Namwali Serpell’s magical realist epic, *The Old Drift*, will inevitably be compared with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. But this novel’s generous spirit, sensory richness, and visionary heft make it almost unique among magical realist epics.

p. 14
Fall Back Down When I Die by Joe Wilkins (March 12): “A heart-rending tale of family, love, and violence in which the ‘failures of the nation, the failures of myth, meet the failures of men.’ Poet Wilkins’ (When We Were Birds, 2016, etc.) politically charged first novel, a ‘sad riddle of a story,’ is set primarily in 2009, in rural, poverty-stricken Eastern Montana, with the first legal wolf hunt in decades about to begin. Wilkins crafts a subtle, tightly plotted, and slowly unfolding narrative told through three characters’ points of view….Following in the literary roots of Montanans Jim Harrison and Rick Bass, Wilkins packs a lot of story and stylistic wallop into this gripping, outstanding novel.”

Under Red Skies: Three Generations of Life, Loss, and Hope in China by Karoline Kan (March 12): “A personal examination of rural China and its one-child policy by a millennial Chinese woman who eventually earned an education and employment as a journalist. A former reporter for the New York Times Beijing Bureau, Kan was born in 1989 in the village of Chaoyang, which was rebuilt after the great Tangshan earthquake of 1976.…A remarkable multigenerational memoir that clearly explores ‘the real China—it’s beauty and ugliness, the weird and familiar, the joyful and sad, progressive and backward at the same time.’”

Another by Christian Robinson; illus. by the author (March 5): “A young child discovers a portal to a whole other plane of perspective in Robinson’s latest. In the dark of night, a portal opens in a small girl’s bedroom, the light attracting her cat. When the curious feline crawls through to chase another cat that looks just like it (but with a different color collar), the little girl cannot help but follow as well….A fearless use of white space and an utter disregard of conventions of direction encourage readers to engage with the physical book as the story unfolds, touching and turning it as they literally take the narrative into their hands. A bright, open primer for Escher.” (Picture book. 2-3)

That Good Night: Life and Medicine in the Eleventh Hour by Sunita Puri (March 5): “Doctors labor to cure disease and (recently) comfort the dying, but this moving memoir portrays a doctor practicing a new specialty that fills a gap between the two approaches….During training, she thrilled to see her skills cure disease and relieve suffering, but she became increasingly disturbed when they didn’t. Repeatedly, she witnessed patients with devastating illnesses and little hope of cure made sicker by treatments the doctors themselves knew were futile….A profound meditation on a problem many of us will face; worthy of being mentioned in the same breath as Atul Gawande’s Being Mortal (2014).”
The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.

A girl displaced by the Syrian conflict navigates a new home in the United States in Jasmine Warga’s illuminating novel in verse. Read the review on p. 118.
An artist and illustrator takes on the feminist classic.

Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale is the most famous work by this celebrated author, and it is widely regarded as a 20th-century masterpiece. Best known for its chilling dystopian premise—much that was once the United States is a theocracy in which fertile women are enslaved for their uteruses—it’s also technically brilliant and gorgeously written. The TV series based on the novel has been praised both for its storytelling and its superb visuals. (There’s also a 1990 film version, of course, but that was neither a critical nor commercial success.) Nault is, then, working with material that is already familiar to and beloved by scores of readers and viewers. In adapting the text, Nault often chooses to present Atwood’s words as written, but what she leaves is what makes the original work sing. For example, on the first page, Nault offers, “We slept in what had once been the gymnasium...,” which is also the opening line of the novel. Atwood follows with “The floors were of varnished wood, with stripe and circles painted on it, for the games that were formerly played there; the hoops for the basketball nets were still in place, though the nets were gone. A balcony ran around the room, for the spectators, and I thought I could smell, faintly like an afterimage, the pungent scent of sweat shot through with the sweet taint of chewing gum and perfume from the watching girls....” There is none of this nostalgia and longing in Nault’s version—not even the textual elements that could have been communicated in picture form. More troubling is her decision to make Gilead a place inhabited almost entirely by white people. Both Atwood’s novel and the Netflix show have been critiqued for how they handle race, but the choice to avoid race at all seems like a poor one in 2019.

For people who prefer graphic novels to all other forms, and probably not for anyone else.
A young girl with a unique talent for identifying scents embarks on a journey of self-discovery when she's ripped from her intensely isolated childhood home.

Emmeline has lived with her father on an otherwise uninhabited island in the Pacific Northwest for as long as she can remember. Her father teaches her to read, to forage for food, and to hone her sense of smell. Emmeline doesn't question their isolation, as she's known nothing else. She adores the long days learning from her father, listening to fairy tales, and watching him use his mysterious machine. The machine produces “scent-papers” that her father stashes inside small glass bottles, each paper preserving a one-of-a-kind scent. When tragedy strikes, Emmeline is forced to relocate to the mainland. She is taken in by a kind, childless couple in a seaside village. Similar to a wild animal suddenly brought into captivity, 12-year-old Emmeline struggles to adapt. As she slowly establishes a new life, beginning school and navigating adolescence, questions about her father, her absent mother, and her own identity continue to grow. The more she learns about her past, the harder it becomes to reconcile her childhood with her future. Told entirely from Emmeline’s perspective, the novel contains three distinct sections. The first, where Emmeline is living in the wild, is suffused with wonder and enchantment. The author deftly describes the lush island and the awe of a little girl watching her father fill a cabin with the aromas of scents and dreams. Once Emmeline moves to the mainland, the patina of her youth wears off, and much of the magic of the story goes with it. Even so, the author’s ability to describe scents, the nature in which they evolve, and how deeply they are tied to memory and emotion provides sufficient heft to keep the novel engaging and worthwhile. Told in a lyrical, haunting prose, the story provides fascinating information about the ways in which different fragrances can impact human behavior and the struggles of finding one’s own identity.

An artfully crafted coming-of-age story that will take the reader on an exquisite olfactory adventure.

Four roommates at a liberal arts college respond differently to the charisma of a married visiting professor with a murky past.

There’s not much good sex in this second novel from Berman (Perennials, 2017) but a fair amount of bad. As the story opens, 21-year-old Fiona Larkin, who rooms with Liv, Lula, and Marley, all seniors at Buchanan College in Pennsylvania, is advised not to spend the night with a male student who has been accused of rape. But needy Fiona sleeps with him anyway, an ugly experience, typical of the kind of poor choices she’s currently making in the aftermath of her younger sister Helen’s sudden death and her family’s disintegration. (Fiona and Helen also featured in Perennials.) And it’s not only Fiona who arrives with a deep backstory. Lula is a rich, black, half-Jewish femme lesbian, and Liv is the product of a Japanese mother and a wealthy, alcoholic American father who possibly abused her. To this mix Berman adds a
The Promise of Elsewhere

Brad Leithauser

This month’s shelves feature books by a number of great writers who’ve been missing from the front of the bookstore for too long. Welcome back to Brad Leithauser, whose The Promise of Elsewhere (March 29) is his first novel since The Art Student’s War in 2009. Our starred review says it’s about an “art-history professor [who] sets off on a journey to see the world’s finest architecture and perhaps forget some of life’s trials” and calls it a “keen-eyed comic work….An exceptional glimpse of the human comedy marked by sometimes-dazzling prose.”

Amy Hempel returns with her first book of short stories since 2005. Sing to It (March 26) is “a dizzying array of short fiction held together by the unmistakable textures of her voice,” according to our starred review. “Hempel is often called a minimalist, and that aesthetic is very much in evidence here. Of the 15 stories, 10 are two pages or shorter in length, but if you think this means they’re slight, you’ll want to think again.” See our interview with Hempel on p. 24.

Kathryn Davis’ fiction has never been easy to summarize; suffice it to say that The Silk Road (March 5), her first book since Duplex in 2013, earned a starred review that ends like this: “A book that stuns, almost literally, with its force and its humility. A tender book. A savage book. A once-in-a-lifetime story.”

John Lanchester’s The Wall (March 5) feels like the logical extension of his last book, Capital (2012), which was a sort of Bonfire of the Vanities for London in the Great Recession. This new dystopia is “a bleak portrait of a future world shaped by global climate change and refugees desperate for a few square feet of dry land.” Our starred review calls it “dystopian fiction done just right, with a scenario that’s all too real.” —L.M.

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.

catalyst, Oliver Ash, a teacher of literature and creative writing who brings to Buchanan a Holocaust background and his own history of dubious sexual conduct. Meanwhile, in Berlin, Ash’s wife, Simone, is tending their 5-year-old son, Henri, while studying the sexual slavery of concentration camp prisoners. Certain themes, it becomes obvious, are the tent pegs holding up this long novel, which partly presents itself as a saga of female campus friendship but also wants to address weighty contemporary topics. The result is a restless, relatively eventless tale: Liv loses a boyfriend and develops a passing crush on Oliver; Fiona grapples with her insecurities, guilt, and a matching crush; Liv and Fiona take a doomed trip to Paris; Simone faces up to her feelings. The learning curve, it seems, is an often gloomy and incremental business.

A readable but reductive and rather off-putting look at relationships, whether new or old.

LIE WITH ME

Besson, Philippe

Trans. by Ringwald, Molly

Scribner (160 pp.)

$25.00 | Apr. 30, 2019

978-1-5011-9787-1

A bestselling French writer—or at least the novelized version of a bestselling French writer—reckons in older age with a passionate affair he had as a young man.

Written in an almost confessional first-person, Besson’s (His Brother, 2005, etc.) latest is a French bestseller set in the mid-1980s in a small, “gray” Bordeaux town “doomed to disappear.” The narrator, an ambitious high school student and son of the principal, falls deeply for a fellow student, the “slender and distant” Thomas Andrieu, a character in the novel but also apparently an actual person to whom the novel is dedicated. Thomas is beautiful but not worldly; he’s a sensitive, stunted stud who doesn’t see a way out of the town. Different as he and the narrator are, they nonetheless initiate an affair that takes place in hidden rooms on campus and at the narrator’s home when his parents aren’t around. Besson’s initial reluctance to put names to their sex acts (“I am enthralled by his sex,” the narrator writes, as if it’s 1822) feels musty, though the author does get more descriptively honest as the story progresses. The love between the two feels real and memorable, and Besson is a thoughtful writer who can strike home with vivid imagery, particularly as he and Thomas age and grow apart and Thomas’ son, Lucas, develops a friendship of sorts with the narrator. The only quibble is that this book, which is deftly translated, doesn’t exactly feel like a novel; it reads like a memoir. In fact, the only thing that keeps it from being garden-variety autofiction is Besson’s willingness to wink at his decision to make fictional an experience that seems to be based in reality.

An insightful reminder that in the years before gay dating apps zapped the mystery out of erotic pursuit, love between even mismatched men could be lifesaving.
THE HELICOPTER HEIST
Bonnier, Jonas
Trans. by Menzies, Alice
Other Press (416 pp.)
$17.99 paper | May 28, 2019
978-1-59051-950-9

A densely populated and spirited novel based on an actual heist. And helicopters.

The polyglot nature of present-day Sweden is ably represented in this imaginative re-creation of the 2009 robbery of a currency counting house. The caper is the handiwork of Zoran Petrovic, a Montenegrin living in Sweden; Michel Maloof, of Lebanese descent; Sami Farhan, who grew up in Sweden with Middle Eastern parents; and to a lesser extent Niklas Nordgren, whose parents emigrated from Poland, all of whom are to some extent inhabitants of Sweden's criminal underworld. They are pointed by a shadowy "old man" toward Alexandra Svensson, an employee of G4S, a currency and security management company that is the daily repository of literally hundreds of millions of kronor. While Maloof romances Svensson and receives vital inside information, he, Farhan, and Petrovic slowly evolve a plan to land a team of thieves on the roof of the G4S building and rob the counting room. Along the way they enlist the services of a large number of people, including Nordgren, their explosives expert, and the American helicopter pilot Jack Kluger. There are setbacks and small triumphs, and when the whole plot comes to the attention of Caroline Thurn, a task force leader in Sweden's Police Authority, the race is on: Can Thurn unravel the clues and intercept the thieves before the heist takes place? There are a lot of moving parts in the scheme, and when it creaks into action on a September night there’s no certainty the machine will function as designed, and the minute-by-minute unfolding of the plot elements is deftly and suspensefully presented. It takes a while to get to know the characters, and the many minor actors can be hard to manage, but everyone, good guys or not so good, achieves a decent humanity and earns a measure of affection by the end. How closely the novel resembles historical reality is happily never revealed.

Despite a slow buildup, a satisfying read.
FLEISHMAN IS IN TROUBLE

Brodesser-Akner, Taffy
Random House (384 pp.)
$27.00 | Jun. 18, 2019
978-0-525-51087-1

It’s not like Fleishman’s estranged wife, a high-powered talent agent, was ever a very involved mother. But now she’s dropped off the kids—while he was asleep—and disappeared.

New York Times Magazine staff writer Brodesser-Akner’s debut novel tracks Manhattan hepatologist Toby Fleishman through a painful divorce whose sting is mitigated somewhat by the wonders of his dating app. “Toby changed his search parameters to thirty-eight to forty-one, then forty to fifty, what the hell, and it was there that he found his gold mine: endlessly horny, sexually curious women who knew their value, who were feeling out something new, and whose faces didn’t force him to have existential questions about youth and responsibility.” About 30 pages in, we learn that the narrator is an old friend named Elizabeth “Libby” Slater, whom he met when both were college students on a year abroad in Israel. After the separation, his therapist advised Toby to reconnect with old friends; not having heard from him in years, Libby is at first nonplussed when he calls. A magazine journalist with a stalled career, she lives out in New Jersey, where she’s no happier with motherhood than Toby’s ex—she describes another male friend’s future marriage as “He would find someone young and take her life away by finally having children.” Toby Fleishman is a man plagued by his height (or at least he is in Libby’s account; this narrative strategy raises questions), and he has never recovered from being chubby as a child; he’s on a permanent no-carb, no-fat, no-sugar diet which qualifies as an eating disorder. He’s a devoted father, but he’s also a doctor who’s angling for promotion and a man who’s trying to take advantage of the unbridled lust of middle-aged women, so his wife’s mysterious disappearance is infuriating. And a little scary. Toby is a wonderful character; Libby’s narrative voice is funny, smart, and a little bitter as she tells his story, and some of hers as well. You get the feeling she wants to write a novel like (the fictional) Decoupling, an outrageous, bestselling, canonical account of divorce written by one of the stars at her old magazine. Perhaps she has.

Firing on all circuits, from psychological insight to cultural acuity to narrative strategy to very smart humor. Quite a debut!

THINGS YOU SAVE IN A FIRE

Center, Katherine
St. Martin’s (320 pp.)
$26.99 | $39.99 audiobook
Aug. 13, 2019
978-1-250-04732-8 audiobook
978-1-250-22140-7 audiobook

Saving lives is not just a job for Austin firefighter Cassie Hanwell; it’s core to who she is. But can she rescue herself from the emotional fortress she’s built and forgive those who have hurt her?

A decade ago, Cassie’s 16th birthday was a one-two punch of heartbreak. First, her mother abandoned her family. Hours later, a high school crush deeply violated her trust. Deciding that love is for the weak, Cassie replaced vulnerability with muscle mass and forged a career in emergency rescue. Ten years later, as the young firefighter is at the top of her game—accepted as one of the boys and receiving a service award—Cassie comes face to face with the high school boy who wreaked havoc on her life. In the first of many surprises in this tale of ever ratcheting stakes, Cassie loses her cool and sets off a series of events that land her at an old-school firehouse near Boston where she is the first woman to serve. Not only does Cassie face an unwelcoming crew, she begrudgingly moves in with her estranged mother, who is dealing with serious health issues and desperately wants
to reconnect. Expertly crafting this page-turner, Center (How to Walk Away, 2018, etc.) creates a character you can't help rooting for while constantly adding new tension to the story. Cassie learns that her job is on the line as the city budget has tightened. Perhaps the worst blow, though, is that she must compete with Owen “The Rookie” Callaghan, her only true friend, for a spot on the crew. Most vexing to the hardhearted Cassie is that The Rookie is nothing short of dreamy, with an easy smile and a washboard stomach. She promised herself long ago that she would never open her heart to romance—or forgive her mother. She’s in for the fight of her life.

Center gives readers a sharp and witty exploration of love and forgiveness that is at once insightful, entertaining, and thoroughly addictive.

CAPE MAY
Cheek, Chip
Cedaron (256 pp.)
$26.99 | Apr. 30, 2019
978-1-250-29715-0

This young couple’s September honeymoon in Cape May got so boring they almost went home early. If only.

Henry and Effie got married a few months after high school graduation in their 1950s Georgia hometown and have come to while away two weeks in Effie’s uncle’s house, the site of fondly remembered summer visits all through her childhood. Unfortunately, Effie “had not understood what ‘off-season’ meant,” and Henry’s no help—he’s never been north of Atlanta. Sadly, the “old clerk at the grocer’s seemed as happy to see them as they were to see him.” At least they have the delicious problem of losing their virginities, and then their inhibitions, with the help of Uncle George’s well-stocked liquor cabinet. But after several days, the sad, lonely feel of the town starts to get to them. They are planning to leave a week early when they notice lights on down the street and decide to stop by. The effusive woman who answers the door turns out to be someone Effie knows, a friend of her much older cousin—actually, someone she hated. But before she can get Henry out of there, gin is being poured, dinner is being served, and a gang of people, including everyone from older men in tuxedos, beatniks, Coast Guard cadets, and a naked toddler, is boogeying it up in the living room. Higher on gin and excitement than she’s ever been in her life, Effie decides running into Clara Strauss was not such a bad thing after all. The couple becomes completely infatuated with this decadent, sexy, cosmopolitan crowd, in the process falling down a rabbit hole with life-changing consequences. Deceptively relaxed and simple at first, the novel seems to be an easygoing trip down Memory Lane. It soon reveals itself as a swirling vortex of psychological suspense with insights about marriage that recall writers like Margot Livesey and Alice Munro.

The 1950s setting, the pellicud prose, and the propulsive plot make this very steamy debut novel about morality and desire feel like a classic.

RESISTANCE WOMEN
Chiaverini, Jennifer
Morrow/HarperCollins (608 pp.)
$26.99 | May 14, 2019
978-0-06-284110-0

From the end days of the Weimar Republic through the rise of Hitler and the atrocities of World War II, four women boldly defy the Nazis, risking their own lives and those of their loved ones.

Chiaverini’s (Enchantress of Numbers, 2017, etc.) latest historical novel masterfully reimagines the real lives of Mildred Fish Harnack, an American who moves to Berlin to pursue her doctoral degree in American Literature and reunite with her German husband, Arvid; Greta Lorke, a German woman returning from studying abroad at the University of Wisconsin, hoping to make her mark as a writer in the theater world; and Martha Dodd, the politically naïve daughter of the newly appointed American Ambassador to Germany.
Linking these women together with the fictional character of Sara Weitz, a Jewish student of American literature, Chiaverini spins a fascinating web of relationships. As the Nazis place increasingly severe restrictions on non-Aryans, Arvid's cousin Dietrich Bonhoeffer is surveilled for speaking out against the regime, and Mildred finds employment difficult to get, while the jobs that do exist require loyalty oaths to the Nazi Party. Meanwhile, Greta has found love with Adam Kuckhoff, an influential dramaturge with a complicated marital status, and Martha recklessly toys with the affections of both high-ranking Nazi and Soviet officials. The second daughter in the Weitz family to choose a gentile fiance, Sara discovers the anti-Semitism lurking in the hearts of complacent Germans, forcing her to rethink her marriage plans. All four women and their partners find themselves drawn into an underground espionage network—later dubbed the Rote Kapelle by the Nazis—gathering intelligence and connecting with communist cells seeking to destroy the Third Reich. But a single, careless radio transmission could cast everyone into the clutches of the enemy.

A riveting, complex tale of the courage of ordinary people.

**THE TENTH MUSE**
Chung Catherine
Ecco/HarperCollins (304 pp.)
$26.99 | Jun. 18, 2019
978-0-06-257406-0

A mathematician with a Chinese immigrant mother and a white American father recounts her life among geniuses and the search for her true identity.

“I suppose I should warn you,” says Katherine, the narrator of Chung's (*Forgotten Country*, 2012) elegant novel, “that I tell a story like a woman: looping into myself, interrupting.” Katherine's womanhood weighs heavily on her, first as a young math prodigy and then later as one of the only female graduate students at MIT in the early 1960s. Despite being surrounded by men who either dismiss her outright or want to use her astonishing intelligence for their own gains, Katherine never loses her ambition to have an academic career and to solve the Riemann hypothesis, one of the greatest mysteries of math. Though she befriends some of history's most famous scientists and mathematicians—Chung weaves numerous historical figures into her fictional world—Katherine's feeling of otherness is deepened by a mystery at her life's core: Her parents are not who she thought they were, and she has only a few stories from her father, a World War II veteran, and a German notebook full of equations to help her solve the mystery of her parentage. Their real identities, buried somewhere in the gaps left after the Nazis ravaged Europe during the war, may help Katherine understand not only the riddle of who she really is, but perhaps even some of the largest mysteries of nature and the universe. Chung's novel, with its formality and clean chronology, seems a throwback to another time, like a perfectly tailored tuxedo. But that's perfect for a memorable character like Katherine, whose belief in what she has to offer the world, and in her place in the lineage of women “who chose a different path,” never wavers.

**KEEP YOU CLOSE**
Cleveland, Karen
Ballantine (352 pp.)
$27.00 | May 28, 2019
978-1-5247-9705-8

The Russians are here—and they're deeply embedded in the most powerful echelons of the United States government.

FBI Agent Stephanie Maddox has made a career of putting the bad guys away, starting with organized crime in Chicago and moving up to internal affairs in Washington, D.C. No one knows that she's driven by a trauma from her own past and that trying to outrun this pain has consistently caused her to prioritize her job over the raising of her son, Zachary. Now 17 and about to graduate from high school, Zachary suddenly seems like a stranger to Steph. When a colleague approaches her with the news that Zachary has some links to a domestic anarchist group, she fears the worst, yet she can't help but keep some faith in her son. Drawn deeper and deeper into the web of lies that has been created around Zachary, and desperately fearful for her family's safety, Steph realizes that they are planning an imminent attack. Now if she can only find someone to believe her....The Russian connection is, of course, both a classic spy trope and also a fear plucked from our daily headlines; Cleveland excels at twisting her plots so tightly that the “big reveal” in the end truly is a surprise. The writing, sadly, isn't as sharply honed as the action, but in a novel like this, few fans will complain as they're swept along by the layered plot.

**LIFE OF DAVID HOCKNEY**
Cusset, Catherine
Other Press (192 pp.)
$15.99 paper | May 14, 2019
978-1-59051-983-7

A fictionalized life of the gay British painter who came to define and embody California dreaming.

Many have tried to put into words the tumultuous life of the much-loved British David Hockney, but few have captured his essence. In
this novel, Cusset (The Story of Jane, 2001, etc.) traces Hockney's life from his first encounter with art as a child to his sexual awakening to the bursts of luck and opportunity that punctuated his career to his heartbreak, in so many senses of the word. Cusset paints a picture that, for those familiar with Hockney's work and life, feels hyper-realistic. In fact, it's often hard to draw the line between biography and novel—perhaps this is what gives the book its strength. “David knew that success didn't just fall from the sky. In New York he had admired what in England would have been considered bad taste: the ease with which Americans knew how to sell themselves, without getting bogged down in false shame and feelings of guilt,” Cusset says through the omniscient narrator. The sentence summarizes Hockney's understanding of the art world: one where personalities thrive and personal histories crumble, where taste dominates and timidity falters. So begins Hockney's eccentric career as an explicitly gay artist living in the world; from London to San Francisco to Paris to Los Angeles, there isn't a cosmopolitan city his work hasn't touched. Cusset discusses with grace the heart-wrenching relationship with Peter Schlesinger—the primary male subject of most of Hockney's early- and midcareer paintings—that the artist watched dissolve. “Peter was sexier than Marilyn, sexier than the living doll in the song by Cliff Richard that David liked so much. A boy doll. David would have given his kingdom for a kiss.” Cusset's style oozes with delicacy, pointedness, and gusto. She masters the short sentence, enlivening the narrative with the speed of Hockney’s rise to fame—a speed that comes to perfectly mirror his experience with the AIDS epidemic, friends dying too quickly all around him. A perfect short exposé of Hockney's life as seen through the eyes of an admiring novelist.
IF YOU CROSS THE RIVER
Damas, Geneviève
Trans. by Gladding, Jody
Milkweed (152 pp.)
$16.00 paper | May 14, 2019
978-1-57131-120-7

Award-winning Belgian actress and playwright Damas’ fablelike first novel tells the story of an illiterate teenager in a small village struggling with loneliness and a sense of not belonging.

Seventeen-year-old François Sorrente misses his beloved older sister, who crossed the eponymous river in defiance of their father years ago and never returned. His only friends are the pigs he spends his days tending on the family farm. His father and two brothers are brutish and uncommunicative; a third brother committed suicide by jumping off the roof. In spite of his self-isolating family, François strikes up a secret friendship with the village priest, finds a girlfriend, and eventually learns to read. He longs to discover what happened to his mother and also what lies across the river, where he has been sternly instructed never to go. François’ life is startlingly bleak and his journey toward happiness, sympathetic. “For as long as I can remember I’ve felt that deep within I really am stupid and a simpleton, because the father tells me that, because my fingernails are black, I live among pigs, and my life is so small—how can your life be big when you don’t know how to read and you don’t know anything but your village?” But the fairy-tale quality of the story works against nuance or real surprise. Events unfold predictably. Of course the ruins of the burned-out buildings across the river hold the secret truth about our hero’s origins! Of course the horrible father and brothers aren’t really his blood relations! The moments of epiphany likewise fail to satisfy: “Suddenly I thought that life was beautiful...like something bloody that takes you by chance, that flays you, but that’s how life is when you’re at the heart of it, when something happens and it happens to you, then you can say that life is beautiful.”

Well-meaning but heavy-handed.

The Chatelaine of Montaillou

by Sue Kaberry

A debut novel set in 14th-century France follows the plight of a woman accused of heresy by the Roman Catholic Church.

"...a captivating story, as emotionally moving as it is intellectually engaging"

"A meticulously researched and stirringly executed blend of historical fact and fiction."
—Kirkus Reviews

For information on publishing and film rights, email sekaberry@yahoo.co.uk
A literary rom-com about the importance of knowing yourself.

**IN AT THE DEEP END**

Davies, Kate  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (336 pp.)  
$33.00  |  Jun. 4, 2019  
978-1-328-62967-8

In Davies' exceedingly charming debut, a romantically frustrated 20-something Londoner realizes maybe the problem isn't her—maybe the problem is men. It's been three years since Julia has had sex herself, although she is frequently privy to sex—adjacent to sex, subjected to sex—living with her best friend, Alice, and Alice's boyfriend in a flat with unfortunately thin walls. But her own sex life has been, to date, lackluster. "I'd always preferred the idea of sex to sex itself," she muses. "The thing is, sex had never been particularly high on my list of priorities." Dance had been her priority, but then she was injured, and so, instead of the ballet career she'd dreamed of, she has an uninspiring government job, a very opinionated therapist, and a total lack of romantic intrigue. Until, at a cool warehouse party, she meets Jane. Sex is different with Jane; everything is different with Jane. Julia is overcome with ecstatic relief: She's a lesbian. "I felt like I belonged, at last, in the world of the sexually fulfilled," she declares. "Now I had a sense of purpose. I was going to find someone to be a lesbian with." And quickly, she does—not one of the women from her new queer swing-dance group (she immediately joins a queer swing-dance group), but Sam, an artist she meets at a club. But as their relationship intensifies, Sam's one-sided demands start to feel increasingly stifling—leaving Julia to define the kind of relationship she wants for herself. Davies recounts the progression of Julia and Sam's relationship in such detail, and with such focus, that it's occasionally exhausting, like listening to a friend obsess over the plodding minutiae of a fundamentally doomed relationship for years. (And who among us has not?) But Davies' writing is so breezy and effortless—and her characters so

**STAR-CROSSED**

Darke, Minnie  
Crown (368 pp.)  
$26.00  |  May 21, 2019  
978-1-9848-2282-6

For all that he coined the phrase "star-crossed," Shakespeare didn't really show his work, astrologically speaking. Tasmanian author Danielle Wood—debuting as Minnie Darke—is here to fix that, and, luckily for her lovers, her novel is a comedy. Nick (Aquarius) and Justine (Sagittarius), childhood friends and sharers of one electric teen make-out session, reconnect in the Alexandria Park neighborhood of Sydney, where Justine is an aspiring reporter and Nick an aspiring actor. Love is in the air, but because Nick is intimidated by Justine's smarts and Justine is incapable of acting remotely interested, nothing happens. That is, until Justine is promoted to contributions manager of the glossy news magazine where she works and given access to the horoscopes; she thinks these prognostications are bunk but knows that Nick takes them seriously. What harm can come from her editing the memo to Aquarians in an attempt to drive Nick into her arms? And what harm can come from doing it again and again when her messages continue, painfully, to have the opposite of their intended effect? It's dispiriting that the plot comes from a modern heroine making such incredibly dumb decisions, but impetuousness is, apparently, a Sagittarian trait. Adding a magical flair to the book are a bevy of subplots wherein seemingly random Aquarians (every character in the novel is announced with their sign and a handful of quirky personal trivia) read Justine's fabricated horoscopes and are inspired to make sweeping life decisions. Where will it all lead? The author has a great deal of fun with words, circling themes (two different productions of Romeo and Juliet occur in the span of the book), and crafting an intricate, interlocking plot, but the cleverness can feel self-satisfied.

The stars foretell of happy endings.
It’s hard to know where to begin with Namwali Serpell’s *The Old Drift*. It is a great big book; it is a great book. It’s the great American novel, set in Zambia, or, perhaps, “the great Zambian novel you didn’t know you were waiting for,” as the author wryly suggested to a Library of Congress crowd in 2016. She sold the manuscript after its last chapter was published as a short story, “The Sack,” which won the 2015 Caine Prize for African Writing. (That chapter was cut from the novel.) The book prominently features three flavors of fiction—historical, speculative, magical realism—a little like a literary Neapolitan ice cream. It was titled by a friend eating an ice cream cone on a trip to Victoria Falls. Additional influences may include but are not limited to Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan novels, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and *Beloved*; Salman Rushdie, Vladimir Nabokov, and Milan Kundera; Björk, Fiona Apple, and Zambian musician Alick Nkhata.

“As you say, it’s hard to know where to begin, because there’s a lot in the novel,” Serpell says by phone from San Francisco, where she lives and teaches English at the University of California, Berkeley. “I am a very anachronistic writer—it’s historical fiction in as much as I am capable of writing historical fiction, but I’m an anachronistic thinker, so the simultaneity of all the references is very important to me....And I do tend to think in threes. There’s probably a little bit of the trinity in that, but also the dialectic.”

*The Old Drift* is a vibrant account of three generations of three Zambian families, told in three parts: “The Grandmothers,” “The Mothers,” and “The Children.” All flows from a prologue, “The Falls,” in which shady Englishman Percy M. Clark somehow wends his way to the Old Drift, a small settlement on the northern bank of the Zambezi River at the turn of the 20th century. (Clark is a historical figure who wrote about his experience in *The Autobiography of an Old Drifter*.) The Old Drift’s white denizens are destined to die of malaria, but first Clark braids three families’ fates, setting in motion a series of slapstick violence by assaulting Italian hotelier Pietro Gavuzzi in the Victoria Falls Hotel dining room, grabbing the hat off his head and a hank of hair with it.

“I wanted to make the relationship of what I call ‘unwitting retribution’ between the families to escape...
“To make causality oblique, I needed a third term—I needed for an action that affects one family to affect the third family rather than having it be a back-and-forth, direct Montague-Capulet situation.”

Bursting binaries, _The Old Drift_ explores the richness and variance of Zambian life in a way that uproots expectations and stereotypes.

“[It] often happens to me when I’m writing that I’ll learn some entomological fact about mosquitos,” Serpell says, “or I’ll learn about the Zambian space program, and it turns out that Matha Mwamba, who was also a historical figure, was pregnant in the exact same year as a character I’m writing. It’s like these things just suddenly—they come in as if they were already there, as if they were meant to be. And the larger-scale philosophical concepts that I was already working with—migration and the question of movement, the question of the swerve as one of the most generative forces that we have—biologically, naturally, socially, culturally—just seem to fit so beautifully.”

Information and insights are channeled through characters who turn out to be all too human, even when they happen to inhabit remarkable bodies. Among the grandmothers, for example, there is one case of blindness coupled with eye-pocked skin, one case of unending tears that spill forth from another’s eyes, and a case of magnificent hirsutism.

“The hair on her crown and face were the same, as if her scalp simply continued down her forehead and cheeks, skirting the eyes and the lips. The hair on her arms, legs, and torso was longer. Every day, it grew until it matched her height—if you suspended it from her body, it would form a sphere. Sibilla had some hairless patches, which she cherished, counting them off every night as she went to sleep, a rosary of mercy: navel, nipples, ears, soles, palms, the spaces between the toes and the fingers. She did not realize it yet but her genitals were bare too.”

Playful and profound, electrifying and eclectic, _The Old Drift_ truly contains multitudes, and you should catch it while you can. “Comparisons with Gabriel García Márquez are inevitable and likely warranted,” Kirkus writes in a starred review. “But this novel’s generous spirit, sensory richness, and visionary heft make it almost unique among magical realist epics.”

“I’ve always been excited by speculative fiction, broadly—fairy tales, the gothic, science fiction, and magical realism—and as I conceived the novel, the magical realist elements came first,” says Serpell, who studies the relationship between “reading, uncertainty, and ethics” in contemporary fiction, with a focus on 21st-century American and British fiction.

“I think fiction really allows us to imagine things that we wouldn’t otherwise imagine,” she says, “to break through perceptually. When you see something new or when you experience something new in the world, it’s very clear to us that that’s a form of knowledge that can change how we feel. Reading about something that doesn’t exist yet—the impossible, the very near future, that sort of thing—does something to our emotions. I think it’s a lot of where hope comes from.”

Megan Labrise is a staff writer and co-host of the Fully Booked podcast. _The Old Drift_ received a starred review in the Jan. 15, 2019, issue.
 delightful—that to spend time in her world is a pleasure.
Sweet but never saccharine; a literary rom-com about
the importance of knowing yourself.

SLEEPLESS NIGHT
De Moor, Margriet
Trans. by Doherty, David
New Vessel Press (122 pp.)
$15.95 paper | May 7, 2019
978-1-939931-69-6

During a bout of insomnia, a young
widow ruminates on her husband's sui-
cide. While a Bundt cake bakes in the
oven and the house is silent, she scruti-
nizes the past for telling details, the
moment on which everything hangs.

Compact, haunting, and lovely, the story takes place over
the course of one long night interspersed with flashbacks to
the unnamed narrator's young adulthood. She recalls meeting
her husband, Ton, as college students in the late 1960s and
their fall through winter ice while skating on frozen canals. We
learn of their brief marriage, as they establish themselves as a
couple on Ton's inherited family farm. Dutch author de Moor
(The Kreutzer Sonata, 2014, etc.) was a classical singer and pian-
ist before becoming a writer, and even in translation, her prose
retains a balanced, musical quality. Descriptions of places and
people are evocative, but de Moor also renders more abstract
concepts—such as what it's like to be alone and wide awake
in the middle of the night—with razor-sharp specificity: “The
fever of sleeplessness drives people to do the strangest things.
They whisper poems that appear in mirror-writing behind their
eyes, weigh grains of rice on imaginary scales, picture them-

selves lying on a bed of red velvet.” Despite the novel's short
length, it is unhurried and assured; no word is wasted even as de
Moor spends paragraphs recounting often slow and mundane
processes, like mixing eggs and milk and yeast to make dough.
Yet there is vitality in the chores, too, as when the dough is later
kneaded, when the widow begins “slamming my fists into the
culinary past for telling details, the
moment on which everything hangs.

De Moor’s book fails to provide easy answers or pat
conclusions, but of course life is like that, too. Like the
widow, we must all learn to tolerate that which is ambigu-
ous, unexplained, incomplete.

THE NEVER GAME
Deaver, Jeffery
Putnam (416 pp.)
$28.00 | May 14, 2019
978-0-525-53594-2

Veteran thrilmeister Deaver kicks
off a new series about a man who collects
rewards for a living.

Don't call Colter Shaw a private eye, or
a freelance investigator, or even a soldier of
fortune, though his job includes elements
of all three. The son of a cranky survivalist who died years ago amid
suspicious circumstances, light-footed Shaw has returned close to
his childhood home in the Bay Area in the hope of claiming the
$10,000 Frank Mulliner is offering for the return of his daughter,
Sophie, a college student who stormed out after the two of them
fought over the FOR SALE sign outside his house and hasn't been
seen since. Shaw, who has the cool-headed but irritating habit of
calculating the numerical odds on every possibility, thinks there’s a
60 percent chance that Sophie's dead, “murdered by a serial killer,
rapist or a gang wannabe.” Even though he accepts rewards only
for rescues, not recoveries, he begins sorting through the scant evi-
dence, quickly gets a hot lead about Sophie's fate, and just as quickly
realizes that Detective Dan Wiley, of the Joint Major Crimes Task
Force, should have followed exactly the same clues days ago. (The
rapidly shifting relations between Shaw and the law, in fact, are a
particular high point here.) The day after Shaw’s search for Sophie
comes to a violent end, he's already in the time-honored manner
of Deaver's bulldog heroes (The Burial Hour, 2017, etc.), on the trail
for a new series about a man who collects
rewards for a living.

For once Deaver takes more effort to establish his
hero's bona fides than to give him a compelling and logical
plot. The results are subpar for this initial installment but
more encouraging for the promised series.

THE DARKNESS THAT DIVIDES US
Dorrestein, Renate
World Editions (336 pp.)
$16.99 paper | May 21, 2019
978-1-64286-014-6

A family's demise unfurls in the
shadow of a mysterious murder.

Its first half narrated by a gang of
bullies, renowned Dutch author Dorres-
tstein's (A Crying Shame, 2011, etc.) brooding story begins in an
outwardly utopian setting—a respectable Dutch housing estate
where neat bamboo gardens are tended and traditional family roles are filled without objection. However, “in the sea of maternal bodies” that comprise the matriarchs of the neighborhood, one girl’s mother stands out. “Gazing at her, you’d feel so happy and dreamy inside that you couldn’t believe she could seriously be somebody’s mother.” Six-year-old Lucy and her mother live on the periphery of the estate—with two male lodgers named the Luducos—in a home where happiness is freely inhabited and not dictated by what’s socially acceptable. As the kids in the neighborhood note in amazement, Lucy lives by her own rules. She “had sailed a pirate ship” and “spilled hundreds of glasses of orange squash, too, without any dire fallout.” But the tides change when a new family arrives and the son becomes Lucy’s boyfriend. When Lucy’s mother wants to leave the neighborhood, a storm, both literal and figurative, rolls in, leaving the boy’s father dead in its wake and Lucy’s mother pegged as the murderer. Sworn to never talk about what happened, Lucy recites the lines she’s fed about that night, leaving the particulars of the crime a mystery. From here, Dorrestein’s idyllic town sheds its civilities to reveal a menacing portrait of domestic harmony disrupted. With her mother in prison, Lucy is left in the doting care of the Luducos. But at school, she resolutely suffers merciless bullying as atonement for her sins. While Dorrestein’s writing is terrifically bleak at its best, the macabre is deployed shrewdly. When Lucy gains control of the narrative, moments of tenderness—like a heartening correspondence she maintains with her mother in jail—peek through. As Lucy fumbles through her adolescence, and eventually starts a new life with her family on a Scottish island far away, Dorrestein’s tale becomes less a murder mystery and more a disquieting reflection on how people construct their own versions of the truth.

Frighteningly clever. The haunting landscapes Dorrestein creates are as real as they are darkly fantastical.

INTO THE JUNGLE
Ferencik, Erica
Scout Press/Simon & Schuster (336 pp.)
$26.00 | May 21, 2019
978-1-5011-6892-5

A death-defying Bolivian adventure in the primordial forest...starring a homeless teenager from Boston who just might be a shaman.

Sleeping late isn’t an option in the jungle. By the time the sun is up, it’s “already ricocheting with the calls of monkeys, parrots, frogs, all going at it molto vivace, shrieking and squawking as if the world were waking up in pain, the jungle giving birth to itself each morning.”

The setting of Ferencik’s (The River at Night, 2017) second female-driven adventure thriller is hair-raisingly vivid, replete with tarantulas, piranhas, jaguars, and electric eels. We experience them all through the eyes of Lily Bushwold, 19, “a half-starved, high strung wild child who lived out of a backpack, homeless since [she] was thirteen.” Lily thought she had landed a dream job in Cochabamba when she meets Omar, a handsome hunter from a remote jungle village who has come to try his luck in the big city. He and Lily have already fallen in love when he learns that his 4-year-old nephew has been eaten by a jaguar; when he returns to seek revenge, Lily goes with him. What does she have to lose, right? She finds out pretty quickly during the most terrifying plane flight in recent literary history. After a near crash and a water landing, it’s welcome to Ayachero—Omar’s jungle home, where everybody except one little cross-eyed boy immediately hates the gringa. “A burnt-meat smell, the reek of stale water, and a stray sweet whiff of pig dung merged with a humid, breathless heat.” Among the unwelcoming locals are two missionaries named Harriet and a female shaman named Beya, an outcast from a rival tribe who lives in the woods nearby. When Beya is able to save Lily from death by coaching her telepathically through an electric eel encounter, her next question is, “Are you the only shaman in Boston?” Even with the telepathy, Lily’s experience feels almost real—then, in the final chapters, takes a wild turn into superhero territory.

The closest thing to an actual hell ride you’ll ever experience (one hopes). Thrilling, bloody, and ferocious.
**Evvie Drake Starts Over**

_Holmes, Linda_

Ballantine (334 pp.)

$26.00 | Jun. 25, 2019

978-0-312-61924-6

A widow and a former baseball player try to start over after life throws them some surprises in _Pop Culture Happy Hour_ podcaster Holmes’ debut.

As far as everyone in her small town knows, Evvie Drake is a grieving widow. Her husband died in a car accident, and she’s been living all alone in their big house, rarely venturing out except to get breakfast with her best friend, Andy. But what no one—not even Andy or Evvie’s father—knows is that her husband was emotionally abusive, and she was planning to leave him on the night of his death. When Andy suggests that his old friend, former baseball player Dean Tenney, move in to the apartment attached to Evvie’s house, she agrees. Much like Evvie, Dean’s life hasn’t turned out the way he wanted it to. After pitching for years, he’s struggling with “the yips”—he’s unable to pitch for reasons that neither he nor any professionals can figure out. Evvie and Dean are both mourning their old lives, for very different reasons, and the two of them quickly become friends—and then, slowly, something more than friends. Holmes writes with an easy warmth about kind people who are trying their best but messing things up anyway. Characters speak to each other with natural but hilarious dialogue, making their conversations a joy to read. Refreshingly, Evvie and Dean’s relationship hurdles come about because they’re adults with complex lives and baggage, not because of easily fixed miscommunications. Although their romance is often front and center, there are many other emotionally affecting storylines, chief among them the changing friendship between Andy and Evvie and Evvie’s need to stand up to her half sisters, who are also struggling with their pasts.

_A warm and lovely romance, perfect for readers of Rainbow Rowell and Louise Miller._

**CALM SEA AND PROSPEROUS VOYAGE**

_Howland, Bette_

A Public Space Books (336 pp.)

$26.00 | May 7, 2019

978-1-5420-4236-9

A remarkable literary voice rediscovered.

Many readers have probably never heard of Howland. This selection of her work, the debut title from literary magazine _A Public Space’s_ new book imprint, aims to change that. Born in Chicago in 1937, Howland was raised in a working-class Jewish home on the city’s west side and went on to publish three books—_W_3 (1974), _Blue in Chicago_ (1978), and _Things Come and Go_ (1983)—and become a protégée, muse, and sometime lover of Saul Bellow. Along the way, Howland married, had two sons, divorced, and, in 1968, spent time in an asylum, being treated for depression following a suicide attempt, prompting Bellow, in one of his many letters to her, to urge his friend “to write, in bed, and make use of your unhappiness.” Having apparently followed that advice, she found acclaim, winning a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1978 and a MacArthur Fellowship in 1984. After the latter honor, however, Howland mostly stopped publishing and faded into literary obscurity only to be rediscovered shortly before she died in 2017. This collection, which blends memoir, essays, and fiction, is intended to introduce Howland’s work to a new generation of readers, and it is an introduction well worth making. Her words and observations shine like buried treasure, each story a glinty, multifaceted gem that, despite the passage of time, has lost none of its luster or clarity. In stories like “Blue in Chicago,” about a University of Chicago graduate student who spends a day traveling from gritty, crime-ridden Hyde Park on the South Side to a family wedding in the city’s safer, more affluent North Shore suburbs, and “Public Facilities,” about the workers and patrons who populate a branch of the Chicago Public Library, Howland captures not only a particular locale and era—dreary, decrepit, dilapidated, yet lovably familiar—but also the connections between members of families into which we are born and those we find in unlikely, even inhospitable places. In works like “Aronesti,” the first story she ever published, “To the Country,” “German Lessons,” and the collection’s title story, essentially an extended note to a dying friend, Howland takes us further afield, turning her acute eye to areas outside her hometown. Throughout, she proves herself to be a stellar observer of worlds external and internal and a master of description.

_This achingly beautiful book throbs with life, compassion, warmth, and humor; hums with an undercurrent of existential despair; and creeps into your soul like the slushy-gray-yellow light of a wintry Chicago morning._

**HAVE YOU SEEN LUIS VELEZ?**

_Hyde, Catherine Ryan_

Lake Union Publishing (320 pp.)

$15.95 paper | May 21, 2019

978-1-5420-4316-9

Sixteen-year-old Raymond doesn’t have any friends, so no one really understands what a kind young man he is. At least, not until his neighbor Millie Gutermann asks him a very strange question: Do you know Luis Velez? Toggling between his divorced parents’ homes, Raymond has never felt wanted. At his mother’s apartment, he’s just an extra child his stepfather endures and his half sisters ignore. Except for baby Clarissa. She likes “Ray Ray.” At his father’s posh apartment, Raymond keeps to himself, waiting to eat takeout pizza with his mostly silent father whose resentful second wife refuses to even stay home when Raymond is around. Despite his cold families, Raymond has a big heart, which so
far he has opened to a stray cat hiding in the basement of an abandoned building. When he realizes that Millie, a blind 92-year-old woman, has lost the man who used to check in on her, making sure she got to the bank and grocery store, he steps up to the plate himself. Raymond also decides to track down Luis. Finding 21 Luis Velez in the NYC phone directory, Raymond sets out to knock on doors. His quest introduces him to several Luis Velezes—some friendly and others not so much. The fate of Millie’s Luis devastates Millie, but Raymond refuses to give up on her. A master of making a heartwarming tale feel authentic and socially urgent, Hyde (Just After Midnight, 2018, etc.) deftly sketches the plights of Raymond and Millie, weighting their friendship with worries and regrets that echo as true. That authenticity often lies in the silences that Hyde lets linger when Raymond tries to process a compliment or Millie simply is present with her grief.

A tender tale of new families born of chance and the determination to bring light into darkness.

THE UNLIKELY ADVENTURES OF THE SHERGILL SISTERS
Jaswal, Balli Kaur
Morrow/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
978-0-06-264514-2
978-0-06-288757-3 lg. prt.

In Jaswal’s second novel (Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows, 2017), three British-born Punjabi sisters must come together to carry out their mother’s final wishes. Matriarch Sita Shergill’s cancer diagnosis has kept her from returning to Punjab to complete a pilgrimage of Sikh holy sites, so she writes a letter to her estranged daughters commanding them to fulfill the journey after her death to spread her ashes. Rajni, the eldest by more than a decade, organizes the trip. As the firstborn, she’s the drill sergeant. Jezmeen, the middle child, is the rebellious drama queen, literally an actor, or at least an aspiring one, and Shirina, the baby of the family, is...
the peacekeeper who’s so weary of this role that she’s left the others behind in London and moved to Melbourne to be with her wealthy husband and his mother. The author draws out the distinctions among the sisters’ personalities rather convincingly without making any of them too one-note. The women are complex but also wholly recognizable in their differing perspectives. Each of Sita’s daughters has a trial she’s holding back from her sisters, and while the author has a few secrets she’s keeping herself, she doesn’t play coy. This road-trip story is suspenseful without making the reader feel manipulated. The author has a knack for efficient yet affecting summary and swift-moving scenes, which together make the sisters’ past dynamics and present relationships feel wonderfully rich. Jaswal handles myriad familiar themes related to the complicated experiences of womanhood, immigration, and grief with a fresh voice and mostly seamless prose.

This women-driven story explores family relationships and histories with grace, humor, and warmth.

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**THE SNAKES**

Jones, Sadie

Harper/HarperCollins (448 pp.)


978-0-06-289702-2

978-0-06-291156-8 lg. prt.

Snakes as temptation, snakes as untrustworthy people, snakes as dangerous reptiles—all present and accounted for in this suspenseful drama of an ultrarich, dysfunctional British family.

After growing up among private jets and criminally narcissistic parents, Bea Adamson has cut herself off from her family and their money and has never been open with her biracial husband, Dan, who has only been introduced once, about the extent of their wealth. The couple lives close to the bone in London off their earnings as a psychotherapist and real estate agent. When they decide to take a break and drive an old Peugeot around the continent, their first stop is to see Bea’s ne’er-do-well brother, Alex, who has been set up by their father with a hotel outside Beaune, a town not far from the Swiss border. When they arrive at the Hotel Paligny, they are surprised to find a defunct operation which hasn’t seen guests in quite some time. “There are loads of snakes,” Alex warns when taking them up to the attic. “Mostly they’re just grass snakes. They’re sort of company ....It’s the vipers I don’t like.” Soon after, the hotel gates swing open and more snakes arrive—Adamson père et mère. As horrified as she is by the appearance of Griff and Liv, Bea has no idea how bad things can get. The most impressive accomplishment of Jones’ (Fallout, 2014, etc.) fifth novel—her first with a contemporary setting—is the seemingly straightforward, actually rather complicated nature of the relationship between Bea and Dan. The depiction of the frustrations of dealing with the French bureaucracy is also on the money. However, the rich parents are two-dimensional in their utter repulsiveness, and the violent closing section of the book does not quite fulfill the potential of what precedes it.

A well-executed, character-driven cross between domestic drama and crime thriller.

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**ASK AGAIN, YES**

Keane, Mary Beth

Scribner (400 pp.)

$27.00 | Jun. 4, 2019

978-1-9821-0698-0

Neighboring families in a New York commuter suburb are entwined, root and branch, through work, their children, and a tragedy of profound consequence.

Displaying impressive reach in this third—and possibly breakout—novel, Keane (Fever, 2013, etc.) delivers an epic of domestic emotional turmoil. Its twin families are united initially through the careers of Francis Gleeson and Brian Stanhope, who meet as unmarried...
Kirshenbaum is a remarkable writer of fiercely observed fiction and a bleak, stark wit.

**RABBITS FOR FOOD**

A writer experiences a breakdown and ends up hospitalized; against all odds, hilarity ensues.

“The dog is late,” says Bunny, “and I’m wearing pajamas made from the same material as Handi Wipes, which is reason enough for me to wish I were dead.” Bunny is seated on a bench in a psych ward waiting for the therapy dog to arrive. It never does. After a New Year’s Eve breakdown, preceded by months of severe depression—she found herself unable to leave her apartment or sleep or eat or shower—Bunny has landed in a Manhattan hospital surrounded by the fellow patients she refers to, variously, as inmates, lunatics, psychos, and loons. Occasionally her husband, Albie, visits, bearing chocolate bars and peanut butter. Kirshenbaum’s (*The Scenic Route*, 2009, etc.) latest novel follows Bunny, whose name is just one vowel sound away from Kirshenbaum’s own, through her depression and hospitalization. Surprisingly, the book is hilarious. Bunny has no patience for self-delusion or pretension; she’s sharp-tongued and deliciously mean. (Like Kirshenbaum, she’s a writer—they share other biographical details, too.) Anticipating the New Year’s Eve party she and Albie attend every year, Bunny describes “catching up with people they’ve not seen since the New Year’s Eve before because who would want to see these people by choice?” Kirshenbaum’s prose is lean and her timing is impeccable; even better, her descriptions of Bunny’s intellectual “friends” are sharply unforgiving. At dinner, one friend “wants to know if any of them have read the Bolaño. That’s how he refers to 2666, as ‘the Bolaño.’ “ The novel is just as strong once Bunny gets to the hospital, where she refuses medication. If anything, the book’s end comes too soon.

Kirshenbaum is a remarkable writer of fiercely observed fiction and a bleak, stark wit; her latest novel is as moving as it is funny, and that—truly—is saying something.
DECEPTION COVE
Laukkanen, Owen
Mulholland Books/Little, Brown (384 pp.)
$27.00 | May 21, 2019
978-0-316-44870-3

When Mason Burke is released from a Michigan prison after serving 15 years for murder, he has no skills and no money. Near the end of his sentence, he worked with a rescue pit bull mix named Lucy in an experimental program. They weren’t supposed to bond, but you know how men and dogs are. Upon his release, Burke knows he can never have Lucy back, but he simply wants to know she’s doing well. From a photo he correctly guesses that she’s been sent to tiny Deception Cove, Washington, so he borrows money and follows her there. Lucy has been a companion for widowed ex-Marine Jess Winslow, whose psyche remains badly shaken by combat in Afghanistan. “She couldn’t survive without Lucy.” But when a corrupt deputy sheriff gives Jess trouble, Lucy bites him in the butt. Authorities take umbrage—and Lucy—and plan to destroy her. Jess’ dead husband, Ty, had something the crooked cops want, and they hold Lucy hostage until Jess coughs up information she doesn’t have. When Mason and Jess meet, they are two troubled people connected only by a homely, comforting dog. Jess’ nightmares make her scream, and Lucy’s slobbery tongue on her face calms her down. For his part, Mason’s time in prison was well spent with reading and reflection on his screw-ups. Once they meet, the story escalates quickly. Springing Lucy from death row is job No. 1, after which all three are in deep trouble. Jess and Mason carry equal weight in this story as they learn to trust and rely on each other. Her marksmanship skills come in handy, while “the most decent man she’d ever met in her life” has much to learn. But decency is his strong suit, and it serves him well. And Lucy shows them both a fierce loyalty. If the novel ever becomes a movie, she’ll be a strong candidate for best supporting dog.

Laukkanen’s thrillers go beyond bloodshed and giving bad guys their due. His protagonists show a level of humanity that makes his stories a real pleasure.

HOW WE DISAPPEARED
Lee, Jing-Jing
Hanover Square Press (352 pp.)
$26.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-335-95375-9

An elderly woman is haunted by her past as a “comfort woman,” while many people would prefer to cover up their family member’s tragic history. This novel set in Singapore grapples with a history that many in the city-state would rather leave forgotten. The story is told from alternating points of view, that of an elderly woman, Wang Di, facing the imminent death of her beloved husband; the teenage Wang Di and her family, struggling to survive the Japanese occupation during World War II; and Kevin, a precocious 12-year-old schoolboy facing bullying in the 21st century. Wang Di’s narrative as a young woman is the most compelling, as the reader learns that the Japanese military kidnapped her as a teenager to work as a “comfort woman” providing sex for Japanese soldiers. Not only did Wang Di face the threat of death should she not comply while enslaved by the Japanese military, but she faced censure from the rest of society after the war ended. These themes of silencing a tragic history run through Kevin’s chapters as well, as the intrepid boy seeks to uncover his grandmother’s secrets. However, Kevin’s chapters do not match Wang Di’s in power, and the constant shifting of perspective can be distracting. The novel has many graphic scenes of violence and rape, but they are never gratuitous. Ultimately, debut novelist Lee creates a compelling story of generations haunted by war and the silence surrounding their suffering.
A historical novel about “comfort women” in Singapore restores the dignity of the survivors and criticizes the misogyny that marked their lives.

**THE MOST FUN WE EVER HAD**

Lombardo, Claire  
Doubleday (544 pp.)  
$27.95  |  Jun. 25, 2019  
978-0-385-54425-2

Four Chicago sisters anchor a sharp, sly family story of feminine guile and guilt. Newcomer Lombardo brews all seven deadly sins into a fun and brimming tale of an unapologetically bougie couple and their unruly daughters. In the opening scene, Liza Sorenson, daughter No. 3, flirts with a groomsman at her sister’s wedding. “There’s four of you?” he asked. “What’s that like?” Her retort: “It’s a vast hormonal hellscape. A marathon of instability and hair products.” Thus begins a story bristling with a particular kind of female intel. When Wendy, the oldest, sets her sights on a mate, she “made sure she left her mark throughout his house—soy milk in the fridge, box of tampons under the sink, surreptitious spritzes of her Bulgari musk on the sheets.” Turbulent Wendy is the novel’s best character, exuding a delectable bratty-ness. The parents—Marilyn, all pluck and busy optimism, and David, a genial family doctor—strike their offspring as impossibly happy. Lombardo levels this vision by interspersing chapters of the Sorenson parents’ early lean times with chapters about their daughters’ wobbly forays into adulthood. The central story unfurls over a single event-choked year, begun by Wendy, who unlatches a closed adoption and springs on her family the boy her stuffy married sister, Violet, gave away 15 years earlier. (The sisters improbably kept David and Marilyn clueless with a phony study-abroad scheme.) Into this churn, Lombardo adds cancer, infidelity, a heart attack, another unplanned pregnancy, a stillbirth, and an office crush for David. Meanwhile, youngest daughter Grace perpetrates a whopper, and “every day the lie was growing like mold, furring her judgment.” The writing here is silky, if occasionally overwrought. Still, the deft touches—a neighborhood fundraiser for a Little Free Library, a Twilight character as erotic touchstone—delight. The class calibrations are divine even as the utter apolitical whiteness of the Sorenson world becomes hard to fathom.

Characters flip between bottomless self-regard and pitiless self-loathing, as late as the second-to-last chapter, yet another pleasurable tendril of sisterly malice uncurls.

**THE DEN**

Maxwell, Abi  
Knopf (288 pp.)  
$25.95  |  May 16, 2019  
978-0-525-65528-2

An exploration of loss spanning two centuries from the author of Lake People (2013).

Jane is 12 when her older sister, Henrietta, disappears from their New England town. This is sometime around the turn of the millennium and 20 years before Jane begins her tale. In the 1850s, Claire is still living at home with her parents when her older sister, Elspeth, stops sending letters from America. What unites these two narratives—aside from the coincidences—is a building in the woods. In Elspeth’s time, it’s the house her husband built for her and their children. In Jane’s time, it’s a ruin and the setting of fables her father tells his two girls. This is an ungainly book, more like two unfinished novels loosely stitched
**A Writer Who Teaches Us to Read Between the Lines**

Human havoc causes trouble in our world and in Amy Hempel’s new story collection, *Sing to It* (March 26). Solace, however, may often be found among animals, whether pit bulls in the euphemistically named “A Full Service Shelter” (which means the capacity to put down dogs not adopted), the stray poodle in “The Chicane,” or the ghost of a deceased dog in “Moonbow.” Animals not only serve Hempel’s fiction, but also serve a long-standing need in her life. Hempel’s first family dog arrived when she started elementary school. She’s now had five Labs in her life: “There’s something so clean about loving animals. Their true nature is right there for you to see,” she says. “If my dog chews the molding in my apartment after being confined during the day, I can just get it repaired.”

*Sing to It* is packed with Hempel’s economical mix of despair and warmth—even in the same story (and sometimes the same sentence). Caring for others—even when so many people are egoists, selfish, and unreliable—is a refrain in these stories: friends caring for each other amid bad romances (“I Stay with Syd”) and recent deaths (“The Second Seating”) or service providers assisting the elderly in their routines (“Cloudland”). Hempel’s stories give voice to the displaced and the dispossessed, outlining human damage at both the personal and global levels. For example, the narrator of “Cloudland” has given up her writing ambition and lost her teaching job. And she has discovered that an event in her past may have been even more tragic than she imagined. “The way ambition changes in people interests me,” Hempel says. “Mine has changed in the last 20 years. Part of it is aging and part of it is a willingness to look outward rather than the constant inward gaze of youth.” —J.W.B.

**J.W. Bonner writes regularly for Kirkus. Sing to It received a starred review in the Feb. 1, 2019, issue.**

Together than a coherent, multifaceted whole, Jane narrates her own story but she never emerges as a real person. That she remains a shadow of her older sister makes psychological sense, but it makes for a boring character. And Henrietta herself is, in the sections narrated by Jane, little more than a sexually precocious loner and a bit of a jerk. It’s hard to see what makes her so fascinating that Jane doesn’t seem to have a life of her own even before Henrietta’s disappearance rips a hole in everything. And Henrietta remains inscrutable even when she’s describing her experiences in her own voice. More than that, the portion of the novel that covers Henrietta’s early days on her own is simply incredible. Readers are expected to believe that a 15-year-old girl with no form of identification is able to get two jobs and buy a car. The fact that one of these jobs is as the caretaker of an empty and isolated home is also fantastically convenient. This teen also pays for everything with crisp $100 bills that she clips from uncut sheets herself with scissors; this stolen fortune is another astonishingly lucky break for the runaway. Section of the book set in the 19th century are slightly more compelling, but, even here, the text reads more like notes toward a novel than a finished work.**

Odd and unsatisfying.

**RED, WHITE & ROYAL BLUE**

McQuiston, Casey

St. Martin’s Griffin (432 pp.)

$16.99 paper | Jun. 4, 2019

978-1-250-31677-6

The much-loved royal romance genre gets a fun and refreshing update in McQuiston’s debut.

Alex Claremont-Díaz, son of the American President Ellen Claremont, knows one thing for sure: He hates Henry, the British prince to whom he is always compared. He lives for their verbal sparring matches, but when one of their fights at a royal wedding goes a bit too far, they end up falling into a wedding cake and making tabloid headlines. An international scandal could ruin Alex’s mother’s chances for re-election, so it’s time for damage control. The plan? Alex and Henry must pretend to be best friends, giving the tabloids pictures of their bromance and neutralizing the threat to Ellen’s presidency. But after a few photos ops with Henry, Alex starts to realize that the passionate anger he feels toward him might be a cover for regular old passion. There are, naturally, a million roadblocks between their first kiss and their happily-ever-after—how can American political royalty and actual British royalty ever be together? How can they navigate being open about their sexualities (Alex is bisexual; Henry is gay) in their very public and very scrutinized roles? Alex and Henry must decide if they’ll risk their futures, their families, and their careers to take a chance on happiness. Although the story’s premise might be a fantasy—it takes place in a world in which a divorced-mom Texan Democrat won the 2016 election—the emotions are all real. The love affair between Alex
and Henry is intense and romantic, made all the more so by the inclusion of their poetic emails that manage to be both funny and steamy. McQuiston's strength is in dialogue; her characters speak in hilarious rapid-fire bursts with plenty of “likes,” “ums,” creative punctuation, and pop-culture references, sounding like smarter, funnier versions of real people. Although Alex and Henry's relationship is the heart of the story, their friends and family members are all rich, well-drawn characters, and their respective worlds feel both realistic and larger-than-life.

A clever, romantic, sexy love story.

**THE ISLANDERS**

*Moore, Meg Mitchell*  
Morrow/HarperCollins (432 pp.)  
$26.99 | Jun. 11, 2019  
978-0-06-284006-6

When a novelist writer retreats to Block Island to hide, his new life gets off on the wrong foot with a big lie.

Anthony Puckett, son of a blockbuster writer of James Patterson-esque dimensions, published his first novel to acclaim so fervent it made his father jealous. Unfortunately, his sophomore effort was found to contain 1,200 words plagiarized from a little-known Irish author. (How do you steal 1,200 words from one novel and drop them unchanged into another? Don’t think about this too long.) His downward spiral hits bottom when his soulless bitch of a wife puts him out of the house and cuts off communication between him and his 4-year-old son. Off he goes as “Anthony Jones” to a borrowed cabin on Block Island, where his next-door neighbor is a former attorney who graduated fourth in her class at Stanford Law but is now unhappily married to a surgical oncologist who has demanded she abandon her career to become a stay-at-home mom. In secret, she has become a popular food blogger under a false identity: an articulate, sensitive stay-at-home dad posting as Dinner by Dad.

In a coincidence that the author herself labels bold, *Dinner by Dad* is the favorite food blog of the island native who becomes Anthony’s love interest—Joy, a single mom and whoopie-pie entrepreneur with a teenager, who in turn ends up babysitting at the home of the food blogger. Novelist that he is, Anthony often identifies “plot twists” in his life as they arrive, and the final section of this book will give him plenty of material, with an apparent kidnapping, a hurricane, a sudden death, and an earthshaking backstory reveal. Moore (*The Captain’s Daughter*, 2017, etc.) has a pretty jaded view of writers—liars, plagiarists, lukewarm mothers, and terrible fathers. This book has all the elements of an Elin Hilderbrand novel—island setting, writer character, second-chance love story—without the polish and sophistication, which unfortunately cannot be pasted in via references to Virginia Woolf, Edith Wharton, etc. Editing could have deleted some of the flat-footed, sometimes-laughable dialogue and the near-silliness of the cavalcade of climactic events. Also, how many times does someone have to say they have something to tell you before you let them spit it out?

Fans of the island-lit genre will find familiar pleasures but also unrealistic situations and cringeworthy moments.

**PRAIRIE FEVER**

*Parker, Michael*  
Algonquin (320 pp.)  
$26.95 | May 21, 2019  
978-1-61620-853-0

One man prompts two sisters to take divergent paths out of early-1900s Oklahoma.

Winter, 1917: Fifteen-year-old Elise leaves her one-room schoolhouse during a blizzard and attempts to ride a horse to town to research a saloon shooting she’s fixated on. She’s rescued by her older sister, Lorena, who’s used to Elise’s peculiar flights of fancy. But the brief, ill-fated trek has extensive consequences: Elise loses half her toes and the tip of her nose,
and both sisters are drawn closer to their teacher, Gus, who'll play a transforming role in both their lives. Parker’s sixth novel (All I Have in This World, 2014, etc.) is a familiar hardscrabble frontier tale (the title illness claimed the sisters’ two brothers), though it’s enlivened by Elise’s distracted, savantlike temperamental, which allows her to memorize whole newspaper articles and predisposes her to impulsive horse rides and distracting reveries. (“Dreaming your dreamy dreams,” as Lorena puts it.) Lorena, more practical and studious, escapes the homestead for college, with Gus seemingly interested in marrying her. But with Lorena away, Gus soon falls for Elise instead, and the sisters split, Elise for Texas, Lorena for Wyoming. Moving the narrative through 1940, Parker’s novel isn’t as much about sisterhood as love, as the two struggle to reckon with their estrangement head-on; some of the novel’s most powerful sections are Elise’s letters to Lorena, addressed not directly to sis but to the horse she rode during the blizzard. The two women’s reconciliation is wan compared to the peculiarities that Parker introduces in the narrative, but the easygoing, sometimes-smirking nature of the prose (True Grit comes to mind) makes the novel a pleasant ride overall.

_A frontier tale of sibling rivalry that could use more of its entertainingly otherworldly touches._

**EVERY HUMAN LOVE**
_Pearson, Joanna_
_Acre (220 pp.) _
_$17.00 paper | May 15, 2019
978-1-946724-18-2_

Pearson’s short stories explore the boundary between the surreal and the mundane as her characters negotiate demanding situations. This collection of 14 stories—Pearson’s first book of fiction for adults—focuses on how tensions build to the breaking point for isolated people who have reached their limits. A new mother exhausted from lack of sleep and intellectual fulfillment lets a neighbor watch her infant while she naps only to wake disoriented and alone with just the baby (“Changeling”). A student hungry for validation accepts an invitation to a benefactor’s home and is startled by a request related to the man’s deteriorating health (“The Private Collection”). A doctor consumed by grief following her ex-fiancé’s sudden death engages in a battle of wills with a patient in detox (“Wages”). And a new teacher is humiliated when students expose the circumstances that prompted her career change (“Romantics”). No matter the size of the decisive moment, the details of the situation always border slightly on the surreal, causing both characters and reader to question reality. Pearson’s stories are meticulously written, with layers that are incrementally and patiently revealed. Her voice nimbly creates a sense of strangeness and detachment without ever lapsing into coldness, providing a remarkable sense of continuity across a diverse array of characters and settings. At the heart of this collection are questions about how people can survive circumstances that demand hard choices without losing faith in everything in their lives up to that critical juncture. Intriguing and satisfying.

**NIMA**
_Popescu, Adam_
Unnamed Press (288 pp.)
_$27.99 | May 21, 2019
978-1-944700-85-0_

Journalist Popescu’s debut novel tells the story of a teenage girl from the Sherpa community coming-of-age in the Himalayas.

The novel begins two days before 17-year-old narrator Nima’s wedding day, about three years after a tragedy befell her family, which includes her abusive father, compliant mother, and five younger sisters. When the groom-to-be, Norbu, seeks to alter an important detail of the arrangement, the prospect of the marriage becomes untenable, and Nima must flee. Few opportunities exist for married women in Nima’s community, let alone young, single ones, but a determined Nima commits to supporting herself the way her father once supported the family and Norbu would his, by trekking to Mount Everest’s base camp, initially disguised as a boy, and then as the girl she is. She encounters a trio of Westerners—Val, a reporter for the BBC, Val’s boyfriend, Ethan, and their photographer friend Daniel—that hires her as one of two guides. (Popescu has himself climbed partway up Everest as a reporter for the BBC.) Between the hostile terrain and even more hostile culture toward women and girls, the journey proves perilous. The novel is at its best when it’s grounded in Nima’s spiritual upbringing even though she herself doesn’t necessarily believe what her parents do. But too often, Nima is explaining her culture and the worldview that alienates her so deeply to the reader. The novel’s structure, language, and characters, most of which do not move beyond archetypes, do little to enrich the story. Nima faces many compelling challenges, but a series of hardships, even when rooted in intersecting oppressive circumstances, do not a novel make.

Popescu tries hard to give voice to the needs and wants of a girl from a marginalized community but falls short of his literary aspirations.

**THE BOOK WOMAN OF TROUBLESOME CREEK**
_Richardson, Kim Michele_
_Sourcebooks Landmark (320 pp.) _
_$15.99 paper | May 7, 2019
978-1-4926-7152-7_

One of Kentucky’s last living “Blue People” works as a traveling librarian in 1930s Appalachia. Cussy Mary Carter is a 19-year-old from Troublesome Creek, Kentucky. She
Get the ultimate inside scoop on the best new books.

New episode every Tuesday
was born with a rare genetic condition, and her skin has always been tinged an allover deep blue. Cussy lives with her widowed father, a coal miner who relentlessly attempts to marry her off. Unfortunately, with blue skin and questionable genetics, Cussy is a tough sell. Cussy would rather keep her job as a pack-horse librarian than keep house for a husband anyway. As part of the new governmental program aimed at bringing reading material to isolated rural Kentuckians, Cussy rides a mule over treacherous terrain, delivering books and periodicals to people of limited means. Cussy’s patrons refer to her as “Bluet” or “Book Woman,” and she delights in bringing them books as well as messages, medicine, and advice. When a local pastor takes a nefarious interest in Cussy, claiming that God has sent him to rid society of her “blue demons,” efforts to defend herself leave Cussy at risk of arrest, or worse. The local doctor agrees to protect Cussy in exchange for her submission to medical testing. As Doc finds answers about Cussy’s condition, she begins to re-examine what it means to be a Blue and what life after a cure might look like. Although the novel gets off to a slow start, once Cussy begins traveling to the city for medical testing, the stakes get higher, as does the suspense of the story. Cussy’s first-person narrative voice is engaging, laced with a thick Kentucky accent and colloquialisms of Depression-era Appalachia. Through the bigotry and discrimination Cussy suffers as a result of her skin color, the author artfully depicts the insidious behavior that can result when a society’s members feel threatened by things they don’t understand. With a focus on the personal joy and broadened horizons that can result from access to reading material, this well-researched tale serves as a solid history lesson on 1930s Kentucky.

A unique story about Appalachia and the healing power of the written word.

HOW NOT TO DIE ALONE
Roper, Richard
Putnam (336 pp.)
$26.00 | May 28, 2019
978-0-525-53988-9

In Roper’s quirky and heartfelt debut, a lonely man learns to step outside the confines of his safe but stifling comfort zone.

Andrew never meant to get caught up in a lie at work. It started innocently enough—he misspoke when his boss asked if he had kids, so he made up an entire family to get out of an awkward conversation. It was all a misunderstanding, but now his office thinks he has a loving wife and two children even though Andrew lives alone. His only friends are members of an online model train forum, and his only relative is a faraway sister with whom he has a strained relationship. Andrew thinks it’s just more comfortable to be by himself—but then Peggy starts working at his office. Their job is an unusual one: visiting the apartments of people who died alone, examining their belongings to see if they had next of kin. As they sort through apartments, Andrew and Peggy become closer, and for the first time in quite a while, Andrew starts to form a connection with another person. The problem, of course, is that she thinks he’s a married father. Telling her the truth would put everything in jeopardy—but it might be the only way he can truly be happy. What could be an overwhelmingly grim premise is much sweeter and funnier than it sounds. Andrew is an easy character to like: an introspective and kind loner who’s suffocating under the weight of his own grief. Andrew’s past traumas are revealed gradually, and the reasons behind his isolation are heartbreaking and poignant.

A moving and funny look at grief, hope, and the power of human connections.
IF I HAD TWO LIVES
Rosewood, Abbigail
Europa Editions (272 pp.)
$18.00 paper | Apr. 9, 2019
978-1-60945-521-7

A woman raised in a Vietnamese military camp must reclaim her identity in this debut novel.

In 1997, when she's 7, the unnamed narrator is taken to a military camp where her mother, a reform-minded energy consultant, is hiding from her political enemies. There, the girl forms relationships that will shape the rest of her life. Her mother, engrossed in her mission of bringing electricity to Vietnam, alternately ignores her and berates her. A young soldier assigned to protect the mother and daughter offers the girl emotional support and a nurturing, stable presence. But the girl's most intense relationship is with a friend she refers to only as “the little girl,” who is being sexually abused by her father. The narrator happily participates in her friend's fantasies: “My life depended on whatever imagined role the little girl gave me.”

But a rift forms between the girls when the narrator, now 13, is abruptly whisked to the U.S. In 2012, the narrator works in a cafe in New York and constructs facsimiles of her past relationships: She follows a man who reminds her of her soldier, moves into his apartment building, and befriends him. And she falls into an intense, erotically tinged relationship with a woman named Lilah. “I stared at [Lilah’s] back, her narrow and boyish hips, and wondered what the little girl might look like as a woman.” The narrator agrees to become a surrogate mother for Lilah and her husband, Jon, a decision that ultimately leads her back to Vietnam to confront her past. The novel is an exploration of the way people co-opt others for their own ends, and it's satisfying when the narrator finally gains clarity on the way her life has been warped to reinforce fantasies, both her own and other people's. But the story is filled with clumsy melodrama, with the prose trending a deep, bewildering purple: “The acme of all love was abandonment, the only point at which we would fulfill the promise of immortality, to persist in our love for those who are absent, into oblivion.”

An intriguing premise marred by awkward pacing and an overwrought style.

THE FAVORITE DAUGHTER
Rouda, Kaira
Graydon House (336 pp.)
$26.99 | May 21, 2019
978-1-525-83514-8

There's nothing a little revenge can't fix in Rouda's (Best Day Ever, 2017, etc.) diabolical new domestic thriller.

It's been about a year since Jane Harris' eldest daughter, Mary, drowned after a fall from a high cliff into the torrential waters off the Southern California coast, plunging Jane into a haze of grief and pills. It's also been hard for Jane's husband, David, and artistic younger daughter, Betsy, who is about to graduate from high school. Jane is ready to make her return to the social scene of The Cove, her exclusive neighborhood, and of course as the glue that holds her loving family together. Not so fast. “Loving family” might be an overstatement. After two decades of marriage, Jane discovers David is cheating (those tracker apps come in handy), and Betsy has been doing some sneaking around of her own. Jane has also been getting anonymous notes that indicate Mary's accident might not have been so accidental and that Betsy might even have had something to do with it. That's unacceptable. Jane didn't claw her way up from her horrid Arkansas upbringing for nothing. No one gets away with doing Jane wrong, and absolutely no one gets away with killing her favorite daughter (and Jane repeatedly makes it clear that Mary was her fave). Poor Betsy. In Jane, Rouda delivers another highly damaged and wildly unreliable narrator who is impossible to love but equally impossible to look away from. The utterly shameless Jane takes full advantage of people's
tendency to underestimate her and punctuates her bad behavior with flashes of dark humor. Readers will know they’re surely being duped but will want to find out just how far the deeply narcissistic Jane will go to maintain her carefully constructed veneer of humanity and bend those around her, especially her family, to her will. And revenge is a dish best served cold.

Delightfully wicked fun.

TOM CLANCY’S OP-CENTER

Sting of the Wasp
Rovin, Jeff
St. Martin’s Griffin (352 pp.)
$16.99 paper | May 28, 2019
978-1-250-18302-6

The latest military thriller in the late Tom Clancy’s Op-Center series (For Honor, 2018, etc.).

On a sunny summer morning in New York, visitors and crew are on the USS Intrepid at the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum. One such visitor is Capt. Ahmed Salehi, formerly of the navy of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard. When wind conditions are just so, he unleashes deadly chlorine trifluoride into the air. Horrible deaths ensue, and victims’ flesh falls away “in dead lumps.” Chase Williams, director of the National Crisis Management Center (the Op-Center), immediately wants to know why their intelligence failed to pick up on the threat. They want to identify the country responsible and counterattack. “Find out why we did not know this,” Williams tells himself. The Op-Center had been watching Salehi before but had taken their eyes off him. At Fort Bragg and Camp Pendleton, Special Ops teams receive the ominous message “Black Wasp.” Maj. Hamilton Breen, who takes America and its defense “very, very seriously,” receives the same message. Op-Center connects Salehi to the attack, and of course he’s on the lam, so the Black Wasp team is assembled to find him and his cohorts, wherever in the world they may be. Black Wasp’s plan of action is so dangerous it “could not just explode in your face,” but could topple President Wyatt Midkiff’s administration. Meanwhile, and for no obvious plot reason, a teenage girl in Saudi Arabia is beaten nearly to death for wearing Western clothing with her hijab. The story has more talk than action, more action than character development, and frankly feels as though it’s been stamped out of a mold at the Clancy Factory. The Op-Center concept looks like a straitjacket that prevents the kind of creativity thriller fans enjoy in stories like those found in Mark Greaney’s Gray Man series.

A decent read but several clicks below the books that made Tom Clancy so well-admired.

ORANGE WORLD AND OTHER STORIES

Russell, Karen
Knopf (288 pp.)
$26.95 | May 14, 2019
978-0-525-65613-5

Russell’s third collection beckons like a will-o’-the-wisp across the bog, with eight crisp stories that will leave longtime fans hungry for more.

Since her debut more than a decade ago, Russell (Sleep Donation, 2014, etc.) has exhibited a commitment to turning recognizable worlds on their heads in prose so rich that sentences almost burst at the seams. Her third collection is no exception, and its subjects—forgotten pockets of violent American history, climate-related apocalypse, the trials of motherhood—feel fresh and urgent in her care. Russell takes an expansive view of history, excavating past horrors and imagining the contours of real terror on the horizon. In “The Prospectors,” two society-savvy gold diggers must fight their way out of a haunted ski lodge without attracting the wrath of long-dead Civilian Conservation Corps men killed by an avalanche on the job. Even within the framework of her ghost story, Russell remains attuned to the performances women mount in order to survive the threat of male violence: “People often mistake laughing girls for foolish creatures,” cautions the narrator. “They mistake our merriment for nerves or weakness, or the hysterical looning of desire. Sometimes, it is that. But not tonight.” In “The Tornado Auction,” a widowed farmer risks it all to return to his calling—rearing tornadoes on the Nebraskan plains—over the protests of his three grown daughters. “I saw, I understood, that in fact I had always been the greatest danger to my family. I was the apex predator,” he muses after a terrible accident, exhibiting the guilt and regret of a loving father who nevertheless finds it difficult to change his ways. While the title story, “Orange World,” offers a chilling—and insightful—depiction of motherhood as a real-life devil’s bargain, it dips a toe in the realm of schlocky and crude horror uncharacteristic of Russell’s other work. The result is mixed even though the story retains Russell’s hallmark narrative strengths: a narrator who butts up against the edge of her own expectations and a strange, uncanny world that yields a difficult solution to a familiar emotional problem. “Rae admits that she is having some difficulties with nursing....There is no natural moment in the conversation to say, Mother, the devil has me.”

A momentous feat of storytelling in an already illustrious career.
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**LAST DAY**

*Ruta, Domenica*

Spiegel & Grau (272 pp.)

$27.00 | May 28, 2019

978-0-525-51081-9

What would you do on your last day on Earth...if there was a last day every year?

Ruta’s (*With or Without You*, 2013) debut novel centers around Last Day, a worldwide holiday to celebrate the Earth, prepare for the end of days, and atone for one’s mistakes. The novel weaves together a seemingly disparate group of people as their lives overlap in small and large ways over the course of the holiday: Sarah, the anxious, bookish high schooler; Kurt, the middle-aged tattoo artist; Karen, the troubled loner; Rosette, the religious zealot; and Bear, Svec, and Yui, the international space travelers. Sarah travels to get tattooed by Kurt after having fallen in love with him during a family party the previous year. Kurt plans to atone for his past mistakes. Karen travels to find the last vestige of her family. Rosette joins a new religious movement. Bear, Svec, and Yui float through space together and apart. Ruta delicately sketches the large cast of characters—as well as their dreams, fears, and failures—with care. She’s able to pinpoint certain universal feelings with precision. For example, when Sarah undergoes an underwhelming yet life-changing event, Ruta writes that “now she was alone and full of feelings that were at once ancient, almost inherent, and also brand-new.”

The novel falters in its final stretch when the plot becomes cluttered with too many secondary characters. Despite this, Ruta’s talent shines when she writes about the natural world: “Long before there was sleep, there was night, Earth rolling away from the sun as a lover in a bed,” and “Beauty remained. It had existed before, and always would, whether or not it could be borne.”

**THE ORGANS OF SENSE**

*Sachs, Adam Ehrlich*

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (240 pp.)

$26.00 | May 21, 2019

978-0-374-22737-1

Mix Umberto Eco and Thomas Pynchon, add dashes of Cixin and Asimov, and you’ll approach this lively novel of early science.

Being an astronomer in the days before high-powered telescopes were developed was not an easy job, especially for the sightless but productive astronomer at the center of Sachs’ (*Inherited Disorders*, 2016) literate, quietly humorous historical novel. The astronomer in question, who, notes protagonist Gottfried Leibniz—yes, that Leibniz, polymathic philosopher and inventor of calculus—is “in fact entirely without eyes,” has predicted, to the very moment, that at noon on the last day of June 1666 a profound solar eclipse will plunge all Europe into temporary darkness. Given that no other astronomer has arrived at this forecast, Leibniz is intrigued, and off he goes to find the astronomer and gauge whether he is truly blind and truly not off his rocker: “So, if he is sane, and he has not detected me, then this is not a performance, and either he really sees, or he thinks he really sees.” Given that the year 1666 has been an ugly one of plague and war and anti-scientific purges, there’s plenty of reason not to want to see. The astronomer has much to say about such things, spinning intricate tales, some of them increasingly improbable. There’s a gentle goofiness at work in Sachs’ pages, as when he constructs a syllogism about the relative movements of thinkers and nonthinkers, concluding that “if you look very closely at a nonthinker and a true thinker you’ll notice that they’re actually standing still in completely different ways,” and when a prince reasons that in order to call a dog a dog, the thing has to love us, whereas “before that point we call it a wolf.” Yet there’s an elegant meditation at play, too, on how science is done, how political power can subvert it (in the astronomer’s
case, in the form of onerous taxes), and how we know the world around us, all impeccably written.
A pleasure to read, especially for the scientifically inclined.

OUTSIDE THE GATES OF EDEN
Shiner, Lewis
Subterranean Press (880 pp.)
$45.00 | May 4, 2019
978-1-59606-900-8

Sprawling generational novel that takes the flower children of the beautiful 1960s through their paces and deposits them in the ugly world of the Trump-ian teens.

All things, including the title of novelist/music writer Shiner’s (Dark Tangos, 2011, etc.) latest, begin and end with Bob Dylan, author of lyrics that “were the secret handshake, the tap on the shoulder, the beckoning hand from the alleyway.” Jeff Cole, dutiful child of the middle class, is on a scholarship at a fancy-lad school in New York, where he meets a young Mexican, “good-looking and confident,” named Alex Montoya, his family blessed with a vastly larger bank account. “Once you get past a certain point,” Alex shrugs, “being rich is a full-time job all by itself.” Alex knows all there is to know about music and Cole, nothing—so, there in 1965, Alex takes it on himself to induct Cole by means of yes, “Highway 61 Revisited,” or, as he calls it, “Lesson One.” Cole learns—and does he. Soon he’s playing before adoring crowds, scoring big with the ladies, hitting the road for the Golden Gate and acid sessions with the Dead and the Doors and the Airplane among “runaways, acid-heads and straighties, the seekers, the believers, the gawkers, all responding to a desire that didn’t have a name yet.” Over hundreds of winningly spun pages, Alex, Cole, and a host of supporting players seek that desire, finding themselves variously here at Woodstock, there on a Virginia commune, there at Berkeley and the Sunset Strip, then later seeking meaning in middle-class, tenured lives of scaled-down dreams that grow large again once the 2016 election cycle looms and the good old days look better and better. Though the book is a touch too long, it holds its energy without flagging, and every note sounds true.

If James Michener were hipper on music—and everyone from Dylan to Country Joe to Jerry and Janis shows up in Shiner’s pages—he might have written this instead of The Drifters. Reality-tinged nostalgia for those who were there—or wish they were.

THE ROSIE RESULT
Simsion, Graeme
Text (404 pp.)
$26.99 | May 28, 2019
978-1-9257-7381-1

Raising a preteen turns Don Tillman’s whole life around in this finale to the well-loved Rosie Trilogy (The Rosie Effect, 2014, etc.).

Time has passed since readers last saw the Tillman family. Don, Rosie, and Hudson have packed up and moved back to Australia after Rosie was offered a dream job. Hudson, who has the same analytical mind as his father, is unhappy about leaving New York and has trouble fitting in at his new school. Don, back in his position at the university, is also in trouble after a class exercise goes viral for all the wrong reasons. At a turning point, Don decides to leave his job and devote himself to one thing: The Hudson Project. As Don finds himself wrapped up in many different issues,
A long-retired moviemaker recalls the early days of silent films.

**THE ELECTRIC HOTEL**

**Smith, Dominic**
Sarah Crichton/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (352 pp.)
$27.00 | Jun. 4, 2019
978-0-374-14685-6

A long-retired moviemaker recalls the early days of silent films in Smith's atmospheric follow-up to *The Last Painting of Sara De Vos* (2016, etc.).

In 1962, 85-year-old Claude Ballard lives in a run-down Hollywood hotel and spends his days gathering mushrooms and photographing street scenes. He has not made a movie since his "grand cinematic experiment," *The Electric Hotel*, appeared in 1910. As his reminiscences to young film scholar Martin Embry unfold, we eventually learn the reasons for his decision, but first we get a wonderfully vivid re-creation of the spell cast by the earliest films, when photographer's apprentice Claude sees the Lumière brothers' first reels exhibited in the basement of a Paris hotel in 1895: "every inch of the screen was alive...you burrowed into the screen, dug it out with your gaze." His work for the Lumières takes him to New York, where the audience's loud response to a moving picture next door to her theater infuriates touring French actress Sabine de Vos. She winds up in bed with Claude and in the new medium; buccaneering producer Hal Bender finds them a stunter, however, with everything coming to a proper close.

A fitting end to this delightful trilogy that doesn't pull punches.

World War I is something of a letdown, but a final scene with Sabine ties up emotional loose ends, and Martin's screening of the restored *Electric Hotel* provides a moving finale.

A compelling plot, robust characters, and finely crafted prose richly evoke a bygone age and art.

**CALL YOUR DAUGHTER HOME**

Spera, Deb
Park Row Books (352 pp.)
$26.99 | Jun. 11, 2019
978-0-7783-0774-7

In South Carolina in the 1920s, three memorable women struggle with challenging family relationships amid the depths of the Depression in this impressive first novel.

Spera's debut weaves together the stories of Annie Coles, matriarch of a white, plantation-owning family; Oretta Bootles, Annie's black housekeeper; and Gertrude Pardee, a young white woman who has fled a brutally abusive husband and their isolated, ramshackle home. The trio comes together in the small town of Branchville; one thing they have in common is fraught relationships with their daughters. Annie has been estranged for 15 years from her two adult daughters, for reasons only slowly revealed. Retta still grieves for her only child, a beloved girl who died at age 8. Gertrude is trying simply to keep her four young girls alive, given their grinding poverty, and away from their father and, in the case of the older daughters, from lusty boys. The first-person narration alternates among the three main characters, and Spera deftly creates distinctive voices for each one. The novel is rich with details about the hard physical work and emotional resilience demanded of women in the rural South almost a hundred years ago. It also makes no bones about marriage in that time. As Retta says, "When a woman marries and takes her husband's name she is forever bound by his action and not her own. It ain't right, but that's the way it is." Retta has a warm and loving marriage despite the fact her husband was badly injured in a work accident. Gertrude and Annie are not so lucky; each of them must reckon with husbands capable of terrible things. The novel's plot can sometimes veer toward melodrama and even overload, as when a raging diphtheria epidemic, the revelation of a criminal secret, and a hurricane all happen at once. But Spera's sure-footed depictions of women's friendships and mother-daughter relationships are the book's strengths.

A story of strong women pushed to extremes succeeds with convincing characters and a vivid portrait of the rural South a century ago.
In her debut, Wang examines the difficulties of immigration as sources of pain, connection, and confusion between friends, family, and would-be lovers.

Wang's narrators come from all walks of life, from the poorest factory towns of rural Henan to the richest high-rises of Beijing. Yet they all struggle with feelings of alienation and distance from the people they should love the most—a state of unbelonging and disconnection spurred by migration. In “Mott Street in July,” overworked immigrant parents drift away from their three children, leaving them to survive on their own in New York’s Chinatown. In “Fuerdai to the Max,” a spoiled rich kid who counts himself one of the “fuerdai,” or “second-generation rich,” tries to outrun the consequences of a brutal assault designed to keep the powers of his social circle intact. “Why should I care?” he asks himself, defensively. “Nobody cared what I did. I never had anybody to answer to.” Wang’s stories are spare and haunting, with endings that leave characters just as unsettled as their beginnings. Only occasionally do they turn tender, as in the exquisite “Vaulting the Sea,” in which an Olympic hopeful decides to end his career after realizing his diving partner will never love him back. The collection is strongest when it fully embraces Wang’s love of the uncanny as a way to parse generational misunderstanding or the surreality of contemporary life. “Echo of the Moment” offers a satisfying contemporary riff on the Narcissus myth and digital culture. Echo, a young Chinese-American student living in Paris, steals the couture from a suicide’s apartment only to find that the clothes transform her into a viral sensation online—and that they might drive her to the same fate. A later flash of insight is conveyed by “The scalpel of grim epiphany sliced into my consciousness.” What with the narrative that spreads like spider cracks in glass and the far-too-frequent flashbacks to the man who was Coleridge’s mentor, you might wish another scalpel had made its way through the manuscript.

This is secondhand tough-guy stuff, memorable only in that it feels like you’ve read it all before.

Annie Oakley travels to England and solves a murder.

In April 1887, the Wild West Show of Buffalo Bill Cody embarks for England at the invitation of Queen Victoria. The famous sharpshooter Annie Oakley is the star of the show (Girl with a Gun, 2018), and she boards the steamship State of Nebraska along with her husband and manager, Frank Butler, her horse, Buck, her younger sister, Hulda, and her reporter-friend, Emma Wilson. Amal Bhakta, one of the queen’s servants, has been sent to smooth Annie’s way, but the trip proves to be a difficult one, especially after a frantic Buck jumps overboard soon after having received a sedative
which has rendered him unable to swim. Frank and Bhakta both end up in the water, Buck is saved but Bhakta does not survive. Both the veterinarian, Mr. Everett, and the physician, Dr. Adams, examine the corpse, and Adams opines that Bhakta died from internal bleeding possibly caused by poison. Frank may have been the target, as some think he is associated with the anti-English Fenian Brotherhood because of his Irish background. Frank tells Annie that he and Bhakta were both pushed overboard, and she is determined to find the truth despite feeling unwell herself and being worried about Hulda, who is still a child determined to act like an adult with the encouragement of Annie’s flamboyant rival, Lillie Smith. Annie had a difficult childhood and was earning money to help her family at an early age; her Quaker background has left her with strong opinions, and she is offended by Lillie’s looser morals. After making some interesting discoveries, Annie accuses passenger Becky Brady, the emotionally unstable niece of infamous Irish nationalist Charles Parnell, of Bhakta’s death. Once in England, Annie, Frank, and Hulda are invited to stay at the palace, where the queen’s physician helps cure Frank of his terrible malaise and suggests to Annie that her discomfort is caused by pregnancy, an idea that does not please her. Attempts are made on Victoria’s life, and Annie realizes she was wrong to accuse Becky and must go back and look at a long list of suspects in order to find the real killer.

A meandering mystery with plenty of suspects cleverly weaves the true facts of Annie’s storied life with plenty of historical tidbits.

SEEING RED
Dratch, Dana
Kensington (368 pp.)
$7.99 paper | May 28, 2019
978-1-4967-1658-3

A reporter can’t say no to investigating multiple mysteries in a tale in which the discovery of several dead bodies is upstaged by myriad other complications.

Following her foray into crime-solving to save her own hide (Confessions of a Red Herring, 2018), now-freelancing reporter Alex Vlodnachek is ready for the stories she writes to be the most dramatic part of her life. She even plans to take a turn as wise old advice columnist Aunt Margie as soon as she can figure out a way to get cantankerous Marty Crunk, the current voice of the common-sense advice queen, to show her the tricks of the trade. Marty’s willing to help so long as Alex will put him up and keep him away from his nudgey niece, Helen, who Marty is convinced is trying to do him in through “care-taking” for him after a short hospital stay. Alex promises to use her connections to investigate as well as to lodge Marty even though her house is filling up. Together with her brother, Nick, who seems to have taken up permanent residence, she discovers that someone evidently broke into the house and left a baby for the siblings to care for. Alex’s dog, Lucy, has eaten the note that might have explained crucial details about the new arrival, so until Alex can look into it further, the baby, dubbed “James Bond Vlodnachek,” is in their care. Enter Baba, Alex and Nick’s grandmother, who’s determined to help with J.B. and lighten the mood. Alex thinks it’s just as well that Baba has come to town given the other mysteries on her plate. Her neighbor and crush, Ian Sterling, has asked for Alex’s help in the sudden disappearance of his father, Harkins. In investigating the disappearance at Ian’s B&B, Alex discovers a body in a freezer on the property. What sort of trouble is Harkins in, and is his body likely to be Alex’s next discovery?

The characters’ clever quips are lost in a plot so overloaded that it’s hard to care very much about any one of its many mysteries.

MURDER IN RED
Fletcher, Jessica & Land, Jon
Berkley (320 pp.)
$25.00 | May 28, 2019
978-0-451-48933-3

Murder strikes Cabot Cove, Maine, again, and yet again. Jessica Fletcher’s friend Mimi Van Dorn is almost struck by a speeding SUV while attending a funeral. The pre-diabetic Mimi has deserted her longtime physician, Dr. Seth Hazlitt, for Dr. Charles Clifton, who runs the Clifton Clinic, a private hospital known for conducting experimental clinical trials, which he hopes to expand into a chain. But when Mimi collapses at the funeral luncheon, Seth, who’s also in attendance, treats her and sends her to the Cabot Cove Hospital. Seth, who’s unhappy at losing so many patients to Clifton, is suspicious of the clinic’s treatments, especially the regenerative medicine Clifton claims will make his patients look and feel years younger. Jessica is meanwhile both delighted and disturbed by the sudden appearance of her old friend DCI George Sutherland of Scotland Yard, the only man she’s been attracted to since the death of her husband. Jessica worries when she learns that George is checking into the clinic for an experimental treatment for a rare disease. When Mimi dies in the hospital, Sheriff Mort Metzger, Seth, and Jessica all doubt the causes were natural. Mimi had high doses of a cancer drug in her system, and the security tapes from the hospital have been tampered with. When Jessica checks Mimi’s phone calls, she finds many to a single number that turns out to belong to Tripp Van Dorn, Mimi’s quadriplegic son, who Jessica never knew existed. Shortly before her death, Mimi removed all the money from the trust fund that kept Tripp at a private nursing home. Fred Cooper, the lawyer Tripp wants to hire to fight her action, first hedges and then refuses to take the case. When Tripp is the next to die, Jessica goes all in on her investigation and comes up with some disturbing answers.

Jessica (Murder, She Wrote: Manuscript for Murder, 2018, etc.) won’t disappoint her myriad fans in her latest case, whose premise is all too easy to believe.
Akira Anno, who reportedly celebrated in a restaurant only a few days ago by pouring a glass of wine over the head of her husband’s girlfriend, Deputy Police Chief Rocco Schiavone hides out in a hotel far from his home in the Alpine town of Val d’Aosta. His only companion is his faithful dog, Lupa, a rare Saint-Rhemy-Ardennes. Rocco’s guilt is severe since Adele had been staying at his house in his absence. Was he the real target of the killer? Searching for a likely suspect, Rocco runs through a list of criminals he’s put away in the course of his long career (Out of Season, 2018, etc.). In the forefront is notorious madam Stefania Zaccaria, in the hospital after a head-on collision—an apparently convincing alibi, though not an ironclad one. As Rocco methodically investigates this case, another baffling one lands on his desk.

During a prison riot, infamous inmate Domenico “Mimmo” Cuntrera is found dead, perhaps by a heart attack from the excitement of the riot. Cuntrera is another of Rocco’s past adversaries who’s been jailed for his involvement in a complex Mafia operation. Work should be a welcome distraction for Rocco. Friends and colleagues try to support him. But grief continually shadows him. Manzini peppers his account of Rocco’s travails with the perspectives of several others throughout, like prisoner Sergio Mozzicarelli, who can’t sleep because he saw the murder of Cuntrera and knows whodunit.

Rocco’s fourth case offers a procedural panorama with an abundance of subplots, characters, and lively dialogue. For readers new to the series, persistence will be needed, and rewarded.

The real-life Victorian police detective who was the inspiration for Charles Dickens’ Mr. Bucket serves as the main character in a fast-paced historical mystery. Although this is Mason’s debut novel for adults, he’s an accomplished playwright. Those skills are evident in the crisp dialogue and well-structured scenes of this book. It begins with a bang in 1860 as Chief Detective Inspector Charles Field, assigned to guard Queen Victoria and Prince Albert during a public appearance, witnesses an assassination attempt. The shooter, who’s arrested, is mentally ill, but Field quickly begins to suspect the man is just a tool of a conspiracy—one connected to the controversy over the new ideas of the naturalist Charles Darwin. Field’s determined pursuit of the truth sometimes snags by his celebrity; Dickens fans, including some in the royal family, insist on calling him “Mr. Bucket” and confusing the fictional policeman with the real one. Field persists, however, plunging into a dizzyingly complex plot that takes him all over London and off to Germany. The cast of characters teems with satisfyingly despicable villains, many of them based on real aristocrats and scientists. The most villainous, however, is the memorably terrifying Decimus Cobb, a former choirboy–turned–Victorian-era Hannibal Lecter. Countering Cobb and the other bad guys are the earnestly heroic Field, his
resourceful wife, a kidnapped butcher’s boy, and Prince Albert, who gets a touchingly human portrayal. There are cameos by such famous figures as Karl Marx, Dickens, and, of course, Darwin. With many grisly murders and many shocking surprises along the way, the book rockets toward a last dark twist.

Careful research, a driving plot, wry wit, and compelling characters make this a most entertaining read.

MURDER AT MORRINGTON HALL
McKenna, Clara
Kensington (304 pp.)
$26.00 | May 28, 2019
978-1-4967-1777-1

An independent-spirited American struggles to fit into the stultified lifestyle of the Edwardian British aristocracy.

Stella Kendrick is surprised when her crude, uncaring, but very wealthy father, Elijah Kendrick, brings her and her great-aunt Rachel Luckett on a trip to England’s New Forest region to deliver three of the finest thoroughbred horses he’s bred at his Kentucky estate. She’s even more surprised to hear that her father is giving Viscount Lyndhurst, son of the Earl of Atherly, the three horses in exchange for his marriage to Stella. Unaccustomed to the strict rules of British society, Stella makes many missteps that attract the disapproving eye of Lady Atherly. But Lyndy’s pleasantly surprised by her beauty and knowledge of horses. Although Stella incurs her father’s wrath by her refusal to marry Lyndy, an even darker shadow is cast by the murder of the Rev. Bullmore, the vicar who was to marry them. The whole group, including Atherly’s houseguests, Mr. and Mrs. Westwoode and their daughter Elizabeth, who’s engaged to Lyndy’s friend Lord Hugh, attend the derby, where more trouble is brewing. Orson, the stallion Kendrick brought from Kentucky, is the sire of the favorite, whose victory makes Orson even more valuable. Stella faces sly looks and gossip at the derby until King Edward VII grants her an audience. Then, of course, everyone wants to meet her. When Orson is stolen, Stella and Lyndy turn sleuths in order to solve both crimes. Can they solve the crimes and resolve their differences? It won’t be easy for feisty Stella to conform, but she proves she’s as clever as she is beautiful.

Although the plot could use some pruning, McKenna’s series kickoff will warm the hearts of fans who cherish all things Edwardian.

THE RED-STAINED WINGS
Bear, Elizabeth
Tor (384 pp.)
$27.99 | May 28, 2019
978-0-7653-8015-9

Second part of the fantasy trilogy (The Stone in the Skull, 2017) set in the Lotus Kingdoms, splinters of the collapsed Alchemical Empire, where by night a cauled sun gives heat but little light, while days are lit by a brilliant ribbon of stars.

Anuraja, the malevolent, despotic, and ambitious ruler of Sarathai-lae, has captured Sayeh, the princess of devastated Ansh-Sahal. Now, his armies and sorcerers besiege the old imperial seat, Sarathai-tia, ruled by Sayeh’s cousin, Mrithuri. A mighty river protects her city, and the rainy season’s beginning, so Mrithuri considers her situation impregnable. But what if the rains sorcerously fail? And who among her closest confidants is a traitor? Sayeh, reasoning that she can help Mrithuri by subverting Anuraja, works her wiles on her guards without revealing her concern for her young son, Drupada, who’s been kidnapped by Himadra, Anuraja’s nominal ally. Himadra, surprisingly, proves to be solicitous of the boy’s welfare. Elsewhere, the Gage, an immensely powerful brass automaton with a human soul, introspectively pursues his nebulous mission into a poison desert beneath an alien sky and provides spectacular travelogue. There’s plenty of intrigue and interplay among the characters, who have real complexity and depth (with, oddly, one exception), while the lack of action surprises even the characters themselves. It’s almost as if the plot’s waiting for the author to catch up. Illogically, the good wizards quickly reveal their limitations while the evil sorcerers don’t seem to have any—though a yet more powerful player may still be hidden. And once again Bear illuminates the narrative through her talent for linking landscape with character. Yet despite it all, there’s a persistent sense that her attention isn’t fully engaged.

Despite many alluring parts, this one has to qualify as a disappointment, if only because of Bear’s previous lofty standards.
An astronaut and Mars colonist returns to Earth to give an account of the disaster that almost wiped out humankind on the red planet.

**REENTRY**

**GATHER THE FORTUNES**  
Camp, Bryan  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (384 pp.)  
$24.00 | May 21, 2019  
978-1-328-58991-0

A brainy, awesomely resourceful heroine makes her way through a supernatural doppelgänger of New Orleans to track down a missing soul and, in the process, save both her world and ours from unimaginable catastrophe.

Readers of Camp’s debut, *The City of Lost Fortunes* (2018), may remember a captivating, tough-talking young woman named Renaissance “Renai” Raines, who died in 2011 and reawakened a few weeks later in a “new reality...where myths walked the streets of New Orleans and magic was possible.” Renai’s role in this fascinating if macabre realm is as a “psychopomp,” whose task, roughly speaking, is to break apart the mortal coils of the dead and lead what remains of their souls into the Underworld. With guidance from a talking raven named Salvatore, Renai's been gradually shaking away her awkwardness with this uneasy calling; that is, until one soul destined for passage belonging to an adolescent boy named Ramses St. Cyr vanishes from the site of a drive-by shooting along with the rest of what should have been his dead body. And so with Sal and another talking bird named Cordelia (by her side or, more precisely, on her shoulders), Renai mounts her ghost motorcycle to probe the corners of her shadow universe to find Ramses. Along the way she interrogates shape-shifters, tricksters, and a wily sorcerer named Jack Elderflower, who has somehow managed to cheat death without having a soul. The more she finds out, the more questions she has; most of them having to do with whatever consequences could ensue for both the living and the dead if Ramses continues to avoid his ultimate fate. In this second installment of his Crescent City urban fantasy series, Camp raises the stakes and broadens the scope of his alternate world; at times his impulse to further explain the nuances of this world make his new book a bit slower going than its predecessor. But the richness and inventiveness of Camp’s vision and the vivacity, warmth, and compassion of his leading woman keep you alert to whatever's happening next.

As with the real New Orleans, once you leave this creepier but just as colorful variant, you’ll be eager to go back.

**TRIUMPHANT**  
Campbell, Jack  
Ace/Berkley (336 pp.)  
$27.00 | May 21, 2019  
978-1-101-98840-4

Third of the military sci-fi Gen-  

*Reentry*  
Campbell, Peter  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (304 pp.)  
$24.00 | Jun. 11, 2019  
978-1-328-87671-3

Equal parts science-fiction adventure and post-apocalyptic thriller, the sequel to Cawdron’s *Retrograde* (2017) follows astronaut and Mars colonist Elizabeth Anderson as she returns to Earth to give an account of the disaster that almost wiped out humankind on the red planet.

After Anderson defeated a malicious artificial intelligence that triggered a world war on Earth and almost killed all the colonists on Mars, she returns to Earth assuming that she’ll be received as a hero. Instead, she finds that much of the world perceives her as a traitor—the enemy—as she has had communication with the AI, which possessed, among other things, the uploaded consciousness of her dead lover, Jianyu. Still unsure of whether the artificial intelligence was permanently dispatched or not, the population of Earth is in chaos. Large sections are radioactive wasteland, millions are displaced, and a sense of paranoia pervades everyday life. Once Anderson is back on Earth—with the essence of Jianyu in a box of damaged computer hard drives—her life immediately becomes imperiled as some factions attempt to kill her as a retributive measure and others try to destroy the hard drives they believe contain the last remnants of the killer AI. While the potential is certainly there for a thought-provoking narrative about the dangers of humankind’s dependence on technology, this novel is laid low...
by a plethora of flaws. First and foremost are the two-dimensional characters, which are so poorly developed they are almost immediately forgettable. The hackneyed subject matter and contrived nature of some sequences negatively impact the reading experience, but arguably the most frustrating element is the novel’s concluding sequence, which isn’t so much a conclusion as it is an arbitrary stopping point until the next installment.

Science-fiction fans looking for novels with derivative storylines, cardboard characters, and unsatisfying endings will find all that and more in this deeply disappointing read.

**PERIHELION SUMMER**

_Egan, Greg_

_Tor (224 pp.)_

$14.99 paper | Apr. 16, 2019
978-1-250-31378-2

Near-future catastrophe devastates the Southern Hemisphere: another entry from Egan (_Phoressi_, 2018, etc.) that’s more than a novella yet less than a novel. A small black hole, **Tāraxippus** (_taraxippoi_ were horse-frightening demons believed to haunt racetracks throughout ancient Greece), enters the solar system. Matt Fleming and his friends, concerned about the possible effects of the black hole’s passage, invest in a mobile aquaculture rig, the Mandjet, self-sustaining in food, power, and fresh water, reasoning that they’ll be safe at sea no matter what climatic effects might occur. **Tāraxippus**, however, proves to be a double whammy: two black holes orbiting one another. They don’t harm the planet directly but do pass close enough to permanently perturb Earth’s elliptical orbit around the sun. Almost immediately, Southern Hemisphere summers grow considerably hotter, with winters much colder (the north experiences cooler summers and warmer winters), rendering much of Australia and South America uninhabitable and accelerating the melting of the Antarctic icecap. In a series of quick, vivid sketches, Egan shows us how, for those aboard the Mandjet and their friends and relatives still on land, life—the entire planet—will change forever. As a metaphor representing global climate change, it’s effective enough; more than 30 years ago, another Australian, George Turner, did something comparable in _Drowning Towers_. This lacks that book’s weight and complexity, though it’s certainly a noteworthy contribution to a debate whose implications Egan is content to leave to our imaginations.

More an appetizer than an entree.

**A BRIGHTNESS LONG AGO**

_Kay, Guy Gavriel_

_Berkley (448 pp.)_

$27.00 | May 14, 2019
978-0-451-47298-4

Veteran fantasist Kay (_Children of Earth and Sky_, 2016, etc.) weaves another grand drama of war, intrigue, and love set against a backdrop inspired by the Italian Renaissance.

Set in the same world as several of his previous books—a reimagined Mediterranean with locations that serve as analogues for Venice, Florence, and Constantinople—the story follows an expansive cast, though the central figure is a one-time tailor’s son named Danio. As an old man, Danio recalls the ways in which, despite his humble birth, his life came to involve dukes, lords, and generals. While serving as a court official’s assistant, young Danio recognizes a woman being brought to satisfy the monstrous appetites of the city’s despot. He deduces her true goal of assassination...and says nothing. The woman in question is Adria, a duke’s rebellious daughter, who chafes against the expectations of her gender and instead pursues a dangerous life covertly serving her uncle Folco, a renowned mercenary commander. Danio’s silence enables the assassination’s success and puts in motion events that will take him to the courts and council rooms of the powerful. The memory of Adria haunts him, and their paths will cross again. Choices made by Adria and Danio—as well as by Folco; his hated rival, Teobaldo; and an independent healer named Jelena—continue to impact the duo and their world, and the characters move in an orchestrated orbit in which no encounter is truly “chance” and may in fact change people’s lives forever. Fans of Kay’s previous work will find his usual elements in play: strong historical research and worldbuilding, a vast cast of characters, world-changing events, and prose that sometimes gets carried away with itself.

An epic tale filled with characters compelling enough to bear the weight of the high stakes.

**SYNC**

_Kyle, K.P._

_Allium Press (270 pp.)_

$18.99 paper | May 14, 2019
978-0-9996082-3-5

Kyle’s debut novel is a contemporary science-fiction thriller built around a middle-aged woman’s life-changing choice to help a desperate young man. Brigid Sullivan is divorced, depressed, and working as a telemarketer to pay the bills for her Alzheimer-afflicted mother’s medical care. When she spots a hitchhiker in midwinter, she takes a chance and gives a stranger a ride—sending her predictable life into chaos. For Jason is an escapee from a secretive research lab who has the
ability to shift into alternate realities. He's also on the run, and
soon, the bad guys appear at Brigid's home, looking for Jason.
Thanks to Brigid's emotional support dog, Lithium, and her
own willingness to beat up a home intruder, the attacker is
driven off, but this is the start of Brigid's new, dangerous life.

As she and Jason flee from the police and more ominous forces,
Brigid learns about Jason's powers and his traumatic history.

While Jason wrestles with fear, guilt, and the physical side
effects of his powers, Brigid rises to the crisis with strengths
she didn't know she possessed. When Jason is recaptured, it's
up to Brigid to find allies, expose the project, and free Jason
and everyone else. For his part, Jason will finally learn the pur-
pose that the project's current managers have been hiding, but
will the truth ultimately destroy him? The stakes and the vil-
ains throughout remain realistic and believable, and Brigid's
aggressive normalcy lends her great charm as a protagonist.

There's a solid supporting cast as well; even relatively minor
characters like Jason's family get strong, poignant moments to
shine and to help save the day.

A well-executed debut whose compellingly human cast
enriches the standard "parallel universe" science-fiction
trope.

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**STORM OF LOCUSTS**

Roanhorse, Rebecca

Saga/Simon & Schuster (320 pp.)

$27.99 | Apr. 23, 2019

978-1-5344-1353-5

Maggie Hoskie and her god-blasting
clan powers are back in the second book of
Roanhorse's post-apocalyptic Sixth
World series; this time she's taking on
The White Locust, a man with clan pow-
ers who wants to destroy the now-thriv-
ing dystopian Navajo Nation (or Dinétah), Maggie's home.

We already know that the Big Water has drowned most of
America, and Dinétah is one of the last remaining strongholds.
The magic of the Diné (Navajo) gods and the clan powers they
bestow, and the powerful walls the medicine men constructed,
are the only thing holding the chaos of the rest of the world
back. What we don't know is that a man given the power to rain
down locusts and create humanlike figures from them, a cult
leader called The White Locust, wants to destroy Dinétah for
rejecting him as a mixed blood. What we find out is that this
man has Kai, Maggie's love, a medicine man she feels she has
betrayed—and who betrayed her. Thus begins Maggie's journey
to find Kai, to defeat the White Locust—and to face her fears
of intimacy and betrayal, garnered from a tragic, violent past.
Her journey takes her out of the safety of Dinétah, straight into
the hands of people willing to do anything to survive, cultures
built on ones that existed in the American Southwest but are
now powerful, rich, and terrifying warrior-states. It also takes
her to zoot suit–wearing trickster Gods. Roanhorse is the first
Indigenous American to win a Nebula, a Hugo, and the Camp-
bell award and is nominated for a second Nebula this year.

She's a groundbreaking writer, weaving Diné language and cul-
ture throughout her work in innovative and deeply important
ways while at the same time providing a purely joyous reading
experience.

Roanhorse's latest is a killer.
Francis Stevens. This novel, first published in serial form in 1919, has been reprinted from time to time as readers and scholars revisit past visions of the future, fantasy and science fiction by women, and forgotten influences on more famous genre writers. In 1918, a lawyer down on his luck, his wealthy and burly Irish buddy, and the buddy’s fetching younger sister spill a vial of strange gray dust that catapults them forward through time, first to a mystic realm between worlds and then through a moonlike door into a possible future. In Stevens’ 2118, isolationism has been taken to a totalitarian extreme. The city-state of Philadelphia no longer has any communication with the rest of the world, and its citizens have numbers instead of names, all except for the Servants of Penn (government officials) and the Superlatives (rulers), who go by their titles—things like Virtue, Mercy, Strongest, and Loveliest. These officials attain their positions through nepotism and graft, and their characters are generally the exact opposite of their titles: Pity is pitiless, Virtue is corrupt, and so forth. That part will feel familiar to readers from the strange, alternate-reality version of 2019 that we appear to be inhabiting—although, as with most visions of the future, the story probably says more about the moment when it was written than the period in which it’s set. The novel has the workmanlike prose, forward-sweeping plot, and stereotyped characters of well-crafted popular fiction of the period.

As dated as it is prescient, this novel will appeal both to historians and to readers who enjoy a fast-paced, imaginative yarn.

Swanwick’s third fantasy (The Dragons of Babel, 2008, etc.) set in an industrialized Faerie bristling with weird entities. Curious readers will learn that this is just one of many worlds (Aerth, or Earth, is another) that are “different energy states of the same place... the surfaces of an n-dimensional tesseract.” Now you know. Caitlin Sans Merci serves in Her Absent Majesty’s Dragon Corps as the pilot of a malevolent iron dragon, 7708. The Corps’ purpose is to steal children’s souls from Aerth so they can be embedded in soulless high elf bodies; Cat herself is one such. As her story opens, she returns from a raid discovering that somehow she’s acquired a secret stowaway in her cranium, the mysterious Helen V. from Aerth. Soon, Cat’s half brother, Fingolfinrhod, a full-blooded elf, will inherit House Sans Merci from their dying father. Fingolfinrhod, appalled at the prospect, instead vanishes (after warning Cat of a conspiracy against her) into what Cat will later learn is the city Ys, drowned long ago beneath the waves. Cat, framed by her superiors and betrayed by 7708, flees, determined to clear her name and reclaim her position. The scintillating narrative, sprinkled with black humor, bulges with symbols and allusions to topics in science, alchemy, magic, folklore, mythology, fantasy/science fiction, and literature. Remarkably, all the major and most of the minor characters are female, not to mention an alluringly innocent protagonist. A few signs warn that Swanwick’s extraordinary inventiveness may be running down, with recycled characters and scenarios and too-frequent passages where descriptions lapse into itemized recitations, like laundry lists. Still, these are minor blemishes in what is primarily another bravura performance, with a surprise ending that, after a moment’s reflection, isn’t so surprising after all.

Discworld meets Faust. They do not like each other. Philip Pullman picks up the pieces.
embodied demon who calls himself Crookback but whom history knows as Richard III of England. Walton masterfully engenders sympathy for the fanatic Savonarola, conveying how devastating it is to remember God’s love but be forever cut off from it. This book may also impel her close readers to perform their own feats of intellectual gymnastics. Walton’s Thessaly trilogy (Necessity, 2016, etc.) features two of Girolamo’s friends, the historical figures Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino, who are snatched out of time just before their deaths by the Greek gods to participate in an attempt to build Plato’s Republic. This suggests that not only does the Judeo-Christian God coexist with the Greek pantheon, but that both employ time travel to explore philosophical possibilities; that indeed, it is a vital part of the theological toolbox.

By itself, a fascinating meditation on the choices which alter lives and the course of history; in the context of Walton’s other novels, positively mind-bending.

ROMANCE

NO OTHER DUKE BUT YOU

Bowman, Valerie
St. Martin’s Press (320 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Apr. 30, 2019
978-1-250-12167-7

Longtime friends get the nudge they need from a magical love potion in this kooky and playful historical romance.

After six seasons, Delilah Montebank needs a husband. With her mother growing increasingly frustrated by Delilah’s constant attempts to make matches for her friends while neglecting her duty to secure a betrothal herself, the clock is ticking. Either Delilah finds someone to marry or her mother will pick a husband for her. But as Delilah sets her sights on London’s most eligible bachelor, the Duke of Braville, she realizes extra help is required. Her solution: a love potion. Delilah’s best friend, Lord Thomas Hobbs, doesn’t believe in love potions, but when Delilah accidentally sprinkles the potion on him, he knows it’s the perfect excuse to finally act on his feelings for her. He’s always loved her, but as Delilah begins to fall for her friend, she worries about what will happen to the two of them when her potion finally wears off. And even if Delilah and Thomas can make a go of their relationship, they’ll still have to earn her mother’s blessing. A comedy of errors, the romance between Delilah and Thomas, along with all the background shenanigans, pushes this novel into the territory of the ridiculous. There isn’t much emotional depth, though there are still feel-good moments that make the courtship lean more toward sweet rather than sizzling. This book is part of the Playful Brides series, which boasts more than 10 installments, and much of the character development appears to rely on history established in previous books. With runaway squirrels, Shakespearean plays produced in secret, and numerous clumsy misunderstandings, this is cotton candy in book form: light and whimsical but not enough to fill you up.

Cute and kitschy but emotionally unsatisfying.

ANYTHING BUT A DUKE

Carlisle, Christy
Avon/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Apr. 30, 2019
978-0-06-285397-4

A self-made businessman who wants to climb the social ladder agrees to help a lady inventor find funding in return for her matchmaking skills in early Victorian London.

On a rainy night in Belgravia, inventor Diana Ashby is late for a scientific lecture when she spots an altercation in the alleyway. She manages to scare off two ruffians with her umbrella only to find herself looking up at a very attractive gentleman. Aidan Iverson is a wealthy self-made investor and part owner of Duke’s Den, a gentlemen’s gambling club that also functions as a Victorian version of Shark Tank. Abandoned to a workhouse as a child, he is determined to discover his true parentage while at the same time finding a well-born bride whose social status can raise his own. Diana and Aidan strike a deal: She, a well-connected baronet’s granddaughter, will find him a match, while Aidan will locate an investor for her manual vacuum cleaner. Diana is under pressure to make her own match, but an investor could help her family’s finances just as much and without forcing her to forsake her one true passion in life. Aidan and Diana are both intelligent, tenacious, and driven. Neither seeks love or marriage for its own sake, but as they spend time together, their own romance blossoms, and their goals shift. The nobleman’s gambling den has been overdone in historical romance, although here the plot rests on technology and commercialization in England in the years leading up to the Great Exhibition of 1851. Readers will need to overlook Diana’s unusual, and unexplained, amount of unchaperoned freedom. When Aidan admits, “I’ve never known where I belong,” he could be speaking for Diana as well. This is the second book in Carlyle’s Duke’s Den series, after A Duke Changes Everything.

Mature, interesting, and romantic protagonists elevate a familiar story.
NEVER A BRIDE
Frampton, Megan
Avon/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
$7.99 paper | Apr. 30, 2019
978-0-06-286740-7

An aristocratic sea captain discovers he's the heir to a duke and agrees to help a ruined lady find a former sailor from his ship if she'll pretend to be his betrothed as he enters society.

After months at sea, Capt. Griffith Howlett, a duke’s daughter, but before she can explain why she’s looking for him, he’s arrested by the Royal Naval Police. He’s released because—and simultaneously discovers that—he’s the heir to the Duke of Northam, who he’s surprised to find out is his cousin Frederick (“many people had to have died in the interim,” he realizes), who is unwell. Griffith ran away to sea to escape his amoral, privileged family, but he’s always loved Frederick and is willing to honor the title for him and to possibly make a positive impact on the direction of his country. Della tracks him down again, asking him to help her find her best friend’s husband, a black man who was previously a sailor on his ship. He agrees, but only if she’ll play the part of his betrothed: “I have faced battleships, fearsome storms, and the most voracious boll weevils while at sea. None of them terrify me as much as the thought of all those unmarried Society ladies discovering there is an eligible duke’s heir in their midst....I want you to be my guide and to let these women believe I am already spoken for.” Della explains she is ruined, with an illegitimate daughter, and is loved by Frederick and is willing to honor the title for him and to possibly make a positive impact on the direction of his country. Della tracks him down again, asking him to help her find her best friend’s husband, a black man who was previously a sailor on his ship. He agrees, but only if she’ll play the part of his betrothed. Griffith has faced battleships, fearsome storms, and the worst voracious boll weevils while at sea. None of them terrify him as much as the thought of all those unmarried Society ladies discovering there is an eligible duke’s heir in their midst....I want you to be my guide and to let these women believe I am already spoken for.” Della explains she is ruined, with an illegitimate daughter, and is loved by Frederick and is willing to honor the title for him and to possibly make a positive impact on the direction of his country. Della tracks him down again, asking him to help her find her best friend’s husband, a black man who was previously a sailor on his ship. He agrees, but only if she’ll play the part of his betrothed.

A merry, modern historical romance.

PUPPY LOVE
Gilmore, Lucy
Sourcebooks Casablanca (384 pp.)
$7.99 paper | May 28, 2019
978-1-4926-7165-7

First in a sweet new contemporary romance series about three sisters and their service-puppy training school.

Ever since recovering from leukemia as a teen, 26-year-old Sophie Vasquez has been an object of pity and concern for her loving family. She and her sisters own Puppy Promise, a service-dog training school in Spokane, Washington. Against a protective sibling’s advice, Sophie takes on the challenge of training Bubbles the Pomeranian, rescued from a puppy mill. The challenge increases exponentially when she tries to match Bubbles with Harrison Parks, a diabetic wildland firefighter who requires a dog that can detect and alert him to blood sugar swings. Undaunted by his skepticism, Sophie convinces the gruff, impatient man to give the tiny dog a chance. While others are terrified of Harrison—a physically imposing and emotionally closed man—Sophie responds to the undercurrent of longing and fear she senses in him and the family trauma that he experienced. Gilmore rises above the eye-roll–inducing setup with a more compelling study of the classic tough romance hero than the title implies. Straightforward and kind, Sophie works to break down Harrison’s barriers without taking on responsibility for his emotional well-being. He protests that “I’m never going to be cheerful or pleasant or even all that likable,” but he builds her confidence and strength in ways that are more enticing than romantic gestures. This small-town, family-centered, and fairly chaste romance should appeal to readers of Jill Shalvis and Susan Mallery.

Readers who can get beyond the trite setup will enjoy a satisfying, heartfelt romance.

SMOOTH MOVES
Harte, Marie
Sourcebooks Casablanca (384 pp.)
$7.99 paper | May 28, 2019
978-1-4926-7047-6

Cash Griffith is navigating a lot of complicated emotions, so getting involved with a bold, sexy co-worker might be a bad idea since she’s juggling a few stressors of her own.

After losing his mother and watching his brother fall in love, Cash feels slightly lost. He knows getting involved with anyone right now is a bad idea, especially someone who works with him at the moving company he partially owns with his brother and cousin. Yet Jordan, the “sexy ex-Army MP,” gets to him: “Just being around her heated his blood.” When Jordan asks for help with her struggling teenage brother, he agrees to step in. Suddenly the two feel like partners, which gives them the courage to face a variety of challenges. Plus they can’t keep their hands off each other. Jordan isn’t used to someone fighting her battles, and Cash is convinced he doesn’t deserve the fierce, beautiful warrior. Their feelings for each other are powerful, but overcoming a lifetime of independence and admitting to vulnerability are different kinds of conflicts. In an age of billionaire romances, prolific author Harte (Contract Signed, 2019, etc.) has staked a claim in the blue-collar realm and made herself at home. Her Movin’ On series (The Whole Package, 2019) is another creative canvas on which to draw characters who fight to balance power, attachment, uncertainty, and tenderness. In Book 2, Cash and Jordan confront everyday obstacles as well as dangerous events, so the plot moves apace, but seemingly lifelong conflicts feel too easily resolved, and the time it takes Cash and Jordan to
admit to themselves they’re in love versus when they tell each other seems too long, dulling the tension.

Harte blends action, heat, and emotion in mostly satisfying ways.

REBEL
Jenkins, Beverly
Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$7.99 paper | May 28, 2019
978-0-06-286168-9

Love and longing in Reconstruction-era New Orleans.

It’s 1867, and Valinda Lacy has traveled from New York to Louisiana to teach former slaves. After a series of misfortunes—the barn she’s using as a schoolroom is overrun by vagrants, she’s assaulted by soldiers, and her landlady throws her out onto the street—Val is welcomed into the LeVeq family. Jenkins fans may remember the name LeVeq from an earlier trilogy (Captured, 2009, etc.). Now, the author returns to New Orleans to launch her Women Who Dare series. Val is a winning heroine, and Capt. Drake LeVeq is an excellent match. He admires her sense of independence, she respects his kindness and generosity, and—of course—they are both wildly attracted to each other. The evolution of their romance has an organic flow. Jenkins doesn’t create elaborate contrivances to keep her characters apart. Val has been raised to expect neither love nor passion. Even when Drake introduces her to pleasure she’s never imagined, she’s reluctant to give away her freedom. For his part, Drake is wounded that she doesn’t immediately return his affections when he makes his devotion to her known. As Jenkins’ readers will expect, the love story is interwoven with a great deal of historical detail. She offers a vivid portrait of life during Reconstruction, and New Orleans is revealed as the unique place it is. There is colorism and classism and tension between old Creole families and former slaves, but there is also a great deal of opportunity for ambitious women. This is a huge part of the city’s appeal for Val—this, and the amazing food. So often, stories drawn from the African-American past deal largely with struggle, and Jenkins does not shy away from depictions of injustice and violence. But she also gives us characters who are able to thrive and love and find their ways to happy endings.

A satisfying start to a new historical series from one of romance’s finest writers.

DAISIES AND DEVOTION
Kilpack, Josi S.
Shadow Mountain (304 pp.)
$15.99 paper | May 14, 2019
978-1-62972-552-9

When an impoverished gentleman learns he’ll earn a fortune once he’s married, he changes his plans to offer for a certain heiress, but as his search for the perfect bride becomes tedious, he wonders if she isn’t the right one after all.

After a few seasons, Timothy Mayfield “was officially tired of the hunt for a wife and was, instead, eager to marry and settle.” He feels drawn to heiress Maryann Morrington, the sister of his best friend’s wife, who is adamant that she doesn’t want to marry anyone who only wants her fortune. During an unexpectedly candid conversation, he admits to being without means and hints he’s interested in discovering if they’re well-suited but also lets her know, “I will remain a bachelor all my life if the only other choice is a loveless marriage.” After their conversation, he visits his wealthy uncle, who tells him he will provide him adequate funds so he can marry the woman he chooses. Timothy returns to London, and, after a few days of basically ignoring her, he tells Maryann of his newfound good fortune. Secretly broken-hearted, she decides to help him with his bride quest, hoping he’ll see her qualities and appreciate their obvious rapport and mutual respect. All seems lost when Timothy meets the ostensible woman of his dreams, and Maryann must decide whether to continue to risk her heart or give him up completely.

Kilpack’s newest release is a slow-building love story that asks the hero and the reader to choose the simple daisy over hot-house roses, and it is generally persuasive despite Timothy’s slow uptake, Maryann’s sudden obstinacy toward the end, and a slight overuse of the daisy theme.

A sweet, original romance.

THE UNHONEYMOONERS
Lauren, Christina
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
(416 pp.)
$16.00 paper | May 14, 2019
978-1-5011-2803-5

An unlucky woman finally gets lucky in love on an all-expenses-paid trip to Hawaii.

From getting her hand stuck in a claw machine at age 6 to losing her job, Olive Torres has never felt that luck was on her side. But her fortune changes when she scores a free vacation after her identical twin sister and new brother-in-law get food poisoning at their wedding buffet and are too sick to go on their honeymoon. The only catch is that she’ll have to share the honeymoon suite with her least favorite person—Ethan Thomas, the brother of the groom. To make
matters worse, Olive’s new boss and Ethan’s ex-girlfriend show up in Hawaii, forcing them both to pretend to be newlyweds so they don’t blow their cover, as their all-inclusive vacation package is nontransferable and in her sister’s name. Plus, Ethan really wants to save face in front of his ex. The story is told almost exclusively from Olive's point of view, filtering all communication through her cynical lens until Ethan can win her over (and finally have his say in the epilogue). To get to the happily-ever-after, Ethan doesn’t have to prove to Olive that he can be a better man, only that he was never the jerk she thought he was—for instance, when she thought he was judging her for eating cheese curds, maybe he was actually thinking of asking her out. Blending witty banter with healthy adult communication, the fake newlyweds have real chemistry as they talk it out over snorkeling trips, couples massages, and a few too many tropical drinks to get to the truth—that they’re crazy about each other.

Heartfelt and funny, this enemies-to-lovers romance shows that the best things in life are all-inclusive and non-transferable as well as free.

THE PERFECT DATE
Lozada, Evelyn with Lorincz, Holly
St. Martin’s Griffin (288 pp.)
$16.99 paper | Jun. 18, 2019
978-1-250-20488-2

A young single mother falls in love with an injured major league pitcher.
Angel Gomez is just weeks away from her goal of completing the nursing program that will allow her to make a better life for herself and her 7-year-old son, Jose. When Jose has an asthma attack, a handsome stranger helps keep him calm. That night, Angel meets the good Samaritan again while she’s tending bar at a local hipster spot and learns that he’s Caleb “The Duke” Lewis—sports celebrity and known playboy. Duke has been hiding the full extent of an ankle injury from his coaches, hoping a miracle will keep him on the Yankees roster for the upcoming season. He’s been visiting the clinic where Angel works to receive dubious, under-the-table treatments from a sketchy doctor there—the same doctor who’s sexually harassing Angel. When the paparazzi spy Duke at the clinic, he begs Angel to give him a believable pretext for being there by pretending to be his girlfriend. Angel is a likable character striving to do the right thing, and she values her family and her community more than Duke’s fame and money. Her character is the highlight of this novel by reality TV star-turned-author Lozada. However, the sheer number of wildly outlandish subplots—including implausible financial shenanigans, cheating friends, a vengeful ex with a sex tape, a blackmail plot and a murder mystery—distracts from the underdeveloped romance between Angel and Duke. Even the title is a misnomer, since their only real “date” is such an unmitigated disaster that any friend of Angel’s would have advised her never to speak to Duke again.

A debut novel overstuffed with everything except a persuasive romance.

THE TAKEOVER EFFECT
Sharma, Nisha
Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
$3.99 e-book | Apr. 4, 2019
978-0-06-285417-9 e-book

Two bright and razor-sharp Sikh lawyers in New York discover that no amount of diligence will protect them from the consequences of their mutual attraction.

Not long after Hemdeep Singh left his family’s thriving tech company to carve his own legacy, he learns that Bharat Inc., painstakingly nurtured by his father, Deepak, is in troubled waters. Hem rushes to the aid of his younger brothers, Ajay and Zail, but while attempting to steer the company to safety, he is distracted by the presence of Mina Kohli. The gorgeous and ambitious lawyer has been appointed by the board of Bharat to head up a committee reviewing a takeover offer from a malicious competitor. Mina’s rise in the legal firm built by her late mother is contingent on her performance in the review proceedings. If she fails to impress, she is likely to be trapped in a marriage that has been arranged by her unsympathetic uncle. Although Mina enters the boardroom with a very clear agenda, she’s thrown for a loop by her attraction to the charming man she meets there. Hem and Mina’s relationship is quickly propelled forward by mutual desire, but their journey toward lasting love and companionship is threatened by the twisting maze of corporate espionage. The first installment in Sharma’s (My So-Called Bollywood Life, 2018) Singh Family Trilogy is full of sharply etched characters with vibrant personalities. Armed with an insider’s insight, Sharma sketches a culturally authentic and emotionally rich portrait of a typical Indian-American family, warts and all. Deliciously evocative descriptions of spicy Indian food compensate for the occasional blandness in the characters’ interactions with each other.

A sweet love story enlivened by energetic displays of cool intellect, warm familial ties, and hot sexual chemistry.
In a largely harmonious meld of biography and science writing, Arianrhod (Seduced by Logic: Émilie Du Châtelet, Mary Somerville and the Newtonian Revolution, 2012, etc.) furthers the drive to resurrect the reputation of English mathematician Thomas Harriot (1560–1621).

The author, a research fellow at Monash University in Melbourne, writes with the authority of a distinguished professor, placing Harriot's achievements in the context of his era and of the evolution of science. Early on, he worked in navigational theory and was indispensable to ventures to the New World mounted by Sir Walter Raleigh; Harriot was especially adept at interacting with native peoples. Apart from astronomy and optics, he soon branched out into the then-unnamed studies of ethnology, linguistics, and physics, his questing mind and new mathematical approaches in some ways anticipating Galileo, Descartes, Kepler, and even Newton. Sadly, until recently, Harriot's name and contributions, many of them eminently practical, had been all but lost to history, largely because of his failures to publish many of his findings (often for valid reasons).

Arianrhod does not attempt “retrofitting Harriot into a celebrity star system,” which she regards as misguided. However, she demonstrates how he was on equal footing with giants, especially in his gift for employing novel approaches to recognizing general patterns and devising solutions. Filling in the gaps of a transitional era with deep background, the author alternates between straight histories and a close examination of Harriot's calculations, experiments, and theories. Although designed for a general audience, readers must be prepared to wade through tables and formulae better grasped by fellow mathematicians. Nonetheless, the richness of biographical and historical detail more than compensates for the effort. The book is almost as much a biography of Raleigh, Harriot's longtime patron and friend, who emerges as a complex but remarkable man, and of Raleigh's formidable wife, Bess.

A significant achievement that builds on previous works and takes the next step in establishing Harriot's genius.
A MASTER OF LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

After graduating with a degree in English, I spent the next couple years drifting away from the literary history and criticism that occupied so many hours of my college studies. However, during the past decade or so, I have reimmersed myself in the field, largely due to my exposure to the hundreds of books I have received at Kirkus.

Though I didn’t study him in college, I have come to greatly appreciate the work of Leo Damrosch, a Harvard literature professor whose specialties include Romanticism and the Enlightenment. On March 26, Yale will publish Damrosch’s new book, The Club: Johnson, Boswell, and the Friends Who Shaped an Age, which received a starred review, the author’s third in a row.

In the review of The Club, our reviewer notes how “late-18th-century Britain comes brilliantly alive in a vibrant intellectual history.” Furthermore, “besides illuminating the salient issues of the day, Damrosch characterizes with sharp insight his many protagonists,” which included, among other luminaries, Edward Gibbon, Adam Smith, Samuel Johnson, and James Boswell, all of whom gathered weekly in a London tavern to discuss literature, politics, current affairs, and other topics. The adjectives “illuminating” and “insightful” easily apply to his previous books, including Eternity’s Sunrise, in which Damrosch brought “decades of study to an analysis of William Blake’s art, poetry, religion, and philosophy”; and Jonathan Swift (2013), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Biography and was a finalist for the Kirkus Prize and one of the best biographies of the past 10 years.

Though not quite as well-known as some of his contemporaries (Harold Bloom, Marjorie Garber, et al.), Damrosch has proven to be a titan in the field and is certain to grace college syllabi for years to come. —E.L.

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.

THE VALEDICTORIAN OF BEING DEAD
The True Story of Dying Ten Times to Live
Armstrong, Heather B.
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
(256 pp.)
$26.00 | Apr. 23, 2019
978-1-5011-9704-8

The candid self-portrait of a woman who, years deep in depression’s clutches, mustered the courage to live again by way of dying.

In her third book, acclaimed “mommy blogger” Armstrong (Dear Daughter: The Best of the Dear Leta Letters, 2012, etc.), the founder of the popular website dooce, tells the intriguing story of how she was put into a coma 10 times as part of a controversial experimental procedure to overcome severe clinical depression. In a narrative that is part cathartic confessional, part apology to those who stood by her through years of anguish and recovery, and part accessible explanation of a highly scientific procedure, the author takes readers on a room-by-room tour of events leading to the treatment that finally helped her overcome her depression. “I’d been almost brain-dead for fifteen minutes,” she writes of the first session. “I felt fantastic! When you want to be dead, there’s nothing quite like being dead. And boy, did I do dead well.” Chronicling how the anesthesiologists used propofol (“the Michael Jackson drug”) to induce the coma, the author writes that “the study is designed to determine if ‘burst suppression’—quieting the brain’s electrical activity—can alleviate the symptoms of depression.” Later, she continues, “it’s like rebooting a computer. Anyone who has ever had problems with a computer knows that sometimes you have to turn it on and off again several times to fix whatever glitch was causing all your applications to crash.” Instead of detailing the personal hells of the glitch itself, Armstrong tactfully walks around it, poring over past failed therapies. She provides an experiential blow-by-blow chronicle of the test study, its effects on her daily life, the progressive improvement of her condition, and the reactions of her daughters, unconditionally dedicated mother, and the team of specialists overseeing the closely monitored deaths and rebirths that ultimately led to her victory.

An unvarnished account of a boundary-pushing procedure and patient.
Essential for environmentalists, back-to-the-landers, and students and practitioners of the essay form.

WHAT I STAND ON

THE BRITISH ARE COMING
The War for America, Lexington to Princeton, 1775-1777
Atkinson, Rick
Henry Holt (800 pp.)
$40.00 | May 14, 2019
978-1-62779-043-7

The Pulitzer Prize-winning historian shifts his focus from modern battlefields to the conflict that founded the United States.

Atkinson (The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945, 2013, etc.) is a longtime master of the set piece: Soldiers move into place, usually not quite understanding why, and are put into motion against each other to bloody result. He doesn't disappoint here, in the first of a promised trilogy on the Revolutionary War. As he writes of the Battle of Bunker Hill, for instance, “Charlestown burned and burned, painting the low clouds bright orange in what one diarist called ‘a sublime scene of military magnificence and ruin,’ ” even as snipers fired away and soldiers lay moaning in heaps on the ground. At Lexington, British officers were spun in circles by well-landed shots while American prisoners such as Ethan Allen languished in British camps and spies for both sides moved uneasily from line to line. There's plenty of motion and carnage to keep the reader's attention. Yet Atkinson also has a good command of the big-picture issues that sparked the revolt and fed its fire, from King George's disdain of disorder to the hated effects of the Coercive Acts. As he writes, the Stamp Act was, among other things, an attempt to get American colonists to pay their fair share for the costs of their imperial defense (“a typical American...paid no more than sixpence a year in Crown taxes, compared to the average Englishman's twenty-five shillings”). Despite a succession of early disasters and defeats, Atkinson clearly demonstrates, through revealing portraits of the commanders on both sides, how the colonials “outgeneraled” the British, whose army was generally understaffed and plagued by illness, desertion, and disaffection, even if “the American army had not been proficient in any general sense.” A bonus: Readers learn what it was that Paul Revere really hollered on his famed ride.

A sturdy, swift-moving contribution to the popular literature of the American Revolution.

WHAT I STAND ON
The Collected Essays of Wendell Berry
1969-2017
Berry, Wendell
Ed. by Jack Shoemaker
Library of America (1,650 pp.)
$75.00 | May 21, 2019
978-1-59853-610-2

A splendid gathering of 50 years’ worth of essays “cultural and agricultural” by the eminent Kentucky farmer, poet, novelist, and social critic.

In 1969, Berry (b. 1934), who had previously written a couple of novels that received little attention, published The Long-Legged House, his first book of nonfiction. The timing for the book of essays on the Ohio River backcountry was just right, anticipating the wave of interest in things ecological and place-oriented, and Berry's neo-transcendentalism ("it is another world, which means that one's senses and reflexes must begin..."

WHAT I STAND ON
The Light in 9/11
By Lisa Luckett

A uniquely positive memoir, from a 9/11 widow, about seeing the light in our struggles and the healing power of kindness.


“Buoyed by the ‘kindness of strangers’, Luckett learned how to help her family navigate the tragedy and find a new strength, joy and positive direction...”

“...Luckett’s narrative skillfully weaves together events of different eras to present a vivid portrait of one American middle-class family’s life during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s.”

“A stimulating, personal work about self-actualization in the wake of tragedy.”
—Kirkus Reviews

For agent representation, publishing, or film rights, please contact lisa@lisaluckett.com
to live another kind of life”) found an audience that would grow significantly in the coming years. This comprehensive anthology, whose first volume reproduces his entire 1977 manifesto, *The Unsettling of America*, is made up of selections made by Berry and his longtime editor, Shoemaker, who, for nearly 40 years, has made it an unceasing project to continue to expand Berry’s audience and influence. *The Gift of Good Land* (1981), an early collaboration between writer and editor, gives attention to such country comforts as horse-drawn farming as contrasted to industrial agriculture, which “considers only the machine.”

The second volume of this sweeping collection, comprising 1,650 pages altogether, offers further arguments in favor of an agriculture and rural culture that are anything but simple—and, according to the author, in constant need of defense against those who would attack them “morally as well as economically.” Conservative in the deepest sense, and often resembling T.S. Eliot as much as Edward Abbey, Berry goes on to insist that “the distinction between the physical and the spiritual is, I believe, false,” urging instead that the truly relevant contrast is “between the organic and the mechanical.” Over a consistently developed line of argument through the decades, it’s abundantly clear what side Berry falls on and what he stands for—which is, as he has long said, what he stands on.

Essential for environmentalists, back-to-the-landers, and students and practitioners of the essay form.

**RED HOT & BLUE**

*Fifty Years of Writing About Memphis, Music, and Motherf**kers*

*Booth, Stanley*

Chicago Review Press (400 pp.)

$19.99 paper | May 7, 2019

978-1-64160-106-1

Five decades of writing from one of the foremost chroniclers of the blues and other Southern music.

Memphis-based music journalist Booth (Keith: *Standing in the Shadows*, 1996, etc.) has been immersed in jazz, blues, rock, and other genres since he was a child. The blues, in particular, reverberate throughout Booth’s writing, underscoring the inseparability of his life and body of work. “I never intended to have anything to do with the blues,” he writes. “They came into my life through my bedroom window when I was a child. It wasn’t a matter of choice. What I learned I paid for in experience at the school where they arrest you first and tell you why later.” In this new anthology, the author offers a slew of highly personal dispatches that reflect much of the best of his writing. Plunging in with a humorous—somewhat salty—indictment of contemporary music journalism, so-called authorities on American musical traditions, and the slick treatment of the blues by modern media, Booth stakes his ground, imparting the value of essence over image in music writing. Including recent essays on Ma Rainey and Blind Willie McTell and winding through reprints of his now-iconic pieces “Furry’s Blues” and “Situation Reports: Elvis in Memphis, 1967,” the volume features 29 articles of varying lengths in no stated order, spanning his career. Rather than the customary date and associated publication notes, Booth offers a brief contextual paragraph with personal asides for each piece. For instance, in a screenplay excerpt titled “Mr. Crump Don’t Like It: If Beale Street Could Talk,” he notes that he “stole” the idea for writing a three-arc plot from William S. Burroughs’ *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz*. Other topics include Graceland, Memphis soul, Mose Allison, and James Brown.

Further entertaining testimony from a music journalist whose writing pulsates with the same blues rhythms as the soil and streets in which they were born.

**BROTHERS DOWN**

*Pearl Harbor and the Fate of the Many Brothers Aboard the USS Arizona*

*Borneman, Walter R.*

Little, Brown (368 pp.)

$30.00 | May 14, 2019

978-0-316-43888-9

A fresh account of a well-documented historical event, the Pearl Harbor attack, which “has never been told through the eyes of the many brothers serving together aboard the Arizona that fateful day.”

As Borneman (*MacArthur at War: World War II in the Pacific*, 2016, etc.) recounts, there were 38 sets of brothers serving on the *Arizona* when it was attacked. The author’s history of their lives and the events of that day alternates between impending doom and eternal hope for survivors. The narrative gets bogged down in the necessary but inevitably similar backgrounds of the soldiers, most of whom suffered during the Great Depression. They came from all over the country and entered the Navy at the lower ranks. Most were farm boys or children of merchants who joined up to help feed their families. They were luckier than most because the Navy was happy to assign brothers to the same ship, recognizing the positive impact on morale. Of the 2,403 killed in the Japanese attack, almost half were on the *Arizona*; it remains the single worst military ship disaster in American history. Borneman’s extensive research turns up interesting details about the history of the battleship, including the massive amounts of fuel and gunpowder that contributed to the conflagration when the Japanese bombs hit. Ultimately, though, this is the soldiers’ story, and the author tells it in moving, only occasionally excessive detail. Later, accusations rose that the Navy never should have had so many ships at Pearl Harbor, but the author notes that while there were more than 100 vessels there, there were more than 100 others out to sea, and not all those in port were lost.

The subject matter makes the book sometimes difficult to read—as it was no doubt difficult to write—but Borneman’s broad knowledge and sensitive touch make it an entirely worthwhile experience.
This massive nuts-and-bolts account corrects many of the inaccuracies surrounding the vaunted Allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944.

British historian Caddick-Adams (Military History/Defence Academy of the U.K.; Snow and Steel: The Battle of the Bulge, 1944-45, 2014, etc.), a major in the British Territorial Army, offers an impressive summary of the sheer materiel and human effort required in securing the Normandy beachhead, from years of preparation to excruciating execution. Examining Gen. Erwin Rommel’s reinforcement of the so-called Atlantikwall, which was supposedly impenetrable, the author underscores some faulty suppositions—e.g., that German soldiers were “supermen” when in fact they were aged, exhausted, and relying heavily on horses for mobility. The American presence in Britain dazzled the local population, while the black American troops were treated with markedly more respect and warmth by the British locals than they were used to back home, prompting one veteran to recall, “our biggest enemy was our own troops.”

Caddick-Adams, an expert in this terrain, devotes considerable space to the months of training that the invasion required and the many lives that were lost in run-up accidents; the prickly personalities of the various leading generals; the reliance on the sketchy weather reports; the nerve-wracking decision to delay the invasion 24 hours due to unpromising sea conditions; and how the Germans, who of course knew an invasion was coming at some point, had essentially “applied different criteria for a successful invasion” than the Allies. Following the armada toward Normandy, the author explains the roles of airpower, minesweepers, and assault flotillas and chronicles how, beach by beach, the Allies made their valiant, perilous forward thrust.

A thorough, exciting, and altogether excellent choice for World War II—and especially D-Day—aficionados.

| F I C T I O N | N O N F I C T I O N | C H I L D R E N ’ S | Y O U N G A D U L T | I N D I E |

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**An octogenarian atheist leader & pater familias emerges from the closet**

Q. What do Adolf Hitler, Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, Elvis Presley, Larry Flynt, Leonard Bernstein, and Madalyn Murray-O’Hair have in common?

A. All their lives intersect that of Frank Zindler in his memoir

**CONFESSIONS OF A BORN AGAIN ATHEIST: The Implausible Lives of a Godless Guy**

“…Zindler’s prose is energetic, humane, and engaging, often revealing long-ago feelings as if they’re happening at the moment; … a sharp, personable presence on the page….”

—Kirkus Reviews

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**SAND & STEEL**

_The D-Day Invasions and the Liberation of France_

Caddick-Adams, Peter

Oxford Univ. (928 pp.)

$34.95 | May 6, 2019

978-0-19-060189-8
In an intriguing postscript, he examines the crucial role of the spy network in “inducing Hitler to order a series of mistaken moves based on false intelligence.” There is also a glossary, rank table, and a list of the orders of battles.

A thorough, exciting, and altogether excellent choice for World War II—and especially D-Day—aficionados.

FURIOUS HOURS
Murder, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee
Cep, Casey
Knopf (336 pp.)
$26.95 | May 7, 2019
978-1-101-94786-9

Cep’s debut recounts how a series of rural Alabama murders inspired Harper Lee to write again, years after the publication of To Kill a Mockingbird.

Death surrounded the Rev. Willie Maxwell. Following his wife’s mysterious murder in 1970, four more of Maxwell’s family members were inexplicably found dead within seven years. Locals blamed voodoo, but a deeper investigation pointed to fraud: Maxwell, said Lee, “had a profound and abiding belief in insurance,” and he collected thousands in death benefits. He was a suspect in his wife’s case (charged and curiously acquitted), but years later, before the police could make another arrest, he was killed in a public fit of vigilante justice. In a further twist, the same lawyer who helped clear Maxwell’s name decided to represent his killer. Lee, still uncomfortable over the embellishments of her friend Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood, wondered “whether she could write the kind of old-fashioned, straitlaced journalism she admired, and whether it could be as successful as the far-bending accounts of her contemporaries.” In this effortlessly immersive narrative, Cep engagingly traces how Lee found the case and began—and ultimately abandoned—a project she called The Reverend. Cep writes with the accessible erudition of podcast-style journalism; she breathes not only life, but style into her exhaustive, impressively research narrative. She relies heavily on the backstories of each of her narrative temporaries. “In this effortlessly immersive narrative, Cep engagingly traces how Lee found the case and began—and ultimately abandoned—a project she called The Reverend.”

A well-tempered blend of true crime and literary lore. (16 pages of photos; map)

WHERE THE LOST DOGS GO
A Story of Love, Search, and the Power of Reunion
Charleson, Susannah
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (320 pp.)
$27.00 | Jun. 4, 2019
978-1-328-99505-6

A bestselling author tells the very personal story of how and why she became involved in lost animal search and rescue missions.

Charleson’s (The Possibility Dogs: What a Handful of “Unadoptables” Taught Me About Service, Hope, and Healing, 2013, etc.) dog Puzzle had long worked by her side searching for lost people or those who had been victims of catastrophe. Then the author brought home a Maltipoo rescue named Ace whose “dignified, shabby gentility” and last-minute rescue from euthanasia became a talking point for her and the parents she kept at arm’s length. Despite a harrowing existence as a lost canine, Ace showed the marks of a dog who had once been loved; he also revealed a knack for locating lost pets. Charleson familiarized herself with the tactics of lost animal search and began training Ace and Puzzle in on-the-ground location strategies. As she helped reunite pets with their owners, the author began recalling the life she had led with the parents who had “made me a rescuer.” Though they were deeply troubled, both shared a common bond in their love for animals that was so strong that they often spent beyond their limited means to save strays. But the author’s own life with the pet-loving parents who “had rarely been wonderful together” was difficult. The family moved often, and when Charleson was a teenager, her mother left to start a life on her own; after that, the three of them slowly drifted apart. In a touching twist of irony, the Maltipoo stray was the one who ultimately came to Charleson’s rescue. Not only did he help heal the relationship with her parents; he also became a source of comfort when Puzzle and her parents eventually died. Moving and profound, Charleson’s book affirms the special human-animal connection and fully celebrates the healing powers of forgiveness and love.

A warm and heartfelt memoir perfect for fans of the author’s first two dog-focused books. (30 b/w photos)
2000)—five-time All-Star Cone offers advice on becoming a successful pitcher, recollections of specific games, and professional gossip about teammates and opponents encountered during his long career (1986-2003). From an early age, the author, who grew up in Kansas City, was determined to play baseball professionally—and not just as any player, but specifically as a pitcher, arguably the most important position on the field. In the early pages, Cone discusses the tireless coaching from his father as well as the influences of his mother and siblings. Quickly, however, the author moves on to baseball matters. He focuses on a professional career that began in the minor leagues on teams controlled by his hometown Kansas City Royals—and ultimately included five World Series championships. Cone concedes that sometimes he acted immaturely off the field, but his dedication to the craft of pitching is undeniable—as a student and, later, a teacher. His insights about how pitchers must develop not only physically, but also emotionally and intellectually will be enlightening for all baseball fans. Readers uninterested in the didactic pitching insights should find satisfaction in Cone's accounts of his stints with the Royals, Toronto Blue Jays, New York Mets, New York Yankees, and Boston Red Sox. The author compliments many players, coaches, and managers, but he is also candid about the flaws of many of these individuals. Thematic chapters about the synergy—or lack thereof—between pitchers and catchers, and between pitchers and home-plate umpires, add to the richness of the narrative. Currently a broadcaster for the YES Network, Cone briefly discusses that career, as well. Although the book is mostly chronological, the ordering of the chapters is occasionally puzzling. The narrative will be best digested as individual chapters rather than a connected narrative.

A well-intentioned, competent sports memoir that will appeal most to MLB fans.
In this thoughtfully observed and poignant debut memoir, Connell paints a remarkably authentic portrait of farm life in all its harshness and beauty.

THE FARMER’S SON

Calving Season on a Family Farm
Connell, John
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (256 pp.)
$25.00 | May 7, 2019
978-1-328-57799-3

A writer returns home to work at his family’s farm in rural Ireland and records day-to-day struggles and triumphs throughout his first season.

In this thoughtfully observed and poignant debut memoir, Connell paints a remarkably authentic portrait of farm life in all its harshness and beauty. His story begins in January as he is about to deliver his first calf on his own. He describes the long, painstakingly intense procedure before he successfully delivered the calf, followed by the equally difficult task of helping the newborn to feed. This experience sets the tone for the engrossing narrative that follows, as Connell recounts the many challenging moments he faced over the next several months. These included the births and deaths of various livestock, endless feeding and cleaning, and protecting the animals from varied and unpredictable forces of nature. “The work is so relentless that I have forgotten I have lived other lives or that other lives exist,” writes Connell. “There is only the yard and cows and the mountain of chores before me.” The author also shares his internal struggle with his identity and family, in particular the difficult ties with his father, who has been mentor and guide and occasionally his harshest critic. Connell returned to the farm following a 10-year absence working as a journalist and film producer and living abroad, all the while preserving a longing for the farm life he left behind and struggling through periods of depression. Though the author vividly depicts the many hardships and grueling labor involved in running a farm, he maintains an open reverence for the intrinsic value of these efforts and a deep compassion for the animals and environment. “Farming,” he writes, “is a walk with survival, with death over our shoulder, sickness to our left, the spirit to our right and the joy of new life in front.”

A deeply felt, unforgettable story that will linger in readers’ imaginations. (7 b/w photos)
talented pitcher but was a serial abuser of his wife; his abuse grew grotesquely grim when, in a rage in 1989, he shot her several times (she survived) before killing himself.

Fine, tasty fare for dedicated baseball fans. (16-page b/w insert)

**ORIGINS**

*How Earth's History Shaped Human History*

Dartnell, Lewis  
Basic (352 pp.)  
$30.00 | May 14, 2019  
978-1-5416-1790-2

A thoughtful history of our species as a product of 4 billion years of geology. According to British astrobiologist Dartnell (Science Communication/Univ of Westminster; *The Knowledge: How to Rebuild Our World from Scratch*, 2014), “to truly understand our own story we must examine the biography of the earth itself—its landscape features and underlying fabric, atmospheric circulation and climate regions, plate tectonics, and ancient episodes of climate change. In this book we’ll explore what our environment has done to us.” Indeed, the author largely ignores human creations or actions, including war, religion, technology, and government. Readers will encounter plenty of intriguing surprises. The study of plate tectonics, which produces earthquakes and volcanoes, is vital to understanding the rise of early civilizations. The earliest, from the Aztecs to those in Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and India, grew along fault lines that happen to be rich in water and fertile soil. “We are the children of plate tectonics,” writes Dartnell. For 80 to 90 percent of our existence, our planet was hotter than today; then, 50 million years ago, it began cooling. The Antarctic ice cap first appeared 35 million years ago, the Northern ice caps 15-20 million years later. East African jungles retreated, replaced by open grasslands that encouraged the diversity of hominins as well as the large herbivorous mammals they hunted. More than 2.5 million years ago, encouraged by variations in the Earth’s movement, glaciers began spreading south and then retreating in a dozen ice ages. We are currently enjoying a warm period of retreat, but the industrial burning of fossil fuels is leading to an uncertain future of increasing temperatures, acidic oceans, unstable weather, shifting rainfall patterns, and rising sea levels. Despite the inevitable gloomy conclusion, Dartnell is an engaging guide through millions of years of history.

An expert chronicle of the Earth that culminates in human civilization. (26 b/w images)

**UPHEAVAL**

*Turning Points for Nations in Crisis*

Diamond, Jared  
Little, Brown (512 pp.)  
$35.00 | May 7, 2019  
978-0-316-40913-1

The MacArthur fellow and Pulitzer Prize winner looks at how societies respond to crises.

A crisis is a turning point, a time when decision and action are necessary. As Diamond (Geography/UCLA; *The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies?,* 2012, etc.) puts it, it is a “moment of truth” that calls on us to cope. We do so as individuals following such adaptations as we are able to draw on, including recognizing that there’s a problem, being honest in appraising where the fault lies and what can be done, and then drawing on flexibility and intelligence to work things out. So it is with societies.

— Kirkus Reviews

**SQUEEZING SILVER**

by Mark A. Cymrot

An attorney presents a vivid chronicle of a civil trial that resulted from a catastrophic meltdown of the global silver markets in his debut book.

“...a genuinely thrilling financial drama.”

“A captivating economic tale, both riveting and historically enlightening.”

— Kirkus Reviews


For information on publishing and film rights, email markcymrotbooks@gmail.com
Diamond astutely examines seven turning points in the history of the world, some of them little known—e.g., the Winter War between Russian and Finland, which briefly pushed Finland into the Nazi camp and involved a humiliating defeat first for the Soviets and then for the Finns. Nations “do or don’t undertake honest self-appraisal,” writes the author: The Russians scarcely acknowledge a war that remains strong in Finnish history, just as Germany, the epicenter of Nazism, at first tried to brush aside that history and then became the first among nations in acknowledging guilt and making sure such crimes would not be repeated. For its part, Japan has not adequately owned up to the historical chain that made it into a modern nation and then a brutal imperial power, while the United States has yet to reckon with the crisis of slavery, racial enmity, and civil war. Diamond seeks commonalities and distinctions. In his case studies, only Indonesia lacks a strong sense of national identity, which is explainable given its rather recent emergence as a nation and which helps explain its reluctance to work through a traumatic civil war in which millions may have died. Just so, honest self-appraisal is sometimes hard to come by, as when modern Americans shun scientific reasoning, “a very bad portent, because science is basically just the accurate description and understanding of the real world.”

Vintage Diamond; of a piece with Collapce (2004) and likely to appeal to the same broad audience. (two 16-page 4-color inserts)

A FORGOTTEN HERO

 Folke Bernadotte, the Swedish Humanitarian Who Rescued 30,000 People from the Nazis

Emling, Shelley

ECW Press (280 pp.)

$26.95 | May 21, 2019

978-1-77041-449-5

A biography of “the dashing Swedish diplomat who dared to breach Hitler’s inner circle during the waning days of World War II.”

Emling (Setting the World on Fire: The Brief Astonishing Life of St. Catherine of Siena, 2016), a senior editor at AARP, introduces us to Folke Bernadotte (1895-1948), a member of the Swedish royal family who was in a unique position to promote humanitarian projects throughout his long career. Health problems derailed his military career, but he maintained an interest in diplomacy. He represented Sweden’s king at Chicago’s Century of Progress Exposition in 1933 and served as Swedish commissioner general for the 1939 New York World’s Fair. Later, he became vice president of the Swedish Red Cross. Though Sweden had practiced active neutrality since the 1920s, that stance was growing increasingly difficult to maintain in the face of rampant German aggression. In the spring of 1943, word leaked that Germany planned to round up and deport all the Jews in Denmark, and Danish physicist Niels Bohr convinced the king to allow the Jews into Sweden. Over the course of two weeks, fishermen ferried 8,000 to safety. Bernadotte was responsible for the first prisoner exchange between the Allies and Germany, a massive effort that benefitted thousands of POWs. With the end of the war looming, German prisoners were being quickly exterminated. Heinrich Himmler knew the war was lost, and Bernadotte convinced him to let Scandinavian prisoners be removed to a camp near Denmark. Himmler also hoped Bernadotte would carry a capitulation offer to Dwight Eisenhower. In March 1945, Bernadotte’s “White Buses,” under strict German control, retrieved prisoners from a series of camps. In April, Himmler finally said he could evacuate any prisoners he liked. Added to the white buses were more than 7,000 women from Ravensbrück.

Emling effectively shows her subject’s “extraordinary feats” as well as the immense difficulties facing those involved in humanitarian work during World War II. (b/w photos)
Parents and caregivers will find plenty of inspiration in these moving, empathetic pages.

*A LIFE BEYOND REASON*

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**RANGE**  
*Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*  
Epstein, David  
Riverhead (352 pp.)  
$28.00 | May 28, 2019  
978-0-7352-1448-4

Why diverse experience and experimentation are important components of professional accomplishment.

Arguing against the idea that narrow specialization leads to success, journalist Epstein (*The Sports Gene: Inside the Science of Extraordinary Athletic Performance*, 2013) mounts convincing evidence that generalists bring more skill, creativity, and innovation to work in all fields. The author begins by contrasting the career trajectories of Tiger Woods, who began training as a golfer before he was 1, and Roger Federer, who dabbled in a range of sports before, as a teenager, he “began to gravitate more toward tennis.” Although he started later than players who had worked with coaches, sports psychologists, and nutritionists from early childhood, a late start did not impede his development. His story, Epstein discovered, is common. When psychologists have studied successful individuals’ “paths to excellence,” they have found “most common was a sampling period” followed only later by focus and increased structure. “Hyperspecialization,” writes the author, is not a requisite for achievement, and he offers abundant lively anecdotes from music, the arts, business, science, technology, and sports. Drawing on studies by cognitive psychologists and educators, Epstein examines how knowledge develops and, equally important, how it is assessed. He distinguishes between teaching strategies that emphasize repeated practice, leading to “excellent immediate performance” on tests, and “interleaving,” an approach that develops inductive reasoning, in which students “learn to create abstract generalizations that allow them to apply what they learned to material they have never encountered before.” Interleaving, he asserts, applies to both physical and mental skills: to a pianist and mathematician as well as to Shaquille O’Neal. The author critiques higher education for rushing students to specialization even though “narrow vocational training” will not prepare them for jobs “in a complex, interconnected, rapidly changing world.” Although he admits “that passion and perseverance” are important precursors of excellence, “a change of interest, or a recalibration of focus” can also be critical to success.

A fresh, brisk look at creativity, learning, and the meaning of achievement.

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**A LIFE BEYOND REASON**  
*A Father’s Memoir*  
Gabbard, Chris  
Beacon (240 pp.)  
$24.95 | May 28, 2019  
978-0-8070-6057-5

A professor steeped in the literature of the Enlightenment has his core beliefs about science, reason, and progress altered when he faces the reality of raising a son with severe brain damage.

In his debut memoir, Gabbard (English/Univ. of North Florida), who serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, chronicles the challenges and joys of raising his son, August, who was born with profound impairments, both cognitive and physical: a spastic quadriplegic, legally blind, incontinent, unable to speak, and unable to feed himself. The author describes his son’s birth and the questions about decisions made in the delivery room. Gabbard is highly

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**Theme and Variations**  
*Musical Notes by a Neurologist*  
By Carl Ellenberger, M.D.

*Playing and listening to music boosts brain power. Learning why advances brain science.*

“I devoured it with pleasure and admiration for the thorough, educated research into the effects of music on the brain.”  
—John Poynter, Professor of History and pianist

“…it’s clear he knows his stuff, and he makes the science of music understandable throughout this work.”  
—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN#: 9780999561232

CarlEllenberger.com

For information on publishing and film rights, email carl@carlellenberger.com
detailed in his discussions of his routine as daily caretaker and the ups and downs of August’s life, which included many surgeries and long hospitalizations. While making clear the enormous demands in both time and money, he is also transparent in his rendering of his deep, abiding love for his son. Once a devotee of the concept that our intelligence is what makes us human and that the unexamined life is not worth living, the author embraced the belief that love is what makes life worth living. To curious strangers, some of whom viewed August with wariness, Gabbard’s frequent reply—“This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased”—speaks volumes. The scenes with various doctors involved in August’s care reveal some of the limitations of the medical profession when faced with such physical and mental impairments, but Gabbard is not writing an exposé. This is both a memoir of a child’s short life and a father’s journey from an academic who thought that love was a weakness to a thoughtful, questioning adult who values the capacity to give and receive love.

Parents and caregivers will find plenty of inspiration in these moving, empathetic pages.

A MORTUARY
OF BOOKS
The Rescue of Jewish Culture After the Holocaust
Gallas, Elisabeth
Trans. by Skinner, Alex
New York Univ. (416 pp.)
$35.00 | May 1, 2019
978-1-4798-3395-5

Saving cultural property was central to postwar Jewish identity and recognition.

Throughout World War II, Jewish leaders around the world became horrified that Nazi looting of books, manuscripts, Torah scrolls, ritual objects, and documents would annihilate Jewish culture in Germany and Eastern Europe. In meticulous detail, drawing on archival life sources, memoirs, correspondence, and histories, Gallas, chief research associate at the Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture, makes an impressive book debut with a comprehensive history of efforts to recover, identify, and restore artifacts of Jewish culture and scholarship. The process was complex and sometimes contentious, generating debates about how to define the “Jewish collectivity”—as constituted through “the collective experience of persecution,” religious affiliation, or by territorial boundaries; how to give legal recognition to that collectivity; where European Jewries and their sociocultural worlds could be revived; and where—and under whose auspices—recovered property should be housed. Gallas focuses on four individuals who took prominent roles in the efforts: political theorist Hannah Arendt; rabbi and scholar Salo W. Baron, who held the first professorship of Jewish studies at Columbia and came to believe that Jewish communities could never be re-established in Europe; archivist and historian Lucy S. Dawidowicz, the daughter of Polish immigrants; and philosopher Gershom Scholem, who championed an Israeli state as the only home for Jewish culture. Offering capsule biographies of these key figures and extended examination of their efforts, Gallas notes that they “defined fundamentally in terms of their generation, background, self-image, and political vision” but “regarded their shared rescue mission as an existential duty.” All contributed actively to Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc., the most significant of many such organizations devoted to compiling detailed data about the recovered material. The result, writes the author, “was tantamount to the creation of an archive of documentation and remembrance.” Their work was imbued with emotion: “The smell of death,” Dawidowicz said, emanated from hundreds of thousands of books and objects, “orphaned and homeless mute survivors of their murdered owners.”

A fresh, significant contribution to Jewish history.

THE NONSENSE FACTORY
The Making and Breaking of the American Legal System
Gibney, Bruce Cannon
Hachette (544 pp.)
$28.00 | May 14, 2019
978-0-316-47526-6

A sweeping, vituperative examination of how the United States, a nation that prides itself on the rule of law, has devolved into an essentially lawless country.

“It’s not only possible, but likely, that all three branches of government are controlled by criminals,” writes Gibney (A Generation of Sociopaths: How the Baby Boomers Betrayed America, 2017), a former lawyer who is now a venture capitalist. “At a minimum, it cannot be proved otherwise, for the simple reason that no one truly knows what the criminal laws of the United States contain. The U.S. Department of Justice, charged with enforcing federal criminal law, can’t even count the number of criminal provisions.” Consequently, most nonlawyer citizens—and even many lawyers—cannot know precisely when they have crossed the line into criminal activity. In the early portion of his outside-the-box yet cohesive diatribe, the author constructs a philosophical foundation for his thesis. Then, chapter by chapter, he eviscerates the American criminal justice system, including police, prosecutors, public defenders, private defense attorneys, law professors, and judges. Gibney also focuses his penetrating gaze on the maze of noncriminal law, slamming arbitrary presidential powers, executive branch rule-making, trial and appellate courts, and the privatized proceedings known as arbitration. Regarding the presidency, he writes, “the greater executive power becomes, the larger the possibility for error. After decades of expansion, the presidency has become a near-impossible job, reposed in one beleaguered and often unstable person.” Throughout the readable text, the author illustrates his criticisms by skillfully employing relevant analogies and metaphors, and his humor is subtle and mostly effective. Defenders of the alleged rule of law in the U.S. often point to the concept of American exceptionalism; Gibney effectively
attacks this idea with examples showing how laws are administered more clearly in other nations. At times, the book is eerily timely, as when the author discusses alleged national emergencies invoked by occupants of the White House.

A keen, lively deconstruction of the American legal system’s seemingly countless flaws.

THE SPIRIT OF INQUIRY
How One Extraordinary Society Shaped Modern Science
Gibson, Susannah
Oxford Univ. (384 pp.)
$34.95 | May 1, 2019
978-0-19-883337-6

The story of a 19th-century scientific society that exerted wide-ranging influence throughout Britain and beyond.

In 1819, naturalists Adam Sedgwick, newly appointed professor of geology at Cambridge, and his friend John Stevens Henslow, a recent graduate, proposed to establish a scientific society for Cambridge, a place where “gentlemen of science” could share their research. As Gibson (History and Philosophy of Science/Univ. of Cambridge; Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?: How Eighteenth-Century Science Disrupted the Natural Order, 2015) reveals in a vivid, deeply researched intellectual history, the Cambridge Philosophical Society changed both the university and the larger scientific community. At the time the society was founded, Cambridge “was an intellectually cautious place” devoted to teaching the classics, the Bible, and the mathematics of Isaac Newton. Yet science was burgeoning, and the society was one among many that arose across Britain in the late 18th and early 19th century. Some were specialized (focused, for example, on astronomy or mineralogy), others intended as gatherings for the scientific elite. The society was unique because of its connection to the university, which both supported its efforts and allowed for its reach beyond the confines of its meeting rooms. Since its original members were members of the university, their own research and the ideas they gleaned at forums—letters from Charles Darwin from his trip on the Beagle, for example—made their ways into undergraduate teaching. Its two enthusiastic founders saw the society as “a place where things got done: if Cambridge lacked a decent scientific library, they would assemble one; if the town didn’t have a natural history museum, they would create one; if the press failed to produce a natural philosophical journal, they would write one themselves.” All these resources shaped Cambridge curriculum, which by the 1850s allowed students to be examined for a degree in the Natural Sciences. Over the years, students increasingly took up that option, and the university attracted major scientists—Niels Bohr, J.J. Thomson, Ernest Rutherford, among others—from all over the world.

A colorful, detailed history of scientific passions and the hunger for knowledge.
the “larger churning machine” that wants to chew us up and instead do cool stuff. This is a book full of cool stuff and the people who do it, from making swords—swordsmiths are “our last line of defense from this craft being completely lost to history”—to rebuilding vintage motorcycles and carving gargoyles for cathedrals. Gorges, who hosts a TV show of the same title as the book, also notes that doing such pursuits can take passion to levels of mania, with no such thing as time off, no social or family life, and no chance of ever winning that “never-ending struggle to find that work-life balance.” Nevertheless, like the kindred-spirit book Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Gorges’ narrative serves up the lessons that one learns from Greta’s presence in a local park, the author suddenly realized New Mexico who they hoped would help them process Greta’s family life, and no chance of ever winning that “never-ending struggle to find that work-life balance.”

A friendly, pleasant manifesto; without the philosophical depth of Matthew Crawford’s Shop Class as Soulcraft, but still a fine read for DIYers looking to up their game—or get their hands callused in the first place.

**ONCE MORE WE SAW STARS**

Greene, Jayson
Knopf (350 pp.)
$25.00 | May 14, 2019
978-1-5247-3353-7

A Brooklyn-based music journalist’s account of his 2-year-old daughter’s accidental death and his journey to acceptance of her passing.

One day, Greene and his wife, Stacy, left Greta with her grandmother. Shockingly, a brick from an eighth-story windowsill fell on Greta’s skull, causing irreversible brain damage. Overcome with grief and guilt for having “failed this little person so completely,” the couple struggled to fit the shattered pieces of their life together again. “Grief at its peak has a terrible beauty to it,” he writes, “a blinding fission of every emotion.” A bitter rage made Greene hate the “unexamined happiness” of the people—especially parents—he saw around him while Stacy was forced to confront not only her own anguish, but that of her mother. After feeling Greta’s presence in a local park, the author suddenly realized that “there will be more light upon this earth for me.” He and Stacy began attending grief workshops, one of which included a medium who encouraged them to “pay attention to signs” from their loved ones. They also decided to leave the home where Greta “padd[ed] agreeably around every corner” and start a new life—complete with what they hoped would one day be another child—elsewhere in the city. They took up yoga while Greene “became a prospector for safe screaming spaces” where he could release pent-up emotional suffering. After the couple discovered they were pregnant, they went to see a ceremonialist in New Mexico who they hoped would help them process Greta’s death along with the impending birth of the son who would never know his sister. The powerful visions of death and rebirth they experienced helped them to understand and embrace the brokenness within themselves with love, grace, and gratitude. Compassionate and sensitively told, Greene’s story accomplishes an exceptionally difficult feat: transforming tragedy into both a spiritual journey and a celebration of wonder.

**TELL ME WHO YOU ARE**

Guo, Winona & Vulchi, Priya
Tarcher/Penguin (400 pp.)
$25.00 | Jun. 4, 2019
978-0-525-54112-7

Two young women collect stories about race from a diversity of voices.

Before they started college, Guo and Vulchi spent a gap year traveling across the country asking 150 people the same question: “How has race, culture, or intersectionality impacted your life?” “The responses,” they write in their startling, moving, and revelatory debut book, “were astonishing,” giving eloquent voice to the meaning of intersectionality: the many “overlapping parts” of any individual’s identity, including race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, nationality, ability, age, and physical appearance. Equally astonishing are the sophistication and insight that the authors bring to their collection. By the time they embarked on their research, they were already impressively knowledgeable about race; they had founded CHOOSE (princetonchoose.org) “as a platform for racial literacy,” on which they shared stories from interviewees in the Princeton area; they had spoken at schools; and they had given a TED talk. Their yearlong investigation deepened and widened their perspective. They listened to people who grew up in racist families, some whose parents threw them out for being gay or transgender. Many encountered virulent racism: “Traveling with predominantly black softball team to a city that was home to the Ku Klux Klan, one woman recalls her fear at spending the night in a hotel. The next morning, the team left without stopping for breakfast. A Creole woman in New Orleans discusses the lifetime of secrecy experienced by light-skinned blacks who decide to cross the color line and pass as white. A Japanese-American tells about her family’s internment for 4 years during World War II. “We accepted our way of life just because, culturally, we’re very obedient citizens,” she said, adding, “I still feel that America is the best country that we could be in.” Besides the revelatory stories, the authors provide informative introductions, annotations, and a rubric for talking about identities. Clearly, they hope this volume will lead to social change. As one young Asian woman remarks, “research papers and big words aside, what are you doing to shake things up?”

A stirring, inspiring collection.
SISTERS AND REBELS
A Struggle for the Soul of America
Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd
Norton (672 pp.)
$39.95 | May 21, 2019
978-0-393-04799-8

A history of 20th-century sisters who bore witness to Southern culture, politics, and values.

In 1973, Hall (Revolt Against Chivalry, 1993, etc.), director of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina, interviewed two sisters, “improbable voices from the deepest South,” who each had grappled with their heritage and was shaped by a “maelstrom of historical events and processes.” Grace Lumpkin (1891-1980) and her younger sister, Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin (1897-1988), are the central characters in a sweeping, richly detailed intellectual and political history of America from the 1920s to the 1980s, an absorbing narrative based on impressive scholarship: the women's published and private writings; their racist father’s “bitter, murderous memoir,” in which he discloses participating in the Ku Klux Klan; and abundant archival sources and oral history interviews. William Lumpkin boasted that he taught his children “to love the Lost Cause”—i.e., the South’s past glory and the Confederacy’s “brilliant and heroic” fight. The Lumpkin sisters, however, came to see their Southern past “as both a burden and an opportunity” as they sought to create “new patterns in the tangled threads of memory and history.” Both sisters observed racial violence and “grinding class inequity” that led them to redefine the meaning of whiteness and their complicity in America’s social structure. Both were educated at Brenau, a women's college that drew its white students from relatively wealthy families. Grace took a degree in domestic science; Katharine became a student leader and, after graduating, worked as a traveling secretary of the YWCA, whose mission was to save souls and nurture “independent womanhood.” As Grace gravitated to fiction writing, Katharine continued her education in sociology and

Sharply etched biographical portraits focus a compelling history.

SISTERS AND REBELS

“It is a volume to be read, reread, and then read yet again.”
— Doug Clifton, Pulitzer Prize Winner

Four weeks before he was assassinated, Kennedy spoke at Amherst College to honor his friend, the poet Robert Frost, who died nine months earlier. He discussed the ways in which poetry functions as a literary check on the untethered use of political power. The volume reflects on Kennedy’s political legacy, the essence of presidential leadership, and - the core message of his speech - the profound significance of liberal education for a flourishing democracy.

“...heart-warming...”
— Alice M. Rivlin, Senior fellow in Economic Studies and the Center for Health Policy at the Brookings Institute

“At a time when political morality, civility, and fidelity to a common destiny are brutally trampled, day by day, this volume on JFK’s call for the cultivation of civic virtue is welcome nourishment for our democracy.”
— Hedrick Smith, Author of Who Stole the American Dream?

For more information, please email jfkthelastspeech@gmail.com
AN AMERICAN SUMMER IS A FIERCELY UNCOMPROMISING PORTRAIT OF GUN VIOLENCE

By Joshunda Sanders

In Alex Kotlowitz’s An American Summer: Love and Death in Chicago (March 5), the writer builds on what he began with his 1991 book, There Are No Children Here, which is a modern classic, selected by the New York Public Library as one of the 150 most important books of the 20th century. There Are No Children Here is a seminal look at poverty and inequality based on two brothers living in the Henry Horner Homes, a housing project in Chicago that was mostly demolished in the 1990s.

An American Summer takes place in a vastly different political, economic, and racial context than when Kotlowitz’s documentation began. We speak, for example, soon after the one-year anniversary of the horrific Parkland, Florida, shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in which 17 Americans were killed.

The subsequent stories of the mass shooting were focused on themes as unfortunately common as mass shootings themselves: Who was the perpetrator? Who were/are the victims? What can we do to actually cut off the availability of guns to those who would perpetuate this kind of heartache again and again?

But Kotlowitz, now a professor at Northwestern University, wrote An American Summer to ask different questions and to expand the lens through which we look at gun violence to include more Americans: largely poor and black Americans.

“How do you manage to go on?” Kotlowitz asks. “How do you manage to not let [gun violence] shape that community? We don’t ask those questions of people in these communities. The title is very purposeful. People tend to put this incredible distance between them and us, and I just wanted people to recognize that this is not some distant land. It’s the great American paradox. We like to think that we’re all on this ship heading in the same direction, and yet we lead incredibly disconnected lives.”

There are several narratives of lives fractured forever by gun violence in An American Summer, including four young people that have been killed that Kotlowitz knew from writing his first book.

Ramaine Hill, a former resident of the Cabrini-Green projects, is a witness whose testimony haunts him in devastating ways that are, ultimately, unresolved; Eddie Bocanegra offers red and white roses to his victim’s loved ones every July 17, the anniversary of the murder he is trying to forgive himself for. “I felt that one narrative wouldn’t capture the depth of what was going on,” Kotlowitz says. Some stories he knew he would write about; others were mostly “stories that knocked me off balance, taught me..."
something I didn’t know before. This is a hard book because I’m asking people to revisit what for many people was the most difficult moment in their lives.”

The effect of this is that Kotlowitz expands the lens of how we think of the impact of gun violence. He depicts the ways that it can wreak havoc on not just individual survivors and families, but purveyors of violence, too. “I think we’ve completely underestimated the impact of violence on communities and their spirits. They’ve been traumatized by the violence,” he says. “You walk out of a building in Englewood on the South Side [and] you see this beautiful glistening skyline and you know it’s not yours. How can you become anything but resentful? In this book, I really wanted people to reflect on the fact that this is not a foreign country; this is our nation.”

The intimacy and empathetic storytelling—augmented by moments of surprising beauty, like a statement Lisa Daniels gives in court asking for forgiveness for the man who fatally shot her son or letters between an imprisoned young man named Aries and a young woman named Ashara, an old crush—are both haunting and deeply spiritual, knitting together seamlessly stories that move somewhat erratically across time.

“Writing [There Are No Children Here] I felt this deep sense of shame. How could I not know about this and we live in the most prosperous country in the world?” Kotlowitz says. “It’s sobering to see how much hasn’t changed.”

Joshunda Sanders is a writer and educator living in New York City. An American Summer received a starred review in the Jan. 1, 2019, issue.

Politics, where ideas from Darwin to John Dewey shook her preconceptions. Hall traces the sisters’ professional careers, their campaigns against the oppression of blacks and women, their love affairs (Katharine lived with a woman for more than three decades) and involvement in communism, and, eventually, the divergent paths that resulted in their becoming “the most intimate of strangers.”

Sharply etched biographical portraits focus a compelling history. (35 b/w illustrations)
An award-winning journalist delves into the events surrounding the 2015 massacre of nine people at Charleston, South Carolina’s historic Emanuel AME Church—and how the community recovered after the horror.

Hawes, who writes for the Charleston-based Post and Courier and has won the Pulitzer Prize and George Polk Award, among other honors, begins with the heart-rending details of Roof’s crime, describing the victims, the church, and the fateful night during which the perpetrator infamously completed his plan to create a sensation of racist violence. Though often difficult to read due to the emotional magnitude of the material, Hawes’ book describes the crime in compassionate, detailed, and engaging prose. Shockingly, even after the crime, the pain for survivors and victims’ families was far from over. Inept church leadership would make a mockery of Emanuel’s story through poor pastoral choices, questionable use of donations, and an utter disregard for the needs of those most closely connected to the tragedy. In addition to the bungling next steps of their beloved church, survivors had to endure Roof’s trial, a lengthy and painful reminder of the horrors of that day. Hawes is a talented storyteller, recounting every phase of this saga while focusing on the individual tales of survivors and family members. She also examines the forgiveness some parishioners offered to Roof, which captured the nation’s imagination in the weeks following his crime, and she paints an impressively detailed portrait of the shallow criminal, whom she memorably describes at one point as “a gargoyle come to life.” Hawes dispassionately examines the larger issues surrounding the tragedy, including the debate over the Confederate flag, fringe white supremacist groups, and urban racial tensions, all against the backdrop of one man’s evil choice. Perhaps most impressively, the author does not let her subject drag her into pontificating; instead, she maintains her journalistic poise and balance amid a highly emotional storyline.

At once horrifying and inspiring, engaging and thought-provoking, this is a definitive must-read about the Charleston tragedy.

An appealing popular-science account of carbon, the “giver of life.”

According to this lively, expert overview, although carbon is only the fourth most abundant element in the universe—and second in the human body—it is the key to everything. Hazen (The Story of Earth: The First 4.5 Billion Years, from Stardust to Living Planet, 2012), executive director of the Deep Carbon Observatory at George Mason University, emphasizes that “carbon, by itself, and in chemical combinations with other atoms, provides unmatched cosmic novelty and unparalleled potential for cosmic evolution...As the basis for all biomolecules, no other element contributes so centrally to the well-being and sustainability of life on Earth, including our human species.” The author divides the book into a symphony of four movements, each entitled with a classical element: earth, air, fire, and water. “Earth” begins with the universe itself. Carbon, essentially absent after the Big Bang, first appeared in the cores of massive stars, spreading across the universe when those stars died and exploded in supernovae. Our planet formed 4.5 billion years ago from dust and rocks in a protoplanetary disc rotating around the young sun. Extremely hot at first, as it cooled, heavy elements (mostly iron) sank, taking most of the carbon, but plenty remained in the “Air” as carbon dioxide engaged in the essential carbon cycle, shifting between atmosphere and ocean, plunging deep into the Earth and then emerging through volcanoes. Readers expecting to learn how massive amounts of extra carbon dioxide from the human burning of hydrocarbons are destabilizing the cycle will not be disappointed. In “Fire,” Hazen, a smooth stylist, reminds us that carbon remains our major source of energy but also the source of almost everything we use, from shampoo to the soles of our shoes. “Water” is essential for life, at least on Earth. Scientists disagree on how life began, but few doubt that only carbon, with its supreme ability to link with other elements, makes it all possible.

A skillful account of the central element in our lives. (8 pages of color illustrations)
A look at how new advances in bioengineering have the potential to radically transform our lives—and they are closer to reality than we think.

From genomics to artificial intelligence, innovations in science and technology have already made significant impacts on our daily lives. However, Hockfield, the first woman and first life scientist to be president of MIT, argues that significant progress is needed to combat the major issues that face a rapidly growing—and rapidly consuming—global population. In this vibrant and accessible book, she is optimistic that scientists are in the midst of a “revolutionary convergence of biology and engineering” that has the potential to not just overcome great challenges, but usher in a new golden age of biotechnology. The author continues, “ingenious and powerful biologically based tools are coming our way: viruses that can self-assemble into batteries, proteins that can clean water, nanoparticles that can detect and knock out cancer, prosthetic limbs that can read minds, [and] computer systems that can increase crop yield.” What’s especially exciting about the narrative is that much of the research Hockfield describes occurred as a result of her foresight and tenacity; her vision at MIT was to bridge disciplines in a manner similar to the pioneering work that was conducted at Bell Labs in the mid-20th century. Her insight and expertise enhance the vividness of her writing. Imagine a virus-based car battery that takes the form of a dashboard; a nanoscience-driven urine test that can detect cancer long before an MRI; or a method to feed 9.5 billion people using genetic modification. The author effortlessly navigates complex advances for a lay audience while telling the stories of the brilliant scientists who are innovating in these fields. In these uncertain times, Hockfield instills hope for an enriched and peaceful tomorrow.

A thrilling, insightful, and highly readable work of popular science.

The Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist wanders Dixie in search of what makes it so intractably un-American.

Picking up, in a sense, where Confederates in the Attic (1998) left off, Horwitz (Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid that Sparked the Civil War, 2011, etc.) follows a fruitful trail in the footsteps of one-time journalist Frederick Law Olmsted, who traveled through the South reporting on the region for the precursor to the New York Times before reinventing himself as “a visionary architect of New York’s Central Park, among many other spaces.” Olmsted found a land bent on racial suppression, even as blacks and whites lived side by side, as well as one on the brink of civil war; Horwitz wonders how much things have changed since then. He discovered plenty of difference. For example, in West Virginia, a state that seceded from secession to rejoin the Union, the author passed time with coal miners who have been perfectly happy to destroy their almost-heaven while complaining that federal environmental scientists “find a puddle in your yard and call it a wetland.” Like Olmsted, Horwitz’s circuitous path took him along the Mississippi River and into Texas, perhaps the most schizophrenic of states today. As the resident of one East Texas town told him, after the author witnessed one scene after another of casual racism punctuated by an oddly easy mixing of black and white residents, the place is “somewhere between Mayberry and Deliverance.” Horwitz seldom reaches deep; his book is casually observed and travelogue-ish (“Eagle Pass was no longer a mud-and-whiskey bedlam at the edge of the American frontier”), more Paul Theroux than de Tocqueville. Still, one can’t help but notice that the things that occupied Olmsted’s attention haven’t changed much in the years since the earlier traveler toured a region that sometimes defies description.

Not as sprightly as some of the author’s past reports from the fringes but provocative and well worth reading.
A rich, anecdotal biography of one of the bestselling authors in publishing history.

**BECOMING DR. SEUSS**

Theodor Geisel and the Making of an American Imagination
Jones, Brian Jay
Dutton (496 pp.)
$32.00 | May 7, 2019
978-1-5247-4278-2

A rich, anecdotal biography of one of the bestselling authors in publishing history.

Theodor Seuss Geisel (1904-1991), aka Dr. Seuss, created more than 60 books, classified mostly as readers for children. However, as Jones (George Lucas: A Life, 2016, etc.) points out in this engaging, page-turning work of Seuss scholarship, Geisel was writing and illustrating for children and adults simultaneously. Some of his books could be considered in the vanguard of activism about environmental degradation (The Lorax), nuclear war (The Butter Battle Book), and an increasingly geriatric society (You’re Only Old Once and Oh, the Places You’ll Go). During his Massachusetts childhood and education at Dartmouth and then Oxford, Geisel developed his talent for drawing comic figures; early in his career, he earned his livelihood as a creator of advertisements for commercial products, including an insecticide. The shift to writing books for children occurred gradually, surprising almost everybody, including Geisel himself, who never had children. Used to being perceived as a funny guy, Geisel evolved into a serious thinker about how to develop books that would encourage children to read while also enjoying the learning process. Jones is particularly masterful in this vein, showing how Geisel, his wife, filmmaker/publisher Bennett Cerf, and other key collaborators collectively revolutionized reading education, with Dr. Seuss always reserving the final say. “Nearly thirty years after his death,” writes the author, “books by Dr. Seuss still sell as well and as fast as ever, rivaled only by the Harry Potter books by the brilliant J.K. Rowling—Geisel’s natural heir, as she reignited the same love for books in today’s young readers that Dr. Seuss had first sparked...fifty years earlier.” Though the narrative is strictly chronological, it never bogs down because the character sketches and publishing anecdotes are so well-rendered, and Jones is especially skillful with foreshadowing. Although sometimes exasperating to work with because of his exacting standards, Geisel comes across as a mostly kind, well-intentioned person.

 Whether readers are familiar with Dr. Seuss books or not, they will find this biography absorbing and fascinating.

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**SMOKIN’ JOE**

The Life of Joe Frazier
Kram Jr., Mark
Ecco/HarperCollins (320 pp.)
$27.99 | Jun. 4, 2019
978-0-06-265446-5

A spirited biography of the thunder-punching boxer.

Former Philadelphia Daily News sports-writer Kram Jr. (Like Any Normal Day: A Story of Devotion, 2012) picks up where his late father left off with his reporting for *Sports Illustrated* on the long feud between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier (1944-2011), particularly as played out in 1975 in a celebrated match, the “Thrilla in Manila.” As the story opens, Frazier—called “Smokin’ Joe” after promising the press corps that he would “come out smokin’” in a 1967 prizefight—is in a reflective mood, surprisingly gentle for someone reputed to be so fierce. Yet Frazier earned every bit of that reputation: “His way was the hard way,” writes the author. “In the ring, he lived and died by the simple yet daring principle of engagement that in order to deliver one bone-crunching blow, it was too frequently necessary to absorb three in exchange.” Absorb the blows he did, while pounding just about everyone who came up against him, including Rocky-era Sylvester Stallone, who recalls “a thunderous left hook that was planted extremely deep in my body.” The author speculates that Frazier, who died in 2011 with no autopsy, may have been finally felled by chronic traumatic encephalopathy following years of concussive blows. The author covers all the bases while focusing, appropriately, on the long enmity between Frazier and Ali, who called the younger boxer a “gorilla” and played mind games, race cards, and all sorts of mischief, later claiming that he did it to stir up attention and sales at the box office. Frazier was thought never to have forgiven Ali for the barrage of insults, but the closing of the narrative finds the two boxers in a tender moment, albeit one that might have blown apart had the two been their younger, healthier selves. The narrative is sometimes by-the-numbers, but Kram pays appropriate homage to a fighter who, though lacking in finesse, dominated heavyweight boxing for nearly a decade.

Bookish fans of the sweet science will flock to this biography.
Although the men often bickered and battled verbally with one another, they quick to assure us—and show us—that they are not mere trophy hunters but rather ecological ones. They eat what they kill, and they kill, it seems, respectfully. (In one scene, the author speaks to a buck he has just shot.) The author’s father believed that if he and his sons restored an old Michigan hunting camp he bought, it would improve their lives—and he was right. Year after year, they have planted, cultivated, and tenderly cared for the land, knowing that doing so would bring back the wildlife. Although the men often bickered and battled verbally with one another, they all eventually recognized the significance of what they created: unity and family. Kuipers alludes often to the land that animates him.

Lushly detailed and full of eco-devotion, this candid narrative has much to say about human beings bearing burdens, coping, and aiding one another.

**THE DEER CAMP**
*A Memoir of a Father, a Family, and the Land that Healed Them*

Kuipers, Dean

Bloomsbury (304 pp.)

$28.00 | May 14, 2019

978-1-63557-348-0

Kuipers (Operation Bite Back: Rod Coronado’s War to Save American Wilderness, 2009, etc.) returns with a frank, personal, and sometimes-painful account of his fractured family.

The author, who has written about environmental issues for decades, tells a grim but ultimately uplifting story about his family, mostly his father, a serial adulterer in his first marriage but a man whom his three sons loved (despite his dominant personality), a man who eventually, writes Kuipers, became a responsible adult. We learn about his father’s history as well as his two brothers, one of whom has long battled psychological issues. We learn about the women in these men’s lives (more than one divorce) and about their children. But the dominating, unifying factor in their experiences is hunting. Kuipers is quick to assure us—and show us—that they are not mere trophy hunters but rather ecological ones. They eat what they kill, and they kill, it seems, respectfully. (In one scene, the author speaks to a buck he has just shot.) The author’s father believed that if he and his sons restored an old Michigan hunting camp he bought, it would improve their lives—and he was right. Year after year, they have planted, cultivated, and tenderly cared for the land, knowing that doing so would bring back the wildlife. Although the men often bickered and battled verbally with one another, they all eventually recognized the significance of what they created: unity and family. Kuipers alludes often to the land that animates him.

Lushly detailed and full of eco-devotion, this candid narrative has much to say about human beings bearing burdens, coping, and aiding one another.

**APOLLO’S LEGACY**
*Perspectives on the Moon Landings*

Launius, Roger D.

Smithsonian Books (288 pp.)

$27.95 | May 14, 2019

978-1-58834-649-0

The former chief historian of NASA examines the history and lasting impact of America’s program to reach the moon.

Launius (The Smithsonian History of Space Exploration, 2018, etc.) begins with one of the most significant scientific feats of the 20th century, the July 20, 1969, landing of the Apollo 11 astronauts on the moon. After summing up that historic moment, he turns to the ways it has been viewed since: as an awesome achievement in its own right, a waste of valuable resources better used otherwise, an abuse of government power, or even (by a minority) a hoax. The author then examines every phase of the program: creating rockets powerful enough for the job, building the spacecraft and moon lander, and devising the technology to guide and control it—all of which had to be done from scratch. The human component—the astronauts and their support team—receives similar scrutiny, with a focus on how the astronauts were positioned (and marketed) as real-life heroes and how they were received by the public. As for its scientific impact, the program essentially changed our understanding of the moon, while attempts to apply its management principles to more mundane projects—e.g., city management—were less successful. One chapter takes the historian’s viewpoint, examining how the many artifacts generated by the program have or haven’t been preserved. Especially interesting is a chapter on how the images captured by the astronauts have made an impact on the world, notably the iconic images of the Earth from space. Launius even attempts—without notable success—to figure out why, despite all evidence, some continue to deny that the moon landing occurred. The book also provides extensive background material on the space program, both from within NASA and from outside observers, as well as a useful annotated bibliography for those who want to do their own research.

A valuable summary of an important piece of modern history and its effects and a must-read for space enthusiasts. (18 b/w images)

**FULL SURROGACY NOW**
*Feminism Against Family*

Lewis, Sophie

Verso (240 pp.)

$26.95 | May 7, 2019

978-1-78663-729-1

An incisive polemic on the surrogacy industry and the feminist movement to ban it.

Philadelphia-based translator, geographer, and queer feminist Lewis persuasively calls for “more surrogacy,” “more mutual aid,” and an “open-source, fully collaborative gestation.” Through an unapologetically queer, anti-capitalist lens, the author investigates the landscape of commercial surrogacy, a “reproductive meritocracy” where wealthy people are empowered to use reproductive technology that is materially and morally off-limits to others. The industry’s well-documented abuses, as well as the race and class dynamics that animate them, make it easy to anticipate feminist protest. Sadly, writes Lewis, “the surrogacy-critical among us must be almost as wary of the forces ranged against commercial surrogacy as we are wary of those profiting from it.” The author is both sardonic and
No books may be easy to write, per se, but few books have ever sounded more difficult for their author than What You Have Heard Is True: A Memoir of Witness and Resistance (March 19) seems to have been for Carolyn Forché. “I was trying to avoid writing it,” she tells me over the phone one afternoon. “I was scared to write it. It’s a shocking story. But eventually I just had to write it and let everything else fall away. This one had to be what it was. It was the most difficult story I could imagine telling, so of course I had to circle and avoid it and procrastinate.”

What You Have Heard Is True is Forché’s first memoir after a long career as a poet. She begins her story in 1977, when she is 27 years old and living in San Diego. A man arrives at her door—a man she has heard about from a friend. The man is Leonel Gómez Vides, a revolutionary and farmer and intellectual from El Salvador. He invites her to El Salvador. This begins a story of friendship grown somehow in a barren landscape that feels very close to hell, in the midst of the Salvadoran civil war. Death squads roam the landscape. Her life is directly in danger—all of this terror is suggested by Forché in the book’s first pages: “On this day, I will learn that the human head weighs about two and a half kilos, and a child’s head, something less.”

For Forché, this book marks an important moment. “This story has been my own secret, within myself, for many decades….For me, it’s a whole story now. I had to discover lots of things [to tell it]: I had to discover that, when you go to another place, you don’t come back—a changed person comes back.” —B.R.

Benjamin Rybeck is the author of a novel, The Sadness. What You Have Heard Is True received a starred review in the Feb. 1, 2019, issue.

perceptive in her deconstruction of anti-surrogacy feminism’s paternalistic, colonial, and transphobic logic. Noting profound connections to the “sex worker-exclusionary feminism” that clamors for rescue over rights, Lewis argues that “carceral solutions to the ‘problem’ of informal economies” ultimately obscure a more important question: “why is it assumed that one should be more against surrogacy than against other risky jobs”? If exploitation is the issue, how is work under capitalism itself implicated? The author’s proposal is as philosophical as it is pragmatic: Rather than surrogacy as we know it, we need a full surrogacy that “counteract[s] the exclusivity and supremacy of ‘biological’ parents in children’s lives” and uplifts the ingenuity of “polyparental abundance.” Lewis, an affluent white woman who has “never gestated nor worked as a surrogate,” takes care to acknowledge numerous black, native, and queer theorists/activists whose intellectual and revolutionary labor deeply informs her work. Some readers may balk at the author’s wry tone and breakneck pacing, but this explosive treatise is well worth the effort.

Intellectually demanding and irresistibly agitational, Lewis’ compact debut may very well convince readers to “[seize] the means of reproduction” alongside her.

FROM SCRATCH
A Memoir of Love, Sicily, and Finding Home
Locke, Tembi
Simon & Schuster (352 pp.)
$26.00 | May 7, 2019
978-1-5011-8765-0

In her literary debut, actor and TEDx speaker Locke offers a warm memoir of romance, wrenching loss, and healing.

Studying in Florence for a semester abroad, the author met Saro, a handsome Sicilian chef, whose sincerity and kindness, as well as “sultry” good looks, won her heart. “I think we could be something great,” he told her, conjuring “a vision of an us and greatness so effortlessly that it suddenly seemed as right as butter on bread. I was taken aback by his boldness, his certainty.” When Locke returned to college, Saro visited as often as he could, and finally he left his position, prospects, and—most wrenchingly—his family to move to the United States. They married hastily in New York with only a friend as witness; at a later celebration in Italy, though, his family refused to attend, disapproving of Saro’s marrying anyone but a Sicilian—especially a black American woman. Soon the author understood why Saro put off to the last minute telling his parents that he was leaving Italy to marry Locke’s family; on the other hand, “progressive, barrier-breaking Texas black folks,” were delighted—especially her father: Boisterous and gregarious, he arrived in Italy dressed “in full Texas regalia, complete with cowboy hat, denim pants, and alligator boots.” Her family wholeheartedly “claimed him as their own,” while Saro’s family’s disapproval haunted the early years of their marriage. Locke portrays their life together as otherwise idyllic: They moved from New York to Los Angeles in order to
foster her acting career, and they adopted an infant daughter—until Saro’s diagnosis with a rare cancer changed everything. By then, the couple’s relationship with Saro’s parents had thawed somewhat, and when Locke and her daughter returned to Sicily to bury Saro’s ashes, they were nurtured—not only spiritually and emotionally, but with traditional, and abundant, Sicilian food.

The author includes recipes at the end.

A captivating story of love lost and found.

HAIG’S COUP
How Richard Nixon’s Closest Aide Forced Him from Office
Locker, Ray
Potomac Books (432 pp.)
$32.95 | May 1, 2019
978-1-64012-035-8

Journalist Locker (Nixon’s Gamble: How a President’s Own Secret Government Destroyed His Administration, 2015) continues to unravel White House intrigue during Richard M. Nixon’s administration by focusing on the outsized persona of Alexander Haig (1924-2010).

During his career, Haig combined his high-ranking military status with his role as Nixon’s White House chief of staff to place his imprint on U.S. foreign and domestic policy initiatives. The author focuses less on those initiatives than on Haig’s devious roles within the corrupt Nixon presidency. After Haig realized the extent of the corruption, he pretended to serve as Nixon’s confidant while actually maneuvering to drive him from the presidency. However, Locker rarely ascribes noble motives to Haig, suggesting instead that his vanity drove him to believe that he could direct the fate of the nation better than any elected politician. Haig published his own version of events in a 1992 memoir, Inner Circles: How America Changed the World, a book that Locker claims is filled with exaggerations and outright falsehoods. After presenting a brief biography of Haig, Locker chronicles the unraveling of the Nixon presidency in month-by-month chapters beginning in May 1973 and ending in August 1974. Locker’s account is especially revelatory when he moves away from the convoluted scandals of Watergate and explains how Haig maneuvered to place Gerald Ford as Nixon’s successor. That maneuvering required the jettisoning of initial vice president Spiro Agnew, whose corrupt years as Maryland’s governor caught up with him. Ford replaced Agnew, at which juncture Haig felt comfortable accelerating the timetable for Nixon’s departure. When the author delves further into Watergate, he provides copious details about dozens of already well-known characters. In many instances, the author criticizes the work of Bob Woodward and his mostly hidden source relationship with Haig. Though the chronological structure of the narrative leads to repetition and sometimes difficult-to-digest detail, Locker’s reconsideration of the Nixon administration offers enough fresh insight to make it worthwhile.

A useful historical document on the seemingly evergreen topic of the Nixon White House.

WORDS AND WORLDS
From Autobiography to Zippers
Lurie, Alison
Delphinium (225 pp.)
$25.00 | May 14, 2019
978-1-883285-78-4


Although a few of the essays—e.g., on women’s decisions to change their surnames after marriage, the meaning of aprons, or fashion’s arcane rules—seem dated and others rather slight, most are engaging. Among the liveliest are the author’s recollections of friendships with editor Barbara Epstein, writer and artist Edward Gorey, and poet James Merrill. Lurie met Epstein when both were students at Radcliffe—in the 1940s, Radcliffe women were “poor relations” compared to Harvard men, Lurie recalls in “Their Harvard”—and was impressed at once by her “quiet, often almost invisible brilliance” and her capacious reading. When Epstein became editor at the New York Review of Books, Lurie relied gratefully on both her editorial skill and “remarkable” tact. Also remembered with affection is the “immensely intelligent, perceptive, amusing, inventive, skeptical,” and “scarily gifted artist” Gorey, whom Lurie first met at a quirky bookstore in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They took excursions to make tombstone rubbings, were involved in the Poets’ Theatre of Cambridge, and, later, when both lived in Manhattan, became best friends. Gorey was inspired to write The Doubtful Guest by Lurie’s offhand comment that having a young child around all the time “was like having a houseguest who never said anything and never left.” Equally warm is Lurie’s portrait of Merrill, whom she admired for “how intensely aware he was of language, even in the most casual and banal circumstances.” One of the longest, and most captivating, essays, “What Happened in Hamlet,” recounts Lurie’s experience watching a month of rehearsals as Jonathan Miller directed the play in 1974, with Irene Worth as Gertrude and Peter Eyre as the beleaguered prince. Worth, Lurie writes, even offstage, emoted as if she had an audience of 500. Musings on “Pinocchio,” the Babar tales, Harry Potter, and “Rapunzel” stand out among essays on children’s books.

An appealing miscellany.
A marvelous journey brimming with adventure and poetry and narrated by a keen, compassionate observer.

**ARABS**

A 3,000-Year History of Peoples, Tribes and Empires  
Mackintosh-Smith, Tim  
Yale Univ (656 pp.)  
$35.00 | May 1, 2019  
978-0-300-18028-2

An engaging history of the Arab world by a Yemen-based Westerner thoroughly versed in Arabic.

One clarifying theme runs throughout this extensive, illuminating narrative of the Arab people from ancient to modern times: language. Long before the writing of the Quran, the language that “evolved on the tongues of tribal soothsayers and poets...has long, perhaps always, been the catalyst of a larger Arab identity.” Arabist and translator Mackintosh-Smith (*Yemen: The Unknown Arabia*, 2014, etc.), a senior fellow at the Library of Arabic Literature who has lived in the Arab world for 35 years, structures his study around “three waves of unity” in Arab history that originated from the “momentum of ‘arabbiyyah, the high language par excellence.” These included the slow, ancient tribal agitation of self-awareness; the “tsunami” of conquest inspired by Muhammad’s Quranic recitations; and the 19th-century nationalism awakened by Napoleon’s conquest. “That last wave,” writes the author, “is still breaking now.” Throughout this impressive book, Mackintosh-Smith grapples with coexisting “rationalities” of Arab history: the “settled” society, or the civil polity where people lived together in a town; and the Bedouin or nomadic tradition. The rugged, dry terrain and lack of fresh water kept the people of the Arabian subcontinent in perpetual mobility (another theme) and imparted the masterful pairing of two beasts of burden—the camel and horse—that enabled the Arabs’ transformation from “plodding hauliers into dashing warriors.” The author demonstrates the power of rhetoric by the orator-leaders who “gathered the word”—of the people, recorded battles, etc.—even before Muhammad channeled that energy in disciplined Quranic teaching and embarked on his state-building years in Medina. Over the course of an extensive, consistently fascinating history, Mackintosh-Smith expertly picks and chooses his details and analyses, providing an admirably complete picture of a consistently misunderstood part of world history and culture. In addition to illustrations and maps, the author includes a useful chronology delineating both “events” and elements of “language, culture, society, identity.”

*A marvelous journey brimming with adventure and poetry and narrated by a keen, compassionate observer.*

(illustrations and maps)

**CODE BLUE**

Inside America’s Medical Industrial Complex  
Magee, Mike  
Atlantic Monthly (368 pp.)  
$27.00 | May 7, 2019  
978-0-8021-2905-5

A doctor and medical historian relies on his experience inside the medical establishment to offer a searing and persuasive exposé of the American health care system.

Magee, who is on the faculty of Presidents College at the University of Hartford, has worked as a doctor, a university medical school administrator, a hospital executive, and head of global medical affairs for Pfizer. About that last position, the author writes, “until I turned away in a kind of revulsion at the manipulation and well-financed maneuvering, I was right there, helping give moral cover and scientific legitimacy to the world’s largest drugmaker, which also happens to be an industry leader in penalty fees paid to the government for regulatory infractions.” Clearly, Magee understands that he has been complicit as an insider, and he issues mea culpas throughout the book. As part of his penance, he blows the whistle on guilty industry leaders in penalty fees paid to the government for regulatory infractions. “That last wave,” writes the author, “is still breaking now.” Throughout this impressive book, Mackintosh-Smith grapples with coexisting “rationalities” of Arab history: the “settled” society, or the civil polity where people lived together in a town; and the Bedouin or nomadic tradition. The rugged, dry terrain and lack of fresh water kept the people of the Arabian subcontinent in perpetual mobility (another theme) and imparted the masterful pairing of two beasts of burden—the camel and horse—that enabled the Arabs’ transformation from “plodding hauliers into dashing warriors.” The author demonstrates the power of rhetoric by the orator-leaders who “gathered the word”—of the people, recorded battles, etc.—even before Muhammad channeled that energy in disciplined Quranic teaching and embarked on his state-building years in Medina. Over the course of an extensive, consistently fascinating history, Mackintosh-Smith expertly picks and chooses his details and analyses, providing an admirably complete picture of a consistently misunderstood part of world history and culture. In addition to illustrations and maps, the author includes a useful chronology delineating both “events” and elements of “language, culture, society, identity.”

*A marvelous journey brimming with adventure and poetry and narrated by a keen, compassionate observer.*

(illustrations and maps)
A pulp, precisely rendered account of the CIA’s dalliance with organized crime in pursuit of Fidel Castro.

Former Newsday investigative reporter Maier (When Lions Roar: The Churchills and the Kennedys, 2014, etc.) provides fresh eyes and an urgent tone in this unsettling narrative. “Historically,” he writes, “the CIA’s murder plot against Castro marked America’s first foray into the assassination business....The tradition of gentlemen spies engaged in gathering intelligence...had now transformed into the killing games of covert operations, carried out by gangsters and other CIA surrogates.” The author makes his rendition of an oft-referenced tale compelling by focusing on statements by key figures who fought to preserve their secrecy. Maier credits “recently declassified files about the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy” for this verisimilitude. The labyrinthine narrative veers from Castro’s 1959 revolution to Watergate and the 1975 Church Committee investigation of the intelligence agencies. Essentially, CIA go-between Robert Maheu approached Mafia members Sam Giancana and Johnny Roselli to pursue assassination plots against Castro. Other CIA officers helped Roselli set up a formidable network of training camps for Cuban exiles in Florida, but their plans were disrupted following the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the Cuban missile crisis. Roselli and others defied assignment out of patriotic fervor. The gangsters’ friendship with the Rat Pack provided a back-channel and electoral assistance to JFK, and their disappointment with his presidency would fuel conspiracy theories after his assassination, though Roselli hinted at connections to avengeful Castro instead. Maier’s writing is approachable (if occasionally repetitive), almost breezy, despite the dark undertones and the violence surrounding Giancana and Roselli, both of whom were murdered in the mid-1970s.

As he has done before, Maier offers another deft translation of murky American history, focused on dynamic, improbable protagonists.
Mulgrew pays homage to her mother and father, their deep, at times troubled union, and the intense bonds she shared with each. She dedicates the first half of the book to her father, a charming alcoholic tormented by the fact that he “wasn’t a winner but...wasn’t a loser, either.” The author’s relationship with him simmered with tension over the years, and when his wife, Joan, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, it was the author whom she named her health care guardian. In the second half of the book, Mulgrew tells the story of her mother. Though outwardly vibrant, Joan had been made inwardly fragile by the loss of her own mother at an early age. She married Tom, “who had wooed her with...tenacity” and promises of happiness, only to find mediocrity. His drinking drove her to take solo trips from home and temporary refuge in the arms of a handsome local priest. The author became her source of strength when death and disappointment marred her later life. Like Born with Teeth, this book is self-consciously literary and sometimes overwritten. Nonetheless, the narrative offers a rich, eloquent, and emotionally complex portrait of parent-child bonds and a colorful, unforgettable family.

On the whole, Mulgrew delivers another candid and moving memoir.

**ALL THE WAY**

*My Life in Four Quarters*

Namath, Joe with Yäger, Don

Little, Brown (240 pp.)

$30.00 | May 28, 2019

978-0-316-42110-2


Tom Brady may always live with Deflategate hanging over his head, but such shenanigans were the coin of the realm when, half a century ago, Namath was a household word. During one game, he writes, he filed down five thumbtacks and taped them to his fingers to better grip the ball. It was ill-conceived: As he writes, “the ball stuck to the tacks just long enough so the release was too low,” and his passes went straight into the turf. “So the tacks didn’t work,” he adds, with characteristic amiability, “but hey, in the days before playing gloves, the idea was worth a try.” Both all-out star and team player, Namath has much to say on the inspirational front about trying, getting smacked down and dusting yourself off, and the usual sports stuff. He also discusses the N-word, divorce, booze, adultery, and other off-field violations of decor, taste, and ethics, and he has a very long memory for past injuries and insults as well as triumphs: “Oakland was real good, but certainly had some players who completely disregarded the rules of decent sportsmanship.” “This victory, the biggest upset in professional football championship history, was for all underdogs to be shared by all the underdogs.” Though he professes to hate writing, calling himself a “reluctant author” who’d much rather be outside playing, he’s got a handle on the storytelling racket. If it’s not especially literary, it’s good fun, with Burt Reynolds, Janis Joplin, Elvis Presley, and other assorted luminaries joining in. And if you want to know how his
The riveting life of a deeply flawed diplomat whose chief shortcoming seems to have been the need to be more recognized than he was.

OUR MAN

Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century

Packer, George

Knopf (608 pp.)

$30.00 | May 7, 2019
978-0-307-95802-0

The riveting life of a deeply flawed diplomat whose chief shortcoming seems to have been the need to be more recognized than he was.

New Yorker staff writer Packer (The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America, 2013, etc.), winner of the National Book Award, was a friend of the diplomat and foreign policy specialist Richard Holbrooke (1941-2010), one of whose signal accomplishments was navigating through the endless difficulties of Balkan ethnic politics to negotiate peace in the former Yugoslavia. When it came to national interest versus universal principles of human rights and the like, “Holbrooke favored the former while making gestures toward the latter.” Still, faced with the ugly realities of such things as the Cambodian genocide, which, as one of the “best and the brightest” of the American technocrats in Vietnam, he bore some responsibility for, he stretched to accommodate justice. Serving one administration after another, Holbrooke accumulated friends and favors; he also made powerful enemies, and it was not always easy to tell one from the other. As a sometime outsider—he was descended from a Jewish immigrant named Golbraich—he desperately longed for power, wanting especially to rule over Foggy Bottom as Secretary of State. Alas, he did not achieve his aim, though Packer supposes he was worthy enough. Instead, he served other leaders, such as Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, the latter of whom considered him disruptive. The author notes Holbrooke’s real accomplishments along the way, including founding an American cultural center in Germany and achieving delicate balancing acts in the intractable mess of Afghanistan. As Packer notes, he also had a “huge appetite for details [and] need to understand from the ground up,” attributes that not every American diplomat shares. In the end, though egotistical and quick to be insulted, Holbrooke was also, by Packer’s absorbing account, highly capable.

Students of recent world history and of American power, hard and soft, will find this an endlessly fascinating study of character and events. (35 illustrations; 3 maps)
An exploration of a significant year in late-20th-century film.

In a year shrouded in worldwide concerns over Y2K, filmmakers “shared one unspoken trait,” writes Raftery (High-Status Characters: How the Upright Citizens Brigade Stormed a City, Started a Scene, and Changed Comedy Forever, 2013, etc.): the “ambition to make something no one had seen before.” Whether it was the greatest year ever is highly debatable (likely not), but the author, thanks to more than 100 interviews with key players, offers a spirited celebration of the year’s movies. As Sam Mendes, creator of the “dark, suburban fantasy” American Beauty, told Raftery, “it’s astonishing how many different genres were being redefined.” The author examines more than 30 films, mostly American, from January’s “jumpy, star-free vomit comet,” The Blair Witch Project, to December’s “movie-ist movie of the year,” Magnolia. He does a fine job taking us behind the scenes to reveal how the films were made, actors chosen, and film scores written. In addition to the blockbusters—Star Wars: Episode One—The Phantom Menace, The Sixth Sense, Three Kings—the author discusses smaller films, including Iron Giant, The Best Man, and The Wood. Tom Twyker said his German film, Run Lola Run, was about “breaking the chains of our existence.” The Matrix, Raftery writes, tried “to make sense of the confusion and unease that were beginning to take hold in the late nineties.” Office Space “was intended to reflect the new decade’s collective middle-class malaise” and had a “lucrative afterlife” in DVD sales. Though he doesn’t make a fully convincing case for the importance of 1999 in film history, Raftery offers plenty of interesting trivia—e.g., Brad Pitt’s then-girlfriend, Jennifer Aniston, shaved his head for Fight Club. Other interviewees include Edward Norton, Reese Witherspoon, Kirsten Dunst, Steven Soderbergh, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Taye Diggs, and “the man who played Jar Jar Binks.”

Fun, light entertainment for devoted moviegoers.

The renowned food writer recounts her adventures as editor-in-chief of the noted epicurean magazine Gourmet in its last decade.

A native New Yorker, Reichl (My Kitchen Year: 136 Recipes that Saved My Life, 2015, etc.) grew up reading the magazine, and food soon became her “own private way of looking at the world.” While working as a chef in Berkeley, California, in the 1970s, she began writing about food, at New West and then the Los Angeles Times, before returning to New York to become the formidable restaurant critic for the New York Times. In 1999, at age 51, somewhat fearfully—she lacked magazine experience and faced managing a staff of 60—Reichl took the editorial helm of Gourmet, at six times her Times salary plus perks, with free rein from Condé Nast publisher Si Newhouse to revamp the staid magazine. In this fun, gossipy, and beguiling memoir, Reichl offers revealing glimpses of her parents, both introduced in earlier books, but the focus is on the heady process of “magazine making,” which meant turning an old-fashioned book into a modern, edgy monthly. She describes the exhilaration of working with talented, quirky staffers, and she provides vivid snapshots of Condé Nast honchos, including publishers Newhouse (supportive) and Gina Sanders (who “relished” fights) as well as the “large, loud,” yet appealing CEO Steve Florio, who regaled her with tales of Newhouse (“You know that Roy Cohn was his closest friend?”). Throughout, the author tells winning stories—of goings-on in the celebrated Condé Nast cafeteria, midnight parties for chefs, zany annual meetings, and providing food to 9/11 firefighters. Her success in introducing provocative articles like David Rakoff’s “Some Pig,” about Jews and bacon, and David Foster Wallace’s classic “Consider the Lobster,” on the ethics of eating, taught her that “when something frightens me, it is definitely worth doing.” A dream job, it ended in the late-2000s recession, when declining ads forced the closing of the venerable publication.

An absolutely delightful reading experience.
One of the most talented—and controversial—players in the history of Major League Baseball shares his life story.

When Rose (b. 1941) set his on-field records during the 1970s and ’80s, he became famous for his high-energy performances as well as his tough-guy brashness. He opens the book by noting, “my dad taught me that nothing mattered more than winning.” Later, he earned a different sort of renown: for his gambling on the outcomes of games, which led to the sport’s commissioner banning Rose from the game. So far, the ban has blocked his induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Based solely on performance, Rose, the game’s all-time hits leader, is one of the most deserving Hall of Fame candidates in history, and controversy about whether his apparently victimless gambling should prohibit his entry might never end. The author addresses his gambling and the ban it yielded in a few pages toward the end of the book, and the tone of those pages is difficult to characterize; it’s a cryptic tumble of sentences that is half apology and half defiance. As for the remainder of the book, Rose builds the explanation of his successes and his quirks around the influence of his father, who held a day job in Cincinnati but became best known locally for his semiprofessional athletic prowess. Over and over the author describes how his father emphasized winning for the team no matter the physical and emotional costs. From his early childhood, Rose felt confident that he would reach professional baseball even though the odds are extremely slim for anyone. Unfortunately, the narrative is marred by an absurd amount of repetition regarding the author’s macho nature and his immodesty about his hard-won skills. But when he tones down the attitude, his recollections about baseball—and life off the field—yield rewards for readers.

In a baseball memoir filled with plenty of strikes and balls, Rose offers abundant evidence of why he has become a touchstone of controversy.
A shape-shifting debut memoir about a family’s coming to terms with schizophrenia—or not.

Essayist and critic Sardy delivers an extraordinarily ambitious and accomplished narrative about significant challenges. She chronicles the immense difficulties in trying to maintain a semblance of sanity while both her mother and brother suffer through schizophrenia that they refuse to acknowledge, with the rest of the family in various states of denial as well. The structure keeps readers off balance, as the author refuses to follow conventional notions of chronology or connection, illuminating mental illness from the inside out. “Mental illness is not contagious, but madness often is,” she writes, a crucial distinction in her exploration of how, “in my family, psychotic illness has threaded its way through four generations in a row” and how those not afflicted have suffered through the effects of coming to terms with the delusions of schizophrenia, which seem so real to the one suffering and so outlandish to anyone else. At the outset, the book seems to be a memoir about coming-of-age while the author’s mother was falling apart, refusing to acknowledge her condition, spending all of her sizable inheritance, and telling her daughter that now is a particularly good time to emigrate to Pluto. Meanwhile, her father, whom her mother refused to acknowledge as such, remained in a state of denial while trying to provide a safe harbor when he had the children. Yet much more of the narrative concerns her relationship through her 20s with her brother, who showed similar signs of disintegration from schizophrenia, resisted diagnosis and treatment, and suffered from increasingly harmful delusions, leaving him in jail or homeless—though rarely completely out of touch with his family. The author herself suffers from bouts of depression, which she acknowledges and probes in her unsettling narrative.

Both powerful and disturbing, this impressive debut memoir suggests just how challenging it can be to regain some semblance of balance after that balance is lost.
In this calm, deeply informed, and accessible consideration of artificial intelligence, Shadbolt (Computer Science/Oxford Univ.; co-author: *The Spy in The Coffee Machine: The End of Privacy as We Know It, 2014*) and Hampson, an economist who has implemented technological change in the public sector, examine our lives as “digital apes” in a “super-fast and hyper-complex interconnected world of immensely powerful devices.” Recalling the “utter interdependence of *Homo sapiens* and tools, each shaping the other over the millennia,” and the rise of AI, the authors offer a leisurely, engaging account of our present digital landscape, explaining how mathematically driven technologies affect us every day. Algorithms, they write, run “significant parts of our lives.” The authors range widely, covering robotics, gene editing, “social machines” (Wikipedia, etc.), the rise of giant tech companies, and AI and the world of work, and they find both challenges and opportunities. Rich in ideas and insights, the book is especially strong on our growing personal relationships with Alexa and other robots. “We are optimists,” write the authors, dismissing predictions of machines running amok in the streets: “It will be a long time before people have to worry about self-aware AIs, let alone jealous or malevolent ones....[W]e are more afraid of what harm natural stupidity, rather than artificial intelligence, might wreak in the next 50 years of gradually more pervasive machines and smartness.” Besides, humans control “the supply of silicon and aluminum and the power switch.” However, the broad population does not manage the tech elites who make digital decisions. “A dozen white American businessmen” dominate the world of AI through “private mega-corporations, extraordinarily rich and answerable only to themselves.” The authors describe the many dangers of mixing digital elites and machines, and they urge readers to remain vigilant and choose wisely.

An upbeat—even reassuring—take on what will be an AI-saturated future.

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**UNSPEAKABLE**

*The Things We Cannot Say*

Shawcross, Harriet

Canongate (352 pp.)

$26.00 | May 7, 2019

978-1-78689-004-7

A British filmmaker and journalist documents the mysteries of selective speechlessness.

In her affecting debut, Shawcross charts the lives and struggles of people for whom interactive communication has become a virtually insurmountable feat. As a homesick exchange student studying English at the University of California, the author discovered the writings of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet George Oppen. She was fascinated by the fact that he abandoned poetry for more than two decades after serving in World War II. The author also reports on childhood selective mutism, following the unique activity and progress at a New York camp for mute teenagers, and she discusses how menstruation has been tabooed to almost mythical proportions in the mountains of far west Nepal. Shawcross chronicles her time at a Buddhist retreat and her visit with a silent order of nuns in central London where peacefulness is golden and ritualistic. “The...sisters have renounced almost all contact with the world....Their lives are dedicated to prayer.” Shawcross refers often to Oppen's life and poetry, which serves as a kind of anchor to her narrative. She shares an enlightening interview with Eve Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues*, a project the author participated in. Braided throughout these profiles and stories is Shawcross’s moving personal history. As a child, she’d lost the ability to speak in conversation with others and retreated into her own silent world. This development was spurred by the permanent arrival of her grandmother into the family home and the shame of her father’s sudden unemployment. “I never intended to stop talking....It felt safer, easier somehow, to say the bare minimum,” she writes. Those years of self-imposed pseudo-silence shaped her as a future journalist and a pensive filmmaker but also plagued her romantic relationships with women. Though she slowly found her own voice again in adulthood, the author still admits to experiencing difficulty in saying what she feels even on the brink of marriage, an “alien” but welcome concept to her.

A curious, intensive exploration of the eccentric world of silence and solitude.

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**NO VISIBLE BRUISES**

*What We Don’t Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us*

Snyder, Rachel Louise

Bloomsbury (320 pp.)

$28.00 | May 7, 2019

978-1-61597-097-7

A powerful exploration of the sinister, insidious nature of domestic violence in America.

As an international reporter for more than two decades, Snyder (Literature/American Univ.; *What We’ve Lost Is Nothing, 2014*, etc.) encountered regular acts of violence against women adjacent to the issues she covered. The grim statistics about and the prevalence of unreported incidents both startled and motivated her to begin chronicling the universality of an issue that “is too often hidden.” Through a graphically portrayed series of in-depth profiles, the author discusses how domestic violence has reached epidemic levels while efforts to curb the trend have been historically underfunded and ineffective. She elucidates this point in stories spotlighting both victims and assailants alongside the investigators and family members who’ve become all-consumed with sleuthing the crimes that have torn their relationships apart. She also tackles the complex conundrum facing victims of familial violence who choose to remain in abusive households. Intriguingly, Snyder probes the chilling territory of the perpetrators, sketching them from the inside out. Especially memorable is the author’s incisive coverage of
A thrilling history of the development of the theory of relativity.

**EINSTEIN’S WAR**

*How Relativity Triumphed Amid the Vicious Nationalism of World War I*

Stanley, Matthew

Dutton (400 pp.)

$28.00 | May 21, 2019

978-1-5247-4541-7

An obscure enemy scientist, but this did not prevent Eddington from initiating plans, even as the war raged, for the famous 1919 eclipse expedition. The author excels in explaining its surprisingly complex details, the tedious work required to tease out the minuscule bending of starlight that obeyed Einstein’s prediction, and the still stunning explosion of adulation that resulted when results were announced.

Stanley gives history priority over science. His explanation of general relativity will be a stretch for readers unfamiliar with college physics, but he delivers a superb account of Edison’s and Eddington’s spectacularly successful struggles to work and survive under miserable wartime conditions.

**THE MAKING OF A JUSTICE**

*Reflections on My First 94 Years*

Stevens, John Paul

Little, Brown (560 pp.)

$35.00 | May 14, 2019

978-0-316-48964-5

The retired Supreme Court justice chronicles his impressive life story, including his 34-year tenure with the court.

Born in 1920, Stevens (Six Amendments: How and Why We Should Change the Constitution, 2014, etc.) recounts his privileged upbringing, early law career, and lower-court experience before providing nearly 400 pages of year-by-year decision-making as a Supreme Court justice. A Republican appointed by President Gerald Ford, Stevens transcended the party ideology of many court colleagues in order to work together with those appointed by Democratic presidents. Despite the conventional wisdom of court chroniclers who identify justices as “conservative” or “liberal,” the author’s majority opinions and dissents cannot be easily pigeonholed. He candidly shares his thought processes on hundreds of cases, often openly criticizing his fellow justices for their lack of legal acumen and/or lack of compassion. Stevens is frequently critical of justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas for the refuge they have sought in the theory of originalism. Refreshingly, though, the author never attacks his fellow justices in a personal, gossipy manner, and he discusses his varying degrees of friendship with each of them. Stevens theorizes that the dynamics of the court—and the nature of the rulings—undergo transformation every time a new justice joins. As a result, the author presents brief sections about the immediate impact of each new justice during his 34 years, ending with his successor in 2010, Elena Kagan. Although Stevens reveres the court’s reputation as a nonpartisan arbiter, he realizes that reputation has never fully recovered from the politically tinged 5-4 ruling in 2000 that handed the presidency to George W. Bush rather than Al Gore. The author also offers searing commentary on cases involving abortion rights, gun control, wrongful convictions in criminal courts, campaign finance, and many other ongoing societal issues.
The author’s consistently absorbing commentary on a wide variety of legal cases will require close attention by readers, but the payoff is worth it. (two 8-page color inserts)

**THE PERFECT PREDATOR**
*A Scientist’s Race to Save Her Husband from a Deadly Superbug: A Memoir*
Strathdee, Steffanie & Patterson, Thomas
Hachette (352 pp.)
$28.00 | May 21, 2019
978-0-316-41808-9

A real-life medical thriller that proves when science, medicine, and perseverance align, “the impossible becomes possible.”

In 2015, infectious disease epidemiologist Strathdee (Global Health Sciences/Univ. of California, San Diego School of Medicine) and her husband, Patterson, a psychologist, were on vacation in Egypt when he was infected with one of the deadliest antibiotic-resistant superbugs on the planet. In a few terrifying days, his health deteriorated to the point where it was uncertain whether modern medicine could help him. As Strathdee writes, “Tom was quickly becoming the poster child for the dystopian future of the post-antibiotic age.” In this fast-paced memoir, the authors describe how Strathdee scoured scientific history and identified an unconventional cure: phage therapy, in which a virus is utilized as a bacterial killer. The catch was that phage therapy hadn’t been used in the United States in nearly a century, and no one knew how to find the right virus, purify it to meet FDA standards, and administer it safely. Miraculously, Strathdee overcame every one of these obstacles with the help of kindhearted and intrepid researchers from around the world. The catch was that phage therapy hadn’t been used in the United States in nearly a century, and no one knew how to find the right virus, purify it to meet FDA standards, and administer it safely. Miraculously, Strathdee overcame every one of these obstacles with the help of kindhearted and intrepid researchers from around the world. The potential heartbeat that lurks within every chapter, the writing is always infused with humor, hope, and intelligence, and the couple’s remarkable story is grounded in real-life details that bring readers directly into their world: desperate late-night emails to people who might help, on-the-fly Googling of critical care lingo, impromptu dance parties at Tom’s bedside. The book also includes dark, surreal poetic interludes from Patterson’s perspective, providing a glimpse into the patient’s mindset, an interesting contrast to the chronicle of his wife’s relentless effort to save him.

Strathdee’s recognition as one of *TIME*’s 50 Most Influential People in Health Care is unquestionably well-deserved; as this page-turning book shows, she is a hero whose insight and determination could serve as models to help save many more lives.

**GRINNELL**
*America’s Environmental Pioneer and His Drive to Save the West*
Taliaferro, John
Liveright/Norton (608 pp.)
$35.00 | Jun. 4, 2019
978-1-63149-013-2

A biography of a 19th-century naturalist who worked tirelessly on behalf of America’s wilderness and Native American rights.

Beginning in 1870, with his first trip west, George Bird Grinnell (1849-1938) evolved into one of the most prominent conservationists in America, a friend of Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, and many native tribal leaders. He campaigned to establish national parks, the Audubon Society, and the New York Zoological Society; edited the long-running journal *Forest and Stream*; founded the Boone and Crockett Club, whose mission it was to preserve large game; and published many ethnographies of Plains tribes. Drawing on 40,000 pages of correspondence, 50 diaries and notebooks, and an unfinished autobiography, Taliaferro (*All the Great Prizes: The Life of John Hay, from Lincoln to Roosevelt*, 2013, etc.) thoroughly—and with due admiration—documents the life of “a man of worthy causes.” He acknowledges, however, the limitations of his sources: “Possibly Grinnell was simply too busy and proper to indulge in self-reflection. Or was there something he wanted to avoid reflecting upon?” Although the author hints at “secrets,” he reveals little about Grinnell’s intimate relationships with friends and family, including his wife, whom he suddenly married in 1902. A photographer, she energetically accompanied him on his trips west, where he exulted in freedom from the commercial world of New York and experienced the “magnificent drama” of events such as the Pawnee buffalo hunt: “the most momentous, the most defining experience” of Grinnell’s life. “There is something rather horrible in the wild and savage excitement that one feels under such circumstances,” he said of another hunt. Taliaferro portrays Grinnell evenhandedly as a man of his time: Seeing the oppression suffered by Native Americans, Grinnell urged recognition that they “are humans like ourselves”; still, he “hewed to the prevailing anthropological wisdom that Indians were only midway up the ladder from savagery to civilization.” Grinnell’s life, Taliaferro aptly concludes, “was a study in romanticism, evolution, and progressivism.”

*A fine biography of a significant environmental champion.* (16 pages of b/w illustrations)
A biographical of a self-described “geologist” who worked to deepen humanity’s connection to nature.

Priest, historian, and environmentalist, Thomas Berry (1914-2009) was an inspiring teacher and writer whose most influential works focused on cosmology and ecology. Tucker and Grim (Yale Divinity School and the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies; Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology, 2016), both Berry’s former students, remained closely involved with their esteemed teacher, editing his essays for publication; promoting his legacy; and serving as his literary executors. Along with Angyal (Emeritus, English and Environmental Studies/Elon Univ.; Wendell Berry, 1995, etc.), they offer an admiring biography of a man they call “a Renaissance thinker,” quoting extensively from Berry’s prolific writings and unpublished memoirs. Educated in Catholic schools, Berry felt drawn to a priestly vocation. Religion, he said, exerted on him the call of the wild: “the meaning and symbolisms of the various natural phenomena, the manner in which the transition moments in the daily and yearly cycles of nature were sacred moments.” The order of the Passionists attracted him especially because he hoped to be sent to their missions in China. Although his stay in China was cut short by the Maoist revolution, it inspired a lifelong interest in Asian religions, which he incorporated into his studies and teaching. In the History of Religions graduate program at Fordham University, which he initiated, he also taught classes on American Indian religions and on the meaning of symbols, based on the work of Mircea Eliade and Carl Jung. Influenced by the religious philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin, in 1970, Berry established the Riverdale Center for Religious Research, where, he wrote, “Human-Earth relations became the central issue” of study. Throughout his life, the authors assert, “the allure of the cosmos penetrated his psyche.” He called for a merging of science and the humanities and advocated for the creation of Earth Jurisprudence to address “the devastating impact of industrial culture on the survival of the planet.”

A warm celebration of an environmentalist whose ideas are increasingly relevant. (53 b/w photos)

A skillful mixture of biographies, on-field action, and behind-the-scenes baseball politics in a story with a happy ending for Dodgers fans.

The spirited tale of a unique Major League Baseball championship team.

While less vaunted than the 1927 or 1961 New York Yankees, the 1981 Los Angeles Dodgers produced enough fireworks to deserve significant attention, and Turbow (Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastical: Reggie, Rollie, Catfish, and Charlie Finley’s Swingin’ A’s, 2017) delivers the goods. He begins with the frustrating 1970s, when the Dodgers continued to win without winning the World Series. He claims that the painful 1978 loss—four defeats after winning the first two games—so demoralized the team that it sunk below .500 in 1979, finishing third in the division. The 1980 season also ended badly when the Dodgers tied for first place only to lose a one-game playoff to the Houston Astros. Many fans remember the 1981 strike, which was inspired by the owners’ distress at free agency. The author’s detailed, blow-by-blow account tells readers perhaps more than they want to know. Far more entertaining were the games themselves, beginning opening day. With starters either injured or unavailable, for the first time in baseball history, a rookie became opening-day pitcher: Fernando Valenzuela, who threw a shutout, proceeded to win his first eight games, launched “Fernandomania,” and became the first pitcher to win rookie of the year and the Cy Young award. With superb pitching and celebrated infielders Steve Garvey, Davey Lopes, Bill Russell, and Ron Cey in the last of their many years together, they led their division when play halted in June. Play resumed in August following controversial rules under which the Dodgers, having won the division in the first round, were guaranteed a playoff position. Perhaps as a result, they played poorly, finishing fourth. Turbow devotes nearly half the book to the postseason, which featured as much grit and luck as heroism but ended well when the Dodgers lost two World Series games to the Yankees but then won four straight.

A skillful mixture of biographies, on-field action, and behind-the-scenes baseball politics in a story with a happy ending for Dodgers fans. (8-page b/w photo insert)
MIND IN MOTION
How Action Shapes Thought
Tversky, Barbara
Basic (384 pp.)
$32.00 | May 21, 2019
978-0-465-09306-9

An earnest effort to describe how our physical movements and the movements of those around us shape our consciousness.

Scientists seeking to explain how we think—no one has fully succeeded yet—prefer to focus on language and perception. According to Tversky (Emerita, Psychology/Stanford Univ.; Induced Pictorial Representations, 1993), however, this is simply rephrasing the question. The author has enjoyed a distinguished career as a cognitive psychologist specializing in visual-spatial reasoning, and this is her first book for a general audience. She summarizes her life’s work with an admirable absence of turgid academic prose and technical jargon, although it remains a somewhat arcane field. “From the beginning of life,” she writes, “we move and act in space, interacting with our surroundings, with space itself, and with the things we encounter in space. These actions yield sensations both from within our body and outside our body. The actions and sensations of our bodies form our conceptions of our bodies. The world is never static. We are constantly acting in that world and adapting to it.” Put bluntly, this means that our thoughts are intimately connected with movements—our own and those in our environment. This is reflected in the architecture of the brain, where a single nerve cell, called a mirror neuron, fires both when we observe another person do something such as pick up an object and when we perform the same action. Moving our hands—gesturing—is a form of communication older than language. When experimental subjects sit on their hands, their ability to communicate efficiently drops, and people blind from birth gesture as they talk. While mass audiences exist for popular science writing on cosmology, evolution, medicine, and technology, this often ingenious exploration of spatial thinking will command a more limited readership.

A well-informed book that will appeal to psychology buffs willing to pay close attention. (37 b/w illustrations)

WHY THEY MARCHED
Untold Stories of the Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote
Ware, Susan
Belknap/Harvard Univ. (320 pp.)
$26.95 | May 6, 2019
978-0-674-98668-8

A collection of inspiring stories of the women who fought for the 19th Amendment.

Refreshingly, Ware (American Women’s History: A Very Short Introduction, 2015, etc.), the honorary women’s suffrage centennial historian at the Schlesinger Library, focuses on many of the lesser-known but equally audacious, talented women who joined the fight, profiling 19 courageous individuals who thought for themselves and brought their husbands willingly with them. “To bring the story of the...movement to life,” writes the author, “I have organized the narrative as a prosopography featuring nineteen discrete but overlapping biographical stories.” Many suffragists were abolitionists first, which both strengthened and weakened their cause, as the same arguments against granting votes for black men were applied to women. The feminist movement merged with the suffragists in the early 1900s, and feminism brought a broader commitment to economic independence, sexual emancipation, and freedom from the need to marry. Individual states began to give women the vote slowly, beginning with Utah in 1870, although it was temporarily repealed in 1887 in an attempt to control polygamous marriage. By 1896, Colorado, Wyoming, and Idaho had given women the vote. Those who fought for enfranchisement were often writers, artists, and cartoonists, and their work was put to good use in designs for banners, buttons, and posters and in publications like Alice Stone Blackwell’s Woman’s Journal and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Forerunner. There were also those who were practically a one-woman show—e.g., Claiborne Catlin, who raised awareness in Massachusetts during her long unfunded pilgrimage on horseback. Ware also discusses the experiences of black women, like Ida B. Wells and Sojourner Truth, who faced not only sexism, but racism as well. Mary Church Terrell, the daughter of wealthy ex-slaves, not only traveled to Europe, but also addressed the Berlin International Council of Women in 1904. By 1919, most of the Western states had granted women the vote; the next fight would take all their talents to gain ratification of the amendment.

Important American history that is also timely given recent attempts at voter suppression.
MORE THAN ENOUGH
Claiming Space for Who You Are (No Matter What They Say)
Welteroth, Elaine
Viking (336 pp.)
$26.00 | Jun. 11, 2019
978-0-525-56158-3

The former editor-in-chief of Teen Vogue tells the story of her rise in the world of media and high fashion. The child of a black mother and Irish Catholic father, Welteroth grew up in the largely white middle-class suburbs of Newark, California. She knew from childhood that she “wanted to be the boss.” Yet by the time the author reached puberty, her growing self-doubt began to fester. Though popular, she did not have the straight blonde hair—and more to the point, the whiteness—of girls who were the “Thing” among her peers. She also discovered that as a biracial girl, she did not have full “membership” among black students. Although she felt out of place and somehow never quite “good enough” or “worthy enough,” Welteroth eventually found the models who helped shape her path in college. The first was a young biracial female professor who encouraged the author to embrace her blackness. Internships with a Los Angeles entertainment PR firm and then a major New York advertising company followed. Ambition ignited, she courted the attention of Ebony creative director Harriette Cole and was rewarded with a job at the magazine, where she came into contact with powerful black women like Serena Williams and Michelle Obama. She then took a junior editorship at Glamour followed by positions at Ebony and then Teen Vogue. There, she caught the attention of Vogue editorial icon Anna Wintour, who helped promote her to Teen Vogue editor-in-chief. Under pressure to increase the magazine’s revenue, Welteroth came into awareness of her true mission: to celebrate diversity in a predominantly white fashion and media industry. The author’s impressive career trajectory makes for fascinating reading, but what makes the book especially worthwhile is its depiction of an emergent social and political consciousness so strong that it eventually led her to abandon corporate media for the “joy of dancing into [an unknown] future.”

An inspiring memoir by a dynamic groundbreaker.

HOW TO RAISE SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE
Simple Lessons for Radical Results
Wojcicki, Esther
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (320 pp.)
$28.00 | May 7, 2019
978-1-328-97486-0

Wojcicki (co-author: Moonshots in Education: Blended Learning in the Classroom, 2015) is no stranger to raising successful children: One daughter is the CEO of YouTube, another is the CEO of 23andMe, and the third is a professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco. In addition, the author has been teaching journalism to high school students for almost four decades and has seen her “kids” blossom under her guidance. Here, she compiles her knowledge into an accessible guidebook for parents, teachers, and others involved in nurturing a child’s or adolescent’s development. “We’ve made parenting into an incredibly complicated, unintuitive endeavor, filled with fear and self-doubt,” writes the author. “We’re stressed out because we’ve become slaves to our children’s happiness.... We are the ones who are creating this frantic, overly competitive world for our kids. In truth, parenting is really quite simple—as long as we rediscover the basic principles that allow children to thrive in homes, in schools, and in life.” For the author, these basic principles include trust, respect, independence, collaboration, and kindness. Though straightforward, these principles, when combined and applied judiciously, have the potential to help children to thrive and parents to relax. In many ways, Wojcicki’s TRICK approach is a throwback to the type of parenting that characterized the generations before the digital age and the rise of helicopter parents and tiger moms. The author illustrates her points with examples from both her personal and professional lives (she founded the media arts program at Palo Alto High School and launched the Google Teachers Academy), which helps readers incorporate them into their daily routines.

Simple, down-to-earth techniques to help shape children into responsible, independent, kind individuals with the capabilities to become successful at whatever endeavor they may try.
A picture-book affirmation of female friendship.

Four girls—Sasha, Lottie, Alice, and Leela—become friends in childhood. They designate an apple tree their Secret Meeting Place, and here they play and form fast bonds that sustain them through the trials, tribulations, and triumphs that mark their lives. Throughout, the text offers general statements about those life events while cheery, colorful, cartoon-style illustrations provide specificity. For example, above text that reads, “They worked hard,” an accompanying illustration shows Alice in a cap and gown, jumping for joy while holding a diploma. Another scene says the girls “always took pride in their friendship” and shows them with their arms about one another and raising rainbow flags aloft as they march in a queer pride parade. This pictorial reference to queerness is extended in Sasha’s subplot, when she is depicted as an adult with her arm around another woman as they gaze at a little house. Ultimately, this could read like an aspirational vision of friendship for girls, but it will likely also find a readership among women who see their own bonds reflected. Sasha appears black, with brown skin and afro-puffs; Lottie and Alice both present white; and Leela is South Asian, with brown skin and straight, black hair. Although the ostensible audience is children, this book also has gift potential among adult women.

A veritable gal-entine. (Picture book. 5-8, adult)
I have an aversion to the word "offensive." It’s a mealy-mouthed word, often used to deflect and obscure more than to enlighten. What is “offensive” language, for instance? Moreover, its use implies that I, the writer, know what you, the reader, find offensive—impossible, unless my readership is limited to myself. To use it with an audience that explicitly includes librarians—for whom, mind you, “I have something in my library to offend everybody” is a proud tote-bag slogan—is gallingly ironic.

So editorially, I encourage reviewers to examine what makes them believe that such-and-such a phrase or scenario rises to the level of “offensive” and state it affirmatively, without the weasel-word “offensive” obscuring what is at issue. Let our readers decide what’s going to offend them. Since our diverse readers are often purchasing books on behalf of children whose caregivers will likewise hold a varied sense of what is “offensive,” come out and say what you mean so they’re not blindsided—but don’t scare them from purchasing books the children in their charge may benefit from.

But in this issue you will find “offensive” in a children’s review, possibly the first one I’ve consciously let pass in 11 years in this job. It occurs in our review of Anita Silvey’s Undaunted, about the orangutan researcher Biruté Mary Galdikas. The book is published by National Geographic Kids and details its subject’s work in Indonesian Borneo. In the way of NatGeo’s publications, it is a photo-laden, positive profile of a white naturalist who’s ventured into a remote—to U.S. readers but not, of course, to Borneans—part of the world and made a career there. The book does not cover the controversy that Galdikas has garnered even though it’s been documented in such works as Linda Spalding’s A Dark Place in the Jungle (which does not appear in Silvey’s bibliography).

But it’s not this controversy that summons the word “offensive.” That’s left to a stunningly ill-considered page that features a full-bleed photo of some of Galdikas’ Bornean employees, with the following quote stamped across it: “Remember that in camp the orangutans come FIRST, science second, local staff and people third, and we, the foreign researchers, LAST.” The reviewer notes: “A white scientist ranking ‘locals’—whose homeland she views imperiously as a place where ‘time had stood still’—so low in her hierarchy is offensive.” And as I pondered that “offensive” I realized I was inclined to leave it be. For one thing, the reviewer very clearly stated what they felt was offensive—there’s nothing weasely about it. For another, I see their point. What must have felt benign, even magnanimous viewed through the National Geographic filter—“foreign researchers” come last, after all—is anything but when viewed through a Bornean one. By arrogating control of the agenda and determining relative importance, Galdikas is putting herself first, above the Borneans. And the placement of her words over brown bodies underscores the insult.

Will our readers find it equally offensive? I don’t know, but “offensiveness” is a subjective, changing concept. How many of our readers circa 1933, when Virginia Kirkus launched her service, would have found, say, blackface offensive? Would 100 percent of our readers today? I don’t know. But somehow I don’t think most would blink if we were to assign that label to blackface, and I suspect a healthy number of them will likewise be in agreement with our assessment in this case. And if they aren’t initially, I hope they step back to consider that, perhaps, the usage is entirely appropriate one. —V.S.

Vicky Smith is the children’s editor.
via motorcar, where he lives with the lyricist of “In My Merry Oldsmobile”; to the airship America as it attempts the first trans-Atlantic flight in history; to London via steamship before he heads back to North America on...the Titanic. This Forrest Gump of a cat is accompanied by an unnamed, irascible flea who acts as the cat’s guide, compensating for his vision impairment. The flea’s character arc—from parasite to companion provides most of the book’s emotional verve, as Pudding, though he ostensibly seeks adventure, has less an adventurous spirit than an amiable one and seems happy to go where Adderson and the flea direct him. Characters are assumed white; even railroad porter Asa is not identified racially, thoroughly undercutting the poignancy of his insistence on being called by his name for readers who do not bring pre-existing knowledge of the history of the all-black corps of Pullman porters to the text (or read the concluding author’s note before they read the book).

Lovers of animal fantasy drawn to the book will find themselves taking in some history they likely never would have thought themselves interested in before. (Historical fantasy. 8-12)

**FLORA’S TREE HOUSE**

*Alborozo, Gabriel*  
Illus. by the author  
Henry Holt (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 28, 2019  
978-1-62779-226-4

Flora is inspired to create her artistic drawings and paintings as she watches her younger brother, Will, engage in his adventurous, imaginative play.

A loud and rambunctious muse, Will has never seen the artwork that decorates the walls of his sister’s treehouse. One day, however, he observes her sketching, becomes curious, and climbs the ladder even though he is strictly an unwelcome visitor (“NO WILLS ALLOWED!” reads her sign). Flora’s gallery is impressive, and despite her initial grumpiness, she explains that many of the pictures mirror his play, like the recent aliens he was fighting or the time he flew his rocket to Pluto. As the siblings, who are white, reminisce about each of Will’s escapades represented in Flora’s masterpieces, the two soon combine their imaginative talents and create a new adventure together. Colorful digital illustrations temper the mild sibling rivalry with the children’s round, smiling faces. As Flora explains her artwork, realistic scenes fade to magnificent imaginary tableaux in which both children enact the artwork, underscoring how the creative use of crayons and markers can extend a young child’s concepts and perceptions.

A subtle and inventive alternative to today’s technology-tethered indoor play. (Picture book. 4-8)

**FINDING ORION**

*Anderson, John David*  
Walden Pond Press/HarperCollins  
(368 pp.)  
$16.99 | May 7, 2019  
978-0-06-264389-6

The casket at a strangely festive funeral proves to contain not the deceased but a clue that leads the bereaved family on an epic scavenger hunt.

Rion Kwirk, 12, regards his grandfather with wary fascination. Papa Kwirk, a hard-living biker and Vietnam War vet, and Rion’s dad, a Ph.D. candy-factory chemist, were semi-estranged. Rion’s planetarium-director mom maintained peace on Papa Kwirk’s short, friction-filled visits. When news of Papa Kwirk’s death arrives via singing clown, the family drives to Greenburg, Illinois, where his sister, Gertie has organized a “funeral.” Rion’s older sister, Cass, 16, brings her pet python, Delilah (Papa Kwirk was a fan); his younger sister, Lyra, 10, brings a hefty vocabulary. Edgy with Gertie and uncomfortable in his hometown, which carries bad memories, Dad’s unsettled by the funeral. Still, curious about the crowd showing up to laud Papa Kwirk, Dad agrees to the hunt. Reflective Rion’s an outlier among the appronymic Kwirks. A convincing preteen when interacting with his sisters and peers, he sounds decades older—wry and nostalgic by turns—when pondering life. There’s a time-warp feel to Rion’s insular, mostly white world (Tasha, Rion’s possible crush, is dark, race unspecified). Recurring jokes include other cultures’ burial practices and Rion’s fantasy of being orphaned and adopted. The Kwirks’ dead-of-night adventure digging up a stranger’s backyard prompts gun jokes but not fear.

A smoothly written family adventure that evokes both Willy Wonka and *The Wonder Years.* (Fiction. 8-12)

**DANIEL’S GOOD DAY**

*Archer, Micha*  
Illus. by the author  
Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)  
$16.99 | May 14, 2019  
978-0-399-54672-3

The tale of a kid who loves his neighborhood as much as Mr. Rogers loved his.

Wearing blue overalls and red tennis shoes, Daniel leaves his mom and baby sibling to venture to Grandma’s house. As passers-by wish him “a good day,” he asks what makes a good day for each of them. Mrs. Sanchez, the painter, says clear skies; kite-flying Emma says “a steady wind”; the bus driver mentions riders who say “please” and “thank you.” Daniel seems to know nearly everyone in the diverse neighborhood, and each has a response for him. On his way back, leading Grandma to his house, he sees that his neighbors are all having a good day. As this little brown-skinned boy progresses through his urban neighborhood, readers can appreciate the level of detail Archer includes in her
colorful, meticulously composed, collage illustrations, from small cutout photographs on the front covers of the magazines on the newsstand to individually cut and torn paper that makes up the flowers and plants lining many yards. This visually stunning book also embraces nontraditional gender roles, illustrates diversity within families, and advocates for the importance of giving children a level of independence and also welcoming them into the family circle after their adventures.

A gorgeous picture book that invites young readers to make their own neighborhoods places where good days abound. (Picture book. 4-8)
Most of the crafts involve tracing a template from the book and then transferring the template onto colored paper before putting the pieces together. The crafts generally use inexpensive items that are easily found around the house, such as toilet-paper rolls and coat hangers. While some of the crafts are innovative and entertaining, such as a fluttering butterfly that rides on one’s finger or animal finger puppets, others, like a paper-plate fish, will likely garner only a little attention before winding up in the recycling. The information is easily read with a child, but the craft instructions are best suited for an adult reader who will demonstrate the craft for the child. The illustrations are certainly the best part about both this and its companion volume, The Ocean Craft Book.


THE UNBELIEVABLE OLIVER AND THE FOUR JOKERS
Bosch, Pseudonymous
Illus. by Pangburn, Shane
Dial (192 pp.)
$14.99 | May 14, 2019
978-0-525-55232-1
Series: Unbelievable Oliver, 1

The author most recently of the Bad series (Bad Magic, 2014, etc.) returns with a new series opener for somewhat younger children.

It’s clear he loses none of his comedic touch with this shift in audience. The narrator invites readers to the story of 8-year-old generous-spirited Oliver, a Jewish boy and a beginning magician. He hasn’t yet developed the confidence to pull off the card trick he’s rehearsing in front of twin friends Beatriz, or Bea, who loves games involving math and science, and Martina, or Teenie, who loves running and acrobatics. As encouraging as they are truthful about Oliver’s skills, the twins do Oliver a favor and get him invited to 9-year-old classmate Maddox’s birthday party, who invited everyone in third grade but Oliver. Oliver’s debut flops...and becomes a diversion for someone stealing the robot cat Bea and Teenie give to the tantrum-throwing birthday boy, who accuses Bea, Teenie, and Oliver of stealing said gift. The robustly multicultural cast—Bea and Teenie are Mexican-American and have two dads; Maddox’s gal pal Memphis builds architectural models; and Jayden, who’s drawn as black, is a tech whiz—is introduced naturally. With a talking rabbit on the lam, this amusing story of friendship, failure, and success (and an erupting candy volcano) neatly slips in vocabulary along the way.

Readers shouldn’t have so much ridiculous fun with a book as they do with this one. (Fiction. 8-10)

CHIP AND CURLY
Breisacher, Cathy
Illus. by Heinz, Joshua
Sleeping Bear Press (32 pp.)
$16.99 | May 15, 2019
978-1-58536-408-4

One potato, two potato, three potato, four. Five potato, six potato, seven potato, more—more potato puns than you can count, as a young spud strives to win the sack race at the Spud City Festival.

After training all year to win the Golden Bushel Award, Chip learns he must beat Curly, the new spud in town. From pre-race to finish, Breisacher and Heinz use their setup to share verbal and brightly colored visual puns that children will enjoy. The race begins at the corner of Russet Boulevard and Fry Avenue. Couch potatoes—resting on a couch, of course—line the race route. The Waffle Fries can’t decide whom to root on. First Chip is in the lead. Then Curly speeds past. After Curly trips, the way is clear for Chip to win. Instead he offers Curly a hand up, and they race toward the finish line together. Chip doesn’t win, but he gains a friend, and Chip and Curly team up for the
relay. Maybe that coveted Golden Bushel Award is within reach after all. All characters are potatoes illustrated in a range of (potato-y) skin tones. However, both Chip and Curly are male, and only the Sweet Potato cheerleaders are explicitly coded as female (with pink skirts and pompoms). The book’s raison d’être is the wordplay, with Home Fries, Tater Tots, and Twice Bakes joining the cast of characters and a spud-centric attitude toward verbs: These taters “wedge,” “whip,” “hash,” “pancake,” and “peel,” all leading up to the moment when “Chip’s dreams of winning [are] mashed.”

For children who appreciate clever and silly puns (Picture book. 4-8)

COMICS: EASY AS ABC!
The Essential Guide to Comics for Kids
Brunetti, Ivan
Illus. by the author
TOON Books & Graphics (56 pp.)
978-1-943145-44-7
978-1-943143-39-3 paper

The creator of 3X4 (2018) leads a posse of veteran cartoonists offering advice and techniques for making simple comics.

In a text interspersed with quotes and doodles by artists including Chris Ware, Neal Gaiman, and Pablo Picasso, Brunetti demonstrates how to use simple geometric shapes or even letters and numbers to draw faces and figures, express emotions, and create distinct characters. Switching from monochrome to color partway through, he and fellow contributors move on to more-sophisticated topics such as the uses of “emanata” in comics (that’s those often-squiggly lines indicating emotion, to the unschooled), creating one- and two-point perspective, designing panel sequences, and telling stories. Despite Brunetti’s reminders not to draw on the book’s pages, Art Spiegelman invites budding cartoonists to finish off his mini-tale by adding their own art, and at the end, imprint co-founder Françoise Mouly throws a commercial cast over the whole volume by promoting TOON titles as gateways to both visual and verbal literacy. Still, both newbies and graduates of Ed Emberley’s classic manuals or, more recently, James Sturm and Co.’s Adventures in Cartooning series will find plenty of beneficial insights (“stick people aren’t as easy as they look”) and inspiration.

First and next steps for budding graphic artists and illustrators. (glossary, bibliography, topical index) (Graphic nonfiction. 6-11)

ZENOBIA JULY
Bunker, Lisa
Viking (320 pp.)
$16.99 | May 21, 2019
978-0-451-47940-2

A young trans girl solves a mystery and finds her people.

Zenobia July hasn’t had an easy go of it: Her mom died when she was little, and her religious, conservative dad has just died in what might be a hunting accident but was probably suicide. She’s shipped off to Portland, Maine, into the loving arms of her aunts Phil and Lu, an eccentric but competent hippie/academic lesbian couple. Zenobia makes friends with a gang of misfits fairly easily, but she still doesn’t want anyone to know that she’s trans (even after new friend Elijah is outed and her main confidant, Arli, genderqueer with vo/ven/veir pronouns, cringingly tries to convince Zenobia to be a better ally). Zenobia’s hacker skills come in handy when a mysterious troll posts transphobic and anti-Muslim memes to the school’s website, and her new friendships are put to various tests. Zenobia is an endearing white trans girl heroine, with an accessible amount of angst and anxiety that never tips over into titillating tragedy. Her community of weirdos and queers (including her aunts’ drag-queen friend Sprink) offers desperately needed representation. Hijab-wearing Congolese immigrant Dyna and Asian Elijah provide some racial diversity, though the default is white.

A fun read that manages to feel solidly traditional while breaking new ground (Fiction. 8-13)

GENTLY BENTLEY
Buxton, Caragh
Illus. by the author
Child’s Play (32 pp.)
$16.99 | May 1, 2019
978-1-78628-203-3

Five-year-old Bentley is so full of energy that he is trying to family and friends alike.

Bentley Oliver Anthony Brown. It’s a big name for a young rhino, but he’s substantial enough to cause trouble when he gets excited. His mother loves her “bright little spark,” but she is constantly telling him, “Gently, Bentley.” (The phrase is 1950s-era British slang for “slow down.”) The understated text lets the cartoonish illustrations document the havoc: paint on the walls, lamps tipped over, laundry pulled from the clothesline, a mess at the breakfast table. And at school, he’s in such a rush all of the time that school supplies go flying, as do his classmates when he chases them during recess (called “the break” in this English import). What will Bentley be like with a new baby in the house? Two double-page spreads develop tension as Bentley spots the sleeping baby. Young readers will
As in fables of yesteryear, Cao holds a mirror to selfishness.

**SUMMER**

Cao Wenxuan  
Illus. by Yu Rong  
Adapt. by Erin Stein  
Imprint (48 pp.)  
$18.99 | May 7, 2019  
978-1-250-31006-4

In the spirit of Aesop, the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen winner weaves an animal fable set in the grasslands.

Seven creatures are desperate for relief from the sweltering sun. After they argue and vie for a spot under the single tree, the elephant muscles his way underneath. The sight of the giant trying to cool off under several tiny leaves is so hilarious the animals burst into laughter. Their attention is diverted by the sight of a child walking by in his father’s shadow. In a brilliant design feature, the next six pages are cut to gradually increase in width, moving from 3 1/2 inches to 10 inches, as each creature, starting with the lynx, crosses the gutter to offer shade to smaller beings. Yu cleverly contrasts a lineup of wilting figures rendered in pencil on the verso with smiling, colorful, cut-paper versions on subsequent rectos. Before the page turns, viewers can spot a silhouetted portion of the next animal’s shadow; setting up a guessing game. Ultimately, a natural solution offers coolness for themselves in her shoes. (Dawson presents white.)

For middle schoolers, challenging science about a perennially appealing but surprisingly complex subject. (glossary, research suggestions, acknowledgements, sources and bibliography, photo credits, index) (Nonfiction. 10-14)

**HAIR LOVE**

Cherry, Matthew A.  
Illus. by Harrison, Vashti  
Kokila Books (32 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 14, 2019  
978-0-525-55336-6

A black girl helps her dad learn how to give her the perfect hairstyle for a very special day.

Zuri’s voluminous head of hair “has a mind of its own. It kinks, coils, and curls every which way.” She is pictured asleep with a large Afro framing her face. She is proud of her hair, which she sometimes wears in braids with beads like a princess and other times in pigtail puffs. But today is a special day. She knows Daddy is “worn-out” and probably needs a break, so she lets him sleep in while she looks up hairstyles on a tablet. When Daddy wakes and offers to help, he tries a series of hairstyles that just don’t work. Finally, Zuri grabs some hair supplies and shows him a tutorial. “Watching carefully... / Daddy combed, parted, oiled, and twisted. / He nailed it!” Zuri is lovely and happy with her freshly done hairstyle, and when Mommy arrives to their “Welcome Home” sign, she loves Zuri’s look too. The digital illustrations feature details that feel just right: Zuri’s thick, textured hair, Daddy’s locs and tattoo, and dark-skinned Mom’s bright headwrap. While it’s unclear where Mommy is returning from (she is dressed casually and has a rolling black suitcase), this authentic depiction of a loving and whole black family broadens the scope of representation.

Positively refreshing. (Picture book. 4-9)

**THE TORNADO SCIENTIST**

Carson, Mary Kay  
Photos by Uhlman, Tom  
HMH Books (80 pp.)  
$18.99 | Mar. 19, 2019  
978-0-544-96582-9  
Series: Scientists in the Field

Research meteorologist and radar expert Robin Tanamachi, who once studied tornadoes by chasing them across Midwestern plains, now lies in wait for them in the hills and forests of America’s southeast.

Writer Carson (Inside Tornadoes, 2010) and photographer Uhlman document the veteran storm chaser’s work and her change of focus from storms in Tornado Alley (from the Dakotas down to Texas) to an area called Dixie Alley that stretches from Louisiana to Georgia and up to Tennessee and Alabama. Chapter by chapter, they introduce the scientist and the science, including the genesis of severe storms and tornado anatomy; explain the use of weather radar and other tools; recall the effects of a record-breaking number of highly destructive tornadoes in Tennessee and Alabama in 2011; show cooperating scientists gathered in Alabama to “set a tornado net”; and describe efforts to predict tornadoes further in advance and to ensure that people react appropriately to storm warnings. There is particular attention to Tanamachi’s work with radar and husband Dan Dawson’s measurement of the sizes and shapes of raindrops. Plenty of well-captioned photos (including pictures of disasters and of the scientist as a tornado-obsessed child) break up the exposition and will add to the appeal. Carson’s description of the fourth-generation Japanese-American scientist’s work is detailed and immediate; readers might well be able to imagine themselves in her shoes. (Dawson presents white.)

For middle schoolers, challenging science about a perennially appealing but surprisingly complex subject. (glossary, research suggestions, acknowledgements, sources and bibliography, photo credits, index) (Nonfiction. 10-14)

**KIRKUS.COM | CHILDREN’S | 15 MARCH 2019 | 89**
A pair of shoes serves as the constant in a grueling trek across three borders. Young René and Papá together begin a northbound journey, by foot and bus, away from their native El Salvador. As they cross into Guatemala, then Mexico, and finally the United States, the story repeats a chorus of “Uno, dos, tres,” representing the number of borders they must cross. It is uncertain whether the father-son team is crossing these borders with required documentation until they are waist-deep in a rushing river before joining Mamá on the other side. If there’s a moment when readers realize the perils of their journey, it’s here. Nevertheless, Colato Lainez handles the narration gently. Framing the narrative deliberately and at the center of Vanden Broeck’s illustrations are René’s shoes, often depicted from low angles or bird’s-eye views. Brush-stroked spreads depicting various landscapes—lush, green scenes, muddy trails, mountains, cities, the river—are reminiscent of Central American artwork often depicted on murals, souvenir trinkets, or postcards. Not until the last spread does Vanden Broeck finally unveil René’s smiling face in its entirety. The bilingual narrative is told in short sentences and enlivened with repetition, running metaphors, and sound effects, easily engaging readers.

Inspired by the author’s own story, this tale of a young boy’s arduous escape serves as a crucial, insightful, and timely light shone on a sensitive, highly relevant subject.

(author’s note) (Bilingual picture book. 3-6)

**A SONG FOR BEAR**

Dawunay, Gabby
Ilus. by Barrow, Alex
Thames & Hudson (32 pp.)
$14.95 | May 7, 2019
978-0-500-65181-0

Rhyming quatrains combine with an energy-filled rap to capture a bear’s journey of self-discovery.

Birdsong has woken the little brown bear up for so long that he knows all the words. But when he tries singing them, his voice is “strong, / but it wasn’t exactly / a bird sort of song.” In fact, his voice makes the birds fly away. When an owl flutters down to give advice, the bear jumps to the wrong conclusions. The owl points out that birds fly. Instead of understanding that birds and bears are different, the bear thinks learning to fly will help him sing—but, of course, he just falls to the ground.

The owl explains that birds have beaks, so the bear creates a paper beak—but that does nothing for his singing. When the owl finally suggests there are plenty of things the bear can do, the enthusiastic ursine discovers his own song, a rap. “I can...

Well-intentioned but far more prescriptive than engaging. (Picture book. 4-8) (Counting Critters: 978-1-64370-760-0; Treasured Wisdom: 978-1-64370-762-4)

**BRUSH-STROKED SPREADS DEPICTING VARIOUS LANDSCAPES ARE REMINISCENT OF CENTRAL AMERICAN ARTWORK.**

**MY SHOES AND I / MIS ZAPATOS Y YO**

**Crossing Three Borders / cruzando tres fronteras**

Colato Lainez, René
Illus. by Vanden Broeck, Fabricio
Piñata Books/Arte Público (32 pp.)
$17.95 | May 31, 2019
978-1-55885-884-8

**WE’RE MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT**

Celebrate! Diversity

Day, Sophia & Johnson, Megan
Illus. by Strouse, Stephanie
Real MVP Kids (36 pp.)
$4.99 paper | May 7, 2019
978-1-64370-761-7
Series: Celebrate!

One in a series meant to help educators and caregivers help kids be their best.

This volume features a group of diverse children (collectively referred to as the MVP kids and named only in backmatter) of different races, abilities, and religious backgrounds. As they interact, the rhyming text affirms and values their diversity, but it neither delivers a story nor develops characterization. “There are many ways we’re different— / How we look, play, talk, or eat, / what we’re good at, what we like, / or how we move along the street,” reads the text on one spread, with others homing in on specific scenarios. The accompanying illustrations resemble animation stills but are notably stiff, even when children (all illustrated with ungainly, disproportionately large heads) are depicted in active scenes, such as one of a child using a rollator while playing freeze tag with children who have no visible disabilities. Backmatter offers “Helpful Teaching Tips” to encourage observational speech as opposed to judgmental comments and questions (eschewing “(not) normal” for “(not) typical,” for example), and it advocates listening to others’ preferences when describing differences (for example, perhaps adjusting phrasing to refer to “a child with autism” as opposed to saying a child “is autistic”). Companion titles Counting Critters, Treasured Wisdom, and The Way We’re Made feature the MVP kids learning about number sense, respect for elders and their knowledge, and self-esteem, respectively.

Readers will appreciate learning that there’s more than one way to sing a song. (Picture book. 3-6)
FORKY IN CRAFT BUDDY DAY
Daywalt, Drew
Illus. by McClements, George & Kardos, Stéphane
Disney Press (40 pp.)
$16.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-4847-9958-1

Bonnie so loves her homemade toy, Forky, teacher Miss Wendy holds a Craft Your Own Buddy Day so everyone can create a special toy from found or recycled materials.

After the children finish their projects, they leave for recess—and the newly created toys come to life. Lovable Forky is excited to have new friends to play with, but he rapidly realizes the new toys have serious existential concerns. Juice Box Robot wants someone to drink from him. Miss Paper Plate and Paper Bag Puppet are looking for food to hold. Bubble Wrap Woman begins obsessively popping herself. Everyone is feeling out of their comfort zone, arguing and yelling, so Forky takes charge before the children return and wisely explains that to be a toy, made with a child’s love and imagination, is now “the best thing to be.” The cartoon drawings emulate a child’s artistic hand, while a dual narrative that combines traditional prose text with speech bubbles moves the story along. In this companion to Disney/Pixar’s Toy Story 4 (readers familiar with the franchise will recognize some of the faces in the background), Daywalt reiterates the series’ message that toys and their owners love one another. However, the underlying theme of creativity with the simplest of materials will resonate as well. Bonnie presents white, and she has racially diverse classmates.

The talking crafted toys hold considerable child appeal. (Picture book. 4-7)

THE COOK AND THE KING
Donaldson, Julia
Illus. by Roberts, David
Abrams (32 pp.)
$16.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-4197-3757-2

Donaldson and Roberts cook up a treat for young readers.

After yet another soggy pizza from a box, the king decides he needs a cook “like anything.” He “tries out lots and lots of cooks” and decides on Wobbly Bob, who looks the part but has “feet that [shuffle] and hands that [shake]” and admits to being “a bit of a wimp.” Wobbly Bob may well turn out to be more royal disaster than royal cook. The king fancies a supper of fish and chips, but Wobbly Bob is scared of everything—fishing, digging the spuds, chopping, and frying. “I’m scared! I’m scared! I’m terribly scared,” is Wobbly Bob’s constant refrain, but the cheerful king helps every step of the way. “He fished and he fished like anything”; “he dug and he dug like anything”; “he chopped and he chopped like anything.” In fact, the king does all of the work and congratulates Wobbly Bob for the “delicious dish,” which they sit down and eat together. Donaldson’s lively rhyming text, tailor-made for reading aloud, is nicely complemented by Roberts’ colorful illustrations—strong on facial expressions that add to the story so that no explanation is needed when Wobbly Bob looks quizzical when the king congratulates him on his “great cooking” and gives him the job. Complexions in this medieval European-esque kingdom vary from pale to ruddy.

A delicious cooking adventure that storytimers will love like anything. (Picture book. 3-8)

THE ROOT OF MAGIC
Duble, Kathleen Benner
Delacorte (224 pp.)
$16.99 | $19.99 PLB | Jun. 11, 2019
978-0-525-57850-5
978-0-525-57851-2 PLB

A 12-year-old with a sick brother chooses between supernaturally comforting certainty and painful reality. Returning from Canada, Willow, her mother, and her 8-year-old, chronically ill brother, Wisp, nearly die in a car accident in rural Maine. Thank goodness for their rescuers, a friendly couple who bring them to a B&B in an isolated snowbound community. Willow’s mother panics about Wisp, whose extremely rare, undiagnosed condition means frequent hospitalizations and constant risk of death, but the snowstorm and the accident have left them without cellphones, car, or escape route. At least the people of tiny Kismet, Maine (all 173 of them), are helpful and kind—if also a little spooky. It’s as if the locals know what’s going to happen before it comes to pass. Can Willow cope with her mother’s obsessive overprotectiveness of Wisp, get home to Vermont, and learn Kismet’s strange secret? The townsfolk all appear to be white, like Willow and her family, and Franco-American—descended from early Acadians. Kismet’s not remotely believable (this infinitesimal, magically isolated village somehow supports both a hospital and a movie theater), and the magical rules are only slightly more credible. But the emotional truths Willow and her mother confront are wrenching and genuine, albeit not as meaningful as they’d be if Wisp were a fully developed character in his own right.

Works better as fable than as fantasy. (Fiction. 9-12)
WE CHOSE YOU
A Book About Adoption, Family, and Forever Love
Dungy, Tony & Dungy, Lauren
Illus. by Wolek, Guy
Harvest House (39 pp.)
$16.99 | Apr. 2, 2019
978-0-7369-7325-0

Former star football player and coach Tony Dungy and his wife, Lauren, offer a story about adoption for Christian families.

Young, bespectacled Calvin has a school assignment to “tell the class about my family,” so Mom and Dad sit him down, break out the family photo album, and share once again the story of how it was God’s plan that he was chosen to be a member of their family. Calvin is pleased with the story until he wonders, since Mom and Dad chose him, what would happen if they changed their mind: “Could you un-choose me someday?” To alleviate his fears, Mom and Dad reassure Calvin that they chose him because they love him and that will never change. This book is smoothly written and pleasantly illustrated for its specific audience, depicting Calvin and his parents as black. The story is inclusive—up to a point. When Mom and Dad discuss the fact that families are made up of all sorts of people and that “there are lots of ways to make a family,” they list families with many children or just one, a child who lives with a grandmother, and a blended family. While care is taken to illustrate racially distinct characters and at least one interracial family, there is no mention of families with same-sex parents, nor is there any explicit religious diversity presented.

A decent if limited offering. (Picture book. 3-8)

THE TRUTH ABOUT CROCODILES
Eaton III, Maxwell
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook (32 pp.)
$16.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-250-19844-0
Series: The Truth About...

Get to know the crocodilian family—crocodiles, alligators and caimans, and gharials—at an eventful birthday party.

Eaton (The Truth About Elephants, 2018, etc.) continues his series of tongue-in-cheek introductions to iconic animal species with facts and fancies about these toothy reptiles. Cartoon illustrations feature talking animals (mainly white-coated scientists) and the brown-skinned human birthday girl. Text is presented in speech bubbles, callout boxes, and a simple informational narrative. Facts and exaggerated fiction mingle in both words and pictures. Young readers, listeners, and even adults will enjoy the humor and the curious infobits presented along with the usual important topics: distinguishing among the major groups and describing where crocs live around the world, their reptile characteristics, customary habitat and behavior, feeding, child-rearing, ways to avoid the threat they pose to humans, and the threats they face from humans. The illustrations are lively. On the title page, three crocs speed down a waterway in an Everglades-style airboat. An early spread shows an Australian freshwater crocodile floating underwater, with ears, eyes, and nostrils above. Its “powerful tail for swimming” is highlighted. The tail returns, later, when “The croc, powered by its muscular tail, bursts out of the water with its jaws open” to demolish a piñata at the birthday party. Repetition, humor, and surprise help cement the learning.

A party to remember—and a species to respect. (Informational picture book. 4-9)

THE GIRLS OF FIREFLY CABIN
Ellingsen, Cynthia
Whitman (288 pp.)
$16.99 | May 1, 2019
978-0-8075-2939-3

Four preteen girls converge at summer camp for eight weeks and discover new truths about themselves and one another.

Lauren, Isla, Archer, and Jade make up the girls of Firefly Cabin at Blueberry Pine Camp for Girls. Each girl has a reality that she’s reluctant to share with the others. Lauren is an orphan, lives in a foster home, and can only afford to attend camp on scholarship. Isla has asthma as well as strict parents who won’t let her attend coed dances. Archer has an older mean-girl sister who makes her life miserable. And Jade lost her best friend in a car accident that she’s still convinced is her fault. This is adult romance writer Ellingsen’s first book for children. While the story has an omniscient viewpoint, each chapter focuses on a different one of the four girls. When they’re not grinning, giggling, mad, or in tears, the Fireflies are engaging in secret handshakes, declaring undying devotion to one another, or pushing the envelope of camp rules. Unsurprisingly, they eventually become self-reflective and resolve their challenges, all in prose that milks their emotional ups and downs. The four main characters are white, with diversity seen in peripheral characters.

Captures the pace, spirit, and intensity of summer-camp friendships while occasionally leaning toward earnest, sentimental, and contrived. (Fiction. 8-12)
This sweet story is predictable, but its reassuring ending will gratify nevertheless.

**NO PLACE LIKE HOME**

A polar bear is permanently out of sorts.

George is forlorn; nothing gladdens his heart. He dislikes his house, and he can do without his current habitat—the city: unsuitable, too crowded. What’s a bear to do when he wants to return home? George doesn’t remember where that is, but he sets off anyway. He tries one place after another—the jungle, a mountain, the desert, and the sea. Each in turn has drawbacks, though George concedes the sea’s OK given that he “like[s] to make the connection. A page of international pride further along in the book is lovely but aspirational, as some of the suggested nations (Egypt, for example) still struggle with LGBTQ acceptance compared to Western Europe and the United States. LGBTQ grandparents, for instance, won’t find themselves, as all the characters appear as either children or young caregivers. The illustrations adequately enhance the text throughout, although most likely digital—capture a range of skin tones and ethnicities but, sadly, not a range of ages among adults depicted. LGBTQ acceptance compared to Western Europe and the United States. A welcome addition to rainbow bookshelves and a potential workhorse in June. (Picture book. 2-5)

**RAINBOW: A First Book of Pride**

Genhart, Michael
Illus. by Passchier, Anne
Magination/American Psychological Association (24 pp.)
$17.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-4338-3087-7

A pleasant look at the rainbow flag.

Tailor-made for LGBTQ–pride storytimes, this self-described “first book of pride” looks at the six-color rainbow flag and dissect the meaning behind each color. Genhart’s text is set primarily in single sentences across each double-page spread, with a longer summation on the final page. Fans of Todd Parr’s books will find the formatting (if not the colors) familiar. Like Parr’s work, the text is simple, with one or two multisyllabic words per page, which nicely allows for breakaway moments to “clap out” syllables or have a discussion about a reach word. Passchier’s illustrations—bright, serviceable, and most likely digital—capture a range of skin tones and ethnicities but, sadly, not a range of ages among adults depicted. LGBTQ grandparents, for instance, won’t find themselves, as all the characters appear as either children or young caregivers. The illustrations adequately enhance the text throughout, although the image for violet’s representation of “spirit” (a smiling child finger painting in a purple room) may have some adult readers pausing to make the connection. A page of international pride further along in the book is lovely but aspirational, as some of the suggested nations (Egypt, for example) still struggle with LGBTQ acceptance compared to Western Europe and the United States. A welcome addition to rainbow bookshelves and a potential workhorse in June. (Picture book. 2-5)

**THE CHUPACABRAS OF THE RIO GRANDE**

Gidwitz, Adam & Bowles, David
Illus. by Aly, Hatem
Dutton (208 pp.)
$14.99 | Apr. 16, 2019
978-0-3752-3179-5
Series: Unicorn Rescue Society, 4

Uchenna and Elliot join Professor Fauna on a trip to the southern border to rescue the mythical chupacabras.

In this borderland adventure of the Unicorn Rescue Society, Peruvian Professor Fauna whisks Uchenna and the ever-reluctant Elliot out of class and flies them down on a dilapidated plane to Laredo, Texas. The trio’s mission is to rescue a baby chupacabra, whose pack’s feeding pattern has been disrupted by a border wall. In this fourth installment of the series, Gidwitz seeks to provide credibility and authority on border topics by bringing on Mexican-American author Bowles as a co-writer. However, their effort to incorporate complex topics—such as environmental and immigration issues—into an otherwise formulaic and predictable plot falls short, as the complexities of border life are constantly pointed out and explained by adults. As in previous installments, one of Professor Fauna’s colleagues makes an appearance to aid the group in thwarting whatever species-endangering scheme the Schmoke brothers may have concocted. The encounter between Dr. Cervantes, a Mexican-American professor teaching at Texas A&M, and her former mentor creates tension between the adult characters, forcing the children to become spectators who simply learn and imitate the correct behaviors from adults. Uchenna presents black and Elliot, white.

An unsubtle and unengaging attempt to educate children on border issues. (Fantasy. 7-12)
As in the previous volumes, the photos are a particular highlight.

**SUPER SUMMER**

*All Kinds of Summer Facts and Fun*

Goldstone, Bruce  
Henry Holt (50 pp.)  
$18.99 | May 7, 2019  
978-1-250-12015-1

Goldstone’s final installment in his seasonal celebrations (Wonderful Winter, 2016, etc.) serves up all things summer. “Summer is a...season of plenty” is the centering theme, and readers may tire of the word “plenty” by the end. Fittingly, a large number of page spreads are devoted to the heat—the length of days, how to protect yourself from the sun and keep cool, the role of sweat, how animals adapt to the weather. Goldstone also highlights flowers, devoting one spread to sunflowers and their heliotropism and another to the power of blooms to attract pollinators. Summer insects get a couple of spreads—one about harmless ones (at least to people) and another to stingers. The book concludes with a variety of types of vacation destinations (an amusement park, the woods, etc.) and ways to enjoy the months “in the water, on land, and in the air,” a look at summer celebrations, and the looming start of school. Backmatter includes six activities to fill summer days. As in the previous volumes, the photos (some stock, some by Goldstone) are a particular highlight. Bright colors, up-close pictures, photos cropped in fun, summery shapes, and a diverse array of kids who don’t seem overly posed fill the pages.

A solid ending to an excellent seasonal series. (Nonfiction. 5-10)

**GIRLS WITH GUTS!**

*The Road to Breaking Barriers and Bashing Records*

Gonzales, Debbie  
Illus. by Gibbon, Rebecca  
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)  
$16.99 | May 14, 2019  
978-1-58089-747-1

Girls in sports! This cheerfully illustrated survey of efforts to make women’s athletics socially acceptable and financially supported provides snippets of information and visually appealing portrayals of female barrier-breakers over time. The tone is a bit naive—it assumes that readers will be shocked by the sexism of yesteryear—and arbitrary-feeling italicized phrases (“And never, ever sweat”; “Game on!”) interrupt the flow of the text. It’s light on diversity: While ancient and modern Greece (1896 Olympic marathoner Melpomene) are mentioned, the focus is almost entirely on white Americans (Frances Willard, Senda Berenson Abbot, Eleanor Sears, Gertrude Ederle, Margaret Gisolo, Donna de Varona, Maria Pepe), with only brief mentions of women of color Althea Gibson, Shirley Chisholm, and Patsy Mink—although African-American athletes are featured in the timeline, and a multiracial cast of girls is shown in sports today. The somewhat simplified ending holds that through Title IX, girls now receive equal treatment in athletics, ignoring the world outside of the United States as well as the fact that boys’ sports may still receive preference within it. Still, there is nothing similar for this age group, and readers will be interested in the progress of women in sports and drawn in by the excitement of the passage of Title IX.

A welcome, though flawed, introduction to the history of girls and athletics. (Informational picture book. 5-8)

**SERENA**

*The Littlest Sister*

Gray, Karlin  
Illus. by Ahanonu, Monica  
Page Street (40 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 7, 2019  
978-1-62414-694-7

A picture-book biography of tennis champion Serena Williams. Serena was the youngest of five sisters, behind, in birth order, Yetunde, Isha, Lyndrea, and Venus. The sisters used old, donated balls to play tennis in their hometown of Compton, California; they weren’t very bouncy but would later help Venus and Serena as “good practice for Wimbledon...where the balls bounced lower because the tennis court was made of grass” (Serena would go on to win seven Wimbledon titles). Emphasis is placed on the deep and “unbreakable” bond among the five sisters. Ahanonu’s style emphasizes flat swathes of digital color, and as a result readers may need to rely on the sisters’ relative sizes and hairstyles to pick out Serena. As Gray tells it, Serena was gifted at tennis, but her father didn’t feel she was ready to compete—so she won her first match after secretly signing up for a tournament Venus was competing in, the beginning of an incredible career that has continued to make history and has consistently been supported by her sisters’ love and encouragement. Though focusing on the sisterly bond is commendable and introducing the three older sisters refreshing, alluding to but never naming racism feels disingenuous, especially given the racial injustice Williams has endured. Later images of the Williams sisters at their predominantly white Florida tennis academy only partially compensate.

An illuminating and inspiring—if somewhat rose-colored—chronicle of the life of a world-class athlete. (afterword, biographical note, bibliography) (Picture book/biography. 5-9)
A ZOMBIE ATE MY HOMEWORK
Greenwald, Tommy
Illus. by Bardin, David
Scholastic (256 pp.)
$6.99 paper | May 14, 2019
978-1-338-30592-0
Series: Project Z, 1

A kid zombie escapes from a lab—and it’s not brains he’s after, just freedom. United States government documents from 2024 tell of a top-secret human reanimation program known as Project Z. Three years later, a juvenile zombie named Norbus Clacknozzle is the first (and only) one to escape. He’s rescued by a friendly human couple—aptly named the Kinders—who bring him to their home. Under their direction, Norbus begins masquerading as a human fifth-grader. But even jeans and a T-shirt can’t hide Norbus’ pale skin, strict jelly bean diet, or ridiculously advanced vocabulary. And the pseudonym Arnold Z. Ombee is a dead giveaway. Can the Kinder family keep the secret, or will the government catch on? Greenwald breathes new life into the zombie story with a few twists and Norbus’ fresh, funny narration. Bardin’s cartoon spot illustrations add a cinematic quality that matches well with the short chapters and quick pace. Overarching messages about embracing difference are reflected by a diverse cast to complement the white Kinders and deathly white Norbus: Kiki has dark skin, jeans and a T-shirt can’t hide Norbus’ pale skin, strict jelly bean diet, or ridiculously advanced vocabulary. And the pseudonym Arnold Z. Ombee is a dead giveaway. Can the Kinder family keep the secret, or will the government catch on? Greenwald breathes new life into the zombie story with a few twists and Norbus’ fresh, funny narration. Bardin’s cartoon spot illustrations add a cinematic quality that matches well with the short chapters and quick pace. Overarching messages about embracing difference are reflected by a diverse cast to complement the white Kinders and deathly white Norbus: Kiki has dark skin, Evans uses a prosthetic leg, and Sarah Anne is nonverbal. How—

OUR FLAG WAS STILL THERE
The True Story of Mary Pickersgill and the Star-Spangled Banner
Hartland, Jessie
Illus. by the author
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)
$17.99 | May 21, 2019
978-1-5344-0233-1

The story of the flag that inspired the national anthem, from its commissioning through its construction by Mary Pickersgill to its current place at the Smithsonian.

AND THE BULLFROGS SING
A Life Cycle Begins
Harrison, David L.
Illus. by Cosgrove, Kate
Holiday House (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 14, 2019
978-0-8234-3834-1

The cycle of frog life begins with a male bullfrog’s song. Harrison uses simple, short sentences to describe bullfrog courtship and development: singing, eggs hatching, tadpoles growing, eating and the threat of being eaten, hibernating, and a season of unsuccessful singing before the young frog grows big enough to sing loudly and attract a mate. Appropriately for the preschool audience, the author ignores the variations in bullfrog life that reflect different climate zones. He also simplifies breeding: “A female bullfrog likes his song. Before long she lays eggs.” (There is no backmatter note about fertilization to help caregivers manage questions about what happens between the song and the eggs.) Debut illustrator Cosgrove uses pencils and digital tools to create stylized illustrations that show frogs in a likely environment. She shows the (textually unmentioned) differences between males and females nicely (males have a much larger tympanum, a hearing organ behind their eyes), but occasionally text and illustration don’t quite match. On the spread that reads, “The babies have no legs,” some of the tadpoles do have legs. On the next spread, “They grow fatter and begin to grow legs,” and indeed, the picture shows the process of growth from tiny tadpoles to larger ones developing legs. The text lends itself well to reading aloud, with opportunities for sound effects, and the illustrations show well from a distance. A useful addition to a nature-themed storytime. (Additional facts, further reading, online references) (Informative picture book. 3-6)
This book of Christian-themed infographics is anchored by the theme of light versus darkness. Infographics are a hot ticket, utilizing eye-popping graphic design to present charts, graphs, and other informational text in a visually appealing way. Harvest House uses high-contrast colors with bold sans-serif type to grab their viewers. Spreads contrast light with dark and battles between good and evil. Heroes (Esther, Deborah, John the Baptist, Paul) and villains (Cain, Delilah, Herod, Saul before he became Paul) are identified, as are good rulers and bad rulers, God’s power, and human fallibility—though often lacking the nuance present in the source material. Though a “find the hidden objects” game seems targeted to younger readers, the majority of the information presented is best suited to older children with well-established religious vocabularies. The text tackles some difficult theological discussions, including the doctrine of the Trinity. Even with kid-friendly illustrations and simplified language, the concept of “modalism” may be over the heads of many. Still, the book demonstrates an admirable respect in introducing the terminology and addressing the ways Sunday school analogies fall short in capturing this particular mystery of Christian faith. Some design flaws, such as text in the gutter and confusing charts, further mar an inconsistent introduction to Bible history and doctrine. The decrival of polytheism makes this a less-than-inclusive introduction to Christian principles for non-Christian readers. A commendable if imperfect effort; caregivers should be ready for questions. (Nonfiction. 8-14)

Outdoor-adventure activities combine wisdom and fun in this practical guide to the wild. Knowledge about the natural world and its resources used to be passed down from one generation to the next, as it was required for survival. Although modern society no longer requires familiarity with wild edibles, forecasting weather from clouds, and making a friction fire, these skills remain useful, say the authors of this handy guide. A thoughtful introduction acknowledges the Native American origins of many of the skills introduced in the book. Part 1, “Secrets of the Woods,” includes tapping a maple tree and navigating by the stars. Part 2 covers camping skills from tying knots to brushing your teeth with a stick. Part 3 offers instructions for making such useful items as a willow basket, a log raft, or a birch-bark knife sheath (there is a discussion of knife handling and safety). Part 4 shows readers how to make fun things from nature, like a whistle from a stick or a kite from turkey feathers (“ask a turkey hunter or look on eBay or Etsy”). The instructions are remarkably clear, and black-and-white illustrations add visual interest, levity, and clarity when needed. Fascinating enough to read cover to cover without that dream. With his Mexican parents’ support, he followed his father’s “recipe” for success: “Identify my goal, determine how long it would take me to achieve it and create a plan to reach it.” His mother added that he should strive for excellence in school, and José contributed his own special ingredient: “never ever give up!” After earning degrees in electrical engineering, he applied to NASA and was rejected—11 times. In order to better his chances of entering the program, he became a pilot, was certified as a scuba diver, and learned Russian. NASA finally accepted his 12th application, and in 2009 he blasted into space. Hernández’s descriptive narrative flows effortlessly in both English and Baeza Ventura’s Spanish translation and is easily accessible. Petruccio’s colorful and detailed paintings bring this amazing adventure to life, hazy backgrounds giving the scenes a pleasing dreamlike quality. Hernández closes his account with a heartfelt exhortation to readers to pursue their own dreams, asking them “Which stars do you want to touch?” This outstanding bilingual autobiography encapsulates the life-changing power of having a goal and the will to achieve it. (Bilingual picture book/biography. 7-12)
Hofmeyr espouses the joy of imagination and the power of art to stimulate it.

**TIGER WALK**

setting foot outside, it will also be a reliable companion on camping and hiking trips to augment hours of outdoor exploring.

This in-depth guide offers plenty to learn and do for adventurers of all skill and experience levels. (Nonfiction. 11-17)

**THE GIANT FROM THE FIRE SEA**

Himmelman, John
Illus. by Himmelman, Jeff
Henry Holt (256 pp.)
$16.99 | May 21, 2019
978-1-250-19650-7

Can giants and humans overcome their differences to battle a common enemy?

Giants only exist in nurserytales, or so Jat thought. But when one arrives on the shore of the Fire Sea, Jat is forced to rethink his understanding of the world and how it works. Once Jat and the others in his village grow used to having a giant in their midst, they become comfortable trading chores for food. But this precarious balance between species is threatened when more giants arrive, giants who are not as reasonable as Newton. These giants not only want to (and do) eat the villagers, they also want to capture Newton and return him to their own land to be punished for daring to practice magic.

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**JACOB’S ROOM TO CHOOSE**

Hoffman, Sarah & Hoffman, Ian
Illus. by Case, Chris
Magination/American Psychological Association (32 pp.)
$17.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-4338-3073-0

When two students are bullied in the bathroom, their class makes new rules so that everyone can pee in peace in this follow-up to Jacob’s New Dress (2014).

Jacob, a white boy with blond hair, and his friend Sophie, a girl with brown skin and Afro-textured hair, need to use the bathroom after library time. Jacob wears a dress; Sophie has on a button-down shirt and khaki trousers. “Do you think it’s OK?” they worry together outside the gender-segregated lavs, each marked with the familiar blue, gendered icons. Entering the boys’ room, Jacob attracts unwelcoming stares, and Sophie is likewise driven from the girls’ room. With the help of their teacher, they work together with their classmates to design new signs and rules so that anyone can use the bathroom without fear. Case’s watercolor illustrations match the style of the first book’s and fill the page, inviting readers into Jacob’s diversely depicted class of students. Unlike in the first book, no children tell Jacob he can’t wear a dress, but his classmates still make assumptions about gender based on one another’s clothing choices. Their teacher’s lesson shows that there are more than two ways to dress—not all boys wear short hair, and not all girls wear long hair or dresses. Even their own classroom represents a spectrum of expressions. While the overall theme emphasizes inclusion, the language never moves beyond “boys and girls” when referring to gender identities; nonbinary identities are not explored.

**TIGER WALK**

Hofmeyr, Dianne
Illus. by Hodgson, Jesse
Otter-Barry (32 pp)
$17.99 | May 1, 2019
978-1-91095-941-1

A little boy's picture of a tiger comes to amazing life.

At the art gallery, Tom watches the tiger in a jungle painting full of lush green foliage. “And the tiger watches Tom.” At home, Tom uses crayons to draw a big tiger with “pointy teeth” and “green-jewel eyes.” In the shadows in his bedroom that night, Tom sees the eyes, twitching whiskers, and swishing tail, and he holds his breath. The tiger gets very close—and invites Tom to go for a walk. “Climb up. Hold tight.” They pad into the gleaming jungle, where “they see foxes and bears and even a lion” and play hide-and-seek. When they reach the river, the tiger helps Tom get over his fear of swimming. On the other side is a fair “high above the world and close to the stars.” Next, the tiger takes Tom down to a cave lined with snowy walls of ice, where snow tigers love to dance. Everyone dances and ensures that the tiger never overwhelms readers. Tom has olive skin and straight black hair.

Simply lovely. (Picture book. 4-7)
Readers will see the wonders of While-a-Way Lane, magical and otherwise, unfold.

**THE LOST BOY’S GIFT**

*Holt, Kimberly Willis*

Illus. by Bean, Jonathan

Christy Ottaviano/Henry Holt (244 pp.)

$16.99 | Apr. 30, 2019

978-1-62779-326-1

The dull and seemingly ordinary neighborhood in which Daniel fetches up with his newly divorced mom turns out to be anything but.

Daniel’s first impressions of While-a-Way Lane aren’t good, as most of the neighbors are away for spring break, and he’s already in a dark, missing-his-dad mood. But then he spots his next-door neighbor, an older lady named Tilda Butter, apparently talking to the air. Had he looked a bit closer, he would have seen her actually in conversation with a small snake named Isadora. Tilda is very good at looking closer, and as her third-person chapters tend to be much longer than Daniel’s, it’s largely through her eyes and memories that readers will see the wonders of While-a-Way Lane, magical and otherwise, unfold. Wondrous things that happen to Daniel include an exciting encounter with squirrels in Tilda’s attic, landing a role as Lost Boy No. 8 in a school production of *Peter Pan* (his favorite book), and being followed home one evening by a cloud of fireflies. In Tilda’s view, everyone has a “gift” (hers happens to be talking to animals), and though on the surface Daniel remains rather unappealingly sullen and unobsevant until near the end, he ultimately rewards her faith in a way that adds further buoyancy to the upbeat finish. Both Bean’s map and his chapter-head vignettes themselves reward closer looks. The cast defaults to white.

After Daniel’s experiences, readers will want to move there too. (Fantasy. 9-11)

**THE COLD LITTLE VOICE**

*Hughes, Alison*

Illus. by Dolly, Jan

Clockwise Press (32 pp.)

$19.95 | May 15, 2019

978-1-988347-11-0

A young child struggles to banish pervasive negative thoughts.

“I have a cold little voice that follows me everywhere,” the beleaguered narrator declares as a snarling, blue, tadpole-shaped thing with arms taps their shoulder. Sometimes it “digs in its claws and whispers its cold little thoughts,” berating their every inch—from their “ridiculous” haircut to their “funny” gait—until it’s all they hear. After the child, who ordinarily has purple skin, is “crushed” into “a small, grey nothing” and vanishes, the lost boy’s gift “other people’s cold little voices,” spreading happiness until cold voices disappear. Though hopeful, this approach—culminating in soothing voices filing through a “kindness factory” to emerge all smiles—feels unsettlingly facile against such relentless, unexplained self-criticism. The “little” voice looms frighteningly large; neither the text’s Comic Sans–esque typeface nor Dolly’s pastel-hued, cartoonish illustrations soften its nasty, eager grin or the exhaustion shadowing the child’s eyes.

Readers struggling with low self-esteem might find coping strategies here, but caregivers will want to add another: asking an adult for help. (Picture book. 6-9)

**LINDSAY’S JOYRIDE**

*Hurford, Molly*

Illus. by Lemay, Violet

Rodale Kids (256 pp.)

$13.99 | $19.99 PLB | May 7, 2019

978-1-63565-277-2

978-1-9848-9425-0 PLB

Series: Shred Girls, 1

A socially awkward preteen named Lindsay emerges from a superhero fantasy world to make friends and become a BMX queen.

When Lindsay’s parents announce that they are going on an archaeological dig in Estonia, she can hardly believe her luck. She is sure to find a hidden amulet on their assignment that will finally reveal her superpowers, unleashing the fearless girl underneath her shy, bilingual facade. Instead, they tell her that she will be staying with her cousin and archnemesis, Phoebe, the tough-dressing and tattooed daughter of her tía Maria. All at once, she has to say goodbye to her house, her parents, and her comic books for a summer adventure that will push her to athletic new heights and force her to admit how wrong she was about her cousin’s dark nature. Getting to know the real Phoebe means attending her BMX classes at an indoor track named Joyride, where Lindsay enters an all-gender bike-jumping competition. While Lindsay stops judging Phoebe for her punk style of dress, she remains preoccupied with external appearances and popularity throughout the novel, undergoing a makeover in an attempt to fit in. Dressing for a training session, she reflects that “the hat makes me feel like I actually belong on the tracks at Joyride.” The author uses clothing styles and stereotypes in place of character development throughout, defeating the point of Lindsay’s earliest lesson. Biracial Lindsay’s mom is Mexican, and her father is white; she and Phoebe both have light skin and brown hair.

Disappointingly superficial. (Fiction. 8-12)
During World War II, the U.S. 23rd Headquarters Special Troops was created to launch a series of operations to deceive the Germans.

Artists, actors, telegraphers, set designers, engineers, and sound technicians were recruited for this secret unit—an atypical group of soldiers. By using prerecorded sounds of moving tanks, staging false camps with inflatable tanks and artillery, driving around the countryside wearing fake unit patches, and feeding locals false information, the men of the 23rd may have influenced the course of the war. Although the information presented is accurate and generally interesting, the structure of this effort is unsatisfactory. Numerous pages long supplemental sections (printed on darkened pages and in a sans-serif type) provide additional information on topics introduced in the narrative, but these sections confusingly interrupt the story, sometimes midsentence, and too often come before the topics are introduced. Other additional sections provide brief biographies of some members of the 23rd, sometimes long before or after they’re mentioned in the story.

Save this one for only the most dedicated of World War II buffs. (Nonfiction. 11-18)

On a beautiful Arctic morning a group of friends decides to go seal hunting.

Through water rich with ice floes, five friends set off in their outboard motorboat on a sunny day to catch a seal. The morning passes quickly with clear skies and calm seas, and as they sail, the hunters remember how delicious seal stew is and exclaim how much they miss it. However, they have no luck that morning. In the afternoon, they continue cruising and looking for a seal. The later the day grows, the hungrier they become. They run out of everything: bannock, tea, hot dogs, and jerky! Neverless, they choose not to give up but keep going, hoping their luck will change—and at last it does, with a resolution that leads to a full stew pot that evening. The book’s text brings a popular song by the Inuit band The Jerry Cans to life for young readers, and its musical origins are evident in repetitive phrasing and catchy rhythms. On all pages the text appears in both Inuktitut and English, with the former printed in a large font above the latter in a smaller type. Kim’s colorful illustrations, featuring firm, black outlines and bold digital colors, depict the enthusiastic hunters in a mix of knitwear, furs, and nylon. The seal is cute, with bright, black eyes, so it’s just as well its demise occurs outside of the frame.

Readers will get a snapshot of a unique way of life in this book’s enthusiastic pages. (Bilingual picture book. 5-8)

MAMAQTUQ!
The Jerry Cans
Illus. by Kim, Eric
Inhabit Media (36 pp.)
$16.95 | May 7, 2019
978-1-77227-230-7

A time-travel adventure incorporates reflections on human nature in this middle-grade stand-alone.

With their mother in danger overseas, 12-year-old Will Menzies and his little brother, Jamie, are bundled off from the United States to Scotland to live with relatives. At the family’s ancestral castle, Will discovers his ability to look into the past...and, as Jamie impulsively learns, even to visit it. Will and his irrepressible cousin Nan are determined to rescue Jamie, but every trip into history brings greater dangers. Will is an immensely appealing protagonist—introspective and responsible yet sick with worry, anger, and guilt over his mother’s situation. The other characters (most of them Will’s Scottish relatives and ancestors and all white, like Will and Jamie) are more thinly drawn but still lively and likable. The historical chapters especially shine: Despite the hand-waving pseudo-scientific mechanics, the trio’s jaunts to the Middle Ages, Roman times, and even earlier are vividly realized, rich in well-chosen details, and charming and thrilling and gross and cruel where appropriate. (While never graphically explicit, the level of bloody violence sometimes clashes with the simple, almost naïve, illustrations.) These episodes are united by Will’s growing awareness of humanity’s tragic predilection toward fear and violence, along with its capacity for bravery and kindness. In a touching epilogue, he is able to bring his new understanding to reconciliation with his parents’ choices.

Gripping and thoughtful; readers will be left pondering their own connections to the past. (Fantasy. 9-13)
THE AUTHORS DELIVER A CAPTIVATING STORY OF TRAVELERS DREAMING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

By Sara Ortiz

Tony Johnston and María Elena Fontanot de Rhoads met over 50 years ago in Mexico City at the foot of El Ángel, the Angel of Independence, a monument that sits at the center of a roundabout located in a main thoroughfare of the city. The two friends and co-authors raised their children together, experienced maternity together, and traveled all over Mexico together.

But the duo’s middle-grade novel, Beast Rider (March 19), is their first venture into crafting a novel as a team. The book is a moving, harrowing journey about a young boy who jumps aboard the treacherous U.S.-bound freight trains known as La Bestia. Beast Rider doesn’t shy away from the cruel and crude journey that hundreds of thousands of migrants experience. I talked to the authors separately, and both of them discuss how the journey for women can sometimes be harder, though their protagonist Manuel is a young boy. Women who board La Bestia often take birth control, knowing that they will be raped at least once on their way to the border. This information isn’t detailed in the book but rather hinted at when Manuel meets a young girl who is disguising her hair under a baseball cap: “Put back your cap. Girls especially are at danger on The Beast,” she’s told. Fontanot de Rhoads admires the resilience of the people who ride La Bestia. “Many of these women and youngsters, who really have lived through terrible things,” nonetheless “study and work and try to make a better life,” she says.

Beast Rider’s first draft was penned by Johnston, on Post-its. She refers to herself as the world’s first Luddite, for she does not have email, seldom gets online, considers a No. 2 soft pencil her companion, writes longhand, and is “not fond of machinery.” To make things slightly more complex, Fontanot de Rhoads (whom Johnston fondly calls Malena) lives in Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula, where a phone connection isn’t always reliable. Their collaboration and exchanges were possible only when the phone connection was actually successful or by mail—that’s if the mailed manuscripts arrived to their destination in the Yucatán.

So it’s no surprise that the making of the book wasn’t traditional. Johnston provided the foundation of the prose, the plot, and narrative, and Fontanot de Rhoads contributed the expertise on Mexican culture, landscape, and Span-
ish idiom. While Johnston does speak Spanish, it’s not her first language, so she relied on Fontanot de Rhoads to make sure she utilized Spanish correctly. Fontanot de Rhoads’ friend and Mexican railroad engineer Francisco Gorostiza Perez offered insight to what often happens on migrants’ journeys to the U.S.–Mexico border, and Dr. Alejandro de Ávila Blomberg with the Textile Museum of Oaxaca lent knowledge about Mexican government laws, serving as a fact-checker of sorts. The co-authors are vocal about the teamlike efforts in building the novel.

Johnston says of herself that she is a very nonpolitical person, but she realizes that due to the environment we live in today, “we can’t be nonpolitical.” Yet she maintains that the book is not a political statement: The novel depicts a more human element of what viewers merely glimpse on television and in the news. She hopes that readers open up their souls to understand that migrants are not statistics and numbers but people. Families are being displaced, and it’s uncertain if they will be reunited. “I don’t think you need to be political to understand what these [migrants] are going through. If somebody could put [him/her]self in the position of Manuel—on that train, what he gives up, the isolation he endures—I hope they have a better understanding….I want to offer a portrait of people that are desperate. It’s not just Mexicans and Salvadorans; it’s people all over the world.”

Sara Ortiz is the program manager for the Believer Festival. Beast Rider received a starred review in the Jan. 15, 2019, issue.

**WE ARE (NOT) FRIENDS**

*Kang, Anna*

*Illus. by Weant, Christopher*

*Two Lions (40 pp.)*

$17.99 | May 1, 2019

978-1-5420-4428-8

Series: You Are Not Small

Two friends navigate the tricky waters of including a third into their duo.

The bear pals from *You Are (Not) Small* (2014) and its successors are back, learning another childhood lesson. This time they are figuring out friendship skills. The large brown bear and small purple bear stand next to a toy chest stuffed with infinite possibilities. But a blue rabbit stops them in their tracks by asking the ultimate vulnerable question: “Can I play with you?” The big brown bear doesn’t hesitate: “Yes!” But the small purple bear isn’t sure: “Well….” The rabbit and the larger bear happen to be wearing matching bowler hats, and they grab some canes and launch into a tap-dance sequence, with the tiny purple bear (in a pith helmet) huffing to catch up. But then the situation is upended, with the rabbit (now also in a pith helmet) and the tinier ursine friend building a jeep out of blocks. The large brown bear tries to squeeze in, but it’s only a two-seater. No matter what they try to play, there always seems to be one friend left out. Tears ensue, but a clarification of “best” and “new” friend solves the dilemma. Kang and Weant’s childcentric sensibilities are funny and empathetic. Humorous expressions and comedic timing lighten the rejection and anger oft stemming from young group dynamics.

This friendship will likely face many more tests, but these pals are stronger because of this one. *(Picture book. 3-6)*

**CAT’S EGG**

*Karthikeyan, Aparna*

*Illus. by Kastl, Christine*

*Karadi Tales (30 pp.)*

$13.95 | Apr. 2, 2019

978-8-19365-422-4

The cat has found an egg; now she must figure out how to hatch her kitten.

When the cat finds a yellow egg in her basket, she is convinced it’s going to produce a kitten. Her friend the dog is quite skeptical. After sitting on the egg for a while, the cat needs a break, so she tries to find a babysitter for it. In turn she asks the dog, the crow, the cuckoo, and the turtle to help her. However, no one is able to help her, and now, after being carried around in her mouth, the egg is damp and smells odd. When she takes it back to her house, the dog discovers that the egg is not a real egg but a chocolate Easter egg. The cat considers eating it, but the dog tells her chocolate is not good for her and instead kindly shares his dinner with her. Kastl’s illustrations are playful and soft, giving the pages an uncluttered feel. The spatial creativity on display allows readers to see the story from the animals’ perspectives. While Karthikeyan’s wry text develops its feline
and canine characters well, the story misses an opportunity to explore the ways in which different animal babies are born or why some people use chocolate eggs on Easter.

A rather meandering story about a whimsical cat and her chocolate egg. (Picture book. 4-8)

**SPACE**

Kastner, Emmy
Illus. by the author
Roaring Brook (32 pp.)
$16.99 | $7.99 board | May 7, 2019
978-1-250-31204-4
978-1-250-31205-1 board
Series: Nerdy Babies

A quartet of curious babies wearing glasses and spacesuits explores the moon, the sun, and the planets.

In speech bubbles, various babies ask questions (“Why are we floating?”) or make comments (“It’s so quiet”), leading to answers or information in the narrative text about gravity on Earth and sound in space. Using bright, bold colors and simple lines and dots, Kastner gives each planet personality and facial features. Mercury appears in sunglasses because it is “closest to the sun.” (Caregivers will note that thanks to artistic license, Venus is depicted as magenta rather than dun.) The order of presentation is confusing, especially given its very young intended audience. One early spread shows the sun, “the center of our solar system,” yet a schematic spread showing the sun surrounded by the planets occurs a few pages after information is given about Earth and its moon. Although the descriptions of the planets are simple—“Mercury is the smallest planet and closest to the sun. Venus spins backward!”—the topic is not one of the planets are simple—“Mercury is the smallest planet and closest to the sun. Venus spins backward!”—which is within babies’ developmental grasp. The same babies or “if you are on the potty” or “if I am on the potty!” Hugs from those with full diapers are verboten, as well as from those with no diaper. No hugs from scaly persons, bears, or overzealous boa constrictors. But with all these rules...when the kitty needs a hug, no one can give one. So this persnickety cat makes some revisions to the rules. Basically, the cat will now accept hugs from nearly everyone previously ruled out. Nostrils pinched shut will take care of “stinky hugs,” and “pinchy hugs” will be OK so long as they are gentle. Suddenly everyone wants to offer a hug. And so forth. Bestselling author/illustrator Kirk’s first from his boutique publishing house is not auspicious. The protagonist’s expression is almost terrifyingly uber-cute, with exaggeratedly wide eyes and a blood-red smile, and its imperviousness makes it rather unlikable. While its guidelines that “hugs are to be given gently [and] respectfully” are welcome, the long catalog of unacceptable hugs and then newly permissible ones feels repetitious rather than enjoyably silly.

**THE NOT-SO GREAT OUTDOORS**

Kloepfer, Madeline
Illus. by the author
Tundra (40 pp.)
$17.99 | May 14, 2019
978-0-7352-6417-5

A school-age kid is grumpy about going on a family camping trip but eventually comes to appreciate what the outdoors has to offer.

Standing on the street in a very cool town, with its artsy soap and pottery stands and street musician, our protagonist, arms folded, tells the other kids, “I have no idea why we have to ‘venture into the great outdoors’ this summer,” but off they go, leaving the city behind and driving straight into the mountains. “It’s not like there’s anything out here,” the narrator continues, as the landscape turns thick with wildlife. “There’s no electricity,” is the next complaint, as the protagonist sits glumly, ignoring the campfire. The narrator misses the “city lights” even as mom points up at the aurora borealis. The others seem oblivious to this disgruntlement complaint, as the protagonist sits glumly, ignoring the campfire. The narrator misses the “city lights” even as mom points up at the aurora borealis. The others seem oblivious to this disgruntlement as they frolic, take pictures, and explore. After they spot bears and pottery stands and street musician, our protagonist, arms folded, tells the other kids, “I have no idea why we have to ‘venture into the great outdoors’ this summer,” but off they go, leaving the city behind and driving straight into the mountains. “It’s not like there’s anything out here,” the narrator continues, as the landscape turns thick with wildlife. “There’s no electricity,” is the next complaint, as the protagonist sits glumly, ignoring the campfire. The narrator misses the “city lights” even as mom points up at the aurora borealis. The others seem oblivious to this disgruntlement as they frolic, take pictures, and explore. After they spot bears — but off they go, leaving the city behind and driving straight into the mountains. “It’s not like there’s anything out here,” the narrator continues, as the landscape turns thick with wildlife. “There’s no electricity,” is the next complaint, as the protagonist sits glumly, ignoring the campfire. The narrator misses the “city lights” even as mom points up at the aurora borealis. The others seem oblivious to this disgruntlement as they frolic, take pictures, and explore. After they spot bears...
**DISASTER STRIKES! The Most Dangerous Space Missions of All Time**

Kluger, Jeffrey
Philomel (224 pp.)
$18.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-9848-1275-9

Twelve harrowing episodes in the history of space travel.

Beginning with the hatch that prematurely blew off Gus Grissom’s *Liberty Bell 7* capsule, Kluger (*To the Moon!, 2018*) offers a truly terrifying tally of catastrophes or near catastrophes—basing each incident on authoritative sources and relating each with melodramatic flair: “It can be oddly peaceful inside a dying spacecraft.” To requisite accounts of the *Apollo 1* fire, the *Apollo 13* thriller, and the destruction of the space shuttle *Challenger*, he adds the less-well-known tragedies of the *Soyuz 11* crash and the asphyxiation of the three cosmonauts of *Soyuz 11* as well as such near misses as Gene Cernan’s first extravehicular venture (“The Terrible, Horrible, No-Good, Very Bad Space Walk”), the lightning bolt that struck *Apollo 12* as it was taking off, and the space-suited Italian astronaut who (ironically) narrowly escaped drowning outside the ISS when his helmet filled with water. The author analyzes the causes of each explosion or snafu, and his view of early spacecraft as exciting but chancy death traps riddled with flawed, often hastily designed technology will be an eye-opener for readers schooled on blander space-program narratives. Sharp black-and-white photos at the chapter heads depict the actual disasters or earlier views of the affected spacecraft or astronauts (where faces are discernible, all present white).

A thrill ride punctuated with spectacular failures—but also spectacular successes. (sources, glossary, index) (Nonfiction. 11-14)

**LEVEL 13**

Korman, Gordon
Scholastic (236 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 25, 2019
978-1-338-28620-5
Series: Slacker, 2

Can Cam hit 50,000 subscribers on his game stream? Not with distractions like schoolwork.

In *Slacker* (2016), Cam Boxer tried to perpetuate his video game “lifestyle” by starting a fake do-gooder club at school; then everyone joined the Positive Action Group. Now it’s so successful (and the eighth-grader is such a hero) that he has no time to game. He and his best friends, Chuck and Pavel, devise a scheme to convince the student body that Cam is failing and needs to study instead of running the P.A.G. This works, and Cam’s stream takes off, especially after Cam starts playing a rare, early-release copy of “Guardians of Geldorf.” But then his classmates, worried about their hero, start offering homework help; a mysterious stalker comes to town; and Chuck’s budding relationship with P.A.G. second-in-command Daphne threatens both the game streaming and the three boys’ friendship. This sequel, narrated, as before, by the threesome and a few others by turns, is more of the same. Cam is no more likable, as he lies and cheats his way to unearned success. Nothing here is actually believable—a Zorro mask would not hide Cam’s identity—and a twist about questionable content in the game’s early release is profoundly unexciting. As before, the cast defaults to white, with diversity largely cued via naming convention.

Fans of Korman’s school stories and caper novels may find this fluff just fun enough. (Fiction. 7-11)

**POLLY DIAMOND AND THE SUPER STUNNING SPECTACULAR SCHOOL FAIR**

Kuipers, Alice
Illus. by Toledano, Diana
Chronicle (112 pp.)
$14.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-4521-5233-2
Series: Polly Diamond, 2


Polly Diamond’s day is going to be spectacular. Today is the school fair, and it’s all about books. The mixed-race girl’s love of books and words has only grown since her magic book, Spell, appeared, and the pair have had several adventures, playing with words and stories as everything that Polly writes in Spell comes true. At school, what starts as one idea to make up for the broken popcorn machine soon becomes a game of punny attractions as a Pop-Open-A-Book-Corn stall, a Title-Tastic-Photo Booth, a Read-A-Coaster, and much more spill from Polly’s imagination to Spell’s pages and out over the fair. The fair is a massive hit, but after a magic carpet ride and turning a friend into a dragon (and her annoying babysitter into a squirrel), Polly realizes she has lost Spell. Alas, retracing her steps is not as simple as vanquishing a puddle monster. This second installment is full to the brim with the fun and tricky flexibility of language, which drives the small tempest of plot. Potential new vocabulary is called out with italics and defined, though clarity is hampered somewhat by the use of italics for emphasis with other words as well. Nevertheless, Toledano’s spot art continues to add another dimension to Polly and Spell’s world, giving less-experienced readers extra context clues and establishing Polly’s dad as white and her mom as a woman of color.

For story lovers and storytellers. (list of books mentioned) (Fantasy. 5-8)
ME, TOMA AND THE CONCRETE GARDEN
Larsen, Andrew
Illus. by Villeneuve, Anne
Kids Can (36 pp.)
$16.99  |  May 7, 2019
978-1-77138-917-4

Two boys learn valuable lessons about the power of nature.

Sent to stay with his aunt Mimi while his mother recovers from surgery, Young Vincent is less than thrilled to be spending his summer in a cramped city neighborhood. Soon, however, he meets Toma, a local neighborhood kid, and they spend their days playing ball and eating ice cream. Mimi asks the boys to dispose of a box of dirt balls that have mysteriously appeared, and what begins as a simple chore quickly becomes a project that breathes new life into the neighborhood and creates a sense of community that is stronger than the boys could have imagined.

Larsen’s text works nicely with Villeneuve’s illustrations, channeling elements of *The Secret Garden* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as well as such recent efforts as Peter Brown’s *The Curious Garden* (2009) in re-creating the drab neighborhood that slowly is transformed through the planting of flowers and neighbors working to keep them alive. The opening double-page spread depicts a city awash in grayish-green as Vincent arrives. As the boys begin throwing the balls of dirt (actually seed bombs) into the nearby lot, more and more color slowly seeps into the pictures until the garden comes to life and the neighborhood reflects all of the colors of the rainbow. Vincent and Aunt Mimi present black, and Toma presents white.

A sweet story that celebrates community coming together to create something wonderful. *(Picture book. 3-7)*

WHAT KIND OF CAR DOES A T. REX DRIVE?
Lee, Mark
Illus. by Biggs, Brian
Putnam (40 pp.)
$17.99  |  May 28, 2019
978-1-5247-4123-5

Dinosaurs and vehicular modes of transportation meld in symbiotic bliss.

What’s a used car salesman to do? Ava and Mickey’s uncle Otto is having a summer sale, but the customers aren’t coming. Or are they? When dinosaurs arrive looking for wheels, the kids’ dino knowledge helps to put the right terrible lizard in the right car. The herbivorous stegosaurus gets one that it can take off the road and into the forests, for instance. Then a T. Rex with a short fuse arrives on the scene, and it’ll be curtains for our heroes unless they can find him the best transport (and pronto!). Colorful and goofy, even the Rex, these dinos are the visual stars of this show. Much of the brush and ink work (colored digitally) appears simple, but details lurk, such as the perpetually changing signs around the lot. And one of the best unspoken gags is how oversized they might be. The range of cars exceeds that of dinosaurs, but kids who are fans of either will find plenty to enjoy. Alas, while the book does take care to include a female dino in the mix, she stereotypically buys the only vehicle with flowers on it and calls a sales kid “a dear.” Ava, Mickey and Uncle Otto all have light skin and straight, black hair.

Only the extinct would fail to enjoy this kooky amalgamation of dinos, deals, and automobiles. *(Picture book. 3-6)*

PIRATE QUEEN
The Legend of Grace O’Malley
Lee, Tony
Illus. by Hart, Sam
Candlewick (128 pp.)
$19.99  |  Apr. 16, 2019
978-1-5362-0019-5

To save her homeland, a 16th-century Irishwoman fears no man.

In this exciting graphic novel, fierce, scarlet-haired Grace O’Malley grows up on the sea alongside her chieftain father in Ireland. When her father tries to steer her toward pursuits he deems ladylike, she admonishes him, “A woman’s skills? Needlework and dancing? I’m an O’Malley! We don’t dance!” Under the rule of Henry VIII, Ireland suffers greatly as people lose their homes and their lands to English tyranny. As the oppression grows, Grace finds herself enmeshed in the conflict, losing a son, a lover, and two husbands to the intolerable and seemingly unrelenting war. Grace takes to sailing the seas and destroying English ships, fearing nothing; she even goes so far as to shoot a boarding enemy with a crossbow minutes after giving birth. Lee depicts O’Malley as a truly powerful figure: She fights, kills, and leads men into battle—but she never abandons facets of her selfhood with which she strongly identifies, such as being a mother. Hart’s illustrations are vigorously kinetic, creating compelling scenes of battle that rocket along at a breakneck pace more electrifying than any action movie. While Lee and Hart’s previous volumes tackled more widely known figures (such as Joan of Arc and Robin Hood), discovering the legend of Grace O’Malley feels like unearthing a hidden gem. The tale takes place in the United Kingdom in the 1500s; all characters portrayed present white.

Spirited, thrilling, and wonderful. *(Graphic historical fiction. 10-adult)*
Incorporating nails, knuckles, and skin textures as well as paint, Daniele crafts animal heads of startling realism.

**WHAT IF...?**

Lenain, Thierry
Illus. by Tallec, Olivier
Enchanted Lion Books (32 pp.)
$17.95  |  Apr. 30, 2019
978-1-59270-281-7

“A child sat on his island, looking out at the world and thinking. He sees a world full of miseries: war, famine, hegemony, pollution, and sorrow. For each, he imagines a transformation: “What if we lasso the clouds and bring rain to the desert?” What if we wash [the ocean] clean?” In Tallec’s painterly scenes, the child is defined by swift pencil lines, the only color to him his red cheeks and pants—the rest is white. He is placed on negative space, swathes or spots of white that share the spreads with the painted depictions of destruction and evil. It’s a novel visual approach to a familiar theme, subverting what readers may expect by making the reality appear more concrete than the possibility and mostly leaving the what-if’s in readers’ imaginations. Some spreads are at once more pointed and more obscure than others: When the child sees “the powerful gorging, ordering, shouting, and decreeing,” he stands in front of a TV set tuned to a smug-looking politician and thinks, “We have to open their eyes or drive them out.” Open the eyes of the two people watching from the couch! Drive out the powerful! Exactly who those pronouns refer to can spawn a conversation all by itself. At the end, readers learn why the child appears so ephemeral: He doesn’t yet exist but has decided he has the resolve to be born.

**Sobering and provocative.** (Picture book. 5-10)

**G IS FOR GOLAZO**

The Ultimate Soccer Alphabet
Littlejohn, James
Illus. by Shipley, Matthew
Triumph Books (32 pp.)
$17.95  |  May 14, 2019
978-1-62937-671-4

Featuring dozens of emblematic soccer players, this picture book lives up to its subtitle as the “ultimate alphabet book” for the young soccer/football enthusiast.

Lionel Messi, the yellow card, Pelé, the bicycle kick, Mia Hamm: This soccer-themed alphabet book features concepts and notable players from past and present. Going beyond a mere depiction of the players, it employs a humorous approach, through clever takes on both the players’ names and monikers as well as game situations and soccer lingo. Each page/letter has an unexpected twist to it—a surprising pun, a semi-obscurereference...not exactly what one would expect. For instance, Pelé, the Brazilian legend, is found not under the letter P but K, as he is the “King” of the game; similarly, Diego Maradona, one of last century’s legends, is not under the letter M but under H, as in the “Hand of God,” referencing the infamous illegal goal he scored with his hand in the 1986 World Cup. The subject matter yields some inspiring choices for typically difficult letters: “V is for Vuvuzela,” patch, and “Z is for Zizou in Zebra Stripes.” However, “X is for XI” (as in 11 players) is a little pallid and will need some unpacking for younger readers. In addition to appearing on the copyright page, women are confined to two entries: “Queen” Marta and team “USA” (where Hamm appears).

An imaginative take on the alphabet-book genre that’s sure to gain a place in the hearts of soccer fans. (Informational picture book. 4-8)

**HANDIMALS**

Animals in Art and Nature
Lopez, Silvia
Illus. by Daniele, Guido
Christy Ottaviano/Henry Holt (42 pp.)
$18.99  |  Apr. 30, 2019
978-1-62779-891-4

A gallery of animal portraits guaranteed to cause double takes, as they are all made up of painted human hands.

Incorporating nails, knuckles, and skin textures as well as paint, Daniele crafts animal heads of startling realism, from an alpaca and a polar bear that really look furry to a chameleon on which every tiny scale shimmers with nuanced colors. Some, such as the toucan and flamingo, are composed of single hands, but most use more, topping out at the six that are intricately folded together to create a mandarin duck. Several photos are digitally assembled (in more ways than one, in the case of the giant panda, which crouches in a thicket of fingers painted like bamboo), but the artist claims that none of the original paintings are retouched.

Opposite each of the 16 close-ups, general descriptions of the animals as well as facts and will need some unpacking for younger readers. In addition to appearing on the copyright page, women are confined to two entries: “Queen” Marta and team “USA” (where Hamm appears).

A worthy successor to Mario Mariotti and Roberto Marchiori’s Hanimali (1988), with a low-key message about the importance of animal conservation carried in a handful of nature notes. (Informational picture book. 5-9)

**SPARKY & SPIKE**

Charles Schulz and the Wildest, Smartest Dog Ever
Lowell, Barbara
Illus. by Andreasen, Dan
Cameron + Company (40 pp.)
$16.95  |  Apr. 23, 2019
978-1-944903-58-9

How young Sparky and Spike became the famous cartoonist Charles Schulz and his beloved creation Snoopy.
Sparky's dog, Spike, white with black spots, is the “wildest and smartest dog ever.” He drinks from the bathroom faucet, fetches potatoes on command, and eats seemingly anything (razor blades!) without getting sick. He can tell time, letting Sparky's father know on Saturday evening when it's time to head to the drugstore for the Sunday funny pages. Sparky loves to draw cartoons. When his teacher predicts he will be an artist someday, Sparky is determined “not...to be just any artist—he is going to be a cartoonist.” When Sparky sends a letter about Spike to Ripley's Believe It or Not! and it's published in the Sunday comics along with his drawing of Spike, Sparky is inspired. And, indeed, as explained in the author's note (which includes family photos of Sparky and Spike), Charles grew up to create “Peanuts.” In the illustrator's note, Andreasen reveals that when he was a young boy he sent a drawing to Charles Schulz and got a personal reply (included in the backmatter) that inspired him, like Sparky, to become an illustrator. Andreasen does not try to emulate Schulz's iconic style, instead rendering delicately hashed, fairly realistic cartoons, placing his mostly white cast on funny-pages–bright backdrops.

A fetching story, perfect for budding artists and lovers of the funnies. (Picture book/biography. 4-8)

**THE RISE OF WINTER**
Lyttle, Alex  
Illus. by Madia, Sydney & Peirce, Aidan  
Central Avenue Publishing (320 pp.)  
$9.99 paper | May 1, 2019  
978-1-77168-158-2  
Series: Terra Protectorum, 1

This first in a fantasy trilogy features a young girl and a band of animals questing to save the world from itself.

Readers meet Winter, who is in grade nine, surrounded by schoolyard bullies at the novel's opening, but she is whisked to a world of talking animals within a few chapters. As the newly named leader of the Guardians, which protect the planet and its life force, Winter hones magical skills with guidance from Vulpeera the fox, Perton the bat, and others. Threats to the Guardianship mount, and common fantasy elements pile up. Winter's deceased biological parents, her role as a chosen child with magical blood, and a journey to a powerful mountain feel familiar. Meanwhile, themes of grief and climate change add social complexity—though they are woven in with little subtlety, a problem that's exacerbated as the novel loses control of its pacing. As Winter and her animal comrades race against time, Winter must face painful revelations about her family members while becoming a leader. Chapters end on action to pull readers along. The names of animal characters and magical powers are so numerous that readers may lose track, but Latin buffs might love it. Winter presents white; Vulpeera references two mothers (of different species), and human character Alectus uses a prosthetic foot. Madia and Peirce contribute occasional grayscale spot illustrations.

For readers who want to meander. (Fantasy. 10-13)

**CROSSING ON TIME**
Stein Engines, Fast Ships, and a Journey to the New World  
Macaulay, David  
Illus. by the author  
Roaring Brook (128 pp.)  
$18.99 | May 1, 2019  
978-1-91095-924-4

Childhood memories, as well as loads of historical and archival research, anchor a history of ocean liners from the invention of steam pumps to the magnificent SS United States. Linked by recollections of his own family's 1957 journey from the U.K. to New York aboard the United States, Macaulay traces the development of steam-powered ships from a small 1783 paddle-driven experiment to the gargantuan 900-foot monster that still holds the record for the fastest Atlantic crossing by a ship of its type. Ignoring the Titanic-like tragedies, he focuses on design and engineering—mixing portrait profiles of dozens of increasingly long, sleek hulls with lovingly detailed cutaway views of boilers, turbines, and power trains, structural elements being assembled (sometimes with the help of a giant authorial hand reaching down from the skies), and diagrams of decks and internal workings. All of this is accompanied by sure, lucid explanations and culminates in a humongous inside view of the United States on a multiple gatefold, with very nearly every room and cupboard labeled. Having filled in the historical highlights, the author turns to his own story with an account of the five-day voyage and his first impressions of this country that are made more vivid by reconstructed scenes and family photos. A waiter in one of the former is the only person of color in clear view, but human figures of any sort are rare throughout.

**DANCE, DOLPHIN, DANCE**
A California Ocean Adventure  
MacCarthy, Patricia  
Illus. by the author  
Otter-Barry (32 pp.)  
$18.99 | May 1, 2019  
978-1-91095-924-4

Down in the deep ocean, a young dolphin explores the beauty of the kelp forest and also discovers it has dangers. In many places, the ocean floor harbors forests of kelp, which are home to many creatures, both large and small, including Dolphin. As the kelp dips and sways, Dolphin dances with a shoal of sardines. As the sea swells, the kelp ripples and Dolphin plays with sea lions. When the sea becomes stormy and rough, the kelp forest twists and corkscrews around everything in it. Although it is a sheltering place for many, from the diminutive sardines through tuna to a blue whale, predators have learned
to hunt in the kelp forest for their sustenance. When Dolphin happens upon a great white shark and then an orca, he must struggle to survive. MacCarthy’s text is delightfully alliterative and onomatopoeic: “the giant kelp / twirls and twists, twirls and twists”; “zig zag zig zag / Dolphin dances for his life in the deep, dark kelp forest.” The powerful use of verbs adds to the drama of underwater sea life and will keep readers turning the pages. Her swirling paintings modulate in palette to suit the mood. Her prose is stunningly extravagant in its sparseness, painting memories and dreams. Eleven-year-old (almost 12) Louisiana, nicknamed “Louisa,” and her brother, Theo, travel to the tiny island where their paternal grandparents, Boots and Jake, live, same as every summer. Louisa does not like change, and her erudite younger brother craves the stability of Boots and Jake’s quiet island refuge. Both children live with the gnawing uncertainty of life with bird-watching parents struck by wanderlust. This summer, however, is different. Jake is losing his eyesight. And Louise meets George. Through these two changes, MacLachlan delivers a sweet, evocative tale of love young and old, the entrenched and enduring paired with the new and tenuous. Her prose is stunningly extravagant in its sparseness, painting a watercolor canvas of emotion with the barest of strokes. Each creature here is clearly labeled and identified as inhabiting California’s kelp forests.

An exciting marine adventure just right for reading aloud. (Picture book. 3-6)

DREAM WITHIN A DREAM
MacLachlan, Patricia
McElderry (128 pp.)
$16.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-5344-2959-8

A kiss on the palm is at once simple and full of emotion, meaning, magic, and... wonder. MacLachlan’s latest, too, offers much promise and wonder while also conjuring memories and dreams. Eleven-year-old (almost 12) Louisiana, nicknamed “Louisa,” and her brother, Theo, travel to the tiny island where their paternal grandparents, Boots and Jake, live, same as every summer. Louisa does not like change, and her erudite younger brother craves the stability of Boots and Jake’s quiet island refuge. Both children live with the gnawing uncertainty of life with bird-watching parents struck by wanderlust. This summer, however, is different. Jake is losing his eyesight. And Louisa meets George. Through these two changes, MacLachlan delivers a sweet, evocative tale of love young and old, the entrenched and enduring paired with the new and tenuous. Her prose is stunningly extravagant in its sparseness, painting a watercolor canvas of emotion with the barest of strokes. Each simple word glides easily to the next, making this a prose poem of discovery told as a story of interconnected lives and feelings. “Why,” Louisa asks herself, “when I look in the mirror now, do I suddenly look beautiful for the very first time in my life?” Louisa and her family are white, and George, the son of a Tanzanian immigrant and an American aid worker, is black.

This book clings to the heart and echoes in the soul for days. (Fiction. 8-12)

CAMP SHADY CROOK
Malone, Lee Gjertsen
Aladdin (288 pp.)
$17.99 | May 21, 2019
978-1-5344-2226-1

When a skillful (but lonely) con artist meets up with a clever (but friendless) trickster at summer camp, the outcome is sure to leave other campers suffering misfortune.

Archie Drake’s starting his fourth summer at the woefully run-down Camp Shady Brook, cleverly misguiding other campers into thinking he’s rich—very far from the truth. But the misperceptions help him with his cons, aided by Oliver, a counselor-in-training. And sometimes, Archie even rewards some of the other, poorer campers with bits of his payout, helpfully assuring his unde仗tective conscience. Vivian Cheng is new to Shady Brook, but she’s there because of a scam she participated in at school that’s left her parents feeling little trust in her. Under Archie’s reluctant tutelage, she readily learns the tricks of the con trade while avoiding the attention of the camp director, the evil “Miss Hiss.” But after the pair challenge each other to con two undeserving campers, the situation quickly spirals out of control, and both begin to experience the hurtful consequences of their acts. Writing alternately in tightly focused third-person from the two protagonists’ points of view, Malone infuses into each enough believable personality to carry the story along to its satisfying conclusion. Vivian’s name suggests she’s Chinese-American, but Archie (and most of the rest of the kids) seems to be default white.

A summer-camp story that’s just right for summer reading. (Fiction. 9-12)

PENCIL’S PERFECT PICTURE
McKay, Jodi
Illus. by Motzko, Juliana
Whitman (32 pp.)
$16.99 | May 1, 2019
978-0-8075-6476-9

Pencil visits an art school to find out what makes a perfect picture.

Pencil wants to do something special for dad today and decides a perfect picture would be just the thing. However, Pencil doesn’t know what makes a picture perfect and so heads off to the art school to find out. There, Pencil questions Brush, who tells Pencil, “I paint for pleasure”; Marker, who says, “Do your best”; Pastel, who draws for “peace, not perfection”; the crayons, because “they really think outside the box”; and Chalk. But the answers given don’t satisfy Pencil, who decides to put them all together and just go for it. Pencil’s resulting picture is pronounced “perfect” by Pencil’s dad, who then reveals to Pencil the secret of a perfect picture. Author McKay’s text is often perkily alliterative—great for reading aloud—and is enlivened by small bursts of humor. Illustrator
Motzko’s animate art utensils are sparsely drawn, primarily consisting of rectangles with stick arms and legs and black outlines for faces, but they are all satisfyingly expressive. The book’s overall visual look, however, is a tad less satisfying, since straight lines predominate in both the individual objects depicted and in the layout, which gives it a somewhat regimented feel—at odds, perhaps, with a story about creativity.

A sweetly solid story about creating for the pleasure of it and not worrying whether it’s good enough. (Picture book 4-8)

**SUPER JAKE & THE KING OF CHAOS**

*Milliner, Naomi*

Running Press (288 pp.)

$16.99 | May 7, 2019

978-0-7624-6615-3

An aspiring magician in Maryland must balance performing with caring for his baby brother, disabled due to brain damage, who’s based on Milliner’s son.

Eleven-year-old Ethan Miller loves magic. Having honed his tricks at birthday parties with his puckish 7-year-old brother, Freddy, as his assistant, Ethan’s determined to compete at Magic Fest in Atlantic City; the winner gets to meet his hero, Magnus the Magnificent! Unfortunately, getting his parents’ permission—and attention—is tough. Born with brain damage that’s left him unable to move or speak and prone to extreme internal temperature fluctuations, Ethan’s baby brother, Jake, almost 2, requires constant care. However, there’s no question that Jake’s primary role in the plot is to inspire Ethan—a tired, worn-down magician in [his] family.” Though the author sympathetically acknowledges the stress of Jake’s condition and Ethan’s occasional feelings of neglect, the Millers’ love for one another radiates throughout Ethan’s witty, introspective narration. Jake is never a burden; his family members include him in fun activities and everyday life as best they can. However, there’s no question that Jake’s primary role in the plot is to inspire Ethan—a tired trope. Ethan’s Jewish faith inflects his story, from his observation of Yom Kippur to thought-provoking discussions of disability and God’s will. Some characters are stock, and some conflicts resolve via incredible coincidences—but, as Ethan notes, magic is “a mysterious, seemingly inexplicable” force, after all. As a fun finale, Ethan teaches five magic tricks. Most characters appear white; one of Ethan’s friends is East Asian.

*A warm, hopeful debut.* (Fiction 8-12)

**CAN CAT AND BIRD BE FRIENDS?**

*Muir, Coll*

Illus. by the author

Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Jun. 25, 2019

978-0-06-286593-9

A dialogue between predator and prey upends the expected outcome of their encounter given their positions within the food chain.

Cat is ready to eat Bird, but the quick-thinking, diminutive creature has the sense to ask why. When the feline does not have a well-reasoned response, Bird suggests they become friends and sets out to show the surprised listener where to find the best box (for playing), the highest branch, and the most desirable car to hide under. Just as Cat is considering the possibilities, Bird raises reverse suitability questions. They finally decide to give it a go—until they realize they have nothing in common. Uncluttered, digital compositions are rendered in black (the cat) and white (the bird) on a taupe background; the type colors correspond to the respective characters, so there is no need for quotation marks or framing explanations. The caricatures are formed of stylized shapes with a limited range of expressions: the feline is essentially a rectangle topped with two curved, triangular ears, while the bird is a small white circle with wings, tail feathers, and thin legs. At the conclusion, the two discover that they both enjoy painting, so the palette expands as they render each other against a paint-splotted background.

*It’s mildly diverting, but there are a host of more compelling explorations of what it takes to be friends.* (Picture book 4-6)

**THE WHITE SNAKE**

*Nadler, Ben*

Illus. by the author

TOON Books & Graphics (64 pp.)

$16.95 | $9.99 paper | May 7, 2019

978-1-943145-37-9

978-1-943145-38-6 paper

A brave servant seeks adventure and the hand of a princess in this modern adaptation of a lesser known Grimms’ tale.

Randall wants to do more with his life than serve at the beck and call of King Arnold, a ruler so self-absorbed that he would rather focus on having paintings hung than ruling his kingdom. His opportunity comes when Arnold sends him on a covert mission to Borisylvania to discover their king’s secret for ruling so justly. Randall’s sleuthing leads to his eating a piece of the eponymous white snake and gaining the power to understand animals. Returning to Arnold, Randall begins a quest for the princess’s hand in marriage that demonstrates the value of kindness and truly listening to others. Using comic-book-style graphics and panels, Nadler makes this tale fresh, multiethnic, and accessible to younger children. The artist is an expert at
The illustrations make impressive use of texture and varied perspectives to create depth.

**HIDE AND SEEK**

Noakes, Polly
Illus. by the author
Child's Play (32 pp.)
$16.99 | May 1, 2019
978-1-78628-182-1

A child and some animal friends play hide-and-seek in a vast meadow filled with wildflowers, where lurking danger becomes a new friend.

The child rides on the back of a large brown bear; their raccoon and rabbit friends run in front, each on their two hind legs. When the child faces a tree and counts to 10 for hide-and-seek, the three animal friends sneak away; readers see the back of a wolf’s head up close, sharing its view of the scene. When the child turns around, calling “Coming...ready or not,” the wolf peeks at them from nearby, while the bear, raccoon, and rabbit hide far away. The child approaches the hiding friends: “I can hear you!”; “I can smell you!” The child just misses spying them each time, always unaware of the nearby wolf, whose face becomes increasingly menacing. Finally, in the sunflower patch, the child gives up and declares that it’s their turn. When the bear, raccoon, and rabbit begin searching, they instead find the wolf, who looks meek when they ask where their friend is. Contrary to readers' expectations, the group of friends ends up gaining one instead of losing one. Depicting the sole human character with brown skin and free, kinky hair, the illustrations make impressive use of texture and varied perspectives to create depth in the environment. The soft color palette minimizes the potential scariness of the wolf throughout the suspenseful drama.

**A visual romp. (Picture book. 3-6)**

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**SQUIRRELED AWAY**

Nawrocki, Mike
Illus. by Séguin-Magee, Luke
Tyndale House (128 pp.)
$6.99 paper | May 7, 2019
978-1-4964-3498-2
Series: Dead Sea Squirrels

A humorous early chapter book featuring childish adventures, biblical concepts, and Christian life.

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Randall has light brown skin and brown hair; Arnold and Tilda present black; the rulers of Borisylvania present white.

**A sweet and amusing update. (Graphic fairy tale. 8-12)**

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**THE GOOD SON**

A Story from the First World War, Told in Miniature

Ober, Pierre-Jacques
Illustr. by Ober, Jules & Coonan, Felicity
Candlewick Studio (104 pp.)
$22.00 | May 14, 2019
978-1-5362-0482-7

Terror and irony alike shape a French soldier’s experiences in World War I.

“About one hundred years ago, the whole world went to war,” Pierre-Jacques Ober writes. “It was fought by little soldiers like Pierre.” Words literally suit action here, as the original tale is illustrated with antique, battered-looking toy soldiers in period uniforms placed in astonishingly realistic miniature landscapes and photographed close up (with some digital finishing) in subdued natural light. The effect is both eerie and poignant. In the wake of battles that have left fields strewn with corpses, Pierre earns a commendation by leading in six equally exhausted Germans who had actually asked him to take them prisoner—but when Pierre takes two days off to visit his mother at Christmas, upon his return he is sentenced to death for desertion. “None of it makes sense,” he resignedly observes in a last letter to Maman before

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Preiss Glasser carries the book with her slyly humorous ink-and-watercolor illustrations.

*LAMBSLIDE*

Patchett, Ann
Illus. by Preiss Glasser, Robin
Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
$18.99 | May 7, 2019
978-0-06-288338-4

When three self-centered young lambs hear the word “landslide,” they mistake it for “lambslide.”

The lambs live on an idyllic farm with the Farmers and their three children. The daughter, Nicolette, is running for class president. Her enthusiastic mom tells her: “You’ll win by a landslide!” The lambs believe everything on the farm happens for their benefit and are excited about the new lambslide, but their mother corrects them and says plaintively: “Now will you please let me finish eating the lawn?” After considering the other animals’ fun (pigs cavorting in mud and horses riding out with the humans), the lambs return to their mom, and she suggests polling the other farm inhabitants about a lambslide. They ask a chicken, a goat, and a pig for their support, then the humans. Nicolette, an experienced campaigner, makes signs. An election is held. “When all the votes were counted, the lambslide had won by a landslide.” The Farmers and their farmworker (all white) construct the slide, with everyone working. Patchett’s first children’s book is pleasantly old-fashioned, with some modern touches: Nicolette and her mother work as hard as the boys and men, and Nicolette gets involved in politics early! Preiss Glasser carries the book with her slyly humorous ink-and-watercolor illustrations, crafting distinct personalities for all her animal characters.

A good story about cooperation—and the democratic process. (Picture book. 8-12)

*I’M A BAKED POTATO!*

Primavera, Elise
Illus. by Medina, Juana
Chronicle (32 pp.)
$16.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-4521-5592-0

A cozy story about a curious pup with a slight identity crisis who runs into a host of characters on his way to reunion with his owner.

A stylish, mature lady has few loves: potatoes, dogs, and walks in the rain. When the lady adopts an adorable little brown dog, she notices that he is “smooth” and “warm” and that she could just “[eat] him right up,” so she combines two of her loves and starts calling him Baked Potato. The pair eat dinner by the fireplace and cuddle up next to each other in bed—they seem to have the perfect arrangement. But one eventful day, the lady steps out, and the dog’s adventure begins. Venturing out in search of the lady, he meets a big, rude dog, a fox, and an owl, all of which assure him he is not a baked potato (though the fox does think he’d be “good with carrots and onions”) and suggest alternatives. The digital illustrations bring a sense of vitality while maintaining adorableness, creating the scenes with firm lines and bright colors. The use of vibrant reds, greens, and blues is striking against the white page and helps amp both excitement and coziness. The lady has brown skin and puffy, dark brown curls.

Children and caregivers alike will enjoy this charming tale about a dog who must find out if he’s a baked potato, a groundhog, or a bunny. (Picture book. 3-5)

*ELENA’S SHELLS*

Robbins, Rose
Illus. by the author
Starfish Bay (36 pp.)
$16.95 | Apr. 1, 2019
978-1-76036-057-3

A young beachcomber learns about ownership—and friendship.

Elena is a bright red tapir who loves collecting shells. Adorning a tall pile of sand on the beach, her collection resembles a colorful array of Christmas tree ornaments. One day, “right in the middle of her lunch,” one of her shells runs away. Thinking quickly, Elena yells, “SHARK!!” and the shell stops dead in its tracks, right on the edge of the water. When Elena picks up the shell, out plops an orange hermit crab with enormous eyes. Even after the crab explains that the shell is his home, Elena turns back and walks away with it. But back home, she begins to worry about the crab, “all alone and with no shell to hide in.” Elena rushes back to the shore to find the crab, who’s been hiding inside a cluster of rocks, and gives him back his shell, along with a sincere apology. The crab squeaks out a “Thank you!” and returns to the safety of his shell. Elena still has a large collection of shells, and now she has friends—a whole slew of hermit crabs—to share her treasures with. Both Elena’s selfishness and her later remorse are entirely believable. Robbins’ bright, childlike illustrations and minimal text match the sweet simplicity of her tale. Both tapir and hermit crab are adorable.

An important lesson deftly delivered. (Picture book. 5-8)
GOOD DOG, MCTAVISH
Rosoff, Meg
Illus. by Easton, Grace
Candlewick (112 pp.)
$15.99 | Apr. 9, 2019
978-1-5362-0058-4

A perceptive dog rescues a family in crisis with sheer cleverness and humor.

“McTavish’s decision to adopt the Peachey family was not the most sensible decision of his life.” So begins the adventure of a sandy-colored terrier who arrives unbidden, like Mary Poppins, in this domestic satire. Having “decided to give up being a mother,” Ma Peachey is boycotting her household responsibilities, leaving Pa Peachey cranky, Ava (14) gloomy, and Ollie (12) petulant. Only 8-year-old Betty is wise enough to see their dire straits. Who will do the cooking and the cleaning and get everyone to school on time? McTavish sees the youngest one’s sensible nature and works with her, without magic or fantasy, to bring the family back from the brink even as Ma Peachey indulges her yoga habit while the household falls to pieces. If the essential ridiculousness can be overlooked, this is a sweetly humorous story about training a family to behave. Readers will enjoy seeing the role reversal of the dog adopting a family, and they might gain some psychological awareness of others. Easton’s grayscale illustrations in her debut offer a gentle counterpoint, depicting the round-shouldered members of the Peachey family with light skin and straight, dark hair.

This book is a good selection for those ready for the next step beyond early readers and will undoubtedly create more children wanting a great dog to join the family. (Fantasy. 7-10)

RED LIGHT, GREEN LION
Ryan, Candace
Illus. by Yerkes, Jennifer
Kids Can (40 pp.)
$16.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-253-0014-8

“Red light, green li—” — not so fast! Readers will eagerly rush to finish this familiar phrase with the word “light,” but a page turn that cuts that fourth word off after “li—” leads to unexpected endings: “green li- / -ghtning,” “green li- / -lac,” “green li- / -saver,” “green li- / -ma bean,” “green li- / -feboat.” This playful picture book stretches out these surprise endings, keeping children entertained and engaged while positing that life often dishes up the unpredictable. An expressive green lion encounters all these shockers (floating livestock, endangered library books), and his dumbfounded dot eyes, hair-on-end mane, and earnest efforts to get through such a kooky day evoke empathy and laughs. A matter-of-fact, soothing narrative voice admits “some days, nothing goes the way we thought it would.”

But then something happens that makes the journey easier” and also “[s]ome days, everything slows down, and we may feel stuck. Those are good times to be still and think.” Assured pastel and brush-pen illustrations inscribe a world outlined in simple colors, set atop cloud-white backdrops—it’s an environment that makes thinking about murky concepts easy for young people.

Funny, helpful, empathetic, accessible, and perfect for an interactive group read-aloud or quiet contemplation under the covers. (Picture book. 4-8)

THE CURSE OF GREG
Rylander, Chris
Putnam (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Jun. 18, 2019
978-1-5247-3975-1
Series: An Epic Series of Failures, 2

Greg (Dwarven name “Greggdroule,” please don’t use it) Stormbelly begins this sequel to The Legend of Greg (2018) by setting his pants on fire with a misdirected spell at a Gargoyle and ends by organizing an expedition to find a certain pivotal amulet in the episode’s abrupt conclusion.

In between he adds a diamond-pooping Rock Troll to his posse of staunch allies; battles elves in a literally spooky New Orleans cemetery; spends weeks imprisoned in Alcatraz by his Elven best frenemy, Edwin (who hints at an ominous plan to save the world by putting himself and a few other well-intentioned Elves in charge); and comes to realize that a bloodthirsty talking war axe isn’t really a good thing for a pacifist to own. He also gets at least a line on a cure for the Elven potion that has apparently driven his beloved dad “kookier than ever.” Unfortunately, between and even during the fun battle scenes and set pieces, Rylander breaks all too often for momentum-killing dwarfsplaining (enhanced, if that’s the word, by footnotes) of Dwarven history and values, comparisons of Elf and Dwarf religions, digressions, and open-ended ruminations. Greg and Edwin present white, but the cast’s Elves and Dwarves include some with brown skin; it’s unclear whether the Goblins, Harpies, Trolls, Orcs, and other races here enjoy like diversity.

A middle volume that turns more on moral and identity issues than keeping the plot rolling. (Fantasy. 11-13)
**HAROLD & HOG PRETEND FOR REAL!**
Santat, Dan  
*Illus. by the author*  
Hyperion (64 pp.)  
$9.99 | May 7, 2019  
978-1-368-02716-8  
Series: Elephant & Piggie Like Reading!

This meta–early reader begins (between the end pages and the title page) with the famous duo Elephant and Piggie expressing excitement about reading a book about a pig and an elephant who happen to be best friends, just like them.

Piggie holds a copy of *Harold & Hog Pretend for Real!*—which is identical to the book readers are holding, leading them to believe that the characters are reading the *same* book. Piggie and elephant Gerald then open the cover of the book just as elephant Harold and Hog push it open from the inside, and the story seamlessly shifts to the latter pair’s perspective. Harold and Hog—illustrated with depth and fairly realistically, compared to the cartoonlike Piggie and Gerald—are excited to see the famous duo, and Harold suggests they pretend to be them. Harold then produces round, wire-rimmed glasses for himself and a cartoon pig’s snout for Hog so that they can pretend “for real.” Unfortunately, Hog is “too CAREFUL to be Piggie,” and Harold is “too CAREFREE to be Gerald!” The question then arises: Can Harold and Hog’s friendship survive this game? Building on the popular Elephant and Piggie books and with the frame story contributed by Mo Willems, Santat creates yet another early reader that is at once playful, self-aware, and perceptive in its exploration of the differences of personalities and the complications (or simplicities) of friendship.

*A hoot for readers who already know Elephant and Piggie. (Early reader. 5-8)*

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**SINCERELY, HARRIET**
Searle, Sarah Winifred  
*Illus. by the author*  
Graphic Universe (180 pp.)  
$11.99 paper | $29.32 PLB | May 7, 2019  
978-1-5415-4529-8  
978-1-5124-4019-5 PLB

Searle writes and illustrates her first graphic novel for middle-grade readers. Whiling away the long summer days alone in a new apartment in a new city, Harriet “Harry” Flores begins to spin stories. Perhaps the nice mail carrier has nefarious intentions for the neighborhood dogs. Maybe the house is haunted. The old woman who lives downstairs? Probably a murderer. Though her tales frustrate her parents, the escapism this storytelling offers seems to comfort Harry as she faces an uncertain future with a chronic illness. Begrudgingly, Harry begins to spend time with Pearl, the mysterious old woman from downstairs. Through that budding relationship, and the memories and books they share, Harry finds the courage to be honest with her parents and to face what lies ahead. The subtle absence of cellphones and computers as well as pop-culture references place the story in the 1990s, yet it feels incredibly current. The pacing is masterful as the truth behind Harry’s many fears is slowly and poignantly revealed, maintaining the tension and mystery of each story thread until the tapestry is complete. Searle tackles Harry’s anxiety about her illness as well as common adolescent concerns about friendships, school, and family with an honesty and tenderness that will resonate with readers. Harriet’s biracial: Her mother is white while her father is Mexican; Pearl is black.

*Heartfelt and heartwarming, highlighting the power of story to both conceal and reveal. (Graphic historical fiction. 8-12)*

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**THE BOOK CASE**
Shelton, Dave  
*Illus. by the author*  
David Fickling/Scholastic (368 pp.)  
$17.99 | May 28, 2019  
978-1-338-32379-5

At her new school full of horse snatchers, bootleggers, and jam thieves, Daphne becomes a detective.

When English schoolgirl Daphne arrives at the imposing gates bearing the legend “St. Rita’s School for Spirited Girls, est. 1873,” all she knows is that she’s been offered a scholarship and a job as an assistant librarian. There’s a crater in the driveway from an accident with stolen chemistry supplies and a massive hole in the dormitory floor made by a falling cannonball. The students (all apparently white) pick locks and forge Monets. As the deputy head explains, “you’d need to be bonkers in the noodle to want to be here. It’s a dreadful place!” Even Daphne’s job as assistant librarian is a mess: The gorgeous library is nearly empty after a fire that destroyed the old library, the head librarian who hired Daphne is on indefinite sick leave, and her replacement is a small girl who doesn’t seem inclined to trust Daphne. But somebody needs to solve all the skulduggery and shenanigans: break-ins, thefts, and even a missing student. The school is so odd that the mid-20th-century time period is easy to miss, and both the third-person narration that shifts between limited and omniscient and the narrative voice’s adult tone are similarly unmooring. Cartoonish illustrations by the author are comical but as slightly off as St. Rita’s itself.

*Fans of David Walliams will enjoy the formulaic nonsense, but there’s no shortage of higher-quality slapstick mysteries for eager readers. (Mystery. 8-12)*
Oona, with her bright blue skin and joyful dancing, again lights up the pages.

THE RED MAZE

In their continuing quest to kindle the giant beacons that will save their worlds from eco-catastrophe, sand dancer Oona Lee and friends travel to Moon Yatta, an industrialized superpower that is being taken over by a corrupt demagogue. Following the pattern of earlier episodes, Oona, An Tzu, and Jax Amboy travel to another distinctive world inhabited by a polychrome array of residents both humanoid and far otherwise. Though significant portions of the information-filled endpapers are covered by jacket flaps, the interior panels depict fully realized settings ranging from inner-city neighborhoods to remote desert, and they lay out a complex tapestry of local practices, politics, and values...many of which come into play as election day approaches. One candidate in particular, tycoon Stan Moon (eerily depicted as a white human above the waist, a writhing tangle of tentacles below), whips up fears of power that is being taken over by a corrupt demagogue. “Remember that in camp the orangutans come FIRST, second, local staff and people third, and we, the foreign researchers, LAST.” A white scientist ranking “locals”—whose homeland she views imperiously as a place where “time had stood still”—so low in her hierarchy is offensive.

Audacious, yes, but not in a good way. (foreword, extended resources, author’s note) (Biography. 8-12)

CHARLIE & MOUSE EVEN BETTER

“Mom is the best!” — and her birthday is just around the corner.

In four short chapters, Charlie and Mouse repeatedly one-up themselves as they arrive at better and even better ideas. The early reader opens on a familiar scene in which Mom makes pancakes for the kids. Charlie and Mouse enthusiastically offer suggestions for improvements on the pancakes, until Mom’s expression turns from cheer to exasperation and her humor becomes blunt. In the following sagas, the siblings shop for gifts, prepare decorations while Dad burns the cake, and split up to distract Mom just long enough for a backup special surprise. The standout second chapter captures the comical banter as the children consider what gifts Mom would like with the money they have to spend. They mull over buying her a box they would promise never to peek in but, knowing that they “like to snoop,” reject the idea in favor of a more practical one. Though previous titles in this series have identified the children as male, they are not referred to by any gendered pronouns and nothing about their illustrated appearance codes them as overtly masculine or feminine. They do appear to be biracial, with a white mom and Asian dad.

An affectionate and quirky offering, spot-on for beginning independent readers. (Early reader. 6-9)

UNDAUNTED

The Wild Life of Biruté Mary Galdikas and Her Fearless Quest to Save Orangutans

A portrait of primatologist Biruté Mary Galdikas and her long career studying Bornean orangutans.

With a magazine-style format (the pages are crowded with sidebars), the book uplifts the life and work of a lesser-known conservation scientist. Beginning with Galdikas’ childhood in Toronto as the daughter of Lithuanian immigrants, the narrative quickly moves on to her start in primatology. When Silvey dives into Galdikas’ exploits in Indonesian Borneo, the author emphasizes Galdikas’ relentlessness despite constant challenges. Curiously, Galdikas’ controversial rehabilitation program for captive orangutans is depicted in near-hagiographic terms. Most glaring is the book’s white-savior tone, in which Silvey problematically represents Indigenous peoples and Galdikas’ paternalism is thinly veiled. In a profile of Toronto’s High Park, the author describes the city’s Indigenous peoples (who are still very much alive today) in a section labeled “Ancient History.” In a similar vein, Galdikas’ shocking “rule for life” is emblazoned across a photograph of her orangutan center’s brown-skinned staff: “Remember that in camp the orangutans come FIRST, science second, local staff and people third, and we, the foreign researchers, LAST.” A white scientist ranking “locals”—whose homeland she views imperiously as a place where “time had stood still”—so low in her hierarchy is offensive.

Audacious, yes, but not in a good way. (foreword, extended resources, author’s note) (Biography. 8-12)
It’s a perfect day for flying kites as Farmer Falgu and his daughter, Eila, make their way to the fairgrounds for the annual kite festival.

Father and daughter load their ox cart with a spool of thread, four kites, some lunch, and a box of odds and ends; Eila sits behind Farmer Falgu on the cart and holds up her large green kite. The wind blows gently at first, but with a sudden "WHOOOSH!" it carries Eila’s kite away. Farmer Falgu reassures his disappointed daughter, suggesting that she choose another kite to fly. Along the way, Eila and her father meet Ahmed the balloon seller and then Pushpa the fortuneteller, who are also on their way to the fair. "WHOOOSH!" goes the wind each time, carrying each of their kites away as well. Despite the strong wind, however, Farmer Falgu is confident that they will have kites to fly at the festival, and with a little ingenuity they eventually have “the best in the sky!” Soundar’s straightforward narrative and Nair’s bright, cheerful illustrations are accompanied by artful typography that conveys emotions and movement. A note about the International Kite Festival in Rajasthan, India, at the end of the book will provide readers with context for this story.

Captures the spirit and vibrancy of this fun North Indian festival. (Picture book. 3-6)

The adorable piglets (and dachshund pup) are expressive and distinct.

**THE PECULIAR PIG**

Steuerwald, Joy

*Illus. by the author*

Nancy Paulsen Books (32 pp.)

$17.99 | Jun. 18, 2019

978-0-399-54887-1

One of Mama Pig’s piglets is not like the others.

“There was a different sort of piglet in the pigpen one spring morning.” Mama Pig doesn’t mind; she loves all her children equally, even this brown, furry little girl. The others are “bigger and stronger,” so Penny peacefully waits for her turn. “The piglets grew bigger every day. And Penny grew... / 1 0 n g e r.” Her siblings remark on her peculiar looks and sounds and digging methodologies. Each time her siblings point out her peculiarities, Mama Pig assures Penny, “I love all my little piglets the same.” And when something scary, hissy, and scaly enters the farm yard, Penny jumps in with a bark and a growl to chase it off. All her brothers and sisters agree “that peculiar [is] perfect.” Steuerwald’s debut as both author and illustrator is an excellent, gently told addition to anti-bullying, adoption, and individuality storytimes. The adorable piglets (and dachshund pup) in the hand-drawn and digitally painted illustrations are expressive and distinct, with a look that strikes the right balance between cartoon and realism. The bullying never rises beyond giggles at Penny’s differences, making this a good conversation starter even for the youngest audiences.

Look forward to more from Steuerwald; Penny the puppy piglet is perfection. (Picture book. 2-7)

**TIPPY FINDS A HOME**

Stevens, Mary Beth

*Illus. by Spellman, Susan*

Peter E. Randall (32 pp.)

$16.95 | Apr. 1, 2019

978-1-942155-20-1

A boisterous, homeless dog finds a permanent home with the foster family assigned to care for him temporarily.

Tippy is called a terrier in the story, possibly a mix of terrier breeds or a smooth-coated fox terrier. He is transported along with many other dogs to a new location for potential adoption and “forever homes.” A white couple named Nice Woman and Nice Man take Tippy home as a temporary foster placement, introducing him to their own dog and cat. Nice Woman and Nice Man give rambunctious Tippy lots of attention and teach him basic obedience, and gradually he learns how to get along and behave. The couple realizes that Tippy has adjusted to his new home so well that they decide to keep him permanently. The text, based on a true story in the author’s life, is told in an old-fashioned style that includes Tippy’s thoughts, lots of words in capital letters for emphasis, and too many exclamation marks. The story’s saccharine slant includes Tippy’s exuberant pronouncements of joy at his permanent adoption, including a “happy tear” sliding down his nose. The illustrations include lots of humorous mischief in altercations among the two dogs and the cat, and multiple views of Tippy’s changing expressions help establish his personality. The human characters are shown primarily from the shoulders down and include children of color in one illustration.

Tippy finds a new home, but his sentimental tale doesn’t cover any new territory in the crowded field of dog-adoption stories. (Picture book. 4-7)

**JEANNIE HOUDINI**

A Hamster’s Tale

Stouck, Mary-Ann

*Illus. by Evans, Rebecca*

Gryphon Press (25 pp.)

$17.95 | May 7, 2019

978-0-940719-40-8

A lonely little girl makes a friend by assuming responsibility for the forgotten family pet. Sophia plays with her elaborate dollhouse, imagining a mansion—one in which the fighting between her older twin siblings,
Mateo and Martina, won't be so loud. The twins steal all of their mother's attention as they argue about chores, neither of them wanting to line their hamster's cage with newspaper to keep it sanitary and clean. In the pages of these newspapers, Sophia learns about the illusionist Houdini, who becomes the namesake for the family pet once it starts escaping its cage out of boredom and neglect. With an interesting layout of full and partial illustrations, this sweet picture book entertains, especially on the pages that depict Sophia hunting the missing hamster down. A friendship between Sophia and the mischievous pet is inevitable as she discovers the commonalities between Jeanie's small world and her own miniature playhouse. Interesting subplots available for discussion include sibling rivalry, the historic vaudeville performer, and responsible pet ownership. A helpful section at the end of the book answers questions about how to care for and adopt hamsters as pets. Evans paints the children with light-brown skin and straight or wavy black hair; their names suggest Latinx heritage.

A fine educational tool for children who think they may be ready to give love and attention to a pet. (online resources) (Picture book 3-6)

**LLAMA DESTROYS THE WORLD**

Stutzman, Jonathan

Illus. by Fox, Heather

Henry Holt (40 pp.)

$17.99 | May 7, 2019

978-1-250-30317-2

An astronomically tall tale in which a llama's inability to control his appetite inadvertently creates a black hole.

Stutzman and Fox's debut collaboration takes on the concept popularized by Adam Rubin and Daniel Salmieri's *Dragons Love Tacos* (2012), in which creatures' dining preferences wreak havoc upon the world as we know it. It happens, more specifically, after Llama has eaten a gigantic pile of cakes, squeezed into too-small dancing pants, and then ripped his pants while dancing. The understated narration is passively critical of Llama's choices, detailing the moments (“mistakes”) in which he could have made different choices in the past tense. The book's exploration of consequences is muddled by the fact that readers are positioned alongside the narrative voice, which, in expressing disapproval of Llama's choices, sounds somewhat fatphobic: According to the text, overeating is an “honest mistake” that leads to “the ultimate doom of everything.” However, Fox's digital illustrations successfully utilize color and shape to simultaneously heighten the hilarity and the drama; Llama's gigantic eyes and stubby legs belie the gravity (or lack thereof) of the world's impending doom. The book itself is well-designed. Beneath the appropriately urgent-looking fluorescent orange dust jacket, emblazoned with the title in capital letters, Llama appears wearing intact pants in a spotlight underneath a disco ball, and the front and back endpapers contain clues about the fate of the world.

Will make Rubin and Salmieri's fans split their own pants. (Picture book 3-8)

**OUT THERE**

Sullivan, Tom

Illus. by the author

Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

$17.99 | May 14, 2019

978-0-06-285449-0

This book is about the universe we call ours—and the not-so remote possibility that life might exist “out there.” Our universe is big—really big. Chances are likely that we are not alone in inhabiting it. But if someone else is out there, what form would that life have? “Creepy extraterrestrials” looking a bit like us, only with big, bald heads, pallid skin, and big, eerie eyes? Robotlike creatures? Fanged green bipeds with antennae and webbed feet? What would their attitude be toward us: evil and warmongering? Friendly and peaceful? But wait! What if that extraterrestrial life is just like us, minding its own business on its remote planet? People who look just like us, with *our* diversity, both human and animal; an intelligent life-form behaving just like we do, on a planet just like ours? Author/illustrator Sullivan's tour de force comes in the form of a surprise in the last few pages: What if we, human beings inhabiting planet Earth, are someone else's alien life? An imaginative invitation to empathy and a serious reflection on otherness are hidden between the pages of an adorable and cleverly written piece. Candid and colorful illustrations on two-page spreads do justice to a simple and thought-provoking narrative, postulated scenes depicted in round frames, as if seen through a telescope.

Inspiring and perspective-granting. (Picture book 4-8)

**IT FEELS GOOD TO BE YOURSELF**

Thorn, Theresa

Illus. by Grigni, Noab

Henry Holt (45 pp.)

$17.99 | May 14, 2019

978-1-250-30295-3

This expansive, straightforward framing of gender emphasizes curiosity, joy, and positive self-expression.

In Thorn's uplifting picture-book debut, young readers meet four children: Ruthie, a thin, transgender girl with light brown skin; Xavier, Ruthie's cisgender brother, who also has brown skin; Alex, a pale-skinned, round-bodied kid who is “both a boy and a girl”; and JJ, a brown-skinned child who uses a wheelchair and who is “neither a boy nor a girl.” Through plain, intentional language, Thorn normalizes each child's gender identity and skillfully introduces the multifaceted concept of nonbinary gender: “Just like there are many different ways to be a boy or a girl, there are many different ways to be non-binary—too many to fit in a book!” As the main characters move through their vibrant neighborhood, families and children are portrayed with...
a prismatic array of gender expressions, skin colors, and physical features. Nonbinary illustrator Grigni’s full-bleed images are magical in their jewel-toned palette. Among gender-centered picture books, this one stands out for its dazzling #ownvoices art and its simple yet nuanced phrasing—particularly when Ruthie shares her true gender with her family, and her parents (an interracial couple) respond with a loving group hug. “Oops! Ruthie was a girl all along—they just didn’t know it at first.” Giving kids and adults a hopeful model for discussing (and embracing) one another’s gender is just one of the gifts offered by this valuable narrative.

Exceptional.
(glossary, resources, note on pronouns, author’s note, illustrator’s note)

ALL THE GREYS ON GREENE STREET
Tucker, Laura
Illus. by Murphy, Kelly
Viking (320 pp.)
$16.99 | Jun. 4, 2019
978-0-451-47953-2

Sixth-grader Olympia—called Ollie by her best friends, Richard and Alex—is left fending for herself when her father disappears and her mother experiences a major depressive crisis.

A vividly depicted urban landscape firmly establishes this novel in the SoHo of 1981, where Ollie lives in a converted industrial loft and picks up packs of cigarettes and Tab at a store on Broadway for her mom. A talented artist, Ollie’s mom has stopped getting out of bed since Ollie’s father, an art restorer, embarked on a clandestine trip to France a week before. At first glance, this elegantly nostalgic and leisurely paced story, sparingly illustrated with delicate pencil drawings, is a mystery involving a valuable wood carving on which Ollie’s dad and his business partner, Apollo, were working. However, there are so many other themes at play—including the intricacies of friendships, the pain of living with depression, and art’s ability to create meaning out of life’s ordinary and sometimes-difficult circumstances—that it defies simple genre categorization. A host of honest, flawed, deeply sympathetic characters that are poignant and funny are at once unique and familiar. Ollie, her parents, and Alex seem to be white by default, Apollo grew up in Poland, and Richard is a black boy of Haitian heritage. There is realistic ethnic diversity reflected in secondary and background characters.

Lovely, sad, hopeful, and memorable.
(Historical fiction. 9-12)

THE SOUND OF SILENCE
Growing Up Hearing with Deaf Parents
Uhlberg, Myron
Whitman (240 pp.)
$16.99 | May 1, 2019
978-0-8075-3146-4

Picture-book author Uhlberg (A Storm Called Katrina, illus. by Colin Bootman, 2015, etc) tells his story of growing up with Deaf parents in Depression-era Brooklyn.

Evoking a pleasant nostalgia with its strong sense of place, the episodic narrative follows Myron Uhlberg, a young, white Jewish boy, and his family from Myron’s birth to the day he leaves for college. Through anecdotes both funny and poignant, the author explores his complex relationship with his father. Forced to act as an interpreter by the age of 5, Myron feels trapped between the worlds of child and adult as well as Deaf and hearing. This dilemma leads to both humor and pain as Myron navigates the considerable responsibility. The author presents a nuanced portrayal of Deaf life. Myron’s main link to the Deaf world is his parents, but other Deaf adults make appearances, hinting at a spectrum of Deaf experiences. The author’s decision to write his Deaf parents’ speech phonetically could be prejudicial for readers who lack further context, and there is the occasional biased cliché of disability and culture (due to their deafness, he claims his parents’ sole source of entertainment is books; seeing a friend in an iron lung causes him to reassess his self-pity). Additionally, in contrast to the author’s first memoir, Hands of My Father (2009), published for adults, the title of this adaptation feels like a trite appeal to hearing readers. However, the warmth, love, and playfulness of the narrative prevail.

A sweet, satisfying memoir about family bonds and finding one’s place in the world.
(Memoir. 9-14)

OGILVY
Underwood, Deborah
Illus. by McBeth, T.L.
Godwin Books/Henry Holt (40 pp.)
$17.99 | May 21, 2019
978-1-250-15176-6

Clothes do not make the bunny. When Ogilvy, a bunny of unknown gender, moves to a new town, they are initially excited to play with other bunnies in their neighborhood. But Ogilvy finds themselves the center of unwanted attention because of their attire: a long, knit turtleneck. The local rules are soon broken down: Bunnies in dresses can knit and play baseball, and bunnies in sweaters can create art and go rock climbing. No crossovers allowed. But what is Ogilvy wearing? Is it a dress or a sweater? Ogilvy decides daily it’s one or the other depending on their mood, until run-ins with the unofficial
A TRIP TO THE TOP OF THE VOLCANO WITH MOUSE

Viva, Frank
Illus. by the author
TOON Books & Graphics (36 pp.)
$12.95 | May 21, 2019
978-1-943145-36-2

What would it be like to climb a volcano?

Mouse is back, and this time, instead of journeying down to Antarctica, (A Trip to the Bottom of the World with Mouse, 2012), he and his human companion are traveling up to the top of a volcano. Inspired by Viva’s experience climbing Mount Etna and framed as a conversation between a curious, knowledgeable child and an impatient, childlike, pizza-loving mouse, this graphic early reader is replete with gentle humor and memorable images. Beginning with an explanation of some necessary objects a volcano explorer would need, this cheerful selection continues on to provide some basic facts about volcanoes, including plants, trees, and animals that can grow and live along the exterior; some of the sights one might see on a climb; and the characteristics and anatomy of the volcano within. Clear, relatively simple language paired with striking and amusing graphics will draw emerging readers in while well-chosen scientific details provide an appealing introduction to earth science and the world of volcanoes. Add to those draws an entertaining character—if Mouse is lucky, the outing might include both pepperoni pizza and an extra climb up the volcano—and you have a recipe for an enjoyable reading expedition in a very approachable format.

An engaging blend of fiction and nonfiction and a nice choice for reluctant readers. (Graphic informational easy reader. 4-7)

FLIGHTS OF FANCY
Creative Inspiration from Ten Award-Winning Authors and Illustrators
Ed. by Walker Books
Walker US/Candlewick (80 pp.)
$19.99 | Apr. 9, 2019
978-1-5362-0536-7

To celebrate 20 years of the U.K.’s Children’s Laureate program, the first 10 to be appointed to the position offer remarks on their craft.

The roster of contributors is heavy with honored names, bookended by Quentin Blake, the first laureate (1999-2001), who writes about stylistic relations between pictures and story, and Lauren Child (2017-2019), describing how her stories develop in a dynamic mix of writing and drawing. In between, Michael Rosen grows a poem from one funny-sounding word, “Bobble”; Michael Morpurgo ruminates on finding just the right voice; Jacqueline Wilson presents a short story in diary form; and Chris Riddell visually lays out a five-point strategy for making drawing a constant daily activity. Malorie Blackman, the

WHAT’S WRONG? IN DINOSAUR TIMES

Veitch, Catherine
Illus. by Solis, Fermin
QEB Publishing (24 pp.)
$14.95 | Apr. 18, 2019
978-1-78603-477-9
Series: What’s Wrong?

An invitation to pick out anachronistic (or downright daffy) details in nine Mesozoic scenes.

Spotting the odd hat or potted plant, roller skates, skis, and other zingers that Solis slips into his moderately crowded cartoon scenes won’t be much of a challenge for most young dinophiles, as there are only five per spread, two of which are virtually pointed out with heavy hints delivered by a pair of human tour guides, and there is a visual key at the end. Perhaps to compensate for setting the bar so low, the author and illustrator repeatedly don’t play fair—designating the rainbow-crested Guaibasaurus specimen bogus, for instance, in the weak reason that “scientists don’t think [its crest] was rainbow colored,” and slipping a chicken and a duck in among such similarly feathered predecessors as Bambiraptor, which is even described as “look[ing] like a purple duck or chicken.” Just to muddy the waters a bit more, each picture also includes an unlikely element that is actually correct (“Omeisaurus had a neck which was four times longer than its body”), and the introductory comments include a claim that “Earth was a scorching hot, dry desert when dinosaurs first appeared,” which is both overly general about our planet’s land masses and ignores the oceans. One of the tour guides presents Asian and the other white.

Thin on both fun and facts. (Picture book 5-10)

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only person of color in the lineup, follows a set of brainstorming questions with a fable written from three points of view. Some contributions, such as Morpurgo’s tale of a heroic librarian, “I Believe in Unicorns,” Anne Fine’s selection of original bookplates by various eminent illustrators, and Anthony Browne’s Shape Game, have appeared elsewhere in print or online, but the personal statements are new and the contents assembled in an appealingly informal way that invites younger audiences to the party as well as readers who have grown up with these authors and illustrators. Riddell’s caricatures at the end are alone worth the price of admission.

A genial salute to and from the original corps of children’s-literature ambassadors. (Anthology. 10-13)

Jude’s free-verse narration cuts straight to the bone.

OTHER WORDS FOR HOME

Warga, Jasmine
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
$16.99 | May 28, 2019
978-0-06-274780-8

A story about war and displacement, resilience and adjustment.

Warga portrays with extraordinary talent the transformation of a family’s life before and after the war began in Syria. Living in a tourist town on the Syrian coastline, Jude experiences the inequalities in her society firsthand. With the unfolding of the Arab Spring, her older brother, Issa, wants to join protests against the Syrian regime. The parents are in favor of staying out of it, but with news of a new baby and nearby towns turning into battlegrounds, Jude and her mother travel to join her uncle, a medical doctor, and his family in the American Midwest. Her free-verse narration cuts straight to the bone: “Back home, food was rice / lamb / fish / hummus / pita bread / olives / feta cheese / za’atar with olive oil. Here, that food is Middle Eastern Food. Baguettes are French food. Spaghetti is Italian food. Pizza is both American and Italian, depending on which restaurant you go to.” Jude, who has always loved American movies, shares her observations—often with humor—as she soaks everything in and learns this new culture. Only when she starts feeling comfortable with having two homes, one in Syria and one in the U.S., does a terrible incident make her confront the difficult realities of being Muslim and Arab in the U.S.

Poetic, immersive, hopeful. (Historical verse fiction. 11-adult)

AN UNEXPECTED HERO

A Bible Story About Rahab

Wegelt, Udo
Illus. by the author
Minedition (44 pp.)
$19.99 | May 1, 2019
978-988-8341-79-5

The story of Rahab, a woman of Jericho, appears in both the Old and New Testaments.

She is known for her bravery when the Israelites were about to conquer the city. She had heard of their belief in one God and wondered if this faith could be hers. When two Israelite spies were in danger of discovery and desperately needed assistance, she offered them a hiding place, but that also caused them to be locked inside the city walls. With prayer and guidance from this newly found God, she cleverly devised a way for them to escape. In return she demanded that they guarantee safety for herself and her family. When the walls came tumbling down, the Israelites kept their promise and accepted her as one of them, giving her the opportunity for a new beginning in her new faith. She is further idealized as the fifth-great-grandmother of Jesus, God granting her this honor for her great courage and faith, a detail that centers this telling firmly as Christian rather than Jewish. The authors have taken the main body of Rahab’s tale and expanded it. Her adult life as a prostitute is somewhat glossed over as “making a lot of bad choices,” though her “profession” is hinted at in a readers’ note. Elwell’s very bright, purple-and-pink, sun-washed illustrations enhance the narration, providing a strong vision of the time and place. All characters are shown as having dark and swarthy skin color.

Rahab is intriguing and exciting, but her tale is told in a saccharine, preachy tone. (reflection questions) (Picture book/religion. 8-10)

THE WILD WOMBAT

Wiegelt, Udo
Illus. by the author
Minedition (44 pp.)
$19.99 | May 7, 2019
978-988-8341-79-5

At a zoo in an unnamed location, a wombat is arriving “all the way from Australia!” When Parrot hears the zookeepers say they must be “very careful” with him, he lets the other animals know, starting with Seal, who interprets Parrot’s announcement as a warning. Seal tells Chameleon, who informs Owl, and the news travels on and on. Soon all the animals are terrified of this wild wombat, whose fictitious traits soon include sharp teeth, wings, fangs, and invisibility. When the adorable, furry wombat does arrive, he asks Parrot if he’s the only animal at the zoo, as none of the animals have stuck around to greet him. Each spread in the chain of gossip features a half-page flap that depicts each animal’s overreaction to the ever more alarming
From a brown, sunless sky. “It reminds Maria of olden-day pictures of how the sky once looked,” and of rain and wind. The children carry the feather (“light as thistledown”) through the woods and to a village seen from above as a collection of broken buildings, abandoned vehicles, and empty streets. The villagers are equally entranced, remembering clouds and bright skies. But three older men, figures of authority—a doctor, a lawyer, the mayor—suggest locking away this valuable reminder of better times. When the feather takes on a leaden hue and weight, it is dismissed, along with the children. Maria and Nico’s optimism restores the feather to its lightness when they bring it back to their home, sleep cuddled next to it, and finally launch it back into the sky. Blackwood’s delicate scenes, gentle pencil lines, and subtle shades of gray and brown convey the sense of loss in the village and the subtle breaks in the dense cover of cloud that allow the feather to soar. Maria, Nico, and the rest of the villagers appear white.

A simple and deeply discussable message about hope and faith. (Picture book. 4-8)
**HELLO**
Woodcock, Fiona  
Illus. by the author  
Greenwillow (40 pp.)  
$17.99  |  May 14, 2019  
978-0-06-264456-5

The siblings of *Look* (2018) are back, this time delving into words with a double _L_.

The sun greets sister and brother with a warm “hello” at their campground. Navigating “valley” and “hilltop,” the family drives to a beach amusement park to “yell,” “gallop,” and “thrill.” At “nightfall” they roast “marshmallow[s]” and then “collapse” onto a “pillow” after a full day. As in their debut, the sunglasses-clad sister and baseball-capped brother daytrip to (mostly) one word per page. The artwork, done with markers, rubber stamps, and digital compositing, showcases Woodcock’s cheerful, primary color palette. Sometimes labored, her most effective work focuses on shapes and playful compositions rather than lighting. The “ll” in “gallop” are formed by the posts on carousel horses; the “ll” in “marshmallow” are two sticks holding the puffy confections aloft. “YELL,” on the other hand, is depicted, one letter at a time, descending the articulated dips of a mammoth slide. The wit in “THRILL / SHRILL / (ILL)” resides in textual juxtaposition alone rather than the words’ incorporation into the illustration of the “rollercoaster.” An exemplary piece is the title page, on which the “ll” of the title are formed by the shadow cast by the indigo-haired girl standing in front of the sun. Deliciously colored end pages, patterned with the letter “L,” highlight the design’s appeal. Both kids have light skin.

Woodcock captures the joy of a summer day’s adventure in this diverting romp through a thematic concept.  
(Picture book. 4-8)

**CHASING HELICITY INTO THE WIND**
Zee, Ginger  
Disney-Hyperion (356 pp.)  
$16.99  |  Apr. 23, 2019  
978-1-368-00217-2  
Series: Chasing Helicity, 2

Fourteen-year-old Helicity, survivor of both a tornado and a flash flood in her eponymous first outing (2018), is back for more encounters with stormy weather.

This time, she’s spending summer vacation at a bed-and-breakfast on the Gulf of Mexico, but not before a frighteningly turbulent flight from her home in Michigan. Unexpectedly, Helicity’s crush, fellow weather fan Sam, arrives with her brother, Andy, who has secretly become addicted to pain killers after his serious injuries during the tornado. Now Andy is hanging around with a sketchy dude, and they may be responsible for a series of break-ins. Meanwhile, Helicity falls for hunky Trey; then endures a sequence of strong thunderstorms with him—and Sam. Naturally, a major hurricane is also on the way. In an effort to locate missing Andy, Helicity ultimately finds shelter in an abandoned lighthouse as the hurricane barrels ashore. Dealing with her conflicted romantic feelings—Sam or Trey?—she moves from one weather-related cliffhanger to another as Zee sometimes interrupts the action to offer brief explanations of these weather events. These are too little to satisfy those who might choose this effort for an immersive meteorology experience rather than hackneyed melodrama. The cast of predictable characters are nearly all white except, perhaps, Trey, who has a Spanish surname.

Even with its flaws, this effort slightly outpaces the first, edging marginally closer to believability.  
(Adventure. 10-14)

**BOARD & NOVELTY BOOKS**

**HIDE-AND-_SLEEP**
* A Flip-Flap Book  
Boyd, Lizi  
Illus. by the author  
Chronicle (20 pp.)  
$12.99  |  Apr. 9, 2019  
978-1-4521-7096-1

This split-paged book with a tall trim encourages the youngest readers to look closely at the forest and meadow scenes. Every other leaf is intentionally sliced in two a little over halfway down the page, encouraging readers to play a game of hide-and-seek and search for critters behind trees, flowers, sloping hills, rocks, and more. When the page or pages are turned, more creatures (everything from fish to a squirrel) reveal themselves, and readers can make three different double-page spreads out of two. Gentle, two-word phrases caption the endearing images: “Turtle peeks” and “Raccoon sneaks.” In the bottom of every recto is the question: “Who is hiding?” In the penultimate pages, Boyd reveals that “No one!” was hiding and, then, after the sun goes down, depicts “Everyone!” sleeping except for a hooting owl. The true stars here are Boyd’s friendly, stylized images in rich colors, both cool and warm, bejeweled with an array of simple shapes and patterns. The split pages may not offer enough variety when turned for a true hide-and-seek experience, but their rounded corners are a thoughtful detail for the littlest readers.

The lively interiors belie the word “Sleep” in the title; this is high-energy fun.  
(Board book. 6 mos.-3)
Duisit’s tidy pop-ups include birds that flit or stretch realistically.

**SIX LITTLE BIRDS**

Follow a silver submarine through grand adventures in this French import.

When readers open the durable, oversized cardboard pages they’re immersed in gorgeous, sweeping digital renderings of colorful ocean ecosystems. There’s only a smattering of plot: A tiny submarine plunges underwater to explore but is whisked off course by a violent storm, ultimately traveling to the Arctic, along coral reefs, down to the ocean’s dark trenches, and back up to the sunny surface. Conversational narrated as though readers are riding along, the text names the species depicted and provides clues to help locate and identify most from among the busyness, though some specimens are missing any contextual hint and would benefit from a label or key. The teeny, thin type is also tricky to see against the large pages. An accompanying, digitally accessible ocean soundtrack is nicely atmospheric but also suffers from vagueness, as without track markers, it’s challenging to match the page with specific movements. But the immersive, multilayered art teeming with intricately drawn crowds of sea creatures set on ethereal backgrounds and the feeling of grand scale admirably capture the majesties under the sea. Variegated background shades of blue and green make the colorful underwater flora and fauna glisten, especially the metallic-inked silver sub and dynamic neon pink and Day-Glo yellow highlights.

Quibbles won’t prevent readers from diving in and marveling. (Board book. 2-4)

**WE LOVE ANIMALS**

**Two Books in One!**

*Six Little Birds*

*Deep in the Ocean*

*We Love Animals* by Lo Cole

Illus. by the author

**SIX LITTLE BIRDS**

Cosneau, Olivia

Illus. by the author & Duisit, Bernard

Little Gestalten (16 pp.)

$19.95 | May 28, 2019
978-3-89955-828-9

As the seasons turn, six nestlings have different experiences in pop-up scenes.

The narrative, translated from the French, reads like a nursery rhyme: “Six young nuthatches fly the nest. / The first one has found the food she likes best.” Others like to sing, narrowly escape a “bird of prey,” or join a varied flock of fellow birds on a wintry perch. Within an extra-tall trim that suits the subject matter, Duisit’s tidy pop-ups include an excellent, large sunflower, neatly branched tree trunks, and birds that flit or stretch realistically. Cosneau’s stylized avians are also pleasingly neat—sometimes a little hard to make out against too-busy backdrops but usually standing out clearly enough thanks to contrasting and sometimes-flamboyant plumage. Rather than a nesting scene to bring the annual round full circle, the final double-page spread features a number of different birds pairing off as, in the foreground, the sixth nut-hatch performs a courtship dance for a prospective mate. The rhyme ends, appropriately, with a suggestive ellipsis....

A woodsly outing for younger readers with an affinity for feathered folk. (Pop-up/picture book. 3-5)

**FRIENDLY FLIERS**

*Finn’s Fun Trucks*

*Finn’s Fun Trucks: Friendly Fliers*

*We Love Animals: Friendly Fliers*

*Deep in the Ocean: Friendly Fliers*

*Six Little Birds: Friendly Fliers*

*We Love Animals: Six Little Birds*

*Deep in the Ocean: We Love Animals*

Cosneau, Olivia

Illustrated by Bassani, Srimalie

Flowerpot Press (14 pp.)

$8.99 | Mar. 5, 2019
978-1-4867-1548-0

Vehicle-loving author Coyle turns his attention skyward in this guide to flying conveyances.

Following the format of previous volumes in the Finn’s Fun Trucks series, a racially diverse crew, apparently three men and two women in this case, presents five different types of aircraft and explains the features and uses of each. Featured types of views of animals native to that environment, one per quadrant, with a fifth species to match in the center, inside the small book. Like the no-nonsense format, the lightly detailed animals are equally efficient. Though they lack any spark of life, they are handsome and cleanly silhouetted, with rich, mottled colors and shading that contrasts well with the backgrounds. When the book strays from its tidy organization, such as an owl that flies dynamically out toward readers, it’s a welcome diversion.

Though this early nonfiction feels a tad generic, the interactive format is fun. (Board book. 1-3)

**DEEP IN THE OCEAN**

Brunellière, Lucie

Illus. by the author

Abrams Applesauce (14 pp.)

$15.99 | May 28, 2019
978-1-4197-3356-7

Follow a silver submarine through dark trenches, and back up to the sunny surface. Conversationally narrated as though readers are riding along, the text names the species depicted and provides clues to help locate and identify most from among the busyness, though some specimens are missing any contextual hint and would benefit from a label or key. The tiny, thin type is also tricky to see against the large pages. An accompanying, digitally accessible ocean soundtrack is nicely atmospheric but also suffers from vagueness, as without track markers, it’s challenging to match the page with specific movements. But the immersive, multilayered art teeming with intricately drawn crowds of sea creatures set on ethereal backgrounds and the feeling of grand scale admirably capture the majesties under the sea. Variegated background shades of blue and green make the colorful underwater flora and fauna glisten, especially the metallic-inked silver sub and dynamic neon pink and Day-Glo yellow highlights.

Quibbles won’t prevent readers from diving in and marveling. (Board book. 2-4)

**MATCH ANIMAL WITH ITS HABITAT IN AN INNOVATIVE TWO-BOOKS-IN-ONE FORMAT.**

In this board book’s center, a rectangular cutout acts as a small book within a book, with pages that turn independently of the larger book. Though it’s a stretch to see this as “Two books in one!” as the cover promises (the small book alone is fairly underwhelming), it works well as a matching game, allowing readers to connect the animals to their neighbors in the larger book. Each of the six different habitats has a simply patterned but atmospheric background in a distinctive color, ranging from lightly dappled temperate forest to rich teal waves. It’s easy to match the sandy camel from the small book to its tan-backgrounded, desert-dwelling buddies in the larger book. Predictably organized pages present four clearly labeled side views of animals native to that environment, one per quadrant, with a fifth species to match in the center, inside the small book. Like the no-nonsense format, the lightly detailed animals are equally efficient. Though they lack any spark of life, they are handsome and cleanly silhouetted, with rich, mottled colors and shading that contrasts well with the backgrounds. When the book strays from its tidy organization, such as an owl that flies dynamically out toward readers, it’s a welcome diversion.

Though this early nonfiction feels a tad generic, the interactive format is fun. (Board book. 1-3)
The brightly colored dinosaurs (all different types) are gleeful, energetic, and expressive.

STAR LIGHT, STAR BRIGHT, EVEN DINOSAURS SAY GOOD NIGHT

After a full day of play, even dinosaurs can benefit from a healthy bedtime routine.

A houseful of rambunctious young dinosaurs wish they could extend their playtime ‘round the clock, a notion that this book’s toddler audience will have doubtless shared from time to time. “Star light, star bright, / even dinosaurs say goodnight. / They wish they may, they wish they might, / get to stay and play all night.” Three raucous, double-page scenes follow, with boisterous dinos bash ing a drum, blazing on a trumpet, twanging a guitar, dancing, clomping, and jumping on beds, with every intention of “making noise the whole night through.” The artwork is charming—the brightly colored dinosaurs (all different types) are gleeful, energetic, and expressive, and to all appearances, they are having an absolutely splendid time. When the dinosaur kids cut loose in the conventionally homey setting of their room, it feels like a tamer version of Maurice Sendak’s wild rumpus, sans jungle or island. This book is about more than rumpus, sans jungle or island. This book is about making noise just the same, even in their room, it feels like a tamer version of Maurice Sendak’s wild rumpus, sans jungle or island. This book is about more than rumpus, sans jungle or island. This book is about making noise just the same, even in their room.

BABY’S BEST FRIEND

Curley, Suzanne
Tiger Tales (12 pp.)
$8.99 | Apr. 1, 2019
978-1-68010-567-4

This board book features simple, rhyming text and photographs of babies and their canine companions.

The arrival of a new baby often means pets get pushed to the side; this book shares the ways that babies and pups coexist lovingly. On each two-page spread, Curley’s rhyming text accompanies a beautiful, adorable photograph of the titular best friends. While a distinctly different breed of dog appears in each photo, four of the eight images showcase white-appearing babies; there appear to be two babies of color within the book’s pages and a third on the back cover. This imbalance is a disappointment, really, as the photographs are otherwise high quality and detailed. There’s a knitted hat that looks soft enough to touch along with equally fuzzy puppy fur and baby hair. The text is straightforward, with rhymes about snuggles, sleep, and playtime—all of the obvious baby-and-puppy combinations. It’s written in the first person, though it’s unclear whether or not it’s the baby or the dog sharing their perspective. Arguably, it works either way. This is a nice one to share with very little readers on a lap, but it definitely caters to caregivers inclined to gush over the sweet photos of little ones of the human and furry variety.

Cute enough—if only the babies were as diverse as their puppy pals. (Board book: 6-18 mos.)

HUMAN BODY

Flint, Katy
Illus. by Seixas, Ana
Wide Eyed Editions (16 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 5, 2019
978-1-78603-323-9
Series: Scratch and Learn

A very simple guide to (some) human anatomy, with scratch-off patches.

On sturdy board pages two cartoon children—one brown, one a sunburned pink—pose for cutaway views of select anatomical features. In most images certain parts, such as lungs and bladder on the “Organs” spread and both gluteus maximus on “Muscles,” are hidden beneath a black layer that can be removed with the flat end (or more slowly with the pointed one) of a wooden stylus housed in an attached bubble pack. With notable lack of consistency, the names of select organs or areas,
with such child-centric additions as “A cut,” or “Poop,” are gathered in bulleted lists and/or placed as labels for arbitrarily chosen items in the pictures. It’s hard to envision younger readers getting more than momentary satisfaction from this, as they industriously scrape away and are invited to learn terms such as “Alveoli” and “Latissimus dorsi” that are, at best, minimally defined or described. Older ones in search of at least marginally systematic versions of the skeletal, sensory, nervous, and other (but not reproductive) systems will be even less satisfied. Even those alive to the extracurricular possibilities of a volume that contains, as one of the two warnings on the rear cover notes, a “functional sharp point,” will be disappointed.

There may be an audience for this—but not in any library, classroom, group, or, particularly considering the pointy piece, preschool setting. (Informational novelty. 5-7)

**DOGS**
Flowerpot Press
Flowerpot Press (20 pp.)
$7.99 | Mar. 5, 2019
978-1-4867-1581-7

Photographs of dogs accompany descriptions of their actions, moods, and appearance.

This board book reads like a coffee-table book of dog portraits for babies and toddlers. Each page features another gorgeous photograph of an adorable dog with a short descriptor: “spotted dog,” “dirty dog,” and “shy dog,” to name a few. The photographs truly stand out, as the dog itself is shown against a distance-dappled natural background or a starkly contrasting color without any other images or distractions. Readers won’t be able to help but grin right back at the contagious smile of “happy dog” or the little furball that is “fluffy dog.” While by and large the photographs do accurately depict the text, the character descriptions could be confusing for the intended audience of young readers. For example: “In the garden, what has a trunk, branches, and many leaves?” A page turn reveals the answer—“A tree”—in a larger font on the upper left. The cheery art with multiple scenes per page has a retro feel, no doubt due to the fact that French illustrator Grée’s heyday was in the 1960s and ‘70s; these images have been repurposed from earlier books. Details in the pictures, which feature Romeo, a multiracial cast of children, and various bugs, animals, butterflies, and birds, add more information. Romeo’s costume changes frequently. On the page about bees, he is wearing a beekeeper’s veil; he wears a striped sunsuit on the tree and wheelbarrow pages and, oddly, what looks like a motorcycle helmet on the page about rain. The formal, pedantic text of this British import sounds stilted: “Which prickly animals that sleep curled up might you see in the garden?” The answer, a hedgehog, will likely puzzle readers in the U.S., where hedgehogs live in zoos, not the backyard.

These explorations are limited. (Board book. 2-4)

**LITTLE DARLING’S BOOK OF LOVE**
Hall, Algy Craig
Illus. by the author
Boxer Books (18 pp.)
$6.95 | Jan. 1, 2019
978-1-910716-71-7
Series: Little Holiday Books

By exploring the smell, taste, sound, and feel of love, a cherub and some human children offer young readers a glimpse of what love can look like.

Although the title character’s name borders on saccharine, this volume has a genuine sweetness that’s hard to resist. Certainly, it should please young children, who lack such sophisticated prejudices. Author/illustrator Hall offers up a sampling of the ways we say, “I love you,” in terms that should be accessible to the Pre-K crowd. The book avoids smarminess largely on the basis of the charm of its cast of racially diverse children, wide-eyed and smiling with delight at a succession of roses, chocolates, poems, and hugs, all offered by Little Darling, who is white. The kids are adorable, each in a cozy pair of footie pajamas; the winged cherub’s are bright blue with shiny red hearts. The format is simple: “Little Darling knows the smell of love.”
“Turn the page, and the cherub offers a brown girl with beaded locs a bouquet of flowers. “Little Darling knows the taste of love,” a turn of the page reveals that taste to be chocolates. Poetry represents “the sound of love.” Little Darling’s preferred way to show love is hugging, making this almost a primer on the five senses. Unfortunately, perhaps, there is no mention of consent. Companion title *Little Rabbit’s Easter* features a brown-skinned child in a purple bunny suit rounding up a troupe of other children in animal onesies.

**Appropriate for Valentine’s Day or any day.** *(Board book. 2-5)* *(Little Rabbit’s Easter: 978-1-68010-566-7)*

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**A KISS FOR YOU**  
*Hegarty, Patricia*  
Illus. by Barker, Laura  
*Tiger Tales* *(10 pp.)*  
$9.99 | Mar. 1, 2019  
978-1-68010-566-7

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Sturdy flaps shaped like baby animals simulate hugs or cuddles when opened.

Pages are double thick to accommodate the nested die-cut flaps, which are the thickness of an ordinary board-book page. On the first three double-page spreads, a grown-up animal is on the verso, and when the flap on the recto is swung to the left, the baby critter closes in for a nuzzle. Little Bear “runs” for a kiss, Little Elephant goes “trunk-to-trunk” with their parent, and Little Bunny leaps over for a “special” public display of affection. The final two dyads break this pattern and show Little Owl in a nest as an adult owl swings their wing across the gutter for a snuggle, and Little Bear, appearing for second time, gets a full embrace as arms fold in for a hug. The text mostly consists of gently rhyming quatrains, the final line appearing only after the flap is opened. The direct address of adult to child allows for the most part and includes some charming turns of phrase, such as “brushing bolts” in place of brushing teeth. Dickason’s illustrations use a consistent palette of mostly primary colors and feature 1960s-style robots drawn with antennae, motherboards on boxy chests, and wheels for feet. The pages are busy and packed, allowing for new discoveries upon each read, though this busyness argues for use with older toddlers. It’s not entirely clear where the robots are headed (school?) or whether or not they’re also ETs (they fly away on a spaceship), but the story is fun enough to overlook those muddled details.

**Good for a giggle from preschool readers despite its slight imperfections.** *(Board book. 2-4)*

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**HELLO ROBOTS!**  
*Holub, Joan*  
Illus. by Dickason, Chris  
*Little Simon/Simon & Schuster* *(26 pp.)*  
$8.99 | Jan. 22, 2019  
978-1-5344-1871-4  
Series: A Hello Book

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A brightly illustrated story told in rhyme about mixed-up robots getting ready for the day. Holub and Dickason team up for another title echoing the style of their similarly formatted *Hello Knights! and Hello Ninjas!* *(both 2018).* Here, the titular robots are having trouble getting ready for the day. They put socks on top of shoes and even forget how to eat their cereal, pouring milk on their heads and flipping their bowls upside down on the table. The confusion comes to a climax in a double gatefold in which the robots realize that they need a reboot, correcting their routines. Young readers will delight in the silliness: underpants on heads, bathing in clothes. Holub’s rhyming text works well for the most part and includes some charming turns of phrase, such as “brushing bolts” in place of brushing teeth. Dickason’s illustrations use a consistent palette of mostly primary colors and feature 1960s-style robots drawn with antennae, motherboards on boxy chests, and wheels for feet. The pages are busy and packed, allowing for new discoveries upon each read, though this busyness argues for use with older toddlers. It’s not entirely clear where the robots are headed (school?) or whether or not they’re also ETs (they fly away on a spaceship), but the story is fun enough to overlook those muddled details.

**Good for a giggle from preschool readers despite its slight imperfections.** *(Board book. 2-4)*

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**YOGA WHALE**  
*Hinder, Sarah Jane*  
Illus. by the author  
*Sounds True* *(true pp.)*  
$9.95 | Feb. 5, 2019  
978-1-68364-076-9

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Following the pattern set in *Yoga Bug* and *Yoga Bear* *(2017, 2018), 10 toddlers model yoga poses whimsically named after sea creatures.

Their varied skin tones, hairstyles, and yoga clothes, which match the coloring of their animal partners, stand out against solid-color backgrounds. The brief text describes both animal behavior and the depicted child’s actions. Appropriately, Hinder begins and ends with deep breathing and relaxation, starting with deep breathing that makes “your tummy grow,” illustrated by a puffer fish, and finishing with a “sparkly stretch,” illustrated by a smiling “Starfish.” In between, her fanciful descriptions of yoga poses are not always useful. Young children unfamiliar with sea horses may be mystified by that metaphor. The poses emulating a dolphin and a crab are clear, but “Shark” (for boat or locust pose) or “Sea Urchin” for child pose are a stretch. A child in happy-baby pose waving four limbs is paired with an eight-legged octopus. The picture of a child in a wide-legged forward fold (“Jellyfish”) does not indicate how to move into the position. Thankfully, the final spread includes a thumbnail picture of each child in their posture along with the common name of that pose and clear instructions in small print.

**This whale of a metaphor requires adult assistance to really flow.** *(Board book. 2-4)*
It feels as though an entire encyclopedia of animals—a very odd one—has been squeezed into 12 pages.

_A HOOPOE SAYS OOP!_

**SPACE RACE**
_The Story of Space Exploration to the Moon and Beyond_
Hubbard, Ben
Barron's (96 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 1, 2019
978-1-4380-5068-3

The story of space travel, from the V-2 of World War II to the next wave of Martian rovers.

In the bells-and-whistles department, this survey comes with a free app that allows readers with camera-equipped phones or tablets to see blurry historical video clips and crudely rendered hovering VR images of a moon lander and the International Space Station. Less gimmicky but more useful for conveying a sense of the space program's scope and techno-wizardry, sheaves of photos, graphic images, labeled cutaway views, and flight diagrams present the epic tale in a primarily visual way, with fact boxes and blocks of explanatory text wedged in around the pictures to create a narrative flow and fill in further incidents and details. Hubbard's highlights-reel account spares barely a nod for Apollo missions before and after the first moon landing and relegates the human element largely to a handful of astronauts, Wernher von Braun, and Sergei Korolev. But he does give the U.S. and Soviet space efforts equal time in the early going, describes catastrophes as well as “firsts” in both programs, and he brings the tale up to NASA's upcoming Space Launch System, the currently en route Parker Solar Probe, and no fewer than four Mars probes various countries plan to launch in 2020.

Conventional and a bit sketchy in spots but a decent overview with some techno-tricks for young digerati. (index) (Nonfiction/novely. 10-13)

**WORLD OF FORESTS**
_Illus. by Hunter, Robert_
Wide Eyed Editions (24 pp.)
$22.99 | Feb. 5, 2019
978-1-78603-327-7

Visits to 10 types of forest, with portraits of select native wildlife and audio soundscapes.

Though the lineup does include an unusual “Desert Forest” on Yemen’s Socotra Island and locales for the rest of the more common woody habitats are likewise specified, Hunter’s generic, artificially populous panoramas are neither placed on a map nor presented in any particular order. His wildlife characters, six or seven per spread, pose naturalistically but are sometimes seen from distorted perspectives—a wood mouse in England’s deciduous New Forest looks, for instance, almost as big as the donkey—making it hard to compare relative sizes. Numbered, descriptive captions squeezed in among the figures highlight the animals’ distinctive calls or noises, snatches of which can also be heard on the enclosed sound chip. Pressing hard and repeatedly on a designated spot, one per spread, results in a uselessly brief audio sequence of fragmentary hoots, squawks, snorts, chirps, and general rustling presented, supposedly, in left-to-right order. Oddly, several of the chosen animals, such as snowshoe hares, okapi, and blue-haboon spiders, do not vocalize and so are sonically represented (if at all) only by magnified leaf chewing or some similar contrivance. The sound chip features replaceable batteries but no on/off switch.

Ambitious in concept, pedestrian at best in execution. (Informational novelty. 7-10)

**A HOOPOE SAYS OOP!**
_Animals of Israel_
Kiffel-Albeb, Jamie
Illus. by Kuman, Ivana
Kar-Ben (12 pp.)
$5.99 | Mar. 1, 2019
978-1-5415-049-5

Any author can find a rhyme for “cow” or “moo.” By the time they start school, most kids have read dozens of books about farm animals, but they may not have seen an ibex or a hyrax or a hoopoe. This board book would make an excellent compendium for children who want to be zoologists, but it creates a huge challenge for the author: Almost nothing rhymes with “ibex.” She goes out of her way to work around the problem: “Ibexes on crater ledges / Call out ‘Maa!’ and walk the edges.” Every couplet is awkward, but every new animal is surprising, and Kuman finds unexpected ways of painting them. Her bats are shaped like Chinese dumplings, and her camels are an unexpected assortment of geometric objects: a mountain peak perched atop a tiny rectangle underneath a slightly lopsided eggplant. The book also provides a variety of sound effects. The last two pages are crammed with “chirrup’s” and “urr’s” and “oop’s.” It feels as though an entire encyclopedia of animals—a very odd one—has been squeezed into 12 pages. The book also gives kids an incentive to travel. The cover copy says, “Meet some of Israel’s unique animals.”

The forced rhymes will be too painful for some readers, but very patient children will find it hilarious and surreal and a little startling, and they’ll learn years’ worth of animal facts before they reach kindergarten. (Board book. 1-4)

**LISTEN!**
_Israel’s All Around_
Kiffel-Albeb, Jamie
Illus. by Mack, Steve
Kar-Ben (12 pp.)
$5.99 | Mar. 1, 2019
978-1-5415-0969-6

Some people believe that the sound effects are the best part of a comic book. This story is for them.

If someone removed all the words from a graphic novel except for the sound effects, it would sound a lot like this board
The words are all inspirational, and so are the stories.

**SHE SPOKE**

MacMillan, Kathy & Bernardi, Manuela
Ilus. by Honesta, Katrin
Familius (32 pp.)
$24.99 | Mar. 1, 2019
978-1-64170-131-0

Yet another retelling of the classic fairy tale, updated for inclusivity and suitable for the board-book set, if somewhat lacking in whimsy and magic.

The familiar fable of the three little pigs is retold in simple language. This go-round, one of the piglets is a she, offering girls a chance to place themselves in the narrative. For the record, she’s the one who builds her house of sticks, so she’s slightly less lazy than pig No. 1 but less practical and ambitious than pig No. 3. The only visual suggestions of her gender are the frilled top of her overalls and eyelashes, a feature the other two lack even though they are both mammals as well. The storytelling is bare-bones; youngsters won’t be overwhelmed by the amount of detail, but exposition is quite skimpy even so. As the story opens, for example, the pigs bid their “mommy pig” and “daddy pig” farewell: “The time had come for the three little pigs to leave home.” The statement begs to be followed with, “... to make their homes and seek their fortunes,” but caregivers will have to fill that in on their own. Although geared to the audience, the lack of detail diminishes the fairy-tale quality of the story. Even a “Once upon a time” would help immeasurably.

**THE THREE LITTLE PIGS**

Adapt. by Lloyd, Clare
Ilus. by Di Lernia, Giuseppe
DK Publishing (30 pp.)
$12.99 | Feb. 19, 2019
978-1-4654-7848-1

This mirror-centered board book puts the focus quite literally on baby and mothers’ love.

A circular cutout going almost all the way through this board book allows the mirror at the back to be seen on each page. The left side of each spread asks what “mommy” animals say to their babies, and the right side answers with a punny phrase. The mirrors, which appear on each recto, are framed by an animal torso so that looking in puts a reader’s face on the body. The puns are cute enough: the “mommy elephant” says, for instance, “I love you a ton!” The book misses an opportunity to introduce readers to new vocabulary words (using “baby elephant” rather than “elephant calf”) and includes some unnecessary redundancies (“baby puppy,” for example). The illustrations echo many of Magsamen’s other, similarly styled books, outlined in dashes and made to look quiltlike. The front cover features an eye-catching introdctions to 14 women activists, with an audio feature that allows readers to literally hear what they had to say.

The roster opens with May McLeod Bethune, speaking of bridges and “brotherhood” in 1955. It goes on to pay respects to a mix of eminent role models (all but three still living), from Maya Angelou and Jane Goodall to Nobel Peace Prize winners Leymah Gbowee and Malala Yousafzai, disabled veteran and recently elected senator Tammy Duckworth, and Native rights activist Suzan Shown Harjo, a founding “director” (actually, trustee) of the National Museum of the American Indian. Each single-spread entry includes a career overview, a stylized but recognizable full-page painted portrait, provocative questions addressed to readers (“What skill do you have that you could teach the people around you?” “Do you think you have an obligation to help those who need it?”), and a transcription of the accompanying sound clip. The last is helpful, as the clips, which are taken from speeches or interviews, run from around 15 to 30 seconds each, and are keyed from a side-mounted touch pad, vary in clarity. The words are all inspirational, and so are the stories. Better still, as examples for budding activists, along with the predictable recitations of jobs, honors, and successes, the overviews often acknowledge failures, cannily characterizing them as first steps or as means to some greater end.

A chorus of voices for justice and change, diverse alike of identity and cause. (Further reading) (Novelty/biography, 8-12)

**BABY LOVE**

Magsamen, Sandra
Ilus. by the author
Cartwheel/Scholastic (10 pp.)
$8.99 | Apr. 30, 2019
978-1-338-24320-8

A circular cutout going almost all the way through this board book allows the mirror at the back to be seen on each page. The left side of each spread asks what “mommy” animals say to their babies, and the right side answers with a punny phrase. The mirrors, which appear on each recto, are framed by an animal torso so that looking in puts a reader’s face on the body. The puns are cute enough: the “mommy elephant” says, for instance, “I love you a ton!” The book misses an opportunity to introduce readers to new vocabulary words (using “baby elephant” rather than “elephant calf”) and includes some unnecessary redundancies (“baby puppy,” for example). The illustrations echo many of Magsamen’s other, similarly styled books, outlined in dashes and made to look quiltlike. The front cover features an eye-catching...
but otherwise pointless heart-shaped flap with a heart cutout. Nevertheless, it’s still a sweet question and response that’s sure to suck in moms who are always eager to tell their babies how loved they are. And what better time than with a book in hand?

Not every element of this one is perfect, but for providing mothers with an opportunity to say, “I love you,” to their little ones in a sweet way, it succeeds. (Board book. 6 mos.-1)

ONE WHOLE BUNCH
Meyer, Mary
Illus. by Gillingham, Sara
Cameron + Company (32 pp.)
$14.95 | Apr. 30, 2019
978-1-944903-56-5

Young children can learn the names of some flowers and practice their number skills by counting down from 10 to one in this attractive concept book.

On heavy, textured paper the book portrays a light-skinned brown child with a mop of brown hair happily gathering a colorful bouquet of flowers. “TEN stems of lavender, / NINE dandelions / EIGHT daisies / SEVEN sweet peas / SIX tidy tips” (of daisies, apparently), and so it goes until there is “ONE whole bunch of love for Mama”—but perhaps even more importantly, as can be seen in the last spread, in which a smiling Mama has her arms around the child—“a great big hug for me.” Observant children will enjoy spotting the little ladybug that makes an appearance on every spread. Gillingham’s mixed-media artwork includes paper collage and a palette of saturated pastel colors. Each spread has a clean and uncluttered look that adds to the upbeat feel of the book. Though there is nothing particularly new or exciting about the content, adult readers may want to consider it because of its charming presentation. Pair this with Susan Anderson’s book Flowers for Mommy (1997).

Readers looking for a springtime or Mother’s Day theme may find this book fills the bill. (Board book. 2-4)

MOM LOVES LITTLE JUMBO
Muraki, Yasushi
Illus. by the author
Minedition (22 pp.)
$9.99 | May 1, 2019
978-988-8341-78-8

Elephant calf Jumbo details all the ways Mom lovingly cares for her child.

Set primarily on tan-colored backgrounds so deeply textured as to look fibery, collage-style elephants constructed from expansive, beautifully curved shapes dominate each page. From the first moment, readers perceive that while Jumbo might be small, solid and stable Mom elephant will emotionally (and literally!) shelter her baby from any storm. As some pages open on some dramatic scenes in which the small elephant stumbles off a cliff or is menaced by lions, the determined eye contact between mother and baby or the furiously red, larger-than-life mother blocking her child from danger are eminently reassuring. After the introductory action, the narrative transitions to a less-tumultuous day, with the pair playing, snacking, and snuggling, leading to a somnolent bedtime scene. Mom’s skin subtly and helpfully changes color to hint at the mood, whether she’s playfully purple or restfully green-tinged while finding food. Narrating through a series of frank observations and sentiments about Mom, Jumbo achieves that just-right tone: “Mom plays with me. She makes me laugh.” Toddlers will also relate to the simple gesture of reciprocity when Jumbo picks a flower for Mom—what small child, elephantine or not, doesn’t enjoy gifting a dandelion?

A touching final page of baby elephant looking adoringly up to Mom confirms it: This is a perfect read for Mother’s Day or any day. (Board book. 1-3)

THE RABBIT, THE DARK, AND THE COOKIE TIN
O’Byrne, Nicola
Illus. by the author
Nosy Crow/Candlewick (32 pp.)
$15.99 | Mar. 12, 2019
978-1-5362-0576-3

A rabbit who is not ready to go to sleep traps The Dark in a cookie tin.

The Dark (joined by a chorus of bats, owls, and baby foxes) quietly retreats from within the cookie tin, explaining that certain animals are awake at night and also that without bedtime there can be no breakfast. Gradually, Rabbit’s grumpy resistance fades...then vanishes when he sees his prized carrots wilting in the constant daytime heat. At last he opens the tin—a flap that lifts to unfold a big, spectacular starry sky—and: “WOW!” said Rabbit. “The Dark can be so beautiful.” Off goes Rabbit to bed, and barely has The Dark begun to murmur a bedtime story before he’s snoozing away. O’Byrne endows her anthropomorphic bunny with particularly expressive ears, adds several distressed but cute creatures, and depicts The Dark as a nebulous, unthreatening patch of blackness with no feature except a hand reaching into the tin for an offered cookie. The idea isn’t exactly original, but the strong connections between the narrative and the pictures give this a leg up over Anthony Pearson and Bonnie Leick’s similarly themed Baby Bear Eats the Night (2012), while Jöns Mellgren’s Elsa and the Night (2014) shares the conceit (and even the tin) but goes in a different, deeper emotional direction.

Similarly resistant young children will be lulled by a subtly soothing tone that even the outsized pop-up doesn’t disturb. (Pop-up/picture book. 3-5)
Lift the flaps to help marine life parents find their babies.

For better or worse, there’s plenty going on in this board book. Each die-cut page grows progressively taller, with variously shaped waves, boats, and rocks jutting out of the top, creating a three-dimensional appearance. It’s a swell look, but those little edges sticking up bend and shred when handled, significantly shortening the book’s life span, especially when combined with the flimsy binding. Inside, readers lift (thankfully more robust) flaps to locate the baby animals. Rendered in an eye-catching but somewhat disquieting palette of blood-red, navy, teal, and pale chartreuse, the angular, heavily layered backgrounds with extensive shading capture a feeling of the water’s depth. The marine life is equally idiosyncratic, with evocatively stylized bodies that are more striking than traditionally adorable. Though the sea creatures have those friendly faces and wide eyes that so often denote picture-book cuteness, there are too many sharp angles and toothy mouths to see them as sweet, with the exception of a perfectly cradled baby otter. Conveyed in a perfunctory rhyme that starts on the page and finishes inside the flaps, the uninspired verse scans but reads aloud as choppy as the waves atop the pages. Companion title Farm offers a bit more adorableness but shares this title’s construction flaws.

The bookmaking quality underwhelms, but the compelling, vivid art makes this one untraditional excursion under the sea. (Board book. 1-3) (Farm: 978-1-4521-6645-2)

A counting board book illustrated with nature collages.

A row of 10 die-cut eggs across the front hints at the game within. Each spread follows the same format: On the left are a numeral, the number spelled out, and the word “eggs”; a parent animal guarding the eggs; and a one- or two-line riddle about that animal. Another hint can be found in the eyes or tails seen through small die-cut holes in the flap on the right. Lift the flap to find the answer along with a brief animal fact and sometimes another conversational question. Children at the older end of the recommended age range will quickly learn the pattern. Younger toddlers will quickly tear the rather thin flaps. The first five egg-laying critters are birds (flamingo, hen, owl, hummingbird, and duck). The sixth and seventh are crocodiles and chameleons, which are shown approximately the same size. The eighth, octopus, is a confusing choice, as the eggs are neither easily recognizable nor labeled (eight elongated, white ovals hang from a rock; in reality, there would be dozens). Nine is a tortoise. For 10, caterpillar eggs (again, not to scale) are shown on the left with the caterpillars on the right; the flap reveals 10 butterflies to count with no mention of the pupa stage. The final spread arranges all the critters on a number chart.

Overly ambitious and too busy; the counting is overshadowed. Count this one out. (Board book. 1-3)

A natural-history guessing game, with sets of “bamboozling” hints to what animals lurk behind gatefold flaps.

Poliquin challenges readers to imagine which animal could be made up of, for instance, dinosaur feet, feather dusters, “a lion-killing kick,” three billiard balls, and a handful of like components. Lifting the foldover reveals the answer—an ostrich—along with explanations (the balls represent the bird’s eyes and brain) and additional facts, all delivered in a breezy style: During dry spells, ostriches “get moisture from grasses, roots, leaves, and an unlucky lizard or two.” Eggenschwiler realistically portrays the 12 animals and the sometimes–outré clues (a blender turns out to represent a tarantula’s digestive juices; a “3-legged woman” notionally suggests a red kangaroo’s ambling gait) in contrasting hues over corrugated monochrome scenes of mildly cluttered rooms, workshops, garages, and like settings. The author’s closing note on the exotic portmanteau creatures sometimes found in old travelogues points both to the source of her inspiration and a promising line of inquiry for budding naturalists with a historical bent.

Definitely bamboozling—but in a good way, as exercises in unconventional logic. (glossary) (Informational novelty. 8-10)
The simple repetition expands young children's vocabularies without distracting and wordy explanations.

**MONSTERS**
*A Magic Lens Hunt for Creatures of Myth, Legend, Fairy Tale, and Fiction*
Potard, Céline
Illus. by Ledesma, Sophie
What on Earth Books (32 pp.)
$21.99 | May 1, 2019
978-1-9999680-6-9

Monsters from many lands, cultures, and media are revealed by peering through a red cellophane spyglass. Placed in cartoon landscapes or other settings and hiding behind red grids that vanish when viewed through the colored lens, the monstrous lineup features the likes of a troll, Dracula, and the Big Bad Wolf but also goes far beyond such usual suspects to include Gollum, Voldemort, Jabba the Hutt, Edward Scissorhands, Cthulhu, the ghost of Anne Boleyn, and Martians—not from *The War of the Worlds* but the ones with exploding heads from *Mars Attacks!* Reflecting the distinctly Eurocentric (not to say Gallic) slant to the selections, at least eight are or are billed as French while only one, Mokele-Mbembe, represents African traditions, and there are no Native American boojums. Also, some entrants, such as Casper the Friendly Ghost, *Hyposigatibus* (a big but real bat), and the Dahu, a goatlike creature of French folklore that has short legs on one side for walking on slopes, seem like outlaws. Whether they are bad actors or not, Ledesma draws them all in such a scrawly, naïve style that they would be hard to recognize without the prompts that Potard supplies (“JAWS: This giant shark has razor-sharp teeth,” and “you can tell he’s coming by the scary music”) along the bottom edges. For young fans who want to make their own monsters and/or spyglass, an array of reproducible body parts for the former and simple directions for the latter bring up the rear.

An unusual gallery of new and old monsters, kaijus, cryptids, creatures, and pop-culture creations. *(Informational novelty. 5-9)*

**SOUNDS OF THE FOREST**
*Riggs, Kate*
Illus. by Dogi, Fiammetta
Creative Editions/Creative Company (14 pp.)
$8.99 | Mar. 12, 2019
978-1-56846-318-6

Just enough information for toddlers—and noisy too!

The forest of the title is the rainforest. A close-up of a gorilla nibbling on a leaf invites readers to explore this habitat. On the first spread a chimp is shown trying to catch a raindrop. The spare text reads, “Raindrops splash.” The following six spreads follow a pattern: an adjective that describes the animal shown is followed by a sound that animal might make: “Singing frogs hum.” Preschoolers will want to imitate the animals’ noisy behaviors and “hoot” like the chimpanzees, “squawk” like the parrots, “munch” like that gorilla, and “thud” like a herd of elephants. Order is restored on the final spread: “Night air whispers”—illustrated by the elephant and parrot, now sleeping. The verbs are emphasized by larger, colored type. The simple repetition expands young children’s vocabularies without distracting and wordy explanations. Despite all the noise, a fair amount of information about the African rainforest is relayed through detailed, if somewhat idealized, pictures. Dogi created the layered paintings using an airbrush, with details added by hand. Oversized tropical plants, decorative butterflies, and animals stand out against clean white backgrounds.

Share this sturdy, age-appropriate board book freely—just don’t expect a quiet storytime. *(Board book. 2-4)*

**BELIEVE**
*A Pop-Up Book of Possibilities*
Sabuda, Robert
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (24 pp.)
$27.99 | Apr. 9, 2019
978-0-7636-6397-1

A pop-up invitation to dream big. With his latest set of seemingly miraculous white pop-ups, Sabuda urges expansive life goals. Accompanying a flat image of a small pine cone, the phrase “When I grow up” concludes, with a page turn, “I will stand TALL,” next to a towering tree. “When I strive for my goals” (a small bee looping in for a landing) leads to a magnificent stand of finely petaled sunflowers and a satisfied “I will savor the outcome.” A bowl of eggs turns to a swirling flight of birds when dreams are shared; dreaming “of the future” transforms a bath toy into a great ship in full sail; a multileveled castle is the result when “I build my life”; and finally the “humble beginning” envisioned as a paper airplane becomes a rocket blasting off “to a life among the stars.” Younger viewers may be more inclined to admire the way each model unfolds and marvel at its intricate paper engineering than to embellish the metaphorical images with specific personal ambitions—but the wide-angled outlook may inspire at least some longer thoughts. It’s easy to imagine this giving *Oh, the Places You’ll Go* a run for its money as a perennial graduation gift.

An elevated outing, perhaps a touch vague but, as ever, magnificently designed. *(Pop-up picture book. 7-9, adult)*

**SPACE**
*Sirett, Dawn*
Illus. by Ward, Elle
DK Publishing (12 pp.)
$9.99 | Mar. 12, 2019
978-1-4654-7933-4

A voyage to the moon, with surprises hidden behind large flaps along the way.
Astronauts Danny and Daisy blast off with a lift of the first flap (“Liftoff! Bye-bye, Daisy and Danny”), race another rocket that’s hiding behind a space station (“Peekaboo!”), discover Rilo the Robot in a locker, glimpse a pair of shy ETs, and finally plant a generic Earth flag on the plasticine moon next to a plaque with friendly greetings. Made from plugs of soft-looking material with rounded edges and brightly colored painted details, all of the spacesuited figures sport smiles, and all—including the three-eyed ETs—are differently hued. The rhymed narrative doesn’t exactly soar (“The moon is really close now. / It’s a great big ball of rock. / Is something hiding behind it? / Watch out! You might get a shock”), but fanciful as the flight may be, no laws of physics are actually broken, and exposure to such vocabulary as “launch tower” and “cockpit” may give diapered STEM-winders a boost. Relentlessly perky but, like other outings in this high-fructose series, not entirely empty calories. (Pop-up board book. 1-3)

Insects and animals that feature prominent spots, spikes, and spirals are depicted in vibrant watercolor. This board book comes from the team behind Dot, Stripe, Squiggle (2018), and similarly, it’s also all in the name. It opens with a series of three progressions of the words, “Spot / Spike / Spiral,” each featured on its own two-page spread, matched with an insect or animal featuring one of those three descriptors. Tuttle’s text is basic and simple, with only slight changes thanks to some ellipses, exclamation points, and arbitrary-feeling capitalization. Nerlove’s incredibly rich and detailed watercolor illustrations drive all of the reader interest. Though the pages appear sparse and the illustrations are shown on a starkly contrasting, all-white background, they encourage readers to linger and look. There is so much to absorb and study: the depth of color variation in the blue poison dart frog’s skin and the tiny fly capturing its attention, the gorgeous rainbow of color and pattern on the lanternfly. The last two pages show each animal or insect and its complete name—a nice touch and certainly necessary for curious young readers.

Setting aside the repetitive text, this one is worth picking up for the rich, absorbing illustrations of lesser-known animals and insects. (Board book. 1-3)

On the Mountain
Walden, Libby
Illus. by Clover Robin
Kane/Miller (12 pp.)
$14.99 | Mar. 1, 2019
978-1-61067-821-6
Series: Nature Pop-ups

Five types of North American animals pop up over alpine slopes and meadows.
In big, centered pop-ups that really elevate as each spread opens, a pair of wolf cubs races toward viewers, a rainbow trout gapes, a bighorn sheep lowers his head ominously, two roly-poly black bear cubs tumble, and a bald eagle soars. In the backgrounds, which, like the animal stars, are done in a cut-paper-collage style, triangular trees, bright wildflowers, and lush green grasses perch decoratively on rocky hillsides or wave sinuously in the flowing water. Walden adds bland but bouncy rhymes (“As the sun soars in the sky, / Two bumbling, tumbling bears roll by”) and, in smaller type, a few bits of natural history about each creature or about mountains in general: “The highest point of a mountain is the summit or the peak.” The co-published Across the Savannah features the same approach and the same sort of large figures (all African, notwithstanding an observation that savannahs are found on four continents), including a toothily grimacing hippo, towering giraffes, and a quartet of alert meerkats. Both galleries conclude with a final, peaceable-kingdom-style gathering.
Pleasant visits to wild habitats for the Oshkosh set. (Informational novelty. 3-6) (Across the Savannah: 978-1-61067-822-9)
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Smiley, Jane
Knopf (208 pp.)
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Series: Ellen & Ned, 2
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THE CASE OF THE BUSTED VIDEO GAMES
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EYE OF THE EARTHQUAKE DRAGON
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$15.99  |  $4.99 paper  |  Apr. 30, 2019
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Series: Dragon Masters, 13
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MARTY’S MISSION
An Apollo 11 Story
Young, Judy
Illus. by Miles, David
Sleeping Bear (32 pp.)
$17.99  |  Apr. 15, 2019
978-1-5341-014-4
Series: Tales of Young Americans
(Picture book. 6-10)
WITH THE FIRE ON HIGH
Acevedo, Elizabeth
HarperTeen (400 pp.)
$17.99 | May 7, 2019
978-0-06-266283-5

Seventeen-year-old Afro-Boricua Emoni Santiago hones her gift for cooking and makes important decisions about her future.

Emoni’s ‘Buela says she’s had a gift for cooking since she was small. Now Emoni has her own toddler, Emma (“The kind of name that doesn’t tell you too much before you meet her, the way mine does”), nicknamed Babygirl. Emoni’s first day of senior year at her Philadelphia high school is also Babygirl’s first day of day care, leaving Emoni saddened about missing parts of her life. Emoni’s a classic example of the school system’s failure to harness many students’ creativity and interests, but thankfully she discovers and enrolls in a new class called “Culinary Arts: Spain Immersion.” Though the teacher, Chef Ayden, respects her, he’s strict, and Emoni nearly drops the class, but eventually she gathers the ingredients—connections and skills—she’ll need for success. A romance that doesn’t fit the usual mold and a class trip to Spain round out this flavorful tale. Emoni occasionally breaks from first-person narration to address readers directly, and her voice and story feel fresh and contemporary.

Diversity in representation is primarily racial and ethnic; however, Emoni’s best friend Angelica is a lesbian. The short, precise prose chapters will draw in even reluctant readers, and the inclusion of several recipes adds to the appeal. Current pop-culture references and cultural relevance will attract both window and mirror readers.

Sabroso. (Fiction. 14-adult)

FUGITIVE
Ayala, Vita
Illus. by Allen, Raúl & Martin, Patricia
Valiant Entertainment (112 pp.)
$9.99 paper | May 21, 2019
978-1-68215-301-7
Series: Livewire, 1

Move over Marvel, there are new superheroes on the graphic-novel stands. In this thought-provoking comic series, readers meet Amanda McKee, aka Livewire, a black former government agent whose powers
enable her to manipulate technology. Amanda and her fellow psiot friends are now on the run from U.S. officials who want to control their powers and who fear their influence. Amanda is currently public enemy No. 1 after causing a blackout that resulted in mass casualties. While evading agents out for blood, she struggles to reunite with her psiot friends who feel betrayed by her actions. The narrative begins in media res, and Ayala (Twisted Romance, 2018, etc.) and artists Allén and Martin do a credible job of creating a world that feels realistic and visually fantastical while also orienting readers within the story. Amanda’s trio of friends are a multietnic bunch (East Asian, Sikh, and white), and through their dialogue, readers confront uneasy truths about superheroes that other, more fantasy-based, characters are able to avoid. As much as superpowered beings are revered, on some level we fear and resent them for reminding us of our own powerlessness, a tension explored here.

Given how technologically dependent society has become, few superheroes can feel more timely—or more threatening—than these. (Graphic novel. 13-18)

THE CANDLE AND THE FLAME
Azad, Nafiza
Scholastic (416 pp.)
$18.99 | May 14, 2019
978-1-338-30604-0

Noor is a fantastical, multicultural city in South Asia, home to a tremendous variety of languages, religions, and cultures.

Eight years ago, however, Noor was attacked by a tribe of chaotic djinn called the Shayateen, resulting in many deaths. Only three humans survived the massacre, and Fatima was one of them. The ruler at the time, Maharajah Arjun, asked the djinn of order and reason, the Ifrit, for help safeguarding the city, and now, his son, Maharajah Aarush, peacefully rules over Noor alongside Zulfikar, the leader of the Ifrit. When one of the most important and powerful Ifrit dies, however, Fatima undergoes a radical transformation—one she doesn’t immediately comprehend—and wakes to discover that she now has the fire of the djinn within her. Now, she must find a way to protect her family and friends from a seemingly inevitable civil war while figuring out her new identity. Based on Islamic mythology and Arabic folklore, debut author Azad’s descriptive storytelling and complex characters give the novel a certain richness and texture missing from solely plot-based narratives; readers can vicariously taste foods from different cultures and partake of the sights, smells, and sounds of the city of Noor where Hindus and Muslims live side by side in peace and harmony. The novel also sensitively deals with the delicate issues of grief and trauma.

A must-read for lovers of fantasy. (Fantasy. 14-18)

HAPPILY AND MADLY
Bass, Alexis
Tor Teen (352 pp.)
$17.99 | May 21, 2019
978-1-250-19591-3

A fortuneteller once warned Maris Brown that she would find love and be dead before age 18—could this be the fateful summer?

Maris’ summer with her father’s new family is supposed to be a break from the trouble she’d been getting into back in Phoenix, where she lives with her mother. But when she stumbles into a dangerous encounter on an island, she finds herself immersed in a game of intrigue that reaches closer to her and her family than she ever suspected. To complicate things even more, she finds herself falling for the boy her stepsister is dating, Edison, who is part of an ultrarich family that treats the Browns to expensive parties, boat rides, and days on the beach. Can Maris figure out a way to protect her family and her love without sacrificing herself? Bass’ (What’s Broken Between Us, 2015, etc.) descriptions of lavish parties and rich people are as tantalizing as the fresh lobster they consume. However, the plot is by turns too convenient and too hazy while the characters, all coded as white, seem stuck in their roles. There is no sense of lessons learned or even avoided—instead, the main characters remain static from beginning to finish despite the onslaught of revelations they are dealt toward the end.

An uneven look at the ways money doesn’t guarantee freedom. (Thriller. 13-16)

MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD
Berquist, Emma
Greenwillow (384 pp.)
$17.99 | May 21, 2019
978-0-06-264281-3

A lonely teen must use her odd powers to track down a killer.

Eighteen-year-old Alexandra “Lexi” Ivanovich can tell how and when someone will die with just a touch and has an affinity with ghosts. If she tries to save someone from their fate, it only delays the inevitable and can have horrible consequences, a lesson she learned the hard way. Lexi keeps people at a distance, including her de facto family members, who all work for a Los Angeles club, Elysium, whose owner, Urie Porchowsky, offers lifetime protection to youngsters with at least “one foot in the unknown.” After one of their own goes missing, Lexi witnesses the gruesome murder of a local high school student named Jane, and her ghost is soon asking Lexi for help. The disappearances escalate, and Lexi must find the killer while battling her burgeoning feelings for Jane. Lexi and Jane’s tentative (and unusual) relationship is sweet, actually overshadowing the murder mystery, and Berquist (Devils unto
As a school librarian, I was thrilled by the students who read voraciously, expressed joy over the books I recommended, attended every book club, and breathlessly shared recommendations for titles they wanted me to purchase.

But I had a soft spot for the ones who were not natural-born readers, the kids who read only under duress. Reading is an incredibly recent human development, neither universal nor “natural.” While mastering literacy skills is important and reading can bring great joy, there isn’t anything inherently morally superior about it—there are so many ways that humans express emotion, share stories, and learn information. Some teens have learning differences that make reading a challenge. Others can read perfectly well in another language but are still grappling with decoding written English.

And yet, all these kids, readers and nonreaders alike, attend school and are evaluated daily in ways that depend to a great degree on reading ability. The bookworms would have been fine even without me—show them books and they’d know what to do. It was the other kids who needed to walk into a space where they would be met without judgment, where their fears would be respected and their needs would be fulfilled.

The greatest challenge was finding books that were simple but not simplistic, of a manageable size but not babyish in appearance, and filled with engaging, high-quality content. There were never enough that fit the bill. So it was with tremendous joy that I noticed the YA titles from Enslow Publishing’s West 44 imprint that started crossing my desk last year. These are reluctant reader books whose trim size does not distinguish them from mainstream titles. They are novels in verse, so there is ample white space to make tracking easier and not too many words to overwhelm someone who is struggling. The quality of the writing is consistently strong, the covers are attractive, and the subject matter is diverse across many dimensions.

Second in Command by Sandi Van (Feb. 1) is about a boy from a socially conservative background, son of a Cuban immigrant, proud of his active military mother, and an Eagle Scout who wants to join a summer police program. It’s a mirror for many young people who do not often see themselves in YA literature.

In Sanctuary Somewhere by Brenna Dimmig (Apr. 1), a Latinx boy who hopes to go to college to study meteorology is shocked to learn that he is undocumented, a secret that places his dreams for his future at risk.

A white girl in Maine who is struggling in school and faces multiple pressures at home becomes addicted to OxyContin in Little Pills by Melody Dodds (Apr. 1). It’s a slippery slope as she seeks an escape from the challenges and stresses of her life but falls deeper into addiction.

The value of titles such as these cannot be overstated, and I hope that along with the huge doorstopper tomes YA has become known for we’ll see an increase in the number of titles that speak to all those other kids, the ones we can’t afford to forget. —L.S.

Laura Simeon is the young adult editor.
While "Trans," he acknowledges that he doesn’t know “what life I’d be today if I had grown up there. Would I ever have had the diversity can be found in peripheral characters. Moody paranormal fare that lacks the spark of Berquist’s debut; consider this a sophomore slump. (Paranormal thriller. 14-18)

**TRANS MISSION**

*My Quest to a Beard*

Bertie, Alex
Little, Brown (304 pp.)
$17.99 | May 14, 2019
978-0-316-52903-7

A YA addition to the long-standing genre of trans memoir.

“I’m not really a writer,” explains Bertie, the 23-year-old YouTuber-turned-author, “but I have had some different experiences that I’d really like the world to know about.” In chapters like “Chest Binding” and “Bottom Surgery,” Bertie repackages generations of information developed and shared by transmasculine people, with some contemporary additions. Given that it’s also memoir, he narrowly focuses on a fairly privileged white trans male experience with chatty prose in disterringly laid out text. Bertie sticks to fairly basic information around medical and social transition in addition to his personal experiences. Early on he remarks that “the area I lived in until I was five was not a nice place. I can’t imagine the kind of person I’d be today if I had grown up there. Would I ever have had the confidence to risk sharing their truth again. Dealing with new friendships, family rejection, first love, anxiety, and personal growth, this novel is grounded in familiar YA terrain while exploring themes of gender identity. Deaver’s treatment of Ben’s nonbinary identity creates a realistic portrayal of their journey toward self-acceptance. Ben and their family are white, holds appeal for readers of all genders and sexualities through sympathetic characters and a hopeful narrative of empowerment. (Fiction. 14-18)

**KINGS, QUEENS, AND IN-BETWEENS**

Boteju, Tanya
Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster (384 pp.)
$18.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-338-30612-5

A lesbian teen struggles with coming-of-age in this sassy young adult novel filled with pixies, poets, wisecracks, and drag queens.

Nima, a biracial (Sri Lankan/white) high school junior, feels like a supporting character in her own life. Gawky and socially awkward, she is the basketball team’s equipment manager as opposed to a player and is relegated to the position of “good friend” with her longtime crush, Ginny, a popular redheaded senior who is departing for college. As the summer before her senior year approaches, Nima is desperate to break the patterns that keep her feeling ignored, overlooked or invisible. She gets her wish when she attends her town’s annual carnival and meets a group of colorful drag queens who are loud, proud, and unapologetic about who they are. Debut author Boteju does an excellent job of depicting the awkwardness that is an inherent part of adolescent life; additionally, Nima grapples with her sexuality, unrequited love, feelings of inadequacy, and conflicting feelings about being abandoned by her mother, and at times her struggles can feel unrelenting. Interpersonal relationships between Nima, her friends, and the drag queens feel authentic and fresh. The author clearly has a profound knowledge of drag queen culture, and her love for it practically pops off the page.

A bright and sparkly celebration of love and self-acceptance. (Fiction. 12-18)

**I WISH YOU ALL THE BEST**

Deaver, Mason
PUSH/Scholastic (336 pp.)
$17.99 | May 14, 2019
978-1-338-30612-5

Deaver’s debut delivers an honest coming-of-age and coming-out story about 18-year-old queer, nonbinary Ben De Backer.

The novel centers on conflicts within a North Carolina family that drive the narrative after Ben comes out to their parents and is kicked out of the house. Welcomed by their older sister, Hannah, who they haven’t spoken to in more than a decade, and her husband, Thomas, they begin a new life, enter therapy, and begin to find peace as they finish their senior year. Ben finds comfort in art classes, which become a safe haven as the art teacher takes them under her wing. Ben’s loneliness abates thanks to budding friendships, but when their connection with another student, Nathan, hints at something more, Ben struggles to find the confidence to risk sharing their truth again. Dealing with new friendships, family rejection, first love, anxiety, and personal growth, this novel is grounded in familiar YA terrain while exploring themes of gender identity. Deaver’s treatment of Ben’s nonbinary identity creates a realistic portrayal of their journey toward self-acceptance. Ben and their family are white, Nathan is brown-skinned (ethnicity unspecified), and a few secondary characters are ethnically diverse, including a nonbinary character who is a Muslim immigrant and hijabi.

Holds appeal for readers of all genders and sexualities through sympathetic characters and a hopeful narrative of empowerment. (Fiction. 14-18)
points make the novel feel more like literary fiction than young adult. The island metaphor that runs throughout sometimes feels forced, as do the romantic relationships. Rad and his family are white and working class, Key is queer, and two secondary characters are implied biracial (Korean/white).

A psychological portrait of a family torn apart by grief and mental illness that is, at times, overly dramatic. (Fiction. 16-adult)

**BE/HOLD**

_**A Friendship Book**_

Erlichman, Shira
Illus. by the author
Penny Candy (68 pp.)
$17.95 | Apr. 2, 2019
978-0-9996584-2-0

An ode to the pleasures and surprises of compound words: “the smallest poem in the English language.”

Erlichman writes short lines of love and comfort, addressed to an unspecified “you” and laced throughout with standard or newly fashioned compound words: “A friendship is like that. / With sails powered by / the deepest of breaths. / Some might call it a loveship... / or a songship...or a wowship... / and they'd be right. / But even if your ship’s makeshift, / come beloved, be loved / by me.” In the fanciful, semiabstract art, human figures—most but not all adult, paper-white with red lips and other visible features, but drawn in simple, flowing lines as if wearing sheets over their heads—dance, embrace, wave, or gaze pensively outward. The voice, too, is adult (or nearly so), addressing an absent “Sweetheart” who evidently wrestles with depression and loneliness. Though the language occasionally takes a turn to the twee side (“Don’t be too scared. Be too cared”), there is an insistent flow to the sounds and sentiments that will carry readers over the (not very rough) emotional rapids to a concluding reassurance that “you’ll always belong.” The trim is 8 1/2 inches high by 6 1/2 inches wide, so despite its heavily illustrated nature, it will not look out of place on YA shelves.

Nascent wordsmiths will be left keen to explore the expressive possibilities for themselves. (Picture book. 12-16)
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    – Booklist, starred review

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her childhood, to speak with her when she’s spiraling, to puzzle over their shared history of mental illness. She doesn’t tell anyone else: not her single mother, nor her best friend, Grace (with whom she shared a kiss), not the new boy, Jasper, who walks with a limp, or his grandmother, who has taken Biz under her wing. After an incident further triggers her undiagnosed (or, at least, unnamed) PTSD, Biz begins to unravel, dropping out of school before both literally and metaphorically journeying to better understand her father. Biz’s mental health crisis, which primarily takes the form of hallucinations, dissociation, and panic attacks, is portrayed with raw, vivid authenticity. Biz and the majority of the cast default to white (Grace is implied biracial Chinese/white), and while their sexual identities are questioned, they never become the central focus of the story. Characters sometimes feel flat or underdeveloped, but this is fitting for Biz’s first-person perspective, which is unreliable and frequently foggy. Fox’s prose is lyrical and profoundly affecting, providing a nuanced account of the hereditary effects of trauma.

**Haunting. (resources)** *(Fiction. 14-18)*

**THE MISSING SEASON**
*French, Gillian*
HarperTeen (304 pp.)
$17.99 | May 21, 2019
978-0-06-280333-7

In small-town Maine, new girl Clara is pulled into the orbit of the mythical monster rumored to be responsible for disappearing teens.

Clara Morrison moves to Pender when her father takes on work demolishing the town mill. She’s used to the nomadic life, but she longs to belong somewhere. Enter Bree, the steely girl from across the street, and her best friend, Sage. The girls welcome Clara, inviting her to the skate park where they moon over boys. Bree admits a crush on Kincaid, a striking and enigmatic skater, but Kincaid keeps to himself unless he’s spinning tales about the Mumbler, the monstrous man who supposedly lives in the marsh, killing a teenager every few years. As Clara ingratiates herself into the group, it feels like she’s playing with fire: assisting in an escalating prank war and growing closer to Kincaid, which she knows will destroy Bree. And then Halloween looms close, and suddenly a girl disappears—could this be the work of the Mumbler? Clara doesn’t buy into the town legend, but she can’t deny that something’s ramping up. Every locale jumps from the page, imbued with magic and foreboding. Clara’s new relationships ring painfully true, both sharp and beautiful. Readers will burn through pages and be left haunted long after, fitting for Biz’s first-person perspective, which is unreliable and frequently foggy. Fox’s prose is lyrical and profoundly affecting, providing a nuanced account of the hereditary effects of trauma.

**Imperfect but empowering. (Fiction. 12-18)**

**AMELIA WESTLAKE WAS NEVER HERE**
*Gough, Erin*
Poppy/Little, Brown (368 pp.)
$17.99 | May 21, 2019
978-0-316-45066-9

Opposites attract in this story of pranks, justice, and hate-to-love romance.

Harriet Price and Will Everhart feel like they’re worlds apart despite being in the same year at the same prestigious girls’ private school. Harriet is well-off, a prefect, and a tennis champion obsessed with not rocking the boat. Will is fiery and rebellious, a middle-class student who resents the establishment. When they witness a coach yet again sexually harassing students, however, the duo surprise themselves and decide to team up to take action. Working secretly under the pseudonym Amelia Westlake, the pair starts with a series of school newspaper comics satirizing the school’s sexism and general complicity. They build momentum with larger-scale pranks that further their message, growing closer as they do so. As their hoax grows bigger and bigger, the two must decide what they’re willing to risk—friendships, girlfriends, expulsion—to further the legend of Amelia Westlake (and their relationship). Harriet’s and Will’s characterizations sometimes fall flat, and their alternating first-person narrations sound less distinct than might be anticipated. Their romance is well-paced and satisfying. Emotional abuse, heterosexism, and racism are all touched upon in the narrative but are secondary to the skewering of sexism and institutional hypocrisy. The majority of characters are white, although a prominent secondary character is first-generation Vietnamese-Australian.

**Imperfect but empowering. (Fiction. 12-18)**

**HER ROYAL HIGHERNESS**
*Hawkins, Rachel*
Putnam (288 pp.)
$17.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-5247-3826-6
Series: Royals, 2

A Texas teen enrolls in a Scottish boarding school in this fresh spin on the commoner/royal romance.

Keen geologist Amelia “Millie” Quint is spending her senior year in the Scottish Highlands, at the prestigious Gregorston school. It’s a dream come true (hello, local rock samples) until Millie’s roommate arrives. The gorgeous and glamorous Princess Flora of Scotland is rude and condescending, and the two girls can barely co-exist. Flora repeatedly tries to get kicked out of school, and Millie often finds herself dragged along for the ride. During the annual wilderness challenge, Flora sends their camping gear downstream in another scheme to get sent home. During the resulting trudge through the woods, the girls each admit to an
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BOOKS TO EMPOWER THE BUDDING FEMINISTS IN YOUR LIFE.
Cori McCarthy always longed to read a book about “girl King Arthur.” They didn’t know they’d have to write it.

“In fact, it took me this long to write because I figured someone else would do it,” says McCarthy, who was busy writing four other YA novels (Now a Major Motion Picture, etc.), a middle-grade series, and a nonfiction picture book about Arab-American poet Khalil Gibran.

Only in sharing the idea with their partner, YA author Amy Rose Capetta (Unmade, Echo After Echo, The Brilliant Death, etc.), did McCarthy begin to seriously consider the possibility.

“At first, it was just ‘girl King Arthur,’ and then it was ‘girl King Arthur in space,’” McCarthy says. “Then one day I looked at [Amy Rose] and said, ‘Merlin ages backward, so he would be a teenager in this....’ And that was the tipping point, where all of a sudden she said, ‘Well, you have to write it.’ And I said, ‘Well, I clearly am not writing it—maybe if you wrote it with me?’”

Capetta’s strengths are dialogue, metaphor, and magic; McCarthy’s are plot and structure. Together, they forged a bold, brilliant, funny, edgy epic, Once & Future (March 26), starring a queer 17-year-old girl as King Arthur, a questioning 17-year-old boy as Merlin, and their chosen family as the Knights of the Rainbow.

“I fangirled my way into writing this book,” Capetta says. “I loved the idea of having this big adventure that invites so many new people into the canon, a story about heroes and who gets to be one, and I felt immediately I needed to read it. I did not yet know I needed to write it, with Cori. That was a slight surprise.”

Arthur incarnation Ari Helix is surprised to discover a sword sticking out of an oak tree on Old Earth, the ecological preserve where she and her adoptive brother, Kay, crash-land after being pursued by the Mercer Company, a merciless conglomerate that controls most of the galaxy’s resources.

“There were things in this universe that Ari didn’t understand,” they write. “Space travel, for one, the segregation of Ketch for another, herself for the grand finale. But this tree—it needed to be set free. She’d never felt anything so strongly in her whole
life, almost like someone was nudging her toward it. Almost as if that someone had been nudging for a lot longer than the last few minutes, and only now were they willing to tip their hand."

Claiming Excalibur sets in motion the 42nd iteration of the Arthurian cycle: train, conquer, defeat greatest evil in world, unite humankind. But as Merlin soon discovers, Ari isn't your typical Arthur—which is exactly what makes Once & Future a can't-miss for fantasy fans:

“All hail this worthier-than-ever, fresh, and affirming reincarnation of the legendary king and her round table of knights, which dazzles with heroic flair, humor, and suspense,” our reviewer writes.

“We’re very excited that this book was welcomed,” McCarthy says. “It was—I don’t want to say a surprise, but we didn’t know if somebody would see it the way we saw it, which was a blockbuster, flashy, fun, and commercial, all on purpose.

“I hope this book makes people feel a little bit less alone,” Capetta adds, “and makes them feel they’ve found people in the pages that maybe they needed to know.”

Once & Future received a starred review in the Jan. 1, 2019, issue.

attraction to girls (Millie is bi and Flora is gay), and they reach a turning point, starting to fall for each other. Can Millie hack it as a princess's girlfriend? What will Flora’s mother, Queen Clara, say? Millie narrates in the present tense with funny, smart, and sarcastic observations of the posh people around her. The short chapters are interspersed with chatty gossip articles about events as they unfold, and character relationships come across clearly in dialogue that is at turns witty, awkward, and romantic. Millie’s new friend Lady Sakshi is biracial Indian/white, while everyone else is white.

Light and sweet. (Romance. 13-17)

Perfection proves illusory in this modern portrait of a high-living family brought low.

Sixteen-year-old Annie Tripp seemed to have it all—beauty, a picture-perfect and wealthy family, a private school education, and a promising ice-skating career—but always yearned for something more authentic. Then Annie and her older brother, Jay, are shipped off to her estranged Aunt Nicole and Uncle Skip in Breckenridge, Colorado, while her father’s on trial for real estate fraud. Dumped by her coach, shunned by her best friend, Cee, and judged by strangers for her last name, anchorless Annie accepts a job as a dishwasher at Skip’s restaurant. Expected teenage restaurant escapades ensue (ill-advised hookups, lots of drinking, occasional culinary scenes) as ice-queen Annie attempts to reinvent herself while also struggling to understand her father’s crimes and the reason why her mother has kept them away from Nicole for so long. Hemmings (How to Party with an Infant, 2016, etc.) continues her usual analysis of privilege and familial dysfunction but targets teen audiences with a melancholy, mildly angst-y tale. Aloof and abrasive, Annie isn’t always likable. Her sudden fall from grace may elicit sympathy but feels more like an inconvenience than a high-stakes crisis or a chance for a humbling epiphany. Annie and her family are white, and there are few characters of color either in her elite circles or what Annie deems the “ghetto” ski town.

A mumblecore, morally ambiguous “Cinderella” story, sans prince. (Fiction. 14-18)
LET ME HEAR A RHYME
Jackson, Tiffany D. with Sharif, Malik “Malik-16”
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins
(384 pp.)
$17.99 | May 21, 2019
978-0-06-284032-5

After a Brooklyn teen is murdered, his sister and best friends set out to launch his rap career.

Stephon “Steph” Davis could’ve been one of the hottest emcees to come out of Brooklyn, just like his inspiration and fellow Bed-Stuy rapper, the Notorious B.I.G. Unfortunately, like Biggie, Steph was murdered. His grieving best friends, Quadir and Jarrell, discover a treasure trove of tapes and CDs of Steph’s music in his bedroom. With the help of Jasmine, his socially conscious sister, Quadir and Jarrell hatch a plan to promote Steph’s music. With lyrical finesse (penned for the novel by Sharif) and beats that can rock a party, Steph is “killing them while he’s dead.” Soon, Steph’s demo catches the attention of a well-known rep for a major record label who wants to meet hip-hop’s newest rising star. The three teens must keep up the charade while also trying to uncover the truth about his murder. Exceptional storytelling, well-crafted, true-to-life dialogue, and the richly drawn Brooklyn landscape will draw readers into this fast-paced blend of mystery, budding romance, and social commentary. Quadir, Jarrell, and Jasmine are endearing, tenacious, and memorable. Hip-hop lovers of all ages will appreciate this homage to rap legends from a bygone—but not forgotten—era.

Thoroughly engrossing and as infectious as Steph’s lyrics: a testament to the unbreakable bonds of friendship and a love letter to Brooklyn and hip-hop in the late ’90s. (Fiction. 13-18)

DARK SHORES
Jensen, Danielle L.
Tor Teen (368 pp.)
$17.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-250-31772-8
Series: Dark Shores, 1

The pirate Teriana is the epitome of the beauty and strength of the seafaring Maarin; Marcus is leader of the feared (and revered) Thirty-Seventh Legion.

What the two have in common, though, is secrets...Celendrial—inspired by ancient Rome—is the center of the Empire, home of their government, with major ports bringing wealth to the upper echelons of the city. Through the years, the Cel have used their legions to subdue the continent as they know it. But the Maarin, who have no land, are left free to sail the seas and trade as they will—until now. Newly elected Lucius Cassius has other plans for the Maarin people and the Dark Shores only they know how to reach. Once believed to be a myth by the Cel, Cassius has made it his mission to find the Dark Shores and will use any means necessary to conquer them. The book grabs readers from the beginning with its stellar worldbuilding and multidimensional characters, and the mythical elements are truly believable within the constructs of the story. The perspective shifts between the viewpoints of Teriana and Marcus from chapter to chapter, offering readers greater insights into each. Teriana has dark skin, Marcus has light-brown skin, and other characters have a range of skin tones; race is of no significance in this world.

A gripping introduction to a new series. (Fantasy. 14-18)

WE ARE THE PERFECT GIRL
Kaplan, Ariel
Knopf (384 pp.)
$17.99 | May 21, 2019
978-0-525-64710-2

Kaplan (We Regret to Inform You, 2018, etc.) returns with another modern retelling of a classic as three teens grapple with love à la Cyrano de Bergerac.

Ever since they were 8-years-old, Aphra, born with bravado and a mouth that won’t quit, has always looked out for her meek BFF, Bethany, who rarely opens up in public. It’s clear, though, that Bethany likes hot, athletic, all-around nice guy Greg. It’s also clear to Aphra that her large nose can’t compete with Bethany’s gorgeous body, and for once, she keeps her mouth shut about also liking Greg. In Aphra’s snarky yet thought-provoking first-person narrative, an advice app she creates for her computer science class further complicates her dilemma when the AI technology doesn’t work as planned. Posing as the computer, the teen finds herself doling out advice to fellow students, especially Greg. But when Greg incorrectly believes Bethany is behind the app, Aphra decides that if she can’t be Greg’s girlfriend, she’ll help Bethany attain this coveted position. More than a clever technological twist on the original, Kaplan’s version raises awareness of female body image: Aphra’s discovery about the subjectivity of beauty is at once painful and heartfelt. Greek, Latin, Russian, and other literary references and wordplay will engage sophisticated readers. Aphra and Bethany are white, Greg is Latinx, and there is additional ethnic diversity in secondary characters.

A smart and honest look at female beauty, with plenty of panache to boot. (Fiction. 14-18)
AURORA RISING
Kaufman, Amie & Kristoff, Jay
Knopf (480 pp.)
$18.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-328-72096-4
Series: Aurora Cycle, 1

When Legionnaire Tyler Jones follows a distress call to rescue a cryogenically frozen girl from a 220-year-old lost transport ship the night before the squad Draft, he ends up with much less—and much more—than he expected.

Having missed the Draft, overachieving Tyler is stuck with a squad of leftover misfits that now represent the Aurora Legion, an interplanetary peacekeeping coalition. The six teammates, each with an area of expertise, include four men and women of varying skin tones as well as two members of alien species. On the motley crew’s first mission, however, they discover a stowaway: biracial (Chinese/white) human Aurora Jie-Lin O’Malley, recently rescued girl out of time. Trouble follows immediately. This first installment of Kaufman and Kristoff’s (Obsidio, 2018, etc.) second series is a high-octane, thrilling, snarky adventure through space, combining the best elements of the heist genre and space opera. Nonstop action, intrigue, and drama will keep readers turning pages as the squad seeks answers to questions about Aurora’s past, her superhuman powers, and why the entire Terran Defense Force is after her. Meanwhile, the seven shipmates blossom into a true cohort as their pasts are revealed and their bonds (romantic or otherwise) grow. A satisfying ending reveals the truth, both terrible and beautiful, with the promise of many more adventures ahead.

This intergalactic space opera has it all: action, thrills, suspense, laughs, and all the feels. (Science fiction. 12-18)

I LOVE YOU SO MOCHI
Kuhn, Sarah
Scholastic (320 pp.)
$17.99 | May 28, 2019
978-1-338-30288-2

A disheartened teen takes a trip to Japan to find her true passion. 
Japanese-American high school senior Kimi Nakamura’s future is planned out: become a great Asian-American artist. But painting is her mom’s dream. Kimi enjoys designing bold outfits that make her feel like the ultimate version of herself. After fighting with her mom, Kimi is eager to accept a surprise invitation to visit her estranged grandparents in Kyoto over spring break. With a fourth-generation Japanese-American father and a Japanese mother, the country offers her many familiar foods and customs but also a completely foreign culture. With its beautiful sights, Kyoto is the perfect place to find herself. It also helps that Akira, a cute boy, offers to be her guide. What begins as an escape from reality becomes Kimi’s path to developing insights into her mother’s past and her own future. Kuhn (Heroine’s Journey, 2018, etc.) has brought together travel, fashion, food, romance, and family to create an incredibly sweet and heartwarming coming-of-age romantic comedy. Weaving in Japanese vocabulary and slang, she also subtly addresses racism and differences between Japanese and Japanese-American cultures. She explores the struggle of discovering one’s familial and cultural history and how it shapes who one becomes. Strong characters and a story with real depth make this a worthy read.

Readers will love this teen rom-com so mochi. (Fiction. 12-18)

KINGSBANE
Legrand, Claire
Sourcebooks Fire (608 pp.)
$18.99 | May 21, 2019
978-1-4926-5665-4
Series: Empirium Trilog, 2

In the sequel to Furyborn (2018), Rielle and Eliana struggle across time with their powers and prophesied destinies. Giving readers only brief recap, this book throws them right into complicated storylines in this large, lovingly detailed fantasy world filled with multiple countries, two different time periods, and hostile angels. Newly ordained Rielle contends with villainous Corien’s interest in her, the weakening gate that holds the angels at bay, and distrust from those who don’t believe her to be the Sun Queen. A thousand years in the future, Eliana chafes under her unwanted destiny and finds her fear of losing herself to her powers (like the Blood Queen) warring with her need to save those close to her. The rigid alternation between time-separated storylines initially feels overstuffed, undermining tension, but once more characters get point-of-view chapters and parallels start paying off, the pace picks up. The multietnic cast (human versus angelic is the only divide with weight) includes characters of many sexual orientations, and their romantic storylines include love triangles, casual dalliances, steady couples, and couples willing to invite in a third. While many of the physically intimate scenes are loving, some are rougher, including ones that cross lines of clear consent and introduce a level of violence that many young readers will not be ready for. The ending brings heartbreaking twists to prime readers for the trilogy’s conclusion.

A very full mixed bag. (map, list of elements) (Fantasy. 17-adult)
DON’T DATE ROSA SANTOS
Moreno, Nina
Disney-Hyperion (336 pp.)
$17.99 | May 14, 2019
978-1-368-03970-3

Whatever you do...Don’t. Date. Rosa. Santos. They say she is cursed by the sea, and perhaps they are right, but love doesn’t keep to still waters.

After attending both high school and community college for the last two years, it is time for Florida teen Rosa to pick a four-year college, and she has made the perfect choice: one with a study abroad program in Cuba. For most students, this would be an exciting adventure, but for Rosa, it’s personal. Her grandmother left the island as an exile and will not entertain the idea of going back, while Rosa longs to understand the place her family came from. Now, if she can just tell abuela. Things get more complicated when she literally runs smack into Alex Aquino, a tall, dark, and tattooed guy who comes waltzing back into town—and into her life. Rosa soon learns that love is never easy, especially when the boy has a boat. Readers will feel Rosa’s excitement and anxiety as she not only navigates life’s difficult relationships, but pushes to make the journey to Cuba to find out where she came from and, ultimately, who she is. Rosa’s Cuban-American best friend, Ana-Maria, is Afro-Latinx. The text is enhanced by authentically Cuban Spanish.

Full of complex family relationships, a diverse community, and plenty of swoonworthy moments, fans of rom-coms won’t be able to put this one down. (Romance. 13-17)

HOW TO BE LUMINOUS
Reuter Hapgood, Harriet
Roaring Brook (336 pp.)
$17.99 | Apr. 30, 2019
978-1-62672-375-7

An English teen reckons with the loss of her artist mother.

Reuter Hapgood (The Square Root of Summer, 2016) serves up an intriguing story of love, loss, and sibling relations. When 17-year-old Minnie Sloe’s “disco ball of a mother” vanishes on the last day of the school year, Minnie’s world is completely upended as she finds a letter that points to suicide—and literally begins to see in black and white. Minnie and her sisters were raised solely by their mother, who attained artistic superstardom when her debut sculpture won the prestigious Turner Prize. Minnie and her sisters—19-year-old Niko, who’s Deaf, and 15-year-old Emmy-Kate—each have strong artistic leanings and have relished their eclectic upbringing, accustomed to their mother’s erratic behavior, characterized by Minnie as “sinkholes and starlight” and not a psychological condition that might lead their mother to take her own life. But when she begins to suffer from monochromacy, Minnie begins to question her own sanity and deeply probe her mother’s demons in ways that greatly impact her relationships with her sisters, steady boyfriend, and an attractive new guy at school. Bracketed by the loss of a parent and teen romance, this well-wrought narrative excels at normalizing both the throes of artistic expression and the varying dimensions of physical and mental challenges. Minnie and her sisters are white; her boyfriend and his uncle are of Indian descent.

A moving tale of grief and self-discovery. (Fiction. 14-18)

BIRTHDAY
Russo, Meredith
Flatiron Books (288 pp.)
$18.99 | May 21, 2019
978-1-250-12983-3

Two best friends fall in love despite the changes in their lives and societal pressures that threaten to tear them apart.

Inseparable childhood friends, transgender girl Morgan and cisgender boy Eric spend every birthday together. A September snowstorm brought their families together in the hospital on their shared day of birth. As they navigate puberty and high school, Morgan struggles to understand and love herself. Cancer took her mother away, and she fears rejection from Eric and her football coach dad if she tells them she’s not a boy. On top of family tension and worries about his friendship with Morgan, Eric hides his own concerns about his sexuality and his future. In a narrative that follows Morgan and Eric from year to year on their birthday, Stonewall Award Winner Russo (If I Was Your Girl, 2016) captures the intense longing of two teens who feel trapped in their small, football-obsessed Tennessee town. Morgan’s self-acceptance is an intimate, honest journey with an ultimately hopeful resolution that acknowledges the diverse struggles and experiences of transgender people. While the story ends on a happy note, grief, economic struggle, abuse, discrimination, suicide, and divorce play significant roles in the narrative and the characters’ development. The slow-burn romance between Eric and Morgan is affirming and worth the wait. Apart from Morgan’s Latina friend, Jasmine, the cast is white.

An emotional, winning touchdown. (Fiction. 14-18)
A very impressive, ultimately hopeful, treatment of mental illness.

**ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN**

**THE RULE OF MANY**
Saunders, Ashley & Saunders, Leslie
Skyscape (359 pp.)
$16.99 | May 7, 2019
978-1-5420-4370-0
Series: The Rule of One, 2

Newly connected with leaders of the rebellion, twins Ava and Mira Goodwin set their sights on revolution in this sequel to *The Rule of One* (2018).

A futuristic United States, short on resources and high on advanced tech, allows families only one child. After a lifetime of hiding their existence, now Ava and Mira work with members of the Common, a rebel group determined to flip the loyalties of state leaders and bring down the tyrannous Texas governor Roth. The cross-country quest begins in Calgary and ends in the girls’ hometown of Dallas. Though action-packed, the linear plot lacks tension. High-stakes challenges are predictably achieved, leading to sometimes far-fetched victories that feel too easy (such as whole groups of citizens making split decisions to join the rebellion). The most compelling aspect of the first book—the protagonists’ experience as identical twins, as written by twin authors—doesn’t get a lot of attention here, and the girls’ characters don’t see much development. There is some expansion, such as the welcome addition of new narrative perspectives, including Owen, a dark-skinned programmer, and Zee, a mysterious work camp prisoner with ties to the Goodwins. The twins have green eyes and red hair, the Roth family is Tejano, and some character’s names hint at a somewhat diverse cast.

The revolution rolls on, but readers may find their interest lagging. *(Science fiction. 13-17)*

**THE BOY NEXT STORY**
Schmidt, Tiffany
Amulet/Abrams (448 pp.)
$9.99 paper | May 21, 2019
978-1-4197-3436-6
Series: Bookish Boyfriends, 2

The Campbell girls’ (mis)adventures at Hero High pick up without missing a beat in this follow-up to *Bookish Boyfriends* (2018).

Merri has adjusted to high school and is now dating Fielding, the headmaster’s son. She’s also assisting older sister Lilly with her upcoming nuptials. Meanwhile youngest sister Rory is feeling like the odd-man out. Rory’s sophomore mentor, Toby, who is supposed to help her acclimate to the school, is so smitten with Merri that he does not always seem to remember Rory; Toby certainly doesn’t notice that Rory has fallen for him. Merri and Lilly leave Rory out of wedding planning, and ordinarily, Rory would escape into her art, but upperclassmen jealous of her talent are deliberately sabotaging her work. What’s a girl to do? If English teacher Ms. Gregoire has anything to say about it, Rory will take a page from a classic. If *The Great Gatsby*, with its pining protagonist, doesn’t suit her, then how about *Little Women*? Told in the first-person, Rory takes cues from literature, attaining great insights about her self-worth and expectations for love. The love focus is so exclusive that secondary characters and plotlines fall into the background, including the possibility of a life-changing opportunity to study with an illustrious New York City artist. The Campbells are white, Toby is Latinx, and ethnicity is difficult to determine for other characters.

Even if one-note, Rory’s story will still ring a chord with die-hard romantics. *(Fiction. 12-15)*

**ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN**
Scott, Ceylan
Chicken House/Scholastic (288 pp.)
$17.99 | May 14, 2019
978-1-338-32376-4

A suicide attempt lands a teen in a British psychiatric hospital in this #ownvoices debut.

“Jump, Iris,’ she said. ‘I’ll follow you.’ ” Iris jumped. Tamar didn’t, and she’s left grappling with the belief that she’s a murderer. They were both 15 on the summer day Iris drowned in the weir. Over a year later Tamar’s attempt at suicide lands her in Lime Grove with other mentally ill teens. She narrates her stay there, the events of the past, her relationships with her fellow patients, and her gradual stumbling recovery in a staggeringly honest, astonishingly lucid first-person narrative. Scott, a young woman diagnosed with borderline personality disorder when she herself was committed to a psychiatric hospital at age 16, brings readers so far into Tamar’s head that they truly understand what it’s like to be her, participating in both her self-deception and her climb toward truth and sanity. And sanity doesn’t always look like what you’d expect—when Tamar drinks herself senseless at a party the first time she’s given leave, her psychiatrist congratulates her for not doing worse. There are no stereotypes here. Even minor characters are complex and rich—though they are all white—and the prose is elegant and direct. “Rock bottom is always far lower and far darker than you think.”

An important book and a very impressive, ultimately hopeful, treatment of mental illness. *(author’s note)* *(Fiction. 12-18)*
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<td>Small, A.K.</td>
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**THE BONE CHARMER**

When Saskia’s future fractures in two, can she survive either path?

On the day of her kenning, when her vocation and possibly her mate will be revealed by bone magic, 17-year-old Saskia’s Bone Charmer mother, Della, views multiple futures and picks the one with the greatest chance of happiness and fulfillment. At a crucial moment, Saskia balks and snaps one of the bones; two futures spin off. In one she has the job she feared was her fate, Bone Charm ing, and a dark, brooding mate, Bram. In the other she has the job (T utor) and mate (charming and funny Declan) she would have chosen. If Tutor Saskia and her mother can’t knit the broken bone back together, both futures will vanish. On top of that, both futures are in danger from a dark magic–wielding Charmer intent on amassing more power. Shields (Poison’s Cage, 2018, etc.) creates a dark and interesting world peopled with recognizable (and ostensibly white) characters, but her ultimate message that you can’t fight fate and shouldn’t try might not sit well with free-minded teens. Saskia narrates her own stories in alternating chapters, first one future then the other. A sequel is a certainty, as the somewhat muddy, downer of an ending leaves Saskia in danger.

An enjoyable read as long as logic is not applied strongly. (Fantasy. 14-18)

**BRIGHT BURNING STARS**

Two best friends navigate their final transformative year at a cutthroat Paris ballet school.

Life for students, or “rats,” at the Paris Opera Ballet School isn’t for the faint of heart, and Marine Duval, who is French, and American Kate Sanders, have been inseparable since they were 12. It’s been a whirlwind four years, and now, as 16-year-old First Division students in their final year, they’ll begin the fight for The Prize: an invitation to become part of the Paris Opera’s corps de ballet. It’s believed that their ridiculously handsome and talented classmate Cyrille Terrant, aka The Demigod, can elevate a girl’s ranking just by proximity. Kate single-mindedly seeks out his attention while Marine worries that her more voluptuous figure is a hindrance. The pressure to win inevitably strains their once-unbreakable bond. Marine’s and Kate’s dual narratives explore their inner pain, desires, and motives, from why they dance to who they love, and, most importantly, what, and who, they allow to define them. Debut author Small, herself a dancer, brings authenticity (fascinating day-to-day details abound) to what it takes to flourish or wither amid the soaring highs and crushing lows of a competitive dance school while sensitively exploring the girls’ many emotional and physical extremes. All main characters are assumed white.

Addictive, angst-y, and heartfelt. (Fiction. 14-18)

**DEPOSING NATHAN**

Two West Virginia teens become as close as two boys can get—until one stabs the other.

During the course of a three-day deposition, Nate, the victim, gives the prosecutor a detailed account of how Cam stabbed him. Before it turns violent, the bromance begins when the two pair up in 11th-grade biology class. Between formerly attending private Catholic schools and losing family members young, the two share an intimate connection. As that intimacy becomes physical, problems start to arise—for one, Nate has a girlfriend. Nate’s home, run by his straight-laced aunt, is also one of rules. The new-est rule is that Nate can’t see Cam anymore. But Nate still wants to. Cam does, too. So, why the violence? The first-person present-tense narrative twists between dialogue, letters, and descriptive sequences. Jolting moments of direct address heighten the drama. Though the adults read as extremes, debut author Smedley adds depth by including intimate backstories. Nate’s internalized homophobia and Catholic guilt mix, resulting in a layered, complex depiction of questioning (bi)sexuality. Meanwhile, ignostic Cam provides a more bi-positive foil. Smedley’s tight control of the structure, alternating between burgeoning romance and cringeworthy case details, skillfully results in cognitive dissonance. Most of the cast presents as white, but the prosecutor is black and uses a wheelchair.

A heartbreaking case worth revisiting again and again. (Fiction. 13-18)
THESE WITCHES DON’T BURN
Sterling, Isabel
Razorbill/Penguin (336 pp.)
$17.99  |  May 28, 2019  
978-0-451-48032-3

Keeping an identity secret, avoiding a manipulative ex, flirting with girls, dealing with threats to the coven—these are a few of the hassles of being a teen witch.

Hannah lives in Salem and works at a touristy witchcraft supply store, but few know she’s the real deal—an Elemental Witch who can manipulate fire, water, earth, and air. Her best friend, Gemma, certainly doesn’t, since she’s a Reg (Sterling’s version of Muggles). Her ex, Veronica, does, because she’s part of the same coven, although Hannah’s trying to avoid her during this summer before senior year. Her new crush definitely can’t find out—as if being 17 wasn’t hard enough. Meanwhile, someone’s dabbling in dark magic, and Hannah’s worried it’s a Blood Witch, who historically are the unpopular, manipulative ones of the bunch. Or it could be something worse—Witch Hunters. Among the white main cast, Hannah is a self-identified lesbian, and Sterling presents a realistic treatment of her other queer characters. Hannah also admirably stands her ground in leaving an unhealthy relationship. Unfortunately, the book includes a lot of telling instead of showing, with everyday magic and motivational backstory scenes. Additionally, there are some weaknesses in structure and in characters professing intense emotions that often don’t lift beyond the page.

A little patience pays ample dividends in a suspenseful tale wrought from power chords, creeping darkness, and disquieting twists. (Fiction. 13-16)

THE RAVEN’S TALE
Winters, Cat
Amulet/Abrams (368 pp.)
$17.99  |  Apr. 16, 2019  
978-1-4197-3362-8

A fictionalized account of horror master Edgar Allan Poe’s life from March 1826 through December 1827.

Edgar “Eddy” Poe is desperate to escape the suffocating life of upper-crust Richmond, Virginia. At college, the 17-year-old will be free from his emasculating foster father’s controlling grip and can work on his poetry. The passionate and talented Edgar is close to achieving his goal when she appears. A girl in a dress of ashes and raven feathers, she is Eddy’s muse, whom he names Lenore. Lenore is fierce, powerful, and hungry for words, but she needs Eddy to commit to her so she can evolve from her new frail human form into a higher being. Will Poe pursue that which makes him happy, or will he succumb to what’s expected of him and live a life without artistic expression? Edgar and Lenore share the present-tense narration in distinctive first-person voices. Several of Poe’s most well-known works enhance the narrative, complemented by the author’s own finely crafted writing that flows with gorgeous, Poe-inspired phrases. Major characters are white; the family has three slaves, one of whom, Judith, plays an important role in inspiring and guiding Poe. The author’s note troublingly refers to her as having “joined the Allans in January 1811,” a phrasing in keeping with the benign manner in which these characters’ enslavement is portrayed.

A labor of literary love that will appeal to fans of Gothic horror and anyone who has ever had to assuage a determined muse. (poems, author’s note, further reading, quoted material) (Historical horror. 13-adult)
CONTINUING SERIES

HONOR BOUND
Caine, Rachel & Aguirre, Ann
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (480 pp.)
$17.99 | Feb. 19, 2019
978-0-06-257102-1
Series: Honors, 2
(Science fiction. 13-18)

THE FAIREST KIND OF LOVE
Cesar, Crystal
Disney Hyperion (320 pp.)
$17.99 | Mar. 5, 2019
978-1-368-03884-3
Series: Windy City Magic, 3
(Fantasy. 12-18)

THE TRIUMPHANT
Livingston, Lesley
Razorbill (416 pp.)
$18.99 | Feb. 12, 2019
978-0-451-48068-2
Series: Valiant, 3
(Fantasy. 12-18)

DROP DEAD GORGEOUS
Stine, R.L.
HarperTeen (336 pp.)
$9.99 paper | Feb. 5, 2019
978-0-06-269429-4
Series: Return to Fear Street, 3
(Horror. 13-18)
AMAZING THINGS ARE HAPPENING HERE
by Jacob M. Appel
Black Lawrence Press (152 pp.)
$17.95 paper | Apr. 15, 2019
978-1-62557-705-4

Appel’s (The Cynic in Extremis: Poems, 2018, etc.) short story collection offers portraits of people experiencing new revelations. In these eight poignant, insightful tales, award-winning author Appel—a physician, attorney, and bioethicist—continues to address many preoccupations that he’s explored in earlier works. One of his most prominent themes is the human tendency to alter the truth—often less to gain an advantage than to experience the sheer joy of invention. In the title story, Carlo, a VA hospital nurse, notes that he’s long been “fascinated by schemes and hoaxes”; when a patient goes missing (“We were short one lunatic”), he hatches a coverup plan, which he embroiders beyond necessity: “fabricating Dunham’s data—and pulling it off so effortlessly—was about as much fun as anything I’d done in years.” Several characters in other stories come to understand that human connection, like creativity, is a mysterious thing that can lead to unlikely attachments. In “Grappling,” Oriana Bingham, a wealthy young woman, insists on marrying Jeb Moran, a “gator grapper” who risked his life to save hers when she was 11; “A girl dreams that a man will put his life on the line for her,” she explains. Oriana stays loyal to Jeb, even though he’s crude, abusive, and drinks, but rejects Arthur Dobbins, a much more suitable man. Other stories similarly describe a loved one’s mystifying preference for someone unworthy. Illness, criminality, and broken lives or dreams appear in “Dyads,” “Embers,” and “Live Shells.” The hope of rescue, or at least comfort, underlies these tales, but the author shows how hope can only go so far in the face of sorrow, death, and bad decisions. Still, the stories are never morbid, as the author effectively balances them with humor and sharp observations about characters and settings. Some pieces have a surreal tinge, but generally, they hew closer to realism than Appel’s previous work.

Mordant, humorous stories that display a fine understanding of the human condition.
Many home cooks need some serious incentives to whip up healthy snacks and meals. They would rather serve tried-and-true, hearty fare: Buffalo chicken wings, mac and cheese, classic green-bean casserole, or meatloaf. But some chefs seek beneficial dishes to put on the table. Kirkus Indie recently reviewed three food books that should motivate readers to start experimenting in the kitchen.

Lisa Sharon Belkin’s *Comfort Cooking for Bariatric Post-Ops and Everyone Else!* offers low-fat versions of traditional snacks: spinach and artichoke dip, zucchini-chicken croquettes, and “cheese and chives brownies” (mini-quiche bites). The author, who underwent weight-loss surgery, also provides low-carb renditions of ethnic favorites. Our reviewer describes Belkin’s meals as “small, nutritious, and tasty,” calling her work “a thoughtfully presented resource for eating well.”

In *Seasoning Substitutions*, Jean B. MacLeod suggests a wide array of swaps, including vegan alternatives to rich items like sour cream (a mixture of cashews, water, lemon, and salt) and cream sauce (a puree of silken tofu and a bit of soy milk). Jettisoning alcohol in recipes becomes easy. The author recommends using freeze-dried instant coffee dissolved in hot water in place of coffee liqueur, and frozen orange juice concentrate and water instead of Curaçao and Cointreau. “A functional, authoritative reference book that home chefs should be glad to have on their shelves,” our critic writes.

Jim Beecham, a retired Florida physician, focuses on Albert Einstein in *Choose Food Like a Genius*. Inspired by Einstein’s method of “looking into nature,” the author explores cholesterol claims and the diets of healthy groups, such as Pacific Island denizens. Beecham encourages consumers to be adventurous—to savor Asian sweet potatoes and shelf inflammation-causing okra, tomatoes, and peppers. According to our reviewer, this manual remains “an exuberant, health-positive guide for readers eager to reform their eating habits.” —M.F.

Myra Forsberg is an Indie editor.
Debut author Barseghian offers an analysis of how the globalization of commerce has increased the importance of localized customer satisfaction.

Thanks to advancements in technology, people around the world are more connected than ever, but, according to the author, this hasn't resulted in a placeless cosmopolitanism but rather a newfound attachment to local life. Consumers want more than just good products, delivered affordably and conveniently, he says—they want a customized experience that reflects their values and those of their particular communities.

As a consequence, he asserts, companies now must adopt a “deep local” approach that markets directly to individuals—an “individual smart” strategy that moves beyond traditional marketing models that focus on large demographic groups. In short, corporations need to combine sensitivity to locality with retail scale, which Barseghian paradoxically calls “mass customization.” In this book, he discusses how artificial intelligence technology now allows marketing experts to predict, with increasing accuracy, the behavior of consumers as well as collect and precisely analyze their shopping habits. This “sentiment analysis” makes it possible to know how consumers feel about a particular product or brand, he says, making establishing brand loyalty an intentional strategy rather than a fortuity: “Traditional marketing research uses field studies, focus groups, and surveys, but it’s passive. In the new world of marketing, sentiment analysis takes place in real time.” Barseghian's analysis of these issues is astute, as he draws from experience; he founded a company, SambaConnects, whose stated mission is to “connect local businesses with larger retail venues.” He divides his analysis among three main targets—the consumer, the corporation, and the technology that connects the two—and this organizational approach gives readers a panoramic view of the issues at hand. His impressive professional expertise is matched with the clarity with which he expresses his theories. Also, the book offers helpfully illustrative case studies and pragmatic counsel. Overall, Barseghian's principal strength isn't originality—there's plenty of literature on this subject matter that's already available—but his book is the most accessible and synoptic analysis of its kind.

A thorough assessment of an important business trend coupled with sound, actionable advice.

When a young woman who can enter fictional worlds decides to change their plots, she faces fierce resistance in this debut contemporary novel.

“Sometimes I just want to shout the truth about me and what I’m capable of at the world,” says Elana Black, but she knows that's a terrible idea. Who would believe that Elana can depart her current reality and step into novels, TV shows, movies, and even comic books? She can't explain it herself: “There’s a lot that I don’t know. I don’t know most things.” In an old sitcom, Elana for the first time meets someone like herself, Paolo, who explains they're not alone; they're “travelers of a kind.” They can tap into the Knowing—learning people's tales—and all worlds are real. Thinking of the suffering she's read or seen, Elana is deeply unsettled, and after entering a favorite episode of the Doctor Who–like show Eternity Pilgrim, she prevents a minor character's destruction. Elana can depart her current reality and step into novels, TV shows, movies, and even comic books? She can't explain it herself: “There’s a lot that I don’t know. I don’t know most things.” In an old sitcom, Elana for the first time meets someone like herself, Paolo, who explains they're not alone; they're “travelers of a kind.” They can tap into the Knowing—learning people's tales—and all worlds are real. Thinking of the suffering she's read or seen, Elana is deeply unsettled, and after entering a favorite episode of the Doctor Who–like show Eternity Pilgrim, she prevents a minor character's destruction. This success gives her a new sense of purpose: “I've decided to rewrite history at a full-time hobby.” But Elana has dangerous, angry foes who don't want her to upset the balance of things and are willing to use her friends as pawns. Elana must learn more about herself and her abilities to stand up for the principle that every story matters. In this series opener, Bell (Warning Call, 2017) offers a nice twist on the portal fantasy, with Elana able to enter any kind of world that fiction can describe. It's almost too soon that the tale turns to its complications, because the intriguing notion is worth more exploration. Elana is a sympathetic heroine with some challenges (social anxiety, a low-status bookstore clerk job) but a strong moral compass that points true. Friendship, too, is a theme of the novel, and Elana must learn to trust that she can rely on her circle. As she explains, with an appropriate fictional reference, she's not a lone wolf, she's “Buffy Summers, someone who needs a family.”

An entertaining premise, effective voice, and underlying warmth make a strong start to this fantasy series.

A Toronto-based urban planner and consultant gives a tour of some of the world's greatest metropolises.
From Sydney to Belfast, this debut book walks readers through eight cities. Drawing on his career competing in the “high-energy, high-rise global market for ideas on cities and their futures,” Berridge presents his thoughts on urban machinery, economic development, and what makes metropolises work. In England, he became the master planner for the redevelopment of Hulme, “an inner-city district just south of Manchester’s centre that has gone through several incarnations even in my lifetime.” In these pages, he examines Manchester’s history and the impact of Brexit. The author’s firm “specializes in planning downtowns, waterfronts, and similar large-scale urban projects.” In addition, he advises on projects in Belfast, Singapore, and Governors Island in New York City. Throughout the volume, which includes ruminations on Toronto, Shanghai, and New York, the author offers readers insights into differing approaches to city planning. The specters of Jane Jacobs—whom he became acquainted with in his adopted hometown of Toronto—and Robert Moses both loom large. In Singapore, and New Y ork, the author turns his professional eye toward these cities—“First impressions are so important”—to share reflections that deftly spotlight his knowledge of urban planning. He writes enthusiastically about public libraries and local food. His description of London’s District Line exemplifies his ability to combine urban appreciation with analysis: “Starting in the leafy Thames-side urban villages of Richmond, Wimbledon, and Kew, home to quiet, secure money, moving east it picks up the aspiring inner suburbs of Hammersmith, Putney and Fulham before diving below ground through the expensive squares and crescents of South Kensington.” The volume’s only shortcoming is that Berridge’s discussions of political problems like housing inequality are too cursory. Still, he provides readers with a helpful road map for successful urban development and skillfully details the thinking behind a number of remarkable metropolises.

A compelling and peripatetic account of an urban fixer’s work in cities around the globe.

BEFORE THE CURTAIN GOES UP
Blake, India
Photos by the author
IB Publications

A theater lover chronicles actors’ backstage lives.

For her new book, Blake (Captured, 2014) took her camera to six small-town community and professional theaters in New England, Pennsylvania, and Florida. She documented what John Shea, artistic director emeritus of the Theatre Workshop of Nantucket, describes in the foreword as “the critical and intimate moments of transformation when the actor gives birth to the character.” The author’s fascination with this “metamorphosis” that actors undergo to become a conduit for the stories they will present on stage is clear in her casually evocative color photographs. More than 60 in number, crisply framed by white space, they draw the eye with their slice-of-life scenes of actors—male and female, older and younger—getting into costume, applying a mustache, straightening a wig, brushing on makeup, taking a coffee break, sharing a laugh, or running lines. Accompanying many of the photos are well-curated quotes by actors who speak of their roles and give considered, often ardent thoughts about what being involved with the theater has meant to them. Accessible to a wide range of readers, smartly designed with a deft balance of text and pictures, the volume spotlights each theater with its own section, introduced by Blake’s lively narrative relating the origins of the institution’s founding, a brief history of the productions staged there, and an insider’s anecdote or two. Other photos in the book show theater exteriors and backstage environments (a shelf of jumbled props, utilitarian dressing rooms, makeup tools, costumes) when the players are absent. The author adds further interest and visual appeal with informational tidbits about each theater in framed boxes integrated into the photographic layout. These well-preserved moments are informed not only by Blake’s skill with a camera, but also by her past as part of the theatrical community, a pursuit, she writes in her eloquent preface, kindled by her own early experiences as an audience member.

Authenticity and a passion for the subject remain the hallmarks of this well-designed, intimate look at theaters and performers through a camera lens.

ETTA, THE BRAVE
Collins, Lee W.
CreateSpace (276 pp.)
$10.99 paper | $2.99 e-book
Dec. 15, 2017
978-1-978475-22-9

A 10-year-old girl and her grandparents share a special ability, which she’ll need when danger strikes in this middle-grade novel.

For Henrietta Jananne, always called Etta, summer means going to her grandparents’ cabin on Marmot Lake, which is “Etta’s favorite place in the entire world.” The alpine idyll is perfect for reading, fishing, drawing, relaxing, and hanging out with her beloved grandparents. This year, Etta’s parents worry that a bear has been near the cabin, but they allow her to stay, warning her repeatedly to be careful. On one walk, Etta’s comments about a rescued dog prompt Grandma to tell Grandpa “She has it, and I think she has it strong.” Sitting Etta down, her grandparents tell her some important family history. Her great-grandmother Morse had a special gift—she could talk with animals—and so can Grandpa, Grandma, and Etta herself. Though at first hard to believe, Etta discovers it’s true and works on honing her ability. A hike up to Jayden Peak with Grandpa turns dangerous when a snowstorm hits—and a deadly mountain lion is on the prowl. Surviving will require Etta’s gift and the help of some loyal animal friends. In his debut book, Collins offers a very appealing lead whose kind heart is recognized by all, including an animal: “You love me
Costanzo's book is shot through with big, abstract ideas that give the gratifying mystery intellectual weight.

**DE ANIMA(L)**

Costanzo, Joe

Lulu (234 pp.)

$12.99 paper | $3.03 e-book

Nov. 2, 2018

978-1-4814-9293-3

A mystery novel explores animal rights, human responsibility, and the soul itself. *De Anima* is Aristotle's extended discussion of the human soul. Yet in it, the philosopher also allows for the possibility that animals, with their seemingly rich emotional lives, have souls too. Or so argues Professor Edward Stathakis, the lead in Costanzo's (*The Grand Junction*, 2014, etc.) latest book. Edward presents his thesis in an undergraduate philosophy class. Yet when his college's jackrabbit mascot unexpectedly vanishes a few days later, fears arise that his students have taken Edward's argument a bit too seriously. The rabbit's disappearance is just the first of a string of crimes that all seem to contribute to one noble goal: the liberation or protection of newly ensouled birds and beasts. And to save his job—or at least justify his teaching style—Edward embarks on a quest to reveal the perpetrator. (This notion that students might take a philosophy class so seriously is as quaint as it is attractive.) Edward, a bit of a fusty academic, is more George Smiley than Sam Spade, but that's part of the fun. Like John le Carré before him, Costanzo knows that an improbable hero is often more likely to hold readers' attention.
A debut memoir recalls a juror’s momentous decision and his struggle with religious faith.

In 2009, Dubler was summoned to jury duty in Colorado’s Arapahoe County, and his 10-week service in a double-murder trial changed his life. The charges in the case were grim—a drug dealer was accused of a coldblooded shooting—and the stakes were dauntingly high; if the defendant was found guilty, he could face the death penalty. The author was emotionally overwhelmed by the gravity of his role, torn by a dilemma that he poignantly recounts: “I could choose mercy and offend everyone who clamored for the full extent of justice. Or I could choose death penalty and offend everyone who said that there had been enough tears, suffering, and death.” Dubler situates the trial within his own painful crisis of faith. Raised as an evangelical Christian, he was taught that the line between sin and righteousness was inflexible; he also says that he was generally seen by others as a man who was filled with divine spirit. However, despite his commitment to his faith, he felt disappointed in God as he languished in a dysfunctional marriage. While reconciling himself with the enormity of his judgment and his humanity, Dubler felt compelled to confront his inclinations toward moral judgment. In this book, he sensitively portrays his duties as a juror, filling these moments with nuance, introspection, and self-doubt. Despite the monstrousness of the crime, Dubler recounts how he resisted thinking of the defendant as the personification of evil, as he detected “glimpses of his humanity.” Throughout, the author’s personal recollections are remarkably forthcoming and unguarded; he even discusses how sexual abstinence before marriage affected his relationship with his wife and how uncomfortable he was about sex’s “mechanics and messiness.” Still, the highlight of the book is his running comparison between his uneventful upbringing and the defendant’s traumatic one and the ways in which both virtue and chance indelibly shape a life.

An emotional, edifying remembrance written with power and clarity.

**BOY DREAMER**

*An Artist’s Memoir of Identity, Awakening, and Beating the Odds*

Ecke, Paul

Morrison Meyer Press (266 pp.)

$26.00 | $17.00 paper | $5.99 e-book

Nov. 20, 2018

978-1-73232-920-1 paper

An American artist recounts his hard journey from a troubled childhood to a successful career in this debut memoir.

In 1957, when Ecke was only 4 years old, he was sent to live with foster parents, who immediately established themselves as cold disciplinarians. According to the author, he and his two sisters, Gail and Tina, were fed less well than the couple’s own daughter; forced to perform dreary chores; and forbidden to speak unless spoken to or to cry. Ecke lived in that state of affectionless “imprisonment” for 15 months until he finally was sent home to his parents. He had no idea at the time that his mother had suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of abuse at the hands of his father or that she had spent nine months as a “voluntary resident at the mental hospital.” Ecke discloses that his father was an incorrigible philanderer who eventually left the family, and his mother grappled with depression. The author poignantly depicts his volatile upbringing as well as the challenge of fully accepting his gay sexuality (He had “struggled with” his sexuality since he “was a child”). At one point, he even submitted himself to the mortification of “aversion therapy” during a time when his sexual orientation was routinely treated like a curable disease. But he was able to find love in a healthy, stable relationship and finally pursue a career in art, which he always pined for, earning success as a painter. The author is courageously forthcoming about his personal struggles, and his story, though often heartbreaking, is ultimately an inspiring one. He beautifully describes the retreat he took as a child into his own imagination, a precocious sign of his life as an artist: “With no books or toys to occupy my time, I would escape into a vibrant fantasy world, where anything was possible.” And though Ecke has learned he has advanced prostate cancer, he refuses to harbor any defeatism. The book includes personal black-and-white photographs of the author and his family as well as his art and studio.

An affecting account of overcoming despair and triumphing as a painter.
Elbein shares tales of a turn-of-the-century Appalachian witch in this illustrated debut story collection.

After her husband, Tom, stumbles back to their cabin in a remote Appalachian holler near death and muttering the word “Ewah,” Anna O’Brien knows that the only way to help him is to seek out the aid of the local witch. The witch confirms that an Ewah—an ancient spirit of madness—has possessed Tom, and it will be nearly impossible to save him: “To banish the Ewah, the witch said, soft, ‘you need power, and power is a strange thing. Some you have. Some you have to trade for. A price higher, perhaps, than you wish to pay.’ ” The witch gives Anna the Wampus Mask to drive away the Ewah, but this might not cure Tom, and Anna might lose even more than a husband. In these eight stories, Elbein unspools the legend of Anna O’Brien, the one-legged witch of the Appalachians. In “Night on the Bald,” Anna tries to avoid spending a night in the open by following a dog to an abandoned church, but she ends up amid a coven of witches—led by a malignant raven spirit—thirsty for stolen souls. In “The Revenant Score,” Anna attempts to exorcize a gold-guarding ghost from a lonely graveyard by delivering a message to a living family only to end up a hostage in a bank robbery. In “Pretty Flowers Are Made for Blooming,” a pair of women in a farmhouse invite the traveling Anna in out of the rain, though she soon learns she’s not the only magical being expected for supper. Through hollows and mountain villages, these eight stories track Anna, whose powers bloom as she combats an increasingly strange and dangerous assortment of beasts and spirits straight out of campfire stories.

Elbein’s prose is crisp and highly sensory, building tension within each fable with the skill of a veteran storyteller: “When the first movement came under her foot it was a soft shiver, like a sleeper waking from a dream. Anna O’Brien straightened and held up the lamp, the light playing over the gravestones and dried dogbane, sparkling off the rocks. As she shifted something knocked, deep down below.” The ghouls that populate Anna’s world come mostly from Cherokee mythology—Anna is herself of Cherokee descent—which provides a refreshing change from typical European-influenced American fabulist fiction. Each story stands alone, but cumulatively, they outline the evolution of Anna from a rural housewife to an old wives’ tale in her own right. Accompanying the collection are marvelous full-page illustrations by Hurrill, which help the reader to better reflect on the words of Anna’s antagonists, like the soul-devouring Kalona Aye-liski, or Raven Mocker. Though Anna is an original character of Elbein’s, the ways the author and illustrator texture her give her the feel of a Rip Van Winkle or Ichabod Crane: a character who has been wandering hills—and storybooks—for generations.

A finely constructed linked story collection full of Indigenous American ghosts and goblins.

The ghouls that populate Anna’s world come mostly from Cherokee mythology, which provides a refreshing change from European-influenced fabulist fiction.
INTERVIEWS & PROFILES

Catherine Bybee

A WRITER WHO FINDS SUCCESS IN TRADITIONAL AND SELF-PUBLISHING
By Rhett Morgan

Catherine Bybee worked for years as an ER nurse, but while convalescing from a serious injury, her long love of romance novels led her to draft her first manuscript. Following moderate success with a small press, Bybee self-published *Wife by Wednesday* in 2011, and readers flocked to the contemporary “Cinderella” story. The book landed on the *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *New York Times* bestseller lists and launched two series centering on brides and recently divorced women, both of which Bybee has since sold to Amazon Publishing’s romance imprint, Montlake. She spoke with us about her latest release and creating romances that empower female characters, no matter where the book is released.

When did you first want to be a writer?
I dabbled in writing a few scenes down from time to time, but none of that even manifested into anything. In truth, I didn’t think I could do it. It wasn’t until I wrote the first chapter in *Binding Vows* that I decided I was going to write for a living. I remember telling my then husband that I was going to be a writer, to which he said, “That’s nice, what’s for dinner?”

What do you appreciate the most about working in the romance genre?
That’s easy: the people. All of them! I have been surprised by how much of a family this community is. My fellow writers offer more support than a sports bra. They want to see me finish my next novel as much as I want to see them sell theirs.

How do you keep things fresh and exciting for your readers?
I think the freshness of my work stems from my process. All of my books start with the characters. My characters drive the story. Their complexity has as much to do with their pasts as it does with their presents. I think there is something else that rings true with every Bybee romance, and that’s women empowering women. My personal friendships have been a cornerstone of my life and I try and sprinkle that into every book. No, sprinkle isn’t the right word...cloak. Like a warm blanket of protection and comfort. The friendships in my novels are almost as important as the romance.

Why did you decide to publish *Wife by Wednesday* on your own?
It was too small for NY, or so I thought at the time. Then this thing called the Kindle came on the scene. I knew if I used the small press they would outprice my readers. Since I went from being a trauma nurse to a published author in a couple of years...why not try publisher? What did I have to lose? *Wife by Wednesday* went viral, and I...
wasn’t about to ask for an antibiotic. Within a year I had reclaimed the rights to all my small-press published work and continue to self-publish those titles.

What are the advantages for you in working with Montlake?
I feel I have the best of both worlds. My Montlake team is deeply invested in my publishing world. I proved I knew what I was doing before I came to them, and they value my opinion when it comes to covers and plots and style. They understand digital publishing and are willing to try new ways to market an author and help their career.

What can you tell us about your latest release?
*Faking Forever* is the fourth book in the First Wives Series. Afraid of rejection and with her biological ticking clock screaming at her, [Shannon] sets her sights on becoming a single mother. Add a runaway bride and a groom honeymooning on his own who is attracted to the wedding-wrecking photographer, and we have the start of a great romance.

Rhett Morgan is a writer and translator living in Paris.

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**RICHARD THE POORER’S ‘GLUTEN FREE’ FOOD 4 THOUGHT**

_A Smorgasbord of Thoughts and Ideas for Cogitators of All Stripes...Plus Dessert!_

_Fitzgerald, Tom_

Kingsley Books (224 pp.)
Jan. 17, 2019
978-1-7325479-0-2

A collection of quotes and inspirational ruminations on all aspects of life.

As its title suggests, Fitzgerald’s well-designed follow-up to his _Beyond Chicken Soup_ (2019) takes its initial cues from _Poor Richard’s Almanack_, collecting the author’s wisdom and gentle humor on a wide variety of topics ranging from ethics and morality to God to loneliness to sports. The author shifts easily from a tone of jocularity to one of serious concentration and back, and the focus of his meditations likewise shifts. One little segment is an ode to the wonders of “Real books, flesh-and-blood books” (as opposed to electronic books, presumably) while another digs into a gentle indictment of the false nature of consumer culture: “Happiness in our culture is largely fool’s gold peddled by all manner of hucksters and pied pipers, ranging from auto dealers to fast-food purveyors to televangelists.” Some sections use historical grounding to ponder a topic, as when he suggests a “Bill of Responsibilities” to accompany the Bill of Rights with examples like “I will offer forgiveness” and “I will hold myself accountable.” Other sections are composed of quick aphorisms like “What compassion is to kindness, empathy is to civility” or “A leader stands in front of the flag; a politician, behind it.” The rustic simplicity of some of these sentiments stands at odds with the complexity of the issues they raise (many parents, for instance, might take issue with being told “Loving parents are the children of loving parents; like begets like”), but Fitzgerald’s straightforward sincerity is always evident, and the wry, common-sense tone he adapts from Poor Richard works well in modern contexts (“An alarm clock can only wake us; it can’t get us out of bed,” and so on). The tone adopted throughout is that of inviting conversation; readers seeking practical reminders of everyday wisdom will doubtless respond.

A friendly, all-purpose compendium of thought-provoking intellectual odds and ends.
WILDFLOWER HEART
Greene, Grace
Lake Union Publishing (300 pp.)
$14.95 paper | $4.99 e-book
Jan. 22, 2019
978-1-5420-4060-0

A widow recovering from a devastating accident finds hope and renewal in an unlikely place in this series opener.

Kara Lange Hart is no stranger to tragedy and loss. When Kara was 14 years old, her mother, Susan, abruptly left the family and was discovered dead two years later in Ohio. Later, Kara marries her college sweetheart, Niles, and moves to northern Virginia. After six years of marriage, she is thrilled to learn she is pregnant; but before she can tell Niles, the couple is involved in a car accident. Niles is killed instantly, and Kara suffers a miscarriage along with serious injuries. Bereft, Kara moves in with her father, Henry, to recuperate. When her father tells her that he is planning to purchase a Victorian mansion in an area of Louisa County called Cub Creek, she decides to move with him and stay until she can find a new job and place of her own. While the mansion needs renovating, Kara is struck by the property’s beauty, particularly the field of wildflowers behind the house. She soon befriends her new neighbors Nicole Albers, a real estate agent and close friend of her father’s, and Nicole’s brother, Seth, and settles into the quieter pace of life in Cub Creek. The move also prompts the usually reserved Henry to open up to Kara about his difficult childhood and the tragic circumstances of her mother’s death. Kara sees the possibility of a life in Cub Creek when a tragedy forces her to decide whether to leave her new friends or remain in the community she has grown to love.

This first installment of Greene’s (The Memory of Butterflies, 2017, etc.) Wildflower House series is an affecting and emotionally resonant tale of love, loss, and the possibility of second chances that’s bolstered by a winsome heroine, well-drawn supporting characters, and a nuanced story full of surprising twists and turns. Kara is a strong and dynamic protagonist whose physical and emotional recovery from the car accident that killed her husband lie at the center of the tale. She is surrounded by a vivid and likable supporting cast, including Henry, a dependable, hardworking man whose taciturn nature hides a secret sorrow; and Seth, a former journalist and self-described “guy-of-all-trades,” whose friendship with Kara slowly blossoms into something deeper and more significant. The setting plays a major role in the story, and the author deftly brings the community of Cub Creek and the Victorian mansion known as the Wildflower House to life, from the friendly real estate agent who knows whom to call to have something repaired to the descriptions of the breathtaking beauty of the wildflowers (“As a mass, they raised their bright faces to the sun, gathered its rays, and reflected the light from bloom to bloom, ultimately bouncing it back to greet my eyes”). The briskly paced narrative also includes several well-developed subplots, including Henry’s revelations about his past and Kara’s exploration of her marriage to Niles. The tale may appeal to fans of Debbie Macomber or Nicholas Sparks.

A poignant and heartfelt contemporary romance.

SON OF PERDITION
Harms, William
Leviathan Books (216 pp.)
$14.95 paper | $4.99 e-book
Oct. 24, 2018
978-0-692-18456-1

In the wake of the Civil War, a former Southern sheriff reluctantly chases a man bent on vicious, bloody retribution.

In Harms’ (Infamous Vol. 1, 2011) historical novel, Samuel Glazer is a man seeking revenge. He has a list of eight members of Bloody Bill’s gang, which rampaged through Missouri during the Civil War. Glazer’s wave of vengeance takes place in a South that has been decimated by the conflict; entire towns are ravaged, and people are scrounging to feed themselves. After the ruthless deaths of Harold Camp’s wife and son, Oliver Hansford, a wealthy man in Whitwell, Tennessee, forces Lee Sinclair, the ex-sheriff, to track down the murderer with two associates. Despite the misgivings of his wife, Kate, and his own doubts, Lee sets off with Eli and Bobby to hunt for the killer. Back in town, Kate is trying to survive with their son, Jeremiah, while fending off the advances of Hansford. On his journey, Glazer saves a black freeman named Joseph from being lynched and tries to protect him. After several encounters on the road, Lee realizes that Eli and Bobby are barbarous murderers and that he is not supposed to survive this operation. The three searchers are keen on the heels of Glazer as he systematically finds and kills his targets and their families through stakeouts and deceptions. The book succeeds in making the opposing characters of Glazer and Lee into compelling adversaries. While Glazer’s mission is definitely merciless, he is driven by his own deep grief and sense of justice; Lee is simply a man with a moral code who wants to return to his family. Readers will dread the inevitable showdown between the two adversaries. Hansford, Eli, and Bobby make excellent villains in the tale, set against the backdrop of the misery and suffering after the war. The novel doesn’t pull any punches about racism and the cruelty against blacks. The ending is sharp and sudden, somewhat at odds with the slower nature of the rest of the story.

A gripping, brutal tale of revenge and devastation.
It Felix Jr. a run for his money.

Handy Howie is a lobster mechanic who affixes tools to his tail in order to fix the cars of other animals in the area. His first job of the day comes when Grandma Pig Laura's vehicle springs an oil leak; Howie fixes it, and she pays him in muffins. Later, two turkey construction workers have trouble with their dump truck when the back of it comes loose, an artist iguana has a flat tire, and vacationing Mr. Deer's headlight goes out. Howie fixes everything in time to snuggle with his lobster children at bedtime. Howe's rhymes are packed with humor, and the book should have lap readers and newly independent readers alike giggling about the crustacean mechanic's antics. The author doesn't seem to have rules about which of her fictional animals wear clothing, as some are fully dressed, and Howie only wears eight yellow boots—but the kid-friendly cartoon style will likely keep young readers from questioning this stylistic choice. They may also appreciate the realistic drawings of Howie's tools and how his tail looks like it's on fire when he's welding.

A fun and silly addition to titles about mechanics, helping others, and animal adventures.

THE CREEPY-CRAWLY THOUGHT
Hughes, Alison
Illus. by Rabby, Jennifer
Self (32 pp.)
978-1-9993934-0-3

A child banishes anxious thoughts in a series of positive visualizations in this rhyming tale by Hughes (Kasey & Key, 2018, etc.).

The book’s narrator—a cartoonishly illustrated pear-shaped girl with pale skin and brown hair—is plagued by a “creepy-crawly” thought, which manifests as a cloudy, purple creature that hovers between her and the sun. The girl explains that this thought invites friends at night, which only makes matters worse. Tired of their interference, the girl takes action, planning ways to get rid of such ideas, such as flushing them down a toilet, throwing them into a fireplace, feeding them to fish, or blowing them into balloons and sending them into outer space. By singing and thinking happy thoughts, she shoos the negative notions away. Although Hughes’ tale offers no concrete, realistic suggestions for banishing anxiety, young readers may giggle at the narrator’s ideas, which could help them combat their own fears. The rhymes feel natural and use approachable vocabulary and although some lines scan a little longer than others, the overall rhythm is consistent. Rabby's humorous, mixed-media illustrations—which feature cartoon characters, painterly backgrounds, and innovative erasing of slithery, black outlines—will generate enough smiles to put creepy-crawlies on the run.

A silly picture book that offers readers humor to confront anxieties.

AWÂSIS AND THE WORLD- FAMOUS BANNOCK
Hunt, Dallas
Illus. by Strong, Amanda
HighWater Press
978-1-55379-779-1

A little girl loses her delivery of bannock bread, but animal helpers restore the ingredients in this picture book that includes Cree vocabulary.

Kôhkum asks her granddaughter Awâsis to deliver a basket of freshly baked bannock to a relative. But, running and skipping along the way, Awâsis drops it over a bridge, losing it in the river. A series of animals stop her tears by providing ingredients for a new batch. For example, Sîsîp (duck) provides margarine: “I don't have any bannock, but I do have some tohtosapumehkan, and I’m pretty sure that’s in bannock!” Rabbit, frog, and owl also come to the rescue. Back at Kôhkum’s house, Maskwa (bear)—who ate the bannock that fell in the river and has been following along—knocks on the door, offering the final ingredient. Grandmother and granddaughter make a new batch, sharing it with Awâsis’ animal friends. A recipe and Cree word list follow. In his debut book, Hunt tells a story that already feels like a childhood classic. Young children will enjoy the tale’s effective repetition of incident and language (counterpointed with the unfamiliar vocabulary and some variation, as when Awâsis whispers or shouts), its cooperative animals, and the happy ending. Strong’s charmingly faux naïf illustrations, dominated by soft colors of blue, purple, brown, and green, are lovely and expressive; the bear that can be spotted in many panels is a nice touch.

A delightful story with appealing illustrations that centers on Native American culture.

BIGFOOTS IN PARADISE
Lawson, Doug
Red Hen Press (214 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $8.69 e-book
Nov. 15, 2018
978-1-97709-692-8

In Lawson’s (A Patrimony of Fishes, 1997) short story collection, dynamic characters struggle to stay together or gradually drift apart.
In “The Mushroom Hunter,” a man named Chundo is looking for a rare fungus, but at the heart of the story is the fact that the narrator, Barnaby, idolizes him—a fact that Chundo has used to his advantage for years. Each of these character-driven tales, primarily set in California, astutely examines interpersonal relationships. In “My Year Under the Dog Star,” for example, a man named Scott must deal with the animosity between his fiancée, Kelly, and his venture capitalist father, Ted. Ted gifts Scott with a new dog, but it doesn’t get along with the canine that the couple already have; indeed, the animals are literally at each other’s throats—an apt representation of Ted and Kelly’s dynamic. In the sublime “House on Bear Mountain,” April and her young daughter, Claire, lose husband and father Alec, and they fight and forcing him to share farm dog Rex’s quarters. A tragic loss along. Ted’s gruff dad doesn’t help, banning Tobî from the house at least some humor, the endings are generally somber or unset-
tling—though certainly memorable. For example, in “Catch the
Air,” Gordon’s father, Cris Hogart, once a member of a popular music group, has just turned 75. Although the story initially uses
Cris as comic relief, it’s clear by the end that he’s not a happy
man. The book concludes with two exceptional tales: “The Bee
keeper of Río Momón” and the titular story, which both take
true chilling turns; in the first, characters search for a friend in
South America, and in the second, a group goes into the woods
to film a staged Bigfoot video. Lawson’s taut, graphic prose
sparkles, as in this passage from “House on Bear Mountain”:

“The tape clicks into place in the amped-up sound system, and

Y ork–based Little Deer’s (Little T ramp, 2014) first book—both

kirkus.com

inspired by his real-life dog companion—the YA novel begins

when the Chihuahua is uprooted from his contented life in a

small city, relates his backcountry of V ermont, relates his
eventful struggle to find his way home.

In the same league as Ann M. Mar
tin’s touching novel A Dog’s Life, this beautifully observant story, told from the point of view of a bighearted Chihuahua, will stay with canine-loving readers long after the tale is finished. A sequel to the New
York-based Little Deer’s (Little T ramp, 2014) first book—both inspired by his real-life dog companion—the YA novel begins when the Chihuahua is uprooted from his contented life in a

New York City apartment. The dog, named Tobî, travels with his beloved human, Ted, to northern Vermont for a summer on the family farm. Tobî is confused and bereft when one day Ted is
gone, unaware that he will be traveling and can’t take the canine along. Ted’s gruff dad doesn’t help, banning Tobî from the house and forcing him to share farm dog Rex’s quarters. A tragic loss
and other incidents periodically bring Ted back, but he always

leaves Tobî behind when he departs again. The pooch suffers

but gradually adjusts, finding comfort with gentle Rex and Ted’s

grandmother until, caught up in the thrill of a dog pack’s wild
deer hunt, he is lost in the woods. Danger, refuge, companion
ship, and a hint of uncanny mystery follow as Tobî encounters

memorable animals and people during his monthslong ordeal.

Tobi’s internal dialogue (he doesn’t speak with other animals)
has a compelling authenticity, encompassing eloquent ponder

ings about the bond between humans and dogs, canine devo

tion, and forgiveness—and the awakening of his own ancestral

memory. Driven to join in the howls of a pack of Native Ameri
can sled dogs one night, he observes: “I was carried into time

less moonlit wilderness, and I, too, became a wild thing.” The

novel’s rural, woolly, and lake-side setting, described from

Tobi’s perspective, is vividly detailed in sights, sounds, and

smells. Little Deer (a pen name) seamlessly connects the inter

secting stories of all his well-drawn characters, both human

and animal, with a poignant thread—keep the tissues handy.

Delivering suspenseful storytelling, colorful and believable
characters, and a deeply moving tribute to canine loyalty, this tale should resonate with dog lovers of

any age.

LAKE ISLE
Little Deer; Tobî

LAKE ISLE
Little Deer; Tobî

LAKE ISLE

Tobi Books (312 pp.)

$14.99 paper | Feb. 12, 2019

978-1-949596-00-7

A small city dog, lost in the rugged backcountry of Vermont, relates his
eventful struggle to find his way home.

In the same league as Ann M. Mar

In this debut memoir, a retired high

school teacher recounts a horrific moun
tain lion attack and its aftermath.

On March 23, 1986, Mattern was in

Casper’s Park in California with her husband, Don, and their

two young children. Suddenly, the author saw what looked like a

“large tan dog” running toward her daughter, Laura, who was

looking for tadpoles in a stream. Before Mattern realized it was

a mountain lion, it had bitten Laura’s head and dragged her away.
The lion finally left the girl and ran off; the child survived, but in

the coming months, she underwent multiple surgeries to repair

her skull and eye. A neurosurgeon said that Laura’s injuries were

the worst he’d ever seen. Mattern’s memoir gives a vivid, day

by-day report of Laura’s early recovery, conveying an impres

sive amount of detail about her condition. The author also

devotes a large section to the family’s negligence suit against

Orange County, which started after Don heard from a park

ranger, “We’ve been having a lot of trouble with that moun
tain lion lately.” An anonymous source told the author that the

county had recently voted to continue its deer-hunting policy
despite warnings that mountain lions weren’t getting enough to
eat and thus might come after people. The case came to trial in

1991, and Laura’s family was awarded more than $2 million.
The use of the present tense throughout the book makes the

events feel current even though they all occurred more than

OUT OF THE LION’S DEN
A Little Girl’s Mountain Lion Attack, a Mother’s Search for Answers.

Mattern, Susan

CreateSpace (322 pp.)


978-1-5331-1745-8
a quarter-century ago. Alongside the author’s concern for her daughter, she offers a poignant record of her loss of faith; she’d been a nun for six years before leaving the convent and meeting her husband, but Laura’s attack led her to question whether there was a God in control. A 1991 Easter vigil, she says, marked the beginning of her “step into the darkness of unbelief,” she says, and she now considers herself an atheist. In a well-chosen epilogue, set in 2002, Laura reassures her mother she wouldn’t undo the attack if she could, as it formed her character and brought their family closer.

A gripping account of a frightening event and its ramifications.

FAMOUS DISHES FROM AROUND THE WORLD
Healthy, Tasty, and Affordable
Ed. by Maze, Stephanie.
Moonstone Press (85 pp.)
$14.99 paper | May 13, 2019
978-0-9727697-2-3

Edited by Maze (Healthy Foods from A to Z, 2015, etc.), a bilingual cookbook that introduces readers to iconic foods from cultures around the world.

Take a tour of international flavors through 30 ethnic recipes in this engaging, educational cookbook in English and Spanish. From British shepherd’s pie to Chinese kung pao to Israeli cabbage rolls, each recipe delves into its corresponding culinary tradition. Cooking tips and tricks kick off the book: If you ever wondered what to use to thicken sauces (cornstarch), how to clean a cast-iron pan (water, oil, and salt instead of soap), or how to prevent bamboo skewers from burning (soak them overnight in cold water), you’ll find answers here. The introduction emphasizes the emotional and nostalgic ties people feel to the food of their homelands and ways the United States, a country rich with immigrants, benefits from the abundance of cultural options. Breaking bread, the book states, is a timeless unifier: “In an age of zillions of impersonal gadgets, a shared meal may be one of the last bastions of true interpersonal connectivity and communication in our country and across the world.” While inspired by the traditional dishes of their countries of origin, some recipes have swapped red meat and pork for healthier proteins like chicken and turkey, and in some cases, the recipes have gone vegetarian. Further healthy hints, like substituting sweet potatoes for white potatoes or using ghee instead of butter, are offered at the end of the book. All dishes in the cookbook cost less than $18 to prepare, and each recipe includes nutritional facts. The brightly colored pages feature whimsical fonts and enticing food photography. Readers won’t just learn how to cook these dishes, they’ll learn about the historical and cultural origins of them; e.g., New Orleans’s staple jambalaya was born out of Spanish paella and a dish common among French Cajun settlers in the Louisiana bayou.

A vibrant culinary take on the American melting pot via an international array of recipes and flavors.

Older readers, in particular, will enjoy these practical, cost-efficient health strategies.

FIT FOR LIFE
Think It, Do It, Be It!
Moor-Doucette, Saba
Waterside Press (212 pp.)
Jul. 30, 2018
978-1-945949-86-9

Moor-Doucette (Change Your Thinking, Change Your Body, 2015) shares her secrets on how to look and feel great into your 70s and beyond in this fitness guide.

Inspired by a friend, Moor-Doucette decided to attempt to limit the effects of aging on her body by improving her diet, working out, and focusing her mind with affirmations and visualizations. “All of this would ultimately translate into an

ROADKILL ABC
McPherson, Adair
Photos by the author & Miille, Jake
XlibrisUS (36 pp.)
Sep. 14, 2018
978-1-984553-21-8

A debut alphabet book collects photographs of things that haven’t survived the perils of the road.

Though roadkill will likely make most readers cringe, the majority of what appears in this tongue-in-check volume are nontraditional victims. For example, A is for Arm, which is merely the limb from a baby doll lying atop the ground. Similarly, both the Bear and the Lion are of the plush variety. McPherson often tinkers with the notion of roadkill, which isn’t always on or near a street. A broken Tree planter sits among vehicles in a parking lot; a Fly seems to be the victim of a license plate; and a train has apparently left a car in ruins (in this case, X is for railroad crossing). This playfulness carries over to the ABCs as well: Both Coyote and Knight (a plastic toy) are listed under their phonetic spellings (K is for ‘k’-o-te; N is for ‘n’i-ht). While the photos occasionally show animals (including the coyote), there is no sign of viscera and hardly any blood. The creatures, like so many things in the book, simply look forlorn. A largely intact seemingly empty modular Home has fallen by the side of a road; and a solitary Glove is stuck on a fence. The photos throughout are bright, sharp, and filled with details. (The railroad-crossing shot is by Miille; the rest are by McPherson.) One of the standouts is a Mattress that’s torn with its springs exposed, as if a driver dumped it without even slowing down. But there’s much more to the photo: The Mattress is next to pieces of trash and on a mostly desolate stretch of road save for the ambulance that’s clearly passed it by. In other striking pictures, road signs unfortunately haven’t been very helpful, from the railroad crossing to the stop-ahead one that offered no assistance to what’s now lying in the street.

C is for cheeky and clever; a work that all ages can enjoy.

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Think It, Do It, Be It!
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Eron drinks too much and suffers nightmares. When Theodore, a rogue councilman, track down Eron, they hope to persuade him to return to the once-proud city of Asmara and reclaim the throne. Yet as Eron’s friend Sturage says, “One man can’t liberate a city full of Lycans.” But doing so would make him a deity among mortals, following in the footsteps of Ludamia the Savior himself. In this series opener, Nathaniel lays out a bouquet of what fantasy fans will consider comfort food. There’s a race of elegant, otherworldly elves; a mythical sword (the Muric Atamina); and a cult of sorcerers called the Laughing Skull. Smooth prose capably transports readers to places like the Elven city of Elanora in lines such as “the plants had strange variations of blue and purple and their blossoms were shaped to resemble the constellations of the stars.” Luna and other characters, including young Richard from the Institute of Knowledge, harbor secrets that jolt the narrative and add philosophical weight (“We call Lycans and Vladirians monsters…but in reality, our true nature is far more malevolent”). Certain story elements go underexplored—like Luna’s lineage—though the next installment promises a new conflict.

This tale offers a fresh remix of familiar fantasy motifs.

A debut novel stars a young royal hesitant to rule even as supernatural hordes close in on humanity.

On the world of Airys, the kingdom of Hatam has been leveled by the Wolf Legion. King Edmund is dead. Prince Eron Eaglesword has fled to Ludamia’s Keep with his mentor, Lucas, chief of the Winged Guardian Order. As the Lycans approach, Eron and his lords commit to wiping them out. But the Wolf King slaughters Lucas, and cowardly Eron surrenders. Two years later, Eron and Princess Luna Flameheart have been living in peasant Rogava, positing as Hans and Gytha, to escape the Ruling Council’s justice. Problematically, the kingdoms of Amondia and Litharia don’t acknowledge the Ruling Council and threaten war. Worse, the winged Vladirian race hopes to turn a fractured humanity into Blood Cattle. Not without guilt over his decision to capitulate, Eron drinks too much and suffers nightmares. When Theodore, a former Winged Guardian, and Lord Gregory Weaverheart, a rogue councilman, track down Eron, they hope to persuade him to return to the once-proud city of Asmara and reclaim the throne. Yet as Eron’s friend Sturage says, “One man can’t liberate a city full of Lycans.” But doing so would make him a deity among mortals, following in the footsteps of Ludamia the Savior himself. In this series opener, Nathaniel lays out a bouquet of what fantasy fans will consider comfort food. There’s a race of elegant, otherworldly elves; a mythical sword (the Muric Atamina); and a cult of sorcerers called the Laughing Skull. Smooth prose capably transports readers to places like the Elven city of Elanora in lines such as “the plants had strange variations of blue and purple and their blossoms were shaped to resemble the constellations of the stars.” Luna and other characters, including young Richard from the Institute of Knowledge, harbor secrets that jolt the narrative and add philosophical weight (“We call Lycans and Vladirians monsters…but in reality, our true nature is far more malevolent”). Certain story elements go underexplored—like Luna’s lineage—though the next installment promises a new conflict.

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**THE PEASANT KING**

*The War of Howls*

Nathaniel, A.R.F.

Self (361 pp.)

$9.99 paper  |  $0.99 e-book

Dec. 5, 2018

978-0-9987220-2-3

A debut novel stars a young royal hesitant to rule even as supernatural hordes close in on humanity.

On the world of Airys, the kingdom of Hatam has been leveled by the Wolf Legion. King Edmund is dead. Prince Eron Eaglesword has fled to Ludamia’s Keep with his mentor, Lucas, chief of the Winged Guardian Order. As the Lycans approach, Eron and his lords commit to wiping them out. But the Wolf King slaughters Lucas, and cowardly Eron surrenders. Two years later, Eron and Princess Luna Flameheart have been living in peasant Rogava, posing as Hans and Gytha, to escape the Ruling Council’s justice. Problematically, the kingdoms of Amondia and Litharia don’t acknowledge the Ruling Council and threaten war. Worse, the winged Vladirian race hopes to turn a fractured humanity into Blood Cattle. Not without guilt over his decision to capitulate, Eron drinks too much and suffers nightmares. When Theodore, a former Winged Guardian, and Lord Gregory Weaverheart, a rogue councilman, track down Eron, they hope to persuade him to return to the once-proud city of Asmara and reclaim the throne. Yet as Eron’s friend Sturage says, “One man can’t liberate a city full of Lycans.” But doing so would make him a deity among mortals, following in the footsteps of Ludamia the Savior himself. In this series opener, Nathaniel lays out a bouquet of what fantasy fans will consider comfort food. There’s a race of elegant, otherworldly elves; a mythical sword (the Muric Atamina); and a cult of sorcerers called the Laughing Skull. Smooth prose capably transports readers to places like the Elven city of Elanora in lines such as “the plants had strange variations of blue and purple and their blossoms were shaped to resemble the constellations of the stars.” Luna and other characters, including young Richard from the Institute of Knowledge, harbor secrets that jolt the narrative and add philosophical weight (“We call Lycans and Vladirians monsters…but in reality, our true nature is far more malevolent”). Certain story elements go underexplored—like Luna’s lineage—though the next installment promises a new conflict.

This tale offers a fresh remix of familiar fantasy motifs.

**MAPLE & LEAD**

Parrett, Aaron

Illus. by Roby, Seth

Territorial Press (150 pp.)

$20.00 paper  |  Jan. 1, 2017

978-0-9976006-3-6

A collection of 11 previously published short stories, many of which portray failing relationships.

Parrett (Montana Americana Music, 2016, etc.) opens with the masterful, deeply affecting “Side of the Road,” in which an unnamed narrator recounts his troubling interactions with his abusive, alcoholic father. The latter eventually finds work removing detritus from the roadways of Montana. An early scene involves a dead moose and demonstrates Parrett’s skill with sensory detail: “The blood was frosting over on the highway when we got there, but it was still sticky enough to coat my boots like paint. I left red prints, one foot in front of the other, on top of the white shoulder stripe as the two of them gutted the carcass.” Purposeful ambiguity is another evocative feature of Parrett’s style; for example, the aforementioned narrator reveals that he was 19 when he last saw his parents but not why he never saw them again. Consequently, later goodbyes are heart-wrenching in their simplicity, and what the narrator does with an object that his father gives him effectively brings the story full circle. By contrast, the title character in “Evelyn’s Footprints” has a childhood full of wonder and discovery, anchored by a tender rapport with her widowed father, although the tale’s ending is similarly ambiguous. Other standouts include the raw “The Stars Threw Down Their Spears,” in which a woman blames her boyfriend for her dog’s gruesome death, and the contemplative “Thirteen Things I Have Sold on EBay,” which neatly captures the pathos of an ended marriage. As an added bonus, debut illustrator Roby offers images of wood engravings that visually support each story. If there’s
The novel evokes the works of Edith Wharton and other writers from the period without ever stumbling into parody.

**BLOOMSBURY’S LATE ROSE**

A rich, enjoyable historical novel with compelling themes.

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Lunching with Lions

Strategies for the Networking-Averse

Patterson, Katherine McGraw

Two Chickens Press (254 pp.)

$19.95 paper | Feb. 25, 2019

978-0-578-43847-4

A debut guide to networking targets readers who hate the practice.

Thanks to her early years accompanying her professionally itinerant father, Patterson came to think of herself as the “Professional New Girl” who was always dealing with a fresh environment where she knew nobody. She’d gone from New Jersey to the Dallas suburbs, “where old money mingled with new and my classmates popped the collars on their Ralph Lauren Polos and cuffed the hems of their madras plaid Bermuda shorts before they left for the country club.” The years of needing to make new ties and friends shaped her, she later realized, into “a natural connector,” somebody who was still “painfully, tragically uncomfortable walking into a room full of strangers” but who could nonetheless do it and triumph. In the course of her chatty and smoothly involving book, she lays out a series of pithy observations and tips for people in the business world who face the prospect of networking with less confidence than a “Professional New Girl.” In a series of easily flowing chapters, she focuses on some of the ways people navigate networking events incorrectly or poorly. Effective networking is about far more than shaking hands and passing out business cards, she asserts: It’s about building relationships based on genuine respect and affection. “It’s hard to connect with people when you’re unhappy, and it’s damn near impossible to connect with people when you don’t like and respect them,” she writes. “Because (ahem) we do business with people we know, like, and trust.” Throughout the personable guide, Patterson adopts a tone of jocular chiding combined with helpful pragmatism (sections are anchored with a series of “Prompts and Activities”) to help readers codify her valuable suggestions. Readers who’ve dreaded networking or been frustrated by failures will no doubt discover some of their errors pointedly probed here, which may be uncomfortable. But they will also find an enormous amount of worthy advice in these pages.

A fun and demystifying manual that seeks to humanize networking.

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BLOOMSBURY’S LATE ROSE

Pearson, Pen

Chickadee Prince Books (358 pp.)

$14.99 paper | Sep. 1, 2019

978-1-73291-394-3

Pearson (Poetry as Liturgy, 2010) imagines the life of the early-20th-century English poet Charlotte Mew in this novel. Charlotte and her sister Anne have always been close. After their two siblings, Henry and Freda, were institutionalized for mental instability in 1894, the sisters swore to each other that they would never get married or have children in order to avoid passing on what they saw as a family curse. Now, in 1909, the nearly 40-year-old women are still single, living with their ailing mother, her maid, and other tenants in a modest house in the Bloomsbury area of London. Charlotte thinks back on her life over the past two decades, which has hardly been what she’d hoped for: “Her run as a fiction writer and essayist...That utter foolishness in Paris, not so long ago...It seemed now as if she were waiting, but for what?” She begins to express her rich interiority in her poetry. Sensing that Anne is attracted to a man at their church, she encourages her sister to rent a studio to pursue her painting while Charlotte begins to participate in the city’s salon scene, where other ambitious women discuss art and suffering. She’s finally building the life that she always wanted as an independent, artistic woman—but things become complicated when she falls in love with a woman herself. Pearson writes in an elegant prose that summons the era of the novel in precise detail: “Gone were the full skirts and crinolines, fitted bodice, and stiff, upright collar of the Victorian era. Today the fashionable Edwardian woman wore the less confining shirtwaist and a more fitted, ankle-length skirt, which was slightly less cumbersome than its predecessor.” In its pacing and style, the novel earnestly evokes the works of Edith Wharton and other writers from the period without ever stumbling into parody or awkward pastiche. In Mew’s story, Pearson not only uncovers central questions of first-wave feminism, but also finds an opportunity to resurrect an intriguing and worthwhile real-life poet for posterity.

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LAST NIGHT IN GRANADA

Pellizzari, Chris

Readlips Press (108 pp.)

$8.99 paper | $5.99 e-book | Jun. 28, 2018

978-0-9990584-8-0

Pellizzari’s debut novella tells a young man’s story of idealism, passion, and loss, toggling between 2003 and 2012 as well as between Andalusia and America.

The story opens with a young man named Chris seeing an Illinois doctor to get a prescription for Ambien. He’s a wreck who can’t sleep and has panic attacks. But it wasn’t always this way. Nine years before,
We talk to Dustin Lance Black, author of Mama’s Boy

By Karen Schechener

When screenwriter Dustin Lance Black pressed for federally recognized gay marriage during his acceptance speech for Milk at the 2009 Oscars, he didn’t expect some of the fiercest opposition to come from within the LGBTQ world. In his memoir, Mama’s Boy: A Story from Our Americas, which earned a Kirkus star, Black talks about his push for marriage equality and the moxie, inherited from his mother, to stick to his guns. “We know where we want to end up, but we don’t always know how exactly we will get there,” says Black. “So, you must maintain faith in the path that you believe in, fight for it, and keep moving forward.” Here, we talk with him about Mama’s Boy, which our reviewer calls a “terrifically moving memoir of the myriad complexities of family dynamics.”

At your Academy Award acceptance speech for Milk, you’d promised that the LGBTQ community would soon have marriage equality. What were some of the reactions to that call for action?

I had anticipated a backlash from people who were anti-LGBTQ, perhaps some people of faith, people who were conservative in the way that much of my family is. Instead, most...criticisms came from a surprising source: my heroes within the LGBT community who thought that a call for federal equality was premature and perhaps even dangerous...I think it’s important that young activists today know that when they present bold, new ideas, the first wave of criticism may come from within...from the very people they may admire the most. It can often be helpful to listen to others’ concerns in order to avoid land mines, but one must never let others’ concerns deter them from their vision and plan.

What was it about Harvey Milk that led you to write a screenplay about him?

Growing up when I did and where I did—in a conservative, Southern, military home—I did not have access to stories of LGBTQ people who had come out and lived full lives, much less who had fought for the lives of other LGBTQ people. I had no idea that I had forefathers and foremothers who had put their lives on the line so that my life could be better. If I had known that as a young person in Texas, I might not have considered the dire solutions to my situation that I sadly did consider....I saw writing Milk as one small piece of what I hope will one day be an immense collection of diverse histories that might provide hope and inspiration for future generations of LGBTQ people.

In your memoir, readers get to know and love your irrepressible mother, Roseanna Bisch, who was partially paralyzed by polio as a child. Did your mother show you how to be an activist?

My mom...contracted polio when she was 2 years old and never walked again. But she carried with her an optimism I believe she inherited from her own mother, a mother who raised nine children, mostly on her own and in extreme poverty. My mom came to believe that there is nothing that can be imagined that can't be accomplished. And with that optimism (that many called foolish) she proved all of her doctors, church bishops, and many of her own family members wrong. So, when I first came out and I was told that gay people didn't have the right to hold a job, or keep...
their home, or get married and raise a family, I carried my grandmother’s and my mother’s “foolish” optimism with me as I began to do battle with the forces of bigotry that sought to deny LGBTQ people our full humanity. And although it may seem counterintuitive, this book tells the story of how the skills learned in my mother’s conservative, religious, Southern home are the very skills I eventually put to good use in our fight to win marriage equality for all.

Your mother had been anti-gay. What changed her mind?
My mom held anti-gay views that she had learned from her communities in the South, her faith, and the military, which all said that LGBTQ people were sick and wrong and undeserving of respect. In the book, I tell the story of how my own inadvertent coming out to my mom, followed by her beginning to meet actual LGBTQ people and hear their stories began to dispel many of the myths and stereotypes she had learned growing up in a Southern, military, Baptist and then Mormon home. This book helps tell the story of how arguing politics, the law, and science—regardless of how much their facts support your argument—actually does little to change minds. In fact, being “right” often just makes the fight harder. The more effective solution lies in meeting real people and hearing their personal stories. Those personal stories hold the power to change hearts, and changing hearts is by far the most powerful, long-lasting way to change minds.

Karen Schechner is the vice president of Kirkus Indie.

When he was a junior at the University of Illinois, he spent his spring semester in Granada, overwhelmed by the romance of it and his passion for the Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca’s works—and for a young woman named Vera, a precocious sophomore in the same program. Now, in 2012, he takes three Ambien pills and tries to sleep, and the remainder of the novella takes place in a liminal space in which he confronts his dreams and his demons, his memories and his present dismal reality. Chris has been fired from his dead-end job and lives alone, fighting his anxieties and trying to make sense of his past and salvage some sort of future. However, what once promised to be everlasting love between the two young people is over; Vera is now a matron with three kids and a clodhish husband in another Chicago suburb.

Pellizzari shares Chris’ first name, he lives in Chicago, and he once attended the University of Illinois, as his character does. Whether the author actually went to Spain for an idyllic semester or fell in love with a woman named Vera isn’t stated in the novel; what is real, or at least fully realized in these pages, is the protagonist’s fervor over García Lorca, and the surreal, poetic way in which Pellizzari tells the story is very effective indeed. Ghosts almost overwhelm this tale—not just that of the Spanish poet, but of all those others who perished in the Spanish Civil War, famously captured by Pablo Picasso’s painting Guernica. To call this novella elegiac is an understatement, and those who love García Lorca—who was assassinated in 1936 at the age of 38—will be moved by the love that Pellizzari shares here. Still, readers would do well to get up to speed on the Spanish Civil War, García Lorca’s life, and the concept of “El Duende” before reading this work. On another level, the story of Chris and Vera is a very old and wry one—a tale of the exotic and romantic versus the mundane and realistic. The passionate love in Granada, as depicted here, seems fated to end as it did in Illinois. Such love hurts, then it passes, and soon we’re middle-aged and wiser, as Chris learns—pining for a ghost that won’t come back again. Fortunately, Pellizzari has the good sense to tamp this emotion down somewhat in his prose, which is poetic but controlled—and all the more successful for its restraint.

A surreal performance that’s worth a read, particularly as a reflection of a historically important time and place.
delectable road map of farming innovation and conservationist food preparation. The Earth is two-thirds water, mostly saline, and by 2030, it’s estimated that half the world will experience freshwater scarcity. Preservation is a key conservation concern, writes the author, who regularly attends Earth Day events and promotes water-saving items like shower timers. After focusing on water-waste prevention in bathrooms, Ramirez, recognizing that “seven out of every ten gallons of water is used for food production,” redirected her efforts to the kitchen, where much more could be saved. In a text bolstered by documentation and suffused with a true creative passion for resource preservation, the author presents a series of chapters on the interaction and integration of water with a variety of foods, liquids, production processes, and “on-the-edge farming.” Ramirez fully immerses herself in her subject with eye-opening field trips to resourceful water-sustainable croplands across America. Among them, a California dry biodynamic wheat farm thriving through the advent of cover cropping, a trailblazing rice farm, an aquaponic ranch in the Texas Plain, a “green” egg farming operation, and a Hawaiian organic shade-grown coffee plantation. Concerned conservationists, environmental and agricultural activists, and everyday farmers and consumers alike will be enticed by Ramirez’s passionately delivered and convincing combination of charming narrative, strategic resource preservation techniques, and pages of recipes ideas from crustless cheesecake to spinach quiche and chicken tortilla soup. “Be part of a change that will make a difference in creeks, rivers, groundwater, and oceans across the planet,” she encourages. “Start tonight at your kitchen table.”

Impeccable writing and practical, relevant, planet-friendly alternatives to reducing water consumption in cooking and agricultural production.

**APPROACHING NINETY-SIX**
*The Films I Love Viewing & Loved Doing*
Reiner, Carl
Random Content Publishing (421 pp.)
$200.00 | Dec. 31, 2017
978-0-9995182-1-2

A master gives a guided tour of Hollywood films in the second half of the 20th century.

Legendary actor and director Reiner (*Alive at Ninety-Free, 2017, etc.*) begins the second of his captivating two-volume pictorial memoir in 1950, when he joined Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca on the TV series *Your Show of Shows.* The author continues through the highlights of modern Hollywood history, closing out in the 2010s with films like *The Wolf of Wall Street, The King’s Speech,* and *Ocean’s Eight,* in which Reiner reprises the cameo role of Saul Bloom he originated in the 2001 George Clooney remake of *Ocean’s Eleven.* As in the previous volume, the author here reverses the usual pattern of memoirs, presenting page after page of set photographs and striking movie posters and adding only minimal text comments, a feat of restraint that becomes all the more remarkable when his tour reaches classic films he directed, like *That Old Feeling, The Jerk,* and *Oh, God!* As he approaches the rarer and raunchier topicality of modern movies (including *Blazing Saddles,* the hilarious 1974 comedy directed by his frequent collaborator Mel Brooks), he refers to his own favorite contention: “Any sexy, dirty, racist or offensive joke is totally acceptable as long as it’s funnier than it is dirty, sexy, racist or offensive.” And he allows himself the occasional nod to industry scandal, as in the case of *Sunset Boulevard:* “On screen, Gloria Swanson played a vixen and off screen, she was a bit of a vixen, having an ongoing affair with the scion of one of America’s wealthiest and most prestigious families.” Throughout the book, there’s a tone of enthusiastic invitation, an undimmed sense of exploration (“If you haven’t seen the documentaries on the careers of Rita Moreno and Chita Rivera, get copies of them, invite some friends over and you’ll thank me”). The cumulative effect should convince readers that they are in the presence of one of the world’s oldest—and most passionate—film geeks.

A tremendously welcoming survey of modern movie classics.

**DARKNESS**
Richmond, Iain
Rogue Planet Publishing (460 pp.)
Jan. 1, 2019
978-1-946807-10-6 paper
978-1-946807-08-3
978-1-946807-10-6 paper

A future military-exploration force at the edge of Earth’s solar system confronts a vast zone of darkness—alerting a concealed alien civilization prepared to violently attack any intruders.

Richmond (*Beyond Terra, 2017*) opens the Oortian Wars series with a narrative set in a war-wounded 23rd century. Nearly two-thirds of Earth’s inhabitants—20 billion people—perish in a horrific strike by a dying “Korean Empire.” Among the victims: the wife and daughter of United Nations pilot Jack Falco, who becomes obsessed that he might have averted the atrocity by shooting sooner. Falco finds renewed purpose via a mission to the outermost solar system to a giant new space station at the Oort Cloud asteroid field (near Pluto’s orbit). The hopeful fresh start for Earth suffers inexplicable asteroid bombardments and a vast, encroaching “Darkness” field, impenetrable by sensors. Suspecting malice by another rogue state, the U.N. wants Falco, in advance of a state-of-the-art Chinese battle fleet, to probe the Darkness. Crosscutting points of view inform readers early that the mystery zone holds an ancient alien civilization—armored, bellicose organisms able to self-propel through the void of space. First contact between Falco’s vessel and Darkness denizens is inevitably hostile, initiating a hard-combat sci-fi plotline that continues through the cliffhanger ending. The novel sustains a high-stakes, chess-game feel not unlike a claustrophobic submarine-warfare thriller. “The officer’s eyes
Despite the fact that the material universe is at risk, Smith's tone remains chirpy and playful.

**QUANTUM MAYHEM**

jumped from screen to screen, while the underpowered Battle-Net processed the sample at a slower, but efficient rate. Every few minutes a number dropped out of the streaming data into a dimly lit square on the bottom of the center screen. Humans and “Oortians” maneuver and countermeasure, each gradually learning more about the enemy. Peace may not be an option in the musically bleak scenario, but enough about the Oortians (and the Darkness) remains shrouded in mystery to preserve the sense of awe and wonder for forthcoming volumes. Richmond insinuates romance and valor, even developing personalities among the kamikaze aliens, while the overall storyline follows a fatalistic arc of escalating strategies, casualties, and weapons of mass destruction.

A heavy but saluteworthy dose of combat sci-fi, impressive alien worldbuilding, and warrior gloom.

**FIVE FERRIES**

*Ried, William Michael*  
CKBooks Publishing (320 pp.)  
$16.00 paper  |  $4.99 e-book  
Oct. 4, 2018  
978-1-949085-02-0

After his brother’s death, a young American sets out to backpack around Europe in this debut novel.

Stephen Kylemore’s fixation with travel comes in part from reading “too many novels.” From an early age, he took to perusing the books his elder brother, Edward, left behind. During a tour of duty in Vietnam, Edward writes to Stephen, recommending he read Patrick O’Brian’s *Master and Commander*. When Edward is killed in battle, the novel is returned home as part of his effects. Stephen reads the book over the course of one evening and is fascinated by the mystical setting of Catalonia. He purchases a one-peseta Catalonian coin for good luck and as a reminder of his brother and starts to plan the journey that in happier circumstances he and Edward would have taken together. Leaving behind his partner, Pam, Stephen takes a flight from New York to London and begins his adventure. His initial target destination is Grettstadt in Germany, where he believes his old boss will set him up with a job. He chances his way there, first catching a ferry to the Netherlands and then hitchhiking. His mind regularly turns to the love he left behind, his lost brother, and the hope of finally arriving in Catalonia. The novel captures the naiveté of a young, wide-eyed American traveling overseas for the first time—comparing all that he encounters to home: “Tiny cars, large black taxis and double-decker buses drove on the wrong side of the street. Still, it seemed a bit staged, as if this weren’t real.” Such passages read as extracts from a travel diary, and as a consequence it is easy to forget that this is a work of fiction. In Stephen, Ried has created a believable and likable first-person narrator that speaks with a simple sincerity: “I loved my brother and I hated war, but I was resolved that my life would be enriched, not shrouded, by his memory.” The author's prose never displays the fervid passion for the road found in Kerouac’s *Lonesome Traveler* nor captures the vulnerability of being penniless and exposed to the grime of the urban underbelly evoked in Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*. But Ried’s narrative earnestness is sufficiently beguiling to make this an emotionally engaging travel novel that will prove difficult to put down.

Full-hearted, believable writing in an enjoyable travel tale.

**QUANTUM MAYHEM**

*Smith, Lesley L.*  
Quarky Media (325 pp.)  
$12.99 paper  |  $4.61 e-book  
Dec. 9, 2018  
978-0-9973131-9-2

In Smith’s *A Jack in the Dark*, 2018, etc.) latest sci-fi series installment, physics professor Madison Martin’s former student may be using her reality-bending technique for large-scale vandalism.

In the last book in this series, Boulder, Colorado–based college instructor Martin grappled with villains who misused her breakthrough technique, “q-lapsing.” It involves using mind power, adrenaline, and quantum physics to alter reality to a chosen outcome—such as disintegrating the door to a bank vault. Martin’s expertise resulted in her becoming a special consultant to the police and FBI, tentatively training lawmen to use her process for a range of tasks. Now she, as the “Quantum Cop,” must assist them again following another outbreak of mischief—this time involving the eradication of a mining ghost town and the dissolution of a highway. The apparent perpetrator is Luke Bacalli, Martin’s foremost ex-student-gone-bad, whom she thought she’d killed in a quantum duel. Despite the fact that the material universe is at risk, Smith’s tone remains chirpy and playful, and in side plots, Martin’s long-standing love affair with faculty colleague Andro Rivas cools and her attraction to police officer Ben Willis heats up. The motivation for the large-scale destruction isn’t explained, and the behavior of the villains, who alternate between being maniacal and panicked, seems inconsistent, but these questions may be addressed in a future installment. Q-lapsing, in narrative terms, feels very much like spellcasting despite repeated assertions that it’s all based in science (“I concentrated and collapsed the wavefunction, instantiating the reality in which I’d followed this particular improbability to its source”). As is her habit, Smith, a real-life physicist at the University of Colorado at Boulder, concludes this flyghty tale with a lucid nonfiction physics essay; this time around, it’s about neutrinos even though they only have a small cameo in the text.

A semiconclusive entry in a lightweight science-minded series.
A man plagued by chronic pain turns to an experimental “miracle surgery.”

Thorner’s (The Rabbit, 2018) medical thriller taps into the hopelessness felt when physical pain becomes a psychological nightmare. For Greg Owens, getting out of bed is an arduous and excruciating daily challenge. Ever since he fell from a ladder during a roofing job seven years ago, back pain has been constant, contributing to a divorce, estrangement from his 3-year-old daughter, and diminished capacity as a construction foreman. When a radical experimental treatment at a remote clinic is suggested, Greg decides to investigate the promising possibilities at the facility rather than relying on questionable street drugs. The physician in charge of the trial is the nearly 60-year-old Dr. Dante Menta (fittingly named “Dr. D. Menta”), whose controversial pain-elimination therapy involves the injection of liquid nitrogen into the spinal column. His surgical techniques have incrementally graduated from animals of assorted sizes to the new human trials, which Greg and other patients, all in varying degrees of severe pain, are about to embark on. Once Greg becomes a patient, he is in good company with a broad full of other nosy subjects and a compassionate, motherly nurse named Roberta. She begins to suspect foul play when she discovers some of the treatment’s undesirable effects. Thorner, a software architect–turned–novelist, displays a knack for sustaining a simmering plot and really ratchets things up once the full grisly consequences of Menta’s seemingly foolproof experiment begin to emerge. The doctor’s transformation from creepily concerned advocate into mad-scientist mode with a zombified, pain-free patient roster to contend with is both horrifying and electrifying. Fans of uncomplicated medical thrillers will find much to savor here even if the author, a writer to watch, tends to lay on the graphic, gory details a bit thick. In the dog experiments, the animals run themselves into walls because they feel no pain and are delusional. Menta’s human patients begin pulling out their own fingernails, burning themselves, and gouging out their eyeballs. A devilishly crafted psychological thriller fusing mad science with desperate people in the grip of physical agony.

This Issue’s Contributors

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Lucia Acosta • Maya Alkabets-Chan • Autumn Allen • Elizabeth Bird • Marcel Bovet • Lisa Boyden
Christopher A. Brown • Jessica Brown • Timothy Capell • Party Carleton • Hicham Chami • Alec B. Chunn • Anastasia M. Collins • Dave DeChristopher • Audi Deich • Luisana Duarte Armendáriz
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Alan Aisher • Rebecca Leigh Anthony • Kent Armstrong • Darren Carton • Charles Causav
Michael Drigger • Stephanie Dobbs Carter • Steve Donegani • Lynne Heffly • Justin Hickey • Ivan Kennedy • Mandy Malone • Rhet Morgan • Joshua T. Pederson • Jamison Pfister • Jim Piechota
Sarah Retger • Erica Rivera • Mark A. Salti • Jerome Sheu • Elisa Shoenberger

HARDENED TO HICKORY

The Missing Chapter in Andrew Jackson’s Life

Turnbow, Tony L.
Self (602 pp.)
Sep. 27, 2018
978-0-692-19527-7
978-0-692-08752-7 paper

A biography of Andrew Jackson that focuses on a period before he was president of the United States—specifically, his rivalry with a U.S. Army general during the War of 1812. Jackson detested the British—he blamed the deaths of his mother and brothers, who died of various causes during the Revolutionary War period, on them—and deeply pined for military glory, which offered two irresistible incentives for him to fight in the War of 1812. Professional historians have meticulously scrutinized Jackson’s life, particularly his seemingly insatiable ambition, but debut author Turnbow, a Tennessee-based attorney, turns his attention to a comparatively neglected but intriguing part of his rise to fame, telling the story of the undying antagonism between Jackson and Gen. James Wilkinson. The latter was also profoundly ambitious, and he saw Jackson as a competitor in a zero-sum game for power and acclaim. He aimed to thwart Jackson’s success, even at the expense of military victory. He attempted to deny Jackson’s Tennessee Volunteers necessary supplies, tried to divert Jackson’s troops away from New Orleans to the Spanish province of East Florida, and worked to tarnish Jackson’s name and orchestrate his demolition. Jackson rightly believed that Wilkinson was a treasonous agent of Spain; indeed, the general provided Spain with sensitive intelligence regarding the United States’ plans for westward expansion. Turnbow paints Wilkinson as a “master of manipulation and deception” who always seemed capable of gaining
Wald’s novel is an intelligent and sensitive exploration of the ineffable power of connection and coincidence.

GILLYFLOWER

A strategic upper hand. Throughout, the author painstakingly depicts the historical context, including the precariousness of the United States as a still-fledgling nation and the threat posed by hostile Native American warriors; his account of Tecumseh’s extraordinary attempt to create a confederation to oppose American settlement is among the highlights of his rigorously researched study. Turnbow also lucidly captures Jackson’s impressive courage as well as the ways in which his ambition undermined his judgment; he nearly ruined his career by associating with the treacherous Aaron Burr. The account is relentlessly granular, and at times Turnbow produces an amount of detail that’s sometimes more disorienting than edifying. Overall, though, his effort is both original and thrillingly dramatic.

An impressive combination of scrupulous scholarship and powerful storytelling.

RED RIVER RESISTANCE

A Girl Called Echo

Vermette, Katheryna
Illus. by Henderson, Scott B. & Taciku, Donovan
HighWater Press (48 pp.)
$13.61 paper | Mar. 1, 2019
978-1-55379-747-0

A sequel offers a teenager’s further adventures through Métis history.

In Vermette’s (Pemmican Wars, 2018, etc.) graphic novel, Métis teen Echo Desjardins is starting to fit in a little better at Winnipeg Middle School, making friends and getting involved in the Indigenous Students Leadership group. But she still spends most of her time listening to music on her cellphone and getting swept up in the lectures that her teacher gives on the history of the Métis people. This volume covers the 1869 Red River Rebellion—or Red River Resistance, as Echo’s back-in-time friend Benjamin calls it, because “there will be no violence.” After the Hudson Bay Company sells the land on which the Métis people live to the government of Canada, Métis leaders Louis Riel and Ambroise Lépine attempt to halt the inevitable flood of settlers. They establish a provisional Métis government for the Northwest Province. Though the Métis take great pains to negotiate peacefully with the incoming Canadian government, troublemakers both inside and outside of their territory—including the anti–Roman Catholic, anti-French, anti-Indigenous Orangemen—may make the violence that Benjamin promised would never occur impossible to stop. As Echo witnesses one of the great what-ifs of North American history fall apart, the tragedy is reflected in the pain she feels in her personal life back in the 21st century. As in the previous volume, the story is accompanied by beautiful, full-color artwork by the team of Henderson and Yaciuk (Pemmican Wars, 2018, etc.). This book has less of Echo’s own life in it than the first novel, and the historical portions, with their many bearded 19th-century leaders, feel perhaps more didactic and less dramatic than the author’s account of the Pemmican Wars. Even so, this underexplored portion of North American history should prove intriguing and affecting for readers, particularly those living in the United States, where the struggles of the Métis people are largely unknown. By contrasting these historical events side by side with Echo’s story, this installment does a wonderful job showing how the ripples of past policies have shaped the current day and how political decisions always have a personal cost.

A visually stimulating and emotionally gripping graphic novel about the Métis people.

GILLYFLOWER

Wald, Diane
She Writes Press (56 pp.)
$16.95 paper | $9.95 e-book
Apr. 16, 2019
978-1-63152-517-9

A mysterious event leads to an unlikely connection between an actor and an artist in this novel.

In 1984, Nora Forrest lives a quiet and contented life in Boston. She is happily married to a man named Rick and enjoys success as an artist. Although she was “never the crush type,” she has a deep affection for Irish actor Hugh Sheenan. When her sister, Fran, tells her Hugh is starring on Broadway in a production called The Lion’s Share, Nora asks her mother in New York to purchase tickets. Before she leaves for the trip, she has a cryptic and baffling dream about Hugh. In New York, Hugh prepares for the play with the help of his trusted friend and secretary, Leon. The show is going well, but he is troubled by a peculiar dream involving a young woman. Nora is enchanted by The Lion’s Share, but toward the end of the final act something happens that neither she nor Hugh can understand or explain. After Nora returns to Boston, she sends Hugh a letter and a drawing of her impression of his performance. The drawing haunts Hugh, prompting him to arrange a visit with Nora in Boston, setting the stage for an encounter that may answer their questions about what happened during the play. The latest novel from Wald (Wonderbender, 2011, etc.) is an intelligent and sensitive exploration of the ineffable power of connection and coincidence. The inventive narrative is told from the perspectives of four characters: Nora, Hugh, Leon, and Rick. In chapters that alternate among these characters’ first-person points of view, the tale of Hugh’s fateful turn in The Lion’s Share and its aftermath unfolds along with the love story of Nora and Rick. While the theatrical performance lies at the heart of the narrative, flashbacks throughout the book enable the author to examine Nora’s relationship with her husband and her admiration for Hugh as well as the actor’s career and his turbulent personal life. Wald’s elegant and graceful prose begs to be savored: “After I mailed the drawing, I thought the circle was complete. In a way I wished that I’d taken a photograph of it so it would not be so irrevocably gone from my life, but in another way its absence made the sacrifice sweeter.”

A haunting meditation on lives that intersect in unexpected ways.
A MUTUAL ADDICTION
Widdicks, Mary
Outmanned Publishing (314 pp.)
Jan. 4, 2019
978-1-73297-620-7

In Widdicks’ debut psychological thriller, a sleep-deprived therapist becomes obsessed with a curious woman who seems to have restored her ability to dream.

Dr. Cressida Dunhill hasn’t dreamed since she had a car accident a decade earlier. She has no memories of the incident, but she survived it and someone named Max didn’t. One day, Viola “Vee” Marquis walks into Cressida’s office in Silverside, Oregon, at a psychiatric facility known locally as “The Mermaid Asylum.” Although Vee claims that she’s there because she’s upset that her boyfriend, Rex, is cheating on her, she seems indifferent about the visit. Cressida is unsettled and mesmerized by the woman as she casually strolls around the office. The doctor has a dream soon afterward in which she recalls some of the accident, and she associates this apparent breakthrough with Vee. The therapist wants to continue seeing her, even if that means pursuing a relationship outside the office. One potential obstacle is Rex, who Cressida believes is responsible for the bruises that she sees on Vee’s body. Protecting Vee from Rex may be the only way that Cressida can overcome her troubled, sometimes-sleepless nights. Before long, however, her concern for her patient turns into a fixation—one that could be dangerous for everybody involved. Widdicks’ deceptively simple tale has very few characters and a plot that burns slowly, gradually offering up its revelations about who Max is and particulars of the accident. There are a couple of plot twists along the way, but the novel’s most unpredictable element is the protagonist herself; she begins as a therapist who unquestionably cares about her patients, but surprising details about her past will cause readers to see her in a new light. The author’s prose is acute and self-assured, with pithy descriptions shaded with black humor. “Her hair was the topic of several discussions that day, including one twenty-minute negotiation with a paranoid patient who refused to even enter the room.”
A dark, delightfully bizarre story that dives deep into the psyches of unbalanced characters.
INDIE
Books of the Month

EISENSTEIN’S MONSTER
A.V. Bach
An incredible debut, as entertaining as it is outlandish, with at least one thing (and most likely many more) for everyone.

THE SCREAMING SKULL
Rick Ferguson
A joyously coarse and self-aware epic fantasy.

HOMAGE TO THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT
Judy Juanita
An engaging collection of writings that celebrates and reveals the historic Black Arts Movement.

THE SANDPIPER’S SPELL
Tom Pearson
A startlingly intuitive new poet—one to watch.

THE WILD WAVES WHIST
Erin Nelsen Parekh
Illus. by Mehrdokht Amini
A beach adventure pairs with the beautifully lyrical words of Ariel in this triumph of poetry and approachability.

REBECCA YARROS
A novel
THE LAST LETTER
Rebecca Yarros
A thoughtful and pensive tale with intelligent characters and a satisfying romance.
“[W]
writing a book in which I slam
an asteroid into Washington, D.C.,
is very different before Trump than
after Trump.”
—Mary Robinette Kowal, author of the
2018 Nebula Award for best novel nomi-
née The Calculating Stars, on Syfy Wire

“I don’t know that I set out to refute
any particular stereotypes—because
you need base knowledge of a his-
tory to form misconceptions about it,
and I don’t think that many Western
readers even have that. A lot of read-
ers have written me about how they’d
never heard of the Nanjing Massacre
until they read the book, which is sad-
dening but not surprising. American
education is terribly Americentric
and Eurocentric. We learn about Nor-
mandy but not Shanghai.”
—R.F. Kuang, author of the 2018 Nebula
Award for best novel finalist The Poppy
War, on the B&N Sci-Fi & Fantasy blog

“[I]t makes me happy that people
write fanfiction about my books. I
want to write worlds that feel real
to people, and when my stories are
done I would not want the charac-
ters to just live happily ever after. The
stories are living on in these readers,
and that’s what I love.”
—Naomi Novik, author of the 2018 Neb-
ula Award for best novel finalist Spinning
Silver, in the Straits Times

“I wanted to tell a rez story, but a
story that reflected the rez as I
know it—contemporary, dynamic,
challenging, but wholly a place unto itself....And I threw in a few
badass monster hunters, which is a
Navajo tradition, too.”
—Rebecca Roanhorse, author of the
2018 Nebula Award for best novel final-
ist Trail of Lightning, on Syfy Wire
It’s a story often repeated, a told-you-so about literary gatekeeping: 50 years ago, on March 26, 1969, a 32-year-old prep school teacher named John Kennedy Toole (1937–1969) pulled his car over in the woods outside Biloxi, ran a garden hose from the exhaust pipe into the cab, and killed himself. He had written a couple of novels that rested atop his New Orleans armoire, unpublished as he descended into madness. His mother, grimly determined, put one of them in the hands of writer and professor Walker Percy, who, initially reluctant, championed it as a novel for the ages.

So it was that A Confederacy of Dunces came into the world, published in 1980 and at first just a succès d'estime, then, after winning the Pulitzer Prize, a success, period. Toole, of course, was beyond caring, and Confederacy came and went, leaving that origin story behind, incomplete, for Toole had corresponded with legendary editor Robert Gottlieb for a couple of years, and had he revised according to Gottlieb’s suggestions, it might have appeared much earlier—and Toole might have lived out a long life in triumph.

As it is, the novel is an odd beast, its protagonist a man very much like Toole himself, not quite fit for the 20th century, in some ways the last of the medieval philosophers. Ignatius J. Reilly is a Rabelaisian character who knows his way around every corner of New Orleans, a city that provides a multivocal backdrop for his adventures and misadventures. Early on, he draws the unwanted attention of a beat cop, Officer Mancuso, who can’t catch a break but who falls into the orbit of Ignatius’ mother, who’s a walking wonder of chaos. She chides the cop: “You got plenty business picking on poor chirren with all the kind of people they got running in this town.”

Meanwhile, the “poor child,” 30 years old, beset by a sour stomach, decked out in a hunter’s cap with earmuffs to ward off dreaded colds, mustachioed to filter out unwanted smells from the tropical streets, stirs up plenty of chaos of his own. The raucous Bloomsday that Confederacy recounts is alcohol-fueled, ribald, and at various turns decidedly incorrect by modern standards. Part of the job of being Ignatius J. Reilly is to reject all that is modern, including modern mores, modern ideas, and modern practices and standards.

Still, Reilly gets by, just, filling Big Chief notebooks with his latter-day neoscholastic musings (“With the breakdown of the Medieval system, the gods of Chaos, Lunacy, and Bad Taste gained ascendancy”), offending, sometimes unintentionally and sometimes by design, sure that the world that surrounds him is bent on reducing him “to a fragmented and mumbling vegetable.” In some ways, he’s a precursor to the Sheldon Cooper of the Big Bang Theory franchise, but in most, Reilly is a thing all unto himself, sui generis and very strange.

The Swiftian title and its implications aside, Ignatius J. Reilly has found many fans over the half-century since his creator ended his life. A Confederacy of Dunces is a puzzle and, at times, a pain, but it’s a picaresque wonder that bears reading and rereading.

Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.
**THE NEXT GREAT PAULIE FINK** is Ali Benjamin’s follow-up to her bestselling book *The Thing About Jellyfish*. In a starred review, Kirkus called it “A book to make readers think, question, reach, laugh, and strive harder.”

**LBYR:** How do you think *The Next Great Paulie Fink* can help young readers discover who they are and come into their own in the face of new and bewildering challenges?

**ALI BENJAMIN:** Humans are storytelling creatures; we use narratives to create sense from the confusion of living. *The Next Great Paulie Fink* is, at its heart, about the stories we tell—about ourselves, others, and the world we all share. It’s about the inherent limitations of these stories...as well as the things we get to discover when we open ourselves to new, more expansive possibilities.

By exploring the stories Caitlyn and her classmates tell—not just about Paulie Fink, but also about themselves and the community around them—I hope young people can begin to examine their own guiding narratives. Whom do their stories center or elevate? Whom do they cast as villains or scapegoats? What do these stories tell them about who they are? Most important: who might they become if they make room for a better story?

Because growing up involves making mistakes (and so, frankly, does adulthood!), I also hope the book gives readers permission to be wrong...then to learn and grow from that experience. Every character in *The Next Great Paulie Fink* gets to a little bit wrong, and then to find some redemption.

Perhaps most of all, I hope *The Next Great Paulie Fink* gives readers freedom to laugh. The characters in this book are goofy; they do ridiculous dances, wrestle like zombies, imitate robots, construct a larger-than-life statue from a cartoon image of a guy picking his nose. Even as their own world changes in confounding ways, they remain wholly, unabashedly themselves...and they allow others to do the same. This is something we can wish for all children, everywhere.

**MORE MIDDLE GRADE BOOKS TO MAKE YOU THINK**

- *How High the Moon* by Karen Round
  - 3.5.2019

- *The Great Jeff* by Tony Abbott
  - 3.19.2019

- *The Absence of Sparrows* by Kurt Kirchmeier
  - 5.7.2019