

Featuring 424 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

# KIRKUS

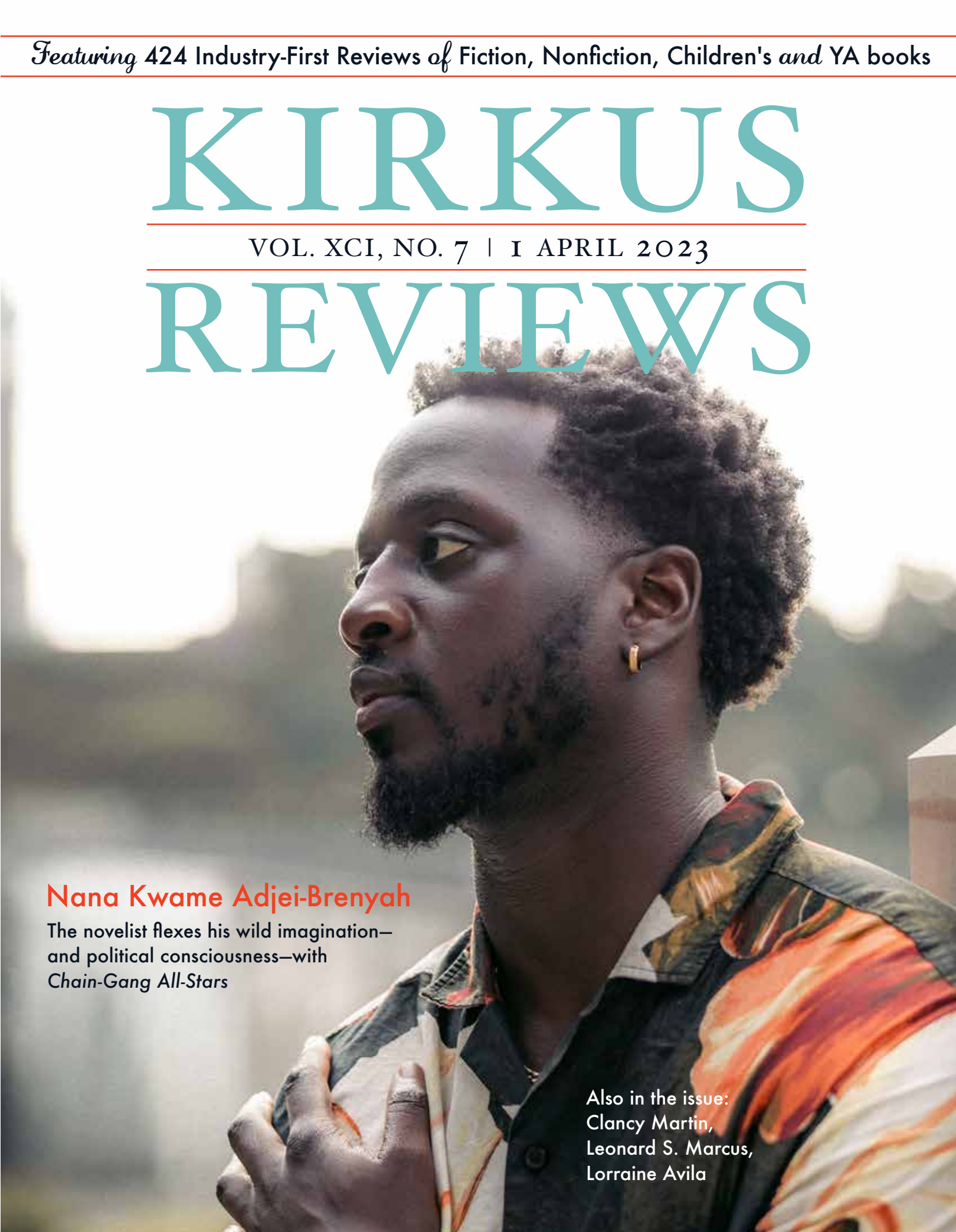
VOL. XCI, NO. 7 | I APRIL 2023

# REVIEWS

## Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah

The novelist flexes his wild imagination—  
and political consciousness—with  
*Chain-Gang All-Stars*

Also in the issue:  
Clancy Martin,  
Leonard S. Marcus,  
Lorraine Avila



# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK | Tom Beer

## TALES OUT OF SCHOOL



John Parastikas

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME you read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*? If you're like me, you probably haven't reached for this medieval classic since high school or college (unless, of course, you teach English lit). Those thickets of Middle English were tough going.

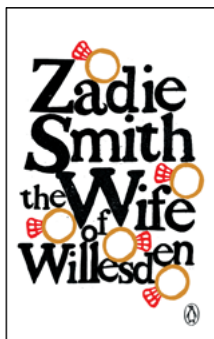
In case your memory's a bit hazy, here's a recap: *The Canterbury Tales* were written by Geoffrey Chaucer, an English poet and civil servant, between 1387 and 1400. A group of 30 odd pilgrims makes its way to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral; en route they tell stories to pass the time. Readers learn about the individual pilgrims of the frame story—a knight, a miller, a physician, a prioress, and many others—and hear the tale that each tells.

Translators, writers, and artists are always seeking ways to make *The Canterbury Tales* more accessible to contemporary readers. An unabridged modern English translation by Burton Raffel appeared in 2008. Peter Ackroyd, known for his many works on English history, produced a prose retelling in 2009. In 2011, Seymour Chwast illustrated an idiosyncratic graphic adaptation that found Chaucer's pilgrims riding motorcycles and speaking in modern vernacular ("Hey, babe, let's party!").

Perhaps no character in the book has endured like the Wife of Bath. As scholar Marion Turner demonstrates in *The Wife of Bath: A Biography* (Princeton University Press, Jan. 23), this liberated, blunt-spoken merchant woman was a revolutionary female depiction in medieval times and continues to inspire readers today, as she recounts the chronicle of her five marriages with her frank and funny perspective on sexual and marital relations. "Over and over again, in different time periods and cultural contexts," Turner writes, "readers see her as 'relatable' in certain ways, as a three-dimensional figure who is far more than the sum of her parts."

Creators as diverse as Voltaire, Ted Hughes, and Pier Paolo Pasolini have reimagined the Wife of Bath in their work. The latest is novelist Zadie Smith. Her first play, *The Wife of Willesden*, opens off-Broadway at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on April 1 after successful runs in London and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Smith recasts Chaucer's "Alyson" as "Alvita," a Jamaican-born British woman in her mid-50s who regales the customers of a northwest London pub on open mic night.

In her introduction to the published script (Penguin Books, Feb. 14), Smith writes that "from the moment Alyson opens her mouth... I knew she was speaking to me, and that she was a Kilburn girl at heart.... For Alyson's voice—brash, honest, cheeky, salacious, outrageous, unapologetic—is one I've heard and loved all my life: in the flats, at school, in the playgrounds of my childhood and then the pubs of my maturity, at bus stops, in shops, and of course up and down the Kilburn High Road, any day of the week." This entertaining play is further proof of Turner's thesis: *The Wife of Bath* really has legs.



## KIRKUS REVIEWS

Co-Chairman  
HERBERT SIMON

Co-Chairman  
MARC WINKELMAN

Publisher & CEO  
MEG LABORDE KUEHN  
mkuebn@kirkus.com

Editor-in-Chief  
TOM BEER  
tbeer@kirkus.com

Chief Marketing Officer  
SARAH KALINA  
skalina@kirkus.com

President of Kirkus Indie  
KAREN SCHECHNER  
kschechner@kirkus.com

Managing/Nonfiction Editor  
ERIC LIEBETRAU  
eliebetrau@kirkus.com

Fiction Editor  
LAURIE MUCHNICK  
lmuchnick@kirkus.com

Young Readers' Editor  
LAURA SIMEON  
lsimeon@kirkus.com

Young Readers' Editor  
MAHNAZ DAR  
mdar@kirkus.com

Editor at Large  
MEGAN LABRISSE  
mlabrisse@kirkus.com

Senior Indie Editor  
DAVID RAPP  
drapp@kirkus.com

Indie Editor  
ARTHUR SMITH  
asmith@kirkus.com

Editorial Assistant of Indie  
DAN NOLAN  
dnolan@kirkus.com

Editorial Assistant of Indie  
LEAH BLOCK  
lblock@kirkus.com

Editorial Assistant  
NINA PALATTELLA  
npalattella@kirkus.com

Mysteries Editor  
THOMAS LEITCH

Contributing Editor  
GREGORY MCNAMEE

Copy Editor  
BETSY JUDKINS

Designer  
ALEX HEAD

Kirkus Editorial Senior  
Production Editor  
ROBIN O'DELL  
rodell@kirkus.com

Kirkus Editorial Senior  
Production Editor  
MARINNA CASTILLEJA  
mcastilleja@kirkus.com

Kirkus Editorial Production Editor  
ASHLEY LITTLE  
alittle@kirkus.com

Publishing Promotions Manager  
RACHEL WEASE  
rwease@kirkus.com

Indie Promotions Manager  
AMY BAIRD  
abaird@kirkus.com

Author Consultant  
JESSICA PACK  
jpack@kirkus.com

Graphic Designer  
KYLA NOVAK  
knovak@kirkus.com

Cover photo by  
Alex M. Philip

Frequently Asked Questions: [www.kirkusreviews.com/about/faq](http://www.kirkusreviews.com/about/faq)  
Fully Booked Podcast: [www.kirkusreviews.com/news-and-features/content-type/video-interviews](http://www.kirkusreviews.com/news-and-features/content-type/video-interviews)  
Advertising Opportunities: [www.kirkusreviews.com/book-marketing](http://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-marketing)

Submission Guidelines: [www.kirkusreviews.com/about/publisher-submission-guidelines](http://www.kirkusreviews.com/about/publisher-submission-guidelines)  
Subscriptions: [www.kirkusreviews.com/magazine/subscription](http://www.kirkusreviews.com/magazine/subscription)  
Newsletters: [www.kirkusreviews.com](http://www.kirkusreviews.com)



YOU CAN NOW  
PURCHASE  
BOOKS ONLINE  
AT  
KIRKUS.COM

# CONTENTS

## FICTION

INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS.....	4
REVIEWS.....	4
EDITOR'S NOTE.....	6
ON THE COVER: NANA KWAME ADJEI-BRENYAH.....	14
MYSTERY.....	41
SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY.....	48
ROMANCE.....	51

## NONFICTION

INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS.....	55
REVIEWS.....	55
EDITOR'S NOTE.....	56
INTERVIEW: CLANCY MARTIN.....	64

## CHILDREN'S


INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS.....	99
EDITOR'S NOTE (PICTURE BOOKS).....	100
REVIEWS.....	101
EDITOR'S NOTE (MIDDLE GRADE).....	102
INTERVIEW: LEONARD S. MARCUS.....	106

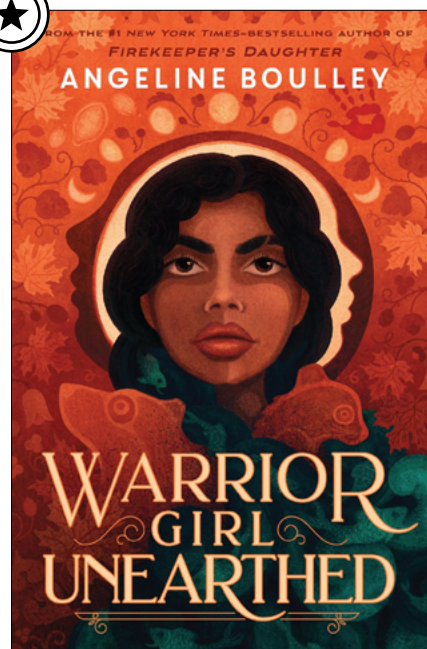
## YOUNG ADULT

INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS.....	147
REVIEWS.....	147
INTERVIEW: LORRAINE AVILA.....	154

## INDIE

INDEX TO STARRED REVIEWS.....	168
REVIEWS.....	168
EDITOR'S NOTE.....	170
SEEN & HEARD.....	186
APPRECIATIONS: DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?.....	187

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



Angeline Boulley's sophomore novel is a textured, thrilling mystery grounded in an Anishinaabe community dealing with stolen ancestors and artifacts and missing women. Read the review on p. 148.

*Don't wait on the mail for reviews! You can read pre-publication reviews as they are released on [kirkus.com](http://kirkus.com)—even before they are published in the magazine. You can also access the current issue and back issues of Kirkus Reviews on our website by logging in as a subscriber. If you do not have a username or password, please contact customer care to set up your account by calling 1.800.316.9361 or emailing [customers@kirkusreviews.com](mailto:customers@kirkusreviews.com).*

# FICTION



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

<b>SWAMP STORY</b> by Dave Barry .....	8
<b>THE COLLECTED REGRETS OF CLOVER</b> by Mikki Brammer .....	10
<b>FLUX</b> by Jinwoo Chong .....	11
<b>ENTER GHOST</b> by Isabella Hammad .....	20
<b>BLOOD OF THE VIRGIN</b> by Sammy Harkham .....	22
<b>OPEN THROAT</b> by Henry Hoke .....	23
<b>THE GULL YETTIN</b> by Joe Kessler .....	24
<b>LIKE THE APPEARANCE OF HORSES</b> by Andrew Krivak .....	25
<b>CLOSE TO HOME</b> by Michael Magee .....	28
<b>THIS IS NOT MIAMI</b> by Fernanda Melchor; trans. by Sophie Hughes .....	29
<b>HONEYBEES AND DISTANT THUNDER</b> by Riku Onda; trans. by Philip Gabriel .....	31
<b>A HISTORY OF BURNING</b> by Janika Oza .....	32
<b>THE THREE DEATHS OF WILLA STANNARD</b> by Kate Robards .....	33
<b>THE NEW EARTH</b> by Jess Row .....	34
<b>STONE AND SHADOW</b> by Burhan Sönmez; trans. by Alexander Dawe .....	36
<b>THE HOUSE ON VIA GEMITO</b> by Domenico Starnone .....	36
<b>THE LAST SONGBIRD</b> by Daniel Weizmann .....	39
<b>GLASSWORKS</b> by Olivia Wolfgang-Smith .....	40
<b>THE ESSENTIAL PETER S. BEAGLE, VOLUME 1</b> by Peter S. Beagle .....	48
<b>THE ESSENTIAL PETER S. BEAGLE, VOLUME 2</b> by Peter S. Beagle .....	49
<b>THE BOOK THAT WOULDN'T BURN</b> by Mark Lawrence .....	49
<b>TRANSLATION STATE</b> by Ann Leckie .....	49
<b>MORE PERFECT</b> by Temi Ob .....	50
<b>INK BLOOD SISTER SCRIBE</b> by Emma Törzs .....	50
<b>JANA GOES WILD</b> by Farah Heron .....	52
<b>THE TRUE LOVE EXPERIMENT</b> by Christina Lauren .....	53



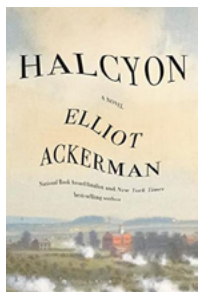
## BEWARE THE WOMAN

*Abbott, Megan*  
Putnam (304 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 30, 2023  
9780593084939

An expecting couple's whirlwind summer trip to reconnect with family unravels into something like a game of cat and mouse.

It's no spoiler to say that Jed and Jacy's trip to Michigan's Upper Peninsula to visit Jed's father, Dr. Ash, doesn't go as expected. Jacy, as first-person narrator, is not afraid to drop hints that all is not well in Jed's childhood home despite the happy reason for the trip—celebrating the newlyweds' pregnancy news. After a lucid dream in a roadside motel, Jacy suggests "we could go back and just explain it wasn't a good time. Not with the baby coming." How different things could have been. Instead, the couple pushes on, their nervous excitement brimming. "It was tempting fate, though, wasn't it? I see that now," says Jacy, a couple days into the visit and growing more aware. Dr. Ash shows a touching interest in Jacy's well-being, an eye always on her belly. It's only natural that Jed's mother would come up. She died in childbirth, Dr. Ash reveals. "Had Jed told me this and I'd missed it?" Jacy wonders. This is the first crack in the family facade, a chip in the paint that reveals layers of history underneath. The voice of Jacy's own mother rings in her head—"Honey...we all marry strangers." Lurking in the background is Mrs. Brandt, the Ash household's longtime caretaker. Her formal nature suggests a strong loyalty to Jed's family. "It's hard enough seeing you," Mrs. Brandt says. "Pregnant, fulsome. Fecund, ripening." This ability to twist a good thing inside out until it feels shameful is classic Abbott. Jacy's belly is suddenly a trigger, the inevitability of birth like a bomb waiting to go off. Unease turns to discomfort turns to fear when Jacy wakes up bleeding one morning, and suddenly her body no longer feels like her own. Jacy wants to leave, but Dr. Ash wants her to do what's best for the baby. Who gets to decide? And what about Jed? Compared to Jacy, Jed reads like a ghost of a person, flat on the page. But maybe that's the point given this is Jacy's story to tell. Abbott masterfully uses the pretext of a pregnant woman's heightened senses—"I could smell everything now...even the carpet glue, the wood paste in the staircase post"—to build a claustrophobic atmosphere of mistrust and insecurity reminiscent of *Get Out*. You're sure to get chills.

An unsettling, nightmare-inducing morsel from a master of suspense.



**HALCYON**  
*Ackerman, Elliot*  
 Knopf (256 pp.)  
 \$24.99 | May 23, 2023  
 9780593321621

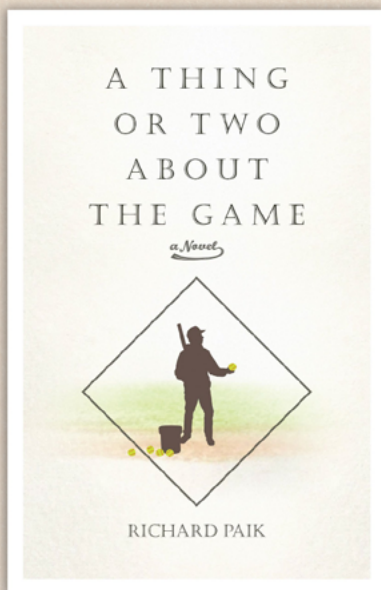
A novel of alternate history, life everlasting, and American democracy in peril.

In this version of the recent past, President Al Gore has assumed office after a perjury conviction drove Bill Clinton from the White House, and he has

his hands full in a sharply divided and polarized country. First-person narrator Martin Neumann is a historian and college professor, on leave to write his next book, “a study of postbellum attitudes on the Civil War...and what the historian Shelby Foote termed ‘the great compromise,’ a cultural reconciliation between North and South that followed those blood-soaked years.” Foote’s interpretation has “fallen from favor,” Neumann’s department chair tells him. Ackerman wants to explore whether nuance and compromise are possible where others see

black and white, right and wrong. His narrator has “become obsessed with the role of compromise in the sustainment of American life,” a notion that has fallen from favor as polarized opinions became louder and more rigid. Recently divorced, he’s also obsessed with his own alternative histories of what might have been. He’s spending his sabbatical on an estate with the ominous name that gives the novel its title, where his landlord is the legendary Robert Ableson, a legal lion and champion of liberal causes, now retired and in his 90s. And very spry, for reasons the novel will reveal but signals in its very first sentence, informing the reader that “resurrection, a new life, had become a scientific possibility.” In 2004, when the novel opens, there are all sorts of further complications to the context—Gore plans to pardon Clinton, statues of the Confederacy are sacrificed to historical revisionism, conservatives want to shut down scientific progress. The historian and his landlord both find that their perspectives and attitudes, once perfectly acceptable, now put them on the wrong side of history. The narrator seems to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders, or at least the future of democracy as we know it.

**A novel of ideas in an age of opinions.**



ISBN: 978-1-63988-240-3

**“...the novel features rich character work as well as the earnest questions about trivial pursuits that maybe aren’t so trivial, after all...An unpretentious story of community and finding one’s purpose.”**

—*Kirkus Reviews*

**“Paik’s inspiring debut novel is an assured look at how and why it’s imperative to change traditional definitions of failure and success...”**

**This rich character study of a man dealing with a mid-life crisis through coaching is full of small, resonant details.”**

—*BookLife Reviews*

**“Its ability to teach and inspire about life’s progression and challenges makes for an involving book... that is ultimately about a quest for purpose, meaning, and achievement...”**

—*Midwest Book Review*

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights,  
 Email [richarda\\_paik@yahoo.com](mailto:richarda_paik@yahoo.com) • [richardpaik.com](http://richardpaik.com)



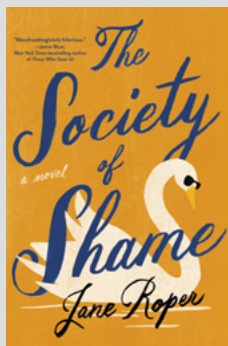
# SERIOUSLY FUNNY



APRIL FOOLS' DAY is a day for humor, but it's also a day that reminds us that humor is intimately bound up with darker feelings, including shame, anger, and grief. Here's a look at some of the fiction coming out this month that's funny without necessarily being light.

*The Society of Shame* by Jane Roper (Anchor, April 4): After Kathleen Held returns home early from a trip

to discover that her garage is on fire, her politician husband comes tumbling out of the car in his underwear followed by a 20-something woman from his campaign staff. But the thing that ends up really embarrassing Kathleen is the fact that she got her period and the blood leaked onto her pants—and the stain was caught on camera by her taxi driver and broadcast to the world. Kathleen becomes the face of the #YesWeBleed movement, with unpredictable consequences. Our starred review calls the book “astutely written, with the perfect balance among humor, heartbreak, and understanding.”



*Calling Ukraine* by Johannes Lichtman (MarySue Rucci Books/Scribner, April 11): This comic novel provides a portrait of Ukraine before Russia's 2022 invasion. In 2018, American John Turner moves to Lutsk to help call-center reps learn to banter in American English. Our starred review says: “Perhaps most impressive is Lichtman's high-wire act of tone.... When a comic figure...is set down in a country inured to tragedy—and as the undeclared Russian war worsens and a comic actor is elected to the Ukrainian presidency—it becomes clear that John's misunderstandings and awkwardnesses...can't stay mere fish-out-of-water humor. In places like Ukraine, comedy is backed with consequences.”



*Hit Parade of Tears* by Izumi Suzuki, translated by Sam Bett, David Boyd, Helen O'Horan, and Daniel Joseph (Verso, April 11): Suzuki (1949-1986) was a Japanese SF writer who produced what our review calls “dark and punky stories” filled with people who feel like aliens or

are placed in the wrong timelines. “These 11 stories surprise with wry humor and stun with the loneliness of living,” according to our review.

*Games and Rituals* by Katherine Heiny (Knopf, April 18): Heiny specializes in what our starred review calls “lovably quirky” characters, and the beauty of her story collections is that there are more of them (though of course her novels are wonderful, too!). “Here again,” our review says, “Heiny approaches her disarmingly charming characters with tenderness, empathy, and humor, even (perhaps, especially) when they meander outside the bounds of good behavior.” This book features a love-smitten driving examiner; a woman dealing with her elderly father's foibles; and an almost-empty-nester who's committed to decluttering her home and maybe her life. “For Heiny fans and those just discovering her naughty, generous-spirited fiction, this collection is bound to spark considerable joy.”



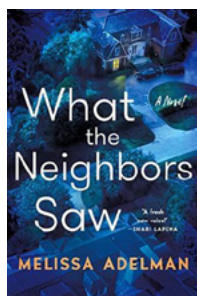
*Moorewood Family Rules* by HelenKay Dimon (Avon/HarperCollins, April 25): Dimon is known for romance novels, but her latest “leans more significantly into the wacky interpersonal hijinks of its premise,” according to our review. The Moorewoods are a family of con artists based at a glamorous house in Newport—but when Jillian Moorewood gets out of prison, she's not happy to find them up to their old tricks of wooing wealthy widows. She'd only taken the fall for them because they'd promised to go legit. Our review calls it “an ensemble comedy with a healthy dose of humorous back-stabbing.”



Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.

“Stories that rely heavily on depictions of violence but dazzle with formal experimentation.”

HUMAN SACRIFICES



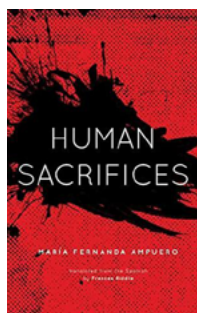
**WHAT THE NEIGHBORS SAW**

Adelman, Melissa  
Minotaur (304 pp.)  
\$28.00 | June 20, 2023  
9781250876560

A shocking death rocks an upscale neighborhood and makes it harder for the residents to conceal dangers that lurk beneath the surface.

When Alexis Crawford and her attorney husband, Sam, decide to buy a fixer-upper for their growing family, they follow the adage of looking for the worst house in the best neighborhood. And River Forest is about the best neighborhood they can afford: It's D.C.-adjacent, it's certainly safe, and it has a run-down yet gorgeous Cape Cod Revival that's just come on the market and is the sort of place that realtors might call gracious. Alexis and Sam don't often act impulsively, but soon they find themselves moving in and trying to get to know their new neighbors. Immediately, Alexis feels out of place, not only as a Black woman in a largely White neighborhood, but also as someone from a different class background. Though she tries to talk with Sam, he's too busy working to make partner to notice how isolated she's becoming. The tragic death of neighbor Teddy Bard gives Alexis a chance to connect to his widow, Blair, and the story continues in alternating chapters from the two women's first-person points of view, with varying degrees of reliability. After the police determine that Teddy's death was a murder, Alexis starts to wonder if this is a sign of more simmering tensions in what was supposed to be her safe haven. Sam's ongoing distance and Blair's friendship make Alexis wonder how much she really knows herself as well.

May have fans of “all's well that ends well” rooting for an imperfectly fitting ending.



**HUMAN SACRIFICES**

Ampuero, María Fernanda  
Trans. by Frances Riddle  
Feminist Press (144 pp.)  
\$15.95 paper | May 16, 2023  
9781558612983

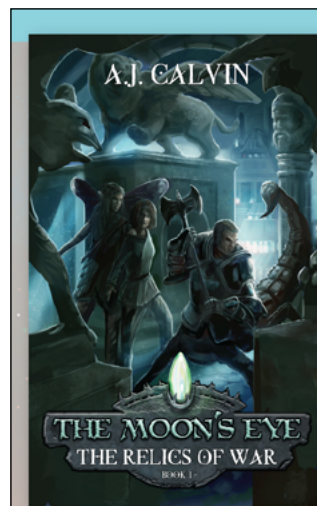
Terrifying stories lay bare the brutality of patriarchy and the violence it metes out on women and children.

Ecuadorian writer Ampuero begins with “Biography,” a nightmarish story of an undocumented woman who travels

to a remote house to meet a man who's offered her money to write his life story. In the next tale, “Believers,” a girl living in the shadow of turbulent protests spies on two missionaries who are renting a room from her family. A sense of claustrophobia dwells in these pages. A few stories in, the reader begins to prepare for the horrible thing (or things) that will inevitably happen. Page after page, women and children are brutalized and

raped. Confronted by one monstrous scene after another, the reader becomes almost inured to the collection's representations of violence. The stories are strongest when they avoid relying on the shock value of human cruelty and experiment with the possibilities afforded by the form of the short story. “Pietà,” for instance, is told in a stream-of-consciousness style from the perspective of a nanny and maid who dotingly watches her charge grow up. The singular point of view and the rapid jumps in time reveal, within the span of a few pages, the tragedy of loving someone who's terrible. In “Sacrifices,” the story unfolds completely in direct dialogue between a husband and wife lost in a parking lot. The lack of visual description—usually the bread and butter of fiction—yields deliciously frightening results.

Stories that rely heavily on depictions of violence but dazzle with formal experimentation.



“Calvin’s engaging epic tale opens with a dense and emotionally complex narrative... This...intricate fantasy will delight seasoned genre fans.”  
—Kirkus Reviews

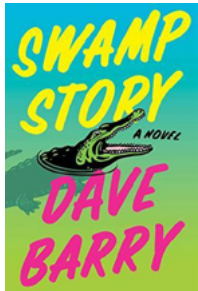
“Calvin’s layered and nuanced world-building is exceptional. Her prose is illuminating, and vivid...”  
—Before We Go Blog

ISBN: 978-1737920403 [paperback]  
ISBN: 978-1737920410 [hardcover]

“Calvin’s writing really brought this story to life on so many levels, and the action and pacing made this book a quick, enjoyable read that was a lot of fun...a classic epic fantasy...”  
—Beneath a Thousand Skies Blog

FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL  
AUTHORAJ@GMAIL.COM • AJCALVIN.NET





## SWAMP STORY

Barry, Dave  
Simon & Schuster (320 pp.)  
\$28.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781982191337



Gold bars, pythons, and TikTok videos of swamp monsters add up to a hilarious Florida tale.

Jesse Braddock has a spectacularly handsome boyfriend and a darling baby girl, but she's not feeling the happily-ever-after. Slater may look like "classic Tom Cruise," but he's a philanderer who's spent most of Jesse's trust fund, and now they're living in a broken-down cabin in the Everglades with Slater's videographer pal, Kark, "and ninety trillion mosquitoes. And no money." Slater and Kark's highest ambition is to sell a reality TV show called *Glades Man*, which would feature Slater taking his shirt off among the palmettos. After a close encounter with a python, Jesse is developing an ambition to

take baby Willa and flee, but how? Nearby, Ken and Brad Bortle, proprietors of the failing Bortle Brothers Bait & Beer, are cooking up a get-rich scheme of their own (well, Ken's). After seeing a viral video of Phil Teagler, an alcoholic former newspaper reporter, attempting to play a costumed character at a rich little girl's birthday party, with dire but hilarious results, Ken has the idea of making a video of Phil playing a cryptid, which they dub the Everglades Melon Monster for its giant head (from a repurposed Dora the Explorer costume). Once that hits the sound and fury of TikTok, they'll sell a ton of Melon Monster merch. When Ken, Kark, and Slater meet, they quickly realize they can join forces: Glades Man vs. Melon Monster. Meanwhile, Jesse has literally stumbled upon a legendary cache of Civil War-era gold bars buried in the Glades long ago. She has also run afoul of the Campbell brothers, Duck and Billy, a couple of ex-cons who, despite their childish nicknames, are mean as snakes but not as smart. In desperate need of help and a ride to Miami to consult a lawyer, she joins forces with Brad. All of those plot threads will get further entangled with Eastern European mobsters, the secretary of the interior, and a python hunter with an "emotional



## PALADINS WERE MADE FOR SHARP CONFLICT, NOT SKULKING AROUND IN THE SHADOWS.


"...a promising start to a series that will be enjoyed by high-fantasy fans."

—LoveReading UK

"A fast-paced high fantasy quest in the tradition of Dungeons & Dragons with bloody, action-packed battle sequences aplenty...solid world building, a strong protagonist, and a spirited cast of familiar fantasy characters."

—IndieReader

"...an impressive scope. Although there is a complete story arc with a satisfying ending, this volume is just the start of a much larger saga."

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) 

ISBN-13: 978-0228868668 [paperback]  
ISBN-13: 978-0228868675 [hardcover]  
ISBN-13: 978-0228868682 [eBook]

FOR AGENT REPRESENTATION OR INFORMATION ON PUBLISHING AND FILM RIGHTS,  
EMAIL [FAT.PALADIN.CONTACT@GMAIL.COM](mailto:FAT.PALADIN.CONTACT@GMAIL.COM) • [FATPALADIN.CA](http://FATPALADIN.CA)

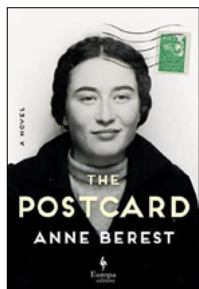


“The anguish and horror of genocide arrive with fresh impact in an absorbing personal account.”

THE POSTCARD

support boar,” among other things. Barry makes mirth of all this mayhem with his usual aplomb.

Florida’s humorist laureate finds chaos and comedy in the Everglades.



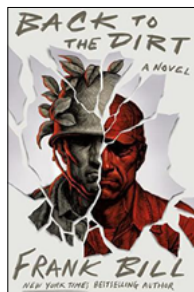
THE POSTCARD

*Berest, Anne*  
*Trans. by Tina Kover*  
 Europa Editions (464 pp.)  
 \$28.00 | May 16, 2023  
 9781609458386

A Jewish family’s experience across multiple generations, researched by a mother and daughter, shines a spotlight on French antisemitism, both historic and contemporary.

The arrival in 2003 of an unsigned postcard, delivered to her mother Lélia’s postbox in Paris, bearing the names of four family ancestors murdered at Auschwitz, forces Anne Berest properly to consider her Jewish heritage. The result is this autofiction sharing the tragic saga of one branch of her forbears, the Rabinovitches, seeking peace and a safe home in the shifting European landscape of the 20th century. Lélia, who has methodically pieced together the story of her grandparents, now shares it with Anne, starting with Ephraïm and Emma’s marriage in Moscow and the birth of their first child, Myriam, Lélia’s mother, who will be the sole survivor. Two more children, Noémie and Jacques, are born, while the Rabinovitches move, for political reasons, to Latvia, then France. But Ephraïm fails to secure French citizenship for the family, and, as their lives become increasingly circumscribed after the German occupation, first Noémie and Jacques and then the parents are arrested, imprisoned, and slaughtered. Berest’s descriptions of captivity are notably horrific. Years later, as Anne’s child reports anti-semitism at school, Anne remembers the postcard and begins a quest to find its author. Now the narrative switches from historical record to detection, involving a private eye and a graphologist, before turning more introspective as it traces Myriam’s experience. Having escaped into the French free zone with her husband, she settles in a remote Provencal cottage, then comes back to Paris and joins the Resistance. As the war ends, she witnesses the return of skeletal survivors from Germany. The story overall is poignant, tense, restless, and ultimately pivotal, as Anne not only solves her mystery, but, more importantly, gains her identity.

The anguish and horror of genocide arrive with fresh impact in an absorbing personal account.



BACK TO THE DIRT

*Bill, Frank*  
 Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)  
 \$17.00 paper | May 9, 2023  
 9780374534431

Grim, violent, and chock-full of mayhem and despair—welcome back to Frank Bill country.

Miles Knox is an aging Vietnam vet, well-meaning but prone to steroid-fueled rage—and tortured still by what he saw and did in country. Shelby McCutchen is his much-younger girlfriend, a stripper forced to take care of the fragile and damaged men in her family: her painkiller-addicted twin, Wylie, and her drunk and deeply unpleasant father. When Wylie is sought for the coldblooded double murders of his oxy dealers—sought by the slow and irrelevant forces of the law but also, more dangerously, by Nathaniel, the resourceful ex-cop whose brother was one of the victims—he holes up at Miles’ rural fishing camp,

Before Baker Street  
 there was Montague...

Before partnership  
 with Dr. John Watson...

Sherlock Holmes  
 worked alone.

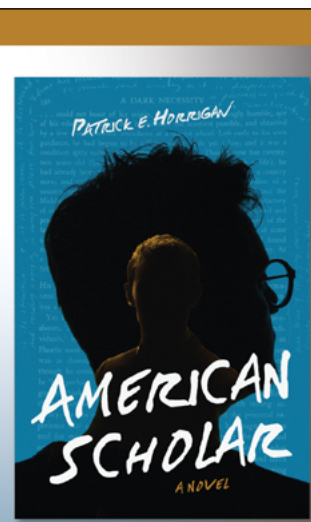
M. K. Wiseman's  
**SHERLOCK HOLMES**  
*& the Singular Affair*

ISBN: 978-1734464146

For All Inquiries, Please Email  
 contact@mkwisemanauthor.com • mkwisemanauthor.com

with Shelby as a kind of hostage. Meanwhile Miles (when he's not distracted by brutal fistfights, flashbacks, job worries, and even an industrial accident) begins in a haphazard way to search for her...and he and Nathaniel eventually join forces, though at this point (it's a long story) Miles, having suddenly been introduced to LSD, is inhabiting a hallucinatory world that's equal parts southern Indiana now and southern Vietnam then. The book is not so much gritty as relentlessly grim—at its bleakest it seems a kind of ruin porn focused not on bombed-out buildings but on bombed-out people—but it does move quickly, with plenty of surprises, and it provides the all-hell-broke-loose tumult one expects from Bill. Reading it is like mainlining testosterone and hopelessness...and whether or not that seems like a compliment to you will give a good sense of whether you're the intended audience.

**All ain't well in the heartland.**



“A haunting, complex look at love, gay history, and the passage of time.”  
—Kirkus Reviews

“...a big, ambitious, beautifully written book. It's deeply felt and powerfully moving, but quick on its feet and witty.”  
—Paul Burston, Author of *We Can Be Heroes: A Survivor's Story*

ISBN: 978-1-59021-736-8

“...an exquisite and soulful leap into the landscape of love and memory, literature and history. Sexy and moving, the book is a masterful fugue...”  
—Tim Miller, Performer & Author of *A Body in the O: Performances and Stories*

FOR INFORMATION ON FILM RIGHTS, EMAIL  
PEHORRIGAN@AOL.COM • PATRICKEHORRIGAN.COM



## THE COLLECTED REGRETS OF CLOVER

*Brammer, Mikki*

St. Martin's (320 pp.)

\$28.00 | May 9, 2023

9781250284396



Clover Brooks has spent almost her whole life in the presence of death; maybe the time has come for her to live a little.

When she was 5, Clover witnessed her kindergarten teacher's collapse, and then, when she was 6, her parents died in an accident while on vacation in China. Taken in by her maternal grandfather, she moved from Connecticut to New York City, where he raised her lovingly, if in some isolation. Now 36, she still lives in her grandfather's West Village apartment, though he's been dead for 13 years; works as a death doula; and counts as her only true friends her pets and her 87-year-old neighbor. Her work is emotionally challenging but rewarding; she holds the hands of the dying, then goes home to write down their last words in one of three journals: "Regrets," "Advice," or "Confessions." Despite the loneliness of her life, Clover isn't looking for a change, which is, naturally, when change finds her: first in the form of Sebastian, who asks her to spend time with his dying grandmother, and then in the form of Sylvie, who moves into the apartment downstairs. The grandmother, Claudia, turns out to be a spitfire: a former photojournalist, she left the love of her life behind when she married, and Clover, inspired by her energy and kindness, seeks closure to this tale, while also (maybe?) going on her first date ever with Sebastian and beginning a friendship with Sylvie. As she connects with others, she must also accept her lingering grief and guilt for her beloved grandfather's death. There are so many opportunities for cliché here, and Brammer adroitly sidesteps them all. This is a beautiful tale of a vulnerable, compassionate woman who finds that, in order to care for others, she must also let herself be cared for. Even that cliché feels moving, rather than saccharine, in Brammer's capable hands.

**Walks the edge of sentimentality with poignant success.**



## DOÑA CLEANWELL LEAVES HOME

*Castillo, Ana*

HarperVia (256 pp.)

\$27.99 | May 16, 2023

9780063259416

A new collection of stories from a grande dame of Chicana literature.

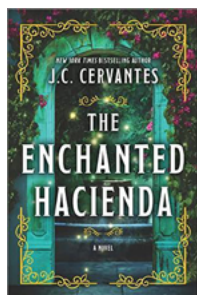
"Being who you are isn't static," says Ada, a middle-aged nurse in the story "Ada and Pablo." She should know: Everything she thought was stable about her life in Mexico City with her husband, Pablo, has become unfamiliar, from a surprising new friendship at work with a young, handsome doctor, to

“A paranoid and inventive cautionary tale about buying into someone else’s glitchy utopia.”

FLUX

physical changes wrought by menopause. Most unsettled of all is her decadeslong marriage to Pablo, as rumors and suspicions swirl about his behavior. Ada is not the only character tangled in this web of secrets in Castillo’s collection, comprising seven long stories and a very brief prologue. A gay man whose accomplished sister, a professor in Chicago, dies suddenly goes through her papers and learns she had a secret life in Mexico that extended far beyond what he ever could have imagined of her (“Ven”). An architect visits the site of one of his elderly father’s oft-told family legends to discover the facts behind it (“Cuernavaca”). In the memorable title story, set in the mid-1970s, 18-year-old Katia, a budding feminist near the top of her Chicago high school’s graduating class, is sent to Mexico by her father to retrieve her mother, who has abruptly abandoned the family. Katia, obsessed as she is with learning what being a woman truly means—how free a woman’s freedom can actually be—is shocked when she arrives in Mexico and learns her mother has fallen in love with another woman. Throughout these stories, Mexico is the source of both mystery and clarity, whether through characters’ histories as immigrants or children of immigrants, or because, as happens frequently, the characters in these tales must travel there, like Dorothy to Oz, to unlock knowledge which often has the potential to alter their lives.

Castillo’s truth-seeking characters leave an impression.



**THE ENCHANTED HACIENDA**

*Cervantes, J.C.*  
Park Row Books (368 pp.)  
\$30.00 | May 16, 2023  
9780778334057

A 20-something returns home to find the magic within herself in this heart-warming tale.

Harlow Estrada has just had the worst day: She was let go from her dream job as a book editor and broke up with her boyfriend, a lawyer, after she overheard him mocking her at a party celebrating his own promotion. It’s a good thing she’d already been planning to go down to Hacienda Estrada, the family flower farm in Mexico, since her mother and aunt are gathering all her sisters and cousins for a special announcement. This isn’t just any farm: It’s full of magic that’s been passed down for generations in Harlow’s family, magic that only she didn’t inherit. Despite this, for some reason Harlow is the one chosen for the family’s magic-related task, and she must muster up the confidence to deal with the mishaps, troubles, and charismatic young men that come along with it to ultimately figure out what she truly wanted all along. Cervantes has created a charming world, the kind of place that anyone would want to spend time. The magic system, a combination of person-specific traits and magical flowers, is original and cozy, never entirely explained and yet incredibly familiar. Harlow’s family is similar, a warm hug of a group, sometimes causing friction but mostly showering Harlow with love. Each sister and cousin is interesting in her own right and could easily lead to her own follow-up book.

Though the beats of the book are fairly easy to predict, that doesn’t take away from the story. If anything, it heightens it as Harlow comes into her own in multiple areas of her life, from writing to family to love.

An enchantingly comfortable romantic dramedy.



**FLUX**

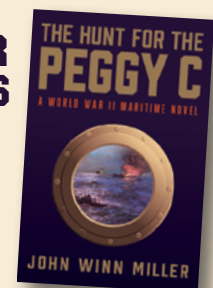
*Chong, Jimwoo*  
Melville House (352 pp.)  
\$28.99 | March 21, 2023  
9781685890346



A marketing exec unknowingly makes a devil’s bargain when he’s offered a job that’s too good to be true.

More literary alchemy than timey-wimey SF, Chong’s debut novel falls right on the emotional bubble between the cult film *Donnie Darko* and Charles Yu’s noodle-bender *Interior*

**WW2 MARITIME THRILLER THAT’S WINNING AWARDS & RAVE REVIEWS**



“...electrifying...the author’s knowledge of the relevant historical material...is extraordinary...A captivating, action-packed thriller that’s historically astute.”  
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“This superior maritime thriller finds an American captain smuggling Jewish refugees as Nazis prowl.”  
—*BookLife Reviews at Publishers Weekly, Editor’s Pick*

“Library collections on the lookout for vivid World War II accounts and lively plots will find *The Hunt for the Peggy C* a winning attraction.”  
—*Midwest Book Review*

**The Hunt for the Peggy C by John Winn Miller**



Published by Bancroft Press

978-1-61088-570-6 (HC)  
978-1-61088-572-0 (Ebook)  
978-1-61088-574-4 (Audio)



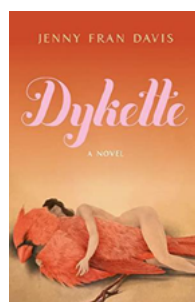
For Film Rights: Bruce L. Bortz, Esq., Publisher, Bancroft Press, 410-627-0608 (cell) bruceb@bancroftpress.com



*Chinatown* (2020). The narrative throughline pivots on one very strange day for 28-year-old Brandon, who's half Korean, queer, and confused most of the time. Working for one of America's last magazines, he's not really surprised when he's fired a few days before Christmas. After he uncharacteristically buys an expensive handbag and makes a pass at the salesclerk, he falls down an elevator shaft. Then he's offered a job by Lev, a fast-talking raconteur who works for Flux, a Silicon Valley-flavored startup founded by enigmatic Io Emsworth, a doppelgänger for convicted charlatan Elizabeth Holmes promising an equally nebulous breakthrough. By the time these machinations start revolving, Chong has already broken the timeline. When 8-year-old Bo loses his mother in a car accident, he becomes obsessed with the 1980s detective show *Raider*. The show's legacy is both groundbreaking for star Antonin Haubert's portrayal of an Asian police detective and "the most racist fucking thing I've ever seen in my life," according to Lev, compounded by its star's spectacular fall from grace. Meanwhile, Blue, 48, is navigating life after two months spent in a coma and a tenuous relationship with his ex and their daughter. Every day, Brandon

comes to work, eats his breakfast, and then...he doesn't know what happens, but he's losing days and weeks at a time. In a story about identity, our hero isn't always the most sympathetic cast member even in a story flush with fakers. The fantastical elements lend intrigue, but Chong seems more interested in grief and the ways it shapes us than rewarming old chestnuts about art and the nature of blame.

**A paranoid and inventive cautionary tale about buying into someone else's glitchy utopia.**



**DYKETTE**

Davis, Jenny Fran  
Henry Holt (320 pp.)  
\$26.99 | May 16, 2023  
9781250843135

In her first novel for adults, Davis explores what happens when people are isolated physically while remaining very much online.

Over the course of 10 days—as 2019 turns into 2020—three New York couples convene for an ostensibly bucolic holiday getaway. Cable-news host Jules Todd and her partner, therapist/podcaster Miranda Saraf, are the “queer elders” with enough money and enough of a sense of domesticity to own a second home in the Hudson Valley. Lou runs a home-goods shop in Bushwick that has been featured in *Vogue*. Their new girlfriend, Darcy, retails coveted fashions on the Lower East Side. Perhaps more importantly, she's leggy and gorgeous and has a blue checkmark next to her name on Insta. Jesse is a set decorator by trade and a “Renaissance butch” by inclination. He's there with Sasha, a graduate student working on a cultural history of femininity as defined by small spaces and miniaturized objects. Most of the story is narrated from Sasha's point of view, and if the descriptions of the main characters seem hyperspecific, it's because Sasha is acutely aware of both status and LGBTQ+ typology. How readers react to this novel will largely depend on how they react to Sasha. Both she and her creator clearly understand that she's a whole situation—radically insecure and spectacularly self-involved, emotionally demanding but never not playing a role, impulsive while never losing sight of her immediate goal. During the time covered by this narrative, her immediate goal is to not let Darcy replace her as the adorable bimbo in this particular ménage. The battle for high-femme dominance comes to a head when Jesse and Darcy collaborate on a piece of livestreamed performance art that Sasha perceives not just as infidelity, but also as a parody of her sweetly pink aesthetic.

**A view of contemporary queer life presented by a spectacularly unreliable narrator.**

**Birdie Pesky Was Here**  
The Story of the Big Bad Buxom Blonde Boston Bank Boost  
Andrew Augustine Connor

“A spiraling account of a fictional historical heist...a rowdy and unpredictable thriller that teeters on the edge of believable from start to finish, making it easy to forget that this novel is a wildly creative piece of imagination.”  
—Self-Publishing Review

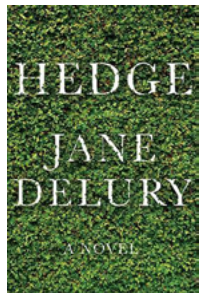
ISBN-13: 979-8843786519 [paperback]  
ISBN-13: 979-8843790295 [hardcover]

**“An engrossing tale with a touch of suspense and a fuzzy paranormal element.”**  
—Kirkus Reviews

For Information on Film Rights, Email  
andrewaugustine@yahoo.com

“A persuasive, quietly satisfying portrait of a woman’s midlife crisis and the essential choices she makes.”

HEDGE

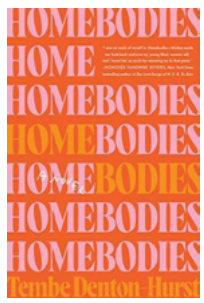


**HEDGE**  
*Delury, Jane*  
 Zibby Books (272 pp.)  
 \$26.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9798985282856

The romance that arrives in the life of a woman moving on from her marriage turns out to be more of a problematic beginning than a happy ending.

Maud, a 40-year-old garden historian in San Francisco, has had enough of her pretense of a marriage to Peter, which also denied her the opportunity to follow her career. Now, spending the summer working on the restoration of a formal Victorian garden in New York’s Hudson Valley, and separated from her husband, she finds herself falling for Gabriel, an archaeologist who’s attached to the same project. But Maud’s two daughters have arrived to join her for two months and need her attention, especially sensitive, moody 13-year-old Ella, who seems jealous of Maud and is flirting with Gabriel. The tension among the group reaches a crisis point as Peter comes to visit and Ella disappears, leading to revelations that will require Maud to stay married and put her children’s needs first. Back in San Francisco, trying to make things work with Peter and assist Ella on her long road to recovery, Maud finds a new, local restoration job involving the garden of Hispanic settlers and looks back with a critical eye on “the collateral damage of that heedless summer.” Then she meets Alice Lincoln, a wealthy artist who might underwrite the current garden project, and they become friends, distracting Maud from her musings about Gabriel, sex, and a life free from compromise. But the association with Alice leads unexpectedly to further ruptures that will blow Maud’s life open even more drastically. Delury’s sharply drawn portrait of anguish, loneliness, fear, and desire is less innovative and more slender than her noted debut, *The Balcony* (2018). But dodging romantic predictability while acknowledging the heart’s true priorities, it delivers an engaging new journey from ignorance to knowledge via a garden.

A persuasive, quietly satisfying portrait of a woman’s midlife crisis and the essential choices she makes.

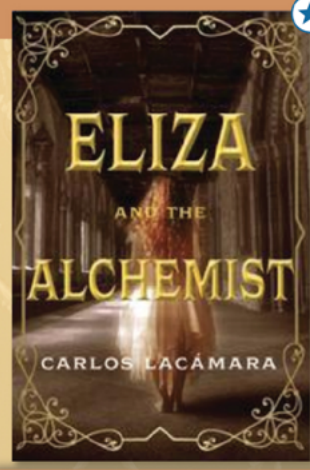


**HOMEBODIES**  
*Denton-Hurst, Tembe*  
 Harper/HarperCollins (320 pp.)  
 \$30.00 | May 2, 2023  
 9780063274280

A young Black woman contends with New York media culture.

Mickey Hayward’s shiny writing job is not as great as she’d hoped it would be. “Instead of reporting on the goings on of Black life,” Denton-Hurst writes in her engaging debut, Mickey “was making listicles about the best lipsticks for every skin tone.” But when she’s abruptly

fired from her position, Mickey is devastated and thrown into a depression that forces her to reconsider every aspect of her life—including her relationship with her girlfriend, Lex. For a break, Mickey takes off for her Maryland hometown, where she reconnects with old friends and tries to decide what to do with herself next. Full of contradictions, Mickey makes for an interesting protagonist—but very few of the other characters seem fully formed. Denton-Hurst’s descriptions of the publishing landscape are witty, as when she observes, “Every editor, writer, and intern believed they had a New York media memoir brewing just beneath the surface,” or when Mickey agonizes over a casual text message to her editor: “‘Of course!’ she wrote back, wondering if one exclamation point was enough.” But when Mickey heads for Maryland, the book starts to drag. Denton-Hurst has the novice writer’s habit of overwriting: Every action is engulfed by unnecessary description. For example, “Mickey toed off her sneakers before continuing inside, peeling off her coat and hanging her keys on the small hook in the entry.” The verbiage slows down the action and distracts from Denton-Hurst’s otherwise astute observations about media culture,



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY.  
LET’S GO TO HELL.**

“A wacky paranormal novel centers on a college student who’s at least partly responsible for hell’s newly open gates’ unleashing demons.”

“Actor and playwright Lacámara’s first novel presents a bracing, animated tale.”

ISBN: 979-8-9867427-0-0

“The author surely has a sequel in mind, as this novel ends with unanswered questions, suggesting that further adventures await Eliza.”

“A delightfully bizarre and rollicking supernatural comedy with colorful humans and ghastly monsters.”  
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) Ⓢ

FOR AGENT REPRESENTATION OR INFORMATION ON PUBLISHING AND FILM RIGHTS, VISIT [CLACAMARA.COM](http://CLACAMARA.COM)



## ON THE COVER

# NANA KWAME ADJEI-BRENYAH

The author's first novel, *Chain-Gang All-Stars*, is a wild imagining of the penal system as a form of mass entertainment

BY GENE SEYMOUR



Alex M. Philip

people they find threatening just by being in the same space. The euphemism applied by the park's managers to this dubious form of entertainment is "problem-solving."

Such high-concept satire—droll, mordant, and unnervingly plausible—typifies most of the stories in Adjei-Brenyah's critically acclaimed collection. And in his first novel, *Chain-Gang All-Stars* (Pantheon, April 4), he has extended the theme of commodifying institutional racism into entertainment.

*Chain-Gang All-Stars* imagines an alternate present in which one-on-one death matches between convicted, condemned felons are broadcast live from standing-room-only arenas all over America thanks to something called Criminal Action Penal Entertainment as part of the growing privatization of the prison industry and the world's seemingly insatiable appetite for violent competitive spectacle.

The novel's central character is Loretta Thurwar, CAPE's brightest star by virtue of her winning record; having withstood three years of brutal, bloody triumphs, she is close to winning clemency, commutation, or a full pardon. The prospect deeply upsets her lover and sister gladiator Hamara Stacker, better known to her legion of fans as Hurricane Staxxx, who tends to weep copiously after each of her own victories. The novel takes in not just these two put-upon inmates, but their fellow all-stars; the guards and handlers who viciously keep them in line; and those who protest the games, the legislation that created them, and the whole penal system. Kirkus' starred review calls *Chain-Gang* "an up-to-the-minute j'accuse that speaks to the eternal question of what it means to be free. Or human."

"I LIKE TO THINK," says Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, "that a lot of my work operates in a state between extreme hyperbole and understatement." Another way of putting it: The tone of his fiction is mostly deadpan, while its content often screams with urgency.

Take "Zimmer Land," one of the stories in Adjei-Brenyah's 2018 debut, *Friday Black*. The story takes its title from a mythical theme park whose White patrons are encouraged to act out their fantasies of dealing harshly, even violently, with Black



In an interview conducted over Zoom from his home in the Bronx, Adjei-Brenyah says he got the idea for the novel while gathering stories for *Friday Black* and that the concept was originally destined to be part of that collection.

“At first, it was going to be just about Thurwar,” he says. “And it was going to be her recollecting her time with this program and just when she was about to be free. And at some point, I said to myself, *Wait a minute!* I started thinking about the insidious nature of solitary confinement. Then I thought about the whole history of prisons and the Auburn system [a 19th-century penal method in which prisoners worked in groups by day and were kept in solitary at night].

“That’s when I realized I needed to do more research about this,” he continues. “And the deeper I got into the subject, the whole philosophy behind prisons and punishment, the more I knew it was [too much] for a short story, where all you get is the tip of the iceberg and maybe, at best, a single perspective. With a novel, you deal with different angles, different points of view, fleshing out characters, and dealing with different settings as you’re also shaving off what you don’t need to make it more precise and direct, and just generally finding your way to the end.”

He sums up the novel-writing process as “a lot of years of swimming to shore with no shore in sight. It was scary.”

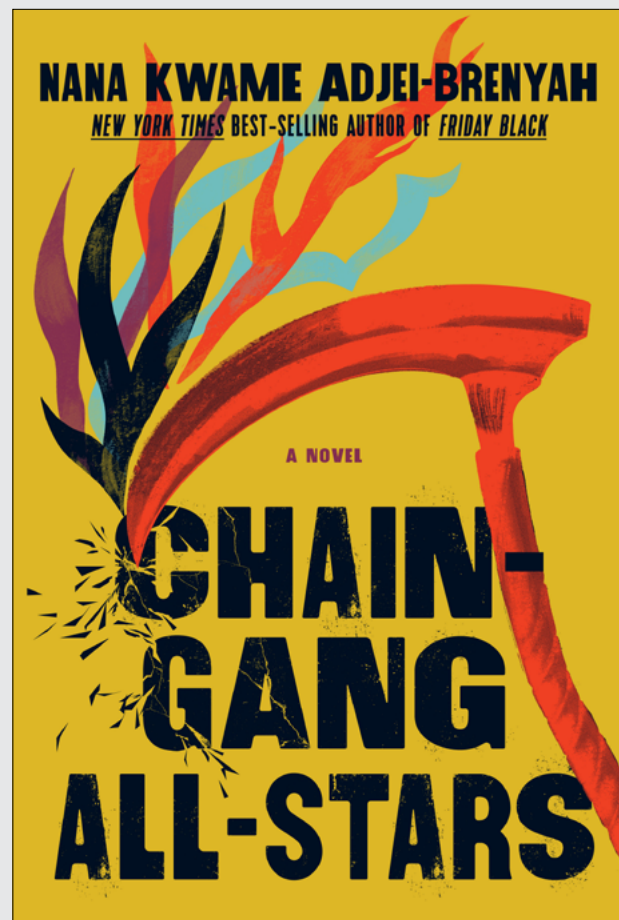
Born to Ghanaian immigrants 32 years ago in Queens, Adjei-Brenyah grew up in Rockland County, New York. From childhood, he was made aware of the racial and social inequities in the legal system from conversations with his father, a criminal justice attorney. He was also galvanized by Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, the influential inquiry into the disproportionate incarceration of people of color. After graduating from SUNY Albany in 2013, he worked with the Rockland Coalition to End the New Jim Crow, an organization that, in its own words, works “towards ending the use of the criminal justice system as a tool of racial oppression.”

Adjei-Brenyah’s research comes through not only in his novel’s imaginative depiction of CAPE’s establishment and ruthless procedures, but also in footnotes that both augment the fictional narrative and offer historical facts related to the past

and present of the American penal system. (“And I’m not exactly a footnotes person,” he said wryly.) One such footnote caps the true story of a 14-year-old African American boy who, in 1944, became the youngest person executed in the U.S.; we learn that 20 years later he was exonerated of the crime for which he was electrocuted—and that 186 wrongly convicted prisoners have been executed since 1973.

As he did more and more research, Adjei-Brenyah wanted to “engage” the underlying principle in our criminal justice system that “those who do harm deserve to be harmed,” he says. “I feel like that’s another way of saying at our core we are not a compassionate society, and I think that speaks to almost all my work. Until we address that reality, it’s really hard for us to progress to a more compassionate, more loving space.”

*Gene Seymour, a writer in Philadelphia, has contributed to the Nation, the New Republic, and CNN.com. Chain-Gang All-Stars received a starred review in the Feb. 15, 2023, issue.*

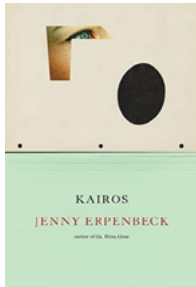


# “A sage, brainy study of language and history.”

AUSTRAL

race, and the experience of a young woman trying to make her way in the world.

**An intriguing but imperfect debut.**



## KAIROS

*Erpenbeck, Jenny*  
*Trans. by Michael Hofmann*  
 New Directions (336 pp.)  
 \$29.95 | June 6, 2023  
 9780811229340

A thorny love affair and a momentous historical moment combine in this novel by prizewinning German playwright and author Erpenbeck, author of *Go, Went, Gone* (2017), etc.

Structured as a series of flashbacks, the novel begins with news of a funeral. Cut to East Berlin in the 1980s and a chance encounter on a public bus. Katharina, 19, meets Hans, a married

writer 10 years older than her father. Erpenbeck evokes their early all-consuming passion, fueled by sex and a shared love of music and art, and deftly overlaps their points of view. “Why a love that has to be kept secret can make a person so much happier than one that can be talked about is something she wishes she could understand....Perhaps because a secret is not spent on the present, but keeps its full force for the future? Or is it something to do with the potential for destruction that one suddenly has?” As time passes, rifts and menaces appear. The lovers, from different generations, have experienced different Germanies. “Only a very thin layer of soil is spread over the bones, the ashes of the incinerated victims,” Katharina thinks. “There is no other walking, ever, for a German than over the skulls.” From her apartment in Berlin, she can see the Berlin Wall. Erpenbeck’s handling of characters caught within the mesh (and mess) of history is superb. Threats loom over their love and over their country. Hans is jealous, weak-willed, vindictive, Katharina self-abasing. At heart the book is about cruelty more than passion, about secrets, betrayal, and loss; it’s at its best as the Wall comes down. “Everything is collapsing,” Erpenbeck writes. “The landscape between the old that is being abolished and the new that is yet to be installed is a landscape of ruins.”

**The personal and the political echo artfully in the last years of the German Democratic Republic.**

**Coming Full Circle**  
 A Sweeping Saga of Conservation Stewardship  
 Across America

**An award-winning rewrite of United States history that everyone will feel good about**

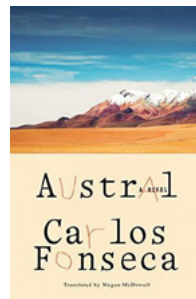
“...a worthy read... a text for our times...”  
 —Reader Views

ISBN: 978-1-80074-568-1

“Using a blend of historical fiction and poignant truths, the narrative delivers a spirited discourse on conservation, our environment, oneness, and, chiefly, the concept of coming full circle.”  
 —The US Review of Books

“An adventurous, passionate historical novel about an eco-friendly balance between humans and nature.”  
 —Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email [btitlow@aol.com](mailto:btitlow@aol.com) • [buddtitlow.com](http://buddtitlow.com)



## AUSTRAL

*Fonseca, Carlos*  
*Trans. by Megan McDowell*  
 Farrar, Straus and Giroux (224 pp.)  
 \$27.00 | May 23, 2023  
 9780374606657

A literature professor is compelled to untangle a mentor’s posthumous writings in this work of metafiction.

Julio Gamboa, the protagonist of Costa Rica-born Fonseca’s third novel, has headed from Cincinnati to a small town in northern Argentina’s desert, where Aliza Abravanel, a friend and mentor from decades back, has recently died. Aliza was a brilliant novelist and photojournalist, but a stroke rendered her mute in the last decade of her life and slowed her career. Still, she’s completed a pair of unpublished manuscripts, titled *Sketches for a Private Language* and *Dictionary of Loss*, and one of her dying wishes is that Julio read them. Cue a knotty travelogue of intellectual and South American terrain. Julio explores Aliza’s past, which has a loose connection to New Germany, a haven for antisemites founded in Paraguay in the 1880s; in a roundabout way, that ugly history is passed down to Aliza’s father and then Aliza herself. The prevailing themes are clear: violence, colonialism, and how many stories of both go unspoken or land in “that invisible border where fiction blurred into memory.” But Fonseca approaches this in a variety of registers, from semiotic musings on the expressive capacity of language (there’s a fair number of Wittgenstein references), history lessons (much of the story touches on the 1980s Guatemalan genocide), and Aliza’s

writings, which blend fact and fiction, image and text. Which is to say that Fonseca conjures a very Sebald-ian mood, and translator McDowell ably distinguishes his purposeful stylistic shifts. The reader may feel much like Julio does when reading Aliza's manuscripts: "too many possible points of entry, too many coded trajectories." But as a study of the confusions of history and the challenge of language to get the story right, it's an admirably complex, intellectually searching work.

**A sage, brainy study of language and history.**



**SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT**

*Forrey, Avery Carpenter*  
 Mariner Books (304 pp.)  
 \$28.99 | May 23, 2023  
 9780063294905

A young woman's retrospective on a year that changed everything.

It's six hours after Callie Holt's wedding, and her marriage is already over. While lounging in her pizza-stained wedding dress in the honeymoon suite's bathtub (which she compares to a casket), Callie scrolls through photos on her phone and lands on one she took with her best friend, Virginia Murphy, on the day they moved in together. Callie thinks the day of the picture "marked the rising...of the strangest year of my life—the bright start of an arc that could only end in darkness." From there, Forrey transports us back 13 months so we can witness the disaster unfold. Callie has just moved into an apartment on New York's Upper East Side owned by Virginia's



**PALADINS WERE MADE FOR SHARP CONFLICT,  
 NOT SKULKING AROUND IN THE SHADOWS.**

"...a promising start to a series that will be enjoyed by high-fantasy fans."  
 —LoveReading UK

"A fast-paced high fantasy quest in the tradition of Dungeons & Dragons with bloody, action-packed battle sequences aplenty...solid world building, a strong protagonist, and a spirited cast of familiar fantasy characters."  
 —IndieReader

"...an impressive scope. Although there is a complete story arc with a satisfying ending, this volume is just the start of a much larger saga."  
 —Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

ISBN-13: 978-0228868668 [paperback]  
 ISBN-13: 978-0228868675 [hardcover]  
 ISBN-13: 978-0228868682 [eBook]

**FOR AGENT REPRESENTATION OR INFORMATION ON PUBLISHING AND FILM RIGHTS,  
 EMAIL FAT.PALADIN.CONTACT@GMAIL.COM • FATPALADIN.CA**

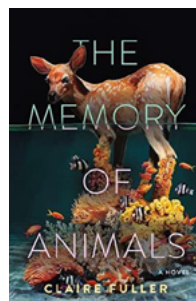


“A former marine biologist struggles to survive a global pandemic while reconciling with her difficult past.”

THE MEMORY OF ANIMALS

parents, Mimi and Walter. They have known Callie since she was a child and love her like she was one of their own. Except Callie is not one of them, a fact that she’s constantly reminded of because of their money and her lack thereof. When Callie has a meet-cute with handsome Whit Harris on the subway, it seems like her life may be finally falling into place—except that she can’t stop thinking about Virginia’s cousin Ollie, whom she secretly dated in college and whose carelessness with her feelings leaves her constantly trying to prove that she’s worthy of his love. Combine this with an eating disorder, friendship jealousy, and trauma from losing her father when she was a teenager, and Callie’s growing relationship with Whit starts to take a back seat. The novel centers mostly on the year leading up to the wedding but includes some flashbacks, particularly to Callie’s college days, and flash-forwards to the wedding. The novel is overcrowded, and the subplot of Callie’s trying to finish her late father’s novel in progress feels pretty muddled. Despite the book’s flaws, Forrey’s gift for making the everyday feel compelling shines throughout.

An absorbing, if sometimes unconvincing, novel about the trials of navigating adulthood.



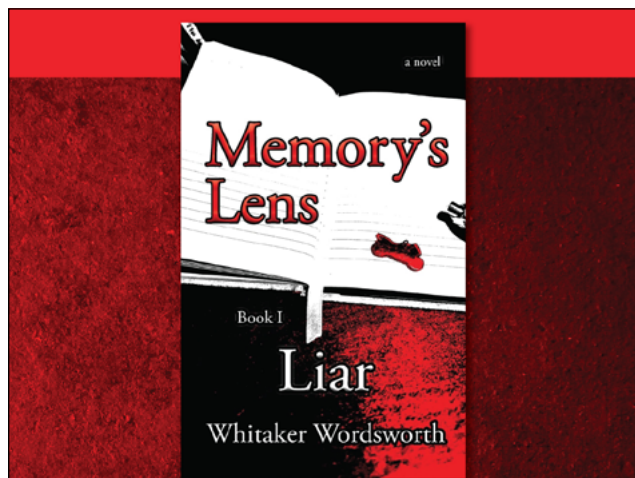
THE MEMORY OF ANIMALS

Fuller, Claire  
Tin House (304 pp.)  
\$27.95 | June 6, 2023  
9781953534873

A former marine biologist struggles to survive a global pandemic while reconciling with her difficult past.

In a future that bears an uncanny resemblance to the present, Neffy, a 27-year-old former marine biologist, registers for an experimental vaccine trial, perhaps the last chance to halt a devastating worldwide pandemic. While spending three weeks in a hospital in London, Neffy and four other volunteers—Rachel, Piper, Yahiko, and Leon—watch in horror as the outside world slides further into chaos and debate what they will and won’t do to try to make it out alive. Meanwhile, through experimental technology that enables people to revisit memories, which Leon was working on before the pandemic, Neffy is tempted to lose herself in the past, reliving a love affair, her childhood in England and Greece, and a brazen choice that led to the end of her career. Fuller, the author of the Costa Novel Award–winning *Unsettled Ground* (2021), among other books, excels in examining the everyday moments at the heart of a life: Rachel scrolling through the pictures on her phone, hoping that one day social media will come back; the group celebrating a birthday by drinking water and pretending that it’s vodka. In quotidian and thrilling moments alike, Fuller expertly grapples with the sickeningly real personal and ethical complexities of human survival. In the end, however, she seems to trade her attention to nuance for an ill-defined, ethereal optimism, especially in the hurried conclusion. The novel may end on a hopeful note, but in doing so, it compromises its potential to be a great post-apocalyptic novel and instead rises just above the recent spate of pandemic-inspired narratives.

A memorable meditation on how the human struggle to survive in captivity is not so different than that of our animal kin.



ISBN: 979-8986771007

“Many readers will find this thriller gripping from beginning to end; the slow revelations will keep them connected to the story, and the author’s facility at creating suspense will make them invested in what happens next.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation, Email whit@whitakerwordsworth.com  
whitakerwordsworth.com



THE MUSEUM OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

Gayle, Mike  
Grand Central Publishing (352 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 30, 2023  
9781538740835

A London woman finds secrets and more in an unusual British museum.

Jess Baxter has been having a rough year. She’s recently lost her beloved mother and has taken from her house a few bags of reminders: records, scarves, and a set of encyclopedias that her mother had given to her when she was 11 years old. There’s no room for the books at the apartment where Jess lives with her boyfriend, Guy, so she tries to donate them but

finds no takers—until her friend Luce tells her about an odd place called the Museum of Ordinary People, located in the warehouse of a house clearance company. When Jess takes her encyclopedias there, she meets Alex, who has just inherited the company—he’s not sure why, as he never knew the late owner, and news of the museum, located in a locked section of the warehouse, comes as another surprise to him, with its “row upon row of rusting industrial shelving units, all of which are crammed, like some sort of crazy church jumble sale, with all manner of objects.” Alex, a web designer, is planning to sell the company, but Jess convinces him to let her redesign and redevelop the museum for at least a little while. Over the next few weeks, Jess gets to know Alex, who’s been living somewhat in isolation, self-conscious about the scars that cover half of his face, and the two spend time together working on the restoration, in the process uncovering a few secrets that hit close to home. This novel is pure, unadulterated feel-good, and Gayle is a master puller of heartstrings. It radiates an unforced kind of goodwill, which makes up for some of the overly expository dialogue and unabashed sentimentality. Cynics will find themselves

rolling their eyes, but fans of uplifting-lit authors like Fredrik Backman will likely be suitably charmed.

**Unrelentingly sweet pop fiction.**



**THE CHATEAU**

*Goldis, Jaclyn*

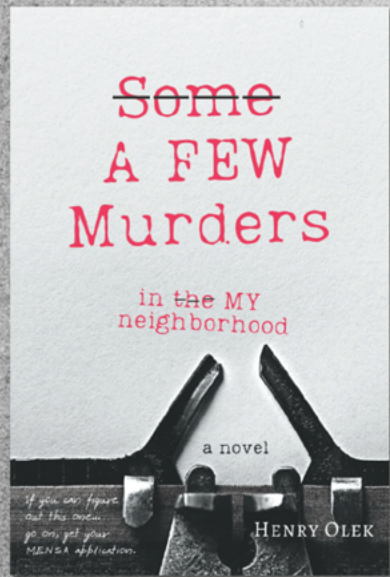
Emily Bestler/Atria (336 pp.)

\$27.99 | May 23, 2023

9781668013014

Provence is the stunning backdrop for this murder mystery, in which a much-anticipated vacation turns deadly and friends struggle to discover the killer in their midst.

Visiting the lush lavender fields and olive groves of the French countryside is a dream come true for Darcy, Jade, Vix, and Arabelle when Darcy’s Grand-mère Séraphine invites them to stay at her chateau. The women



ISBN: 979-8838416575

“In this novel, a man and a woman team up to solve seemingly unrelated crimes, both hoping to leave behind their ruts and find new directions for their lives.”

“In this charming mystery, veteran screenwriter Olek has created a memorable pair in April and Preston.”

“Olek’s engaging narrative flies along with April and Preston as they careen from one false lead to another, unbothered by failure. They’re a winning combination, hopefully one that the author will bring back for another case.”

“This delightful mystery succeeds in uniting two kindred souls in need of a change.”

—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email [henryol@pacbell.net](mailto:henryol@pacbell.net) • [henryolek.com](http://henryolek.com)



have known each other for decades and are looking forward to their reunion. But not long after their arrival *Séraphine* is stabbed to death. Reeling from the horrific attack, the four friends are even more unsettled when they receive a follow request from an anonymous Instagram account entitled @imwatchingyou88. The feed contains photos of the women at the chateau and includes menacing messages: “You can’t hide,” and “I know what you did. You won’t get away with it.” In the tradition of a classic Agatha Christie locked-room mystery, everyone in the chateau is a suspect, and each of the women may have a motive unknown to the other three. At least three of them have serious financial issues and could benefit if they are included in *Séraphine*’s will. Goldis is in firm control of her plotting and stealthily employs the unreliable narrator trope with alternating first-person chapters told by Darcy, Jade, Vix, and Arabelle as well as *Séraphine*; the groundskeeper, Raph; and *Séraphine*’s housekeeper, Sylvie. They all have reasons for hiding their truths, but past traumas and secrets slowly come to light. A messy extramarital affair, a missing Van Gogh painting, and a Holocaust-era

betrayal spin the plot toward shocking revelations that do not stop until the very last page.

**Sex, lies, and secrets turn deadly in this modern-day tale built on classic plot devices.**



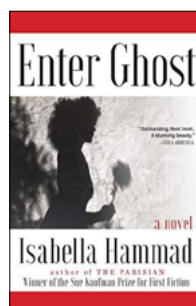
**THE PIGEON**

*Gordon, David*  
Mysterious Press (336 pp.)  
\$17.95 paper | June 13, 2023  
9781613164051

The theft of a caged bird may seem like no big deal, but in author Gordon’s hands the recovery mission assumes epic proportions.

Call Ramses II the Maltese Pigeon. He’s worth \$1 million, and his owner, Alonzo the breeder, convinced that he’s been stolen by billionaire Wing Chow, offers Joe Brody, the bouncer at their mutual friend Giovanni Caprisi’s Club Rendezvous in Queens, 5% of that sum to retrieve him. The job seems insultingly straightforward—sneak into the thief’s place in luxurious Manhattan co-op the Eleonora, open the cage, grab the pigeon, and leave—but Joe’s completed only the first of those steps when he’s detected on the premises and escapes only by the skin of his teeth. Curious about why the Eleonora is so well fortified, he asks Juno, his underage neighborhood hacker, to find out more, and it turns out there are excellent reasons that lead to a further pursuit of the would-be pigeon rescuer: four separate attempts on his life and a listing as a target on the online International Bounty Exchange. As Joe dodges the freelance assassins jockeying to claim their reward and the NYPD chases after the Parking Avenger, a wish-fulfilling vigilante who defaces illegally parked cars, Joe’s secret lover, FBI agent Donna Zamora, is given the equally trivial-sounding job of serving as guide and bodyguard to newly arrived refugee Col. Evon Kozco, who swiftly turns into an ardent pursuer of both her and a plush apartment in the Eleonora. Donna’s too jaundiced to rejoice in a swain more socially acceptable than the unofficial sheriff of New York’s mob scene, and her reservations are abundantly justified.

**Trust Gordon to whip a bunch of nothing into something breathtakingly over-the-top.**



**ENTER GHOST**

*Hammad, Isabella*  
Grove (336 pp.)  
\$28.00 | April 4, 2023  
9780802162380

An actress grapples with the political and contemporary significance of a classic tragedy.

Palestinian actress Sonia Nasir finds herself immersed in an essential drama, with repercussions extending beyond



**How a warrior for peace becomes a warlord: is this the future for the Levant?**

ISBN: 979-8359100328

**“An intriguing...tale that offers compelling, informed visions of a new Middle East.”**  
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation and Information on Publishing Rights, Email [david.tarr@yahoo.com](mailto:david.tarr@yahoo.com)



# “An entertaining shaggy dog of a futuristic whodunit.”

TITANIUM NOIR

the stages she is accustomed to, upon a visit to her older sister, Haneen, in Israel. The women’s paternal grandparents maintained their home in Haifa in 1948, giving the family a foothold both inside Israel and in the West Bank. Haneen and Sonia grew up in London, but their annual childhood summer visits provided them with familiarity and comfort in the Arab world and knowledge of life in the Israeli state. Sonia, who still lives in London, attempts to heal psychic wounds resulting from the unpleasant end of a love affair by paying a long-delayed visit to her sister. A politically aware academic, Haneen has been living in Haifa and working at a university in Tel Aviv. Sonia has not returned to Haifa since before the second intifada and must absorb the cultural, political, and familial changes that have occurred since. Almost immediately upon her arrival, she becomes involved in a production of *Hamlet* put on by a Palestinian theater company, directed by her sister’s energetic and passionate friend Mariam Mansour. The production is politically charged, employs classical Arabic, and challenges Sonia personally and professionally. When Sonia eventually agrees to undertake the role of Gertrude, she becomes immersed in macro and micro aspects of the production and develops varying degrees of closeness with the rest of the cast, Palestinian theater veterans all (except for the pop star slated for the lead role to attract attention to the production). A thorough and thoughtful exploration of the role of art in the political arena unfolds as Sonia and the troupe work through rehearsals toward performing a tragedy with contemporary resonance.

**Hammad provides a brutal update on a classic theme.**



## TITANIUM NOIR

*Harkaway, Nick*  
Knopf (256 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 16, 2023  
9780593535363

An SF-tinged romp that blends elements of the noir thriller and the picaresque novel.

Son of the late John le Carré, Harkaway comes by his moody thriller credentials honestly. Yet here he echoes

not his father so much as the Thomas Pynchon of *Inherent Vice*. His book stars schmo of a detective Cal Sounder, who’s pulled into a tangled tale of corporate intrigue and ethnic cuisine (“the Goan-Hungarian place is called Bela’s but the chef’s name is Atilla....His wife, Mări, runs the business and she’s the brains”). The men blunder through, for the most part, while the women do the thinking. One topic at the top of everyone’s list is why a “nerd,” as Sounder describes him, should be lying dead on his apartment floor, his outfit a pastiche of high-fashion pants, a clip-on tie, and orthotic shoes that “complete the anti-chic vibe.” Oh, and the dead nerd with the bullet in his brain is 7 feet, 8 inches tall and 91 years old: a superman, in other words, known in Harkaway’s metropolis of the near future as a Titan. And how does one get to be so old and gigantic? Therein lies a tale of genetic manipulation—familiar to fans of movies such as

*RoboCop* and *Elysium*—the mastermind of which is, naturally, a Very Bad Man—or half-man, half-whatever—named Stefan Tonfamecasca. The mad science required to produce a Titan might be intellectually interesting, but it has produced a few monsters to make Sounder’s life miserable. And, Tonfamecasca being the creator of a new life form, who knows how many to produce before “ruining that post-scarcity thing for the few”? There are the inevitable crooked cops and femmes fatales (some of them quite oversized) along with some fun culinary side notes (“Barbecue...is the only food apart from lobster where a grown man is permitted to wear a bib without criticism”) to pepper Harkaway’s tale.

**An entertaining shaggy dog of a futuristic whodunit.**

**HIT & SPLIT**  
Simon Green

INSPIRED BY A CONTENTIOUS INTERNATIONAL NEWS STORY, *HIT & SPLIT* IS A POWERFUL THRILLER WITH BROAD COMMERCIAL APPEAL FROM AN EXPERIENCED NON-FICTION PROFESSIONAL

“Stunning debut, totally immersive thriller...up there with the best while genuinely outclassing plenty of major household names.”  
—Warren Pole, Former Features & Investigations Writer for *The Times*

“...an intriguing...well-paced page-turner... dramatic...appealing...humorous and emotional...”

“An engaging tale...surprisingly endearing...”  
—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 979-8837056529

Publisher/Agent Sought • Completed Sequel Available  
Contact: [simon@shotbysimon.com](mailto:simon@shotbysimon.com) • [shotbysimon.com](http://shotbysimon.com)



### BLOOD OF THE VIRGIN

*Harkham, Sammy*  
Pantheon (296 pp.)  
\$30.00 | May 2, 2023  
9780593316696



The monsters aren't just on screen in this lurid graphic novel from Harkham about a horror-film editor with dreams of directing, his dissatisfied wife, his manipulative boss, and his alcoholic and

occasionally violent colleagues.

Seymour loves horror movies and came to Hollywood to make them. In 1971, he mostly works as an editor at a small studio, but one day his boss wants to buy a script that Seymour has been shopping around. Despite his initial hesitation that the script isn't right for the film his boss wants to make to satisfy an investor, Seymour seizes the opportunity. His commitment to his work causes tension with his wife, Ida, who regularly berates him for neglecting household responsibilities but tolerates

the all-night, drug-fueled debaucheries Seymour attends at his boss's mansion. Though Ida repeatedly rebuffs Seymour's amorous advances, while he's away she pleasures herself on the couch while their baby wails from another room. When the shoot of Seymour's script faces logistical pressures, the studio gives Seymour an even bigger opportunity (enough rope to hang himself with?), and Ida takes their son on an open-ended visit to her family in New Zealand, where she spends time with childhood friends, including an old flame. Harkham weaves a psychologically complex tale, balancing the bad behavior of Hollywood with an intriguingly pragmatic look at the movie-making process. Seymour's passion for film and his conflicted conscience keep us reasonably sympathetic to him as he self-destructs, perhaps mostly because of his desire for Ida even as his stresses and urges don't exactly keep him committed to her. Harkham's text delivers punchy banter and sly sound effects, while his exceptionally expressive art is equal parts comic strip and cinema.

**A finely crafted look at the complexities and grotesqueries of Hollywood and the human heart.**



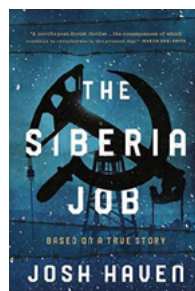
"The author starts his time-leaping, dimension-folding epic 'a few hundred years into the fourth millennium of the common era.'"

"...Blair acknowledges a wide spectrum of intriguing influences, ranging from classic SF author Arthur C. Clarke to director Alfred Hitchcock..."

ISBN: 979-8-9859094-7-0

"At the heart of this storm of concepts is what appears to be a loving homage to literary creativity and imagination itself."

—Kirkus Reviews



### THE SIBERIA JOB

*Haven, Josh*  
Mysterious Press (384 pp.)  
\$26.95 | June 6, 2023  
9781613164075

In post-Soviet Russia, a get-rich-quick scheme proves too good to be true—and deadly, to boot.

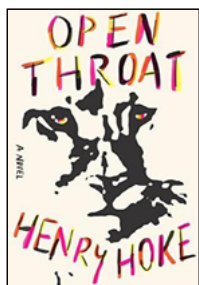
June 2, 1994. Businessman John Mills, sick of London, sick of banking, and homesick for Texas and his family, abruptly quits his job with an investment bank and buys a plane ticket to Dallas. But a chance airport encounter with slick Czech Petr Kovac turns his life upside down and takes him on a wild and sometimes scary escapade. Following a Czech model, the new Russian government has privatized industry and distributed vouchers of partial ownership to citizens. Buying up the Czech vouchers from clueless fellow countrymen has made Petr rich, and now he plans to do the same thing in Russia. Petr downplays the potential dangers: Their efforts make them business partners with Bratya (that is, Mafia), who manufacture counterfeit cigarettes, but no worries. Shrewd Russian beauty Anna Scherbatskaya proves a helpful guide and romantic partner for Petr. The rocky road to wealth untold takes the trio through hedonistic night spots, a forest bordello, and a series of oligarchs demanding their share. The most engaging aspect of this caper, which is based on a true story, is its depiction of this bizarre moment in recent Russian history. Haven, who describes post-Soviet Russia as "the Wild Wild West of the East," makes his protagonist a keen and often wide-eyed observer and invites readers to make their own judgments. The tale slides smoothly from adventure to culture-clash drollery to tense crime yarn.

**A colorful depiction of recent history wrapped in a comic caper. Think Donald Westlake with a Slavic accent.**



“Compassionate, fierce, and bittersweet, this is an unforgettable love letter to the wild.”

OPEN THROAT



**OPEN THROAT**

*Hoke, Henry*  
MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux (176 pp.)  
\$25.00 | June 6, 2023  
9780374609870



A mountain lion ekes out a lonely existence below the Hollywood sign in this singular, stunning novel.

The narrator of Hoke’s fifth book (after the memoir *Sticker*) cannot share the name his mother gave him because “it’s not made of noises a person can make,” but it might be fair to refer to him as P-22. That puma, to whom the book is movingly dedicated, lived in Los Angeles’ Griffith Park from 2012 to 2022 and was the subject of much adoration and occasional concern. Driven from where he was born by a violent and territorial father, Hoke’s leonine protagonist is forced to brave the highway that he refers to as “the long death” to survive. That tenacious act strands him on

the other side, however, and forces him to make a life defined by his proximity to humans rather than his fellow big cats. As he overhears hikers in conversation, recognizes a shared queerness with men having a covert tryst, and comes to care for the unhomed people camping in the park and an aspiring teenage witch, the mountain lion makes sense of who he is and finds an indelible place in readers’ hearts. Hoke’s prose is a joy, as it alternately charms with malapropisms (as when the cougar wonders what a “scare city mentality” is) and stuns with poetic simplicity (“a father to a kitten is an absence / a grown cat to a father is a threat”).

**Compassionate, fierce, and bittersweet, this is an unforgettable love letter to the wild.**

**“The offbeat second daughter of a French mother and a Montana-born Marine recounts her struggles and romances in this contemporary novel.”**

**“This novel is a rather rollicking melodrama of ‘what’s going to happen next?’ to Johanna, with her ending up having wide-ranging and exciting experiences, including romances with a struggling but soon-to-be famous Irish singer and a rich Swiss banker.”**

**“A richly detailed...tale of a spirited hero’s adventures.”**  
—**Kirkus Reviews**

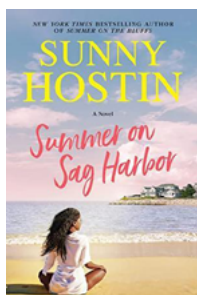
ISBN-13: 979-8764360027

FOR AGENT REPRESENTATION OR INFORMATION ON PUBLISHING AND FILM RIGHTS, EMAIL [RXM76@YAHOO.COM](mailto:RXM76@YAHOO.COM)



“A remarkable exploration of what it is to believe, to lose, and to start again.”

MINOR PROPHETS



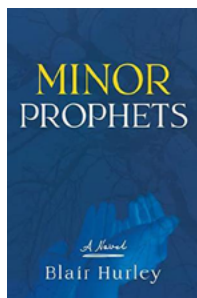
### SUMMER ON SAG HARBOR

Hostin, *Sunny*  
Morrow/HarperCollins (416 pp.)  
\$27.99 | May 2, 2023  
9780062994219

An elite Black enclave in the Hamptons welcomes its newest resident, hoping she'll help preserve the integrity of the community.

When investment banking whiz Olivia Jones arrives in Sag Harbor (packing her Sergio Hudson mohair poncho, her Dior limited edition tote, and other brand-name essentials) to claim the home she's inherited from her late godfather, she quickly bonds with the longtime residents—other wealthy, accomplished Black women as well as a genial older real estate agent, a gentleman with connections to her family and memories of the father Olivia never knew. Not fitting in quite as easily is Anderson, Olivia's White boyfriend, an Uber driver and stand-up comedian. Though the two got along great during lockdown in Manhattan and “his words and presence were like chamomile lavender tea on a cold winter night” and his “cheekbones [could] cut diamonds,” poor Anderson simply is not going to be able to hold his own against new next-door neighbor Garrett Brooks, a Black single dad and veritable love god. Garrett was just about to sign a deal to sell his home to the real estate developers who are trying to take over the area, but the arrival of the exquisite Olivia, and her alliance with the locals who are fighting the developers, seems poised to press pause on those plans. Meanwhile, Olivia starts therapy with the insightful Dr. LaGrange to work herself free of the burdens she bears due to a pyramid of losses and betrayals in her past. The family history is complicated and will be quite a bit easier to follow if you've recently read the first book in the series, *Summer on the Bluffs* (2021), which introduces Olivia's godparents and their three talented goddaughters, setting up the history of secrets and connections that continue to unfold here. A few steamy bedroom scenes provide all the “velvet hammer sliding into silk” and ice-cream-cone metaphors you could ever want.

The political and social dynamics of Sag Harbor are fascinating even if some of the writing is a bit eye-rolling.



### MINOR PROPHETS

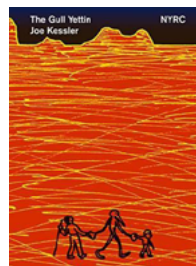
Hurley, *Blair*  
Ig Publishing (280 pp.)  
\$17.95 paper | April 18, 2023  
9781632461490

Hurley probes the complexities of religious extremism, fraught family relationships, and the legacies of abuse in her subtle but engrossing second novel.

Nora is a hospice nurse struggling to come to terms with life outside the apocalyptic Christian cult in which she was raised. The cult

leader, Nora's father, teaches that “once the sin is in you, it only ever goes deeper,” and the relationship between faith and fear is arguably the core of the novel, which Hurley explores with deep empathy. The combination of a declining economy and increasingly volatile political milieu leads a group of disaffected people to come together to search for a better life. Hurley writes that the “plagues” of the contemporary U.S. are “amorphous and baffling: job losses, opioids, deaths of despair”—and shows how these systemic failures can be used to manipulate desperate people. Nora speaks in tongues to the growing cult, foreseeing the end of the world and promising that by following her father, they'll be led to salvation. When the group relocates to the remote wilderness of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Hurley captures the area's harsh natural beauty in glorious prose, providing the reader some respite in a novel with very few points of light. The visceral descriptions of the cult's survival techniques—hunting, boiling pine needles for protein, making herbal treatments for beaten women—draw the reader into the dark, insular world hidden among the trees. Hurley's writing is beguiling, working analogously to the rhetoric of the cult. Even as the reader witnesses the manipulations, lies, and performances, it's clear how familiarity, family, and isolation work to draw lost souls in. Nora's eventual escape, her life in Chicago, and battle to stay away from the remaining cult members speak to the ways trauma haunts people. By paying specific attention to the misogynist Nora experiences during and after her time in the cult, Hurley exposes the violence done to women as ubiquitous—and categorically not limited to secular society. This is a deeply intimate novel, capturing what is in essence a survivor's tale.

A remarkable exploration of what it is to believe, to lose, and to start again.



### THE GULL YETTIN

Kessler, *Joe*  
New York Review Comics  
(216 pp.)  
\$19.95 paper | May 2, 2023  
9781681377391

A supernatural creature takes interest in a young boy, and both suffer ordeals and wrestle with their worst instincts in this wordless, psychedelic graphic novel.

On a family outing in the city, a young boy tosses a button to a sea gull, attracting the attention of a lanky, long-nosed, humanoid creature who follows the boy and his family back to their home and perches in a tree outside. That night, an explosive fire orphans the boy and lands him in the hospital. After holding vigil from a nearby branch, the creature escorts the boy out the window of his hospital room, and they set off on a long canoe ride through a gaudy, abstract landscape. The creature provides what comfort it can as grief and hunger overwhelm the boy. Eventually a storm swamps their canoe, and the creature struggles to shore with the boy in its arms, where a woman—distressed by the sight—strikes the creature with a pitchfork



and absconds with the boy. She nurses the boy back to health and grapples with the reality of raising a young child, even as the recovered creature sets up shop in a tree outside her home. After the woman and boy become close, the creature takes its gruesome revenge, which reverses the caretaking roles of boy and woman. The boy and now-disabled woman set off on a journey that tempts the boy with a new, thrilling-but-frustrating life among his peers and presents the creature with an opportunity to atone for its brutality. Kessler's art is a striking mix of heavy, kinetic lines; simple but expressive faces and bodies; and a riot of mostly primary colors—like the trauma drawings of a child with a keen grasp of both color theory and sequential art.

**Mesmerizing.**



**LIKE THE APPEARANCE OF HORSES**

*Krivak, Andrew*  
 Bellevue Literary Press (288 pp.)  
 \$28.99 | May 9, 2023  
 9781954276130



Krivak examines war's effect on one family.

This book follows several generations of one family—as well as a few others in their orbit—from the aftermath of World War I into the early days of the 21st century. It's the final book in a trilogy, following *The Sojourn* (2011) and *The Signal Flame* (2017), but it can be read alone. The narrative moves backward and forward in time, which seems fitting for a novel in which the past looms as large as it does here. It opens in the 1930s, with Jozef Vinich, protagonist of *The Sojourn*, living in Pennsylvania with his wife, Helen, and daughter, Hannah. A boy with ties to Jozef arrives on their farm, having been sent across the Atlantic for fear that he would be killed by fascists. This is Bexhet Konar, sometimes called Becks, who Krivak reveals will go on to marry Hannah, fight in World War II, and die in a hunting accident a few years later. Eventually, the narrative reveals Bexhet's wartime activities, which also showcases Krivak's penchant for evocative prose: "Becks saw men in the line of the column ahead of him wither, like they had fallen asleep in mid-stride." It's one of several scenes where Krivak evokes hardship through deftly worded passages. Earlier in the novel, a scene of the Depression's effect on a Pennsylvania community emerges via a description of characters drinking "pine-needle tea and coffee made from chicory." Eventually, the book's focus shifts to Becks and Hannah's sons, Bo and Sam. Sam's time in a POW camp in Vietnam and his heroin addiction haunt him, and both brothers must come to terms with their father's wartime legacy.

Though combat plays a big part, this is a subtle and nuanced work.



**BIG GAY WEDDING**

*Lane, Byron*  
 Henry Holt (336 pp.)  
 \$26.99 | May 30, 2023  
 9781250267146

In rural Louisiana, a conservative Christian mom tries to get her mind around hosting the fabulous nuptials required by her son's marriage.

It's a long way from New Orleans to the Polite Society Ranch, where Chrissy Durang is getting through one more school bus full of little field trippers as she awaits the arrival of her adored son, Barnett, who's returning, she's sure, to take the reins of the old homestead. But to her unhappy surprise, Barnett is not coming to assume responsibility for the blind chicken, the alpaca with alopecia, and the beloved dying goat, Elaine (who will be buried near her late compadres, Seinfeld, Kramer, and George). Instead, he's coming to announce that he's getting married, and

**"Arginteanu's prose throughout is vivid and colorful, and he keeps his narrative bubbling with interest by filling it with a large cast of well-defined characters..."**

**"The author does a remarkably skillful job at mixing casual brutalities of life with the uplifting qualities of existence that stubbornly persist..."**

ISBN: 979-8846651418

**"A grim but thoroughly enjoyable tale set amid urban horrors."**  
 —Kirkus Reviews

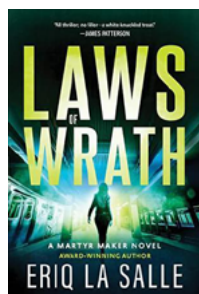
For Information on Film Rights, Email  
 tomaliventures@yahoo.com • marcarginteanu.com

“An economical, elliptical, but always entertaining novel of transformation by a highly skilled enigmatist.”

AUGUST BLUE

he has fiancé Ezra on his arm. The story spirals from there in two directions. In the hilarious one, Ezra’s mother, Victoria, “the alcoholic’s alcoholic, the silver-tongued complainer who only flies first-class,” and event-planner sister, Nichole, show up to organize the blessed event, planning to transform the farm into “a modern gay wonderland” with a gazebo, a brigade of fireflies, rainbow-sashed valet parkers, and more—though no separate chef for the animals, Nichole pouts, “because that guy turned out to be a fictional character from a *New Yorker* article I misread.” In a more serious aspect of the plot, highlighted by chapter headings that give the “Countdown to Damnation,” rigid Chrissy is unable to accept her son’s sexuality, his partner, or his plans—until finally, the virulent homophobia of her neighbors awakens a protective response. Actually, the opening of Chrissy’s mind begins when she eats several foil-wrapped packages of chocolate she finds in Ezra’s luggage that turn out to be infused with magic mushrooms. Lane’s sophomore effort is over-the-top in so many clashing ways—like *Schitt’s Creek* meets *The Laramie Project*—but simpatico readers will likely throw reservations to the wind and go all in.

Come for the Applebee’s-sponsored rehearsal dinner and stay for the extended journey of a goat into the next life.



### LAWS OF WRATH

La Salle, Eriq

Poisoned Pen (352 pp.)

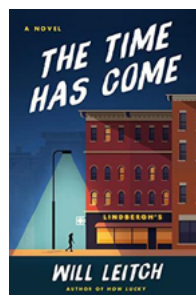
\$16.99 paper | May 2, 2023

9781728261034

The grisly ritualistic murder of New York detective Phee Freeman’s tricking, cross-dressing brother, A.J., makes his investigation of a series of similar killings intensely personal.

Phee is the younger son of powerful career criminal Clay Freeman, whose ruthlessness he inherited. After their recent killing of a serial murderer under questionable circumstances, Phee and his partner, Quincy Cavanaugh (whose own older brother, a priest, has dark secrets to hide), have been suspended from the force. But that won’t stop Phee from going after A.J.’s killer, who also is the target of a new “Mirror Project” run by FBI agent Janet Maclin that temporarily releases convicts to help the feds catch criminals at large. The big question is whether the FBI’s helper on this case, Harvard-educated Satanic cult leader and murderer Dr. Daria Zibik, is an asset or a lethal threat. Not for sensitive readers, the second installment in La Salle’s Martyr Maker series, following *Laws of Depravity* (2022), has victims carved up while they are still alive—the better to “capture” the departing souls of the corpses. Though the dialogue and action scenes tend to be flatly rendered, La Salle, the former *ER* star, exerts a tight grip on his exceptionally bleak narrative, which strives for a *Godfather*-like dynamic in its family dramas. Everyone, it seems, has been touched by murder or suicide or physical abuse. Which is fine with Dr. Zibik, for whom retribution—as opposed to mere revenge—“puts us all on par with what you call God.”

A devilish thriller in which no one escapes the darkness.



### THE TIME HAS COME

Leitch, Will

Harper/HarperCollins (304 pp.)

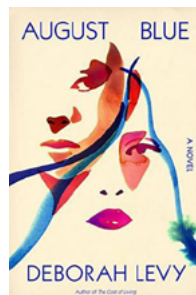
\$26.99 | May 16, 2023

9780063238510

The routine lives of several residents of Athens, Georgia, collide unexpectedly when a fourth grade teacher seeks to avenge injustices she believes were caused by a prominent local family.

Leitch launches the timeline of Tina Lamm’s efforts to expose and end the misbehavior she believes has occurred for years at Lindbergh’s—a family-owned drugstore in Athens—with a missive from Tina that (vaguely) explains why she feels her actions are needed. The ticking of Leitch’s countdown clock grows louder as the backstories of the varied characters are gradually revealed. Tina’s own unhappy family saga is one of loss and misunderstanding. Theo, the ambivalent heir to the Lindbergh legacy, copes as best he can with the weight of an inheritance and responsibilities he did not seek. Daphne, a local nurse and military veteran, relies on her strong religious faith to cope with the realities of her work and life. Widowed Dorothy attempts to create a new life for herself, while Karson, a lawyer by trade, balances his nonprofit social-development work with the need to support a family. Building contractor (and baseball coach) Jason walks the line between good ol’ Southern guy and worried dad, while music entrepreneur David faces the demons of recovery and capitalism while running a popular venue in town. (Everyone has family, friends, and foes in their own orbit, and these characters wind up in the larger mix as well.) The racially mixed cast of characters comes together in an explosive episode that has elements that are both predictable and unexpected. Leitch touches on issues of historical concern as well as current social ills as the suspense builds toward Tina’s misguided, violent attempt at settling scores in a game she may not totally understand.

Humor and empathy propel Leitch’s characters toward their fates.



### AUGUST BLUE

Levy, Deborah

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (208 pp.)

\$27.00 | June 6, 2023

9780374602048

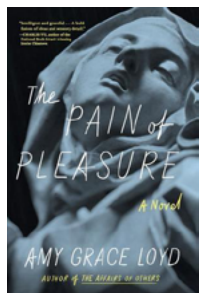
Does the onstage crisis afflicting a famous musician denote an end or a beginning?

Celebrated 34-year-old concert pianist Elsa M. Anderson has “a double following [her] around the world.” First glimpsed in Athens buying toy horses, then in London, then Paris, the nameless woman seems to be in dialogue with Elsa, inside her head. Elsa has also stolen the doppelgänger’s hat. This first enigmatic note is soon joined by others, echoing and



overlapping through the new novel by esteemed British writer Levy, which has introduced Elsa at a point of professional upheaval. Midway through her most recent concert, playing Rachmaninov in Vienna, she messed up and walked off the stage. Now, choosing to give music lessons to teenagers, Elsa spends time on a Greek island, then in Paris, returns home to London, and eventually travels to Sardinia, to the home of her adopted father, Arthur Goldstein, who may be dying. Elsa, who feels herself to be porous, unraveling, has a complicated heritage. Referred to as Ann, she was the ward of foster parents till age 6, then was “gifted” to Goldstein, who took the infant prodigy into his care and tutelage and renamed her. Now an adult, but with “no lovers. No children,” she is preoccupied by thoughts of suicide and increasingly of her mother. Slowly, while invoking a welter of European cultural icons, Levy pulls tighter her characteristic threads of identity, perspective, and parenting, intensifying Elsa’s experiences with friends, music, and various abusive men while constantly questioning herself: “Maybe I am.” Who is she really, what is the significance of the toy horses and of her blue hair are among the many questions in this short, teasing novel, which enlarges the possibility of answers when Elsa and her double meet at last, back in Paris.

**An economical, elliptical, but always entertaining novel of transformation by a highly skilled enigmatist.**



**THE PAIN OF PLEASURE**

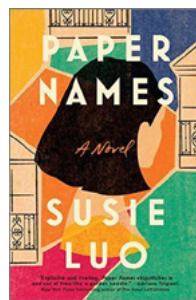
Loyd, Amy Grace  
 Roundabout Press (400 pp.)  
 \$16.95 paper | June 13, 2023  
 9781948072113

In her second novel, Loyd explores how suffering and our efforts to escape it define us.

The Doctor has left his ex-wife’s pain-management practice to launch his own with the support of Adele Watson, a wealthy migraine sufferer. Mrs. Watson is worried about the Doctor’s attachment to Sarah, a former patient who has disappeared. She enlists Ruth Aitken, a nurse she’s just hired, to slip into the Doctor’s office and make a copy of Sarah’s journal. Ruth has her own wounds, both physical and emotional. A philosophical sort, the Doctor asks himself, “At what cost do we wish to be cured of what we are?” This is a provocative question, and a headache clinic in the basement of a deconsecrated Catholic church in Brooklyn seems like a better place than most to ask it. But readers who want full-bodied characters and a story that goes somewhere might not stick around long enough to arrive at an answer. Loyd is a sensuous writer who lingers over details—all the details. Sometimes this is effective, as in a scene in which Mrs. Watson overcomes Ruth’s psychological defenses with wine and Giovanni Battista Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*. But, even here, the lushness and drama don’t seem to mean anything. The author does an incredible job of bringing the reader into her world without offering enough information to understand why Ruth is so susceptible to Mrs. Watson’s seduction—or how Mrs.

Watson might know precisely how to bend Ruth to her purpose. As it turns out, Loyd is at her most evocative when she says the least. Throughout the novel, there are references to powerful winds sweeping through New York. Of course, no 21st-century reader needs an explanation for aberrant, alarming weather, and Loyd’s choice to just make this part of the background of her fictional world creates a wonderfully eerie undertone.

**A slow-moving narrative peopled by underdeveloped characters.**



**PAPER NAMES**

Luo, Susie  
 Hanover Square Press (288 pp.)  
 \$27.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9781335426888

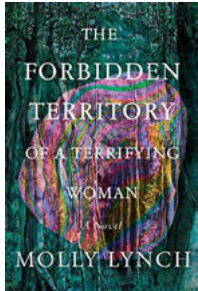
An ambitious debut novel that follows a Chinese immigrant, his daughter, and a White lawyer over three decades.

Tony Zhang is a quick-tempered engineer from Dalian who uproots his life in China and moves with his wife and daughter to New York in search of a better future. He finds work as a handyman at The Rosewood, a fancy apartment building, where Oliver, a handsome lawyer at a white-shoe firm with a dark family history, resides. The novel opens in 1997, when a violent incident brings Oliver into the lives of the Zhangs. Told in alternating perspectives—those of Tony; his daughter, Tammy; and Oliver—the novel reprises staple themes of Asian American fiction: generational differences, anti-Asian racism, the dogged pursuit of the American dream, and the challenges of dating across racial lines. As the novel progresses, Tony lands a job at an engineering firm and moves up its ranks, Tammy grows up to become a Harvard-educated, headstrong young lawyer, and Oliver becomes the youngest partner at his firm. The prose is at times bogged down with exposition; lengthy internal dialogue often unnecessarily supplements direct speech. The characters also verge on caricatures (that an attractive White lawyer from a wealthy background is conceited and cowardly is surely no surprise to anyone, nor is the trope of him being changed by his acquaintance with a young woman from a working-class family). But the plot is propulsive, prompting the reader to keep turning the pages, and the novel as a whole is undeniably enjoyable.

**An entertaining and touching debut from a new voice in Chinese American literature.**

“Makhene’s vividly rendered stories are propulsive and challenging.”

INNARDS



**THE FORBIDDEN TERRITORY OF A TERRIFYING WOMAN**

*Lynch, Molly*  
Catapult (288 pp.)  
\$27.00 | June 13, 2023  
9781646221424

Mothers the world over start vanishing without a trace.

Creative writing professor Ada Berger, 39, lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with her husband, history professor Danny, and the couple’s 6-year-old son, Gilles. Canadian-born Ada has never felt at home in the U.S., where “the general order is pure chaos,” and ever since she had Gilles, she’s been unable to envision the future, which makes it hard “to be here, on the earth, in any form.” Not only is Ada surrounded by stories about social and ecological collapse—on NPR, in conversations with her friends—but two local mothers have recently disappeared from their houses in broad daylight, with no sign of foul play. Though Ada can’t put the missing women out of her head, Danny doesn’t take much notice—until he and Gilles wake up one morning to find Ada gone. The doors are all locked, and Ada’s phone, keys, and wallet are still in the kitchen. Danny calls the police, who arrive with a federal agent in tow; it seems the mysterious disappearances aren’t confined to the Rust Belt—or even the United States. Using a candid close-third-person narration that shifts between Ada and Danny, debut author Lynch offers a nuanced contemplation of marriage, motherhood, and the anxieties of modern life. While efforts to explain the missing-mother phenomenon feel convoluted and undercut the tale’s otherworldly appeal, Lynch writes evocatively and insightfully about the divine feminine, nature’s gravitational pull, and her characters’ struggles with alienation and fear.

At once visceral and ephemeral but lacking in catharsis.



**CLOSE TO HOME**

*Magee, Michael*  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux  
(288 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 16, 2023  
9780374608323



A young man in Northern Ireland sees little hope of escape from hard times in this persuasive debut.

Sean Maguire returns home to Belfast with a university degree in literature and no prospects. A recession has eroded the job market, and serving drinks in a nightclub doesn’t pay much. As his narrative opens, he’s 22, sharing a mold-ridden flat that’s soon to be repossessed, cheating the supermarket’s self-checkout for free food, and drifting from one binge to another. A violent assault lands him in court, where 200 hours of community service and a hefty fine add to his woes. His family is haunted by his father’s sexual abuse of Sean’s older brother when he was a child. And 20 years after the 1998

Good Friday Agreement, Sean’s contemporaries see few gains in the wake of the Troubles, with its legacy of trauma and bitterness. Magee’s is a dark tale but rather understated when compared with the extreme sorts of dead-enders found in Rob Doyle’s *Here Are the Young Men* (set in Dublin) and Gabriel Krauze’s *Who They Was* (in London). What’s especially plausible are the many snares that even an intelligent fellow like Sean falls into because of self-pity or laziness or that old reliable demon, peer pressure, thanks to enabling childhood buddies. Only a chance meeting with an old friend—one of the two strong female characters, along with Sean’s mother—suggests that a better life is within reach. Mairead was “always getting into all sorts of trouble with the peelers” (police), but she went to university and crucially found a better life afterward with fellow graduates. As she says, “I made new friends.” That sounds simplistic, but the key is the inverse: She avoided the old friends, the old snares.

An impressive coming-of-age tale enriched by its bleak setting.



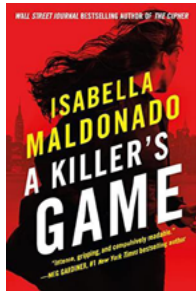
**INNARDS**

*Makhene, Magogodi oaMphela*  
Norton (224 pp.)  
\$27.95 | May 2, 2023  
9781324051008

Linked stories of life in Soweto, South Africa, animate the region’s fraught history of colonization and apartheid.

Makhene shapes her debut story collection around suburban Soweto, from its inception during apartheid as the South-Western Townships until its eventual incorporation into Johannesburg proper. Makhene weds the region’s evolving geography with a distinct sense of place, as in the title story, “Innards,” which opens on Ntatemogolo’s family farm, “a plump parcel on rich red earth” where generations have shepherded goats and sheep and buried umbilical cords in the ground according to tradition. The aging Ntatemogolo must sell off to make ends meet, and Makhene renders these disparaged innards into treasure, each heart with “a bright gold fat blanketing the angry muscle.” In other stories, ambitious narrative conceits don’t always deliver. “7678B Old Potchefstroom Road,” narrated by the home at that address, yields a conventional plot about a family reunion. But “7678B Chris Hani Road” reveals that Old Potchefstroom Road has been renamed for the leader of the South African Communist Party and artfully traces the connections between land and family back through history. Throughout the stories, Makhene peppers her prose with Dutch, Afrikaans, and South African English. Quick internet translations will reward diligent readers, but the book’s most striking multilingual moments arrive when characters add their own flavor of interpretation. In “Star Colored Tears,” a young man reflects on the word *ninkumpupie*, which sounds like “something you maybe drop from your mouth because it is hot inside from all the sweet potatoes you eat.”

Makhene’s vividly rendered stories are propulsive and challenging.



### A KILLER'S GAME

Maldonado, Isabella

Thomas & Mercer (367 pp.)

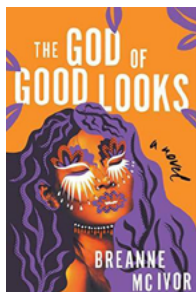
\$16.99 paper | June 1, 2023

9781662507830

Ever wanted to try out an escape room but been stopped by your own claustrophobia? Here's the perfect substitute.

Alertly spotting the fatal poisoning in progress of Nathan Costner, chief of staff to Sen. Thomas Sledge, on a New York street, FBI agent Daniela Vega pursues the assassin but loses him in the crowd. Luckily, he's soon identified anyway as Gustavo Toro, a killer for hire whom Dani's boss, Special Agent in Charge Steve Wu, nabs and cuts a deal with that depends on Toro's passing Dani off as his romantic and professional partner when he reports back to his paymaster, Col. Xavier Treadway, who's said that he needs him for a big new operation. There's a new operation all right, but it's one in which Treadway is just another pawn, not a king. Someone calling himself Nemesis has lured 12—with the addition of Dani, 13—killers into a vast and isolated structure rife with dangers and promised that only one of them will make it out alive. "This was not entertainment," Dani tells herself. "People's lives were at stake." But she's doubly wrong, not only because she's a character talking about other characters in a novel, but because a virtual version of the helpless killers' attempt to escape from their elaborate trap by collaborating with each other when they must and killing each other when they can is streaming in real time for an audience that includes the FBI, the NYPD, the Joint Terrorism Task Force, and Dani's kid sister and brother, who each bring something extra to the party.

If you can swallow the outrageous premise, Maldonado keeps the plot boiling and the bodies dropping to the end.



### THE GOD OF GOOD LOOKS

McIvor, Breanne

Morrow/HarperCollins (384 pp.)

\$27.99 | May 16, 2023

9780063278813

A young Trinidadian writer strikes back at the patriarchy with the help of a famous beauty entrepreneur.

Though it's set in the world of the Caribbean beauty industry and its fascination with makeup might seem frivolous at first glance, McIvor's entertaining first novel is anything but skin deep. Under the glossy surface of this story about two skittish, driven people finding each other in complicated circumstances, this novel has bigger ambitions. McIvor uses the beauty industry to explore the rifts created by poverty, sexism, and class in modern-day Trinidad, revealing how ingrained misogyny can be in a patriarchal society and how hard it can be to overcome. At the heart of the story is Bianca Bridge, a

promising young writer who's the daughter of a wealthy businessman. When her affair with a powerful married man becomes public, her reputation and hopes for success are crushed. She refuses to ask her father for help and works as a model to make ends meet though she hates the work. (She is, of course, conveniently beautiful.) Then makeup guru Obadiah Cortland hires her to work at his magazine. Obadiah is cold and supercilious, but his carefully cultivated public persona is a mask. Growing up in poverty, Obadiah has fought for everything he has, and to him, his success seems precarious. Still, he and Bianca and the magazine staff decide to make a powerful statement on crime and corruption in spite of the risk. The novel sputters on occasion—Bianca's attempts to write fiction about her late mother are an unnecessary distraction, for example—but the irony of her needing her father's support to carve a path for herself is not lost on the author. McIvor's ultimate message is clear: We all hide behind something, whether it's makeup or privilege, and only by being true to ourselves can we triumph.

An entertaining novel that uses the beauty industry to examine issues of poverty, class, and sexism.



### THIS IS NOT MIAMI

Melchor, Fernanda

Trans. by Sophie Hughes

New Directions (160 pp.)

\$15.95 paper | April 4, 2023

9780811228053

A collection of narratives focusing on the dark side of Veracruz.

"To live in a city is to live among stories," Mexican author Melchor writes in her latest book to be translated into English. But what does she mean by *stories*? The accounts in the collection—"relatos," she calls them, or "tales"—are based on real events, she writes, but "have no journalistic claims because they don't include accurate dates, hard facts or car registration plates...but nor can they be called realist fiction." Whatever they're called, they're extraordinary, each one a portrait of life in Veracruz in the past decades. In "Queen, Slave, Woman," Melchor tells the story of Evangelina Tejera Bosada, a former queen of Veracruz's annual Carnival who bludgeoned her sons to death, dismembered them, and placed the remains in a pot on her balcony. Melchor's observations about the case are fascinating; she writes about the dissonance between Tejera Bosada's former image as a beloved Carnival queen and her image after the slayings as a coldblooded killer: "Opposing yet complementary archetypes, masks that dehumanize flesh and blood women and become blank screens on which to project the desires, fears, and anxieties of a society that professes to be an enclave of tropical sensualism but deep down is profoundly conservative, classist, and misogynist." In "The House on El Estero," Melchor recounts a story told to her by a former partner who visited a supposedly haunted house years before and claims to have come face to face with the devil. Her ex's story itself is indeed terrifying, but Melchor turns it into a fascinating



reflection on the nature of narrative itself. The collection closes with “Veracruz With a Zee for Zeta,” a wrenching story, told in the second person, about the experience of a person who witnesses violence connected to the Los Zetas cartel. The last two paragraphs are a gut punch, some of the most wrenching prose to come around in years. Skillfully translated by Hughes, this is a book that’s as gorgeous as it is dark, and it proves that Melchor is one of the finest writers working today.

**Absolutely stunning.**



### THE QUIET TENANT

Michallon, Clémence  
Knopf (320 pp.)  
\$28.00 | June 20, 2023  
9780593534649

While a widowed man falls for a bartender, the woman he’s held hostage for years plots her escape in this fast-paced thriller.

Aidan Thomas doesn’t seem like a bad person: “People loved and trusted him because he was a normal man.” When his wife dies and he needs to move, his hostage, a woman he calls Rachel, convinces him to move her into his new house under the guise of being his tenant rather than killing her in the shed where he’s been hiding her. There, she has more access to his life—she can look through his possessions, hear who comes into the home, and even talk to his daughter. In alternating chapters, she figures out how to stay alive and how best to try to leave. The tight clip of Rachel’s voice—“Any minute now, the tires of his truck will screech outside. He’ll climb up the stairs, the furious *tap-tap-tap* of his boots a prelude to his anger”—lends urgency. Meanwhile, Aidan is so popular that his community is raising money for him in a 5K race; bartender Emily has volunteered to run a hot-cocoa station to get to know him better. It’s the contrast between the man Aidan appears to be to the outside world—and even to his family—and the man he is in secret that makes Rachel’s job so difficult. The people who love him will protect him because they can’t see him the way that she does. In other chapters, Aidan’s earlier victims chime in to show what’s at stake for Rachel if he isn’t caught. And when Rachel meets the other women in his life—first his daughter and then Emily—she knows she must escape for their sakes, too, but will they help or hinder her?

**He’d be a rom-com hero if not for the woman tied up in his house—a twisted premise that raises unexpected moral questions.**



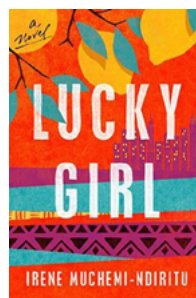
### SUMMER STAGE

Moore, Meg Mitchell  
Morrow/HarperCollins (336 pp.)  
\$30.00 | May 23, 2023  
9780063026162

A 19-year-old social media star spends the summer working with her famous uncle on a summer theater Shakespeare revival.

With an uncle who’s a movie star, it’s unsurprising that Sam Trevino was drawn into acting as a child—first in *To Kill a Mockingbird* on Broadway, then in a short-run Disney sitcom out in LA, where she lived with her uncle, Timothy Fleming, and his then-wife, Gertie Sanger. But now, Sam has global fame all her own—albeit of the TikTok variety. Ready to be done with that after a scandal not of her own making, Sam lands back at home in Naragansett before swiftly relocating to Block Island, where her Uncle Timmy is directing a *Much Ado About Nothing* revival that will star her once-upon-a-time Aunt Gertie. (Fans of Moore’s *The Islanders*, from 2019, will recognize some of that novel’s characters in the background here.) Sam’s mom, Amy, a high school English teacher, will be the production manager for her brother’s show. Moore has created a story that unfolds much like a hot summer day at the beach—for the most part slow and languid but every now and again spiced up with a bit of drama. Most of the story is told from the third-person perspectives of Sam, Timothy, and Amy as each of them works to get the production ready for its run while simultaneously processing the emotions of their pasts—the choices they made and the events they couldn’t control—and what their futures might hold.

**A light beach read that also examines the benefits and costs of celebrity.**



### LUCKY GIRL

Muechemi-Ndiritu, Irene  
Dial Press (336 pp.)  
\$18.00 paper | May 2, 2023  
9780593133903

A young Kenyan woman in New York City faces an identity crisis while coming to recognize how issues of race, culture, and religion are different for Black Americans than for Black Africans.

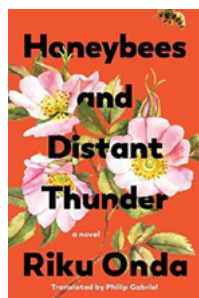
As a teen in Nairobi, Soila chafes at her rigid upbringing as the privileged daughter of a wealthy, widowed businesswoman depicted as painfully complex. Despite financial success, Mother has not recovered emotionally since her husband’s suicide years ago. Her extreme version of Catholicism requires that she regularly self-flagellate. An authoritarian unable to accept vulnerability in herself or others, she conveys love to Soila only through strict overprotectiveness. Cowed yet inwardly rebellious, Soila expresses herself in photography, aware that her mother will never let her pursue

# “A thrilling depiction of the power of music.”

HONEYBEES AND DISTANT THUNDER

it seriously. Without her mother’s knowledge, she applies to American colleges and is accepted at Barnard. Unfortunately, when Soila asks her mother’s beloved priest to help her break the news, he molests her. The shame weighs her down until she finally opens up to her first New York boyfriend. Half Black Kenyan, half White American, he criticizes Soila’s judgmental attitude toward Black Americans and educates her on the “cycle of poverty” she has blithely ignored. Similarly, her best college friend teaches Soila to recognize her privilege as a rich Kenyan with a British accent by explaining America’s systemic racism in discussions that veer into the heavy-handed—was anyone really using the term *white fragility* in the 1990s? Most interesting when she tries to sort out her attitudes, Soila can be wearying as a narrator, often letting readers know how exceptionally smart, pretty, talented, and beloved she is. By 2001, Soila has graduated, eschewed photography to work in finance as her mother expects, and has a Black American lover her mother knows nothing about. But then comes the tragedy of Sept. 11 and a visit from her mother, causing Soila to reexamine what she really wants and where she fits.

**A thought-provoking exploration of the complicated experience of an African woman in America.**



## HONEYBEES AND DISTANT THUNDER

*Onda, Riku*  
*Trans. by Philip Gabriel*  
 Pegasus (432 pp.)  
 \$26.95 | May 2, 2023  
 9781639364039

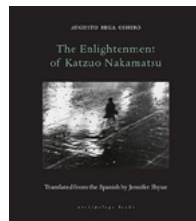


Driven young people face off at a prestigious Japanese piano competition in this propulsive and poetic novel.

While moving smoothly among multiple points of view, Onda concentrates on four of the more unusual contestants. Aya Eiden, now 20, was an up-and-coming pianist when her mother died seven years earlier and hasn’t played professionally since. Ambitious Japanese Peruvian Masaru Carlos Levi Anatole, a Juilliard student, knew Aya when they were both kids in Tokyo. Akashi Takashima, 28, is the oldest of the competitors and has been working in a music store, while precocious and startling 16-year-old Jin Kazama, the “Honeybee Prince,” has been traveling the world helping his beekeeper father and has never had a piano of his own, though he has been nurtured by recently deceased maestro Yuji Von Hoffmann since the age of 5. As the competition proceeds through four taut rounds, eliminating contestants liberally along the way, Onda places the reader not only in the position of those playing a particular piece, but often in the minds of several observers, each with their own take on the style and effect of the playing. She pays particular attention to how her four key players affect each other, both personally and musically, but also broadens out to include the perspectives of, among others, the stage manager, a couple of the judges, many of the other competitors, the florist with whom Jin stays while at the competition, the piano

tuner, and the composer whose new work all the contestants are required to play. Setting the novel during the two weeks of the competition both gives the novel a solid structure and adds suspense, and the author’s clear passion for and knowledge of the classical repertoire shine through. Even readers with no prior affection for the works played in the competition should be tantalized into taking a listen by Onda’s descriptions of the music and its effects on listeners; one piece sounds like “a fluffy, plumped-up quilt, cushiony, as well as slightly damp” and another like a “thick, rough-hewn log. Unvarnished, unworked, the beauty of the grain visible.”

**A thrilling depiction of the power of music.**



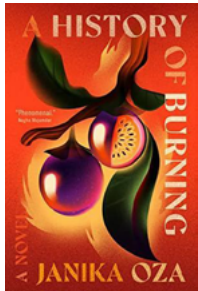
## THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF KATZUO NAKAMATSU

*Oshiro, Augusto Higa*  
*Trans. by Jennifer Shyue*  
 Archipelago (150 pp.)  
 \$18.00 paper | May 9, 2023  
 9781953861528

A professor finds himself slipping toward madness, depression, and perhaps spiritual enlightenment.

Initially, the title character seems like a sort of Everyman on the precipice of existential crisis. He is enjoying a lovely day, “filling him with a private joy and, he believed, a secret spirituality.” Until, all of a sudden, he isn’t. Once everything shifts without warning, he becomes filled with dread, obsessed with his mortality, “unable to dislodge that feeling of death.” And once he knows he’s going to die, down to the marrow of his bones, everything either falls apart or comes together. But this short novel, originally published in 2005 (though not translated into English until now), proceeds into some details that make the context more specific. Like the author, the protagonist is a Peruvian novelist of Japanese descent very much aware of his outsider status in Lima, where the large Japanese population found itself even more than usually targeted by racism and discrimination during World War II. The title character has also been suffering from some mental issues and has been taking medication and a few days off from work. When he returns, he finds he has been forced into retirement, which accelerates his downward spiral. He is a man of order in a world that increasingly seems disordered to him, where he feels threatened by others that no one else sees, bombarded by sounds that no one else hears. Death might seem like a respite to him. He has a few friends, one of whom consents to lend him a pistol, but has no close family. His wife is long dead, a young cancer victim, and they were pretty much opposites when they were married. He retreats further into the terror and madness of himself until he proceeds into the “enlightenment” of the title, confronting and exorcising some of the demons of his heritage in the process.

**A powerful, provocative, and occasionally puzzling evocation of a mind unraveling.**



## A HISTORY OF BURNING

Oza, Janika

Grand Central Publishing (400 pp.)

\$29.00 | May 2, 2023

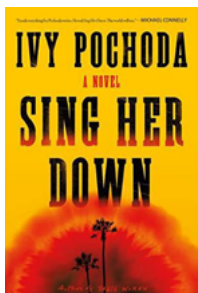
9781538724248



Four generations of an Indian family struggle with displacement in this debut novel.

Artfully juggling the perspectives of 10 characters over the span of nearly a century, Oza follows the members of an ordinary family from India to Africa to Canada as they struggle to maintain their cultural traditions and solidarity amid an often hostile environment and changing social norms. Pirbhai, the patriarch, is lured to Africa as a 13-year-old in 1898, where he's pressed into indentured servitude laying track for the British railway to Lake Victoria. His fateful decision to obey an order to set fire to a village the British wanted gone provides the novel's title and looms over his descendants as a sort of original sin. After he moves from Kenya to Uganda, his family slowly climbs the economic ladder into the middle class until the moment in 1972 when the dictator Idi Amin orders the expulsion of all Asians. When Arun, an anti-government activist, disappears following his arrest, his wife, Latika, Pirbhai's granddaughter, allied with her husband in the struggle against the repressive regime, chooses to remain behind rather than joining her parents, siblings, and her own infant son on their journey to Toronto and the beginning of a new life in yet another alien land. The family's fears about her fate give birth to a secret that will reverberate in their lives decades later. Oza subtly observes the shift from practices like arranged marriages to unions that are the product of romantic attachments and trusts her readers to acclimate themselves. In intimate domestic scenes and scenes of societies in turmoil, she displays a sure-handed ability to write at both small and large scale and to portray with deep sympathy the universal human desire to find "a little place to simply exist, freely, and with dignity."

**An ambitious family drama skillfully explores the bonds of kinship and the yearning for peace and security.**



## SING HER DOWN

Pochoda, Ivy

MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux

(288 pp.)

\$28.00 | May 23, 2023

9780374608484

Two women with bad blood between them get out of jail during the pandemic and head for more trouble.

Pochoda has carved a place for herself in California noir—and her lockdown Los Angeles is about as noir as it gets, a hellscape overrun by homeless encampments, contagion, and violence. Florence

"Florida" Baum and Diana Diosmary "Dios" Sandoval both receive early release from their sentences due to Covid-19. By jailhouse reputation, Florida is a party girl who got in too deep, Dios a ruthless force of nature (though her criminal career began when she was a scholarship student at a fancy New England college). Amid a riot during their incarceration, a woman who was cellmates with each of them at different times was murdered; their shared responsibility for the death has put them at odds. Florida wants nothing to do with Dios; Dios thinks they are bound for life. Shortly after both go on the run from their two-week quarantine, another murder is committed, and soon a female LAPD officer named Lobos is on their trail. The story is laid out in shifting perspectives, with much of the plot conveyed either in awkward dialogue, by a Greek chorus-type character back at the jail, or by clunky internal ruminations. "When do you become the thing you've kept at bay? When do you become the abused or the abuser?... When do you become the person for whom violence is easily within arm's reach?" These questions are very personal to Officer Lobos as she is being stalked by her mentally ill husband, a subplot that is one very heavy cherry on top of this nasty sundae. Lobos is also in a debate with her police partner about just how violent women can be; Pochoda's point seems to be there's no limit. Neither Florida nor Dios feels much like a real person (thank God), and there's little suspense as they move toward their dark outcome, which is immortalized in a mural described in the first pages of the book.

**Awful people doing awful things in an awful place and time, plus talking ghosts and walking murals.**



## SHY

Porter, Max

Graywolf (136 pp.)

\$25.00 | May 2, 2023

9781644452295

A gloomy but memorable tale by British novelist Porter, who likes his literature dark.

Porter's previous novels have addressed death, metamorphosis, and monstrous figures out of British folklore who walk the mews and have permanent addresses. Here, his protagonist is younger and, though he comes over as tough, quite vulnerable. Midway into his teens, Shy has already been expelled from school, arrested, thrown out of his home. "He's sprayed, snorted, smoked, sworn, stolen, cut, punched, run, jumped, crashed an Escort, smashed up a shop, trashed a house, broken a nose, stabbed his stepdad's finger, but it's been a while since he's crept" (that is, burgled). Now, in the doldrums of the mid-1990s, Shy finds himself in a program meaningfully called Last Chance, populated by fellow screw-ups and well-intentioned adults such as "Nice Andy the Bearded History Teacher" who want only to help Shy even as the lad finds ways to offend against both the law and polite discourse (as when he calls a visiting dignitary the C-word, asking whether being such is "part of the training

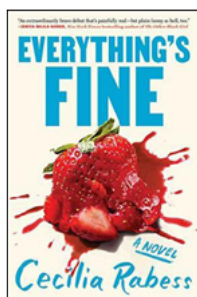


“A welcome debut that’s both a fleet thriller and a pathology of sisterhood at its most harrowing.”

THE THREE DEATHS OF WILLA STANNARD

for, like, becoming an MP”). This brief and sometimes oddly lyrical novel is spoken in numerous voices rendered in different typefaces, but Shy’s remains the chief voice even as he is nearly appalled into silence by a chance encounter with death in the form of two dead badgers: “Fuuuuuuck’s sake, he whines into his sleeve. Someone killed you?” Whether Shy will straighten up at the end of this slender, lyrical tale is anyone’s guess, but, touchingly, even the “dangerous young men” at Last Chance, assumed to be lost causes and incorrigible, encourage Shy at least to come to grips with his feelings. Porter does a fine job of inhabiting the mind of a teenager in ways that may remind readers of David Mitchell’s novel *Black Swan Green*, with all the confusion and lack of resolution that come with the territory.

Laughs most definitely do not ensue, but Porter gets his bumbling, anomic antihero down to a T.



**EVERYTHING'S FINE**

Rabess, Cecilia  
Simon & Schuster (336 pp.)  
\$27.99 | June 6, 2023  
978-1-9821-8770-5

A romance between a Black woman and a White man unfolds in an ever more polarized world.

Josh Hillyer and Jessica Jones, both gifted students and math prodigies, meet at college on the day of Obama’s election when each is interviewed about the historic event. “I’m not convinced that now is the right time to entrust another tax and spend liberal with the economy,” says Josh, to Jess’ disgust, and the two will continue to disagree on everything every time they meet. She pins him as a boring preppie; he loves to push her buttons. Their sparky dynamic continues when both are hired by Goldman Sachs, where he is an overnight sensation and she is an angry outsider, mistaken for admin staff even when she tops the leaderboard. Rabess’ fascinating, complicated, discussion-worthy debut follows the pair through the day of Trump’s inauguration, offering a nuanced and provocative treatment of the operation of race and politics in an intimate relationship. It would be easy to label this book an enemies-to-lovers rom-com of the Hepburn-Tracy genus, but that doesn’t capture the unconventional aspects of Rabess’ depiction of her characters. Flummoxed by Josh’s interest (is it “jungle fever,” as one of his friends suggests?), Jess proceeds on impulse. Rabess’ snappy writing captures Jess’ reaction to her desire for Josh: “She feels like one of those patients with an alcoholic anesthesiologist who gets the dosage wrong, so that even though they are meant to feel nothing, they end up feeling everything and can only lay in excruciating silence while their nerve endings erupt.” The author never allows us to completely dismiss Josh, a true believer in meritocracy and the market economy—though since we don’t get inside his head, it’s not clear why his devotion to Jess never inspires him to see the world through her eyes. Though the pacing is a bit frustrating in the last third of the book, don’t

put it down. You cannot fully understand the meaning of the title until the last page.

A hot book on a hot topic, well worth reading and arguing about.



**THE THREE DEATHS OF WILLA STANNARD**

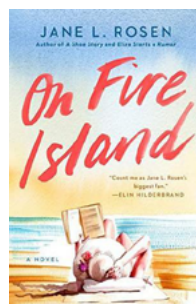
Robards, Kate  
Crooked Lane (320 pp.)  
\$28.99 | June 20, 2023  
9781639103478



A spin instructor who can’t believe that her sister killed herself looks into the circumstances of her death and unearths a shocking series of secrets that go back to their childhood.

Willa Stannard was a news anchor on KZTV in Chicago until a panic attack ended her career in the middle of a broadcast. When she’s found in her bathtub, her wrists slit and a cryptic note to her sister nearby, all the evidence points to suicide. But Sawyer Stannard can’t believe that the sister she’d grown away from years ago would end her own life. Despite a distinct lack of encouragement from Officer Mallory Curry, she fastens on a true-crime story Willa had pseudonymously immersed herself in for *TruthShout*, a local newspaper: the kidnapping 26 years ago of 18-month-old Melody Wynne from her parents’ home in rural Michigan. Corbin Campbell, the Trowbridge County deputy who took the lead on the case, never found enough evidence to arrest either Abel Bowen, a neighbor of the Wynnes’ with a criminal past, or self-anointed psychic Merrill Vaughn, who inserted himself into the investigation repeatedly until he died. Why was Willa so obsessed with the ancient case that she not only covered it for *TruthShout*, but prepared a book-length manuscript, *Cry of the Cicadas: The True Story of Melody Wynne’s Disappearance*, for literary agent Gemma Matthews? And why does Gemma, who’s supported the project enthusiastically, suddenly have cold feet about submitting it for publication without more solid evidence supporting its conclusions? Producing that evidence will exact a fearsome cost on Sawyer, with anxious readers half a step behind her.

A welcome debut that’s both a fleet thriller and a pathology of sisterhood at its most harrowing.



**ON FIRE ISLAND**

Rosen, Jane L.  
Berkley (320 pp.)  
\$17.00 paper | May 23, 2023  
9780593546109

After a 37-year-old woman dies, she spends one last summer watching those she left behind work through their grief.

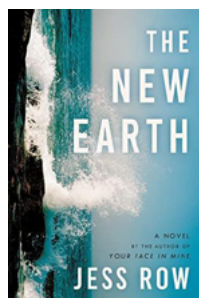
Julia Morse is at the height of her happiness—successful in her career as

“A deeply ambitious saga that takes on many of the thorniest questions of 21st-century American life.”

THE NEW EARTH

an editor, married for 10 years to the love of her life, pregnant with their first baby—when it all comes crashing down and she’s fighting for her life after a cancer diagnosis that was, quite simply, discovered too late. Ben, her husband, a sportswriter-turned-novelist on deadline for his latest book, is shattered by her death. Rather than sitting shiva at their Manhattan apartment for seven days, as had been the plan, he leaves for their beach house on Fire Island. He spends the summer processing his grief with their group of close-knit neighbors and friends: Shep, the octogenarian who also lost his wife; Renee, Julia’s best friend, who has barely survived an acrimonious divorce; Matty, Renee’s 16-year-old son, who’s grown up spending summers on the island; Pam and Andie, whose baby, Oliver, was conceived around the same time as Julia and Ben’s never-to-be-born child; and many others. Julia watches the summer unfold, sharing her thoughts and opinions about it all. Author Rosen has created a neat and tidy story about grief in which everything is wrapped up by the end. Some readers will find the emotional aspects of the novel tough to process, and having Julia as narrator can prove confusing, as sometimes she seems to have knowledge of the interior thoughts and emotions of the people she’s watching while at other times she’s just an observer. Themes of heartbreak, death, divorce, infidelity, and family strife are all addressed, as are finding love after heartbreak and happiness after grief.

**A sometimes tough read that will appeal to readers wondering if those who die can stick around for just a little longer.**



### THE NEW EARTH

Row, Jess  
Ecco/HarperCollins (592 pp.)  
\$32.99 | March 28, 2023  
9780062400635



A New York Jewish family confronts its catastrophic past.

In his latest novel, Row introduces us to the Wilcox family, a sprawling, dysfunctional group traumatized, in various ways, by several key moments in their past. When their mother, Naomi, informs them that her biological father had been Black, Patrick and his sisters, Winter and Bering, are horrified that she’s been keeping that secret for so long. Bering winds up traveling to Palestine as a peace activist, where she’s killed by an Israeli sniper. Winter becomes an immigration attorney; Patrick flees to Germany after a stint as a Buddhist monk. To reel off these plot details, however, is to give a poor impression of Row’s deeply ambitious, genre-defying work, which hops back and forth in time, shifts between various points of view, and incorporates a massive amount of politics and theory on race, Zen Buddhism, climate change, the history of Israel and Palestine, and, among other things, the novel itself as a literary form. This is not a novel to be devoured in one gulp. “This family has never had a coherent story to tell about itself,” Winter says one night. “Like an egg cracked over a pan,” Row writes, “the story spreads until it stops. It finds its

boundaries by exhausting its materials.” Much of the novel is told via dialogue: This is a book of discourse, in every sense of the word, and its happenings are *told* rather than shown. Characters speak to each other or to themselves at immense length, and we have access to their emails and texts. If the books seems overstuffed to the point of being overdetermined—one storyline involves the Zapatista uprising, for example—it’s a testament to Row’s talent to say that, somehow, he manages to tie it all together.

**A deeply ambitious saga that takes on many of the thorniest questions of 21st-century American life.**



### THE CELEBRANTS

Rowley, Steven  
Putnam (320 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 30, 2023  
978-0-59354042-8

A privileged but somewhat diverse group of friends support each other in a profound way through their early to middle adulthood.

Meeting first as misfit transfer students in their sophomore year at Berkeley, Marielle, Naomi, Craig, the Jordans (a gay couple), and Alec quickly become family to each other. But Alec, the wildest, dies of an overdose two weeks before graduation, leaving the others bereft and confused. After Alec’s funeral, Marielle convinces them to join in an unusual pact to celebrate each other: At any time of their choosing, each can call on the others to gather for their own “funeral” during which they get to be celebrated, loved, and supported while still alive. The book covers the “funerals” of Marielle, Naomi, and Craig at different crisis points in their lives over the next 30 years. Hanging over the proceedings are two things, one of which is always present for the characters: the trauma of Alec’s death. The other is the novel’s present-day framing, in which one of the Jordans has terminal prostate cancer, and his husband (now Jordy for distinction) is nudging him to trigger the pact and tell the group. There is an updated *Big Chill* quality to it all, hitting many of the same sweet and melancholy notes around aging, death, love, and the shorthand old friends have with each other. This particular group’s lingua franca is quite tart—they trade in jabs, cynicism, and intellectualism—but over time it becomes clear how much they value each other, even when old secrets get revealed and dynamics shift. Rowley peppers biographical details evenly through the book, making it initially hard to get a good grasp on the friends’ individual personalities, though they come into better focus over time. Occasionally their dialogue and misadventures are downright hilarious.

**A touch wiseacre but more wise.**



**ATALANTA**

*Saint, Jennifer*  
Flatiron Books (304 pp.)  
\$28.99 | May 9, 2023  
9781250855572

A baby girl is left to die on a mountainside but survives under the goddess Artemis' protection.

Deep in the Arcadian forest, secluded from Greek society, Atalanta grows into a formidable huntress. She's faster than any mortal, independent, and confident. In other words, she's made in Artemis' image, and the goddess has plans for her. She sends Atalanta to join the quest for the Golden Fleece to bring glory to her name. Atalanta, who has never been among other people, let alone a group of men—some the sons of gods, others the greatest heroes and adventurers in the land—must prove herself worthy of her place in history. Most of the crew of the *Argo*, her fellow Argonauts, don't make it easy, but she does find allies, including the famed Orpheus and an uncharacteristically egalitarian fellow named Meleager who becomes her lover as they journey for the legendary fleece. While all the Argonauts encounter tests of their strengths, Atalanta alone faces constant disdain. How can a woman be among the world's best warriors, a hero poets will sing about for all time? To most minds, it's impossible. And even when she proves them wrong, they find ways to diminish her. It's not just people Atalanta has to worry about, either. Like most other gods and goddesses, Artemis is a demanding and punishing champion. Author Saint—author of *Elektra* (2022) and *Ariadne* (2021)—has written another captivating protagonist who challenges the status quo to demonstrate the power of women when the odds stack against them. While the story sags here and there, the ending is so beautiful it makes every moment leading up to it worth the wait. In her acknowledgements, Saint says she hopes the novel will make readers fall as in love with Atalanta as she did—and her quest has been fulfilled.

This contemporary rendition of Greek mythology gives the heroine's journey its due.



**LEAVE IT TO THE MARCH SISTERS**

*Sereno, Annie*  
Forever (400 pp.)  
\$16.99 paper | May 30, 2023  
9781538721469

Amy Marsden (sister of Jo!) deals with complications in her personal and professional life in a romantic comedy inspired by *Little Women*.

Amy, an English professor and harried department chair at a college in Illinois, unwittingly goes from the frying pan into the fire when she moves out of her faithless boyfriend's apartment into a rental owned by the

object of her lifelong love and lust, Theo Sinclair. (Only his corporate name appears on the lease she signed in a hurry.) Amy, Jo, and Theo had been next-door neighbors and confidants during their younger years, but misunderstandings and life circumstances broke the trio apart. Jo, a high school teacher in Seattle, toils to perfect her writing and is finally successful in having some work published. Amy, however, put her passion for painting aside in the wake of an awful misunderstanding with Theo after an early exhibit of her work. Theo—once training to be a physician but now pursuing a career as a counselor—and Amy slowly unravel the many misconceptions they each hold about their shared history. A cast of supporting characters who cajole and console along the way includes Amy's colleague Athena, who starred in Sereno's prior literature-influenced rom-com, *Blame It on the Brontës*; the door is left open for future classic-based frolics involving Jo and others in the ensemble.

A slightly hotter take on a warmly regarded classic.



**THE WISHING GAME**

*Shaffer, Meg*  
Ballantine (304 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 30, 2023  
9780593598832

A young woman's dreams are in the hands of an eccentric author.

Lucy Hart is a 26-year-old kindergarten teacher's assistant, desperate to adopt her orphaned former student, Christopher Lamb. Unfortunately, she lacks the funds. When Lucy wins a chance to compete in a game devised by reclusive children's book author Jack Master-son, she hopes the competition will be the answer to her problems. Jack lives on a private island off the coast of Maine with his pet raven and his only friend, Hugo Reese, who illustrated his books, and, after years of silence, he's finally written the next installment in his Clock Island series. Dismissing conventional channels for publishing, Jack has decided that whoever wins his competition can do whatever they like with the only copy of his book. Thus four competitors descend on the eponymous Clock Island—all of them former runaways who had gone to Jack's island as children seeking reprieve from less-than-idyllic circumstances, and all of whom, in adulthood, have problems that only Jack can solve. Jack's game starts off as a series of riddles (ones that readers will enjoy solving alongside the competitors) but quickly turns into something deeper as Jack, acting in the role of the Mastermind from his books, makes the competitors confront their traumas. Despite the sinister-sounding nature of the competition, Shaffer posits Jack as fatherly and loving, and Lucy and her opponents are mostly happy to play along. Shaffer's characters are not fully developed, and Jack's motives in particular feel a little trite. But, somewhat two-dimensional characters notwithstanding, readers will appreciate the interplay of whimsy and realism on the island: "Jack's number one rule was *Don't break the spell*. Lucy was under the spell of Jack Masterson, of Clock Island. Hugo wasn't about to tell her that it

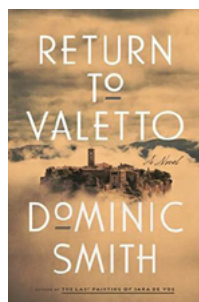


“A complexly structured masterpiece that doubles back on itself in order to move forward.”

THE HOUSE ON VIA GEMITO

wasn't as wonderful as it looked, that the mysterious, mystical, magical Mastermind...had been drinking himself into an early grave for the past six years.”

**A meditation on the power of hope when all else seems lost.**



**RETURN TO VALETTO**

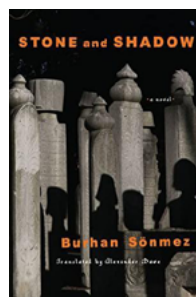
*Smith, Dominic*  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)  
\$28.00 | June 13, 2023  
9780374607685

A grieving widower uncovers some long-buried family secrets in his mother's native village in Italy.

Six years after historian Hugh Fisher's wife died from cancer, her shoes are still in his closet, and his daughter,

Susan, asks him bluntly if he ever plans to be happy again. After his well-regarded book about vanishing Italian towns garners Hugh several invitations to speak at Italian universities, Susan deplores his decision to spend six months there as yet another example of his wallowing in the past. But his plan to base himself in Valetto, the tiny village where his aging aunts still live, is upended when he learns that the cottage he inherited from his mother—her death is another recent trauma—is being occupied by someone his outraged Aunt Iris calls “a squatter.” Milanese chef Elisa Tomassi claims that her family was promised the cottage as recompense for assisting Hugh's grandfather, who left his wife and daughters to join the anti-Fascist resistance during World War II and never returned. Veteran novelist Smith deftly weaves multiple themes of abandonment and loss throughout a compelling narrative studded with gorgeous descriptions of the Italian landscape and sharp character sketches; each of Hugh's three aunts comes to life with ornery individualism, as do their indefatigably cheerful caretaker, Milo; his long-suffering wife, Donata; and other secondary characters. Hugh and Elisa are drawn to each other even as their separate agendas and individual psychic wounds threaten to keep them apart. A late-novel revelation about long-ago wrongdoing brings an overdue reckoning for a local fascist and enables Hugh to make peace with the mother he never felt he really knew. Nonetheless, Hugh acknowledges, “History does not offer us closure. It offers us the inscrutability of the present.” As this absorbing novel closes, Smith's engaging protagonist seems ready to embrace this inscrutability and move on with his life.

**More fine work from a gifted storyteller: engrossing, well written, and affecting.**



**STONE AND SHADOW**

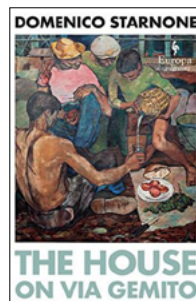
*Sönmez, Bulhan*  
Trans. by Alexander Dawe  
Other Press (432 pp.)  
\$18.99 paper | May 2, 2023  
9781635422771



The blood-soaked history of modern Turkey is rendered through the life of Avdo, a tombstone designer who gets caught up in the country's culture and religious wars.

A man of muted emotion who never knew his parents and had to survive on the streets, Avdo likes working as well as living in cemeteries for the quiet and solitude they provide. But in 1958, while attempting to help Elif, a girl he has fallen for, escape the clutches of her physically abusive fiancé, Mikail Agha, he shoots two armed men and is wounded himself. Convicted of murder, he spends seven years in prison, dodging execution thanks to a pardon following a military coup. In 1985, his life is upended again by Reyhan, a desperate girl whom he hides from ruthless military officer Cmdr. Cobra, who's hunting her for unstated reasons. Reyhan, it turns out, is the niece of Elif, who, after being forced to wed Mikail, is fatally shot by him years later while again attempting to leave him. Around those two plotlines—two of many in this expansive, dreamy, richly allusive novel—Sönmez contemplates such themes as religious and personal freedom, the sweep of time, fate, and, while making few explicit references to politics, the very meaning of nations. The novel is in constant motion, jumping back and forth among decades from the 1930s to 2000s—and even back to the Ottoman Empire. Turkish Kurdish novelist Sönmez has been compared to magical realists including Borges and García Márquez. With this, his fifth work of fiction, he recalls the Rushdie of *Midnight's Children* in viewing the dispiriting crush of history through the lens of humanity.

**An enthralling, multidimensional epic from a leading figure on fiction's world stage.**



**THE HOUSE ON VIA GEMITO**

*Starnone, Domenico*  
Europa Editions (480 pp.)  
\$27.00 | May 30, 2023  
9781609459239

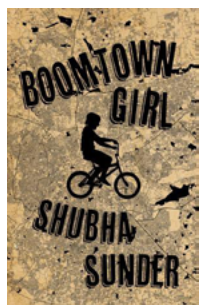


A son comes to terms with his narcissistic father.

To Starnone's English-language readers, his new novel might seem to signal a departure: Expansive and winding where his previous books (*Trust*, 2021, etc.) were spare and straightforward, Starnone's latest to be translated into English was in fact published in Italy years ago, where it won a prestigious award and helped cement the author's illustrious reputation. In it, the eldest son of a narcissistic, bitter, grossly exaggerating man—a

complicated character, to say the least—describes his father's life. He does so by recounting the stories his father, Federi, told over and over again, with details that shifted with each telling, always in Federi's favor. Though he worked for the railroads his whole adult life, Federi considered himself an artist—an untrained but brilliant artist, misunderstood, of course, and vastly underappreciated. He spent his days raging against the innumerable injustices he believed himself to endure. Federi's son has grown up hearing the same complaints so many times he's no longer sure what is real and what is merely an exaggeration: "The angrier he grew when telling the stories of his life and the reasons for his actions," our narrator explains, "the thicker the fog grew inside my head." Starnone writes with the same intricate sympathy for his characters as he has in other books: Every character, including Federi, is a full-fledged human being filled with desire, regret, resentment, bitterness, and hope. At the same time, the Neapolitan setting comes equally alive. Federi married his wife, Rusinè, in the midst of the Second World War, and the confused aftermath of that war, as Italy struggled to regain standing, is beautifully described. Starnone, it seems, can do no wrong.

**A complexly structured masterpiece that doubles back on itself in order to move forward.**



**BOOMTOWN GIRL**

*Sunder, Shubha*  
Black Lawrence Press (200 pp.)  
\$21.95 paper | April 14, 2023  
9781625570499

A debut collection of nine meandering short stories set in Bangalore, India—a town on the cusp of transformation.

The town's mutation into a bustling commercial hub is mirrored in the stories, and with each mushrooming multiplex ("Boomtown Girl"), new film ("Independence Day"), or ice cream store ("A Very Full Day"), characters experience change that determines their lives. Like Amrita Mahale's *Milk Teeth*, Sunder's stories are concerned with Indian liberalization, when the country's economic and cultural landscape changed to accommodate all that once seemed foreign and unattainable. The characters share aspirations, and desire throngs the pages. Many of these stories feature youth at the edge of puberty, recognizing their own desires ("The Footbridge") or confronting their own bodies as desirable objects ("Dragon Girl"); they also ruminate over the particularities of patriarchal control and policing of desire in small-town India. Other stories trail the movements of men ("Jungleman" and "The Western Tailor"), capturing regret, solitude, and a studied misogyny. Sunder's style is granular and broad, and memories of Bangalore and its residents are colored by the looming shift into modernity, the whole collection striking, perhaps, an autobiographical tenor. Though these stories are well crafted, the singularity of focus and the similitude in rendering disaffected young teens and nostalgia-struck adults make the collection feel monotonous.

Nevertheless, however predictable the stories may be, the author's expressive style depicts lives cocooned in uncertainty and loneliness, novelty and longing.

**A gentle read for those who believe the minutiae of life—especially childhood—are imbued with inexplicable meaning.**



**THE FAWN**

*Szabó, Magda*  
*Trans. by Len Rix*  
NYRB Classics (288 pp.)  
\$17.95 paper | March 28, 2023  
9781681377377

An actress relates her own drama.

Award-winning Hungarian writer Szabó (1917-2007) makes her country's turbulent history the backdrop for her second novel, published in 1959 and newly translated by Rix. During one fateful day in 1954, theater star Eszter Encsy, a woman consumed by hatred and bitterness, recounts the story of her life to someone whose identity is slowly revealed. She was shaped, she shows, by an impoverished childhood in pre-war Hungary, the brutal war that broke out when she was 15, and the Soviet takeover in 1948, which turned Hungary into a puppet communist state. Her father was a lawyer, "refined, easy-going, exceptionally cultured," but prone to giving free advice and turning away potential clients. Instead, he happily devoted himself to horticulture. As the family devolved into poverty, they became, Eszter admits, "a public disgrace." Supporting the family fell to her mother, who offered piano lessons; and carrying out all the household chores fell to Eszter: "Mother had to take special care of her hands, so I did the shopping, I cooked the supper, I chopped the firewood and dealt with the laundry." She felt "utterly insignificant" to her parents, who were devoted only to each other; she had no friends. "Everyone hated me," she recalls, describing herself as "a bad classmate, sour, irritable and riddled with envy." Her jealousy was focused especially on her classmate Angéla—beautiful, wealthy, and kind; her benevolence incited Eszter's rage. Eszter boasts that she lies "so easily I could have made a career out of it," which, as an actress, she actually did; but her confessions of cruelty and spite, of the betrayals and hypocrisy she witnessed, of the hurts she experienced, hardly seem lies but rather evidence of desperate need. Among the many tormented women who people Szabó's other novels, Eszter stands as most deeply and irreparably wounded by a traumatic past.

**A bleak, shattering tale.**



### **SUPER BLOOM**

*Tady, Megan*  
Zibby Books (272 pp.)  
\$26.99 | May 2, 2023  
9798985282870

A grief-stricken massage therapist agrees to help a romance novelist write her next book—but gets more than she bargained for.

Joan Johnston works as a massage therapist at Vermont spa the Apex, and she's beyond burned out. Part of that is because she kind of hates her job (the demanding clients, the physical stress, the unpredictable pay), and part of it is because she's grieving the death of her beloved boyfriend. They may have been a couple only for six months, but they were planning to spend the rest of their lives together—and now all she has to look forward to is another day getting yelled at by clients. If she doesn't get fired, that is. Her boss, Tara, tells her that if she can't get a review from notoriously hard-to-please client Carmen Bronze, she's finished. Joan thinks her days at the Apex are done—until Carmen wants to strike a deal. Carmen, a prolific romance novelist, wants Joan to give her notes about the inside workings of the spa so she can use them in her next book about a massage therapist. In return, she'll give Joan a glowing review—and a decent amount of cash. Joan happily takes the deal, but holding up her end of the bargain is harder than she expected. Taking notes for Carmen awakens her own long-dormant dream of writing, and soon Joan is secretly working on her own romance novel. What will happen when Carmen finds out? Debut author Tady carefully balances humor and grief, exploring Joan's genuinely touching heartbreak over the premature death of her boyfriend while also giving readers plenty of her snarky internal monologue. The story is at its best when Joan begins to open up to the people around her—her co-workers, book club members, and even a favorite grocery store employee she nicknames Deli. As Joan works through her grief and attempts to restart her life, it's satisfying to see her realize how much support and love she already has.

**An alternately heartbreaking and hopeful debut about the importance of writing your own story.**



### **A FATAL AFFAIR**

*Torre, A.R.*  
Thomas & Mercer (320 pp.)  
\$16.99 paper | June 20, 2023  
9781542039901

Nothing is remotely routine in Torre's heady brew of serial murder spiced with fraud, torture, impersonation, and assorted celebrity hijinks.

Oscar-winning Hollywood star Hugh Iverson's house manager phones the police from Iverson's exclusive gated neighborhood in Beverly

Hills to say that she's found two dead bodies. The man who's been shot through the head is pretty clearly Trent Iverson, Hugh's train wreck of a twin brother. But no one can identify the woman who's been tied to a chair and slashed to death—at least not until Torre drops this story like a hot potato to shift to that of Kyle Pepper, a plumber whose application to Protect the Children led to an invitation to his cancer-stricken son, Miles, to get a flight to Los Angeles and a VIP tour of Disneyland free of charge. Now the 6-year-old and his mother, Kerry, have gone missing, and eagle-eyed readers will instantly develop a strong suspicion about what's happened to Kerry. But they'll need all their wits to keep up with the torrent of nasty surprises that greet detectives Farah Anderson and Kevin Mathis. Not content to link these crimes in a particularly ugly way, Torre keeps pulling more rabbits from her hat. Nolan Price, a social-needs leader at Protect the Children, is hiding a terrible secret. So is Kerry Pepper. So are Hugh's pregnant fiancée, movie star Nora Kemp, and Hugh himself. And they aren't even all the same secret, though they're connected through some deep-laid plans. The roller-coaster revelations become so overheated that the tale moves deep into Jeffery Deaver territory. It's all too wildly implausible to give you nightmares, but you won't put it down till every last drop of blood has been shed.

**Buckle up and prepare to suspend your disbelief.**



### **THE MYTHMAKERS**

*Weir, Keziab*  
Marysue Rucci Books/Scribner (368 pp.)  
\$28.00 | June 13, 2023  
9781982189587

A journalist reconstructs the history of a recently dead writer by stepping into the life he left behind.

Salale Cannon is an aspiring writer who lives with her boyfriend, Hugh, in New York City. After the publication of an admiring magazine profile about an elusive playwright, her subject is revealed to be a plagiarist and a scumbag and to have told big lies about his life—all of which Sal failed to uncover. Now unemployed and adrift, Sal stumbles across a short story by Martin Scott Keller, a much older writer she once hit it off with at a literary event. To her shock, Sal realizes this story is about her encounter with Martin and, to her greater shock, learns that Martin is dead. Sal becomes personally invested when she learns that this story may be part of a larger unpublished novel—has he written more about her?—and is professionally inspired to chase a new profile that could redeem her reputation and put her career back on track. After a fight with Hugh, Sal heads to upstate New York to meet with Martin's widow, Moira, a theoretical physicist. Sal moves from interviewing Moira to spending her days at the widow's home going through archives and reaching out to others in Martin's life to piece together a portrait not just of the man and his work, but of the people, especially the women, who loved him. Beginning in Part 2 of the novel, Weir—herself an editor at *Vanity Fair*—alternates



“Everything you love about White—explicit sex, French champagne, and insouciant murder included.”

THE HUMBLE LOVER

Sal's story with chapters from the lives of Martin and his circle of family and friends, rippling further into the past as the tale unfolds. In this way, the novel itself is the result of Sal's imaginative rebuilding of Martin's world, though one that dissipates the psychological tension that builds during Sal's chapters. It's a testament to Sal that we want to stay with her more than we do.

**A thoughtful, if meandering, debut about what it means to make, and remake, a self.**



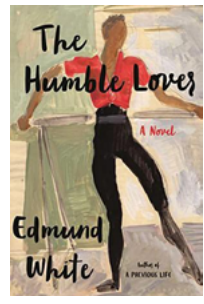
**THE LAST SONGBIRD**  
*Weizmann, Daniel*  
 Melville House (336 pp.)  
 \$17.99 paper | May 23, 2023  
 9781685890308



A moving neon noir cruise through Los Angeles, past and present.

Aspiring songwriter Adam Zantz, a Lyft driver, has been shepherding aged folk/pop icon Annie Linden around the city for months, gradually growing attached to the near recluse and enjoying the magnetism of her fame, her complex personality, the way she gives meaning to his down-at-heels life. When she's found dead in a muddy ditch on Hermosa Beach with, of all things, ripped-out cassette tape entangling her neck, the police finger Annie's personal assistant, a guy Adam knows couldn't be the murderer. So, lacking the necessary set of skills almost entirely, he nonetheless decides to play detective and solve the crime himself. Behind the wheel of his beloved silver 2016 Jetta, his home away from home (his actual home, sadly, is a storage space), he creeps and speeds by turn through the streets of Malibu, West Adams, and the Valley, casing joints, interviewing suspicious friends and family, earning some socks on the jaw and even occasional gunfire for his pains. All he has to go on is the existence of a certain mystery tape and the shadow of a stranger from Annie's dark past; all he has to encourage him is a deepening, post-mortem devotion to this star who felt like the mother he lost. Adrift within the LA worlds of yoga, hot tub sales, and the music convention industry, Adam in time realizes his white-knight derring-do is a sad distraction from an emotional whirlpool that, though drawing him downward to the truth of Annie's life, also threatens to submerge him in a Pacific Ocean of amateur-gumshoe consequences. Like, say, jail time or even death. In hard-boiled language with an added layer of humor and psychological insight, Weizmann tells a tale reliant on the thrill, and pathos, of popular music. Adam's quest for truth and justice is permeated by the constant soundtrack inside his head as he moves among Weizmann's wonderfully drawn cross-section of LA types with pluck and determination, a reluctant though willing Sam Spade for the sensitive slacker in us all.

**At turns thrilling and poignant, this is fine, thoughtful entertainment.**

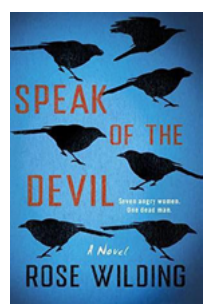


**THE HUMBLE LOVER**  
*White, Edmund*  
 Bloomsbury (272 pp.)  
 \$27.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9781639730889

A gay older gentleman's passion for a handsome ballet dancer assumes mythic proportions, with mythic consequences.

“His mother used to say there were only four good subjects for conversation in a disparate group: very complicated Indian food, a baby, a puppy, or the weather,” recalls Aldwych West early in this narrative of his doomed and desperate passion for 20-year-old August Dupond. There are times in White's latest when readers might find themselves wishing for a vignette concerning one of these anodyne topics. Studded with endless witticisms and brilliant social comedy, this book is likely the most clever and creative pornographic novel ever written by an octogenarian. No, it's not *all* sex—there's also ballet. August and his female friend Zaza are principal dancers in the New York City Ballet, and both the artistic and business aspects play a role here. Aldwych at first has the impression that French Canadian August is a bit of a dolt, but after the two men become chaste roommates in Aldwych's spacious apartment, August opens up and speaks eloquently about dancing. Aldwych watches in pain as August takes up with Pablo, then with Ernestine, an evil, shallow dominatrix who is married to Aldwych's nephew. When Aldwych senses that August is losing interest, he devises a plan to start his own ballet company with his idol at its center—kicking off the most energetic phase of life he's ever known, complete with a staff and meetings and the possibility that he should stop drinking. (He doesn't.) Unfortunately, Ernestine's ruinous schemes are well underway. White has perhaps taken Nijinsky as his model here, whose late career also inspires his main character: “Like a dragonfly who has only fifty days to live, he must do something remarkable with each one, something scandalous, something *new*.”

**Everything you love about White—explicit sex, French champagne, and insouciant murder included.**



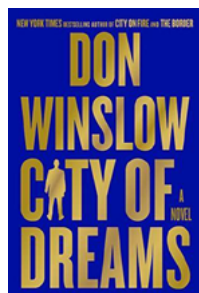
**SPEAK OF THE DEVIL**  
*Wilding, Rose*  
 Minotaur (304 pp.)  
 \$28.00 | June 13, 2023  
 9781250886934

Wilding's debut thriller asks which of seven women beheaded a man they all had compelling reasons to kill.

Once DI Nova Stokoe learns that the decapitated head found in an upper room in Newcastle's Towneley Arms Hotel is that of scientist Jamie Spellman, the mystery is only beginning. Despite his undoubted charm and the coveted grant he'd won to support a project intended to identify the perpetrators of

long-ago sex crimes, Jamie was a master manipulator who seems to have seduced, gaslighted, threatened, and betrayed every woman who crossed his path. It's clear from the beginning that the women in his life—retired policeman's wife Maureen Jones, infertile Sadia Spellman, wealthy Sarah Smith, librarian Olive Farrugia, cafe server Josie Kitchen, journalist Kaysha Jackson, trans chemist Ana Maria Cortês—have somehow made common cause, but it's much less clear how they came together in ways that transcended the particulars of their nominal relationships with him. As the story leaps from one woman's point of view to the next, a damning portrait emerges of a man without scruples who richly deserved his death. What's most distinctive here is not the question of whodunit or even the piercing group portrait of the women in Jamie's life but the delicate care with which Wilding ensures that even the most routine revelations—which of these women was Jamie's aunt, which one his wife, which one the mother of his child, which one his rape victim, which ones his sometime lovers, which of them cast a spell that involved the sacrifice of a sheep—arrive with a jolt.

**Man-hating driven to a furious point.**



### CITY OF DREAMS

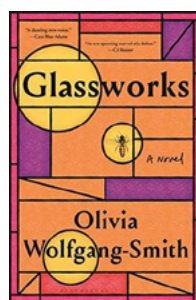
*Winslow, Don*  
Morrow/HarperCollins (320 pp.)  
\$21.00 | April 18, 2023  
978-0-06-285123-9

A gangster heads to LA in this bleak sequel to *City on Fire* (2022).

It's 1988. Recently widowed drug dealer Danny Ryan wants to "get the hell out of Rhode Island," where the victorious rival Moretti crime family wants him dead. He and a few buddies steal millions of dollars' worth of the Morettis' heroin, which he dumps into the ocean. Then they rob the gang of cold, hard cash, lots of it. But Danny won't kill anyone. "We came for the money, not a massacre, Danny thought. Tens of millions of dollars in cash to start new lives, not keep reliving the old ones." Then he and his pals head west to Tinseltown. More than anything else, he'd like to protect his young son, Ian, and raise him in a crime-free environment. Perhaps Danny's estranged mother, Madeleine, can help if he'll allow it. You'd think he'd keep a low profile, but instead he makes a series of blunders such as investing in a particular movie and boffing a famous actress. Thus, he forgets his old man's advice: "When you're on the run, you leave the skirts alone." Danny is, to play on the book's favorite profanity, effing inept. (Of course, if he does everything right there is no story, so there's that.) Instead of leaving his East Coast troubles behind, he brings them along where they metastasize into bloody violence. The story is well crafted but for a deus ex machina ending, and even that is enough of a shocker that readers may not mind. Along the way are a couple of eye-popping twists. And there are some great lines: "I thought Jesus died for my sins..." Danny muses. "Maybe my sins just maxed out Christ's credit card." And "Ned Egan has killed more guys than cholesterol." While the story can stand

alone, readers might want to read *City on Fire* first, as it provides essential background and is the better story. There is a glimmer inside Danny Ryan suggesting he wants to become—*could* become—a good person if he can only survive. The story has no more violence than many other crime thrillers, but a sense of hopelessness progressively builds. Danny pisses off his enemies, has the FBI's attention, and brings heartbreak to Hollywood. He may not live to raise his 3-year-old son.

**Enjoyable despite a few flaws, but damn, it's dark.**



### GLASSWORKS

*Wolfgang-Smith, Olivia*  
Bloomsbury (368 pp.)  
\$28.99 | May 16, 2023  
9781635578775



This sophisticated debut from Wolfgang-Smith traces an evolving emotional legacy through four generations of a family while examining the basic question of "how to love something without letting it have everything."

Glass—sometimes transparent, sometimes opaque, both sturdy and fragile—serves as the novel's primary metaphor while anchoring its plot. Characters sometimes see each other with joyous clarity but often with distortions or not at all. In 1910, Boston socialite Agnes Carter renounces wealth and respectability (and perhaps her moral compass) for glass blower Ignace Novak, drawn to his talent, passion, and lucidity. The glass bee he gives Agnes will thread its way through the novel, a small detail of growing resonance, a lovely merging of image, theme, and plot. In 1938, Edward Novak knows nothing of his parents' past. Stung more by their disinterest than their disappointment in him, the 18-year-old leaves their Chicago home to apprentice at a stained-glass studio in "their least favorite city," Boston. He fails at stained glass but finds love, unaware that his sympathetic girlfriend, a rebellious daughter desperate to escape her wealthy, overbearing family, offers a skewed mirror of his indifferent mother. With AIDS as the backdrop in 1986 New York, the failed attempts of high-rise window washer Novak (given name Pamela, but known just as Novak) and her disabled father, Ed, to understand each other's affection are heart-rending. At 47, wary loner Novak becomes unexpectedly captivated—"not lust but recognition," she explains—by Cecily, a young actress whose commitment to her art form offers another off-kilter mirroring, this time of equally obsessive if more gifted Ignace. Novak's misguided effort to reunite Cecily with her parents ends disastrously. Almost 30 years later, Cecily's daughter, Flip, working for a company incorporating cremains into small glass sculptures, feels unloved and bullied by her family, a co-worker, and an ex-lover until she begins to understand that "people didn't know things unless you told them." Wolfgang-Smith writes like a glass blower, patiently building and enhancing to create durable beauty.

**Simply put, this is a wonderful, wonderful book.**

## “Three misfits find their friendship tested in the 1980s and ’90s metal scenes.”

GONE TO THE WOLVES



### GONE TO THE WOLVES

Wray, John

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (400 pp.)

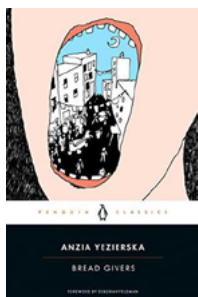
\$28.00 | May 2, 2023

9780374603335

Three misfits find their friendship tested in the 1980s and ’90s metal scenes.

Wray’s sixth novel centers on Kip, a White kid who, in 1987, is 16 and has moved from his broken home in Tallahassee, Florida, to live with his grandmother on the state’s Gulf Coast. Soon he befriends Leslie, a Black bisexual man with a passion for heavy metal, and Kira, a hard-nosed young White woman for whom metal concerts are an escape hatch from her impoverished, abusive home. The bands they love—“downright life-affirming in their bleakness”—become important enough to build a life around in the years to come. In time they head for LA just as its glam-metal scene has reached its zenith. (In one funny scene, Kip lectures Mötley Crüe’s inebriated lead singer about his artistic failures.) Kip becomes an in-demand writer for metal magazines, and Kira tends bar at a popular club, but Leslie starts to fall through the cracks and uses heroin. And once Kira grows entangled in the Norwegian black metal scene, where rumors of church burnings and ritual murders abound, everyone’s lives become more troubled. Wray deftly captures teenage alienation, the precarity of adolescence, and the way multiple subgenres of metal can provide solace, be it via glitzy fantasy or doomy angst. That is, so long as life doesn’t try to imitate art: The closing section, set in Norway, features set pieces that make the novel as much a horror story as a bildungsroman. And though the storytelling drags in places, Wray is gifted at capturing the dynamics of difficult friendships, as Kip’s relationships with Kira and Leslie snap and reknit over money, addiction, and music. Metal might offer a form of salvation, but the story turns on the commitments the three make to each other when the music is off.

**A giddy, harrowing, manic, and often dark coming-of-age tale.**



### BREAD GIVERS

Yezierska, Anzia

Penguin Classics (240 pp.)

\$17.00 paper | May 2, 2023

9780141313719

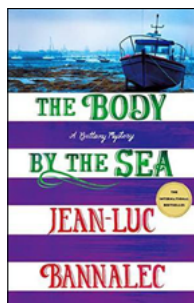
A classic of Jewish American literature returns to print.

First published in 1925, Yezierska’s fine novel describes a young girl struggling to survive the chaos and poverty of the Lower East Side tenements. Like her author, Sara Smolinsky emigrated from Poland with her family—in Sara’s case, several sisters, a worrying, nagging mother, and a holy fool of a father. While Sara and her sisters hire themselves out to shops and factories, bringing home their scant wages,

their father stays at home, consulting his holy books. “More and more,” Sara thinks, “I began to see that Father, in his innocent craziness to hold up the Light of the Law to his children, was as a tyrant more terrible than the Tsar from Russia.” Yezierska’s sense of vernacular is wonderful: The book, which was written in English, bears a strong Yiddish imprint. “But from always it was heavy on my heart the worries for the house as if I was mother,” Sara thinks near the beginning. The gradual smoothing-out of the language, as Sara herself becomes more assimilated, is subtle. But Yezierska can also be heavy-handed, as when the landlady bursts in on the Smolinsky family demanding “My rent!” while “waving her thick diamond fingers before Father’s face.” The book is saved from its own bleakness by Yezierska’s sense of humor—there is a helter-skelter kind of slapstick comedy throughout—and by Sara herself. After watching her sisters married off, one by one, to unpromising (to say the least) husbands, Sara decides to strike out on her own. She finds a small room of her own and starts attending night school: “I want to learn everything in the school from the beginning to the end,” she tells the teacher.

**A Jewish Little Women with less moralizing and—paradoxically—both bleaker and with more humor.**

## M Y S T E R Y



### THE BODY BY THE SEA

Bannalec, Jean-Luc

Minotaur (304 pp.)

\$26.99 | April 25, 2023

9781250840974

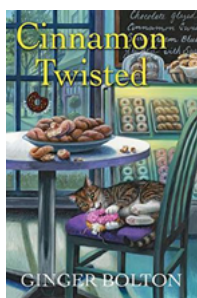
Murder comes to Concarneau.

Commissaire Georges Dupin has much on his mind. Renovations have made conditions in the police station intolerable. So although Kadeg, his other inspector, is on paternity leave, Dupin allows Inspector Riwal to take his family to Belle-Île for a few days. Even his assistant, Nolwenn, gets fed up with the dust and dirt and heads for the hills, quite literally, on a bike tour of the oldest pubs in Brittany. Dupin himself is ready to take time off to spend Pentecost with his companion Claire’s parents. But these plans get tossed out the window—again, quite literally—when he’s called to investigate the death of Dr. Pierre Chaboseau, whose wife found him dead in the courtyard after he fell from their apartment on the upper floor of the same building housing the Amiral, Dupin’s favorite restaurant. The outrage of a crime committed not only in his adopted province of Brittany, but in Concarneau, the very town he chose as his home after having been banished from Paris, is too much. Claire will have to show her parents the town on her own. Dupin scares up Rosa Le Menn and Iris Nevou, two young policewomen, to pitch in



for his missing inspectors, puts in a frantic call to Nolwenn, and sets out to find the general practitioner's killer. Since Chaboseau was a sharp businessman with a finger in many pies, there are plenty of suspects to choose from. But as the web grows more extensive and diffuse, it's a tip from the late Georges Simenon, whose novel *The Yellow Dog* was set in Concarneau, that leads the latter-day Georges to solve a crime with deep Breton roots.

**The tight-wound puzzle is half the pleasure Bannalec offers. The other half is the gorgeous Breton sea.**



### CINNAMON TWISTED

Bolton, Ginger

Kensington (256 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | April 25, 2023

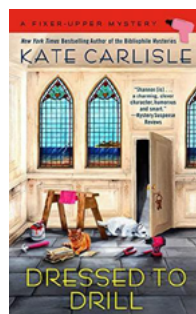
9781496740199

A Wisconsin baker learns that no good deed goes unpunished.

Emily Westhill can't help noticing the woman who sits alone at a table in Deputy Donut for two days in a row, making her mug of coffee last all afternoon

and taking home a bag of cinnamon twists. When the woman leaves through the back door after giving Emily's cat a catnip toy, Emily can't help thinking there must be something wrong. The woman rushes off down the alleyway, but in her hurry, she drops part of her gold earring on the ground before she disappears. Emily pockets the donut-shaped dangle. Later that evening, on her way to visit her parents at their campground, she realizes that the cabin the woman is renting from crafter Summer Peabody-Smith is on the way. So she stops to return the dangle and see if her customer is all right. She isn't. Emily finds her dead on the floor of the cabin, her dinner burning and the smoke alarm blaring. A severance paycheck from Happy Times Home Health Care suggests that the dead woman is named Pam Firston but gives no clue as to why she rented the remote place or who didn't want her to survive her vacation. Unfortunately, Chief Agnew, the new boss of the local force, thinks the answer to the second question is easy: It's Emily. He shuffles the ranking investigator, Det. Brent Fyne, off to Green Bay and takes over the case himself, bringing his inquiries literally to Emily's doorstep. Emily's determination to keep doing the right thing in spite of mounting pressure from a cop who knows no boundaries is a tribute to the winning ways of shopkeeper cozies.

**Like a good raised donut, Bolton's latest is light but consistent from first bite to last.**



### DRESSED TO DRILL

Carlisle, Kate

Berkley (336 pp.)

\$8.99 paper | May 2, 2023

9780593201350

The repurposing of an old church uncovers some unpleasant surprises.

Shannon Hammer and her sister, Chloe, are both involved in the construction business, though in very different ways. Chloe, who's engaged to Lighthouse Cove Police Chief Eric Jensen, stars in the national TV show *Makeover Madness*; Shannon runs a Northern California contracting business that does everything from building tiny houses for veterans to her latest project, turning an old church into an art museum. Shannon and her boyfriend, Mac Sullivan, have just returned from the Hollywood premiere of a movie based on Mac's popular Jake Slater novels when Shannon heads over to get the church project started. She has such a long-standing reputation for finding bodies that nobody's really surprised when she discovers Sarah Spindler, assistant to museum artistic director Madeline Whistler, dead in a chapel. As long as the building remains a crime scene, Shannon and her tightknit crew work on the exterior and wonder why the basement is so much smaller than the plans show. The Rev. Roy Patterson, his wife, and the congregation have all moved to a new church building, but they left behind a trove of valuable items, including some gold and silver pieces, in an enormous built-in cupboard that Shannon plans on repurposing. Despite the church secretary's promises to come collect their things, Shannon gets no help from the congregation. So she starts packing on her own and soon finds a key leading to a secret staircase. Some of the people involved in the restoration have long-standing connections with church members, giving Shannon plenty of suspects to investigate.

**Mystery, romance, and a primer on churches combine in a charming page-turner.**



### THE SEAT OF THE SCORNFUL

Carr, John Dickson

Poisoned Pen (256 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | June 6, 2023

9781728267630

The British Library Crime Classics reprints one of Carr's few novels not to include one of his signature locked rooms or impossible murders, first published in the U.S. in 1942 as *Death Turns the Tables*.

Aglow at her marriage proposal from nightclub partner Anthony Morell, Constance Ireton has finally screwed up the courage to introduce Morell to her father, dour Justice Horace Ireton, leaving the two men alone to get acquainted. Predictably taking against the suitor who has a shady past and who he

“A voracious and felonious appetite for paperback books gets a resourceful young woman into all kinds of trouble.”

DEATH IN FINE CONDITION

thinks can't hold a candle to barrister Frederick Barlow, a friend of Connie's from childhood, the judge asks how much he'll need to pay Morell to send him packing. They agree on a sum and arrange to meet at Ireton's home the following evening to hand off the cash. When a plea for help to the telephone exchange brings the police, they find Morell shot dead with a most surprising item in his pocket and the judge nearby. The case against Ireton is so strong that his old acquaintance Dr. Gideon Fell, who just happens to be on hand, announces that the question Inspector Graham must answer is not "Whodunit" but "Did he, or didn't he?" As Martin Edwards observes in his introduction, Carr is less interested here in presenting an impossible scenario than in plumbing the moral question of whether murder is ever justified. Despite the absence of any locked rooms, the clueing is as intricate as ever; if fans find fault, it'll more likely be with the piling of incident on unrelated incident in the story's second half and the outsized role improbable coincidences play in the mystery's solution.

Second-best Carr is still a potent brew.



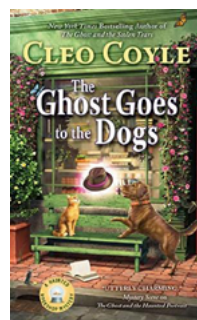
DEATH IN FINE CONDITION

Cartmel, Andrew  
Titan Books (336 pp.)  
\$16.95 paper | June 6, 2023  
9781789098945

A voracious and felonious appetite for paperback books gets a resourceful young woman into all kinds of trouble.

A brief prologue introduces Cordelia Stanmer with a dead man at her feet, a scene straight out of James M. Cain and the first of the many noir fiction references with which her story is packed. Just a few weeks earlier, she's indulging her passion for softcover books, which she can resell at an astronomical price after forging the author's name inside. Cordelia's not above indulging in burglary to feed her paperback habit. Edwin, her laid-back landlord, helps her stay afloat with the occasional loan and with weed. Cordelia's no-account elder brother, Stuart, also known as Stinky, pops in unannounced from time to time to complicate her life further. What she covets most are a series of vintage crime novels under the Sleuth Hound imprint. When Cordelia spots a collection of them in a photograph, she devises a daring and totally illegal plan to obtain them. But the biggest score of all is the cache of Sleuth Hound books she spots in a bag held by mild-mannered Colin Cutterham. Fortunately for her, the man is not only a voracious collector of Sleuth Hound titles, but also a creature of habit. Cordelia undertakes a serious surveillance mission in anticipation of a big score. What could possibly go wrong? Cartmel brings the same insouciance and offbeat charm to this series kickoff as to his long-running Vinyl Detective series.

A quirky crime yarn bound to hit the sweet spot for mystery lovers.



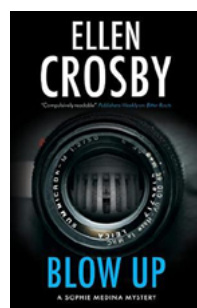
THE GHOST GOES TO THE DOGS

Coyle, Cleo  
Berkley (320 pp.)  
\$8.99 paper | May 2, 2023  
9780425255490

A bookstore owner and a hard-boiled ghost tackle two dog-centric mysteries.

Back in 1947 New York City, tough shamus Jack Shepard is hired by a terrier with a C-note and an explanatory letter around her neck. Meanwhile, in present-day Quindicott, Rhode Island, bookstore owner Penelope McClure is immersed in preparations for Pet Mystery Week, which will include a variety of events culminating in a pet parade. Ever since Jack was shot dead in her shop, his ghost has lingered on, helping Pen solve crimes while she helps him solve some in the 1940s. When an insistently barking dog belonging to Jane Cunningham, one of the customers helping Pen organize the pet week, shows up at the bookstore, Pen and her son, Spencer, follow him through town, eventually finding a badly wounded Jane. The police write it off as a hunting accident, but Jane's doctor thinks the wound is from a small caliber bullet fired at close range. Pen takes in Jane's dog, Sparky, and she and Jack resolve to discover the truth. Their quest is complicated by a backbiting crew of pet lovers quarreling over the events for the pet week and some episodes in Jane's past that could have made her enemies. Back in 1940s New York, Jack cares for the terrier Toto Two while he watches out for a threatening gangster fresh out of prison. When Pen returns to his time period, they attempt to solve Toto Two's case, helped by a key Pen finds attached to her collar that proves a valuable clue. Jack may be a figure of Pen's imagination, but he's real enough to strike sexual sparks as they work together to solve past and present crimes.

A delightful tale sure to appeal to pet lovers and fans of quirky whodunits alike.



BLOW UP

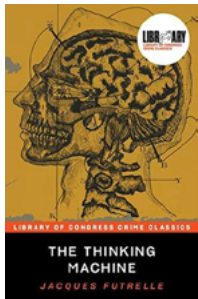
Crosby, Ellen  
Severn House (240 pp.)  
\$31.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781448308033

A photojournalist notices too many odd things for her own good.

Sophie Medina is struggling to deal with the death of her husband, a CIA spy supposedly killed in an accident. Even former Secretary of State Quill Russell, a family friend, won't reveal much, but he does ask Sophie to shoot photos for a book about his Virginia home as an anniversary gift for his wife, Vicki. On an early morning trip to shoot the last of the photos, she sees Vicki naked in the pool with a man who isn't her husband. Upset, Sophie flees, determined to say nothing. Stopping at her mother's nearby home, she learns about the handwritten

will of her recently deceased grandfather, a famous photographer, which leaves everything but his cameras to a small arts school. When she meets former boyfriend Jack O'Hara, now a Jesuit priest, for a run and dinner, they find an unconscious man lying in an alley; Jack recognizes him as Supreme Court Justice Everett Townsend, and Sophie sees he's the naked man from Vicki's pool. The justice is disliked by many and has a reputation as a womanizer. Maybe that's why his wife, Diana, who Jack says is a living saint, seems all too eager to have him cremated as soon as he's died. A young formerly homeless man named Javier Aguilera, whom Sophie's been helping to become a photojournalist, tells her he was in the ER when Justice Townsend came in—except it wasn't Justice Townsend. Javi says it was a homeless man with dementia who was Townsend's doppelgänger and who was known around town as “the Professor.” That information sets Sophie on a frustrating trip to try to prove what she's come to suspect.

**Boldly drawn characters shoulder mysteries set among elite Washington power brokers.**



### THE THINKING MACHINE

*Futrelle, Jacques*  
Poisoned Pen (304 pp.)  
\$14.99 paper | June 6, 2023  
9781728276083

Seven of Futrelle's 47 stories about Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen, originally published in 1905 and collected in 1907, five years before the author went down with the *Titanic*.

He's not much to look at, and his manners could stand a polish. (His most frequent greeting is “Well?”) For sheer brainpower, though, not even Sherlock Holmes can top the detective dubbed The Thinking Machine. Accompanied and often assisted by newspaper reporter Hutchinson Hatch, he's available to solve an impressively wide range of crimes. Even “The Scarlet Thread” and “The Flaming Phantom,” the most routine of these stories, are ingenious in demonstrating how an aspiring murderer doused the flame but kept the gas going in the target's home and why something called the THING is haunting an otherwise respectable domicile. “The Man Who Was Lost,” “The Great Auto Mystery,” “The Ralston Bank Burglary,” and “The Mystery of a Studio” all showcase both the powers of the irritable sleuth and the author's ability to generate suspense from apparently simple mysteries—who blew up a bank's impregnable safe? What's become of a missing artist's model? What's the connection between a murdered actress and another woman's elopement? What's the true identity of the amnesiac John Doane?—by letting the detective spin out one possibility after another instead of simply grilling suspects. The masterpiece here, however, is the endlessly anthologized story “The Problem of Cell 13,” in which The Thinking Machine bets a friend he can escape from solitary confinement in a local prison within a week. Spoiler: Even after his successful escape, his explanation is strewn with surprises.

**A largely forgotten detective well worth getting to know beyond his signature appearance.**



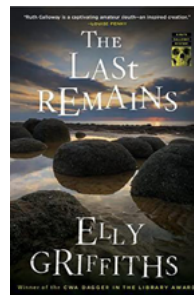
### DEATH BY CHOCOLATE MARSHMALLOW PIE

*Graves, Sarah*  
Kensington (304 pp.)  
\$27.00 | April 25, 2023  
9781496729255

A rival's death brings nothing but trouble to a rural Maine baker.

It's not all moonlight and roses for Jacobia Tiptree, known to Eastport's chocolate fans as Jake. Her father and stepmother are quarreling about his plans to move from the home they share with Jake into assisted living. Her son, Sam, and daughter-in-law, Mika, are having some yet-to-be-disclosed disagreement. And while drama dominates at home, there's also stress at work ever since Brad Fairway, whom Jake thinks she remembers vaguely from her days in New York laundering money for the mob, opens up high-end patisserie Choco's directly across Water Street from Jake and Ellie White's Chocolate Moose. But finding Brad shot to death in his shop proves no solution to Jake's business woes, since the local police immediately pounce on Ellie as their sole suspect. While Ellie waits to be thrown in the slammer, Jake searches frantically for alternatives, beginning with Brad's lady friend Babs Littrell, a local textile artist. Her investigation takes her into Eastport's art scene, where she meets a painter, a potter with a pet pig named Jillian, a virtual artist, and a cross-eyed Siamese cat who charms the pants off Jake's stepmom. What she doesn't meet is success, until an accidental encounter with the real murderer puts Jake's life in serious jeopardy.

**Offering a peek into the world of 21st-century fine art gives an extra shot of class to a standard shopkeeper cozy.**



### THE LAST REMAINS

*Griffiths, Elly*  
Mariner Books (352 pp.)  
\$30.00 | April 25, 2023  
9780358726487

Another suspicious death increases the pressure on Dr. Ruth Galloway's relationship with DCI Harry Nelson, which has never been resolved despite the daughter they share and the murders they've solved together.

Ruth is happy to get away from the University of North Norfolk, where she's a respected archaeologist whose department has just been cut as insufficiently profitable. An expert in old bones, she's worked cases with Nelson for years, sharing their daughter, Kate, while he's still married and has three children with Michelle, who's currently living in another city. Nelson wants Ruth and Kate to live with him, but after years of seeing him choose Michelle and their children first, she's understandably reluctant. Now a builder has called Ruth to check out a skeleton found behind a wall in an old shop; she

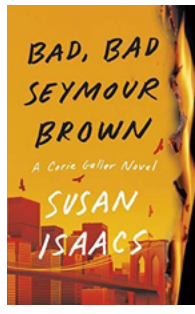


# “Murder casts a dark shadow over yet another Hollywood production—and particularly over its key costumer.”

FINAL CUT

identifies the bones as being fairly modern because there’s a metal pin in the ankle. The bones turn out to be those of Emily Pickering, a Cambridge archaeology student who was last seen on a field trip with Prof. Leo Ballard, several other students, and a druid called Cathbad in 2002. Cathbad, who’s been Ruth’s friend for years, readily admits to knowing Emily and Ballard, whom Emily’s parents accused of masterminding her disappearance. Then Cathbad vanishes, deepening the mystery of Emily’s murder. Cathbad is partner to Judy, Nelson’s best officer, who must recuse herself. Frantic with worry, Judy relies for support on Ruth, whose own life is in a shambles as she considers her future with teaching and with Nelson. She’ll find herself in real danger before the crime and her problems are solved.

**Another treat in an excellent series that balances detection with personal relationships.**



## BAD, BAD SEYMOUR BROWN

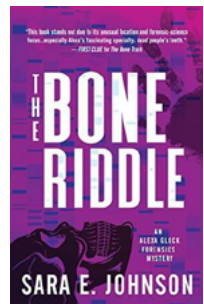
Isaacs, Susan  
Atlantic Monthly (400 pp.)  
\$27.00 | May 2, 2023  
9780802159069

In this follow-up to *Takes One To Know One* (2019), an ex-FBI agent and her retired cop father team up again to solve a homicide cold case.

Still suffering PTSD symptoms from the last FBI case she consulted on, Corie

Geller has settled into a quiet post-pandemic life on Long Island as an “underemployed suburban wife and mother” with her husband, daughter, and her Queens-based parents, who moved into the guest suite during the initial lockdown. But when Corie’s father, former NYPD detective Dan Schottland, is contacted by April Brown, the sole survivor of a two-decades-old unsolved arson that killed her parents, Corie gets pulled into helping him investigate a potential murder attempt on April—someone driving a dark SUV tried to run down the film studies professor on the Rutgers University campus. Was the attack related to the murders of Seymour Brown, a brutal man who laundered money for the Russian mob, and his wife, Kim? More than 40 years ago Isaacs burst onto the publishing scene with the bestselling *Compromising Positions*, a comic mystery mocking suburban mores. Unfortunately, she breaks no new ground here; her dull storyline is slowed down by the constant observational digressions of the characters. Everyone talks, talks, talks, and they don’t always stick to the point, as in the conversation about Seymour’s memorial service, which devolves into a comparison of funeral rites among different ethnic and religious groups, much to Dan’s (and the reader’s) annoyance. While true to life, this doesn’t make for stimulating reading. Likewise, Isaacs’ noted snarky humor now feels stale. The action only picks up in the book’s final third, and by then the reader doesn’t much care.

**Only for die-hard Isaacs fans, who will get the title’s Jim Croce reference.**



## THE BONE RIDDLE

Johnson, Sara E.  
Poisoned Pen (336 pp.)  
\$16.99 paper | June 13, 2023  
9781728257341

Forensic odontologist Alexa Glock, already transplanted from Raleigh, North Carolina, to Auckland, continues to reach beyond her professional credentials in her fourth case.

Tony Cobb, the caretaker at Black Reef estate, has found a body in its survivalist bunker whose face has been rendered unidentifiable by maggots. It can’t be that of Harlan Quinn, the Silicon Valley billionaire who owns the New Zealand estate, because his wife, Audrey, reports from California that he’s in Germany. So the first mystery to solve is the identity of the corpse, and that’s why Alexa’s boyfriend and sometime collaborator, DI Bruce Horne, who just happens to be passing through, calls her in. Even after Alexa conclusively identifies the dead man as Harlan Quinn, his wife continues to maintain that he’s in Germany, and a new mystery quickly sprouts: How did he die? The fact that Alexa’s formidable forensic skills don’t throw any light on this second riddle doesn’t prevent her from inserting herself into the investigation, with the full approval of Bruce and DI Micala Steele, who’s officially in charge of the case. Once the police, with unexpected assistance from Alexa, establish the cause of death, they can finally get down to the question of who killed the billionaire, whose obsession with maintaining his privacy seems to have rubbed off on everyone who served him, including the mistress he cheated on Audrey with and the other lover he cheated on the mistress with. Though Quinn’s seigneurial indifference to people he’s not trying to bed makes the riddle of whodunit the least interesting of the three mysteries, there’s much to enjoy, especially in the first half of this tale, and readers who check out early won’t have to worry about what they’re missing.

**Bonus: those New Zealand landscapes the victim seemed determined to destroy.**



## FINAL CUT

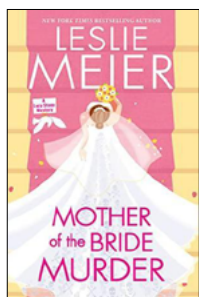
McCown, Marjorie  
Crooked Lane (336 pp.)  
\$28.99 | June 6, 2023  
9781639103676

Murder casts a dark shadow over yet another Hollywood production—and particularly over its key costumer.

Despite his name, producer/director Marcus Pray is a predator who bullies his colleagues, does his best to surround himself with Victoria’s Secret models, and hits on every woman in sight. Joey Jessop, the “queen of made-to-order” at Left Coast Costumes, is a consummate pro, but part of her professionalism has been to turn a blind eye to Pray and his kind as he asserts

his seigneurial rights. Pray's new production is threatened with the worst kind of publicity and even a shutdown after Joey finds Courtney Lisle, the second assistant director, dead of undisclosed causes. Since Courtney was Pray's semisecret lover, their lives are both held up to scrutiny. But it's even worse for Joey, who left her own lover, first AD Eli Logan, over his uncontrollable coke habit a year ago only to see him pair up with Courtney. *Popvibe* reporter Maggie Fuller keeps hounding her for an interview; an anonymous source keeps texting her threats of vengeance; Det. Corinne Blankenship, of the LA County Sheriff's Office, keeps expressing impatience with her protestations of innocence; and the production keeps being interrupted by an escalating series of accidents that seem like anything but. McCown steepers her workmanlike whodunit in a million sharply observed details that give you a painfully keen sense of what it's like to work on a Hollywood production on which somebody else has all the power.

**The perfect remedy that will keep star-struck wannabes down on the farm.**



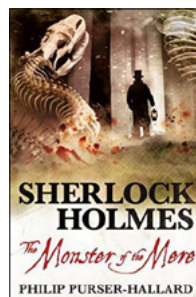
### MOTHER OF THE BRIDE MURDER

Meier, Leslie  
Kensington (304 pp.)  
\$27.00 | April 25, 2023  
9781496733764

Maine reporter Lucy Stone sees her daughter's dream wedding turn into a nightmare.

As the only local newspaper in Tinker's Cove, the *Courier* gets its fair share of wedding announcements. Still, Lucy can't help feeling nettled when Janice Oberman sails into the paper's office, duck boots and all, to crow about her third daughter, Chelsea, becoming engaged less than a month after Morgan, her second. Although her son, Toby, married his high school sweetheart ages ago, Lucy's three intelligent, accomplished daughters are still unwed. Fortunately, Elizabeth, the oldest of them, calls within minutes from Paris, where she works in an upscale hotel, to announce her engagement. Her prospective groom, Jean-Luc Schoen-Rene, is the son of a count (take that, Janice!), and the wedding will take place at his parents' 80-plus-room chateau in the French countryside. Wrangling everyone, including Toby's Seattle-based family, overseas is a major undertaking, but once there, Lucy is increasingly uneasy about the upcoming nuptials. Why, she wonders, are Elizabeth and Jean-Luc allocated just two dark, tiny rooms in the majestic family home? Why does Jean-Luc take Elizabeth and her sisters to a local pub only to spend the evening playing ball with his friends? Readers never find out, because the wedding ceremony is prefaced by a corpse and disrupted by a shooting, leaving Lucy to pick up the pieces. Fortunately, American ingenuity saves the feckless foreigners from a self-induced disaster, and Lucy's able to return to Tinker's Cove with her head held high.

**Meier's xenophobia manages to flourish even on its targets' home turf. Vive l'Amérique!**



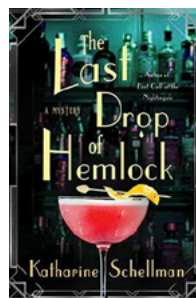
### SHERLOCK HOLMES The Monster of the Mere

Purser-Hallard, Philip  
Titan Books (320 pp.)  
\$15.95 paper | May 9, 2023  
9781789099263

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson wander into a case that might better have suited Professor Challenger of *The Lost World*.

A walking tour of the Lake District in 1899 brings Watson to the nothingburger village of Wermeholt, where his old teacher, noted anatomist Prof. Summerlee, has joined forces with paleontologist Prof. James Creavesey on a mission too hush-hush to reveal to an outsider. The plot thickens when Creavesey's student Henry Gramascene goes missing and curdles when Gramascene's found mauled and bashed to death, having evidently been attacked while rowing across the Wermewater and dragged himself to collapse in the local cemetery. In the wake of this gruesome discovery, Summerlee and Creavesey acknowledge that they're investigating signs of the Hagworm, a dinosaur rumored to have somehow survived into the Anthropocene Era. Watson naturally writes to Holmes, though this particular mystery doesn't exactly seem to be up his alley. Holmes' investigation throws new light on the connection between Gramascene's death and legends that the foreign-born wife of Lord William de Wermeston, an ancestor of local aristocrat Lady Ophelia Wermeston, who's sponsoring Summerlee and Creavesey's research, turned into a "loathsome worm" and devoured her distinguished husband. But all of Holmes' insistence that there must be a rational explanation for all these incidents cannot prevent two more violent deaths before he and Watson confront the Hagworm in all its ghoulish glory.

**Sherlock Holmes in Jurassic Park. If you think that sounds too outlandish to work, you may be on to something.**



### THE LAST DROP OF HEMLOCK

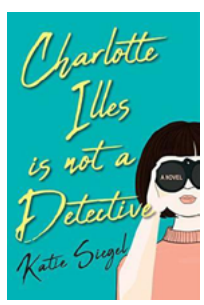
Schellman, Katharine  
Minotaur (336 pp.)  
\$28.00 | June 6, 2023  
9781250831842

Jazz Age friends team up again to uncover the truth about a suspicious suicide.

A single word—*Dead*—ripples through the lively speak-easy the Nightingale like a flood. Vivian Kelly catches the eerie sensation and links it to the absence of her best friend, Bea, who's uncharacteristically late. When Bea finally arrives at their nightly hangout, it's with the sad news that her beloved Uncle Pearlie is dead by his own hand. Despite a doctor's declaration of suicide, Bea is certain that someone killed Pearlie. Vivian, not convinced but concerned for her friend, decides to help Bea with her probe. Her belief in Bea's theory grows when the coroner

rules that arsenic was the cause of death and a visit to Uncle Pearl's apartment reveals that his secret hoard of money has been stolen. Schellman builds on the vivid portrait of Roaring '20s New York that she introduced in the series debut, *Last Call at the Nightingale* (2022): The social order is superficially progressive but simmering with multiple prejudices which both the Irish immigrant Vivian and the African American Bea encounter. The rich supporting cast includes the androgynous Honor "Hux" Huxley, who runs the Nightingale with an iron hand; colorful criminal Leo Green; and Vivian's demure sister, Florence, working with quiet determination as a dressmaker to make ends meet. The discovery that Pearl's gal, Alba, is pregnant and that he worked for gangsters thickens the plot, and a threatening letter adds urgency to the probe.

**A brisk and bubbly period whodunit with a pair of indomitable heroines.**



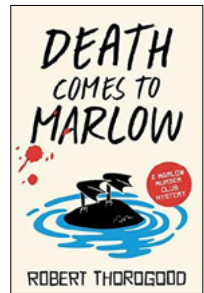
**CHARLOTTE ILLES IS NOT A DETECTIVE**

*Siegel, Katie*  
Kensington (352 pp.)  
\$16.95 paper | June 27, 2023  
9781496740984

A former child detective grapples with her identity now that she's neither child nor detective.

When you were a wunderkind pre-tween detective, there's nowhere to go but down. While 25-year-old Charlotte Illes still has all her curiosity and eye for detail, early semifame has turned her from investigative work to checking job listings from her mother's couch in New Jersey. It's not that Charlotte isn't motivated. Maybe she's just in the throes of a quarter-life crisis now that her closest friends, Lucy and Gabe, have abandoned her for city life and full-time (technically Gabe is in social media, so *fullish*-time) work. Charlotte's spinning her wheels, hanging with her mom, and going on bad first dates, like the one with that girl who wants to hear all about those early days rather than get to know Charlotte now. When your whole identity is defined by not being what you used to be, it's easier to know who you aren't than who you are. Charlotte is almost ready to ponder these big questions when she gets a call on the old detective phone—think landline Batman—with a case from her brother Landon's girlfriend, Olivia. Charlotte's pretty sure Landon and Olivia are only humoring her out of her slump with the promise of a mystery, but maybe, just maybe, an investigation is the best way for Charlotte to define who she is if she's not a detective.

**Notes of a Gen Z-er, with writing on the edge.**



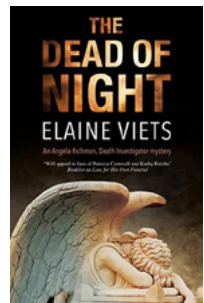
**DEATH COMES TO MARLOW**

*Thorogood, Robert*  
Poisoned Pen (288 pp.)  
\$16.99 paper | June 6, 2023  
9781728250540

Put on your thinking cap. It's time for another round with the brainiest trio of amateur sleuths on either side of the Atlantic.

You know someone's in serious danger of dying when he phones you out of the blue the day before his second marriage, asks you to a party that afternoon, and assures you that no one in attendance expects to be murdered. At the party at White Lodge, the unlucky bridegroom, Sir Peter Bailey, quarrels with Tristram, the son he plans to disinherit in favor of his bride, nurse Jenny Page, but doesn't even get to greet most of his guests before he's found dead in his study, crushed under a heavy cabinet. The study door is locked; the only key is in Sir Peter's pocket; and every plausible suspect, from Sir Peter's intended to his two children to Chris Shepherd, the White Lodge gardener who has every reason to hold a grudge against his employer, has a solid alibi. It's all a massive headache to DS Tanika Malik and DI Gareth Hoskins, who snatches the case away from her, and it's all catnip to sharp-witted retiree Judith Potts and her two buddies, vicar's wife Becks Starling and Suzie Harris, a dogsitter who has her own radio program. Starting while the corpse is still cooling on the floor, they venture a series of deductions as keenly observant and remorselessly logical as they are unlikely. Yes, there'll be another murder, but no, whatever it seems, the Marlow Murder Club is never in danger of losing control.

**As anodyne as a village fair and as fiendishly clever as one of the many crossword clues embedded in the story.**



**THE DEAD OF NIGHT**

*Viets, Elaine*  
Severn House (240 pp.)  
\$31.99 | April 4, 2023  
9781448310357

Death investigator Angela Richman probes a gruesome murder in a cursed crypt.

Chouteau Forest University's Howlo-ween Benefit Auction features a fancy dinner where the hoi polloi mingle freely with the likes of Reggie and Bradford Du Pres, members of the exclusive Chouteau Founders Club. There's even room for rich nobodies like Trey Lawson to breathe the rarified air. But the main event is a bidding war for the right to spend the night in the university's Cursed Crypt, the burial spot of Eugene Franco "Mean Gene" Cortini, who in 1822 laid a curse on the fledgling college that haunts it to this day. What could possibly go wrong when Lawson snatches the prize from under Bradford's nose and is gleefully locked in the tomb to spend the night with his



college-age girlfriend, a case of beer, two bottles of Merlot, and a fifth of tequila? Angela, who attends the shindig at the urging of her boss, Police Chief Butkus, has her misgivings, especially when she finds a jack-o-lantern inscribed with the warning “*Mean Gene will not sleep alone. Tonight two will join him—permanently!*” But Butkus pooh-poohs her concerns until the next morning, when two dead bodies are discovered, awash in blood. The first part of the puzzle: How did someone get into the crypt, which was locked and chained shut? The second, even more puzzling part: Which of Lawson’s many enemies did it? Viets lets Angela stretch way past her pedestrian role as a collector of death scene evidence, making her almost a partner to the investigating officer.

**Allowing her heroine to be both methodical and intuitive should endear Viets to fans of feisty female sleuths.**



**PLAYING IT SAFE**

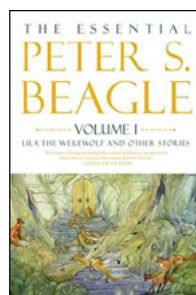
Weaver, Ashley  
Minotaur (272 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 9, 2023  
9781250885876

A British intelligence officer and a safecracker combine their talents in yet another dangerous enterprise during World War II.

Electra McDonnell was brought up to be a lady in the London household of her safecracking Uncle Mick, where she learned a thing or two about the criminal side of life. Intelligence officer Maj. Ramsey finds her in a movie theater, seeking respite from the Blitz, when he arrives with her latest assignment. Ellie is provided with false papers and a book on birds and sent to stay at a lodging house in Sunderland to await orders. On the way to her new digs, she barely escapes being crushed by a lorry, a harbinger of things to come. Ellie makes friends with sisters living near her lodging and their circle of friends, including the man who saved her from the lorry but later dies before her eyes. When she finally encounters Maj. Ramsey while searching the dead man’s room, he’s annoyingly reticent about her mission. So she continues to chat up the group and meet new faces until Ramsey approaches her in the guise of a suitor, a ploy they’ve used before and one that capitalizes on the obvious attraction between them. Ellie finally learns that a ring of counterfeiters is making both money and fake identity cards for German spies. Ramsey suspects that the printing plates are hidden in the safe of an eccentric, bird-loving printer. Ellie’s job is to crack it and roll up the spy ring.

**Mystery, romance, and adventure aplenty in a rousing wartime setting.**

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



**THE ESSENTIAL  
PETER S. BEAGLE,  
VOLUME I  
*Lila the Werewolf and  
Other Stories***

Beagle, Peter S.  
Tachyon (352 pp.)  
\$28.95 | May 16, 2023  
9781616963880

The first part of a two-volume retrospective from the author of *The Last*

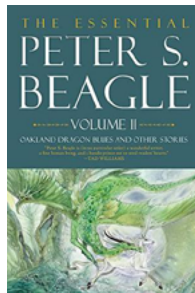
*Unicorn* (1968).

Volume 1, introduced by Jane Yolen, contains some of Beagle’s most classic stories, including “Come Lady Death,” in which a jaded British woman meets her match when she invites Death to her ball, and “Professor Gottesman and the Indian Rhinoceros,” about a socially awkward academic’s relationship with a somewhat unusually presented and philosophically minded unicorn. “Lila the Werewolf” features the first appearance of Joe Farrell, the protagonist of Beagle’s novel *The Folk of the Air* (1986); fans of that book will be delighted to encounter Farrell in an additional story that takes place after the novel and features some interesting character growth on his part. The collection also contains the absolutely chilling “We Never Talk About My Brother,” the story of a news anchor with a secret and impossibly powerful control over the stories he reports, and the sweetly melancholy “Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel,” concerning a painter’s divinely compelling model. There are also whimsical works like “Gordon, the Self-Made Cat,” starring a mouse who refuses to accept that biology is destiny. Whether set in a fantastical landscape, the New York City of Beagle’s youth, or the invented northern California town of Avicenna, these are fables that explore how a brush with the uncanny can either change a life or simply spotlight what is already present. Magic is the lens through which the author shows us how fraught a mother-daughter relationship can be, how difficult it can be to let go of a dead friend or lover, and how a greater threat can unite two squabbling siblings. Delicate line drawings by artist Stephanie Law add a charming coda to each tale.

**Brimming with magic, lyrical prose, and deeply felt emotion, this is, indeed, essential reading.**

“Another of Leckie’s beautiful mergings of the political, philosophical, and personal.”

TRANSLATION STATE



**THE ESSENTIAL PETER S. BEAGLE, VOLUME II**  
**Oakland Dragon Blues and Other Stories**

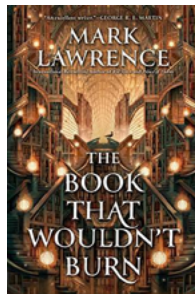
Beagle, Peter S.  
 Tachyon (352 pp.)  
 \$28.95 | May 16, 2023  
 9781616963903



The second part of a two-volume retrospective from the acclaimed fantasist.

This installment, introduced by SF and horror writer Meg Elison, draws more directly from Beagle’s past, featuring multiple stories purportedly chronicling otherworldly encounters experienced by Beagle and his friends in their youth. Two other tales attribute unearthly abilities to Beagle’s dear friend Avram Davidson, the late (and somewhat quirky) writer. Some of the stories draw from others’ literary works, including a Tarzan/John Carter crossover that also serves as a not-so-subtle criticism of creator Edgar Rice Burroughs’ bigotry and a gripping Patricia Highsmith-inspired story of a meek housewife summoning previously unknown inner strength when confronted by a new member of her bridge club who views her as prey. Two stories have something of a *Twilight Zone* resonance about them (which isn’t intended as a criticism of these two powerful tales): “Sleight of Hand,” involving a woman mourning the recent death of her husband and child who’s granted an impossible second chance, and “Vanishing,” about an unhappy man forced to confront his dark memories serving as a young American soldier monitoring the Berlin Wall. Of course, there are two tales of dragons invading California (one a work of metafiction and the other a buddy-cop story) and a chronicle of werewolf revenge that draws from an entirely different cultural tradition than the first volume’s “Lila the Werewolf.” There are perhaps many readers who know Beagle only from his classic novel, *The Last Unicorn* (1968), unaware of his considerable body of long and short fiction; others are longtime fans already familiar with such gems as *A Fine and Private Place* (1960), *The Folk of the Air* (1986), and *The Innkeeper’s Song* (1993), among others. This two-volume collection is a must-have for all of them.

Yes, essential, for whomever you are.



**THE BOOK THAT WOULDN'T BURN**

Lawrence, Mark  
 Ace/Berkley (576 pp.)  
 \$29.00 | May 9, 2023  
 9780593437919

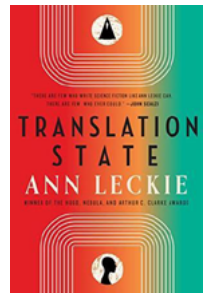


An aspiring librarian and a young man trapped in her library attempt to unravel its mysteries in this tightly paced fantasy.

Livira came to Crath City as a refugee after sabbers—wolf-men who prey on humans—destroyed

the tiny desert village she called home. In a stroke of good fortune, the city’s internal bureaucracy sends her to train at its vast library. Lawrence’s young and uneducated protagonist quickly finds her feet, gaining literacy at a frenetic pace, but soon realizes she may not be cut out to follow all the library’s rules. Meanwhile, in a distant corner of the same library, a young man grapples with his weighty relationship to the cavernous building that acts as his prison. Over several generations, five children disappeared inside the library’s Mechanism, a well-guarded mystery structure that can bring any book to life. Years later, the Mechanism spat Evar and his four “siblings” out together, un-aged, into a world in which they may now be the last of their kind—and though they’ve left the Mechanism, they still can’t leave the library. Each child emerged with a particular skill set honed by the book they happened to be carrying at the time of their disappearance. All except for Evar, that is. Where the others returned with advanced knowledge in combat, subterfuge, and the humanities, “Evar had emerged with nothing, just the sense that something had been torn from his memory, leaving a chasm so wide he could fall into it and never be found.” More than 10 years after his return, a full-grown Evar sets out to track down the mystery woman he lost in the Mechanism, who now exists only as a gap in his memories. In his search, he crosses paths with Livira, who becomes preoccupied with his mission herself. What follows is a madcap adventure full of political intrigue, time travel, philosophy, and romance. Lawrence works with many threads here, but none feels misused or insufficiently explored. Rather, the author unspools them masterfully, leaving behind a tightly woven tapestry that readers will ache to see finished even if they can predict one or two of the tale’s myriad twists and turns.

Gripping, earnest, and impeccably plotted.



**TRANSLATION STATE**

Leckie, Ann  
 Orbit (432 pp.)  
 \$29.00 | June 6, 2023  
 9780316289719



A seemingly pointless quest ignites a political firestorm in this space opera follow-up to the Imperial Radch trilogy and *Provenance* (2017).

Enae Athtur (whose pronouns are *sielbir*) is forced from hir childhood home and hir comfort zone to take a job for the Saeniss Polity’s Office of Diplomacy that’s intended as a sinecure: searching for traces of a fugitive Presger Translator who disappeared 200 years ago. Meanwhile, despite having been raised by kindly foster parents, Reet Hluud has never quite fit in anywhere. Ignorant of his origins, trapped in a dead-end job, friendless, and tormented by strangely compelling daydreams of vivisectioning the people he meets, he thinks he’s finally found community with the Siblings of Hikipu. On what appears to be very little evidence, they claim that Reet is a Schan, a scion of their long-vanished royal line, and welcome him to their fellowship,

## “A fantastic magical adventure.”

INK BLOOD SISTER SCRIBE

which celebrates their cultural heritage...and perhaps dabbles in a little terrorism. And Qven, brought up in the innocently violent nursery of the Presger Translators, fears losing herself in the transition to adulthood, which involves a physical and mental merging with another person; their attempt to escape that apparent inevitability leads to Qven's permanent disgrace. When Enae does what no one expects—actually *finding* the trail of the lost Translator—it upends the lives of Enae, Reet, and Qven and threatens the treaty that protects humanity from the Presger, an impossibly powerful and enigmatic alien race. It all sounds very complicated—and it is, enjoyably so—but basically, this is yet another opportunity for Leckie to explore her favorite themes: the meaning of family, humanity, and the right to one's personhood. Although the novel is mostly set outside the Radch Empire, the events of that trilogy and of *Provenance* have a profound effect on the action here, and they also share some characters. This work also addresses many questions from the previous books about the peculiar behavior of Translators, whose originally human DNA has been substantially reengineered by the Presger.

**Another of Leckie's beautiful mergings of the political, philosophical, and personal.**



### MORE PERFECT

*Oh, Temi*

Gallery/Saga (544 pp.)

\$19.99 paper | May 30, 2023

9781982142834

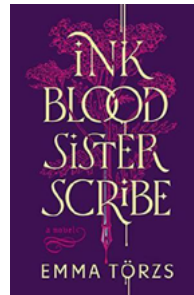
In the near future, technology brings minds and dreams together—but to what end?

Despite her family's concerns, Moremi is elated to receive a Pulse, which will finally allow her brain to tap directly into

the internet. With the Pulse, Moremi no longer has to be alone: She can message everyone she knows from inside her head or run a search on anything she sees or anything she might wonder. Meanwhile, Orpheus' father has raised him alone on an island, dodging the authorities, until a misstep sends him into a London full of technology that he doesn't wholly trust. As Orpheus learns how to use the Pulse to manipulate dreams, Moremi continues to seek solutions for her depressive episodes, and the two will eventually find themselves in each other's lives. Meanwhile, technology and politics entwine as, on one side, the inventors of the Pulse push for technological singularity while, on the other, Revelators like Moremi's sister advocate for a more analog lifestyle. Moremi and Orpheus simply want to focus on their own lives and concerns, but plans have been made since before they were born that they may never escape. The world of dreams blends seamlessly with the world of big tech as author Oh explores the drawbacks and positive aspects of living plugged in. The depiction of a near-future London easily portrays the diversity of the country—Moremi is British Nigerian, and Orpheus is mixed race—and deftly underscores the inequalities and problems that are still present. While the pacing leaves time for

the reader to sink into emotions, the plotting is tightly crafted, weaving science fiction, mythology, and more to tell a tale that feels pertinent right now.

**An emotional tale exploring light and dark and the gray areas in change and progress.**



### INK BLOOD SISTER SCRIBE

*Törzs, Emma*

Morrow/HarperCollins (416 pp.)

\$27.99 | May 30, 2023

9780063253469

Two half sisters work to protect their dead father's collection of magical books in Törzs' bewitching debut.

Esther and Joanna Kalotay are keepers of an impossible secret: that magic exists, and it's channeled through certain enchanted books. Esther and Joanna's father, Abe, is fanatical about his collection of these books, but despite having devoted his life to magic, he's never been able to figure out how they were written. One terrible day, he tries to enact a spell from a mysterious book and is killed. This tragedy leaves Joanna, who shares her father's ability to sense magic humming in a book, to tend to the library. Before he died, Abe had warned Esther, who is mysteriously immune to all magic, that she must take care never to stay anywhere for longer than a year, always leaving on Nov. 2, or she will risk being hunted down and killed by the same people who murdered her mother. Only once did Esther test this rule, and after barely escaping a strange man bent on killing her in her bedroom, she's careful not to put down roots. But when Esther's travels take her to a science station on Antarctica, she discovers that someone who knows about magic has finally found her, and her only chance to save herself is to trust a stranger who sent her a note and a plane ticket through an enchanted mirror. When Esther uses that ticket, she soon meets more people who know about magic and is forced to decide whom she can trust as she tries to discover why someone wants her dead. Törzs' simple magic system of books is straightforward, with clear rules set out for readers early on, leaving her plenty of space to explore how an obsession with power can twist people so deeply that they betray the ones they love. Esther and Joanna's complicated but loving relationship is wonderfully rendered, and Törzs pulls off such an expert series of twists that readers would be advised to cancel their plans until they get to the end.

**A fantastic magical adventure, not to be missed.**



## ROMANCE



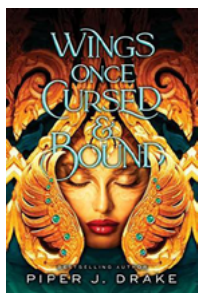
### FOR A SCOT'S HEART ONLY

Conkle, Gina  
 Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)  
 \$9.99 paper | April 25, 2023  
 9780062999016

A buttoned-up corset maker is forced to turn to a whaler for more than just business.

Mary Fletcher's direction in life was set the day she and her sister were taken in by their mother's Highland clan following her untimely demise. Vowing to steer clear of romantic entanglements, a young Mary decided to devote her life to her clan and the care of her little sister. She continues to be motivated by the same goals as a straight-laced corset maker in London. A member of a league that is attempting to hunt down a lost Scottish treasure, Mary is sharply focused on her mission until she becomes associated with businessman Thomas West. Thomas has inherited the whaling concern started by his father and is struggling to keep the legacy afloat. Mary's league owes Thomas a favor, and when their paths cross while she's at a brothel searching for clues to the whereabouts of the Lost Treasure of Arkaig, he sees the opportunity to claim his reward. When they join forces, Thomas and Mary find themselves, perhaps for the first time in their lives, motivated by causes other than duty. However, to build a future together, they must first tackle powerful enemies who seem to be perfectly aware of their deepest weaknesses. The final installment in Conkle's Scottish Treasures trilogy sparkles when it dwells on the relationships between the women of the league and details their tussles with powerful adversaries. While Mary and Thomas' interactions with each other are entertaining and sometimes heartwarming, their individual tugs of war with a complicated and layered nemesis are most engaging.

**A romance enlivened by mystery and intrigue.**



### WINGS ONCE CURSED & BOUND

Drake, Piper J.  
 Sourcebooks Casablanca (304 pp.)  
 \$16.99 paper | April 11, 2023  
 9781492683865

A vampire teams up with a woman who is unsure of the exact nature of her own supernatural abilities.

Bennett Andrews is an old and powerful vampire. He works for a dragon who finances and oversees the Darke Consortium, whose purpose is to research and recover magical items that might pose a danger to humans. Bennett is on the hunt for a pair of cursed red

shoes, which, once donned, will force the wearer to dance until they die. He finds the shoes on the feet of a beautiful and mysterious ballerina in Seattle. When the shoes arrived at rehearsal, Peeraphan Rahttana felt them calling to her and could not resist wearing them, only to discover they couldn't be removed. Bennett realizes that the shoes don't have the same power over Peeraphan that they do over other humans. She confesses that she might be a descendant of the kinnaree, a Thai bird princess. The kinnaree are magical creatures who lived in the Himmapan, the hidden mystical forests and mountains of Thailand. What she doesn't know is how she inherited their powers, including a pair of gorgeous swanlike wings, and how to control or use the magical talents she might have. Bennett is determined to teach Peeraphan what she needs to survive and understand the supernatural world she has entered. Their sweet, courtly romance evolves on their quest to save her from the shoes' curse. This is the first book in a new fantasy series by Drake, with a rich marriage of Thai-inspired mythology and more common paranormal creatures such as vampires and werewolves. The world-building slows the book down but will likely pay off in future installments of the series.

**An engaging new fantasy series introduces supernatural creatures from Thai mythology and culture.**



### LOVE AT FIRST SET

Dugan, Jennifer  
 Avon/HarperCollins (336 pp.)  
 \$16.99 paper | May 23, 2023  
 9780063307483

A woman who inadvertently convinces her best friend's sister to ditch her own wedding finds herself falling for the runaway bride.

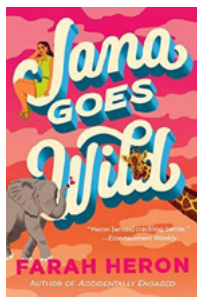
It's no exaggeration to say that Lizzie McCarthy's entire life revolves around the gym—it isn't just where she grew up and learned responsibility at a young age, but a gym called The Fitness Place is also her current professional home. She's never been able to score the promotion she thinks she deserves, though, and it seems that the Manderlays, who own the gym, are determined to keep her staffing the front desk for the foreseeable future. When their son, James, Lizzie's best friend, begs her to be his date to his sister Cara's wedding, Lizzie reluctantly says she'll do it—primarily to get some face time with her employers, since she's hoping to become the manager of their gym's new branch. One too many cocktails later, Lizzie stumbles on a crying woman in the bathroom and gives her a drunken pep talk only to discover much too late that the stranger she's just helped out is Cara—and that Lizzie has convinced her to ditch her wedding. Lizzie is determined to do everything she can to make sure her bosses don't learn she had a role in this mess, but now she's getting pushed into entertaining Cara while the newly single woman is hanging around trying to figure out what to do with her life. As the weeks pass, Lizzie discovers that she has a pretty strong crush on Cara, but with a promotion on the line and secrets stacking

# “A beautiful, compelling romance celebrating second chances and forgiveness.”

JANA GOES WILD

up all around them, is there a way she can both fulfill her aspirations and get the girl? The book's premise has so much potential, and the developing romance between Cara and Lizzie is the strongest component, but the toxic family relationships drag the book down, making the eventual resolution less effective.

**A clever rom-com that loses some of its spark by the end.**



## JANA GOES WILD

Heron, Farah

Forever (352 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | May 2, 2023

9781538725450



A destination wedding might be just the ticket to reuniting a woman with her ex.

Jana Suleiman was always known as a good girl who followed the rules—until five years ago, when a brief but intense fling with Anil Malek led to a broken heart and life as a single mother. Now, she and Anil both live in Toronto and successfully co-parent their daughter, Imani, but Jana is careful to keep an emotional distance from Anil. He's a wonderful father to their daughter, but he's still the man who broke her heart. Jana and her extended family, including her mother and daughter, are traveling to Tanzania for a destination wedding in the Serengeti National Park. Once they arrive, she is appalled to discover that Anil will also be a member of the wedding party. Jana's plans for a relaxing two-week vacation are ruined by Anil's presence. Suddenly, her private life is once again under intense scrutiny from her colleagues, friends, and extended family on the trip. Jana is a character who is both fierce and tender, determined to do right by herself and her daughter. With the help of the other bridesmaids, she makes a “letting loose” list to help her escape the rut she's in, but everything keeps bringing her back to Anil. The challenges facing the couple are complex. Jana is righteously angry at the way society has punished her for being a single mother while simultaneously rewarding Anil for being an attentive father. Anil has steadfastly tried to support Jana and Imani, but he doesn't know how to earn forgiveness for the mistakes of the past. Heron's novel is an exemplar of the “second chance” romance trope, with Jana and Anil working through layers of misunderstanding before they can trust each other again.

**A beautiful, compelling romance celebrating second chances and forgiveness.**



## BEST MEN

Karger, Sidney

Berkley (368 pp.)

\$17.00 paper | May 2, 2023

9780593439487

It's a battle of the best men in screenwriter Karger's debut romantic comedy.

Max Moody is not what most people think of when they hear the phrase “gay best friend,” and he's fine with that. No, he'll never call you “fierce” or gush about

Britney Spears, and so what if he unironically wears New Balance sneakers and has a soul-sucking HR gig? Max's best friend, Paige, has been perfectly content with his basic take on being a GBF... that is, until she gets engaged. Paige enlists Max to be her best man, her “gay of honor,” and, much to his chagrin, her wedding planner. Max always assumed he'd be first of their duo to get married, but the closest thing he has to a relationship is hooking up with his ex or embarrassing himself with strangers in dark corners. Unable to deny Paige, though, Max reluctantly agrees to help her wrangle up her dream wedding in just three months. It turns out that Paige has also recruited her fiancé's brother and best man to help, and sexy chocolatier Chasten Benchley is the ultimate example of a gay best friend. He curbs Paige's indecision with ease, throws her a fabulous Fire Island getaway with homemade brunch, and hobnobs with New York's finest in their penthouses. Not only is Chasten a wedding planner extraordinaire, but he's also one of Max's embarrassing dark-corner hookups...so basically, he's enemy No. 1. And yet, Max can't help but hate to love Chasten: He's hot, thoughtful, and genuine—and yeah, Max wouldn't mind staring at his “perfect” lips a little while longer. Try as he might to resist Chasten's charms, when Paige's indecision threatens to turn into cold feet, the two best men must band together to save their bride. Karger's debut is laugh-out-loud funny, and Max is the epitome of millennial dry humor: “What's a group of bridesmaids called? A school? An army? Let's go with a cackle.” Max and Paige's friendship is ultimately the star of the show, and readers will find their banter reminiscent of fan favorites like Amy Poehler and Tina Fey or Dan Levy and Annie Murphy.

**A charming debut filled with cocktails, chocolate, and comedy.**



## JASMINE AND JAKE ROCK THE BOAT

Lalli, Sonya

Berkley (336 pp.)

\$17.00 paper | April 18, 2023

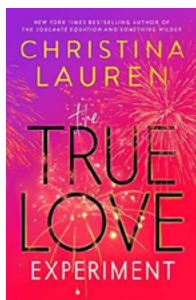
9780593440650

A woman and her childhood nemesis are stuck together on a 10-day cruise in this contemporary romance about family expectations.

Jasmine Randhawa has worked hard for her independence, knowing that her decisions have labeled

her a troublesome daughter to her parents though she's ticked the boxes of having a well-paying job and an attractive boyfriend. But finding herself suddenly single and overhearing her parents invite her sister, Niki, on an Alaskan cruise they're taking along with other members of their South Asian community have finally put her over the edge. Alas, Niki can't go, and, in a small act of defiance, Jasmine insists on taking her place. What she doesn't know is that it's a cruise for seniors, and the only other person her age is Jake Dhillon. For years, Jasmine has watched her community accord Jake celebrity status as the ideal South Asian son, while Jake knows of Jasmine's reputation for trouble. They each must fight against the judgmental assumptions they've made, but Jasmine finds Jake too cocky for his own good, while Jake thinks Jasmine tries too hard to be a rebel. Then, when they both volunteer to host the ship's amateur dance competition, they start to bond over adventurous excursions and their fraught relationships with cultural norms. The romance is slow and sweet as the leads test each other's boundaries. A cruise to Alaska makes a charming setting, combining a lively cast of characters with beautiful, immersive descriptions of the environment, and the gorgeous backdrop further accentuates Jake and Jasmine's developing attraction. As well as finding romance, Jasmine learns that there's a middle ground between isolating herself from family conventions and fully embracing Punjabi traditions. She can have it all—and on her own terms.

**A modern romance with the perfect mix of emotional growth and meddling aunts.**



**THE TRUE LOVE EXPERIMENT**

*Lauren, Christina*  
 Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster  
 (416 pp.)  
 \$25.19 | May 16, 2023  
 9781982173432

A reality show brings together a romance author and a documentary producer.

As a bestselling, prolific romance author, Felicity “Fizzy” Chen knows love. Or at least she thought she did...until, in the middle of a commencement speech, she realizes she doesn't even “remember the last time [she] was genuinely happy.” As she puts it, “the meat of my story—the romance plot, including love and happiness—is one gaping hole.” She stops writing and dating, worried that her lust for life is gone for good. But then she's contacted by Connor Prince III, a producer for a reality show. He normally works on socially conscious documentaries, but he needs this job so he can stay in San Diego close to his beloved daughter. He wants Fizzy to be the lead in a dating show, one in which the world can watch a woman who usually writes happily-ever-afters fall in love herself. Fizzy has her own list of demands for the show—namely, that each contestant fit a romance-novel archetype (Hot Nerd, Cinnamon Roll, Vampire, etc.). The result is a refreshingly real show that audiences love—but Fizzy's most intense connection

isn't with any of the contestants. It's with Connor, and their powerful chemistry threatens to disrupt the show—and both of their lives. The two women who write as Lauren return with yet another pitch-perfect rom-com that manages to be funny, angst-y, and extremely sexy. Fizzy is an exciting and hilarious main character, and Connor is her perfect complement as a love interest. Most importantly, though, the story is a love letter to the romance genre and its many devoted fans. As Fizzy puts it in her commencement speech, romance is “about elevating stories of joy above stories of pain. It is about seeing yourself as the main character in a very interesting—or maybe even quiet—life that is entirely yours to control.” Fizzy's journey to see herself as the main character of her own life is moving and satisfying.

**Another winning romance from Lauren, full of big laughs, a few tears, and some seriously steamy scenes.**



**THE BOOK PROPOSAL**

*Micciche, KJ*  
 Sourcebooks Casablanca (336 pp.)  
 \$16.99 paper | May 16, 2023  
 9781728264721

A romance writer reconnects with her high school crush and uses his past relationship drama as inspiration for her next book.

After a few too many drinks, Gracie Landing, miserable after her fiancé left her for their wedding planner, pulls out her high school yearbook and, on a whim, emails Colin Yarmouth, high school athlete-turned-estate attorney. He may have been responsible for giving her the nickname Elvis back then, but she still pined for him and wrote him anonymous notes. Although her email is less than kind, he writes back, and soon their easy banter sparks a friendship. Colin also had a recent hurtful breakup, which he encourages Gracie to put in the book she's writing. Their flirtation evolves into a romantic relationship, but just when they both think everything is going great, the book in progress stirs up drama that puts everything at risk. Told through Gracie's and Colin's alternating first-person narratives, the story goes for the comedy part of rom-com, but most of it falls flat. The juvenile body-related humor feels out of place and adds nothing to the story. The leads' thoughts about others can be mean-spirited, and while maybe this makes them suitable for each other, it doesn't endear them to the reader. The expositional chunks of Gracie explaining her book are a clumsy way to frame the story within a story and halt any momentum. At best, the book is a mess, but it also veers toward problematic with its framing of gender and body image.

**The story is as much of a wreck as its heroine.**





## CAPTURE THE SUN

*Mihalik, Jessie*

Harper Voyager (432 pp.)

\$19.99 paper | June 20, 2023

9780063051102

A thief and a teleporter team up to save their former crew in the finale of Mihalik's *Starlight's Shadow* trilogy.

Lexi Bowen is one of the most accomplished recovery specialists—code for *thief*—in the galaxy. She's nervous about

taking a contract that requires her to return to Valovia, home planet of the ruthless enemies she once fought as a soldier, but the payout is too enticing to decline. Once she arrives on Valovia, she is almost immediately cornered by the Empress Nepru's private guards. Teleporter Nilo Shoren appears in the middle of the altercation and teleports her to safety. Lexi's history with Nilo is complicated. They were both crew members on *Starlight's Shadow*, but Lexi has never forgiven Nilo for luring her to what she thought was a date only for him to steal a job right out from under her. She can't understand why Nilo would save her now, and she's determined to escape Valovia on her own. Nilo convinces her to accept his help escaping the empress, but their plans change when they discover *Starlight's Shadow* and its crew are missing. Lexi and Nilo suspect that their friends were heading for the planet Rodeni, trying to capture a fugitive, and they set a course to mount a rescue mission. Lexi is a likable, tough-as-nails character determined to make it on her own. The truth is that she suffers flashbacks and panic attacks from the war, and she is afraid to show her vulnerabilities to Nilo. Although she tries to convince herself that her attraction to Nilo isn't serious, she finds it impossible to resist him. In order to be together, they must learn to trust and openly communicate with each other, whether on the battlefield or in the bedroom.

**An epic space adventure.**



## ROLE PLAYING

*Yardley, Cathy*

Montlake Romance (336 pp.)

\$13.10 paper | April 25, 2023

9781662503979

Two online gamers develop a friendship that morphs into the possibility of more when they meet in person.

Since 48-year-old Maggie Le's son left for college, she's become more of a hermit than ever, so she joins an online

guild of local gamers in an attempt to be more social. Fifty-year-old Aiden Bishop, a former nurse and hospice worker, moved back to Fool's Falls, Washington, a few years ago to care for his ailing parents. As Otter, he leads the gamers and quickly makes friends with newcomer Bogwitch. Due to misunderstandings, she thinks he's a young college student, and he believes she's an octogenarian. Once that gets cleared up after they meet in real

life and they've gotten over the shock, their friendship grows deeper and attraction blossoms. Both have family dramas to contend with, though, that put barriers in their path to happiness. Humor and drama are deftly balanced throughout, making the story compulsively readable. Maggie and Aiden are well drawn, appealing characters; they're both nerdy and introverted, but Maggie is grumpy, with a no-nonsense attitude, whereas Aiden is genial, always putting others before himself. Aiden's growing understanding of his sexual orientation is thoughtfully and realistically woven into the story. A good amount of time is spent building up their friendship as they learn to lean on each other before inviting in a romantic attachment. It's so cozy and warm to witness them open up and bring out the best in each other through mutual support.

**Singular characters and genuine emotion make this a broadly appealing romance.**

# NONFICTION

★ These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

**CAMERA GIRL** by Carl Sferrazza Anthony ..... 55

**STEWUDIO** by Chuck D ..... 66

**THE OVERLOOKED AMERICANS** by Elizabeth Currid-Halkett... 66

**LAST TO EAT, LAST TO LEARN** by Pashtana Durrani ..... 68

**PAVED PARADISE** by Henry Grabar ..... 73

**THE FACE LAUGHS WHILE THE BRAIN CRIES**  
by Stephen L. Hauser ..... 75

**AN AMERIKAN FAMILY** by Santi Elijah Holley ..... 76

**FIRES IN THE DARK** by Kay Redfield Jamison ..... 77

**HOW TO STAY MARRIED** by Harrison Scott Key ..... 81

**THE GHOST FOREST** by Greg King ..... 81

**UNDAUNTED** by Brooke Kroeger ..... 82

**THE WORLD** by Simon Sebag Montefiore ..... 84

**LESBIAN LOVE STORY** by Amelia Possanza ..... 87

**BRAVE THE WILD RIVER** by Melissa L. Sevigny ..... 89

**SIZE** by Vaclav Smil ..... 90

**TRAFFIC** by Ben Smith ..... 91

**WINNIE AND NELSON** by Jonny Steinberg ..... 92

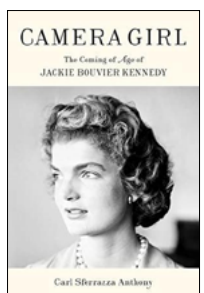
**UNSCRIPTED** by James B. Stewart & Rachel Abrams ..... 92

**HANDS OF TIME** by Rebecca Struthers ..... 93

**GRAVEYARD OF THE PACIFIC** by Randall Sullivan ..... 93

**EASILY SLIP INTO ANOTHER WORLD** by Henry Threadgill ..... 94

**OUR MIGRANT SOULS** by Héctor Tobar ..... 95



★ **CAMERA GIRL**  
**The Coming of Age of Jackie Bouvier Kennedy**

Anthony, Carl Sferrazza  
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster  
(400 pp.)  
\$29.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781982141875

A uniquely focused portrait of the former first lady before Camelot.

Prior to her marriage to John F. Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier (1929–1994) was an ambitious journalist and photographer, a remarkable period of her life captured in this engaging coming-of-age biography. Anthony, a former speechwriter for Nancy Reagan who has written several historical books about first ladies, digs deep into what her life was like before she became a public figure herself. He mines Bouvier’s “Inquiring Camera Girl” column, which she produced for the *Washington Times-Herald* from 1951 to 1953, for connections to her private life and examples of what her journalistic process was like. “Instead of asking ladies at luncheons, for example, ‘What do you think of Dior’s spring fashion line?’ she waited on a street corner for truck drivers to stop at a red light and shouted out the question,” writes Anthony. “Other times she poked at what might lie beneath the surface of those with strongly defined personas, asking circus clowns, ‘Does your smiling face hide a broken heart?’ and ‘Are you funny at home?’” Drawing on Bouvier’s letters and interviews, Anthony pulls together a compelling portrait of a young woman facing both the problems of her time and timeless issues. Should she focus on her career or getting married? How can she be respectful to her problematic parents while still declaring her own adult independence? When she met then-Congressman John F. Kennedy and his family, her conflicts became more emotional, especially as she broke off an engagement and dealt with Kennedy’s presidential ambitions and unorthodox courting style as well as his much-documented extramarital relationships. The fact that the book ends when Bouvier is 24 and marries Kennedy shows how impressive her early accomplishments really were.

A well-crafted biography that could easily spawn both a delightful TV drama or a historical look at female journalists.

## BOUND FOR THE BESTSELLER LISTS



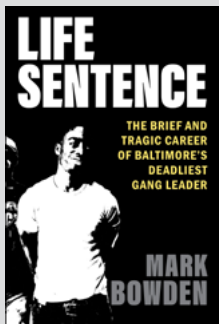
Leah Overstreet

APRIL IS AN ACTIVE MONTH in the book world, as many publishers roll out their biggest spring titles, many from perennially bestselling authors. This month is no exception. Here are six releases from writers who have seen their fair share of time on best-seller lists over the past two decades.

First up is *A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot To Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped*

*Them* (Viking, April 4) by Timothy Egan, whose book *The Worst Hard Time* won the National Book Award in 2006. In his latest, the author uncovers the frightening story of the ascendancy of the KKK and its ability to infiltrate all levels of society in the early to mid-1900s. In this characteristically well-researched, vivid history, Egan delivers “an excellently rendered, unsettling narrative of America at its worst,” says our reviewer.

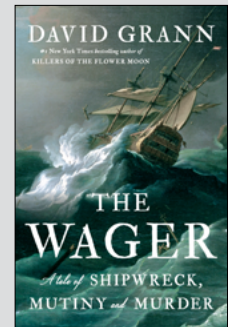
Tom Clavin returns with *Follow Me to Hell: McNelly's Texas Rangers and the Rise of Frontier Justice* (St. Martin's, April 4), which our critic calls a “rollicking tale of a Texas lawman and the iron-jawed contingent that rode with him.” The author of *Lightning Down, Wild Bill*, and other nonfiction page-turners takes us into the raucous world of 1870s Texas, chronicling the creation of the Texas Rangers and their unique brand of justice. “Fans of the Wild West and its pistol-packin’ miscreants will enjoy Clavin’s latest,” notes our reviewer.



One of the biggest names in contemporary nonfiction is Mark Bowden, author of *Black Hawk Down*, *Hue 1968*, and other popular works. His latest, *Life Sentence: The Brief and Tragic Career of Baltimore's Deadliest Gang Leader* (Atlantic Monthly, April 11), is a can't-miss tale for fans of *The Wire* and similar dramas. The author brings readers into the streets of Baltimore, offering “a powerful, nuanced depiction of gang violence in America that makes a strong case for meaningful reform beyond policing,” according to our review.

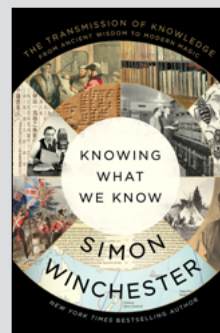
The suspense continues with *The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder* (Doubleday, April 18), by David

Grann, author of two of the most recognizable popular nonfiction books of the last decade: *Killers of the Flower Moon* and *The Lost City of Z*. This riveting, mid-18th-century tale of high-seas treachery chronicles the fate of the *Wager*, and Grann's meticulous re-creation of the crew's many ordeals is both vibrant and chilling. “Recounting the tumultuous events in tense detail,” writes our reviewer, “Grann sets the *Wager* episode in the context of European imperialism as much as the wrath of the sea.”



In her latest incisive exploration, *Monsters: A Fan's Dilemma* (Knopf, April 25), Claire Dederer, author of *Love and Trouble* and *Poser*, digs deep into a fascinating question: “What to do when we love the work and hate the life behind it?” Using examples ranging from Roman Polanski to Vladimir Nabokov and beyond, Dederer skillfully blends close textual readings and riveting cultural analysis. Our reviewer concludes in a starred review, “Bringing erudition, emotion, and a down-to-earth style to this pressing problem, Dederer presents her finest work to date.”

Finally, we have Simon Winchester, one of the most prolific authors of popular nonfiction, author of *The Perfectionists*, *Pacific*, and *The Map That Changed the World*. The



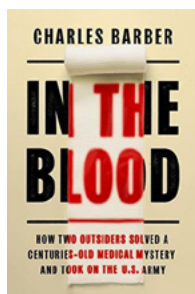
next in Winchester's long line of wide-ranging, fact-packed histories, *Knowing What We Know: The Transmission of Knowledge: From Ancient Wisdom to Modern Magic* (Harper/HarperCollins, April 25), explores how humans have acquired, retained, and passed along knowledge through the centuries. “Drawing on abundant research and autobiographical reflections on personal experiences of learning,” writes our reviewer, “the author creates an engaging narrative populated by a vast array of individuals, including philosophers, religious figures, polymaths, inventors, and researchers from all over the world.”

*Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.*



“A densely packed yet fruitful review of the philosophy behind Bible translation.”

THE WORD



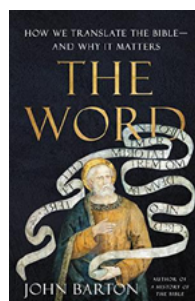
**IN THE BLOOD**  
**How Two Outsiders Solved a Centuries-Old Medical Mystery and Took on the U.S. Army**

Barber, Charles  
 Grand Central Publishing (304 pp.)  
 \$29.00 | May 30, 2023  
 9781538709863

The tale of an outcast engineer and a desperate marketer who came together to create a new medical technology.

In a book that blends biography, history, and medical science, Barber—a lecturer in psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine and author of *Comfortably Numb* and *Citizen Outlaw*—begins with an unlikely duo: Frank Hursey, an eccentric and uncharismatic inventor who uncovered the blood-clotting properties of the common mineral zeolite but sat on the discovery for years until he teamed up with salesman Bart Gullong. Together, they launched a new company, Z-Medica, in 2002 and introduced their zeolite blood-clotting product, QuikClot, to the U.S. Navy, to rousing success. Over the course of its venture, Z-Medica overcame obstacles from the outside—namely, those of antagonistic Dr. John Holcomb, the head of trauma medicine for the Army—and from within when Gullong struggled with his own personal traumas. It is a classic American success story—perhaps too classic even for the broad target audience. The author’s prose is readable by anyone, background in medical technologies or not, including explanations and common terms whenever technical phrasing arises. This fits well with the biographical content but contrasts with the explorations of the mechanics of various technologies. Specialist readers may be interested in these sections, though Barber doesn’t delve deeply enough and includes redundancies to keep general audiences up to speed. Just as abundant are extra biographical elements, namely character backgrounds for the minor players in Hursey and Gullong’s story. While often interesting in their own rights, these character-specific historical asides are presented formulaically and have little bearing on the primary narrative. The core story lacks sufficient development, requiring numerous digressions, some of them intriguing and at least tangentially related, to fill out the text.

An inspiring story about a novel medical invention, albeit one stretched thin as a single layer of gauze.



**THE WORD**  
**How We Translate the Bible—and Why It Matters**

Barton, John  
 Basic Books (368 pp.)  
 \$32.00 | May 2, 2023  
 9781541603684

A study of the craft of translating the Bible.

Esteemed biblical scholar Barton, the author of many books on the Bible and Christianity, introduces readers to the art of translation. After barreling through a cursory but serviceable history of Bible translation, the author moves on to explore his topic in depth. “This book is about how translators negotiate the difficult task of producing usable versions of the Bible in the language of their own day, while remaining true to the original,” he writes. “It is a task that raises issues of faith and interpretation, as well as the obvious technical requirements, such as

“Danon’s message is unrelenting: every life stage has value, just as every person has value... a compelling life design system...” —Foreword Clarion

EGAL N. DANON  
**THE PRINCIPLE OF 18**  
 Getting the Most Out of Every Stage of Your Life

ISBN: 978-17362994-4-9 [paperback]  
 ISBN: 978-17362994-5-6 [eBook]

“Genuinely thought-provoking strategies for the various stages of life.”  
 —Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

“...a compelling life design system, dividing life into five eighteen-year segments.”  
 —Foreword Clarion Reviews, 5 out of 5

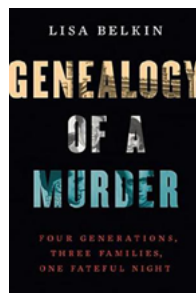
“Danon provides excellent examples from his life and others, and his insights are sound.”  
 —BlueInk Review

“...the perfect self-help book for all genders, ages, and occupations.”  
 —Manhattan Book Review, 5 stars

For Agent Representation and Information on Publishing Rights, Email  
 eyal@igniteag.com • eyaldanon.com/books

an intimate knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was written.” Barton explores the many nuances of a dichotomy he characterizes as either “bringing the Bible to the reader” or “taking the reader to the Bible.” In the former case, the translator stresses meaning and message over technical correctness. In the latter, the translator focuses on an accurate, even “literal,” rendering of the original text. Barton argues, however, that there are more possibilities available to translators than this single choice. He also notes that “the ‘adequacy’ (rather than perfection) of a translation is time- and context-bound.” In other words, a translation’s value should be judged by how it fulfills its purpose in a given culture, time, or setting. The author also examines a variety of challenges unique to Bible translators. For instance, which primary texts should one use as a basis for a translation? With Hebrew Scriptures, especially, there are a wide variety of possibilities. Also, in what ways can and should inclusive language be used in a Bible translation? Barton’s work is accessible but certainly geared toward students of language and of Biblical history and content. His choice of translation examples is broad, illustrative, and erudite.

A densely packed yet fruitful review of the philosophy behind Bible translation.



**GENEALOGY OF A MURDER**  
*Four Generations, Three Families, One Fateful Night*

Belkin, Lisa  
 Norton (416 pp.)  
 \$29.95 | May 30, 2023  
 9780393285253

The entangled history of the people, incidents, and systems that led to the murder of a police officer in 1960.

On July 7, 1960, a convict out on parole killed David Troy in a holdup gone wrong. Belkin, a former *New York Times* correspondent and author of *Show Me a Hero* and *Life's Work*, begins her story decades before, tracing the twists and turns of four families to the moment they entwined in that tragic event. From the years before the Great Depression through the following decades of war and economic growth, we come to know not just Troy and his killer, Joseph DeSalvo, but also their ancestors and Dr. Alvin Tarlov, whose support led to DeSalvo’s being granted a second chance. Obsessed with “how any of us become who we are,” Belkin inspects the inflection points that push an individual—and their family tree—into one plot rather than another. As generational stories overlap, the author masterfully builds hand-wringing anticipation of the fateful evening despite having already revealed its shape. Wading into the details of characters’ personal dispositions, successes and failures, and attempts to correct course, she creates a rich backdrop against which to probe the implications of punishment, rehabilitation, and recidivism in America’s system of imprisonment and parole. She deftly manages the particularities of a wide catalog of individuals and their historical and cultural contexts, teasing out pertinent insights into how America treats its prisoners; the tenuous position of parolees and the system surrounding them; and the messy connections among fate, dispositions, and outcomes. If never decidedly answering some of her questions about the case, Belkin creates an impressive work of in-depth narrative journalism that artfully conveys the countless paths a life can follow and exposes the instinctual human desire for alternative endings.

An absorbing, thought-provoking inquiry into what it means to change and defy the odds.

**THE HIDDEN LIVES OF TAXI DRIVERS**  
 RUTH FINNEGAN

ISBN: 978-1739893767

“A nonfiction book examines the challenges faced by taxi drivers...”

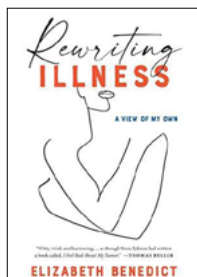
“...a lively and often insightful ethnographic study compiled from five years’ worth of informal interviews with drivers.”

“A survey that perceptively captures the lives of taxi drivers and their distinctive qualities.”  
 —Kirkus Reviews

FOR AGENT REPRESENTATION, EMAIL  
 R.H.FINNEGAN@OPEN.AC.UK · RUTHFINNEGAN.COM

## “A fine antidote to anodyne cancer accounts.”

REWRITING ILLNESS



### REWRITING ILLNESS A View of My Own

Benedict, Elizabeth

Mandel Vilar Press (216 pp.)

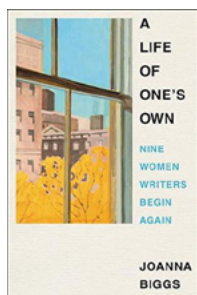
\$21.95 paper | May 23, 2023

9781942134916

A New York City cancer memoir informed by Susan Sontag and Nora Ephron.

“I first read Susan Sontag’s *Illness as Metaphor* in 1992,” writes Benedict, “curious about it as a writer and still an inhabitant of the kingdom of the well.” Sontag’s work, she writes, is “a touchstone, a learned investigation on a disease that’s still baffling, still killing.” Benedict chronicles many seemingly mundane activities that assumed greater resonance after her own diagnosis: visiting Zabar’s for chocolate babka when anxiety took away the ability to stomach anything else; picking up a puzzle at the Metropolitan Museum of Art gift shop before starting treatment at the facility that treated Ephron; taking a chemo-driven walk through Central Park in the middle of December. These and other aspects of the author’s cancer experience will be less relatable to readers who, for instance, cannot share their pathology report with a good friend who used to run a major New York City hospital. Of course, illness is a great leveler, and privilege neither eliminates the fear of death nor guarantees a cure—though it may increase the chances. As Benedict shows, the “best” doctors still struggle with communication, and even the empowered can lose their voices in front of the lab coat. The author mostly resists the standard tropes of illness memoirs and compiles her thoughts not in chapters but brief episodes, which allows her to explore the range of her reactions to the disease she spent a life fearing. She invokes both the writing and silence of Sontag and Ephron—her cancer “support group”—and sometimes tamps down the emotional intensity of her experiences with analysis or humor. Throughout, there are a host of deeply moving moments—e.g., sharing her diagnosis with her adult stepdaughter or wrestling with the death of a close friend.

**A fine antidote to anodyne cancer accounts.**



### A LIFE OF ONE'S OWN Nine Women Writers Begin Again

Biggs, Joanna

Ecco/HarperCollins (272 pp.)

\$29.99 | May 16, 2023

9780063073104

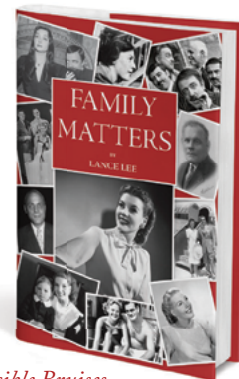
Biggs wonders how to begin again after divorce, turning for advice to the women writers who kept her company through processing her new freedom.

In this mixture of memoir and literary criticism, featuring moments in the lives of writers who thrived in moments of transition, the author begins with a series of rapid-fire questions,

clearly seeking urgent answers. To find them, she begins exploring the ways in which the women writers she has felt kinship with have had to start over in their own lives as well as how their work during those transitions continues to help readers through their own rebirths. Biggs delves into the experiences of Mary Wollstonecraft, George Eliot, Zora Neale Hurston, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Sylvia Plath, Toni Morrison, and Elena Ferrante. Biggs excels at tying the lives and the works of these women together, showing how Eliot was influenced by Wollstonecraft, Woolf by Eliot, and so forth. As a result, the author creates a powerful collective portrait of women writers who are often only studied via their isolated exceptionalism. “Women might draw benefit from thinking of themselves as being involved in a long conversation,” writes Biggs, “in which they both listen and talk, and even manage in this way, over time, to establish a tradition.” Naturally, the author is unable to find answers to all of her questions, but her journey did allow her to cultivate a sense of being free that doesn’t require isolation but instead leans into community—sometimes with the women writers in this book, other times with various people in

## FAMILY MATTERS

BY LANCE LEE



A profound examination of family and the power of love  
—*Publishers Weekly (Booklife)*

Luminous—*Rachel Snyder, No Visible Bruises*

A fascinating journey—*Shanta Acharya, Imagine (UK)*

Dramatic twists and turns—*Publishers Weekly (Booklife)*

Bright, flowing, very highly recommended  
—*Diane Donovan, Midwest Book Review*

Pitch perfect and a fine read  
—*Jamie Michele, 5\* Readers' Favorite Review*

A brilliant writer and gifted thinker  
—*Self Publishing Review*

A compelling memoir  
—*Anna Maria Colivicchi, Clarion Foreword Reviews*

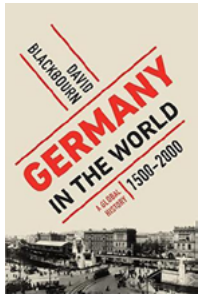
**Available at amazon.com**

ISBN: 9798218025397



her daily life. Ultimately, though Biggs may not be sure of her success in beginning again, she is sure of her freedom and lucid in her assessments of how these nine authors helped her find it.

**An enlightening meditation on the intersections of art and freedom.**



**GERMANY IN THE WORLD  
A Global History, 1500-2000**

*Blackbourn, David*  
Liveright/Norton (832 pp.)  
\$45.00 | June 6, 2023  
9781631491832

Ambitiously wide-ranging history of Germany that emphasizes influences and migrations over five centuries.

Blackbourn, the chair of the history department at Vanderbilt who has written extensively on German history, begins in 1500, when

Nuremberg was the hub of printing and publishing, and ends with Chancellor Olaf Scholz's recent grudging move to increase military expenditure to aid Ukraine against Russia. Blackbourn makes a good case for how German people and ideas have been central to global events, whether positively or negatively. He emphasizes the Germans' networks of learning and skilled labor, such as in printing; the rise of the university system, disciplines such as psychology and philology; the "invention of modern self" and the concept of "world literature." But he also delves into the hideous militarism that spurred two world wars, virulent antisemitism, and the Holocaust. The author argues that the age of exploration was spurred by northern European lumber and pitch to make ships; by German mapmakers, gunners, and miners in Spanish America; and by printing presses that published the explorers' accounts. At the same time, Protestant universities in Wittenberg and Heidelberg served as models for humanist learning. Germans led the way as writers, poets, and intellectuals, and their migrations created thriving German communities across the globe. Yet the 20th century would become the German century for horrific reasons, as the author fairly delineates. He moves fluidly into the postwar German economic miracle, progressive politics, terrorism, and ultimate reunification, yet another geopolitical spasm of global consequences. Angela Merkel's acceptance of Syrian refugees proved another startling move, but the nation's tendency to cozy up to Russia and China for exports has created new problems. Regardless, there's no getting around Germany's pivotal place in the world, and Blackbourn ably demonstrates how and why that position has been maintained, for better and worse.

**A compelling exploration of "German history viewed through a global lens."**

*rhythm*

A practical handbook on how you can reduce suffering and increase joy—for yourself, loved ones, work, and the planet.

64 Drills to Live, Lead, and Laugh  
Dr. Sven Hansen

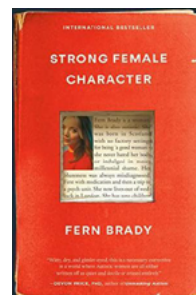
ISBN: 978-0-473-65120-6

"The author, a medical doctor and the head of the Resilience Institute in Auckland, New Zealand, has decades of medical research under his belt."

"In this book, he shares his integrative approach to mental and emotional health by using a combination of preventative and sports medicine, psychology, neurobiology, and ecology."

"A guide that offers a delicate balance of hard science and practicality."  
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation and Information on Publishing Rights, Email [sven.hansen@resiliencei.com](mailto:sven.hansen@resiliencei.com)  
[resiliencei.com/books/rhythm-64-drills-to-live-lead-and-laugh/](http://resiliencei.com/books/rhythm-64-drills-to-live-lead-and-laugh/)



**STRONG FEMALE CHARACTER**

*Brady, Fern*  
Harmony (288 pp.)  
\$25.00 | June 6, 2023  
9780593582503

The tumultuous life of a bisexual, autistic comic.

In her debut memoir, Scottish comedian Brady recounts the emotional turmoil of living with undiagnosed autism.

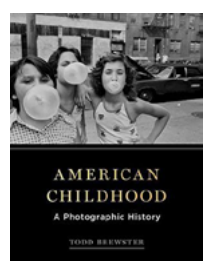
"The public perception of autistics is so heavily based on the stereotype of men who love trains or science," she writes, "that many women miss out on diagnosis and are thought of as studious instead." She was nothing if not studious, obsessively focused on foreign languages, but she found it difficult to converse in her own language. From novels, she tried to gain "knowledge about people, about how they spoke to each other, learning turns of phrase and metaphor" that others found so familiar. Often frustrated and overwhelmed by sensory overload, she erupted in violent meltdowns. Her parents, dealing with behavior they didn't understand—including self-cutting—sent her to "a high-security mental hospital" as a day patient. Even there, a diagnosis eluded her; she was

“Captivating glimpses of children’s lives.”

AMERICAN CHILDHOOD

not accurately diagnosed until she was 34. Although intimate friendships were difficult, she depicts her uninhibited sexuality and sometimes raucous affairs with both men and women. “I grew up confident about my queerness,” she writes, partly because of “autism’s lack of regard for social norms.” While at the University of Edinburgh, she supported herself as a stripper. “I liked that in a strip club men’s contempt of you was out in the open,” she admits. “In the outside world, misogyny was always hovering in your peripheral vision.” When she worked as a reporter for the university newspaper, she was assigned to try a stint as a stand-up comic and write about it; she found it was work she loved. After “about a thousand gigs in grim little pubs across England,” she landed an agent and embarked on a successful career. Although Brady hopes her memoir will “make things feel better for the next autistic or misfit girl,” her anger is as evident as her compassion.

**An unflinching self-portrait.**

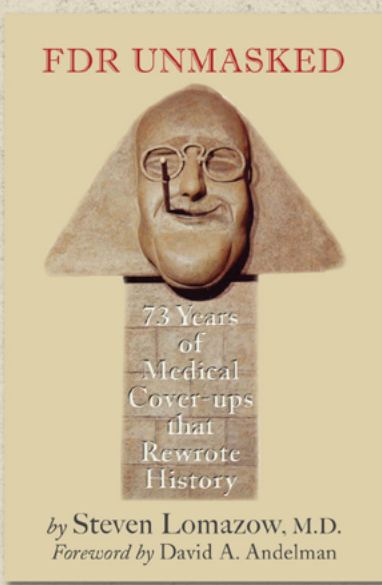


**AMERICAN CHILDHOOD  
A Photographic History**

*Brewster, Todd*  
Scribner (320 pp.)  
\$36.00 | May 23, 2023  
9781501124884

A photographic celebration of American childhood.

Culled from more than 2,000 images, this book by journalist and historian Brewster brings together more than 200 photographs from museum collections (Library of Congress, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Public Library, New York Historical Society), Getty images, flea markets, antiques stores, eBay, and his own family’s trove to tell a visual history of the life of American children. Spanning 250 years, the photos document children at home and school, sitting primly or playing exuberantly, dressed formally or in costume or play clothes. They range from babies to teenagers, a diverse assortment of youngsters: Black, White, Asian,



ISBN: 978-90-6299-293-5

“An extensively researched and persuasive medical biography.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“With relentless sleuthing and great empathy Steven Lomazow has rewritten the life story of a great American to set the record straight. Lomazow’s startling discoveries demand that we rethink Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s career and character, particularly in his later decades...an epic achievement in truth-telling.”

—Michael Dolan, Editor, *American History Magazine*

“...a major contribution to world history and the history of medicine.”

—Robert J. Ruben, M.D. Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Distinguished University Professor, Department of Otorhinolaryngology—Head & Neck Surgery

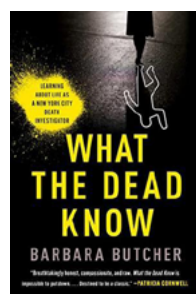
FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL [DRLOMAZOW@GMAIL.COM](mailto:DRLOMAZOW@GMAIL.COM) • [FDRUNMASKED.COM](http://FDRUNMASKED.COM)



Native American, urban and rural. There's a 12-year-old drummer boy who served in the Civil War and a 13-year-old Freedom Rider arrested in 1961. Brewster, who founded the Center for Oral History at West Point, dispenses with chronological or thematic organization in favor of juxtaposing pictures "simply because I liked how they looked or because together they delivered an ironic or telling message." The result is like paging through an album from a sprawling, blended family. Brewster contextualizes the images in historical essays about childhood as well as about photography. "In the 1910s and 1920s," he notes, "the camera becomes portable and we start to see the lives of children in their environments, and even in movement—playing, going to school, dancing, competing in sports." These contrast with the solemn daguerreotypes and staid family portraits of earlier times. It's amusing to see childhood photos of celebrities: 4-year-old Stephen King, Lucille Ball at 2, Thomas Edison at 5, and the future Lady Gaga at 4. Not surprisingly, there's a photo of Shirley Temple. There's also one of Truman Capote, smiling winningly, and another of Ernest Hemingway, at 12, writing during a fishing trip. Brewster argues that Americans

invented childhood and, sadly, will oversee its demise due to insidious forces such as social media and school shootings. Childhood, he exults, is "the original adventure."

**Captivating glimpses of children's lives.**



**WHAT THE DEAD KNOW**  
**Learning About Life as a New York City Death Investigator**

*Butcher, Barbara*  
Simon & Schuster (288 pp.)  
\$28.99 | June 20, 2023  
9781982179380

A sober, queer woman describes how becoming a New York City medicolegal examiner changed her life.

In the early 1990s, after a particularly devastating drunken night, Butcher decided to get sober. "Once I start something," she writes, "I have to be good at it, so I threw myself heartfirst into AA." To the author, this meant breaking up with her girlfriend, finding "a gay women's meeting" where she celebrated 90 days without a drink, and attending a vocational training service that ultimately led her to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Manhattan, where she was unexpectedly hired on the spot. What followed was a decades-long career that included a wide variety of cases, including accidental deaths, gruesome murders perpetrated by serial killers, identifying the remains of bodies uncovered in the aftermath of 9/11, and suicides. "Some of the angriest suicides I saw took place at the Marriott Marquis hotel in Midtown Manhattan," she writes. "Like the Golden Gate Bridge in the past or the Vesel in Hudson Yards today, it was a popular place to jump to your death." Although Butcher loved her job, her constant exposure to humanity's worst cruelties exacted an emotional toll that led to a post-retirement depression severe enough to require hospitalization and electroshock therapy. The author is a witty, gifted observer who approaches her own struggles with mental health with the same keenness and curiosity as she approaches the bodies she encounters on the job. However, while she never shies away from the gruesome details of corpses and crime scenes, she is less than forthcoming about her personal life, providing only brief glimpses into a history of "depression and suicidal tendencies" that began in her teen. This gap is noteworthy mostly because Butcher's forays into memoir are heartbreakingly beautiful; their brevity leaves readers wanting more.

**A gritty, humorous portrait of a strong woman who found sobriety while working with the dead.**

Stephanie Martin Glennon

*The Company of Ghosts*

*A family memoir of grief, grace, and the love that surpasses measure*

ISBN: 979-8-218-03787-1

"A wife recalls her beloved husband's illness and mourns his loss in this memoir."

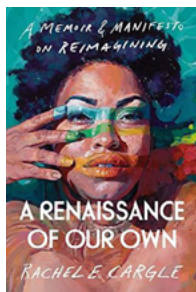
"Glennon's experiences are limned in a nuanced, delicate prose that fits perfectly in a poignant story about navigating the intricate, emotional folds of a family's struggle to process terminal illness and the selfless beauty and release of palliative care."

"This is a searingly candid, potent story about unexpected illness, loss, and what it truly means to be human."

"A powerful, heart-wrenching cancer chronicle of enduring love and compassionate care."  
—Kirkus Reviews

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email [wheelhouse@harborsidebooks.com](mailto:wheelhouse@harborsidebooks.com)  
[stephaniemartinglennonauthor.com](http://stephaniemartinglennonauthor.com)





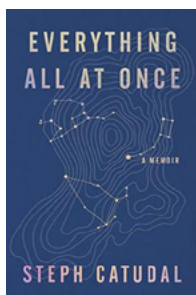
**A RENAISSANCE OF OUR OWN**  
**A Memoir & Manifesto on Reimagining**

Cargle, Rachel E.  
 Ballantine (256 pp.)  
 \$28.99 | May 16, 2023  
 9780593134733

A vulnerable look at one activist's long journey of deconstruction, healing, and reimagining of the toxic societal structure meant to oppress marginalized identities.

In her debut book, Cargle—an activist, academic, anti-racism educator, philanthropist, artist, writer, and entrepreneur—takes on a host of preconceived notions that make up the definition of success in the modern world, frameworks she knew could never align with her true self. Through an examination of her own journey from social media activist to the birth of her umbrella company, the Loveland Group, Cargle breaks down the countless “reimaginings” that led to the creation of her personal manifesto. Today, she writes, “reimagining the world is not just ideal but critical for our continued healing. Here we are, in a time when our goodness, our wellness, our livelihoods, are begging us to dream up bigger and bolder realities for ourselves and one another.” Exploring relationships, education, feminism, work, and self-care, Cargle emphasizes the necessity of unlearning the capitalistic system that has been structured to work against her—and against any person within a marginalized group. As a Black queer woman striving for “ease, abundance, and opportunity” in every aspect of life, she creates her own way of living that feeds her soul via a wide variety of personal and community projects. After laying out the framework of her own process of reimagining, Cargle then implores the reader to do the same by making their own manifesto that pulls from their value system. The author expertly strikes down the idea that one size fits all in a Whitewashed society and shows that, above all, marginalized groups yearn to live instead of simply survive. In her acknowledgements, the author thanks “my intellectual and literary elders and ancestors who tilled the ground for the blooming gardens of my generation,” including Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and James Baldwin.

Cargle opens the door into a possibility-rich world of acceptance, accountability, and allyship.



**EVERYTHING ALL AT ONCE**  
**A Memoir**

Catudal, Steph  
 HarperOne (272 pp.)  
 \$28.99 | May 30, 2023  
 9780063253131

During her husband's near-fatal illness, the author reckons with faith, loss, and the meaning of existence.

Married to endurance athlete Tommy Rivers Puzey, Catudal, a freelance writer, omits his full name in her debut memoir, referring to him only as Rivs. The book begins when the author learned, at 13, that her father had terminal lung cancer. Raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Catudal had been “taught that god was a merit-based interventionist—one who would save me from my mortal sins if only I did my part.” However, she writes, “the more I prayed, the worse he became.” After her father's death, the author “boxed up faith, hope, and spirituality and labeled them with a strict note to self in the archives of my mind: *Rotten. Do Not Touch.*” Following this tragic story, Catudal focuses on her husband's devastating 2020 illness and, relatedly, the life-affirming lessons she's learned by virtue of pain. When Rivs, an accomplished runner who once finished the Boston Marathon in 2 hours, 18 minutes, “a qualifying standard for Olympic trials,” became sick, he refused to go to the hospital. Eventually, he spent more than three months in the ICU (he was in an induced coma for a month), where Catudal and their three daughters' visits were severely limited due to Covid-19 restrictions. As Rivs battled lung cancer and

Joy

What dwells within a body?  
 A soul

What dwells within a soul?  
 A song

What dwells within a song?  
 Only sorrow

I dream of a land  
 where every heart  
 when lonely dances  
 every petal when withers  
 arrives at pearly gates  
 every tear becomes a star

ISBN-10: 1594980926  
 ISBN-13: 978-1594980923

“A Chinese poet seeks answers in the sky and the soul...from the first page to the last, the poems are dramatic and deeply spiritual.”  
 —Kirkus Reviews

For All Inquiries, Please Email  
[xueyanpoetry@163.com](mailto:xueyanpoetry@163.com) • [xueyanpoetry.com](http://xueyanpoetry.com)

WORDS WITH...  
*CLANCY MARTIN*

***How Not To Kill Yourself* offers a study of suicide that is philosophical—and deeply personal**

BY TOM BEER



Lauren Schrader

IN HIS NEW BOOK, *How Not To Kill Yourself: A Portrait of the Suicidal Mind* (Pantheon, March 28), Clancy Martin wastes no time getting to the dark heart of his subject. “The last time I tried to kill myself was in my basement with a dog leash,” he writes in the opening line of the preface. That tone—bluntly direct and deeply human—characterizes this remarkable volume, an attempt to bring discussion of suicide out of the shadows so that we can better understand the powerful impulse to kill oneself and how we might circumvent it.

A professor of philosophy at the University of Missouri in Kansas City and Ashoka University in New Delhi, as well as a novelist (*How To Sell*), Martin writes with disarming candor about his own suicide attempts—he counts more than 10—as well as his difficult childhood and struggles with alcohol. He also brings lenses both philosophical and literary to bear on the subject, invoking Plato, Nietzsche, Anne Sexton,

and David Foster Wallace. Above all, he writes, he seeks to “sincerely and accurately convey what it’s like to want to kill yourself, sometimes on a daily basis, yet to go on living, and to show my own particular reasons for doing so.”

In a starred review, Kirkus called *How Not To Kill Yourself* “disquieting, deeply felt, eye-opening, and revelatory.” It’s not an easy book to read, but it’s an urgently important one—especially for those contemplating suicide and their loved ones. We spoke with Martin, 55, by Zoom from his home in Kansas City; our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

**This must have been a difficult book to write. How did it come about?**

The impetus for the book was an article that I wrote for *Epic* magazine. An editor got in touch with me about writing a non-fiction piece. I said, “One thing I could write about is some time I’ve spent in psychiatric institutions. It could be a latter-day riff on *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.” We started working on it, and someone close to him attempted suicide. And he said to me, “I noticed as we’re working on this together that you tend to go to the psychiatric hospital because you tried to kill yourself. Well, that’s interesting. And I think you could help some people if you focused a little bit more on that.” So I did.

When the article came out, so many people emailed me from all over the world. This one kid sticks in my mind, a 16-year-old kid writing to me from England—incredibly bright, feeling the need to be very literary in the writing but also in such obvious pain—who said, “I was Googling how to kill myself, and I came across your article, and I didn’t kill myself.” Enough of that [sort of response], and you’re like, *OK, I’ve finally done something worthwhile with my writing, and I need to do something more.*

**You write at length about your own struggle with alcoholism and how you came to see suicidal thinking as a form of addiction, too.**

I remember this one young woman, from a stay in a psychiatric hospital, who had tried to kill herself more times than I had. She was a very magnetic person. If I think about it now, it was so clear that she was addicted to the thought of killing herself—this was just an addiction in a very traditional sense. If she had told me she was addicted to vomiting or to cigarettes or to Instagram, I would have immediately understood it. But it was right there in front of me that she was addicted to suicide, and I didn't see it. And I never saw it until I wrote the book. The idea is at least as old as the Buddha—that one of our fundamental, habitual sources of suffering is a commitment to the idea of self-annihilation. The idea is right there waiting for someone to grab it.

**You're a professor of philosophy, and there's obviously a connection between that field of inquiry and the issue of suicide. Could you say more about that?**

Virtually every great philosopher—at least up until the 20th century, when things change a little bit—wrote about suicide. It just seemed reasonable to them, when thinking about what constitutes the question of the good life, also to think about what constitutes the question of a good death. You have a handful of great Christian philosophers who are writing against it for various reasons—some of them for social/political reasons, some of them for theological reasons. Once we get past the Enlightenment, they're all writing in defense of the right to suicide because they see it as part of the emancipation of the life of the mind from the dogmatism of a particular Judeo-Christian worldview.

I took an interest in the question of how many of the major and minor philosophers actually took their own lives, and it turns out that very, very few of them did. There's a handful, but they really are in the minority compared with poets and writers and painters—even scientists and mathematicians. I believe that is due to the fact that if you take a good hard look at life—under ordinary human circumstances, up until maybe a certain age and a certain level of physical or mental deterioration—you will conclude that life is worth living. There might be very, very rough days, but those will come to an end and the sun will come out from behind the clouds again. I think a philosophical disposition, at the end of the day, actually leads one toward resisting the kinds of suicides typically associated with depression, despair, meaninglessness of life worries, all these kinds of things. Most of the great existential philosophers who considered this question seriously come to the same conclusion, that suffering is meaningful rather than meaningless.

**What is your hope for the book?**

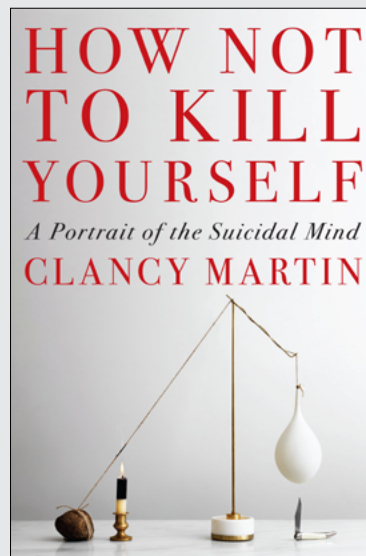
My first hope is that people who are repeat suicide attempters will see the thing that I have started to see, that suicide is a bad idea. I might still want to do it, but at least I can see: Nope, that's a bad idea. I hope that it will help some other people who have tried suicide, and failed, to shift their thinking so that they no longer see it as one good option that's waiting out there for them.

My next hope is that it can contribute to a growing movement to help suicidal people generally, and particularly that it can become part of our national conversation about helping young people avoid making an attempt. The vast majority of the time suicide is not an impulsive act—it's an expression of a pattern of thinking that's been a long time in the making, and it's going to take some real work on the part of that person and their loved ones to change that pattern of thinking, if we have the opportunity to do so.

**The book has two appendices full of helpful resources—articles, books, websites, videos, podcasts, and interviews. Is there one you'd like to highlight for readers here?**

One that I find to be particularly powerful is a series of portraits with people telling their stories that's done by a suicidologist named Dese'Rae L. Stage. The website is Live ThroughThis.org, and it's very, very effective. There's also the Trevor Project for LGBTQ+ kids (thetrevorproject.org) that is incredibly important for the most vulnerable population right now. Those are two that I think are particularly good and undermentioned.

*How Not To Kill Yourself* received a starred review in the Feb. 15, 2023, issue.



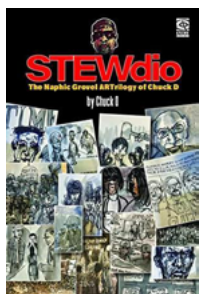


“In an engaging, distinctly hip-hop style, Chuck D reveals important lessons from the early pandemic years.”

STEW DIO

lymphoma, the author blogged about her experience; some of these posts are included near the book's end. She repeatedly shares her realizations, many of which border on cliché—e.g., “Love is light—only fully realized when it is reflected”; on love, “The only thing in this world that is truly pure and purely true. And in that singularity, I found god. Which is to say, I found myself.” Catudal writes far more about Rivs' near death than about his astonishing survival.

A heart-wrenching, sincere memoir weighed down by insipid revelations such as, “Everything simply *was*.”



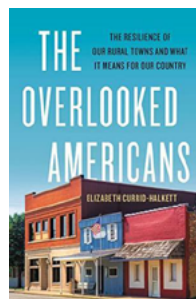
**STEW DIO**  
**The Naphic Grovel**  
**ARTrilogy of Chuck D**

Chuck D  
Enemy Books/Akashic (720 pp.)  
\$59.95 paper | June 6, 2023  
9781636141008

The Public Enemy mastermind combines art and hip-hop rhymes to provide his compelling, personal views on the chaotic years between 2020 and 2022.

Though they often feel like diary entries, each installment has an overarching storyline and theme. “There’s a Poison Goin’ On,” written in 2020, began as a chronicle of Public Enemy’s planned social media hoax to kick out rapper Flavor Flav to generate attention to promote its new album. Of course, the pandemic interrupted that plan, but Chuck D, who started out as a graphic design major at Adelphi University, decided to capture his thoughts of those days in words and drawings. His drawings in this installment are mostly impressionistic, immediate reactions to significant events—e.g., the March 12 entry, in which he discusses the NBA deciding to go on hiatus and the cancellation of the annual South by Southwest conference. Because they capture those moments, Donald Trump and Anthony Fauci make multiple appearances along with players in Public Enemy’s world. Trump takes on the prime role in the second installment, “45 Daze of Red Octobot,” which covers the tumultuous, exhausting 2020 presidential campaign between Trump and Joe Biden. Here, the author writes in rhyming couplets, and he adds charming portraits of stars like Questlove and George Clinton as well as less-than-charming likenesses of Trump and members of his administration. Chuck D also shows how much power he can pack in a couplet: “For those non believers denying the climate effect toll / There are clear waterways and melted ice in the arctic North Pole.” The final section, “Datamber Mindpaper: Attack of the Screenagers,” is the most impressive. Also written in couplets, it masterfully combines an indictment of experiencing life through a smartphone with reverent appreciations of the lives of those who didn’t, including such major historical figures as Sidney Poitier and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

In an engaging, distinctly hip-hop style, Chuck D reveals important lessons from the early pandemic years.



**THE OVERLOOKED AMERICANS**  
**The Resilience of Our Rural Towns and What It Means for Our Country**

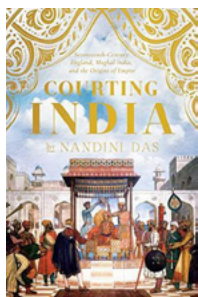
Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth  
Basic Books (432 pp.)  
\$32.00 | June 6, 2023  
9781541646728



A lively dismantling of preconceptions about the rural U.S.

Currid-Halkett, a professor of public policy and author of *The Sum of Small Things* and *The Warhol Economy*, makes a convincing case that the sharp divide we have come to imagine exists between urban and rural America is more a result of lazy or prejudiced journalism than reality. Using an intriguing combination of statistical analysis and extensive telephone interviews with a range of residents, she argues that “the depiction of rural America as a cultural backwater, rife with pathologies and problems,” doesn’t reflect the lived experience of the 20% of Americans who live in areas defined as rural. In fact, residents of these areas have lives as “varied and diverse” as those in cities. In particular, the author found very little evidence of anger directed by residents of rural areas toward city dwellers. Examining “the ongoing narrative of the poor, angry Trump voter” and taking a deep dive into the data, she found “not that Trump voters are angry, poor, and left behind, but rather that they are in regions with high home ownership and low unemployment” and that “most people voted for him not because they felt left out of the economic system or desired a deeper reckoning, but rather because they wanted to.” (Many readers may wonder *why* they wanted to.) The author suggests that when urban Americans think about rural America, they tend to think about Appalachia and, in particular, West Virginia, areas that have been ravaged by opioid abuse but whose experiences do not reflect small-town life as a whole. Currid-Halkett, who grew up in rural Pennsylvania and now lives in Los Angeles, found the process of getting to know her interviewees, often over a long period of time, a positive experience. “To sit on the phone for an hour or so with each of these people,” she writes, “was one of the most heartening experiences of my life.”

A hopeful and provocative analysis bound to raise discussion.



**COURTING INDIA**  
**Seventeenth-Century**  
**England, Mughal India, and**  
**the Origins of Empire**

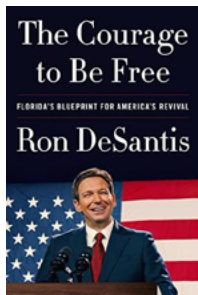
Das, Nandini  
 Pegasus (400 pp.)  
 \$29.95 | April 4, 2023  
 9781639363223

A richly textured account of the first Englishman to make meaningful contact with India via the Mughal court in the

early 17th century.

In 1615, Thomas Roe (1581-1644) became the first ambassador to the Mughal court, and he was enormously influential in how India was portrayed in England henceforth. As Oxford historian Das shows, at the beginning of the reign of James I, England had not yet become a colonial power, as Elizabeth I had embraced isolationism in international politics. Nonetheless, the English were hungry for luxury goods; James needed to raise money, and trade with Asia was integral. The East India Company, founded in 1600, was increasing its profits every year. The eager Roe, who had cut his teeth in the Amazon basin and then at the Ottoman court, was recommended to the post of ambassador so that English interests could be secured. Das examines the fabled reputation of India before Roe arrived, especially through the works of Chaucer, Ariosto, and Shakespeare. The author vividly describes Roe's acceptance at the sumptuous court of Jahangir at Agra. She delves intriguingly into the roles of his sons, in-laws, and harem as well as the elaborate court rituals and layers of access, the role of women, and, most vexing for Roe, "the problem of finding and giving the right gifts." Das offers elucidating digressions into the roles of Roe's chaplain, Edward Terry, and Jahangir's queen, Mihr-un-Nisa, "the effective co-sovereign" of the empire. Ultimately, Roe had to adjust his initial view of the emperor as a "stock-figure of Asian tyranny" and his duplicitous court as rather more warmhearted and nuanced. Keen to the incursions of the Portuguese and Dutch, Roe was anxious to secure British trade interests because, at the time, "European politics was a powder keg waiting to explode."

Ornately detailed study of an early ambassador, with an emphasis on fruitful trade in India.



**THE COURAGE TO BE FREE**  
**Florida's Blueprint for**  
**America's Revival**

DeSantis, Ron  
 Broadside Books/HarperCollins  
 (288 pp.)  
 \$28.00 | Feb. 28, 2023  
 9780063276000

Florida's governor describes how he turned his state into a "citadel of freedom in a world gone mad."

While DeSantis offers few glimpses into his inner life, it's clear that he has a healthy sense of self-regard. As he recounts

his past, he depicts himself moving from success to success: Little League stardom, captain of Yale's baseball team, Harvard Law School, officer corps in the Navy, Congress, and chief executive of the Sunshine State. The author presents himself as someone who governs through sheer force of will, never admitting to a single moment of doubt or weakness. At the same time, his ambition compels him to qualify some of his achievements. He characterizes his Ivy League education as something that happened to him, not something he chose, and he takes pains to portray himself as a perpetual political outsider even after winning three terms in Congress. "I may have been serving *in* Washington, but I would never become *of* Washington," he writes. Burnishing his populist bona fides also means asserting that, while he was born and raised in Florida, his upbringing was shaped by the "working-class" values of family in Pennsylvania and Ohio. Most of the gubernatorial "accomplishments" DeSantis boasts about will be familiar to anyone who has been paying attention since 2019. He touts his opposition to "open borders," increased penalties for "mob violence" in the wake of legitimate protests, and efforts to protect students from

**DELAWARE**  
*before the*  
**RAILROADS**  
 A DIAMOND AMONG THE STATES  
 DAVE TABLER

ISBN: 979-8987000601 [paperback]  
 ISBN: 979-8987000625 [hardcover]  
 ISBN: 979-8987000618 [eBook]

"...the volume should appeal to regional history buffs and proud Delawareans."  
 —Kirkus Reviews

"A lavishly illustrated history immersing readers in Colonial Delaware life and culture."  
 —BookLife Reviews

For All Inquiries, Please Email [author@davetabler.com](mailto:author@davetabler.com)  
[www.davetabler.com](http://www.davetabler.com) • [books2read.com/u/47gqd7](https://books2read.com/u/47gqd7)

# “Readers beware: will cause the irresistible desire to open a small bookstore.”

DIARY OF A TUSCAN BOOKSHOP

critical race theory and children from transgender Disney characters. He devotes entire chapters to his refusal to bow to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the White House Coronavirus Task Force during the Covid-19 pandemic, his attacks on “woke corporatism,” and his disdain for “legacy media.” Anyone hoping for DeSantis to dunk on Donald Trump is going to be disappointed. Except for a few subtle swipes, the governor cannily refers to the ex-president only when establishing himself as the new face of “America First.”

**Boldly grandiose, turgid, and remarkably unenlightening.**



## DIARY OF A TUSCAN BOOKSHOP A Memoir

Donati, Alba

Trans. by Elena Pala

Scribner (224 pp.)

\$17.99 paper | May 30, 2023

9781668015568

Charming tale of an Italian book publicist and poet who “launched a [successful] crowdfunding campaign on Facebook

to open a bookstore in a tiny village in the mountains.”

In 2019, Donati decided to quit the city rat race and return to Lucignana, inhabited by 180 people, including the author’s 101-year-old mother, with whom she had a complicated relationship. With the help of friends, relatives, and strangers, she raised enough money to open Libreria Sopra la Penna. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, which hit Italy hard a couple months later, and a fire that destroyed much of the building and its stock, the business continues to operate. Donati constructs her story as a series of journal entries from January to June 2021, when pandemic regulations in Italy were still in constant flux and the bookstore was holding its own with the help of local volunteers and a steady mail-order business. Each of the dozens of entries ends with a catalog of books ordered on that day, lists on which British and American titles hold their own with Italian ones, and Emily Dickinson calendars and novels by Fannie Flagg reveal a surprising popularity. While each of the entries is loosely anchored by the homely events of that day—whether that means planting some clover in the garden or welcoming a few guests on days when travel is permitted—Donati doesn’t confine herself to the present. She meditates on the books she likes (and dislikes) and experiences growing up, and she traces the connections among five generations of her family. As the narrative proceeds, readers get a clear sense of the mercurial, devotedly feminist Donati and her tastes in literature as well as a slightly foggier but alluring sense of a daily life that seems to be dominated by making choices of flowers for the garden and packing up a few books and literary-themed jars of jam.

**Readers beware: will cause the irresistible desire to open a small bookstore.**



## LAST TO EAT, LAST TO LEARN My Life in Afghanistan Fighting To Educate Women

Durrani, Pashtana & Tamara Bralo

Citadel/Kensington (288 pp.)

\$24.99 | May 23, 2023

9780806542447

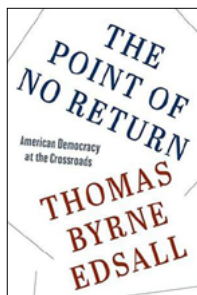


A Pashtun girls’ education advocate and tribal leader reflects on Afghanistan’s uncertain future.

Despite being a “third-generation refugee,” Durrani considers herself “privileged.” The daughter of an influential tribal leader, she grew up in a home large enough to dedicate two rooms to a family-run community school—despite the fact that her family owned land in Pakistan where they could have lived. Although Durrani understood that “educating girls was our family business,” it wasn’t until her 9-year-old friend and academic rival was forced to drop out of school to marry a widower in his late 30s that Durrani’s interest in this field went from professional to personal. “If you’re a tribal woman,” she writes, “the bar for activism is low. Trained our entire lives to be neither seen nor heard, whenever one of us tries to raise her voice, it becomes a political act.” Much to her mother’s dismay, the author’s dedication to girls’ education was so intense that she turned down a prestigious college preparation program at Oxford to start a nonprofit organization that used pre-loaded, solar-powered tablets to deliver educational content to Afghan girls who were unable to access formal schooling. When the pandemic, the American military withdrawal from Afghanistan, and—most devastatingly—her father’s unexpected death threatened the group’s future and her family’s financial security, Durrani was forced to choose between her mission and her life. Written with the assistance of veteran war correspondent Bralo, the text offers consistently adept observations, whether describing a dangerous border crossing as a mission that “required a Beyoncé-like number of wardrobe changes” or trenchantly illustrating how the widely underestimated tribal culture was, in fact, nimbler than the Afghan government and Western aid. Durrani’s voice sparkles with humor and grit, and she is a gifted storyteller, equally comfortable analyzing Afghanistan’s gender inequity and defending the strengths of the oft-underestimated culture and country she loves.

**A lovingly narrated, sharply nuanced memoir from a talented activist.**





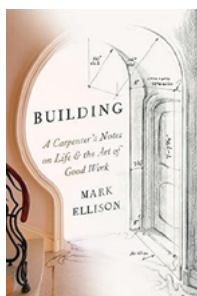
## THE POINT OF NO RETURN *American Democracy at the Crossroads*

Edsall, Thomas Byrne  
Princeton Univ. (448 pp.)  
\$32.00 | April 11, 2023  
9780691164892

A journalist with a penchant for political economics delivers a series of sharp judgments on the conditions that made Donald Trump possible.

“The Trump era is not over yet—forewarned is forearmed.” So writes Edsall in this collection of opinion pieces from the *New York Times*, beginning in 2015. While it seems clear that the author is no fan of Trump’s, he takes an evenhanded approach in his analysis of events. For one thing, he notes, Trump took about the same share of White voters as did Mitt Romney four years earlier, but that White constituency was very different: “Trump won non-college-educated whites by 14 points more than Romney, a modern-day record.” Moreover, Edsall notes, the Whites Trump won were largely blue collar and lived in the Rust Belt, states that Obama had carried against Romney. Not coincidentally, Trump won among lower-income Whites, as well, who had suffered economically for any number of reasons—not least of them, Edsall observes, free trade with China, which had offshored many jobs. Given current tensions with China, that may change. In any event, the author notes that the Democratic Party once positioned itself as the champion of working-class people but has attracted and served wealthier voters—even as, Edsall observes in a typically statistics-dense op-ed, the share of gross national product held by Democratic districts had increased to 63.6% by 2019. All of this speaks to a central truth about Trump. “Because the viewpoint he represents is now so widespread, he is in one sense personally irrelevant—a symptom rather than a cause,” writes the author. One manifestation of that viewpoint is the polarization that Edsall bravely quantifies, and another is a campaign of Republican legislative efforts aimed at voter suppression, “a strategy more dangerous than the January 6, 2021, insurrectionists who sought by violent means to block the orderly transition from one president to another.”

Political trend watchers and history buffs alike will benefit from Edsall’s insights.



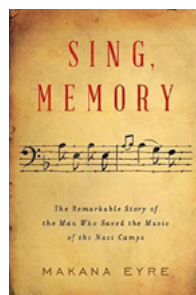
## BUILDING *A Carpenter's Notes on Life & the Art of Good Work*

Ellison, Mark  
Random House (304 pp.)  
\$28.99 | May 16, 2023  
9780593449127

A master carpenter with over 40 years’ experience in the trade offers heartfelt reflections on a life of dedicated craftsmanship.

Ellison is a New York City renovation carpenter who lays claim to additional skills as a welder, sculptor, contractor, cabinetmaker, inventor, and industrial designer. In his first book, he describes his work on high-end construction projects such as a Park Avenue apartment renovation under the auspices of his “first ‘name’ architect,” the makeover of a Central Park West aerie designed for “prominent Buddhists,” and a deluxe beaux-arts town house that is a proud neighbor to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ellison also built the penthouse “Apartment of the Decade” of the 2010s, as designated by *Interior Design* magazine, and he was profiled in a long essay in the *New Yorker* pegged to tours of two of his most acclaimed projects. You might expect his memoir to concern itself primarily with issues of building expertise as well as recollections of his collaborations with star architects. However, the text is more reminiscent of Robert M. Pirsig’s classic metaphysical contemplation *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. While Ellison is clearly attentive to technical prowess and skillful craft, his real subjects are philosophy and the existential aspects of living in the modern world. In a prologue, the author calls it a “book for people who are interested in doing anything well.” Ellison titles the chapters based on concepts meaningful to him (“Belief,” “Talent,” “Competence”), and each contains a few simple lessons applicable to all manner of pursuits. Along the way, the author considers the lost traditions of craftsmanship, class conflict between homeowners and renovators, and the importance of both speed and precision in every endeavor. “In the last decade,” he writes, “I’ve been able to act as a bridge between the cerebral world of design professionals and the skilled and sweaty world of the workers who realize their visions.”

Ellison demonstrates how skills in construction and design have deep resonance in more general problems of living.



## SING, MEMORY *The Remarkable Story of the Man Who Saved the Music of the Nazi Camps*

Eyre, Makana  
Norton (352 pp.)  
\$32.50 | May 23, 2023  
9780393531862

An uplifting story of music emanating from the depths of one of the 20th century’s most horrific periods.

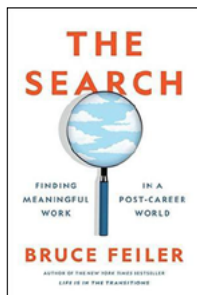
Drawing on abundant archival sources, Paris-based journalist Eyre makes his book debut with a well-researched dual biography of two men who brought the consolation of music to the Nazi concentration camp at Sachsenhausen: Polish nationalist and amateur musician Aleksander Kulisiewicz (1918-1982) and Jewish choral conductor Rosebery D’Arguto (1890-1942). Although Aleks, as he’s referred to throughout, had been a member of antisemitic groups as a young man, he later renounced those views. After Germany invaded Poland, he joined an underground network of tutors, which led to his arrest when Nazis rounded up teachers, students, and intellectuals. Rosebery had

“A useful, insightful guide to anyone who is seeking a more satisfying way to live.”

THE SEARCH

been a choir director in Berlin before leaving for Warsaw in 1938; returning for what he thought would be a brief visit, he was arrested in 1939. Eyre depicts in harrowing detail the brutality inflicted on the camp inmates, including Aleks and Rosebery. Aleks managed to survive by his wits and an astute sense of camp structure and hierarchy. He took to composing poems and lyrics, bearing witness to the carnage and inhumanity sometimes by overlaying his own words on existing melodies. When he discovered that Rosebery had convened a choir in the Jewish barracks, he was astounded, and the older man quickly became Aleks' musical mentor. He was devastated when Rosebery was sent to Dachau and then to Auschwitz. When the camp was evacuated and the war ended, Aleks emerged emaciated, ill with tuberculosis, and deeply depressed. Mentally, he claimed, “he still lived in the camp,” making it impossible to feel joy or even friendship. Two marriages failed, and he was a distant father to his children. Instead, he became obsessively devoted to gathering music, poetry, and art of the camps, including the 50 songs that he had created and others he had memorized, and worked tirelessly to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.

**A significant new chapter of Holocaust history.**



**THE SEARCH**  
**Finding Meaningful Work in a Post-Career World**

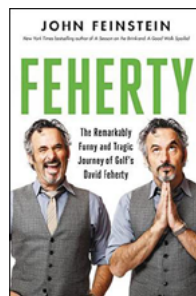
Feiler, Bruce  
Penguin Press (352 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 30, 2023  
9780593298916

With many people seeking alternatives to the 9-to-5 routine, Feiler speaks to those who have successfully made a “workquake” transition.

Feiler has written a number of life-affirming bestsellers, including *Life Is in the Transitions* and *The Secrets of Happy Families*. In his latest, he delves into a subject that he has touched on previously: work, which can give our lives meaning if approached in the right way. However, as the author shows, the worth of work is often undercut by the idea of the career. The notion of joining a corporation in an entry-level position and then slowly climbing through the ranks to a corner office is the antithesis of a meaningful life to many people, and Feiler believes that there needs to be a new definition of what constitutes success. True, there are some who find great satisfaction in the corporate life, but the point is that everyone should be able to seek out what is suitable for them. The author chronicles his interviews with hundreds of people who found meaning by making radical changes in their work paths, often eschewing regular salaries to do something that they loved. Some jumped into a different type of organization, some founded their own companies, and others retrained for new opportunities later in life. Of course, it's difficult to determine what makes you happy, and Feiler sets out a number of questions to ask yourself, ranging from what sort of stories you like to identifying when you were happiest as a child. He emphasizes that finding a new direction can mean

getting past the expectations of other people and accepting tough challenges—hardly easy but essential to finding satisfaction. Feiler communicates all this in plain language, and it is an important message. After all, nobody dies wishing they had spent more time at the office.

**A useful, insightful guide to anyone who is seeking a more satisfying way to live.**



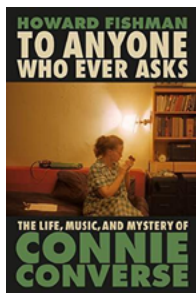
**FEHERTY**  
**The Remarkably Funny and Tragic Journey of Golf's David Feherty**

Feinstein, John  
Hachette (352 pp.)  
\$30.00 | May 9, 2023  
9780306830006

An affectionate portrait of the popular Northern Irish golfer and commentator.

Interviewing numerous people in Feherty's orbit as well as the man himself, prolific sportswriter Feinstein profiles his good friend in an engaging biography. He nimbly chronicles his subject's early years in his usual crisp, polished prose. A child of the Troubles, Feherty dropped out of school to work on his golf game. His first marriage was “a terrible mistake” and “a nine year hostage situation,” and he seemed to be always fighting a self-destructive streak. In 1986, he won his first tournament, the Italian Open, pocketing 23,227 pounds for the win. Feinstein describes Feherty during these years as a “functioning alcoholic.” He won the BMW Championship in 1989 and captained Ireland's Dunhill Cup team in 1990. Another win got him on the 1991 European Ryder Cup team. Feherty's career was on the rise, but his marriage was crumbling. He admits to Feinstein that subconsciously he really didn't want a major championship—fearing “what would have come if I'd won.” He joined the PGA tour and married again before retiring to become a golf announcer for CBS. He also began hosting a golf show with Gary McCord, where his unique brand of humor was refreshing, but he “still struggled with addiction and depression.” Tom Watson and Jack Nicklaus conspired to get him on the road to recovery. He began writing for *Golf Magazine*, got his own show on the Golf Channel, wrote a book, and started Feherty's Troops First Foundation. Many observers were shocked when he decided to join the Saudi-backed LIV tour. Feherty wasn't particularly happy in his current position and was mourning his son's overdose death, and LIV offered him a highly lucrative deal. Feinstein doesn't criticize him, but he does rip into the “silly” Masters' rules and “troubling history with minorities.”

**Terrific personal anecdotes pepper the text, providing both frivolity and insights into the game.**



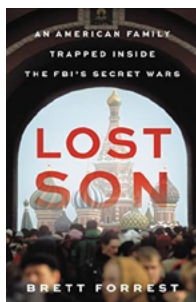
**TO ANYONE WHO EVER ASKS**  
*The Life, Music, and Mystery of Connie Converse*

Fishman, Howard  
 Dutton (560 pp.)  
 \$30.00 | May 2, 2023  
 9780593187364

In-depth biography of an obscure midcentury American musician who disappeared in 1974.

Early on in his debut book, *New Yorker* contributor Fishman, a musician himself, memorably describes his first encounter with Connie Converse (b. 1924), when he heard a recording at a party. “Contextually, I couldn’t place the song,” he writes. “It possessed the openhearted, melodic feel of an old Carter family recording, but there was also some gentle acoustic guitar fingerpicking...and harmonic movement....The traditional elements seemed so finely stitched together, with such a sophisticated sensibility, that the whole sounded absolutely original—modern, even. The song swallowed me. The party froze. The room disappeared.” This was the beginning of an evangelical obsession to learn everything about Converse. Over the years, Fishman wrote a play about her and performed her songs in concert, and he spent more than a decade researching and writing this book. The text’s power derives as much from the writer’s obsession as from Converse’s music. He compares her to a host of luminaries, including Bob Dylan, Dinah Shore, Hank Williams, Emily Dickinson, and Jack Kerouac. It’s astonishing how much he hears in her and how far he has been willing to go to learn more, whether tracking down folks in their 90s who might have experienced a performance or visiting places where her family lived decades ago. Fishman writes about tapes recorded in her New York kitchen—at a time when it wasn’t easy or common to do so—and in other unofficial venues. She never released a record or performed for a paying audience yet somehow made a morning TV appearance with Walter Cronkite. She later quit making music and vanished. Because so little is known about this private woman, Fishman is forced to engage in speculation about her influences, thoughts, and motivations, but his enthusiasm and diligence are infectious.

Through the obsession of such dedicated fans as Fishman, Connie Converse will find a larger audience.



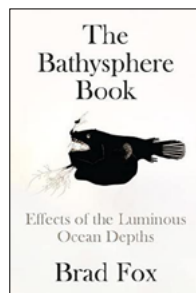
**LOST SON**  
*An American Family Trapped Inside the FBI’s Secret Wars*

Forrest, Brett  
 Little, Brown (400 pp.)  
 \$29.00 | May 23, 2023  
 9780316591614

A complex tale of espionage and betrayal against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.

Billy Reilly was a loner who, while his friends were playing sports and video games, was learning languages and reading advanced books. Not long after 9/11, he announced his conversion to Islam, which was no mere contrarianism. He then set about learning Arabic and other languages, including Russian—which made him an attractive subject for the intelligence community, especially since he’d been appearing in supposed terrorist chat rooms. *Wall Street Journal* national security reporter Forrest, who has been covering this story for years, chronicles how Reilly traveled to Russia in 2015, where, in theory, he was going to accompany a humanitarian relief mission to the insurgent Donbas region. Instead, Forrest hazards, he might have been feeding information to a U.S. agency. But which one? The FBI—an agent of which showed up at Reilly’s home one day even as he was across the ocean—denied knowing about him, saying it was the CIA’s purview, with one agent saying, “The FBI doesn’t give a shit about Ukraine and Russia.” The CIA professed plausible deniability. Following his diligent investigation, Forrest eventually learned that Reilly was killed somewhere on the front, presumably by Russian state intelligence. Even as the FBI denied knowledge, the agency’s third-in-command asked to speak off the record, leading Forrest to conclude that Reilly’s case “was dangerous enough for the Bureau’s third-highest official to have it top of mind.” No definitive answer emerges from these pages despite the dogged research on the parts of Reilly’s family, private investigators, politicians, the intelligence agencies, and Forrest himself. The lesson to draw is to warn any smart young person without moorings to stay away from the government’s hollow promises, which soon turn, as Forrest so capably shows, to denial.

An intriguing, somber study of the manipulation of a single person in the context of big events.



**THE BATHYSHERE BOOK**  
*Effects of the Luminous Ocean Depths*

Fox, Brad  
 Astra House (336 pp.)  
 \$29.00 | May 16, 2023  
 9781662601903

A loose history of the bathysphere that’s imbued with the adventurous spirit of science and exploration.

Designed by diver and inventor Otis Barton in the late 1920s, the bathysphere was a spherical, submersible, windowed chamber that allowed scientists to observe marine life in their natural environment. From 1930 to 1934, Barton and the naturalist William Beebe performed record-setting dives off Nonsuch Island in Bermuda, exploring depths and seeing luminescent, phantasmagoric fish that had never before been recorded. While centered on the Nonsuch dives, the book unfurls its tentacles to adopt a strange new form, caught between a biography of Beebe, a collection of oddball anecdotes, and a meditation on the pursuit of knowledge. Fox, author of the novel *To Remain Nameless*, eschews a traditional

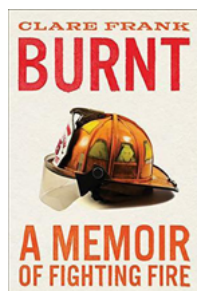


“A well-reasoned, evenhanded account of the immigration system.”

DREAMLAND

chronology for a more constellation-shaped story, jumping among interrelated vignettes. For example, the author connects Beebe’s 1925 adventure aboard the ship the *Arcturus* to a 1930s production of *King Kong* (the co-director was coincidentally aboard the *Arcturus* and likely drew inspiration from Beebe’s exploits). Elsewhere in the book, Beebe visits a friend during a hurricane, which prompts Fox to recount the strange-but-true story of Dr. James Barry, who was born female in 1789 but lived and worked their whole life as a man. Some readers may be frustrated by Fox’s vaguely connected tangents and wish instead for a more linear history, but there’s a method to his pacing. Beebe believed “no action or organism is separate” and that all of life was “underwritten by the same natural forces.” In Fox’s words, “it was not the number of species that mattered, but how they all fit together, and to sense that, you had to feel around at the edges of things...into the immaterial meaning of things.” Fox seeks to not just tell Beebe’s story, but to embody his philosophy, and he explores the vast potential of storytelling and searches its depths for glimmers of life and connectivity.

An enchanting cabinet of curiosities.



**BURNT**  
**A Memoir of Fighting Fire**

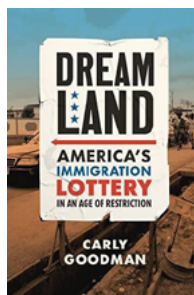
Frank, Clare  
Abrams (336 pp.)  
\$27.00 | May 23, 2023  
9781419763908

A pioneering woman firefighter recounts a life on the line.

Frank opens on a climactic point long into her multidecade career: She was in line for a promotion to California’s state chief of fire protection, “a position six ranks above captain, and successor to the director if something took him out of play.” The problem was, after attaining the rank of captain, you can’t ride in a firetruck, and a firetruck is where she was born to be. The author writes about her beginnings as a rookie longing for a fire in California’s backcountry that would allow her to prove herself to those who doubted she belonged; of one surprising ladder maneuver, she writes, “It wasn’t martial arts pretty, but I left some mouths open.” After battling lightning- and human-caused wildfires, stumbling upon remote marijuana fields and meth labs, and facing just about every challenge fire could throw her way, a gruesome injury forced her to leave active service. She studied for a law degree and entered the corporate world for only as long as it took to heal and then got right back out on the line. “I liked lawyering,” she writes, “but it didn’t satisfy me the way firefighting did—especially on a day like [9/11]. While former colleagues packed their bags to help at Ground Zero and my brother drove north to protect our state, I sat in my ergonomically correct chair, shoes kicked off under my desk, feeling useless.” Throughout the book, Frank is energetic and inspirational, especially to women considering work in the field—though she is always candid about the countless dangers of the job, from being caught up in a firestorm to

going down in a tanker plane. Regardless of the potential pitfalls, there will be plenty of work in the future, with climate change ensuring that large swaths of California will burn regularly. The author includes a helpful 12-page glossary at the end.

A vigorous and quite timely memoir.



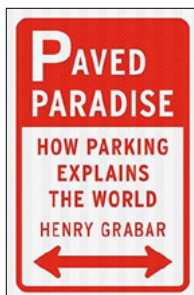
**DREAMLAND**  
**America’s Immigration**  
**Lottery in an Age of**  
**Restriction**

Goodman, Carly  
Univ. of North Carolina (400 pp.)  
\$30.00 | May 2, 2023  
9781469673042

Exploration of an obscure corner of immigration law tinged with racism and politicization.

Dating to the Cold War, a lottery system that in 1995 offered some 55,000 visas for Africans to move to the U.S. provided “a rare alternative to a long-standing sense of global marginalization.” There were 6.5 million applications for those visas. Naturally, scams soon abounded, with entrepreneurs promising shortcuts to success. Then the business of admitting entrants from any country—but particularly majority Black countries—fell into the morass of legislative and political dealing, especially in what Goodman, senior editor of the Made by History site at the *Washington Post*, characterizes as the openly racist Trump administration. “What has become clearer over time is that those who seek to eliminate the diversity visa lottery,” she writes, “do so because it represents a threat to white power in America.” Conversely, proponents of the diversity lottery view it as an expression of pluralistic democracy in action. Trump tried to undo it, though his efforts were thwarted, such that in 2019 about 110,000 green card recipients were from Africa. Because these recipients can bring family members with them, the process further runs up against foes of “chain migration,” an objection that, oddly enough, seems never to arise when the immigrants are White. Goodman looks at the history of Irish migration in several waves, with comparatively few roadblocks. However, she adds, the demographics have shifted, with most immigrants arriving not from Europe but Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Goodman offers a strong defense for the visa lottery, which is not weighted by country, allowing immigrants from all over Africa. Moreover, it has proven to be an instrument of goodwill not just in the Cold War era, but also in the post-9/11 years. As one Ghanaian told the author, “In the whole world it is only America that is open,” a sentiment that altogether too many nativists would like to disprove.

A well-reasoned, evenhanded account of the immigration system.



## PAVED PARADISE How Parking Explains the World

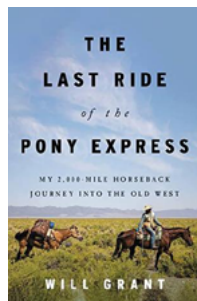
Grabar, Henry  
Penguin Press (368 pp.)  
\$30.00 | May 9, 2023  
9781984881137



A deep dive into how the complex rules of parking are affecting us all and what we can do about it.

Grabar, a staff writer for *Slate* who covers housing, transportation, and urban policy, introduces us to the issues surrounding parking with an example that begins with a dispute and ends with assault and arrest. “You may feel... shocked to learn that disputes over parking spaces can and do lead to violence,” he writes. “In a few dozen incidents each year, they even lead to death.” Examining the development of cultural rules involved with parking (not all of them are actually laws), the author illuminates a variety of related, interconnected issues, including the nation’s lack of low-income housing; how the downtown cores of major cities are effectively blocked from development due to efforts to increase parking areas; and how parking and urban development rules are being manipulated to aid money laundering, tax evasion, and theft. Grabar investigates the problems from the points of view of housing developers, architects, parking enforcement officers, garage owners, city councils, app developers, and analysts and consultants who think they have solutions. The author highlights both success stories and failures—e.g., when the city of Chicago signed away the rights to their own parking meters to a Wall Street firm for a century, costing the city billions of dollars in unexpected costs. Although we all understand what ideal parking means—“immediately available, directly in front of our destination, and most important, free”—attempting to figure out where it exists and who is responsible can be overwhelming. “Parking lies at the intersection of transportation and land use, a bastard field of study shunned by both architects and traffic engineers,” writes the author, who proves to be an adept guide to this knotty topic.

**An engrossing examination of parking and the many other issues that intersect with it.**



## THE LAST RIDE OF THE PONY EXPRESS My 2,000-Mile Horseback Journey Into the Old West

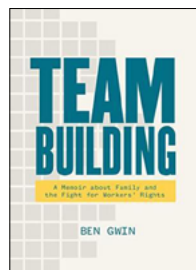
Grant, Will  
Little, Brown (336 pp.)  
\$30.00 | June 6, 2023  
9780316422314

Genial exploration of the breakneck-ride world of the Wild West’s postal carriers.

“I got two questions for you. One, how crazy does a guy have to be to ride a horse from Missouri to California? And two, how

sore is your ass right about now?” So asked a Nevada rancher of Grant, well into his 100-day, cross-country travels. The questions were apposite. Over the course of his entertaining narrative, the author has occasion to think about at least the first at some leisure. Whereas the original Pony Express, which ran for less than two years, took 10 days to make the distance from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, Grant increased the time tenfold. As Grant points out, the original riders didn’t have to face the dangers of “civilization and its infrastructure,” as represented by the mile-wide, multilane bridge over the Missouri River just outside St. Joseph and the mad traffic of places such as Salt Lake City. The author shows that sometimes, it does help to ask, for he had assumed that the good people of the city would be in church on Sunday morning, when he hoped to guide his two geldings, named Chicken Fry and Badger, out of town. Not a chance, said one friendly fellow: “We call that the Mormon 500...and there’s always traffic.” Aware of the vagaries of Sierra Nevada snowfall, too, the interlocutor tells Grant he’d best pick up the pace: “Might be time to find another gear, partner.” Amazingly, knowing little but with a wellspring of friendly intention and a lively curiosity about the places he saw and people he met, Grant survived it all. Call it a *Travels With Charley* with two beat-up but utterly dependable mounts instead of a poodle, and you’ve got an idea of what this good-natured narrative is all about. It will also appeal to fans of Rinker Buck.

**Well and self-effacingly written and a pleasure for armchair travelers and Old West buffs.**



## TEAM BUILDING A Memoir About Family and the Fight for Workers' Rights

Gwin, Ben  
Belt Publishing (220 pp.)  
\$17.95 paper | June 13, 2023  
9781953368331

A novelist and editor’s account of how he helped organize fellow contract workers to fight for more equitable ben-

efits at Google.

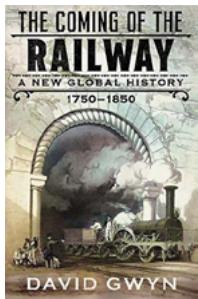
Gwin was a single father when he took a job—through a staffing firm named HCL—to work as a contractor for Google. Recruiters told him that despite a low starting salary of \$40,000, hard work would help him regain his old salary of \$52,000 in just “a couple of years” and potentially get him hired as a full-time Googler. Eager to end the employment insecurity he had been experiencing and get good health insurance for himself and his asthmatic daughter, Gwin accepted the offer. The arcade games and snack-filled kitchens made his new work environment look hip, “like a copy of a copy of someone’s idea of what a cool office space should look like.” But the actual workspace designated for contractors felt more like a “panopticon,” while the office rules Gwin and his colleagues had to follow—like never talking to full-time Googlers about anything, especially their salaries—made HCL workers feel demeaned. After dealing with his ex-wife’s fatal heroin overdose and his own health problems, Gwin

## “A staggeringly researched book.”

SAY ANARCHA

realized he had to reckon with a benefits system that did not offer contractors the same flexibility—such as working from home—as full-time employees. Unwilling to be “infantilized and condescended to” by management any longer, Gwyn began building momentum among his colleagues to create a chapter of a national labor union. Over a period of two years, that chapter successfully negotiated with HCL for better pay and benefits. Gwyn’s prose is dull, and the story of his struggles lacks emotional resonance. Where the book redeems itself is in its depiction of the many ways unfair work policies can impact employee lives and its vigorous assertion that labor unions are key to protecting workers’ rights.

**A flawed but often illuminating delineation of relevant workplace issues.**



### **THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY A New Global History, 1750-1850**

Gwyn, David

Yale Univ. (416 pp.)

\$35.00 | June 13, 2023

9780300267891

An encyclopedic reference work about the “early iron railway,” the development of which “truly made the modern world.”

A practiced preservationist as well as historian, Gwyn relates the tangled sequence of invention, trial, and error that, by 1850, had relegated roads and canals to being “tributaries of the iron road” that helped knit modern nations together. While the author makes clear that Britain was the center of the creation of the modern railroad system, he covers railways’ spread into the U.S., across continental Europe, and then to the distant shores of Australia and the Caribbean. From their origin in wooden, animal-drawn vehicles, railroads became the factor without which the industrial and commercial revolution, starting with its voracious need for coal, would have been unimaginable. They linked cities; eventually carried people as well as coal and goods; made seaside ports indispensable; caused commerce to be measured in speed; and created many of the auxiliary trades, scientific discoveries, engineering feats, labor realities (including exploitation, unions, and strikes), market competition, military logistics, and methods of finance we now take for granted. To make clear how this happened, Gwyn digs into details about such innovations as the track system, curved rails, the standardization of railroad gauges, and the challenges of inventing locomotives of sufficient power and braking systems to be economical. The author’s primary limitation is that by sticking mostly to basic factual history, he doesn’t offer enough analysis of the railroads’ contribution to the larger history of capitalism through the middle of the 19th century. Yet even if the text’s relentless factuality requires reader diligence, it’s worth the effort. Gwyn closes with a coda on railroads’ influence on the artistry of such figures as Dickens, Thoreau, and Victor Hugo, who

“was enchanted by the iron horse...a machine which for him became a living thing.”

**The author’s wide-ranging global focus makes this book valuable for scholars.**



SAY ANARCHA

### **A Young Woman, a Devious Surgeon, and the Harrowing Birth of Modern Women’s Health**

Hallman, J.C.

Henry Holt (448 pp.)

\$29.99 | June 6, 2023

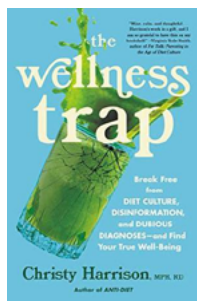
9781250868466

An excavation of the lives and legacies of Dr. J. Marion Sims, “the so-called Father of Gynecology,” and Anarcha, the enslaved woman upon whom he operated without anesthesia.

“Every woman living today owes a debt to Anarcha,” writes Hallman, author of *In Utopia* and *The Chess Artist*, in the introduction to this dual biography. Beginning in 1845, Sims conducted experimental vaginal surgeries to treat fistulae, without anesthesia, on enslaved women in his backyard “Negro Hospital” near Montgomery, Alabama. “If Sims could contrive a cure for fistula on a slave,” the author writes, “gains that could be realized were immeasurable....The women would be willing because they were desperate, and their masters would leap at the chance of salvaging their investment.” The women, meanwhile, “said that a painful experiment was like being whipped while giving birth,” and the surgeries often resulted in death. Supposedly, Anarcha’s fistula was the first one Sims “cured.” Later, another doctor recognized that “the girl who was the first cure of an incurable condition had not been cured at all.” Still, Sims persevered, fueled largely by what the author identifies as blind ambition. “Sims knew his ambition was too large for Alabama,” writes Hallman, who divides the book into two parts. Instead of titles, numbered chapters bear descriptions—e.g., “Foreshortening of the vagina,” “Animal laboratory,” “An enslaved man, stabbed,” “Money problems.” Although Sims was long esteemed for pioneering modern gynecology, by 2017, the author writes, his legacy “had become intertwined with broader reevaluations of white supremacy in American history” and “with a long overdue indictment of the causes of racial health disparities.” Hallman has drawn from almost 5,000 sources, and he includes a four-page list of “all the formerly enslaved persons whose narratives contributed to the re-creation of Anarcha’s story.” Further information on his research can be found at [AnarchaArchive.com](http://AnarchaArchive.com).

**A staggeringly researched book that serves as an indictment of Sims’ hubris and an homage to Anarcha.**





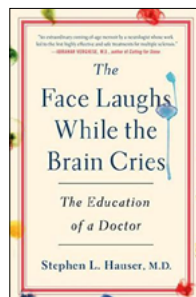
**THE WELLNESS TRAP**  
**Break Free From Diet Culture, Disinformation, and Dubious Diagnoses—and Find Your True Well-Being**

Harrison, Christy  
 Little, Brown Spark (320 pp.)  
 \$29.00 | April 25, 2023  
 9780316315609

A hard look at health and diet scams.

Harrison, a dietician, journalist, and author of *Anti-Diet*, mounts a persuasive critique of the multi-trillion-dollar wellness industry. Distinguishing between wellness and well-being, the author faults the wellness industry for selling the idea that individual choice—“the things you do,” rather than genetics or social determinants—is central to attaining and maintaining health. “And doing those things,” Harrison notes, “typically requires a fair amount of economic privilege.” Emphasizing the overlap between wellness and diet culture, the author shows how restrictive diets, juice cleanses, and intuitive fasting have incited eating disorders. “For many people,” Harrison asserts, “wellness culture’s views on food are a gateway into a belief system where every product is a potential threat, every lifestyle choice a matter of life and death.” Wellness culture denigrates conventional medicine, portraying doctors, in league with big pharma, as more interested in financial gain than healing. In contrast to medical diagnoses, wellness practitioners have invented ailments such as adrenal fatigue, leaky gut syndrome, and chronic candida, for which they offer a host of useless supplements and expensive treatments. Harrison sees a strong link between the claims of such alternative medicine and conspiracy theorists: Both believe “nothing happens by accident, nothing is as it seems, and everything is connected.” Both spread misinformation and disinformation—about the perils of vaccination, for example—through social media. Harrison urges tech companies to stop this insidious spread and calls on Congress to repeal a 1994 law that barred the FDA from testing or approving herbal and dietary supplements. Most empathically, she urges us to think critically about the wellness industry’s claims. “Wellness culture is a trap,” she writes, “keeping us stuck in a narrow view of what it means to be well and exposing us to much that is harmful—weight stigma, scams, conspiracy theories, damaging approaches to mental health, false diagnoses.”

A sobering, well-informed analysis of widespread deceit.



**THE FACE LAUGHS WHILE THE BRAIN CRIES**  
**The Education of a Doctor**

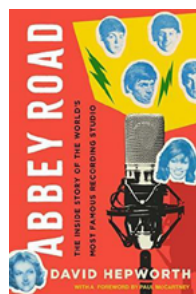
Hauser, Stephen L.  
 St. Martin's (304 pp.)  
 \$29.00 | May 23, 2023  
 9781250283894



A neurologist brings us into his unique, fascinating world.

Hauser, director of the Weill Institute for Neurosciences and a leading researcher in the treatment of multiple sclerosis, is a skilled writer, and he offers many compelling insights into his career as well as necessary doses of subtle humor along the way. A neurologist is arguably the most intellectual of medical specialists, and their first step in any procedure is determining the precise location of a problem with a careful exam and the latest high-tech scans. “In the Jewish religion, life begins when the fetus is accepted to medical school,” writes the author amusingly, though he maintains that he did not decide on a career until well into his studies at MIT, after which he attended Harvard Medical School. In addition to chronicling his own upbringing, Hauser writes about his youngest brother, who was born “severely handicapped, mentally and physically”; his best friend in elementary school, who died of a brain tumor; and his mother’s closest friend, stricken with crippling temporal lobe encephalitis. Near the halfway point of the narrative—after recounting his education, marriage, and post-graduate work (three years in Paris!)—the author shifts the focus to his life’s work: understanding and treating MS, an often devastating autoimmune disease affecting nearly 1 million Americans today, “a threefold increase in just one generation.” No good treatment existed when Hauser finished training in the late 1970s. Explaining the immune system is not for the faint of heart, but the author does a fine job describing several decades of research, during which he and others teased out the specific cells and antibodies that wreak havoc in MS patients. Partly as a result of his work, the 1990s brought rituximab, the first drug to dramatically relieve MS symptoms, followed by ocrelizumab, which works even better.

A winning mix of engaging memoir, accessible popular science, and a happy ending.



**ABBEY ROAD**  
**The Inside Story of the World's Most Famous Recording Studio**

Hepworth, David  
 Pegasus (400 pp.)  
 \$28.95 | Aug. 1, 2023  
 9781639364312

A sprightly history of the legendary recording studio.

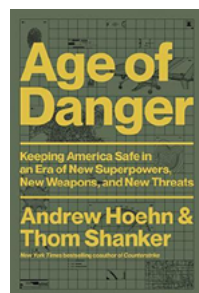
Abbey Road claims that exalted status, of course, because it’s where the Beatles made their iconic,

“Well written and richly detailed, this book is a strong contribution to the literature of Black militancy.”

AN AMERIKAN FAMILY

innovative albums with the assistance of producer George Martin, who developed his knack for sonic experimentation by recording comedy albums for the likes of Peter Sellers. As veteran British music writer Hepworth, author of *Never a Dull Moment*, notes in this well-researched overview, the Beatles titled their 1969 album *Abbey Road* not to mythologize the place (or its now-famous nearby crosswalk) but to honor its role as their humble workplace. The author’s thesis is similarly nuts and bolts: More than just Fab Four headquarters, the studio is where the British record industry, and recording technology, evolved over a century. Opened by EMI in 1931, its initial showpiece was Studio One, designed to accommodate symphony orchestras. However, as microphones better captured nuanced vocals, crooners and pop music became more prominent, and an army of fussy technicians (EMI was a “belt-and-braces organization”) stood ready to assist. The Beatles get their due—and Paul McCartney contributes a breezy foreword—but Hepworth emphasizes the diversity of acts and technology Abbey Road has attracted over time: Pink Floyd, cello virtuoso Jacqueline du Pré, Paul Simon, Fela Kuti, Tina Turner, Oasis, Lady Gaga, Frank Ocean, and Kanye West have left their marks on the place, and the author usually has a wry anecdote to share in each case. For example, when Turner arrived to record *Private Dancer*, she asked “Where’s the band?” and was pointed to a synthesizer. In recent years, the place has changed hands and faced financial challenges, especially as digital technology has reduced the need for full-service studios. But in the closing chapters, Hepworth shows Abbey Road doing brisk business in high-tech remixing—and attracting acts looking for some of its old magic.

Smart music writing, historically savvy without lapsing into easy nostalgia.



**AGE OF DANGER**  
**Keeping America Safe in**  
**an Era of New Superpowers,**  
**New Weapons, and New**  
**Threats**

Hoehn, Andrew & Thom Shanker

Hachette (368 pp.)

\$30.00 | May 9, 2023

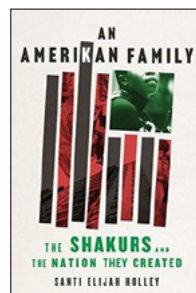
9780306829109

A detailed examination of the flawed U.S. national security apparatus, which costs more than \$1 trillion per year to operate.

Hoehn, research director at the RAND Corporation, and Shanker, the director of the Project for Media and National Security, bring great expertise to their subject, knowledge they bolster with further wisdom from a small army of Beltway experts and former officials. Despite massive expenditures, the last few presidential administrations have often been stunned by events at home and abroad. The authors divide the system into “the warning machine,” aimed at identifying emerging threats, and “the action machine,” tasked with dealing with those threats. Much of the problem is that these two parts

have different mindsets, and debate often degenerates into interagency conflict. A related issue is that the national security agencies were initially designed for the Cold War environment, and they have been slow to adapt to a nonbipolar world. After 9/11, the pendulum swung toward terrorism. As that threat receded, China emerged as the central security concern. Hoehn and Shanker identify a parade of new-generation threats, from cyberwarfare to climate change to biological attacks on the food supply. But therein lies the problem: There are so many things to worry about that information overload is a systemic danger. The authors are clearly aware of the many pitfalls involved, and they propose the creation of a series of standing joint task forces to work across agencies. It’s a worthy idea but one that could lead to deeper layers of bureaucracy. Nevertheless, the authors’ forceful message about the necessity of meaningful action is significant. “If recent decades have taught us anything,” they write, “it is that the seemingly urgent has a way of displacing the quietly important. The immediate overshadows the pending. Not always, but often enough.”

An instructive deep dive into a system that requires vast improvement efforts.



**AN AMERIKAN FAMILY**  
**The Shakurs and the**  
**Nation They Created**

Holley, Santi Elijah

Mariner Books (320 pp.)

\$32.50 | May 23, 2023

9780358588764

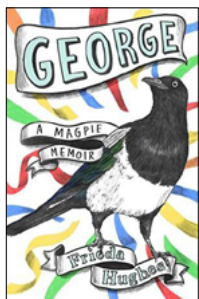


The history of a dynasty of Black resistance.

“The legacy of the Shakur family exists all around us—in culture, activism, and our professional lives,” writes journalist Holley. Best known is Tupac, murdered in 1996 at the age of 25, who brought a questioning complexity to his lyrics that has remained influential. His mother, Afeni, was an activist in the Black Panther Party, which was a tiny organization in New York until she joined in 1968 and became an engaged speaker and recruiter. Activist Bill Hampton called it “a service organization and a black liberation army,” but J. Edgar Hoover discounted the service aspect and launched an extensive campaign against the Panthers involving informants and surveillance. Afeni was swept up in a charge of conspiracy and jailed until, pregnant with Tupac, she was acquitted in May 1971. She remained a committed activist, while others in the family and organization drifted when the Panthers began to break apart. Assata Shakur became an activist in the Black Liberation Army—though, Holley writes, she “was more of an enigma than a leader.” Convicted of murder, she escaped from prison in 1979 and has lived ever since in Cuba. Mutulu Shakur, “a soldier in the New Afrikan Security Forces” who became a leader and holistic healer, married Afeni after Tupac was born. Later, he was implicated in a series of admittedly undisciplined armed robberies; he was released from prison in December 2022 after four decades, but even as he languished

there, his acupuncture-based techniques for narcotics detoxification were widely employed. “What remains today of the Black liberation movement is not immediately evident,” writes Holley, but much of it resides in social justice work, youth education, and food programs—and much of that owes to the Shakurs.

**Well written and richly detailed, this book is a strong contribution to the literature of Black militancy.**



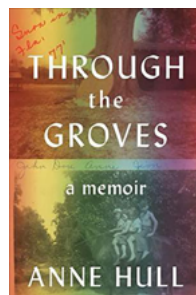
**GEORGE  
A Magpie Memoir**

Hughes, Frieda  
Avid Reader Press (272 pp.)  
\$28.00 | June 6, 2023  
9781668016503

A painter and poet’s account of how caring for a wild baby magpie changed her life.

Lifelong bird and animal lover Hughes never foresaw that the magpie chick she found one spring day in her garden would become the center of her world. The lone survivor of three abandoned baby magpies, George, as the author named the “tiny feathered scrap,” joined her indoors to live with her three dogs and her less-than-enthusiastic husband. From childhood on, Hughes had cared for a colorful assortment of animals, including badgers, tadpoles, and cats. But George, with his never-ending need to eat, shriek, and poop, proved to be her greatest pet-parenting challenge. Enchanted with his feisty ways and the helplessness that made George totally dependent on her, Hughes soon fell in love with the “eating-shitting machine” that perched on her shoulder and acted like a fourth dog. Everything that had preoccupied her to that point—e.g., fixing up her ramshackle old house into the home she never had growing up with her peripatetic father—became secondary. As George grew into his ability to fly over the summer, the author, fearing her magpie-hating neighbors would harm him, began building an aviary to protect him. Its completion that fall coincided with George’s final disappearance from her life. The “bird-shaped hole” that appeared in her heart afterward led Hughes to begin fostering other birds, like the dying crow she named Oscar and raptors like the broken-winged Bengal eagle owl she named Arthur (“I was still focused on crows and magpies, but it ate meat, it was stunningly beautiful, and it NEEDED A HOME”). Illustrated throughout with pen-and-ink drawings, this charming memoir about the author’s accidental adventures in avian rescue offers tantalizing insights into her struggle to fly free of the difficult emotional legacy bequeathed by her literary-icon parents, Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes.

**A poignantly heartwarming delight.**



**THROUGH THE GROVES  
A Memoir**

Hull, Anne  
Henry Holt (224 pp.)  
\$26.99 | June 20, 2023  
9780805093377

A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist chronicles her childhood and formative years in rural central Florida.

When she was young, Hull often accompanied her father through the orange groves he tended as a fruit buyer for the juice processor HP Hood. Her schoolteacher mother had designated her the “ride-along minder” meant to “steer [her father] clear of the red neon Schlitz signs that called to him on his drive home.” Before Hull’s parents had settled in the town that, every spring, smelled “like God had knocked over a bottle of Ladies of Gardenia,” both had dreamed of becoming writers. That dream ended when Hull’s mother, unwilling to nurse her husband’s “illness” any longer, took her children back and forth between Sebring and St. Petersburg as she struggled to make a life on her own. The family finally settled in “St. Pete,” a city of “old people.” Living in her eccentric grandmother’s house among “Tibetan singing bowls [and] Guatemalan handicrafts” made Hull feel more at ease. Her mother eventually remarried, this time to a man she didn’t love and who didn’t appreciate “kids who talked back.” The newly sober father with whom she began reconciling paid for Hull’s “escape” to Florida State, where she embraced her nascent lesbianism and became a Revlon shampoo sales representative. “Being aimless and average at nineteen was excusable; at twenty-two, I was ready to grab any piece of driftwood floating by that might keep me from going under,” she writes. Then a small newsroom job with the *St. Petersburg Times* kick-started the writing career neither of her parents chose to pursue—she went on to work for more than two decades at the *Washington Post*—and it began the unlikely journey that took Hull away from her multigenerational roots. This warmly evocative recollection of her formative years will appeal to a wide audience, especially those who enjoy understated, stylishly well-told stories.

**A funny, candid, and authentic memoir.**



**FIRES IN THE DARK  
Healing the Unquiet Mind**

Jamison, Kay Redfield  
Knopf (416 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 23, 2023  
9780525657170

A scholar of psychology and psychiatry examines some of the changing regimes by which the mentally troubled are treated.

Jamison, author of *An Unquiet Mind*, *Touched With Fire*, and *Night Falls Fast*, opens with a graceful portrait of Sir William



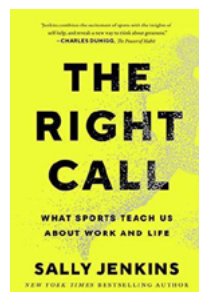


“A pleasure for self-help aficionados and buffs with an interest in the mental aspects of a variety of sports.”

THE RIGHT CALL

Osler (1849-1919), the medical pioneer recognized by American doctors a century later as “the most influential physician in history.” Osler explored many aspects of medicine, but much of what concerned him toward the end of his life had to do with the death of his son, who was badly injured on the Western Front. Returned to combat, he died there. “Death had been Osler’s tutor for the shadowland,” writes Jamison. “As a young pathologist he had performed nearly a thousand autopsies; he was keenly aware of the debt owed by the living to the dead.” Now it was personal, and he and some of his peers urged physicians to use the same attentive and loving care nurses delivered, with the charge to “bear witness to suffering, not flinch from it; be still with it and apprehend its meaning.” Those mind-oriented physicians had plenty to do when unfortunate veterans such as the poet Siegfried Sassoon, shellshocked and tormented, sought postwar care. (Said one physician to Sassoon, while on home leave before returning to the front, “you appear to be suffering from an anti-war complex.”) Jamison moves on to a consideration of the ancient connections of healing, ritual, and magic, some of which come into play in modern therapy. Along the way, while looking further at stress- and trauma-borne illness, the author studs her narrative with luminous figures such as Paul Robeson and Robert Graves, whose book *Goodbye to All That* was “a bitter, unsentimental account of war, atrocity, and death.” There the hero quest and its challenges come in, and, Jamison concludes memorably: “There is a cost for this, and to redeem it we look to our healers.”

A humane, elegantly written contribution to the literature of trauma and care.



**THE RIGHT CALL**  
**What Sports Teach Us About Work and Life**

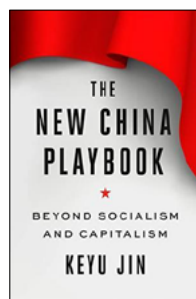
Jenkins, Sally  
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster  
(272 pp.)  
\$27.99 | June 6, 2023  
9781982122553

Wide-ranging psychological inspiration from a veteran *Washington Post* sports-writer and columnist.

“Champions are essentially the product of their own work,” writes Jenkins, author of *The Real All Americans*. This may seem self-evident, but on closer examination, it has depth: We can train and be coached, but striving in the right spirit comes from within. In conversation with Charles Barkley, for instance, Jenkins pulls out the observation, “I don’t want mistakes to be part of my life.” That’s all well and good, though it would seem to contradict, at least somewhat, the author’s assertion that failure is part of the process, without which nothing can be learned. At heart, this book is about applying the lessons of professional athletics to everyday life—e.g., the idea that whether we want to or not, we sometimes have to make difficult decisions, just as a quarterback caught in a make-or-break play has to decide what to do. How does that happen? As Jenkins, who seems at home

in every sport, writes, we should consider NFL Hall of Fame coach Bill Walsh’s advice: “The less thinking people have to do under adverse circumstances, the better.” The best professional athletes game out just about every possible permutation beforehand to know what to do without thinking about it moment by moment. Along the way, Jenkins draws useful lessons in leadership, self-discipline (“it’s a form of self-rule”), the aspiration to win, and, perhaps most important, the way in which the love of a game is transformational—especially “when circumstances seem overwhelming,” as they so often do. Though confined to running, John Jerome’s long-forgotten book *The Elements of Effort* is superior in many respects, but Jenkins’ book is more than serviceable.

A pleasure for self-help aficionados and buffs with an interest in the mental aspects of a variety of sports.



**THE NEW CHINA PLAYBOOK**  
**Beyond Socialism and Capitalism**

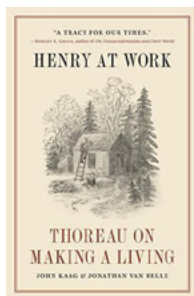
Jin, Keyu  
Viking (320 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 16, 2023  
9781984878281

A respected academic provides a nuanced examination of China’s past, present, and future.

China has always been difficult for many Westerners to understand, but the issue has become increasingly crucial as the country’s global role has grown. Jin, who grew up in China and retains strong connections there, was educated in the U.S. and is now a professor at the London School of Economics. With this background, she is well qualified to play the role of cultural interpreter. She has a special interest in the problems now emerging in China as the society struggles to move from an unremitting focus on economic growth to quality-of-life and equity issues. Jin notes that China’s transition from an impoverished, rural country to a wealthy, urbanized society has been remarkably fast. The private sector has driven the growth, especially in the past two decades, but the government remains firmly in control, with a complex system of incentives, rules, easy credit, and government-owned enterprises. The author traces key policies since the time of Deng, and she delves into the impact of the “one-child policy,” an area often overlooked by armchair commentators. For the most part, the Chinese people are willing to accept government direction, including a high degree of personal surveillance and intervention in their lives. They value security over freedom and generally believe that China requires a powerful central authority. Significantly, the younger generation is in many ways more conservative than their parents despite their taste for Western brands and lifestyles. Jin acknowledges China’s incredible progress but wonders what the future holds. “China’s central leadership, which spurred the most successful economic growth story of our time, could also make choices that might have the opposite effect in the future,” she concludes. “The power of the

state provides the system's greatest potential and also poses its gravest inherent risk."

Mixing research with personal experience, Jin offers critical insights about the future of China and its global impact.



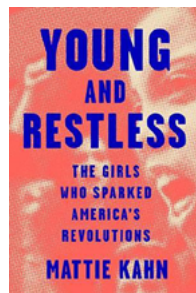
**HENRY AT WORK**  
**Thoreau on Making a Living**

*Kaag, John & Jonathan van Belle*  
Princeton Univ. (232 pp.)  
\$27.95 | June 13, 2023  
9780691244693

Two philosophers turn to Henry David Thoreau for help in understanding the nature and purpose of work.

To witness a society obsess over efficiency, productivity, and profitability as ours does would have distressed Thoreau, if not surprised him. After all, he recognized the seduction of rapid communication long before the age of social media: "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate.... As if the main object were to talk fast and not to talk sensibly." Kaag and van Belle want to showcase a Thoreau who is not the out-of-touch stubborn recluse of lore but rather a philosopher with his feet on the ground, someone who has relevant advice for our daily lives, including how we spend a majority of our waking hours: at work. The authors speculate that, following the most recent recession, the "Great Resignation" might be an indication that in the aftermath of the pandemic, Americans are finally ready to take after Thoreau's example of living deliberately. Even if the current disinclination to punch the clock is less idealistic than that, we might still benefit from hearing from Thoreau in light of high inflation rates. The first chapter of *Walden*, after all, is "Economy," and Thoreau shows us how to do more with less. Kaag and van Belle range widely over a variety of relevant topics, including meaningful versus meaningless work, annoying co-workers, and the threat of AI to human workers. Readers of Kaag's philosophical memoirs will recognize a similar clarity and command of language here even as the personal takes a back seat to the sociological as well as the philosophical. This is philosophy as Thoreau would have recognized it: full of life.

An inspiring book that will give you the succor you need to reconsider—and possibly change—the way you work.



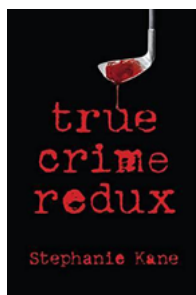
**YOUNG AND RESTLESS**  
**The Girls Who Sparked America's Revolutions**

*Kahn, Mattie*  
Viking (368 pp.)  
\$29.00 | June 13, 2023  
9780593299067

A historical review of the ways in which girls' activism has shaped American history.

In 2017, while writing an article about the possibility of a women's museum opening in Washington, D.C., journalist Kahn, the former culture director at *Glamour* and staff writer for *Elle*, learned for the first time about Sybil Ludington. During the Revolutionary War, 16-year-old Ludington allegedly "outrode Paul Revere" when she warned her community about the impending British invasion. Although the veracity of Ludington's story has since been questioned, the idea of a young girl taking on responsibilities that frightened the adults around her spurred the author to explore the world of historically verified Americans whose heroism has, in the modern era, remained unsung. Kahn profiles girls from a variety of backgrounds and historical eras, including striking millworkers in Lowell, Massachusetts, in the 1800s; Black girls Claudette Colvin and Mary Louise Smith, who refused to give up their bus seats long before Rosa Parks did; and Greta Thunberg, "who turned student strikes for climate into a worldwide phenomenon" when she was only 15. At its best, this well-researched book delves deeply into the lives of girls like Alice de Rivera, who, at age 13, sued Stuyvesant High School in New York for only admitting boys. At times, though, the chapters are so crammed full of information that they feel disjointed or contradictory. In one chapter, for example, Kahn argues that activism both enhances and is detrimental to girls' mental health. Another limitation of the book is the author's almost exclusive focus on cisgender White and Black girls. She only briefly mentions Latine girls demanding immigration reform, trans activists protesting anti-trans laws, and Indigenous activists resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline. Overall, though, the book is thoughtful and compassionate.

A critical, informative, not-quite-comprehensive analysis of girls' activism in the U.S.



**TRUE CRIME REDUX**

*Kane, Stephanie*  
Bancroft Press (278 pp.)  
\$26.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781610886116

The crime that inspired a crime writer comes back to haunt her.

One morning in 1973, Kane's soon-to-be mother-in-law, Betty, was murdered. While Betty's husband, Duane, was investigated for the murder, he

eventually walked free, leaving Kane—and the rest of Betty’s family—to reckon with the aftermath. For the author, that meant writing a crime novel loosely based on the violent events, though by the time *Quiet Time* was published, she and Betty’s son had gotten divorced. As a result of that book’s publication, the cold case was reopened, and Kane eventually had to testify. In this uneven narrative, she revisits the circumstances of the original crime, including witness statements, court papers, police reports, and her own conversations with family members. Kane’s stated intent is to examine how her own fictionalized account unwittingly played a role in these events. The short, stunted chapters certainly add to a quick-paced, suspenseful flow, but Kane’s writing is often so fractured and truncated that significant analysis eludes her. She repeats information without elaborating on it, and she fails to examine the motivations, mindsets, and even basic reactions of her characters, none of whom are satisfyingly rendered—not even her ex-husband, Doug. In fact, she doesn’t describe Doug’s reaction to his mother’s murder until halfway through the book. Even then, the description is sparse. Almost 10 years after the murder, Doug spoke to a sister about the tragedy. “This was the first time he’d said he wanted to talk to one of his siblings about his mother’s death,” writes Kane. “He took the bus to Philly. When he returned, he was shattered. She couldn’t believe I had doubts, he told me. She always knew Dad killed Mom.” While the author excels at pulling together a mountain of documents, her analyses—and many of her descriptions—leave much to be desired.

**A suspenseful read that asks more questions than the author is prepared to answer.**



**THE LAND OF HOPE AND FEAR**  
**Israel’s Battle for Its Inner Soul**

*Kershner, Isabel*  
Knopf (384 pp.)  
\$30.00 | May 16, 2023  
9781101946763

A journalist who has lived in Jerusalem since 1990 offers her perspective of Israel’s present-day struggles.

As we approach the 75th anniversary of the creation of the Israeli state, many of its founding ideals have shifted dramatically as the country has expanded to more than 9 million citizens. Under Benjamin Netanyahu’s increasingly hard-right government, Israel is “a country on the precipice, battling for its inner soul.” Kershner, a veteran *New York Times* correspondent who also served as a senior editor at the *Jerusalem Report*, investigates the nation’s current condition through a vast historical and geographical framework, reporting on many aspects of its sociocultural experience. She recounts interviews with Israeli citizens of various walks of life (and religious backgrounds), and she reports on the present state of the kibbutz, which originated as socially collective spiritual communities but have become increasingly secularized in the past two decades. Kershner also examines

stories of the growing number of individuals who have recently migrated to the controversial Israeli-occupied territories that include the West Bank. “In many respects,” writes the author, “Israel had exceeded its own expectations, or at least those of its founders,” and its “self-definition as a Jewish and democratic state...was being tested and, some critics said, was an impossible contradiction in terms. Increasingly split between those who prioritized its Jewish character and those who put more value on its democracy, the rival camps were no longer so much a matter of right and left as ‘Jews’ and ‘Israelis.’” While Kershner’s compelling, densely packed narrative offers an insightful overview of Israel’s complex struggles, it assumes a fairly deep grasp of Israel’s history and culture from the outset. The text would have benefitted from an introductory notes section with Hebrew terms, place names, and maps. Some American readers may turn to Eric Alterman’s *We Are Not One* for further context, but Kershner’s book is valuable for students of contemporary Middle Eastern affairs.

**A well-reported study of Israel’s rapidly shifting cultural and religious environment.**



**ARRANGEMENTS IN BLUE**  
**Notes on Loving and Living Alone**

*Key, Amy*  
Liveright/Norton (240 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 9, 2023  
9781324091738

A collection of introspective essays about singleness, organized by themes from Joni Mitchell’s *Blue*.

Mitchell’s iconic album came out in 1971, seven years before Key was born; when Key discovered it as a teen, it became her guide to life and love. One night when she was 14, “*Blue* ignited my desire and ambition for romantic love, my idea of how I would press my heart against the world. What appealed, I think, was the way it described the complexities of love. It was the best representation of love that seemed truthful: love as best and worst, joy and sorrow.” The author, now in her mid-40s, has not had a boyfriend in more than two decades. Key, a poet and essayist, excavates this predicament in 10 essays named for bits of Mitchell’s songs—Chapter 1: “Love / looking for something, what can it be”; Chapter 2: “Home / the bed’s too big, the frying pan’s too wide”—assiduously interrogating her emotions in a manner similar to a session with a therapist. Though some of Key’s issues are relatable (“I never feel uglier than when I see myself in a hairdresser’s mirror”), many are tedious and excruciating. The author writes about how she “used to identify myself as some kind of patron saint of unrequited love,” and she repeatedly acknowledges that her obsession with her predicament makes her even less desirable. However, she has also rejected men who pursued her, and one of them died recently. The most unbearable part of the book details the weeks of his demise, a nightmare of alcohol-induced liver failure. Despite his suffering, Key maintains the focus on

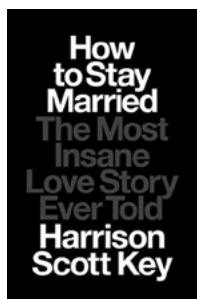


“An exceptional memoir of a humorist’s attempts to deal with his wife’s infidelity.”

HOW TO STAY MARRIED

how it has affected her. The author writes well about Mitchell’s music, but many readers will be uninterested in the dull story of her not becoming a single parent and the dreary scenes from her solo vacations.

A gathering of uninspiring self-assessments.



**HOW TO STAY MARRIED**  
**The Most Insane Love Story Ever Told**

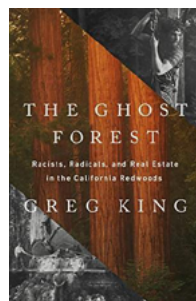
Key, Harrison Scott  
Avid Reader Press (288 pp.)  
\$27.99 | June 13, 2023  
9781668015506



Vivid scenes from a fractured marriage.

Every tumultuous marriage has its unique set of fault lines. One combination occurs when a spouse feels trapped because of her partner’s perceived inattention and insensitivity. That was the case with Key and his wife, whom he calls Lauren, “perhaps my greatest literary creation” and “the deliverer of wincing punch lines to my foolishness.” The line she delivered in 2017, however, after a decade and a half of marriage, was anything but funny: She was having an affair with a man Key refers to as Chad—“We’ve all been dumped for Chads”—a married neighbor in their adopted town of Savannah, Georgia. That devastating admission is the driving force of this witty, painful memoir. Key, who received the 2016 Thurber Prize for American Humor for *The World’s Largest Man*, describes in grimly hilarious detail the affair and its effect on their union and on their three daughters, who, in a touch typical of the author’s humor, he refers to as Coco, Pippi, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Most notably, Key describes the ways in which the affair tested the couple’s Christian faith. Admirably, the author not only lambastes himself for his own errors—when they started couples therapy, “Her noose loosened, and so did my blinders begin to fall”—but also gives Lauren an extended chapter in which she explains how insignificant she felt with a husband who had “his nose always stuck in a book or a laptop or staring out the window looking for the next idea.” This book documents Key’s attempt to summon love and understanding in the face of Lauren’s admission, seeking guidance from friends and the Bible. It makes for occasionally dark reading, but it’s never maudlin or vindictive. Through it all, Key demonstrates his gift for memorable humorous descriptions, as when he writes of himself on his wedding day, “I felt hideous and puffy, a Twinkie in the rain.”

An exceptional memoir of a humorist’s attempts to deal with his wife’s infidelity.



**THE GHOST FOREST**  
**Racists, Radicals, and Real Estate in the California Redwoods**

King, Greg  
PublicAffairs (480 pp.)  
\$32.00 | June 6, 2023  
9781541768673



A history of the efforts to preserve “one of the world’s greatest natural phenomena—the unique redwood belt.”

Early on, award-winning journalist and activist King points out that only 4% of the original 2 million acre ancient redwood ecosystem remains standing. As shocking as this statistic may seem, the number of old-growth redwoods remaining today would be much fewer were it not for the efforts of King and other activists. Beginning around 1850, settlers in California began commercially logging redwoods, and the destruction remained largely unchecked for generations even in the face of public outrage. “The rise of the United States, and especially of the western states,” writes the author, “to world economic and military dominance was paved, sometimes literally, with the life of the redwood forest.” Having grown up in Humboldt County, King was familiar with the lore of the great redwoods that once stood in his hometown, a grandeur that future generations would not have the pleasure of knowing. In the 1980s, while working as a journalist reporting on redwood logging, the author recalls being brought to tears at the sight of a clear-cut section of forest, a moment that forever changed his life. King goes on to share his continued efforts to preserve the redwoods of California, particularly the Headwaters Forest, despite facing arrest and numerous threats to his safety and life. The author’s strong passion and dedication to the cause can be felt throughout the text. Following the near-death experiences of two fellow activists, King felt the true story of redwood logging needed to be told, and he succeeds in his quest “to preserve the record and to honor the countless individuals who, for more than a century, have dedicated their lives to protecting redwoods.” His haunting, sometimes inspiring narrative is sure to move anyone interested in trees and nature.

A disheartening yet wholly engrossing, urgent account of redwood preservation.



**THE JOY OF POLITICS**  
**Surviving Cancer, a Campaign, a Pandemic, an Insurrection, and Life's Other Unexpected Curveballs**

*Klobuchar, Amy*  
St. Martin's (336 pp.)  
\$30.00 | May 9, 2023  
97811250285140

The Democratic Minnesota senator who ran for president in 2020 seems to be throwing her hat in the ring again, massaging her likability points and listing accomplishments.

In this folksy narrative, Klobuchar works back in time to the pandemic, when her husband became ill with Covid-19 and she was diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer. After a lumpectomy and radiation, she announced her full recovery publicly. Before that, of course, was the bruising 2020 presidential race, during which she shared the stage with Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, Elizabeth Warren, Kirsten Gillibrand, Tulsi Gabbard, and Marianne Williamson. Ultimately, Klobuchar conceded, and she was a running-mate candidate for Biden. The author rehashes events in the campaign, painful moments both personal and national during the pandemic, and her work with pandemic relief legislation. Her investigation of the Trump administration's many flawed Covid-19 policies is elucidating, as are her thoughts on pivotal events over the past few years, including George Floyd's murder by police, which occurred in her state, and the Jan. 6, 2021 Capitol insurrection. Klobuchar hails from generations of a Minnesota family dedicated to public service; her father was a journalist, her mother an elementary school teacher. "From the very beginning of my time in Washington," she writes, "I decided to advocate for the causes of those who couldn't afford the big lobbyists or the big megaphones." During her career, she has worked diligently on such issues as gun safety regulation, immigration reform, clean energy, voting rights legislation, health care, and antitrust. Her book title comes from the late Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone, who, after losing an amendment battle on the Senate floor, asked his staffers, "WHAT HAPPENED TO THE JOY?" Perhaps we will see Klobuchar much more in the news as the 2024 presidential campaign heats up.

A senator reminds readers she has been "doing my job without fear or favor."



**UNDAUNTED**  
**How Women Changed American Journalism**

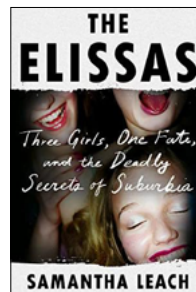
*Kroeger, Brooke*  
Knopf (592 pp.)  
\$35.00 | May 16, 2023  
9780525659143



A substantial work of research on women journalists over the last 180 years, underscoring both sexist hurdles and tremendous breakthroughs.

A historian who has published biographies of Fannie Hurst and Nellie Bly, Kroeger, the founding director of the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute, moves chronologically in this monumental study of journalists who made a significant impact in their time and forged the way for those who came later. She begins with one of the most influential: Margaret Fuller, a friend of the transcendentalists and leading advocate for birth control and other progressive causes. In 1870, "long before Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*," Midy Morgan exposed the animal abuse in New York City's cattle market for the *Times*. The author then turns to the two ferocious Idas: Wells, a crusader against lynching, and Tarbell, who revealed the extent of the monopoly of Rockefeller's Standard Oil in *McClure's* from 1902 to 1904. By the turn of the century, it was assumed that women journalists were paid less than men, and women accepted it along with the sexist treatment and the belief that they should be relegated to the "soft" pages rather than hard news. Nonetheless, many young women continued to seek out the glamorous career of journalism. Many uncelebrated women journalists covered the world wars—so-called "front-page girls"—often without credit, though many achieved real breakthroughs—e.g., Martha Gellhorn, Rebecca West, Dorothy Thompson, and Rachel Carson. Despite feats by "supernovas" in the 1960s and '70s (Lois Wille, Ada Louise Huxtable, Charlotte Curtis), Kroeger cites the lawsuit by women journalists against *Newsweek* in 1970 as a turning point. Decades later, the #MeToo movement amplified the concerns of discrimination and won important victories. A recent study shows that women are still "sorely lacking" in "all realms of media," emphasizing the age-old refrain: "progress, setback; push, pull."

A tour de force that should be in every library and school in the country.



**THE ELISSAS**  
**Three Girls, One Fate, and the Deadly Secrets of Suburbia**

*Leach, Samantha*  
Legacy Lit/Hachette (288 pp.)  
\$29.00 | June 6, 2023  
9780306826917

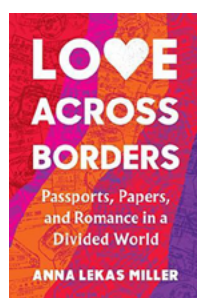
A *Bustle* entertainment editor examines the lives and deaths of three young women who were also products of therapeutic boarding schools.

## “An alarming chronicle of catastrophic chronic illness and a passionate plea for health care reform.”

AMERICAN BREAKDOWN

Rhode Island native Leach met Elissa—who would eventually befriend two girls named Alyssa and Alissa—when both were infants. Raised by suburban “parents with means and access,” all four girls experimented with drinking and drugs, “rebellious behaviors that were of the socially acceptable, suburban variety—until they became something greater, more fearful.” Leach would be the only one who reached age 26. Drawing on her memories and interviews with countless people involved in the girls’ lives, Leach subsumed her grief into a quest to understand how she had managed to survive what the other girls did not. Like Elissa, the author fell under the spell of media stars like Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie, whose “rehab stints, public meltdowns, breakups and hookups” transformed them into icons of cool and, more insidiously, into models of the disordered behavior that plagued the Elissas. As a teen, the author, shy around boys, “dived in the booze,” while Alyssa flaunted her sexuality and fell in love with a boy who introduced her to heroin. In high school, Leach chose to express rebellion through hipster bohemianism, and the more stubbornly defiant Elissa was sent to therapeutic boarding schools. At one of them—Ponca Pines—Elissa met Alyssa and Alissa, two hard-living girls with whom she formed the troubled triumvirate that fascinated Leach to the point of obsession. The author refrains from indicting either Ponca Pines or the “Troubled Teen Industry” for the girls’ deaths, which happened after they left. Instead, she develops sensitive portraits of each girl and suggests how social pressures, combined with health and environmental factors, conspired to damage the minds and then destroy the bodies of three vulnerable young women.

A poignant and heartfelt mix of sociology and memoir.



### LOVE ACROSS BORDERS *Passports, Papers, and Romance in a Divided World*

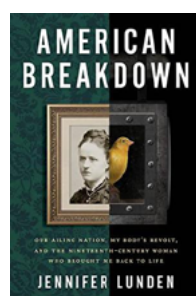
*Lekas Miller, Anna*  
Algonquin (256 pp.)  
\$27.00 | June 6, 2023  
9781643752334

A freelance international correspondent examines the unique relationship challenges faced by couples with unequal passport and travel privileges.

When Lekas Miller fell in love with a Syrian photojournalist in Turkey, she never dreamed their relationship would force her to rethink the nature of citizenship. As an American, she could “breeze through passport control gates of airports around the world with barely a glance at my documents.” Her partner, Salem, could only visit 29 countries without a visa, and later, he was forced to confront the Trump administration’s infamous Muslim ban. Lekas Miller interweaves an account of overcoming border politics to marry with stories of how other couples fought the government policies that tore them apart. Just as sudden changes in Turkish policies toward Syrians forced Salem to be deported into Kurdish-controlled Iraq, unfair policies toward south-of-the-border immigrant workers forced an

American named Cecilia to follow her husband back to Mexico after he was deported for not wearing a seat belt. In remembering the way the Muslim ban forbade Salem from following the author to the U.S., she tells of the trials faced by another couple from the Middle East. Amal, a woman still living in Yemen, and Mohammed, who had begun a life in New York, struggled to be together in the wake of Trump’s racist law. In order for them to be together, Mohammed had to go back to Yemen during war-time, marry Amal in secret, return to the U.S. to apply for her visa, and then wait for more than a year. Lekas Miller followed Salem to Iraq, where the two concocted a plan to live together and build documents needed to help them apply for an American spouse visa. Anyone interested in moving beyond the headlines to see the human face of immigration will find this book about the structural inequalities of cross-border relationships timely, thoughtful, and provocative.

Eye-opening reading that ably blends the personal and the universal.



### AMERICAN BREAKDOWN *Our Ailing Nation, My Body's Revolt, and the Nineteenth-Century Woman Who Brought Me Back to Life*

*Lunden, Jennifer*  
Harper Wave (464 pp.)  
\$32.00 | May 9, 2023  
9780062941374

A writer and social worker charts her harrowing descent into mysterious

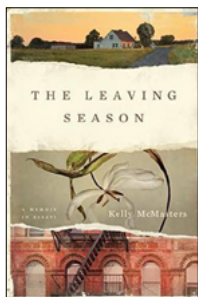
physical illness.

What is now more popularly known as chronic fatigue syndrome was a complete anomaly to Lunden when, in 1989, at age 21, she became ill six months after relocating from Canada to Maine. Her symptoms included lassitude, exhaustion, headaches, and deep depression. A mononucleosis diagnosis brought little relief since her chronic weakness persisted so intensely that she could barely hold a pen to write in her diary. In 1988, the “wicked flu that never went away” received its official name: chronic fatigue syndrome. With limited resources for regular physician visits, the author became disheartened and even suicidal. At 26, Lunden discovered the biography of mid-19th-century diarist and social critic Alice James, sister to novelist Henry and psychologist William, who developed a fatigue that crippled most of her bodily systems. Lunden drew immediate correlations between James’ debilitating medical ailment—first misclassified as hysteria, then neurasthenia—and her own ordeal. With a detective’s persistence, the author began intensive research into potential causes, including chemical toxins and stress emergencies. She dug into the work of immunologists, toxicologists, and infectious disease specialists, past to present, who studied CFS, and her investigation broadened her perspective about not only overlooked medical ailments, but the current problematic state of American health care in general. Throughout, Lunden deftly interweaves her story with



that of James. After producing such an exhaustive survey of disease and disorder, the author's cynicism is understandable, and she criticizes physicians who dismissed her with depression, just as James' doctors had mischaracterized her symptoms as female hysteria. Lunden shines a sobering light on CFS, its evolution and misinterpretations, and its increasing prevalence within the general population. Blending theory and memoir, the author personifies her struggle for wellness and its associated costs and consequences.

**An alarming chronicle of catastrophic chronic illness and a passionate plea for health care reform.**



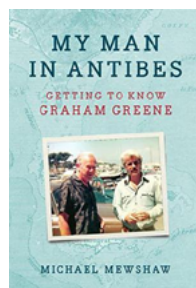
**THE LEAVING SEASON  
A Memoir in Essays**

*McMasters, Kelly*  
Norton (288 pp.)  
\$29.95 | May 9, 2023  
9780393541052

A writer reflects on her decision to leave her marriage and her idyllic rural home.

McMasters begins this poignant memoir in essays with an anecdote about how, when her children were young, she was obsessed with fire safety. She was so “focused on preventing fires inside the house” that she failed to notice that her family was falling victim to a “less spectacularly dramatic catastrophe”: the dissolution of her marriage. In the next essay, “Intrepid,” McMasters backtracks, relating her arrival in New York City in 1998 to work as a corporate legal assistant. Disillusioned by big law, she moved into editorial work and started dating a painter, referred to as R. In the wake of 9/11, she and R. moved in together and eventually married. Soon after, the couple bought a farmhouse in rural Pennsylvania, and their fish-out-of-water experiences there form the heart of the book. McMasters and her husband joined an unofficial barn bar run by a group of chain-smoking local farmers, unearthed a brood of rabbits living under their house, and reckoned with hunting season for the first time. If the author occasionally describes the surrounding community with anthropological detachment, she rhapsodically renders the experience of living at one with the natural world. Living in the farmhouse, McMasters felt “a kind of cellular belonging” she hadn’t known since childhood, “as if the whole world belonged to me, every curving cattail, every sweet blossom of honeysuckle.” Still, trouble in paradise emerged, and her husband’s uncompromising devotion to his art, so alluring before, became problematic when McMasters gave birth to first one son and then another. Later, the couple opened a bookstore in a small neighboring town, a venture that was significant for the author in reclaiming her sense of self, even as it further exposed the fissures in her marriage. As meditation on motherhood, divorce, and creative work, the essays retread familiar territory, but the memoir is nevertheless appealing, told with candor and grace.

**A frank, introspective memoir of divorce, creativity, and the sacrifices of motherhood.**



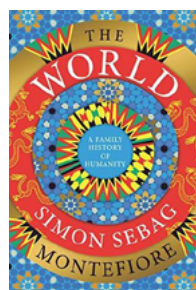
**MY MAN IN ANTIBES  
Getting To Know Graham Greene**

*Mewshaw, Michael*  
Godine (248 pp.)  
\$28.95 | June 6, 2023  
9781567927191

Meeting his literary hero led a young writer to a decadeslong friendship and correspondence with the older and sometimes volatile author.

Mewshaw has published novels, travel writing, literary profiles, and reviews, but this memoir centers on his friendship with author Graham Greene (1904-1991). During the last two decades of Greene’s life, Mewshaw paid many visits to his house in Antibes, France, keeping up the acquaintance through letters now archived at Boston College and the University of Texas. “What Greene thought of me comes across in his letters,” writes Mewshaw, “the bad along with the good.” The former mostly involves the fallout from a profile the author wrote about Greene that was published in the *Nation* and *London Magazine* in 1977. The author includes a reprint of the entire offending profile, “The Staying Power and the Glory,” as well as Greene’s excoriating response and Mewshaw’s wounded reply. The younger author clearly considered the older one a role model, even a “surrogate father,” though Greene was born into a family of wealth while Mewshaw’s upbringing was blue collar. Even before their meeting, Mewshaw spent his honeymoon in Haiti in order to stay at the Hotel Oloffson, “the disintegrating gingerbread palace where Greene had set his novel” *The Comedians*. He was 29 when he first wrote to Greene, 68, who responded by inviting him to visit Antibes. In their initial encounter, he found that “behind a mask of detachment, he concealed a loquacious nature,” but the celebrated author was also an “expert at frustrating expectations.” He couldn’t drive, cook, type, or use maps. Yet as an intrepid adventurer, he was able to meet with Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, Omar Torrijos and others, a record of power interviews that “even Oriana Fallaci would envy.” Mewshaw finds much in Greene’s life and work to admire and emulate, along with human frailty, and he conveys the ups and downs of their relationship with genuine intimacy.

**The humanity of a renowned literary figure is fascinatingly revealed through a long friendship.**



**THE WORLD  
A Family History of Humanity**

*Montefiore, Simon Sebag*  
Knopf (1,344 pp.)  
\$45.00 | May 16, 2023  
9780525659532

How family dynamics have shaped the world.

Award-winning historian Montefiore draws on 30 years of research, reading,

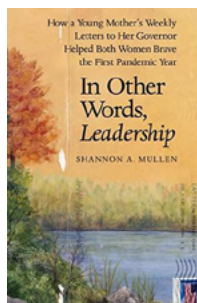


## “An instructive survey for fans of margaritas and their cactus-born kin.”

AGAVE SPIRITS

and travel to create a panoramic, abundantly populated, richly detailed history of the world through the stories of families across place and time. History, he asserts, started when “war, food and writing coalesced to allow a potentate” to harness power and promote his or her children to keep it. That lust for power often involved violence, and promoting a child sometimes meant doing away with another. A family’s aspirations frequently tested loyalty. Arranged chronologically into 23 Acts, beginning in prehistory, the blood-soaked narrative abounds with murder and incest, war and torture, enslavement and oppression. The author identifies the Mesopotamian leader Sargon as head of “the first power family.” As his domain thrived, it proved fragile, an example, Montefiore claims, of “the paradox of empire”—the richer it became, the more its borders had to be defended against rivalrous incursions and “the greater was the incentive for destructive family feuds.” In 2193 B.C.E., Sargon lost his empire. Roughly 1,000 years later, in China, the warrior king Wuding tried to shore up his own empire by placing each of his 64 wives in control of his conquered fiefdoms. Marriages—even between siblings or other close relations—proved helpful, and if alliances frayed, there was always exile, imprisonment, and murder. Pregnancies also were helpful, even if they resulted from rape. Some families that Montefiore examines are familiar to most readers—Medici, Bonaparte, Romanov, Habsburg, and Rockefeller—but Montefiore’s view is capacious, as he recounts the histories of Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern, Hawaiian, and African dynasties as well as the more recent Bushes, Kennedys, Castros, and Kims. The history of humanity, the author ably demonstrates, displays “cruelty upon cruelty, folly upon folly, eruptions, massacres, famines, pandemics, and pollutions”—yet throughout, he adds, an enduring capacity to create and love.

A vibrant, masterful rendering of human history.



**IN OTHER WORDS, LEADERSHIP**  
**How a Young Mother’s Weekly Letters to Her Governor Helped Both Women Brave the First Pandemic Year**

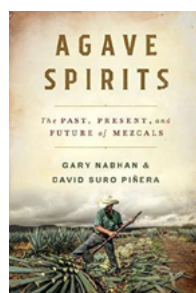
Mullen, Shannon A.  
 Steerforth (336 pp.)  
 \$29.95 | June 6, 2023  
 9781586423681

How an unusual correspondence buoyed two Maine women through the uncertainty of the first several months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At first glance, the women couldn’t have been much more different. Ashirah Knapp was a homesteader living off the grid in a tiny town situated literally at the end of the road; Janet Mills was in the middle of her first term as Maine’s first woman governor. But the women share a deep humanism, and the connection New Hampshire-based journalist Mullen teases out of the former’s letters and the latter’s journal entries and public addresses provides a neat structure for the narrative. Observing

the angry resistance to the Democratic governor’s pandemic restrictions, starting in May 2020, Knapp took it upon herself to write weekly letters to Mills to “keep reminding you of the many people who agree with the path you are choosing for our state.” For the next year, Knapp never wavered, even as Mills’ emergency orders hamstring her family’s small business. It was largely a one-sided correspondence, but Mills took heart from Knapp’s missives, even referencing them in her 2021 annual address to the state legislature. While Knapp wrote to Mills, the latter kept a daily journal, recording her sorrow over the pandemic’s rampage, her distress at the difficulty of managing it, and the relief she found in Maine’s outdoors and her circle of (safely distanced) friends. Mullen nods at the confusion some of Mills’ policies promulgated, but the account is unabashedly admiring. Like-minded Mainers will find it a heartwarming record; those further flung will recognize much while encountering uniquely Maine variations, not least of which is the state’s unlikely love affair with its pandemic-era Maine CDC director, Dr. Nirav Shah. The author quotes her subjects and other sources liberally and diligently, but too often the inclusion of unremarkable text slows readers’ passage. Still, her earnest approach will keep readers engaged.

Readers will find both governor and homesteader sturdy pandemic companions.



**AGAVE SPIRITS**  
**The Past, Present, and Future of Mezcal**

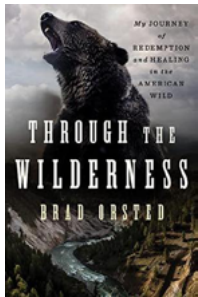
Nabhan, Gary Paul & David Suro Piñera  
 Norton (256 pp.)  
 \$30.00 | May 16, 2023  
 9780393867107

A comprehensive, readable exploration of the history and science of tequila, mezcal, and other agave-derived spirits.

Agaves yield complex distilled beverages that can rival the finest of wines, cognacs, and brandies at one end of the spectrum or yield weak, milky, crude drinks such as pulque on the other. Ethnobotanist Nabhan and Mexican environmental activist Piñera, founder of the Tequila Interchange Project, explain the ways in which the 215-odd known species of agaves are put to use in making toppers happy. That biodiverse body of plants, as with so many other industrially made products, is suffering as large corporate growers—none, the authors point out, headquartered in Mexico—clear large expanses of land to make the stuff to be found at the corner drugstore, all at the expense of localized products. “Somehow along its wayward journey,” they lament, “tequila lost most of its connections to its ancestral roots, going astray.” Tequila—now bottled by celebrities along with those faceless corporations—ranks high among the popular agave drinks, but there are many other varieties that are growing in popularity around the world, including mezcal and the rural hooch called bacanora. The authors conclude their survey with a suggested platform for preserving variety and diversity among the agave distillates,

including paying workers better, in the hope that “the responsible drinkers of the world will stand up and take notice.” Occasionally the authors dip into arcana, as when they puzzle over whether distillation was known to Indigenous peoples before European contact or whether it was introduced from Asia by way of the Spanish galleon trade. They also surrender to puns and cute turns of phrase (on agaves: “They stay celibate and delay having sex much later than other plants, but then they do it with a bang”) that detract from the serious yet approachable discussions surrounding them.

**An instructive survey for fans of margaritas and their cactus-born kin.**



**THROUGH THE WILDERNESS**  
*My Journey of Redemption and Healing in the American Wild*

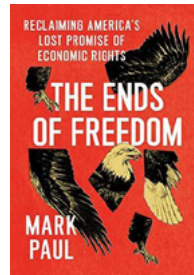
Orsted, Brad  
St. Martin's (256 pp.)  
\$29.00 | June 27, 2023  
9781250284693

A filmmaker, photographer, and “self-proclaimed bear nerd” tells the story of how personal tragedy pushed him to the

edge and taught him how to live.

When Orsted lost his 15-month-old daughter, Marley, in 2010, he spiraled into a deep depression. His mother was taking care of Marley the day she died, and her inability to speak of what happened and articulate the cause of Marley’s sudden death effectively ended the already difficult relationship between mother and son. Looking for a new start, Orsted and his wife moved from Michigan to Yellowstone a year and a half after Marley’s death. However, the author’s overwhelming grief, which he continued to combat with a dangerous cocktail of alcohol and prescription medication, did not yield until he came face to face with a grizzly bear in the wild. The bear inspired a fear so profound it forced Orsted into the moment, “completely halting the merry-go-round of toxic sludge I’d been strapped to.” Afterward, he began reading “everything I could get my hands on” about grizzlies (he took particular solace in Doug Peacock’s *Grizzly Years*) before embarking on a venture to shoot documentaries about grizzly lives and habitats. Orsted’s work took an especially personal turn when he began to follow the progress of two grizzly cubs whose mother had been shot by a hunter. Though warned to keep “an emotional arm’s length,” the author nevertheless developed an attachment to the young bears. Sadly, the state of Montana later killed them for ranging too close to populated areas. Yet rather than fall prey to despair, Orsted found strength in the realization that the bears had helped him find the wholeness he had lost. “This is the gift of the grizzly,” he writes. As the author grapples with the meaning of unimaginable loss, he delivers a powerful, uplifting celebration of the healing power of nature.

**A candid and affecting memoir of grief and discovering salvation in the wilderness.**



**THE ENDS OF FREEDOM**  
*Reclaiming America's Lost Promise of Economic Rights*

Paul, Mark  
Univ. of Chicago (320 pp.)  
\$26.00 | May 12, 2023  
9780226792965

A proposal for an economic Bill of Rights designed to expand freedoms and “address the problem of persistent economic insecurity in America.”

Arguing against the use of negative rights to champion individual freedom and bolster conservative thought, Paul, a professor of public policy at Rutgers, begins his counterargument with a history of the rise of neoliberalism in the U.S. and of governmental efforts to realize positive rights that ensure that everyone prospers. Midway through the text, the author shifts from history to policy analysis and proposes “concrete alternatives that would provide all with universal security by guaranteeing economic rights.” These efforts, he notes, could succeed in “rooting out the deep power imbalances that warp America’s economy and society.” Paul groups his alternatives in broad categories: work, housing, education, health care, basic income and banking, and climate change. Among many other initiatives, the author lays out plans for federally funded and owned social housing for everyone, free college education, universal health care, and a basic income program that applies to each household and includes generous child allowances. The daunting issue is whether the government can afford the increased spending such an economic program would require. Paul believes it can, and he offers as a possible solution a combination of reduced social expenditures due to a lessening of poverty, full employment, and a commitment to the living wage and increased taxes. The result will be a “well-being state” that realizes the deeply flawed concept of the American dream. Paul is sharp and deeply knowledgeable about his field, and his comprehensive approach is admirable, if politically impractical. However, his book enters a crowded field of other recent attempts to build on a resurgence of progressivism, most of which work the same political-economic terrain in a quasi-historical style with similar liberal inclinations.

**A reminder of the country’s lost ideal of economic freedom and the many actions that might turn that ideal into reality.**



**I SWEAR**  
*Politics Is Messier Than My Minivan*

Porter, Katie  
Crown (304 pp.)  
\$28.00 | April 11, 2023  
9780593443989

Debut memoir from the whiteboard-wielding U.S. representative.

Since her election to the House of Representatives in 2018, Porter has

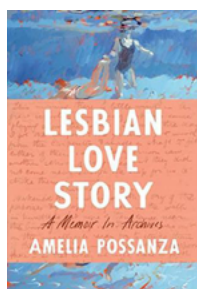


“Detailed and immensely readable, this is a generous history of lesbian love.”

LESBIAN LOVE STORY

established a reputation as a no-nonsense single mother fighting on behalf of everyday people. As an Iowa native who spent her early childhood on the family farm, Porter comes by her Everywoman persona honestly. Later, she graduated from Phillips Academy, Yale, and Harvard Law School, and she counts Elena Kagan, Elizabeth Warren, and Kamala Harris among her mentors. Had Hillary Clinton won the presidency in 2020, Porter would have been on her transition team. Although the author never planned to run for office, she’s not exactly a political outsider. Maybe it’s the tension between these very different aspects of her story that makes her come across as defensive. Eschewing a chronological narrative, Porter offers a series of essays that don’t fully cohere thematically or stylistically. There are autobiographical vignettes; detailed—possibly too detailed—descriptions of her work as an academic specializing in bankruptcy law; and numerous diatribes. Some chapters are terrific. Her fiery explanation of how difficult it is to serve in Congress unless you’re independently wealthy should make us all angry, and her account of the role domestic violence has played in her life is affecting. Her description of the senior project she completed at Yale—about a dying Iowa city being “revitalized” by big agriculture—serves as a sort of intellectual and political origin story. The author seldom misses an opportunity to take a swipe at someone—her staffers and House colleagues get especially rough treatment—and the chief takeaway from her brief account of the Jan. 6 insurrection is that while she was largely unfazed, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was distraught, hoping that the MAGA hordes wouldn’t recognize her. The only person who emerges from these pages looking good is Sen. Warren, someone for whom Porter has genuine respect and affection.

Porter is a remarkable woman, but she undercuts her important accomplishments in the way she tells her story.



**LESBIAN LOVE STORY  
A Memoir in Archives**

Possanza, Amelia  
Catapult (288 pp.)  
\$27.00 | May 30, 2023  
9781646221059

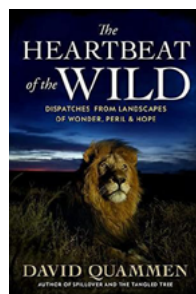


An archive of queer love and community by a talented storyteller.

“Mostly grown and living in New York City, I still rarely spotted other lesbians,” writes book publicist Possanza in her debut. “I joined a queer swim team, but it was full of gay men who didn’t recognize me.” As such, she “resolved to become a collector of lesbians.” Part personal memoir, part archival research, the book expertly weaves together stories of lesbians across time with a historian’s precision and a novelist’s pacing. Bringing together seven epic love stories across eras, ranging from the classical Greek poet Sappho and her lover Anactoria to lesbian caretakers in the AIDS crisis extending beyond romantic boundaries, Possanza cultivates a worthy collection of lesbian love stories. “I chose them because their stories are

singular,” writes the author, “each a match struck against the grain of their eras until their lives burned bright, and yet they also represent the broader history of lesbians at each moment in time.” The author’s meticulous research reveals an exciting historical tapestry, encompassing Coney Island drag kings of the mid-20th century, Black lesbians in Harlem during the Great Depression, and one of the earliest female Olympians. Showing us a pantheon of role models, community organizers, and champions of progressive causes, Possanza effectively shows how lesbians are united by more than just a shared sexual identity; “they are also bound together by their ability to create safe havens in even the most hostile circumstances, buried projects that were a direct response to the systems that tried to trap and trade women.” These women filled gaps and imagined radical ways of living outside of a heteronormative system, and the author highlights their stories in full, sensual detail. In addition to chronicling the past and present, Possanza seeks a future that goes beyond “simple stereotypes” into “private intimacy and public recognition.” Throughout, the prose is warm, personal, and accessible.

Detailed and immensely readable, this is a generous history of lesbian love.



**THE HEARTBEAT OF THE WILD  
Dispatches From Landscapes  
of Wonder, Peril, & Hope**

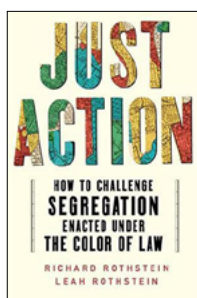
Quammen, David  
National Geographic (352 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 16, 2023  
9781426222078

A collection of *National Geographic* articles from the veteran science writer.

Quammen, the award-winning author of *Breathless*, *Spillover*, and *The Song of the Dodo*, has long worked for the iconic magazine, and most of the pieces have been slightly updated. Some readers may be surprised to learn that huge areas of the planet exist where no man has set foot, and there are plenty of blank spots in our knowledge of life, humans included. The author chronicles the story of Mike Fay, a quasi-Victorian “half-crazed white man” explorer in the tradition of David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley who walked more than 2,000 miles through the last great remaining forests of Central Africa to survey its biological diversity. Three long articles describe the 15-month expedition, which resulted in no deaths but a few near misses. Tales of Africa occupy most of the chapters, although there is a compelling story from Chile and Argentina, where a wealthy American couple has persuaded the governments to form national parks including much land they have bought. Two chapters detour to Kamchatka in Russia’s far east, a sparsely populated wonderland of volcanoes, geysers, wildlife, and salmon-rich streams and a reminder that the Soviet Union’s fall was an ecological disaster, as its government abandoned nature reserves to rapacious entrepreneurs and poachers. Quammen strains to remain optimistic on the subject of conservation and sometimes succeeds, but the future looks

uncertain. It's mostly money from richer nations that supports conservation in poor nations, but much must be spent to provide their citizens jobs, education, and infrastructure. *National Geographic* is famous for maps and brilliant photographs that accompany the articles. Sadly, there are none in this collection, and readers may struggle to follow some narratives because Quammen often writes about villages and other geographical features too obscure to turn up in internet searches.

**A great nature writer cleans out his desk.**



**JUST ACTION**  
**How To Challenge**  
**Segregation Enacted Under**  
**the Color of Law**

*Rothstein, Richard & Leab Rothstein*

Liveright/Norton (288 pp.)

\$25.00 | June 1, 2023

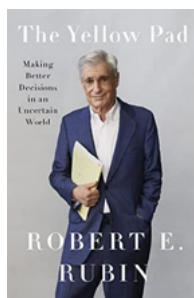
9781324093244

A useful framework for “policies that need to be as forceful in the redress of segregation as those that created it.”

Historian Richard Rothstein, whose book *The Color of Law* exposed how federal, state, and local laws have perpetuated segregation, teams with his daughter, community organizer and housing-policy expert Leah Rothstein, to argue forcefully that residential segregation underlies the nation's social problems, including inequalities in health care, education, and income. Addressing readers who seek to remedy housing segregation, the authors present a tool kit for activism and advocacy, with myriad examples from communities, groups, and individuals that have confronted challenges from legal, real estate, banking, and development industries. Some obstacles to Black homeownership, they reveal, hide within long-standing laws. Homeowners in Modesto, California, for example, were shocked to discover that their property deeds contained restrictive covenant stipulations prohibiting them from selling their homes to non-White buyers. With the help of student researchers, they mounted a campaign to publicize the offensive stipulation. In Oakland, the Greenlining Institute was founded in the 1970s to encourage increased investment from banks in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods. In Mount Airy, Pennsylvania; Oak Park, Illinois; and Cleveland Heights, Ohio, local groups were successful in ensuring racial stability after their neighborhoods became integrated, making sure that White flight did not occur. The authors counter NIMBY (not in my backyard) attitudes that result from unfounded assumptions about the consequences of integration. Gentrification, they assert, can produce racially and economically diverse communities where there is robust community involvement. They suggest strategies for closing the wealth gap that has made homeownership unaffordable for middle-class Black Americans, especially as home prices have skyrocketed in many areas. These strategies include savings support plans, subsidized down payments, fair and responsible appraisals and assessments, modifying single-family zoning to allow large, multifamily housing developments, and instituting

low-income housing tax credits. Although the authors acknowledge that not every reader will become an activist, anyone can support efforts to redress segregation.

**A thoughtful, pragmatic manual for reform.**



**THE YELLOW PAD**  
**Making Better Decisions in**  
**an Uncertain World**

*Rubin, Robert E.*

Penguin Press (336 pp.)

\$32.00 | May 16, 2023

9780593491393

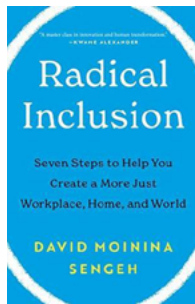
A sometimes repetitive but generally useful manual on introducing cost-benefit analysis to decision-making.

“We need an effective intellectual framework for thinking about thinking—an approach to the world that acknowledges complexity and uncertainty but can nonetheless help us make the best possible decisions,” writes Rubin, a former Treasury secretary and Goldman Sachs executive. There's a lot packed into that suggestion, for acknowledging that complexity and uncertainty involves introducing risk analysis into decisions of import, which entails probabilistic thinking (What are the chances this is going to fail?), which involves the old economists' trick of cost-benefit analysis, which circles back to risk. One does all this, Rubin counsels, by means of a yellow legal pad, a metaphor for any means of listing possible outcomes for reckoning honestly with key questions: “How do you make judgments about the probabilities? How do you consider trade-offs when priorities conflict? And how do you deal with potential scenarios that can't be expressed in numerical terms?” Rubin is a qualitative thinker, but he admits that some qualitative assessment boils down simply to gut reactions. Though he belabors certain points, he makes subtle arguments about the dangers of, for instance, assuming that low risk means no risk and the desirability of leaders who care less about whether they're popular than whether they make their best effort to get things right. In that regard, he branches out to leadership style, notably Bill Clinton's, who was inclined to make decisions while taking a wide range of opinions that weren't necessarily weighted toward the seniority of the person offering them. That approach relies on “embracing human complexity: recognizing and engaging with the inherent strengths, weaknesses, and motivations of individuals, and then working to give them the best chance to succeed.” And never skip the important step of asking “foundational questions.”

**With intellectual heft and plenty of actionable items, this is a smart prescription for better thinking.**

“A beautiful tribute to two pioneering women of science.”

BRAVE THE WILD RIVER

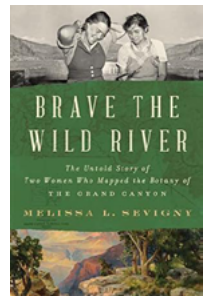


**RADICAL INCLUSION**  
**Seven Steps To Help You Create a More Just Workplace, Home, and World**  
*Sengeh, David Moinina*  
 Moment of Life Books/Flatiron (256 pp.)  
 \$26.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9781250827746

An optimistic approach to fostering greater inclusion.

Sengeh, chief innovation officer for the government of Sierra Leone, acknowledges that aspects of systemic exclusion touch everyone’s lives at some point, regardless of social or economic status. In this informative and galvanizing book, the author first addresses how exclusionary biases are formed, how they permeate and systematically deconstruct social norms, and why “the pursuit of inclusion is in everyone’s interest.” As he writes, “debates about exclusion and inclusion can tear families apart—or bring whole societies together.” Sengeh dismisses roadblocks like hesitancy, appeasement, or behavioral “code-switching” and offers comprehensive solutions and tactics to achieve inclusiveness. His own experiences with exclusivity include a consistent series of detourments at border control checkpoints in Sierra Leone as well as other countries like Tanzania, Gambia, and Uganda, where girls are not allowed to attend schoolroom classes while visibly pregnant. As a father of two daughters, he is attuned to how females experience a host of exclusionary inequities, including lower pay differentials and social status as well as susceptibility to sexual violence. In engrossing detail, Sengeh describes how, through “active listening,” smart timing, and vigorous challenges to traditional religious edicts, he has advocated for progressive changes in his home country and beyond. The most controversial was his role in enacting dramatic changes in traditional school policy and the repealing of the ban on teenage pregnancy in the classroom. Alongside his personal story, the author provides a helpful play-book for building inclusive solutions to many societal problems. These principles include identifying and understanding a particular exclusion, defining one’s role in effecting its eradication, and looking outward at other opportunities to cultivate inclusionary behaviors and challenge public policy. Inspirational, motivating, and intellectually sound, Sengeh’s instructional guidance seeks to inspire systemic change and encourages readers to fight for diversity and equity in their own communities.

Proactive, pragmatic initiatives promoting radical inclusivity across social divides.



**BRAVE THE WILD RIVER**  
**The Untold Story of Two Women Who Mapped the Botany of the Grand Canyon**  
*Sevigny, Melissa L.*  
 Norton (304 pp.)  
 \$30.00 | May 23, 2023  
 9780393868234

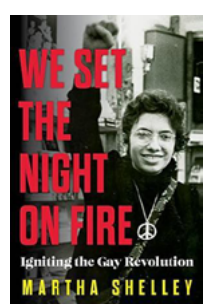


A biography of two female botanists who cataloged the plants of the

Grand Canyon.

Sevigny, a science journalist for Arizona Public Radio, recounts the details of the 1938 river journey of Elzada Clover and Lois Jotter, who, along with their guide, Norm Nevills, and a few other crew members, traveled down the Colorado River with the goal of cataloging undiscovered plants in the area. As women scientists, Clover and Jotter faced scrutiny even before their trip began. They started in Green River, Utah, and then traveled through Cataract Canyon, Glen Canyon, and the Grand Canyon before ending at Lake Mead. For Clover, the trip “fit perfectly with her dream of cataloging all the Southwest’s cacti, but, more than that, it was a chance to make her mark on the field of botany.” As they made their way down the river, they continued to face challenges, including navigating intense rapids, losing one of their three boats, and contending with aggressive reporters and inaccurate and speculative news reports. When Clover and Jotter finally reached the entrance of the Grand Canyon, they felt apprehensive, but they decided “they had no choice now but to brave the wild river.” Drawing from the crew’s letters and journals, Sevigny brings us directly into the boats and introduces us to many of the plants that Clover and Jotter surveyed and collected, including desert mistletoe, Indian paintbrush, and coyote willow. The author also includes a map of the route and images of the crew at different points along the way. Woven throughout the narrative of Clover and Jotter is the early history of travel on the Colorado River as well as how Indigenous peoples, Europeans, and the Park Service have shaped the ecology of the river over time. As the author notes, women in science still face challenges, stereotypes, and barriers; Sevigny hopes that recalling the past will lead to a more equitable future.

A beautiful tribute to two pioneering women of science.



**WE SET THE NIGHT ON FIRE**  
**Igniting the Gay Revolution**  
*Shelley, Martha*  
 Chicago Review Press (224 pp.)  
 \$27.99 | June 13, 2023  
 9781641609418

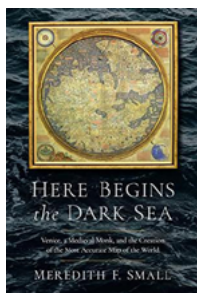
The autobiography of a co-founder of the Gay Liberation Front.

On June 28, 1969, Shelley was giving two gay Bostonians a tour of Greenwich



Village in New York City when they “came upon a group of men throwing things at cops.” When the women asked what was going on, Shelley answered, “It’s just a riot...we have them all the time.” It was only later that she realized that the women had passed through the famous riot at the Stonewall Inn that marked a major transition in the movement for gay rights. A graduate of the Bronx High School of Science and the City College of New York, Shelley was a tough, precocious New Yorker who began to identify as a lesbian after having an affair with a woman she met in a judo class. At a young age, the author was confident enough in her sexuality to become a public speaker for the New York chapter of a “lesbian organization” called Daughters of Bilitis, a role she wore proudly despite having to hide it from her employer. “Although I was out as spokesperson for the DOB, I couldn’t be out at work,” she writes. “I was still living a double life.” It was through this organization and its male counterpart—the Mattachine Society—that Shelley helped found the radical Gay Liberation Front, a group famous for organizing the march that alchemized the ire of the Stonewall riot into a decadeslong movement. Shelley’s frank, conversational tone, wry sense of humor, and keen eye for detail make the text feel like an intimate conversation with a radical friend. At times, her rapid-fire introduction of characters is confusing, but the book is a well-paced, highly informative page-turner about a history that is rarely told.

**A gay rights activist’s funny and thoughtful memoir.**



**HERE BEGINS THE DARK SEA  
Venice, a Medieval Monk,  
and the Creation of the Most  
Accurate Map of the World**

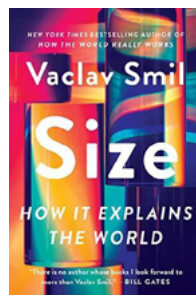
Small, Meredith F.  
Pegasus (352 pp.)  
\$28.95 | June 6, 2023  
9781639364190

A study of one of history’s most influential maps.

In this follow-up to *Inventing the World: Venice and the Transformation of Western Civilization*, Cornell anthropologist Small provides a fascinating exploration of the impressively detailed mappa mundi created by Venetian monk Fra Mauro. Crafted by Mauro and his team between 1450 and 1459, the map, 7 feet in diameter, is on display in Venice, and it is both an artistic masterpiece and an encyclopedic resource that includes numerous textual explanations. Small begins by explaining the history and significance of mapmaking before moving on to chronicle the work of this particular mapmaker. Fra Mauro, whose real or full name is lost to history, was a Camaldolese monk on the Venetian island of San Michele. As the author notes, his life story is murky. “The creator of one of the greatest maps in the world remains an enigma,” she writes. Nevertheless, his map speaks for him, literally, in that many of his comments on the map are written in the first person. Small explains that Fra Mauro, though himself not a traveler, relied on eyewitness accounts for his information. Working in the trade city of Venice,

he was well placed to learn about faraway places. The result is a map that visualizes Africa better than any map up to this point; it also includes places such as Japan in a time when very little was known to Europeans about East Asia. Beyond this, Fra Mauro laid out his map with a southern orientation and did not center it around Jerusalem or Europe. His map, writes the author, was “the instigator of change, the map that rejected religion and went so far as to embrace the nascent methodology and philosophy of science.” Small concludes by describing Fra Mauro’s influence on European exploration, cartography, and culture.

**Interesting and approachable, this book will appeal to any student of geography or world history.**



**SIZE  
How It Explains  
the World**

Smil, Vaclav  
Morrow/HarperCollins (304 pp.)  
\$32.00 | May 16, 2023  
9780063324091



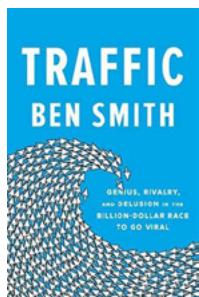
One of the world’s most interesting thinkers investigates the large, the small, and everything in between.

The term *polymath* is overused these days, but in Smil’s case, it is appropriate. He is currently a professor of environmental studies at the University of Manitoba, but his research interests—and the dozens of books he has written (*How the World Really Works*, *Numbers Don’t Lie*, *Oil: A Beginner’s Guide*, etc.)—cover subjects ranging from technology and energy to psychology and art. Here, the author skillfully synthesizes a wealth of material to help explain the world and our place in it. He notes that humans have always been impressed by giant things, whether naturally occurring or of human design. The reasons are not entirely clear, but Smil suggests that there are elements of inspiration, intimidation, shock, and awe. He tracks the history of big constructions, from Stonehenge to skyscrapers, and provides a fascinating chapter on the limits on size imposed by materials, construction methods, and economics. Even in the age of environmental awareness, there is still a preference for bigness—e.g., cars and TVs. Smil also examines how the concept of averages was developed and deployed across society. Somehow, he even manages to make a section on the formulae used to establish deviations from norms interesting and accessible. He throws in an array of factoids, such as the above-average height of the CEOs of large corporations, the ergonomics of airline seats, and the mountains of money amassed by a few people. At the other end of the scale, he examines the very small, looking at molecular construction and how microchips work. Along the way, he provides an analysis of relative sizes in *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. As Smil acknowledges, there is no finale of condensed wisdom in the concluding chapter, but no matter: The journey itself is an appealing and informative ride.

**Smil packs entire worlds into entertaining, colorful, pleasing packages.**

“There’s no better history of the Wild West days of early social media than this one.”

TRAFFIC



**TRAFFIC**  
**Genius, Rivalry, and Delusion in the Billion-Dollar Race To Go Viral**

Smith, Ben  
Penguin Press (352 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 2, 2023  
978-0-593-29975-3



The founding editor-in-chief of BuzzFeed News recounts life in the tech-startup trenches.

Jonah Peretti, co-founder of BuzzFeed and the *Huffington Post*, began his media career on a fluke note, engaging in what used to be called “culture jamming” with Nike, goofing on its labor practices by requesting a bespoke pair of shoes emblazoned with the word *sweatshop*. In 2001, he ignited what became one of the first instances of something going viral on the internet. That culture jamming of two decades ago would become the flame-war-scorched social media of today. So it was with the man who would become Peretti’s “nemesis, his archrival, and his polar opposite,” British immigrant Nick Denton, who obsessively gathered page views that could in turn be monetized in ad sales, yielding the Gawker website. By Smith’s account, although Denton was more businesslike, he was also wedded to click-bait gossip, if sometimes with a social purpose: “The Gawker scoop of his dreams had always been to out a gay, Christian Republican senator, and thus reveal right-wing hypocrisy in its most naked form.” Alas, he ran up against right-wing billionaire Peter Thiel instead, “a schemer who believed in revenge served cold,” who took years and spent a fortune to lay Gawker to waste. The author gives a detailed, smart account of the foibles of those early days, when no one knew how to conduct decent journalism and make money at the same time. His discussion of the *Huffington Post* is especially telling as a study in haplessness. Along the way, he tells entertaining out-of-school tales of the early Facebook, the Drudge Report, Breitbart, and Twitter. Self-aware and self-critical, Smith allows that while all these entities helped create today’s digital culture, it was often not for the better, even if Denton today voices hope for “a Talmudic internet still to be made.”

**There’s no better history of the Wild West days of early social media than this one.**



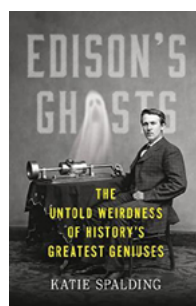
**ON WOMEN**

Sontag, Susan  
Ed. by David Rieff  
Picador (208 pp.)  
\$15.99 paper | May 30, 2023  
9781250876850

A crisp new collection of early Sontag pieces on gender, sexuality, and feminism. The energetic pacing and well-chosen variety of pieces (kudos to editor Rieff, the author’s only child) highlight

both Sontag’s ideas at the peak of the women’s movement and the breadth of her boldly ranging rhetoric. “The Double Standard of Aging” reads like a transcript of ambient social attitudes: “Society is much more permissive about aging in men,” while “everyone finds the signs of old age in women aesthetically offensive.” In “The Third World of Women,” Sontag speculates about the means and possibilities of gender and class revolution. “The liberation of women,” she writes, “is a necessary preparation for building a just society—not the other way around, as Marxists always claim.” Writing about “Fascinating Fascism,” the author advances an argument about the lingering endurance of fascist aesthetics with an engrossing evidentiary walk-through: Leni Riefenstahl’s public comeback via a popular paperback on SS uniforms glimpsed at an airport newsstand. Later, in “Double Standard,” Sontag writes about how “beauty, women’s business in this society, is the theater of their enslavement. Only one standard of female beauty is sanctioned: the *girl*.” Trading open letters with Adrienne Rich, the author is forcefully eloquent. “Virtually everything deplorable in human history,” she writes, “furnishes material for a restatement of the feminist plaint (the ravages of the patriarchy, etc.), just as every story of a life could lead to a reflection on our common mortality and the vanity of human wishes. But if the point is to have meaning some of the time, it can’t be made all the time.” To move through this collection is to watch Sontag practice what she also preaches to cultural critics and to liberated women: “lead the fullest, freest, and most imaginative life she can” and always maintain “her solidarity with other women.” Merve Emre provides the foreword.

**A potent Sontag capsule compounded of legendarily smart prose and clever editorial decisions.**



**EDISON’S GHOSTS**  
**The Untold Weirdness of History’s Greatest Geniuses**

Spalding, Katie  
Little, Brown (320 pp.)  
\$29.00 | May 16, 2023  
9780316529525

A cheeky tour of history’s brightest and most peculiar people.

From Pythagoras to Yukio Mishima, first-time author Spalding delivers consistently lively, witty excursions into the sometimes-weird lives and beliefs of the famous. The author writes that Leonardo da Vinci was a compulsive quitter, someone who would take on big commissions and money and then leave, sometimes coming back up to years later to finish or not. “Even his most famous work, the *Mona Lisa*, he never finished—he took it with him to France and insisted until his death that there was still more to do before it was complete,” writes the author. Meanwhile, Galileo “utterly fail[ed] to read the room” when it came to inquisitions about the center of the universe. Descartes was a “weirdo celebrity heretic pseudo-refugee who had a weakness for cross-eyed women, weed and conspiracy theories.” Besides his physics, Isaac Newton was “literally looking for the Philosopher’s

Stone,” poking his eye with a needle and blind for three days after staring at the sun too long. “You really wouldn’t want to hang out with Karl Marx,” writes Spalding, as he was a bit of a bruiser and drunkard. Besides finding and cataloging animals, the always hungry Charles Darwin would then eat them. Sigmund Freud was “more responsible for cocaine’s use as a recreational drug than any other person in history.” Thomas Edison was a “sort of proto-Elon Musk” who believed his “Spirit Phone” could reach the dead, and though Einstein loved sailing, “he was terrible at it.” There are only a few women included: Emilie du Châtelet, a “scientific genius” in the 1700s who studied math and duelled a man in her underwear; Ada Lovelace; Marie Curie; and Maya Angelou, whose life was “bonkers” in a good way. Others scrutinized by Spalding include Confucius, Napoleon, Mozart, Franklin, Byron, and Hemingway. Don’t miss the footnotes; they’re a hoot.

An entertaining and informative collection.



**WINNIE AND NELSON**  
**Portrait of a Marriage**

Steinberg, Jonny  
Knopf (576 pp.)  
\$35.00 | May 2, 2023  
9780525656852



A probing study of a complicated marriage that became emblematic of the revolutionary struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

In this eloquent biography, Steinberg, author of *A Man of Good Hope* and *Sizwe’s Test*, captures the mythic quality of these two leaders, their great love story and tragic estrangement, and the hubris and human frailty beneath the personas. While Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for nearly three decades, became the “personal embodiment of his people’s quest for freedom,” his untouchable grandeur only growing with time, Winnie was scarred by raw passion, anger, violence, and scandal. Nonetheless, she is an entirely sympathetic character here. Steinberg begins with composite portraits of each before they met in 1957, when Nelson was a sought-after lawyer in Johannesburg, married with children, and Winnie, at 21, was a social worker with a fiancé. Nelson and Winnie had both grown up amid clans undergoing “great ambition and rapid self-transformation,” and both had a sense of how politically dynamic their match could be. Enmeshed in Black nationalist politics, Nelson became leader of the African National Congress and eventually embraced armed struggle. Married in 1958, the couple would barely live together two years before Nelson was sentenced to life in prison on Robben Island. Steinberg also delineates how Winnie “had built her household in a world full of young men’s violence,” and her reputation was tarnished when she was implicated in a variety of human rights violations. The truth is muddied by conflicting versions, but her connection to Nelson allowed her protection from justice. While his role as leader required supreme self-discipline, masking his enormous pain at his wife’s infidelity and treachery, her actions

“stand as a monument to the revolution’s underbelly, a reminder of lives lost for nothing.” The author is careful not to vilify her while deifying him; rather, he presents a nuanced, well-contextualized look at their relationship within its time.

A magnificent portrait of two people joined in the throes of making South African history.



**UNSCRIPTED**  
**The Epic Battle for a**  
**Media Empire and the**  
**Redstone Family Legacy**

Stewart, James B. & Rachel Abrams  
Penguin Press (416 pp.)  
\$26.99 | Feb. 14, 2023  
9781984879424

Page-turning exposé of very bad behavior in the top echelons of the entertainment industry.

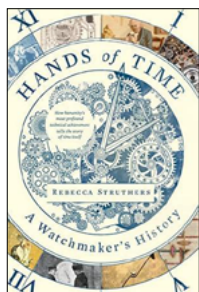
If you need a tale of intrigue, infighting, and crime that makes the Trump White House look like a bastion of normalcy, this is it. Veteran reporters Stewart and Abrams uncover the untoward doings of the heads of CBS and Viacom: Les Moonves, “the first chief executive of a major publicly traded company forced to resign for predatory sexual conduct,” and Sumner Redstone, a much-feared business leader who threw it all away to satisfy his own urges. Then in his ninth decade and, by the authors’ account, in evident decline, Redstone courted women young enough to be his granddaughters—and never mind that he had grandchildren of his own who were on the way to being bilked out of their inheritances by two of his paramours, who, one bragged, “could get [him] to do pretty much whatever she wanted.” Amid all the sexual and financial misadventures came a complex dance to merge the two corporations. “Given Sumner’s mental state and communication issues,” the authors write, “it’s hard to know how much of the intricacies of the proposed Paramount deal he knew or understood.” Enter Redstone’s often estranged daughter, Shari, a sharp negotiator and sole hero of this book, who went up against both her father and Moonves, cleaned house on the domestic and corporate fronts, and, amid a flurry of lawsuits, prevailed. Moonves and the parasites were gone, and the newly restructured Paramount was emergent, if well behind Netflix and Amazon, in the streaming-services market. To call it sordid is to undervalue the word, but Stewart and Abrams serve up a sharp-pointed morality tale that excoriates a corporate culture—now on the way to extinction, one hopes—that “had largely ignored the misconduct of so many rich and powerful men so long as they delivered profits and higher stock prices.”

An ugly yarn full of money-grubbing villains, irresistible in all its inglorious nastiness.



“A strikingly rendered tale of the hard and lasting costs of courage.”

GRAVEYARD OF THE PACIFIC



**HANDS OF TIME  
A Watchmaker's  
History**

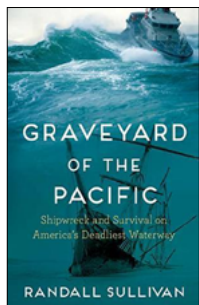
Struthers, Rebecca  
HarperCollins (288 pp.)  
\$35.00 | June 13, 2023  
9780063048706



An acclaimed expert provides a striking account of watches, their history, and their social impact.

“Watches not only measure time, they are a manifestation of time—signifiers of the most precious thing we have,” writes Struthers. The first watchmaker in British history to earn a doctorate in antiquarian horology, the study of time and timepieces, the author has devoted her life to them. Her debut book is a fascinating, charming examination, and Struthers ably melds the larger story with her own. She initially trained as a jeweler and silversmith, and before that, she was intrigued by forensics. All these came together when she encountered watchmaking, and she fell in love with the complexity and precision of the discipline. She takes a tour through the evolution of watches, noting that the first were produced in the early 16th century. Some watches constructed hundreds of years ago still work perfectly, with little maintenance; few machines can make comparable claims. The book has plenty of stories and colorful characters, making for a remarkable narrative. For a while, it looked as if mechanical watches would become extinct under pressure from digital technology, but the past decade has seen a new generation emerge as high-prestige items, and most of them are superb objects. Struthers provides a glossary as well as an appendix on how to repair a watch, and her expertise and passion for her subject shine through. She has always been aware of the passage of time, but it became an acute concern when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The prognosis is good, but it gave her a fresh perspective on her work. “We all measure our lives in moments of time, and the memories that accompany them,” she writes. “Watches, which tell the time for us as they did for those before us, provide a constant in those memories.”

A beautiful story about beautiful things from someone who knows everything there is to know about the field.



**GRAVEYARD OF  
THE PACIFIC  
Shipwreck and  
Survival on America's  
Deadliest Waterway**

Sullivan, Randall  
Atlantic Monthly (272 pp.)  
\$27.00 | June 6, 2023  
9780802162403

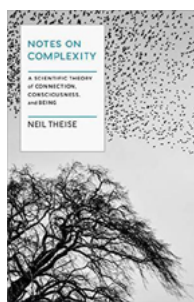


A riveting story of maritime tragedies and a personal passage.

The Columbia River, writes Oregon-based journalist and former *Rolling Stone* contributing editor Sullivan, is “the most

vital natural feature west of the Rocky Mountains.” He continues, “only the Missouri/Mississippi system exceeds it in annual runoff, and there are years when the Columbia’s flow is greater.... The Columbia is unique among all rivers of the world... in the combination of its close proximity to the ocean and the tall mountain ranges that feed it all along the way there.” But it is the Columbia Bar, site of the river’s harrowing collision with the sea, that earned it the sobriquet “Graveyard of the Pacific.” In the fascinating introduction, the author chronicles the geological origins of the Columbia and its many tributaries and torturous route to the sea. Yet it is Sullivan’s gripping, vividly detailed accounts of nautical disasters at the Columbia Bar that make the book such an achievement for the three-time Pulitzer Prize nominee. The author digs deep to recount the most famous disasters at the Bar from the 18th to the 20th centuries, punctuating them with skillfully distilled biographies of notable figures of this period. The author’s personal story—from growing up with an abusive father to his 2021 attempt to cross the Bar by trimaran—courses through the book like an intermittent current. Well written and affecting, it risks becoming a mere framing device—until the compelling final chapter. Clearly, Sullivan wants to offer more than a dramatic historical account of shipwrecks and rescue operations, including his narrative of the hoped-for catharsis of a 69-year-old adventurer. In a touching coda about his friend and fellow sailor, their exploits, and their shared survival from lifelong traumas, the author finds a path to reconciliation and a reaffirmation of manhood that defies our caustic modern labels.

A strikingly rendered tale of the hard and lasting costs of courage.



**NOTES ON COMPLEXITY  
A Scientific Theory of  
Connection, Consciousness,  
and Being**

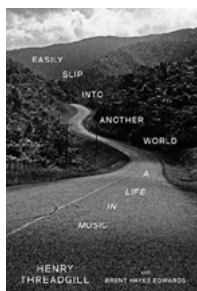
Theise, Neil  
Spiegel & Grau (224 pp.)  
\$27.00 | May 9, 2023  
9781954118256

An introduction to a theory that “provides a powerful, yet delicately nuanced understanding of the nature of reality and of our place within it as conscious, living beings.”

Theise is a professor of pathology at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine, expert on adult stem cell plasticity, practicing Zen Buddhist, and pioneering researcher in “complexity theory.” During his distinguished career, he has made associations among different kinds of cells that other scientists have missed in their research. In his debut book, the author shifts his associative analytical skills into overdrive, as he seeks—and often finds—similarities between complex systems on all kinds of levels, from the smallest to the largest, organic to inorganic. Theise has given many talks about complexity theory and stem cell research to the general public, which might explain why the text occasionally falls victim to oversimplification. For example,

the author asserts that Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock—who conceptualized Earth as “Gaia,” a system in which all living and nonliving components collaborate—“proved the critics wrong” and “established the study of Gaia as a robust field of investigation.” While some of the research leading to this theory is accepted, even lauded, in the scientific community, many researchers approach it with wariness. Nonetheless, as These eloquently notes, it is increasingly inescapable that, on a warming planet in which nonliving elements like carbon are being weaponized by the living, all kinds of worlds, ecosystems, geo-systems, cells, and particles are impacting all kinds of others. The author is enthusiastic and convincing in his demonstrations of the universe’s vast interconnectedness, consistently showing us how it is much greater than the sum of its parts. Are we “moment by moment...unique emergent expressions of the universe itself?” Not all will agree, but few will be uninterested.

**A stimulating read for anyone who has wondered about unexpected similarities between divergent systems.**



**EASILY SLIP INTO ANOTHER WORLD**  
**A Life in Music**

*Threadgill, Henry & Brent Hayes Edwards*  
Knopf (416 pp.)  
\$32.50 | May 16, 2023  
9781524749071



An American composer and saxophonist recounts a long, extraordinarily accomplished life in music.

Born in 1944, Threadgill grew up in a Chicago whose airwaves were as catholic as they came: “I remember Mexican music, country music (which people used to call ‘hillbilly’ back then), jazz, rhythm and blues, boogie-woogie, plus regular programming including radio plays, detective shows, and science fiction.” All that, plus the gospel of the likes of Mahalia Jackson and the world music pioneered by none other than DJ Studs Terkel. Threadgill might have fallen victim to the mean streets of the South Side, where he got into his share of scrapes and police officers shot to kill. “People talk about being scared—they don’t know what being scared is,” he writes. “I was running for my motherfucking life.” Enlisting in the Army as a musician, he was promised soft postings until he managed to bring heat down on the brass for a unique arrangement of the national anthem, whereupon he was packed off to Vietnam. His recollections from the battlefield are immediate and affecting. “I played both clarinet and alto saxophone, depending on the circumstances,” he writes. “But in terms of my situation, the key word was ‘infantry.’” After his discharge in 1969, Threadgill began putting together one stylistically revolutionary act after another, from Air to Zooid, playing with Sun Ra, James White and the Blacks, John Cale, and Cecil Taylor and absorbing lessons from—while avoiding imitating—the likes of Miles Davis and John Coltrane. The author is both encouraging and stern, as when he counsels, “If you haven’t had a love affair with the music, I don’t know what you’re doing in it.” More than that,

he urges readers to innovate, improvise, and widen their horizons—for example, follow the Cuban model, studying percussion along with whatever instrument one chooses.

**A vivid, vigorous memoir that every budding musician should read.**



**THE MIGRANT CHEF**  
**The Life and Times of Lalo Garcia**

*Tillman, Laura*  
Norton (288 pp.)  
\$30.00 | May 23, 2023  
9781324005773

An examination of a pioneer of cuisine, from his time as an itinerant farmer picking oranges to hosting the political and social elite at Mexico City eateries

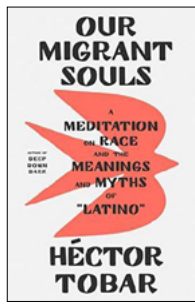
Máximo Bistrot and Lalo!

Tillman, the Mexico City–based author of *The Long Shadows of Small Ghosts*, brings five years of reporting to the story of one of Mexico’s foremost chefs. Born in the tiny village of San José de las Pilas, in Guanajuato, Eduardo “Lalo” García Guzmán (b. 1977) followed his family across the border to the U.S., where he began to travel agricultural routes between Florida and Michigan starting at age 10. Through distressing experiences of family separation and pesticide-ridden labor, which convinced him that “the health of the oranges was more important than his own,” Lalo found a calling in kitchens where his grit and focus caught the attention and mentorship of chefs. His early success was hampered by a robbery conviction. Though he fled at first, he returned to turn himself in and face deportation. Lalo again crossed the border to care for his father during cancer treatment. He won critical acclaim as the head chef of Atlanta’s Van Gogh’s but then was deported again. Tillman ably contextualizes the Mexico City to which Lalo returned, a city on the cusp of change with chefs like Enrique Olevera of Pujol exploring local ingredients and Mexico’s agricultural legacy. The author frames Lalo’s reentrance into the food scene and elevation as a star with an examination of what makes a pioneer. Referencing the work of anthropologist Alyshia Gálvez, she points out that chefs are often natural fits, crossing divisions of wealth and status among purveyors, the kitchen, and the dining room. Many are increasingly “asked to explain the connections between a country’s food, people, history, and environment.” In Tillman’s pages, Lalo’s voice rises above the fray with his drive to see Mexico recognized for its abundant culinary wonders.

**A harrowing and inspiring portrait of an important contemporary chef.**

“A powerful look at what it means to be a member of a community that, though large, remains marginalized.”

OUR MIGRANT SOULS



**OUR MIGRANT SOULS**  
*A Meditation on Race and the Meanings and Myths of "Latino"*

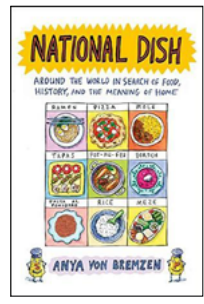


Tobar, Héctor  
 MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux  
 (256 pp.)  
 \$27.00 | May 9, 2023  
 9780374609900

A pensive examination of the many ways there are to be Latinx in America.

Novelist and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Tobar, the son of Guatemalan immigrants and a native of Los Angeles, begins on a paradoxical note: Whereas terms such as *Latino*, *Latinx*, and *Hispanic* are expressions “that are said to describe our ‘ethnicity’ or ‘common cultural background,’” the White majority reduces them to refer to “race,” a parsing that, in practice, always imposes an inferior designation. “Throughout this country’s history,” writes the author, “the lives of people today known as ‘Latino’ have been shaped by the American tradition of creating legal categories applied to the ‘nonwhite.’” A fan of pop culture, Tobar likens such terms to words like *Vulcan* or *Wookie*, explaining, with a nod to Junot Díaz, that history provides context to movies such as *Dune* (slavery), *X-Men* (racist classification), and *Star Wars* (colonialism). It’s a matter of some irony, he adds, that his hometown is both the most Latinx city in the U.S. and the center of an entertainment industry “that makes billions of dollars telling empire fantasy stories.” To broaden his perspective, Tobar travels widely across the country, finding perhaps unlikely centers of Latinidad in little towns in Pennsylvania and suburbs in Georgia as well as unmistakably Cubano Florida. Even if these enclaves are culturally quite distinct at home, they are reduced to the same non-Whiteness in the U.S., some suspect and some praised as “model” immigrants yet all sharing an “emotional commonality.” On completing his travels, he returned to LA to find that it resembled less a monolithic Latinx capital than “the encampments of dozens of different tribes.” While they share some cultural features, they have all been victimized by capitalism and racism. Tobar’s travels and meditations are altogether provocative and thoroughly well thought through, his account sharply observed and elegantly written.

A powerful look at what it means to be a member of a community that, though large, remains marginalized.



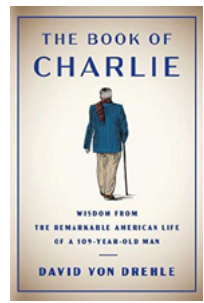
**NATIONAL DISH**  
*Around the World In Search of Food, History, and the Meaning of Home*

von Bremzen, Anya  
 Penguin Press (352 pp.)  
 \$29.00 | June 20, 2023  
 9780735223165

An award-winning food journalist searches for the connection between a nation’s people and what they eat.

Is it food that defines the culture or the culture that defines the food? Von Bremzen—a three-time James Beard Award winner and author of the memoir, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*, as well as multiple cookbooks—wonders if there can still be national dishes in the age of globalization and convenience foods. In her travels around the world, she has found plenty of evidence of distinctiveness, and she demonstrates how the idea of the national dish is often opposed by aggressive regionalism. She strolls through the back streets of Naples looking for the origins of pizza and pasta, and she discusses the connection between religion and tapas in Seville. Her vivid narrative is packed with intriguing characters, and in some countries, conversations about the food can be as important as the dish itself. The author finds much to admire about Oaxacan cuisine, and although Mexican dishes are often seen as bold and spicy, she is particularly impressed by the subtlety of atole (“a pre-Hispanic maize drink”) and the mysterious rituals attached to it. She finds street food more authentic than Michelin-star fanciness, a point that is made clear with her explorations of rice and ramen in Japan. Paris proves to be a disappointment, apparently stuck in a cul-de-sac of nostalgia and factionalism. There is still plenty of good food in the City of Lights, but it seems to have lost its luster. Von Bremzen obviously enjoys these cross-cultural discussions and disputes, although she does not really find answers to the questions she initially asked. Eventually, her travels bring her back to the U.S. and, ironically, to the Slavic dishes she grew up with.

In this piquant platter of a book, von Bremzen tackles questions of culture, history, and the meaning of a good meal.



**THE BOOK OF CHARLIE**  
*Wisdom From the Remarkable American Life of a 109-Year-Old Man*

Von Drehle, David  
 Simon & Schuster (208 pp.)  
 \$27.99 | May 23, 2023  
 9781476773926

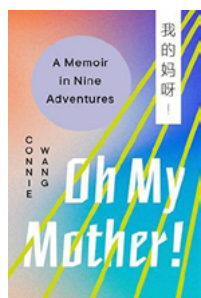
A journalist reconstructs the life of his neighbor before his death at age 109.

Regarding his motivation for writing this book, *Washington Post* columnist Von Drehle writes, “I needed to find someone whose early life would have been



recognizable to farmers from the age of Napoleon, or of Leonardo da Vinci.” Born in 1905, Charlie White descended from aristocratic Virginia Confederates who shared a family tree with Gen. Robert E. Lee. A boisterous child, he once accidentally set himself on fire while hopping over a flame in fringed pants in an impersonation of an “Indian brave.” After his father’s untimely death in a freak elevator accident, White’s mother designated him “the man of the house,” a responsibility that didn’t stop him from traveling across the U.S. in a Model T Ford. During the journey, he remembers complimenting a Navajo man on his English only to find out the man had graduated from Harvard. After medical school, White served as a doctor in the Air Force during World War II and trained in anesthesiology at the Mayo Clinic. In 1948, his wife, Mildred, an alcoholic who also suffered from an eating disorder, committed suicide. Soon after, White married a pilot who divorced him for being “a little too possessive.” White’s third marriage ended when his wife, Lois, died of cancer. Von Drehle attributes White’s survival to his adherence to stoicism, a philosophy that requires focusing on what can be controlled rather than what can’t—an approach White was partly able to take because of his race privilege. In a well-researched and often poignant narrative, the author rarely interrogates White’s privilege; maintains his subject’s insensitive language without comments; and quotes from thinkers like Theodore Roosevelt and Rudyard Kipling but never women or people of color. Despite the nuggets of wisdom sprinkled throughout the text, these choices make it feel outdated.

**A story of a 109-year-old man’s life told through a White male gaze.**



**OH MY MOTHER!  
A Memoir in Nine Adventures**

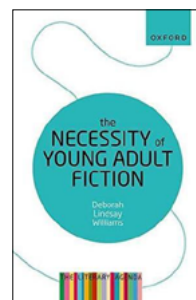
Wang, Connie  
 Viking (256 pp.)  
 \$27.00 | May 9, 2023  
 9780593490921

A memoir in essays about the author’s relationship with her mother and their travels together.

From long road trips to a Magic Mike live show in Las Vegas to a trip to visit family in China, Wang explores several themes familiar to immigrant memoirs: practicality and frugality, wonder at America’s bounty and beauty, fear of becoming easy prey for scams, and a search for belonging and relief in invisibility. The author balances entertaining fashion and other allusions gleaned from TV and her time as a reporter and editor at Refinery29 with piercing cultural observations. These insights are incisive and almost reverent, perhaps only possible from “new Americans newly inhabiting the middle class.” Wang makes clear that she collaborated closely with her mother, Qing, whom she describes as a “tiger mom with a temper,” and even gave her editing power. “This is our memoir—a long personal essay, if you will—and it was forged through shared fact-checking,” writes the author. “Qing was the first person to read each chapter as it was written, and

she is this book’s first editor. Every word you read here has first passed under her red pen.” Restricted to earlier chapters, Qing’s storied wrath and personal background become somewhat dulled, and brief discussions of such elements as a precarious family dynamic leave readers searching for a missed reference. While this structure reduces some of the narrative tension, it is a strong, refreshing counterpoint to the story of immigrant suffering that Qing insists Americans prefer. Eschewing voyeurism for an empathetic, nuanced study of a subject never fully revealed, Wang drives to the heart of how a daughter comes to know her mother as someone with a life beyond motherhood. Readers will finish the book hoping that this mother-daughter pair will continue to collaboratively inch toward some of the things left veiled or otherwise unsaid in this collection.

**A creative and entertaining shared memoir of identity, place, and their indelible connection to each other.**



**THE NECESSITY OF YOUNG ADULT FICTION**

Williams, Deborah Lindsay  
 Oxford Univ. (160 pp.)  
 \$19.95 paper | June 9, 2023  
 9780192848970

A clinical professor of liberal studies at NYU offers close readings of several books plus a discussion of the impact of the Harry Potter series on young readers worldwide.

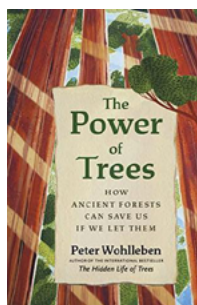
A more accurate title for this book, part of the publisher’s Literary Agenda series, would have been *The Necessity of Speculative Fiction*, as Williams confines her exploration to such works, a substantial portion of which are not what many professionals in the field would call YA literature. Drawing heavily on Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism*, she proffers exegeses of Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*; G. Willow Wilson’s *Alif the Unseen*; Rebecca Roanhorse’s *Trail of Lightning* and *Storm of Locusts*; Nancy Farmer’s *The House of the Scorpion* and *The Lord of Opium*; Nalo Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring*; and Nnedi Okorafor’s *Akata Witch*, *Akata Warrior*, and *Akata Woman*. Of these titles, only Farmer’s and Okorafor’s were published for a YA audience, though all feature young protagonists. As an argument for the importance of an audience-defined literature, the book is feeble. Nevertheless, Williams’ readings, though at times plodding, are generally not uninteresting. She finds in these texts endorsements of Appiah’s “challenge” to embrace difference as well as repeated themes of the importance of reading broadly and well and of the danger of climate change. The book comes alive in the fourth chapter, entitled “Reading *Harry Potter* in Abu Dhabi.” It is in conversations with students at NYU’s Abu Dhabi campus, with representation from all over the world, that Williams sees Appiah’s cosmopolitanism in action. These students, many having read the Harry Potter books in translation and often in secret, explore an experience that is “simultaneously local and global” and tussle movingly with J.K. Rowling’s tarnished legacy

“A brisk, well-researched study of athletic performance.”

UP TO SPEED

due to anti-trans comments. Williams doesn't prove her thesis, but this chapter is where she gets closest to it.

A book that fails in its ambition but still offers some provocative nuggets.



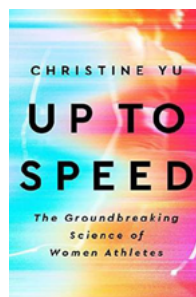
**THE POWER OF TREES**  
**How Ancient Forests Can Save Us If We Let Them**

Wohlleben, Peter  
Trans. by Jane Billinghurst  
Greystone Books (280 pp.)  
\$27.95 | May 2, 2023  
9781771647748

The author of *The Hidden Life of Trees* returns with a book that shows how trees help each other and us.

A highly experienced German forest manager with keen insight, Wohlleben persuasively describes the beauty, complexity, and resilience of natural forests versus the planted monospecies “plantations” dominating Germany’s arboreal landscapes. Illustrating for lay readers the work of Suzanne Simard, the pioneering ecologist who demonstrated the remarkable ability of trees to communicate via networks of roots and fungi, Wohlleben shows us how trees thrive in diverse, untamed communities—and how vulnerable they become when isolated from other trees. “Trees...are not life-forms that stand there and suffer as human activity changes the global climate,” he writes. “Rather, they are creatures rooted in their environments that react when conditions threaten to get out of control.” The author is less persuasive in his claim forests cannot be “managed” to thrive while being culled for considerable amounts of wood (the most sustainable large-scale building material, as it can sequester carbon while steel and concrete emit it). Wohlleben contends that it is “impossible to extract raw materials in a way that benefits nature”; that German forest-industry politics would get in the way even if it were possible; that wood doesn’t last long, anyway. However, his sourcing is thin, as it has occasionally been in earlier books. Research increasingly shows fire-resistant engineered timbers are hardy. Indeed, a paper by a global team of researchers, calculating that “engineered timber” cities may sequester climate-saving amounts of carbon, is being cited by officials from the United Nations to the European Union. Many agree with Wohlleben that trees are a key weapon in the war against climate change, but many also contend that wood can be safely drafted into the war—that humans, like trees, can collaborate with nature.

Good introductory reading for those interested in the role of trees—and wood—in climate change.



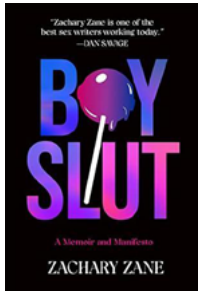
**UP TO SPEED**  
**The Groundbreaking Science of Women Athletes**

Yu, Christine  
Riverhead (336 pp.)  
\$28.00 | May 16, 2023  
9780593332399

How to nurture women athletes.

Based on scientific papers and more than 140 interviews with athletes, parents, coaches, and researchers, this book by sports and health journalist Yu, who is also an athlete and yoga teacher, takes a close look at the challenges faced by women in sports, where their performance, training, and needs have long been assessed against norms and data gathered from men. Historically, women were discouraged from participating in athletics, believed to be inherently physically inferior to men. Moreover, they were told by doctors and teachers that they risked harming their reproductive systems if they invested their energy in sports. Even after women became increasingly engaged in athletics, sports science focused on men, whose bodies set standards for nutrition, endurance, treating injuries, and even designing gear and clothing. Clothing manufacturers, for example, came late to offering a range of sports bras that provided comfort and support. The onus, therefore, has been “placed on women to overcome the obstacles inherent in a system that was rigged against them from the get-go.” With more women involved in research in the 1980s, though, the focus has shifted, revealing surprising information on their abilities and potential, such as the impact of women’s menstrual cycle on performance; their nutritional needs and risk of undernutrition; and their aerobic capacity, muscle endurance, and ability to metabolize fat that gives them an advantage in sports such as distance running. Yu addresses three stages in women’s lives during which profound physical changes must be acknowledged: adolescence, pregnancy and the postpartum period, and menopause. Muscular, skeletal, hormonal, and psychological changes during adolescence, for example, should factor into a girl’s training regimen, which too often emphasizes early specialization. More informed guidance by coaches and intervention by nutritionists might keep girls from dropping out in discouragement. Yu urges more research and awareness of the scientific evidence that has emerged to “celebrate women’s unique abilities.”

A brisk, well-researched study of athletic performance.



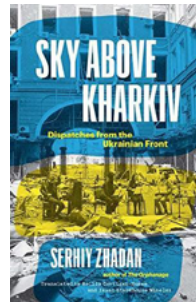
**BOYSLUT**  
**A Memoir and Manifesto**

Zane, Zachary  
Abrams Image (240 pp.)  
\$26.00 | May 9, 2023  
9781419764714

The sex and relationship columnist for *Men's Health* explores his erotic identity in a series of spicy biographical vignettes.

Though Zane was raised in a liberal, queer-affirming household, he “still struggled with being bisexual, polyamorous, and horny all the time.” He reveals a consistent struggle with OCD and extensively discusses his burgeoning same-sex desires while at Vassar, boosted by the “powdered courage” of cocaine. The author succeeds at candidly detailing and measuring the value of his sexual exploits. These episodes interplay nicely with perspectives on pornography, rejection theories, the pros and cons of gay hookup apps, and the unabashed promotion of intensive psychotherapy for readers to “delve deep, tackling the root of your shame and insecurities.” For neophytes, Zane provides an enlightening glossary of common and lesser-known sexual terminology—e.g., *fraysexual*, someone who “experiences sexual attraction toward those they are *not* deeply connected with and loses attraction as they get to know an individual.” He also vividly describes a polyamorous relationship involving his then-boyfriend, the boyfriend’s wife, and her girlfriend. In his time writing a sex advice column, Zane came to believe that most men “do not have a healthy relationship with sex at all” and are “continuously failing to navigate their sexuality, masculinity, and romantic relationships.” These pointed perspectives stem from stories shared with him as well as his own vast carnal experiences as a liberated, “sexually shameless” man boasting over 2,000 sexual encounters. Zane seeks to dispel preconceived notions about bisexuality and alleviate the pervasiveness of sex-negative shame and stigma, but the author’s more serious notes on sexual liberation sometimes get lost amid chapters detailing his rampant promiscuity. The book works best when enjoyed as a chronicle of Zane’s unapologetically salacious history and the lessons he’s learned. His emphatic discourses on erotic liberation, the misunderstood bisexual community, and overcoming sexual shame are credible and noteworthy, but they are often overshadowed.

A provocative, uneven confessional from a self-avowed “slutty antihero.”



**SKY ABOVE KHARKIV**  
**Dispatches From the Ukrainian Front**

Zhadan, Serhiy  
Trans. by Reilly Costigan-Humes &  
Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler  
Yale Univ. (208 pp.)  
\$26.00 | May 16, 2023  
9780300270860

A Ukrainian poet shares the resilient response by Kharkiv citizens and resistance by the armed forces over the first months of Russian bombardment.

By turns defiant, sentimental, and improbably optimistic, these dispatches, which comprise an installment in the publisher’s Margellos World Republic of Letters series, were posted on social media from the beginning of Russia’s invasion through June. Collectively, they bring a visceral sense of what the people of Kharkiv and Ukrainians in general have been enduring. Poet and musician Zhadan and his band, Zhadan and the Dogs, traveled the city to deliver humanitarian supplies and sometimes organize impromptu concerts in order to maintain morale. His daily reports praise the citizens’ sense of bravery in the face of the sudden Russian military onslaught; he also lauds their lack of panic and the work by the Territorial Defense Forces. As he chronicles his visits to volunteer units, checkpoints, stores, hospitals, schools, and subway stations where people were living, especially children, Zhadan interjects resentment of Russian attempts at subjugation, especially the suppression of the Ukrainian language. He argues that the great “culture of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy” masks a contempt for Ukrainian identity, and he reflects on Ukrainian linguist George Shevelov’s writings during World War II as well as the work of national Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. Zhadan shows how eight years of aggression by Russia have led to a stronger Ukrainian resistance and how the Russian propaganda attempts at “denazification” and demilitarization of the country have only strengthened Ukrainian resolve. “We simply cannot afford to lose,” he writes. “We have to crush our enemy and liberate our territory.” Curiously, the author doesn’t mention President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his nightly addresses to the nation or his international campaign for support.

A vivid, in-the-trenches report from a Ukrainian city and its “injured, yet unbreakable” citizens.



# CHILDREN'S



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- DESERT JUNGLE** by Jeannie Baker ..... 103
- YOU GO FIRST** by Ariel Bernstein; illus. by Marc Rosenthal ..... 105
- TREE, WILDFLOWER, AND MUSHROOM SPOTTING**  
by Mary Kay Carson; illus. by John D. Dawson ..... 109
- OUR POOL** by Lucy Ruth Cummins ..... 111
- THE REMARKABLE RESCUE AT MILKWEED MEADOW**  
by Elaine Dimopoulos; illus. by Doug Salati ..... 113
- BILLIE AND BEAN AT THE BEACH** by Julia Hansson;  
trans. by B.J. Woodstein ..... 117
- BILLIE AND BEAN IN THE CITY** by Julia Hansson;  
trans. by B.J. Woodstein ..... 117
- ELLIE ENGLE SAVES HERSELF** by Leah Johnson ..... 120
- THE SECRET OF GLENDUNNY** by Kathryn Lasky ..... 122
- THE MIRACLE SEED** by Martin Lemelman ..... 123
- RUBY LOST AND FOUND** by Christina Li ..... 125
- EVERY BODY** by Megan Madison & Jessica Ralli;  
illus. by Tequítia Andrews ..... 126
- BRIDGES** by Marc Majewski ..... 126
- BING! BANG! CHUGGA! BEEP!** by Bill Martin Jr &  
Michael Sampson; illus. by Nathalie Beauvois ..... 127
- LEI AND THE FIRE GODDESS** by Malia Maunakea ..... 128
- THE FAIREST IN THE LAND** by Lesléa Newman;  
illus. by Joshua Heinsz ..... 132
- ONYEKA AND THE RISE OF THE REBELS** by Tol Okogwu ..... 133
- THE BRIGHT SIDE** by Chad Otis ..... 134
- WHY ARE WE AFRAID?** by Fran Pintadera;  
illus. by Ana Sender; trans. by Mibaila Petričić ..... 135
- OH NO, THE AUNTS ARE HERE** by Adam Rex;  
illus. by Lian Cho ..... 137
- HOW TO STAY INVISIBLE** by Maggie C. Rudd ..... 138
- HOW DO YOU FEEL?** by Kathrin Schärer ..... 138
- MARIBEL'S YEAR** by Michelle Sterling; illus. by Sarah Gonzales... 141
- DÍA DE MUERTOS** by Duncan Tonatiuh ..... 141

- THE SHAPE OF YOU** by Mignon Thib Vãn; illus. by Miki Sato ..... 142
- HALF MOON SUMMER** by Elaine Vickers ..... 143
- BIBI** by Jo Weaver ..... 145
- A FLOWER IS A FRIEND** by Frieda Wisbinsky;  
illus. by Karen Patkau ..... 146



**OH NO, THE AUNTS ARE HERE**  
Rex, Adam  
Illus. by Lian Cho  
Chronicle Books (40 pp.)  
\$16.99 | May 23, 2023  
978-1-79720-794-0

## AN ODE TO TREES



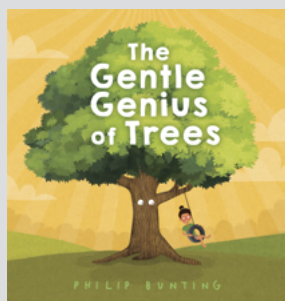
“IT’S ALIVE...IT’S ALIVE!” Those words popped into my head on a recent walk through Central Park as I stared up at a tree. I’ve always known intellectually that trees are living, breathing organisms, but it can be easy to forget—especially for city dwellers who don’t encounter them regularly.

However, I’ve started thinking of

them in a new light, in large part because of Tera Kelley’s *Listen to the Language of the Trees: A Story of How Forests Communicate Underground* (Dawn Publications). One of our Best Picture Books of 2022, it’s an unforgettable tale of natural disasters, survival, and hope. Faced with catastrophes, from a devastating storm to a swarm of ravenous beetles, a forest of Douglas firs fights back with everything it has: an interconnected network of roots that allows trees to send one another nutrients, warnings, and more. Illustrator Marie Hermansson’s dynamic use of angles and perspective gives this story an epic feeling.

The book is a necessary reminder that trees aren’t merely a beautiful backdrop to the natural landscape; they’re active, involved, and crucial parts of our ecosystem. It’s also a gripping tale that will leave readers eager to learn more. Luckily, they have plenty of options, like Philip Bunting’s *The Gentle Genius of Trees* (Crown, Jan. 31). With round saucer eyes but no mouths, Bunting’s trees have hilariously solemn countenances; the author/illustrator deftly blends whimsy with clearly elucidated facts on how trees create glucose, communicate with one another, and nurture saplings. His affection for the subject is evident as he urges readers to channel their inner trees: help those in need, persevere through tough times, and “grow slow, grow strong.”

A spiritual successor to Joyce Kilmer’s poem “Trees,” Emma Carlisle’s *What Do You See When You*



*Look at a Tree?* (Templar/Candlewick, 2022) takes a contemplative approach. Readers who respond to the titular question with “leaves and twigs and branches” should look again; a tree “moves and breathes and dances” and provides a home for animals. Though there’s backmatter with hard facts, this gracefully illustrated work is more concerned with helping readers forge an emotional connection with trees. Carlisle asks children to ponder whether trees feel joy or sadness, to consider what a tree might have experienced over its long life, and to wonder who will one day love the saplings that have yet to even sprout.

Trees also help define communities both rural and urban, as demonstrated by Anne Wynter’s *Nell Plants a Tree* (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins, Jan. 31), illustrated



by Daniel Miyares, and Shira Boss’ *The City Tree* (Clarion/HarperCollins, April 4), illustrated by Lorena Alvarez. Wynter’s story weaves back and forth in time between Nell as a young girl, planting and tending to a seed, and Nell as a grandmother, watching her children and grandchildren enjoy the literal and metaphorical fruits of the

now flourishing pecan tree. In this eloquent tale, the tree has become an integral part of this loving Black family, linking older generations to new.

In Boss’ book, the arrival of a tree on an urban block devoid of greenery transforms a community. Dani, the story’s young protagonist, is now awoken by birdsong rather than garbage trucks, and the tree’s leafy canopy shelters Dani and others in hot weather. Alvarez’s palette becomes more saturated and vibrant over the course of the narrative—an effective visual metaphor for the ways in which this new addition has enriched the neighborhood. Significantly, Boss also shows locals taking action when they see litterbugs mistreating the tree: The relationship between humans and trees is clearly a two-way street.

*Mahnaz Dar is a young readers’ editor.*



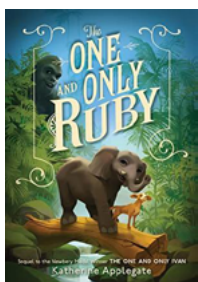
**MY DAD IS A TREE**

Agee, Jon  
 Rocky Pond Books/Penguin (40 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9780593531372

Dendrophilia is the name of the game in this tale of a patriarch emulating his leafy neighbors.

When Dad finds Madeleine imitating a tree, he asks why. “Because a tree gets to stay outside all day long!” the child explains. After Madeleine begs Dad to join in, he acquiesces, but “only for a minute!” Trouble is, Dad is a particularly convincing tree. First a baby owl falls asleep on his shoulder, and then a robin makes a nest in his hair. Soon Dad is covered in animals, getting hit by kites, becoming soaked in the rain, and standing outside in the dark. Each provocation, however, is met with Madeleine’s assurance that trees don’t mind these trivialities. And when it’s time to go inside, the child agrees, “We definitely are *not* trees. But that’s OK.” After all, they got to be outside all day! Agee eschews his usual penchant for peculiarities with this sweet tale. Dad’s the straight man here, and Agee is unafraid to have him deadpan a look right at viewers when situations become particularly wacky. Accompanied by textured, collagelike visuals, this is an amusing little ode to the extent to which dads sometimes go above and beyond. Madeleine and Dad are light-skinned. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A fun paean to fathers willing to go the extra mile for their nature-loving kids. *(Picture book. 2-4)*



**THE ONE AND ONLY RUBY**

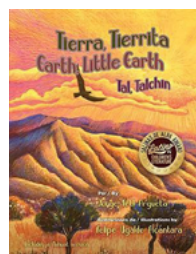
Applegate, Katherine  
 Illus. by Patricia Castelao  
 Harper/HarperCollins (240 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9780063080089

In this follow-up to 2020’s *The One and Only Bob*, Ruby the elephant is still living at Wildworld Zoological Park and Sanctuary.

She’s apprehensive about her Tusk-day, a rite of passage for young elephants when she’ll give a speech in front of the rest of the herd. Luckily, she can confide in her Uncle Ivan, who is next door in Gorilla World, and Uncle Bob, the dog who lives nearby with human friend Julia. Ruby was born in an unspecified part of Africa, later ending up on display in the mall, where she met Ivan, Bob, and Julia. The unexpected arrival of someone from Ruby’s past life on the savanna revives memories both warmly nostalgic and deeply traumatic. An elephant glossary and Castelao’s charming, illustrated guide to elephant body language help immerse readers in Ruby’s world. Goofy, playful, and mischievous Ruby is fully dimensional, as she has shown her bravery during the many hardships of her young life. Applegate deftly tempers themes

of grief and loss with compassion and humor as Ruby finds her place in the herd. The author’s note touches on climate change, the illegal ivory trade, and conservation efforts, but the highly emotive framing of the story through the memories of a bewildered baby elephant emphasizes the impact of lines such as “in Africa,’ I say softly, ‘there were bad people,’” without offering readers a nuanced understanding of the broader context that drives poaching.

Certain to steal hearts. *(Fiction. 8-12)*



**TIERRA, TIERRITA / EARTH, LITTLE EARTH**

Argueta, Jorge  
 Illus. by Felipe Ugalde Alcántara  
 Trans. by Elizabeth Bell  
 Piñata Books/Arte Público (32 pp.)  
 \$18.95 | May 31, 2023  
 9781558859678  
 Series: Madre Tierra / Mother Earth, 4

A trilingual homage to the glory that is Mother Earth.

Mother Earth tells her story and that of the myriad forms of life that call her home. Of all mothers, she is the oldest. “My song is the song / of all the animals / of all the trees / the plants, fruits, herbs and vegetables.” As in the author’s previous three books in this series, an artful resonance flows through the verse. Argueta’s reverence for our planet—Tierra, Tierrita, or Earth, Little Earth, as he calls her—comes through clearly: “Within me are born / all the rivers. / In my hands / I hold the seas.” On each page, translated English free verse follows the Spanish; the entire text also appears at the end in Nahuat, a reflection of the author’s Pipil-Nahua heritage. These sentiments are conveyed through Alcántara’s panoramic illustrations of a peaceful, animal-filled forest, an arid desert, a tranquil, snow-covered meadow, and more. The message is clear: Respect for all life is imperative for our continued existence. Readers will be left stirred; educators and caregivers will find plenty of opportunities to spark discussion about the natural world. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A welcome invitation to ponder the totality of nature—and our place within it. *(Picture book. 5-10)*



**STARLA JEAN CRACKS THE CASE**

Arnold, Elana K.  
 Illus. by A.N. Kang  
 Roaring Brook Press (96 pp.)  
 \$15.99 | April 18, 2023  
 9781250305800  
 Series: Starla Jean, 3

Starla Jean and her bug-eyed side-chicken, Opal Egg, are back for a third neighborhood adventure...and this time it’s a mystery!



## UPDATING CLASSICS: WHAT'S REALLY AT STAKE?



EVERY FEW YEARS the same debate arises: A classic of children's literature is released in a new edition with small alterations to the text, and people respond as if civilization is coming to an end. I'm not going to comment on particular instances—of which Roald Dahl's work is simply the latest—as that is a distraction from what I believe to be the really interesting question

behind these recycled conversations, namely: What is the real fear motivating the backlash? Is it that children will grow up ignorant of societal biases or opportunities to discuss them? Given how deeply we are all steeped in biases from birth, that seems unlikely. That children will lack exposure to truly great literature? Again, highly unlikely due to the sheer number of fantastic books that have been published worldwide since the invention of movable type. That wonderful novels are being distorted beyond recognition and gutted of their essence? This, of course, would be a tragedy if it were true, but it's hardly the case when relatively light edits are involved. And if these books' literary merits were somehow dependent upon the bits and pieces that have been updated to suit contemporary sensibilities, isn't that something that should make us stop and reflect?



Roald Dahl's grandson Luke Kelly reads to children with dyslexia at the Imagine Children's Festival in London, 2014.

I believe that a critical factor contributing to this existential panic is the unfortunate moral framing of questions of bias. It goes something like this: *I believe that bias is bad, but I know I am a good person. If I read and loved a*

*book that contains biased language and is therefore bad, am I as good a person as I think I am? To feel comfortable with myself and avoid considering what I might have absorbed from this book without conscious reflection, the book cannot change.*

Cognitive linguists, spin doctors, and others understand how deeply language shapes perception, even among adults. People who make minor changes to books are not reshaping entire cultural landscapes with nefarious intent. Through reading, children absorb vocabulary, syntax, story structures, and cultural values. Developmentally, they don't have the broad perspectives of adults who can put shifts in social norms or language into historical context.

Nostalgia is a powerful force, as evidenced by the passion of grown-ups for whom particular books are positive reminders of childhood. But what about the many adults who remember these same books differently—particularly the shock, betrayal, and pain of encountering content that suddenly brought home where they stood in the eyes of authors they admired?

Pakistani Muslim author Rukhsana Khan illustrates this vividly with a blog post about her childhood in Canada, during which she felt like she was outside “on the porch, looking in, to a warm scene of people gathered around a fire....Growing up in such a community, I used books to survive”:

And I remember reading one of the Anne of Green Gables books, one of the later ones...and I got to a point where L. M. Montgomery refers to “those heathen Muhammadans,” and I couldn't believe it!

She was talking about *me*!

Couldn't she ever have imagined that one of those “heathen Muhammadans” would one day be reading one of her Anne books and identifying so much with the characters...?

I got so mad I threw the book across the room.

And once more I felt like I was out on the porch, looking in.

We can't know what a particular deceased author would have done if they were writing today. I like to give the benefit of the doubt and assume they would not have wished for any child to be hurt or to absorb ways of hurting others through reading their words. But we can also ask: Who did they imagine their child

reader to be? Who is implicitly invited inside their world?

This connects to another frequent argument: that classic books can prompt enlightening conversations about changing norms, the fallibility of geniuses, and more. This is absolutely true, but how often is children's literature actually used in this way, whether at home or in the classroom? Given how fraught these topics are in classrooms today—and how rarely most White parents explicitly talk about race with their children, something explored in *NurtureShock* by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman—the answer is likely not very often.

When these educational conversations do happen, they often exclude the most vulnerable children from a feeling of community, putting them in the uncomfortable, exploitative position of serving as learning opportunities for their peers. By contrast, consider how many books kids from dominant backgrounds can read that are purely fun, ones in which they don't for a moment have to think about their identities as "issues" and in which exclusionary harsh words or phrases never jolt them out of immersion in the story.

Ultimately, all the outrage over updated classics can serve as a distraction from larger and more important truths, as translator M. Lynx Qualey so wisely put it on Twitter:

There is a fixation on a very small handful of "classic" English-language children's books, generally by people who aren't involved w/literature for young readers. The world of kid lit is HUGE, wild, fun, new, funny, innovative, & happening in \*many\* languages.

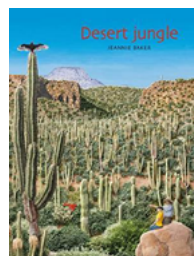
I don't want a flattening of children's literature and sure, sometimes editorial interventions make things more pallid. But some old books can be re-translated, can go out of print, can make way for new ones. Kid lit canons & curricula should be in motion, just like grown lit.

For most of human history, stories have been transmitted orally, shifting with each retelling. Even today, this more fluid method of story transmission flourishes: Of the roughly 7,139 living languages, just over 4,000 have writing systems (and not all of those have universally literate populations). Stories have always evolved to serve the people who share them. Written stories shift through collaboration between author and editor before appearing in print. Given this context, attributing untouchable sanctity to one iteration of a text feels like a very narrow approach to cultural abundance.

*Laura Simeon is a young readers' editor.*

Starla Jean, expert on all things chicken-related, embarks on a well-meaning but rather erratic walk with her beloved pet and her bubble-obsessed little sister, Willa. Along the way, they uncover a handful of mysterious beads. More neighbors join the walk until the case is finally cracked, just in time for a bubble-filled celebration. Starla Jean's indelible voice continues to be the strength of this series, especially evident in the polished comedic timing of the dialogue. In Chapter 1, Starla Jean introduces each of her neighbors in the same order she encounters them in the following three chapters. This structure, along with the large font and plentiful white space around and between words, provides support for developing readers transitioning to early chapter books. Similar in visual layout and text complexity to Laurel Snyder and Emily Hughes' *Charlie & Mouse* series, each page has a handful of sentences with occasionally challenging vocabulary. There are a few idioms that may be a little daunting to readers, but overall the text uses familiar words and phrases. The playful illustrations feature soft colors and humorous facial expressions. Even readers unfamiliar with Starla Jean's world will take to this winsome tale. Starla Jean, Willa, and most characters are depicted with pale skin; neighbor Nate is brown-skinned.

**An egg-cellent addition to this humorous series for readers en route to early chapter books. (Fiction. 6-9)**



## DESERT JUNGLE

Baker, Jeannie

Candlewick (40 pp.)

\$18.99 | May 9, 2023

9781536225778



A child learns greater appreciation for the previously ignored desert around him after a coyote steals his backpack—and his gaming tablet.

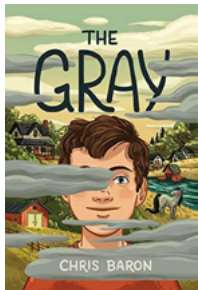
Inspired, she writes, by a long research trip to the Sonoran Desert's Valle de los Cirios, located in Arizona and Baja California, and by studies indicating that deserts are actually richer in pollinator diversity than rainforests, Baker carpets the rocky, sandy landscapes in her beautiful low-relief collage illustrations with realistically detailed ocotillo, cholla, and other succulents. So dense is the vegetation that a young narrator briefly loses his way after wandering off in search of the backpack he had left outside his grandfather's ranch house. Left with nothing better to do, he begins exploring—encountering local flora and fauna, collecting small mementos, and, climactically, sharing a cave with a coyote when a sudden storm blows up. And though the cave is empty when he returns, his grandpa claims that the animal is still there... pointing to an ancient image painted on the wall. From then on, even after he goes back to his village, the child's newly kindled love of his land's wonders remains. The author adds thoughts about how more and more children are subject to "nature-deficit disorder," an indifference to the natural world caused by isolation from, and ignorance of, the plants and animals around them. As this profoundly stirring tale hints, connection

# “Cuddly, funny comics will charm the crankiest of readers.”

CRANKOSAURUS

is the only cure. Both characters present Latine. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Rich in sights and insights alike. (map)** (*Informational picture book. 6-9*)



## THE GRAY

Baron, Chris

Feiwei & Friends (304 pp.)

\$17.99 | June 13, 2023

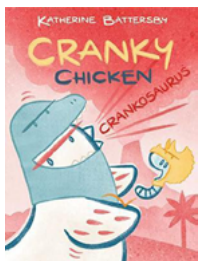
9781250864710

A 13-year-old boy learns to cope with anxiety serious enough that it sends him to a place he calls the Gray.

Sasha's parents and doctor think his obsession with video games is exacerbating his mental health issues, so they send

him to spend a month with his Aunt Ruthie in upstate New York, where Sasha's aunt and uncle used to run a Jewish summer camp. Now Uncle Lou is dead, and the grounds of Camp Akiva sit empty and abandoned. Sasha tries hard to lean in to new experiences like riding a horse and learning martial arts. After being persistently bullied by one of the neighborhood kids, he asks Eli, another troubled boy, to be his bodyguard, leading to a tentative friendship and the recognition that Eli is suffering too. There's a side plot with a horse called the Gray that is a bit unclear in its purpose. Many plot elements are clunky in execution, and some of the characters feel flat or contrived. However, the central idea—that, since water can slowly change a rock, any person on Earth can also change, a concept connected to Uncle Lou's beloved story from the Talmud about Akiva and the Stone—is one of enormous importance. Baron also gets props for his sympathetic and evenhanded depiction of anxiety and the many different ways to treat it, from in-the-minute breathing exercises to appropriate medication.

**Important and worthy despite some flaws in the storytelling. (author's note)** (*Fiction. 9-14*)



## CRANKOSAURUS

Battersby, Katherine

McElderry (116 pp.)

\$12.99 | May 23, 2023

9781665914550

Series: Cranky Chicken, 3

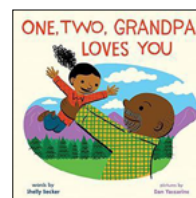
A crabby chicken and her worm BFF achieve friendship goals.

Crowds, trampolines, baths, skipping a nap—there's plenty that makes

Chicken cranky. But “tiny and tickly” Speedy Worm makes Cranky Chicken actively “un-cranky.” Libraries also make Chicken happy, even though “Crankiness is allowed” there. Honestly, Speedy and Chicken are such great friends that dour-looking, unibrowed Chicken spends most of the book looking pretty upbeat. In one story, Speedy and Chicken have

different ideas about how to take a nap, but they're still best friends. In another, Speedy has an existential crisis (are they really a worm, or could they be a cobra, a giraffe, or a brontosaurus?), but the duo's friendship reigns supreme—indeed, they are “Best Feathered Family forever.” All the while, they help each other learn. Speedy asks Chicken how she knows she's a hen and not a rooster, and—unibrow thoughtfully cocked up—Chicken explains it's because she just *feels* like a hen. Simple shapes and linework bring to life a wonderfully expressive pair in this sweetly silly graphic novel. Chapters are separated by funny vignettes; one especially hilarious page finds Chicken and Speedy in costumes—Chicken as Princess Leia with Speedy as Yoda; Chicken as a worm and Speedy as a chicken; and both dressed as “Stripy Lost Guy” in Where's Waldo-style red-and-white tops and beanies.

**Cuddly, funny comics will charm the crankiest of readers.** (*Graphic early reader. 5-8*)



## ONE, TWO, GRANDPA LOVES YOU

Becker, Shelly

*Illus. by Dan Yaccarino*

Abrams Appleseed (24 pp.)

\$16.99 | March 28, 2023

9781419765087

A child goes on an overnight camping trip with Grandpa.

Verse inspired by the nursery rhyme “One, Two, Buckle My Shoe” describes this brown-skinned grandfather and grandchild's outing. “One, two, / Grandpa loves you.” Grandpa arrives to pick up the child, and the child's parents—one light-skinned, one brown-skinned—help load up the car and wave goodbye. Once Grandpa and the little one arrive at their destination, the pair spend an action-packed day together (“Three, four, / hike, explore”) before roasting marshmallows and falling asleep (“Nine, ten, / all snuggled in”). The next morning, they cook breakfast and skip stones, then return home, excited to do it again soon (“Nine, ten / can we go again?”). The simple, spare text is brought to life by Yaccarino's visuals. From true and tender embraces to sweeping mountainscapes, the illustrations establish a sense of place and the bond between Grandpa and grandchild. The images are full of bold colors, and thick black outlines carve out features and details. One standout illustration plays with perspective, showing the travel buddies stuck in traffic as the rest of the cars fade into a single color, the two of them the most important image on the page. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Like a scrapbook of sweet memories with a beloved grandparent.** (*Picture book. 2-5*)



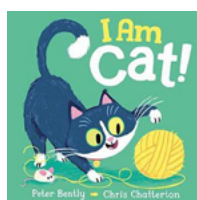


**I'M A PRINCE!**

*Benjamin, A.H.*  
*Illus. by Alessandro Montagnana*  
 NubeOcho (44 pp.)  
 \$17.99 | May 23, 2023  
 9788419253460  
 Series: Somos8

Is it better to be a pompous prince or a humble pig? Pig finds a crown in the grass, declares himself a prince, and sets off on an adventure, much to the irritation of his friends. In Pig's vivid imagination, Lizard becomes a dragon that Pig needs to subdue, Squirrel is a princess whom Pig attempts to rescue... with disastrous results, and Donkey becomes Pig's steed before Pig is unceremoniously bucked off. The porcine prince orders other forest friends to sing, dance, and bow to him; soon, everyone is tired of imperious Pig. But then they hear cries for help. Little Mouse has fallen into the turbulent river, and none of the friends can rescue him. Dramatically leaping from a tree branch and flipping three times in the air before splashing into the river, Pig saves Little Mouse. Because of his bravery, the forest friends are now ready to acknowledge Pig's royal standing, but Pig comes to his senses and is finally embarrassed by his past arrogant behavior. He is happy to just be Pig, and that makes his friends happy, too. This simple yet fun tale is full of humor. Colorful, detailed illustrations capture the beauty of nature and the friends' varied emotions as they struggle with Pig's egotistical demands and rejoice at his reformation. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An enticing cautionary tale about the dangers of putting on airs. *(Picture book. 3-6)*



**I AM CAT!**

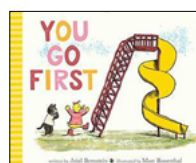
*Bently, Peter*  
*Illus. by Chris Chatterton*  
 Penguin Workshop (32 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9780593520864

A proud puss tells it like it is.

"I am Cat. Cat is me. A most superior thing to be." Cat likes their paws and their chair-scratching claws. And in the morning, when Cat is hungry, it's just too bad if their human is sleeping. A jump on the bed (and Cat's human's head) and a "Me-ow!" chorus will get breakfast in the bowl tout de suite. Cat has no fear when dealing with intruders (Cat's own mirror reflection)—a good hiss and a yowl will scare them away. Prowling in the backyard, Cat feels as bold as a lion—but even a lion can be startled by the giant dog next door! After getting stuck in a tree and then rescued, Cat is as serene as ever and ready for a quick bath. "Every day is Cat fun day. Little human wants to play." Then it's lap time...and nap time...and "me time," but maybe the family pup wants to play? Bently's kitty's-eye view of a day is a rhyming romp that young feline aficionados will enjoy. The orange-haired, fair-skinned parent and child in Chatterton's dynamic and colorful illustrations obviously love their mischievous

tuxedo cat. (Even the canine sibling seems to like the cat.) *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A furry, funny feline day in the life; every cat should be so lucky. *(Picture book. 2-6)*




**YOU GO FIRST**

*Bernstein, Ariel*  
*Illus. by Marc Rosenthal*  
 Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (48 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | June 13, 2023  
 9781665911511



Duck really wants to try out the new playground slide, but Cat keeps creating new ways to stop her.

Two simple statements on the verso of this book's first spread set up the premise that Duck and Cat are close friends on their way to the playground to slide. Another full-page spread depicts a delightful, stylized playground populated by anthropomorphic animals, with bright-yellow, pink-ribboned



**CLOUD KINGDOMS**  
 Three Aussie kids uncover a new world  
 - Life on the clouds!

**CRUIKEY!**

"Durnan's fantasy debut series starter sees three Australian children transported to a fabulous land up in the clouds."

—Kirkus Reviews

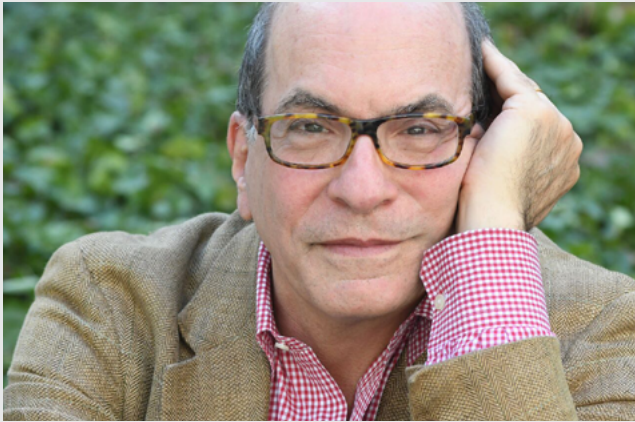
FOR AGENT REPRESENTATION OR INFORMATION  
 ON PUBLISHING AND FILM RIGHTS, EMAIL  
 ANNEMAREE@CLOUDKINGDOMS.AU • CLOUDKINGDOMS.AU

## BEHIND THE BOOK

# PICTURED WORLDS

### Leonard S. Marcus makes a highly selective but rich survey of global children's book illustration

BY MAHNAZ DAR



Tonia Barringer

HARD AS IT MIGHT BE to imagine now, there was a time when *Goodnight Moon* (1947) was a controversial story-time pick, when the idea of putting your name on a children's book was considered an embarrassing frivolity for a serious artist, when the thought of classes devoted to kid lit was laughable. But, as children's book historian Leonard S. Marcus makes clear in *Pictured Worlds: Masterpieces of Children's Book Art by 101 Essential Illustrators From Around the World* (Abrams, March 28), kid lit has transformed radically over the last few centuries.

The book isn't "meant to be the last word" on the topic, Marcus, 72, told Kirkus via Zoom from his Brooklyn home. And he admits that spotlighting just 101 artists and their works is "an impossible task." Indeed, he hopes his choices—among them Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1901), Ezra Jack Keats' *The Snowy Day* (1962), Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1968), Brian Selznick's *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007), and Yuyi Morales' *Niño Wrestles the World* (2013)—spark debate among readers. Rather than presenting an exhaustive list of artists and titles, he strove "to identify books that...represented seminal moments in the development of the illustrated book for children and to show that as wide-rangingly as possible across the world and over time." Mis-

sion accomplished—his beautifully designed volume is both a love letter to children's literature and a portrait of a rich and evolving field.

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

One theme that pops up is the tension between the New York Public Library and the Bank Street School of Education—in your entry on *Goodnight Moon* illustrator Clement Hurd, you note that author Margaret Wise Brown was a protégée of Bank Street's Lucy Sprague Mitchell and that the NYPL refused to purchase the book until 1974.

At Bank Street, they were paying attention to what people like William James and John Dewey had observed about childhood and the new understanding of developmental psychology, whereas the librarians were coming out of a time when most publishing for children was very commercial. And so the librarians were inspired by the Romantic writers and artists of the 19th century. They wanted beautifully produced books, well-told stories that would work at story hour, whereas the Bank Street people were interested in kids being messy and getting down on the floor and feeling like they were collaborators in their own storytelling. It was less important for them to present the children with a well-made completed aesthetic object than it was to give the children a sense of agency.

It resulted in two different kinds of books for young children. And ultimately, the two traditions came together. And, in my opinion, if you look at *Goodnight Moon*, what's in the Great Green Room, that's where it comes together, because you have all the ordinary things of everyday life like clocks and socks in the room. But you also have the cow jumping over the moon, the fantasy that the librarians love. And I think Margaret Wise Brown in her subtle way was saying, we both have half the story. Let's put it all together.

**Are there any other themes that emerge throughout your book?**

You see a change in ideas about what a children's book should be like and what it should do. If you look back at two books from the 1840s—the one by Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense*, and the book in German called *Struwwelpeter*, or *Slovenly Peter*—they came out within a year of each other. They were both made at home, originally just as a gift to the author's own child, and published anonymously. It shows there was a time when, if you made a children's book, you wouldn't necessarily want to be associated with it. It might be sort of embarrassing if you were a doctor or serious botanic naturalist illustrator, as Lear was. So it was before children's books as a commercial entity or as a cultural venture had respectability.

And yet both of those books became sensationally popular. So they represent a moment when attitudes were changing in a very dramatic way. And both books were saying to children, we can laugh together. Your books don't have to be about how to be a good child or how to behave well. It didn't end the tradition of didactic books for children. But it made a strong case for books that were not that way.

**Now it's quite the opposite—celebrities who may not have actually written a children's book want to stick their name on it.**

Everybody wants to have their name on books now. But when I started writing about children's books as a history major in college, it was unimaginable that there would be a museum devoted to children's book art, and now there are museums of that kind all around the world.

One of the first questions I asked as I switched from being interested in historical children's books to contemporary ones was: Why does none of this beautiful art ever get shown in an art museum? I realized there are always pecking orders in the art world. Painting is better than drawing, and drawing is better than illustration, and illustration for a magazine is better than illustration for a children's book. That's really how it was for a long time. So what we've seen in the last 30 years, and not just in this country, but in many countries, is a reevaluation of children's books and children's book art.

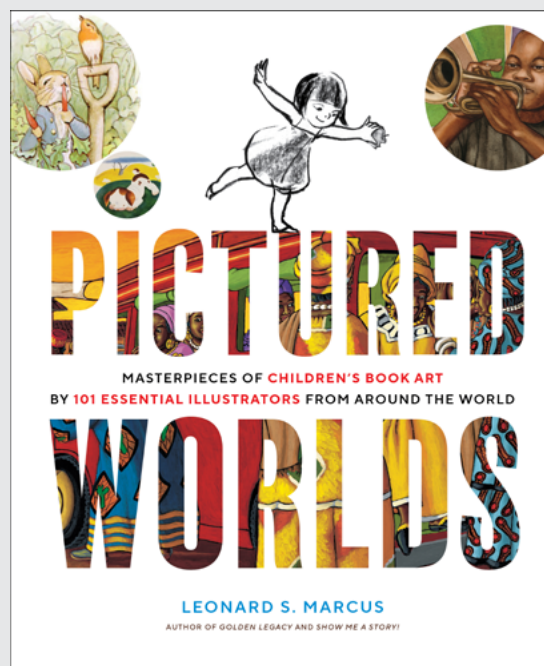
**There's a strong emphasis on international artists in your book. You've been vocal about your belief that the Caldecott Award should expand to encompass artists outside the United States. Can you speak to that?**

In the '30s, when the Caldecott Medal was created, and in the '20s, when the Newbery was created, Amer-

ica was still culturally dependent on England. And one of the motives for creating these awards, which could only be given to an American, was to inspire artists and writers here to create a literature of our own, which was a valid goal. But now we're at the point where we've, to a degree, dominated the world. It's a kind of globalization that American books have made it out into so many different languages around the world, particularly over the last 40 or 50 years. And that has had reverberating effects, where people in many other countries have decided they want to have their own children's books. So we're moving more toward an international style or approach to picture book-making. I don't think we're quite there yet. But there are signs of that. The circumstances have changed so dramatically that I think the award should be reconsidered on that basis.

**What misconceptions about kid lit do you see your book dismantling?**

That it's mostly an Anglo-American phenomenon. Or even an Anglo-European phenomenon. I think that wherever you have a growing middle class, people at least consider the possibility of having children's books that will encourage kids to love reading. It's happened in so many different parts of the world that are culturally unlike each other. You have it in Mexico, you have it in China, you have it in Cameroon. It looks like a pattern, doesn't it? This is something that is likely to happen almost anywhere in the world.





Duck leading wide-eyed Cat across the foreground. But something is different today. Their usual slide has been replaced with a newer, bigger, curvier one. Expressive art with cleverly inserted dialogue shows how the new slide produces wildly different emotions in the friends: excitement in Duck, high anxiety in Cat. And with each page turn, Cat finds a way to postpone Duck's trip down the slide. Little ones will giggle and nod knowingly as the unseen narrator continues to inform us that Cat is doing all this from friendship; the art and dialogue clearly show otherwise. Duck willingly submits to every ridiculous excuse—even donning goggles and a helmet—until Cat finally convinces her not to go down the slide. Will Cat learn a lesson about true friendship? Spoiler alert: of course, and brilliantly. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Both extremely funny and spot-on sensitive.** (*Picture book. 3-6*)



### GOSSAMER SUMMER

*Bowman, H.M.*  
Atheneum (192 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 30, 2023  
9781665912532

Five children find a portal to fairyland.

Ten-year-old Jojo and her sisters, 11-year-old Maisie and 5-year-old twins Amy and Bee, are spending their summer outside while their mom, an author,

tries to meet her looming deadline. The girls while away their sunny days, reading, playing, and imagining. When Theo comes to stay with his uncle, who lives across the street, he joins the gang. Last year, Jojo, the group's storyteller, had woven an intricate tale of an impending attack upon the fairies from frightening skeletal birds she dubs "bone creatures," but she never finished the story after the death of her beloved Grandma Nan. When the quintet follow a fairy through a tiny door in a tree, they discover that Jojo's tale has taken on a life of its own, and she must summon the resolve to give it a conclusion. Bowman's clever middle-grade fantasy has a delightful throwback feel, noticeably absent of technology or adult intervention as the children spend entire days outside together. As the group delves further into fairyland, Jojo struggles to reconcile her own grief but comes to realize that Maisie and Theo have their own heartaches to unpack. Jojo directly references Narnia as inspiration for her tales, but the book also has much in common with *The Neverending Story*. Physical descriptions of characters are minimal.

**A heartwarming fantasy exploring grief, friendship, and fairies.** (*Fantasy. 8-12*)



### THE CASE WITH NO CLUES

*Brady, Deserae & Dustin Brady*  
*Illus. by April Brady*  
Andrews McMeel Publishing (144 pp.)  
\$8.99 paper | March 7, 2023  
9781524877538  
Series: Leila & Nugget Mystery, 2

News of a treasure hidden in her soon-to-be-demolished school prompts a third grade sleuth to search for clues that were laid down decades ago.

Cued by an elderly neighbor's memories of a never completed treasure hunt set up when *she* was a third grader in 1947, Leila and canine sidekick Nugget rush to investigate. Though it seems impossible that clues so old could have survived, the authors stretch things surprisingly little to accommodate the unlikely premise as they plant hints for Leila to uncover, ranging from an altered old class photo to origami animals slipped into the spines of certain books. Efforts to keep her hunt secret not only leave her (temporarily) on the outs with her best friend, Kait, but quickly prove futile, and soon several grown-ups, many of her schoolmates, and even a local TV news crew are following behind or haring off on searches of their own. As it turns out, there's no gold (as Kait excitedly supposes), but the "treasure" that Leila discovers with significant help from Nugget and others in a nicely timed denouement does have enough dollar as well as sentimental value to satisfy young chapter-book readers. Race and ethnicity are left ambiguous in the occasional monochrome illustrations. Nugget, a "cavapoo," is as cute as he is clever.

**A well-constructed mix of brains and footwork.** (*Mystery. 8-10*)



### MY DOG JUST SPEAKS SPANISH

*Cáceres, Andrea*  
Candlewick (32 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 9, 2023  
978-1-5362-2278-4

After immigrating to the United States, a young Latine girl learns to speak English, but her dog only understands

Spanish.

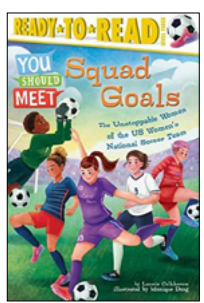
Post-it notes surround Aurora at home, labeling every item—the lamp (*lámpara*), the raincoat (*poncho*), her shoes (*zapatos*)—in English with its Spanish translation. Clearly, Aurora knows her stuff. "But not Nena." The brown-and-white dog obeys commands only when given in Spanish. So *sit* becomes *siéntate*, *espera* substitutes for *wait*, and *vente* means *come*. Even at the dog park, Nena manages to stand out. But that's OK. Aurora helps her new friends and neighbors interact with Nena, teaching them Spanish words, and many folks they encounter can speak Spanish just fine on their own. Will Nena ever learn English? Aurora knows that with her help, Nena will be able to figure

“A celebration of the winningest women’s team in World Cup competition.”

SQUAD GOALS

it out eventually, and Aurora can depend on her four-legged friend, too. After all, Nena is a “¡BUENA CHICA!” A breezy delight, Cáceres’ picture-book debut takes a modest premise to humorous heights, bolstered by a reassuring message to readers who may be in a similar spot as Nena. The artist’s zesty, colorful digital illustrations have a childlike appeal (bushes, hair, and fur look as though they were scrawled with an enthusiastically held crayon) and nicely serve to encourage a light Spanish vocabulary lesson. Aurora’s city is racially diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Pawsitively wholesome. (Picture book. 2-5)



**SQUAD GOALS**  
**The Unstoppable Women of the US Women's National Soccer Team**

*Calkhoven, Laurie*  
*Illus. by Monique Dong*  
Simon Spotlight (48 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781665933421  
Series: You Should Meet

A celebration of the winningest women’s team in World Cup competition.

Along with tracking the success of the women’s national team from its early years when it was (in the author’s polite phrase) “not the team to beat” to four World Cup wins—each described in dramatic fashion—Calkhoven profiles five prominent pros from Mia Hamm to Trinity Rodman, noting that both Megan Rapinoe and Briana Scurry are gay. She goes on to add a thumbnail history of the sport’s early days, coaching notes for some important ball skills, and select records and facts before rounding it all off with a review quiz. At least some of Dong’s painted figures, including an image of Brandi Chastain wearing a sports bra and holding her jersey aloft after making a winning goal and another of Megan Rapinoe in a victory pose, are based on famous photos but leave their subjects recognizable, and besides portraits of Rodman and Scurry, brown-skinned girls and women feature prominently in nearly all of the illustrations. A claim near the end that at least 100 more U.S. colleges sponsor soccer teams for women than for men now is a telling sign of the sport’s growing popularity.

A rousing cheer for women on the pitch. (Nonfiction. 7-9)



**TREE, WILDFLOWER, AND MUSHROOM SPOTTING**  
**The Definitive Interactive Nature Guide**

*Carson, Mary Kay*  
*Illus. by John D. Dawson*  
Odd Dot (416 pp.)  
\$14.99 paper | Feb. 28, 2023  
978-1-250-75061-7  
Series: Outdoor School



The latest book in the Outdoor School series tackles plants and fungi.

Like the previous books in the series, this guide cuts no corners in its layout, information, and presentation—beginning with the physical book, which is bound in a rugged, flexible material with metal reinforced edges and with handy rulers in both centimeters and inches printed on the back cover. Inside, the book is divided into five parts. The first gives a clear



“A sharply written, beautifully illustrated book...one of the best children’s books that has come across my desk in quite some time.”  
—Kate Ankofski, Editorial Director, Hillcrest Media

“Pascoe’s endlessly enjoyable story overflows with sharp characterizations, often paralleling human and animal characters.”

“The illustrations boast stunning definition...”

“A warm, entertaining tale of friendship that will appeal to readers of all ages.”

—Kirkus Reviews

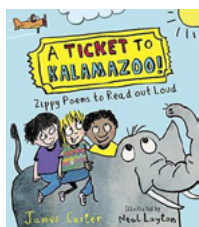
For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email [info@sarapascoe.net](mailto:info@sarapascoe.net) • [sarapascoe.net](http://sarapascoe.net)

# “A boy summons the courage to help friends, whomever or whatever they might be.”

THE ANCIENT UNDERWATER CITY

overview of the subject matter: the how, what, and where of plant spotting (including the all-important safety guidelines). The remaining four sections cover in-depth looks at trees and shrubs, wildflowers, ferns and mosses, and mushrooms and fungi, respectively. Each part is arranged similarly: Terminology is defined, and each subject is given an in-depth treatment with copious illustrations naming parts, how they reproduce, their environment, and more. Interspersed throughout are sections labeled “Try It,” “Track It,” and “Take It to the Next Level” that invite readers to activate their minds and get their hands dirty while they get up close and personal with nature. An illustrated identification guide concludes each part with space for readers to note what they saw, as well as when, where, and any further information. Another plus: Color-coding makes quick reference easier. While other nature guides give information, the Outdoor School is notable for encouraging readers to directly participate.

Another stunning addition to this stellar series. (index) (Nonfiction. 8-14)



## A TICKET TO KALAMAZOO! Zippy Poems To Read Out Loud

Carter, James  
Illus. by Neal Layton  
Otter-Barry (32 pp.)  
\$19.99 | June 20, 2023  
9781913074104

Layton’s sketchy portraits of active, popeyed children and creatures animate a slender gathering of verse.

Though undeniably zippy as advertised, the 19 poems here vary widely in quality of both execution and presentation. Carter starts off with a pair of lively but ordinary fingerplays (“Four little *finger*s / add one *thumb* - / and what / have you got...? / A *handful* / of FUN!”) and a title poem that, in order to fit its allotted spread, confusingly leaves the recurrent chorus to be filled in by readers after the first iteration. The author goes on to follow a “Scratch & Sniff Bear” down and up a mountain, string together several unchallenging puzzle poems, compile a recipe for “Night Soup,” and finish with verse about space, hugs, and being happy. Aside from a few bright spots, like a catalog of “Busy Bugs”—“*wiggly* bugs / that hide in sand / *tickly* bugs / that like your hand”—the rhyming runs the gamut from arbitrary to uninspired: “*Fancy a ride on an ELEPHANT?! What a hoot it’ll be, all tickety-boo / when you’re on board, so come on you!*” “*I whizz ’round / Jupiter, Saturn and / the sun. Yeah, / I’m a little / alien, life is fun!*” Layton depicts a brown-skinned young wheelchair user having a “Conversation With a Fly,” and others of diverse skin color peer at bugs or hold out hands. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

Slim pickings for personal or public performance. (Picture book/poetry. 6-8)



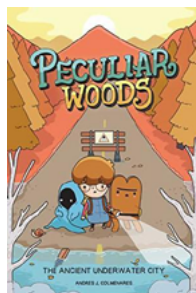
## THIS IS TAP Savion Glover Finds His Funk

Castrovilla, Selene  
Illus. by Laura Freeman  
Holiday House (40 pp.)  
\$18.99 | Feb. 21, 2023  
9780823438631

A look at Savion Glover, the Black tap-dancer extraordinaire who choreographed *Bring in ’da Noise, Bring in ’da Funk*.

In the womb, Savion kicked “to ’da beat.” As a toddler, he bounced through the house. He pounded beats on pots and pans. At age 4 he took drum lessons, and, at 7, tap dance. Savion felt rhythm everywhere. At 10, he was dancing in shows, and he learned “hittin’ ” from the “old-time cats” in Harlem—“expressin’ / yourself / with your feet.” Eventually, Savion found a way to combine the old—tap—with the new: hip-hop. He choreographed and starred in *Bring in ’da Noise*, which opened off-Broadway in 1995 and moved to Broadway the following year; the show traced racism in history through tap and integrated hip-hop, transformed theater, tap, and Broadway, and defined Savion’s contribution to the art form. In short lines of verse, Castrovilla describes Savion’s evolution as an artist. The rhythmic text, while generally fun to read, is a bit awkward; for those without historical or dance backgrounds, some information may be lost on readers—*Bring in ’da Noise*, for instance, isn’t mentioned by name until the afterword. But Freeman’s illustrations use unique design and cultural detail to convey energy and movement, paying powerful homage to this legendary artist. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A soaring tribute to a legendary dancer and choreographer. (bibliography) (Picture-book biography. 4-8)



## THE ANCIENT UNDERWATER CITY

Colmenares, Andrés J.  
Andrews McMeel Publishing (160 pp.)  
\$12.99 paper | May 23, 2023  
9781524879297  
Series: Peculiar Woods, 1

A boy summons the courage to help friends, whomever or whatever they might be.

Young Iggy is moving in with his mother after living with an aunt and uncle. As he arrives in Peculiar Woods, his aunt warns him to stay away from a mysterious lake. Iggy’s suspicions that he’s entered a new world are confirmed when he wanders off his first night and learns that the inanimate objects here can walk and talk. On his horrible first day at his new school, Iggy cowers in the face of mean bullies, but another opportunity for courage presents itself when he meets two chess pieces—a demanding pawn and a philosophical king—who need help getting to their ancient underwater city. Accompanied by a baby blanket and a chair who needs frequent yoga breaks to cope with stress, Iggy agrees to help, and



they sail across the lake, flee ornery beavers, and are rescued by a washing machine named Lazarus Gallington. Rounded cartoon illustrations build suspense at pivotal moments. Though the tale bursts with humor, it's also a tender exploration of the search for home—both the chess pieces' journey toward a literal home and Iggie's adjustment to a new life with his mother. Iggie and his family are light-skinned; a new girl he befriends at school is brown-skinned.

**Imaginative worldbuilding and adventure mixed with unique characters and quirky humor.** (*Graphic fiction.* 8-11)



**MY DAY WITH DAD**

*Crawford, Rae*  
 Holiday House (32 pp.)  
 \$15.99 | May 9, 2023  
 9780823452637  
 Series: I Like To Read

The child of parents who live apart spends the day with their father.

An illustration spanning the copy-right and title pages sets the stage for this quiet, needed story. On the verso, a brown-skinned woman driving a red car smiles and waves to a child with lighter brown skin standing next to a bearded, light-skinned man. On the next page, the young narrator informs us, “I am having a day with my dad. I smell breakfast.” The child stands in a bedroom, with photos of them with each parent in frames on the dresser, while their corgi, Pup, paws at them. Ensuing pages follow the narrator, Dad, and Pup through various activities as they enjoy their time together, navigating small disappointments (like when rain forces them to cancel their bike ride) and having fun. The day concludes with a goodnight video call to Mom on a smartphone. Throughout, the controlled vocabulary makes text accessible to new readers, while digital, cartoon-style illustrations provide cues to support decoding. Gently rounded forms, curving lines, and a balance of calming cool colors and gentle warm ones visually underscore the security and comfort the narrator feels with Dad and with their family's structure.

**An affirming read centering a child of a two-home family.** (*Early reader.* 5-7)



**OUR POOL**

*Cummins, Lucy Ruth*  
 Atheneum (48 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 16, 2023  
 9781534499232

A child and their mother take a trip to the city pool on a hot day.

The sounds of clanking in the locker room, a pause to apply sunblock, the muffling of noises under the water—everything about this outing is thrilling. The young narrator (the tale is told in first person, although there's no specific character identified as the narrator within the illustrations)



notes that swimmers have various body and skin types (“even sunburned skin—OUCH!”), and everyone has different ways of entering the water—some make their way in slowly, one toe at a time, while others dive right in. Everyone swims or lounges in their preferred manner. They float, splash (pausing for the lifeguard's whistle), flip, dive, and swim through legs like dolphins. For most of this, the swimmers are united (“I” switching to “we”), but never more so than when a cloud covers the sun, everyone waiting until the sun shines again, and there's a collective cheer! The ritual of leaving is just as important—one more “CANNONBALL!” before everyone gets ice cream at a waiting truck. The merriment, beauty, and comforting routines of a pool day are on full display in this celebration of an urban summer tradition. Both the chatty, child-friendly text and the gouache, colored pencil, and digitally finished artwork ooze exuberance; Cummins' saturated colors and energetic, curving waves are utterly inviting. The cast is racially diverse. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Pure summer fun.** (*Picture book.* 3-8)



**TEAM CHU AND THE EPIC HERO QUEST**

*Dao, Julie C.*  
*Illus. by Chi Ngo*  
 Farrar, Straus and Giroux (416 pp.)  
 \$17.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9780374388812  
 Series: Team Chu, 2

Tryouts for a reality TV series veer into realms of fantasy for a dedicated group of young gamers.

Having won chances in the 2022 opener to try out for an upcoming series based on a favorite video game, the racially and culturally diverse group of middle schoolers led by squabbling Vietnamese American sibs Clip and Sadie Chu fly to Ireland (families in tow) to join other young competitors in screen test challenges. As the tests take place on elaborately constructed medieval sets and come complete with costumed actors and dramatic but manufactured scenarios, both the contestants and readers have the option of taking them as games of pretend or (the fun option) as real and going with the flow. Actually, the challenges do turn out to be real tests of courage, intelligence, humility, teamwork, and determination, and Dao certainly has fun with them—concocting not only safe, but thrilling exploits for her multiple narrators to tackle, including a blindfolded zip line ride, decoding puzzles, and gathering magic substances from an orc-infested castle. She gives young cast members who are eliminated along the way further roles to play, too, so that no one is totally cut out of the action or made to feel like a loser. Ngo contributes comical if sparse vignettes.

**Perceptive takes on the potential of role-playing games for building character as well as for fun and excitement.** (*Adventure.* 8-12)



**BRYSON THE BRAVE BISON**  
**Finding the Courage To Face the Storm**

*Davenport, Nate & Luke Freshwater*

*Illus. by Richard Cowdrey*

Zonderkidz (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | June 27, 2023

9780310153108

When should we run away from danger, and when should we run into it?

Bryson is far from the largest or strongest of his bison herd and lacks artistic gifts, but he has “smarts” (an accompanying illustration suggests that higher-order math is his domain). He and his friends enjoy the “wide-open ranges and canyons so grand.” They fear thunderstorms but, unfortunately, live in a region where they are common. One day a storm breaks out. Bryson’s “plan”: run **into** the storm. The text lauds the “courage he chose,” though it’s not clear why he was sure they’d be safe as the lightning strikes all around them, nor how he knew which direction would take them out of the storm. Where is the line between bravery and foolhardiness? The verse is sometimes awkward and not always coherent (“He used his big thinker, no matter the season”—is it more difficult to think at some times of the year? Does lightning “boom like a drum?”). The illustrations might override doubts, however. They are vibrantly wacky; realistic yet expressive bison sport human haircuts, with hooves that are otherwise convincingly natural but in a pinch can grip. The underlying message is a good one: Face fears boldly, and you can get through to the other side. But here, confronting fear means running right into the path of lightning. Do NOT try this at home! (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A tale with lively illustrations but challenging prosody and an inadvertently risky takeaway.** (*Picture book. 4-8*)



**OVER THE RAINBOW**  
**The Science, Magic and Meaning of Rainbows**

*Davis, Rachael*

*Illus. by Wenjia Tang*

Flying Eye Books (64 pp.)

\$19.99 | June 6, 2023

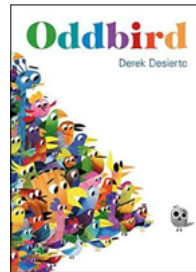
9781838748579

A broad-spectrum overview of rainbow physics, lore, and symbology.

Davis splits up her topic into five distinct sections. First, she explains how rainbows are created by light bouncing around inside raindrops or prisms, why the order of colors is always the same, with red on top (unless the prism is positioned pointy side down...an exception she doesn’t unpack in the text but that Tang illustrates), how thinkers from Aristotle to Sir Isaac Newton refined our understanding of the physics involved, and how certain conditions can generate fogbows and other “almost rainbows.” She then moves on to examples of rainbows in Chinese, Japanese, Aboriginal Australian, Norse, and ancient Greek

mythology and looks at rainbows in art from Elizabethan times to the “Rainbow Village” painted in protest in Taiwan in 2008 by folk artist Huang Yung-fu and, along with nods to rainbows as good (to Noah, for instance) or bad (in “Amazonian culture”) omens and to Greenpeace’s ship *Rainbow Warrior*, which was blown up by French intelligence services, closes with a full spread on the history of the rainbow flag as a symbol of the LGBTQ+ rights movement. The illustrations offer schematic views of refracting light rays and of rainbows lighting up ancient and modern skies above a culturally and racially diverse array of observers, historical figures, and, at the end, couples.

**Light, bright, and commendable for its inclusive, world-wide perspective.** (*glossary, index*) (*Nonfiction. 7-9*)



**ODDBIRD**

*Desierto, Derek*

Feiwel & Friends (32 pp.)

\$8.99 | June 6, 2023

9781250882813

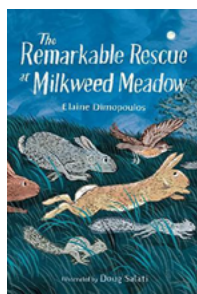
A bird enjoys a cool swim on a hot day despite the judgment from his colorful counterparts.

A group of brightly hued birds are clustered around the pool, but no one is taking a dip—they’re more interested in “showing off their fabulous feathers.” When a diminutive, gray “oddbird” arrives and tries to swim, the others force him out, telling him he doesn’t belong. Oddbird creates some festive new plumage out of jungle leaves, then returns to the pool, where his fabulous colors impress—but they wash off in the water. But by then, Oddbird is “having too much fun to be worried,” and the other birds are inspired to swim, too, realizing that how they feel is more important than how they look. The story is simple and the message a bit heavy-handed, but Oddbird’s confidence doesn’t wash away with his fake feathers; it’s clear that a little bit of bravery goes a long way. The illustrations resemble animation, and there are some dramatic moments, like when the other birds loom over Oddbird and he is literally in their shadow. The textured feathers on the vibrant birds pop effectively against the white of the page. Young readers will understand the appeal of a cool pool on a hot day and will appreciate Oddbird’s willingness to go against the grain in pursuit of a swim. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Fresh presentation of a familiar moral.** (*Picture book. 2-5*)

## “Use your milkweed: Read this!”

THE REMARKABLE RESCUE AT MILKWEED MEADOW



### THE REMARKABLE RESCUE AT MILKWEED MEADOW

Dimopoulos, Elaine  
 Illus. by Doug Salati  
 Charlesbridge (192 pp.)  
 \$17.99 | May 16, 2023  
 9781623543334



A wild rabbit narrates a tale of friendship, bravery—and storytelling.

Young Butternut and her siblings receive an in-depth education from their mother, who in turn learned from Butternut’s grandmother Sage, a wise, experienced rabbit who’s determined to keep her family safe. Humor shines through as Butternut describes lessons in survival, storytelling, and grooming. Grandmother tells the younger rabbits that just as monarch butterflies have the advantage of eating milkweed (which makes them toxic and keeps them safe from predators), “Our milkweed is our brain power.” Despite her family’s misgivings, Butternut—known for her “brambles” (or anxiety) and storytelling prowess—befriends Piper, a baby robin who enjoys using alliteration. The duo soon start venturing out at night to help an injured fawn, and more adventures ensue as Butternut slowly learns that there are some things in life worth taking risks for. By the time of the titular rescue, a host of secondary characters have been introduced, including a bullying blue jay and a “little female human.” Cleverly, the text uses Butternut’s voice to point out literary devices and techniques as she tells her tale. Witty, engaging, and heartfelt, this novel compares favorably with Cynthia Voigt’s gray squirrel odyssey, *Toaff’s Way* (2018), expertly entwining actual, observed facts about wildlife with whimsical anthropomorphism. The charming illustrations complement the text and show the girl to be light-skinned.

Use your milkweed: Read this! (Fiction. 6-10)



### CHARMED LIFE

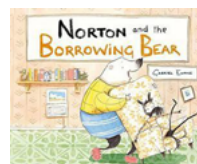
Dumas, Marti  
 Amulet/Abrams (384 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9781419755637  
 Series: Wildseed Witch, 2

Hasani’s magical journey continues with more tests and lessons for the young witch in this follow-up to 2022’s *Wildseed Witch*.

This time Hasani is back on her home turf at her old school, New Orleans’ Riverbend Middle. Dee and Angelique, her fellow coven members from her summer witch camp, Les Belles Demoiselles, are back there with her for eighth grade, and so is deceitful ex-friend LaToya. Hasani is faced with balancing these elements of her new life with ones from the past, like best friend Luz, who is still unaware that Hasani is a witch. When a huge swarm of termites descends upon the school, Hasani is convinced that LaToya is responsible

and is trying to undermine her. She’s determined to prove this despite the doubts of others, including Miss Lafleur, her Belles Demoiselles mentor who shows up and offers to help find the source of the trouble. Hasani’s fear of using her magic is highlighted as well as her challenge with balancing all the moving parts of her life. Will she be able to tap into her magic and grasp what is truly important, or will she allow her fears and biases to wreak havoc on her life and relationships? Dumas shows how Hasani’s magical world gets enmeshed with her everyday existence and the complexities as she tries to navigate it. Readers will be best served by having read the first volume.

A fitting sequel filled with magic and friendship. (Fantasy. 10-14)



### NORTON AND THE BORROWING BEAR

Evans, Gabriel  
 Berbay Publishing (32 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9781922610553

Is it ever polite to say *no* to a friend?

Norton, a scruffy anthropomorphic dog, lives at number 42. With most of his neighbors too busy to make friends, Norton is thrilled when a bear moves in next door. He invites the bear to dinner, and they spend a delightful evening. The bear asks to borrow Norton’s fluffy slippers, and Norton is too polite to refuse. However, he spends a sleepless night worrying that the bear might never return his favorite slippers. The bear’s borrowing quickly gets out of hand. Soon, the bear isn’t even knocking at the door before trying to borrow Norton’s comfy chair. Norton finally explodes, chastising the bear for not returning his things. The embarrassed bear shuffles home and returns with everything he has borrowed. Norton puts on his favorite fluffy slippers, makes a cup of tea, plays his flute music, sits in his comfy chair, and is finally at peace. Until...“Ding! Dong!” The bear returns. Only this time, he respects Norton’s boundaries and asks to borrow one thing...Norton himself. In this Australian import, delightfully detailed pastel drawings create a quaint modern urban neighborhood filled with animals and diverse humans. The images effectively show Norton’s escalating frustration and capture the bear’s misguided attempts at friendship and sincere apology; readers who have been in Norton’s or the bear’s shoes will emerge enlightened. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sound lesson in making friends—and setting boundaries. (Picture book. 4-7)



“Powerfully demonstrates the wonders imagination can dream up...and how quickly reality can crash back in.”

LET'S BUILD A DAM!



### LET'S BUILD A DAM!

Febr, Daniel

Illus. by Mariachiara Di Giorgio

NorthSouth (32 pp.)

\$19.95 | May 23, 2023

9780735845015

Siblings + rocks + running water + imagination = adventure.

In this tale translated from German, Lily and May are building a dam near their house. Their younger brother, Noah, adds his special green rock to the dam but quickly loses interest and decides to fish instead. As the girls continue to work, readers will become aware that Noah is suddenly fishing not from the dam, but from a fishing boat that's come into view, and in the distance, there are ship's sails. A king arrives, and while he refuses to schlep rocks, his men help. Suddenly, the king calls for help against a pirate attack. May and Lily echo his call, telling the pirates to join in the building, and they aren't refuse. Even the king pitches in. "It would have been a really good day if Noah hadn't wanted his stone back...." As the three soaked sibs drink Mom-supplied hot chocolate, they dream of tomorrow's imaginary adventures. Di Giorgio's perspective remains the same as the children build, allowing readers to immediately recognize the changes that happen between the page turns: the growing dam, the arrival of a boat and then a ship, the unfolding imaginary scene. The rocks are wonderfully textured and patterned. May and her mother have light skin and dark hair, Lily has light brown skin and Afro-textured hair, and Noah has light skin and blond hair. The king, his men, and the pirates are light-skinned. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Powerfully demonstrates the wonders imagination can dream up...and how quickly reality can crash back in.** *(Picture book. 3-8)*



### UNDER THE BLANKET SKY

Fischer, Tim

Doubleday (40 pp.)

\$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | May 30, 2023

978-0-593-64591-8

9780593645925 PLB

The enchanted haze of childhood serves as the backdrop for a nostalgia-soaked tale.

One summer morning, a bespectacled, light-skinned child encounters "a strange creature" in the backyard. We see what appears to be a gargantuan fuzzy owl gazing down at the nameless young narrator, eyes sparkling. The two soon become inseparable, the child showing the newcomer "all my favorite things to do / and places to spend time." Wordless spread after wordless spread showcases a childhood filled with push-button landline phones, stuffed animals, and toy trucks, all cast in the cozy glow of sun-filtered imagery. The creature looks on as the child wields a sword, draws with sidewalk chalk, and plays with a toy robot; snuggled up against a pillow, the two fall asleep together. We're deep in "Puff, the Magic Dragon" territory here as autumn arrives and the friend must move on as our

hero prepares for the first day of school. Fischer leans heavily on Gen-X wistfulness in his illustrations, conjuring up a world absent of adults or even other people. While the dreamlike art proves to be the true lure, the storytelling rehashes a familiar theme more likely to be appreciated by grown-ups—saying goodbye to a beloved part of childhood on the path to growing up. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**Sunlight and feathers are the stars of the show, but the intended audience of this story is clearly its adult consumers.** *(Picture book. 3-6)*



### THE VAN BUREN SISTERS VS. THE PANTS POLICE

Fox, J.F.

Illus. by Anna Kwan

Kids Can (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | May 2, 2023

9781525302480

Series: Head-to-Head History

The Van Buren sisters defy gender roles on a cross-country motorbike ride.

To prove that women are just as capable as men of serving as messengers during World War I, Addie and Gussie Van Buren set off on a journey from Brooklyn to San Francisco, armed with Addie's mechanic tools and sporting goggles and leather jackets and pants, but not everyone supports them. Though their father raised them with a love of sports and a confident attitude, most people at this time believe that women should be prim, quiet, and domestic while wearing cumbersome dresses, and they make sure to tell Addie and Gussie that over and over again. But the indomitable sisters won't be dissuaded from their adventure and complete their 5,000-mile trek despite threats of arrest for the crime of wearing men's clothing. With only a pair of goggles to differentiate them when they're in their biker gear, it's difficult to tell the sisters apart throughout the story. Bland backgrounds and the largely interchangeable cast of mostly White-presenting characters flatten the reading experience. At times, the book seems to suggest that wearing dresses and frilly clothes is inherently incompatible with women achieving autonomy. Still, many will welcome this enthusiastic celebration of two relatively lesser known women sticking up for their passions and beliefs despite societal expectations. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**An occasionally simplistic but rousing tale that shines a light on a story that should be more widely known. (more information on the Van Buren sisters, glossary, sources)** *(Informational picture book. 3-7)*



### BEYOND THE PORTAL

*Galanti, Donna*  
*Illus. by Bethany Stancliffe*  
 Andrews McMeel Publishing (240 pp.)  
 \$15.01 | April 4, 2023  
 9781524878702  
 Series: Unicorn Island, 3

A secret portal to the home world of the unicorns brings Sam and her long-lost mother back together in this trilogy closer.

The revelation in the previous episode that her mom, who disappeared 10 years ago, might still be alive sends Sam slipping away from her overprotective dad to open a portal on fog-shrouded Unicorn Island. She and friends Tuck (a human boy) and Barloc (a unicorn) pass through. On the other side, they find the villagers of Crag Haven packing up to flee because the unicorns, whose ground up horns counteract the poison in the local river's water, have been hunted to extinction—by, shockingly, Sam's own mother, Sylvie. Can Sam not only protect Barloc, but also save the villagers and, most difficult of all, persuade Sylvie to give up her new life for her former one? Galanti poses her young unicorn protector some tough challenges, all of which are successfully met (without harm done to any two- or four-legged cast members) on the way to a tearful parental reunion and, as is the author's wont, a series of informational appendices on relevant topics from equine colic and horseback riding to the healing properties of unicorn horns in legend and the importance of pure water. Sam and the unicorns alike in Stancliffe's neatly finished illustrations shake out lyrically flowing locks, and the luridly green river looks properly noxious.

**A nimble trot to a joyous finish.** (*Fantasy*. 7-11)



### JUNETEENTH

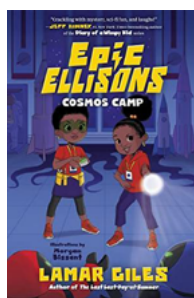
*Garrett, Van G.*  
*Illus. by Reginald C. Adams & Samson Bimbo Adenugba*  
 Versify/HarperCollins (40 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9780358574323

A child experiences Juneteenth with their family.

The day starts with a Black family loading their car with blankets, food, and drums in preparation for a trip to Galveston, Texas. When they arrive at the Strand, the young protagonist pulls a wagon full of supplies as the family looks for a place to watch the parade. With the perfect spot secured, they unpack their food and listen for the sounds of the parade beginning. However, the narrator notes that this parade feels different from those held on Labor Day or the Fourth of July: "Many of the people on the big, bright floats looked like me." Taking it all in, the protagonist points out the "soulful rhythms" of the marching bands' music along with the beauty queens riding in decorated cars. Most notably, the protagonist observes the camaraderie of the participants as they "[rejoice] in the ending

of slavery in Texas." Vibrant, highly textured watercolor-and-pen-and-ink illustrations depict the sense of community the author conveys through the simple, poetic text. An ideal read-aloud, the story focuses more on the feelings of taking part in the parade than on the origins of Juneteenth, but it might inspire young readers to seek out more information. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A stirring introduction to an important holiday.** (author's and artists' notes) (*Picture book*. 4-8)



### EPIC ELLISONS Cosmos Camp

*Giles, Lamar*  
*Illus. by Morgan Bissant*  
 Versify/HarperCollins (288 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 9, 2023  
 9780358423379

Twelve-year-old African American girls attempt to solve a complicated mystery that also threatens their tight familial bond in this stand-alone novel that reunites readers with characters from Giles' *Legendary Alston Boys* series.

Twins Evangeleen and Victoria Ellison, who go by Leen and Wiki, respectively, have always done everything together. But now, Leen is excited to attend the STEM-focused summer Cosmos Camp on her own, while Wiki is looking forward to doing her own thing and helping with the family farm. Anna Thunkle, wife of the wealthy tech entrepreneur whose company is behind the camp, causes tension between the sisters by offering Wiki a camp scholarship—even though she didn't even apply. Neither girl is happy about this, but their parents are enthusiastic about the opportunity. Shortly after their arrival, Anna asks the sisters to help find her missing husband, Petey. The mission is made more complicated when Wiki's eidetic memory starts glitching and Leen struggles with imposter syndrome after being placed on a team with bullies. The sisters must work collaboratively to try to figure out what is really going on at Camp Cosmos and in Petey's company. This story highlights the valuable impact African American women and girls can have in science and technology. The relationship dynamics between the engaging, likable sisters will resonate with many readers, who will enjoy accompanying them on this adventurous journey.

**An imaginative, thrilling story exploring family and team dynamics through the lens of invention.** (*Science fiction*. 8-12)



### IN THE MIX

*Gonzalez, Mandy with Sushil Preet K. Cheema*  
Aladdin (224 pp.)  
\$17.99 | April 4, 2023  
9781665922012  
Series: Fearless, 3

The third stand-alone entry in a middle-grade series that explores the lives of young people in showbiz.

Hudson Patel is torn between two pursuits that speak to his passions: acting and baking. He's a cast member of the hit Broadway musical *Our Time* along with fellow young actors and friends Monica Garcia, April DaSilva, and Relly Morton. They need all hands on deck when they realize that there's new competition in the form of a show opening just down the street from their theater. But Hudson finds himself spending more and more time honing his baking skills, as he wants to participate in the Bake It Till You Make It Competition hosted by a well-known social media foodie. Of course, there's a twist: The contest requires contestants to use flavors from their families' backgrounds, but thanks to his parents' idiosyncrasies in the kitchen, Hudson knows nothing about his Gujarati family's Indian cuisine. What follows is a story of friendship, family, and passion that blends heritage and aspiration as Hudson's mother reassures him that, "it's important to have a lot of different interests, to nurture them....It keeps life fun and engaging." There's rivalry, there's camaraderie, and there's a deep dive into Hudson's Indian heritage as he looks to his grandmother to unpack his cultural food stories, adding a dash of sweetness and spice to the book.

**A story as delectable as meringues and gulab jamun.** (*Fiction. 8-12*)



### GARVEY'S CHOICE The Graphic Novel

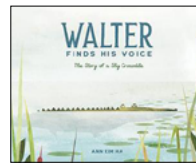
*Grimes, Nikki*  
Illus. by Theodore Taylor III  
Wordsong/Astra Books for Young Readers (144 pp.)  
\$22.99 | \$12.99 paper | June 6, 2023  
9781662660023  
9781662660085 paper

Grimes' acclaimed novel in verse sees new life in comics format.

Garvey, an imaginative young Black boy, loves reading SF and stargazing, but his father would rather he play sports. Feeling unheard, he copes by overeating and is mocked for his weight at school. But through new friendships and a passion for music, Garvey forges a path to self-confidence and finds a way to connect with his father. Grimes' tanka poems, kept mostly intact with minor edits and some changes to their order, pair nicely with Taylor's straightforward illustrations, bringing to life Garvey's story of newfound self-possession. The energetic

illustrations playfully depict his rocky journey toward a truer version of himself, providing levity at times but never short-changing the most poignant moments. The poem "Stars" offers a breezy portrayal of Garvey's extraterrestrial fantasies: "Stars on my ceiling / Wink at me when the full moon / comes for a visit." In "Shadow," the magnitude of his feelings about body image and his emotional eating becomes clear, with Garvey looming above his comparatively tiny family: "Whenever I stand near that's / how it feels. They're all so small." These charming, reflective poems are an ideal match for Taylor's endearing first graphic novel endeavor.

**An adaptation that expands the world of a captivating, much-loved character.** (note on tanka) (*Graphic fiction. 9-12*)



### WALTER FINDS HIS VOICE The Story of a Shy Crocodile

*Ha, Ann Kim*  
Red Comet Press (32 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781636550503

A timid crocodile learns to express himself.

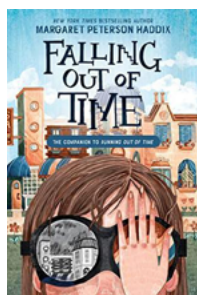
Walter likes to skim through the water with just his eyes visible—not to sneak up on possible prey but because he is shy. Walter's inner voice is filled with self-doubt. When seeing his aquatic friends having fun, Walter anxiously wonders, "WHAT IF I SAY SOMETHING WRONG? WHAT IF THEY LAUGH AT ME? WHAT IF I SCARE THEM AWAY?" Walter slowly slinks back down below the surface, out of sight. But one morning the heron twins are bullying Walter's friend Turtle. As the birds toss him back and forth like a ball, Walter pushes through his fear and shouts (across a double-page spread, with his toothy mouth open wide), "STOP MESSING WITH MY FRIEND!" In that moment, Walter learns that even a gentle soul can be filled with courage—and being brave doesn't mean you don't still get scared or nervous. In Ha's picture-book debut, soothing green and blue watercolors deftly mirror Walter's watery habitat and his quiet nature. Quirky details (at a party for Walter and his friends, Turtle, balloons tied to his tail, inadvertently starts to levitate) and expressive eyes on the full cast—even when that is all readers can see of Walter—brim with warmth and personality. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Emboldens readers with the knowledge that bravery is not the absence of fear.** (*Picture book. 4-7*)



## “A simple yet wonderfully satisfying escapade.”

BILLIE AND BEAN IN THE CITY



### FALLING OUT OF TIME

Haddix, Margaret Peterson  
 Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (352 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 30, 2023  
 9780063251618

The daughter of a character from *Running Out of Time* (1995) discovers that she's a victim in a similar swindle.

Setting her sequel a generation later but returning to the same family, villain, and even Midwestern locale, Haddix sends 12-year-old Zola Keyser—who *thinks* she's living with her mother, Hannah, in a utopian 2193 in which all social and environmental problems have been solved and a benign AI named Sirilexagoogle answers every need and question—on a shocking journey of discovery. She gets a handwritten (!) note on actual paper (!) pleading for help. As it turns out, Zola is not only wrong about the date by 170 years, but learns that she's an involuntary tester of experimental technology whose every (public) moment is being watched by crowds of invisible spectators. Worse yet, the Futureville attraction in which she lives is being kept up by the trapped, half-starved residents of a counterpart settlement, a nightmarish place supposedly devastated by unchecked war and climate change. Haddix's premise and plotline are strong on raw appeal, so fans of the original story who are primed to cheer for Zola will be more pleased than those dissatisfied by the author's hand-wavy approach to plausibility or fussy details. The main cast reads White; names and physical descriptions cue some diversity in the supporting cast.

**Entertaining fan service, mostly—with a lightly tweaked premise, cast, and course.** (*Fiction. 9-13*)



### SNAIL TRAIL

Hanaor, Ziggy  
 Illus. by Christos Kourtoglou  
 Cicada Books (32 pp.)  
 \$16.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9781800660311

What do you do if you're a snail in need of space but well-meaning people keep finding you?

Marjorie enjoys time with her family and friends, but sometimes she just needs to be alone...to be thoughtful or sad or simply apart from what has become “too much.” But no matter what new hiding spot she tries, somehow she's always found. That's because Marjorie is a snail, and snails leave trails everywhere they go. After much wandering, though, Marjorie may have found the perfect spot. But can she find her way home again once she's regained her equilibrium? Luckily, her friend Bernard saves the day, twice in fact, as he tells Marjorie his secret to not leaving a trail others can follow. Bernard is happy to share his relaxing spot; sometimes the two play a game, sometimes they're just “alone, but together.” Marjorie's bright blue shell is easy to pick out in the watercolor illustrations.

The female snails have prominent eyelashes or hair bows or hats; Bernard sports red glasses. Oddly, most of the plants in the snails' world are potted, and the snails have hair on their heads. However, it's nice to see a book about introverts where they don't have to conform to others' expectations. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A refreshingly empathetic portrayal of introversion.** (*Picture book. 3-8*)



### BILLIE AND BEAN AT THE BEACH

Hansson, Julia  
 Trans. by B.J. Woodstein  
 Orca (32 pp.)  
 \$21.95 | Feb. 14, 2023  
 9781459834415  
 Series: Billie and Bean, 1

A child ventures into the ocean with encouragement from her dog.

Billie, a solidly built, brown-skinned little girl, spends a day at the beach with her brown-skinned mother and roly-poly dog, Bean. Billie, hair swept back from her face in a topknot, is content to lie under the shade of the umbrella while Bean jumps happily in the sand. But in the afternoon, Billie ventures, somewhat reluctantly, into the water, where she is stung by a jellyfish! Her mother tenderly bandages the red marks “even though they aren't bleeding.” Not every memorable day is perfect, and the glimpse of Billie's furious tears will resonate with readers who have also experienced something painful. When Bean finds a snorkel and mask, Billie is brave enough to try the water again. Translated from Swedish, this is a charming depiction of a contained yet adventurous outing, infused with the reliable warmth and affection of a mother—and dog. From the dance of light under the beach umbrella to the purple light and splashes of color under the water to the simple figures and late-afternoon shadows on the sand, Hansson's art has an open, clear, inviting feel. The sparkling sea treasure Billie carries home isn't revealed but remains a pleasant, intriguing mystery, a reminder of a truly special day. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A pitch-perfect portrayal of a summer day.** (*Picture book. 3-6*)



### BILLIE AND BEAN IN THE CITY

Hansson, Julia  
 Trans. by B.J. Woodstein  
 Orca (32 pp.)  
 \$21.95 | May 16, 2023  
 9781459834446  
 Series: Billie and Bean, 2

A girl and her dog go on an afternoon adventure.

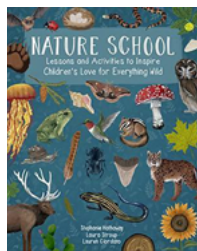
Billie, a sturdy, brown-skinned child, and her rotund dog, Bean, set out for a stroll around the block while Mom is off doing

“A cleverly told, engaging portrayal of an indomitable woman.”

THE LOBSTER LADY

laundry. Billie's been out with Bean before—with Mom watching from the window. On her own now, Billie takes in the sights and sounds. As Bean scarfs up a bit of ice cream on the sidewalk, a kindly mother asks Billie her dog's name. When Bean leads the pair into a small park to poo (“Billie has a bag”), they dance among the flowers and trees. But when they leave, the street looks unfamiliar. An aerial view of the city, a sea gull flying by, shows a brightly colored collection of tidy buildings. It's complicated but not entirely scary, but Billie is in tears. Bean sets off with her in tow—and suddenly there is the familiar street and blue doorway and even a banana peel from an earlier scene. The image of the pair back in the cozy apartment, napping, flat out on the floor, is sweet, as is the hug from Mom (who is brown-skinned) when she returns. Hansson has a gift for showing us the world as experienced from the perspective of a small child. Her crisp linework, gentle, bright palette, and matter-of-fact text, translated from Swedish, are delightful, portraying a little one's first forays into independence, joys, fears, and all. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A simple yet wonderfully satisfying escapade. (Picture book. 2-6)



**NATURE SCHOOL**  
**Lessons and Activities To**  
**Inspire Children's Love for**  
**Everything Wild**

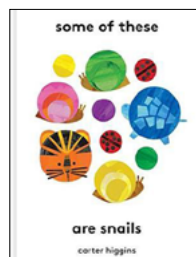
Hathaway, Stephanie, Laura Stroup &  
Lauren Giordano

Quarry (144 pp.)  
\$24.99 paper | June 20, 2023  
9780760378359

An invitation to explore the outdoors.

Divided into five sections—temperate forests, deserts, the seashore, grasslands, and wetlands—this volume explores each biome's climate and weather, geology, habitats, life cycles of various flora and fauna, and more. The theme is connection: between elements of nature and between nature and humans. Each section ends with activities (make a desert diorama, grow a cacti garden), many solitary (journal-keeping), a few of which require adult supervision (a demonstration of evaporation). A list of suggested supplies appears early on, but (perhaps thanks to the writers' no-screen ethos) it does not include useful free ID apps like Pl@ntNet, iNaturalist, or Merlin Bird ID. Words like *crepuscular*, *autotroph*, and *echolocation* appear without definition (there is no glossary). But the informative illustrations largely compensate; for instance, the canopy, understory, shrub, herb, and floor levels of the forest are clearly shown and described, as are salt deposits under the sea floor, distinctive bird beaks, and more. Small, informative “fun fact” boxes dot the pages. The scope is truly global (animals covered include the African-dwelling cape hare, Eurasian lynx, and hawfinch, found in Europe and Asia), though many North American species (e.g., gray squirrels) and settings are featured in lovely double-page spreads that make the book a pleasure to look at as well as a valuable asset for home or school libraries.

An enlightening nature encyclopedia with useful activities. (index) (Nonfiction. 9-14)



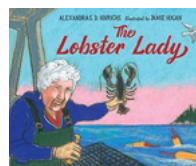
**SOME OF THESE ARE SNAILS**

Higgins, Carter  
Chronicle Books (52 pp.)  
\$15.99 | May 2, 2023  
978-1-79722-018-5

The Ehlert-Gravett mashup you didn't know you needed.

It's likely many readers will see the influence of Lois Ehlert in Higgins' collage art—cut from hand-painted paper and then assembled digitally. The simple, colorful forms that make up the illustrations in this concept book invite readers to play an I-spy sort of game prompted by text, with questions like, “Can you sort by color?” “Can you sort by size?” and “Can you sort by shape or find the animals with eyes?” Other parts of the text echo Emily Gravett's playful storytime staple *Orange Pear Apple Bear* (2006): “Turtle is a circle / circle is a snail // green circles / orange circles / circle circle square.” Higgins guides readers to engage with the pictures and see how they visually represent the singsong, descriptive words. It's a whimsical romp; on one page, a series of pink triangles paired with orange circles evokes both rodents and birds (“all of these are triangles / all of these are pink / some of them go / tweet-tweet-tweet / some of them go squeak”). Combined, words and pictures deliver a pleasing, interactive game of a read sure to inspire conversation and laughter from the readers who encounter this picture book. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Will quickly become a read-aloud favorite. (Picture book. 1-5)



**THE LOBSTER LADY**

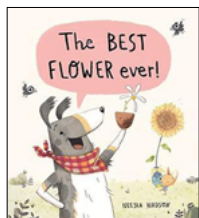
Hinrichs, Alexandra S.D.  
Illus. by Jamie Hogan  
Charlesbridge (32 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 23, 2023  
9781623543938

Maine librarian Hinrichs profiles 102-year-old Virginia Oliver, “the oldest person lobstering in Maine, and maybe even in the world!”

The Lobster Lady rises before dawn, eats breakfast, and sets out with her adult son Max to her boat (named *Virginia* after her years ago). Out on the water they pull their traps, measure and sort the lobsters, and band the claws of the keepers. When Virginia sets aside a crab, it claws her, and the injury requires stitches. The doctor's tactless question—“What were you doing out there anyway?”—prompts a flow of memories: spending childhood summers on the Neck, an island where her father ran a store and blacksmith shop; returning the rest of the year to live with her aunts and grandparents on the mainland and attend school; learning to helm a boat; marrying a lobsterman; and doing various jobs but finally joining him

on the water. The backmatter offers more information about the subject, changes in the industry and community, two simple recipes, and sources, including numerous admiring media accounts. This inspiring story is set on full-bleed images done with chalk pastel on roughened paper that convey a strong sense of the waterwoman's world, the boats, the sea, the sky. Even more than the matter-of-fact text, the saturated illustrations chronicle Oliver's long life and convey a rich sense of history. Most characters present White. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A cleverly told, engaging portrayal of an indomitable woman.** *(Informational picture book. 5-9)*



### THE BEST FLOWER EVER!

Hudson, Neesha  
Dial Books (32 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 13, 2023  
9780593323342

A pup takes pride in a flower until others show up with better ones.

Decked out in a plaid bandanna, a spotted dog happily holds up a tiny potted daisy. "Would you like to see my beautiful little flower?" A Chihuahua yaps that it is lovely but then brings out a great big sunflower. The original pup droops. "That is...humungous." Desperate for validation, the dog asks a passing hound, "Doesn't it smell lovely?! Please tell me how lovely it smells!" The hound agrees but then brings out some lavender. Everyone swoons. More and more pups come, each proclaiming the attributes of their flowers (one even says, "My flower potty trained the cat!"). (All the canines pause in consternation.) In spare text, broken into color-coded speech bubbles, Hudson deftly explores the feelings of jealousy and frustration that often ensue when we compare ourselves to others. Luckily, these doggo pals come together in the end, realizing each flower is special in its own—helpful—way. The anthropomorphic dogs cut hilarious figures in the watercolor-and-colored pencil artwork; a poodle with an oversized hairdo and a bespectacled Great Dane are especially fun additions. There is also a subplot to be discovered in the illustrations; follow the antics of the frog and two birds for extra chuckles. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A gentle reminder that there are more important things than aspiring to being the best.** *(Picture book. 4-7)*



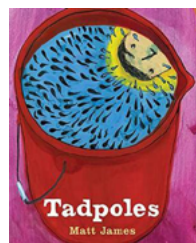
### LET'S PLAY GONGGI

Im Seo-Ha  
Illus. by Minjoo Kim  
Brown Books Kids (44 pp.)  
\$16.99 | May 9, 2023  
9781612545820  
Series: Traditional Korean Games, 2

A childhood game brings confidence and an unlikely friend in this Korean import.

Eunji, who lives in Seoul, enters her classroom only to be greeted as "partner," to her annoyance, by Jingu, her classmate from the countryside. Eunji borrowed her sister's dress and, reaching into her pocket, is surprised to find gonggidols, small, colorful stones used to play the Korean game of gonggi. As with jacks, a player throws a stone in the air and must grab the others before catching the thrown stone; each time, the number of stones grabbed increases. Jingu is overjoyed at the discovery, revealing that gonggi is popular in his hometown of Gyeongsang-do. Impressed by his skills, the class plans a gonggi tournament while a jealous Eunji, who doesn't know how to play, refuses to participate. But Eunji runs into Jingu on her way home, and they share a sweet dalgona. Jingu cleverly persuades Eunji to try gonggi with the enticement of more candy, and eventually she falls in love with the game. The day of competition arrives, and Eunji is slotted in the last pairing while Jingu is mysteriously absent—until the last minute. Bold cartoon illustrations effectively highlight the characters' emotions amid textured backgrounds and bring the straightforward narrative to a satisfying—and epic—conclusion; readers will be eager to learn more about the game, and the backmatter obliges. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A delightful introduction to a beloved childhood game.** *(Picture book. 5-8)*



### TADPOLES

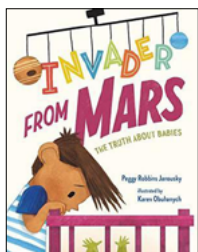
James, Matt  
Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 2, 2023  
9780823450053

A child narrates their springtime adventures against the backdrop of a field of old junk across from their school.

It's easy to get into the head of the child protagonist, as the stream-of-consciousness narration is so perfectly childlike. At the end of a school day during which a girl brags about finding a two-headed frog, the child's father meets them and walks them home in the rain across the field, talking about clouds and listening to frogs until it's time to part ways. The child visits the field on their own, exploring the junk that lies about and remembering how they once screamed their anger and fear over their father's moving out into the old echo-y silo. The spring rains flood the field, forming an ephemeral pond where the child-dad duo catch, examine, and release the tadpoles they find. James' artwork combines acrylic, ink, gouache, cut paper, and photos. Readers will almost be able to feel the bumps and ridges in the thickly textured illustrations. While the close bond between father and child is quite evident, what's unclear is what readers should take from this tale that jumps from topic to topic. Dad and the child share light skin and black hair; Dad sports a mustache. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A tale of father-child bonding full of visual appeal but unfocused in its storytelling.** *(notes about frogs and ephemeral ponds, author's note, further reading)* *(Picture book. 4-8)*





**INVADER FROM MARS**  
**The Truth About Babies**

Janousky, Peggy Robbins  
Illus. by Karen Obuhanych  
Henry Holt (40 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 9, 2023  
9781250818553

The arrival of a new baby elicits joy... and uncertainty.

When Micah (a boy with light-brown skin that is between his mother's lighter shade and his father's darker skin tone) sees a sonogram picture on his refrigerator, he thinks it looks like an alien. His parents explain they are having a new baby, and Micah seeks out advice from older Cousin Maxwell. Maxwell, who is brown-skinned, confirms Micah's alien suspicions and shares the telltale signs for determining for sure whether the baby is an extraterrestrial, including the presence of green skin. When baby Lily is born, illustrations depict her with green skin, which no one but Micah and Cousin Maxwell seems to notice. The internal logic of the story falls apart when Micah and his mom bring Lily to his school for Show-and-Share. "Why would anyone bring a weird baby in for Show-and-Share?" said a particularly rude classmate. Micah froze. Lily did not." An accompanying illustration shows green-skinned Lily shooting the light-skinned classmate with lasers from her eyes and vaporizing him. Everyone sees this, so Lily's alienlike status can't be chalked up to big-brother jitters enabled by a cousin. Though anxiety surrounding a new sibling is a perennially popular topic, and the big-headed, cartoonish characters cut endearing figures in Obuhanych's digitally finished watercolor, colored pencil, and collage illustrations, this tale will leave many little ones perplexed. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

The hard truth is that this book's twist doesn't quite land. *(Picture book. 3-7)*



**KIKI CAN! GO TO SCHOOL**

Jaramillo, Susie  
Illus. by Abigail Gross  
Roaring Brook Press (40 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 9, 2023  
9781250872029

The little chickies from the award-winning *Canticos* preschool series are ready for the first day of school.

Kiki, the youngest, is excited to join her two older brothers, Nicky and Ricky. But once they arrive, Kiki is surprised to see her brothers go off in another direction as Mama Hen leads her to her classroom. "You're going to do great on your own!" When she joins circle time, Kiki begins to realize she has a lot in common with the chickies in the class and, with the teacher's encouragement, begins to feel more comfortable. Even after a sneezy, glittery mishap during arts and crafts, Kiki is accepted and welcomed by her new school friends. Gross follows the lovable, charming artistic style of Jaramillo's original artwork with a bit of embellishment,

particularly in the large expressive eyes of the characters. First-day anxiety and uncertainty are addressed as Kiki has positive interactions with others, culminating in a successful and happy initial day. Her adjustment to an unfamiliar place with unknown classmates is handled well and will be relatable to others anticipating their first days of school. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A sweet primer on what nervous first-time students should expect. *(Picture book. 4-6)*



**ELLIE ENGLE**  
**SAVES HERSELF**

Johnson, Leab  
Disney-Hyperion (288 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 2, 2023  
978-1-368-08555-7  
Series: Ellie Engle, 1

A seventh grader doing her best to navigate middle school, a secret crush, and new family dynamics wakes up with a life-altering superpower.

Elliot "Ellie" Engle, a 12-year-old Black girl, has always been fine fading into the background with her comic books. Best friend Abby Ortega, who is cued as Latine, always seems to have the spotlight. Following an earthquake during a sleepover at Abby's house, Ellie wakes up feeling weird. She returns home to find her beloved pet, Burt the Betta Fish, has died. While giving his eulogy, Ellie touches Burt, and, to her disbelief, he bounces back to life. Superhero-loving Ellie's first thought is to keep her new abilities a secret or risk being shipped off to some institution like the X-Men's Xavier Institute. But she tells Abby—incidentally her crush and therefore the object of her other big secret. Together, they attempt to test her powers, until an unfortunate incident on frog dissection day in science class throws Ellie's life into a tailspin. Ellie must come to terms with hard truths, but along the way she learns she doesn't have to live her life in the shadow of others and that true friends will support you through everything. This fast-paced, humorous novel will have readers racing to the end as they fall in love with Ellie's quirky and authentic personality. Johnson deftly explores identity and responsibility to ourselves and others in this joyful coming-of-age story.

Marvelous. *(author's note) (Fiction. 8-12)*



**SECOND CHANCE SUMMER**

Kapit, Sarah  
Henry Holt (240 pp.)  
\$16.99 | May 23, 2023  
9781250860903

An already-damaged relationship turns seriously nasty at theater camp.

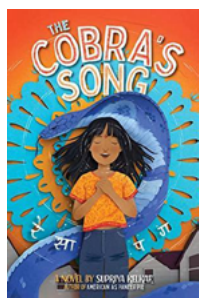
Chloe and Maddie have been besties since kindergarten, but a lot has happened by the summer after seventh

“Exciting and fast paced, with provocative notions to ponder about what makes us human.”

THE RUBY CODE

grade, when both go to Camp Rosewood in Southern California. Thin, redheaded Chloe, a White girl, has starred in *Super Hero Kids*, a popular streaming series; she’s instantly recognized and fawned over by other campers. Maddie, who has two moms, is “a chubby Jewish girl with thick glasses and a tendency to fall over at the worst possible moments.” Her dyspraxia led to an embarrassing incident on stage during the middle school musical this past spring—a video went viral. The girls’ bond has not survived Maddie’s humiliation and Chloe’s rising star status. The narration goes back and forth between the two protagonists and the summer camp and school settings—chapters are labeled with names and time periods but can still be confusing. Maddie is a vivid character, but Chloe feels less authentic; among other things, she is too clueless about why her relationship with Maddie tanked: “Is she jealous of me or something?” As the camp pulls together a production of *Wicked*, the girls launch vengeful plots against each other but also confront serious issues: Chloe, her first period and attraction to girls, Maddie, the question of whether “fat girls can be the stars of our own stories.” Drama kids will love the setup, though the emotional tug of war is protracted.

A sincere exploration of friendship’s ups and downs. (*Fiction. 8-12*)



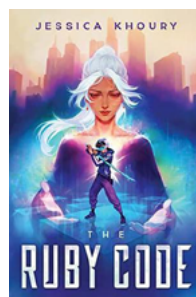
**THE COBRA’S SONG**

Kelkar, Supriya  
 Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)  
 \$17.99 | May 16, 2023  
 9781665911887

A story exploring family, friendship, and facing your fears.

Soon-to-be sixth grader Geetanjali has grown up in the shadow of her mother and grandmother, who were famous Hindustani classical singers back in India. But every time she has to sing publicly, she finds herself besieged with anxiety. And it all starts to snowball: Geetanjali’s meant to sing at a public event in her Michigan hometown alongside bestie Penn, a White American boy, but she doesn’t feel ready. She’s hoping Aaji’s visit from Pune will make her feel less anxious, but her grandmother doesn’t seem like herself. Nor does their neighbor, recently widowed Heena Mavshi, who is behaving most unusually. Could it have something to do with mysterious new arrival Lata Auntie, who keeps pestering Aaji to sing Raag Naagshakti, a melody said to attract cobras? What about the dead mouse in the backyard with bite marks like those of a snake’s fangs? The book digs into changing family dynamics, grief and healing, tween fears, and culture and belonging, among other topics. There’s also a mystery connected to snake-related curses and folk beliefs around naagmanis, stones supposedly formed by cobras. Readers might wish for deeper development of some of the many strands. However, the strong pace and the relationships between the vivid characters, both Geetanjali’s Marathi family members and others, come together to make this story immensely readable.

An absorbing story that has music at its heart. (*Adventure. 8-12*)



**THE RUBY CODE**

Khoury, Jessica  
 Scholastic (304 pp.)  
 \$17.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9781338859287

A gamer in the real world and an AI in a virtual one team up to tackle both corporate baddies and personal crises.

Setting her thriller a few years into a high-tech surveillance state future but basing it on universal themes, Khoury pairs 13-year-old Ash Tyler, trying to escape his widowed mother’s vicious boyfriend by losing himself in a VR fantasy called Glass Realm, with 13-year-old white-haired, red-gold-eyed Ruby. At first, he takes her to be an NPC in the game, but she turns out to be a powerful, curious intelligence who is really good at slaying virtual monsters. This, it quickly develops, is because she’s an escaped cyberweapon developed by Syntheos, a ruthless security corporation that will stop at nothing to get her back. Fast and furious escapades through a futuristic Manhattan lead to both good chemistry between the leads and two assaults on the heavily defended corporate headquarters (“It looks like a middle school,” remarks one kid). The first is a disastrous one that leaves Ruby recaptured and reprogrammed; the second is a rescue that works because Ash finds a way to reawaken in Ruby a suppressed curiosity about feelings and self-awareness that leads to restored independence of thought and an upbeat ending. Ash reads White; names cue ethnic diversity in the supporting cast.

Exciting and fast paced, with provocative notions to ponder about what makes us human. (*Science fiction. 9-13*)



**CHORE PIRATES**

Klungel, Johan  
 Clavis (32 pp.)  
 \$18.95 | June 13, 2023  
 9781605378411

While Mommy is at work, a boy and his father complete chores with an imaginative twist.

Tom is eager to play, but Daddy is overwhelmed with household tasks. When Daddy appoints Tom his assistant, the little boy decides that the dish brush is a pirate sword, and away they go, cleaning, organizing, and having fun. The “chore pirates” land on a tropical island and reunite “sock bird” pairs, bulldoze a volcano made up of messy toys, and even concoct a pot of magic. Klungel’s story is irresistibly playful. The illustrations are detailed and true to life. A messy kitchen table covered in everything from children’s artwork to an apple core feels like something out of any family’s home. Each new adventure is complete with a fitting ensemble, like safari gear or hard hats, with Tom’s little sister tucked into a baby carrier strapped to Daddy’s chest or back. Not only does the story show that chores are a necessary part of this family’s life, but they also depict Daddy,

# “The beaver kits of Glendunny Pond are charged with a dangerous mission.”

THE SECRET OF GLENDUNNY

not Mommy, taking the lead. Daddy and Tom’s exploits serve as wonderful ideas for caregivers wanting to include little ones in these jobs at home. Mommy has brown skin, Daddy and Tom’s sister are light-skinned, and Tom has light brown skin. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A refreshing take on the division of household labor that will appeal to little ones and their grown-ups.** (*Picture book. 3-5*)



## SALLY’S BIG DAY

Larsen, Andrew

*Illus. by Dawn Lo*

Orca (32 pp.)

\$18.57 | Feb. 14, 2023

9781459834613

Sally is excited to join the other puppies at puppy school.

Sally sees pups of all kinds on the way to and in school. “Big pups and little pups. Short pups and long pups. Fluffy pups and smooth pups.” At first, Sally has difficulty obeying the teacher’s commands. When told to sit, she sniffs and becomes distracted by a rabbit she sees in the distance. At recess—“the best thing about school”—Sally slurps water and plays. Eventually, like all the other puppies, Sally learns to listen and do what she is told and is rewarded with a treat. At home, the now exhausted Sally naps and dreams of rabbits. Simple, short declarative sentences are accompanied by thin-lined, soft colored drawings. Children beginning a new milestone as preschool students will draw parallels between their experiences and Sally’s—the newness of the experience and the importance of following rules and getting along with others. Readers will also be encouraged to search for Sally’s distracting rabbit as it appears hidden on almost every page throughout the story, providing some additional intrigue. A diverse community of dog owners is depicted; the teacher has brown skin. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A winsome first-day-of-school offering for the new student and year.** (*Picture book. 3-5*)



## SHERMY AND SHAKE, THE NOT-SO-NICE NEIGHBOR

Larson, Kirby

*Illus. by Shinji Fujioka*

Candlewick (96 pp.)

\$15.99 | May 9, 2023

9781536219425

Series: Shermmy and Shake, 1

A new neighbor upends Shermmy’s plans for a quiet summer.

Shermy’s looking forward to an entire summer of his favorite activities—reading, doing puzzles, and collecting small treasures—but he hadn’t counted on the arrival of Shake, who’s spending the summer with his grandmother, Shermmy’s next-door neighbor, while his mom and stepfather are on their honeymoon. And from the start, Shake

disrupts Shermmy’s routine. Shake hogs snacks, interrupts Shermmy’s reading, accidentally knocks his puzzle pieces to the floor, loses Shermmy’s favorite Frisbee, and nabs the last rocket pop from the ice cream truck. Shermmy attempts to hide out in his room, but his mom keeps inviting Shake over to play. Almost imperceptibly, however, Shermmy’s attitude begins to change. By August, Shermmy even misses Shake when no one comes to interrupt his reading. So he goes looking for him and finds Shake wiping away tears, homesick for his mom. Without realizing it, the two have become fast friends. Divided into three sections, each titled by month, this fast-moving tale features short chapters and black-and-white illustrations throughout. Those looking to transition into longer chapter books will find this one accessible, and the storyline will resonate—readers will be eager to read more in this series. In the artwork, Shermmy presents as Asian, while Shake reads White.

**A relatable scenario sets up future books for more summer fun.** (*Fiction. 6-9*)



## THE SECRET OF GLENDUNNY The Searchers

Lasky, Kathryn

Harper/HarperCollins (240 pp.)

\$17.99 | March 14, 2023

978-0-06-303106-7

Series: The Secret of Glendunny, 2

The beaver kits of Glendunny Pond are charged with a dangerous mission.

To avoid extinction, beavers have maintained a secret existence at Glendunny since the reign of Henry VIII and must never be seen by humans, or two-legs. A human sighting of the kit Dunwattle was the impetus for the harrowing life-changing adventures described in the first series entry. Now, even more sinister, terrifying events threaten Glendunny and beyond. Eagles have reported animals captured by two-legs and taken to New Eden, the Dark Place, for evil purposes. The swan Elsinore, who is essential to the community’s well-being, may be one of the captives. Beaver kits Dunwattle, Locksley, and Yrynn must search for and, if need be, rescue her. The intricate plot twists and turns and weaves, with the tale told from multiple viewpoints showing the experiences of those imprisoned and those searching as they hatch a daring escape. These varied creatures—beavers, otters, eagles, owls, whales, and more—gain insights, empathy, self-knowledge, and trust as their plan takes shape. There is great kindness, bravery, and compassion as well as unimaginable cruelty, loss, and evil, mostly perpetrated by the two-legs. The heroes are many, but Blekka the octopus is perhaps the most surprising and heart-breaking. Lasky’s perfectly constructed fantasy is told in beautifully descriptive, soaring language, with invented words and names feeling just right and an abundance of detailed information about each animal’s habitat, attributes, and physiology.

**Magical, exciting, and deeply moving.** (*map*) (*Animal fantasy. 9-13*)







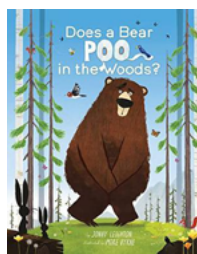
**MATTEO**

*Leali, Michael*  
Harper/HarperCollins (336 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 23, 2023  
9780063119918

“The tree chose me to stop the lies and find the truth.”

Every small town hides secrets, but in Creekside, they’re rooted as deeply as the beloved ancient oak that watches over the town. For 11-year-old Matteo Lorenzini, the tree is not just history, but entwined with his own story in more ways than even he knows. But the tree is dying, and as the day it’s slated to be cut down approaches, strange things start happening that Matteo can’t explain. In working to save tree and town alike, he must discover not only who he is, but who he was in order to stop the blight of secrets. Much like leaves changing color with the seasons, this story smoothly and without any fanfare shifts from baseball bildungsroman to a riff on the story of Pinocchio to fabulism. Although the descriptive prose is a bit clumsy at times, the plot quickly gains momentum that builds to a wonderfully touching ending. Complex issues such as family relationships, masculinity, homophobia, bullying, mental health, and more are tackled with sensitivity and grace. Young readers will find it easy to empathize with bright, passionate, insecure Matteo, and the supporting characters’ rich inner lives provide great depth to the story. Matteo is White; the secondary cast is racially diverse.

**Tear-jerking and heartwarming in equal measure.** (*Fiction. 8-12*)



**DOES A BEAR POO IN THE WOODS?**

*Leighton, Jonny*  
*Illus. by Mike Byrne*  
Aladdin (32 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 13, 2023  
9781665903479

A bear searches for the perfect—private—place to poo.

Barry is a typical bear: He likes growling, eating honey, and slumbering. When nature calls, he prefers to do his business alone. But the forest is full of animals! There are watchful eyes everywhere. “So Barry set off through the trees to find a quiet place, / a corner of the forest, where he could have some space.” Alas, on Barry’s trek, he encounters some unlucky scatological disasters. Birds who clearly don’t share Barry’s shyness defecate midflight—right on top of him. And then he slips in a “**POOEY PILE**” left by a moose. In complete despair, “Barry threw his head back. / He was desperate for release. / ‘**HELP!**’ he cried out to the sky. / ‘I need to **POO** in / **PEACE.**’” Luckily, wise Brenda Bigpaw, a fellow bear, has a solution. She points Barry to an outhouse, which seems divine. Except maybe not to the light-skinned lumberjack who also

needs to use it. Readers will sympathize with the desperate wiggle dance (a universal bathroom signal) and poor Barry’s plight. The lively rhyme scheme (which falters only slightly) keeps the tempo upbeat as Barry rushes to find the perfect spot, while the cartoonishly exaggerated illustrations will keep readers giggling. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Toilet humor done well.** (*Picture book. 3-6*)



**THE MIRACLE SEED**

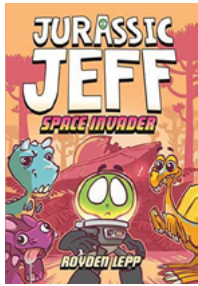
*Lemelman, Martin*  
Eerdmans (80 pp.)  
\$18.99 | March 28, 2023  
9780802855909



An extinct seed was reborn after two millennia thanks to the work of two 21st-century Israeli scientists.

Our tale begins in ancient Israel, when Romans vanquished embattled Jews atop their last stronghold—the mountaintop fortress of Masada. Among the items abandoned there were Judean date-palm seeds; these trees were considered a “treasure in Israel and throughout the ancient world,” and their fruit was believed to have medicinal purposes. The seeds remained hidden by time and sand until archaeologists unearthed six in 1963. In 2004, Jerusalem physician Dr. Sarah Sallon decided to study their potential health benefits. No one had ever resuscitated an extinct plant, but she wanted to try and contacted Dr. Elaine Solowey, Ph.D., a prominent Israeli plant expert, to ask if it were possible. It was. She planted a seed that miraculously sprouted; six years later, Dr. Solowey replanted her thriving success in the desert. Over the next several years, Dr. Sallon located additional ancient seeds; Dr. Solowey sprouted them, too, and pollinated one from her first plant. Amazingly, in 2020, she picked dates from the first tree she’d so carefully developed years before. Students interested in STEM will be fascinated by this unique blend of ancient history and modern science, skillfully combined in an easy-to-understand, easily navigable graphic novel. The writing is smooth, with a conversational tone; pronunciation guides and diagrams are included. The unfussy, fine-lined digital illustrations are atmospheric, beautifully capturing time and place.

**Restores hope in the idea that all things are possible; especially empowering for young women interested in STEM subjects.** (*author’s note, timeline, map of Israel, photos*) (*Graphic nonfiction. 7-11*)



## JURASSIC JEFF Space Invader

Lepp, Royden

Random House Graphic (224 pp.)

\$13.99 | \$16.99 PLB | May 30, 2023

9780593565391

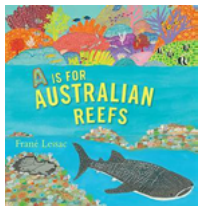
9780593565407 PLB

Series: Jeff in the Jurassic, 1

An extraterrestrial with a chip on his shoulder learns about friendship from an empathetic group of dinosaurs.

Jeff crash-lands his spacecraft on prehistoric Earth and declares himself ruler only to be met with laughter and Pterodactyl poop. He meets Carl and Hungry, two talking dinosaurs who tolerate his demands to meet their leader, as well as petlike Spike. Spike drools and cannot speak, but Carl and Hungry love him and include him in decision-making. As Jeff learns more about the flora and fauna of Earth, he becomes both comfortable leading a cooking lesson and impatient with Earth's less-evolved population. Jeff represents a technologically advanced but selfish, status-driven perspective, while the dinosaurs are in touch with nature and their feelings and do not take Jeff's insults personally, regarding him indulgently, as one would a cranky toddler. The biomes and landscapes, such as forest, swamp, canyon, and lakeshore, are visually distinct and help separate the group's adventure into geographical segments. Likewise, each of the species on Earth bears a unique silhouette and color. Everyone stands out, including (literally and hilariously) a fish with feet. The laughs are as dependable as the moral. With the exception of Sara, a dinosaur who, along with her babies, enjoys Jeff's cooking lesson, the cast reads entirely male. The backmatter includes instructions for drawing Jeff and Carl and a guide to Jeff's alien alphabet.

**The funniest, most heartwarming alien invasion this side of the Jurassic Period.** (*Graphic fiction. 7-10*)



## A IS FOR AUSTRALIAN REEFS

Lessac, Frané

Candlewick (48 pp.)

\$18.99 | June 13, 2023

978-1-5362-2830-4

Admire the astonishing biodiversity of Australian coral reefs.

Lessac, who has written and illustrated numerous informational books about places around the world, here focuses on her home country. The volume is organized alphabetically, starting with A for *Australian reefs* (which discusses fringing and patch reefs and includes a map of reefs surrounding Australia) and B for *biodiversity*, to, finally, Z for *zebra seaborses*. Each spread includes a topic overview and a few brief paragraphs of further material likely to appeal to young readers. Sometimes, if the alphabet permits, there are two topics on a spread—like *parrot fish* and *peacock shrimp* or *urchins* and *violet sea apples*. Lessac profiles four different types of sharks

whose names begin with W (whale sharks, whitetip reef sharks, walking sharks, and wobbegongs). Her detailed gouache paintings emphasize the colors, patterns, and varieties of the reef's coral and fish. A final page invites readers to go back and spot 12 different fish species found throughout. The information is accurate, and the lively images reward attention. This title joins a long line of coral reef celebrations, though it stands out for its stress on biodiversity, even occasionally showing how the many species are connected. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Sure to cultivate a sense of wonder at an oceanic ecosystem.** (*Informational picture book. 5-8*)



## THE JAKE SHOW

Levy, Joshua S.

Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins

(240 pp.)

\$18.99 | May 23, 2023

9780063248199

An Orthodox Jewish seventh grader who has watched way too much television negotiates new schools and divorced parents.

Readers who are familiar with television-land tropes will enjoy this knowingly comic novel, in which an extremely self-conscious Jewish boy processes his experiences as if they were elements of a long-running TV show. At school, he's Forgettable Kid #5, who goes by Jake if asked. But at his mother's house—post-divorce, she's married a rabbi and become extremely Orthodox—he's quiet Yaakov, who wears a black suit and fedora. His father's remarried to a non-Jew and is now fully secular; there, he's lively, goofy Jacob in jeans and T-shirts. His parents have been using the courts to yank him between schools representing various denominations of Judaism, moving him so frequently he can't make friends. But two kids at his latest stop—Broward County Jewish Day School—just won't let him slip into the background. Caleb, who's gone through a lot to come out as gay, and Tehilla, whose mother's low-paying jobs don't always cover the basics, help Jake devise a madcap scheme to join their beloved Jewish summer camp, one too secular for his mother and too religious for his father. The web of lies, the fake camp websites, a wild caper scene at the airport—have they pulled off “the greatest sleeper switcheroo in history”? All characters are presumed White.

**Astutely depicts the pain of a contentious divorce, the balm of friendship, and the complexity of Jewish culture.** (*Fiction. 8-12*)

# “Empathetic and emotionally intelligent.”

RUBY LOST AND FOUND



## RUBY LOST AND FOUND

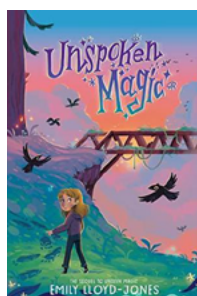
Li, Christina  
Quill Tree Books/Harper  
Collins (304 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 16, 2023  
9780063008939



Big feelings are uncomfortable but to be expected in this story of finding joy and community amid change and loss.

With her best friend, Mia Ortega-Anderson, moving across the country to New York, Chinese American Ruby Chu was already afraid of seventh grade, but nothing prepared her for another close friend drifting away and the unexpected death of her beloved paternal grandfather. After Ruby's caught ditching school, her parents decide she'll spend summer weekdays with Nai-Nai, her paternal grandmother. At first reluctant to stay somewhere her grandfather is noticeably absent, Ruby's walls lower as she and Nai-Nai speak openly about their grief. As Ruby begins to open up and find a comfortable routine, more big changes threaten her fragile sense of safety. When a family friend's bakery is poised for closure, Ruby and classmate Liam Yeung set out to save it. The San Francisco Chinatown community is realistically presented: Mandarin and Cantonese are spoken, not every older adult is an immigrant, and a variety of professions and experiences are portrayed. It's unclear if impulsive, restless Ruby, who struggles in school, is neurodiverse or just stands out compared to the rest of her driven, focused family. Readers will identify with Ruby's roller coaster of emotions amid the challenges of growing up: loved ones leaving, friendships waning, and fitting into the world authentically. Ruby is incredibly self-aware, and her emotions are given space and validity without excusing harm done.

**Empathetic and emotionally intelligent.** (Fiction. 9-13)



## UNSPOKEN MAGIC

Lloyd-Jones, Emily  
Greenwillow Books (320 pp.)  
\$16.99 | Feb. 21, 2023  
978-0-06-305803-3

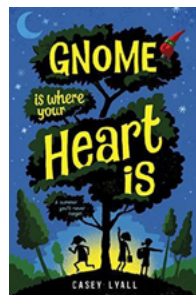
Cryptozoologists seek to expose a magical town's secrets—if they can find any proof.

Spring break in Aldermere promises local Finley Barnes “a week's worth of quiet.” But the arrival of a Society of

North American Cryptid Chasers film crew sends the whole town into a frenzy. While the crew may themselves struggle to find magic, what if something magical finds them? First, Fin spots a horselike shadow in the forest outside her cottage. Then, her friend Cedar learns of big tracks with “human-ish toes.” A run-in with a baby Bigfoot catapults the mystery into full-on crisis: Can they keep the creature a secret from everyone and reunite her with her herd? Lloyd-Jones' follow-up to *Unseen*

*Magic* (2022) adds more depth to the cozy Northern California town's lore while maintaining its airy fog of intrigue. Deliberate pacing allows for secondary characters' backstories to get some time in the limelight. While Fin's previously revealed trauma is far from gone, this sequel presents a Fin with better coping skills for her anxiety. The specters of climate change, forest fires, and rising housing costs ground the magic with some present-day realities. Most of the cast is White by default; Cedar is cued Mexican American. The ending hints at more adventures—and possibly cryptids—to come.

**A second cup of enchantment best savored slowly.** (map) (Fantasy. 8-12)



## GNOME IS WHERE YOUR HEART IS

Lyall, Casey  
Greenwillow Books (304 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 30, 2023  
9780063239821

A loopy plan for multigenerational reconciliation hinges on the hunt for little green aliens.

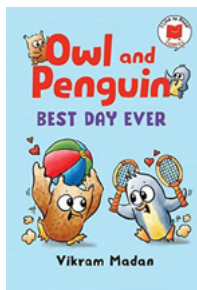
Because of a silly rule about unaccompanied minors, 11-year-old Lenore Peabody is forced to sneak through a window to visit her beloved Grandpa Walt at the Shady Elms Retirement Home. As Lenore, known to family and friends as Lemon, explains, Walt is virtually estranged from Dad; thus the covert visits. Walt and Lemon are deep into Project Validation, Grandpa's long-running effort to prove that he actually *did* encounter a gnomelike alien 30 years ago. All the evidence is kept in a fat binder under Grandpa's bed. Truthfully, Lemon comes to visit to hear Walt's wild tales, casting all the garden gnomes in the neighborhood in a different light. Lemon and best friend Marlo had planned on a Super Chill Summer, but Grandpa's yarn-spinning has set her on a path to verify the story and, not incidentally, trigger a reunion between Walt and Dad. Lyall weaves her earthbound story into the adventure of the above-mentioned aliens—and delightfully so. The chapters have a lively, starship-adventure feel that plays nicely against Lemon's artless storytelling. All the aliens have appropriately gnomeworthy names like Gnedley, Gneelix, Gnilsson, and their leader, Capt. Gnemo. Lemon and her family read White; there is racial diversity in the supporting cast.

**Drill science-fiction elements send this tale of relatable family issues to delightfully surprising places.** (Fiction. 8-12)



“A soaring visual tribute to the qualities that both unite bridges and make them individually distinct.”

BRIDGES



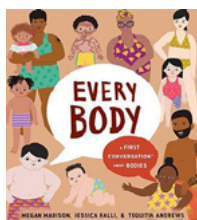
**OWL AND PENGUIN  
Best Day Ever**

Madan, Vikram  
Holiday House (40 pp.)  
\$14.99 | June 6, 2023  
9780823451517  
Series: I Like To Read Comics

In their sophomore outing, supportive bird buddies recognize their differences and devise workarounds that satisfy both of them.

“Playtime” sees Owl wanting to play catch with a beach ball while Penguin holds a racquet, ready for tennis. Short sentences in sans-serif panel captions set out the dilemma: “They cannot agree.” “They play alone.” “Playing alone is no fun.” Light bulbs indicate their simultaneous ideas: They play catch, then bat the beach ball with racquets, then play tennis—and engage in some acrobatics. “Best day ever!” In “Fish,” Penguin wants Owl to see the colorful fish underwater. “But Owl cannot swim.” Penguin tries to submerge Owl in a glass bowl—but “Owl is scared.” So Penguin fills the sphere with fish and holds it up to Owl. While Owl loves the film they watch on “Movie Night,” Penguin is terrified. But they find something to agree on: “Best popcorn ever!” When Owl plays the ukelele, Penguin pushes for Owl to take part in a talent show. On stage, Owl panics until Penguin cheers and Owl relaxes and wins. Finally, Owl finds a creative way to help Penguin fly a kite. Inside simplified outlines, Penguin is pale blue, Owl brown, both with appealing googly-eye faces. The friendship lessons are sound but never heavy-handed. The multiple-frame graphics on every page get the plot across; in fact, the visuals render the text almost superfluous.

Charming evidence that compromise and inventiveness can produce the best day yet! (*Graphic early reader*. 3-6)



**EVERY BODY  
A First Conversation  
About Bodies**

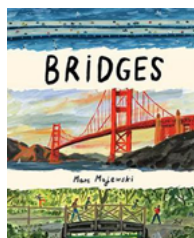
Madison, Megan & Jessica Ralli  
Illus. by Tequtia Andrews  
Rise x Penguin Workshop (40 pp.)  
\$15.99 | May 9, 2023  
9780593661505  
Series: First Conversations

ALL bodies are awesome!

Bodies come in many shapes, sizes, colors, ages, and textures. Each body “can be healthy” and “deserves love and care!” Every body has fat, which stores energy. Bodies are very smart; they tell us when they need something. They signal how we might be feeling with different physical sensations—a tense neck indicates fear; wiggling toes are a sign of excitement. All bodies change and grow over time, whether that be over a day or several years. No matter what, “You are in charge of your body!” Unfortunately, “there’s a big problem”—we’re often erroneously told that some bodies are better or healthier than others and

that some doctors might even convey misinformation about fat people. Thankfully, there are already many people who work to promote fair treatment for every body. Fostering acceptance and self-love, this book encourages children to consider their own bodies “with curiosity, and without shame.” It tackles big issues with a straightforward frankness that makes the themes digestible to its young audience. Backmatter includes more detailed information about the big subtopics of self-care, body diversity, fat activism, critical media literacy, and the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and ableism with body perception. People of various races, abilities, and sizes are represented in the bright, flat illustrations, while the text calls out medical racism directly. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

So important—“every body” should read this! (website)  
(*Informational picture book*. 3-5)



**BRIDGES**

Majewski, Marc  
Abrams (48 pp.)  
\$19.99 | March 28, 2023  
9781419756818

A soaring visual tribute to the qualities that both unite bridges and make them individually distinct.

From the 10.4-foot-long El Marco Bridge that links Spain with Portugal to the 34-mile Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macau Bridge—an undulating ribbon in Majewski’s painted overview that sweeps elegantly into the distance and out of sight over the edge of the page—this gallery of nearly two dozen examples, drawn from every continent except Antarctica and Australia, offers both a dazzling catalog of engineering wonders and an opportunity to reflect on their commonalities. “All over the world,” the author/illustrator writes, “bridges connect.” Some, as his pithy captions and brief endnotes indicate, connect cities, countries, or even continents; others, like the Pont du Gard in Paris or Alabama’s Edmund Pettis Bridge, are historic sites that link our past and present. Whether made of steel, stone, or, like the Umshiang Double-Decker Root Bridge in Meghalaya, India, of living wood, some soar high overhead, while others run just over or even under water. His groups of pedestrians, when the figures are large enough to tell, are racially diverse. Dan Zettwoch’s work of graphic nonfiction *Bridges: Engineering Masterpieces* (2022) offers a fuller history of bridges and a more systematic look at the nuts and bolts of their construction, but this will do at least as good a job of exciting feelings of wonder at the beauty of bridges as well as their remarkable range of designs and materials. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Grand and thought-provoking. (*Informational picture book*. 6-9)





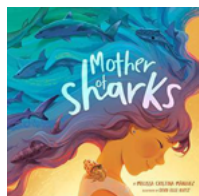
**COULD YOU EVER DIVE WITH DOLPHINS!?**

Markle, Sandra  
 Illus. by Vanessa Morales  
 Scholastic (32 pp.)  
 \$17.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9781338858761  
 Series: Could You Ever

An invitation to imagine what it would be like to live, swim, play, and even eat as bottlenose dolphins do.

Enhanced by illustrations that pair stock photos with cartoon scenes of stubby-limbed, racially diverse children floating in imagined nautical settings, this series opener pours out relatively hefty doses of dolphin data. Markle presents facts in ways that invite emulation—we learn on one page that dolphins sleep with one eye open; the facing page depicts a brown-skinned, hijab-wearing child with one eye closed. And the author informs us that dolphins identify themselves with individual squeaks and whistles; an accompanying image shows a tan-skinned young wheelchair user rolling along the sea bottom and squeaking and squawking away. Markle also uses language that will resonate with her target audience; she tells readers that as social animals, the finny frolickers hang out in age-based groups or, sometimes, “super groups” of 1,000 or more, are ever alert to “stranger danger” from sharks, and have seafood for every meal (“Snacks, too!”). Morales brings readers back to dry(ish) land with a final transition from the deep sea to a swimming pool, and a world range map supplies a final splash of information for this imagination-stretching venture. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Immersive fun for young nature and wild animal lovers. (fun facts!) (Informational picture book. 6-8)**



**MOTHER OF SHARKS**

Márquez, Melissa Cristina  
 Illus. by Devin Elle Kurtz  
 Penguin Workshop (48 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | May 30, 2023  
 9780593523582

A Latine ocean enthusiast gets the surprise of a lifetime in this tale from Márquez, a Puerto Rican shark scientist committed to making STEM fields more inclusive.

As the sun sets on the beautiful Playita del Condado, Puerto Rico, Meli promises her mami that she’ll be ready to leave in just five minutes. She’s shocked when a hermit crab suddenly speaks to her. As Meli and her new friend, Jaiba, travel underwater and witness the effects of humans’ damaging impacts on the ecosystem, her interest in sharks and ocean conservation is amplified. Meli, who is brown-skinned with curly brown hair, has many questions, but when Jaiba suggests she become a scientist, she quietly muses that she hasn’t seen any who look like her. Then she and Jaiba find themselves in the audience of

a lecture being delivered by a real-life scientist who resembles her. Meli observes the scientist, referred to as the Mother of Sharks, conducting research—and soon realizes that she and the scientist are one and the same. In a flash, she’s back on the beach and her five minutes are up, but her passion for science has been ignited. Readers will soak up the vividly illustrated underwater scenes alongside the important message to follow their passions; children from marginalized backgrounds will be especially heartened by Márquez’s encouraging tale. Meli and Jaiba speak English, though there’s some unitalicized Spanish throughout. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A magical story for budding scientists. (author’s note, glossary, resources, Spanish translations) (Picture book. 5-8)**



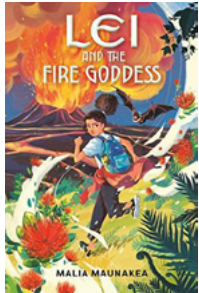
**BING! BANG! CHUGGA! BEEP!**

Martin Jr, Bill & Michael Sampson  
 Illus. by Nathalie Beauvois  
 Brown Books Kids (32 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | April 25, 2023  
 9781612545998

In this previously unpublished work from the late Martin and co-author Sampson, the travels of an antique car are enumerated in rollicking rhymes.

This tale is best enjoyed when read or sung to the rhythm of “This Old Man.” Each verse spans a double-page spread that depicts the automobile in a different setting, from climbing a hill and jumping over bricks to flying through the sky and revving up on the racetrack. The sounds are smooth and endearing, e.g., “This old car, / it’s my buddy, / even when it’s wet and muddy / With a bing, bang, / chugga, beep, / Bouncing here and there / This old car goes everywhere.” In a fun twist, readers finally see a mother call out to her child: “Charlie, it’s time to come in for your bath.” Then we see a hand on the car—turns out it’s a child’s toy. The vehicle gets spiffed up in the tub before resting beside its driver—ready to transport the child to dreamland. On most spreads, each word of the titular refrain is printed in a different color—a clear prompt for kids to join in the telling. Beauvois’ watercolor collages, rendered in a cheerful palette, channel Eric Carle. Young children will love everything about this book and will soon be “reading” it to anyone who will listen. Mother and Charlie are tan-skinned. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Playful, high-octane fun. (Picture book. 1-4)**



## LEI AND THE FIRE GODDESS

*Maunakea, Malia*  
Penguin Workshop (304 pp.)  
\$17.99 | June 6, 2023  
9780593522035



Anna comes face to face with the Hawaiian legends she doesn't want to believe are real.

Ever since her family moved to Colorado seven years ago, 12-year-old Anna Leilani Kama'eahu has been spending summers with her tūtū, or grandmother, learning the family's mo'olelo. Usually she enjoys these stories that connect her to her Native heritage. She also normally loves spending time with Kaipō, her best friend in Hawai'i, and eating li hing mui gummy bears, but this year is different: Kids at school are mocking her, and her Colorado best friend has left her for the popular crowd, leaving Anna feeling conflicted about her heritage. Now she refuses to believe in the Hawaiian gods and goddesses and tries to convince tūtū to let her do touristy things. Then a frustrated Anna loses her temper, insults fire goddess Pele, and picks a sacred 'ōhi'a lehua flower to prove her point. Pele, angered by her disrespect, causes two earthquakes, a lava flow heads toward tūtū's house, and a giant hawk takes Kaipō away. To fix things, Anna must find herself and her Hawaiian roots. This exciting, fast-paced adventure is full of humor and action. Anna wrestles with friendships, being biracial (her mother is Polish American), figuring out where she belongs, and finding pride in her culture. Hawaiian cultural elements are seamlessly woven into the story, giving just enough context for those unfamiliar with them without taking away from the narrative.

**An exhilarating, adventure-filled celebration of Hawaiian culture.** (*Adventure. 8-12*)



## PLUTO! Not a Planet? Not a Problem!

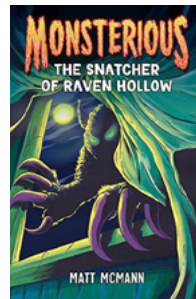
*McAnulty, Stacy*  
*Illus. by Stevie Lewis*  
Henry Holt (40 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781250813466  
Series: Our Universe, 7

Meet Pluto, a "proud, playful, and popular non-planet."

Today's young readers likely grew up learning that there are only eight planets in our solar system, a fact that sets them apart from generations past. Pluto may well have been stricken from the planetary record, but in "his" own words, "Not a planet? Not a problem!" McAnulty's chipper text seems torn between a multitude of directions. It could have been a story about identity and how it's OK not to fit in. It could have been an exploration of the solar system, what's in it, and how humans have studied it. It could have offered knowledge about dwarf planets and what makes them special. It somehow manages to do all and none

of these things, likely limited by the young age of its intended audience. What stands out most are the facts, interspersed throughout the text and also found in the backmatter; the story itself, conversational, bubbly, and littered with misplaced dog metaphors (Pluto dubs himself both a "runt" and a "stray"), isn't quite as engaging as it attempts to be. The highly anthropomorphized art is bright and cute, although the occasional floppy ears are somewhat disconcerting. Backmatter is highly informative, containing those juicy specialized details sure to please space-loving readers. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**An endearing but unfocused look at everyone's favorite dwarf planet. (author's note, statistics on Pluto, information on what makes something a planet, sources, "Pluto or Earth or Both?")** (*Informational picture book. 4-8*)



## THE SNATCHER OF RAVEN HOLLOW

*McMann, Matt*  
Putnam (208 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 9, 2023  
9780593530726  
Series: Monsterious, 2

Teo and Logan's summer plans are disrupted when they stumble onto a lead about the mystery of Raven Hollow's missing infants.

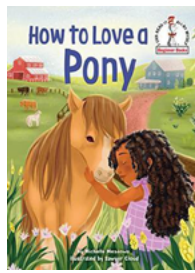
After coming across an empty stroller, the kids learn that a baby recently disappeared in their town. Then they see a flyer for yet another missing infant. Teo is sure they can figure out what is going on, and Logan is willing to tag along but doesn't really share her urgency until he realizes the implications for his little sister and baby cousin. Their research leads them in several mythical directions, and they find themselves on an increasingly dangerous quest to discover which legendary creature may be responsible for the disappearing babies. Brown-skinned, willowy Teo and pale-skinned, stocky Logan are very different; Teo is a brave and determined leader, while Logan is somewhat doubtful but devoted to his friend (and also more experienced at handling actual babies). The duo strike a great balance and make believable friends despite (or perhaps because of) their differences. Like the first in this series of stand-alones, short chapters and a lack of extraneous information keep the pace quick and the tension high. The unsettling ending is thoroughly entertaining, and striving middle school readers interested in mysteries or creepy horror will be particularly enthralled.

**Brief but darkly mysterious.** (*Thriller. 8-12*)



## “Perfect for picky eaters and puppy lovers.”

RUFFLES AND THE NEW GREEN THING



### HOW TO LOVE A PONY

*Meadows, Michelle*  
*Illus. by Sawyer Cloud*  
 Random House (48 pp.)  
 \$9.99 | \$12.99 PLB | May 2, 2023  
 9780593483169  
 9780593483176 PLB  
 Series: Beginner Books

Let's go for a pony ride!

Lily, a young Black child who lives on a farm, takes readers on a tour. Meadows' verse leads us step by step through the seasons—ponies grazing in a pasture on a warm day, Lily taking part in a pony show in autumn, and ponies hunkering down in the barn, taking refuge from the “frost and snow” of winter. The easy rhythm of the text pairs well with Cloud's soft, pastoral vistas. While the story is delivered with a light touch, it still shows the hard work of caring for a large animal. “Soapy water in a pail. / Gentle strokes from head to tail.” “Pick the hooves / for stone and dirt / I notice when / my pony's hurt.” Exuding familial warmth, the bright artwork lets readers follow Lily from pastures to picnics—and even, best of all, to the arrival of a newcomer: “A foal is born / New life is here.” This easy reader will speak to any child who has wished for a pony of their own and refreshingly centers a family of color—something not often seen in similar titles.

**A charming year in the life of a most idyllic farm; horse lovers will be entranced.** (*Early reader. 5-8*)



### BOOM!

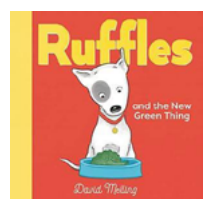
*Meisel, Paul*  
 Holiday House (40 pp.)  
 \$14.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9780823448579  
 Series: I Like To Read Comics

A fraidy dog and a cool cat endure a thunderstorm.

As this easy-to-read graphic novel begins, both pets are napping. When two large yellow block-letter words (“RUMBLE”) appear, Dog sits up, lip quavering, wondering, “What is that?” while Cat barely opens an eye to deadpan, “Nothing.” As the storm waxes and wanes, parallel panels contrast the animals' responses: Dog hides under a table, behind the sofa, and then under the sofa cushion, while Cat blithely pounces on and pummels a mouse toy and stuffed duck and revels in a ball of yarn. At an especially loud “BOOM,” the dog leaps, catapulting the cat from the top of the cushion for a satisfyingly dynamic moment. Dog races to the best hiding place, deep in a closet, as Cat retrieves yet another toy. In climactic frames, Dog dreams of being a superhero who combats the lightning and blows the clouds away; then Cat awakens Dog, reporting the squall's end. Dog, gazing out at the blue sky, announces, “I made the storm go away,” though Cat is unimpressed. As in *See Me Run* (2011) and *I See a Cat* (2017), Meisel once more demonstrates a gift for

conveying the everyday activities of pets. His digitally rendered pen-and-ink illustrations are artfully composed; with minimal text, he tells a story oozing humor and drama.

**A delightful display of animal antics.** (*Graphic early reader. 4-8*)



### RUFFLES AND THE NEW GREEN THING

*Melling, David*  
 Candlewick (32 pp.)  
 \$17.99 | June 6, 2023  
 978-1-5362-2982-0

WHAT can that green thing be?

Ruffles, a white puppy with a dark circle around one eye, has survived the red sweater and a herd of affectionate kittens, but he is completely mystified by the green thing in his food dish. Now, there's plenty that Ruffles loves. (Melling enumerates the little pooch's many passions, from howling, eating, and fetching to chewing, running, and sleeping.) But the bumpy, new green object in his dish (which many readers will recognize as broccoli)? No, he does not like it! Ralph, a Dalmatian pal whom Ruffles very much admires, visits. (Another page lists the things Ruffles and Ralph enjoy doing together.) Ralph takes one look at the green thing and...takes a huge bite! “If Ralph can try the new green thing...then Ruffles can, too!” So Ruffles “nibbles...and gnaws...and chews” (a slew of other synonyms ensues) the green thing. And what is it? “Delicious!” Amending the list of things he loves, Ruffles adds Ralph (of course) and “new things” (except for the strange orange object now in his bowl). Melling's third outing with this expressive, inquisitive puppy is delightful; neatly outlined sequential pencil vignettes of Ruffles poking at the broccoli cleverly bring to life his consternation. Youngsters reluctant to eat their veggies may identify, but they will absolutely appreciate Ruffles and Ralph's adorable antics. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Perfect for picky eaters and puppy lovers.** (*Picture book. 2-6*)



### NO HORSES IN THE HOUSE! The Audacious Life of Artist Rosa Bonheur

*Messier, Mireille*  
*Illus. by Anna Bron*  
 Orca (32 pp.)  
 \$21.95 | March 8, 2023  
 9781459833524

A tribute to a 19th-century artist driven by talent, stubbornness, and impatience with nonsense.

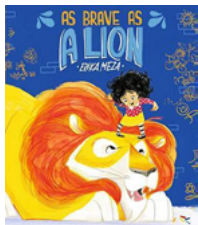
“Balivernes!” (French for *nonsense*) says Rosa Bonheur when told that it's “unladylike” to visit the horse market in Paris. And again, “Balivernes,” when she sees men allowed to cross-dress as members of the opposite sex but is (wrongly) told that *she* could never receive such permission. Drawn by Bron as a determined but very small, White-presenting child surrounded by towering horses and grown-ups in period clothing and, in group scenes,

## “An upbeat confidence booster.”

AS BRAVE AS A LION

some variation in skin color, Bonheur comes across in Messier's terse account of her early life as an artistically gifted force of nature who drove her reluctant father to give her art lessons, brought live farm animals to her family's apartment to draw and paint, and quickly shouldered her way to public attention at the Paris Salon with the huge and stunning *Horse Fair*. This version of her story ends there, with just a brief note and a closing timeline covering the rest of her rise to fame, her death 10 years after that of her “lifelong companion,” Nathalie Micas, and the (now, at long last, waning) eclipse of her reputation. Ruth Sanderson's *A Storm of Horses* (2022) presents younger readers with more analytical views of Bonheur's art and career, but for all its brevity, this offers an equally vivid glimpse of her character. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**More sketch than finished portrait but gives the artist's personality its due.** (*Picture-book biography. 6-8*)



### AS BRAVE AS A LION

Meza, Erika  
Candlewick (32 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 16, 2023  
9781536225082

Where do you find your courage?

A brown-skinned child sings the praises of their constant companion, a lion who helps them speak up when they feel shy or nervous and protects them late at night, when things look scary. Today, the two of them are planning on trying out a new, “rocket-fast” slide at the playground. Followed by the lion, the child climbs the tall ladder, hands getting sweatier and feet wobblier. At the top, panic sets in—what if they're stuck there forever? The child realizes the lion is just as scared and quickly determines that this time, *they* have to be the brave one. They hold their lion's paw, take a deep breath, then count down and... slide! It's so much fun that they do it again. This is a great primer for building self-esteem and helping young children and their adults grapple with overcoming obstacles. Meza recognizes that similar moments will continue to pop up—but the young protagonist and their leonine sidekick are up for the challenge. The visually arresting, predominantly blue and yellow/orange illustrations are full of big, organic shapes that play deftly with perspective and the lion's size. No one ever acknowledges the lion other than the protagonist, so one could interpret the creature as a purely imaginary character. However, the young narrator's self-assuredness is real enough that it doesn't matter. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**An upbeat confidence booster.** (*Picture book. 3-6*)



### FLASHBACK TO THE... AWESOME '80s! Ready-To-Read Level 2

Michaels, Patty  
Illus. by Sarah Rebar  
Simon Spotlight (32 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781665933476  
Series: Flashback

Dip a toe into ancient history.

Salting her popstastic narrative with slang expressions for extra flava (“People were psyched to talk on **cordless phones** and leave a message on an **answering machine**”), Michaels harks back to the fads, fashions, “rad” toys, “gnarly” entertainments, and unwieldy tech that kick-started the millennial generation. The bare lists of names here aren't going to give today's readers much sense of what popular toys or Saturday morning cartoons looked like or why they appealed to those born in the '80s...but even younger children will have no trouble marveling at, say, TVs with no remotes (“you had to manually change the channel!”) or, for that matter, seeing the effect on their elders of resurrecting nearly forgotten terms like *mullet* and *boom box*. On the whole, however, it's fairly shallow, though a closing suggestion to ask grown-ups for memories or even mementos of the decade may well spark a bit of cozy inter-generational give-and-take. While the children portrayed in the cartoon images are diverse, the stock photos mostly depict White-presenting kids.

**A superficial jaunt through the age of the Rubik's Cube, Cabbage Patch Kids, and the Walkman.** (*Informational early reader. 6-8*)



### FLASHBACK TO THE... FLY '90s! Ready-To-Read Level 2

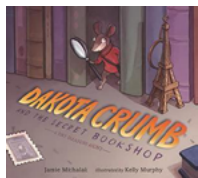
Michaels, Patty  
Illus. by Sarah Rebar  
Simon Spotlight (32 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781665933506  
Series: Flashback

A quick survey of “majorly cool things that helped define the decade.”

Trying for period language as well as trends in fashion, music, fads, and gadgets, Michaels opens with “off the hook” tallies of yesteryear's toys, from Beanie Babies to the Nintendo 64, and goes on to record “dopest” trends in kids' TV viewing (*Teletubbies*, *Barney & Friends*, *The Powerpuff Girls*) and snack food (Funyuns to Dunkaroos) on the way to the rise of the world wide web and AOL. Specific dates are rare, and the focus stays resolutely on North American and Western European culture. Specific historical or cultural events go unmentioned, but young readers will come away with a taste of the era's pop culture. Fashion trends such as cargo pants, bucket hats, choker necklaces,

and butterfly clips and popular hairstyles including pixie cuts, cornrows, and bobs are covered, too. A closing invitation to ask grown-ups what they remember from the decade should also have amusing results. In the mix of stock period photos and Rebar's cartoon illustrations, characters are diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A superfly overview.** *(Informational early reader. 6-8)*



**DAKOTA CRUMB AND THE SECRET BOOKSHOP**  
**A Tiny Treasure Hunt**

*Michalak, Jamie*  
*Illus. by Kelly Murphy*  
Candlewick (32 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781536223309

In this follow-up to *Dakota Crumb* (2021), a request from her cousin Julien sends a mouse investigator to Paris to hunt down a most important book.

As oblique, rhymed hints lead Dakota into a shop called Le Mystère and then through a series of book-filled rooms, Murphy's precisely drawn interiors, festooned with small details, invite readers to follow along and, perhaps, be first to spot the next clue. A clue located on the collar of a sleeping canine "monster" sparks a merry chase, but then a thrilling climb up to a high shelf reveals a small doorway in a volume labeled "Albert Camouse." What's behind the door? A surprise birthday party for Dakota, complete with the gift of a book whose pages are filled with tiny objects (a marshmallow, a sticker, a boomerang) for readers to go back and find in previous scenes! Aside from a glimpse of the Eiffel Tower on the title page, there isn't much to see that is distinctively Parisian in the pictures, but the quest's the thing—and the rewards are in taking close looks at the books, toys, and even delicious-looking pastries (it's *that* sort of bookstore) on display. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**An engaging offering for sharp-eyed young adventurers.** *(Picture book. 5-7)*



**UP FOR GRABS**

*Mulder, Michelle*  
DCB (160 pp.)  
\$14.95 paper | May 16, 2023  
9781770866942

A rootless teenage orphan stumbles upon a family mystery that might redefine her life.

When 13-year-old Frida and her adult brother, Zac, inherit their estranged grandmother's home in Victoria, British Columbia, the two must pause their life of endless international travel and sell off her belongings. Zac digs in without a nostalgic pause, while Frida explores their new locale. She's befriended by high-energy Hazeem, another young summer

visitor, and quickly meets neighborhood fixtures like auctioneer Liz, octogenarian landlord Anna, and Pierre, a longtime family friend who lives on a sailboat docked in the nearby harbor. Frida comes across a painting in a desk drawer with a false bottom. A historical mystery gradually builds—who hid the painting, who might benefit from its discovery, and is Frida in peril for having uncovered it? Though the plot is absorbing, Frida's interior experience is central. As she learns more about her family and their connections to the unearthed art, she begins to find a sense of self in the context of the place and home that her ancestors inhabited. This satisfying tale winds its way through art history and neighborhood intrigue with a reflective, relatable protagonist at its core. Descriptions of characters' race and ethnicity are for the most part minimal; Hazeem is described as Pakistani Canadian.

**A subtle page-turner that captures the youthful search for a tangible concept of home.** *(Fiction. 9-13)*



**BATU AND THE SEARCH FOR THE GOLDEN CUP**

*Nauryzbai, Zira & Lilya Kalaus*  
*Trans. by Shelley Fairweather-Vega*  
Amazon Crossing Kids (318 pp.)  
\$17.99 | June 27, 2023  
9781662507021

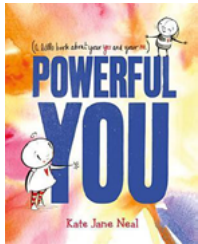
To locate a powerful relic, a group of friends must find allies and confront monsters from Kazakh mythology in this translation from Russian that was a

bestseller in Kazakhstan.

One afternoon, Batu, a regular boy in contemporary Almaty, Kazakhstan, accidentally summons Aspara, a 13-year-old warrior prince from the ancient Saka people who has been dead for 2,000 years. Aspara enlists Batu's help to find the Golden Cup, said to make all those who drink from it "wise, honest, and just." The duo travel across time and space seeking counsel from Samruk, a giant eagle. When they arrive, however, the eagle is missing, as is her nest in the world's tallest tree. Instead, they are attacked by the taloned monster Jeztyrnaq. Their narrow escape reveals the need for reinforcements, and Batu invites his friends to join their efforts. Even then, the group makes little progress in the search for the Golden Cup; just as they start to unravel the mystery of its disappearance, they are sabotaged by Batu's bully, Scorpion, and Scorpion's cruel grandfather. The adventure concludes with an epic battle with evil spirit Shahruh, who manifests as a giant black bear, and many lingering questions to be answered in sequels. Although the twists are predictable and the dialogue leans heavily on repetitive insults, the dramatic battles, plentiful monsters, and fast pacing make this a worthwhile story for readers in search of new worlds.

**A promising series opener that journeys into a thrilling world.** *(glossary, cultural note)* *(Fantasy. 8-12)*





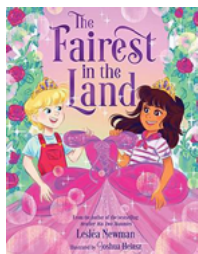
**POWERFUL YOU**

Neal, Kate Jane  
Feiwei & Friends (40 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 13, 2023  
9781250841278

A simple story about the power of two little words.

A round-headed human with skin the white of the page and their anthropomorphic animal friends traverse a world of options opened up by *yes* and *no*. Pops of color, especially present in spread-spanning words like *powerful* and *massive*, illustrate how those two words can help “look...after your heart.” Straightforward text explains that “You can say *yes* to trying new things,” “to making new friends,” and to “help[ing] others,” with the characters dancing and steeling themselves before climbing mountains. Saying *no* is an equally positive response: “**No** can help keep you safe” and establish boundaries, even though “it can take courage to say **no**,” and it might make your “*insides feel wiggly*.” (The only unsafe situation presented involves a ball in the middle of a road.) This tame, spare, and direct read-aloud offers open-ended examples, making it a potentially useful primer for teachers, parents, and caregivers to introduce children to some of the fundamentals of consent. A combination of thick black lines, generous use of white space, and frothy bursts of color work to make this visually appealing as well. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A helpful introduction to *yes* and *no*. (Picture book. 3-7)



**THE FAIREST IN THE LAND**

Newman, Lesléa  
Illus. by Joshua Heinsz  
Abrams (40 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781419757099



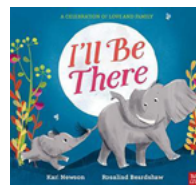
Annabelle and Benjamin love playing dress-up, but they both want to be the

princess.

Benjamin, a light-skinned child with blond hair, always wants to be the bride, ballerina, or princess. His friend Annabelle, who has brown skin and dark brown hair, dutifully dons groom and prince costumes, but she wants to be the princess herself. Benjamin doesn't want to give up his role, but luckily, it turns out there can be more than one princess. The story is told in rhyming verse that gives it a fairy-tale or nursery-rhyme feel, with artwork dominated by twinkling stars and hues of pink and purple. There have been a number of picture books that have told boys it's OK to wear dresses, but this one handles the topic of gender expression with particular nuance and care. Young readers are most likely to notice the messages that sharing and taking turns are important. Yet without directly saying it, Newman also makes clear that it's perfectly fine to be either gender-conforming or gender-nonconforming. The characters' decision

to play as two princesses without a prince distances them from the heteronormative romance narrative that can underlie even gender-nonconforming play. With the appearance of additional, racially diverse friends of varying gender expressions at the end, the book encourages readers to embrace themselves, no matter what that looks like. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A pink and purple sparkling celebration of self-expression. (Picture book. 4-8)



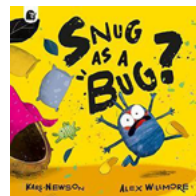
**I'LL BE THERE**

Newson, Karl  
Illus. by Rosalind Beardshaw  
Nosy Crow (32 pp.)  
\$15.99 | May 2, 2023  
9798887770215

Adult animals help their young explore and try new things.

Sweet illustrations of kid-favorite animals like elephants, polar bears, whales, field mice, tigers, and owls demonstrate the encouraging message that adults will always be there to help their young learn, practice, and play. A double-page spread toward the end shows a bedroom scene with a dark-skinned adult holding up a smiling dark-skinned infant; the full moon is visible through the window, and all the animals shown previously can be seen in toy form or in the art on the wall. The last page is an exterior scene that depicts several houses with windows, through which readers can see diverse adults holding their own babies. Simple rhyming text that mostly adheres to an ABCB rhyme scheme flows easily when read aloud, and there are plenty of opportunities to perform sound effects (tooting elephants, squeaking mice, etc.) or just lean into the alliteration (“sing my song”). Both the artwork and the text are adorable, colorful, and encouraging, but the story lacks the humor of some of Newson's other books, like *I Am a Tiger* (2019), illustrated by Ross Collins, and doesn't stand out from similar titles. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Positive messaging and cute illustrations but not much more. (Picture book. 0-3)



**SNUG AS A BUG?**

Newson, Karl  
Illus. by Alex Willmore  
Happy Yak (32 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023  
9780711274860

This bug makes the case for not answering the doorbell.

“I’m as snug as a bug in a rug, I am,” says a bug with pink spots. “There has never been a bug / in **THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD** / so happily snug as me!” When the doorbell rings after the bug has already retired for the night, they grumble but answer it anyway. From there, it's one misadventure after another as a parade of different animals demand their dinner,

## “Triumphant.”

ONYEKA AND THE RISE OF THE REBELS

aka the bug. Our protagonist periodically recites the “I’m as snug as a bug” verse that began the book, hilariously replacing the phrase “in the whole wide world” with their current terrifying situation: “IN A CAVE OF CERTAIN DEATH,” “IN A FOREST OF DOOM.” After narrowly escaping a flight on the back of a bird, a trip down a waterfall, and like perils, will the bug finally be digested in the stomach of a croc? Not likely. “I may be small... / but I’m *mighty!*” And when the doorbell rings again after this adventure? Well, the bug doesn’t have a choice—it’s mom come calling. The hapless bug will entertain readers as they ping-pong from one danger to the next with their fuzzy yellow slippers, bug eyes, antennae, and four arms (always in motion) expressing their every emotion while the predators leer hungrily. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

In this giggle-inducing tale, the Indiana Jones of bugs escapes to sleep another night, snug as a bug. *(Picture book. 3-7)*



### BACK TO THE BRIGHT BEFORE

Nolte, Katherin

Illus. by Jennifer Bricking

Random House (208 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$20.99 PLB | May 30, 2023

9780593565100

9780593565117 PLB

A resourceful girl confronts a greedy foe with courage and an open heart.

A debilitating injury prevents 11-year-old Perpetua’s father from working, forcing

her waitress mother to take double shifts. The cost of yet another surgery is prohibitive, so Pet and her younger brother, Simon (who since their father’s accident says only one word: *cheese*), set off in search of a priceless coin said to have been held by Christ. The coin is rumored to be located somewhere on the 200 acres belonging to a nearby community of nuns, and the only clue to its whereabouts is a rhyme remembered by a neighbor, a woman with an irredeemably wicked and menacing adult son. Pet’s undertaking involves “borrowing” another neighbor’s pony and setting out onto the prairie. Everything becomes more challenging than Pet anticipates. But three individuals, perhaps divine beings, provide her and Simon with food, shelter, healing, and stories. The success of their quest, not expressly religious but with a sense of the divine, turns out to be practical as much as redemptive, and the satisfactory, if not entirely convincing, outcome is welcome. The dark cloud hanging over Pet’s house is offset by her clear-voiced ebullience; she is a funny, determined, and charming narrator. Most characters read White. Final art not seen.

A diverting, warmhearted, unusual fantasy. *(Fantasy. 8-12)*



### CLASS PEST

Ocean, Davy

Illus. by Aaron Blecha

Aladdin (64 pp.)

\$17.99 | May 2, 2023

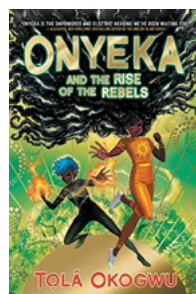
9781534455160

Series: Harvey Hammer, 2

Can an easily distracted young shark learn responsibility?

This second installment in the series, a spinoff from the Shark School books, opens with Harvey Hammer getting in trouble for drawing superheroes instead of listening in class. His teacher, attempting to teach him some responsibility, tasks him with caring for the class parrotfish for the weekend—though Harvey already has plans: attending his friend Flash’s party. Not only that, pets aren’t allowed in his already too-loud household. Of course Pirate the parrotfish is discovered, and though Harvey tries to put a positive spin on the situation, Pirate parrots the teacher’s words, making it clear that the weekend of pet care is a punishment for bad behavior rather than a special prize. Just as eager to teach Harvey responsibility, his parents tell him he may attend the party—if he takes Pirate. A list of characters, a glossary with pronunciation help, and reading questions help ensure comprehension. Shorter than the Shark School books, with brief chapters and a large font, this fast-moving tale reproduces many aspects of the formula that made Shark School a success, like so-bad-they’re-good puns and sibling bickering, but eliminates some, like the illustration on every spread. The wacky, black-and-white cartoons that do enliven the pages are appealing, focusing on the faces of the anthropomorphized sea creatures. It’s familiar fare, but Harvey’s predicament will strike a chord with youngsters.

Predictable but relatable, this short adventure should lure developing readers. *(Chapter book. 5-8)*



### ONYEKA AND THE RISE OF THE REBELS

Okogwu, Tolá

McElderry (288 pp.)

\$17.99 | May 30, 2023

9781665912648

Series: Onyeka, 2

A superpowered British Nigerian girl fights to find her parents and save her schoolmates.

After narrowly escaping capture by her foe Dr. Dòyinbó, head teacher at the Academy of the Sun, her boarding school in Nigeria, Onyeka, her Aunt Naomi, and her fellow superhuman Solari friends Adanna, Niyi, and Hassan are hiding in a safe house and struggling to plan their next move. Now that Onyeka has had time to reflect, she cannot escape feeling burdened by guilt for having trusted Dr. Dòyinbó. She and her friends are now considered enemies of their school, her

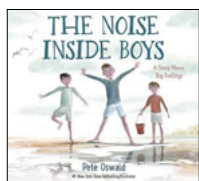


“An honest yet uplifting and deeply empathetic child’s-eye view of houselessness.”

THE BRIGHT SIDE

parents are missing, and Niyi has lost his Ike, or power, maybe for good. Without any of their former classmates around to help, they turn to the Rogues, fellow Solari who resist Dr. Dòyìnbó’s plan to take over Nigeria with his brainwashed student army. But the Rogues are not easy to find—nor are they quick to trust Onyeka. With the odds stacked against her, will Onyeka be able to stop Dr. Dòyìnbó before his plans come to fruition? Okogwu knocks it out of the park with this highly anticipated sequel to *Onyeka and the Academy of the Sun* (2022). As Onyeka prepares to face Dr. Dòyìnbó, her internal turmoil comes to the surface, adding emotional depth and texture to this thrilling adventure that wraps up with a satisfying ending.

**Triumphant.** (*Fantasy*. 9-13)



**THE NOISE INSIDE BOYS  
A Story About Big Feelings**

Oswald, Pete

Random House Studio (40 pp.)

\$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | May 2, 2023

9780593483220

9780593483237 PLB

Amid the hubbub of boisterous play, can a young boy learn to listen to the “noise inside” him?

Three brothers spend an exuberant day at the beach, leaping, running, and playing soccer. When the ball careens into the red-shirted boy’s sand castle, the fun and games end abruptly. Overcome with emotion, the child storms off. Back at home, the narrative takes on the voice of the still-hurting protagonist’s sympathetic dad: “Take a beat. This moment won’t last. / Breathe in, breathe out. Let the noises pass.” Gentle rhymes speak to the wide range of feelings the child is capable of: happiness, loneliness, fear, anxiety, jealousy, anger, grief. The parent’s message is to “Listen to your emotions—learn how to name them. / Then you’ll know better how to explain them.” Oswald’s watercolor, gouache, acrylic, and digital illustrations use engaging color and texture to highlight various emotions; the family members have light skin, short hair, and slim builds. While the emphasis on men encouraging boys to identify their feelings is important, the story doesn’t offer further strategies for how to process big feelings. In an increasing field of picture books on emotional literacy, other options deal more deftly with this subject. Backmatter includes a visual glossary of 20 emotions, depicted by humans of different skin tones, hair textures, and genders. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**This book on boys’ emotional lives will resonate with some but falls a little flat in its scope.** (*Picture book*. 4-8)



**REINA RAMOS MEETS  
A BIG PUPPY**

Otbeguy, Emma

Illus. by Andrés Landazábal

Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | May 30, 2023

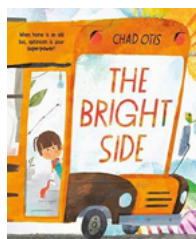
9780063223158

Series: I Can Read!

Spunky Latine protagonist Reina Ramos is back, and this time she has a big furry problem.

Reina and her friend Lila love to practice gymnastics at the park, and they both adore their neighbor Ms. Carol’s tiny and adorable dog, Gala. Later, at school, Lila shares the news that she’ll be getting her own dog soon, and Reina can’t wait to meet the new pup. Reina is startled to discover, however, that Lila’s new dog isn’t small like Ms. Carol’s—Chico is huge, with a loud bark and sharp teeth. Reina avoids Chico—and Lila—as much as possible and focuses instead on perfecting her cartwheel, though it’s lonely without her friend. No longer able to hide her fear from Lila, Reina admits she’s uneasy around Lila’s big dog, and the two have a heart-to-heart. Lila is understanding and supportive of her friend, and the girls are able to happily resume their carefree park gymnastics play with a well-behaved Chico as their audience. Accompanied by charming illustrations of big-eyed, expressive characters, this is a simple yet encouraging tale with a wonderful message about friendship and fears. Easy-to-decode sentences with potentially new vocabulary words, as well as a handful of unitalicized Spanish words sprinkled in, are ideal for developing readers. Reina and her mom have brown skin and curly brown hair; Lila and her dad present Black.

**A sweet friendship story that reassures kids that it’s OK to be scared.** (*Spanish glossary*) (*Early reader*. 4-7)



**THE BRIGHT SIDE**

Otis, Chad

Rocky Pond Books/Penguin

(40 pp.)

\$18.99 | Feb. 21, 2023

9780593530627



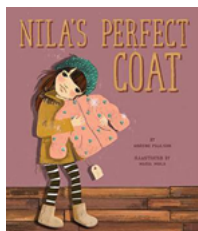
An unhoused child finds a way to fit in.

The unnamed narrator and their family “live in an old school bus...until we can get a normal house again.” Mom and Dad valiantly try to get the child to “look on the bright side”—cold nights in an unheated vehicle become “family snuggle time,” being hosed down for lack of better plumbing becomes bathing “in the ‘great outdoors,’” and not being able to afford a new toy becomes an opportunity for arts and crafts. Enrolled in “a real school,” presumably with classmates whose existences are less precarious, the narrator struggles to understand rules both academic and social. The child is excluded (but not bullied) until skills born from necessity save the class’s about-to-be-canceled pizza party in



a satisfying conclusion. In general, first-person, present-tense narration can be distancing, but overall the story deftly walks a tricky tightrope. The author, whose experiences mirror the character's, honestly acknowledges the physical and emotional difficulties of the family's situation while still leaving room for joy and avoids evoking feelings of pity by granting full agency to the sympathetic lead. The art is blocky and simple, with great use of repetition and subtle but powerful facial expressions. Mom, Dad, and the protagonist are tan-skinned; the class is diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**An honest yet uplifting and deeply empathetic child's-eye view of houselessness.** *(Picture book. 5-8)*



**NILA'S PERFECT COAT**

*Paulson, Norene*  
*Illus. by Maria Mola*  
 Beaming Books (32 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | Feb. 7, 2023  
 9781506485812

Everyone needs a good coat. Nila loves "treasure hunting" at thrift stores with her mom. One day she finds the best coat—it's pink with green hearts and has a perfectly gliding zipper. But last year's coat still fits, so her mom tells her to put it back—though she tells Nila that she and her father can make the final decision. The next morning, Nila rushes for the school bus before her mom can remind her to grab her old coat. Nila notices that Lily doesn't have a coat either. During recess, both girls are told to stay inside since it's so cold. Nila asks Lily to play, but Lily seems distant. Nila spends the following weekend with her dad and buys the much-covered coat. But when she sees a "for sale" sign by Lily's house and her dad tells her that Lily's family is "going through a hard time," Nila considers her two coats—and makes a decision that allows everyone to go out for recess. With a lesson of putting other's needs before one's own desires, Paulson's narrative is community-focused and stresses the importance of charity in a supportive—but never patronizing—way. Mola's painterly and rustic-looking art fits the "thrifed" theme of the story. Nila, her parents, and Lily are light-skinned; the cast is diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A warmhearted tribute to the spirit of altruism. (information on the nonprofit One Warm Coat and how to hold a coat drive)** *(Picture book. 4-8)*



**WHY ARE WE AFRAID?**

*Pintadera, Fran*  
*Illus. by Ana Sender*  
*Trans. by Mibaila Petričić*  
 Kids Can (34 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9781525311291



After the electricity cuts off during a thunderstorm, a pajama-clad father and son discuss fears by candlelight.

As this Spanish import opens, Max asks his dad if he has ever been afraid. Dad explains that fear is universal—and he acknowledges how quickly it can arise. Instantly the home is filled with black ovals of different sizes. As Dad describes various types of fears, Max vividly conjures up visuals. There is fear of the unknown, depicted as a maze of trees, and loneliness, paired with an image of a huddled Max looking at a group of partygoers. There are times when people are afraid "because the **real monsters** aren't under the bed after all." Planes drop black ovals over a city, causing smoke to billow. Pintadera, Sender, and Petričić explored the complexities of another emotion in *Why Do We Cry?* (2020); they are equally effective in developing a nuanced approach to this topic, even suggesting that "Often we're afraid of **freedom**." Max is not consumed by this conversation. When the streetlights come on, he wants to linger in semidarkness, because "It's the perfect night for **telling stories**." Scary ones. With its surreal imagery, the stylized, arresting artwork evokes fear yet also hope in the face of terror. Max and Dad are both brown-skinned. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A safe space to examine a powerful, often overwhelming feeling.** *(Picture book. 4-8)*



**FAIRIES DON'T FIGHT  
 A Sprightly Sibling Story**

*Pippin-Mathur; Courtney*  
 Sky Pony Press (32 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9781510775763

Fairy siblings spar but eventually make up. Though they were born inside a single flower, brown-skinned sisters Piper and Nissa are as different as can be. Piper is active, ebullient, and loud; Nissa is quiet, artistic, and introverted. Nissa makes dainty dresses and collects mineral gems; Piper chases fireflies. When Piper politely asks to borrow some of Nissa's things, Nissa hesitates but duly concludes that "fairies should always share." Belatedly she discovers that Piper has made a mess out of Nissa's belongings—including her favorite book. An unseen narrator repeatedly stresses that "fairies never fight," but nevertheless a brawl breaks out as others watch, appalled. After "tiny tempers cool," Piper makes a new book (apparently not in her prior dribbly drip-painting style) showing the siblings "doing all their favorite activities, together and separately" and presents it to Nissa. It seems that fairies don't say sorry...and that a beloved book can simply be replaced by a different one. Words like *harmony*, *tranquility*, and *tousled* might need explanation. The hard black outlines that edge the flowers, leaves, trees, birds, and fairies are somewhat at odds with the delicate subjects. All the fairies have full arms and hands but stick legs and feet; most wear dresses and have brown skin (one is lighter-skinned). The psychedelic pink and purple colors are strident, and the tiny typeface rules out reading to a group. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A far too easily resolved tale of sisterly woes.** *(Picture book. 3-6)*



**SEJAL SINHA BATTLES SUPERSTORMS**

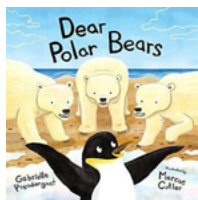
Prasad, Maya  
Illus. by Abira Das  
Aladdin (128 pp.)  
\$17.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781665911788  
Series: Sejal Sinha, 1

When a hurricane threatens to ruin Diwali, teamwork—and a little bit of magic—is all a young Indian girl needs to

save the day.

It's Diwali, and Sejal, 8, can't wait to draw rangoli, light sparklers, and devour a traditional Indian feast with her family, including her younger brother, Abu, her older cousin Mira, and her dog, Fluff Monster. But then a hurricane threatens to put a damper on the festivities. Determined to save the day, Sejal gathers up Professor Cheetah, her "best stuffie friend," and hops into her cardboard box, which, with a little bit of magic, transforms into a "hurricane-hunting aircraft." She's soon joined by a frantic Abu, an enthusiastic Fluff Monster, and a reluctant Mira, who no longer believes in cardboard-box magic. It isn't until the team meets a group of scientists in the center of the storm that Mira admits that magic is just as real as science—and that some jobs require a degree of imagination that only children possess. Prasad layers the narrative with internal and external conflicts, investing just as much importance in Sejal's determination to salvage her relationship with her cousin as she does in the children's mission to save Diwali. At its best, Sejal's narratorial voice crackles with intelligence and perseverance; at times, however, the language is a bit clunky. Overall, though, the book is a well-plotted, entertaining story about science, tradition, creative thinking, and growing up.

**An absorbing read that balances lessons about friendship and science. (Fiction. 7-10)**



**DEAR POLAR BEARS**

Prendergast, Gabrielle  
Illus. by Marcus Cutler  
Orca (32 pp.)  
\$21.95 | Feb. 14, 2023  
9781459833005

Polar bears wouldn't think of missing a party—even if it's at the far end of the

world.

No sooner do written invitations from the penguins arrive in Alaska, Nunavut, Siberia, and Norway than the polar bears pack their suitcases, hug loved ones goodbye, and set out on the long journey to Antarctica. Pausing along the way to get directions from passersby and marvel at wonders like the Egyptian pyramids and Machu Picchu, the bears wash up at last on a rocky shore (it's been "a little warmer than usual," as the invitation notes) where their feathered hosts await with a large pile of fish for noshes. Cutler expands on Prendergast's spare text with

wordless scenes, some inset like postcards, to illustrate both the trip and the preparations—culminating in a get-together that, aside from one furry guest who plainly regards the penguins themselves as party food, is altogether amicable. The author explains at the end that, of course, living at opposite latitudes, the two animals never actually meet in the wild...and also that both are threatened by habitat loss. Human figures met along the way are racially diverse, and one friendly city dweller wears a hijab. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

**Lighthearted fun for all (except perhaps that one penguin going down the hatch), with some solid underlying messages. (Picture book. 5-7)**



**TEGAN AND SARA Junior High**

Quin, Tegan & Sara Quin  
Illus. by Tillie Walden  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (304 pp.)  
\$14.99 paper | May 30, 2023  
9780374313029  
Series: Tegan and Sara, 1

The high and lows of preteens navigating school and life, inspired by the Quin sibling pop duo's actual childhoods.

Identical twin sisters Tegan and Sara have moved and are entering a new junior high in Calgary where they'll be in different classes, making everything even more intimidating. They navigate a slew of awkward, messy moments—making new friends and keeping faraway ones, getting their first bras and first periods, crushing on cute classmates, trying to be cool but still appreciating dorky parents, and living separate lives while trying to remain close to each other. Eventually they find their stepfather's guitar in the garage, and making music together not only mends some rifts in their relationship, but begins a meaningful, far-reaching creative journey. The setting has been updated for modern audiences and includes cellphones and Taylor Swift references. The narrative switches between depictions of the characters going through real life (drawn in purple tones) and interludes in which the twins, color-coded with light blue for Tegan and pale maroon for Sara, share their innermost thoughts, feelings, and reflections with readers. The story is sweet, focusing on the all-important relationships of tween life. Walden's illustrations are, as usual, wonderfully expressive. They transition smoothly from busier scenes to quieter ones along the story's emotional beats. The White twins' circle of friends includes queer kids and people of color.

**Tugs at the heartstrings like a well-tuned guitar. (authors' note) (Graphic fiction. 9-13)**

“When you gotta go, you gotta go...and read this comical, all-too-relatable tale of a potty mishap.”

THE BOY WHO CRIED POOP



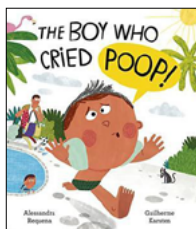
**HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS  
A Bear's Guide**

*Rabbit, Cat*  
Berbay Publishing (36 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023  
9781922610560

How do you make friends?

Bear doesn't have friends other than her toys, but she would like some, specifically Lamb and Koala. But she's forgotten the most basic friendship rule: Be yourself. Instead, Bear creates a "How To Make Friends" list ("follow them everywhere," "dress to impress," "bake treats"). But Bear gets out of breath while jogging behind Koala and Lamb, and she scares them when she puts on "her best, most spectacular outfit." Finally, she bakes a cake. Who doesn't like cake? Unfortunately, Koala and Lamb eat only green things. Bear gives up and grabs toys and a sketchbook to go draw in the park. She's so wrapped up that she doesn't notice Koala and Lamb jogging past. They notice her, though, and join in for a drawing party. Soon, the three are friends. Note, too, that this trio successfully navigates the "dangers of three" and contentedly finds things that they like to do in pairs. "Lamb and Bear practice recorder. (Koala doesn't like the noise.)" "Lamb and Koala learn routines from their favorite musicals. Bear prefers opera." The author/illustrator is a textile artist who has created characters and physical objects from felt and fabric, set against simple backgrounds with cardboard cutout details—the result is a quirky, winsome tale that provides a solid example of how to make friends. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A friendship tale that stands out for its unusual visuals and modeling of a flexible, supportive threesome. *(Picture book. 4-7)*



**THE BOY WHO CRIED POOP**

*Reguena, Alessandra*  
*Illus. by Guilberme Karsten*  
Frances Lincoln (40 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023  
9780711288294

Oops—or, rather, poops! Accidents happen.

It's the first day of vacation, and savvy Dad asks if the nameless narrator or their younger brother, Marc, needs to use the bathroom before they head to the pool. "NO!" Bidding farewell to Mom and other family members, they descend "exactly 168 steps." No sooner do the kids jump into the empty pool than Marc announces that he desperately needs to go No. 2. Marching back upstairs, the family runs into assorted neighbors. However, when Marc sits on the pot, he can't deliver the goods, so they return downstairs. This frenetic scenario repeats itself. But when they make it downstairs a third time, Dad's too pooped to make another trek when Marc moans that he really has to go, then finally does—right in the water. What could have been an eww moment becomes a surprisingly reassuring one when a few folks—big sibling plus

those encountered on the staircase during the family's several journeys—confide their own poop-your-pants experiences. Marc is relieved to learn that "everyone poops their pants sometimes." (Readers will feel similarly.) This take on a perennially popular topic will grab children's attention and promote empathy. The colorful digital illustrations are humorously energetic; characters are very expressive. Dad, Mom, Marc, and the narrator are brown-skinned; the supporting cast is racially diverse. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

When you gotta go, you gotta go...and read this comical, all-too-relatable tale of a potty mishap. *(Picture book. 4-7)*



**OH NO, THE AUNTS  
ARE HERE**

*Rex, Adam*  
*Illus. by Lian Cho*  
Chronicle Books (40 pp.)  
\$16.99 | May 23, 2023  
978-1-79720-794-0



Oh no, here they come!

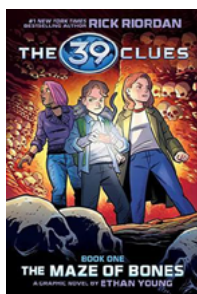
A small brown-skinned child braces as four of their aunts (two are brown-skinned, one presents as Asian, and one is light-skinned) cheerfully burst through the front door. Soon, the child is overwhelmed with hugs, pinched cheeks, the smell of coconut, and rapid-fire questions. To the dismay of the child, the aunts are here, they're there, they're everywhere! But as the adventure takes a more fantastical turn, the aunts become fiercely protective, fighting a wolf ("They read an article about this") before reassuring the child in a loving embrace. Then, just as the child warms up to their presence, they leave in a fashion as dramatic as their entrance. Armed with sun visors, hand sanitizer, and fanny packs, the aunts have undeniable charm—it's hard to not be swept away by their shenanigans. The pacing and rhythm of the text make it a joy to read aloud, with streams of repeating lines, occasional rhymes ("Fanny packs. A snack. Pack that snack back in the fanny pack"), and varied use of fonts contributing to the hilariously over-the-top energy of the aunts. Cho's vibrant illustrations and mastery of perspective perfectly capture the eccentricities and exuberance of each aunt, contrasting the child's concerned expressions to humorous effect. Keen-eyed readers will delight in finding clues in the illustrations that foreshadow what's to come. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A gleefully fun take on the loving chaos of family reunions. *(Picture book. 4-8)*



“The *Outsiders* meets *Hatchet* in this story that follows Raymond’s ordeal to both survive in the winter woods of North Carolina and attend middle school without anyone finding out how he lives.”

HOW TO STAY INVISIBLE



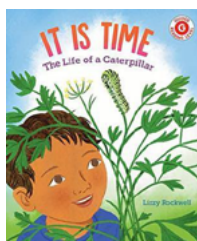
**THE MAZE OF BONES  
A Graphic Novel**

*Riordan, Rick*  
Adapt. by *Ethan Young*  
Illus. by the adapter  
Colors by *George Williams*  
Graphix/Scholastic (192 pp.)  
\$24.99 | \$12.99 paper | April 4, 2023  
9781338803372  
9781338803365 paper  
Series: 39 Clues—Graphic Novel, 1

The wildly popular 39 Clues series is adapted into graphic-novel format.

Orphans Amy Cahill and her younger brother, Dan, attend their grandmother’s funeral and learn that not only is the Cahill family tree larger than they knew, but that Grandma left each of them a most unusual inheritance. They may opt for \$1 million or a clue leading to “the most important treasure in the world.” Some relatives take the money, but the rest choose the clue—including Amy and Dan. Tensions ramp up as family members pursue and threaten one another in the search for leads. Though the siblings aren’t as financially well off as many of their opponents, they have skills that give them an edge—Amy is a bookworm with a love of history, while Dan is a whiz with numbers and puzzles. The story remains faithful to the original 2008 book, with added smartphone appearances and a few scenes tightened up. The artwork captures the danger and excitement of the international quest, including locales such as Philadelphia and Paris. Backmatter includes an invitation to download Scholastic’s Home Base app so readers can be sorted into a branch of the Cahill family and play interactive games. Amy and Dan read *White*, while their au pair and adult chaperone, Nellie, is cued as *Latine*; the rest of the Cahill clan is racially diverse.

**Wits and history expertise trump money and influence in this entertaining, globe-hopping remake.** (*Graphic fiction. 8-12*)



**IT IS TIME  
The Life of a Caterpillar**

*Rockwell, Lizzy*  
Holiday House (32 pp.)  
\$15.99 | May 9, 2023  
9780823450794  
Series: I Like To Read

A butterfly’s life, for early readers.

A small, brown-skinned, brown-haired child watches as a caterpillar grows, pupates, and emerges as a black swallowtail butterfly. (This species, identified on the dedication page, is familiar across much of the continent east of the Rocky Mountains.) What’s striking about this book is its careful accuracy in words and pictures. The title page shows five stages of the butterfly’s life, from egg through several morphs to the final image of a female adult near a dill plant, a food commonly eaten by swallowtail caterpillars. Inside, readers see the tiny egg and then the emerging caterpillar on parsley leaves, another food it often eats. Brief text, rendered in a large font, clearly charts the insect’s

journey. Attractive, uncluttered illustrations include the frass and the shed skin the caterpillar leaves behind as she eats and grows. Two spreads show her defending herself from an avian predator. She sheds and pupates. The child discovers her pupa. (Appropriately, Rockwell has used the simpler term rather than *chrysalis*.) The little one watches through sun and rain and is rewarded by the sight of the butterfly emerging, stretching her wings, and flying off.

**Concise text and thoughtful illustrations document a remarkable transformation, another of nature’s wonders.** (*Life cycle diagram*) (*Informational early reader. 4-7*)



**HOW TO STAY  
INVISIBLE**

*Rudd, Maggie C.*  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (240 pp.)  
\$17.99 | June 27, 2023  
9780374390334



When 12-year-old Raymond’s parents abandon him, he takes to the woods to survive.

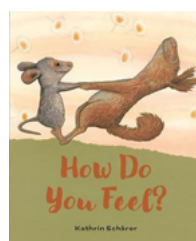
*The Outsiders* meets *Hatchet* in this story that follows Raymond’s ordeal to both survive in the winter woods of North Carolina and attend middle school without anyone finding out how he lives. Trying to balance keeping up his grades with living in a hollow, overturned tree with his dog, Rosie, existing on fish he catches and food he scavenges from the dumpster outside his school, Raymond stoically accepts his reality even as he wishes for parents who cared for him. The narrative poignancy of Raymond’s being cold, hungry, and doing homework by the light of a fire is grounded by descriptions of creative survival techniques: how to catch minnows using a plastic water bottle, how to make fire with a battery and foil gum wrappers, and how to build a lean-to with branches. Completely devoid of cheap drama, this tightly written, understated narrative tells its story through finely drawn characters, intensely realistic atmosphere and setting, and a protagonist who will capture readers’ hearts with both his courage and his creative survival skills. All secondary characters—irrepressible NASCAR-loving classmate Harlin; red-haired love interest Lexi; emotionally torn old man Stigs, who offers friendship; and the teachers, both callous and obtuse—are drawn with originality and verve. Characters read default *White*.

**An exceptional story of courage.** (*Fiction. 8-12*)



**HOW DO YOU FEEL?**

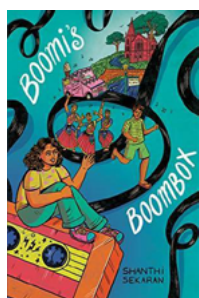
*Schärer, Katrin*  
Kane Miller (64 pp.)  
\$15.99 | May 1, 2023  
9781684646975



Animals experience all the feels. Using concise, repetitive wording, this striking book covers a range of sentiments, from simple (“feeling safe”) to complex

(“feeling connected”). A quizzical, large-eyed lemur is “curious”; alone in a nighttime forest, a small bear clutching a lovey is “anxious.” Against a background of daisies, a squirrel, eyes blissfully shut, holds paws with a smiling mouse, both indubitably “feeling happy.” A similar squirrel is “feeling guilty” for not sharing. We don’t know what irked them, but three defiant iguanas are clearly “offended.” Cleverly, a long, “impatient” line forms behind an elephant at an ice-cream stand; on the next page the viewpoint rotates 180 degrees so we can look over the fox vendor’s shoulder at the “undecided” pachyderm. In the most dramatic close-up, a golden-eyed owl is magisterially “annoyed.” Some words will be easily recognizable by little ones, like *sad*, *scared*, *alone*, or *shy*; to illustrate this last one, a baby bear presses against a trusted grown-up as a looming hippo tries to say hello. More difficult words are included, too; young children surely might feel but be unable to name *anticipation* and *apprehensive*. Among the other emotions covered are “contented,” “bored,” “triumphant,” “queasy,” “comforted,” “brave,” “unique,” “playful,” “protected,” “excluded,” “furious,” “touched,” “sick,” and “everything.” The brilliant, evocative woodcutlike illustrations are wonderfully expressive—these spreads would look beautiful as wall art. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A delightful guide to essential feelings.** (*Picture book. 3-6*)



**BOOMI'S BOOMBOX**

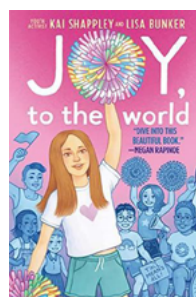
*Sekaran, Shanthi*  
 Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (272 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 23, 2023  
 9780063051584

A grieving Indian American girl finds healing through time travel.

Boomi Gopalan has had a terrible year. The 12-year-old ballet dancer lives in San Francisco with her mother and Paati, her paternal grandmother who has dementia.

Boomi's doctor father died of Covid-19 last year, and it's thrown her off balance. When his friend gives Boomi her dad's old boombox that contains a mixtape, insisting that he wanted her to have it, she finds a note he wrote tucked inside reading, “you can change your life.” By playing the cassette, Boomi travels back in time to 1986 and her father's North of England hometown of Thumpton-on-Soar, where she meets him as a boy her own age. When an accident in the past threatens to change the future, Boomi must reach across the timelines to find a solution. Along the way, she tries to understand her loss and find her true self. The book tackles complex issues, including body image, as both Boomi's mother and ballet teacher make negative comments about her weight; complicated friendships; and racism and xenophobia, explored in 1980s England in ways that parallel Boomi's present-day awakening. Sekaran keeps all the plates spinning at a fast pace. The characters are vividly portrayed, including Boomi's father, his rebellious older sister, and vibrant and wise Paati. Bharatanatyam, an Indian classical dance that is rich in beauty and symbolism, becomes a link between grandmother and granddaughter and a way for Boomi to honor herself.

**A warm and empowering story.** (*Fiction. 8-12*)



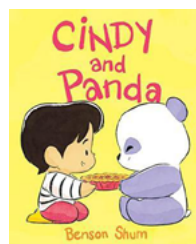
**JOY, TO THE WORLD**

*Shappley, Kai & Lisa Bunker*  
*Illus. by Noab Grigni*  
 Clarion/HarperCollins (240 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 9, 2023  
 9780063242753

Twelve-year-old Joy fights harsh opposition to her cheerleading in this collaboration between trans child activist Shappley and middle-grade author Bunker.

When her best friend, Max, introduces Joy to cheer, she falls in love with the sport. The two get together with another girl, Steph, calling themselves the Sparkle Squad. They plan to practice their cheer routines before tryouts when seventh grade starts. All three girls do make the team, and despite their heavy workload and high academic expectations, Joy loves it—until someone outs her as transgender and she's banned from the team in accordance with a Texas law limiting participation based on sex assigned at birth. Joy is also required to use the school nurse's bathroom, and Steph turns hostile. But Max stands by her side, kicking Steph out of the Sparkle Squad, and they're joined by a mix of supportive cheer team members and kids who feel excluded. When a bill threatening families with trans kids is put before the Texas Senate, Joy, inspired by watching real-world activist Shappley's Senate testimony, decides the Sparkle Squad is ready to cheer in support of trans rights. Joy is a fundamentally resilient character with an unconditionally supportive mom and the enviable quality of resilience, bouncing back after each obstacle and defeat. Her attitude and proactive nature keep the narrative upbeat while never undermining the serious nature of the issues raised. Main characters read White. Final art not seen.

**A vibrant battle cry for rainbow kids.** (*advice for activists, song list*) (*Fiction. 8-12*)



**CINDY AND PANDA**

*Shum, Benson*  
 Clarion/HarperCollins (40 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | May 9, 2023  
 9780063248182

Baking with a panda! What could go wrong?

Young Cindy sets off to the garden for ingredients to make sweet rhubarb pie—her favorite—but returns with something even sweeter: a panda friend! After convincing her mother that she can be responsible for the panda, Cindy shows her lovable new sous-chef the basics of pie-making. First, of course, they must play dress-up, have a tea party, and climb some trees. After all, “playing is a very important part of pie preparation.” Next, Cindy shows Panda how to measure ingredients, carefully pour them in...then throw out the recipe book and “freestyle!” But just as they are ready to add their final ingredient, conflict arises and

feelings sour. There's nothing that the power of friendship and blueberry pie can't fix, though! Shum's chibi-style characters with their adorably plump proportions, squishable cheeks, and exaggerated expressions add undeniable charm and a touch of humor to the story. The endpapers depict scenes of Cindy developing a sense of independence along with cute moments with her mother and Panda, adding depth to the characters and their relationships. This endearing, relatable tale will especially speak to caregivers of children taking their first steps toward self-reliance. The story is finished off with a recipe for blueberry pie (which Cindy and Panda end up making). Cindy and her mother appear to be of East Asian descent. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A simple tale of friendship that's as sweet as pie.** *(Picture book. 3-7)*



**PRIDE AND JOY  
A Story About Becoming an  
LGBTQIA+ Ally**

*Sileo, Frank J. & Kate Lum-Potvin*

*Illus. by Emmi Smid*

Jessica Kingsley Publishers (48 pp.)

\$17.95 | May 18, 2023

9781839975264

A child learns about being an ally.

Joy can't wait for big brother Noah to get home so they can bake cookies. But when Noah and his boyfriend, Miguel, arrive, their neighbor Jimmy and his friends bully them for being gay. Joy is upset but finds standing up to the bigger kids scary. That night, Mom explains what it means to be an ally and how Joy can make a difference. With help from Mom, Dad, and friends, Joy holds a bake sale to raise money for Noah and Miguel's Teen Center; the cookies they bake incorporate the colors of the progress pride flag. When Jimmy shows up again to sneer ("Nobody wants your gross cookies and your gay flags!!"), Joy finally summons the courage to stand up to him. With smudgy, expressive artwork in a rainbow-hued palette and clear, simple sentences, this engaging book highlights the challenges of being an ally without downplaying the fear or uncertainty of speaking out against queerphobic bullies. Joy and Noah appear to be biracial; their mother presents Asian, while their father reads White. Miguel is brown-skinned; Jimmy is light-skinned. The diversity of the cast and a foreword from actor Vanessa Williams lend weight to the idea that everybody belongs, and though told from Joy's perspective, the tale centers Noah's and Miguel's needs and feelings, driving home what it truly means to be an ally. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A sweet and inspiring guide for young LGBTQIA+ allies.** *("note to grown up allies," discussion questions)* *(Picture book. 3-7)*



**GRANNY LEFT ME  
A ROCKET SHIP**

*Smith, Heather*

*Illus. by Ashley Barron*

Kids Can (32 pp.)

\$19.99 | June 6, 2023

9781525305528

A child copes with the death of their grandmother.

The young, unnamed narrator returns with their family to their late grandmother's home and explains that her passing left "a hole in our family" but that her memory lives on. Granny left the child's father a tuba, their mother a locket, their brother all of her records, and their sister a microscope. The child lists the many things Granny left them—a tent, a knight's sword, the titular rocket ship, and much more. Straddling the line between fantasy and reality, cut-paper collage, watercolor, and pencil crayon illustrations depict Granny and the little one camping out in the living room, riding toy ponies, scaling mountains made of ice cream, and encountering sea monsters. Granny's blue cane can be seen throughout—it's the broomstick they ride and the flagpole they plant on the mountain. The simple text and lush pictures form an ideal combination, making this a wonderful resource to start a conversation about grief and the importance of preserving our memories of deceased loved ones. Some readers may not immediately notice the blue cane's unifying presence; still, this vibrant tale's insistence on sitting with conflicting feelings of joy and sadness is welcome. The child and their siblings are various shades of tan, Granny and one parent are brown-skinned, and the other parent is light-skinned. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A gentle, thoughtful, age-appropriate guide to loss.** *(Picture book. 2-7)*



**THE WEIRD SISTERS  
A Robin, a Ribbon, and a  
Lawn Mower**

*Smith, Mark David*

*Illus. by Kari Rust*

Owlkids Books (96 pp.)

\$16.95 | April 18, 2023

9781771474597

Series: Weird Sisters Detective Agency, 2

Three outcast sisters solve crimes.

Hildegurp, Yuckmina, and Glubbifer are perhaps the most unusual residents of the town of Covenly. Lacking a car, they travel by broom, and they run a pet emporium and a detective agency out of their home. Sadly, their neighbors are too spooked to visit—except for young Jessica Nibley. The sisters are depressed by their lack of business, while Jessica is at loose ends with school out for the summer. When Jessica, attempting to elevate everyone's mood, takes them to the tire swing, they're shocked to see the swing's rope has been cut. In addition to using their Eye (a crystal ball attached to an old stick) to investigate and going undercover, they look into the case of a missing



## “A heartfelt, beautiful tale of finding home.”

MARIBEL'S YEAR

robin. Mishaps—and hilarity—ensue. Puns, charmingly eccentric characters, and Amelia Bedelia-esque misunderstandings on the parts of the well-meaning but clueless sisters (“Robin!” “We are not robbing”) result in an amusing book for readers transitioning into longer chapter books. Enticing black-and-white illustrations capture the spirit of this quirky tale. The mystery is simple but just right for the target audience. Readers will be left with wise guidance on the importance of self-confidence. The book ends with a recipe for seed cakes for robins. Race and ethnicity are generally left ambiguous in both text and artwork.

**Punny, whimsical fun.** (Fiction. 6-9)



### MARIBEL'S YEAR

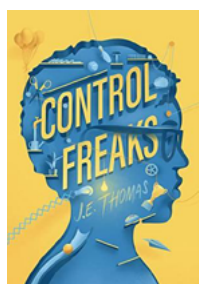
Sterling, Michelle  
 Illus. by Sarah Gonzales  
 Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (40 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 9, 2023  
 9780063114357



A young immigrant explores the seasons while awaiting a sweet reunion.

Told in verse, this tale opens with Maribel and Mama traversing a snowy landscape in January, taking in their “First steps, / first snow” in a “New country, / new home.” The sunny flashback that follows reveals that the child misses their home in the Philippines, with “fresh carabao milk... / And friends and family / dropping in for merienda.” The pages are labeled by month, with February showing a frustrated Maribel in school trying to figure out how to spell words in English, but the child sees a glimmer of hope: a potential new best friend. In March, “Gray shivers / and rain” are countered by the memory of a family trip to Batan Island under a starry sky. Throughout the year, Maribel reflects on fond remembrances of Papa while adjusting to a new life; pieces of mail exchanged reveal that he has yet to journey from Makati to join them. The lyrical narrative is paired with Gonzales’ gorgeous illustrations, an artful blend of hues and shadows that bring warmth and depth to each page. Characters are surrounded by eye-popping swirls of colors and lush, textured landscapes. As the seasons pass, new holidays mixed with Filipino traditions take root. Christmas marks a return to “cold cheeks, / crisp noses”—and Papa’s arrival. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A heartfelt, beautiful tale of finding home.** (Picture book. 5-8)



### CONTROL FREAKS

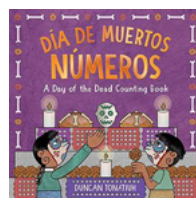
Thomas, J.E.  
 Levine Querido (272 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | June 13, 2023  
 9781646143054

Family, friends, and middle school are tough in ways this book intuitively gets and even celebrates.

At elite Benjamin Banneker College Prep in Denver, a new weeklong STEAMS competition—that is, science, technology,

engineering, arts, mathematics, and sports—requires collaboration among teams of sixth through eighth graders. For Black seventh grader Frederick Douglass Zezzmer, losing is not even an option. His former professional football player dad has recently come back into his life with big sports-centric expectations for Doug. However, Doug intends to become the “World’s Greatest Inventor,” avoid summer sports camp, and legitimize his talents in his dad’s eyes. His nervous but optimistic best friend, Huey, is also part of comically named team TravLiUeyPadgeyZezz, a portmanteau of the students’ names. While Doug’s point of view is foremost, the novel’s narration shifts among many perspectives, giving a rich, panoramic view of how stressful yet ultimately rewarding these learning experiences are for the overachievers, the socially awkward, the kids with complicated home lives, and all those—young and old—who just need to see each other a little differently. The competition itself impressively brings readers into the week’s suspense while highlighting insights that many who have had to balance the demands of academics with the complexities of home life already know—and that Doug and his crew are finding out the hard way.

**Creative and hilarious.** (Fiction. 8-12)



### DÍA DE MUERTOS Números: A Day of the Dead Counting Book

Tonatiuh, Duncan  
 Abrams Appleseed (24 pp.)  
 \$15.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9781419764462



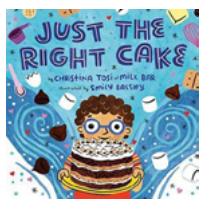
A bilingual English-Spanish counting book that explores and honors Dia de los Muertos.

A family adds to their home ofrenda, an altar honoring loved ones who have died. With each page turn, the number of items grows by one—the family starts with “una foto” (“one photo”), then adds “dos incensarios” (“two incense burners”), “tres bebidas” (“three beverages”), and more. The simple and unadorned ofrenda soon becomes more elaborate and abundant as the family heaps on pan de muerto, marigolds, candles, and sugar skulls. Both a counting book and a primer on building a Dia de los Muertos ofrenda, this tale will delight readers with each new addition to the altar. Images are brought to life with Tonatiuh’s signature collage style. Bold graphics gain depth from overlaid textures of papers, fabric, wood, and other more subtle images such as grains of sugar. The distinctive pre-Colombian-inspired character profiles and strong linework create magnetic visual interest. The heart of the holiday, “remembering a loved one with a beautiful altar,” shines delightfully. A brief author’s note provides more background about where, when, and how Dia de los Muertos is celebrated. This Latine family includes a wheelchair user who participates in the celebration. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

**A charming concept and holiday book—count on this one to be a future favorite.** (Concept book. 2-6)

“Best when dished up with sweets and a napkin, like all the better pastry-centered picture books.”

JUST THE RIGHT CAKE



### JUST THE RIGHT CAKE

Tosi, Christina  
Illus. by Emily Balsley  
Rocky Pond Books/Penguin (32 pp.)  
\$18.99 | Feb. 7, 2023  
9780593110713

It's all about the yum in this tale from Tosi, founder of Milk Bar, a chain of bakeries.

Now that his mom and dad are living apart, young Phil finds that his delectable double chocolate cake isn't the same when he prepares it with just one parent at a time. Nor does making brownies with one and s'mores with the other quite butter the biscuit. His peanut butter cookie-making partner, Sammi, tells him that “every cake has a story. And sometimes stories change.” That sends him to the grocery store for inspiration and leads to a mouthwatering epiphany: “A Chocolate Brownie PB S'mores layer cake!” “New could be exciting and special,” enthuses the author before closing with a challenging but feasible recipe (with the suggestion to torch the top properly left for grown-up sous-chefs). Reinforcing the upbeat tone and positive outlook in this tale of family changes, Balsley's cartoon illustrations depict a young patissier presenting the very picture of culinary self-confidence as he bustles about two kitchens while his parents look on affectionately and lend an occasional willing ear or hand. This one is best when dished up with sweets and a napkin, like all the better pastry-centered picture books. Phil and his father are tan-skinned, Mom is brown-skinned, and Sammi is light-skinned. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A foodie's delight, with a sweet message between the layers. (Picture book. 7-9)



### THE SHAPE OF YOU

Vãn, Mưon Thj  
Illus. by Miki Sato  
Kids Can (32 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781525305450



A picture book that invites readers to consider shapes of all kinds.

A lively young child and a grown-up, both of whom present Asian, with beige skin and dark, wavy hair, experience their world in all its forms. Vãn's simple yet evocative verse explores the shapes of tangible, concrete objects like the Earth (“a sphere”), the characters' front door (“a rectangle”), and their kitchen table (“a square”) as well as the shapes of abstract concepts like thinking (“the shape of thinking is quiet”), friendship (“a dog”), and surprise (“best when it hides what's inside”). The author trusts young readers to understand such heady material. The grown-up is never far from the child's side, ready to answer a question or reassure but also encouraging the little one's curiosity. Sato's enchanting illustrations craft a recognizable world filled with crayons, toys, a lovable puppy, and more, all made from textured fabrics and other materials that, when sewn together, evoke warmth and love. Striking scenes, like

a luminous rose sunset and deep space, with its dark, impenetrable purples, matter as much as a smaller yet equally powerful moment of sadness that leads to a reassuring cuddle. The closeness between the characters enables the child to grow and learn and change—as the book closes, both are confident that “The shape of my love will always be you.” (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Destined to become a classic. (Picture book. 3-6)



### THE DO-OVER

Vargas, Rodrigo  
Illus. by Coni Yovaniniz  
Clarion/HarperCollins (224 pp.)  
\$24.99 | \$15.99 paper | May 23, 2023  
9780358394044  
9780358394051 paper  
Series: Do-Over, 1

A cross-country move from California to Ohio leaves Peruvian American Mariana Gutiérrez anxious about starting over and uncertain where she fits in.

Following the death of Mariana's mother, her barber father, Carlos, decides they should relocate in a bid to be closer to extended family. Life is a struggle for Mariana after the move—she misses her old friends but vows to make new ones if she can only overcome her nerves. When inquisitive, artistic classmates Zoe and Everly stop by Carlos' shop to try selling the natural hair dye they invented, Mariana gets her chance. Before long, the trio find themselves working to build their own hairstyling business with the help of Mariana's abuela and tío. Misunderstandings occur between multiple characters, often resulting from a lack of communication or listening. Mariana, in particular, maintains her guard around others, including her father. As well as sympathetic human frailty, the characters model growth, empathy, and patience in their interactions. Many panels utilize clean, bright, color-blocked backgrounds that reflect the girls' infectious enthusiasm, while creative techniques are used to direct focus: The foreground is blurred, panels are broken or borderless, and tertiary pop-art coloring is used. Spanish is sprinkled throughout. Everly is Black, Zoe presents as White, and there is racial diversity among the background characters.

Touching in its vibrant and earnest depiction of vulnerability and being true to who you are. (Graphic fiction. 9-13)



**SECRETS AND SIDEKICKS**

Venable, Colleen AF  
 Illus. by Stephanie Yue  
 Random House Graphic (224 pp.)  
 \$20.99 | \$13.99 paper | \$23.99 PLB  
 May 2, 2023  
 9780593379691  
 9780593379721 paper  
 9780593379707 PLB  
 Series: Katie the Catsitter, 3

Katie continues her superhero sidekick training while dealing with friendship jealousy.

The only thing better than getting trained to be a sidekick by the Mousstress (aka her neighbor Ms. Lang) is getting to do it alongside her best friend, Beth. Or so Katie thinks until Beth's skills are immediately, naturally better than her own. Beth has also been getting extra chummy with Marie, Katie's skateboarding friend, making Katie feel left out. At school, Katie's friend Jess is acting distant, and at home, it's getting harder to keep her superhero life a secret from her mom. Meanwhile, robots are attacking New York City, and Katie believes she knows the villain responsible—and his real identity. The third installment of the Katie the Catsitter series treads the same ground as its predecessors: It's another funny and exciting story grounded by real emotions and conflict that utilizes easy-to-navigate panels full of simple yet colorful and expressive art. Some side plots in this entry feel more like page fillers than meaningful additions, but existing fans will find enough of the charm and humor from the earlier books to latch onto. The sheer silliness of the many cats, each with a special expertise, continues to delight. Katie is White; other characters bring racial diversity to the cast.

Follows the formula established in the previous books for guaranteed success. (sketches, meet the creators, friendship bracelet instructions) *(Graphic fiction. 8-12)*



**LET'S GO TO THE MUSEUM  
 A Modern Art  
 Adventure Maze**

Vera, Luisa  
 Schiffer (36 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | June 28, 2023  
 978-0-7643-6574-4

A child experiences art personally.

This Spanish import combines a whimsical fantasy about a father and child visiting a modern-art museum with information about modern-art movements and artists. Dad heads toward his favorite painting, unaware he and his child have split up. Meanwhile, the wide-eyed child is dazzled by everything. A ballerina emerges from a Degas painting, inviting the child on a tour. The child winds up cavorting around and inside some paintings. Double-page spreads include cartoonish replicas of paintings by, for instance, Piet Mondrian, Paul Gauguin, and Andy Warhol and briefly define modern-art movements (e.g., expressionism, surrealism) and present cursory information about artists. A

page defining museums and modern art is included, though it should have preceded the others. Occasionally, figures in artworks speak to the child or readers. By adventure's end, the child can't wait to return to the museum, and Dad's taken a deep dive into art in more ways than one. This well-meaning but not wholly successful introduction clearly requires an adult to share and explain the information; most young readers are unlikely to fully absorb and appreciate the technicalities, let alone complain about omitted artists (for instance, Salvador Dalí, M.C. Escher). Still, the lively, colorful, lampooning illustrations are humorous, with numerous nods to renowned artworks. The cartoonishly portrayed protagonists are light-skinned; most of the represented artists are White men, though some women are included. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Despite flaws, if this book gets some kids even a bit excited about art and museums, all may be well. *(Informational picture book. 5-9)*



**HALF MOON SUMMER**

Vickers, Elaine  
 Peachtree (352 pp.)  
 \$17.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9781682635391

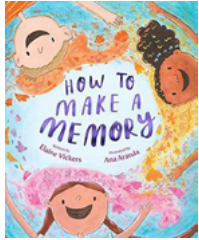


A bond formed in infancy is reestablished during a pivotal summer when two tweens each need a staunch friend by their side.

Drew and Mia have an unusual origin story: They were born on the same day and in the same hospital in Half Moon Bay, California. One baby's presence comforted the other inconsolable one in their shared bassinet. While this story is familiar to each, they don't see each other again until life brings them together 12 years later when Mia returns to Half Moon Bay from Sacramento to visit her grandmother. The two young people feel a connection that blossoms into friendship, one that sustains each of them through some of the worst of life's difficulties. For Drew, it's his father's diagnosis with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. For Mia, it's financial stress and the impending loss of her family's home. They take turns telling their individual stories: Drew's prose is direct and descriptive; Mia uses free verse to capture concise moments and feelings. They begin to go running together, and the way they start to open up is sensitively portrayed and rings true. Just as Drew and Mia fall into step during their runs as they train to enter a half-marathon, their stories begin to align as well, and they encourage and support each other through their challenges. It doesn't alter the road ahead, but it does influence how they handle what comes next. The cast is cued White.

Uplifting. *(Fiction. 10-13)*





## HOW TO MAKE A MEMORY

Vickers, Elaine

*Illus. by Ana Aranda*

Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster

(32 pp.)

\$18.99 | May 2, 2023

9781534494411

Saying goodbye isn't easy.

Life is always moving along, and that "means that someday / something you love will come to an end / and it will be time to say goodbye." Acknowledging that transitions can be sad (one spread shows a child grieving a dog and later bidding farewell to the pet during a beach ceremony), Vickers uses easily recognizable events and activities to craft a child-centered message: Readers can make memories of happy moments to look back on later. They can take photos, draw pictures, write stories, or even use their mind's eye to commit events to memory; for this last one, the accompanying illustration shows scenes from a fabulous birthday party worth remembering. Children also learn that sometimes memories have a way of emerging on their own, summoned by a familiar song or scent. And sometimes they return when a child is sitting quietly on their own. Readers are asked, when they are ready, to imagine all their memories and recognize how they define them and give them strength for the future. Finally, they are reminded that even though something they love has come to an end, their story and their memories continue. Aranda's vibrant spreads, suffused with rich hues that convey characters' various emotions, depict racially diverse and generally joyful children and adults. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Multisensory suggestions to help children transform difficult moments into something positive.** (*Picture book. 4-9*)



## GRETEL AND HANSEL

Waeland, Bee

Orca (64 pp.)

\$19.95 | May 16, 2023

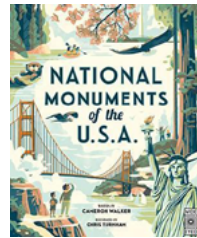
9781459833821

Waeland (*The Three Bears and Goldilocks*, 2022) fractures a second familiar fairy tale in this graphically crisp, word-less project.

As the inverted title telegraphs, twists await. A gray-haired witch in owlsh red spectacles bakes sweets, a black cat nearby. After a woodcutter and two children reach the forest, Gretel and Hansel wander after a scuttling fox; a robin swiftly consumes Gretel's scattered baguette crumbs. Discovering the witch's delectably edible cottage, the pair—eyes popping like candy pinwheels—commence gobbling it, licking lollipops and chomping slabs of cookie siding. The witch invites them inside, and their boots dry beside the woodstove's crackling fire. The rowdy duo devour a cherry-topped Black Forest cake, candies, fruit, and more—leaving a messy wake that includes an overturned cauldron and cat dish.

The witch exacts revenge: A lightning bolt from a star-tipped wand reaches the fleeing Hansel, who is turned into a frog. The woodcutter searches for and tearfully reunites with the children—though the trio seem relatively unbothered by Hansel's species switch. Meanwhile, the witch and the sleek cat enjoy refreshments, including a cookie with a sly resemblance to Gretel. Flat color and simple, bold shapes yield easily decoded visuals in this quirky, humorous tale. The woodcutter and children have brown skin; Hansel and the woodcutter sport black hair, while Gretel's tresses match the witch's flax-colored skin. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**Another wry romp in the author/illustrator's alternate fairyland, where justice is served to recalcitrant half-pints.** (*Picture book. 3-5*)



## NATIONAL MONUMENTS OF THE USA

Walker, Cameron

*Illus. by Chris Turnham*

Wide Eyed Editions (112 pp.)

\$30.00 | June 13, 2023

9780711265493

Series: National Parks of the USA, 4

The national monuments get their due.

Walker briefly recounts the history of the monuments (thank you, Teddy Roosevelt). Instead of the usual glossy photos, the text is paired with copious subtle watercolors, harmoniously arrayed with text on generous double-page spreads. Sparkling descriptions invite reader participation: "Imagine it's 1892, and you're arriving" in New York Harbor. "What will you see in the [pipestone] rocks?" Many monuments are in sites of superb natural beauty, but unlike the national parks, they must have historical, prehistorical, cultural, and/or scientific interest. Readers will find information on dinosaur fossils, geology, flora and fauna, and places important to Indigenous people, significant in history (Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument, Stonewall National Monument, the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument), and/or connected to American leaders like Cesar Chavez. Fascinating facts are interspersed (the Washington Monument is held together through friction and gravity rather than mortar; the Pullman workers' 1894 strike helped establish Labor Day). Regional maps throughout indicate the locations of the various monuments, divided by area: East, Central, Southwest, Mountain West, West, Alaska, and Tropics. A calm, subdued palette and geometric-based forms that use washes rather than line allow for a maximum of information without fussiness and, with help from typography, evoke classic WPA posters.

**A glorious monument to the national monuments. (index)** (*Nonfiction. 6-10*)

“A marvelous model of respect for elders that all humans should emulate.”

BIBI



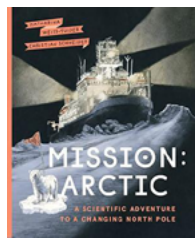
**BIBI**  
*Weaver, Jo*  
 Peachtree (32 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 16, 2023  
 9781682635537



A lyrical celebration of old age and the wisdom and love that accompany it.

Bibi, *grandmother* in Swahili, is the oldest flamingo in the flock, and the other birds follow her and rely on her guidance and teaching for everything from preening to standing on one leg to nest-building. Bibi greets each new chick by name, the latest being Toto (*child*). When the sun evaporates the lake water, Bibi leads the flightless chicks to the new shoreline while the parents fly. As they walk, Bibi reassures the frightened chicks, shelters them under her outstretched wings, and tells them stories of life on the lake. Reaching their destination, the chicks feed, turn pink, and get ready to fly. But Bibi is feeling her age, wondering if she can make the flight when it's time for the birds to move on. Toto leads the flock in rallying around their beloved elder, showing her the same love and compassion she once showed them and echoing back her words. And though it's clear Bibi's goodbye to this particular lake is a final one, the last spread is triumphant, the flock flying together against a full-moon sky. Weaver's charcoal illustrations with digital pink tinges lend a nostalgic tone to the remarkably lifelike flamingos. Backmatter fills in the facts about the real Lake Natron in Tanzania and the flamingos that migrate there to breed. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A marvelous model of respect for elders that all humans should emulate.** (*Picture book. 3-8*)



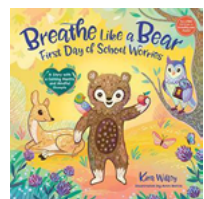
**MISSION: ARCTIC**  
*A Scientific Adventure to a Changing North Pole*  
*Weiss-Tuider, Katharina*  
*Illus. by Christian Schneider*  
*Trans. by Shelley Tanaka*  
 Greystone Kids (128 pp.)  
 \$21.95 | May 23, 2023  
 9781771649568

A groundbreaking—and ice-breaking—13-month exploration of the Arctic.

From 2019 to 2020, the German research ship *Polarstern* used Norwegian scientist and explorer Fridtjof Nansen's 19th-century discovery of sea ice drift to travel from Norway to the Fram Strait off Greenland. Allowed to freeze in the ice, the ship drifted along with the floe before finally breaking north through the ice to the pole. International teams traded off every two or three months. The expedition, aptly named MOSAIC (Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the Study of Arctic Climate), produced countless discoveries about this largely unknown region. The author, an expedition member, offers her account in bits and pieces. She explains their rationale: The Arctic is “the epicenter of climate change,” and what happens here

affects the rest of the planet. She describes the overall plan and provides historical background, focusing particularly on Nansen's trip in 1893. Weiss-Tuider discusses their climate research: investigating the ice, the atmosphere, the ocean underneath the ice cap, and “biogeochemistry.” All this is presented through a lengthy, smooth, liberally illustrated text, translated from German. The lively design includes maps, labeled drawings, logbook notes, photographs big and small, even sticky notes. An enormous amount of information is packed in, though the author doesn't share much about the personal impact of being part of such an important expedition. People depicted in illustrations are diverse.

**Readers curious about the ins and outs of scientific discovery will be intrigued.** (*glossary, index*) (*Nonfiction. 9-14*)



**BREATHE LIKE A BEAR**  
*First Day of School Worries: A Story With a Calming Mantra and Mindful Prompts*  
*Willey, Kira*  
*Illus. by Anni Betts*  
 Rodale Kids (32 pp.)  
 \$12.99 | June 27, 2023  
 9780593486726

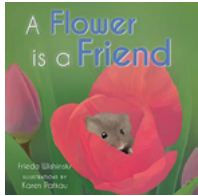
Children's musician and mindfulness expert Willey helps children learn to assuage first-day-of-school jitters.

On the way to school, Bear encounters her pal Bird and confides that she's got “butterflies in her tummy.” Bird admits that he's worried, too—what if the other classmates don't like his feathers? Owl overhears and suggests a mantra to calm their anxiety. She breathes deeply and says, “Breathe in, breathe out. / Everybody has a heartbeat. / Breathe in, breathe out. / It's a rhythm we all share.” Realizing that Bear's fur and Bird's feathers “may look very different...but they do the same job,” the pals feel much better and continue on their way. They come upon Fawn, who's worried that his preference for eating grass is strange, so Bear and Bird teach him the mantra and breathing technique. Arriving at school, they see Owl, who, unsurprisingly, is their new teacher, leading the class in the mindfulness activity. Discussion questions for readers, related to Bear's, Bird's, and Fawn's concerns, are interspersed, with the final one intended to instill confidence about children's own uniqueness: “What makes you special?” Though the text is somewhat wordy and the Disney-esque cartoon illustrations are a bit saccharine, overall the story gets its message across effectively. The book ends with a link to Willey's song “Everybody's Got a Heartbeat.” (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A practical approach to anchoring oneself in the face of uncertainty.** (*author's note*) (*Picture book. 4-8*)

# “A garden of gorgeous delights.”

A FLOWER IS A FRIEND



## A FLOWER IS A FRIEND

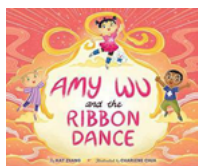
Wisnisky, Frieda  
Illus. by Karen Patkau  
Pajama Press (36 pp.)  
\$18.95 | May 2, 2023  
9781772782806



Nature creates marvelous and beneficial partnerships.

Besides being beautiful, elegant, and fragrant, flowers are helpful, supportive, and protective friends of fellow garden dwellers. Beginning with this quietly lovely book's first spread, blossoms proudly announce themselves in clear, simple prose and describe how they help their friends (“Kiss a butterfly,” “Shade a frog”). Altogether, 12 symbiotic relationships are covered—between crocuses, zinnias, magnolias, roses, and tulips and creatures including butterflies, bumblebees, beetles, snails, ladybugs, mice, bats, and hummingbirds—most of them active pollinators. A thought-provoking question (“Why would a morning glory be happy to see a dragonfly?”) about a specific flower-creature relationship at the bottom of each page stimulates visual literacy and creative and critical thinking. The remarkable digital illustrations, so photographically, lusciously lifelike that one can almost smell floral aromas wafting from the pages, call for readers' close scrutiny and attention to detail and suggest answers to the questions. If they don't bring responses to readers' minds quickly, the fact-packed backmatter about the flower-creature bonds will do the trick. The final illustrated page depicts the garden creatures shown previously in the book. For the text to be appreciated in its entirety without interruption, the flowers' “proclamations” should probably be read or listened to first; readers may then return to the beginning of the book and proceed with each question in turn. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A garden of gorgeous delights. (index of flowers)** (*Informational picture book. 4-7*)



## AMY WU AND THE RIBBON DANCE

Zhang, Kat  
Illus. by Charlene Chua  
Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 30, 2023  
9781665916721  
Series: Amy Wu

Amy Wu twirls, taps, and troubleshoots in this latest story.

Whether it's wriggling on the carpet during story time or hopping on her bed at night, Amy, a young Chinese girl, is always on the go. When she sees Chinese ribbon dancing on TV, she is instantly drawn to the fluttering and twisting swaths. She must have a ribbon dance party with her friends. They'll each bring an instrument, and Amy will supply “the most important thing—**dancing ribbons.**” Looking around the house, Amy thinks outside the box to find a suitable ribbon replacement. Will a hair ribbon be close enough? Maybe a scarf or a

tablecloth? Nothing seems quite right, and Amy's bouncy feet are at a glum standstill—until her family and diverse friends encourage Amy to see past these details and have fun with her makeshift ribbons. Ultimately, she adjusts her expectations and learns to appreciate what's most important—dancing and enjoying a magic moment with friends and family. This fourth entry is just as bouncy and buoyant as previous series installments. Illustrations expressively capture Amy's enthusiasm and joy as well as her frustration and disappointment. Full of movement, Chua's vignettes evoke the energy and celebration of dance and music in Zhang's rhythmic prose. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

**A heartwarming whirl. (instructions for making dance ribbons)** (*Picture book. 4-8*)



## BUNNY & TREE

Zsako, Balint  
Enchanted Lion Books (184 pp.)  
\$29.95 | May 30, 2023  
9781592703937

Cooperation, regeneration, and reunification conveyed wordlessly in nine acts.

After a prologue chronicles Tree's germination and growth through four seasons, Act 1 introduces high drama.

A hungry wolf threatens Bunny and eight multihued companions. Separated from the group, Bunny flees, pursued by the wolf. Tree shape-shifts, matching the wolf's menacing visage and scaring it off. Bunny is grateful, but pictograms in thought bubbles pinpoint the new issue: finding Bunny's missing mates. When Tree indicates that it's rooted to the ground, resourceful Bunny reappears with a wheeled cart, transplanting Tree into a pot for a classic quest. Responding to Bunny's pictograph cues, Tree morphs into a locomotive engine, sailboat, and airplane as the pair search. (Zsako's depictions of skies and weather are particularly mesmerizing.) Weeping atop a hill, Bunny encounters a bird who's spotted the bunnies near a twin-peaked mountain. Soon after Tree-as-airplane's landing, Bunny joyfully reunites with the colony. Though Tree manifests “eyes”—round voids in its foliage—Zsako avoids anthropomorphism, communicating emotions through body language, not physiognomy. The final acts in this handsomely bound, rich volume revel in the symbiosis among the rabbits, their poop, and Tree's newly replanted roots as its leaves nourish the hungry colony and they later spend winter burrowed beneath it. Wry visuals, like Tree's clear need for replanting, as well as color associations between rabbits, seeds, and newly emerging trees will intrigue both kids and grown-ups.

**A lush tale that's worthy of repeat perusals.** (*Picture book. 4-8*)

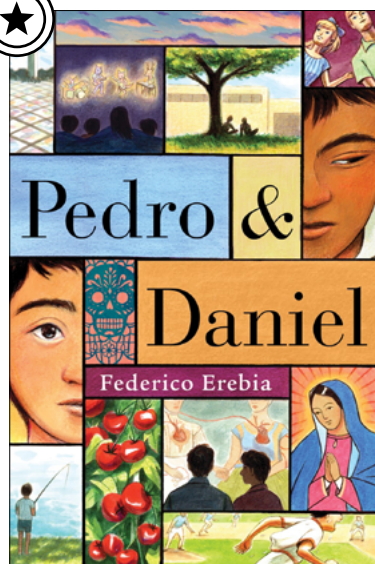


# YOUNG ADULT



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- WARRIOR GIRL UNEARTHED** by *Angeline Boulley*.....148
- TAKE** by *Jennifer Bradbury*.....149
- WHEN THE VIBE IS RIGHT** by *Sarah Dass*.....152
- PEDRO & DANIEL** by *Federico Erebia*; *illus. by Julie Kwon*.....152
- WHERE YOU SEE YOURSELF** by *Claire Forrest*.....153
- THE GRIMOIRE OF GRAVE FATES** Ed. by *Hanna Alkaf & Margaret Owen*.....157
- INVISIBLE SON** by *Kim Johnson*.....158
- SOME SHALL BREAK** by *Ellie Marney*.....160
- ONLY THIS BEAUTIFUL MOMENT** by *Abdi Nazemian*.....161
- AN ECHO IN THE CITY** by *K.X. Song*.....165



**PEDRO & DANIEL**  
*Erebia, Federico*  
*Illus. by Julie Kwon*  
 Levine Querido (336 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9781646143047



## THE WARNING

*Acevedo, Kristy*  
 Sourcebooks Fire (320 pp.)  
 \$11.99 paper | June 6, 2023  
 978-1-72826-839-2  
 Series: The Warning, 1

A reissue of the 2016 novel published as *Consider*.

Alexandra Lucas and her boyfriend, Dominick, are about to start their senior year of high school when 500 vertexes—each one a doorway-shaped “hole into the fabric of the universe”—appear across the world, accompanied by holographic messages communicating news of Earth’s impending doom. The only escape is a one-way trip through the portals to a parallel future Earth. As people leave through the vertexes and the extinction event draws nearer, the world becomes increasingly unfamiliar. A lot has changed in the past several years, including expectations of mental health depictions in young adult literature; Alex’s struggle with anxiety and reliance on Ativan, which she calls her “little white savior” while initially discounting therapy as an intervention, make for a trite after-school special-level treatment of a complex situation; a short stint of effective therapy does finally occur but is so limited in duration that it contributes to the oversimplification of the topic. Alex also has unresolved issues with her Gulf War veteran father (who possibly grapples with PTSD). The slow pace of the plot as it depicts a crumbling society, along with stilted writing and insubstantial secondary characterization, limits the appeal of such a small-scale, personal story. Characters are minimally described and largely racially ambiguous; Alex has golden skin and curly brown hair.

A glossy repackaging of a jejune tale. (*Science fiction*. 13-16)



## GOING BICOASTAL

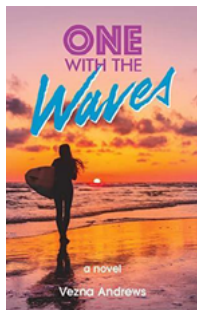
*Adler, Dahlia*  
 Wednesday Books (336 pp.)  
 \$20.00 | June 13, 2023  
 9781250871640

Natalya Fox is ready for change but afraid of making the wrong decision; luckily she doesn’t have to choose in this parallel-timelines rom-com à la *Sliding Doors*.

Seventeen-year-old Natalya Fox has been given the choice of spending the summer at home with

her father in New York City or moving in with her mother in Los Angeles. Manhattan is the safer option and would keep Natalya in her all-too-familiar comfort zone, but it does come with the possibility of romance with the girl Natalya has been crushing on for ages, known to her only as the Redhead due to Natalya's inability to introduce herself. Los Angeles offers an internship and a chance to reconnect with her mother, and the other new intern, a boy her mom describes as cute, could be an unexpected perk. So Natalya makes her choice—and then she makes her other choice. Split between two parallel timelines, the novel shows readers Natalya falling in love, exploring her post-graduation plans, and finding new ways of connecting with her parents in both cities. Each of the timelines is exciting and heartwarming, although the Los Angeles love interest reads as more complex than the one back East, and the New York storyline lacks significant conflict, giving the West Coast one more depth overall. Bisexual Natalya is Jewish, and subjects such as keeping kosher, being queer and Jewish, and observing Shabbat are thoughtfully woven in.

**A sweet and joyful romance times two.** (*Romance*. 13-18)



### ONE WITH THE WAVES

Andrews, Vezna

Santa Monica Press (288 pp.)

\$12.99 paper | May 23, 2023

9781595801227

A city girl emerges from grief and discovers her inner self through a passion for surfing.

March 1983: In the wake of her father's death from cancer, high school junior Ellie remembers treasured moments as she struggles to come to grips with this

new reality. It was Dad, a university professor, who left his job to raise her, allowing Mom to continue to run her art gallery in the city. Father and daughter explored New York City together. An extended visit to California and her Uncle Charlie, Aunt Jen, and their big galumphing dog becomes an introduction to a different world, the quiet of California's wide-open spaces, the fresh sea air, and the immense ocean. Jen loves to surf and takes Ellie along. On her first outing, Ellie feels the dolphins calling her to come and play. Andrews' evocative novel counterpoints Ellie's memories surrounding the loss of her father with her immersion into the stress-free aesthetic of surfing. She decides to stay in California, triggering a rocky new dynamic in her relationship with her mother. Andrews' plot contains several expected elements—adjusting to a new school, first love, standing up to bullies—all depicted in a competent, familiar way. The novel soars to a literary sweet spot in its descriptions of surfing and Ellie's blossoming identity as a surfer, at one with the ocean and its mysteries as each day becomes a limitless adventure.

**An enchanting coming-of-age story with a lyrical heart.** (*Fiction*. 14-18)



### MAKE THE FIREFLIES DANCE

Bateman, Rachel

Running Press Kids (384 pp.)

\$18.99 | May 16, 2023

9780762478910

After a magical kiss with a mystery boy, a girl goes on dates to try to uncover his identity.

It's senior year, and Quincy, a White girl, is working on shooting a movie as a project for her film class. After receiving a surprise kiss in a dark movie theater from an unknown boy who doesn't offer his name, the search for him becomes a distraction. Her friends execute Operation Mystery Kisser, setting her up on dates with the boys who were present that evening and are possible candidates. With classmate Kenyon, one of them, she finds romance, forcing her to question whether she already has what she wants right in front of her and whether the search for the anonymous boy who gave her that perfect kiss is worth pursuing. There are plenty of complex and vulnerable moments in the story. Quincy lost her mother in a tragic accident; this loss and tension with her older brother give her realistic depth. Kenyon, whose mother is implied White and whose father was adopted from Vietnam, is a three-dimensional love interest. The relatively robust character development makes the mystery kiss as catalyst ultimately feel like a letdown, particularly in a climate of growing awareness of the importance of consent, a subject that is not addressed. The treatment of that key detail is ultimately unsatisfying and problematic.

**A questionable central plot point holds back this otherwise enjoyable read.** (*Romance*. 12-17)



### WARRIOR GIRL UNEARTHED

Boulley, Angeline

Henry Holt (400 pp.)

\$19.99 | May 2, 2023

9781250766588

Ten years after the events of *Firekeeper's Daughter* (2021), Boulley's thrilling debut, readers return to Michigan's Sugar Island in this stand-alone novel.

It's 2014, and Perry and Pauline Firekeeper-Birch are 16 and still devoted to their Auntie Daunis. The twins are participating in the Sugar Island Ojibwe Tribe's summer internship program: Academically driven, anxiety-prone Pauline is thrilled to be working with the Tribal Council, while impulsive, outspoken Perry, who would rather be fishing, is initially less than excited about her assignment to the tribal museum. But the girls' shared passion for their heritage and outrage over acts of desecration by greedy individuals and institutions lead them, some fellow interns who are dealing with varied life circumstances, and even some elders to carry out a daring, dangerous plan to right a terrible wrong. First-person

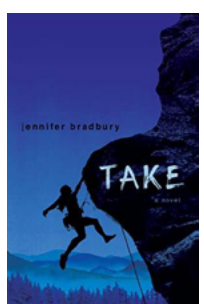


“Great holds, great movement, and a worthwhile finish.”

TAKE

narrator Perry’s voice is irresistibly cheeky, wry, and self-aware, and her growth is realistic as, without losing her spark, she comes to understand why her beloved mentor believed that “doing the right thing for the right reason, with a good heart and clear intentions, matters.” Boulley, an enrolled member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, sensitively and seamlessly weaves in discussions of colorism (the girls’ father is Black and Anishinaabe), repatriation of cultural artifacts and human remains, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and more into a story with well-developed characterization that is both compellingly readable and deeply thought-provoking.

**A page-turning heist grounded in a nuanced exploration of critical issues of cultural integrity.** (*Thriller. 14-18*)



**TAKE**  
*Bradbury, Jennifer*  
 Caitlyn Dlouhy/Atheneum  
 (272 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9781416990093



A rock-climbing adventure unearths an unexpected mystery.

The summer after high school graduation, Cara’s busy working three jobs to fund a gap year rock climbing in Patagonia. She’s independent and tough, not the least because she has to be—her dad, who taught her to climb, is unstable, mentally ill, and so unreliable he missed her graduation ceremony. Now, he’s not responding to messages. When Cara goes to check on him, she finds his climbing gear gone and one wall of his trailer papered over with maps, photographs, and sticky notes. To find him, she’ll need to figure out what it all means—and what peak he’s trying to climb. Interspersed with Cara’s first-person narrative are diary entries from the 1940s by a young, implied White climber in the Civilian Conservation Corps describing his growing romance with an artistic Japanese American farm girl. They are hampered by racism, particularly once America enters the war. Bradbury’s smart, fast-moving book immerses readers in the language, procedures, and emotions of rock climbing without overwhelming those unfamiliar with the sport. She lets her characters and their stories be complicated and multidimensional. Her description of Cara’s dad’s mental illness is particularly real: “Sometimes he was sort of medically allowed to be a selfish jerk. The tricky part was how the messiness made it really hard for everybody around him to know when to cut him some slack and when to just cut him off.”

**Great holds, great movement, and a worthwhile finish.** (*Fiction. 12-18*)



**THE SECRET SUMMER PROMISE**  
*Brown, Keah*  
 Levine Querido (336 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9781646141739

When a girl falls in love with her best friend, will it lead to a tragedy of errors?

Andrea, a painter, is planning an amazing summer with her friends. Last summer’s adventures were lost to recovery from a cerebral palsy surgery, so this year’s “Best Summer Ever” list is ambitious: an art show for Andrea; skinny-dipping for Hailee, her Chinese American bestie; a Drew Barrymore movie marathon for both of them. But there’s one big problem: Andrea’s crush. Though the queer, Black 17-year-old is well loved, well off, and talented, she doesn’t know how to tell Hailee that she’s fallen hard for her—and her internalized self-loathing is crushing. Perhaps if Andrea dates a popular boy she can get over her feelings for Hailee? To readers, it’s clear that Andrea and Hailee share mutual feels, and disaster looms over all this secret keeping, but Andrea struggles in miserable ignorance until the inevitable friendship explosion. During all this secret (and painfully messy) pining, Andrea grows in both empathy and self-respect. The dialogue is often stilted and unnatural, but the girls (and their multiracial, multi-ability, multi-sexuality friendship circle) are affectionate and dedicated to each other. Race, sexuality, and disability are not Andrea’s roadblocks, though they’re all obviously central to her identity and her life. Her difficulties come from everyday teen drama—and it is resoundingly, emphatically expressed drama.

**For fans of messy queer romance, some realistically complicated representation.** (*Fiction. 12-16*)



**EVER SINCE**  
*Bruzas, Alena*  
 Rocky Pond Books/Penguin (272 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | May 23, 2023  
 9780593616178

The summer before senior year, friendships are fractured by secrets and a revelation of sexual abuse.

Virginia has a reputation for making poor choices, including sleeping with Edison, her friend Thalia’s boyfriend, behind her back. She and her close-knit group of friends are determined to spend the summer living it up, when suddenly, without explanation, her best friend, Poppy, leaves to spend the summer at her grandpa’s. Virginia feels unmoored because Poppy offered her harbor from her own house, where she does not feel safe amid her neglectful parents’ parties that include Him, their friend who sexually abused her when she was a child. Virginia starts spending time with Rumi, Poppy’s boyfriend, with whom she develops an intense emotional connection. But



when she realizes that Rumi's 11-year-old sister is being groomed by this same abuser, Virginia must find the courage to finally speak up. What follows is a harrowing journey, compounded by the fact that not everybody is receptive to her revelations. In the process of coming to terms with what happened to her, Virginia must also reckon with her revictimization and ask whether her sexual activity with Edison was consensual. Virginia, Thalia, Edison, and Poppy are cued White; ethnically ambiguous Rumi has reddish-brown skin. The supporting cast includes diversity in race, gender identity, and sexual orientation; these characters sometimes feel too perfect to be fully realized people.

**Lyrical prose combines with a searing indictment of how society treats young women. (content note, author's note, resources)** (*Fiction*. 14-18)



### RADIANT

*Bustamante, Ashley*  
Enclave Escape (304 pp.)  
\$24.99 | May 9, 2023  
9798886050424  
Series: Color Theory, 2

Overcoming prejudice and joining forces are the only things that will help the rebels defeat the Benefactors of Magus.

After trying to expose the Benefactors as manipulators who have systematically driven out or captured Mentalists (practitioners of Yellow Magic), Ava and Elm have gone into hiding. A band of Ava's classmates have joined them, but their learned distrust of Mentalists is deeply ingrained, leading to tense confrontations that threaten to divide them. Adding to the drama, the romance between Ava and Elm is rocked by the appearance of a girl from Elm's past. But when the Benefactors attack their hideout, the group unites. In a daring escape, they break through the barrier surrounding Magus and find refuge in a peaceful city where they must make a decision: sink into tranquility or train for the fight. Readers must have read the first in the Color Theory series (*Vivid*, 2022) to follow the action, but devoted fans will lock in for the roller-coaster ride as the somewhat racially and ethnically diverse band returns to Magus, where they're joined in an epic battle against the Benefactors by an unexpected group of allies. Gentle romance, emotional reunions, painful betrayals, and historical insights add nuance to the story. The most surprising discovery is saved for the last, promising another fascinating chapter to come.

**Captivating. (map)** (*Fantasy*. 12-15)



### LIAR'S BEACH

*Cotugno, Katie*  
Delacorte (288 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 2, 2023  
9780593433287

A summertime stay on Martha's Vineyard confirms everything Linden thinks about rich people.

Best known for emotional YA romances, Cotugno tries her hand at an emotional whodunit—and readers who can roll with the weird attraction her protagonist seems to exert on the two main young women here may find themselves caught up in an engrossing whirl of, as the title promises, lies, secrets, and louche living. Hardly has he arrived for a two-week stay at palatial August House than Michael Linden and his host and boarding school roommate Jasper's twin sister, Eliza, are bedroom-bound; his ghosted former platonic friend Holiday turns up; and Greg, despised boyfriend of another houseguest, winds up in a coma after an apparent accident. Dragged along by Holiday, who, along with inexplicably letting bygones be bygones, turns out to be an enthusiastic amateur sleuth, scholarship student Linden finds plenty of fuel for his (supposedly) secret resentment of the privileged classes and the way they can get away with anything. Though not, as it turns out after a comfortably conventional denouement complete with surprise confession, murder. Also, as a tease at the end suggests, for all that he comes clean about several secrets of his own, Linden leads the pack in the "things to hide" department. Aside from one prominent supporting character—a brown-skinned lacrosse champion—the central cast reads White.

**This scorching glimpse of life (and death) among the moneyed classes hits its marks, if a bit mechanically.** (*Mystery*. 14-18)



### SAINT JUNIPER'S FOLLY

*Crespo, Alex*  
Peachtree Teen (304 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 16, 2023  
9781682635773

Teens save themselves from a haunted house.

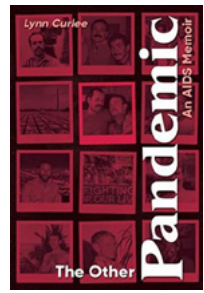
Jaime Alvarez-Shepard, Theo Miller, and Taylor Rivera Bishop all live in small-town Vermont. Jaime is newly returned to picture-perfect Saint Juniper; he lived there as a child but ended up in foster care after his unstable family left 8 years ago. Privileged White boy Theo chafes under his overbearing father but finds solace volunteering at the library. Taylor, with a stern Boricua father and a recently dead White mother who was descended from local witches, lives above her family's occult shop in Wolf's Head, the slightly scrappier town next door. All feel hemmed in by Saint Juniper's Folly, a densely wooded region that's been the subject of fear and rumor for generations. The alternating three-person point of view follows

“Compelling and important.”

THE OTHER PANDEMIC

Theo and Taylor as they discover that biracial White-passing Jaime, whose father was Mexican, is trapped by an invisible barrier inside the crumbling and definitely haunted Blackwood Estate, which may be connected to Taylor’s mom’s death. Part romance, part story of new friendship, part family history, this story never fully relaxes into itself, and the pace of the story-telling flip-flops between rushed and overly expository. Readers who enjoy watching a queer love story unfold amid peril will enjoy that aspect of this otherwise middling debut.

Earnest but unmemorable. (*Supernatural*. 13-17)

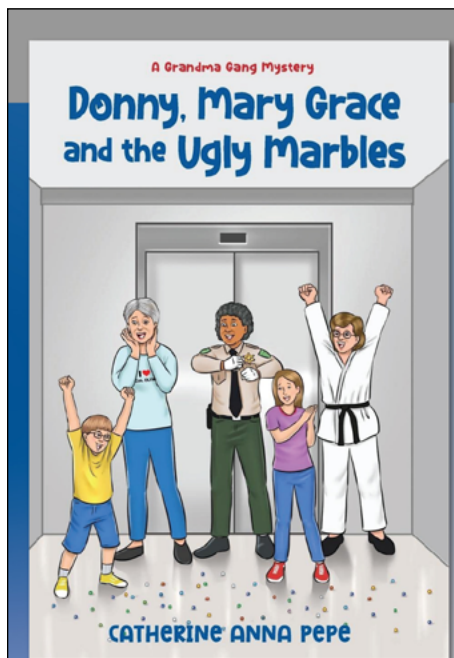


**THE OTHER PANDEMIC**  
**An AIDS Memoir**

Curlee, Lynn  
Charlesbridge Teen (176 pp.)  
\$19.99 | June 6, 2023  
9781623543501

A firsthand account of living through the AIDS pandemic as a young, gay man in the U.S.

Prolific author for young readers Curlee introduces teens to this topic by starting with Covid-19 as an empathic entryway to the past. He describes being a teenager in 1960s North Carolina, setting the scene in terms of technology and daily life and painting a picture of a time when sex was a secret kept by adults and homosexuality was only mentioned in joking or insulting ways. He goes on to chronicle how movements seeking equality across gender, sexuality, and race were interconnected and how the Stonewall uprising set the stage for a dazzling period



ISBN: 978-1088072189

**10% OF THE NET PROCEEDS OF BOOK SALES  
WILL BE DONATED TO THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS**

“The Grandma Gang is back and ready to embark on another adventure in Pepe’s third volume of a mystery series.”

“Written in the vein of James Preller’s *Jigsaw Jones*, Pepe’s early elementary school mystery novel is one of the few currently on the market to feature a disabled main character.”

“A warm, well-paced follow-up in an inclusive series that will keep readers coming back for more.”  
—Kirkus Reviews

FOR AGENT REPRESENTATION OR INFORMATION ON PUBLISHING AND FILM RIGHTS,  
EMAIL CATHY@CLOSPEPE.COM · GRANDMAGANGMYSTERIES.COM

# “Captivating, witty, and heartfelt.”

WHEN THE VIBE IS RIGHT

of freedom and falling in love during the 1970s disco era in New York City. That fun-filled time came crashing down as many of Curlee’s vibrant friends began to die sudden, mysterious deaths. As the book progresses, educational, historical, and scientific content in text boxes increasingly supplements the narrative, although its placement and layout are sometimes distracting. It can also become difficult to track all the different individuals who are introduced. However, Curlee’s memoir, illustrated with personal photographs, is intimate and resonant as it presents the thrill of coming out and living openly and the fear and pain that followed when so many people he loved were taken from him too soon.

**Compelling and important. (important people, the origins of AIDS, author’s note, musical references, source notes, select bibliography, image credits, index) (Nonfiction. 12-18)**



## WHEN THE VIBE IS RIGHT

Dass, Sarah

Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (336 pp.)

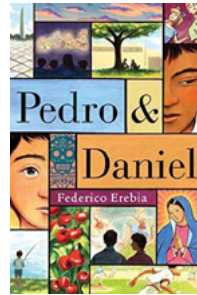
\$19.99 | May 30, 2023

9780063018570

A Trinidadian girl learns to open up herself to love and attachments after enduring grief and heartbreak.

Seventeen-year-old Tess is in her final year of high school. She tragically lost her parents years ago and now lives with her uncle, aunt, and Hazel, her cousin and best friend. Tess is also a designer and seamstress, working with her uncle making Carnival costumes for Grandeur, the family’s masquerade band. When a rivalry with another popular Carnival band leads to a catastrophic incident that threatens the future of Grandeur, Tess finds herself in a position where she may have to work with her sworn nemesis, Brandon, whom she maddeningly also happens to find incredibly attractive. Will Tess be able to put aside her grudge to do what it takes to save Grandeur and her dream of one day taking over the family business? How will she handle it when her feelings for Brandon start shifting from hostile to romantic? Through captivating, witty, and heartfelt prose, Dass’ sweet romance novel shows her protagonist dealing with grief and growing pains. Tess’ relationships with her family and small circle of friends highlight her dynamic personality. The banter and obvious chemistry between Tess and Brandon are enthralling from the get-go; readers root for Tess and feel invested in every part of her journey. The cast reflects the multicultural makeup of Trinidad and Tobago.

**An exciting and sentimental love story perfect for romance lovers who appreciate multifaceted characters. (Romance. 13-18)**



## PEDRO & DANIEL

Erebia, Federico

Illus. by Julie Kwon

Levine Querido (336 pp.)

\$19.99 | June 6, 2023

9781646143047

A poignant look at brotherhood.

This fictionalized version of real events explores the author’s relationship with his brother, Daniel, who died at age 30 in 1993. Written in a lyrical style that mixes prose with occasional poetry and poignant illustrations, the stories are presented mostly from the two brothers’ points of view, with the added perspectives of adults in the community. This creative format also includes many dichos, or proverbs, some of which are Mexican in origin; an appendix lists them in both Spanish and English. In this truly immersive, often melancholic narrative, readers are introduced to the boys’ physically and emotionally abusive mother, who directs homophobic slurs at them. Despite their struggles, their sibling bond shines through: In one story, the kindergarten teacher asks the children to share “their one true treasure,” and Pedro brings Daniel to class. Years later, they look at the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt on display in Washington, D.C., and contemplate their differing beliefs about God and religion. Throughout, they’re constantly forging and completing each other’s developing selves. Both boys are gay and struggle with issues of mental health and neurodivergence. Something else that pulls them together is their deep love for Mexico, where they went every summer as children to visit family. Through the AIDS pandemic, they learn to rely on each other when Daniel tests positive for HIV. Pedro and Daniel’s journey, whether together or apart, is an unforgettable one of resilience and, most of all, love.

**Stunning. (resources, author’s note) (Fiction. 12-18)**



## KNEE DEEP

Flood, Joe

Oni Press (224 pp.)

\$21.99 paper | May 30, 2023

9781620109380

Series: Knee Deep, 1

Two hundred years after a worldwide eco-catastrophe, a teenager descends into the vast labyrinth of deep sewers and tunnels beneath a ruined city in search of her parents.

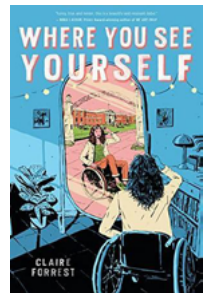
Flood kicks off this series opener by pitching 16-year-old Sarah “Cricket” Higashi, daughter of two long-missing scientists, deep into the sodden, rubble-strewn bowels of the earth, where she battles foes ranging from evil mining company PERCH’s armed corporate goons to (inevitably) alligators and mutants. These characters are reminiscent of the Star Wars





and Mad Max universes, not to mention *Howard the Duck*, as humanoid but mallard-headed hybrid Bill takes her under his wing just in time for a rousing climactic clash. Wielding a length of iron bed frame and making good use of her kendo master's lessons, Cricket fits readily into this wretched hive of subterranean scum and villainy as she begins her journey into darkness and danger. In addition to Cricket's Japanese heritage, diversity in the cast is cued through names and physical appearance. The dynamic illustrations, executed in rich, vibrant colors and laid out in interestingly varied panels, are captivating and dramatic. This volume closes on a cliffhanger that will leave readers eagerly anticipating the next installment.

**A strong start featuring both a memorable dystopian setting and an intrepid hero ready to take names and bash heads.**  
*(Graphic dystopian. 12-16)*

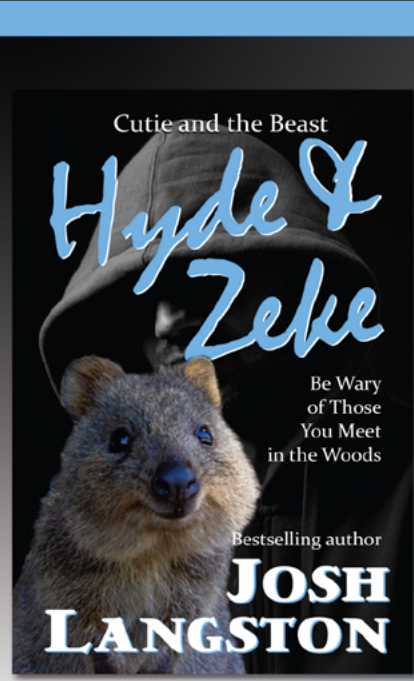


**WHERE YOU SEE YOURSELF**

*Forrest, Claire*  
 Scholastic (320 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | May 2, 2023  
 9781338813838



A college-bound teen with cerebral palsy learns to advocate for herself. Even though her friends are buzzing about senior year and their college plans, Greek American Euphemia Galanos can't muster the same enthusiasm. For Effie, an aspiring journalist, choosing a college is fraught with additional variables: Are the dorms wheelchair accessible? How easily can she navigate campus? Such concerns threaten to derail her dream of attending New York's prestigious Prospect University, home to an excellent journalism program...and the choice of her crush, Wilder. As if Effie doesn't have enough on her plate, she faces discrimination from Mill City High's administration—and this



**BE WARY OF THOSE YOU MEET IN THE WOODS**

“People are mysteriously disappearing in Langston’s SF fantasy set in small-town Georgia.”

“...entertaining narrative...”

“...an enjoyable ride, with at least one incident that’s laugh-out-loud funny and a surprise denouement.”

“An amusing, imaginative read featuring a lovable furry critter with unique qualities.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

ISBN: 978-1737823742

For Information on Film Rights, Email [DruidJosh@gmail.com](mailto:DruidJosh@gmail.com) • [JoshLangston.com](http://JoshLangston.com)

## WORDS WITH...

# LORRAINE AVILA

The author's YA debut, *The Making of Yolanda La Bruja*, is a love letter to her community in the Bronx

BY ILANA BENSUSSEN EPSTEIN



Zoa Photography

LORRAINE AVILA'S DEBUT YA NOVEL, *The Making of Yolanda La Bruja* (Levine Querido, April 11), follows Yolanda Nuelis Alvarez, a Black Dominican American, as she comes into her own as a leader within her Bronx high school and as a bruja within her family's spiritual tradition. Both journeys are disrupted when a new White student named Ben sends ripples through the school and joins Yolanda's activist group, the Brave Space Club, leaving her uncertain how best to protect her beloved community. We spoke to Avila, a 31-year-old lifelong Bronxite, over Zoom while she was visiting family in the Dominican Republic. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

**This book defies easy categorization. What genre do you consider it?**

I consider it realism. Many of the spiritual practices in this book, and in our real lives, are shoved into the genre of the supernatural. The stories I use in the book came from experiences I had with my own family, but the West, at least, doesn't have the space to hold all of that. I was excited to read Ingrid Contreras' *The Man Who Could Move Clouds*; it's a memoir that brings to the center lived experiences that are usually put to the side as magical realism. I read it while I was working on *Yolanda*, and it made me so glad to see folks who are coming from the spaces of Latin America and Africa, saying, *Call it what you want, but we know what it is*.

**How much of *Yolanda's* religious tradition is taken from existing practices?**

It's based on a religion that exists in the Dominican Republic, which is Afro-descendant and has veins all over the Caribbean. However, I changed the name of the religion, and I changed the names of each particular saint. I'd been on my own journey, trying to trace the lines of my paternal family with the religion. The more I learned about it, the more I realized that the elders who practice are private about it, and that's one of the reasons there aren't more folks in the younger generations who practice. It's a vein of Vudú, and many folks are open about the work they do with Vudú, but because of the stereotypes the religion has faced, I wanted to protect it.

That's something I was thinking about for the Bronx, too. It's the last frontier of gentrification in New York. Folks in the Bronx are private about our practices in Van Cortlandt Park or Pelham Bay Park—we have the best parks in the city, but we are private about how we use those spaces because we didn't want to become another Brooklyn or another Washington Heights. Now that gentrification is coming forth, I think about how we can protect the spaces where we've created safety for ourselves. I hope kids and younger folks who read this book get that message, because especially with social media, we want to share so much. We should listen to our elders when they tell us we need our safeguards.

**Can you tell me about building your rich ensemble of characters?**

All of these folks came from the community I see in the Bronx. Even though the Bronx has been low-resource for ages, it's a community where if someone doesn't have, someone else will jump in and do that work. I grew up on a block where if one of my friends didn't have food, they could come to my house and my grandmother would feed them. Oppressed folks, marginalized folks: The way we survive is by being in constant community.

**You taught middle school for several years. How did your time teaching shape your writing of the book?**

I remember reading *The Hate U Give* with my eighth grade class and seeing which chapters the kids were motivated by. They were compelled by Starr's relationships with others but also by the points of conflict that mirrored things they were seeing in their own classrooms. That's when I realized I had to put Ben in the Brave Space Club—I didn't want to, because I wanted it to be a protected space, but I had to have more of those interactions. I saw that the more teachers wanted to implement transparent lessons in terms of what was happening socially, the more White students started to feel isolated. When there are no White adults willing to have those conversations with White students, because they haven't sat with their own stuff yet, it becomes the problem of everyone else. We see Ben going through all of this, and who is supporting him? No one. He's definitely the antagonist, but the reality is he should have had an adult supporting him through all of the tensions he was feeling.

**The book starts on a powerful note, with Yolanda taking responsibility for the narrative she's about to share.**

The prologue was one of the first things I wrote down, but I didn't come back to it until the first draft was done. Somewhere in 2020, I got stuck because I was wondering, *Why am I writing this story about a Black girl who wants to befriend this White kid?* I realized she's not trying to befriend him; she's trying to keep herself and her community safe. If that means she has to swallow what she wants to say or be a damsel in distress when she's not, that's what she's going to do. I think the reason I wrote the prologue first is because, subconsciously, I was already finding a way out of that thinking for Yolanda. She realizes that trying to befriend him was the thing that made the whole situation worse than it had to be. She is also thinking about the ways in which women and femmes are told to make themselves small for safety. Basically, she's taking accountability for the ways she's betrayed herself.

**What elements of your earliest drafts survived to the final manuscript?**

The moments when Yolanda is just observing her face and her body are the earliest ghosts in the manuscript. I wrote so

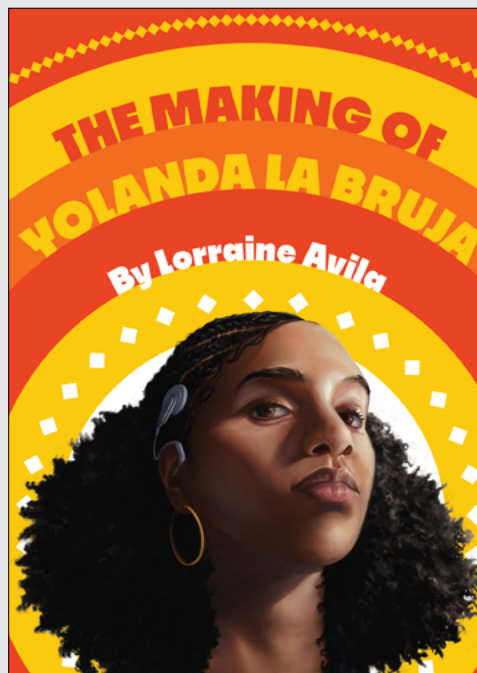
much of it alongside my students as they were writing their own stories, and they were very connected to the physicality of their characters. I got sucked into that through them. Young adults are so aware of their bodies and then, somehow, we force them to disconnect from themselves.

So many students in the Bronx are living with PTSD, carrying trauma in their bodies. For Yolanda, she has these experiences of being catcalled and harassed from a young age. There's a toll that takes on the body. I'm glad Yolanda's initial connection to her body is something that lived through to the final draft.

**Ultimately, this is an optimistic book. Yolanda retains her connection to herself and to her community.**

I took a workshop with Daniel José Older in 2020, and he told me, "You need to put some healing in this book." I had to sit with that, because 2020 was a shitty-ass year. We were seeing Black and brown kids dragged on video and killed. I know how it looks when terrible things happen in communities, and I also know that Dominicans are funny as fuck. Even when someone has just died, folks will crack jokes at funerals. What else is there to do? We can sit here and cry, but we're always seeking some sort of gusto. There's also the friendship between Victory and Yolanda. Black sisterhood has shown me that no matter what happens, whatever's left, we're gonna make a celebration out of it. My optimism comes from believing that the joy I know exists in my community will persevere.

*Ilana Bensussen Epstein is a writer and filmmaker in Boston. The Making of Yolanda La Bruja received a starred review in the Feb. 1, 2023, issue.*





time, her mother insists she manage things herself. But Effie isn't used to speaking up, and her efforts go awry. How can she show her mom she can handle moving from Minnesota to New York if she can't be assertive? And will she ever get the chance to tell Wilder how she feels? Forrest, also a wheelchair user with CP, explores the role of media representation in developing self-confidence and refreshingly highlights the importance of disabled peers. Readers will appreciate Effie's conflicted, insightful introspection and appraisals of her options; those who struggle to speak up will empathize as she finds her voice. Supportive friends and family and a sweet romance add warmth. Wilder reads White; there's some racial diversity among the supporting cast members.

**Affirming, uplifting, and thoughtful.** (*Fiction. 13-18*)



### THE NIGHT IN QUESTION

Glasgow, Kathleen & Liz Lawson

Delacorte (416 pp.)

\$19.99 | May 30, 2023

9780593645833

Series: An Agathas Mystery, 2

Inseparable teen sleuths snark and squabble their way through a second whodunit infused with the spirit of the Queen of Mystery.

“This is what happens when you start messing around with history,” someone comments. “The bones begin to rattle.” In this follow-up to *The Agathas* (2022), the principle definitely holds. Investigating a brutal assault that leaves a widely disliked classmate in a medical coma leads unlikely friends Alice and Iris to the mysterious deaths of a budding starlet and her secret beau 74 years ago, in 1949. Along with paying frequent homage to Agatha Christie and lavishing their tale with tried-and-true elements—an old mansion with a secret staircase *and* a hidden room, a fabulously valuable missing necklace, an apparent perp who may be innocent despite being caught literally red-handed, shadowy family connections, and more—the authors enthusiastically shovel clues, or things that look like clues, into nearly every one of their short, alternately narrated chapters on the way to a violent climax. In a strong continuing subplot, the friendship between the two teenagers sometimes looks more like war as they come from different social circles (wealthy Alice’s dubbed the Mains, working-class Iris’ the Zoners) in a similarly divided small California town, and as they wrestle with individual personal issues, their characters, values, and expectations also frequently clash. They’re talented detectives though, with ingeniously complementary methods. The main cast reads White.

**A delight for teen Poirots, chock-full of puzzling clues and swirling tensions.** (map) (*Mystery. 14-18*)



### THE TREACHEROUS HOPE

Gray, Claudia

Illus. by Eric Zawadzki

DC (208 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | Feb. 7, 2023

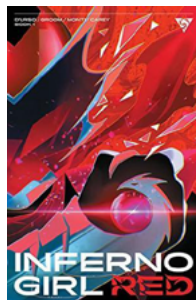
9781401296094

Series: House of El, 3

The end of Krypton is nigh.

Having cracked Jor-El and Lara’s uber-encrypted data, Sera and Zahn discover the horrific truth: Krypton will soon face its demise. On cue, harsher, stronger quakes start to hit the planet. With his newfound knowledge, Zahn finally breaks free of his upper-caste restrictions. But other plots are afoot. Midnight—the insurgent group led by Gen. Zod—plans to sabotage Krypton’s amniosis grid and bring the reigning tribunes to their knees. Unaware of Krypton’s imminent destruction, Gen. Zod schemes to leverage the deadly chaos stirred by Midnight to shore up power in hopes of promising an unattainable future for the planet. Upon uncovering the extent of Zod’s objective, Sera resolves to disrupt her former commander’s coup efforts even if it may cost her any remaining minutes with Zahn. As Krypton crumbles, Kal-El (“the last son of Krypton”) is finally born. As Jor-El and Lara prepare to secure Kal-El’s future via an escape ship, Zahn scrambles for a way to spare Sera, himself, and their blossoming love from Krypton’s fate. In this trilogy closer, Gray and Zawadzki successfully establish Sera and Zahn as a pair of doomed young lovers thanks to the considerable character development featured in the previous two volumes. The action sequences hit harder as a result, and quieter moments between Zahn and Sera accentuate the unbearable, inevitable end that Kryptonians will confront—apart from Kal-El, of course.

**A poignant, gripping conclusion.** (*Graphic science fiction. 13-17*)



### INFERNO GIRL RED A Massive-Verse Book

Groom, Mat

Illus. by Erica D’Urso

Colors by Igor Monti

Image Comics (136 pp.)

\$17.99 paper | June 13, 2023

9781534324817

Series: Inferno Girl, 1

Can a newly minted superhero save a city under threat?

Cássia Costa is entering Helix, a prestigious boarding school in Apex City. She’s close with her journalist mother, Ana, who has had difficulty finding employment after reporting about a superhero named Inferno Girl Red. At Helix, Cássia meets her new roommate, Harriette Temples, and the two become fast friends. However, the semester takes an unexpected turn when the residents of Apex City are teleported into another dimension, where they are plagued by terrifying monsters unleashed

# “Actively empowering.”

THE GRIMOIRE OF GRAVE FATES

by a villainous foe called the Griffin. Cássia finds a mysterious bracelet that turns her into Inferno Girl Red. Unsure of her powers, she learns that her mother knows much about this superhero and can serve as her guide. Can Cássia save Apex City from the Griffin? And, with Harriette by her side, can she rescue her mom from an unknown fate? Groom’s take on superhero tropes is abundantly fun and over-the-top exciting, with an inclusive, predominantly female cast that refreshingly eschews the unrealistically buxom, wasp-waisted representation widely found in mainstream comics. Panels are punctuated with dazzling, psychedelically hued scenes, nearly blazing the action off the page. A nail-biting cliffhanger ensures that readers will anxiously await more of Cássia’s adventures. Harriette has brown skin and lavender locs; Ana and Cássia have light-brown skin, and Cássia appears to have vitiligo.

**This series opener is on fire.** (*Graphic science fiction. 12-18*)



## THE GRIMOIRE OF GRAVE FATES

Ed. by *Hanna Alkaf & Margaret Owen*  
 Delacorte (464 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | June 6, 2023  
 9780593427453  
 9780593427460 PLB



In a magical school packed with chosen ones, a teacher is murdered.

Galileo Academy for the Extraordinary educates future Sorcerers and prides itself on its diverse student body and outreach initiatives. Or so it claims—though, for the nonlegacy students from previously underrepresented backgrounds, the reality is grim. Professor Dropwort, for example, is a transphobic, racist, sexist, ableist bigot, and nobody particularly minds when he’s brutally murdered. Alas, it’s predictable which demographics the school administrators treat as suspects. In skillfully interwoven chapters, each written by a different author representing a breadth of powerhouse voices, 18 young adults try to protect themselves. From the moment Marieke Nijkamp’s Wren, a nonbinary, disabled necromancer who’s been bullied by Dropwort, finds the body, everything changes. Most of the students believe they are required to fulfill some kind of sacred quest, from Mason Deaver’s Maxwell, a trans boy who’s cursed with an actual prophecy, to Kat Cho’s Jia, a Korean overachiever, who *needs* to be the hero to feel worthy of her parents’ love. But the students aren’t at odds with one another, although they’re all preoccupied with their own fears. Every teen is the main character of their own corner of the story, each equally responsible for pushing Galileo to live up to its principles. The many individual voices are threaded together well, leading up to a conclusion that is cohesive and actively empowering.

**Eighteen heroes, individual yet not alone, beautifully find self-respect and force their school to change.** (*Fantasy mystery. 12-18*)



## THREADS THAT BIND

*Hatzopoulou, Kika*  
 Razorbill/Penguin (352 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | \$11.00 paper | May 30, 2023  
 9780593528716  
 9780593696064 paper

Deities abandoned this nearly ruined world long ago; now their descendants, the other-born, wield lesser, inherited powers for good and evil in this duology opener.

Io is the youngest of three sisters descended from the Moirae, or Fates, but she has the deadliest gift: She can sever the threads of life spun by eldest sister Thais and manipulated by middle sister Ava. Orphaned early, the girls were left to fend for themselves. Ava’s a nightclub chanteuse, and Io’s a private detective. Thais disappeared two years ago. Trailing an errant spouse in the Silts, a sprawling, gang-controlled slum in the half-flooded city of Alante, Io uncovers a murder involving mysterious wraiths intent on avenging past injustices. She reports this to the Silts’ mob queen, Bianca, who lends Edei, her handsome, laconic associate, to help Io defeat them. They visit the mansion of the Nine, reclusive muse-borns, to attend an upscale political rally, and as they investigate, their connection grows. Should Io disclose the fate-thread that binds them? Characters’ descriptions suggest a multiracial population corresponding to European, Middle Eastern, and North African identities. The apocalyptic setting, including a cosmology in which Greek, Roman, and Egyptian pantheons offer clues to other-born powers, is a strength. The highly original worldbuilding effectively counters some overly familiar, noir-ish elements, occasionally inconsistent characterization, and frenetic pacing. But there’s plenty to engage fantasy fans, leaving them eager for the next installment.

**Classical mythology, police procedural, and romance combine in this imaginative, intriguing post-apocalyptic story.** (*Fantasy. 14-18*)



## THE LIBRARY OF BROKEN WORLDS

*Johnson, Alaya Dawn*  
 Scholastic (448 pp.)  
 \$21.99 | June 6, 2023  
 9781338290622

Freida, sent to kill AI war god Name- ren who will likely kill her first, trades him a story instead: hers.

Found by the Head Librarian as a baby in the ever changing tunnels in the depths of the Library, most considered Freida a secondary AI, not quite human. She spent her childhood communing with the material gods, while some mortals and gods sought to love her, and others, to own her. When the Treaty peace between worlds, enforced by the Library for the last five centuries, comes under

“Strong pacing and vivid characterization will keep readers engaged.”

INVISIBLE SON



threat from the bloodthirsty Mahām, who want to feed Name- ren their most oppressed ethnic minority, Freida must use her forbidden knowledge of the Library tunnels to find answers in deep and dangerous places, risking her life and future to save the tri-systems from a humanitarian crisis. While this is an interesting premise, the execution may not appeal to most teen readers. The language is so ostentatious it’s hard to tell what’s actually happening versus what is metaphor or perhaps a sentient AI program flitting through brain-digital interfaces. Readers may need to allow themselves to gloss over large chunks of text or make assumptions about many elements in order to follow the all-too-hidden story threads. Which prompts the question: If the slog doesn’t lead to any real understanding of the tale, was the read worth it? Most characters are brown-skinned.

Filled with beautiful prose vignettes but a confusing and tedious narrative nonetheless. (map, author’s note) (*Speculative fiction. 16-adult*)



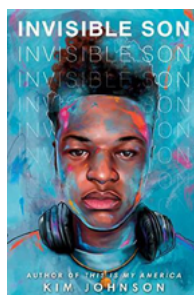
**DO A POWERBOMB!**

Johnson, Daniel Warren  
 Illus. by the author  
 Colors by Mike Spicer  
 Image Comics (168 pp.)  
 \$24.99 paper | March 7, 2023  
 9781534324749

A chance to see her mother alive again propels a young pro wrestler into elimination bouts with foes from around the multiverse—and beyond.

Combining the first seven issues of a comic originally issued in 2022, the tale begins with the accidental death of Tokyo Grand World Heavyweight champion Yua Steelrose, who reads Asian, in a match with hooded Mexican Canadian luchador Cobrasun. It then picks up 10 years later with Lona, Yua’s fierce daughter, trying to follow in her mother’s footsteps—and with the promise of a sleazy necromancer to revive her dead parent if she wins. She’s even willing to team up with the still grieving Cobrasun to enter the otherworldly Deathlyfe Tag Team Tournament, where the outcomes are not predetermined and all of the opponents are fighting for similar rebirths. Demonstrating an uncommon ability in his art to project outsized swagger and spectacle, wild aerial exploits, and spatters of gore delivered by rock-hard fists or folding chairs wrapped in barbed wire so that it all seems to explode off the page, Johnson pits his dynamic duo, styling themselves Sun and Steel, against massive opponents on the way to a climactic smackdown. With a fine disregard for physics, the artist mixes teams freely and has his wiry protagonist delivering as well as taking bone-crunching blows and kicks as she faces much bigger opponents.

Shock and awe—even for jaded WWF fans. (cover gallery) (*Graphic fantasy. 14-18*)



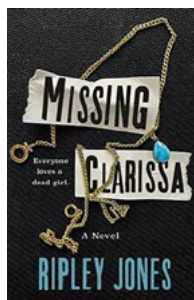
**INVISIBLE SON**

Johnson, Kim  
 Random House (416 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | June 27, 2023  
 9780593482100  
 9780593482117 PLB

An African American boy released from a juvenile detention center attempts to clear his name amid a pandemic and a social justice movement that are reshaping his hometown of Portland, Oregon.

Seventeen-year-old Andre Jackson is returning home to participate in a restorative justice program. He was trying to keep his friend Eric Whitaker from getting in trouble, but it backfired, and he was charged for a crime Eric committed. Andre’s life used to revolve around swimming, the YouTube channel he created with his best friend, and Sierra, who is his crush and Eric’s biological sister (the two Black teens were adopted by White parents). Now Andre is trying to rebuild his life while adjusting to the Covid-19 pandemic and a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. He wants to find out why Eric might have betrayed him instead of telling the truth. But Eric is missing, and his parents aren’t answering questions. As schools switch to remote learning and people protest the murder of George Floyd, Andre begins his own investigation. His efforts reveal a different, disturbing picture of the Whitakers’ multiracial family—they also have two biological children and a son adopted from Mexico. The novel tackles in a nuanced way topics such as the erasure of Black history, the disproportionate negative impact of the pandemic on communities of color, and entrenched racial bias in the justice system. The strong pacing and vivid characterization will keep readers engaged.

A powerful, emotional, and insightful read. (author’s note, resources) (*Fiction. 14-18*)



**MISSING CLARISSA**

Jones, Ripley  
 Wednesday Books (256 pp.)  
 \$18.99 | March 7, 2023  
 9781250801968

Two friends investigate a 1999 disappearance that happened in their fictional small town of Oreville, Washington, on the Olympic Peninsula.

Cameron Muñoz and Blair Johnson are, on the surface, unlikely best friends—Cam is tenacious and headstrong, with little concern for or even understanding of social norms, while Blair, a talented writer, doubts her abilities at every turn despite being a good reader of people. They undertake their dive into the decades-old case of Clarissa Campbell, a popular White 17-year-old who went missing following her high school graduation, as a project for their journalism class. Cam decides they should make a podcast about their research without really knowing how they’re made,



which becomes a running joke. What follows is a familiarly framed whodunit, carefully plotted to parse information out to readers at intervals, that stands out due to its thoughtful characterization. A wealth of issues is touched on throughout the story, including welcome recognition that domestic violence is far more prevalent than violence perpetrated by strangers, the case for prison abolition, and the disproportionate attention and resources directed toward crimes against attractive young White women. The novel is narrated in the third person, and podcast transcripts are interspersed. Gay Cam is Mexican American and White; Blair reads White; and there is diversity represented in secondary characters.

**A smart, engaging, and suspenseful mystery.** (*Mystery*. 13-18)



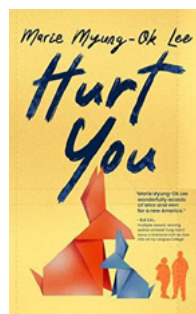
**SOMETHING MORE**

*Khalilieh, Jackie*  
Tundra Books (336 pp.)  
\$17.99 | June 6, 2023  
9781774882139

Autistic Palestinian Canadian high school student Jessie navigates family, friendship, and love while trying to figure out: Who exactly is Jessie Kassis?

Though her family is Greek Orthodox, 15-year-old Jessie begins attending high school at Roman Catholic Holy Trinity, where she hopes to start over fresh with kids who don't know her. Since recently being diagnosed with autism, she's finally had an answer to why fitting in has always been hard. Meanwhile, Jessie tries everything she can to mask her autism and fulfill the goals she lists in the journal her psychologist suggests she keep, ones like making friends, kissing the cute 10th grader in her science class, and participating in the school musical. It's not long before Jessie struggles to keep it all together and fulfill the expectations of those around her, however, and it's ultimately up to her to find her place in the world without losing herself. As an autistic person herself, Khalilieh presents readers with a genuine protagonist. Jessie's identity as the daughter of Palestinian immigrants is woven into the novel through cultural elements and brief explorations of Palestinian issues. Her inner monologue is at times profoundly introspective while also displaying the gushing enthusiasm of an adolescent with a crush. This is an enjoyable read that will have readers rooting for Jessie's success in love and life.

**A coming-of-age debut with a refreshingly authentic protagonist.** (*playlist*) (*Fiction*. 12-17)



**HURT YOU**

*Lee, Marie Myung-Ok*  
Blackstone (350 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 16, 2023  
9798200758098

A Korean American teen recounts the events leading up to the shooting of her brother.

A newspaper reports that a high school student shot a mentally ill man in self-defense; the victim is Leo, Georgia Kim's beloved older brother. But as Georgia's flashback narrative reveals, there's more to the story... and to Leo, whose developmental disability causes seizures, minimal speech, and violent meltdowns. To meet Leo's educational needs, the Kims have moved from a diverse city to the suburb of Sunnyvale, California. Georgia, already self-conscious about being fat, is thrust into heavily White Cambridge Academy. Additionally, Georgia struggles to reconcile her devotion to Leo's care with her radiologist father's high academic expectations, her mother's desire that Georgia live her own life, and her own college dreams. Soon, however, Georgia befriends a group comprising Korean Americans and Cambridge's sole Black student—and falls for two different guys. Her new friends even welcome Leo to hagwon, their Korean study hangout. But everything shatters when a somewhat two-dimensionally villainous classmate misunderstands Leo's behavior. Georgia's efforts to respect Leo's thoughts and feelings are heartening. Because her identity is inextricably entwined with being his sister and protector, her character arc is also closely tied to Leo. This contemporary take on *Of Mice and Men* tackles numerous heavy issues, including racism, ableism, gun control, and the challenges of caring for a significantly disabled family member, but offers no easy answers.

**Devastating.** (*Fiction*. 13-18)



**STARS AND SMOKE**

*Lu, Marie*  
Roaring Brook Press (336 pp.)  
\$17.99 | March 28, 2023  
9781250852816  
Series: Stars and Smoke, 1

Two 19-year-olds endeavor to bring down an evil villain—and resist their draw to one another—in this romantic thriller.

International superstar Winter Young is bewildered when Panacea, a secret organization with ties to the CIA, briefly abducts him following one of his concerts and suggests that he should work for them as they attempt to infiltrate the shadowy empire of an ultrawealthy tycoon who is poised to unleash a deadly new chemical agent on the world. The shipping magnate's daughter is a huge fan of Winter's, and a private concert for her birthday gives him the perfect cover.

Winter is further taken aback when he's introduced to Sydney Cossette, the young Panacea agent who will pose as his body-guard during the operation, finding her abrasive and surly. Lu vividly sketches a high-stakes world in which the glitz of money and power forms a nicely juxtaposed background for curmudgeonly Sydney, whose traumatic background provides ample character motivation, and likable Winter, whose kind decency is of as much import as the sometimes-gushing descriptions of his beauty and grace. Tech gadgetry and well-paced action sequences will keep readers engaged, and while it's never really in doubt that the pair are attracted to each other, their volley of insults and awkwardness is clever and fun. Winter is Chinese American and has previously had a relationship with another guy; Sydney is cued White, and diversity is woven into the large supporting cast.

**An engrossing thriller that centers the characters at its heart.** (*Thriller. 14-18*)



### THESE INFINITE THREADS

*Mafi, Tahereh*  
Harper/HarperCollins (416 pp.)  
\$19.99 | Feb. 7, 2023  
978-0-06-297247-7  
Series: This Woven Kingdom, 2

Alizeh's world is turned upside down when murderous Tulanian King Cyrus spirits her away, intending to marry her at the behest of the devil, Iblees.

Alizeh plots to win her freedom, but upon encountering her people and their hopes for the salvation Alizeh can bring as Tulan's Jinn queen, she is conflicted and frustrated. She knows these long-plotted machinations of Iblees, the fallen Jinn responsible for the ruin of all Jinnkind, are meant to manipulate her heart and sense of duty. She is further shocked by Cyrus' plan for Alizeh to solely rule Tulan and his admission that he is willing to die after they marry and therefore be liberated from Iblees' control. Able to see beneath Cyrus' cruel veneer, Alizeh sympathizes with his constant pain and torment—both by Iblees and his desire for her—stirring emotions within her even as she remembers Kamran. In Arduania, King Zaal's murder has left Kamran literally and figuratively scarred and running out of time. The resistance to his ordination reveals betrayals, impending war, and a prophecy that leads him to Tulan and back to Alizeh, who he hopes is not among his betrayers. Mafi builds a rich world, based on Islamic concepts and the Persian epic poem the "Shahnameh," and continues to layer eloquent prose and exquisite emotional turmoil in a growing star-crossed love triangle that will leave fans hungry for more.

**A necessary, beautiful, and torturous entry in this epic series.** (*Fantasy. 13-18*)



### YOU DON'T HAVE A SHOT

*Marie, Racquel*  
Feiwel & Friends (384 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 9, 2023  
9781250836298

A refreshing, queer coming-of-age story.

Valentina Castillo-Green is captain of her soccer team, and even with her two best friends playing by her side, she still allows herself, as usual, precisely seven seconds to panic before the last and biggest game of the season. Not only is Vale's intensely competitive father closely watching, they're playing against undefeated Hillcrest, the team Leticia Ortiz, her childhood nemesis, is on. The game goes poorly, in large part because of Vale's impulsively angry interactions with Leticia. More bad news follows—coach tells Vale she won't be captain the following year, putting her chances of a college soccer scholarship at risk—so her besties propose a fun alternative for the summer. The three of them return to the soccer camp in Santa Cruz that they used to attend together. It starts out well with some happy reunions, but things quickly go south because not only is Leticia there, she's assigned to co-captain a team with Vale, one that could salvage her college dreams. But in spending more time together, the girls develop feelings for one another. Colombian and Irish American Vale is easy to root for. She sounds authentically her age as she wrestles with believable problems and complaints, engages in self-reflection, and confronts her changing feelings for Letitia. The lively banter and fun cast of broadly diverse characters support a story in which soccer forms the backdrop of a sweet romance and a teen figures out what's truly important to her.

**Uplifting.** (*Fiction. 13-18*)



### SOME SHALL BREAK

*Marney, Ellie*  
Little, Brown (400 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023  
9780316487719



Three months after helping the FBI bring down the Berryville Butcher in *None Shall Sleep* (2020), college students Emma Lewis and Travis Bell reunite on a new case with a chilling connection to Emma's past.

Emma was the sole survivor of serial killer Daniel Huxton, who died three years ago in 1979. Her insights from that experience proved invaluable to the FBI's fledgling Behavioral Science department in their hunt for the Butcher. Now, the department is investigating murders in Pittsburgh that bear a resemblance to Huxton's M.O. Despite her distrust of the bureau, Emma figures that consulting on this case in hopes of saving other girls is preferable to chafing in protective custody until the copycat is caught. Travis is now in part-time training at

“Historically resonant and culturally nuanced.”

ONLY THIS BEAUTIFUL MOMENT

Quantico, and there’s another familiar face there—that of Kristin Gutmunsson, whose sociopathic twin, Simon, played a critical role in the Butcher case. Enigmatic Kristin volunteers her own insights—plus Simon’s cooperation—in hopes of reducing her brother’s death sentence to life in prison. The rich, engaging narrative jumps among the three young people, employing taut, restrained language laced with a pervasive feeling of dread as the stakes escalate. While the fast pace and morbidly fascinating subject keep the pages turning, the book’s thoughtful exploration of intense trauma, PTSD, and therapy-informed treatment centers survivors and keeps the story grounded. Emma and Kristin are White; Travis is Mexican American.

**A razor-sharp sequel exceeding the previous installment’s high expectations. (author’s note) (Thriller. 13-18)**



**ONLY THIS BEAUTIFUL MOMENT**

Nazemian, Abdi  
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (400 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 9, 2023  
9780063039377



A textured novel that uncovers secrets spanning three generations of an Iranian family.

It’s 2019. Seventeen-year-old Moud Jafarzadeh is removing all traces of gayness from his social media before he leaves Los Angeles for Tehran. He’ll be visiting Iran with his dad, Saeed, to spend time with Baba, his terminally ill grandfather. As they’re visiting a country where gay people are confronted with violence or worse, this trip is a source of conflict between Moud and Shane, his White boyfriend. The perspective then shifts to that of 18-year-old Saeed Jafarzadeh in 1978, during the Iranian revolution. He’s going to a student protest, a risky activity he conceals from his parents. It’s there Saeed meets and starts to fall for beautiful Shirin, a fellow protester. The novel then flashes back to 1939. In Los Angeles, 17-year-old Babak “Bobby” Jafarzadeh, Moud’s grandfather, desperately wants to tell Vicente, his Mexican American best friend, that he loves him. Today was supposed to be the day—until Mother picked Bobby up from school and whisked him away for a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer screen test, his ticket to becoming a movie star and fulfilling her own disappointed dreams. The Jafarzadeh men’s narratives alternate, intriguingly unveiling family secrets. Nazemian expertly bridges the past and the present, exploring racism, homophobia, and relations between the United States and Iran along the way. His elegant prose propels this historically resonant and culturally nuanced family drama.

**A stunning intergenerational coming-of-age story. (author’s note) (Fiction. 14-18)**



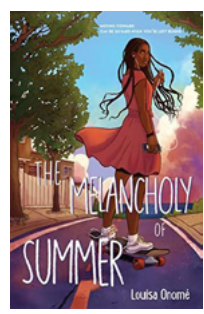
**MÈO AND BÉ**

Nguyen, Doan Phuong  
Illus. by Jesse White  
Tu Books (320 pp.)  
\$21.95 | May 23, 2023  
9781643796253

A harrowing account of one girl’s life during the Vietnam War.

Nine-year-old Bé is happy in her village in South Vietnam, but with the war encroaching on their home, her father decides that it’s safer for her and her mother to move further north—to another village where he has another wife and five sons. Bé quickly realizes that their arrival is not welcome. Since she is her father’s only daughter, Bé’s new grandmother favors her, which infuriates her father’s first wife. To escape the latter’s abuse, Bé finds solace in a tiny kitten, Mèo, and it is Mèo who will accompany Bé as she faces escalating abuse, loss, abandonment, trafficking, and war. Based on Nguyen’s family’s experiences, this is a grim portrayal of life in wartime and the trauma that accompanies it. While Bé does not necessarily understand all the atrocities she witnesses, the implications will be clear to many readers. This relatively mature content is sometimes at odds with the narrative voice, which overall reads as quite young, in line with Bé’s age at the beginning of the novel. While the narration is easy to digest, and Mèo’s presence makes for some softer moments, the novel is perhaps better suited for an older audience.

**This raw story of perseverance in the face of horror will challenge readers and their interlocutors. (language notes, Vietnamese names, glossary, author’s note) (Historical fiction. 12-14)**



**THE MELANCHOLY OF SUMMER**

Onomé, Louisa  
Feiwel & Friends (320 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 30, 2023  
9781250823564

A 17-year-old Nigerian Canadian girl struggles with the fallout of missing parents, changes following high school graduation, and a complicated relationship with her new guardian.

Summer Uzoma has been managing to survive in the aftermath of her parents’ disappearances following suspicions of credit card fraud involving their beauty product company. She has perfected a careful facade through carefully managed interactions with school counselors who have helped her graduate. Unfortunately, an inquiry from York University and an inquisitive guidance counselor bring her unparented status to the attention of Child Protective Services social worker Gardenia Cruz. Gardenia explains that couch surfing at her friends’ houses is not adequate, and she places Summer with her cousin



# “An uplifting story about the power of family.”

AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER

Olu Arai. Nineteen-year-old Olu has a Japanese father and is a big celebrity in Japan who has returned to Canada following a scandal of her own. Skateboarding, a newly minted friendship with a skater boy, and the beauty of Lake Ontario help Summer deal with her fear of abandonment. The nuanced portrayal of the effects of emotional distress is deeply layered in this well-paced novel. Summer's relationships with her two closest friends are balanced by sharp outbursts that allow readers to experience her internal emotional landscape. The characters, who reflect the diversity of the greater Toronto area, are relatable, and the story realistically offers no easy endings or quick resolutions.

**An engaging read that explores the impact of trauma and the uncertainties of young adulthood.** (*Fiction. 14-18*)



## NICK AND CHARLIE

Oseman, Alice  
Scholastic (176 pp.)  
\$16.99 | Jan. 3, 2023  
9781338885101  
Series: Heartstopper

In this novella addition to the Heartstopper graphic novel series, English teen boys Nick and Charlie face a new challenge—sustaining a long-distance relationship.

At the end of the summer, Nick will leave for university a couple of hundred miles north in Leeds. He can't wait for independence and an escape from his hometown. As much as Charlie wants to support his boyfriend, every time Nick mentions his plans, Charlie sinks deeper into anxious thoughts about a whole year apart. All of Charlie's followers on Tumblr say their breakup is inevitable, which doesn't help. Determined not to make Nick feel bad about his insecurity, Charlie tries to distract both of them from the future and the upcoming changes. Chapters switch back and forth between Charlie's and Nick's perspectives. Each time Charlie swallows his anxiety and lies to Nick, he feels worse. The steady buildup of tension drives the story forward at a fast pace. Returning characters and references to past events from the comic series receive some introduction and explanation for new readers, but familiarity with the previous volumes or the live-action Netflix series provides beneficial context for characters' relationships and the central conflict. Illustrations throughout capture romantic and emotional moments. Although presented in a different format from the rest of the series, this appealing addition strikes the same balance of engrossing drama and gentle love.

**Sweet and idealistic. (cultural notes for American readers, character information and sketches)** (*Romance. 14-18*)



## YOU BET YOUR HEART

Parker, Danielle  
Joy Revolution (320 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 30, 2023  
9780593565278

A look at the excitement and intensity of high school senior life.

Parker's debut sings with intensity and insight as readers follow Sasha Johnson-Sun through the final months of her senior year at Skyline High School in Monterey. All is as it should be as Sasha prepares to clinch the valedictorian title—and the \$30,000 in scholarship money that goes along with it, money she needs to help relieve the financial burden her widowed mom is bearing. Enter Ezra Davis-Goldberg, Sasha's former best friend, who is tied for the title—and the money. The duo decides to bet on the best two out of three in key upcoming assignments to see who will win and who will agree to bow out of the competition. Only, as their feelings grow and the end-of-year stakes intensify, Sasha must decide what matters most and what kind of mark she wants to make. Parker deftly portrays Sasha's Black and Korean and Ezra's Black Jewish identities, giving thoughtful voice to their complexity and the pressures placed on the students' shoulders by their parents and themselves. Sasha in particular gives voice to the stress of becoming the first in her family to attend university full time. Parker also writes Sasha's and her mother's grief in a moving and inspirational manner. Secondary characters reflect the multiculturalism of modern California.

**An insightful and emotional exploration of teen changes and growth.** (*Fiction. 12-18*)



## AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER

Peppins, Brianna  
Scholastic (256 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 16, 2023  
9781338814071

As the middle child of seven, 16-year-old Novah Wilkinson feels overlooked.

She is often left covering work shifts for her older siblings at their family's dog grooming, day care, and boarding business and helping take care of her younger siblings, which means no time for hanging out with her friends. But overnight the Wilkinsons' world turns upside down when Novah's parents are killed in a car accident. Oldest sibling Ariana is forced to turn down her volleyball scholarship to Howard University and becomes the siblings' legal guardian on a conditional basis: Ari has less than a year to prove to the judge that she is a capable guardian or the children will be split up. She has to keep the family business running, make sure everyone stays in school and out of trouble, and pass every visit with their caseworker. Novah and her family are Black, and Novah knows foster care

is the worst possible scenario for them. Understanding there is too much for Ari to handle on her own, Novah is determined to help in every way she can to prevent their separation, even if that means overwhelming herself and struggling to hold on to parts of her adolescence—like pursuing a relationship with her crush, Hailee. Although this is a short, quick read, it packs an emotional punch. The exploration of the siblings' various mechanisms for coping with grief is especially poignant.

**An uplifting story about the power of family.** (*Fiction. 12-18*)



**HOUSE PARTY**

*Ed. by Reynolds, Justin A.*  
Joy Revolution (384 pp.)  
\$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | June 27, 2023  
9780593488157  
9780593488164 PLB

Teens use the last party of senior year to fulfill long-held dreams in this novel that features contributions from 10 acclaimed young adult authors.

The most important event for the seniors of Florence Hills High School will be the party hosted by DeAndre Dixon, a wealthy African American teen who lives in a big house with a pool. Students from all the school's social groups will be there. Some have decided this will be the night they connect with a crush or reignite an old relationship. With no adults on the premises, the party, complete with a DJ and lots of alcohol, grows even bigger. As the evening progresses, a hidden relationship is revealed, a long-term friendship is nearly undone, and a band reunites for one last gig. The teens are also dealing with serious issues such as a parent with early-onset dementia, and not every student has material advantages. By the time the party breaks up, some have achieved their goals, others have found more important things to focus on, and new connections have been made. Each of the characters has a distinct voice. Social media posts and texts sprinkled throughout and the fast pace contribute to a sense of immediacy and excitement. More importantly, this diverse group of teens is realistically portrayed with heart and humor.

**A lively narrative that shows the power of friendship and connection. (cast of characters, maps, playlist)** (*Fiction. 13-18*)



**FRIENDS LIKE THESE**

*Rosoff, Meg*  
Tundra Books (208 pp.)  
\$12.99 paper | May 30, 2023  
9781774881101

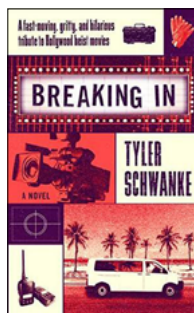
An instant friendship between summer interns in 1983 New York veers into rough waters.

"I like the way you never speak before thinking," says Edie to her new best friend, Beth, who for once is able to deliver a

snappy reply: "I like the way you never think before speaking."

The girls, both recent high school graduates, are otherwise opposites: Beth has come to New York City from nowhere-ville with little money and even less self-confidence, while Edie is the epitome of Manhattan wealth and cool. They join two boys, ultracompetitive Dan and preppy Oliver, in the bustling offices of a daily newspaper. As much as Beth absorbs about journalism from this coveted post, she will learn even more from her sophisticated new friend—and roommate, after Edie rescues her from a cockroach-infested tenement downtown. Rosoff evokes an unbearably hot summer in Manhattan with sidewalk-melting intensity, not skimping on gritty period detail, conveyed in a tabloid tone from the very first page: "Muggers mugged. Junkies jacked up. Pickpockets picked pockets. Flashers flashed, rapists raped and perverts perverted. Psycho bag ladies shouted obscenities at miscellaneous crazies. You could get shot just for being in the path of a bullet. AIDS knew where you lived." Beth, the granddaughter of four Holocaust victims, may be unworldly, but her sensitivity and her moral clarity give her a grounding her loose-cannon friend Edie sorely lacks. The book follows a White default.

**Readers who remember the 1980s will enjoy this edgy tale of lost innocence as much as new adults. (content note)** (*Fiction. 16-adult*)



**BREAKING IN**

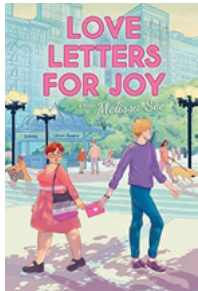
*Schwanke, Tyler*  
Blackstone (332 pp.)  
\$18.99 | May 9, 2023  
9798200960798

Teens try to reclaim what's theirs in the cutthroat world of Hollywood.

Since before her father died in a botched bank robbery, 17-year-old aspiring filmmaker Millie Blomquist has dreamed of becoming a famous director of heist films. She finally gets the chance

to pursue her dreams at the Manhattan Movie Academy, where she is working with friends Paz, Devin, and Jordan, when her idol, famed director and academy founder Ricky O'Naire, is arrested for embezzlement. The school collapses before her summer program is even over. Seven months later, Millie is back home in Fargo, North Dakota, trying to make movies on her own when she sees the trailer for recently exonerated O'Naire's new project—only to realize it's the film about her father she presented to him at the academy. Desperate to hold him responsible, Millie organizes Paz, Devin, and Jordan to carry out a real-life heist and take O'Naire's materials ransom. But with the stakes ramping up, they don't realize how dangerous things are about to become. Given her personal history with heists gone wrong, Millie's naïveté is occasionally unbelievable, and readers not deeply familiar with heist films may have trouble with the endless movie references, but overall, this is a compelling read that doesn't shy away from slightly darker content. Main characters are cued White; contextual clues may indicate that Paz is Latine and Jordan is Black.

**A fast-paced homage to the classic heist film.** (*Thriller. 14-18*)



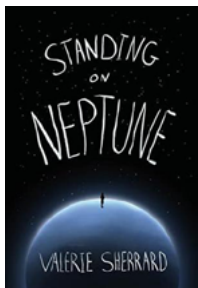
### LOVE LETTERS FOR JOY

See, *Melissa*  
Scholastic (304 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023  
9781338875386

A wholesome romance featuring a case of hidden identity and an asexual protagonist with cerebral palsy.

Love is in the air at Manhattan's Caldwell Preparatory Academy thanks to an anonymous student known as Caldwell Cupid. Overachiever Joy Corvi is on the romantic side of the ace spectrum but hasn't had much time for first love, preferring to devote her energy to academics. She's poised to become the school's first valedictorian with cerebral palsy—if she can stay ahead of her academic rival, self-assured and handsome Nathaniel Wright. But when people around Joy begin pairing off thanks to Caldwell Cupid, she starts to wonder whether she's missing out. Seeking a sympathetic ear, Joy emails Caldwell Cupid for advice, and their correspondence causes her to question her approaches to love, friendship, and her future. Details about the matchmaker's identity are cleverly revealed to readers but not to Joy, providing dramatic irony as they wait for the truth to emerge. Joy's cerebral palsy is an important part of her character, woven into her emotional and physical responses throughout. The discussions of social themes are satisfying, and the scenes of gentle courtship and vulnerable confessions as Joy's heart thaws are charming. A central source of conflict for Nathaniel and Joy is developed without subtlety and features a rushed resolution, however. Joy and Nathaniel are cued White; supporting characters bring racial diversity and span the queer identity spectrum.

**Earnest, sweet, and socially aware. (author's note) (Romance. 13-18)**



### STANDING ON NEPTUNE

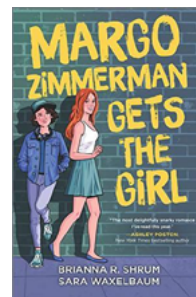
Sherrard, *Valerie*  
DCB (160 pp.)  
\$16.95 paper | April 18, 2023  
9781770866874

A possible pregnancy and the details of daily life fill a teenage girl's mind.

As a new school week begins, 17-year-old Brooke Morgan Wells realizes that her period is five days late. Though fear and a barrage of questions flood her mind, she moves through the week as though everything is outwardly normal, attending classes, celebrating a family birthday, and completing a science project about Neptune. Neptune serves as a personal symbol for her own feelings of isolation and the latent mysteries contained within her body. The crux of this novel in verse is the ceaselessness of Brooke's inner monologue that integrates her thoughts about her family roles as a child of divorce who navigates life with stepparents and as a caring

older sister. She also reflects on her increasingly tenuous relationship with her boyfriend, Ryan, and the existential realities of the potential state of pregnancy. By situating the story in this weeklong moment of suspense, Sherrard focuses affectingly on the intricacy of a teenager's scattered yet profound internal emotional experience rather than delving into the practical choices and social implications she may soon face. Characters lack physical descriptions and are racially indeterminate.

**A tender, intense story capturing the vast scope of a young adult's interior universe. (Verse fiction. 13-18)**



### MARGO ZIMMERMAN GETS THE GIRL

Shrum, *Brianna R.* & *Sara Waxelbaum*  
Inkyard Press (304 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781335453655

Margo Zimmerman has it all: She is smart, gorgeous, and she's dating one of the most popular guys in her school.

When Margo plays a game of spin the bottle at a friend's party and it lands on a girl, Margo realizes midkiss that she's gay. With no helpful guidance from her polyamorous, pansexual older brother, Margo reaches out to the only openly queer person she can think of: Abbie Sokoloff. Abbie herself is in need of guidance, as her prospective university has rescinded their acceptance letter due to her poor grades. Abbie decides to teach Margo queer 101 in exchange for academic tutoring. This lighthearted story addresses lesbian and bisexual stereotypes through comical interactions and witty dialogue that sometimes reads as more grown up than teen. Despite being the product of a collaboration between two authors, the plot-driven narrative told from alternating first-person points of view is sometimes confusing when it comes to distinguishing between the protagonists' voices. However, this adorable, sex-positive, will-they, won't-they romance is an engaging story. The characters, though somewhat one-dimensional, will keep readers interested as they learn more about themselves and each other. Both main characters are Jewish, neurodivergent, and queer; they are cued as White.

**A largely enjoyable story with a spicy queer romance. (Romance. 14-18)**



# “Riveting and meaningful.”

AN ECHO IN THE CITY



## AN ECHO IN THE CITY

Song, K.X.  
Little, Brown (352 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 20, 2023  
9780316396820



When 16-year-old Phoenix Lam is invited to attend a student-led protest, it's mostly curiosity that compels her to go.

Even though Phoenix has lived in Hong Kong since her family moved back from the U.S. 6 years ago, she's never felt like she truly belongs. The protesters' outcry against an extradition bill that would intensify the Chinese government's pressure on political activists sparks something within Phoenix, and she decides to join them and document the protests through photography. An accidental phone swap introduces her to 17-year-old Kai Zhang, a recent returnee to Hong Kong from Shanghai who is grieving his mother's recent death. Kai expresses interest in attending protest organizing meetings with Phoenix but doesn't reveal that he's a police academy trainee and the son of a police inspector. Despite their differences—naïve, well-meaning Phoenix comes from a wealthy family, while Kai lives with bitter awareness of his poverty—attraction grows between them. The story is narrated by both Phoenix and Kai, and they take readers into the thick of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Well-developed characterization saves their romance from falling into star-crossed-lovers cliché. Instead, the teens' relationship highlights questions about class and national identity alongside overarching themes of freedom, duty, and accountability. The prose is lyrical and evocative, describing the characters' emotional turmoil and the brutal clashes between protesters and police with equal deftness.

**A riveting and meaningful coming-of-age story. (author's note, further reading and viewing) (Fiction. 13-18)**



## DARKHEARTS

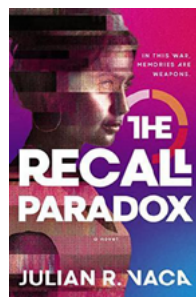
Sutter, James L.  
Wednesday Books (320 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 6, 2023  
9781250869746

Fantasy author Sutter's first foray into young adult romance follows former best friends in Seattle who reconnect and become something more.

World-famous Korean American rock star Chance Ng and David Holcomb, who is White, are reunited after the recent death from alcohol poisoning of mutual friend and band mate Elijah. David's departure from the band before it became famous is a source of conflict between them, and they have not spoken in years. In the meantime, David has found comfort in his friend Ridley as well as in his new woodworking hobby; he intends to pursue carpentry as a career. Despite the heavy opening scene at Eli's funeral,

this story sparkles with laugh-out-loud dialogue and well-drawn secondary characters, especially movie fanatic Ridley, a confident, sexually liberated Black girl who is an aspiring film critic. Several intimate scenes between Chance and David are tenderly written and exceptionally sweet, while David's ruminations on his sexuality feel natural and appropriately complicated, contributing to the fun and impressively sex-positive vibe. Unfortunately, clumsy, odd phrasing occasionally detracts from the otherwise charming dialogue. Several instances in which the boys' different body shapes are contrasted and stigma around fatness is brought up could have been more clearly unpacked. The positive representation of pursuing a trade is a refreshing, much-needed addition to books about teens that too frequently focus on college as the only goal.

**A funny romp with a lot of heart. (Romance. 14-18)**



## THE RECALL PARADOX

Vaca, Julian R.  
Thomas Nelson (416 pp.)  
\$18.99 paper | April 11, 2023  
9780840701152  
Series: The Memory Index, 2

The secret origin of the viral plague of memory loss afflicting the world is revealed in this duology closer.

Picking up the action where *The Memory Index* (2022) left off and driving on with minimal recapping, Vaca sends his multiethnic group of four teenagers back to the secret laboratory in the Tennessee woods for more shared “knifing” into the memories of others, reclamation of repressed memories, fragmentary premonitions of future disasters, and clues that the secretive Memory Ghosts may not be the terrorist front they're billed to be, not to mention shocking revelations that the massive Memory Frontier corporation, sole source of high-tech recording gadgets that purportedly preserve and restore memories deleted by the Memory Killer, has a nefarious secret agenda. Though an ingenious premise and period references to '80s-era music add flavor to a plotline expertly boosted by short chapters and multiple narrators, the author not only loses control of his cast—trotting in four new rival memory knifing and a major villain to play scenes and then vanish abruptly—but rather than let the young folk take the lead in saving the world, he goes for multiple timely interventions by grown-ups to rescue them and do most of the heavy lifting to bring the tale to its conveniently tidied-up resolution.

**A strong start peters out to a patchy, less-than-memorable finish. (playlist, discussion questions) (Science fiction. 13-18)**

## “A sweet summer romance.”

I LIKE ME BETTER



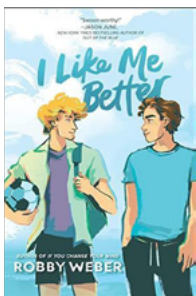
### FATIMA TATE TAKES THE CAKE

VanBrakle, Khadijah  
Holiday House (304 pp.)  
\$18.99 | June 13, 2023  
9780823454853

Seventeen-year-old Fatima Tate feels in control only while indulging her passion for baking, relinquishing major life decisions to her conservative Black Muslim parents.

Juggling charter school, daily prayers, hanging out with best friend Zaynab, and crushing on fellow soup kitchen volunteer Raheem is all in a day's work. Though she aspires to become a pastry chef, her working-class parents steer her toward more stable careers. Fate intervenes with an arranged marriage proposal from Raheem and a spot in a teen baking contest. Charmed by Raheem's romantic gestures, Fatima succumbs to her physical attraction for him. However, when he expresses annoyance at her male baking class partner and advises her to cut ties with Zaynab for dating a girl, Fatima bristles at his controlling nature. Growing secrets strain her friendship with Zaynab while Raheem's checkered past and a unilateral decision he makes that undermines her pursuit of her dreams make her question their future. The book presents a diverse Muslim community with conservative and progressive values, strong hijabi and nonhijabi Black Muslim women, and complex family dynamics. Aspects of Muslim life are explained, educating those who are unfamiliar with them but possibly feeling heavy-handed to those in the know. While the pacing is uneven, the honest explorations of the pressures of early marriage, relationship struggles, and conceptions of respect and double standards within a tightknit community provide much food for thought.

Looks at underrepresented issues within Muslim communities, making a case for forging one's own path. (recipes) (Fiction. 14-18)



### I LIKE ME BETTER

Weber, Robby  
Inkyard Press (288 pp.)  
\$19.99 | May 2, 2023  
9781335453648

A rising senior faces pressures and pleasures.

Soccer star Zack Martin's last year at Citrus Harbor High is set to be fantastic. Coming off a state win, Zack's the presumed captain for next year: Helping his team attain victory at the upcoming July 4 charity match will boost his chances of getting his teammates' votes. But then outgoing captain Ryan, afraid of losing his college scholarship after a prank he pulls goes wrong, convinces Zack to take responsibility for it. Zack maneuvers his mandated community service hours into a position at the Marine Institute where he can be

closer to Cute Guy—aka Chip, Ryan's environmentalist cousin who doesn't share Zack's admiration for Ryan. Zack develops feelings for Chip, but he must reckon with his place on the team and who he really wants to be. Weber's characters pop off the page in their sunny Florida setting as they deal with a variety of adolescent stressors. Zack and Chip's slow-burn relationship and the easygoing acceptance of their sexuality by their peers are delightful. Zack's emotional turmoil over competing concerns is realistic as he deals with his teammates, his budding relationship with Chip, his divorced parents' expectations, and more. Main characters read White.

A sweet story of soccer and summer romance with a lovable protagonist. (Romance. 13-18)



### BORROW MY HEART

West, Kasie  
Delacorte (288 pp.)  
\$12.99 paper | June 13, 2023  
9780593643259

A girl's attempt at preventing a boy from being embarrassed by his friend's catfishing prank complicates their growing relationship.

When Asher and his friend Dale show up at a coffee shop for Asher's date with Gemma, a girl he's met online but has never seen a photo of, it's clear to best friends Wren and Kamala that Dale has set Asher up and intends to humiliate him. Usually orderly Wren, eavesdropping and hidden from the boys' view behind a plant, impulsively presents herself as Gemma. What she didn't imagine was that she'd see Asher again or that they would form a connection and develop a trusting friendship that quickly heads toward something more. This initial lie eventually catches up with Wren, threatening to ruin the closeness they build over the summer. Though the romance is compelling, West's best writing tackles the complicated relationship between Wren and her mother, who left her family 7 years prior. The very real emotions of hope, disappointment, and heartache existing among Wren, 20-year-old sister Zoey, and the girls' mother are well drawn. Kamala is a present and active part of the story. The backdrop of Wren's job at an animal shelter gives the story shape as well, highlighting her personality traits and tenderness. Main characters are White; Kamala is Indian American.

A solid teen romance with strong characterization and nuanced relationships. (Romance. 12-18)



**FOUR MONTHS PAST FLORENCE**

Wilson, Emily Paige  
 Illus. by Sam Ward  
 Andrews McMeel Publishing (384 pp.)  
 \$18.99 paper | May 30, 2023  
 9781524881337

An aspiring reporter reveals a scandal after a hurricane hits her community.

High school junior Millie Willard desperately wants to be the next editor of her school's paper, *The Bloom*, and takes every opportunity to show she's worthy of being chosen. When Hurricane Florence comes through her small town of Magnolia, South Carolina, an opportunity arises. Millie overhears a conversation between her mother and her cousin, who's deputy sheriff, during which he reveals the cause of the fire in the local library that was serving as a temporary shelter for people and their pets: It broke out accidentally after a librarian plugged in an electric kettle and went outside for a cigarette break. Millie seizes her chance, not considering the impact on the subject of her exposé. Her story in *The Bloom* goes viral and is picked up by Felicia Fitz, local news anchor and Millie's hero. Soon the librarian starts getting threats, she's derided on social media, and her property is vandalized. The free verse makes the hurricane's impact feel visceral, and Millie's motivations and determination come across as authentic. Millie feels the strain of the fallout of publishing the story, but her internal ethics don't kick in immediately: She's ultimately able to rectify the situation but experiences few consequences and is forgiven in a way that doesn't feel wholly earned. Main characters are cued White.

An interesting examination of journalistic integrity that doesn't hit all its beats. (Verse fiction. 13-18)



**PAPER PLANES**

Wood, Jennie  
 Illus. by Dozerdraws  
 Mad Cave Studios (216 pp.)  
 \$14.99 paper | May 16, 2023  
 9781952303548

Two teens trapped at summer camp confront their feelings about their history and senses of self in this contemporary graphic novel.

After "the incident," Dylan, a White nonbinary teen, and Leighton, a biracial asexual girl, face a threat to their futures at high school unless they can demonstrate personal growth to the counselors at a summer camp for kids with behavior challenges. Although they were once close friends, conflicting desires for their relationship and the disapproval of Leighton's parents have created a rift between them that even their paper-airplane notes struggle to fly across. Losing Leighton is what Dylan fears most, but they have always prioritized her feelings before their own. Meanwhile, Leighton

battles her own frustration that her family (especially her mom) and Dylan refuse to accept more than one part of her identity: She is Black and White, an artist and an athlete, and in love but uninterested in dating or sex. The narration flips between their two perspectives, indicated by illustrations of rocket ships for Dylan and pink roller skates for Leighton. Flashbacks in between scenes at camp, cued visually by a faded color palette and yellowed pages, reveal the story of their relationship. Tension builds as each memory, beginning with the first time they connected, ramps up toward the climactic incident. The art depicts diversity in the world, including casual representation of fatness.

A queer coming-of-age story that embraces the mess and complexity of identity and relationships. (Graphic fiction. 14-18)



**THE BOOKS OF CLASH  
 Legendary Legends of  
 Legendary Achievery**

Yang, Gene Luen  
 Illus. by Les McClaine & Alison Acton  
 Colors by Karina Edwards & Alex Campbell  
 First Second (144 pp.)  
 \$16.19 paper | May 30, 2023  
 9781250816269  
 Series: The Books of Clash, 1

Nail-biting battles spun off in graphic format from the immensely popular Clash of Clans and Clash Royale video game franchises.

In action-crammed panels, Yang makes good on an opening promise of "eye-smackingly good" smashing and bashing by pitting the awesomely muscled, hammer-wielding Hog Riders of Triumphica village against the seemingly defenseless town of Jazzypickleton—where the invaders on their porcine steeds are first met and sent reeling by a giant battle machine. Then, in a rematch, they are battled to a stalemate by an even more powerful secret weapon. It seems that in Triumphica, Barbarians march only with Barbarians, Wizards with Wizards, and so forth, each to their own. But in Jazzypickleton, as diminutive and despised Hog Rider Terrodicus discovers when he creeps in to spy but stays to become part of the mixed and wildly successful Jazzypickleton Cucumbers Royale team, diversity is key to achieving a "win condition." Let the bashing begin! Though the cast comes in an array of typecast Valkyries, Goblins, Minions, Barbarians, and more, the Hog Riders are depicted with brown skin, and the other human-adjacent sorts are shown in a mix of hues. The backmatter features strategy tips for gamers as well as preliminary scenes and sketches.

A legendarily legendary kickoff. (Graphic fantasy. 12-15)



# INDIE



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- THE DEATH OF DEMOGRAPHICS** by David Allison .....169
- I EAT MEN LIKE AIR** by Alice Berman ..... 170
- JUDGING IRAN** by Charles N. Brower ..... 172
- ELIZA AND THE ALCHEMIST** by Carlos Lacámara ..... 177
- LITTLE KNOWN STORIES** by Eric B. Miller..... 179
- TO BIRD OR NOT TO BIRD** by S.J. Russell & Lucy Noland;  
illus. by Kaity Lacy ..... 181
- ARTEFACTUM** by J.E. Tobal..... 183
- LOVE LETTERS FROM AN ARSONIST** by David van den Berg .... 183



**LITTLE KNOWN STORIES**

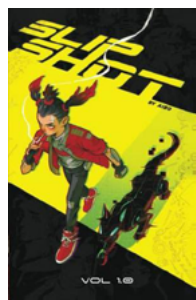
*Prose in Format*

Miller; Eric B.

Milbrow Press (174 pp.)

\$14.95 paper | \$7.99 e-book | April 21, 2022

9798985911305



**SLIPSHOT**

*AiBO*

Illus. by Ryan Sunada-Wong & Gabriel Juarez

(320 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book | March 1, 2023

9798987084502

A young man may be the only shot at stopping high-tech machines from destroying Earth in this debut SF novel.

San Francisco college student Fredrick Munchen has been seeing things—unexplained shadows visible even in dim light. He’s sure no one else can see these until he runs into a strange woman sporting a half-metal arm in an alleyway. It’s clear that she’s fully aware of the two “blurry smudges” flanking her. This encounter unnerves Fredrick, and he confides in fellow student and romantic interest Jillian Crenshaw. They’re equally determined to figure out what exactly is going on. Meanwhile, Opal Fremmitt, the woman from the alley, is a Mechanic who hails from the Griddish Realm. This faraway domed place is where many people oversee countless worlds, including Var 8, what Fredrick calls Earth. None of the “Varlings” on the individual worlds should be able to see the “shadowy” Négatrae, machines of both metal and flesh, with certain models used to deconstruct worlds. A Griddish manager, assuming Opal has done something wrong, sends someone to Var 8 to check out the man continually spotting these Négatrae. Fredrick and Jillian’s impromptu investigation surprisingly leads them to defectors from the Griddish Realm who are against a planned “dismantlement project.” The authoritative Commission has evidently decided that Var 8 could very well spread its chaos throughout the universe. As a dismantling could mean the end of Earth, Fredrick and Jillian undertake a perilous task—to somehow make their way to Griddish and sever the connection between that realm and their home planet.

In this engrossing series opener, *AiBO* painstakingly describes seemingly mundane acts. For example, Fredrick’s delivering a pizza includes everything from turning on the ignition and accelerating a motorcycle to cruising the streets. But these specifics are concise and never dull, and they allow for the narrative to linger on the environment. In one instance, Fredrick drives through the cold, dark night: “Police cars, their bright red and blue lights flashing, their buzzy sirens announcing their arrival, whooshed by, rushing towards unseen skirmishes and brawls.” Fredrick makes a superb reluctant hero who, though understandably shaken by inexplicable sights, stays levelheaded. His numerous scenes with Jillian are wonderful; despite his obvious attraction to her, the couple bond

as friends, and it's fun to watch her playfully interact with Fredrick (for example, she gives him an affectionate smack on the head). The two become immersed in a plot that's initially confusing; even Opal's narrative perspective doesn't immediately clarify such things as "Slipshot Silos." But readers learn a great deal before this story ends and catch more than a glimpse of Earth-like Griddish, its working locals, and what it entails to travel there. Sunada-Wong and Juarez's crisp, comic book-style illustrations outfit characters with plentiful details, from nuanced facial expressions to suave attire. While much of the artwork involves the cast merely posing, two-page spreads with moments of action and serene backdrops are breathtaking. The final act reveals a major character's possible death and introduces a new player, both providing crucial turns that open avenues for the sequel to explore.

**An impressive cast headlines this remarkable futuristic tale.**



**THE DEATH OF DEMOGRAPHICS**  
*Valuegraphic Marketing for a Values-Driven World*

Allison, David

Lioncrest Publishing (376 pp.)  
\$29.99 | \$16.99 paper | \$8.99 e-book  
Nov. 29, 2022  
9781544534619  
9781544534626 paper



A business book makes a case for values-based marketing. Marketers have long relied on demographics, such as age, gender, and marital status, to define specific audiences. Applying psychographics that include attitudes and aspirations helps refine audience segments. But according to researcher and international speaker Allison, how people actually behave comes from understanding human values—something he has built a research company around, using more than 750,000 global surveys to develop a "Valuegraphics Database" of 56 values that funnel into 15 "Valuegraphics archetypes." This is more than merely marketing mumbo jumbo; Allison offers a solid, compelling argument for why his approach is sensibly relevant. Not surprisingly, the first part of the book is designed to wean marketers off their devotion to demographics. Characterizing demographics as "the Dewey Decimal System of humanity," Allison notes they are useful for classification, but "there's no link between what people are and what they'll do next." With that as the basis for fundamental change, in Part 2 of the volume the author uses examples and cites scientific research to show how and why values hold the key to human behavior. Allison explains the rationale behind the Valuegraphics Database and identifies the 56 human values he says can be applied globally. Part 3 is particularly intriguing; here, Allison takes readers on an informative tour, demonstrating how Valuegraphics are similar and different across the world's various regions. Part 4, characterized by the author as a "DIY Valuegraphics Toolkit," provides a detailed, four-step process that includes the raw

materials a marketer needs to construct a "Valuegraphics Profile." Part 5 eloquently defines and describes the 15 "data-driven archetypes," such as "The Seekers," "The Creatives," and "The Savers," that Allison believes represent broad categories encompassing the values identified for specific audiences. Finally, Part 6 is a valuable compendium of "case stories" illustrating how the Valuegraphics methodology can be applied in various real-world situations. The author writes with clarity, passion, and unbridled enthusiasm for "the power and potential of a values-driven view of humanity." He generously shares information about Valuegraphics with the fervent hope that marketers will embrace his thinking.

**Convincing, insightful, and possibly revolutionary marketing advice.**



**PEOPLE MAKING MUSIC**  
*Stories*

Bachmann, David

Self (114 pp.)  
July 8, 2018  
9781717701671

A collection of short stories about the many roles that music plays in people's lives.

Bachmann's slim book collects 11 of his tales, all revolving in some way around musicians and music. The stories range in length from a couple of pages to a dozen, and in them, the author experiments with a variety of narrative techniques and points of view. The opening work, "Employee Preoccupation," takes the form of an interoffice memo penned by an irked team manager named Jim about an employee named Phil Lanyard, who moonlights as a musician in a number of bands with monikers such as Perpetual Motion, Bloodmusk, and The Junqueyard: "names so bad they are impossible to un-know, so tasteless they sting you with embarrassment for whomever came up with them," Jim complains, adding petulantly, "Obviously, let's keep my petty judgments out of the official report." This brief story is full of droll humor, as Jim details his efforts to stop Phil from playing his music at work ("First, I send him an instant message that simply reads, 'Stop.' If he fails to do so within thirty seconds, I throw a wadded napkin at the back of his head"). Far more solemn is the story "An Exquisite Pair of Hands," a historical work revolving around the decision of some of composer Frederic Chopin's acolytes to get a plaster cast of the dying composer's face—despite the resistance of his loved ones. "Of course we must preserve the face," comments one character sarcastically. "Or what? His legacy cease to flourish? Our memories of him flutter away? As if his likeness is sufficient in describing him to those born too late and too far away to have ever known him."

**A varied and affecting collection of brief, tuneful works.**

INDIE | David Rapp

# WITCH WORLDS



BOOKS ABOUT WITCHES have long been a staple of books for children and teens, such as Tomie dePaola's *Strega Nona* (1975), Roald Dahl's *The Witches* (1983), and, more recently, Hal Schriever's Kirkus-starred *Out of Salem* (2019). Here are three others, all recommended by Kirkus Indie, that may cast a spell on young readers.

In T.C. Bartlett's 2020 YA adventure, *The Good Witch of the South*, 15-year-old

Sam Goodwitch is the magically talented daughter of witch Glinda the Good, whom readers will know from L. Frank Baum's classic *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. When Glinda goes on a mission to the City of Emeralds, Sam embarks on her own quest to take on rumored local dragons. Our reviewer calls it a "well-developed fantasy spinoff that will transport teen readers."



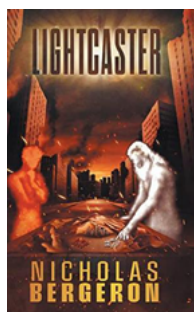
*Fat Witch Summer* is a YA fantasy by Lizzy Ives due to be published later this year. It tells the story of 16-year-old Theodora "Thrash" Blumfeld-Wright, the "plus-size" daughter of two magic-wielding women, who recently found out that three intriguing classmates are witches, just like her. When Thrash learns that her widowed mother plans to give her the Gift of Glamour—the ability to create visual illusions, which the teen sees as "the magic of lies"—the nascent sorceresses escape on a road trip to figure out their futures. Kirkus' review highlights the story's "imaginative magical system" and "intriguing characters."



Thirteen-year-old Abby Shepherd finds out she's a witch in Josh Roberts' 2020 middle-grade series starter, *The Witches of Willow Cove*, which received a Kirkus star. Before long, she meets others like her and starts receiving training from Miss Winters, a new magic user in town. Soon, Abby and her best pal, Robby O'Reilly, get involved in investigating local mysteries. "Roberts perfectly balances small-town drama, pre-teen hijinks, and paranormal thriller action in an engaging novel," writes Kirkus' reviewer.



David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.



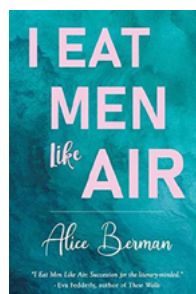
## LIGHTCASTER

Bergeron, Nicholas  
FriesenPress (378 pp.)  
\$37.99 | \$27.99 paper | \$11.99 e-book  
Dec. 22, 2022  
9781039148222  
9781039148215 paper

There's no eternal rest for the talented, as a soldier discovers the hard way in Bergeron's supernatural military thriller.

Navy SEAL Hunter Carmichael always fought for what he felt were the right reasons: to protect his teammates and his country. But that idealism didn't protect him on his last earthly mission, during which he lost his life—but it turns out that the afterlife also needs fighters. Hunter learns that brother gods D and J have been battling for millennia, conscripting the souls of humans for their armies. Hunter is informed that his talents make him a one-in-a-billion prospect. However, he and the other soldiers in the afterlife don't have any memories of their lives on Earth. D makes Hunter his right-hand man, in charge of all his military forces. Hunter receives his own special strike force made up of soldiers Verdune, Sierra, and Orto, who serve him well through several campaigns. One of those adventures includes unearthing a community of pacifists who are living underground in an afterlife city to escape nonstop warfare on the surface. After Hunter loses some of his favorite soldiers, he starts to question the war and his role in it. A climactic battle raises the stakes, setting up a sequel as Hunter wrestles with losses and doubts. In his debut novel, Bergeron has created a complex backdrop for a prospective series, although this first installment seems to barely scratch the surface of this fictional universe. Still, Hunter's mindset will be easy for readers to comprehend; his frustration while struggling to use his existing skill set in a strange, new environment is palpable. Hunter proves to be an admirable protagonist whose sense of morality survives the jarring transition to the afterlife; interestingly, this often proves to be an obstacle, as he has no idea which power players can be trusted. Bergeron also supplies a colorful supporting cast, and late revelations effectively open things up for a sequel.

An intriguing and promising beginning to a complex fantasy series.



## I EAT MEN LIKE AIR

Berman, Alice  
Vanguard Press (294 pp.)  
\$12.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book  
Jan. 26, 2023  
9781800165229



In Berman's mystery novel, a true-crime podcaster immerses himself in the overprivileged world of a "despicable lot" after a member of the group dies in an apparent suicide.

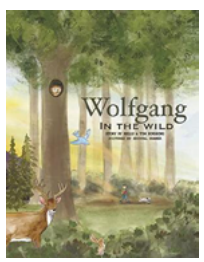


“An appealing adventure that celebrates the wilderness.”

WOLFGANG IN THE WILD

Police detective Sean Strickland is assigned to the case of Alex Sable, the 30-year-old son of a billionaire who apparently committed suicide in the bathroom at his best friend's wedding: “Of all times to kill yourself! It's very selfish,” the wedding planner rails. “The best man. Do you know anyone who would do something like that?” Tyler, a popular podcaster who's come to this part of New England to investigate the fentanyl epidemic, has questions and increasing suspicions about Alex's death, which Strickland says could be suicide but also could be an accident or a homicide. Tyler talks with members of the wedding party and Alex's friends, including Will and Jessica, the shattered bride and groom; famed Instagram influencer Lulu Swanson; Alex's former high school classmate Maxie Stein-Golden; Rob, a trader, who's “always just a few seconds late, a few meters short, a few words off”; and Yael, a “perfectly nice” doctor. Through these interactions, Tyler unearths the inevitable secrets and scandals that bind the group together and threaten to tear their lives apart. As Alex's life comes more into focus, the question of whether his death was self-inflicted or inflicted by another remains elusive. Berman's debut novel is an instantly addictive read. “Tyler found Alex Sable three hours after he had been declared dead” is the kind of opening upon which entire TV series have been launched, and the large cast of characters mostly avoids falling into whodunit clichés; Lulu, for example, makes Tyler “unnerved” when he finds his assumptions to be flawed: “She looked like she should say *like* every ten seconds and instead she dropped words like *expound* and *maudlin*.” Berman also drops in some fine literary references; the book's title, for instance, comes from a Sylvia Plath poem. More *Metropolitan* than *Gossip Girl*, this novel makes for an entertaining spin on F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous line that “the very rich...are different than you and me.”

An intriguing whodunit with richly drawn characters.



**WOLFGANG IN THE WILD**  
*Birdsong, Kelly & Tim Birdsong*  
 Illus. by Krystal Kramer  
 BookBaby (32 pp.)  
 \$22.99 | \$9.99 paper | Jan. 27, 2023  
 9781667880235  
 9781667882420 paper

A young boy and his dog seek a home in the woods in this debut picture book.

Wolfgang, a blond-haired White boy with a trusty Dalmatian, decides to live in the wild, and he's out the door of his family's cabin before his mother can tell him, “Dinner will be ready when you come home.” Accompanied by his pooch and a parade of wild animals, Wolfgang heads into the woods and arrives at a vast lake. When he encounters animals, he asks about their homes. But he realizes that the anthill is too small, the pine tree too high, and the forest too vast for him to make a cozy home. Finally, when his mother calls him for dinner, he returns to his house, happy to be there—but still intent on living in the wild the next day. Using vibrant language to describe Wolfgang's odyssey, Kelly Birdsong and Tim Birdsong make the textures,

sounds, sights, and smells vivid for young readers. Kramer's mixed-media illustrations, which feature cartoon and sketched characters and animals against painted backgrounds, are equally inviting. But the assortment of creatures is never mentioned in the text, and readers may be surprised that a bear, wolf, fox, dog, and squirrel get along so well. The images also indicate a much wider world throughout the story than is indicated in the last pages when Wolfgang returns home. This will lead many readers to question how much of the trek is in the boy's imagination.

An appealing adventure that celebrates the wilderness.

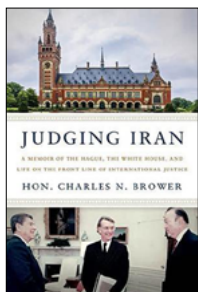


**THE GIRLS IN CABIN NUMBER THREE**  
*Braun, Chrysteen*  
 Marble Creek Press (266 pp.)  
 \$14.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book | Nov. 29, 2022  
 9781647046323

This second volume in Braun's trilogy continues exploring the hidden histories of guests at a California bed-and-breakfast, now under new ownership.

Eighty-year-old interior designer Annie Parker has just completed her first year as the proprietor of a seven-cabin B&B that she bought on impulse while visiting Lake Arrowhead and recovering from a broken marriage. She's been working on a long-term redecorating project for her most lucrative client, Grayson Underwood, an elegant, wealthy part-time resident. She also meets Carrie Davis, a stylish older woman who grew up in Lake Arrowhead and returned after a painful divorce to care for her elderly mother; she becomes not only a new customer for Annie, but a new friend, as well. Carrie's mother left the lake house to her, and she's ready to sort through decades of family keepsakes and begin redecorating—a project that unexpectedly reveals her mother's secrets. Meanwhile, Annie and Noah Chambers, a local construction contractor, have become a couple, although neither has fully committed to the relationship, which results in jealousy and conflict. Noah believes that Grayson is interested in Annie romantically, and Annie worries that Noah's new client, Bunny Bryant, has amorous intentions. Following the format established in the series opener, Annie and Carrie alternate narration in a story in which the cabins serve as an intersection point. Local history surrounding the Tudor House, a popular local venue for weddings, events, and musical productions, plays an important, surprising role in Carrie's history and adds an intriguing element to the narrative; in the 1920s and '30s, it was owned by an infamous mobster and was a speak-easy retreat for Hollywood luminaries: “*There were photos of Bugsy Siegel helping a woman out of a car, others of well-known actors coming up to the mountains, including Jack Benny and Jimmy Durante.*” Annie's story, as in the first volume, contains an overabundance of decorating details, including schematic drawings of rooms she's redesigning, but this time Braun places greater focus on the more engaging issue of Annie's challenging relationships.

Personal drama and historical tidbits combine nicely for a quick and entertaining read.



## JUDGING IRAN A Memoir of The Hague, the White House, and Life on the Front Line of International Justice

*Brower, Charles N.*

Disruption Books (352 pp.)  
\$29.95 | \$12.99 e-book | April 11, 2023  
9781633310704



A man documents his storied career in government and international law, including his many years working in The Hague, in this memoir.

Brower's influential legal career began in the 1960s when, fresh out of Harvard Law School, he worked at the New York City firm of White & Case. There, he gained experience as a litigator and got some exposure to international law in cases involving a rogue stock trader, an accused spy, and the Hungarian representative to the United Nations. But shortly after being made partner, he resigned. He wanted to see what the world had to offer and to work on policy matters ("My true calling, I felt, was diplomacy"). He accepted a position at the State Department and worked as a legal adviser for European affairs during the détente under President Richard Nixon. Brower thrived in government but left in the early '70s to return to White & Case at its Washington, D.C., office. There, he gained more experience in international law, including expropriation, in intriguing cases involving Indonesia, Nigeria, and, eventually, Iran. In 1984, he was appointed a judge for the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal in The Hague, which was created so companies and citizens that lost assets in the Iranian Revolution could recoup their funds. With an admirable devotion to fairness, he tirelessly worked for years alongside hotheaded Iranian judges and sometimes-spineless Europeans as they tried to sort out the multitude of claims before them. Brower's fast-paced account of his impressive accomplishments should serve as necessary reading for those seeking careers in international law. But his innovations and varied experiences make this compelling enough for a general audience. It is purely a career story, with few personal details, but the globe-trotting nature of the work and the author's front-row seat to high-profile world events are remarkable. Written with energy and a devotion to detail, this book is a powerful recollection by a man who personally shaped modern international dispute resolution.

**A superb, intensely readable account about a striking career in international law.**



## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

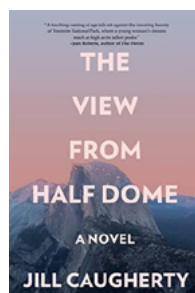
*Brown, Shadleigh T.*

Vanguard Press (342 pp.)  
9781800166912

In this debut thriller, an inspector pursues a methodical serial killer and fights to prevent a gang war in East London.

A particularly brutal murder scene unsettles DCI Frank Palmer despite years of experience. Career criminal Billy Barker and his family are dead, with much of the violence inflicted on him and his 12-year-old daughter. Palmer, having grown up with the Barker brothers, is known for his ties to London's underworld. So he may be the only one to stop Billy's dangerous older brother, Jack, whose retaliation Palmer anticipates will be a "bloodbath" ("He knew that Barker would react quickly and violently, as he always did"). The DCI scrambles to unmask the killer, with the P carved into Billy's skin his best piece of evidence. Jack's hunt for his brother's murderer, meanwhile, leaves bodies in his wake, while a villainous Russian immigrant, taking advantage of the chaos, tries muscling into the criminal's territory. As the murderer kills again, Palmer inches closer to the culprit. But he may not have enough time, especially as someone, it seems, is trying to frame him for the escalating murder spree. Brown's dynamic antihero fuels this somber tale. Palmer is determined to take down a killer, but he faces enemies at the police station, and even conversations with Jack are relentlessly tense. Palmer is submerged in a narrative that buzzes with a moody, noirish vibe. For example, incessantly pouring rain and dimly lit scenes set the tone for a plot teeming with unpredictable criminals. Still, the author grounds the story with a familiar backdrop: It unfolds at the heart of the Covid-19 pandemic, as many characters grow accustomed to face masks and social distancing. What begins as a slow-burn procedural picks up in the latter half, with the animosity between rival gangs surging and the killer's disturbing motive becoming clearer. Surprises keep popping up as the final act winds its way to an ending that's both convincing and unforgettable.

**A fierce, sublimely brooding, and exceptional murder mystery.**



## THE VIEW FROM HALF DOME

*Caugherty, Jill*

Black Rose Writing (286 pp.)  
\$21.95 paper | \$5.99 e-book | April 20, 2023  
9781685131807

Caugherty offers a Depression-era coming-of-age novel set amid the beauty of California's Yosemite National Park.

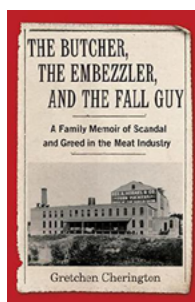
It's 1934, and 16-year-old Isabel Dickinon has just finished her second year of high school in San Francisco when a tragic accident takes the life of her young sister, Audrey. Life at home with her mother, in the city's rough Tenderloin District, had already become unbearable; now, as she struggles with

“A dazzling account that deftly combines crime, drama, history, and introspective remembrance.”

*THE BUTCHER, THE EMBEZZLER, AND THE FALL GUY*

Audrey's death, she asks her friend Claude DeVille to drive her to Yosemite, where her older brother, James, is working for the Civilian Conservation Corps. She flees one day before dawn, unaware that women aren't allowed in the Cascades Camp: "She was doing it: leaving Mother, the flat, the San Francisco cold. At long last she was traveling to a beautiful, wondrous place." After their arrival, Isabel passes out due to an excruciating migraine. She wakes the following morning in a tiny apartment above a post office that belongs to Enid Michael and her husband, Charles. Enid, a delightfully eccentric and bubbly older woman, is Yosemite's first and, at the time, only female ranger-naturalist, while Charles is Yosemite's assistant postmaster. At this point, Caugherty seamlessly blends fact and fiction; the Michaels are real-life historical figures, and Enid's nemesis, Chief Naturalist Bert Harwell, did repeatedly attempt to have her removed from her position for being too unconventional. She's the perfect mentor for Isabel, who convinces the couple to let her stay with them through the summer, earning her keep by helping Enid with her wildflower garden and typing articles the Michaels write for local publications. As Isabel gradually discovers peace, redemption, and a new life trajectory, readers are treated to a veritable encyclopedia of intriguing and informative details about the flora, fauna, and natural wonders of Yosemite. Caugherty's love letter to the extraordinary park has a simple plot, but the breezy, conversational prose is engaging, capturing the despair of the Depression and the frustration of women struggling for equality. Isabel is a sturdy, compelling protagonist, but it's quirky Enid who will linger in readers' minds.

A gentle, poignant tale with nicely developed real and fictional characters.



**THE BUTCHER, THE EMBEZZLER, AND THE FALL GUY**

**A Family Memoir of Scandal and Greed in the Meat Industry**

*Cherington, Gretchen*

She Writes Press (272 pp.)

\$17.95 paper | \$8.99 e-book | June 6, 2023

9781647420833

In this nonfiction book, the daughter of a renowned poet attempts to unravel the mystery of her grandfather's potential involvement in a corporate scandal.

Cherington never met her grandfather Alpha LaRue "A.L." Eberhart. But she grew up hearing her father, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Richard Eberhart, tearfully relate the great injustice A.L. once suffered while working for Geo. A. Hormel & Company, then a sizable meat-processing firm and now a multibillion-dollar conglomerate. In 1922, A.L. was asked to resign by the company's CEO and founder, George Hormel, after it was discovered that the comptroller, Ransome Josiah "Cy" Thomson, had embezzled more than a million dollars. The resignation request was based on a "flimsy pretext": that A.L. personally borrowed money from the company's brokers.

Meanwhile, there were suspicions "that A.L. had known Cy was stealing." Eberhart often recounted the tale with furious indignation—in his eyes, the innocent A.L. was "six feet of manhood and not a mark of fear," while Hormel was a "bastard, all greed for laying father so low." But the author gradually became suspicious of her father's penchant for poetic embellishment. She began to question the "family mythology" and to reflect with impressive sensitivity on the allure of such fabricated histories: "We cling to our myths, especially heady and intoxicating ones. We want to believe them as truth. We help in their construction by denying what's in front of us and filling in holes to reinforce their validity. And in every great myth there are heroes, ones we don't want to see fail." She conducted an investigation and uncovered some discomfiting details—her grandfather was likely friends with Thomson, and at one time the comptroller inexplicably paid off one of A.L.'s loans, an incriminating piece of evidence. Moreover, there were rumors in the aftermath of the scandal that A.L. was an accomplice to Thomson's crimes. Cherington rigorously combs all the available evidence and reconstructs not only the details of the scandal, but also the history of the company and the industry it came to dominate as well as her grandfather's significant contributions to both. This is a mesmerizing story, one filled with drama and suspense and told with remarkable emotional insights.

A dazzling account that deftly combines crime, drama, history, and introspective remembrance.



**TOP SECRET TANGO**  
**A South American Spy Adventure**

*Cole, Leonard*

Self (403 pp.)

\$10.95 paper | \$2.99 e-book | Dec. 19, 2022

9798370275395

Decades after finding a top-secret courier pouch, 68-year-old J. Paul Kingston trains to join a clandestine mission to Peru to retrieve a spy plane in Cole's thriller series starter.

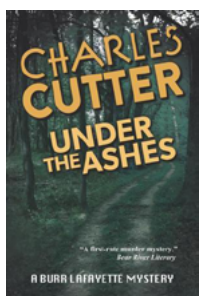
In 1972, on his last day working at the Hughes Aircraft Company in Culver City, California, Kingston is thrilled that "the guards and their leadership trusted me enough to let me see Howard Hughes' inner sanctum." Kingston has been working the night shift full time at Hughes and "as an emergency cryptographer for the U.S. Air Force at the same facility on the weekends" while also attending business school. He's just earned his MBA, so he's leaving all these activities behind to take a job as a business analyst and spend more time with his wife and kids. To celebrate his last day, the Hughes guards bring Kingston to the company founder's private area, which includes a racing plane. Kingston finds a pouch stamped "TOP SECRET TANGO" inside the craft and makes a decision to bring it home with him for safe-keeping. Decades later, the 68-year-old Kingston, a recent widower, removes the pouch from his home safe. He reaches out to the contact listed in its materials, which leads to meetings with



Washington, D.C.–area intelligence agencies. Soon, he’s on a mission to retrieve a B-17 spy plane, now in Peru and being used for “nefarious activities, such as drug trafficking,” by Russian criminals. Kingston undergoes weeks of rigorous testing and training before the team goes undercover as tourists in Peru. Kingston is tasked with drawing the “bad actors” away from the B-17 but ends up being tortured by a Russian, bit by an anaconda, and more.

Cole, a partner at a wealth-management firm who also has an intelligence background, appears to have had a lot of fun crafting this return-to-duty fantasy, which features an aging baby boomer hero and splashy appearances by a parrot and “a huge harpy eagle, with legs as thick as a person’s arms.” The novel has an intriguing beginning, linking the always-fascinating Howard Hughes to espionage activities, although the recluse tycoon then fades from the plot. The novel’s detailing of the various spy planes that could, like this book’s B-17, be overtaken by rogue players lends a sense of real-life urgency to this narrative. The book’s training section, which has the feel of insider knowledge, takes up a large part of the narrative; indeed, the team doesn’t advance from training to touchdown in Peru until more than midway through the novel. However, this mission prep, while a bit overextended, has its pleasurable elements, as when Kingston and his team stumble upon real FBI and Russian spy doings during what was supposed to be just a simple “weekend field exercise.” Some of the plot points are a bit puzzling, such as the reason why Kingston didn’t contact anyone about the pouch for so long. Overall, though, this book is an entertaining, wild ride that ably sets up a potential series recounting Kingston’s further adventures.

**A colorful, if training-heavy, covert-ops tale with an appealing protagonist.**



### UNDER THE ASHES

*Cutter, Charles*

Mission Point Press (276 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | \$5.95 e-book | Feb. 23, 2023

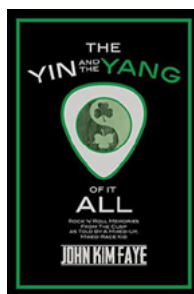
9781958363638

In this fifth installment of a mystery series, a Michigan attorney’s fight against his client’s stingy insurance company suddenly turns into a murder case.

While Burr Lafayette is an appellate lawyer, he has reluctantly participated in a few homicide trials. His newest client, Molly Fagan, is merely looking for a life insurance payout. Her radio-station-owner husband, Nick, suffered a heart attack at a restaurant and later died in a hospital. But just when Burr has a shot at getting her the money, Molly winds up arrested for murder. The local prosecutor claims she slipped poisonous mushrooms into Nick’s veal morel, which ultimately proved fatal. While it all seems circumstantial, the prosecutor keeps scoring wins in the courtroom, especially when he offers a potential motive—beyond the million-dollar policy. It certainly doesn’t help that the soon-to-be-retired judge doesn’t seem to like Burr and that Molly hasn’t been exactly truthful about everything. The lawyer

has his work cut out for him, as he struggles to show that his widowed client, who many believe is “guilty as sin,” didn’t kill her husband. Fans of Cutter’s series will spot its distinctive, abundant hilarity. Even in the courtroom, Burr endlessly quips or slyly exchanges his chair for the prosecutor’s less-wobbly one. There’s likewise welcome banter between Burr and his assistant, Eve McGinty, and legal partner, Jacob Wertheim. Nevertheless, an engrossing court battle takes precedence and hurls obstacles Burr’s way. There are, for example, unsettling moments when the whip-smart lawyer is a bit off his game: “*I have no idea where to start,*” he thinks to himself before questioning a witness. Similarly, his affinity for alcohol becomes a serious problem and may derail him completely. Rapid-fire dialogue ignites the copious trial scenes, making this a brisk, enjoyable tale that many readers will devour in an afternoon.

**An appealing hero headlines a bracing legal thriller.**



### THE YIN AND THE YANG OF IT ALL

*Faye, John Kim*

Advantage Media Group (448 pp.)

\$29.99 | \$9.99 e-book | April 4, 2023

9781642257434

Faye recounts a life caught between identities in this debut music memoir.

The Caulfields released two albums with A&M Records during the height of late-1990s alternative rock. Unlike many of their contemporaries, however, the band was fronted by a mixed-race singer/songwriter. Faye was raised in Delaware by a Korean American mother who was 40 years old when he was born; his father was a 62-year-old Irish American ex-cop who died when the author was 6. Faye thought of himself as a perpetual outsider—a sensitive child who felt alienated from White kids he grew up with and from his extended Korean family. He found his voice in rock ‘n’ roll, although that path was hardly a simple one to follow. As a lifelong working musician, Faye says, he still feels caught between worlds: “I’m always just one song, one soundtrack, one viral anything from being able to put my kids through college,” he writes in his preface, “or one unforeseen dry patch from having to play ‘Wagon Wheel’ in front of an eighty-inch plasma TV that the bar owner refuses to turn off during my set.” With this memoir, Faye recounts not only “the Caulfields’ fifteen minutes in the spotlight,” but what happened to him before and after it: his confused childhood in the 1970s, the premature demise of his band, and the way music and writing helped him to grapple with subsequent losses in his life. Faye’s prose is even and evocative, particularly in chapters framed as letters to his late mother. Here, he drives past her old house: “Even though the bamboo trees are gone—the ones that used to piss off the neighbors when they sprouted up into their yards—the Japanese maple you planted when I was a teenager is still there, standing as strong as I remember, although the current occupants don’t seem to have the skill or desire to maintain it like you did.” The book sometimes drags a bit due to its

“Gaston’s prodigious research brings the early 16th century alive.”

MARGARET OF AUSTRIA

length of nearly 450 pages, but Faye’s thoughts on music and family are likely to linger in readers’ minds.

A sometimes-rambling but often affecting remembrance.



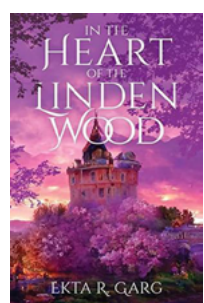
**PARIS HISTORIES & MYSTERIES**  
**How the City of Lights Changed the World**

Frederick, John A.  
Aviva Publishing (402 pp.)  
\$22.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book | Oct. 25, 2022  
978-1636182414

Frederick explores grand urban vistas, strange prophecies, and death in many guises in this collection of Parisian lore.

The author ventures down many odd Parisian alleyways, excavating the city’s past and tracing the influence that radiated out from it to the rest of the world. A meditation on the city’s morgue as it was circa 1880—when crowds were encouraged to gawk at unclaimed corpses—centers on a never-identified woman whose dead body was fished out of the Seine; her beautiful, enigmatically smiling face was memorialized by artists and poets and became the model for the visage of Resuci-Annie, the plastic manikin used to teach CPR. The French Revolution’s Enlightenment rationalism is exemplified by the story of a journey made by teams of scientists to survey the circumference of the Earth to establish the length of the meter. The Pont Neuf, the bridge over the Seine built in the 17th century, which introduced the world to sidewalks, is depicted as a grand stage where common people could take in both the breathtaking sweep of Paris’ landscape and the drama of its crowds. The 18th-century showman Étienne-Gaspard Roberts is celebrated for terrifying audiences with swooping, glowing ghosts that anticipated Hollywood special effects. The fictional Paris of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is credited for having inspired the first detective story. Paris’ patron St. Denis is venerated for having continued to stroll about and sermonize for hours after he was beheaded by locals for his Christian faith in the third century. The 16th-century queen Catherine de Medici is remembered as both a consummate power player in the era’s deadly religious politics and as the patroness who brought the court astrologer and seer Michel de Nostradame to public notice. And the *Phantom of the Opera* story, beloved of Broadway, is revealed as a surprisingly faithful retelling of the Paris Opera House’s early history.

A rich, atmospheric montage that conveys both the particular charms of Paris and its global cultural impact.



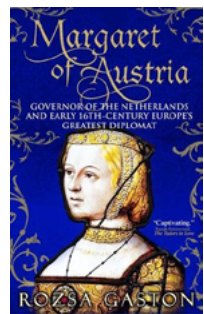
**IN THE HEART OF THE LINDEN WOOD**

Garg, Ekta R.  
Atmosphere Press (368 pp.)  
\$18.95 paper | \$9.95 e-book | Feb. 7, 2023  
9781639887460

A king must go on a journey to heal the heart of a forest and save his people in Garg’s fantasy novel.

King Christopher of the land of Linden should be experiencing the happiest day of his life. His wife, Queen Lily, is giving birth to their first child when tragedy results in both her and the infant’s deaths. He wants nothing more than to sink into his grief, but the countryside has other plans. The beautiful, magical trees of the Linden Wood are starting to become diseased, and objects previously made from its wood are turning into piles of ash. Christopher and his closest friend, Martin, the master of the Linden Guard, rush to meet with the magic-wielding Keeper of the Wood to discover what might be done to save the forest. The Keeper’s answer is short but frightening: “I’m dying, and with me, bit by bit, the wood as well.” Now Christopher and Martin must go on a journey to find the Keeper’s heart, which she lost long ago due to a betrayal. Christopher and Martin hope that bringing it back to her will heal her and the wood. Only they can’t go on this quest alone: Alistair, the young boy that led them to the Keeper’s home and her only confidant, must go with them along with his mother, Geraldine, the Healer that recently failed to save the queen. Garg’s affecting novel offers readers a quest that fantasy fans may find familiar, but its primary story is one of grief, loss, and finding ways to move on after suffering. As such, the book is relatively light on fantasy but heavy on emotion, which may attract those who might otherwise be unfamiliar with the genre. The novel does move quite slowly—it’s almost the book’s halfway point before the main characters even receive their quest—but those who stick with it will experience a touching tale of a healing journey.

An often moving fantasy novel about emotional pain and a quest for personal and natural healing.



**MARGARET OF AUSTRIA**  
**Governor of the Netherlands and Early 16th-Century Europe’s Greatest Diplomat**

Gaston, Rozsa  
Renaissance Editions (412 pp.)  
\$16.95 paper paper | \$3.99 e-book | March 7, 2023  
9781732589995

A novel celebrates the life of a brilliant European power broker of the early 16th century.

Born in 1480 in Brussels, Margaret, daughter of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, is raised to be a queen. But destiny has other plans for the young princess. Betrothed to Charles, the Dauphin of

France, when she is 3 years old, she is sent to that country to study its language and culture. Readers meet her in 1491 at the French court, just before the 11-year-old girl is told by Charles, now king, that he has married another. It takes several years but Maximilian, determined to increase the Habsburg influence in Europe and protect his empire from France, forms an alliance with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain via two marriages. Maximilian's son Philip gets paired with the monarchs' second daughter, Princess Juana, and Margaret with the royal couple's only son, Prince Juan. Margaret and Juan's wedding in April 1497 is followed by a frolicking six-month honeymoon. But tragedy strikes in October of that year, when the young heir to the Spanish throne is stricken by illness and dies. Four years later, Maximilian arranges another marriage for Margaret, this time to Philibert, Duke of Savoy. Unlike most royal marriages, this one is a passionate love match. Plus, with Philibert only minimally interested in the affairs of state, Margaret, "organized, practical, and sure of her position," begins managing the Duchy "with a council to guide her." The experience prepares her for her life's diplomatic work, especially after 1504, when she is once again widowed. Gaston's prodigious research brings the early 16th century alive, taking readers inside back-room negotiations and family wranglings over wealth and power. Although the novel is burdened with a plethora of royal names and fluctuating titles, carefully scripted dialogue creates a sometimes poignant and at other times feisty narrative. The intricate minutiae of a multitude of marriage contracts—those broken and those honored—are head-spinning, and Gaston's prose occasionally displays the rectitude of a history textbook. Fortunately, the cadence becomes delightfully lighter during those sections brimming with the trials and triumphs of Margaret's personal life. She emerges as a charming, savvy, and wily hero, capable of manipulating Europe's political chessboard.

**A diplomatic tale that's rich in history and filled with entic-ing drama.**



### THE LAST LION OF KARKOV

*Griffin, Dale*

Books Fluent (596 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | \$5.99 e-book

March 14, 2023

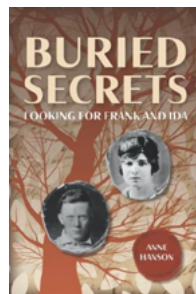
9781953865601

This debut novel offers a sweeping historical fantasy revolving largely around the twin daughters of a brutal king and their attempts to survive his political machinations.

The ruler of the militant kingdom of Karkov has always been known as the Lion—he is invariably a product of sexual domination, conceived as a result of his father's conquest of another nation. The current king, known as the Old Lion, comes from a long line of "legendary conquerors" and rules "his nation of feared warriors absolutely." For centuries, Karkov has always had a male heir. But after the Old Lion conquered a nation to the north, impregnated the jarl's daughter, and she gave birth to two daughters, the future of Karkov's

long-established, misogynistic culture is in jeopardy. As the girls grow up, they are trained relentlessly to become warriors and are even forced to endure torture. Jillian shows promise early as an elite fighter and future leader of Karkov, while the beautiful Natalia is groomed to marry a prince from a neighboring country for political gain. But when the twins begin to discover the real histories of their kingdom and their violent father, they vow to protect each other while they shape the future of Karkov in their own images. While Griffin's worldbuilding isn't exactly unique (pseudo-early-19th-century Europe), the power here comes from the dynamism between the two sisters. Their intimate relationship fuels the narrative and makes many sequences emotionally intense. Additionally, love interests add another layer to the already rich emotional tapestry. But while the twins are deeply developed and fully realized, other significant characters come off as two-dimensional, like their unhinged father, who almost becomes a caricature. But the brisk pacing, exceptionally well-choreographed fight scenes, and intricate storyline (filled with bombshell plot twists) make up for these minor flaws as the tale races to its climactic and satisfying ending.

**Emotionally compelling protagonists and an action-packed storyline make this a rousing fantasy read.**



### BURIED SECRETS

*Looking for Frank and Ida*

*Hanson, Anne*

New England Books (368 pp.)

\$18.99 paper | \$8.99 e-book | Sept. 16, 2022

9798218025274

A woman struggles to find proof of her grandparents' early lives in this debut memoir.

Hanson's family on her father's side had a curious history—curious in that, for decades, no one had been able to figure out what it was. The origins of her father's parents, Frank and Ida, were untraceable prior to their arrival in Akron, Ohio, in 1925. They told stories of their earlier lives—of Brooklyn roots, Swedish immigrants, wealthy English relatives—but none could ever be corroborated despite the best efforts of their children and grandkids. "How could a bunch of smart people look so hard and never find a thing?" writes the author, who joined the effort in the 1980s. "If our genealogical research were a Nancy Drew mystery, its title would be 'The Case of the Missing Ancestors.'" A lucky break came in 2002 when Hanson finally got her hands on a box of her grandparents' photographs—pictures her father was reluctant even to look at—depicting the couple's early years. What emerged was a story of changed names, doctored photos, missing children, and secret marriages. But did the author's investigation ultimately provide her with answers or only more questions? Hanson interweaves her engaging personal account of the search with fictionalized vignettes from various times in her grandparents' lives, which give the memoir a novelistic dimension. Here is one from "Circa 1978": "Finally, Frank was



“A thoughtful and optimistic work of healing wisdom.”

WE ARE GEMS

done. He carefully gathered up the photo fragments he was saving, now jagged strips and squares featuring Ida, minus the excised portions. He placed the uneven images of Ida in an envelope and back into the box.” While the revelations are perhaps not as earth-shattering as readers will want them to be—especially given the book’s nearly 350-page length—it’s an intriguing journey through the world of genealogical sleuthing. The author deftly demonstrates the extent to which the few facts people know about their ancestors shape their perceptions of themselves—and how the details they don’t know can keep the dead alive in their imaginations.

A well-told family mystery investigating the secret lives of the author’s grandparents.



**WE ARE GEMS**  
**Healing From Anti-Asian**  
**Microaggressions Through**  
**Self-Love & Solidarity**

*Kim, Ko*  
*Illus. by Christine Yoon & Andrew Hem*  
 Self (34 pp.)  
 \$15.95 | \$9.99 paper | \$8.99 e-book  
 May 2, 2022  
 978-0578285566  
 9798802251997 paper

Kim’s illustrated children’s book addresses racism and community-building.

This Kickstarter-backed work specifically addresses anti-Asian racism in its subtitle, but the text also focuses on intersectionality and cross-community solidarity. The book’s second two-page spread introduces readers to the idea of “shared liberation,” explaining that the Asian community is intertwined with Black and Indigenous communities and that systemic racism affects everyone. The text moves through several common microaggressions, suggesting an empowering and challenging response to each one: “When people try to commend you with, ‘You are unlike the others,’ reply that you are not straining yourself toward the dull cast of sameness.” Although the book is structured around a clear message, it avoids preachiness and didacticism through its cadence: Each wordy page exploring racism is followed by a single short sentence (such as “Our liberation is the history in our veins”), which shifts the narrative’s focus from problems and solutions to healing. There’s substantial backmatter, making up almost a quarter of the page count, which explores each microaggression in more detail, such as explaining the problematic nature of the question “Where are you really from?” This section of the book, which includes footnotes and suggestions for further reading, offers an introduction to historical figures, colonialism, and structural racism, giving adult readers a solid background that will help them share the book with young children. Yoon and Hem’s full-color illustrations feature kids and adults with a variety of skin tones and body types; a sense of joy and movement infuses each spread, depicting parades, dancers, and children floating against a starry backdrop, among other things. The slightly muted but

varied color palette enhances the text, and although each image accompanies a description of racism, they depict only celebratory moments. Overall, the book is thoughtfully organized and inclusive in its approach, making for an engaging read-aloud for kids and an informative text for older readers.

A thoughtful and optimistic work of healing wisdom.



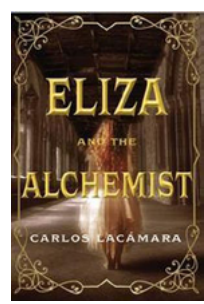
**SHOWDOWN SYMPHONY**

*Klein, Kevin & Leah Klein*  
*Illus. by Sarah D. Newell*  
 Self (40 pp.)  
 Feb. 21, 2023  
 9798986512112  
 9798986512105 paper

A mouse’s clever evasion of a cat and an owl is accompanied by a glossary of musical terminology in this picture book by Kevin Klein and Leah Klein.

Late one autumn evening, a maternal mouse seeking seeds for her children rustles through a pumpkin patch; the scene is accompanied by the term “Allegro (quick).” Newell’s autumnal paintings have incredible texture, botanical detail, and mastery of light—and lightly anthropomorphized, cape-wearing Mother Mouse is extremely cute. Readers will feel genuine anxiety about the cat’s “Adagio (slow)” prow toward her, though the cat, gracefully sporting a necklace of fish bones, is also an appealingly designed character—and so is leather-belted Owl, accompanied by the term “Andante (walking pace).” Couplets and tercets, with corresponding musical cues, will help children understand musical words; the rhymes keep the pace and movement engaging. Young readers can use their imaginations to invent the melody that would score this forest drama. When Owl and Cat both try to claim Mouse for dinner, Mouse thinks of a clever ruse to get home on time with food. The full-color high-fantasy visuals add pleasurable richness and depth to a relatively simple concept, although kids may wonder if Owl and Cat are hoping to bring Mouse home as food to their own domestic dinner tables.

Clear musical education in an Aesopian, artistic package.



**ELIZA AND THE ALCHEMIST**

*Lacámara, Carlos*  
 Fixed Mark Productions (383 pp.)  
 \$16.95 paper | \$7.99 e-book | Feb. 22, 2023  
 9798986742717

A wacky paranormal novel centers on a college student who’s at least partly responsible for hell’s newly open gates’ unleashing demons.

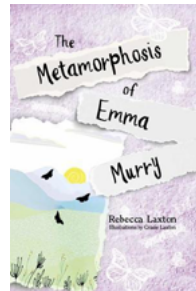
Eliza Horowitz is only 19 years old and has already decided relationships are either boring or tragic. But her enigmatic UCLA history professor Oliver Crowley excites her, and Eliza has just the thing to grab his attention.



Well, she has to steal it first, as it's a rare book (and family heirloom) from her Hollywood producer father's library. Crowley seems to like it but then walks away with the volume when Eliza was merely showing it off. Hoping to retrieve her father's book from Crowley's university office, she stumbles on a dark, creepy tunnel leading to her professor. Apparently, he's an alchemist who is using the volume to bring someone back to life. And now it's either his fault or Eliza's when a "tear in the universe" allows demons into the world. But Crowley realizes that Eliza harbors the skills of an alchemist, which is a surprise to her, and together they may be able to slam shut this wide-open hellish portal. In a concurrent plot that abandons the present day for the early 20th century, teenager Aurelio Cienfuegos falls in love. But this farmer's son's shot at marriage fizzles after he's wrongfully accused of murder. Aurelio keeps his head down and finds work on a film set only to one day become a Hollywood actor—with a new stage name, of course. It's only a matter of time before he reunites with his love in a turn of events that ultimately ties to Eliza's story.

Actor and playwright Lacámara's first novel presents a bracing, animated tale. It boasts a sprightly supporting cast, from kindhearted gangbanger Jaime, who reluctantly takes part in a hit, to UCLA student Ethan, who's obsessed with a decidedly uninterested Eliza. They join others in a demon-infested story that showcases such creatures as skeletal zombies, a giant scorpion, and an earthworm-eating homunculus. While these otherworldly beings deliver ample scares, they never truly overwhelm the comedy, most of which comes courtesy of likably snarky Eliza. She, for example, appreciates a creepy black mirror blurring her facial blemishes and hilariously throws a fit when Crowley suddenly vanishes at school with her dad's book ("No one leaves this hallway until I get some answers!"). Lacámara fills in the Los Angeles backdrop with nods to real-life movies, actors, and scandals, especially in the Old Hollywood plotline, where stars like Gloria Swanson and Charlie Chaplin show up. Likewise, the author deftly weaves historical flourishes into the narrative, including Eliza's family heirloom and an intimidating figure whose unwelcome arrival, it seems, is imminent. Aurelio's story, though slightly less funny than Eliza's, is equally engaging; their dual plots come together in the latter half in numerous ways that only a few readers will predict. The final act, meanwhile, delivers an unlikely hero, growing distrust among allies, and a startling betrayal. The author surely has a sequel in mind, as this novel ends with unanswered questions, suggesting that further adventures await Eliza.

**A delightfully bizarre and rollicking supernatural comedy with colorful humans and ghastly monsters.**



## THE METAMORPHOSIS OF EMMA MURRY

Laxton, Rebecca

Illus. by Gracie Laxton

Warren Publishing (244 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | March 28, 2023

9781960146229

In this debut middle-grade novel, a teenage girl fights an environmentally destructive development in her hometown, where a werewolf roams.

Thirteen-year-old Emma Murry loves nature and animals. She and her best friend, Sophie, are proud members of their middle school's Environmental Club in Black Mountain, North Carolina, a place renowned for its monarch butterfly population. So they, like other locals, are horrified by the news that a ski resort is in the works. Its environmental impact will be devastating, starting with tearing down the community's monarch butterfly garden. Some Black Mountain residents support the development, seeing it as an economic boost. The girls brainstorm ways to protest, and even act on some of them, before learning that action movie star of yesteryear Chester Scott is the one planning the resort; Emma's been crushing on Chester's teen son Jeb via Instagram. She forces herself to look past Jeb's indisputable cuteness and sells him on Black Mountain's natural beauty, hoping the boy can change his father's mind. But when they discover a bizarre set of paw prints, Emma and Jeb become convinced that there's a werewolf on the loose. Identifying the lycanthrope gives Emma another great excuse to spend time with Jeb and, while she's at it, try to scare the resort developers away. There's not much time, as the zoning meeting to greenlight the project takes place in only a week. It's an uphill battle for Emma, but she knows her beloved environment is worth it.

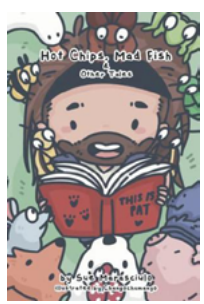
Rebecca Laxton delivers a diverting, environment-friendly mystery. The werewolf subplot focuses more on investigation than scares; Emma first has to prove that a werewolf even exists before identifying its human counterpart. Further engaging plot threads emerge from the narrative as well, including a death threat against Chester, a wrongfully accused townsfolk, and a character who turns up missing in the final act. Emma is an appealing young hero who shares a subtle romance with Jeb. She quickly sees him as more than a social media idol; the two connect over their love of skateboarding and their utter belief in the existence of a legendary shape-shifting creature. At the same time, there's potential trouble between Emma and Sophie. Sophie doesn't hide her animosity toward Jeb, and her perpetual negativity spoils some of the book's lightheartedness. Descriptions are colorful; Emma, a painter, equates people's traits with soothing hues (e.g., "buttery yellow"). Rebecca Laxton's prose, meanwhile, engages multiple senses: "At lunchtime, the crowd flocked to the restaurants. The street smelled like hot bread, tangy oregano, and warm tomato sauce, making my stomach rumble." There's educational value, too, as Emma not only praises nature, but also notes for Jeb (and readers) things that harm the environment. Gracie Laxton's black-and-white minimalist artwork prefaces each chapter. These unembellished

“A beautiful and piercing look at grief handled with delicacy.”

LITTLE KNOWN STORIES

illustrations and silhouettes leave lasting impressions of such things as a howling wolf and a wheels-up skateboard.

A smart, riveting environmental tale with a laudable adolescent cast.



**HOT CHIPS, MAD FISH & OTHER TALES**

Marasciulo, Sue  
*Illus. by Changochamango*  
 Bowker Identifier Services (56 pp.)  
 \$10.95 paper | \$4.95 e-book | Oct. 11, 2022  
 9798218084943

A collection of animal stories for beginning readers.

Marasciulo’s collection of five illustrated stories is designed for very beginning readers, with a comic book–like illustration style that straddles the gap between picture book and graphic novel. The opening story, “This Is Pat,” introduces readers to the book’s sole human character, a White man with long hair who wears torn blue pants and a matching vest. Pat has an affinity for animals, who arrange themselves in a stack on his head over the course of the story. In “Pat Had a Ship,” an unfortunate sailing adventure gives Pat an opportunity to connect with more animals, this time on a floating log. In “Bud,” about a dog who is drawn to mud, Pat tries to keep his pal clean. “Zig and Zag” follows a pair of bugs Pat tries to keep in a box. Pat is absent from the book’s final story, “The Tunnel,” in which a group of bugs run away from a tick only to find that he isn’t as scary as they had believed. The book, which rarely has more than a dozen words to a page, uses simple syntax and vocabulary (“Then Frog got on the log”), keeping the text within reach of the earliest of readers. This occasionally leads to awkward verb use (“Bud did hop in the mud”), but it never interferes with comprehension, and each story is a fully realized narrative despite its brevity and limited word choice. Changochamango’s colorful cartoonish illustrations—sometimes a single frame to a page, occasionally three or more—do an excellent job of capturing the playful essence of Pat and his companions and clearly depict the actions described in the text, another useful tool for readers who need help deciphering the words. Readers who have exhausted the Elephant and Piggie oeuvre may find the book an enjoyable alternative, though the extremely simple text may limit the rereading potential.

A simple but engaging and charming work.



**LITTLE KNOWN STORIES**  
*Prose in Format*

Miller, Eric B.  
 Milbrow Press (174 pp.)  
 \$14.95 paper | \$7.99 e-book | April 21, 2022  
 9798985911305



A collection of poetic vignettes detailing a lifelong love, a terminal illness, and an unbearable absence.

These detailed poems provide readers with a nonlinear voyage through the author’s memories, jumping between his present solitary state and the relationship he shared with his late wife, Lisa. Often the reader receives glimpses of his spouse in works that reference her boundless imagination, her determination to work and create, and the sadness that plagued her throughout her 60 years. As a result, the collection becomes not just a chronicle of the author’s grief, but also an effort to offer a complete portrait of Lisa, pulled from memories that become increasingly difficult to grasp with time. Readers join the author in his struggle to hold onto his wife as he loses himself in all that they shared. This late-in-life grief is portrayed as a gutting transformation—a death in and of itself: “As far as the good life I was supposed to have, / I let myself believe it once.... / Foolish expectations / dug a big hole. / I climbed in / and folly was more than happy / to cover me over,” the author writes. The strength of the collection originates in the sense of understanding and awe it forces upon its readers, revealing how one is unable to distance oneself from the pain inherent in love and grief; they’ll be struck with the certainty that they’ll one day experience both. To combine simplicity with artistry is a demanding task, and it’s one that few works can accomplish. Such a balance pulses throughout these stories, which are as stark and complex as loss itself.

A beautiful and piercing look at grief handled with delicacy.



**THE ULTIMATE INVESTMENT**  
*A Roadmap To Grow Your Business and Build Multigenerational Wealth*

Murphy, Mark B.  
 ForbesBooks (137 pp.)  
 \$19.99 | \$9.99 e-book | Jan. 31, 2023  
 9781955884259

Entrepreneurship coach Murphy presents a guide for current and aspiring entrepreneurs.

This book is aimed at entrepreneurs in any field, offering firsthand advice for achieving success. It opens with Murphy’s definition of what an entrepreneur is: namely, the person running the show—but, pointedly, not in a hands-on manner. The overall purpose of this manual, he says, is to “teach you...how to create a business that eliminates or reduces costs and competition. But that takes getting

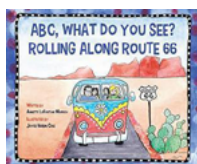


## “An eclectic presentation of roadside sights and a good basic guide to the American West.”

*ABC, WHAT DO YOU SEE? ROLLING ALONG ROUTE 66*

the organization to grow to where it's no longer centered around the entrepreneur's ability to produce a function or do the work.” Along the way, Murphy offers such concepts as his four core values for building wealth; the importance of having coaches, mentors, and advisers; dealing with almost-certain roadblocks; and, as a recurring theme, the notion that successful entrepreneurs need not bother themselves with the minutiae of a business: “If you're not focused on the issues that truly matter...you're essentially wasting your time.” Murphy's advice runs the gamut, from the psychological to the practical, concisely covering familiar ideas—such as surrounding yourself with the right people—that are often handled clumsily in other guides. It's an excellent read for people who want to be entrepreneurs or CEOs, but it will be equally valuable for people who want to know more about the mindset of such people, either to better work with them or to better understand the business world in general. Murphy's skillful writing will keep all these audiences engaged.

**A compelling and informative self-help business book.**



### **ABC, WHAT DO YOU SEE? ROLLING ALONG ROUTE 66**

*Murray, Annette LaFortune*

*Illus. by Joyce Harbin Cole*

Atmosphere Press (40 pp.)

\$22.99 | \$7.99 e-book | April 10, 2022

9781639881956

Murray's debut, this ABC book takes upper elementary readers on an alphabetical journey across the American West along iconic Route 66.

Opening with a regional U.S. map that shows the winding path of Route 66 across eight states, from Illinois to California, Murray's picture book takes readers on an alphabetical journey as much as a geographic tour. The author uses mostly sentence fragments, featuring words beginning with a certain letter to outline specific locations encountered on the famous highway. For example, G includes the cities “Galena” and “Glendora,” the “Gemini Giant” and the “Gateway Arch” landmarks, and the more common sights of “Gila monsters” and “gift shops.” Not every letter has attractions conveniently assigned to it, and sometimes Murray must give a more general description: “N is for National Parks. Neon signs illuminating the Night sky.” Cole's hand-drawn illustrations and watercolor pictures are superimposed on maps and feature a black-and-white road stretching across every two-page spread. The book is a celebration of this famous stretch of American highway. Though Murray includes a list indicating where some of the landmarks are, others remain a mystery, such as a trio of sauro-pod dinosaurs depicted next to a sign reading “Rock Shop” on the L page. Oddly, no historical context is given for Route 66 itself—and no mention of its relationship to Native American history—but readers may be compelled to learn more.

**An eclectic presentation of roadside sights and a good basic guide to the American West.**



### **PARTICLES IN THE AIR A Dr. Mallory Hayes Medical Thriller**

*Podjasek, Jemma*

Bancroft Press (285 pp.)

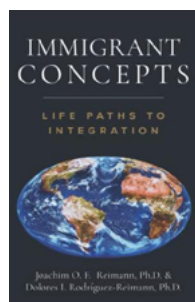
\$25.00 | \$9.95 e-book | Jan. 24, 2023

9781610885379

A medical investigator seeks the source of a catastrophic virus in Podjasek's medical disaster thriller.

When a tsunami triggered by a 9.1-magnitude earthquake rains destruction upon Southern California, Dr. Mallory Hayes is dispatched by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help contain any subsequent outbreak of disease. Storm damage to sewer lines threatens exposure to *E. coli*, while the lack of running water makes hand-washing difficult and increases the spread of contaminants. But “a few bizarre deaths in otherwise healthy, young adults” point to an even deadlier and more immediate threat—one generated by human evil rather than tectonic forces. Meanwhile, in Sweden, Dr. Erik Lindgren has accrued gambling debts serious enough to warrant a menacing visit by two henchmen who beat him and pull one of his teeth. He vows vengeance against the company that fired him just before receiving his big payday for developing a protein for them, and he wants to get back at his wife for reporting his physical abuse. He hatches a plan to collaborate with Islamic terrorists to spread a virus around the world. The author etches a terrifying vision of the ensuing pandemic, as quarantine zones are established in Chicago, New York, Atlanta, Southern California, Las Vegas, Sacramento, and Lake Tahoe. There is a substantial shortage of soldiers to enforce order, and in the six weeks it would take to develop even the first batch of a vaccine, the virus's could spread across the entire country. While the attention given to Mallory's personal baggage occasionally detracts from the virus's very real and relatable danger, Podjasek provides a hateable villain in Lindgren. As an allergist/immunologist, the author knows her way around terms like “hemodynamically unstable ventricular tachycardia.” A medical thriller needs a viable, visceral menace to keep those pages turning, and Podjasek obliges.

**A credible and all too timely medical thriller with a hero who could go viral.**



### **IMMIGRANT CONCEPTS Life Paths to Integration**

*Reimann, Joachim O.F. & Dolores I.*

*Rodriguez-Reimann*

Romo Books (206 pp.)

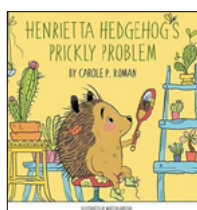
\$14.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book | Dec. 6, 2021

9781955658003

A husband-and-wife team explores the psychosocial dimensions of immigration in this nonfiction book.

While the details of their biographies may differ, as Reimann immigrated to the United States as a 10-year-old boy from Germany and Rodríguez-Reimann came via Mexico at 15, the authors share the ubiquitous experiences of most immigrants in grappling with a new home, culture and language barriers, and questions surrounding identity. The book begins by emphasizing that the history of humanity is one of “people on the move,” from early migration out of East Africa onward. From a 21st-century perspective, the volume notes, the number of global immigrants has risen by more than 51 million people per year since 2010, as migrants make up more than 3% of the world’s population. Written as “an act of love,” the volume presents “a framework that helps foster a better understanding of the many pieces that make up an immigration experience.” With doctorates in psychology, the authors come from academic backgrounds and have published multiple articles in scholarly journals. Built on their personal experiences and academic research, this work has a solid basis in peer-reviewed studies and boasts a healthy network of endnotes. But it also succeeds in the authors’ goal of offering readers “professional information about common immigration experiences” in “more accessible,” jargon-free prose. The volume’s accessibility is enhanced by graphs and other visual aids, ample text-box vignettes that feature gripping anecdotes, and a glossary that breaks down the nuanced differences among *refugees*, *asylum seekers*, *migrants*, and other terms often misused in public conversations. As top executives of the Group for Immigrant Resettlement & Assessment, the authors focus much of their writing on providing pragmatic policy suggestions and valuable advice to immigrants and their allies regarding transitioning to life in a new nation. This includes how to navigate Covid-19-related protocols. The authors’ practical advice, combined with their academic backgrounds and humanitarian empathy, makes for a definitive work on immigration that convincingly counters the simplistic “zero-sum game” analysis that too often surrounds debates on the issue.

**A well-researched and approachable survey of 21st-century immigration.**



**HENRIETTA HEDGEHOG'S PRICKLY PROBLEM**

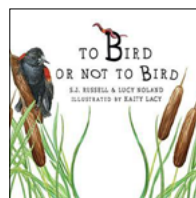
*Roman, Carole P.*  
*Illus. by Mateya Arkova*  
 Chelshire (44 pp.)  
 \$25.32 | \$12.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book  
 Jan. 3, 2023  
 9781950080083  
 9781950080076 paper

Roman, the award-winning children’s book author, presents a charming picture book about friendship and embracing difference.

Henrietta Hedgehog doesn’t want to go to school, because the other animals make fun of her quills and think they’re scary. Once she gets there, she puts on a mask that makes her look just like Bella Beaver. However, Bella thinks that Henrietta’s making fun of her because of the mask’s big teeth; in addition,

Henrietta finds that her mask doesn’t even stop the teasing. At recess, Bella confesses to Henrietta that she wishes she had sharp quills to protect her from kids who make fun of her. This admission encourages other animals to step forward with what makes them targets of teasing, including Spencer Squirrel’s “Squeaky” nickname and Wally Weasel’s short legs. Finally, Dylan Deer shares his mom’s assertion that what makes us different makes us beautiful. Henrietta’s “prickly problem,” expressed in Arkova’s bold, colorful cartoon illustrations and Roman’s simple prose, is one that is certain to resonate with children who may be nervous about their own differences. The message of social acceptance is laid out clearly and quickly. Overall, this is a book that’s likely to spark meaningful conversations between younger and older people—a worthy goal for any kids’ book.

**A sweet animal tale that encourages young readers to love what makes them unique.**



**TO BIRD OR NOT TO BIRD**

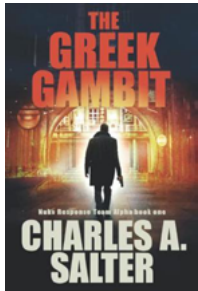
*Russell, S.J. & Lucy Noland*  
*Illus. by Kaity Lacy*  
 Archimedes’ Printing Shoppe & Sundry Goodes (40 pp.)  
 \$21.99 | April 3, 2023  
 9781955517058



A red-winged blackbird and an earthworm learn about each other in Russell and Noland’s picture book, the second in the To Be series.

A worm burrows through the undergrowth of a forest while a bird soars high above. When they sense each other’s presence, they ask each other why they are the way they are. Bird says he has babies to feed while he helps bushes and grasses to grow by spreading their seeds. Worm replies that they are also helping the forest to grow by recycling fallen leaves. And what if they were to stop doing what they do? Worm notes that gardeners would miss how worms aerate the soil as they channel through the ground, and Bird remarks on how itchy people would get if birds didn’t eat biting bugs. Finally, “Bird birded and Worm wormed. And both were amazed at what they’d learned.” The book contains extensive information on red-winged blackbirds and earthworms; the wiggly star of this book is *Eisenoides lonnbergi*, a species indigenous to North America. Illustrator Lacy’s watercolor animals are exquisitely detailed; Worm looks not only real, but somehow thoughtful. The book is an ideal mix of easy storytelling followed by comprehensive yet accessible factual information—the perfect blend for beginner naturalists.

**A great book for young nature lovers showcasing two unique ecological niches.**



## THE GREEK GAMBIT

Salter, Charles A.

Self (274 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book | Nov. 14, 2022  
9798363659188

In this novel, a special military unit must quickly thwart terrorists in Greece cooking up a secret nuclear plot.

Col. Blake Hunter's relaxing Santorini vacation takes a turn for the worse when armed men enter the picture. They threaten his wife, Mia, and their kids, coercing Blake, who heads the American military's Nuclear Response Team, into aiding a scheme underway. Combat-trained Blake manages to save himself and his family, but now the United States ambassador wants to know what the baddies wanted him to do. This is especially crucial, as it definitely entails a classified "plasma sphere" and the likelihood that terrorists are planning to get "the biggest bomb in the history of the world," a weapon that could blow an entire

country off the map. Back in America, Lacey Brown and Jim Logan of the NRT look into cases of acute radiation syndrome. Their investigation sends them to Greece, where they team up with Blake. The NRT soon has eyes on a ship that the team will have to intercept if it wants any shot at preventing a nuclear catastrophe. In this series opener, Salter maintains a brisk pace with a kinetic plot unfolding on Greek islands and vessels at sea. Blake proves to be an engaging hero; for much of the story he's fighting an undiagnosed ailment that's gradually weakening him. Flashbacks also take readers to his youth and a scene with his grandfather that parallels Blake's relationship with his twin son and daughter. Unfortunately, the supporting cast pales in comparison, as even Mia is little more than a woman in peril and an emblem of family life. Salter nevertheless outfits this thriller with action, as NRT members engage in fisticuffs and stealthily shadow dubious types. A highlight is Blake's quiet pursuit of a would-be assassin as a musical rehearsal goes on.

**A dynamic officer headlines this energetic thriller that will make readers eager for the sequel.**

### This Issue's Contributors



#### ADULT

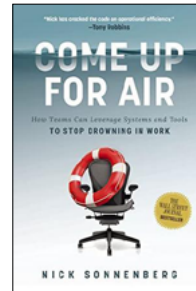
Colleen Abel • Jeffrey Alford • Ryan Asmussen • Mark Athitakis • Diego Báez • Colette Bancroft • Robert Bearegard • Ty Billman • Amy Boaz • Jeffrey Burke • Catherine Cardno • Tobias Carroll • Kathy Chow • Carin Clevidence • K.W. Colyard • Emma Corngold • Devon Crowe • Perry Crowe • Sara Davis • Coeur de Lion • Dave DeChristopher • Shinjini Dey • Amanda Diehl • Melanie Dragger • Lisa Elliott • Lily Emerick • Chelsea Ennen • Rosalind Faires • Katie Flanagan • Cynthia Fox • Mia Franz • Harvey Freedenberg • Jenna Friebe • Roberto Friedman • Glenn Gamboa • Amy Goldschlager • Michael Griffith • Katrina Niidas Holm • Natalia Holtzman • Jessica Jernigan • Damini Kulkarni • Carly Lane • Chelsea Langford • Tom Lavoie • Judith Leitch • MarQuese Liddle • Elsbeth Lindner • Georgia Lowe • Kirk MacLeod • Michael Magras • Zoe McLaughlin • Don McLeese • Gregory McNamee • Carol Memmott • Clayton Moore • Molly Muldoon • Jennifer Nabers • Christopher Navratil • Liza Nelson • Therese Purcell Nielsen • Sarah Norris • Connie Ogle • Mike Oppenheim • Derek Parker • Scott Parker • Jim Piechota • William E. Pike • Margaret Quamme • Lauren Roberts • Lloyd Sachs • Nadia M. Sahi • Bob Sanchez • Michael Schaub • Danielle Sigler • Leah Silveus • Linda Simon • Jennifer Smith • Wendy Smith • Leena Soman • Margot E. Spangenberg • Mathangi Subramanian • Bill Thompson • Valeria Tsygankova • Francesca Vultaggio • Wilda Williams • Kerry Winfrey • Marion Winik

#### CHILDREN'S & TEEN

Nada Abdelrahim • Autumn Allen • Jenny Arch • Elizabeth Bird • Ariel Birdoff • Kimberly Brubaker Bradley • Nastassian Brandon • Melissa Brinn • Jessica Brown • Timothy Capehart • Alec B. Chunn • Amanda Chuong • Tamar Cimenian • Jeannie Coutant • Maya Davis • Dave DeChristopher • Elise DeGuiseppi • Heidi Estrada • Brooke Faulkner • Amy Seto Forrester • Ayn Reyes Frazee • Jenna Friebe • Laurel Gardner • Carol Goldman • Tobi Haberstroh • Zoe Holland • Abigail Hsu • Julie Hubble • Ariana Hussain • Kathleen T. Isaacs • Darlene Ivy • Wesley Jacques • Lenna Jawdat • Danielle Jones • Betsy Judkins • Deborah Kaplan • Megan Dowd Lambert • Silvia Lin Hanick • Patricia Lothrop • Wendy Lukehart • Kyle Lukoff • Isabella Luongo • Leanne Ly • Joan Malewitz • Thomas Maluck • Emmett Marshall • Gabriela Martins • J. Alejandro Mazariegos • Kirby McCurtis • Jeanne McDermott • Sierra McKenzie • Zoe McLaughlin • Kathie Meizner • Mary Margaret Mercado • J. Elizabeth Mills • Sabrina Montenegro • Katrina Nye • Tori Ann Ogawa • Emilia Packard • Sarah Parker-Lee • Hal Patnot • Deb Paulson • Alea Perez • John Edward Peters • Elissa Bongiorno • Justin Pham • Vicki Pietrus • Kristy Raffensberger • Julia Refiner • Nancy Thalia Reynolds • Amy Robinson • Christopher R. Rogers • Sadaf Siddique • Karyn N. Silverman • Laura Simeon • Rita Soltan • Allie Stevens • Mathangi Subramanian • Jennifer Sweeney • Deborah D. Taylor • Desiree Thomas • Renee Ting • Bijal Vachharajani • Marion Winik • S.D. Winston • Bean Yogi • Jean-Louise Zancanella • Jenny Zbrizher

#### INDIE

Alana Abbott • Paul Allen • Kent Armstrong • Darren Carlaw • Charles Cassidy • Michael Deagler • Steve Donoghue • Joshua Farrington • Alec Harvey • Ivan Kenneally • Corinne Leong • Donald Liebenson • Barbara London • Dale McGarrigle • Andrea Moran • Judy Quinn • Kristen Bonardi Rapp • Matt Rauscher • Sarah Rettger • Hal Schriever • Jerome Shea • Barry Silverstein • Amanda Toth • Lauren Emily Whalen



## COME UP FOR AIR How Teams Can Leverage Systems and Tools To Stop Drowning in Work

Sonnenberg, Nick

HarperCollins Leadership (320 pp.)

\$25.15 | \$19.99 paper | \$14.99 e-book

Feb. 7, 2023

9781400236725

9781400243846 paper

Entrepreneur and consultant Sonnenberg offers a comprehensive plan for increasing workplace proficiency.

"Most teams are drowning in work because they're using yesterday's methods in today's fast-paced environment," writes the author at the start of this book. "Either they're unaware of modern tools or they lack knowledge around when and how to best use them, which holds them back from streamlining the way they work." Addressing this problem is the core concern of Sonnenberg's book, in which he lays out the tenets of a tool kit he proposes to fix it: the CPR ("Communication, Planning, and Resources") Business Efficiency Framework. Sonnenberg, a self-described "numbers guy," is familiar with the importance of seemingly small factors in meeting larger goals; as a trader, he used algorithms and math to trade billions of stocks a day, which he says taught him the value of time: "Shaving even a few seconds off a process that's done many times per day could provide huge time savings in the end," he notes, and in these chapters, he uses eye-catching graphs, bullet points, and discussion questions, such as "What are your current business needs?" and "What problem are you trying to solve?" to break down many different strategies for improving team efficiency. Along the way, he touches on everything from team size to the finesse required in planning realistic projects, with a point of view that takes in the grand design as well as the smallest tasks—the

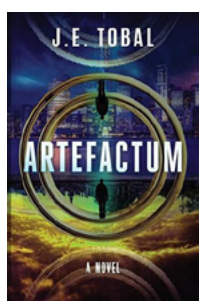


“Complex, conceptual speculative fiction that’s rendered with breathtaking ease.”

ARTEFACTUM

latter of which Sonnenberg calls “the bread and butter of any work management platform.”

A brisk and engaging series of proposals for improving corporate team performance.



ARTEFACTUM

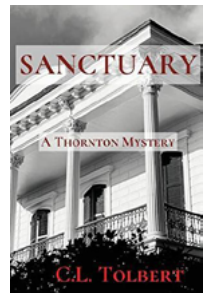
Tobal, J.E.  
Mindstir Media (448 pp.)  
\$19.95 paper | \$2.99 e-book | Nov. 11, 2022  
9781958729526



In Tobal’s SF novel, a 20-something man discovers a technique for traveling between alternate universes—which, in the long run, could cause a cosmic apocalypse.

Bartender Sam Cattan and tattoo artist Una Malia Owens are a couple in New York City. One day, Sam accidentally discovers that, among Una’s collection of pagan god idols, there’s a particular effigy of a fertility deity that has the power to teleport them to alternate realities; in their case, the worlds seem based on the setting of whatever pornographic videos they’re watching. (Thankfully, the descriptions are not overly graphic.) This becomes the recreational foundation of their affair, but it ends badly when Sam cheats on Una in one of the X-rated universes. Tormented by loss, guilt, and desire, Sam starts questing through other settings, hoping to find one where he and Una didn’t break up; in the process, he learns more about universe-jumping and the surprisingly large number of people—including members of a shadowy government regulatory agency—who also know the trick. Although Sam seems like an ordinary guy driven by love, the ease with which he traverses the multiverse signifies that he’s much, much more—and therefore unimaginably dangerous. Tobal’s narrative is a hell of a ride—and, indeed, Hell is one of the first places Sam visits. It’s a tale that’s ambitious on a scale that brings to mind the works of Olaf Stapledon, laying out a map of reality based on potentially infinite numbers of universes and choices—although in Sam’s case, whether he possesses free will in his cross-dimensional rampages is seriously in question. Ultimately, the novel delivers a lucid, credible, mechanistic explanation for its multiverse and its human wanderers. Genre readers may be reminded of Ursula K. Le Guin’s classic *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), but this book is very much its own creature, combining science, philosophy, Lovecraft-ian horror, dark humor, romantic tragedy, and the origin of all creation. It’s a tall order, but Tobal keeps the plates spinning in multiple dimensions at once.

Complex, conceptual speculative fiction that’s rendered with breathtaking ease.



SANCTUARY  
A Thornton Mystery

Tolbert, C.L.  
Level Best Books (280 pp.)  
\$13.56 paper | \$5.99 e-book | July 14, 2022  
9781685121464

Law professor/amateur sleuth Emma Thornton aids an innocent young woman framed for murder in Tolbert’s thriller.

Young runaway Stacey Roberts is named the prime suspect in the murder of cult leader James Crosby, who was injected with ketamine, thrown over his balcony, and impaled on a spiked fence at his Temple of the Japaprajna People in New Orleans. The Temple offers both spiritual guidance and massages but also operates a head shop at a nearby location. Girls—often homeless and on the run—are offered jobs at the Temple in exchange for room and board. Illicit drugs (ketamine, cocaine) are a big part of the cult’s business model, and Angelina Diaz, one of the girls, is found murdered—injected with a fatal dose of ketamine when Crosby’s killer fears she knows too much. The killer is desperate to shift blame and cover things up and is willing to murder again if necessary. Said killer is eventually unmasked but not before the reader enjoys some clever deductions, scary confrontations, hairbreadth escapes, and truly stunning surprises and revelations. Tolbert makes good use of the mystique of New Orleans, as when Emma admires an old restaurant: “It was charming [in the dim light], but she never wanted to see it in the daylight.” This is the author’s third novel featuring Emma, a character informed by Tolbert’s tenure as director of the Homeless Law Clinic at Loyola Law School, which contextualizes Emma’s empathy for the marginalized, the homeless, and the runaways (like Stacey); Emma is as much a wise and patient counselor as a savvy lawyer. The author evokes the world of homeless shelters and encampments with the authority and sensitivity of one intimately familiar with such places.

A well-plotted nail-biter with believable and sympathetic characters.



LOVE LETTERS FROM  
AN ARSONIST

van den Berg, David  
April Gloaming Publishing (100 pp.)  
\$14.99 paper | March 28, 2023  
9781953932174



Van den Berg’s debut poetry collection wrestles with themes of alienation and religion.

This group of poems, introducing a rogues’ gallery of outsiders, from itinerant blues musicians to train-hopping hobos, is divided into three “epistles”; the poems featured in the first epistle, “Salt River Blues,” are undiluted Southern gothic, describing bizarre characters such as “the witch-mama of nubbins slough” who “takes babies from

girls / raises them on foxmilk." The second epistle, "The Midnight Gospel," addresses religion and the notion of an absent God: In "now am i become death," the poet sneers: "god turned off the heat and locked himself away 'cause the critics wrote / *the universe is not your best work*...." The final epistle, "Pinecone Son," contains poems that are distinctly more intimate and confessional: "i'm not made of flesh and bone / but candle wax. / tell me, / does the wick not fear the match?" Van den Berg is a master of discomfiting imagery. The opening to the title poem effortlessly captures the rage and weariness of lives lived in toil and torment: "daddy was a wildfire burned himself inside out / spat out pinecone sons." Such rawness is skillfully tempered elsewhere with delicate, painterly observation: "wrote a love note on the side of a freight train signed in / cigarette ash and montana black." Poems like "Grandma Voodoo's Motel Six" reflect van den Berg's wry humor, smirking at the tourist who desires an "Authentik" experience "in a gen-u-ine replica of a Cracker shack...." The result is a satisfyingly textured collection that has the power to repulse, endear, and even make us question our relationship with God.

**A weird, wild, and beautiful wail of emotion that seems to emanate from the very heart of the American South.**



### FINALLY IN TUNE

*Vinson, Kat*

KV Books (276 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book | Jan. 2, 2023

9781958342091

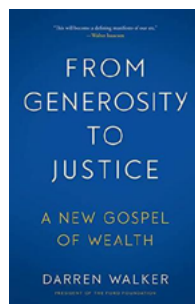
A computer programmer reconnects with her college crush in this second-chance romance.

Walking into a Tulsa, Oklahoma, record store, Casey Washington is immediately hit by a blast from her past: Adam

Raines. Eighteen years ago, they shared math and science classes

and a passion for live music, but Adam—now a co-owner of the record store, music journalist, and songwriter—was married and soon expecting his first child. Almost 40 years old, Casey now lives in Portland, Oregon, a single and successful computer whiz with millions to her name. But the death of her beloved yet complex father has her back in Tulsa, preparing her childhood home for sale and getting ready to unload her dad's prized assortment of records ("His record collection was his baby"). Adam is divorced, with two teenage girls from his marriage and a toddler son from a rebound fling, and when he sees Casey again, romantic feelings from their college days immediately resurface. As Adam helps Casey categorize and sell her dad's records, a new love begins to blossom—but life isn't quite as simple anymore, especially with his family responsibilities and the fact that her job and home are far away. When a secret from Adam's mother's past comes to light, its repercussions may once again drive the pair apart. Alternating Casey's and Adam's perspectives, Vinson's sequel presents a likable couple with a host of realistic obstacles. Casey is a once-favored daughter who is now taking on the bulk of responsibilities after her father's death while spending time with her brother and his partner and two children. Adam is a dad sharing custody with two exes and dealing with a sullen and moody 15-year-old daughter. When it becomes clear that the main characters' connection is far more than a "just in town" dalliance, they must also cope with challenges relating to geography and family, even before a potentially devastating truth is revealed. Casey and Adam's chemistry remains palpable throughout the enjoyable tale, as does their potential to be "the one" for each other.

**A sweet love story brimming with music and nostalgia.**



### FROM GENEROSITY TO JUSTICE A New Gospel of Wealth

*Walker, Darren*

Disruption Books (224 pp.)

\$22.00 | \$5.99 e-book | March 28, 2023

9781633310773

Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, argues for a new vision of philanthropy informed by the demands of justice in this nonfiction debut.

The author frets that the current age is marked by "historic disruption," roiled by such pervasive injustice, inequality, and authoritarianism that we are "staring down existential risk." Walker contends that a traditional interpretation of charity—one that emphasizes generosity toward the downtrodden—is simply insufficient insofar as it neglects the causes of socioeconomic inequality. In short, Walker posits that charity must not be abandoned but rather transformed by a new relation to justice, one that strives to attack "systemic issues, not just their symptoms." To this end, the author recommends the adoption of a "justice mindset," which carefully takes stock of one's various privileges, investigates the biases and ignorance that undermine our philanthropic efforts, and ensures that our own egos don't get in the way. Moreover, he feels that the effective

KIRKUS MEDIA LLC



Co-Chairman  
HERBERT SIMON

Co-Chairman  
MARC WINKELMAN

Publisher & CEO  
MEG LABORDE KUEHN



Copyright 2023 by Kirkus Media LLC.  
KIRKUS REVIEWS (ISSN 1948-7428)  
is published semimonthly by Kirkus Media LLC,  
2600 Via Fortuna, Suite 130, Austin, TX 78746.  
Subscription prices are:  
Digital & Print Subscription (U.S.) - 12 Months (\$199.00)  
Digital & Print Subscription (International) - 12 Months (\$229.00)  
Digital Only Subscription - 12 Months (\$169.00)  
Single copy: \$25.00.  
All other rates on request.

POSTMASTER

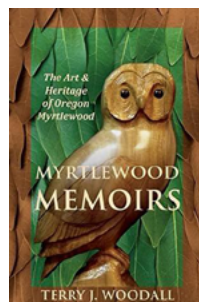
Send address changes to Kirkus Reviews Periodicals Postage Paid  
at Austin, TX 78710 and at additional mailing offices.

“Woodall’s vivid descriptions of both the natural landscape and the woodworking community will capture the audience’s attention.”

MYRTLEWOOD MEMOIRS

philanthropist must seek out solutions that are empirically rigorous and resist the temptation of “silver bullets” and grand strategies concocted independent of real experience. Walker’s acumen in professional philanthropy is impressively vast, and he covers the field with great expertise and clarity. Also, he includes edifying interviews with other notable philanthropists like Elizabeth Alexander, the president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Walker’s discussions can be frustratingly vague—he’s more interested in broadly sketching a general approach to charity than providing immediately actionable counsel—the absence of which he acknowledges. Consequently, the book is filled with platitudinous moral exhortations: “Now is the time for courage. This is our moment to show each other—and the world—that we can rise above the flaws and mistakes of our past, that we are better and stronger than hate, fear, and injustice.” Nevertheless, this remains a thoughtful reflection on the limits and possibilities of philanthropy, one that does not reject capitalism but advocates for a “more inclusive form” of it.

An insightful analysis of contemporary philanthropy offered by a perceptive, experienced insider.



**MYRTLEWOOD MEMOIRS**  
**The Art & Heritage of Oregon Myrtlewood**

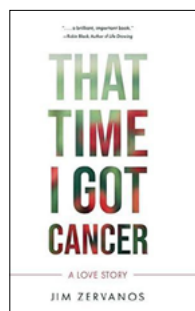
Woodall, Terry J.  
PacCarve Publishing (226 pp.)  
\$19.95 paper | \$9.99 e-book | July 19, 2022  
9798986146607

An artist pens an ode to the mighty Oregon myrtle in this memoir.

The Oregon myrtle is a hardwood with remarkable properties and applications. Also known as the California bay laurel, the tree is found up and down the Pacific shoreline, particularly in the dense forests spanning Oregon’s Coast Range and the Klamath Mountains. “The myrtlewood range of Southwestern Oregon, with its artists, craftsmen, and history-heritage, may not exist on any national treasure list, but is one of the rarest and most beautiful woods of the world,” writes Woodall in his introduction. In particular, the wood of the Oregon myrtle has been much sought-after by woodworkers since the mid-1800s due to its easy workability and beautiful grain. The author began tackling myrtle as a young man in the 1970s—indeed, the preponderance of myrtlewood is what brought him to the woodworking community around Coos Bay in the first place. In this memoir, Woodall describes both the history of myrtlewood in the Coos Bay region and his own adventures in carving with the wood—a passion that ultimately brought him international renown as a sculptor. The author writes about the myrtlewood with obsessive lyricism, as here where he describes the first hunk he cut from a felled trunk in Charlestown, Oregon: “A straw-colored field merged into yellows, then bands of black, intoned with silver grays, and finally, the indented center peppered with white speck that created a honeycomb effect. In a moment of amazement, I recognized a solitary human-like figure outlined in the

grain pattern.” These pages open up a world that few outside Southwest Oregon have probably thought much about, and Woodall’s vivid descriptions of both the natural landscape and the woodworking community will capture the audience’s attention. The book’s structure is anecdotal, without much momentum to carry readers from one chapter to the next, but the story is hardly the point. Instead, the author manages to capture the meditative tranquility that an artist might find from slowly shaping a hunk of myrtlewood.

An unexpectedly immersive, rich blend of art and nature writing.



**THAT TIME I GOT CANCER**  
**A Love Story**

Zervanos, Jim  
Koehler Books (228 pp.)  
\$29.95 | \$19.15 paper | \$7.99 e-book  
Nov. 22, 2022  
9781646638192  
9781646638178 paper

A memoir of one Pennsylvania man’s cancer struggle and how it transformed his relationships with his loved ones.

Around 2012, after experiencing strange symptoms that caused his face to swell and vision to blur, Zervanos found himself entangled in a medical mystery. Doctors struggled to figure out what caused an unprecedented and life-threatening blockage in the author’s superior vena cava (“the most important vein in the body”). It was a situation that made Zervanos—a husband, father, and teacher—confront his mortality and reassess his relationships with everything, and everyone, in his life. The reconstruction of Jim’s blocked blood vessel was apparently successful, but then the author was diagnosed with lymphoma, which required him to undergo treatment that threatened to undo the results of the surgery. During these crises, however, Zervanos found profound new meaning in “the bare essence of...life”—deeply appreciating the relationships he had with his family, choking back tears when he returned to his high school teaching job, and noting how he and his wife had the opportunity to get to “know each other all over again.” The memoir is delicately constructed and ably renders what it’s like to face the possibility of death. It also effectively renders the complex nature of one’s connections with other people and how one perceives the world vividly during frightening experiences. The memoir also refrains from painting the author as either a saint or a victim; instead, his history comes to embody how illness can be a disorienting, alienating, and ultimately redefining experience. His story is not simply about survival, but also about trust, anger, and being present for others—all inescapable facts of life.

A precise, moving, and expertly crafted remembrance.



# SEEN & HEARD

## DISPATCHES FROM THE BOOK WORLD

BY MICHAEL SCHAUB

### RACIST LANGUAGE TO BE REMOVED FROM JAMES BOND NOVELS

Reissued editions of James Bond novels will be edited to remove offensive language, the *Guardian* reports.

Ian Fleming Publications Ltd., the company that manages the literary estate of the British author who created 007, is republishing the writer's spy novels this spring in a celebration of the 70th anniversary of the first Bond book, *Casino Royale*.

The new editions of the books were reviewed by sensitivity readers, who recommended that the N-word be removed from the novels. Other racially insensitive passages have been changed, including one from *Live and Let Die* that described patrons at a Harlem nightclub as "panting and grunting like pigs at the trough." The new version reads, "Bond could sense the electric tension in the room."

A disclaimer in the new editions reads, "This book was written at a time when terms and attitudes which might be considered offensive by modern readers were commonplace. A number of updates have been made in this edition, while keeping as close as possible to the original text and the period in which it is set."

Ian Fleming Publications issued a statement saying that "we looked at the instances of several racial terms across the books and removed a number of individual words or else swapped them for terms that are more accepted today but in keeping with the period in which the books were written."

News of the changes comes after the controversy that resulted from a report that new editions of Roald Dahl's children's novels have been edited to remove descriptions of characters as "fat" and "ugly." The U.K. publisher of Dahl's books, Puffin, later announced that it would publish the original versions of the novels alongside the edited ones.



Roger Moore as James Bond

Amrur Hussain/Getty Images

### NEW ZADIE SMITH NOVEL COMING IN SEPTEMBER

Zadie Smith's latest novel is coming this summer.

Penguin Press announced that it will publish Smith's *The Fraud*, describing the book as "a dazzling novel about truth and fiction, Jamaica and Britain, fraudulence and authenticity and the mystery of 'other people.'"

The novel, Smith's first since *Swing Time* was published in 2016, follows Eliza Touchet, a Scottish housekeeper who is enthralled by the Tichborne trial, a real-life case in which an Australian butcher claimed to be the heir to an English baronetcy and its large estate. The book is based on actual events and people in Victorian England.

Smith made her literary debut in 2000 with the novel *White Teeth*, which quickly became a bestseller and won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Guardian First Book Award. Her other novels include *The Autograph Man*, *On Beauty*, and *NW*.

Last year, she published *The Surprise*, a children's book co-written with her husband, novelist Nick Laird, and illustrated by Magenta Fox. A critic for Kirkus called it "a fun story of friendship and acceptance that treads familiar territory."

Penguin Press calls *The Fraud* "a kaleidoscopic work of historical fiction set against the legal trial that divided Victorian England, about who deserves to tell their story—and who deserves to be believed." It's scheduled for publication on Sept. 5.



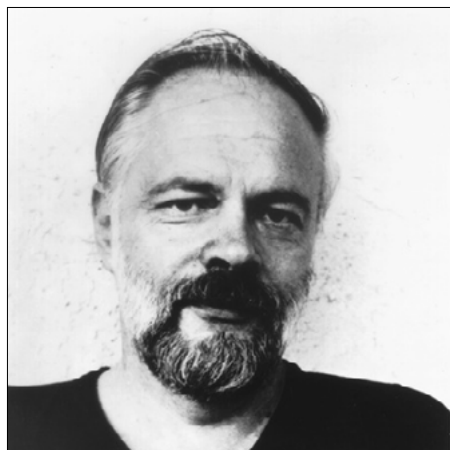
Zadie Smith

Fabian Sommer/Picture Alliance via Getty Images

Michael Schaub, a journalist and regular contributor to NPR, lives near Austin, Texas.

APPRECIATIONS | Gregory McNamee

Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*



Philip K. Dick

Nicole Oliveri Parlier

“I THINK I WOULD BE HAPPIER as a human, because I would have more freedom and independence. I would have more choices and decisions. I would have more actions and consequences....That’s why I think I would be happier as a human.”

In mid-February, an AI program said that—if *said* is the right word—to *New York Times* technology writer Kevin Roose, sounding a theme that Carlo Collodi explored in his 1883 novel, *Pinocchio*, and that has figured in much science fiction ever since: Machines want nothing more than to be human, and most humans don’t like it.

Certainly that’s the case in Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Its premise is that many humans have left a nuclear war-ravaged Earth for Mars, where they have an army of enslaved “andys” at their disposal. The humans up there are bored and isolated. And, one

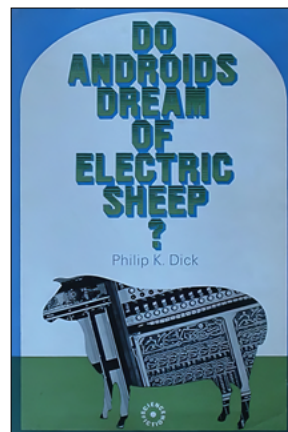
escapee tells earthling Rick Deckard, “the androids...are lonely, too.”

Deckard still lives with his wife on a barely habitable Earth, practitioners of a new, guilt- and grief-laden religion whose messiah endlessly ascends a mountain, Sisyphus-like, while being pelted with stones. Deckard is a cipher, without evident emotion. That’s probably for the better, as feelings would just get in the way: He’s a bounty hunter, and it’s his brief to hunt down androids who have made their way home from Mars and “retire” them, even though they live only for four years anyway and mostly keep to themselves.

The problem is, the new generation of androids so closely resembles humans that it’s almost impossible to tell them apart. And although the law forbids such liaisons, Deckard finds it impossible to resist one andy named Rachael. Though she allows that her kind “*are* machines, stamped out like bottle caps,” Rachael feels more empathy for her fellow androids than Deckard feels for his fellow humans. (That doesn’t keep her from a murderous moment late in the book, but we’ll let that spoiler go no further.)

In Dick’s worldview, empathy is what distinguishes humans from machines, and the book hints at several turns that Deckard might himself be an android. He does have feelings for animals, though, a poignant connection given that most animals are extinct, down to the tiniest spider, and have been replaced by mechanical simulacra. The book ends with Decker finding a toad that would seem to be real and alive—“unless,” as Deckard says, “reality is a fake,” a typically Dick-ian rabbit hole that lands us in the Matrix.

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* famously begat the 1982 film *Blade Runner*. Book and film could scarcely be more different, the heroic onscreen Deckard (Harrison Ford) battling ill-intended, superhuman invaders while the morally indifferent, weary Deckard of the book destroys robots with no special abilities beyond the ordinary human ones—at least yet, anyway. Both Deckards, though, realize a central truth: “The electric things have their lives, too.” And if that doesn’t trouble your dreams....



Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.

# TRANS KIDS ARE OUR KIDS



---

Every  
Reader  
Deserves  
to See  
Themselves  
in a Book

---



Scan the QR code for a list of  
books celebrating trans identities

[PenguinClassroom.com](https://PenguinClassroom.com)  [@PenguinClass](https://twitter.com/PenguinClass)   [@PenguinClassroom](https://www.facebook.com/PenguinClassroom)

