necessary structure. This collection definitely includes some tight, clever, and vivid entries, including “Not Even Legend,” about a cabal of mythological creatures prepared to go to any lengths to ensure that ordinary humans never get a hint of their existence; “Hypothetical Lizard,” which chronicles a brothel worker’s nasty revenge on his former lover; “Location, Location, Location,” concerning a real estate agent officially signing over a house to Jesus after the Rapture; and “And, at the Last, Just To Be Done With Silence,” a creepy tale of madness-inducing penance in the late 12th century. The title story, in which a man longs to recapture his youth, and “Cold Reading,” which features a successful fake medium who learns the perils of disbelief, have an entertaining if slightly derivative Twilight Zone vibe. But Moore goes off the rails with “What We Can Know About Thunderman,” the book’s longest work, taking up fully half the pages. It’s a self-indulgently savage lampoon of the comic-book industry, wandering over several decades, taking the occasional clever potshot, very occasionally affirming the way that comic books and comic-book conventions can bring lonely nerds together, and frequently veering into the grotesque, petty, and bizarre. The story never has any clear destination other than to suggest that the industry is a cesspool that’s impossible to escape in any clean way. The well-informed reader will infer that Moore is still extremely angry at DC for a number of intellectual property issues, remains upset with the way Warner Brothers adapted his works for film, and isn’t exactly happy with Marvel, either.

A mixed bag with a misshapen boulder in it.
**PARTICIPATION**

Moschovakis, Anna  
Coffee House (216 pp.)  
$16.95 paper | Nov. 8, 2022  
978-1-56689-657-3

Amid environmental and economic uncertainty, two reading groups, Love and Anti-Love, merge syllabuses and members as they redefine what it means to participate—in community, in relationships, in humanity.

E is a member of two reading groups—Love, which has recently begun to meet solely in virtual spaces, and Anti-Love, which variously bills itself as “resistance, revolt, revolution,” and which meets at a village cafe 150 miles from the city where E lives and where Love is centered. The syllabus for Love ranges from Aristotle to Badiou, and E is behind in her reading. She attempts to catch up while on a temporary break from one of her three jobs (the mentor who is training her as a mediator has disappeared midcase with no explanation), and through her interactions with the group’s listserve, she finds herself increasingly fixated on fellow Love member S, whom she has never met in person. Meanwhile, the weather has become unpredictable, a part of the cycle of news reports that “[appear] at the top right of the screen, a stack of small explosions, almost registering, then, compulsively, swiped away.” As E burrows into her reading and through her memories—of Pablo, the gadfly interpreter; Giorgos, a talkative Greek poet; a cherry-lipped bookstore clerk who’s “an acquaintance from a time past, when drugs and love intersected in a clear and particular way”—the general sense of apocalypse coalesces in the form of Tropical Storm Ezekiel, much bigger and farther west than meteorologists anticipated, which wreaks havoc in the village where Anti-Love meets. As the diverse characters of E’s life converge on the flooded region, the methodology of Love versus Anti-Love transcends its binary to become something at once more complex and more humanely simple. Theory-driven, opaque, and formally experimental, the book risks abstraction that can be alienating, allowing its characters to exposit their thoughts on their lives, surroundings, memories, and expectations rather than explore these ideas in-scene. However, Moschovakis’ take on what it means to form community in opposition to the expectations of hierarchy, anticipated outcome, or even narrative that have been indoctrinated in readers feels timely, perhaps even prescient, in an era when the only thing that seems constant is the incontrovertible need for change.

Densely intellectual, the novel forces an alert reader to reconsider what it means to participate in the very act of reading.

**WE ALL WANT IMPOSSIBLE THINGS**

Newman, Catherine  
Harper/HarperCollins (224 pp.)  
$25.99 | Nov. 8, 2022  
978-0-06-323-089-7

A woman takes care of her dying best friend while handling her own messy life. Edith and Ashley have been best friends for most of their lives. They’ve been there for each other during their greatest joys and struggles—marriages, infertility, and raising children. Now, though, Ash has to support Edi through their greatest, most heartbreaking challenge yet—Edi’s death. When Edi’s ovarian cancer progresses to the point that treatment is no longer an option, they decide she should stay at a hospice near Ash’s home in Massachusetts, leaving Edi’s husband and young son back in Brooklyn. Ash spends most of her time in Edi’s hospice room, bringing Edi the food she requests, talking to the nurses, and handling an environment that is both horrifically bleak and hilariously odd—_Fiddler on the Roof_ blares from one resident’s room every afternoon, as if it’s the soundtrack to everyone’s death. But as Ash takes care of Edi, she also has her own chaotic life to worry about. She has two lovely, nearly
grown daughters whom she adores. She has a complicated relationship with her ex-husband, whom she never technically divorced and who spends most of his time at her house. And she’s sleeping with several people who are either on Edi’s care team or in Edi’s family, which leads to some awkward situations. Ash makes for a unique and easy-to-love narrator, one who jokes about her own self-centeredness even as she devotes her time to helping her best friend. Newman is frank about the physical reality of cancer and explicitly shows how grueling it can be to care for a friend while watching them die—there are falls and tears, leaking tubes that soak Edi in bile, and gradual changes to Edi’s appearance and mental state as the end draws nearer. As Ash says, “It’s monstrous. It is too much to take. Why do we even do this—love anybody? Our dumb animal hearts.” But Newman is also open and honest about how joy can commingle with grief and how happiness and gratitude can coexist with sorrow: “Life is just seesawing between the gorgeous and the menacing—like when you go for a run and one minute the whole neighborhood is lilacs in purple bloom, and then the next it’s stained boxer shorts and an inside-out latex glove.” Newman perfectly captures the beauty and burden of caring for someone in their final moments while showing the gift of Edi and Ash’s once-in-a-lifetime friendship.

A warm and remarkably funny book about death and caregiving that will make readers laugh through their tears.

BLITZ
O’Malley, Daniel
Little, Brown (688 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-316-56155-6

In the third installment of the Rook Files series, new recruits to secret supernatural protection agency the Checquy all of them women, contend with Nazi killers. Alternating between 1940 and the present, the book opens during the London Blitz. Three young Checquy agents with special
powers are “standing” in the sky 10,000 feet above the beleaguered city—one of them has the ability to alter gravity—when a Nazi bomber comes into view. Violating strict rules against interfering with normal military operations (as opposed to warding off supernatural enemies), the headstrong Pamela breaks away from her cohorts and causes the plane to implode by sending a ferocious pulse through it. The women assume everyone aboard perished, but a crew member survives and subsequently goes on a killing spree down in London. Pamela and Usha, both apprentices, and Bridget, a fully-fledged Pawn, must track him down before he kills again—and Pamela’s illicit actions are revealed. Decades later, a librarian named Lyn has her life as a wife and mother upended after a freak fire in her kitchen proves to be a manifestation of her long-dormant electrical powers. Recruited by the Checquy and trained in a hidden island academy, she is sent into the field, where she herself becomes wanted for murder based on brandinglike effects on the victims. With a relaxed style and array of fun characters, including an agent who makes people who look at him see their mother and a baby goat that turns into a little boy, O’Malley’s latest will appeal to his many followers. Other readers may grow impatient with the time he spends in setup and background modes. After the nifty opening scene, nothing much happens for a good half of the book’s nearly 700 pages.

An entertaining but overstuffed fantasy.

O’Malley’s latest will appeal to his many followers. Other readers may grow impatient with the time he spends in setup and background modes. After the nifty opening scene, nothing much happens for a good half of the book’s nearly 700 pages.

An entertaining but overstuffed fantasy.

**SWANN’S WAR**

*Oren, Michael*

Dzanc (256 pp.)

$26.95 | Oct. 25, 2022

978-1-950539-60-4

During World War II, a female police officer investigates a spate of murders on a tiny island off the coast of Massachusetts.

Oren’s novel opens arrestingly with a local police captain discovering a fisherman’s unexpected catch of a human body. Then, an initial assessment of death by drowning goes distinctly south when it turns out that the man was strangled. Things only get trickier from there since it’s wartime, 1944, and the corpse is that of a prisoner of war: The island, along with its docks, trawlers, and cranberry bogs, includes a prison camp of Italian POWs and a U.S. military emplacement headed by a lieutenant who’d prefer to be on the front lines (his wealthy family ensures that he’s not). To complicate matters further—especially when another murder victim emerges—the police captain is Mary Beth Swann, who took over her husband’s law enforcement role when he shipped out to the South Pacific. Being a female police officer was already challenging enough; Mary Beth, originally from Boston, also has to tolerate the disrespect of the island’s inhabitants. What elevates this intriguing story—comparisons with television’s always engaging *Foyle’s War* are inevitable—are the wonderfully delineated specifics of the location and characters. This island may be fictional, but it’s drawn directly from the author’s experiences on Nantucket, and each of the characters sparkles with their own vitality, including the town’s brothel madam, the Acadian short-order cook missing two fingers, a visiting gangster, and the nearly 90 Italians waiting out the war in a remote corner of a foreign land.

Sharply drawn characters, a “locked-room” location, and a tension-filled WWII setting illuminate this wartime thriller.
NIGHTS OF PLAGUE
Pamuk, Orhan
Trans. by Ekin Oklap
Knopf (704 pp.)
$32.50 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-525-65689-0

Plague strikes a small Ottoman island in 1901.
Nobel laureate Pamuk’s latest novel is a behemoth: 700-some pages about a fictional island in the Mediterranean under siege by plague. Mingheria, in Pamuk’s imagining, is populated by both Muslims and Orthodox Greeks, who react with varying levels of obedience to the strictures of quarantine.
Set in 1901, the novel also takes on the dwindling of the Ottoman Empire and the tensions between West and East, modernity and tradition, and science and religion. There is a lot at play here, and while Pamuk’s prose is as elegant and informed as ever, an occasional hint of pomposity does waft through his pages. Then, too, there is so much information to be conveyed that the burden sometimes falls to his characters, and dialogue becomes an unfortunate vehicle for exposition. So, for example, the young doctor who has been sent to Mingheria to help tells his wife, the former sultan’s daughter, “Let me first tell you of the state the international quarantine establishment finds itself in.” It’s possible the novel is overdetermined. The frame for the narrative is as follows: Princess Pakize, that young doctor’s wife, has been writing long letters about the events at hand to her sister, and, more than a hundred years later, Mîna Mingher, a scholar, is narrating a novel based on those letters. On top of all that, there’s a murder mystery at play. And yet, despite these flaws, Pamuk’s storytelling is so compelling and coy; his intelligence and interests so wide-ranging; the project, as a whole, so ambitious, that the book has survived its own excesses. There is a great deal here to savor.

Not quite a triumph, Pamuk’s latest work still manages to delight.
EVERYTHING THE LIGHT TOUCHES
Pariat, Janice
HarperVia (512 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-06-321004-2

Across centuries and continents, this novel explores questions of self-discovery, botany, empire, and the limits of knowledge, with a trace of romance.

This novel—the first by Indian writer Pariat to be published in the U.S.—travels between present-day India and 18th-century Europe through the viewpoints of four characters. Shai, a young woman in India, wants to see her sick childhood nanny and so leaves her city life behind for a remote village that has connections to a vanished nomadic past and is currently suffering from the consequences of illegal uranium mining. Evelyn is an eager Cambridge graduate in the 1910s committed to Goethe’s botanical writings and his belief in the Metamorphosis of Plants. Linnaeus is at the center of the book, with a poetical travelogue of his journey to Lapland in 1732. The book asks how we see the world—through an organized system, like how Linnaeus classified the plant world, or through a sense of connection and unity, like how Goethe describes plant life in The Metamorphosis of Plants. It can be hard for the reader to follow the thread between each character and feel satisfied with the space each has been given; Goethe’s sections in particular feel like more of a digression and pull away from the more engaging storylines of Shai and Evelyn.

Readers interested in historical fiction may want to check this out while noting that not all chapters are equally engaging.

TRIPLE CROSS
Patterson, James
Little, Brown (416 pp.)
$29.00 | Oct. 31, 2022
978-0-316-49918-7

Dr. Alex Cross and his wife each pursue an equally monstrous serial predator.

In this corner, the D.C. Metro Police Department, where Cross still serves as a consultant, brings him in to throw light on the murders committed by the Family Man, who breaks into upscale homes and shoots everyone inside: grandparents, parents, children. In this corner, Bree Stone, who’s moved from D.C. Metro to the Bluestone Group, is tasked with keeping everything hush-hush while she investigates a series of explosive charges against fashion queen Frances Duchaine, whom multiple litigants have accused of saddling them with insurmountable debts for plastic surgery she and her close associate Paula Watkins insisted they’d need to make it as models, then forcing them into sexual slavery when they couldn’t repay them. As Bree worms her way into ever darker allegations about Duchaine, the Family Man continues his open season on picture-perfect households. Then editor Suzanne Liu, who’s just been dumped by star true-crime author Thomas Tull, comes to Cross with an incredible story: Tull, whose pitch for a new book on the Family Man earned an eight-figure contract in a closed auction, has actually been killing all those people himself. As usual, Patterson throws everything against the wall to see what sticks until the two cases, either of them complicated enough to sustain an entire volume, eventually collide in a way that’s surprising but ultimately unsatisfying, and his triple cross falls flat.

Just the thing for readers who think their own work lives are high-stress drudgery.
Five years after their mother dies on Christmas Day, two children have a magical Christmas experience.

Will and Ella Sullivan, ages 14 and 12 respectively, have had a tough five years. With their mother’s death, their father, Henry, has retreated into himself. He drinks too much, refuses to buy anything approaching a luxury (and in his mind, that would include honey and jam), and does the bare minimum at Columbia University, where he’s a professor. With Christmas a forbidden topic, let alone a day to celebrate, Will and Ella decide to set up a dating profile for their father in an attempt to find happiness for him—and Christmas presents for themselves. The result is a crazy, magical, outlandish story that still works: A Ms. Truelove starts messaging “Henry,” and the kids message back, pretending to be their father. Henry discovers the scheme almost immediately and lets Ms. Truelove know she’s been messaging children. The next day, however, a crate arrives on the doorstep of their Harlem town house with the words “Truelove Nurseries” stenciled on the outside. Inside: A partridge in a pear tree. More gifts follow: Two turtle doves, followed by three French hens—and so on, through the end of the song for which the book is named. With outlandish yet joyful elements reminiscent of books such as Mr. Popper’s Penguins (1938), this joint effort by authors Patterson and Safran is a magical throwback to classic children’s fiction. Scary elements are touched on—a mother’s death, a father’s alcoholism, school bullies, shoplifting, and more—but the story itself is uplifting, with friendships rekindled, family love and happiness rediscovered, and neighborliness and kindness shared.

A delightful Christmas story to be shared by the whole family.
WE SPREAD

Reid, Iain
Scout Press/Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-982169-35-0

An assisted living facility isn’t what it seems.

Penny, the narrator of the latest novel from Canadian author Reid, isn’t doing so well. She’s lived alone in her apartment ever since the death of Mike, her partner—like her, an artist—and feels “alone. Very old and very much alone.” Things get worse when she suffers a fall at home and finds out arrangements have been made for her to live in a small assisted living community; she resists the move even after she meets the other residents of the facility: “I don’t want to be on an adventure. Not at all. I want to be home. I want to be having a nap. These people all know each other, are all used to living side by side, but they don’t know me. I don’t know them. They’re all strangers.” It doesn’t take long for things to get creepy—she starts to get creeped out by Shelley, the community’s director, whose speech “sounds almost scripted and rehearsed” and who says things like “We don’t like to have secrets here.” After an assortment of odd goings-on, Penny realizes, “This is not the comfortable, cozy place I thought it was. I was wrong about that, fooled.” This is an undoubtedly creepy book, but it’s anything but subtle; Reid doesn’t so much drop hints as scream them. The characters, save Penny, function more as props, given ominous dialogue to hammer home the point that things aren’t quite right in the facility—the novel has the tone of a horror movie directed by someone desperately afraid the audience is going to miss the point. In his previous books, Reid has proved himself capable of crafting taut, original thrillers. This is not one of them.

Shoots for scary, lands on silly.

RIGHTEOUS PREY

Sandford, John
Putnam (416 pp.)
$29.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-42247-2

Lucas Davenport and Virgil Flowers join forces once more with each other and a host of other law enforcement officials to take down a cabal of white-collar vigilante killers.

The Five, as they style themselves, are a group of Bitcoin billionaires oozing self-righteousness who’ve declared war on crooked politicians, heartless corporate leaders, slumlords, and right-wing radio bloviators. That’s an awful lot of targets, and it’s no wonder that even though The Five issue regular manifestos, progress reports, and teasing hints about where they’ll strike next, the FBI has been helpless to identify and protect their victims. Not surprisingly, the two U.S. senators from Minnesota want Lucas, a U.S. Marshal, on the job, and Lucas wants to work with Virgil, his old protégé at Minnesota’s Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. At first their progress is frustratingly slow, but things heat up abruptly when they identify a likely suspect who’s promptly executed by Vivian Zhao, the scheming self-proclaimed economist who’s the brains behind The Five. During a routine inquiry, Lucas and Virgil get an unexpected glimpse of Zhao, who flees the scene and issues an S.O.S. to the surviving members of The Five asking for funds to finance her flight. By now, of course, every one of the conspirators is afraid that Zhao, the only one who knows their identities, will flip on them, and Lucas and Virgil’s race to find the ringleader is complicated by the vigilantes’ race to cover themselves by killing anyone who might betray them, beginning, of course, with each other. Sandford manages the ensuing circular firing squad with brisk expertise, though it’s hard to generate much suspense over the threats to such a despicable bunch.

The most relaxing tale of double-digit murder you’ll read this year.
Applying methods gleaned from a Poe story, a pair of 19th-century working girls put their heads together to fight a crime spree.

This strange little book from Pulitzer Prize winner Smiley combines a lurid plot involving the serial strangulation and stabbing of prostitutes in Monterey, California, in the early 1850s with a naïve, plainspoken style of narration and characterization that makes even scenes of copulation and gore seem sort of G-rated. This reflects the personality of the protagonist, Eliza Ripple, who is the proverbial whore with the heart of a Midwestern elementary school teacher. Married off by her parents at a tender age to a nasty older man who drags her from Kalamazoo to California and then gets shot in a bar fight, she winds up on her own, working at the brothel of kindly Mrs. Parks. As her new boss explains it, “Everyone knows that this is a dangerous business, but, between you and me, being a woman is a dangerous business, and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.” Eager for companionship, she finds a friend in a cross-dressing colleague named Jean McPherson, who’s employed at an establishment serving the women of the town, a possibly ahistorical narrative flourish which adds to the dreamlike quality of the narrative. As women continue to disappear, as corpses turn up in the countryside outside town, and as local law enforcement remains steadfast in its lack of interest, Eliza and Jean decide to emulate the methods of detective Dupin in a Poe story they’ve both enjoyed: “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” Eliza begins to observe and analyze her clients’ behavior and the contents of their pockets and the various characters she runs into around town, with a focus on finding the murderer. Like their creator, Eliza and Jean have a love for horses, and the agreeability of their various rides into the countryside somehow makes a bigger impression than the gruesome finds they turn up.

An oddly pleasant little trot through Gold Rush-era California.
THE VICIOUS CIRCLE
St. John, Katherine
Morrow/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-06-322405-6

Deep in the Mexican jungle, a New York model wrangles with a cult leader for the estate she’s inherited from her uncle.

“A stately pleasure-dome” à la Kubla Khan was the inspiration of self-help author/vitamin magnate Paul Bentzen when he created a retreat center called Xanadu on the grounds of an isolated villa built by a drug lord, empty and languishing on the real estate market after a mass killing ended the kingpin’s reign. Though she has warm childhood memories of her uncle Paul, Svetlana Bentzen and her widowed single mother became estranged from him for reasons she has never fully understood. Therefore it’s quite a surprise when she learns that he’s died and left her his entire estate—$180 million, as Chase, her dishwasher-dull fiance, learns when he asks Alexa. Why wouldn’t the man leave it all to Kali, the common-law wife with whom he ran The Mandala, a spiritual program which requires aspirants to abandon their lives and move to Xanadu? With her engagement to Chase on the rocks, Sveta travels down alone, though luckily she’s joined at the last minute by Lucas Baranquilla, a handsome lawyer whose late father worked with her uncle (and whom she’d hooked up with as a teen). At Xanadu, the pair quickly learn that Uncle Paul’s death was far from straightforward and that Kali has both some disturbingly potent herbal tea recipes and an alternate version of the will that was signed at the last minute. Sveta, who has her doubts about wealth and the wealthy, might not have put up much of a fuss, but when she finds out that forced dieting and body-shaming are part of the quest for enlightenment, it really rubs her the wrong way. For all the intriguing issues addressed in the book—jungle psychedelics, spiritual faddism, cultural appropriation, and more—it lacks the satiric edge of St. John’s debut, The Lion’s Den (2020), and the plot is marred by unnecessary complications with hasty resolutions.

Missing the je ne sais quoi that makes a silly thriller built on clichés and stereotypes fun.

THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE
Van Booy, Simon
Godine (184 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 15, 2022
978-1-56792-744-3

A sentimental author reflects on his life and career as he lies dying.

In the final days of his life, Max Little takes memory and gratitude as the tasks at hand. Writing a journal from his hospital bed, he describes the people who have mattered to him: Carol, the therapist he saw in the weeks following his diagnosis; Jeremy, a kindred spirit facing the loss of his mother; and, most importantly, his wife, Hadley, whom he met when they were children. After his diagnosis, he wonders how he should break the news to her. How will his death affect her? These questions weigh on Max even more than his own sadness: While his diagnosis does cause pain, Max’s tone is overwhelmingly one of acceptance and nostalgia. “Those we’ve lost do return,” he says. In the novel’s brief second section, we see that theory manifest in scenes taking place eight years after Max’s death. The concept of listening to a famous author reflect on life and writing is an appealing one, but the novel’s aphoristic musings are often too pat to yield new insight or too abstract to reconfigure the reader’s views. One of Max’s central claims is that each reader will imagine scenes differently in light of their unique experience. To that end, he repeatedly invokes his readers—“good company you are”; “It’s actually you telling the story”—but the novel is most affecting when it commits to a narrative of its own. Max’s initial response to his diagnosis is particularly poignant: He goes through a series of everyday activities—making toast, brewing tea, taking...
a bath—that feel like “impersonating myself.” But his later posture of calm renders the narrative placid and oddly ethereal.

A free-floating reflection on human connection that never quite touches ground.

NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO PANIC
Wilson, Kevin
Ecco/HarperCollins (256 pp.)
$27.99  |  Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-06-291350-0

The irrepressible Wilson presents a grunge-era fable about a pre-internet mass-hysteria incident and the alchemy of art.

Family dramas and short stories are the author’s sweet spots, but for this emotionally acute peek into the inner life of the artist, he’s turned to the uncomfortable exile of adolescence. Coalfield, Tennessee, circa 1996 is as remote (and boring) as any rural American outpost, so budding teen writer Frances “Frankie” Budge is intrigued when Zeke, a strange boy from Memphis, shows up at the public pool. “This town is weird,” the stranger observes. “It’s like a bomb was dropped on it, and you guys are just getting back to normal.” In the grip of summer’s dog days, Frankie and Zeke pursue their artistic outlets elbow to elbow, hers the written word, his visual arts. Joining forces, they make a poster emblazoned with a throwaway couplet about outlaws on the run: “The edge is a shantytown filled with gold seekers. We are fugitives, and the law is skinny with hunger for us.” Soon, they commandeer an old copy machine and plaster the town with their anonymous manifesto, punctuated by inevitable adolescent canoodling.

What follows is a rough approximation of the “Satanic panic” of the Reagan-era 1980s, as the media labels the work “troubling street art” before it snowballs into a national hysteria that fortunately exists mostly on the periphery here. Wilson ignores the low-hanging fruit—Frankie and Zeke’s relationship is fundamentally a coming-of-age tale, but not in the way

From the chaos of her first psychic dream, Katie Riley was swept into a world of magic and the paranormal, awakening talents mastered in her prior lives and opening pathways to her true destiny.

“The author jampacks the novel with characters and subplots, which may be a bit too much for one volume to handle. Still, most of it works wonderfully.”

“A smashing hero headlines this densely plotted, riveting supernatural tale.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights,
Email aderynlonigan@yahoo.com • aderynlonigan.com
you might think. Instead, he focuses on the wonderful, terrible, transformative power of art. The catalyst for Frankie's reluctant confession, 20 years later, is a visit from a New Yorker art critic convinced that Frankie wrote the infamous, trouble-causing line. In a world where art is often dismissed, Frankie will learn whether the line she created still holds the power she’d thought long since lost.

A warm, witty two-hander that sidesteps the clichés of art school and indie film and treats its free spirits with respect.

**THE LAST DREAMWALKER**

Woods, Rita
Forge (272 pp.)
$27.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-25-080561-4

A young woman discovers that her inheritance from her estranged mother includes an island—a and a supernatural power.

Like many of the scariest horror stories, this one is set amid family drama. A young Black woman named Layla Hurley struggles with how to mourn her mother, Elinor, a cold and exacting woman from whom Layla was long estranged. Then Layla’s aunts, Jayne and Therese, whom she hasn’t seen for years, appear at her mother’s funeral, enveloping her with the love and warmth their sister Elinor withheld. Condolence and affection aren’t all they have to offer—they want Layla to know that she has inherited Scotia Island, one of the Sea Islands off the South Carolina coast, near where the aunts live in Port Royal. One problem is that ownership is disputed by their cousin Charlotte Fortenberry, who is, to put it mildly, a difficult person. The other problem is that the island isn’t the only thing Layla inherited. It turns out that the strange, inexplicable dreams she has had off and on over the years are the manifestation of a gift—or curse—handed down through the female members of her family, the third daughters of third daughters. They are Dreamwalkers, able to enter into and experience the dreams of other people—and, if their skill is carefully developed, to manipulate those dreams. Chapters of the book jump back to the last days of the Civil War, when an enslaved woman named Gemma, Layla’s ancestor, was living on Scotia Island and using that power, escalating it to frightening levels. As Layla tries to understand the nature of her own power, she also must decide whether to deploy it—and whether the outcome would be worth the cost. Woods develops complex and mostly appealing characters, and she keeps the plot moving at a swift pace.

Family life is the grounding for a compelling story of strange powers and old secrets.

**BLACK DOG**

Woods, Stuart
Putnam (304 pp.)
$29.00 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-593-54000-8

New York attorney Stone Barrington fights to protect a sizable estate from a predatory claimant determined to grab it from whomever stands in his way.

When Stone’s secretary, Joan Robertson, introduces him to her aunt, Annetta Charles, whose attorney at Stone’s firm, Woodman & Weld, has just died, Stone thinks her request to revise her will is routine. And so it is, on paper. Annetta, who rose from
a shady background to marry into her late husband’s serious money, wants to continue paying $100,000 a month into the trust fund of her stepson, Edwin Charles Jr., but to cut him off without a cent at her death—because she wants to discourage him from killing her for the nest egg. Eddie, a Yale Law graduate who’s never worked a day in his life, reacts to the news that his do-nothing lifestyle depends on his leaving his stepmother alone with predictable outrage and a series of pleasingly unpredictable countermeasures. He bursts into Stone’s home office in Turtle Bay; accosts him at dinner with his former partner, NYPD Commissioner Dino Bacchetti; and tells everyone who’ll listen that he’s Stone’s client. The lie becomes especially fraught when Annetta is shot to death and Eddie’s arrested for her murder. Apart from Stone’s forgettable flings with two women involved in very different ways with Eddie’s threats, Woods keeps his eye on the ball throughout, and though the suspense never exactly intensifies—Woods doesn’t do rising suspense—Stone’s pesky antagonist is so well matched with both his hero and the requirements of his plot that fans’ interest will never flag.

As a bonus, Stone’s self-effacing secretary is rewarded with a leading role and other emoluments.

Stone’s most memorable reflection: “He had been too long without a woman.” Yeah, right.

DISTANT THUNDER
Woods, Stuart
Putnam (272 pp.)
$22.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-593-54003-9

Stone Barrington’s latest dalliance with President Holly Barker at his Maine island retreat is interrupted by the discovery of a dead man.

CIA director Lance Cabot commands that the twice-shot man, who’s carrying CIA identification under the name John Collins, be moved from the deck of the Dark Harbor ferry to Stone’s...
garage, but Holly doesn't think he actually knows the dead man. When Stone returns home to Manhattan, he's soon visited by Collins' widow, model-turned–fashion magazine editor Vanessa Morgan whom he proceeds to solace between the sheets. He's disconcerted when Vanessa reports that the husband whose death interrupted their divorce is very much alive. Stone and his old NYPD partner, Commissioner Dino Bacchetti, are soon in a position to confirm these reports—and so is Lance, despite his initial resistance to them. Sadly, Jack Collins, who turns out to be a friend of Stone's from NYU Law School, is given precious little to do after returning from the grave, as the focus shifts to Stone's attempts to keep Vanessa and himself from being targeted for death by Valery Majorov, the Russian operative who thought he'd killed Jack. Stone spirits Vanessa off to Windward Hall, his estate in England, where he introduces her to MI6 director Dame Felicity Devonshire and they all fall into bed together. On their return to New York, though, both Stone and Vanessa find themselves in the sights of a resourceful female assassin who just won't take no for an answer.

A frank indulgence for the author and readers who share his preference for abrupt scene changes over a consequential plot.

**MYSTERY**

**ANTIQUES LIQUIDATION**

*Allan, Barbara*

Severn House (208 pp.)

$29.99  |  Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-7278-5091-1

The mother-daughter pair of Vivian and Brandy Borne may appear to be simple antiques dealers, but there's more to them than meets the eye.

When Vivian wakes Brandy at 2 a.m. to get a jump on a warehouse full of things that are going to be auctioned off soon—thanks to some sensitive information Vivian has about Conrad Norris, the auctioneer—Brandy gathers up her dog, Sushi, and they all drive to the warehouse where Norris awaits. They leave with a barrel of pearl buttons that Sushi picks out, two valuable toy arks, and a set of dishes. When the auction itself takes place, Norris is drunk and many people are left unsatisfied. Vivian does buy something, though—she couldn't resist attending the auction, even having picked off some items beforehand—and when she and Brandy return to the warehouse to pick it up, they find Norris dead. Naturally, Chief of Police Tony Cassato—Brandy's fiance—is called in. Vivian fancies herself a sleuth, and she and Brandy have solved quite a few murders together—a fact that does not incline Tony to want their help. Vivian drags Brandy along on her investigations, knowing that Norris was far from beloved by many people. Someone steals the ark Brandy had given to her best friend's daughter, but Brandy is hesitant to finger the two collectors she knows fought fiercely to buy the remaining arks at the auction. Vivian and Brandy may be amateur detectives, but they know a hawk from a handsaw and are determined to track down the killer, especially once a skeleton is found in their button barrel, opening up a long-dead case.

A rich combination of mystery and boldly painted historic detail.
A charitable Murder Fête at Mallowan Hall brings Agatha Christie’s housekeeper her second case. Hardly have real-life Detection Club authors G.K. Chesterton, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Anthony Berkeley joined members of the fictional Listleigh Murder Club than Father Tooley, pastor of St. Wendreda’s Catholic Church, the financial beneficiary of the event, collapses in the Mallowan library. As the local authors competing for a publishing contract circle the murder scene, debating which poison could have killed him, Mallowan housekeeper Phyllida Bright takes it all in with a coolly appraising eye. When Inspector Cork arrives on the scene, solicitor Alastair Whittlesby, the overbearing president of the Listleigh, assures him that since the poison was slipped into the imported bitters that were a key ingredient of his favorite cocktail, he must have been the intended victim. The Mallowan cook is dumbfounded when she’s asked to limit her offerings to a “cold supper? After a murder?” A second poisoning considerably muddies the waters. So does Cork’s arrest of vicar Digby Billdop, whose Anglican church stands opposite St. Wendreda’s on the village green. Phyllida insists that even though the vicar was competing with Whittlesby for the publishing prize, he can’t possibly be guilty. But authors Mathilda Crowley and Louis Genevan and unpublished author Vera Rollingbroke are still likely candidates. The theft of an antique table and a fatal car crash produce new frissons but not clarification, which has to await the brain wave that allows Phyllida to summon all the suspects to the pleasingly extended denouement.

Cambridge takes inspiration from several of Christie’s most celebrated novels in devising her agreeably intricate plot.
“An enjoyable mystery from a tried-and-true veteran.”

RACING THE LIGHT

Crais, Robert
Putnam (368 pp.)
$29.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-525-53572-0

In the latest Elvis Cole mystery, young podcaster Josh Shoe is on the verge of nailing a corrupt city official when the murder of his prime source—a porn actress—sends him into hiding.

A hulking 26-year-old, Shoe—short for Schumacher—prides himself on “bringing the truth the mainstream media hides,” whether that involves alien visits or conspiracy theories. Following the murder of Skylar, who works as a call girl to support her efforts as a visual artist, Josh’s own life is in danger. When it’s revealed that sophisticated surveillance equipment used by Chinese intelligence has been installed in his apartment, Elvis suspects the stakes are higher than he thought. The LA detective has other things on his mind: His long-lost girlfriend, Lucy Chenier, has returned to town with her son, Ben, who was traumatized by his father’s sick plot to cast himself as a hero. Ben loves Elvis, but does Lucy? But back to the action, which involves a hapless bagman, a city councilman who sells out a low-cost housing project, a Chinese enforcer, and, of course, Cole’s taciturn sidekick, the ex-Marine Joe Pike. Though the novel promises intrigue of a higher order than it delivers, Crais’ affection for his characters, masterful pacing, and dry wit make this one of his better efforts. An unrepentant classicist, he keeps the traditional detective novel alive and well.

An enjoyable mystery from a tried-and-true veteran.

VIVIANA VALENTINE GETS HER MAN

Edwards, Emily J.
Crooked Lane (288 pp.)
$26.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-63910-182-5

As the title suggests, Edwards’ debut is a snappy valentine to a bygone era when people actually talked, or at least wrote, like that.

Viviana Valentine, whose name everyone she meets duly comments on, is girl Friday to Tommy Fortune, a private eye working out of Hell’s Kitchen in the summer of 1950. Tommy’s latest client is Tallmadge Blackstone, diamond merchant and railroad owner. Blackstone, a formidable figure who’s obviously used to controlling every variable in his world, has run into one he can’t control: his daughter, Tallulah, a debutee barely 18 who shows distinct signs of rejecting her designated fiancé, Blackstone’s partner Webber Harrington-Whiteley, for no better reason than that he’s three times her age and famously reclusive ever since an accident disfigured him years ago. Asked to keep tabs on Tallulah by accepting a dinner invitation to the Blackstones’ posh digs, Viviana quickly bonds with her quarry, who lends her clothing and confides in her about some of the downsides of being her father’s daughter. Next morning, Viviana reports to Tommy’s office brimful of information to share only to find a stiff on the floor. Closer examination reveals that the unknown man isn’t quite dead, but he clearly won’t be in a position to identify his assailant anytime soon. All this would doubtless be of great interest to Tommy if he hadn’t taken a powder, leaving his girl Friday to the tender mercies of smirking Det. Jake Lawson and 22-year-old Officer Alan Leary. Though the mystery doesn’t seem to be up to much, Edwards sneak’s in a raft of twists and complications under your guard, and the big reveal is surprisingly big and revealing.

Just what 1950s men’s magazine fiction would be like if it were written by and about women.

CANTER WITH A KILLER

Camp, Amber
Crooked Lane (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-63910-180-1

A woman’s dream of running a horse rescue is threatened when she becomes a murder suspect.

Mallory Martin gave up a stressful job and left her ambitious lawyer husband to turn an old farm near her hometown of Hillspring, Arkansas, into a horse rescue. Not everyone is pleased by her choice—especially her wealthy neighbor, Albert Cunningham, a grump who thinks her plan to add riding lessons for Schumacher—prides himself on “bringing the truth the mainstream media hides,” whether that involves alien visits or conspiracy theories. Following the murder of Skylar, who works as a call girl to support her efforts as a visual artist, Josh’s own life is in danger. When it’s revealed that sophisticated surveillance equipment used by Chinese intelligence has been installed in his apartment, Elvis suspects the stakes are higher than he thought. The LA detective has other things on his mind: His long-lost girlfriend, Lucy Chenier, has returned to town with her son, Ben, who was traumatized by his father’s sick plot to cast himself as a hero. Ben loves Elvis, but does Lucy? But back to the action, which involves a hapless bagman, a city councilman who sells out a low-cost housing project, a Chinese enforcer, and, of course, Cole’s taciturn sidekick, the ex-Marine Joe Pike. Though the novel promises intrigue of a higher order than it delivers, Crais’ affection for his characters, masterful pacing, and dry wit make this one of his better efforts. An unrepentant classicist, he keeps the traditional detective novel alive and well.

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An enjoyable mystery from a tried-and-true veteran.
HAN DIS DOWN
Francis Felix
Crooked Lane (340 pp.)
$28.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-63910-294-5

Life once more challenges Sid Halley, ex-jockey and ex-investigator, to turn lemons into lemonade.

You’d think that replacing his prosthetic left hand with a transplanted hand would be great for Sid, but its main consequence is the announcement by his wife, cancer researcher Marina, that she’s so freaked out by the new limb that she’s leaving him—or at least that she’s taking their 9-year-old daughter with her to Holland to care for her dying father and has no particular plans to return. In her absence, the always-moody Sid has nothing better to do than take up arms on behalf of Gary Bremner, a Yorkshire trainer and former jockey whose horse caused the damage to Sid’s hand during a race years ago. Gary is afraid that his stable will be targeted by a mysterious jockeys’ agent who’s not only found more and more creative ways to grab a piece of any transactions between trainers and the jockeys they hire, but who’s begun to dictate which favorites must lose which races. Gary’s absolutely right that defying the trainer, whom he eventually identifies as the sinister Anton Valance, is bad business. Though he miraculously escapes the barn fire that claims three of his horses, he doesn’t escape getting hanged from a tree, providing a news flash to DCI Williams, who’d assumed that Gary had died in that fire. The longer Sid spends poking into the jump-racing world of trainers and jockeys and horses he’s repeatedly tried to walk away from, the more convinced he becomes that Valance has a partner, and identifying that partner becomes his obsession. The inflated but routine mystery accordingly gets less and less mysterious as it goes along, but the horse-racing dope is as fascinating as ever.

For fans whose pulses quicken when they hear that “the very future of British racing was at risk.”

“Two English brothers, one dead and one alive, face off against a powerful, otherworldly group in this debut graphic novel.”

“...the quirky novel is consistently funny, sporting witty dialogue and visual gags...The author’s artwork also shines. Although most people in Terra Mortuum appear monstrous, their comically animated faces give them immense charm.”

“...a sublime visual and narrative denouement.”

“A vibrant, delightful tale of life, death, and all the amusing stuff that comes after.”

—Kirkus Reviews
**BONES OF HOLLY**

*Haines, Carolyn*  
Minotaur (352 pp.)  
$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-1-63910-117-7

A mysterious disappearance disrupts a very Southern Christmas.  
Detective duo Sarah Booth and Tinkie Bellcase Richmond are in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, along with Tinkie’s baby, Maylin, and the ladies’ significant others to judge a Christmas tree decorating contest. Their fellow judges, authors Sandra O’Day and Janet Malone, are always at daggers drawn, and the sleuths soon get to see their fraught relationship up close. When Sandra and her assistant, Daryl Marcus, vanish from a party, leaving traces of blood behind at Daryl’s fishing family claims to know nothing, the contacts of Bjerre get a phone call that informs him that his son has gone. Bjerre to confirm her in-home pregnancy test and get help securing an abortion. She’s distressed to find that her troubles, serious as they are, are jolted into perspective when she hears Bjerre get a phone call that informs him that his son has gone missing from Copenhagen’s Nyholm School. In fact, it turns out that no one’s seen 10-year-old Lukas Bjerre since his father dropped him off that morning, several precious hours ago, and that he could have been spirited far away in the meantime. A reported sighting of Lukas’ corpse in a frozen moat leads only to the recovery of his jacket, whose bloodstains and traces of rat poison hint at a dark story. Erik and his colleagues in the Violent Crimes Unit work every lead, and they’re both horrified and frustrated when the DNA found in the blood on Lukas’ jacket leads them to a man who was shot to death very shortly after the boy’s disappearance, or maybe even before. As Hancock shows the dragnet widening to include an ever wider array of characters, her story threatens to lose focus. But though it lacks the unforgiving intensity of *The Corpse Flower* (2021), Erik and Heloise’s memorable debut, it closes the circle with a suitably nightmarish snap.  

Despite the colder weather, this slice of Nordic noir reads surprisingly like top-line American procedurals.

**THE TWIST OF A KNIFE**

*Horowitz, Anthony*  
Harper/HarperCollins (400 pp.)  
$26.99 | Nov. 15, 2022  
978-0-06-293-818-3

What’s worse than having an influential London critic skewer your latest play? Getting arrested for her murder, that’s what.  
Novelist/playwright Anthony Horowitz, who’s awfully hard to tell apart from his author, right down to the playful acknowledgments, is determined not to renew his collaboration with detective Daniel Hawthorne, who’s repeatedly upstaged him in their past investigations. Instead, he has high hopes for *Mindgame*, his latest theatrical thriller, which has consistently entertained audiences in the provinces. When the play opens in the West End, *Sunday Times* reviewer Harriet Throsby brings him crashing back to Earth by panning the play and everyone associated with it at length. The next day, the police are at Horowitz’s door to take him in for stabbing Throsby to death that morning. It’s true that all three performers in *Mindgame*—Lakota star Jordan Williams, rising Welsh hopeful Tirian Kirke, and punk ingenue Sky Palmer—had ample motive to kill Throsby. So did producer Ahmet Yurdakul and director Ewan Lloyd. But they didn’t leave behind the fingerprints or DNA that make Horowitz the obvious suspect, though he insists, “It’s critics who kill writers: never the other way round.” In order to beat the rap, he’ll require timely assistance from Kevin Chakraborty, the hacker downstairs, and of course from Hawthorne himself, who clearly revels in Horowitz’s dependence on him as he immerses his clinging, unwilling client in a deep dive into Throsby’s earlier writings, which provide even more motives for her murder. The real-life author, mostly eschewing the floridly inventive meta fireworks of his earlier tales, sticks more closely to his golden age models this time, producing an efficiently old-fashioned whodunit with all the surprises you’d expect.

An expertly conventional puzzle.
“Sherlock Holmes is alive—and living in San Francisco.”

**THE MERCHANT MURDERERS**

*Jecks, Michael*

Severn House (240 pp.)

$29.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-7278-5092-8

A cowardly assassin repeatedly escapes death as he tries to return to London. Arriving in Exeter in August 1556, Jack Blackjack immediately stumbles over a dead body. Jack had left London and his employment as Lady Elizabeth Tudor’s hapless hired killer hoping to escape the dangers of political skulduggery unleashed by the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary as she turns the country away from her father’s religion. As he looks for a horse to take him to London, he’s horrified to find himself caught up in the murder of a priest of the new religion while vendettas unspool between several merchants who’ve recently lost valuable ships. He falls in with the son of one of those merchants and his friend, who introduce him to noisome taverns and a higher-class house of prostitution. When his purse is snatched by a young girl, his better nature leads him to buy her a meal. His efforts to obtain a horse become more desperate as he becomes unwillingly entangled in the affairs of the town’s ruling class. Following a suggestion, he attempts to return to London by ship only to find that he’s being sent to France. After the ship is attacked by pirates, he barely escapes back to Exeter, where he’s once more embroiled in trouble from which he can extricate himself only by solving the murder of the priest.

The comical hero provides an amusing instrument for exploring the mores and history of the period.

**HOLMES COMING**

*Johnson, Kenneth*

Blackstone (350 pp.)

$25.99 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-72826-118-8

Sherlock Holmes is alive—and living in San Francisco! In a brief “Author’s Apology” at the beginning of the book, ER physician Amy Winslow maintains that the story she’s about to tell, however outlandish, is true. While taking his early morning jog, SFPD Detective Donald Keating suffers a bizarre attack from a Bengal tiger. He’s rushed to Saint Francis Memorial Hospital, where Winslow is unable to save him. Still shaken by this bizarre episode, Winslow responds to a distress call from former patient Estelle Hudson, an elderly Scot who lives alone in a Victorian house in Marin County. Mrs. Hudson, who’s in a reminiscent mood, regales Winslow with stories from her past that culminate in an unexpected appeal to Winslow to buy the house and the unveiling of a secret room where dwells…Hubert Holmes, the real-life inspiration for the fictional Sherlock, kept alive for more than 100 years by a complicated chemical formula. Johnson clearly knows and respects his source material, though his plot is slowed by stories from Holmes full of references to 19th-century notables that, however clever, should appeal primarily to Doyle aficionados. But with a second bizarre murder and the disappearance of Keating’s partner, Luis Ortega, the game is definitely afoot. Naturally, a Moriarty emerges, and even Scotland Yard is thrown into the mix. Winslow’s plummy narrative voice is a satisfying imitation of Dr. Watson’s; additional pleasures of this confec tion come from Doyle-inspired updates, like the young Zapper, an Artful Dodger type who’s the foremost of the San Francisco Holmes’ Baker Street Irregulars. Splashy Holmes redux executed with skill and style.

**THESE NAMES MAKE CLUES**

*Lorac, E.C.R.*

Poisoned Pen (272 pp.)

$14.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-72826-118-8

An invitation to a “treasure hunt” open to thriller writers and lesser mortals confronts Scotland Yard’s Chief Inspector Macdonald with two baffling deaths. Though Macdonald doesn’t really want to attend publisher Graham Coombe’s party, he feels certain he’ll look equally foolish if he declines. So he braces himself, goes off to Caroline House, where Coombe lives with his sister, Susan, and accepts a tag identifying him as Izaak Walton. The other pseudonymous guests include Ben Jonson, Madame de Sevigné, Thomas Traherne, Samuel Pepys, Laurence Sterne, Fanny Burney, Anna Seward, Jane Austen, and Mrs. Gaskell. All the players are immersed in various stages of deciphering individually dispensed clues when Caroline House is plunged into darkness. When Susan Coombe finally finds enough candles to provide minimal lighting, they realize that Samuel Pepys has disappeared, and he’s shortly found dead in the telephone room. Although one of the guests reports having seen a gray-haired man lurking in the vicinity, Macdonald, condemned to playing who’s-on-first with suspects who spent the evening flitting from one room to the next, considers himself lucky to figure out how Pepys, who’s actually the mystery writer Andrew Gardien, was killed. A visit the next day to Gardien’s agent, Mardon-Elliott, reveals that he’s been shot dead, the name “Gardien” scrawled on a nearby sheet of paper. This golden age curiosity, previously out of print since shortly after its initial publication in 1937, proceeds from one head-scratching riddle to the next. But alert fans will recognize a late-blooming clue as pivotal and share honors with Macdonald for identifying the culprit.

Crime and punishment as the ultimate parlor game, aimed at readers who’ll keep its title front and center.
HIGH SPIRITS
Perry, Carol J.
Kensington (320 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-4967-3137-1

A Florida innkeeper’s latest attempt to build her haunted business is hampered by a murder.

Just because the circumstances under which she inherited the Haven House Inn in the Gulf Coast town of Haven are shrouded in obscurity doesn’t mean that Maureen Doherty won’t try her darnedest to make her new career as the inn’s owner and manager a success. And while she may not know the mysterious Penelope Josephine Gray who willed her the property, that doesn’t absolve her of the responsibility to the town’s locals to keep the century-old community hub alive. Christmas is the perfect time to build on the inn’s ongoing programming through a creative connection with Haven’s vintage theater, the Paramount, for a Twelve Days of Christmas extravaganza. Maureen gets her second-in-command, executive chef Ted Carr, to plan themed menus to complement the Paramount’s offerings in a sort of dinner-and-a-movie special. Maureen and Ted get into a groove of working with Paramount projectionist Decklin Monroe, whose history at the theater enables him to tell all the old stories, including a doozy about a patron shot midway through a flick 50 years ago. If the theater is still haunted, it’s in good company, for fash-ionista and ghost (but fashionista first) Lorna, Maureen’s unofficial roommate at Haven House, is accompanied by a rotating cast of spectral characters, including some of her dates. Though Ted and Maureen want to know more about the paranormal at the Paramount, a modern murder disrupts their digging. Has the past come back to haunt the present?

This ghost-infused cozy has all the pieces but just doesn’t stack up. Blame the spirit world.

NO ONE WEEPS FOR ME NOW
Ramírez, Sergio
McPherson & Company (288 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Nov. 3, 2022
978-1-62054-050-3

Has the missing stepdaughter of a wealthy businessman been kidnapped, or has she fled a perilous home life?

The middle volume of the author’s Managua Trilogy, following The Sky Weeps for Me (2020), introduces famous Nicaraguan detective Dolores Morales via his Wikipedia page. Though he works now as a private investigator, Morales still carries the honorific title Inspector, as everyone addresses him. His longtime sidekick, Bert “Lord” Dixon, tartly advises Morales in italics even though he happens to be dead. Lord Dixon also visits other members of Morales’ ragtag team, just to provide pithy commentary.

Morales is hired by wealthy, shady Miguel Soto Colmenares to find his missing stepdaughter, Marcela. Kidnapping is suspected, but there’s been no ransom demand, and Soto is leery of calling police because of the attendant publicity. Ramírez’s shaggy plot frequently wanders down colorful bypaths and takes readers hooked by his MacGuffin through a fun house of Nicaraguan locations and people. Foremost among these are the skeletal Rev. Úrsula, who, along with sidekicks Rambo, Magic Johnson, et al., runs the Tabernacle, a sanctuary she inherited along with her title from Rev. Joshua, her late husband; and Marce-la’s friend Frank, fired by Soto after oversharing with Morales. Ramírez habitually tags minor characters with handles from pop culture, like SpongeBob and Justin Bieber. What makes his novel a page-turner is not its plot twists but the delightfully unique individuals Morales encounters in his probe.

A playful crime yarn that lands like Raymond Chandler rein-magined by Almodóvar.

A TWIST OF MURDER
Redmond, Heather
Kensington (320 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-4967-3797-7

A famous British author deals with a string of unfortunate incidents at a struggling boarding school.

Still waiting for his new rooms to be completed before he marries his fiancee, Kate Hogarth, Charles Dickens is called away to Harrow on the Hill to investigate the disappearance of three students, not from the illustrious school that takes its name from its location, but from a more modest establishment run by Eustace Aga, the father of Charles’ colleague William Aga. Charles feels responsible for the lads, since he’s paying their way as charity students at the school after having rescued them from the dangerous life they led under Blackfriars Bridge in A Tale of Two Murders (2018). The leading theory about the boys’ vanishing—other than rebellion against the strict new rules and meager new rations instituted by Eustace’s parsimoni-ous new business partner, Fagin Sikes—is that they joined the traveling circus that recently visited town. But the concurrent disappearance of William’s niece Agnes, who worked as a maid at the school, sheds doubt on this explanation, since Agnes, who’s expressed no interest in circus life, has been showing off a treasure map that she claims will win her fortune right in Har-row. More calamities follow. Charles and William are eventually joined by Kate, William’s pregnant wife, Julie; and Julie’s maid, Lucy, all of whom struggle mightily to put things right against this cavalcade of misfortune.

The Victorian setting holds a plot out of Elizabethan tragedy.
“A group of library lovers works to solve a murder.”

A BOOK CLUB TO DIE FOR

St. James, Dorothy
Berkeley (304 pp.)
$27.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-593-09863-9

A group of library lovers works to solve a murder.

Trudell Becket, an assistant librarian in quiet Cypress, South Carolina, is hiding a big secret. As part of her town’s effort to attract tech businesses, her library has gone completely online. Since she can’t bring herself to trash real books, Tru’s created a secret library in a basement storage space only a select few know about. Now she’s been invited to give a presentation at a meeting of the snobbish Arête Society book club at the home of her possible future mother-in-law, Hazel Bailey. The society—which is so insular that even Tru’s pal Flossie Finnegan-Baker, an author, hasn’t been invited to join—is run with an iron fist by former opera star Rebecca White, who refuses to let anyone read what she considers trashy books. Hazel is known for her beautiful house and stunning dinner parties, but Rebecca’s reduced her to a trembling wreck. So when Rebecca ends up dead on her kitchen floor, Hazel is a prime suspect. Tru has built a reputation as an accomplished sleuth, but this case presents unusual challenges. Her boyfriend, Jace, a former NYPD detective who’s joined the local police, is warned off the case. Desperate to help his mother, he begs Tru to investigate. Rebecca had plenty of unseen enemies, but all the evidence points straight to Hazel, leaving Tru and her friends with their hardest test yet.

Loyalty, romance, and Southern mores are highlighted in this pleasant cozy.

CRIME FOR THE BOOKS

Young, Kate
Crooked Lane (336 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-63910-108-5

The Jane Doe Book Club continues to specialize in mysteries on and off the page.

Lyla Moody, who started out working as a receptionist in the office of her private detective uncle Calvin in Sweet Mountain, Georgia, has become a successful sleuth in her own right. She’s helped her boyfriend, Special Agent Brad Jones, crack a series of Jane Doe cases. But now their relationship seems to be developing some cracks of its own. The book club’s Agatha Christie–themed murder hunt at Magnolia Manor is upended when the bed-and-breakfast’s owner, Elaine Morgan, is threatened by her vengeful cousin, Patricia, and police officer Rosa Landry, a club member, gets involved. When the lights come back on during their staged mystery a little later, Patricia turns out to be dead for real. Rosa, who’s been left in charge while Chief Quinn is on his honeymoon, is clearly in over her head. Brad reports seeing an officer who doesn’t exist. And Quinn’s cousin, another officer, doubts Rosa’s ability to handle the crime scene. Rosa’s suspicion is Elaine puts her at odds with her book club friends, who are taken aback when another murder is announced in the local paper. After Rosa’s blamed for arresting Elaine on scant evidence, even her friends begin to doubt her. It takes all Lyla’s prowess plus help from her friends to solve a puzzle worthy of Christie.

Plenty of red herrings play against the tensions of broken romance and endangered friendships.
Iari, Gaer, and company investigate a supposedly haunted cave and find more than ancient ruins.

After the events of Nightwatch on the Hinterlands (2021), Iari got a promotion and was sent north to Windscar along with Gaer and his arithmantic expertise. Gaer, Iari, and Iari’s team of fellow templars are charged with investigating a mysterious cave. Local legend says the cave is haunted. Government intel says the cave is a former hideout used by a long-dead alien species trying to save themselves from extinction. With this in mind, Iari assumes that those aliens used arithmancy to feed the rumors about hauntings in order to keep their hiding place a secret. In any case, she’s more concerned with discovering whether the cave is now being used as a home base for violent insurgents. But when the team delves into the cave and is attacked by ancient mecha that is able to reanimate itself, Iari and Gaer discover that rogue arithmancers are the least of their problems. Iari and Gaer’s unlikely friendship was a nice highpoint in the series opener, so it’s disappointing that they spend much of this book separated from each other. Equally anticlimactic is the way the main antagonist from Book 1 is forgotten, making way for an entirely new villain. Still, Eason excels at action sequences, and the new villain is wonderfully frightening. Gaer’s tense situation as an ally to Iari but spy for his own people continues to provide plenty of narrative interest.

A nice balance of political complications and SF action sequences.

LOST IN TIME
Riddle, A.G.
Head of Zeus (416 pp.)
$24.95 | Sept. 1, 2022
978-1-5387-0653-4

A father and daughter must solve a time-spanning mystery in this twisty science-fiction thriller.

As the book begins, scientist Sam Anderson is visiting his late wife Sarah’s grave with his children, 19-year-old Adeline and Ryan, who’s 11. While they’re still talking about Sarah, they’re approached by three drones and seven cops who arrest Sam for the murder of Nora Thomas, one of his colleagues—with whom he’d begun a relationship. Sam is shocked to find out that Nora is dead, that he’s a suspect, and especially that Adeline has been arrested, too. Gradually, Riddle reveals how Sam and his colleagues at Absolom Sciences made their fortunes via a process that sends “the world’s worst criminals” millions of years back in time and into a parallel timeline, thereby ending most crime on the planet. While the process that the Absolom scientists created is central to the plot, its societal effects are not—the parts of the book dealing with those effects (and the ethics behind it) are the least developed aspects of the novel. Trying to save Adeline, Sam offers a false confession to the murder and is sent back to prehistoric times, while, in the present day, Adeline tries to get to the bottom of who murdered Nora. It’s here that the plot really kicks into high gear. If Riddle was simply telling two parallel storylines—one of a man struggling to survive in the Triassic, the other of his daughter exploring corporate intrigue to clear his name—it would be thrilling enough. But Riddle makes use of a few neatly done plot twists to send the narrative around some unexpected corners. Some aspects of the setting feel undercooked, but the plot and pacing are handled strongly enough to make up for it. The end result is thoroughly gripping once it’s worked up enough momentum.

Come for the time travel, stay for the plot twists.

SEASON OF LOVE
Greer, Helena
Forever (384 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5387-0653-4

When she inherits her Jewish great-aunt’s Christmas tree farm in the Adirondacks, Miriam Blum faces her difficult past and embraces a new love.

Miriam hasn’t been to Carrigan’s Christmasland in a decade. Because of her father’s emotional abuse, she cut ties with her past and didn’t look back. When she learns her beloved great-aunt Cass has died, she returns to New York to sit shiva, intending to stay for just one week. Her plans are upended when Cass’ will reveals that Miriam has inherited part of the tree farm and inn, and the place is in financial distress. Noelle Northwood, manager of the farm, doesn’t think Miriam deserves to be an owner after having been absent for so long. Still, Noelle and Miriam have a common goal of saving the place, so they work together on a plan. Attraction is instantaneous between the women, even when they frustrate each other. As the season progresses from one holiday to the next, Miriam and Noelle work through their grief and trauma and start to find solace in each other. This
A self-conscious, disaster-prone baker develops a crush on one of his fellow contestants on a famous British reality show. Paris Daillencourt and self-confidence don’t usually belong in the same sentence. While he may have grown up rather well-off, his healthy background only seems to isolate him from his peers. His sole friend is his roommate, Morag, who strong-armed him into a friendship. It’s because of her that he’s showcasing his baking talents on Britain’s favorite reality show, Bake Expectations. His first day on set turns into a disaster when he hits fellow contestant Tariq Hassan in the face with a refrigerator door, giving the man a bloody nose and interrupting the chocolate chip cookie challenge for both of them. Paris naturally feels gutted, though Tariq reassures him things are completely fine—no need to apologize for the accident. But when Paris makes an effort to soothe him, sets up a cycle that occurs throughout the book. Paris will make a mistake (perceived or otherwise), agonize, and mentally beat himself up to the point of an anxiety attack until someone talks him down. Living with and treating an anxiety disorder is the bulk of Paris’ journey. While it’s wonderful to see more mental health representation in romance, especially with a character who’s on a journey to diagnosis, the level of attention Hall pays to Paris’ anxiety can drown out the struggles faced by other characters. Tariq has his own challenges with Islamophobia and microaggressions, which don’t get nearly as much attention. Several secondary characters are needlessly unpleasant, from Jennifer Haller, the Bake Expectations producer, to Morag, Paris’ roommate, who often undermines Paris’ feelings and concerns. Hall has lofty aspirations in this romance that fail to fully rise. The complexity of the issues facing Paris and Tariq both separately and as a couple are explored unevenly and with resolutions that feel shaky at best.

An ambitious romance that fails to conquer the couple’s many obstacles.

PARIS DAILLENCOURT IS ABOUT TO CRUMBLE
Hall, Alexis
Forever (400 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-5387-0333-5

A TABE FOR TWO
Lister, Sheryl
Forever (356 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Aug. 16, 2022
978-1-5387-5327-3

A nurse with a painful past learns to heal herself when a software engineer reprograms her attitude toward companionship.

When avowed city dweller Gabriel Cunningham moves to a small town to replace his sister, Andrea, as their grandmother’s caregiver, he’s confident that he will return to Atlanta—along with Nana—within a few months. But Firefly Lake, nestled close to Napa Valley, has its own charms. One of them is Serenity Wheeler, accomplished professional nurse and superb amateur chef, who regularly hosts a Supper Club for her girlfriends, which includes Gabriel’s sister. When Andrea moves away, Serenity extends a courtesy invite to her brother. Although Gabriel makes a terrible first impression, Serenity gradually begins to enjoy his company. But when mutual dislike morphs to desire, both decide to keep their relationship casual. Serenity is especially not keen to enter a commitment after a bad breakup. But when they bond over food and conversations, Gabriel and Serenity are required to reevaluate their demands from the relationship. The rhythms of Firefly Lake, complete with a lovely ice-cream shop and several food-loving denizens, are consistently warm and comforting. Lister displays a knack for seamlessly weaving evocative descriptions of culinary delights with equally vivid portraits of engaging characters. While Serenity and Gabriel are fun when together, their interactions with their respective friends and family are especially entertaining. It’s easy to empathize with Serenity’s fears and Gabriel’s reluctance to commit, but the obstacles that mar their path to happy companionship often seem perfunctory. While Serenity’s tendency to compare Gabriel to her ex-boyfriend is perfectly justifiable, the bar often seems set too low for Gabriel: He’s able to lope over it merely with his effortless charm and consistent likability.

An enemies-to-lovers romance that is light on the animosity and heavily loaded with love.

A magickal Fey community works together to celebrate life and fight against evil.

In the third and final installment of Roberts’ Dragon Heart Legacy series, Breen Kelly has made a life for herself in Talamh, a mystical realm reached through a portal in Ireland. In Talamh, Breen has found love and acceptance in the Fey
community. She has settled into a passionate, romantic relationship with Keegan, the leader of the Fey. Breen is learning more about her powers and explores how to control and harness the magick she was born with, along with discovering new powers that belong to her alone. However, Breen realizes Talamh is still in danger. Although the Fey community has successfully held off attacks from Breen’s grandfather the god Odran, Talamh will never be safe as long as he is alive. The Fey refuse to live in fear, and people in the village celebrate both weddings and births as they prepare for what they hope will be the final battle with the vengeful god. All signs and prophecies indicate that Breen will play a key role in defeating Odran. As Breen gains control of her powers, she also has disturbing dreams about Odran’s plans. Breen’s visions reveal that several Fey are actually Odran’s spies. The Fey are pained by this betrayal, wondering how their loved ones could be so steeped in poisonous hatred that they turned their backs on their own people. Roberts explores how communities battle evil from without and within. In the end, the community’s bonds of love and loyalty show how good can defeat evil, a classic fantasy theme that continues to stay relevant.

A thought-provoking and action-packed series finale.
An uneven oral history of the early development of a vital musical genre.

Readers may expect more from a writer with the resume of Abrams, a well-known New York Times reporter and author of *Boys Among Men*, a compelling book about top-flight basketball players going from high school straight to the NBA, and *All the Pieces Matter*, an insightful oral history of *The Wire*. His latest has an intriguing premise: the germination and proliferation of hip-hop and how rappers became globally recognized superstars. While Abrams obviously couldn’t talk to his hero, the late Tupac Shakur, so many of the artists that he cites as essential—from DJ Kool Herc, who is credited as the pioneer of the musical style, to Rakim and Public Enemy’s Chuck D, all mentioned throughout the book—are still around and offering interviews. Not having any input from them—not to mention Jay-Z, Queen Latifah, Nas, De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, and numerous other significant figures and groups—is problematic. (Much of the information about DLS and ATCQ comes from the author’s interviews with the Jungle Brothers, who influenced both collectives, and Muhammad Islam, the security manager for ATCQ.) What makes the omissions more glaring is that when Abrams does have interviews with the artists involved, the narrative is an entertaining treat for fans—e.g., Ice-T talking about one of his earliest singles or Ice Cube talking about how he decided to move forward with N.W.A.’s most controversial songs. As Abrams writes about the incendiary “Fuck Tha Police,” though it “provoked consternation among police supporters, the song was a cathartic expression of protest for many people whose lives had been touched by negative encounters with law enforcement.” Unfortunately, these kinds of insightful segments are few and far between in this sprawling text, which skids abruptly to a stop with a few random thoughts about the meaning of hip-hop.

A great concept receives a middling treatment.
When we think of work most of us conjure up the picture of a soulless, harshly lit cubicle city, something straight out of Office Space or The Office. Of course, numerous jobs take place in other environments, and countless people toil in arduous, often thankless jobs that many of us ignore, whether it be construction, sanitation, hospitality, agriculture, or even sex work. For this inaugural Work Issue, I’m highlighting five books about important work that often flies under the radar.

The hospitality industry is perhaps the most visible yet widely misunderstood arena of contemporary work. In his debut book, A Waiter in Paris: Adventures in the Dark Heart of the City (Pegasus, Sept. 6), Edward Chisholm reveals the underbelly of the oft-romanticized Paris dining scene. “In this revealing social commentary,” notes our review, “Chisholm shares the appalling working conditions that he and his co-workers faced behind the facade of fine French dining.” While many books have taken us behind the scenes of celebrated restaurants, Chisholm’s portrait of Paris is uniquely insightful, portraying not just the grueling hours and poor treatment from managers, but also broader social concerns for the service staff.

In Pig Years, Ellyn Gaydos (Knopf, June 14) chronicles her experiences as a farmhand. Our reviewer wrote that the author “describes the realities of farm life with honest precision, neither indulging in unnecessary dramatizing nor shy- ing away from the numerous harsh realities.” Most of us understand the physical labor involved in farming, but Gaydos gives us the details, providing “a complex and fraught portrait of a lifestyle that is simultaneously protective, precarious, and resistant to change.”

Caregiving is yet another overlooked job, and it’s arguably the most physically and emotionally stressful. Lynn Tillman’s latest book, Mothercare: On Obligation, Love, Death, and Ambivalence, (Soft Skull, Aug. 2), is “an extended essay [that] plumbs the effects of aging and illness on patient and caregivers alike.” In characteristically incisive prose, the author explores her mother’s experience with “normal pressure hydrocephalus, a condition virtually unknown then—and one that remains poorly understood today.” In this slim yet potent book, Tillman “painstakingly catalogs the numerous challenges of illness, not only for the patient, but also for those around her, including the frustrations of finding good or even adequate care.”

Though the consumption of pornography is widespread across the spectrum of society, performers in the industry are often ignored, their work dismissed or even attacked. Maitland Ward fights against this ignorance in Rated X: How Porn Liberated Me From Hollywood (Atria, Sept. 6), a personal chronicle of her journey in the porn industry. “Throughout the narrative,” notes our critic, “the author is clear and engaging in her frank discussions of sex and womanhood.” It’s a remarkably refreshing narrative in which the author “expresses herself with effortless honesty and humor about the support and creativity she found in an industry where the creators ‘are all too often forgotten about as being human and deserving of anyone’s real help.’ ” Contrary to what some may believe, sex work is real work, which Ward makes abundantly clear.

Though she took a decidedly different path than Ward, Chris Belcher explores similar themes of sex, sexuality, and self-discovery in Pretty Baby: A Memoir (Avid Reader Press, July 12). The author, a professor of gender studies, “reflects on the life path that led her into part-time sex work as a professional dominatrix.” She is never less than fully open and honest, bringing into the light many issues that demand continued attention. “As it explores issues of class, gender, and sexuality,” noted our review, “this refreshingly bold, boundary-breaking book reveals that no matter how formidable a woman is, she is still subject to the ever present threat of patriarchal brutality.”

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
“A warmly candid book for dog lovers and anyone affected by cancer.”

**SIT, STAY, HEAL**

A veterinary oncologist explores how caring for cancer-stricken animals helped illuminate her own private war with metastatic cancer.

“How can you do what you do? They think cancer in animals is too sad to be a full-time job,” writes Alsarraf. “They are surprised to hear I experience much more happiness than sadness….I try to give pet parents realistic hope, another summer or perhaps a few years of good quality time. It is an emotionally draining profession, yet it fills me right back up.” One of the author’s stories involves Daisy, a happy-go-lucky, treat-seeking cocker spaniel with lymphoma. Daisy, who went on to live into old age, reiterated the lesson that pets diagnosed with life-threatening disease could still live happily and that humans were the ones who immersed themselves in self-defeating worry about the what ifs they could not control. As she observed Daisy’s devoted family, which also includes an adopted special needs daughter who is unable to speak or eat by mouth, Alsarraf also realized that concerns like losing her hair from chemotherapy were trivial by comparison. Among the more poignant accounts is that of the author’s own dog, Newton, a “mentally challenged” boxer who “provides unconditional love for me and my family.” Regardless of the toll that cancer treatments took on Alsarraf’s body, Newton loved her without judgment. The unexpected—and devastating—discovery that Newton had lymphoma unexpectedly brought her into even closer contact with the mortality she had been fighting against. Rather than impose her desire to beat cancer on Newton’s situation, the author opted to make her dog’s remaining days comfortable rather than increase his time through treatments that might bring him even greater pain. In this wise, often moving narrative, Alsarraf offers useful insight into the meaning of health, wellness, and good living through uplifting stories of animal and human healing.

A warmly candid book for dog lovers and anyone affected by cancer.

**HOLLYWOOD**

More than 300 film professionals tell the story of the world’s most prominent movie industry.

In 1969, the American Film Institute began the Harold Lloyd Master seminars, “intimate conversations between Hollywood professionals and AFI conservatory students,” named for its first participant. For this book, Basinger and Wason “were granted total and unprecedented access to the AFI’s seminars, oral histories, and complete archives” to make what they call “the only comprehensive firsthand history of Hollywood.” This massive book contains thousands of quotes from producers, actors, directors, composers, and other professionals that span the earliest days of flammable celluloid and the studio system to the current freelance world of digital filmmaking and special effects. The authors only intermittently provide historical context and avoid commenting directly on speakers’ recollections. Consequently, readers must take the stories on faith, a fraught prospect when dealing with luminaries such as Fritz Lang, who was notorious for embellishing facts, or elderly director Tay Garnett, who began a reminiscence with, “I’ll never forget one D.W. Griffith picture, I’m not sure what the title was.” For a comprehensive history, important details are missing, revealing the peril of letting people speak without providing perspective. Prominent figures offer praise of Griffith’s contributions to
early cinema—In "discovered the close-up" and gave film "the form and grammar it has today"—yet not a word about the jaw-dropping racism in films such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). For cinephiles, however, this volume is a gold mine of production details, backroom deals, and inside gossip. There are surprising revelations—e.g., Joan Crawford was more beloved than her reputation for derangement would have one believe—and memorably graphic stories, as when Billy Wilder noted that during the filming of *Greed* (1924), Erich von Stroheim "stopped shooting for three days because there wasn't enough horse shit in the streets" and forced staff to collect more for him "because that's what he wanted. Plenty of good horse shit.

Fun firsthand accounts from 100 years of Hollywood history.

**HOME BOUND**

**An Uprooted Daughter’s Reflections on Belonging**

**Bee, Vanessa A.**

Astra House (256 pp.)

$28.00  |  Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-66260-133-0

A Cameroonian-born lawyer and essayist explores layers of a multiracial upbringing across cultures, continents, and economic classes.

By age 14, Bee had lived in four different countries: Cameroon, which she left in infancy with her aunt and her aunt’s White husband; France, where she spent most of her childhood; England, where she lived as a preteen; and the U.S., which became her adopted home. All of her moves brought connections to cultures far different from the traditional, clan-centered traditions in Cameroon. They also gave her an early awareness that she was a Black girl moving in a White-dominated world. "My blackness was a marker that assigned me in and out of teams," she writes. "The stark contrast against my dad’s white skin and differing last name reminded me of being imported. An outsider in my own home.

After her aunt divorced and left for London with no job, Bee also came to know housing insecurity and that the concept of home was as impermanent and as "cumulative as a nesting doll.

The Christian faith she shared with her aunt became the impetus to join an evangelical church in Nevada, where Bee and her aunt eventually moved. Academic success led to Harvard Law School, a radical restructuring of her worldview, and the painful and the baptism of her home. Bee took a job with the Department of Housing and Development in Washington, D.C., her home stabilized, and she bought a house of her own. Still, the meaning of home, including the Black female body that faced so much danger in the world, continued to haunt her. "My Blackness was a marker that assigned me in and out of teams," she writes. "The stark contrast against my dad’s white skin and differing last name reminded me of being imported. An outsider in my own home.

An intimately moving story.

**VIRAL JUSTICE**

**How We Grow the World We Want**

**Benjamin, Ruha**

Princeton Univ. (392 pp.)

$29.95  |  Oct. 11, 2022

978-0-691-22288-2

Small steps toward a just world.

Benjamin, a professor of African American studies at Princeton, offers an impassioned argument for the need...
to foster the “deep-rooted interdependence” that characterizes strong communities and to counter the ableism, sexism, racism, and classism that lead to injustice and inequality. Besides drawing on the findings of sociologists, epidemiologists, educators, and historians, among others, Benjamin shares her own experiences as the daughter of a Black American father and Indian-born mother of Persian descent, as well as the experiences of her family and friends, to expose the effects of racism in education, health care, policing and punishment, housing, economic opportunity, political participation, and scientific research. The victimization of her mentally ill brother by a “ravenous carceral system” informs her vision of police reform that would divert funding to housing, education, and community support. Turning to education, she exposes the “myth of meritocracy”—the idea that hard work and innate talent always lead to educational and professional success. In an “apartheid-like system” of education that is organized by race and class, success unfortunately breeds entitlement and “elitist delusions of specialness” rather than an awareness that achievement depends on luck: where, to whom, and in what economic stratum you were born. Benjamin reveals racism in hospitals, doctors’ offices, and the designs of research studies, where Black bodies are probed and tested but not provided adequate health care based on the outcomes of research. Impatient with the “datafication of injustice,” she claims we do not need more studies or more evidence. We need only the will to look at ourselves and “to individually confront how we participate in unjust systems.” Viral justice, argues the author convincingly, entails a redistribution of resources to overcome inequality and to create “communities of care” that support everyone’s needs. Each of us, she writes, must “question the roles and narrative you’ve inherited, and scheme with others to seed a different world.”

A powerful, urgent plea for individual responsibility in an unjust world.

THE SELF DELUSION
The New Neuroscience of How We Invent—and Reinvent—Our Identities
Berns, Gregory
Basic Books (304 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-541-60229-8

A fresh look at the relationship between our brains and self-identity. Scientists call consciousness the “hard problem” because other brain functions are easy by comparison. Berns, a professor of psychology at Emory University and author of How Dogs Love Us and What It’s Like To Be a Dog, delivers an expert and thoroughly satisfying exploration of this specific area of neuroscience. As the author points out, everyone identifies themselves via memories strung together with the stories we absorb to link the memories together. “The development of memory has received the lion’s share of attention from researchers,” writes Berns, “but a few psychologists have dedicated their careers to the equally interesting study of how children tell stories.” The brain enters the world in a rudimentary state. No one remembers their birth, and the infant brain stores no memories for its first two years, after which high-arousal events like deaths can make an impression. By age 4, the memory region of the brain, the hippocampus, is almost fully functional. Berns reminds readers that the brain evolved for survival, not accuracy. Despite resources vastly superior to those of a computer, it is incapable of taking in every perception, let alone recording them all. It takes shortcuts, inventing stories about the world based on past experience (“schemas”). Encountering something that doesn’t fit an existing schema, we may change the memory to make it fit or perhaps not remember it at all. “Who you think you are—your notion of ‘self’—is a mere cartoon, just as your notions of other people are cartoon versions of them,” writes the author. Berns ably blends scientific literature with his accounts of his interviews with experts in a variety of fields to make a compelling case that our identities, as well as our perceptions of the world, are ever changing narratives based on highly selective evidence. Not a solution to the “hard problem,” but an ingenious account of how the brain creates ourselves and our world.

THE FIRST IN A TRILOGY
This debut author invites men into a process of conscious evolution through key relationships

“‘This book is for anyone who wants to explore an authentic expression of himself as a consciously evolving man.’”
—James Knight, Founder of Gentle Somatic Yoga, Author & Movement Educator

“‘The book insightfully supports its conception of healthy, sustainable masculinity; it doesn’t seek to demonize men but rather to lift them up... An elaborate but useful resource for men seeking spiritual growth.’”
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email Ellema@PerfectWorldTrilogy.com PerfectWorldTrilogy.com
THE NEED TO BE WHOLE
Patriotism and the History of Prejudice
Berry, Wendell
Shoemaker & Company (528 pp.)
$24.00 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-8-9856798-0-9

The acclaimed farmer, novelist, and environmental essayist considers—and grumbles about—our current racial reckonings.

Berry has been writing about race for much of his career. His 1970 book, *The Hidden Wound*, considered the impact of slavery and its aftereffects on the country in general and his native Kentucky in particular. In essence, his approach hasn't changed. He still advocates for tightknit communities that are, if not actively agrarian, at least compassionate toward the environment; from there, he suggests, balms to many social ills will naturally arrive. This digressive, at times exhausting book is at best a well-meaning, eloquent utopian plea to abandon urbanity; at worst, it lapses into all-lives-matter rhetoric insisting that slavery and the Confederacy, while wrongheaded, were misunderstood. Berry finds recent efforts to remove Confederate monuments to be unhelpful, leading to an extended consideration of Robert E. Lee as “one of the great tragic figures of our history, who embodied and suffered in his personal life our national tragedy.” The author also argues that most Confederate soldiers were not necessarily White supremacists but rather unfairly maligned just-following-orders types. “Whatever there may have been of kindness in slavery does not excuse it,” he writes later, “and whatever was most cruel does not typify it.”

In his effort to seek nuance in racial divisions, Berry risks being misunderstood, which he acknowledges. The deeper problem is that he cherry-picks where he goes looking for nuance. He laments the Great Migration without considering its causes; curiously, mentions Jim Crow only in passing; and laments the loss of Confederate statues but doesn’t consider the option of elevating other communities in their places. The hardworking Amish farm he describes certainly sounds lovely, but his prescription that we somehow build a country from that kind of model is as impractical as any bureaucratic approach he has railed against in the past.

A rambling and frustrating book from a normally reliable author.

SOUL CULTURE
Black Poets, Books, and Questions That Grew Me Up
Bingham-Risher, Remica
Beacon Press (248 pp.)
$26.95 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-8070-1592-6

Essays for poets and poetry lovers framed by personal narratives and interviews with Black poets who have influenced the author in her life and career.

In her latest book, Bingham-Risher champions literacy, writing, and teaching as acts of love and social responsibility. The author emphasizes the work that spoke to her early on and led her to mentors like E. Ethelbert Miller, Sonia Sanchez, Lucille Clifton, Natasha Trethewey, and a host of other significant writers who fueled her burgeoning career. She recounts her life through the lens of poetry, asking vital questions: What is the Black poet’s responsibility as a writer? To the community? To the self? Each interview offers something to ponder. Bingham-Risher recounts how poetry softened the blow of personal and political hardships, enriched her education, and “grew her up.” Some essays, like the ones linked with the author’s interviews with Patricia Smith and Tim Seibles, are cohesive and sharply rendered, while others are meandering. The author doesn’t deeply explore each topic she addresses; the narrative operates at a loosely associative level, the voice and persona of the narrator remaining somewhat elusive. Nearly every experience—e.g., marrying the love of her life, a chance meeting with
children’s book author Eloise Greenfield, coping with personal losses—is expressed in the same register. This sometimes creates a static reading experience, and some chapters get bogged down or brush too lightly over important territory, including Black Lives Matter, the death of Sandra Bland, and the massacre at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The book is strongest when the personal narrative is sharper, as when Bingham-Risher writes about her daughter’s unique name, the tragic tale of a good friend who was killed by police in Phoenix, or her family’s biannual The Color Purple breakfast, a festive, all-day affair of cooking, mentoring, and honoring elders. Still, Bingham-Risher asks questions of poetry, community, and responsibility that will inspire both seasoned and aspiring poets and educators.

A love letter to Black literary art that leaves you wanting more.

**DELIQUENT**

*Inside America’s Debt Machine*

Botella, Elena

Univ. of California (320 pp.)

$26.95 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-0-520-38035-6

An ambitious insider’s critique of the “debt machine” created by credit card companies and financial culture.

As a former senior business manager at Capital One, Botella is well positioned to explore a landscape of unnecessary, manipulated debt. In addition to her own experience, she weaves in interviews with diverse working Americans about their debt-generating misadventures within this system. “When I started working at Capital One,” she writes, “I was in awe of how smoothly the machine ran, how neatly it seemed to match the lessons in my economics textbooks.” The author clearly shows how the company pursued risk-based pricing, marginal revenue, and other strategies to widen credit availability, reaping huge profits and experimenting to derive new “levers” to manipulate consumers into unwise financial choices. Botella begins with a history lesson, noting how lending practice used to be somewhat straightforward, even at the level of working-class “loan sharks.” Americans now “fall into debt through use of a product that, after decades of scientific experimentation, has been engineered to encourage them to borrow more and pay less.” The author divides her often complex discussion into chapters focused on topics such as the manipulation of interest rates, which ensures that “Americans are charged far too much to borrow money,” and deceptive credit limit policies. “The practice of unsolicited changes to customers’ credit lines,” she writes, “is central to understanding why Americans are so deeply in debt.” The author also explores areas of reform, relating her ideas to those proposed by Bernie Sanders and Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez: “Americans can afford to, and morally ought to, build a system where no one feels they must turn to high priced credit to survive.” Botella confidently relays her unsettling arguments about how these outwardly populist institutions market indebtedness to consumers, although her detailed discussions of financial tools and levers are sometimes opaque despite her enthusiasm.

Original, passionate fusion of progressive polemic and stark portrait of the labyrinth of contemporary consumer finance.

**THE LAST CAMPAIGN**

*Sherman, Geronimo and the War for America*

Brands, H.W.

Doubleday (416 pp.)

$35.00 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-0-385-54728-4

A sweeping history of the Indian Wars and two iconic fighters.
The Geronimo campaign has been so intensely studied for the last 150 years that it’s hard to imagine there’s much new information to discover. Noted historian Brands finds news, though, by placing the war against the Apaches in the larger context of the Indian Wars generally, from the mass hanging of Sioux rebels in 1862 to the Modoc Wars, Little Bighorn, the Red Cloud War, and more. A central figure in those campaigns was William Tecumseh Sherman, who, ironically, bore the name of an early champion of Native American resistance. Stationed in Florida during the time of the Indian removals from the East, he opined that “Florida…was of little value to us” and suggested that Native tribes should be moved there and not what he considered the more valuable lands of Oklahoma. Transferred to the West after heroic service in the Civil War, he told a militant White audience bent on annihilating neighboring tribes, “I don’t see how we can make a decent excuse for an Indian war.” Yet, when the occasion demanded, Sherman could be as ruthless as he was in Georgia, noting that the foremost goal of war was not extermination—a word he used sometimes inadvisedly—but instead economic disaster. Reflecting Sherman’s thinking, Gen. Philip Sheridan wrote, “reduction to poverty brings prayers for peace more surely and more quickly than does the destruction of human life, as the selfishness of man has demonstrated in more than one great conflict.” The application of that technique brought mixed results, and Geronimo held out to the end. Brands is particularly good in placing all this in a political as well as military context, with Sherman wrestling with Indian Agency bureaucrats in Washington over whether they or the Army should oversee matters of war, peace, and, in the end, cultural extermination.

An excellent, well-written study—like most of the author’s books, a welcome addition to the literature of westward expansion.

DAVID SMITH
The Art and Life of a Transformational Sculptor
Brenson, Michael
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (864 pp.)
$50.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-374-28146-5

A capable, densely detailed portrait of the noted abstract expressionist sculptor.

In 1943, when David Smith was 36, noted art critic Clement Greenberg wrote, “If he is able to maintain the level set in the work he has already done…he has a chance of becoming one of the greatest of all American artists.” A contemporary of Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, and other leading and well-known artists, Smith certainly believed that he was. As arts writer Brenson chronicles, much set Smith apart from others: He took a nearly blue-collar approach to his work, regarding his studio as a kind of factory, and much of his welded metal sculpture owes to a period he spent on the factory floor assembling automobiles. But Smith was also chaotic. Toward the end of his life, he was addicted to drugs and alcohol, a philanderer and absentee father, abusive, angry, and estranged from the art establishment. “Smith had long cultivated conflict, believing that the more of it his work could direct and transform, the greater it would be,” writes the author. In the end, the conflict absorbed him, and Smith’s star has faded. Brenson’s careful, thoroughly researched biography does much to explain why his work merits reconsideration. For example, even though it is sometimes “anonymous and cold,” it has associative power: “The sculpture both encourages projection and stops it. It is reachable and it isn’t.” Smith, who held on to his later work, saying, “I want it all where I can see it,” showed it sporadically and enjoyed only limited sales. In the last year of his life—Brenson, following Smith’s ex-wife’s lead, suggests that his death in a 1965 car crash may have been suicide—he was honored by a major exhibit in Los Angeles, and his work has since been paired in shows with Calder and other major contemporaries. The book includes more than 100 photos.

A lucid, welcome life of an artist who, though long gone, is well worth discovering.
A bound copy of the text of the dissenting opinions in the recent watershed case.

As the title (printed in massive letters on the cover) hints, the dissenting opinion fronts this publication of the Supreme Court’s decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization. That is the only change made to the text, which is freely available on the court’s website. The book contains no annotations nor any other concessions to lay readers, who will find themselves picking their way through the document’s many impenetrable citations—e.g., “See Janus v. State, County, and Municipal Employees, 585 U.S. ___, ___–___ (2018) (slip op., at 42, 47–49).” This publication’s chief assets are its portability and, for readers who disagree with the majority as fervently as the dissenting justices do, the bolstering reassurance that at least someone understands the bedrock need for bodily autonomy as a prerequisite of liberty before they tackle the majority opinion, penned by Samuel Alito. (Readers accustomed to the conventions of legal writing may not blink at his sevenfold repetition that Roe v. Wade was “egregiously wrong,” but to lay readers it layers on the spite.) While literary gems are few, some passages may elicit a hollow chuckle or two. At one point, the dissenters mock Alito’s assertion that other rights associated with Roe, such as the right to contraception or marriage equality, are not at risk: “The majority tells everyone not to worry. It can (so it says) neatly extract the right to choose from the constitutional edifice without affecting any associated rights. (Think of someone telling you that the Jenga tower simply will not collapse.)” The unavoidable result of beginning with the dissent, however, is that readers will be faced with not only the majority opinion,
We think we know a status symbol when we see one. A Rolex watch, a foreign car, opera tickets—we think of status as it relates to the trappings of the upper classes. But what about the jobs we have and the recognition we strive for? In his new book, *Status and Culture: How Our Desire for Social Rank Creates Taste, Identity, Art, Fashion, and Constant Change* (Viking, Sept. 6), W. David Marx explores the inextricable relationship between status and culture: how our desire for status shapes our choices and what we value, which in turn affects our behaviors and what become cultural norms. In a starred review, a critic for Kirkus called the book “essential for anyone desiring a deeper understanding of status inequity.” Marx spoke to us via Zoom from Tokyo, where he lives. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How did your idea for this book come about?
I have been thinking about the question *What is culture?* for about 20 years now, and it’s such an ambiguous term. I was very frustrated with trying to analyze culture: what it is, where it comes from, and why it changes so often. I kept coming back to the concept of status, and, in understanding status, it really neatly organized things like taste, authenticity, identity, class, subcultures and countercultures, art, fashion, history. All of these things became part of the same macro phenomenon once you understood how status works. I really wanted to sit down and put all this information together into one book, because these things tend to be all over the place.

Is it generally more taboo to discuss status in the workplace or with friends and family?
Inside of a status group, such as within a company, in some ways status is very clear, because people have certain positions or titles. That being said, it creates a lot of conflict, because people want to make sure that their contributions are matched by those titles. In terms of talking about your status inside of a company, it’s so clear-cut that it’s less taboo, but it creates quite a bit of anxiety in that people constantly look at the people above them on this hierarchy and believe that those people are unfairly there and [that] they should be there instead. It’s a driving force of envy as well.

You write that the jobs of the creative class, to use Richard Florida’s term, earn more status benefits from these jobs than financial rewards.
Certainly, it’s a big critique of journalism and of editorial roles in particular that you often have to start as an unpaid intern—I worked as an unpaid intern for a couple months in New York when I was getting my start. There’s the question of who has the economic safety to take these
positions, and that creates disproportionate advantages for people who are already wealthy and creates disparities that increase as you move up. But also, the people who are attracted to those positions seek some form of status, whether it’s the cultural capital of being in the know or being close to celebrities and tastemakers. Those are the benefits of those roles, along with having a job that lets you have personal creative expression rather than just doing tasks.

That being said, what’s interesting about the way that the economy has developed in the last 20 years or so is that some of those positions are better paid than people’s parents’ positions in serious upper-middle-class professions. You could be a graphic designer today and make way more money than your own parent who was an accountant or something like that. I think what’s been interesting about the creative class is that, sure, they do not have as much economic capital as people working in finance, but their general status position in society has risen because of this combination of pretty good economic capital, strong educational backgrounds, and the occupational capital that comes with proximity to art and celebrity.

Are there jobs or careers that have experienced a drastic change in the status associated with them in recent years?
The creative class has seen a huge rise over the last 30 years or so, especially when you add in tech as a kind of an auxiliary to that. So those industries are on the rise, and they’re extremely urban, extremely coastal. On the other side, there are the people whom Patrick Wyman calls the “American gentry”—people who, in places like Iowa or Oklahoma, own a fast-food franchise or a car dealership and have very high incomes relative to the average income of these places. They see themselves as very high status in those worlds. But there’s a lot of resentment when they turn on the TV and what is considered to be a high-status position tends to be coastal, creative-class, or finance positions. That conflict [over] what counts as high status is actually one of the things that’s really splitting America, because there isn’t broad agreement between these groups about who should be afforded respect and esteem. The rise of these positions has not simply changed the nature of the economy and society and how money is distributed, but also how esteem is distributed.

What about the rise of the influencer?
This is a new world in which we can quantify status unlike ever before. When you look at two influencers and you say, Who is more of an influencer? you simply can compare follower counts: This person has 3 million, this person has 2 million. Now, you can probably say, Well, they have the right 2 million and they have the wrong 3 million, but it’s very quantifiable. At the same time, this position may still not be quite as high status as becoming famous for something that people see as a worthwhile accomplishment or exclusive skill or strong contribution to society. It’s almost like the influencers have all the forms of status—the quantifiable, huge audience following them, influence benefits from companies—but they don’t quite have the esteem and respect in doing the activity. There’s something I talk about in the book called status integrity, which is that in every status group, in order to function, people need to believe that the people above them have status for good reason, and there’s punishing of people when they tried to claim more status that they deserve. Social media influencers are interesting because they create questions of status integrity.

What is one thing that each individual can do to help combat status inequity?
The first thing to do is to understand how status manifests in how we treat each other. You have a role in treating other people in certain ways. The hierarchies that we [have] in society are created, they’re not natural, and you perpetuate those hierarchies in how you treat people. If you understand all these issues from a status lens, you can think more about the way you treat people [and] how that manifests in creating and replicating hierarchy.

Nina Palattella is the editorial assistant. Status and Culture was reviewed in the June 15, 2022, issue.
but also the three concurrences—Clarence Thomas’ (strident), Brett Kavanaugh’s (vacuous), and John Roberts’ (insipid)—before finishing the book.

Like eating dessert first, if your idea of dessert is despair flavored with rage.  

SEDUCED BY STORY  
The Use and Abuse of Narrative  
Brooks, Peter  
New York Review Books (176 pp.)  
$16.95 paper | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-68137-663-9  

A rigorous exploration of narrative, from its usage in classic literature to its misuse in contemporary discourse. In 1984, Brooks published Reading for the Plot, in which he argued that we live in “an episodic, sometimes semiconscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue” and have situated ourselves “at the intersection of several stories not yet completed.” Decades later, the author senses a problem that warrants this follow-up book: In our world of 24-hour media, narrativity has run amok. Weary of “the storification of reality,” Brooks seeks a way forward that recognizes facts and storytelling as two separate concepts. “The universe is not our stories about the universe,” he explains, “even if those stories are all we have. Swamped in story as we seem to be, we may lose the distinction between the two, asserting the domination of our constructed realities over the real thing.” Now, he laments, “story…has entered the orbit of political cant and corporate branding.” To better understand this new engagement with storytelling, the author proposes an “analytic unpacking of the claims for narrative.” These whirlwind essays span centuries of literature, from Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa (1747) to Paula Hawkins’ thriller The Girl on the Train (2015). Brooks extrapolates ideas of narrative veracity, character, speaker, and audience, all while conscientiously maintaining his collection’s accessibility. Even readers who are not yet familiar with Proust or Faulkner will find stable footing in these essays despite their many erudite digressions throughout the canon. In the final piece, the author shifts from novels to the legal world and chillingly recounts how the Supreme Court can disparately interpret its cases by widening or constricting the “narrative circle” of a particular situation. He closes with a plea: “We need, more than ever, the reflective knowledge that the humanities can provide, very much including analysis of the dominant stories of our economics, our ethics, our politics.”

An enlightening challenge to readers curious about literary theory and its real-world applications.  

THE MINIATURISTS  
Browning, Barbara  
Duke Univ. (232 pp.)  
$21.95 paper | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-4780-1891-9  

Boundless curiosity inspires an engaging series of essays. Browning, a professor of performance studies at NYU, melds memoir, philosophical musing, and scholarship in eight essays inspired by, digressing from, and meditating on tiny things. Among the trove of small items that she considers are the “nutshell studies” of Frances Glessner Lee, known as the “mother of forensic science,” who created miniature dioramas of crime scenes in order to examine them for evidence. Watching movies such as Honey, I Shrunk the Kids and The Incredible Shrinking Man (and Woman) leads the author to question human significance as one’s body devolves into a speck. Browning returns to this question when thinking about microscopes and telescopes, both of which allow a vision of the “infinitesimal and infinite,” generating a sense of disorientation and even existential anguish. The movies also divert the author’s attention to parenting—by her own mother and father and also
“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
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her mothering of her son, Leo, who features in several essays (as do her partner, friends, and students). Because Leo was a proficient pianist, she once gave him a toy piano; now, the history of toy piano manufacturing, not surprisingly, piques her interest. A psychoanalytic study of Jonathan Swift and Lewis Carroll, writers “who presented the best-known literary depictions of miniature (as well as gigantic) people,” reveals that both were hypochondriacs. “Maybe you’re wondering what hypochondriasis and miniaturism have to do with one another,” Browning writes, “or maybe it’s obvious to you that germs are very tiny things, though one’s fear of them can be quite overwhelming.” During the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the author has experienced that fear viscerally. Some miniaturists created portraits for lockets, private encasements for images of a beloved. “They were commodity fetishes,” Browning notes, “with a high degree of sentimental value.” The author sees connections between privacy and miniaturism, as well, for writers such as Robert Walser, creator of Microscripts, and Emily Dickinson, who bound her poems into tiny fascicles.

An appealing collection of fresh, free-wheeling essays.

What’s the matter with the Democratic Party? Burmila explores a slate of problems, from poor messaging to ideological inconstancy.

“If you have yet to conclude that the Republican Party is a malignancy that needs to be destroyed rather than appeased or reasoned with, this is the wrong book for you.” So writes the author in an opening gambit to a discussion that finds fault—sometimes a touch excessively, but with cause—with what he regards as the appeasing tactics of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, who were both too eager to compromise during their presidencies. A larger problem is that while the Democrats are asking to steer the ship of state, they’re not offering persuasive arguments for why they should be trusted to do the job. The Republicans, courtesy of Newt Gingrich, Mitch McConnell, and their ilk, have developed a “scorched earth approach to politics” that in essence says “shove off” to anyone not a true believer. On the other hand, Obama contorted himself to enlist both left and right in a struggle in which one side had no interest in compromise. His successors at nearly every level of electoral politics, Burmila argues, have yet to seize on successes, however partial, and to improve on half victories like the Affordable Care Act, which, he notes, did not reform health care nearly as much as it could have. What to do? Burmila admits that he is stronger on pinpointing problems than coming up with solutions, but some of his fixes make eminent sense, including finding true remedies for the economic struggles of working people rather than kowtowing to the wealthy elite. Otherwise—and Burmila suggests this is the likelier outcome—the Republicans will win, about which he writes, “On the plus side, you might be dead before some of the worst parts happen. See? There’s always a positive.”

Food for thought for the progressive side of the aisle.
Every White citizen of a Jim Crow state was effectively depu-
tized to enforce racially discriminatory laws and customs, even
to the point of murdering a supposed offender, a common prac-
tice of the police as well. Burnham, director of Northeastern
University’s Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project, offers
a vast roster of cases that highlight this formal/informal system
of oppression. For example, bus drivers throughout the South
had carte blanche to commit violence on any Black rider who
dared insist on his or her dignity, while Black men were rou-
tinely lynched for responding the wrong way to a police offi-
cer—to say nothing of being in a White neighborhood without
apparent reason. Most of the author’s illuminating and disturb-
ing examples come from the mid-20th-century because abun-
dant federal records exist (even if state and community records
have been suppressed) and because living descendants of Jim
Crow victims can often be found to corroborate official and
civilian crimes against them. These include a Black man hanged
for alleged sexual assault; a Black woman driven from her city
to the friendlier climes of Detroit after a botched abortion pro-
cedure; a Black soldier killed for demanding equal treatment,
one of countless Black service members who agitated for voting
rights and equal employment even as they “continued to protest
Jim Crow transportation and police brutality.” Burnham closes
with a closely argued case for paying reparations to the descend-
ants of victims. “Such a program is both practicable and politi-
cally feasible because the beneficiaries constitute a finite group,”
she writes, adding, “Material reparation should be a part of a
larger program of redress, including public educational initia-
tives and memory projects like memorial markers.”

An indispensable addition to the literature of social justice
and civil rights.
“Numerate computer whizzes are the key audience, but there’s something for lesser mortals on most pages.”

PROOF OF STAKE

OUR AMERICA
A Photographic History
Burns, Ken, Susanna Steisel, Brian Lee & David Blistein
Knopf (392 pp.)
$75.00 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-385-35301-4

In the filmmaker and author’s latest photo book, the triumphs and tribulations of the American spirit take the stage.

In his introduction to this remarkable collection of images, Burns shares early memories of his father, a cultural anthropologist, building a darkroom in the basement of their home in Newark, Delaware. According to the author, his father guided him to his life’s calling, perhaps unwittingly: A short time later, following his mother’s death, Burns witnessed his father weeping for the first time while watching a movie. “I understood instantly the power of film and the safe harbor it permitted him to have,” he writes. This book, he notes, “was conceived and created in the spirit that assembling photographic evidence of our collective past might help heal our divisions.” In a narrative that spans the years 1839 to 2019, Burns presents the work of various photographers one by one on a black background with a short description of the year and location the image was taken. The author follows the individual images with relevant notes, providing further detail about each image. Among the captivating photos are a self-portrait by photographer Louis Daguerre; the exposed, bloody back of an enslaved man; the first national monument, Devil’s Tower, which many Native peoples consider a “sacred place”; a plane piloted by the Wright Brothers; a group of Sioux on a reservation in North Dakota; an ominous cloud that formed at the beginning of the Dust Bowl era; a tree-lined back road in the Mississippi Delta; Ernest Hemingway working in his studio.; a soldier locked in an embrace prior to shipping out overseas; a Black man drinking from a Jim Crow-era water fountain; Jacqueline Kennedy receiving the flag following John F. Kennedy’s funeral; Coretta Scott King at the funeral of Martin Luther King Jr.; and Rosa Parks at the age of 80.

A moving tribute to America’s rich and complex history.

PROOF OF STAKE
The Making of Ethereum and the Philosophy of Blockchains
Buterin, Vitalik
Seven Stories (256 pp.)
$18.95 paper | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-64421-248-6

A wonky excursion into the world of cryptocurrency and computer-generated governance.

Bitcoin uses an elaborate set of algorithms to provide “proof of work,” showing that a computer has been active in its role of “mining” digital coinage. Ethereum, founded by Buterin (b. 1994), aims for “proof of stake”—i.e., that participants in its digital realm demonstrate their legitimacy by virtue of their holdings alone, buying and selling them ethically without trying to game the system. In this collection of writings, mostly blog posts and talks, the famed billionaire who sleeps on other people’s couches takes on heady matters: the nature of the blockchain mechanism that safeguards crypto transactions and that may have broader uses as furthering a “way to pool together our money and support public projects that help create the society we want to see”; the seigniorage aspect of cryptocurrencies; the extensibility of crypto techniques to develop decentralized business agreements and contracts. Blockchains, the be-all and end-all in some cryptolibertarian systems, are in Buterin’s eyes merely convenient means to ends, “simply marginally better than the next available tool for the job.” Nevertheless, they have allowed the author to reimagine Ethereum as not just a marketplace, but a platform for social change: more equitable justice provided by a kind of open-source judiciary; a means of decentralizing power to put it into the hands (and keyboards) of ordinary people, not governments or corporations. Buterin is an earnest and decidedly technical writer; it helps to know mathematics, economics, and computer science to follow some of his denser arguments. Yet he has a playful side, too, as when he unveils a game called 1.58-dimensional chess,” so named “because the twenty-seven open squares are chosen according to a pattern based in the Sierpinski triangle.”

Numerate computer whizzes are the key audience, but there’s something for lesser mortals on most pages.

WE ARE PROUD BOYS
How a Right-Wing Street Gang Ushered in a New Era of American Extremism
Campbell, Andy
Hachette (356 pp.)
$29.00 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-306-82746-4

A journalistic account of the rise of the increasingly influential—and virulent—far-right cabal whose members “have been on a yearslong fascist march.”

“I think there’s not enough violence in today’s day and age.” So declared Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes in late 2016. HuffPost writer Campbell has for years been following what in essence was a street gang gone viral, one named, with due irony, after a song from the Disney movie Aladdin, performed at a school performance by “a twelve-year-old boy with brown skin.” By the author’s account, a mere non-White complexion is enough to set McInnes into paroxysms of rage, since the Proud Boys are among the chief fomenters of the “replacement theory” that holds that White people are being crowded out of America by members of one-time ethnic minorities. The loosely knit but growing group’s vision of the world may be “chaotic,” writes Campbell, but the threat they represent to their political enemies—i.e., anyone to their left—is real. As McInnes once
The group's leadership in the 2017 Charlottesville riots and its deflate bodyguard status for Donald Trump at the storming of the Capitol have yielded plenty of legal trouble, with conspiracy charges leveled at 17 members for their roles in the latter event. Still, Campbell suggests, Jan. 6 was only a warm-up. Even as the Proud Boys are “working to sanitize their image,” they continue to create chaos at school board meetings, women’s health clinics, and statehouses. More disturbingly, their numbers are growing, and they have become “the most successful political extremist group in the digital age.”

Right-wing politics are scary now, but this well-researched account foresees an even darker future.

The Australian alt-rock icon talks at length about the relationship between faith, death, and art. Like many touring musicians stalled during the pandemic, Cave pursued an autobiographical book project while in quarantine. But rather than write a standard memoir, he instead consented to a book of extensive interviews with U.K. arts journalist O’Hagan, photography critic for the Guardian and a feature writer for the Observer. Cave chose this approach in order to avoid standard rock-star patter and to address grittier, more essential matters. On that front, he has plenty of material to work with. Much of the book focuses on his 15-year-old son Arthur, who died...
from an accidental fall off a cliff in 2015. The loss fueled Cave’s 2019 album, *Ghosteen*, but Cave sees the connection between life and art as indirect, involving improvisation, uncertainty, and no small amount of thinking about religion. “The loss of my son is a condition; not a theme,” he tells O’Hagan. Loss is a constant in these conversations—during the period when they were recorded. Cave’s mother also died, as did his former band mate Anita Lane. Yet despite that, this is a lively, engaging book energized by Cave’s relentless candor—and sometimes counterintuitive thinking—about his work and his demons. His well-documented past heroin addiction, he says, “fed into my need for a conservative and well-ordered life.” Grief, he suggests, is surprisingly clarifying: “We become different. We become better.” Throughout, he talks about the challenges and joys of songwriting and improvisation (mostly around *Carnage*, the 2021 album he recorded with band mate Warren Ellis during this period) and about the comfort he gets answering questions from fans and strangers on his website. O’Hagan knows Cave’s work well, but he avoids fussy discographical queries and instead pushes Cave toward philosophical elaborations, which he’s generally game for.

A somber, sage book about art-making that deserves a readership beyond Cave’s fan base.

**THE VISIBLE UNSEEN**

*Essays*

Chapela, Andrea

Illus. by Fabiola Menchelli

Trans. by Kelsi Vanada

Restless Books (160 pp.)

$20.00 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-63206-352-6

An inquiry into transparency.

Making an impressive nonfiction debut, award-winning fiction writer Chapela brings the perspective of a poet to three lyric essays that probe the act of seeing and the challenge of communicating what is perceived. With a mother who is a mathematician, a father who’s a physicist, and a background in chemistry, the author is sensitive to the limits of both science and language to represent reality. “How can I write about science from outside it?” she asks. “How can I stop seeing *through* language, using it as a tool, pretending exactitude is possible in words?” In the scientific world, even though “each repeatable experiment and proven hypothesis brings us closer to some absolute truth,” Chapela believes that an experiment—like a painting or poem—“is a representation of reality that astonishes us.” Any representation of reality is conveyed in words, themselves not “solid” and “reliable” but malleable and contingent. The author investigates three forms—glass, mirrors, and light—that pose singular conundrums: Glass is not a solid, but neither is it a fluid. So what is it? “Even the most basic sources disagree,” she writes. Light “creates shadows” but “doesn’t cast them. Though it seems the most natural conclusion, it leaves me feeling unsettled.” Mirrors invite Chapela to think about the connection between selfhood and reflection. As she moves between her native Mexico and Madrid, where she travels on cultural grant, and between present and past, she draws on a host of provocative thinkers, including Galileo, Newton, Descartes, da Vinci, Niels Bohr, Marie Curie, and Richard Feynman, whose writings underscore the importance of metaphor in science and who validate her curiosity, uncertainty, and celebration of mystery. “It took me a long time to accept that writing helps me understand the questions,” she admits, “rather than nailing down the answers.”

**Philosophical meditations graced by radiant prose.**

**FATTY FATTY BOOM BOOM**

A Memoir of Food, Fat, & Family

Chaudry, Rabia

Algonquin (352 pp.)

$28.95 | Nov. 8, 2022

978-1-64375-038-5

The highs and lows of a lifelong love affair with food.

Chaudry, a podcaster, lawyer, and author of *Adnan’s Story*, which was adapted as a documentary for HBO, is a gifted storyteller and cultural commentator with a special knack for food writing, as quickly becomes clear in this unblinking account of the high price paid for the pleasures of eating. The author begins in Lahore, Pakistan, where her veterinarian father and school administrator mother married and started their family, moving suddenly to the U.S. while she was still an infant. Jaundiced and scrawny at birth, she was given half-and-half in her baby bottle and frozen butter when she began teething. “You won’t believe me when I tell you this, but as God is my witness, I can still taste the salty, cold butter in my mouth melting into heavenly pools,” writes the author. “You have to wonder exactly how many sticks of butter I consumed to leave an indelible mark on my memory. Too many is the only right answer.” This tone of rueful candor continues as she tracks her expanding body into adulthood, with desperate recourse to fast diets, CrossFit, a gastric sleeve operation, and more along the way. The tortures of immigrant life in suburban Maryland; blissful return visits to Pakistan; the hilariously horrible wedding of her aunt, and the equally horrible but not so funny occasion of her own—every episode glitters. Whether she’s describing a mad motorcycle mission to score Lahore street food with her overweight uncles, the acquisition of the “freshman 25” with new friends at college, or sharing ice cream in bed with her sweet second husband, Chaudry eloquently portrays the role of food in love and friendship. At the same time, she doesn’t flinch from reporting the humiliations heaped on the overweight at every turn. She also includes a selection of enticing recipes.

**The literary equivalent of chaat masala fries: spicy, heady, sour, and uniquely delicious.**
From Navy SPEC/WAR bomb disposal frogman to John DeLorean's Codefendant, to inmate, to chief diver and expedition leader for Captain Jacques Yves Cousteau.

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"If there is one book...you must read this year, let it be Stephen Arrington's story. It doesn't fail in any aspect! Great dialogues, awesome scene narratives, and an evocative, spellbinding style of writing."

—Readers’ Favorite

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"An eventful and turbulent saga that makes for compelling reading."

—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation, Publishing, and Film Rights, Please Email drugsbite@gmail.com
“Sensible arguments opposing what seems like the wave of the future.”

WORSE THAN NOTHING

The Dangerous Fallacy of Originalism

Chemerinsky, Erwin
Yale Univ. (264 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-300-25990-2

A legal expert examines “a dangerous approach to constitutional law that would jeopardize many basic rights and advances in equality.”

In his latest, Chemerinsky, the dean of Berkeley Law School, delivers a lucid, convincing attack on a prominent legal philosophy, though he admits that it is unlikely to change its adherents’ minds. The author writes that the Constitution is an impressive document written by brilliant men who considered it a framework that defined the responsibilities and limitations of government. For nearly two centuries, judges interpreted it broadly to deal with issues in an ever-changing world. Matters changed after World War II when the Supreme Court issued a series of decisions that infuriated conservatives, certain they were based on the judges’ personal (and liberal) values. At only four pages, the Constitution seems limited, but scholars maintained that intense study would reveal the Founders’ true intentions. Proponents of originalism postulated that those intentions, plus their beliefs at the time they wrote the document (and of those who wrote amendments), must serve as the sole determining factors for a legal decision. Chemerinsky maintains that this makes no sense. Madison and Hamilton violently disagreed on major constitutional issues of executive power and of Congress’ spending power. Who was right? The 14th Amendment, which guarantees “equal protection,” has long been taken literally, but the intent of the framers in 1868 was to protect freed slaves. Therefore, originalists insist, it does not forbid discrimination against women, racial minorities, the disabled, or gay citizens. They maintain that there is no constitutional right to privacy because the Constitution doesn’t mention it. In a disheartening look toward the future, Chemerinsky warns that the Supreme Court, now solidly originalist, will radically transform our nation in the decades to come. Roe v. Wade has been overturned already, and the author also explores rulings that restrict environmental protection and immigration and expand the right to carry guns.

Sensible arguments opposing what seems like the wave of the future.

DIAGHILEV’S EMPIRE

How the Ballets Russes Enthralled the World

Christiansen, Rupert
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (384 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-374-13969-8

The dance critic for the Spectator recounts a seminal period in the history of ballet.

He was the original Ed Sullivan, a man with “no creative gift of his own” but whose genius was “to spot and gather the necessary talents, to render them effective, and to get results.” Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929), the son of Russian landed gentry, “a great charmer,” arrived in St. Petersburg at age 18 determined to make his mark. After joining forces with the Nevsky Pickwickians, a “small fraternity of young men of the upper middle class,” Diaghilev formed the Ballets Russes, a troupe of Russian artists who set the standards that made ballet “a crucial piece in the jigsaw of Western culture.” Christiansen, an “incorruptible balletomane,” takes readers through the 20-year history of the Ballets Russes and the talents behind it: choreographer Alexander Gorsky; dancer Anna Pavlova; and, most notably, Vaslav Nijinsky, who shocked audiences with his “supernatural hovering jump,” was one of Diaghilev’s many male lovers, and whose mental state degenerated to the point that he was confined to a Swiss sanatorium in 1919 and thereafter “alternated between long periods of catatonic dociity and episodes of violent self-harm.” Christiansen often notes that many of Diaghilev’s paramours—Nijinsky, “entirely heterosexual” dancer Léonide Massine, composer Igor Markevitch—were not gay, a debatable assertion next to comments such as that set designer Leon Bakst was “secretly cursed with perverse sexual tastes.” This mars an otherwise well-researched work full of entertaining stories, as when Nijinsky, dancing Giselle for the Mariinsky in front of duchesses, forgot “to wear mitigating baggy trunks or a support strap, leaving the bulges of both his genitals and his buttocks exposed.” When the ladies demanded decency, “Nijinsky, never one for a tactful compromise, refused and went on to dance the second act unencumbered.” The Mariinsky fired him.

A comprehensive look at the influence of one of ballet’s most famous companies.

A MORE JUST FUTURE

Psychological Tools for Reckoning With Our Past and Driving Social Change

Chugh, Dolly
Atria (254 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-982157-60-9

An Indian American social psychologist develops a set of psychological tools that can be used to effectively confront the darkest, most violent sides of our shared history.
As a young parent, author Chugh eagerly read her children the Little House on the Prairie series, relishing its depiction of a “quintessential American family” on the frontier. Years later, she realized that these supposedly educational stories actually “whitewashed” essential aspects of American history, most notably the genocide of Native Americans. The author is now committed to leading her family on a journey of “unlearning” false historical narratives, something she notes that many Black and Indigenous communities have already done. Rather than focusing on the history itself, though—which Chugh admits she doesn’t have the credentials to adequately teach—the author describes a series of psychological methods that can allow us to unlearn and redress the whitewashed myths of the past. These include reaffirming personal values to combat and refocus feelings of guilt and shame, fostering our ability to empathize with marginalized groups by consciously taking steps to reduce psychological distance, and combating “hindsight bias” by reminding ourselves to imagine alternate versions of the past as well as the possibilities for the future. The author clearly explains how each concept can be used for individual growth and posits how they could be implemented in schools to create systemic change. Chugh’s underlying goal of bolstering American patriotism is frustrating because it reflects an ideological commitment to the legitimacy of borders that sometimes contradicts the purportedly progressive politics. Overall, though, the author’s sincerity, clarity of thought, and subject matter expertise render the text a refreshingly unique approach to a challenging issue. “How and what we remember is not intended to shame us, but to protect us from our own home team bias,” she writes. “If we fail to remember what happened then, we fail to see what is happening now.”

A vulnerable, compassionate, and pragmatic psychological guide to facing the darkest corners of America’s past.

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Walk with Morris between the Slave Power at home, and the British Empire from afar.

“Readers will come to feel great sympathy for the man...a cogent, complex look at the American Revolution that goes beyond names like Washington and Franklin. This highly informative work profiles a man who risked everything to play an important part at a crucial juncture in the founding of America.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For Information on Film Rights, Email RMorris@RM1776.com • www.RM1776.com
“A masterwork of Irish diaspora history and immigration studies generally.”

MAUS NOW
Selected Writings
Ed. by Chute, Hillary
Pantheon (496 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-0-593-31577-4

An omnibus of criticism attests to the enduring legacy of Art Spiegelman’s masterpiece.

Editor Chute, a scholar who specializes in graphic narrative in general and Spiegelman in particular, curates a collection that draws on works from around the world (including pieces translated from German and Hebrew for the first time) and different disciplines (journalism, literary criticism, philosophy, psychology). The book includes pieces from the 1980s, before Maus had been published in book form in 1992 (it was serialized from 1980 to 1991), and it extends into the current political climate, when it remains hailed as a cultural milestone but is also often threatened with banning from libraries and school curricula. The contributors examine an array of pertinent questions: What does it mean to translate such a uniquely devastating experience into the form of a comic? What is the relationship between the artist and his subject and between father and son? Is it unseemly for such a work to provide entertainment or even meaning in the wake of the Holocaust, not to mention profit and prestige for its creator? How can the creator re-create something he was too young to experience, despite interviews and extensive research? There is much information on Spiegelman’s successful request to have the book shift from the New York Times bestseller fiction list to the nonfiction list as well as the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize. The exhaustive obsessiveness of Maus criticism seems by now to have transcended the Joycean level, but the contributors present convincing cases that the work can bear such critical weight. From Ken Tucker’s visionary review of the early work in the Times through Marianne Hirsch’s introduction of “post-memory” to describe Spiegelman’s relationship to the material, the essays are sure to generate dialogue among literary historians, critics, and scholars as well as the legion of Maus mega-fans across the globe. Other contributors include Adam Gopnik, Philip Pullman, and Alisa Solomon.

A valuable resource for the cottage industry of Maus research.

ON EVERY TIDE
The Making and Remaking of the Irish World
Connolly, Sean
Basic Books (544 pp.)
$35.00 paper | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-465-09395-3

Sweeping history of Irish migration and the many forms Irishness took in new lands.

As longtime Irish history professor Connolly observes, the numbers of Irish who left the island in the 19th century were huge: a mere 14,000 in 1816-1817, but 244,000 between 1831 and 1835, numbers that would further swell to millions with the Potato Famine. Some went to Australia, some to Canada, but most to America, for, as Connolly writes, “the mass movement of people was possible only because of the inexhaustible demand for settlers and workers in the expanding economy of the United States.” Whereas in Australia and Canada, Irish immigrants tended to spread out into provincial towns as well as major cities, the largest waves to America landed in cities on the East Coast, both because that’s where the jobs were and because most immigrants lacked the financial resources to go further. Consequently, in Australia and Canada, there were fewer purely Irish enclaves than in America. In the latter, though, postwar suburbanization was a powerful vehicle for changing the face of Irishness. “The move to the suburbs,” writes Connolly, “already meant that, for growing numbers, neighborhood life no longer revolved around the parish church and the clubs and societies linked to it,” making Catholicism a less central symbol of identity than in years past. The author shows how Protestant Irish were heavily represented in the immigration rolls. Combined with rising affluence and a splintering of the old community was an increasing pattern among both Protestants and Catholics to marry outside their ethnic group, also common in other diaspora communities elsewhere in the world. Working the statistics—Connolly observes that, for example, England’s Irish communities grew markedly during World War II both because of jobs and because travel across the oceans was perilous—and popular culture and social history alike, the author delivers a complex but accessible narrative.

A masterwork of Irish diaspora history and immigration studies generally.
DYING OF POLITENESS

A Memoir
Davis, Geena
HarperOne (356 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-31913-0

A celebrated actor reflects on her identity.
Academy Award winner Davis makes an engaging literary debut with a candid, appealing memoir recounting her evolution from self-effacing young woman to feisty activist. “The characters I’ve played,” she writes, “have helped transform me, slowly, in fits and starts, into someone who can stand up for herself.” The author’s parents, models of politeness, expected her to be undemanding and acquiescent. By the time she was an adult, she realized that she had spent her life “trying to massage everyone’s feelings, walking on eggshells, subjugating my own wishes to keep the peace.” In her early jobs as a model, throughout several marriages, and in her first roles as an actor, Davis struggled with diffidence—until she was cast in *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and met her co-star, Susan Sarandon. “How had I never been exposed to a woman like this,” Davis asked herself, “a woman who very simply and clearly said what she thought?” The author takes readers behind the scenes of movies that include *Tootsie* (“that whole experience was a masterclass in filmmaking, and from two industry geniuses—Sydney Pollack and Dustin Hoffman*”), *Beetlejuice; The Accidental Tourist*, for which Davis won an Oscar for best supporting actress; *A League of Their Own*, in which she starred with Tom Hanks; and *Stuart Little*, where she and Hugh Laurie played Stuart’s parents. Although she imparts gossip (“Only as time went on did I understand how rampant sexual harassment was in my business, and the extremity of what so many of my peers were suffering”), for the most part, she portrays her colleagues with kindness. In her 40s, she invented a vastly different role for herself. As a new mother to a daughter and twin boys, the dearth of female characters in kids’ entertainment led her to create an institute that serves as “the go-to resource for research and insights into onscreen bias.”

An entertaining and ebullient memoir.

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ODYSSEY TO MY DAUGHTER

A Memoir by
Valborg, Helen
HarperOne (279 pp.)
$15.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-31913-0

“...a moving and singular vision of belonging, family, and heroic adventure... An astonishingly rare insight into a lost way of life, *Odyssey to My Daughter* recounts a struggle for history and identity, and brims with fortitude, curiosity, and an uncompromising heart.”

— JOHN KNIGHT, WRITER & EDITOR

ISBN 978-0578985343
Inquiries: helenvalborg@gmail.com

“In a fit of impressive courage the author traveled to Mani and discovered a portal to a vanished world... In meditative, poetic prose, Valborg deftly describes her process of acclimation... A frank and lyrical... account of a striking journey.”

—KIRKUS REVIEWS
A heartfelt memoir of life and fatherhood in Big Sky country.

THE RIVER YOU TOUCH
Making a Life on Moving Water
Dombrowski, Chris
Milkweed (336 pp.)
$25.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-63955-0-63-0

A heartfelt memoir of life and fatherhood in Big Sky country.

Born in Lansing, Michigan, Dombrowski, author of the acclaimed Body of Water, was "pointed the way west" when a teacher suggested he read A River Runs Through It. Seeking "the promise of a life less bound by convention, less dictated by status quo and occupational demands than by one's passions," he and his would-be wife, Mary, moved to Missoula, Montana. Dombrowski found work as a writer and fly-fishing guide, and Mary became a kindergarten teacher. Over time, they amassed a group of like-minded friends who shared their respect for the abundant flora and fauna in Montana. Through a collection of vignettes, the author shares his concerns for the environment, the effects of the appropriation of land from Native inhabitants, and the emotions the landscape stirs in him. "The angler standing in the river is not so much absolved of time as disburdened of it, able to shirk its weight—for some moments anyway—before with a dull thud a trout strikes his swinging fly, and he returns to pretending that he set himself in this cliff-shadowed stretch in search of a fish." With the arrival of their first child, Dombrowski was determined to pass on his passion for the land, but his thoughts soon turned to his family's financial situation. Adding to his concerns was the "inevitable environmental impact our growing family is likely to have on our planet." After the arrival of his third child, the author accepted a teaching position at a boarding school in order to provide his family more financial stability. However, the move took him and his family away from their beloved Montana. (They are now back, and the author teaches creative writing at the University of Montana.) Nature lovers will be captivated by Dombrowski's lyrical descriptions of the land and its wildlife, while parents are sure to relate to his familial challenges and sacrifices.

A beautifully and poignantly written tribute to a beloved landscape and its spirit.

THE RANSOMWARE HUNTING TEAM
A Band of Misfits' Improbable Crusade To Save the World From Cybercrime
Dudley, Renee & Daniel Golden
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (368 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-374-60330-4

White and black hats collide, and, as ProPublica reporters Dudley and Golden reveal, the unseen war between them shapes and shakes the world. "The frequency and the impact of ransomware attacks are widely understated because many victims don't make them public or inform authorities," write the authors. Still, they note, the monetary value is colossal, and there is a broad range of victims to choose from. In the early days, through the machinations of a Harvard-educated ("and subsequently Harvard-disavowed") researcher in primatology, the demands were small: A virus he'd written would infect a computer, demand via an onscreen message that the user send $189 or $378 to Panama, and then restore access to the computer's files. This early hacker died young, but also hospitals, schools, and even city governments, including that of Baltimore. Enter the Ransomware Hunting Team,
an ad hoc band of self-anointed saviors from all over the world, who know their foe as if alter egos, mostly young and freelance, interested in money but also the thrill of the game, but who also, in places like Russia and North Korea, “appear to be weapons in an undeclared cyberwar.” As Dudley and Golden describe the titanic struggle, often waged with sympathy and respect for the bad-guy opponents’ computer skills and vice versa, they observe that the corporate and governmental response has been less than stellar, with the FBI today just as unprepared for cyberwar as it was when Clifford Stoll published The Cuckoo’s Egg in 1989, when black-hat computer mischief was a new thing. In some ways, this book is an update to that distinguished predecessor, though it also enters into the newer realms of the dark web, cryptocurrency, and high-level code-breaking.

An accessible, tautly written account of cyberwarfare in real time.

**ELDERFLORA**
*A Modern History of Ancient Trees*
Farmer, Jared
Basic Books (448 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-465-09784-5

An ingenious examination of old trees, mixing history, politics, and science. Trees are simply big plants, but humans have long revered them, and bigger, older trees have been objects of worship. Farmer, a history professor and author of *Trees in Paradise* and *On Zion’s Mount*, adds that we often revere old trees better than old people. “Caring for elderflora does not track with eldercare,” he writes. “Because gnarled trees possess personhood without bodily mortality, and because they have oldness without elderliness, they elicit wonder and esteem, unlike hunched bodies of old people, objects of pity and contempt.” The author defines an “old” tree
as one that has lived more than 1,000 years. Almost all are evergreen gymnosperms (“flowerless plants with naked seeds”) as opposed to angiosperms (“flowering plants with fruits”). Farmer’s examples—cedar, olive, ginkgo, fig, baobab—have enormous capacity to recover from catastrophic damage. “At the organismal level,” writes the author, “they do not senesce, meaning they don’t lose vitality with age. In theory, such a plant is internally capable of immortality.” Death comes via an external force: wind, flood, disease, and, increasingly, humans. By the 18th-century, most Western cultures no longer worshiped trees but grew fascinated by those of great age and historical symbolism. Farmer devotes much of the narrative to the scientists who study them and the ongoing efforts of naturalists and Indigenous people to reconcile industrial capitalism with forest preservation. Nature lovers will relish the author’s stories, if not his conclusion. Tree cover is expanding across the planet but mostly through monoculture plantations of young, commercially useful trees. Humans continue to cut down old-growth forests. Farmer notes that we wonder what it was like for our ancestors to live among mastodons and other giant animals. Our descendants may wonder how it felt to experience “mammoth and millennial trees.”

Fascinating accounts of the greatest plants that ever lived.

TED KENNEDY
A Life
Farrell, John A.
Penguin Press (572 pp.)
$36.00 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-525-55807-1

Farrell delivers a comprehensive biography of the late senator. Ted Kennedy (1932-2009), writes biographer and former White House correspondent Farrell, was “a warm, playful human being who loved dogs, good times, song, and devilry.” As a young man, he was health-conscious, abstemious, and a hard worker, though the least of a family deeply embedded in politics. His habits and mindset changed after the assassination of his brothers John and Bobby, when, as one family friend put it, “Much against his will...[Ted] was suddenly the head of this extraordinary family, a position he never aspired to and never expected.” He bore that burden by womanizing and drinking, which became a troublesome hallmark. His political career was not always successful. Working on JFK’s presidential campaign, he found himself in above his head, and the Denver Post blamed him for Kennedy’s loss in Colorado. During that time, though married, he tried to seduce a woman named Judith Campbell only to be bested in the effort by JFK, who “replied...at having beaten Teddy to the prize.” His first run for public office stirred up outrage among some for the offense of “trading on his brother’s name.” Yet, in his decades in the Senate, he forged working alliances on both sides of the aisle and helped craft significant legislation—e.g., the foundations of the Affordable Care Act. Farrell looks closely at some little-known aspects of Kennedy’s career, including his refusal to run as Hubert Humphrey’s vice president in 1968, which, Farrell suggests, might have enhanced Kennedy’s role as a national candidate and certainly would have changed the course of history. As this lengthy but engrossing narrative reveals, Kennedy, whom Senate colleague Alan Simpson called “one of the orneriest sons of bitches around,” got plenty done, including adding a prescription drug benefit to Medicare.

An exemplary study of a life of public service with more than its share of tragedies and controversies.

HOMECOMING
The Path to Prosperity in a Post-Global World
Foroohar, Rana
Crown (400 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-593-24053-3

An incisive study of how “the paradigm of globalization is now shifting.” Globalization may have provided cheap consumer goods, notes Financial Times associate editor Foroohar, but there is an increasing awareness of the long-term costs. In her latest book, the author marshals an impressive range of knowledge to investigate the negative consequences of unquestioned globalization. The Covid-19 pandemic was a wake-up call to U.S. officials, revealing that the manufacture of even simple things such as cotton masks had been outsourced abroad, mainly to China. Fortunately, many American companies were able to structure their manufacturing processes to provide some of the needed goods. As Foroohar demonstrates, this revealed both the weaknesses and strengths of the U.S. economy. She accepts that globalization made many things cheaper for consumers, but she is realistic about the cost in the loss of jobs and resilience. At the same time, many companies have been cutting research-and-development spending and putting money into complex financial products—yet another example of short-sighted thinking. Much of the money and energy to support innovation has gone into the technology sector, and the result has been a “barbell economy” of big tech wealth and a “precariat” of low-paid service workers. However, Foroohar, who traveled the country as part of her research, sees an emerging generation of companies that have returned to making things in top-of-the-line factories that are making full use of 3-D printing and clever thinking. The author also sees a key role for government—not in splashing money around but in setting sensible trade rules and long-term objectives. Examining the industrial policies of other nations, Foroohar shares useful lessons. Ultimately, the pendulum has swung away from cut-price globalization toward more considered, localized perspectives. These are interesting, important views and ideas; hopefully, this book forms the basis of a new, cool-headed national discussion.

A careful, well-informed examination of where the U.S. economy stands, how it got here, and where it needs to go.
A first-rate account of one of the few Jewish prisoners who escaped Auschwitz. Concentration camp stories make for painful reading, but British journalist and broadcaster Freedland relates a riveting tale with a fascinating protagonist. Born in 1924 in Czechoslovakia, Rudolf Vrba was a precocious child and superachiever in school. In 1939, Slovakia became an independent, Nazi satellite state. Entirely obedient to Nazism, its government expelled Jews from schools and dismissed them from jobs. In 1942, Vrba received a summons to report for “resettlement.” Understanding the dangerous situation, he tried to escape to England. Caught in Hungary, he was sent to the first of several increasingly barbaric camps, ending in Auschwitz. Through a combination of youth, linguistic ability, and luck, Vrba attained privileges that allowed him to survive from his arrival in June 1942 to his escape in April 1944. Freedland delivers a gripping description of Vrba and a companion’s planning, breakout, and grueling walk to Slovakia, where surviving Jewish officials transcribed their story, which included, from Vrba’s memory, dates and the number of every trainload of Jews, with details of their murder and a map of the camp. By summer, articles about the horrors of the camps began to appear in Western newspapers. Readers will squirm to learn how little Vrba’s spectacular achievement accomplished. Some believed his revelations but not the people that mattered. Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt consulted military leaders, and while they admitted that the Nazis were certainly mistreating Jews, they claimed that the best way to save lives was to win the war quickly. As a result, they ordered that no resources be diverted to projects such as bombing death camps. Freedland smoothly recounts Vrba’s long, often troubled postwar life, during which...
he persistently criticized Jewish and Israeli leaders who could have resisted the genocide more than they did.

A powerful story of a true hero who deserves more recognition.

WELL OF SOULS
Uncovering the Banjo's Hidden History
Gaddy, Kristina R.
Norton (304 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-393-86680-3

Though the banjo has a uniquely jaunty sound, underneath the bluegrass playfulness is an often painful history.

Gaddy traces the instrument’s origin to the rituals of enslaved Blacks in the American South, the Caribbean, and South America. Regardless of its exact form, the instrument played a crucial role in religious and ceremonial dances, and Gaddy tracks its early history through Suriname and Haiti. Some slave owners sought to suppress it, while others tolerated it. In fact, one of the first depictions of a banjo is in a painting of a spiritual dance performed by enslaved people on an 18th-century North Carolina plantation. The author shows how the arrival of Christianity among enslaved people was a setback for the banjo. “For hundreds of years, drums, fiddles, banjos, and wind instruments were part of religious dances,” she writes. “Now, as a result of conversion to Christianity, there were none. The banjo and Christianity didn’t seem to mix.”

The next step in the evolution of the banjo came from an odd place: a White musician named Joel Sweeney (1810–1860), who was taught to play by an enslaved man. Sweeney did much to popularize the sound, as did the minstrel shows popular at the time. In the 1840s, William Boucher, an instrument maker, began constructing and selling banjos, defining the pattern of construction along the way. Eventually, the banjo would return to Black communities, but it would take several decades. Though Gaddy weaves an undeniably interesting tale, the focus often remains on the history of slavery rather than the banjo. While she demonstrates how the two are intertwined, there are long sections of the book that do not connect to the instrument’s story. This is not a fatal flaw, but rigorous editorial streamlining would have resulted in a more focused, coherent book. Grammy-winning musician Rhianne Giddens provides the foreword.

A deep dive into the social history of the banjo.

THE PERSUADERS
At the Front Lines of the Fight for Hearts, Minds, and Democracy
Giridharadas, Anand
Knopf (352 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-593-31899-7

A sharp examination of how activists are working to build resistance to the many antidemocratic forces now at work around the world.

In 2013, writes political analyst Giridharadas, a Russian troll farm recruited writers with the pledge of free meals and weekly payments in exchange for social media posts that supported Russia’s first invasion of Ukraine. The farm soon added a brief “to foment political unrest in Russia’s great adversary, the United States,” by exploiting already widening divisions in American society in order to undermine belief in democracy. The drumbeat sounded to both left and right at Russian hands: “These people are not to be trusted. They will never change. They are who they are. And who they are is a risk to your being.” Granted, notes the author in a cogent, sometimes encouraging narrative, there were yawning divisions to exploit, and they would widen with the rise of Donald Trump on the right and Bernie Sanders on the left. Some of Giridharadas’ subjects seem more or less doctrinaire at first blush: Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, say, who came under resounding assault from her own progressive wing for having dared say something nice about John McCain after he died, giving indications that there may be room for common ground after all. Of course, there are plenty of good reasons for political division. As one social justice activist told the author, “You probably don’t want to end up in a partnership with Jared Kushner just because you favor prison reform.” But most of the activists the author illuminatingly profiles are seriously committed to building bridges to a kinder, gentler, more united politics at a time when many purists, agreeing with others on 90% of issues, confine their focus to the 10% difference. Instead, the goal is to help voters find common ground, recognizing, for one thing, that “making manipulated people feel stupid is a terrible way to fight these [antidemocratic] forces.”

A welcome, revealing study of how political messages can be shaped positively to counter both enmity and disinformation.
“Legal-minded readers and SCOTUS watchers will enjoy the author’s account of her brief spell in the lion’s den.”

— Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 978-163107-042-6 (hardcover, color), 978-163107-040-2 (paperback, b&w)
VISUAL THINKING
The Hidden Gifts of People Who Think in Pictures, Patterns, and Abstractions
Grandin, Temple with Betsy Lerner
Riverhead (320 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-593-41836-9

An exploration of the richness of neurodiversity.

In her memoir Thinking in Pictures, Grandin, who was not formally diagnosed with autism until she was an adult, defined herself as a visual thinker, a concept she expands in her latest examination of neurodiverse minds. "The world,” she writes, “comes to me in a series of associated visual images, like scrolling through Google images or watching the short videos on Instagram or TikTok.” Drawing on her own experiences and research as well as the findings of psychologists, neuroscientists, animal behaviorists, and educators, the author argues persuasively for the need to encourage visual and spatial thinkers who can make crucial contributions to engineering, problem-solving, inventing, and creating. Because education privileges verbal thinkers by assessing learning through written tests, and because curricula have dropped “hands-on” classes such as shop, mechanics, and home economics, Grandin asserts that visual thinkers are neither identified nor given adequate resources to develop their talents and skills. In fact, their difficulty with verbal thinking often relegates them to remedial classes. Grandin reveals, however, that many innovators in the arts and sciences and in technology were visual and spatial thinkers—and likely also on the autism spectrum—including Thomas Edison, Michelangelo, Alan Turing, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, and Albert Einstein. “Genius,” she writes, “requires not only intelligence and creativity but divergent thinking as well.” Grandin cites research to support the idea that combining people with different neurological strengths makes a team more successful than one composed of homogeneous thinkers. Some famous collaborators, such as Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, serve as evidence of the brilliance that results when “a verbal thinker and a spatial thinker” work together. This book itself serves as another example of a fruitful collaboration: The author submits her work to her editor and co-author, Lerner, a verbal thinker and “the master organizer of information,” who “teases out the stories behind my technical writing” and gives it shape and coherence.

A thoughtful examination of how minds work.

THE ESSENTIAL DICK GREGORY
Gregory, Dick
Ed. by Christian Gregory
Amistad/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-287920-2

A collection of pieces from the revered Black American comedian and activist. Gregory (1932-2017) was a stand-up comedian dealing with topical issues who evolved naturally into an important social justice advocate. His son, Christian, who manages his father’s estate, compiled material from 16 books, 12 albums, “hundreds of interviews and syndicated news columns, and hundreds of hours of archival footage.” Though “skinny and underweight” as a child, he learned that “once you get a man laughing with you, it’s hard for him to laugh at you.” Awarded “Outstanding Athlete” at Southern Illinois University, Gregory endeavored to bring the same “dignity and honor and respect to show business as I carried to the track.” In 1960, a successful set at the Playboy Club in Chicago led to mass-media attention. The next year, Mike Wallace called him “one of America’s top egghead comics” who could find humor in the “tragic problems of your race.” As Christian notes, “the funny man from the South Side was now one of the biggest names in show business.” Drawn into the civil rights movement by violence in Greenwood, Mississippi, in 1963, Gregory delivered fiery orations in Birmingham, Selma, and at college campuses nationwide. He identified himself as a “comedian, social satirist, maybe a clown. The true clown knows all the social problems.” He also held hunger strikes to protest the war in Vietnam. This volume collects many impassioned speeches and his final nightclub performance as well as diet advice drawn from his role as a “nutritional guru.” “The salvation of the planet is in what they can.” After his death, the New York Times called him “a sledgehammer for justice,” an appropriate moniker based on the evidence presented here.

A satisfying encapsulation of the career of a seminal comedian and social justice warrior.

IF YOU WANT SOMETHING DONE
Leadership Lessons From Bold Women
Haley, Nikki R.
St. Martin’s (256 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-250-28497-6

Profiles of “ten bold and courageous women with ten important lessons to teach us.”

Haley’s latest book is a refreshing change from her previous tepid, partisan books. The author discusses the lives of women
“The definitive account of a brief yet frightening period in global history.”

THE ABYSS

who have inspired her in her roles as South Carolina governor and as ambassador to the United Nations. The title comes from a quote from Margaret Thatcher: “If you want something said, ask a man. If you want something done, ask a woman.” Some of the women the author highlights are well known—Thatcher, Golda Meir, Amelia Earhart—and Haley applauds their determination to overcome significant obstacles. At the real heart of the book, however, are the women who led quite ordinary lives until driven to take a public role. Cindy Warmbier became a vocal critic of North Korea after her son was unjustly arrested there and later killed. Her actions eventually led to the nation being redesignated as a state sponsor of terrorism. Nadia Murad, a young Yazidi woman, escaped enslavement by the Islamic State group. (For more on her incredible story, check out her memoir, The Last Girl.) Virginia Walden Ford pushed for greater parental choice in education and for a scholarship program to assist disadvantaged students. Claudette Colvin was a civil rights activist who refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus months before Rosa Parks. As the daughter of immigrant Hindus, Haley understands discrimination. Virginia Hall worked as a spy for the French Resistance during World War II, and Wilma Rudolph overcame a polio-induced disability to become a champion runner. The connecting thread is the willingness to act for one’s beliefs, even if there are plenty of gainsters and roadblocks along the way. “Your potential is limitless,” writes the author, speaking to women in particular. “Your life—the life you want—is worth fighting for. So, fight.”

An inspiring collection that could lead to further study of these remarkable historical figures.

ORCHID MUSE
A History of Obsession in Fifteen Flowers
Hannickel, Erica
Norton (320 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-393-86728-2

A celebration of the world’s second largest family of plants.

In a charming, informative, and profusely illustrated volume, gardener and environmental historian Hannickel looks at the global phenomenon of “orchidomania” through profiles of men and women who had an exuberant passion for studying, collecting, growing, and displaying the elegant plant. Love of orchids transcends time and place—in ancient China, feudal Japan, and Victorian England, the plant was revered. Erasmus Darwin and his son Charles were interested especially in the orchid’s intricate process of pollination; For Erasmus, the flower’s carnal acts “could be loving, violent, duplicitous, and sometimes downright murderous.” Charles investigated orchids’ “ingenious sexual subterfuge upon insects.” Naturalists were not alone in their fascination with orchids. Hannickel traces the first orchid show to 1887, when plants from all over the world were exhibited at a New York City dime museum, an odd event for a venue that boasted all manner of weird, fake, and sensational artifacts. The hugely popular exhibition inspired the jeweler Charles Lewis Tiffany to create 25 jewel-encrusted orchid brooches, which he displayed at the Paris Exposition in 1889 and sold in his Manhattan store. Orchidomania, not surprisingly, threatened habitats, as plant hunters, in their lust for the rare and beautiful, wrecked orchids from their native soil. In the early 20th century, orchidelirium reached its height, with wealthy collectors amassing plants in specially constructed conservatories. One species fueled an industry: Vanilla planifolia provides 95% of the pods used for flavoring, but its pollination was especially arduous—until, in 1841, an enslaved boy on an island off the coast of Madagascar invented a method of hand-pollination, thereby revolutionizing the vanilla industry. Each chapter ends with a profile of a particular species, including its morphology and needs. In an appendix, Hannickel shares 15 tips for choosing, handling, and raising orchids, making this entertaining book a practical companion for orchid growers.

A garden of delights.

THE ABYSS
Nuclear Crisis
Cuba 1962
Hastings, Max
Harper/HarperCollins (528 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-06-298013-7

One of the greatest living historians tackles the Cuban missile crisis.

In his long, distinguished career, Hastings has masterfully covered both world wars, the Korean War, and Vietnam. In his latest, he thoroughly explores a fraught set of circumstances that almost lead to World War III. He sets the scene with a highly illuminating description of the Cold War world in 1960. The Soviet Union, barely recovered from World War II, was no match for the wealthy U.S., but its flamboyant premier, Nikita Khrushchev, had convinced the world that he commanded a massive intercontinental ballistic missile arsenal—although he didn’t. Fidel Castro’s seizure of power in Cuba in early 1959 made him popular in America for several months until he seized all American businesses and resorted to violence to maintain his position. When John F. Kennedy took office in January 1961, the purportedly covert action to overthrow Castro was underway. To his everlasting regret, Kennedy assumed that its organizers knew what they were doing. Delighted at crushing America’s Bay of Pigs invasion but certain there was more fighting to come, Castro appealed to the Soviets, who responded favorably. Aware of Russian shipments arriving in Cuba, Kennedy’s administration assumed that these contained conventional weapons until photographs photographed nuclear missile sites. Hastings does not hide his contempt for Khrushchev’s decision to send atomic weapons. Explanations exist because Khrushchev, his son, and many high-level officials wrote memoirs. All blamed him, but Khrushchev himself insisted that it was a sensible response to
American missiles on his nation’s border. Early on in the crisis, almost everyone, Kennedy included, agreed to bomb strategic sites and invade, which would likely lead to war. Hastings argues that Kennedy prevented a catastrophic conflict by deciding that this was a bad idea. Instead, he ordered a blockade and sent a warning to Khrushchev, who withdrew the missiles. The author’s painfully insightful conclusion credits Kennedy with brilliant statesmanship but adds that most successors would have chosen war.

The definitive account of a brief yet frightening period in global history.

**SOMEBWHERE SISTERS**  
A Story of Adoption, Identity, and the Meaning of Family  
Hayasaki, Erika  
Algonquin (320 pp.)  
$28.00 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-1-61620-912-4

Twins, raised apart, recover their bonds.

Journalist Hayasaki, the daughter of a Japanese father and White American mother and herself the mother of identical twin boys, examines questions about biological and cultural identity, nature versus nurture, and the complexities of transracial adoption, focusing on the lives of three adopted Vietnamese girls: identical twins Ha and Loan, born in 1998, and Khanh Nhu, born in 1999, not related to the twins. Given up by an unwed mother who lived in poverty, Ha was raised by an aunt and her partner in a rural village in Vietnam; Loan was left in an orphanage, where Khanh Nhu soon arrived. In 2002, Loan and Khanh Nhu were adopted by a wealthy White couple who believed that by removing the girls from poverty, they were offering them a chance at a better life. The adoptive parents renamed the girls Isabella and Olivia and raised them, along with their four biological children, in an affluent Chicago suburb. Discovering that Loan had a twin, the family worked tirelessly to connect the sisters to each other and their birth families, involving many trips to Vietnam. Hayasaki places the girls’ experiences in the context of decades of transracial and transnational adoptions, beginning after World War II, when couples began “seeking out children whom they believed had been cast aside, impoverished, or born to families fragmented by war and upheaval.” Adoption, writes the author, became “increasingly embraced as a political act, and a humanitarian one.” But America’s racist attitudes marginalized and victimized many Black, Asian, and biracial children, including Isabella and Olivia, who were often bullied. Hayasaki weaves their reflections about belonging, heritage, and identity—gleaned from hundreds of hours of interviews with the girls and their birth and adoptive families—with a broad consideration of adoption and twin studies that aim to shed light on the extent to which genes and environment shape human behavior, personality, and development.

An engaging portrait of intersected lives.

**BRAVE HEARTED**  
The Women of the American West  
Hickman, Katie  
Spiegel & Grau (400 pp.)  
$30.00 | Oct. 25, 2022  
978-1-954118-17-1

Wide-ranging survey of the multifaceted roles of women in the 19th-century settlement of the American West.

English historical novelist and travel writer Hickman combines those interests in this effort to correct the view that the frontier West was the sole domain of men. The story is less about gunfighters and lone prospectors than “one of the largest and most tumultuous mass migrations in history,” and women were there from the first. Among them, as early as 1836, were Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding, two missionaries who crossed the plains and mountains to Oregon, scouting a trail that their husbands would later follow. Known largely only to specialist historians, Whitman and Spalding were the first White women to witness one of the great Native American trade rendezvous, made up of thousands of people, including friendly women who, recognizing their achievement, wrote Spalding, “were not satisfied short of saluting Mrs. W. and myself with a kiss.” Another traveler was fortunate to have lived to tell the tale, exalting in the splendors of California’s Napa Valley after surviving the unfortunate Donner Party disaster. Hickman writes sensitively of Olive Oatman, a woman in a wagon party ambushed by Native warriors in Arizona and held in captivity for years, noting the unpleasantly prurient nickname poor Olive bore during that time. (Suffice it to say that it relates to Mohave women’s reaction at first seeing bearded White men, laughing because “the beards made the men look like talking vaginas.”) The author also illuminatingly profiles the larger-than-life Sarah Bowman, “Army camp follower, entrepreneur, cook, innkeeper, and battlefield heroine” and leader of “a thriving business as the madam of the local brothel”; and Hiram and Matilda Young, a Black couple whose wagon business, in the single year 1860, “produced three hundred wagons and six thousand ox yokes.”

A welcome corrective to the long-skewed male-centric history of westward expansion.

**LONG ROAD**  
Pearl Jam and the Soundtrack of a Generation  
Hyden, Steven  
Hachette (272 pp.)  
$29.00 | Sept. 27, 2022  
978-0-306-82642-9

A critical consideration of one of rock’s most durable and inscrutable acts.

For young casual music listeners, Pearl Jam may seem like an oldies band,
best known for early-1990s hits like “Alive” and “Jeremy.” Yet they’re not a nostalgia act; they still release records and deliver high-energy live shows. Though they’re not a jam band, they attract a rabid, bootleg-hungry fan base that rivals those of the Grateful Dead or Phish. Veteran music critic Hyden, whose last book, This Isn’t Happening, focused on Radiohead’s Kid A, explores these cultural disconnects. As he points out, there are plenty of reasons why Pearl Jam could have collapsed during their heyday—they cycled through multiple drummers and addiction issues—but Hyden credits their endurance to frontman Eddie Vedder’s emotional candor and the support he sought from veteran rock stars like Neil Young and Pete Townshend. (In contrast, Hyden argues, other grunge-era frontmen fell victim to their own isolation, most notably Kurt Cobain.) Pearl Jam’s effort to preserve a measure of integrity amid their stardom was often mocked—especially during a quixotic mid-’90s battle with Ticketmaster—but Hyden argues that dedication and focus allowed them to weather crises like a 2000 concert in Denmark during which nine people were trampled and died. The author is a hardcore fan—he’s listened to all 72 CDs the band released of its 2000 tour—but a thoughtful one, noting the feebleness of their recent albums while pinpointing their top-tier performances. Hyden offers little original reporting—he didn’t interview the band for the book—but he’s an informed, engaging interpreter of the band’s music and their place in rock history. If they seem like odd survivors, perhaps it’s because they’ve avoided chasing trends. “They are a middle-aged rock band that looks and acts like a middle-aged rock band,” writes the author.

A music biography well suited to fans of both the band and 1990s pop culture.

Instead, the narrative is a series of rollicking, engaging coming-of-age stories. He chronicles his childhood in Newcastle living in an overcrowded flat with a father who had been a British soldier and the Italian woman he had married. His literary flair in writing about that childhood is borderlining Dickensian, but otherwise, he never seems to put on airs. Johnson’s accounts of grinding poverty and postwar drabness recall other British rock memoirs, as does his description of the jolt he received when he first discovered rock music. What distinguishes his memoir is the way the author narrates such familiar tales, with a geniality and humor that make clear how much he enjoys the company of others. Before AC/DC, he was all but finished with rock, working on cars, winning a legal battle to prevent eviction from his house, on the wrong side of 30—then opportunity knocked. The rest is history, and fans will eagerly await the next volume.

A solid rock-'n'-roll tale with a to-be-continued ending.

THE LIVES OF BRIAN
A Memoir
Johnson, Brian
Dey Street/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-304638-2

The formative years of a British rocker who hit the jackpot with an iconic band.

Though he has been the lead singer for AC/DC throughout the band’s peak popularity, Johnson (b. 1947) is also known as the replacement for Bon Scott, whose death in 1980 from alcohol poisoning imperiled the band’s future. Refreshingly, the author has no interest in challenging his predecessor’s legendary status. In fact, his account reinforces it, showing how difficult it was for the band to decide to continue as well as his appreciation for the opportunity to replace Scott. Just months after that tragedy, AC/DC released Back in Black, the first of a long streak with Johnson, an album dedicated to Scott that is the band’s bestselling album. It shot the band to a new level of commercial success, and there was no looking back. Yet only about one-quarter of the memoir is about AC/DC (Johnson explains that he’s saving those stories for another volume).
true university. The book is part of the publisher’s new Black Power series, edited by Ibram X. Kendi and Ashley D. Farmer. A well-researched and -written addition to the history of the tumultuous 1960s.

HERETIC
A Memoir
Kadlec, Jeanna
Harper/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-358-58181-9

In a memoir of discovery and unlearning, a Midwest girl finds religious freedom on the East Coast. Veering from scholarly and self-assured to angry and doubtful, Kadlec chronicles her experiences being raised by evangelical Christians and her subsequent deconstruction and rebuilding of everything she thought she knew about herself. Opening with her trip to the county courthouse where she filed her divorce papers, the author doesn’t try to surprise us with shocking twists or turns. Instead, Kadlec tells us the story of her life so far in bits and pieces, interspersed with graduate-level research. This approach along with accounts of her childhood that never seem to go as deep as they could combines in a narrative technique that sometimes feels like it is meant to keep readers at arm’s length. The researched pieces—about the origins of evangelicalism, the 1990s explosion of purity culture, and the roots of misogyny and racism in the church—are fascinating, but more interesting is Kadlec’s personal journey. She grew up and out of evangelicalism but not before she was taught to hate her body, endured a disastrous marriage, and found her relationship with Jesus much more fraught than her younger self would have thought possible. Traveling from Iowa to Wisconsin as a child with her family, Kadlec was sure that college was her “ticket out”...a guarantee I wouldn’t end up like my mom: stuck in a nowhere town, financially trapped in a no-good marriage with a man who provided for you but didn’t appreciate you.” However, the author discovered that higher education was “only another example of liberal America’s and academia’s own cruel optimism, where what is given financially, energetically, emotionally, and even physically, so overwhelmingly, and so often, exceeds the actuality of what is received.” Ultimately, Kadlec found peace in Brooklyn and acknowledgement of her true identity as a queer woman.

Both memoir and thesis, this book highlights a cultural, social, and spiritual journey that will resonate with many.

WHAT’S PRISON FOR?
Punishment and Rehabilitation in the Age of Mass Incarceration
Keller, Bill
Columbia Global Reports (160 pp.)
$16.00 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-7359137-4-2

A compassionate argument about why any reckoning with mass incarceration should transform imprisonment itself. Keller, a founder of the nonprofit Marshall Project and former executive editor of the New York Times, acknowledges he came late to this thorny topic: “My crash course in criminal justice taught me that this country imprisons people more copiously than almost any other place on earth.” While others have outlined the inequities fueling mass incarceration, imprisonment itself remains an invisible cultural archipelago. “Our prisons are not the most transparent institutions,” writes the author, “and out of sight too often means out of mind. But the American way of incarceration is a shameful waste of lives and money.” The author clearly reveals the contemporary prison experience, from intake following conviction to the surreal “afterlife” of parole. At each stage, he shows absurd injustice, brutality, and despair, countered by enlightened approaches in places like Norway and domestic desires for change, including “a political force few saw coming: a reform movement on the right.” Keller initially reviews how American society became increasingly punitive in the early 1970s, as “punishment supplanted rehabilitation in the national discourse.” Yet other factors, including acknowledgement of unjust policing and declining post-1990 violent crime rates, laid the groundwork for a “cultural and generational shift away from the punitive.” We can see this shift in the restorative justice movement as well as “prosecutors questioning what crimes should be prosecuted and judges seeking non-court remedies.” The author also explores less-discussed facets, including the systemic pressures faced by corrections officers, the insidious effect of for-profit incarceration, and the particular marginalization of women prisoners. He portrays education and mentorship as especially crucial. “Almost every conversation I had with prison veterans,” writes Keller, “turned sooner or later to a plea for respect, for dignity.” Though some of the author’s observations have been documented before, the narrative is well researched and lucid.

A strong single-volume response to a seemingly intractable national dilemma.
THE HARVEST OF WAR
Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis: The Epic Battles That Saved Democracy
Kershaw, Stephen P.
Pegasus (480 pp.)
$32.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-63936-234-9

A new history of the iconic battles between ancient Persia and Greece.

Paying more attention to Persia than many previous accounts, Kershaw, the author of The Enemies of Rome and The Search for Atlantis, reminds readers that, after conquering Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon, it ruled the largest empire in the Western world, extending from India to Egypt to the Black Sea. By 550 B.C.E., Persian armies had reached the western edge of modern-day Turkey, an area filled with prosperous Greek cities. Rule by the emperor’s satraps was probably no worse than that of earlier native tyrants, but Persians considered all Persians barbarians. Trouble began in 499, when Athens sent a small fleet to aid a rebellion in a Persian-ruled city. The revolt was crushed, but the emperor, Darius, did not forget, later sending a huge army to defeat at Marathon in 490. Darius died a few years later, but his son, Xerxes, sent an even larger army, which overwhelmed the Spartans at Thermopylae and destroyed Athens but was stalemated after the Greeks destroyed his fleet at Salamis in 480. A skilled scholar and dedicated historical researcher, Kershaw is not shy about explaining the often unreliable sources and pointing out celebrated events that probably didn’t happen. “The ancient chronologies, based on genealogies with multiple variants, which are traced back to a vaguely dated Trojan War, are sketchy in the extreme,” he notes. The author is at his best describing ancient politics and culture, and the confusing battle accounts are not his fault. Half a dozen ancient historians mention them, but their details are contradictory and impressionistic—and all from the Greek point of view. Many modern writers edit them into a comprehensible story, but Kershaw admits that the specifics are gone forever.

A fine study of a turning point in ancient history.

GIULIANI
The Rise and Tragic Fall of America’s Mayor
Kirtzman, Andrew
Simon & Schuster (480 pp.)
$30.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-982153-29-8

The life and work of Giuliani are tragic by definition, since they mark the collapse of a once upright man who fell victim to his own ambitions and imagined himself above the law.

Taking a page from Giuliani’s own strongly Catholic upbringing, Kirtzman—who first met Giuliani as a journalist in 1992—frames the matter as a moral issue, “the result of a series of moral compromises made over the years as the temptations of power and money grew.” Even his victories, such as his seemingly steady leadership after 9/11, were so compromised—in that case, by “his administration’s ineptitude,” made evident by the fact that a badly cobbled communication system made it impossible for first responders to share information. Outwardly cheerful, Giuliani, “had a dark, Machiavellian streak, yet managed to wrap his problematic acts in a cloak of righteousness.” Giuliani’s apparent belief in his own moral invincibility led him to questionable acts even while the memory of 9/11 was fresh. For example, he became counsel and de facto lobbyist for Purdue Pharma, “earning millions by protecting a company whose actions were contributing to the overdose deaths of America’s young people.” All that pales next to his relationship with and actions on behalf of Donald Trump, which extend far into the past. Kirtzman deserves much credit for following the trail to Giuliani’s mayoral terms, when he helped Trump shortcut zoning issues to build behemoth towers. Giuliani’s final collapse, of course, came when he helped with Trumpian grafts, from trying to bully Ukraine to dig up dirt on Joe Biden to contesting the 2020 election. Giuliani’s take might well stand as a motto for his entire sordid trajectory: “My attitude about my legacy…is ‘fuck it.’”

A sad tale, expertly told, of corruption, bad judgment, avarice, and treason.

BOUNDLESS
The Rise, Fall, and Escape of Carlos Ghosn
Kostov, Nick & Sean McLain
Harper Business (384 pp.)
$29.99 | Aug. 9, 2022
978-0-063-04103-5

An explosive exposé of a disgraced automotive-industry titan.

Wall Street Journal reporters Kostov and McLain meticulously probe the life and career of Carlos Ghosn (b. 1954), who was arrested in Tokyo for financial crimes in the fall of 2018. First, they lucidly depict the magnate’s early life as a scion of a prominent Lebanese Brazilian business family. Focused on academic success, Ghosn was an overachiever in grade school, and he replaced his legally troubled father as the “man of the house” with three sisters and a doting mother. Displaying a “swift problem-solving prowess,” Ghosn was a “social chameleon” who ascended the company ranks for nearly two decades at Michelin, maximizing his time with executives and treating it “like a management school.” In the mid-1990s, he flourished in upper management roles at Renault and Nissan, and an alliance between the two companies solidified his name as a premier global executive. Yet throughout his meteoric rise to prominence, Ghosn continuously felt undercompensated and began devising financial
schemes to pay himself what he felt he deserved. Eventually, his crimes caught up to him, and he landed in a Tokyo prison. Kostov and McLain create a riveting narrative based on a trove of documentation and incriminating source material, including previously "untapped" legal documents, email transcripts, and interviews with corporate executives, friends, family, rivals, and Ghosn himself, whom, they note, was forthcoming with information—other than matters related to France, where he still faces criminal investigation. Fearing he was being persecuted without merit, Ghosn employed the assistance of a former Green Beret to mastermind a stealthy flight from custody in a box, making him an internationally wanted “celebrity fugitive” who fled Japan for Lebanon, where he remains today. This exciting, vividly detailed book explores a variety of relevant topics, including globalization, international business ethics, and how excessive wealth and fame have the potential to corrupt even the shrewdest businessperson.

First-rate reporting on corporate savvy and greed and the ultimate cinematic escape.

MAKING AMERICANS
Stories of Historic Struggles, New Ideas, and Inspiration in Immigrant Education
Lander, Jessica
Beacon Press (384 pp.)
$30.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-8070-0665-8

An educator identifies “eight elements” necessary for successfully educating immigrants in the U.S.

After six years at Lowell High School (Massachusetts) teaching “more than a hundred recent immigrants and refugees” annually, Lander became curious about nationwide trends in immigrant education. Consequently, she embarked on a journey around the country visiting schools and programs widely considered innovative. In the course of this investigation, she identified eight characteristics of effective immigrant education programs, ranging from “supportive communities” to “recognition of their strengths” to “chances to dream.” In distinct chapters, she examines each of these elements and includes relevant historical context, a description of a well-functioning, modern-day immigrant education program, and a life story of one of her immigrant students. “As I wrote this book, it became clear to me that the eight elements are all ways to achieve an overarching goal: instilling in newcomers a sense of belonging,” she writes. “Belonging is fundamental. Young people who feel that they belong are more likely to invest their talents, their energy, and their heart in enriching their new home.” The author offers a nice mixture of conversational tone and intriguing research, uncovering important, untold stories in educational history. For example, she chronicles how, in the 1940s, a Mexican family filed a Supreme Court case that led to the desegregation of Mexican Americans in California schools; at the same time, they rented a farm from a Japanese family interned during World War II in an act of interracial solidarity. Despite these inspiring stories, the author rarely explicitly ties the examples back to the central theme of each section, and the connections are not always clear. Although much of Lander’s research is solid, she doesn’t adequately address the contributions of many important scholars—e.g., Ofelia García and Lisa Delpit—who formed the theoretical and practical frameworks that guide immigrant education today.

An uneven but well-intentioned survey of immigrant education in the U.S. today.

THE RISE OF A NEW LEFT
How Young Radicals Are Shaping the Future of American Politics
Lipsitz, Raina
Verso (272 pp.)
$26.95 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-83976-426-4

A journalistic account of the recent emergence of a millennial cohort of progressive politicians and activists.

It’s no small irony that the swelling ranks of youthful leftists came about, at least in some measure, because of the presidential campaigns mounted by the superannuated Bernie Sanders. “As much as they admire Sanders, this new crop of left-wing…candidates are more interested in enacting his vision than imitating his personal style,” writes political journalist Lipsitz, “which, unless Sanders’s apparent artlessness counts as a style, isn’t what attracted them in the first place.” In other words, next to the rumpled Sanders, an array of well-put-together young people such as, notably, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, has risen to put a fresh face on progressive politics. Some of them, such as a Buffalo-based activist, eschew “capital S” socialism. Others are quicker to embrace the label, but they also seek to run for existing political offices rather than attempt to build a larger movement because the path to the former is more clearly defined. One of the great strengths of the more effective candidates and activists is their ability to explain “poorly understood concepts like ‘identity politics’ and ‘intersectionality’ ” to their young audiences. In doing so, some are helping to expand the horizons of a new kind of socialist feminism, “broadening its conception of workers and deepening its understanding of the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression.” A new labor movement is also emerging. For all that, the young progressives face considerable opposition not just from their right-wing challengers, but also from entrenched Democratic Party operatives who understand correctly that they’re in the crosshairs, too. It’s for that reason, Lipsitz suggests, that not much has changed with the Biden presidency, which causes her to conclude, somewhat dejectedly, that “progress does not inevitably follow a smooth, upward trajectory.”

A well-reported introduction to a growing, controversial movement among the younger electorate.
“A compelling, hopeful, potentially divisive look at the future of technology and its ability to positively shape human life.”

THE EQUALITY MACHINE

Harnessing Digital Technology for a Brighter, More Inclusive Future

Lobel, Orly

PublicAffairs (368 pp.)

$30.00 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-541-77475-9

Enthusiastic yet measured argument for technology’s potential to promote equality across many facets of culture and industry.

Lobel, founding member of the Center for Intellectual Property Law and Markets at the University of San Diego, works from the twin premises that “equality is today’s foremost moral imperative” and that “we must understand technology as a public good.” The author catalogs emerging technologies that encourage diversity, accuracy, and empathy in fields historically plagued by bias and inequity, organizing her broad survey around economics, employment and labor, health care, media and education, sexuality, homes, and families. While ultimately optimistic about the future of technology, Lobel rejects the utopian-dystopian binary, viewing tech as neither good nor bad but rather an array of tools that can help solve human problems—though sometimes with unintended consequences. “To be sure,” writes the author, “the same technology can serve to support and to surveil, to learn and to manipulate, to heal and to harm, to detect and to conceal, to equalize and to exclude.” As extensions of humanity, algorithmic automation, artificial intelligence, and robotics show great potential to compensate for human shortcomings, but they also risk reinforcing them without proper standards for data and design. In an attempt to offer a progressive, business-friendly path forward, Lobel outlines a vision for guiding the ongoing integration of automation and AI into our daily lives with a different kind of tool: public policy. The author believes that by leveraging legal frameworks to establish equality-focused principles in tech development, we can “forge[...] humanity’s robotic future in an egalitarian image.” While some readers outside Lobel’s political lens may fault her premises or proposed direction—the final section recognizes and lightly dismisses potential criticisms—many will find the text a convincing road map to institutionally confirmed, technologically reinforced equality.

A compelling, hopeful, potentially divisive look at the future of technology and its ability to positively shape human life.
THE SEVEN CIRCLES
Indigenous Teachings for Living Well
Luger, Chelsey & Thosh Collins
HarperOne (256 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-06-311920-8

How Indigenous traditions can shape a healthy lifestyle.

Wellness advocate Luger is Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, and photographer Collins is On Akimel O’odham, Seneca-Cayuga, and Osage. “The teachings in this book represent a diverse swath of Indian Country,” they write, “which reflects the makeup of our family.” Drawing on both Western and Indigenous insights into healthy behaviors and mindsets, the authors focus on seven circles, or interdependent topics: movement, land, community, ceremony, sacred space, sleep, and food. Luger and Collins rightly point out that Indigenous wellness practices are not widely known in America, and they argue convincingly that these practices “indeed have something to teach the world in the way of conjuring resilience.” The authors frame each chapter with eloquent commentary on their own spiritual growth, which illustrates the benefits, as well as challenges, of adopting and adapting specific traditions. These sections consistently defy stereotypes about Indigeneity, particularly regarding the all-too-common expectation that Indigenous peoples must eschew all Western influences in order to be “authentic.” The chapters devoted to movement and sacred space are particularly compelling, and they suggest dimensions to well-being that are typically overlooked in similar guides—e.g., the importance of integrating self-help practices into everyday life rather than thinking of them as separate activities with discrete ends. Perhaps the book’s most important contribution to the genre, however, is the emphasis on communal modes of healing and the importance of sustaining networks of personal bonds rather than, as is more typical in Western self-help, cultivating a concern for the self as responsible only for and to itself alone. A few of the authors’ generalizations about Indigenous practices are idealized, and their advice is sometimes marred by clichés. Nevertheless, Luger and Collins provide a range of sensible, informed, accessible guidance for both small- and large-scale lifestyle changes. The book also features a nice selection of bright photographs.

An appealing short manual for healing the self through Indigenous traditions.

BOTTICELLI’S SECRET
The Lost Drawings and the Discovery of the Renaissance
Luzzi, Joseph
Norton (256 pp.)
$28.95 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-324-00401-1

Tracing the fate of remarkable 15th-century drawings.

In 1475, the artist Sandro Botticelli (circa 1445-1510) was at the height of his prominence, proclaimed “Master of Painting, one of Florence’s highest artistic honors.” Soon, he undertook two important projects: to illustrate each of the 100 cantos in Dante’s Divine Comedy, one set for a deluxe edition intended for mass production and another, commissioned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici—Botticelli’s most influential patron and a cousin of Lorenzo il Magnifico—for a private, hand-lettered volume. Luzzi, a professor of comparative literature, brings his extensive knowledge of Dante and Italian history to a richly detailed investigation of the creation, reception, and afterlife of Botticelli’s second project: drawings that informed an understanding of the fertile, contradictory period that came to be known as the Renaissance. The Dante drawings went unfinished for more than a decade while Botticelli worked on other projects, including three frescoes in the Sistine Chapel and The Birth of Venus. In 1494, however, Lorenzo apparently rushed the artist to fulfill the commission, probably to offer the volume as a gift to the French king, Charles VIII, who had just marched into Florence and with whom Lorenzo hoped to ingratiate himself. Luzzi recounts the sad trajectory of Botticelli’s last years and his diminished posthumous reputation until a renewed interest in Dante in the late 18th century and a celebration of the Renaissance by pre-Raphaelites and prominent art critics in the 19th century led to “the Victorian cult of Botticelli.” After migrating through Europe, the drawings, not seen for some 400 years, ended up in England, where they were bought by an astute German art historian. Precariously surviving World War II in a salt mine and divided during the Cold War, in 2000, “all 92 extant Dante illustrations by Botticelli appear[ed] together for the first time at exhibitions in Rome, Berlin, and London.” The book includes photos, a timeline, and a list of “key terms.”

A fresh perspective on an iconic artist and his time.
THE LIGHTHOUSE OF STALINGRAD
The Hidden Truth at the Heart of the Greatest Battle of World War II
MacGregor, Iain
Scribner (400 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 29, 2022
978-1-982163-58-7

The voices of the combatants enliven this account of the Battle of Stalingrad. The titular structure, for those unfamiliar with details of this pivotal conflict, is no aid to maritime navigation but instead a four-story apartment building in the middle of Stalingrad that became a critical garrison for Soviet forces struggling to repel the Nazi invaders. Given the call sign “Lighthouse,” it provided a commanding vantage point amid the rubble that surrounded it (marked “ruins” on an accompanying map) and became the stuff of legend when its dramatic storming by Yakov Fedotovich Pavlov and an ethnically diverse group of guardsmen hit the Soviet propaganda machine. Despite the title and his introduction’s insistence on the need to examine the truth behind the myth, MacGregor spans the entire campaign, from Hitler’s decision in spring 1942 to take out Stalingrad on the way to the Caucasian oil fields to the ignominious surrender of the tattered remains of the Sixth Army in winter 1943. The capture of “Pavlov’s House” occupies a chapter midway through, but the author reserves an actual examination of the myth for the epilogue. Uncertain focus notwithstanding, the battle makes for a compelling account, and MacGregor effectively uses primary sources, including the archived personal stories of Soviet veterans and the unpublished memoir of German officer Friedrich Roske, who comes fully alive in these pages—as does Alexander Ilyich Rodimtsev, whose 1967 memoir also furnishes significant color. MacGregor’s telling, however, is notably rough. In addition to presenting readers with the usual alphanumeric thicket pervasive in military histories, the author has a propensity for convoluted, awkward sentences that make the reading experience a slog. That the drama of the conflict, with the fighting waged room by room, still comes through is no small testament to the story’s bones, but readers will find a more satisfying study in Antony Beevor’s Stalingrad.

SCOOPS
Behind the Scenes of the BBC’s Most Shocking Interviews
McAlister, Sam
Oneworld Publications (288 pp.)
$26.95 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-86154-440-0

A former producer and booker for the BBC’s Newsnight takes us behind the camera. In 2019, McAlister succeeded in booking an interview with Prince Andrew, which proved to be an unmitigated disaster for the bumbling interviewee. In her candid memoir, the author chronicles how she landed that interview and dishes about other big names she locked in during her tenure on the program. Known for her tenacity in securing talent, McAlister joined Newsnight in 2011, when Jeremy Paxman, known for his severe interrogations of politicians and other newsmakers, was still the presenter. Paxman left in 2014, and his replacements, Evan Davis and Emily Maitlis, employed a more discursive, conversational style. In this straightforward account, the author picks and chooses her material from an impressive roster of major figures, including Julian Assange, Sean Spicer, Amy Schumer (who turned out to be the worst interviewee), Stormy Daniels (the best), and James Comey, who “reeked of establishment and quiet power.” McAlister was also able to get a rare interview with the daughter of Auschwitz commander Rudolf Höss, “one of the foremost mass murderers in history.” Throughout the text, the author shares tricks of the trade about producing short, intricately organized segments and reveals some of the resentments among the staff toward the presenters and their extravagance. The grotesque era of Donald Trump, she writes, was “an absolute boon for news,” and she was able to book interviews with many in his orbit. However, it was the sensational Prince Andrew interview, offered up blithely by the prince’s PR crew without any sense of legal implications, that put McAlister’s name on the map. She left the BBC shortly after the fallout, but her memories will appeal to anyone interested in the production of news programs and how big-name guests make it to the screen.

A seasoned journalist seizes her moment.

THE SPORTY ONE
My Life as a Spice Girl
Melanie C
Grand Central Publishing (320 pp.)
$29.00 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5387-4029-3

A member of the Spice Girls chronicles her rise to fame and struggles to love herself. “The reason I decided to write this book,” explains Melanie C, better known
“A master class for writers and a backstage bonanza for TV fans rolled into one unforgettable package.”

LIFE’S WORK

David Milch
Milch, David
Random House (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-525-51074-1

A brilliant memoir from the writer who brought us Deadwood, NYPD Blue, and many other great TV shows.

Known for his gritty dialogue and reality-driven, richly meaningful plots, Milch (b. 1945), a consummate storyteller, sets himself up as an unreliable narrator from the start. In the prologue, he reveals that he has Alzheimer’s and that he is writing with the aid of his family’s recollections as well as transcripts of his writing sessions from the past 20 years. For most of the book, the author writes with a mix of authority and swagger about his early days—both his triumphs and missteps. While Milch was at Yale, his writing got the attention of Robert Penn Warren, who mentored him. Warren’s support continued even as he developed a heroin addiction, among other tribulations. Milch outlines all those issues, alongside his successes with Hill Street Blues and NYPD Blue (which created more issues), with the command and charm that so many of his memorable characters possess. He also provides interesting inside details about his classic shows. In one of his many asides about writing, Milch explains that he was writing more assuredly during Deadwood, which he says was inspired by the Apostle St. Paul, and he began using what he calls “God’s voice.” Using that voice, the author delivers several amazing passages—including one about Zenyatta, the famed racehorse—that beautifully encapsulate the power of sports and the experience of being a sports fan. “I really started pulling for that filly the last eighth of a mile, even as one had the sense that it didn’t look like she was going to get there,” he writes, setting the scene. That’s why when Milch’s formal writing voice begins to weaken, coinciding with his declining health and struggles with other issues, including the “corrosive” influence of gambling, the story becomes all the more poignant.

A master class for writers and a backstage portrait of the dangers of blindly following leaders of whatever stripe.
CHIP WAR
The Fight for the World’s Most Critical Technology
Miller, Chris
Scribner (464 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-982172-00-8

How the U.S. lost its lead in the crucial area of microchip manufacturing and how it might be reclaimed.

Without microchips, entire industries can grind to a halt. “Most of the world’s GDP is produced with devices that rely on semiconductors,” writes Miller, who teaches international history at Tufts. “For a product that didn’t exist seventy-five years ago, this is an extraordinary ascent.” While it was primarily American scientists and entrepreneurs who created the industry, American chip manufacturing has lagged behind in recent years. Production happens in surprisingly few places, with one of the most important being Taiwan, where the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company provides 37% of the world’s logic chips and 11% of the world’s memory chips. Miller notes that in the early years of chip manufacture, when most of the painstaking work was done by hand, high labor costs in the U.S. pushed producers to look overseas, first to Japan. But then Japan became a major competitor. An answer was to undercut the Japanese firms by finding countries with even lower labor costs, such as South Korea and Taiwan. Eventually, those countries became competitors as well as partners. American tech firms were willing to send chip manufacture offshore so they could focus on their strengths of innovation and design. Apple, for example, is a major user of chips but makes absolutely none. As Miller shows, the problem with this globalization strategy is China, which has long sought to build its own chip industry, with mixed results. From Beijing’s perspective, Taiwan’s chip factories make the island an even more tempting target. Though the author doesn’t make any clear policy proposals, his implicit message to U.S. policymakers is to recognize the danger and act accordingly. America’s tech lead is shrinking, so the time has come to develop policies to ensure that the secret machinery of the digital era continues to operate smoothly.

An important wake-up call with solid historical context.

IT TAKES A WORRIED WOMAN
Essays
Monroe, Debra
Univ. of Georgia (192 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Oct. 15, 2022
978-0-820-36308-0

A novelist recalls a difficult past of loss as well as a stormy present.

In this follow-up to her memoir, My Unsentimental Education, Monroe covers some of the same ground: hand-to-mouth living as she launched her writing career, failed relationships, challenges as a White single mother adopting a Black daughter. The author’s wry, straight-talking style keeps this material fresh, and her stories are often wrenching. In one piece, she recalls the abusive men in her mother’s life; in another, her own experience with sexual assault. Circling around these stark topics are more modest but engaging tales about her efforts to sublimate her fears. She recalls spending her 20s attending Weight Watchers meetings, caring less about slimming down than finding the company of older women, and a piece on acquiring babysitters for her young daughter while teaching is an object lesson in being both inventive and bone-tired. The author also shares stories about long-distance relationships, small literary successes, and a search for stability, all of which she relates with gravitas and brass. (“Good lovemaking doesn’t happen right away. People say that. I wouldn’t know. I never waited to find out.”) If aging has bestowed maturity on Monroe, it hasn’t necessarily brought comfort. Essays in the latter third of the book involve her college-age daughter’s experience with racist violence and the way her well-intentioned White friends tried to downplay or ignore it (“You think about race too much. You need to stop”); the casual bigotry of Monroe’s next-door neighbors; and the sense of entrapment that accompanied the pandemic lockdowns. In these final pieces, the author cannily interweaves the stresses of the daily news and the reckless charms of nature. In mistletoe, she finds an apt metaphor for her daily life—a toxic species that, alas, cannot be completely extinguished from her life.

A thoughtful set of essays that unravel the clichés of trauma writing.

INVISIBLE BOY
A Memoir of Self-Discovery
Mooney, Harrison
Steerforth (364 pp.)
$18.95 paper | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-58642-346-9

A debut memoir recounts a scarifying childhood as the adoptive son of White religious fundamentalists.

“We give them Black children to raise, like they’re flowers in a vase, and perhaps that’s what they think of us,” writes former Vancouver Sun reporter and editor Mooney toward the end of the book. “Well, think again. Lovely as they look inside your living room, the flowers are dying.” Soul death came in the form of a studied denial of any possibility of exploring Blackness. As Mooney, the biological child of a Ghanaian mother and a German father, details, in the remote wilderness community in which he was raised by adoptive White parents, there simply were no Black people like him, no books about the Black experience, and no access to appropriate education or media. As a progressively unwilling devotee of a certain kind of religious understanding, he found role models in the Bible among those sold into slavery and oppressed by authority; Joseph, Moses, and Samson, “whose hair was a total mystery to everyone and impossible to manage. Needless to say, no one knew what to do with my hair either.”
“A captivating chronicle driven by keen wit, a strong sense of place, and a clear love of a city’s old soul.”

FERAL CITY
On Finding Liberation in Lockdown New York
Moss, Jeremiah
Norton (256 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-393-86847-0

A captivating chronicle driven by keen wit, a strong sense of place, and a clear love of a city’s old soul.

Entering college and leaving a household headed by a man of sour disposition and a surpassingly mean-spirited woman—“father” and “mother” increasingly failed to remain appropriate designations—Mooney eventually replaced a religion marked by suspicions that demons were all around with a more secular one whose texts included the songs of Nina Simone (“I was using her to signify a Blackness that I didn’t really feel”) and the writings of James Baldwin, who, “like me, was a child of church.” Having become racially conscious through that education, Mooney is highly sensitive to systemic racism—which is practiced, he wisely notes, by people who are “as brainwashed as anyone, mindlessly minding their homes in a slave state.”

An affecting portrait of life inside the twin prisons of racism and unbending orthodoxy.

YOU SHOULD SIT DOWN
FOR THIS
A Memoir About Life, Wine, and Cookies
Mowry-Housley, Tamera
Grand Central Press/Legacy Lit (192 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-306-92595-5

A TV star shares her wisdom.

Mowry-Housley (b. 1978), a former co-host of the Fox talk show The Real, offers an upbeat memoir peppered with nuggets of advice that she calls Tameraisms. Describing herself as “a little Black girl who had big dreams and grand ambitions,” she recounts many times that she “doubted herself, almost quit, shed tears, cried a ton, but learned how to laugh some more through it all.” Born in Germany, where her parents were stationed in the Army, she moved to Hawaii when she was 3 and then to central Texas, where she and her identical twin sister conjured up a routine that they performed at county fairs and in shopping malls. Seeing potential in her children’s talents, her mother moved them to Los Angeles. After failed auditions, they finally broke into TV. Mowry-Housley’s brother was cast in Full House and she and her twin in the sitcom Sister, Sister. One Tameraism: “It’s okay to fail as long as you fail up.” With TV work and school, she had no time for boyfriends, resulting in “dashed fantasies, unreasonable expectations, and wasted lip gloss” when she finally started to date. In matters of love, and in her career, she learned quickly that “there is no express train to success.” Mowry-Housley opines on sex, race (she is biracial), and family. She shares a moving homage to a beloved 18-year-old niece killed in a mass shooting, and she reflects on being a working mother and reveals the dark side of her time working on The Real. Although she loved her co-hosts, dealing with cruel public scrutiny played out on social media made it “one of the unhappiest times of my life. I suffered horrible anxiety, I’d throw up in my dressing room, I drank way too much.” Self-care, she underscores, is crucial for happiness. Though she offers little groundbreaking insight, the author comes across as genuine.

Heartfelt hints for living a good life.

HOW COVID CRASHED THE SYSTEM
A Guide to Fixing American Health Care
Nash, David B. & Charles Wohlforth
Rowman & Littlefield (320 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 15, 2022
978-1-538-16425-9

An expert overview of America’s dysfunctional health care system and good ideas for fixing it.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic started, the U.S. has suffered the most deaths of any nation, with a far
higher percentage among the elderly, racial minorities, and the poor. In passionate but lucid, fact-based polemic, Nash, a professor of health policy, and journalist Wohlforth point out the primary cause of this dire situation: a wildly expensive, technology-obsessed, fee-for-service system that emphasizes treating disease over prevention, public health, and addressing the socio-economic determinants of health. In the first half of the book, the authors recount the failures that accompanied a pandemic in which “America performed “uniquely badly.” It turns out that not all the failures were Donald Trump’s fault. Vital institutions, especially the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration, performed poorly, and America’s fiercely entrepreneurial medical culture continues to veto lifesaving decisions on cost-effective grounds—even though nearly everyone agrees that these are sometimes wrong. Studies prove that giving the poor enough income, housing, and nutritious food to lift them out of poverty is cheaper than treating the medical and social consequences of that poverty. The pandemic was a gold mine for insurance companies because patients stayed away from doctors in droves but continued to pay premiums. Many rewarded their stockholders, but some purchased hospitals to become “payviders.” This is simply a single-payer system on a local scale, where the providers become responsible for a patient’s overall health rather than delivering episodic care and then sending a bill. Readers will squirm as they learn how American doctors are educated but feel some relief as they read about how medical schools are increasingly teaching compassion and communication and a willingness “to tackle issues not traditionally thought of as a role of a health care provider.” In the second half of the book, Nash and Wohlforth deliver an intelligent prescription for reform; thankfully, many of its features are already in progress.

Convincing advice for reform that should persuade the persuadable.

ME AND PAUL
Untold Stories of a Fabled Friendship
Nelson, Willie with David Ritz
Harper Horizon/HarperCollins (256 pp.)
$26.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-7852-4560-5

The country music icon offers a touching tribute to his late friend and drummer.

“In 2020, my closest friend left me. Into the infinite abyss. The mission of this book is to bring him back,” writes Nelson at the start of this chronicle of his many adventures with his longtime drummer (since the mid-1950s), dear friend, and partner in crime, Paul English. He continues, “I’m at the age when I’ve long stopped fussing around and started focusing on stuff that matters. Remembering Paul matters. If anyone, Paul must be immortalized.” Much more than just a collection of crazy antics, the narrative is a heartfelt resurrection of a key figure in Nelson’s life. English not only kept the beat during thousands of performances; he was also a guiding light during many pivotal moments in the singer’s journey. Written with veteran music journalist Ritz, the book reads like an extended eulogy. Nelson regales us with countless tales of English rescuing him from romantic travesties gone awry, getting money from crooked promoters, and helping him navigate the music industry at multiple significant eras in his career. Like all good tales from a life in music, these are clearly the kinds of stories that shift ever so slightly with each telling. At the end, we might not know the exact truth about each detail, but when the stories are so entertaining, who cares? Diehard fans of Nelson and his band will surely appreciate the rough-and-tumble anecdotes about the legendary drummer, and others will see the text as a genuine testament to the power of friendship, loyalty, and what it means to live from the heart. As the author notes near the beginning, “if someone tries to tell my story without putting Paul by my side, don’t bother reading it.” An appealing look at a friendship that spanned more than six decades and shaped the life of a musical legend.

THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF AN ORDINARY MAN
A Memoir
Newman, Paul
Ed. by David H. Rosenthal
Knopf (320 pp.)
$22.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-593-53450-2

Raw reflections from a movie icon. From 1986 to 1991, Paul Newman (1925-2008) worked on what he called a project of “self-dissection,” hoping “to try and explain it all to my kids.” That project took the form of conversations with his close friend and screenwriter Stewart Stern supplemented by interviews with friends, family, actors (Tom Cruise, Patricia Neal, Eva Marie Saint), and directors (John Huston, Robert Altman, Sidney Lumet, among others) and illustrated with family photos. Journalist and publisher Rosenthal has edited Stern’s transcriptions to produce a revealing memoir of a life marked by pain, grief, and regret. The son of a “dismissive, disinterested” father and a volatile, possessive mother, Newman grew up feeling like an outcast. Small, underweight, and a mediocre student, possibly because of a learning disability, Newman had no direction for his future. He gravitated to acting, worked sporadically, and decided to enroll in Yale drama school’s directing program because he thought he couldn’t depend on a career in acting. When he was accepted into the Actors Studio, he felt like an impostor, and insecurity dogged him. Compared to his second wife, Joanne Woodward, he considered himself a fraud. He failed as a father, too. “I don’t have a gift for fathering,” he said. “I never had a sense of my children as people.” He felt guilt over abandoning his children with his first wife, especially his eldest son, Scott, who died of an overdose at age 28. Newman was candid about his own alcohol abuse. According to Woodward, he found peace in being, as Joanne Woodward notes, “dead drunk”—and in auto racing, where the risk and challenge
felt like “something real and quite primitive.” As for acting, he said, it “gave me a sanctuary where I was able to create emotions without being penalized for having them.”

Intimate reflections on an extraordinary life steeped in sadness.

**WE’VE GOT TO TRY**
*How the Fight for Voting Rights Makes Everything Else Possible*

O’Rourke, Beto
Flatiron Books (224 pp.)
$29.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-1-250-85245-8

The Texas politician places his progressive gubernatorial campaign against a backdrop of voter and civil rights activism.

Thanks to a law signed by his opponent, Greg Abbott, in 2021, O’Rourke argues convincingly that it is now more difficult to vote in Texas than in any other state. This law and allied legislation, of course, were the result of the Trumpian trope that the 2020 election was stolen, and the votes so denied were those of non-White citizens, especially Black voters. “This accelerating attack on the right to vote is alarming but is not out of rhyme with what has come before,” writes the author, whose title comes from an early voter rights activist in his native El Paso, a Black doctor named Lawrence Aaron Nixon who paid his poll tax annually and yet was not allowed to vote. Neither were any other Black or Hispanic voters, and when the Supreme Court ruled that this violated the 14th Amendment, Texas responded by passing laws that allowed political parties to determine who could cast a vote for their candidates. Richard Nixon persisted, and he “did what he knew had to be done,” writes O’Rourke, adding, “now that we find ourselves facing the greatest threat to democracy since the crucial battles of the civil rights era, and nowhere more so than in Texas, we must look to the heroes of our past to guide us toward the victories that our country needs.” The author’s heroes are many, but he keeps his eye resolutely on the present and future, offering ideas for how to thwart the Texas GOP’s current campaign of voter suppression, outlining a platform that includes health care and justice reform and changes in immigration policy “to reflect current demands and challenges”—not to mention “to organize pro-democracy Texans wherever I can find them.”

A rousing call for political action—and, not coincidentally, to vote for the author.

**THE LAST FOLK HERO**
*The Life and Myth of Bo Jackson*

Pearlman, Jeff
Mariner Books (480 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-358-43767-3

An appreciative life of sports star Vincent “Bo” Jackson (b. 1962), a star in both football and baseball.

In his latest sports bio, prolific sportswriter Pearlman demonstrates Jackson’s near-mythical achievements on the gridiron and diamond, whether “throwing a football straight into the air and hitting the New Orleans Superdome scoreboard—140 feet above his head,” or “the 1989 throw from the leftfield corner to gun down Seattle’s Harold Reynolds at home” as an adult or chucking a rock a couple of hundred yards as a 7-year-old. Much of the book centers on Jackson’s accomplishments as a player for Auburn, often the Alabama Crimson Tide’s poor relation on the Southern football circuit, at least until Jackson helped engineer crushing victory over their archrivals (legendary Alabama coach Bear Bryant retired immediately afterward). Of particular interest to aspiring athletes are the pages devoted to Jackson’s carefully orchestrated negotiations with the MLB and NFL, who wanted him so badly that he was able to play both baseball and football concurrently—albeit not without some hardball thrown by the owner of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who treated Jackson precisely like “a poor kid from East Bumfuck, Alabama.”

Taking down other sports heroes outright, including Bo, Pearlman throws in about every sports cliché in existence, from staccato sentence fragments to overwrought mixed metaphors (“Jackson was no longer a secret weapon. If anything, he was a flashing bolt of lightning”). Yet there are revelations, as well, including an explanation of how he came to be known as Bo. Ultimately, Pearlman is no mere hero worshipper, writing of his subject, “he is far from warm and bubbly, and oftentimes quite suspicious of the motives of anyone not named Bo Jackson.”

A good choice for devotees, showing how their hero sometimes has feet of clay—but remains a hero all the same.

**HOW WE WIN THE CIVIL WAR**
*Securing a Multiracial Democracy and Ending White Supremacy for Good*

Phillips, Steve
The New Press (384 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-62097-676-0

It’s 2022—high time, Phillips urges, to finally defeat the Confederacy.

We must choose “between democracy and whiteness,” writes Phillips, author of *Brown Is the New White*. The democracy of which he writes is an anti-White supremacist,
multiracial, and multicultural one. The Whiteness is that of the Confederacy's vice president that “the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.” Though there’s some stridency to Phillips’ argument, it’s not hyperbolic. The emergence of a neo-Confederate White supremacist movement, abetted by the Trump administration, and recent Republican efforts to suppress the ethnic-minority vote are of a piece with the past. Phillips characterizes this continuity as the product of a “Confederate Battle Plan” that has five major planks, including never giving an inch while insisting, say, that elections have been stolen and White people disenfranchised, as well as “rewriting the laws so that they don’t lose again.” Imetical to a true multiracial democracy, this battle plan has been refined and sharpened—and it’s in place today. Against it, Phillips proposes a “Liberation Battle Plan” with components that include the demand that Democrats stop trying to accommodate and compromise with those “who are waging an unrelenting, centuries-long war in defense of their cherished belief that America should be a white nation.” Leading this battle in its most recent skirmishes are Black activists, particularly Black women such as Georgia’s Stacey Abrams. These leaders “don’t look like the traditional white male model of intelligence and competence,” but they are obviously capable of unexpected victories, aided by smart use of hard data and clearly defined plans of attack, all in the interest of arriving at “a social contract for the society we want to live in.”

A politically charged, thoughtfully reasoned call to rally around the flag—and not the Stars and Bars, to be sure.

DARK CARNIVALS: Modern Horror and the Origins of American Empire
Poole, W. Scott
Counterpoint (384 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-64009-436-9

How terrifying narratives reflect the grisly realities of the American past and present.

In this follow-up to Wasteland: The Great War and the Origins of Modern Horror, history professor Poole surveys imaginative connections between the horror genre and the most brutal aspects of modern American history. The author argues that the appeal of these narratives can tell us a great deal about how the nation has struggled to make sense of its implication in imperial violence. “So much of the truth of the last one hundred years survives not in museum exhibitions or patriotic celebrations or lengthy documentary treatments but in horror films,” he writes. Focusing on a broad selection of representative films, TV shows, and fiction, Poole links particular works with events such as the Vietnam and Iraq wars, drawing out the allegorical significance of monstrous antagonists and their gory misadventures. The author ably demonstrates that horror narratives commonly serve two coexisting yet opposing functions: promoting fantasies about the nation’s ultimate innocence by displacing responsibility for domestic injustices or military aggression abroad onto some other party and insinuating, in often subtle but always unsettling ways, that one cannot evade guilt for misdeeds done in one’s name. The author makes it clear that paying close attention to works routinely dismissed as mere mindless escapism can be uncannily revealing about how unpleasant truths are publicly and privately repressed. Poole’s style shares a spirit with the sensationalism of the works he explores, and his emphasis on blunt (and sometimes reductive) assessments of complex historical phenomena and their representation in horror narratives can prove distracting. Nevertheless, the author provides persuasive commentary on the political inflections and emotional appeal of both well-known and obscure works. He is particularly insightful in probing such cultural touchstones as The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, Jarus, and The Twilight Zone.

A lurid overview of some of the darkest dimensions of American history through the lens of the horror genre.

BUTTS: A Backstory
Radke, Heather
Avid Reader Press (224 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov. 22, 2022
978-1-982135-48-5

A thorough uncovering of the symbolism, history, and significance of the female posterior in Western culture.

“How are butt and ass, as parts of the human body, used for what is typically interpreted as sexual or sexualized contexts? In this book, Heather Radke tackles this question with a focus on the butt as a cultural icon and a symbol of power. She traces the history of the butt from ancient times to the present day, examining how it has been used to represent power and authority. The book covers a wide range of topics, from the butt as a symbol of fertility and health in ancient Egypt to the butt as a symbol of rebellion and protest in modern times. Radke also explores the cultural significance of the butt in different regions of the world, from the United States to the United Kingdom to China.

A compelling read for anyone interested in the history of the butt and its cultural significance.”

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“Women's butts,” writes Radke, a contributing editor and reporter at NPR's Radiolab, “have been used as a means to create and reinforce racial hierarchies, as a barometer for the virtues of hard work, and as a measure of sexual desire and availability.” Following the introduction, the author divides the book into seven sections and accompanying subsections. The section titled “Sarah” refers to Sarah Baartman, born into the Khoe tribe, in present-day South Africa, in the late 1770s. She was captured and forced to perform as a fetishized specimen (“Hottentot Venus”) whose large butt represented a European “fantasy of African hypersexuality.” “Norma” was fashioned by American eugenics in 1945 to represent the so-called “normal” American female body: fertile and “native-born white.” Having codified a staggering amount of information, the author relies her research coherently, but her language and sentence structures are repetitive, even tedious. Radke’s insertion of her own experiences often casts her as an enthusiastic, earnest guide, but in certain sections, it serves only to underscore the often tame nature of her investigation. “The first time someone told me my butt was sexy,” she writes, “was in 2003. Since high school, my butt had grown ever larger.” To her credit, Radke includes a suitably wide array of sources, from studies suggesting that “hominids may have become bipedal, in part, in order to run” to the classic rap track “Baby Got Back” by Sir Mix-A-Lot. “From the start,” she writes, “the people involved in producing the song and video...interpreted it differently: some found it hilarious, others
uncomfortable and objectifying, still others empowering.” The author also includes excerpts from her numerous interviews with other relevant cultural figures, such as the creator of the late-1980s, early-’90s fitness phenomenon *Buns of Steel*.

An intermittently informative, surprisingly staid treatment of the subject.

**A SILENT FIRE**
*The Story of Inflammation, Diet, & Disease*

Ravella, Shilpa

Norton (368 pp.)

$30.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-393-54190-8

A chronicle of the history of inflammation and suggestions for remedies for chronic inflammation.

In her debut book, gastroenterologist Ravella takes a deep dive into the scientific and medical history of inflammation. Rather than focusing on specific organs or systems, the author looks at the body as a whole, exploring how scientists and physicians came to understand inflammation as both a cause and consequence of disease. She traces the strengths and weaknesses of the immune system; discusses how and why it might turn against the body by creating autoimmune disorders; and explains the role of “invisible” inflammation in afflictions such as heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer’s disease. Ravella makes a compelling case for the role of diet in reducing chronic inflammation, and she offers a host of recommendations for alleviating it: Eat a plant-based diet with few processed foods; experiment with fermented foods; don’t overeat; get plenty of rest; and exercise. Regarding the latter, she issues a warning: “Exercising too much, or in the wrong way, injures and inflames. Long, intense periods of exercise, particularly for those unaccustomed to such rigor, can increase the risk of chronic, hidden inflammation.” Though the author’s suggestions are straightforward and largely unsurprising, she provides a full justification for each of them from the point of view of a medical doctor as well as a researcher. Examples of cases from her medical practice serve as cautionary tales for those who fail to take the effects of inflammation seriously. While the amount of medical detail included can be daunting, Ravella’s prose is clear, nuanced, and restrained. Readers fascinated by the science behind her assertions will be satisfied, while those more interested in the takeaways can access them easily. A full set of endnotes provides possibilities for further reading, and Ravella’s ability to connect the concrete and the abstract makes this a worthwhile study of a complex process.

A thoughtful and well-informed discussion of a misunderstood subject.

**WAGING A GOOD WAR**
*A Military History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968*

Ricks, Thomas E.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (448 pp.)

$30.00 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-374-60516-2

A novel interpretation that conceives of the civil rights movement in terms of a sequence of military campaigns “on carefully chosen ground that eventually led to victory.”

As Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Ricks notes, the campaign for civil rights was fought by “a disciplined mass of people [who] waged a concerted, organized struggle in dedication to a cause.” While that campaign was nonviolent, those involved understood that, as Gandhi said, “there is no civil disobedience possible, until the crowds behave like disciplined soldiers.” As with any military operation, this disciplined behavior hinged on extensive training and precise communication. In this regard, it’s no surprise that many early civil rights activists were Black veterans of World War II, returning soldiers who found that they were denied the democratic rights for which they had fought. The Fort Sumter moment of the struggle came during what was conceived as a siege on the Alabama city of Montgomery, with its iconic symbol, Rosa Parks, trained in nonviolent resistance at the Highlander Folk School, “a leftist, pro-labor, racially integrated outpost in the hills of eastern Tennessee.” The most challenging part of that resistance was “declining to counterattack the hoodlums sometimes set upon them,” a refusal to fight back physically that led to revulsion on the part of an electorate watching Bull Connor’s water cannons and police dogs and George Wallace’s defiant White supremacy. Quite simply, Ricks ventures, the Southern police were disarmed by nonviolence, which they had no idea how to counter. An encounter between the sheriff of Selma and defiant future politician John Lewis is emblematic, proving that nonviolent resistance is anything but passive—a matter that, Ricks suggests, modern activists should study as one of the “clear and concrete lessons we can take from [the civil rights movement], especially from its focus on discipline and organization.”

A thoughtful contribution to the history of the struggle for civil rights in America.
SAVING MAIN STREET
Small Business in the Time of Covid-19
Rivlin, Gary
Harper Business (352 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-06-306596-3

A Pulitzer Prize–winning investigative journalist reports on how small-business owners in northeast Pennsylvania—and one in New York City—weathered the challenges posed by the pandemic.

In the best of times, running a small business is a precarious proposition; the pandemic made it nearly impossible. In early 2020, Rivlin, author of Broke, USA: From Pawnshops to Poverty, Inc.—How the Working Poor Became Big Business, among other books, set out to document how a handful of businesses dealt with the precipitous decline in customers, unrelenting mortgage and utility bills, and costs that escalated as supply chains faltered. Among others, these include Vilma’s Hair Salon, Cusumano’s Italian restaurant, Lech’s Pharmacy, J.R.’s Hallmark, and Sol Cacao, a chocolate bar business. During the pandemic, owners worried about their employees and rethought their businesses. They navigated shifting shutdown orders and mask mandates and applied for financial assistance from the federal and state governments. Making matters worse was the lack of a “coordinated federal plan”; each state made its own rules. In addition, there were the constant threats posed by large restaurant and pharmaceutical chains, retail behemoths such as Walmart, and, of course, Amazon. These large corporations not only undercut their prices; they also gutted the downtown centers that brought in customers. Politicians might celebrate small businesses for being essential to living in a community and for embodying the independent spirit that ostensibly defines the American character, but economic policy always favors big business. That many businesses survived was due, in part, to the loyalty of employees and customers, the support of local business associations, and governmental grants and loans that carried them through the worst of the pandemic. For Rivlin, though, most important were business owners’ “creativity and fortitude,” the tenacity and improvisational talent to get the job done.

Compelling stories at the intersection of entrepreneurial aspirations, personal obligations, and public policy.

THE NEW YORKERS
31 Remarkable People, 400 Years, and the Untold Biography of the World’s Greatest City
Roberts, Sam
Bloomsbury (336 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-62040-978-7

A journalist who has covered New York City for more than 50 years offers a potpourri of stories about some of the city’s overlooked residents during four centuries of history.

America’s largest and most polyglot city is impossible to bring into crystal-clear focus, but this book makes it come alive. Although not all of Roberts’ figures are stellar humans, he succeeds in his quest to rescue New York’s “unheralded heroes, men and women whose roles were largely overlooked or, at best, survive as a footnote.” Writing with delightful verve, the author creates a narrative that falls somewhere between a rogues’ gallery and a pantheon of extraordinary people. Opening with a murder and closing with an inspirational neighborhood leader, the text is filled with a full range of NYC characters, the already well-known ones playing only walk-on roles. We learn about Revolutionary firebrand Isaac Sears; African American oyster restaurateur Thomas Downing; Bishop John Hughes, a champion of Catholic schooling; attorney Charles O’Conor, who brought down Boss Tweed; Elizabeth Jennings, who protested discrimination on public transport 100 years before Rosa Parks; Charles Dowd, creator of standard time zones; the Bradley-Martins, the city’s most extravagant and clueless 19th-century couple; Clara Lemlich, early-20th-century labor firebrand; Ciro Terranova, the “Artichoke King” and crime-family mobster; Audrey Munson, “America’s first supermodel”; Jack Maple (whose sketch is the most amusing tale), the transit cop who invented the crime-mapping Compstat system; and Carmelia Goffe, an unsung heroine of the revival of her Brownsville neighborhood in the 1970s and beyond. Perhaps fittingly, the book feels like a New Deal painting you spot in post offices: a panorama of all kinds of New Yorkers doing their best to either improve the world or take advantage of it. The author readily admits his subjectivity, wryly noting that “‘The Biography’ might have required 923,380,602 chapters, if you accept that figure as the number of people who ever lived in New York.”

A book guaranteed to enlighten and entertain anyone interested in NYC.
In the 1880s, a group of German-speaking Mennonites known as the Bride Community followed the charismatic visionary Claas Epp on a harrowing journey into pre-Soviet Uzbekistan, where Epp predicted Christ would return. Despite losing many followers to death or disillusionment, the core group reached the Muslim khanate of Khiva and founded the Christian community known as Ak Metchet—the White Mosque—a village that survived 50 years before its dissolution by the Bolsheviks. Embarking on a Mennonite heritage tour through Uzbekistan, Samatar—fantasy novelist, professor of African and Arabic literature, and daughter of Swiss Mennonite and Somali Muslim parents—chronicles her journey through the century-old footsteps of the Bride Community in an attempt to see this beautiful, alien region through their eyes. In addition to the community’s path, the author traces their intersections with the Muslim people of the region, whose generosity carried the Christian pilgrims to their destination. Samatar interweaves this historical narrative with her own personal history and a litany of religious, literary, and philosophical texts, stitching together a multifaceted account of faith, identity, and acceptance. “It’s the contrast, the incongruity, that delights,” she writes. “Beyond the initial shock of the story of reckless prophecy, this story that makes my listeners shake their heads, recoil, or laugh, there’s the reverberation of Mennonites in Uzbekistan.” Rendered in the author’s vivid prose, Uzbekistan—a place unknown to most Western readers—feels like a fantastic land of deep history, stunning architecture, and uniquely diverse culture. The author devotes the same careful attention to Mennonite theology and society, depicting the complicated international religious and ethnic community with a caring but critical eye. Reaching beyond all state and religious boundaries, Samatar is “always saying we,” incorporating more and more of humanity into a growing inner circle.

Complex and gorgeously written, this memoir invites readers on a journey to the ever-expanding borders of human compassion.

The rise and demise of a powerful family.

Historian Sassoon draws on extensive family, business, and historical archives to create a richly detailed, incisive portrait of the wealthy, influential Sassoons, a family to which he is distantly connected. From their origins in 18th-century Baghdad through the first half of the 20th century, the Sassoons were major players in a burgeoning global economy, accruing their wealth largely from opium. Although they were aware of the consequences of opium addiction and weathered

A Syrian dissident author, now a refugee in Canada, interweaves details of his incarcerations and torture in Syria with a once-Idyllic life in a small village.

Raised by farmers in the rural town of Kfarieh, Saeed was first imprisoned in 1980, for more than a decade, for protesting the Syrian dictatorship of Hafez al-Assad. He spent most of those years in the notoriously brutal Tadmur military prison in Damascus, where he was routinely tortured. After his release, he was detained two more times. By the early 1990s, he had begun writing regularly and made a name for himself in literary circles. One critic told him, “You’ll be to Syria what Maupassant was to France.” Sadly, the repeated incarcerations interrupted his promising career. In a moving, novelistic narrative, Saeed beautifully, gently chronicles the appealing details of his early life in his village: first childhood crush, a painful reconciliation between science and piety, and the adulation of his cosmopolitan uncle, who encouraged him “to ask questions with absolutely no inhibitions.” During this time, Saeed keenly followed global events on the radio. He revered Egyptian president Abdel Nasser and did not understand the subsequent military coup by Assad. During 10th grade, the author established a Marxist discussion group. In 1977, he transferred to a private school in Damascus, where he was enlightened much like the biblical Saul when he saw the Messiah on the road to the city. In the next few years, his political activity drove him underground until his arrest. In this multilayered text, the author ably captures the arbitrary brutality of the guards as well as the tender human interactions with his fellow prisoners that made his incarceration tolerable. “The world that turns in my heart is like a warm house, open to all, an amazingly beautiful world that keeps turning, and turns its back on passports and borders and bloodshed and famine and all the suffering that people endure.”

A lyrical, extremely rich narrative of loss, memory, and trauma.

An exploration of religious and cultural identity through the lens of an ill-fated pilgrimage into Central Asia in the late 19th century.
“A treat for any thoughtful traveler, armchair or otherwise.”

Nomads

A meditation on human wandering through history, looking deep into past and future alike.

Sattin tells the story of a life-and-death rivalry between settled farmers and roving pastoralists. That conflict was not always thus, writes the author, a British traveler with long-standing interest in the Middle East, and he begins with a consideration of “the challenges of being a herder in the Zagros Mountains in the twenty-first century.” The challenges they face today are similar to those of their ancestors, fulfilling a biological imperative to move and keep on moving, hard-wired into human DNA. Sattin digs into the urban-rural divide, noting that one of the earliest places of the gods. Just so, there was ancient Baghdad, built on a circular plan “around which the nomadic world could turn.” At some point in history, those who stayed close to or within the walls began to fear those who moved freely outside, and for good reason. Sattin considers the history of the Mongols, who, from deep within Asia, built an empire that encompassed much of Europe and well built, was apparently never meant to be inhabited: It was a place of the gods, just so, there was ancient Baghdad, built on a circular plan “around which the nomadic world could turn.” At some point in history, those who stayed close to or within the walls began to fear those who moved freely outside, and for good reason. Sattin considers the history of the Mongols, who, from deep within Asia, built an empire that encompassed much of Europe but whose wandering ways, albeit violent, “stimulated the nearest thing the world had ever seen to a global trade network.” One has to wander in order to make sales, after all. The author observes that people will be made to move in the future because of climate change—perhaps a net positive given that nomadic ways are “less damaging for the natural world and therefore better for the future of the planet on which we all depend.” Brimming with literary, historical, and anthropological references, Sattin’s book makes a splendid rejoinder—and without its fictions—to Bruce Chatwin’s now-classic book The Songlines.

A treat for any thoughtful traveler, armchair or otherwise.

The Revolutionaries Samuel Adams

Schiff, Stacy

Little, Brown (440 pp.) $35.00 | Oct. 25, 2022 978-0-316-44111-7

The Pulitzer Prize–winning author recounts Samuel Adams’ instrumental role in triggering the events that would lead to the American Revolution.

Though he is typically overshadowed by such towering contemporaries as Washington, Jefferson, and Adams’ second cousin, John Adams, Samuel’s behind-the-scenes machinations were a crucial factor in setting in motion the wheels of revolution. In her latest, Schiff enthusiastically digs through much of the limited material available on her subject. In a calculated move, Samuel destroyed countless documents and most of his personal correspondence, leaving little for future biographers to unearth. “He operated by stealth, melting into committees and crowd actions, pseudonyms and smoky back rooms,” writes Schiff. “There ought to be a memorial to Samuel Adams in the CIA,” quips a modern historian, dubbing him America’s first covert agent. We are left to read him in the twisted arm, the borrowed set of talking points, the indignation of America’s enemies. We know more about him from his apoplectic adversaries than from his friends, sworn to secrecy.” Schiff exhaustively dissects whatever was written about him by his contemporaries, and she also explores the numerous politically charged essays that he submitted under pseudonyms to newspapers such as the Boston Gazette, many of which openly criticized British colonial policy. Schiff provides a penetrating analysis of Samuel’s tactics and motivations, and in tracing his story from his unassuming and somewhat aimless roots as a failed businessman to his role as a highly influential American statesman, she reveals how his grounded idealism was present from the outset and remained consistent throughout his life. This is a meticulously researched and often eloquent work of historical biography; but it’s an occasionally dry cerebral exercise, lacking some of the author’s typical storytelling verve. Still, Schiff offers a welcome, fresh study featuring notions of liberty and democracy that feel particularly relevant in today’s consistently tumultuous political landscape.

A sturdy portrait of Samuel Adams for our times.
A MAN OF IRON
The Turbulent Life and Improbable Presidency of Grover Cleveland
Senik, Troy
Threshold Editions/Simon & Schuster
(384 pp.)
$32.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-06-327658-1

Robust biography of an overlooked president.

There aren’t many good reasons that Grover Cleveland (1837-1908) is largely forgotten alongside such fellow presidents as Millard Fillmore and Franklin Pierce, yet there he is. Granted, writes former George W. Bush speechwriter Senik, he “didn’t look like a president. He looked like a foundry foreman.” Bulky, but with an oddly high-pitched and nasal voice, he had a quick temper accentuated by the habit of pounding his fist on a table to make an objection known. Cleveland certainly has demerits on his resume. For one, surrounded by Civil War generals who entered politics, he paid a Polish immigrant (who, happily, survived the war unscathed) to take his place, leading to the charge that he was an unpatriotic elite who bought his way out of the war. “The elite part is wrong, Senik holds, for Cleveland was a working man through and through, a president. He looked like a foundry foreman.” Bulky, but with an oddly high-pitched and nasal voice, he had a quick temper accentuated by the habit of pounding his fist on a table to make an objection known. Cleveland certainly has demerits on his resume. For one, surrounded by Civil War generals who entered politics, he paid a Polish immigrant (who, happily, survived the war unscathed) to take his place, leading to the charge that he was an unpatriotic elite who bought his way out of the war. “The elite part is wrong, Senik holds, for Cleveland was a working man through and through, a president. He looked like a foundry foreman.”

A capably written introduction to a political leader who, though no rock star, deserves to be better known.

Charlie Watts (1941-2021) came onto the London music scene in the late 1950s, a student of art—a common trope in the era—and, as music journalist Sexton writes, “a nippy right-winger” in soccer and a cricket whiz, “even having a trial for Middlesex.” The broad Briticisms might pose a challenge for some American readers, but anyone with ears can recognize that Watts’ swinging, jazz-inflected sound was central to the sound of the Rolling Stones, the band he joined in 1962 once he extracted a promise from Mick Jagger. “If you can come back to me and say you’ve got a couple of solid gigs a week, I’m in.” He was in for nearly 60 years, though always, like bassist Bill Wyman, of a different cut from many rock stars. Watts remained a student of classical and jazz music, an artist who did much to shape the Stones’ stage look in the big-tour era and a collector of fine things, from American Civil War uniforms to flatware. Sexton is a serviceable storyteller, though he lacks the literary flair of Stanley Booth or Stones guitarist Keith Richards. For longtime Stones watchers, there’s not much news, although Sexton does play up the fact that Watts, famed for never missing a gig, in fact didn’t turn up for one because, he confessed for another book published in 1998, “I got the wrong date.” The author also casts doubt, via Jagger, on whether Watts really punched Jagger out, something Watts blamed on drink and a late-in-the-game drug habit, saying, “in retrospect I think I must have been going through some kind of mid-life crisis.” There’s other juicy stuff here—just not quite enough, and not quite fresh, though plenty appreciative of Watts’ musical genius.

A middling addition to the large library surrounding the Rolling Stones.

Dutiful biography of the late Rolling Stones drummer.

All Things Aside (Absolutely Correct Opinions)
Shlesinger, Iliza
Abrams Image (256 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-4197-5940-6

A comedian shares her thoughts on womanhood, motherhood, comedy, and many things in between.

Comedian Shlesinger (b. 1983) rose to prominence as the first woman to win NBC’s Last Comic Standing in 2008 and has since become a fixture in stand-up comedy, with credits that include five Netflix specials. Despite her prolific career, she admits that “this book didn’t pour out of me….It wasn’t writer’s block, it was self-imposed fear.” The book is divided between standard text and indented asides, a format that mimics the author’s thought process. As she was writing, she worried that she didn’t have anything worthwhile to say or that her words and insights, however well intentioned, would be maliciously taken out of context. Shlesinger grapples with a fear of being “canceled by the internet,” and she states outright her belief that “the saccharine and often performative wokeness of pop culture are a constant threat to comedy.” These themes recur throughout the collection amidst the array of
While Young Americans for Liberty aligns with libertarianism, the essays are enjoyable as a whole, Shlesinger's writing from her stand-up, such as the “Party Goblin,” also appear.) While the essays are enjoyable as a whole, Shlesinger’s writing is most affecting when she talks about personal subjects, such as her miscarriage and her experience of being a mother, her support of women’s health care initiatives, and her yearslong ordeal with a stalker. Shlesinger makes clear that she owes no one these stories; however, by sharing her experiences, she hopes she can provide solace to “people who have to deal with the same bullshit.” Margaret Cho provides the foreword.

A delight for the author’s fans plus worthwhile insights for a broader audience.

RAISING THEM RIGHT
The Untold Story of America’s Ultraconservative Youth Movement and Its Plot for Power

Spencer, Kyle
Ecco/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$29.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-06-304136-3

A close look at far-right activism among the younger electorate.

Drawing on more than 200 interviews conducted between 2018 and 2022, journalist Spencer produces an eye-opening report on the rise of ultraconservatism among young people, focusing intensively on three figures: Cliff Maloney (b. 1991), who rose to become president of Young Americans for Liberty; Charlie Kirk (b. 1993), founder of Turning Point USA; and Candace Owens (b. 1989), celebrated as a “Black YouTube sensation” and often appearing on Fox News. The movement promotes the anti-government, free-market ideas common to the far right. While Young Americans for Liberty aligns with libertarianism, Turning Point USA focuses on culture wars issues: anti-abortion, pro-gun rights, and climate change denial. Owens, promoting a stance she calls BLEEXIT, is “unapologetically dismissive when others claimed Black victimhood” and pointed out “systemic racism.” Stop complaining about the impact of slavery, she has exhorted, and look to the future. After the election of Donald Trump, the movement’s rhetoric became increasing infused with expressions of cruelty, homophobia, and ethnic stereotyping. Besides chronicling the spread of right-wing views among young people, Spencer underscores Republicans’ enthusiastic support of strategic advice and significant amounts of money. Though ambitious, outspoken, and hardworking, the movements’ leaders would not have been able to gain widespread influence and attract followers without funding by wealthy, powerful conservatives such as Charles Koch and Robert and Rebekah Mercer, among other billionaires. YAL’s “Win the Door” campaign, aimed at electing ultraconservative candidates in state races, and TPUSA’s savvy deployment of online outlets fed into Republicans’ game plan—which, Spencer advises, could well serve as a model for Democrats, who historically have ignored young, progressive activists. Bringing just as much energy and determination as their conservative counterparts, these young people, writes Spencer, must be heard as well as supported wholeheartedly.

A dispiriting picture of deepening political polarization.

DON RICKLES
The Merchant of Venom

Starr, Michael Seth
Citadel/Kensington (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-8065-4172-3

Appreciative biography of the original insult comic.

Born in 1926, Rickles grew from a shy boy to a man who, fearless on stage, would “lock on someone in the audience before verbally assaulting his prey, firing his insults in tommy-gun fashion, rat-tat-tat, crossing ethnic, gender, and religious lines.” By the end of his long career, which ended with his death at the age of 91 in 2017, that style of comedy was broadly considered racist, sexist, and every other kind of –ist—and for good reason, writes longtime New York Post reporter and editor Starr. After all, one of his latter-day jokes went, “President Obama is a personal friend of mine. He was over to the house yesterday, but the mop broke.” For all that, even those whom he assailed very late in his life, in a different time, were apt to forgive him as an equal-opportunity offender. As one reporter wrote, by way of posthumous summation, Rickles’ career began in the distant past, “when racist and sexist broadsides delivered by white male comedians were OK, and he got grandfathered in for the remainder.” Whether that will make this biography palatable to younger readers is questionable, but even if Rickles was out of step with the times, he stuck to his act and continued to crack up the old-timers on late-night TV and in countless celebrity roasts. Starr charts Rickles’ long rise to fame, which accelerated from Borscht Belt to stardom once he insulted Frank Sinatra, who laughed instead of busting him in the chops. A junior member of the Rat Pack thereafter, Rickles was a familiar in mob- era Las Vegas, an experience that served him well when he was booked for a part in Martin Scorsese’s film Casino. Characteristically, he returned the favor by telling the diminutive director, “When you direct me, Marty, could you stand on a chair so I can see you?” A fan’s notes, and probably for fans only given the clash of eras.
The history and legacy of the Second Vatican Council.

In his latest, Catholic scholar Weigel, a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and author of *Letters to a Young Catholic*, examines the ecumenical council that took place between 1962 and 1965. The author begins with a detailed yet concise exploration of the many global changes that led to the council. Though Pope John XXIII, “an essentially conservative and traditional pope,” shocked the church by calling for a council, which hadn’t taken place since 1870, it should have been clear that modern society—punctuated by world wars, the rise of communism, decolonization, and countless other factors—had changed the landscape so thoroughly that a fresh approach was vital for Catholic survival. Weigel writes that the ultimate purpose of the council was to “empower a revitalized Church to offer the modern world a path beyond incoherence—or, worse, self-destruction”—through an encounter with Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Once it began, institutionalists lost their bid to steer the council’s work toward less important matters of rules and administration. Instead, the council took a decidedly theological turn in order to answer the pressing question of “how God made his purposes known to humanity in a binding way that was authoritative for the Church over time.” The council would be thoroughly Christocentric in nature and explore the church’s role in a modern world through a Christian viewpoint. Weigel thoroughly analyzes the major documents that resulted from the council’s decisions. He then discusses its lasting legacy, especially through the lens of two of its participants: popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Finally, he notes that a 1985 synod most clearly affirmed the meaning of Vatican II as a great gift of grace until “the Church lived fully the truth about itself as a communion of disciples in mission.”

A readable traditionalist appraisal.

A collection of essays by a poet, novelist, and professor of international Indigenous studies at the University of Calgary.

“Am I queer enough to be queer? Perhaps the answer is no. But also, perhaps the answer is yes.” So asks Whitehead,
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

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TRUE YOU
A Gender Journey
Agna, Gwen & Shelley Rotner
Photos by Shelley Rotner
Clarion/HarperCollins (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-324046-9

Photographs and text describe gender identity.

Full-color images show a wide array of children—diverse in age, race, gender, and ability—grinning for the camera, playing, and posing. In a series of upbeat affirmations, the kids collectively explain that they are “courageous, / curious, creative, and proud,” with background colors subtly evoking a rainbow. The cheery narration tries to be as broadly applicable as possible but unfortunately lapses into vague tautologies such as “There’s a whole wide world of kids and different ways to be who you are—your true you.” This explanatory text transitions into speech bubbles paired with images of trans, cis, and gender-expansive youth (“When I was born, people said I was a girl. They were right!” “Nonbinary kids, like my sibling, should be treated the same way that other friends who are cisgender boys and girls are treated”). These appear to be quotations from real kids but might be manufactured dialogue. The book ends with collective narration, repeating the same message of acceptance. Extensive backmatter explores concepts and terms not touched on in the book itself. While this title tries for sweet and open-ended, it instead comes off as cloying, confusing, and directionless. Though it may be helpful for some, a more focused nonfiction text or skillfully done work of fiction could contain the same messages without being overwhelming. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A heartfelt but skippable contribution. (authors’ note, note from an educator, letters from “a grown-up trans girl” and a family, glossary, terminology, information on therapeutic support, resources and sources) (Picture book. 4-8)

DARKROOM
Alexander, K.R.
Scholastic (272 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-338-80733-2

After Beatrice downloads DARK Room, she realizes the game’s ghosts aren’t confined to the digital realm.

The Ghastly Girls, sophomore best friends Beatrice and Rochelle, are trying...
“What do you do for a living?” It’s one of the most common questions that adults are asked upon meeting someone new and a reminder that identity and career are closely intertwined. Kids, however, get “What do you want to be when you grow up?” The answers can change from month to month, even from day to day. Children have the freedom to try on new identities, to envision themselves as astronauts, teachers, journalists, doctors, and more. Several middle-grade titles published this year offer opportunities for kids to dream big. Many of these titles center on children who are already working—for some kids, having a job isn’t a far-off fantasy but a part of everyday life.

Two novels follow girls whose dreams can’t be crushed even by tough circumstances. Set in Mumbai, India, Varsha Bajaj’s Thirst (Nancy Paulsen Books, July 19) follows 12-year-old Minni. After her mother becomes ill, Minni takes over her job working as a servant for a wealthy family while still attending school. But enrolling in a computer class makes her realize that, despite her family’s grinding poverty, her ambitions—among them writing poetry and pursuing a career in the sciences—aren’t out of reach. In this empowering coming-of-age tale, Bajaj deftly tackles weighty topics including labor, education, and unequal access to natural resources.

With money tight after her father is laid off, 12-year-old Mira, the biracial protagonist of Sonja Thomas’ Sir Fig Newton and the Science of Persistence (Aladdin, March 22), gets creative as she seeks ways to pay for her beloved cat’s diabetes treatments. Thomas doesn’t shy away from the realities of the working world—Mira’s father deals with unemployment, while her mother spends less time on hobbies that bring her joy and takes an accounting job she dislikes. But Mira’s effervescent voice keeps the narrative upbeat, and her goal of becoming an astronaut and astrophysicist may spur STEM-minded kids to explore their own interests.

Children unsure where their passions lie—and many adults, too—will appreciate Colleen Nelson and Kathie MaIsaac’s If You Can Dream It, You Can Do It: How 25 Inspiring Individuals Found Their Dream Jobs, illustrated by Scot Ritchie (Pajama Press, Oct. 25). Detailed profiles on careers ranging from storm chaser to barber to cake designer will leave readers with ideas to mull. Science lovers who don’t know where to start may find inspiration in Nancy F. Castaldo’s The Wolves and Moose of Isle Royale: Restoring an Island Ecosystem, with photographs by Morgan Heim (Clarion/HarperCollins, Aug. 9), which examines the reintroduction of wolves to a national park. As in other installments in the Scientists in the Field series, the profiles of working scientists are a highlight.

Aspiring cub reporters will find role models in two books by young journalists. In Hilde on the Record: Memoir of a Kid Crime Reporter (Chicago Review Press, April 19), Hilde Lysiak describes how accompanying her father on reporting jobs ignited her love of journalism; just before her eighth birthday, she started her own newspaper and at 9 even broke the story of a murder. Woven into her candid narrative are tips on everything from interviewing sources to shaping news stories. Similarly, Muhammad Najem, growing up in war-torn Syria, interviewed other young people about their experiences; the videos he posted spread awareness around the world. His poignant graphic novel, Muhammad Najem, War Reporter: How One Boy Put the Spotlight on Syria (Little, Brown, Sept. 27), co-written by CNN reporter and producer Nora Neus and illustrated by Julie Robine, is a compelling tale, laced with the heartbreaks Najem encountered from a startlingly young age.

Mahnaz Dar is a young readers’ editor.
As the week progresses, Sweeps tries to join in on cleaning jobs, despite desperate online warnings from other players that it could be deadly. The concept seems simple enough: snap photos of the seven unleashed ghosts in as many days. What the girls didn’t anticipate was that the ghosts would spill over from the app, haunting and terrorizing the people in their lives. At first, readers might think they’re in for a predictable, cheesy read, but in Alexander’s hands, the story is fast-paced and interesting, and the ghosts are well imagined. Take, for example, the Tooth Fairy with its dozens of fangs, pincers formed from cat’s teeth, spiderlike appearance, and terrorizing need for more teeth to add to its collection. The story is mostly propelled by action with a modest amount of character development. Alexander’s best move, though, is wrapping up the story for Beatrice and crew but giving the book a chilling epilogue, leaving room for more haunting. Beatrice defaults to White; Rochelle is Black.

Watch what this little green machine can do!

Sweeps, a compact green sidewalk sweeper, wants to prove her mettle, but her small stature frequently means she’s dismissed with a “Big jobs are for big trucks” by the bigger guys. As the week progresses, Sweeps tries to join in on cleaning jobs, but the larger vehicles beat her to it. So Sweeps tries her spinning bristles at towing cars and making a siren noise, but she’s not equipped to handle these jobs. On Friday, Sweeps’ mounting failures lead to depression, and she decides to stay inside the garage, but the other trucks get caught in a “floody, muddy mess” caused by a storm. Thankfully, Sweeps is there to get the big guys cleaned up and back on the road. Readers will appreciate Sweeps’ can-do attitude and perseverance even though the plot doesn’t always make sense. (Even if an excavator can get stuck in the mud, can a street cleaner really save the day?) The digital illustrations do a lot to distract from the nonlogic of the situation, and young readers who love trucks will be enchanted to see a sidewalk sweeper get a starring role. Mike Mulligan and Katy don’t have anything to worry about just yet, but Sweeps makes a charming addition to the genre of vehicles-as-characters.

**MINI MIGHTY SWEEPS**

Alexander, Lori
Illus. by Jeff Harter
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-06-225016-2

**An entertaining underdog tale.** (Picture book. 4-6)

**TOUCH AND GO**

*Amato, Mary*

Holiday House (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-8234-4912-5

Series: Star Striker, 2

Middle schooler Albert Kinney evades more murder attempts while searching for both peace and public glory on the playing pitch.

Having been recruited from Earth in *Star Striker: Game On!* (2021) to play the soccer(ish) game johka on planets in the Fügör Solar System, Albert finds himself struggling to get past feelings of guilt and inadequacy in order to regain an essential mystical union called ahn with his Zeenod teammates, all while training for the huge upcoming match, which will be held partly on ice, and contriving to stay alive through multiple efforts to assassinate him for reasons of interplanetary politics. Meanwhile, in what amounts to a second plotline rather than a subplot, mad botmaker Mehklen Pahck schemes to secretly switch Albert out for an android of his own design...once he escapes from prison. What with all these intertwined threads, it’s no surprise that actual game action doesn’t get underway until nearly the end, but as Amato is focusing less on plot than character in this series, it’s the way Albert copes with his internal challenges that takes center stage anyway. Through meditation and with teammates on his side—as well as an unusually smart dog who occasionally takes over narratorial duties and friendly classmate Jessica—Albert does regain balance and confidence just in time for a properly spectacular performance. As before, minimal description makes racial identity difficult to determine.

**Will score higher with sports fans of the inner game than the on-field sort.** (Science fiction. 9-12)

**PICK ME!**

*Amato, Max*

Scholastic (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-31729-9

Five persuasive ice-cream flavors vie to get chosen.

Personified cones with silly stick-figure arms and legs shout, “Over here! Pick me!” “How about me?” “Me, me, meeee!” Each flavor lists their best qualities. Fudge Brownie confidently states, “I’m the most downright delicious / ice cream flavor of all time.” Cool Mint, wearing a pair of shades, drawls, “I’m the coolest, most refreshing flavor around.” Very Berry, Vanilla Bean, and Cotton Candy all have their turns to shine. But then the stakes increase. Cool Mint decides to add chocolate topping! The others rush to get toppings, too. Vanilla Bean ups the ante even more...with two scoops. The others follow suit, adding scoops, too. Suddenly,
Rocky Road comes on the scene and asks, “Do you even know / what happens when you get picked?” (A large bite from the scoop atop Rocky Road is a clue.) The cones quickly change their tunes. But can they avoid becoming a tasty treat? The uncluttered white backgrounds keep the focus on the frenzied flavors, with their distinct personalities and hilarious facial expressions stealing the show. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**Comical and delicious.** (Picture book, 3-7)

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**BLACK-EYED PEAS AND HOGHEAD CHEESE**
A Story of Food, Family, and Freedom
Armand, Glenda
Illus. by Steffi Walther
Crown (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-48614-6

A child learns about her Creole heritage through food in her grandma’s kitchen.

While Frances, a dark-skinned Black girl, helps Grandma prepare black-eyed peas, hoghead cheese, and turnip greens for New Year’s celebrations, she learns about how her enslaved ancestors created dishes from foods that were familiar to them, from foods that were given to them as scraps, from fresh harvests from their gardens, and from fishing. While helping in the kitchen and in the garden, Frances learns how these foods, which are an important part of her family’s tradition, connect them to their ancestors and their history. A second layer of text in boxes on some spreads gives readers a deeper look into the historical significance of events and foods mentioned in the story. Depictions of present-day events are richly saturated, while images of historical scenes have a sepia tint. Armand and Walther provide a refreshingly loving portrayal of family life during the era of chattel slavery, and the juxtaposition with a modern Black American family offers a healing connection and insight. While the premise feels somewhat didactic, with a thin pretext for all the information that follows, the resulting package is worth the read. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**A solid overview of the history of soul food. (recipe for pralines, author’s note, sources, further reading)** (Picture book, 4-10)

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**TOO SMALL TOLA AND THE THREE FINE GIRLS**
Ainuke
Illus. by Onyinye Iwu
Candlewick (96 pp.)
$15.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5362-2517-4
Series: Too Small Tola, 2

In this follow-up to Too Small Tola (2021), a Nigerian girl perseveres—and thrives—despite setbacks.

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Over three chapters, Tola, the youngest of a family consisting of sister Moji, brother Dapo, and Grandmommy; confronts various problems. “Tola Saves the Day” sees the protagonist trying to get her quarrelsome siblings to do their fair share of cleaning rice, their Saturday chore. In “Tola Takes Control,” Tola assumes more responsibility in the household after Grandmommy falls ill from malaria. Tola goes to buy medicine, and the family, led by Tola, sells groundnuts, just like Grandmommy does, so they can afford food. In the final chapter, “Tola and the Three Fine Girls,” Tola feels jealous when she sees rich children shopping for luxuries but learns that having money and expensive things doesn’t necessarily make one happy. From the family’s inability to afford clean rice to their decision to use Grandmommy’s savings to buy medicine (for 5,000 naira, about US$12), this poignant book conveys great warmth and familial love despite the characters’ tenuous circumstances. Tola is an endearing and utterly relatable protagonist. The tale uses colloquialisms and references that will make Nigerian readers feel at home. Cartoon images full of whimsy bring to life this close-knit family.

**Mighty fine! (Fiction, 7-9)**

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**A DIFFERENT KIND OF NORMAL**
My Real-Life COMPLETELY True Story About Being UNIQUE
Abigail, Balfe
Crown (240 pp.)
$22.99 | $15.99 paper | $25.99 PLB
Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-56646-6
978-0-593-56648-0 paper
978-0-593-56645-9 PLB

An author illustrates an autobiographical story of growing up as a bisexual autistic girl.

Abigail, a White girl growing up in England, has so many sources of anxiety: If nothing else, there are too many scary things that might go wrong in a school bathroom. Illustrated with whimsical, doodle-like art, this work follows Abigail, who wasn’t diagnosed as autistic until she was 33, as she looks back on her childhood and teen years. Her narrative isn’t orderly by any means; she’ll interrupt a fraught topic to insert sketches of cats or a smiling uterus and fallopian tubes making a terrible pun. But the overall theme is clear: It can be rough to be autistic in an allistic world, but it can also be pretty great. It’s fine to stim, flap your hands, draw a whole page of cats, or do other things that are satisfying and don’t hurt anyone else. The chaotic storytell—ing belies the overall helpfulness of the contents. Sidebars cover everything from intersex conditions, infodumping, and sensory overload to autism myths. Abigail assures autistic readers that they’ll have friends, romance (if they want it), and places where they don’t have to mask: Readers will feel comforted hearing that things really do get better. The awkward and inconsistent conversion from the original British English muddies the clarity,
“A boy gets to portray a hero in Powe’s picture-book introduction to several Black figures from U.S. history.”

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

“A well-illustrated tale that’s also a great pick to expand libraries’ Black history sections.”

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

For All Inquiries, Please Email
mail@mosespowe.com • mosespowe.com
"I’m glad." For readers who come away trying to think of other ways in which people are distinctively alike, from the same traits that define us, Susan Verde’s even more searching exploration is likewise individually distinct, from the young narrator’s parents (one is brown-skinned; the other is light-skinned) to each of the 15 diverse passersby in a climactic crowd scene, but at the same time recognizably human. “I am more like you than I am like most of the things on Earth,” the young observer concludes. “I’m glad.” For readers who come away trying to think of other traits that define us, Susan Verde’s even more searching I Am Human (2018), illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds, makes a helpful follow-up. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A strong argument for the logic of inclusivity, founded on our having more in common than in conflict. (Picture book. 6-9)

A blind girl endeavors to share her musical perception of city sounds.

When Emmalene and Grandma Jean set out one Sunday, Emmalene rejoices at the “busy city symphony” that surrounds them as Bernstrom imbues his rhythmically rhyming text with exuberant onomatopoeia. There’s the “RUMBLE” of the bus, the “BIPPITY-BOP!” of a nearby marching band, and the “RUMBLE” of the wind. But to impatient Grandma Jean, the sounds are mere “commotion”; for her, music is the church choir’s “loud and joyous” song. When Emmalene becomes frustrated that Grandma Jean doesn’t understand, Grandma Jean valiantly tries to hear from her perspective. But only after Emmalene covers Grandma Jean’s eyes does Grandma Jean finally hear her song; in kaleidoscopically colored text against black background, “acorns ticked. A backhoe WRECKED. A truck HARRUMPHED. And birds peck-pecked.” Emmalene and a tearful Grandma Jean embrace, and together they listen to the city’s “CLAPPING / FLAPPING / tippity-tapping” tune. Mohammed’s bright, bold illustrations vividly animate the bustling city, and Emmalene’s and Grandma Jean’s expressions are endearing; their love is palpable. Though Grandma Jean’s poignant epiphany echoes the trope of a disabled character imparting a lesson to a nondisabled character, the potentially off-key note is offset by the heartwarming portrayal of Emmalene and her grandma’s intergenerational bonding. Grandma Jean and Emmalene present Black with light- and dark-brown skin respectively. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An eye-catching, toe-tapping celebration of the melodies in everyday sounds. (Picture book. 4-7)

but the work is inviting and accessible for both neurotypical and neurodivergent readers.

Useful and reassuring—and wrapped up in a charming, cutely illustrated package. (reading list, glossary) (Nonfiction. 9-12)

LIKE
Barrows, Annie
Illus. by Leo Espinosa
Chronicle Books (44 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-4521-6337-6

A child ruminates over things in the world that are like and unlike them.

Looking up from the page with an engaging smile, the brown-skinned narrator greets viewers as fellow humans and then, in a wandering train of thought, reflects on how we are different from most things—like a can of soup (“If you open up our lids, nothing good happens”)—but do have at least some similarities to, for instance, a mushroom or a hyena. This leads to ways in which people are distinctively alike, from wearing clothes to being embarrassed sometimes. And, all things considered, aren’t people more alike than different? In keeping with that insight, everyone in Espinosa’s bright retro illustrations is likewise individually distinct, from the young narrator’s parents (one is brown-skinned; the other is light-skinned) to each of the 15 diverse passersby in a climactic crowd scene, but at the same time recognizably human. “I am more like you than I am like most of the things on Earth,” the young observer concludes. “I’m glad.” For readers who come away trying to think of other traits that define us, Susan Verde’s even more searching exploration is likewise individually distinct, from the young narrator’s parents (one is brown-skinned; the other is light-skinned) to each of the 15 diverse passersby in a climactic crowd scene, but at the same time recognizably human. “I am more like you than I am like most of the things on Earth,” the young observer concludes. “I’m glad.” For readers who come away trying to think of other traits that define us, Susan Verde’s even more searching I Am Human (2018), illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds, makes a helpful follow-up. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A strong argument for the logic of inclusivity, founded on our having more in common than in conflict. (Picture book. 6-9)

YOU CAN LIVE ON THE BRIGHT SIDE
The Kids’ Guide to Optimism
Bell, Lucy
Illus. by Astred Hicks
Andrews McMeel Publishing (256 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5248-7552-7

In a time of uncertainty, this resource book is full of tips for being more optimistic and mindful.

With all the challenges young people face today, mental health has become a priority. This practical resource, full of bright illustrations and recommendations for self-help, starts with information on the mind and body. Mindfulness, meditation, and breathing are discussed early. Bell addresses positive and negative thoughts and cultivating a growth mindset before diving into the benefits of physical activity for an upbeat outlook. Some topics, like keeping a gratitude journal, get brief treatment, while others that are more complex, like yoga, have multiple pages and illustrations. Information is provided via different formats: narrative text, bright artwork, activities, recipes, games, and stories of kids around the world who are making a positive impact in their communities. The second half of the book covers ideas for doing rather than being. Some of the suggestions might be out of reach for those with limited budgets, but the number and variety of options make the volume inclusive. While the premise of creating an optimistic mindset is strong and valuable, the examples of exceptional children may not have the intended effect. Nevertheless, suggestions that help readers experience the pleasure of having a positive influence on others include more modest and accessible ideas.

An inviting guide covering internal and external pathways to optimism. (resources, author’s note) (Nonfiction. 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
Were ancient Mesoamericans among the first emoji users? Duncan Tonatiuh thinks so; the elaborate books they created featured pictogramlike art that conveyed just as much meaning to readers as smiley faces and hearts do to us. Tonatiuh took a deep dive into the world of Mesoamerican bookmaking for his latest work, *A Land of Books: Dreams of Young Mexihcah Word Painters* (Abrams, Nov. 15), which he both wrote and illustrated. “When we talk about books in [world history], we talk about Europe, China, Egypt. But Mesoamerica was one of the places where books flourished independent-ly, without outside influence,” he tells Kirkus via a Zoom call from San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where he lives.

Though many Mesoamerican cultures created books, Tonatiuh’s picture book focuses on the Mexihcah, also known as the Aztecs, who lived in what is now Mexico from the 14th to the 16th centuries. The tlahcuilohqueh (a Nahuatl word that translates to “painters of words”) who worked on these books were highly respected. “They attended this special school called the calmecac...with noblemen and with warriors,” says Tonatiuh. “They were very well regarded because they were in charge of preserving the knowledge, the different legends, the different myths, the history.”

Tonatiuh’s book is narrated by a child telling her brother about their parents’ work. “Children were often involved in the family’s work from an early age,” he says. “I wanted to show the brother and sister learning and being involved in the making of books.”

Unlike bound books, these codices (or amoxtin as they were known in Nahuatl) folded out, like accordions. Bookmaking was communal work, says Tonatiuh. Similar to how teams of writers, artists, colorists, and letterers work on comic books, many people lent their talents to bookmaking in Mesoamerican cultures, though the codices were unsigned. “There were different people that were involved in things like making the paper. The Mixtecs would paint on the hides of deer, but the Mexihcah would paint on paper made out of tree bark.”
Making the paint for the books was an involved process. Cochineal insects that lived on nohpalli, a kind of cactus, were used to create red paint, while black paint was made from ash mixed with gum and water. “When a tlahcuiloh was painting and he wanted to change color, he could just lick off the paint from his brush, because it was all made from flowers, from different vegetables,” and from other natural ingredients, explains Tonatiuh.

The communal aspect extended to the reading of books, too. “Nowadays, when we read a book, it’s usually a very individual experience,” Tonatiuh says. But in Mesoamerican culture, not everyone had access to books. Festivals, he says, were opportunities for public readings. “There would be a reader that would sing the words that were painted on the books. And there would be musicians, and there would be dancers. It would be a performance, almost like theater.”

Mesoamerican bookmaking traditions have long resonated with Tonatiuh, who was born in Mexico. He draws inspiration from pre-Columbian art for his illustrations, something that began when he was in college, at Parsons School for Design in New York. He volunteered at the organization National Mobilization Against Sweatshops, where he met a Mixtec man, Sergio, from Mexico. “He had successfully organized at this restaurant where he was paid very poorly because he was undocumented.” Tonatiuh knew the story would make a compelling subject for his senior project.

Intrigued that Sergio and his family preserved many Mixtec traditions, including speaking the language, Tonatiuh researched Mixtec art at his university library. He’d seen this kind of art growing up in Mexico but now fell in love with it, adopting it for his project “Journey of a Mixteco,” which years later was published as the adult title Undocumented: A Worker’s Fight (2018). Both works fold out, accordion-style, like a codex. In many ways, Mesoamerican bookmaking helped launch Tonatiuh’s own career; a professor noticed his project and put him in touch with a children’s book editor. “Eventually, it led to my first picture book, Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin [2010].”

For A Land of Books, Tonatiuh did even more research. Because most Mesoamerican codices were destroyed with the Spanish conquest (some were created after the conquest), and the few that do exist are extremely fragile, he looked at digital versions for his research, though he has seen two from the early colonial period in person at the Library of Congress and at Tulane University. Digitization, he notes, has made researching these books much easier; before that, scholars had to travel to see codices and obtain special permission to view them.

Readers of A Land of Books will emerge enlightened about bookmaking; Tonatiuh hopes they will also come away aware of the complexity of Mesoamerican cultures, which many U.S. history classes tend to overlook. “Sometimes people forget that there were civilizations that existed for thousands of years before the Europeans came,” he says. “But there’s this rich tradition of food, of music, of language.”

A Land of Books received a starred review in the Aug 15, 2022, issue.
THE YEAR THE MAPS CHANGED
Binks, Danielle
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(368 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-06-321160-5

It’s 1999 in a sleepy town in Victoria, Australia, and Winifred’s life is about to change.

Fred, 11, has been raised by her caring police officer stepfather, Luca, and beloved maternal grandfather, Pop, since her mother died when she was 6. Now, Luca brings Anika and her 10-year-old son, Sam, into their lives. Worse, a new baby is on the way, and Sam ends up in Fred’s class when their tiny school combines grades. Fred’s favorite teacher, Mr. Khouri, who emphasizes the human aspects of geography, becomes an important character as the book moves beyond the scope of the single family. The students receive a firsthand geography lesson when Australia accepts Kosovar Albanian refugees from war-torn former Yugoslavia but forces them to stay in a remote quarantine station. Some locals welcome the newcomers; others don’t. Fred becomes involved with several of the arrivals, including Nora, a pregnant woman who shares a hospital room with Anika. Nora’s character gains strength as the book unfolds and she fights for her and her unborn child’s rights to stay after the Australian government decides to send the asylum seekers back. Each of the adults and children who become supporters of the refugees are heroic in their own ways. This work will resonate as similar situations arise today and citizens take action against their governments’ refugee policies. Fred is White; the multiethnic supporting cast reflects Australia’s immigrant history.

A poignant, emotional coming-of-age story. (map) (Fiction. 9-12)

UNLAWFUL ORDERS
A Portrait of Dr. James B. Williams, Tuskegee Airman, Surgeon, and Activist
Binns, Barbara
Scholastic Focus (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-338-75426-1
Series: Scholastic Focus

An account of a Black doctor and veteran whose principled actions helped change America.

James Buchanan Williams, JB to his friends, was a Black doctor and Tuskegee Airman born in 1919. His mother, Clara Belle, was the daughter of formerly enslaved sharecroppers, and his father, Jasper, was a co-founder of the El Paso chapter of the NAACP, something that made him a target for the Ku Klux Klan. Williams was among many Black men who served in the U.S. military during World War II but were denied financial benefits as well as dignity and basic respect. Along with other Black officers, he participated in the Freeman Field Mutiny, refusing to sign a paper consenting to abide by segregation at the Freeman Field base in Indiana, an important step toward the eventual integration of the armed forces. As a pioneering surgeon, Williams went on to play a role in the civil rights movement. He and his brothers, who also became doctors and established their own clinic, were active in the National Medical Association, which was founded to advocate for inclusivity in response to the American Medical Association’s racist practices. Binns tells Williams’ story succinctly and with respect and admiration. The book includes context about the broader social movements of the times and is enhanced by photographs and documents that bring the time period to life for readers.

An eye-opening look at the courage, dedication, and perseverance of an activist for racial equality. (afterword, bibliography, additional resources, source notes, photo and illustration credits) (Nonfiction. 10-14)

TALENT SHOWDOWN
Bolden, Jevon
Illus. by DeAndra Hodge
Scholastic (144 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-338-77961-5
Series: That Girl Lay Lay, 1

Rapping sensation Alaya High learns to balance her rising stardom with middle school friendships.

After her dad’s video of her free-styling went viral, Alaya became famous as That Girl Lay Lay. From posting YouTube videos to recording albums, her life feels brand-new, but she’s happy she still gets to see her friends every day at school. When Lay Lay and her friends find out that developers plan to tear down the historic Hayes Theater, they are determined to find a way to save it. At the upcoming school talent show, proceeds will go to a cause voted on by students, and the winning act will perform on television. The girls plan to get everyone to vote to support the theater, then win the TV spot and use it to further publicize their cause. But their success depends on whether Lay Lay can balance her life as a star with her friendships and if her friends can brush off other kids’ comments about them being her backup dancers. Lay Lay is determined to have it all and to push her friends to shine. This lighthearted story combines the high drama of fame with realistic middle school social life, expressed with the conversational flair of a confident, trendy girl. Lay Lay’s ability to see and support her friends’ unique strengths offers a refreshing portrayal of girlhood. Lay Lay presents Black, and her friends are of various ethnicities.

This stuff has heart. (Fiction. 8-10)
"The Unknown Soldier"—a jarring phrase, given that this soldier "boring," but his attention is captured by the 21-step march of the soldier guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Brallier nicely captures the solemn poignancy of this monument to soldiers who fell in battle, far from home, unidentified. The family then visits the World War I Memorial and the Vietnam War Memorial. Beginning the trip home, Jack spots an Army Ranger in uniform in the waiting area. He runs to offer his thanks, and the Army Ranger presents as Black.

A useful title for Memorial Day and Veteran's Day. (more information on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier) (Picture book. 4-7)

NOTHING INTERESTING EVER HAPPENS TO ETHAN FAIRMONT
Brooks, Nick
Union Square Kids (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-4549-4557-4

A young inventor gets in and out of trouble in an out-of-this-world summer adventure.

Their already small house becomes even smaller when Ethan’s brothers return from college, making for four boys, two parents, a guinea pig, and a lack of space for Ethan’s projects. Luckily, an abandoned factory offers him a place to tinker while avoiding his ex-best friend, Kareem, who has seemingly teamed up with neighborhood bullies in a frustrating act of betrayal. New arrival Juan Carlos is having a hard time settling in, but soon he and Ethan build a strong bond while outrunning those bullies and clumsily making first contact with an alien. When Kareem returns to the fold, explaining that his mood changes were fallout from his parents’ messy divorce, the three sixth graders make for an impressively empathetic friend group of Black and brown boys who are transparent about their fears while working together to help the extraterrestrial visitor they lovingly name Cheese. Getting Cheese home, however, will require navigating the police—who understandably don’t have the best reputation in this community—and the mysterious agents they’re working with who are obvious threats to Cheese. Flashy science-fiction elements are paired with authentically kidlike attention to social realities as Ethan reflects on the value of connections in the face of confusing threats. Although all is resolved in a sort of anticlimactic and idyllic hurry, the boys find happy endings that readers will root for.

Young green thumbs will enjoy this engaging intro to winter fruits and vegetables. (Informational picture book. 4-6)

LOGAN'S GREENHOUSE
Brown-Wood, JaNay
Illus. by Samara Hardy
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-68263-167-6

Accompanied by his pet chameleon, Logan searches for a carrot in preparation for a pet play date. Logan, a pale-skinned, red-haired boy who uses a manual wheelchair, surveys fruits and veggies in his greenhouse with the aid of a reacher. Which one is the carrot? In straightforward text, Brown-Wood provides descriptive clues and invites readers to compare and contrast possibilities to find the answer. For instance, a carrot has a few light and dark rings inside it; that purple root has rings, too. Is it a carrot? No, the author explains, that’s a beet; beets have many more rings than carrots do. Carrots are bright orange with ribbed skin—what about that bright-orange, textured plant? But no—that’s an orange, which has dimpled skin. Where could the carrot be? Fortunately, Logan’s chameleon has a keen eye. The elusive carrot finally spotted, Logan and his reptilian pal join “some hungry pets and some hungry friends” for a delicious meal. In addition to learning about leeks, Brussels sprouts, and more, readers will develop their reasoning skills as they apply the author’s clues. With bright hues, clear shapes, and friendly faces, Hardy’s cozy cartoon illustrations add warmth to the snow-dusted setting, and a recipe for winter carrot soup will entice kids to eat their veggies. Background characters are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A boy visits a special place while on vacation.

Jack and his parents fly to a city where cherry blossoms bloom. Views from the plane and a glimpse of the Washington Monument from the airport offer clues to their destination. The city and sights are unnamed in the simple, easy-to-read text but recognizable from the pleasant, serviceable illustrations. On their trip to the nation’s capital, the family visits the Air and Space Museum, the Spy Museum, the Lincoln Memorial, the zoo, and Capitol Hill (where Jack shakes hands with “somebody important from back home”). On the last day of the trip, they visit Arlington National Cemetery, which Jack at first finds “boring,” but his attention is captured by the 21-step march of the soldier guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Brallier nicely captures the solemn poignancy of this monument to soldiers who fell in battle, far from home, unidentified. The family then visits the World War I Memorial and the Vietnam War Memorial. Beginning the trip home, Jack spots an Army Ranger in uniform in the waiting area. He runs to offer his thanks, and the Army Ranger presents as Black.

An inventive story with a lot of heart. (Science fiction. 8-12)
**UP TO NO GOUL**

_Bunn, Cullen_

_Ilus. by Cat Farris_

_HarperAlley (200 pp.)_


978-0-06-289613-4

978-0-06-289612-4 paper

Evil takes root in this chilling sequel. Ander’s Landing is a “beacon for the unusual and the insidious.” Most denizens go about their days without noticing. Those who do notice blame it on the ghouls. Despite this, Grey, a biracial middle schooler (his mother is brown-skinned; his father presents as White), maintains his forbidden friendship with Lavinia, a young ghoul, through secret rendezvous and gifts left in the cemetery. When a mysterious blood drive pops up in town, the adults start obsessively donating, sleepwalking, and more. Young people soon follow. Through truly terrifying (and beautifully rendered) nightmares, Grey brainstorms the possible culprit behind it all. His theory: vampires. But, with no one to believe him, Grey must risk it all to enlist Lavinia’s help to save both their homes—or else. Bunn expands upon the ghoul lore introduced in _The Ghoul Next Door_ (2021) to create a compelling supernatural history. Though the vilification of ghouls throughout is pervasive, toward the end, there’s an empowering moment for Lavinia, who embraces her ghoul identity. Farris’ dynamic paneling and Melanie Ujimori’s evocative lettering add playfulness (and occasional comedy) to the grim plot. The vibrant illustrations, rendered digitally and in watercolor, ink, and mixed-media paper, feature bloodlike drips on the copyright page—a thematic and immersive touch. 

Gorgeous art meets ghoulish, monster-hunting fun. (Graphic horror: 8-12)

**365 DAYS OF PLAY**

_Activities for Every Day of the Year_

_Butter, Megan Hewes_

_Ilus. by Emily Balsley_

_Odd Dot (256 pp.)_

$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-250-75588-9

This breezy compendium of simple ideas for solitary and group entertainment offers something for nearly everyone.

A range of activities are presented in a way that is not tied to specific dates or holidays, creating a versatile, browsable collection. The variety of options for interactive and solitary amusement suggests an appealing reprieve from screens for families dealing with travel, rainy days, or simply needing to redirect attention. Camp counselors and youth group leaders will find plenty of entertaining and usable material here. Card games, word games, paper folding, crafts, simple art projects, recipes, and active games are intermingled, adding to the appeal of browsing randomly. Some are quick diversions, others require planning, time, space, or equipment. Most are well within the reach of 8- to 12-year-olds; many could be used with younger children or in mixed-age groups. Adults will want to vet activities and crafts for environmental impact (as with those involving balloons or toilet paper, for example), dietary or safety issues, or messes and risks that might be undesirable. The entire presentation is cheerfully designed and clearly presented in a friendly, unfussy format, with a brief introduction and list of all the activities at the front. Clear, concise visual and written instructions and uncluttered cartoon art accompany each activity. Icons indicate categories for those searching for particular kinds of projects: outdoors, games, recipes, tricks, science experiments, ones requiring imagination, and ones with no supplies needed.

Lots of great possibilities for fending off boredom. (Activity book: 4-12)

**12 TO 22**

_POV You Wake Up in the Future!_

_Calonita, Jen_

_Delacorte (256 pp.)_

$16.99 | Aug. 16, 2022

978-0-593-43336-2

On her half birthday, 12-year-old Harper’s ready to grow up, but maybe it’s better not to rush things.

Harper wants to launch a dog-walking business with BFF Ava and start posting on social media. Although her parents won’t agree to Harper’s business plan, they let her start posting. Harper happily uploads a makeup tutorial featuring Taylor Swift’s “22”—and it’s a TikTok hit. She and Ava are invited to queen bee Celia’s birthday party. Ava is skeptical, but Harper, initially thrilled, is crushed when she learns from members of Celia’s clique that she was only included because her mom did Celia’s mom a favor. Despite her burgeoning online popularity and Celia’s envy of her success, Harper feels humiliated about the party and wishes she were already 22, just like in Taylor’s song. With the help of a photo filter, her wish comes true: She jumps ahead a decade and is now the success she feels she lacks, meeting and making friends who are her own age. The story then shifts to 2018, with Harper’s original half birthday and her unlikely friend group. Harper’s ready to grow up and move on from the problems of a younger Harper, but the themes in this tween drama are familiar. Harper’s giddy narration bounces along, admirably expressing her hope and determination. Most main characters read White; Ava is Mexican American.

Irresistible fun. (Science fiction: 8-12)
“The play (on words) is definitely the thing!”

LITERARY CRITTERS

HOW TO HEAL A GRYPHON

Cannistra, Meg
Inkyard Press (384 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-335-42687-1
Series: Giada the Healer, 1

Fly into a magical world of mythical creatures and captured moonlight.

Among streghe, or witches, Giada’s family has been known for generations as the most innovative of the healers called guaritori. Rocco, her 16-year-old brother, is even somewhat of a prodigy. But 12-year-old Giada wants to do something slightly different with her magic—she wants to be a healer of animals, both the mundane kind and the fantastical. She recognizes the benefit in cultivating relationships with these creatures to collect powerful ingredients, like gryphon feathers or spider silk. Before she can confront her traditionalist family with this news, her parents are called away. There’s also a bunch of bad luck omens that keep appearing, but Giada tries to brush such things off as superstitions. Then, a black cat starts following her around, and worse, her brother disappears. Now it’s up to Giada to rescue Rocco from some not-so-helpful streghe. Set on the Amalfi Coast and steeped in traditional Italian folklore and mythology and Christian influences, this story features a young magic user coming into her own. Though self-admittedly stubborn at times, Giada is very talented, tries her best, and has supportive friends (both human and animal) to aid her quest. The body-positive portrayal of Giada shows a tween girl proud of her fat body. Cannistra’s entertaining narrative features wonderful descriptions of places and events that will transport readers.

Stupenda! (Fantasy. 8-13)

SHARK PRINCESS

Chanani, Nidhi
Colors by Elizabeth Kramer
Viking (80 pp.)
$12.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-593-46460-1
Series: Shark Princess, 1

Sporting an elaborate crown of shells and sea stars, slow-moving whale shark Kitana (the self-declared “first and only SHARK PRINCESS!”) rejects smaller but toothier chum Mack’s initial eager invitations to play games—but the prospect of exploring a wreck is a different matter. And when a sparkly golden crown turns up inside the hulk, it only makes sense to declare Mack a princess, too. Mack doesn’t think so, being, embarrassingly, allergic to the smell of blood and dead fish, but Kitana will have none of that: “Princesses can be allergic!” And when Mack still expresses doubts: “Our crowns. Our story.” So it is that the two chime “SHARK PRINCESSES!” with a tail slap and swim into a briefly dangerous—though entertaining and amusing—adventure (with more to come, Chanani promises). Kramer uses a rainbow palette of bright pastels to color the sequential seascapes, and a drawing lesson joins a “hide and sea” game and facts about whale sharks and shipwrecks to close.

A finny, funny foray that encourages inclusivity even when it comes to play. (Graphic novel. 7-9)

LITERARY CRITTERS

William Shakesbear’s Journey for Inspiration

Corrigan, Sophie
Zonderkidz (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-310-73409-3

An attack of writer’s block sends upset ursine William Shakesbear out to seek inspiration from some strangely familiar friends.

Except for hirsute Yak Kerouac (“No time to talk, Will! I’m on my way to EVERYWHERE!”), every animal tries to help—from Mole Dahl, who suggests that “a little magic can take you a long way,” to C.S. Shrewish, who finds inspiration even in a box of Turkish delight. Beatrix Trotter snorts that there’s “something delicious about writing the first words of a story.” Edgar Talon Crow advises him to seek it “in the shadows.” “Hold fast to your dreams, Will!” purrs Langston Mews, sprawled out beside a (doubtless) deep river. Big-eyed Loris Carroll invites him to a tea party with fluttery Flyer Angelou and rotund T.S. Elephant. The puns don’t stop there, but the bearish bard’s imagination remains unfired until at last he lumbers back to his den to hibernate and “perchance to dream.” And indeed, the following spring he wakes up with an idea for a play (tentatively?) titled “A Winter-Long Dream” and closes with a letter to readers asking what they will be reading or writing next. In her cartoon illustrations, Corrigan sandwiches sweet views of friendly critters in appropriate period dress between a blank membership certificate in the Literary Critters Guild at the beginning and a closing portrait gallery of the authors on whom the characters were based. (This book was reviewed digitally)

The play (on words) is definitely the thing! (Picture book. 7-9)
“This group of committed friends will win readers’ hearts.”

**FIGHT BACK**

Dassu, A.M.
Tu Books (384 pp.)
$20.95 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-64379-588-1

Thirteen-year-old Aaliyah is attending a K-pop concert in Lambert, England, with her friends when an explosion sends the audience stampeding to safety.

Mum and Dad have agreed to allow Aaliyah to attend her first concert. With her are Lisa, who is White; Sukhi, who is Indian Sikh; and Sukhi’s 21-year-old sister, Harpreet. Aaliyah’s Muslim family has connections to Tanzania, Pakistan, India, and Iraq. A panic-inducing terrorist attack was not part of their plans. Mayhem erupts as the girls escape. Outside, Aaliyah is relieved to see Lisa’s brother, Darren—until he spews anti-Muslim venom at her. The aftermath of these events leaves Aaliyah feeling anxious in crowds, and she finds comfort in her hospitalized neighbor’s cat, which she hides in her room; her parents had already vetoed her campaign to get a cat of her own. The Islamophobic harassment escalates along with bullying at school and a menacing White Zone hate group led by Darren. Aaliyah decides to empower herself by donning a hijab to remind the world that being Muslim does not equate to being dangerous; she also learns that her mother started wearing the hijab after 9/11. The attention-grabbing writing style and intensifying pace suit the storyline, and characters develop in plausible ways. Hope is interjected into the serious tone as Black, Jewish, and Chinese classmates, among others, share their experiences and help Aaliyah and her friends take action against racism and xenophobia.

This group of committed friends will win readers’ hearts.

((guidance for allies, glossary, author’s note) (Fiction. 11-14)

**PICTURE DAY JITTERS**

Danneberg, Julie
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-62354-357-6
Series: Jitters

A tradition as familiar as the first day of school.

Mrs. Hartwell’s elementary class has come dressed to the nines for class-picture day. The only problem? Photographs won’t be taken until the end of the day, so everyone has to stay neat and tidy until then. Throughout the day, the students are tremendously careful, and their routine goes relatively smoothly—except when a tomato explodes on a student; the pencil sharpener breaks, spilling shavings all over another student; and everyone cleans up the classroom at the end of the day. Each time there’s a mishap, Mrs. Hartwell reassures the kids with a “Don’t worry, I can fix it.” When it is finally time for pictures, the students look smart and neat in their individual photos. Relieved, they run off to play—and make a mess—before convening for a photo of the whole class, in which everyone looks rumpled and disorganized. But, says Mrs. Hartwell when they finally see the photo, “You’re picture-perfect just the way you are!” This latest series installment is as much about Mrs. Hartwell as it is about her students, reminding readers that all classrooms have their own symbiosis. Educators will find this book all too relatable, while children will laugh at the fun Mrs. Hartwell’s class has together. Love’s watercolor illustrations are marvelously detailed and look almost like photographs themselves. Mrs. Hartwell is light-skinned; her class is diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A class abuzz on a special day! (Picture book. 5-8)

**MARIKIT AND THE OCEAN OF STARS**

Cruz, Caris Avendaño
Illus. by Alexis Young
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-374-38909-3

A girl embarks on a journey in a magical land of Filipino deities and monsters.

Ever since Marikit Lakandula’s father and brother were lost at sea 3 years ago, her seamstress mother has only been able to give her hand-me-down clothes. All she wants for her 10th birthday is a blue dress that makes her look like a Diwata, or fairy, so the other children won’t tease her anymore. Hating the patchwork birthday dress that her mother presents her with instead, Marikit runs away and hides. When she eventually returns home, an evil shadow follows her, revealing a magical secret: Her mother is a Diwata, and Marikit is a Halfling. She must go to the land of Engkantos to find the other half of her magic. With the help of new friends, Marikit explores Engkantos in hopes of saving herself from the shadow god. Thrust into a world of powerful gods, goddesses, nightmares, and spirits, she uses the dress her mother made, whose patterns form a map, to find the place marked by an X. Inspired by Filipino folklore and legends, this is an exciting quest full of heart. Through her choices and mistakes, Marikit finds courage and power, learns what is truly valuable, and comes to understand real sacrifice. There are many Filipino (mostly Tagalog) words woven into the text, with each chapter starting with a definition of a different term.

A captivating tale of family, love, loss, and magic. (author’s note, glossary) (Fantasy. 8-12)

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**Aaliyah and her friends take action against racism and xenophobia.**

**This group of committed friends will win readers’ hearts.**

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A class abuzz on a special day! (Picture book. 5-8)

**Marikit and the Ocean of Stars**

Cruz, Caris Avendaño
Illus. by Alexis Young
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-374-38909-3

A girl embarks on a journey in a magical land of Filipino deities and monsters.

Ever since Marikit Lakandula’s father and brother were lost at sea 3 years ago, her seamstress mother has only been able to give her hand-me-down clothes. All she wants for her 10th birthday is a blue dress that makes her look like a Diwata, or fairy, so the other children won’t tease her anymore. Hating the patchwork birthday dress that her mother presents her with instead, Marikit runs away and hides. When she eventually returns home, an evil shadow follows her, revealing a magical secret: Her mother is a Diwata, and Marikit is a Halfling. She must go to the land of Engkantos to find the other half of her magic. With the help of new friends, Marikit explores Engkantos in hopes of saving herself from the shadow god. Thrust into a world of powerful gods, goddesses, nightmares, and spirits, she uses the dress her mother made, whose patterns form a map, to find the place marked by an X. Inspired by Filipino folklore and legends, this is an exciting quest full of heart. Through her choices and mistakes, Marikit finds courage and power, learns what is truly valuable, and comes to understand real sacrifice. There are many Filipino (mostly Tagalog) words woven into the text, with each chapter starting with a definition of a different term.

A captivating tale of family, love, loss, and magic. (author’s note, glossary) (Fantasy. 8-12)
GOOD DREAM DRAGON
Davis, Jacky
Illus. by Courtney Dawson
Christy Ottaviano Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-316-34945-1

When a child has trouble falling asleep, the Good Dream Dragon sweeps them away to Dreamland.

"Once upon a bedtime," a child is ready for bed but not quite ready to sleep. Momma suggests warding off bad dreams by calling on the Good Dream Dragon. After unsuccessfully attempting to fall asleep, the child summons the creature, who appears. "If your good dreams aren't coming to you," she says, "I will bring you to them!" The dragon takes the little one to Dreamland, where the child experiences dreamy adventures like skipping cookies like stones and riding on a sound wave. When the child gets truly sleepy, the Dragon returns them to their bed for a peaceful rest. The concept of the Good Dream Dragon will reassure little ones who might have nighttime or bad-dream anxiety. Eagle-eyed readers might notice a dragon stuffed animal at the child's side that closely resembles the titular character, a comforting image. Dreamland itself is, fittingly, safe and whimsical. The illustrations are soft with twilight purples and playful patchwork scenery. The idea of a protective dream guide is perfect for the preschool crowd, often newly aware of nighttime fears. Both Momma and the child are brown-skinned; they\'re referred to with they/\'them pronouns. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sweet and gentle, an ideal bedtime read. (Picture book. 3-5)

THE CRAYONS TRICK OR TREAT
Daywalt, Drew
Illus. by Oliver Jeffers
Philomel (32 pp.)
$9.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-62102-8

The Crayons return in time for Halloween as vampire-costumed Purple coaches the dressed-up wax pack through its first trick-or-treating venture.

It takes five houses' worth of door-knocks for this skeleton crew of seven to perfect the protocol, with enough outlandish flubs to generate giggles in Halloween-savvy preschoolers. At Door No. 1, Orange, dressed as a jack-o'-lantern, says, "Give us your candy, Lady." At the next, the gang, encouraged by Purple to "think holiday," responds with an impressive array of misguided greetings, including "Merry Christmas!" and "Happy American Cheese Month!" Later, White, levitating impressively in a ghost costume, overreacts to Halloween's "scary" aspect by overwhelming residents with a "BOO!" Peach, unnamed here but recognizably wrapperless from the initial title, exuberantly perfects its treat-inducing line, though a certain ghost cannot resist an ad lib. This excursion, like many of the holiday-themed Crayon books, has a smaller trim size, a lower price point, and far less complexity than Daywalt and Jeffers' first two Crayon titles. Still, the pair deftly let young children in on the jokes through funny, hand-lettered dialogue and the visually telegraphed, all-in helplessness of this well-branded band. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A laugh-inducing Halloween read-along. (Picture book. 4-6)

PHENOMENAL AOC
The Roots and Rise of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Denise, Anika Aldamuy
Illus. by Lori Lora
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-311374-9

The sparkling biography of a young changemaker.
Born into a working-class Puerto Rican American family in the Bronx, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, or AOC, became aware of economic disparities around her at a young age, starting when her family moved to suburban Yorktown Heights. In school, she worked to disprove those who didn’t believe that “a brown girl from the BX” could achieve the highest grades in the class. Her passion for activism was kindled when she recognized the injustice of different neighborhoods having access to different resources. Reeling from the death of her father, she worked hard to graduate college with honors and went door to door campaigning for progressive candidates and supported climate justice efforts. Passionate, driven, and intelligent, AOC ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and, in 2018, beat the long-standing incumbent by a landslide, becoming the youngest congresswoman in America. Paired with bold illustrations that match AOC’s vibrant personality, the text highlights the importance of challenging the establishment and advocating for change when systems aren’t working. The clear voice and thoughtful inclusion of powerful quotes by Ocasio-Cortez create a compelling underdog story with a hopeful message. The election process is simplified for young readers but accurately charts AOC’s path to Congress. Young activists will find inspiration in the details of AOC’s life. A variety of ethnic back-grounds is represented in the illustrated characters. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Pure moxie. (inspiring lessons, glossary, sources) (Picture-book biography. 6-10)

**THIS STORY IS NOT ABOUT A KITTEN**
de Seve, Randall
Illus. by Carson Ellis
Random House Studio (40 pp.)
978-0-593-37453-5
978-0-593-37454-2 PLB

In this gently rhyming cumulative tale, a stray kitten is the catalyst for neighbors coming together.

The initial double-page spread—which repeats the book’s title—shows a stylized view of a neighborhood where houses sit close to each other, telephone wires overhead, and vehicles are parked in the street near gray trash cans (one overturned) and blue recycling bins. The palette is full spectrum, with grays dominant over subdued greens and blues. After a page turn, we see a kitten huddling near trash underneath a car: “A kitten, hungry and dirty / scared and alone / meowing sadly / needing a home.” Each succeeding part of the text introduces a new, helpful character, à la “The House That Jack Built” (“This story is not about the dog // who stopped when it heard the kitten”), always beginning with a phrase about how this story is not about that character and eventually ending with the litany about the kitten. The climax occurs when the kitten has been fed, rescued, and named but has no home. At this point, the tried-and-true narrative style deviates appropriately with text that includes short speech balloons. It partially reemerges for an enormously satisfactory and sweet ending. Perfect for read-alouds, the thoughtfully created text is complemented by artwork that shows a happy diversity in the neighbors’ appearances, from stocky, red-bearded twins to a young Black girl who takes in the kitty.

A winsome take on “The House That Jack Built” and a tribute to the power of community. (Picture book. 3-7)

**HONEY AND ME**
Drazin, Meira
Scholastic (304 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-338-15543-3

Best friends navigate relationship changes and inner growth as they enter middle school.

Modern Orthodox Jewish sixth grader Milla Bloom is thrilled when her best friend, Honey Wine, transfers to her school but struggles with jealousy and forming her own identity as she approaches her bat mitzvah. Being in school together creates tensions between the girls, especially when they choose the same topic for a speech competition. They must also write bat mitzvah speeches, and Milla admires the way Honey carves her own path (“where I see roadblocks, she sees different routes”), while she struggles to make choices that don’t always match what her mom wants for her. Choice is a strong theme not just for Milla, but for her mother, who gave up her career for her family but wasn’t able to have more children other than Milla and her little brother, Max. The need for approval and appreciation is also well developed, as is feeling connected and anchored to one’s culture and religion; in addition to her parents, Milla has strong support from her aunt and a teacher. The story’s structure is chronological, with sections named for major events in the Jewish calendar, emphasizing the way that Milla’s life is organized around them. The Blooms and the Wines are coded White; one of Honey’s younger brothers is autistic; a member of their shul is a Holocaust survivor.

Authentic, joyful, achingly real. (Hebrew and Yiddish glossary, author’s note, list of Jewish festivals) (Fiction. 9-13)

**THE REPLACEMENT**
Duga, Lindsey
Scholastic (256 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-338-84666-9

After 12-year-old Erin moves to the small town of Pembrokebrook, she is haunted by the ghost of a girl.

At first, Erin is optimistic about her family’s move from Chicago. It means more space away from her 5-year-old sister, Becca, and breathing room, unlike the cramped city—she’s
always loved the freedom of being in nature during visits to her aunt in rural Illinois. After discovering an old treehouse on the property, Erin encounters a ghost inhabiting it, a pale girl with curly blond hair dressed in old-fashioned clothing who seems to have the power to enter and take over her mind. There are plenty of classic paranormal motifs: the ghost appearing in the mirror, unfinished business, mysterious noises in the night, and possession. For those new to the genre, these tools are effective at creating safe, eerie spooks. Unfortunately, Duga's writing style is heavily expository: For example, the sibling relationship between Becca and Erin wears on the older sister, but this is largely stated rather than shown through their interactions. All main characters are presumed White except for Erin's new neighborhood friend, Tara, who is Black. This book works as a not-so-scary intro to ghost stories for young readers, but it might feel unsurprising for well-read fans of horror.

A paranormal tale offering mild chills just right for younger audiences. (Horror. 8-12)

GIVE THIS BOOK AWAY!
Farrell, Darren
Illus. by Maya Tatsukawa
Knopf (48 pp.)
978-0-593-48051-9
978-0-593-48052-6 PLB

A meta-narrative about sharing love, rooted in the tangible.

The endpages include the words “This book belongs to” and multiple lines below for readers to write in their names, an enticing way to lay out the challenge issued in the title. (A caveat for library borrowers will help ensure that the book returns to circulating shelves.) As a pensive-looking Asian-presenting child finishes reading a book, an unseen narrator offers commentary: “Seriously, find someone you’ve NEVER talked to before. And why stop at harvesting jelly beans when you can build your own sky-high treehouse and even dance nude in the rain on the branch of your tree? This creative child even imagines a splendidous crown with which to stake his claim of “Jelly Bean King.” With a barrage of the sugary goodties, he successfully defends his colorful kingdom against invading weasels, mice, and a strange bird. But even a monarch gets lonely from time to time. After he sends out an airmail invitation, his family joyfully gathers round for a fantasy teatime. Finn’s whimsical rhymes explore the make-believe world of every child’s dream—candy on demand! It doesn’t take much—just some sugar and jugs of jelly—and soon this little curly-haired boy has a tree all to himself. And why

Why buy dry jelly beans from a shop when you can get them fresh from your own tree?

Ten-year-old Robyn prepares to be the new kid again by writing a set of rules to help her blend in and make friends. Robyn and her biology professor mom have relocated frequently, but this move to San Luis Obispo, California, might be permanent, so Robyn has planned for a successful transition. When her beloved rescue dogs, Sundae and Fudge, are turned away from an agility class because of their disabilities (Fudge is deaf and has limited vision; Sundae has anxiety), Robyn makes a deal with the dog trainer’s grandson, Nestor; Nestor’s cousin, Jonathan; and classmate Alejandra. Alejandra will provide math tutoring and Robyn will bring snacks in inventive illustrations are the perfect backdrop for the fantastical narrative. The ending of this British import, which sees the child’s loving family with attributes of the animal intruders, offers a particularly charming visual parallel. The boy and his family are light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet treat for the young and young at heart. (Picture book. 4-7)
purple. Consumed with what others think of her, Robyn forgets to think about others; in a conversation with her babysitter, Nivien, Robyn realizes, “It’s like the rules have become the bus driver, and I’m the bus.” In this well-paced work that relatably unpacks core aspects of middle school life, Robyn realizes as her rules backfire that as much as she wants others to know her whole story, she needs to be open to learning theirs as well. Robyn and her mom are assumed White; secondary characters are ethnically diverse.

A thoughtful story about learning to look beneath the surface and be a better friend. (Fiction. 8-12)

THE SPIRIT QUEEN
Flores, Arnée
Bloomsbury (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-5476-0515-6

Princess Calliope must discover her magical ability in order to keep her kingdom safe.

After calling back the Firebird and defeating the Spectress in The Firebird Song (2021), 12-year-old Calliope, the Lost Princess of Lyrica, is back in the Royal City. The time has come for her to assume the throne, but Calliope isn’t sure she’s ready to be the queen. The people are still fearful, and her responsibility is to keep them safe, but she has no idea how. The Bookkeeper recalls learning that the queen can use Spirit magic by listening to the Firebird Song. After many failed attempts, Calliope finally hears something, but it isn’t the Song: It’s screams and cries for help from afar. On top of that, someone called the Silver Shag is trying to overthrow Calliope and take the throne for an Ancient Spirit. When the Silver Shag kidnaps Ilsbeth, former leader of the Glade Girls, Calliope and Royal Bargeboy Prewitt embark on a journey to save their friend and the kingdom. This fast-paced sequel focuses on the characters’ internal struggles with duty, grief, fear, and loneliness. Calliope pushes away the past, forcing herself to be hopeful and, in the process, hindering her growth. Finding strength from our stories and trauma—rather than silencing them—lies at the center of this journey. And although magic is important, readers learn that humans make their own magic through hard work, determination, and resilience.

A heartfelt adventure. (Fantasy. 8-12)

ROLL FOR INITIATIVE
Zolotow, Peter
running press kids (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-7624-8106-4

A middle schooler starts up a Dungeons & Dragons party.

Sixth grader Riley’s best (and only) friend is her older brother, Devin, who’s left Florida for California and college; now she’s facing middle school alone. Having to learn independence without Devin’s guidance and hand-holding, she decides to write a Dungeons & Dragons campaign for him so when he comes home for the holidays, she can take a turn as their Dungeon Master. But Riley draws the attention of Lucy, a neighbor Riley thought was too cool for her, who wants to play D&D. Soon they’re joined by Hannah, a high-energy neighbor from their apartment building, and Jen, an artistic, high-achiever classmate. Riley’s emotional, sensitive nature—which causes her social anxiety—enables her to perceive the insecurities of those closest to her and support them. Her growing confidence is challenged by her brother’s purist take on D&D, however, especially when his own emotional fragility brings him home early, expecting to take on his old caretaker role and cramping her newly autonomous style and social life. The D&D elements give enough detail to guide a new player and capture the tabletop game vibe without overwhelming the narrative. The interpersonal conflicts are all based in affection and care, and the ending rewards Riley’s growth. Riley, her family, and Hannah are White; Jen is Black, and Lucy has a Black father and White mother. Spot art enhances the text.

Maxes out its stats in empathy, creativity, and character growth. (Fiction. 8-14)

MORTIMER
Rat Race to Space
Galat, Joan Marie
DCB (192 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-77086-653-9

Getting to the International Space Station is only the first hurdle in a rodent’s race to space.

Mortimer, a discarded pet, is a lab rat in Houston at the Johnson Space Center. He enjoys his life, observing AsCans (astronaut candidates) and hanging out with his friends, especially Celeste. However, he’s upset that humans don’t realize how great rats are, and he’d love a chance to visit the space station and maybe prove rats are better suited to colonize Mars when the humans finally have the technology to make the trip. Mortimer is thrilled when he learns that the rat with the fastest maze time will get a spot on the space station, and with only a little cheating and a little luck,
he’s chosen to go. Mortimer keeps a journal (hidden in his bedding), and when he steals a camera from a reporter, he’s ready to pursue his Grand Plan proving rats are more suited to space by posting video evidence on YouTube. Executing his plan is no easy task even with the help of Boris the cosmorat, who was born in space. The juxtaposition of myriad space facts and rat facts with many ludicrous and physically impossible feats of rat sneakiness makes for a flawed novel. No suspension of disbelief is spingy enough to allow for the goings-on in nonfiction writer Galat’s first attempt at fiction.

A potential option for nonfiction fans hoping to dip a toe into fiction. (Fiction. 7-10)

THE SEA IN THE WAY
Gilmore, Sophie
Greenwillow Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-302519-6

Two animals separated by a vast body of water find a way to connect.

Badger and Bear live in simple cottages on opposite sides of the sea. Both care for each other, but Badger is clingier, wishing Bear “could tuck her in” and feeling too emotional to talk on their phone calls—a moment that will resonate with anyone who has ached for another but frozen under the pressure to find the right words. Finally, Badger has had enough and tries to cross the sea. After a botched rowboat ride lands her back where she started, a frustrated Badger attempts to negotiate with the sea, which spits back requests for objects as barter for passage. As Badger seeks these items, a bird shadows her, eventually providing a much-needed anchor; somehow, the journey across the water seems less important now, but the friendship between the two remains strong. Unlike many narratives about being apart from a loved one, this one doesn’t end in blissful reunion; instead, an open-ended conclusion leaves room for conversation and wondering. Hands will be picking up the phone to dial a beloved friend or family member after closing this book. Muted greens, soft grays, and spots of sleepy red complement the quiet yet potent prose, making for an insightful commentary on separation. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Dreamy, smart waves of love, longing, listening, and learning. (Picture book. 4-6)

THE LOST WHALE
Gold, Hannah
Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-304111-0

A young boy discovers both his limits and his power.

Eleven-year-old Rio Turner has lived all his life in London with his American mother. But when his mother’s depression worsens and she has to be hospitalized, Rio is sent to live with his near stranger of a grandmother in California. As the story unfolds in waves of both nuance and perceptively delivered atmosphere—the ocean and California coast are evocatively rendered—Rio, resentful, lonely, and missing his adored mother, deflects his grandmother’s attempts at friendship. But then she gives him a shoe box of his mother’s childhood treasures, and Rio discovers drawing after drawing of whales. One drawing, titled White Beak, stands out for how lifelike it is, and Rio keeps it close in his pocket. Then, while walking the beach, Rio meets Marina, a girl about his age who lives on a whale-watching boat. Marina tells him that White Beak is an actual whale, and she invites Rio to come on a whale-watching trip, where he glimpses the actual White Beak on her migratory route to Mexico. Rio is entranced, and as he learns more about the magnificent creatures, including their plight as a result of human carelessness, he determines to help however he can. And then White Beak goes missing. This superb story captures the power and mystery of the ocean as well as delivering bite-size morsels of climate change advocacy. Characters read as White default.

Poignant and empowering. (author’s note, resources) (Fiction. 9-12)

CAT CREW
Grabenstein, Chris
Illus. by Beth Hughes
Random House (304 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-593-48087-8
978-0-593-48088-5 PLB
Series: Dog Squad, 2

A cat spinoff leads to more crime-fighting adventure in this Dog Squad (2021) sequel.

Just as the canine cast of the live-action television series Dog Squad (which formed the basis for the first book) breaks for hiatus and its star, Fred, heads back to Jenny Yen’s animal training ranch, ratings for the show dip. The network’s solution is Cat Crew, a crossover spinoff featuring some of Jenny’s rescued cats. Delivering tension and driving the plot are next-door neighbor and billionaire Kitty Bitteridge; her chauffeur, Dimitri (a former cat trainer in exile from his Russian homeland); and their performing Abyssinians, who become Cat Crew’s rivals with
EVERYBODY makes mistakes... // and everybody can learn from them. “EVERYBODY wants friends... // and everybody can be a friend.” In the first instance, a biking child has crashed; the facing page shows them donning a helmet. In the second, a child stands apart as three peers play ball. The next image shows the threesome stopping to welcome the newcomer. Aware of young children’s delight in poop and fart jokes, Gravel includes both here. For “EVERYBODY goes to the bathroom,” she depicts a cat in a litter box and a kid on a toilet reading a copy of Gravel’s Not Me (2020). The text “EVERYBODY gets embarrassed” is accompanied by an image of a mortified kid passing a visible cloud of gas with a speech bubble labeled “Vruumpt!” The need for self-care, the inevitability of everyday struggles, and the importance of our hopes, dreams, and ideas—this slender volume tackles it all. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Emphasizing familiar, relatable scenarios, this funny, empathetic read is a kid magnet. (Picture book. 5-9)

Entertaining but not purr-fect. (Animal fiction. 8-12)

EVERYBODY! You, Me & Us
Gravel, Elise
Scholastic (48 pp.)
$15.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-338-83089-7

Gravel plumbs the many behaviors and states of mind that humans hold in common.

Employing several of her signatures—humor brimming with child appeal; puffy, hand-lettered—style type; and potato-shaped youngsters in a variety of colors—Gravel avows that while each human is unique, “we are more similar than we think.” The short, deceptively simple declarative sentences often manage to convey both poignancy and profundity. “EVERYBODY makes mistakes... // and everybody can learn from them.” “EVERYBODY wants friends... // and everybody can be a friend.” In the first instance, a biking child has crashed; the facing page shows them donning a helmet. In the second, a child stands apart as three peers play ball. The next image shows the threesome stopping to welcome the newcomer. Aware of young children’s delight in poop and fart jokes, Gravel includes both here. For “EVERYBODY goes to the bathroom,” she depicts a cat in a litter box and a kid on a toilet reading a copy of Gravel’s Not Me (2020). The text “EVERYBODY gets embarrassed” is accompanied by an image of a mortified kid passing a visible cloud of gas with a speech bubble labeled “Vruumpt!”

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to explore how family bonds endure despite separation and the passage of time. The spare text in this mostly wordless tale is well placed. Rendered in Photoshop, watercolor, and colored pencil, the illustrations depict expressive faces and dynamic perspectives, beautifully capturing the joy of a hug, the wonder of visiting new places, the sadness of saying goodbye, and the hope of reuniting. The use of color is inspired; muted illustrations with pops of reddish pink depict the present, while both Lao Lao's and the child's stories are portrayed in vibrant hues. Use of the term Lao Lao cues the characters as Chinese, though locations aren’t specified.  

*This tale soars.* (Graphic fiction. 5-9)

**WAIT TILL HELEN COMES**

*A Ghost Story Graphic Novel*

Dec. by Hahn, Mary Downing

Adapt. by Scott Peterson

Illus. by Meredith Laxton

Colors by Russ Badgett

Clariorn/HarperCollins (160 pp.)

$12.99 paper | Sept. 20, 2022

978-0-358-53689-5

Hahn’s famous ghost story sees new life in graphic-novel format.

When a blended family uproots their lives from their home in Baltimore to live in a converted church out in the country, the tension between the family members is strained to the breaking point. Seven-year-old Heather, who is frequently rude to her older stepsiblings, Molly and Michael, and their mother, Jean, becomes obsessed with a tombstone in the old church’s graveyard. The tombstone has no name initials, only initials (the same as Heather’s), and when Heather refers to the grave’s inhabitant as Helen, the family slowly learns that this is more than just an imaginary friend. Helen’s power over Heather grows as she makes plans to spend the rest of her afterlife with this new friend. Making effective use of color to move between everyday domestic scenes and far more chilling moments, this version modernizes the story. The illustrations give both Heather and her father, Dave, a menacing quality that will have readers guessing where exactly the horror lies. The denouement wraps up organically, proving that even the scariest of stories can have a happy ending. Readers familiar with the original tale will be pleased with this faithful adaptation, and new fans will be eager to read more from Hahn. Molly, Michael, and Jean are light-skinned, while Dave and Heather are tan-skinned; some supporting characters present as Black.

*An adaptation that feels as fresh as a newly dug grave.* (Graphic novel. 8-12)

**STORY QUILTS**

*Appalachian Women Speak*

Hitchcock, Shannon

Illus. by Sophie Page

Reycraft Books (32 pp.)

$17.95 | Sept. 30, 2022

978-1-4788-7537-6

The scraps of Appalachian lives, forgotten by many, persist in the memories marked by thread and bits of cloth. Green pines, blue mountains, and star-frosted skies peek out of squares stitched together by weathered hands that cooked, cleaned, canned, and gardened all day long. Quilts that would one day hang in museums lovingly sheltered families on cold Blue Ridge nights. Girls would watch their mamas until one day their young hands learned to gather squares and form quilts of their own. Hitchcock’s quiet homage is humbling. The author’s note details the resourcefulness of these women who endured poverty and often lacked formal schooling yet could turn feed sacks into songs of love. Page’s earth-toned art, made out of clay, paper, wire, and fabric, fills the pages with mountain life. Hands guiding needles pop out of scenes. Cut-out flowers, appliqued dogs and fish, intricate stars, and textured images animate the narrative. Hitchcock makes clear that hardship couldn’t silence these women’s stories, told in the language of embellished pieces of worn fabric. Illustrations depict light-skinned characters, though one child appears to be darker-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

*A loving tribute to perseverance and inner strength.* (Picture book. 6-10)

**SECRETS OF STONE AND SEA**

Hymas, Allison K.

Roaring Brook Press (304 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-250-79947-0

Are you strong enough to battle the sea?

Impulsive twin Kai, whose name means sea, and contemplative twin Peter, whose name means rock, leave Ohio to visit their retired history professor grandmother in Seaspire, Massachusetts, along with their father and older sister—their Greek American archaeologist mom is away on a Mediterranean dig. The boys unwittingly perform an ancient ritual that unleashes a terrifying ancient sea god that will ascend to its full power during the next full moon, only a week away, and use its might to attack and flood the land. Armed with this knowledge and Kai’s new ability to read every language in existence thanks to his connection with the creature, the family sets out to save the land. Thankfully, hints of the creature remain in myth, oral tradition, and literature, and they are able to work together to uncover seven seals that may be the key to stopping the creature—or will they unlock something worse? Readers with an interest in codes and ciphers will be impressed with the clues
embedded in the story and the layers of sea versus land allusions as the hints and secrets are revealed, but they may be distracted by the characters’ interactions. The family members act and respond more like people in a book who are working toward predetermined plot points than a real family caught in the crosshairs of a primordial god. All characters are coded White.

Like the sea: sometimes choppy, sometimes smooth sailing. (Fantasy. 8-12)

**MEANWHILE BACK ON EARTH . . .**

**Finding Our Place Through Time and Space**

*Jeffers, Oliver*

Philomel (64 pp.)

$22.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-593-62152-3

A car trip through space becomes a journey back in time.

Keeping to a steady 37 miles an hour as they motor into the sky, a light-skinned parent, accompanied by two children squabbling over territory in the back seat, comments that “we humans have always fought each other over space,” drawing borders since our planet seemed so big. Readers will certainly see the fallacy in that last notion play out after the parent hangs a left at the moon, and looking back after a 78-year drive to Venus, notes that 78 years ago our entire world was at war. Similarly, the 150 years it would take to reach Mercury marks a time when Africa was being violently divvied up by colonial powers.

As a zigzag course passes the sun and each outer planet, other conflicts in the Americas and on back 8,000 years to the end of the latest ice age pass in review, too. But the already-strained conceit collapses at Pluto with the astoundingly facile claim that 11,000 years ago people were “much too busy surviving to bother with fighting each other.” Scenes of a sedan wheeling through the vast distances of space past recognizably limned planets alternate with views of tiny figures on battlefields, waving national flags and wielding weapons; the book ends with the family back home, children asleep in parental arms beneath starry skies. The absurdity of humans continually fighting for tiny bits of our tiny planet comes through, but the confusing contradiction of the main premise results in a conclusion that feels less like a resolution than an abrupt loss of interest. *(This book was reviewed digitally)*

The message is sound, the delivery decidedly otherwise. **(timeline)** *(Picture book: 7-9)*

**THE POLAR BEAR IN THE GARDEN**

*Jones, Richard*

Peachtree (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-1-62862-433-2

The tale of an unusual rewilding.

On Monday, a child with brown hair and tan skin finds a polar bear so small that the child can hold it in their hands. Each day the bear grows a bit bigger so that by Wednesday, the child decides the time has come to take him home. They raise anchor and set sail in a little brown boat with red sails. Each day the bear grows a bit larger and they grow closer until at last, on Sunday, the bear quite dwarfs the boat and they make it to land. There, child, bear, and the bear’s new family romp and play until nighttime arrives and the child must say farewell. With hints of Judith Kerr’s *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968) and *Ape* (2007) and *Can We Save The Tiger?* (2011), the author writes as if he’s casually talking off the top of his head, and the illustrator’s photorealistic art completely steals the show. Identifying the locale as Taman Negara, the author glibly reels off all kinds of unseen but resident animals—including “sixty-six kinds of frogs (more or less),” “eighty kinds of bats (roughly),” and “goodness knows how many kinds of beetles (I certainly don’t)—describes a few sounds, and explains how tree seeds are spread through animal poop. That all of this is printed in a hair-fine typeface makes it even easier to ignore in favor of poring over full or three-quarter spread paintings, mostly monochrome, in which every twig and bug-eaten leaf is rendered with convincing exactitude, tree trunks viewed through misty, humid light soar up beyond the frames, and in close-up views, tropical insects and tiny frogs hide amid thick tangles of ground-level stems and fronds.

Larger creatures, from hornbills and butterflies to an elephant and a prowling clouded leopard, appear, too, often in pictures that have been given subdued tints like old hand-colored photographs. The author closes with a note stating that this particular forest is protected but similar habitats elsewhere are in danger, and the illustrator provides a visual key at the end to the wildlife on display. *(This book was reviewed digitally)*

Amiable if generalized commentary paired with breathtaking visuals. **(index, map, resource list)** *(Informational picture book: 7-9)*

**A WALK THROUGH THE RAIN FOREST**

*Jenkins, Martin*

Illus. by Vicky White

Candlewick (48 pp.)

$19.99 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-5362-1120-7

A stroll through a Malaysian rainforest, with a voluble tour guide to point out salient features.

As in Jenkins and White’s previous collaborations *Ape* (2007) and *Can We Save The Tiger?* (2011), the author writes as if he’s casually talking off the top of his head, and the illustrator’s photorealistic art completely steals the show. Identifying the locale as Taman Negara, the author glibly reels off all kinds of unseen but resident animals—including “sixty-six kinds of frogs (more or less),” “eighty kinds of bats (roughly),” and “goodness knows how many kinds of beetles (I certainly don’t)—describes a few sounds, and explains how tree seeds are spread through animal poop. That all of this is printed in a hair-fine typeface makes it even easier to ignore in favor of poring over full or three-quarter spread paintings, mostly monochrome, in which every twig and bug-eaten leaf is rendered with convincing exactitude, tree trunks viewed through misty, humid light soar up beyond the frames, and in close-up views, tropical insects and tiny frogs hide amid thick tangles of ground-level stems and fronds.

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A BOOK, TOO, CAN BE A STAR

The Story of Madeleine
L’Engle and the Making of A Wrinkle in Time
Jones Voiklis, Charlotte & Jennifer Adams
Illus. by Adelina Lirius
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-374-38848-5

Life experiences that shaped the author of A Wrinkle in Time (1962).

Beginning with an early memory of being taken out to view a glorious night sky, this measured, reverent profile follows Madeleine L’Engle, who even as a child had a yen for “big questions.” Through school into adulthood, marriage, and work, she found—in art, in theater, and, most of all, in writing—ways to ask questions and seek answers. L’Engle’s best known book, begun on a camping stopover in Arizona’s Painted Desert, was famously rejected by many publishers but quickly became the polar bear? Yet readers never for a moment doubt the possibility. Joyous art, celebrating freedom and the beauty of the sea, matches the text in tone and quality. Be ready for children to scour their own gardens in the hopes of finding a tiny bear of their very own. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

As satisfying as a warm blanket or a cup of cocoa. (Picture book. 2-5)

THE UNBREAKABLE THREAD

Joof, Emily
Illus. by Asma Enayeb
Soaring Kite Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-953859-25-9

The story of a parent-child bond.
Inspired by the Gambian practice of a parent leaving a thread with their child when they travel, this story opens on an image of a rosy-cheeked baby whose parent says that they are “bound together by a thread. An unbreakable thread.” As the child grows and eventually graduates, the thread unwinds little by little, and they both adjust to the idea of the child having friends, teachers, and other adults in their life. When parent and child argue, the thread tangles, and they work together to untangle it. The child’s other parent appears occasionally, but the text never mentions them. While a child’s growing up is a bittersweet and poignant experience for most parents, this tale, told mostly in second person, presents no conflict that might drive the plot or pique interest in this relationship. Joof’s over-use of the thread metaphor lessens its impact, and given the centering of an adult perspective, this story has little to offer the child. The illustrations further detract from the narrative—some of the characters look wooden, and others have oddly proportioned facial features. Parent and child are Black; the child grows up in a diverse environment. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A lackluster read accompanied by a disappointing visual experience. (Picture book. 3-7)

BEWARE THE BURMESE PYTHON

And Other Invasive Animal Species
Kaner, Etta
Illus. by Phil Nicholls
Kids Can (48 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-5253-0446-0

In a mix of fanciful cartoon panels and narrative snippets, Kaner and Nicholls sound the alarm about 10 invasive species.

As creatures from nutrias and cane toads to tawny crazy ants and killer shrimp mug ferociously in the art, Kaner explains with much hand-wringing how each was introduced to a new locale by either hitchhiking in or being released by a well-meaning importer, to the detriment of native species and ecosystems. The concern is certainly justified (even if humans, the most destructive ones of all, didn’t make the cut), but not only are the entries subject to occasional carelessness with facts—no, feral cats are not native to Europe—but remediation strategies are often facile, with suggestions like having farmers control ants by getting rid of aphids and holding a contest to...
design a ship that would somehow prevent potential pests from hitching a ride. Still, the message that it’s a bad idea to release imported pets certainly gets its proof here (see: starlings, northern snakehead fish, and the titular pythons), and the author’s “If you were a scientist or conservation officer, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?” challenge at the end of each profile may well motivate constructive thinking. Nicholls adds human figures with a range of skin tones to the panels and larger scenes of animal invaders and victims.

A lightweight introduction to an increasingly serious issue. (glossary, maps, bibliography) (Nonfiction. 7-10)

A VERY BIG FALL
Kastner, Emmy
Clarion/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-358-41945-7

Change is on the horizon for a trio of leaves at home in the branches of various trees in a park.

When the air grows chilly, Birch, Oak, and Maple all experience different emotions. Birch is optimistic and expectant, Oak is cautious and reluctant, and obstinate Maple feels left out as the other leaves change colors but she doesn’t. Illustrations rendered in acrylic gouache, colored pencil, and collage depict endearingly anthropomorphized leaves, with autumnal colors that pop. As the leaves learn more about fall from a pair of knowledgeable squirrels, Maple’s slow change to red is overshadowed by her impatience to join her friends. It’s only when she pulls herself free that she learns about the downside of fall—namely, the bottoms of boots, rain gutters, and rakes. Much like the shift from the bright crisp early days of autumn to the damp cold ones later in the season, it’s here that the story changes, going from a surprisingly nuanced examination of growth to something fluffy and less interesting. A young girl with straight black hair and tan skin finds the fallen leaves and takes them home, where she draws them as anthropomorphic characters, and all discussion of the importance of change is lost. Caregivers looking for a springboard to a discussion about growing up and the uncertainty of change may find this useful, but its sputtering ending detracts from its early momentum. Maybe next year will bring a more promising crop of leaves. (This book was reviewed digitally.) After a promising start, this autumnal offering ultimately disappoints. (Picture book. 6-8)

SARDINES
Kaufman, Sashi
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-06-299561-2

When adults don’t take charge, five middle schoolers resolve their own problems.

Lucas is miserable: Charlie, his older brother, died last year. Then his mom left the family, and he was left living with his unsupportive dad in a trailer. The Maine sixth grader bands together with new friends from his after-school group. Finn, a mysterious boy with formal manners and an adult vocabulary, assumes leadership, suggesting games like the titular Sardines (a hide-and-seek variation) and acorn cap gathering, which leads to wish making. Cat, a basketball player, wants to cut her hair, something her mother opposes. The group figures out that her mother can’t refuse if Cat gives her hair to an organization that assists cancer patients. Robbie, a likable boy, wants the school bully to stop picking on him, and the group figures out how to intervene. Anna wants her banker mother to pay attention to her. Finn needs a foster family so he can stay in the area when his group home closes. Lucas wants to find his mom—and discovering the truth shakes up and deepens his relationships. Lucas is a believable first-person narrator for this strong story of tween angst and friendship. The personal complexities of these five young people are explored in detail. Most characters are White; Anna is Black. A thoughtful and compassionate story of friends and family. (Fiction. 9-12)

THE GIRL WHO BUILT AN OCEAN
An Artist, an Argonaut, and the True Story of the World’s First Aquarium
Keating, Jess
Illus. by Michelle Mee Nutter
Knopf (40 pp.)
978-0-593-30511-9
978-0-593-30512-6 PLB

Science and fashion meet in this portrait of a 19th-century seamstress whose fascination with ocean life led both to multiple discoveries and to the invention of the glass-sided aquarium.

In the wake of Ocean Speaks (2020), illustrated by Katie Hickey, a profile of pioneering oceanographer Marie Tharp, Keating introduces another woman in marine science who was strong minded enough to torpedo sexist expectations. Folding lyrical touches into her measured account, the author follows Jeanne Villepreux as she learns how to use her hands to “transform a pile of nothing into a beautiful...something” in her parents’ dressmaking shop, then goes on to a successful career making
SURELY SURELY MARISOL RAINEY
Marisol Rainey is back with more worries.

Gym class is Marisol's least favorite thing. She's not great at sports, but for once, she'd like to hear "Way to go, Marisol!" rather than "Nice try, Marisol!" or "Great effort, Marisol!" When their gym teacher announces that they'll be doing a unit on kickball, Marisol and her best friend, Jada, get nervous. The Brain Train, Marisol's term for her string of thoughts and worries, chugs along, making it hard for her to sleep and focus at school. Surely things would be easier if her dad were home to teach her kickball, but he's on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. But with some helpful ideas and advice from her friends and family, Marisol eventually faces kickball with fewer worries and a little more confidence. This stand-alone companion novel to Maybe Maybe Marisol Rainey (2021) is a charming, delightful story that readers, especially those with fears and strong emotions, will find relatable. Marisol and her friends all have their quirks, like Jada asking "Would you rather?" questions, adding to the fun. The black-and-white illustrations provide humor and help move the story along. Marisol is biracial; her mother is from the Philippines, and her dad presents White. Jada presents Black.

Surely surely a book readers will enjoy. (Fiction. 6-9)

GIVING THANKS
How Thanksgiving Became a National Holiday
Kiernan, Denise
Illus. by Jamey Christoph
Philomel (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-439-40441-6

A new kind of Thanksgiving story:
Pastoral opening spreads invoke old-timey illustrations with an updated spin: rolling farmland, an elder embracing a child, and four vignettes of children expressing gratitude for things in their lives in French, Algonquin, Twi, and Korean. The story then transitions, with somewhat lengthy blocks of text, to explain how Sarah Josepha Hale, a 19th-century White feminist writer and activist, agitated through five presidential administrations to make Thanksgiving a national holiday. By describing older, localized thanksgiving festivals, the somewhat universal concept of gratitude, and President Abraham Lincoln's efforts to unite America in the midst of the Civil War, this story provides an accurate recounting of how an inconsistent regional tradition became a federally recognized day. By not even nodding toward the more popular but historiographically flawed
“A searingly relevant opus to intellectual freedom.”

ATTACK OF THE BLACK RECTANGLES

Kilpatrick, Karen
Illus. by Germán Blanco
Genius Cat Books (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-938447-45-7
Series: Nobody Likes, 4

How do you feel about bedtime?

A Black child breaks the fourth wall to list six reasons why going to sleep is no fun; meanwhile, a group of monster friends interrupt to explain why sleeping is beneficial for our bodies and health. “First: Bedtime is too early!” Second, bedtime routines are dull. Third, nighttime is frightening. Fourth, there is too much to do! Fifth, lying very still is a very difficult task, and sixth, fun cannot happen while you’re sleeping. However, as the monsters note, sleep gives us the energy we need to climb trees, bedtime routines include stories and hugs, monsters can be found under the bed at night (and some of them are down-right adorable), bodies and brains need rest to perform well, and sleeping is when we get to dream. Finally, the child concedes that nobody loves bedtime—because everyone loves bedtime. Kilpatrick’s text is funny, like when the child acknowledges that one of their monster pals may have a point yet is quick to add, “Let’s not get distracted. Moving on!” Blanco’s cartoon illustrations are rich and colorful; the artist smartly devotes several pages to a dream sequence. In addition to curbing fears of the dark, this creative entry in the field of bedtime books also encourages kids to let others share their opinions. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An inspired bedtime tale laced with a wise lesson about listening to advice from friends. (sleep facts) (Picture book. 4-8)

NOBODY LIKES BEDTIME

Kilpatrick, Karen
Illus. by Germán Blanco
Genius Cat Books (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-938447-45-7
Series: Nobody Likes, 4

Independence signers owned slaves, embracing Indigenous land acknowledgments at the dinner table, or questioning blacked-out words in classroom copies of Jane Yolen’s award-winning Holocaust novel, The Devil’s Arithmetic. However, Mac’s teacher defends censorship—as well as a bevy of school and town regulations and discriminatory attitudes surrounding LGBTQ+ pride, dress codes, curfews, and access to junk food. Mac lives with and is close to his single mother and grandfather, his disengaged father’s dishonesty and explosive anger damage his feelings of self-worth. Mac has support from aromantic and asexual friend Denis and feminist classmate Marci. Mac exhibits real growth in his understanding of Marci’s perspective and advocacy. Reading The Devil’s Arithmetic also influences a Vietnamese American classmate to use her real given name, rather than the Anglicized form, something she felt pressured to do in their 97% White town. Though the school’s administration resists the young people’s challenges, the students’ movement builds a promising following on the way to a cathartic showdown with the school board. The protagonists clarify the various issues for readers who may not be aware of them, and the story skillfully encourages keeping open minds and extending grace to the oblivious and hostile alike. An author’s note addresses the real-world events that inspired the book.

A searingly relevant opus to intellectual freedom. (Fiction. 9-12)

HIDERS SEEKERS FINDERS KEEPERS

Kulekjian, Jessica
Illus. by Salini Perera
Kids Can (32 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-5253-0485-9

People take vacations to warmer climes, put on heavier clothing, and hunker down in warm buildings in the winter. How do animals survive the season?

In a play on the traditional childhood chant, “finders, keepers, losers, weepers,” Kulekjian divides animals into several groups according to how they tackle wintry weather. Hiders find places to hole up while it’s cold; hibernation, brumation, dia-pause, and torpor are all introduced. Seekers look for places that are better suited to them (migration): places where food is easier to find or where the weather is warmer. And the finders keep warm with heavier coats, full with stashes of food, and close in order to stay warm together. Many animals in this last group have adaptations that help them survive winter conditions. The main text is printed right on the full-bleed spreads. Further information about the science or the species on the page is provided in round text bubbles; for example, bee colonies die out each autumn, the queen going into diapause, then lay eggs and starting new colonies each spring. Perera’s digital illustrations reflect the palettes of fall and winter, the realistic-looking scenes featuring many opportunities to spy animals in...
A room finally opened up at the hospice, but the child can still dismiss her concerns, saying, “It’s just a small recital,” while other students are there to help, and they volunteer to play her solo with her. This gives Elephant the courage to both mention that she composed her own song and to teach it to the class. The story wants to do a lot but suffers from shallow messaging. Sure, Elephant finally has the courage to share more of herself, but her anxiety isn’t proactively addressed by the other characters, who clearly see how unhappy she is—and Tiger dismisses her concerns, saying, “It’s just a small recital,” while Grandpa tells her, “Sometimes we need to push ourselves.” The digital illustrations do their best to distract from the hollow dismisses her concerns, saying, “It’s just a small recital,” while Grandpa tells her, “Sometimes we need to push ourselves.” The digital illustrations do their best to distract from the hollow story, as the characters are delightfully designed and extremely expressive, but the art can’t quite make up for the issues with the narrative. Regardless of anxiety level, readers will agree that the strongest takeaway here is that Ms. Gator seems like a real jerk. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Weak messaging sadly leads to sour notes. (Picture book. 4-7)

But readers are sure to notice that Grandma spends more and more time in bed, that she is sleeping more and looking thinner. Her death happens offscreen, the child glad that Grandma got to see the three baby cardinals in their nest but sad she won’t get to see them fly. Once back home again, the child gazes at the birds visiting the feeder outside their bedroom window, pictures of Grandma prominent on the dresser. The digital illustrations masterfully center both the relationship at the heart of the story and the outside world that seems such a part of each scene. The child and mother are tan-skinned and have black hair; Grandma has pale skin and white hair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A tear-jerker sure to bring comfort to those facing similar partings. (Picture book. 5-8)

A child describes their time with their grandmother and their job keeping the bird feeder filled.

Since Grandma got sick, she’s moved in with the child’s family, and the child couldn’t be more thrilled: The two draw together and watch the birds at the feeder outside. But then the child returns home from school to find Grandma’s room empty: A room finally opened up at the hospice, but the child can still visit all they want. It’s not at all the same, but the child improves it when they bring the feeder from home and hang it on a tree outside her window. As days pass, the two eat jello, draw pictures that cover the walls, and visit with Suki, the therapy dog.

THE BIRD FEEDER
Larson, Andrew
Illus. by Dorothy Leung
Kids Can (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-5253-0483-5

A child describes their time with their grandmother and their job keeping the bird feeder filled.

Since Grandma got sick, she’s moved in with the child’s family, and the child couldn’t be more thrilled: The two draw together and watch the birds at the feeder outside. But then the child returns home from school to find Grandma’s room empty: A room finally opened up at the hospice, but the child can still visit all they want. It’s not at all the same, but the child improves it when they bring the feeder from home and hang it on a tree outside her window. As days pass, the two eat jello, draw pictures that cover the walls, and visit with Suki, the therapy dog.

THE BIG DREAMS OF SMALL CREATURES
Lerner, Gail
Nancy Paulsen Books (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-40785-1

Can Eden find a way to stop insect-hating August from killing all the bugs? In this debut by the writer and director of Black-ish and other hit TV shows, 9-year-old August, a White boy who is the victim of bullying, hates insects: A cockroach climbs up his arm during a school play, a fly lands in his mouth and he vomits on his favorite teacher, and a spiderweb causes him to drop a box of his mother’s homemade jelly. August schemes to get his hands on a pesticide that is rumored to be exceptionally toxic—only its inventor is missing. On her 10th birthday, Eden, who has a White Jewish mother and Black father and comes from a musical family, learns she can talk to wasps using her kazoo. She saves a paper wasps’ nest from a group of destructive children, and, taken by her kindness, the wasp queen informs her of a mysterious school dedicated to teaching communication between insects and humans. Eden finds a card in a library book for the Institute for Lower Learning: Could it be the right school? Eden’s and August’s quests intersect at the institute. Though the prose is beautiful, the novel creeps along, with extensive passages of narration that are not broken up with dialogue. Despite the protagonists’ young ages, older middle-grade readers may be drawn to the strong messages about environmentalism, friendship, and self-discovery.  

A slowly unfolding read for bug lovers and environmentalists. (Morse code and semaphore charts) (Fiction. 10-14)
A IS FOR ASIAN AMERICAN
An Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Alphabet

Loh-Hagan, Virginia
Illus. by Tracy Nishimura Bishop
Sleeping Bear Press (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 15, 2022
978-1-53411-137-0
Series: Arts and Culture Alphabet

An alphabetized celebration of Asian Americans.
Written in verse accompanied by detailed historical notes, the book opens by explaining that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have long been crucial parts of U.S. history. Images of Chinese railway workers on the following spread are evidence of that statement. Instead of dedicating each letter to a different individual, Loh-Hagan explores broader concepts, with Bishop’s illustrations filling out the details. For instance, on the page with the words “D is for Dishes,” we see images of noodles, spam musubi, dumplings, and Korean barbecue. “I is for International Travel” notes that many families fly overseas to visit relatives. There are several nods to activism: “M is for Movements” highlights Philip Vera Cruz and Grace Lee Boggs, while “P is for Pioneers” spotlights Dalip Singh Saund, the first Indian American to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and athletes Sunisa Lee and Victoria Manalo Draves. Bishop’s warm palette fills every page with soft lines and shapes, bringing to life charming portrayals of the subjects set against attractive backgrounds.

A few flaws aside, a bright tribute to the contributions and cultures of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. (author’s note, timeline, glossary, activity guide, resources) (Informational picture book: 5-9)

CALLING THE WIND
A Story of Healing and Hope

Ludwig, Trudy
Illus. by Kathryn Otoshi
Knopf (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-42640-1

A telephone box and a little imagination help a family confront their grief.
An Asian-presenting family sits around a low table with a conspicuously empty seat. The scene is depicted in a soft, muted, melancholy blue, while a memory of a meal with the now-departed loved one is shown in sunny yellow. That yellow hue then reappears in the form of a bird, which guides one of the family members to a telephone box where they have a (one-way) conversation with their loved one (“Can you hear me? I just hear the wind. Is that you?”). Other family members have conversations, too; after, each discovers a yellow flower and brings it back to the house, adding to a growing bouquet on the table. When one of the members learns about this, they break the vase, furious, scattering the flowers and the family. Only when the anguished member finds solace through the telephone can they also find peace with their family. Structured around the seasons, poetic text alternates between narration and dialogue. Sensitively composed illustrations, rendered in watercolor, pen, and colored pencil in a pastel palette, use colors thoughtfully. An author’s note explains that this telephone box (kaze no denwa, or wind phone) is real and located in Ōtsuchi, Japan; it was created by Itaru Sasaki as a way to cope with the death of his cousin, and it has provided solace for others, including those affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A beautifully written, quietly poignant depiction of one family’s journey through loss. (photograph, resources on grief) (Picture book: 3-7)

DESTINY CALLING

Mabbitt, Will
Illus. by Taryn Knight
Walker US/Candlewick (240 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-5762-1049-1
Series: Embassy of the Dead, 3

Jake and Cora return to save the world one more time.
Jake Green has defeated the evil Fenris and his minions twice now, most recently with the help of his friend Cora, a ghost, and Sab, his human best friend. But there’s no rest for the decent: A new secret mission has been given to Jake, involving a traitor in the Embassy of the Dead’s midst. Jake, Cora, and Sab need to figure out where this traitor is, and it should be no sweat considering Jake wears a tooth he discovered in the Eternal Void, a fabled tool he picked up during his last adventure in the Afterworld. But Jake is starting to wonder if he’s got the stomach to keep fighting spooks and monsters for the rest of his days or if maybe there’s another path he could take. Jake’s characterization as a hesitant hero isn’t new to the series, but this time the author wraps it into something dramatically interesting. Coupling this motif with the series’ humor and scratchy black-and-white illustrations makes this the strongest entry yet, building on its predecessors with effective ease. The laughs are sharp, the pacing is strong, the horror is effective, and the characters continue to impress and evolve.

A stirring entry in a series that’s come into its own. (Horror: 9-12)
“A heartwarming, hopeful dragon-filled journey through family life and the importance of finding common ground.”

**NEW DRAGON CITY**

*Tim Possible & The Time-Traveling T. Rex*

Masty, Axel

Aladdin (208 pp.)

$13.99 | Aug. 30, 2022

978-0-316-37668-6

Series: Tim Possible, 1

Two best friends find their lives transformed when they meet a time-traveling T.Rex.

Fearful Tim Sullivan couldn’t be more different than adventurous Tito Delgado. When Oskar’s Transtemporal Theropod Transporter 3.0 lands in Tim’s backyard, Tito befriends the talking dinosaur, but Tim is much warier. Things keep happening that prove him right. First Tim drinks all the IMPOSSIBLE JUICE™ and then finds out it was the only fuel source onboard. Now Oskar is stuck in the present and cannot travel back to his own time. The juice gives Tim a superpower that brings his worries to life, but he won’t understand that for a while. Oskar quickly absorbs human knowledge via the internet and then produces SARA, “the nicest, smartest, and most powerful virtual assistant ever created.” Little does he know that SARA will turn evil and begin a series of battles with her creator and the two friends that will involve poop, giant “flying duck-shaped robots,” a honey badger, and Tim’s finally discovered superpower. This over-the-top humorous fantasy mashes up technology (even including a chart of the binary code for each letter of the alphabet, with a coded message for readers to decipher), comic-book tropes, weird animals, and scatological humor, with cartoon-style digital illustrations on almost every page that will keep readers poring over the details. Latine Tito inserts occasional Spanish phrases into his dialogue; Tim and most other human characters read as White.

Funny sci-fi and comic-book adventures rolled into one heavily illustrated novel. *(Fantasy. 8-10)*

**NEW DRAGON CITY**

*Mancusi, Mari*

Little, Brown (352 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-316-37668-6

When a young dragon saves Noah’s life, he realizes that dragons may not be as monstrous as he was taught.

It’s April in New York City, and a lot has changed in the years since dragons appeared and society collapsed. The time has come for people to go underground for the summer to avoid the dangerous beasts emerging from hibernation, but Noah’s mom has been missing for two months, and his dad isn’t going without her. Not wanting to be separated from both his parents, Noah devises a plan to get himself left behind. A chance encounter with a baby dragon named Asha sets a series of events in motion that cascade beyond Noah’s control, threatening the safety of everyone—human and dragon. Caught between parents who are as unable to see eye to eye as the humans and dragons, 12-year-old Noah is a sympathetic character with a gentle demeanor and a kind heart. His struggle to balance a desire not to disappoint either of his parents with his own developing ideas about what is right and true will resonate deeply. A nuanced exploration of the ways external influences can change us for better or worse is threaded through this story with a vividly rendered setting and a tense, high-stakes adventure at its center. Noah and his family default to White; there is some racial diversity in the supporting cast.

A heartwarming, hopeful dragon-filled journey through family life and the importance of finding common ground. *(Fantasy. 8-12)*

**SPIRIT WEEK**

*Marks, Ira*

Little, Brown (304 pp.)

$12.99 paper | Oct. 25, 2022

978-0-316-27806-5

An old Colorado hotel with dark secrets and a brooding horror novelist as its caretaker make a properly atmospheric setting for a young filmmaker’s latest project.

Fresh from the cinematic escapades of Shark Summer (2021), teenage documentarian Elijah Jones arrives in Estes Park thinking he’s been invited to record a rare interview with famous recluse Jack Axworth—but he’s actually been summoned to make a biopic of the novelist, who has young-onset dementia. Once again, the footage Elijah ends up with tells more than the story he set out to make, as Axworth’s poigniant reminiscences and increasingly erratic behavior become inextricably mixed with a portrait of a struggling town whose history and very survival center on the nearby Underlook Hotel, a closed-up resort haunted by tales of supernatural evil and slated for imminent demolition. Is there time to save it? The storyline struggles to advance through thickets of subplots and hints, but the Underlook’s deadline adds enough suspense to keep readers interested, and the hotel turns out to have hidden levels and treasures to be discovered when the action flags. Also, Marcks trotts out such an engaging supporting cast, led by local teen engineering whiz Suzy Hess and including colorful characters like a ghost hunter with a truly creepy crow, that watching the ensemble in action is pleasurable enough. Finished art was not seen, but Elijah and another significant character present as Black in the otherwise White cast.

Stronger in character than plot but spooky in parts. *(Graphic fiction. 10-13)*
If Dinosaurs Had Hair

Marvin, Dan
Illus. by Lesley Vamos
Roaring Brook Press (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-250-79256-3

Ever wonder why there are no dinosaurs?

Marvin and Vamos offer a possible answer with a humorous twist: Dinosaurs had hair. Imagine! If dinosaurs had hair, they must have had hair problems, too, like “parents who brushed it too hard,” “siblings who pulled it,” and “snarls. SO. MANY // SNARLS.” And if dinosaurs had hair, they probably flaunted their impressive styles by “flying with flair,” “galloping with gusto,” and “swimming with sass,” all of which led to gossip, jealousy, and hair drama like the “HAIR // WARFARE!” between Team Hair-o-dactyl and Team Pompadour-o-saurus, complete with Jurassic jeers and computer game–esque illustrations. Readers see a battle of hairstyles, “from pigtailed to pixie cuts...// from pageboys to perms.” The winning style? “BIG BANGS!” As a T. rex shows off his hairdo, illustrations show asteroids raining down in the background; the final page shows a lone, feathered dino who has survived—consistent with the theory that dinosaurs evolved into birds. The book’s climax may also provide a teachable moment to distinguish the concept of the Big Bang from theories of extinction. The primary text moves the story forward briskly, but a second layer of sassy commentary, times, and punny speech bubbles also add humor for older readers and adults. Detailed, digitally created illustrations feature vibrant colors, hilarious hairstyles, and dinosaur facial features with lots of attitude and emotions, making this a book that will be read and reread often. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A laugh-out-loud, dino-themed farce. (Picture book 5-8)

ScalEs And Stardust

McIsaac, Meaghan
Holiday House (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-8234-4661-2
Series: The Bear House, 2

Fourteen-year-old Aster Lourdes is now the Major, ruler of the Bear Higien, but there’s still turmoil in the kingdom in this sequel to The Bear House (2021). When a star falls from On-High, something that hasn’t happened in 200 years, royalty from all over flock to the Kingdom of Felisbrook for the Shooting Star Parade. The new Queen of Felisbrook, Iris Goreman, although selected by a High Beast, isn’t accepted by everyone. Some in the kingdom are still loyal to the previous—now exiled—ruler. When Iris, Aster, and Aster’s friends Dev, Lorc, and Quintin discover a mysterious girl in the Deadwood, they have no idea of the danger that awaits. The Moon Door is open, and the Terror Maids, a trio of sisters turned into Moon Demons, have plans for the girl that threaten the entire Highen. This medieval fantasy has court politics, lovable and unique beasts, spooky evil creatures, and just a hint of romance. The intricate lore of this constellation-inspired world continues to grow. As before, there’s a complete story arc but still many open threads that could be explored. Patience is required, as this tale takes a while to get going and sometimes the writing feels repetitive, but it pays off in a cinematic finale. Most characters are assumed white; Iris has brown skin.

Not quite as captivating as the first book, but the rich worldbuilding continues to shine. (map) (Fantasy. 10-14)

When Your Daddy’s a Soldier

McLellan, Gretchen Brandenburg
Illus. by E.G. Keller
Viking (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-593-46390-1

Life continues when parents are overseas.

An unnamed narrator is proud of his soldier father. The boy often engages in imaginative play that mimics his perceptions of military life, but he’s also saddened by his father’s long absences. The boy and his mother and sister do their best to cope, writing letters to Daddy, sending him things (like a seashell and a skipping stone) that will remind him of them, and, when Daddy does come home, celebrating his return. Digital illustrations beautifully capture each family member’s emotions and speak volumes to the stress endured by military families; the art will pull in readers, especially military families. Unfortunately, the book includes the harmful, outdated message that boys should hide their sadness and that the suppression of valid emotions equates to maturity and bravery: “Our daddy is going to war. Sis cries, but I try to act like a soldier. Brave. Daddy says he’s proud of me, but his voice sounds lumpy. Later, I hide in my fort and cry.” It’s an unfortunate addition in a story dealing with a topic of relevance to many. The boy, his father, and his sister are brown-skinned; their mother is lighter-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Well intentioned and earnest but laced with problematic “boys don’t cry” messaging. (Picture book 6-10)

My Mom Is a Spy

McNab, Andy & Jess French
Illus. by Nathan Reed
Welbeck Flame (176 pp.)
$8.95 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-80130-030-8
Series: My Mom Is a Spy, 1

The peaceful life Idris shares with his mum is upended when her boyfriend, David García, and his daughter, Lucía, come to stay for half term.
Though Idris knows his mom is a worker in a paper clip factory. Lucia is convinced that she is really a spy. Idris is skeptical, but Lucia, a spy enthusiast herself, becomes more suspicious when three pangolins are stolen from the zoo where her veterinarian dad works. And, even more strangely, on a trip to the zoo the next day, Idris’ mum seems to be associating with a vulture-like man named Victor. After Mum goes missing, Idris works with Lucía to find her and uncover the mystery of the stolen pangolins. Idris must come to terms with the realization that his mother has been keeping a secret from him, but, when they are reunited, she assures him her parental love was never in doubt. In this book, the first of a new adventure spy series, veteran author McNab and TV personality and veterinarian French have created a fast-paced spy caper complete with good guys to root for, nefarious villains, and plot twists. An animal lover, Idris is a relatable narrator; his interactions with Philby, Lucia’s dog, and Budi, an unhappy and withdrawn ape, will resonate with readers. Some British vocabulary appears but will be easily understood through context. Idris and his mother appear light-skinned in the illustrations; Lucia and her father are cued as Latine.

Thoroughly entertaining and suspenseful. Kids will eagerly await the next volume. (Fiction. 8-10)

SHOW US WHO YOU ARE
McNicoll, Elle
Crown (304 pp.)
978-0-593-56300-7 PLB

An autistic London girl discovers that a groundbreaking technology comes at a heavy cost.

Usually, 12-year-old Cora Byers doesn’t mind being autistic. But when her teacher patronizes her and classmates bully her, sometimes it feels very important to be “normal” and mimic neurotypical interactions. So when she’s dragged to a party hosted by her brother’s boss, CEO Magnus Hawkins of the prestigious Pomegranate Institute, she doesn’t expect to befriend Adrien, Hawkins’ son. Adrien, who has ADHD, doesn’t care about Pomegranate Institute, she doesn’t expect to befriend Adrien, feeling a destructive blaze. But, with kindness and a heartfelt desire to do the right thing, Carolina and her friends learn to own up to their mistakes and move forward together.

A touching, entertaining read about caring for others—human and horse alike. (Fiction. 8-12)

WHERE THERE’S SMOKE
Méndez, Tamile Saited
Scholastic (224 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-338-74950-2
Series: Horse Country, 3

A sixth grader deals with challenges stemming from her first crush and the threat of local wildfires near the horse ranch where her family lives. Fans will enjoy seeing 11-year-old Carolina Aguasvivas, the ranch manager’s daughter, mature in this third series installment. Having learned valuable life lessons in the previous books, a self-aware Carolina is excited to welcome Rockwell Richards, the newest scholarship recipient, to the ranch’s riding program. But misunderstandings arise when Carolina unexpectedly develops a crush on Rockwell and isn’t sure how to act around him. Suddenly, Chelsie, the ranch owner’s daughter and one of Carolina’s closest friends, begins avoiding her and spending more time with bully Loretta, who makes fun of Rockwell for being chubby. Rockwell is very protective of his little brother who has Down syndrome and prides himself on being kind and accepting.

A touching, perceptive take on grief, technology, and self-acceptance. (Science fiction. 9-13)

BROADWAY BABY
Miller, Russell with Judith Proffer
Illus. by Yoko Matsuoka
Meteor 17 Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-957317-04-5

This Broadway baby is looking for a tube of greasepaint and a turn in the spotlight.

In this love letter to Broadway, specifically musical theater, a toddler with curly brown hair and pale skin dreams about the day when they are old enough to perform on stage. Although the story attempts to create a safe space for theater kids who feel
like loners (“I dream about Broadway, / my name big and bright. // The music, / the dancing, / my opening night. // Where cornfields soar / and animals roam. / Where tap shoes and misfits / all feel right at home”), there’s a heavy emphasis on performing for the adoration and fame as opposed to the joy of theater: “With curtain calls over, I rush out to see / fans at the stage door waiting for me.” While many of the verses would apply to an older reader, the text and the illustrations make the narrator a literal “Broadway Baby”: “What good is chilling / at home in my crib? / I’ll dress up my diaper, / I’ll sequin my bib.” The combination of fame-hunting and infancy may appeal to a few pageant moms desperate for a toddler-sized tiara, but readers genuinely interested in performing will be disinterested by a too-young narrator. The cluttered illustrations do little to advance (or save) the story. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

This flop should have closed in previews. (Picture book. 2-6)

BEST WISHES
Mlynowski, Sarah
Illus. by Maxine Vee
Scholastic (192 pp.)
$15.99 l Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-338-62825-8
Series: Best Wishes, 1

Be careful what you wish for.

Becca, who lives on New York City’s Upper West Side, is planning a sleepover for her 10th birthday. But her best, and only, friend, Harper, seems uninterested, admitting that she has a new best friend. After the two have a falling out, Becca is truly friendless. Everything changes when she receives a mysterious box containing a magic bracelet with a poem saying that the bracelet will ease her sadness and will provide a single wish. She is instructed to mail the bracelet forward when it is no longer needed. Becca wishes everyone to be her pal, and almost immediately, kids are talking to her, complimenting her, and inviting her to sit with them at lunch. It all seems wonderful but soon gets out of hand. She now wants the bracelet off. But it’s not so easy. Becca narrates her story via a letter to an unknown Addie Asante, describing in meticulous detail her adventures in the realm of magic, holding nothing back as she questions events, eventually finding new understanding and new friends. Becca is Jewish and depicted as light-skinned in Vee’s black-and-white illustrations; she seamlessly includes descriptions of family traditions. Harper is cued South Asian. Readers will love Becca for her humor, honesty, kindness, and insecurities. Many mysteries remain unsolved, but Addie is to be the next recipient of the box and probably the hero of the next book in this new series.

A coming-of-age tale told with humor, compassion, and more than a touch of magic. (Fantasy. 8-11)

CORE 52 FAMILY EDITION
Build Kids’ Bible Confidence in 10 Minutes a Day
Moore, Mark E. & Megan Howerton
Illus. by Grace Habib
WaterBrook (224 pp.)
$16.99 l Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-593-23629-1

In conversational and straightforward prose, a father-and-daughter team provide a simple guide to building Christian faith.

Designed to be worked through in 10 to 15 minutes per day, five days per week, over the course of one year, this work covers key Bible passages, examining topics like life purpose, core identity, discovering joy, and how to pray. The sample conversations start scripted and may be helpful for some adult caregivers but may feel forced for others. Designed to prompt self-reflection and including service-based challenges, this is a guide to living out faith in action and a resource that defines challenging concepts at a child-appropriate level. Though it steers clear of some key social issues, God’s perspective on racism is explored with strategies for being more inclusive. Parents and young readers may find this resource an easy way to integrate their faith throughout the week.

A simple, practical daily guide to complex Bible topics for Christian families. (Nonfiction. 7-12)

MRS NOAH’S SONG
Morris, Jackie
Illus. by James Mayhew
Otter-Barry (40 pp.)
$17.99 l Oct. 1, 2022
978-1-913074-42-5

A matriarch shares the wonder of song.

Mrs Noah sings constantly while she sews, gardens, and wakes her children for a new day. The children ask where she learned to sing, and she looks sad as she replies, “Far away and long ago.” When pressed by her youngest child, she elaborates that her mother and her grandmother were her teachers and that sadness can be good when reminiscing about people you love. In the verdant garden, Mrs Noah tells her children to close their eyes and listen. After a moment, the children hear birds singing, bees humming, and a breeze whispering in the leaves. They are amazed, but Mrs Noah says the garden sings best in the morning, just as the sun rises. Mr Noah sews a huge hammock so the family can sleep in the garden that night to be
ready for the dawn. In Morris and Mayhew’s latest adaptation of the Judeo-Christian story of Noah and the ark, life after the flood is once more enchanted and interwoven with nature. The imagery-rich text and lavish collage and mixed-media art create a harmonious composition that touches on themes of oral storytelling, generational art, and rebirth (“Does this happen every morning?” one child asks, to which Mrs Noah replies, “Every morning. A wild song to raise the sun”). The children have varying skin tones inherited from dark-skinned Mrs Noah and pale Mr Noah. (This book was reviewed digitally.) Dulcet elegance. (Religious picture book. 4-8)

**CHILDREN OF THE STONE CITY**
Naidoo, Beverly
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(240 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-06-309696-7

Twelve-year-old Adam and his 10-year-old sister, Leila, have grown up inside the Stone City. Even though they are Nons—lower-class citizens under the rule of the Permitted—their father’s accomplishments have allowed them to get a good education and take music lessons. Things become uncertain when their father unexpectedly dies, especially with their mother’s possible deportation. As things in the city get worse for Nons, for example, having their houses taken, Adam and Leila follow the rules and try to go unnoticed. One day, while the siblings are walking home together, their friend Zak pranks some Permitted teen boys, leading them to accuse him of attempted murder. And simply because he gave his friend a farewell hand slap, Adam is implicated in assisting Zak in the fabricated crime and is sent to a detention center. Though the plot is heavy and full of trauma, the author’s note maintains hope and pursuit of freedom. Themes of equality, human rights, and justice prompt readers to reflect on how they can improve the world.

A timely, powerful, relevant story. (Fiction. 10-14)

**5,000 AWESOME FACTS (ABOUT ANIMALS!)**
National Geographic
National Geographic Kids (224 pp.)
$19.99 | $29.90 PLB | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-4263-7261-2
978-1-4263-7262-9 PLB
Series: 5,000 Awesome Facts

A colorful, information-packed guide created from a trusted publisher in the science world. Vivid and jammed with information, this resource is suitable for browsing by the many children who are fascinated with animals. Young readers will enjoy perusing this book for the high-quality colorful photographs scattered throughout as much as for the data, and the lively, exciting format will appeal even to struggling and reluctant readers. Each two-page spread includes tidbits about a different topic roughly organized by theme, some of which focus on a specific type of animal, while others are broader in scope. Sections include “100 Swimmingly Fun Facts About Marine Mammals,” “35 Facts About Glorious Gorillas,” and “30 Towering Facts About Giant Prehistoric Animals.” Diverse locations from the Himalaya to the Galápagos Islands and the Serengeti are featured. Pets starring on social media, animals used as sports mascots, and record-holding animals are included. The layout is varied: Some pages feature small chunks of data separated into individual boxes, others use a list format, and occasionally there is a spread that is predominantly text, with individual facts printed in alternating colors. Due to the brevity of each factoid, this is a work well suited for trivia buffs and casual explorers that will require further reading and research by those who wish to delve deeper into anything of interest.

Lively and full of interest. (photo credits, index) (Nonfiction. 9-12)

**MWIKALI AND THE FORBIDDEN MASK**
Nguru, Shiko
Illus. by Melissa McIndoe
Lantana (228 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-91747-93-0
Series: Intasimi Warriors, 1

A sixth grader discovers her true powers just in time to save the world.

Mwikali has never stayed in the same place for long. Her mother’s job as a flight attendant has given her permanent new-girl status at every school she’s attended across the world. This year will be different. She has returned with her mother to her birthplace, Nairobi, Kenya, to attend elite Savanna Academy. After being accused of cursing her friend Amanda and sending her to the hospital at her previous school, Mwikali cannot afford to make waves again. Her first day ruins
any chance to fly under the radar, however, when she freaks out after witnessing her teacher turn into a monster. Unfortunately, she’s the only one who can see what happened, and her chance for a regular school year seems to be crushed. Fortunately, three of her classmates—Odwar, Soni, and Xirsi—believe Mwikali because they recognize her gift. They are all Intasimi, people from magical bloodlines, some of whom are born with special powers. Her new friends help Mwikali hone her skills, prepare to confront the monsters hiding in plain sight, and save the world from a dark future. Nguru’s series-opening debut is rich in the mythology and beauty of Kenya. Although the climax is slightly rushed, the strong characterization supports the work: Mwikali’s path from self-doubt to confidence inspires, and her struggles with friendship feel universal. A handful of charming full-page illustrations enhance the work.

A heartfelt page-turner. (Fantasy 9-13)

A DREAM FOR EVERY SEASON

Njie, Haddy
Illus. by Lisa Aisato
Trans. by Megan Turney & Rachel Rankin
Arctis Books (40 pp.)
$18.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-64690-023-7

A cyclical dream of seasons to come. Originally written in Norwegian, this story in verse follows the four seasons as they each in turn emerge from their slumber to change the landscape of a village and a nearby field with an apple tree. With each passing season, a different child is depicted nestled into the larger landscape asleep. As the year progresses, a pair of young children with pale skin and straight dark hair play and interact with the tree, but the real stars of the book are the seasons, each emerging with a vibrant design from various locations near the tree. Spring, a pale young boy with grassy hair, slumbers underground, emerging to dance around the town, a cloud of pollen surrounding him. Summer, a dark-skinned girl with hair made up of multicolored daisies, swings with joy after awakening in a flower bud. After snoozing inside an apple, a middle-aged, pale-skinned Autumn trails falling leaves from her flowing mane of auburn locks as she walks through the countryside, and an elderly, pale-skinned Winter, wrapped in coats and scarves, surveys the town after snoozing against the trunk under a toadstool. Readers of all ages will happily study the painterly illustrations for seasons to come, and the verse creates a soothing lullaby perfect for a nap at any time of the year. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sure to be a favorite no matter what season readers are welcoming. (Picture book 4-8)

THE PERFECT ROCK

Noble, Sarah
Flying Eye Books (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-83874-051-1

Juvenile otters learn an important lesson.

After a busy day frolicking in coastal waters, otters Ollie, Bea, and Ula enjoy a shellfish feast with their mother, who tells them they need something to help them open shells so they can feast on their own one day. Mama and Papa suggest it will take time to find the perfect rock, which must be “tough enough to break the hardest shells,” “smooth enough to dance in your paws,” and “something you hold dear, something you’ll hold tight and never lose.” Together Ollie, Bea, and Ula search until they find a rock that’s tough, smooth, and one they all love. However, with only one perfect rock, sibling rivalry rears its head when Bea grabs it and flees with a shocked Ula and Ollie in pursuit. A frantic underwater chase ensues until a swooping bird carries off their perfect stone. Angry and sad, Ollie, Bea, and Ula refuse

A solid, action-filled comedy with a crucial message. (Graphic fiction 8-11)
to acknowledge one another on the swim home until a storm strikes and they all embrace tightly. Rendered in loose strokes of blues, greens, violets, and pinks, lively illustrations capture the luminosity and fluidity of the sea as well as the playfulness of the sleek little otters in close-ups, vignettes, and double-page spreads, while the perfect rock proves an ideal metaphor for the strength, comfort, and love of family. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Heartwarming and uplifting. (Picture book. 3-7)

WANDA THE BRAVE
Nontobakhwezi, Sihle-isipho
Illus. by Chantelle Thorne & Burgen Thorne
Crocodile/Interlink (32 pp.)
$18.95 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-62371-811-4

Sometimes kids must speak out until adults listen.

In this follow-up to Wanda (2021), co-authored by Mathabo Tlali and also set in South Africa, the protagonist and her mom go to O’Natural, a hair salon for children run by Aunty Ada. Wanda has brought a picture of a complicated, “pineapple-looking,” braided hairstyle she wants, but Aunty Ada dismisses Wanda’s wishes because the salon is busy. Aunty Ada slathers Vaseline and then cream on Wanda’s hair, and it starts to burn. She and Nkiruka, another girl, protest, but Ada tells them “ubuhle buyasetyenzelwa,” isiXhosa (a South African Bantu language) for “One works hard for beauty,” and insists that the straightening chemicals remain in their hair longer despite the pain. Both girls confide that their teachers call their hair a bird’s nest when they wear it natural, and together they sing a protest song to get Aunty Ada to wash out the relaxer. The two are successful, their determination conveying a crucial lesson both to Aunty Ada and to readers about bodily autonomy. This story sheds light on a common beauty practice of chemically straightening Black hair—a process that often causes painful scalp burns. This brightly colored picture book, dominated by pinks and purples, showcases the beauty of brown skin and natural Black hair, as well as the versatility of hair, and spotlights beauty practices common throughout the African diaspora. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Whether a mirror or window for readers, this culturally rich story exemplifies the importance of self-advocacy. (Glossary) (Picture book. 4-7)

BLACK GOLD
Obuobi, Laura
Illus. by London Ladd
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-301576-0

This new creation myth centers darkness as a positive force and positions the Black child as a child of the Universe.

Night skies, images of nature, and a Black parent and child grace the pages of this picture book addressed to the child. Describing how the child was created, Obuobi begins, “When the Universe decided to create you, / she drew you from the earth— / rich, / dark, / and full of everything that gives life.” The Universe shaped the child’s features, including “full lips / to speak your truth” and coiled hair, then adorned the child with gold, breathed life into them, and sent them to the Sun for light and to the Moon for wisdom. Finally, the Universe, personified in the form of a female figure with thick hair, filled the child with love from her own arms, whereupon “her work was complete.” After telling the child where they come from, the narrator tells them how to answer anyone who asks about their origins. This emotionally charged tale has the power of a strong embrace, framing the Black child’s life and existence as nothing less than a miracle born of love. Ladd’s acrylic paint and collage artwork is richly textured, layered with color and shadow for an intense visual treat full of movement and depth. Free-spirited caregivers will relish sharing this nurturing tale with their children. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A stunning work of art. (Picture book. 3-8)

ELEPHANTS REMEMBER
A True Story
O’Connell, Jennifer
Tilbury House (48 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-88448-928-3

A look at the friendship between a conservationist and the elephant herd he rescues.

When the elephants need to be relocated as a result of their destructive wanderings, Lawrence Anthony knows that if he does not take the herd to Thula Thula, his animal reserve in Zululand, South Africa, the animals risk being killed by poachers. Two elephants—the matriarch and her calf—were killed during their capture, and Lawrence struggles to gain the animals’ trust and ensure their safety and well-being. Slowly he succeeds, and his initially uneasy relationship with new matriarch Nana develops into a lasting bond; even after Lawrence tries to distance himself from the elephants, granting them their independence, the elephants never forget him, and on his death, they come to his house, seemingly to mourn him. This is a compelling true story that will leave readers on the edges of their seats. O’Connell’s text is supplemented with backmatter.
that includes information, in question-and-answer format, about elephants, Lawrence Anthony, and Thula Thula as well as an author’s note and a list of additional resources. Acrylic illustrations capture Nana’s anger and mistrust of humans and Lawrence’s patience with the herd. Librarians and educators should prepare for a rush of elephant-related questions once this book hits the shelves, and caregivers may find themselves equally fascinated by this heartbreaking story of trust, survival, and loss. Lawrence is White. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An excellent story, well told. You’ll remember it always.

(Informational picture book. 6-10)

MEMORIES AND LIFE LESSONS FROM THE MAGIC TREE HOUSE
Osborne, Mary Pope
Illus. by Sal Murdocca
Random House (144 pp.)
$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-48454-8
978-0-593-48460-9 PLB

An author reminisces on her life and her work.

After 30 years of writing the Magic Tree House series, Osborne collects some of the books’ core values and lessons and makes connections to moments in her own life, whether formative or small. As a child in a military family, she moved frequently and often relied on her siblings, her imagination, and nature for reliable amusement. The 10 chapters each present a different theme, such as the importance of compassion, the magic of a good book, honoring heroes, and the warning to “Be Daring, but Not Foolish.” Each short chapter presents particular maxims, some of which are more profound than others (“Look outside yourself to find unexpected treasure all around you” versus “Love dogs. Start now”), but they are always sincere. Prefacing each of Osborne’s reminisces are selections from various series installments that relate to the theme at hand. However, this scrapbook memoir is only loosely tied together, and readers will probably get only minor satisfaction from it unless they are great fans of the series. Two-toned pictures by the original series illustrator, Murdocca, are interspersed throughout; children depicted present White. Bookending the text are notes from the author on why she decided to write this work as well as the moment of inspiration for the series. Also included are some of Osborne’s family photographs.

Strictly for the author’s devotees. (Nonfiction. 7-12)
“A book to share, a community to celebrate, and a spirit to promote everywhere.”

ALL ARE NEIGHBORS

in a large font as vehicles travel and people gather and happily find books. The book is colorful, using seemingly every color of the rainbow, evoking the feeling of a busy summer day. Though the narrative is a little disjointed, the depiction of a diverse, supportive community is heartening, and spreads filled with vehicles will delight readers—a look at the inside of a tractor is especially enjoyable. Backmatter describes the history of the bookmobile and includes photos of various book delivery methods across the world. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A fun introduction to bookmobiles. (Picture book. 3-5)

GARLIC AND THE WITCH
Paulsen, Bree
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(160 pp.)
$22.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-06-299512-4

In this follow-up to Garlic and the Vampire (2021), vegetable helpers become human.

In Paulsen’s first foray into this world, Garlic and her vegetable friends showed up fully formed. The second installment explains how they were harvested when melancholy, light-skinned Witch Agnes decided to grow herself some helpers, making her world a brighter place. She’s still working on a blood substitute for her vampire friend, Count, and sends Garlic and Count to a far-off market to retrieve some bloodroot. Garlic, meanwhile, is worried about sprouting a fifth finger, not having been told that she and her vegetable friends would eventually become human. There are a few sticky storytelling moments—it’s hard to believe that it would take the witch so long to remember that a plant called bloodroot might be helpful in synthesizing blood, and it’s unclear for quite a while that Garlic’s concerns revolve around her number of fingers. The cheerful art, rendered in an autumnal palette, and relatable characters remain the series’ main draws, though this story veers a bit more toward cloying sentimentality than the first, with many overt conversations about being yourself and embracing change even though it’s scary. Still, though, when the vegetables turn into a multicultural group of humans, readers will close the book feeling good.

Earnest and thoughtful. (Graphic novel. 7-10)

AKPA’S JOURNEY
Pelletier, Mia
Illus. by Kagan McLeod
Inhabit Media (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-77227-429-5

The amazing migration of a murre chick, hatched in the Arctic and combining swimming and flying for a journey unique in the bird world.

Nesting high on cliffs that tower above the sea, murres gather in the thousands, nesting pairs taking turns guarding the egg from predators and keeping it warm and then feeding the chick once hatched. The book follows the titular chick as he grows through late summer. On a night with a full moon, the fathers and chicks leap off the cliffs into the sea. The young birds cannot yet fly and will start their migrations by swimming with their fathers. Along the route, Akpa grows stronger, learns important skills, and meets a narwhal, a walrus, and a seal, all of whom give him advice that comes in handy several weeks later when it’s at last time for Akpa to take to the skies to finish his journey. This relatively unknown migration will fascinate readers who are mature enough to sit through the rather lengthy text, and the language will captivate: Winter would soon be “slowly stitching the waves together with ice.” “Fish darted like silver needles sewing a silky blue gown.” The blockiness of the cliffs lends a nice visual texture to the slightly stylized artwork, especially against the blues of the sky and sea. Dialogue uses italicized text rather than quotation marks, and the endnote contains additional vital information. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Readers will not want to miss this migration story: (range map, glossary of Inuktut words) (Informational picture book. 5-10)

ALL ARE NEIGHBORS
Penfold, Alexandra
Illus. by Suzanne Kaufman
Knopf (44 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-593-42998-3
978-0-593-42999-0 PLB

“What is a community? It’s a place for you and me.”

From a poster on the underside of the book jacket showing an array of people to a spread featuring neighborhood businesses on the case cover, this follow-up to All Are Welcome (2018) celebrates a vibrant community. A brown-skinned family—an adult, a child, and an infant—move into a new residence. Other brown-skinned neighbors on the block greet the newcomers with smiles and raised hands. Spread by spread, the family meets new people who are diverse in terms of age, race, religion, and ability. Friendships are formed at a corner market, on busy sidewalks, at a coffee shop, at a library, at a playground, and elsewhere. Penfold’s easy, concise, rhythmic verse offers an age-appropriate road map for how to meet neighbors and make friends (“A friendly smile, a familiar face, / Helping hands, just in case”). Kaufman’s vivid and bold illustrations feature a mainly primary palette and a variety of perspectives as well as myriad details to delight eagle-eyed young readers. Moreover, the careful attention to inclusion and equity (the wheelchair ramp to the library goes right to the front door) will prompt thoughtful conversations about how all people can contribute to and enjoy their neighborhood. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A book to share, a community to celebrate, and a spirit to promote everywhere. (Picture book. 3-7)
ME AND YOU IN A BOOK MADE FOR TWO
Reidy, Team
Illus. by Joey Chou

The arrival of a purple-hued owl inspires two brown-haired, tan-skinned children staring out the window to ponder: “Life’s an adventure—/a story—/that’s true!/Now imagine our tale/in a book made for two!/What would we do in a book,/ME AND YOU?//Would we dance in a rainstorm/and dodge every drop?//Would we race on a rainbow/and meet at the top?” From there, the characters seem to climb into their own book as the pages change from one far-flung adventure to another. The poetic text may inspire imaginative readers to consider their own daydreams and fantasies, but some may need a shot of insulation to counter the saccharine sweetness of the poem. The digital illustrations don’t temper that feeling, as their diverse array of rosy-cheeked children seem to take inspiration from the animatronic characters of It’s a Small World but with unnerving dead-eyed stares, all set against backgrounds created through shapes and designs in varying degrees of subtlety. Even the most ardent bibliophile would suggest they pull it back a little. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sometimes too much is too much. (Picture book. 4-6)

THE SECRET STREAM
Ridley, Kimberly
Illus. by Megan Elizabeth Baratta
Tilbury House (40 pp.) $18.95 | Oct. 18, 2022 978-0-88448-817-0

Follow a headwater stream from its start as a spring in the forest on its journey to becoming a river, nourishing life all along its length.

The main text, written in the first person from the point of view of the stream itself, sticks to the top or left of each spread, introducing major ideas: how insect larvae and nymphs recycle leaves; kingfishers; beaver dams, etc. Further information, on, for instance, aquatic insect metamorphosis or otters’ transparent eyelids, is found underneath headings in a slightly smaller font. As the water flows downstream, children read about riffles, how aquatic insects must anchor themselves or be washed down to be a trout’s meal, the importance of trees along the stream’s banks, and the animals that find food or shelter near the water. Most but not all animal species are labeled in the illustrations, which are mostly realistic looking and come to life with masterful use of shading and sunbeams. The text alternates between rhyming and non, which can be distracting. Endpages are two halves of a map showing the course of the stream and the many sights pointed out in the text. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

MALIK’S NUMBER THOUGHTS
A Story About OCD
Rompella, Natalie
Illus. by Alessia Girasole

Malik wants to go to his friend’s birthday party, but he’s afraid his obsessive compulsive disorder—his “Number Thoughts”—will get in the way.

Malik, a boy with brown skin and dark, coily hair, has been dealing with his Number Thoughts since last year. He feels compelled to count everything he does, such as tapping his pencil or blinking before going to sleep, and he feels scared and anxious when he doesn’t do things in fours. Malik is worried that his Number Thoughts will get in the way at the party; but he draws on techniques given to him by his therapist, such as deep breathing. This book provides a simple, realistic explanation of OCD, presenting it as something that can be coped with rather than as a problem to be easily solved. Children who have OCD will likely see themselves reflected in Malik and will benefit from the calming and centering techniques provided. These are incorporated into the story, modeled by Malik, so that readers can absorb them in context. The book could also be a useful teaching tool to help children who do not have OCD understand it. Unfortunately, the plot is a bit boring, and the tone is didactic. The illustrations are cute, providing support for the text, though they are static at times. Malik’s therapist is light-skinned, and his friends are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A straightforward tale that sheds light on OCD. (Additional information on OCD) (Picture book. 4-8)

ROVER AND SPECK
This Planet Rocks!
Roth, Jonathan
Series: Rover and Speck,1

Two robots explore a strange planet and form a friendship along the way.

Rover’s landing on an unidentified planet is a bit rough, resulting in a damaged communication antenna, but the wheeled robot explorer can still search the planet for new discoveries. One search unearths Speck (which stands for Special Planet Explorer Class-K), an enthusiastic, helpful, slightly ditzy,
When the barber refuses to do a quick cut, Blue Buffalo draws Rover, adorable Speck, and the fun-loving rock people. Rocky and his friends break into song ("Rocks will, rocks will help you! / Rocks will, rocks will help you!"). Although the music isn't loud enough to call Rover's ship, Rover, with help from Speck and the rock people, finds another way to make contact. Amusing science-speak like "ignitable mineral masses" (coal) and "nearest spheroid of luminous stellar plasma" (the sun) dot the text, and periodic "Fun Science Facts" add tidbits of relevant information about minerals, microseconds, space caves, and more—and sometimes a joke. Brightly colored cartoon illustrations tell the story clearly and bring to life earnest Rover, adorable Speck, and the fun-loving rock people.

An appealing tale that suggests that music is the path to interplanetary harmony. (information on famous rovers, drawing instructions) (Graphic novel. 7-10)

BLUE BISON NEEDS A HAIRCUT
Rothman, Scott
Illus. by Pete Oswald
Random House Studio (40 pp.)
978-0-593-42816-0
978-0-593-42817-7 PLB

A bad hair day prompts hours of angst.

Blue Bison prefers "to look nice and neat for his family and playground associates," and the difference between a scruffy, long-haired Blue Bison and a Blue Bison with a spiffy new haircut is striking. Blue Bison needs a haircut (though his mother corrects him: "You WANT to get a haircut. You don't NEED to"). But for some reason, the entire town, including the barber shop, is closed—for days. Blue Bison grows, snorts puffs of anger, and then rams his head into a nearby rock, as any true bison would. Little sister Bubble Gum Bison grabs her scissors and offers to help, but Blue Bison first visits the barber's home. When the barber refuses to do a quick cut, Blue Buffalo dramatically "wallow[s]." Family and friends try to cheer him up; Bubble Gum Bison's suggestion makes Blue Bison laugh and turns the day around. The next day, Blue Buffalo wakes without a care for his hair, but when he looks in the mirror, he discovers someone has given him a haircut that he doesn't just like—but absolutely loves. Digital illustrations add layers of texture and humor through emotionally expressive Blue Bison's close-ups and creative details to pore over like a billboard for "extra soft"

This one puts the "ha" in "haircut"—be prepared to snuggle up and laugh often. (Picture book. 3-8)

THE LAST DODO
Roxas, Isabel
Flying Eye Books (96 pp.)
$22.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-83874-055-9
Series: The Adventures of Team Pom, 2

This latest series installment sees Team Pom dealing with dodos.

Well, technically, as the title suggests, there's only one dodo—at least at first—and his name is Steve. Steve is no birdbrain; he used to be the powerful Overlord of C.A.O.S. (the Criminal Agents of Steve), a band of nefarious ne'er-do-wells who were brought to their knees by Team Pom. Team Pom is composed of animal lover Agnes, genius Ruby, and team leader Roberto, three friends in matching orange-and-white track suits who are unstoppable when they work together. Steve's hoping that's not the case, however, as he needs Team Pom out of the way so that he can herald in the Age of the Dodo, a plan that involves using a ray gun to zap humans and turn them into dodos. Can Team Pom stop Steve before his avian antics succeed? This graphic novel is a little James Bond, a little W eapons of Mass Destruction, a little Steve Jobs, and a lot of fun. Readers will love the larger-than-life characters and the offbeat jokes, brought to life in cool tones of orange. Anyone seeking a creative storyline and droll humor should look no further.

Quirky, inspired fun. (Graphic novel. 9-12)

IT'S TOUGH TO BE TINY
The Secret Life of Small Creatures
Ryall Woolcock, Kim
Illus. by Stacey Thomas
Flying Eye Books (48 pp.)
$20.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-83874-853-1

Very small creatures nevertheless have many effective survival strategies.

Jumping out of the way of enemies, shooting them with toxins, relying on armor, and camouflage themselves are all ways tiny creatures can avoid being eaten. But, Ryall Woolcock explains, they can also turn the tables, biting, hunting, herding, or just joining up with others. This survey of survival skills begins cleverly with an illustration of a small pink-skinned child being squished in a crowd. Having made a connection with their intended readers, Ryall Woolcock and Thomas introduce their subject: the "superpowers" of various small creatures. From baby planthoppers, which use gears to perform jumping out of the way so that he can herald in the Age of the Dodo, a plan that involves using a ray gun to zap humans and turn them into dodos. Can Team Pom stop Steve before his avian antics succeed? This graphic novel is a little James Bond, a little W eapons of Mass Destruction, a little Steve Jobs, and a lot of fun. Readers will love the larger-than-life characters and the offbeat jokes, brought to life in cool tones of orange. Anyone seeking a creative storyline and droll humor should look no further.

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set directly on full-bleed illustrations that effectively showcase menacing predators and their potential prey, like the gently humorous cover, which depicts a frog about to be surprised by the beetle it’s hoping to eat. This builds on the information provided by Nathalie Tordjman’s *The Book of Tiny Creatures* (2021), illustrated by Julien Norwood and Emmanuelle Tchoukriel. Humans portrayed are diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An appealing reminder that mighty things come in small packages. *(Informational picture book. 7–9)*

THE MOTHER OF A MOVEMENT
Jeanne Manford—Ally, Activist, and Co-Founder of PFLAG
Sanders, Rob
Illus. by Sam Kalda
Magination/American Psychological Association (40 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-4338-4020-3

A good parent shows up—and stands up.

Jeanne Manford was an excellent mother. When her son Morty told her that he was gay, she accepted him. When Morty was later attacked while protesting discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, Jeanne took action: She started by writing a letter that was published in the *New York Post* that declared that she loved her gay son, a groundbreaking move in the 1970s. Jeanne was also a founding member of PFLAG, which began in 1972 as POG, or Parents of Gays, before becoming Parents FLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). In 2014 the group changed its name to just PFLAG to be more inclusive. In rousing prose, Sanders describes how Jeanne helped motivate other loving parents to create a support network of allies who have diligently worked to help defend equal rights for queer individuals. This is a valuable tool for research projects, with backmatter that includes information on Jeanne’s son Morty Manford, PFLAG’s history, a robust list of sources, and an up-to-date selection of other titles about queer history.

Jeanne presents as White; racially diverse individuals are represented in the illustrations. The artwork has a timeless feel, with a hat tip to the earthy tones of the 1970s. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Stylish, chic, and strong. Brava! *(discussion guide, glossary, image of a protest poster created by Jeanne)* *(Informational picture book. 6-10)*

A LONG WAY FROM HOME
Schaefer, Laura
Carolrhoda (280 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-72841-670-0

Twelve-year-old Abby is full of anxiety about the state of the world. Abby’s physicist mother has taken a job at SpaceNow in Florida, and the family has relocated from Pennsylvania, much to Abby’s displeasure. Worse, her mother keeps telling Abby to apply herself and look for the positive, and Abby does not feel heard. Then she meets two unusual looking boys: Adam, who is about her age, and Bix, 9. They don’t seem to belong to this world—and they don’t. As the story unfolds, Abby learns that the two have traveled through a time vortex and need to find Adam’s sister, Vanessa, before the future is irrevocably changed. While the premise is intriguing, the novel is occasionally strained in its presentation, with plot devices being introduced that seem to be there simply to get the story from point to point rather than growing it naturally. Abby, who narrates in first-person present tense, has a voice that seesaws among believable snarky tween, some strangely adult-sounding passages, and a detached narratorial voice not unlike a tour guide’s. Although readers are told Abby is very smart, there is no evidence of that integrated into the plot, and the same limited characterization is used for her oft-mentioned anxiety, in this case through frequent references to her stomach. While the theme is worthy—don’t give up—the delivery is uneven. Abby and her family present White; a prominent secondary character is Latine.

A well-intentioned story that doesn’t quite deliver. *(Science fiction. 9-13)*

SO MUCH SNOW
Schroeder, Kristen
Illus. by Sarah Jacoby
Random House Studio (40 pp.)
978-0-593-30820-2
978-0-593-30821-9 PLB

A series of animals, from smallest to largest, enjoy a week of snowfall, then welcome spring as the snow melts away.

On Monday, a mouse welcomes a few flakes of snow that resemble dandelion puffs. On each subsequent day, the snow accumulates—their word alliterative phrase—and an animal wonders, “How high will it go?” By the time Sunday arrives, only a moose’s antler is visible through the snow ("When will it go?"). Sunshine then begins to melt the snow, with each animal reappearing in the reverse order they were initially presented, and each page has more color than the next, culminating in spring wildflowers. All the animals—mouse, rabbit, fox, wolf, deer, bear, and moose—revel in the
spring weather, their body language and expressions playful and engaging. “But wait!” Another snowflake drifts down, and on the final spread, Bear stands to greet another snowfall. There is much to love here; patterned language, animals, and seasonal surprises combine for a sure hit. Even the back cover is cleverly designed, with each animal’s ears (or antlers) poking out of a mountain of snow. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Bursting with appeal factors for kids, this charming book is perfect for a winter (or spring!) storyline. (Picture book. 3-6)

**THE OCEAN IS KIND OF A BIG DEAL**

Seluk, Nick
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-31465-6
Series: Big Deal

Cartoonist Seluk offers another science-focused picture book, this time taking a dive into the ocean to look at food chains, the role of phytoplankton, and plastic pollution.

Our planet’s ocean is in several ways far from being, as the author claims, “its own ecosystem, living in perfect balance.” Still, with a green krill and a hot-pink octopus taking the lead, he does deliver broadly accurate outline introductions to four oceanic zones, select sea life at each level from whales to microorganisms, and the worldwide effects of oceanic currents. Along with frequent “Oh Hey, Guess What?” inserts of random facts, Seluk’s seascapes feature lots of simply drawn, googly-eyed animals in animated poses and eye-popping hues with the occasional human diver mixed in. An ominous warning that floating plastic is “bad for sea creatures” that might eat it (not to mention people who eat sea creatures) will stir children young enough to regard the title as actual news (as well as older readers), and a set of very simple activities and quizzes at the end is likewise aimed at a broad audience. Humans depicted are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Occasionally simplistic but likely to make a splash, particularly with younger readers. (facts, glossary) (Informational picture book. 6-8)

**PECULIAR PRIMATES**

**Fun Facts About These Curious Creatures**

Shumaker, Debra Kempf
Illus. by Claire Powell
Running Press Kids (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-7624-7820-0

The team who produced *Freaky, Funky Fish* (2021) returns for a primer on primates.

Rhyming couplets provide rudimentary information on chimpanzees, gorillas, howler monkeys, and more. The minimal text—in a bold sans-serif font and with excellent scansion—will pull in reluctant readers and also make for a good read-aloud for the very young. The colorful artwork uses a winning combination of accurate details, sly humor, and expressive, comical facial expressions. On nearly every page, measurements, labels, and brief facts supplement the primary text. A page with the text, “One’s butt is splashed with colored streaks” will have viewers taking in the carefully diagrammed and labeled mandrill anatomy. The recto of this spread is simpler (“Some primates store food in their cheeks”), with one example each of a guenon, patas, mangabey, and macaque—each labeled accordingly—stuffing their faces with fruit. Each page includes a tongue-in-cheek “peculiarity” rating from one to 10. Unsurprisingly, the mandrill—with its side note of “male has a colorful butt to attract females”—scores a 10. Well-researched backmatter offers scientific observations and speculation about unusual appearances and behaviors, plus a few more facts about the highlighted families and about primates in general. The sole spread featuring humans depicts people with varied skin and hair types. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Yes, a barrel of monkeys! (resources for further learning, selected sources) (Informational picture book. 3-8)

**THE GHOST OF DROWNED MEADOW**

Skovron, Kelley
Scholastic (304 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-338-75432-2

A new girl deals with more than one kind of haunting. Morgan Calvino just moved to Long Island from Brooklyn and is having a hard time adjusting. She’s obsessed with a series of Japanese novels, doesn’t know how to wakeboard like the other kids, and also just moved into a notorious haunted house. She reluctantly joins forces with Joel Applebaum, who is described as creepy and weird by the girls Morgan tries to befriend, to unravel mysteries surrounding the child-sized Nazi uniform she finds in the attic, the Hitler Youth camp that existed nearby during the 1930s, and how to send a restless spirit to its resting place (answer: a mix of kindness and the Indigenous practice of smudging with sage). The chills are creepy and well executed, as is the awkwardness of being a new kid in a new environment. However, in a book grappling with the legacy of the Nazi Party in suburban White America, the Nazi characters, children and adults alike, are given more interior life and character development than the single Jewish character. Through flashbacks and one encounter with a friend’s great-grandfather, readers are given multiple opportunities to empathize with and feel sorry for Nazi youth, who are presented as either generic bullies or victims of circumstance with no investment in their shared ideology, a troubling conclusion to present. Characters are cued as White except for one friend who is Black.

Fun as a ghost story but doesn’t fulfill its goal of exploring antisemitism in America. (author’s note) (Paranormal. 9-12)
“Reassuring banter for any young maker hitting their first rough patch.”

**THE MOST MAGNIFICENT IDEA**

Spries, Ashley

*The Most Magnificent Idea* (2014) with a tale about the dreaded block suffered by creators of all sorts.

A light-skinned girl and her best friend, a small cream-and-brown dog, do all sorts of things together: They play and snuggle and fantasize. They also MAKE things! The girl builds "cozy things, whirling things and helpful things" with the help of her trusty assistant. "Her brain is an idea machine. It's so full of ideas that her hands can barely keep up" until one day the idea machine jams and leaves her in a fix. She goes looking for an idea—a MAGNIFICENT new idea—high and low, far and wide, in boxes and books and the basement, and still comes up empty. “Without ideas taking up space, her brain fills up with sad instead,” and all of a sudden from the mess comes a problem needing to be solved. Newly confident that new ideas may not come every day but will come eventually, our protagonist sets off once again at top speed, assistant in tow. Presented simply, in a variety of panels and a few scattered spreads, the flat illustrations may not inspire a blocked young artist, but the message surely will. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Reassuring banter for any young maker hitting their first rough patch. (Picture book 7-9)

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**THE NEW SWITCHEROO**

Snider, Brandon T.

*Illus. by Ed Steckley*

Amulet/Abrams (272 pp.)

$14.99 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-4197-5006-9

Series: Rube Goldberg and His Amazing Machines, 2

Rube Goldberg is back in this second book in the series inspired by the famous cartoonist. It’s election season at Beechwood Middle, and Rube’s friend Pearl Williams is running for class president. Even though he has good intentions, things get messy when Rube agrees to go to the dance with Pearl’s opponent, Emilia Harris, and accidentally botches the irrigation device for Pearl’s school garden project and her automated campaign flyer distributor. Snider introduces a trans girl named Reina Lopez and has Rube grapple with deep-rooted issues of racism (Pearl is Black), sundown towns, and antisemitism (Rube is Jewish). Another character comes out to a friend as gay. These frank conversations about oft-ignored parts of life and history are refreshing, though they sometimes read as heavy-handed, forced inclusion rather than naturally integrated character development. There isn’t much to the plot, as it mostly centers around the election, and the epilogue makes a grab at trying to tie in a mystery from the first book that is shallowly included throughout the second. Steckley’s black-and-white illustrations are at their best when showing detailed, sinister faces or busy details, as in the antiques store The Treasury, where Rube and his mom liked to browse.

A thin plotline that is only slightly redeemed by likable characters. (Fiction. 8-12)

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**CITIZEN SHE!**

Stevan, Caroline

Illus. by Elina Brasliņa

Trans. by Michelle Bailat-Jones

Helvetiq (144 pp.)

$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-3-907293-72-0

An overview of the ongoing worldwide struggle for women’s suffrage and gender equality.

This slim volume translated from the French highlights notable figures from the past and present, describes obstacles to achieving equal voting rights around the world, covers women in government, and outlines other gender-related challenges facing women and girls today. The style is lively and conversational and complemented by attractive full-color illustrations and hand-drawn infographics. However, the language choices at times feel dismissive, as when niqabis are compared to “Zorro or Batman.” Other wording, information, or highlighted examples are confusing, misleading, or incorrect. A strong Western bias pervades the framing of content. Maps show the Global South with a healthy representation of women leaders, yet in describing women heads of government, the book doesn’t name Indira Gandhi; instead it states that “the first woman who often comes to mind is Margaret Thatcher.” Oversimplifications include the elision of the double impact of racism and sexism in describing gender-based wage gaps and the assumption of a gender binary throughout. Confusingly, alongside education, social media, petitions, and similar nonviolent means, explosives and stone-throwing are shown as parts of a “protesters’ toolkit” that might otherwise be understood as inspiration for young activists. The minimal text struggles to cover the ambitious scope, and sources are given for only two studies.

A well-intentioned overview of a critical topic that is disappointingly sloppy in execution. (quiz, glossary, educators’ guide) (Nonfiction. 11-14)
MEGA-PREDATORS OF THE PAST
Stewart, Melissa
Illus. by Howard Gray
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-68263-109-6

A rousing roundup of outsized meat eaters for readers who, like the author, find *Tyrannosaurus rex* and cousin dinos “overexposed and overrated.”

Looking like modern creatures, only much bigger, the extinct predators Stewart selects run from a 28-inch prehistoric scorpion to “railroad car”-sized protoshark Megalodon. A slavering “giant ripper lizard” (*Varanus priscus*) on the cover sets the tone, and as Gray goes on to depict beaked or toothy horrors chasing or snatching prey, the author makes up for the lack of explicit gore with commentary that suggestively goes for the gusto: “*Dive!* *Swish!* *Chomp!* *Gulp!* Meet the Sanders seabird—a prehistoric predator guaranteed to make fish fret and squid squirm.” Each sharply detailed portrait comes with a fact box and, entertainingly, a silhouette with a to-scale human figure flinching, cowering, or fleeing in terror. In a closing twist, the friendship—is changed with the addition of new student Reuben, a boy who doesn’t talk, and seventh grader Rae, a girl who refuses to atone to a teacher for voicing her opinion and must spend time with the younger class until she crafts an apology. The story does a lot of things well, including its subtle examination of masculinity and friendship, although it suffers slightly under some far-fetched plot points, excessively tidy resolutions, and easy summations of trauma. Readers looking for a breezy read will most likely be pleased, but those hoping to sink their teeth into something meatier may find it too saccharine. All main characters read White.

*Sweet but superficial.* (Fiction. 8-12)

THE REAL DEAL
Stoddard, Lindsey
Harper/HarperCollins (272 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-06-320685-4

Some friendships are easy; and some are more complex.

Sixth graders Gabe and Oliver have been best friends since pre-K, when sporty Oliver inspired bookish Gabe to try the teeter-totter—and encouraged him to keep trying it until he got the hang of things. This became the basis of their philosophy of complementary friendship. It’s a solid relationship but one that Gabe sometimes worries about as their interests diverge. However, they’re still a natural choice to work together when their teacher gives the class a storytelling assignment that can take any format they wish. The duo embarks on creating a comic that chronicles the adventures of Gabiver, a fictional detective and crime fighter inspired by Dav Pilkey’s *Dog Man* who is a composite of the two boys. Their assignment—and their friendship—is changed with the addition of new student Reuben, a boy who doesn’t talk, and seventh grader Rae, a girl who...
SNOT, SNEEZES, AND SUPER-SPREADERS
Everything You Need To Know About Viruses and How To Stop Them
Ter Horst, Marc
Illus. by Wendy Panders
Trans. by Laura Watkinson
Greystone Kids (138 pp.)
$19.95  |  Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-77164-973-5

An in-depth look at viruses.
In this work translated from Dutch, the author rightly points out that viruses are ubiquitous but mostly harmless or even, in the case of bacteriophages, potentially beneficial, but here he focuses on those that are “tiny little troublemakers.” Casting them alternately as cartoon villains (“chuckling away” to themselves as conspiracy theorists reject public health measures) and as terrorists that wiped out millions, he explains how viruses in general spread, mutate, and can unpredictably jump from animals to people. Along with retracing in exact detail the likely origins of the 1918 flu pandemic, SARS, AIDS, Ebola, and Covid-19, he describes the ways our immune systems respond to infections and significant medical triumphs. The author does sometimes wander off topic in the interests of telling a colorful story, so the Black Death and Typhoid Mary trot by even though, as he admits, both involved bacteria, not viruses. But a poignant interview with three children who lost their grandfather to Covid-19 adds a tragic personal note to all the tales of generalized catastrophe, and following stout arguments for the value of vaccination, the author closes with hopeful notes about new ways to counter future viral outbreaks and pandemics. Panders’ cartoon drawings of microbes with expressive faces, slimy floods of mucus, and a diverse array of victims (some green-faced) further lighten both message and informational load.

Chronicles episodes in an epic, age-old struggle but lightly enough to keep the megrims at bay. *(index)* (Nonfiction. 9-11)

FULL OF LIFE Exploring Earth’s Biodiversity
Thoms, Isabel
Illus. by Sara Gillingham
Phaidon (224 pp.)
$24.95  |  Oct. 12, 2022
978-1-83866-536-4

A journey through the world of all life on Earth.
Sure, it sounds like a lot—and it is. But by linking all of existence into “Earth’s tree of life”—a concept that borrows from genealogy—readers will find an accessible organization that breaks down the world of living beings into a clear and fascinating read. Starting with true bacteria, the organization moves through archaea (tiny microbes) to eukaryotes (plants, algae, fungi, and animals) and ends with infectious particles (with a note clarifying that scientists don’t agree about whether they are alive). Particularly noteworthy—if one aspect in this exceptional book could be said to be more successful than another—is the overall visual presentation. The graphics are clean, colorful, sophisticated, and eye-catching. Each double-page spread follows the same format: A clade (“a group of living things that share a common ancestor”) is highlighted and described. Common traits, where it fits in the tree of life, its scientific name, more unusual aspects of some members, as well as any benefits or detriments the clade may have to humankind (for example, many bacteria are used to develop medicines) are presented in an organized, easy-to-understand manner. Humans are given the same treatment as the rest of the living creatures, and from this, readers will understand we are just one life form out of billions, and our survival depends on the health of every other living thing.

Absolutely stunning. *(resources, glossary, index)* (Nonfiction. 10-16)

HOLD THEM CLOSE
A Love Letter to Black Children
Thompkins-Bigelow, Jamilah
Illus. by Patrick Dougher
Photos by Jamel Shabazz
Harper/HarperCollins (48 pp.)
$18.99  |  Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-06-303617-8

“When happy things come to you / hold them close and never let go.”
Verse and mixed-media artwork blend for a work that aims to guide young Black readers to build resilience in a world that is too often violent and grossly unforgiving toward Black people. Thompkins-Bigelow goes on to encourage readers to hold on—“to the smile of that loved one / who just got free,” “to good tastes and good laughs on your tongue,” and “to the stories the grown / folks tell of your greatness.” Making inspired use of textures in the backgrounds, this comforting book has the look and feel of a quilt. Photographs of Black children taken by Shabazz as well as images of historical figures incorporated into the collage illustrations give the book the feeling of a family album. This celebration of Black culture covers the impact of racism honestly yet in an age-appropriate way; one especially noteworthy spread includes the photo of a child with head bowed opposite the names of the victims of racist violence, such as Trayvon Martin and Michelle Cusseaux, set against the wall of a building. Backmatter includes author’s and illustrator’s notes and additional information on people and topics alluded to in the book, among them Black Lives Matter, Jim Crow, lynching, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A love poem to Black children that both educates and bolsters. *(selected sources)* (Picture book. 6-9)
“A brilliant introduction to a powerful Black female politician and voting rights activist.”

**STACYE ABRAMS AND THE FIGHT TO VOTE**

Todd, Traci N.
Illus. by Laura Freeman
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-0-06-313977-0

What would Stacey Abrams’ Black political female predecessors say to her if they were alive today?

Todd and Freeman bring this scenario to life in their creative biography of Georgia-based politician Abrams. Voting rights champions across two centuries—Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Septima Poinsetta Clark, and Fannie Lou Hamer—speak to one another about Abrams as they reflect on the barriers that national and state governments have systematically erected to prevent specific populations from voting. While the text focuses on the Black vote, the backmatter describes many other groups that have been excluded from voting throughout American history. This biography begins with Abrams’ parents, who also, growing up in the Jim Crow South, faced obstacles that required courage and tenacity to overcome. Abrams’ parents taught their children to take care of one another and took them to the polls every election to show them that voting was how to take care of your community. The daughter of a librarian, Stacey loved books and using “big, juicy words.” As the book traces Abrams’ successes at Spelman College and her political accomplishments, the brightly colored digitally rendered illustrations, featuring striking portraits of Abrams and others that fill the page, emphasize her determination despite disappointments, and the more faded images of her political predecessors remind readers that they speak from the past. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A brilliant introduction to a powerful Black female politician and voting rights activist. (author’s note, biographical notes, voting rights timeline, bibliography) *(Picture-book biography, 7-10)*

**I AM PICKY: CONFESSIONS OF A FUSSY EATER**

Tracy, Kristen
Illus. by Erin Kraan
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-374-38954-3

Are raccoons picky eaters?

Readers may not assume so, but this friendly raccoon narrator claims to have always been a fussy eater, just like Mom and Dad. Readers follow along as the raccoon, with their parents, raids a dumpster for years-old moldy green milk and eats fish from the pond scum, beetles from the bottom of the compost, and wormy apples that fall from the tree but draws the line at freshly washed jeans and snails. The narrator is a connoisseur of bright flower and crunchy bee combos (“magnifique!”) and seasonal treats like jack-o’-lanterns (“chef’s kiss”), but their favorite dish—dog food (“delicioso!”)—requires the sneakiest moves, like distracting the canine with a game of fetch and a daring escape across a fence. Near dawn, the raccoon family returns home with bulging bellies. Remembering their manners, the young raccoon shares some of the night’s bounty with readers. Only very un-picky readers will happily indulge in the offered meal of fish head, moldy pizza, wormy cat food, and crunchy beetles. Woodcut prints and digital collages depict the raccoon with black-rimmed eyes and an expressive face; close-ups of the little creature help build a relationship between readers and the narrator. Colorful background details reinforce facts about the raccoon’s habitats and diet, which won’t seem very picky to most. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Readers will giggle, groan, and learn about raccoons as they reconsider what it means to be a finicky eater. *(Picture book, 3-6)*

**THE SECRET OF THE JADE BANGLE**

Trinh, Linda
Illus. by Clayton Nguyen
Annick Press (128 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-77321-715-4
Series: The Nguyen Kids, 1

When 9-year-old Vietnamese Canadian Anne inherits her grandma’s jade bangle, she begins a journey of cultural exploration. It’s the new moon, and the Nguyen family is preparing altar offerings for the recently deceased Grandma Nő. “Three ceramic bowls of jasmine rice, three cups of black tea, barbeque pork, kale salad, lasagna, apples, and oranges” line the altar. But after Anne puts on the bracelet that night, Grandma Nő appears, revealing that she and the other family spirits wish to feast on food from the homeland. She never had the chance to pass on her culinary knowledge to Anne’s father, but now she has chosen Anne to learn her recipes. Anne is not sure she can live up to this responsibility, but cooking with Grandma Nő makes her feel safe. These days, assurance is something she’s looking for—her White ballet instructor’s racial microaggressions leave her feeling uncertain. Trinh addresses racism, allyship, and friendship in this series starter. Short chapters keep the narrative moving, capturing the emotional beats of a young person grappling with the complexity of traditions, differing cultural identities among generations, and the weight of expectations as a child in an immigrant family. Grandma Nő and Anne’s parents, separately, open up to Anne about their own experiences with racism, which empowers her to voice her feelings. Expressive black-and-white illustrations bring to life this Vietnamese Canadian family’s story.

A solid chapter book laced with themes of cultural confidence and family. *(character biographies, author’s note) * *(Fiction, 6-9)*
THE LAST HOPE IN HOPETOWN
Tureaud, Maria
Little, Brown (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-316-36845-2

A middle schooler will do whatever it takes to save her moms and keep her family together.

Human Sophie Dawes lives in Hope-town, Pennsylvania, with her adoptive vampire moms, Mama and the Duke. Vampires made their existence known nearly two decades ago and have since lived peacefully beside ordinary mortals. However, in the past few years, random vampires have gone rogue, so that means curfews and regular visits from Child Protective Services for Sophie's family. Sophie's best friend, Delphine, a 300-year-old vampire who will forever appear 12, believes there's a government conspiracy that's causing the vampires to change. When Mama goes rogue, they must act quickly before the whole family is taken away, so Sophie decides to take matters into her own hands and uncover the truth. This energetic, action-filled story is rounded out with an exploration of what makes a family and Sophie's realistic emotions about being adopted. She knows her moms love her, but she has a deep-seated fear of being abandoned, and she's conflicted about whether she should agree to meet her birth mom. Her upbringing is contrasted with other characters' experiences with their parents, showcasing different types of family relationships. Worldbuilding and paranormal elements are naturally incorporated, and small hints lead to exciting reveals. Sophie's thoughts about prejudice against vampires may get readers thinking about real-world examples of bias. Characters are cued White.

A suspenseful supernatural story about belonging and inclusion. ( Paranormal. 8-12)

EMI ISN'T SCARED OF MONSTERS
Tyoe, Alina
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-75565-7

A tot prepares for bedtime—and the monsters that come with it.

Armed with a cooldander on her head, a trusty flashlight, and a map of the monsters' favorite hiding spots, Emi is ready. She just needs to stay very quiet and wait for a monster to spring her trap. Unfortunately, her dog, Cookie, doesn't understand the importance of stillness. Cookie bounds after a ball, leaving Emi to face the dark unknown and attempt a daring rescue. Sweeping her flash light from room to room, Emi searches for Cookie. Fluffy, friendly-looking monsters cower in the shadows as she passes. Emi's courage shines through in comic-style speech bubbles: "I'm not SCARED!" she declares, just in case the monsters are listening (they are). Muted blue surroundings show the monsters, who are just as afraid of Emi as she is of them. Luckily, they duck in time and are never caught in her flashlight's beam. Goggle-eyed Emi is the epitome of determination. "There aren't even ANY monsters here. So boring." Rich illustrations offer well-timed guffaws and silliness. The plucky protagonist is light-skinned; the monsters—furry, horned, and spiky. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Bravery at its best. (Picture book. 3-6)

FENRIS & MOTT
van Eekhout, Greg
Harper/HarperCollins (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-0-06-297063-3

"Things done could not be undone. Things destroyed could not be undone. But sometimes they could be fixed."

There's a lot Mott, a young girl of Indonesian and Dutch descent, doesn't expect about the abandoned puppy she finds. She doesn't expect to be able to keep him. She doesn't expect him to be a wolf. And she certainly doesn't expect that wolf to be Fenris of Norse mythology: god-foe, moon-eater, ender of worlds. The very universe seems destined for destruction, brought about by Fenris, but Mott made a promise to keep Fenris safe, and she knows only too well the pain of broken oaths. In this Rick Riordan-esque epic, modern and ancient worlds collide in a vividly sketched adventure that begs to be adapted for the screen. The exhilarating pace comes somewhat at the expense of characterization. Only toward the very end, however, does this cause some believability to be lost as deeper emotions and motivations and some themes remain loosely explored. Still, the text strikes a remarkable balance between the hollowness of inevitable destruction and the hope hiding within the darkest voids. Unlike with most stories of this type, readers will at times be utterly convinced that Mott will fail, which only makes her determination to do right by her vows more rewarding to witness. The idea of the downfall of the world feels all too relevant, and the book imparts a subtle warning to readers that while the inevitable may be delayed, it can never truly be reversed.

Thrilling and touching in equal measure. (Fiction. 8-12)
Early in the book, the Spy Ninjas, YouTubers dedicated to safeguarding the internet from evil hackers, find a hidden trove of weapons, including a doomicycle—a unicycle combined with a circular saw—and a plungechuck, which is exactly what it sounds like: a nunchuck combined with a plunger. It’s hard not to admire gadgets that are so wonderfully impractical. The main characters occasionally make spectacularly bad decisions. They come across some sinister-looking masks, and two of them try them on. The masks, of course, are a trap. They’re virtual-reality helmets that threaten to imprison the ninjas in a video game forever. Fortunately, the villains in the story aren’t much brighter. They keep attempting to locate the Spy Ninjas’ safe house and then forgetting to jot down the address. The art style may take some getting used to. The anatomy is occasionally distorted, and some of the drawings are more confusing than necessary. A bowl of rice noodles, for example, looks like melted ice cream. But fans of the original series will instantly recognize their favorite characters. (Like their YouTube counterparts, Chad Wild Clay and Daniel Gizmo present as White, while Melvin PZ9, Regina Gnera, and Vy Qwaint present as Asian.) The ninjas do have moments of cleverness, like when they defeat their enemies not by fighting but by boiling soup in a giant volcano.

**Rais goodniness to an art form.** *(Graphic adventure. 8-12)*

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12-year-old Fleurine is trying to grow purple carrots on her own in order to acquire a longed-for baby sister. Spyng Quincy stealing her seeds, she secretly follows him to the Warren, where she steals a Chou, oblivious to how her actions will impact the Warren and Montpeyroux. Discovering his own actions accidentally led Fleurine to the Warren, Quincy knows he must undo the damage he’s caused. Narrating their stories in alternating voices, Quincy and Fleurine pass the blame as they desperately try to protect and hide the stolen Chou while Quincy valiantly attempts to rescue and return it to the Warren. Both walk a fine line between hero and villain in this original tale based in part on European folklore.

A clever tale of rabbits, cabbage babies, purple carrots, mistakes made, and lessons learned. *(author’s note)* *(Fantasy. 8-12)*

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*Canuck jokes run amok in this hockey-themed twist on "The Three Little Pigs."*

After a rigorous practice, a trio of porcine players smile on the rink while a shifty wolf in a denim outfit and trucker hat spies on them from the bushes. Cold and starving, the wolf claims the pigs for a meal, forcing them to flee for their lives over the frost-covered hills before seeking refuge in their CN Tower–inspired snow fort. Though he threatens to blow the house down and even brings in a pair of minions—a burly bear and moose—to help him, the wolf is unable to reach the pigs. The porky pals don’t take the assault of their home lightly, charging out and challenging Wolf and company to settle this competition instead of violence makes it a sweet, silly lesson for young athletes. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A humorous exploration of the value of playing fair. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

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**THE RABBIT’S GIFT**

*Vitalis, Jessica*

Greenwillow Books (320 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 25, 2022

978-0-06-306746-2

A privileged girl and a starving rabbit unwittingly endanger their interdependent communities.

Longing to be a hero, Quincy Rabbit lives with his family in the Warren, where cabbagelike plants called Chou de vie, each containing a human baby, are grown and transported nightly to humans of Montpeyroux in exchange for purple carrots the rabbits need to live on. With Chou deliveries declining due to decreased human demand, the rabbits are starving, prompting Quincy to surreptitiously leave the Warren in search of purple carrot seeds, which he locates in a garden shed, unaware Fleurine d’Aubigné is watching him. He spoiled only child of the governing Grand Lumière, presumably White
Weatherford infuses the lyrics of a traditional spiritual with pivotal events in African American history.

In four-line stanzas, references to the unseen narrator (“It’s me, it’s me, O Lord”), the ancestors, and present-day children alternate with the line “Standing in the need of prayer.” From “families enslaved and sold apart,” “a band of rebels,” and “freed Weatherford personally.”

Morrison’s elegant, emotional, painterly illustrations highlight figures and topics referenced in the main text, and an author’s note explains the importance of spirituals to the culture and to one light-skinned parent and one brown-skinned parent. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Doubly fun! (Picture book 3-6)

STANDING IN THE NEED OF PRAYER
A Modern Retelling of the Classic Spiritual
Weatherford, Carole Boston
Illus. by Frank Morrison
Crown (32 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-593-30614-5
978-0-593-30635-2 PLB

A loving family—Mommy, Daddy, and child—have a fun summer outing at the beach. Then, just as the waves wash in to claim the family’s sand castle, the parents say they won’t be living together anymore. The child is distraught, with feelings rolling inside them like the sea. The adults say, “Sometimes grown-ups separate...But parents are forever.” Autumn arrives, and then winter snow, and the child plays with Daddy at his new house and with Mommy on a sledging hill. The child continues to have big, sudden feelings about the breakup, but each time the parents provide reassurances that all emotions are valid. “We can’t stop our feelings, or the leaves from dropping...but we can catch them as they fall,” says Daddy. As the seasons change, life does as well (like Mommy having a new partner), and that knowledge frees the child’s mind. This book deftly compares emotions to nature and conveys the message that life goes on, even changing and ever growing. The text and illustrations work harmoniously to provide examples and extend the metaphors. This one is ideal for young ones processing a big life change. Mommy is light-skinned, Daddy is brown-skinned, and the child has light brown skin; supporting characters display a wide variety of skin tones. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Tenderly nuanced. (Picture book 3-8)

EVERYTHING CHANGES
Welsh, Clare Helen
Illus. by Åsa Gilland
Kane Miller (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Dec. 1, 2022
978-1-68464-494-0

With two houses, life can get confusing.

Mabel has two homes, and both are very different. In one, her bedroom is upstairs. In the other, it’s downstairs. In one house, you’re not allowed to jump on the bed, but in the other you can. Breakfast is an even more confusing routine. All of it makes her want to scream, but she doesn’t want to scare the class pet, Izzy the iguana, who is Mabel’s responsibility for the weekend. Mabel looks through Izzy’s travel journal and learns about all the amazing and very different things the iguana has done with the other children in Mabel’s class: She saw a football game, went apple picking, spent a weekend without power thanks to a storm, watched the same movie in two places, and celebrated two different holidays (Hanukkah and Christmas). Mabel can relate to a lot of these moments, like how she watched the same movie in both her houses, and celebrating holidays twice means double the presents (and hugs). Mabel considers both herself and Izzy lucky to have so many opportunities. This sweet tale highlights the exciting variety of a two-home child’s experiences, validating them all. Parental love and quality time are ever present in the warm, cozy illustrations. Bespectacled, curly-haired Mabel presents as biracial, with one light-skinned parent and one brown-skinned parent. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Doubly fun! (Picture book 3-6)

MABEL’S TOPSY-TURVY HOMES
Welsh, Candy
Illus. by Jess Rose
Beaming Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-5064-8286-6

A Modern Retelling of the Classic Spiritual
Historical picture book. 4-10

With two houses, life can get confusing.

Mabel has two homes, and both are very different. In one, her bedroom is upstairs. In the other, it’s downstairs. In one house, you’re not allowed to jump on the bed, but in the other you can. Breakfast is an even more confusing routine. All of it makes her want to scream, but she doesn’t want to scare the class pet, Izzy the iguana, who is Mabel’s responsibility for the weekend. Mabel looks through Izzy’s travel journal and learns about all the amazing and very different things the iguana has done with the other children in Mabel’s class: She saw a football game, went apple picking, spent a weekend without power thanks to a storm, watched the same movie in two places, and celebrated two different holidays (Hanukkah and Christmas). Mabel can relate to a lot of these moments, like how she watched the same movie in both her houses, and celebrating holidays twice means double the presents (and hugs). Mabel considers both herself and Izzy lucky to have so many opportunities. This sweet tale highlights the exciting variety of a two-home child’s experiences, validating them all. Parental love and quality time are ever present in the warm, cozy illustrations. Bespectacled, curly-haired Mabel presents as biracial, with one light-skinned parent and one brown-skinned parent. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Doubly fun! (Picture book 3-6)
“A heartwarming story about living your own life fully, even in the face of obstacles.”

**KEY PLAYER**

**Yetis Are the Worst!**

*Wildan, Alex*

Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)

$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022

978-1-66592-177-0

If you’ve ever wanted to talk with a friendly goblin or meet a yeti, here’s your chance.

Gilbert, a blue-green goblin with huge eyes and ears, whispers to readers on the title page, then engages them in a discussion about how mysterious goblins are (they “pop up in unexpected places,” “lurk in the shadows” and “are masters of disguise”) and how unmysterious yetis are. To prove the point, Gilbert is determined to find and photograph a yeti. Gilbert plows through the snow, snapping pictures of “yetis” that turn out to be shrubbery, an ice carving, and even a “snowboarding unicorn in a puffy coat.” These illustrations are giggleworthy, but they also share a secret with readers. Gilbert is totally unaware of actual yetis quietly gathering to watch. Frustrated, Gilbert screams, triggering an avalanche. Thanks to a sign in one of the illustrations, readers know before Gilbert that the avalanche is whisking the protagonist toward a secret yeti hideout. With a gulp, Gilbert realizes that “yetis aren’t so mysterious. They are just a little shy…until they’re not.” Gilbert’s large eyes and open face reveal a range of emotions, and small details help individualize the yetis. Gilbert’s running conversation with readers, presented in speech bubbles, is engaging; repeat readings will also reveal humorous details in the artwork. With some pages divided into panels, this one has the feel of a graphic novel. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Readers will laugh all the way up the mountain and down as the goblin searches for and finds a very unmysterious yeti.

*(Picture book. 4 7)*

**LOVE BIRDS**

*Tolen, Jane*

Illus. by Anna Wilson

Cameron Kids (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Nov. 8, 2022

978-1-951836-40-5

When birds are easier to speak to than people, what do you do when you meet another bird lover?

It’s been a month, and Jon still hasn’t spoken to another kid his age since he moved to town. Still, while he may not talk much, he’s an excellent listener. He listens particularly to birds of all sorts, in the fields and the skies. One evening he hears a barred owl and imitates its song. Yet when he follows its response, he instead finds a girl and fellow bird lover named Janet. Together they talk and listen together, “for days and weeks, / and into the years.” While Yolen’s author’s note states that this book is a partner to her Caldecott Award winner *Owl Moon* (1987), illustrated by John Schoenherr, it might be more accurate to say it exists in the same universe. The story sets up a nice series of contrasts (Jon’s mother’s chattiness versus her son’s silence versus the give and take of Jon and Janet’s conversations). Meanwhile Wilson weaves images of birds into an array of panels. Delicious details also hide in the cracks of these pictures, like the images on a page opposite the author’s note depicting photographs of Jon and Janet growing older, marrying, and having children to bird with. Jon and his mother are light-skinned, and Janet presents Black. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Feathers and friendship make for a good pairing in this gentle ode to appreciating both.

*(Picture book. 4 7)*

**KEY PLAYER**

*Tang, Kelly*

Scholastic (288 pp.)

$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022

978-1-338-77625-6

Series: Front Desk, 4

Mia’s feelings about her Chinese and American roots are complicated by the Women’s World Cup soccer final between Team USA and Team China.

Bookworm Mia Tang struggles to kick a soccer ball, but she must raise her grade in her least favorite class, PE, if she hopes to attend the journalism camp she’s dreaming of. She perseveres in her goal of interviewing the women playing for the U.S. and Chinese teams. While Mia remains the Keystone for this title, the supporting characters also help elevate the story. Her friend Jason’s dad’s storyline—told through Jason’s eyes—reveals internal pressures to succeed as an immigrant and the importance of family in Asian cultures. Meanwhile, Lupe, Mia’s other close friend, dreams of winning the Math Cup, but Mia’s mother gets into trouble for helping to coach the team. A central theme of this title is identity, and many Asian American children will relate to being ostracized as perpetual foreigners. Beloved adult characters also experience inequities in housing and the workplace. Yet the hope and excitement for the soccer players clearly inspire Mia, her family, and friends to fight for respect for themselves as they strive to do things others don’t believe they can achieve. Reassuringly, everything is resolved positively. Yang scores another win with this tightly paced entry that will ramp up the excitement for Mia’s next empowering adventure.

*A heartwarming story about living your own life fully, even in the face of obstacles. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 8-12)*

*(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Kirkus.com** | [KIRKUS.COM](https://kirkus.com) | [CHILDREN’S](https://kirkus.com/childrens) | 1 SEPTEMBER 2022 | 149
“Young balletomanes will clamor to attend a live performance or perhaps aspire to dance themselves.”

**THE NIGHT BEFORE THE NUTCRACKER**

*Allman, John Robert*

*Illus. by Julianna Swaney*

*Doubleday* (40 pp.)

$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sept. 6, 2022

See *The Nutcracker* from the best seats in the house and from behind the curtains.

Modeled after Clement C. Moore’s “A Visit From St. Nicholas,” this book, created in partnership with the American Ballet Theatre, takes readers through the process of mounting the beloved show, with special attention paid to the youngest dancers. There are no dreams of sugarplums the night before the opening performance. Instead, these racially diverse young ones are restless, reliving the preparations that brought them to this point. First there were tense auditions, and then they learned and practiced the poses and steps before even beginning rehearsals and run-throughs with the professional adult dancers. Costumes were constructed and fitted, and the performers had their dress rehearsal. When the big day arrives, schoolwork must be done, and the dancers must warm up, don costumes, apply makeup, and have their hair styled. Finally, there are last family hugs and encouraging good wishes, and a stagehand calls out, “Places!” Allman now directs attention to the stage as readers experience the entire magical tale of *The Nutcracker*, followed by bows, cheers, and celebrations. Tonight, the children dream of all the fun to come in the next performances. Swaney’s illustrations spread across the pages, often showing the action in multiple spaces, depicting the grueling hard work to achieve perfection in line and movement and the utter joy of the dance. *(This book was reviewed digitally)*

**Cute but cliché.** *(Picture book. 3-7)*

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**WINTER HOLIDAY BOOKS**

**THE MAGIC OF A SMALL TOWN CHRISTMAS**

*Alexander, Megan*

*Illus. by Hiroe Nakata*

*Aladdin* (32 pp.)

$19.99 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-66592-980-6

Spend Christmas in Heartbeat Falls. “Nestled under smoky hills, with skies crystal and clear,” this small town is beautiful year-round, but it especially comes alive around Christmastime. From the pine-tree farm to the bakery full of gingerbread, the unique charm of the season springs up everywhere. Citizens enjoy the festive lights and skating pond as well as the church with candles in its windows that mirror the glowing stars above. Then there are the individual family traditions of baking cookies or making decorations to adorn the trees. The celebration is capped off with a communal meal and a final proclamation that a small town is measured by the “love shared by its people.” The host of the television show *Small Town Christmas* on UPtv, Alexander has crafted a companion piece to display her appreciation of Christmas in the country. Her verse is a bit lackluster, though the rhymes and enumerations of classic holiday traditions give the book an old-time, homey feel. Nakata’s appealing watercolor and ink illustrations depict a racially diverse town. *(This book was reviewed digitally)*

**Cute but cliché.** *(Picture book. 3-7)*

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**PIPPA PARK CRUSH AT FIRST SIGHT**

*Tan, Erin*

*Fabled Films* (288 pp.)

$16.99 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-1-044020-80-4

Series: Pippa Park, 2

Pippa is in over her head and head over heels in the second installment of the Pippa Park series.

Pippa, a working-class Korean American 12-year-old, lives with her adult sister, Mina, and Mina’s husband in Massachusetts; her mother returned to Korea due to visa issues. Pippa has settled into the private middle school she attends on a basketball scholarship. She is friendly with the Royals, the group of popular girls, most of whom are wealthy and White, but she isn’t quite one of them—yet. When the venue for the Royals’ Christmas party falls through, Pippa impulsively volunteers to host it. What the other girls don’t know is just how tiny Pippa’s apartment is and that her family can’t afford glitzy decorations or catering—even Christmas presents are outside their budget. Obstacles abound, one of the Royals seems to have it in for her, her best friends are drifting away from her, and she develops feelings for two different boys, one White and one Korean American. It’s too much, and Pippa makes one disastrous decision after another until it all comes to a head a few days before the party. Luckily Pippa learns some valuable lessons in friendship and teamwork just in time to make it a very merry Christmas after all. This is solid, classic middle-school drama fare that benefits from the interesting ways Pippa’s family background is developed.

**An engaging variation on a familiar theme.** *(Fiction. 9-12)*

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**WINTER HOLIDAY BOOKS**

**THE NIGHT BEFORE THE NUTCRACKER**

*Allman, John Robert*

*Illus. by Julianna Swaney*

*Doubleday* (40 pp.)

$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sept. 6, 2022

978-0-593-18091-4

978-0-593-18092-1 PLB

See *The Nutcracker* from the best seats in the house and from behind the curtains.

Modeled after Clement C. Moore’s “A Visit From St. Nicholas,” this book, created in partnership with the American Ballet Theatre, takes readers through the process of mounting the beloved show, with special attention paid to the youngest dancers. There are no dreams of sugarplums the night before the opening performance. Instead, these racially diverse young ones are restless, reliving the preparations that brought them to this point. First there were tense auditions, and then they learned and practiced the poses and steps before even beginning rehearsals and run-throughs with the professional adult dancers. Costumes were constructed and fitted, and the performers had their dress rehearsal. When the big day arrives, schoolwork must be done, and the dancers must warm up, don costumes, apply makeup, and have their hair styled. Finally, there are last family hugs and encouraging good wishes, and a stagehand calls out, “Places!” Allman now directs attention to the stage as readers experience the entire magical tale of *The Nutcracker*, followed by bows, cheers, and celebrations. Tonight, the children dream of all the fun to come in the next performances. Swaney’s illustrations spread across the pages, often showing the action in multiple spaces, depicting the grueling hard work to achieve perfection in line and movement and the utter joy of the dance. *(This book was reviewed digitally)*

**Young balletomanes will clamor to attend a live performance or perhaps aspire to dance themselves. (scene-by-scene summary of the ballet)** *(Picture book. 4-10)*
IT’S CHRISTMAS EVERYWHERE
Celebrations From Around the World
Barnaby, Hannah
Illus. by João Fazenda
Phaidon (26 pp.)
$19.95 | Oct. 5, 2022
978-1-83866-539-5

This Christmas tree–shaped book recognizes holiday traditions from around the globe. The story opens with rhyming stanzas told in the first person from the point of view of a “plain pine.” Longing for decorations of its own, the tree counts down the 10 days until Christmas as forest animals travel and then bring back ornaments and symbols of holiday celebrations from all over the world. A group of racially diverse children decorate the tree with these ornaments. Each page features a different cultural custom, explained in a short paragraph, while four simple rhyming lines keep the pace going. On one spread, the tree is decorated with silver and gold spiderwebs; the text describes the Ukrainian legend of the Christmas spider. On another spread, readers learn about the Mexican celebration of Las Posadas. Because of the book’s shape, the bright illustrations largely feel clunky. There are two stories happening at once—one about the pine tree’s decorations, the other a short nonfiction piece about celebrations around the world—which makes for a disjointed, split age-level reading experience. The large, awkward shape of the book is more gimmicky than purposeful.

Physically cumbersome with a well-meaning yet muddled storyline. (Board book. 3–5)

EIGHT NIGHTS, EIGHT LIGHTS
Barnes, Natalie
Illus. by Andrea Stegmaier
Kane Miller (32 pp.)
$14.99 | Dec. 1, 2022
978-1-68464-441-4

Families in a vibrant community celebrate Hanukkah. People bustle around in the wintry weather, preparing for the holiday. On the first holiday night, Max, his mother, and his grandparents light the first candle. Throughout the book, varied festivities take place in different homes. After lighting the menorah, families give gifts, prepare foods such as jelly doughnuts, latkes, and Hanukkah cookies topped with Jewish stars, and play dreidel. Aunts, uncles, and cousins come to visit; a young couple (David is dark-skinned; Jillian is light-skinned) celebrate their first Hanukkah in a new apartment. On the eighth night, families gather in the synagogue for a big party and the rabbi begins to tell the story of the holiday’s origins. At home, Max and his mom have lit all eight candles of their menorah, and as they look out their window, “fireworks burst overhead.” This relatively new Hanukkah tradition ends the festival and this straightforward tale perfectly. Although some streets are pictured with old-fashioned cobblestones, the colorful scenes also depict modern-looking houses and buildings. (Could that be the London Eye on the last spread in this English import?) Max and his family are light-skinned, as are most characters in their community, though several people of color also appear. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A simple, contemporary introduction to the holiday focused on the children’s point of view. (Picture book 3–7)

THE BEST GIFT FOR BEAR
Bell, Jennifer A.
Two Lions (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5420-2922-3

A tale about gifts, friends, and tasty treats. Hedgehog bakes gingerbread cookie gifts for her friends: The mice’s cookies are shaped like snowflakes, the squirrels’ are shaped like trees, and the rabbits each get a specially decorated rabbit cookie. But what about Bear? Bear is a special friend, after all. When Hedgehog arrives back home after delivering gifts, she sees the frosted roof of her cottage and is inspired. In step-by-step illustrations, she creates a wonderful gingerbread house for Bear—one that’s even bigger than Hedgehog herself. The journey to deliver the finished house begins smoothly, but a whipping wind soon reduces the gift to crumbs. Bear rescues Hedgehog from the storm, and later, in the safety and warmth of home, Bear admits to making a mess of Hedgehog’s gift earlier in the day and notes that they were planning to try again tomorrow. Happily, this admission leads to the best gift of all. Recipes for spice-laced gingerbread cookies and honey frosting begin the book, and perhaps all those spices keep this simple story about friendship and holiday gift giving from becoming too saccharine. Hedgehog is adorable, wearing emerald-green earmuffs, baking up a storm, and snuggling in a teacup bed. A bright-red ribbon winds through the story, artfully separating flashbacks from the present, linking baking steps, and focusing attention on important images. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sure to sweeten holiday traditions with the true spirit of friendship. (Picture book 3–8)
Christmas is going to stink this year.

This tale from the creators of *The Great Big Poop Party* (2020) finds children requesting that Santa bring them not toys or treats but Christmas poo, and Santa doesn’t know what to do. Santa is not a fan of bathroom humor and takes a stance against the pro-poop majority at the North Pole, which includes Mrs. Claus, an abominable snowman, and the elves. As the story progresses, it becomes clear that Santa has a limited view of Christmas enjoyment, while the others realize that the holiday can mean many things to different people: ‘I just don’t think Christmas is the time for poop,’ said Santa. ‘Christmas is a time for peace.’ The elves knew Christmas was a time for peace, but they wondered if it could also be a time for poop.” A chance encounter with a whoopee cushion during a strained discussion might be enough to break the tension and change Santa’s mind. The toilet humor comes fast and furious—so much so that it could make even an atheist say, “Hey, come on, some things are sacred!” — but for children (and caregivers) who can’t get enough poop jokes, this book will be a hit. The energetic mixed-media illustrations keep pace with the text, and a recipe for “Reindeer Dropping Treats” may add a new cookie to families’ holiday rotations of sweets. Santa and Mrs. Claus are light-skinned; the elves vary in skin tone. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Gross but that’s what they were going for.** *(Picture book. 3-6)*

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**MOO, BAA, FA LA LA LA LA!**

*Boynton, Sandra*

Boynton Bookworks (16 pp.)

$6.99 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-1-66591-435-2

Deck the stalls?

A bevy of barnyard animals, a cat, and some dogs get fully into the Christmas spirit by sprucing up the farm with colorful decorations, including holly berries and sparkling baubles. They have a great time and sing while going about their merry chores in a manner somewhat in keeping with the rhythm of the classic tune “Deck the Halls.” (In fact, a flock of sheep are shown holding song sheets for it.) As might be expected with these particular celebrants, some of the familiar lyrics are altered just a bit; for instance, “boughs of holly” is “translated” as “cows and holly.” Adult readers expecting the rhythm here to work exactly as it does in the original will be disappointed, because it doesn’t—it’s clunky. This is merely a brief, lightweight spoof of the familiar ditty, so it’s recommended that grown-ups read rather than sing this—except for that final line! — to very young targeted audiences, who may be unfamiliar with the actual song anyway. Some fun is still to be had in the illustrations, however. The spirited, wittily expressive animal characters are depicted having a fine time romping about and producing a variety of onomatopoeic sounds throughout. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Cute and sprightly but not a standout.** *(Board book. 3-6)*

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**SANTA MOUSE BAKES CHRISTMAS COOKIES**

*Brown, Michael*

Illus. by Robert McPhillips

Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (22 pp.)

$8.99 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-1-5344-3804-0

Series: Santa Mouse

Santa Mouse prepares cookies for St. Nick and the reindeer team.

Ordinarily, mice might be an unwelcome sight in a kitchen, but in his tiny suit, Santa Mouse makes a wonderful seasonal chef, baking holiday treats with the help of the elves. This tale, told in rhyming couplets, shows Santa Mouse stirring up the batter, making cookies in various shapes, and adding icing and sprinkles. Santa Claus is pleased with the snacks — Santa Mouse has even remembered to make some for the reindeer. The titular critter is irresistible, with a faux beard and striped mittens. The elves’ kitchen is something plucked straight from a child’s imagination, endearingly too large for the little helpers and even bigger compared with the tiny mouse. There are also some delicious details, like Santa Mouse’s sardine-can bed, his thimblelike sprinkle shaker, and the timer on the table set exactly to the 30 minutes described in the text. The story is well matched to the board-book format. The simple plot is easy for toddlers to follow, with read-aloud-friendly rhymes and lovely, engaging illustrations. Santa presents as White, while the elves vary in skin tone. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A sweet holiday tale perfect for little readers.** *(Board book. 1-3)*

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**TWELVE DINGING DOORBELLS**

*Brown, Tameka Fryer*

Illus. by Ebony Glenn

Kokila (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 18, 2022

978-1-984815-17-0

Soul food and larger-than-life personalities populate the pages of this catch-all family celebration.

Beginning and ending with “a sweet potato pie just for me,” this colorful picture book modeled after “The Twelve Days of Christmas” follows a young Black child as doorbells ring and the house fills with relatives. Counting up from the first ding-dong to the dizzying 12th, people arrive — “two selfie queens,” “three posh sibs” — and dishes pile up (“four pounds of chitlins”) and the highlight, “BAKED MACARONI AND
Though the book is a funny riff on a familiar Christmas song, “CHEEEEESE!”oddlers and aunties and fraternity brothers arrive to view the northern lights, there is a gently humorous appeal. / A sway and creak as pines bow low, / and then begins theverture an old tune into a modern, energetic romp. Glenn's bright art makes inspired use of perspective and a broad palette to emphasize the joys and chaos of large family gatherings. Though the book is a funny riff on a familiar Christmas song, there aren't any Yuletide-specific references, nor does it appear to be set during winter, making this delightful and dynamic story perfect for any time of year. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A new classic that will ease children through any holiday season. (Picture book. 3-7)

BRIGHT WINTER NIGHT
Brydon, Alli
Illus. by Ashling Lindsay
Two Lions (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-5420-2224-8

A disparate group of animals constructs a large sleigh so they can travel together to watch the northern lights. “There’s magic in the winter air, / as all the creatures are aware. / A sway and creak as pines bow low, / and then begins the song of snow.” On this initial double-page spread and throughout, simple but eloquent rhymes are complemented by stylized, appealing animal characters that move within a soothing world of pinks, purples, and blues, dotted with flecks of snow and points of light. As the creatures gather, they sense they need a change in language mirrors the shift in attitude familiar to anyone who’s had enough of family for one night. Brown cleverly turns an old tune into a modern, energetic romp. Glenn’s bright art makes inspired use of perspective and a broad palette to emphasize the joys and chaos of large family gatherings. Though the book is a funny riff on a familiar Christmas song, there aren’t any Yuletide-specific references, nor does it appear to be set during winter, making this delightful and dynamic story perfect for any time of year. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A new classic that will ease children through any holiday season. (Picture book. 3-7)

ONE GRUMPY DAY
Butler, M. Christina
Illus. by Tina Macnaughton
Tiger Tales (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-68010-286-4
Series: Little Hedgehog and Friends

Sometimes the best cures for the blues are the unexpected ones.

In the latest story in the Little Hedgehog and Friends series, Fox is grumpy. He has a cold, a stubbed paw, and no hot chocolate. Trying to cheer him up, Hedgehog, who’s out looking for mistletoe, suggests going for a walk through the snowy woods and thinking about all the things Fox is thankful for. It doesn’t work, though. When Rabbit and the mice bring hot chocolate and chocolate chip cookies, Fox begins to feel better until he sneezes and drops the refreshments, and snow from a nearby tree falls onto his back. Fox leaves in a huff, and his friends worry about him getting home safely in the snow and dark. Conveniently, Fox’s borrowed hat starts unraveling, and the yarn leaves a trail for Hedgehog to follow. After Hedgehog

Lighthearted Hanukkah fun. (Board book. 1-3)

FIVE LITTLE DREIDELS
Burton, Jeffrey
Illus. by Juliana Motzko
Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (14 pp.)
$6.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-66592-238-8

An invitation to the youngest Hanukkah celebrants to twirl like holiday spinners.

Set to the sprightly rhyme scheme and rhythms of “Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed,” this Hanukkah ditty stars five—what else?—miniature dreidels spinning so gleefully that each in turn experiences a minor mishap (e.g., getting dizzy and falling, tripping, and one simply leaving) until only one remains. Following each episode, Mama dreidel calls a professional-looking doctor dreidel who cautions against further spinning—ill-timed advice given that spinning is a dreidel’s holiday raison d’être. In the end, all’s well that spins well, as all five dreidels are reunited and advised to spin again. Logic isn’t the point here, but some slight fun is, and so are holiday symbols: menorahs, wrapped gifts, latkes, the Star of David, and gold-wrapped chocolate gelt are all on display here. Most importantly, the brightly smiling, gaily colored dreidels bear the Hebrew letters nun, gimmel, heh, and shin, forming the acronym for the Hebrew saying “Nes gadol haya sham,” meaning “A great miracle happened there.” This refers to Hanukkah’s origin—the miracle of one day’s supply of oil in the menorah in Jerusalem’s Great Temple remaining lit for eight days. Young readers may be aware of those holiday emblems, but even if they aren’t, they’ll likely be acquainted with the song this tale is based on and will gladly frolic about to that cheery game’s rhythms and appreciate this story’s satisfying ending. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Lighthearted Hanukkah fun. (Board book. 1-3)
finds Fox and they start toward Fox’s home, Hedgehog trips and tumbles down a steep hill. When Fox rescues Hedgehog, he says, “My bad mood stopped me from seeing how lucky I am to have a friend like you!” Soon all the friends are together and enjoying a sleepover at Fox’s. Though some may find this one a little on the sweet side, it’s a cozy tale nevertheless. Illustrations in a soft palette enhance the story and create a delightful wintry woodland world for Fox and his friends. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A gentle tale of friendship and gratitude. (Picture book. 3-6)

**THE CHRISTMAS PRINCESS**

*The Adventures of Little Mariah*

Carey, Mariah & Michaela Angela Davis
Illus. by Fuuji Takashi
Henry Holt (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-250-83711-0

Singer Carey, whose “All I Want for Christmas Is You” is in near-constant rotation each holiday season, makes the leap to Christmas picture book with co-author Davis.

Little Mariah lives in a worn, shabby house in a wealthy neighborhood; though poor, she has a kind nature and musical talent—both of which ultimately save her. Taunted by a nasty brother-sister duo who enter her home uninvited, Little Mariah is distracted by snowfall and runs out into the nearby woods. The snow transforms into Snowflake Butterfly Fairies. Following these entrancing visions, she encounters a gang of fox and they start toward Fox’s home, Hedgehog trips and tumbles down a steep hill. When Fox rescues Hedgehog, he says, “My bad mood stopped me from seeing how lucky I am to have a friend like you!” Soon all the friends are together and enjoying a sleepover at Fox’s. Though some may find this one a little on the sweet side, it’s a cozy tale nevertheless. Illustrations in a soft palette enhance the story and create a delightful wintry woodland world for Fox and his friends. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A gentle tale of friendship and gratitude. (Picture book. 3-6)

**THE PERFECT TREE**

*DiCamillo, Kate*

illus. by Chris Van Dusen
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-5362-1360-7

Bunny searches for the perfect Christmas tree.

For her, *perfect* means one that’s “just her size.” Her friends’ ideas of perfection match their physical characteristics. Squirrel suggests a tree that, like his tail, is bushy; Mole believes that a Christmas tree’s top should be pointed, like her nose; vibrantly red Cardinal mentions color—the “greenest green”—as the singular attribute; and Skunk thinks that aroma is key: It “should smell like Christmas.” Each pal also guides Bunny to the best place to locate her tree. Bunny finds trees that are almost perfect but not quite. Deer posits that “maybe there isn’t a perfect tree,” or, perhaps, Bunny reflects, she hasn’t found it yet, and she starts to return home. Suddenly, she spies a tree she had previously overlooked but that meets physical specifications. Bunny realizes she hasn’t the heart to cut it down. Her friends appear on the scene and help her decorate the tree with the garlands she’d previously gathered; they sing carols, and Bunny understands why she’s found the perfect tree after all. This sweet, delightful story brims with messages of holiday warmth, cooperation, and friendship. Charming, vividly colored illustrations set a lovely holiday tone, with bright green trees highlighting wintry scenes of glistening white. Toward the end, blue-black skies are highlighted by puffs of falling snow, and the endearing animal characters are gaily dressed for winter. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A cuddly, reassuring holiday tale. (Picture book. 3-6)

**A VERY MERCY CHRISTMAS**

DiCamillo and illustrator Van Dusen collaborate again, this time on a holiday story that includes their beloved porcine heroine, Mercy Watson.

Though Stella, who lives next door to the Watsons, is determined to spread spur-of-the-moment Christmas spirit, when she goes door to door asking for neighbors to go caroling with her, no one is willing except for Mercy, General Washington the cat, and Maybelline the horse. The quartet’s loud and “not very musical” version of “Deck the Halls” brings out the neighbors for an accordion concert and an impromptu merry feast. In any other hands, this story might be too saccharine, but thanks to DiCamillo’s quirky and endearing characters and subtle use of scene, it feels like a bit of Christmas magic. Van Dusen’s distinct
rosy-cheeked characters give life to the uniquely named neighbors. Perhaps the most powerful illustration shows the group hand in hand looking up at the stars. Readers’ perspective is from below them, forcing the eye up and into the beautiful night “above the tired and hopeful earth,” a pitch-perfect pairing with DiCamillo’s poetic text. This celebration of community is from the spark of just one joyful child anchors this familiar, warm story. Stella is biracial, and most of her neighbors are light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Has to be said: It hits all the right notes. (Picture book. 4–7)

**THE CHRISTMAS PINE**  
Donaldson, Julia  
Illus. by Victoria Sandøy  
Scholastic (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022  
978-1-338-82927-3

London’s Christmas tree tells its own story.

Narrating in first “person,” a lovely pine describes, in gentle, lilting rhyme, its journey from seedling to tree. Like other trees before and others that will come after, the pine sprouts from a seedling in Norway, grows to a majestic height, then is cut and transported the long distance to the U.K. When set in place, it proudly stands, resplendently decorated, in London’s Trafalgar Square, where it’s watched over by the statue of Adm. Nelson, atop his towering column, and the majestic lion statues surrounding its base. Cheery throngs come and go in the square, fireworks light up the night, and children frolic and sing around the tree, an annual gift from Oslo’s mayor to the U.K. since 1947, in thanks for Britain’s aid to Norway during World War II. This is a charming homage to the holiday season, expressed from an unusual point of view. Children should appreciate gaining some insight into where some large, civically displayed trees may have come from and how they came to be placed on public view. The delicate illustrations effectively contrast the bright greenery, deep blues, and striking winter whites of the Norwegian forest with the lighter colors of London’s day and night skies. Some of Trafalgar Square’s iconic buildings are also on view, as is a vivid red double-decker bus. Adult and child characters are racially diverse; one child is depicted using a wheelchair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet ode to and pleasant reminder of the Christmas spirit. (author’s note) (Picture book. 3–6)

**THROUGH THE NORTH POLE SNOW**  
Faber, Polly  
Illus. by Richard Jones  
Candlewick (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-5362-2852-6

This foxy spin on a beloved Christmas character will put readers in the holiday mood.

Out hunting for dinner on a winter’s night, a nameless white fox suddenly finds itself stuck halfway through the roof of a cabin that had been buried under drifts of snow. The cabin’s inhabitant, a tired, light-skinned old man with white hair, a beard, and a penchant for red outfits, takes pity on the fox and gives it dinner and a warm place to spend the night. The fox’s sleep, much like the man’s, seems to go on for a season. Eventually, both awaken in a warm, verdant “world lit bright again.” As the fox frolics outside, the man busies himself by making and wrapping toys; collecting letters as the seasons shift and snow begins to fall; and making and checking lists until a magical sled pulled by reindeer arrives and the fox suddenly realizes with whom it has been living. This quiet, Santa-centric story is original, and holiday-minded readers will appreciate the unique angle. The cover art gives away the big reveal of the identity of the fox’s new roommate, but the soft, mixed-media illustrations and the expressive lines of the fox make up for the lack of mystery. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

As delightful and sweet as a candy cane. (Picture book. 4–8)

**THE TWELVE CATS OF CHRISTMAS**  
Flores, Feather  
Illus. by Carrie Liao  
Chronicle Books (48 pp.)  
$15.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-1-4521-8461-6

There’s no better gift for Christmas than a cat, right?

Everyone who celebrates Christmas can sing “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” but what about the 12 cats? “On the first day / of Christmas, / my true love gave to me / A kitten under the tree.” On the second day, that true love gives two more felines (for a total of three), and these are “batting bows.” Each day, another cat is added, and they all (kitten under the tree included) perform a different catly act: purring, sitting in boxes, clawing at wrapping paper, running after ribbons, watching snow fall. After each new cat arrives, the text counts back to that one kitten under the tree. As one would guess, when the rhyme gets to 12, the cats are climbing the tree, and the countdown ends with the original kitten sleeping under the result of the mayhem. Flores’ adaptation of the English carol will have feline fans giggling merrily, but Liao’s mixed-media illustrations, which resemble watercolors, are the real stars of the show. The expressive, hyperactive pussies doing nothing but being cats...
After the tour of the famous toy workshop, they head home in Mrs. Claus is light-skinned, and the elves vary in skin tone. Christmas Eve.

At the end of which the family will give Avital a “big, exciting gift.” On the first night of Hanukkah and on every night of the holiday thereafter, Ruby gives Avital a rhyming clue to a gift she’ll receive. The mostly small items cheer Avital somewhat, but Ruby still isn’t sure about the special surprise. A phone call on the seventh night provides just the inspiration she needs. On the final night of Hanukkah, Ruby surprises Avital with the best possible present and receives a terrific, cuddly gift herself. While the ending is satisfying, though a little sappy, some may wonder why no one communicated with Avital’s mom via phone or videoconferencing earlier. Hanukkah traditions are mentioned, but some adults may note that Ruby’s gesture, while very thoughtful, seems to focus primarily on the holiday’s gift-giving aspects. The colorful, cheery illustrations are laden with holiday symbols but are otherwise bland, and characters’ faces aren’t individualized. Avital, with dark, curly hair and tan skin, appears biracial; her mom is depicted as pale-skinned with red hair, while her dad and infant sister have light-brown skin and dark curls. Ruby and other family members are light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**A Christmas Adventure**

Francescchelli, Christopher
Illus. by Allison Black
Abrams Appleseed (54 pp.)
$15.99  |  Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-4197-3154-9
Series: Abrams Trail Tale

This lift-the-page and -flap board book sees two children travel to visit Santa and Mrs. Claus on Christmas Eve.

After receiving an invitation, the children travel on a sled pulled by a husky through snowy forests and across the ice. After the tour of the famous toy workshop, they head home in Santa’s sleigh. The text plods along slowly, generally with only a phrase or one word on a two-page layout. This story is actually one very long sentence, with limited punctuation, which makes it very difficult to read aloud and doesn’t allow readers much time to observe each illustration and flap without losing the thread of the narrative. This is unfortunate given that the images are charming, from the wide-eyed deer of the forest to busy elves in the workshop. The differences between the scenes must be followed: You can’t peek at your presents until Mommy and Daddy are up and about. Three siblings get ready for a cozy night, but two of them hear a loud squeak coming from downstairs. When they go to investigate, the other one, the book’s narrator, suspects them of ulterior motives. To stop them from repeating the trick, the narrator makes a bed on an armchair at the base of the stairs. No matter how many times the two kids get sent back upstairs, the squeaking keeps happening. Finally, the narrator can’t deny the incessant sounds coming from below the Christmas tree. The children all discover what was making the noise just as their parents appear. This quick and simple tale, told mostly through dialogue among the kids, plays on sibling dynamics. The very straightforward premise provides little in the way of nuance and inventiveness, but younger readers may find it somewhat amusing. The lighthearted, cartoon style of the illustrations makes for some fun moments, especially through the sound-effect balloons. The narrator is light-skinned with reddish-orange hair, the other siblings are brown-skinned and dark-haired, one of the parents is light-skinned and blond, and the other parent is dark-haired and brown-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**NO PEEKING AT PRESENTS**

Heim, Alastair
Illus. by Sara Not
Clarion/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$18.99  |  Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-328-80959-9

How can you obey a rule when there’s a mystery to solve?

It’s Christmas Eve, and there is one very important rule that must be followed: You can’t peek at your presents until Mommy and Daddy are up and about. Three siblings get ready for a cozy night, but two of them hear a loud squeak coming from downstairs. When they go to investigate, the other one, the book’s narrator, suspects them of ulterior motives. To stop them from repeating the trick, the narrator makes a bed on an armchair at the base of the stairs. No matter how many times the two kids get sent back upstairs, the squeaking keeps happening. Finally, the narrator can’t deny the incessant sounds coming from below the Christmas tree. The children all discover what was making the noise just as their parents appear. This quick and simple tale, told mostly through dialogue among the kids, plays on sibling dynamics. The very straightforward premise provides little in the way of nuance and inventiveness, but younger readers may find it somewhat amusing. The lighthearted, cartoon style of the illustrations makes for some fun moments, especially through the sound-effect balloons. The narrator is light-skinned with reddish-orange hair, the other siblings are brown-skinned and dark-haired, one of the parents is light-skinned and blond, and the other parent is dark-haired and brown-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**A Christmas Adventure**

Franceschelli, Christopher
Illus. by Allison Black
Abrams Appleseed (54 pp.)
$15.99  |  Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-4197-3154-9
Series: Abrams Trail Tale

One girl’s holiday gets off to a less than twinkling start.

Avital is despondent because her mom’s away this Hanukkah. Kindhearted cousin Ruby is determined to boost Avital’s spirits and devises a “huge eight-night Hanukkah treasure hunt,” the end of which the family will give Avital a “big, exciting gift.” On the first night of Hanukkah and on every night of the holiday thereafter, Ruby gives Avital a rhyming clue to a gift she’ll receive. The mostly small items cheer Avital somewhat, but Ruby still isn’t sure about the special surprise. A phone call

**MERRYTALE**

Less than twinkling start.

The text bogs down the otherwise engaging and cheerful illustrations. (Board book. 2-4)
“A thoughtful and inclusive overview of seasonal celebrations.”

CHRISTMAS WITH AUNTIE
James, Helen Foster
Illus. by Petra Brown
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Aug. 15, 2022
978-1-5341-1173-8

The Christmas season is made extra special by time spent with a favorite auntie.

A charmingly illustrated family of bunnies welcomes Auntie into their warren for holiday fun. Auntie and a young bunny relative enjoy baking together, trimming the tree, listening to carols sung by a host of woodland creatures, and building a snowbunny, among other activities. Their forest home is richly adorned with cheery décor, with a blanket of white snow atop the warren. Rhyming text gently narrates, and the loving relationship between aunt and child is demonstrated through hugs, kisses, and kind words. Sweet details, like Christmas tree ornaments made from carrots and pine cones, add to the cozy and cheerful feel. Young readers will love sharing this story with their own aunties at Christmastime. Blank lines printed in the back serve as a space where an aunt can write a special message to a “favorite bunny,” and the opposite page has an area where a photo of auntie and child can be glued, turning this book into a keepsake. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A Yuletide tale featuring irresistible bunnies that also spotlights a cherished relationship. (Picture book. 0-3)

HAPPY ALL-IDAYS!
Jin, Cindy
Illus. by Rob Sayegh Jr.
Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (16 pp.)
$7.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-66952-141-1

A look at the many ways people observe the holiday season.

This rhyming board book serves as a brief introduction to different celebrations. Each two-page layout features a family with items and symbols, such as a menorah or a Christmas tree, as well as a holiday card. Many different types of families are shown in the spirit: a single parent and child or a multiracial family, among others. The book includes not only Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa, but also “Chrismukkah” (a celebration of both Christmas and Hanukkah). Notably, one spread depicts a family with no holiday symbols; instead, the text wishes readers a cheerful, nonreligious “Season’s Greetings / and Happy New Year!” The illustrations are simple and colorful. Nearly everyone is portrayed with a smile or an open-mouthed grin. Though the art may lack overall sophistication, its inclusive depiction of people gets high marks—in keeping with the book’s spirit of representation, characters range in age, size, ability, and skin tone. While it can be difficult to draw out nuance in a story for toddlers, this book does a lot to underscore the point that family and celebration don’t have singular definitions. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A thoughtful and inclusive overview of seasonal celebrations. (Board book. 2-4)

THE COOL BEAN PRESENTS
As Cool as It Gets
John, Jory
Illus. by Pete Oswald with Saba Joshaghani
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$10.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-06-304542-2
Series: Food Group

The pressure of picking a proper gift to exchange at a party makes the holiday season anything but a favorite time for the leguminous star of The Cool Bean (2019).

Having picked ultra-cool Beanadette J.’s name out of the basket but lacking the bean-bucks to buy anything, the frustrated frijole turns creative, using pens and paints to depict the intended recipient surrounded by tigers and rainbows. Seeing the multicolored guests at the party getting electronics and other expensive fancies only cranks up the anticipated humiliation—but Beanadette loves the picture, and so does everyone else. “I’d created something unique and original. I’d given it away. And it had made somebody happy.” If that summation isn’t explicit enough for some readers, John’s beany bestower leaves the party with a brand-new, hand-knit scarf of their own (“truly a cool—and also warm—gift, indeed”) and then ends by boiling the message down to a mushy meme: “When in doubt, just make something.” However easy it may be to see as naïve (or at best aspirational) the notion that beans, human or otherwise, are sure to value hand-made gifts over manufactured ones, young children or anyone with no bean-bucks to spend might take it to heart. No specific holidays are identified aside from glimpses of snow, garland, and carolers in the illustrations of anthropomorphized, cartoonish beans. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A solid message for young DIYers, particularly those with more time than bean-bucks. (Picture book. 6-8)

PINKALICIOUS AND THE HOLIDAY SWEATER
Kann, Victoria
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
978-0-06-300388-0
978-0-06-300387-3 paper

Pinkalicious turns a “Secret Snowman” gift from fashion disaster to fab in this easy reader outing.

Joining a recent spate of holiday celebrations that never actually mention a specific holiday, the episode begins when Pinkalicious pulls classmate Molly’s name...
from the bowl at school and decides to knit her a “pinkamazing” sweater. Unfortunately, the project is beyond Pinkalicious’ knitting powers, and the finished result is a sad mess. What to do? Enter Dad, on his way to an “ugly holiday sweater party” at work...and the next day Molly is delightfully modeling a sweater so encrusted with garland, pompons, candy, and small ornaments that the ragged original is transformed. In no time Pinkalicious is teaching the entire class, including Ms. Penny, the teacher, how to knit and decorate holiday scarves and other small projects because: “’Tis the season to make everything sparklerrific!” In similarly oblique visual nods to certain December festivities, the sedate, finely detailed illustrations feature a gaudy evergreen on Dad’s sweater and a brown-skinned classmate knitting, and then rocking, a red, green, and black scarf. Pinkalicious presents as White (as do Ms. Penny, Mom, Dad, and brother Peter), Molly presents as Black, and the class is racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**A pink typical bit of problem-solving with a holiday theme.** (Early reader 5-7)

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**HAPPY SANTA DAY!**

Katz, Alan
Illus. by Sernur Isık
Aladdin (80 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-5444-6795-8
Series: Elf Academy, 3

With Christmas over, will anyone thank Santa for all his work?

Santa is home, and Santa is pooped.

The young elves worked hard to make the toys that he delivered, but they were able to have a snooze while he was delivering toys to millions and millions of children. The kids of Ms. Dow’s second grade class at the Elf Academy toy workshop think that Santa needs to be thanked for all his hard work. What better way to thank him than with a surprise party? Meanwhile, Santa is very grateful for all the hard work of the elves at Elf Academy...don’t *they* deserve a surprise thank you party? Both parties plan a surprise party, and when the parties clash, it’s a post-Christmas surprise for everyone! Katz’s third book in the Elf Academy series, part of Aladdin Quix, which consists of early, easy chapter books, is an amusing, light tale, another good bridge between picture books and chapter books. Bolded, potentially difficult words appear in a list at the back with their definitions, and a cast of characters in the beginning and content questions in the back of the book complete the package. Isık’s occasional black-and-white illustrations of happy elves and Santa are a plus. The images depict the elves as diverse; Santa’s and Mrs. Claus’ faces are never seen.

**A fun, holiday-themed treat for emerging readers.** (Fiction. 5-8)

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**MURRAY CHRISTMAS**

Keller, E.G.
Illus. by Sydney Hanson
Doubleday (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-593-37506-8 PLB
$21.99 PLB
978-0-593-37505-1
978-0-593-37506-8 PLB

A dog living in a big city takes his job very seriously.

Murray isn’t going to let anything happen to his humans, saving them from random birds, blowing laundry, and anything else that might endanger them; after all, his collar states his job: “patrol dog.” But he’s mightily confused when his humans plant a tree in the house, and who is this bearded guy in a red suit he is seeing everywhere? And what’s with all the new threats in the house? From “flashy snake[s]” (Christmas lights) to “smelly sticks” (candles), Murray has his paws full (as do his family members). When Christmas Eve arrives, readers will be able to guess what will happen. The showdown fortunately ends happily for both “intruder” and dog, who is gifted a new tag for his collar. Funny details in the digital illustrations will keep readers in stitches. Murray predictably “waters” the Christmas tree, and his pink pig stuffie is usually never far away. Murray’s family includes one parent who has red hair and pale skin; the other presents as Black with short dark hair. Their adorable tyke has brown skin, often sports a dress and tights, and is missing a tooth. Murray is short with black-and-white fur and a big nose. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**A delightful Christmas tale that shows a dog’s perspective on the holiday and all its trappings.** (Picture book 3-8)

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**THE DONKEY’S SONG**

A Christmas Nativity Story

Kellum, Jacki
Illus. by Sydney Hanson
Doubleday (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-593-37505-1
978-0-593-37506-8 PLB

A rhyming Nativity narrative.

The donkey who carried Mary to the Nativity calmly focuses on feelings of wonderment surrounding the child’s birth. With huge eyes and a disproportionately large head, it’s tough to imagine this tiny creature hauling humans; still, the little donkey is utterly adorable. Lines like “a bit of tingle-toes. / That’s how the evergreen / smelled to me, / a bit of fresh pine to my nose” offer opportunities for caregivers to extend the reading to sensory activities, though the scent of pine doesn’t seem historically accurate. An uncluttered stable features friendly, curious barn animals that greet baby Jesus along with the three Wise Men. Told in verse, the tale evokes a tender, pleasant mood. Despite the title, it is unclear if the text can be sung aloud or if it is a reference to the closing lines, “I lifted my head / above His hay bed // ...and sang of this morning of grace.” Jesus, referred to as “the Baby” and “the Babe,” is tan-skinned, as are his parents. Two of the Wise Men
are light-skinned, while one is darker-skinned. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A gentle, spare tale, part bedtime story, part Christmas fare. *(Picture book. 2-5)*

**THE CHRISTMAS BOOK FLOOD**
Kilgore, Emily
Illus. by Kitty Moss
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-374-38899-7

A long-held holiday tradition centered on the written word.

As winter settles across a beautiful land, people prepare for the tradition of gifting books on Christmas Eve. They pore over bulletins and bookstore shelves to plan the perfect choices for family and friends. Scenes of holiday cheer and tight-knit community abound as the day approaches. Then, people stream into the bookshop to make their long-awaited purchases. A young brown-skinned child even makes a last-minute discovery, having found the perfect book “to bring loved ones joy.” Everyone heads home for a celebration among festive decorations, sparkling lights, sumptuous food, and many loving hugs. After, they all settle in for “the best part of all”—cozy snuggles by the hearth with hot chocolate and hours of reading their new treasures. Kilgore depicts the Icelandic tradition of Jólabókaflóðið, or “Christmas Book Flood,” in loving, magical terms (more historical information is provided in an author’s note). The art adds old-world charm while leading the narrative through blue-tinted winter nights and warm, homey interiors. Moss’ lovely, heavily saturated colors seem to evoke old Currier and Ives prints with their detail to scenic landscapes, while collaged images of newsprintlike pages add texture and fun. These captivating illustrations depict a family of four (one parent and two children are brown-skinned; one parent is light-skinned) as the story’s focus among a racially diverse country town. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Marvelously enchanting. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

**TWINKLE, TWINKLE, WINTER NIGHT**
Litwin, Megan
Illus. by Nneka Myers
Clarion/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-358-57204-6

A sky spangled with stars lights up snowy scenes in this celebration of winter holidays.

Casting her verses in the cadences of a familiar nursery rhyme, Litwin catalogs sources of illumination beginning with the stars—“In the quiet, calm, and clear—// sky sparkles like a chandelier.” She moves on from “quiet wood / to busy town,” the latter a village decked in festive strings and displays of lights, before finishing by sending readers “off to cozy beds to sleep.” In illustrations that are hazily aglow with natural and artificial lights, Myers follows suit by sending an adult and a child, both brown-skinned, on a walk through woods to a skating rink, then into a town square in which racially diverse residents can be seen chatting or singing carols, and on past a big hanging star and houses and stores lit with Kwanzaa candles, a menorah, a stylized Diwali lamp, and other seasonal symbols. At last, following a glimpse of two olive-skinned children leaving a plate of cookies next to their fireplace before bedding down, faces peering out of windows take final glances at the stars together. The snow and heavy dress indicate a setting in the Northern Hemisphere, but even if some of the imagery is oblique, at least an effort has been made to be inclusive without any prioritization or even mention of a specific holiday. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Suitable for bedtime reading any season, rich in both visual and sonic resonances. *(Picture book. 5-7)*

**WINTER WONDERLAND**
Lyons, Kelly Starling
Illus. by Niña Mata
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-06-308362-2
Series: Ty’s Travels

Ty and Momma explore a Christmasy winter wonderland.

This installment of the Ty’s Travels early-reader series focuses on the magic of the holiday season. Ty notices that his North Pole snow globe resembles the freshly fallen snow in his own neighborhood. He and Momma head out with pup Brownie past a snowpal, a group of singing polar bears, and dancing dolls and toy soldiers, all straight out of Ty’s imagination. After sledding, Ty’s big wish to meet Santa comes true. Lyons tells a simple story that leans on Mata’s illustrations to bring it to life. Ty’s expressive face conveys his initial disappointment at not seeing Santa and his eventual surprise and joy. Mata’s crayonlike images, which look as though they were created by Ty himself, depict Ty’s imaginings, while the illustrations of real life are more saturated, conveying movement and texture. There are big sprays of snow as the children sled gleefully as well as patterned scarves and the springy curls of Ty’s hair. Though the storyline is a basic “day in the life,” the illustrations will delight readers. Ty and his family are Black; Santa is brown-skinned, and the elves and children at Santa’s workshop are diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A cozy, snowy Christmastime read. *(Early reader. 4-6)*
SNOW HORSES
A First Night Story
MacLachlan, Patricia
Illus. by Micha Archer
McElderry (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-5344-7355-3
A young woman harnesses two Percheron horses for a magical sleigh ride on New Year's Eve.

Archer's signature scenes set the mood with snowy fields dotted with groupings of trees; an illustration of one of the trees features graceful limbs encircled with collaged images of music notes. Readers follow sheep and Jenny into the barn at dusk as she leads the strong, black horses to the sleigh, attaches bells to their bridles, and turns on the lights outlining four rows of seats. MacLachlan, deftly crafting her narrative with a minimum of well-chosen words, provides the sensory details. Text is presented in blocks of free verse: “The breaths of Tim and Tom make silver clouds. / The sleigh makes a whisper sound in the snow—a comforting swish, swish, swish.” En route, the vehicle gathers children, some of whom trumpet their excitement from a front porch before hopping aboard. When their turn is over, the elders get a ride, laughing and talking, remembering their own childhood snow play, presented in a sequence of vignettes. Changes in light and perspective maintain interest, as do the patterns of the snowflakes and the starbursts glowing from streetlamps. The warm palette and bold designs of the papers used to depict fabric and floor planks contrast beautifully with the smooth coolness of the wintry landscape. Jenny is brown-skinned; the other characters are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A quiet, deeply satisfying celebration of the turn of the year and the joy of community. (Picture book. 4-7)

LATKES AND APPLESAUCE
A Hanukkah Story
Manushkin, Fran
Illus. by Kris Easler
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-62354-156-9
A heavy snowstorm affects a family’s Hanukkah celebrations.

This new version of a tale originally published in 1989 with illustrations by Robin Spowart sees the Menashe family planning to celebrate Hanukkah with the traditional candles, games, and, most especially, delicious feasts of latkes and applesauce. But the snow is falling relentlessly; there are no apples in the house, and the potatoes are covered under the heavy snow. Still, Papa, Mama, Rebecca, and Ezra find joy in lighting the candles, one more each night, playing the dreidel game, and eating their quickly dwindling chicken soup. Two visitors, a small kitten and a skinny dog, provide a surprising and very satisfying conclusion, reflected in the wonderfully appropriate new names they are given. The narrative feels like a folk tale, with simple, descriptive language that highlights ever hopeful Papa’s charming phrases as he encourages a cheerful outlook. Easler’s large-scale, digitally rendered graphite and gouache illustrations complement the text and add lovely touches of humor. The family members are expressive, depicted with tan skin and dark brown hair. Although the tale is set “long ago in a village far away,” there is a definite modernity to the family’s clothes and furnishings. The author addresses young readers at the end, asking if the story is a miracle (“Who can say? It happened, and maybe that is miracle enough for anyone!”). (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A warm and tender tale of a loving Jewish family celebrating an ancient tradition. (information on Hanukkah, latkes and applesauce, and the dreidel) (Picture book. 3-8)

RANDY, THE BADLY DRAWN REINDEER!
McBeth, T.L.
Henry Holt (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-250-26384-1
A third metafictive story about the “badly drawn horse,” this time for the Christmas bookshelf.

As in the prior titles about Randy, illustrations look as though they were torn from a child’s coloring book, with colorful, carefully crayoned detail. Speech balloon text from offstage characters—a child excitedly sharing the story with a caregiver before bed—focuses attention on Randy himself, whose dialogue forms the main text. He learns about Christmas and becomes enamored of Santa’s reindeer. Following a suggestion from the unseen child (“If only Randy were a reindeer….Then he could help Santa!”), Randy decides he wants to join them in pulling the sleigh through the Christmas Eve sky. Alas, his attempts to prance, fly, and eat carrots are, though hilariously endearing, less than successful and tiring. A forlorn Randy collapses with exhaustion and is alarmed when he wakes up on Christmas morning, too late to pull Santa’s sleigh. A happy ending emerges, however, when Randy discovers a gift from Saint Nick, perfect for his reindeer aspirations. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A merry, bright, and silly Christmas tale. (Picture book. 3-6)
“An ode to late-life nostalgia that will nonetheless be visually enchanting to all ages.”

THE LITTLE TOYMAKER

Min, Cat
Levine Querido (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-64614-180-7

A magical toymaker creates wondrous toys not for children but for grandparents and older people.

Min’s fantastical imagination is once again on full Technicolor display in this fairy tale–like story about a toymaker who lives “in a faraway land, on top of a rainbow mountain.” The twist? The Little Toymaker is a small boy, wearing a red and yellow robe adorned with tiny stars. Older people bring him toys from their childhood, and he rebuilds them into “something new—something magical.” One day, a particularly tough case arrives at his door. A woman has brought a small tin that she played with as a girl. Though the message might, like the toys themselves, be best visualized as a bronze soldier, the woman he helps is light-skinned and white-haired; and the stockings so they aren’t forgotten. Santa agrees, and he and the mouse, Tinsel (nicknamed Tiny Tin), set off on their circumnavigating sleigh ride. Dressed in a miniature Santa outfit, Tinsel walks along the mantel of the first house and slides trinkets and sweets into each family member’s stocking, even leaving a special treat for a local mouse. Though this tale is sweet, there’s little new here. It’s yet another tale—and a fairly low-stakes one at that—where a character saves Christmas; plus, it’s similar in poetic structure to Clement C. Moore’s famous “A Visit From St. Nicholas.” Still, it does offer the opportunity for a new holiday tradition, as the little mouse tells readers to write both Santa’s and Tinsel’s names on their Christmas letters next year.

Though digital, Graegin’s illustrations have a hand-drawn look and a 1940s-1950s feel. Santa is light-skinned, while the elves vary in skin tone. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Small amusement. (Picture book 3-7)

THE STOCKING STUFFER

Merriweather, Holley
Illus. by Stephanie Graegin
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
$12.99 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-0-06-314207-7

A tiny helper’s moment to shine.

It’s Christmas Eve, and Santa is almost ready to go. When double-checking his list, he’s surprised and delighted that there’s no one on the Naughty List this year. But that means that Santa and the elves will need to deliver more toys than ever. A mouse who lives in the reindeer’s barn, who has always wanted to help Santa and his crew, tells Santa that with so much work, someone needs to oversee the stockings so they aren’t forgotten. Santa agrees, and he and the mouse, Tinsel (nicknamed Tiny Tin), set off on their circumnavigating sleigh ride. Dressed in a miniature Santa outfit, Tinsel walks along the mantel of the first house and slides trinkets and sweets into each family member’s stocking, even leaving a special treat for a local mouse. Though this tale is sweet, there’s little new here. It’s yet another tale—and a fairly low-stakes one at that—where a character saves Christmas; plus, it’s similar in poetic structure to Clement C. Moore’s famous “A Visit From St. Nicholas.” Still, it does offer the opportunity for a new holiday tradition, as the little mouse tells readers to write both Santa’s and Tinsel’s names on their Christmas letters next year.

Though digital, Graegin’s illustrations have a hand-drawn look and a 1940s-1950s feel. Santa is light-skinned, while the elves vary in skin tone. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An ode to late-life nostalgia that will nonetheless be visually enchanting to all ages. (Picture book 4-8)
“Charming visuals and manipulatives make this Christmas tale highly appealing to little readers.”

**WE’RE GOING ON A SLEIGH RIDE**

**MARY ENGELBREIT’S THE LITTLEST NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS**

*Moores, Clement C.*  
*Illustrated by Mary Engelbreit*  
*Adapted by the illustrator*

Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sept. 20, 2022  
978-0-06-296933-0

The classic holiday poem, cut to fit, updated to suit modern sensibilities, and presented with a cast of small animals.

Actually, considering that in the original, Santa rode a “miniature sleigh” (here, an extravagantly decorated ice skate), there’s a certain logic to replacing the human family of her 2002 version of the poem with mice, transforming the reindeer into cardinals, and depicting the “jolly old elf” as a raccoon. Though the liberties Engelbreit takes with the text to accommodate these changes are relatively minor (“And then in a twinkling on the roof I heard / The prancing and pawing of each little bird”), dropping whole lines (“More rapid than eagles…” “As dry leaves…”), dressing Santa in velvet rather than fur, and having him suck not on a pipe but a peppermint stick (so “holly leaves,” not smoke, “encircled his head like a wreath”) justifiably account for the altered title. But what are elisions and distortions to audiences who delight in luxuriantly detailed domestic scenes strewn with antique toys, sweets, and dancing lines of block-lettered verse? For literary purists, there are alternative editions aplenty. *(This book was digitally reviewed.)*

A cozy pleaser, especially for the author’s fans and collectors. *(Picture book. 5-8)*

**WE’RE GOING ON A SLEIGH RIDE**

**A Lift-the-Flap Adventure**

*Mumford, Martha*  
*Illustrated by Cherie Zamazing*

Bloomsbury (24 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sept. 6, 2022  
978-1-5476-1122-5  
Series: Bunny Adventures

Rabbits ride along on Santa’s sleigh helping deliver gifts. The rhyming lift-the-flap book shows a White-presenting Santa and friends flying past penguins and over polar bears, zipping over coastal towns, leaving presents as they go. Every other page invites readers to help find hidden gifts beneath camouflage-flaps—in a grandfather clock door, on a boat, and behind a shuttered window, for example. Though these gifts are spread throughout the book, the text beneath the flaps keeps a running count, ending with 10 presents beneath the tree. Though it doesn’t inhibit the flow of the book, this addition might be tough for little readers to follow and keep track of. Zamazing’s illustrations are darling. The bunny helpers are oh-so-sweet, each with an individually designed scarf and sweater. Each page is full of fun details, like a penguin pulling on the sleigh’s string of Christmas lights, the dwindling pile of gifts as the team flies on, and the squares on the quilts of the sleeping bunnies as Santa delivers presents to the little ones. Children will delight in finding and flipping the flaps, and each page invites readers to linger over and absorb the lovely artwork. The pages are extra thick, so while this title isn’t as sturdy as a board book, it should endure some rough handling.

Charming visuals and manipulatives make this Christmas tale highly appealing to little readers. *(Picture book. 3-5)*

**THE RETURN OF THE CHRISTMAS WITCH**

*Murphy, Dan & Aubrey Plaza*  
*Illustrated by Julia Iredale*

Viking (56 pp.)  
$19.99 | Oct. 11, 2022  
978-0-593-35083-6

Author Murphy and actor Plaza’s follow-up to *The Legend of the Christmas Witch* (2021) sees the titular character entering the modern world.

After hundreds of years sleeping in ice, Kristtörn, the Christmas Witch and the sister of Santa Claus, awakens to find she is alone and has lost her magical powers. After walking through a blizzard, she is welcomed indoors by a worker at Kringle Headquarters, a corporation that has replaced Santa Claus. While the Christmas Witch finds a spot to sleep in the woods, a girl named Poppy causes a ruckus at home, ridiculing her brother for believing in Santa. When Poppy discovers Kristtörn in the nearby woods, she leaves food and clothing for her, and Kristtörn leaves her gifts from the natural world in return. But as Kristtörn discovers more upsetting realities of the modern era and recovers her magic, she blames her brother for abandoning Christmas and decides to seek vengeance, making everyone pay. Santa arrives barely in time to stem the tide of his sister’s violent rage and save Christmas. This tale’s commentary on the commercialization of holidays is overshadowed by the destructive woman’s rage, leaving readers to decipher layered messages about capitalism and anger; those unfamiliar with the first book will have an especially hard time doing so. Iredale’s illustrations have a classic fairy-tale feel, with tones of white, brown, and forest green. Kristtörn and Santa are light-skinned; Poppy is tan-skinned. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Strictly for fans of the character’s first outing. *(Picture book. 3-5)*
One teacher knits up a minor miracle. Fresh snow on the day before Christmas vacation means a fun-filled, extra-long recess for Miss Mary's class. But the event falls well below the beloved teacher's expectations—the snow angels have no wings, and the hockey game is short-lived. The reason? All the children have to tuck their cold hands into their coat pockets. So Miss Mary, who loves to knit her own clothes, decides to make mittens for all the students for Christmas, but the store is out of yarn. Determined, she rushes home and unravels her own gloves, plus her hat and scarf. Realizing that's not enough yarn for 20 pairs of mittens, she raids the rest of her house for more material. For two days, she knits and knits. On Christmas morning, the students find wrapped packages on their front steps. They pause their excited outdoor play to thank Miss Mary. Though the story focuses on the holiday's values of giving and gratitude, it positions the best teachers as angelic, sacrificing miracle workers—a rosy perspective at odds with the efforts of actual, overworked educators. Andrianí's artwork has a classic feel, in the inked-cartoon vein of Peggy Parish's *Amelia Bedelia* (1965), illustrated by Fritz Siebel. The book includes instructions, aimed at intermediate knitters, for making a mitten ornament. Among a racially diverse class and small town, Miss Mary is light-skinned. Andrianí's portraits complement the material beautifully. All characters are pale-skinned.

A fresh story for fans of classic fairy tales. (Picture book. 4-8)

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Miss Mary's Christmas Mittens
Noble, Trinka Hakes
Illus. by Renée Andriani
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 15, 2022
978-1-5341-1167-7

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Evie's Christmas Wishes
Parkinson, Siobhán
Illus. by Shannon Bergin
Little Island (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-912417-79-7

Evie and her family prepare for Christmas while she notes her holiday wishes. Getting ready means rehearsing the school Nativity play, preparing the cake, decorating the tree, and writing to Santa Claus. Throughout, Evie whispers wishes and hopes—for a singing part in the play, for a delicious cake, and even for a baby sister. Though she doesn't get exactly what she dreams of, things have a way of working out—she wishes for a reindeer but she finds the family has an ornament version at home, for example. The family also looks forward to a visit from Uncle Seán, who has a surprise in store. While the location isn't explicitly stated, Gaelic shop signs and terms such as *Mammy* for mom indicate the story is likely set in Ireland. Bergin's illustrations are warm and inviting, with rich oranges and reds and effective use of light and shadow. Evie, her parents, and her uncle are light-skinned; their community is a diverse one. Parkinson, the first children's laureate of Ireland, captures a child's eager holiday energy and hopeful spirit. Though the plot is simple, the pairing of text and illustration makes this a cozy, feel-good read. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Charming illustrations buoy this sweet holiday tale. (Picture book. 3-6)

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12 Days of Richard Simmons
Simmons, Richard
Penguin Young Readers
Penguin Workshop (48 pp.)
$12.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-593-52059-8

Get ready to become a holiday sweater. And of course we mean sweater as in “one who perspires” because Simmons, the home-aerobics guru who brought us *Sweatin’ to the Oldies*, returns with a holiday-themed book designed to promote healthy living. The book parodies “The Twelve Days of Christmas” but with a shift in lyrics: “On the
THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS
Pingry, Patricia A.
Illus. by Alice Buckingham
WorthyKids/Ideals (22 pp.)
$7.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-374-31460-6

Originally published in 1998 with illustrations by Lorraine Wells, then republished in 2010 with art by Rebecca Thornburgh, Pingry's Nativity story sees new life with fresh artwork by Buckingham.

A brown-skinned family gathers on Christmas and learns the story of Jesus’ birth, from the angel telling Mary that she will have a child, to Joseph and Mary traveling to Bethlehem, to, finally, the Wise Men celebrating the new baby’s birth. At the end, the present-day family exchanges gifts as a sign of love for each other and celebrates Jesus’ birthday. The somewhat bland text treads familiar ground; this is a story that’s been told and retold many times, though it does break the tale down into digestible pieces for young children. Because the explanations are fairly simple, it may not be helpful to those seeking to learn about the holiday. The illustrations, however, are cheery and warm. Notably, the biblical figures, except for a couple of light-skinned angels, are depicted in varying shades of brown skin—a welcome change from books about the Nativity that portray characters as White. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

WORTH WADING THROUGH the text for the artwork, which offers a more inclusive portrayal of the Nativity. (Board book. 2-4)

WRECK THE HALLS
Rathjen, Melinda L.
Illus. by Gareth Williams
WorthyKids/Ideals (20 pp.)
$7.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-5460-0226-0

A tow truck shows off their holiday preparation skills.

This Christmas board book features many different types of vehicles, but when it comes to superior decorating and merrymaking skills, the wrecker takes top prize. There are holiday puns galore here: “Boats buoy spirits / in low or yuletide.” “Taxis fare well / at making things merry.” Young readers who adore all things with wheels will be pleased to see buses, race cars, semis, and trains, among others. The wrecker really takes center stage in this story, proving helpful at stringing Christmas lights, towing Santa’s cookies, and hanging ornaments on a tree. While many of the wrecker’s jobs make sense given its build and tools, not all do. Is a wrecker really better at caroling than a train that can whistle? Still, young readers will be delighted to see the wrecker in action. The book wraps up with the expected sentiment: Christmas is about “the love that we share.” Each vehicle has eyes on their windshield and a mouth on the grill, giving them humanlike expressions. The illustrations feature familiar board-book elements such as bright colors, simple drawings, and minimal detail. This one blends child-favorite trucks with a Christmas theme; nothing here is novel or refreshing, but there’s really nothing wrong with that either. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

FULL OF WHAT LITTLE READERS LOVE. (Board book. 1-3)

SEASON OF LIGHT
Redman, Jess
Illus. by Ramona Kaulitzki
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-374-31460-6

Families welcome the many-sided spirit of Christmas.

Christmas, Redman reminds us, means joy and wonder. It means loved ones coming together, it means people giving their time, their resources, and the gift of song, and it means sharing stories of faith. Throughout these seasonal proclamations, readers observe three core families, each celebrating Christmas in their own way. Later, these families come together during a Nativity play. Then the congregation lights candles on a snowy evening amid stringed lights and sparkling stars. Told in rhyme, the text closes with an acknowledgement that “the world may not always shine so bright” but encourages readers to keep these values alive during the rest of the year. The story exudes a sense of community, from the church play to a festive scene at a community center to a group of people caroling at an assisted living facility. Kaulitzki’s soft-edged illustrations conjure a calm and bright atmosphere. Still, though the tale is a solid one, it
“A lovely choice to help emergent readers get into the Christmas spirit.”

**POPPLETON AT CHRISTMAS**

Doesn’t quite stand out in a crowd of similarly themed books. The town is racially diverse; one of the central families presents as Black, another is brown, and the third is light-skinned. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**TWELVE LITTLE FESTIVE FROGS**

A reimagined version of “The Twelve Days of Christmas” with some hoppy new friends.

Twelve colorful amphibians pass a bright-yellow present from one to the next while also getting help from various woodland creatures along the way. Each verse introduces a new natural wintry item such as “ten holly leaves” or “four snowy flakes.” There are even “two rockin’ robins” who join in the fun (which hints at the book’s original publication country of England, where robins can be found all year). The frogs are collecting all of the items for a very special, festive reveal. The song scans well except for the inclusion of the frogs’ names (“On the eighth day of Christmas / Tate frog gave to Kleine”), which can sometimes trip the tongue. These Santa hat–adorned amphibians, who first appeared in Robinson and Stanley’s *Ten Little Yoga Frogs*, a U.K. title that hasn’t yet been published in the United States, strike curious poses against the snowy terrain, reminiscent of their moves in the earlier book. Snow-dusted pines, icy lakes, and frosted hillsides create cozy backdrops for this early concept counting book. The yellow present is ultimately opened (thank goodness, the only suspense found in the narrative is resolved) at the final festivities. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**POPPLETON AT CHRISTMAS**

Each tale presents the charming porcine at his most conscientious, gracious self. In “The Jar,” good-natured Poppleton considers his BFFs’ preferences and needs above all when making his gift choices. When his money runs out before he can purchase the just-right item he wants for llama pal Cherry Sue, the store’s manager comes up with an ingenious solution. In “Snow,” Poppleton wishes for a white Christmas, but the weather isn’t cooperating, so he takes matters into his own trottters with the aid of dozens of artificial-snow–filled aerosol cans. When he’s done, the whole neighborhood “looks like Christmas.” In “Midnight,” Poppleton and buddies Cherry Sue, Fillmore the goat, and Hudson the mouse celebrate a festive Christmas Eve with cider and cookies, sparkling candles and tree lights, secret Christmas wishes, and, before going home to bed, a walk to wish “a good Christmas to the animals of the night: the owls, the deer, and the raccoons.” This sweet, easy chapter book overflows with warmth and coziness and exudes the true spirit of the holiday season: friendship, thoughtfulness, and kindness. The cheery, colorful illustrations and endearing, expressive animal protagonists are well suited to the text. Backmatter bonuses include a guide to drawing Poppleton and a prompt for creating an illustrated story.

**WHEN SANTA CAME TO STAY**

Santa overstays his welcome after Christmas, overwhelming a family with North Pole visitors.

It’s hard to imagine a world in which Santa’s everyday presence would be too much, but that’s what happens to one child and their family after Santa visits and stays. What’s more, it’s not just Santa who moves in; it’s Mrs. Claus; their kitten, Santa Paws; Santa’s parents and in-laws; even the reindeer. As the year goes by and the family observes various holidays, such as Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day, all with too much Yuletide cheer, the child eventually steps in and teaches Santa a lesson about the sanctity and joy of Christmas. Sharff’s rhyming text reads well, giving the story a bouncy pace while keeping the pages turning. Kabán’s illustrations feature a multiracial central family and character ensemble, and the child who narrates the story has brown skin; Santa is light-skinned, while Mrs. Claus is tan-skinned. In addition, the illustrations convey a feeling of movement and action, whether it’s Easter bunnies hopping around the house or a chaotic Fourth of July party. Together, the story and art make for a smileworthy book with lots of playful silliness and a gentle reminder about the heart of Christmas. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**“Too much Santa is a bad thing done just right.” (Picture book. 4.7)**

**“Nice but feels standard.” (Picture book. 3.6)**

**“A cheery singalong to share.” (Picture book. 3-6)**

**Kirkus**
“A warm and welcoming Hanukkah story.”

HANUKKAH, HERE I COME!
Steinberg, D.J.
Illus. by Sara Palacios
Grosset & Dunlap (32 pp.)
$5.99 paper \ Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-593-09426-6
Series: Here I Come!

Come celebrate the joys and traditions of Hanukkah in this poetry collection. The cover of this exuberant book hints at the fun within as a group of diverse children play a game of dreidel with a menorah shining behind them indicating that it’s the first night of Hanukkah. Steinberg’s poems guide young readers through various aspects of the holiday, explaining its origins in biblical days with the Maccabees fighting to recapture the temple and the miracle of the small amount of oil burning for eight days and nights. Steinberg then focuses on a modern family’s celebration, including the lighting of the candles with the shammas, the presents stacked and ready to open, the rules of the dreidel game, the food, and the wonderful, noisy, loving togetherness that pervades it all. Attempts to take family selfies by the menorah are a hilarious failure. Then there’s the endless debate over the right condiment to accompany the latkes, with family members declaring themselves Team Applesauce or Team Sour Cream. The poems, generally in simple abcb rhymes, capture the family’s love and pride in their religious traditions. Palacios’ cartoonish art depicts characters with a wide variety of skin tones and hair colors and who vary in age, complementing and enhancing the text. Stickers with illustrations from the book are appended. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A warm and welcoming Hanukkah story. (Picture-book poetry. 4-8)

PINEY THE LONESOME PINE
A Holiday Classic
West Bakerink, Jane
Running Press Kids (32 pp.)
$18.99 \ Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-7624-8180-4

After being taken from the farm, Piney the Christmas tree tries desperately to get back to the little girl who grew him from a seed.

Grandpa Sid, Georgie, and her pup, Jackster, live in the “town with the longest name in Europe!” Grandpa Sid owns a Christmas tree farm and invites Georgie to plant a tree seed of her own. From that seed, Piney grows, and after four years, Georgie plans to take him home, but he’s accidentally taken from the farm, bound for a tree lot. With the help of Jackster, Piney gets back to Georgie by Christmas Day. One year later, Piney also finds a second life as a book, The Lonesome Pine, written by Grandpa Sid; though the book is made from Piney, he is still alive and still a friend to Georgie. West Bakerink’s book is based on the CGI–animated, Emmy-nominated special Piney: The Lonesome Pine (2019), and the illustrations are stills from this short. Some of the best images are close-ups, like the one of Georgie gazing eagerly at a handful of seeds or the ultrarealistic detailing on her sweater. Otherwise, the images feel disjointed, interrupting the flow of the story. As for the tale itself, the more meaningful relationship seems to be between Georgie and her loving, determined pup, Jackster, even though Piney and his ultimate end as recycled goods are the focus. Grandpa Sid and Georgie are light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A story that swings and misses at becoming a new holiday tradition. (Picture book. 4-7)

AVA’S HOMEMADE HANUKKAH
Woberg, Geraldine
Illus. by Julia Seal
Whitman (32 pp.)
$17.99 \ Sept. 1, 2022
978-0-8075-0495-6

Ava’s extended family members bring their menorahs to celebrate the eighth night of Hanukkah.

The girl decides to create her own menorah after she learns the story behind each special lamp. She tells her pet rabbit, named Maccabee (after the warriors who found the miraculous oil that burned for eight nights in the Hanukkah story), about their meanings. Pop-Pop’s menorah uses “corks that float in jars of oil,” often found in the Sephardic tradition. Aunt Rachel’s lamp is fashioned with a clear glass tube displaying pieces of the special glass ceremonially broken at her wedding with Aunt Tamar. Aunt Tamar’s traditional metal menorah was found by her grandfather in a box left by his grandfather. She tells Ava that she was excited to discover that she had Jewish ancestors, although she was not brought up as a Jew. Other relatives explain their menorahs, and Ava then makes her own menorah to remember people, places, a special event, and her family origins. The story reflects different aspects of contemporary Jewish life and could be used with other books that tell the story of Hanukkah as a festival of religious freedom. It would also work well as an introduction to a menorah-making activity. The characters are light-skinned, except for Aunt Tamar, who is brown-skinned, and Pop-Pop, who has slightly browner skin than most others, perhaps indicating Sephardic heritage. The colorful though pedestrian illustrations clearly show the details of each menorah. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Inspiring creativity and a closer look at personal observances of Hanukkah. (Picture book. 6-8)
When the northern lights twinkle, the winter skies are never truly dark.

Though its title might suggest a strictly winter holiday–themed book—think Christmas-tree bulbs or Hanukkah candles—this poetic picture book, a British import, actually describes the northern lights from the lights’ own point of view. In quiet verse, they tell how they’re formed—“as specks of dust blown to Earth from the sun”—and how they spread their brilliant colors as they travel across various weather patterns in wintry night skies. The illuminations deliver not only transcendent brilliance, but also joy to the numerous flocks, packs, and herds of wonderstruck animals (polar bears, arctic hares, whales, seals, reindeer, wolves, and various bird species among them) and to appreciative Indigenous people—the “storytellers”—who dwell in the Arctic lands below. Readers will delight in the variety of wildlife that call these snowbound forests and waters home; they might also long to feel the “magic” experienced and hear the singing of the people greeting the beaming lights. One might have wished for a very simple explanation of the phenomenon. Still, the delicately lovely illustrations capture the lights’ sparkling luminosity. Some spreads have few or no words, allowing the lush colors to speak for themselves. While this may not explicitly be a holiday book, the wintry setting and celebratory mood make it a delightful seasonal addition. People depicted have varied skin tones. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A glowing tribute to a remarkable natural wonder. (Picture book. 4-8)
A handbook for teens engaged in the work of building healthy relationships—with themselves and with others—written by licensed clinical social workers with experience in this field.

Short, digestible chapters build on one another in this accessible handbook for building empowered relationships. The opening chapters, “So, What’s Important to You?” and “Know Your Worth and Others Will Too,” deal with relationship to self, providing definitions and tools for determining values and cultivating self-esteem. From this core emphasis on self-knowledge and self-love, the book branches out to cover topics that range from friendship to sexual relationships in the age of the internet. The authors are never judgmental or dismissive of teen concerns and focus on providing a tool kit for safe passage, no matter the reader’s path. The chapter entitled “Online Love Doesn’t Feel Virtual” honors digitally forged relationships while highlighting the importance of caution, while “Sex, No Sex, or Something Else? Set Your Terms” explains consent and encourages teens to make their own decisions using the principles of self-knowledge established earlier. Also discussed are body image, abuse, breakups, sexuality and gender identity, and safer sex practices. Each chapter includes illustrative anecdotes and exercises that invite positive action. The authors open with an informative and reassuring opening note for adults explaining the value and importance of sexuality education. Although the book references girls, there is much of value here for all readers.

Compassionate, holistic, purposeful. (resources, references) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
HOW TO EXCAVATE A HEART

Arlow, Jake Maita
HarperTeen (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov 1, 2022
978-0-06-307872-7

Queer Jewish love stubbornly blooms despite the cold of a Washington, D.C., winter.

Fresh off a cataclysmic first semester of college, Shani is determined to pass her winter break internship at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History like a Jewish nun: no girls, no distractions, just fossils. Like all the best-laid plans, hers go awry when she finds herself on a literal collision course with a very cute girl named May. Hallmark movie–style shenanigans ensue. Arlow demonstrates a nimble command of the genre, executing a lean, character-centric plot with a satisfying balance of sweet, funny, and heavy moments. The text is rich in dialogue, the first-person voice distinct and controlled. Shani’s journey to understanding her history and its ramifications for her present is never overwrought and all the more poignant for it. Sexual assault features in the story; it’s an aspect of the lesbian experience that is not often depicted, and it’s handled with sensitivity and compassion. Shani and May are both of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage, and their shared background adds an enriching ripple like a weed in the would-be-salted earth of Shani’s heart; this is a tonic and a testament for the times.

Warming as hot chocolate in a blizzard; a familiar favorite made fresh from scratch. (Romance. 14-18)

THE PORTALS OF SPARKLING FALLS

Bailey, J.S.
BHC Press (262 pp.)
978-1-64397-314-2 paper
978-1-64397-313-5

A girl without memories crosses into a different world.

After falling down a flight of stairs, Laura—at least, she thinks her name is Laura—wakes up in an empty house in the middle of a snowstorm with no memory of who she is. Something guides her to the basement, where she unwittingly crosses through a portal into the strange town of Sparkling Falls. There, the year is 241, and Laura sounds younger than her 16 years, but her dedication to finding the truth guides the novel to a fitting, poignant conclusion. Laura is White; the inhabitants of Sparkling Falls are racially diverse.

An entertaining read for fans of science fiction with religious undertones. (Science fiction. 12-16)

WE SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST

The Bluma and Felix Goldberg Story
Baker, Frank W. & Tim E. Ogline
Illus. by Tim E. Ogline
dev. by Esther Greenberg, Karl Goldberg & Henry Goldberg
Imagine & Wonder Publishers (156 pp.)
978-1-63761-021-3 paper
978-1-63761-020-6 paper

A graphic nonfiction book shares the history and legacy of the Holocaust through the stories of two Polish Jewish survivors. Bluma Tishgarten and Felix Goldberg fell in love at a displaced persons camp outside Munich in 1944 and went on to raise a family in the United States, leaving Europe and the horrors of the Holocaust behind. Bluma and her sister had weathered Bergen-Belsen and Dachau; Felix had survived Auschwitz and the death march to Buchenwald. These stories are shared in tandem, a split perspective winding them together and including relevant historical information. Kinetic artwork in a classic graphic novel style accompanies the text, bringing their story to a new audience. The book frames itself as “a cautionary tale of what happens when people stand by and allow antisemitism, hate and prejudice to run rampant,” joining a repertoire of Holocaust sources that call a new generation to action over the fascistic tendencies still alive in our world. The American military is positioned heroically in the text, and America is portrayed as the land of the free, where an immigrant’s dreams of a better life can and will come true. An afterword by editor and project manager John Shableski briefly contextualizes America’s own history of racial oppression within the book’s overarching mission, but a nuanced consideration of America is lacking in the main text.

Moving and important. (family photos, timeline, glossary, resources, index) (Graphic biography. 12-16)
Many young people are regularly subjected to questions from adults about what they want to be when they grow up. In fact, many adults seem to regard the teen years not as valuable and worth enjoying in their own right but simply as a passage to The Future, assessing every decision and activity for how it affects a young person’s adult potential. Some teens are told they can do or be anything only to become overwhelmed by the possibilities and the pressure to make the right choices. Others are discouraged from dreaming, feel they have few options, and struggle to feel optimistic about what adulthood might bring.

A number of recent nonfiction releases offer reassurance. There are books about people who felt compelled to pursue things that brought meaning to their lives with no inkling or expectation of the success that would follow. There are stories of those who overcame obstacles and took winding paths that ultimately led to satisfying work. And there are books that offer concrete guidance for things teens can try right now. Taken together, these titles are formative, hopeful, valuable road maps.


Cramm This Book: So You Know WTF Is Going on in the World Today by Olivia Seltzer (Philomel, Feb. 15): Led by curiosity, a tween took her concerns about current events and turned them into an online newsletter with a global reach—and several years later, this book.

Ready for Launch: An Astronaut’s Lessons for Success on Earth by Scott Kelly (Crown, April 12): A little boy who had difficulties in school grew up to become a record-holding astronaut. Here he shares his remarkable story and hard-earned insights.

Animal Allies: 15 Amazing Women in Wildlife Research by Elizabeth Pagel-Hogan (Chicago Review Press, May 17): The sheer variety of fascinating stories included here is a testament to the many ways there are to make contributions to the study and protection of wildlife.

Don’t Sit on the Baby!, 2nd Edition: The Ultimate Guide to Sane, Skilled, and Safe Babysitting by Halley Bondy (Zest Books, Sept. 6): Babysitting, a common first job for teens, is challenging, rewarding, and cultivates many broadly applicable skills covered by this thorough, accessible guide.

Maybe an Artist: A Graphic Memoir by Liz Montague (Random House Studio, Oct. 4): A successful young cartoonist welcomes readers along on her journey from dyslexic school child to college athlete to someone who found her voice and passion in art.

More Than Money: How Economic Inequality Affects…Everything by Hadley Dyer and Mitchell Bernard, illustrated by Paul Gill (Annick Press, Oct. 11): This comprehensive work gives readers a truly global perspective on societies, explains how their lives are affected by inequality, and motivates them to make things better.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
DANDELION TRAVELS
Barber, Angel
West 44 Books (200 pp.)
$25.80 | Oct. 1, 2022
978-1-9785-9614-6

Over the course of a summer spent away from home, a gay Black teen is able to stop hiding his truths.
At school, Eric Wallace has been perceived as “the Angry Black Man” ever since he defended another queer student from a bully. When he is enraged, he feels overwhelmed and out of control. Around Andrea and Xavier, his friends who are very much in love with each other, Eric is haunted by a longing for Xavier that is fed by a memory of the night when they kissed. At home, Eric hides his emotions, sexuality, desire for dresses, and uncertainty about God from his preacher father and interior designer mother and tries to be “man enough / to be their son.” But all his efforts to hide and pretend fall apart when he witnesses his father’s infidelity. With Andrea and Xavier, Eric flies to Los Angeles, where he finds healing in the ocean, the possibility of new love, reckoning with himself, and unleashing his anger toward his father. This verse novel uses spare text in a large font with plenty of white space surrounding it to convey heavy, nuanced thoughts and emotions concerning identity, relationships, and coming-of-age. What the verse lacks in lyricism and rhythm, it makes up for in authentic and surprising content: The sparsely drawn characters feel alive on the page despite the simplicity of the poems.
A strong, emotionally complex choice for reluctant readers. (Verse novel. 14-18)

THE SCEPTRE
B. E. Boucher

“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
Xander sees a different side to her, one that is daring, loud, and free. As Elaine starts to wonder about all the things she doesn't know about herself, she becomes convinced that the ghost that haunts her home may have the answers she is seeking. This thoughtful novel focuses on Elaine's finding her voice and figuring out who and what she wants to be. There is a lot of rich character growth, and her relationships with friends and family alike feature strong dynamics. Her love triangle with Miles and Xander is engaging. The paranormal elements add to the novel without overwhelming the main storyline. Main characters are assumed White.

A thoughtful coming-of-age tale with a touch of the paranormal. (Fiction. 13-18)

**GRAVE THINGS LIKE LOVE**
Bennett W eagerly, Sara
Delacorte (352 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-593-0355-7

Everybody seems very sure about who Elaine is, except for Elaine herself.

Elaine's family owns a traditional funeral home, handed down from generation to generation. She's always there to help, and her father is certain Elaine will go to mortuary school and take over the struggling business one day. Local kids have dubbed her Funeral Girl; her good friends Sienna and Madison are begrudgingly understanding of all the times she has to cancel plans to help her parents; and to her best friend, Miles, she is a companion to geek out with over their favorite science fiction/fantasy TV show, Dragonfly. Then new student—and ghost hunter—Xander comes to town. Elaine sees a therapist for her generalized anxiety disorder, but Xander sees a different side to her, one that is daring, loud, and

**SUCK IT IN AND SMILE**
Beaudoin-Masse, Laurence
Trans. by Shelley Tanaka
Groundwood (336 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-77306-809-1

An influencer grapples with presenting an authentic life on social media instead of living one in this novel translated from French.

From her home in Quebec, 25-year-old Ellie watches her YouTube account, Quinoa Forever, grow to nearly half a million followers. From recipes to workouts and polished photos on Instagram, Ellie finds new fame thanks to her relationship with her handsome musician boyfriend, Sam, who was a finalist on The Voice. But her life starts to unravel when she meets kind, interesting Dave and she can't stop thinking about him. In addition, someone from a dark part of her past resurfaces, and she begins to lose her grip on maintaining picture perfection. Ellie struggles with disordered eating, including obsessing over calories, bingeing, and misusing exercise; a supporting character accuses her of promoting orthorexia. There is some discussion of body positivity, but frustratingly, Ellie never fully recognizes the seriousness of her behaviors or stops participating in the perpetuation of the culture of fat-shaming. Beaudoin-Masse expertly weaves Ellie's emotional distress—often taking the form of a quiet, burning rage and desperation—into the storyline. The pacing is well done, and the supporting characters are interesting. However, the book finishes on a cliffhanger that may leave readers searching for missing pages. The main characters are assumed White.

A relevant read that comes close to making substantial social revelations. (Fiction. 16-adult)

**NO ESCAPE FROM THE ALHAMBRA**
Boie, Kirsten
Trans. by David Henry Wilson
Arctic Books (400 pp.)
$16.00 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-64690-019-0

A teen's school trip takes a literal approach to hands-on learning in this translated title from Germany.

Boston is a short, blond German boy being raised by a struggling single mom; he was named after the hometown of the American father who doesn't know of his existence. On a class trip to Spain, he's occupied with seeing the sights and trying to fit in with cooler classmates who mock him. While in search of a birthday present for his mother, Boston touches a magical tile and is transported to the year 1492, just as Queen Isabella has decreed that Jewish residents of Granada must convert to Catholicism or leave—without any of their belongings. Amid this religious persecution, Boston encounters some unlikely friends and must find a way to return home before it's too late. Boie skillfully interweaves historical facts, creating a novel that gives equal attention to the three religious communities of 15th-century Spain. The language used by Moorish characters, who frequently refer to Christians as pork-eaters, unfortunately feels caricatured at times. However, the individual characters are developed sufficiently to move the largely predictable plot forward. Boston consistently seems to be at the mercy of other characters, always getting rescued from hopeless situations. This ineptitude comes off as slightly unbearable instead of endearing. Still, the novel's compelling side characters and well-researched historical backdrop are redeeming enough to make it attractive for fans of this genre.

A straightforward time-travel story that never quite fulfills its potential. (author's note, glossary) (Adventure. 12-16)
THE WITCH’S THRONE
Caballes, Cedric
Andrews McMeel Publishing (320 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-5248-7650-0

A quest to stop a prophesied evil, full of fantasy archetypes and special attacks and based on a popular webcomic.

Agni is a human alchemist with skeleton arms who dreams of making friends and taking down a powerful witch. Danger in the form of bandits almost immediately finds her, but her potions are explosively powerful. Before long, she befriends Grom, an elf/giant blacksmith with an eye patch and prosthetic legs who can summon an array of bladed weapons. Together they beseech Reksha, an orc/dwarf combat expert, to train them for the upcoming witch hunt tournament that determines the heroes who will fight the witch. Agni grew up sheltered and possesses a painfully altruistic worldview that endears her to others. Sepia-toned flashbacks reveal the characters’ backstories and motivations, gradually fleshing out their personalities. Video game and shonen manga influences are explicit as characters shout the names of their over-the-top special attacks, resulting in shock waves and damage. Fighting game parries also figure into the action. The world operates according to tabletop and video game logic laid down by a wizard, which is all the explanation needed when the characters are this fun and compelling. The narrative’s shifting perspective keeps track of an expansive roster of friends and foes. The diverse cast includes a range of skin tones and colors, including human and fantasy races.

Put down that controller, manga, and 20-sided die and get lost in this tale inspired by them all. (Graphic fantasy. 13-17)

SALT AND SUGAR
Carvalho, Rebecca
Inkyard Press (368 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-335-45433-1

Two bakeries in the fair city of Olinda, Brazil, are rivals—and two teens fall in love while fighting for their livelihoods.

Lari Ramires grieves the recent passing of her beloved grandmother, her absence deeply felt everywhere, especially in the now-empty spot she occupied in Salt, their family’s bakery. Already struggling to make ends meet thanks to fierce competition with Sugar, the bakery across the street owned by the Molinas, their longtime enemies, the family business takes an even bigger hit when supermarket chain Deals Deals starts driving small businesses to close. Lari finds herself at a crossroads, wanting to help with the bakery but under strict guidance from her mother to concentrate on her studies so that she can be the first Ramires to go to university. To protect Salt, she may do the unthinkable: reach out to Pedro, the Molinas’ teen son, to see if they can work together to save their bakeries. Can Pedro and Lari overcome decades of familial mistrust to work together? Brazilian author Carvalho’s novel is a sweet, charming story that sets its perfectly seasoned enemy-to-lovers tale in the diverse region of northeastern Brazil. As Pedro and Lari’s connection develops, their romance is enriched by the ways they find their own voices despite the weight of family expectations, grief, and financial distress. A delectable rom-com debut. (Romance. 14-18)
For a long time, author Eric Gansworth wanted to write a novel about Brian, a reservation kid who finds himself straddling two worlds, two cultures, and two careers. But he couldn't quite figure out how to do it.

“I kept putting him in the background of other novels until I could figure out how to tell his story,” says Gansworth, who is the author of the young adult novels *If I Ever Get Out of Here* and *Give Me Some Truth* as well as poetry collections, adult novels, essays, plays, and the YA memoir *Apple (Skin to the Core)*. “The reality is, the very first novel I tried to write was a version of his story. But it was terrible.”

A visual artist and a professor of English and creative writing at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York, the multifaceted Gansworth sets his stories on the Tuscarora reservation in western New York (he’s an enrolled Onandaga tribal member). His characters can easily cross each other’s paths, so giving the adult Brian cameo appearances was a good strategy until a worthy story presented itself.

The waiting paid off. *My Good Man* (Levine Querido, Nov. 1) is Brian’s coming-of-age story, and it’s a funny, moving book. Gansworth explores Brian’s struggles between loyalty to his family and his Indigenous community and his desire for a job to escape grinding poverty (Gansworth calls this high-wire act “staying balanced between two canoes”). At odds are Brian’s legacy as a tribal healer versus a career as a reporter at the *Niagara Cascade* newspaper, which means estrangement from friends and family when he has to write about them.

When Tim Sampson, an old friend, is found beaten on the reservation, Brian is assigned the story. But he knows there is more to the attack than his editor suspects. Tim is a White man who married an Indigenous woman and lived on the reservation after her death. The crime leads Brian to revisit his childhood and adolescence and to consider his choices.

Though *My Good Man* is aimed at a young adult audience, it’s mostly set in the 1970s and 1980s, when Gansworth himself was growing up. Adult readers will appreciate its humor and nostalgia, especially fans of the Canadian band Rush, Brian’s favorite group (Gansworth’s, too).

Growing up on the Tuscarora reservation wasn’t always easy, but it provided Gansworth with a fertile background from which to shape stories.

“I definitely didn’t always have favorable experiences growing up,” he says. “But they were rich experiences for someone who was going to go on and be a writer and a painter.” We recently spoke with Gansworth about the novel over the phone from his home in Niagara Falls.
Did you ever work at a newspaper?
I never did personally, but I had a friend who did. We were English majors and had parallel careers, and I hung out with the student journalists. So I knew what their lives were like. This friend did get a version of Brian's job, and he only stayed five years. It was so heartbreaking to him to go to a victim's family and try to get a quote. I thought that was a really intense way of having to live in the world. The world of fiction writers is a little safer. I control who lives or dies.

As the book opens, Brian is the only Indigenous reporter in the newsroom, and he's expected to be the voice of his community yet still report on it when, say, a cousin ends up in a police report. Did you ever see that happen?
I have forever read local newspapers, and so have my peers and family and friends. We’re all in our 40s and 50s, and that’s what people turned to first, the police blotter. What it means to have that job is getting bombarded from both sides, from the newsroom and from your people. I thought it would be a tough balance. Those of us who work in public, we’re always balancing that. And we become perceived as voices of the community, which is hard.

Why did you set the book in this time period?
I knew I wanted to have 1992 as the end date, for Brian to emerge exploring family responsibility and the idea of being a medicine person on the 500th anniversary of the invasion of Columbus.

What appeals to you about writing from a young person's perspective?
It reflects my worldview. My personal history is constantly informing my present. When I was 13, I was reading adult novels—I didn't know there were young adult novels. But I thought there must be other kids like me who can see the richness of their own lives. I guess to be a writer for young people, you have to have kept that set of highways open. I don't know if that happens naturally or you cultivate it.

Have you changed a lot since your own teenage years?
I am not super different to who I was at 15! Some of my contemporaries barely remember high school, which is shocking to me. My memory is pretty much intact. I still love music as much as I ever did, while most of my friends got to a point where concerts weren't interesting to them anymore. For me, the toughest thing about the pandemic was the end of live music in my life.

Why do you set all your stories in the same universe?
I grew up as a Marvel kid, so as I started to write fiction, I made the decision that all my characters were going to live on the same reservation for my whole career. Louise Erdrich gave me the permission to do this. She wrote Love Medicine, and her career launch was a perfect augur for who I might become. Not that Louise and I are similar talents! She's a supernova.

The relationship between Brian and Tim, his mentor, is special. What inspired it?
Tim is an amalgam of people in my life. I want my students to value their experience and work, but a lot of them don’t have a sense of community. It made me realize I had lived in this really unusual situation. There were probably 50 people contributing to my well being and influencing who I became as an adult. All these people made honest contributions to me, and you’d sometimes find one who would be that super honest person with you. Those were such rich moments for me; I wanted to capture them, to give hope to other people like me. You can find people who will nurture you.

Do you think more Indigenous stories are finding their ways to publication now, as opposed to when you first started writing?
I think there has been a tremendous shift in the last five years and new forces that have helped that shift. It’s encouraging. I wish these things were going on when I was a younger writer. I spent much of my early career writing for adults, and I was told point blank by editors: “We’ve already got our Indian.” Would they ever say, “We’ve got our one White writer?” There was one box, and they had filled it. But I think things are improving.

Connie Ogle is a writer in Florida. My Good Man received a starred review in the Aug 15, 2022, issue.
Ivy League ambitions by finding definitive proof of his cheat discoveries made before and after Garrett’s disappearance to dropped with little resolution. Still, readers will find Ada’s story, are sporadically intertwined in her story as the book guides every twist and turn, is worth the trip. other internal conflicts, making it difficult to follow that ele this plane and the other in a place where she sees spirits. The teenager exploring love and drugs right through to her blossom tions with her mother. At school, Ada meets Sal and Stacey, who great-aunt and stepfather, so different from her chilly interac standing the person Ada is growing into, like the one with her mystic aspects of this identity are not as fully explored as ing, but instead she finds a mystery that is much bigger and more dangerous. The manipulated timeline—alternating the main character.

A sometimes-meandering narrative journey with a magnetic main character. (Fiction. 14-18)

TELL ME NO LIES
Contos, Andrea
Scholastic (384 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-338-72620-6

Estranged sisters uncover the mystery behind a star football player’s disappearance. Analytical Nora and social butterfly Sophie alternate narrating chapters—with Nora giving a “confession” regarding the events leading to the disappearance of Sophie’s boyfriend, Garrett, a rich, popular football player; and Sophie investigating what happened after he was gone. It all started when Garrett cheated by copying one of Nora’s essays—and his word was given equal credibility to Nora’s due to his social status (the narrator sisters are fully cognizant of the various privileges they have). Nora is at first determined to protect her Ivy League ambitions by finding definitive proof of his cheating, but instead she finds a mystery that is much bigger and more dangerous. The manipulated timeline—alternating the discoveries made before and after Garrett’s disappearance to paint a cohesive picture— is expertly paced and managed, balancing plot tensions with each sister’s emotional arc. Though the romantic relationships are ripe with attraction and suspicion, female friendships are presented positively as a source of strength. The most important relationship is that of the sisters despite their mostly having separate scenes. Aside from the complexity of the sisters’ relationship, their distinct personalities make them entertaining foils. Refreshingly, each sibling’s strengths are presented as equally important. The exciting climax is satisfying, answering readers’ questions. Main characters are White; diversity is plentiful among secondary characters.

A twisty, impeccable mystery with dynamite heroes. (Thriller. 13-18)

AQUARIAN DAWN
Chiseca, Ebene
Three Rooms Press (295 pp.)
$15.00 paper | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-953103-25-3

Fifteen-year-old Ada Ekene leaves her home of Nabuka, a fictional country in West Africa, to start a new life with her mother in Pennsylvania. Ada isn’t excited about this new life. Even though her home country is on the brink of civil war, she misses the warmth and attention of her great-aunt and stepfather, so different from her chilly interactions with her mother. At school, Ada meets Sal and Stacey, who are sporadically intertwined in her story as the book guides readers through Ada’s first-person perspective, from being a teenager exploring love and drugs right through to her blossoming as a college poet writing fiercely about the war in Nabuka. Back home, Ada was accused of being an ogbanje, or reincarnated spirit child. She straddles two worlds, with one foot in this plane and the other in a place where she sees spirits. The mystical aspects of this identity are not as fully explored as other internal conflicts, making it difficult to follow that element of her journey. Relationships that seem critical for understanding the person Ada is growing into, like the one with her mother, are underdeveloped, and plotlines, like her search for her paternal and maternal extended families, are introduced but dropped with little resolution. Still, readers will find Ada’s story, every twist and turn, is worth the trip.

A sometimes-meandering narrative journey with a magnetic main character. (Fiction. 14-18)

READER, I MURDERED HIM
Cornwell, Betsy
Clarion/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-0-358-30664-1

A reimagining of the story of Adèle Varens of Jane Eyre fame as a queer feminist vigilante.

Adèle grows up with her beloved Maman, a showgirl and prostitute, in a brothel in France until the day when a certain Mr. Rochester, her presumed father, takes her away from everything she has ever known all the way to the English countryside. As Adèle grows up, she studies under the tutelage of her beloved governess, Jane Eyre; discovers the appalling secret her father keeps hidden at Thornfield; and starts a correspondence with her distant cousin Eric Fairfax. But after her father and Jane get married, she is sent away to the Webster School for Young Ladies to become the perfect English lady. As Adèle and her newfound friends navigate the world of balls and courtship, Adèle discovers a darker side of life. She tangles with an alluring young woman, an honorable thief, to fend off the abusive men who come after those she loves—until the day one of them comes for her. This story inspired by Charlotte Brontë’s classic is an engaging tale of female friendship, love, and vigilantism that does not pull punches in its study of the original, especially when it scrutinizes and wholly deromanticizes Mr. Rochester. Adèle shines as an astute, clear-minded, bisexual protagonist who is moved above all by her fierce love for her friends. All main characters are assumed White.

An absorbing and empowering tale. (Historical fiction. 14-18)
Seventy-three years after the events of *The Death Cure* (2011), the Maze Runner world expands in this trilogy opener. Isaac and Sadina are about to go on the adventure of a lifetime. Their island home has been safe from the Flare virus and infected Cranks, but when a ship called *The Maze Cutter* arrives with all but one crew member dead, everything changes. Now they’re making a long journey to medical clinics in Los Angeles because Sadina’s DNA could provide a cure for the latest version of the Flare. In Alaska, Alexandra, Nicholas, and Mikhail, who together form the Godhead, battle for supremacy. Lastly, Orphan Minho is sent to fulfill his destiny: trekking to Alaska to find the Godhead—though he has a secret plan of his own. Each chapter has subsections that follow a specific character, allowing readers to jump between various perspectives, keeping the action and intrigue levels high. This entry brings new life to the series with its diverse, international cast and expanded universe that explore the implications of the protagonists’ earlier choices. The younger islanders are naïve about how things are working in the rest of the world, as faith in the Godhead shapes existence for the people of the new world. Here Dashner takes his original idea to a larger stage: Entire nations hang in the balance, and nothing is cut and dried.

Series fans will not be disappointed by this return to a world where danger lurks around each corner. (Dystopian. 12-18)
Vampire aliens threaten the lives of everyone on Earth, and only the most elite teens are trained to stop them.

Admission to London’s Carlisle Academy is notoriously difficult, yet Artemis is attending not for the prestige but to avenge her boyfriend’s untimely death at the hands of the Nosaru, an alien species that has been feeding off the blood of their human hosts for centuries. Training to kill them will be difficult enough, but Black scholarship student Artemis’ biggest challenge may be fitting into the snobby, upper-crust school culture, especially considering squad leader Abyan’s initial commitment to making things difficult for her. The Sevenfold is the highest ranked squad at the school, and while Artemis replaces her not-quite-as-he-seemed late boyfriend on the team, there are many secrets for Artemis, Abyan, and the five other combat-ready (but nonetheless paint-by-numbers) teens to unravel. Hijabi Somali British Abyan acts tough but carries a lot of baggage. The Sevenfold is the highest ranked squad at the school, and while Artemis replaces her not-quite-as-he-seemed late boyfriend on the team, there are many secrets for Artemis, Abyan, and the five other combat-ready (but nonetheless paint-by-numbers) teens to unravel. Hijabi Somali British Abyan acts tough but carries a lot of baggage.

Science-fiction action pairs with teen angst in this blood-pumping, if uneven, outing. (Science fiction. 13-18)

A college sophomore juggles her impossible schedule and her superhero boyfriend.

In a world of superheroes and supervillains, Astrid’s ability to infallibly know what time it is may be relatively unimportant, but it has served her well in organizing every moment of her superbusy life. A double major in biochemistry and biophysics, she aspires to be the best pre-med student at Columbia University. Sure, she barely has time to eat and sleep, but at least she manages to build in time for Max. But then Max—her lovely, sweet, earnest boyfriend—reveals that he is the superhero Kid Comet, and Astrid must find time to join a support group for superheroes’ significant others. It feels like too much, and Astrid starts to wonder if she can cope with the chaos and complications. This fun and funny take on superheroes goes back and forth in time, looking at the evolution of Astrid and Max’s relationship. Though it primarily delves into Astrid’s history through defining moments, past trauma, and living with generalized anxiety, the story also looks at what it feels like to be on the sidelines of superhero life. Supporting cast members are not as fleshed out as Astrid is, and overall, the characters sound younger than college students, but cuteness abounds in this charming story. Astrid and Max, who is bi, read White in a cast that is broadly diverse.

A romantic, breezy, delightful take on superheroes. (Fantasy. 14-18)

The curse tournament continues to collapse following the events of All of Us Villains (2021).

The five champions must end the tournament—either with a single victor or by destroying it—before the curse breaks and takes all of them with it. Alistair and Gavin fall on the side of wanting to win—Alistair to protect his brother, Hendry, brought back to life by the tournament’s high magick; Gavin, in defiance of a family that raised him for the slaughter. They end up an unlikely team in order to stand against the alliance of Isobel, Finley, and Briony, who are seeking to destroy the tournament. Alistair and Gavin battle mistrust, an attraction, and their vulnerabilities—the Reaper’s Embrace curse that’s consuming Alistair, and Gavin’s messed up magick (courtesy of curse maker Reid). Reid’s betrayal of Isobel (herself suffering from the side effects of a spell that saved her life) backfires on him, pulling him closer to the tournament than he’d like. To have a shot at surviving, the champions must directly confront history and their family stories so as to defeat the trials that will end the curse—but damaging the curse allows the outside world’s intrusions, including close-to-home threats and dangerous parties seeking high magick for themselves. Expanded tensions help keep the story fresh and the action inventive, but it’s the characters that shine. Finley reads Black; the other champions are cued White.

A high-stakes conclusion with satisfying finality. (Fantasy. 15-adult)
Young adults in the New United States deal with the aftermath of a life-changing revolt.

During Revolt 2030, the oppressed actually succeeded in overthrowing the rich and powerful. The victors then accumulated all the wealth and left the rich losers of the conflict to fend for themselves in slums like Ashes, where protagonist Josephpine Monarch, a 17-year-old Black girl, lives. It’s 2070, and her neighborhood borders New Georgia—a place of prosperity and plenty—but as an act of revenge, she and other descendants of those once in power mostly aren’t allowed access to its abundance. Some, however, are allowed to leave if they are picked by a New Georgia Rep in the Lineup. Cove is the privileged White stepson of the current Lineup Rep who is in a sexual relationship with his stepsister. After capturing his eye, Jo is swept into a world of secrets, betrayal, and revolution. The ambitious conceit of this novel does not follow through to the execution due to confusing character motivations and questions around the worldbuilding. Some readers may enjoy the plot’s quick pace and dark nature, but others may find that Cove’s sexual opportunism and racial fetishization of Jo would benefit from more unpacking.

An uneven execution of a solid concept. (author’s note)

(Dystopian. 16-adult)
Francisco to a small town in Oregon? Why does she sleep with a knife under her pillow? Vivid descriptions bring scenes to life while imaginative metaphors compassionately depict Emma’s interior struggles. In less deft hands the inclusion of fairy tales written by Emma in her diary might feel heavy-handed, but here they add to the thematic substance. Depictions of forensic interviewing and children’s advocacy centers add to the believability of the plot. A content warning foreshadows the difficult topics addressed. All main characters are White.

An exceedingly well-written, powerful, and suspenseful novel that lights the path toward truthfulness and healing. (resources) (Fiction. 14-18)

**THE SECRETS WE KEEP**

Cassie Gustafson
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-66590-694-4

When high schooler Emma learns that her father has been arrested, she suspects that it is connected to her best friend, but she can’t imagine how much her world is about to change.

Emma quickly learns that her dad has been accused of inappropriate sexual contact by Hannah, the girl who rescued her from an otherwise friendless existence. The accusation is a bombshell that threatens to destroy the girls’ relationship as well as Emma’s family, which consists of her mom, dad, and 6-year-old brother. The gripping story unfolds in chapters alternating between Emma’s first-person narration of the present day and second-person narration of the past. This device builds suspense and helps readers string together clues.

What was the scandal that made Emma’s family move from San Francisco to a small town in Oregon? Why does she sleep with a knife under her pillow? Vivid descriptions bring scenes to life while imaginative metaphors compassionately depict Emma’s interior struggles. In less deft hands the inclusion of fairy tales written by Emma in her diary might feel heavy-handed, but here they add to the thematic substance. Depictions of forensic interviewing and children’s advocacy centers add to the believability of the plot. A content warning foreshadows the difficult topics addressed. All main characters are White.

An exceedingly well-written, powerful, and suspenseful novel that lights the path toward truthfulness and healing. (resources) (Fiction. 14-18)

**BOY IN THE BLUE HAMMOCK**

Darren Groth
Nightwood Editions (208 pp.)
$22.95 paper | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-88971-426-7

A dog and a teen boy seek safety after a civil war brings massive death.

Tao the dog regains consciousness in a house of horrors. Hauling himself upstairs on a badly injured leg, he sees that the Woman, Man, and Girl are all dead. The Reparation Party forces have rampaged through the house leaving alive only Tao and Kasper, the neurotypical, cognitively disabled teenage son of the house. Tao and Kasper can’t communicate but must flee, so they begin a dreadful journey through a White-default city ravaged by civil war and filled with mutilated corpses (a fictionalized version of current post-pandemic politics ramped up to a genocidal extreme). It’s total victory for the racist, homophobic Reps, who repeatedly use a slur to refer to Kasper. The imagery-packed narration switches between Tao’s and Kasper’s points of view as well as that of an omniscient narrator who understands more than either. This moody piece about surviving in a war zone is kind and supportive of disabled Kasper, but it portrays him as barely human—phonetically, othering his communications, sapping his words of meaning, and contributing to the alien feeling of his overall portrayal. Tao, meanwhile, has a semimagical power and decent understanding of the situation; he’s the leader, the character with a growth arc, and, as he has the last word, he’s treated as more competent and understandable than the boy.

Well-intentioned but disturbing in its portrayal of the disabled protagonist. (Speculative fiction. 16-18)

**BENEATH THE WIDE SILK SKY**

Emily Inouye Huey
Scholastic (336 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-338-78994-2

At the height of World War II, a Japanese American girl and her family navigate life on their farm in Washington state.

High schooler Samantha Sakamoto is tending to Clark Gable, the family rooster, when her best friend, Beau, a White boy, enters the barn with a photo contest entry form. The $50 grand prize would do wonders for Sam and her family, who are struggling to keep their farm on fictional Linley Island. Her older brother, Charlie, deferred his college admission after their mother died last year and helps out by earning money at the local brickyard, while older sister Kiki takes on sewing jobs. Sam’s dad put the last of Charlie’s college fund toward the mortgage to avoid losing the farm, a source of tension between father and son. Winning the contest would be Sam’s contribution. When Japan bombs Pearl Harbor, the racism faced by Sam, her family, and others of Japanese descent on the island intensifies—from spitballs in class to implied sexual assault. Though Sam harbors feelings for 16-year-old Beau, she becomes increasingly close to her neighbor Hiro Tanaka while fighting against the injustice and violence faced by the Japanese American community leading up to their incarceration by the U.S. government. This slice-of-life historical fiction debut meanders, ultimately lacking the emotional impact to do full justice to the horrors it addresses.

A quiet snapshot of a teenager discovering the art of protest. (author’s note) (Historical fiction. 12-16)
Tony investigates murders in the Grey Heights Cemetery. Later, Tony is a skeptic, Naomi believes this theft has triggered a curse. Naomi confronts the Abyss Demon of Choice, who has Tony under its thrall. This volume utilizes grayscale, manga-style illustrations in flashy, dynamic panels to collect several loosely related adventures featuring the Yellow Stringer reporters. Often a bit over-the-top and sometimes tropey, these journeys will nevertheless bring readers lots of fun. Naomi and Tony have light skin and black hair; there is racial diversity in the supporting cast.

Action-packed manga-inspired mysteries. (Manga. 16-adult)

ATTENTION DEFICIT
How Technology Has Hijacked Our Ability To Concentrate
Kallen, Stuart A.
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$32.95 | Sept. 1, 2022
978-1-6782-0454-9

A cogent call for alarm over modern social media’s power to distract. When (according to the National Safety Council) 1 in 4 car crashes is caused by drivers using cellphones, there’s definitely a problem—a “distraction pandemic,” as Kallen puts it—and he marshals studies and expert opinions aplenty to present a picture of how commercial websites and social media have been designed to grab our attention willi-nilly by targeting our brain’s primitive, instinctive, “bottom-up forces.” He does admit to evidence that certain video games can improve memory, problem-solving skills, and even general outlook, but it’s the hazards of interacting with modern tech that are the focus of this title, and Kallen devotes space to discus-sions of the deleterious effects on brain chemistry and plasticity as well as the fallacy that true multitasking is even possible for most people. He also offers general suggestions for a “digital detox” that can break addictive interactions with electronic devices, backed up in the abundant backmatter with a bulleted list of strategies. A scant assortment of stock photos of small screens and posed phone zombies accompanies this fervent appeal to reason. Will it spur readers to change their ways? Perhaps not…but it may get some few to start thinking about the issue.

Destined for assignment use but with arguments and resources enough to spark some genuine interest in the topic. (source notes, tips, further research, index, picture credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

INUUNIRA
My Story of Survival
Koonoo, Brian
Illus. by Ben Shannon
Inhabit Media (37 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-77227-430-1

A vivid firsthand account of a hunting expedition that goes disastrously wrong. Koonoo, from Pond Inlet in Nunavut, Canada, relates a page-turning story about a near-fatal caribou-hunting trip to Naujaat, 500 km to the southwest. A Parks Canada employee, he learned Inuit hunting and survival skills from his father, using them to provide for his wife and daughters. From shooting his first murre at age 3 to hunting hare, ptarmigan, seal, and caribou, Koonoo took pride in his ability to feed those he loved on a traditional, healthy diet. In 2015, when a shortage of caribou resulted in a hunting moratorium on Baffin Island, he set off alone for the Melville Peninsula. Despite careful preparations, a combination of bad weather, human error, and mechanical issues with his snowmobile led to his nearly perishing. This slim volume is rich in sensory details enhanced by beautiful, informative illustrations and photographs. Descriptions of family and community life, the landscape, and animal behavior are shared in straightforward but evocative prose. Even knowing that the author survives, readers will feel breathless anticipation as they follow his trek by foot through harsh conditions in search of help. He explains how to build an iglu, melt snow to create naturally filtered drinking water, shelter in a snow cave, and more. Speaking directly to Inuit readers in a way that instills pride in heritage, this work has broad appeal, especially for readers interested in wilderness survival narratives.

An unforgettable physical and emotional journey. (glossary, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
“Clips quickly along, crafting a world that proves hard to leave behind.”

WHEN THE ANGELS LEFT THE OLD COUNTRY

Lamb, Sacha
Levine Querido (356 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-64614-176-0

An angel and a demon immigrate to the goldene medina.

Little Ash, a lesser son of the famed demon king Ashmedai, studies Talmud all day with his counterpart, a forgetful angel, in the synagogue of a tiny Jewish town in the Pale of Settlement. But Little Ash wants to see more than their unnamed shetel: He convinces the angel to go to America, ostensibly to find out what happened to Essie, the baker’s daughter who hasn’t written since she left Warsaw. Steeped in Ashkenazi lore, custom, and faith, this beautifully written story deftly tackles questions of identity, good and evil, obligation, and the many forms love can take. Queerness and gender fluidity thread through both the human and supernatural characters, clearly depicted without feeling anachronistic. A generous peppering of nonitalicized Yiddish and Hebrew (with a glossary in the back) combined with culturally specific dialogue and turns of phrase make this read like a classic while still feeling fresh and contemporary. The immigrants, human and B’nei Elohim, deal with medical gatekeepers at Ellis Island, assimilationist American Jews eager to denounce their greenhorn landsmen, exploitative factory owners, and religious obligations toward the beloved dead. Despite its length, this novel clips quickly along, crafting a world that proves hard to leave behind.

Gorgeous, fascinating, and fun. (Fiction. 13-18)

ISSUNBOSHI
A Graphic Novel
Lang, Ryan
Oni Press (200 pp.)
$34.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-63715-081-8

Being small doesn’t stop Issunboshi from pursuing his destiny to defeat an evil demon, or oni, in this graphic retelling of a Japanese folktale.

It is said that when the world was new, the gods used the Heavenly Spear known as the Ame No Nuhoko to stir the oceans and create the islands of Japan. Aware of its great power, the gods divided the spear into four separate pieces, secreting them away so no one could use it for harm. One day, however, an oni found the shaft of the spear, spurring him to hunt down the remaining pieces and gain the power of the gods. The spirit of the spear fled his hiding spot in the sky and was reborn to an old couple desperate for children of their own as a thumb-sized baby boy named Issunboshi. His parents knew he was born for something extraordinary, but before he can leave home, an ominous bird kidnaps him, intending to take him to his master, the oni. Managing to escape, Issunboshi is faced with his destiny: to defeat the powerful oni. Lang re-creates a classic and beloved Japanese story as an exciting, action-packed graphic novel. Issunboshi’s struggles show that even the strongest people have doubts and worries but that being a true hero means summoning courage and doing our best to stand against evil. The black-and-white graphics are visually stunning, with a cinematic quality enhanced by incredible lighting and details bringing to life the feudal setting.

Visually impressive and well told. (Graphic folklore. 12-18)
Medal of Honor. But despite the award, which she cherished, Lakes region in 1832, Mary Edwards Walker became an early Confederate prisoner, and the only female recipient of the Croix de Guerre. As she aged, but she does not seem to have regarded herself as a transsexual. Latta’s carefully researched story, drawn primarily from contemporary accounts and featuring many photographs, places Walker in the context of her time and shows her as the complicated and principled person she was.

An eye-opening and engaging tribute to a fascinating historical figure. (author’s note, source notes, selected bibliography, index, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

IF YOU COULD SEE THE SUN

Liang, Ann

Inkyard Press (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-335-91584-9

Will an unexpected power become a gift or a curse? Alice Sun is the recipient of an academic scholarship from Airington International Boarding School in vibrant Beijing and an overall high achiever with serious perfectionist issues. One day, as she stresses about family funds and the possibility of dropping out of this elite institution, she discovers she has the curious ability to become invisible. Who does she turn to for help? Rich, charismatic, and aggravatingly handsome Henry Li, her academic rival and the only person she knows well enough to take her seriously. They both quickly move past the freak-out stage, looking instead to the opportunities this power might bring. As they set up a business, charging classmates for ferreting out secrets, things quickly escalate from discovering who is cheating on whom to requests that have them questioning their moral grounds. Contemporary cultural references may quickly date the novel, but it is certainly reflective of its time. The story, in which events sometimes take a comedic turn, focuses less on Alice’s supernatural ability and more on her building relationships, including a growing romance with Henry, and the truths behind the facades people put up. Most featured characters are assumed ethnically Chinese, though this international school caters to many elite East Asians.

Like a Dalí painting, rich details permeate this unusual story. (discussion questions) (Fiction. 16-adult)
FOOD STARS
15 Women Stirring Up the Food Industry
Mahoney, Ellen
Chicago Review Press (224 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-64160-585-4
Series: Women of Power

A palatable tasting menu of 15 women stirring up the food world.

Mahoney profiles farmers, chefs, activists, media professionals, and scientists who are making a buzz in the industry. In this helpful volume for school research or browsing by young people interested in a career in food, the chapters highlight individuals interviewed by the author who likely are previously unknown to readers, expanding awareness beyond television and social media personalities. Such crucial issues as food insecurity, food sovereignty, the impact of climate change, and injustice in the industrial food system are addressed, and those profiled come from a variety of backgrounds. Political scientist and urban farming advocate Gail Taylor is the Washington, D.C., founder of the CSA Three Part Harmony Farm whose grandparents were sharecroppers and whose interest in food began when she saw many people she loved die of diet-related diseases. Iranian American cultural anthropologist and activist Halez Zandi volunteered at San Quentin State Prison, teaching incarcerated men gardening and landscape design, which led her to establish the nonprofit Planting Justice. Sidebars include information about Michelin Stars, types of seeds, Indigenous cuisine, and more. Each chapter ends with fun facts about the subject’s favorite cuisines, books, places, etc., as well as their social media handles and websites so readers can connect with them. Featuring a broad sampling of movers and shakers in the food industry, this accessible volume also addresses an array of current issues.

Inspiring profiles of women revolutionizing the food world today. (notes) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

SALT & HONEY
Jewish Teens on Feminism, Creativity, & Tradition
Ed. by Mandel, Elizabeth, Emanuelle Sippy, Maya Savin Miller, Michele Lent Hirsch & jGirls Magazine Collective
Behrman House Publishing (176 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-68115-077-2

Jewish teens share their experiences, loves, hopes, and fears in this anthology of essays, poems, and artwork from the online publication jGirls Magazine.

Split into six chapters, the works trace the young people’s experiences through triumphs and tragedies. “We Always Seem To Return” brings meditations on memory and inheritance, highlighting how Jewish joy and sorrow often walk hand in hand. “When We Were Small” tells stories of childhood and growing up, interrogating such themes as gender identity, substance abuse, and antisemitism. “A Healthy Collection of Blessings and Hardships” tells of the body and the mind, exploring the sacred nature of the self while making space for struggles in mental health. “Traditions, Interpretations, and Imperfections” dives into spirituality and tradition, celebrating the rich variety of the Jewish community. “Where Is the Peace?” confronts ignorance, including experiences of racist, homophobic, antisemitic, and sexist violence. Finally, in “Carving Our Own Footsteps,” the artists of a new generation set out to continue the battle for justice and freedom. The offerings in this book are emphatically and unapologetically Jewish, but the stories they tell will resonate broadly. Contributors include Jews who are Black and Asian, Sephardic and Ashkenazi, and who reflect diversity in gender identity, sexuality, and ability. The young artists and writers featured here bring an appetite for life as well as the teeth necessary to enjoy the meal.

Raw, vibrant, and full of love. (artist statements, reader’s guide, resources, about jGirls Magazine, about the contributors) (Anthology. 13-18)

MEDIA BIAS
What Is It and Why Does It Matter?
Marcovitz, Hal
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$32.95 | Sept. 1, 2022
978-1-6782-0362-7

A brief, basic, balanced overview. Marcovitz opens by highlighting pre-trial media comments about teen Kyle Rittenhouse, arrested for shooting three people at a protest in Wisconsin in 2020, using them to illustrate bias or the appearance of bias. Chapter 1 introduces Benjamin Franklin’s journalistic advocacy of the American Revolution to help readers differentiate news versus opinion, on both left and right. Acknowledging that some news providers present fabricated stories, the author discusses in the fourth, and final, chapter the ways that news outlets’ misguided commitment to reporting on “both sides” can in fact legitimize disinformation, for example in unfounded claims that the 2020 election was stolen from former President Donald Trump. Chapters 2 and 3 look at the impact of bias on the public and new forms of media: Covid-19—vaccine conspiracy theories demonstrate the effects of unfounded claims on consumers’ decision-making, and uncredentialed contributors’ blogs and podcasts can reach a wide audience without engaging in proper research and due diligence. Sidebars explore topics such as a research study on bias in reporting on protests by Black activists; the use of sensationalism, as in news outlets’ focus on Meghan Markle’s personal life; how journalism schools provide valuable training; and why people are prone to believing unfounded claims. Tackling a broad and complex subject in a concise manner, this is a readable, accessible guide.
A clear, useful starting point raising important issues. (source notes, further research, tips for recognizing bias, index, picture credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

INFORMATION GLUT
Sorting the Good From the Bad
Nardo, Don
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$32.95 | Sept. 1, 2022
978-1-6782-0342-9

What problems stem from data overload, and how can teens tackle it? For unwary victims of an information glut, Nardo shows that, whether it’s informative, connective, or exploitative; pictorial, textual, or aural, data floods us and competes for our limited attention and memory storage. Our judgment suffers as we become fatigued by exposure to excess content. This information avalanche defeats even data collectors, who fail to analyze and use it productively. Dealing with cognitive overload, the author says, requires both proactive and reactive filters; without them, memory distortions multiply. There is much (but not too much!) useful information here, including suggestions to turn off app notifications on your phone, not multitask, and exercise more, which has a beneficial impact on the brain. Key chapters differentiate misinformation from disinformation and detail the effects (especially on teens) of data overload. Analyzing causal factors for difficulties in identifying reliable information, Nardo cites the proliferation of unreliable sources, weak critical thinking and fact-checking skills, feedback loops, and confirmation bias but doesn’t discuss distrust of authority or disparagement of mainstream outlets. Another oversight is the relative lack of attention to the impact on self-image and emotional regulation of pressures resulting from social media exposure. Readers may wish for more suggestions for dealing with many of the problems cited. However, this is a solid introduction to a significant issue.

This basic presentation of key issues offers some ideas for mitigating a widespread problem. (picture credits, source notes, further research, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

UNFAMILIAR
Newcome, Haley
Andrews McMeel Publishing (160 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-5248-7683-8

Planchette the witch tries to rid her new house of ghosts in this debut graphic novel based on the author’s popular webcomic.

Planchette and her rabbit familiar, Winston, got a great deal on a new place, probably because it’s haunted. Planchette is just a kitchen witch—she’s excellent at food magic—so she needs help with an exorcism of her new house. Searching the town for assistance, Planchehette meets fellow witch Pinyon and her bird familiar, Ari, but Pinyon isn’t great at exorcism magic either, despite coming from a family of powerful witches. Thankfully, they run into grumpy loner Sun and pink-haired, half-siren Babs with her cyclops cat, Marlow, who complete their new group of friends. Together, the witches try various ways to help the ghosts in Planchette’s new home move on to the next life, along the way solving their own problems, like curses and tense family dynamics. Planchette and friends are immediately intriguing, drawn with expressive, cartoony eyes and quirky, charming designs. Newsome takes advantage of the graphic format to land countless visual jokes and imbue the world with personality and whimsy. All human characters have light skin although they vary in hair color.

Wide-eyed characters spellbind in this cute and cozy tale. (character designs) (Graphic paranormal. 12-18)

I WAS BORN FOR THIS
Oseman, Alice
Scholastic (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-338-83093-4

Two teens—a super fan and a celebrity musician—confront their insecurities about their relationships and identities as their lives unexpectedly intertwine.

Fereshteh (or Angel as she’s known online, a translation of her Farsi name), is a Persian British hijabi who lives for The Ark, a boy band rising to international fame. Before the final show of their tour, Fereshteh ditches her high school leavers’ ceremony to fulfill her dream of seeing them in concert with Juliet Schwartz, a White online friend she’s meeting for the first time—but when she arrives in London, her high expectations are derailed by reality. Jimmy Kaga-Ricci, a gay Christian transgender boy of Indian and Italian descent, greets his fans from a distance. On the inside, he’s overwhelmed by anxiety. His emotions spiral out of control when the press exposes too much about his relationships. This irresistibly energetic coming-of-age story alternates between the perspectives of two emerging adults grappling with their senses of self. Fereshteh values The Ark more than her own achievements, while Jimmy questions whether he can keep sacrificing his happiness for his career. Love takes center stage in the unfolding drama, showcasing the complex and varied experiences of admiration, attraction, and connection within relationships, particularly friendships. Religious faith also plays an important role in the protagonists’ lives, shaping their outlooks and decisions. The characters are multidimensional with flaws and goals that direct their growth.

A magnetic, emotional journey with nuanced internal conflict and dynamic characters. (bonus story) (Fiction. 14-18)
“Bursts open the doors of multiple fairy tales, retold with a feminist, empowering focus.”

THE WICKED REMAIN

FLIGHT 171

Parker, Amy Christine
Underlined (388 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-56703-8

Secrets are revealed and drastic choices are made in this airborne thriller.

Devon has had a rough year: Her twin sister, Emily, was killed in a hit-and-run on Halloween. The driver was never caught, although she suspects it was their classmate Jack. Now, on the flight to Colorado for their senior class ski trip, turbulence isn’t the only thing she needs to worry about. A menacing fog emanates from an old woman onboard, leaving all the adults and small children alive but frozen in place. The old woman announces that the body she’s possessed since 1948 is wearing out and she requires a new sacrifice—or they will all die. As the plane begins to plummet and come apart, the teens must vote on a sacrifice. The supernatural being rights the plane and gives them three hours to decide. In the meantime, they are shown everyone’s worst secrets on the in-flight entertainment system. This offers a chance to uncover Emily’s killer—but can the group wait to hear all the reveals, or will they vote sooner? The story’s pacing, tied to the 4-hour flight, is strong. The central mystery and individual characters’ histories are slowly revealed, propelling readers onward but allowing them space to make their own predictions. The story twists realistic themes like grief, human fallibility, and angst with the supernatural into an exciting whole. Characters seem to default to White.

A flight takes a nail-biting detour in search of the truth.
(Horror. 12-18)

THE BOOK OF US

Peacock, Shane
DCB (240 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-77086-665-3

A heartstuck teen does his best to set things right.

It’s the summer before their senior year, and Noah Greene is very much in love with Miranda Owens. The bookish and beautiful Miranda has always kept Noah on his toes, and he does his best to present himself as the ideal boyfriend. But honesty doesn’t come naturally to Noah, and one day this vice comes back to bite him. When Miranda overhears a conversation Noah has with the local flirt, she calls the whole thing off, leaving Noah to lick his wounds, do some soul searching, and craft the apology of a lifetime. Will Miranda forgive Noah? Will Noah be able to set things right in time for prom? Will readers notice that this John Green homage never really comes together? The fragmented timeline papers over most of the narrative gaps, but the lackluster characterization is always front and center. The two lovebirds are just never that interesting; there’s no crackle, snap, or pop to their relationship. The author tries to sidestep the simmering physical passion many teen romances underline in favor of Noah and Miranda’s having a more emotionally mature relationship, but it doesn’t quite work. Their extensive friend circle evades deep characterization as well: Readers will lose track of who’s speaking to whom and why as every teen speaks in the same pop-and-lock cadence Green popularized nearly two decades ago. Noah and Miranda are White.

A misfire. (Fiction. 14-18)

EIGHT NIGHTS OF FLIRTING

Reynolds, Hannah
Razorbill/Penguin (400 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-0-593-34975-5

Meet the Hanukkah rom-com.

In this stand-alone companion to The Summer of Lost Letters (2021), Shira Barbanel is driven, intelligent, attractive, and the kind of rich that has a family mansion in Nantucket where extended
Hallmark Hannukah movie tradition, this would be optioned.

Nelson, her romantic nemesis and Nantucket neighbor, she fans of the genre may find things to be a bit too formulaic, but for this cocoa- and snow-dusted holiday classic: If there was a family (the triplet cousins are comedy gold), Chinese food on family gathers for Hanukkah each year. She's also lost, lonely, and leans heavily on visceral descriptions and well-crafted sus

A strange, cloying scent in the air, it seems as if something sin

as Sephardic; Tyler is White and Christian.

characters default to White.

enjoyable if not particularly groundbreaking story contains center of a bad situation. This time, though, she is the one who strikes a deal: He'll teach her to flirt in exchange for an intro to her media mogul great-uncle. It's a rom-com, so readers will know what's coming next—and the book delivers. Contemporary Jewish life, complete with a loving but fractious extended family (the triplet cousins are comedy gold), Chinese food on Christmas, and a little bit of history (researching a mystery box hidden in the attic), underpins the story, and while Shira is a bit shallowly drawn, watching her grow serves as a nice leitmotif for this cocoa- and snow-dusted holiday classic: If there was a Hallmark Hannukah movie tradition, this would be optioned in a heartbeat. The previous book establishes Shira and family as Sephardic; Tyler is White and Christian.

Cozy and cute. (Romance. 12+18)

A pocket full of posies
Sarles, Shawn

Scholastic (304 pp.)
$10.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-338-79401-4

A fresh start turns into a living night-

mare when Parker is the first to fall in a high-stakes game of Ring Around the Rosie.

At first, an unexpected and sudden move away from Washington, D.C., to a new town seems like exactly the break Parker needs to escape the consequences of her own bad decisions. But from the moment she arrives in Coronation, Massachusetts, and notices a strange, cloying scent in the air, it seems as if something sinister is brewing beneath the idyllic, charming surface of the town. As she delves deeper into the mystery surrounding Rosa-mund, the saintlike figure who saved the town's original settlers, the saintlike figure who saved the town's original settlers, she receives a warning from a mysterious boy that she doesn't understand until it's too late—and she again finds herself in the center of a bad situation. This time, though, she is the one who has been betrayed, and she may not escape with her life. This enjoyable if not particularly groundbreaking story contains many of the hallmarks of good campy horror—too-convenient plot points, shallow characterization, forewarned betrayal—and leans heavily on visceral descriptions and well-crafted susp-

ence rather than deeply resonant characters. More seasoned fans of the genre may find things to be a bit too formulaic, but newer horror readers and those likely to be intimidated by longer, denser works should find much entertainment here. Main characters default to White.

A creepy premise, a strong hook, and a quickly moving plot will capture less-critical readers. (Horror. 12+18)

Not just about food understanding eating disorders
Sonnenklar, Carol & Tabitha Moriarty

Twenty-First Century/Lerner (104 pp.)
$17.32 PLB | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5415-8894-3

An up-to-date introduction to eating disorders.

Defining the range of disordered behaviors, identifying psychosocial causes and adverse results, and showing a recent increase in diagnoses, the authors cast a wide net. Framing eating in biological terms and noting particular dishes’ emotional significance in our cultures and families, the authors largely ignore food’s sensory pleasures. In sober but clear language, they briefly cover the Western his-

tory of such disorders and detail the variability of symptoms and types, going beyond anorexia and bulimia to more recent diagno-

ses, such as diabulimia and orthorexia. Genetic and other contribu-


ting biological factors (including mental health stresses of the Covid-19 pandemic) are also discussed. One chapter stresses that, contrary to popular belief, eating disorders are not restricted to people of certain genders, races, or socio-economic levels and that sports like gymnastics may trigger disorders. The section entitled “Eating Disorders and Margin-
alized Populations” explores communities often overlooked by the medical community; unfortunately the discussion of peo-

ple of color leaves out Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and exploration of LGBTQ+ individuals’ experiences doesn’t mention transgender people. One chapter details the dangerous impact on the body, but coverage of treatment options—including helplines and the recovery process—ends the book on a positive note. Despite its impressive scope, the book primarily focuses on individuals, neglecting systemic factors such as food processing and marketing.

Clear, evidence-based information make this a reliable, if incomplete, resource. (glossary, source notes, resources, bibli-

ography, further reading, index, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12+18)

Tall, daughter of the moon
Sourya

Oni Press (168 pp.)
$19.99 paper | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-63715-089-9

Talli flees persecution for her powers in this work translated from French.

When Lord Ulric attacks her castle home, Talli’s adoptive father, Lord Borin, stays behind to defend it while she escapes with the knight Sir Alan. With sharpshooter Capt. Nina in pursuit, the duo flee. Pavel, a merchant, and his
grandson, Lélo, offer Talli and Alan transport to Dame Sybbyl, where Talli will be safe. On the road Talli meets worshippers of the moon goddess Meness—they must follow their forbidden religion in secret as they are branded heretics. Talli learns more about her own origins as a Summoner, or descendant of Meness, who had four baby girls. Since the first chimera war, nobles have attempted to eradicate Summoners; Talli is the very last survivor. When a Summoner’s blood is shed, a magical creature known as a chimera appears, and this knowledge keeps the group on a strict deadline: They must reach refuge with Dame Sybbyl before Talli’s next period comes. Meanwhile, Lord Ulric interrogates Lord Borin, concerned that Talli’s inherited powers could lead to another chimera war. The setting evokes medieval Europe, and the story is populated by racially diverse characters; Talli reads White. This action-oriented graphic novel features classic fantasy motifs, engaging characters, and expressive, dynamic, manga-style art. The framing of menstruation as something once naturally accommodated may feel empowering to some readers.

A plot-driven fantasy adventure that keeps pages turning. (author/illustrator notes) (Graphic fantasy. 14-18)

PANDEMIC REPORT CARD Successes and Failures
Stephan, Jennifer
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$12.95 | Aug. 15, 2022
978-1-67820-346-7

An early overview of what went right and what didn’t.

Drawing on surveys, official reports, and news stories from 2019 to the first months of 2022, Stephan sketches a picture of a confused, rapidly politicized response to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States. Notwithstanding some dramatic language and frequent quotes from experts and victims, the narrative makes dry reading. It seems mostly to be a catalog of failures, as the author records then-President Donald Trump’s skeptical early statements, points to racial and political divides in vaccination rates, lists the impact of diverted attention and funds from other pressing social and medical issues, and questions how beneficial school closures were. On the plus side, she does highlight the speed with which vaccines were developed (if not distributed, particularly to people in low-income countries) and successful efforts to reach the unvaccinated. She also ends with a reference to the soaring recent enrollment of Black and Latino students in Brown University’s public health program. Considering that Covid is still very much with us and that many of its effects are going to be of the long-term sort, this overview is almost certainly premature. Still, students will find it a sobering record of the United States’ lack of preparedness to cope with a (long-predicted) public health crisis.

Judicious but rushed; suitable for research assignments. (source notes, resources, further reading, index, picture credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

A talented gamer hides her identity and competes in an e-sports tournament.

Sixteen-year-old Vicky Tan lives in the shadow of her older brother, Virgil, an e-sports champion and her legal guardian. Virgil always speaks for her, believes she hates video games, and chooses food she doesn’t like, making it hard to communicate with him. Little does he know, Vicky has a secret: She not only loves playing Xenith Orion, the game he also plays, she’s extremely talented and dreams of one day playing on stage and winning a tournament. Between her brother’s unpredictability and the harassment and scrutiny women face in the male-dominated field, Vicky prefers playing as Aegis, her powerful alter ego. When the game developers announce an open tournament, Vicky and some new friends have the chance to realize their dreams. This is an emotion-filled story of family, friendship, growth, and identity based on a popular webcomic. Even readers unfamiliar with gaming will be able to enjoy it, as it includes enough explanation and background information. As the story develops, the misogynistic tendencies of the e-sports world are exposed, bringing awareness to the issue. Virgil and Vicky’s sibling relationship also portrays the fine line between being protective and overbearingly toxic. Vicky and Virgil are cued Chinese American; there is a diverse cast of secondary characters.

A captivating read for teens, especially those who enjoy e-sports. (Graphic fiction. 13-18)

CRAFTING CHANGE Handmade Activism, Past and Present
Vitkus, Jessica
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (208 pp.)
$24.99 paper | Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-374-31332-6

An overview of using crafts as a form of political activism.

Profiling a variety of makers, craftpeople who use their creations to get their messages out, this bright, well-illustrated book encourages readers to try their hands at craftivism. A variety of pursuits are showcased—baking, fiber arts, and sculpting, among others—and the author interviews each creator, presenting their backstory and path to expressing themselves through crafting. The subjects are broadly diverse, and their passions connect to a range of social issues, so most readers will both feel included and learn something new. Vitkus’ upbeat narrative emphasizes that it is community and message rather than technical skill that are the important parts of craftivism. Many of the people profiled are unapologetically angry about
causes including sexual assault, Black women’s history, and gun violence. The poignant story of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt begun in 1987 is heartening, giving context to craftivism’s ability to produce change, something all the craftivists profiled are working to achieve. Over 48,000 panels strong, the quilt was developed to bear witness to the often shunned victims of AIDS and lead to greater awareness and support; it raised nearly $500,000 for AIDS research in its first year alone. Brief but cogent history lessons enrich the narrative and connect present-day activists with a legacy of creative protest. A few simple projects to get readers started are included. 

Expansive, inclusive, and motivating. (photo credits) (Non-fiction. 12-18)

AVATAR, THE LAST AIRBENDER
The Dawn of Yangchen
Tee, F.C.
Amulet/Abrams (336 pp.)
$19.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-4197-5677-1
Series: Chronicles of the Avatar, 3

A young Avatar and her companion strive to make their marks in this sequel to The Shadow of Kyoshi (2020).

Yangchen is a talented Avatar with the ability to relive the experiences and pain of all the Avatars who came before. While learning how to manage these episodes was traumatic, eventually she began to use her visions to deal with diplomatic obstacles. Despite her raw talent, Yangchen blunders through a meeting with the merchant rulers, or shangs, of the city of Bin-Er. She learns of Unanimity, an asset that would give the shang possessing it dangerous powers. The narrative toggles between the third-person perspectives of Yangchen and Kavik, a Waterbender whose family fled to Bin-Er. A reluctant spy, he trades in secrets with the goal of helping his family return to their northern homeland. When Yangchen catches Kavik, they make a deal: He will help her secure Unanimity in exchange for his family’s receiving travel papers. What starts as a transaction eventually develops into deeper loyalty as the duo’s shared trials foster mutual trust. Tensions are heightened when family obligations and political intrigue threaten their newfound companionship. Despite the tightly written narrative, the pace of the first half gets bogged down by political intricacies and flashbacks before the action picks up. Readers are left with a promise of a sequel. In this Asian–inspired world, Kavik is cued as coming from a culture reminiscent of northern Indigenous peoples.

An intriguing romp occasionally slowed down by worldbuilding details. (Fantasy. 12-16)

PLASA
Yokoyama, Yuichi
Trans. by Ryan Holmberg
Living the Line Publishing (240 pp.)
$32.00 paper | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-73686-051-9

Yokoyama, a painter and manga artist from Japan, offers his interpretation of Brazilian Carnaval in this translated graphic work.

The black-and-white art shows figures watched by bystanders as they set up for a parade, followed by a procession of individuals playing musical instruments, kicking and tossing soccer and rugby balls, and engaging in other activities. Large text—both Japanese katakana and kanji as well as English, some of it onomatopoetic—is superimposed on much of the background art. The people, largely faceless, wear futuristic, avant-garde costumes that rob them of individual distinction. Although no distinguishable action unfolds, the overall impression appears rather violent, with art that is full of sharp angles. The author, who says in the included author interview that he has never visited Brazil, describes how he drew upon Carnaval for inspiration, referring to the “outrageous costumes” and referencing large floats from other traditional community celebrations, such as in Japan. The audience for this work is unclear: It is questionable whether readers will recognize Carnaval in its pages, but fans of the artist and this style of illustration may find it intriguing.

A confusing read. (afterword, additional art) (Manga. 13-18)
In this debut novel, a man in the hereafter must decide how he will live his next life.

Thirty-something American Scott Stillman finds himself in the afterlife, though details of his death are initially hazy. The realm is not unlike a giant airport terminal, as people decide if they'll stay or live another life on Earth. But Scott is a “direct return”—his unnatural death means he must go back to the planet. He can purchase a new body and such traits as artistic talent and IQ points using the “monetary award” he’s earned during his latest lifetime. This doesn’t give Scott much of a budget, so he’ll have to choose wisely. Amazingly, he spots people he knows in the hereafter—his recently deceased and overbearing father, Mort, and Scott’s ex-girlfriend Allison Newhart, who’s also a direct return. Scott’s on-again, off-again relationship with Allison is back on, and the two plan to reunite in their ensuing lives. But Scott has a devastating secret that he’s afraid to tell Allison. He may have to make amends, even with Mort, before his departure. Alexander’s amusing afterlife tale comes with numerous guidelines. There are, for example, different levels in the hereafter, and a worthy soul will “graduate” to the next. Scott befriends Buddy Shanken, a Level 8 who is the novel’s most endearing character. The vibrant story's short chapters include snippets of a popular hereafter guidebook that entertainingly elucidates the “rules” and provides tips. Along with dry humor and a charmingly sardonic Mort, the tale offers intriguing insights into these characters, who examine their lives, past and future. Scott, who blames his misfortune on everyone except himself, soon has regrets over things he’s done. Eventually, the cast members choose which traits will afford them happiness, from physical beauty to something that can make others joyful. The ending, while predictable, delivers a memorable wrap-up.

A breezy, funny, and profound tale about death and new beginnings.
THE BIG BLUE LAKE  
Armstrong, Robert W.  
Illus. by Janet Broxon  
All About Kids (52 pp.)  
$13.95 | Sept. 1, 2022  
978-0-9801468-3-7

All the wildlife in and around a lake gets ready for bed in Armstrong's rhyming picture book.

Evening has fallen at the Big Blue Lake, and it’s bedtime for all the anthropomorphized animals and fish. One by one, the rhyming text introduces them to readers: “There was a beaver’s house that was made of logs, / And in one small corner lived a pair of frogs.” Everyone finally gets ready for sleep; the fish gather close to their mother, the frogs put on their pajamas, the turtles turn off the lights in their house, and so on. Then, finally, the narrator encourages readers to say good night to everyone, ending with “Say good night to the frogs and the turtles, too. / Listen as they whisper, ‘goodnight’ to you.” After the story ends, the book includes real-life facts about beavers, turtles, frogs, and fish; while useful, they feel a bit incongruous after such a calming bedtime book. However, Broxon's watercolor illustrations lend a wondrous sense of quiet depth to the lake, which contrasts with the assorted animals’ activities. They’re a perfect accompaniment to the gentle, lulling rhymes, which are sure to help many young readers unwind before sleep.

An ideal, animal-centered alternative for kids who’ve grown a bit tired of Goodnight Moon.

A CAREGIVER’S LOVE STORY AND REFERENCE GUIDE  
Attwater, Namcie Wiseman  
Atmosphere Press (254 pp.)  
$17.99 paper | $7.99 e-book | April 18, 2022  
978-1-63988-328-8

In this memoir, retired critical care nurse Attwater looks at her marriage and her role as her husband’s devoted caregiver. The author met her spouse in Sacramento, California, in 1992. She was a 41-year-old registered nurse who’d also opened a yarn and knitting store; Bill Attwater was 53 and the chief counsel for California’s Water Resources Control Board. They came from different backgrounds—hers financially troubled, his well-to-do—and they alternated caring for each other, the physical and mental tolls of arduous island winters left the author depleted and depressed, so they moved back to Sacramento; she writes, “I believe the move saved us both.” The bulk of this memoir/reference guide for caregivers offers a comprehensive depiction of Bill’s gradual but steady decline. The work is written in a staccato, just-the-facts style, spiced with a bit of edginess. Each chapter includes a lesson to aid readers, such as “Trust Each Other for Understanding and Strength When All Around You Appears Chaotic.” Overall, readers will find Attwater to be a knowledgeable guide through complicated medical terminology and confusing health care protocols, which become routine when dealing with long-term illness. She’s clearly an expert on the challenges of being a 24/7 “hypervigilant” caregiver, and she shares many coping tools for helping loved ones safely maintain their personal agency and involvement in critical decision-making; she also aims to help readers protect their own physical and mental well-being.

A useful, personal tutorial for those caring for ill loved ones.

A VISION IN SMOKE  
Barkley, Allyson S.  
Atmosphere Press (524 pp.)  
$22.95 paper | $9.99 e-book | July 26, 2022  
978-1-63988-416-2

After years spent hiding her identity, a misanthropic princess-turned-thief must join the army in the fight to reclaim her rightful place as royalty in this fantasy sequel. Ari Debouryne and Ely Novian are on the run. The 20-somethings have stolen the dragith stone and Ari has been forced to reveal her true identity as Princess Ariana, rightful heir to a usurped throne. She’s kept this fact guarded for many years, living a fierce, solitary life with only her symbiotic animal familiar (the bobcat Jag, “whose purrs [rumble] joyfully into the air and the earth” when she pets him) for company. This novel’s events directly follow those of Barkley's debut novel, A Memory of Light (2021), and no attempt is made to orient new readers. When Ari finds her underworld contact dying, she and Ely feel obliged to take the dragith stone to the Third Army gathering against the Malavi usurpers. The stone, it transpires, is a weapon that only Ely can wield. Ari may be able to keep him safe, but if she stays, she will be hailed as a princess—a title that comes with responsibilities. Can she reconcile the past and present and find a way forward? Barkley writes from Ari’s and Ely’s third-person perspectives and very occasionally from a lesser character’s, which affords readers a wider understanding of the main conflict. Ari is a remarkable protagonist—strong yet distant and always tightly controlled. Her relationship with Ely is one of tolerance, unshakable camaraderie, burgeoning friendship, and perhaps something more. This uncertainty is representative of a story that eschews predictable genre conventions; for example, the magical artifact is a MacGuffin that the characters fight not to use, and the final battle plays out not in rousing overview but...
Espionage fiction has a long and storied history, from the influential work of old spymasters, such as Ian Fleming and John le Carré, to the operations of more recent operatives, such as Mark Greaney and Olen Steinhauer. Indie authors have contributed their own missions to the genre, and we recommend the following:

In Keith Yocum’s Kirkus-starred 2019 series entry, Valley of Spies, recently retired investigator Dennis Cunningham is tapped by the CIA’s director to find a therapist who’s gone missing: Dr. Jane Forrest—er, who previously treated members of the agency—including Dennis. What she knows could jeopardize all her former clients, and it’s up to this ex–Navy SEAL to find her and nail down the facts of the case. Kirkus’ reviewer calls the novel “a taut, thoughtful thriller” and Yocum’s best.

Agent Doppelgänger (2019) by Gene Hetzel adds SF and horror elements to its spy story of a shape-shifting operative who can look like anybody and is part of a secret government project. His missions involve infiltrating enemy groups, but when his latest outing ends in a massacre, he finds himself on the run. Our reviewer recommended it for readers “weaned on Philip K. Dick’s conspiracies-within-conspiracies brand of SF paranoia or Robert Ludlum’s identity-scrambled spy thrillers.”

Michael P. King, author of the Travelers crime-fiction series, jumped into the spy game with the 2021 series starter The Hunt for the Hijacked Nerve Agent. Down-and-out Katherine Denise “KD” Thorne has a remarkable resume, including a doctorate in environmental science, multiple tours in Afghanistan, and even a few years at NASA. Now, the shadowy National Defense Agency wants her to help track down a stolen cannister of nerve agent XP-93 before it’s used in a terror attack. It’s “an undeniably entertaining way to spend an afternoon at the beach,” according to our reviewer.

David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.
little interest in the sport. One key technique that assures this is a regular broadening of its scope from the specific (with many individual games dramatically reconstructed) to the general and even the ideological: “If ever a team had been favored by the gods, it was this one,” they write of the 2002 National Championship, keeping readers hooked into the grand story they’re telling. “The entire season was an old-fashioned movie serial that ended with a cliffhanger every Saturday.” Baskin and O’Bryant don’t shy away from play-by-play specifics, but they always draw readers into the drama and the passion of Ohio State football, and they do so with gusto. Even football newcomers will finish the book wishing that Baskin and O’Bryant would give other Big Ten schools the same terrific treatment.

A colorful and captivating account of a college football team's defeats and glories.

RAVENS ROOST
Bates, Maggie
Steady Horse Publishing (42 pp.)
June 10, 2022
979-8-98629-741-5
979-8-98629-740-8 paper

A curious narrator follows ravens at dusk to find out where they go at night in Bates’ nature-focused picture book.

After exiting a fairylike cottage, the White, unnamed narrator asks readers if they’ve ever wondered what happens to ravens after sunset and sets out to discover the answer: “I climbed a tall spruce, way up high, / and I watched the birds fly through the night sky.” A storm blows in, soaking the main character, who starts to return home. Then the moon shines through the clouds, showing not just three ravens, but 100, roosting in the same tree. Bates’ rhyming text has a lulling quality; even during the fierce storm, there’s a sense of calm, and the illustrations highlight the largeness of nature around the small, singular human protagonist (and a companion frog, tucked in a pocket). The scansion draws readers through Bates’ textured paint-on-canvas images, which appear to mix watercolors and oil pastels; the result is a night sky that offers a realistic feeling of depth. A few images border on the frightening (including some eyes in the dark), but the overall message of peace and kinship in the natural world comes through as brightly as the sparkling stars.

A nighttime forest adventure perfect for bedtime read-alouds.

GLACIER HIGHWAY
Batt, Donna V.
LifeRichPublishing (208 pp.)
Feb. 25, 2022
978-1-4897-3982-7
978-1-4897-3983-4 paper

Batt offers a Christian romantic thriller about an ex-soldier and the federal agent who rescues her from a mysterious kidnapping attempt.

Jen Stander, a military veteran who was wounded in combat in Afghanistan a year before the story begins, lives a peaceful life near Glacier National Park in Montana with her service dog, CD. But her serenity is shattered when she’s nearly abducted by two assailants while on a hike. Thanks to the intervention of CD and the courage of handsome Homeland Security agent Zack Julion, she’s unharmed, but Jen and Zack are left wondering why anyone would commit such an act. After a human trafficking victim escapes captivity in nearby Whitefish, they discover the chilling answer, which has far-reaching implications. Jen and Zack dive into the mystery, and both pray to God for guidance along the way. As they close in on the culprits, their feelings for each other grow—as does the danger that surrounds them and those close to them, and it all ends in a harrowing showdown. Batt’s work clearly affirms the importance of faith, emotional rather than physical intimacy, and patriotism. The work also effectively focuses on social justice, confronting the issue of human trafficking with conviction; it depicts the plight of its victims with realism and empathy while also encouraging readers to consider the fact that slavery may be right in their midst. This subject matter may be difficult for some readers, but Batt offers a hopeful ending for both major and minor characters, including an emotional reunion of two long-lost loves.

A religious romance that’s full of passion and purpose.

THE LAST HUNTRESS
Mirror Realm Series Book I
Borja, Lenore
SparkPress (368 pp.)
$17.95 paper | $8.99 e-book
Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-68463-173-5

A teenager enters a world of demon hunts and malicious Greek gods in this YA fantasy debut.

High school senior Alice Daniels has just moved from Colorado to Phoenix. She’s welcomed to the neighborhood by David Martin, a handsome but oddly unsettling Remington High student. He invites Alice to a party to mark the end of summer, which her mother insists that she attend. At the party, Alice learns that David is a true creep and capable of foul pranks—such as throwing fish guts on new students. Later that night, Alice finds David’s Porsche and covers it in eggs. She also sees through his home’s
A remembrance that provides a sharp, detailed image of a tumultuous life.

NOTHING IS US

Brown, E. David
Sell (452 pp.)
978-8-79804-611-9

A memoir of growing up in a military household in the 1950s and ’60s. Brown, the author of the novel Tell You All (2000), was born in 1951 at Fort Benning in Georgia, and he describes his father as a domineering and violent presence in his life. His dad was a career U.S. Air Force officer who, according to the author, could fly into an abusive rage at the slightest provocation. The family moved frequently, from Michigan to Nebraska to Germany and elsewhere as the author’s father received new postings. Much of the book takes place in Texas, where they lived outside of Dallas during turbulent times as the Vietnam War raged; views that were outside the status quo could land one in trouble. As the author’s brother pointed out, “Anybody can be a hippie love freak in California. But hell, you gotta be tough, know how to fight to be a pacifist in Texas.” The author rebelled against educators that legally doled out corporal punishment; he also regularly endured his father’s wrath, he says. He fell in with a leftist group called the Revolutionary Youth Movement, which was affiliated with Students for a Democratic Society, and met people who experimented with drugs. He eventually got a GED diploma rather than continue in his hostile high school environment. Later, however, he joined the U.S. Navy, although he had a rough go of it, ultimately obtaining a general under honorable discharge before completing basic training.

Although the author notes that he eventually found stable ground, his story is one of frequent disappointments and countless physical confrontations. The prose style is sparse but telling; for example, here the author describes the Texas town in

windows that several girls have him tied up, and black tendrils twist out from his eyes. Alice is soon confronted by a “beautiful stranger” with “pale blue eyes” whom she would “lie down and die for.” This is Colin Tinsley, leader of a group of teens who hunt demons. His partners are Olivia Diaz, Sharon Roxland, and Hadley Caldwell. These “Wayward Sisters” use a Realm of mirrors to track humans possessed by demons across the globe. Their patron deity is the Greek Philautia, who gives pieces of her soul to mortals, empowering them. When Alice learns that she’s the final portion of Philautia’s soul, she becomes entangled in a centuries-old power game that her heart may not survive. Borja’s series opener radiates the youthful, sisterly glow of classic TV shows like Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Charmed. Everyone meets, from Alice’s dad, Gavin, to her aunt Molly, helps provide excellent twists that deepen the hero’s turmoil. The Realm is fabulously portrayed as a topsy-turvy wonderland of mirrors, as in the line “Every single one was displaying part of a vast blue sky, complete with fluffy white clouds and even… birds traversing from one mirror to the next.” The romance is superb and highlights the author’s flair for dialogue. Colin says, “You knock the wind out of me,” and Alice replies, “I guess I’ve found my calling.” Skillful reversals keep the narrative crackling, and the final scene hints at an appealing sequel.

Strong characters remain the focus in this confident, imaginative fantasy.

SIT WRITE SHARE

Practical Writing Strategies To Transform Your Experience Into Content That Matters

Britton, Kathryn
Theano Press (238 pp.)
978-8-98582-460-5

A debut manual lays out practical steps to making writing part of one’s daily life.

As a former computer scientist–turned–writing coach, Britton’s path to writing wasn’t always clear; she quips that in graduate school, she “preferred cleaning toilets to writing papers.” But the writing she did as part of her job and her work toward a master’s degree in positive psychology made her realize that putting words on paper didn’t have to be a chore, and in this book, she encourages readers to similarly “enter the space of deliberate writing practice with an experimental mindset.” The book focuses on ways to encourage writing as a habit through three eponymous actions: “Sit” (quieting the mind to prepare for writing), “Write” (getting material on paper), and “Share” (invoking an audience in the work). Britton breaks these into subcategories of “experiments,” such as setting one’s specific intentions for a writing project, using dictation as a creative jump-start, or examining one’s writing for cultural sensitivity. Most experiments include a “Story,” or fictionalized anecdote, to help readers visualize an exercise, and sections end with a “Moral,” or takeaway, such as “It is easier to be accountable to someone else than to yourself.” The author presents an accessible structure that readers can adapt to their lives as needed. The book reads like a scientific sibling to Julia Cameron’s more spiritual The Artist’s Way (1992), as Britton’s advice is well grounded in research on habit creation, backed by an ample resource list. Although some experiments may seem overly familiar (reading more books to inspire one’s writing; silencing the inner critic), others are refreshingly intriguing (using a “procrastination hierarchy” to get writing done). The use of subcategories and granular steps may overwhelm some readers, but Britton’s conversational tone is a strength, and when discussing the fear people often face in starting to write, she’s reassuring: “Let me invite you to write without worrying about whether you are a writer. You are a writer already. You make up new sentences out loud all day long without worrying about whether you are a speaker.”

A thoughtful, well-researched guide to creating good writing habits.
which his family lived: “Bereft of visual stimuli, the most outstanding features of this Dallas suburb were the Cowboy Stadium and a multi-lane interstate slab of concrete.” Along the way, Brown presents stories of threats and beatings and even tells of visits from the FBI, who looked into his RYM activities; as the author paints a picture of the time, it seems amazing that anyone not toeing the line could come out alive. Readers also get a thorough experience of the author’s time in the Navy; from the bus ride to the Nimitz Naval Training Center to the consequences he faced for being a cutup. Even the author’s exit from the armed forces was no simple feat, Brown explains; those who received the type of discharge he did were treated as “neither fish nor fowl; neither bad nor tough enough to do time, nor strong enough morally, physically, and intellectually to stick it out.” By contrast, a later portion on a trip to Europe provides little of interest; the author returned to where he once lived in Germany, but he does not discover all that much about himself in the process. Still, by that point, readers will be willing to follow the author for every step of his turbulent journey.

A remembrance that provides a sharp, detailed image of a tumultuous life.

A bunny-loving girl who hates carrots learns that with just a drop of honey, her least favorite vegetable can become a treat.

Inspired by Carlson’s youngest granddaughter, Leni, this picture book introduces the child’s namesake, called “The Bunny Whisperer.” Despite Leni’s love of nature and bunnies, she can’t stand to eat carrots. One night, she encounters a rabbit in a dream who explains the origins behind the name Honey Bunny. When mother bunny tries to get Honey Bunny to eat carrots, the young rabbit refuses. So the mother takes Honey Bunny to some beehives to explain where honey comes from. Bunny . When mother bunny tries to get Honey Bunny to eat carrots, the young rabbit refuses. So the mother takes Honey Bunny to some beehives to explain where honey comes from.

The author combines the idea of trying a new food—or attempting to fix a detested item by adding a different flavor—with notes about how bees live. An endnote from the bus ride to the Nimitz Naval Training Center to the consequences he faced for being a cutup. Even the author’s exit from the armed forces was no simple feat, Brown explains; those who received the type of discharge he did were treated as “neither fish nor fowl; neither bad nor tough enough to do time, nor strong enough morally, physically, and intellectually to stick it out.” By contrast, a later portion on a trip to Europe provides little of interest; the author returned to where he once lived in Germany, but he does not discover all that much about himself in the process. Still, by that point, readers will be willing to follow the author for every step of his turbulent journey.

A bunny-loving girl who hates carrots learns that with just a drop of honey, her least favorite vegetable can become a treat.

BEE, HONEY BUNNY, AND ME
Yucky Yummy Carrots
Carlson, Lavelle
Illus. by John D. Moulton
SLP Storytellers (31 pp.)
$11.95 paper | $2.99 e-book | Nov. 13, 2021
978-1-73444-272-4

A mystery with a nice mix of tenderness, humor, and excitement.

 Inspired by Carlson’s youngest granddaughter, Leni, this picture book introduces the child’s namesake, called “The Bunny Whisperer.” Despite Leni’s love of nature and bunnies, she can’t stand to eat carrots. One night, she encounters a rabbit in a dream who explains the origins behind the name Honey Bunny. When mother bunny tries to get Honey Bunny to eat carrots, the young rabbit refuses. So the mother takes Honey Bunny to some beehives to explain where honey comes from. How just a dollop of it on carrots makes them “sweet and yummy in my tummy.” The author combines the idea of trying a new food—or attempting to fix a detested item by adding a different flavor—with notes about how bees live. An endnote geared more toward grown-ups describes how pollinators help fertilize plants and how some, like bumblebees, are at risk. The main text features succinct sentences, frequently appearing in word balloons for easy reading. Portraitist Moulton’s oil pastel illustrations, especially an early image of Leni’s face, are beautiful. The cartoonish bunnies are well suited to the tale. But the bees tread the line between cartoons and realism. The White protagonist appears in the background on each page, reacting to Honey Bunny’s story.

This engaging tale’s idea of improving disliked foods with honey may win over reluctant eaters.

THE UNICORN AGENDA
Calbertson, William L.
Self (230 pp.)
$12.95 paper | $2.99 e-book | Jan. 21, 2022
978-0-9745353-5-7

In Calbertson’s thriller, a private eye’s latest case turns deadly—and supernatural. When PI Mickey Holmes (no relation to Sherlock) gets a new client—famous hedge fund administrator

DOGGED PURSUIT
A Veronica Kildare K-9 Mystery
Carter, Tracy
BookBaby (366 pp.)
978-1-66783-454-2

The search for a missing scientist challenges the mettle of a dog trainer and her stellar Chesapeake Bay retriever in this mystery/adventure that takes readers deep into Colorado’s Rocky Mountain National Park. Veronica Kildare and her father, Bob, recent transplants to Colorado, moved from Ohio after a brutal mass shooting took the lives of her fiancé and others in the office where she worked as the county prosecutor’s legal assistant. She escaped only because she had taken her dog, Leda, out for a quick walk just before the assault. Leda, whom Veronica adopted from Animal Control on the day the canine faced euthanasia, is beginning to overcome her history of abuse. Together with Bob, the two have found sanctuary in the fenced Colorado compound where they now live, and Veronica has begun a new career as a trainer and handler of service dogs. Leda is her devoted partner, in life and work, employing her awe-inspiring nose in the hunt for drugs and missing persons. Now, the wife of Dr. Randy Jeffers, a prominent scientist who is about to testify in an upcoming murder trial, has reported that he is missing. He has not been heard from since he recently entered Rocky Mountain National Park, and Sgt. Tim Donovan with the Boulder County Sheriff’s Office asks Veronica and Leda for help with the search. Carter’s artfully composed series opener, which gradually picks up steam as it heads toward a dramatic finale, is packed with engaging extras beyond the adventure itself. Dog people, naturally, will enjoy the amusing antics of the pooches that populate the compound. And Veronica, who narrates the story, maintains an informative running commentary on the specifics of her meticulous training procedures. Her father, who writes articles on the latest outdoor-adventure equipment, keeps Veronica supplied with enough intriguing gear to tempt gadget- and accoutrement-loving readers. Plus, everything is set against the vividly detailed backdrop of Colorado’s magnificent flora and fauna, although occasionally the wildlife descriptions are so lengthy that they slow the narrative’s pace.

A mystery with a nice mix of tenderness, humor, and excitement.
Alexander Stuyvesant—he hopes that it means that he’s finally made it into the big leagues of his profession. The case appears straightforward enough, involving an allegedly cheating wife and a potential divorce with millions of dollars on the line. But the more Mickey looks into Samantha Stuyvesant’s life, the less sure he is about her husband’s goals with the investigation. When people connected to the case start getting murdered, Mickey becomes a suspect, and he realizes that everybody around him has their own agenda—including a unicorn named Mel. Mickey, as it happens, has always been able to see supposedly mythical creatures, including gnomes, pixies, and, yes, unicorns. He’d always thought that they were hallucinations, but as he delves deeper into this case, he finds that Samantha, Alexander, and Mel all have very real connections to a piece of land that doubles as a unicorn breeding ground. It’s up to Mickey to prove his innocence, find the killer, and help Mel—and if he can do so with gnomes, pixies, and the odd troll backing him up, so much the better. Along the way, he hopes to locate Jessica, his missing friend and occasional assistant investigator. Calvertston deftly navigates well-known tropes in this slightly predictable but fun supernatural detective noir fiction. Mickey’s narrative voice has a lightness to it that feels like a breath of fresh air in a milieu that traditionally tends toward the hard-boiled: “Who knew what else besides a gnome might be lurking in all the surrounding foliage? Fortunately, I didn’t have much time to vegetate amongst the vegetation.” The protagonist’s connections to his allies and friends all feel genuine, and the secondary characters that surround him are well drawn. This book is a stand-alone, but Mickey’s adventures have a lot of potential as a series.

A breezy, genre-blending mystery.

THE MUSIC WE MAKE

DeBellis, Michelle Rene
Paradise Publishing (392 pp.)
June 16, 2022
979-8-98616-720-6
979-8-98616-721-3 paper

A young musician deals with love, heartbreak, and addiction in DeBellis’ debut novel.

As the story opens in 2017 in Redlands, California, 22-year-old Santiago DeAngelo’s friend Abby Wilson asks him if he’s going to make any New Year’s resolutions. Santiago, a talented musician who’s four years into a five-year architecture degree and plans to apprentice with his successful architect father, tells her he doesn’t need to make any resolutions: “I’m right on track.” But life has other plans: While driving home with his mother, Ana, their car is struck by an SUV, and after a few days, his grief-stricken father decides to take his severely injured wife off life support. The family—father, son, and sister Lucy—is devastated by the loss, which encourages Santiago to lose himself in the fog of his postoperative pain medication. With Lucy’s help, he eventually starts to process his grief, but by that time, he’s also struggling with a Vicodin addiction. He pursues his dream of a music career and starts to find some success; however, he also meets a woman named Kitty Holladay who seems perfectly comfortable feeding his drug habit, which she sees as keeping his music flowing; he thinks that she’s “opened up a portal into a variation of my life where I could be happy,” but his family members think otherwise. The narrative, told in fast-moving chapters, charts Santiago’s rise in the music industry, his unhealthy relationships, and his ongoing drug dependence. His collaboration with Kitty is energizing; when they come up with a future hit song, she tells him, “A product like this is the miracle of pop music.” However, that energy comes at a very high cost.

Over the course of this novel, DeBellis crafts a story of one man’s rise and fall with remarkable empathy and sharp, often lovely prose. Overall, Santiago often comes across as a bit of a puzzle, as his keen intelligence doesn’t seem to allow him to see the damage he’s doing to his own life; the moment when he finally says “I can’t live like this anymore” is likely to strike many readers as coming far too late. However, he’s an unquestionably well-realized character, and the author does a particularly sensitive job of depicting the thorny interplay between him and his father; the latter initially blames Santiago for causing Ana’s death, and things don’t get too much better from there. The book’s most effective plot thread, however, is an interior one: Santiago’s powerful artist’s personality confronting a persistent pill addiction: “I don’t expect you to save me,” he writes to another character while deep in its throes, “I won’t lie and tell you that I’ll never take another pill. But I will say that you’re the first person who ever made me feel like I could quit.” The dramatic, shifting tides of faith that others have in the protagonist bring his difficulties into sharp relief, which makes it easy for readers to root for the troubled artist.

A moving story of pursuing one’s goals through pain and loss.

MUCH ADO ABOUT DUKES

Never a Wallflower, Book 2
Devon, Eva
Entangled: Amara (336 pp.)
978-1-64937-140-9 paper

A fiery bluestocking and an emotionally detached duke clash in a historical romance. Lady Beatrice’s cousin, Margaret, is engaged to Lord Christopher, known as Kit. Beatrice is not thrilled because this means she will now be related by marriage to Kit’s odious brother, William Easton, the Duke of Blackheath. It’s not just Blackheath; fiery women’s rights advocate Beatrice has come to loathe all dukes, finding them generally pompous and arrogant. By contrast, Blackheath admires Beatrice’s passion for her various causes but does not wish to form romantic attachments with anyone. They have several tense encounters, including one night at a production of Much Ado About Nothing, which ensures that neither can get the other out of their head. They
become friends but remain determined not to marry until Beatrice’s uncle and guardian announces he has lost his fortune—and the money her parents left her—to some bad investments. This means Beatrice’s only option is to do something that goes against her principles—sacrifice her independence and marry for stability. When she tells this to Will, he spontaneously proposes but insists they be friends and allies, not lovers. Beatrice reluctantly agrees. But will their marriage turn out to be a love match after all? Will’s determination to remain a bachelor is a little puzzling given that dukes mostly exist to make more dukes. He has two brothers to pass the title to, but he doesn’t really have a reason for not wanting to marry besides that he thinks being emotionally detached is a better way to live. There’s a sense that being a duke is bad—neither of Will’s brothers wants the title—but it’s hard to have much sympathy for the plight of a wealthy, powerful man. A more compelling reason for avoiding wedlock would have made Will a more fully realized character. Will and Beatrice clash, mostly arguing about politics, but it’s clear almost from the first page that they are made for each other, with similar political opinions and having read many of the same books. He doesn’t act pompously, despite Beatrice’s first impression, but is instead considerate of everyone around him, if sometimes blind to his own privilege. The plot is predictable, but the chemistry and sexual tension between Beatrice and Will are off the charts, and watching them spar is fun.

A hot, entertaining romance.

ICE BRINE
A Peter Case Novel

Eshleman, William P.
FriesenPress (312 pp.)
May 30, 2022
978-1-03-914810-9

A diving pro and part owner of a Canadian undersea salvage company tangles with international criminals and multiple intelligence agencies.

In Eshleman’s second installment of a thriller series, Peter Case returns home to Canada after completing his doctorate in zoology in Jamaica, where he also got involved in an international conspiracy with a CIA connection. Now, he and his buddy Hal operate their maritime salvage business out of a former fish factory that is half a kilometer up the inlet from the vacation cabin of redhead widow Kathleen and her precocious young daughter, Amy. Case, a swaggering, 6-foot-3-inch (in cowboy boots), sculpted-thighed, deep-chested, long-haired heavy smoker, is smitten with Kathleen, but imminent danger demands more of his attention. On a mission to kill him are crime ring members he encountered in Jamaica, a pair of whom Case outmaneuvers on a twisty mountain road. Humor adds flavor to the story; for example, when examining a sunken wreck, Case encounters a shark that turns out to be a dead specimen Hal released in the ship to freak out his friend (mission accomplished). Car chases, kidnappings, fights, killings, and proposed torture, such as a “foot tenderized with a ball-peen hammer,” saturate the book. Case is so cocky and so often in danger that someone says to him, “Everyone you meet seems to want you dead. I believe I’m beginning to understand why.” Case’s mind whirls as he realizes some of the players—“CSIS, MI6, KGB”—in the crime drama surrounding him. The backstory of the Jamaica escapade is revealed organically, as is Case’s past as a bullied, chubby kid who transformed his body and built his confidence by engaging in martial arts and weight training. Underwater sequences are handled particularly well, and scenes of the stunning Rockies are travelogue perfect. But Kathleen’s inability to keep tabs on her daughter is bothersome, and the spunky kid often comes off as more annoying than charming (remember what Lou Grant said about spunk).

An exhilarating thriller; Clive Cussler fans will find that Peter Case floats their boat.

STILLED
The Story of Inklebrawt Winklehank

Estvander, Brian
Self (337 pp.)
979-8-48829-706-7

A secret clan of biologically enhanced humans battles their would-be destroyers in this SF adventure.

In Pawtucket, Massachusetts, Maggie Henderson leads a ragtime cover band. Her vibrant onstage persona is at odds with her day-to-day life as a postdoctoral student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She’s working on programming “nanorobots” to help fix damaged skin cells. The work will be, as she tells her boyfriend, Tim Gritmuff, like “the perfect skin-cream.” Maggie also harbors a strange secret. She’s a Huply; she has both human and Plythi’i ancestry. The Plythi’i are a race of humanoids created with nanomachines who possess a telepathic Sense. Our heroine’s life putsters along until she meets a man flying a kite barefoot in a park. This is polymath Inklebrawt Winklehank, who briefly attended Maggie’s high school. She’s star-struck because of his brilliant work in the field of “Integrated Bio-circuits” and wonders if he’s attending their high school reunion that night. Meanwhile, a violent offshoot of Huply, known as the Shepherds, wants to stop humanity’s “artificial speciation” and destroy the Plythi’i. The last grand battle between the two secret groups happened in 13,330 B.C.E. in Bolivia. With an attack imminent, Maggie must figure out her connection to Inklebrawt, another Huply, and a strange coterie of individuals, including Navy SEAL David Wessel and a woman named Zayla. The group’s only hope may rest in contacting the ‘I’r Yyd, an enigmatic force that, once unleashed, could change life on Earth. Can Inklebrawt access a revered Plythi’i text called the Convictions in time to act?

Estvander’s hard SF adventure is similar to Greg Egan’s and Vernor Vinge’s novels; all toss readers headlong into conceptually dense worlds that require skillful absorption of ideas along the
19 Great Indie Books Worth Discovering

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**BLOODROOT**
by Daniel V. Meier Jr.

“A young Englishman travels to the newly settled Virginia that’s billed as a paradise only to find a realm dominated by greed, hunger, and violence in this novel.”

A thoughtful and historically exacting tale of a treacherous New World.

**A DOCTRINE OF FEAR**
by Paul J.C. Edge

“Mysterious inscriptions on an Englishman’s skin and attacks by demonic assassins are among the signs interpreted by the Vatican that an apocalyptic battle between good and evil is nigh.”

The devil is in the details as this engaging, epic SF thriller begets unholy mayhem.

**DRINKING & KNOWING THINGS**
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A heartbreaking but forthright, informative, and ultimately forward-looking cancer account.
**GHOST GAMES**  
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“Playing games to conjure spirits and demons leads to horrifying consequences in MacKenzie’s debut short story collection.”  
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FROM BEYOND THE SKIES
by Juli Boit
“A memoir about fighting AIDS and finding love in Kenya.”
A heroic, uplifting account of easing others’ suffering and building a family.

FRANCES FINKEL AND THE PASSENGER PIGEON
by D.M. Mahoney
“A talented young pilot and her homing pigeon join the war effort in this debut YA historical novel set in the 1940s.”
An entertaining, well-researched aviation tale that allows its hero to soar.

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by Charles Porter
“Porter’s prequel to Shallcross (2015) explores the first 42 years of a South Florida man living with hallucinations.”
Another beautifully original, striking, and poetic novel.
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by Liam Fialkov

“In this novel, a renowned physics professor gets arrested for murder, a crime that inexplicably places him in two places at the same time.”

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**LIFESCAPES**
by Lee Woodman

“A collection of poems that chronicle a relationship from sweet beginning to bitter end.”

A streamlined, satisfying set of works about love and loss.

**TRINE FALLACY**
by C.K. Donnelly

“A magical realm marches to war while a teen hero explores her potential in this second installment of a YA fantasy series.”

A mature and deftly plotted fantasy sequel by a shrewd author.
way. The story opens on the realm built by the Plythi’i in ancient Bolivia; this segment is flush with futuristic elements, including “Enginteks” who shape and build with stone using devices called “Vecco’i Sean.” The name Sean crops up frequently in reference to the creator of the Plythi’i, but a full explanation doesn’t arrive until the story’s end. Estvander rewards patient readers with tightly interlocking plot segments, many of which shuffle the cast through time and location (to the planet Ply’, for example). Grounding readers in more mainstream SF motifs is the Sense, designs, with many close-ups allowing readers to see individual constructed, the book explores the common motifs used by cre- tations often co-opt his cool Plythi’i, Spock-like logic. In one thrill- ing scene, the character Yumi uses her Sense to merge metal and stone, sealing a doorway against attacking Shepherds. And while there’s much innovation to love in the work’s first half, it often relies on traditional thriller components to goose the plot. The Shepherds, for example, appear on Earth as mobsters who resort to kidnapping and gunplay to achieve their goals. The clever, remarkable finale will give audiences much to think about as far as the workings of the universe and humanity’s place in it. A well-written, conceptually agile adventure with a memo- rable ending.

**Making the Rounds**

**Defying Norms in Love and Medicine**

Grayhall, Patricia

She Writes Press (344 pp.)

$17.95 paper | $8.99 e-book

Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-64742-273-8

MAKING THE ROUNDS

A young woman steadfastly challenges sexism, prejudice, and societal norms in this memoir. Grayhall’s pseudonymous debut takes on crucial topics by detailing the author’s experiences in love and medicine. Immediately, the reader steps into the shoes of an isolated young woman who imagined herself as the “only lesbian in Arizona” in 1965. The author describes discovering her attraction to women and the ugly stereotypes that bigots attached to being gay. However, the author’s strong spirit shines through in moments of empowerment self-discovery, her passion for education, and her confidence in the possibility of finding love. As Part I concludes, Grayhall tells of heading to medical school at the University of Utah. Part II follows Grayhall as one of five female students in a class of 100, showing the stark realities of being a woman in a world dominated by men. Grayhall’s love of science propelled her forward, and she excelled in school as she continued her search for love. It’s heartening to read about her pursuing rela- tionships after her earlier loneliness and confusion, but life for Grayhall pivoted once again when she accepted an internship at Boston University Hospitals. In the grueling Part III, she

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978-1-64742-273-8

**An enlightening look at vibrant designs and their place in Hmong traditions.**

_Hmong Reverse Appliqué_

Gerdner, Linda A.

Ficzicato Press (176 pp.)

$27.00 paper | $15.00 e-book

March 17, 2022

978-0-9986864-6-2

A detailed guide explores a form of textile art.

This lushly illustrated book places the Hmong reverse appliqué technique in its cultural context, examines the traditional motifs used in the designs, and presents dozens of examples of needlework produced by artisans in Laos, Thai refugee camps, and the United States. Gerdner offers a high-level overview of Hmong culture and the impact of the Vietnam War, when Laos’ involvement in the conflict led to thousands of people leaving the country. After a brief glimpse of how reverse appliqué is constructed, the book explores the common motifs used by cre- tators, explaining the meanings and purposes and showing how different artists have interpreted imagery, including the double snail, the elephant foot, and the cucumber seed. The volume’s many photographs from various sources clearly capture the vivid colors and geometric features of the designs, making it easy to appreciate the works on an aesthetic level as well as their role as a cultural production. While casual readers may wish for a more detailed explanation of how reverse appliqué is created (a visual tutorial covers many of the steps but not all), those familiar with sewing techniques will have no trouble following the demonstra- tion. That quibble aside, the book’s high-quality pictures make it easy to appreciate the skill and labor involved in fashioning the designs, with many close-ups allowing readers to see individual stitches. In addition to images of the textiles discussed in these pages, Gerdner includes contemporary and historical photos of people wearing reverse appliqué garments, giving a distinct portrait of their use in daily life. The book engages with Hmong cultural traditions on their own level while making them comprehensible to readers who lack the expertise needed to fully interpret them. The writing is lucid and generally avoids technical jargon, making the volume appropriate for a general audience without specialist knowledge of textiles or Hmong culture and allowing it to be both informative and captivating.

An enlightening look at vibrant designs and their place in Hmong traditions.
In a new edition of this novel for roughly ages 10 and up, a Chinese American boy enlists in the Union Army to fight against slavery but must also battle prejudice.

Young Thomas Beck is not really sure how old he was when his uncle saved his life by hiding him on an American merchant ship about to sail away from Canton harbor in China. The kindly captain, Joseph Beck, took the young stowaway home to Connecticut, where he and his wife named him Thomas and raised him as their own alongside his brother, Robert. Ten years later, Thomas is a normal, rough-and-tumble, freedom-loving American boy, with only his Asian facial features and the hairstyle known as a “braided queue” to signal his Chinese heritage.

Thomas and his brother long to fight in the Civil War, though Robert scoffs, “There ain’t no such thing as a Chinese Yankee.” Ignoring their mother’s warning that their place is at home with her, both boys run away to enlist in the 14th Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry. Thomas soon finds harsh truth in Robert’s warning that, “Folks don’t know what being Chinese means,” as he faces rejection and hostility from new comrades, including heartbreakingly, his own brother. Unable to hide his difference, Tom embraces his Chinese identity with stubborn courage and an American belief in freedom and fairness as he is plunged into one bloody battle after another.

Haas’ narrative brings the contradictions of that devastating conflict to life as the brothers encounter a world of complex moralities. Saved from a life of enslavement as a coolie in China, Tom feels a deep connection to the fight against slavery, but many of his fellow soldiers are as hostile to freed Blacks as their Southern counterparts. Alongside vivid descriptions of the chaos and intensity of 19th-century warfare, this stirring book explores the evolving class and racial attitudes of the time. An author’s note gives a brief biography of Joseph Pierce, the “real-life Chinese Yankee” on whom the book is based.

A moving depiction of courage and immigrant pride amid the horrors of war.
members of the ton in London in 1817. It’s how the 27-year-old spinster supports her family, including her loving, widowed mother; her younger sister, Bessie; and her best friend, Lilly Appleby, a gifted aspiring architect who has lived with the Porters for years. But Jo’s thrown for a loop when 33-year-old Matthew Leighton, also known as the Duke of Crestmont, enters her office on a mission: get married to a suitable duchess-in-training as soon as humanly possible. Jo knows from experience that even a facilitated relationship takes time to grow, but Matthew has his own reasons for hurryng to wed, namely a scheming uncle with his eyes on the duke’s legacy, and a bruised ego from a past engagement that went awry. And if Jo “could match a duke, then everyone in London—no, all of England—would want to work with her.” When Lilly’s love, Charles Cherrington, reveals that he can’t marry her unless one of his sisters is engaged to a man with sizable enough wealth to erase the Cherlington family’s debt, Jo sees an opportunity. She plans to match Matthew with one of Charles’ many sisters so Lilly and her beau are free and clear to wed. What Jo doesn’t count on is her growing feelings for Matthew, a gruff but good man with passions for meteorology and rowboats—and for his matchmaker.

A historical novel that offers a charming, feminist love story.

A SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION
Ten Men and Women Who Reinvented American Medicine

Hruban, Ralph H. & Will Linder
Illus. by David Rini
Pegasus Books (408 pp.)

A collection of 10 biographical vignettes of men and women connected to Baltimore’s Johns Hopkins Hospital and Medical School who all contributed to the progress of medicine.

According to pathologist Hruban and author Linder, a revolution in medicine occurred in the late-19th and early-20th centuries that transformed the industry forever, and Johns Hopkins Hospital played a pivotal role in it. As University of Michigan School of Medicine professor Dr. Howard Markel states in a foreword: Johns Hopkins “played an instrumental role in pulling American medicine out of the muck and mire of nineteenth-century humorism, bloodletting, and industrial-strength toxins posing as therapeutics.” The authors convey the significance of the institution by documenting, with great clarity and historical rigor, the groundbreaking efforts of 10 men and women all associated with it. The book begins with Mary Elizabeth Garrett, a wealthy philanthropist who pledged a considerable donation to Johns Hopkins University for the express creation of a medical school but only on the condition that it admitted women into its inaugural class in 1893. John Shaw Billings, who served as a military surgeon for the Union during the Civil War, not only helped design Johns Hopkins Hospital, but also recruited its first class of leaders. Dr. Jesse W. Lazear was instrumental in determining the causes of yellow fever, especially in Cuba, and died from a self-administered bite from an infected mosquito—a martyr for scientific experimentation.

Hruban and Linder cast a wide net in their selection of pioneers; Max Brodel, for instance, wasn’t a physician at all but blazed trails in the art of medical illustration, setting it on a “solid and sustainable course.” The assemblage of synoptic biographies highlights not only the great importance of Johns Hopkins to the advancement of medical science, but also the remarkable distance that science traversed in less than a century. The authors adopt a writing style that’s not only accessible—an impressive feat since some of the subject matter is technically prohibitive—but also captivating. Readers will be drawn into an edifying chronicle of scientific accomplishment and also into the drama of the people who made it possible. Notably, they consider figures who were marginalized by society; for example, they tell the story of Vivien Thomas, a Black man from the South who was a brilliant laboratory technician and researcher who made essential contributions to cardiac surgery but struggled for recognition in a racist society. The authors don’t mince words regarding prejudice and bias in the rarefied cosmos of Johns Hopkins and in the larger history of medical science. Indeed, they tackle the issue head-on, admitting that their story “has inextricably woven into its fabric the ugly realities of racism, sexism, and a host of other harsh truths. While some of these harsh truths may be understood in the context of their place and their time, this understanding does not absolve past wrongs.” Overall, the authors have produced a historical record that’s riveting as well as edifying and unflinchingly honest, as well.

A readable and informative medical-science chronicle.

A challenging, topsy-turvy addition to 21st-century pandemic-inspired literature.
A thoughtfully curated collection of nonfiction

Maxie, Linda
Spoon Creek Press (416 pp.)
979-8-98592-340-7

A retired Virginia librarian compiles an annotated bibliography of high-quality nonfiction.

With decades of experience in public and school libraries, Maxie has a lifetime of experience helping patrons locate the next book to add to their reading lists. In her debut, written under the pen name of Library Lin, Maxie distills a century of nonfiction into a digestible best-of compilation. Following the organizational structure of the Dewey Decimal System, the book’s 10 chapters parallel the classification system’s 10 hierarchical divisions of knowledge, from General Knowledge and Computer Science (000-099) and Religion (200-299) to Languages (400-499) and Geography, Biography, and History (900-999). Drawing on 65 lists, including those of National Book Award winners and the Kirkus Best Nonfiction Books of the Year, Maxie’s entries include a brief synopsis paragraph that describes each book’s thesis. Books that make Maxie’s cut must meet three additional criteria: They “must teach me something new,” “must change the way I look at life in some small way,” and must “keep the pages turning with a clear, engaging writing style.” Adhering to the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights, the book does not discriminate based on the ideology or background of the author and thus includes books that span a full range of sometimes competing perspectives on controversial topics like religion and politics. For a reference book of such enormous scope that has barely 400 pages, Maxie acknowledges her lists are “a tiny sampling,” part of a larger network of Library Lin book lists featured on her Further Reading blog. Dedicated “to all those who love to read and learn,” this is a useful reference tool for bibliophiles on the never-ending journey to find their next favorite book, and it’s accompanied by practical appendix material such as an author and title index. And while the book’s introductory chapter makes a too-curtsory attempt to deal with topics like theoretical debates over blurred lines between “Fiction vs. Nonfiction,” its lists nevertheless make for a delightful guidebook.

A thoughtful, thorough survey of the best nonfiction found in today’s libraries.

DARK SONNET
McCartby, Tom & Bill Dohar
De Profundis Books (426 pp.)
$4.99 e-book | June 24, 2022

In McCarthy and Dohar’s thriller, an ex-cleric and his friend must solve a poetic puzzle that may be connected to multiple murders.

Myles Dunn, a former Jesuit priest (and “self-professed adrenaline junky... who happens to be a polyglot with an advanced degree in world religions”), is lured back to his alma mater by his “one-time fellow Jesuit and best mate,” Jeremy Strand, with an email that promises the solution to a mystery. Upon his arrival in Oxford, England, from Colorado, he finds a community rattled by the horrific murder of an altar boy, who bigots believe was committed by someone from the local Muslim immigrant community. Strand, an esoteric Jesuit and poetry scholar, has discovered a hidden meaning in one of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ lost “dark” sonnets. Specifically, he believes that Hopkins, a fellow Jesuit and brilliant and idiosyncratic Victorian poet, wrote this poem in an effort to reveal the “quasi-historical legend” of the Cuxham Chalice, a priceless artifact from the time of the Lumen, a secret religious sect founded during the reign of King Henry VIII. When Strand goes missing—and another murder, similar to the first, is committed—Myles and Oxford librarian Eva Bashir must race to solve the poetic riddle and find out who’s behind the crimes. They soon discover that the culprit will go to any length to keep their secret hidden. Fans
of Dan Brown's historical thrillers, particularly the bestselling *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), are likely to best appreciate McCarthy and Dohar’s dive into the complex and mysterious history of “the self-proclaimed ‘keepers of the Grail.’ ” The plot’s use of the work of Hopkins, a complicated author who often invented his own words, gives readers a clever character to explore. However, the intricate poetic devices at play, which include reverse acrostics, sprung rhythm, sestets, and octets, may be confusing to those who are unfamiliar with serious study of formal poetry. That said, it remains an intriguing thriller to the end.

An engaging, if sometimes dauntingly complex, whodunit.

**THE READING**

*Monier, Barbara*

Amika Press (271 pp.)


A chance meeting with an old college friend leads a novelist to revisit memories of her freshman year in the fifth novel by Monier.

Esmé is a novelist in her 60s who is about to give a reading of her new book when she gets a shock. Someone from her freshman year of college, a year she hated at a school she disliked in a town she despised, appears and says hello. It is Tom Killarney, a friend from that alcohol-soaked year whom she hasn’t seen in 40 years. Esmé, who is moving in with her partner, Gino, begins to recall difficult but consequential moments from the early 1970s, when she left tiny Clarion, Pennsylvania, to attend a private college in a city seven hours away by car. An only child whose father died when she was 5, she was lonely and penniless but bright enough to become one of only 10 students accepted for a coveted English lit program at the school. Her dorm room was impressive, and the other students well dressed but lacking in intellectual curiosity: “Kids my age opened their doors to fetch their WSJs wearing pajamas that looked as if they’d be ironed, covered by plush monogrammed bathrobes, their feet toasty in sheepskin scuffs.” Disillusioned, Esmé found solace in friends like Tom, and in Monier’s novel, reconnecting with him causes her to reexamine her post-college life. A question at the heart of this novel is: What happened to the young people of her generation who were so ready to take on the world? Monier deftly spans the decades and writes incisively about how the answers aren’t always easy to find. She gives shape to fragmented and loose connections between people, however dispersed they have become, and thoughtfully explores an idea that may resonate with many members of her hero’s generation.

As Esmé puts it: “Perhaps it’s not the past that catches up with us, but rather the other way around.”

A beautifully written novel shows how small moments can make a big difference in people’s lives.

**YOGA FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING**

*An Embodied Approach to Mastering Your Onstage Presence*

*Newman, Margie*

Newman Communications (145 pp.)

$9.99 e-book | May 19, 2022

A yoga-centered debut self-help book aimed at helping novice and veteran public speakers improve and sharpen their onstage presence.

Newman, a longtime public-speaking coach and yoga instructor, offers a holistic manual for tackling public speaking anxiety via yogic breathing, movement practices, mindfulness,
“A detailed and troubling picture of private equity depredations.”

ETHICALLY CHALLENGED

Private Equity Storms
US Healthcare
Olson, Laura Katz
Johns Hopkins Univ. (440 pp.)
$34.95 | $34.95 e-book | March 8, 2022
978-1-4214-4285-3

Private equity firms are weakening America’s medical industry and hurting patients with their callous drive for profits, according to this sobering exposé.

Lehigh University political science professor Olson, who previously wrote about the industry in The Politics of Medicaid (2010), probes the takeover of much of the health care sector by private equity firms that buy companies with borrowed money and saddles them with enormous debt obligations; the PE owners then service these debts and make profits out of their new companies by slashing costs, raising prices, and laying off workers, with an eye toward quickly selling the company. Olson patiently unravels the labyrinthine dealmaking by which PE firms have bought hospitals, medical specialty practices, dialysis clinics, rehab centers, nursing homes, hospices, dental offices, and ambulance services, sometimes assembling them into giant health care monopolies. The results, she contends, have been dire. The pressures of debt and profit-seeking incentivize PE managers to cut budgets; shift care from highly trained doctors to lower-skilled, underpaid, and overworked nurses and physician assistants; skimp on supplies; lower standards while also performing unnecessary procedures; engage in upcoding, raise prices; and hound patients who can’t pay the resulting inflated bills. She uncovers many horror stories at PE-run facilities; for example, dermatology practices that misdiagnosed cancer as eczema, inadequately anesthetized kids strapped down for agonizing root canals on their baby teeth, autistic teens beaten and sexually assaulted, epidemics of shabbiness that’s poisoned a field that should be idealistic and humane. Many readers will feel similarly outraged at the avarice she unveils here.

A disturbing, timely report on the deep corruption of health care by capitalism run amok.

A THING OR TWO ABOUT THE GAME
Paik, Richard
Atmosphere Press (320 pp.)
978-1-63988-240-3

In Paik’s literary debut, an aimless man’s life is changed when he coaches a softball team.

Brad doesn’t have a ton going on in his life since he quit his job in biotech, taking the fall for something he didn’t do. Now he mostly gardens and tries to figure out what the future holds. While raking leaves, he gets a call from his ex-wife, Stephanie, with a strange request: Her boyfriend backed out of a commitment to coach a Little League softball team, so can Brad do it? Brad’s coaching experience extends only to a single season of his nephew’s hockey team—and he was only the assistant coach. Yet for reasons he can’t explain, he says yes. As the new coach of the Marlins, he’s responsible for the success, both on and off the field. He’s forced to contend with rival coaches—including his frenemy, Mike—helicopter parents, and volunteer assistant coach Diane, the mother of Kelli, one of the players. To help his players win, Brad will have to master something he’s never been very good at: playing ball. Paik’s prose is elegantly understated, succinctly capturing not only Brad’s point of view, but those of the players as well. Here, for example, young Meghan identifies what she likes about softball: “Nobody has been mean to her in softball. There are no bad grades. When she bats, she can hear other girls—even popular girls—yelling you can do it, Meghan, let’s go Meghan, you can do...
it!” The premise that kicks off the narrative is somewhat trite; however, the novel features rich character work as well as the earnest questions about trivial pursuits that maybe aren’t so trivial after all. The story also manages to be moving without delving too much into the sentimental, and as a result, readers may be forgiven if their first instinct after reading it is to volunteer for a local youth softball league.

An unpretentious story of community and finding one’s purpose.

THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT
A Novel Based on the Life of St. Augustine of Hippo
Reiser, Sharon & Ali A. Smith
Mentoris Project (314 pp.)

A fictionalized rendering of St. Augustine of Hippo’s life that emphasizes his difficult emotional journey to Christian faith.

Augustine is born in the year 354 to a poor family in a part of the Roman Empire that is now modern-day Algeria. His father, Patricius, an olive farmer, realizes the brilliance of his son early on and doggedly devotes himself to securing him an education as a way to a better life. Augustine is sent far away to Carthage—“the edge of the world,” in what is now Tunisia—to study rhetoric and eventually become a lawyer, but he becomes intoxicated by philosophy and especially the Manichaean religion, to which he converts. He takes a lover, Titrit, with whom he bears a child, Adeodatus. Augustine’s mother, Monica, a devout Christian, is despondent over her son’s choices—in particular, his abandonment of the faith she tried hard to impart to him. Debut authors Reiser and Smith meticulously chronicle Augustine’s fraught spiritual journey to a final reconciliation with Christian faith with the help of Plotinus’ Platonism. However, this work is not principally an intellectual biography—its account of its subject’s philosophical evolution is fairly rudimentary—but a portrait of Augustine’s character, and, as such, it’s a vivid depiction.

Eventually, Augustine is ordained a priest and becomes the Bishop of Hippo and is called upon to defend Christianity from the charge that it’s responsible for Rome’s vulnerability to foreign invaders. At the heart of the book is Augustine’s complex relationship with his mother—Monica clearly favors him over her other son, Navigius, and she devotes herself to bringing him back to Christianity. The authors also movingly capture the personal features of Augustine’s life—his love of Titrit, the pain he experienced due to the tragic death of a loved one, and the doubt that haunted him. For a more searching account of the philosophical trajectory of Augustine’s life, one should look elsewhere, but this is a dramatically powerful reconstruction of his emotional development.

A sensitive portrayal of a complex historical figure.

FAR OUT MAN
Snearly, Chuck
BookBaby (398 pp.)
$19.50 paper | $0.99 e-book
June 11, 2022 978-1-66783-090-2

Detroit native Snearly’s Motor City mystery revolves around a disgraced English professor’s attempt to clear his name, which has life-changing, and life-threatening, consequences.

Wayne State University professor Jack Crost is best known for his class on 1960s counterculture literature. A trio of entitled, overprivileged students struggling to pass his class decide to set Crost up by producing a video that inaccurately depicts the professor as racist and unhinged; it goes viral on social media, and overnight, he becomes the “most hated man in Detroit.” Forced into a yearlong sabbatical, he retreats to the wilds of the Upper Peninsula to spend a year at his family’s old home and write the Great American Novel. But his fixation on clearing his name leads him to hire Murphy (“just Murphy”), a Vietnam veteran, former Detroit cop, and Jack Daniels–imbibing Buddhist who’s considered a top-notch private investigator. As Murphy and Crost dig deeper into the mysterious activities of the three students, they unexpectedly become targets of dangerous criminals involved in a drug-manufacturing enterprise—a new kind of meth in pill form called Howdy Doodys.

To complicate matters, Crost falls for Maggie Stollard, a Wayne State professor whose graduate assistant allegedly committed suicide just as Stollard was about to complete an experiment involving quantum entanglement. Snearly’s novel has a few plot inconsistencies, as when one of the villains inexplicably acts out of character toward the end. However, the story is powered by exceptional character development. Crost’s, Murphy’s, and Stollard’s backstories are all impressively detailed and deep; a major narrative thread, for example, is the death of Crost’s wife 20 years earlier during a home robbery and his conversations with her in his dreams. Another notable element is the heaping helping of iconic 1960s references, including such novels as Tom Wolfe’s The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test (1968), Hunter S. Thompson’s Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas (1971), and Carlos Castaneda’s The Teachings of Don Juan (1968).

A highly entertaining mystery fueled by a smooth blend of irreverence and ‘60s ideology.
“Amid the magic and mayhem, YA readers will find more than just escapism.”
blazing away as I sit there copying.” Her tenderness is palpable when recalling her quest for love, including awkward triangles and unsuccessful marriages. She has, however, a tendency to casually spoil her own stories—especially the outcomes of her relationships. There’s a similar casualness toward nuances of privilege, as when she breezily notes the support and housing she received from her family during her year abroad. She’s at her best when grounded in sensory memories: “The soulful wail of a goatskin bagpipe in a Bulgarian dance tune floods out the door and pools around my feet like dark water.”

A dreamlike and visceral set of remembrances that occasionally feel offhand.

DAWN OF DEORIDIUM

Ting, Jeff
Self (352 pp.)
979-8-40665-453-8

Centuries after a planetary disaster turns Earth into a sun-scorched wilderness, a teenager abandons her kingdom during a barbarian siege to embark on a forbidden quest for a legendary energy source.

Ting’s debut novel kicks off a YA SF/fantasy series. The principal setting, as tipped off by a map in the opening pages, is the “Arctic Fist”—recognizable as Alaska and its surroundings. Some 300 years ago, a 90-degree “Shift” in Earth’s magnetosphere exposed much of the planet to pitiless solar flares and radiation. The consequent mass extinctions and societal collapse have led to a strange, feudalist new world order in which one portion of scattered humanity subsists near the poles. A small number of people, predominantly women, evolved as “Faradants,” able to generate magnetic fields via their cardiopulmonary systems. They can control certain metals, heal some forms of illnesses, generate heat, and, at least temporarily, erect force shields against the “Solscream” barrages of lethal radiation. Kaili, 16, is the royal heir to the matriarchal city-state of Kalulishi, an underground fortress that keeps her people safe from solar flares. It is one of the few relatively comfortable and prosperous settlements in the Fist, but it’s arrogantly estranged from adjacent fishing villages and under regular attack by “Arcfarer” barbarians. When a fearsome, mysterious “Iron King” with formidable Faradant abilities lays siege to Kalulishi, Kaili impulsively ventures into hazardous territories (with ruins of the long-gone civilization) after the Deoridium, a rumored artifact of immense power. But Kaili does seem to make more tragic mistakes and bad choices than the average plucky YA protagonist, and this may be one of them. Ting’s concept of metallurgical magic is at first one of those irksomely elastic fantasy gimmicks whose logic seems to come and go as is convenient to rescue the hero from seemingly hopeless peril. But a neat, last-act twist does explain the inconsistencies. The action-packed plot concludes with a number of dangling story strands, unaccounted-for villains still in play, and a romance (low on the author’s list of priorities) deep in the background. But genre readers should be attracted by the well-planned worldbuilding and clever narrative and not be repelled by the loose threads. A smart, magnetism-driven SF/fantasy tale that gives a new series admirable power.

THE BOOK OF INVASIONS

Vick, Rod
Penmore Press (474 pp.)
$20.50 paper | $5.50 e-book | April 28, 2022
978-1-97851-02-0

After the discovery of a mysterious map in Greenland, a tormented archaeology assistant and her allies fight a sinister cult trying to recover an ancient Egyptian secret.

A Hollywood screenwriter might pitch this paranormal adventure by Vick as the “Girl With the Dragon Tattoo Meets Indiana Jones,” though hero Limerick “Ricky” Crowe’s body art consists not of a dragon but of a Celtic triskelion, an ancient three-lobed mythological symbol. Ricky left her native Ireland with her sister and widowed mother after the death of her father and subsequently endured a traumatic adolescent rape-mutilation while growing up in troglodyte Alabama. Now an alcoholic introvert, Ricky finds solace in online gaming in her Chicago apartment and in archaeological fieldwork with a local institute. Then her sister Sasha disappears in tandem with a massacre, at a climatology outpost in Greenland, by armed raiders who struck the remote site after the discovery of an ancient map, seemingly of Egyptian origin. The doomed Sasha managed to send the map to Ricky and her research teammates, who are promptly targeted by a ruthless global cult. Elements of Irish folklore and the Old Testament fall into place in Ricky’s bewildered and angry but resourceful mind, and soon she and allies are on an international chase to recover an ancient Egyptian secret of life and death. Escapist beach reads such as Clive Cussler’s Sahara and Iris Johansen’s Storm Cycle have jeep-driven down similarly dusty, artifact-strewn paths, but here the supernatural—not just lost wisdom, treasure, or technology—lies at the center of a conspiracy that has bad guys a step ahead of the heroes and cliffhangers that involve literally hanging from cliffs. Vick keeps his hero credibly flawed during hideous ordeals and drops surprises after surprise until the end. Lucky encounters with occult-hieroglyphics interpreters in back alleys may be a bit much. But a grand spirit of master storytelling hangs over the novel, and readers will be glad to go along for the ride.

A top-notch paranormal adventure is supercharged by a far-fetched premise with unexpected verve, emotion, and thrills.
The struggle to save the charismatic wild horses of the American West animates this lavishly illustrated book that explores freedom and captivity.

Walker, a photographer, recounts her experiences with Blue Zeus, a wild stallion named for the exquisite color of his blue-gray coat. He also sports four knee-high white socks; a magnificently shaggy, wind-tossed mane; and a shock of hair that flops over his face to veil his brooding black eyes. The author, who judges him “the most beautiful stallion” she has ever seen, spent several seasons photographing Blue Zeus and his family of pinto mares and their yearlings and foals as they roamed the Red Desert Complex region of Wyoming. Her work is in part a pictorial essay on horse life. Her subjects graze, nuzzle, loll, and survey their grassy domain. Their idyll ended in 2020 when the Bureau of Land Management rounded up thousands of wild horses to clear range land for cattle. Thanks to his habit of leading his family out of approved Herd Management Areas, Blue Zeus was targeted for capture with no release. Later sections of the book relate Walker’s efforts to find Blue Zeus and his mares somewhere in the archipelago of BLM pens and arrange their adoptions by a horse sanctuary before they got sent to the slaughterhouse. The author’s homage renders the society of wild horses in vivid, evocative prose. (“Blue Zeus walked a little bit away from his family...and tried to nap in peace. First, little Fire got too close and Blue Zeus chased him away with ears pinned. Then Nike came over and he pinned his ears at her, but she was undeterred. Slowly the whole family came over, getting as close to him as possible.”) Walker’s pastorals are balanced by a gripping, intensely emotional cri de coeur against BLM roundups. (“It is a horrible feeling of helplessness: wanting to scream, throw up, as I see a horse go down or riders roping a foal and dragging it in.”) The color photographs are vibrant and glowing, posing the animals nobly against wide skies and distant mountains and conveying their fearful kineticism as they fled BLM helicopters. Wild-horse lovers will be fixated by the author’s arresting visuals and her dramatic story of equine pathos.

A captivating coffee-table volume that will fascinate the eye and pluck the heartstrings.

**BRODY THE LION MEETS THE DOC**

Wegner, Kristin
Illus. by Fay Stayer
Autism and Behavior Center (40 pp.)
April 23, 2022
979-8-98586-082-5
979-8-98586-080-1 paper

Friends and family help an anxious lion cub with autism get through his medical exam.

This appealing picture book by a clinical psychologist at the Autism and Behavior Center in Western Wisconsin is the fourth in a series featuring autistic lion cub Brody—who roars when he feels overwhelmed. Told in pleasing rhyme, it begins as Brody worries about the approach of his annual medical checkup. He knows that a “big poke” will be involved, and he is apprehensive about what else will happen (“even just the thought of walking through Doc’s door / made Brody worry and really want to ROAR”). Wegner, who dedicates her books to children and families “embracing the joys and facing the challenges of autism,” deftly uses Brody’s experiences to model parental advocacy, positive reinforcement, and communication techniques in a nonclinical way. Here, adults Mrs. G, a giraffe, and Dr. Roo, a kangaroo, help reassure Brody by setting up a playroom doctor’s visit. Brody overcomes his anxiety and upsetting moments, like accidentally flipping a fish out of the fish tank, by taking a deep breath and counting. Stayer’s cartoon-style illustrations, encompassing the clearly lettered black text, fill each page with color, expressive characters, and thoughtful details; e.g., the inclusion of a teddy bear in a wheelchair and a nonverbal child’s communication tablet device. The book ends with substantive tips to help children facing medical and therapy appointments.

A well-informed narrative with an appealing animal stand-in for a child with autism.
An intriguing, wide-ranging story collection with a hint of magic. The real and the surreal drive the 15 stories in this debut, many of which have been previously published in other formats. “Passeridae” is told from the perspective of cruise ship staff members hiding out in a linen closet after an armed attack on their ship. In “Ghosting,” a woman sees her weight loss drugs work while other pills do nothing to stem her mother’s increasing dementia. “Fuse” is narrated by one-half of a pair of conjoined twins, and “Strange Magic” features an opening line that immediately embodies the story title: “When Mary Ellen’s left breast grew back on its own during our Saturday dinner break, we had confirmation that something weird was happening.” Oddities continue in “Seven Minutes in Heaven,” in which wishes are granted to those who kiss, making it difficult for the narrator to avoid unwanted attention. The letters that make up “Billet-Doux” are struggling San Franciscan Liz’s imagined conversations with her job, her local bar, and the attractive man she sees on the train every day but never actually speaks to. Relatives handle family conflicts, scientists investigate natural and unnatural phenomena, and overlooked children take action throughout the book. The protagonists tell their stories from a wide variety of locations and circumstances, with common themes that unite the collection, and the author uses a narrative tone that is consistent across the stories while also allowing each story to develop a unique voice.

Wimmer is a strong writer and fills the pages with elegant, evocative phrasing (“We said words of respect in our native languages, which between the eight of us totaled fourteen gods and six words meaning ‘grace’”). Her tone is often wry (“Evelyn thought of her bed like a trapdoor spider, capturing the interest and monetary resources of her romantic partners”), and even the book’s most sardonic narrators balance their misanthropy with a touch of curiosity. The stories vary in length and format but retain a clear aesthetic sense throughout, making it easy to imagine that the characters from “Flarby” and “Inter-somnolence” might someday cross paths. The work educates without being didactic; readers learn about Wisconsin bingo regulations and Waardenburg syndrome in “INGOB” and the properties of sphagnum moss in “The Bog King,” with the bits of trivia blending seamlessly into the tales. The far-from-superfluous details bring Wimmer’s characters to life and add a layer of authenticity, convincing readers that the author knows what she is talking about (whether the topic is used car salesmanship, roller rink playlists, or the duties of sleep lab technicians). The elements of magical realism are presented without fanfare, and Wimmer succeeds in creating a world where they are entirely plausible. Fans of Karen Russell, Veronica Schanoes, and Connie Willis are all likely to find stories to enjoy in the collection, as Wimmer blends traditional literary fiction with a touch of the fantastic.

Vivid, thought-provoking stories make an enjoyable and challenging book.
BY MEGAN LABRISE

Episode 274: Joanna Scutts, author of Hotbed: Bohemian Greenwich Village and the Secret Club That Sparked Modern Feminism (Seal Press, June 14), on finding friendship in the historical record:

The thing about friendship is that it’s difficult to research historically; it’s not something that necessarily finds its way into archives and into biographies in ways that are concrete. The sort of letters and emotional outpourings that you might get from someone and their lover, you don’t always get that with friends. And in a way, friendship exists, I think—for a group like this—it exists in the doing, in the living. It’s not so much that people were writing great letters about their love for their friends, but that they were showing up, week after week, in the same company, and they were doing other things professionally to promote and support their friends.

Episode 276: Mecca Jamilah Sullivan, author of Big Girl (Liveright, July 12), on working with Lambda Literary’s LGBTQ Writers in the Schools program:

I spoke with four different groups of students. They had read [my short story collection] Blue Talk and Love…. In every single instance, they came with incredible questions about the characters. They really were very attentive to some of these concepts that we’re talking about: What’s going on with race? What’s happening with class? Why did the characters reject the Weight Watchers imperatives of weight loss?… In Blue Talk and Love, as in Big Girl, most of the settings I’m drawn to are late ‘80s, ‘90s, some early 2000s. And so, for folks in high school today, that’s old school, right? Like that is back in the day, oh yes. Oh, it’s so real. I learned so much about how old school we are.

Episode 278: Oscar Hokeah, author of Calling for a Blanket Dance (Algonquin, July 26), on reading the chapters told by male characters for the audiobook:

It was important to me to be able to capture the difference between Kiowa and Cherokee community members. So when they approached me—“Would you be interested in potentially reading for the audiobook?”—I got super excited. I did have to audition for it, I had to record myself reading one of the stories…and they gave me the green light. For the characters who are female, Rainy Fields is the reader. She’s Creek and Cherokee, also, so she’s a tribal member…I was super excited when she got onboard, and I think it’s going to be a pretty awesome audiobook.

Editor at large Megan Labrise is the host of the Fully Booked podcast. Find new episodes every Tuesday on Apple Podcasts and Spotify or at kirkusreviews.com/podcast.
In 2021, the average full-time employed American worked 9.09 hours a day, with more than a quarter of all full-time workers spending more than 50 hours a week on the job—ironic, considering that in 1967, a Senate subcommittee declared that by 1987 the average worker would spend no more than 22 hours a week on the job. Well, the Senate be damned: even politicians must now sell their souls from dawn to midnight, weekends and happy hours included.

It’s small wonder that Studs Terkel’s classic oral history Working, published half a century ago, is full of discontentment; workers back then logged just as many hours, though with much more purchasing power for their troubles than workers enjoy today.

Louis Terkel was trained as a lawyer but rebelled at the thought of a daily grind. Instead, with the byname Studs, he became a radio journalist. With decided working-class sympathies and Marxist leanings, he put a tape recorder to work collecting the thoughts of his fellow Chicagoans about matters concerning race, class, war, and other issues. His first book, the aptly named Division Street (1967), explored how people on one side of the ethnic divide viewed people on the other, with Terkel working venues that had him talking with subjects “on the steps of a public housing project, in a frame bungalow, in a furnished apartment, in a parked car.”

Working raised a battle cry of working-class rebellion, for as Terkel defiantly noted, because the book was about work, it was therefore about violence “to the spirit as well as the body.” For Terkel’s workers, just getting up and getting one’s body into the foundry or emergency room or classroom was a heroic effort, a guaranteed means of collecting too-small paychecks and too-large psychic scars. Enacting vengeance on the bosses could mean sneaking an extra smoke break or swiping a paper clip, but it could also have greater implications, as when an automobile worker did a shoddy job of assembly, saying, as Terkel wrote, “Aw, fuck it, it’s only a car.” Every worker, Terkel found, was a saboteur, whether real or potential.

Terkel proceeded by hunches and tips, aware that many people might be wary of talking about matters so sensitive as work and money. He found that he didn’t have to worry. No one held back. Farmers complained that most of the money in agriculture went to the corporations. Steelworkers spoke of long shifts, adding “in between…don’t even try to think.” Maids reviled the class pretensions of their employers. Flight attendants, then as now, had dire stories to tell about demanding, dimwitted passengers.

The world of Terkel’s Working has changed, if only because many of the jobs of half a century ago—stenographer, factory worker, switchboard operator—have disappeared or been offshored. But it’s the kind of book, full of insight and despair, that deserves a follow-up to show us just how far we have come or, depending on your point of view, fallen. It remains a revealing portrait of an era that, while bygone, reverberates with resentments and resistance all these years later.

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
If Elmore Leonard and Kurt Vonnegut had a ‘60s love child it would be... Far Out Man

Jack Crost is a professor of sixties literature with a painful past who teaches the ideals of peace and love.

“...a brilliant piece of fiction... Vonnegut fans will immediately appreciate Snearly’s wide-eyed protagonist and the increasingly surreal narrative that unfolds.”
—IndieReader

“...well-paced and fun... will keep readers flipping the pages to its conclusion.”
—BlueInk Review

“...exceptional character development...A highly entertaining mystery fueled by a smooth blend of irreverence and ’60s ideology.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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