Introducing the finalists in fiction, nonfiction, and young readers’ literature

Also in the issue:
Celeste Ng, Adam Silvera, Margo Price, and Estela Juarez
LITERARY PRIZE SEASON is our favorite time of year at Kirkus—it’s always fascinating to see which books are up for the Booker Prize and the National Book Awards and what world author receives the Nobel Prize in literature. For nine years now, we’ve been adding the Kirkus Prize to the mix, with $50,000 awards in the categories of fiction, nonfiction, and young readers’ literature.

Books in contention for these prizes are those that received starred reviews between Nov. 1, 2021, and Oct. 31, 2022—a whopping total of 1,391 books. Our judges then take on the heroic project of winnowing these down to 6 finalists in each category. Here are those finalists:

FICTION:

Scary Monsters by Michelle de Kretser (Catapult)
Trust by Hernan Díaz (Riverhead)
God’s Children Are Little Broken Things by Arinze Ifeakandu (A Public Space Books)
Mecca by Susan Straight (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
Scattered All Over the Earth by Yoko Tawada, translated by Margaret Mitsutani (New Directions)
The Books of Jacob by Olga Tokarczuk, translated by Jennifer Croft (Riverhead)

NONFICTION:

By Hands Now Known: Jim Crow’s Legal Executioners by Margaret A. Burnham (Norton)
The Facemaker: A Visionary Surgeon’s Battle To Mend the Disfigured Soldiers of World War I by Lindsey Fitzharris (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story edited by Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein (One World/Random House)
These Precious Days: Essays for My People by Tanaïs (Harper/HarperCollins)
In Sensorium: Notes for My People by Tanaïs (Harper/HarperCollins)
An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us by Ed Yong (Random House)

YOUNG READERS’ LITERATURE:

Picture Books:
Coffee, Rabbit, Snowdrop, Lost by Betina Birkjær, illustrated by Anna Margrethe Kjærgaard, translated by Sinéad Quirke Køngerskov (Enchanted Lion)
The Year We Learned To Fly by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López (Nancy Paulsen Books)

Middle-Grade:
The Golden Hour by Niki Smith (Little, Brown)
The Troubled Girls of Dragomir Academy by Anne Ursu (Walden Pond Press/HarperCollins)

Young Adult:
Himawari House by Harmony Becker (First Second)
How You Grow Wings by Rimma Onoseta (Algonquin)

This year’s Kirkus Prizes will be presented live—for the first time since 2019—at the Central Library in Austin, Texas. The ceremony will also be livestreamed on YouTube. We hope you’ll tune in to find out the winners. In the meantime, read this month’s editors’ notes to learn more about these outstanding books.
## CONTENTS

### FICTION
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS ........................................................... 4
- REVIEWS ......................................................................................... 4
- EDITOR’S NOTE ............................................................................... 6
- INTERVIEW: CELESTE NG ................................................................. 14
- MYSTERY .......................................................................................... 23
- ROMANCE .......................................................................................... 32

### NONFICTION
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS ......................................................... 36
- REVIEWS .......................................................................................... 36
- EDITOR’S NOTE ................................................................................ 38
- INTERVIEW: MARGO PRICE .............................................................. 44

### CHILDREN’S
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS ......................................................... 64
- REVIEWS .......................................................................................... 64
- EDITOR’S NOTE ................................................................................ 66
- INTERVIEW: ESTELA JUAREZ ........................................................... 72

### YOUNG ADULT
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS ......................................................... 102
- REVIEWS .......................................................................................... 102
- INTERVIEW: ADAM SILVERA ........................................................... 108

### INDIE
- INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS ......................................................... 114
- REVIEWS .......................................................................................... 114
- EDITOR’S NOTE ................................................................................ 116
- BOOK TO SCREEN ............................................................................ 134
- APPRECIATIONS: RACHEL CARSON’S SILENT SPRING ............... 135

The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

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Amy E. Herman and Heather MacLean adapt Herman’s bestselling *Visual Intelligence* into an insightful guide to processing visual information aimed at a middle-grade audience. Read the starred review on p. 79.

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LONG SHADOWS
Baldacci, David
Grand Central Publishing (448 pp.)
$29.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5387-1982-4

A thriller with bloody murders and plenty of suspects and featuring an unlikely partnership between two FBI investigators.

FBI consultant Amos Decker has a lot on his mind. The huge fellow once played for the Cleveland Browns in the NFL until he received a catastrophic brain injury, leaving him with synesthesia; he sees death as electric blue. More pertinent to the plot, he also has hyperthymesia, or spontaneous and highly accurate recall. On the one hand, his memories can be horrible. He'd once come home to find his wife and daughter murdered, dead in pools of blood. Later, he listens helplessly on the telephone while his ex-partner shoots herself in the mouth. On the other hand, his memory helps him solve every case he's given. Now he's sent to Florida with a brand-new partner, Special Agent Frederica White, to investigate the murder of a federal judge. Both partners are pissed at their last-minute pairing, and they immediately see themselves as a bad fit. White is a diminutive Black single mother of two who has a double black belt in karate "because I hate getting my ass kicked." (The author doesn't mention Decker's race, but since he's being contrasted with his new partner in every way, perhaps readers are expected to see him as White. Clarity would be nice.) Their case is strange: Judge Julia Cummins was stabbed 10 times and her face covered with a mask, while her bodyguard was shot to death. Decker and White puzzle over the "very contrarian crime scene" where two murders seem to have been committed by two different people in the same place. The plot gets complex, with suspects galore. But the interpersonal dynamic between Decker and White is just as interesting as the solution to the murders, which doesn't come easily: At first, they'd like to be done with each other and go their separate ways. But as they work together, their mutual respect rises and—alas—the tension between them fades almost completely. The pair will make a great series duo, especially if a bit of that initial tension between them returns. And Baldacci shouldn't give Decker a pass on his tortured memories, because readers enjoy suffering heroes. It's not enough that his near-perfect recall helps him in his job.

Fascinating main characters and a clever plot add up to an exciting read.
Political upheaval in Egypt circa 1954 threatens the location shooting of The Ten Commandments—and the life of a young local hired as Cecil B. DeMille’s personal assistant.

A film buff, Ali Hassan is initially thrilled to work for DeMille, whose swan song this biblical epic proves to be. But his enthusiasm is dimmed by the director’s imperious and temperamental ways. And his safety is compromised by the violent aims of the Muslim Brotherhood extremist group, which targets newly installed Prime Minister Gamal Abdel Nasser for his anti-theocratic ways and for cozying up to the blasphemous Hollywoodians. One of the group’s outspoken members is Sherif, Ali’s close but combative cousin, who pressures Ali into abetting a planned terrorist attack on the film set. After it becomes known that Ali, as DeMille’s driver, ran over an influential imam to escape a demonstrating mob in Cairo, it’s only a matter of time before he faces some very bad music. He ends up spending many years in prison, where he’s beaten and tortured by an escaped Nazi welcomed into Egypt—supposedly “a new beacon of liberty”—for such purposes. The book is presented as Ali’s firsthand account of his experiences, written years later for his radicalized American grandson, who sporadically emails his responses to it from jihadi training grounds unknown. These interruptions prove superficial in linking fundamentalism past and present and examining religious belief, but otherwise this departure by Blauner from his urban thrillers—including Sunrise Highway (2018) and Proving Ground (2017)—is great storytelling, a coming-of-age tale with a love story at its heart. The drama is leavened with wry accounts of the mercurial DeMille and his buff star, Charlton “Chuck” Heston. A Jewish documentary filmmaker thought to be an Israeli spy is straight out of classic noir. All in all, an inspired idea skillfully executed.

A gripping, hard-to-put-down thriller.
It’s been another incredible year for fiction, and it’s a delight for me to celebrate the six finalists for the 2022 Kirkus Prize. Our dedicated judges—Luis Correa, the operations manager at Avid Bookshop in Athens, Georgia, and Kirkus reviewer Wendy Smith—have been reading nonstop since February to choose the stellar group of finalists. Deesha Philyaw, author of *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies*, and I will join them to choose the winner on Oct. 27.

*Scary Monsters* by Michelle de Kretser (Catapult) is a novel in two parts that face each other back to back, and you can start reading in either direction. Both parts are about Asian immigrants to Australia; one section, set in the 1980s, tells the story of 22-year-old Lili, who moves to France, while the other is about Lyle, “who lives in a future just a bit darker than our present,” according to our review. “De Kretser, one of our most deeply intelligent writers, offers a book that is wry and heartbreaking, playful and profound.”

*Trust* by Hernan Diaz (Riverhead) is a tour de force about money, history, and narrative, the story of one of the wealthiest men in America told in four different forms. “Structurally, Diaz’s novel is a feat of literary gamesmanship in the tradition of David Mitchell,” according to our review. “But more than simply succeeding at its genre exercises, the novel brilliantly weaves its multiple perspectives to create a symphony of emotional effects.”

*God’s Children Are Little Broken Things* by Arinze Ifeakandu (A Public Space Books) is a stunning collection of stories about queer relationships in contemporary Nigeria, and it’s “nothing less than breathtaking and daring,” according to our review. “At the centers of these carefully constructed stories are queer men whose identities and romances are constantly ruptured by political turmoil and by stratified social and cultural ideas of masculinity.”

*Mecca* by Susan Straight (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) is “a sweeping and kaleidoscopic work,” according to our review, in which Straight “stakes her claim” to be “the bard of Southern California literature.” Following Johnny, a highway patrolman, as well as Ximena, an undocumented worker, and Matelasse, a single mother, “this is a novel that pushes back against the clichés of Southern California to reveal the complex human territory underneath.”

*Scattered All Over the Earth* by Yoko Tawada; translated by Margaret Mitsutani (New Directions) is an intriguing dystopian novel about Hiruko, a Japanese refugee living in Denmark—since Japan no longer exists. She teaches children to speak Panska, or Pan-Scandinavian, a simple language she’s invented, then sets off on a journey to find another speaker of her native tongue. “A varied cast of characters—each in search of something—joins the quest along the way,” according to our review, “and, as the band of seekers grows, Tawada expands upon the themes of language, immigration, globalization, and authenticity which underpin this slyly humorous” novel.

*The Books of Jacob* by Olga Tokarczuk; translated by Jennifer Croft (Riverhead) is, according to our review, a “massive achievement” in more ways than one: Weighing in at nearly 1,000 pages, “the book tackles the mysteries of heresy and faith, organized religion and splinter sects, 18-century Polish and Lithuanian history, and some of the finer points of cabalist and Hasidic theology”—all through the charismatic figure of Jacob Frank, a real person who was believed to be the Messiah by a group of Jews in what is now Ukraine. “The book...has been widely hailed as Tokarczuk’s magnum opus,” and it’s the first of her novels to be translated into English since she won the Nobel Prize in 2019.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.
An old woman is seen at key moments in a lifelong struggle to deal with the guilt-laden secrets of her youth.

Irish writer Boyne mines his 2006 novel, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, for this sequel about the boy’s sister. Gretel was 12 in the earlier book when she lost her brother, Bruno, while they lived next to Auschwitz, where their father was the commandant. In the new novel, she narrates two storylines, alternating between several months before her 92nd birthday and some 10 years in her teens and 20s. In the earlier narrative, she and her mother have changed their names and fled Germany for Paris, where they fall afoul of a group hunting collaborators. Gretel moves to Australia when her mother dies but must leave after meeting a figure from Auschwitz who can expose her. The other narrative finds the nonagenarian in London dealing with a friend sliding into dementia (and the subject of a delightful twist in the tale) and troubling new neighbors in the flat below. The abusive father in this family will spark the last of several episodes in which Gretel faces the threat of having her wartime past revealed. Through these, her sense of guilt emerges as a complex amalgam of feelings about her father’s role in the death camp, her initial ignorance and eventual realization of what Auschwitz represented, her silence after the war, and the part she thinks she played in Bruno’s death. Boyne handles the alternating narratives well and uses them to create suspense, but they contribute to some avoidable repetitiousness in the writing and an occasional sense of aimlessness in the plot, unlike the taut, effective economy of *Striped Pajamas*. The ending may spark fierce debate, for what seems to be an act of redemption also smacks of self-justification that, in this fraught context, evokes grim historical antecedents.

A complex, thoughtful character study that avoids easy answers.

What is it called again when dystopian fiction seems too uncomfortably plausible: Horror? Speculative fiction? A wake-up call?

Treading in territories visited over time by Dickens, Orwell, Atwood, Ishiguro, *Squid Game*, and *Parasite*, Cho recounts—in specific and painstaking detail—the miserable lives endured by the many residents of the Saha housing complex. Saha Estates is located in Town, a mysterious island city-state entirely under the auspices of a corporation that has grown into a Hydra-headed monster (but not the benevolent kind!). There are none of the pesky ethical and constituent-interest constraints faced by a representative government. Cut off from electricity and access to conventional gas and water sources, the residents of the ill-begotten apartment complex deal with those privations as well as an even more stigmatizing condition: the lack of coveted Citizen status, marking those who rightfully “belong” in Town and may reap benefits such as employment, health care, and education. Generation after generation of Saha residents have tolerated the awful conditions visited upon them by circumstance or accident of birth. A long-forgotten revolt—referred to as the Butterfly Riot—provides no impetus for most of the development’s residents to rebel against the hideous conditions of their diminished lives. When Jin-kyung, a resident, is faced with the disappearances of her brother and another beloved resident of the complex, she is prompted to seek out answers not only about their whereabouts, but about who runs Town and how. (“Why” may
be too gruesome to contemplate.) Sadly, Jin-kyung is not the only victim in Cho’s litany of suffering. This successor to Kim Jiyoung Born 1982 (2020), Cho’s chronicle of the misogynistic forces behind South Korea’s #MeToo movement—a finalist for the National Book Award—addresses another equally corrosive social horror.

Read. Weep. Learn.

JUDAS 62
Cumming, Charles
Mysterious Press (494 pp.)
$27.95 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-61316-339-9

The past comes calling for a London spy, setting him on a course of revenge.

The horrible death of ceramics-factory worker Alexei Nikolaye after a disastrous—and top secret—leak from a Soviet bioweapons program in 1979 serves as prologue to the present-day murder of Russian émigré and retired spy Saul Kaszeta near his Adirondack cabin. In London, meanwhile, Lachlan Kite, a British intelligence agent, is dealing with his mother’s descent into Alzheimer’s when he receives an unwelcome visit. His colleague Cara Jannaway has unsettling news about a new addition to a hit list called JUDAS that contains the names of former Russian intelligence personnel living in the West, several of whom have been murdered. When Kite sees Peter Galvin, a former alias of his own, listed as JUDAS 62, he realizes that he must act to save himself and his family, who know nothing of his intelligence work. As one character remarks, “the personal is operational.” So it is with Cumming, who creates fully fleshed characters whose storylines play out in a perilously realistic world. Before undertaking an intricate mission that culminates in Dubai and involves leveraging the assistance of businesswoman and call girl Natalia Kovalenko, flashbacks take Kite to 1993, when he first became involved in espionage as a carefree cricketer at Eton. Cumming’s timely second installment, following Box 88 (2022), stands alone but
also adds breadth and depth to the story of Lachlan Kite. Expect more. An engrossing cloak-and-dagger thriller that's both chilling and convincing.

**HUNTING TIME**

*Deaver, Jeffery*

Putnam (432 pp.)

$29.00 | Nov 22, 2022

978-0-593-42208-3

After the reward money, as always, security consultant Colter Shaw searches for a missing person several other less scrupulous people are searching for, too. The Midwestern startup Harmon Energy Products has worked feverishly to develop Pocket Sun, a room-sized nuclear reactor that holds serious promise for supplying African states' energy needs. Its biggest innovation, founder Marty Harmon tells Shaw, is the security intervention trigger developed by engineer Allison Parker, a device that renders the reactor inoperable if it's stolen. When an S.I.T. is itself stolen by an insider planning to sell it to one of Harmon's competitors, Shaw promptly identifies the thief, earning a shot at a much bigger reward if he can find Allison Parker, who's taken off with her daughter, teenage math prodigy Hannah, in response to the news that her ex-husband, former Ferrington Police Det. Jon Merritt, has been released from prison early. Allison's testimony had put Merritt away for three years for assaulting and attempting to kill her. Now, hours after lawyer David Stein warns her that Merritt has been released after only a year, she and the vocally reluctant Hannah have taken a powder, and Merritt has grabbed Stein for information about where they might have gone. The complication is that Shaw and Merritt aren't the only people looking for Allison; a crew of mobbed-up killers are on her trail as well. Remarkably for the reliably inventive author, that really is the main complication; the converging searches proceed along relatively predictable lines, though Deaver wouldn't be Deaver if he didn't have cannily timed surprises to detonate along the way.

Deaver lite: a fleet, irresistible tale with just enough twists to have been imagined by someone else.

**A HISTORY OF FEAR**

*Dumas, Luke*

Atria (368 pp.)

$27.99 | Dec. 6, 2022

978-1-9821-9902-9

A methodical story about evil—its mystery and its toll—takes its murderous narrator past the brink of sanity. Grayson Hale has committed murder, claiming the devil made him do it. What makes this first-person novel so chilling is that Grayson, an American graduate student in Edinburgh, sounds completely sane, the product of an emotionally neglectful San Diego home who has suffered from satanophobia, or a paralyzing fear that the Adversary is coming for him. His parents, detached heads of a living-room church, barely gave him the time of day as he grew up neurotic and terrified. Now, in Scotland, an enigmatic stranger wants him to ghostwrite a book about the devil. The stranger, who goes by D.B., believes his countrymen no longer have a healthy fear and respect for Satan. Grayson really needs the money if he's going to pursue his doctorate. Of course, he has no idea what he's getting into. Lean and propulsive, this dissection of evil marches forward with a deadly logic and sleight of hand, with occasional gaps filled in by an enterprising journalist and a Scottish information commissioner. The key is that we feel for Grayson as he leads us up to the brink of his terrible deed. The characters surrounding him, from his ghoulish family to his annoying roommate to his eventual victim, come to life on the page, all part of Grayson's living nightmare. His bouts of satanophobia are characterized by visits from swarms of yellow-eyed fiends who crowd the aisle of the bus he rides. All the while he...
undergoes a crisis of faith; a one-time theological prodigy, he falls away from the calling even as its imagery fills his consciousness. It’s a patient pursuit and a patient book, one that builds without the reader quite realizing it. It blurs the line between mental illness and something less definable, more supernatural and sinister. A muscular, enigmatic, and devilishly smart read.

AMOK

Eisler, Barry

Thomas & Mercer (380 pp.)

$17.99  |  Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-5420-0565-4

Eisler reaches back to 1991 for a warts-and-all thriller pitting an American sniper sent to Indonesia against pretty much everyone else in sight.

The civil war the Falintil guerillas are waging in protest of East Timor’s occupation by Indonesian forces has raged for years when Mossberg, a shadowy CIA recruiter, asks Carl Williams to travel to Indonesia to put one more thumb on the scale. In some ways, Carl’s an obvious choice, an ex-Marine sniper with a long record of hot shots as an independent contractor in Afghanistan. In other ways, he’s a misfit from a family of misfits—especially his hard-case father, Roy, who’s up for parole after years in prison for abusing his ex-wife. Swallowing his doubts, Carl spends two days flying to Dili, where he’s been asked to establish contact with heroic healer Dr. Isobel Amaral, who’s just been released by the Indonesians who captured her. As luck would have it, she’s also been pressed by her ex-captors to establish contact with him, including horizontal contact, so that he can be tracked and neutralized. Using the sobriquet Dox (for unorthodox), Carl instantly takes against his handler, eminently dislikable team leader Joko Sutrisno, whose slippery loyalties offer a foretaste of the series of breakdowns to come. Taking the edge off his recent contemporary thrillers, Eisler dives deep into the conflicts of this very special place and produces an equally high body count whose political ambiguities generate significantly fewer thrills. The appended endnotes and annotated bibliography and filmography will go a long way toward helping readers decide whether they want to book this particular flight.

A labor of love aimed at kindred souls who see the value in resurrecting yet another humanitarian nightmare.

THE BOYS FROM BILOXI

Grisham, John

Doubleday (432 pp.)

$29.95  |  Oct. 18, 2022
978-0-385-54892-2

Friends turn foes in this Mississippi mix of courtroom and crime. In 1960, 12-year-olds Keith Rudy and Hugh Malco are Little League fast-balling all stars and great friends in the Gulf Coast city of Biloxi, Mississippi. They’d love to make it to the big leagues one day, but alas, this story isn’t Field of Dreams. The lads’ lives diverge dramatically: Keith studies hard at Ole Miss, becomes an attorney, and sets up a law practice, while Hugh thrives in a seedy underworld of strip joints, honky-tonks, prostitution, and “unchecked vice” along “the poor man’s Riviera.” The Category 5 Hurricane Camille flattens Biloxi in 1969 and gives Keith many clients from cheated insurance policyholders. Unfortunately, Camille doesn’t clean up the local underworld so much as rearrange it. So Keith decides to run for district attorney and put criminals behind bars. At first, corrupt county sheriff Fats Bowman isn’t worried. “Need I remind you,” he tells his gang, “that the graveyard is full of politicians who promised to clean up the Coast?” But he and Hugh soon feel the heat from Keith, and they fight back hard. Plenty of murders stoke the story’s engine, naturally leading to courthouse scenes where the author excels. But how far will Hugh Malco go to keep Biloxi dirty and profitable? He wouldn’t try to hurt his old pal, would
“Smart, bighearted, and hilarious.”

**REALLY GOOD, ACTUALLY**

Heisey, Monica

Morrow/HarperCollins (384 pp.)

$27.99 | Jan. 17, 2023

978-0-06-323541-0

The trials and tribulations of a young divorcée.

“My marriage ended because I was cruel. Or because I ate in bed. Or because he liked electronic music and difficult films about men in nature. Or because I did not. Or because I was anxious, and this made me controlling.” Narrator and protagonist Maggie introduces herself by presenting a litany of all the reasons why she and her husband, Jon, are getting divorced. Some of these reasons will be familiar to most longtime couples—“Or because he forgot our anniversary once”—while others seem quite specific to this couple—“Or because he kept insisting we go vegan, then sneaking pizzas into the apartment while I slept.” (“Or because we finished watching *The Sopranos* and never started *The Wire*” is difficult to categorize.) In the aggregate, they suggest a relationship that has collapsed for a whole lot of reasons and no particular reason at all, and they make it clear that the story Maggie is going to tell is defined by that loss. Which is not to say that she doesn't have other issues. She kind of hates her teaching job, and her dissertation has stalled. But she might have coasted along forever without completely falling apart if not for her divorce. Novels about women who unravel somewhere around the age of 30 aren’t exactly rare, but this one stands out both because it’s laugh-out-loud funny and because of the artful way Heisey reveals that her heroine is most definitely not OK. Maggie’s tales of dating-app life and trying out new hobbies with another young divorcée are recounted with ironic humor, but the cracks in her carefree persona expose a deep despair. For instance, Maggie torpedoed her relationship with a guy named Simon because he’s “too nice” to her. During a couples counseling session Maggie schedules so she can finally sort out everything with Jon and finalize their divorce, it becomes apparent that Maggie isn’t just an unreliable narrator of the story she’s telling us; she’s also an unreliable narrator of the story she’s telling herself. Her ultimate breakdown is inevitable, and she has to work hard to win back the trust of the people who love her most—and regain trust in herself. Maggie’s redemption is well earned. Smart, bighearted, and hilarious.

**ALL YOUR RACIAL PROBLEMS WILL SOON END**

The Cartoons of Charles Johnson

Johnson, Charles

New York Review Comics (280 pp.)

$34.95 | Oct. 11, 2022

978-1-68137-673-8

A portrait of the novelist as a young artist.

Before he became an award-winning fiction writer, Johnson was a professional gag cartoonist and was so well respected at the trade that he hosted a how-to-draw TV series for a PBS station. This anthology is a compilation of both previously anthologized

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Not vintage Grisham but still a worthy yarn.
drawings and some never before included in book form. It doubles as both gallery and memoir, as the chronologically arranged drawings (beginning with a 1965 “pictorial resume” from his senior year at Evanston High School in Illinois) are interspersed with passages by the author describing his growth from a childhood so obsessed with drawing pictures on a home blackboard that “my knees and the kitchen floor were covered with layers of chalk” to contributing cartoons first to his college newspaper at Southern Illinois University and eventually to the Chicago Tribune and to gaining the attention of John H. Johnson, legendary publisher of such Black-oriented magazines as Ebony, Jet, and Negro Digest (later Black World). The cartoons are blunt, in-your-face, and, often, still funny-and-fresh lampoons of racial mores and manners. The earlier ones from the late 1960s through early ’70s reflect the post–civil rights era militancy and conflicts with the police. In one, one Black man says to another, “You’d be surprised how many people mistake me for [Black Power advocate] H. Rap Brown” as they’re walking down a city street while, just behind them, a cordon of armed-and-uniformed Whites make their way toward them. In another, two Black men are in a car pulled over by a White motorcycle cop as one says to the other, “Look moderate.” In another, one freshly minted Black college graduate says to another, “Well, I guess now I’ll see if Standard Oil or the Bank of America needs a consultant with a degree in Black History.” For those with knowledge or memories of that latter topic, these crafty single-panel drawings resonate with rueful nostalgia, roughhousing wit, and, as noted earlier, some eerie convergences with present-day turmoil. Now, as then, Johnson’s efforts here are intended to soothe with drollness as much as sting with recognition. “Like the best haiku,” he writes, “where a thought or feeling is perfectly expressed in just a few lines and is instantly understood, a well-done cartoon can often lead to an epiphany or ‘Aha!’ moment of laughter and sudden insight.”

An illuminating, warmhearted souvenir of a tumultuous era.

“AT CERTAIN POINTS WE TOUCH”

Joseph, Lauren John
Bloomsbury (384 pp.)
$26.00 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-5266-3130-5

A transgender performer and writer recounts a doomed love affair with a beautiful Londoner.

It’s a phrase that repeats throughout the novel: “ten years since we met, six years since we last spoke, four years since your death.” The “you” here is Thomas James, a gorgeous scenester with whom the narrator, JJ, had an off-again, on-again affair. When the book begins, the peripatetic JJ is in Mexico City and, struck by the realization that it is about to be Thomas’ birthday, sits down to write “the chant recalling [his] life.” What follows is an almost operatic retelling of queer longing and artistic struggle: JJ bounces between London and the U.S., couch surfing, party-hopping, and trying to sustain their dream of becoming a writer. JJ tries everything from stripping to perfume selling, honing a reputation as a performance artist, all the while pining for Tom. Tom, with his churlish mockery and his barely concealed misogyny, encapsulates everything JJ struggles with: gender definitions, confidence in their artistry, the need to overcome their working-class roots. This struggle builds until the catastrophic end of the affair, though JJ’s heartbreak is unending. As perhaps befits a work about a performance artist (a career JJ shares with the author, like their near-names), Joseph’s novel is less about story and more about style. JJ notes, “My own tastes have always been baroque, florid even; I always wanted everything in gold leaf,” which is as precise a definition of the novel’s style as there could be. It’s also true, though, that this high drama gets pushed too far at times; comparing Tom’s looks to “a little boy, bundled onto the Kindertransport by his desperate mother” is one of multiple unfortunate examples.

A debut that lies in the gutter while looking up at the stars, with moving, if sometimes overindulgent, results.
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“WILDBOUND” REFLECTS WHAT WE’VE COME TO LOVE ABOUT WORKING WITH TALENTED STORYTELLERS: THEIR TIRELESS DRIVE TO VENTURE INTO THE WILDERNESS OF THE MIND, ALWAYS ON THE PRECIPICE OF THE UNKNOWN, ALWAYS DARING TO MEET THEIR LIMITS IN WORLDS BOTH REAL AND IMAGINARY.

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When she finished writing her second novel, *Little Fires Everywhere*—which became a bestseller and was adapted for a limited series on Hulu—Celeste Ng thought she was going to write a finely observed family drama about a mother and son. Then came the seismic political shift of the 2016 presidential election. “There was the rise of the far right, all the things that had been simmering all along but were really coming up to the surface,” she explains in a recent Zoom interview from her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. “It started to feel almost disingenuous to write a story that pretended all these things were not in the world.”

The book she wound up writing is *Our Missing Hearts* (Penguin Press, Oct. 4), which showcases Ng’s signature storytelling abilities and engaging characters but is set in an unexpected dystopic world. In the wake of a crushing economic and political crisis, the government has passed a law called PACT—the Preserving American Culture and Traditions Act—and political dissent is squashed. Anti-Asian violence is rampant. Ng’s protagonist, 12-year-old biracial Bird, lives alone with his politically cautious White father. Bird’s Asian American mother, Margaret, is a poet whose work has been condemned, causing her to flee the family for their own safety. But as the novel opens, Bird believes he has received a message from Margaret—opening the door to a very different life. In a starred review, Kirkus calls the novel “taut and terrifying...[It] underscores that the stories we tell about our lives and those of others can change hearts, minds, and history.”

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

I love a book that probes political questions and ideas but does so with a lot of heart and feeling. I always want my emotions to be engaged, and I’m grateful when a book can give me both those things, which yours did.

I’m glad to hear it, because that’s how I am, too. I love books of ideas—what books aren’t books of ideas?—but I always need an emotional connection. And I need an emotional connection before I can find my way into [writing] a book. This one for me is really a parent story. It’s the story about this mother and son in particular, and then this family in general. And that was my way in. And all the other stuff came after that.

You mean the political dimension of the story? There was so much happening in the outside world that it was creeping into the document. It felt like we were living in a dystopia, and to make sense of it, I needed to write into that dystopia.

Was that a genre you felt comfortable writing?
I read pretty widely, and I’ve read books that are dystopian, but I don’t think of myself as that kind of writer. I didn’t really know what to do. But I thought of Margaret Atwood’s famous dictum that when she was writing *The Handmaid’s Tale*, she chose not to put anything in the book that didn’t have a precedent in some way in the real world. I tried to take that as my guiding principle, because I didn’t want people to be able to say, *That’s completely made up.* All the things that I put in the story have some root in what’s happened before or what’s happening now. It’s not exactly a dystopia—it’s where we are but dialed up maybe two notches. It’s a place where we might be heading, and I hope not, but it felt eerily close to me. And I’m hoping it’ll feel that way to readers, too, so they’ll start thinking, *Is that where we want to go? Can we do anything about it?*

We start with Bird’s perspective. He’s 12, and he has a 12-year-old’s perspective on his family, on world events. Why did you want to begin there?

I always thought of the book as an opening out. If we start off with Bird’s perspective, a child’s perspective, it’s quite limited because of what he’s been exposed to. He’s been sheltered on purpose, right? And of course, because he’s a child, he doesn’t have the context and doesn’t even have the vocabulary to explain what’s going on. And he’s pulled out from his very small dorm—literally in a tower at a university—and he’s moved out into the wider world. I wanted this to mirror the opening-up that happens to you in adolescence. Adolescence has always been a really interesting period to me because you have a lot of capability, but you don’t have a lot of agency. Your body is turning into an adult, but your mind is not necessarily adult. Then when we move into [his mother] Margaret’s perspective, in the second part of the book, it’s an outward movement; we’re getting the sense of Bird’s family. And then in the third part, we zoom out even further; we’re now able to move around in time and space, and we can get a wider perspective. My hope is that the reader takes that journey along with Bird.

Early in the book, we don’t know a lot about Margaret. We know that she’s a poet and that she has become a symbolic icon for the resistance. And we learn that this happened in an almost accidental way, not deliberately. I was really interested in the idea that as a creative person, your work takes on a life of its own, and at a certain point it’s no longer up to you to decide the meaning of your work. Its meaning is decided by the people who engage with the work. Margaret wrote a poem. She thought it was about one thing; it became interpreted by one group as an emblem of resistance, and it became interpreted by another group as a clear sign that she was a threat and danger. And yet, for her, it had this very different, very personal meaning. And a lot of times that’s how art works.

Is there anything else you’d like people to know about *Our Missing Hearts*?

Even though it does take place in this very dark world, it is for me, fundamentally, a book about hope and about love, which sounds cheesy when I put it that way. But I wrote the book because I am a parent, I am a person in the world. The past three years have not been great. And I’ve been asking myself, *How do you keep going? How are you supposed to raise the next generation when it feels like the world is falling apart?* I was looking for reasons to keep going, and that was the quest that I think the characters in the book have: Why should you keep fighting? We always think about fighting against something. Well, what are you actually fighting for? What are the reasons for hope and to keep going? I think we need those; I’m looking for books that are pointing me in that direction.

*Our Missing Hearts* received a starred review in the Aug. 15, 2022, issue.
THREE-EDGED SWORD
Lindsay, Jeff
Dutton (384 pp.)
$27.00 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-593-18622-0

The stakes continue to rise in master thief Riley Wolfe’s third go-big-or-go-bust adventure.

The Russians, as is their wont, have developed a fearless new weapons system, and American operative Chase Prescott has flipped GRU agent Ivo Balodis to secure its particulars. Instead, Balodis has kept the thumb drive containing the necessary information to himself and retreated to his Fortress of Solitude, a private island off the coast of his native Lithuania. Will Riley help Prescott steal the thumb drive from its impregnable hiding place out of patriotism? No thanks. How about the chance to help himself to Ivo’s collection of priceless 17th-century icons painted by Simon Ushakov? Ah, that’s more like it—and Riley, after giving Prescott the slip because he likes working on his own, comes up with the idea of introducing himself, in suitably heavy disguise, to his target by stealing another Ushakov icon and offering it to him at a bargain-basement price. Prescott, who’s rightly less than convinced that he can trust Riley, thinks he’s scaling his allegiance by kidnapping Riley’s mother, who’s been in a coma for years, and his art-forger friend Monique, who’s just emerged from a coma after her ordeal in Fool Me Twice (2020), and holding them hostage. But of course what he’s really doing is antagonizing his would-be tool, and you definitely don’t want to antagonize Riley. Lindsay supplies an effortless, weightless supply of complications apparently designed to keep the overscaled enterprise, which has a lot more than three edges, from shutting down too soon. The result is a perfect beach read for anyone bound for the islands of Lithuania.

The name is Wolfe, Riley Wolfe, and his latest caper will leave fans stirred but not shaken.

THE BEQUEST
Margaret, Joanna
Scarlet (312 pp.)
$26.95 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-61316-344-3

Trying to save an endangered friend, a young American historian rushes around Europe trying to uncover a link between the court of Catherine de’ Medici and a priceless emerald from the New World.

Isabel Henley leaps at the chance to continue her historical studies by joining the graduate program at St. Stephens in Scotland, far away from her estranged family and her married professor/lover in Boston. She’s also eager to study with Madeleine Grangier, “French feminist extraordinaire,” and reconnect with Rose Brewster, the “beautiful wunderkind” who set the bar for Isabel in college in both scholarship and social success. But when she arrives, she learns that Madeleine has just died in a fall, and while it’s been written off as an accident, there are some who find her death suspicious. Isabel throws herself into the challenges of research—her topic is the women of Catherine de’ Medici’s court—and breaking into the department’s social hierarchy. Rose welcomes her with open arms, and she finds herself drawn romantically to another professor. Then Rose goes missing, and a suicide note is discovered. Weeks later, Isabel finds a hidden recording from Rose that reports she is being held against her will and urges Isabel to take over her research into a little-known Renaissance-era Italian family that may have been the owners of a priceless emerald, current whereabouts unknown. This research takes Isabel to Genoa, Florence, and Paris, always with the sense that Rose’s captors are breathing down her neck as she works desperately to uncover the mystery of the Falcone family and the emerald, unsure of whom to trust. There’s an academic bent to the mystery; this one will appeal to lovers of Dan Brown and Elizabeth Kostova and other mysteries of old documents and historical figures.

For lovers of history mysteries: a less robust Da Vinci Code, less complex The Swan Thieves.
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ONE LAST SECRET
Parks, Adele
Harlequin MIRA (368 pp.)
$17.99 paper | Dec. 27, 2022
978-0-778-38677-3

A female sex worker decides to take one last job before retiring from the profession, but everything goes wrong.

Dora is a high-end escort in London who’s grown accustomed to her life. She has all the right systems in place to keep herself feeling safe despite the potentially hazardous nature of her profession. Her manager, Elspeth, vets each client, explaining that Dora does not indulge certain fetishes. Elspeth ensures that no one has Dora’s direct line, nor do they know her real name. Dora expects she’ll continue in her line of work indefinitely—until the day a client beats her badly enough to send her to the hospital. Following the beating, Dora’s one true friend, Evan, insists that she must quit. Dora is reluctant to take his advice, which she’s heard many times before, until Evan, who has long been in love with Dora, proposes. To her surprise, she accepts and begins preparing to leave her old life behind. But then a longtime client calls begging Dora to escort him on a getaway where his friends will be coupled up. Dora reluctantly agrees to take on this final assignment, provided there will be no sex. Unfortunately, as the trip unfolds, she realizes she has stepped into something far more nefarious than a simply holiday. At a luxurious but secluded French estate, with a missing cellphone, too much alcohol, and a brain that starts playing tricks on her, Dora suddenly fears for her safety. Told in the first person, primarily from Dora’s perspective, the story is engaging and evocative throughout. Brimming with sensuality and suspense, the novel is also full of inside details about life as a sex worker. Although many questions are left maddeningly unanswered and certain plot points feel flimsy (like the attachment that Evan and Dora feel for each other), the intrigue never wavers. A sudden change of narrator deep in the story feels both jarring and unnecessary, but as soon as the narrative returns to Dora, the story picks up at a furious pace. Readers should be aware of several dark and potentially triggering topics, including drug use, violence, and rape.

A chillingly addictive story of sex, money, romance, and revenge.

THE DEN
Reinard, Cara
Thomas & Mercer (335 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Dec. 13, 2022
978-1-5420-3976-5

In Fox Chapel, Pennsylvania, the collapse of a wealthy financier at a charity gala to honor his incapacitated wife throws his adult children for a loop. And the loops are only beginning.

Impoverished poet/playwright Lucinda Fox’s behind-the-scenes make-out session with Aja (“Asia, like the continent”), a waitress she’s just met, ends up as kissus interruptus when the curtain is raised to disclose the pair to a bevy of scandalized charity supporters that include Lucinda’s father, Stefan Fox, who instantly clutches his heart and collapses. When his thoroughly dysfunctional family gathers in the hospital, they learn that he’s suffered both a heart attack and a stroke; later, Det. Lucas Kapi- nos, whose high school romance with Lucinda’s older sister, Valerie, was nipped in the bud by her father, informs them that he’s been poisoned as well. As the patriarch hovers between life and death, family attorney Corbin Piedmont tells Lucinda, Valerie, and their brothers that Stefan’s plan to divide his estate among his children has been complicated by his creation of the Den, a secret family trust fund where he’s squirreled away $5 million. No sooner has Christian Fox, his father’s favorite son and heir apparent to Fox Wealth Management, announced his intention to challenge the trust than he’s killed in a suspicious car crash. Who’ll be next—his chronically unsuccessful brother, Jeremy, one of his sisters, or a corpse from out of left field? Reinard
juggles suspects, motives, and family skeletons with such dexterity that it’s hard to imagine any of the Fox clan actually being innocent.

A heartburning family tell-all just in time to gladden your Thanksgiving. Yes, your own relatives could be worse.

**EXTINCTION**

Somer, Bradley
Blackstone (350 pp.)
$26.99 | Nov. 22, 2022
979-8-21201-123-5

A park ranger struggles with an ethical dilemma on a near-future Earth.

Somer’s new novel is a pared-down story about one man’s desperate attempt to maintain order in the face of corruption. It’s also a story set on an environmentally devastated Earth in the near future. And while each of these aspects has plenty to offer, their juxtaposition isn’t as seamless as one might hope. Protagonist Ben works as a ranger, part of a pared-down group working to protect a bear, the last of its kind on the planet. Early on, Somer neatly establishes Ben’s routines and worldview through an emotionally charged exchange with his colleague Emma. But soon enough, trouble arises in the form of a wealthy father and son who have come to the valley where he works to hunt the bear Ben watches over. Complicating things more is the fact that they have hired Ben’s estranged mentor as their guide—and soon, what began as a moral standoff escalates into a violent confrontation. Ben’s desperation to protect the bear, even as he becomes aware of the corruption that surrounds him, makes for a powerful and even primal engine for the story. But it also has the effect of making some of this novel’s speculative elements feel superfluous—including references to lunar colonies and a discussion of the psychological effects of space travel. Ben’s refusal to compromise and dedication to his job—which borders on the quixotic at times—make him a memorable protagonist. But it’s also easy to imagine this conflict between two
people—one scrupulously ethical and one so wealthy he can essentially buy his way past most people's ethics—playing out at nearly any moment in time.

An adventure novel whose timelessness sometimes works against it.

DAWN
Soysal, Sevgi
Trans. by Maureen Freely
Archipelago (350 pp.)
$20.00 paper | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1953861-38-2

A family dinner party in Adana, Turkey, is interrupted by a police raid, thrusting the lives of all involved into disarray.

This autobiographical novel first published in Turkish in 1975 is divided into three parts. The first section, “The Raid,” describes a dinner party hosted by Ali of Maraş. Ali’s wife, Gülşah, bustles around the kitchen to prepare a fulsome dinner, aided half-heartedly by her sister, Ziynet. Around the dining table are Ali’s two nephews, Hüseyin and Mustafa, who have fought their way out of their working-class backgrounds with their family’s support and become, respectively, a lawyer and a teacher. They are joined by Ziynet’s quiet husband, Zekeriya, and Oya—the sole outsider to the family—a journalist recently released from prison who was invited to dinner by Hüseyin on a whim. Family tensions fueled by political disagreement bubble and almost erupt but are arrested by a raid initiated by rumors that the dinner is a meeting of anarchists. The novel’s second part, “The Interrogation,” follows the attendees of the dinner party who are arrested during the raid. We spend the most time with Oya, who remembers the other women detained with her during her previous stint in prison. The novel also offers glimpses into the psyches of the captors and interrogators. The final section, “Dawn,” describes the consequences of the raid on the morning after. The novel shifts seamlessly between perspectives. The result is a complex portrait of 1970s Turkey that critiques the senseless violence inflicted by autocratic bureaucracy.

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

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

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

ISBN: 979-8423264109

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“A luxury vacation turns into a chain-reaction explosion of dark secrets in this tense tale.”

**SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX**

A luxury vacation turns into a chain-reaction explosion of dark secrets in this tense tale.

Hannah frets over being away from her baby daughter for the first time, but she and her workaholic husband, Bruce, do need a break. And the vacation Hannah’s older brother, Mako, has arranged sounds too sumptuous to pass up: a long weekend in a luxury cabin deep in the North Georgia woods, complete with gourmet chef, in-house massage, and more. Mako has become wildly wealthy running a video game company, and he’s picking up the tab for all of it. The group also includes Mako’s wife, Liza, whom Hannah hopes to get closer to, and Hannah’s longtime

**SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX**

Unger, Lisa

Park Row Books (352 pp.)

$27.99 | Nov. 8, 2022

978-0-778-33323-4

**THINGS WE FOUND WHEN THE WATER WENT DOWN**

Swanson, Tegan Nia

Catapult (256 pp.)

$22.95 paper | Dec. 6, 2022

978-1-64622-169-1

A young woman investigates her mother’s disappearance and lifelong traumas in this stylistically rangy novel.

Lena Bailey, the narrator of Swanson’s brash, atmospheric debut, has grown up in a region full of conflict. Beau Caelais, located in an area loosely modeled after northern Minnesota, has been ravaged by decades of mining. Hugo Mitchum, one of those miners, has a history of physical abuse and sexual assault, and he’s long detested Lena’s hippie-ish mother, Marietta Abernathy, for being a “goddamn witch.” So when Hugo turns up dead, Marietta is the lead suspect; her disappearance from police custody only intensifies that sense. But though Swanson’s novel includes news stories, police interviews, and other elements of a detective story, it resists easy categorization. Swanson shifts from footnoted just-the-facts police interviews to lyrical prose poems to visual collages; the cast of characters is similarly diverse, encompassing hardheaded miners to the occupants of a bar that’s a refuge for “femmes and boi-dykes and faeries and two-spirits and nonbinary bodies.” In time, it becomes clear that the tragedy in Beau Caelais runs deeper than Hugo’s murder and Marietta’s disappearance; a “World Below” is occupied by decades of female victims of abuse and murder. Swanson’s approach is impressionistic and heavy on allegory—the body of water key to the story is called Ruin Lake, and before her disappearance, Marietta gathered a “menagerie” of artifacts—silt, weeds, feathers, minerals, leaves, ashes, fur—intended as an offering to heal both the wounded land and its damaged ancestors. Swanson handles this in a witty, sober manner, so the effect is less New Age-y and more earthy and strange, like a Joseph Cornell shadow box.

An inventive and beguiling debut.
best friend (and Mako’s ex-girlfriend), party girl Cricket. The only unknown is Cricket’s new boyfriend, Joshua. Well, Hannah thinks that’s the only unknown, but she’ll be proven wrong. The three couples arrive for the summer getaway despite a tropical storm brewing in the Atlantic that could curve their way. There are tales of ghosts on the property that suggest past violence there, but those could just be an inventive selling point. The host and cabin owner, Bracken, definitely has a creepy air, though (and almost no online footprint), and even scarier, his promise of Wi-Fi might not be reliable. This is Unger’s 20th novel, and she builds tension skillfully from Page 1 of a prologue about Christmas dinner with Hannah’s family, which ends bitterly over a mysterious gift of DNA test kits for everyone, which everyone claims to know nothing about. By the time the vacationers reach the cabin, the ominous mood is in place and everything seems disturbing, from the gleaming array of knives in the kitchen to a skull-shaped chandelier. Before they even make it through the first night’s dinner, one of the six disappears, and so does contact with the outside world. The others begin a frantic search as the storm blows in and as it becomes clear that all of them are in peril—but from whom, and why?

Hidden history and 21st-century technology collide in a breathtaking thriller.

THE KIND TO KILL
Wegert, Tessa
Severn House (256 pp.)
$29.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-4483-0713-5

A New York state cop makes still another heroic effort to exorcize her murderous cousin from her life—and he takes a lot of exorcizing.

Years before Blake Bram became the East Village janitor who kidnapped and killed Jess Lowenthal, Becca Wolkwitz, and Lanie Miner, he was Abraham Skilton, the cousin and childhood playmate of Shana Merchant, whose love and companionship he repaid by abducting her as well—and he might have executed her, too, if he hadn’t been killed first. Even though Shana has moved to the Thousand Islands, Bram has continued to haunt her in unimaginable ways. His latest avatar is revealed by a combination of two painful experiences: the disappearance of Rebecca Hearst after an argument with her well-connected husband, car-dealership heir Godfrey Patrick Hearst III, and the publication of a vitriolic anti–Shana Merchant screed in the local paper by Gracelyn Barlowe that attracts the attention of Estella Lopez, the wife of Jay Lopez, a rookie cop who was killed trying to rescue Shana from her cousin’s clutches, and Javier Barba, Estella’s ex-con brother, both of them bent on making her life hell. It’s an unnecessary gesture, since her late cousin is already doing a bang-up job—this time through a series of copycat killings of women who share the first names of his earlier victims. The author turns the screws on Shana even tighter by making Gracelyn Barlowe the mother of Juliet Barlowe, the pregnant wife of Shana’s fellow cop Don Bogle, who soon comes under suspicion himself.

Considering who the bogeyman clearly is and remains, Wegert does an admirable job of generating mounting suspense.
DEAD MEN DON’T DECORATE
Abbott, Cordy
Crooked Lane (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-63910-125-2

When the inventory of an antiques shop turns up not only fraud, but also a letter that, if authentic, could shake a nation, the new proprietor digs deeper.

Camille Benson must strike a deal with Roberto Fratelli, the meanest man in Marthasville, Virginia, in order to buy Waited4You, his antiques store. Well, it’s only been his antiques store for a few years; before that, it belonged to Camille’s family. Buying Waited4You seems like her fate, especially now that her most recent project of managing her son Paul’s mayoral run has come to a successful end. With the encouragement of her nearest and dearest friend, Opal Wells, Camille prepares to make the deal. The other local merchants are excited about the potential change—apparently Roberto’s reputation was well earned—and Camille has a million ideas to restore the place to its former glory. In between rounds of planning, celebrating, and taking inventory, Camille and Opal start to wonder if all of Roberto’s business dealings were really aboveboard, particularly when Opal discovers a letter addressed to George Washington from Sally Fairfax, apparently written after his marriage to Martha. Scandal! If the letter proves real, it could upset history as we know it, but when Camille and Opal try to retrieve the letter from Waited4You, it’s gone. Instead, they find Roberto’s corpse on the floor. His murder convinces Camille that there’s something seriously amiss and that Roberto may have served as a front for someone trying to trick him and the business—but who?

It’s hard to say what’s special about this debut, which seems like a bit of a knockoff.
DEVLIN'S DELIGHT
Beaton, M.C. with R.W. Green
St. Martin's (256 pp.)
$26.99 | Dec. 13, 2022
978-1-2508-1616-0

Agatha Raisin continues to handle some murders—and some men—more easily than others.
Agatha and her detective-agency employee Toni Gilmour are on their way to a wedding when they're flagged down by a naked young man who claims to have found a dead body in the woods. Thus begins one of Agatha's oddest cases, which will involve her removing her clothes for the Mircester Naturist Society and trying out several new amatory partners while pondering her past relationships. Agatha is attracted to all she can see of Jasper Crane, chairman of the Naturist Society, but since the dead body has vanished by the time she and Toni arrive in the clearing where it had been earlier, they press on to the wedding of DS Bill Wong and DC Alice Peters after trading insults with DCI Wilkes. There, Agatha meets Inspector John Glass, another desirable prospect. In addition to delving into the murder on her own time, Agatha is hired to discreetly investigate drug sales at a boarding school for girls. She's just visited Sir Charles Fraith, another of her on-and-off lovers, to learn more about the Naturist Society, which was founded by his grandfather, when the missing body turns up in a lake. It becomes clear that Agatha's investigation has hit a nerve when her house is trashed and she's almost burned alive. Furious, she digs even deeper and discovers a connection between the society, the drugs, and ice cream that will reveal all.

The convoluted mystery plays second fiddle to the heroine's even more convoluted love life.

MURDER IN THE BASEMENT
Berkeley, Anthony
Poisoned Pen (272 pp.)
$14.99 paper | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-72826-124-9

A newlywed's hunch that a treasure is hidden in the Middlesex house he's rented leads to an unwelcome discovery in this forgotten golden age gem first published in 1932.

The corpse buried beneath Reginald and Molly Dane's basement is too decomposed for Chief Inspector Moresby to identify by any of the usually obvious ways, but it's clear that the remains are those of a woman in her 20s with perfect dentition and a baby sadly no longer on the way. Doggedly pursuing the slim leads he unearths, Moresby eventually traces the woman to Roland House, a boys boarding school in Allingford. When he shares the news with his friend Roger Sheringham, he's surprised to learn that Roger, after spending some time a few years ago at Roland House, started a novel about the people running the place. So Moresby's announcement of the victim's identity is delayed for 60 pages while the author provides what amounts to an extended flashback of the events leading up to her death. Sheringham's tale of petty rivalries, affairs, and revenge plots is so deliciously entertaining that many readers will forget that they're supposed to be keeping an eagle eye out for the future victim and will be surprised when her name is finally revealed. Moresby and Sheringham soon zero in on an obvious suspect who all but admits his guilt but sneers that there's no evidence against him. But those familiar with the peerlessly tricky mysteries A.B. Cox (1893-1971) published as Anthony Berkeley and Francis Iles, from The Poisoned Chocolates Case (1929) to Trial and Error (1937), will know enough to keep an open mind.

A pioneering example of the “whowasdunin” that, like that corpse in the basement, richly deserves exhumation.
“A quick trip to Paris turns into a dangerous murder hunt in 1936.”

PERIL IN PARIS

A quick trip to Paris turns into a dangerous murder hunt in 1936.

Lady Georgiana Rannoch O’Mara may be cousin to King Edward VIII, but she and her husband, Darcy O’Mara, are poor and lucky to be living on an estate belonging to a relative. The pregnant Georgie, who’s finally over her morning sickness, jumps at the chance to go to Paris with Darcy and spend time with her best friend, Belinda, who’s apprenticing with Coco Chanel. Darcy has a hush-hush job, and Georgie always worries when he’s away, so she’s especially happy that they won’t be separated. Once they settle in Paris, Darcy asks Georgie to do a little job for him picking up microfilm from Frau Goldberg, whose husband, a Jewish scientist, isn’t allowed to travel. Georgie enjoys spending time in the city with Belinda and her avant-garde friends. Since she’s modeled for Chanel before, with disastrous results, she’s urged to model a dress Chanel designs to hide her pregnancy. The only good thing to come out of the experience is the chance it provides to get the microfilm from Frau Goldberg, who’s attending the fashion show with the ladies from a delegation that includes Georgie’s mother, who’s engaged to a wealthy German. After rude American Mrs. Rottenburger takes Frau Goldberg’s seat, Georgie finds the lady dead of cyanide poisoning. Was she the real target, or was it a case of mistaken identity? Georgie had better find out, for the French police think she’s the killer.

The mystery is meager, but touring prewar Paris with Bowen’s irresistible sleuth is a treat.
WASTE OF A LIFE
Brett, Simon
Severn House (192 pp.)
$29.99  |  Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-7278-5069-0

Not even the death of a client can keep professional declutterer Ellen Curtis from probing the details of his sorry life.

“I get interested in people and I want to see how their stories turn out,” says the proprietor and sole employee of SpaceWoman. It’s as good an explanation as any for why she attaches herself to Cedric Waite, an elderly widower who’d been referred to her by social services after a nasty fall. At first Cedric, whose accident clearly hasn’t mellowed his disposition, won’t let Ellen inside; even after he relents, he’s not her most cordial client, and their standoffs don’t end until she finds him lying dead on his bed. DI Bayles thinks Cedric was poisoned, and he’s not pleased that Ellen’s unwittingly disposed of some important evidence before the Chichester police could examine it. She expresses due regret, more to herself than him, but her continuing interest in the arc of Cedric’s life must compete with her work for retired English teacher Mim Galbraith, whose dementia is worsening, and new client Lita Cullingford; with her dismay that Bayles favors her colleague Gervaise “Dodge” Palmier, who retired from the city to do hauling and woodworking, as the poisoner; and with the distressing complications in the personal lives of her grown children, aspiring animator Ben and aspiring influencer Jools, who’s always been “mildly bolshie” anyway. The veteran author, who could probably compose these chronicles in his sleep, distributes his clues cleverly and ties them up with a professional neatness his heroine might envy.

Brett’s brisk descriptions, pacing, and juggling of subplots temper the sadness of the victim’s recovered biography.

AND JUSTICE FOR MALL
Copperman, E.J.
Severn House (240 pp.)
$29.99  |  Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-7278-5077-5

A family lawyer gets schooled by her 11-year-old multimillionaire client.

Despite a string of successful forays into criminal defense, New Jersey transplant Sandy Moss intends to spend the rest of her career negotiating divorce decrees and custody settlements at the Southern California firm of Seaton, Taylor, Evans, and Wentworth. But Riley Schoenberg isn’t looking for better parental support because she accepts the fact that neither parent supports her. Her mother is dead, and her father is currently a guest of the state prison in Lancaster, just north of Los Angeles, convicted of her mother’s murder. Instead, Riley is convinced that Sandy can exonerate him based on what to an 11-year-old is an unassailable legal argument: He didn’t do it. Although unimpressed with Riley’s understanding of American jurisprudence, Sandy is swayed by the child’s determination, and on reviewing the case, she finds errors on the part of the court that would seem to warrant a new trial. While she’s waiting to file her motion, her boyfriend, television actor Patrick McNabb, urges her to look at properties that could accommodate their soon-to-be-merged households. With a combination of egocentric logic and raw persistence that rivals Riley’s, he hires Emily Webster, a realtor he knows is competent because she’s his former fiancee, someone he’s willing to trust even though she tried to hire a hit man to kill Sandy. Text-messaged threats against Sandy and her pint-sized client, a kidnapping, and a grenade-wielding abductor in a Covid-protective mask are only some of the zaniness Copperman has on tap for his latest dose of legal mayhem.

Can a Jersey girl become a Valley girl? Wait and see.
Amateur sleuths Matthew and Harriet Rowsley solve a series of murders at a relative’s country manor house in 1861. Although Col. Barrington and his wife, Lady Hortensia, did not unbend sufficiently to dance at their wedding, the Rowsleys are generous enough to attribute their kin’s reluctance to physical infirmity rather than snobbery. Col. Barrington suffered a grave war injury, and on the eve of the Rowsley nuptials, his Lady was on the verge of presenting him with a son and heir. So the common-born pair agree to visit their noble cousins at Clunston Park for a weekend of cricket. The slights begin immediately on their arrival. The couple is assigned a dark, pokey bedroom when grander quarters are readily available. The gentleladies avoid conversing with Harriet, preferring to share the latest gossip with their social equals. True, Lady Pigeon does spare her a few words. And Gräfin Weiser, the widow of a Viennese count, seems inclined to treat the former housemaid as a confidante, earning the newcomer a sharp admonition from Lady Hortensia not to monopolize the noblewoman. When Biddlestone, a footman, refers to Harriet as Mrs. Faulkner, the name she used when she was in service, Matthew approaches his boiling point. But their ill-treatment by the Clunston household doesn’t deter the principled pair from doing their best when disaster strikes, and they gamely pitch in to investigate the murders that send the weekend festivities into a tailspin.

“Snootiness appears a greater crime than murder in this offbeat cozy of manners.”

Bloodroot; The beauty and the horrors of Jamestown 1609.

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

—Kirkus Reviews

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

—The US Review of Books

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

—Booklife Reviews

ISBN: 978-1-95-278204-6

FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL DVMEIERJR@GMAIL.COM • DANIELMEIERAUTHOR.COM
Dorothy Martin, an American expatriate in the English countryside, and her husband, retired chief constable Alan Nesbitt, solve a murder and gain a relative.

Alan’s unofficial great-niece Lucy Bowman, who was born in England but moved to the U.S. with her family as a young tween, plans to visit them while she’s in Sherebury to head a conference at the university. Although Dorothy’s a bit apprehensive, she’s also a warm person who loves to entertain and can always count on her neighbor Jane Langland to pitch in. The delightful Lucy admits to being in love with Iain Campbell, a wealthy fundraiser whose marriage proposal has been sealed with a ring that’s the spitting image of Princess Diana’s. Naturally, Alan and Dorothy both sense something wrong with this picture of perfection. When Alan takes Lucy’s uninsured ring to be appraised and learns that it’s only a piece of costume jewelry, he’s horrified. The_rng is an impostor who plans to waste the money on a lavish party. Alan and Dorothy realize that the impostor is not a stranger, but an old enemy who has been trying to get their attention for years. They must stop the impostor before he can pull off his scheme.

Two of the charity’s trustees, want to end the relationship with Walker & Price. Susan wants Rafael to remove himself from the dispute and help her out at home. The disagreement among the trustees is tricky for Ellie to negotiate because Stewart is father to one of her three grandchildren, abandoned by her daughter Diana, while Susan and Rafael are serving as foster parents to the other two. The situation heats up further as the social media trolling of Walker & Price morphs into vandalism. Ellie worries that’s the last hope before utter mayhem descends.

Salvation seems a long shot, but with Heley all things are possible.

Ellie Quicke tries to resolve a real estate dispute that escalates into violence. Ellie and her husband, Thomas, return home from an extended trip to Canada to find their household in disarray. Susan and Rafael, who share their two-family house, have allowed their daughter and two foster children—who are Ellie and Thomas’ grandchildren—to trample the shared garden, flinging mud everywhere. Worse yet, Susan, in her ninth month of pregnancy, is at odds with her husband, and their clamorous arguments send the children fleeing to Ellie and Thomas’ house for safety. A look at the books of the housing charity she heads gives Ellie an idea about the source of the couple’s disagreement. While Ellie was away, a student died in an unexplained fall in a house owned by the charity and managed by Walker & Price, a local estate agency. Stewart and Kate, two of the charity’s trustees, want to end the relationship with Walker & Price and move on to Streetwise Estate Agency, a younger, trendier firm. But Rafael, also a trustee, digs in. He suspects that Streetwise may be behind the social media campaign trashing Walker & Price. Susan wants Rafael to remove himself from the dispute and help her out at home. The disagreement among the trustees is tricky for Ellie to negotiate because Stewart is father to one of her three grandchildren, abandoned by her daughter Diana, while Susan and Rafael are serving as foster parents to the other two. The situation heats up further as the social media trolling of Walker & Price morphs into vandalism. Ellie worries that’s the last hope before utter mayhem descends.

A widowed New Orleans mother is pulled into an unexpected bequest and a murder case. Most people would welcome the news that they’d just inherited 75% of the Rare Things Antiques and Estate Sales Company, but Valerie Cooper isn’t most people. First she’s suspicious because she’s never heard of Arthur Cooper, the owner who left her and her late husband’s heirs his entire estate; then she’s unhappy because her husband, firefighter Tony Cooper, never told her he had an uncle before he was killed battling a blaze. What other secrets might he have kept? Dionne Williams, a long-time employee at Rare Things, takes to Val so completely that she quickly hires her at $20 an hour to help out, but Randall Charpentier, the 25% owner who’s managed the place forever, is clearly aggrieved that his old partner didn’t leave his major interest to him. Val’s concerns about Rare Things, which would’ve taken the spotlight in many another series launch, are upstaged by her discovery that social-climbing realtor Collette Monaghan, a not-quite nemesis of Val’s who’s always seemed to have a grudge against her, has been fatally stabbed at a ball given by the rising Krewe of Boudicca. Ignoring the warnings of NOPD Det. Andy “Ed” Guillotte to stay away from the case, Val makes delicate inquiries of parties who clearly don’t want to see her, and she quickly amasses an impressive roster of motives Collette would have had for killing Val—which make her a suspect in Collette’s death. Despite veteran Herren’s conscientious attention to the clues, the unmasking of the killer is a serious letdown.

Forget the puzzle and enjoy the snarky dishing on New Orleans society and its wannabes, murderous or just scurrilous.
The fatal stabbing of a prominent businessman in the heart of Tokyo unleashes a fury of scandals.

The fatal stabbing of a prominent businessman in the heart of Tokyo unleashes a fury of scandals. No sooner has Takeaki Aoyagi, head of production at Kaneseki Metals, collapsed on the Nihonbashi Bridge than police spot a possible suspect fleeing the scene. Struck by a car before they can catch him, Fuyuki Yashima turns out to be carrying Aoyagi’s wallet; the dead man’s briefcase is found nearby. Yashima can say nothing in his own defense because he’s in a coma. So Inspector Kyoichiro Kaga and his cousin, Detective Shuhei Matsumiya, of the Tokyo Metropolitan homicide squad, have to be satisfied with questioning Yashima’s live-in lover, Kaori Nakahara, who’s three months pregnant. Yashima, she tells them, had been unemployed since losing his job with Kaneseki Metals under circumstances that turn out to implicate Aoyagi in a shameful coverup and give Yashima a perfect motive for his murder. Though Yashima’s death gives them an excuse to close the case, Kaga and Matsumiya persist in digging deeper and find evidence that Aoyagi had been making the circuit of the Seven Lucky Gods, leaving a flock of origami cranes at the Kasama Inari Shrine. What was his motive for his pilgrimage, and what other foul secrets lie beneath it? Though the alternative explanations for Aoyagi’s murder, unfolding in strict succession, have little to do with one another, Higashino unfolds them with the force of a powerful indictment against the corruption that seems to pervade his great city.

The dark side—make that sides—of Tokyo, masterfully revealed.
WHAT MEETS THE EYE

Kenna, Alex

Crooked Lane (288 pp.)
$26.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-63910-184-9

An LA private eye hired to look more closely into an artist’s suicide unearths a host of felons and felonies along the way. Milt Starling can’t believe that anyone as successful as his daughter, star painter Margot Starling, would have hanged herself six months ago. Since the LAPD has all but closed the case, he’s reduced to trawling for a shamus willing to reopen it. Kate Myles, the one who takes on the job, is in rough shape. Badly injured by a car driven by a criminal she was pursuing while she served on the force, she’s become dependent on painkillers, losing her job, her marriage, and her 7-year-old daughter in the process—and although she’s no longer hooked, she’s still hurting. Despite the inconclusive forensic evidence about the manner of Margot’s death, Kate’s ex-partner, Det. Ron Bennett, and his colleagues are more interested in the possibility that the Starling carvases offered for sale by nothingburger gallery owner Aksel Berkland are forgeries. Setting aside the forgery angle to concentrate on Margot’s death, Kate discovers that she collected lovers like pennies and blackmailed her much older husband, Vic, a womanizer who runs a powerful talent agency. The two disparate groups are linked by a celebrated photographer who’s squatting in a falling-down house. Ansel McKay and Winter Candler, daughter of movie star Chris Candler, strike up a friendship after a chance meeting in town. Both have serious problems, and both are often shadowed by a tangle of flashbacks that are more distracting than enlightening, but the power of the story still shines through the haze.

MURDER BY DEFINITION

Lehane, Con

Severn House (240 pp.)
$29.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-7278-5089-8

The acquisition of a once-noted crime writer’s papers leads to all kinds of trouble for the New York Public Library, the New York Police Department, and the writer himself. Some writers donate their papers to archives; Will Ford, a has-been with a floridly checkered personal history, wants $100,000 for his. Against all odds, Raymond Ambler, curator of the crime fiction collection, and his sometime allies at the NYPL raise enough money for the material, and that’s when the trouble begins. Reading “The Unrepentant Killer,” an unpublished story Ford claims to have “based on an actual incident,” makes Ray wonder uneasily about the roots of this tale of a corrupt cop who walked away from a bloodbath that left a basement gambler and his prostitute mistress dead. When Ray asks him about the story’s source, Ford claims amnesia, and when NYPD Det. Mike Cosgrove, the pal Ray has told about the story, makes the rounds among his own cohort, he’s warned to back off. Even so, Ray and Mike soon identify to their satisfaction the cold case Ford had fictionalized. Predictably, the case, involving a crime lord, a brothel, and a crooked cop, comes roaring back to life, leaving both Ford and Mike’s ex-partner Lt. Chris Jackson dead and Mike fighting for his life after getting shot in the back. It’s a miracle that Ray, already struggling to revisit the conviction of his son for beating a man to death in a brawl and dealing with the unexpected advances of his co-worker and friend Adele Morgan, has any time to devote to the mystery. Luckily, solving it will take more courage and persistence than imagination or brains.

DEATH ON A WINTER STROLL

Mathews, Francine

Soho Crime (288 pp.)
$29.95 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-641-29274-0

Christmas and death come to Nantucket. U.S. Secretary of State Janet Brimhold McKay; her husband, Ron; and his unsatisfactory, artistic son, Ansel, are in Nantucket for Christmas Stroll, a beloved island tradition. Also on the island is a film crew that’s staying at the compound of wealthy tech genius Mike Struna, an old friend of ambitious director Carly Simpson-Sonnenfeld and her much older husband, Vic, a womanizer who runs a powerful talent agency. The two disparate groups are linked by a talented nature photographer squatting in a falling-down house. Ansel McKay and Winter Candler, daughter of movie star Chris Candler, strike up a friendship after a chance meeting in town. Both have serious problems, and both are often shadowed by their parents’ security teams. Ansel, who had long believed his father’s story that his cocaine-addicted mother left him and later died, has now identified her as Mary Alice Fillmore, an actual incident, makes Ray wonder uneasily about the roots of this tale of a corrupt cop who walked away from a bloodbath that left a basement gambler and his prostitute mistress dead. When Ray asks him about the story’s source, Ford claims amnesia, and when NYPD Det. Mike Cosgrove, the pal Ray has told about the story, makes the rounds among his own cohort, he’s warned to back off. Even so, Ray and Mike soon identify to their satisfaction the cold case Ford had fictionalized. Predictably, the case, involving a crime lord, a brothel, and a crooked cop, comes roaring back to life, leaving both Ford and Mike’s ex-partner Lt. Chris Jackson dead and Mike fighting for his life after getting shot in the back. It’s a miracle that Ray, already struggling to revisit the conviction of his son for beating a man to death in a brawl and dealing with the unexpected advances of his co-worker and friend Adele Morgan, has any time to devote to the mystery. Luckily, solving it will take more courage and persistence than imagination or brains.

A conscientious valentine whose librarians come off a lot better than its cops.

Plenty of fascinating characters and myriad motives make for an exciting read.
“Red herrings abound in a twisty tale of love, hate, and revenge.”

IT CAME UPON A MIDNIGHT SHEAR

Pleiter, Allie
Berkley (304 pp.)
$8.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-593-2018-24

Christmas cheer and murder don’t mix—or do they?

Yarn shop owner Libby Beckett has pulled off a near miracle by getting charismatic Vincenzo Marani to bring a few rare vicuñas from a New England zoo to be shorn in public at her shop. Vincenzo, who comes from a wealthy Italian family of textile makers, has made it his mission to protect the animals and their native Peruvian habitat. A skein of their yarn sells for $500, but touching it is heaven to knitters. Libby’s bliss is shattered by the arrival of her wealthy, aggravating ex-husband, Sterling Jefferson, who wants her to amend their divorce agreement. To top it off, both his haughty mother and flighty sister are also in town. So many people overhear the nasty argument between the ex-spouses that even though she’s helped the authorities with other murders, police chief Frank Reynolds still considers her a suspect when Sterling is found stabbed to death by the shears used on the vicuñas. In addition, somebody’s stolen some vicuña yarn, Libby’s two assistants at the shop are at daggers drawn, and the man she’s slowly rebuilding a relationship with is wildly jealous of Vincenzo—who turns out to be a longtime friend of Sterling’s. An autopsy reveals several unusual drugs in Sterling’s system, a discovery that opens up a whole new line of investigation at his family pharmaceutical business. Whatever the story behind Sterling’s death, Libby needs to find the killer fast before she ends up in jail.

Red herrings abound in a twisty tale of love, hate, and revenge.

“REMEMBER, ONLY YOU CAN SAVE THE SEAS”

“...a fast-paced hero’s journey that takes the reader on an exploration of conflicts between nature and mankind...a novel that will appeal to adults and thoughtful young readers of all ages.”

—Jill Marie Landis, NYT and USA Today Bestselling Author of The Tiki Goddess Mysteries

“Duncan’s imaginative writing style is realistic and puts you right in the middle of the adventure.”

—Sebastian “Seabass” Zietz, Professional Surfer

“Kai’s coming of age story is a must read in middle and high school classrooms. This modern-day Jonathan Livingston Seagull shares challenges facing young adolescents today.”

—Leslie Howell, Educator, Mentor and Writing Coach

ISBN: 978-1-6393-7116-7

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SECRETS TYPED IN BLOOD
Spotwood, Stephen
Doubleday (384 pp.)
$27.00 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-641-29381-5

Early 1947 provides Lillian Pentecost and Willowjean Parker with a baffling new case and a continuation of an old one that just won’t go away.

Someone has been copying prolific pulp magazine writer Holly Quick’s stories. And it’s not just an ordinary plagiarist, but someone who’s bringing them to sanguinary life and death. The job Holly offers the one-eyed private eye and her hand-picked sidekick—to identify and decommission the copycat killer—should be straightforward, but it comes with a raft of restrictions. Holly won’t permit Lillian and Willow to go to the police or reveal her identity as the person behind all her male pseudonyms. She hides important information from them that they really need to know. Lillian is determined to start the investigation during the same two-week period when Willow is already unhappily undercover as secretary Jean Palmer at the law firm of Shirley & Wise, where her predecessor as Kenneth Shirley’s secretary was criminal mastermind Olivia Waterhouse, an old adversary of Lillian’s whose motives for her masquerade are a lot less clear than Willow’s. As if these aren’t enough difficulties, Darryl Klinghorn, the bedroom-peeping shamus Lillian hires to gather information on the three victims murdered in homages to Holly’s fiction, ends up getting killed himself, running his inquiries into an emphatic dead end. Both cases have their high points and low (the copycat is eventually unmasked as an entirely marginal one that just won’t go away.

Untidy but undeniably engaging.

BLOWN BY THE SAME WIND
Straley, John
Soho Crime (216 pp.)
$27.95 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-385-54926-4

Think nothing could possibly make Cold Storage, Alaska, any goofier? Think again.

The summer of 1968 brings five new arrivals to the little fishing village. The first is a rash of burglaries—nothing too serious but more than a nuisance and well outside the competence of George Hanson, the Seattle cop who followed barkeeper Ellie Hobbes and boat keeper Slippery Wilson to Cold Storage and settled there as an unofficial lawman. The second is Brother Louis, a Trappist monk sent forth from Gethsemane, Kentucky, to dim the publicity his Cistercian monastery has gained from the books he’s published as Thomas Merton. The third is FBI agent, or maybe ex-agent, Boston Corbett, who’s traveled there to have a word with Brother Louis about his possible Communist sympathies. The fourth and fifth are George Atzerodt and Ed Spangler, a pair of racist agitators bent on recruiting equally weak-minded souls to their visionary cause and acquiring the Old General, a mummy Ellie grew up with in back in the Haywood Saloon. Word on the streets is that the Old General’s remains are actually those of actor/assassin John Wilkes Booth, and the insurrectionists think they’d be an inspiration to the followers they hope to enlist. It’s hard for the Cold Storage natives to keep up with this many star-crossed arrivals, but Straley assigns a memorable role to Venus Myrtle, a 16-year-old who inspires mystical dreams in Brother Louis and straight-up lust in the sons of the Confederacy. Fans of this loopy series, licking their lips in anticipation of the ensuing complications, won’t expect everything to be tied up in a neat bundle, and it isn’t.

Resonant 1968 memories, racist conspiracies, Zen-like mysticism, and the reliably off-kilter takes of the regulars. Perfect.

R O M A N C E

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT
Abrams, Stacey writing as Selena Montgomery
Berkley (336 pp.)
$27.00 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-0-593-43939-5

Two spies are forced to work together despite their mutual mistrust in the latest pseudonymous novel from Stacey Abrams.

Dr. Raleigh Foster is a brilliant chemist who was recruited to work as an operative for the International Security Agency when she was only 20. The mysterious agency is a joint effort of more than 75 countries, undertaking top-secret missions to ensure peace and security around the globe. Adam Grayson and his best friend, Phillip Turman, were recruited to work for the ISA after graduating from Harvard Law School. The three worked together on a mission that went disastrously wrong three years earlier. Phillip died in action, and Adam blamed Raleigh for his death. Adam quit working with the ISA and returned to running his wealthy family’s network of companies, while Raleigh continued to work as a highly decorated agent. Now, Raleigh is given the job of recruiting Adam to go undercover and stop a terrorist organization from converting one of his company’s inventions into a chemical weapon. On the mission, Adam and Raleigh must pose as lovers, which makes it hard for them to ignore the sizzling attraction between them. As they spend more time undercover, they find a
series of puzzling clues indicating that there’s a mole inside the ISA. Adam is convinced that Raleigh’s friend and mentor is the mole, while she suspects that Phillip might have faked his own death. The beginning of the novel is overburdened with exposition, but once Raleigh and Adam go undercover on the fictional Mediterranean island of Jafir, the plot picks up speed. The novel deftly explores loyalty and the perils of trusting in “the rules of engagement” in a world of intrigue and secrets.

A slow-burn romantic suspense story eventually finds its footing.

WELL TRAVELED
DeLuca, Jen
Berkley (336 pp.)
$15.99 paper | Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-593-20046-9

An overworked attorney decides to give up law life and join a Renaissance Faire.

Louisa “Lulu” Malone isn’t happy working long, thankless hours as a corporate attorney. While on a business trip, she decides to take a break and visit a local Renaissance Faire, and while she’s there she gets a phone call that confirms what she already knows—she’s never going to make partner at her firm. In a fit of anger and desperation, she tells her boss she’s quitting and throws her phone into a tub of water the “laundry wenches” are using for their show. Luckily, she makes a new friend at the Faire, a woman named Stacey who works with a band called the Dueling Kilts. Stacey also happens to

Who are some of Africa’s most promising upcoming writers?

“Mukana Press collects a dozen stories by contemporary African writers in this new anthology.”

“Some of these 12 stories effectively address the shifting natures of identity and understanding across cultures...These and other tales are uniformly lean and precise, and the prose is exuberant or mordant, depending on the story.”

“By the end, readers will come away anxious to see more from these authors.”

“A varied but consistently satisfying sampler of emerging artists.”
—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 978-0578397146 [paperback]
ISBN: 978-0578297989 [hardcover]

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know Lulu’s Ren Faire–loving cousin, Mitch, and the two of them convince Lulu to take some time away from the law world. Instead of rushing into another job, why not travel with the band... or, as Lulu puts it, “run away and join the Renaissance Faire”? Soon, Lulu’s wearing a lace-up bodice, selling turkey legs, and meeting the “bad boy” of the Dueling Kilts, Dex. Dex has a reputation for hooking up with any acrobat or belly dancer who will have him, and Lulu has no intention of falling for his charms, his over-the-top flirting, or his man bun. As she gets to know Dex, she realizes there may be a depth to him that no one else sees. But he lives for the Faire and his band, and Lulu has to figure out if there’s a future for the two of them. DeLuca returns to the Renaissance Faire world of her previous three books, bringing back many familiar characters. The Faire is a unique setting, and Lulu and Dex’s relationship feels both realistic and fun, making this an easy and perfectly charming read. 

A comforting, low-angst romance that will make readers want to attend a Renaissance Faire.

NEVER RESCUE A ROGUE
Heath, Virginia
St. Martin’s Griffin (368 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-2507-8778-1

A lady journalist chases a story—and a duke. Diana Merriwell has a secret. No, it’s not that she’s a journalist; everyone knows that, and she has her family’s support. It’s that her career is a front for her undercover job as the Sentinel, an anonymous writer who unearths and exposes damaging gossip about prominent and problematic noblemen. Unfortunately, that job comes with conflicts of interest, and never is that truer than now, when the hottest story in London concerns her family friend Giles Sinclair, who is suddenly the Duke of Harpenden. He learned before his father’s sudden death that he was actually a bastard and fears it’s only a matter of time before the truth comes out and he’s cast

“Lovers of romance and thrillers will relish this novel, which is equal parts heartwarming and exhilarating.”
—BookLife Reviews

“An involving thriller that ably juggles themes of love, loyalty, and risk.”
—Kirkus Reviews
from society. When he accidentally stumbles across Diana’s Sentinel secret, he admits his own secret to her, and she’s pulled into his mission to repair the damage his ostensible father did before the truth comes out. She agrees to help even though it means she has to avoid the temptation of exposing him publicly—not to mention the long-simmering chemistry between them. The more they explore his family’s history, the closer they become, especially after their lives are put in danger. It’s not a shock when they finally do connect intimately and the book takes a welcome, steamy turn, balanced with their hunt for the truth about Harpenden. The second book in the Merriwell Sisters series combines romance and intrigue well and can be read as a stand-alone. Giles and Diana’s banter is charming, and while it’s hard to believe they don’t understand why everyone in their families thinks they’re secretly in love, they’re so sweet that it’s hard not to root for them anyway. A pleasant historical romance with a touch of mystery.

A slow burn of a Regency that will please lovers of the subgenre.

**A DASH OF SALT AND PEPPER**

*Jackson, Kosoko*

Berkley (384 pp.)

$15.99 paper | Dec. 6, 2022

978-0-593-33446-1

Sparks fly in and out of the kitchen in this age-gap contemporary romance.

Following a disastrous two months in which Xavier Reynolds loses his job, his fellowship opportunity with the Carey Foundation, and his boyfriend, he moves back into his childhood bedroom in Harper’s Cove, Maine. While his parents and longtime best friend, Mya, are happy to have him around, that doesn't stop them from meddling in both his professional and personal life. Xavier has already made a disastrous first impression on Logan O’Hare, an older local restaurateur who’s a friend of his parents’, and word travels fast in such a small town. When the Carey Foundation calls to offer Xavier another spot in their program, he agrees, knowing that the cost to attend is pretty steep. He needs a job, fast. The Wharf, Logan’s restaurant, is in desperate need of a sous chef, and Xavier’s family legacy in the kitchen seems like a perfect match for a temporary solution. The two stubborn men dance around their attraction, their banter over delectable New England fare serving as foreplay. Xavier’s point of view is charming and snappy; it’s a delight to be in his head. But unfortunately, Logan falls short. With his smarmy attitude and frequent undermining, Logan often treats Xavier more like his preteen child than a grown man with his own wants and needs. Sadly, the romance element of the book feels unnecessary and even, at times, detrimental to Xavier’s growth. Logan and Xavier eventually resolve their communication issues, but this is a romance in which the main character deserves so much better.

Though Jackson nails the tone and humor, the romance falters.
The insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021, was no anomaly but instead “the inexorable culmination of a sustained four-year war on the institutions and traditions of American democracy.”

New York Times reporter Baker and New Yorker staffer Glasser are no admirers of Donald Trump or his MAGA agenda, the latter of which they hold to be a cynical non-ideology defined mostly by opposition: Anything Barack Obama might have deemed good, Trump deems bad. When Trump became president in 2016, the “Axis of Adults” surrounding him hoped fervently that he would develop a coherent doctrine that could be supported and reinforced by key staff members. They were soon disabused of that sensible notion. Trump did not learn, did not change, and did not budge. He ruled by division, and his base was an us-versus-them proposition, his White House an arena of roiling rivalries; everyone took part in the scheming. The authors are particularly good when they bring Melania Trump onto the stage. It’s a guilty pleasure to watch Melania maneuver Ivanka out of photographic shoots and remove her from guest lists. Trump, thin-skinned as only a self-doubting narcissist can be, was well aware of how disliked he was. As Baker and Glasser note, in his years in office he “would never go out to a restaurant in Washington that was not owned by his company,” knowing he would otherwise be booed and heckled. That did not deter Trump from playing his zero-sum games, and it ended with the only time a president refused to transfer power peacefully. Unfortunately, he left another legacy: Although Trump was “the most politically unsuccessful occupant of the White House in generations,” he altered the political landscape in such a way that “the Trump era is not past; it is America’s present and maybe even its future.”

A scorched-earth account of an utterly failed presidency.
A fun, buzzy history that effectively uses context and criticism to explain the effervescence of pop music.

THE NUMBER ONES

Twenty Chart-Topping Hits That Reveal the History of Pop Music

Breihan, Tom

Hachette (336 pp.)

$29.00 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-938126-77-2

Trying to capture the last seven decades of popular music through 20 songs sounds daunting, but this breezy history is gripping and entertaining.

Breihan is a senior editor at Stereogum, where he writes “The Number Ones” column, which catalogs the story behind every No. 1 single on Billboard’s Hot 100 chart. In this book version of his project, he attacks his subject with an engaging mix of clever facts and savvy observations. With only 20 slots to fill, he has to make some tough choices, meaning the Rolling Stones and Elton John aren’t on the list, but Rae Sremmurd and Soulja Boy are. It’s a testament to Breihan’s arguments that all these choices make sense, as he tries to explain how we moved from Chubby Checker’s “The Twist” to the current state of pop music.

That road involves shifting business and racial influences in addition to musical developments, and the author reveals it all. Writing about “Billie Jean,” Breihan notes, “Michael Jackson is a tragic and troubling figure, but he’s also a pivotal one. He changed the size and scope of pop music. He moved things away from segregated radio formats and toward a pan-racial, pan-genre music-video future.” The author also explains the current power of streaming services and social media. “Since the streaming services’ playlists and algorithms constantly updated themselves,” he writes, “a viral kid like the Mannequin Challenge could have an immediate effect on the charts. Rae Sremmurd and their label were smart enough to connect the group to a viral kid, and in the new streaming economy, this was enough to push them to #1.” For those looking for more conventional commentary, Breihan offers plenty of interesting insights into hits from the Beatles, Fleetwood Mac, Prince, and Mariah Carey, but the surprises are where he shines brightest.

A fun, buzzy history that effectively uses context and criticism to explain the effervescence of pop music.

A CHEERLEADER’S GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT

A Memoir in Essays

Caschetta, MB

Engine Books (376 pp.)

$14.95 paper | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-938126-77-2

Chronicles of love, loss, and healing.

In her graceful debut memoir, award-winning fiction writer, essayist, and medical writer Caschetta gathers 11 essays that reflect on family, loneliness, and her queer identity. She grew up in an Italian American neighborhood in upstate New York, the only daughter in a culturally and politically conservative family. Her father, a physician, could be cruel and demanding; her mother, deeply invested in affirming her girliness, signed her up for cheerleader tryouts. For years, she became the pom-pom waving enthusiast that her mother wanted. “Soon enough,” writes the author, “everything my mother dislikes about me disappears under a dirt mound in the backyard, patted into the shape of a little girl who has disappeared.” Caschetta’s closest friend was a neighbor whose father “once tried to drown his own gay son in the toilet.” That friendship, she writes, was “based on what we have in common: a place we will both have to leave to become who we are.” The author’s escape, aside from her “secret backup plan” to become a nun, was Vassar College, where she found a community and “an entirely new vocabulary” to describe herself: “feminist, queer, depressed, trauma survivor.” In New York City in the 1980s, she became an activist, joining ACT UP, Queer Nation, and the Lesbian Avengers. She found work as a medical editor for an AIDS newsletter called Treatment Issues, a job that led to her becoming a medical writer.

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Stephan Ferris

“Blue Movie is harrowing, heartbreaking, unsparring, and will tell others like us they are not alone.”

Alexander Cheves 

Author of the bestseller, My Love Is a Beast: Confessions, and columnist for Out Magazine

“Blue Movie is a grim thriller … heartbreaking, harrowing, unapologetic true story of hedonistic self-destruction and great personal triumph. Truly riveting.

This book is a rare one. In fact, it is raw in every way … and will not disappoint. Truly riveting.

Confessions, My Love Is a Beast: Confessions, Blue Movie

PRAISE FOR

Out Magazine

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Race Bannon

Author and community leader...
The finalists for our ninth annual Kirkus Prize for Nonfiction are characteristically diverse in terms of author and subject matter, and I’m extremely proud of the monumental efforts of our judges, Kirkus critic Sarah Norris and librarian Lillian Dabney. In the coming weeks, Sarah, Lillian, and I will join our writer judge, Hanif Abdurraqib, to determine the winner.

In *By Hands Now Known: Jim Crow's Legal Executioners* (Norton), Margaret A. Burnham, an expert on civil and constitutional rights, resurrects the dark ghosts of the Jim Crow era, deconstructing the legal apparatus that enabled hundreds of shameful crimes against Black Americans. Our review called it a “persuasive case for long-overdue reparations” as well as “an indispensable addition to the literature of social justice and civil rights.” It’s also, unfortunately, relevant to so many of the racial problems we still face today.

*The Facemaker: A Visionary Surgeon’s Battle To Mend the Disfigured Soldiers of World War I* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) is Lindsey Fitzharris’ riveting follow-up to her acclaimed debut, *The Butchering Art*. It sounds gruesome, and it is; but it’s also an exemplary work of historical biography, an “inspiring [and] engaging portrait of Harold Gillies (1882-1960), a successful British ear, nose, and throat surgeon whose pioneering work in repairing faces places him among the war’s few true heroes.” *The Facemaker* is a “consistently vivid account” of a “true miracle worker.”


*These Precious Days: Essays* (Harper/HarperCollins) is the latest work of nonfiction from acclaimed novelist Ann Patchett, a beautiful follow-up to her previous collection, *This Is The Story of a Happy Marriage*. Here, the author “opens the door and invites you into her world,” bringing us along as she examines friendship, literature, the writing life, and her decision not to have children. With essays that will appeal to almost any kind of reader, the collection puts on full display “an enviable life” rendered with the author’s characteristic “candor, emotion, and knockout storytelling power.”

*In Sensorium: Notes for My People* (Harper/HarperCollins) is a strikingly unique memoir by novelist and perfume maker Tanais, a Brooklyn-based writer of Bangladeshi descent. Our critic noted that “Tanais… brings a millennial sensibility—and a rejection of outdated mores—to their work as a sharp observer of the world.” Elegantly written and threaded throughout with fascinating information about scents and their histories, it offers “a heady pleasure of language in love with the author’s many subjects, and perfectly suited to them.”

Finally, the world of animals comes kaleidoscopically alive in Pulitzer Prize–winning *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us* (Random House), “an ingenious account of how living organisms perceive the world.” From butterflies and birds to catfish and the peacock mantis shrimp, Yong shows us a multitude of colorful delights. Our critic called Yong’s book “one of the year’s best popular natural histories.” In my eyes, it’s the best popular natural history of the year.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.
Caschetta recounts her search for love, including a wry piece about her bumbling efforts at water skiing and snowboarding to impress a girlfriend; her abiding need to make sense “of why we live and how we die, or how we live and why we die”; and her desire to rewrite the “troubling narrative” of her life: “bad choices, difficult women, anxiety, despair.” Happily settled and married, that narrative is once again troubled, this time by the ravages of long Covid.

Candid, affecting essays cohere into a moving memoir.

How our intimate lives have been compromised and what we can do about it.

A law professor and vice president of the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, Citron, author of Hate Crimes in Cyberspace, explores how corporations and governments, as well as unscrupulous individuals, have laid siege to our privacy. She surveys some of the most invasive and egregious examples of privacy violations that have become common in the last decade or so, ranging from secret video recording, hacking of personal digital devices, “sextortion” schemes, cyberstalking, cyberflashing, deepfakes, nonconsensual pornography, and various modes of digital surveillance and data collection. Citron demonstrates how specific groups—especially women and members of the LGBTQ+ community—have been particularly subject to abuse, and she highlights in her treatment of individual cases how grievous the personal toll on victims can be. The author argues persuasively that what currently limits efforts to address privacy violations are the weakness of legal protections, a widespread laxity in the pursuit of offenders, and a broader cultural confusion or apathy about what is at stake in the defense of privacy across all platforms. At present, she writes, the “law lacks a clear conception of what intimate privacy is, why its violation is wrongful, and how it inflicts serious harm.” Despite this grim message, this is a hopeful and inspiring book, offering plausible suggestions about a variety of meaningful reforms that could be enacted in the near future. Citron’s detailed, carefully argued recommendations include the application of civil rights laws to privacy violations, much tighter regulation of the tech industry, an expansion of the range of criminal law; stricter enforcement of existing laws, and the cultivation of political support by raising public awareness about the urgent need for change. Such interventions, Citron makes clear in this timely and compelling book, might help forge a “new compact for social norms.”

An informed, bracing call to action in defense of our private selves.
understanding of biology will likely find that the scientific complexity of the history robs it of some of its drama. Cobb’s focus, however, is not on the science itself but on the social and political context of these discoveries. In particular, he examines the few moments in which scientists themselves sought to organize public debate about the potential consequences of their work. Most interestingly, Cobb contends that the famous 1975 Asilomar conference, while well intentioned, was limited by its focus on laboratory safety and lacked sufficient discussion of the broader ethical issues surrounding genetic manipulation. This view informs the main conclusion the author aims at the funders, scientists, and policymakers who are his primary audience. He believes the excitement surrounding “inevitable technical solutions,” such as CRISPR gene editing, often distracts from posing a more fundamental question, one that encompasses a wider variety of disciplines other than molecular biology: To which pressing problems are these techniques the safest and simplest solutions? While Cobb is careful to note that there are important potential applications in the three areas that concern him, he concludes that a great deal of research remains a risky solution in search of a problem.

A look at genetic engineering that provides valuable background for rethinking the appropriate uses for these technologies.

**How Sex Changed the Internet and the Internet Changed Sex**

* Cole, Samantha

Workman (288 pp.)

$30.00 | Nov. 15, 2022

978-1-5235-1384-0

A colorful, graphics-heavy exploration of how “the internet was built on sex, and sex has remained its through line no matter how hard some people try to deny it.”

Before smartphones and social media platforms, the earliest days of the internet began with connections and communication, and a key part of that was sex. “A demand for sex built the shopping cart, browser cookie, ad revenue models, payment processors, and the dynamic web page,” writes Cole, a senior staff writer for Motherboard, VICE’s science and technology outlet. “The desire to explore and share our sexuality constructed the internet, piece by piece, as we know it today.” The author takes us back to the earliest days of the internet, when communication online was difficult and slow. She then discusses how the development of graphics on computers can be traced back to a test image of the face of a Swedish *Playboy* model in 1972. She moves on to the explosion of user-generated content, from early Bulletin Board Systems; to “lifecasters” like Jennifer Ringley, who launched her 24/7 webcam site, JenniCam, in 1996; to current tech developments, legislation, societal changes, and the figures, legitimate and exploitative alike, who have profited from creators and users—including those who use deepfake technology as well as Pornhub and a wide variety of online hosts for porn of every variety. “This is a history of control: how we had it, grappled for it, lost it, and how we can learn from the past to get it back,” writes the author. “And it’s a history that’s still being written as I type this. Power to the workers, the players, the posters, the survivors, my fellow members with me in the ‘now online.’” Cole presents an easy-to-read package complete with relevant sidebars (many of which define key terms), screenshots, photos, and other graphic elements.

An engaging look at a topic that many choose to ignore or are too embarrassed to discuss.
THE WIND AT MY BACK
Resilience, Grace, and Other Gifts From My Mentor
Raven Wilkinson
Copeland, Misty with Susan Fales-Hill
Grand Central Publishing (240 pp.)
$29.00  |  Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-5387-5385-9

A pioneering Black dancer recounts her hard-won success.

In 2015, Copeland (b. 1982) became the first Black ballerina at the American Ballet Theatre promoted to principal dancer, 14 years after joining the company. Following up on her previous memoir, Life in Motion, Copeland, assisted by Fales-Hill, describes the challenges, frustrations, and successes of her career, paying special homage to her friend and mentor, Raven Wilkinson (1935-2018), who danced with the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo in the 1950s, the first Black woman to get a contract with a major ballet company. With unfailing encouragement and pragmatic advice, Wilkinson helped the younger dancer navigate a profession often unwelcoming to Blacks. “She showed me,” Copeland writes, “that we dance for all those who came before us and the many who will hopefully come after us.” When she seemed overwhelmed by self-doubt, Wilkinson reminded her, “Every time you step on that stage, I’ll be the wind at your back.” She buoyed Copeland’s spirits as she recovered from a severe injury and when she felt isolated and alone: For her first 10 years at ABT, she was the only Black woman dancer; later, she was one of only three dancers of color among a company of 80. A soloist for many years, she despaired about being given principal roles: “Would any Black ballerina ever shatter ABT’s glass ceiling?” she asked herself. Wilkinson urged her to speak openly with the company’s artistic director, and finally, at age 32, she debuted in principal roles, including Odile/Odette in Swan Lake. Although Copeland never faced the racial violence that Wilkinson encountered when she toured the South in the 1950s, she admits that racism hindered her opportunities and stoked her anxiety about “the reaction of critics and the jabs from online commentators that maybe I

“Even readers with just a casual interest in space travel and interstellar exploration will find much to savor in this admirable, inspiring, and heartfelt account. The memoir proves that with enough drive and determination, anything is possible.”

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 978-163107-042-6 (hardcover, color), 978-163107-040-2 (paperback, b&w)
 wasn’t ‘right’ for these leading roles”—fears amply assuaged by her audiences’ acclaim.

A candid, instructive reflection on artistry, dedication, and race.

**AMERICAN PSYCHOSIS**
*A Historical Investigation of How the Republican Party Went Crazy*

Corn, David

Twelve (400 pp.)

$30.00 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-1-5387-2305-0

The veteran political journalist connects the authoritarianism and White supremacism of yore with the Trumpism of today. In the 1964 Republican National Convention, liberal Republicans tried to introduce a resolution to condemn the extremism of the John Birch Society and Ku Klux Klan and were shouted down by supporters of Barry Goldwater, who said that “extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice.” Corn’s vivid narrative starts there, but it goes back much further, to the anti-immigrant Know-Nothingism of the 1850s, where the author locates the beginnings of a recurrent theme: Just as Abraham Lincoln could not disavow the nationalists because he needed their vote, Richard Nixon had to ally with racist Southerners, and George W. Bush had to pal around with Christian fundamentalists to win the 2000 primary against a more principled John McCain. In turn, McCain turned to Sarah Palin to placate far-right, tea party supporters, a group that morphed into the Trumpists of today. It’s a zigzag line indeed, but Corn makes important connections. “Nixon attained the presidency by exploiting the paramount divisive force in American society—racism—and the sense of fear and dread spreading through much of the nation,” he writes, and substituting Trump for Nixon makes that sentence scan without a hitch. Much of the “psychosis” of recent years has hinged on a long pattern of lies. While the author makes clear that Trump is master of the form, he had plenty of predecessors, from Joseph McCarthy to Palin’s winking insinuations that Barack Obama was a Muslim, the latter yielding what Corn calls Palinism, “a combination of smear politics, conspiracism, and know-nothingism.” Since then, it’s only gotten worse. “Formed 168 years earlier to save the nation from the expansion of slavery,” writes the author, “the Republican Party, now infected with a political madness, [is] a threat to the republic.”

An absolutely fascinating work from a gifted storyteller.

**AMERICAN PSYCHOSIS**
*A Historical Investigation of How the Republican Party Went Crazy*

David Corn

Twelve (400 pp.)

$30.00 | Sept. 13, 2022

978-1-5387-2305-0

A powerful memoir of a life driven by “a spirit of... extreme exophoria—that uncontrollable tendency of eyes to gaze outward.”

In her debut book, Daniel, a dual citizen of Nigeria and the U.S., tracks her life across Africa, Europe, and North America. In pursuit of a better life, her parents, who were professors at the university in Maiduguri (“birthplace of Boko Haram, the terrorist militia that specializes in kidnapping the girl child”), moved Daniel and her siblings to England, which she found “blanched, like all color had been boiled out of it,” compared to the “angry red” of her native land. Throughout the enchanting narrative, Daniel vividly shares her and her family’s traditions, customs, and religious views. However, in order to assimilate to English culture, she and her family had to forego many elements of Nigerian culture, including those of her tribe, Hausa-Fulani. The author writes poignantly about being “acutely wounded by the separation from my culture.” After nearly 10 years in England, her parents decided to move again, this time to Nashville. Daniel chronicles the racism she experienced and describes how she changed her first name to Mary-Alice in order to further assimilate. During return trips to Nigeria, the author began to feel embarrassment for being “noticeably Western,” in a way that the author felt “embarrassed by being identifiable African.” Overall, she believed she “no longer belonged anywhere.” Daniel writes memorably about how her religious views have changed over the years and ponders how different she might feel had she stayed in Nigeria. “My immediate family and I have shared a dozen residences across three continents,” she writes. A few pages later, she reflects that “because I come from nomads, I have a tenuous, less tactile relationship with place.” Daniel also acknowledges how, as immigrants, she and her family are “integral, even when we are not integrated.” Today, the author is “semi-settled” in California, a place that she has chosen for herself.

An absolutely fascinating work from a gifted storyteller.
A husband-and-wife Egyptologist team delineate the life and legacy of Akhenaten and his queen, Nefertiti.

Akhenaten (previously known as Amenhotep IV) and Nefertiti ruled from roughly 1352 to 1336 B.C.E. During their reign, they swept out the old gods in favor of a single sun god, Aten. Their legacy was powerful yet brief, all but erased by their son, Tutankhamun, who repudiated their iconoclasm and reinstated the former gods. In a multilayered narrative employing a variety of fictional re-creations, archaeological records, and descriptions of their own scholarly pursuits, the Darnells, co-authors of Tutankhamun’s Armies, ably narrate the life and legacy of the titular “golden couple.” The authors readily acknowledge the academic controversy and endless speculation about their subjects, and they demonstrate the widespread influence of Akhenaten’s father on his outlook and methods. “As with so many of the seemingly innovative, unusual, or revolutionary actions of Amenhotep IV, his father’s reign provided a precedent,” write the Darnells. By the fifth year of his reign, “when the king changed his name to Akhenaten, he made an even more momentous decision, founding a new capital in Middle Egypt: Akhet-Aten. With that new name and in that new city, his new religion found its full expression.” In addition to chronicling the complex political, social, economic, and architectural elements of the history, the Darnells offer a touching portrait of family life, and they briefly trace some of the biographical details of the couple’s descendants. Acknowledging the cooperation of the Ministry of Antiquities in Egypt, the authors make good use of information gleaned from a variety of sites that have only recently undergone excavation, examining the evidence in
Margo Price burst onto the country music scene in 2016 with her debut album, *Midwest Farmer’s Daughter*, which drew rave reviews from critics. Two more studio albums—and a 2019 Grammy nomination for best new artist—would follow, earning her a reputation as a razor-sharp singer/songwriter with a voice that calls to mind country legends like Loretta Lynn.

But her success was anything but overnight. In her new memoir, *Maybe We’ll Make It* (Univ. of Texas, Oct. 4), Price tells the story of her early days, from a girl growing up in Aledo, Illinois, to her experiences as a young woman trying to make it in Nashville, working a series of bad jobs and playing gigs wherever she could find them. Price discussed her memoir, which a critic for Kirkus calls “a brutally honest and at times heart-wrenching account of one musician’s struggle to make it in a challenging industry,” via Zoom from her home near Nashville. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

What made you initially decide to write a memoir?
I’ve always just really loved writing, and I’ve had several other attempts at writing books, but I never could complete any of them. But when I found myself pregnant with my daughter in 2018, I didn’t know what to do with my time. I was really missing working and playing shows, and so I decided to start writing. I owe a lot to Patti Smith and her book, *Just Kids*. I’ve read hundreds of music memoirs in my life, but hers was the one that made me think, *I really would like to attempt this*. I loved that she wrote about the years that she struggled, and I thought that if I don’t write down everything that happened to me over that decade, I’m just going to forget it all. So that was what spurred it.

Were you still working on the memoir when the pandemic hit in 2020?
I was, yeah. I worked on it for quite a long time. When I initially turned it in, I didn’t really know how long it was, because I’d never written a book. I didn’t know about font size and all that. I thought it was about 250 pages or something. And then they told me that it was more like 500 pages, and I still did not have an ending. There were no chapters; it was just this free form, and a lot of the time just jumped around. So I really am very grateful to my editors for helping me pull that together.

That first year of the pandemic was rough for everybody, but especially you. Your husband [musician Jeremy Ivey] became sick with Covid-19 and you lost one of your heroes, John Prine. And obviously your memoir deals with some painful memories. Was writing the book more painful because of all of that, or did you find it to be therapeutic at all?
It was definitely a form of therapy, going through all of that and reconciling things and being honest about them.
Some of my close friends know a lot of what’s in the book, but my family is going to be pretty surprised by a lot of it. After I finished it, I thought, *This was a total mistake. I don’t know if I can wear my heart on my sleeve like this.* And I just started thinking about how the internet is and how people say things to me on there that are hurtful already. But ultimately, I’m stronger than that. And I know that it’s going to resonate with people.

The book is so radically honest, and you write with candor about struggles with eating disorders and substance use.

We live in a society that doesn’t always encourage people to talk about what they’re struggling with. I grew up in a time and in a place and in a household where we didn’t talk about the things that we were struggling with. We just needed to put on a happy face and project this image. And especially the business I’m in, there’s a lot of expectations that women are supposed to live up to, and it’s really toxic. I’ve really, really struggled with my self-image—like really, really, really struggled with it. And now I’m approaching 40, and I just don’t want to live my life like that anymore.

Can you talk about how you arrived at the title of the book? There’s such a sense of hope in it but also a kind of wry humor.

I went on a lot of bad tours when I was young, but the very first one that we ever went on was one that I fabricated from creating this fake booking agent and fake email address. And we went on this crazy tour, and we were traveling west and seeking our fortune and the American dream. I’d thought maybe if we head out to California and go play all these shows that we’ll get discovered. So that was kind of the idea for this documentary that we were making. We were just filming the whole thing with a video camera on VHS, and it was called *Maybe We’ll Make It.* And that title kept sticking with me through life, through every moment that I could steal away, I was dreaming about it and writing down things. I’d go on a hike in the morning and write down little vignettes, little conversations, or think about how I would do justice to a character, to somebody in my past.

You mentioned that you’ve read a lot of music memoirs. Are there any that stand out in your mind as being formative to you as a writer and musician?

Carrie Brownstein’s *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl.* Brandi Carlile’s book [*Broken Horses*] was really well done. I liked Kim Gordon’s *Girl in a Band* and obviously *Chronicles* by Bob Dylan. Willie Nelson’s *It’s a Long Story* is a classic. George Jones’ book [*I Lived To Tell It All*] is quite the wild ride. And Jeff Tweedy’s books [*Let’s Go (So We Can Get Back)*] and *How To Write One Song* are absolutely brilliant. I really soak in the memoirs and especially when I’m trying to write a certain kind of music, then I’m definitely reading a certain kind of book.

Michael Schaub, a journalist and regular contributor to NPR, lives near Austin, Texas. *Maybe We’ll Make It* received a starred review in the Aug. 1, 2022, issue.
a manner accessible to nonarchaeologists. The book also includes a brief chronology and a translation of the ancient poem “Hymn to Aten.”

For lay readers, a riveting, occasionally speculative portrait of ancient Egypt.

A 2006 murder in New Haven, Connecticut, provides a framework for a wide-ranging study of the problems of life in cities divided by class and race and of the effects of an inept or corrupt police system.

Journalist Dawidoff, who was born in New York City but grew up in New Haven, examines in great detail the murder of Herbert “Pete” Fields Jr., a crime for which 16-year-old Bobby Johnson was falsely accused and convicted. He served nine years of a 38-year prison term before he was exonerated and released. The text—compassionate, thoughtful, and thorough to a fault—is caught somewhat uncomfortably between a sociological study of the causes and results of racial division and a more straightforward narrative of Bobby’s conviction, imprisonment, and bumpy reentry into society. The author spent hundreds of hours interviewing hundreds of people, including Bobby, his family members, the lawyer who dedicated years of his life to getting Bobby released from prison, Fields’ family members, and other residents of the economically depressed Newhallville neighborhood, which Dawidoff describes as “a fully formed working-class neighborhood without any work.”

The author’s research and dedication to the project are clear, but the book would have benefitted from a stronger editorial hand. Readers anxious to get on with the story may get bogged down in the long account, drawing on Fields’ sister’s memoir, of his childhood in South Carolina. Certain chapters—e.g., an indictment of Yale for its lack of action in the city—are not thoroughly integrated into the narrative structure. Overall, though, Dawidoff presents a compelling examination of a situation in which police officers eager to put another case in the “solved” column ignored obvious evidence and coerced a teenager into a confession of a crime he didn’t commit. Anyone with grand illusions about the American justice system will have lost them by the end.

An uneven but rigorously reported, urgent book.

The bestselling authors return with another tale of an elite military unit’s battles and ultimate triumph.

Journalists Drury and Clavin have turned out a steady stream of well-received military histories, including Halsey’s Typhoon, Valley Forge, Blood and Treasure, and Lucky 666, and their latest fits well with their previous titles. Having raced across France after the breakthrough in Normandy, U.S. troops were surprised at the sudden resistance when they crossed into Germany. Among their worst experiences was a nasty November-December 1944 battle in the Hürtgen Forest, a fortified wilderness on the frontier. Historians agree that American leaders mishandled it, sending in units that suffered terrible casualties for minimal gains. Drury and Clavin focus on the final, bloody attack of Castle Hill, toward the end of the campaign, which was ultimately taken by the 2nd Ranger Battalion. Special forces remain controversial among the military because they cost far more than regular troops but don’t fight often and, formed by volunteers, deprive units of their best men. Still, civilians and popular writers find them irresistible. Clearly fascinated by the subject, the authors rewind the clock to deliver the Rangers’ history since its 1942 approval by Gen. George Marshall, inspired by British Commandos. Ranger units distinguished themselves during the invasions of North Africa and Italy and then landed at Normandy in June 1944 before the main force to destroy an artillery emplacement that endangered Omaha Beach. Military buffs will enjoy the authors’ account of the often bitter fighting that followed, described in minute, occasionally excessive detail; the authors vividly capture the miserable, freezing, wet conditions and the bloody small-unit actions that often failed.

Drury and Clavin conclude that victory was costly, and the Hürtgen campaign was a mistake: “The American high command knew well…how much blood had been spilled in that woodland to accomplish so little.”

“Untold” and “epic” war stories remain a persistent genre, and this should satisfy its substantial readership.
Two sociologists examine the many challenges facing “working poor women.” Based on interviews and research conducted over the past 10 years, Freeman and Dodson, author of The Moral Underground: How Ordinary Americans Subvert an Unfair Economy, show the factors that place many women, particularly immigrants and women of color, in low-income positions—and often keep them there. The authors’ shared goal in writing this book is to help these women “climb out of working poverty.” The majority of the women have found employment in service industries, including food, health care, and child care. Many jobs in the service industry have unpredictable hours, leading to difficulty in finding consistent care for their own children. Additionally, most of these positions are low paying and lack benefits, requiring workers to take on multiple jobs to support their families, often on their own. In some cases, older children are required to assume household responsibilities for their families, sacrificing their own futures and contributing to this cycle of poverty. Many interviewees also believe that because they have children, they are at a further disadvantage. “Moms told us about the upheaval surrounding the birth of a child without leave, income, or accommodations to ease the transition home,” write the authors. Furthermore, domestic workers caring for wealthy families often face racism and harassment from parents and children alike. Several of the interviewees relate that their paths to higher education, frequently needed for job advancement, have also been filled with obstacles. The authors clearly show how affluent women often become uncomfortable when considering how lower-income families live, choosing to donate rather than volunteer. While the book does tend to generalize the views and opinions of individuals, the authors’ stance on
advocating for others by encouraging policy change is convincing and sound.

An insightful book that shines light on issues that should be better understood by any responsible citizen.

THE STORIES WE TELL
Every Piece of Your Story Matters
Gaines, Joanna
Harper Select/HarperCollins (256 pp.)
$31.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-4003-3387-5

The home-improvement TV star shares her story.

Co-founder of the construction and home-renovation company Magnolia and co-host of Fixer Upper, Gaines writes that she was motivated to write a memoir out of “a yearning for healing, for clarity, for steadiness.” At 44, feeling as if “the crescendo” of her life had passed, she felt a need to think about her identity and reassess her goals—a project she recommends to her readers, as well. “Getting your story down,” she advises, “needn’t be in pursuit of happiness but rather wholeness.” Her narrative is light on anecdotes; instead, the author imparts lessons and epiphanies that she gleaned from examining her experiences. “Fear, vulnerability, intentionality, perfectionism” are recurring themes. Half Korean, as a child, Gaines was mocked by kids “who made fun of the slant of my eyes,” inciting feelings of insecurity and shame that dogged her for much of her life. Through writing, she confronted that trauma and recognized how it led to self-limiting behavior, such as micromanaging. Motherhood features prominently in her story. Gaines had four children in five years, a period she recalls as “all a bit of a blur.” Pregnant again eight years later, she was able to spend more time mothering; her son’s rapt attentiveness to the world taught her something valuable: “I’ve let perfectionism win scenarios and busyness steal seconds of true joy. I’ve kept my head down when I should have looked up.” Perhaps that busyness is one of the “myriad” causes of the guilt she admits to carrying. She urges readers to pay attention “to the moments you’ve kept close,” to listen to their own story, and to be open to “a way of living that grows toward change rather than against it.” As she writes near the beginning, “our story may crack us open, but it also pieces us back together.”

An earnest testament to the healing power of writing.

THE RUIN OF ALL WITCHES
Life and Death in the New World
Gaskill, Malcolm
Knopf (336 pp.)
$30.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-593-31657-3

A contextually rich history of the first witch panic during a tumultuous time in Massachusetts in 1651.

A leading British scholar of witchcraft, Gaskill dives into an Early American version at a fraught time of transition between the medieval and modern worlds. “Witchcraft was not some wild superstition,” he writes, “but a serious expression of disorder embedded in politics, religion and law…. Witches were tangible symbols of this chaos.” Following in the wake of political, religious, and economic turmoil in Great Britain, which they were fleeing for land and economic opportunity, the Puritans and other dissenters faced enormous toil and hardship in the small, hard-bitten communities like Springfield, founded in the late 1630s by trader and entrepreneur William Pynchon as an industrious hub in the region. The settlers’ lives were “dominated by piety and toil,” and “beneath the surface of most settlements…courses dark currents of wrath.” Teeming with envy and contention between neighbors, Springfield, with its 50 households, erupted in discord in 1651. One of the causes was the faltering marriage between Hugh Parsons, a “turbulent English brickmaker and jack-of-all-trades,” and his wife, Mary, likely caused by a combination of overwork, spite, and mental illness. Mary, “depressive and delusional,” accused not only her neighbors of witchcraft, but also her husband. Within an atmosphere of heightened suspicion and bad omens and accusations among other citizens of the small town, Hugh and Mary were both arrested and tried in Boston for witchcraft. Gaskill presents a meticulous, multilayered snapshot of this smoldering society, combining history, theology, and psychological speculation. Around the same time, Pynchon wrote and published a controversial tract that questioned Calvinist orthodoxy; and he was charged with heresy by authorities and sent back to England. Both trials, held in the same week, “pricked a primal fear,” an element that Gaskill investigates insightfully throughout the book.

An elucidating study on the forces that fed witchcraft hysteria in early America.

THE OSWALDS
An Untold Account of Marina and Lee
Gregory, Paul R.
Diversion Books (304 pp.)
$28.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-63576-821-3

An inside look at a troubled relationship reveals truths about a notorious crime.
Some six decades after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Gregory offers his reflections on the time he spent with Lee Harvey Oswald and his wife, Marina, shortly after their arrival from the Soviet Union. Refuting prominent conspiracy theories that have implicated various foreign and domestic powers, the author makes a convincing case that Lee acted alone. “The army of assassination buffs are wasting their time on missing bullets, Oswald doppelgangers, and Soviet, Cuban, or Mafia assassinations,” he writes. “We need to look no further than Oswald himself.” Focusing on the interactions he observed between Lee and Marina, Gregory documents his impressions of Lee’s capacity for violence, desperate need for recognition, and uncanny effectiveness at manipulating others in order to achieve his warped goals.

The author is particularly effective in countering the notion that Lee was unintelligent and incapable of plotting the assassination without the help of others. “We misjudge Oswald by focusing on his working-class attire and simple manner of speech,” writes Gregory, “all the while not noticing his street-smart intelligence, craftiness, and wiliness.” A clear portrait emerges of a disturbed individual who had the motivation and means to carry out an attack intended to make him famous. Ultimately, Gregory doesn’t provide any groundbreaking revelations about the Oswalds’ marriage or who else may have been involved in plotting the assassination. Works by such authors as Priscilla McMillan, Norman Mailer, Gerald Posner, and Thomas Mallon have already provided a thorough understanding of the dynamics of Lee and Marina’s relationship and the serendipitous events that gave an ambitious deviant a chance to make his mark on history. Nevertheless, Gregory delivers a lucid, insightful summary of these topics, and this book will serve as an excellent introduction to more in-depth considerations.

An informative view of a killer’s marriage and lethal motivations.

JOHN CONSTABLE
A Portrait
Hamilton, James
Pegasus (496 pp.)
$29.95 | Nov 8, 2022
978-1-63936-272-1

A biography of the pioneering English landscape painter.

In this vibrant text, cultural historian Hamilton, author of a biography of J.M.W. Turner, paints a unique portrait of John Constable (1776-1837). Born in Suffolk, Constable is renowned for his landscape paintings, particularly those inspired by the countryside where he spent his youth, now commonly known as “Constable Country.” As the author writes, “from innumerable boyhood walks in the countryside Constable began to bring home drawings. This was ominous, and began to cast its shadow.” While his parents wished for him to become a parson or perhaps carry on the family business, Constable had other aspirations. In his painting, he was “attentive to detail, spontaneous in gesture, brave in his use of colour, and so powerful an advocate for his native landscape that even after two hundred years his work is scrutinised for social and agricultural information.” As his skills developed, Constable became increasingly conflicted between painting portraits and painting landscapes. “There could be money in portraits; but for a young man drawn to landscape painting there was only struggle,” writes Hamilton, who also examines Constable’s experiences as an art student at the Royal Academy in London. While his time in London made an impression, he felt “artistic talent, his own and that in others, should be nurtured in tranquility” further strengthening his connection to home. In addition to exploring elements of Constable’s personal life, Hamilton describes the rapid rise of his reputation in France and the effects this recognition had on his career. Through skillful use and analysis of Constable’s writings, Hamilton takes a deep look into his subject’s life, including his influences, challenges, and tragedies, as well as the misconceptions that have followed the man behind the paintings. The book includes a selection of four-color photos of Constable’s work.

An intimate, enlightening look at an indispensable painter.
THE REBEL AND THE KINGDOM
The True Story of the Secret Mission To Overthrow the North Korean Regime
Hope, Bradley
Crown (272 pp.)
$29.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-593-24065-6

A fast-paced, true-life thriller pitting a merciless North Korean state against a band of high-tech, courageous activists.

The events of 9/11 affected different people in different ways. In the case of Adrian Hong Chang, then a student at Yale, the terrorist attacks focused his attention on a terrorist state: North Korea. Hope, the author of Billion Dollar Whale and Blood and Oil, writes that Chang’s “growing obsession...would lead to hundreds of rescues of international refugees and a confrontation with one of the most brutal regimes on earth on its own soil.” The author opens with a thrilling exploit in which Chang and a band of associates invaded the North Korean Embassy in Madrid after receiving word that the ambassador wanted to defect. Things didn’t quite work out; one embassy insider escaped and told the Spanish police, “Some people have entered the embassy and are killing and eating people.” In this thoroughly engaging narrative, Hope writes that in the end some of the self-taught secret agents with Chang’s organization, Cheollima Civil Defense, wound up in jail, while Chang himself has gone underground. The reason: They trusted the Trump-era FBI when the administration was determined to sideline them so that Trump, believing that “his unparalleled business negotiating experience would finally hit home with ‘rocket man,’ ” could take credit for wrestling Kim Jong-un to accommodation. The administration failed, while Chang and company infiltrated North Korea many times to smuggle defectors out. More than that, Cheollima revealed much about the nefarious, shadowy North Korean state, whose ambassadors abroad have to fund themselves, essentially, through often illegal activities such as drug smuggling and arms sales. By eroding the North Korean ideology that its leaders are “godlike and undefeatable,” Hope amply shows, Cheollima’s people deserve medals instead of being prosecuted.

A page-turner of a spy-vs.-spy tale that, one hopes, will eventually see the good guys carry the day.

DICKENS AND PRINCE
A Particular Kind of Genius
Hornby, Nick
Riverhead (192 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-0-593-54182-1

Comparing the lives of two protean geniuses and gleaning the lessons thereof.

Hornby considers together the lives of two of “My People—the people I have thought about a lot, over the years, the artists who have shaped me, inspired me, made me think about my own work.” This exercise will interest a particular Venn diagram of readers. You don’t have to be a fan of Prince, Dickens, and Hornby, but 2 out of 3 would help. Among the qualities that unite Hornby’s two heroes is that they had “no off switch,” continuously pouring out work until their deaths, both at the same age, 58. Both had truncated, difficult childhoods; both hit a spectacular creative zenith in their 20s; both went to war with their publishers and damaged their reputations considerably by doing so. Hornby also takes on the idea, popularized in Malcolm Gladwell’s Outliers, that virtuosity requires 10,000 hours of practice, putting the focus instead on reading, listening, watching, and bringing himself into the picture, as he does from time to time. “I am closer to being Dickens than being Prince, although of course that’s like saying I’m closer to Mars than to Saturn,” he writes. “But I suspect my degree of passion for books, music, TV and movies has never been ‘normal.’ ” In an interesting section on Prince’s androgyny, Hornby points out that “Prince’s sexuality came from the future”—i.e., now, when the notion of nonbinary gender is part of mainstream culture. Dickens’ sexuality “came from the future” only in the sense that he went through a public shamming in the media when his relationship with an 18-year-old girl became public. Most importantly, writes Hornby, “Prince and Dickens tell me, every day, Not good enough. Not quick enough. Not enough. More, more, more. Think quicker, be more ambitious, be more imaginative.”

No one else could have gotten a book like this published, but no one else could have pulled it off, either.

MY PEOPLE
Five Decades of Writing About Black Lives
Hunter-Gault, Charlayne
Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$26.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-06-313539-0

A distinguished journalist offers a selection of her published work over 50 years chronicling the Black experience.

Growing up in Covington, Georgia, Hunter-Gault (b. 1942) dreamed of becoming a journalist like comic-strip reporter Brenda Starr. It was a seemingly
impossible dream in the segregated and racist Deep South, but the author was diligent in her quest for knowledge. In 1961, she and Hamilton Holmes became the first Black students to enroll at the University of Georgia, and she graduated in two years. From the mid-1960s onward, she worked for an impressive array of publications and networks, including the Atlanta Inquirer, the New Yorker, the New York Times, NBC, CNN, and PBS NewsHour. In this thematic collection, the author comments insightfully on the decadeslong social developments and unrest in the lives of Black people in both the U.S. and South Africa. The earliest pieces look at the teachings of the Black Panthers, John Lewis’ work registering Black voters, early Black urban development projects in law enforcement and education, and the widening Black-White income gap. In the second part, Hunter-Gault presents pieces about “My Sisters,” including profiles of NAACP leader Margaret Bush Wilson, poet Phillis Wheatley, and Shirley Chisholm, “the first black woman member of the House of Representatives.” Having spent nearly 20 years living in South Africa, Hunter-Gault also offers a unique perspective on the apartheid era; her 2010 New Yorker piece “The Third Man,” about President Jacob Zuma, is a nuanced portrait of a troubled country and its leaders. The section titled “A Road Less Traveled” serves as an illuminating portrait of the author’s upbringing and early influences, while somber commemorations in “Honoring the Ancestors” include salutes to Malcom X, Langston Hughes, Julian Bond, and Nelson Mandela. Despite chronicling periods of enormous pain and despair, Hunter-Gault ends with an upbeat, hopeful interview with David Brooks about working for “common action” since the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement.

A wonderful showcase of the work of an invaluable 20th-century journalist.

**THE PEACEMAKER**

Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink

Inboden, William

Dutton (608 pp.)

$35.00 | Nov. 15, 2022

978-1-247-4589-9

An admiring account of Ronald Reagan’s role in winning the Cold War.

Inboden, executive director of the Clements Center for National Security at the University of Texas, admits that Reagan had a few warts, and members of his administration far more, but some readers may believe he gives Reagan more credit than he deserves. Throughout the Cold War, many Americans believed that the Soviet Union was militarily stronger than the U.S. and that clever communists were more successful than democratic parties in influencing foreign governments. In fact, by Reagan’s arrival, its clumsy command economy was on life support, its leaders a series of unimaginative old men, and its army bogged down in Afghanistan. Reagan hated communism and détente, the American policy at the time (begun the previous decade by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger), which aimed to ease tensions. Most Republicans approved of Reagan’s confrontational policies, but the Soviet Union showed no signs of change until his second administration. Largely ignoring Reagan’s domestic agenda, Inboden delivers an expert account of the political and diplomatic events of the 1980s. Carrying out his vow to pressure the Soviets, Reagan expanded the military, pressed allies to do the same, and “escalated the CIA covert action flooding the Iron Curtain with contraband media to undermine communism.” He extolled free elections, democracy, and human rights, but critics still point out that dictators who proclaimed their anti-communism often got free passes. Matters changed when Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in 1985, but few knew it at the time. A year passed before Reagan came “to see that Gorbachev was indeed the partner for peace Reagan had long sought.” To his credit, he was far ahead of his advisers, and by the time he left office, the Cold War hostility and fear of nuclear Armageddon had vanished and the Soviet Union was on its way to collapse. Throughout, the author’s portrait is more flattering to Reagan than usual but not unconvincing.

A well-researched study that will produce further debate about the Reagan era and the Cold War.

**HIS MASTERLY PEN**

A Biography of Jefferson the Writer

Kaplan, Fred

Harper/HarperCollins (672 pp.)

$35.00 | Nov. 8, 2022

978-0-06-244003-7

The literary prowess of a Founding Father.

As he did in Lincoln: The Biography of a Writer, Kaplan examines the life and thought of Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) through an astute reading of his copious writings. Jefferson, he notes, “was a superb writer, with a genius particularly suited to his needs as a Virginia legislator, wartime propagandist, governor, Congressional delegate, secretary of state, vice president, president, and the premier intellectual, cultural, and moral voice of the republic he helped create and then lived in for fifty years.” Trained as a lawyer, Jefferson found the practice of law “intellectually thin and repetitive” and became immersed, instead, in the Colonies’ political fortunes. In 1774, his A Summary View of the Rights of Britsh America “put Jefferson’s name on the transatlantic map,” and the text served as a template for his crafting the Declaration of Independence. That powerful document, reflecting the views of the incipient nation’s elite leaders, “was to be philosophy, argument, and propaganda combined and raised to the highest level of political literature. Its purpose was to help make and change history.” Jefferson navigated through tumultuous times, partisan dissent, war, and the fraught matter of slavery. He claimed to abhor slavery “in principle,” yet he “still defined slaves as property” and kept hundreds of enslaved people as “his irreplaceable
“Most books about the war in Afghanistan end grimly, and this one more than most, but readers will find it impossible to put down.”

**BRAVO COMPANY**

An urgent account of a parachute infantry regiment in Afghanistan. Most books about the war in Afghanistan end grimly, and this one more than most, but readers will find it impossible to put down. *Wall Street Journal* Midwest correspondent Kesling, a former Marine officer in Iraq and Afghanistan, follows Bravo Company of the elite 82nd Airborne Division, already experienced from earlier tours, on their 2009 deployment. The author delivers vivid biographies of a dozen soldiers who “grew up as kids playing Army in the woods...waiting for the day they could enlist and head off to boot camp. They watched movies like *Full Metal Jacket* and *The Green Berets* and hagiographic tales of manly heroism.” During their deployment, Bravo soldiers ventured into the Arghandab Valley, an extremely dangerous area where a previous unit had stopped patrolling, “tired of getting fucked up by Taliban bombs.” Kesling delivers a gripping, detailed, nuts-and-bolt account of their ordeal. Only three men died, but a dozen “lost at least one limb,” and half the company received Purple Hearts. Most unnervingly, they almost never saw the enemy, who kept out of sight but were those who stormed the Capitol, an event to which Kesling devotes just a couple of cautious, don’t-blame-us pages (“no one is to blame.”) This Kusher secured his revenge by keeping Christie out of the Trump White House, but he’s an equal-opportunity hater, both barrels constantly aimed at Steve Bannon—a gossipy morsel is that Bannon, by Kushner’s account, “didn’t hide his disappointment” when Kellyanne Conway passed a drug test—but also trained on Priebus, Lewandowski, Kelly, Comey, Faucci, and a battery of other well-known names. As for Trump, father to the “arrestingly beautiful” Ivanka, well, he can do no wrong except perhaps to be overly enthusiastic. So, it seems, were those who stormed the Capitol, an event to which Kushner devotes just a couple of cautious, don’t-blame-us pages (“no one at the White House expected violence that day”).

Bland, dutiful, self-serving, and unconvincing.

**BREAKING HISTORY**

*Kushner, Jared*

Broadside Books/HarperCollins (512 pp.)

$35.00 | Aug. 23, 2022

978-0-06-322148-2

The colorless Trump functionary fails to inspire in a look-at-me memoir. “One rule applies to both fathers-in-law and presidents. When they ask for help, there’s only one answer: yes.” Another rule applies to Kushner’s memoir: When it works, he gets the credit; when it doesn’t, others are to blame. The author risks dislocating his shoulder patting himself on the back for having “orchestrated some of the most significant breakthroughs in diplomacy in the last fifty years.” Naturally, he accomplished these and other feats by learning geopolitics on the fly while facing down a host of opponents single-handedly. When not self-congratulatory—or fawning, when it comes to the man whom he at least calls Trump, usually without the increasingly inappropriate-seeming honorific “President”—Kushner is aggrieved. He opens with an embittered account of his father’s prosecution at the hands of attorney Chris Christie for witness tampering and violations against the Mann Act, whereupon Christie “sought to punish my father in a way that would hurt the most: by putting other Kushner...executives in jail, bankrupting the family business, and shutting it down for good.” This Kushner secured his revenge by keeping Christie out of the Trump White House, but he’s an equal-opportunity hater, both barrels constantly aimed at Steve Bannon—a gossipy morsel is that Bannon, by Kushner’s account, “didn’t hide his disappointment” when Kellyanne Conway passed a drug test—but also trained on Priebus, Lewandowski, Kelly, Comey, Faucci, and a battery of other well-known names. As for Trump, father to the “arrestingly beautiful” Ivanka, well, he can do no wrong except perhaps to be overly enthusiastic. So, it seems, were those who stormed the Capitol, an event to which Kushner devotes just a couple of cautious, don’t-blame-us pages (“no one at the White House expected violence that day”).

Bland, dutiful, self-serving, and unconvincing.

**ARTHUR MILLER**

*American Witness*

Lehr, John

Yale Univ. (264 pp.)

$26.00 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-0-300-23492-3

Highlights from the life and career of one of America’s most famous playwrights.

“Why are you a revolutionary?” Arthur Miller (1915-2005) asked himself in one of his notebooks. “Because the truth is revolutionary and the truth you shall live by.” In the latest installment

"of one of America’s most famous playwrights."
of the publisher’s Jewish Lives series, Lahr, whose 2014 biography of Tennessee Williams won the National Book Critics Circle Award, shows the ways in which that truth-seeking spirit manifested itself in one of the most storied playwriting careers ever. Miller grew up in Jewish Harlem, and his father, Isidore Miller, was the owner of a financially successful clothing company before the Depression wiped out the family’s savings. His “unhappy” mother, Augusta, believed that “Arty” had a “special destiny,” but his high school grades were so bad that no college would accept him. He eventually attended the University of Michigan, where he would “soak up” Marxism, gain sympathy for the working class, and learn to incorporate politics and family life into landmarks of the American theater, including All My Sons and Death of a Salesman. Lahr takes readers through the highs and lows of his subject’s life: the antisemitism he faced; his break with director Elia Kazan over Kazan’s willingness to testify to the House Un-American Activities Committee; and his three marriages, including a disastrous union with Marilyn Monroe. Lahr cites Miller’s autobiography, Timebends, so often that some readers may want to go directly to the original source. He does a good job, however, showing how Miller’s experiences informed plays such as The Golden Years, The Price, The Crucible, and the Pulitzer-winning Salesman. Lahr also excels in his analyses of Miller’s works, including his one novel, Focus, which showed how alienation and mindlessness were “part of the equation that results in anti-Semitism,” and plays such as 1964’s After the Fall, his first after his marriage to Monroe, a flawed work that is nonetheless “extraordinary as a map of Miller’s internal geography.”

An engaging summary of a celebrated and checkered career.

THE GREAT AIR RACE
Death, Glory, and the Dawn of American Aviation
Lancaster, John
Liveright/Norton (352 pp.)
$28.95 | Nov 15, 2022
978-1-63149-637-0

A dramatic account of the massive 1919 cross-country air race, “the likes of which the world had never seen.”

In his debut, journalist Lancaster, a former Washington Post foreign correspondent, focuses on Army Gen. Billy Mitchell (1879-1936), who rose to command all air combat units in France during World War I and returned after the armistice to fiercely advocate for an expansion of America’s air power, a campaign that included organizing the great air race. At the time, airplanes were built with fragile wood and fabric, with open cockpits, unreliable engines with a range of 150-200 miles, no navigation aids more complex than a compass, and no parachutes. The U.S. airmail service was already a year old, despite a litany of disasters, and air races attracted large crowds and media attention. Only months before the big race, Mitchell had overseen a widely publicized competition in which 40 planes flew between New York and Toronto. With only a few weeks’ notice, he announced a round-trip race across the continent, leaving from either Long Island or San Francisco. There followed a mass of publicity and torrent of applicants, mostly ex- or current airmen. In this well-researched text, Lancaster delivers an expert description of the planes (mostly ex-WWI fighters) and biographies of the volunteers, and he devotes more than half of the story to the precise details of the race. Primitive aircraft and unreliable weather forecasting, combined with the flyers’ fierce competitiveness, proved a deadly combination. More than 50 planes crashed; some were repaired and flew on, but nine men died. The media praised the courage of the participants, and while writers claimed that it sped technical and commercial progress, Lancaster quotes some skeptics. He agrees that it marked the beginning of a new age and ends with a lively, occasionally gruesome history of early cross-country airmail and the not terribly pertinent but still intriguing story of Mitchell’s eventual flameout.

Entertaining fireworks during the early days of flight.

THE WORLD DESERVES MY CHILDREN
Leggero, Natasha
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov 15, 2022
978-1-982137-07-6

A comedian offers a humorous assessment of parenting.

Leggero’s journey into motherhood began when she froze her eggs at age 38 while still single, thinking “maybe one day I might want a kid, in the same way I thought I might eventually want an infinity hot tub.” When she was 42, happily married and eager to be a mother, she and her husband began what she describes as a vigorous (and ultimately successful) in-vitro fertilization process. The author also recounts her life’s journey. She was an overachieving child who grew up with “an overwhelmed single mother” in Rockford, Illinois, and she studied theater in college. She shares amusing anecdotes about taking acting classes with a not-yet-famous Paris Hilton and ascending the ranks of the Hollywood improv comedy circuit. Leggero gets real about the more difficult aspects of motherhood, including the evaporation of free time (“the end to all fun”), child discipline, anxiety, and “cleaning up after my husband.” Nonetheless, she wouldn’t change a thing, and her daughter has become a “new reason to live.” Many aspects of her motherhood journey will resonate with a wide variety of readers, including breastfeeding and pandemic-era parenting, though she satirically skewers just about everything else with gleeful abandon. As one would expect from a former Chelsea Lately guest panelist (73 appearances), Leggero’s snark comes fast and furious throughout her book. As one might expect from a former Chelsea Lately guest panelist (73 appearances), Leggero’s snark comes fast and furious throughout her book. Occasionally, the humor feels forced—e.g., when she is mockingly critical of her husband, dubbing his
A diverting interlude with two exceptionally clever souls.

NUMBER ONE IS WALKING

THE BOOK OF JOE
Trying Not To Suck at Baseball & Life
Maddon, Joe & Tom Verducci
Twelve (384 pp.)
$29.00 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-5387-5179-4

A winning manager reflects on changes in Major League Baseball, many of which devalue managers.

If there’s an unstated theme to this likable memoir, it’s that things happen when they happen, sometimes without rhyme or reason. Maddon worked his way around the field before heading several clubs, including the Chicago Cubs, which he guided to their first World Series win in more than a century. Yet, as sportswriter Verducci (whose previous book, The Cubs Way, covered that win) writes in the preface, Maddon never played a minute of major league ball and “logged twenty years in the minors as a player, manager, and instructor before getting a major league job.” He was working at a liquor store and contemplating a move to play in Italy when the call came from the California Angels to come aboard as a scout. Four decades later, Maddon recalls, what got him there was positive thinking: “I never lost sight of my dreams, and my self-confidence has held up in spite of many obstacles.” Maddon has often found himself swimming against the stream: For one thing, though “an early adopter of the use of computers in baseball,” he resisted the siren call of the quants to let numbers do all the talking, insisting that instinct—“thinking in advance”—be a key component of the manager’s analytical toolset. “Never forget the heartbeat,” he told his players. You can’t argue with Maddon’s wins, but you can also see why he was ground down by a system that came to be almost entirely numerical—not just on the field, but also on the bottom line—and in which risk and daring are forgotten. Near the end of the book, he quips, “you can make all the right decisions in the world, and it can come out wrong.”

Fans of the diamond will find this assembled wisdom to be both pleasing and instructive.

NUMBER ONE IS WALKING
My Life in the Movies and Other Diversions
Martin, Steve
Illus. by Harry Bliss
Celadon Books (256 pp.)
$23.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-250-81529-3

Martin and Bliss breeze down a yellow brick road of memories. In this light-hearted follow-up to their charming 2020 collaboration, A Wealth of Pigeons, Martin and Bliss offer an illustrated look at the former’s career, the latter’s musings, and their shared muse, Bliss’ dog, Penny. The narrative is both disarming and brief. Through his cartoon persona, Martin recounts his

UP CLOSE AND ALL IN
Life Lessons From a Wall Street Warrior
Mack, John
Simon Element (352 pp.)
$28.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-982174-27-9

The former CEO of Morgan Stanley chronicles his life in the financial trenches.

Mack (b. 1944) opens on a fierce note: At a company gathering, a fellow trader made a poor fellow delivering his breakfast wait for half an hour while, presumably, he slept in. As the author writes, he “tore into him. ‘Who do you think you are? This guy is trying to do exactly what you do: make a living. When you keep him waiting, you’re taking money out of his pocket. Do this again and I’ll fire you.’ ” Mack recounts plenty of hiring and firing, the latter almost always for cause but sometimes in the apparent interest of shaking things up to try something different. “Giving anyone a fiefdom is a terrible idea,” he writes, sagely. Though the author admits there is inherent recklessness in the business, that’s no excuse to be inhuman. “This is a real lesson: don’t avoid the hard things or the difficult people,” he writes, both of which will in turn teach future lessons. Hard lessons came with the financial meltdown of 2008, which found Mack resisting calls from the federal government to merge while staring down the possibility of a complete economic collapse. Instead, the author quickly recruited Japanese investors to shore up the company and avoid the chaos that killed other financial institutions, a deal that had the mixed blessing of bringing tighter federal oversight over Morgan Stanley while giving what was now a holding company “permanent access to the Fed lending window.” The ideal reader for much of Mack’s book will be business wonks or those pursuing an MBA, but the author’s common-sensical approach to matters both financial and personal, while familiar, is worth pondering, as when he counsels, “Making the hard calls when you have no idea of the outcome—taking the risk, putting yourself out there—that’s when you prove your mettle.”

A refreshingly straightforward, plainspoken look at what happens on the trading floor and in the boardroom.

Judaism as “the religion my husband forced me to convert to,” though she ultimately concedes he was “worth giving up Christmas for.” Leggero also straightforwardly addresses her reasons for not wanting another child, and overall, she achieves a commendable balance among practical advice, wry commentary, and over-the-top offensiveness.

The benefits and headaches of later-life motherhood from a candid, often hilarious comedic mind.

“A diverting interlude with two exceptionally clever souls.”

NUMBER ONE IS WALKING
My Life in the Movies and Other Diversions
Martin, Steve
Illus. by Harry Bliss
Celadon Books (256 pp.)
$23.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-250-81529-3

Martin and Bliss breeze down a yellow brick road of memories. In this light-hearted follow-up to their charming 2020 collaboration, A Wealth of Pigeons, Martin and Bliss offer an illustrated look at the former’s career, the latter’s musings, and their shared muse, Bliss’ dog, Penny. The narrative is both disarming and brief. Through his cartoon persona, Martin recounts his
progression from stand-up comedy to a celebrated movie career, reminiscing to anyone who will listen, bystanders as well as Bliss and Penny. Penny, a one-canine Greek chorus, adds asides and clarification (though not always on the films). Martin recalls the hit he made with his first starring vehicle, *The Jerk*, and his four-film partnership with Carl Reiner that produced a certified gem, *All of Me*, which, along with Martin’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* adaptation, *Roxanne*, would be among his most adventurous outings. Martin is amiably self-deprecating throughout, though he sees fit to praise the two critically panned *Cheaper by the Dozen* films, which found success at the box office. If, because of all of his years performing in front of live audiences, he thought he’d segue easily into film acting, his first movie disabused him of that notion. On his discomfort at watching his own performances, he notes, “If you think I’m being too sensitive, try watching a film of yourself for two hours in close-up and come out unscathed.” Martin remembers encounters and/or co-starring gigs with a bevy of famous performers and wryly suggests why his film career ran out of gas: “I lost interest in movies at exactly the same time the movies lost interest in me.” For his part, Bliss gets to ad lib in the section “And Other Diversions,” a collection of *New Yorker*-style cartoons that are characteristically witty but don’t connect to the rest of the text.

A diverting interlude with two exceptionally clever souls.

**THE BURNOUT CHALLENGE**

Managing People’s Relationships With Their Jobs

Maslach, Christina & Michael P. Leiter

Harvard Univ. (272 pp.)

$27.95 | Nov. 15, 2022

978–0–6745–101–4

Strategies for a healthy workplace. Psychologist Maslach, creator of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and Leiter, an organizational psychologist and consultant, offer a well-grounded examination of the causes of widespread job dissatisfaction and burnout along with proposals for solutions. “At a time when leaders extol the virtues of respectful workplaces and engaging teamwork,” they note, “complaints of incivility, abuse, and bullying run rampant.” If workers feel “ignored, limited, manipulated, distrusted, and undermined,” they become increasingly frustrated. Chronic exhaustion, cynicism, and a feeling of ineffectiveness are caused by problems that include work overload, breakdown of community, and workers’ sense of a lack of control—problems that became exacerbated during the pandemic, when working at home eroded boundaries between jobs and private life. Because burnout has been stigmatized as a sign of weakness, workers “are often reluctant to self-identify as having this problem or needing help.” The authors, though, see burnout as “a social phenomenon” that needs to be addressed by organizational solutions. Although a “massive self-care industry” advises getting enough sleep and eating healthy foods, these suggestions alone will not eliminate burnout, which is caused by a mismatch between workers and workplace environments. These mismatches, the authors have found, can be discovered through direct input from workers and managers, surveys, and organizational assessments. In an appendix, they present an informal questionnaire designed for a worker’s self-assessment. Once the area of a problem mismatch is identified, employers should consider ways to pivot to improve the job-person relationship—e.g., creating a sustainable workload, nurturing a supportive work community, and giving workers ample choice and control. The authors’ approach to problem-solving “combines the power of collaboration, customization, and commitment. These ‘three C’s’ all serve to boost participation” and can lead to lasting improvements. “Essential to any pivot,” they add, “is to pose a basic question: What will success look like?”

Thoughtful advice for managers and employers.

**DISABILITY PRIDE**

Dispatches From a Post–ADA World

Mattlin, Ben

Beacon Press (264 pp.)

$26.95 | Nov. 15, 2022

978–0–8070–3645–7

A disabled journalist charts the progress his community has made since the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990, but he is clear that “we are not resting on our laurels.” Born with spinal muscular atrophy, Mattlin offers unique insights into disabled people’s fights for civil rights, the many faces of ableism, and the emergence of a spirit of disability pride. “The idea of disability has shifted from a medical signifier to an emblem of cultural identity,” writes the author, and he explains all five main “titles” of the ADA and follows the path of its many amendments and implications. Most significantly, the author expands the parameters of *disability* to include those with hidden disabilities, chronic illnesses, cognitive and intellectual disabilities, and autism spectrum disorders. He makes convincing arguments that “poverty is linked to high incidences of every disability type” and that White privilege is a continuing problem in mainstream disability circles. The author laments the flawed representations of disabilities in Greek myth, Shakespearean drama, and contemporary film and TV. “The only disability figures in the media were Captain Hook or villains in James Bond,” said a disabled male model whose “ruggedly” handsome face and “rippling” muscles prove that “disability doesn’t have to be ugly,” as actor Jillian Mercado notes on her agency’s website. Mattlin cites
relevant public personalities such as Ali Stroker, the first actor in a wheelchair to win a Tony Award. The author also describes “adaptive apparel” that meets the needs and tastes of disabled people and introduces some stand-up comedians living with disability, using humor as a tool of awareness.

Illuminating portraits of disability activism with much to teach nondisabled readers.

**A SPECTRE, HAUNTING**

*Miéville, China*

Haymarket Books (202 pp.)

$50.00 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-64259-893-3

A passionate argument for the continued, urgent relevance of *The Communist Manifesto*.

Though perhaps best known in the U.S. as an award-winning writer of speculative fiction, Miéville has both a doctorate in international relations and a long history as a Marxist. As such, he comes to the topic not as a dilettante but as a learned apostle of the communist creed. The author escorts readers through the *Manifesto’s* origins and publication history before launching into a summary of the document itself. (Samuel Moore’s 1888 English translation is appended for reference along with several introductions to various editions.) Miéville’s exegesis draws on both external commentators and co-authors Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’ other writings to inform it. It is when Miéville enters into dialogue with the *Manifesto’s* critics that his own writing comes most robustly to life. In addressing those who take swipes at the document’s religiosity, the author responds with an unabashed dialogue with the document’s religiosity, the author responds with an unabashed dialogue with the document’s religiosity, the author responds with an unabashed dialogue with the document’s religiosity, the author responds with an unabashed dialogue with the document’s religiosity, the author responds with an unabashed dialogue with the

Rupture as Rapture. We have nothing to lose but our chains.

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**NAKAM**

*The Holocaust Survivors Who Sought Full-Scale Revenge*

*Porat, Dina*

Trans. by Mark L. Levinson

Stanford Univ. (392 pp.)

$40.00 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-0356-7018-1

An intricate, chilling portrait of a group of Jewish “avengers” of the Holocaust.

In this work translated from the Hebrew, Porat, former chief historian of Yad Vashem, focuses on Abba Kovner and other members of the group that planned to take revenge against Germany’s leaders for the Nazi Holocaust. The book is an account of their efforts to unite Jewish survivors behind that goal, as well as their struggles with the day-to-day reality of survival once they had made their decision. Through Porat’s compelling narrative, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and determination involved in the survivors’ pursuit of retribution.

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**EXCUSE ME WHILE I DISAPPEAR**

*Tales of Midlife Mayhem*

*Notaro, Laurie*

Little A (256 pp.)

$24.95 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-5420-3352-7

A journalist and bestselling author reflects on being a 50-something “girl gone gray” in a series of hilarious personal essays.

Notaro, the author of three novels and numerous essay collections, begins her latest in a state of wonderment: Somehow, five decades of hard living had not managed to land her “in rehab, prison, or an urn.” Her roots looked like “someone had clearly poured powdered sugar on my head,” and her midlife had rendered her socially and sexually invisible. As the author shows, getting older is not easy, even for a hardened, punk rock-loving Gen Xer like Notaro, who had survived everything from Hamburger Helper to Aqua Net. She now had to deal with new challenges, including vanishing eyebrow hair; sagging breasts and ankles that “look like a python who snuck out of its cage at a pet store and paid a visit to a colony of rats”; and making grown-up decisions like taking an office job with the benefits she needed for her ill husband, a job in which she and other graying women were constantly ignored by younger colleagues. Turning 50 also meant a colonoscopy for a body that had already endured years of medical indignities, including gynecologists coming at her “with ultrasound-enabled dildos[3]” or radiologists sandwiching her chest on equipment that transformed breasts into “the center of a plexiglass panini.” Musing on the aging process itself, Notaro wonders at the irony of being told about the facts of life before she understood what they meant, then being left in middle age to watch her body change and hormones die “like they’re on a muddy battlefield in France in 1917.” Witty and full of sarcastic energy, the author fearlessly tackles what it means to get old not only as a modern woman, but as a member of the “coolest”—if at times clueless—generation of the late 20th century.

Unplugged, refreshingly off the hook, and consistently entertaining.
Moreover, they strongly believed that the blood of the Nokmim (1918-1987), a partisan fighter from the Vilna ghetto (in present-day Lithuania) who became a messianic figure to the waves of traumatized young survivors of the Nazi death camps. Kovner’s manifesto of resistance against the Germans resonated mightily to those “whose lives were reduced to rubble.” For the millions who suffered under the Nazi regime, “life as it had been was replaced by forced relocation, torture, hunger, physical exhaustion, and disease.” Kovner gathered around 50 devoted men and women in a carefully orchestrated underground army, and the group devised two potential plans for wide-scale revenge on the Germans. Plan A involved the poisoning of water sources in several major German cities, while Plan B would target SS and other German prisoners of war in Allied camps. Porat presents many fresh, moving perspectives from the archives, enlivening the narrative with important information gleaned from her interviews with many of the surviving Nokmim (“avengers”). As she chronologically recounts the group’s incredible story, she circles back to the question of why these young people would sacrifice everything for revenge. “They adopted vengeance as an indispensable stage in their rehabilitation,” she writes, “without which they could not return to life, society, and social order.” Moreover, they strongly believed that the blood of the murdered demanded recompense, and the specter of antisemitism still loomed. Porat also tells the little-understood story of how Kovner navigated the more moderate Yishuv (administrators of the Land of Israel) and Haganah (Zionist military) leaders, whose postwar focus was on the rescue and transit of survivors and the construction of a political homeland for the future. Many of the Nokmim kept their silence for decades and rued the Germans. Porat presents many fresh, moving perspectives from the archives, enlivening the narrative with important information gleaned from her interviews with many of the surviving Nokmim (“avengers”). As she chronologically recounts the group’s incredible story, she circles back to the question of why these young people would sacrifice everything for revenge. “They adopted vengeance as an indispensable stage in their rehabilitation,” she writes, “without which they could not return to life, society, and social order.” Moreover, they strongly believed that the blood of the murdered demanded recompense, and the specter of antisemitism still loomed. Porat also tells the little-understood story of how Kovner navigated the more moderate Yishuv (administrators of the Land of Israel) and Haganah (Zionist military) leaders, whose postwar focus was on the rescue and transit of survivors and the construction of a political homeland for the future. Many of the Nokmim kept their silence for decades and rued their inability to carry out their “divine retribution on a cosmic, biblical scale.”

A valuable work of Holocaust research and Jewish history.

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**NO FILTER**

**The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful**

Porizkova, Paulina

Open Field (240 pp.)

$27.00 | Nov 15, 2022

978-0-593-49352-6

An iconic supermodel offers insights into lessons learned from a life that has been anything but perfect. Porizkova (b. 1965) ruled the catwalks in the 1980s and ‘90s, but the hard truths behind her rise to fame and marriage to Ric Ocasek were buried under the outward glamour. In this collection of essays, she speaks candidly about the difficult childhood that included living as a Czech political refugee in Sweden, where, as a bullied teenager, she “frequently felt ugly” and endured her “flaws [being] discussed before me as though I couldn’t hear what they said.” Even when she began earning money as a model, high anxiety levels caused daily panic attacks. Her relationship with Ocasek began in youthful blindness. She could not see that the still-married musician’s demands—that she wear less revealing clothes, give up her gay male friends, and put his career and needs above hers—were symptomatic of the possessive behavior she accepted—and even cherished—because it made her feel she was “home.” The author writes that Ocasek was like a Russian tank, an occupying force she greeted with “flowers and cheers.” Growing older brought clarity regarding an increasingly troubled personal life and the fact that her looks had transformed her from a real person into an object. It also forced her to confront the fears that drove her to seek small procedures like eye lifts to fight not only the loss of beauty, but also increasing social invisibility as a woman. Ocasek’s sudden death and his claim, written in his will, that she “abandoned” him, drove Porizkova into a painful period of litigation and soul-searching from which she emerged determined to “be heard” for who she was rather than as the “manufactured image” into which she had been made. The occasional repetitiveness and fairly haphazard organization of these essays make the book feel unpolished, but its raw honesty will appeal to Porizkova’s many fans. A flawed but well-intentioned self-examination.

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**HOW TO STAND UP TO A DICTATOR**

The Fight for Our Future

Ressa, Maria

Harper/HarperCollins (352 pp.)

$29.99 | Nov 29, 2022

978-0-06-325751-1

A Filipino journalist who won the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize describes her ongoing fight against political corruption and online disinformation.

For years, Ressa has been a brave and consistent critic of technology’s increasing power in affecting people’s behavior, and she and the news site she co-founded in 2012, Rappler, have been consistently targeted by the regimes of Rodrigo Duterte and his successor, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Like Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov, with whom she shared the Nobel, the author has battled the information warfare tactics of dictators and remains under constant threat of harassment and arrest. In this engaging work, Ressa shares the story of her life and career, beginning with her immigration to the U.S. from the Philippines in 1973, when she was 10. Her early years in the U.S., she writes, were defined by three lessons: Always choose to learn, embrace your fear, and stand up to bullies. These lessons would follow her into a successful career as a journalist—first at CNN, where she served as the bureau chief in Manila and then Jakarta, followed by a role heading the news division at the Philippines network ABS-CBN. When she resigned over an ethics issue in 2010, she and some journalist friends began work on Rappler, with the intention of injecting the positive elements of social media into old-fashioned journalism. Increasingly, however, evenhanded journalists—who once served as reliable “gatekeepers of facts and information”—were being pushed aside by unscrupulous tech companies and manipulated by populist politicians like Duterte and Trump via
bots, fake accounts, and disinformation campaigns. These nefarious tactics led to the author's profound disillusionment with Facebook, in particular, which she now calls "one of the gravest threats to democracies around the world." Her courageous work has garnered well-deserved international attention, and her book serves as a readable, urgent plea for journalistic integrity, vigilance, and transparency. Amal Clooney, who serves as one of Ressa's attorneys, provides the foreword.

An indispensable journalist presents an impassioned, well-informed warning about vital global issues.

**ACCIDENTAL CONFLICT**

*America, China, and the Clash of False Narratives*

Roach, Stephen

Yale Univ (448 pp.)

$32.50 | Nov 29, 2022

978-0-300-25964-3

Thorough analysis of the current uneasy relationship between the U.S. and China.

Roach, a senior fellow at Yale’s Jackson Institute for Global Affairs and author of the prescient book *Unbalanced: The Codependency of America and China* (2014), finds the two largest world economies in a clash of dueling and incorrect narratives each holds about the other. Not so long ago, the U.S. and China needed each other to prop up their own flagging economies—China required external demand to support its "export-led" development strategy, while Americans relied on low-cost goods from China—but in recent years, they have undergone a trade war and a tech war. Now, argues the author, they face a new cold war. Both countries constantly seek economic growth, but they both have a savings problem: The Chinese have excessively high savings and low internal consumption, while Americans have little savings and high debt. In illustrating his theme of codependency, Roach breaks down the reasons behind this disparity, fed by the different "national dreams" of the two countries and the persistent "false narratives" they entertain about each other. Harkening back to the mid-1980s, U.S. officials have, for purposes of "political expediency," often blamed China for many economic problems in the form of intellectual theft, predatory tech practices, and cyberhacking. The author stresses that many of these issues are overblown, and he suggests three areas of focus for conflict resolution: climate change, global health, and cybersecurity. He also suggests "re-opening trade in both countries...loosening visa restrictions for students and journalists, and restarting educational exchanges like the US Fulbright Program." Finally, Roach delivers a thoughtful framework for moving from codependency to interdependency, involving a bilateral investment treaty and the establishment of a U.S.–China Secretariat. He concludes that "there is ample opportunity to exercise good faith."

A timely, fluid, readable assessment of a testy and rapidly changing global relationship.

**IN SICKNESS**

*A Memoir*

Rollins, Barrett

Post Hill Press (224 pp.)

$28.00 | Nov 15, 2022

978-1-63758-558-0

A wife conceals her cancer from her husband until, after 10 years, it becomes impossible.

At the beginning of this painfully moving memoir, Rollins, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, notes that he and his wife, Jane, "worked at the same place—we were doctors at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Harvard’s cancer hospital." As they walked to lunch one day, Jane collapsed, the result of a blood clot in her lungs—a consequence, the author learned to his dismay, of massive, metastatic breast cancer. When the ER doctor asked about her history with cancer, Rollins admitted that he "knew nothing about the hideous cancer that was threatening her life." After several days, Jane was well enough to return home. With cure out of the question, Rollins compellingly describes the remaining year of her life, mixing a detailed account of the complex nursing and medical care she received with the poignant story of their marriage and his attempts to cope with the circumstances. Readers will learn that his wife, although brilliant, charismatic, and popular at work and clearly in love with her husband, had her share of "quirky" personality traits. At home, she preferred to watch TV and play computer games, leaving housework, meals, shopping, and even driving to her husband. Although they had a few close friends from work, she did not enjoy socializing with other family members, including his daughter from a previous marriage, with whom he was extremely close. Rollins had long been aware that Jane "never had a primary care doctor and never went to a routine medical appointment," and he learned—after discovering a hidden trove of self-prescribed medication—that she had been treating herself for her cancer. The author also looks back on his own life, attempting to explain why he yielded such unwavering control to his wife.

Other peoples’ marriages are often beyond comprehension, but this is an eloquent, compulsively readable account.

**AMERICAN RESISTANCE**

*The Inside Story of How the Deep State Saved the Nation*

Rothkopf, David

PublicAffairs (288 pp.)

$29.00 | Nov 1, 2022

978-1-5417-0063-5

A revealing book about how government professionals—the so-called "deep state"—kept the Trump administration from wreaking even more havoc than it did.
While bound to be taken in some circles as an apology for Democrats, this close-up report of the chaotic Trump presidency is a solid, well-reported record of applied American patriotism. From numerous interviews as well as evidence already publicly available, political scientist Rothkopf, author of Traitor: A History of American Betrayal From Benedict Arnold to Donald Trump, among other books, builds an unchallengeable case that a host of government officials "worked together to keep a dangerous, unhinged, ill-prepared president and his closest allies from doing irreparable damage to the United States, its people, our allies, and to the planet as a whole." It’s the best work yet on how federal employees, military as well as civilian, helped preserve democracy from the "dark state" during the gravest constitutional peril the U.S. has faced since 1860. As with the Watergate crisis, whose full story took a half-century to be known, the history of the Trump presidency will remain incomplete for decades. Yet while this can’t be a full treatment, Rothkopf adds useful texture as well as new, sometimes striking, details to what’s already known about how Republican, Democratic, and nonpartisan officials worked in the shadows to limit damage from the Trump administration’s incompetence and corruption. In the most striking chapter, the author offers astonishing new evidence about how senior military officers, such as James Mattis and Mark Milley, accepted orders but slow-walked them to uselessness to prevent the corruption of both the military command structure and its ethos at the hands of amateurs, opportunists, and what witnesses termed "morons" and "cowards." Rothkopf also rescues the reputations of some officials, such as Kirstjen Nielsen, secretary of homeland security, while further lowering those of White House advisers Stephen Miller and Jared Kushner.

A searing yet optimistic account of how true constitutional patriots preserved American democracy.

**PAIN IS WEAKNESS LEAVING THE BODY**

**A Marine’s Unbecoming**

Rubin, Lyle Jeremy

Bold Type Books (304 pp.)

$29.00 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-1-64503-709-5

A former Marine officer recounts his disillusionment with the American military-industrial complex.

When he arrived for officer training before being sent to Afghanistan, Rubin was given a long list of bullet points assembled by officers who had been in the field, with recommendations such as buying a new canteen in the place of the nasty government-issued one and carrying tweezers to rid oneself of ticks. “The best hit, though,” he writes, “was the simple warning that it was all going to be very fucked, it was designed that way, and the most you could do was mitigate the worst of it through nonstop anticipation.” That was exactly so, he found. Having been through enlisted basic training and experienced its grinding dehumanization by which young men and women “became clumsy beasts, scared beasts, and self-conscious beasts, unsure of how beastly to be and when,” the former college Republican found himself wondering about the uselessness of a war in which everything was transactional. For ordinary Afghans in the countryside, it was normal to greet GIs one day and Taliban fighters the next, hoping neither would destroy their homes; for Marines, it was enough to stay alive when “everyone was getting fucked by the green weenie in the suck.” Rubin gets a little textbook-ish when, returning stateside to wrestle with depression and PTSD, he mounts a critique of “the carceral state and the warfare state and the capitalist state,” but there’s a sharp point to his anger over lives and treasure wasted in the name of profit for a few as well as regret for having serviced a machine centered on murder. Though lacking the street-smart fury of Ron Kovic’s Born on the Fourth of July or the literary merits of Anthony Swolford’s Jarhead, Rubin’s book is a rueful, heartfelt admonition.

A fierce denunciation of a pointless war “punctuated by little deaths and big deaths and then just death.”

**LIFE IS HARD**

How Philosophy Can Help Us Find Our Way

Setiya, Kieran

Riverhead (240 pp.)

$27.00 | Oct. 4, 2022

978-0-593-3821-0

A lighted path for dark times.

In his previous book, Midlife, Setiya, a professor of philosophy at MIT, called upon myriad thinkers for guidance in overcoming his anguish when his life seemed “like a mere accumulation of deeds” as he strived for professional success. Now, amid an ongoing pandemic, mass unemployment, the ravages of climate change, and the revival of fascism, he again looks to philosophy, history, film, and literature for solace and illumination. Life is hard, to be sure, but thinkers and artists from Aquinas to Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson to P.D. James, Descartes to Sartre, help him to craft a “map with which to navigate rough terrain.” Along with devastating global issues, one’s sense of tumult and struggle can be fomented by physical disability and pain, psychic pain, loss, grief, a sense of personal failure, and injustice. Setiya was 27 when his own experience with chronic pain began suddenly with “a band of tension running through my groin.” For more than a decade, the pain defied diagnosis, and it still besets him. Pain and disability, he reflects, shape our relationship to our bodies as well as “our relation to others and their relation to us.” For Setiya, the pain’s positive result was in generating his “presumptive compassion” for other people’s experiences. Although he considers himself an “inveterate loner,” the author underscores the importance of fostering connections. From Aristotle, the “great theorist of friendship,” and others, Setiya sees that the way out of loneliness is “through the needs of other people.” Confronting a feeling of powerlessness in the face of structural injustice or systemic problems, he...
Along the way, he examines a number of experiments that have provided yet more reason for doubt, and reason to pause, on the road to fatalism. Sheldon argues that criminals, for example, are not responsible for their actions and that their actions are the fault of everyone but themselves. He also cites evidence showing that a belief in determinism negatively affects them in many ways. The results of these experiments provide yet more reason for doubt, and reason to pause, on the road to fatalism. Sheldon generally comes down on the side of free will, although he acknowledges the difficulty of defining it and locating its origins. Sheldon can see the intellectual sense in this idea but cannot accept that humans are merely the sum of parts and influences. He has little time for determinists who argue that criminals, for example, are not responsible for their actions and that their actions are the fault of everyone but themselves. 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**A BOOK OF DAYS**

Smith, Patti  
Random House (400 pp.)  
$22.99 | Nov. 15, 2022  
978-0-593-44854-0

Smith returns with a photo-heavy book of days, celebrating births, deaths, and the quotidian, all anchored by her distinctive style.

In 2018, the musician and National Book Award–winning author began posting on Instagram, and the account quickly took off. Inspired by the captioned photo format, this book provides an image for every day of the year and descriptions that are by turns intimate, humorous, and insightful, and each bit of text adds human depth to the image. Smith, who writes and takes pictures every day, is clearly comfortable with the social media platform—which “has served as a way to share old and new discoveries, celebrate birthdays, remember the departed, and salute our youth”—and the material translates well to the page. The book, which is both visually impactful and lyrically moving, uses Instagram as a point of departure, but it goes well beyond to plumb Smith’s extensive archives. The deeply personal collection of photos includes old Polaroid images, recent cellphone snapshots, and much-thumbed film prints, spanning across decades to bring readers from the counterculture movement of the 1960s to the present. Many pages are taken up with the graves and birthdays of writers and artists, many of whom the author knew personally. We also meet her cat, “Cairo, my Abyssinian. A sweet little branch, or a morning worktable, or the sculpted headstone of a beloved poet.”

A powerful melding of image and text inspired by Instagram yet original in its execution.

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**CHUCK BERRY**

**An American Life**

Smith, RJ  
Hachette (432 pp.)  
$32.00 | Nov. 8, 2022  
978-0-306-92163-6

A capable warts-and-all biography of one of the founding fathers of rock ‘n’ roll.

Chuck Berry (1926-2017), writes Smith, was a “lifelong tinkerer, one of the great American makers of the twentieth century” who “longed to build something big.” Even though he protested that rock had many origins, he was the great synthesizer, using his profound knowledge of many genres, including and perhaps especially country music, to blend them into a percussive, hip-moving new form. Berry was so knowledgeable a master of country music, then considered the sole province of White musicians, that he was able to correct Ernest Tubb on a rendering of Jimmie Rodgers. Tubb, at the center of traditional country, returned the favor by recording “a more reserved version of Berry’s “Thirty Days,” while everyone from Elvis to Marty Robbins to the Rolling Stones and the Beatles covered Berry as well. Widely admired by audiences White and Black and himself seemingly indifferent to race, Berry still had to endure Jim Crow racism and all that followed. He was even the subject of some resentment among other Black performers, Muddy Waters and Ike Turner among them, who at the time lacked his crossover appeal. Plenty of trouble dogged Berry, much of his own making, as when he transported a 14-year-old girl across state lines for, as the grand jury noted, “immoral purposes” and later videotaped women using the restroom of a restaurant he owned. Smith ventures a little psychoanalysis along the way (“He didn’t feel worthy in some basic sense”), but while dealing with some admittedly sordid and discomfiting matters, Smith always returns to the music, which, of course, was world-changing. On that note, Smith’s book is both a corrective and complement to Berry’s 1987 autobiography.

The best life of Berry in several years, though whether artist and art can be separated will be up to readers.

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**NEWSROOM CONFIDENTIAL**

Lessons (and Worries) From an Ink-Stained Life  
Sullivan, Margaret  
St. Martin’s (288 pp.)  
$28.99 | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-1-250-28190-6

A veteran journalist recounts her life in the newsroom while prescribing cures for the media’s current woes.

“If one side claims it’s raining outside, and the other side claims the sun is shining, it’s not journalists’ job to quote both equally; it’s their job to walk outside, look at the sky, and report the truth.” So writes Sullivan, the media columnist for the Washington Post, who has been covering various beats since being lured into journalism by the glamour portrayed in the film version of All the President’s Men. The author found little glamour in her work at the Buffalo News, where she wrote about poverty, pollution, and political malfeasance and learned a lesson or two about how to overcome White privilege in a largely Black city. She joined the New York Times in the role of public editor, in which she acted as a post facto umpire on published pieces. The job, of short tenure by design so that the editor didn’t become part of the establishment, was full of fights. One obituary celebrated the domestic attributes of a subject in its lede before revealing that she was a distinguished scientist; concludes Sullivan, to the anger of the obituary writer, “the glories of her beef stroganoff should have been little more
than a footnote.” Small potatoes next to the biggest challenge she would face, though, when she moved to the Post and began covering Donald Trump’s countless distortions and lies, by which, thanks to his vengeful supporters, she “continually felt irrational anger like an unending blast of liquid poison from an industrial-strength hose.” The author, whose liberal perspective is occasionally heavy-handed, acknowledges that Trump helped change journalism: It need not be adversarial, she holds, but it will necessarily be that way if it tells the truth about liars, and objectivity is a less-desirable standard than truth in the face of endless mendacity.

A welcome memoir of time in the reportorial trenches.

COSMOGENESIS
An Unveiling of the Expanding Universe
Swimme, Brian Thomas
Counterpoint (336 pp.)
$27.00 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-64009-398-0

An evolutionary cosmologist analyzes the profound entanglements between the history of the universe and our understanding of that history.

Blending autobiography and science writing, Swimme, a professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies and co-creator and host of the PBS series Journey of the Universe, explores the concept of cosmogenesis, which describes the origin and evolution of the universe from primordial soup to human intelligence. The author’s breakthrough came when he realized that “I was evolving, that I was as much a development of the universe as were stars and galaxies. If I wanted to tell the story of the expanding universe and how it developed through time, I needed to include the story of my long struggle out of the structures of existence I had been born into.”

Taking this idea further, he ponders a statement famously uttered by Freeman Dyson, repeated in conversation with the author: “The universe—in some sense—must have known we were coming… The universe knew.” Swimme likens this idea to a human embryo “knowing” how to create a human nervous system endowed with an intelligence capable of performing incredible feats. In writing that is clear and free from complex jargon, the author argues that this integrated cosmological self is an overlooked aspect in scientific communities and that a “radically new vision of the universe” is needed to account for the fact that “we ourselves are constructions of the universe’s process.”

While the concepts he explores are fascinating, his reliance on the minute details of his life—what he calls “time-developmental experiences”—at times hogs down the trajectory of his argument even as he invites readers to participate in a mutual “transformation” as part of the “living universe.” Yet the overall message of the power of storytelling leaves readers with a new appreciation for how we view the universe’s history and ourselves within it.

An invigorating perspective on how science and spirituality inform the history of human experience.

LOST TO THE WORLD
A Memoir of Faith, Family, and Five Years in Terrorist Captivity
Taseer, Shahbaz
MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)
$28.00 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-0-374-19222-8

A Pakistani businessman recounts his harsh captivity under the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

On Aug. 6, 2011, Taseer, the son of a prominent Pakistani media tycoon and politician who was assassinated in January of the same year, was abducted on his way to his office in Lahore. The kidnappers hid Taseer first in a safe house in Lahore, then spirited him away to Mir Ali, the border region of Northern Waziristan run by warlords. The Uzbek cell was headed by the brutal terrorist Muhammad Ali, who seemed to enjoy tormenting Taseer with twisted Quranic logic and torturing him without mercy while being filmed to extort ransom money from his family. Ali considered Taseer his “golden goose,” and he made exorbitant demands that Taseer’s family could not meet. The kidnappers kept the author in squalid conditions, without electricity, “chained and barely able to move,” with nothing but a Quran to read. For the first time in his life, he notes, he began reading it “seriously,” and he challenged his captor on his fraudulent interpretation of the text and his “great pious superiority.”

Taseer maintained his courage and sanity by thinking about his father, who withstood months of solitary confinement in prison in the 1980s. After drone strikes on the camp, Taseer was moved to Ali’s home complex, and Ali’s compassionate mother-in-law put a stop to his torture. When full-scale war broke out between the Taliban and the government, Ali shifted allegiances from the Taliban to the Islamic State group. During the ensuing chaos, Taseer was able to slip away, ending four and a half years in captivity. The fluid, often dramatic narrative is punctuated with raw, graphic details, but the author stops short of rendering deep political or religious insights. Nonetheless, Taseer’s story alone makes the book a page-turner.

A rare story of actual survival from brutal terrorists.

CON/ARTIST
The Life and Crimes of the World’s Greatest Art Forger
Tetro, Tony & Giampiero Ambrosi
Hachette (288 pp.)
$29.00 | Nov. 22, 2022
978-0-506-82648-1

A successful, prolific art forger tells his remarkable story.

As a forger, Tetro made a fortune by making and selling fake works, and his memoir, co-authored by journalist Ambrosi, explains his
spectacular rise and dramatic fall. Though he showed artistic flair at an early age, his attempts to sell his original paintings went nowhere—not due to a lack of quality but because he was an unknown figure. He fell into forgery by accident and found there was good money in the business even though a lot of it went to dealers. Tetro realized that the best plan was not to copy paintings by famous artists but to emulate their style and then make up a story about how the piece had been found in a dusty attic or forgotten collection. A key part of the forgery process was the creation of fake certificates of authenticity and other paperwork. He learned how to make a painting look pleasingly aged and which artists were the bestsellers. Chagall, Dalí, and Miró were fairly easy. Picasso and Caravaggio were more difficult, but Tetro eventually worked out their methods. He even forged a Ferrari car. He was proud of his achievements, but eventually, the authorities closed in. Though he was convicted on a variety of charges, he was given probation and community service, which involved creating safety posters and painting neighborhood murals. It was a long way down, but he eventually managed to recover, finding some recognition as a painter of acknowledged fakes. The irony is not lost on him, and he has amusing things to say about people who have too much money and not enough sense. He also notes that forgery is a dying art, as the verification technology has become too sophisticated to fool. Tetro tells his rollicking story well, and the result is a unique narrative.

An entertaining account that shines a light onto a shady world as well as a personal story of hubris and redemption.

TUTANKHAMUN'S TRUMPET
Ancient Egypt in 100 Objects From the Boy King's Tomb
Wilkinson, Toby
Norton (496 pp.)
$35.00 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-393-53170-1

A fresh history of King Tut and his world, generously illustrated and lucidly written.

The ancient Egyptian obsession with burying important people in elaborate tombs has rewarded archaeologists with more Egyptian artifacts than those found for all other ancient civilizations combined. British journalist Wilkinson, author of many books on this subject, including A World Beneath the Sands, builds this expert history on items recovered from Tutankhamun's tomb, which, only lightly looted, contained more than 5,000 well-preserved objects and drawings, making it “the greatest archaeological discovery of all time.” Following tradition in the genre, the author includes a history of Egyptology, initially a sophisticated form of looting in which European antiquarians snapped up objects for their collections. By the 19th century, scholars had solidified the study of ancient Egypt, and the establishment of the Antiquities Service (by the British, who ruled Egypt) produced a steady stream of discoveries, capped by the bombshell of Howard Carter’s 1922 opening of Tutankhamun's tomb. Wilkinson writes that the early rulers of the Nile Valley were the first humans to exercise authority over a geographically extensive state, beginning around 3000 B.C.E. The pharaonic government endured unchanged—though often challenged—for three millennia until Cleopatra surrendered to Rome in 31 B.C.E. It remains the longest-lived nation in history; as the author notes, “a greater span of time separated the Great Pyramid from Cleopatra than separates her from our own age.” Even better, artifacts include innumerable written documents because papyrus preserves better than paper. Uniquely blessed with material, scholars have had no trouble filling multivolume tomes on ancient Egypt, but readers will have no regrets at the end of this one. Beginning not with “prehistoric” but “predynastic” people who settled in the river valley, he moves smoothly through the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, inevitably emphasizing religion but not ignoring politics and war as well as the surprisingly well-documented daily lives of the people. The book includes 50 black-and-white photos and 16 pages of color.

A well-written, beautifully produced piece of ancient history.
These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

**MADDIE AND MABEL** by Kari Allen; illus. by Tatjana Mai-Wys 64
**VOICES OF THE PEOPLE** by Joseph Bruchac .......................... 68
**TOO MANY PIGS AND ONE BIG BAD WOLF** by Davide Cali; illus. by Marianna Balducci ............................................................... 69
**A PLACE TO CALL HOME** by Lauren Castillo ................................... 70
**CELIA CRUZ** by Claudia Romo Edelman & William Alexander; illus. by Alexandra Beguez ................................................................. 76
**SMART** by Amy E. Herman with Heather MacLean ......................... 79
**SHE HOLDS UP THE STARS** by Sandra Laronde .................................. 85
**OUR STORY STARTS IN AFRICA** by Patrice Lawrence; illus. by Jeanetta Gonzales .............................................................. 86
**CURVE & FLOW** by Andrea J. Longy; illus. by Keith Mallett .......... 86
**JOÃO BY A THREAD** by Roger Mello; trans. by Daniel Hahn .......... 89
**ONLY THE BEST** by Kate Messner & Margaret E. Powell; illus. by Erin K. Robinson ................................................................. 90
**DIFFERENT** by Mónica Montañés; trans. by Laurence Schimek; illus. by Eva Sánchez Gómez ............................................................. 90
**WHAT’S YOUR NAME?** by Bethanie Deeney Murguia .................... 91
**HOW TO SEND A HUG** by Hayley Rocco; illus. by John Rocco ........ 94
**MY SELF, YOUR SELF** by Esmé Shapiro ........................................ 96
**BALLET KIDS** by Holly Sterling .......................................................... 97
**MEOW! THE TRUTH ABOUT CATS** by Annette Whipple .................. 100
**RISE UP WITH A SONG** by Diane Worthy; illus. by Helena Pérez García ................................................................................ 101

**I LOVE YOU, COCKATOOS!**
Aspinall, Sarah
Viking (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Dec. 20, 2022
978-0-593-32742-5

To err is...bird.
With crayon scribbles on the wall and toys strewn about, little Cockatoo appears very energetic. When his mama says how much she loves him, he questions: “Even when I’m grumpy and tired?” “Even when you’re grumpy and tired,”
Mama confirms. Papa and Aunt P also say how much they love him. But when Cockatoo dresses as a pirate and interrupts Mama’s bathtime and tracks mud through the house just when Aunt P is sitting down to have a delicious treat, their admonishments make Cockatoo feel less than loved. “Maybe Mama, Papa, and Aunt P didn’t love him ALL of the time after all?” Through comfort and snuggles, plus admitting their own mistakes (“Do you still love me even when I forget to put raisins in your porridge?” Aunt P asks), Cockatoo realizes their love will never end.

Some adult readers may wish that it was made clear that one can love someone but not love their actions. Regardless, for young tots searching for reassurance, this family of cockatoos has overflowing affection. Illustrations featuring vibrant colors—dominated by pinks and yellows—portraying an adorably anthropomorphic avian family make the love palpable. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

By turns funny and deeply heartening. (Picture-book biography. 3-5)

**ARTHUR WHO WROTE SHERLOCK**

Bailey, Linda  
Illus. by Isabelle Follath  
Tundra Books (56 pp.)  
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022  
978-0-7352-6925-5  
Series: Who Wrote Classics

The life story of a famous mystery writer.

Smoke wreathes a pipe-smoking silhouette, a magnifying glass and violin completing the opening mise-en-scène. Initial questions ask readers, “What if you wrote a story about a detective, and...the whole world loved [him]?” Then, as Bailey launches into an account of the author’s life, a young Arthur Conan Doyle sits on the floor of his Edinburgh home while his mother tells him and his unnamed sister fantastical stories. Doyle’s life includes many twists and turns. First he’s a poor medical student sacrificing a meal to buy books. Next, he has multiple adventures on the high seas and focuses on his writing while failing to establish a practice as an eye doctor. Each stage of his life and literary career is explained in a matter-of-fact tone, accessible though slightly dry. Long blocks of text on almost every page would make this challenging to read aloud, but the precise, detailed watercolor, pencil, and digital illustrations provide a lot to pore over. In addition to addressing Doyle’s eventual resentment for Sherlock Holmes, the story doesn’t shy away from describing Doyle’s father’s alcoholism, and in-depth backmatter provides more information about other compelling aspects of his life, like his interest in spiritualism and his defense of a “young Anglo-Indian lawyer victimized because of his race.” Most characters present as White. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An informative biography for an older picture-book audience. (sources) (Picture-book biography. 6-9)

**HOW DO MEERKATS ORDER PIZZA?**

Wild Facts About Animals and the Scientists Who Study Them  
Barker, Brooke  
Simon & Schuster (200 pp.)  
$16.99 | Nov. 22, 2022  
978-1-66590-160-4

From meerkats to bettongs, a look at animals all over the world.

There’s no shortage of books that present intriguing wildlife info to encourage a sense of wonder at the natural world. But by including stories about the scientists who study these animals, Barker sets her volume apart, making clear the connection between research and the factoids that engage us. Each section opens with a page that names the scientist and their field of study, highlights a few identifying features of the animal in text circles, and includes a sketch of the animal. Three to six spreads follow describing the creature and the methods the scientist uses to study them. The text is set off with white space and comics in panels with speech balloons full of commentary from the animals. Scientists who study white-tailed deer, roosters, jaguars, humpback whales, and more are included. The amusing, spare illustrations depict animals that are just as interested in the scientists’ research as readers will be. Also covered is a scientist whose studies of the ocean parallel some of the environmental issues mentioned in other sections. The scientists are racially diverse, as are the other people depicted in the illustrations. A concluding spread suggests ways readers can emulate the individuals profiled.

A pleasing and informative collection of animal facts—and the scientists responsible for unearthing them. (glossary) (Graphic nonfiction. 6-10)

**GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE KNOCKS**

Barrington, Gregory  
Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | Nov. 15, 2022  
978-0-06-289137-2

Who’s ready for a prequel? Just as readers are beginning a traditional retelling of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” a precocious, light-skinned, golden-locked child interrupts to clear things up. Did she eat the porridge? Yes. Did she break a chair? Also yes. Did she nap? OK, that’s a yes, too, but here’s the thing: The story started long before all that—it started when the bears came to visit Goldilocks. Goldilocks had just moved into her new home in the forest when the bears came to welcome her—with a pie! On this visit, Goldilocks’ chair was accidentally broken, and when Goldilocks went out to fetch some tools to fix it, the bears decided it was time to hibernate. Rude. After a seasonal sleep, the bears left and invited Goldilocks to
This year’s Kirkus Prize judges for Young Readers’ Literature—educator Junko Yokota, a prominent figure in the global children’s literature community, and Kirkus critic Alec B. Chunn, a librarian and 2021 Caldecott Award selection committee member—have chosen their six finalists from 512 eligible Kirkus-starred titles.

In late October they will be joined by two more judges, award-winning New Kid author Jerry Craft and Kirkus young readers’ editor Laura Simeon, to help choose the winner of the $50,000 prize.

The sheer variety of astonishing, delightful, memorable reads under consideration made this first round of selections, the result of many hours of reading and discussion, quite challenging. Without further ado, we’re proud to present our slate of finalists.

PICTURE BOOKS

Coffee, Rabbit, Snowdrop, Lost by Betina Birkjær, illustrated by Anna Margrethe Kjærgaard, translated by Siénée Quirke Køngerskov (Enchanted Lion): A child observes as Grandpa loses first words, then abilities and memories. Birkjær’s matter-of-fact text, translated from Danish, and Kjærgaard’s graceful, impressionistic illustrations are both sophisticated and child-friendly. Gentle yet forthright, this stirring, evocative picture book makes a topic that even adults find difficult accessible for a young audience.

The Year We Learned To Fly by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López (Nancy Paulsen Books): Encouraged by their grandmother to “use those beautiful and brilliant minds of yours,” two Black siblings facing a range of challenges, from boredom to a move to a new neighborhood, find themselves taking flight through the power of imagination—a talent, they learn, that has its roots in the perseverance of their enslaved ancestors. López’s vibrant images match Woodson’s rousing verse beat for beat in this picture book that will bolster young ones confronting troubles of their own.

MIDDLE-GRADE

The Golden Hour by Niki Smith (Little, Brown): In the wake of witnessing an act of violence at school, Manuel, a young Latine boy, grapples with PTSD while working with his classmates on a project. Though this tender, perceptive graphic novel focuses on Manuel’s turmoil, it’s also a tale of quiet joy as the protagonist finds solace in friendships, a blossoming queer romance, and a newfound passion for photography.

The Troubled Girls of Dragomir Academy by Anne Ursu (Walden Pond Press/HarperCollins): “Who does the story serve?” This critical question lies at the heart of this remarkably original, attention-grabbing fantasy that shines a spotlight on the ways manipulation of history is used to justify gender bias. Twelve-year-old Marya Lupu is banished to a repressive boarding school along with other “troubled”—or, rather, troublesome—girls. Jolted out of trusting acceptance, she begins to unravel the lies they’ve been fed.

YOUNG ADULT

Himawari House by Harmony Becker (First Second): This extraordinary work demonstrates the emotional resonance graphic novels can have. After high school, biracial (White and Japanese) Nao moves from America to a shared house in Tokyo. She and her housemates bond across linguistic and cultural differences, quickly forming the passionate friendships of youths navigating life’s challenges together. This multilingual title accessibly conveys the joys and bewilderment of being immersed in a new language environment.

How You Grow Wings by Rimma Ongoseta (Algonquin): This unforgettable, emotionally sophisticated novel explores universal themes of familial and cultural bias and dysfunction in ways that are grounded in a richly evoked Nigerian context. Cheta’s and Zam’s lives—shaped by their mother’s (and broader society’s) explicit preference for compliant Zam over rebellious Cheta—are radically divergent. The sisters, buffeted by sexism, colorism, and socio-economic divisions, strive in their own ways to lead fulfilling lives.

Mahnaz Dar and Laura Simeon are young readers’ editors.
It’s not too hot; it’s not too cold—it’s just mediocre. (Picture book. 6-8)

MAYA AND THE LORD OF SHADOWS

Barron, Rena
Clarion/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$16.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-0-358-10633-3
Series: Maya and the Rising Dark, 3

The evil Lord of Shadows makes his move and the godlings-in-training at Chicago’s Jackson Middle School rise up to help their orisha mentors save the universe in this follow-up to 2021’s Maya and the Return of the Godlings.

Being still in the early stages of learning to control their various powers, Maya Abeola and her classmates continue to be schooled at every turn by the Lord of Shadows and his darkbringer minions—particularly after the veil that keeps him from this world is finally torn open in the school library and darkbringer minions—particularly after the veil that keeps him and outfought, Maya never loses heart, and with help from her

cartoonish rather than threatening, and the final joke of the bears inviting her over is a little too expected. The digital illustrations try to capture some of the zaniness, but the fairy-tale magic just isn’t there. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

It’s not too hot; it’s not too cold—it’s just mediocre. (Picture book. 6-8)

HEART FINDS

Berry, Jaime
Little, Brown (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-0-316-39047-7

Mabel's sixth grade year challenges her in unexpected ways.

Narrator Mabel is bright, observant, and an inveterate punster who wears Doc Martens with everything. The summer’s end change in her lifelong friendship with neighbor Ashley might have been the most bewildering and unpleasant thing that could happen to Mabel at the start of sixth grade. But when her beloved Grampa has a stroke and must move for a time to assisted living, Mabel is distraught and concerned with protecting and defending his collections. A former banker, Grampa has spent recent years scavenging for treasures he finds in dumpsters and at garage sales, repurposing them or sometimes selling them for cash. He and Mabel have had a routine, including weekly visits to a local pawnshop and a thrift store in their Oklahoma town and watching a television show about unexpected finds. He knows “how to take things that look a mess and make them right again.” Mabel's relationship with her competitive mother, a talented wedding planner, is less easy and comfortable. Mabel believes if she can help her mother finance her grandfather’s care, she can save his house full of salvaged treasures. At the same time, she struggles with navigating her changing friendships and relationship with her sometimes-prickly mom. The characters read White.

Sure-handed storytelling and a resilient, extremely likable young hero. (Fiction. 9-13)

HEART STRING

Boynton-Hughes, Brooke
Chronicle Books (40 pp.)
$17.99 | Dec. 20, 2022
978-1-4521-8165-3

A rainbow-hued string swirls from one character to the next, creating a glow of kinship wherever it lands.

An adult with brown skin and cornrows hugs a lighter-skinned child with short, black hair. The youngster pulls a wagon containing a plant and watering can down the street; the child's string enters a window and goes into a light-skinned, elderly person. The simple, repetitive text, which initially seemed to be directed to the child, takes on a more universal feeling—wisdom imparted from reader to listener: “There is a string, / an invisible string, / that ties my heart / to yours. // Even if we have not met yet, // my heart is tied to yours.” The cord enters a variety of diverse people and visits a birthday party; a pet burial, and a community garden and crosses mountains, deserts, and oceans. Ultimately, the child from the first spread offers garden produce to the elderly neighbor. The notion that our humanity connects us is a worthy message, as is the idea that even when
separated from loved ones, something binds us. However, these concepts have been addressed more successfully, with a stronger framing story, as in Patrice Karst's popular *The Invisible String* (2018), illustrated by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff. Boynton-Hughes offers a catalog of situations rather than a fully developed protagonist; the charming visuals don’t completely compensate for the resulting lack of emotional investment. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

For adults wanting to teach world harmony, though it likely won’t resonate with kids. *(Picture book. 3-6)*

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**I AM OKAY TO FEEL**

*Brown, Karamo & Jason “Rachel” Brown*  
*Illus. by Diobelle Cerna*  
*Zando* (40 pp.)  
$18.99 | Nov 8, 2022  
978-1-63893-010-5

Queer Eye star Karamo Brown and his son Jason “Rachel” Brown affirm that all feelings—even negative ones—are OK.

A round-faced boy with brown skin, big brown eyes, and a bright smile walks outside, talking with his dad about feelings. With the son’s speech printed in blue and Dad’s in black, the boy announces that he’s happy and shows it by jumping and spinning while Dad dances. The book’s palette, which often reflects the boy’s emotional state, shifts drastically when a thunderstorm blows in as the sky swirls with patterns in deep blue and purple, and a thick yellow lightning bolt blasts through—a dramatic scene that represents the boy’s perception of the turbulent weather as he sits on the ground crying, hugging his knees. Dad assures him that it’s all right to feel and express fear and helps him calm these negative emotions by encouraging him to stretch and breathe deeply. While the book’s lesson is conveyed in a slightly heavy-handed manner, it’s a good message, and readers will appreciate seeing a story that centers a Black father and son dispensing the stereotype that men and boys—especially those of color—don’t or shouldn’t express emotions. The backmatter includes an emotion wheel with the boy showing a range of facial expressions, accompanied by activities and questions. The acronym “FEEL OKAY” offers opportunities to practice discussing emotions. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A useful primer for socioemotional growth. *(authors’ note)*  
*(Picture book. 4-7)*

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**BRUCHAC, JOSEPH**

*Reycraft Books* (96 pp.)  
$18.95 | Nov 1, 2022  
978-1-4788-7516-1

Biographical profiles of 34 Indigenous Americans, rendered as poems, are illustrated by nearly 30 enrolled tribal artists.

Bruchac’s introduction dispels stubborn stereotypes about Native people, disputing that their time was “back then, not in the present—or the future.” By presenting profiles chronologically, from The Peacemaker (circa 1000 C.E.) to Wilma Mankiller (1945-2010), he elegantly unspools a more nuanced Native history. Free verse, arranged in stanzas with short lines and simple language, renders complex historical figures relatable for their courage, perseverance, and passion. While some of the subjects—Pocahontas, Geronimo, Jim Thorpe, and others—are covered in student curricula, Bruchac provides unique details and a fresh approach. He refutes the tired trope of a “romance” between preteen Pocahontas and John Smith, explaining that a White observer misinterpreted Smith’s ritual adoption by the Powhatan Nation as violence, mistaking the girl’s ceremonial role as intercessory. Warriors, including women, defended their lands against Spanish, British, and American invaders. Po’Pay (circa 1630-1688) helped unify the Pueblo villages against the Spanish colonizers, effectively repelling them for 12 years. Others bridged tribal and mainstream cultures through law, medicine, activism, religion, and art. Throughout, Bruchac meticulously details how the successive colonizers’ brutality, deceit, and coercion scarred both individual members and tribal communities. The stellar art, representing varied media and styles, reifies tribal reverence and often uses humor, irony, and pop-cultural references to skewer stereotypes.

A brilliant integration of Indigenous American art and history. *(biographical thumbnails, author’s note)*  
*(Historical poetry. 10-14)*

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**BAD KITTY DOES NOT LIKE VALENTINE’S DAY**

*Bruel, Nick*  
*Roaring Brook Press* (24 pp.)  
$9.99 | Nov 8, 2022  
978-1-250-74995-6  
Series: Bad Kitty

Bruel’s fractious feline takes on another holiday.

This time, Bad Kitty is not happy because while Puppy got piles of pink and red and purple punny valentines, she got zero. When prompted to think of all the things she has done since last Valentine’s Day, she remembers stealing all the eggs at Easter, scaring light-skinned Uncle Murray on Halloween, and knocking over the Christmas tree. Suddenly, she becomes anxious: What if no one loves her? Maybe if she gives someone a valentine, she will get one. Puppy, dressed as Cupid (and drooling as usual), seems an available candidate. However, Kitty’s attempts are less than loving. “Roses are red, / Violets are blue, / Sugar is sweet, / YOU SMELL BAD!” Her second attempt is even worse. Third time’s the charm, when she admits to maybe liking Puppy, and he eats it up (literally). When he coughs up a reply (again, literally), Kitty loves her valentine...but Valentine’s Day? Too drooly. Kitty’s scads of fans will be in love with this short holiday confection. Those not into the mushy stuff will
be right there with her, and all will enjoy the four tear-out valen-
tines that come with the book. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A taste of holiday hilarity while fans wait for the next chap-
ter book. *(Picture book. 2-8)*

**TOO MANY PIGS AND ONE BIG BAD WOLF**

**A Counting Story**

Cali, Davide
Illus. by Marianna Balducci
Tundra Books (36 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-7352-6991-0

Will the pigs’ storytelling ever please the big bad wolf?
It’s a battle of wits. Back-and-forth dialogue between the pigs and the wolf makes clear that the wolf is a demanding editor. Most tales that the pigs tell are too short. Some veer off topic. Other stories lack specificity. The wolf wants a story with a “beginning and a middle and an end.” The pigs try. At the end of each story, the wolf almost always eats the pigs. The pigs are creative. They describe a soccer game. They write a story with 26 pigs (one for each letter of the alphabet) and one with 29 pigs (one for each day of the month—it’s February and a leap year). They even write math-based stories, but the wolf is still not satisfied. However, in a logical but still surprising ending, there is a clear victor. Readers who carefully watch the wolf’s face and posture will get hints. The illustrations, an inspired blend of illustration and photography, depict the pigs as beads grouped along an abacus. The pigs’ faces are expressive, with interesting details like a doctor’s coat and fun hats. The sometimes numbered or lettered pig beads shift from side to side and multiply as each spread’s story requires. The result is a clever take on metafiction that will appeal to both budding mathematicians and writers. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Creative visuals and storytelling make for an absorbing read and a great bridge for both math and writing activities. *(Picture book. 5-8)*

**I CAN’T DO WHAT?**

**Strange Laws and Rules From Around the World**

Camlot, Heather
Illus. by Mike Deas
Red Deer Press (112 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Sept. 1, 2022
978-0-88995-618-6

A fascinating (and sometimes disturbing) look at bizarre laws and rules around the world, gearing readers toward action and advocacy.

Exploring international, national, and local legislation, this guide is designed to help readers not only understand world cultures, but engage in meaningful action such as speaking up when just laws are ignored or challenging ones that need to be altered. Understanding the law can also be vital when traveling, as many examples show. Some laws explored here are silly and pointless; others are tremendously unfair and disproportionately target certain marginalized groups, such as women and racial or religious minorities. The four major sections cover general living, sports, the entertainment industry and arts, and children’s lives. The book also describes the consequences for breaking certain laws. Some cases represent positive changes, such as requiring helmets for ice hockey to protect the players. Slightly confusing is the inclusion of common customs or practices—such as Japanese students’ regular cleaning of their schools—that are neither rules nor laws in the sense of most of the other content. Each section ends with a fun quiz. Cartoonlike pictures on many pages as well as speech bubbles sharing fun (or gruesome) statistics break up the text. The conclusion offers practical steps for taking action. This book is a valuable and entertaining tool suitable for learning and browsing.

Justice-minded students will find this an interesting and useful read. *(glossary, author’s note, endnotes, selected sources)* *(Nonfiction. 10-14)*
A PLACE TO CALL HOME
Castillo, Lauren
Knopf (144 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-247-6674-0
978-1-247-6675-7 PLB
Series: Our Friend Hedgehog

Hedgehog has always known where she belonged...until one day, she isn't so sure.

Hedgehog is excited about winter coming! Winter means snowball fights, tubing, and making snowhogs! On her way to Owl's house with her best friend, Mutty (a stuffed dog), she runs into...herself? Owl, with the help of his trusty dictionary, tells Hedgehog she has a doppelgänger, although they soon realize it is simply another hedgehog, something Hedgehog is not entirely comfortable with. Meanwhile, Beaver and Annika Mae (a tan-skinned human girl) are building a Friend Fort. Upon learning of the doppelgänger, Beaver stops his work and takes Hedgehog and her animal friends down the river to find the hedgehog. They discover the Hedge Hideaway, where hedgehogs go to hibernate. Should Hedgehog give up her fun winter plans and hibernate among her own kind? She soon realizes it's not those who look like us on the outside but those who feel like family on the inside who matter most. Laced with a lovely yet never heavy-handed message, Castillo's follow-up to Our Friend Hedgehog (2020) is as charming as the first title. The cast of characters is delightful, especially Mole, who refers to her pals by using the word friend in different languages. The changing palette draws readers into the seasons—autumnal colors and hints of chilly breezes soon give way to the beauty of snowflurries and, of course, snowhogs.

An endearing and heartwarming journey to define family and self that will resonate deeply. (Fantasy. 5-9)

CANIS MAGICUS
Colonna, Heidi
Thayer Street Publishing (210 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Dec. 1, 2022
978-8-9851469-2-9

Twelve-year-old Hayley didn’t want to move to her stepdad’s Massachusetts town, but when she adopts a dog who becomes friends with a coywolf threatened by hunters, she finds a cause worth speaking up for.

The story opens with seventh grader Hayley visiting a blind medium (whose depiction plays into tired magical disability tropes) and receiving messages from her great-grandmother, who encourages her to thrive in her new home, let her stepfather’s negative energy roll off her back, find her authentic voice and use it to influence others — and be prepared for another dog to come into her life. Despite her fear of public speaking, Hayley delivers a class presentation on the importance of protecting wildlife and gets involved in the political process, working with a state representative and speaking at a town hall meeting. The core messages and themes are worthwhile, but the transitions between scenes are often abrupt and uneven, and second characters are not well developed. Hayley’s primary relationships are with her dog, Greta, and the coywolf, Al; her siblings occupy background roles. Hayley misses her old best friend, but the final scene indicates she’s reaching out socially. The parental figures seem caring but are only sporadically involved; it’s unclear how much they know about the coywolf in their backyard. Hayley’s family is coded White.

Positive though unpolished representation of raising your voice for a cause. (image credits, author’s note, how to help wild dogs, discussion questions, further reading) (Fiction. 10-14)

DRAGON NOODLE PARTY
Compestine, Ying Chang
Illus. by Paula Pang
Holiday House (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-8234-4950-7

The animals of the Chinese zodiac are having a party. One sunny day, each of the animals in the Chinese zodiac heads up a hill with something special. Horse trots up the hill, pulling a cart with a big wok in it, Goat strolls along, carrying wild onions, Monkey climbs up, holding oil and spices, and so on. Each animal is charmingly depicted with earthy tones and block-print–like textures on a double spread, with only a single sentence describing the animal, how it moves, and what it brings. Compestine cleverly hints at the feast to come without giving the plot away. But wait—why is Snake, the final animal, slithering up the hill with nothing? Readers find out in the final spread, which reads, “Happy birthday, Snake!” While the story is appealing and perfect for preschool listeners, some cultural details may derail their adult caregivers. Why is Horse the first animal up the hill when, according to legend, Rat is the first in the zodiac? Why is the snake singled out? And why is the book called Dragon Noodle Party when noodles are only one of the items brought? This last question is answered in the backmatter, which provides clarity on the importance of noodles in birthday celebrations, information about the zodiac (and its correct order), and a recipe for dragon beard noodles. (This book was reviewed digitally)

Cute and delightful despite a few hitches. (Picture book. 3-6)
“A work of advocacy and encouragement for the youngest readers.”

**STAND UP!**

**10 Mighty Women Who Made a Change**
Cooper, Britteny
Illus. by Cathy Ann Johnson
Orchard/Scholastic (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 2, 2022
978-1-338-76225-0

The joys and challenges of standing up for oneself and others are celebrated.

Writer and activist Cooper highlights the concept of “standing up” by introducing examples of African American women who made a difference by refusing to back down from the positions they took. Some of the stories are well known; others may be less familiar to readers but are just as worthy of notice. She begins with Mum Bett, who was born into slavery before the American Revolution. Once the United States became independent, she took the words of liberty in the country’s new constitution to heart and sued for her freedom. Other entries cover journalist Ida B. Wells, who risked her life to bring attention to the violence that African Americans faced after the Civil War; Rosa Parks and Claudette Colvin, who fought against segregation; Prathia Hall, a preacher and powerful advocate for Black voting rights whose words resonated with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; and Mari Copeny, a girl from Flint, Michigan, who wrote a letter asking President Barack Obama to do something about the unsafe water in her city. Cooper’s text is a clarion call that educates children about the work of Black women over the years and invites young people to become active in the causes they believe in. The engaging text is enhanced by Johnson’s bright, fluid illustrations. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A work of advocacy and encouragement for the youngest readers. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

**LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD AND THE DRAGON**
Compestein, Ying Chang
Illus. by Joy Ang
Abrams (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-4197-3728-2

A Chinese Little Red Riding Hood meets a dragon in the woods.

A gentle, bespectacled gray wolf would like to set the record straight about the old folktale “about a girl in a red cape.” The real story, the wolf recounts, is about a girl who lived in China in the shadow of the Great Wall. Accompanied by cartoon animation-style art, the tale mimics the Western version of the story, with Chinese cultural details incorporated throughout (for instance, bringing Nâinai herbal soup and a rice cake) and a big bad dragon as her adversary. Nâinai gets gobbled up, and Dragon jumps into bed wearing her nightgown and cap. “What large hands you have!” Little Red exclaims. “All the better to hold you with,” Dragon replies. And so on. However, once Little Red has also been gobbled up and no woodsman comes to the rescue, she takes matters into her own hands. Inside Dragon’s stomach, after reuniting with Nâinai, Little Red finds various items with which to antagonize him, such as a Chinese yo-yo that bounces around and silk ribbons that tickle Dragon’s insides. In a delightful illustration showing the cross section of the creature’s long stomach, Little Red even deploys her kung fu moves. Finally, she splashes the pungent herbal soup about to make the dragon retch, and out comes everything in his stomach. Page compositions and backgrounds may be run-of-the-mill, but the colorful characters, including Dragon, are adorably expressive. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A fun addition to the fractured fairy-tale bookshelf. *(Author’s note, more information on the items in the dragon’s belly) (Picture book. 4-8)*

**PRESIDENTIAL CONVERSATIONS FOR KIDS**
Corey, George S.
Illus. by Cleo
Cinergistik (128 pp.)
$22.00 | Sept. 20, 2022
978-1-73535-093-6

Two kids careen through time on a magic skateboard for quick encounters with American presidents at pivotal moments.

Corey at least tries to tone down the satire of 2020’s *Presidential Conversations* by replacing his original time-traveling protagonist Donald Trump with grade schoolers—GiGi, whose family comes from the West Indies, and her BFF, Georgie, who is of Egyptian and Lebanese descent—but the high spot of this romp through history is a Kennedy Center performance by Richard Nixon with backup singers Trump, Bill Clinton, and Andrew Johnson warbling, “Impeachment is not that bad / So many other things are much more sad / When the House votes to indict / But the Senate says no, it’s alright.” Otherwise, though, presidential character at its best is the theme as Georgie and GiGi use navigation apps to help George Washington cross the Delaware and then, among later stops, pass Lincoln a pen to draft the Gettysburg Address and chant “Yes, we can!” at Barack Obama’s first inauguration. The author closes by having his young witnesses deliver their takeaways to Joe Biden and Kamala Harris on a White House class tour. Most of the presidential dialogue consists of quotes from speeches and so has a rhetorical cast. Still, aside from a common but incorrect claim that the Emancipation Proclamation freed enslaved people in every state, historical contexts and occasions are rendered with reasonable accuracy. The illustrator’s closing gallery of loudly decorated skateboards and semiabstract posters scattered elsewhere add color if not relevance to public domain portraits of the 14 presidents (plus one vice) who step onstage.

*History with a wink, though earnest at its base. (afterword) (Fiction. 10-13)*
Twelve-year-old Estela Juarez is an old hand at speaking truth to power: In 2018, at the age of 8, she wrote a letter to the president of the United States, admonishing him for the immigration policy that led to the deportation of her mother, Alejandra, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico.

Juarez’s brave call for her mother’s return went viral, and she was invited to share her family’s story at the 2020 Democratic National Convention. Because she raised her voice— with help from many along the way, including President Joe Biden and Florida Congressman Darren Soto—the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services granted Alejandra permission to return to the United States.

Now that her family is reunited, Juarez is sharing their story in a new picture book, *Until Someone Listens: A Story About Borders, Family, and One Girl’s Mission*, written with Lissette Norman, illustrated by Teresa Martínez (Roaring Brook Press, Sept. 13). Kirkus calls the young author’s lyrical, poignant debut an “inspirational and heartfelt story that will resonate with young activists.”

Juarez spoke with Kirkus from her Florida home via Zoom in late August. The interview has been edited and condensed.

How are you today?
I’m doing well, and yourself?

I’m doing well, thank you for asking. You’re not back to school yet, are you?
Oh yeah, I am. This is my third week of school.

Wow! So you’re an eighth grader and an author—congratulations on your beautiful picture-book debut, *Until Someone Listens*. What made you want to write a book for young readers?
When my mom first got deported, I tried to search for a book about kids with undocumented parents. I tried to see if anyone had a similar situation. Unfortunately, I never found that book. That’s when I decided that I was going to create one of my own, to bring attention to my family’s story and to try to find a permanent solution to keep my mom in the U.S.

How did the opportunity to write a book arise?
After [national media] showed a video of me writing a letter to the past president—it went viral—they showed another video of me at the National Democratic Convention, reading a letter to the current president, and it went viral. People seemed really interested in what I had to say. And that’s when I was approached [by publishers] with the opportunity to write a book.

How do you write? By hand? On the computer?
When I first started writing, I was actually very young. So I wrote on paper because I didn’t really have access to internet. But now I’m writing on a laptop.
You’ve kept a diary for many years. Do you think that practice helped prepare you for writing your first book?
I definitely think writing in my diary helped me become a better writer. It helped me a lot to put those feelings down, to write the whole experience on paper.

How did you approach finding the right language to tell your story?
My story is a very difficult and serious one. I tried to put it in a way where young readers could understand, because I know that when I first heard that [my mother] was getting deported, I did not understand what it meant. We tried to put it in a beautiful way, so readers can be inspired by it, and I think Lissette [Norman] definitely helped me achieve that. She made the whole experience easier. We tried to find a way to make the story that was true to my experience, and my voice, and I think we achieved it.

I understand the book is being published simultaneously in English and Spanish.
I wanted to give people that didn’t get the opportunity to learn English the opportunity to read my book, because I hope my story can inspire them to share their voice also. I know that it might be more popular in English, because it is going to be published in the U.S., but I hope it is shared with other Spanish-speaking people.

What was it like for you to see Teresa Martínez’s illustrations for the first time?
I think Teresa did a beautiful job with illustrations. When I first looked at the little girl in the book, I thought she looked exactly like me! We were actually sent the illustrations after the book was finished—we were sent the final product.

And what was it like to hold that finished book in your hands?
First of all, it was very overwhelming. I was overwhelmed with happiness and gratitude. And I was—I am so grateful that I get this opportunity to share my message with the world.

You were inspired by John Lewis’ book, March. What do you admire about that book?
John Lewis’ book encourages young readers to fight for equality and to stand up against injustice. As a young man, he fought for civil rights, and he inspired me to share my voice. He showed me that I can change the world even though I’m young. I admire him because overall he’s just a very strong person.

I agree—he’s a hero to me, and I love his books. Do you plan to continue writing in the future?
I’m looking forward to writing more books about my experience as the daughter of an undocumented immigrant.
“A tasty treat for any mystery lover.”

FINALLY, SOMETHING DANGEROUS
The One and Onlys and the Case of the Robot Crow
Cornett, Doug
Knopf (240 pp.)
$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | Nov. 22, 2022
978-0-593-43293-8 PLB
Series: The One and Onlys, 2

Who’s ready to sniff out some crime?

The One and Onlys—Gloria Longshanks “Shanks” Hill, Alexander “Peephole” Calloway, and Paul (still no nickname) Marconi—return in this sophomore outing. Although technically Peephole isn’t an only child since the birth of his baby sister, Trillium, the group name is really good, so they kept it. This time Shanks serves as the narrator, guiding readers through the evolving town of Bellwood, where Mayor Frank Pilkington is aggressively pushing a platform of newness and wants the residents to start patronizing the sleek, national restaurant chains that have been popping up around the city. Along with the restaurants, the town has been experiencing a wave of scents drifting through the air, from the sweet smell of ice cream to the mouthwatering aroma of pizza. But when the denizens start queuing up at their old favorites, the foul odor of sewer pipes frequently sends them running toward the corresponding chain restaurants instead. Who could be responsible for these crimes against mom-and-pop stores? And are they connected to the recently spotted robot crows seen around town? As before, Cornett plays fair with the clues, allowing young sleuths to potentially solve the case ahead of the detectives. A subplot regarding the historically unequal treatment of Black citizens of Bellwood integrates seamlessly into the story, providing readers with some food for thought after the denouement. The central cast reads White; there is racial diversity among supporting characters.

A tasty treat for any mystery lover. (Mystery. 8-12)

THE BLUE SCARF
Danawe, Mohamed
Illus. by Ruaida Mannaa
Running Press Kids (48 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-7624-7889-7

Seeking a beloved lost belonging, Layla embarks on a journey.

Layla, a blue-skinned, dark-haired girl, enjoys an idyllic childhood in the world of Blue. When fire falls from the sky and carries away the treasured scarf her mother gave her, she sails across the sea in search of it. In the worlds of Green, Yellow, Red, Orange, and Purple (where cultural symbols and attire imply European, Middle Eastern, Asian, African, and Latin American settings respectively), the inhabitants, uninterested in other colors, send her away. But when she arrives in the Rainbow world, the people, who are diverse in skin tone, help her find the object (a note at the end makes clear that the scarf symbolizes identity). As she wraps herself in the scarf, she is welcomed to a new, more accepting land. Though the artwork is attractive, with graphic shapes and shaded textures, the stereotypical imagery is jarring—in the world of Red, Layla meets East Asian people with lines for eyes, including a geishalike figure, along with a dragon and a tiger; in the world of Orange, she encounters Black people wearing tribal marks and masks in a desert landscape as well as a monkey, a giraffe, and a cheetah. While the rather simplistic messages of inclusivity and embracing one’s identity may resonate with readers, they are lost amid the illustrations, which distill these rich cultures down to the level of cliché. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A well-meaning lesson in acceptance and identity overshadowed by flattening and problematic cultural depictions. (Picture book. 4-7)
Through they’re identical, they are as different as can be. Perse

The tiger’s soothing words are delivered in gentle, lilting verse.

few friends, but trendsetter Portia prefers something more
dren can’t hear such esteem-building confidences often enough.

dances to a tiny child.

and information. The twins present as White on the book’s cover,

all the guests she wants. But family changes also loom. Their dad,

approves Perse’s idea, Portia plots to have the perfect cake and

elaborate—a disco party with a DJ and a disco ball. When Mom

wants the two to have a princess party and sleepover for just a

and a few hints imply an Australian or New Zealand setting.

As the pair explore their habitat, reinforcing the idea of togeth-

erness close to home and farther afield. Loving words like these

The book ends in August 1896 with the inventor at 48 sailing in

attaining their goal despite skepticism from those around them.

error, and crashes as Otto and younger brother Gustav work hard

chronicles years of determined research, observation, trial and

surprises.

May is Perse and Portia’s birthday month; the twins are turn-

ing 11, and Perse captures all the drama in her angst-filled diary.

Though they’re identical, they are as different as can be. Perse

wants the two to have a princess party and sleepover for just a

few friends, but trendsetter Portia prefers something more

elaborate—a disco party with a DJ and a disco ball. When Mom

approves Perse’s idea, Portia plots to have the perfect cake and

all the guests she wants. But family changes also loom. Their dad,

who lives in England with his new wife, seems to be hiding some-

thing. And Mom’s boyfriend, Will, becomes her fiance, provok-

ing anger, sadness, and, finally, acceptance as the twins realize

their parents won’t be reuniting, and they meet Will’s parents,

who own a massive and practically empty house. Short journal

entries with some words in all capitals (defined by Perse) help to

capture sibling rivalry and love, chaotic preteen life, and emo-

tions with humor. The occasional cartoon sketches add more fun

and information. The twins present as White on the book’s cover,

and a few hints imply an Australian or New Zealand setting.

A fun, emotional, and relatable roller coaster of family ups

and downs. (Fiction. 7-12)

A doting parent offers tender assur-

ances to a tiny child.

An adult tiger vows that they will be everlastingly devoted
to their baby and at their side in every circumstance, under all

conditions, no matter what, no matter when—and without the

child’s having to change for any reason…ever. The pair, whose

genders are unspecified, are endearingly depicted very close to
each other, their bodies often entwined, over the course of a day

and night. The enraptured cub listens carefully, taking the warm,

comforting, empowering message to heart, not missing a word

as the pair explore their habitat, reinforcing the idea of togeth-

erness close to home and farther afield. Loving words like these

come from parents to children can’t be said often enough—and

children can’t bear such esteem-building confidences often enough.
The tiger’s soothing words are delivered in gentle, lilting verse.

The very sweet illustrations, created digitally, depict this appeal-
ing duo expressively; especially charming are scenes of the pair

caught beneath a starry night sky. Though there’s little new

here, parent-child affirmations are always welcome. Grown-ups

sharing this title shouldn’t be surprised if their own offspring

want to hear it more than once. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An adult tiger vows that they will be everlastingly devoted

to their baby and at their side in every circumstance, under all

conditions, no matter what, no matter when—and without the

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children can’t bear such esteem-building confidences often enough.
The tiger’s soothing words are delivered in gentle, lilting verse.

A soaring tribute to a pioneering

German aviator who had a dream and

the perseverance to achieve it.

Perseverance is certainly the overriding theme here, as

Downs begins his profile with Otto Lilienthal at 14, fruitlessly

flapping a rickety-looking set of manufactured wings. The author

chronicles years of determined research, observation, trial and

error, and crashes as Otto and younger brother Gustav work hard

at attaining their goal despite skepticism from those around them.

The book ends in August 1896 with the inventor at 48 sailing in

a much more elaborate (if still rickety) glider high over an awe-

struck crowd of onlookers with, in Hohn’s breezy but precisely
detailed illustrations, a blissful expression on his face. The author

relegates the dampening news that Lilienthal died in a crash the

following week to an afterword but, along with providing notes

on the numerous diagrams of his subject’s evolving glider designs,

credits both his example and influence on his better-known con-

temporaries, the Wright brothers. Flyers and groundlings alike in

the pictures are White. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Misty the Cloud

Friends Through Rain or Shine

Today show co-host and meteorologist Dreyer’s sequel to

Misty the Cloud (2021) finds Misty celebrating her birthday,

which she shares with human Clare.

Clare is having a birthday party. Unfortunately, she’s shar-

ing the party with her younger brother, Tyler, whose birthday
is approaching. Clare wants Tyler's guests and party paraphernalia to stay on their own side of the yard. But that may be moot when it starts to rain. The cause? Misty's party game of One, Two, Three, Can't Catch Me!, which also gets in the way of the Sex Pistols, one of her late father's favorite bands. Need-and Tyler are light-skinned; other human characters are diverse. Clare does some research and discovers what a health and environmental disaster that would be. Starting a punk-inspired movement to stop an asphalt plant is going to be built near their school, she unites and educates the community through the power of music; the history of protest rooted in various musical genres.

CELLA CRUZ
Edelman, Claudia Romo & William Alexander
Illus. by Alexandra Baguez
Roaring Brook Press (128 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-64603-280-8
Series: Hispanic Star, 2

A biography of iconic Afro-Cuban musician Celia Cruz that pays special attention to her early years. Úrsula Hilaria Celia Caridad Cruz Alfonso got her start in music when she was tasked with singing lullabies to young relatives at bedtime—Celia's lullabies were so dynamic that the children stayed awake and demanded more songs instead of drifting off to sleep. With the encouragement of her favorite instructor, she set her plans to become a teacher aside in order to pursue a career in music. Celia's meteoric rise to stardom was not without difficulty, but her hard work and support from family and fellow musicians kept her on track to becoming one of the most famous Latin singers in history. The book explores topics such as the prejudice Celia faced because of her darker skin, political turmoil in Cuba during the 1950s, and Celia's painful exile from her home country, all within the context of her career and celebrity. It's clear that Celia touched those around her with her dynamic talent and innovative musicality and used her status to advocate for others. Engaging illustrations and informative sidebars further enrich the heartfelt informational text. Positive affirmations are sprinkled throughout the book; readers will come away inspired to follow Celia's positive example. Backmatter includes an author's note from Alexander and a note from the nonprofit organization Hispanic Star, which partnered with the publisher for this series.

A compelling look at the radiant life of La Reina de la Salsa. (facts) (Biography. 8-12)

VICIOUS IS MY MIDDLE NAME
Dunn, Kevin
Fitzroy Books (228 pp.)
$16.95 paper | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-64003-280-8

Sydney Vicious Talcott—yes, that's her real name—is pure punk, inside and out. The ends of her hair are dyed bright red, her head is shaved on one side, and she's named after bass player Sid Vicious from the Sex Pistols, one of her late father's favorite bands. Needless to say, when she moves to Beaver Dam, North Carolina, she stands out a lot more than she did in Rochester, New York. Ducking into the school library to avoid the mean clique, Sydney, who is assumed White, meets Guatemalan American Rita and Affrilachian Shawn, two other outcasts in the school hierarchy. They bond over a shared love of Harry Potter. When Sydney learns that an asphalt plant is going to be built near their school, she does some research and discovers what a health and environmental disaster that would be. Starting a punk-inspired movement to fight back against people with a vested interest in building the plant, Sydney learns that speaking up isn't easy or safe for everyone. She unites and educates the community through the power of music; the history of protest rooted in various musical genres is explored in an interesting way. The author also attempts to engage with complex issues of race, but many subjects are overly simplified, Rita and Shawn take on the heavy lifting of educating Sydney about race in America, and this young, White outsider is ultimately framed as the community's savior.

A book about social justice that falls short in representation. (Fiction. 9-13)

THIS SIDE UP
Fairgray, Richard & Lucy Campagnolo
Illus. by Richard Fairgray
Pixel+Ink (96 pp.)
$20.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-64595-041-7
Series: Cardboardia, 2

In this second entry in a series centering on a land where everything is made from cardboard, a group of kids must defeat the evil Grey Queen. After the adventures detailed in The Other Side of the Box (2021), Mac, Maisie, and Bird are safe in The Cardboardia thanks to the help of three witches. But Mac’s sister, Pokey, is trapped in between worlds with Columbo, a phantom dog. And the witches need the children’s help making sense of the board game Cardboardia in order to take down the Grey Queen and save the world. The game came with no instructions, and the
“A winsome tale starring a determined young protagonist.”

**ANISA’S INTERNATIONAL DAY**

*Faruqi, Reem*

Harper/HarperCollins (112 pp.)

$16.99 | Sept. 20, 2022

978-0-06-320623-6

A celebration of culture and cuisine. An “All About Anisa” page introduces readers to the titular character, Atlanta-based third grader Anisa Zakaria, whose parents are from Pakistan and who loves baking, the color turquoise, and art.

Though this section feels like a bit of an infodump, the pace quickly picks up as readers learn that Anisa’s class is planning to host an International Day. Her teacher explains that many students are from different places, some from the United States, others from around the world, so the students will celebrate these places through food and activities. Anisa wants to bring samosas in, but when she learns that another student, whose parents are from India, has already signed up for samosas, Anisa decides to find something different—a tough task given that there’s so much to choose from when it comes to Pakistan. But inspiration strikes when Anisa gets her hands decorated with mehndi patterns in preparation for her aunt’s wedding. This illustrated chapter book is a deep dive into different cultures in a classroom as well as family and friendships—Anisa encounters friendship woes when she wrongly assumes that her best friend, Katie, is making fun of the mehndi. A relatable character, Anisa employs innovative problem-solving when backed in a corner. Katie presents White; the other classmates are diverse.

*A winsome tale starring a determined young protagonist.*

(glossary; recipes for samosas and thumbprint cookies, activities, author’s note) (Fiction. 6-10)

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**EZRA EXPOSED**

*Feldman, Amy E.*

Blackstone (148 pp.)

$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022

978-0-8234-4916-3

A fifth grader learns about cellphone and internet safety the hard way.

Ezra finally gets the phone he’s been dreaming of. He immediately takes a picture of a chicken nugget that looks like a butt and posts it to his Instagram account along with all kinds of objects that resemble butts. The trouble really starts when he takes a picture of his own butt to try to prove a bully wrong. This is an age-appropriate introduction to the legal and social dangers of underage internet use and—though the term is not used—sexting. Ezra ends up facing consequences for distributing lewd images of a minor, even though that minor is him. However, though the story starts off engaging, it becomes didactic, ultimately lacking excitement. Girls are often regarded as annoyances or lesser (Ezra describes his classmate Lilly as “the best I could have for a girl partner”). Ezra’s sister also jokes about a butterfly landing on a woman’s “tushy” (“She was wearing yoga pants so she could probably feel it land”). Ezra and his family are cued White.

*Preachy though potentially a teaching tool on internet safety. (afterword) (Fiction. 9-12)*

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**POLAR BEAR**

*Fleming, Candace*

Illus. by Eric Rohmann

Neal Porter/Holiday House (32 pp.)

$18.99 | Nov. 22, 2022

978-0-8234-4916-3

The creators of *Honeybee* (2020) tell the story of a polar bear in the wild shepherding her two cubs through their first boreal year.

Readers hoping for a complete overview of a polar bear’s life cycle will have to look elsewhere, but Rohmann’s scenes of roly-poly cubs sleeping in a heap, gazing up at viewers, and wrestling in settings either icy or strewn with summer wildflowers as mom sniffs the air alertly serve those content with partial glimpses of the big, furry cuties well enough. A brush with two wolves who are quickly driven off and an exhausting swim portrayed in a double gatefold after a chunk of ice breaks off and somehow carries the bears far out to sea before they can react add some manufactured drama. But, Fleming makes clear, the main danger polar bears face is that the sea ice will not remain being either caught or eaten) becomes too difficult to catch. This leads to a superficial description of climate change in the

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*For more information, visit Kirkus.com*

*978-0-8234-4916-3*
backmatter, which also offers a list of extra polar bear facts. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Straightforward though somewhat bland, especially compared with the creators’ earlier collaboration. (websites, bibliography) (Informational picture book. 6-8)

**MOON TREE**

**The Story of One Extraordinary Tree**

Fraiser, Carolyn Bennett
Illus. by Simona Mulazzani
Reycraft Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Sept. 1, 2022
978-1-4788-7597-0

A tribute to an ecological legacy of the early space program. Fraiser tells the tale simply, then again in more detail in an afterword: “One ordinary boy,” she writes, grew up to be an astronaut and took a parcel of tree seeds to the moon in honor of the smokejumpers he had worked with earlier in his career. Later, the 500 or so seeds were brought back to Earth, planted in pots, distributed around the country—and forgotten, even at NASA, until 20 years later an “ordinary girl” in Indiana wondering why a sycamore was dubbed a “moon tree” sparked a third grade class to investigate. The author appends a partial list of moon tree locations and invites readers to “see if there is a moon tree near you!” Along with views of our planet and its satellite against starry backdrops, Mulazzani fills the branches of the mature tree with stars and other astronomical wonders. The White astronaut, whose name was Stuart Roosa, poses in a final scene similarly bedecked in commemoration of the ordinary boy who took “some ordinary seeds / on one extraordinary journey.” Human figures elsewhere in the art, including the unnamed “girl,” are small but seem to be depicted with some variation in skin color. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A small but “extraordinary” episode, well worth the belated notice. (glossary) (Informational picture book. 6-8)

**MY PAATI’S SARIS**

Gopal, Jyoti Rajan
Illus. by Art Twink
Kokila (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-993-32460-8

A Tamil child finds love and solace in their grandmother’s saris.

The child watches as their paaati opens her cupboard and out come tumbling saris in gorgeous colors, patterns, and weaves, each seeming to tell the story of where it comes from. Each sari beckons the young child as they and their grandmother explore different spaces—the market, the kitchen, the festivities, and more. The book ends with the child—with Paaati’s help—donning a sari and proudly displaying it to the rest of the family. Though gender isn’t explicitly mentioned in the text, the young narrator presents male, and the book seems to hint that the protagonist initially feels some hesitancy at wearing a sari in front of others; ultimately they’re joyous when their family embraces them (“They see me. ME”). There’s little tension in the story. However, the art makes up for the text. It’s glorious, each sari resplendently rendered, the textiles telling a powerful story by themselves. The last sari, the one the child chooses for themselves, is stunning. Tigers leap across the fabric as dazzling suns offer highlights to the blue and pink of the material, an invitation to the child to explore and be themselves: “My paaati’s saris are my shelter, my home.” Many readers will be especially heartened to see a tale of LGBTQ+ identity—and acceptance—in a South Asian setting. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An uplifting story of family, community, and friendship. (author’s note, research ideas, resources) (Fiction. 9-13)
Two personified volcanoes cheerfully explain how they are similar and different.

This latest addition to Heos’ Science Buddies series introduces volcanoes with a conversational first-person narrative directed at science-minded elementary school readers. First, a smiling gray volcano (perhaps Mount St. Helens or certainly a neighbor) reveals the underground secrets that lead it to EXPLODE! Starting with a pictorial representation of Earth’s layers and a map of goopy-eyed tectonic plates, the text and the colorful, expressive illustrations explain how plate movements lead to magma melting and lava erupting. Two red volcanoes join the conversation to present current theories about the flow of their lava. The narrators are reassuring, letting readers know that scientists often monitor volcanoes to warn people before dangerous eruptions happen. Puns add to the chatty effect. More straightforward information in the backmatter includes descriptions and pictures of famous volcanoes, including Mount St. Helens; volcanoes that changed the course of history; and a cross section of a typical cone-shaped volcano. Humans shown include a dark-skinned adult and child enjoying the natural world and a diverse group of volcano scientists observing an eruption. Though not as detailed as other books on the topics, this title’s effective explanation of two distinct types of volcanic formation makes it a welcome addition, perhaps as a companion to Susan Rusch’s Volcano Rising (2011), illustrated by Susan Swan. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Not quite overflowing with information when compared with other books on the subject but simple and engaging. (glossary, further reading, bibliography) (Informational picture book. 6-9)

**SLEEP**
Herbert, Barbara
Illus. by Daniel Long
Whitman (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 1, 2022
978-0-8075-7435-5
Series: Imagine This!, 5

An introduction to the ways humans and certain other animals rest and sleep.

Readers drawn by Long’s painted view of snoozing sperm whales suspended tails-down on the cover will find a series of equally engaging scenes within, ranging from a light-skinned human baby, a pile of drowsy puppies, and somnolent sea otters holding paws (aww) to sacked-out bats, sharks, and even jellyfish. What they won’t find is consistently reliable information.

Though Herkert does accurately describe REM sleep, for instance, and the diverse sleeping patterns of various wild creatures—all while noting that elephants chew food while sleeping, that orb spiders have a 17-hour internal cycle rather than the otherwise universal 24-hour one, and other fascinating tidbits—she wrongly differentiates torpor from hibernation (one is actually a type of the other) and offers contradictory data in adjacent paragraphs about how long frigate birds sleep per day. Kate Prendergast’s Sleep: How Nature Gets Its Rest (2019) will safely lull younger audiences; for slightly older ones, the hitches in Octavio Pintos’ How Does an Octopus Sleep? (2022), illustrated by Martín Iannuzzi, are at least less significant. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Curious students tempted to dive into this may want to sleep on it. (author’s note, resources, glossary) (Informational picture book. 6-8)

**SMART**
Adapted From the New York Times Bestseller Visual Intelligence
Herman, Amy E. with Heather MacLean
Simon & Schuster (192 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 1, 2022
978-1-66590-121-5

An adaptation of Herman’s Visual Intelligence (2016). This creative reimagining from a renowned art historian and leadership trainer is divided into three sections (“How To See,” “How To THINK About What You See,” and “How To TALK About What You See”). Opening with a series of exercises to spark more active looking and increase readers’ powers of observation, the first section offers a fascinating discussion of psychological phenomena that can impede our ability to make accurate observations and how to circumvent those preconceptions. The second part focuses on organizing all those pieces of visual information and thinking through to gather as many clues and details as possible. The third section closes the circle by explaining how readers can use accurate, objective, precise language to convey their observations of the world to others. Written in a conversational tone and full of journal-style prompts (for instance, look at Edvard Munch’s The Scream and list everything you notice about it) along with longer-term practice exercises, this is a book to be revisited again and again. At each stage, readers are encouraged to become more aware of their initial assumptions and perceptions and the ways those reactions may be skewed or flawed, gently touching on unintentional but automatic biases and judgments. The thorough discussion of clearer, more effective communication transfers to many contexts, and Herman’s note to adult readers sets the stage for use of this book as a whole-family learning experience.

An engaging, enlightening interpretation that will lead readers young and old to clearer observation and deeper thought. (endnotes, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 10-14)
ON THIS AIRPLANE
Heuer, Lourdes
Illus. by Sara Palacios
Tundra Books (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-7352-6860-9

An intro to airline travel, from boarding to landing.

Step onboard and join a young family that is relocating as they travel in a plane flown by a brown-skinned pilot “living her dream.” Some passengers are just beginning their journeys; others are returning home. Each spread begins with the phrase “On this airplane,” followed by a description of passengers or activities. Caregivers and educators reading this tale aloud should allow extra time for children to match details in the illustrations to the information in the text and perhaps discuss personal travel plans. Readers will enjoy finding the sleeper and daydreamer, the busy laptop user and the soldier, a young solo traveler, and a soon-to-be mother (“two travelling as one”). The images don’t show anyone wearing seat belts, so adults may want to remind future travelers to do so. Later spreads describe the sounds of takeoff; passengers help each other cope with turbulence, offering a familiar hand to hold (a previously self-centered, seat-reclining traveler proves thoughtful, giving another passenger a piece of gum). Passengers land, deboard, and move through the terminal to meet friends and retrieve luggage; the story closes with the family reaching their new home. Detailed illustrations created with gouache, cut paper, and digital media depict a group of passengers diverse in terms of age and race; the family includes a brown-skinned parent, a lighter-skinned parent, a brown-skinned child, and a tan-skinned baby. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A calm, informing preflight primer and an engaging book to pack to ensure a smooth trip. (Picture book. 3-7)

THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD
Hirsch, Andy
First Second (128 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-250-79477-2
Series: History Comics

The story of one of our country’s greatest infrastructure projects, from “mad dream” to golden spike.

Hirsch doesn’t gloss over the enterprise’s rampant financial chicanery, undisguised exploitation of Irish and Chinese immigrants, and environmental damage—even adding an afterword that highlights them—but by and large he plays this account of the rail line’s Civil War-era conception and construction as a breathless, epic race between two teams of racially and culturally diverse hired workers, punctuated by fiendish conniving, remarkable feats of engineering, and broad comedy. Hirsch parades a cast of colorfully wrought historical figures ranging from the Union Pacific Railroad’s larger than life Chief Engineer Peter Dey (“Shh! He’s envisioning!” comments an awe-struck bystander) to the Central Pacific’s hard-driving Construction Superintendent J.H. Strobridge, whose “TOOT!”-threaded fulminations evidently signal serious intestinal issues. Through tumultuous cartoon panels, the author/illustrator follows the progress of Irish war veteran Tom coming east and “Gold Mountain” seeker Lim, from China, to stand in for the workers as they face hardships both natural and otherwise on the way to a climactic handshake in the final scene. Exhilarated readers will come away with clear enough pictures of the project’s costs and benefits to decide whether the one was worth the other.

Suspenseful, grand of scope, and related with cinematic brio. (Graphic nonfiction. 10-13)

HOORAY FOR TRUCKS!
Hughes, Susan
Illus. by Suharu Ogawa
Owlkids Books (24 pp.)
$17.95 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-77147-467-2

Hooray for trucks, bathtime, and fun rhyme and wordplay.

It’s hard to round up trucks for their time to literally and figuratively shine. When a brown-skinned human attempts to get them to line up, they don’t budge. “Trucks LIKE dirt and mud and sludge!” They finally cooperate after the human convinces them that getting clean is “an IMPORTANT chore” and “getting clean is ALSO work.” Let the bubbly bathtime and playful alliterative description begin (“Splash and spray, / slather and slosh, / dunk and swish— / wash, wash, WASH!”). Once the trucks are “rubbed and buffed,” it’s time to head out, with plenty of toots, beeps, and honks that will invite young listeners to join in. The trucks’ destination? A parade. A diverse crew of children are on hand to decorate the vehicles with banners, flowers, and balloons. Decorators and parade spectators include people who use wheelchairs and kids wearing headscarves. Truck lovers will appreciate the colorful variety of trucks, personified as hardworking community members complete with jaunty work hats and even a bow on one of them. Those using the book for a storytime will enjoy the lively rhyming couplets, some with a singable rhythm, and plentiful alliteration and onomatopoeia. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Sure to please young truck lovers—and just the thing to get them eager for their own baths. (Picture book. 3-6)
An imaginative and ambitious not-so-distant future tale with a lot to say about the present.

FUTURELAND

Battle for the Park
Hunter H.D.
Illus. by Khadijah Khatib
Random House (320 pp.)
$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-593-47942-1
978-0-593-47944-5 PLB
Series: Futureland, 1

Black seventh grader Cameron J. Walker has never been to a normal school before—he’s been busy hovering above major world cities in Futureland.

It’s 2048, and the high-tech theme park is filled with his parents’ imaginative inventions, including lifelike androids, or revs. But the plan this school year is to float above Atlanta so Cameron can enroll at Eastside Middle School, spend time with his Grandma Ava, and make some human kid friends. Plans go awry as corporate espionage and shady housing practices intersect before Futureland’s Atlanta opening. The Atlanta Disuse and Redevelopment Corporation and its shady White CEO have been spying on them, hoping to sabotage the park and appropriate its technology in its continued efforts to exploit the city for profit. Their plan involves hacking into revs, undermining the park’s—and surrounding community’s—security and safety measures, as well as abducting children to elicit fear and acquiring the space for themselves. These events evoke the real-life child abductions of 1980s Atlanta and the displacement issues the city faces today. The book is not entirely successful in handling weighty subjects like missing Black children, gentrification, and racial inequities. Aspiring detective Cameron struggles with self-doubt, something that is relatable for readers but also compromises the momentum of such a high-stakes story. Nevertheless, with the help of friends (human and rev alike), Cam saves the day. Final art not seen.

An imaginative and ambitious not-so-distant future tale with a lot to say about the present. (Science fiction. 9-13)

AFRICAN ELEPHANT
A First Field Guide to the Big-Eared Giant of the Savanna
Ihwagi, Festus W.
Illus. by Nic Jones
Neon Squid/Macmillan (32 pp.)
$15.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-68449-252-7
Series: Young Zoologist

A portrait of the big flappers as parents and “ecosystem engineers.”

Ihwagi, a zoologist who works for an elephant conservation organization, opens with a gallery of necessary gear for elephant observers—including an elephant GPS collar (“Elephant GPS collars are HUGE. You will need a vehicle to transport them”)—and then goes on to survey his subjects’ physical features, matriarchal social organization, behaviors, moods (including useful cues to when an elephant is “unhappy” and thus to be well avoided), threats from poachers and other hazards, and migratory habits. He closes with a look at the many ways elephants affect their habitats, from thinning forests by knocking down trees to creating water holes in dry seasons to providing plenty of poop to spread seeds and fertilize seedlings. Books on elephants are plentiful, but Ihwagi’s commentary is insightful, spread in digestible blocks through Jones’ painterly illustrations, which are crowded with stately pachyderms eating, drinking, fleeing hastily from bees (local farmers have found fences strung with beehives to be an effective deterrent), nuzzling calves, and posed in sociable groups. A view of silhouetted poachers pointing rifles in one scene is the only break from the cheery overall tone. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Similar profiles abound, but this is a particularly engaging one. (glossary, index) (Informational picture book. 6-8)

LET’S PLAY DDAKJI
Im So-Ha
Illus. by Jung Joon-Young
Brown Books Kids (44 pp.)
$16.99 | Nov. 22, 2022
978-1-61254-583-7

A childhood game helps a Korean boy learn that winning isn’t everything.

In this Korean import, Kim Woo watches as neighborhood kids play ddkaji, a Korean childhood game played with handmade folded tiles typically made with paper. Each player takes turns throwing their ddkaji in hopes of flipping over their opponent’s; the winner gets to keep their opponent’s flipped ddkaji. Last year, while visiting his aunt in rural Hameupri, Woo played with kids at the community center but lost to a girl named Gorin; this year, Woo plans to make his ddkaji the heaviest and, he believes, the best. A mix of textures and colors with fine lines creates a bold portrayal of Woo as he rushes to test his thick, gold ddkaji and enjoys a winning streak in the neighborhood only to lose his coveted ddkaji to Gorin and her much older ddkaji. Crushed, Woo becomes obsessed with beating Gorin, eventually deciding to visit her house to ask for his ddkaji back. When he arrives, Gorin reveals her own ddkaji museum in memory of her father, revealing the stories of the community from her collection. Humbled, Woo rediscovers the simple joys of the game. Though the dialogue-heavy narrative does a lot more telling than showing, the protagonist’s realization that there’s more to life than winning will resonate.

Notes on the origin of the game and instructions for making ddkaji follow. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A charming tale of rediscovery and community. (Picture book. 5-8)
Fins then share nesting duties until their huge single egg hatches. Facts about puffin diet and predators with backmatter on geography off to inspect former burrows in sea cliffs. After driving off do discuss some unusual feats such as the European robin’s ability to sense magnetic fields and the cave-dwelling oilbird’s use of echolocation. Prehistoric predecessors gather on one topical spread, flightless birds on another, and a final page of recently extinct species underscores the conservation message. A closing table listing each of the dozens of birds depicted serves as both index and factual summary. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Another feather in the veteran co-authors’ cap. (Further reading, websites) (Informational picture book: 7-9)

A populous, cut-paper portrait gallery of avian species present...and past.

**THE BIRD BOOK**

**Jenkins, Steve & Robin Page**

Illus. by Steve Jenkins

Clarion/HarperCollins (48 pp.)

$18.99 | Dec. 6, 2022

978-0-358-32569-7

A populous, cut-paper portrait gallery of avian species present...and past.

The authors make clear throughout that despite birds’ great antiquity, they are currently under threat from habitat loss and other factors, but as usual it’s the late Jenkins’ spectacularly realistic collage illustrations that sound the loudest notes. Following an opening sequence showing a kingfisher in flight and a close-up of a king vulture’s head that is a burst of vivid colors and textures, gorgeously feathered subjects parade past in profusion—in close-ups to display distinctive feet, beaks, and eyes or in full-body poses alongside nests, eggs, and prey. Pithy captions tucked between and around the images largely cover familiar territory in noting typical features and behaviors but do discuss some unusual feats such as the European robin’s ability to sense magnetic fields and the cave-dwelling oilbird’s use of echolocation. Prehistoric predecessors gather on one topical spread, flightless birds on another, and a final page of recently extinct species underscores the conservation message. A closing
of magical creatures preparing to go to battle to free their friends and family, who are imprisoned by the power-hungry Emperor Tomcat. Busily composed watercolor panels alternate between subdued and cotton-candy hues in this unevenly paced tale. Set in a strange, Wonderland-esque world, the story primarily focuses on Jo’s adventures on the magical side of the tunnel, though many encounters parallel her difficulties back home; ultimately, her escapades leave her willing to embrace her new family. Most characters are animals or human-animal hybrids, including Jo’s closest companions Nouk (a humanoid feline), Maurice (an anthropomorphix fox), and Pompom (a talking bichon). Some characters make phobic remarks, mild acts or threats of physical violence occur, and there are a few references in conversation to topics that, though not inappropriate, seem more likely to resonate with adults. Most humans are light-skinned, including Jo and her family.

An at-times disconcerting testament to the power of creating a home amid challenging circumstances. (Graphic novel. 9-12)

MASON GOES MUSHROOMING
Kahn, Melanie
Illus. by Ellen Korbonski
Green Writers Press (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-950584-89-5

Kahn fills a gap on the mycology shelves for children with one child’s mushrooming adventures.

From the book’s start in spring until its close at the start of winter, Mason’s enthusiasm for collecting and eating mushrooms is palpable. With his dog and his basket, he heads out in different seasons and weather to check reliable spots for each of four varieties: morels in spring under the apple trees; chanterelles in early summer; lobster mushrooms in late summer under the hemlocks; and black trumpet mushrooms in autumn. Readers will learn the qualities that make each spot good for each variety; and they’ll also glean Mason’s tricks and tips for making sure each mushroom is the one he’s looking for. After his mushrooming adventures, he’s pictured with at least one adult at home inspecting the finds and then cooking: a morel omelet, pasta with chanterelles, lobster saute, and crispy black trumpet chips. A note to future foragers details the author’s prior experience with mushrooming and passes along two important pieces of information (twice!): Always check mushrooms with an experienced adult forager, and “When in doubt [about the species], throw it out.” Korbonski’s watercolor illustrations are evocative of each season and capture the enthusiasm of Mason and his pup well, though those who want to forage themselves may wish for photos as well. Mason and his family have pale skin; background characters have diverse skin tones. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

This is sure to start many down the path of mushroom foraging. (additional information on the mushrooms Mason finds) (Picture book. 6-10)
examines the clues and questions the suspects. Luckily, the disappearance is explained, and the book closes with a list of tips from P.I. Butterfly for aspiring sleuths conducting their own investigations. Along the way, she also provides a few vocabulary words—some relating to butterflies and some relating to investigations. This is a delightful, cartoonish romp with zany digital illustrations that will have readers begging to know when the promised sequel will be released. P.I. Butterfly and her family are light-skinned.

Don’t let this book flutter by—read it! (observation game)

(Graphic novel. 8-10)

APRIL & MAE AND THE BOOK CLUB CAKE
The Monday Book
Lambert, Megan Dowd
Illus. by Briana Dengoue
Charlesbridge (48 pp.)
$12.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-58089-887-4
Series: Every Day With April & Mae

In this installment of a new series that follows two best friends throughout a week, the titular duo attend a weekly book club after they bake an unusual cake for the group.

April, who is African American, a dog lover, and a fast reader, helps Mae, who is Asian, a cat lover, and a slow reader, to finish this week’s book by reading aloud while Mae adds ingredients to the cake batter. April’s expressive reading of the story distracts Mae, who laughs, then cries. After April calms Mae with a hug, Mae pours the batter into the pan and tells April to put it in the oven while she cleans up. Only later do they see the bag of flour on the counter and realize Mae left the all-important ingredient out. Even so, the cake smells good, though it looks “like a bowl,” with a sunken hole in the middle. Together the friends cover the hole with some cream and berries, salvaging a very tasty treat for their successful book club meeting. With short sentences and repetitive vocabulary, this sweet early reader is augmented with digital illustrations that provide some foreshadowing clues to the narrative. April and Mae are strong friends who problem-solve effectively.

A simple, charming tale of friends who work through concerns together. (Early reader 6-8)

APRIL & MAE AND THE SOCCER MATCH
The Tuesday Book
Lambert, Megan Dowd
Illus. by Briana Dengoue
Charlesbridge (48 pp.)
$12.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-58089-888-1
Series: Every Day With April & Mae

At Tuesday’s soccer game, April and Mae have an opportunity for competition and reflection. The field, muddy after a rain shower, causes Mae to slip as she tries to kick the ball to make a winning goal. April cheers despite their team losing the match. “It’s all right! It’s OK! We will win another day!” But Mae is upset about losing and about being covered in mud. April good-naturedly tries to tell Mae that winning isn’t everything; it’s more important to do your best and have fun. The two go to Mae’s house, and Mae worries that she is “the best at baking…but…the worst at soccer.” As they wash up, the two giggle over how muddy they are, and April’s supportive friendship buoys Mae, who later concedes that her soccer skills aren’t that bad. “Maybe it is mud that is bad for soccer.” In this latest entry of a series that follows April and Mae throughout a week, two best friends show that a few laughs and the understanding of a good pal can save the day. With brief sentences and a simple yet delightful plot, this early reader, enhanced with digital illustrations, continues to highlight the caring and sympathetic relationship between two companions who work through the ups and downs of everyday life. April is Black, while Mae is Asian.

A sweet tale of two true winners who navigate their expectations together with a healthy attitude. (Early reader 6-8)

OPERATION FINAL NOTICE
Landis, Matthew
Dial Books (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-593-10975-5

Jo and Ronny are neighbors, best friends, and both in a real jam. Though their specific struggles differ, they must work together to successfully squash their fears and meet their deadlines. Josefina “Jo” Ramos is a talented young Mexican American cellist with dreams of star soloist success like her idols Carlos Prieto and YoYo Ma. In fact, her teacher even nicknamed her Jo-Jo Ma, but she has a major hurdle in her way: stage fright. Her neighbor and best friend, Ronny Russo, is a White boy who has serious anxieties of his own. In the wake of his dad’s being injured at work, his family has hit hard times financially, lost the town home he grew up in, and now faces scary final notice bills. Fortunately, an opportunity that may help both friends presents itself: a part-time after-school gig
helping at a senior living center. For Jo it is a chance to perform in a low-stakes environment to defeat her stage fright, and for Ronny it is a chance to make a little extra money just by being his friendly self and chatting with the residents. With notes of O. Henry’s “The Gift of the Magi” and plenty of winter weather mishaps in the lead-up to Christmas, this is a strong seasonal choice, but the universality of the protagonists’ struggles makes this a title with year-round appeal.

A well-paced, engaging, heartwarming story. (author’s note) (Fiction. 8-12)

THE COOL CODE
Langeland, Deirdre
Illus. by Sarah Mai
Clarion/HarperCollins (224 pp.)
$24.99 | $13.99 paper | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-358-54931-4 paper
978-0-358-54932-1
Series: Cool Code, 1

Can an app actually make you cool?
After being exclusively home-schooled by her software programmer parents, bespectacled 12-year-old Zoey McIntyre is entering eighth grade in public school. With her own penchant for coding, Zoey makes an app she names Cool Code that features an adorable pink llama avatar named C.C. who advises her on how to be socially successful. Her first day of school is mostly a disaster, however, though she meets Daniel and Morgan, who invite her to their after-school coding club. Zoey divulges the truth about her app, and the three decide to work on it together. As C.C. ’s database of knowledge grows, the cute but bossy creature begins to take over Zoey’s life in unbearable ways. He commands her to do things that make her uncomfortable, like running against Daniel in the school election, and takes the initiative, acting on her behalf in unsettling ways. What will Zoey do: continue on an exhausting path to being cool or eschew C.C. and stick by her true friends? Langeland’s text is an easy read, with a tried-and-true message—albeit moralistic—ending. While Zoey, Daniel, and Morgan are sympathetic, their lack of depth renders them overly predictable but fun. (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)

SHE HOLDS UP THE STARS
Laronde, Sandra
Annick Press (192 pp.)
$17.95 | Aug. 16, 2022
978-1-77321-066-7

A 12-year-old Ojibway girl has come back to the rez for the summer, hoping to finally find out what happened to her mother.

What she doesn’t anticipate is how much she’ll learn about herself. After a scary experience in Winnipeg, where she lives with her aunt, Misko goes to the rez to spend the summer with her grandmother and family. Misko’s mother disappeared when she was just 4 years old, and as much as she would like to know what happened, all she gets are half answers. At the rez, she reconnects with her grandmother and cousins and with her Ojibway roots. She also meets a horse she names Mishkadim and Thomas, a White boy who, along with his rancher father, is viciously “breaking” the horse’s spirit. Drawing parallels between the brutal breaking of horses and the ways in which Indigenous children—including her own family—were forcibly taken to residential schools, Misko knows she must do something to stop the violence. This heartfelt story of self-discovery and personal strength is told in language filled with evocative imagery and Anishinaabemowin sprinkled throughout. Readers will find themselves rooting for Misko in a situation where so much seems stacked against her.

A tale of strength and determination rooted in the ancestral pull of home and family. (Fiction. 9-13)

THE WORLD’S LONGEST SOCK
Law, Juliann
WorthyKids/Ideals (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-5460-0258-1

Sock it to me! Competitive knitters vie for the ultimate crafting honor.

Sock shop proprietress Nana Nina adds a row to one long sock every time someone makes a purchase. The result? Her sock is soon a world record holder...but not for long. Far away, a lonely lumberman named Chuck has his own incredible sock, and he quickly wins Nana Nina’s prize. What follows is a series of one-upmanship scenarios as each knitter tries desperately to outdo the other. By the time both contestants reach the end of their rope/yarn, ready to throw in the sock, they find that the judges have revealed the perfect solution: a tie! After all, socks really should come in pairs. Law lays on the intricate details, including such accurately rendered elements as carding machines, drop spindles, and knitting needle placement. Background characters reappear throughout the storyline, giving sharp-eyed spotters plenty to notice. And while the ending comes rather abruptly, the reveal of socks being best as pairs is both sweet and clever. Brown-skinned Nana Nina hails from
Chile and has an alpaca companion, while tan-skinned lumberman Chuck comes from cooler, forested areas and is often accompanied by multiple sheep. Background characters are diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

There are plenty of purls of wisdom from this clever competition, no knitting knowledge required. (Picture book. 3-6)

### OUR STORY STARTS IN AFRICA

**Lawrence, Patrice**
Illus. by Jeanetta Gonzales
 Magic Cat (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 13, 2022
978-1-4197-6022-8

One child’s journey to taking pride in and inspiration from her African heritage.

Paloma, a little Black girl with a curly Afro, visits her relatives in Trinidad and is eager to spend time with her three cousins. But they won’t play with her because her accent sounds so different from theirs. She instead spends time with her aunt, Tante Janet, who informs her that while their family may be different, they all have common roots in Africa. Tante Janet unwraps her headwrap to undo her cornrows while telling Paloma about historical African arts; the warrior Queen Amarnenas, who fought Romans 2,000 years ago; techniques Africans used to document their own history and culture; the slave trade; and more. In the yard, they pick limes for their ginger beer, and when Paloma asks Tante Janet about her cocoa pods, Tante Janet tells about other natural resources, like frankincense and ebony, which made some African rulers successful and rich. Paired with Lawrence’s enlightening text, Gonzales’ bright, colorful illustrations of Paloma’s world emphasize the verdant flora of Trinidad; by contrast, the scenes depicting African history have more of a sepia tone. The text never identifies Paloma’s home, stating only that she was not born in Africa, which suggests that her belonging to the African diaspora is more important than where in the diaspora she comes from. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An informative, visually rich picture book that personalizes African history and entices readers to learn more. (more information on Africa, further reading) (Informational picture book. 4-7)

### CURVE & FLOW

**The Elegant Vision of L.A. Architect Paul R. Williams**

Loney, Andrea J.
Illus. by Keith Mallett
Knopf (48 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-593-42907-5
978-0-593-42908-2 PLB

A portrait of an African American architect who “curved his creativity around the stone wall of racism.”

The title reflects the course of Williams’ career more than his characteristic rectilinear style, but the creators of *Take a Picture of Me, James Vanderzee* (2017) again pair a narrative alive with rhythm and rich imagery to equally vibrant pictures to celebrate both the achievements and the character of a (this time) literally groundbreaking Black figure. Writing in present tense for immediacy, Loney gives her subject youthful dreams of building a home that lead him to bend around naysayers and racial prejudice to establish himself as an architect—learning to sketch ideas upside down on the fly to impress White clients across the table, to create structures with a Southern California flair “from paper to pine to paint job,” and then “flow[ing] in a different direction” to help found a bank that would lend to Black communities in South LA. Mallett follows Williams from childhood to dignified maturity, catching the overall motif with curving lines, restrained lighting, and slightly softened focus while portraying him here bent over blueprints with glimpses of his work visible over his shoulder, there standing proud with his family before the house he did at last design and build, and, in a final scene, posing with a racially diverse group of smiling Angelenos. Along with a timeline and a select list of sources, the backmatter includes photos of several of the thousands of structures with which he is associated. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An inspiring tribute to a determined dreamer and doer constructed with admirable verve. (author’s note) (Picture-book biography. 7-9)

### HORSE & BUGGY ON ICE!

**Long, Ethan**

Holiday House (32 pp.)
$15.99 | Dec. 20, 2022
978-0-8234-4768-8
Series: I Like To Read

Did you know horses could ice-skate? Horse, a spotted gray stallion, and Buggy, a long-lashed horsefly, are back for some wintry fun. Buggy is impressed with Horse’s ice-skating abilities, but as Horse gets bolder, Buggy grows concerned that Horse will fall. Horse reassures Buggy that all is well…until a mistimed somersault results in an ice-cracking fall. Still, Horse is unhurt, and soon the duo are
back on the ice, trying again with all the style of professional skaters. Designed to encourage reading through simple sentences and repetitive word choices, the story is brief, and the resolution is less exciting than the build-up implies. While die-hard fans of the series will welcome a new title, this outing may prove less thrilling and less humorous to those unfamiliar with the pair’s previous antics. The concise text and Buggy’s deadpan expressions may make curious readers wonder if the horsefly is expressing concern for the showboating Horse or is just an insectoid Debbie Downer predicting gloom and doom. Horse’s wacky body language and expressive face provide most of the book’s humor, but it may not be enough to keep this book from skating on thin ice.

The humor’s fallen...and it can’t get up. (Early reader. 4-8)

**CYBERSPIES**

*Macx, Logan*

Walker US/Candlewick (356 pp.)

$17.99 | Nov. 22, 2022

978-1-5362-2415-3

Series: Swift & Hawk, 1

Tween whiz kids get recruited into spy games. Caleb Quinn is a supergenius when it comes to AI, capable of programming some very fancy gizmos and gadgets. His best friend, Zenobia Rafiq, is an engineering wunderkind. Together they attend the ARC Institute in London, an accelerated school for the best and brightest. When intruders enter Caleb’s home and abduct his widowed mother, Caleb turns to Zen for help. It turns out that family members of high-tech talent, Zen’s included, are being kidnapped. One thing leads to another, and soon Caleb and Zen are recruited to investigate the peculiar Möbius Program. Given the code names Swift and Hawk, the 12-year-old sleuthing geniuses embark on a dangerous mission that brings them to the docklands of Amsterdam, through the tunnels beneath the British Museum, and aboard the mysterious container ship *Nightfall*, with a villainous island lair on the horizon. Action, adventure, gadgetry, suspense: Everything a young spy thriller enthusiast craves can be found here. Swift and Hawk make for engaging protagonists, and their absurdly heightened world is one readers will be eager to return to. The exposition is smartly paced, the action is well structured, and there’s just enough humor to keep things rolling. Caleb is White, with an American mother and English father; Zen is Syrian, and there’s plenty of diversity among the supporting players.

An excellent kickoff for a new spy series. (Thriller. 9-13)

**THE MANY HATS OF LOUIE**

*Marsh, Sarah Glenn*

Illustrated by Tiffany Rose

Running Press Kids (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-0-7624-7505-6

A young girl takes a fantastic adventure to the Crayola factory. Ellie, a brown-skinned girl with long, curly black hair, dreams every night of colors “no one had ever seen.” Though she tries to re-create these hues in art class, she can’t quite get them right. So when her teacher announces a trip to the Crayola factory, Ellie is thrilled. At the factory, a guide shows the students the different pigments used to create the crayons and tells the children that little creatures called color catchers traverse the globe in search of dynamic hues. Unfortunately, Ellie’s untied shoelaces cause her to fall and break several containers of pigment. But the tour guide is encouraging and tells Ellie that her accident has resulted in a wonderful new color, a rich blend of yellow, orange, and green, which Ellie proudly names daydream. Each page prominently displays the multihued rainbows that crayon lovers have come to expect when opening a box from the beloved company. As the book is the result of a partnership with Crayola, the logo can be seen when opening a box from the beloved company. As the book is the result of a partnership with Crayola, the logo can be seen (Early reader. 4-8)

**ELLIE’S CRAYON ADVENTURE**

Marsh, Sarah Glenn

Illustrated by Tiffany Rose

Running Press Kids (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022

978-0-7624-7505-6

Aww rats, inventing is tough! Louie wants to create “useful things from not-so-useful things,” but the other rats in his village don’t appreciate his craft. In fairness, Louie’s inventions aren’t particularly useful (or safe). Luck smiles upon the inventor one day, though, when he notices a new trend: fancy hats that are so large they cover their wearers’ eyes. Inspired, Louie starts manufacturing his own, more practical hats: “wool hats for warmth, wide-brimmed hats for shade, hard hats for safety, and handy hats for bad hair days.” The rats, well aware of Louie’s track record and enamored with their stylish yet impractical hats, take no notice of his new, useful creations. Thankfully, Louie gives away a few hats to needy individuals, the rats take notice, and Louie begins recycling the old hats into ones that serve a purpose. The story’s message is greatly diluted when one of these large hats, dubbed non-useful, suddenly becomes a lifesaving boat during a flood. The illustrations, which appear hand-drawn, are amusing, and Louie is adorable, but it’s not enough to save the meandering plot. Rodent fans and aspiring inventors may be drawn to the story, but there’s not a lot to keep them invested. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An ultimately muddled message accompanied by attractive artwork. (Picture book. 6-8)
A mystery lover finds a way to appreciate Valentine’s Day. Pippa the porcupine would rather read a Sherlock Gnomes book than do almost anything else—especially participate in Valentine’s Day projects like the one her teacher, Mr. Tod, has assigned the class. Whoever heard of making lists of “things that take up room in your heart”? At lunch, all the students share their heart-shaped pizzas—except for Pippa. Everyone has a best friend—except for Pippa. But what’s this? Somebody’s pink, heart-shaped “love list” has attached itself to Pippa’s quills. Pippa is one of the items included on the list—somebody likes her! (Also on the list: Berry Berry Twigs cereal, the Beastly Boys T-shirt and trying to share Berry Berry Twigs cereal with her classmates, one’s pink, heart-shaped “love list” has attached itself to Pippa’s quills. Pippa resolves to ferret out the answer. After wearing her Beastly Boys T-shirt and trying to share Berry Berry Twigs cereal with her classmates, Pippa is no closer to solving the mystery. What is she missing? After reviewing photos of all the love list activities she took part in, she discovers the identity of her secret friend. Valentine’s Day won’t be so lonely after all! Marsh’s focus on the mystery friend invites readers to go a-sleuthing alongside our curious porcupine. Lobo’s fanciful woodland classroom and schoolyard are filled with whimsical detail, from the boy band T-shirt to the bedecked cervine model whom the kids draw during art class. Sharp-eyed detectives will soon spot the mysterious friend. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A fun case of elementary deduction. (Picture book. 4-7)

WHALES TO THE RESCUE
How Whales Help Engineer the Planet
Mason, Adrienne
Illus. by Kim Smith
Kids Can (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 6, 2022
978-1-5253-0537-5
Series: Ecosystem Guardians

A look at the many ways whales serve as “ecosystem engineers,” even on a planetary scale. With the riveting declaration that “whale poop makes the world go round!” Mason launches an effervescent study of how whales affect oceanic food webs—not only by participating in “a massive poop pump” that feeds krill and phytoplankton on the surface, but by taking significant quantities of climate-changing carbon out of the air to store it in their bodies while alive and “export” it to the bottom of the ocean when dead. Along with overviews of food chains, the carbon cycle, and the greenhouse effect, plus a case study involving the interdependence of baleen whales and krill in the Antarctic and gobsmacking facts (fin whales pee 257 gallons a day! One mouthful of krill provides a blue whale with roughly the same calories as 83,000 peanuts!), the author tucks in basic information about whale types and behavior on the way to a compelling conclusion that no, they aren’t going to accomplish a “rescue” alone…but they have a role to play, and so do we.” Smith mixes helpful schematics with views of whales of various species gracefully feeding, breaching, or, yes, pooping. In rare glimpses, tiny humans, when they’re not clad in wetsuits, appear diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)
“A moody, ingenious masterstroke.”

JOÃO BY A THREAD

Mello, Roger
Trans. by Daniel Hahn
Elsewhere Editions (37 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-953861-34-4

Nighttime imaginings and musings unspool at the precipice of sleep.

In bed, João, an abstract figure who appears entirely black or white on various pages, tugs at his homemade blanket, submerged in his thoughts. “So it’s just me now,” he thinks, “alone with myself.” Before long, his imagination wanders as he slips into sleep. The ever changing blanket, it seems, becomes the canvas for his unnamed doubts and uncertainties, his unchecked fantasies and figments. Set against lakes of striking deep red and black, the threads of the blanket weave and stretch into different shapes and symbols, echoing Mello’s whimsical text (translated from Portuguese by Hahn) in all its compelling allure. At the book’s core, João’s bedtime reveries wed a simple premise with magnificent possibilities. Over several pages, readers consider João’s blanket as it flutters as if in the wind, trembles under the fidgety feet of its drowsy owner, and strains against “a fish that’s bigger than us.” A passing reference to a father who “goes out fishing” hints at a source of João’s ruminations. Soon, João wakes with a question: “Who unravelled my blanket?” To return to his dreams, João threads together words strewn across the floor into a “word-blanket” more fanciful than ever. Evocative in its execution, this Brazilian import invites readers to ponder the scenarios it casts (and those it doesn’t). (This book was reviewed digitally.

A moody, ingenious masterstroke. (Picture book: 4-8)

THE LOST LIBRARY

McGeachin, Jess
Viking (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-593-35133-8

A strange book prompts a wild journey.

When Oliver, a light-skinned boy with glasses, moves, he leaves a lot of things behind. But he still has his books to keep him company, and his new house surprises him with a fluttering book behind his bedroom closet. A note inside asks that the book be returned to the Lost Library, wherever that is, but his new neighbor Rosie, a girl with dark skin and curly hair, offers to help. Together, they visit the local library. When Oliver places the book in the returns slot, the floor gives way, and Oliver and Rosie slide into an underground library adventure, where they must traverse stormy waters and a forest of books (luckily, the books there offer guidance). As the forest thins, Oliver sees a way out through a giant bookshelf only to find that it is in fact a Bookshelf Dragon. Luckily, Rosie, a book lover herself, knows a solution, and the pair safely leave the Lost Library, their friendship cemented. The palette changes with location, and the blue and rose tones of the Lost Library add an aura of mystery and danger without being overly scary. A note on a checkout card at the end of the story will send readers scurrying to find a dragon on each spread. (A few require close scrutiny and some imagination.) (This book was reviewed digitally.

An imaginative adventure and friendship story bound together by the love of books and libraries. (Picture book: 4-8)

THE BIRD WHO INSPIRED MOZART

Messier, Mireille
Illus. by Matte Stephens
Tundra Books (36 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-0-7352-6689-6

A friendship between two musicians. Starlings are a species of bird known for their mimicry skills. This picture book, set in 18th-century Vienna, describes the imagined life of a real starling that belonged to Mozart; according to lore, the composer passed a pet store and heard the bird singing one of his pre-published concertos and, charmed, bought the animal. In this book, the bird, later named Star, had previously flown freely around the city, listening to new sounds at various windows (her favorite is Mozart’s), only to be netted by a profit-driven bird catcher and sold to a “dark and noisy bird shop.” She’s finally rescued by Mozart and spends the rest of her life as his beloved pet, possibly inspiring some of his music. The crude illustrations are blocky, with pupil-less eyes, comically stuck-out tongues, and chartreuse-skinned villains (characters have garish skin tones; Mozart himself is purplish-complexioned). While the story is well told, the emotional core is underdeveloped, with the bird kept at a distance. Though adults may understand and appreciate the reference to the Viennese virtuoso, children will likely be less drawn to it, though the goofy pictures will help carry their interest further. Overall this story feels like an interesting historical tidbit unnecessarily lengthened for those few children who are really into birds and/or classical music. (This book was reviewed digitally.

Sweet but of limited appeal to children. (author’s note) (Picture book: 4-7)

A moody, ingenious masterstroke.
With flowers and fancy fabrics, Black fashion designer Ann Lowe created gowns for the rich and famous, breaking color barriers in dress design.

Messner and Powell chronicle Lowe’s story; from her Alabama childhood in a dressmaking family to a salon on New York City’s Madison Avenue, it’s a life of breaking racial barriers, where ugly incidents contrast with the soft fabrics, delicate lace, and sparkles. In New York in 1917, she took sewing lessons at the St. T. Taylor School but was forced to sew in a separate room, away from the White students. For years, her employers didn’t credit her work. Lowe is most famous for her dresses for Jacqueline Kennedy’s wedding, but even this climactic achievement is balanced with an account of confronting racism in her life—when Lowe arrived to deliver the dresses, she was told to use the back door but refused, threatening to take the gowns with her if she wasn’t allowed in through the front entrance. Fittingly, the final spread shows a triumphant Lowe with her own shop, where her name will appear on the labels as well as the door. Robinson’s digital art, full of textures, curves, and color, is perfectly suited to the subject, while Messner and Powell’s evocative, often alliterative text begs to be read aloud. (Powell had written her thesis on the designer and was in the process of organizing a museum exhibit of her gowns when she died.) (This book was reviewed digitally)

A deserving tribute to a designer who wanted only the best. (author's note, quotations, bibliography) (Informational picture book. 5-10)

In alternating chapters, siblings Paco and Socorro narrate their eight-year journey from the Spanish Civil War’s terrors to freedom in Venezuela.

Translated from Spanish, child’s-eye perspectives on daily life are overshadowed by danger: The children’s father, a “Rojo” who sides with the Republic against Francisco Franco’s rebels, has fled for his life to France, forcing the family into an impoverished, secretive existence. Paco, 9, exchanges child’s play for sudden status as “man of the house.” Constantly hungry (as the wife of a Rojo, his mother isn’t allowed a ration book), he fantasizes about stealing a classmate’s mouthwatering lunch. Socorro, 7, who manifests stress through food aversion, calmly provides occasional levity, capturing Socorro’s clever scheme to steal papers for the family. The long journey culminates in a new life for the now teenagers, who marvel at having ample food and constant electricity. Though their accents reveal their refugee status, “being different had stopped being something dangerous” at last. Gómez’s accomplished, somber-toned illustrations inject occasional levity, capturing Socorro’s clever scheme to change schools and exaggerating Paco’s imagined sandwich theft.

“A deserving tribute to a designer who wanted only the best.”

ONLY THE BEST

The Exceptional Life and Fashion of Ann Lowe
Messner, Kate & Margaret E. Powell
Illus. by Erin K. Robinson
Chronicle Books (56 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-4521-6160-0

BESTIES FIND THEIR GROOVE
Miller, Kayla & Jeffrey Canino
Illus. by Kristina Lau
Colors by Damali Beatty
Clarion/HarperCollins (208 pp.)
$24.99 | $13.99 paper | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-358-52116-7
978-0-358-56192-7 paper
Series: World of Click

In alternating chapters, siblings Paco and Socorro narrate their eight-year journey from the Spanish Civil War’s terrors to freedom in Venezuela.

Translated from Spanish, child’s-eye perspectives on daily life are overshadowed by danger: The children’s father, a “Rojo” who sides with the Republic against Francisco Franco’s rebels, has fled for his life to France, forcing the family into an impoverished, secretive existence. Paco, 9, exchanges child’s play for sudden status as “man of the house.” Constantly hungry (as the wife of a Rojo, his mother isn’t allowed a ration book), he fantasizes about stealing a classmate’s mouthwatering lunch. Socorro, 7, who manifests stress through food aversion, calmly provides occasional levity, capturing Socorro’s clever scheme to steal papers for the family. The long journey culminates in a new life for the now teenagers, who marvel at having ample food and constant electricity. Though their accents reveal their refugee status, “being different had stopped being something dangerous” at last. Gómez’s accomplished, somber-toned illustrations inject occasional levity, capturing Socorro’s clever scheme to change schools and exaggerating Paco’s imagined sandwich theft.

DIFFERENT

A Story of the Spanish Civil War
Montañés, Mónica
Trans. by Lawrence Schimel
Illus. by Eva Sánchez Gómez
Eerdmans (88 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-0-8028-5598-5
The well-crafted narrative, nuanced art, and appended historical context combine for a salient, important work. (publisher's note, historical overview, glossary, resources) (Historical fiction. 9-14)

AGATHA MAY AND THE ANGLERFISH
Morrison, Nora & Jessie Ann Foley
Illus. by Mika Song
Dial Books (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Dec. 13, 2022
978-0-593-3475-2

There's a new social outcast in town.

Messy, tardy, and dreamy, Agatha May is not what you'd call a teacher's pet. Indeed, Mrs. Marino can hardly explain the class's next assignment without constantly calling the girl out for her behavior. Students are instructed to choose a deep-sea creature to research; those with the most merit points get to select first, and Agatha fears someone will select her favorite. To her infinite pleasure, however, no one else chooses the anglerfish. No one researches their choice half as well as Agatha May either, and when she presents facts about this particular terror of the deep, everyone is entranced. And her teacher’s praise and encouragement prove to be a reward that will influence her forever. Telling any story entirely in rhyme is always a risk, but there are many different things to stumble upon—each day is its own journey. Though many people are depicted, they're seen at a distance, making it hard to discern race or ethnicity. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A concept book for the sharpest of eyes. (answer key) (Activity book. 5-8)

WHAT’S YOUR NAME?
Murgua, Bethanie Deeney
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-5362-1856-5

What’s in a name?

According to this thought-provoking conversation sparker, lots—more than readers probably realized. Names are fraught with meaning and spring from varied sources. As narrated in jaunty verse and clarified through speech bubbles, this spirited offering invites children to discover, ponder, and discuss fascinating things about names—their own and those of parents, family members, friends, neighbors, and others, even pets. Many kids may never have thought about names this way. They will learn names aren’t just personal identifiers, but also have functions. Names can be familiar or unique. They can honor people from history or pay homage to seasons, weather, birthplaces, and birth times. What if our names don’t suit us? We can “try new names, or add on a bit, / give them a whirl, and see how they fit”—as in the scene depicting a light-skinned child wearing a tutu who adds an A to their name (turning Louis to Louisa) and looks admirably in a mirror. Perhaps this book’s greatest strengths are its cheery declarations, portrayals of diversity—in race, ethnicity, attire, and physical ability (a child fingerspells their name in ASL)—and depictions of respectful camaraderie and pride in being unabashedly oneself, expressed through text and charming illustrations, created with traditional printmaking methods and assembled digitally. Grown-ups should absolutely encourage lively post-reading discussion with kids—and note the characters’ final question (“what’s yours?”); response guaranteed! (This book was reviewed digitally)

What’s a name for this richly satisfying book? Winner. (Picture book. 4-8)

letters: an ambulance and banana on the A and B page, a jaguar on the J page, etc. The illustrations are carefully composed, with bird’s-eye-view shots of construction sites, train tracks, a hospital, a swimming pool, and much more. The objects to find are quite tiny, and because the streets form a maze, some readers may have trouble focusing on each page. Still, readers up for a challenge will enjoy spending time with this book. Laudably, Munro depicts a city where greenery is plentiful and where there are many different things to stumble upon—each day is its own journey. Though many people are depicted, they’re seen at a distance, making it hard to discern race or ethnicity. (This book was reviewed digitally)

A paean to the up-and-coming chaotic, incipient scientists of the world. (facts, definitions) (Picture book. 4-7)

ABCITY Maze & Seek-n-Find
Munro, Roxie
Schiffer (32 pp.)
$16.99 | Oct. 28, 2022
978-0-7643-6481-5

So many sights to see in a city!

This concept book works in two ways: as a maze through the city streets that traces through the entire book and as a seek-and-find, which is a page-to-page activity. The buildings in the city are shaped like alphabetical letters, hence the book’s title, and the items to find are on the buildings and outside of them and correspond to the buildings’
CURSE OF THE WEREWOLVES  
Ogle, Rex  
Inkyard Press (472 pp.)  
$16.99 | Sept. 27, 2022  
978-1-335-91583-2  
Series: The Supernatural Society, 2

Will and his friends are back to save the town from werewolves in this follow-up to The Supernatural Society (2022).

After saving the town from a vampire and his legion of vampire pets, Will, Ivy, and Linus receive a new warning of hirsute strangers appearing on the full moon. When they head out into the town to investigate, they are attacked by newly turned werewolves, and Will gets bitten and turns into a werewolf, too. Soon they discover someone is planning to turn the whole town into a mind-controlled werewolf army. Will struggles with his new hairy self and doglike behaviors as well as his hurt feelings surrounding his father’s not being around for him since the divorce. With the help of a good witch, a lamia (half snake, half human) librarian, and a mystical fox, the trio of friends must find the Alpha werewolf and stop the attack on their town. Ogle writes another hilarious yet thoughtful story of bravery, family, and friendship. Themes of grief and loneliness run throughout the tale, which demonstrates ways of coping and moving forward. This sequel is narrated by a monster named Adam who throws in funny and insightful commentary and directly addresses readers. There are new ciphers and codes for readers to solve, adding to the fun and engagement. Will presents Latine and White; Linus is Black, and Ivy is Korean American.

A humorous, thoughtful, and engaging sequel. (Fantasy. 8-12)

COLORFUL KINGDOM  
How Animals Use Color To Surprise and Survive  
Omedes, Anna  
Illus. by Laura Fraile  
Trans. by Catalina Girona  
Orange Mosquito (48 pp.)  
$17.95 | Oct. 25, 2022  
978-1-914519-24-6

The strange, fascinating role of color.

This wide-ranging survey shows how color in the natural world serves varied purposes. It opens with an explanation of where colors come from (pigments, melanin, etc.) and how animals perceive them. These processes are demonstrated through descriptions of creatures from mandrills to nudibranchs. Peacock spiders, great tits, and blue-footed boobies all use color to attract mates. Tigers’ orange and black stripes camouflage them while they hunt. The bright hues of poison dart frogs and coral snakes advertise toxicity. It’s thought that the orange of silvery langur babies makes them the center of a troop’s attention. Blue is rare in animal coloration, though some animals appear blue through an optical illusion created by reflective colors in skin or feathers. Omedes, former director of the Museum of Natural Sciences of Barcelona, includes explanations of how animals get their color through the foods they eat, how some species produce their own light, and how some, like cuttlefish and chameleons, can change colors. Each topic gets a spread with a two-level text set directly on vibrant illustrations of each species in context. The description of caterpillar metamorphosis does not distinguish between chrysalises and cocoons, but otherwise the information is accurate. The technical language and generally high-level vocabulary may challenge some readers, but the text, translated from Spanish by Girona, is smooth.

A colorful collection of wonders from the natural world. (Nonfiction. 8-12)

THE LIZARD SCIENTISTS  
Studying Evolution in Action  
Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw  
Photos by Nate Dappen & Neil Losin  
Clarion/HarperCollins (80 pp.)  
$18.99 | Dec. 13, 2022  
978-0-358-38140-2  
Series: Scientists in the Field

A veteran science writer reports on some surprising recent discoveries about evolution and adaptation made by researchers studying the small tropical lizards called anoles.

Experiments and observations reveal that the tree-dwelling lizards, when placed in new habitats, begin to show physical changes in as little as four years—and if the news is buried in rather dry and repetitive observations about convergent evolution and ecomorphic differences in leg length and toepads, it should still make readers interested in evolutionary theory sit up and take notice. Though the photos are usually a strong point of this much-lauded series, here they, too, underperform, since, aside from a few close-up views to show colorful dewlaps and scale patterns, the dull brown or green reptiles make inconspicuous visual subjects. Still, in line with the series premise, Patent introduces several zoologists studying anoles both in the Caribbean and in the Miami area (most relatively young and including at least one who is a person of color) who explain their projects, and she also highlights an ongoing grassroots initiative dubbed “Lizards on the Loose” that enlists students in southern Florida to track anole populations.

One of the series’ weaker entries, its appeal more intellectual than visceral. (maps, glossary, resource lists, photo credits, index) (Illustrated nonfiction. 10-13)
**A cozy reminder to appreciate those around us.**

**THE LITTLE ISLAND**

Prasadam-Halls, Smriti
Illus. by Robert Starling
Andersen Press USA (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-1-72846-773-3

If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it.

A group of animals—ducks, geese, sheep, pigs, and others—work on a farm together. The geese and ducks live on an island in a nearby pond. One day, the geese decide that they do not like having the other farm animals traipsing through their island. The ducks don’t agree, but they are outnumbered by the geese, who get rid of the bridge to the island. Now, the geese and ducks must do their chores on their own, and they quickly realize how difficult that is, but the stubborn geese refuse to admit their mistake. Without the protection of the other animals, the ducks and geese are vulnerable when the foxes invade (“Silently, stealthily…”). Art with a naïve flavor depicts the four-legged animals standing on two legs like humans, though the images may be slightly difficult to see at a distance in a large-group storytime. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A welcome addition to the author’s extensive nature shelf. *(Informational picture book. 6-10)*

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**THE SCIENCE OF LIGHT**

*Things That Shine, Flash, and Glow*

Peot, Margaret
Holiday House (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-8234-4872-2

A tally of natural and manufactured light sources, all atmospherically depicted.

With visual effects ranging from ghostly to dazzling, Peot opens with a glow-in-the-dark crystal jellyfish on the cover, then goes on to depict lightning and fireworks, fireflies, fungi, certain deep sea squid, and several other sources of luminosity, all shining in subtle blends of color against deep black backgrounds. Parsimonious when it comes to word count but not vocabulary, she specifically names each—"Mycena singeri (meye-SEE-nuh sin-JE-reh) gleam. // Clusterwink snails blink. // Dino-flagellates (DEYE-noh-fla-juh-litz) sparkle"—and in closing notes adds details and definitions to go with lists of audience-appropriate books and websites. "Stars twinkle" in a final spread, but Peot never explains why, nor do light-shedding minerals, LEDs, or lava (among many other light sources) make the cut…so student readers will find the broader catalog in Walter Wick’s *A Ray of Light* (2019) helpful. Still, the art is infused with a contagious sense of wonder, and even younger audiences will benefit from the exposure to scientific nomenclature. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Illuminating, even literally—but better regarded as a showcase for the artist than a full topical study. *(Informational picture book. 5-7)*

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**WOLVES!**

*Strange and Wonderful*

Pringle, Laurence
Illus. by Meryl Henderson
Astra Young Readers (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 22, 2022
978-1-63592-327-8

Pringle continues his Strange and Wonderful series with an appreciation of wolves.

Nearly 40 years ago, Pringle published *Wolfman* (1983), a “career biography” of L. David Mech, a wildlife biologist who had, at the time, been studying wolves for 25 years. Here, the prolific science writer writes about the wolves themselves, dedicating his book to Mech, still a working scientist, who vetted both text and illustrations. Skillfully, the author draws young readers in by inviting them to howl like wolves. He then proceeds to distinguish different species, explain how they are like and different from dogs, and explore their physical and social attributes and behaviors. Finally, he considers human attitudes toward wolves throughout history and celebrates the more recent protections that have restored wolves to some of their one-time habitats. Though not long, the text is relatively dense and informative, set directly on Henderson’s appealing watercolor and pencil illustrations. These range from scenes of wolves hunting to family close-ups to a clearly labeled diagram of a wolf’s skull, emphasizing the teeth that make them such powerful carnivores. The few pictured humans are racially diverse; also pictured are wolf-related objects from various cultures throughout history. Bolded words are defined in context and in an appended glossary. Print and internet resources and an index add to the utility of this introduction. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A welcome addition to the author’s extensive nature shelf. *(Informational picture book. 5-7)*

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**MATTIE AND THE MACHINE**

Quezon, Lynn Ng
Santa Monica Press (288 pp.)
$12.99 paper | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-59580-118-0

A fictionalized account of Margaret E. Knight’s struggle to win legal rights to the invention of the paper-bag machine.

Fifteen-year-old Mattie holds a rare position at Columbia Paper: Unlike the other girls and women, she doesn’t run
In this picture-book adaptation of R.E.M.’s song, a young fox and rabbit show the adults that everyone can be friends. The joyous reunion of the young animals is cut short when they meet angry adult rabbits gesturing at a no-foxes sign. The duo try to convince the protesting rabbits that Fox is a friend. Fox even makes a carrot peace offering that is refused and tries unsuccessfully to amuse the protestors by riding a unicycle. Next, an adult fox, wolf, and bear show up and threaten the resident rabbits. The animals are about to come to blows when the young fox and rabbit mediate. In the end, tempers cool and everyone shares a meal and some joyful dancing. At first, the song’s lyrics match the illustrations; during the conflict, the words and art appear dramatically at odds; and, in the end, the vibrancy of the images reflects the words. The story is simple, but careful readers will note that color plays a large role—fiery reds and oranges denote conflict, while vibrant blues, purples, and pinks surround the happy folks at the end. While the song on which the book is based has somewhat dark, ironic undertones—it was released two years after the Tiananmen Square uprising, and the titular phrase was taken from Chinese propaganda posters—the illustrations match the pop feel of the melody, with an upbeat tone that will resonate with kids. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A pop song finds new life as a simple yet heartfelt story of acceptance. (Picture book. 4-8)

SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE
A Children’s Picture Book
R.E.M.
Illus. by Paul Hoppe with Shinyeon Moon
Akashic (32 pp.)
$16.95 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-61775-851-5
Series: LyricPop

A HISTORY OF WORDS FOR CHILDREN
Richards, Mary
Illus. by Rose Blake
Thames & Hudson (96 pp.)
$19.95 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-500-62382-4

An introduction to the history and uses of spoken and written language. In this encore to A History of Music for Children (2021), co-written by David Schweitzer, Richards again ties general comments and observations to a broadly inclusive cast of historical figures—discussing the invention of writing and its early use in recording stories, for instance, while introducing Akkadian poet Enheduanna, Chinese calligrapher Wang Xizhi, and the Brothers Grimm. But while she tackles topics ranging from alphabets and language families to sign languages, poetry, graffiti, advertising, and even emojis (with samples of a West African set designed by Ivorian O’Plérou and invented languages from Esperanto to Elvish), she barely touches on what “words” actually are or how they are constructed. She likewise has little or nothing to say about grammar, punctuation, or even semantics. Interspersed with photos of a clay tablet, a page from Anne Frank’s diary, and other well-chosen artifacts, Blake tucks in tiny images of herself and the author squiring readers through the chapters in company with dozens of racially and culturally diverse word users down the ages.

Not the last word but a wide-angled survey nonetheless. (timeline, glossary, sources, list of illustrations, answer key to questions posed throughout the book, resource lists, index) (Nonfiction. 10-12)

HOW TO SEND A HUG
Rocco, Hayley
Illus. by John Rocco
Little, Brown (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-0-316-30692-8

Hugs are for everyone anytime they need a little extra love, but how can you hug a person who lives far away? Talking on the phone or via computer isn’t enough, but luckily Artie shares a way to send a hug—by writing a letter. Infused with the love a hug carries, these step-by-step instructions begin with finding the right writing implement and paper and taking plenty of time for this important task. The story then follows the letter’s journey from the mail drop through a variety of possible transports (“by two legs and four legs, by four wheels and two wheels”) to the magic of delivery and the even greater joy of getting a reply. Readers as lucky as Artie will receive a return letter that carries the scent of its writer, like Grandma Gertie’s missive, filled with rose petals. Fun wording, like putting the letter in a “special jacket to keep it safe and warm” (an envelope), sticking “a ticket” on
the envelope “in just the right spot” (a stamp), and the letter being picked up by a “Hug Delivery Specialist” (postal worker), adds humor, as does Artie’s ever present pet duck. Artie and Grandma Gertie present White; the postal workers and the other people depicted receiving letters throughout are racially and geographically diverse. The realistic illustrations in pencil, watercolor, and digital color expand the story and add a layer of love and humor. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A celebration of letters that gently gives young readers the knowledge and tools to share the love. (author’s note) (Picture book. 5-8)

**WIBBLE WOBBLE BOOM!**
Rodman, Mary Ann
Illus. by Holly Sterling
Peachtree (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-68263-220-8

A young Black girl eager to attend her first ice-skating lesson imagines how she will “Jump. Leap. Twirl.” At the skating rink, Claire’s enthusiasm becomes disappointment when her introduction to the sport is different than her expectations. She hates the ugly brown rental skates, wanting pretty white ones of her own. She does not appreciate being placed among the Snowplows (the beginners group); she’d rather be called a skater. And she doesn’t see the point of the exercises off the ice. “This isn’t skating. I want to skate!” Finally on the ice, skating is harder than anticipated and...“Wibble, Wobble...BOOM!” Claire falls on her bottom. But the light-skinned coach, Miss Nicole, tells everyone that Claire did a good job falling the right way. And she doesn’t see the point of the initial exercises off the ice. “This isn’t skating. I want to skate!” Finally on the ice, skating is harder than anticipated and...“Wibble, Wobble...BOOM!” Claire falls on her bottom. But the light-skinned coach, Miss Nicole, tells everyone that Claire did a good job falling the right way. Getting up correctly is also a technique, but as the lesson progresses, Claire is still discouraged: “Skating is hard, not fun!” Then she takes notice of how Miss Nicole moves her feet: “Push, glide, slide.” One more try, a few wobbles, and Claire understands and skates toward the railing. Her hard work has paid off, and she feels proud to be a Snowplow. The delicate pencil, acrylic, and digital illustrations reflect a diverse group of children lending support and encouragement to an impatient yet determined newcomer; little ones facing their own challenges will be buoyed. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Realistically portrays the ups and downs of learning a new skill with satisfying success. (Picture book. 5-7)

**MICHAEL ROSEN’S STICKY MCSTICKSTICK**
The Friend Who Helped Me Walk Again
Rosen, Michael
Illus. by Tony Rosen
Candlewick (40 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-5362-2532-7

Rosen, now 76, describes relearning to walk with the aid of a cane after contracting Covid-19 and emerging from a medically induced coma. Rosen didn’t meet the titular walking stick right away. Severely weakened, he “gasped and panted” when the doctors attempted to get him out of bed. He had to learn to stand and balance between parallel bars before transitioning to a cane (personified with googly eyes and a tiny smile), which he dubbed Sticky McStickstick. In the hospital, Sticky enabled him to walk the halls and navigate difficult stairs. But after Rosen returned home, Sticky sometimes “played hide-and-seek,” peaking from inside the washing machine or behind a snoozing cat as Rosen regained enough strength to ascend stairs gripping the banister and to make himself tea. At first, Rosen felt he’d “deserted” his trusty pal. But, he notes, even though he can now climb stairs without using the banister, Sticky waits by the front door “just in case,” a reminder of everyone who helped him to walk again. Rosen’s short, matter-of-fact sentences echo his step-by-step progress; Ross’ energetic, limber cartoon illustrations add humor as Rosen caresens haphazardly through hospital hallways in a wheelchair and tenderness as Rosen walks unaided to meet his son’s family in the park. Rosen and his family present White; background characters are racially diverse. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A reassuring tale of patience and persistence that will especially resonate with kids recovering from injuries or illnesses. (author’s note) (Picture-book memoir. 4-6)

**READY FOR SPAGHETTI**
Funny Poems for Funny Kids
Rosen, Michael
Illus. by Polly Dunbar
Candlewick (64 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-5362-2497-9

Thirty-two easy poems aimed at fledgling readers tickled by “rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and play.” “I’m ready for spaghetti. / Will you getti the spaghetti? / Don’t say ‘Not yetti spaghetti!’ / I’m all setti for spaghetti.” Dunbar’s watercolors, depicting a racially diverse cast of laughing, active children in pajamas or play clothes, reflect the celebratory tone of Rosen’s breezy miniverses, which are not only suitable for chanting or singing as well as silent reading, but are often structured to make it easy for children to add their
own rhymes and embellishments. His subjects range from a run through the ABCs and (at the end, of course) snuggling down into a bedtime hush to stars, snails, and sneezes: “Where’s the sneeze gone? / I’m going to guess: / It started in my nose / And ended in a mess.” The wordplay particularly shines in verses evocatively titled “Long Leggy Eggy” and the unbridled nonsense of “I Hip Hap Happy” (“Give me a hip / Give me a hap / Give me a tip / Give me a tap / Give me a tip tap tappy”), but the cheery tone remains so steady that even the final sighed “Good night!” comes with an exclamation point. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Irresistible invitations to engage and interact with words. (index) (Picture book poetry 3-6)

THE DIGGER DANCE
Sadler, Judy Ann
Illus. by Yong Ling Kang
Owlkids Books (40 pp.)
$18.95 | Oct. 18, 2022
978-1-77147-453-5

Let’s explore the graceful side of construction.

The protagonist of this book is captivated by the construction equipment in a field across the street from Grandma’s suburban home. Grandma informs the child that the diggers dance, but the young narrator isn’t so sure about that. Do diggers dance? Sadly, it will be a while before that question is answered. When the book opens, it’s too late to see any action, and rainy weather stops construction the next morning. Thankfully, Grandma is prepared, and she’s all set to bake cookies. The protagonist helps—with a little imaginative play along the way that relates to construction. While the cookies are baking, the sky clears, and the child sets out for the construction site, where the diggers are “dancing” as they complete the project efficiently. The story provides an interesting look at the graceful movements needed for effective construction and demolition, and the watercolor and pencil illustrations help to capture that beauty. The typography attempts to keep up, with words bending and bowing around the page; opinions will differ on whether it succeeds, but overall the story will appeal to construction fans. Savvy storytellers will use some of the action words—dip, swing, pound, and dump—to introduce and reinforce vocabulary building. The protagonist is light-skinned with dark hair, while Grandma is light-skinned with gray hair. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A well-constructed view of construction. (Picture book 3-6)

MELTDOWN
Discover Earth’s Irreplaceable Glaciers and Learn What You Can Do To Save Them
Sanchez, Anita
Illus. by Lily Padula
Workman (128 pp.)
$19.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-5235-0950-8

Glaciers on this planet are vanishing—learn how we know, why we should care, and what we can do.

The author of Itch (2018) and Rotten (2019), both illustrated by Gilbert Ford, turns her attention to another underappreciated part of the natural world: glaciers. With a foreword by glaciologist Jill Pelto and an introduction laying out the problem, Sanchez prepares her readers for the cold hard truth to come. Chapter by chapter, she explains the important roles glaciers play in our world, how we know they are melting, and why that’s happening—clearly explaining climate change. She shows how ice cores reveal climate history, introduces animals and plants that thrive in glacier country, and describes what the future might bring. Sanchez concludes with suggestions for action, personal and communal. At several points, she brings in Indigenous points of view. The author addresses readers directly with compelling evidence for her thesis that this is yet another manifestation of climate change that will wreak havoc on the world we know. Unfamiliar words are bolded and defined in context as well as in a glossary. Encouraging readers to take action, Sanchez includes in the backmatter a long list of science specialties concerned with glaciers. There are occasional photographs, helpful diagrams, and artistic depictions of glacial scenes throughout, breaking up the text and adding appeal; people depicted in Padula’s illustrations are diverse.

An important perspective on our changing climate. (author’s note, additional resources, select bibliography, index) (Nonfiction 10-14)

MY SELF, YOUR SELF
Shapiro, Esmé
Tundra Books (48 pp.)
$18.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-1-77488-023-4

Explore the magic of knowing yourself.

A small fey creature, perhaps a sprite or a pixie, in a lush landscape of flowers and greenery guides readers through a simple but profound examination of their self and their interactions with others. Emerging from their acorn-shaped home, the creature, which vaguely resembles a radish (in boots), goes about their interactions with other characters inspired by nature, such as a walking, mushroomlike friend and a tall, flowerlike chef. As they interact, thoughtful narration guides their day: “I have been / with
“An eye-opening, and sometimes -widening, survey.”

*IF THE WORLD WERE 100 ANIMALS*

Where do big creatures sleep at night?

**Simmons, Steven J. & Clifford R. Simmons**
Illus. by Ruth E. Harper
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 8, 2022
978-1-62354-143-9

Animals from lions and elephants to crocodiles and anacondas bed down.

Actually, when it comes to the anaconda, “no one really knows if it actually does sleep.” But that’s not the only poetic license the father-and-son co-authors take as they record in stumbling metrics (“An ostrich is a bird that’s incredibly tall. / Its eggs can be bigger than a softball”) and a notably loose rhyme scheme not only where, but how various animals larger than those in Steven J. Simmons’ *Where Do Creatures Sleep at Night?* (2021), illustrated by Harper, first spend their days and then enjoy their downtime. The connection between text and image isn’t all that firm either, as the silverback gorilla gets male pronouns and the pride of lions collective ones, but all the rest of the animals are nongendered as *its* even though they appear to be mothers, since Harper depicts them alone with offspring in cozy proximity. An opening spread of toy animals held by variously toned hands hints at unsurprising closing scenes of human children, including a brown-skinned child, taking the final couplet to heart: “Then at night after you’re fed, / you snuggle up in your own sweet bed!”

Light doses of natural history, but better written and more somniferous bedtime reads abound. (Informational picture book. 3-6)

**IF THE WORLD WERE 100 ANIMALS**

A Visual Guide to Earth’s Amazing Creatures

**Smith, Miranda**
Illus. by Aaron Cushley
Crown (32 pp.)
$17.99 | July 5, 2022
978-0-593-37235-7
978-0-593-37236-4 PLB

Things to know about our planet’s animal kingdom, in easily digestible infographics.

Rightly judging that 20 quintillion (an estimate of how many animals live on Earth) is a number that is “hard to picture,” Smith reduces it to 100. In a hypothetical world of only 100 animals, Smith explains, six would be vertebrates and 94 invertebrates. If there were only 100 vertebrates in the world, 43 would be fish, 23 would be birds, 14 would be reptiles, 11 would be amphibians, and nine would be mammals. One hundred sea dwellers would include nine known species and (wait for it) 91 “still to be discovered.” Bringing in the human element, Smith charts animals that do or do not live in the wild (with a racially diverse set of 36 humans mischievously placed in the middle), that share our homes (“23 are cats”), that are deadly to us (mosquitoes lead by a large margin), and that, unless we do something, are most in danger of disappearing. As he did in a companion volume, Jackie McCann’s *If the World Were 100 People* (2021), Cushley gives literal visual dimension to the data by gathering realistically depicted images of tiny creatures, 100 per spread and done roughly to scale whenever feasible, in appropriately sized groups. Along with allowing viewers to grasp the relative proportions instantly, the arrangement, at once logical and ingenious, invites poring over the pages to identify individual species or just to appreciate their glorious diversity. (This book was reviewed digitally)

An eye-opening, and sometimes -widening, survey. (Source list) (Informational picture book. 7-10)

**BALLET KIDS**

**Sterling, Holly**
Candlewick (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-5362-2037-7

A group of young children find friendship and utter joy in the world of ballet.

Thomas, a brown-skinned child with short, curly hair, holds a doll dressed in a purple ballet costume and tells readers, “I’m Thomas, and I want to be a ballet kid.” In brief, spare language, Thomas describes their feelings about ballet class and the friends who share it. Thomas introduces readers to each friend as they meet on a snowy day on their way to class with their parents and provides readers with information about class procedures and exercises, carefully defining ballet terms. With Christmas around the corner, the children, led by their teacher, Mr. Elliot, are preparing for a performance of *The Nutcracker*
and are given the opportunity to choose their roles and costumes. Thomas checks out several possibilities but finally selects a purple, sparkly costume and becomes the Sugar Plum Fairy. Though Thomas initially feels a few butterflies of anxiety, they embrace the role wholeheartedly after a pep talk from Mr. Elliot, and a grand performance follows. Seamless interwoven illustrations depict a cozy, warm setting where Mr. Elliot and the children offer encouragement and compliments. One of Thomas’ parents is tan-skinned; the other is darker-skinned. Mr. Elliot presents as White, and the children in the class are diverse. Thomas and his friends will win readers’ hearts.

(This book was reviewed digitally.)

A tale of unquestioning support and acceptance that will buoy readers, especially aspiring dancers. (picture book. 5-9)

A SWEET NEW YEAR FOR REN
Sterling, Michelle
Illus. by Dung Ho
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster
(32 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-5344-9660-6

A young Chinese American girl enjoys the bustle of new year preparations.

Excited that Lunar New Year is nearly here, Ren wakes up to a window of blooming cherry blossoms. She rushes to the kitchen to ask her parents if she can finally help make the pineapple cakes for the celebration. Her mother, however, insists that she is “still too little” even though Ren points out that she has grown two whole inches since last year. Undeterred, Ren persists with her requests while her family hangs lanterns and visits the local market to buy ingredients for the upcoming feast. Ren asks various extended family members if she can help, but her pleas go rebuffed. It is only when her older brother Charlie arrives that Ren finally has the opportunity to participate. The descriptive narrative is surprisingly subdued at the moment when Ren finally gets her hands on some dough. Still, the gentle pace brings an overall charm to the family get-together. Ho captures the messy coziness of families wrapping and steaming dumplings. Layers of textures and splatters of colors bring depth and movement to each scene, especially when the hand-tossed noodles are prepared and then added to a pot of boiling water. A recipe for the cherished pineapple cakes follows. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A celebration teeming with family, love, and, of course, food. (author’s note) (picture book. 5-8)

STINETINGLERS
All New Stories by the Master of Scary Tales
Stine, R.L.
Illus. by David San Angelo
Feiwel & Friends (224 pp.)
$16.99 | Aug. 30, 2022
978-1-250-83627-4
Series: Stinetinglers, 1

This collection of 10 scary short stories from the bestselling Goosebumps author promises—and delivers—chills, twists, and surprises.

Each entry opens with a brief introduction addressed to readers from Stine describing his inspiration for the story. The book includes a range of subgenres, including cosmic horror, body horror, paranormal, and more. One boy finds himself stuck in time, unsure if he will ever get beyond 6:10. A young athlete’s body betrays him as his skin begins to stretch and slip off. And a practical joker realizes he may have gone too far when he explores cries for help coming from a spooky house. Each story ends with a classic Stine twist and campy humor. This combination is sure to appeal to returning fans and surprise those new to his writing. The stories, whose settings include small-town Indiana, where a transplant from Brooklyn settles down, and a seaside town where kids hang out at the beach, include clues to a contemporary setting (smartwatches, TikTok) and feature timeless preteen fears involving children who act like—and may be—literal monsters; feeling uncomfortable in bodies that are rapidly growing strange and unfamiliar; uncertainty about identity; concerns about being forgotten; fears of being perceived as strange or mundane; and parents who don’t understand you.

Quick doses of horror that send a tingle up your spine. (horror. 8-12)

SIR CALLIE AND THE CHAMPIONS OF HELSTON
Symes-Smith, Esme
Labyrinth Road (400 pp.)
$17.99 | $20.99 PLB | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-593-48577-4
978-0-593-48578-1 PLB
Series: Sir Callie, 1

An aspiring knight stands against the injustice at work in their own kingdom even as war with a vengeful witch looms on the horizon.

Twelve-year-old Callie longs to train in the royal capital of Helston, but the rigid laws of the realm forbid it. Only boys may pursue knighthood, and only girls may learn magic, but Callie isn’t either. When the lord chancellor demands that Callie’s father, the former king’s champion, return to Helston to train the crown prince for an upcoming tournament and the rising
threat of war, Callie seizes the chance to go with him, determined to prove their worth. With the help of two unexpected new friends—the lord chancellor’s daughter and the crown prince—Callie rallies the courage to fight for change. Passing descriptions of background characters indicate diversity in the wider world; the central characters are White. Callie confronts transphobia and internalized shame. When well-meaning but flawed adults try to press for insubstantial change and unfair compromises, Callie and their friends refuse to give up or stop questioning the discrimination within their society. Gentle and affirming romance blossoms gradually throughout the story. A frank and vivid acknowledgement of menstruation stands out as an important moment of inclusion within the coming-of-age narrative. The resolution balances hope with the lingering suspense of lurking danger awaiting Callie in future adventures.

**Fierce, heartfelt, and determined.** *(Fantasy. 8-12)*

**FONCHITO AND THE MOON**

Vargas Llosa, Mario  
Illus. by Marta Chicote Juiz  
Trans. by Adrian Nathan West  
Kales Press (32 pp.)  
$20.95 | Oct. 18, 2022  
979-8-9859558-0-4

Fonchito, please get the moon for me.

Translated from Spanish, this tale by Vargas Llosa, the 2010 winner of the Nobel Prize in literature, follows a young boy’s chaste wish to kiss the cheek of his beautiful classmate, Nereida. When he finally gathers his courage to ask permission, Nereida informs him that she will allow it only if he fetches her the moon. Deflated, Fonchito despairs of ever fulfilling such a request. Despairs, that is, until the night he notices the reflection of the moon in a bucket full of water. So inspired, he at last presents such a moon to Nereida, who, after some contemplation of the moon in her possession, allows the prized peck. American adult audiences may find themselves a bit torn on a tale of a preadolescent so fixated. It is well worth noting, however, that every step of the way, Fonchito acts for permission, obeys Nereida’s dictates, and never presses his case. Even after he fulfills her request, it is Nereida who gives the final permission, casting this tale perhaps less as one of dedication and more about consent. The stylized curves within the art lend the book a sinuous continuity, while clever problem-solving proves to be far more effective than any ladder to the skies. Nereida and Fonchito both are light-skinned. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Cozy, charming, simple.** *(Picture book. 3-6)*

**HERE WITH ME**

Walker, David  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | Nov. 8, 2022  
978-0-374-38929-1

A tiny rabbit questions their place in the world.

Holding hands with a larger, bluish-gray rabbit (presumably a parent) on the title page, the little flop-eared protagonist goes on to wonder “who I would choose to be / if I could wish a wish / to be a different kind of me.” The rabbit then imagines bounding through the forest as a fox, growling like a bear, and sneaking (and squeaking) like a mouse. “I might choose a zebra. / Wouldn’t that be fun? / I’d munch on the grass, / then I’d run, run, run!” But out of all the possibilities, the rabbit always returns home, proudly declaring, “Though if I had a choice / of just who I’d be, / I wouldn’t change a thing, / so you’d be here with me.” The rhymes are steady and gentle, set against smudgy, dreamlike backdrops in a palette of lush greens and warm, toasty yellows. The rabbit appears envious of others’ abilities but always circles back to a connection with family. It’s not a tale of self-acceptance or identity but rather unconditional love. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Strange but satisfying.** *(Picture book. 4-7)*

**LITTLE E**

Wan, Yuxi  
Illus. by Gunter Grossholz  
Reycraft Books (36 pp.)  
$17.95 | Oct. 14, 2022  
978-1-4788-7970-1

Two kids play with their robots.

After a conflict between two light-skinned kids, one blond, one brown-haired, on the title page that goes unexplained, the blond child is left to play all alone. The kid opens the closet and gets out E, a huge robot who “doesn’t know anything” but is still “so big and fun!” With help from a strange-looking but friendly light-skinned adult, the kid gets the robot up and running, hopping inside its torso, and making it walk down the street. The twist comes when E malfunctions and the adult helper is revealed to be another big automaton wearing a baggy person suit…powdered, as it turns out, by the brown-haired child seen on the title page. The rough pencil illustrations are thoroughly detailed and immensely appealing to the eye, a muted palette conveying energy and emotion. The story, translated from Chinese, is an intriguing one, both realistic and fantastical, but the prose is lacking the grace and clarity of the illustrations—it gets the story across but with some awkward transitions and blandness that could use a little more verve. Still, this spare tale about two children and their clunky mechanical buddies will appeal to kids looking for an unexpected friendship story. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Strange but satisfying.** *(Picture book. 4-7)***
MEOW! THE TRUTH ABOUT CATS
Whipple, Annette
Reycraft Books (32 pp.)
$17.95 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-4788-7957-2

Whether readers are owned by a cat or not, they are probably as curious about them as they are about what’s in that box.

Following in the format (and what took so long to get to cats?) of her previous titles, Scarry! The Truth About Spiders (2022), Woof! The Truth About Dogs (2021), and Ribbit! The Truth About Frogs (2022), Whipple addresses questions about our feline friends. Each double-page spread focuses on a question about cats or cat behavior: “What good are whiskers?” “Why do cats puff their tails?” “How do cats show they care?” Arresting and attractive (and sometimes funny) full-bleed and spot photos provide the backdrop for the answers to each question. Each spread also includes a cartoon kitty illustration with a related factoid (and usually a cat pun) in the “Kitty Corner.” Young readers will learn about cat communication, a few common breed names, Hemingway’s polydactyl cats, and the different patterns of feline fur. At the close, there is a behavioral experiment (are cats left- or right-pawed?), a short glossary, and a few websites to search for further information. The only thing missing is a sources list. Feline fans drawn in by the ultra-close-up kitty on the cover will not be disappointed.

All your kitty questions answered, beautifully. (Nonfiction. 4-10)

VAMPIRIC VACATION
White, Kiersten
Delacorte (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-593-37908-0
Series: Sinister Summer, 2

Twins Alexander and Theo, 12, speculate about what awaits them—good or bat—at the Sanguine Spa in the Little Transylvanian Mountains.

Aunt Saffronia drops them off along with 16-year-old sister Wil and vague directions to look closer and away about what awaits them—good or bat—at the Sanguine Spa in the Little Transylvanian Mountains. Whether readers are owned by a cat or not, they are probably as curious about them as they are about what’s in that box.

Following in the format (and what took so long to get to cats?) of her previous titles, Scarry! The Truth About Spiders (2022), Woof! The Truth About Dogs (2021), and Ribbit! The Truth About Frogs (2022), Whipple addresses questions about our feline friends. Each double-page spread focuses on a question about cats or cat behavior: “What good are whiskers?” “Why do cats puff their tails?” “How do cats show they care?” Arresting and attractive (and sometimes funny) full-bleed and spot photos provide the backdrop for the answers to each question. Each spread also includes a cartoon kitty illustration with a related factoid (and usually a cat pun) in the “Kitty Corner.” Young readers will learn about cat communication, a few common breed names, Hemingway’s polydactyl cats, and the different patterns of feline fur. At the close, there is a behavioral experiment (are cats left- or right-pawed?), a short glossary, and a few websites to search for further information. The only thing missing is a sources list. Feline fans drawn in by the ultra-close-up kitty on the cover will not be disappointed.

All your kitty questions answered, beautifully. (Nonfiction. 4-10)

IF YOU TRAVELED ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
Wilkins, Ebony Joy
Illus. by Steffi Walther
Scholastic (80 pp.)
$22.99 | $9.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-338-78892-1
978-1-338-78891-4 paper
Series: If You Lived

A brief history of the Underground Railroad, with tributes to some of its most successful conductors.

Part of a relaunch of the If You Lived series, this title takes on the same subject and question-and-answer format as Ellen Levine’s 1988 book of the same name but is otherwise different. Where Levine’s book referred to you, Wilkins uses they and them to refer to those who sought to escape enslavement. And where Levine’s book explored the roles of White abolitionists like Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Lloyd Garrison, Wilkins highlights the heroic achievements of conductors of African descent, from Harriet Tubman to William Still and David Ruggles. In her narrative, Wilkins creates vivid pictures of the journey’s dangers as well as of the day-to-day brutality of slavery, beginning with the arrival of White enslavers to Africa in 1501 and the arrival of African captives in North America in 1619. She highlights the roles of women, including early escapee Harriet Powell and Harriet Scott, who sued for freedom right along with her better-known husband, Dred. In Walther’s illustrations, individualized brown faces in diverse hues with fearful, courageous, or dignified expressions predominate, leading up to a final march that crosses eras to modern times. “The Underground Railroad may be part of history now,” the author concludes, “but the fight for freedoms and reparations for African people and their descendants lives on.”

A fiery and inspiring look at a pivotal period in U.S. history. (additional reading, glossary) (Nonfiction. 8-10)

HOW TO TEACH YOUR CAT A TRICK
In Five Easy Steps
Winstanley, Nicola
Illus. by Zoe Si
Tundra Books (52 pp.)
$17.99 | Sept. 27, 2022
978-0-7352-7061-9
Series: How To Cat

Five easy steps...to giving readers the giggles.

An unseen narrator and a protagonist with light brown skin and curly hair interact in this humorous guide to training a cat. Something. Children should have read Wretched Waterpark (2022) to fully appreciate and follow the entertaining story threads, characters, and clues about the larger puzzle. Next stop: summer camp!

Another eerie escapade in a delightfully quirky series. (Mystery. 8-12)
The cat in question, Einstein, has other ideas, though, and the introduction of a pet dog, Noodles, who is a silent witness to this training session, repeatedly reminds readers that some pets are easier to train than others. For every trick Einstein is shown, Noodles accomplishes it without notice or fanfare, excluding perhaps the odd chuckle from readers. The ending double-whammy joke of Noodles finally being noticed—and wholly blamed for a communal accident—and Einstein showing off an impressive musical trick (unnoticed) combine into a "cherry on top" moment that will delight readers of all ages. The digital illustrations are hip in a retro way and have an air of classic Sunday comics. Readers with a dry sense of humor will dig this most, so if you have a future New Yorker subscriber in your life, they’ll fall for this book hook, line, and sinker. Cat and dog lovers, especially those who fall into both camps, will also enjoy the quiet moments of mirth when Noodles’ and Einstein’s personalities are on full display. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Droll humor at its best for both dog and cat lovers. (Picture book. 6-8)

RISE UP WITH A SONG
The True Story of Ethel Smyth, Suffragette Composer
Wortley, Diane
Illus. by Helena Pérez García
Bushel & Peck Books (32 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-68819-131-5

A stirring tribute to a free-spirited composer who rode roughshod over her time’s constraints on women.

Following up her profile of conductor Antonia Brico, In One Ear and Out the Other (2020), illustrated by Morgana Wallace, with a look at another strong-minded woman in music, Wortley introduces a British child who preferred outdoorsy adventures to genteel pursuits, fell in love with music at age 12, and went on to compose operas and chamber pieces despite her father’s displeasure, the necessity of publishing anonymously (in early years, at least), and the refusal of some orchestras to perform anything by a woman. Joining the suffragettes, she set Cicely Hamilton’s anthemic “March of the Women” to music—and after getting herself arrested, led fellow prisoners in performances waving a toothbrush as a baton. Pérez García illustrates that episode and earlier scenes in canted depictions of pale-skinned marchers and musicians in Edwardian dress arranged around a redheaded force of nature aglow with self-confidence. With a final view of a racially diverse group of modern women standing together arm in arm, the author closes with lyrical lines about Smyth’s music marching on to inspire women worldwide “…today / …tomorrow; / ...and forever.” An afterword with photos, a timeline, and a select but lengthy list of sources fills in further details of Smyth’s long career. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A rare nod to a now (but undeservedly) obscure artist, eloquent and inspirational. (Picture-book biography. 7-10)

TWIG
Young, Skottie
Illus. by Kyle Strahm
Image Comics (128 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-5343-2346-9
Series: Twig, 1

Twig nearly dooms the world on his first day as Placeling.

After his father dies without taking on an apprentice, Twig—an appealing, large-eyed, blue creature who wears a whimsical little branch with a sprouting leaf on his head—is chosen to become the new Placeling. Tasked with retrieving magical items and placing them for future heroes to find, Twig’s new role is of utmost importance. Unfortunately, not only is Twig late on his first day, he finds the Pathsayer dead. With no one to tell him where the gem he’s carrying must be placed, Twig attempts to use the Pathsayer’s equipment himself. This results in the gem losing all its nektar, becoming useless. The expert Nektarmancer sends Twig on his own heroic quest to find the ingredients necessary to restore the gem—which turns out to be the very last one—so it can be properly placed. If Twig fails, the world will be in terrible danger. The fantastical setting is brought to life by a vivid, enchanting art style with exquisite colors by Jean-François Beaulieu and clean, easy-to-read lettering by Nate Piekos. Twig explores the impact of following in someone else’s footsteps while being dogged by the fear of not being good enough. Despite not learning much about the hero Twig is placing his gem for, readers will be satisfied, as Twig’s journey provides plenty of daring escapades to please the adventurer at heart.

A charming romp through a visually stunning world. (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)
OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS

Alyse, Charity
Denene Millner Books/Simon & Schuster (448 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 22, 2022
978-1-5344-9771-9

An African American teen finds the courage to step into the spotlight and fight for her dreams despite divided loyalties.

Aspiring Broadway dancer Capri Collins longs to attend an exclusive performing arts camp but lacks the courage to oppose her grandmother, who wants her to stay close to home. Capri finds support in her relationship with Zach Whitman, a White boy from Philadelphia who has moved to the town on the other side of the train tracks. He’s shocked by his new White peers’ overt racism. Bayside and Hamilton, located outside New York City, have intertwined histories: With the influx of African American families from the South, Bayside’s White residents established Hamilton to maintain racial segregation. Zach’s love for jazz brings him to Hamilton, where he meets Capri. Meanwhile Capri’s older brother, Justin, aims to attend college on a basketball scholarship, an ambition complicated by his girlfriend’s pregnancy. The siblings’ fears of being trapped in their hometown are heightened when their friend Tyree Thompson, an aspiring doctor on his way to New York University, is killed by a Bayside police officer. The aftershocks ripple through the relationships of residents of both towns. The narrative alternates among the first-person perspectives of Capri, Justin, and Zach. The siblings’ complex relationship is a particular strength. Interracial tension is a main driving force within the narrative, but Zach’s role in this conflict is less well developed.

An interesting look at the many forms activism can take.
(Fiction. 14-18)

SO, THIS IS LOVE

Andreen, Tracy
Viking (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Dec. 20, 2022
978-0-593-52540-1

Teen lovebirds return for another go ‘round after So, This Is Christmas (2021).

Finley Brown and Arthur Chakrabarti Watercress are back from the holidays. Over winter break in Finley’s small

SILVER IN THE MIST

Victoria, Emily
Inkyard Press (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-335-40670-5

“A fast-paced fantasy for fans of entwined families, dark magic, and beautiful friendships.”—JAMIE EMERICK, author of Mark of Shadows

EMILY VICTORIA

These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

THE DRAGONS CLUB by Cyn Bermudez........................................... 103
SILVER IN THE MIST by Emily Victoria........................................... 111

SILVER IN THE MIST

Victoria, Emily
Inkyard Press (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-335-40670-5
Oklahoma hometown of Christmas, the pair started smoochin’ and snugglin’, but now that they’re back at their boarding school in Connecticut, Arthur is giving Finley the cold shoulder. Finley’s confused and annoyed: Are they a couple, or was it all just a holiday fling? In addition to Finley’s romantic woes, she has to navigate her prep school’s snotty rich-kid cliques, an element touched lightly upon in the previous book but brought to the forefront here. Mixing in the boarding school kids with the already large cast of characters risks scuttling the book, but White junior Finley returns to her self-absorbed status quo. The supporting cast is lacking in dimensionality, perhaps because the lead comes across as not being terribly interested in getting to know others as real people. Andreen also returns Indian and White British Arthur to his baseline characterization: smug, erudite, and annoying. The result is an overly anxious protagonist pining over an overly affected goofus. With actively frustrating characters, the narrative never gathers any steam. 

The honeymoon’s over. (Romance. 14-18)

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**THE DRAGONS CLUB**

Bermudez, Cyn
West 44 Books (200 pp.)
$25.80 | Aug. 1, 2022
978-1-978596-03-0

As her sister’s addiction worsens, Faith learns hard lessons about boundaries while finding strength and companionship through talk therapy.

When cancer took their father, Faith and Emma Navarro’s mother started working a lot more. Faith is a talented violinist attending a special arts school on a scholarship, but while she was practicing, older sister Emma was partying and is now struggling with a meth addiction. Faith tries to take care of Emma, but missing too much school lands her in the Dragons Club Teen-Speak Support Group. Participation is mandatory for her to remain enrolled. Though Emma is worsening, Faith begins to feel less alone and invisible as she develops the detachment and boundaries she needs. The sessions are therapeutic even for readers; calm, wise teacher Mr. Padilla, or Boots to the kids, threads coping mechanisms, comfort, and advice organically into the dialogue. Razor-thin verse spotlights a quick chain of moments, never landing too long in one place or lingering on the pain, though Emma’s situation is portrayed realistically and with clarity. Faith’s on-page struggles with anxiety are also no less powerful for their brevity. Any reader who loves a person with an addiction will feel seen, and others will gain much in terms of insight and perspective. Faith’s family and Boots read Latine.

Sharp, tender, carefully crafted; highly recommended for both strong and striving readers. (Verse novel. 12-18)

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**RIGHT ON CUE**

Bradley, Sabine
West 44 Books (200 pp.)
$25.80 | Dec. 1, 2022
978-1-978596-17-7

A high school senior dreaming of a filmmaking career gets sidetracked when her newly sober mother reenters her life.

Five years with stable, loving foster parents have enabled Alex to leave her chaotic childhood behind and envision a future studying film at a New York college to which her art teacher, a former foster kid herself, encourages her to apply. Each applicant must submit a short documentary. Alex has procrastinated and further loses focus when she learns that her birth mom, Marie, now sober but gravely ill, wants to see her. Fearing a reprise of Marie’s humiliating drunken behavior in public two years earlier, Alex visits reluctantly. Aware that frail Marie is eager for her companionship and love, Alex holds...
An intricately plotted whodunit that maintains suspense to the end.

PRETTY DEAD QUEENS

Donne, Alexa
Crown (336 pp.)
$18.99 | Oct. 4, 2022
978-0-593-47982-7

A young woman lands in a Gothic mansion in a small seaside town in Northern California and rapidly becomes mired in its mysterious history.

After her mother dies, nearly-18-year-old Cecelia Ellis moves in with the grandmother she hardly knows. Maura Weston is nothing short of a celebrity, a rich, bestselling author of mysteries—the first and most famous of which was inspired by the 1970 murder of her own friend Caroline Quinn, a homecoming queen. Immediately taken in by a friendly but complicated group at Seaview High, Cecelia's grief over her mother's death is largely subsumed by her interest in Caroline's murder and then by another present-day mystery that unfolds. A large cast of supporting characters, including Ben and Gabriel, two different guys who both interest Cecelia, all seem to be hiding something. Readers will be kept guessing about who she can trust, and the thriller sustains its central tension as one person after another is suspected of misdoings. That Cecelia so rapidly becomes immersed in this insular town following her mom's death and her move from Los Angeles requires some suspension of disbelief, but her clever wit blended with flashes of vulnerability makes for an easily sympathetic narrator. Cecelia reads as White, and she remarks early on about the racial homogeneity of Seaview; Gabriel and his sister, who befriends Cecelia, are Filipinx. There are queer supporting characters.

An intricately plotted whodunit that maintains suspense to the end. (Thriller. 14-18)

EXPLORING CAREERS IN ENGINEERING

Dougherty, Terri
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$32.95 | Sept. 15, 2022
978-1-67820-332-0

A short, clear, and very detailed introduction to various engineering careers.

Like other career-oriented titles from this publisher, Dougherty's volume focuses on engineers' own words, bringing their work to life. Three main engineering subfields get their own chapters: civil, mechanical, and chemical. The fourth, electrical engineering, is mentioned throughout the work, but in lieu of its own chapter, there are sections devoted to environmental, computer (software and hardware), and biomedical engineering. Marine, industrial, aerospace, nuclear, petroleum, communications, structural, transportation, thermal, and geotechnical subspecialties are also mentioned. Despite their varied jobs, readers learn that all engineers solve complex problems.
using applied math and science. Women in the field are prominently featured in references and quotations throughout the work; the stock photos show engineers of different races, and the names of highlighted individuals point to ethnic diversity. Racial and gender imbalances in STEM fields are not addressed, but an emphasis on barriers can inadvertently discourage some from pursuing these subjects. Information for each category covers typical workdays, worksites, required education, and skills (including software, interpersonal, creative, and communication), employers, salary, and personality traits, such as analytical and detail-oriented. Useful online resources follow each chapter. This is a concise work that presents a large amount of information without being overwhelming.

A helpful, relatable, accessible, and information-packed guide for students. (picture credits, source notes, interview with an engineer, jobs in engineering, index) (Nonfiction. 14-18)

**ACTING THE PART**
Ellor, Z.R.
HarperTeen (288 pp.)
$17.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-06-315788-0

As Morgantha of House Moonblade, the ruthless hero of a hit science-fiction television series, 17-year-old actor Lily Ashton takes on tyranny at sword-point, but nanosteel and plasma beams can’t solve real-life problems.

#Morganetta means everything to Lily, and so does Galaxy Spark: In the soon-to-premiere fifth season, Lily convinced the producers to canonize a romance between Morgantha and Princess Alietta. Although despising perfectionist co-star Greta and dreading mom Kate’s plans for next career steps, Lily knows how important representation like #Morganetta is to so many fans. When the script for Season 6 reveals a violent death for Alietta—among other problematic plot points—Lily and Greta go on an impulsive joyride that results in a real-life plot twist: a fake relationship to smooth over the resulting PR scandal. Overwhelmed by the responsibility and messy feelings, Lily retreats into the video game Swordquest Online. Meeting and befriending Aida, another queer gamer, awakens Lily’s unexplored feelings about gender identity. This queer coming-of-age story offers a high-appeal, fandom-inspired romantic subplot with a prickly, enemies-to-lovers dynamic involving an asexual love interest. The central conflict between Lily and the Galaxy Spark producers diverges from the path of a straightforward savior narrative, focusing instead on confronting privilege, setting healthy boundaries, and unlearning gendered expectations. Both Lily and Greta are White; the broader cast of characters depicts racial diversity.

A satisfying balance of self-discovery and enticing drama. (Romance. 14-18)

**ARMADAS IN THE MIST**
Klaver, Christian
CamCat Books (384 pp.)
$19.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-0-7443-0515-9
Series: Empire of the House of Thorns, 3

The human-Faerie war sees its final battle.

In this third installment following *Justice at Sea* (2021) and set in an alternate Victorian England, Adm. Justice Kasric prepares her motley naval crew to fight the Black Shuck after the demise of the queen and Faerie invasion. The Kasric lineage is twisty and tangled, mixing human and Faerie. Justice needs the help of her estranged half siblings to fulfill an ancient prophecy portending the war; will she be able to defeat the evil Black Shuck before he overtakes England and plants his own as monarchs? In this work told through a kaleidoscopic array of viewpoints, including Justice’s, her siblings’ (both human
and otherwise), and even a dragon’s, readers are privy to different dimensions of this intricate and complexly wrought war. Klaver’s swashbuckling naval fantasy offers every trope a genre fan may want, from soaring dragons to murderous pix, dark magic, and summoned demons. The impact, however, is dizzying with the sheer number of magical beings and characters; many are name-dropped, but few have lasting importance, only adding to the bloat. Disappointingly after two strong earlier entries, this time the story plods along, buried under a heap of exposition, only to be resolved quickly and frustratingly, leaving readers wondering what the buildup was for.

Overstuffed and unsatisfying. (family tree) (Fantasy. 12-18)

LUMARA
Landers, Melissa
Disney-Hyperion (288 pp.)
$18.99 | Dec. 6, 2022
978-1-368-07656-2

Talia seemingly has it all: She’s homecoming queen and valedictorian and has a rich, handsome boyfriend...but all that means little when you have a life-threatening congenital heart problem.

Talia Morris wants to live—so desperately that she’s using every penny she’s saved to attend Mystic Con and have a private audience with Legendary Madame Hector in hopes that magic can mend what modern science could not. To Talia’s frustration, Madame Hector says there’s absolutely nothing wrong with her, souring her on Mystics. A year later, she’s gotten #BoycottMysticCon trending, and her dreamy boyfriend, Nathaniel Wood, wants to bring her home from their boarding school to meet his family. However, this comes with a dramatic revelation: Nate is a Mystic. Time-hopping continues as Esta and Harte are transported to a changed 1983 in which the White supremacist, anti-magic Brotherhoods have only grown in power, while the rest of the gang continue in 1902, where Jack (last seen being killed in 1920) is alive and plotting. The short chapters contribute to the stop-and-go pacing. The plot is drawn out by foolish mistakes by the protagonists and padded by a lot of time spent kissing deeply, while the villains are the kind who spend pages internally gloating over their evil plots and seem unstoppable until a massive deus ex machina saves the day. What started off in the first volume, 2017’s The Last Magician, as a sharp look at issues of the past and present through an imaginative premise has petered out by this point, and the characters from marginalized backgrounds are so lacking in depth as to approach being caricatures.

For completists only. (Historical fantasy. 12-adult)

EXPLORING CAREERS IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY
McCarty, Celia
ReferencePoint Press (64 pp.)
$32.95 | Sept. 15, 2022
978-1-67820-334-4

A brief but thorough guide to those whose work is centered around play. McCarty notes throughout that collaboration and communication are requisites for gaming careers and that overtime, unemployment, and gender discrimination are real risks, undercutting naïve stereotypes about solitary gamers and easy success. Creative aspirants might become generalist or specialist game artists, designers, or sound designers; programmers implement their vision, while pro gamers play in tournaments, and testers provide quality assurance. Each chapter opens with a sidebar giving useful stats: the number of existing jobs, typical pay, educational requirements, desirable personal qualities, work settings, and future employment prospects (with projections given through 2030). This data is fleshed out in the subsequent text. Readers follow a typical workday and working conditions, noting necessary skills including software
proficiency, versatility, physical stamina, and mental resilience. Many specific examples and direct quotations make the job descriptions vivid and credible. Readers see and hear from women and people of color in the industry. Each chapter ends with annotated online resources that will allow interested readers to learn more. Realistic about the downsides accompanying the excitement and fun, this guide will help gamers think about their futures.

An encouraging, frank, and informative overview of an often misunderstood career path. (source notes, interview with a game designer, jobs in the gaming industry, index, picture credits) (Nonfiction. 14-18)

HANGED!
Mary Surratt & the Plot To Assassinate Abraham Lincoln
Miller, Sarah
Random House Studio (352 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Nov 8, 2022
978-0-593-18156-0
978-0-593-18157-7 PLB

A meticulously researched account of Mary Surratt, whose still-disputed role in the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln led to her becoming the first woman executed by the United States government.

No one disputed the fact that actor John Wilkes Booth fired the shot that killed Lincoln. A simultaneous, fortuitously nonfatal, attack on Secretary of State William H. Seward made it immediately clear that a conspiracy was involved. In the weeks following, with Booth dead, seven men were arrested for the crime—and one woman, Surratt. A widow, devout Catholic, and former enslaver, Surratt owned and ran a boardinghouse where Booth sometimes met with the other defendants. From the start, newspapers reviled her and, during the trial, wrote sexist, prejudicial accounts of her description and actions. The trial itself, run by a military tribunal, was biased in favor of the accused. Surratt was sentenced to death, refused clemency by President Andrew Johnson, and hung the following day. The controversy surrounding her execution did not die, however; conflicting testimony by her former boarder Louis Weichmann, in particular, created doubts that persist to this day.

Miller does an admirable job of sifting through the often conflicting source material and judicial obfuscation. Her author’s note discusses which sources she most trusts and why. The full truth of this intriguing historical mystery will never be known.

A bold, sympathetic, well-written account of a perplexing and complicated subject. (who’s who, sources, notes) (Nonfiction. 12-18)
When bestselling YA author Adam Silvera first conceived Mateo and Rufus, the queer main characters in his 2017 YA novel, *They Both Die at the End*, he knew he was taking a risk. “I had a moment when I considered writing straight characters, because I was worried about [the book’s] ability to sell widely if the characters were queer, and not just queer but Latino,” he says. “As a queer creator, I understand that my work is not accepted by everyone in the country. There are going to be libraries and bookstores and schools that will never stock my work. So naturally, my market is shrunk compared to anyone who’s writing a story about a straight, White, heterosexual character.”

But, Silvera says, “I stuck to my roots.” It was a good call. The book became a runaway bestseller, thanks in part to a fervent, sustained boost in TikTok book circles. Now comes the second book in the Death-Cast series, a prequel entitled *The First To Die at the End* (Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins, Oct. 4). Anticipation is high. We spoke to Silvera, 32, by phone at his home in Los Angeles; this conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How does audience expectation affect your creative process? Is it inspiring? Stifling?

*The First To Die at the End* wouldn’t exist without this really beautiful fandom. I want to make readers happy; this book is a “thank you” in many respects. But I have to stay true to who I am as a creator because it is absolutely impossible to write a book that will please everyone. I know people want to see Mateo and Rufus, and because this is a prequel, those characters do get to be alive again. But they are a small fraction of the book. I just want to make sure that I am telling the best story that I can in the Death-Cast universe, and there are infinite stories that I can tell in that world. They will just not be centered around Mateo and Rufus.

Instead, in this new book, you have Valentino and Orion. Yes, and I really hope that people give them a chance and fall in love with them. There’s going to be a third Death-Cast novel as well.

This series challenges readers to examine the concepts of mortality and death, ideas that have particular resonance for young people. Why do you think that is?

I was 9 years old, living in New York City, when 9/11 happened. That was my first exposure to death. Two months later, my favorite uncle died in a plane crash. For me, there were these two major events where people were here, alive, and then they were just gone. When someone dies suddenly, it really gives you a different level of perspective of how life
and death work. As people move toward adulthood, they are often exposed to the experience of loss, or the potential of loss, for the first time. You learn you have to adapt. You realize that you are not the same person that you were before you lost someone. You have to figure out who you are after that.

Is there something distinct about looking at mortality through the lens of queerness?

I grew up in the South Bronx, where being gay was definitely not something that felt welcomed at the time. The way that you look at death and the risk of death does get heightened when you’re queer, just because you can feel like there’s a target on your back. That’s how I felt.

Many of your characters are in that complicated space between being out and not being out, or maybe still thinking about it, maybe not yet ready to make a definitive identity call.

I’ve explored so much of that range with my characters. I get frustrated sometimes when, as the conversation for more progressive stories in queerhood continues, there’s always someone suggesting that we don’t need stories about coming out anymore. That is infuriating to me because there are so many closeted teenagers and young adults and even adults who don’t feel safe enough to come out, or welcomed when they do, and we need space for them as well. I wanted to explore this with Valentino in The First To Die at the End. Here’s someone who came out, and it didn’t go well, because not everything is a rosy-colored rom-com. We can want those stories and write those stories, but these other stories need to be told as well.

I’m struck by how some of your characters, despite the shadow of imminent death, still choose to fall in love. This feels like an expression of optimism and, set against such extreme stakes, almost radical.

The act of falling in love is not necessarily something you have control over. I’m someone who’s very big on connections and the way that they serve as the key to open up the world in gigantic ways. In the case of my characters, they are seeking someone to build as much life as they can in the world they are offered. Radical is an interesting word there, because that feels very inherent with queerness.

How does queerness play out in your own life and work?

I am fully living my own life. I do not hold back in any space. I walk into any meeting expecting my queerness to be valued, at the very least in equal measure with the heterosexuals in the room. I don’t ever think that I have to play down or accept less because I’m queer. I’m going to get paid what straight people get paid, I’m going to put out mainstream stories, I’m going to write queer superheroes, I’m going to do whatever I want and always bring my identity to it. I’m doing my work to blow this up in undeniable ways to make sure that we can break through into all these markets because these stories—not just mine—deserve to be. That’s the goal.

In your work, you spent a lot of time contemplating the contours of death and grief. Through the experience of writing, what have you learned about your relationship to death and loss?

Writing has always been therapeutic to me. I’ve written about death in almost all of my work. I’ve written about suicide, loss of a loved one, I’ve written about immortality and resurrection. I cannot get my mind off it. I have death anxiety. I haven’t had a big loss in my personal circle in a few years now, and while that is a blessing, I am so scared of when that’s going to turn. I don’t think I’m going to have the muscles in place to get through that as strongly as I would like to. But I have been able to live my life a little more freely because I have digested so much over the years. I will just have to see who I become once I cross that bridge.

Tucker Shaw is a writer, editor, and author of When You Call My Name. The First To Die at the End was reviewed in the Aug. 1, 2022, issue.
Eden on the edge of ruin. Oguguo’s graphic fantasy ratchets up the intensity with frenzied fight scenes and high-octane action culminating in more teasers and burning questions for later installments. Presumably to flesh out subsequent entries, a bewildering number of characters are introduced (some literally dropped from the sky), but with its action-driven plot, this may be little more than a quibble. Included is a short glossary that helps to explain some of the intricacies of Sano’s world; hopefully this will be expanded in later volumes. Manga otaku should find much to enjoy in the diverse cast of characters and intricate plotting. The black-and-white illustrations depict main and secondary characters with both dark and light skin tones.

A total rush for manga fans seeking something off the beaten path. (Manga. 12-16)

TO BE MAYA
Recinos Seldeen, Claudia
West 44 Books (200 pp.)
$25.80  |  Dec. 1, 2022
978-1-9785-9620-7

A fast-paced novel in verse touches on relatable teen struggles.

Maya was born in the United States after her parents emigrated from Guatemala. Now a sophomore in high school, she and her mom live alone, without the father who left years ago and whom she can't remember. Gemma, Maya’s wealthy Cuban American best friend, left their high school to attend a private school, and now Maya struggles to navigate her absence in the face of casual racism from classmates. The third friend in their trio, Andres, has Peruvian and Mexican parents and is grappling with a same-sex crush. Maya is so engrossed in her own romantic interest in a White boy that she overlooks the difficulties her two friends are facing. Friction with her mom comes to a head when Maya is caught lying. Maya is able to recognize and apologize for her shortcomings while also standing up for herself. She voices her frustration with the racism and classism she experiences as well as the ways that Gemma is treated differently because of her light complexion. The three friends each face very different challenges and offer different perspectives, highlighting the diversity of both Latin American diaspora and individual experiences. The brief page count and attractive spot art should encourage reluctant readers. Spanish words are italicized, something that may support non-Spanish-speaking struggling readers.

A strong voice and lyrical prose center the experiences of a Guatemalan American teen. (Verse novel. 13-18)

THE POISON SEASON
Rutherford, Mara
Inkyard Press (384 pp.)
$16.99  |  Oct. 18, 2022
979-8-9865998-0-9

A bloodthirsty forest and a forbidden romance set the mood for this fantasy novel.

Life on the island of Endla has been the same for generations. Those who have magic stay behind to protect the bloodthirsty Wandering Forests, and they are protected in return from the outsiders who dare cross the poisonous lake that surrounds it. But those who don't show any magical skills are sent away, never to return, as is the case with Leelo's beloved but magicless younger brother, Tate, who is set to be exiled soon. As a Watcher, Leelo is one of the islanders whose singing holds deadly power, and in a desperate attempt to help Tate stay, she performs an illicit sacrifice, shedding her own blood and releasing a song. Sadly, this ritual doesn't save her brother, but an outsider hears her mournful, enthralling music. Jaren doesn't believe in magic, but a twist of fate leaves him wounded and trapped on the island, at the mercy of a beautiful islander—Leelo. As they grow closer, the two teens face impossible odds. This skillful blend of romance, mystery, and fantasy focuses on how Leelo's love for her family and, eventually, Jaren leads her to question the very fabric of her reality and unveil the dark, bloody secrets behind the island and its twisted society. Leelo and Jaren share a narrative that keeps readers trying to guess its secrets up to the satisfying ending. All characters are cued White.

Whimsical, romantic, and satisfying. (map) (Fantasy. 13-18)

POISON FOREST
Starling, Lauri
Sword and Silk Books (358 pp.)
$16.99  |  Oct. 18, 2022
979-8-9865998-0-9

Gender-nonconforming Princess Thedra must survive the Poison Forest despite the limitations of her magic in order to save her former betrothed, Princess Dette. Seventeen-year-old Thedra, a powerful lightning elemental, becomes High Priestess of Death and can now take her father's throne. But grief over her mother’s recent death and the subsequent breaking of her betrothal to half-sylph, half-human Dette leaves her unsure of what she wants. When rumors of a dark mage stealing powered girls become all too real—Dette is kidnapped by a magical monster—Thedra defies her father to rescue her. She is joined by untrained fire elemental Neev, who is Dette's lady-in-waiting, and Agate, a palace guard and rare powered man. Together they must travel through the Poison Forest and face the mage. Complicating matters, Thedra finds herself falling
“The risks are convincingly high, the action nonstop, and the budding romance charming.”

**THE Q**
Tintera, Amy
Crown (352 pp.)
$18.99 | $21.99 PLB | Nov. 8, 2022
978-0-593-48617-7
978-0-593-48618-4 PLB

Two teenagers come together from opposite sides of a post-pandemic world. In a dystopian future, Austin, Texas, is now a sealed-off independent quarantine zone known as the Q. It’s where 18-year-old Maisie Rojas has grown up. The Spencer gang rules the north, while the south is under the control of the Lopezes, but there’s a turf war brewing and other incumbents vying for power. When Lennon Pierce, the 19-year-old son of a U.S. presidential candidate, is kidnapped and dropped into the Q via parachute from a plane, he is given a newly developed short-acting vaccine. He now has 72 hours to leave or else become a permanent resident. The populace inside the walled-off zone’s borders has adapted to live with the deadly virus but still pose an infection threat to the outside world. But the only legal exit into the U.S. lies on the other side of the Q, deep in Spencer-controlled territory, where terror, danger, and possibly death await. Maisie and Lennon become allies: She will lead him out and, on the way, try to fix some of the south’s leadership problems. This is a thrilling adventure in which the risks are convincingly high, the action nonstop, and the budding romance between Maisie and Lennon believably charming. Both characters go through interesting arcs as they handle generational mistakes and the intersections of power, fear, and history. Orphaned Maisie’s mother was from the U.K., and her father was Mexican American; Lennon is White.

Ridiculously fun, romantic, and action-packed. *(Thriller. 14-18)*

**SILVER IN THE MIST**
Victoria, Emily
Inkyard Press (384 pp.)
$18.99 | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-335-40670-5

Devlin dives into the opulent Cerean court to save her home. Once united, the two monarchies of Aris and Cerena are now locked in bitter hatred thanks to a shared history of betrayal. While the citizens of Aris live in fear of the next attack, with their magic casters’ dwindling ability to produce the enchanted, silvery filigree that holds the encroaching Mists and phantoms at bay, the people of Cerena live in fearless luxury, wasting filigree on ornamental uses. When Devlin is sent into Cerena to kidnap Layde Alyse, their strongest magic caster, she sees it as a chance to save her country and prove herself, both as a spy and as the daughter of the Whisperer of Aris. Going undercover as a Cerenian, Devlin...
learns about her enemy’s reality: the beauty of filigree art, social inequities, court politics, the true history of their world, and the nature of Alyse herself. The discussions of resource disparities between the countries, the importance of art, and the impact of societal trauma offer realistic parallels to modern societies. Asexual Devlin’s internal struggles with self-image—understanding her strength, dealing with failure, subsuming her own thoughts beneath her mother’s, and recognizing her own value—are contrasted with her budding friendship with trusting, optimistic Alyse. This work contains a hopeful message about pushing through self-doubt to make changes to your world. The cast is mostly assumed White.

Remarkably grounded in realism while displaying a fantastic and imaginative nature. (map) (Fantasy. 13-18)

**MUSIC MAVENS
15 Women of Note in the Industry**
Walker, Ashley & Maureen Charles
Chicago Review Press (224 pp.)
$16.99 | Nov. 15, 2022
978-1-64160-723-0
Series: Women of Power

Upbeat minibiographies of women in the music industry. Expanding well beyond vocalists, the authors highlight composers, songwriters, producers, improvisational performers, an instrument designer, and others who have found successful career paths in music. They describe the contributions of those who work behind the scenes in sound engineering, cinematic scoring, and similar pursuits through attention to a globally diverse range of celebrated women in music. Drawing upon interviews with their subjects, Walker and Charles provide an antidote to the erasure that can limit young people’s conceptions of what is possible by centering the achievements of those who inspire, inform, and expand the world of music. Covering many musical styles and genres, the ambitious scope and inclusive lens largely succeed at showing the talent, drive, determination, ingenuity, passion, and creativity of each mover and shaker. Unfortunately, the prose doesn’t quite address hurdles so much as they gloss over them, framing stories in terms of a heroic arc in which a key, life-defining twist of good fortune yields an opportunity that changes everything. Nevertheless, the simple structure conveys optimistic narratives and helpful career options for young music lovers to consider.

**Women behind the music take center stage. (tribute to Sophie Xeon, authors’ notes, playlist, resources, notes) (Nonfiction. 12-18)**

**ON THE SUBJECT OF UNMENTIONABLE THINGS**
Walton, Julia
Random House (320 pp.)
$18.99 | Aug. 23, 2022
978-0-593-31057-4

A high schooler’s pseudonymous blog about sex goes viral when a local conservative politician attacks it.

Phoebe Townsend, 16, was surprised and intrigued at her first sight of a penis two years ago: It was nothing like she expected, and she realized she didn’t know much about sex at all. She set about researching and combined her newfound knowledge with her love of journalism to create a blog that received little attention in her small town until it attracted the ire of mayoral candidate Lydia Brookhurst. Phoebe is honest about arousal, the true meaning of consent, and the limitations of her own knowledge when it comes to, for example, queer sexuality, whereas Brookhurst believes that the only permissible sex education is that which emphasizes abstinence. When Brookhurst outs her, Phoebe has to deal with threats and vandalism but stands her ground regarding the importance of her work. Already known for dealing with complex subjects with grace and honesty, Walton creates in Phoebe, best friend Cora, crush Neil, and eventual boyfriend Jorge real, imperfect characters with genuine emotions and actions. Through the medium of Phoebe’s blog posts and tweets, Walton also manages to include a tremendous amount of useful information about sex. Most characters default to White; Jorge is Mexican American. Cora’s identity is not specified; she’s described as resembling both Jameela Jamil and Meghan Markle.

Satisfying and pleasurable. (Fiction. 14-18)

**THE RIBBON LEAF**
Weber, Lori
Red Deer Press (496 pp.)
$14.95 paper | Sept. 1, 2022
978-0-88995-663-6

Growing up together in a small German town, Edie and Sabine are the best of friends.

As Hitler rises to power, things worsen for Edie, who is Jewish. She flees to Montreal with her mother after Kristallnacht, leaving behind her father and a heartbroken Sabine, whose own family is splintered by their different feelings about and involvement in Nazism. As the girls grow, their individual circumstances and the horrors of the world become terribly real, and each must make choices about who they will be and how they will live in dangerous times. While the goals of the story are worthy of respect, the relationships and plot points come across as heavy-handed and didactic rather than organic and dynamic. The narrative voices of the two protagonists...
often blend together despite their disparate experiences. Edie and Sabine are vessels for a narrative that tries to pull on readers’ heartstrings while lacking the complexity and depth of feeling this time in history deserves. It’s noteworthy that the details of Sabine’s German cultural milieu feel more fully realized than Edie’s Jewish heritage, which is touched on relatively lightly, often in moments that make a wider point about antisemitism rather than highlighting other aspects of Jewish life. This righteous gentile meets star-crossed friendship parable is a familiar tale that has been executed more effectively many times before.

Well-meaning but does not add much to well-explored territory. (author interview) (Historical fiction. 14-18)

A CONSUMING FIRE
Weymouth, Laura E.
McElderry (352 pp.)
$19.99 | Nov. 22, 2022
978-1-66590-270-0

Kill or be killed.
Romans were driven from Britain, now called Albion, by the rise of a fierce and fiery god. To sate him, young women are sent up his mountain as living sacrifices and returned after the god takes his due—hands, eyes, memory. When willing sacrifice Ilva is instead rejected and killed by the god, her twin, Anya, puts herself forward as a replacement. She actually plans to kill the god.

Vivid writing, a righteous cause, and a cast of interesting side characters—corrupt religious figures, nomadic rebels, a boy with mysterious gifts—make for an engrossing journey. Anya draws strength from Ilva’s ghost, which appears to her, and her own conviction that the god is wrong. In her willingness to break rules (including physical intimacy with the aforementioned boy), she discovers truths that further her determination.

A small pendant with Christian imagery plays a small but vital role; the god’s holy book, the Cataclysm, has passages with a biblical feel; and the wicked god looks not unlike conventional representations of the devil. But at the same time, this is a tale of female empowerment for Anya and all the women she represents as she fights against the god’s demands, making for unclear deeper metaphor and thematic meaning; fortunately, the surface-level historical fantasy makes for a satisfying read apart from the deeper messages. Albion is depicted with some racial and sexual diversity; the twins are White.

Absorbing. (Historical fantasy. 13-18)

SAINT
Young, Adrienne
Wednesday Books (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Nov. 29, 2022
978-1-250-84676-1
Series: Fable, 3

A prequel to the Fable duology.
Elias is a fisherman’s son whose fearlessness and ability to survive deadly storms as the helmsman of an old, decrepit ship have earned him the moniker of Saint and a fierce reputation. But this facade hides the young man’s guilt over his father’s death and determination to make something of himself as the first Narrows-born trader. Isolde is a gem sage on the run from her mother, the most powerful gem merchant of the Unnamed Sea. There doesn’t seem to exist a place far enough from her mother’s influence—until she finds herself joining the diminished crew of a ship out of the Narrows, one whose helmsman may just have what it takes to help her escape. As Isolde’s and Saint’s lives intersect and their attraction grows, the two become immersed in a game of power and love in which the future of the Narrows lies in their hands.

This novel follows the parents of Fable, the series’ protagonist, showing the intersection of their budding love story with elements of the worldbuilding that lead to the growth of the Narrows. It’s a slow-moving, immersive story with less action and more rich, poetic prose that beautifully underscores the two main characters’ strengths, weaknesses, and beliefs. Both blue-eyed Saint and red-haired Isolde have olive skin.

Returning and new readers alike will find much to love in this absorbing tale. (Fantasy. 12-18)
The manhunt for an assassin stretches around the world in Aithal’s twisty debut thriller.

The story unspools from a Taliban plot to assassinate Terence Collins, a Republican congressman from California who’s introduced a bill in 2021 to reinvade Afghanistan. Talib, an Afghan American man who’s the Taliban’s top agent on the West Coast, is assigned the hit; he duly kills Collins with a sniper shot from a yacht anchored near the congressman’s seaside mansion. Using his considerable criminal guile, mastery of disguise, and the stolen identity of a heart surgeon named Ramesh Kumar, Talib flees to Mumbai, India, on his way to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pursuing him is Newport Beach Police Department Det. Tony Ramirez, assisted by telecommunications surveillance of the National Security Agency and by Inspector Sunil Deshpande of the Mumbai police. Ramirez, whose mother, Simran, is Indian and who speaks a smattering of Hindi, ends up in India himself, where he catches up with family and launches himself onto Talib’s trail.

Aithal, the author of Beyond the Milky Way (2015), fleshes out this simple chase narrative with reams of intricate procedural details. The chapters from Talib’s third-person point of view regale readers with the nerve-wracking minutiae of the killer’s preparation and practice, disposal of evidence, use of makeup and disguises, and so on. (Readers also see the sneaky online plays that the Taliban uses to radicalize Talib.) Tony’s sleuthing also features nifty moments, including a brute-force investigation of a day’s worth of airline passengers from Los Angeles to Mumbai. Ramirez, whose mother, Simran, is Indian and who speaks a smattering of Hindi, ends up in India himself, where he catches up with family and launches himself onto Talib’s trail. Aithal, the author of Beyond the Milky Way (2015), fleshes out this simple chase narrative with reams of intricate procedural details. The chapters from Talib’s third-person point of view regale readers with the nerve-wracking minutiae of the killer’s preparation and practice, disposal of evidence, use of makeup and disguises, and so on. (Readers also see the sneaky online plays that the Taliban uses to radicalize Talib.) Tony’s sleuthing also features nifty moments, including a brute-force investigation of a day’s worth of airline passengers from Los Angeles to Mumbai. There are some effective scenes of violence, but most of the action is in the labyrinthine calculations of the adversaries, conveyed with chilling aplomb by Aithal’s punchy, hard-boiled prose: “He could have quickly put a bullet between his eyes and stuffed his body in the trunk of the Toyota….It would take at least 16 to 20 hours before the stench was noticeably pungent.” The result is a page-turner that offers suspense with real psychological depth.

A tense, entertaining terrorist-on-the-run action yarn.
Arts in Paris, which has previously only admitted men, arises, Morgan's childhood and adolescence, though the adult Morgan Julia's eyes, and real-life figures (Gertrude Stein, William Ran- dolph Hearst, Pierre LeBrun) make pivotal appearances. But though she is talented and deter-
cator Austin claims that not much is known about the real Julia
cousin is encouraging as they traverse the new Brooklyn Bridge
craft an inspiring origin story ideal for young readers. Real-life
of Oakland, California, excels academically, and resists her
family vacation, Julia already knows her dreams
many challenges, including sexist classmates in her high school
school science track and familial pressures to court and eventually
marry. Julia is eventually accepted at the nearby University of
California at Berkeley. But though she is talented and
determined to succeed, the times aren't changing quickly enough.
Still, Julia soldiers on, working harder than any of the men, and
and when a chance to study architecture at the École des Beaux-
architecture firm and became the first woman to be admitted to and
graduate from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, which has previously only admitted men, arises, the young woman debates whether to settle into post-college
life or take the ultimate chance for her future. Author and edu-
cator Austin claims that not much is known about the real Julia
Morgan's childhood and adolescence, though the adult Morgan
is a well-known historical figure who established her own archi-
tecture firm and became the first woman to be admitted to and
graduate from the École des Beaux-Arts. Though Morgan was a
private person, according to the author, Austin uses extensive
research, including the expertise of a Julia Morgan scholar, to
craft an inspiring origin story ideal for young readers. Real-life
events—like the 1893 Columbian Exposition (also known as
the Chicago World's Fair, which featured the first Ferris wheel
as well as architecture by Sophia Hayden)—play out through
Julia's eyes, and real-life figures (Gertrude Stein, William Ran-
dolph Hearst, Pierre LeBrun) make pivotal appearances.

**Thoroughly researched and sweetly written.**

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**SUKKAH-DOODLE-DOO!**

*A Holiday to Crow About*

Blumberg, Margie

Illus. by Tammie Lyon

MB Publishing (56 pp.)

$19.95 | $12.95 e-book | Sept. 6, 2022

978-0-9994463-1-7

A family invites friends to a Sukkot party in this rhyming picture book.

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The Mindel family—parents Janet and Adam, children Shelley and Jimmy, and Ruffles the dog—plans a celebration of Suk-
kot. To commemorate the Jewish holiday, Jimmy and Shelley set
out to gather twigs for the partial roof of a temporary shelter
that their parents are building. (A sukkah shelter’s roof shows the
sky) After baking and other efforts by the family, the day of
the party finally arrives and the guests appear. But when four
frogs also show up, Jimmy has to hatch a plan to keep the party
going. Following songs, fun, and cheer, Jimmy loses his first
tooth to put a cap on the event. Blumberg's amusing story takes
a lot with a short, rhyming text: a celebration, a nature crisis,
and a mission to keep a tooth safe after it falls out (and get a
prize from the tooth fairy). These elements almost feel like too
much for one tale, but they are also very true to life, when many
incidents can intersect at once. While Lyon's cartoon images
depict a pale-skinned Jewish family with a variety of hair
colors, the guests show some diversity in hues. The happy tenor
of the party shines through in the well-lit art. Alternative lyr-
ics to familiar public domain songs add to the festive feel, and
endnotes provide a rhyming context for readers unfamiliar with
the holiday.

A humorous, engaging tale of a chaotic and entertain-
ing event.

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**BERNICE RUNS AWAY**

Boerner, Talya Tate

One Mississippi Press (403 pp.)


978-1-951418-06-9

An elderly woman decides to take care of some long overdue business in
Boerner's latest novel.

Eighty-one-year-old Bernice Hart
doesn't want to move into her daughter's
safety house in Atlanta. She's lived in
her cottage in the small Arkansas town of Savage Crossing for
six decades—she raised two children there and buried a son and
a husband—and if she has to leave it, she's going to do it her
way even if that means she's running away without a word to
anyone: "She would slip away undetected, not in search of one
last great adventure, nor as an attention-seeking antic sure to
upset her family. Bernice had only one goal: She wanted to live
out the remainder of her life on her own terms." With her car
(Miss Fiona) packed with only her dearest possessions and her
cat, Dolly Parton, Bernice hits the road for Lake Norfork in the
Ozarks, the place where she used to go on vacation as a teen.
She has unfinished business there related to the first man she
ever loved, the aptly named John Marvel. But is an old woman
with a bad hip and a slipping memory really up to a quest of
such magnitude? Boerner's evocative prose expertly captures
what it's like to be in Bernice's head: "Old Bernice would never
have spent a moment on her porch in Savage Crossing on a
chilly November morning, but new Bernice was plenty warm
wearing her wool coat over her flannel nightgown....How many
things had Bernice not done because she had been too tired or
New England, as a setting in literature, has a very long tradition, appearing in works by such disparate authors as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Jack Kerouac, and Stephen King. The region’s long, dramatic history and gorgeous scenery have long attracted writers of fiction—and many make the Northeast locales their titular focus. Here are three such works, all recommended by Kirkus Indie:

Linda Stewart Henley’s novel Waterbury Winter (2022) is set in a Connecticut town the author portrays as a “run-down but friendly” place, according to Kirkus’ reviewer. The story, which features small mysteries and digs into the town’s past, features a colorful local pub called O’Malley’s: “The regulars at this establishment, from a sympathetic bartender to a rambling college professor, ably explore different character archetypes and give the setting a sense of history,” our reviewer notes.

The 2020 short story collection Boston: My Blissful Winter by Alain Briottet, translated by Paulette Boudrot, offers a portrait of Massachusetts as seen through the eyes of a French visitor to Boston’s Faneuil Hall and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, among other sites. At one point, the narrator waxes poetic about upstate Lowell, the birthplace of Kerouac: “one of a small number of cities that have a mystery—a hidden sense about them that is not apparent right away.” Kirkus’ reviewer observes that Briottet “takes the familiar and, through his unjaded perspective, makes it seem exotic and remarkable.”

Purgatory Island, in Geraldine Burrows’ 2021 paranormal thriller, Vampire Island, Rhode Island, isn’t real, of course, but—like King’s fictional Castle Rock, Maine—it draws on New England’s distinctive flavor to tell a horror-tinged tale. In it, folklorist Leah Gerard investigates a local legend involving 19th-century vampires and becomes entangled in a murder investigation. Kirkus’ reviewer points out how the author “immers[es] readers in the island’s spooky ambiance” in this “gripping tale.”

David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.

too cold or too worried? She hated to imagine it.” The novel unfurls at a leisurely pace—as leisurely as an octogenarian puttering along in a car called Miss Fiona—and it goes on about 50 pages too long. Its unhurriedness is part of its charm, however. While the story never goes anywhere too surprising, it succeeds in capturing a certain time of life and the way the past never seems to loosen its grip on the present.

A quiet, endearing novel about a woman who refuses to go gently into her golden years.

THE FOSSILARCHY
Clark, Tom
Aurora House (396 pp.)
$19.95 paper | $3.99 e-book | March 7, 2022 978-1-922697-08-0

A wealthy businessman assembles a specialized team to ruthlessly take on an industry believed to endanger the health of the planet.

In Clark’s climate change thriller, Wolfgang Dreiser invites other members of the mega-rich to secretly fund drastic, violent action against the fossil fuel industry to save “the world in the time we have left.” The affluent visitor to Dreiser’s Swiss mansion only need to provide an “eye-watering” amount of financing. The execution of the plan, code-named Operation Phoenix, is “tasked to military strategists and operatives.” Australia, “soon to be the biggest coal exporter,” is a key target. Divorced Londoner Alex Burns, a former member of Her Majesty’s Special Air Service who still passes “the ‘tall, dark and handsome’ test,” gets recruited to lead the sabotage operations of Australia’s coal businessmen secretly and successfully financing a potentially deadly pro-climate escapade suggests a fantasy more than a thriller.

A gripping and timely environmental tale with a combustible mix of deadly elements.
“Readers will be more than satisfied with this pedal-to-the-metal Arizona adventure.”

LANIE SPEROS & THE OMEGA CONTINGENCY

Contes, Chris
BookBaby (390 pp.)
$12.50 | $17.99 paper | $2.99 e-book
April 14, 2022
978-1-66783-279-1
978-1-66782-972-2 paper

In this debut middle-grade novel, a girl and her best friend become entangled in a mystery that involves abandoned mine shafts and a top-secret government project.

Thirteen-year-old Lanie Speros has only been living in the Phoenix area for a few months. Yet she already knows her house, built in the 1950s, is not only unique, but hiding more than a few secrets as well. “Seeming to have pushed itself up out of the same material as the house,” it straddled a red rock formation on the hillside, and some of the giant boulders behind the dining room formed the back walls of the house.” Then Lanie and her family—along with her best friend, engineering whiz Hudson Newman—discover a tunnel under their abode that seems to have been made out of the same material as the house. They begin to realize that an enigmatic mining company, long defunct, may be connected to a massive, self-sustaining subterranean colony supposedly built during the beginning of the Cold War. The narrative’s humorous, middle school tone is spot-on for its intended audience (“Her ragged hat was decidedly dork-tastic”), and Contes’ main characters are all deeply and insightfully portrayed. Lanie’s passion for and knowledge of automobiles, coupled with a combination of social awkwardness and courage, immediately make her identifiable and intriguing to readers.

Readers will be more than satisfied with this pedal-to-the-metal Arizona adventure.

As the story opens, a young, unnamed, apparently preschool-aged reptile misses his grandpa, a dog. He begins to wonder not only where his grandparent is, but also what he’s doing and who’s helping him without his close family members around, like they used to be. The compassionate boy, who lives in a comfortable suburban setting with two parents and plenty of toys, has several worries and concerns about Grandpa; for instance, without assistance, how will grandpa keep his house clean, locate his glasses, or do his laundry? DeWitt’s detailed illustrations begin as black-and-white line drawings but soon include full-color images that show the child playing with Grandpa at his house—flashbacks that effectively demonstrate the closeness of their relationship. In these scenes, readers see an energetic, involved grandparent who builds construction sets, plays make-believe, and is just about the best playmate any young reader could hope for. Over the course of this book, the text is rather limited apart from somewhat overly explanatory pedagogic moments from the child’s mother (a raccoon) and father (a dog) who put positive spins on isolation: “Until this virus and its variants are truly subdued, we take up projects we’ve been meaning to get to. We think about things we don’t usually have time for. I’ll bet that Grandpa has found interesting things to do.”

An earnest kids’ story that aims to build resilience and optimism in young readers.

GRANDPA’S LONELY, ISN’T HE?

Cooper, Joseph Howard
Illus. by Patricia DeWitt
FriesenPress (72 pp.)
June 17, 2022
978-1-03-912148-5
978-1-03-912147-8 paper

Cooper’s debut illustrated picture book explores the changes and adjustments that families have had to manage during enforced separations during the Covid-19 pandemic.
A pelican explores an Earth that humankind has all but destroyed in this debut eco-fiction novel.

Young Kai wants to be the fastest pelican alive. His latest kick is “speed diving,” and his father’s insistence to be more careful doesn’t deter him. Kai yearns for something beyond his one-eyed raven, and sea lions. Kai evolves from a naïve youngster to a mature pelican as he and the ever reliable Pancho get a panoramic view of radiant landscapes. For example, they bask in the sea’s “blue horizon” and the sunrise’s explosion of colors (even “man’s floating trash” spawns a “purple-gray haze”). The novel is rounded out by striking black-and-white artwork from B. Duncan Forgey, the author’s nephew, and teams up with Pancho, a Baja-based blue-footed booby. Sadly, they witness some of the worst human-caused destruction and pollution. But when a heavy storm forces its way to the coastline, Kai does what pelicans have long been taught—he helps others as much as he can. Duncan P. Forgey’s strong environmental message makes an impact as Kai and Pancho witness the extreme degradation of the planet. The duo’s interactions introduce a lively cast to readers, including ospreys, albatrosses, a more ominous one-eyed raven, and sea lions. Kai evolves from a naïve youngster to a mature pelican as he and the ever reliable Pancho get a panoramic view of radiant landscapes. For example, they bask in the sea’s “blue horizon” and the sunrise’s explosion of colors (even “man’s floating trash” spawns a “purple-gray haze”). The novel is rounded out by striking black-and-white artwork from B. Duncan Forgey, the author’s nephew, featuring the woeful eyes of a spotted owl and the whiplike tail of a threshershark popping out of the ocean water.

Avian characters inspire in this appealing environmental tale.

**FLYIN’ KAI**
**A Pelican’s Tale**
Forgey, Duncan P.
Illus. by B. Duncan Forgey
Dorrance Publishing (250 pp.)
$18.00 paper | $9.99 e-book
March 24, 2022
978-1-63937-116-7

A pelican explores an Earth that humankind has all but destroyed in this debut eco-fiction novel.

Young Kai wants to be the fastest pelican alive. His latest kick is “speed diving,” and his father’s insistence to be more careful doesn’t deter him. Kai yearns for something beyond his one-eyed raven, and sea lions. Kai evolves from a naïve youngster to a mature pelican as he and the ever reliable Pancho get a panoramic view of radiant landscapes. For example, they bask in the sea’s “blue horizon” and the sunrise’s explosion of colors (even “man’s floating trash” spawns a “purple-gray haze”). The novel is rounded out by striking black-and-white artwork from B. Duncan Forgey, the author’s nephew, featuring the woeful eyes of a spotted owl and the whiplike tail of a threshershark popping out of the ocean water.

Avian characters inspire in this appealing environmental tale.

**THE CAT’S PAW MURDERS**
Gertcher, Frank L.
Wind Grass Hill (300 pp.)
$29.95 | $14.99 e-book | Nov. 1, 2022
978-1-73514-597-6

Gertcher’s super sleuths are recruited by a French intelligence agency to direct their considerable investigatory skills toward espionage.

It is November 1929, and high-spirited Caroline Case Jones and her unflappable husband, Hannibal, are luxuriating in their rented Parisian town house, shopping the designer showrooms, exploring fine-art collections, and working with Capitaine Inspecteur Soucet from the Sections de recherche de la Gendarmerie Nationale (an investigation unit) to solve a murder or two. But the political waters are churning in postwar Europe. Mussolini is in power in Italy; Hitler, although still a minor player, has begun amassing an increasingly dangerous following and has scored a total of 107 seats (up from 12) for his Nazi Party in the Weimar Parliament.

The worried French want to place secret agents in Germany and Hannibal navigate the subsequent four years, first in Germany and later in Italy. In this fourth volume of Caroline’s diaries, the world grows ever darker. In Berlin, the duo precariously socialize with higher-ups in the Nazi Party, glean ominously tidbits from conversations and rubbing elbows with Josef Goebbels and Herman Göring. Although Caroline maintains her usual frothy banter describing her daily fashion ensembles, food choices, and luxe accommodations, her diary naturally has a more somber tone than previous volumes. Gertcher, a meticulous writer who provides rich historical details, this time animates the rising political machinations and violence roiling the Continent in the first half of the 1930s. And his steady supply of dramatic action scenes and intriguing subplots propels the narrative to its final surprise.

A satisfying, engaging sequel helmed by an increasingly formidable female lead.

**THE RAIN CITY HUSTLE**
Grayson, M.D.
Cedar Coast Press (238 pp.)
978-1-73514-598-3

A valuable painting, a friend in trouble, a dangerous loan shark, and an elaborate con game fuel Grayson’s sixth mystery novel in a series.

Kate Morgan, owner of a small independent movie studio, has a problem.
A message of self-acceptance, inclusion, and diversity delivered with gentle assurance and visual charm.

COMPLETELY ME

She's close to wrapping up production of the film Fade to Crimson, which is shooting in Seattle, but the project has been running low on funds. Unbeknownst to her, Ray LeGrande—her boyfriend and the movie's director—took it upon himself to find a temporary solution: He stole a valuable painting belonging to Kate's father and used it as collateral for a 90-day loan of $500,000 in cash. Unfortunately, the lender is Billy Thorne, son of notorious loan shark Frank Thorne. Now time is running out, and Kate turns to private investigator Danny Logan for help. An initial investigative foray confirms what Danny and his partner, Toni Blair, suspect—that the Thorens are determined to keep the painting and sell it at auction. Logan Private Investigations calls upon the services of Henry Parker, a private investigator, who happens to have a personal score to settle with Thorne; he's more than happy to set up an extravagant ruse to retrieve the painting before Kate's father discovers its missing. Grayson, a fine storyteller, notes in his acknowledgements that he was inspired to become a writer after viewing the classic 1973 film The Sting, and here he creates his own intriguingly clever caper. Although readers are in on the secrets behind most of the deception, they'll still find a few surprises in store. Lurking in the shadows of the narrative is a character with the capacity to torpedo the whole operation, which adds an additional layer of suspense. Overall, this page-turner is a supply of plot twists. Grayson meticulously crafts the hustle to create an enjoyable romp, and it all leads to a satisfyingly explosive conclusion—and a final tease to keep readers guessing.

An entertaining and engagingly complicated joyride.

DELAWARE’S GHOST TOWERS Third Edition: The Coast Artillery’s Forgotten Last Stand During the Darkest Days of World War II

Grayson, William C.

A history of decommissioned military towers on the Delaware coast.

In the third edition of this nonfiction book, military historian Grayson looks into the story behind a collection of large cement towers along the Delaware coast. The structures were constructed as part of a coastal defense system and were manned by soldiers of the U.S. Army’s Coast Artillery Corps throughout World War II until it became clear that the United States wouldn’t face a German invasion by sea. “In hindsight, we now know that the veterans of Fort Miles were actually safe,” the author notes, “but, at the time, none of them knew so and their situation might have been very different, if the Battle of the Atlantic had not been decisively won by the Allies.” Grayson explains the strategic value of the towers, the details of their operation in conjunction with ground-based artillery, and what everyday life was like for the soldiers stationed at Fort Miles. The book also describes the state of each of the towers today, highlighting their status as visual icons of the Delaware shoreline. In appendices to the main text, Grayson goes into more detail about World War II coastal defenses, how artillery trajectories are calculated, and offers a pair of short alternate histories that imagine the roles that the towers might have played if the German navy had indeed attempted a major East Coast military operation. Black-and-white illustrations and photos throughout make it easy for readers unfamiliar with the area to understand the significance of the towers and the geography of the coastline as well as the mechanics of launching ammunition at far-off ships given the technological constraints of the 1940s. Grayson’s subject matter presents a challenge, since the towers were of little operational importance during the war, but he provides enough context to tell an engaging story despite the lack of battlefield drama. The book is likely to appeal most to military history buffs, who will appreciate Grayson’s substantial research, and to readers with an interest in Delaware’s attractions.

A narrowly focused but compelling work that illuminates a largely forgotten aspect of World War II.

COMPLETELY ME

Green, Justine

Illus. by Ana Luisa Silva


A little girl with a physical difference helps friends see her as a whole person.

Despite the uneven cadence of the rhyming text, this simple, heartfelt picture book about a little girl named Justine, who has only one ear, relays the message that people are uniquely themselves. In Justine’s community, helpful people “all looked out / For one another, / As if they were / Sister and brother.” Justine never thinks about having just one ear until someone reports it as missing and a friendly police officer organizes a search. Overwhelmed by commiserations and well-meaning efforts to “fix” her, Justine wonders if she can be her “normal self” without a second ear. Regaining confidence, she teaches her friends that everyone is perfect in their own way. Artist Silva’s illustrations, some full page, others that group vignettes against white space, depict wide-eyed Justine (who presents White) and her idyllic community of people of all ages, skin colors, and body types. Butterflies and soft, watercolor-style backgrounds, accented with tiny stars, reflect the book’s ultimately celebratory mood. According to the book’s biographical notes, Justine is also the author’s name. Her character’s brief self-doubt and the kindly meant offers of “help” and sympathy were inspired by Green’s own experience as someone born with a physical difference and hearing loss. (Illustrator Silva’s firsthand experience with being “different” due to congenital glaucoma is noted as well.) Other books in the “COMPLETELY” series by Green center on individual children with cerebral palsy, ADHD, and Down syndrome.

A message of self-acceptance, inclusion, and diversity delivered with gentle assurance and visual charm.
Hal discusses how he left the sport that had for so long been drafted by the Houston Texans, where he transitioned to safety at the center of his life and began a new career path following a whole lot. Unless there was a game.” With this memoir, Hal excelled at football. After spending three years as the starting cornerback for Vanderbilt University (and helping to take the team to three bowl games), he was drafted by the Houston Texans, where he transitioned to safety and shone at the new position for several seasons. Then, at the top of his game, the star athlete was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma. It should have been the end of his career, but with the help of an experimental drug, he was able to send his cancer into remission and return to the field. But his brush with mortality, followed by the death of his father a couple of years later, caused him to rethink his dedication to football, which he recounts with insightful candor. “My entire life, I’d equated playing football with my father’s love,” he writes. “He and my mom split when I was about nine, and after that, he wasn’t around a whole lot. Unless there was a game.” With this memoir, Hal discusses how he left the sport that had for so long been at the center of his life and began a new career path following his retirement from the field in 2019. From a successful second career in real estate, Hal looks back on his football days and ruminates on all the decisions he made along the way. He writes honestly about his relationship to the sport and his place in it: “I understood the game, I knew my part of it….But I still felt trapped by it—as if I were just going through the motions—and it got worse when the doctors and coaches issued orders that would keep me off the field. I wasn’t free, and the longer it went on, the worse it felt.” Football fans, or any readers who find themselves at a crossroads, will enjoy this unpretentious memoir of athletics, sickness, grief, and rebirth. A concise, revealing memoir of athletics, sickness, grief, and rebirth.

Hal recounts falling in and out of love with football in this debut sports memoir. Known for her deep connection to animals and nature, to help him defeat his fear of dark spaces. After the session, Lucas used Nicol’s upstairs washroom. Downstairs, Nicol took a sharp scene, she cares for a dying mouse, encompassing the narrative’s moral thrust in the line “Every creature, no matter how big or small has the same sized soul.” Mowat the crow and Casanova the octopus are playful creatures with detailed roles to perform. Gabriel, meanwhile, is the consummate gentleman, especially regarding the lovely Maxine. He befriends Father André Barbério, a local Benedictine monk, whose forthcoming nature, mystery buffs will note, stands out in the village’s hushed atmosphere of malice. Overall, the author succeeds in illustrating that human strictures on nature and society sometimes cause more harm than good.

An engaging, contemplative whodunit that advocates for animal intelligence and human compassion.

Hawthorne’s picture book addresses a very specific phase of the potty-training process. It’s a stage almost every kid (and parent) goes through: “Your diapers are done, and clean fannies are fun! / BUT... / Mom’s not wipin’ your bum.” The story, told in rhyming couplets, is framed as a mom addressing an unnamed child. (The child and mother have light-brown skin tones; a group of other diverse moms is also shown.) She congratulates the youngster on entering a new era and leaving diapers behind, but she’s exasperated with the kid’s underwear-destroying ways. After much encouragement to take charge of the process, the child expertly wipes, flushes, and washes their hands, and finally, mom and child collapse into a nap. The book uniquely approaches a particular phase
of child development that’s not usually covered in kids’ books. For adults going through it, the book is not only helpful, but also genuinely funny. Mahardhika’s illustrations have a dynamic graphic style that feels fresh; an image of a woman holding a “WIPE YO’ SELF!” placard will truly speak to some parents. The titular phrase punctuates the end of each section of verse, and it’s brilliantly showcased on its own page. One can almost hear youngsters energetically reading it aloud at each turn of the page.

A fun and funny read-aloud for parents and kids alike.

**PESTICIDE**
Hays, Kim
Seventh Street Books (358 pp.)
$17.95 paper | $9.99 e-book
April 19, 2022
978-1-64506-046-8

Swiss detectives dig into the cutthroat world of organic farming in Hays’ twisty murder mystery series starter.

The city of Bern—Switzerland’s clean, orderly capital—has a rare moment of mayhem when a policeman named Jonas Pauli is accused of clubbing Simon Etter to death during a riot. Det. Giuliana Linder is assigned to investigate the incident and subtly pressured by police brass to find another culprit to take the heat off Jonas, who swears he hit Simon only once, lightly, and that the second, fatal blow must have been struck by someone else. Giuliana feels torn by the case: She’d like to exonerate Jonas, but she’s also primed to believe the worst because of her immersion in Bern’s counterculture as a student, her leftist journalist husband Ueli’s distrust of all police (except her, she hopes), and her 15-year-old daughter’s arrest for rioting on the night of the murder. Pauli’s story gains credence when Giuliana turns up evidence that Simon was a drug dealer who might have had enemies. But the case takes a swerve when Giuliana’s colleague Renzo Donatelli links it to the murder of an organic farmer named Frank Schwab, who was found beaten, smothered to death, and drenched in pesticide—a substance the doctrinaire Frank never allowed on his farm. The prime suspect is a suspicious young man known as Simu, who was often around Frank’s farm—and turns out to be someone connected to Giuliana’s other case. The plot thickens as Giuliana ties Simon to an Albanian drug kingpin and Renzo probes the harsh economics of organic farming. Meanwhile, Giuliana and the handsome Renzo struggle to fend off their intensifying desire for each other.

This first installment of Hays’ Linder and Donatelli mystery series steeps readers in intricate procedural details, such as turning horrific photos of a dead victim’s bloated face into recognizable artist’s sketches; piecing together timelines to verify alibis; and even sussing out the niceties of organic certification and agricultural subsidies. Hays’ plotting is first-rate as she keeps the sleuthing believable and offers up earned revelations, which make sense of the clues even when they go in unexpected directions. Her punchy, evocative prose looks beneath Switzerland’s veneer of antiseptic quaintness to find grungy atmospherics, as in a description of an informant: “A piercing through the nasal septum reminded her of snot dangling from each nostril, and tattoos of thorny vines covered what she could see of his arms. Steel plugs had stretched his earlobes into gaping tunnels.” The author is equally good at painting the inner worlds of her characters, from overworked cops and worried parents to fog-brained criminals: “Christ, he was blitzed….The shots of schnapps—that’d be his mistake. Still, he’d managed; he’d managed everything. Things were set up the way he wanted them. And if he’d messed up somewhere...well, it could be fixed. Later.” The result is an engrossing page-turner.

An entertaining whodunit that finds plenty of toxic rot in a seemingly wholesome setting.

**FLYING FILLIES**
The Sky’s the Limit
Hui, Christy
Kokomo Entertainment (200 pp.)
July 4, 2022
979-8-98629-980-8
979-8-98629-981-5 paper

In this debut middle-grade novel, a tween girl in the World War II era finds inspiration in female fighter pilots.

Dawn Springfield’s family moves from Chicago to Sweetwater, Texas, to be closer to her grandfather. The 12-year-old girl is devastated by the recent losses of her grandmother and a beloved horse, and she dreads visits from her perpetually angry, always working salesman dad. But things soon look up. She makes a new friend; she gets a new horse; and she reunites with her fighter pilot aunt. Georgia Wells had flown planes for the British Royal Air Force since before America’s involvement in the war. Unfortunately, once the United States joined the conflict, her squadron of female pilots was told to “go home.” Still, the women can offer their skills in Texas, where they’ll ferry damaged, new, and repaired planes to wherever they’re needed. That’s also where Dawn becomes a volunteer for the Women Airforce Service Pilots program. While she’s already in awe of her “fearless,” adventurous aunt, Dawn befriends myriad women who fight to sit in the cockpit despite the country’s apparent reluctance to accept female pilots. Though Hui’s novel is primarily from a tween’s perspective, there are plenty of spotlights on the historically based pilots. The varied bunch includes those who flew with Georgia in Britain and new recruits in Texas. They face obstacles not just as women grappling for their place in aviation, but as individuals with their own personal lives as well. Dawn, meanwhile, is a superb young hero who takes jerks in stride, be they bullies or her father. Her ambition and her admiration for these pilots are infectious. Sadly, this short novel neither shows the women in the pilots’ seat nor describes the feelings and sights they experience in the air. The author caps off her book with intriguing particulars.
“The tales raise plenty of questions without offering easy answers.”

**THE HIGH PRICE OF FREeways**

*Juanita, Judy*

Livingston Press (210 pp.)

$29.95 | $18.95 paper | July 20, 2022

978-1-60489-318-2 paper

978-1-60489-319-9

A volume of short stories reflects aspects of the Black experience on the East and West coasts.

This prose collection from poet and fiction writer Juanita (following *Manhattan My Ass, You’re in Oakland*, 2020) features tales set in Northern California and the New York metropolitan area. Some are set in the present and recent past, while others reach back to the 1960s and ’70s. Some of the characters are political activists, working for the Black Panther Party and attending student conferences, while others are more practical than intellectual, focusing on day jobs, chronic pain, and failing relationships. The protagonist of “Making Room” sees ghosts. In “Driving,” just two paragraphs long, the narrator’s poor skills at the wheel tie her to the other motorists who keep her safe. In “Not a Through Street,” one of the more lighthearted works in the assemblage, a comedian works on her material while dealing with an attraction to her acupuncturist. “Between General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz” is the story of a hapless woman who tries her relatives’ patience one time too many, and “Triplets” explores family relationships from another, sadder, angle. “Huelbo” and “the brown of an overripe peach”). Some of the tales appear in multiple stories, but each one stands alone. Readers can easily follow Ouida into the Ira Levin–esque domestic horror of “A Lucky Day” without first watching her marriage fall apart in “The Hand.” The tales raise plenty of questions without offering easy answers, and the mix of historical and contemporary settings suggests that the questions of belonging, equity, love, and responsibility remain unsolved over the course of decades. Fans of Danzy Senna and ZZ Packer will find plenty to appreciate in these pages.

A compelling and challenging collection of tales that will entice readers.

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**MIND MANAGEMENT, NOT TIME MANAGEMENT**

*Productivity When Creativity Matters*

Kadavy, David

Self (262 pp.)

$27.95 | $19.95 paper | $3.99 e-book

978-0-578-30175-4

978-0-578-73369-2 paper

In this guide, a product designer and author shares principles of “mind management.”

Writing his debut book, *Design for Hackers* (2011), made Kadavy realize he needed to practice mind management instead of time management. In his latest work, the author both recounts his writing journey and offers a novel system for being creatively productive. “Too many of us live by the to-do list,” notes Kadavy, as he urges readers to rethink the concept of time management. To support his argument, he points to a Harvard study indicating “the busier knowledge workers were, the less creative they were.” Instead of readers being victimized by time, he describes first how to recognize and incorporate “divergent” and “convergent” thinking into creative work and then how to embrace the “Four Stages of Creativity”—Preparation, Incubation, Illumination, and Verification. To illustrate these stages at work, Kadavy uses the contemporary example of how Paul McCartney crafted the celebrated Beatles song “Yesterday,” referencing a similar process employed by other renowned creatives as well. Next, the author explores what he defines as the “Seven Mental States of Creative Work”—Prioritize, Explore, Research, Generate, Polish, Administer, and Recharge. This discussion is especially illuminating; it suggests a distinct relationship between one’s mental state and creative productivity, which Kadavy explains in lucid detail. The author helpfully shares some of the techniques and tools he uses to encourage the desired mental state. A subsequent description of “Creative Cycles” and “Creative Systems” may cause concern among some individuals that the creative process is being too tightly controlled. But Kadavy assures readers that while “the creative process is characterized by unpredictability,” it is possible to “predict how you’ll arrive at the final solution.” The author diligently demonstrates how his self-discoveries apply to his own
creative processes, particularly writing and podcasting. Some of his nomenclature—for example, “Minimum Creative Dose,” “Sloppy Operating Procedure,” and “Creative Cascade”—may be a bit too slick for some readers’ tastes, but these labels aptly describe elements of an original way of doing things. If nothing else, Kadavy’s approach is likely to spark a new evaluation of conventional time management.

An exhilarating but highly structured approach to the creative use of time.

**CLAIRE AND THE EAGER SPEAKER**  
*Kirk, Tamara & Davis Gordon*  
Illus. by Samantha Lane Fiddy  
Rock-It Publishing (52 pp.)  
$19.99 | $17.99 paper | Sept. 6, 2022  
978-1-73667-570-0  
978-1-73667-571-7 paper

A little girl and a gadget get into some mischief in Keith and Gordon’s debut picture book.

Claire’s parents order a smart speaker that responds to requests. Her mother asks it to play NPR (Keith is an NPR correspondent), and her dad asks it to put things on the family’s shopping list. Because the speaker never says no, Claire secretly adds a wild assortment to the list, including a guitar, a robot, a Tesla, stickers, and even “poop”; in a relatable turn, she requests poop “a few more times because it made her laugh.” Soon, however, the items start showing up at the door. (Yes, including poop, which arrives as bags of manure.) Realizing her mistake, Claire confesses to her parents, and all the stuff is returned with some mischief, may require grown-ups to advise young readers not to imitate the protagonist. Fiddy’s subdued watercolor illustrations are delightful and full of jokes for adults, such as a delivery truck from All Things Delivered. Claire and her family are all portrayed with a range of skin tones.

An enjoyable tale, but one that should be read with parental guidance.

**DRAWING CLOSE, ENCOUNTERING JOY**  
*An Artist’s Psalms and Prayers for the Earth*  
*Kirk, Janice E.*  
Resource Publications (128 pp.)  
$28.00 | $13.00 paper | July 5, 2022  
978-1-66674-290-9  
978-1-66674-289-3 paper

A faith-based collection of drawings and writings that personalizes the grandeur of nature.

During repeated visits to natural settings in the American Southwest, Kirk writes, she “was overwhelmed by wonder upon wonder in the beauty of creation,” believing that amid the natural surroundings of Colorado was “where God found me.” This volume compiles her Christian observations. Each entry opens with a passage from Scripture followed by poems that effectively vibrate with her sense of the immortal and sacred. “Praise God at dew point wakening,” she writes in “Creation, Hymn of Praise.” “Praise God at tints of dawn, / Praise God at morn unfolding.” Some entries take the form of prose, as when she offers gratitude to God for “water—the pure and sweet life-giving flows, for springs and seeps that moisten thirsty ground, for rivers, streams, and all reserves icebound.” Later, the author expresses despair over signs of the presence of humankind within this bucolic realm, from deforestation to pollution of the air and water, which are viewed as a betrayal of humankind’s stewardship of nature: “See the destruction we have caused / Separated from designer, we shattered the design / Parted from our God of order, we live in disorder / Godless, we are loveless” (“Lament With Jeremiah”). Ultimately, however, this collection is full of joyful abandon for the natural world, infusing even seemingly simple scenes with rapturous detail, as when her children follow her husband “across slippery rocks, stopping to explore small pools haunted by hermit crabs and bejeweled by green anemones and purple sea urchins.” Kirk’s choice to intersperse her own drawings along with her writings and Scripture passages offers readers a warm invitation to gaze at images as well as reflect on the text.

An earnest and emotional set of drawings and ecstatic writings.

**WINNING IN YOUR OWN COURT**  
*10 Laws for a Successful Career Without Burning Out or Selling Out*  
*Lefkowitz, Dena*  
American Bar Association (163 pp.)  
$34.95 paper | Sept. 1, 2022  
978-1-63905-130-4

Lawyers tired of the rat race should take responsibility for crafting a more fulfilling career, according to this spirited self-help book.

Lefkowitz, an attorney and career coach, aims her advice mainly at other lawyers who feel as if they’re stuck in a rut, endlessly overworked, underpaid, and trapped by law school debt or family obligations. All is not lost, she contends, if readers are willing to shape their careers by “design” rather than by “default.” She lays out 10 principles of successful career change that can help readers assess their circumstances and prospects, collect data to use in making choices, let go of past decisions that aren’t working instead of doubling down on them, get along with colleagues, bring in more revenue that will boost their clout within their firms, shift their mindsets from pessimism and caution to hopefulness and confidence, and gird themselves for the risk and discomfort that come with making major career changes.
“Vibrant details enrich the novel: the clink of a glass, the swish of a dress, the yips of coyotes accompanying the wail of a distant train.”

**KING HARVEST**

Lefkowitz illustrates these principles with anecdotes from her coaching practice, wherein she gently coaxes clients past their neurotic roadblockings and toward career breakthroughs in which they demand free time to have a life, refuse thankless administrative work so they can increase billable hours, claim credit due, reach for a partnership, take a pay cut and leave their soulless corporate firm to work at a nonprofit that defends people against the powerful, or jump off the legal hamster wheel altogether to pursue the dream of teaching. Lefkowitz knows this terrain well—“I’ve experienced the pounding heart and sweaty palms at the utterance of two words by a judge, ‘Ms. Lefkowitz?’”—and writes about it in vivid, earthy prose. (“‘So,’ I asked Marjorie, ‘what exactly makes you feel so loyal to these douchebags?’”) Her advice is as straight to the point as a well-written legal brief—“dread, sadness, or crying at the thought of going to work” is a sure sign that a change is needed—and sometimes pithily aphoristic. (“Here’s the thing about people pleasing. It’s never enough….If you can’t say no, you will find yourself buried in a pile of yesses.”) Lawyers in particular will appreciate the author’s lessons, but others will glean important insights as well.

A useful, reassuring guide to midcareer course correcting for attorneys.

**KING HARVEST**

_The Kansas Murder Trilogy: Book 1_  
Litton, Melvin  
Gordian Knot Books (420 pp.)  
978-1-63789-875-8

In 1975 rural Kansas, some aimless young men—many of them Vietnam veterans—grow hemp without repercussions until they clash with a rival group versed in murder.

In this first volume of Litton’s Kansas Murder Trilogy, “the boys”—including handsome Frankie Sage, one-eyed Jacko Kelly, confident Will Wolnofsly, fun-loving Gabe Swenson, and Lee Clayton, who has “a pretty wife”—have no money or worthwhile plans and little education. But they realize they can profit by growing, drying, and bagging hemp. Somebody else will sell it, as they know selling leads to the murkier side of things, and “Frankie always cautioned, ‘It’s not the law, it’s our own kind we’ve gotta watch out for.’” Indeed, the entry of a vicious rival group coincides with a brutal double murder. Dead are a teenage girl and her boyfriend, who recently told others that he “saw something.” The homicide investigation dovetails with the increasingly dangerous hemp harvesting and selling. A spooky subplot has Lee and his wife and young child thinking that ghosts reside in their house. The author excels at storytelling and characterization, creating a mood of loneliness. The frustration and desperation of being poor are vividly illustrated. Litton also shines at establishing a sense of place; for example, a farm carries the rich scents of autumn grasses, cattle grazing, the milo harvest, and the broad blankets of turned-up soil. Vibrant details enrich the novel: the clink of a glass, the swish of a dress, the yips of coyotes accompanying the wail of a distant train. The author gets the feel of the ’70s just right—the cars (Ford Fairlanes, GTOs), the clothes, and the songs. Lee keeps his radio tuned to a country station, and Litton gets bonus points for referencing not just “City of New Orleans” and its singer, Arlo Guthrie, but also the songwriter, Chicagoan Steve Goodman. Still, racist language, used infrequently, is jarring, and descriptions of cruelty to people and animals—chickens, puppies, and a beloved old bull—are hard to read.

Beautiful writing about so many sad and disturbing things in a riveting crime story.
promises future installments with at least one Voldemort-esque slippery villain. Smart cyber conundrums and intricate code-breaking meld enjoyably in this installment of a YA SF suspense series.

**HEALING AMERICA’S NARRATIVES**  
*The Feminine, the Masculine, & Our Collective National Shadow*  
Marra, Reggie  
From the Heart Press (515 pp.)  

An educator’s vision for healing America’s traumatic past and politically fractured present.

A classroom teacher for more than two decades, Marra is the co-founder of the Fully Human at Work organization, which provides interdisciplinary workshops on cultivating a more conscientious and thoughtful culture in Americans’ relationships within the workplace and with fellow citizens more broadly. This book, which complements the organization’s purpose, provides a theoretical and analytical perspective on American history and its current state of sociopolitical division. The election of Donald Trump in 2016, the author notes, led many Americans to question prevailing narratives about democracy and equality in the U.S. Yet as appalling as Trump was to many Americans, according to Marra, he embodied a “collective American Shadow” that revealed “the worst of ourselves” and a larger history of American “ignorance, arrogance, fear, bigotry, violence, greed, excess, [and] bullying.”

The book is divided into three parts; the first section provides historical and psychological context and commentary on the history and persistence of this “Shadow.” Part 2 centers on the whitewashed narratives Americans have told themselves, which minimize the mistreatment of women, African Americans, and Indigenous peoples. Despite these historic wrongs, which the author connects to systemic issues that still impact the present, the book is optimistic in tone, emphasizing hope in the possibility of national healing. To this end, its final section centers on “strategies, tactics, practices, and ways of being” that provide practical actions that individuals can make in their own lives to foster collective healing. The author of multiple books of poetry and inspirational nonfiction, Marra is well versed in classical literature, philosophy, and history, and this work is full of references to Jungian philosophy, the writing of feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, and often marginalized historical events. Despite a sophisticated presentation of critical theory, U.S. history, and philosophy, the book carefully balances nuance with accessibility and practical application. Still, at 500-plus pages, the book would benefit from a trim.

A convincing, if occasionally unwieldy, guidebook for a better future.

**TWAS THE NIGHT**  
*The Art and History of the Classic Christmas Poem*  
McColl, Pamela  
Grafton and Scratch (264 pp.)  
$36.00 | Sept. 8, 2022  
978-1-927979-30-3

A nonfiction book offers an in-depth look at the creation and history of a classic Christmas poem.

In celebration of the bicentennial of the Christmas season’s most well-known and oft-recited poem, “A Visit From St. Nicholas” (also commonly referred to as “‘Twas the Night Before Christmas”), McColl provides a collection of illustrations, snippets of literature, and historical tidbits related to Clement Clark Moore’s renowned rhyme. The author’s illuminating peek into the formulation and reception of the poem is well organized, with lovely, colorful images from various sources peppering the pages of text. Readers are given not only the background of the poem—written in 1822 and published in 1823—but also the origins of St. Nicholas and the varying cultural customs tied to Christmas throughout history. For example, McColl notes how Saturnalia was “the most popular festival in the Julian calendar” before Christianity became widespread. Similarly, readers can examine the use of Santa Claus’ image in popular culture—he appears in an Andy Warhol series—and how the belief in witchcraft in Colonial New England affected the region’s holiday celebrations. A highlight of the author’s extensive compilation turns out to be the holiday poems interspersed throughout, such as Louisa May Alcott’s “A Song for a Christmas Tree” (1871) and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Christmas Bells” (1863).

McColl’s book, which seeks to present “selected images, along with dozens of literary excerpts, to illustrate the way in which…” draws inspiration from the historical record of artistic expression and winter celebrations in western culture,” does just that. Though mainly told through quotes or passages from others, with some of her own observations sprinkled in between, the author’s commemoration is a detailed, thorough, and beautiful work for lovers of Christmas and fans of the holiday’s most famous poem.

A delightful and informative exploration of “A Visit From St. Nicholas” for the holiday season.
“A wealth of poems that offer penetrating glimpses into the wide range of African experiences.”

OLD LOVE SKIN

ALPHAPOETICA
A Poetry Primer for the Everyday Poet
Moore, Kate McCarroll
Finishing Line Press (88 pp.)
$31.99 | $21.99 paper | March 18, 2022
978-1-64662-793-6
978-1-64662-792-9 paper

An author extends an invitation to compose in this collection of poems and writing prompts.

Though she had produced verse starting in childhood, it was not until Moore was chosen as the poet laureate for San Ramon, California, that she realized the best motivation for writing a poem is an invitation. In her capacity as poet laureate, she was asked to write poems for various occasions—openings, unveilings, ceremonies—and found these commissions to be extremely fruitful for her output. With this book, the author collects some of her poems and background on the occasions that inspired them for the purpose of helping poets generate pieces of their own. “Each entry begins with a brief description of my inspiration, followed by the poem that emerged, and finally, an invitation for you to give it a try,” writes Moore. “It’s an invitation to enter the life of a working poet to share in the creative process of poetry making.” One poem, for example, “Walt Whitman Sampler,” was originally written on a postcard as a thank-you note for the docent who let Moore into the Walt Whitman House even though it was closed for the day: “As grey light filtered / through / uncurtained windows / we counted the steps— / reverent footfall / across uncarpeted floors / where shadows and / ghosts / whispered his song / in rooms of Prussian blue.” After explaining the context, the author invites readers to compose postcard poems of their own, customizing them with photographs and mailing them to the intended audiences. Moore’s poems focus on approachable, everyday topics, and her spare, image-laden verses lend themselves to imitation. The prompts are simple—write a poem of protest; write a poem about home—and will likely appeal most to those who are relatively new to writing. The better exercises—the echo poems, the ekphrastic poems—tend to be borrowed (with credit given) from other poets and teachers. Moore’s best contribution is her encouraging and nonjudgmental tone. These invitations feel sincere, and readers will be happy to accept.

A functional, unfussy volume of poetry prompts for those who need a bit of inspiration.

OLD LOVE SKIN

Voices From Contemporary Africa
Mukana Press
ed. by Nyashadzashe Chikumbu
Mukana Press (250 pp.)
$15.95 paper | Aug. 8, 2022
978-0-578-39715-3

A collection of works in English by 51 African poets provides a vibrant tapestry of modern perceptions about the continent.

In the foreword to this rewarding anthology, the editor, Zimbabwean poet Chikumbu, notes that, in spite of Africa’s cherished oral tradition of poetry “through its griots and praise singers,” there is a dearth of published African poetic voices. He means to counter this lack with a volume of poems dedicated to the broadest definition of love: “A love of grappling, a love of taking up space, a love of beauty, a love of finding, a love of words, images, sound and a love of the creative passion.” The poems Chikumbu has chosen are intoxicating both in the beauty of their language and the depth of their analysis, and they sweep readers into the dazzling and wounded landscape of Africa’s past and present. In “Playing God in Old Love Skin,” Henneh Kyereh Kwaku sets up a central paradox: “You, god—have given / the crow the wind / & here’s the crow flying against / the gift & not gliding with it.” A number of poems confront the ongoing violations of colonialism. “The Gospel According To Colonialism” by Carolyne M. Acen seethes: “The colonialists...Taught us how to / pray with our / eyes closed. / To a God who hates / our dark skin.” In “Elec(sanc)itations,” Adjei Agyei Baah uses the Japanese Senryū form of ironic verse to satirize how this legacy persists: “Bursting at his seams / the politician tells us / to tighten our belts.” The condition of women is also given broad representation in such works as “Her Story—Flowers,” an indictment of rape culture by Esnala Banda, who warns: “Don’t blame the girls who think that love sounds like an opening zipper, / Or feels like unwelcome hands.” The poems in this collection are well chosen, viscerally lyrical, and deeply meaningful. They offer English-language readers a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the multifaceted voices of modern Africa, and they prove Chikumbu’s assertion that “poetry is powerful, is cathartic and most importantly is far from being a dying art.”

A wealth of poems that offer penetrating glimpses into the wide range of African experiences.
MURDER IN THE BLACK LAND
Nelson, Resa
Self (204 pp.)
$12.95 paper | $3.99 e-book | May 29, 2022
979-8-83190-855-8

A prequel novel set in a world that mixes ancient Egyptian culture with modern technology.

Nelson’s new novel takes place before Our Lady of the Absolute (2010) and features the same intriguing setting: a modern-day kingdom known as the Black Land in which the religion and many ways of life of ancient Egypt are still observed. As the novel opens, Queen Angelique is alarmed by a warning given to her by her chief court magician: A murky plot is brewing somewhere in the Black Land to possibly murder the queen or her son Prince Penaware, who’s about to reach legal age and take on the mantle of pharaoh, laid down at his father’s untimely death several years prior. Women aren’t allowed to become pharaohs, although Angelique’s leadership has vastly improved the standard of living in her country while she’s been in charge. She’s naturally worried about her son’s safety; the court magician recommends consulting a renowned baker named Mrs. Dempsey, who’s also a skilled magician. Meanwhile, disgruntled Black Landers—including the novice priest Hennet, who dreams of a return to days of great ritualistic power—seem to lurk everywhere, and Angelique is uncomfortably aware that some people have strong reasons to want a reformer such as herself out of the way. As in Our Lady of the Absolute, Nelson crafts her strange hybrid world with elegant simplicity, mixing worldbuilding details such as temples to animal-headed gods with widescreen TVs and state-of-the-art security cameras called “Eyes of Horus.” As a character, Angelique initially seems like a boring picture of perfection, but she’s gradually shaded in with minor flaws and is effectively shown to have a caring heart. The various supporting characters—very much including the feckless prince—tend to lack the same level of character-building. However, the narrative’s brisk pace makes this tale irresistible.

A tightly plotted and highly readable fantasy tale of palace intrigue.

THE IMMIGRANT
Petrovsky, Frederic
Koehler Books (253 pp.)
$26.95 | $17.95 paper | $7.99 e-book
Oct. 25, 2022
978-1-64663-807-9
978-1-64663-805-5 paper
978-1-64663-806-2 e-book

A young Eastern European immigrant struggles with issues of identity, love, and loss in Petrovsky’s novel.

In the Bolshevik town of Komska in Byelorussia, Lev is a 17-year-old Jewish boy who’s forced to flee the aftermath of a pogrom. Leaving behind a peaceful past and his hopes for a stable future, he seeks refuge with an eclectic group of Roma travelers who call themselves the Aluşta Traveling Circus & Sideshow of Amazing Freaks. Petrovsky showcases the diversity of this troupe of persecuted people,

THE ADVENTURES OF SUPER OBI
Okonkwo, Dominique
Illus. by Mariana Hnatenko
Okonkwo Press (40 pp.)
Nov. 26, 2021
978-1-73738-230-0
978-1-73738-231-7 paper

In this debut picture book, a young boy fears the shadows and shapes in his dark house until his father comforts him.

When Obi’s mother forgets to turn on his night light, the house seems very dark and scary. A light inside the boy’s closet convinces him there are monsters inside. A light in the hall to call for his mother, the shadows chase him back under the covers. Thumping on the stairs makes Obi think that a giant is after him. Luckily, Daddy comes in to soothe his nerves and shows him there’s nothing to fear. Daddy also tells him: “Even though you were scared, you were super brave!” Obi goes to sleep feeling super but glad Daddy turned on his night light. A family prayer, verses of Scripture, and conversation prompts close out the end pages. In this fun tale, Okonkwo writes in simple sentences broken into paragraphs that frequently feature internal rhymes (bed, forehead, said). A few more challenging vocabulary words (mysterious, imagination) make this story appropriate for emergent readers, especially those who still get nervous in the dark. Obi’s understandable fears and growing confidence should comfort children who have had similar experiences. Veteran artist Hnatenko’s soft-edged images centering on an African American family capture Obi’s anxieties while showing how his imagination created the monsters. (One small, friendly-looking monster, which Obi has been drawing in art posted on his wall, shows up in the end pages.)

An engaging family tale with eye-catching illustrations.
Amazing Exploding Man. Lev’s horizons expand during wild nights with bewitching sex workers, conversations on freedom with a performer who sets himself on fire, and encounters with bigoted law enforcement. Unfortunate hostilities and unforeseen friendships lead him to board a ship traveling from Finland to New York City, where he works in a brothel on the Lower East Side and navigates conflicting local Jewish communities; later, he makes a move to the West. Throughout his journey, Lev searches for love, tries to hold onto the values of his childhood, and comes to terms with the traumas of his past. This work balances distanced observations about the world with the intense emotions of the immigrant experience. Petrovsky's prose is succinct and simple, reflecting the perspective of a young man thrown headlong into the perilous task of growing up. Lev's observations are carefully crafted to evoke universal themes; for example, he notes, upon arriving in New York, that “America is no better than any place else...As an idea, it is genius, a towering light so bright that it blocks all ugliness and intolerance.” The author adds depth to the novel's historical context by showing the complex dynamics among different ethnic groups, including conflicts between Southern and Eastern European Jews in New York and, much later, difficulties between Latine and Native American people in Arizona.

A nuanced and poignant coming-of-age historical novel.

CUBAN QUARTERMOON

Putnam, Ann
Self (347 pp.)
$16.00 paper | $8.99 e-book | June 2, 2022
979-8-42647-677-6

An American scholar visits Cuba and becomes embroiled in the politics of everyday life in this poetic novel by Putnam, author of Full Moon at Noontide (2009).

Professor Laura Gallagher is traveling to Havana to read a paper she has written on Ernest Hemingway to fellow American and Cuban scholars. It’s the 1990s, and such opportunities to visit the country had previously been quite rare. Gallagher is excited and a bit afraid, although her motivation to travel goes beyond mere academic interest; she’s also desperate to use the trip as a way to outrun painful memories. Ever since the death of her mother when she was 12, Gallagher has struggled to face her darkest moments, including the loss of a baby following an emergency C-section, an unrewarding love life, and a traumatic hysterectomy. Almost as soon as she arrives in Cuba, she falls ill with a gastrointestinal illness. Her caregiver is the mysterious Maria, who was once a doctor but is now a hotel cleaner. Maria introduces Gallagher to her daughter, Pilar, who, as a child, believed Hemingway was a spirit watching over her. After Gallagher recovers, she feels an immediate bond with this Cuban family. However, she's soon accosted by a man on the street who tells her to “mind [her] own business” and “stay away.” In an environment where neighbors spy on neighbors, Gallagher must tread very carefully in order to comprehend and fight against the dangers that are facing her newfound friends and rediscover a lost sense of purpose and peace within herself.

As the novel goes on, Putnam skillfully intertwines history and fiction by carefully pondering the impact of political events from the perspective of the Cuban people: “On those dark October days years ago, what was it like from here, with the lighthouse dark and missiles aimed every which way?...No cannons at nine to announce that all is well.” Overall, she offers readers a multifaceted, elegantly described portrait of Cuban life—from the sensual enticement of a famed highball cocktail (“I want the chink of ice cubes, the splash of water, the sweet immersion....Rum, lime, mint, a spritz of seltzer and ice. Mojito”) to the haunting yet enthralling local atmosphere that’s informed by the religion Santeria. However, despite the novel’s breathtakingly evocative descriptive focus on the country and culture, the author never neglects the intricacies of her complex plot. She shows herself to be expert at poetically exploring and pinpointing her protagonist’s psychological state: “I’m an outsider to my own story. I’m still the little girl with the unopened chest buried under her bed.” The novel’s portrayal of Gallagher’s story of altruism and catharsis makes for a satisfying and rewarding read—and one that also confronts a range of relatable anxieties. In addition, there are sufficient Hemingway references here to satisfy fans of that author. Overall, this impressively expansive novel will appeal to academics, Cubanophiles, and general readers alike.

A story with sumptuous description and a gradually intensifying plot that makes for compulsive reading.

BROWN ENOUGH

True Stories About Love, Violence, the Student Loan Crisis, Hollywood, Race, Familia, and Making It in America

Rivas, Christopher
Row House Publishing (240 pp.)
$24.99 | Oct. 11, 2022
978-1-955905-04-6

An Afro-Latino actor blends memoir with broader reflections on race, exclusion, and contemporary America in this debut book.

In addition to his acting repertoire, which includes a recurring role in the Fox television series Call Me Kat, Rivas considers race and ethnicity in America through his podcasts and writings, which include a viral article in the New York Times in which he discussed breaking up with his girlfriend “because she was white.” Indeed, while this book provides plenty of juicy behind-the-scenes stories that will delight fans of Hollywood and pop culture, the book’s strength lies in its exploration of how Rivas’ experiences connect to a broader conversation on race and belonging in America. He was once told by a Hollywood
“Romanov’s personal pilgrimage charts a poignant journey from a sense of self-loss to one of inner peace.”

SAN FRANCISCO PILGRIMAGE

A San Franciscan takes walks to reconnect with her city at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in this memoir. “Living solo in a shut-down world is not all that much fun,” remarks travel writer Romanov, drawing from the journal she kept in early 2020 as the novel coronavirus spread across the country. As her hometown of San Francisco went into lockdown, she felt as though she were “shutting down with it.” A friend recommended a book of travel stories to her—The Art of Pilgrimage (1998) by Phil Cousineau—which inspired her to alter her own life. She decided to make her own pilgrimage by walking the streets of San Francisco, searching for the essence of her city and of herself. This book describes seven days in which the author explored such diverse locations as Potrero Hill, the Fillmore District, and Baker Beach. As she sees the city with new eyes, she makes surprising connections to her childhood spent in a refugee camp in Trieste, Italy, in the early 1950s and bonds with people she encounters along the way. Romanov’s personal pilgrimage charts a poignant journey from a sense of self-loss to one of inner peace. Her elegantly descriptive prose conveys her wonder at the city’s unpredictability: “I drop onto a hidden stairway that splits like the entry to a gracious manor. One block later Vallejo Street opens to a beautiful garden stairway... I am immediately pulled to it and head up those stairs.” The author subtly imparts details of her past, skillfully interweaving descriptions of contemporary San Francisco and flashbacks. On visiting the old Potrero Power Plant, she notes: “it could easily be an old prison. I wonder how I could be heading to Hunters Point and end up in Trieste?” The author is occasionally prone to repetition; for instance, she explains white flight on multiple occasions. However, this doesn't detract from a thoroughly researched study that imparts a wealth of knowledge regarding San Francisco's topography and history, illustrated with the author's black-and-white photography. An eloquent and timely search for meaning.

BAKING IS MESSY AND SO IS LIFE

Roberts offers a middle-grade novella about family and the power of forgiveness. A young girl named JJ Duright lives in a home full of love and laughter in the friendly Forest. Attached to the house is a little building, shaped like a muffin, which JJ has been forbidden to explore; when her curiosity gets the better of her, JJ discovers the dwelling to be a small, long-neglected bakery with a magical history. Her mother, CC, explains that JJ is part of a legacy of bakers and that her great-great-grandmother Honey was gifted an old oven that turned out to be magical by her husband, called Great-Great Ronnie. JJ’s grandmother Joy-Marie established nearby Bakerstown, empowering women throughout the community to start their own bakeries. But Clara-the-Complainer, a greedy baker, sabotaged Joy-Marie, who lost her land to a large corporation. However, the magical oven rekindled her courage, calling her to create again and to build the muffin-shaped kitchen. JJ and CC begin their own baking tradition, as JJ is inspired to build a park on the grounds that once housed her family’s bakery. They raise money through a community bake sale and the support of a mysterious donor, which leads to a tale of forgiveness. Roberts delivers a fun, playful story with plenty of heart that’s easy to read. It encourages children to follow their dreams and shows the power of good deeds while also addressing issues of jealousy and resilience. Its overall message of optimism is likely to appeal to young readers. Roberts also introduces a clever, encouraging character in the form of the BO (Big Oven), the sentient, supernatural appliance whose coaching rallies the main characters to pursue their goals. The work may be a bit long for very young children, but it’s a good fit for family storytimes or for adolescents seeking an uplifting tale. A sweet story that both children and adults will enjoy.

SAN FRANCISCO PILGRIMAGE

Romanov, Tania

Solificatio (272 pp.)


979-8-98587-810-3

A San Franciscan takes walks to reconnect with her city at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in this memoir. “Living solo in a shut-down world is not all that much fun,” remarks travel writer Romanov, drawing from the journalist she kept in early 2020 as the novel coronavirus spread across the country. As her hometown of San Francisco went into lockdown, she felt as though she were “shutting down with it.” A friend recommended a book of travel stories to her—The Art of Pilgrimage (1998) by Phil Cousineau—which inspired her to alter her own life. She decided to make her own pilgrimage by walking the streets of San Francisco, searching for the essence of her city and of herself. This book describes seven days in which the author explored such diverse locations as Potrero Hill, the Fillmore District, and Baker Beach. As she sees the city with new eyes, she makes surprising connections to her childhood spent in a refugee camp in Trieste, Italy, in the early 1950s and bonds with people she encounters along the way. Romanov’s personal pilgrimage charts a poignant journey from a sense of self-loss to one of inner peace. Her elegantly descriptive prose conveys her wonder at the city’s unpredictability: “I drop onto a hidden stairway that splits like the entry to a gracious manor. One block later Vallejo Street opens to a beautiful garden stairway... I am immediately pulled to it and head up those stairs.” The author subtly imparts details of her past, skillfully interweaving descriptions of contemporary San Francisco and flashbacks. On visiting the old Potrero Power Plant, she notes: “it could easily be an old prison. I wonder how I could be heading to Hunters Point and end up in Trieste?” The author is occasionally prone to repetition; for instance, she explains white flight on multiple occasions. However, this doesn't detract from a thoroughly researched study that imparts a wealth of knowledge regarding San Francisco’s topography and history, illustrated with the author’s black-and-white photography. An eloquent and timely search for meaning.

KIRKUS.COM | INDIE | 1 OCTOBER 2022 | 129
A snail and a bee realize that they play important parts in the natural world in this rhyming picture book.

A busy bee and a sluggish snail say to each other: “You’re not like me.” Bee doesn’t understand why Snail moves so slowly. Snail wonders why Bee is in such a hurry. But Bee explains that the flowers need her to pollinate them; Snail counters that his duties are also vital. If he didn’t do his job, “It would be bad, I suppose. / The leaves would not decompose.” Likewise, Bee knows that if she ceased working, fruits and flowers would stop growing. Each acknowledges the other’s significance, and the two share a cup of tea in the only fanciful moment in an otherwise grounded tale. Though Russell’s rhymes vary in tempo, the lines read aloud cleanly, with plenty of evocative words describing sounds and sensations: staggered, buzzed, munching. Lacy’s beautifully textured multimedia illustrations combine tight pen and ink work with watercolor and oil pastel backgrounds. Along with Bee and Snail, the pages are populated by frogs, hummingbirds, squirrels, deer, and other forest creatures. Detailed science notes, written by journalist Lucy Noland, add facts to a story that’s likely to deepen young readers’ appreciation of nature.

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A lovely, enlightening tale about how unique roles make ecosystems—and communities—work.

OBITUARY
Sawyer, Deborah C.
Information Plus (262 pp.)
979-8-21802-156-6

A mystery examines the lasting impact of a cold case on one family.

Sawyer’s novel starts with an obituary for a key character: Abigail Melinda Joss, who died in Toronto on Feb. 1, 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Abigail gained notoriety for being acquitted of the murder of her husband, Montgomery, in 2000. The obit ties together the narratives told from the perspectives of three people affected by Monty’s killing: his daughter, Katelynn; his mistress, Rosalind Wallen; and his son, Robitaille. As the only child of Abigail’s who can be located, Katelynn is called back from her home in France to write the obit for her estranged mother. She is supervised by her aunts Agnes and Yolande, Abigail’s sisters, who are extremely worried about upholding the reputation of the “prominent Raddefords of Des Moines, Iowa.” It takes four months of arguments among Katelynn and her aunts to finish the obit. The piece is seen by Rosalind, Monty’s true love. Young Monty and Roz had planned to be wed until Abigail tricked him into proposing. Roz is also the only living person who knows the truth about Monty’s murder. Rob, who changed his name after leaving home, becomes a homicide detective and is handed the cold case of Monty’s murder by his police chief. Rob searches for clues to the killer’s identity. In this book, Sawyer effectively reveals how a violent act can affect many people. The author shows how Abigail’s history of brutality was covered up by her relatives, who were more concerned with the family’s prestige. As a result, Abigail was viewed as eccentric, not dangerous, despite her past actions. Other characters appear amiable but they once got hattered by Abigail’s wake. Sawyer’s decision to tell the story from three distinct viewpoints is quite productive. Each narrator has pieces of the puzzle, which gets assembled over the course of the well-crafted tale to illustrate how destructive the self-absorbed Abigail was. The story, which traces her actions over decades, uncovers how her narcissism helped shape the decisions made by other characters. She drives the events in this intriguing work.

A heinous crime gets viewed through several lenses in this scintillating whodunit.
SOMETIMES WHEN I'M BORED
Serani, Deborah
Illus. by Kyra Teis
Free Spirit Publishing (40 pp.)
$14.99 | July 19, 2022
978-1-63198-695-6

A boy copes with boredom with parental guidance in this wise picture book finding opportunity in quiet moments.

A young child laments that idle time is no fun: “Sometimes when I’m bored, everything bothers me.” But when the narrator talks to Momma, she promises that boredom just means something special is ahead. All the child has to do is find it by exploring natural curiosity, using imagination, building something new, or following a natural sense of wonder. Daddy suggests that feeling lonely is an opportunity to play pretend, draw a picture, or write to a loved one. The boy takes these suggestions to heart, and now, when he’s bored, the world is full of possibility. Serani, a psychologist and professor at Adelphi University, carefully balances the “Ugh!” feeling of childhood boredom with opportunity in quiet moments.

Along with crafting the authentic child voice of the narrator and using straightforward text and simple sentence structure to help emergent readers, she also offers adults detailed notes on how to support children through their boredom. Teis’ realistic paintings center a Black family in images filled with familial love. Highlights of blue and purple represent the child’s imagination and sparking creativity.


BY FIRE
Poems
Slota, Rhonda Harris
Atmosphere Press (90 pp.)
978-1-63988-203-8

A volume of poetry focuses on life in a religious family.

Each piece in this collection is like a stained-glass scene of a Christian Midwestern family as seen through the eyes of a mature poet. Slota drops readers into a home occupied by a preacher father, a homemaker mother, a beloved daughter, and a beloved son (and later, another son). The author recalls hearty meals at her grandmother’s house, after which the men retired “full-bellied” to talk in the living room or drifted off “in a chorus of snoring” while the women drank coffee and expected the children. Slota drops readers into a home occupied by a preacher father, a homemaker mother, the ghost of a dead sister, and the closet she hid in as a child, “its cool darkness one thing new, or following a natural sense of wonder.

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THE SUGGESTED ASSASSIN
West, David
Self (236 pp.)
978-1-915225-05-4

When an illustrious British spy receives a message from the queen of France requesting his assistance in matters critical to the court, he and his oldest daughter head to Paris.

This third volume in West’s enticing adventure series opens with a rousing sea escape in which Sir Anthony Standen and his eldest daughter, Maria, find themselves battling a two-vessel fleet of Barbary pirates. Fans of all things nautical should thoroughly enjoy the high-action scenes as well as the many pages devoted to the exquisitely detailed descriptions of the innovations installed on the Standens’ newly launched sailboat. But by January 1610, Anthony is happily settled back on his Italian vineyard estate with his wife, Francesca, and their five children—20-year-old twins Maria and Antonio and youngsters William, Anna, and baby Catherine.

Anthony has been instructing the twins—and readers who have a fondness for puzzles—in the arts of lock-picking and cryptanalysis, tools of his trade as a spy. A knock on the door brings a dispatch rider with a letter from Marie, Queen of France. The young dauphin, Louis, is struggling with a debilitating stutter. The court doctors, Marie writes, are considering amputating a portion of the child’s tongue to alleviate the problem. Can Anthony help the future king? But Anthony realizes that the missive also contains a secret code revealing a much more serious issue—somebody wants Marie’s husband, King Henry, dead (“Help we are in danger, foe within court”). Francesca suggests Anthony bring Maria with him to Paris, where she hopes he will find their spirited daughter a suitable husband—a prospect that the young woman is loath to consider. And so, father and daughter are off to the Louvre Palace. The pace of the narrative slows as...
the tale becomes an investigative procedural. Still, the story is filled with captivating historical digressions and, more compellingly, the rich intricacies of palace politics, jealousies, and ambitions. There are enough suspects among the queen's most trusted advisers to keep readers guessing until the final pages. And Maria, who is given a prominent role in this installment, emerges as a sturdy, feminist protagonist.

An entertaining adventure that's packed with diverse and intriguing historical morsels.

THE RELATIVES
White, Billy
Self (329 pp.)
979-8-84191-977-3

Fleeing an unfriendly Earth, the supporters of a space-travel genius colonize a faraway planet, but centuries later, the inhabitants suffer the consequences of the man's choices and the cult surrounding his ruling-class descendants.

White's debut is a partly satirical SF novel with roots in 2155. That is when Nugent Graham, an entrepreneur and inventor of a revolutionary, faster-than-light propulsion engine, bolted from a future Earth under a one-world-government "Single Sovereign." The backstory details (admittedly fuzzy) include that Graham did not want to yield his engineering secrets to the autocratic Sovereign and led a semisuccessful attempt to abscond with his followers in three great starships to a distant, hot, but habitable planet. The new world was grandiosely dubbed Graham's Planet, and 253 years later, the settlement is functional but faintly ridiculous in its social structure. Only one ship arrived; another became lost in recoverable orbit while something on Earth seems to have gone horribly wrong. Jordan worries that hitherto undiscovered Grahams will arrive and rival his power, but a larger menace soon looms. Though low on action—and its sketchy science only exists enough to satisfy the plot—White's sardonic series opener delivers a quick-footed tale whose twists will catch many readers by surprise. With the story's strong emphasis on characterization, even Jordan ends up more a pitiable figure than an outright villain. The vivid sense of a dysfunctional government regime built on nepotism and entitlement during an era of chronic scarcity and epidemics may hit closer to home than this saga's fictitious star system.

This tragicomic SF tale offers a wry view of narcissistic leaders and their unquestioning followers.

THE RELATIVES
Billy White

THE TRAVELS OF DR. REBECCA HARPER
Wooley, Elizabeth
Horse Doctor Press (323 pp.)
978-0-9942972-5-9

In Wooley's series-starting SF novel, a recent veterinary school graduate Invertently travels back in time to the setting of her favorite Western TV show.

In 1981, Dr. Rebecca Harper is working for a veterinary practice near Lake Tahoe in Nevada, where she's planning to move with her husband, Jeff, and young daughter, Lauren. While out riding with one of the practice's owners, a landslide on a horse trail sends her into a pool, which sends her back in time to 1856. The injured and confused Becky stumbles into the nearby town, which strongly resembles the set of Comstock, a beloved television show from her childhood. Her arrival ruffles feathers among the townsfolk, and she's ruffled herself when she comes face to face with a strangely familiar, and handsome, cowboy: "He kind of looked and sounded like Clint Buchanan of the Comstock series, but he was much younger." Becky earns people's respect with her extensive knowledge of horses and embarks on a journey to find her way back home; this quickly evolves into a personal quest to make a new life for herself. Over the course of the novel, Woolsey ably explores many historical aspects of the second half of the 19th century as seen through Becky's eyes; readers will find Becky to be a compelling protagonist as she died mysteriously en route, and his son and heir was assassinated. Readers learn that Graham was no champion of freedom but a would-be monarch who intended a world where his family would reign as hereditary, absolute rulers. Minus a full-blooded Graham on Graham's Planet, political power now falls to any relative by marriage or association. An “Opposition” party gives the appearance of a democracy, but the highest office is held, typically, by the latest relation—now, the petty, spoiled Jordan Graham. When local scientists belatedly activate the old ship-to-ship communication system, they find that the missing spacecraft and its wretched, surviving colonists remain in recoverable orbit while something on Earth seems to have gone horribly wrong. Jordan worries that hitherto undiscovered Grahams will arrive and rival his power, but a larger menace soon looms. Though low on action—and its sketchy science only exists enough to satisfy the plot—White's sardonic series opener delivers a quick-footed tale whose twists will catch many readers by surprise. With the story's strong emphasis on characterization, even Jordan ends up more a pitiable figure than an outright villain. The vivid sense of a dysfunctional government regime built on nepotism and entitlement during an era of chronic scarcity and epidemics may hit closer to home than this saga's fictitious star system.

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questions gender norms and racial divisions of the period. After she heads west, she serves as a nurse during the Civil War and meets the legendary Clara Barton. The novel spans quite a long period of time, and readers may find its time skips to be excessive. However, its familiar time-travel premise is made fresh by the fact that the past setting is that of a fictional TV show rather than that of the true West. Nonetheless, Woolsey’s historical research is excellent throughout, making the world that Becky finds herself in feel realistic and immersive.

An entertaining walk through the 19th century that will appeal to lovers of horses and historical fiction.
THE SUMMER I TURNED PRETTY ADDS TO CAST

Kyra Sedgwick and Elsie Fisher will join the second season of The Summer I Turned Pretty, the Amazon Prime series based on Jenny Han’s book, Deadline reports.

Sedgwick (Something To Talk About, Singles) and Fisher (Eighth Grade, Texas Chainsaw Massacre) will have recurring roles, as yet unspecified, in the series. They join a cast that includes Lola Tung, Jackie Chung, and Rachel Blanchard.

The series is based on Han’s 2009 young adult novel about a teenage girl who spends summers with her family and friends at a beach house. A critic for Kirkus wrote of the book—the first in a trilogy—“The wish-fulfilling title and sun-washed, catalog-beautiful teens on the cover will be enticing for girls looking for a diversion.”

The show was renewed for a second season before the first one even aired. Amazon’s confidence in the series proved to be well earned; it became the most-viewed show on the streaming service shortly after its release.

Sedgwick announced her casting in the series in an Instagram post, writing that she “couldn’t be more excited” to join the show.

The post was accompanied by a video showing someone knocking on a trailer door with the name “Skye” on it. Fisher opens the door and does a brief dance before the camera pans over to Sedgwick, who’s reading a copy of Han’s It’s Not Summer Without You.

RANDALL PARK WILL DIRECT SHORTCOMINGS FILM

Adrian Tomine’s Shortcomings is headed to the big screen, with actor Randall Park directing, Variety reports.

Park, known for his roles in television series including Fresh Off the Boat and Veep, will make his feature directorial debut with the film.

Tmine’s graphic novel, published by Drawn & Quarterly in 2007, follows a young Berkeley, California, man who’s in a faltering relationship with his activist girlfriend. The book was well received by critics, including Jim Windolf for the New York Times, who called it “meticulously observed” and compared Tomine to Philip Roth.

Tmine wrote the screenplay for the film, and he serves as one of its executive producers.

Starring in the movie will be Justin H. Min (The Umbrella Academy), Sherry Cola (Good Trouble), Ally Maki (Cloak & Dagger), Tavi Gevinson (Enough Said), Jacob Batalon (Avengers: Infinity Wars), and Sonoya Mizuno (Ex Machina).

“It was a joy watching these incredibly talented performers bring these characters to life, flaws and all,” Park told Variety. “I am extremely proud to helm a movie that will finally show the world that the Asian American experience includes eating various sandwiches in diners.”

Cast member Maki also took to Instagram to announce the movie, writing, “When the vision board comes to life….Been dreaming of a Japanese American female character like this for so long. Can’t begin to express how grateful I am for this very beautiful group of people.”
Published in 1962, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* could not have been timelier. Its immediate subject was the battery of environmental ills that the use of insecticides and pesticides—which she called “elixirs of death”—had on songbirds and, by extension, every other creature in what had only recently been dubbed the food chain. But there was more, wrote Carson: “We have subjected enormous numbers of people to contact with these poisons, without their consent and often without their knowledge.”

That was indisputable. When *Silent Spring* was first released in the *New Yorker*, the thalidomide scandal was much in the news, involving a licensed sedative for pregnant women that produced a range of birth defects, a drawback the manufacturer knew about and kept hidden. Toxic chemicals and pollutants were everywhere, befouling the air, poisoning the water, lurking in the soil. Spurred in part by Carson’s subsequent book, Congress initiated a series of hearings on the environmental effects of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, which yielded new regulations such as a ban on DDT—though it took a decade for that to happen.

Born in 1907, Carson grew up along a bend of the Allegheny River in western Pennsylvania. She was fascinated by nature, but when she went off to college, it was to study English, thought a proper major for young women in the 1920s. Biology was not, but she switched to biology anyway, then earned a master’s degree in marine science. Soon after, she joined what would become the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a researcher and writer.

Carson was no stranger to literary success. In 1941, her first book, *Under the Sea-Wind*, was published and sold widely. *The Sea Around Us* appeared a decade later and won a National Book Award. Her third book, *The Edge of the Sea*, came out in 1955 and was similarly well received; with the proceeds, Carson moved to a large house on the edge of Washington, D.C., where a garden is now dedicated to her memory.

Unlike those books, the bestselling *Silent Spring* set off a storm of controversy. Lobbying groups and chemical manufacturers tried to have it suppressed, threatening the publisher with lawsuits. Ezra Taft Benson, Dwight Eisenhower’s secretary of agriculture, wondered “why this spinster without children was so concerned about genetics,” concluding that Carson was “probably a Communist.” But *Silent Spring* also had well-placed supporters, among them John F. Kennedy, who acknowledged that his government’s investigations into pesticide poisoning were the direct result of Carson’s book.

*Silent Spring* opened the door for many journalistic works in the public interest in the 1960s. It also swelled membership in groups like the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club. Considered a classic of nature writing and environmental literature, *Silent Spring* remains in print 60 years later—as well it should, for the dark forces of destruction for profit are still at work on the natural world. As the late E.O. Wilson sagely remarked, “We are still poisoning the air and water and eroding the biosphere, albeit less so than if Rachel Carson had not written.”

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
Making friends can be hard for a shy bear, even at summer camp.

"...a detective-duo heist, a moving and cautionary tale of friendship and openness prevailing against prejudice, or a chilling campfire yarn...The first in a thrilling series, this one forgoes the cliffhanger entirely and plunges straight over the edge, leaving readers hungry for more."

— Kirkus Reviews

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