The next big thing in YA fantasy.

The most anticipated YA debut of the year

Interview with Ayana Gray, author of Beasts of Prey

See Page 148

“The next big thing in YA fantasy.”

See Page 148
Nightmares hunt like beasts of prey, vanquished in the light of day.

UNLEASH THE BEAST

Fate binds two Black teenagers together as their dangerous alliance to hunt down the creature menacing their home uncovers deadly secrets. As Koffi and Ekon pursue the creature through the Greater Jungle, the hunt begins and the line between hunter and hunted becomes unclear.

ON SALE 9.28.21
Colson Whitehead
The prizewinning author is on a hot streak with his latest novel, *Harlem Shuffle*

Also in the issue: Joy Harjo, Kelly Yang, and Wab Kinew
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK  |  Tom Beer

Authors in Late Career

The book world loves to shower attention on young talent. And who can blame us? The prospect of finding a debut author in their 20s, poised on the cusp of a long, fruitful career, is irresistible. Just think of the acclaim that greeted Zadie Smith, just 25 years old when she published White Teeth in 2000. No flash in the pan, Smith has gone on to write four well-received novels, a collection of stories, and three essay collections.

Similarly, a generation later, Sally Rooney captured critical attention with her 2017 debut, Conversations With Friends. In the four years since, Rooney has already published two more novels, including the just-released Beautiful World, Where Are You (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Sept. 7). In a starred review, our critic calls it a “novel of capacious intelligence and plenty of page-turning emotional drama”; I predict we’ll be reading Rooney’s fiction for years to come.

But can we pause and pay tribute to the older writers still producing work into their 80s and even their 90s? I ask because I am currently reading Today a Woman Went Mad in the Supermarket (Bloomsbury, Aug. 31), a career-spanning collection of stories by Hilma Wolitzer, age 91. The title story dates back to 1966, but Wolitzer caps off the book with “The Great Escape,” written last year (Knopf, April 13) is narrated by a patrician elderly trustee of the fictional Temple Academy for Boys, reflecting on his time at the school and his charged friendship with Ben-Zion Elefantin, a Jewish boy.

Ozick is still firing on all cylinders. When the New York Times published a mixed review of the novel by Lionel Shriver (“Whatever her age, she can take it,” Shriver concluded), the author dashed off a letter to the editor—in the form of a poem. “No prob—the writer can take it,” she swaggered. That’s pretty OG.
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The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

Michael Eric Dyson makes a thoughtful, elegantly argued contribution to the literature of Black lives in America. Read the review on p. 67.

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**FICTION**

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**THE TELLER OF SECRETS**

Adjapon, Bisi
HarperVia/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
$26.99 | Nov. 16, 2021
978-0-06-308894-8

A Ghanian Nigerian girl questions the patriarchy against the backdrop of political upheaval during the late 1960s and early 70s.

After her Nigerian mother disappears when she’s 4, Esi Agyekum grows up with her father, stepmother, stepsisters, and brother in Ghana. She can’t help but notice the preferential treatment her brother receives, while she has to suppress her burgeoning sexuality. Bearing the weight of her father’s expectations, Esi moves through the childhood rites of passage even as she tries to rebel against societal norms. “Women occupy the kitchen while a man rules from the sitting room,” she observes. Such a fate, she promises herself, will not befall her. The story is packed tight with a brisk catalog of events. Esi constantly shifts from one to another—she sees her father having sex with a woman who is not his wife, she attends elementary school, she attends high school, she visits Nigeria, she falls in and out of love with men—while Adjapon barely gives any of these events time to percolate and matter. For a novel that is packed with so many happenings, the narrative is surprisingly lightweight. It’s a whirlwind tour of a childhood without a compelling (or even believable) voice to guide the reader through the landscape. Esi’s self-centeredness as a young adult seems understandable when so much goes on in her life. Against this character trait, though, her feminist awakening seems incongruous. The Esi we come to know seems impulsive, flighty, and incapable of in-depth analysis. Awkward sex scenes only muddy the waters further. Adjapon also weaves in news of state coups without placing them in context. In the end, the book’s execution doesn’t live up to its grand narrative ambition.

A muddled coming-of-age story that pays lip service to the ideals of feminism.
MILK TEETH

Bukowski, Helene
Trans. by Calleja, Jen
Unnamed Press (202 pp.)
$26.00 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-951213-35-0

The appearance of an outsider disrupts the lives of two women, a mother and daughter, living in an isolated, apocalyptic environment.

Edith and Skalde live in “the territory,” a landscape blighted by oppressive heat. Most large animals have died off, though dogs are still pets and rabbits remain as one of the only sources of meat. Skalde, the book’s sole narrator, tends to their potato patch and does her best to grow up in the face of Edith’s indifference (Edith spends days on end lying on the couch or in the bathtub) and cruelty, both emotional and physical. Now Skalde has only her writings to keep her company. It hasn’t always been this way: From her childhood, Skalde remembers fog, damp weather, and Edith’s attention. Although they are not alone in the territory, the few other inhabitants tend to steer clear of them for reasons that Skalde doesn’t fully understand. She is resigned to their isolation, though; the one bridge to the mainland was deliberately blown up years before to keep the territory residents safe from interlopers. That’s why it shocks Skalde to come across a young girl with red hair—a clear sign that she doesn’t belong to the territory. When Skalde decides to take the girl, Meisis, back to the home she shares with Edith, she has no idea how much this will threaten the territory’s residents and how quickly whatever order was found there will unravel. Bukowski has written a lean, muscular book that dispenses with much worldbuilding or exposition, but the book’s taut shape seems to fit with Skalde’s fiercely guarded self-sufficiency. With dashes of folk horror, cli-fi, and post-apocalyptic influences, Bukowski crafts a narrative that is somehow both propulsive and elegantly spare.

A memorable entry into the dystopian-literature canon from a young German writer to watch.

From “Maverick” Indie Novelist D. László Conhaim

ALL MAN’S LAND

“Conhaim transfers Paul Robeson’s story to the American West and incarnates Robeson in the fictitious Benjamin Neill, son of a slave, and a war veteran whose talent and courage parallel Robeson’s...at its heart, it is a story about freedom and values.”

—The Paris Insider Reader’s Circle

“All Man’s Land:...a book that should be read in classrooms and community book clubs.”

—ThyBlackMen.com

*Winner “Maverick” Category,
2020 Will Rogers Medallion Awards

COMANCHE CAPTIVE

D. László Conhaim


“...Conhaim displays substantial knowledge of the tribes he writes about and creates Native American characters who are as fully developed as his White players...An engrossing and well-written tale of the Old West.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“A deftly crafted and simply riveting read from cover to cover...very highly recommended.”

—Midwest Book Review

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tom@brokenarrowpress.com • dlaszloconhaim.com
With so many brand-name writers publishing books this season, it would be easy for less well-known authors to get lost in the shuffle. It’s particularly hard for books in translation to break through, Ferrante and Knausgaard notwithstanding. These recently published books all received starred reviews from Kirkus and deserve a wide readership.

Inseparable by Simone de Beauvoir, translated by Sandra Smith (Ecco, Sept. 7): Beauvoir is hardly unknown, but this previously unpublished novel could appeal to readers of Elena Ferrante who wouldn’t have thought of reading fiction by the author of The Second Sex. Inspired by her own childhood friendship with a woman who died at 21, this brief novel follows Sylvie and André, two Parisian girls who “meet at school, vie for top honors, and become inseparable,” according to our review. “A moving portrayal of intense female friendship, identity, and loss.”

Last Summer in the City by Gianfranco Calligarich, translated by Howard Curtis (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Aug. 10): Originally published in Italy in 1973, this novel about a young man drifting through life in Rome went in and out of print before being rediscovered a few years ago to great acclaim: a sort of Italian Stoner. Now it’s been translated into English for the first time, with an introduction by Andre Aciman. Our review says, “The account of a lost generation in Rome in the early 1970s...carries the weight of both family history and generational saga.”

Three Novels by Yuri Herrera, translated by Lisa Dillman (And Other Stories, Sept. 14): In these three short novels—Kingdom Cons, Signs Preceding the End of the World, and The Transmigration of Bodies—“the Mexican postmodernist, heir in equal parts to Cormac McCarthy and Juan Rulfo, delivers a hallucinatory study of his country,” according to our review. “One of Herrera’s central preoccupations is with finding a language to convey the strangeness of our time.”

Faraway by Lo Yi-Chin, translated by Jeremy Tiang (Columbia Univ, Sept. 7): A Taiwanese writer named Lo Yi-Chin—the author’s namesake—travels to mainland China to help his father, who’s had a stroke and is in the hospital. He’d gone back to visit the family he left behind when he fled to Taiwan in 1949 and started a new family, and now Yi-Chin must try to get his father home while dealing with the hospital bureaucracy and his newfound half-brother and cousins. Our review says Lo “finds humor in his namesake’s struggles with mainland customs and red tape while tapping into a rich vein of memories and emotions stirred when history or crisis makes the challenges of family life even gnarlier. Thematically rich and intriguing.”

The Dog of Tithwal by Saadat Hasan Manto, translated by Khalid Hasan and Muhammad Umar Memon (Archipelago, Sept. 14): This is a substantial, posthumously published collection of stories from a celebrated Urdu writer. As our review says, Manto has an “ability to regard everyone—crooks, the upper class, politicians, soldiers, housewives, and prostitutes—with an eye trained on humanity. Manto’s characters are forced to consider themselves anew as blood is shed and political boundaries are redrawn.”

Stranger to the Moon by Evelio Rosero, translated by Anne McLean and Victor Meadowcroft (New Directions, Sept. 7): This compact fable by celebrated Colombian writer Rosero creates a world in which a group of naked prisoners are kept in a house where they’re forced to serve the “clothed ones.” As our review says, “The narrator describes his silent and interior rebellion against the clothed ones, unravelling this small society’s structures and rituals in all their nuance and complexity.... Though the world of this story is bleak—sometimes almost unbearably so—the narrator’s soliloquies on agency in the midst of captivity and degradation are timeless, haunting, and extremely powerful. A profound work of dark and brutal truth.”

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
**BETTER OFF DEAD**
Child, Lee & Child, Andrew
Delacorte (336 pp.)
978-1-984818-50-8

Jack Reacher goes on an energy-packed tear in this latest adventure by Child & Child.

Killing off your protagonist nearly from the get-go is a hell of an attention-getter, even if the reader knows it can’t be true. Ex-military cop Reacher watches Michaela Fenton kill two men as she searches for her twin brother, Michael, and of course Reacher can’t not get involved. Michaela feels responsible for Michael’s apparent death and says, “I’d be better off dead,” a sentiment Reacher discourages. The criminal she fears most “only breaks cover when someone who was a threat to him is dead,” so Reacher stages his own fake murder and is shipped to the morgue. But fans of his fists needn’t fret, as he has plenty of occasion to whale the bejesus out of the bad guys. Michael has been caught up in a scheme to build bombs of a curious nature. Maybe they’re harmless devices designed to release red, white, and blue smoke in a “swirling patriotic cloud” in homage to Old Glory. Or perhaps the agenda is to wreak havoc on Veterans Day, because said smoke could be laced with the deadly VX nerve gas. So the plot’s a bit wacky, but at least it’s not trite. Reacher dispenses plenty of knuckle justice and cranium cracking, and wounded vet Michaela gets in some well-placed kicks. The writing is unmemorable, with loads of short, declarative sentences. Incomplete ones, too. No reader is going to say omigod, I wish I could write a sentence like that. Maybe Reacher should repeat high school English to remember that it’s OK for tough guys to express complex thoughts now and then. He could use a love life, too. You’d think Michaela’s titanium boot would be a turn-on for him, but no. Yet all of this—plausible plot or not, Pulitzer-level prose or not—won’t mean much to readers just looking for an exciting escape.

A fun read for the right niche of thriller readers.

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**ENEMY AT THE GATES**
Flynn, Vince & Mills, Kyle
Emily Bestler/Atria (352 pp.)
$28.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-9821-6488-1

Mitch Rapp protects the world’s richest man and faces down a psycho-path in his 20th adventure.

The CIA asks Rapp to protect Nicholas Ward, the first trillionaire ever, who has big plans for improving the planet. In the coming decades, Ward’s technologies will help make Saudi oil worthless. And with Dr. David Chism, he hopes to transform health care worldwide. In a lab in Uganda, Chism is working on creating a single vaccine that could wipe out the entire coronavirus category: no Covid-19, no SARS, no colds. These damn do-gooders are unquestionably an existential threat to the general world order, and the Saudis want them gone. Ruthless U.S. President Anthony Cook is down with that. “The human race can’t absorb that many fundamental changes all at once,” he opines. So the Saudis, with secret encouragement from Cook, hire the crazed warlord Gideon Auma, aka God’s representative on Earth, to neutralize David Chism and stop the research. “Bullets can’t harm me,” Auma brags, and his followers believe him. Soon Chism’s research facility in Uganda is a pile of ashes, and Auma even sees a chance to kidnap Ward, who’d funded the lab. But Ward didn’t make a trillion dollars by just giving up when things turn ugly. President Cook is angry that Rapp is interfering, saving lives and stuff. Indeed, the first lady calls Rapp “the guy every man wants to be.” He lives in South Africa these days, but his loyalty to his homeland is steadfast. When a Saudi considers torturing the hero, he asks, “Do you know your weakness, Mitch?...It’s your unwavering belief in America.” That’s wrong, of course, because Rapp has no obvious weaknesses. Even so, he and his protectees have many
powerful and capable enemies. He’s not the edgiest protagonist ever, but he’s hard to kill and easy to root for.

A serviceable thriller with plenty of satisfying action.

**DAMAGES**

Fraser, Keath

Biblioasis (560 pp.)

$21.95 paper | Nov. 23, 2021

978-1-7796-293-3

Highlights from 30 years of quirky, energetic, varied stories.

Canadian writer Fraser’s stories are odd, sharp, often long, not easy to access... and impressive. The fictions collected here range widely in tone, subject, and setting.

In the unusually short “Roget’s Thesaurus,” we see the famous compiler of similarity and difference still sorting the world in his dotage, at 91. “Waiting” channels the voice of a dignified Hindu server at a French restaurant, one who is also a sharp at tennis. In “Healing,” a grieving widower signs on as a fruit-picker; “The American Caller” tells, in its akimbo way, the story of a disappeared child. There’s “Foreign Affairs,” among other things a harrowing account of multiple sclerosis, alongside “Taking Cover,” a post-apocalyptic Noah’s Ark riff told in the form of instructions for passengers. Fraser can remind one of a Canadian Stanley Elkin, with his rococo style and his tendency to be a bard of occupation—a good number of these stories are explorations of the ways our vocabularies and habits of mind and ways of seeing the world are influenced by the work we do, the roles we play. But the work has a darker exuberance than Elkin’s; it’s usually less lightsome and comic. Fraser is a talent, and the book shows off his eccentric vision, his phrase-making skill, and his inventiveness, but often the thread of narrative in his stories is gossamer. At 560 pages, the book seems closer to a collected volume than to a selected, and it might have benefited from a bit of winnowing, but the skill here on display is unmistakable.

Complex, nimble, peculiar stories from a Canadian writer well worth checking out.

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***In the Belly of the Bell-Shaped Curve***

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...a ruthless exploration of the inanities of contemporary life.”

“The presentation of Turk’s misguided belief in his own superiority... allows readers to laugh at him as well as at the foibles of American society...”

“...Turk emerges as an effective antihero, which keeps the novel’s critiques from feeling didactic.”

“An often funny satire of the excesses of the free-market ethos.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation and Information on Film Rights, Email mcarteratty@gmail.com • michaeltcarter.com
The author of *Madame Zero* (2017) and *The Wolf Border* (2015) turns her attention to the pandemic. “Those who tell stories survive.” This is something Edith Harkness’ mother told her, and it’s the opening line of the book her creator started writing when the United Kingdom went into lockdown in March 2020. This novel was born of a pandemic and is, obliquely, about a pandemic. Its protagonist has lived through and still lives with a world-historical disease, and Hall has earned a place in literary history as one of the first fiction writers to respond in a sustained way to Covid-19. The story is narrated by Edith and addressed to the lover with whom she sheltered from a deadly virus. This summary is available to anyone who reads a synopsis of the novel, but the author takes her time revealing who “you” is, and this gets at some of what makes this novel challenging—challenging being a word that can mean “effortful in a rewarding way” or “exasperating.” The “you” that Edith addresses knows—presumably—much more than the reader does. It makes sense for the reader to stumble along for a bit, hoping to catch up, but the “you” being addressed and the “you” that is the reader remain persistently irreconcilable. This may be no problem at all for some, while it may be a trial for others. Beyond that, the success of this novel depends on the willingness of the reader to turn pronouncements about the human condition and disjointed personal vignettes into a compelling story. “There’s blindness to new lovers. They exist in the rare atmosphere of their own colony, trusting by sense and feel, creatures consuming each other, building shelters with their hopes.” This novel is built from a lot of passages just like that, interspersed with the events in Edith’s life that inspire them.

An interesting relic of a year when the world was in quarantine.

**THE SURROGATE**

*Halleen, Toni*

Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)

$27.99 | Nov 2, 2021

978-0-06-307-007-3

A contract for surrogacy goes predictably bad in this debut novel told from multiple points of view.

Cally is 20, impressionable, and optimistic in 2001 when she signs the papers to become a surrogate for Hal Olson and Ruth Martin. Cally needs the cash, and Type A Ruth has always dreamed of being a mother. It’s Hal’s second marriage, and he’s only marginally interested in having another child, but Ruth envisions a baby as the glue that will bind her family together. “I believed it would be the ultimate bond,” she says. Days after giving birth, though, Cally splits from the hospital, sneaking the infant out. Cally’s old boyfriend Digger picks them up in his truck and they head north. “When I saw her,” Cally says, “and the way she looked at me, I just…couldn’t [give her away].” She starts daydreaming about a new life with Digger and the infant: “Why couldn’t we be one of those families? Weren’t we just like anybody else?” Hal and Ruth are terrified and understandably angry that she disappeared. Author Halleen’s background as an attorney shines as flashback chapters delve into the minutiae of contract law, but the plot is easy to predict. The story is told from all four characters’ points of view, though some of the weaker ones feel like the results of an exercise in Googling cultural touchpoints. “That’s why I play Final Fantasy VII on Playstation,” one of Hal’s sons says in a flashback, letting us know he’s squarely in 1997. Cally’s journey away from the hospital, Hal, and Ruth isn’t directed by much of a plan; the search to find her is short. Digger wants nothing to do with Cally’s fantasy of being a family of three; instead, he saw surrogacy as “creepy as hell.” Cally’s journey comes to a...
mostly inevitable conclusion, forecasted by the chapter where the characters negotiate the contract.

A thriller without many thrills.

LEAN YOUR LONELINESS SLOWLY AGAINST MINE
Hveberg, Klara
Trans. by McCullough, Alison
HarperVia/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$26.99  |  Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-06-303832-5

A debut novel, translated from Norwegian, that explores love as an infinite fractal set, bound only by the dimensions that it invents.

Rakel is the only child of two devoted but unhappy parents. Her mother emigrated from Asia—leaving behind her work, her culture, and her language—in order to marry her father but has found it nearly impossible to acclimate to Norway’s racially homogenous culture. Her father dotes on Rakel but doesn’t understand the pressure she feels to keep her fearful mother safe. As Rakel grows, her propensity for logic puzzles and natural affinity for the patterns of music resolve themselves into a near virtuoso talent for conceptual mathematics. She moves to Oslo to attend the university and quickly meets Jakob Krogstad, a professor who has captured her attention through an article he wrote about the 19th-century Russian mathematician Sofia Kovalevskaya. Jakob is quick to appreciate the uniqueness of Rakel’s mind, and what begins as a mentorship slowly develops into a consuming romance. In spite of the fact that Jakob is married and has two small daughters, Rakel persuades herself that their relationship cannot be immoral because it is being undertaken in the service of true love. She agrees to wait eight years, at which point Jakob’s children will be older and they will be able to love each other openly. As time passes, Rakel’s career soars and her love for Jakob solidifies, but her health declines precipitously from an undiagnosable illness that leaves her frequently bedridden. She is forced to spend more and more time in isolation, too exhausted to live a life outside of the rich one found in her naturally inquisitive mind. The novel progresses in fragments of thought and impression. Small scenes become the gateways for passages of philosophy that stake their existential discourse about identity, space, time, and individuality on the mathematical theories that are Rakel’s solace as her autonomous life grounds to a halt in the grip of her illness. In another author’s hands, Rakel’s stasis—her physical and emotional inability to move beyond the intensity of her feelings for Jakob—might be frustrating. For Hveberg, the imbalance between Rakel’s richly evoked interior life and the lack of agency she wields in her experiences provides an opportunity to delve into the character’s vibrant intellect without diluting the reader’s sense of Rakel as a character whose joys and sorrows reflect our own.

A novel of interior spaces that plumbs the depths of loneliness in order to find within it the origins of love.

PEOPLE FROM MY NEIGHBORHOOD
Kawakami, Hiromi
Trans. by Goossen, Ted
Soft Skull Press (176 pp.)
$15.95 paper  |  Nov. 30, 2021
978-1-59376-711-2

Thirty-six linked fabulist shorts set in a small Japanese town.

Kawakami’s opening story, “The Secret,” sets the stage for the book to come. One day, while walking back to her room, the narrator comes across a white cloth lying underneath a zelkova tree. When she lifts the cloth she discovers a bossy child who moves in with her and stays for the next 30 years, her constant companion, listening with “great sympathy” to her “tales of woe,” neither aging nor changing in any way. When she asks, “Why
did you come here?” the child thinks for a moment before answering, “It’s a secret,” and the story ends. This gleeful tone of wonder, matter-of-fact domestic compromise, fey visitation, and cheek-by-jowl coexistence of the mundane and the fabulous carries through the rest of the collection. Some stories focus on introducing members of the community: the old chicken farmer who risks going to Chicken Hell to harass his hens; the principal of a school for dogs; Grandpa Shadows, whose two shadows don’t get along. Other stories explore notable events like the “secret yet intense” war of false memory between Dolly Kawamata and the proprietor of the local karaoke bar. Yet others illuminate the town’s enduring traditions: There’s the taxi driver who gives three ghosts a tour of town every year and the lottery where the townfolk draw lots to see who will have to take in the belligerent son of the town’s poorest family. While most stories stay within the confines of the town’s borders, sometimes the scope widens. A cursed housing development becomes so prosperous it “secedes[s] from Japan and form[s] its own armed forces, which sometimes [holds] maneuvers in Tokyo Bay,” for example. The result is a book that evokes Italo Calvino’s worldly fabulism and Ludmilla Petrushevskaya’s Grimms-ian domestic surrealism, but with a cultural lexicon that is distinctly Japanese.

An engaging and winsome book that charms without diminishing the precise unease created by Kawakami’s spare prose.

SMALL THINGS LIKE THESE
Keegan, Claire
Grove (128 pp.)
$22.00 | Nov. 30, 2021
978-0-8021-5874-1

An Irishman uncovers abuse at a Magdalen laundry in this compact and gripping novel.

As Christmas approaches in the winter of 1985, Bill Furlong finds himself increasingly troubled by a sense of dissatisfaction. A coal and timber merchant living in New Ross, Ireland, he should be happy with his life: He is happily married and the father of five bright daughters, and he runs a successful business. But the scars of his childhood linger: His mother gave birth to him while still a teenager, and he never knew his father. Now, as he approaches middle age, Furlong wonders, “What was it all for?… Might things never change or develop into something else, or new?” But a series of troubling encounters at the local convent, which also functions as a “training school for girls” and laundry business, disrupts Furlong’s sedate life. Readers familiar with the history of Ireland’s Magdalen laundries, institutions in which women were incarcerated and often died, will immediately recognize the circumstances of the desperate women trapped in New Ross’ convent, but Furlong does not immediately understand what he has witnessed. Keegan, a prizewinning Irish short story writer, says a great deal in very few words to extraordinary effect in this short novel. Despite the brevity of the text, Furlong’s emotional state is fully rendered and deeply affecting. Keegan also carefully crafts a web of complicity around the convent’s activities that is believably mundane and all the more chilling for it. The Magdalen laundries, this novel implicitly argues, survived not only due to the cruelty of the people who ran them, but also because of the fear and selfishness of those who were willing to look aside because complicity was easier than resistance.

A stunning feat of storytelling and moral clarity.
DREAMING OF YOU
A Novel in Verse
Lozada-Oliva, Melissa
Astra House (192 pp.)
$23.00  |  Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-662-60059-3

A young poet spirals into a world of trouble and madness after she raises Tejana pop star Selena from the dead.

Full of zaniness, humor, and existential questions about the ephemeral nature of fame and the toxic misogyny permeating our culture, this novel in verse is an experimental roller-coaster ride. The book opens with a cast of characters introducing Yolanda Saldivar, Selena’s convicted killer; Abraham Quintanilla, Selena’s father, an excellent approximation of machismo; “Las Chismosas,” a Spanish expression referring to gossips, often older women, here serving as the book’s chorus; an amorphous and dark “She,” like the villainess of a telenovela; “You,” introduced as “the consumer and the consumed”; and lastly, Melissa Lozada-Oliva, the author and protagonist, who says simply “it’s been me, it’s always been me. The whole time.”

Las Chismosas narrate Melissa’s journey as a young New York Latina who finds that her real life—writing poetry, looking for love—has been subsumed by the overpowering ghost of Selena as a cultural force. When Melissa decides to resurrect Selena, she becomes obsessively devoted to her at the expense of her own budding romantic relationship. The newly undead Selena eventually leaves Melissa to reconnect with her own career, and as she goes, whoever “Melissa Lozada-Oliva” is begins to dissolve, as well. Abraham Quintanilla, Yolanda Saldivar, and She arrive to fill the blank spaces. In this new millennium, Yolanda is reborn as an antihero, because sometimes you have to kill the thing you love most to truly be free.

An enjoyably madcap journey through the wasteland of fame, popular culture, and feminine identity in a post-colonial world.

HELLO, TRANSCRIBER
Morrissey, Hannah
Minotaur (304 pp.)
$27.99  |  Nov. 30, 2021
978-1-2507-9595-3

Morrissey’s atmospheric suspense debut introduces a troubled female police transcriber who goes beyond her job description to solve a drug case.

Gritty Black Harbor, Wisconsin, is a small city with big-city crime, the kind of place “that not only keeps decent people just racing past on the highway but attracts criminals and seedy characters who need somewhere to hide.” Newly hired police transcriber and aspiring writer Hazel Greenlee works the night shift, transcribing incident reports. On one of her first evenings, she’s horrified when her next-door neighbor Sam approaches her office and writes a message on the frosted window: “I hid a body.”

The following night, Hazel is startled to receive a report from Investigator Nikolai Kole, who had been suspended from the force six months earlier. She learns that Sam’s confession is tied to the overdose death of a 9-year-old boy at the hands of pill pusher Tyler Krejarek. When Hazel meets the “criminally attractive” Nik, she soon gets drawn into the investigation and a steamy affair despite being married to the controlling, gun-loving Tommy. As a former police transcriber, the author writes what she knows. It’s a shame she doesn’t explore this unusual law enforcement world in further detail. What starts out as an intriguing police procedural gets sidetracked into romantic suspense (plenty of sex but not much suspense), mixed up with some marital and family drama, and topped with a bit of an unreliable narrator. The overwritten prose with its excessive use of similes doesn’t help. People’s faces are too often compared to punctuation marks (“The vulpine lady’s smile deepened, a pair of parentheses framing her lurid red lips”).

An intriguing premise, but the execution needs improvement.
“Control of a successful, multigenerational family enterprise fuels this rousing tale of greed, animosity and corporate rivalry.”

“With an economy of words and spry dialogue, Harris’ novel doesn’t skimp on action, subtle romance or satisfying suspense.”

“A sordid tale of sparring bloodlines that will entertain fans of family dramas.”

—Kirkus Reviews for Blood Feud
Colson Whitehead’s crafty new novel, *Harlem Shuffle* (Doubleday, Sept. 14), opens in 1959 as Ray Carney, a mostly upstanding character who owns a furniture store on 125th Street, gets roped into a big heist courtesy of his cousin, Freddie. Carney, whose father was a crook, has a downtown connection where he can fence the occasional console radio that’s fallen off a truck, but he isn’t ready for the jewels Freddie and his colleagues steal from the vault at Harlem’s glamorous Hotel Theresa. Carney lives with his pregnant wife, Elizabeth, and their daughter in a dingy apartment overlooking the elevated subway tracks, nothing like the gracious house on Strivers’ Row where Elizabeth grew up and her disapproving parents still live. Getting in on the Hotel Theresa job helps Carney improve his family’s prospects, but it also gets him tangled up with a variety of miscreants who come back to haunt him over the next several years.

*Harlem Shuffle* has all the literary reach of Whitehead’s last two novels, *The Underground Railroad* and *The Nickel Boys*, both of which won Pulitzer Prizes, while taking on the propulsive rhythm of a classic heist story. Readers coming to his work through the television adaptation of *Underground Railroad* will be delighted (and will be eagerly awaiting the TV version of his earlier novel *Sag Harbor*). We spoke to Whitehead over Zoom from his home in Sag Harbor, New York; this conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

In *The Colossus of New York* you wrote about how each person’s New York is the New York they grew up with or encountered when they first arrived. This book takes place about 10 years before you started building your own internal New York. How did you re-create that time before you were born?

A lot of it was looking at the *New York Times*. I would figure out what kind of political thing I could use in ’61, and it turns out to be the mayoral race—and if you look at the archive, on one page, it’s [Mayor] Robert Wagner, and on the other page is a huge ad for a furniture brand, so newspaper ads were very important for getting the language of midcentury furniture. Then, there are a lot of poorly written memoirs of gangsters and gangsters’ wives. I didn’t really know how the numbers rackets worked, but if you read Bumpy Johnson’s wife’s memoir, there’s a lot about that.

And I’ll do location scouting, just walking around. I’d never been to Marcus Garvey Park before. It was called Mount Morris Park for a long time, and coming across a detail like, “this was just where we dumped the bodies”—people just dumped the bodies there all the time. That’s a great detail I can use. And then I would find stuff about the Hotel Theresa or Chock Full o’Nuts, and I feel like I’m doing some real research. And I’m telling my mother about it, because my parents lived in Harlem in the ’60s. She’s like, “Oh, yeah, Chock Full o’Nuts. I ate there every morning, got coffee there.” And Blumstein was a famous department store; I had Carney working there. And it turned out,
my dad worked there two summers, early ’60s. Oh my God, I really should just have been asking them the whole time!

Carney’s in-laws live on Strivers’ Row in Harlem, and you set up a contrast between strivers and crooks. Strivers’ Row loomed pretty large in the imagination; we knew people who lived on that block, and we’d go there and suddenly you’re in this wonderland, and it’s such a stark contrast between, you know, your crummy block on Broadway and 139th and this very special row of homes. So, in Nickel Boys and Underground Railroad, the overall oppressive structure is institutional racism. And I think this being a New York book, it’s real estate—you know, house envy. There’s a lot of symbolism in those buildings.

There’s a lot in the book about an underground system of payoffs, about money flowing in envelopes up the chain and goods and services flowing around the system, and about Carney figuring out where he fits into it. I think it’s a journey from knowing to understanding. He knows that everybody is corrupt but then comes to understand in a deeper way once he gives himself over to the criminal world. You know, all the straights and the normals walk by those storefronts and don’t know the secret world behind them. Carney sort of knows that, but then he comes to understand it.

It feels so prescient that you wrote this book partially set during the riots of 1964, which happened after a White police officer killed a Black teenager. The weird thing was I finished the book in late May [of 2020], and literally the next day I woke up and the George Floyd protests started. So Minneapolis was burning, and I added a sentence or two. But, you know, if you write about a fucked-up racial incident and then you wait five minutes, something else happens. And so definitely, my experience as a Black New Yorker has been one where every couple years, there’s a huge police brutality incident, and we talk about it, then we stop talking about it, and then it happens again. And now there’s a bigger, more national conversation, but not much has changed since the 1940s riot that was also about police attacking a Black person, and the ’64 riots, you know—just more of the same.

I don’t think it’s a spoiler to say that there are a few times when you flash-forward and say something like, “That photograph remained on the wall of Ray’s office for many years.” You’re signaling that he’s going to get through all this. Why did you decide to do that? I think everything’s sort of happening at the same time, you know—what’s past, what’s present, what’s future, it’s all happening at the same time. And I think those tiny flash-forwards capture that. There’s a way that the history of New York is encoded in Harlem, there are successive waves of strivers coming from Ireland, from Italy, Germany, Jewish immigrants from all over Europe, coming to Harlem and then leaving as they find their way into the middle-class system. And so all those stories are happening at the same time. I think it’s my sense of how the world works and how New York City works in our lives.

When you read a romance novel, you know that whatever bad stuff happens, there’s going to be a happy ending; that’s the compact. And I felt like you were doing something similar. My editor was like, “Do you want to give away that he’s going to make it through this thing?” But that’s not the point, whether he makes it through—it’s how he makes it through. When I first had the idea, it was going to be much bleaker. Maybe it was writing Underground and Nickel Boys, which are so bleak even though there are glimmers of hope, or maybe it’s just my affection for Carney—he grew on me pretty quickly. But I did want him to go that Breaking Bad or Tony Soprano route—I wanted him to thrive and also escape accountability for his crimes.

Harlem Shuffle received a starred review in the July 1, 2021, issue.
SKIN ELEGIES
Olsen, Lance
Dzanc (248 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Nov. 9, 2021
978-1-950539-35-2

This ambitious novel juxtaposes historical tragedies with a futuristic frame.

Olsen’s oeuvre includes a number of structurally and linguistically innovative works, including My Red Heaven (2020). That novel took a kaleidoscopic view of Weimar-era Berlin, blending moments of human connection with suggestions of the devastation to come. This new novel goes even further with the concept. After a few pages of very fragmented text set in 2072, the action moves to a number of stories set in the recent past. Many of them focus on historical tragedies, including the Challenger disaster and the plight of refugees trying to escape a war-torn Syria. Others play out on significant historical dates—including Sept. 11, 2001, and the day Richard Nixon announced his resignation—but move in unexpected directions. Aside from a few short vignettes, the significance and context of the 2072 segment isn’t fully explained until the novel’s final pages. Given that the other storylines largely focus on memory, intimacy, and mortality, the larger context into which the ending places them seems fitting. Each of the storylines is told in a different style—one about the origin of the internet is structured as a retrospective podcast interview, one about John Lennon’s murder inhabits his killer’s very subjective point of view, and the subplot set during the Fukushima tsunami and subsequent meltdown plays out in stark, minimalist verse. And while these storylines can be emotionally devastating on the page (particularly the Challenger subplot), the skill with which Olsen links them together keeps things moving at an impressive pace.

Readers willing to immerse themselves in this challenging novel will be left with plenty to discuss afterward.

TELL ME HOW TO BE
Patel, Neel
Flatiron Books (336 pp.)
$26.99 | Dec. 7, 2021
978-1-250-18497-9

After his father’s death, Akash Amin returns home and struggles with secrets and sobriety.

The debut novel by Patel, author of the acclaimed story collection If You See Me, Don’t Say Hi (2018), continues his exploration of Indian American characters who fight against stereotypes and the expectations of others. Akash wants to live in LA and produce the kind of R&B records he grew up listening to in the 1990s, but his alcoholism and bad decisions keep getting in the way of his dreams. He flies home for the puja commemorating his father’s death one year earlier and faces a brother and mother who don’t know he’s gay and who still resent him for causing a drunken scene the night of his brother’s wedding. Renu, Akash’s mother, has spent the year since her husband’s death watching American soap operas, drinking wine, and holding her tongue at the constant microaggressions from so many supposedly well-meaning White friends. Renu has decided to move back to London, where the man she almost married still lives. No one knows about Renu’s secret desire, but she spends the puja thinking about this lost chance at love. At the same time, Akash can’t stop thinking about the first boy who broke his heart back in middle school and who still lives in town. The novel’s power comes from watching a mother and son suffer under such similar burdens while stubbornly refusing to open up to each other. The flaw in Patel’s novel is structural more than anything else. The short chapters (some as few as two pages) alternate between Akash’s and Renu’s narration; they wrestle with such similar burdens, and they’re together for so much of the book, that the quick jumps between them keep the reader from sinking into either of their stories.

Strong characters and a sharp depiction of familial secrets in a novel that feels too compressed.
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

New episode every Tuesday
THE HAWTHORNE SCHOOL
Perry, Sylvie
Crooked Lane (304 pp.)
$25.99 | Dec. 7, 2021
978-1-64385-792-3

The first suspense novel by a pseudonymous Chicago psychotherapist follows a 4-year-old boy and his mother into a school that’s all too perfect.

At wits’ end because her son, Henry, is miserable and miserably noncompliant at Happy Start Preschool, Claudia Vera, an artist-turned-massage therapist, takes him to visit The Hawthorne School. Even though she knows she could never afford it, she’s encouraged by her neighbor Maggie Timmerberg, who hints that parents can volunteer there to subsidize enrollment. Zelma Huxley, the ageless director of the school, is so taken with Henry that she instantly offers Claudia a similar deal, and the weeks that follow are idyllic. Henry loves the school, bonds closely with his teacher, Evelyn Applegate, and charms everyone, who agree that he’s the perfect little boy. Inevitably, however, storm clouds arise. Devin Richards, the man who abandoned Claudia and Henry weeks after his son was born, returns out of the blue and presses Claudia to withdraw the boy from the school. Claudia begins to sense that something’s not quite right about Zelma’s assistant, Niles Holloway, who befriends her with ferocious possessiveness. She feels Henry growing more distant from her day by day. Yet she’s so peaceful when she’s at the school and so unhappy when she’s away from it that she feels compelled to quit her job, take up residence at the school, and do Zelma’s bidding as the staff awaits the imminent arrival of Gabriel Hawthorne, the late founder’s all-powerful son.

As the horrors in this by-the-numbers fable of Stepford children become more literal, they get harder and harder to swallow.

THE LEFT-HANDED TWIN
Perry, Thomas
Mysterious Press (321 pp.)
$25.95 | Nov. 16, 2021
978-1-61316-259-0

Jane Whitefield McKinnon’s latest mission to hide a fugitive from violence puts herself squarely in the sights of Russia’s fearsome Brotherhood.

Sara Doughton had four good years with Los Angeles errand boy/arranger/skimmer Albert McKeith. Every night he’d take her to another party, sometimes more than one, for which he’d provided champagne or drugs or women, then take her home to bed. When Albert realized that Sara’s attention had wandered to a singer’s promoter, though, he shot the promoter dead in front of her. Charged as an accessory, she turned state’s evidence and testified against Albert. Now he’s beaten the rap and is gunning for her. Even though she hasn’t helped a runner disappear since she was kidnapped herself, Jane agrees to leave her long-suffering physician husband behind once more and help Sara vanish. She’s full of practical advice about what to change and how to think, and she’s so successful that Albert, who’s tracked Sara to Jane’s hometown of Amherst, New York, only to recognize that now he’s up against someone way out of his league, asks a well-connected acquaintance to set him up with someone who’s better at this sort of thing. The someone turns out to be Oleg Porchen of the Bratva, who swiftly realizes that Sara’s guide is much more valuable than the woman she’s helping and promptly deploys serious human resources to track her down and bring her in. Porchen’s dead-eyed professionalism is matched only by Perry’s: An extended pursuit through the Hundred Mile Wilderness of the Appalachian Trail is particularly nail-biting.

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Hits the ground running and never lets up. Be sure to take a few deep breaths before plunging in.
AUTUMN ROUNDS
Poulin, Jacques
Trans. by Fischman, Sheila
Archipelago (198 pp.)
$18.00 paper | Nov 2, 2021
978-1-953861-06-1

The reclusive driver of a bookmobile encounters a life-changing stranger during his travels.

The protagonist of this novel—a man so fully devoted to his traveling library that he’s simply known to all as “the Driver”—leads a quiet and particular life: He occupies a small Quebec City apartment alone; socializes primarily with a lone author friend; and is characterized by a handful of “idiosyncratic ideas” honed privately over the course of his lifetime (“if two people were really made to get along together, they should like not only the same books and the same songs, but also the same passages in his books and songs”). For almost his entire adulthood, his routine has varied little. He makes seasonal rounds in his mobile library (a converted milk truck) to bring everything from Hemingway to publisher-rejected manuscripts to the far-flung readers of Canada’s North Shore and surrounding areas. Now aging, he anticipates his final book “tour,” but his routine is thrown into disarray upon meeting Marie, the enigmatic and captivating manager of sorts for a traveling brass band. The Driver is instantly engaged by her “tenderness and strength,” and, as he befriends and travels alongside the band (they in a refurbished school bus), he and Marie forge a close and intangible bond. As the Driver, full of melancholy, soaks in the details of his penultimate tour—the austere, lonely landscapes; the strange fellow readers, from fishermen’s wives to hydroplane pilots—he and Marie grow closer, exposing the vulnerability of two introverted souls struggling to close a chasm between them. Quaint and understated, Poulin’s novel offers a deeply felt meditation on loneliness, age, and the improbability of human connection. Set against a lovingly rendered landscape, the ups and downs of Marie and the Driver’s relationship are often affecting, though the novel lacks the panache to become something truly original. Those seeking a tender (albeit sometimes milquetoast) account of two intersecting lives, however, will end this book satisfied and even moved.

Finely detailed if sometimes slow.

WE ARE NOT LIKE THEM
Pride, Christine & Piazza, Jo
Atria (336 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-9821-8103-1

The longtime friendship between a Black newscaster and a White woman married to a cop is tested by a tragedy.

The longtime friendship between a Black newscaster and a White woman married to a cop is tested by a tragedy.

Riley and Jen have been besties since girlhood, and as this debut novel from Pride and Piazza opens, they are both realizing their dreams. Riley is in line to be the lead anchor at the local TV station, and Jen has finally, after many tries and a loan from Riley for one last IVF procedure, gotten pregnant. But Jen’s husband, Kevin, is a Philadelphia police officer, and he and his partner have just shot a 14-year-old Black boy while pursuing a suspect with a completely different description. The old friends’ rock-solid connection is stretched to its limit as each is swept into her role in the tragedy, Riley as conduit for the voice of the bereaved family and one of the most visible members of the city’s Black community, Jen isolated among her husband’s racist relatives and terrified by Kevin’s increasingly disastrous prospects. On the downside, the setup seems a bit on-the-nose, and as the plot takes on everything from microaggression to profiling to lynching, the effect is sometimes a bit preachy. “How many marches have there been? How many calls for justice? How many lawsuits? How many ‘national conversations about race’?” On the other hand, this is an area where preaching and teaching can be forgiven. The most unlikely or at least unpredictable aspect of the story—a deep friendship that crosses both race and class boundaries—is the most interesting.

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In 1986, Minnesota native D. László Conhaim was exploring his grandparents’ record collection when he stumbled upon an album cover with just one word in all caps: ROBESON. Like many Americans today, Conhaim had never heard of Paul Robeson and found himself wondering, “Who was this mature, tuxedo-clad singer who needed no further introduction?” It only took listening to the first track for him to recognize the power of Robeson’s voice. Soon, he was off on a 33-year journey, which recently concluded with the publication of his latest novel, All Man’s Land. “There was more than music behind that cover,” he says. “There was a story.”

That story of Robeson’s life, as Conhaim would learn, was a fascinating one. An African American born to a former slave, Robeson became a Rutgers valedictorian, an All-American athlete, a Columbia Law School graduate, and, finally, an internationally renowned recording artist and performer in the 1930s. Vocal against oppression in all its forms, Robeson also became a hero to certain Americans, Soviets, British miners, and especially to Conhaim’s Eastern European grandparents. His incendiary statements also caught the attention of the U.S. State Department, however, and Robeson was deemed a communist sympathizer, a blacklisting that effectively ended his blossoming career.

After finding Robeson’s album and learning about his plight, Conhaim couldn’t get Robeson’s music or his struggles out of his head. In 1988, Conhaim was living in a Buddhist temple in Tokyo while working on a Western novel. “I remember envisioning Paul Newman as a stranger riding into a town,” he explains. However, the more he listened to Robeson on cassette, the more he started to see the rider as a Black man. “Next, he became a singing Black cowboy,” Conhaim says. “Finally, the ‘Paul’ I envisioned in the saddle was Paul Robeson.”

That idea would evolve into All Man’s Land over several years as Conhaim completed it for part of his humanities degree at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. In the novel, the Paul Robeson-inspired figure, Benjamin Neil, comes to a small
Wyoming town, and his fight against a malicious, bigoted landowner involves not only classic shootouts, but also songs and sermons to open people’s eyes. As Kirkus Reviews notes of the intriguing hero, “Benjamin is a compelling, multilayered protagonist who moves beyond his Robeson inspiration.”

Conhaim revisited the text periodically but never published the manuscript. He went on to live in Prague and founded The Prague Review, an international literary journal celebrating Central Europe’s flourishing creative scene in the mid-1990s. In the mid-2000s marriage took Conhaim to Tel Aviv, Israel, where he still lives with his two children. It was also around this time that Conhaim made an important addition to All Man’s Land: a Jewish character named David Cohen (whose family tried to pass as Irish by rebaptizing themselves as the Cohans).

“This is a story that Benjamin, ever passionate about issues of race and especially identity, draws out of David, who is in the process of finding himself,” Conhaim explains. In a pivotal moment in the book, Benjamin tells the young David why the struggles of the Jewish people, of which David himself is only vaguely aware, are important:

To cite the chant of a Jewish sage, The Persians, what boast they?—Our ruler is above all rulers; the Romans, what boast they?—Our Kingdom is above all kingdoms. To realize your potential you must explore your identity, not hide it. Yet that is not enough. You must also open your eyes to other peoples, not look past them or turn away as most men do. And you should know something of the philosophies behind our fledgling and troubled democracy.

In crafting Benjamin Neil, Conhaim grafted on several biographical elements from Robeson and his character traits that Conhaim admired: his dignity, intellectual and physical prowess, courage, and stick-to-itiveness. Conhaim also drew directly from Robeson’s sung version of the kaddish by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, which Benjamin Neil cites for David before making it into his own battle cry. “The Black-Jewish relationship at the novel’s core expresses what Paul Robeson—as a moral figure—means to me more than any essay I might write about him,” says Conhaim.

Conhaim finally decided to publish All Man’s Land in 2017 after releasing his first Western novel, Comanche Captive, and wanting to continue with the genre. He was also spurred to revisit his version of Robeson after seeing that an ESPN list of “The Undefeated: 44 African Americans Who Shook Up the World” failed to include the man he so looked up to. “If Robeson were not a hugely influential figure, the sinkhole that swallowed up his international career—and worse, his public voice for nearly a decade—would not have opened,” asserts Conhaim.

A historical fiction about a Black cowboy, which also includes historically accurate language and is written by a White man, seemed like a tough sell with today’s publishing emphasis on “own voices.” Nonetheless, Conhaim was undeterred in getting his story—and the story of Robeson—into the hands of readers. To that end, Conhaim published independently and bookended the final version of All Man’s Land with nonfiction chapters explaining Robeson’s life and his impact on the novel.

Despite the potential for controversy, Conhaim has been encouraged by All Man’s Land’s positive reception (including by several prominent African American reviewers like Professor Emeritus Michael Searles of Augusta University, writing in Western Writers of America’s Roundup Magazine). More than anything, though, Conhaim hopes to draw attention to Robeson himself and to lead others to see him as Conhaim does: a colossal figure of the 20th century. “Robeson was a true Renaissance man whose ‘oneness of people’ message resonates to this very day,” Conhaim says. “He still has much to teach us—by word, spoken and sung, and by deed.”

Rhett Morgan is a writer and translator based in Paris.
as the women go from easily sharing jokes about Riley running on colored-people time and Jen being a trailer-trash Gwyneth Paltrow to having their connection become starkly politicized, public, and problematic. By keeping the friendship at the heart of the plot, the authors balance topical concerns with character-driven storytelling.

With its timely premise, clear-cut messages, and appealing female characters, this novel is bound for book-club glory.

An archly comic love story with notes of farce and fable.

Meet Charlie Green, a very rich, White, Ivy League–bound 18-year-old with Holden Caulfield genes, about to fall in love with the most beautiful “light-eyed” female barmaid in Philadelphia. Set in 1987, Roberts’ debut almost seems like it was written in 1987; from the title on out, the author is blithely unhampered by current ideas about privilege, sexism, ethnic stereotypes, and more. Charlie is the son of adorable Frenchman George Green, known as Jee-Jee, and Rose, his alcoholic wife, whose fairy-tale wealth comes from a barnful of old masters paintings. At first, the novel has YA overtones, as we meet Charlie working as the only skinny counselor at a camp for overweight middle schoolers. “It pains [Charlie] that he [can’t] give himself…romantically” to the Very-Brown-Eyed-Counselor who has a crush on him; he is saving himself for his last night before college, during which he has elaborately planned to lose his virginity to his girlfriend. Despite following the advice of his successful older brother, John—“The shower you take before you lose your virginity is more important than the shower you take before your wedding….A new bar of Irish Spring. New razor. No cologne. Extra deodorant, but it has to be cheap. You should smell like a working man”—he’ll end up sulking over pizza and headed for life-changing adventures. Every step of the way he consults John, who is, after all, a successful Wall Street “Haircut” with a Princeton degree and an amazing six-figure girlfriend named Shannon Chang. Informing Charlie that almost every pretty girl owns a futon, he explains, “They treat it like a flying carpet. They’re obsessed. It’s weird. They think it makes them seem more grounded, but also sexually aloft. Girls are really into their own paradoxes.” Roberts’ old-school, slightly surreal humor has a dash of Barthelme or Perelman.

If you’re ready to abandon all political consciousness and get in the wayback machine, you’ll exit smiling.

Seçkin’s idiosyncratic debut novel follows its conflicted heroine through a relatively uneventful but richly strange summer in Istanbul.

Turkish American Sibel, who is on summer break before entering her senior year of college, has been dispatched by her family to care for
You've read about the Afghan war. You're curious, not about America's motives, but about the enemies it has fought.

Didn't they understand America's might?

“…a wonderfully imaginative and original story with a strong evocation of time and place…. I was equally impressed by the authenticity…. in the vivid technical details covering military operations, surgery…. legal and political processes.”


“In this novel, a Pashtun American soldier stationed in Afghanistan faces religious zealots as well as a dangerous, clandestine U.S. group.”

“This military tale features rich culture, abundant action, and sublime characterization.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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her grandmother, study for her medical school entrance exams, and visit her father’s grave. None of those projects is going swimmingly. Instead, Sibel and her grandmother, who has Parkinson’s disease, spend their days watching soap operas and eating rich meals. Sibel comes up with every imaginable excuse to avoid visiting the grave, feeling guilty about her father’s death because she feels she didn’t act quickly enough when he collapsed in front of her. Rather than studying modern medicine, she becomes obsessed with the ancient theory of the four humors—“blood, phlegm, black bile, and choler”—concluding, for example, that “Istanbul is black bile, melancholy, only disguised as a city.” Meanwhile, her well-meaning but semicluless boyfriend, Cooper, who accompanied her, decides to dedicate himself to curing Turkey’s ills. As the summer drifts on, Sibel attends one family party after another, pays peripheral attention to the fraught politics of the country—the novel is set a year after the Gezi Park protests of 2013—and investigates her complicated family history, which turns out to be a soap opera of its own, full of kidnappings and sudden deaths. While it’s a challenge to keep track of all of Sibel’s current friends and relatives, let alone the preceding generations, and while the novel may be more concerned with the ebb and flow of daily experience than with advancing the plot, Seçkin conveys a convincing, often dryly humorous sense of life in a constantly changing city and of the experience of those who, as Sibel notes at the airport, can “choose whichever line is shorter, Turkish Citizen or Foreign Citizen.”

A captivating treat for those willing to go with the flow.

THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES
Shafak, Elif
Bloomsbury (368 pp.)
$27.00 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-63557-859-1

Following the travails of one fictional family from late-20th-century Cyprus to present-day London, Shafak explores the physical, psychological, and moral cost of the long conflict between Turkish and Greek Cypriots on the island’s citizens and their environment.

Shafak, whose previous novels have ranged from realistic political and domestic drama to fanciful interpretations of Muslim spirituality and mysticism, here exhibits her passion for an endangered natural world that possesses wisdom the human world lacks. While the novel is framed around London high school student Ada’s attempts to learn about her parents’ past on Cyprus and what drove them to emigrate, much of the novel is narrated by a fig tree. The loquacious, well-traveled tree fills in parts of the plot unknown to the human protagonists and offers rambling treatises on Cyprian history, plants, and animals. Ada’s father, evolutionary ecologist Kostas, has tended the fig tree lovingly in his London backyard since bringing a shoot with him to plant when he and his pregnant wife, Defne, left Cyprus more than 16 years ago. Back in the 1970s, Greek Orthodox Kosta and Turkish Muslim Defne had carried on an adolescent Romeo-and-Juliet romance until civil war separated them. When they reunited in the early 2000s, Defne left Cyprus with Kostas knowing her family would never forgive her. They didn’t. That loss and guilt over deaths she may inadvertently have caused plague Defne for the rest of her life, so she and Kostas decide never to burden Ada with knowledge of that past. Now, a year after Defne’s death, a still-grieving Ada erupts with anger at her parents’ silence surrounding their earlier lives. Then Defne’s long-estranged sister Meryam visits from Cyprus and truths emerge about the hardships, violence, betrayals, and impossible choices faced not only by Defne and Kostas, but all of Cyprus for generations.

Ambitious, thought-provoking, and poignant.
On a future Earth where magic and technology have been at war for two thousand years, can one kiss change the fate of the world?

ISBN-10: 1631955640

“...a surprisingly well-balanced mishmash of genres with robust elements of SF, fantasy, and romance all wrapped up in a post-apocalyptic package.”

“A bracing dystopian tale that deftly mixes magic, evolution, and romance.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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**BLUE-SKINNED GODS**
Sindu, SJ
Soho (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-641-29242-9

A blue-skinned boy is believed to be a god.

Sindu’s third book begins with a bit of what might or might not be divinity. Kalki is born with blue skin, prompting his family and Tamil Nadu villagers to believe that he is the latest—and last—human avatar of Vishnu, the Hindu god. In other words, Kalki, who is 10 when the novel begins, is himself a god. His father builds an ashram around him, and the faithful come from near and far for healing sessions, rituals, and ceremonies. Almost immediately, however, Kalki has reason to doubt that he is what his father says he is. Sindu’s excavations of Kalki’s internal struggles are detailed, nuanced, and rich. “My divinity had been as real as flowers, or the sun, or my own skin,” Kalki thinks. “And when that godhood broke”—when his faith finally gives way—“reality itself had shattered to pieces around me.” Throughout the book, Sindu’s prose has a textured intricacy that never becomes florid. Occasionally, though, she does slip into a slightly didactic tone when explaining Hindu practices; her assumption seems to be that her audience is entirely Western. These contextualizing passages, though not entirely necessary, don’t significantly flaw the book. A larger flaw emerges, however, when Kalki, now 22, arrives in New York. For someone who has never left his ashram—never mind his country—Kalki seems remarkably unfazed by the drinking, smoking, and partying he soon becomes subject to. No, he doesn’t know how to read a subway map, but his reactions to the wider world never feel quite believable. Still, these are minor quibbles for a novel that so admirably skates between insight and pathos, acuity, and poignancy.

**TERMINATION SHOCK**
Stephenson, Neal
Morrow/HarperCollins (736 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov. 16, 2021
978-0-06-302805-0

In the all-too-near future, when unlikely weather events and natural disasters aren’t so unlikely anymore, an eccentric and wealthy Texan makes a move against climate change. Saskia, better known as the Queen of the Netherlands, crashes her plane on an airstrip in Waco, Texas, when wild pigs overtake the runway as she’s landing. Saskia’s visit to America isn’t exactly official, so she and her team enlist Rufus, who happens to be on the runway hunting the vicious boar that killed his young daughter, to help them get to Houston to meet T.R. Schmidt. While America as a nation is “a clown show,” Schmidt has the money to do as he pleases, and what he pleases to do is construct a massive gun that can shoot sulfur into the atmosphere and help ameliorate the effects of global warming. He’s invited people like Saskia, some Venetian aristocrats, and representatives of Singapore and other places that have the most to lose from a rising sea level to see what he’s been working on. When Schmidt starts up his gun and it actually works, a huge global debate emerges. Is Schmidt’s geoenengineering scheme the best step to take? What will happen to global weather patterns with all this sulfur in the air? Will other countries choose to build their own guns or try to put a stop to Schmidt’s actions? Stephenson’s latest novel clocks in at more than 700 pages, and as usual they practically turn themselves as the multiple storylines twist together. This book is the rare climate thriller that’s realistic about political stonewalling in the face of disaster yet unafraid to imagine a possible future where people might actually come together and try to save civilization.

“The kind of climate-change fiction we all need.”
—Termination Shock
TRASHLANDS
Stine, Alison
Harlequin MIRA (384 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-778-31127-0

A trash scavenger and a strip club dancer form an alliance of necessity in a post-apocalyptic junkyard.

Trashlands is both a massive garbage dump where Coral collects plastic—which has replaced cash as currency—and a strip club where Foxy performs on stage and sells tattoos to men whose names are inked on her body. Coral’s plastic makes its way to Dickensian factories where enslaved children remanufacture it into bricks, which are used to replace buildings damaged by severe sea-level rise and flooding. One of the workers is Coral’s moody son, Shanghai, whom she’s desperate to locate and buy out of the factory. Trashlands’ proprietor, Rattlesnake Master, operates the place as a predatory company store and is determined to showcase Coral on his stage. Recollections of how Coral and others came to be trapped in Trashlands are interwoven with episodes of their challenging day-to-day lives. A love match between Mr. Fall, Coral’s father figure, and Summer, a club dancer who lives in a food truck, provides a mature perspective. Coincidental meetings, a random act of violence, and unresolved plot points make the ending less satisfying than the rest of Stine’s engrossing story.

A nicely balanced blend of dystopian tragedy, love, and hope.

“A powerful, beautiful horror story.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

“...one of the best horror books of 2021.”
—Rue Morgue

“I would happily be devoured by it again and again.”
—Lindsay King-Miller, Author of Ask a Queer Chick

“...gorgeous, wonderfully weird....pick up this book, and make your world a better place.”
—Sara Tantlinger, Bram Stoker Award-winning Author of The Devil’s Dreamland

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“Reckless and defiantly intelligent.”

I LOVE YOU BUT I’VE CHOSEN DARKNESS

Watkins, Claire Vaye
Riverhead (304 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-593-33021-0

Reckless and defiantly intelligent, Watkins detonates the ties that bind. An almost hallucinatory craft propels Watkins’ fiction, starting with her ear for titles. Midbook, the reader learns that the narrator’s (doomed) teenage beau tattooed I Love You But I’ve Chosen Darkness across his collarbones, “with a period, as in end of discussion.” The narrator, named Claire Vaye Watkins, starts off in a garden of “mostly rock and dirt,” addressing four naked dolls. Awash in postpartum depression, she has bolted the Midwest for Nevada, leaving an infant daughter and a husband in her wake. She might be directing the title to her daughter, but it works equally well as a signoff from her own handsome, notorious father, Paul Watkins, “Charles Manson’s number one procurer of young girls.” Or from her mother, Martha, “an artist, a naturalist, a writer” who died alone, addicted to OxyContin. Watkins’ reckoning with her mother is breathtaking. “I went from being raised by a pack of coyotes,” she writes, “to a fellowship at Princeton where I sat next to John McPhee at a dinner and we talked about rocks and he wasn’t at all afraid of me.” Dark humor marbles these pages, and whether a reader finds it bracing or bratty may be a matter of temperament, or generation. Watkins breaks the rule of her open marriage by falling in love and, thinking of her husband, tells herself, “Do not say I just have to get this out of my system because I do not want it out.” Along this jagged way, Watkins spins a remarkable set piece as she gives a literary reading at a Reno high school. Mostly, she sifts the remnants of her desert family of origin, the overlapping, connected threads in the painting. The book starts with an explanation of the title: “The word em refers to the little brother or little sister in a family; or the younger of two friends; or the woman in a couple. I like to think the word em is the homonym of the verb aimer, “to love,” in French, in the imperative: aime.” In the narrative, small movements have large effects; love is both healing and misguided. Thúy moves the reader from a rubber plantation to the village of My Lai; from Charlie Company’s massacre to Operation Babylift and the experiences of orphans adopted by American families; from Saigon to nail salons and the cancer-causing chemicals found at both rubber plantations and salons. Characters appear and reappear as the threads weave together in economical but potent prose. Thúy troubles the line between fiction and non-fiction and their different ideas of truth: “In this book, truth is fragmented, incomplete, unfinished, in both time and space.” The book is human-focused and not a historical account; in the end, it feels like a work of visual and literary art at once.

A brief, moving meditation on the nature of truth, memory, humanity, and violence: a powerful work of art.

THE STORYTELLERS AND OTHER POEMS

Thomas Frosch
Riverhead (160 pp.)
$18.49 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-64421-115-1

A constellation of connected characters provides a snapshot of Vietnam and the Vietnamese diaspora in North America from French colonization to life after the war.

Thúy, who was born in Vietnam and lives in Quebec, delivers a series of interconnected vignettes in her new novel. The book is in conversation with a drawing by Quebecois artist Louis Boudreault that appears toward the end of the text and shows a box with many threads attached. The characters—a French rubber plantation owner and the girl he takes from the fields to be his wife, their daughter, her nanny, and an outwardly expanding roster of other people—embody the overlapping, connected threads in the painting. The book starts with an explanation of the title: “The word em refers to the little brother or little sister in a family; or the younger of two friends; or the woman in a couple. I like to think the word em is the homonym of the verb aimer, “to love,” in French, in the imperative: aime.” In the narrative, small movements have large effects; love is both healing and misguided. Thúy moves the reader from a rubber plantation to the village of My Lai; from Charlie Company’s massacre to Operation Babylift and the experiences of orphans adopted by American families; from Saigon to nail salons and the cancer-causing chemicals found at both rubber plantations and salons. Characters appear and reappear as the threads weave together in economical but potent prose. Thúy troubles the line between fiction and non-fiction and their different ideas of truth: “In this book, truth is fragmented, incomplete, unfinished, in both time and space.” The book is human-focused and not a historical account; in the end, it feels like a work of visual and literary art at once.

A brief, moving meditation on the nature of truth, memory, humanity, and violence: a powerful work of art.
“...pure sweetness...”
—Kirkus Reviews

“In this winsome novel, Girvin polishes iconic fantasy elements to a remarkable sheen.”

“...a treat for adults and adventurous younger readers alike.”
—Kirkus Reviews

From the Author of:

WHEN THE ROAD CALLS • QUEST FOR THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH
• LUCKY • THE VOLKSWAGEN VAN

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making it impossible to look away. Less successful are long excerpts of Martha’s teenage letters to a cousin, a wanly parallel coming-of-age. Still, when Watkins thanks both dead parents in her acknowledgements, the sincerity is a measure of rare storytelling capable of lifting them all from the wreckage.

Incandescent writing illuminates one woman’s life in flames.

**NEGLECT**

Wozencraft, Kim

Arcade (312 pp.)

$26.99 | Oct. 19, 2021

978-1-5107-6439-2

When an Afghanistan vet on the poverty line caves in to PTSD and despair, the state removes her 10-year-old twins.

“Erin, the athlete, the smart one. Erin, who never seemed to need anyone or anything, sailing through high school without studying, doing everything right...Erin, in Tanya’s younger-sister eyes, had always seemed invulnerable.” But now Tanya has had to fly home to rural New York, where her sister lies in a psych ward after an alcohol relapse and a suicide attempt, her children sent to live with the father who abandoned them. Wozencraft, author of the 1990 bestseller *Rush*, which went deep into the psyche of a female narcotics detective, again shows she has no fear of the dark in this astringent novel about the ravages of alcohol, war, poverty, sexual predators, and bureaucracy. Erin joined the Army on impulse because her marriage was crumbling and both she and Eddy had lost their jobs, but when she gets back, there is only less money, less connection, and much more trauma. The novel tracks her through the insane, inhuman obstacle course laid out for her by the justice system and social service authorities if she has any hope of setting eyes on her children again. If she fails, her social worker assures her, she “won’t be allowed to have so much as a school picture.” At the same time, flashbacks reveal the unholy nightmare of her Afghanistan tour. Also introduced is a young Afghan girl named Fatima, imprisoned for talking to a boy in the public library. As bad as her situation is, “her mother had lived through the Taliban and feared they would once again come to power and once again shut down the schools, rewrite history, force women indoors, and order that windows be blackened so nobody could see females from the streets.”

The timing of this tense, unflinching drama, as Fatima’s mother’s fears are realized in current headlines, makes it even more urgent.

Don’t even try to look away from this incandescently furious chronicle of a woman’s return from hell.

**Mystery**

**MRS. JEFFRIES AND THE MIDWINTER MURDERS**

Brightwell, Emily

Berkley (304 pp.)

$26.00 | Nov. 16, 2021

978-0-593101-08-7

Yet another pre-Christmas murder for friends of a Victorian police detective to investigate.

Inspector Gerald Witherspoon of London’s Metropolitan Police has a stellar record of solving murder cases. The pleasant, independently wealthy Witherspoon never realizes that his success is due to the sleuthing abilities of his housekeeper, Mrs. Jeffries, his staff, and their friends, who have a spy network ranging from former crooks to aristocrats. When wealthy Harriet Andover is found strangled in a locked conservatory, her death poses a puzzle challenging for even the inveterate sleuths. She married

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**Song of Gabrielle**

The Woman Who Loved Two Men

John Anthony Miller

ISBN-10: 1950613747


Normandy, 1216: Witches, war and the woman who loved two men.

Riddled with hexes, potions and spells, bound by love and honor, it defines the heart and all it holds, as well as the forces that try to control it.

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above herself but kept a firm hand on the purse strings, annoying her husband and stepchildren, who all thought the money she brought into the marriage should be used to keep them in a style befitting their status. Also living in the house is Harriet’s nephew, an Episcopal priest from the United States, whom she had invited to stay while he researched a book, and a widowed friend of hers. The unlikely sleuths get help from Wither spoon’s assistant, who feeds the inspector the clues discovered by the group, while Mrs. Jeffries joins Witherspoon for sherry every evening and boosts his ego with well-placed compliments. The investigation indicates that the killer must be someone who lives in the Andover mansion. And indeed, every one of the residents turns out to have a motive. But which of them did the deed?

Formulaic as ever, but it’s still entertaining to watch the likable sleuths go about their business.

DEATH ON THE SHELF
Brook, Allison
Crooked Lane (320 pp.)
$26.99 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-1-64385-780-0

A librarian must deploy all her sleuthing skills when her dearest friend’s wedding turns deadly.

Carrie Singleton is helping her bestie, Angela Vecchio, negotiate the treacherous shoals of wedding plans. Despite last-minute problems, they manage to make it to the big day with some help from Angela’s cousins Donna and Roxy, even though they aren’t her favorite relatives. The wedding is lovely, but disaster strikes at the reception, where Donna’s physician husband, Aiden, drops dead in the chocolate fountain. Angela’s mother begs Carrie to help find the person who poisoned Aiden, since all the obvious suspects are family members, including Donna; Roxy, who was recently divorced and making a play

“The Sandler is a poet’s poet.... His language is layered with meaning, and his expansive vocabulary will delight logophiles.”

“There is no subject too small for his keen eye and insight.... His imagery.... is evocative and bright.”

“Sandler deftly toggles among nostalgic memory, historical analysis, and present-moment wonder without sacrificing cohesiveness.”

“A complex, electric work of erudite poems.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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www.sandlerpoetry.com
for Aiden; and Angela’s belligerent brother, Tommy, who was furious when Aiden turned down his request to help finance a movie Tommy wanted to make. On top of those problems, Evelyn, the library ghost, asks for help in tracking down her brother, who deserted his family years ago and whose daughter has been in financial trouble ever since her husband dumped her. Luckily, Carrie’s own life is going smoothly. Her landlord, investigator Dylan Avery, is a highly satisfactory boyfriend. And she’s come to terms with her mother, who’s remarried, and her father, who’s a reformed crook. Does the illegal scheme Carrie unearths at Aiden’s medical practice mean that he was killed for love or money?

Red herrings abound as the pleasing heroine continues her crime-solving avocation.

THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT
Brown, Fredric
American Mystery Classics (211 pp.)
$25.95  |  Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-61316-253-8

Brown’s Edgar-winning first novel, originally published in 1947, sets Ed and Am Hunter to solve a case that couldn’t possibly cut closer.

Chicago apprentice printer Ed Hunter suspects the worst as soon as he realizes that his father, Wallace, a linotype setter at Elwood Press, hasn’t come home all night. Sure enough, Wally’s been robbed and beaten to death in a nearby alley. Overriding his stepmother Madge’s dislike of Ambrose Hunter, the uncle he hasn’t seen for 10 years, Ed takes a train to Janesville, where the traveling carnival Am works at has come, and breaks the news about his dead brother. Am immediately announces that they’re not going to leave the investigation up to Detective Bassett, of Chicago Homicide, because even though Bassett’s already reconstructed Wally’s movements from bar to bar the night he died, the clues won’t take him any further; and although they lack Bassett’s official resources, “we’re the Hunters.” Returning to the Windy City, Ed and Am begin poking around in Wally’s private life in the hope of uncovering a motive beyond simple robbery. Along the way, Ed realizes that he’s getting to know Wally better and feel closer to him than he ever did while his father was alive. Brown expertly evokes a tawdry big-city atmosphere, persuasively roots Ed’s ideas about where to look next in his natural grieving process, doles out come-ons from gangster’s moll Claire Raymond and Gardie Hunter, Ed’s 14-year-old stepsister, and introduces a decisive turn in the case with the discovery that Wally had taken out a $5,000 life insurance policy, giving Madge a powerful motive for murder and indicating that he may have been keeping even more secrets.

The first of seven cases for Ed and Am will leave readers hungry for more.

KILLER WORDS
Burns, V.M.
Kensington (336 pp.)
$15.95 paper  |  Nov. 30, 2021
978-1-4967-2897-5

A bookstore owner helps a cop she doesn’t even like fight a murder charge.

Samantha Washington is happy with her life. She enjoys helping customers find their favorite mysteries in her bookstore in North Harbor, Michigan. She likes living with her grandmother Nana Jo in their cozy apartment above the store. She looks forward to nights out at the Four Feathers Casino with Nana Jo’s pals Dorothy Clark, Irma Starczewski, and Ruby Mae Stevenson. And she works diligently on her own mysteries, a historical series starring Lady Clara
“Now that she’s solved a murder, a novice detective thinks she’s ready for the big time.”

ISABEL PUDDLES INVESTIGATES

Trewellan-Harper and her American friend Kathleen Kennedy. But change is swirling all around Samantha. Nana Jo buys a villa at Shady Acres retirement community. Samantha’s mother announces a move to Australia, where she and her rich new husband, Harold Robertson, plan to save the koalas. And Samantha’s boyfriend, restaurant owner Frank Patterson, presses her to enhance their relationship with a marriage license. Still, it’s a surprise when Nana Jo insists that Samantha needs to help her investigate the murder of loudmouthed politician John Cloverston, and not out of any love for the victim. No, Nana Jo wants to defend his accused killer—Detective Bradley Pitt, an officer so inept and obnoxious that he’s earned the nickname Stinky—because he was her student in grade school. Burns gives readers two mysteries for the price of one, playing out Samantha’s account of Lady Clara’s exploits alongside Burns’ account of Samantha’s own investigation.

Despite the complex plotting, quirky characters are the heart of this cozy.

ISABEL PUDDLES INVESTIGATES
Byrne, M.V.
Kensington (352 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Nov. 30, 2021
978-1-4967-2833-3

Now that she’s solved a murder, a novice detective thinks she’s ready for the big time.

Isabel Puddles loves her family home, her dogs, her grown children, and her lifelong friendship with acerbic bestie Frances. Though she still works part time at her cousin’s hardware store, she’s given up her other side gigs to return to college and study criminology. The hot news is the disappearance of the heir to the Bachmeier beer fortune from a Lake Michigan ferry. So Isabel assumes that when she’s summoned to Miss Abigail Bachmeier’s estate for a meeting, it’s because Abigail wants her to investigate. Gull Harbor has long been a summer residence for the wealthy, and
rumors have abounded about the eccentric Abigail. Isabel finds Abigail charming but coldly uninterested in the possible death of the nephew she despised. Instead, after signing a nondisclosure agreement, Isabel is hired to find the son of Abigail’s late and equally despicable brother, who fathered a child but refused to marry the mother. Abigail’s own father helped support the boy until his mother cut all ties and vanished. On top of that, the volatile Frances, at first convinced that her husband is having an affair, grows even more furious when she learns that he’s accepted a promotion that requires moving without even asking her. The tricky mystery leads Isabel to new friendships and the realization that detection might not be her thing after all.

A mellow mystery, down-home characters, and touches of humor add up to a very pleasant read.

THE DAY OF THE SERPENT
Clark, Cassandra
Severn House (256 pp.)
$28.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-7278-9090-0

Clark follows up The Hour of the Fox (2020), her last tale of treachery and deceit, with an even more harrowing installment.

Given a choice of pretense or death, Brother Rodric Chandler is forced to work against everything he stands for.

Since having been sold as an orphan into the House of Lancaster, his liege lord has been Thomas Swynford, stepbrother to Henry Bolingbroke, who’s seized the throne from the popular King Richard II. Swynford insists Chandler travel to Pontefract Castle, where Richard is imprisoned, and Chandler, who secretly supports Richard, is forced to watch the former king’s degradation and finally his slaughter, for which his followers’ rebellion provides the excuse. On the trip back to London with Richard’s coffin, he travels with a group of mercenary archers he befriended at Pontefract, and Swynford is furious as members of his troop are picked off by a talented bowman. Meanwhile, Chandler’s lover, Mattie, who works for Geoffrey Chaucer, is deeply in love and pregnant but enraged by Chandler’s professed loyalty to the usurper king. She’s quietly delivering bits of The Canterbury Tales to someone who can eventually publish it. Chandler must walk a fine line if he’s to survive and at least pretend to hunt for whomever’s killing Swynford’s men. Today’s nasty politic climate is nothing compared to the horrific cruelty of 1400, as Henry’s vicious followers seek absolute power, forcing Chandler to flee if he wants to fight another day.

Not a lot of mystery but the local color and historical detail are outstanding.

QUARRY’S BLOOD
Collins, Max Allan
Hard Case Crime (224 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Nov. 16, 2021
978-1-78909-668-2

In yet another final installment of his pulpy franchise, retired hit man John Quarry meets his daughter, who turns out to be a chip off the old block.

After a prologue in 1983 Biloxi in which Quarry dispatches the team of killers who’ve targeted his former lover Luann Lloyd, a former pole dancer who manages her own club, the story leaps to the present, a most unfamiliar time frame for the hero, who’s now pushing 70. Tracked down by true-crime author Susan Breedlove, who, like him, has based several of her books on his exploits, he’s reluctant to revisit the past—“I hadn’t killed anybody in fifteen, sixteen years!” he protests—until he figures out that she’s his daughter, come to warn him that yet
another contract has been taken out on his life. The leading suspects she's identified after a careful study of his adventures are Montgomery Climer, the Memphis impresario who revitalized the struggling Climax empire by putting a blue-collar, right-wing spin on the magazine and its clubs; Jeffrey Kinman, who inherited control of the Quad Cities’ Concert Inn from his late uncle, a partner of the Broker, the former liaison Quarry killed; and Theodore Brunner, whose brother Alex ended up in the trunk of one of Quarry's many cars after he took out that 1983 contract on Luann. Since Quarry is Quarry, he winnows the field of suspects by arming himself and confronting each of them face to face, unearthing yet another unexpected offspring (not his this time) along the way. A coda, “Quarry’s History,” explains how this unlikely sequel came to be and acknowledges that more may well follow.

Easy listening for readers whose preferred soundtrack is muffled gunfire.

THE DEATHWATCH BEETLE
Eriksson, Kjell
Minotaur (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov. 16, 2021
978-1-2507-6616-8

A Swedish ex-detective who strongly identifies with a missing woman picks up the case after a possible sighting.
Though former Uppsala police inspector Ann Lindell has left the force for a quieter rural life, her innate curiosity and empathy for the victims of crime continue to exercise a hold on her. When her former lover Edvard Risberg bring up the unsolved case of Cecilia Karlsson, who’s been missing for four years, Ann keeps private her bond with Cecilia, whose disappearance she likens to her own retreat from society. Retired homicide detective Folke Åhr’s claim to have seen Cecilia provides just the impetus for the restless Ann to reopen the investigation, though Åhr’s drinking makes him a less than completely reliable witness. Counterpointing Ann’s search with the aftermath of Cecilia’s vanishing, which did indeed begin as an escape from her life, Eriksson skillfully reveals several possible motives: awkward romantic entanglements, criminal activity, threats against her life. At the same time, Ann reexamines her own life choices now that she’s in closer personal contact with Edvard once more. Foreign locales like Portugal, Italy, and South America figure prominently in Cecilia’s travels and plans. Her wanderlust contrasts with Ann's personal investment in her rural community, which Eriksson depicts with depth and affection. The twists in Cecilia’s tale keep the reader engaged, and the finale is a satisfying shocker.

Top-notch Scandinavian noir and a welcome addition to the series.

CLARET AND PRESENT DANGER
Fox, Sarah
Kensington (332 pp.)
$26.00 | Nov. 30, 2021
978-1-4967-3402-0

A traveling fair brings murder to a little Vermont town.
When the Trueheart Renaissance Faire and Circus pitches its tents in Shady Creek, it’s hard to tell who’s most excited. Nine-year-old Kiandra Williams marvels at the jugglers, soothsayers, and magicians in their colorful costumes. Her mother, Shontelle, is surprised and excited to reconnect with her old college buddy Rachael, the fair’s manager. Shontelle’s best friend, Sadie Coleman, is happy not only to see the exotic actors strolling about her newly adopted hometown, but to host them at her pub, the Inkwell, where she serves treats like Paradise Lox and Red Cabbage of Courage salad. Sadie even
Manami disappeared from the Tokyo suburb of Kikuno, her parents, Yutaro and Machiko Namiki, must face the news that her body has been found. The circumstances of the discovery are even more disquieting: Saori’s corpse has turned up in the charred skeleton of the house of Yoshi Hasunuma, along with that of the homeowner. Director Mamiya, the head of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department’s Homicide Division, instantly senses that he’s in deeper waters because Yoshi’s son, Kanichi Hasunuma, was the leading suspect in the murder of Yuna Motohashi, a schoolgirl whose dismembered remains were discovered in the nearby mountains 23 years ago. Shortly after Hasunuma, who maintains a surly silence when the police question him, puts in an appearance at Namiki-ya, the restaurant the Namikis own, to blame them for the way the police have been pressing him and demand recompense for his inconvenience, he’s smothered to death during the town’s annual civic parade, and most readers will breathe a sigh of relief. Not Chief Inspector Kusanagi’s old friend Detective Galileo, as Yukawa is nicknamed. In a rousing triumph of the scientific method, the supersleuth, insisting, “I’m just a regular physicist,” spins out a series of increasingly intricate hypotheses about this latest murder, tweaking each one when he’s confronted with contrary evidence, then generating newly refined and revised theories that are even more impressive in their ability to cover the sprawling network of new data.

Fans of golden age puzzles will wish this one could go on forever.

**SILENT PARADE**

Higashino, Keigo
Minotaur (322 pp.)
$27.99 | Dec. 14, 2021
978-1-2506-2481-9

Physics professor Manabu Yukawa’s fourth round of criminal investigation leads from a discovery of corpses old and new to a series of mind-boggling theories about their connection.

Three years after gifted singer Saori Namiki disappeared from the Tokyo suburb of Kikuno, her parents, Yutaro and Machiko Namiki, must face the news that her body has been found. The circumstances of the discovery are even more disquieting: Saori’s corpse has turned up in the charred skeleton of the house of Yoshi Hasunuma, along with that of the homeowner. Director Mamiya, the head of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department’s Homicide Division, instantly senses that he’s in deeper waters because Yoshi’s son, Kanichi Hasunuma, was the leading suspect in the murder of Yuna Motohashi, a schoolgirl whose dismembered remains were discovered in the nearby mountains 23 years ago. Shortly after Hasunuma, who maintains a surly silence when the police question him, puts in an appearance at Namiki-ya, the restaurant the Namikis own, to blame them for the way the police have been pressing him and demand recompense for his inconvenience, he’s smothered to death during the town’s annual civic parade, and most readers will breathe a sigh of relief. Not Chief Inspector Kusanagi’s old friend Detective Galileo, as Yukawa is nicknamed. In a rousing triumph of the scientific method, the supersleuth, insisting, “I’m just a regular physicist,” spins out a series of increasingly intricate hypotheses about this latest murder, tweaking each one when he’s confronted with contrary evidence, then generating newly refined and revised theories that are even more impressive in their ability to cover the sprawling network of new data.

Fans of golden age puzzles will wish this one could go on forever.

**THE MOORLAND MURDERERS**

Jecks, Michael
Severn House (240 pp.)
$28.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-78029-122-2

July 1556. A maladroit assassin returns in the latest adventure of Jack Blackjack.

Blackjack, who fell into the job of killing those who opposed Elizabeth’s claim to the throne, is on the run. Fear- ing that Queen Mary is after her cousin’s supporters, he leaves London, planning on going abroad, but ends up in deep trouble in a small town in Devonshire. After he wins a goodness at dice from a miner, the loser ends up dead in the stables, and Jack’s purse goes missing after he’s hit on the head. Jack, a cowardly dandy with a high opinion of himself and a quick tongue that usually gets him out of trouble, is easily framed as the killer and becomes enmeshed in the fighting among the moorland miners, a local outlaw gang, and the townsfolk, most of whom seem to want him dead. The coroner seems at least willing to listen to him, but the dead miner’s son is not so accommodating. The tavern-keeper’s wife is a sly minx who’s having it on with the stableboy and knows more than she’s willing to say. Jack must use his wits and smooth tongue if he’s ever to discover the real murderer and escape an area he finds entirely beneath his dignity.

An amusing mystery replete with historical tidbits and fascinating local descriptions.

**A MURDER LIKE NO AUTHOR**

Lillard, Amy
Poisoned Pen (264 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Nov. 30, 2021
978-1-4926-8783-2

A bookstore owner tries her best to rein in the sleuthing of her murder mystery club.

Arlo Stanley’s nomadic parents let her attend high school in Sugar Springs, Mississippi, while they pursued their wandering ways. Now she’s settled down in the quaint town, where she owns a bookshop with her best friend, Chloe Carter, whom she saved from a murder rap when Mads Keller, Arlo’s high school love and now the police chief, arrested her for the murder of bestselling author Wally Harrison. Aiding in her detective adventures are Helen, Fern, and Camille, three older ladies whose Friday night book club has morphed into a successful mystery-solving endeavor despite Mads’ vocal disapproval. The bestselling book by the murdered Harrison, who was the father of Chloe’s son, has been made into a movie, and the town is frantically getting the old theater ready for a Hollywood-style opening night when Helen finds a guest at her B&B dead in the theater. The stranger, newly arrived in town, claimed he could prove that Harrison didn’t write the book and that it was his...
now-jailed assistant, Inna Kolisnychenko, who was the author. Because Chloe stands to make a lot of money for her son if the movie succeeds, she’s once more a person of interest, an unwelcome status that encourages Arlo and her cohorts to investigate. The high financial stakes mean there are plenty of suspects. Can Arlo pick out the killer from among them before becoming the next victim?

The book club ladies make a winning team in an amusing tale replete with down-home atmosphere and romance.

MURDER’S A SWINE
Lombard, Nap
Poisoned Pen (304 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Dec. 7, 2021
978-1-4642-1549-0

Nestled beneath the playful title and byline, a pseudonym for then-married Gordon Neil Stewart and Pamela Hansford Johnson, is an equally madcap case of murder during the London “sitzkrieg” originally published in 1943.

Featherstone Mews air warden Clem Poplett and Stewarts Court resident Agnes Clunkershill Kinghof, nee Sidebotham, is an equally madcap case of searching for the killer of Hartman, whose abrasive personality made him eminently killable.

The Scottish theme overwhelms the mystery. The cast is likable enough, but this foray is not one of their best.

BEAR A WEE GRUDGE
Macy, Meg
Kensington (304 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Nov. 30, 2021
978-1-4967-2917-0

Teddy bears and the people who make them drive another Michigan murder mystery.

Sasha Silverman has a long and unpleasant history with rival teddy-bear maker Teddy Hartman. Since the forced sale of his company, Bears of the Heart, he and his wife, Lucy, have opened a pet product store in Silver Hollow and are out to make trouble for Sasha’s family. Stung by his insulting remarks about Sasha and her parents, her sister, Maddie, punches him in the nose, causing Lucy’s Morkie to bite Sasha and leading to a round of threats and police reports. When the obnoxious Teddy is found dead with an ax in his back on the grounds of the town’s Highland Fling festival, Detective Phil Hunter takes the easy way out and arrests Sasha’s dad, who revealed his skill as an ax thrower when he started practicing for the festival contest. Although he is quickly released for lack of evidence, Sasha is certain that the lazy detective won’t put in the work to find the real murderer. So she takes on the job with help from her family and friends. The festival, and the kilt-wearing bears her family’s company made for it, is a big hit. Not even the trash of Sasha’s car by someone who dislikes her sleuthing deters her from searching for the killer of Hartman, whose abrasive personality made him eminently killable.

The Scottish theme overwhelms the mystery. The cast is likable enough, but this foray is not one of their best.

AT FIRST LIGHT
Nickles, Barbara
Thomas & Mercer (400 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Dec. 1, 2021
978-1-5420-2641-3

The Chicago Police Department turns to a forensic semiotician when mysterious runes are found on a corpse.

Amateur falconer Evan Wilding notices things. Out hunting with his hawk, Ginny, he notices that someone’s been killing pigeons, not for food or sport, but cutting them with knives as though practicing. Around the same time, the discovery of a body on the banks of the Calumet River gives Detective Addie Bisset, Evan’s friend and sometime collaborator on human murders, her next case. Struck by the deliberate arrangement of the body, Addie suspects that this crime is different. Her suspicion is fueled by the discovery of a series of symbols, almost like letters, nearby. Addie’s happy to have an excuse to connect with Evan. While the rest of the department sometimes looks down on Evan, often literally given his short stature as a person with dwarfism, Addie’s always been impressed...
with his wealth of knowledge as a forensic semiotician. After all, the University of Chicago doesn’t hire just anyone, and Evan’s expertise is so impressive that it sometimes makes Addie consider giving up her penchant for bad boys to pursue something with him. Although Evan and his research assistant can figure out the symbols are runes associated with the Viking Age, their discovery doesn’t shed much light on the murder. So Addie’s colleagues consult Ralph Rhinehart, a specialist in cultural anthropology and dark magic who wastes no time developing a profile of the perp. But Evan hesitates to adopt Rhinehart’s easy answers, and the rivals’ verbal one-upmanship does little to help the department catch a killer whose body count is rising.

Well-researched enough to satisfy those up for a deep dive. Casual readers may look elsewhere.

DOWN A DARK RIVER
Odden, Karen
Crooked Lane (336 pp.)
$26.99 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-1-64385-869-2

The Victorian setting remains the same, but Odden exchanges refined Inspector Hallam, last seen in A Taste of Deceit (2019), for conflicted, determined Inspector Mickey Corravan.

Corravan was a poor Irish orphan who worked as a stevedore and bare-knuckle fighter before signing on with the River Police and then Scotland Yard. So he seems the perfect choice for a murder most likely committed on the Thames. The body of a young woman is found floating in a small boat. Her only jewelry, a locket with initials and a picture, soon identifies her as the missing daughter of a wealthy judge. Although Corravan’s boss orders him to make the case his chief concern, he continues his search for a missing woman, the wife of a shipping magnate, whom he finds in an insane asylum for the poor. She’s speechless and so terrified of returning home that she attacks Corravan, who takes her to Dr. Everett, a medical friend who treats mentally disturbed patients kindly, while he investigates her husband. When a second young woman is found murdered in a rowboat, Corravan starts looking for suspects who may have hated their loved ones. The upper classes close ranks, and only maids and friends of the dead women give him any information. As the body count grows, Corravan’s temper threatens to get the best of him, while Scotland Yard is relentlessly criticized in the newspapers and his job hangs in the balance.

A harrowing tale of unbridled vice that exposes the dark underbelly of Victorian society.

AN EGGMNOG TO DIE FOR
Pershing, Amy
Berkley (320 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-593199-16-9

An amateur sleuth must juggle entirely too many suspects in the death of a self-righteous prig.

Samantha Barnes is the perfect cozy sleuth. Neither supercilious nor improbably ditzy, she has a sarcastic tongue and a passion for life, especially food. She’s settled into the house on Cape Cod she inherited from an aunt and rekindled her romance with her high school crush, harbor patrol officer Jason Captiva. Sam makes do writing food reviews and producing videos on the same subject for the newspaper her parents owned for many years. In the lead-up to Christmas, she’s extra busy preparing for her parents’ visit by planning a special five-fish dinner and wrapping the thoughtful, inexpensive presents she’s bought or made for family and the many friends she’s collected since her return. One of her favorite restaurants is run by the Brunis, a brother and sister whose enemy, selectman Caleb Mayo, is an alcoholic’s son who can’t abide any place that serves spirits. When Sam mistakes the Brunis’ office for the ladies’ room, she finds Mayo dead from a blow to the head and can’t stop herself from investigating. She discovers that Mayo used his power to threaten many people over past misdeeds that could ruin their current lives. Sam’s memories of her high school physics class provide the clue she needs to separate the innocent from the guilty.

A delightful sleuth, a complex mystery, and lovingly described cuisine: a winner for both foodies and mystery mavens.

INTO THE SOUND
Reinard, Cara
Thomas & Mercer (349 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Dec. 1, 2021
978-1-5420-2974-2

Her sister’s disappearance forces an alcoholic ex-journalist into a reckoning with their troubled past.

“Please come get me; I need to talk….” Vivian Eddy tells her sister, Holly Boswell, just before the phone call from Bay Shore Marina is cut off. Defying her protective husband, nuclear energy project manager Mark Boswell, Holly leaves their sons, Otto and Tyler, with him and races out in a storm to meet the sister who begged for help. But she’s too late: Viv has vanished, leaving behind a bevy of secrets. As SassyVivi38, she’s been carrying on a sexy online chat with somebody calling himself TomKat45. The struggles of her husband, criminal defense attorney Clayton Eddy, to keep his
distance from the mobbed-up relatives of his latest client, Dr. Raymond Gallo, a physician accused of running a prescription mill, have been torpedoed by his affair with Francine Gallo, the defendant’s sister and the cousin of mob boss Nicky Bellini. And Frankie is not Clay’s only lover. Holly seems initially cast as the innocent in all this, but the scars her parents, endlessly manipulative psychology professors Cynthia and Henry For ester, inflicted on both their daughters, whom their mother especially treated as experimental subjects, lead her to a series of singularly bad decisions Reinard traces in merciless detail. As she sinks deeper and deeper into the mystery of Viv’s disappearance, Holly finds herself questioning every lodestar in her life. Though the heroine’s emergence from this purgatory may be less compelling than her descent, it’s still one wild ride.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SORROWFUL MAIDEN
Saunders, Kate
Bloomsbury (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Dec. 7, 2021
978-1-4088-692-4

Hired to settle a family problem, a proper Victorian widow is dragged into more sordid matters when her investigation into a divorce turns into a murder case.

Based on her reputation for looking into things discreetly, Mrs. Laetitia Rodd is approached by a neighbor seeking services for a friend. Mrs. Sarah Transome has long turned a blind eye to her husband Thomas’ indiscretions, but now he’s left her in order to set up house with the much younger Constance Noonan. Mrs. Rodd is familiar with Thomas from his longtime acting work and his displacement in the tragic fire that burned down the King’s Theater some 10 years ago. Now, after leaving the Duke of Cumberland’s Theater, Thomas has been widely admired as Romeo to Constance’s Juliet. Though Thomas is a thorough cad, Mrs. Rodd can’t help but be impressed by his charisma when she meets him to discuss allegations that he’s neglected his wife. But Thomas quickly dismisses what Mrs. Rodd has heard, even if he freely admits that it echoes what he’s said. He sometimes erupts in anger, he explains, content to move on with his life. Mrs. Transome, whose three adult daughters all appear to take Thomas’ side, is not so inclined. Mrs. Rodd, who arranges to work with Thomas’ lawyer toward an amicable resolution, is amused to learn that Thomas has hired top barrister Frederick Tyson, whom Mrs. Rodd knows more familiarly as her brother. Everything seems wrapped up until a body is discovered in the remains of the King’s Theater fire. Now the focus isn’t on a stingy husband shirking on support but a potential murder.

The fastidious manners, which fit the 19th-century setting, are leavened with enough humor to suit modern tastes.
Frieda, the Impossible Rubber Band Girl, who was more than a friend to Willow back then. But she’s not happy to make the acquaintance of the Amazing Annabelle, the ambitious new assistant to Nedley Johnson, the Great Mysterio, or to regard any of her old friends as suspects, or especially to hear that Stoppard Police Chief Thomas Whiddle has arrested her old mentor, knife-thrower Valentin Kalishenko, who supplied the weapon someone stuck in Ruby’s back. Lillian, who has a glass eye and multiple sclerosis, pieces together some unlikely clues—the recent decease of the boa constrictor Bertha in Ray Nance’s House of Venomous Things, the persistent hints of heroin, the unexpected subject of Ruby’s very first tattoo—to produce a surprising solution.

Rich circus atmosphere and a satisfying puzzle.

**SO FAR AND GOOD**

*Straley, John*

Soho Crime (288 pp.)

$27.95 | Dec. 7, 2021

978-1-641-29253-5

Just because Sitka, Alaska, private eye Cecil Younger is in prison doesn’t mean he can’t bobble a new case as completely as any of his old ones.

Sentence to seven years for the crimes he confessed to in *Baby’s First Felony* (2018), Cecil’s focus on keeping on the good side of Albert Munro, aka Fourth Street, the powerful fellow prisoner whose communication skills with women (for instance, not calling them all “bitches”) he’s working to improve in preparation for Street’s next parole hearing. Cecil’s priorities change when his daughter, Blossom, tells him that her friend Georgiana Paul has taken a DNA test and discovered that her mother, Alaska legislator Ida Paul, isn’t her biological mother—and that Albert Munro, aka Fourth Street, the powerful fellow prisoner Ida’s promptly arrested for kidnapping. Before she can reply

THE ATTIC ON QUEEN STREET

*White, Karen*

Berkley (400 pp.)

$27.00 | Nov. 2, 2021

978-0-451-475-25-1

White finishes her Tradd Street series with panache.

Doughnut-addicted realtor Melanie Trenholm’s ability to see and converse with ghosts has caused considerable turmoil in her life. The old house she inherited in Charleston has provided thrills, chills, and unhappiness. Her husband, Jack, a bestselling author and father of their twins, is still angry with her for finding a long-lost treasure while he was ill—a treasure that was stolen along with his book idea by villainous Marc Longo. Since Longo thinks more treasure, the mythical half of the Hope Diamond, is still hidden in the house, he’s constantly snooping around. Mellie’s even more concerned with the spirit of a young woman who died on the property in the 1800s. The ghost appears to Jack’s teen daughter, Nola, warning her to beware of a tall man. In addition, a creepy doll in a coffin pops up, along with piles of antique buttons. While Jack

**MIDNIGHT HOUR**

*A Chilling Anthology of Crime Fiction From 20 Authors of Color*

Ed. by Vandiver, Abby L.

Crooked Lane (336 pp.)

$16.99 paper | Nov. 9, 2021

978-1-64385-752-7

An exciting anthology of 20 crime and suspense tales by and about people of color.

Vandiver brings together a diverse group of short stories that chill and thrill in their exploration of the many human passions that lead to crime. Tracy Clark tells the tale of a young punk looking for easy money who makes the fatal mistake of choosing the wrong victim. David Heska Wanbli Weiden explores the theft of a book covered in the skin of a Native American that turns out to be much more than a theft for hire. Editor Vandiver’s tale of murder has a surprise you won’t see coming. Callie Browning’s story of hate and karma is set on tropical Barbados. Richie Narvaez’s account of blackmail and revenge in Puerto Rico has plenty of odd twists. A district nurse and a parrot help solve a convoluted case of murder during a robbery in Frankie Y. Bailey’s quick read. E.A. Aymar surveys the choices available to a man down on his luck. Jennifer Chow follows two old high school friends whose decision to meet in an escape room has unexpected consequences, and magic and a séance drive Gigi Pandian’s story of a clever escape from an abusive husband. This eclectic collection will appeal to mystery readers.

An excellent collection of stories told from many different viewpoints.

**THE STORY**

*Pandian, Shweta*

Penguin (352 pp.)

$27.50 | Dec. 1, 2021

978-0-451-479-72-3

Shweta Pandian’s story of a clever escape from an abusive husband. This eclectic collection will appeal to mystery readers.

An excellent collection of stories told from many different viewpoints.

**STRATIFIED**

*Straley, John*

Soho Crime (304 pp.)

$27.95 | Dec. 21, 2021

978-1-641-29252-8

A district nurse and a parrot help solve a convoluted case of murder during a robbery in Frankie Y. Bailey’s quick read. E.A. Aymar surveys the choices available to a man down on his luck. Jennifer Chow follows two old high school friends whose decision to meet in an escape room has unexpected consequences, and magic and a séance drive Gigi Pandian’s story of a clever escape from an abusive husband. This eclectic collection will appeal to mystery readers.

An excellent collection of stories told from many different viewpoints.

**BRIGHT STARS**

*Straley, John*

Soho Crime (288 pp.)

$27.95 | Dec. 7, 2021

978-1-641-29253-5

A district nurse and a parrot help solve a convoluted case of murder during a robbery in Frankie Y. Bailey’s quick read. E.A. Aymar surveys the choices available to a man down on his luck. Jennifer Chow follows two old high school friends whose decision to meet in an escape room has unexpected consequences, and magic and a séance drive Gigi Pandian’s story of a clever escape from an abusive husband. This eclectic collection will appeal to mystery readers.

An excellent collection of stories told from many different viewpoints.
blows hot and cold, Mellie researches the identity of the monitory apparition and begins to wonder if the mystical diamond might exist. This last dispatch from Tradd Street is so closely linked to the prior six that readers are well advised to start from the beginning.

Charleston and its rich history provide a lovely backdrop to this tale of mystery, romance, and danger.

**A COUNTERFEIT SUITOR**

Wilde, Darcie

Kensington (304 pp.)

$26.00 | Nov 30, 2021

978-1-4967-2088-7

Rosalind Thorne’s decision to continue living by her wits lands her in deep waters.

Having decided once and for all to reject the handsome proposal tendered by Devon Winterbourne, Duke of Cas selvaine, Rosalind settles into modest but comfortable lodgings in Little Russell Street with journalist Alice Littlefield, her good friend, and goes back to accepting informal commissions from ladies of London’s haute ton to resolve their various domestic dilemmas. Her latest challenge, helping widowed Valentina Walford plan a charity ball while breaking up her daughter’s budding romance with unsuitable Horatio Salter, seems an easy enough task for someone of Rosalind’s considerable talents. But when a confrontation at the opera fails to move the stubborn Miss Walford, Rosalind suspects that there’s more to the problem than Mrs. Walford has revealed. The death of Rosalind’s father, a blow that should have ended the Walford commission altogether, only complicates it, since the man arrested for his murder, blackmailer Russell Fullerton, is one of Salter’s unsavory associates. Rosalind will need help from her estranged sister, Charlotte, and her dear friend and not-quite suitor, Adam Harkness, a rising star of the Bow Street Runners, to unravel this tangled skein of intrigues personal, professional, and political.

Compelling period drama.

**THE VEILED THRONE**

Liu, Ken

Saga/Simon & Schuster

(1,008 pp.)

$29.99 | Nov 2, 2021

978-1-4814-2433-2

The penultimate installment of Liu’s Dandelion Dynasty quartet—after *The Wall of Storms* (2016)—continues the grand-scale narrative set in the vast fantasy archipelago of Dara as two factions battle for control of the islands.

With the Lyucu invasion and occupation of Dara accomplished—and parties on both sides attempting to maneuver a peaceful path forward—the inhabitants of the islands find life increasingly difficult as Lyucu hard-liners, knowing that massive reinforcements are on the way, push for a world where the warriorlike Lyucu rule supreme and all others are essentially slaves. As the tensions rise, Princess Théra of Dara—daughter of Empress Jia—forsakes the throne to embark on a quest to the Lyucu stronghold of Ukyu-Gondé, trying to find a way to save her country and her subjugated people. But as years pass and Théra falls in love, weds native leader Takval, and has children, the question of what her country is and who her people are becomes complicated. Juggling dozens of main characters and multiple plotlines, Liu manages to keep the momentum brisk and the tension consistently high in this 1,000-plus-page novel. But the real genius here is the fusion of extraordinarily deep worldbuilding with profound (and timely) themes, which include cultural assimilation, identity, intolerance, and more. An extended sequence describing a contest between two popular restaurants battling for bragging rights, for example, is a master class in not only sensory description, but also allegory, as the sequence brilliantly illustrates larger themes explored in the saga—one owner has all the resources while the other must take advantage of ingenuity and innovative thinking to succeed. But ultimately, it’s Liu’s poetic style that makes this book so memorable: “We are embedded in strands of love and hatred, a web that glows in the sunlight of history, bedecked in pearls of blood and fragments of bone.”

This is a shelf-bending fantasy masterwork: as good as it gets.
Perhaps the Stars
Palmer, Ada
Tor (608 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-0-7653-7806-4

The fourth and final volume in the Terra Ignota series, a science fantasy set on a 25th-century Earth where people affiliate by philosophy and interest instead of geography.

For the first time in centuries, the world is seized by war—once the combatants actually figure out how to fight one. While rivalries among the Hives provide several motives for conflict, primary among them is whether J.E.D.D. Mason, the heir to various political powers and apparently a god from another universe in human form, should assume absolute rule over the world and transform it for the better. Gathering any large group to further the progress of the war or the possibility for peace is hampered by the loss of the world transit system of flying cars and the global communications network, both shut down by parties unknown, indicating a hidden and dangerous faction manipulating the situation for its own ends. As events play out, they bear a strong resemblance to aspects of the Iliad and the Odyssey, suggesting the persistent influence of Bridger, a deceased child who was also probably a god. Is tragedy inevitable, or can the characters defy their apparent fates? This often intriguing but decidedly peculiar chimera of a story seems to have been a philosophical experiment, but it’s difficult to determine just what was being tested. The worldbuilding—part science, part magic—doesn’t really hold up under scrutiny, and the political structure defies comprehension. The global government consists of an oligarchy of people deeply and intimately connected by love and hate on a scale which surpasses the royal dynasties of old, and it includes convicted felons among their number. Perhaps the characters are intended as an outsized satiric comment on the way politicians embrace expediency over morality or personal feelings, but these supposedly morally advanced potentates commit so many perverse atrocities against one another it is difficult to engage with them as people. At times, they seem nearly as alien as J.E.D.D. Mason.

Curiously compelling but not entirely satisfying.

Roman

Romance

Not Your Average Hot Guy
Bond, Gwenda
St. Martin’s Griffin (320 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-2507-7174-2

It’s the end of the world as she knows it, but the Prince of Hell is fine.

Callie, a recent college graduate living back at home with her mother, is admittedly “flailing a bit” at adulthood. With no idea what to do with her history degree, she’s helping to run The Great Escape, the family’s successful escape room business. But on Callie’s first weekend taking the reins while her mom is away, all hell breaks loose—literally. A satanic cult headed by the blackhearted Solomon Elerion has been drawn to the occult-inspired escape room for a prop book of spells that turns out to be very real, hoping to summon a high-level demon. Their plan? To bargain for the location of The Holy Lance, which they will use to bring about the apocalypse. Luke Morningstar, Prince of Hell, is also finding adulthood harder than he imagined. He has yet to receive his wings and is under strict orders from his father to start harvesting souls for the underworld. When his supervisor, Lucifuge Rofocale, is summoned by Elerion, Luke goes in his stead with grand plans to accomplish this task and get his dad off his back. What he doesn’t plan for is Callie, their immediate attraction, or how much he wants to help her save the world. The author successfully creates a tongue-in-cheek supernatural adventure held up by witty banter and a ragtag team of heroic underdogs, including Callie’s nonbinary best friend, the artistic and stylish Mag. But the lackluster instalove romance between a stereotypically bookish heroine and a demon who’s supposed to be hot as hellfire but lacks any sinister devilishness, pacing that’s off, and ham-fisted pop-culture references drag the novel down.

A funny but uneven take on love at the end of the world.

An Heiress’s Guide to Deception and Desire
Collins, Manda
Forever (352 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Nov. 16, 2021
978-1-5387-3615-9

A formerly betrothed pair rediscovers their feelings for each other when they team up to find a missing woman.

When Miss Caroline Hardcastle’s friend Effie, an actress, is kidnapped, Caro takes on the case with assistance from friends. As co-author of a newspaper crime column called “A Lady’s Guide to Mischief and Mayhem,” Caro is fully aware of the danger Effie could be
Val and Caro were engaged. Caro’s middle-class upbringing made her unsuitable in the eyes of Val’s father, and Caro eventually broke off the engagement. She’s been harboring negative feelings toward Val ever since, and matters become more complicated when working on the case leads to their being discovered in a compromising situation, with a marriage of convenience the only solution. Following their wedding three days later, Caro and Val rekindle their friendship and old agonies arise. Opening themselves up to love is difficult, however, not only because of their past, but also because they become increasingly entangled in the case, which could lead to danger. The mystery drives the action while the romance provides the heartbeat of the story, and the two weave together to create a well-plotted, entertaining tale for fans of both genres. Expectations and prejudice based on class and gender are scrutinized throughout, while the leads are witty, fierce, big-hearted, and easy to love.

A successful and thoroughly enjoyable mix of mystery and romance.

RULES FOR HEIRESSES
Amalie Howard
Sourcebooks Casablanca (288 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-72821-722-2

A marriage of convenience reunites a rebellious lady and a taciturn new duke.

To escape the ton and one lascivious man in particular, Lady Ravenna Huntley has run away to Antigua in the West Indies. She enjoys the liberties afforded to her while disguised as a man until she unexpectedly encounters Courtland Chase, the childhood friend she was supposed to marry, who’s long been presumed dead. In truth, his stepmother had forced him out of the country because she wanted her own son to be heir to the dukedom. When Ravenna and Courtland are caught in a compromising situation, they marry and return to England, where Courtland assumes his newly inherited role as Duke of Ashvale. He has always been seen as lesser by his stepmother because of his biracial identity—his mother was a free mixed-race Creole woman from Antigua who married his father in a love match—and she, and others, won’t easily accept her as a woman. Physical chemistry sizzles between the new couple, but issues of trust stand toward Val ever since, and matters become more complicated when working on the case leads to their being discovered in a compromising situation, with a marriage of convenience the only solution. Following their wedding three days later, Caro and Val rekindle their friendship and old agonies arise. Opening themselves up to love is difficult, however, not only because of their past, but also because they become increasingly entangled in the case, which could lead to danger. The mystery drives the action while the romance provides the heartbeat of the story, and the two weave together to create a well-plotted, entertaining tale for fans of both genres. Expectations and prejudice based on class and gender are scrutinized throughout, while the leads are witty, fierce, big-hearted, and easy to love.

A successful and thoroughly enjoyable mix of mystery and romance.
technology with one-on-one communication has been a hit, and CEO Christopher “Wes” Lawson is struggling to keep up with demand. It’s not all bad, though, as the interest has enabled Wes to get out from behind his desk and get back into training, which is a wonderful distraction from how much of a nose dive his personal life has taken. Though the FitMi team is aware Best Life has sent in a covert user for an upcoming piece, Wes doesn’t know it’s Britta, his charming new client, and Britta doesn’t know she’s been set up with the company’s founder. Their email and in-app correspondence slowly grow into an adorable flirtation. Since they’re both local to Chicago, Wes suggests some in-person training sessions. Britta and Wes fit well together, and their banter flows effortlessly, but Wes shouldn’t be dating a client, and Britta’s assignment will undoubtedly get nixed should people find out she became intimate with her subject. There’s a lot to like in this romance with its supportive leading man, delightful heroine, and dynamic secondary cast. There’s more than just romance going on, and Williams excels at juggling all the parts. Wes’ former girlfriend and business partner now runs his biggest rival, fitness app HottrYou, which coincidentally is the one being reviewed by Britta’s co-worker in their joint article. Williams also takes great care in providing a content warning for diet culture and disordered eating.

An emotionally resonant and thoughtful novel.

THE BOUNCE BACK
Woolridge, Addie
Montlake Romance (310 pp.)
978-1-5420-3034-2

A disaster-prone artist has almost given up on her career when a dreary 9-to-5 job and a dreamy co-worker catalyze unexpected revelations. Neale Delacroix aspires to follow in the footsteps of her family and blaze a trail through the art world, but her first major event turns out to be a literal baptism of fire: She sets herself aflame by accident. In the wake of her spectacular failure, Neale is kicked out of a prestigious artists’ collective and unceremoniously dumped by her “nonlinear life partner,” Darin. Heartbroken and humiliated, Neale finally decides to strike out on her own. She lands a boring but safe job to support herself, but she’s unable to leave her artistic—and scatterbrained—self firmly behind: Not only does she find herself dangerously attracted to her co-worker Anthony, a brilliant artist in his own right, but her sister, Bille, is also determined to tug her back into the art world. But Neale must polish more than just her skills if she is to truly shine as an artist. The relentlessness of Neale’s clumsy blundering becomes achingly repetitive, but a diverse and entertaining cast of secondary characters—including many who featured in Woolridge’s The Checklist (2021)—adds both sense and sensibility to Neale’s aimless wandering. Woolridge is consistently witty, often dropping insightful nuggets related to the vagaries of art and the eccentricities of artists. But as Neale negotiates with family, makes friends, and finds her professional feet, her story reads more like women’s fiction than romance. Woolridge misses the opportunity to lead Neale to a deeper understanding of herself through her negotiation with the beautifully steady and warmly generous Anthony.

A light and undemanding coming-of-age story.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

1000 YEARS OF JOYS AND SORROWS by Ai Weiwei;
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TWELVE CAESARS by Mary Beard ......................................... 47
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1000 YEARS OF JOYS AND SORROWS
A Memoir
Ai Weiwei
Trans. by Barr, Allan H.
Crown (400 pp.)
$32.00 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-553-41946-7

The artist and social activist explores his father’s turbulent relationship with the early Communist regime and his own struggle for creative freedom.

Spurred by his imprisonment in 2011 for “economic crimes” against the authoritarian Chinese government, Ai Weiwei (b. 1957) uses his father’s heartbreakingly difficult life as a point of departure to tell his own story. Born in 1910, just as the Qing dynasty was collapsing, Ai Qing was part of the new idealistic proletariat, trained as an artist and schooled for a year in Paris before taking his place as part of the increasingly ideological cultural force in the new Communist China. But Mao Zedong unleashed waves of political upheaval, and just when the author was born, Ai Qing was exiled during the so-called Anti-Rightist campaign. Most miserably, during the Cultural Revolution, father and sons were sent to “Little Siberia,” on the edge of the Gurbantünggüt Desert, where they lived in “a square hole dug into the ground, with a crude roof formed of tamarisk branches and rice stalks, sealed with several layers of grassy mud.” Still, his father’s indomitable spirit remained intact, and under Deng Xiaoping’s leadership, the family was able to return to Beijing. At this point, the author segues into his own restless seeking. He spent more than a decade in New York City before returning to Beijing to try his hand at curating art shows, designing architecture (he consulted on the “Bird’s Nest” stadium for the 2008 Olympics), and engaging in social activism (Black Cover Book). The author eventually ran afoul of the party leadership for his “intolerable insolence,” but the tenacity of his father and his artistic vision have always guided him. “In China,” he writes, “we were still living in a culturally impoverished era, but art had not abandoned us—its roots were deeply planted in the weathed soil.” Throughout, the author maintains a fluid, heartfelt narrative.

A beautiful and poignant memoir demonstrating perseverance and the power of art.
Andrews chronicles his interviews with numerous working scientists as well as his travels to observe half a dozen volcanoes in action. He pauses regularly to explain their mechanics, history, and (often inaccurate) popular mythology and to note famous eruptions in the past. The author begins with the catastrophic 1902 Mount Pelee eruption on the Caribbean island of Martinique, which killed 30,000. Then Andrews moves on to the more familiar Mount Kilauea in Hawaii, whose massive, well-publicized 2018 lava outpouring killed no one but destroyed hundreds of houses before flowing into the ocean and adding several hundred acres to the island. That eruption, writes the author, “reminded scientists that volcanoes are still more enigmatic than they are familiar [and] reminded the world that volcanic eruptions are both the privilege and price many pay for existing on a living planet whose innards are still burning.” After a few other examples, including a genuine supervolcano that makes up the entire Yellowstone National Park, Andrews delivers an impressive geologic education that includes illuminating lessons on plate tectonics, deep sea eruptions, and the origin of life itself. At this point, less than halfway through the text, the author leaves the Earth history, and (often inaccurate) popular mythology and to note famous eruptions in the past. The author begins with the catastrophic 1902 Mount Pelee eruption on the Caribbean island of Martinique, which killed 30,000. Then Andrews moves on to the more familiar Mount Kilauea in Hawaii, whose massive, well-publicized 2018 lava outpouring killed no one but destroyed hundreds of houses before flowing into the ocean and adding several hundred acres to the island. That eruption, writes the author, “reminded scientists that volcanoes are still more enigmatic than they are familiar [and] reminded the world that volcanic eruptions are both the privilege and price many pay for existing on a living planet whose innards are still burning.” After a few other examples, including a genuine supervolcano that makes up the entire Yellowstone National Park, Andrews delivers an impressive geologic education that includes illuminating lessons on plate tectonics, deep sea eruptions, and the origin of life itself. At this point, less than halfway through the text, the author leaves the Earth...
"A lively treatise on Roman art and power, deliciously opinionated and beautifully illustrated."

**TWELVE CAESARS**

with a book that appears to be *The Middlesteins* (2012)—though her novels are not named in this book. Attenberg criticizes the other writer for wanting to pick her brain “as if [it] were a carryout salad.” Later, after receiving a copy of *Olive Kitteridge*, she writes, “we receive so much from other writers when they show us how it’s done...We must chew on the words of others.” In another passage, Attenberg remembers a college classmate who was at first a friend but then assaulted her; the man had recently committed suicide. “Then I read a status update on Facebook by someone who had been in our writing program,” she writes, “and he mourned him and said, ‘He was the best writer in our class,’ and I wanted to fucking scream, because I was the best writer in our class.” At the end, Attenberg provides a summary of her flaws and judgment errors, wondering if she deserves to be happy. Though she is “a better person now,” she “will never be perfect.” Nobody is, but readers of the author’s wonderful novels may expect more.

The virtues of Attenberg’s fiction—story, characters, black humor—are largely missing in her first nonfiction book.

**TWELVE CAESARS**

*Images of Power From the Ancient World to the Modern*

Mary Beard

Princeton Univ. (368 pp.)

$35.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-0-691-22236-3

The renowned classicist and bestselling author of *SPQR* (2015) considers Rome’s first rulers as they have come down to us in marble, stone, coins, and metals.

During the time of the Roman Empire, artists churned out an avalanche of portraits of Rome’s emperors, a trend that continued after their deaths, beyond the fall of the empire, and during the centuries following up to the modern age. Suetonius’ *The Twelve Caesars*, which later became one of “the most popular history books of the European Renaissance,” contains the only surviving physical descriptions. Many modern historians, however, consider his stories “the gospel of the palace corridors, or even outright fantasy, but...they have become inextricably part of our view of Roman emperors.” No statue from ancient times has a label; this is not the case with innumerable Roman coins minted during their reigns, but the tiny heads are little help. Beard points out that beginning in the Renaissance, rulers and wealthy patrons not only collected images of emperors and their consorts—or, more likely, a copy, fake, or image of someone else—but they also began portraying themselves as if they were Roman. A leading scholar as well as a writer of bestsellers, Beard, as always, asks important questions: What did the Caesars look like? Did the artists themselves care? Why did European plutocrats, aristocrats, and monarchs like to see themselves in togas? She leads us through the best available evidence (even if it’s not always satisfying) and delivers insightful answers in lucid prose accompanied by dazzling images. Along with a steady stream of commentary on portraits, sculptures, and prints, the author devotes long sections to artistic masterpieces, including tapestries, murals, enormous historical paintings, and Titian’s spectacular room of the Caesars (11 of them, not Suetonius’ 12), now lost.

A lively treatise on Roman art and power, deliciously opinionated and beautifully illustrated.

**THE UNINNOCENT**

*Notes on Violence and Mercy*

Blake, Katharine

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (224 pp.)

$16.00 paper | Nov. 2, 2021

978-0-374-53852-1

A meditation on crime, punishment, and heartache.

Blake began her legal career working for the Children’s Defense Fund in Washington, D.C. The work was depressing, and after Sandy Hook and the subsequent defeat of gun-control measures in Congress, she “lost hope.” A couple of years earlier, a 16-year-old cousin of hers suffered a psychotic episode and savagely killed a young boy; a horrific act that received little publicity because of the explosion of the BP Deepwater Horizon. “When the worst happens, the notion of luck takes on strange significance. What’s lucky when your son murders another mother’s son? That there is oil spilling into the ocean,” she writes. The best part of Blake’s book explores the trajectory of the crime, subsequent trial, and imprisonment of her cousin, who has been spending his life behind bars incessantly reading and teaching Bible classes while wrestling with his crime. Meaningfully, after reading *Crime and Punishment*, he described his crime by saying that he “took Ryan’s choices away.” Were the memoir to stick to this story, it would have been more effective, for much of it is given over to hit-or-miss meditations on heartbreak, lost love, and the like, with references to and quotations from a canon ranging from Ice Age cave paintings to the socially conscious journalism of Rebecca Solnit. Sometimes these musings are weighty (“Complicated grief is complicated because it doesn’t change shape or size; it stays unlivable”), sometimes mere soufflés: “Heartbreak’s popularity in times of great taking reveals the essence of a broken heart—what it is to have and then not have.” One wishes the author had directed her energies to the crime and how it played out; in those sections, her writing shines.

A mixed bag of longueurs and profundities that should prove useful to students of the judicial system.
Covid-19 is raging across the U.S. again, halting many daily activities, clogging ICUs, and leading to the ominous return of the morgue trucks in cities that are unable to handle the volume of deaths. It’s been nothing short of infuriating to watch millions of Americans—and dozens of elected officials (DeSantis, Abbott, and Graham, to name only a few)—refuse the vaccine and ignore basic CDC protocols such as masking and avoiding large gatherings, especially indoors. Their actions will no doubt prolong the suffering for months to come.

Even though I was vaccinated, I recently contracted the virus, as did my 6-year-old son. Thankfully, we have weathered the storm much better than so many in the U.S. and across the globe. The 10-day quarantine period was difficult, and while I’m undoubtedly blessed to come out the other side healthy, the experience got me thinking about the initial 2020 lockdown and whether we are headed for another this year. Two September books offer firsthand accounts of life during lockdown, one in the U.S. and one in the U.K.

In *Voices From the Pandemic: Americans Tell Their Stories of Crisis, Courage and Resilience* (Doubleday, Sept. 28), Eli Saslow, a Pulitzer Prize–winning Washington Post reporter, collected moving and heartbreaking stories from Americans across the country, creating a vivid tapestry of the lockdown experience. As our critic notes in a starred review, “Saslow conducted dozens of interviews with Americans of all ages and professions, and their voices—presented in lightly edited monologues—form the crux of this crucial book.” Perhaps the most depressing and revealing testimony comes from a New York City paramedic who says, “I pronounced more deaths in the first two weeks of April [2020] than I have in my whole career.” This book is one of the most vital documents to emerge from the crisis: “Taken individually, the stories describe not only remarkable hardship and suffering, but also resilience, solidarity, and hope; taken as a whole, this is a vital historical document of a year-plus that none of us will ever forget.”

James Attlee’s *Under the Rainbow: Voices From Lockdown* (And Other Stories, Sept. 7) takes a similar approach, presenting the voices of British citizens during the lockdown. “A few months after lockdown began,” notes our review, “Attlee noticed a rainbow image displayed in many people’s windows. Curious, he knocked on doors to ask what it meant and, after a while, widened the scope of his conversations to talk about people’s experiences with the virus, their views about the government’s response, and their sense of the future. Those conversations inform this thoughtful meditation on the effects of the pandemic on individuals’ lives and livelihoods. Rainbows, depicted in the author’s color photographs, had various meanings: for some, a gesture of support for health workers; for others, a symbol of hope.” Attlee’s observations dovetail with many of Saslow’s, including the sad facts of rampant racism, the deleterious effects of climate change, and the reality that both countries’ health care systems were woefully unprepared. “Many criticized the government’s ineptitude: A decade of austerity, one man told Attlee, left Britain’s health system ‘ill-equipped to deal with something like a pandemic.’ As in the U.S., the pandemic coincided with revelations of systemic racism, inequalities in access to health care, and increasing evidence of climate change.”

For readers up for a reassessment of the tumult of 2020, Saslow and Attlee provide well-rendered, wide-ranging portraits and object lessons on ways to avoid such levels of calamity. Let’s hope we learn.

*Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction editor.*
“An insightful, provocative, heartfelt blend of memoir and social commentary that is as revelatory as it is celebratory.”

**CAREFREE BLACK GIRLS**

*A Celebration of Black Women in Popular Culture*

Blay, Zeba

St. Martin’s Griffin (256 pp.)


978-1-250-23156-7

Essays exploring the lives of Black women through the lens of contemporary pop culture.

“Black girls are everything,” writes Blay, adding that “the culture that Black women pour their talents and their creativity into, the culture that emulates Black women, steals from Black women, needs Black women, is the same culture that belittles Black women, excludes Black women, ignores Black women.” A former senior culture writer for *HuffPost*, Blay was the first person to tweet #carefreeblackgirl, which became a popular shorthand for celebrating Black women. These well-crafted essays, which the author wrote during a period of deep depression and anxiety, helped her get “reacquainted with the concept of joy and freedom.” She discusses a number of issues including fatphobia; sexual exploitation and trauma; righteous anger and the Angry Black Woman trope; mental wellness and the Strong Black Woman trope; and the pain and insidiousness of colorism. Blay also deftly unpacks the public push back from some Black women against the term *carefree Black girl*. Throughout the collection, she brings compelling and astute cultural criticism together with reflections on her personal evolution as a Black woman. Blay’s thoughtful analysis of everything from viral Instagram moments and popular TV shows to headline news about Michelle Obama and Breonna Taylor makes for an infectious read. A chapter devoted to rapper Cardi B considers how she and other Black women rappers “tell us so much about the culture and about ourselves.” But Blay isn’t writing as a fangirl. With Cardi and other public figures, films, and other media, she navigates both adulation and earned critique as well as those important spaces where the personal is definitely political. She also raises timely questions about homophobia, transphobia, cancel culture, representation, and appropriation.

An insightful, provocative, heartfelt blend of memoir and social commentary that is as revelatory as it is celebratory.

**THE SWEET SPOT**

*The Pleasures of Suffering and the Search for Meaning*

Bloom, Paul

Ecco/HarperCollins (304 pp.)

$27.99 | Nov. 2, 2021

978-0-06-291056-1

We are formed by experience, and the worse the experience, the more fully we are shaped.

“We get pleasure through contrast, by creating situations where the release from unpleasantness is its own source of pleasure,” writes Yale psychology professor Bloom, offering as examples the sensation of sinking gingerly into a hot bath and then enjoying the warmth or cutting the pain of a searing curry with a cold beer. Suffering, he argues, is important in our experience in that it lends meaning to life. Recognizing that there are degrees of suffering—he’s not talking about the suffering attendant in genocide, for example—Bloom adds that the contrast makes moments of happiness all the happier. As for the “unchosen,” horrific suffering of the Holocaust, Viktor Frankl observed that “those who had the best chance of survival were those whose lives had broader purpose.” In a book that is diffuse but coherent all the same, Bloom looks at numerous issues: the transitory nature of happiness, the self-inflicted pain of BDSM adepts, the hard work of writing a book or completing a degree. That author adds that not all “chosen” pain is educational or even healthy. BDSM may appeal to our “normal appetites,” but it’s on a spectrum that psychiatrists call “non-suicidal self-injury,” the kind of thing that can land a person in a psychiatric ward. Bloom is careful to define terms as he goes along, and he allows that one person’s meaning may not

15TH ANNUAL NATIONAL INDIE EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNER, SPIRITUALITY CATEGORY

“Sweetland’s memoir will keep the reader glued to the page.”

—Publishers Weekly

ISBN: 978-0-9826769-5-0

“A bold, if occasionally terrifying, personal account of spiritual transformation.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For Information on Film Rights, Email coaching@kristysweetland.com www.CoachingToComeAlive.com
be another’s. He further notes that while suffering can lead to a positive outcome, that’s not always so: “Sometimes we overvalue it; sometimes we indulge too much.” The book is lucid and elegantly written throughout so that there’s little suffering involved in reading it—in this, it’s reminiscent of Michael Sandel and Martha Nussbaum.

A bracing, convincing argument that toil, torment, and tribulation can be good things.

**WILDCAT**

The Untold Story of Pearl Hart, the Wild West's Most Notorious Woman Bandit

Boessenecker, John
Hanover Square Press (352 pp.)
$28.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-335-47139-0

Daring gambits in the Wild West.

Boessenecker, a historian of the Western frontier who has written about a host of pioneer outlaws, cuts through myths and misinformation to offer a colorful, well-researched biography of Canadian-born Lillie Naomi Davy (1871-1935), who became legendary as the tough-talking, gender-defying bandit Pearl Hart. Escaping an abusive, drunken father, Lillie, age 13, and her 11-year-old sister, Katy, cut their hair, donned their brother’s clothes, and ran away from home—only to return to their violently dysfunctional family and run away time and again. In the next few years, the sisters became involved with men who turned out to be criminals and, not surprisingly, abused them. Throughout her teens, Lillie was in and out of reformatories and prisons, but she and Katy were incorrigible. In Buffalo, where a madam who called herself Pearl Hart had committed suicide, 16-year-old Katy established her own bordello, taking the name of Minnie Hart. Lillie became a prostitute, plying her trade in Buffalo; Toledo, Ohio; Trinidad, Colorado, “a hotbed of prostitution”; and Phoenix, Arizona, where she, too, took a new name: Pearl Hart.

Boessenecker recounts in lively detail the sisters’ amorous entanglements—Lillie, at 15, got involved with a 36-year-old bigamist and later eloped with an opium-addicted piano player who, she claimed, introduced her to the habit—and their repeated arrests, as well as the crimes perpetrated by some of their many siblings. The centerpiece of the story, though, is the bold stagecoach robbery that Pearl pulled off with the help of a lover. Needing money to travel to see her mother—her “dearest, truest friend,” she said—whom she thought was dying, Pearl saw robbery as her only choice. Conviction, imprisonment, escape, and recapture ended in a five-year sentence in Yuma penitentiary. After release on early parole, the woman celebrated in newspapers and magazines as a glamorous outlaw, “uniformly noted [for] her physical attractiveness,” retreated into quiet comfort.

A brisk rendering of an adventuresome life.
How the Covid-19 vaccines came to be.

Governments often dithered, but scientists and entrepreneurs were on the ball. *Outside* magazine correspondent Borrell delivers a vivid portrait of the combination of drudgery, greed, legerdemain, and brilliance that made the vaccines a reality in record time. The arrival of the pandemic in the U.S. in January 2020 galvanized America’s public health establishment and a dozen pharmaceutical companies ranging from aggressive start-ups such as Moderna to international behemoths like Pfizer. All were aware that developing a vaccine is horrendously expensive and risky but that governments were eager to make every effort to ensure success. Still, the path remained bumpy. The old method of growing viruses in large stainless-steel vats was facing a new technology in which a vaccine consisted of bits of viral RNA that activate the body’s immune response equally well. New or old, it had to work, and Borrell offers a meticulous, thrilling account of the testing process. First, researchers tested lab animals to determine if the vaccine protected them from the virus. It did. Then human volunteers received it to find a proper dose and check for side effects. Only then were thousands given either vaccine or placebo and then watched for months. Some vaccines flopped, but the best provided more than 90% protection. Led by Lawrence Wright’s *The Plague Year*, most Covid books emphasize chaotic, self-serving politics and the pandemic’s devastation, a dismal one-two punch. Borrell does not ignore ignorant or apathetic leaders, but by concentrating on the vaccines, he tells a story with a happy ending—at least as of May 2021, when his account ends. Drawing on extensive interviews, the author uncovers heroes and villains, works hard, if not always successfully, to explain virology and vaccine technology for a lay readership, and excels in recounting the cutthroat pharmaceutical world in which the process of developing a vaccine can bring riches or bankruptcy.

An exciting, readable exploration of an extraordinary scientific breakthrough.

American loyalists get short shrift in many accounts of the American Revolution. Prolific historian Brands gives them a little more room on the stage. Brands, chair of the history department at the University of Texas and one of our most reliable chroniclers of popular American history, delivers an expert account narrated heavily through quotes from the writings of Washington, Franklin, and their contemporaries. The author’s use of original documents lends the book a vivid, historically authentic flavor, though some readers may not thrill to pages of 18th-century prose. Almost everyone was loyal during the French and Indian War,
when Washington became the Colonies’ best-known military figure and Franklin, already a powerful force in Pennsylvania’s government, led efforts to support British forces. Sent to England to look after Pennsylvania’s affairs, Franklin emerged as the spokesman for American interests in the 1760s. He opposed the 1765 Stamp Act but, still loyal, accepted it when it became law. As a result, his Philadelphia house was nearly destroyed by angry mobs, a fate that befell Thomas Hutchinson, lieutenant governor of Massachusetts. Franklin was as stunned as anyone by the violent reaction, and he worked diligently for repeal and continued, with diminishing success, to support the Colonies, returning to America in 1775, now a firm advocate of independence. Brands delivers a proficient account of the subsequent fighting and peace negotiation, focusing on Washington and Franklin. Regarding the loyalists on the American side, Benedict Arnold’s story is old news; Hutchinson fled to England in 1774; and Joseph Galloway, a friend and colleague of Franklin’s in Pennsylvania politics, served in the First Continental Congress, where he opposed independence, became a leading loyalist, and moved to Britain in 1778. Perhaps the most surprising figure was Franklin’s son, William. Appointed Royal Governor of New Jersey, he remained stubbornly loyal even after his arrest and imprisonment for two years. His father never forgave him.

A skillful traditional history of the American Revolution that pays more than the usual attention to its American opponents.

“Movements don’t happen without a buildup,” says social justice activist Ruby Sales in a standout essay in which Charles examines the complex ties between Black churches and the struggle for racial justice. Sales’ comment sums up a theme of this hit-and-miss book: The Black Lives Matter movement—which might seem to have erupted spontaneously—has deep roots and historical antecedents, some dishearteningly similar to recent events. Bunn explores how racism has heightened Black Americans’ vulnerability in the pandemic and how the BLM movement, though associated with men like Trayvon Martin and George Floyd, grew out of the efforts of Alicia Garza, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, and Opal Tometi, women who built on the legacy of Ida B. Wells and other female activists. Gaines links modern issues such as mass incarceration and “the disrespect U.S. law enforcement has for Black lives” to earlier forms of racism, such as convict leasing and Jim Crow-era Black Codes. Harriston notes that six years before George Floyd said, “I can’t breathe,” Eric Garner shouted the same words and an officer who failed to intervene was demoted but faced no federal charges. Weaker sections offer shopworn denunciations of Trump and near-hagiography of Kamala Harris and other politicians in flat passages with too much overfamiliar or unedifying material. For many readers, however, this book may be worth it for Charles’ insightful observations on Black churches alone; one is that because Martin Luther King Jr. was a preacher, many people overestimate the role that those churches played in the civil rights struggle. As for current anti-racist efforts, Black churches “haven’t gotten a handle” on BLM. The foreword is provided by Marc H. Morial, former mayor of New Orleans and president and CEO of the National Urban League.

An uneven yet useful survey of historical and contemporary forces driving the Black Lives Matter movement.
A look at Lincoln's extensive affiliations with Black leaders, from his law practice to the White House, as key indications of his egalitarian thoughts and feelings.

Historian Burlingame, the chair in Lincoln studies at the University of Illinois, moves beyond Lincoln's well-examined speeches and writings on African Americans to examine the personal relations he developed with Black leaders such as Frederick Douglass over time. "As a racial egalitarian," writes the author, "Lincoln condemned the doctrine of White superiority." Burlingame, whose last book explored the Lincolns' marriage, sets out to chronicle examples through Lincoln's defense of Blacks in his law practice and his welcoming of Black visitors to the White House as well as his deep repugnance of others' expressions of White supremacy, including those by his own wife. He was a defender of the working people and the downtrodden, despite the color of their skin, and Black citizens in Springfield appreciated his personal touch. Studying details of Lincoln's law practice and voting record, Burlingame surmises that he probably opposed the racist Black Code of Illinois. While he initially endorsed the Black colonization movement (to Liberia or Central America), mainly because he did not think White voters would endorse emancipation, later he was more muted in response to Black objections to the movement. Lincoln's treatment of his Black staff—e.g., William H. Johnson, a servant who accompanied the family from Springfield to Washington, D.C., in 1861—is legendary, and Lincoln went out of his way to invite Douglass, his fiercest critic, to the White House and include Black guests at his inauguration (to the consternation of his wife). Burlingame addresses Lincoln's use of the N-word and delight in minstrel shows as indicative of him...
In her new memoir, *Poet Warrior* (Norton, Sept. 7), Joy Harjo describes crouching under her family’s kitchen table as a child to eavesdrop on her mother and her mother’s girlfriends. Beneath the furniture, Harjo was privy not only to her community’s juiciest gossip, but also to its most talented storytellers. Harjo describes these secret moments as the start of her lifelong obsession with stories and the words they contained.

Now, Harjo is one of the most celebrated wordsmiths of our time. The first ever Native American U.S. poet laureate, Harjo has produced nine books of poetry, seven musical albums, two picture books, one play, and a memoir entitled *Crazy Brave* that introduced readers to many of the characters featured in *Poet Warrior*. In addition to her own work, Harjo has edited several anthologies of Native American poetry. Her compassion, generosity, and outspokenness have inspired multiple generations of creators and fostered the careers of Native writers who, unfortunately, still rarely receive the recognition that they deserve. *Poet Warrior* offers a gorgeously raw account of the personal and ancestral histories that shaped Harjo’s trajectory as an artist, mother, activist, and teacher. The book “blaze[s] with honesty and lyricism,” according to our starred review.

Harjo answered our questions over email.

In a recent interview with poets.org, you talk about the concept of “poetry ancestors.” What would you consider the “memoir ancestors” of *Poet Warrior* and *Crazy Brave*?

I consider N. Scott Momaday’s book, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, to be a memoir ancestor. It was marketed as “Indian myth, history, and personal reminiscences” when it was published in 1969. I was struck by how his mythical, historical, and personal lyrical narratives alongside Momaday’s father’s images [Al Momaday] intertwined to make an oratorical whole. Next would be Leslie Silko’s *Storyteller*. It was categorized as poetry and fiction. I think of it as a kind of unique memoir, consisting of poetry, short stories, mythic tales, historic notes, autobiography, gossip, and photographs. Though it’s not memoir, Jean Toomer’s *Cane* also had great bearing on how I consider the making of a memoir. It is a kind of earthy, mythic singing.

Your work spans so many genres: poetry, plays, picture books, and memoir. You are also a musician and a former visual artist. How do these multiple forms influence your work?

Each genre and practice is very specific in what it demands. Yet each is linked by voice and theme. My first creative endeavors were in drawing and painting. I was in shows when I was 12. I intended to be an artist like my grandmother and great-aunt. As much as I loved poetry and most forms of literature, I did not have a desire to become a poet. I didn’t really consider it as an option, and it wasn’t in my realm of experience, though at Indian School many of the students wrote poetry and some were exceptional poets. It wasn’t until I was an undergraduate at the University of New Mexico in the early ’70s that I began writing poetry. It
took hold in a way that I never foresaw. Poetry captivated my deep love of language, song, and music, and I was intrigued at how poetry could hold history, shift time, and sing all at once. I walked away from music at 14. I took it up again and started my first musical performances with Keith Stoutenburg, an alternative music songwriter and performer, when I was in Tucson, then started Joy Harjo and Poetic Justice in Albuquerque, a band of all Native musicians, half of them attorneys practicing Indian law.

Are there any new genres or forms you’re eager to try? I want to return to visual art. I have kept up photography, to a degree. I have a studio ready to go once my last term as U.S. poet laureate has concluded.

Across genres, your work is suffused with compassion; your newest musical album is titled I Pray for My Enemies. I find this particularly remarkable given the brutalities inflicted on your Muskogee-Creek ancestors and the abuse you faced early in life. How has your capacity for compassion influenced your writing, and how has your writing influenced your capacity for compassion?

I have come to realize that writing for me is about making a road of words, images, notions, thoughts that I follow. I do not always know what I will see or hear, or how or what will appear to me. I just listen and allow play in expression and rhythm. That’s part of it. I am often amazed as I participate in the process of creation and what I am taught of craft and wisdom. Other times I am dismayed, as nothing seems to happen, but I keep moving, or stop for a while, go outside, read a book, listen to music, take a deeper look at what artists are doing in the world, then I find a way. That’s the first part of the process. The second part is all the shaping and detail work, what I call the hammer-and-nails part. Again, you’re listening even harder. I love the surprises, the gifts of creation. One of my favorite lines in Poet Warrior, an insight that surprised me and I kept, was “Even the monster has a story.” The scene needed to land, and it did. That line taught me compassion.

The Covid-19 pandemic has tested us all, but studies indicate that it has been especially hard for mothers. As a former young, single mother who successfully balanced family and art, what advice do you have for parents—and especially mothers—weathering the current storm?

I can only imagine how difficult it is for mothers. Mothering is one of the most difficult roles, the most demanding. It never ends, and it calls on our deepest reserves, even in so-called normal times. With the pandemic, mothers have also had to become responsible for supervising their children as they are taught online. And many of these mothers work alongside them, either going to classes themselves and/or maintaining their professions remotely. It seems impossible to me. I don’t know if I would have made it through the university if I would have had to supervise my children’s education. I would gather like-minded parents together and supervise in pods. Take turns so each parent gets a break. Or collectively hire someone out of work from the pandemic to oversee the pods. And take time for yourself, daily, even if you can only squeeze out 10 or 15 minutes some days.

Despite the often difficult nature of the material, your writing carries an undercurrent of delight. What brings you delight? What role does delight play in your life?

I’ve never been asked this question and that…delights me! Delight is really opening your eyes, ears, perception to the music of the impossible and how it finds its way into the ordinary. Children are often the bearers of delight, as are artists. I love dancing, as any of my friends and family will tell you. Dancing has been my primary workout through the pandemic, and before and after the pandemic. Delight is watching young poets, writers, and artists discover delight and grow in their discovery, craft, and insight as they make their road of living. I had never thought much of delight until this question. De-light is an eruption of light, for a spark of a moment. Thank you.

Dr. Mathangi Subramanian’s latest novel, A People’s History of Heaven, was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award and was longlisted for the PEN/Faulkner Award. Poet Warrior received a starred review in the July 15, 2021, issue.
being a man of his time rather than indicating a racist worldview, as other critics have maintained.

A moderate defense of Lincoln’s racial views that should invite further debate about the subject.

**MOTHERTRUCKER**

*Butcher, Amy*

Little A (284 pp.)

$24.95 | Nov. 1, 2021

978-1-5420-1432-8

An acclaimed essay writer and memoirist tells the story of her life-changing meeting with a female Alaskan Artic ice road trucker.

Butcher first discovered Joy “Mothertrucker” Wiebe on Instagram, where she fell in love with her photos of the John W. Dalton highway, a road where “more drivers die...annually than anywhere else in our America.” But the connection to Mothertrucker ran deeper than images. Independent and fearless, she “had built her home in a place of unfathomable fear and danger, in a landscape dominated by men and machinery, in an industry and a remote terrain whose googling returns mostly photos of house-high snowdrifts and 18-wheelers crushed and crumpled like pieces of paper, as if God took them in his fist and squeezed.” A successful professor who had navigated a male-dominated professional world, Butcher nurtured a troubling secret: involvement with an abusive boyfriend named Dave. She contacted Mothertrucker after a particularly disturbing bout of verbal abuse and embarked on a six-day interview. Their connection was immediate despite their different backgrounds. Mothertrucker was a working-class Christian with an open, profoundly spiritual view of God. For Butcher, the concept of religion and church was more “complicated,” especially regarding Dave, who loved God and “tried to scream his faith into me.” During their treacherous drive from Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay, Butcher and Mothertrucker discussed their lives, finding commonality in their experiences with love, bad relationships, and controlling men. A bad first marriage, at age 17, had taught Mothertrucker to value herself and her desires above what her husband wanted; listening to her, Butcher realized what she already knew: Her life was her own, and she could “choose happiness and safety [or] choose Dave.”

A sobering reflection on verbal and psychological abuse, Butcher’s book honors the healing power of female friendship and questions the nature of divinity beyond its constricting patriarchal manifestations.

A searching and deeply empathetic memoir.

**ATLAS OF THE INVISIBLE**

*Cheshire, James & Uberti, Oliver*

Norton (224 pp.)

$40.00 | Nov. 9, 2021

978-0-393-65151-5

An eye-opening visual look at the assumptions and trends that lie beneath how the modern world ticks.

In 2019, writes geographer Cheshire, the FAA tracked 11.2 million commercial flights over U.S. airspace. That’s an astonishing number. More astonishing is the fact that this number was only a modest increase over 2009, yet during that decade, passenger numbers had grown by a third. This suggests that those additional millions of passengers were packed like sardines inside those planes, which “seemed like a good strategy until the pandemic.” Working with former *National Geographic* designer Uberti, Cheshire serves up revealing data about the modern world, his eye set on patterns that illustrate changes in our time. For instance, the authors track the signals sent from mobile phones to monitor migration patterns, which figure into a body of statistical and visual data that “illustrate how a
warming planet affects everything from hurricanes to the hajj.”

Eschewing what mathematician Edward Tufte calls “chartjunk,”
Cheshire and Uberti look with admirable clarity at other patterns over time. One map, for instance, depicts the number of “vagrancy houses” made available in Cheshire’s native England to the homeless a century ago. The program involved removing these people from London, but at least they had somewhere to go, even if that somewhere amounted to “holding pens.” With economic decline and social change, the number of such people has mounted today, even as 216,000 houses sat vacant across the country. Using such data to point to a problem and a solution at once, Cheshire asks, “Why not make the housing permanent?” In a work that brilliantly demonstrates how big data and its visual representation can be put to work, the authors analyze the shift from rural to urban residence across the world, the mixed-race DNA that most of us carry without necessarily knowing it, the connections of rivers to commerce, and many other matters of compelling interest.

Demography and graphic design meet in an extraordinarily revealing book.

THE PRIVATIZATION OF EVERYTHING
How the Plunder of Public Goods Transformed America and How We Can Fight Back
Cohen, Donald & Mikaelian, Allen
The New Press (320 pp.)
$26.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-62097-653-1

A strong, economics-based argument for restoring the boundaries between public goods and private gains.

Public goods are “nonexcludable,” meaning that it is difficult to bar their use, and “nonrivalrous,” meaning that my enjoyment of them does not prevent you in any way from enjoying them, too. By Cohen and Mikaelian’s account, the definition needs to be formally expanded to include things that are useful to human society and should not be made into profit centers: health care, education, etc. “It does not greatly benefit me,” write the authors, making the distinction clear, “if my neighbor has a huge TV. But it benefits me tremendously if she has an education, if his children are fed, and if they are vaccinated.”

Apart from making economic sense as social investments—an educated person generally makes more money than an uneducated one, adding to the revenue stream by way of taxes and consumption, and a healthy person doesn’t unduly incur the insurance-pool cost of medicines and hospitalization—such affordances are simply the right thing to do, the authors add.

This impulse comes at a time when various business interests are trying to redefine water as just another foodstuff so that they can control its distribution and price. Corporations have already taken large swaths of the education system into private hands, to say nothing of privatizing prisons, which have “never been better than the public alternative.” In some municipalities, businesses are privatizing public libraries, applying metrics such as numbers of books checked out to determine the pay of library workers. In the dawning age of privatization, the 1990s, the benefits were clear to the powers that be: It “allowed politicians to take a big step back from their responsibilities.” Now that even the conduct of war is largely in private hands, it’s difficult to put the genie back in the bottle—but, the authors argue convincingly, it’s essential that it be done.

A powerful case for returning public goods to public control rather than allowing them to enrich the few.
“A detailed account of patent law that, against all odds, turns out to be fascinating.”

THE GENOME DEFENSE

“Ike’s “Go-To Guy”

Overall, this is a lucidly written profile that paints a vivid picture not only of its principal subject, but also the age in which he lived.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“At the heart of this biography are two Infantrymen, father and son, subject and author, each wearing almost identical awards for valor. Ike’s Go-To Guy opens a new chapter for historians showing in great detail the pivotal role Paul T. Carroll played assisting Ike.”

—Major General Richard Chegan, Retired U.S. Army

HOW TO LIVE. WHAT TO DO
In Search of Ourselves in Life and Literature

Cohen, Josh
Pantheon (384 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-593-31620-7

A British psychoanalyst explores key stages of life through the illuminating stories of several relatable literary characters.

In his absorbing new book, Cohen, a professor of modern literary theory at Goldsmiths, University of London, and a practicing psychoanalyst, believes there’s a good deal of wisdom to be gleaned about our personal circumstances by reading fiction. He sets out to explore novels that are applicable to various life stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age and death. In each chapter, the author examines at least three significant novels, discussing relevant themes and narratives alongside his actual therapeutic cases, and occasionally reflecting on his own personal experiences. Cohen offers up a rich selection, combining several classic examples such as Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, To Kill a Mockingbird, and Mrs. Dalloway with lesser-known titles such as William Maxwell’s They Came Like Swallows or Christopher Isherwood’s A Single Man as well as more recent works such as Sally Rooney’s Conversations With Friends. Cohen’s analysis is uniformly insightful and well complemented by his case studies, but some readers may balk that his selections, with a few exceptions, represent primarily White American or British authors, their stories confined almost exclusively to a straight cultural perspective. A broader inclusion of racial and ethnic fictional examples would have enhanced this exercise, but Cohen still provides a compelling case for how and why reading fiction can enlighten our human experiences. “In fiction as in the consulting room,” he writes, “different life stories abound with mutual echoes and resonances, bringing out not only what our lives have in common, but what sets them apart. And this is where fiction and psychotherapy come into their own. We may recognize aspects of ourselves in a fictional character or psychotherapeutic case study; but we will also be struck by the singularity of each of them, their tenacious attachment to being themselves and no one else.”

An engrossing consideration of how reading fiction can lay a pathway for emotional and intellectual enrichment.

THE GENOME DEFENSE
Inside the Epic Legal Battle To Determine Who Owns Your DNA

Contreras, Jorge L.
Algonquin (432 pp.)
$27.95 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-61620-968-1

A superb lesson on patents in general and the grotesque American patent system in particular.

Everyone agrees that patents are essential to allow inventors to profit from their inventions, but what is “patentable” remains a subject of fierce debate, notes Contreras, who teaches intellectual property, science policy, and the law and ethics of genetics at the University of Utah. New machines, methods, or materials qualify, but naturally occurring substances don’t. As such, a botanist who discovers a previously unknown mushroom can’t patent it because he only found it; he didn’t invent it. Yet, somehow, genes qualify. During the 1970s and ’80s, genetic engineering exploded when courts began approving patents for genetically modified organisms, and entrepreneurs pushed the envelope by asking for and receiving patents on sequences of human DNA. “By late 1996,” writes Contreras, “the journal Nature reported that more than 350 new gene patent applications had been filed. Genes that could help to diagnose predispositions to more and more health conditions.” There was no shortage of religious and scientific argument in opposition, but
gene patents were legal, and changing a law requires legal arguments. Although it had never litigated a patent case, the ACLU decided in 2009 to take action and chose a target to maximize public interest. It focused on a woman who had a gene that put her at increased risk of developing breast or ovarian cancer, the test for which was in the hands of a company that owned the patent, monopolized the diagnostic test, and set a high price that insurance often did not cover. Having set the scene, Contreras assembles a large cast of lawyers, judges, activists, scientists, and patients and engagingly describes four years of tortuous legal action that saw victory in federal court, reversal on appeal, and a final triumph in the Supreme Court.

A detailed account of patent law that, against all odds, turns out to be fascinating.

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JAMES MADISON

_**America's First Politician**_

Cost, Jay

Basic (464 pp.)

$35.00 | Nov. 2, 2021

978-1-5416-9955-7

An admiring biography of America's fourth president.

James Madison (1751-1836) is known as the "Father of the Constitution." Madison agreed—but only in retirement. The son of an influential planter and already a widely admired Virginia leader, he arrived in Philadelphia in 1787 with plans for a fundamental redesign of American government. Cost delivers a vivid account of Madison's energetic efforts, followed by his role in the first Congress. Under his shrewd political leadership, that body produced tax laws and the Bill of Rights, among other significant accomplishments. "If Madison had suddenly dropped dead on September 29, 1789," writes Cost, "he would..."
still be remembered as one of the greatest Founding Fathers.” He did not, of course, and opposed Alexander Hamilton’s plans for a national bank, a national assumption of state debts, and policies to encourage industry (topics the author covered in his 2018 book, The Price of Greatness). Other historians claim that Madison reversed himself to become a Jeffersonian advocate of minimal government. However, Cost maintains that Madison remained consistent in affirming that government must ensure that its benefits were distributed equally. He opposed Hamilton’s proposals because they favored a privileged class. Jeffersonian ideals triumphed with the 1800 election, and Madison, serving as Jefferson’s secretary of state, enjoyed smooth sailing. By the time Madison became president in 1809, Hamilton was gone, but his realistic view of America’s place in the world trumped Jefferson’s virtuous, agrarian republic, which had no hope of dealing with powerful Britain. Unprepared for war in 1812, the U.S. bumbled through, but according to Cost, Madison showed his usual political acumen. Financing the war proved almost impossible, so he authorized a national bank. He supported internal improvements and the first protective tariff, co-opting Hamilton’s best economic ideas to lay the groundwork for America’s explosive growth.

One of many Madison biographies, Cost’s book deserves high marks as a skillful study of an iconic historical figure.

NOËL COWARD ON (AND IN) THEATRE
Coward, Noël
Ed. by Day, Barry
Knopf (496 pp.)
$40.00 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-525-65795-8

Writings by and about one of the 20th century’s most recognizable playwrights. Anyone who saw 2-year-old Noël Coward (1899-1973) being “forcibly removed from church for spontaneously dancing in the aisle to accompany the hymn being played” would not have been surprised by his eventual success as an actor, a playwright of light comedies such as Private Lives and Blithe Spirit, and a songwriter of innumerable witty classics. He never completed a book about the theater, but Day, who has edited previous works about Coward, has done it for him by compiling his “published writings, interviews, plays, stories, verse, lyrics and other people’s reminiscences.” The result is an illuminating collection of anecdotes, encomiums, and gripes about actors such as Gertrude Lawrence, who, when they were 14, “gave me an orange and told me a few mildly dirty stories, and I loved her from then onwards”; fellow playwrights such as “My colleague Will” Shakespeare, Somerset Maugham, and Arthur Miller, whose Death of a Salesman was “boring and embarrassing”; and more. Coward could be rigid in his beliefs. He proclaimed “intolerance of what I call pretentiousness in the Theatre” and maintained the theatre “is primarily intended for entertainment,” an opinion that might intrigue those who feel entertainment is big enough to include Coward’s frothy comedies as well as grittier fare. Day sometimes forgets to orient readers. He notes that a Mrs. Astley-Cooper “was to prove something of a thread through [Coward’s] early years” but doesn’t say who she was. Theater fans, however, will savor this portrait of a confident artist (“I am probably the best comedian alive”) whose wit wasn’t confined to the stage. When a waiter rushed a fork to him at a cocktail party as Coward struggled to balance his drink and canapés, a fellow guest said, “How come YOU get a fork?” Coward’s droll reply: “Well, I did write Cavalcade, you know.” An entertaining peek behind the curtain at 60 years in the theater.
“...sweeping narrative history of the United States....constantly reminds readers of Black men and women in America who were agitators, warriors, and participants....offers deliberate, precise descriptions of the South...”

“As CNN’s former Cairo bureau chief and Middle East correspondent, McNitt shows a sharp ability to distill decades of complicated material into an approachable story that carefully balances nuance with readability.... ideal history for general audiences that effectively incorporates contemporary scholarship.”

“A skillfully written account of the American past that challenges persistent, Whitewashed tropes.”

—Kirkus Reviews

FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL benmcnitt@gmail.com
BAGGAGE
Tales From a Fully Packed Life
Cumming, Alan
Dey Street/HarperCollins (288 pp.)
$27.99 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-06-243578-1

The acclaimed actor reflects on overcoming a painful past to make room for a fruitful future.

In his moving debut memoir, Not My Father’s Son (2014), Scottish actor and activist Cumming (b. 1965) urgently confessed to growing up in a sadistically abusive family and how that experience hobbled his adult life, suppressing his emotional maturity and limiting his capacity for happiness. In this wise, pensive, sometimes chatty book, the author examines how he has been able to embrace the painful memories embedded in his “splintered psyche” in order to move forward and face further challenges along the way. He shares stories of his strained eight-year heterosexual marriage and his deep dive into early theater roles to fill the void. From there, Cumming nonchronologically glances further back into his childhood and his burgeoning love of performance and drama school. In the 1990s, British theater gave way to glittery feature film junkets and side character roles in Hollywood; he includes an expanded memory about his work with Stanley Kubrick and Tom Cruise in Eyes Wide Shut. Cumming came out in the late 1990s after a momentous Tony Award–winning performance in Cabaret and a greatly anticipated relocation to New York City. The book’s midsection is aflutter with Hollywood anecdotes of stars, dalliances, and heartbreaks over men as well as the breathless first encounter with his husband, Grant. Thoughtful, candid revelations join with intimate confessions while Cumming’s witty repartee never falters. Regardless of his traumatic past, the memoir lifts the veil on a happier man who has “transcended and bloomed.” With heartfelt anecdotes and an honest perspective, Cumming shares the struggles and joys of a fulfilling life while making peace with the baggage of a troubled past.

Cathartic and revelatory, Cumming’s memoir will fascinate fans and those who relate to his internal struggle.

A SPLENDID INTELLIGENCE
The Life of Elizabeth Hardwick
Curtis, Cathy
Norton (400 pp.)
$35.00 | Nov. 16, 2021
978-1-324-00552-0

A respectfully measured biography of the famed literary critic and fiction writer.

Many readers may wonder why Elizabeth Hardwick (1916-2007) isn’t as recognized or widely read today as some of her equally formidable contemporaries—e.g., Mary McCarthy, Susan Sontag, and Joan Didion. Though Curtis never fully answers that quandary, treading carefully around some of the messier bits, she offers a sturdy biographical account that relates the key milestones of Hardwick’s personal and professional lives. Through sheer determination and intelligence, Kentucky-born Hardwick swiftly emerged as a highly influential voice in the postwar New York literary scene. She published two early novels, and her short fiction, essays, and reviews appeared in several notable publications. In 1962, she co-founded the New York Review of Books with her husband, poet Robert Lowell, and others. In 1979, she received attention for Sleepless Nights, an experimental and quasi-autobiographical novel, though she is best remembered for her criticism and essays. At the center of her life and this narrative was her turbulent 20-year marriage to Lowell. Throughout his frequent bipolar episodes and extramarital affairs, she remained tirelessly devoted to their marriage, until their final rift began when he included excerpts of Hardwick’s private letters within the sonnets in his 1973 collection The Dolphin. With many of Hardwick’s contemporaries no longer living, Curtis relies heavily on his strained eight-year heterosexual marriage and his deep dive into early theater roles to fill the void. From there, Cumming nonchronologically glances further back into his childhood and his burgeoning love of performance and drama school. In the 1990s, British theater gave way to glittery feature film junkets and side character roles in Hollywood; he includes an expanded memory about his work with Stanley Kubrick and Tom Cruise in Eyes Wide Shut. Cumming came out in the late 1990s after a momentous Tony Award–winning performance in Cabaret and a greatly anticipated relocation to New York City. The book’s midsection is aflutter with Hollywood anecdotes of stars, dalliances, and heartbreaks over men as well as the breathless first encounter with his husband, Grant. Thoughtful, candid revelations join with intimate confessions while Cumming’s witty repartee never falters. Regardless of his traumatic past, the memoir lifts the veil on a happier man who has “transcended and bloomed.” With heartfelt anecdotes and an honest perspective, Cumming shares the struggles and joys of a fulfilling life while making peace with the baggage of a troubled past.

Cathartic and revelatory, Cumming’s memoir will fascinate fans and those who relate to his internal struggle.
her subject’s published writing and correspondences. It’s not until later chapters, when Hardwick is teaching at Barnard, that we get some firsthand reflections. Prominent writers, including Ann Beattie, Mary Gordon, Susan Minot, and Elizabeth Benedict, recall Hardwick’s sharp intelligence and charismatic style yet also convey her tendency for being cruel and malicious. Indeed, Hardwick had a reputation for being unsparing in her literary criticism. Readers may wish for a less constrained exploration of this complex individual, but Curtis brings to light a cultural fixture deserving of more attention.

An engaging and well-documented yet somewhat anemic portrait of a brilliant and deeply opinionated writer.

THE HOW
Notes on the Great Work of Meeting Yourself
Daley-Ward, Trisa
Penguin (192 pp.)
$17.00 paper | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-14-313560-9

A heartfelt, artful manifesto focused on living fully and authentically.

Poet Daley-Ward addresses readers directly and speaks for them collectively, in addition to sharing her own experiences, in an earnest effort to offer them a reflection of themselves as well as their potential. “We must know,” she begins, “there are no truths but the ones that we arrive at on our own.” This admittedly indirect path—what she describes as “the great work of meeting yourself”—defines this book. The author includes exercises and affirmations designed to help readers examine and redefine what we think life is all about...what we think work is, and to release the idea that we must suffer and struggle for the things that we want.” She addresses feelings such as restlessness, dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression, insecurity, isolation, romance, self-compassion, gratitude, and grief, proposing solutions such as simplifying, writing down one’s dreams, and taking time every day away from the phone. She suggests myriad practices of self-inquiry to attune readers to their inner wisdom and joy. “If you are not spiritually fit right now,” she warns, “running anywhere else is pointless. The next place will never save you.” Other tidbits of advice include: “Just be more you: that’s the solution”; “We should always be letting go”; “You have to save yourself and worry about the rest later”; “Expression is relief, and surefire medicine.” Throughout this slim book, the author strikes a balance between self-help and confession. For example, when she shares her own knowledge that she can never look to anything external as a way out of herself—although that doesn’t stop her from trying—she opens up space for readers to reflect on their own accounts of avoidance and/or real desires. She creates connections, much like a circuit closing, and invites her audience on a voyage of self-discovery.

By turns simplistic, elegiac, and illuminative.

NICE WHITE LADIES
The Truth About White Supremacy, Our Role in It, and How We Can Help Dismantle It
Daniels, Jessie
Seal Press (304 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-5416-7586-5

An immensely readable examination of White women’s prominent role in the endurance of systematic racism.

Daniels, a professor of sociology and Africana studies, considers the many ways that White women—incarnated in the countless “Karen” memes on social media—have been active agents in perpetuating systems of inequality from which they benefit. These ways include being nonquestioning actors in hoarding wealth through inheritance, upholding segregation in schools, and cornering jobs at the expense of people.

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of color—all of which stubbornly maintain the political and economic imbalance between White and Black households. The “built-in advantage” of being a White woman is a legacy of the Colonial era, when “white women in the United States were enthusiastic in their cruelty as owners of enslaved people on plantations.” Affirmative Action, notes Daniels, has overwhelmingly helped White women in the workforce. White supremacy in the South and the lynching of Black men were predicated on the “protection” of White women, and that sense of fragility and entitlement was passed down through the generations. The author uses a wide array of examples of “nice white ladies” both on the right and the left, well-meaning feminists, purveyors of the “shallow promise of the wellness industry,” and “white savior moms” who adopt children of color, and she shows how this “intergenerational” racism is actually raising the mortality rates of White women. Daniels also discusses the tragic suicide of her mother, who, despite relative privilege, was “taught to be nice above all else”—like many White women. Daniels, who has clearly done the work of examining herself first, concludes by offering constructive ways White women can undo the damage of their privileged status by challenging and questioning as well as by cultivating alternate forms of family and kinship outside of the White nuclear family. “As white women,” she writes, “we need to tell the truth about ourselves and we need transformation.”

This significant study, both academic and personal, provides a well-lit path “to swerve away from white supremacy.”

THE ART OF REVISION
The Last Word
Davies, Peter Ho
Graywolf (172 pp.)
$14.00 paper | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-64445-019-9

A collection of essays that explores an elusive piece of the writing process.

As an English professor and novelist who has won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and PEN/Malamud Award, Davies is well situated to tackle the art of revision, which is often invisible, executed behind the scenes, with readers only privy to an author’s final draft. In his writing classes, Davies has found that many writers are reluctant to revise their drafts. The author attempts to shine light on this subject and break down barriers by exploring the revision processes of numerous popular writers as well as his own. Among the authors included in the discussion are Hemingway, Joyce, Flannery O’Connor, Raymond Carver, Lauren Groff, and Carmen María Machado. Davies also looks at other forms of writing that have benefitted from revision, including serial movies and TV series. As the author demonstrates—and as many aspiring writers will acknowledge—the first draft is often hard to let go. Having a first-is-best bias, some writers romanticize their inspirations and are reluctant to make changes. Davies offers another perspective from which writers should view their work. He is clear about the importance of revision, and ongoing project of discovery that allows authors the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of their stories and refine their intent—and their chosen title, if needed. Through the author’s close analysis of popular works, as well as insight on the topic from other writers, the power of this crucial step in the writing process is evident. But how does a writer know when enough is enough? Davies also discusses the risks associated with obsessive revision. Ultimately, in finding the sweet spot, the author suggests that the endpoint be “the point at which the opinions of others no longer burden us.”

A fresh perspective on revision that should inspire even apprehensive writers.

ESSAYS TWO
On Proust, Translation,
Foreign Languages, and the
City of Arles
Davis, Lydia
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (592 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-374-14886-7

A vivid portrait of the translating life. Davis is known for both her precise, uber-concise short fiction and her translations of Proust, Flaubert, and others. In this immersive collection, she offers a second (following Essays One) in-depth exploration of foreign languages and the art of translation. As a girl, learning German as a second language created a “hunger” in her to find out what words “mean.” The author begins by describing the 21 pleasures she gets from translating, including how it helps with her own writing; she enjoys subsuming herself in the writer and another culture and the pure joyous comfort that comes from it. She prefers beginning a translation without reading the book. Davis had already translated more than 30 French books before undertaking the daunting process, which she describes in luscious detail, of translating Proust’s Swann’s Way. In an essay on learning Spanish, she offers advice on how children should learn a foreign language, explaining how she learned by reading a Spanish translation of Tom Sawyer. Essays on translating “one kind of English to another”—e.g., converting Sidney Brooks’ memoir, Our Village, into a poem—and why she does these as experiments are fascinating. The experience of translating Michel Leiris’ The Rules of the Game “was heady because, for the first time in my translating life, I felt like a conduit through which the original French was effortlessly passing to become, instantly, an English equivalent, even a close English equivalent, in some way identical to the French, as though I had achieved some version of Borges’s Menardian ideal.” Other languages Davis discusses are Dutch, Gascon, and the “two kinds of Norwegian.” Taking on a new translation of the oft-translated Madame Bovary, Davis, the inveterate translator, writes, “the more the better.” Numerous examples of her and others’ translations are included throughout.

For those wondering what translators do and how they do it, this collection is a must.
The New Yorker columnist chronicles his mysterious ordeal with Lyme disease.

As Douthat chronicles in brisk detail, what began innocently enough with inchoate bodily aches and pains quickly intensified into “a pan-fry sizzle on my hips, a throbbing at the very front of my skull, an intolerable vibration inside my ankles.” When blood tests and body scans were inconclusive, stress was identified as the probable culprit. When the discomfort worsened, additional evaluations were sought, including a recommended evaluation by a psychiatrist, “my eleventh doctor in ten weeks,” who “told me that in his experience the kind of physical symptoms I was experiencing had to have some real physiological root, some cause beyond stress or psychosomatic collapse.” Exasperated with the unknowns, Douthat became overwhelmed while in the process of relocating back to New England with his family. The bizarre set of medical maladies and their inexplicable causes lends the narrative a surprising amount of suspense and literary tension. Desperate and aggravated after another misdiagnosis of fibromyalgia, the author began self-experimenting with an “insane regimen of drugs,” including antibiotics and a host of unorthodox herbal remedies, all of which proved only marginally effective. In educative chapters that describe the speculated origins and chronology of the resilient disease, Douthat maps out just how elusive accurate treatment can become and how the road to a definitive diagnosis can drag on through years of antibiotic trials. Consistently candid and often harrowing, Douthat’s eloquent prose injects shimmers of possibility into the seemingly hopeless situation he was forced to endure. As with many Lyme disease accounts, there is no happy ending nor a resounding diagnosis and effective treatment eradicating it from the lives

“A palpable patient experience of a pervasive disease that continues to confound medical science.”

THE DEEP PLACES
A Memoir of Illness & Discovery
Douthat, Ross
Convergent/Crown (224 pp.)
$26.00 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-593-23736-6

NOW ON AUDIBLE

“A former bank CEO offers forthright advice in this debut business book.”

“In three succinct but informative parts, Wilcox expounds on leadership principles and qualities, building teams and managing during change, all anchored by a strong emphasis on corporate culture.”

“An illuminating bird’s-eye view of leadership.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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HTTPS://LEADINGTHROUGHCULTURE.ORG/CONTACT • WWW.LEADINGTHROUGHCULTURE.ORG
of sufferers. The author's persistence in conquering Lyme disease's “impenetrable-seeming wall of opposition and denial” bleeds across each page. Douthat’s explorations of bioweaponized theories for Lyme's origins are unconvincing, but they don't ruin the impact of his message.

A palpable patient experience of a pervasive disease that continues to confound medical science.

**IN TRUMP’S SHADOW**

**The Battle for 2024 and the Future of the GOP**

Druker, David M.

Twelve (288 pp.)

$29.00 | Oct. 19, 2021

978-1-9587-5404-7

The GOP is Trump’s plaything. But is he the only presence on the playground? Washington Examiner senior correspondent Drucker doesn’t mean to read the tea leaves—so he suggests, anyway—as much as he wants to lay out possible scenarios to game the next electoral cycle and beyond. Trump has been making dark noises about running again, seeking revenge for his humiliating defeat. (The author allows that there are far too many people who don’t acknowledge that defeat, though, reading between the lines of a Mar-a-Lago conversation with him, Trump himself seems to have accepted the fact.) But then, Drucker writes, every other person positioning for a race “will be running as the next Trump,” so much so that his presence is hardly required. One of them is the Arkansas junior senator, Tom Cotton, groomed by Mitch McConnell to take a leading role in the Republican Congress and a person who amounts to what “a sophisticated version of Donald Trump [might] have looked like.” Cotton is definitively on track for a presidential run—if not in 2024, then in the years beyond. Never mind that he has absolutely no charisma. As Drucker writes, “he just doesn’t give a shit,” a quality that too many voters admire. The author also looks at Nikki Haley, the South Carolina governor who dared resist Trump even while working for him; Chris Christie, the sometime Trump confidant; Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who “is already running for president, if you ask most Republicans,” waging a ceaseless culture war on the non-QAnon contingent; and of course Ted Cruz, who just won’t go away. Drucker even includes the Trump family among the contenders, though he reckons that it’s Don Jr., who has been busily building networks among the Republican establishment that his father scorned, most likely to enter the field.

For those laying odds on 2024, Drucker delivers an opinionated, well-reasoned, and often depressing score card.

**A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE FUTURE**

**What the Laws of Biology Tell Us About the Destiny of the Human Species**

Dunn, Rob

Basic (320 pp.)

$28.00 | Nov. 9, 2021

978-1-5416-1930-2

A stimulating exploration into how the laws of biology can help us “understand the future into which we are—arms flailing, coal burning, and full speed ahead—hurling ourselves.”

Describing the havoc humans are wreaking on the planet is a fertile subject, but this challenging book focuses on what we think we know about nature but don’t. Dunn, a professor of applied ecology, notes that life is far vaster and unexplored than we imagine and that our default approach to nature seems to be an attempt to hold it back. He adds that those who study nature learn by studying isolated systems such as islands, where ecologists learn how species arrive, evolve, prosper, and go extinct. Recently, they have turned their attention to human-made habitats. The largest are farms and cities. Just as new species appear on islands, the same is true in human ecosystems. Rats, mice, pigeons, and weeds are evolving, and eventually each city will have its own species adapted to the local surroundings. Mostly, they eat, uninvited, from our plates, but humans still prefer these habitats. Today, the entire world is becoming a human ecosystem: Wild animals make up just 3% of the vertebrate biomass; domestic animals make up 65%, and the rest are humans. While cutting down forests and paving swamps, humans also began warming the world, which is good for diseases and parasites. In the near future, thanks to our profligate ways, Earth will be more pleasant for insects and microorganisms and less so for humans. “We can find ways to survive...just not forever,” Dunn warns. “Eventually we will go extinct. All species do.” Dealing reasonably with the circumstances requires knowledge and imagination. The author avoids the usual implausible how-to-fix-it conclusion: worldwide cooperation, self-denial, scientific breakthroughs, unpopular (and therefore unlikely) government actions. Instead, he offers a book that is less doomsday prophecy and more excellent primer on ecology and evolution.

An imaginative, sensible education for those concerned with the fate of the Earth.
“Dyson is forgiving of certain aspects of White myopia, but he is a sharp critic, as when he assails Barack Obama for having not played the race card enough.”

**ENTERTAINING RACE**

*Performing Blackness in America*

Dyson, Michael Eric  
St. Martin’s (352 pp.)  
$28.99 | Nov. 2, 2021  
978-1-2501-3597-1

Theologian and public intellectual Dyson turns a gimlet eye on the stereotypes and authentic expressions of Black self-presentation.

The author begins on a disturbing note: A young Black girl on a slave ship is lashed to death because she refuses to dance for the crew. Since that day in 1792 and well before, Black men, women, and children have been hidden to perform. “Black folk only exist,” writes Dyson, “when they are forced to adopt a narrow philosophy of life that is part Descartes, part Nas: *Ut praestare, ergo sum*, I perform, therefore I am.” Some artists perform more or less on their own terms, as in the case of Prince. Some do so by following strange self-erasing paths, as in the case of Michael Jackson, whom Dyson likens to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Benjamin Button. As for Beyoncé, “the greatest entertainer in the world,” the author seems to locate her somewhere in the middle. Given the absence of both Prince and Jackson, “Beyoncé now reigns supreme, alone, atop a kingdom of performance that she inherited from a Prince and a King but which she has made even greater.” Dyson writes with a broad, well-learned view of Black history, drawing on the brilliant career of Kobe Bryant here and the sad death of George Floyd there to discuss representations of Black life in American culture, which, he writes, illustrate the words of a Baptist hymn often heard in his church: “Nobody told me that the road would be easy.” He is forgiving of certain aspects of White myopia, but he is a sharp critic, as when he assails Barack Obama for having not played the race card enough: “if whites won’t remind him that he’s Black, then he won’t remind them that they’re white.” As for that uneasy road? In a stirring conclusion, Dyson urges that we all follow it to fulfill the grand, incomplete promise of America.

A thoughtful, elegantly argued contribution to the literature of Black lives in America.

**INVISIBLE CHILD**

*Poverty, Survival & Hope in an American City*

Elliott, Andrea  
Random House (624 pp.)  
$30.00 | Oct. 5, 2021  
978-0-8129-8694-5

A Pulitzer Prize–winning New York Times reporter offers an immersive portrait of the life of a fearless girl in a tightknit but desperately impoverished family of 10. In this moving but occasionally flat narrative, Elliott follows Dasani for eight years, beginning in 2012 when she was 11 years old and living in a one-room, rodent-infested apartment in a New York City homeless shelter with nine others: her mother, stepfather, and seven siblings. Dasani is a “parentified child”—a de facto mother to the younger ones—as her overwhelmed and unemployed elders fight hunger, evictions, and the dread that a child protection agency will split up the family. Sometimes Dasani catches a break—most notably, when she earned a spot at the free Milton Hershey boarding school in Pennsylvania, where she excelled at first. But she acted out and was expelled when—after devastating setbacks for her family—her worst fears materialized: Her parents temporarily lost custody of their children, who were sent to three separate foster homes. The villains in this catastrophe include alarmingly inadequate legal and child-protective services—among them a foster care agency that placed two of Dasani’s sisters in a violent household. Elliott’s account of the tumult resembles a series of stitched-together newspaper articles; it’s heroically researched but tends to give each incident a similar emotional weight.
whether involving a murder or a harmless gender-reveal party. The book is at least 100 pages too long, and its generally benign picture of Hershey doesn’t mention a well-known sexual abuse scandal there. A more selective chronicle might have given this important book a better chance to find the audience its urgent message deserves.

A poignant but overlong story of an impoverished girl’s efforts to survive a turbulent childhood.

SEED MONEY
Monsanto’s Past and Our Food Future
Elmore, Bartow J.
Norton (464 pp.)
$30.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-324-00204-8

Digging deep into the murky world of the agrochemical giant.

By 2005, Monsanto had become the world’s largest seller of seeds. Elmore, a professor of environmental and business history and author of Citizen Coke (2016), has done his homework to deliver an insightful chronicle of Monsanto since its 1901 founding. Struggling with vicious competition, it faced bankruptcy for years before turning the corner with its major products, saccharine and caffeine, and a big customer: Coca-Cola. In a forecast of what was to come, Monsanto fought off government efforts to brand both as toxic adulterants. Diversifying into chemicals in the 1920s, Monsanto hit the jackpot after 1935 with its monopoly on polychlorinated biphenyls, essential in electrical insulation, paints, and plastics. PCBs turned out to be fiercely toxic, led to a torrent of litigation, and were ultimately banned. Turning from industry to agriculture after World War II, Monsanto produced powerful herbicides that were spread over huge areas of Vietnam as defoliants, devastating that nation’s forests and sickening innumerable Vietnamese and Americans exposed to it. Monsanto’s bestseller today, Roundup Ready, are seeds genetically engineered to tolerate herbicides. Resistant seeds now produce more than 90% of the cotton, corn, and soybeans in the U.S. and are spreading across the world. They seemed miraculous when introduced during the 1990s, but they cost more and don’t increase yields. Herbicide-resistant weeds are spreading, and Monsanto continues to fiercely defend its patents. Elmore admits that the Earth could not support 8 billion humans without high-tech agriculture and chemicals. The future will require more, but we’ve underestimated their dangers and surrendered too much control to institutions whose priority is making a profit and who spread disease and destruction to achieve it. Elmore’s gimlet eye reveals that, although an energetic and creative enterprise, Monsanto did not break the mold. For more alarming information about Roundup, pair this book with Stephanie Seneff’s Toxic Legacy (2021).

An astute, evenhanded history of a business often portrayed, with good reason, as a villain.

RAISE A FIST, TAKE A KNEE
Race and the Illusion of Progress in Modern Sports
Feinstein, John
Little, Brown (384 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 16, 2021
978-0-316-54093-3

One of our most prolific sportswriters examines race and racism in sports.

Black players are prevalent in many areas of professional and college sports. Of the front office and the coaching staff, writes Feinstein, the representation is more skewed. One of the subjects of this fine book is George Raveling, the pioneering Black coach who took the helm of Washington State’s basketball program in 1972 and led it to two NCAA tournaments. “Where I grew up,” he tells Feinstein, “if you were Black, there wasn’t much chance to dream. It was all about survival.” Nonetheless, during his time at Villanova, Raveling played alongside 10 other Black students, all of whom were exemplary. All graduated in four years, half have doctorates, one earned a gold medal in the Olympics, another headed a major corporation. Given equal opportunities, executive performance by Black and White coaches is, yes, equal. However, as Feinstein notes, only one NFL coach has ever been fired after a 10–6 season, and that one was Lovie Smith, who is Black—even though he had led the Chicago Bears to a Super Bowl and three playoff berths and been named Coach of the Year. Protests sometimes make a mark, but mostly not. Even with the famed case of Colin Kaepernick and the spread of his custom of taking a knee, the result has been mostly White rage. One Sunday soon after Kaepernick’s first protest, Feinstein notes, “more than two hundred NFL players either knelt or stayed in the locker room during the playing of the anthem. The issue came roaring back—which may have been what Trump wanted: make white America angry at Black America.” Racial tension is endemic and at every level of the game. As Feinstein writes near the end, only a few analysts and sportswriters are Black—and no matter what the race, all “are under what amounts to a gag order on air,” forbidden to raise thorny issues.

A sobering, carefully written assessment of ongoing inequalities dotted with small victories.

THE BROKEN CONSTITUTION
Lincoln, Slavery, and the Refounding of America
Feldman, Noah
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (384 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-374-11664-4

An astute exploration of Abraham Lincoln’s legal mind as he wrestled with the pro-slavery compromises of the Constitution—and transformed it.

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An astute exploration of Abraham Lincoln’s legal mind as he wrestled with the pro-slavery compromises of the Constitution—and transformed it.
First and foremost, Lincoln was a lawyer. Though he was personally disgusted by slavery—especially after seeing New Orleans’ slave markets, the largest in North America, when he was a young man—he grasped that the Constitution protected the institution in order for the states to work together as a union. Feldman, a Harvard law professor, lays out the central compromises of the Founding Fathers, enshrined in the Constitution in order to ensure Southern ratification: the three-fifths provision, protecting slave importation for 20 years, and the fugitive slave law. In his early forays into politics, Lincoln, a devotee of Henry Clay, followed the new Whig Party line that slavery would just fade away. However, as the author shows, the invention of the cotton gin changed all that, fueling the debate over whether new states should be slaveholding or free. Lincoln had to come to terms with this “compromise Constitution” as essentially a tool to facilitate national expansion. Yet the rebellion of the Southern states shattered this uneasy compromise, and as president, Lincoln resolved that the rebels could be coerced back into the Union. “By this logic,” writes Feldman, “Lincoln had to break the Constitution in order to fulfill his oath to uphold it.” Lincoln's controversial—dictatorial, by some estimations—edicts included the suspension of habeas corpus, censorship of the press, and the freeing of the slaves. Feldman offers an elucidating look into Lincoln's incremental thinking, neatly demonstrating how he articulated the “before” and “after” Constitution in the Gettysburg Address as a compromise versus a moral document, using an Old Testament/New Testament analogy that embodied equality for all promised in the Declaration of Independence. Feldman never bogs down in legalese, rendering a scholarly topic accessible for general readers.

A marvelously intricate work on Lincoln's writings and thoughts, which continue to offer fodder for historians.

What Just Happened
Notes on a Long Year
Finch, Charles
Knopf (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-593-31907-9

Sharp observations of a dizzying year. Agreeing to a request from the Los Angeles Times, critic, essayist, and mystery writer Finch began documenting his experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown beginning in March 2020, when the future seemed hardly imaginable. As a financially secure, Yale-educated White man living comfortably in LA, the author realized that he was far more fortunate than many Americans. An emergency room physician friend in New York made him deeply aware of Covid’s assault on the city that had become the epicenter of the virus. During the height of the pandemic, Finch got out of the house for long walks, connected on Zoom, and occasionally met with a few friends for a socially distanced drink. “Life is simple,” he reflects. “Don’t go anywhere and be afraid.” Although related with appealing candor, much of what Finch notes may well seem overly familiar to readers: a dearth of paper goods and hand sanitizer in the early days of quarantine; hopes of quickly containing the virus; alarming statistics from around the world; anger over the murder of George Floyd; sadness about the deaths of John Lewis and Ruth Bader Ginsburg; Trump’s absurd remarks (an injection of bleach, anyone?) revealed “how things happened every day, sometimes every hour, that you would throw your body in front of a car to stop.” As death numbers mounted, Finch realized that “anyone can find a story of a person that’s almost like them dying.” The narrative is freshest when the author hews closest to his own life: the childhood illness that left him immunocompromised; the consolations of smoking weed, listening to music (Taylor Swift is a favorite, the Beatles a happy rediscovery), reading and writing—and especially his tender remembrance of his grandmother, the minimalist artist Anne Truitt. His radiant portrait of Truitt shines as a transcendent ending to his chronicle of a dark year, when everything seemed to be “trembling at the edges.”

A spirited testimony to hard times.

The Last Winter
The Scientists, Adventurers, Journeymen, and Mavericks Trying To Save the World
Fox, Porter
Little, Brown (320 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-316-46092-7

Think these last few years of climate change have been weird? You haven’t seen anything yet, Fox warns in this ominous though beautifully written book.

“Things on earth are never the same for long,” observes writer and traveler Fox, who divides his time between Brooklyn and, it seems, everywhere else in the world. Transitory, however, doesn’t always mean natural. The author worries in particular that winter is disappearing. For heat lovers, warm winters might be welcome, but winter has a regulatory function that is essential to our planet’s heating and cooling systems and to its water supply. A new aridity now dries our forests and makes them vulnerable to wildfire. “The eight most fire-ravaged years in recorded history had all seen historically low snowpacks,” writes Fox. Indeed, much of Siberia, which has lately been seeing summer temperatures above 100 degrees, burns in season; Fox notes that a recent fire covered an area as large as the country of Greece, which, of course, has been blazing away this summer. The author has traveled widely to interview ski bums, glaciologists, Indigenous hunters, and explorers, and he smoothly incorporate their takes into the narrative. He often writes with a light hand—e.g., “it struck me that if Jesus had bought a snowmobile and a pair of skis, and spent sixty days a year skiing bottomless powder.” Jesus on skis is a nice conceit,
but Fox’s work is deeply grounded in science, as when he notes that in the Alps, “nearly every glacier under 11,500 feet is predicted to vanish in the next twenty to thirty years.” It’s the kind of book John McPhee would write if he were abroad in wintry places, and we’re fortunate that Fox has taken his place.

An essential addition to the library of climate change and one that ought to spur readers to do something about it.

BORN IN BLACKNESS
Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War
French, Howard W.
Liveright/Norton (464 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-63149-582-3

A Black journalist reframes modern history by restoring Africa to its rightful place at the center of the story.

In his latest sweeping book, French, a journalism professor at Columbia and former New York Times foreign correspondent, argues that Europe’s conquest of the world was driven not by a desire for access to Asia, but rather a yearning for the modernity and economic prosperity of Africa. The author believes that restoring Africa’s true place in world history and current affairs is a step toward combatting the racist “diminishment, trivialization, and erasure” of Africans from world history. To this end, French traces “the deeply twinned and tragic history of Africa and Europe that began with geopolitical collisions in the fifteenth century.” The author maintains a particular focus on the roles of African gold, sugar, and slavery in shaping the modern global economy. Throughout, French dispels countless historical myths, including many that render Africans disempowered victims rather than key actors. For example, the author recounts how, in the 1440s, Portugal stopped raiding African countries for slaves, opting instead to negotiate trade agreements with powerful African leaders who profited from the sale of their own people. French also describes the ways in which—despite being painted as a backward continent—African industries were more sophisticated than European ones. The Portuguese were especially covetous of textiles and metalwork Africans produced using complex techniques unknown in Europe. The author effectively argues that these early beginnings shaped the Western world.

A fascinating retelling of modern history that restores Africa to its rightful place.

THE CONTAGION NEXT TIME
Galea, Sandro
Oxford Univ. (280 pp.)
$24.95 | Nov. 1, 2021
978-0-19-757842-7

The Covid-19 pandemic is not a one-off catastrophe. An epidemiologist presents a cogent argument for a fundamental refocusing of resources on “the foundational forces that shape health.”

In this passionate and instructive book, Galea, dean of the Boston University School of Public Health, writes that Covid emerged because we have long neglected basic preventative measures. “We invest vast amounts of money in healthcare,” he writes, “but comparatively little in health.” Readers looking to learn how governments (mainly the U.S.) mishandled the pandemic have a flood of books to choose from, but Galea has bigger issues to raise. Better medical care will not stop the next epidemic, he warns. We must structure a world “that is resilient to contagions.” He begins by describing the current state of world health, where progress has been spectacular. Global life expectancy has more than doubled since 1900. Malnutrition, poverty, and child mortality have dropped. However, as the author stresses repeatedly, medical progress contributed far less to the current situation than better food, clean water, hygiene, education, and prosperity. That’s the good news. More problematic is that money is a powerful determinant of health; those who have it live longer. Galea begins the bad news by pointing out the misleading statistic that Covid-19 kills less than 1% of those infected; that applies to young people in good health. For those over 60, it kills 6%, for diabetics, over 7%, and those with heart disease, over 10%. It also kills more Blacks than Whites, more poor than middle-class people, and more people without health insurance. The author is clearly not just interested in Covid. He attacks racism, sexism, and poverty in equal measure, making a plea for compassion toward stigmatized conditions such as obesity and addiction. He consistently urges the U.S. government, which has spared no expense and effort to defeat the pandemic, to do the same for social injustice.

An oft-ignored but fully convincing argument that “we cannot prevent the next pandemic without creating a healthy world.”

A (VERY) SHORT HISTORY OF LIFE ON EARTH
4.6 Billion Years in 12 Pithy Chapters
Gee, Henry
St. Martin’s (288 pp.)
$24.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-250-27665-0

The title tells it all.

Nature senior editor Gee spends only two pages on the beginning of Earth,
when a cloud of dust circling the sun coalesced into a planet about 4.6 billion years ago. The infant Earth was molten rock that eventually cooled enough for atmospheric water to condense into oceans, and it’s amazing, as the author rightly notes, how quickly it appeared—perhaps 100 million years after the planet formed. Early Earth lacked oxygen, so there was no ozone layer in the upper atmosphere to block the sun’s ultraviolet rays, which sterilized everything above the surface of the sea. Consequently, primitive bacteria lived deep in the ocean for at least 1 billion years until some evolved pigments that absorbed these rays to produce sugar. This was photosynthesis.

Its fiercely reactive waste product, oxygen, produced the first ozone layer in the upper atmosphere to block the sun’s ultraviolet rays, which sterilized everything above the surface of the sea. Consequently, primitive bacteria lived deep in the ocean for at least 1 billion years until some evolved pigments that absorbed these rays to produce sugar. This was photosynthesis.

As Gee relates, it was another several billion years before primitive bacteria (prokaryotes) evolved into advanced bacteria (eukaryotes), which accelerated evolution, forming multicellular life forms by 800 million years ago as well as the first animals—sponges. Life moved onto land 500 million years ago and broke its dependence on the sea not through legs (some fish have legs) but with hard-shelled eggs and seeds. Racing through dinosaurs and mammals, Gee introduce apes less than two-thirds into the text and hominins a few pages later. Readers should be chastened at his conclusion, shared by most scientists, that Homo sapiens is making its habitat—the Earth—progressively less habitable and will become extinct in a few thousand years. For a primer on evolution, readers might prefer Andrew Knoll’s A Brief History of Earth (2021) for one reason: illustrations. Gee writes lucid, accessible prose, but readers of his thorough descriptions of long-extinct creatures or explanations of how body parts evolved will yearn in vain for pictures.

A serviceable history of life that one wishes were more comprehensive.

BLOODY CROSSROADS 2020
Art, Entertainment, and Resistance to Trump
Goldberg, Danny
Illus. by Kasparbauer, Kay
Akashic (280 pp.)
$25.95 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-61775-979-6

A look at the intersection of politics and art during our most recent annus horribilis.

Two Republicans recently in office, Trump and Reagan, came to politics by way of show business, “not anomalies but products of a political mindset that saw entertainment as one of the levers that generated populist political power.” Democrats have been a touch more sanguine about the political uses of the entertainment industry; but as Goldberg notes, the industry has generally tilted their way. Still, culture often leads politics. The author takes as a prime example the way in which TV shows such as Will & Grace, Ellen, and Modern Family helped place LGBTQ-issues in the mainstream and enhance public acceptance of gay marriage. Before Trump, he notes, only one TV entertainment program, the Jon Stewart–helmed Daily Show, centered on politics; with Trump, nearly every such show took up political discourse. Meanwhile, stars such as Taylor Swift, who had been carefully apolitical—and, Goldberg notes, had become an unwitting idol of the neo-Nazi movement—before, rose in opposition to Trump and his base. “For many artists, Trump’s victory reflected a broad and sinister authoritarian agenda,” writes the author, and the result was an outpouring of productions such as the series rendering of Philip Roth’s novel The Plot Against America. Trump bloviated via Twitter about the array of entertainers and culture influencers lined up against him—many, like Swift, inspired to take up rhetorical arms against his agenda thanks merely to his awfulness: Fran Drescher, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, John Legend, and numerous others all made a stand, even as Trump got worse and worse. Goldberg’s text often plods, more dutiful than rapt, as he enumerates those against Trump (and few pro, mostly has-beens like Scott Baio). One thing’s for sure: The One America News Network crew will be more sure than ever that Hollywood is a leftist cabal.

More drab than the subject needs, but a cleared-overview of the modern interaction of culture and politics.

ELECTRIFY: An Optimist’s Playbook for Our Clean Energy Future
Griffith, Saul
MIT Press (272 pp.)
$24.95 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-262-04623-7

Positive news on climate change from an expert.

The degradation is well underway, and matters will get worse before they get better. However, according to this enthusiastic account by engineer and MacArthur fellow Griffith, real change is possible with today’s scientific know-how and an energetic effort. Overcoming the problem of global climate change—essentially by reducing carbon-dioxide emissions to zero—requires a tricky combination of politics and technology. Largely avoiding politics, Griffith emphasizes technology. His solution is to electrify everything. “America can reduce its energy use by more than half by introducing no other efficiency measures other than electrification,” he writes. This climate-friendly future will contain the usual familiar objects in our lives, affecting cars, homes, offices, appliances, etc., but miraculous breakthroughs (fusion power, sucking carbon from the atmosphere) won’t be necessary. Griffith warns that America is stuck in the 1970s mindset of conservation with the mantra “Reduce! Reuse! Recycle.” This has produced great improvements in gas mileage and home insulation and more efficient appliances, but you can’t “efficiency” your way to zero. In a torrent of technical explanation, graphs, and tables, Griffith shows how solar and wind power are already cheaper despite massive subsidies and tax breaks that support fossil fuel companies. He proposes that the government subsidize upfront costs of switching—about $40,000 per
household—by guaranteeing low-interest “climate loans.” As he notes, “if US policymakers can offer [these loans] at the right rate, the transition to clean energy will start saving us today.” To critics proclaiming that the Green New Deal would be a budget-busting government handout, he points out that the U.S. has launched similar programs in the past. For example, it began subsidizing long-term home mortgages in 1933, and predictions of a massive loss of taxpayer money never happened. Indeed, writes Griffith, the result will be prosperity: more jobs and less poverty, with no sacrifice of our current lifestyle.

Surprisingly optimistic, realistic, and persuasive.

BREATHING LESSONS
A Doctor’s Guide to Lung Health
Han, MeilK.
Norton (192 pp.)
$25.00 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-393-86662-9

A concise and accessible look into one of the body’s most “incredible” organs.

The heart, brain, and sex organs have long dominated popular health writing, but Covid-19 has raised the profile of the lungs; readers seeking a painless introduction will find it here. Pulmonologist Han, professor of medicine at the University of Michigan and national spokesperson for the American Lung Association, clearly has an abiding love for her favorite organ, which “provides our bodies with life-giving oxygen, rids us of excess carbon dioxide, and regulates the blood’s acid-base balance while also moving air past our vocal cords and nose, allowing us to speak, sing, and even smell.” Unfortunately, the lungs suffer from neglect in government and the health care industry; compared with heart disease, research on lung disease is trivial. We’re familiar with the blood pressure cuff, but few industry; compared with heart disease, research on lung disease are associated with his company, Beepers Plus. As a bonus, he offered her $50 for each one she accepted. Thinking that the packages contained only items associated with C’s business, Haynes accepted. Later, Haynes discovered that the seemingly innocuous packages were filled with marijuana, which she learned only when the police accused her of conspiring with C to sell drugs. Despite going to trial and pleading innocent, Haynes was sentenced to seven years in prison. This experience would inform the rest of her life. “I was one person—young, female, and Black—against a much larger, much stronger force, whose intentions, it seemed, were not to serve and protect but to intimidate and harass,” she writes. “To fit me into whatever narrative they had dreamed up and then punish me accordingly.” The author’s story is both inspiring and heartbreaking, and her voice is simultaneously impassioned and informed. Haynes is adept at using her personal experience to illustrate general truths about the flaws in the criminal justice system as well as specific avenues for reform.

A gripping, passionate memoir about a wrongly incarcerated Black woman’s drive for judicial reform.
Headlee joins authors such as Ijeoma Oluo (So You Want To Talk About Race) and Robert Livingston (The Conversation) in offering practical suggestions for thinking about, and talking about, racism. Headlee’s mixed-race heritage—she identifies as a “light-skinned Black Jew”—and “non-race-specific features” have allowed her “to see the racial underpinnings of our society in a way that most can’t, or don’t.” Defining a racist as “someone who makes assumptions about another person (either positive or negative) because of their perceived race or ethnicity,” an attitude not limited to White supremacists, Headlee provides questions and exercises for self-evaluation. Drawing on research from neuroscience, psychology, political science, and sociology, as well as ideas from Buddhist thought and philosophy, the author offers a road map for crafting productive conversations that, she contends, “have the power to change hearts. Among her suggestions are engaging with others through curiosity, fostering empathy, and listening actively. She advocates “using a series of questions intended to increase your understanding” of someone else’s views while also encouraging them “to think through their ideas on a deeper level than they may have before.” Even when disagreeing on important issues, it’s possible to develop a meaningful relationship with someone “simply by spending time with them.” Commonalities, Headlee asserts, “help to build bridges of empathy.” Regarding conversational strategies, she advises that we take turns talking: “Before anyone states their own opinion, they should restate what they heard from the other person, making sure they’ve articulated their ideas accurately.” The author focuses most on private interchanges. In the workplace, businesses trying to promote diversity often employ unproductive methods that do not lead to a change in culture. True inclusivity requires “specific policies,” and it’s vital to realize that “silence is complicity.”

A thoughtful, enlightening guide that joins a host of others addressing persistent racism.

THE WIRES OF WAR
Technology and the Global Struggle for Power
Jacob Helberg
Avid Reader Press (384 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-982144-43-2

Disturbing news about the wireless world.

Helberg, senior adviser at the Stanford University Center on Geopolitics and Technology, spent four years at Google trying to eliminate disinformation from its search engine. In the process, he discovered that world autocracies, led by Russia and China, are conducting a cyberwar with democracies, and winning. In 2016, “on election night, the trolls in St. Petersburg popped champagne, toasted one another, and crowed, ‘We made America great.’” Helberg reminds readers that, 20 years ago, pundits proclaimed that the internet’s unstoppable freedom of expression would destroy autocracies. Few say that now. The internet has instead accelerated “truth decay,” where the click of a mouse supports any outlandish opinion. Those who suspect that illegal immigrants started this summer’s forest fires need only search for the terms “forest fires” and “immigrants” to discover that they have plenty of misinformed company. Though the U.S. has largely controlled the internet’s expansion, builds most of the storage and transmission infrastructure, and makes the rules, its leadership days are numbered. China’s Huawei, by far the world’s largest telecom company, dominates 5G, the revolutionary successor to today’s network that will vastly accelerate data and phone transmission. Furthermore, Chinese manufacturers make “a staggering 90 percent of the world’s mobile phones.” In his how-to-fix-it conclusion, the author emphasizes that America’s “digital defense of democracy” must become a national security priority. The U.S. must also establish a “Western 5G alternative,” massively increase technical aid to developing countries, and promote cyber sanctions to protect the free internet. Helberg is entirely correct in his assessment that this will require overhauling science and engineering education and expanding government-business cooperation, all of which will lead to a modern “Sputnik moment” similar to that following the 1957 Soviet satellite launch, which ended in triumph when the U.S. landed an astronaut on the moon.

Unnervingly convincing evidence that time is running out in the “gray war” with the enemies of freedom.
and self-doubt recur: “How to be miserable—compare yourself to other people,” she wrote in 1979, when she already was a successful author. Love affairs, many defined by “powerful attraction and powerful aversion,” could be elating, then disappointing: “It is very tiring to be in love.” Highsmith was often beset by worry about money, fear of losing creative inspiration, restlessness, and loneliness. She had a fractious relationship with her mother, hurt by her mother’s “jealousy, malice, ambiguity, vacillation [and] mixture of feelings toward me.” Humanity could dismay her: Describing her as “rough around the edges,” von Planta notes that Highsmith’s racist, antisemitic, and misanthropic remarks intensified as she aged. Although von Planta cautions that the volume is not an autobiography, it is surely the closest that readers will come to one.

An admirably edited volume for scholars and voracious fans.

BROTHERS IN ARMS
One Legendary Tank Regiment’s Bloody War From D-Day to VE-Day
Holland, James
Atlantic Monthly (576 pp.)
$32.00 | Nov. 16, 2021
978-0-8021-5908-3

A fine account of the brutal daily experiences of a celebrated British tank regiment.

World War II historiography received a shot in the arm with Stephen Ambrose’s 1992 book, Band of Brothers, which eschewed the traditional campaigns-and-commanders format to describe a single unit’s experience. In his latest, veteran military historian Holland, author of more than 10 books about WWII, tries his hand successfully with the Sherwood Rangers. A British cavalry regiment throughout World War I, in 1942, the Rangers converted to armor in time to fight at El Alamein and then across North Africa. Withdrawn to Britain, they trained throughout early 1944 and then came ashore on Gold Beach on D-Day. This book is the result of massive research in British and American archives, plus a few interviews with survivors, and the author includes a generous selection of maps and photos. The text is best suited for military buffs, as Holland delivers an intense, 400-page description of the regiment’s nearly yearlong battle across France, Belgium, and Germany. An expert military historian, the author steps back regularly from battlefield fireworks to explain tactics and technical details. The Rangers mostly drove American Sherman tanks, denigrated from the beginning for having smaller guns and less armor than German tanks, but Holland records few complaints. They were reliable, easy to operate, and quick to repair compared to German behemoths, and they could fire a shell every three seconds. The regiment’s Shermans destroyed many Tigers and Panthers, and shells that bounced off distracted their operators. Readers who assume that it was safer to be inside a tank will quickly realize their error thanks to Holland’s precise accounts. Casualties were high, and deaths often gruesome from burns or suffocation. Many popular historians write that German resistance collapsed once the Allies crossed the Rhine, but this wasn’t the experience of the Rangers, who fought and died until a few days before the end.

One of the better recent blow-by-blow chronicles of a World War II unit.

LIBERTY IS SWEET
The Hidden History of the American Revolution
Holton, Woody
Simon & Schuster (800 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-4767-5037-8

A thoroughgoing work of scholarship that debunks many myths about the American Revolution by incorporating the full story involving Native Americans, African Americans, and women as participants.

In his latest, Bancroft Prize–winning historian Holton, author of Unruly Americans (2007) and other acclaimed works of Revolutionary era history, delineates the story of the conflict in all its complexity, contradictions, and “multiple dimensions.” He begins with the lessons of the French and Indian War, when Britain chased France out of North America, during which arose interest groups focused on taxes, trade, territory, treasury notes, and other issues. It also taught the colonists, who were largely pro-British, the value of the land they were stealing from Indigenous peoples. Holton masterfully describes the slow process of accepting independence from the mother country. The poor embraced the idea of participation in a democracy more enthusiastically than the wealthy, who had reservations about rule by a rowdy commonwealth and fear of republicanism. White America was deeply divided and harbored a distinct fear of chaos and disorder, especially slave uprisings. In this “hidden history,” Holton emphasizes the crucial role of women in effecting a boycott of British goods and acting as spies for the rebels as well as fighting alongside husbands and other family members. He also highlights the contributions of Native Americans and African American troops. Through a painstaking, immensely readable chronological study, the author guides readers through specific elements of the war, including George Washington’s early mistakes and defensive actions, horrendous fighting conditions, disease, mutiny, treachery, and hard-fought victories. Then the author examines post-Revolutionary America, wrecked by debt, recession, and a free Black population battling oppression, and the heady inclusive language of the Declaration of Independence and states’ constitutions, which contrasted with the reality of a system grounded in slavery. For its welcome exploration of often forgotten Revolutionary contributions, file this alongside Alan Taylor’s American Revolutions (2016) and Claudio Saunt’s West of the Revolution (2014).

A rich, multifaceted work showing how the U.S. has always been a multiracial nation.
BAM...AND THEN IT HIT ME
Hopkins, Karen Brooks
powerHouse Books (320 pp.)
$35.00  |  Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-57687-838-5

The president emerita of the Brooklyn Academy of Music remembers her 36 years working to transform BAM from a small, local arts organization into “one of the most significant cultural centers in the world.”

Baltimore native Hopkins fell in love with the arts at age 8 when she made her acting debut at summer camp. After majoring in theater arts at college, she worked for small theater organizations in Washington, D.C., and then New York City. In 1979, when she was still a “hungry” young arts professional, Hopkins was offered a job at BAM, which had just begun establishing itself as a creative locus for avant-garde directors and choreographers like Trisha Brown and Merce Cunningham. For one year, Hopkins helped then-president Harvey Lichtenstein create greater financial stability and a modern identity for BAM, a “venerated Brooklyn institution that, in its heyday, had been a stomping ground for Mark Twain, Booker T. Washington, Isadora Duncan, Sarah Bernhardt, Paul Robeson, and even Franklin D. Roosevelt.” Hopkins, who did nearly everything for the organization, was then promoted to vice president. In this role, she helped Lichtenstein not only recover from financial losses brought about by the demise of the BAM Theater Company, but also bring artists together to collaborate on the interdisciplinary arts programs that would transform BAM into an international sensation. Her efforts resulted in patronage from the likes of Princess Diana, whose presence at a BAM-sponsored 1989 Welsh National Opera performance resulted in the undertaking of even more ambitious projects—an Ingmar Bergman film festival in 1995 and the Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas festival in 2009. Illustrated with dozens of pages of delightful photographs taken from BAM archives and Hopkins’ own family albums, the text also features savvy advice on successful fundraising for aspiring arts administrators. This remembrance of a life lived among cultural icons will appeal to BAM fans and anyone who loves the arts.

A warmly personal celebration of an estimable career.

THE BOYS
A Memoir of Hollywood and Family
Howard, Ron & Howard, Clint
Morrow/HarperCollins (416 pp.)
$28.99  |  Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-06-306524-6

Brotherly coming-of-age reflections from a storied life in show business.

The glowing foreword, by Bryce Dallas Howard, sets the tone for this forthright memoir from her father, Ron, and his younger brother, Clint. Both were primed for the entertainment industry from a young age by beloved Oklahoman parents Rance Howard and Jean Speegle, self-proclaimed “sophisticated hicks” who relocated to New York City in their youth and embarked on a “rich and strange” journey to realize their own showbiz aspirations. Written in alternating segments, the brothers offer crisp, mostly interesting insights into their separate trajectories into the entertainment business. Ron writes about being diligently prepped for screen tests near his fourth birthday by his father, who taught both sons to “understand a scene in an emotional language,” while Clint notes that both were spared becoming “Hollywood casualties” due to the values their parents instilled in them. The authors chronicle the ups and downs of lifetimes in acting—early on, Ron in the Andy Griffith Show and Happy Days, and Clint in an episode of Star Trek before Gentle Ben—as well as belonging to a household fully ensconced in the entertainment industry. Despite a competitive edge between them—which still remains, as Clint acts in many of Ron’s directorial productions—as they struggled up the Hollywood ladder, their familial bond remained strong. Both brothers add some behind-the-scenes snippets; for example, Ron discusses his newfound adulthood appreciation for Andy Griffith while he shot isolated scenes for Return to Mayberry. For the most part, the binary autobiographical approach works, with the alternating commentaries and interpreted memories from each author offering divergent yet complementary perspectives. A treat for movie and TV buffs, this dual memoir is wholesome and satisfying.

Fans of the Howards will revel in the details of their young ascents into the Hollywood spotlight.

BLOOD AND IRON
The Rise and Fall of the German Empire
Hoyer, Katja
Pegasus (272 pp.)
$27.95  |  Dec. 7, 2021
978-1-64313-817-4

A concise history of one of the most fateful developments in modern history: the creation of a united Germany from a clatter of smaller existing jurisdictions.

At the center of the first half of Hoyer’s story is Otto von Bismarck. The head of state of the nation created in 1871 after the German states had crushed France in the brief Franco-Prussian War, Bismarck was the driving force behind the governing of Germany until 1890. Born in that conflict under Prussian leadership, a newly united Germany, gradually ridding itself of regional loyalties, built itself into Europe’s most powerful industrial and military power in a mere 40 years. Then, Hoyer argues that because of the failure of Kaiser Wilhelm II and his ministers to prevent his nation’s march toward another war, it suffered the devastating carnage of World War I. While failing to relate the full complexity of that war’s outbreak as other historians now understand it, the author astutely portrays how, by the early 20th century, budding German
democracy was sidelined in favor of “a silent dictatorship of the military.” But this superb book isn’t simply about government and war. Hoyer roots the gathering unity of the German states in a “defensive nationalism” caused by the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century and skillfully unveils how nationalism can come into being out of a sense of comparative inferiority. The author covers social, cultural, and religious developments under two Hohenzollern monarchs, especially Bismarck’s path-breaking social legislation of the 1870s and ’80s. She also deftly analyzes the emergence of Germans’ sense, not yet fouled by racial assumptions, of themselves as a distinct people, although her resistance to the argument that Bismarck’s and his successors’ aspirations and achievements led inexorably to the future rise of Hitler will be rejected by some.

It’s hard to imagine a better, more up-to-date history of its subject.

POWERS AND THRONES
A New History of the Middle Ages
Jones, Dan
Viking (656 pp.)
$35.00 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-984880-87-1

Jones returns with another sweeping history of the medieval world.

Having penned books about specific elements of his specialty (Crusaders, Magna Carta, The Templars), the author chronicles the 1,000-year story of the Middle Ages. His latest is a doorstep but never less than absorbing. In traditional histories, the Middle Ages extend from the fifth century to the 14th century. Jones extends it to the 1527 sack of Rome; he makes a solid case that the end did not occur until the Protestant Reformation shattered the Catholic Church. In the first 70 pages, the author describes the Roman Empire’s painful decline and abdication of the last Western emperor, whose successor referred to himself as the king of Italy but declared a symbolic obeisance to another Roman emperor, this one in Constantinople. Jones reminds readers that this “Eastern” emperor ruled the Balkans, today’s Turkey, and the Middle East and attempted, with temporary success, to win back lands in Western Europe and North Africa lost to “barbarians.” This Byzantine Empire considered itself Roman and, although vastly shrunken by Islamic conquests in the seventh century, remained in power for a millennium until the Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453. The author delivers long essays on the early years of European nationhood, the rise of monasteries, knighthood, feudalism, and the Crusades. Less familiar is the catastrophic 13th-century Mongol invasion of Europe, followed by a commercial revolution, the rise of a merchant class, trade, scholarship, transoceanic exploration, and technology such as printing, which ultimately weakened the power of the Catholic Church by encouraging the rise of secular society. Despite a nod to contemporary interpretation (climate change and slavery receive much attention), this is traditional great-men-and-events history, but Jones writes a lively narrative, freely expressing doubts when it’s not clear what actually happened.

A fine account of a distant era that still echoes today.
In her keen debut, King taps into her lifelong love affair with low culture in this joyful tribute to the tacky and argument that the “rightness so many intelligent, capable people pursue does not actually matter one bit.” In the introduction, the author lays out her take on the topic: “As far as I’m concerned, tackiness is joyfulness. To be proudly tacky, your apertures for all the too-much feelings—angst, desire, joy—must be all the way open. You’ve got to be so much more ready to feel everything than anyone probably wants to be. It’s a brutal way to live.”

Among the many topics King discusses: the music of Creed (and Scott Stapp’s “gorgeous” face) and Meatloaf, sexting, American shopping malls, Cheesecake Factory (“straddl[e]s an impossible border between casual and fancy”), and films and TV programs most critics disdain. Throughout, the author connects points in her life to cultural touchstones, showing a fearless willingness to share her personal history and view with readers. She argues that when comparing high and low culture, “what’s low may drag out for years as slow and hideous as a funeral dirge, but it still hits hardest, every time.” In the end, whether describing her teenage discovery of Hot Topic (“full of orange- and green-dyed heads as richly hued as Truffula trees”), her first marriage to cultural touchstones, showing a fearless willingness to share her personal history and view with readers. She argues that when comparing high and low culture, “what’s low may drag out for years as slow and hideous as a funeral dirge, but it still hits hardest, every time.”

An engaging, hilarious, unabashed look at what we love in culture and why we should value it for what it is.

**ORIGINAL SISTERS**

*Portraits of Tenacity and Courage*

Kunz, Anita

Illus. by the author

Pantheon (320 pp.)

$30.00 | Nov. 2, 2021

978-0-593-31614-6

A distinguished Canadian artist and illustrator presents a portrait gallery of 156 of the world’s most important—but often forgotten—women of achievement.

This beautifully illustrated collection of images and short biographies started as a pandemic lockdown project in March 2020. Kunz sketched portraits of female contributors to human culture based on information found on Wikipedia, Britannica Online, the National Geographic website, and elsewhere. Where visual resources were sparse or poor quality, the author/illustrator filled in details like color and dress. When no data was available—as for “Anonymous,” who represents the unnamed female cave painters of the Paleolithic era—Kunz created her own imaginative renderings. The featured women come from a diverse swath of societies old and new, but many of them never received the acclaim or attention they deserved. Poet Anna Akhmatova, ballet dancer Maria Tallchief, and artist Amrita Sher-Gil represent the abundant contributions women have made to the arts. Animal behavior expert Temple Grandin, philosopher Hannah Arendt, and medieval woman of letters Christine de Pizan demonstrate female achievement in the advancement of human thought. The Celtic queen Boudicca, the Northern Cheyenne fighter Buffalo Calf Road Woman, and the legendary Chinese pirate Ching Shih remind readers of how women have been underrepresented as leaders and warriors. Many others—e.g., Gloria Steinem, Tarana Burke, Marsha P. Johnson, and Malala Yousafzai—show the abundant work women have done as activists seeking social justice for women and minorities, including people of color and the LGBTQ+ community.

Kunz’s work is important for the way it participates in the ongoing feminist project of reclaiming women’s lives from patriarchal silencing. Colorful and radically inclusive—from Hippolyta and Hypatia to Josephine Baker and Isadora Duncan—these portraits and biographies serve as ample evidence of women’s contributions to world history, which should never be forgotten.

**The Approaching Storm**

Roosevelt, Wilson, Addams, and Their Clash Over America’s Future

Lancot, Neil

Riverhead (672 pp.)

$29.00 | Oct. 26, 2021

978-0-7352-1059-2

A meticulously researched examination of the dynamic among three important American newsmakers of the early 20th century.

Jane Addams was the vociferous pacifist, and Theodore Roosevelt was hellbent on military buildup. President Woodrow Wilson straddled the fence as long as he could. In this chronological work, Lancot, the author of two books on early professional baseball, delineates the incremental influence each person had on the other two as Europe became enmeshed in a bloody conflict and the U.S. tried to stay neutral. Addams, founder of Chicago’s Hull House, “where dedicated men and women lived among the urban poor while providing much needed social services,” was an important voice in progressive causes such as protection for workers and women’s suffrage. She advocated for diplomacy among the world leaders and actually traveled to meet them. Roosevelt, former president and leader of the progressive Bull Moose Party, believed the U.S. should take an active military lead. While his sons participated in a “War Department-run military training camp” in upstate New York, he pushed for universal military service as a boost to his political comeback in 1916. Wilson, obsessed after his wife’s death with widow Edith Galt, with whom he shared state secrets, had originally campaigned on neutrality. He held off the hawks even after German submarines torpedoed the Lusitania on May 7, 1915, while Roosevelt believed he was instrumental in getting Wilson to accept his view that “unless America prepares...
to defend itself she can perform no duty to others.” Germany’s continued aggressive submarine missions gradually helped turn American opinion until the spark of the Zimmerman Telegram, which revealed a German plot to enlist Mexico in an invasion of the U.S.

Lanctot’s book is too long and his prose too wordy, but he delivers an interesting take on how Addams, Roosevelt, and Wilson interacted in alternately cooperative and competitive ways.

A rigorous, dense historical study that reveals how three individuals helped pave the way for the American century.

**UNDER JERUSALEM**

*The Buried History of the World’s Most Contested City*

Lawler, Andrew

Doubleday (464 pp.)

$32.50 | Nov 2, 2021

978-0-385-54685-0

An archaeological journey through the millennia in the Holy Land underscores the tensions between the biblical narrative and the historical record.

Lawler, a contributing writer for *Science* and contributing editor for *Archaeology*, delves into the stubborn attempts to square religion and science through layers of excavation under the ancient “gateway to heaven” for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Jerusalem, contested by the three major monotheist religions, does not give up its secrets easily, especially as each successive invasion and conquest has tended to bury—or appropriate—the construction material of—the one before. In the mid-19th century, the first European treasure hunter (archaeology was not yet a scientific discipline), Louis-Félicien Joseph Caignart de Saulcy, with the Ottoman pasha’s approval, began digging for artifacts under the once-great city, which had since fallen into decrepitude. He sought traces of King David’s legendary conquest of the Jebusites circa 950 B.C.E., the Ark of the Covenant he brought and installed in a beautifully appointed temple, and the temple’s destruction by the Babylonians and the Persians. The French naturalist Francois Leguat, who observed animals on an isolated island in the Indian Ocean in 1691, has her ruminating, “If only mystery could go into exile instead of going extinct.” The author enjoys reading John Milton’s anti-censorship pamphlet, *Areopagitica*, because it “tells the church to butt out” in a time when, “before a book was published, it had to first be approved by a bunch of interfering friars.” In “Pedestrians,” Leach recommends overcoming wishful passivity and beginning the process of learning (anything) right away. Barnacle goslings, for example, must learn that they have to fly from the “four-hundred-foot precipice where they are nested. Their parents cannot carry them down.” When we call someone wild, we think “loud and crazy,” but most wild animals are “reticent” and “wallflowers.” Like many of us, Leach is concerned about the shrinking numbers of animals, and interesting flora and fauna, well-known and obscure—from Sicilian donkeys to elvers (baby eels) to sandhill cranes—travel throughout these pages. For Leach, it’s “yes to the Earth, my Earth, for I do not hope to find a better where.” Not every piece is a hit, but the misses are few, and many are good for sharing with children. The book is a good companion to Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s *World of Wonders* (2020).

**THE EVERYBODY ENSEMBLE**

*Donkeys, Essays, and Other Pandemoniums*

Leach, Amy

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (208 pp.)

$25.00 | Nov 9, 2021

978-0-374-10966-0

A collection of pieces about the lessons nature can teach us when we listen. Leach’s short, pithy, humor-laden essays continue in the vein of the Whiting Award-winning author’s first collection, *Things That Are* (2012). The opening, titular essay, set near the Zambezi River, announces an exuberant, Whitman-esque concert in which numerous animal songs are joyfully sung, and “everyone here is as contemporary as everyone else, and as temporary.” Setting up her own take on a medieval bestiary, the author writes that she “learned how to imitate pinecones” from pangolins and “how to be happy alone” from pandas. The French naturalist Francois Leguat, who observed animals on an isolated island in the Indian Ocean in 1691, has her ruminating, “If only mystery could go into exile instead of going extinct.”

**THE WILL TO SEE**

*Dispatches From a World of Misery and Hope*

Lévy, Bernard-Henri

Yale Univ (208 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct 26, 2021

978-0-300-26055-7

The renowned French philosopher and activist delivers an intellectual biography-cum-manifesto that demands that we face and document the world’s horrors.

“Fierce and elegant, Lévy’s musings will be of profound interest to any reader of modern continental philosophy.”

*THE WILL TO SEE*
“What leads me to throw myself once again into this mess or that inferno?” So ponders Lévy, fondly known in France as BHL and a familiar presence on TV and in the pages of newspapers in a country that takes big ideas and thinkers more seriously than the U.S. The author advocates for politically engaged journalism that does not pretend to objectivity. The writer, he insists, must make a stand in the face of genocide, fundamentalist intolerance, and other assaults on human rights and democracy. Unafraid to be controversial, Lévy demands a new internationalism, which he distinguishes from globalism, and a cosmopolitanism that must be reformed with nuance. “I would keep the word but only after making it sing with the voices of the excluded, those we now refer to, in today’s democracies, as migrants, immigrants, foreigners without and foreigners within.” The author is always willing to put his life where his mouth is. For example, in 1971, he was on the scene in Bangladesh as it struggled for independence, advocating then and at many points since a kind of International Brigade of fighters who, like those in the Spanish Civil War, would battle against fascism. Lévy is a suggestive and allusive writer. Next to such militant pronouncements, for instance, he employs classical literature to discuss two types of traveling: “The voyage of Ulysses, or that of Aeneas. The voyager who thinks of nothing but his return, or the one who is constantly departing.” As for today, Lévy scorns those who have abandoned travel because of the heavy carbon footprint it entails. We must go out to see the world, and we have to fight for it while making of our travels “a poetic adventure in which the stake is, by traveling through space, to exert opposition until time bends.”

Fierce and elegant, Lévy’s musings will be of profound interest to any reader of modern continental philosophy.

“A feminist confronts the representations of women’s bodies in the art world. London-based art historian McCormack, the founder and course director of the Women and Art study program at Sotheby’s Institute of Art, focuses on the representation of women in art and the “roles that western culture has created for [women] as mothers, monsters and maidens” in pursuit of the “unattainably perfect Venus.” The author begins with Diego Velázquez’s famous 17th-century painting the Venus of Aranjuez (also known by other names), a woman “cast as little more than a rich man’s plaything,” and the scandal that erupted over its attempted 1914 destruction by a British suffragette. McCormack delves into how, over centuries—Botticelli, Titian, Picasso, Modigliani, Hottentot Venus, ads for the removal of female body hair, the anti-Venus paintings of Debra Cartwright—Venus “has been employed to make ideal versions of femininity seem normal and to teach us patriarchy’s version of sex.” This conception “satisfies a default male heterosexual gaze and leaves actual female desire without even a voice.” The “routinely overlooked” mothering paintings of Berthe Morisot capture “seemingly straightforward domestic images freighted with psychodrama and existential uncertainty,” challenging the classic Madonna and Child archetype. Art and advertising, writes the author, still struggle with depictions of breastfeeding and birthing as well as nonbinary and nonbiological mothers. The abduction, rape, sacrifice, and victimhood of the maiden, as in Titian’s The Rape of Europa, McCormack ruefully notes, has been a common subject in images and stories since the Greeks, aestheticizing violence against women into easily digestible pop culture and art. It’s time, she writes, “to see the separation between what we find intolerable in real life and what we lionise in monuments and works of art,” and she introduces us to a new generation of female artists who are doing just that.

*WOMEN IN THE PICTURE What Culture Does With Female Bodies*  
McCormack, Catherine  
Norton (256 pp.)  
$22.95 paper | Nov. 16, 2021  
978-0-393-54208-0

A timely, succinct, aesthetic inquiry into debates about sexuality, objectification, and representation.

**ISLAND INFERNOS**  
*The US Army’s Pacific War Odyssey, 1944*  
McManus, John C.  
Dutton Caliber (656 pp.)  
$34.00 | Nov. 9, 2021  
978-0-525-41750-6

The second of the author’s three-volume chronicle of the war against Japan is well worth the wait.

McManus reminds readers that the Marines got the glory, but the vastly larger Army did most of the fighting and demonstrated no less heroism. In fact, he writes, “the Army in the Pacific had matured into a professionally led citizen soldier force of singular potency, flexibility, and complexity.” As in *Fire and Fortitude* (2019) and his other books, McManus delivers a lucid account of the political background, strategy, and leading figures who conducted operations. Journalists and civilian scholars cannot resist fawning over flamboyant generals, but McManus maintains his focus on their actual accomplishments. This means that his opinion of Douglas MacArthur hasn’t improved from his earlier volume; in these pages, he remains a mean-spirited egotist with modest talents. Meanwhile, Marine Gen. Holland “Howlin’ Mad” Smith conducted combined operations despite an intense hatred of the Army, a situation that severely hampered the tactical effectiveness. It’s no secret that Army-Navy relations were so dysfunctional that America fought Japan on two separate fronts. Under MacArthur, the Army campaigned in the southwest Pacific, while the Navy, led by Adm. Charles Nimitz, largely patrolled the central Pacific. No one considered this efficient, but the U.S., with its vast resources, could afford it. McManus’ expertise shines brightest in his gripping descriptions of the tactics, technology, personalities, and gruesome fighting in a score of island campaigns. There is no shortage of eye-opening personal stories, and the author includes generous
material from letters and diaries—although readers may prefer to skim some anecdotes due to the horrendous sameness of the innumerable, bloody small-unit encounters. Keeping matters up to date, McManus emphasizes the racism that permeated the U.S. military but also governed soldiers’ attitudes toward the enemy. There is plenty to deplore, but Japanese soldiers’ seemingly suicidal fanaticism and their nation’s cruelty toward Allied POWs did not encourage tolerance.

Outstanding military history.

**TWELVE TRIBES**  
**Promise and Peril in the New Israel**  
Michaeli, Ethan  
Custom House/Morrow (464 pp.)  
$29.99 | Nov. 16, 2021  
978-0-06-268885-9

An American Jew of Israeli parents returns to Israel to delve into the complicated makeup of that country’s society and demographics.

In his latest book, Michaeli, a Jewish author and activist who hails from Chicago, returns to the adopted land of his parents, early kibbutzim residents who survived the Holocaust. During several years of visits from 2014 to 2018, the author interviewed Israeli citizens and refugees in order to document their stories of survival and aspiration. Though the narrative initially lacks a concrete theme and meanders, Michaeli eventually hits his stride, offering useful, focused sociological portraits of his many subjects. “My goal was to document Israel at this crucial historical moment,” he writes, “and so I kept my literary lens at street level, letting conversations unspool and allowing people to speak for themselves.” On his first visit, when bombs were falling between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, he visited his brother, Gabriel, 17 years his senior, who was born on a kibbutz on the Sea of Galilee. Gabi, a lawyer, opened a whole world of contacts for his brother, and the narrative progresses through a wide-ranging variety of on-the-ground reportage, uncovering a teeming world of Israelis and Palestinians working and living in uneasy proximity. Whether visiting the Tel Aviv suburbs, fashionable cafes in Jerusalem, the West Bank, or Ponevezh Yeshiva, “one of the essential institutions of the Haredi world,” Michaeli reveals aspects of the country’s character that historians and journalists have been unable to capture. “Neither a cautionary tale nor an international role model, Israel is a microcosm, a tiny domain that contains the truth of how the world really works,” writes the author. “The state’s survival will be determined, then, by the extent to which it is able to accommodate all its tribes, creating a system that respects each tribe’s integrity, but ensures that all are able to contribute to the collective.”

A diligently gathered series of personal stories shows a world defined by difficulty and complexity.

**EMPIRE OF RUBBER**  
**Firestone’s Scramble for Land and Power in Liberia**  
Mitman, Gregg  
The New Press (288 pp.)  
$26.99 | Oct. 12, 2021  
978-1-62097-377-6

A dismaying account of an American industrialist whose corporation ransacked Liberia and its people in pursuit of rubber.

Mitman begins with a summary of Liberia’s history. Founded in 1847 by White Americans seeking to “cleanse the United States of the troubling elements and problems that they believed jeopardized the future of a white settler nation,” the nation was mostly unappealing to free African Americans. Only about 11,000 moved there before the Civil War, and by the early 20th century, Liberia was impoverished and vulnerable. In the 1920s, writes the author, the U.S. consumed most of the world’s rubber but produced none. Britain controlled a monopoly through its colonial plantations and passed laws designed to keep prices high. This infuriated Harvey Firestone, whose eponymous company was competing with other familiar names such as Goodyear and Goodrich. Determined to grow rubber free of British control, Firestone sent agents around the world and found an ideal environment in Liberia. Few Americans, including prominent Black figures, objected when Firestone acquired a concession for about 1 million acres in what became “the world’s largest contiguous rubber plantation.” The clearing of the land required the removal of thousands of people from their villages and farms. Today, Firestone remains Liberia’s largest private employer. Mitman delivers an expert education on the mechanics of rubber production along with vivid, dispiriting descriptions of working conditions in which privileged foreign White management controlled overworked Black laborers. The author accurately describes Firestone’s management as racist, cutthroat businessmen focused on profit and efficiency, but readers may feel that he lets Liberia’s rulers off too easily, mentioning in passing that they were mostly interested in staying in power and lining their pockets. Sadly, Mitman demonstrates, plantation capitalism is alive and well, as concessions for other resources have continued into the present, most of which are characterized by “layers of dispossession and violence.”

A well-rendered and -documented tale of exploitation in the developing world.
With keen insight and wit, the author examines her position as Black city. She chronicles the struggles with her role in the gentrification of the neighborhood—even though she was assured that the house had stood empty for the past eight years. Soon, drivers were not allowed to pass White motorists in Mississippi, for “it was believed that the dust from the Black person’s car would fly up and hit the windshield of the white person’s car, which would symbolize domination of Black over white.” White students in Austin have flocked to Moore’s survey courses and emerged with a clear understanding of such injustices, and many have gone on to teaching and activism themselves. The author writes cogently of how he handles such ticklish subjects as reparations—he supports them—and, with a look back at Jim Crow laws, current Republican efforts to suppress the Black vote. He is especially good on economic inequalities: Moore observes that if Black and White people were to sit down and play Monopoly together, the Black player wouldn’t be able even to start to accumulate property until the 20th move. He urges that White liberals, many of whom “value trees and the environment more than people,” learn foremost how to be uncomfortable, for the history that he teaches will expose them as being implicated in the same system in which White supremacists operate. Moore closes with a syllabus of suggested reading that “highlight[s] the historical issues and themes that best connect to contemporary Black life in America.”

An important, sympathetic effort to elucidate matters of Black lives while expanding intellectual horizons.
“Smart and self-aware, Musgrave delivers one of the best recent books on America’s experience in Vietnam.”

THE EDUCATION OF CORPORAL JOHN MUSGRAVE

Musgrave, John
Knopf (288 pp.)
$26.95 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-451-49357-6

Outstanding memoir of service as a Marine rifleman and subsequent radicalization.

Musgrave, a poet who appeared in numerous episodes of Ken Burns’ documentary The Vietnam War, couldn’t wait to sign up. “Every marine has three birthdays: the day his mother issued him onto this earth, the day the Marine Corps was formed—November 10, 1775—and the day he graduated from boot camp and was addressed for the first time as a marine,” he writes. In 1966, when he joined the Corps, those birthdays were all too often cut short. He learned his lessons well, principally the one that teaches a Marine not just how to kill, but also to be willing to do so. His time in boot camp is a pointed reminder that Lee Ermey wasn’t exaggerating in his performance in Full Metal Jacket: More than once, Musgrave found himself “in a complete world of shit for being the ‘stupidest motherfucker on earth.’” Even so dubbed, he emerged a tough-as-nails private who served on long patrols and mounted ambushes, getting plenty of trigger time. At night, he recalls, he and his fellow Marines amused themselves by pondering how they would most and least like to die. After the war, Musgrave went to a conservative college in Kansas, but the misgivings began to build, especially after Kent State and, less well known, Jackson State. There’s not a false note in this book, full of pride and sorrow. It’s just the retort to those who wonder why Vietnam vets can’t just forget about the past and move on. His thoughtful response: “If you have to ask me why, then I’m not sure I can explain it to you.”

Smart and self-aware, Musgrave delivers one of the best recent books on America’s experience in Vietnam.

THE POWER OF WOMEN

A Doctor’s Journey of Hope and Healing

Mukwege, Denis
An Oprah Book/Flatiron Books (320 pp.)
$28.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-250-76919-0

The Congolese gynecologist who won the 2018 Nobel Prize for aiding rape victims during the civil wars in his country depicts his inspiring journey.

A self-proclaimed feminist who often has to justify his chosen profession and life’s work to officers at the U.N. and elsewhere, Mukwege offers an impassioned argument for women’s health care and basic universal human rights. He bases the narrative on his experiences with the ravages of war, colonization, poverty, and ignorance in his own country. The author opens in his hometown of Bukavu, near the border with Rwanda. He chronicles his childhood with parents who largely eschewed the traditional roles ascribed to boys and girls, roles that devalued women’s work in the home and fields. Once he began to work with patients, Mukwege soon recognized the enormous need for women’s health care in a country with few medical doctors but high maternal and child mortality rates. After training in France, he returned to direct a hospital and then build another one in the countryside to address the catastrophic toll of rape during the civil wars that began in the late 1990s. Mukwege became an expert in obstetric fistula, and thousands of women came to him for life-saving treatment after suffering sexual violence. In his moving account of his courageous work, he and his colleagues provided to traumatized survivors. As he writes, he sought out this work in order to combat the stigmatization and isolation of rape victims, despite the threat of death to himself and his family. “Breaking the silence about sexual violence in all its forms—harassment, rape, incest—is the essential first step in tackling the problem,” he writes. All along, he argues forcefully for the necessity of changing the education and mindsets of men throughout the world.

An important, deeply affecting account of the invaluable work of a devoted humanitarian.
Congress, gaining renown for his financial savvy and, toward the end of his tenure, for co-sponsorship of what became known as the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. He was also the first openly gay member of Congress, though it took him some time to accept and publicly acknowledge his sexuality. As Orner, a former aide, writes in this lively graphic book, Frank, like so many of his generation, was inspired to enter politics by the example of John F. Kennedy, who gave them the “notion that they could build a better America.” He was already a “political polymath” as a Harvard undergraduate, with a special interest in human and civil rights. Frank was enlisted by the likes of Michael Dukakis and Kevin White, familiar names in Massachusetts politics, to help organize campaigns and public events, for which he had tremendous skill. Orner writes that all of this had the effect of drawing him away from the academia to which he seemed destined and pushing him instead into public life, starting as an aide to White, the mayor of Boston: “His political acumen, problem-solving skills, and outsider status (without a stake in all the Irishy clan infighting) meant he quickly became the mayor’s most relied-upon aide.” Orner sensitively depicts Frank’s coming out and, at the end of his career, decision to leave Congress and settle with his husband in quiet retirement. But the best part of his book is the unquiet agitation that made Frank, eloquent and stubborn, a bulldog of a fighter on the Hill, representing not just his district, but great masses of disenfranchised, marginalized people in the LGBTQ+, ethnic minority, and labor communities.

Fans of Frank will be delighted, and those who don’t realize the extent of his political legacy will learn much.

E.R. NURSES
True Stories From America’s Greatest Unsung Heroes
Patterson, James & Eversmann, Matt with Money, Chris
Little, Brown (304 pp.)
$29.00 | Oct. 11, 2021
978-0-7595-5426-9

Dispatches from the front lines of emergency nursing.

In this follow-up to the similarly structured Walk in My Combat Boots, Patterson and Eversmann present brief but meaningful first-person narratives that illustrate the true realities of nursing “at the center of it all.” Split into sections representing their clinical shifts, the contributors vary by location, gender, and care experience. The authors open with a harrowing narrative deep dive within the “horrible” first wave of Covid-19 in which four infected patients perished during one nurse’s shift. Her closing sentiments are echoed by many throughout the book: “My years in nursing have taught me resiliency.” Another common theme is the chaotic frenzy of emergency departments. One contributor calls her Detroit hospital, which plays host to a barrage of extreme situations, the “Wild West of nursing,” while another recalls a visit by Dr. Jack Kevorkian, who had just begun his groundbreaking work in euthanasia. Others remember purposefully violating hospital policy to hold a patient’s hand or allow a wife to bring a dying husband’s dog to the ICU. The book is packed with gut-wrenching scenes and a kaleidoscope of emotions. In one heartbreaking scene, a terrified Covid patient, suffering from “guppy breathing,” is met by fully masked and gowned nurses, who later note how the pandemic has caused “a major shift in medical treatment. The human touch is almost gone.” There are happy outcomes, trivial clinical missteps, cantankerous patients (says one nurse, “certain patients are just dicks”), and situations so stressful and bizarre that they can’t help but elicit exasperated laughter. These readable bite-sized snippets represent a significant caregiver demographic of women and men who exhibit the labor-intensive focus, compassion, dedication, and passion necessary to be an emergency nurse. From the heartfelt to the tragic, this book displays the nursing profession in all its unsung glory.

A timely tribute to the modern-day heroes of medicine, conveyed in their own words.

100 THINGS WE’VE LOST TO THE INTERNET
Paul, Pamela
Crown (238 pp.)
$27.00 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-593-13677-5

The editor of the New York Times Book Review offers dismayed lamentations on all that is being lost to the internet.

In her latest, Paul analyzes the implications of the internet age, deploying “my grumpy-old-man thoughts and wary skepticism, lashed through with a contrary streak of optimism, accumulated over years of observing the culture and covering its manifestations and effects.” She acknowledges the putative treasures and tools of the internet, but she reminds readers that for every gain, there is a loss—e.g., privacy, civility, or myriad products, services, and practices we may have thought to be timeless. To many, writes the author, we can say good riddance or a fond farewell, though she aches for the loss of others. From handwritten letters to quiet, unoccupied moments, cursive writing to vacations without work (or email), school librarians to newspapers, LPs to mixtapes to the notion of “closure”—so much we thought eternal is quaintly antiquarian or gone forever. As Paul engagingly shows, their replacements aren’t always an advance. Yet one thing Paul neglects to address, save by implication, is the power of “no.” We are not forced in every case to accede to fashion, to all of modern technology’s demands, or to the dictates of contemporary sensibilities. Paul is incisive when she gets serious, as in her regrets on the decline of reading (especially of books), diminishing opportunities for solitude, and our eroding capacity for empathy. But some of her death knells are premature, a stretch, too sweeping, or off-base, while others come off as overly tongue-in-cheek. It’s understandable that Paul writes as if Gen X reality (and that of their children) is a
dominant force. Still, there are plenty of people pushing back against the tide in meaningful ways. The author should know there are also 100 ways to resist digital dominance as well.

A mixed-bag cultural assessment of the internet landscape.

### The Crime Without A Name

**Ethnocide and the Erasure of Culture in America**

Pitner, Barrett Holmes

Counterpoint (304 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-64009-484-0

A Black writer argues that the American inability to face the nation's racist past is directly related to a lack of vocabulary to describe the violence of White supremacy.

Pitner, the founder of the Sustainable Culture Lab, begins his cogent analysis by introducing the word *ethnocide*, a term created by Polish Jewish refugee Raphael Lemkin, who immigrated to the U.S. to escape the horrors of World War II. Unlike *genocide*, which Lemkin also coined, ethnocide describes the practice of erasing “a people’s culture while keeping the people,” a term the author says perfectly describes American slavery. Pitner argues that naming this violence not only gives us the tools to properly digest the atrocities wrought upon Black bodies throughout history, but also to face what must be done to repair American society. To complement the concept of ethnocide, the author presents a few other terms that may be unfamiliar to readers, including *polderen*, a Dutch word that “articulates the importance of equality and an attachment to place when forging culture,” and *poshlyi*, a Russian word for vulgarity, which Pitner uses to articulate the damage wrought by Donald Trump and his administration. The author ends the book by discussing *naissance* and *ethnogenesis*, both of which he uses to describe the generation of new, more equitable cultural practices that he hopes can redefine the U.S. At its best, this heavily researched book shimmers with creativity and intelligence, expertly balancing realism, optimism, and honesty. At times, though, it can be difficult to keep track of the barrage of terminology, especially since a new word is introduced almost every chapter. Additionally, Pitner draws almost exclusively from White, male, European philosophers; one of the few exceptions is Gandhi, whose problematic attitudes regarding race make him a curious choice for a book that celebrates Black resilience.

A mostly well-argued, deeply felt treatise on the links among language, racism, and redemption.

### From Warsaw with Love

**Polish Spies, the CIA, and the Forging of an Unlikely Alliance**

Pomfret, John

Henry Holt (288 pp.)

$29.99 | Oct. 26, 2021

978-1-250-29605-4

An eye-opening account of America’s relations with Poland and its intelligence service.

In 1994, journalist Pomfret was the *Washington Post* bureau chief for Eastern Europe, located in Warsaw, when he heard a rumor that Polish spies had rescued six Americans from Saddam Hussein’s forces in 1990. Tracking down the story was no easy matter, but his efforts have produced an entertaining political history of Poland since World War II, almost entirely focused on its intelligence service, which, under Soviet domination, rivaled the KGB in its ability to steal U.S. secrets. Unlike other Eastern European satellites that purged their security agencies after achieving independence in 1989, Poland’s new democratic leadership decided that it was a bad idea to create an army of well-trained, unemployed opponents. Consequently, its new security service retained thousands of ex-communists who switched sides and served loyally. As Pomfret notes, CIA leaders were delighted. As one explained, “How could you not benefit from dealing with the Poles who lived in the most dangerous piece of real estate in Europe?...They’d had forty-five years of liaison with the KGB...and they knew tons more about the Soviets.” The author ably demonstrates how, almost immediately, this policy produced benefits that have lasted into the present. Hussein’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait trapped many Americans, among them those six officers privy to secret information. The CIA asked for Poland’s help, and Poland’s security service assigned agents to the task. Pomfret delivers a nail-biting account of the escape that Polish agents engineered, featuring a hair-raising drive across Iraq to the border and safety.

Long a faithful ally, Poland participated, despite misgivings, in the American debacles in Afghanistan and the second Iraq War, hosting a “black site” where investigators could question terrorist prisoners free of American legal protection. In return, the U.S. provided generous foreign aid, subsidized its intelligence service, and (sadly) kept quiet as, in recent decades, Poland has elected right-wing, authoritarian governments.

A lively and insightful exploration of an overlooked international alliance.
BECOMING ABOLITIONISTS
Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom
Purnell, Derecka
Astra House (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-66260-051-7

How radically reimagining policing might benefit not only Black communities, but the broader social order.

In this sociological treatise and intellectual autobiography, Purnell, a human rights lawyer and organizer, argues convincingly that police departments and prisons are irredeemably implicated in racist ideologies and the perpetuation of violence despite longstanding efforts at reform. These institutions, she writes, “don’t solve harm, they simply react to it, arbitrarily, disproportionately, incoherently,” and therefore ought to be dismantled and replaced by alternatives that promote social justice. Purnell offers persuasive accounts of how racial biases produce “daily injustice” not just in policing and the courts, but in housing, labor, and education, and she links systemic discrimination in the present day, as well as specific instances of police violence against African Americans, to the legacy of slavery and colonialism. She also skilfully relates strategies employed by contemporary reform movements to “a history of freedom and resistance,” and this long-term view contextualizes her own conclusions about the need for a thorough reimagining of what might properly constitute law and order. One of the strengths of the book is the author’s illuminating reflections on her own experiences with the failures of policing, her tactics as a civil rights lawyer, and her philosophical evolution as an activist. Another is Purnell’s deft framing of the search for solutions to violence and various forms of exploitation as part of larger—in fact, global—attempts to advance “decolonization, disability justice, Earth justice, and socialism.” Ultimately, she writes, “rather than thinking of abolition as just getting rid of police, I think about it as a way to create and support a multitude of approaches to the problem of harm in society; and, most excitingly, as an opportunity to reduce and eliminate harm in the first place.”

An informed, provocative, astute consideration of salveic alternatives to contemporary policing and imprisonment.

WORKHORSE
My Sublime and Absurd Years in New York City’s Restaurant Scene
Reed, Kim
Hachette (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-0-306-87510-6

The former “Mayor of Crazy Town”—executive assistant to restaurateur Joe Bastianich—tells how she got into (and out of) a backbreaking job in a dazzling world.

By day, Reed was a social worker, “helping Brooklyn’shome-bound seniors, most of whom were past ninety and in varying states of decline.” In the evening, she dashed to her job at Babbo, one of the most sought-after restaurants in Manhattan. Squeezing her way through the narrow bar area known as the “pickle,” she would arrive at the podium, from which she ruled over the seating arrangements of celebrities, foodies, wealthy diners, and anyone else lucky enough to get a table. The intense working conditions created deep bonds among the staff, and Babbo became Reed’s family and home. Still unable to make ends meet, she leapt at the position of assistant to the owner, Bastianich. In partnership with Batali, Bastianich was running a restaurant empire, an import business, a wine company, and a retail operation while also co-hosting MasterChef and constantly traveling the world. Fully engaged by the people, the food, and the glamour, Reed became addicted to her indispensability. With two phones permanently stuck to her hands and no personal life, she did the work of at least four people. By the time she realized her many sacrifices, she was on the job for 17 years and #MeToo had crashed up on the company’s doorstep via harassment allegations against Batali. Change was long overdue. “I could get anyone to divulge their deepest fears and most guarded secrets as though asking them for the time, but nobody—nobody knew anything about me,” writes the author. In that light, the candor of this memoir is just one sign of Reed’s personal transformation—a long, painful coming-of-age that led her to confront and break patterns that could have made her miserable for the rest of her life.

A generously detailed, juicy restaurant industry tell-all and a cautionary tale for young workaholics.

SYSTEM ERROR
Where Big Tech Went Wrong and How We Can Reboot
Reich, Rob & Sahami, Mehran & Weinstein, Jeremy M.
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$27.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-0-06-306488-1

The technological future promises to be a dark one—unless, as the authors insist, technology is pressed into the service of doing no harm, as once promised.

Media technology often taps the worst in our instincts, driving misinformation, exploiting gullibility, and even inciting violence. The authors, Stanford professors and longtime familiars in Silicon Valley, assert that the owners and operators of Facebook, Google, Amazon, and others have wrought more ill than good on many fronts: As engineers, they lack knowledge of public policy; as influencers of public policy, such as they understand it, they tend to a hands-off view that resists government intervention; as systems thinkers, they tend to despise democracy and instead, their demand for independence taken fully into account, to favor a technocratic view. Indeed, in one interesting thought experiment, a number of Silicon Valley
leaders were asked what sort of society they might form if given the power to do so. They answered that they’d want a big patch of land, preferably an island, and certainly not a democracy as the form of government. Said one, “To optimize for science, we need a beneficent technocrat in charge. Democracy is too slow, and it holds science back.” As such, it’s no wonder that big tech has allowed for the amplification of anti-democratic views that go from the Ayn Rand–ian to the neofascist. In accessible prose, the authors argue that social media–wrought social engineering must be curbed. Along the way, they examine the effects—sometimes beneficial, mostly not—of algorithmic decision-making, which some enthusiasts argue will one day make lawyers and doctors redundant. The authors insist that such decision-making must be transparent, auditable, and accountable to norms of due process. In this illuminating account, they even offer a few rays of hope—e.g., actual hate speech on the web is surprisingly rare. Of course, they add, rare or not, it can lead to horrible behavior.

Of interest to futurists and civil libertarians alike.

“A gripping book of starkly revealing testimony.”

A moving portrait of a nation under siege.

Based on interviews with Albanians from all walks of life, award-winning novelist and reporter Rejmer bears shattering witness to the country’s 47 years of communist dictatorship. Although some considered Enver Hoxha (1908–1985) “as kind as a father and as infallible as God”—“the greatest Albanian in the history of our nation,” one man exclaimed—most of the interviewees suffered deeply during his rule. Under Hoxha, a paranoid, ruthless leader, more than 30,000 were incarcerated as political prisoners; more than 6,000 were murdered; and 59,000 detained. “I wrote this book with the victims in mind,” Rejmer says, “and also those who claim that the people who suffered are lying, exaggerating, and trying to extort money by stretching the truth. In Albania, no one who was responsible for issuing sentences and torturing prisoners has ever been convicted.” Like Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich, whose oral histories have documented political oppression, Rejmer allows the voices of everyday Albanians to reveal the privations and fear under which they lived.

“Like Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich, whose oral histories have documented political oppression, Rejmer allows the voices of everyday Albanians to reveal the privations and fear under which they lived.”

**MUD SWEETER THAN HONEY**

**Voices of Communist Albania**

Rejmer, Margo

Trans. by Krasodomska-Jones, Zosia & Lloyd-Jones, Antonia

Restless Books (320 pp.)

$28.00 | Nov. 2, 2021

978-1-63206-283-3

For praising the poetry of a Franciscan priest who had been deemed an enemy of the people. Everyone was forced to parrot propaganda extolling Albania as paradise on Earth even though cities were crumbling, food was scarce, barbed wire surrounded them, religion was outlawed, and “eager spies” enforced the threat of arrest, imprisonment, and torture. “Equality in the communist system was a sham,” one man said, with society divided into “those who had a little and those who had nothing.”

A revisionist portrait of a maligned monarch.

English historian and biographer Roberts, winner of the Wolfson History Prize and many other honors, draws on abundant archival sources to create a deeply textured portrait of George III (1738–1820), whom he calls “the most unfairly traduced sovereign in the long history of the British monarchy.” Countering the characterizations of George as pompous and cruel, promulgated in such plays as Alan Bennett’s _The Madness of George III_ and _Hamilton_, Roberts argues that the king was an intelligent, astute leader, dedicated to upholding the British Constitution. In addition to his passion for the arts and sciences; he was “well-meaning, hard-working, decent, dutiful, moral, cultured and kind.” A shy child, he was by no means backward, although his own mother thought he “was not quick.” Nevertheless, Roberts found that “his exercise books in the Royal Archives show that George was perfectly competent at reading and writing English by the age of nine.” By 15, he could translate classical texts, including philosophy. His father died when he was 12, and his grandfather was cruel and abusive, leading young George to see as his “surrogate father” John Stuart, a handsome, charming man 25 years older, who “introduced George to many of the artistic and intellectual passions of his life, and to the people who stimulated them.” Stuart long served as George’s confidant, adviser, and, briefly, prime minister. Roberts capably traces the complicated machinations that led to George’s selection of Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz as his wife; the roiling politics of 18th-century England; the gosspip and power play that threatened his authority; the American colonists’ inevitable break from British rule (nothing to do with taxes, Roberts argues); and five episodes of manic-depressive psychosis—not, as many historians have believed, porphyria. Vividly detailed, the author’s life of George is comfortably situated in the context of British, European, and Colonial history.

“A capacious, prodigiously researched biography from a top-shelf historian.”

**THE LAST KING OF AMERICA**

The Misunderstood Reign of George III

Roberts, Andrew

Viking (560 pp.)

$40.00 | Nov. 2, 2021

978-1-984879-26-4
COKIE
A Life Well Lived
Roberts, Steven V.
Harper (272 pp.)
$27.99 | Nov 2, 2021
978-0-06-285147-5

An adoring look at the trailblazing journalist who relentlessly promoted the women around her in a male-dominated field.

Breast cancer claimed the life of Roberts, née Boggs, on Sept. 17, 2019, a week after she and the author, her husband, celebrated their 53rd anniversary. Both of them were journalists—he had a long career at the New York Times and elsewhere—but Cokie’s life was often more public, especially since she was the daughter of two influential members of Congress, Lindy and Hale Boggs. A graduate of Wellesley College, from whose ranks many other journalists would emerge, Cokie was staunchly Catholic. In the cultural milieu of the mid-1960s, her romance with the young, Jewish journalist Roberts was seemingly doomed, yet they persevered in the face of conservative families. At the time, it was assumed Cokie would follow her husband’s career, which took them to New York and then Los Angeles. In L.A., Cokie cut her teeth in a “one-man journalism school” run by her husband, who had to travel constantly while she took care of their children. Working as a stringer for CBS in Greece in the 1970s, she was on hand to cover the invasion of Cyprus, and TV executives began to show interest. She got her first full-time journalist job at NPR largely through the support of fellow Wellesley alumna Nina Totenberg and Linda Wertheimer. Eventually, Cokie turned her attention to politics on Capitol Hill, which was in her blood. She and her cohort changed the entire dynamic of the newsroom, insisting that it mattered how male politicians treated women. Her later career as an author of history—and blemishes—of an entertainment gem.

Roe’s studious examination effectively details the brilliance—and blemishes—of an entertainment gem.
to nuance as well as detail, and a keen observer of flora and fauna. Salama’s account is by turns joyous and sad. We meet craftsmen, artisans, folklorists, boat-builders, subsistence fishermen, and one astonishingly devoted teacher, among others, chiefly in rural settings. Without fail, Salama finds what is interesting, sometimes noble, in each of them. Yet his regard for those he encounters never slips into sentiment or romanticism. “Traveling in this way,” he writes, “and trading in stories, is, inevitably, a journey of selection—it was not lost on me that for each voice I heard, many others would be left out.” The book is more than a notable achievement in travel literature and more than a clarifying window into a misunderstood culture; it is a book of conscience and open-heartedness. Pair it with Wade Davis’ Magdalena (2020).

It is a privilege to savor, vicariously, this harvest of a promising writer’s vivid journeys.

LEAVE THE GUN,
TAKE THE CANNOLI
The Epic Story of the Making of The Godfather
Seal, Mark
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
(448 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-982158-59-0

The latest book about one of cinema’s groundbreaking achievements.

How did an author of pulp fiction, an “abject failure” who had never met a gangster, write a bestselling novel about the mob that would inspire one of the most celebrated films in movie history? How did a garment industry executive finalize his way into the job of head of production at Paramount? How did a shoe salesman who admitted, “I don’t know what the hell I’m talking about,” become the film’s producer? Seal answers these questions in this book, an expansion on his 2009 Vanity Fair interview with Robert Evans, the former Paramount head, about the 1972 classic. The author bookends this work with that interview, in which Evans invites him to climb into his fur-covered bed to reread the film. The material in between recounts the story of the film’s driving forces, including the actors; Mario Puzo, the food- and gambling-obsessed author of the novel; and Francis Ford Coppola, the broke writer/director who “wasn’t interested in directing some cockamamie gangster picture” yet grew so passionate about it that he wanted to “smell the garlic coming off the screen.” Much of this material appears elsewhere, and Seal is sometimes too intellectual about the film. The moment in which Richard Castellano, as Clemenza, tells the associate who carried out an execution in a car, “Leave the gun,” then goes off-script to add, “Take the cannoli,” may very well have been a commentary “about the country that had turned its back on these men and their community” or maybe it was just an inspired ad-lib. But Godfather fans will enjoy the behind-the-scenes squabbles that threatened the picture, the dealings with real-life mobsters, and other details, such as Marlon Brando’s needing to have his lines on cue cards and James Caan’s building his character by purchasing used shoes “so tight that they hurt, which gave Sonny his strutting, cocky, lady-killer gait.”

A lively film biography that amply shows how great films aren’t necessarily born great, but they can grow great.

TASTE MAKERS
Seven Immigrant Women Who Revolutionized Food in America
Sen, Mayukh
Norton (304 pp.)
$26.95 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-324-00451-6

Historical survey of American cuisine focused on how its development was enriched by transplanted cooks.

Making a lively book debut, James Beard Award-winning journalist Sen, who teaches food journalism at NYU, celebrates the accomplishments of seven immigrant women who deftly introduced new tastes, ingredients, and recipes to their adopted country. As “a queer child of Bengali immigrants to America,” Sen identifies with the feeling of isolation that the women experienced as they made their ways as teachers, restaurateurs, and writers. The author seeks “to trouble the canon of culinary brilliance” in a male-dominated field. Drawing on cookbooks, memoirs, interviews, and articles, Sen creates warmly appreciative profiles of each: Chao Yang Buwei, from China; Elena Zelayeta, born in Mexico; French chef Madeleine Kamman; Italian Marcella Hazan; Julie Sahni, who introduced Indian cooking; Najmieh Batmanglij, whose books afforded a rare insight into Iranian culture and cuisine; and Jamaican Norma Shirley. Buwei, who taught herself to cook while she attended medical school, arrived in the U.S. in 1921, accompanying her husband, who had been recruited to teach at Harvard. Like the other women, Buwei saw cooking as an expression of independence as well as creativity. How To Cook and Eat in Chinese, published in 1945, proved groundbreaking for Americans, for whom Chinese food meant little more than chop suey. Zelayeta, also self-taught as a cook, opened a Mexican restaurant in San Francisco that she continued to run even after she lost her sight to a cataract. Elena’s Lessons in Living, a self-help book published in 1947, was followed by many cookbooks. In 1950, she briefly hosted a cooking show on a local TV station and, soon after, established her own frozen food business. Kamman, who trained at Le Cordon Bleu, was praised as a “cook’s cook” and never attained the celebrity of her rival, Julia Child. As the author examines each woman’s culinary contributions, he underscores the influence of food writers, notably Craig Claiborne, in shaping America’s tastes.

Well-crafted, engaging portraits of culinary and cultural pioneers.
**A TALE OF TWO OMARS**

A Memoir of Family, Revolution, and Coming Out During the Arab Spring

Sharif Jr., Omar

Counterpoint (224 pp.)

$26.00 | Oct. 5, 2021

978-1-64009-498-7

The grandson of iconic Egyptian actor Omar Sharif shares his coming-of-age as a gay man.

In this moving memoir, Sharif Jr., a Canadian actor and model, begins with the controversial coming-out letter he submitted to the *Advocate* in 2012, in which he expressed distress at being gay amid the political and social upheaval across Egypt. The essay became a viral sensation and further spurred the author’s work for “the movement for LGBTQ equality in the United States and across the globe.” His parents—Jewish Canadian mother and Arab father—divorced when he was a child, and he vividly depicts a youth traveling between Montreal and Egypt, interspersed with fond memories of later years spent with his famous grandfather, who accepted his grandson’s lifestyle unconditionally. When Sharif Sr.’s health began to decline due to Alzheimer’s, the author was there to support him, to survive the repressive, anti-gay “new Egyptian paradigm.”

**HITLER’S AMERICAN GAMBLE**

Pearl Harbor and Germany’s March to Global War

Simms, Brendan & Laderman, Charlie

Basic (528 pp.)

$32.00 | Nov. 2, 2021

978-1-5416-1909-8

A meticulous historical account of “five momentous days” at the beginning of World War II.

Congress declared war on Japan the day after the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, but it didn’t declare war on Germany. That was Hitler’s idea, and he declared war on the U.S. on Dec. 11. Most historians argue that this was a terrible decision, but Hitler showed no doubt. Simms and Laderman deliver an insightful account of those five days. As the authors note, few considered Japan a serious military threat, and most experts believed that it had bombed Pearl Harbor at Hitler’s behest. Franklin Roosevelt and Allied leaders continued to consider Germany the major threat. Yet when Roosevelt’s Cabinet met and Secretary of War Henry Stimson urged a declaration of war against Germany, no one supported him, and Roosevelt did not mention Germany in his famous “day of infamy” speech. Always attuned to public opinion, he deferred to powerful opposition to another European war, as embodied by the America First Committee, which had grumpily agreed to fight only Japan. Many historians report that Churchill “slept the sleep of the saved and thankful” after hearing the news of Pearl Harbor. That’s hindsight, write Simms and Laderman, noting how he documented that sentiment later. At the time in Britain, “opinion was split on whether the new Pacific war was good or bad news.” Many, Churchill included, worried that the U.S. would focus on Japan and leave Britain to face Hitler alone—a realistic concern given that the U.S. had immediately suspended its massive lend-lease program. Hitler’s declaration of war solved the problem, and the authors conclude that he did not declare war in ignorance of America’s immense power but because of it. “In late 1941,” they write, “the Führer saw a narrow window of opportunity not to defeat the United States outright but to create a self-sufficient Axis bloc strong enough to withstand it. Otherwise he risked gradual strangulation.”

An excellent argument that America’s WWII began on Dec. 11, 1941.

**SHOUTIN’ IN THE FIRE**

An American Epistle

Stewart, Dante

Convergent/Crown (272 pp.)

$25.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-0-593-23962-9

A former collegiate star athlete and theologian considers the ongoing battle for Black civil rights in America.

“*Our lives are not just resistance,*” writes Stewart. “*Our lives are not just lessons. We are not heroes. We are not villains. We are human—as beautiful as we are terrible.*” The recognition of Black humanity forms the core of this eloquent book. The author recounts going from a pious childhood (his nickname was Church Boy) to a college career playing football at Clemson, where well-meaning White Christians took him under their wing and deracinated him to the point that he was close to despising not just his fellow Blacks, but his own Blackness: “I had passed into the other world, the white world, and I had become free, and wet, and washed, and clean, and white as snow, and white as white folk...”
desired me to become.” Then came Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the slain parishioners at a Charleston church, and the misgivings came. Stewart turned away: “It wasn’t Jesus nor James Baldwin who radicalized me,” he writes. “It was white people. Apartheid white people.” Drawing on a churchly tradition of vigorous sermonizing, Stewart examines the fruits of that radicalization—e.g., the phenomenon of Black rage, which, though “tricky in America,” is a perfectly appropriate response to injustice. While justly enraged himself, he insists on Black humanity and the necessity of embracing not just the struggle and the anger associated with it, but also the very human impulse to love, embrace, and even forgive: “Jesus does not hurt people in order to love them…he did not cover up his pain by enacting it onto others.” Stewart’s Christian message is broadly ecumenical, with its deeply felt demand that things must change in a society that, as far as Black people are concerned, “loves your production, but…does not value your body.”

An inspired and inspiring treatise that deftly blends religious faith with political activism.

**MELTDOWN**

*The Earth Without Glaciers*

Taillant, Jorge Daniel

Oxford Univ. (296 pp.)

$29.95 | Nov. 1, 2021

978-0-19-008032-7

A vivid appeal to save our rapidly diminishing glaciers.

Outraged to learn that a mining company planned to dynamite three glaciers to reach the gold underneath, Taillant, founder of the Center for Human Rights and Environment, became a “cryoactivist,” a word that hadn’t been invented but that finds meaning in these pages. Though not a scientist, the author is “a career environmental policy expert,” and he is dedicated to the preservation of Earth’s glaciers, a critical factor in fighting against accelerating climate changes. Taillant begins with an avalanche of statistics. The most familiar—namely, that our planet is 2/3 water and 1/3 land—is misleading. The reality, notes the author, is that it is 71% water, 19% land, and 10% ice. A minuscule 2% of the water is fresh, and 75% of that is bound from drinking to agriculture. They keep us cool. Ice is white, so it reflects most of the sun’s rays. When it disappears, brown earth or blue ocean absorb these rays and grow warmer. Ocean levels will rise by 200 feet if all the ice melts. They’re predicted to rise two to seven feet during the 21st century, and Louisiana and south Florida are already visibly suffering the effects. In the final chapters, the author outlines possible solutions. Some engineers are creating “artificial glaciers” or reviving old ones. Laws to protect glaciers should be a no-brainer, but, except in Argentina, all have failed. Of course, the author insists, this must change. Slowing global warming by eliminating carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel burning is essential. It’s not likely to happen in the coming decades, but in the short term, we can easily eliminate superpollutants such as methane and refrigerants and see immediate improvements.

More bad news about climate change but an excellent education on ice.

**RUNNING IS A KIND OF DREAMING**

Thompson, J.M.

HarperOne (320 pp.)

$27.99 | Oct. 5, 2021

978-0-06-294707-9

In his debut memoir, a clinical psychologist and ultrarunner looks back on an eventful life from the hard-won stability of middle age.

What brings a person to where they are? Anyone can profitably ask this question at any time, but there’s something about being on a 205-mile run that forces the issue. Thompson had completed numerous ultramarathons before attempting a four-day race around Lake Tahoe, his most challenging competition yet. The race presented the author with four days of increasing fatigue and disorientation during which deep self-reflection proved inescapable. “On the surface,” he writes, “an ultramarathon is neither necessary nor reasonable. And yet men and women in the tens of thousands appear compelled to do such things….It follows from the unreasonable nature of an ultramarathon that the ultrarunner’s motive must reside in a domain outside reason: the unconscious mind, the shadows of times forgotten, yet still felt.” In this book, the unconscious becomes conscious, the forgotten is recalled, and feelings become thoughts. Thompson, a staff psychologist at the Department of Veterans Affairs, is out to challenge the norm that “mental health professionals almost never tell their own stories” in what is much less a running book than a psychological self-interrogation. For Thompson, running is one method of treatment—along with therapy and Zen practice—that works for him in learning to face up to his childhood trauma, mental illness, drug abuse, alcohol addiction, and lifelong tendency to run away from difficult experiences. A therapist might grant that revisiting the minute details of childhood serves as a healing process, but readers may be less patient with Thompson’s tireless self-examination, which sometimes crosses into self-indulgence. But if that is the price of the author’s keen insight into the psyche and the profound observations of which he is capable, so be it.

Like a long run, there are difficult stretches along the way, but in the end, they’re worth the reward.
“Tomalin ends her story with Wells in his early 40s, noting that she was reluctant to part company with this complicated genius. Readers of this excellent biography will agree.”

THE YOUNG H.G. WELLS

Changing the World

Tomalin, Claire

Penguin Press (304 pp.)

$28.00 | Nov. 2, 2021

978-1-984879-02-8

The acclaimed literary biographer delivers a compelling portrait of the formative years of the iconic British author. Tomalin chronicles the early life of H.G. Wells (1866-1946), who drew on his scientific knowledge and prophetic vision to write some of the most thrilling books of his era. Tomalin paints a picture of a young man desperate and determined to succeed. His family endured genteel poverty, and his mother, a housekeeper, determined that his best shot at success was to apprentice as a draper. Fortunately for future readers, Wells hated the position and “made up his mind to behave badly.” While teaching at a boarding school, he was beaten severely in a rugby game and might have died had his resourceful mother not nursed him back to health at the estate where she worked—and where the convalescing young man absorbed the estate’s magnificent library. From there, a series of lucky breaks propelled Wells to fame and eventual fortune. He won a fellowship to study under Thomas Huxley, foremost English scientist of the age, and his scientific grounding became the eventual foundation for his early novels: The Time Machine, The Island of Doctor Moreau, The War of the Worlds. Wells accurately predicted cross-channel air travel, tank warfare, and aerial bombings. His fiction, writes Tomalin, “reads like reporting of things seen touched and heard.” Wells was a renegade, which enlivens the already engaging narrative. An ardent believer in free love, he pursued multiple extramarital affairs, the most notorious of which was a liaison with the daughter of close friends that produced a child. Tomalin covers her subject’s many shortcomings, but she has an empathy for him and a deep understanding of a young man impelled to reach for everything within his grasp. She ends her story with Wells in his early 40s, noting that she was reluctant to part company with this complicated genius. Readers of this excellent biography will agree.

A vivid portrait of the early years of an author of astounding vision, who predicted many of the horrors of the 20th century.

THE DEEPER THE ROOTS

A Memoir of Hope and Home

Tubbs, Michael

Flatiron Books (272 pp.)

$27.99 | Nov. 16, 2021

978-1-250-17344-7

The story of a young man’s ascent from poverty in Stockton, California, to become, at just 26 years of age, the city’s first Black mayor.

Tubbs was not only Stockton’s first Black mayor; he was also “the youngest person...ever to be elected mayor of a city with a population of over 100,000.” In his debut book, the author movingly chronicles his life story, offering insightful considerations of, above all, the crucial role played by the three women who guided his upbringing, the challenges he faced in claiming an elite education (Stanford) and establishing a career in politics, and the representative lessons to be learned from his experiences about the nation’s abiding racial barriers. Tubbs begins with several chapters detailing his early life and the impact of losing his father to the prison system before moving on to explore the growth of his own fierce determination to succeed academically and professionally despite the odds stacked against him. The author’s voice is both accessible and authoritative, and it establishes a trust that undergirds his commentaries on topics ranging from systemic racism to educational reform to the intricacies of campaign finance. Tubbs also skillfully renders the history and evolving fortunes of Stockton, and the city’s entrenched pathologies—as well as the tenacious efforts of many of its citizens to secure a more peaceful and equitable future—form a vivid backdrop to the author’s personal story. Particularly compelling are the later chapters, which describe Tubbs’ victorious mayoral campaign in 2016 and the ideals that propelled it, along with the abuse he endured from often unscrupulous political adversaries. The scandal surrounding the author’s DUI conviction, which nearly ended his budding career, is treated with rare candor and self-awareness and ought to serve as a model for other memoirists. His reflections on the dynamics of disinformation campaigns and their relevance to contemporary politics could not be more timely. An emerging political leader’s resonant and inspiring account of his life and vision for social transformation.
Union and her husband, former NBA superstar Dwyane Wade, are a Black American celebrity couple the media loves to follow. In the first and longest essay, “Loved Even as a Thought,” the author chronicles the couple’s pregnancy via surrogacy. Although Union first considered their decision to use a gestational carrier a “walk away from home plate,” the strategy paid off with the birth of Kaavia James. The Hollywood veteran is candid in her admission that, ultimately, she was a “character actress” in her daughter’s “one-woman show.” In the rest of the book, Union offers her takes on Hollywood parties, auditions, family dramas, and “how-to” advice for making it in “the industry” for aspiring young people of color. Regarding feedback, she writes, “Examine it and decide what you’re gonna take and what you’re gonna discard.” The author also writes charmingly and instructively about the many “bonding stepmother-stepdaughter moments” she has shared with her gender-nonconforming stepdaughter, and she shares an entertaining anecdote about inadvertently getting on Janet Jackson’s bad side—but don’t worry, Janet is now “the friend who reminds me to set my clocks back.” Union exposes gender problems in work life (“Balance is a lie” since the system “is rigged against women”) and rails against blackface and blackfishing, which entails non-Black people “stealing the looks and features of Blackness for profit.” While recounting the devastating rape she suffered when she was 19, the author describes how she found recovery and emotional support through watching Black Olympians triumph in the 1992 Summer Olympic: “I needed a lifeline,” she writes, “and what I saw was unapologetic Black stardom and perseverance.” Throughout, Black excellence is cast as the antidote to racism and other societal poisons.

As these essays ably show, Union is a dynamic role model for young Black women in all walks of life.

Revolution provoked a civil war, tensions in Ukrainian communities were heightened, and Jews became the convenient scapegoats. Hopes for a Ukrainian republic were dashed by Bolshevik incursions, and “militias acting as part of the army of the Ukrainian People’s Republic initiated or authorized attacks on Jewish civilians” under the pretext that “the Jews were planning an uprising to install a Bolshevik government.” More than 100,000 Jews perished during the pogroms, which the author vividly depicts as “public, participatory, and ritualized.” He notes how early on, “they took place in a carnivalesque atmosphere of drunken singing and dancing; crowds allowed for a diffusion of responsibility, drawing in otherwise upright citizens and ordinary people who in different circumstances might not have joined the proceedings.” The White Army, composed of czarist remnants, also attacked the Jews as perceived allies of the Bolsheviks. Veidlinger also chronicles the international outcry at these pogroms, which helped to instigate important Jewish refugee relief programs while also hardening nations like the U.S. against allowing the immigration of desperate Jewish displaced persons. The last part of the book is an elucidating discussion of how the massive refugee problem galvanized the rise of right-wing politics, especially in Germany.

A vital history that draws a direct line from Eastern European antisemitic violence to the Holocaust.

**CHURCHILL'S SHADOW**

*The Life and Afterlife of Winston Churchill*

Geoffrey Wheatcroft

Norton (656 pp.)

$40.00 | Oct. 12, 2021

978-1-324-00276-5

An authoritative examination of how Winston Churchill’s ongoing geopolitical impact refractions and supersedes his actual biography.

Former Spectator literary editor Wheatcroft brings superior scholarship, controlled, intermittently witty prose, and warts-and-all admiration to the acknowledged surfeit of writing about Churchill. With an evenhanded perspective, he explores how textuality and reputation simultaneously distort and amplify Churchill’s impact. ’I’ve tried to write as what Keynes called ‘the historian of Opinion’, seeing Churchill through the eyes of his contemporaries,” he writes, providing a sinewy account of Churchill’s strange, singular life, with its political fluctuations, admirable and shameful qualities, and repeated seasons of rise and fall. “Churchill’s life until the age of sixty-five,” the author writes about his “apotheosis” in 1940, “had certainly been a dramatic roller-coaster ride of highs and lows...until that ultimate and complete triumph.” Wheatcroft adds materially to this well-known narrative by exploring “the darker side of his character and career, too often brushed over, and the long shadow which he has cast since his death.” The author vividly depicts every dramatic stage of Churchill’s experience, from a privileged upbringing propelling him from colonial adventurism to
journalism and politics, through the disaster of Gallipoli during World War I, to his “wilderness years” of lucrative book deals and behind-the-scenes maneuvering, to his “walking with destiny” as Britain’s savior against Hitler. The author achieves a strong balance between crisp, dramatic historical storytelling and the words and views of both Churchill’s many contemporaries—not least the scoundrels comprising his inner circle—and the scholars and writers who have addressed his enigma ever since. His posthumous legend became ever more diffuse—e.g., after 9/11, when George W. Bush and Tony Blair adopted the Churchillian mantle in inaccurate and grotesque ways: “the Iraq War had gone horribly, and predictably, wrong but Blair was impenitent.”

A lively and rigorous deep dive into the ambiguous, still-relevant geopolitical odyssey that Churchill represents.

Adapted from a series of lectures delivered between 1967 and 2014, Nobel laureate Wiesel (1928-2016) celebrates the lives and struggles of spiritual leaders appearing in the Bible, Torah, and Hasidic lore. How, he asks, can one person make a difference when faced with evil and oppression? With a special affection for prophets, the author introduces Elisha ben Shafat, “strange, elusive, complex, full of contradictions,” a man of volatile temper, at times directed cruelly at children. His teacher was the prophet Elijah, to whom Elisha felt unwavering loyalty. Purveyor of 16 miracles, especially in the aid of women, Elisha fought hunger, repelled enemies of the king of Israel, cured the afflicted, and intervened in affairs of state, including the incitement of a bloody revolution. Among biblical kings, Wiesel singles out Josiah, “one of the notable exceptions to the corrupt idol-worshipping Jewish kings,” who restored the commemoration of Passover among his people. From the Talmudic universe, “such sparks as there were came about largely from us uneducated and disaffected—who were scattered throughout Eastern Europe. Wiesel counts himself among Hasidim. “Faith in memory,” Wiesel reminds readers, “helps individuals transcend their condition” and justifies “faith in the future.”

Empathetic inquiries into the challenges of faith.

A posthumous collection probes sources of Jewish wisdom.

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Empathetic inquiries into the challenges of faith.

A deep dive into the overarching, decades-long narrative of Marvel superhero comics. Wolk, author of the Eisner Award-winning Reading Comics, writes effusively about “the longest continuous, self-contained work of fiction ever created: over half a million pages to date, and growing,” and he delivers an interpretive guide to the thousands of comics that Marvel has published since 1961. The author moves between this multilayered comic-world narrative and the behind-the-scenes timeline of the once-marginal company and its pop-culture DNA, forged by brilliant eccentrics Jack Kirby Stan Lee, and Mike Ditko. Kirby and Ditko eventually parted acrimoniously from wordsmith and showman Lee, though not before establishing bold visual and textual templates that later artists acknowledged. “Stan Lee’s words,” writes Wolk, “from early Marvel comics became the toys of the writers who followed in his path.” In most chapters, the author focuses on prominent tentpoles like the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, and the Avengers. He assembles a critical narrative by linking contemporary issues to earlier decades and tracking the shuffles of artists and writers, recently emphasizing diverse younger talents. As one writer noted about collaboration on X-Men as it gained prominence, “such sparks as there were came about largely from us banging into each other.” In the 1970s, writes Wolk, “Marvel’s second-tier titles were subject to constant creative shuffling,” a process that produced complex crossovers between series amid larger patterns of “retroactive continuity.” But crossovers aren’t always welcome: “There’s a popular conception among irritable mainstream comics readers that crossovers wreck the flow of ongoing series.” Wolk breaks up his narrative analysis with “Interlude” chapters regarding business and cultural issues, noting how comics have pinballed among a variety of audiences: adolescents, comic collectors, film buffs, and more. The author’s exhaustive and mostly uncritical approach will appeal to those who share his passion for this self-sustaining superhero culture, understanding that “in a story as big as Marvel’s, everything can be a reference to the past.”

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A simultaneously wide-ranging and engagingly specific guide to the sprawling realm of comics culture.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

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**GIANT** by T.A. Barron .............................................................. 94
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**OUT OF MY HEART**
Draper, Sharon M.
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-1-66590-216-8

What happens when an imaginary elementary school friend stays around when you’re in middle school?

As a small child, Zach Belvin began his friendship with an imaginary furry purple friend he names Shovel. Zach shared his imagination and bright blue eyes with his dad. But when Zach was just 6, his father fell ill and died. After this devastating loss, Zach escaped with Shovel into fantasy worlds filled with magic and knights and danger. “These places might’ve seemed scary, but we both knew….Reality could be so much scarier.” With Shovel as a narrator—hilarious, despite the seriousness of the subject matter—readers experience Zach’s loneliness up close. On the first day of middle school, Zach is bullied by some boys—including his former best friend, Ryan. Shovel inspires Zach to fight back, and new student Anni joins in to help, resulting in both of them being placed in detention with Ryan for a week, a situation that leads to social and emotional growth and real-life problem-solving. Even as Zach learns to deal with his grief and Shovel begins to fade away, the purple furball protects the heart of this vulnerable boy with humor and love. Spot art depicts a charmingly appealing Shovel and a racially diverse human cast: Zach and his family present White, Anni is cued as East Asian, and some supporting characters read as Black.

A witty, heartfelt, and sophisticated story about the consequences of grief. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

**GIANT**
Barron, T.A.
Philomel (256 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-593-20349-1
Series: The Merlin Saga

A giant loses his identity but finds himself.

This middle-grade prequel to Barron’s Merlin series focuses on Shim, a giant with a kind heart. Shim lives on the island of Fincayra in the giant’s village of Varigal with his mother, Vonya, spending his days with friends Greeno, Lumpster, and...
maybe-crush Sister Behemoth. When their village is suddenly and brutally attacked by the evil usurper Stangmar, only Shim and Vonya survive the aftermath. They flee to the Haunted Marsh, where Vonya makes a horrible wager with a treacherous sorceress, leaving Shim shrunken and missing some very important memories. Now diminutive, Shim and his faery friend, Elf, set off to try to save Fincayla from total ruin. Along the way, they encounter ferocious wyverns, an enchanted unicorn, fierce zombie soldiers, and a magical orange crystal, imbuing this story with many fantasy tropes fans know and love. Barron’s worldbuilding is rich and nuanced but still accessible even to casual fantasy readers; as a prequel, no knowledge of the Merlinverse is needed, making this an excellent jumping-in point for new readers as well as pleasurable reading for established fans. Shim is a wonderfully relatable character imparting a message of empathy that should resonate long after the last page turns.

Simply delightful. (Fantasy. 8-12)
“There is a child in a hijab, and another child uses a wheelchair.”

This sentence, or variations thereof, appears in review after review these days in describing the diversity visible in a picture-book classroom or community. Even when a protagonist is White and nondisabled, as is very often the case, their community is frequently represented as robustly diverse in race and ethnicity and, to a lesser extent, ability. These days in picture books it’s rare to see an elementary school classroom without a child in a hijab and another child in a wheelchair.

As praiseworthy as it is to include children who might very rarely have been seen in picture books as recently as 20 years ago, there can be a perfunctoriness to the gesture that flattens the very complexity the illustrator is trying to communicate.

How many of these children who use wheelchairs are in motorized wheelchairs? Very, very few—and most of the children depicted in manual wheelchairs are in conveyances that do not have visible handrims, so they are dependent on others for their mobility, which is neither empowering nor reflective of real-world children who use wheelchairs. For that matter, how many disabled kids in picture books are depicted with forearm crutches, prostheses, eye patches, or hearing aids? Crucially, how many disabled kids are depicted as children of color?

Kirkus adored Marilyn Singer and Leah Nixon’s Best Day Ever (Clarion Books, June 29) for its centering of a young boy of color who uses a wheelchair (depicted with handrims by Nixon, who uses one herself) and plays happily with his dog. But in addition to more picture books with disabled protagonists, which are grievously few, let’s also see books with thoughtful disability representation within groups. Nichola Cowdery’s illustrations for Susan Rollings’ Best Friends, Busy Friends (2020) display such consideration, as do Jessica Spanyol’s in Rosa’s Big Sunflower Experiment (2020). Both of these books come from British publisher Child’s Play, a leader in inclusive disability representation.

Likewise, it’s the rare picture-book classroom that does not have a girl in a hijab. There are more kippot as well, and the occasional patka, indicating the presence of Jewish boys and Sikh boys. It’s an easily understood visual message that All Are Welcome, as in the title of Alexandra Penfold and Suzanne Kaufman’s forceful hymn to inclusion (Knopf, 2018). As we note in our review of that book, the message is “vital.”

But it seems to be aimed mostly at people who are not members of the groups being represented. Depictions of these elementary-age hijabis don’t really accord with typical Muslim practice, in which girls under the age of puberty usually do not cover their hair—not to mention the many Muslim women who do not cover. Note that the second grade protagonist of Reem Faruqi and Fahmida Azim’s Amira’s Picture Day (Holiday House, April 13) covers her hair only when she is in the masjid for Eid celebrations; when she is at school, her head is bare. And obviously, within any religious community, practices vary. Even leaving aside these variations, using these gendered signals to convey diversity erases opposite-gender and nonbinary kids of these faiths.

I get it: Picture books have very few words, and the illustrations must do a lot of heavy lifting. But can we do better than this now-stereotypical shorthand? Kids depicted wearing religious attire that they wouldn’t normally wear and children in wheelchairs they cannot move should not be the token representatives of their communities.

Vicky Smith is a young readers’ editor.
THE NIGHT RIDE
Coats, J. Anderson
Atheneum (224 pp.)
$17.99  |  Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-5344-8077-3

A stable girl rides in illegal races so she can buy the horse of her dreams. Sonnia would rather lead pony rides than attend school, and she lives for the afternoons when she’s allowed to groom and exercise Ricochet, one of the messenger horses in the fictional, quasi-medieval kingdom of Mael Dunn. Though her family is poor, with nearly no hope of advancement, Sonnia is saving her coppers to someday buy him. When Ricochet is sent to the king’s stables to be a companion for the high-strung racehorse Perihelion, Sonnia tags along and discovers that Deirdre, her childhood babysitter, is now a jockey there. Deirdre isn’t as friendly as Sonnia remembers, but she arranges for Sonnia to be taken on as a stable hand, which Sonnia soon learns is a cover for the young people riding in the dangerous and illegal Night Rides. Though she assumes her new companions are wealthy, she soon discovers they’re from desperate backgrounds like herself; in need of the money the purses provide. Sonnia is an engaging character with grit and determination, dreaming of the impossible while trying to survive in a hardscrabble world. The politics of the racecourse and the kingdom are confusing, however, and in the end, problems are solved externally in a way young readers may find disappointing. Most characters default to White.

Engaging, true-to-life horse content will satisfy many.
(Fiction. 8-12)
A funny read-aloud with a great message. (Picture book. 4-8)

FOR EVERY LITTLE THING
Poems and Prayers To Celebrate the Day
Ed. by Cotner, June & Ling, Nancy Tupper
Illus. by Cann, Helen
Eerdmans (96 pp.)
$18.99 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-8028-5519-0

From morning to night, poems celebrate the everyday joys and wonders to be found in life.

The rising sun, doggy kisses, a parent’s hug, fireflies, butterflies, friends and family, and nighttime dreams are a few of the things given thanks for and highlighted in the poems and blessings collected in this anthology, which combines poems old and new and from several religions and cultures. While God is not addressed or spoken of in every poem, most do show some appreciation of God and/or God’s creation, ask for God’s help or blessings, or acknowledge God’s gifts to humankind. Several have overt social messages (the power of goodness, seeing God in those you meet), some use striking imagery (rain “parachuting from the sky,” snow as “confetti from an angel’s party”), and many use pleasing rhymes and rhythms that will resonate with child readers (“Tuck your covers / snug and tight. / Tuck the good / into the night”). Artwork sets the tone for each poem, sometimes suggesting a theme or setting and other times illustrating the verse itself, whether as a whole or a small piece: Two poems, one mentioning “sandals on my feet,” the other “head to foot” are bookended by eight pairs of feet of diverse skin tones and shod in various sandal styles. A spread with poems talking about being kind and hurting no living thing is filled with realistic-looking life-size bugs of all types. The absurdity of the premise guarantees laughs from readers. They will enjoy watching the boy practice speaking with the animals in their languages, especially the lion, who can’t stop laughing (readers will find out why at the very end). The slick cartoon illustrations are vivid and eye-catching, the pacing of the page turns timed well for humor. The boy seems to have no teeth (a dramatic contrast to the lion’s dentition), which may be an additional point of humor for readers.

A funny read-aloud with a great message. (Picture book. 4-8)

TU YOYOU’S DISCOVERY
Finding a Cure for Malaria
Daemicke, Songju Ma
Illus. by Lin
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-8111-7
Series: She Made History

A picture-book biography about the persistent Chinese researcher whose medical discovery has saved millions of lives.

In 1969 Tu Youyou, a researcher at the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Beijing, was chosen to be a part of a research group to find a cure for chloroquine-resistant malaria. Spread by mosquitoes, this life-threatening disease was making people sick around the world. Using her subject’s given name, Daemicke describes how Youyou’s dedication to both traditional and modern medicines sprang from a life-changing battle with tuberculosis as a teen. In her search for a malaria cure, her observations and openness to traditional remedies led her to the plant qinghao (sweet wormwood). Many experiments failed, but her 191st experiment was finally successful! Youyou led her team to create the medicine artemisinin, also called qinghaosu in Chinese. Her contribution to the project was obscured for decades, but in 2015 she became the first Chinese woman to win a Nobel Prize. This inspiring picture-book biography provides a much-needed counterpoint to harmful Sinophobic rhetoric around the origins of Covid-19. Brief text focuses completely on the linear story of Youyou’s dedicated search for a malaria cure, with a mention that during her research, male researchers weren’t happy with her lack of results or her leadership. Round shapes and bright colors create inviting illustrations with cartoonish characters. Nearly all characters are depicted as Chinese.

A compelling introduction to a passionate and tenacious Chinese researcher. (biography, author’s note) (Picture book/biography. 5-9)

OUT OF MY HEART
Draper, Sharon M.
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum
(320 pp.)
$16.99 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-1-66590-216-8

A tween with cerebral palsy expands her horizons when she attends her first summer camp.

Twelve-year-old Melody Brooks, from Draper’s bestselling award winner Out of My Mind (2010), returns. As the school year ends, her classmates are full of their plans for summer camp, and Melody wonders if there could be a camp that is accessible for her; she uses a wheelchair and an assistive communication device. After getting brochures from the library, Melody convinces her parents to
overcome their concerns and enroll her in Camp Green Glades, a camp for kids with disabilities. Melody feels some nerves, but the staff are welcoming, and she bonds with Trinity, her Jamaican American camp counselor who has a leg brace, and meets the three other girls who will share her cabin. Over the course of the week, the campers go swimming, hiking, horseback riding, and zip lining as they make new friends and have new adventures. Melody also has her first crush on and dance with a boy. Melody's character continues to be irresistible, and a strength of the novel is how completely readers experience the world through her eyes. The supporting characters, who have a variety of ethnic backgrounds and types of disabilities, add richness; Melody's race is ambiguous. The book includes careful, detailed descriptions of physical logistics, but it's Melody emotions, thoughts, and perspectives that propel the narrative.

A deeply satisfying and worthy continuation of a beloved story. (Fiction. 9-13)

THE MOO-STERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF COW
Dumais, Sandra
Illus. by the author
Owlkids Books (48 pp.)
$16.95 | Sep. 15, 2021
978-1-77147-442-9
Series: Farm Crimes!

Inspector Billiam Van Hoof may deserve to be an honorary Muppet.

Muppets are always getting hilariously confused—like Traveling Matt, who explored the human world and decided that yellow cabs were fierce creatures who’d learned to sit when they heard “Taxi!” The goat detective at the center of this Québécois graphic novel follows in the same tradition. When a cow disappears from the farm, he decides she’s been kidnapped by aliens. He has evidence. She was wearing a shiny silver dress that resembled a space suit, and the spiral patterns that suddenly appeared on the lawn might have been crop circles. There are competing theories. Pig, for example, thinks the tractor might have broken down and started spinning in circles. But Pig can’t claim to be the “world’s #1 goat detective.” Van Hoof’s ads also say that he’s the “Winner of Best Disguise, goat category, Grade 8 Costume party.” The most literal-minded readers may wonder if he was a goat disguised as a goat. But that actually fits into the book’s goofy, absurdist sense of humor. It includes a raccoon with a mask tied around his face. None of it makes much sense, and, of course, the youngest cows know the solution before the adults. But the loopiness is appealing, and the minimalist, wavery ink drawings are delightfully simple.

Talking animals! Costumes! Mysterious symbols! This book has everything except logic. (And who needs that?) (Graphic mystery. 5-10)
A spirited and magical underdog story. (author’s note) (Fantasy. 9-13)

ADVENTURE KINGDOM
Foxe, Steve
Illus. by Rodriguez, Pedro with Maruno, Sonia
Andrews McMeel Publishing (160 pp.)
978-1-5248-6982-3 paper
978-1-5248-7078-2
Series: Adventure Kingdom, 1

A shuttered amusement park holds a portal to its magical mirror world.

In the abandoned theme park Adventure Kingdom, a boy hoping to livestream his exploits runs into a girl on the broken-down carousel. Clark and Karoline each carry half of an old coin, given to them years ago by Karoline’s grandad, who ran the park before he vanished. When the kids meet, their half coins pull them through a portal into the original Adventure Kingdom, a magical amusement park full of exciting creatures. Like the mundane world’s park, the magical one has fallen on hard times, and Clark and Karoline must flee the brutish minions of the mysterious Iron King. The tale relies extensively on genre shorthand, and rarely do the emotional beats have any payoff. Why does Clark have such a strong reaction to betrayal, for example, and how is it connected to his parents? Not only do readers never learn, but it’s irrelevant to his action-oriented character arc. The hook isn’t in the sketched outline of a plot, but in the appealing illustrations. The comic panels are bright, well composed, and dynamic, making excellent use of gutters and color (courtesy of Maruno). Adorable animate fuzzballs, a looming fortunetelling robot, and various talking animals people the Adventure Kingdom. The motivations of the Iron King may be thinly drawn, but his illustrated megalomania is gleefully intimidating. Karoline presents White; Clark has olive skin.

Though the storyline’s lacking, the bold art—shivery, cute, exciting—will keep pages turning. (Graphic fantasy. 8-11)

GREAT POWER, NO RESPONSIBILITY
Foxe, Steve
Illus. by Amin, Shadia
Graphix/Scholastic (80 pp.)
$22.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-338-73431-7
Series: Spider-Ham Graphic Novel

Spider-Ham isn’t the brightest, despite his good intentions.

In this funny comic, a porcine version of Marvel’s Spider-Man must make sense of responsibility and adventure when he is given—and then loses—the keys to the city! A pig with all the superpowers, strength, and agility of a spider, he’s also “the funniest hero in the multiverse” who still cannot seem to get any respect. After accidentally accepting the key to the city and then losing it, Spider-Ham must retrace his steps to figure out what happened. In doing so he crosses paths with villains and friends who move him along in his attempt to retrieve the lost key. Many of these characters will remind readers of their human versions from the classic Marvel comics. Even the real Spider-Man shows up for a very brief conversation about responsibility. All the characters except Spider-Man are animals. The book is fun and will get younger readers turning pages. However, while the snappy language and glibness in this text might amuse early-elementary readers, the Spider-Man character doesn’t have much depth. He’s playing video games while being honored by the city, issuing snark and wisecracks while being honored by the city, issuing snark and wisecracks and sarcasm in the name of humor—a technique that comes across as pandering to the early-elementary audience.

Younger readers familiar with the genre may enjoy this funny alternative story. (Graphic adventure. 6-8)

HOW TO SAVE A SUPERHERO
Freeman, Ruth
Holiday House (224 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-0-8234-4762-6

A fifth grader really has her work cut out for her to save her mom’s new job, a particularly surly resident of a Pennsylvania retirement home, and maybe the whole world to boot.

Thanks to a profound education in human nature and foibles gained at the hair salon of her Granny Lu, now two years dead, map-loving Addie is well prepared to navigate both her 11th school and Happy Valley Village, where her footloose single mother has landed a job. The fly in the ointment is nasty Melinda Sloat, HVV’s autocratic director, whose expansive building schemes wait upon the death and/or senility of the estate’s landowner, Mr. Norris. But it isn’t long before Addie begins to suspect that there’s more to the crotchety, seemingly declining Mr. Norris than meets the eye. Sure enough, her mom’s discovery of a stretchy blue body suit
hidden in the bottom of his closet touches off a quiet investigation that quickly spirals into a terrific scramble of stunning revelations, secret meetings, dirty dealings, rising stakes, desperate schemes, and even face-offs with mysterious strangers in black cars capped...ta-da!...by a last-second rescue that will definitely dazzle readers sorry to leave Addie's suddenly not-quite-so-ordinary world. Behind an uncommonly savvy, redoubtable protagonist, Freeman stocks her cast with a diverse array of equally vivacious characters, including as lively and hilarious a group of resident seniors as ever was. Main characters read as White.

A clever, lively romp. (Fiction. 10-13)

Vincent Ventura never knows who will move into 666 Duende St. next, but he can always count on the new occupants to bring supernatural adventure into his life.

Late-night sounds of children playing awaken Vincent. He has a hunch that the kids are ghosts and spots a spectral woman in white searching for them and senses another, darker force at play. This fourth series installment brings back familiar characters: Vincent’s twin cousins, his friend Sayer, and his love interest, Zulema, who is a shape-shifting witch. Vincent explains what he saw, and, with his cousins and Sayer, he researches ghosts from around the world at the school library. When they realize that substitute teacher Ms. Che is also Vincent’s new neighbor, the kids ask her for insights into the Mexican legend of La Llorona and how it might fit into what’s going on in Vincent’s neighborhood. Ms. Che explains that Latin American women phantoms called Cihuateteos seek to steal the souls of children—but that in some cases spirits are simply misunderstood. Vincent and the rest must work together alongside the ghost children to defeat the malevolent spirits so that good can prevail. Multifaceted portrayals of legendary spirits add depth to a narrative that is enhanced by dramatic black-and-white art. A Spanish version of the story is included. Characters are Latinx.

Nuanced folklore shines in this thrilling beginning chapter book. (Mystery. 8-12)

I DON’T LIKE BIRTHDAY PARTIES
Gaspari, Maureen
Illus. by Kalla, Siski
Welbeck Children’s (32 pp.)
$12.95 | Sep. 21, 2021
978-1-80129-010-4

Unlike the other kids he knows, Lucas does not like birthday parties: He finds them chaotic and loud and overwhelming.

Lucas wishes that he could like parties the way that all of his friends seem to instead of just standing in the corner and watching. The next time he receives a party invitation, he decides to go and to be extra brave. When he gets to the party, a girl offers him a temporary tattoo. He takes it even though he finds it “slimy and sticky” and altogether unpleasant. He then gets into the bounce house, where he is “bumped right and banged left.” He even tries to be in the party photo, but the flash hurts his eyes. Finally, in frustration, he crawls under the table—where

“Nuanced folklore shines.”
VINCENT VENTURA AND THE CURSE OF THE WEEPING WOMAN / VINCENT VENTURA Y LA MALDICIÓN DE LA LLORONA
Garza, Xavier
Illus. by the author
Piñata Books/Arte Público (128 pp.)
$10.95 paper | Oct. 31, 2021
978-1-55885-932-6
Series: Monster Fighter Mystery, 4

Vincent Ventura and the Curse of the Weeping Woman / Vincent Ventura y la Maldición de la Llorona

Nuanced folklore shines in this thrilling beginning chapter book.

“Illuminating and often delightful, this picture book invites young readers to appreciate the world through the lens of Geography.”
—BookLife Reviews

ISBN: 978-1662902819

“An inventive, mild adventure for young storytellers and monarchs...”
—Kirkus Reviews

FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL geo@mno.mgimo.ru
Readers first met the indomitable Mia Tang in Front Desk (2018), when the fifth grader and her parents, all Chinese immigrants, became the managers and then the unlikely owners of the Calivista Motel in Anaheim, buying it from Taiwanese frenemy Jason’s father. In sequel Three Keys (2020), sixth grader Mia finds California’s anti-immigration Prop 187 threatening her friend Lupe’s undocumented Mexican family. Now, in Room To Dream (Scholastic, Sept. 21), Mia is in seventh grade. The book opens with a six-week family trip back to China, where Mia is shocked to see how dramatically the country has modernized. She is doubly shocked when they return to the States to find the neighborhood around the Calivista also in the throes of economic change and their beloved motel once again in peril, this time from chains. If that’s not bad enough, Mia’s contending with loneliness after Lupe starts taking classes at the high school, and with confusion and hurt after Jason suddenly kisses her. In all her books, author Kelly Yang draws on her experiences growing up as an only-child Chinese immigrant in the 1990s. She spoke with us via Zoom from her home in Los Angeles, where she moved last year after 15 years in Hong Kong. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

You’re dealing with real economic complexity. How do you approach writing about this for middle graders?
I start from a very personal perspective. China has always been fascinating because of how rapidly it has developed. I left China when I was 6. When I went back for the first time, I was in sixth grade, and I really didn’t recognize it. It became this whole other country. There’s this feeling, as immigrants, when you return to your home country or where you were born and you’ve seen it change so dramatically. You can’t help but wonder, How would my life have been different if I had stayed? My parents [left] for economic opportunities and promise, but maybe some of those promises and opportunities also happened to relatives back home. But the other interesting thing was seeing how [the economic change] was affecting little companies, little businesses, mom-and-pop shops, and the neighborhood. Now we have McDonald’s. Now we have KFC. And you’re missing all those little connections to your past.

Mia experiences a real contrast between her aunt’s posh penthouse and some unemployed steelworkers she meets.
My parents had some friends who lost what they called “the iron rice bowl,” which was a steady job, usually a government job. These people worked hard, they thought that they could depend on it. Then suddenly it would be gone, because China was modernizing at a rapid pace, and all these state-owned enterprises were being privatized. It was hard to see that this amazing modernization wasn’t all wonderful for everyone. If you got to ride the wave and you caught it early, your life could completely change.
could be a millionaire, right? But for other people, it’d be really hard to adjust. And I got to see all of that.

Is Mia’s family’s reception at home autobiographical, too?
I remember my mom would be collecting little items from the thrift store or Walmart, trying to impress her relatives back home. And she would buy, in her opinion, just the most amazing pot, and then she’d get there, [and they’d be using this other] thing, which was way better, and my mom would just shrink into a puddle of embarrassment. I saw that, and my heart broke for her several times, because I knew how hard it was for her to save up to buy those presents.

How did the kiss subplot enter the novel?
I’m always thinking about consent. I am a survivor, and I’ve written about consent [elsewhere], but I was also thinking in the natural progression of Mia and Jason’s friendship, I wanted them to tackle this subject head-on. I think it [can be] hard to talk to younger kids about consent, but they need to have that conversation in a very gentle way early on, so that they understand that they are in control of their bodies and what happens. They need it now more than ever, because they’re coming back from a year of living online—they’re going to need a refresher on boundaries.

How much of young Kelly Yang is in Lupe? She’s accelerating academically, and you went to college at 13.
Absolutely. I had to go to high school when I was in middle school, and that was really traumatic. It was one of the reasons why I decided just to go straight to college, because I really did not have a good high school experience as a very young middle schooler. I wanted there to be some tension between Lupe and Mia, because growing up presents challenges. It’s hard to maintain a best friendship when you have two really ambitious, amazing, driven girls. Lupe has really taken everything by the reins and just gone with it full speed. And I wanted Mia to sit with some of that discomfort. Mia is a very competitive person. So how does that make her feel? But part of what is so great about her is that she has this tremendous empathy for other people, even when that situation maybe makes her feel a little left behind.

Is the dramatic change in Calivista’s neighborhood similar to what your family experienced?
Oh, yes. I think about little me just going, Oh my god, how are we going to compete? If you’re a small business owner, it’s terrifying. You think, I’m up against Goliath here, and I’m one little person. I had that feeling a lot growing up. My parents’ businesses were always going up against huge competitors.

It’s very hard, especially as an immigrant, because you don’t really understand the system that well, but you still have to compete. My parents were constantly terrified that something was going to happen and the health department was going to come. And it wasn’t even like we were doing anything wrong; the rooms were totally clean. But my parents just had this language barrier—they didn’t even know how to communicate with [the health department]. It’s very, very exhausting. Big companies have entire departments to deal with stuff like that. But you know, Mia Tang is a go-getter. [She’ll find a] really creative way and a very human way [to make it happen]. And I think that is actually the best way to compete.

Are we going to see more of Mia?
I would love to see more of Mia and her whole family and the entire Calivista crew. I want to see them achieve the American dream.

What do you hear from your child readers?
I get the most amazing letters, the most amazing emails. I got a note from a child who said, “I’ve been experiencing what I think is racism, but I haven’t really been sure. And I haven’t told anyone about it, because I felt really ashamed of some of the things that people have said to me. But after reading Front Desk, I realized I should not be ashamed. And I should tell someone about it.” I’m so happy that kids are finding these books. I hope that inspires them to find their voices and understand that they can make change at a really young age.

Room To Dream received a starred review in the Aug 15, 2021, issue.
he meets a girl named Kate who also doesn’t like birthday parties. Kate tells him that hers are small and quiet, with only a few friends. Lucas realizes that he does like birthday parties—he just likes ones that are a little different than what you would expect.

The protagonist’s plight is explored with empathy and clarity. However, it is not clear until the end that Lucas is being brave because he is struggling to plan his own party, which makes the book’s final pages feel disconnected from the main storyline. Lucas has very light brown skin, and Kate is pale. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An empathetic picture book about being a little bit different. (Picture book: 3-6)

**CONCEALED**
Gonzalez, Christina Diaz
Scholastic (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-338-64720-4

On the run to elude dastardly forces, a young amnesiac girl must unlock the mysteries of her past to save herself and her family.

Three years in the witness protection program—involving relocations, name changes, and secrets—have taken a toll on 12-year-old Katrina Davis. Unable to recall memories from before the age of 10, Katrina knows little about her life on the run other than the fact that a notorious drug cartel wants to destroy them thanks to her father’s involvement in their downfall. But mental snapshots from Katrina’s blurred past and moments of eavesdropping on her parents’ whispered discussions keep raising questions about her parents’ research scientist pasts and the real reasons behind their covert lifestyle. When her father disappears and armed men kidnap her mother, Katrina flees to a safe house with her new friend Parker Jimenez, a young computer hacker with his share of secrets. There, the duo meets Agent X, an alleged ally of Katrina’s parents. As Katrina races to reunite with her family, she discovers the truth behind her broken memories. Brimming with the knotty twists and eccentric turns found in any good page-turner, Gonzalez’s latest largely fulfills its promise of nefarious, science-based intrigue; bombastic characters; and melodrama. Only a bit of uneven pacing and a rather disappointing conclusion keep this tale of thrills from truly achieving greatness. Katrina and Parker have Cuban and Dominican heritage, respectively.

Gripping. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

**SLIMED**
Gray, Liam
Scholastic (224 pp.)
$6.99 paper | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-338-62072-6

Two kids enter a science contest and instead create slime that could take over the world.

White fourth grader Billy Hamilton hates school. He even got in trouble for saying his favorite part is leaving at the end of the day. But unless he wants to be a very old elementary schooler, he must bring up his scores and pass. Unfortunately, that means entering the TV show America’s Got Science competition with the most dedicated student he knows, African American Samantha Baptiste, the principal’s daughter. Not only does Sam love school, science is her favorite subject. The chance to meet her hero, Professor Quandary, the competition’s host, also fuels her drive to win. When Billy learns that his paternal grandmother, Mariana Hamilton, was a scientist, he and Sam use one of her old experiments for their entry. Unfortunately, chaos ensues when the simple slime turns grown-ups into zombies, or rather slimebies. Billy and Sam fight to put an end to the slimebie takeover threatening the science competition—and the town. Gray’s novel bursts with action and heart as Billy and Sam learn how to bridge their academic differences and combine their individual strengths in a refreshing twist on zombie apocalypse scenarios. As the kids take the forefront in the fight against the sentient slime, their actions transform the scientific method from a dry term in textbooks to an exhilarating adventure.

A high-stakes thrill ride. (Fiction. 8-12)

**A VOTE FOR SUSANNA The First Woman Mayor**
Greenwald, Karen M.
Illus. by James, Siân
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-5313-8

A grandmother remembers when Susanna Madora Salter was elected the first female mayor in the United States.

In 1934, Dora asks her grandson, Ed, to help her bake a cake for her birthday. Though proud to help, Ed worries what his friends will say, since “only girls bake.” In response, Dora tells Ed about a girl named Susanna living in Argonia, Kansas, when only men could vote and make laws. Then in 1887, Kansas becomes the first state to enact a law allowing women to vote and run for office in their city elections. When several men warn Susanna that “women should stay out of politics” as she and other women prepare to endorse a candidate for Argonia’s local election, she ignores the bullies. Next, townsmen create a
“What’s striking and effective are the range of strong women and their accomplishments.”

SHE’S ON THE MONEY

prank ballot listing Susanna as a candidate for mayor, and she surprises them by running and winning by a landslide. When Dora finishes her story and cake, she has a surprise for Ed. As Dora tells Ed this true story of her election as first female mayor in the country, she shares historical information about women’s limited role in politics along with personal details of her own experience, providing an accessible introduction to a landmark event. Simple, colorful illustrations follow Susanna’s political journey in 1887 and her later role as cake-baking grandmother in 1934. All characters present White. 

Factually accurate and accessibly told. (author’s note, research note) (Picture book/biography. 4-8)

THE MYSTERY OF THE TAJ MAHAL TREASURE
Haldar, Raj
Illus. by Rawat, Neha
Sourcebooks eXplore (112 pp.)
$5.99 paper | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-72822-205-9
Series: Word Travelers

Two best friends have an etymological adventure.

Normally, Eddie, a White boy, and MJ, an Indian American girl, spend their sleepover Saturdays playing and watching movies. One special Saturday, however, they uncover Eddie’s grandfather’s tome on word origins. When they open what they call the Awesome Enchanted Book, it magically whisks them away to the Indian city of Agra, home of the Taj Mahal. There, they meet a young Rajasthani prince named Dev who needs to find his family’s ancestral treasure to rebuild a village school destroyed in a typhoon. But Dev isn’t the only one after the treasure: A mustache-twirling White man named Mr. Raffles wants that money too. Together, the three kids race to solve the word-related clues in order to find the treasure first. While this etymologically themed series opener’s premise is promising, its execution oversimplifies India’s complexity. Dev, for example, comes from a Hindu dynasty even though the book takes place largely in and around a city and monument constructed by ancient Muslim rulers, who are never mentioned as such. Additionally, the words tufan (source of typhoon) and pajama are identified only as Hindi in the glossary despite their journeys through Arabic and/or Persian; the phrase Holy Cow is introduced with no explanation of its colonialist origins. These choices shortchange both readers and premise. (This book was reviewed digitally)

This word-based adventure falters in its oversimplification of a complicated place. (Fantasy. 8-10)

SHE’S ON THE MONEY
Hall, Andrea
Illus. by Zhang, Li
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-7342-6
Series: She Made History

Few women have appeared on currency; here are some who have.

A brief history of money introduces short biographies paired to appealing illustrations of women and the bills or coins they’ve appeared on. Those discussed—Cleopatra, Maria Sibylla Merian, Sacagawea, Ichiyō Higuchi, and Queen Sālote Tupou III, for example—are politicians, scientists, activists, artists, educators, and writers from different continents and countries, racial and ethnic groups. Some faces will be familiar to U.S. readers, while others will offer new inspiration. However, even given a collection’s spatial constraints, relevant facts are not always present (the Mirabal sisters of the Dominican Republic feature). (Fantasy. 8-10)
Republic are listed as martyrs, but their assassinations go unmentioned; Eva Perón declined a vice presidential nomination, but reasons why—cancer and purported police opposition—are unstated), which seems a lost opportunity to provide substantial content and context. Changes—Lady Liberty’s new identity as a Black woman, Harriet Tubman’s upcoming appearance as the first African American on a U.S. bill—are included, yet the text does not discuss racism. The connections between the roles and rights of women and the reasons why few women have appeared on money are implicit and may not always be apparent to younger readers. Still, what’s striking and effective here are the range and wealth of strong women and their accomplishments from different corners of the world.

An interesting cross-curricular concept with a feminist slant (and some gaps). (author’s note, glossary) (Collective biography. 5-10)

**BATPIG**

*When Pigs Fly*

Harrell, Rob
Illus. by the author

Dial Books (240 pp.)


978-0-593-35415-5

A pig becomes a superhero. Porcine Gary has a great life reading comics about the Crimson Swine, playing video games, and hanging with his friends, Brooklyn, a bat, and Carl, a fish. When a prank goes awry and he receives a radioactive bite from Brooklyn, Gary discovers he now has superhero powers and develops his new alter ego, Batpig. He tells Brooklyn about this development but not Carl, who can be indiscreet—and immediately picks up that his friends are hiding something from him. Carl’s hurt feelings understandably morph into anger; Gary’s decision to exclude his friend accidentally ends up creating a supervillain who may be Batpig’s undoing unless the trio can work together. A second episode sees the friends face off against a nefarious human foe, The Butcher, a White woman who wants to use the power of the world’s meat and has a robot that makes pigs in blankets. The first in a series, Harrell’s full-color graphic-novel charmer is over-the-top fun, filled with fast pacing, abundant silliness (pig puns abound!), and a well-developed plot and characters, that nevertheless does not rely on humor as its sole support. Gary and his friends are both relatable and accessible: The social tribulations of being part of a trio of friends will resonate with middle-grade audiences. This is an absolute must-read for fans of Dav Pilkey’s Dog Man series.

Readers will go hog wild for this lovable hero. (Graphic fiction. 7-12)

**SHE STITCHED THE STARS**

*A Story of Ellen Harding Baker’s Solar System Quilt*

Harris, Jennifer
Illus. by Pigott, Louise

Whitman (32 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021

978-0-8075-7322-8

Series: She Made History

An imagined history of a unique creation and its creators.

In 1876, Ellen Harding Baker began a visual depiction of the solar system in the form of a quilt that now has a home in the National Museum of American History. But this was a time when women were told to focus on domestic chores—not science. What led Ellen to make her quilt? What was she like as a mother? What was growing up like for her daughters? The text bubbles with enthusiasm as it conjectures that she “inspired her children to dream bigger, to ask questions, to reach for more,” to climb, run, dare, and help their mother research, plan, and stitch the quilt. Warm illustrations brimming with nature and filled with quiet energy show Ellen and her daughters teaching, learning, and exploring the nature around them as they fulfill household obligations and find time to work on the quilt. Though sometimes mildly pedantic (“Neighbors remind us it’s a girl’s duty to sit quietly… Their meaning coils around us: embroider your obedience, embroider only your world”), overall, this lively portrayal of the girls and their mother sparks with curiosity and joy; it’s sure to inspire questions in young listeners as it embraces feminism, history, creativity, and science. Save for one young modern museumgoer, all characters depicted present White.

An engaging inquiry into the lives of everyday girls who are limited by historical circumstance but yearn for more. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)

**CLARA LEMLICH**

*Heiligman, Deborah*

Illus. by Flint, Gillian

Philomel (80 pp.)

$14.99 | $5.99 paper | Sep. 28, 2021

978-0-593-11752-5 paper

Series: She Persisted

A young Russian immigrant becomes a renowned organizer and advocate for workers’ rights.

Heiligman’s entry in the She Persisted series follows Clara Lemlich from Gorodok—where she became a secret voracious reader—to New York in 1904. Clara finds work as a seamstress in a shirtwaist factory where conditions are oppressive. Her innate outspoken nature and sensitivity to injustice lead her to union organizing and eventually to rally tens of thousands of garment workers in a general strike. Heiligman’s six brief chapters
“Celebrates confident girls in sports…”
— School Library Journal

**Lone Runner**
Dirk McLean
9781459415942 | $27.99 | hardback

**Rugby Rookies**
Mike Levitt
9781459415744 | $27.99 | hardback

**Open Ice**
David Trilunov
9781459415862 | $27.99 | hardback

**Last Pick**
David Starr
9781459415829 | $27.99 | hardback

**Volleyball Vibe**
Karen Spotford-Fitz
9781459415539 | $27.99 | hardback

**Head to Head**
Jennifer Manuel
9781459415409 | $27.99 | hardback

**Sports Stories Series Features:**
- Realistic stories full of action
- Characters with diverse racial, physical, mental, and economic backgrounds
- Written by award-winning authors who know their sport
- Accessible, engaging text for hi-lo readers.

NEW IN THE SERIES

Made possible with the support of Ontario Creates
emphasize Lemlich’s passionate ideals and zeal for social justice, using descriptions of “fire” and “burning” to describe Clara’s intensity. These words may remind some of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, which occurred two years after the strike (the Triangle Shirtwaist Company did not sign the contract that workers successfully negotiated). Heiligman describes Lemlich’s work organizing fellow housewives in opposing hikes in rent and the price of food while she raised her children and supporting Cesar Chavez while a nursing-home resident. She considers what lessons in persistence can be found in Lemlich’s long and committed life, offering perspectives from Lemlich’s grandchildren and sharing Clara’s charming personal affirmation (“I am beautiful. I am lover-ly”) along with eight ways to honor Lemlich’s voice. A noteworthy inclusion is the list of sources, including references to the author’s telephone interviews, formatted readily for the target audience.

Intentionally and successfully inspiring. (author’s note) (Biography. 6-10)

**BEST FRIENDS-ISH**

Higgins, Carter  
Illus. by Mann, Jennifer K.  
Chronicle Books (184 pp.)  
$14.99 | Oct. 5, 2021  
978-1-4521-8394-7  
Series: Audrey L and Audrey W, 1

A second grader navigates the ups and downs of a new friendship.

So far, second grade isn’t living up to Audrey Locke’s high expectations. When the odd number of kids pair up, she’s the extra one. Longing to be best at something, Audrey—class Welcome Ambassador—seizes her opportunity when Ms. Fincastle announces they’ll be joined by a new student whose favorite snack is chocolate-covered crickets. Although Audrey drops the welcome cake she’s made, the new student whose favorite snack is chocolate-covered crickets. As Audrey W excels at music, spelling, and more, Audrey L begins to feel jealous, especially after the class votes for Audrey W’s choice to name the classroom’s hermit crab. With Audrey W best at so much, Audrey L is determined to prove herself best at baking. Then their baking-focused weekend play date goes awry, and Audrey L lets out all her worries and anger. Mann’s droll illustrations capture the full range of her changing emotions and convey character diversity. Ms. Fincastle and several students have darker skin than both brown-haired Audrey L (presumed White) and black-haired Audrey W (who has olive skin on the full-color cover). The sophisticated vocabulary and syntax might be a stretch for young readers. If mature, accomplished Audrey W is fairly thinly developed in this first series outing, Audrey L’s struggles to establish herself within the chaotic social hierarchies of elementary school are endearingly authentic.

Funny and engaging. (Fiction. 6-9)

**WHAT ABOUT WILL**

Hopkins, Ellen  
Putnam (384 pp.)  
$17.99 | Sep. 14, 2021  
978-0-593-10804-2

What can a good kid do when his big brother starts being a problem?

Twelve-year-old Trace Reynolds, who is White and Puerto Rican, wants to get noticed for the right reasons: good grades, Little League, pulling weeds for Mr. Cobb next door. Seventeen-year-old Will used to be the best brother, but now he’s so angry. He’s played football since he was a little kid and has been tackled plenty; when he gets horrifically hurt in a JV game, it’s just one too many head injuries. It’s been a year and a half since Will’s traumatic brain injury, and he’s got a hair-trigger temper. He has chronic headaches, depression, and muscle spasms that prevent him from smiling. Trace knows it’s rotten for Will, but still, why did his awesome brother have to give up all his cool friends? Now he argues with their dad, hangs out with losers—and steals Trace’s stuff. At least Trace has a friend in Catalina Sánchez, the new girl on Little League. Her dad’s a retired major leaguer, and she has sibling problems too. Observations from Trace frame Cat as praiseworthy by virtue of her not being like the other girls, a mindset that conveys misogynistic overtones. The fears of stable, straight-arrow athlete Trace are clarified in lovely sparks of concrete poetry among Hopkins’ free verse, as he learns to tell adults when he sees his beloved brother acting dangerously.

Compassionate optimism for a boy who can’t control the chaos around him. (author’s note) (Verse novel. 9-13)

**GERMY SCIENCE**

The Sick Truth About Getting Sick (and Staying Healthy)  
Kay, Edward  
Illus. by Shiell, Mike  
Kids Can (48 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct. 5, 2021  
978-1-5253-0412-5  
Series: Gross Science

Icky, germy pathogens of all sorts are introduced in this newest addition to the Gross Science series.

Germs are everywhere, in everything, and they are even on you. Millions can fit on a pin point. Germs come in many varieties, not just as bacteria and viruses most readers are familiar with, but also as fungi and protozoa. Tracing the history of infectious disease, Kay explores early theories of disease spread, the discovery of microorganisms, and ultimately how germ theory was discovered and proven. How our immune system fights off germy invaders and what we can do to help are also discussed along with plenty more interesting tidbits about humans’ relationships with microbes. In introducing these complex science topics, Kay shows great respect for his readers: The text does
not shy away from challenging vocabulary but always explains concepts at an approachable level. This book is notable for its inclusion of a nuanced view of the microbiome, acknowledging that germs are not all bad, that their harm depends on context, and that they can even be beneficial. Shiell supplies goofy cartoons of racially diverse humans in varying degrees of health and that they can even be beneficial. Shiell supplies goofy cartoons of varying number) and grins or frowns, depending on circumstance. Though books on germs are plentiful, these germs are a worthwhile addition to science shelves. (*This book was reviewed digitally*)

**WINDY DAYS**

Kerbel, Deborah
Illus. by Sato, Miki
Pajama Press (24 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-77278-217-2

See and feel what the wind can do.

The gentle spring wind scatters seed. Everything is set spinning in a quick wind gust. It’s good to be indoors when the stormy wind whistles. When the geese take flight in the autumn wind, it’s time to fly a kite. A strong, steady wind turns a turbine to provide power. And what better way to enjoy the swirling, sawing wind than to play in the piles of fallen leaves? Sweeping winds can knock you off your feet and grab on to your umbrella. The restless wind howls and makes the Halloween night perfect. Even the icy, blustery wind that bites at your nose is an adventure. Kerbel follows the wind through the seasons, setting scenes with strong descriptive language in two-line verses with rhymes or near rhymes, all filled with movement and joy. A diverse cast of young children interact with the wind, which is depicted throughout as streaming white lines pushing through the air in Sato’s wonderfully textured mixed-media collage illustrations that seamlessly match the scenes described. Readers will want to touch the children’s sweaters, pick the luscious-looking apples hanging loosely on the tree, and jump into that buckling pile of leaves. The concept of wind in all its varieties is explained simply and beautifully with just enough information for curious young readers.

**SHIELD OF THE MACCABEES**

A Hanukkah Graphic Novel

Kimmel, Eric A.
Illus. by Smiley, Dov
Apples & Honey Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-1-4413-3762-7

A Greek boy and a Judean boy become unlikely friends at the time of the Hanukkah story.

In Jason and Jonathan’s Judea, the Greek colonizers and the Jews they rule over live in a somewhat troubled peace. They go to different schools and speak different languages, but people are allowed to live and worship as they please. Nonetheless, many Judeans (mostly illustrated with brown or olive skin and dark hair) resent the Greeks (mostly light-skinned, many with pale yellow hair). In this fraught balance, Jonathan and Jason bond over the important things in life: teaching each other slick wrestling moves, playing discus, and discussing the nature of the divine. Jonathan accompanies Jason to Greek school, while Jason joins Jonathan’s family for (somewhat anachronistic) religious celebrations. But their fragile friendship comes to an end when wicked King Antiochus blames the Jews for his own troubles. The boys are pulled into the bloody war that paves the way for the Maccabean victory and the Hanukkah miracle. An author’s note speaks to the aim of reaching for the real history behind the tropes of this most widely known Jewish holiday, but the tale still owes vastly more to myth than to history. The clunky, oddly proportioned comic panels, with blocky but movement-filled composition, don’t complement the philosophical narrative.

**MAYA’S TREASURE**

Kutscher, Laurie Smollett
Illus. by the author
Peter Pauper Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-1-4413-3762-7

A little girl collects and creates with shells she finds on her island.

Maya and her sister, Alita, carry on their family’s tradition of turning shells they collect every morning into shining, bright jewelry and accessories for people around their tropical-island home. While Alita discards the shells she thinks are ugly because they are cracked or misshapen, Maya remembers their grandmother’s words and works to “just find the magic” in every shell she picks up, even the ugly ones. She thinks hard about how to create the right purpose for the ugly shells and eventually finds that they make excellent wind chimes. Maya’s wind chimes end up being a gift to her whole community when they warn her and their town that a dangerous storm is on the way in the middle of the night. Maya
is illustrated with curly, dark-brown hair, and Alita is pictured with more sandy-colored hair. Though no location is disclosed for the island where they reside, detailed pastel images of villagers and island flora and fauna, along with the shifting skies, help create a dreamy atmosphere that complements the delicateness and intimacy of some of the images. One spread of Maya dancing with Grandmother in her dreams emphasizes the importance of sharing lessons and love across generations.

Light, mellow, and as comforting as an island breeze. (Picture book 4-8)

**ELIZABETH WEBSTER AND THE CHAMBER OF STOLEN GHOSTS**

Lashner, William  
Little, Brown (320 pp.)  
$16.99 | Oct. 12, 2021  
978-0-7595-5772-7  
Series: Elizabeth Webster, 3

Elizabeth Webster’s legal troubles come to a head.

The Philadelphia middle schooler hasn’t been in the greatest shape of her legal career following the events of *Elizabeth Webster and the Portal of Doom* (2020). But she is nevertheless approached by Janelle and Sydney, two sisters who ask her for help: The ghosts of their late parents and grandfather used to comfort them and keep them company, but ever since they were stolen, the girls have been bereft. A ghost thief is on the loose, and it’s up to Elizabeth to track the missing spirits down with the help of a most surprising helper: her mother. The ensuing adventure draws out the nefarious demon Redwing, leading to a showdown in the Court of Uncommon Pleas that holds the future of Elizabeth’s world at stake and wraps up the trilogy. At this point, Elizabeth’s fans know what they’re getting—a delicate mix of legal sparring and paranormal trappings propping up a well-charted mystery. This final entry holds its own against its predecessors: Elizabeth remains an engaging protagonist, and her spooky environs are well fleshed out. There’s an emotional undercurrent here that enriches this title, and fans will be pleased with how Elizabeth turns out in this series that remains charmingly original in the field of middle-grade paranormal mysteries. Elizabeth is White; Janelle and Sydney have light brown skin, and there is some diversity in the supporting cast.

A rousing send-off for a wonderful young sleuth. (Mystery. 10-14)

**FACELESS**

Lasky, Kathryn  
Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)  
$16.99 | Oct. 19, 2021  
978-0-06-269331-0

Spying for the British in the final years of World War II, 13-year-old English girl Alice Winfield embarks on a dangerous mission to Berlin.

Involved in British spying for centuries, the Winfields are Rasas, or agents with perfectly proportioned, forgettable faces, ideal for espionage. Alice’s mother is a veteran Rasa spy for MI6, her father’s an operative stationed in Berlin, and her 19-year-old sister, Louise, has been trusted with complex missions. When Louise suddenly resigns and has plastic surgery to alter her face, Alice feels lost. Parachuting into Germany with her mother to join her father in Berlin on her first top-level mission, Alice poses as a schoolgirl. Winning a coveted Reich Praktikum, or student internship, in Hitler’s household, she goes everywhere the Führer goes, observing and reporting back about his mental state as part of an assassination plot. With the Allies approaching, clever Alice tries to fulfill her mission, secretly help a homeless Jewish boy, uncover the mystery of Louise’s sudden appearance in Germany, and remain inconspicuous while surrounded by enemies. Alice’s behind-the-scenes position within the epicenter of Nazi power during the final days of the war provides an intriguing perspective on Nazi luminaries, 1940s German student life, wartime deprivation in Berlin, Nazi xenophobia and racial theory, and the excitement and danger of being a wartime spy. Repeated themes of identity and references to Wagner’s Ring cycle prove effective. Characters read as White.

Fascinating and riveting, especially for history buffs and spy aficionados. (Historical notes) (Historical fiction. 9-13)

**SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS**

Levy, Joanne  
Orca (264 pp.)  
$10.95 paper | Oct. 12, 2021  
978-1-4598-2707-3

Evie Walman does not have, nor does she want, any friends.

A lot of the kids in her class think it’s creepy that her parents own a funeral home. It’s certainly not a normal summer job for a rising eighth grader, but Evie takes her position as junior funeral director very seriously. And despite what anyone may think, she is equally as serious about not making any friends—that just leads to getting hurt. When she meets Oren Katzman after the tragic deaths of his parents, she is eager to help him through his grief during the arduous funeral process, but certainly not as his friend. At first this seems easy for Evie, especially since Oren hasn’t spoken since the accident, but when her parents invite him to help out at the
funeral home as well, the two can no longer avoid their growing (if mostly silent) friendship. This middle-grade novel is both a celebration of life and a peaceful acknowledgement of the harsh realities of death. It is a heartfelt and expertly written tale of loss, family, and friendship that will have readers blinking back their tears as they follow Evie and Oren as they navigate their way through their new companionship. Characters are White and Jewish.

A beautiful and sincere story of death, healing, and family.

(Fiction. 8-12)
“Breaks free from the dichotomy of representing LGBTQ+ lives as total tragedy or happily-ever-after stories.”

THIS IS OUR RAINBOW

16 Stories of Her, Him, Them, and Us
Ed. by Locke, Katherine & Melleby, Nicole
Knopf (336 pp.)
978-0-593-30394-8
978-0-593-30395-5 PLB

These 16 short stories by celebrated authors of literature for young people center the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in pivotal moments of childhood and adolescence.

As the title suggests, this collection delivers a spectrum of diversity in representation of both personal identities and genre. Whether the stories contain overt fantasy (like dragons, spells, the undead, and time loops), subtle glimmers of the supernatural (like ghosts and magical letters), or realistic grounding in the everyday (like a new kitten, sports, and school), they capture with honesty and vulnerability the feelings that accompany events like the grief of losing a friend or facing rejection from a crush, the nervous thrill of new feelings for someone special, and the freeing, but sometimes still scary, power of self-discovery.

Although the majority of the selections are prose, the anthology includes two comics and one story in verse. Many of the protagonists feel a budding desire for close connection—a witch with a squish on her ordinary neighbor, an aspiring marine biologist with a changing friend group, a pirate who misses their sister—and they overcome self-doubt to reach for it. Not every crush works out, and sometimes feelings get hurt, but these outcomes lean toward recovery and personal growth while validating the sadness of loneliness. An essential read, this collection breaks free from the dichotomy of representing LGBTQ+ lives as total tragedy or one-true-love, happily-ever-after coming-out stories.

Vital and liberating. (Anthology, 8-13)

HANGMAN’S CROSSING

Mabbitt, Will
Illus. by Knight, Taryn
Walker US/Candlewick (240 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-5362-1048-4
Series: Embassy of the Dead, 2

Jake and Cora return to solve more ghostly crimes.

In return for helping his mentor, Stifkey, resolve his unfinished business, Jake has been granted a position working for the Embassy of the Dead—whether he wants it or not. He can’t actually turn down this invitation and thus finds himself deep in the realm of the dead at the Hangman’s Social Club, where he overhears a plot to destroy the thin veil between the world of the living and the dead. Now it’s up to Jake, his ghost pal, Cora, and ghost fox Zorro, to right some wrongs. Jake’s refusing of the call to serve gets a bit tiresome, but the author smartly places this in the background relatively early. As spooky and macabre as its predecessor, this outing has a little less novelty but makes up for that with a zippy structure. The first book’s uneven pacing is improved upon here, and the creepy, scratchy illustrations spook readers at every few turns of the page. Readers will delight as they journey through realms unknown with Jake and Cora as they search for a way to save the world. This sequel delivers, expanding the world of the series in smart and engaging ways that will have fans pleased and newcomers going back to read the first volume. Jake and Cora are White.

A blossoming, chill-inducing series. (Horror 9-12)

ANOTHER KIND

May, Cait & Bream, Trevor
Illus. by May, Cait
HarperAlley (288 pp.)
978-0-06-304353-4
978-0-06-304354-1 paper

A group of special youth find themselves a family.

In a clandestine meeting hinting at trouble to come, readers learn that there are six Irregularities, ranging in age from 6 to 16, and that malevolent interest swirls around them. These Irregularities turn out to be a motley group of charming kids with a variety of unusual qualities. One is a quiet selkie, always attached to her seal skin; another is a reptilian alien from a race that has disguised itself as human to infiltrate the government (which nods uncomfortably at antisemitic conspiracy theories that reference alien lizard people); one can turn into a bear; and the angst-y will-o-the-wisp is capable of malicious mind control. The young almost-people are safe in their sanctuary, the Playroom, but when they’re removed by a double agent, they must find their way to safety as a chosen family. Classic comic-style art is effectively

grows increasingly enormous) until it reaches 12 syrup sundaes, at which point the end of the countdown arrives not at another mountain of macaroni but at one green pea. The zookeepers have finally decided this croc needs some veg! Author and sometime Arctic explorer Lewis-Jones shows a silly side in penning a perfect parody of the Yuletide favorite focusing on a greedy croc. Sanders’ stylized illustrations of a bright green croc on equally bright backgrounds inhaling yummies served by a multiracial troop of zookeepers and patrons are a deliciously eye-catching match. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A cumulative singalong fit for hungry crowds (and crocs).

(Picture book 2-7)
deployed to show intense emotion and fast-paced action, and in addition to being nonhuman, the characters represent a diverse group of racial and gender identities that are generally background to the plot. A satisfying climax with a harmless but clichéd resolution about the power of love makes this a fun choice ideal for a middle-grade audience with a taste for more relatable X-Men–style heroes.

An irregularly enjoyable read. (sketches) (Graphic adventure. 9-14)
though she’s good at arithmetic, Amelia struggles with other types of math and hates being on the team. Conveniently, Franklin can communicate with her (what initially seems like realistic interspecies communication becomes a psychic bond), and he coaches her. Because of Chester, Franklin’s learned that you need to act like a friend to have friends. Amelia’s mother explores whether Amelia might have autism, though differently expressed than in mostly nonverbal Gus, while Franklin convinces Amelia to go back to mathletes. Outsider points of view are common in novels about autistic people, but a pet narrator who says that autism’s not shameful because autistic people just behave like cats is not quite the empowering message it’s intended to be. Main human characters read as White.

Representations of autistic kids’ friendships are valuable, but this is not the cat’s meow. (Fiction. 9-11)

A stubborn little dog refuses to wear his new red coat.

Ruffles loves canine activities like howling, scratching, fetching, sniffing, chewing, digging, and running. He especially loves playing in puddles. Ruffles does not, however, love his new red coat. He won’t wear it, even when it’s rainy, cold, and wet. But his pal Ruby wears her new blue coat when they play together in a puddle. They “splish” and “splosh” happily in the puddle until some big dogs splash all the water away—and onto Ruffles and Ruby. Protected by her coat, Ruby wants to continue playing, but wet, cold, mad Ruffles says, “No.” Ruby sadly walks away. Then Ruby returns with Ruffles’ red coat. Will Ruffles still refuse to wear it or relent? The sparse text relies on repetition of verbs addressing Ruffles’ activities as well as his repeated no’s, making his eventual reversal about the dreaded red coat surprising. With a limited palette of vibrant blue, red, yellow, and green, the simple, lively illustrations rely on neat pencil outlines to portray Ruffles as a perky white terrier and Ruby as an affable gray sidekick who stand out against plain white and color backgrounds as they engage in active puddle-play. Small sequential drawings of Ruffles struggling to wriggle out of and back into the notorious red coat prove priceless, his comic facial expressions and body language telling the whole story. A playful, endearing tale of canine friendship. (Picture book. 3-5)

A layered, utterly readable novel about a biracial protagonist grappling with dyslexia. (Fiction. 8-12)
Egypt, King and his friends follow Maestro through various portals, a journey that offers King insight into his family lineage and Maestro’s motives. Their hope is to prevent Maestro from ending the world as they know it. Readers who enjoyed Kingston and the Magician’s Lost and Found (2021) will welcome this brisk sequel that maintains the engaging tone of the first series entry and entertainingly incorporates information about ancient Egyptian gods. King and most other characters are Black.

An illuminating sequel. (map) (Fantasy. 8-12)

THE HEIST AGE
Paleo, Doug
Illus. by Blecha, Aaron
Etch/HarperCollins (224 pp.)
$13.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-358-33157-5
Series: Dinomighty!, 2

The Dinomighty crew works together to protect the Dino Lisa portrait from their nemeses.

NEW! from Ezra Jack Keats New Illustrator Honor Winner
Kate Read

HEY! A Colorful Spelling

“Laugh-out-loud witty.”
—Kirkus Reviews

On Sale October 1st

HC: $17.99 / 9781682633274

“There’s plenty of content with high appeal for kids: dinozombies, scatological humor, and fight scenes.”

A BATCH MADE IN HEAVEN
Nelson, Suzanne
Scholastic (272 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-338-64050-2
Series: Wish

A mentorship at a well-known local bakery, a cute boy, a family secret—and a confident young girl, ready to show the world her baking skills.

Seventh grader Mina Kapur, the daughter of Indian immigrants, cannot wait to begin working at a local bakery called A Batch Made in Heaven. However, tensions with the owner’s son, a surly, White eighth grader named Flynn, immediately frustrate Mina. While helping to care for her 12-week-old twin siblings, she focuses on her family’s dream of opening a restaurant—her father owned a restaurant in Delhi. The bakery’s kitchen, nicknamed the Cookie Vault due to its heavily guarded secret recipes, sets the stage for a storyline that highlights tweenage drama. There is a hot-and-cold relationship with Flynn; disregard for the feelings of her Chinook best friend, Kalli; and living with deceiving her parents about something important—all while Mina’s trying to fulfill her dream of winning a baking contest. Another theme in the story involves middle schoolers feeling responsible for the problems of their friends and family and the impact of the stress this brings. Nelson’s latest addition to her series of food-focused first-crush titles contains mouthwatering descriptions along with recipes at the end of the book. The Kapur family’s Indian identity is primarily signaled through food.

Age-appropriate romance with a focus on baking. (Fiction. 8-12)

THE HEIST AGE
Paleo, Doug
Illus. by Blecha, Aaron
Etch/HarperCollins (224 pp.)
$13.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
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Series: Dinomighty!, 2

The Dinomighty crew works together to protect the Dino Lisa portrait from their nemeses.

Dinomighties Teri-Dactyl, Dave, T-Lex, and the chicken, Bach, leverage their strengths to outwit the bad guys led by Bully Mammoth. The Mayor of Dinotown charges the Dinomighties with protecting the priceless painting the Dino Lisa, but former baddies the Diplos are hot on their trail. They team up with Bully Mammoth, who is at the top of the nemesis list to try to steal the Dino Lisa and stop the Dinomighties. There’s plenty of content in this graphic novel with high appeal for kids: dinozombies, scatological humor, and fight scenes. The all-star, most fun character is the brainiac Bach, who only ever says, Bob! and who often swoops in to save the day with a hack or some chemistry. While the characters are all very likable and fun on the page, the plot is a little thin. There’s no clear motivation for the bad guys (why steal the Dino Lisa?) other than that they are bad guys who therefore do bad things. Blecha’s illustrations, however, add plenty. From little details, like the Diplos eavesdropping on the mayor, to the creative perspective in a scene where the dinozombies close in on the Dinomighties, the art helps buoy the story. The end sets up the next book in the series.

Plenty for kids to enjoy, even if the storyline falls flat. (Graphic fiction. 8-10)
“Funny, sure-handed, wise.”

**GOOD NIGHT, TOUCAN**

Partis, Joanne

Illus. by the author

Tiger Tales (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Oct. 5, 2021

978-1-68010-258-1

Series: Animalographies

A flustered toucan plans a party. Toucan invites his friends Tiger, Sloth, Frog, and Monkey to a sleepover. They are beyond excited. In fact, they declare, “It’s going to be the best sleepover ever!” This makes Toucan nervous. He wasn’t prepared for all of that pressure! He desperately flies into the jungle, searching for something that will make his party better. He fills his beak with flowers for decorations (only the biggest and most colorful, of course), finds fluffy ferns for cozy seating, and picks a tasty bunch of bananas for a treat. Then, he spies fireflies. Their twinkling lights would make the perfect ambiance! But he’s already nimbly builds Toucan’s growing need to please, finding more and more items throughout the jungle while never believing it will be enough. An unfortunate dunk in the river leads to a dripping toucan who must confront failure. Luckily, his friends are there to help.

**BEAUTIFUL JIM**

The World’s Smartest Horse

Parachini, Jodie

Illus. by Kordic, Dragan

Whitman (32 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021

978-0-8075-0611-0

Series: Animalographies

An educated horse tells his own story. Jim was meant to be a racehorse, but he is born awkward. Jim’s “human,” William “Doc” Key, is a Black man who was born into slavery and educated alongside the White children on the plantation. Jim relates how Doc loved to read about animal medicine and became so skilled at it that he was often called upon to treat animals on farms and even humans. When slavery ended, Doc prospered as a veterinarian. After Jim’s birth in 1889, Doc and his wife notice Jim’s remarkable intelligence, and Doc spends time teaching Jim the alphabet and numbers. Jim learns so many impressive skills that he and Doc take their show on the road and astonish audiences, including presidents and visitors to the 1904 world’s fair. Jim can spell, sort mail, use a telephone, and solve arithmetic problems. But the presentation is not just for show. Doc believes that the only skills needed to train animals are patience and kindness, and he hopes that seeing Jim’s intelligence will influence people to treat animals kindly. The text is written as a first-person narrative, and the reader takes inspiration from a pamphlet on puppy training in his plan to reward good behavior and ignore less desirable (as in dumping for shoes) in his dad. The tall-tale, anecdotal quality of Carl’s story is entertaining with its recitation of disastrous, smelly, embarrassing, dangerous, and misguided moments. Carl’s father regards money as stored human energy (and therefore sees energy as a kind of currency)—he “leans well into the concept of being practical and has never been one to honor the cosmetic side of things” and is an accomplished barterer who can’t pass up a garage sale. Carl’s pink, feminine overalls come from a garage sale, and his too-small underwear hails from another bargain source. Carl’s garrulous, singularly imaginative sidekick Pooder (he “has made tangents an art form”) offers color commentary, advice, comic relief, and perspective by turns. Carl takes inspiration from a pamphlet on puppy training in his plan to reward good behavior and ignore less desirable (as in dumping for shoes) in his dad. The tall-tale, anecdotal quality of Carl’s story is entertaining with its recitation of disastrous, smelly, embarrassing, dangerous, and misguided moments. Both father and son turn out to be likable heroes. Characters are assumed White.

**HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DAD**

Paulsen, Gary

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (192 pp.)

$15.99 | Oct. 5, 2021

978-0-374-31417-0

Carl tries to change his father’s frugal behavior over the course of a summer. Narrator Carl, 12, believes that his problem is his relentlessly optimistic, handy dad, who sees their life in a small trailer with pigs (fed partly from dumpster forays), chickens, and a garden as rich and full. But Carl’s heart has been captured from afar, and he believes that being noticed will take an improved kind of being “lookatable.” Carl’s father regards money as stored human energy (and therefore sees energy as a kind of currency)—he “leans well into the concept of being practical and has never been one to honor the cosmetic side of things” and is an accomplished barterer who can’t pass up a garage sale. Carl’s pink, feminine overalls come from a garage sale, and his too-small underwear hails from another bargain source. Carl’s garrulous, singularly imaginative sidekick Pooder (the “has made tangents an art form”) offers color commentary, advice, comic relief, and perspective by turns. Carl takes inspiration from a pamphlet on puppy training in his plan to reward good behavior and ignore less desirable (as in dumping for shoes) in his dad. The tall-tale, anecdotal quality of Carl’s story is entertaining with its recitation of disastrous, smelly, embarrassing, dangerous, and misguided moments. Both father and son turn out to be likable heroes. Characters are assumed White.

**PIGHEARTED**

Perry, Alex

Little, Brown (304 pp.)

$16.99 | Oct. 26, 2021

978-0-316-53877-0

A boy faces heart transplant surgery and losing the friendship of the pig that could save his life.

The two main characters of this story are both named Jeremiah. Jeremiah the boy is a 12-year-old who suffers from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a hereditary heart defect. Jeremiah the pig, or Jeremiah Six, also known as J6, is a
chimera—beings engineered in a lab from the genetic material of two animals. In this case, he is a pig with a human heart. The narrative alternates between the perspectives of the two. Following an episode in which his heart stopped on the soccer field (fortunately he has a device that functions like a defibrillator), Jeremiah is hospitalized, and when he returns home, J6 comes to live with him. Both believe that J6 is intended to be Jeremiah's therapy pig. Once they learn the truth—that J6 is growing a heart for transplantation into Jeremiah's body—the fight for their lives begins. Throughout, the narrative discusses the use of stem cells and the ethics of breeding animals for humans' medical purposes. While the pig's repeated references to his fear of being turned into a pulled-pork sandwich detract from the flow, the novel offers much material for discussion and contemplation. Jeremiah and his family present as White; his two best friends are cued as Latinx and Muslim.

A heartwarming (and unsettling) reminder to never stop fighting for those you love. (author's note, resources) (Fiction, 8-12)

**STUNTOY, IN THE MEANTIME**
Reynolds, Jason
Illus. by Raul the Third
Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum (256 pp.)
$13.99 | Nov 9, 2021
978-1-534-41816-5

Not-so-secret superhero by day and kid from apartment 4D by day as well, Portico “Stuntboy” Reeves will need all his tricks to withstand the great threat facing his family and the anxiety that comes with it.

Portico loves living in Skylight Gardens, an apartment complex as large as a castle, but he cherishes the people and community the most—with the exception of Herbert Singletary the Worst. Herbert is a bully and often a source of Portico’s “frets,” or debilitating anxiety, but neighbor and bestie Zola provides great support to both Portico and his super alter ego. The latter’s purpose is to keep all the other uniquely heroic folk in Skylight Gardens safe through an arsenal of self-sacrificing distractions and awkward hijinks. Raul the Third's illustrations are both dynamic and cleverly slapstick as Portico skillfully tumble down stairs to prevent an older resident from falling or flops in front of his parents to momentarily stop them from fighting. Reynolds' narrative gradually reveals the impact Portico’s parents’ impending separation is having on their deeply sensitive son even as he can’t fully grasp what’s going on around him. Superlative, action-packed art and cheeky narration combine to tell a story of emotional intelligence on a superheroic scale while remaining consistently funny and undeniably thoughtful. Most characters read as Black.

A boy finds a creative coping mechanism in this original tale that speaks to the heart. (additional sketches) (Adventure, 7-12)

**UNI THE UNICORN IN THE REAL WORLD**
Rosenthal, Paris
Illus. by Barrager, Brigette
Random House Studio (42 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sep. 21, 2021
978-0-593-30680-2
978-0-593-30681-9 PLB
Series: Uni the Unicorn

In this third volume, Uni finally gets to visit their little-girl pal where she lives and meet her friends and family.

Sliding in on a double rainbow (the one, of course, that connects Here and There), Uni is excited to visit the Real World for the first time. But when the unnamed little girl introduces Uni to her parents, they don’t see Uni at all. The little tot’s entire body droops in disappointment. The duo then races to the park to find the little girl’s friends. Surely they will want to see a unicorn! But they don’t see Uni either. This time, it is Uni’s turn to sadly droop. Suddenly, light hits Uni’s horn, and a rainbow appears. A glint of believing grows in a little boy, and he can see Uni! The thrum of magic and sparkle is there in both the text and art, but the ending feels slapdash and arbitrary: “The power of believing spread across the Real World, making it a bright and joyful place where everyone...was welcome.” Regardless, the full-circle moment is satisfying, completing the arc begun by author Rosenthal’s late mother, Amy Krouse Rosenthal, in Uni the Unicorn (2014) and Uni the Unicorn and the Dream Come True (2017). Uni and the little girl have now seen each other’s homes and made both better through their friendship. The little girl and her family present White; her friends are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A sweet trilogy conclusion. (Picture book, 3-6)

**MILLIE’S DIARY**
Scott, Oleen Hardaway
Global Publishing Solutions, LLC
(114 pp.)
$10.99 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-7372244-2-6

A tween who comes from a life of poverty strives to overcome challenges while remaining optimistic.

Millie is a Black 12-year-old girl from Gary, Indiana. She has two sisters and a brother, and they all live with their mother; their father has died. Millie doesn’t have much, but she maintains gratitude for what little she has. She has one friend, Rosa, who moved away recently. Though she misses Rosa, she doesn’t let that get her down and eventually desires to make new friends. While knowing that her dreams may not come true, Millie still dares to aspire to achieve great things and hopes that she can influence other children to dream big as well. She is hopeful for a time when all children are able to live in luxury, excess even—and...
she hopes that children will have the drive and opportunities to grow up and achieve. Via her diary entries, readers get insights into Millie’s thoughts about herself, her experiences and life circumstances, her family, and society. The concept of this book is unfortunately so ambiguous that it ends up reading like a collection of unedited streams of consciousness. With its repetitive, generic statements and unfocused structure, the narrative proves confusing and lacking in fluidity. Better worldbuilding, clear plot, and more well-rounded character development could turn this into a novel that would pique and satiate readers’ interests.

**A sincere story that needs more revision, polish, and direction. (Fiction. 8-12)**

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO CULTURE**
Serres, Alain
Illus. by Fronty, Aurélia
Trans. by Tanaka, Shelley
Groundwood (48 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-77306-490-1
Series: I Have the Right, 3

Children's rights include participation in the artistic and cultural worlds.

The French creators of *I Have the Right To Be a Child* (2012) and *I Have the Right To Save My Planet* (2021) imagine what it means to “respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and...encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity” (Article 31, U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1990). With vibrant art and fanciful, appealing examples, Fronty and Serres invite children into a world of creativity. Short text blocks are set directly on colorful, naive illustrations—sometimes panels, sometimes spreads filled with humans, old and young, in all their variety, doing interesting things. In Tanaka’s smooth translation, the writer regularly repeats the phrase, I have the right to, as he considers creating, performing, and appreciating music, arts, dance, history, science, culture, and literature from around the world. He asks questions of and addresses young readers directly, with child-friendly examples. No, we cannot buy the works of art in a museum; no one else could enjoy them. (The dubious proviso of much of the works in the world’s museums is not addressed.) Finally, not every child has the privilege of enjoying art and culture: “The child who could not experience any of this would have every right to be angry...these treasures of humanity should be shared.” *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An inviting and thought-provoking look at a children’s right probably not often considered. *(Informational picture book. 7-10)*

**TELL SOMEONE**
Shumaker, Debra Kempf
Illus. by Yevcienko, Tristan
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-0-8075-7769-1

A gentle reminder about the importance of open communication.

At first glance, the title might suggest intimidating, even frightening scenarios, but the titular phrase is meant for both good and bad days. A small White tot inspects a scraped knee after a scooter accident: “When I’m bumped and bruised / or scraped and scratched— / if I’m hurt— / I tell someone.” But a different White child triumphantly masters a two-wheeler: “When I pedal real fast / and stay upright— / if I’m happy— / I tell someone. / High fives all around!” Other scenes show a racially diverse cast of youngsters who are worried, grateful, sad, or brave. But it always helps to name—and share—emotions. Children are empowered to advocate for themselves. Shumaker deftly points out that “some things I can’t fix by myself”—including when “I have a secret that doesn’t feel right.” Yevcienko’s expressive-eyed cast of characters includes not just parents, but possible friends, siblings, teachers, and grandparents. All can be trusted listeners. The appended note from a clinical social worker touches on the differences between telling and tattling. It also reminds adults of the importance of “listening with our whole bodies” when children have emotions to share.

**A forthright tool for social-emotional learning. (Picture book. 4-8)**

**BARAKAH BEATS**
Siddiqui, Maleeba
Scholastic (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-338-70206-4

Twelve-year-old Nimra Sharif is attending public school for the first time.

Pakistani American Nimra was home-schooled until she was 8, then attended a private Islamic school where she memorized the Quran, becoming a hafiza. Now her parents have decided that it is time for her to attend public school, where she’ll be with her childhood best friend, Jenna, a White girl. But once seventh grade starts, Jenna ignores and avoids Nimra. Fortunately, Nimra meets other Muslim students: Matthew, a White convert; Bilal and Khadijah, Somali American siblings; and Pakistani American Waleed. When Bilal, Matthew, and Waleed ask her to join Barakah Beats, their Muslim band, she hesitates because of her family’s interpretation of Islamic teachings, which eschews taking part in instrumental music. But she gives in, believing that hanging out with three popular, attractive eighth grade boys will impress Jenna. Her plan to join the band just long enough to regain Jenna's friendship
“A compassionate look at a young boy in the grip of PTSD and his path to recovery.”

**THE GOLDEN HOUR**

Smith, Niki
Illus. by the author
Little, Brown (536 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-316-54033-9

After witnessing a brutal attack against his art teacher, young Manuel Soto struggles to cope with the trauma and anxiety that shadow him.

Bouts of panic attacks and moments of disassociation afflict Manuel, especially when reminders of the attack crop up unexpectedly. To manage these flashes of great unease, he uses his love of and skills in photography to anchor and ground himself. One day, he’s paired with Sebastian and Caysha, a couple of classmates, for a school project. As Manuel becomes fast friends with them, he learns more about his newfound friends’ plans to participate in the summer county fair. Spending time on Sebastian’s family’s cattle farm outside of town, as well as with Sebastian’s newborn calf, Manuel finds his space and quiet he needs to experience relief and engage in reflection. Slowly, he begins to open up to his friends about his trauma, joining in with their joyful preparations for the fair (Caysha’s fancy chickens are a hoot) and forging a deeper, more affectionate relationship with Sebastian in particular. Employing artwork that expresses sobering realism with hints of softly colorful catharsis, Smith provides a compassionate, gentle look at a young boy in the grip of PTSD and his hard-won path to recovery. Lightness lingers among the tightly paced, evenly formed panels, broken only by the dynamic, sometimes slanted, lines used to characterize Manuel’s panic attacks. Strong, good-natured characters and an endearing representation of young queer love round out a mighty sweet tale. Manuel is cued as Latinx; Sebastian reads as White and Caysha as Black.

An important story about staying true to yourself. (author’s note) (Graphic fiction. 8-12)

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**THE CIRCUS AT THE END OF THE SEA**

Snyder, Lori R.
Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-0-06-304710-5

Does a young girl have the power to save the magical circus of Venice Beach?

Maddy Adriana has always felt the pull of something magical, but now at 12 she knows not to tell anyone about these feelings. On the way to a new group home for sick kids who need Extra Attention, Maddy follows a tug of magic that leads her to discover Il Circo delle Strade, a wondrous circus fading away due to the absence of their beloved Ringmaster. Encouraged by the Muse of Venice, Maddy and her new octopus companion embark on a quest to find the Ringmaster and revitalize the circus. Maddy’s adventures in Venice Beach, akin to those of Alice in Wonderland and Dorothy in Oz, are a string of surreal episodes populated with bizarre and unusual characters. There are also intriguing existential adventures into body parts, although the writing sometimes veers into rhapsodies of schmaltz. Echoes of the cult classic film Xanadu can be found in this love letter to Venice Beach, supported by the author’s note detailing the actual public art landmarks featured in the story. The work is action-packed, if a bit heavy-handed with its heartfelt message of accepting both the light and dark and happy and sad parts of the world and the self. Maddy has brown skin and wavy black hair.

Amusement-park thrills somewhat chilled by sentimental storytelling. (Fantasy. 9-12)

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**THE THIRTEENTH HOUR**

Sosna-Spear, Quinn
Simon & Schuster (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-5344-5188-9

Rose may feel powerless, but with the help of a new friend she becomes a hero.

Rosemary Marks is bullied, ostracized, and voiceless at school, so she can’t understand why her Aunt Jo is convinced she can save a magical world contained in a pocket watch. Aunt Jo has shared with Rose a book of stories explaining the wonders and dangers of each of the 12 landscapes engraved upon the watch’s petallike segments. When Aunt Jo becomes ill, she gives the watch to Rose, instructing her to keep it close and go to sleep between 11 and 12 o’clock. Rose compiles—and finds herself in another world where a trio of kids has been awaiting her. They explain that she is to destroy the Walls between the hours that keep them trapped. She must continue Aunt Jo’s work of capturing smoke from the evil Smoke Keeper of each hour. Well-paced reveals contrast the complexities of the realm...
with Rose’s home and school lives—e.g., strategies Aunt Jo taught Rose to combat monsters help her deal with school bullies—until the two worlds collide. But it is the help of her new friend, Alejandro Fuentes, and their unexpectedly intertwined family stories that mark turning points in both worlds. If the formula feels familiar, the details are original, and readers will embrace Rose as an unlikely champion. Rose is White; Alejandro is Mexican American.

Captivating. (Fantasy. 8-12)

THE BOOKSHOP OF DUST AND DREAMS
Thompson, Mindy
Viking (336 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-0-593-11037-9

All bookshops feel magical, but even so, Rhyme and Reason is special.

Thirteen-year-old Poppy Fulbright is lucky enough to work in and live above one of the most magical bookshops of all time. In fact, time is precisely why it is unique. Sutton, New York, in 1944 isn’t the only time and place in which Rhyme and Reason exists; Poppy’s family’s magical bookshop appears to patrons whenever they need it most, regardless of the year or where they are located. The magic that exists within the shop comes with its own set of rules, and they’re strictly enforced by the Council. When Carl, the best friend of Poppy’s older brother, Al, dies while fighting in World War II, Al wants to break the rules and use the time-traveling magic of the bookshop to save his life. This historical fantasy is whimsical yet bittersweet given the subject matter. While the premise is engaging, the lackluster plot would have benefited from deeper character development, and more expansive worldbuilding. Despite this, the book could appeal to readers who understand the magic that a dusty old bookshop can contain and who appreciate the weight of the perfect book. Most characters are cued as White; the shop courier and the Council Leader have brown skin.

A simple tale of family, friendship, and the magic of reading. (Fantasy. 8-12)

JOURNEY TO THE LAST RIVER
Unknown Adventurer
Illus. by the author
Ed. by Keen, Teddy
Frances Lincoln (128 pp.)
$22.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-0-7112-5449-7

An anonymous artist’s illustrated journal of an exploratory voyage deep into the Amazon basin.

Following on The Lost Book of Adventure (2019) and presented in the same facsimile format, complete with images of stains, smashed bugs, and small attached botanical specimens, this engrossing diary records a five-week trip upriver—retracing a route from an old hand-drawn map (included as a glued-on foldout) with certain parts tantalizingly rubbed out. What lies in the missing bits? Readers will be as avid to find out as the unnamed and ungendered—but almost certainly European—“Unknown Adventurer” is. Accompanied only by Bibi, a female biologist friend with (fortunately, it turns out) excellent rainforest survival skills, the inexperienced narrator spends much of the arduous trek complaining: “This place isn’t endangered. We are.” But after many encounters with flora and fauna often as dangerous as it is unfamiliar to the adventurer, what lies at journey’s end turns out to be something wonderful, even more precious than gold…but, oh, so vulnerable too. Hundreds of colored-pencil drawings, done largely in blues and greens, accompany text printed in a faux hand-lettered but easily legible type. Sometimes quick and impressionistic, sometimes representational, their subjects include tiny insect specimens, broad landscapes and forest understories, portrait sketches of Bibi (a resident, and possibly Native, Brazilian) and the few locals they meet, and even inventories of camping gear. Keen identifies specific creatures and locales in discreet footnotes. Keen adds comments fore and aft.

Sometimes thrilling, often terrifying, thoroughly immersive. (Illustrated fiction. 10-12)

HORSE TROUBLE
Varner, Kristin
Illus. by the author
First Second (288 pp.)
$21.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-250-22587-0

Horses help a tween navigate middle school in Varner’s graphic novel debut.

Twelve-year-old Kate Williams can’t remember ever not being fat. Her mom means well but is insensitive, suggesting she not wear her favorite striped shirts; her older brother, Ross, unkindly calls her Chubba, among other demeaning nicknames. She’s always loved horses, and Millcreek Farm, where she has been riding for four years and takes lessons twice a week, is a haven—except for the other girls, who also mock her size. Kate’s gotten to the point where she’s ready to compete in jumper classes at horse shows, but she also falls off frequently—10 separate falls over the course of the book, including one just after she crosses the finish line in what should be the triumphant victory scene. It’s enough to make any horse-crazy girl afraid to ride and starts to feel repetitive. Kate, with the help of a friend, also plays a nasty prank on one of the mean barn girls and endures physical harassment from her brother’s friends, but these and other serious issues are dealt with superficially. The clean, expressive illustrations in shades of blue are active and well done, and explanatory text clarifies horse-related terminology. Most characters present White; Kate’s best friend is cued as East Asian.

Visually appealing but skims the surface. (Graphic fiction. 8-12)
Alicia Alonso?
Viña begins this appealing biography in 1929 in Havana, Cuba. Excited to learn ballet, Alonso trains daily in “the only pair of pointe shoes available in the whole country.” She is a girl with a dream to practice an art that does yet exist fully in her homeland. In 1937 she leaves for New York City, in spite of her father’s disapproval, to train, with limited English, at the American Ballet Theatre. There she faces unimpressed teachers but nonetheless receives praise for her technique. When faltering vision causes her to pause training to undergo multiple surgeries to save her eyesight, she eventually ends up on bed rest for a year after a final operation. Alonso relies on her imagination and memory to keep dancing—a remarkable example of her determination. Viña chronicles Alonso’s recovery and eventual stardom as a principal ballerina in Giselle, Swan Lake, and Don Quixote in spite of living with low-vision disabilities, concluding with Alonso’s return to Cuba in 1958, which marks the founding of Ballet Nacional de Cuba. With Spanish words infused so that they flow naturally throughout, Viña adds an authentic cultural layer to an inspiring artist’s career. Félix’s illustrations, while straightforward and simple, add colorful richness that brings Viña’s engaging storytelling to life.

A solid introduction to a Cuban ballet legend that will inspire readers to learn more. (author’s note, resources) (Picture book/biography. 5-8)

THE GENIUS UNDER THE TABLE
Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain
Telchín, Eugene
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (208 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-5362-1552-6

Telchín delivers a darkly humorous slice-of-life account of growing up in the Soviet Union.
Living with his mother, father, brother, and grandmother in a tiny room inside a communal apartment in Leningrad, young Yegevny does not have much privacy. He sleeps underneath the family table, where he spends his nights drawing in secret on the underside of the table. He draws to try to make sense of the confusing world around him, where neighbors spy on one another, everyone seems to be keeping secrets, and only the most remarkable, talented citizens are allowed luxuries like private apartments, cars, and the opportunity to travel outside the country. Yegevny’s older brother is a talented figure skater, and his parents are desperate to uncover a latent talent in him so that he can make a good life for himself, yet he unwittingly foils their well-meaning attempts in several comical incidents. Furthermore, the family’s Jewish identity puts them at a disadvantage in a country where antisemitism regularly rears its ugly head. Yegevny’s line drawings, re-created from his childhood sketches under the table, punctuate his story with visual humor and pathos. The vivid dialogue exchanged among his elders provides comic relief to many of the stark situations depicted as Yegevny tries to hang onto hope amid the chaos and uses what considerable artistic talent he certainly possesses to try to envision a better future for himself and his family.

Humorous, heartbreaking, and ultimately hopeful. (Mem.-or. 10-adult)

THE NEW FRIEND
Zolotow, Charlotte
Illus. by Chad, Benjamin
Milky Way (44 pp.)
$17.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-90252-01-3

The devoted friendship of two children ends without warning.
The narrator uses the past tense to describe an easygoing, intimate friendship: “I had a friend / a dear friend / with long brown hair.” The two delighted in playing outdoors: picking wildflowers, wading in the brook, and talking and reading together underneath a tree. But one day the narrator calls for her, and “she [isn’t] there.” A trip through the woods reveals that she is with a different friend, and this new duo does many of the same things she once did with the narrator. The narrator grieves—but dreams the trauma of abruptly losing a friend, never diminishing the pain of such a betrayal. Yet the story does not allow the protagonist to wallow in self-pity and instead ends on a moderately hopeful note: The narrator, though still sad, considers a future in which “I won’t care” about having lost this friendship. Chad’s illustrations feature a verdant, richly colored world as the children run and play in the woods. Playful animal face masks the pair enjoys are used to great effect: “I had a friend / a dear friend / with long brown hair.” The two delighted in playing outdoors: picking wildflowers, wading in the brook, and talking and reading together underneath a tree. But one day the narrator calls for her, and “she [isn’t] there.” A trip through the woods reveals that she is with a different friend, and this new duo does many of the same things she once did with the narrator. The narrator grieves—but dreams a new friendship. Zolotow’s text, originally published in 1968 (with illustrations by Emily Arnold McCully), sensitively captures the trauma of abruptly losing a friend, never diminishing the pain of such a betrayal. Yet the story does not allow the protagonist to wallow in self-pity and instead ends on a moderately hopeful note: The narrator, though still sad, considers a future in which “I won’t care” about having lost this friendship.

This all-too-common childhood experience is dramatized with an emotional honesty that, refreshingly, skirts sentimentality. (Picture book. 4-10)
BOARD & NOVELTY BOOKS

I MISS YOUR SUNNY SMILE
Adamson, Deb
Illus. by Zimanski, Anne
blue manatee press (14 pp.)
$7.99 | Mar. 23, 2021
978-1-936669-87-5

An ode to a child's love for their teddy bear.
When the day starts out dreary, a caregiver and child go on a hunt throughout the house to find the little one's smile. In rhyming stanzas, the pair looks under the sofa, in the cookie jar, and while blowing bubbles, but it's not until they uncover the teddy bear that the child's smile returns. Adamson's text has a gentle bounce, like a familiar lullaby, the text addressing the child directly as "you." Zimanski's illustrations bring the story to life. There are lovely details that add nuance, like the opening page's rainy window, which contrasts with the final illustration of an inviting playground and brilliant sunshine, a visual echo of the child's despondence at the book's start and joy at the end. Adults will relate to the feeling of eagerly trying to cheer up their little ones, while children will no doubt connect with the love of a most precious stuffed animal or toy. Both the adult and child are White, and no gendered pronouns appear in the text save for the teddy bear, denoted as he. This story has a simple, contained arc making it the right fit for its intended audience.

A sweet childhood experience captured in an age-appropriate way. (Board book. 1-3)

SHHH...GOOD NIGHT
Benson, Nicky
Illus. by Elliott, Thomas
Tiger Tales (24 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-68010-261-1

Parent and baby animals get ready to snuggle down at bedtime in the forest.
Each double-page spread contains a poem on the verso and images of various creatures settling down for the night on the recto. A mother bird quiets her fledging; a squirrel hugs their baby; parent and baby fireflies doze on a leaf; and a deer and fawn snuggle together. Elaborate die cuts in flower, leaf, and tree shapes offer glimpses of the subsequent spreads and keep the first verse of each poem in view when the page containing the second verse is turned. The final spread shows a variety of parent and baby animals bedding down for the night. The collage-effect, jewel-toned illustrations are attractive and pleasingly designed, although the anthropomorphized creatures have a cartoonish look. The die cuts are complex but don't add much to the reading experience. The simple, soothing, but sometimes awkwardly constructed rhymes are suitable for bedtime but sometimes confusing; readers are exhorted to “Watch sunny skies turn gray,” but the skies are resolutely pink in the illustration. A curious child might wonder why fireflies go to sleep if they’re shining at night? The complexity of the production fails to disguise otherwise simplistic and unoriginal content.

This lackluster effort does not add much to an already-stuffed genre of bedtime books. (Novelty. 2-4)

HELLO BABY ANIMALS, WHO ARE YOU?
Botman, Loes
Illus. by the author
Floris (12 pp.)
$9.95 paper | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-78250-720-8
Series: Hello Animals

Soft illustrations identify and name baby animals.

Most little ones are entranced at the sight of cute animals, and in this board book there are plenty of sweet baby fluffballs to hold their interest. It's a slightly odd collection of critters, with an emphasis on barnyard friends such as lambs, a calf, and piglets—to which are added a selection of wilder things, like a baby turtle and a fawn. Succinct and repetitive text introduces the baby animals by their special names and then by their species: "I'm a clever cub, says the baby fox." (Some readers may wish to substitute kit.) Older toddlers past the basic naming stage will enjoy the opportunity to learn that a baby deer, for instance, is referred to as a fawn. Adjectives describing the creatures, including the “wobbly foal” or “curious owlets,” are accessible vocabulary builders. Muted, mottled pastel illustrations are a welcome choice for the intimate nature of the book. Soft, smudged edges make the animals look fluffy, and the pastel lines swirling about the animals create enticing auras about them. While the animals aren't photorealistic, they are definitely naturalistic, with close-ups of a handsome goat kid prancing and a vulnerable, big-eyed donkey foal. Background colors can sometimes be unexpected—the fox and bunny are surrounded by rich peachy, plum tones with diffuse white highlights—but they are all quite attractive.

A darling way to learn baby animal names. (Board book. 1-4)

NOISY ANIMAL SEARCH AND FIND
Crisp, Lauren
Illus. by Elliott, Thomas
Tiger Tales (10 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-68010-685-5

A busy board book of critters and creatures in five habitats.
Animals that live in five broadly defined and geographically unrestricted environments—forests, sun, cold, in the ocean,
“The rhymes work so well even young children can supply the word needed to complete each couplet.”

HALLOWEEN

...
will assume they should count four frogs until they notice the text that identifies them as "4 playful toads"—if they see it. On that page, the black lettering on a dark green background is particularly hard to discern.

This count is not a bit scary. (Board book. 1-4)

**HELLO, YOU! A High-Contrast Book for Babies**

Hepworth, Amelia
Illus. by Chen, Cani
Tiger Tales (10 pp.)
$6.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-68010-695-4

Humans and animals greet baby readers in these high-contrast, black-and-white pages with neon accents.

Paper-white Mommy, Daddy, and crawling baby offer different salutations before, inexplicably, various animals enter the scene. A tiger "grins," a frog "ribbits," and a bear "grunts," among others. Despite these dialogue tags, the accompanying speech bubble almost always encases a Hello! rather than the animals' signature sounds, as if they are being dubbed into English. The final page changes this up with an owl who bids readers, "Night night, Baby!" While this won't bother the target audience, it may leave parents and caregivers scratching their heads. Chen’s enticingly flat cartoons are fluid and fresh, but the accent-color choices of pale yellow and lime green may be too subtle for the blurry eyesight of the very young, the target audience. Companion title Hello, Baby Animals! follows a nearly exact formula, featuring animal motions in the text: "Penguin flaps. / Turtle paddles. / Deer nibbles." Again, the repetitive speech bubble on each page encloses a Hello! until the sloth (with a sleeping baby sloth) bids readers goodnight.

Fun and playful imagery accompanies a repetitive text that lacks internal logic. (Board book. 0-6 mos.) (Hello, Baby Animals!: 978-1-68010-696-1)

**LITTLE SLEEPY SOLAR SYSTEM**

Hutton, John
Illus. by Cenko, Doug
blue manatee press (14 pp.)
$7.99 | Apr. 1, 2021
978-1-936669-85-1

A bedtime rhyme introduces little ones to the solar system.

The first double-page spread introduces the sun, the eight planets, and Pluto (with a question mark); all have eyes, mouths, and arms and look as though they are made of felt and stitched to a quilt. These celestial bodies demonstrate numbers, colors, and opposites in rhyming verse, but Venus, who represents orange, is a bit too yellow, whereas Mars, seen on a previous page, would have done very nicely as orange. Gender stereotypes are subtly evident, with Mars wearing a baseball cap and evidently female-presenting planets given eyelashes. Earth is shown wearing a dress and hair/cloud clips, making it hard to identify our planet. The final double-page spread shows nightcap-wearing planets getting ready for bed, with the parental sun shushing everyone. While the verse scans relatively well, the art is confusing and makes it hard for little ones to identify the planets by their key features.

Those looking for a solar system primer shouldn't drop out of orbit for this one. (Board book. 6 mos.-2)

**JINGLE BELLS / NAVIDAD Bilingual Nursery Rhymes**

Jaramillo, Susie
Illus. by the author
Encantos (30 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-945635-38-0
Series: Canticos Bilingual Nursery Rhymes

This clever board book presents the traditional Christmas song and a Spanish version of the same.

With a neat trick of engineering, this bilingual book can be read in one language first, then the other with a flip of the book, though the illustrations stay the same. In this way, one language is not favored over the other. Readers familiar with other books in the Canticos series will recognize some of the characters—a mother hen and her chicks, elephants, a spider, a rabbit—from previous outings, though familiarity with them is not required to enjoy this one. As the lyrics progress, the images more or less go along with the words. It is strange, though, to see palm trees and a tropical beach cabin under snow and, in the English version, an open sleigh without even one horse. On most pages children can lift a flap to reveal objects or a word associated with the season: gifts; warmth / calor; joy / alegría; delight / deleite; surprise / sorpresa. Readers should not expect to find the Spanish version paralleling the lyrics of the English song. This version, as do other existing Spanish versions, only borrows the tune of the original. The result, though, is still a Christmas song that speaks of the joy to be found on Christmas Day.

Sweet and attractive, though not as strong an entry as other books in the series. (Board book. 1-4)

**ENERGY ANIMATED**

Jorden, Tyler
Illus. by Martini, Elsa
Familius (14 pp.)
$14.99 | Apr. 27, 2021
978-1-64170-254-6

With the help of interactive tabs, readers learn about the many ways energy can be created or harnessed.

It's always exciting when a book tackles a seldom-covered topic, but regrettably, the execution, subject, and vocabulary level of this one are enormously mismatched with the
board-book crew. Children old enough to contextualize uranium as “a radioactive metal that gets very hot as it decays” are too old for this format. Related in a straightforward tone that might be interpreted as “just the facts, ma’am,” the protracted text describes ways of making and capturing energy such as coal, nuclear, solar, wind, and hydro, but it’s overcomplicated and seems, at points, disingenuous. While descriptions of drilling oil are accurate, the flat statements feel pointedly detached from damage drilling can cause; this stands in contrast to the way solar panels’ utility is somewhat pooh-poohed: Solar “only works during the day though.” Innovative paper craft featuring flashy pull-tabs, flaps, gears, and spinners add interest, as kids start dams flowing or move trains, but again, are readers old enough to grasp the complexities of the way mirrors facilitate solar-energy production going to be delighted by a smiley-faced sun spinner? Bright, cheerful cartoon-style art feels tonally jarring at points. No number of upbeat coral and aqua bushes really offsets a radiation symbol. All human characters are depicted with light skin.

Far too ambitious in scope for little ones; far too babyish in format for older kids. (Novelty board book: 3-9)

POLAR ANIMALS
Laboucarie, Sandra
Illus. by de-fanny
Trans. by Hardenberg, Wendeline A.
Twirl/Chronicle (14 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
979-1-02760-878-2
Series: Ultimate Spotlight

A pop-up survey of wildlife in Arctic, Antarctic, and tundra habitats.

In both art and narrative, food and family are definitely the prevailing themes. Here, an emperor penguin horks up a meal for his offspring while a southern giant petrel lurks nearby, hoping to snatch up a chick; there, pulling a tab dumps a basking seal into the water, where a pod of hungry orcas awaits. Elsewhere, moving a slider brings a newborn humpback whale into the world, a pop-up polar bear and her cub hover over holes in an ice floe, and Laboucarie informs readers that a leopard seal “would gladly munch on a penguin.” An arctic fox stalks a lemming in winter and in summer thanks to a double-gatefold view of the same tundra landscape in both seasons. Still, the carnage remains implicit, because for all the references to diet and predation, none of the animals here are actually depicted chowing down on one another. In a well-meaning if only marginally relevant gesture, four bundled-up children—one with brown skin, three with pale—play with toy cold-weather creatures on the title spread. They are not seen again and are the only human figures.

A glimpse of the wilder side of wild nature, though the actual crunching and munching remain offstage. (Informational pop-up picture book: 6-8)

PLANTS
Maehara, Motomitsu
Illus. by the author
Blue Dot Kids Press (20 pp.)
$10.95 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-73622-643-8
Series: Words of the World

Learn the names of exuberantly collaged plants and animals in seven different languages.

Bold botanical collages made from a loud assortment of recycled papers and newsprint dominate this board book’s largely white pages. Among the well-chosen assortment of plants are some that may be intimately familiar to many North American readers, like sunflower or apple tree, but there are also intriguing, lower-profile selections, such as baobab tree, mimosa, or snake plant, which might provide opportunities to learn about new flora and fauna. Befitting its towering status, the sequoia tree must be turned to portrait orientation, an enjoyable feature. Numbered and corresponding with a key on the back cover, the English, Chinese, Hindi, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Esperanto versions of the plant species are printed about the collage, albeit a bit haphazardly. The three languages that do not use the roman alphabet are also presented in romanized form; there is no pronunciation guide. Companion title Animals shares the same art style and features 17 different species. Occasionally in both books, the collaged paper is a tad busy, making the art feel slightly muddied, and some of the animals’ eyes, made of cut newsprint letters, have an eerily uncanny feel (looking at you, deer!). Extra touches of whimsy, such as a rainbow chameleon enthusiastically hunting a hopping cricket, make it satisfying to read.

A pleasant multilingual introduction. (Board book: 1-5) (Animals: 978-1-7362264-4-5)

THIS BOOK CAN DO ANYTHING
Mory, Tristan
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Hardenberg, Wendeline A.
Twirl/Chronicle
$13.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-2-40802-852-7

Toddlers are invited to be amazed by the things this little book, imported from France, can do.

A person representing the book—achieved with simple, bold black lines for the face and hands, pink freckles, a die-cut black hat bumping up from the top of the page, die-cut shoes protruding down from the bottom, and pink pants set against the white of the page—encourages children to turn the pages and see for themselves what the book can do. “Can it wink?” Sure enough: As children turn the page, they will see one eye winking behind bright blue spectacles. And so it goes. The person-book blinks, puts a finger in its nose, sticks out its tongue, makes a
“A surreal or, perhaps, metaphorical journey, rich in surprises.”

INSIDE THE SUITCASE

funny face by smooching its cheeks as it opens its mouth and sticks out its tongue again. Its drawing abilities aren’t so great, but it can tie its shoes. It can even play the game of peekaboo by covering its eyes and then uncovering them. And of course, being a book, it can read. The book ends with an invitation to children to take part in the action by pulling on the sturdy hat—here a tab—and seeing how softly the book can be. Parents and caregivers can have fun encouraging children to perform the same actions as the book. This book-person is literally white (as the paper) and presents White.

Bound to lead to repeat readings and some giggling. (Board book. 1-3)

WHAT’S IN THE BOX?

Otter, Isabel
Illus. by Camp, Joaquin
Tiger Tales (12 pp.)
$14.99 | Sep. 14, 2021
978-1-68010-683-1

Large flaps and tactile elements enliven this guessing-game board book.

The organizing premise of this novelty book is the ubiquitous pile of delivery boxes found almost daily on many a porch. Those in this book have tactile elements poking out to hint at what’s inside. Rhyming text on the left poses a question about each box’s contents. Sturdy flaps on the opposite page reveal the rhyming answer and a fantasy character that’s probably recognizable to even young children. Labels on the depicted box and in the illustrations also contain clues. Three flaps are almost as large as the page; two are split, requiring two hands to open. The rhymes are clever, but the wordplay and sophisticated language seem designed to engage adult readers rather than delight toddlers. For example, a label on one box reads, “HANDLE WITH SCARE.” Older preschoolers will easily guess the answers and be ready to move on quickly. Disappointingly, the fuzzy pink blob poking through the cutout on the front cover has no obvious relation to the contents of any of the five boxes in the slight story. Librarians and book sellers will appreciate what’s under the final flap: “A BOOK! Their stories bring us smiles and fun—/ the magic of reading for everyone!”

Like much of what’s in real delivery boxes, this is ephemeral—fun for a minute but not essential. (Novelty board book. 2-4)

INSIDE THE SUITCASE

Perrin, Clotilde
Illus. by the author
Gecko Press (20 pp.)
$21.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
978-1-776573-43-1

A young traveler’s red suitcase holds all sorts of useful items, including treasures found along the way. Placing images on multiple descending or overlapping layers of large, shaped flaps to enhance the ongoing thrill of discovery, Perrin invites viewers to flip through the seemingly random contents of a White, russet-haired lad’s suitcase, then follow along as he travels over land and sea past a series of houses strangely similar to his own. A simple memory game ensues. Are the mountains cold? There’s a sweater in the luggage. What’s inside that cage? Open it with the key under the sweater. It’s a mouthwatering cake! Eat it or take it along? Into the suitcase it goes, and later it becomes just the thing to distract a scary monster in a dark forest. Behind further doors, a diamond begs to be snatched up and a magic seed to be planted. Occasional glimpses of a smiling snail, a fish floating in midair, or some other small onlooker enhance the surreal feel of the neatly drawn, harmoniously tinted illustrations. By journey’s end, what’s left in the suitcase? Lift the flap…and there’s nothing inside—nothing but intangible experiences and memories, that is. Footloose readers will come away understanding that packing is not an exact science, and it’s always wise to leave a little room in the suitcase.

From France via New Zealand, a surreal or, perhaps, metaphorical journey, rich in surprises. (Picture book/novelty. 6-8)

ANIMALS

Poulain, Maud
Illus. by Tisserand, Camille
Trans. by Hardenberg, Wendeline A.
Twirl/Chronicle (12 pp.)
$22.99 | Sep. 7, 2021
979-1-02760-998-7
Series: Magnetology

Budding naturalists can place 45 animals with magnetic backings on any of five double-page habitats. Visible through a large hole cut into the front cover, the animals come out of a reusable storage pocket inside and are both identified and arranged into related groups at the back. In between, readers find polar, savanna, coral-reef, temperate-forest, and rainforest scenes with several creatures in view. Brief observations that serve as prompts (“Look! A wild boar is taking her young to look for mushrooms”) offer plenty of space to arrange and rearrange the magnetized additions. The overall look is bright and benign. Aside from a mention that forest animals eat “berries, bugs, and small creatures” and one glimpse of a friendly-looking cheetah loping unthreateningly after an antelope, there is no reference to predation anywhere, and all of Tisserand’s wildlife, even birds and fish, are smiling. They are, however, small enough to make the choke-hazard warning on the back cover cogent. Though a good shake may well send them flying, the creatures are magnetic enough to stay in place when the book is held up or laid on a tilted surface. They will stick to a refrigerator too, though not firmly enough to hold anything. There are no human figures in the art.

An attractive (in both senses) early foray into the wild world. (Novelty. 4-6)
the top portion of the rooster’s beak. Along with comical sound “COCK-A-OINK! the porcine lower jaw open wide beneath the bottom. “MOO! WOLF!” it says. The rig is caught in full lie’s lower jaw, complete with canines and tongue, meeting it on eyes above a pop-up bovine nose on top, a pop-up border col faces and bodies. The cog gazes earnestly out at viewers, wide or “row,” “pog” or “cooster,” etc., with likewise silly mismatched so on—or, if just one of the sturdy half pages is turned, a “dow” gives way in predictable fashion to a “dog,” a “rooster,” “pig,” and matching pop-up beaks and muzzles on five farm animals.

Suitable for displays of the staid, matter-of-fact sort. (Informational pop-up picture book: 5-7)

A split-page format invites mixing and matching pop-up beaks and muzzles on five farm animals.

Thanks to vertical labels placed as artfully as the central pop-ups, a “cow” gives way in predictable fashion to a “dog,” a “rooster,” “pig,” and so on—or, if just one of the sturdy half pages is turned, a “dow” or “row,” “pog” or “cooster,” etc., with likewise silly mismatched faces and bodies. The cog gazes earnestly out at viewers, wide eyes above a pop-up bovine nose on top, a pop-up border col lie’s lower jaw, complete with canines and tongue, meeting it on the bottom. “MOO! WOLF!” it says. The rig is caught in full “COCK-A-OINK! the porcine lower jaw open wide beneath the top portion of the rooster’s beak. Along with comical sound effects, conventional or otherwise (“COCK-A-MOO!”), two flaps on each spread lift to reveal sprightly (uncredited) rhymes: “Out in the meadows / I chew and I munch. / Flowers and weeds / I will eat by the bunch!” The goat’s declaration that “my four sturdy hooves / help me climb to the sky” may require some adult amplification since Saldaña depicts the animal standing in a meadow, but that’s the only mismatch here that won’t set the Oshkosh set to giggling. The stock is fairly sturdy, so the book stands a good chance of lasting through a few careful spins through the permutations.

Unusually rich in wordplay as well as visual drollery. (Pop-up picture book: 2-4)

Four green-faced witches fly through this durable board book looking for Halloween fun.

A turn of the notched wheel embedded in the cover page changes the sparkly stripes on a witch’s hat, cape, and broom. Three more witches join the fun inside. Though not identified by gender, all wear dresses. All the interactive elements are focused on the first witch, who wears fluffy orange hair in two pigtails. One slider simultaneously lifts a broom and plops a straight hat on top of that hair. Another slides the witch across the night sky. A second wheel shows the ingredients being added to a cauldron. A final slider magically produces three black cats. Two lines of (uncredited) rhyming text on each of the four double-page spreads hint at what the interactive element will reveal. While the text is conveniently placed in the same spot on each spread, the vocabulary is peppered with reach words for the toddler audience: “Off they swooped on whizzing brooms, / heading for the potions room.” Mice, pumpkins, spiderwebs, owls, brooms, bats, and other thematically appropriate objects and creatures scattered across the busy pages place the book firmly in the Halloween genre. Unnamed and primarily decorative, these seemingly arbitrary additions distract from the slight story thread. Toddlers will readily manipulate the five smoothly performing interactive elements; unfortunately, the text and pictures are not equally enticing.

Purchase for some temporary interactive Halloween fun. (Novelty board book: 2-4)
The positive-affirmation message is muddled, but it still makes the cut. (Board book: 2–3)

MR. LION’S NEW HAIR!
Teckentrup, Britta
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Hardenberg, Wendeline A.
Twirl/Chronicle (36 pp.)
$12.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
979-1-0363-2861-9
Series: Mr. Lion

In this French import, Monkey steps in as hairstylist, with some very silly results. Even the king of the beasts can have bad hair days! When Mr. Lion shows up, leaves and twigs tangled in his mane, Monkey insists it’s time for a wash, a blow-dry—and a new look. Designed with a die cut in the shape of Mr. Lion’s face beginning on the cover and running through to all but the last page, the book allows each page turn to show Mr. Lion modeling a different ‘do. Among the creative collection of styles are perky pigtails, flowing tresses, a bold blond dye job and then an even bolder red, a crown and tiara on a towering beehive, and an “elegant,” severe gray number, each style more unexpected than the last. Lean art on roomy white backgrounds keeps the focus on the silly locks and Monkey’s antics, whose face is as expressive as Lion’s is frozen and skeptical. Deeply mottled and layered illustrations show Lion striking a series of colorful if often chaotically tangled poses, and some readers might be relieved when Monkey finally proclaims that the bells and whistles aren’t needed; Mr. Lion’s hair is “best just the way it is!” While the message of accepting one’s own beauty is refreshing, that Mr. Lion’s face still seems uncertain somewhat undermines that theme. Babies will enjoy turning the holiday-festooned pages, but will they get the science? (Board book: 2–4) (Electrical Engineering on Christmas!: 978-1-62354-191-0)

ANGULAR MOMENTUM ON HANUKKAH!
Spiro, Ruth
Illus. by Chan, Irene
Charlesbridge (20 pp.)
$8.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-62354-190-3
Series: Baby Loves Science

A kippah-wearing tot celebrates Hanukkah and learns the science behind spinning dreidels. A White-presenting child with dark brown hair puts toy candles in a menorah and spins a dreidel with a young friend with medium brown skin and light brown hair. The simple text and illustrations go on to explain torque, angular momentum, and friction to elucidate how a dreidel spins upright before eventually falling over. The companion title, Electrical Engineering on Christmas! follows a similar formula. A baby with light brown skin and wavy, brown hair learns how a Christmas tree lights up via electricity, how an atom carries an electrical charge, where electricity can be found naturally, how a circuit is formed, and how people make electricity. A few holiday tidbits are shared in both offerings, as each kid guest stars in the companion title, with the welcome reminder that not everyone celebrates Christmas. Chan’s art, like others in the Baby Loves Science series, does an admirable job of illustrating the science and looking inviting and playful in bright jewel tones. While the concepts are clearly explained and will work well for a preschool and early-elementary audience, many of the abstract ideas, particularly atomic theory and friction, may be a bit much for the putative baby audience.

In this French import, Monkey steps in as hairstylist, with some very silly results. Even the king of the beasts can have bad hair days! When Mr. Lion shows up, leaves and twigs tangled in his mane, Monkey insists it’s time for a wash, a blow-dry—and a new look. Designed with a die cut in the shape of Mr. Lion’s face beginning on the cover and running through to all but the last page, the book allows each page turn to show Mr. Lion modeling a different ‘do. Among the creative collection of styles are perky pigtails, flowing tresses, a bold blond dye job and then an even bolder red, a crown and tiara on a towering beehive, and an “elegant,” severe gray number, each style more unexpected than the last. Lean art on roomy white backgrounds keeps the focus on the silly locks and Monkey’s antics, whose face is as expressive as Lion’s is frozen and skeptical. Deeply mottled and layered illustrations show Lion striking a series of colorful if often chaotically tangled poses, and some readers might be relieved when Monkey finally proclaims that the bells and whistles aren’t needed; Mr. Lion’s hair is “best just the way it is!” While the message of accepting one’s own beauty is refreshing, that Mr. Lion’s face still seems uncertain somewhat undermines that theme. Babies will enjoy turning the holiday-festooned pages, but will they get the science? (Board book: 2–4) (Electrical Engineering on Christmas!: 978-1-62354-191-0)
STEP BY STEP
van Genechten, Guido
Illus. by the author
Clavis (20 pp.)
$12.95 | Apr. 13, 2021
978-1-60537-622-6

Learning to walk is an overwhelming and exciting step for little humans and animals alike!

Babies’ adorable, tottering first steps are a milestone for a reason: It’s a big move toward independence! This sweet, slightly oversized board book captures the energy of that process along with the uncertainty, dedication, and, yes, the falls required to learn. Featuring a variety of oversized baby animals with giant heads and expressive eyes and clad in adorably patterned diapers, the simple cartoon illustrations sit against plentiful white space. A lightly saturated palette puts the speckled elephant, stripey mouse, or peachy piglet on full display, and the lack of discrete outlines makes the animals look appropriately babylike. An omniscient narrator speaks directly to the animals in the book but also to readers who are mastering this skill alongside them. Always wise and reassuring, the narrator describes the usual process, starting with “lift[ing] up your head first,” using a sofa to steady, then standing “for almost ten seconds.” The animals go “thud!” or “thump!” but the narrator is matter-of-fact and encouraging about that part too, and the warm reminders that “that’s okay” are steadying. After plenty of practice, the book culminates with a human child with beige skin and black hair successfully toddling along, walking “further and further and further.”

Endearing and just right for little ones trying out their own first steps. (Board book. 1-3)
WHEN NIGHT BREAKS
Angeles, Janella
Wednesday Books (480 pp.)
$15.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-250-20432-5
Series: Kingdom of Cards, 2

Following the magical competition of Where Dreams Descend (2020), Kallia experiences a mirror world where it’s difficult to separate illusions from reality.

After falling through a mirror with her mentor, Jack, Kallia enters a dangerous underworld filled with illusions. Magician Daron Demarco desperately searches for her, hoping the trail will also lead to his lost sister who disappeared into a mirror years ago. His path is no easy one, and while looking for the Zarose Gate, Daron unravels countless secrets and mysteries at every turn—despite being blocked by the influential, supposedly peacekeeping Patrons who are led by his aunt. Meanwhile, Kallia and Jack end up in a bustling alternate version of the city of Glorian, created by the Dealer, a powerful magician who reveals that Jack is not what he seems. Though fierce Kallia has lost her magic, she joins a troupe of dazzling performers, all the while seeking a way to escape back to the true world. The stunning fantasy worldbuilding started in the first book continues to delight, but this time the rich, sensational world of the other Glorian offers even more to explore. Entertaining new characters, clever dueling magic, and a touch of romance cap off an unforgettable tale. Kallia and several other main characters are brown-skinned.

This gloriously spectacular finale steals the show. (Fantasy. 14-adult)

FOUR STREETS AND A SQUARE
A History of Manhattan and the New York Idea
Aronson, Marc
Candlewick (440 pp.)
$24.99 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-0-7636-5137-4

From the Munsee and Lenape peoples to the Covid-19 pandemic, this book presents the history of Manhattan and the essence of New York City.

Centering the narrative around Manhattan, specifically the four iconic thoroughfares of 12th Street, Forty-Second Street, Wall Street, and West Fourth Street, historian Aronson...
“This dark historical fantasy is filled with mysterious motives and raw emotions.”

THE KEEPER OF NIGHT

The story also touches on racism, ableism, self-acceptance, and more. Leaders, activists, politicians, and icons are not framed simplistically as heroes; instead, Aronson presents them as the real people they were—sometimes motivated by greed, hatred, fear, and desire. The narrative includes Indigenous people, colonizers, enslaved people, immigrants, queer people, and people of all genders, and it incorporates a broad range of subjects including the arts, sports, and education. This beautifully written book eloquently gives voice to the myriad people who built New York into the singular city it is today.

A profound declaration of love for the city of New York.

(translating author’s note, source notes, bibliography, image credits, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

THE KEEPER OF NIGHT

Baker, Kylie Lee
Inkyyard Press (400 pp.) $18.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-335-40566-1
Series: Keeper of the Night Duology, 1

A young Reaper in the late 19th century must prove her worth by slaying dangerous Japanese spirits.

Ren Scarborough was born half British and half Japanese Reaper (the latter called Shinigami) but has been living and collecting souls in London, England, for as long as she can remember. Her black hair and eyes make her stand out, leading other British Reapers to bully and abuse her. One day, her Shinigami powers—she can control light—rage out of control, forcing her to flee to Japan to control her abilities. There, she meets an infamous, exiled Shinigami called Shinigami but has been living and collecting souls in London, England, for as long as she can remember. Her black hair and eyes make her stand out, leading other British Reapers to bully and abuse her. One day, her Shinigami powers—she can control light—rage out of control, forcing her to flee to Japan to control her abilities. There, she meets an infamous, exiled Shinigami called Shinigami (the latter called Shinigami) but has been living and collecting souls in London, England, for as long as she can remember. Her black hair and eyes make her stand out, leading other British Reapers to bully and abuse her. One day, her Shinigami powers—she can control light—rage out of control, forcing her to flee to Japan. Neven, her younger half brother. Seeking acceptance and a place in the world. The descriptive writing builds a highly immersive world for this duology opener.

Dark, gruesome—and absolutely captivating. (Historical fantasy. 13-18)

INTO THE BLOODRED WOODS

Brockenbrough, Martha
Scholastic (608 pp.) $18.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
978-1-338-67387-6

In this dark fantasy woven together from reimagined fairy tales, a werebear princess and her cruel twin brother vie for inheritance of their father’s crown.

Once upon a time, a story unfolds after a farmer lies to a king, saying that his daughter can spin grass into gold. In this kingdom, the first-born—always a boy—inherits. But when the common-born queen gives birth to twins, first a werebear girl, then a human boy, no one can agree who has the right of succession. Princess Ursula believes in her claim to the throne: Under her benevolent rule, she’d overturn unjust laws that oppress other werefolk. Full of contempt for his sister, Albrecht, the vicious, vain prince, plots his own ascent, no matter the cost. With precise, and poetic prose, Brockenbrough twists and intertwines familiar tales—“Hansel and Gretel,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Rumpelstiltskin,” and “Goldilocks,” among others—to craft an intricate, cohesive narrative framed as a story within a story. Ursula and Albrecht are White; the ensemble cast of primary characters includes two brown-skinned women, one of whom has a fraught emotional relationship with the princess. Injustice, misinformation, and consent are significant themes. While at times the depictions of violence (including sexual assault) are visceral and brutal, this stand-alone journey into grim woodlands arrives at a subversive resolution more satisfying than a traditional happily-ever-after.

Unflinching, bloodstained magic. (Fantasy. 14-18)

THE DELUSIONIST

Calame, Don
Candlewick (304 pp.) $17.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-7636-9689-4

Amateur magician Quinn Purcell has a hard time separating reality from wishful thinking.

Actually, overthinking is 16-year-old Quinn’s biggest problem. He needs to wow the judges at the auditions for the Masters of Magic Fantasy Camp—and his main competition is his smart, driven, talented, and fantastically attractive new classmate, Dani Darling. Is Dani really drawn to him, cleverly messing with his head to get a leg up in the audition, or is she unsure herself what her motives are? Can the grizzled grifter he meets (supposedly) by chance in a cafe really teach him the Monkey’s Paw trick, or is he just being suckered? On top of that, his frontman and best friend, Perry Larsson, has suddenly become the world’s most perfect human being—brilliant, handsome, beloved by peers and grown-ups alike; heroically saving
Working on the student paper is a formative experience for many teens—an opportunity to make their voices heard on issues that matter to them, to bond with like-minded peers, and to learn the fundamentals of a profession that is essential to preserving democracy. Even as the survival of U.S. newspapers is threatened, young readers have a variety of superb 2021 releases centered on journalism that will provide entertainment and inspiration.

All These Bodies by Kendare Blake (Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins, Sept. 21): There’s a serial killer on the loose in the 1950s Midwest. When teenage Marie is found covered in blood at the site of a multiple homicide, the only person she agrees to speak with is Minnesota high school student Michael, who dreams of becoming a journalist. Michael gets a crash course in interview techniques as Marie’s story unfurls and the truth proves elusive.

Off the Record by Camryn Garrett (Knopf, May 18): When teen journalist Josie wins a national entertainment magazine’s writing competition, she gets to travel on a movie press tour that comes with access to its handsome young star. But rather than writing a celebrity puff piece, she uncovers a story with the potential to destroy a powerful, abusive man’s show-business career—and bring much-needed justice to his victims.

As Good as Dead by Holly Jackson (Delacorte, Sept. 28): This final entry in a trilogy reunites readers with aspiring investigative journalist Pippa Fitz-Amobi, who took a plunge into true crime by investigating a missing student from her high school. She started a popular podcast and continued solving mysteries—and now she’s being targeted by a stalker, amping up the stakes and the personal danger.


Tell It True by Tim Lockette (Triangle Square Books for Young Readers, Sept. 28): Alabama high schooler Lisa didn’t plan to shake things up, but when she helps her best friend by becoming editor of the paper, her probing questions shape a student government election. She also puts herself in the national spotlight by doing a story on capital punishment and applying to attend an execution.

Not Here To Be Liked by Michelle Quach (Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins, Sept. 14): It’s not all fun and games on the school paper: Eliza Quan has the talent and experience and fully expects to be elected editor-in-chief. So when a popular school jock suddenly decides he wants in—and beats her out for the coveted role—Eliza uses her skill with words to fight back by writing an essay on gender bias.

Enduring Freedom by Trent Reedy and Jawad Arash (Algonquin, May 18): In this novel that reflects contemporary headlines, two young men bond in Afghanistan. Teenage Baheer is terrified by the Taliban and hopes to practice English and connect with U.S. soldiers. Joe is from Iowa, a young National Guard member who dreams of becoming a journalist. Remarkably, the co-authors met in the same way as their protagonists.

What’s Not To Love by Emily Wibberley and Austin Siegemund-Broka (Viking, April 20): This fun romance features two overachieving rivals—Alison (editor-in-chief of the school paper) and Ethan (school reporter)—who fall for each other despite themselves. A bit of social engineering by the principal forces them to cooperate on a project, paving the way for love.

Laura Simeon is a young readers’ editor.
“A compelling historical story that highlights timeless themes.”

**FREEDOM SWIMMER**

by Wai Chim

Scholastic (256 pp.)

$18.99 | Oct. 19, 2021

978-1-338-65613-8

A young man lives out his father’s dream and learns the meaning of freedom.

Opening in coastal southeastern China during the 1960s and continuing until the 1970s, this gripping story introduces 11-year-old orphan Ming Hong, who is mourning his mother, who recently starved to death, like countless others during the Great Leap Forward. Ming’s fateful encounter with Lam Feiyen, a girl who was running away from her abusive home, gives him hope and evolves into a sustaining plot strand as the tale dives into the Cultural Revolution era. Sweeping social experiments, such as sending city youths to the countryside to learn through engaging in labor, bring Li to Ming’s

**GRACELING**

The Graphic Novel

Cashore, Kristin

Adapt. by Hinds, Gareth

Illus. by the adapter

Etch/HarperCollins (272 pp.)

$24.99 | Nov. 16, 2021

978-0-358-25042-5

A fresh version of the story of the Graceling Realm’s beginnings.

In the Seven Kingdoms, some people are born with Graces, or unusually strong natural abilities. Lady Katsa, who is Graced with killing, works as a heavy for her uncle the king while secretly leading an underground council who oppose him. When she befriends charming Prince Po, a Graced fighter, the two uncover the threat posed by a neighboring king with a Grace even more dangerous than Katsa’s own. This is at its heart much more than just an adventure story: It is a story that looks at consent and power over others and a romance between two people dealing with the ways control over themselves affects the larger world—and their hearts as well. Above all, it is the tale of Katsa’s journey to realizing she may not be the monster she was always told she was. Po’s openness hides painful secrets, Katsa struggles to understand her own needs, and their love grows from mutual respect. Exploring emotional specificity within a fantastical world, Cashore’s singular voice shines through. Hinds’ expressive, detailed, full-color art serves the tone of the story well, and although some beloved moments have been sacrificed in this restructuring, the sweeping landscapes and dynamic action sequences add new layers. Most characters read White; the Liend people, like Po, have light-brown skin.

An adaptation of a YA classic that is sure to draw in new fans. (author’s note) (Graphic fantasy. 14-18)
village, where the teen boys' paths cross. Using spare prose and straightforward language, dual narrators Ming and Li relate their perspectives as acquaintances struggling for a sense of purpose while enduring cruelty and suffering imposed by politics that pitted peasants against city dwellers, friends against one another, and children against their own parents. As Ming processes his long-deceased father's failed bid for freedom and ponders his own ambition to swim to the British colony of Hong Kong, Li persuades Ming they should attempt this escape together. Their breathtaking journey and subsequent events feel plausible and poignant, not only because they are based on the lived experience of the author's father, but also thanks to Chim's gift for storytelling.

A compelling historical story that highlights timeless themes. (note about phonetics, map) (Historical fiction. 12-18)

Still Stace
My Gay Christian Coming-of-Age Story: An Illustrated Memoir
Chomiak, Stacey
Illus. by the author
Beaming Books (212 pp.)
978-1-5064-6951-5

Navigating queer and Christian communities can be complicated. This illustrated memoir by Canadian artist Chomiak traces her life between the summer of 1996, when she was a 16-year-old attending a Christian summer camp and trying to understand confusing feelings about her friend Joanna, until the spring of 2011, when she was heading home to Winnipeg from Vancouver to marry the woman she loved. Chomiak documents the complexities of being a lesbian while growing up in a conservative religious household. The narrative is open and at times raw with the emotional distress of Chomiak's teen life, from complex relationships with her parents to her hormonal urges, the pain of early hidden relationships, and reconciling her sexuality with her deep faith. Illustrations of Chomiak and the people close to her fill the pages (all present as White), documenting her stress, her deep faith. Illustrations of Chomiak and the people close to her fill the pages (all present as White), documenting her stress, anxiety, and sadness through her facial expressions and body language. At times, the sepia tones of the illustrations, possibly meant to indicate flashbacks, work against the art's emotional impact, as the muted colors read as dull and lifeless. This quibble aside, readers of all sexualities and genders will benefit from this glimpse into the life of a Christian lesbian. Other gay Christians will benefit from the resources that are included—lists of faith-oriented websites, organizations, and books designed to help others on their journeys.

Insightful and inspiring. (author's note, letters to Stacey's younger self, letter to readers) (Memoir. 13-18)

Out of the Fire
Contos, Andrea
Scholastic (366 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-338-72616-9

Girls failed by authorities take justice into their own hands—if only Cass knew whom to take vengeance on.

Five months after escaping an abduction attempt, Cass’ life is still held captive thanks to mysterious letters from her attacker, letters that demonstrate he can get to her at any time. After the victim-blaming and doubts she faced from the police after the attack, she gives up and suffers in silence until realizing that other girls around her have been abandoned to face their own demons. Margot was pressured into a more physical relationship than she was ready for and is now being blackmailed with photographic proof of it. Ori wants to take down a racist teacher who thus far has been shielded by powerful connections. Nomi wants to prevent her abusive former stepfather from hurting anyone else. The four come together in a revenge pact, becoming “dangerous girls” in order to scheme against their abusers and hunt down Cass’ stalker. While the plots against the known antagonists are straightforward if risky, the larger storyline centers on untangling Cass’ mystery. It’s a twisted, convoluted whodunit with unexpected connections—at times, readers might question motives, but the dangerous situations and fast pace help keep things moving as Cass and her friends continue playing with fire while doing their best to avoid lasting consequences. Ori’s Black; Nomi’s Japanese American; other main characters are White.

An alternately poignant and action-packed revenge fantasy. (Thriller. 13-18)

Queer As All Get Out
Criswell, Shelby
Illus. by the author
Street Noise Books (192 pp.)
$18.99 paper | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-951491-07-9

Criswell’s debut graphic novel blends memoir with minibiographies of global LGBTQ+ changemakers.

Rather than attempting a comprehensive history, the illustrated biographical sketches provide a well-researched, if slightly disjointed, catalog of 10 queer people the author finds especially inspirational. This broad selection offers a starting place for readers seeking meaningful connections with the past. As White, nonbinary college student Criswell wanders around San Antonio, Texas, they unpack the complexities of Southern identity and begin to research, draw, and discuss significant icons with friends. Accompanying them on this journey, readers meet history-makers who are often
overlooked by mainstream U.S. sources—people who broaden Criswell’s understanding of the difficulties facing those who have fought for LGBTQ+ justice around the world. This approach effectively anchors contemporary life to these influencers. At times the transitions and interjections are a bit stiff, but what is lacking in flow is countered by Criswell’s crisp drawings and eye for details. The choice of subjects reflects diverse perspectives—Nancy Cárdenas, Ifti Nasim, We’wha, and Dr. Pauli Murray, among others—and the biographies address how intersectional identities ground the subjects’ experiences of injustice. As this is a narrative of individual awakening and learning, the framing of the narrator’s reactions to their discoveries sometimes feels naïve, and readers may wish Criswell included more reflection on aspects of their own identity. The tight scope and clear, sequential illustrations will appeal to many who are seeking a window into LGBTQ+ histories.

A positive, highly personal addition to the body of LGBTQ+ stories. (glossary, further reading, resources) (Graphic nonfiction. 13-18)

**RIVER MERMAID**
Goerzen, Christy
Crwth Press (368 pp.)
$12.95 paper | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-989724-10-1

This novel in verse charts an aspiring sculptor’s life-changing year.

The only child of a world-renowned sculptor mom and art dealer dad, 16-year-old Mercedes has already charted her own artistic future. But, unexpectedly denied admission to Wildwood Fine Arts School, her mom’s alma mater and Vancouver’s premier high school for the arts, Mercedes’ confidence evaporates. She abandons her artistic career dreams and ignores school art assignments. Her art teacher warns her she’s failing but believes that if Mercedes reengages with her art, she might have a chance of getting into Wildwood next year. Remaining conflicted about her career choices, Mercedes lets Sandra, her extravert BFF, talk her into pursuing her secret crush on her classmate Ellis. Despite an embarrassing start, romance ensues. At home, Mercedes’ fears about her workaholic parents (who both discount her mom’s worsening headaches) prove justified after her mom has a terrifying seizure. Struggling to get her artistic groove back, Mercedes turns to her mom for inspiration. Gracefully written, the novel goes just deep enough to illuminate the depths it frustratingly declines to explore, such as Mercedes’ fraught relationship with her (underwritten) father; her mother’s counterculture affinities; and above all, art itself. Beyond the fact that it’s her affluent family’s business, what motivates Mercedes to make art is a mystery. Most characters present White; Ellis is biracial (Japanese and implied White).

An underdeveloped but entertaining read. (Verse novel. 13-17)

**WOLF SOLDIER**
Hannibal, James R.
Enclave Escape (336 pp.)
$22.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-62184-195-1
Series: Lightraider Academy, 1

Five young trainees must fight evil creatures to protect their land and people.

The Keledan live behind a barrier created by the Rescuer, protecting them from the dark creatures and oppression that live in Tanellethar, the Dragon Lands. The Lightraider Order went beyond the barrier to save others but disappeared generations ago. One day, Connor Enarian, a shepherd boy and grandson of a Lightraider, receives an invitation to attend and revive Lightraider Academy along with four other young hopefuls. They train, learn, and strengthen their faith for weeks, preparing to defeat the goblins and orcs sneaking into Keledan. Following the Rescuer’s
Virtual and real worlds intersect in a science-fiction thriller by the Anishinaabe author and activist
BY LAURA SIMEON

With Walking in Two Worlds (Penguin Teen, Sept. 14), Wab Kinew, the leader of the Manitoba New Democratic Party, draws upon his personal and family history as well as his Anishinaabe heritage and activism (he was a witness for Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission). Kinew previously published a memoir, The Reason You Walk (2015), and a nonfiction picture book, Go Show the World (2018). In his gripping new teen science-fiction title, he introduces readers to Bagonegiizhigok “Bugz” Holiday, an Anishinaabe teen who has a massive following in the virtual reality gaming world of the Floraverse, where she stands up to her online rivals Clan:LESS, a group of misogynistic White supremacist boys whose unsubtle, militaristic approach to gameplay contrasts with Bugz’ elegance. In real life, however, Bugz wrestles with body shaming and social anxiety. When Feng, a Floraverse gaming rival and the Uyghur nephew of the reservation’s new doctor, shows up at her school, the teens’ parallel worlds collide. Kinew spoke with us over Zoom from his home in Winnipeg; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

What drew you to write for teens?
The genesis for the book was a few trips that I took to a boarding school for First Nations kids in northern Ontario called Pelican Falls. I noticed that many of the young people there were reading YA fantasy. Talking to [them] about the challenges that they faced—moving away from home, trying to pursue education, mental health, and relationships with peers—really got me thinking over this refrain that we hear a lot in the Indigenous community about walking in two worlds. For somebody growing up today, it’s not just the two worlds of Indigenous and mainstream. It’s the worlds of virtual and real—and for a young person, the virtual world is at least as important as the real world.

The video game sequences and the social dynamics of the gaming world were riveting and so well realized. My kids are avid gamers. When they were younger I’d watch them play Minecraft, and that proved to be fertile soil for the more creative side of the Floraverse. Watching them play with their friends online was really the inspiration for how much interactivity and culture-building there is in online communities. I was [also] a gamer growing up. The abusive talk, the trolling, the pack mentality? Unfortunately, I did witness that. Being more of the Nintendo generation rather than the PS5 generation, growing up my whole life hearing that video games are bad for you, I did want to have that balance in the book where I highlight some of the positives. This is just a part of reality for young people today, and we should be confident that as long as we’re helping them
to reach their full potential, they’re going to turn out all right—even with these influences that we don’t always understand as the older generation.

Witnessing how Bugz lovingly builds a world in the Flo-raverse based on Anishinaabe cultural elements she treasures is so powerful. And it stands in real contrast to the more destructive approach of Clan:LESS.

As great as our technology is, it’s only as good as what we put into it. Coming from an Indigenous perspective, where we’ve often been left out of the mainstream conversation, I wanted to flag that there’s a danger in ignoring the Indigenous perspective once again as we move into an AI–powered future. I hope that a young Indigenous reader may feel reassured that they can be who they are in this tech-powered future, and I would hope that the non-Indigenous reader would just nod their heads and be like, Well, yeah, of course, that [perspective] should be part of it, along with all the other influences that are out there.

It’s fascinating to meet Uyghur characters and witness how they settle into the Anishinaabe community and examine their own experiences as members of a marginalized, persecuted group.

In spite of whatever barriers are put between people—social or political—if you put two kids in a room together, they’re going to talk to each other and learn about each other. The reality most of us live in is that many people have mixed backgrounds, mixed ancestries; these relationships happen all the time, even if they’re not well documented or celebrated. I think that the situation Uyghurs are facing in Xinjiang now is one of the great human rights travesties of our time. Not only do I think it’s important to weigh in on that, I also think it’s important to encourage young people to have a global perspective. Part of encouraging young people to spread their wings fully is for them to understand they’re citizens of the globe—and part of that can be finding shared challenges. There’s a scene in the book where they’re exchanging parallels between the [Uyghur] detention camps and [First Nations] residential schools. Other times it’s more positive, like some of the cultural exchange that happens around the Indigenous sweat lodge or at the dinner table in the Uyghur family’s household. Not only are you part of a global community online, you’re part of the global community in the real world.

Within marginalized communities, there’s often a tension between the drive for cultural preservation in the face of mainstream cultural dominance and the reality that living cultures are not static and that long-term survival comes from younger generations engaging and changing things. You develop this theme so thoughtfully.

I think this is a major piece for young people from all backgrounds, but I’ve witnessed it up close in the Indigenous community. Often it is [about] gender, as it is in the book. LGBT youth face situations like this, where a young person who’s very keen and gung-ho to participate in the traditional culture may be made to feel like an outsider or feel shame in some way that I think is not right. Many of the challenges that Indigenous youth face were created by being forcibly removed from their culture. Often the solutions come from encouraging young Indigenous people to participate in their cultures again—but if those are not safe spaces, then the young person needs to know that it’s OK to prioritize their safety or well-being. There is some balance between how much we just carry on the legacy that we’ve inherited versus how we respond to what’s going on around us and add our own piece to it. I hope to encourage young people to know that you can participate in a traditional way of life while also standing up for yourself or what you think is right. Dogma is not good wherever it comes from; it’s better if we can engage with things, and talk about them, and process them, and then try the path that we want to walk for ourselves.

Walking in Two Worlds was reviewed in the July 15, 2021, issue.
will, they embark on a journey to stop an impending invasion. Once on the other side of the barrier, Connor realizes they must trust not only the Rescuer, but also a Lightraider spy, a talking silver wolf, and a young Tanelethar woman who might betray them all. Connor and his friends must lean on their faith in the Rescuer and follow his will or meet their demise. Inspired by the Christian fantasy role-playing game DragonRaid, the moral and religious teachings in the book are clear. With the initial focus on worldbuilding, the start of the book is a bit slow, but once readers get a handle on the names and terminology, they will find this an exciting, action-filled read. Connor and other main characters present White; Connor’s friend Lee Trang is also present White. Connor and his friends must lean on their faith in the Rescuer and follow his will or meet their demise. Inspired by the Christian fantasy role-playing game DragonRaid, the moral and religious teachings in the book are clear. With the initial focus on worldbuilding, the start of the book is a bit slow, but once readers get a handle on the names and terminology, they will find this an exciting, action-filled read. Connor and other main characters present White; Connor’s friend Lee Trang is also present White.

An engaging Christian fantasy. (Fantasy, 12-18)

**BURY ME IN SHADOWS**
*Herren, Greg*
Bold Strokes Books (240 pp.)
$13.95 paper | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-63555-993-4

Mystery, the supernatural, and history combine in this modern Southern gothic tale of murder. Freshly out of the hospital (after an accidental overdose following the end of a lopsided relationship—and with a history of an earlier attempted suicide that is described in graphic detail), New Orleans college student Jake is sent to Alabama to look after his grandmother’s home and provide relief to her nursing staff while she recovers from a major stroke. He’s also there to get away from superficial Tradd, who broke his heart. Relationships between the matriarch and her children are strained, perhaps more so now that Miss Sarah (as she’s known) has taken over college football star Kelly, a very distant relative who has an otherworldly connection with Jake. When an archaeological dig on Miss Sarah’s property uncovers more than expected, sins old and new are discovered. Angst and drama hang from this story like Spanish moss, potentially overpowering readers’ interest. Unrealistic plot points and a thin-as-ice story may simultaneously frustrate and underwhelm readers, and the blink-and-you-missed-it resolution of motives will leave many feeling cheated. The combination of murder mystery, gothic horror, romance, and the supernatural overwhelms the story, and the plot suffers as a result. Main characters default to White.

A story that attempts too many things at once. (Mystery, 14-18)

**TINK AND WENDY**
*Jacobson, Kelly Ann*
Three Rooms Press (192 pp.)
$14.00 paper | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-953103-13-0

A character-driven reimagining of *Peter Pan.* Braiding together three narrative strands—then, now, and excerpts from *Neverland: A History*—this melancholy tale explores the ill-fated love of immortal fairy Tinker Bell. In the past plotline, Tink and Peter meet the Darling family in upstate New York, and both fall for Wendy, the eldest sibling. Peter ages when he’s away from Neverland, so Tink is determined to bring him back even as their lives become increasingly entwined with the Darlings’ the longer they stay. Forty years later, Tink lives alone in the Darlings’ cottage until Hope, Wendy’s granddaughter, appears. Tink opens up to Hope and shares her story of love, loss, grief, and responsibility. Lyrical prose evokes a traditional fairy-tale feeling, but this new spin, although inspired by a magical adventure story, focuses more specifically on its primary characters and their emotions. There is some worldbuilding around Neverland and references to characters from *Peter Pan* lore, but they mostly feel like unnecessary filler and bog down the already unhurried pace. The story succeeds as a character study of Tink: Falling for capable, mature Wendy opens her eyes to Peter’s flaws. Later, she grapples with her culpability in what went wrong while living the lonely life she feels she deserves. Often realistically sorrowful, there is hope at the end. Characters are implied White.

A queer, introspective retelling. (Fantasy, 14-18)

**AURORA’S END**
*Kaufman, Amie & Kristoff, Jay*
Knopf (512 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-0-524-72088-9
Series: Aurora Cycle, 3

The final installment of the Aurora Cycle finds Squad 312 in far-flung reaches of space and time, racing to save the galaxy from being consumed by the Ra’haam. After the disastrous battle of Terra that concluded the previous book, this entry opens with the members of Squad 312 in confusion. Squad leader Tyler Jones has just witnessed the abrupt disappearance of the Ra’haam-destroying Eshwaren weapon with Aurora and Kal aboard, while the ship bearing the remaining three members cannot be found at all. Where have they gone? Or rather, when? The weapon needed to save the galaxy has been severely damaged and flung into a terrible future, while Scarlett, Zila, and Finian have gone in the opposite direction, a couple of centuries into the past. Independently, the three cohorts must figure out what they are meant to do within...
HAUNTINGLY BEAUTIFUL FANTASY
for Young Adults & New Adults

If you’ve ever wished Jane Austen dabbled in blood magic...

PRAISE FOR ASPERFELL
Gold Medal - Fantasy
- Foreword INDIES Awards
Top Ten Best Debut Speculative Fiction Novels of 2020
- Booklist
“Wonderfully inventive... has crossover YA appeal and is sure to win over fantasy readers.”
- Publishers Weekly (starred review)

ASPERFELL by Jamie Thomas
978-1-949671-06-3 (Trade Paperback)

THE FOREST KINGDOM by Jamie Thomas
978-1-949671-28-5 (Trade Paperback)

As if OCD isn’t hard enough, Cassie’s tragic visions of the future are starting to come true

“A thrilling read. Leaves you begging for more.”
- Greta Kelly, author of The Frozen Crown

“Riveting. A must-read.”
- Amber Rae, author of Choose Wonder over Worry

FORETOLD by Violet Lumani
978-1-949671-21-6 (Trade Paperback)

#OwnVoices

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DISTRIBUTION: INGRAM, BAKER & TAYLOR, BOOKAZINE & BPC
their timelines, how to get back home, and how to defeat the Ra’haam. This volume is the most action-packed of the trilogy, with nonstop plot twists, battles, and revelations at every turn. Loose threads from previous installments are tied up, romances blossom, and throughout, there’s no shying away from the violence of battle. Even so, there’s room for humor, as the banter and affection between the humanoid squad members, who are diverse in skin tone, remains at the fore. The happy ending may be a tad melodramatic, but who’s complaining?

An action-packed and satisfying conclusion. (series overview and cast list) (Science fiction. 13-18)

FORGIVENESS
The Story of Eva Kor, Survivor of the Auschwitz Twin Experiments
Lee, Joe
Illus. by the author
Red Lightning Books (144 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Oct. 5, 2021
978-1-68435-178-7

A biography, in comic form, of a survivor of Josef Mengele’s horrific experiments on twins. Eva and Miriam Mozes are twins, born in 1934 to the only Jewish family in their Romanian village. Though Papa, fearing the antisemitism of interwar Romania, wants the family to flee to safety in Palestine, Mama argues against it. And so it is that they are still in Romania when their home is invaded by Hitler’s ally, Hungary. Following an all-too-familiar story, the Mozes family is sent first to the ghetto and then on to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Torn away from their family, the girls are brought to Mengele for his nightmarish twin experiments. The graphic form mercifully makes it difficult to provide much detail of the stomach-churning tortures Mengele inflicted on those he found lesser, though the blocky illustrations certainly feature starvation, death, and disease. After the girls are liberated by the Soviets, they begin the second part of their ordeal: living with their trauma. Two extremely dense chapters detail the next 74 years, eventually building to the journey Eva would take late in her life toward liberating herself by forgiving the Nazis. This over stuffed survivor tale owes less to Maus than it does to the For Beginners series of graphic nonfiction. Dense blocks of historical play-by-play, ungainly prose, and hard-to-read lettering make this a slog.

An important story drowned in illegibility and exposition. (Graphic biography. 13-15)

THE NOBLEMAN’S GUIDE TO SCANDAL AND SHIPWRECKS
Lee, Mackenzi
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (464 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 16, 2021
978-0-06-291601-3
Series: Montague Siblings, 3

Adrian, the youngest of the Montague siblings, sails into tumultuous waters in search of answers about himself, the sudden death of his mother, and her mysterious, cracked spyglass.

On the summer solstice less than a year ago, Caroline Montague fell off a cliff in Aberdeen into the sea. When the Scottish hostel where she was staying sends a box of her left-behind belongings to London, Adrian—an anxious, White nobleman on the cusp of joining Parliament—discovers one of his mother’s most treasured possessions, an antique spyglass. She acquired it when she was the sole survivor of a shipwreck many years earlier. His mother always carried that spyglass with her, but on the day of her death, she had left it behind in her room. Although he never knew its full significance, Adrian is haunted by new questions and is certain the spyglass will lead him to the truth. Once again, Lee crafts an absorbing adventure with dangerous stakes, dynamic character growth, sharp social and political commentary, and a storm of emotion. Inseparable from his external search for answers about his mother, Adrian seeks a solution for himself, an end to his struggle with mental illness—a journey handled with hopeful, gentle honesty that validates the experiences of both good and bad days. Characters from the first two books play significant secondary roles, and the resolution ties up their loose ends. Humorous antics provide a well-measured balance with the heavier themes.

An enticing, turbulent, and satisfying final voyage. (Historical fiction. 14-18)

STEELSTRIKER
Lu, Marie
Roaring Brook Press (416 pp.)
$19.99 | Sep. 28, 2021
978-1-250-22172-8
Series: Skyhunter, 2

A group of young rebels struggle against tyrannical forces in this sequel to Skyhunter (2020).

Resuming the tale shortly after the fall of Mara, the last nation that had been holding out against the murderous Karensa Federation, the story is vividly told in the first person alternating between Talin’s and Red’s perspectives. Talin, who uses sign language to communicate, has now been forced by the deeply evil Premier Constantine, as Red was, to become a Skyhunter, with huge metal wings grafted onto her body, steel armor implanted
under her skin, and her emotions accessible to him. Constantine uses the threat of ending her mother’s life—he holds her captive—to control Talin, thus ending her ability to work with her friends against Karensa. The menacing Constantine is an effective villain whom readers will rail against as Talin and Red slowly discover the complicated web of burgeoning resistance and betrayal that exists in the bleak new world they inhabit. Detailed sabotage plots, action-laden fights, and even some romance are interspersed, but Talin’s psychologically taut internal battle against Constantine’s suffocating control is front and center throughout. The novel wraps up with a satisfying conclusion. The first novel noted characters’ differing skin tones; there are several secondary characters who are queer.

A slow-burning, introspective end to an emotionally powerful duology. (map) (Fantasy. 13-18)

Three estranged friends ditch school and end up involved in a murder. In sixth grade, Cal O’Shea-Wallace, Ivy Sterling-Shepard, and Mateo Wojcik skipped school, enjoying a day so fabulous that it sealed their friendship for the rest of middle school. Since entering Carlton High, the three have barely spoken to each other—until one particularly rough day during senior year when they run into each other and spontaneously decide to do it again. Overachiever Ivy just lost the student council election, Cal got stood up by his maybe-girlfriend, and Mateo is simply tired from working two jobs to help his family. A drive into Boston is just the thing. The adventure takes a turn for the worse, however, when they accidently find the body of Brian Mahoney, who ran against Ivy for class president and won, and the media targets her as the culprit. But her former friends move away, before life becomes one big change. Unfortunately, life won’t wait. For starters, her grandmother, in the not-so-early stages of Alzheimer’s, decides to move into assisted living earlier than Faith had anticipated. Then there’s a recent event in which Faith busted a nefarious criminal plot wide open, literally saving people and puppies from a burning building with the aid of her psiot abilities of flight and force-field manipulation. Her sort-of-girlfriend disappeared that day, as did Colleen, a classmate who could apparently control fire. Suddenly Colleen shows up back at school, behaving almost as if nothing had happened and brushing off Faith’s attempts to talk about the past. There’s no shortage of other shady characters on Faith’s radar, as the aspiring journalist delves deeper into mysteries that are still hidden in her Minnesota town. Murphy crafts a narrative that balances many aspects of Faith’s life—school, friendships, superhero abilities, romance, betrayal, and being both a loving granddaughter and super sleuth. Faith is relatedly imperfect and driven by an unflagging desire to do good and help others. White, plus-size Faith expresses attraction to multiple genders, and there are several secondary characters of color.

The continuing adventures of an admirable superhero who goes above and beyond. (Fiction. 13-18)

Readers first meet Terciel (who is later to become Sabriel’s father) after he’s been plucked out of poverty and obscurity to become the successor to Abhorsen Tizanael. Across the wall in Ancelstierre, Elinor (Sabriel’s future mother), an utterly charming 19-year-old aspiring thespian, has spent all her years secluded in the countryside. Though she is lacking a loving parent—her mother is distant, her father dead—Elinor has found care and companionship in her governess, Mrs. Watkins, and the elderly groom Ham, Mrs. Watkins’ uncle. When a horrible turn of events uncovers an old and dangerous
foe—and leads to Elinor and Terciel’s meeting—Elinor learns of her hidden Old Kingdom ancestry and must find her own way in the world for the first time, eventually returning to Terciel. Chapters alternate between the pair. Terciel is likable and his struggles as Abhorsen-in-Waiting are sympathetic, but it’s endearing, charismatic Elinor who steals the show in this character-driven story. Nix offers fans of the Old Kingdom a gift in the book’s return to the feel of the original trilogy; readers will be glad he chose the path that led to this story. Terciel has deep-brown skin, but his color is leeched by time spent in Death; most other characters read as White.

Enjoyable, engaging, and well written. (Fantasy. 14-18)

CHANCES IN DISGUISE
Noble, Diana J.
Piñata Books/Arte Público (192 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Oct. 31, 2021
978-1-55885-930-2

Following upon Evangelina Takes Flight (2017), Noble picks up Evangelina de León’s story, highlighting an important and frequently overlooked piece of American history along the way.

After her family’s flight from war-torn Mexico in 1911, they settled into their new home in Texas. Evangelina has graduated from high school and adapted well to her role as a midwife and apprentice to Doc Taylor, who serves the community of Seneca and surrounding areas. She is now a high school graduate with dreams of continuing her education. She hopes to marry her sweetheart and maybe even become the first woman of Mexican descent to graduate from medical school in Texas. However, when she attends the labor of Ramona Healy, a White woman, her dreams come crashing down: Hostile, racist Doc Morley bursts in, spewing insults and chasing her out of the room. When Mrs. Healy later passes away, Evangelina is charged with her murder. The story hurtles along as sexual violence and racism torment the young prisoner from the moment she arrives in jail. Though fictionalized, the novel is grounded in true historical events which saw Mexican refugees and American-born Tejanos facing sham trials, vigilantes, and violent policing without due process. This novel presents a story that is as relevant to and important for contemporary readers as it was in the early 20th century.

A timely and intimate first-person courtroom drama. (afterword) (Historical fiction. 14-18)

A riveting reimagining of a historical legend.

DAUGHTERS OF A DEAD EMPIRE
O’Neil, Carolyn Tara
Roaring Brook Press (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-250-75553-7

In 1918 Russia, czarist Anna and communist Evgenia form a tentative alliance to escape a ruthless Bolshevik commander.

Seventeen-year-old Anna is the sole survivor after her family is assassinated in Ekaterinburg. Her only hope of safety is finding her cousin who is stationed with the White Army. She offers 16-year-old peddler Evgenia a diamond in exchange for a ride on her old horse wagon. Evgenia, who’s a communist, agrees to help the bedraggled yet seemingly bourgeois Anna (whose true identity readers familiar with Russian history may divine before it is revealed in the narrative) because she’s desperate to afford a doctor to treat her injured soldier brother. Their journey is dangerous from the start but turns deadly when Evgenia’s branded a traitor and a Bolshevik secret police commander becomes set on killing both girls. Well-researched and accessible, this alternate history immerses readers in the Russian Revolution and the competing, equally bloodthirsty factions hoping to control the country’s destiny. A kind officer from the Czechoslovak Legion introduces a different perspective and the barest hint of romance. But Anna and Evgenia’s hard-earned friendship forms the heart of the tale and reinforces the importance of crossing class, political, and religious lines to find the humanity in all.

A riveting reimagining of a historical legend as a pulse-pounding thriller. (historical note, pronunciation guide, author’s note, bibliography) (Historical fiction. 13-18)

DRAGONBLOOD RING
Ortiz, Amparo
Page Street (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-64567-316-3

Lana thought that all she had to worry about were the Dragon Knights—until she learned about the Dragonblood Ring.

Lana is finally back home in Puerto Rico, but unfortunately, Dragon Knights are still out there: They need the magic of the Sol de Noche dragons to bring their master, the Sire, back. Lana and her Blazewrath team must stay hidden on the island until things are safe. However, when Victoria overhears one of their bodyguards talking about dragon trappers popping up in nearby Cuba and the Dominican Republic, she knows she must investigate—which means working with Lana, no matter how much they butt heads. Lana grabs Victoria and dives headfirst into a Transport Charm, compliments of an unsuspecting Director Sandhar. They land in
Le Parc Du Chasseurs, a dragon arena in France, in the middle of a secret Dragonblood match. As the girls piece together what is happening, they realize that the Dragon Knights are not the only threat their dragons face. Picking up immediately where Blazewrath Games (2020) ended, this entry is exciting from the outset. Chapters switch perspectives between Victoria and Lana, giving a more well-rounded view of the story and its diverse cast of characters. Readers will appreciate the complexity of the human relationships and evolving characterization as well as the psychic bond between riders and dragons. Dragon battles and action sequences, paired with magic elements that expand upon the previous entry, make this a page-turner.

Thrilling from start to finish. (Fantasy. 14-18)

WHY IS EVERYBODY YELLING? Growing Up in My Immigrant Family
Russo, Marisabina
Illus. by the author
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (240 pp.)
$19.99 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-374-30383-9

This memoir introduces Russo as the quiet daughter of an absent Catholic father and a Jewish mother who survived wartime atrocities and converted to Catholicism. Raised in an opinionated, Yiddish-speaking 1950s matriarchy, Russo is enticed by the teachings of her parochial school. So enticed, in fact, that she has decided to become a nun. Horrified, her mother informs Russo she is now attending public school. The episodic story leisurely follows Russo’s life in New York City as she discovers a love of visual art, endures emotional shake-ups and family dramas, and, piece by piece, begins to put together what her family endured during World War II. Notably, clichés of intergenerational trauma are sidestepped: Holocaust and wartime survivors aren’t walking tragedies but fully human, everyday people with foibles as well as pain. Russo grows up both admiring and resenting her relatives—in particular, her courageous, frustrating, mercurial mother—but finds through them lessons she integrates into her sense of self at the intersection of multiple worlds: Jewish and Catholic, fully American and part of an immigrant culture. While the book meanders, and Russo sometimes becomes lost among the more vibrant personalities around her, the meticulous, detailed art is a highlight, striking the perfect tone for the quirky character of the world it portrays and rewarding repeated readings to catch every detail. Main characters are Ashkenazi.

Affectionately celebrates Jewish American experiences. (epilogue, photo gallery) (Graphic memoir. 12-18)

Caring for Critters: One Year at a Wildlife Rescue Centre
Read, Nicholas
Heritage House Publishing (128 pp.)
$19.95 paper | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-77203-387-8

Documents a calendar year in the life of Critter Care—a wildlife rehabilitation center in southern British Columbia that specializes in mammals.

At first glance a journal-style overview and a tribute to founder Gail Martin, this work is in fact much more. Readers will get the expected tales both tragic and amusing, as dedicated workers—including international interns—do everything from hourly overnight nursing of infant moles to teaching otter pups how to swim to releasing charges back into the wild. All these stories—told with accessible language and wry humor—are interspersed with fascinating facts about the habits and behaviors of beavers, skunks, raccoons, and more. From the beginning, the text is also clear about the tension between Critter Care and the philosophy and practice of British Columbia’s Conservation Officer Service, which often resorts to shooting rather than relocating animals. The text emphasizes the ever increasing number of orphaned bear cubs, often caused by officers legally killing mother bears foraging in human settlements. Other serious issues woven into the text are euthanasia, habitat loss, unintentional killing of wildlife, and leghold traps. Nor does the text gloss over the fighting and death that are an inherent part of nature, including a note that rabbits are such popular prey they are sometimes called “nature’s granola.” Nevertheless, a tone of optimism prevails. Abundant, eye- and heart-arresting color photographs and excellent layout complement the text’s call to action.

Inspiring. (index, sources, recommended reading) (Nonfiction. 12-16)

The Color of Dragons
Salvatore, R.A. & Lewis, Erika
HarperTeen (416 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-0-06-291566-5

Two orphaned teens are drawn to each other in a prequel to the Arthurian cycle.

A legend tells of a powerful magic wielder who will one day stand by a great king and ensure the kingdom’s survival. When Maggie discovers she has powers and that they are connected to the moon and to the feared draignochs that plague the kingdom, she hides behind Xavier, her surrogate father and traveling performer, hoping to pass him off as the real magician. When they are brought to the forbidding Walled City to present their magic before infamous King Umbert, Maggie becomes entangled with Griffin, the king’s champion draignoch slayer, who has conspicuous facial scars from his battles. As Maggie’s
Although the worldbuilding is superficially fleshed out and the McSweeney contributes a map, lovingly detailed sets of space diversity of intergalactic body types notwithstanding, human discovered emotions. A few wild aerial dogfights and larger bat for Roma people appears twice in the narrative.

A fast-paced fantasy with elements of romance and violence. (Fantasy. 14-18)

**CYTONIC**

Sanderson, Brandon  
Illus. by McSweeney, Ben  
Delacorte (480 pp.)  
$19.99 | Nov 23, 2021  
978-0-399-55585-5  
Series: Skyward, 3

The third episode in the Skyward series sees red-hot space pilot Spensa Nightshade coming into her full pow-ers as she battles both pirates and space monsters in a strange interdimensional nowhere.

Leaving her ongoing feud with evil galactic overlords on temporary hold back in the somewhere, Spensa passes through a portal to a realm where time and memories tend to slip away, bits of landscape randomly snipped from reality float like islands around a distant sunburst—and teeming hordes of disembodied, malevolent entities called delvers are relentlessly hunting her down. Fun as all the space-opera elements are, they continue a trend from the preceding volume in deadening the efforts of Spensa and sidekicks old and new to establish personal identities or backstories, wrestle with inner demons, or, in the case of the AI M-Bot, practice insults and deal with newly discovered emotions. A few wild aerial dogfights and larger battles later, however, Spensa has come into her cytonic superpower, found out some crucial things about the delvers, and made her way back to the somewhere. Now for those overlords.... McSweeney contributes a map, lovingly detailed sets of spaceship plans, and galleries of the multispecies cast members. Wild diversity of intergalactic body types notwithstanding, human members seem uniformly White.

More terrific combat scenes, but a bit too heavy on character development to fly at speed. (Science fiction. 12-15)

**WHERE ECHOES LIE**

Schuren, Shannon  
Philomel (400 pp.)  
$17.99 | Oct 19, 2021  
978-0-525-51657-6

There’s a ghost in the woods, and she’s angry.

Rena Faye is having a horrible start to the summer before her senior year of high school: Her mother has vetoed the road trip she was supposed to go on with her beloved grandmother, and instead she’s expected to work at her family’s motel again, for no pay. The rural Kentucky motel’s main attraction for tourists is the moonbow—a washed-out rainbow appearing monthly over the falls. There’s also the local legend of the ghost bride, a tragic story of a young woman who fell to her death into the river—exactly why she fell varies by the storyteller. Rena Faye’s grandmother insists the story is based on fact and affects the women in their family, calling it a curse. But Rena Faye doesn’t believe in ghosts; she’s a photographer and focused on what she can see. In fact, she wants to go to art school, but her family doesn’t support her dream. But even she can’t deny that there is something in the woods. The narrative is lengthy and banks on sensationalism for its appeal. Schuren does tap into oral history traditions from a feminist perspective, but this is largely overshadowed by the glaring misogyny and emotional abuse from Rena Faye’s family and boyfriend. While the protagonist acts against and largely breaks free from these unhealthy circumstances, it is a hard slog to get there. The cast defaults to White.

Disappointing. (Paranormal. 14-18)

**BETWEEN SHADeS OF GRAY**

Sepetys, Ruta  
Adapt. by Donkin, Andrew  
Philomel (160 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct 12, 2021  
978-0-593-20416-0

A graphic novel treatment of Sepetys’ acclaimed *Between Shades of Gray* (2011) illuminates the story of a teenage Lithuanian girl’s imprisonment in a Siberian labor camp.

In 1941, 15-year-old Lina is deported, along with her mother and young brother, by the Soviet forces occupying her home country of Lithuania. They endure a grueling six-week train journey, unaware of their destination or the whereabouts of Lina’s father, who disappeared prior to their arrest. Once they reach Siberia, they are sold into a sentence of 24 years of hard labor and forced to sign a document saying that they committed crimes against the Soviet Union. The harsh struggles that Lina and her fellow countrymen face as Soviet prisoners are
Ari has been kidnapped by Blackwatch security, and they are for deploying the physical and emotional abuses they are forced to endure. Throughout these hardships, Lina holds onto hope that she and her family will survive to be reunited with her father; in the meantime, she documents her heartbreaking experiences through her drawing. Like Lina’s art, the stirring, watercolor-like illustrations serve as an evocative medium for relaying both the horrors of her experience and the sublime resilience of the human spirit.

A stunningly rendered graphic adaptation that will introduce new readers to this important chapter in history. (author’s note) (Graphic historical fiction. 12-18)
For those who like a dose of creepy with a heaping of cute.

CREEPY CAT VOL. 1
Valent, Cotton
Illus. by the author
Trans. by Nibley, Alethea & Nibley, Athena
Seven Seas (132 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Oct. 12, 2021
978-1-64827-787-0

Flora inherits a mansion and discovers it’s already occupied. Since she arrived at the mansion, Flora felt she was being watched. She soon meets fellow inhabitant Creepy Cat—a round, squishy, white cat with red eyes—whom she befriends, despite his oddities. He can replicate himself, change size and shape, and fly, but he also engages in typical cat behavior—knocking a cup of water off the table and bringing a dead bug to his human. Flora’s admirer, police officer Oscar, occasionally stops by, but Flora doesn’t return his affections. Unbeknownst to Flora, other spooky creatures of the night sometimes appear in the mansion and interact with Creepy Cat. This quick read is filled with gothic vibes, humor, and lots of spooky adorableness. The manga-style art is in full color throughout, with an emphasis on blacks, blues, and reds. Human characters are thin with paper-white skin and expressive faces. Originally a webcomic, each page is a contained ministory with a title; sometimes they depict silly stand-alone moments, whereas other times they contribute to a story arc that continues over several pages. Reading directions are provided at the beginning, as the panels in this Japanese import are read right to left. Most pages have only four or five crisp panels, readily accessible even for those new to manga.

Squee-worthy reading for those who like a dose of creepy with a heaping of cute. (extra stories) (Graphic fantasy 12-18)
ASL speaker. Lateef McLeod, a Black poet and podcaster who uses an augmentative and alternative communication device, addresses the power and potential of assistive technology. The featured writers are male, female, and nonbinary; Black, Jewish, Asian American, Arab American, White, and multiracial; some self-identify as queer. Many of the essays are deeply personal. The topics the writers explore include disabled community spaces, fighting against institutionalization, and role models with dwarfism or multiple sclerosis. Bipolar disorder and intellectual disabilities share space with facial difference and incontinence. The essayists examine Christianity and Islam, dating, and the freedom to be loud. Some of the authors will be familiar to readers who engage with disability spaces online, such as Keah Brown, an African American woman with cerebral palsy who went viral with her #DisabledAndCute hashtag. A plain language summary and discussion guide are available online. This is a wide-ranging collection presenting diverse and compelling voices.

Ardently, intimately political instead of passively inspirational: will galvanize young activists. (contributor biographies) (Nonfiction. 12-18)

**LIES MY MEMORY TOLD ME**

Wunsch, Sacha
Inkyard Press (304 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 19, 2021
978-1-335-01827-4

A popular new technology has dangerous consequences.
Seventeen-year-old Nova Reynolds’ parents invented Enhanced Memory—an innovative virtual reality technology that allows people to download and engage with immersive experiences ranging from mundane practical skills to thrilling ones like singing on stage or traveling the world. When Nova meets mysterious Kade—who refuses to use Enhanced Memory after becoming overly dependent upon it—and they break into a skating rink, she learns that he makes videos to share his real adventures, something that has become increasingly rare. Even as original thinking and creativity decline, the demand grows for escaping into others’ memories. Nova’s workaholic parents become so busy beta-testing memories that they fail to clean the house and forget to attend her school play. During a lake-house vacation, her parents spend the whole time indoors experiencing Memories. Through Nova’s after-school job at a health facility for elderly people with memory loss, she accidentally stumbles upon the details of the memory extraction process and realizes something sinister is happening. This dystopian thriller presents a thought-provoking metaphor for video game and social media addiction, especially impactful as it is shown from the perspective of a teen who watches her parents lose control. The intriguing premise, fast-paced narrative, and satisfying twists compensate for the sparse character development. Most characters default to White; Kade’s mother is British and his father is Indian.

An entertaining, high-tech page-turner. (Thriller. 12-18)
Ayana Gray Takes Teens On An Epic Journey

Her YA fantasy debut, Beasts of Prey, captures the drama of young people discovering their identities

BY MEGAN LABRISE

There’s no mistaking Ayana Gray’s Beasts of Prey (Putnam, Sept. 28) for anything other than what it is: the next big thing in YA fantasy.

Set in a lush African-inspired realm pervaded by magic, this first novel in a planned trilogy introduces dual protagonists from the same city but completely different worlds. Bookish and thoughtful Ekon, 17, is destined to become a warrior like his older brother, Kamau. Clever and bold Koffi, 16, is an indentured servant at the Night Zoo, a mesmerizing attraction whose majestic and misunderstood beasts require specialized care. After a shocking series of events, the two teens journey to the heart of the Greater Jungle to hunt the Shetani, an otherworldly monster whose vanquishment holds the key to their hearts’ desires.

As Kirkus writes in a starred review, “This pan-African story, rife with betrayal and narrated through poetic language that evokes vivid imagery, will ensnare readers, keeping them engaged with its energetic pace....A dazzling debut.”

“On its surface, it’s a story of two kids who form a tentative and unexpected alliance,” Gray tells Kirkus by phone from Little Rock, Arkansas, “to go into this magical jungle and find and hunt down the monster that has been menacing their city for nearly 100 years. When you go a little bit deeper, though, it’s a story of two kids who have both dealt with grief, who have both dealt with trauma. They are running from monsters—both real and in their heads—and learning to stop running and face the things that are hard, because that’s how you get through things.

“It’s a story like the kind I wanted to tell myself at 17,” continues Gray, 28, an inveterate storyteller whose first medium was drawing: As a child, she would present the images, stapled together, for others to read. Encouraged in her love of learning and expression by family members—especially her grandmother, a retired librarian, and her late grandfather—she began to add words to clarify intended meanings. Now on the cusp of becoming a published author, Gray says she writes to honor the generations that came before her.

“I found a census record of, I believe, my great-great-great-grandfather, who was born a slave, died free, but in his census record, he was my little brother’s age—in his 20s—and he couldn’t read or write. He was a farmhand,” she says. “I’m sitting here writing thousands of words—
not always appreciating the fact that I have the ability to do that—and this man, my ancestor, couldn’t read or write at all. That stayed with me. Now I like to think I’m doing it for him, for his wife, for their children and their children. Because they’re why I’m here.”

Both Ekon and Koffi are deeply indebted to their ancestors’ legacies: Ekon is a member of the Okojo family, whose creed is “Kutoka mizzly” (“from the root”) and whose men, when they come of age, join a class of anointed warriors known as the Sons of the Six. The debt Koffi has been working to pay off at the Night Zoo—owed to greedy, merciless owner Baaz Mtombé—was incurred by her father. It is her mother, working alongside her, who taught Koffi how to care for the beasts, how to view them not with fear but compassion. (“Sometimes things that seem dangerous are just misunderstood,” Mama tells her.) But fortitude and pluck are her essential characteristics.

“Koffi is the braver version of everything I wanted to be at 17,” says Gray, who grew up in Atlanta. “She says what’s on her mind and is probably even more emotional...[S]he has this experience [of working at the Night Zoo] that’s made her brave, even if it’s as an indentured servant, but she’s this girl who has survived, and she’s brave, she’s fierce. She isn’t afraid to correct [Ekon], and she isn’t afraid to stand up for herself.”

Though life and legacy call Ekon to bravery, there is a gentleness at his core that encourages Koffi to let down her walls. “Ekon had been the first person in her life to suggest that she didn’t have to choose between her heart and her mind,” Gray writes, “he’d been the first person to like both parts of her.”

“I have a soft spot in my heart for Ekon, because he’s a book person,” Gray says. “Growing up, I didn’t see many Black characters and stories, I didn’t see a lot of Black boys, and I definitely didn’t see any Black boys who liked books...[Ekon] is someone who—on the exterior, people expect one thing, but on the interior, he’s a really gentle and kind and compassionate soul.”

Ultimately, Koffi and Ekon’s success in the Greater Jungle will be determined by their ability to navigate their own hearts and minds—to claim their identities, confront their fears and desires, and find their rightful places in the world.

“Young adult tends to explore people who are trying to find their place in the world,” says Gray, who calls her YA debut “my proudest creative expression to date.” “While typically you expect that to happen around 16, 18, we’re all constantly trying to find our place in the world as we enter new chapters.

“I think about who I was at 16, 17 years old,” she says, “especially right on the cusp of college. I wasn’t doing anything nearly as magical as Koffi and Ekon do in Beasts of Prey, but that anxiety and that fear of Where do I fit in? is such a memorable piece of my childhood.

“When I was angry, I was furious. When I was sad, I was devastated. When I was happy, I was euphoric. Everything felt like the end of the world, and I just wanted to capture that.”

Editor at large Megan Labrise hosts Kirkus’ Fully Booked podcast. Beasts of Prey received a starred review in the July 15, 2021, issue.
The Rolling Stones spend 40 years rocking out on stage in this captivating photo album. Angeledes traveled 153,043 miles, by his reckoning, to attend 132 Stones concerts from 1975 to 2017 and took black-and-white and color photos of the shows. The subjects of these 276 pictures are a constant—singer Mick Jagger, bassist Bill Wyman, and company playing instruments and/or singing on standard-issue stages—so the book’s deeper theme is the effects of time on each of the band members. Some things changed markedly over the decades: The band’s 1970s glam stylings—lamé, bell-bottoms, heavy eyeshadow—gave way to jeans, natural fibers and lighter makeup, and Jagger’s delicate physique became noticeably more muscular in his 60s. Some things didn’t change, including Jagger’s and guitarist Ron Wood’s hair color, which never betrayed any gray, and drummer Charlie Watts’ stony expression and sartorial conservatism. There’s a timelessness to the images in the sense that, even in the ‘70s, Jagger and guitarist Keith Richards often looked like old men, creased and haggard as they shrieked into microphones. As the years unspooled, the Stones looked less like raging enfants terribles and more like relaxed old friends, sneering less and smiling more. Angeledes’ photographs are evocative and atmospheric, and each conveys something of the character of those pictured and the kineticism of their performance antics. There are some indelible images here, including a shot of a youngish Jagger, writhing in a torn, wispy top and print pants, his lips gaping, which is, by itself, worth the price of admission. In between photos, Angeledes relates a few amusing, shaggy dog anecdotes from his Stones-chasing days: getting a snapshot of Richards leaving a court proceeding regarding drug charges; hitchhiking through England after a gig; or getting hassled by security at a Calgary concert (“the guy got really steamed when I tossed that roll of film hoping to ‘lasso’ some portion of his anatomy”). The result is a fine record of the Stones’ stage act and a set of absorbing pictorial studies of the band mates.

Arresting portraits of the Stones in flamboyant youth and slightly mellower maturity.
In this thriller sequel, a Secret Service agent chases a homicidal terrorist plotting global cyberattacks against nuclear power plants.

Izzy Stone’s trip to the beautiful city of Paris is “a matter of national security.” The Secret Service agent’s mysterious friend Victor believes terrorist attacks in the United States and France are imminent, and he’ll only give the details to Izzy. But Victor, who lives in Paris’ catacombs, offers mere possibilities: North Korea may be planning the attacks, which likely involve Lalo, a wanted terrorist whose real identity is unknown. The man with all the actual specifics is already dead; in fact, Izzy was riding the metro when someone gunned him down—a murder that no one witnessed. Apparently, a killer targets anyone with information on the impending strike, which includes someone close to Izzy. Convinced Lalo is the culprit, Izzy races to track him down, a pursuit that takes her of disguises as well. Meanwhile, a hacker infiltrates nuclear targets anyone with information on the impending strike, which includes someone close to Izzy. Convinced Lalo is the culprit, Izzy races to track him down, a pursuit that takes her back to America. He’s not only dangerous, but an elusive master of disguises as well. Meanwhile, a hacker infiltrates nuclear power plants in Georgia. As this is surely a precursor to full-scale cyberattacks, thousands are at risk of catastrophic radiation. Aragon’s gripping story moves at a steady clip, keeping the capable hero on her toes. It’s moreover delightfully complex, at least for a time; tied to the diabolical plot is a mysterious Russian woman covertly working for rival agencies. Action scenes pop: “Izzy withdrew her Sig Sauer and chambered it with the hood of a car. Bendzela’s formal style manages to replicate the timeless language and logic of Aesop’s originals, as in this passage, early in an unusual section of human-centered tales: “With the arrival of words, these new great apes began to stratify themselves... The institute clumped together in disparate settlements, while the lucky few dwelled in the highlands. Some accumulated hides and tools, others lovers and children, still others stories and legends.” At their best, in pieces such as “As Numerous as the Hares” and “Coy Wolf,” the fables offer lessons that apply not only to the laws of nature, but to human society as well. The author may have limited his audience by hewing to such literary language, as one could see more minimalist fables going down a bit smoother, but this doesn’t take away from their merit. These complex stories are still executed with a great sense of economy, and many will leave readers pondering their layers of meaning for some time afterward.

An inspired and insightful collection of tales rooted in biology.
The piles of books aimed at helping leaders achieve their ambitious goals and inspire their talented employees could fill myriad office shelves. Like hard-boiled detectives hunting for clues, diverse authors have studied successful leaders to identify the positive qualities they share. In their guides, they disclose the distinctive attributes and winning strategies of dynamic impresarios. Kirkus Indie recently reviewed three works that explore this rich topic.

In Changing the World Without Losing Your Mind, Alex Counts presents the lessons that he learned after founding a humanitarian nonprofit organization. He covers fundraising, effective decision-making, supervising a staff during turbulent times, and more. According to our reviewer, “Counts eloquently discusses the dangers of work-life imbalance, how to be a constant learner,” and “the importance of gratitude,” delivering “noble and enriching leadership advice.”

Pamela J. Newman’s Leadership Is Doing offers readers 44 axioms, each one accompanied by a vignette. Many of the stories are based on Newman’s experiences as a civilian aide to the secretary of the Army for the South Region of New York. The axioms range from “The Value of the Mentor/Protégé Relationship” to “Leaders Have Excellent Communication Skills.” The author emphasizes integrity: “Doing the correct thing takes courage, extra energy, perseverance, risk taking and a fundamental belief that ‘right is right.’” The manual “leaves a lasting impression,” our critic writes.

Andrew Freedman, a strategic business consultant, shows leaders how to build a high-performance culture in Thrive. Freedman’s book, written with Paul Elliott, includes research that reveals “70 percent of business transformation and change initiatives fail to deliver the intended results.” To help executives cope with this grim situation, the manual supplies a tactical approach, case studies, essential tools, and interactive exercises. The guide, our reviewer writes, provides “valuable high-level thinking about high performance in business.”

The real focus of the narrative is on a premature baby named Ryan, whom Boit took into her home. Soon after, she and Titus agreed to adopt Ryan. The story expands to include their adoption of two more children. Throughout the tale, Boit maintains a glowingly optimistic, companionable tone. She never makes the foremost mistake of so many memoirists—thinking the mere details of her story will in and of themselves interest readers. Instead, she consistently ties her memories to broader insights about love and about her own personal Christian faith. “Over the years,” she writes, “as I stepped closer to those in their suffering, I came to recognize the nearness of God—present in the hard places and the pain, in the spaces where death and destruction always wanted to win.” Boit has worked in those hard places, and her memoir illuminates them.

A heroic, uplifting account of easing others’ suffering and building a family.
“A fun throwback horror tale that will keep readers on edge.”

**THE GIRL FROM DARK DAKOTA**

*Devore, Bryan*

Self (244 pp.)

$0.99 e-book  
978-0-9852413-8-4

In this horror mystery, an unlikely group of detectives investigates the evil forces at work in a small town.

Donovan Graves is a parapsychology professor in Chicago with a well-earned skepticism of the paranormal, caught between a desire to debunk those he sees as fraudsters and a sincere yearning to know what waits on the other side of death. His work is fueled in part by his own grief over the loss of his son, David, who died in childhood. Now—in a moment when paranormal activity is on the rise across the world—Donovan feels for the first time that David is trying to contact him. A message appears in front of his son’s grave: “FIND HER.” Meanwhile, in Williston, North Dakota, high school senior Rachel Black is having her own problems with a ghost: recurring dreams filled with screaming wake her in the middle of the night. Rachel knows

**FALLING & UPRISING**

*Cammaratta, Natalie*

Darkstoke (305 pp.)

979-8-50-794291-6

Cammaratta’s debut YA dystopian novel follows the efforts of two teenagers fighting to enact revolution in a society with dark secrets.

On the opulent island of Kaycie, where social status reigns supreme, 14-year-old Serenity Ward lives a life of fame, wealth, and comfort. However, her life, as she knows it, is based on a lie. Most people believe that Kaycie is the last surviving vestige of humanity after a global flood. In truth, there are seven other islands beyond the horizon, all secretly under the control of Kaycie’s shadowy government, known as the Establishment. They monopolize the islands’ resources and steal their residents’ children, while Kaycian citizens are kept ignorant of injustices that fuel their indulgent lifestyle. After Serenity joins Kaycie’s Leadership program and starts to learn the truth, she decides to become a spy for a rebellion operating within the Establishment. In the process, she meets Bram, a cynical young man who seeks revenge on behalf of his island home and views Serenity as a liability. However, both are aware that even their allies are keeping secrets from them, and the two will have to learn to trust each other if they’re to keep the rebellion afloat.

Cammaratta’s novel hits many of the standard beats of the dystopian YA genre, but it does so with cleverness and sincerity. The worldbuilding is mostly succinct but doesn’t feel underdeveloped, and the cast, especially Serenity’s cohort of friends, speak and interact in a realistic, natural way that includes genuine moments of humor. Serenity and Bram both act as narrators, which allows the story to strike an excellent balance between vastly different viewpoints, and their tumultuous relationship develops in sweet, unexpected ways. The overall premise, which seems simple at first, grows in scope as the stakes get higher, and the novel ably interrogates the underpinnings of its setting and the ways in which unjust systems are allowed to operate unhindered.

Serenity undergoes realistic, engaging, and meaningful evolution as she struggles with betrayal, takes dangerous risks, and learns to trust each other if they’re to keep the rebellion afloat. An exciting series starter with engaging concepts and memorable characters.

**WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS**

*Bunn, M.C.*

Bellastoria Press (466 pp.)

$16.00 paper | $5.99 e-book | Apr. 23, 2021  
978-1-94-220979-9

Bunn offers a historical romance about love in the midst of adversity.

It’s 1892, and Winifred de la Coeur is a London heiress with a strong will and an impressive fortune. She has more than enough wit to manage her affairs, but she languishes due to social conventions that limit her potential; people encourage her to get married for the sake of social advancement and define her value solely by her “virtue.” When criminals take her hostage in a bank robbery gone awry, she comes face to face with Court Furor, a rough, ribald man whose sincerity awakens her to a love she thought impossible—and one that traditional society would condemn. The pair soon surrender themselves to their attraction and are forever changed by a passionate night together. Winifred’s love awakens Court’s dormant sense of optimism, but emerging questions about her honor further limit her freedom—as does her agreement to marry George Broughton-Caruthers, who, though noble by birth, is dissolute in character. Later, Court returns to her, and they could both have to face the consequences of their forbidden love. Bunn’s thoroughly researched and brilliantly crafted novel is captivating from the first line (“Winifred de la Coeur was not a traditional beauty, but she was one of a kind”).

The central love story is powerful enough to carry the work, but its subplots are equally compelling, featuring the struggles of other characters to sustain unconventional love amid societal scrutiny. One powerful example can be found in the narrative of Beryl Stuart, who’s forced into sex work to protect her lover, Rosie, but later finds a way to break the cycle of poverty and begin a new life. The story addresses issues of poverty, women’s rights, and homophobia directly, confronting hypocrisy and social stigma that can trap people in untenable circumstances. However, it also ultimately grants many of its characters the happy endings they so richly deserve, allowing love to prevail.

A compelling and rewarding story of hearts’ desires.
who the screams belong to. Nearly a year ago on Halloween, a woman named Annabel Heller was murdered by her husband. Rachel isn’t the only one experiencing the supernatural. Jason
Heather Jo, leaves with her new boyfriend to have some qual
Halloween is just around the corner.
Jennifer is forced to stay there for the time being as her mother, 
remote town of Williston —“a place of drifting roughnecks and 
dirty riches beneath windy, barren plains”—a mystery involving 
less said about the twists
Devore’s prose deftly vacillates between the concrete and 
phantasmagoric: “Rachel drifted in and out of sleep. Her
mystery get? The seekers have less than a week to find out since 
Halloween is just around the corner.

Devore’s plot takes some fairly predictable turns, but Jennifer’s
An unruly teenager finds herself
Her muscles were relaxed, and her body felt as if floating into a 
dream. Someone called her name, but the voice came from the
dreamscape. The real world had fallen away, ceding its
she's been forced to scam her customers. But for some reason, her ability has recently come back—and tells her inexplicably to locate Rachel Black. As these four figures assemble in the
As the novel opens, young Eddie

An unruly teenager finds herself

Sir Stuckie; and local alligator Guinevere. At first, Jennifer
engages in defiant acts: She dyes her grandmother’s little dog, 
like me was running the place, the killer might think he could

A thriller in which a man under pressure from the mob investigates a murder.

An unruly teenager finds herself

This is a very big “if.” Eddie

A thrill seeks her way to a friend or feels self-conscious around the dreamy Guthrie.

Eddie’s plot takes some fairly predictable turns, but Jennifer’s 
sharp tongue and the endearingly sweet Mama Rudeen will keep YA readers entertained even as they see the inevitable 
heartwarming conclusion coming a mile away.

A standard teen rebellion tale but with charming characters and laugh-out-loud dialogue.

WAGER TOUGH
Farrell, Tom
Self (367 pp.)
978-1-73659-321-9

A thriller in which a man under pressure from the mob investigates a murder. As the novel opens, young Eddie O’Connell, hero of Farrell’s Wager Easy (2021), is in a bind. He owes the Burrascano family a gambling debt and can’t afford to repay it. Uncharacteristically, instead of stuffing 
Eddie in an oil drum and depositing him in the nearest deep body of water, the mob accepts a counteroffer: Eddie can travel from Chicago to Denver and take over the Team Player Collection Agency on the mob’s behalf. Team Player had until recently been run by Eddie’s acquaintance Zany, but Zany was gruesomely and dramatically murdered, and Eddie has positioned himself as the most likely candidate to unravel the crime. “If Burrascano called in a gang of known mobsters to run the store, the killer would never surface,” Eddie thinks. “But if someone like me was running the place, the killer might think he could take advantage of the situation.” This is a very big “if.” Eddie
knows nothing about running a collection agency and is acting without the sage advice of his older and wiser crime-solving 
Uncle Mike (a detective detained on another case). He gets help from Team Player’s manager, Paula “Rudi” Rudinger, and soon
the two are embroiled in tracking Zany’s murderer through the labyrinthine worlds of gambling and organized crime—all while Eddie tries to keep his own gambling demons in check.
This latest outing from Farrell is even more compulsively readable than "Wager Easy." The author has a pitch-perfect ear for the intricacies of the no man's land Eddie inhabits. He's "caught between two vicious worlds," beholden to the Burrascoso crime family and its nefarious but oddly ethical strictures and the blue-wall codes of his uncle the cop. The downplayed role of Uncle Mike in this adventure might have worked against the novel (the chemistry between the uncle and nephew is particularly enjoyable), but Farrell compensates in two ways. First, he drops the reader into the action at a breakneck moment and never slows down. (As Eddie himself notes, his role in his partnership with Uncle Mike was always action-oriented. With Uncle Mike mostly missing from this adventure, Eddie's quick temper drives the tempo.) And second, he fills the narrative with memorable characters, including an enjoyably despicable bad guy and, of course, Rudi, whose own backstory steadily builds.

Farrell has mastered the art of action-thriller pacing, punctuating the novel with unexpected turns, and each of his characters has a distinctive voice and motivation. The everyday dangers of Eddie's world—as he navigates the violence of the mob and the violence of the law—are expertly limned, and the result feels very assured: "Zany used to say that sometimes horses find a soft spot they never expected and they run the race of their life," Eddie reflects at one point. This novel and its predecessor comfortably occupy that soft spot; they both probe vulnerability to good effect.

A crackerjack crime novel about an upright Chicago bartender on the hunt for a killer.

LAST TRAIN TO AUSCHWITZ
The French National Railways and the Journey to Accountability
Federman, Sarah
Univ. of Wisconsin (344 pp.)
$79.95 | May 25, 2021
978-0-29-933170-2

A historical account of how the French national railway company collaborated with the Nazis and of its contentious journey toward atonement.

During the German occupation of France during World War II, the Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français, a state-owned railway firm, helped transport around 76,000 Jewish deportees to death camps. In the wake of France's liberation, however, the beleaguered citizenry seemed to have little appetite for prosecuting its people's war-related crimes; as author Federman, an assistant professor of negotiation and conflict management at the University of Baltimore, memorably puts it: "France emerged from World War II like most of Europe—too cold, hungry, and perhaps too disoriented to do much justice seeking." During the occupation, she points out, the SNCF played a series of contradictory roles, variously assuming the mantle of a victim when the French government signed it over to the Germans; a hero of the Resistance, when some of its workers fought back; and a perpetrator of treason when it aided Nazi crimes. Later, when its collaboration became a topic of angry debate, the company retreated into legal technicalities and strenuously avoided acknowledging its moral transgressions or making any restitution. Partly because of protests in the United States, a 2014 settlement of $60 million was finally reached, including a considerable donation toward Holocaust education and commemoration. The author furnishes a remarkably thorough account of the issues—historical, legal, and moral—as well as a rigorously lucid exposition of the "discursive landscape" surrounding them. Also, Federman astutely examines the debate as an illustrative microcosm of corporate responsibility at large, calling it "a rare example of what accountability looks like when a company...participates in a variety of transitional justice practices: commemoration, education, apology, and transparency." The author's analysis admirably combines scholarly scrupulousness with moral insight as she documents the personal stories of some who survived the Holocaust and others who did not.

A rare book that ably combines historical edification with a moving narrative.

AFTER PERFECT
Gabriel, Maan
She Writes Press (304 pp.)
978-1-64-72203-3

A woman starts over after the end of her marriage in Gabriel's debut contemporary romance novel. Gabby Stevens' divorce has just become final. As part of her plan to move on, she decides to study creative writing. On the way to her first class, she collides with a handsome man who turns out to be her teacher, Colt James. They begin to develop a friendship, and he helps her get a much-needed job at a bookstore. She credits him with bringing light back into her life, and the sexual tension between them is intense, although she's unsure about where he stands until he kisses her. Gabby's head over heels, but Colt's best friend, Tina, warns her not to "take things too seriously"—and, specifically, not to fall in love with him—and Gabby's best friend, Felicity, is concerned about how fast things are going. Gabby keeps seeing him, and as they grow closer, he confesses that he's dealing with past trauma and that he's not sure how to be a good partner. Still, when he finally declares his love for her, it feels like a dream—until he suddenly leaves town without a word. Will Gabby have to learn to cope with another heartbreak? Another major element is the fact that Gabby, her ex-husband, and Felicity have been close friends for 20 years, and Gabby's navigating these relationships post-divorce adds a nice layer of complexity to the story, effectively showing how hard it is to make a clean break with the past. A few minor issues keep the novel from complete success, though; a few details regarding Gabby's financial situation and Felicity's job as writer for the New York Times don't quite ring
true, and Gabby must constantly reassure Felicity that they're still friends, which becomes tedious. Colt's tendency toward the dramatic almost makes him seem like he's in a different novel from the rest of the low-key characters at times. Still, the author's narrative voice is engaging, and readers will root for Gabby and Colt to find happiness.

* A sexy and often compelling love story despite a few flaws.

**ALL GOOD QUESTS**

Graber, Joe

Last Match Books (310 pp.)


978-1-73716-120-2

A billionaire tycoon vanishes without a trace from his ranch in Gunnison, Colorado, and a reporter embarks on a quest to find him.

Brogan Quint is an unremarkable man, a freelance journalist with a penchant for writing about travel and human interest stories. But it's his popular features about missing person cases that has earned him the moniker “the vanishing man.” When billionaire tech tycoon John Breckon disappears, it's only natural that one of Brogan's editors asks him to investigate—a request that yields unexpected consequences when the reporter obsesses over Breckon's life and sudden disappearance. Brogan finds clues about where Breckon could have gone, convinces himself he is the only one who can find him, and embarks on an ill-advised journey into the Alaskan wilderness on his own—leaving everything behind, including his girlfriend, Abby Kincaid, and the life they were about to build together. Graber's debut work presents a memoiristic novel that begins with Brogan setting off to Alaska and toggles between his life prior to his departure, focusing on the investigation, and his experiences in the wild. The excitement of the physical challenges and the dangers Brogan faces on his journey—the crossing of a raging river, an encounter with a bear—are interwoven with a lot of navel-gazing that is at once utterly mundane and very relatable. There is an element of self-discovery in the novel that is informed by Brogan's eventual understanding of his obsession with Breckon, as well as his confronting mortality, an early tragedy, and the future. There is a remoteness about the writing; the first-person narrative never delves too deeply into Brogan's or Abby's personalities until the finale.

* Fans of personal accounts and wilderness adventures will find enough to like here.*

**RED’S NEST**

Grimebeek, Belinda

Bearhead Books (40 pp.)

Illus. by the author


Jul. 27, 2021

978-1-73476-693-6

A resourceful bird forms an unusual family in this picture book.

Red, a small woodland bird, dreams about having a family; “but first, he needed a good nest.” Red builds a structure impressive enough to attract a mate, a green bird named Olive, who also wants to start a family. Olive sends Red on a mission to find a few more twigs for their nest. But he doesn't get far before discovering a baby bunny, a baby raccoon, and a baby bear who have all lost their parents. Red assures the mammals they can live with him and Olive, thinking they’ll need a bigger nest. Grimbeek's mixed-media cartoon illustrations tell as much of the tale as her spare text, showing the solutions Red devises for the nest size problem until he, Olive, and the babies construct a perfect home. Stories of nontraditional families as inclusive as Red and Olive's are still a rara avis in picture books. The author hits just the right note in sharing Olive's surprise at Red's adoptions: “Olive's eyes grew big, but her heart grew bigger.” The immediate acceptance and love of both birds for the abandoned animals is uplifting, and Grimbeek's images reveal that Red leaves a note at each location in case the biological parents return. The sweet tale makes the most of the animals' different sizes and shapes in a way that's reminiscent of Jan Brett's *The Mitten* while telling a completely original story.

* A heartwarming, inventive animal tale about making room for unexpected love.*

**THE RED KNIGHT**

Grode, Jeff

Self (316 pp.)

$12.95 paper | $0.99 e-book | Jul. 18, 2021

979-8-74-997878-0

Tripets separated at birth unite to fulfill an ancient prophecy and defeat the Dark One in this YA fantasy adventure.

After Queen Sarah of Castle Hartwood gives birth to twins, King Frederick is happy that the girl looks just like her mother. But the boy is a dead ringer for the king's adviser, Wizard Fangal, who disappears with the baby. Neither man knows that the dying queen delivered a third infant, a red-haired boy spirited away by her midwife. Fifteen years later, the scattered siblings live very different lives, although all have magical powers, some still latent. Hannah is a princess; Titan is Fangal's apprentice; and Drake is a shepherd and unwitting adoptee. When Frederic's rival, King Fisher, proposes that Hannah marry one of his three sons, the courtship turns into a kidnapping and leaves the kingdoms on the brink of war. With
the dragon Kaylox—the legendary White Wyrm—awakening, fate brings the triplets together as part of an ancient prophecy: “Seek the wizard and find the key. Beware. Miracles and mayhem come in threes.” Together, they must help armies defeat the Dark One, a Black Dragon, before he escapes his prison and unleashes destruction. Grode sets his first fantasy novel in a familiar medieval European world, although diction sometimes clashes: “Okay,” “the guy with the armor.” That said, the triplet heroes provide an original spin, and the magic is imaginative. A shape-shifter, for example, must slice off some of his own skin and painfully graft it with a patch of animal hide, then tattoo a sigil. Complex plotlines and character development sometimes meander, but they mesh well in the climactic confrontation.

An involving sword-and-sorcery story with fresh, well-realized ideas.

**ASTRONAUT KIDS**

**Jeffries, Jo Ann & Bob, Lukas Kaiolohia**

*Illus. by Rosenberg, David Faber*

Bluewater Publications (106 pp.)


Five young astronauts join a two-year scientific research mission in this children's SF novel.

Ten-year-old Kai of Hilo, Hawaii, is beyond thrilled that he's going to be a real astronaut like his hero Ellison Onizuka. He's been chosen for a two-year NASA youth mission that will travel to the dwarf planet Ceres, where they'll also get a good view of Mars. Four other kids will participate: Greg, 13, from Texas; 12-year-old Floridian twins Mary and David; and Keola, 11, from Southern California, with each youngster working on a special research project. Greg's, for example, involves a time-travel mechanism, and Kai wants to test a device that could sense life-supporting elements and minerals on asteroids. In addition, Kai is bringing his cat, Cappy, to measure how weightlessness affects him, although he receives many warnings that the animal must stay inside his pod (spoiler: he doesn't). While studying, testing, collecting, and reporting data for individual projects, the young astronauts must work as a team and with adults to address challenges that arise. It's a learning experience in several ways, testing the kids' maturity and intelligence. In the end, they earn Capt. Bowie's praise and look forward to future adventures. Co-authors Jeffries, in her third children's book, and Bob, in his debut, offer improbably accomplished young characters in this story, but it's a fantasy that will appeal to any kid who dreams of space exploration. The book fairly vibrates with enthusiasm—and employs many exclamation points—but also takes science seriously; modeling teamwork and depicting realistic problems. A shuttle-door malfunction, for example, is diagnosed by examining a schematic that shows a weak connection—and requires a cool spacewalk to fix it. Rosenberg presents monochrome illustrations with lively compositions that capture the story's fun.

An enjoyable coming-of-age tale that's also a next-level Space Camp adventure.

**RAE'S FIRST DAY**

The First Story in the Capables Series

**Jordan, Danny**

*Illus. by Perciante, Agustina*

The Capables (40 pp.)


Feb. 15, 2021

978-1-73-645801-3 paper

978-1-73-645800-6

A kindergartener uses her secret superpower on her first day of school in this picture book.

Rae starts her day with her dad's affirmations: He assures her she's strong, smart, and—most importantly—capable. That word gives her a jolt, which she knows emanates from her superpower. But she's nervous about how kids will react to her limb difference (“Her right arm was shorter than her left, and her hand had two fingers”). To comfort her, her father has her repeat words they've shared: “Some people will look at me differently, and that's okay” because differences “make our world super.” Confidence restored, Rae meets her classmates, and they easily accept her—difference and all—as a friend. When recess is threatened due to rain, Rae confides to a new pal about her superpower, then duck behind a bookcase to summon the sun shine and save the day. While this series opener addresses Rae's limb difference, it's couched within a superhero story that's the real focus of the comic-book-styled work. The tale deftly shows that kids with differences can be heroes. Perciante's bright cartoon illustrations, featuring a diverse cast, are sometimes full page and sometimes in panels, with lettering in boxes and word balloons to reinforce the comic-book influence. While the vocabulary Jordan uses is more appropriate for confident readers beyond kindergarten, the lap crowd will be entranced by the format, and preschoolers will find comfort in Rae's success.

First-day jitters, inclusivity, and an engaging superhero tale all in one.

**KEROKTORS**

Short Stories

**Kennaley, T.C.**

Manuscript

Kennaley explores the folly of systems, philosophies, and romantic relationships in this debut short story collection.

In a barely livable dystopia, a professional propagandist is tasked with infiltrating a youth culture movement by attending a music festival in “The Movement.” In “Of Deplorable Nature,” set in the Roaring '20s, a rakish son of wealth must buckle down and concentrate on his studies or be cut off from his father's money. A man begins to suspect that his wife is having an affair with a fisherman when she comes home regularly smelling of seafood in “Plentitudes of Fish”: “I had hoped for a frank explanation, but she was
clearly concealing something,” notes the narrator, and the eventual explanation is unexpected. In these eight stories, slightly ridiculous men—and, in one instance, a sentient house—find themselves in thoroughly ridiculous situations, whether they’re inventing clothes at the dawn of man (“The Dawn”) or trying to live according to the principles of a highly discounted self-help book (“Help Thyself”). Kennaley’s prose is wry and precise, as when the aforementioned thinking house complains about some of the people who might buy him: “The children were all thoroughly detestable, screaming and slamming doors, smashing windows….One might say they were just kids being kids, but a few of them had a destructive streak that bordered on psychopathic.” The stories marry strong premises with a slightly absurd sense of humor, though Kennaley always makes sure to take his characters seriously. Standouts include “Of Deplorable Nature”; “First Love,” a tale of an elementary school crush in a community where everyone is a mess; and “The Applicant,” about a man attempting to find a job in a hypercompetitive future society. The book is a quick read that goes down easily—their methods, but nothing works, and he returns to his jar. One day, Otto discovers a bowl of happy half-popped and unpopped Kernels. He tries to become a popped Kernel via various methods, but nothing works, and he returns to his jar. One day, Otto discovers a bowl of happy half-popped and unpopped Kernels. They invite Otto to join them, saying, “You can have fun whether you pop or not!” Otto enjoys spinning in butter, sliding down a wedge of cheese, and soaking in chocolate. The next Pop Day, Otto holds a sign that says, “HAPPY POP (OR NOT) DAY!!!” Otto’s adventure is a quirky and endearing one. Kilpatrick’s picture book.

A clever and delightful snack-time story.

A popcorn kernel doesn’t pop but learns to have fun anyway in Kilpatrick’s picture book.

The Kernels are excited for Pop Day, when they leave their jars and head to the “MicroWave” to become popcorn. Otto can’t wait to do “the fun things he’d been dreaming about,” such as swim in butter and mingle with the Nuts. But although the other Kernels become white puffs, as planned, Otto remains unpopped. He tries to become a popped Kernel via various methods, but nothing works, and he returns to his jar. One day, Otto discovers a bowl of happy half-popped and unpopped Kernels. They invite Otto to join them, saying, “You can have fun whether you pop or not!” Otto enjoys spinning in butter, sliding down a wedge of cheese, and soaking in chocolate. The next Pop Day, Otto holds a sign that says, “HAPPY POP (OR NOT) DAY!!!” Otto’s adventure is a quirky and endearing one. Kilpatrick effectively teaches readers that, like the protagonist, they can excel even in circumstances that may not be exactly what they pictured. Blanco’s charming, full-color illustrations depict Otto and other expressive Kernels in a cheerful kitchen setting. Also included is a creative, detailed illustration of a “map” to MicroWave City, including locales such as Pistachio Way and Juice Box Café.

A clever and delightful snack-time story.
Dwayne, the protagonist of the opening story, “Blood in My Hair,” is serving a life sentence for unintentionally contributing to the death of a police officer; the prisoner, who’s known as “Cowboy,” spent much of his adulthood riding bulls in rodeos and has been craving a similarly perfect, adrenaline-filled moment ever since his incarceration began. In “Find Franny Now,” a woman named Lydia gave up on optimism after her autistic son was diagnosed with brain cancer and her husband subsequently left her; her general lack of hopefulness extends to Franny, the titular missing teenage girl, who Lydia believes has no chance of ever being found. In these tales, Lambert also deftly paints portrayals of people who long to find some kind of meaning in details of everyday life. For example, Miss Arnold, a newly hired nurse working the night shift at East Louisiana State Hospital in “Harold and Harold,” attempts to determine a profound reason for a patient’s obsession with the 1971 movie Harold and Maude. In “Lucinda,” the title character is happily married to a “Jungian analyst” but trying to move beyond emotional trauma caused by her mother; after a meditation workshop, she and her husband venture to the Ozarks for a vacation. In evocative, deeply human prose, which is characteristic of the collection as a whole, the author shows how Lucinda feels closer to freedom and her true self: “Embracing the mountain silence, she felt that there was something more out there. At home...she could sense it, like a slight tug. But up here...she felt its presence all around her.” Throughout these stories, Lambert successfully highlights the uncertainty people feel even as they hold out hope, and this results in a robust collection.

A moving, skillfully written set of tales.

**BECOMING MYSELF...AGAIN**

Lavoie, Renatt  
Self (134 pp.)  |  Aug. 31, 2021

A divorce leads a woman to reimage herself and her life in Lavoie’s novel. Emma Cloutier is a well-respected transplant surgeon at New York Presbyterian Hospital with a handsome, loving husband who’s always waiting for her when she gets home from a rough day at work. However, Martin isn’t the amazing spouse she thinks he is; by chance, she discovers that he’s been cheating on her for a quarter of their two-year marriage. Couples therapy does little other than make them realize that there’s no way to fix what they have. Emma finds herself alone for the first time in years, and she decides to shake things up. She quits her job to join an international association that allows her to travel and work in hospitals around the world. The time away from New York, her parents and siblings, and her memories of her ex-husband allows her to try to figure out who she is and what she wants. Between work assignments, she returns to New York to visit family and friends. She’s enjoying some alone time in a quiet eatery when she meets a handsome guitar player named Andre. He’s in a similar place as Emma, having sold his tech company so he could travel. With him, Emma starts to realize what it means to love and be loved while still hanging on to her whole self. Over the course of this novel, Lavoie offers readers a short but sweet work of contemporary fiction about a woman in search of her identity. In fewer than 200 pages, the author manages to give her protagonist a fair amount of depth, and Martin and Andre come across as solid characters. However, Emma’s friends and family members don’t get the same treatment despite the fact that some appear multiple times; instead, they feel underdeveloped and more like plot conveniences than real people. That said, the book has an uplifting tone, and readers will be happy to see how Emma’s narrative plays out.


**A MOUNTAIN OF EVIDENCE**

Lewis, Amy O.  
Sep. 14, 2021  |  978-1-73-729770-3

A young woman seeks refuge and anonymity in a small mountain town as she gets entangled in multiple homicide cases in Lewis’ debut suspense novel. A 29-year-old accounting executive has been framed for the murder of Michael Leeds, a junior accountant at her Chicago firm, as well as the crime of embezzlement. She knows the identity of the real culprit—her former boss, Stephen Bender—but false evidence has been planted that implicates her, so her only option, she feels, is to flee. With $10,000 in cash and a new false identity (“Kim Jackson”), she drives west, settling in Montrose, a small, rural mountain town in Colorado. She takes a job at a grocery store and tries to keep a low profile but finds it difficult; soon, she feels compelled to join the women’s softball team and volunteer at a nursing home. When the dead body of Emily Riley, a recently disappeared teenager, turns up, everyone is horrified, and the police have no leads in their murder investigation. Curious, Kim starts to do her own sleuthing, convinced that if she can solve Emily’s murder, she’ll figure out a way to prove her own innocence. What follows is a bracing whodunit that involves several town residents and forces Kim to wonder if catching the killer is worth blowing her cover. This is the first installment in Lewis’ Colorado Skies series, and it unfolds at a brisk, action-packed clip with enough suspense to satisfy thriller fans. Although most readers will likely solve the mystery long before Kim puts the pieces together, they’ll stick with the story thanks to Lewis’ engaging characters. The most compelling figure is Kim herself, whose struggles to preserve her anonymity and avoid human relationships give the book emotional depth; she comes off as far more than just a crack amateur sleuth. The conclusion leaves the door open for potentially exciting sequels.

A multilayered thriller with a sympathetic protagonist.
“Lücke does a skillful job of bringing the intricate politics of his broader plot into sharp, personal focus.”

AT THE END OF EVERYTHING

THE MOUNTAIN

Lucas, Matthew C.
Montag Press (718 pp.)
$24.95 paper | $2.99 e-book | May 10, 2021
978-4-29-429899-2

A war looms in an oppressive land in this fantasy. The three realms in the Mountain—the Quarter, the Crag, and the Crest—are separate but united under the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth’s banner shows a crossed sword, pick, and hammer, symbolizing the high, sunlit Crest (and its shining, forbidding Citadel); the mines of the Quarter; and the slums of the Crag. Once there were gods that showed the way for the Mountain’s inhabitants, but now they must follow the benign guidance and godless oversight of the Commonwealth and its “Our All for All” plan. In the Crag, a young student named Lillia eagerly awaits her chance to climb up the ranks and become a commissar in the service of the Crest under the proud eyes of her father, Tom. In the Quarter, there are some who still believe in the gods and its only officially allowed Priest, the Divine Nicodemus. He and King Elon stand at the crossroads of their diverging faiths. Judge Jonathan of the Crest passes judgment on those who break laws while he fights a dangerous addiction to “Redcaps,” a type of mushroom. Meanwhile, a brewing war unveils what lies behind that facade of equality. The rumors of a coming goddess signal a bleak time for all of the inhabitants, when they’ll “each have to pay the price for what we want, the real price” because “nothing gets shortchanged in the Mountain.” Characters’ arcs ebb and flow toward a confluence of threads in this engrossing dystopian fantasy that features a complex chain of events. The players engage with questions of faith and politics, war and peace, the personal and the communal against the backdrop of a corrupt, tyrannical system. Most of Lucas’ multicharacter narrative focuses on men, with a noticeable dearth of attention on its captivating female players. Even Lillia’s story is primarily seen through her father’s perspective. Despite its overlong setup, the slow-paced, well-orchestrated plot exploits the enthralling, dark premise with admirably detailed and careful worldbuilding.

Fans of twisty, cerebral dystopian fantasy will enjoy this intriguing tale.

AT THE END OF EVERYTHING

Lücke, G.W.
With Distinction Consultants (594 pp.)
978-0-64-882072-7

This second installment of an epic fantasy follows a young man through war and intrigue.

In When Darkness Descends (2020), the first volume in Lücke’s series, Tom Anderson of Earth used the mystical "eyes of lost souls" to travel to Enthilen in the world of Ostamp in search of his grandmother’s murderer. Predictably, he immediately plunged into a series of escapades in Enthilen and beyond, gathering a small group of friends and allies (including the valiant warrior Athalee “Thaly” of Bagendon, the trollish stone-grell Grin, and the impish “mouldewerp” Dwarrow) and amassing a rogues’ gallery of enemies, including Enthilen’s banished former king, Malphas. Book 1 ended on an old-fashioned cliffhanger. Tom’s friends rescued him in the nick of time from human sacrifice, and the whole band leapt off a cliff to the improbable safety of the dark waters below. This second volume picks up right where the previous one left off, but the author very smoothly prefaces the main narrative with a fairly involving synopsis in the unlikely event that readers are starting the series here. Certainly, Lücke doesn’t pause any longer than this for readers new or old. The story takes off like a shot and keeps churning, with Tom being instantly separated from his friends at sea. He lands desperate and alone in a remote Enthilen fishing village, with Thaly and Grin believing him drowned. The tale that unfolds is full of adventures and political intrigue, with more typical fantasy elements deliberately downplayed ("People spend way too much time bewitched by the promise of divine enchantment and not enough time in wonder of the real magic all around them,” one characters says, in a comment that might also serve as a mild rebuke to fantasy fans). Lücke does a skillful job of bringing the intricate politics of his broader plot into sharp, personal focus, mainly through well-drawn secondary characters like Thaly’s mother, Emelin. The riveting story is a sure-fire treat for Game of Thrones fans.

This propulsive, gripping sequel focuses on a hero’s quest to find personal justice.

READ ISLAND

Magistro, Nicole
Illus. by Feagan, Alice
Self (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 1, 2021
978-1-73-652330-8

A young girl travels to an isle of stories in Magistro’s debut picture book with illustrations by Feagan.

After dawn, a nameless child with olive skin, brown eyes, and long, wavy brown hair sets sail to an island composed of books. There, a sea wolf announces that it’s safe for all the other animals to come out, including grizzly bears, eagles, whales, elk, foxes, and salmon. They gather for a reading by a fox who encourages them to “Breathe in. Breathe out. Listen well.” The tale, told in short, rhyming prose from a poetic second-person perspective, is immersive. However, some readers may wish for a more well-defined plot. After the many vivid animal descriptions (“An eagle lands, a humpback waves”), not much happens on Read Island—but perhaps that’s Magistro’s point. Magistro’s winning, joyful illustrations, which use pleasing, delicate color palettes, make up for the lack of a strong storyline. One of the images—a fantastical, dynamic rainbow featuring mermaids, gryphons, astronauts, and dragons—effectively
captures the feeling of reading something really special for the first time. In the end, Magistro clarifies her point about the safe space that reading creates: “This world of stories, safe and true, / Is always here to welcome you.”

A beautifully illustrated children’s poem about the joys of reading.

**FRIENDSHIP CITY**

**Hanging by a Thread**

Mitchell, Carl H.

Covenant Books (296 pp.)

$28.95 | $19.95 paper | $3.99 e-book

Jul. 25, 2021

978-1-69885-435-7

978-1-69885-433-3 paper

In the future, the remnants of a dictatorship which once ruled the planet use a lab-created virus and planned social unrest to target their enemies in Mitchell’s dystopian SF sequel. This follow-up continues the story begun in *Sundown: Engineering Gives the Devil a Sunburn* (2017). In March 2058, Earth is still building back up after the previous year’s overthrow of the World Council, a murderous organization whose vile “supreme leader from hell” Jason Beck ruled via police-state tactics, including assassination and surveillance. Nick Garvey, a no-nonsense veteran police detective in New York City, had joined with President of the United States Lenora Allison, a hands-on leader who doesn’t shy away from a fight, in an investigation that exposed and destroyed the generation-long reign of the World Council. But victory came at a price. Beck is presumed dead, but a new mystery fiend called Ishmael has risen to prominence in what remains of the regrouping World Council. Now, the evildoers resort to bioterror and blackmail, first unleashing a deadly, engineered plague with strategically placed cures. This is just a foretaste of a second, even deadlier pestilence, which comes with a demand from Ishmael for the forces of justice and democracy to surrender. A key target of the World Council’s revenge is the glass-walled showcase community of Friendship City, an amalgam of Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Mexico, designed to set an example of model citizenship, racial harmony, and civic responsibility for other nations to try out on their own troubled borders. Garvey, Allison, and other key allies find themselves inside Friendship City, dealing with waves of crime and violence instigated by World Council infiltrators and collaborators as the plague threat looms.

Mitchell relates this tale in short, staccato sentences that are reminiscent of Jack Webb’s narration in theclassic cop show *Dragnet*. Garvey is a similarly familiar type of fearless cop, common in thrillers, who can seemingly shrug off any damage that’s inflicted upon him. However, he is a bit of an unusual player in the action-hero department, as he’s a grandfather whose family spends much of the adventure right alongside him—either willingly or unwillingly; the good guys here have an alarming tendency to suddenly drop their guards and make themselves vulnerable at strategic moments, but, then again, so do the villains. One subplot deals with Garvey’s estranged, now-comatose daughter who hated him for meting out punishment to a scoundrel uncle, which she may or may not remember when she wakes up. Perhaps the biggest payoff here is the “BORO,” or the Bill of Rights with Obligations, reprinted in full in the appendix, which lays out the ground rules for behavior and administration for all residents of Friendship City; it brings the material into line with the work of such SF grandmasters as Isaac Asimov and Robert A. Heinlein, who were wont to include civics and social-responsibility instruction in their fictional worlds. The conclusion leaves the door open for another sequel.

A familiar but sometimes-offbeat SF action thriller complete with a prospectus for good government.

**THE PIOUS INSURRECTION**

**The Reaping**

Morgenstern, Dexter

Self (229 pp.)


May 25, 2021

979-8-51-024556-1

978-1-72-372607-1 paper

A pair of children from a religious sect go on a quest as their world tips toward war in Morgenstern’s fantasy series opener. In the world of Evigonda, four kingdoms vie for resources and power: Yudecca, Borenati, Selador, and Nazarelle. In the waters south of Yudecca, on an island monastery, the monks of Regnaröv magically harness the elements to defend the continent against monstrous, sea-going reptilians called Naga. To satisfy the demands of deities Leviathan and Naamah, a ritual called the Reaping must occur, which requires a seer to “harvest life energy from each nation and bring it to the Shepherd’s Nexus” in the continent’s center. The young seer Bo, who’s sightless but can read emotional auras, has been chosen for the task. She’s accompanied by acolyte Amos, who’s unable to speak; his best friend, Eli, died during a Naga attack and became the first soul collected in a ceremonial dagger for the Reaping. Though escorted for part of their journey by the monk Kohana, the children eventually meet Vyuri, a wily former monk who renounced his loyalty to Regnaröv. Meanwhile, in Nazarelle, the soldier Lancaster Ben’Shual hopes to win the hand of Princess Winona. After Lancaster loses an eye in battle against Seladorian Templars, King Saul assigns him to gather intelligence on the technologically advanced Ashborn warriors. Over the course of this book, Morgenstern offers a brisk, concept-dense epic that succeeds in keeping its large cast in focus. Fans of grand fantasy series, such as David Farland’s Runelords novels, will be impressed by the abundant cultural details, including each nation’s splinter groups, gods, magic systems, and unique relationships. As the tribal chaos surrounding Amos and Bo increases, the two lonely main characters grow closer. Morgenstern’s main theme—that everyone has within them good and evil—is perfectly illustrated in the gripping...
25 Great Indie Books Worth Discovering [Sponsored]

**ESTHER’S STORY**
by P.K. Thomas
“In this historical Christian novel, a young girl without parents witnesses the crucifixion of Jesus and embarks on a spiritual journey that’s fraught with challenges.”
An often affecting tale of a youngster’s Christian discipleship.

**DIARY OF A MALPRACTICE LAWSUIT**
by Jack Spenser
“A debut memoir of a physician grappling with a malpractice lawsuit.”
A well-crafted remembrance that may be of most interest to those in the medical field.

**SURRENDER**
by Marylee MacDonald
“A memoir examines the complex psychological impact of adoption.”
A touching personal account of a journey to understanding and acceptance; informative and unsettling.

**LOSING THE ATMOSPHERE**
by Vivian Conan
“Manhattan-based librarian Conan grapples with complex mental disorders and misdiagnoses in this tumultuous memoir.”
A potent, heartfelt life story.

**YOU BE YOU**
by Richard Brehm
illus. by Rogério Coelho
“Faced with a blank canvas, a young girl finds her creative spirit in Brehm’s unusual picture book.”
An uplifting, eye-filling adventure encouraging children to realize their innate creativity and individuality.
**WATER MUST FALL**
by Nick Wood

“In this novel, two White South Africans and a Black American must open themselves to change in a near-future dystopia of chronic water shortages and a corporatocracy.”

Well-considered social SF—an engrossing, foreboding, and uncomfortable offering.

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**I REALLY DO CARE; SHOULDN’T WE ALL?**
by Lena Redman

“A critique of polarization in contemporary politics.”

A well-researched, thoughtful, if wandering, sociopolitical analysis of the contemporary West.

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**THE EIGHTH MASTER**
by J.D. Rutherford

“In this debut mystery, a construction project in progress is the site of murder, theft, and the occasional betrayal.”

A lengthy but smart and diverting whodunit.

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**THREE WOMEN**
by Bunmi Oyinsan

“In this domestic novel set in 20th-century Nigeria, Oyinsan tells the story of Oyinkan and Kole, their troubled marriage, and Oyinkan’s relationship with the grandmother who raised her and the mother who largely abandoned her.”

A solid, well-written novel of relationships and growth.

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**ALL MAN’S LAND**
by D. László Conhaim

“A black man settles an old score in a small Wyoming town in the early 1900s.”

A well-developed and thoughtful novel of right and wrong in the Old West.
25 GREAT INDIE BOOKS WORTH DISCOVERING

[Sponsored]

**GHOST**
by Michael Marra
“Marra’s memoir tells of his complicated life as a man associated with the Mafia and a covert operative trying to get drugs off of New York City’s streets.”
An often engrossing and edgy story of a man with conflicting loyalties.

**STARK RAVING ZEN**
by Kristy Sweetland
“Sensing her mental well-being unraveling, a woman embarks on a road trip that proves to be a mind-expanding voyage of spiritual discovery in this memoir.”
A bold, if occasionally terrifying, personal account of spiritual transformation.

**THE FLEDGLINGS: A Great Divide**
by E. DeLaurentis
“In this fantasy debut, ethereal beings aid the progress of humanoids whose fate is entwined with theirs.”
A series opener that explores an intriguing creation myth in the making.

**THE FLEDGLINGS: A Winding Path**
by E. DeLaurentis
“In this fantasy sequel, the god-like Sakrosians disagree among themselves about whether or not the humanoid Fledglings should embrace violence to survive.”
A fantasy in which the author, through her divine cast, maintains a slow-boiling narrative.

**99 TRUTHS**
by Lori Lacefield
“An FBI profiler tasked to help solve a grisly murder gets push back from a hard-nosed detective in charge of the case in this procedural thriller.”
A worthy origin story featuring a driven, cat-loving, complex FBI agent.
**THE TURNING POINT**
by Julia Ash

“Ash’s third volume of the ELI Chronicles sees animals attacking humans and vampires.”

Ash combines an array of fantasy concepts in a rousing new series entry.

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**RIVER OF BLOOD**
by Skitz O’Fuel

“In O’Fuel’s novel, a cop with familial baggage and personal hang-ups comes to see urban American policing in a new light.”

A fragmentary and arduous but ultimately potent tale of good and evil.

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**IN THE COUNTRY DARK**
by Mike Mallow

“A small-town West Virginia journalist gets mixed up with the wrong people and goes from writing obituaries to causing the need for them.”

Surprises add to a strong, scary story filled with questionable characters.

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**BETWEEN**
by D’Angelo

“In this coming-of-age novel, a young woman grapples with faith and unusual powers.”

A rich, evocative tale of growing up in Canada.

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**GOBBLEDY**
by Lis Anna-Langston
illus. by Rich Powell

“In this novel, a boy gets into even more trouble than usual after encountering a cute (and hungry) alien creature.”

Hugely entertaining as well as emotionally moving.

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**RIVER OF BLOOD**

**THE TURNING POINT**
25 Great Indie Books Worth Discovering

[Sponsored]

**THE FAVORITE**
by Lucinda Watson

“This debut poetry collection examines a trajectory from privileged and constrained girlhood to full maturity.”

Thoughtful, well-crafted poems that trace a path of self-discovery.

**TO DREAM OF WHITE & GOLD**
by R.K. Hart

“In Hart’s debut fantasy novel and series opener, a young woman is thrust into a world of magic and intrigue as she tries to master strange powers that she inherited from her late mother.”

A sparkling first novel of self-discovery by a skilled author.

**OOF**
by Strobe Witherspoon

“In Witherspoon’s novel, a writer catalogs the outrage that met the impending publication of his latest book.”

A strikingly original book that astutely captures an era of division.

**MISTAKE OF IDENTITY**
by A. Darius Kamali

“Kamali’s second book of poetry ruminates on the pressing political and moral issues of our age.”

Provocative and deserving of attention.

**EMERGENCE**
by Shira Shiloah

“In this debut thriller, a Memphis anesthesiologist suspects a neurosurgeon of intentionally harming—and sometimes killing—patients.”

Authentic characters and a vivid hospital setting enhance a tense medical tale.
A potent assemblage of briskly paced tales that will satisfy mystery and crime noir fans.

THE SILVER WAVES OF SUMMER
Ed. by Olsen, David M.
Kelp Books (217 pp.)
978-1-73-732280-1

A collection of short fiction primarily centers on beachfront locales. In assembling a variety of literary tales, short mysteries, and crime noir, Olsen handpicked these stories not only for their often bestselling and award-winning authors, but also for their suspense quotient and deft ability to thrill in a few pages. The opener, “In the Bank,” from novelist Antoine Wilson, follows two greedy thieves with a boat who hatch a plan to disguise themselves as Coast Guard sailors to intercept a lucrative marijuana shipment from cartel smugglers. Things, of course, go horribly wrong, as is the case in other tales like Edgar Award winner Naomi Hirahara’s crisp, effective “Off the 405,” in which a multifamily day at a Southern California beach quickly devolves into high-speed chaos on a freeway, and the noir crime short “Summer of ’86” from writer Tod Goldberg. Goldberg’s story focuses on a recently released felon traveling to Monterey Bay to help a sibling make ends meet after her boyfriend mysteriously disappears. The East Coast finds private investigator and newspaper reporter Susan Jaffe in prime form as she unravels the coldblooded murder of an original member of a private nudist resort in Shamus Award–winning writer Charles Ardai’s charming and endlessly engrossing mystery “The Naked and the Dead.” The quirky cast of characters, Jaffe’s pluckiness, and the seamless narration create a winning tale that will have readers seeking Ardai’s longer mysteries. Novelist Rob Roberge’s atmospheric missing person story “The Five Thieves of Bombay Beach” is set near the dry, desolate, sulfur-stinking Salton Sea. The narrator searches the beach for his father, who vanished. Other tales vary in theme, from the eclectically imagined life of jazz great Miles Davis in the 1950s to a horror yarn about outlaw sisters who murder together. Though these works often share similar themes, the diversity of the narrative voices and the seasoned storytelling abilities of these talented authors create compelling tones that evoke the suspenseful, the downtrodden, and the murderously moody. The collection’s longest entry is Alex Webb Wilson’s novella Wasteland, which uses essential elements and family bonds to brilliantly conclude the anthology with raw, vividly realized emotions. Olsen has masterfully gathered an established crew of writers to maximum effect.

A potent assemblage of briskly paced tales that will satisfy mystery and crime noir fans.

THE GREEN BEACH FILE
Perry, K.A.
Permuted Press (272 pp.)
978-1-68-261907-0

In Perry’s ecologically minded mystery, the tranquility of a small Connecticut coastal town is disrupted when a local attorney discovers a corpse in a bookstore parking lot. Thirty-something Jennifer “Jenn” Bowdoin is about to enter PT Jane’s bookstore to meet her sister-in-law, Claire, when she receives a phone call from her boss at the Shipward & Waters law firm. While walking back into the parking lot to answer it, she happens upon a dead body partially hidden behind a free-standing freezer. The next day she finds out that the man, Dr. Tilman, a herpetologist from Columbia University, was murdered; he’d been evaluating a property, Riverfront Landing, for Jenn’s law firm that was on the verge of being approved for development into a multiunit complex. The firm is handling legal work for the developer, but a local conservation group has been fighting to preserve the land, “the largest undeveloped tract of shoreline between New York and Boston.” Several days later, the body of environmental activist Dot Hutchinson is discovered; like Tilman, Dot was dispatched with a blow to the head by a blunt object. Haunted by the image of Tilman’s lifeless face, Jenn feels compelled to investigate the crimes on her own. Despite coming across less as a legal eagle than as a worker bee, she has a curiosity and persistence that result in the discovery of several significant clues, including the eggs of a possibly endangered salamander. Over the course of her debut novel, Perry, who has experience practicing environmental law, provides readers with plenty of intriguing environmental factors as well as amusing social commentary. Jenn is a pleasantly quirky heroine who takes “tree hugging” to a whole new level: She’s poignantly named the two American chestnut trees on her property—the last two locally surviving members of their species—“Romeo” and “Juliet.” The author does have a tendency to unnecessarily explicate emotions that are otherwise clear from dialogue and action. However, she also offers plot twists, a diverse assortment of characters, and even a potential romance that propel the narrative toward an exciting denouement.

An enjoyable beach read that speaks to timely issues.
DOIZEMASTER
Phantasm Creed
Quintana, Tony M.
Crystal Carriage Publishing (366 pp.)
978-1-7369340-0-5
978-1-7369340-1-2 paper

In Quintana’s YA fantasy debut, a teenager joins an elite team whose mission is to aid those suffering under a merciless ruler.

Sixteen-year-old Dashiel Ermitage lives in the small, relatively safe town of Azahar. A magical forest barrier separates the community from the Empire of Zaphyrelia, with vile emperor Abelon Aseidia sitting on a throne that he seized years ago. When two of Asedia’s monstrous soldiers slice their way through the barrier, Azahar suddenly finds itself in peril. Young Dashiel helps skilled warrior Sylvain Aurante take down the invading creatures—a feat so impressive that a covert, elite order known as the Cobalt Phantasms recruits him. They fight for Zaphyrelia’s people, which Azahar’s corrupt government deems an illegal act. Dashiel leaves his family and his safe haven behind and joins Sylvain, who’s also a Phantasm, on an eastbound journey to the group’s base. There, the teen trains with a weapon called a Doizemant—a powerful baton his father gave him that, legendarily, was forged by gods. His father is so respected among the Cobalt Phantasms that Dashiel’s assigned mentor, Sofia Spaigne, assumes that nepotism got him into the group, and she hates him immediately. But Dashiel trains hard and earns his spot—and maybe Sofia’s respect, as well. He’s soon going on missions, such as rescuing Sofia’s kidnapped younger brother. Meanwhile, Asedia sets his sights on conquering Azahar once and for all. The people in Dashiel’s close-knit hometown don’t stand a chance against the emperor’s vicious minions, so the Cobalt Phantasms vow to protect Azahar from destruction.

Quintana’s novel sublimely fuses elements of fantasy and real-world elements of history. The story takes place in the mid-19th century in a world that’s certainly akin to Earth; some of the characters brandish guns, and Dashiel rides a train, a vehicle that he didn’t even know existed. However, the story highlights its more sensational elements, such as bouts of magic, the music of unseen elves, and roaring gargoyles made of stone. The author’s tightly written scenes proceed at a steady pace as he packs his pages with rich details: “Each engraven crystal that reflected the candlelight.” The narrative primarily centers on the Phantasms and the burgeoning friendships among Dashiel, Sylvain, and Sofia; the latter’s animosity eventually eases, although she and Dashiel often hilariously bicker. Along with the humor, there’s a touch of romance, jolts of action, and even a possible betrayal. The narrative tone is often quite jaunty, with understated violence and mild curses (“you son of a smartlapser!”). This doesn’t undermine the villains, however; they’re especially frightening after the emperor aims his forces at Azahar and one character battles for their life. Quintana ends the book on a cliffhanger, and there’s still a lot more of the empire to explore and plenty of villains to vanquish. A few twists enliven the final act, and a cliffhanger will leave readers eager for a sequel.

A taut, riveting story set in a remarkable and entertaining world.

MURDER IN FIRST POSITION
An On Pointe Mystery
Robbins, Lori
Level Best Books (260 pp.)
$16.95 paper  |  $1.99 e-book
Nov. 24, 2020
978-1-947915-74-9

Metaphorical back-stabbing in a ballet troupe leads to the real thing in this whodunit.

The spryly first installment of Robbins’ On Pointe Mystery series finds Leah Siderova, a 30-something principal dancer in New York City’s American Ballet Company, hoping to make a comeback from knee surgery by starring in hot choreographer Bryan Leister’s new work. She loses out to Arianna Bonneville, the company’s new ingénue, 10 years her junior and possessed of superlative talent and sly cruelty. (“I used to watch you dance when I was still a little girl,” she purrs to Leah.) When Leah finds Arianna in the costume room with dress shears planted in her back, all signs point to her as the perp because 1) she clumsily put her fingerprints on the murder weapon; 2) the whole company heard her threaten to cut the victim down during a tiff; and 3) when asked who attacked her, Arianna murmured “Leah” before expiring. Shrewd, handsome police detective Jonah Sobol likes Leah for the crime, and even her Uncle Morty, a lawyer, thinks she should cop a plea. But she’s determined to prove her innocence by finding the real killer. The suspects include Zarina Devereaux, an amoral French ballerina and rival of Arianna’s; various men and women who may have been sleeping with or jealous of the two dancers; and many corps de ballet peons whom the victim tormented. With the police closing in, Leah goes on the lam in disguise to continue her investigation—and discovers a world of salt-of-the-earth types very different from the ruthless denizens of her dancer’s bubble. In this limber yarn, Robbins, an ex-ballet dancer and author of Lesson Plan for Murder (2017), deploys her tartly witty prose to offer a delicious, well-observed sendup of the ballet world. The plot has red herrings, arbitrarily withheld evidence, and third act problems, but that doesn’t detract from the fun of watching Leah navigate atop her aching, blistered feet through the labyrinth of balletic cattiness and vanity (Zarina “peered around my shoulder to look in the mirror that hung behind me, checking to see that she was still as beautiful as she was five minutes earlier”). Readers will root for Leah as she sleuths her way through the troupe’s comic excesses.

A graceful mystery that pirouettes around a cast of entertaining narcissists.
“Heiduczek’s evocative, lineless pictures with easily named animals and distinctly shaped leaves and plants provide much for young readers to discuss.”

THE S.O.U.R.C.E.
Royce, Suzanna L.
Illus. by Gershman, Jo & Chang, Tara Larsen
Self (204 pp.)

With magical and human help, sea creatures spread the word about ocean pollution in this book for children and tweens.

Guided by a majestic Sea Spirit, a pelican and his marine mammal friends team up with concerned humans to send a universal message about the devastating effects of pollution on the world’s oceans. Avoiding preachiness with a mix of humor, lively animal characters, and empathy, this thoughtful work opens with a cliffhanger as young skateboarding champions Sky Ryder and Silk are swept off a jetty by monster waves after a visit to the Ocean World Marine Mammal Entertainment Park. Their fate remains unknown for several chapters as the narrative flashes back to Ocean World several months before. There, pelican Duster, his sea lion friend Jaxx, and an orphaned gray whale named Nikki make a plan to help three injured newcomers—Rio the orca, Bubba the beluga whale, and baby sea otter Patches—escape Ocean World’s veterinary hospital and find their families. (The creatures’ injuries were all caused by ocean pollution: Plastic damaged Duster’s beak; fishing wire scarred Jaxx; Rio, sick from pollutants, was hit by a boat; Bubba got tangled in fishing netting; and Patches lost fur to burning tar.) Following a daring escape by the six animals, Sky Ryder and Silk encounter the mystical Sea Spirit and return to the plot. Now, the humans and animals are tasked with communicating to the world the need to take action against the pollution threatening “The Source”: “All of the oceans, seas, and waterways around the world that feed all life.” Helped by a sympathetic reporter, the Sea Spirit’s playful sister, and social media–savvy children, Duster and his friends overcome fraught challenges to get the word out (and Ocean World shifts its mission from entertainment to cetacean sanctuary). Royce ends with a comprehensive list of websites for readers to explore ocean conservation, aquatic life, recycling, and pollution facts. The illustrations by prolific children’s book artists Gershman and Chang are beautifully rendered in pencil and alive with realistic details, from the animal and diverse human characters and the sea dragon–like Sea Spirit and her sister to the poignant, fact-based images of the toll human pollution takes on ocean life.

An environmental tale with appealing animal characters, an action-packed plot, and striking illustrations.

WHY, CHARLIE, WHY?
Safarik, Ed
Illus. by Boom, Dany & Lebel, Edith
FriesenPress (44 pp.)
978-1-52-558232-5 paper
978-1-52-558233-2 paper

As he grows up, a curious boy becomes alienated from the natural world in this debut illustrated children’s book.

Charlie lives on scenic Marina Island, Canada, where the sea, beaches, and forest are filled with abundant life, including evergreens, orchards, gardens, flowers, and berries; many different birds; deer and raccoons; crustaceans, fish, seals, dolphins, and whales; and more. He asks “Why?” about everything he sees, and his Poppa, a fisherman, answers as best he can. When his family moves to the city, Charlie has new questions that other schoolchildren and his teachers can’t answer, and he wonders less. After high school, Charlie makes some detours, such as fighting in Vietnam and graduating from law school, but eventually becomes a fisherman himself, marries, and has children. Though occasionally reminded of Poppa’s beach, he’s distracted from the mystery of life until an Indigenous fishing-boat captain advises him to “listen to time before time.” He visits Poppa’s island, where wildlife still thrives, and, over time, repairs the abandoned house, cuts back overgrown bushes, and replants the gardens, which restores his sense of “mystery and light.” Charlie now lives there year-round, and his grandchildren are the ones asking, “Why? Why? Why?” Safarik powerfully evokes the compelling splendor of nature and animals in his book. His prose has an effective storytelling cadence that engages readers, together with a main character whose sensitivity and curiosity claim sympathy. Debut illustrator Boom supplies wonderfully appealing images with nice touches like a thieving raccoon’s mischievous expression. Debut colorist Lebel creates a rich palette that contributes to the story’s celebration of natural beauty. It will possibly be confusing to readers that the work’s title closely echoes the 1990 animated TV special Why, Charlie Brown, Why?

An impressive, beautifully illustrated tale of recapturing childhood wonder and nature’s magic.

NATURE PARADE
Samuels, Nikki
Illus. by Heiduczek, Martina
Tiny Twigs Press (32 pp.)
Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-73-640301-3

A child skips, hops, and tumbles through the myriad sounds of an outdoor afternoon in this debut picture book.

The subject of this tale is not the kid—it is the child’s anthropomorphized red shoes, the “perfect pair for the day,” which carry the White, brown-haired, gender-neutral protagonist through digital paintings of lush natural landscapes. The
Heiduczek’s evocative, lineless pictures with easily named animals and distinctly shaped leaves and plants provide much for young readers to discover, and satisfying natural noises make for a lively read-aloud.

Nature lovers and advocates of independent learning will find much to love in this tale.
“When Yarin meditates on Rope Walker’s character and exploits, his prose is moved to a lyrical exuberance.”

ROPE WALKER

A teenage girl moves to her dad’s Pennsylvania hometown and confronts tragedies old and new in Symons’ debut novel.

Frances “Frank” Coolidge is almost 16 and still scarred by the fact that her mother left the family years earlier. Her single dad, Chuck, tells her and her little sister, Boots, that they’re all moving from Troy, New York, to live with their grandmother in the old steel town of Slippery Elm, Pennsylvania.

Grandma Ruth has cancer and Chuck is afraid she might fall and hurt herself if left on her own. Frank also has an unshakeable sense of dread: “I sensed doom like a dog senses an impending earthquake.” Ruth is a cantankerous woman, Frank is bullied by kids at her new school, and Chuck staggers home drunk every night. But there’s something more serious hanging over everyone’s heads: It turns out that over 20 years before, Chuck’s brother, Danny, was killed when a poisonous cloud of smog hung over the town for four days, suffocating town residents, and there are rumors that Chuck was somehow involved with his sibling’s death. Sadly, other Slippery Elm locals come from troubled homes, and a little girl named Bernie starts regularly visiting the Coolidges. As Frank continues to worry, more secrets from the town’s past are revealed. Over the course of this novel, Symons shows that she’s unafraid to confront some of the gritty realities of old industrial towns in America. Her story starkly highlights Slippery Elm’s frightening characters, its rampant economic despair, and its tragic history, and it contrasts these sharply with the sweet kids at the heart of the narrative. Although it reads like a literary novel, the compelling plot features elements of a detective story, and the investigation is exciting to read. It’s skillfully written throughout, and the novel’s overall sense of sadness isn’t mitigated by its numerous strengths.

A moody, hard-edged coming-of-age story that keeps the horrors coming until the very end.

QUEEN OF THE SUGARHOUSE

Studer, Constance

Atmosphere Press (168 pp.)
978-1-63-752922-5

Studer, the author of Body Language: First of All Do No Harm (2009), explores life in medical institutions from varied perspectives in nine stories.

The collection opens with “Mercy,” about an intensive care nurse who administers the wrong drug to a patient; the narrative digs beneath the everyday turmoil of life on the ward to examine the vulnerability of medical staff and how they deal with the trauma of their work in their personal lives. The following story, “Shelter,” introduces Benjamin Tyler, a destitute Desert Storm veteran who’s being treated for a debilitating illness following his tour of duty, and “The Isolation Room” is about a patient; the narrative digs beneath the everyday turmoil of life

feline has been sad since the family’s dog died. He proposes that the family adopt a homeless kitten—today. A smooth, happy ending easily follows, and as the two cats begin comforting each other, color returns to the world. Feline fans will appreciate the tale’s empathetic approach to pet ownership and concern for animals’ emotional well-being and need for companionship. Ka’s clean, appealing digital illustrations with a matte finish animate this short, sweet story of recovery after mourning. Sommer’s rhythmic text occasionally slips into near rhyme, but the internal rhythm carries the tale for read-aloud enthusiasts.

A cute, informative, sympathetic introduction to the tough emotional stakes of pet ownership.

ROPE WALKER

Yarin, Jim

248 Ancestors (396 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Dec. 15, 2020
978-1-73536-230-4

The spectacular death of an unknown tightrope walker opens a window on a small-town Texan Jewish community in this debut historical study.

Yarin investigates the colorful legend of the enigmatic “Rope Walker,” an otherwise nameless man buried in the Jewish cemetery in Corsicana, Texas. He was, according to town lore, a
man with a prosthetic leg who, in 1884, attempted to traverse a high wire across the town’s main intersection while carrying an iron stove on his back. When he fell and was fatally injured, he asked for a Methodist minister but then said that he was Jewish and proved it by reciting some Hebrew prayers with a Jewish businessman; he then died before revealing his identity. Yarin weighed many long-after-the-fact accounts of the incident for their plausibility and found them a tangle of ill-sourced, sometimes-contradictory rumors. They offered just a few wispy leads, including a report of another one-legged tightrope walker, “Professor Berg,” said to be operating nearby. The trail led him to take a deep dive into Corsicana’s history and to reconstruct backstories of many locals, including the area’s Jewish families; the Methodist minister, a charismatic revival speaker and author named Abe Mulkey; the doctors who may have attended the Rope Walker; assorted gentile town fathers; and other residents or passersby of note. He also includes the legend of a ghost of a murdered sex worker, said to have haunted the hotel where Rope Walker died, and the story of an ornery circus elephant who gored a Corsicana matron to death during a 1929 rampage and was executed by firing squad.

The author, a genealogist, devotes much of the book to a detailed, if sometimes rambling and disjointed, account of his intricate sleuthing through online newspaper databases, census entries, Civil War veterans’ records, municipal archives, and town maps. Researchers, amateur genealogists, and history mavens will find this procedural engrossing, and Yarin arrives at a nifty solution to the riddle of Rope Walker’s identity that vividly fleshes out his picaresque life. (Part of his act, it seems, was using the stove he carried onto the tightrope to cook pancakes while teetering above his amazed audience.) The author’s portrait of Corsicana’s Jewish community is equally detailed but less intriguing; there were a few ex-Confederates and a tragic suicide among them, but most of its members were simply prosperous and rather staid. Much of his writing in these chapters consists of flat, perfunctory genealogical notes that read like obituaries: “I.N. Cerf (Dec. 23, 1873–June 21, 1935), Louis’s son, was born in Corsicana and lived his whole life there… He was the State National Bank President when it erected its new building, in 1926.” But when Yarin meditates on Rope Walker’s character and exploits, his prose is moved to a lyrical exuberance: “His spirit of adventure, his courage, his jousting with the fates was a lifestyle worthy of respect and deference… his full life will be celebrated, and not just lamented, in chiseled verse.”

An often dry but sometimes-piquant saga of Jewish people in the Old West.
INDIE
Books of the Month

BABY OUT OF WEDLOCK
Jim & Jessica Braz
Skillfully outlines how to prepare for and raise a child out of wedlock.

THE CULTURE PUZZLE
Mario Moussa & Derek Newberry & Greg Urban
A thorough, highly engaging, and superbly written exploration of organizational culture.

HE GETS THAT FROM ME
Jacqueline Friedland
A thoughtful and gripping family tale that will haunt readers long after finishing it.

THE GHOSTS OF BELCOURT CASTLE
Harle H. Tinney
A spirited, frightfully enjoyable collection.

AMONG THE BEAUTIFUL BEASTS
Lori McMullen
A fantastic debut that showcases an important figure and the landscape she worked to preserve.

WHEN EMILY WENT MISSING
Michael Weems
A gripping, ultimately endearing supernatural tale about an odd girl and an even odder garden.
FILMMAKER WERNER HERZOG WILL PUBLISH TWO BOOKS

Iconic German filmmaker Werner Herzog is writing two new books, including a memoir, the Guardian reports.

Herzog, the director of films such as Aguirre, the Wrath of God and Grizzly Man, will publish both books with The Bodley Head, a Vintage Publishing U.K. imprint. There’s no word yet on whether the books will be published in the United States.

The first book, The Twilight World, will tell the story of Hiroo Onoda, the Japanese soldier who, for 29 years, refused to accept his nation’s defeat in World War II. Onoda lived in the Philippines for many years before surrendering in 1974; he died in 2014.

Herzog will follow that book with one that tells the story of his life and his six decades as a director. Jörg Hensgen, The Bodley Head’s editorial director, said the memoir will “throw fascinating light on the influences and ideas that drive Herzog’s creativity and have shaped his unique view of the world.”

Herzog is the author of previous books, including Conquest of the Useless, a diary of his experiences directing the famously troubled 1982 film Fitzcarraldo, and Of Walking in Ice, about his 500-mile journey on foot from Munich to Paris to visit a dying friend.

The Twilight World is slated for publication in the summer of 2022; his memoir will be published the following year.

INSTAGRAMMER SORRY FOR CO-OPTING IJEOMA OLUO BOOK

An Instagram user has apologized to author Ijeoma Oluo for naming her account @soyouwanttotalkabout, a handle similar to the title of Oluo’s 2018 book, So You Want To Talk About Race, the Guardian reports.

Jessica Natale started her social justice–themed Instagram account last February. The account currently has 2.8 million followers, and Natale scored a book deal based on the account with Little, Brown earlier this year.

Oluo said she reached out to Natale about her account’s name but was ignored. “I knew from their response this was a White person immediately because otherwise you wouldn’t ignore that question of who’s behind this account,” she said. “It’s actually been really heartbreaking to hear from hundreds of people who didn’t know this wasn’t my page.”

Natale expressed her regret on Instagram, writing, “I apologize for the harm that I’ve caused to Ijeoma Oluo....I recognize that once again people of color have had to carry the burden of education, and I regret that my actions have increased that burden....This conversation will be ongoing. Thank you all for holding me accountable.”

Natale has since renamed the account @so.informed and said she is pausing publication of her book. Little, Brown’s webpage for the book still says it’s set for publication next October, but it’s now listed as “Untitled Natale Nonfiction Book.”

Michael Schaub is a Texas-based journalist and regular contributor to NPR.
A young elephant lives in a forest paradise, all palm trees, ponds, and low hills. Then, suddenly, a White hunter fires a shot, and the young elephant’s mother falls dead. Babar flees, the hunter in pursuit.

Babar soon finds himself in a city that looks very much like Paris. He’s welcome there, with one proviso: like Adam after the Fall, he must clothe his nakedness. Fortunately, help is at hand: “A very rich Old Lady who has always been fond of little elephants understands right away that he is longing for a fine suit.” Presto: A couple of pages later, Babar has entered a fancy department store, where he purchases a Kelly green suit, a derby, “and also shoes with spats.”

It’s a very fin-de-siècle look, one that Jean de Brunhoff evoked from his own childhood while spinning bedtime stories of Babar the Elephant for his young sons in the Jazz Age. The boys were so enamored of the stories—an origin story shared by such classic works as *The Wind in the Willows* and the Winnie-the-Pooh series—that they clamored for more, asking their father, a fine artist, to create illustrations for them. De Brunhoff sketched out pieces that might have been by Poussin, but he instead chose a faux naïf style for the finished drawings, always with something going on in the distance: an airplane crossing the sky, the Milky Way glittering in the dark night.

De Brunhoff took his work to a publisher, and *The Story of Babar* appeared in 1931. Five installments followed, with Babar returning to his beloved forest to become a benevolent dictator over an animal kingdom in which the lambs truly do lie down with the lions. Granted, a war breaks out with the rhinoceroses, who reject the benefits of Babar-ian civilization, but peace is quickly restored.

Jean de Brunhoff died of tuberculosis in the fall of 1937, not long before a much more serious war engulfed his native France. One of his sons, Laurent, resumed the series not long after the war ended, and new titles continued to appear into the 21st century, charming generations of children. The Babar books remain in print to this day, standards of children’s literature.

They have not been without their critics. The leftist Argentinian writer Ariel Dorfman has seen in them all the hallmarks of French colonialism, and certainly there’s a lot of implied mission civilisatrice in de Brunhoff’s pages. Other critics, conversely, have found an anti-colonial impulse: The elephant and not the hunter rules, after all.

And then there’s the matter of death, a touchy, traumatizing subject. The death of the mother, animal or human, often violent, is a trope of children’s literature in which, literary scholar Maria Tatar writes, “beauty is often shadowed by the primal, unforgiving horror of evil and beastliness.” Indeed, but the beasts are not the perpetrators of that horror, a lesson that resounds 90 years later, when it seems that there are more elephants in books than in the wild, and the whole world is dying.

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
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—KIRKUS REVIEWS, STARRED REVIEW

“BETWEEN TRANSPORTIVE, IT’S DOWNRIGHT TRANSCENDING.”
—ROSHANI CHOKSHI,
New York Times bestselling author of The Gilded Wolves

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—RENÉE AHDIEH,
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