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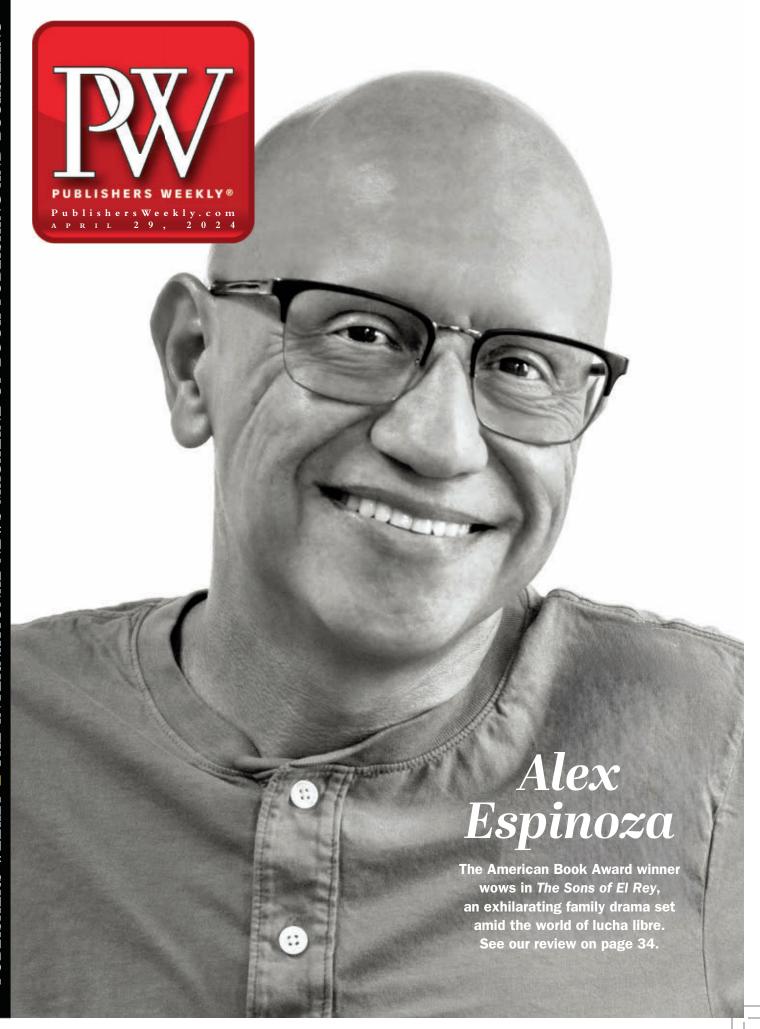


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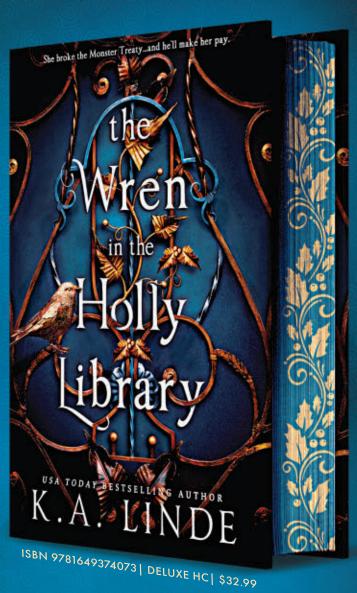
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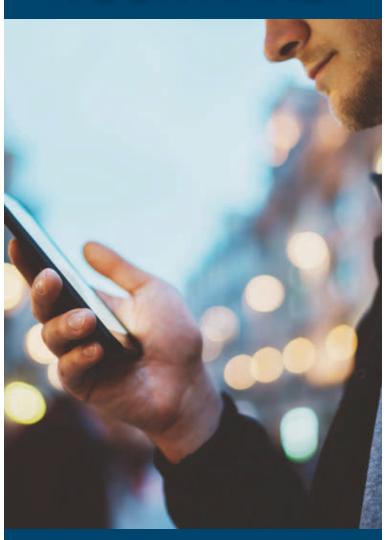


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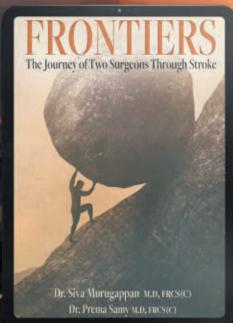


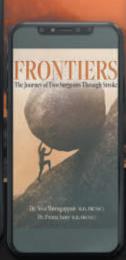
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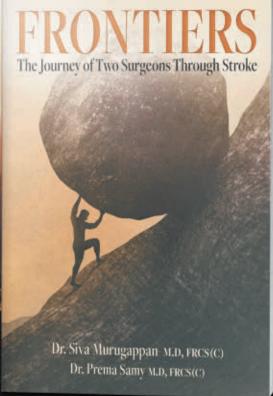
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The Week in Publishing

PEN America Cancels Literary Awards Ceremony

mid mounting criticism over PEN America's response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the organization has announced the cancellation of its 2024 Literary Awards ceremony, which was scheduled to be held April 29 in New York City. The move comes after 28 authors withdrew their books from consideration for the awards in protest—including

Tina Fey was among those honored at the 2023 PEN Literary Awards.

PEN AMERICA

nine of the 10 authors nominated for the organization's top prize, the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award.

In the wake of the cancellation, the \$75,000 prize accompanying this year's PEN/Jean Stein award will be donated to the Palestine Children's Relief Fund, at the direction of the literary estate of Jean Stein. The late Stein was "a passionate advocate for Palestinian rights who published, supported, and celebrated Palestinian writers and visual artists," said her daughters, Katrina and Wendy vanden Heuvel, and the estate's literary agent, Bill Clegg, in a joint statement.

PEN reps explained in a statement that the finalists and winning titles for each of the more than 20 awards conferred by PEN America had been selected before the mass withdrawals. As a result, two winners who had remained under consideration will still receive their cash prizes, while no prizes will be awarded where the winning title was withdrawn from consideration. Decisions regarding how to handle cash awards in those circumstances "will be made on a case-by-case basis," PEN reps said.

The four previously announced career achievement award winners will still receive their prizes.

At press time, no changes have been announced for the organization's World Voices Festival or Literary Gala, which are both less than a month away. —*JHM*

Tin House Names New Publisher

Masie Cochran has officially been named publisher and editorial director of Tin House Books, after taking the role on an interim basis last October. She succeeds Craig Popelars, who joined indie press Milkweed Editions as



Masie Cochran

v-p of sales and marketing last month.

Cochran has been with Tin House since
2011, and has been editorial director for
the past four years. —SMS

USBS Speakers Announced

The U.S. Book Show announced the lineup for its May 22 event at NYU's Kimmel Center. The program will feature 12 panels and a closing keynote by TikTok star Vivian Tu, author of *Rich AF: The Winning Money Mindset That Will Change Your Life*. The day will begin with a CEO roundtable featuring Jonathan Karp (S&S), Aman Kochar

(Baker & Taylor), Mary McAveney (Abrams), and Peter Warwick (Scholastic).

Also appearing at the show, among others, are Knopf publisher Reagan Arthur; Sally Kim, president and publisher of Little, Brown; Todd Shuster, co-CEO of Aevitas; Ayesha Pande of Ayesha Pande



Literary; and Stacey Barney, associate publisher of Nancy Paulsen Books for Young Readers. Launched in 2021 by *Publishers Weekly*, the U.S. Book Show is being presented in cooperation with the Association of American Literary Agents.

For a full schedule and registration info, visit usbookshow.com.

Abrams Gets into Manga

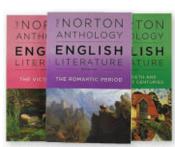


Rodolphe Lachat

Abrams ComicArts is launching a new imprint, Kana, focusing on manga series translated into English. The imprint will primarily publish titles for an adult audience, translated from the Japanese, in addition to some originally published in French. Kana plans to release 40-60 titles per year in paperback. The imprint will be led by Rodolphe Lachat, v-p and publisher of Abrams ComicArts, who said it is looking to "celebrate the art of manga" and to publish "stories that resonate with us, classic works that deserve an English translation, and art that inspires us." -JHM

Norton Sues Follett Over Late Payments

W.W. Norton is suing Follett Higher Education for back payments totaling around \$9 million for print and digital content distributed on college campuses.



In addition to being paid what is owed, the publisher is seeking damages and reimbursement of its legal costs and expenses. "It is unusual

for Norton to initiate litigation, but the facts in this case warranted taking that step," a Norton rep said. "Follett has failed on an ongoing basis to make payments as due and owes Norton a substantial sum." In 2022, Follett Higher Education was acquired by a private investor group. A Follett rep declined to comment directly on the litigation but told PW they hope to resolve the matter "promptly." -AA

Swift Sales

Taylor Swift is reaching new heights of forever part of history, and there's no



denying that Taylor Swift more than deserves a seat at the HO table," said Penguin Workshop publisher Francesco Sedita.

stardom-and publishers are here for it. After the success of Wendy Loggia's Little Golden Book bio of Swift (which landed at #3 on PW's 2023 children's bestsellers list), PW recently assembled a list of new and forthcoming Swift-inspired books for young readers, which can be found on our website, including a just-published book in Penguin Workshop's popular Who HQ series that sold 55,000 copies in its first three weeks. "Who HQ is all about people, events, and places that are



-SM

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For this feature, we're previewing the upcoming San Diego Comic-Con. We'd like to hear from publishers big and small that are promoting books, comics, and prose at the convention. Which authors and artists are appearing, and are they special guests or featured on panels? Please indicate if they are available for interview. Do publishers have new and innovative ways of marketing at fan conventions, new booth setups or off-site events? Send pitches to comics@publishersweekly.com.

Lifelines, Deadlines for SPD Clients

A host of vendors and organizations are attempting to mitigate the damage caused by the distributor's sudden closure

ith little hope that the leadership of Small Press Distribution will emerge to help sort through the chaos caused by its abrupt closure at the end of March, other organizations have begun stepping in to try and mitigate the damage. One potential lifeline came through when the Poetry Foundation announced the establishment of a new \$150,000 bridge fund to help nonprofit poetry presses affected by SPD's collapse.

According to the April 25 announcement, the fund will operate through an "open request" process, providing grants that range up to \$7,500 per press, with the foundation accepting requests on a rolling basis until September 1, or until the fund has been exhausted. To answer questions about the new fund, the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP) will hold an information session with Poetry Foundation staff on April 30 at 3 p.m. CT.

In addition, the Poetry Foundation announced that it has also expedited \$250,000 in grants to nonprofit small presses (the grants are open to poetry and prose publishers) that had applied as part of its regular spring grants cycle. The foundation will begin accepting applications for its regular fall cycle on June 1.

Former SPD clients based in New York State can also apply for financial help through the NYSCA-CLMP Forward Fund. The fund offers one-time grants of \$500 and \$1,000 to help defray expenses related to the SPD closure. The application process is now open via the CLMP website and will run through May 17. Grants will be announced on May 30.

While the grant programs are welcome news, a growing number of publishers are also turning to GoFundMe campaigns to raise money. One such press is Fonograf Editions, whose owners hope to recoup \$12,000 in royalty checks that were never paid by SPD, as well as to raise \$3,000 to cover the shipping and handling costs of moving to a new distributor.

The nonprofit record label and book publisher has released 16 books and records over the past two years and hopes to release more than 19 works from established and debut authors over the next two years. As of press time, Fonograf's campaign had raised nearly \$9,000—three-quarters of its goal.

Meanwhile, some former SPD clients are making progress finding new distributors, even as they grapple with financial and logistical challenges. As of this writing, Asterism Books had signed more than 60 publishers, Itasca Books had onboarded eight presses, and the Independent Publishers Group had signed agreements with two publishers and has deals pending with eight others.

Of course, with new distributors lined up, the challenge for many publishers remains how to help fund the transfer of their books, which are now being stored in warehouses owned by the Ingram Content Group and Publishers Shipping and Storage, to their new homes.

Asterism's Phil Bevins said he is in contact with Ingram and PSSC in an effort to arrange bulk shipping of inventories as a way to save publishers money and minimize damage to inventories. No agreement has been signed to date, Bevins said, but conversations continue.

Sources also told PW that the extent of the confusion caused by

SPD abruptly closing so soon after shipping its entire inventory to Ingram and PSSC is becoming more apparent. For example, Ingram had been expecting to get books for about 50 of SPD's largest clients, but instead received inventory for some 130 publishers.

For its part, PSSC is offering publishers with inventory in its warehouse the option to become PSSC clients. PSSC director of sales and marketing Pam Nuffer said the company has reached out to more than 300 publishers with books in its warehouse and has heard back from a little over half.

For publishers that have requested their books to be shipped, Nuffer said PSSC is preparing estimates for the shipping and handling costs, which it will begin to email to publishers this week. Once payment is received, PSSC will begin shipping the inventory. PSSC has also extended the grace period through June 30, after which it will institute storage charges, and Nuffer noted that the company continues to reach out to publishers it has not yet heard from about how they would like their books to be handled. For publishers that want their inventory destroyed, PSSC will do so at no charge.

Meanwhile, the only communication publishers say they have received from SPD has come from the distributor's lawyer. In a letter dated April 10, SPD attorney Mary Dowling informed publishers that if they wish to assert a claim against SPD, they must file a form with her San Diego firm by August 8, along with copies of any relevant documents. At press time, Dowling had not responded to *PW*'s request for more information about the dissolution process.

—Jim Milliot

INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING



Introducing New Works from Liu Liangcheng

Liu's *Bearing Word* and *Bomba* are among the award-winning titles published by Yilin Press, an imprint of Phoenix Publishing and Media Group

bucolic philosopher. That's the term used by the Chinese literati to describe author Liu Liangcheng. Born in 1962 in Xinjiang, Liu has written more than 50 books in the past 25 years and even has a literature center named after him that showcases his works such as Bearing Word, Bomba, Drifting Soil, Hollowed Out, In Xinjiang, and A Village of One's Own. Many of his essays have also been included in the Chinese middle school textbooks and university courses.

Bearing Word, for instance, was published in English by Balestier Press in May 2023; rights for the Arabic, Macedonian, and Nepalese editions has been sold. Set in ancient Xinjiang during a turbulent time, this 340-page fable revolves around Ku, a folk messenger and polyglot, and Xie, a donkey that understands what humans are saying and can communicate with every creature out there, including ghosts. Ku, tasked to deliver the donkey to a hostile country thousands of miles away, then embarks on a journey that crosses battlefields and deserts while bearing witness to incredible life and death.

"In Bearing Word, Liu delves deep into the changes—through faith, love, power, and war—in the human soul. He strikes a harmonic balance between human and nature, which essentially boils down to his own writing philosophy and belief that everything has a spirit," says deputy editor-in-chief Lu Zhizhou of Yilin Press, a subsidiary

of Phoenix Publishing and Media Group (PPMG) that specializes in Chinese and translated literary titles.

For Lu, *Bearing Word* is also about translation. "As Ku notes in the story: 'All languages from distant places felt like dream talk.' He further acknowledges the transformative power of translation, pointing out that 'the difference between languages is so great, translating between them is like herding out a flock of goats in the morning and finding they'd turned into dogs by afternoon.' Translation

is the engine that enables our authors and their works to go global and cross different cultural and language barriers, and so these observations from Ku—and by default, from the author—are particularly illuminating not just for us at Yilin Press but for everybody in the publishing, translation, and rights business," Lu says.

Then there is Bomba, the novel that won the 11th Mao Dun Literature Award last year. In the Chinese publishing circle, Bomba is lauded as a majestic saga in the same vein as François Rabelais's Giant accompanied by a quixotic sense of innocence. "Liu's mastery in turning oral tradition and folk stories into this highly imaginative

and philosophical fiction

has been frequently compared to that of Calvino's," adds Lu.

In Mongolian epic, 'bomba'—originally means 'a treasure vase'—refers to the mother's womb for all human beings and living things. Liu's *Bomba* draws on *Jangar*, Mongolia's best-known epic poem,

which describes the bitter struggle of 12 great warriors and thousands of brave soldiers defending their homeland.

In Liu's story, 'bomba' is the name of



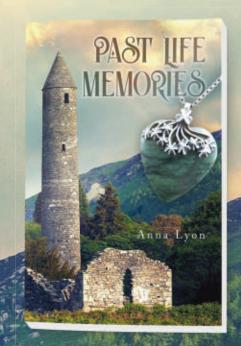
the grassland where storyteller Qi and his people live, and where people remain forever at the age of 25, free from aging or death. During the cold nights on the way eastward, they recite the Jangar epic together, telling

the story of three children and their games, and lead the tribe out of the harsh conditions, thus changing their destiny.

Bomba traces the lost childhood and innocence of mankind. It tells the world ancient and novel Chinese stories with words full of dreamy and philosophical thoughts. "It seeks to take readers back to the original meaning of the world through dreams, games, and stories, and allow them to see themselves in another time," says Lu.

Bearing Word and Bomba are among the many bestselling works that Yilin Press had published since its 1988 inception. Its catalog, which has more than 500 new titles every year, includes top authors such as Yu Hua, Ge Fei, Ye Zhaoyan, A Yi, and Lu Min. "Our social science titles-Contemporary Chinese Visual Culture, Daughter of Dunhuang, and The Theory of Moral Capital, for instance are known domestically and proven influential abroad," says Lu, adding that Yilin Press has copublishing programs with multinational publishers such as Simon & Schuster, Springer, and Taylor & Francis. "To-date, our imprint has sold rights to over 160 publishers in more than 50 countries."

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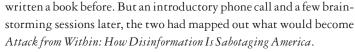


Make Facts Great Again

In Attack from Within, Barbara McQuade explores the need to defend the truth—and her publisher is taking note

n spring 2022, Seven Stories Press editor Greg Ruggiero read a *New York Times* op-ed that unnerved him. In it, University of Michigan law professor and former U.S. attorney Barbara McQuade discussed the then-upcoming state elections and how several candidates for secretary of state—the office that generally oversees voting in each state—were seeking to use the post as "a platform to spread disinformation" about the security of U.S. elections.

"What I saw in Barb's message was an effort to warn the country about the very real possibility of fascism in America," Ruggiero said. A few days later, Ruggiero emailed McQuade and invited her to expand her op-ed into a book. McQuade replied somewhat bashfully, he recalled, having never



On February 27, the book landed with a splash, debuting at #3 on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Seven Stories publicity director Ruth Weiner largely credits McQuade for the book's success. McQuade brought with her an audience from her appearances as a legal analyst on NBC

News and MSNBC, her popular podcast #SistersInLaw, and some 680,000 followers on X. But there is also the book's timely subject matter. The rising threat from disinformation is "arguably the most important issue of this historic moment," said Seven Stories founder and publisher Dan Simon.

In Attack from Within, McQuade explores how bad actors at home and abroad are sowing division and eroding trust in the institutions that have sustained American democracy, and how social media platforms have become particularly potent engines of disinformation. The book's final section offers several proposed solutions, all of which are anchored by a single core value: "an unyielding commitment to the truth," McQuade writes. "While we can never rid politics of spin and advocacy," she concludes, "we can insist on facts and refuse to perpetuate assertions we know to be lies."

With some 67,000 copies in print so far, the book has resonated with readers. But it also feels especially pertinent for publishers. As trusted institutions, book publishers have long been regarded as bulwarks against disinformation. At the same time, however, book publishers have historically maintained a rather arm's-length approach to fact-checking, for the most part putting the onus on authors to guarantee the accuracy of the facts contained in their manuscripts. But with disinformation on the rise, as McQuade argues in her book, is that kind of soft approach to accuracy still sufficient?



Greg Ruggiero and Barbara McQuade



McQuade isn't so sure. "While we all need to read with a critical eye to avoid being deceived or misled, publishers have a duty to the public to ensure that they are putting out accurate facts," she said. "Failing to fact-check strikes me as a recipe for publishing false claims."

Indeed, a scan of the publishing industry headlines suggests a number of recently published books might have benefited from a more rigorous fact-checking approach. Earlier this month, for example, critics took aim at White Rural Rage: The Threat to American Democracy by Paul Waldman and Tom Schaller (Random House), suggesting the authors misread or misused the academic data they relied on to create their political portrayal of white rural Americans. In a scathing piece in the Atlantic, contributing writer Tyler Austin Harper even cited the book's "shoddy methodologies, misinterpreted data, and distorted studies" as evidence of an "anti-rural prejudice." And Last November, former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows's publisher, All Seasons Press, actually sued him after media reports suggested that Meadows told federal investigators that he had not seen any evidence of election fraud, seemingly contradicting statements in his book about the election being stolen.

While the political stakes have been raised in recent years, the issue of fact-checking for book publishers is hardly new. In a 2010 PW article, the late Random House publisher Daniel Menaker conceded that in the digital age it was probably time for publishers to revisit their fact-checking practices. Still, "total accuracy," he said, will always be an "insoluble problem" for publishers, primarily due to costs. "It would be impossible for publishers to check all their books and still create an economy of scale."

Ruggiero agrees there is "no simple answer" for publishers, especially in an age when the concern has shifted from James Frey's embellishments in *A Million Little Pieces*, for example, to the kind of false narratives and alternative facts used to undermine our democracy. "Better fact-checking might mitigate misinformation," he said, "but that does not address the willful attempt to achieve political domination through deception."

At the same time, Ruggiero questions whether publishers can continue to risk passing the buck on accuracy. Indeed, *Attack from Within* was vetted by professional fact-checkers, which McQuade called an "essential" step in the book's publication process. In addition, Ruggiero and McQuade worked "page by page" to check and cite sources (some "1,117 citations, to be exact," Ruggiero said).

For Seven Stories, it is a matter of putting public interest over profit, Ruggiero suggested—something more publishers may also choose to do in these uncertain times. McQuade concurs: "Regardless of our political preferences, without a commitment to truth, we can't expect to make any progress as a society."

—Sophia Stewart



In Memoriam Faith Ringgold 1930–2024



Brilliant artist, legendary activist, beloved friend





DEAL OF THE WEEK

Putnam Lands Santopolo Sequel



Putnam executive editor Tara Singh Carlson has acquired world rights to *The Love We Found* by Jill Santopolo, the sequel to the international bestseller *The Light We Lost*. Miriam Altshuler at DeFiore & Company brokered the deal. Putnam said that in the new novel, set 10 years after *The Light We Lost*, Lucy "discovers an address among Gabe's old photos that prompts her to travel to

Santopolo

Rome, where she ends up meeting the next love of her life, even as she wrestles with a family-changing decision." Putnam plans to publish in spring 2025.

■ Hardy's 'Queen' Coronated by Ballantine



In a preempt, Natalie Hallak at Ballantine has signed world rights to Kayla Hardy's *The Quarter Queen*, along with an as-yet-untitled second book. The deal was negotiated by Emma Kapson at Verve Talent & Literary. Ballantine said *The Quarter Queen* is "a mother-daughter saga set in a magically and racially divided 19th-century New Orleans" that tells the story of "the

daughter of voodoo queen Marie Laveau, who must race against the clock to navigate the power struggle of her city in order to save her mother, in the process discovering her own inner magic and its connection to a dark secret, intertwined with Marie's rise to the throne 20 years earlier." No pub date has been announced.

■ Simon Element Goes 'Higher' for Anderson



Platinum-selling rapper, entrepreneur, and philanthropist Sean "Big Sean" Anderson has sold world English rights to Go Higher: Five Practices for Purpose, Success, and Inner Peace to Samantha Weiner at Simon Element. Sarah Passick at Park & Fine Literary and Media brokered the deal. The publisher said that in the book, Anderson will share his "five key practices for inner work and self-acceptance through

an interactive guidebook on maintaining daily mental wellness." GoHigher is set to publish in October.

Grand Central Signs Four from Berry



Grand Central publisher Ben Sevier has acquired North American rights to four books by bestselling author Steve Berry: three in the author's perennially popular Cotton Malone series, as well as a standalone title, which Grand Central described as a thriller that leans on Berry's legal background. Simon Lipskar at Writers House negotiated the deal, and Grand Central executive editor Lyssa

Berry

Keusch will edit. The first scheduled among the books is *The Medici Return*, the next Cotton Malone thriller, which will be released in February 2025.

Stoddard's Debut Novel Goes to Celadon



Kat Stoddard has sold world rights to Wasp's Nest to Faith Tomlin at Celadon Books. The deal was brokered by Claire Romine at Trident Media Group. Celadon called the debut novel a contemporary queer homage to the 1940 film The Philadelphia Story, with "the heart and coastal backdrop of The Summer I Turned Pretty." It follows "an artist and recovering alcoholic who attends his

Stoddard

ex-wife's glamorous Cape Cod wedding with an unpredictable young writer as his fake boyfriend, resulting in a complicated love triangle." The book is tentatively set for a summer 2026 publication.

■ Gallery Takes Arons's Kate Spade Memoir



Gallery Books editorial director Aimee Bell has acquired world rights to We Might Just Make It After All, a memoir by Elyce Arons, cofounder of Kate Spade and Frances Valentine, and the best friend of the late designer. Dan Strone at Trident Media Group brokered the deal. Gallery said the book tells "the story of a friendship forged in college—Arons and Spade having met

Arons

as freshmen at the University of Kansas in 1981—that carried the two young women as they developed from broke teenagers to Midwestern 20-somethings in New York City to aspiring career women in the early 90s whose upstart company went on to become an iconic global fashion brand." The book is due out in fall 2025.

Behind the Bestsellers APR. 14-20, 2024

By CAROLYN JURIS

TIKTOK BOOM

TikTok's future in the U.S. may be uncertain, but BookTok continues to exert its influence. In 2023, Bloom Books-which scored last week with Elsie Silver's Wild Love—acquired six books in Chloe Walsh's popular Boys of Tommen YA series, four previously self-published entries plus two additional titles. Bloom released the backlist titles, beginning with Binding 13, from November through March; the first new title, Taming 7, debuts at #3 on our children's fiction list.

15,420

7,113







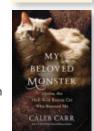
FIRST-WEEK PRINT UNIT SALES FOR THE BOYS OF TOMMEN SERIES

Truth Be Told

Memoirs by two writers who are better known as novelists land on our hardcover nonfiction list.

At #5, Knife is Salman Rushdie's "forceful and

surprisingly good-humored account of the 2022 knife attack that nearly killed him," according to our review. The author "chronicles the year following the attack, during which he recovered from liver damage, the removal of part of his small intestine, and the loss of his right eye. Though he writes of being plagued by nightmares and gory memories of the assault, Rushdie's wit shines through."



SALMAN RUSHDIE

Five spots below, Caleb Carr "delivers a lively and moving memoir about his 17-year companionship with a Siberian forest cat named Masha," per our review of My Beloved Monster. "Carr's gift for narrative

momentum gives shape to the potentially flimsy premise, and he wrings real pathos from this tale of wounded souls finding one another."

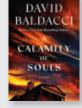
NEW & NOTABLE

A CALAMITY OF SOULS

#2 Hardcover Fiction, #3 overall "Baldacci's stirring latest finds Black Vietnam veteran Jerome Washington

on trial in 1968 Virginia

David Baldacci



for murdering Leslie and Anne Randolph, his married white employers and two of the most prominent citizens in fiercely segregated Freeman County," per our review. "This ranks among the author's best."

AN UNFINISHED LOVE STORY

Doris Kearns Goodwin #2 Hardcover Nonfiction, #7 overall

Pulitzer winner Goodwin revisits her late husband Richard Goodwin's experiences as a speechwriter to presidents John F. Kennedy



and Lyndon B. Johnson and working on the 1968 presidential campaigns of senators Robert F. Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy.

POLITICAL POSITION

Ahead of the landmark June 2 presidential election in Mexico—for the first time, the two leading candidates are women—outgoing president Andrés Manuel López Obrador lands at #7 on our trade paperback list with ¡Gracias! / Thank You!, a memoir of his six years in office. The Spanish-language book sold best in Los Angeles, where it ranked #3 and where 22% of copies in the U.S. sold.



TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	UNITS
The Scarlet Shedder (Dog Man #12)	Dav Pilkey	Graphix	52,310
The Women	Kristin Hannah	St. Martin's	39,037
A Calamity of Souls	David Baldacci	Grand Central	34,404
The Anxious Generation	Jonathan Haidt	Penguin Press	28,127
A Court of Thorns and Roses	Sarah J. Maas	Bloomsbury	26,376
Jujutsu Kaisen, Vol. 22	Gege Akutami	Viz	23,954
An Unfinished Love Story	Doris Kearns Goodwin	Simon & Schuster	21,517
Seriously, So Good	Carissa Stanton	Simon Element	20,320
Oh, the Places You'll Go!	Dr. Seuss	Random House	19,044
Just for the Summer	Abby Jimenez	Forever	17 614
	The Scarlet Shedder (Dog Man #12) The Women A Calamity of Souls The Anxious Generation A Court of Thorns and Roses Jujutsu Kaisen, Vol. 22 An Unfinished Love Story Seriously, So Good Oh, the Places You'll Go!	The Scarlet Shedder (Dog Man #12) The Women A Calamity of Souls The Anxious Generation A Court of Thorns and Roses Jujutsu Kaisen, Vol. 22 An Unfinished Love Story Seriously, So Good Oh, the Places You'll Go! Davi Pilkey Kristin Hannah David Baldacci Jonathan Haidt Sarah J. Maas Gege Akutami Doris Kearns Goodwin Carissa Stanton Dr. Seuss	The Scarlet Shedder (Dog Man #12) The Women Kristin Hannah St. Martin's A Calamity of Souls David Baldacci Grand Central The Anxious Generation Jonathan Haidt Penguin Press A Court of Thorns and Roses Sarah J. Maas Bloomsbury Jujutsu Kaisen, Vol. 22 Gege Akutami Viz An Unfinished Love Story Doris Kearns Goodwin Simon & Schuster Seriously, So Good Carissa Stanton Simon Element Oh, the Places You'll Go! Dr. Seuss Random House



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Hardcover Frontlist Fiction

RANK	LW	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	1	The Women	Kristin Hannah	St. Martin's	9781250178633	39,037
2	_	A Calamity of Souls	David Baldacci	Grand Central	9781538765029	34,404
3	3	Fourth Wing	Rebecca Yarros	Red Tower	9781649374042	16,287
4	2	The Familiar	Leigh Bardugo	Flatiron	9781250884251	15,083
5	5	Iron Flame	Rebecca Yarros	Red Tower	9781649374172	14,902
6	6	Table for Two	Amor Towles	Viking	9780593296370	12,816
7	4	Toxic Prey	John Sandford	Putnam	9780593714492	10,532
8	7	James	Percival Everett	Doubleday	9780385550369	8,119
9	10	The #1 Lawyer	Patterson/Allen	Little, Brown	9780316499675	7,332
10	12	The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store	James McBride	Riverhead	9780593422946	6,937
11	_	Bad Dreams in the Night	Adam Ellis	Andrews McMeel	9781524887186	6,566
12	8	House of Flame and Shadow	Sarah J. Maas	Bloomsbury	9781635574104	6,553
13	_	Close to Death	Anthony Horowitz	Harper	9780063305649	6,410
14	11	First Lie Wins	Ashley Elston	Viking/Dorman	9780593492918	5,666
15	9	A Fate Inked in Blood	Danielle L. Jensen	Del Rey	9780593599839	5,213

Hardcover Frontlist Nonfiction

RANK	LW	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	2	The Anxious Generation	Jonathan Haidt	Penguin Press	9780593655030	28,127
2	_	An Unfinished Love Story	Doris Kearns Goodwin	Simon & Schuster	9781982108663	21,517
3	_	Seriously, So Good	Carissa Stanton	Simon Element	9781668020722	20,320
4	_	Love, Mom	Nicole Saphier	Broadside	9780063325654	17,356
5	_	Knife	Salman Rushdie	Random House	9780593730249	7,276
6	1	Somehow	Anne Lamott	Riverhead	9780593714416	6,753
7	3	The Wide Wide Sea	Hampton Sides	Doubleday	9780385544764	6,242
8	_	Briefly Perfectly Human	Alua Arthur	Mariner	9780063240032	6,199
9	_	Financial Literacy for All	John Hope Bryant	Wiley	9781394209026	6,089
10	_	My Beloved Monster	Caleb Carr	Little, Brown	9780316503600	5,653
11	7	Indulge	Valerie Bertinelli	Harvest	9780063244726	5,157
12	13	Practicing the Way	John Mark Comer	Waterbrook	9780593193822	4,992
13	8	The Wager	David Grann	Doubleday	9780385534260	4,769
14	6	Age of Revolutions	Fareed Zakaria	Norton	9780393239232	4,505
15	_	Pizza Night	Alexandra Stafford	Clarkson Potter	9780593579947	4,368

Trade Paperback Frontlist

RANK	LW	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	-	Jujutsu Kaisen, Vol. 22	Gege Akutami	Viz	9781974743414	23,954
2	1	Just for the Summer	Abby Jimenez	Forever	9781538704431	17,614
3	4	The Teacher	Freida McFadden	Poisoned Pen	9781728296210	12,160
4	5	The Inmate	Freida McFadden	Poisoned Pen	9781728296173	11,338
5	3	Happy Place	Emily Henry	Berkley	9780593441190	11,222
6	14	Super Fan-Tastic Taylor Swift Coloring & Activity Book	Jessica Kendall	Design Originals	9781497206861	10,567
7	_	¡Gracias! / Thank You!	Andrés Manuel López Obrador	Planeta	9786073911320	9,543
8	6	One by One	Freida McFadden	Poisoned Pen	9781728296197	9,485
9	2	Wild Love	Elsie Silver	Bloom	9781464220814	8,907
10	10	The Housemaid's Secret	Freida McFadden	Mobius	9780349132617	7,992
11	8	Butcher & Blackbird	Brynne Weaver	Zando	9781638931737	7,973
12	7	Bride	Ali Hazelwood	Berkley	9780593550403	7,232
13	13	Never Lie	Freida McFadden	Poisoned Pen	9781728296166	6,957
14	_	The Corpse in the Closet	Lucy Score	Bloom	9781728295183	6,864
15	9	House of Sky and Breath	Sarah J. Maas	Bloomsbury	9781639731756	6,766



Children's Frontlist Fiction

RANK	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	The Scarlet Shedder (Dog Man #12)	Dav Pilkey	Graphix	9781338896435	52,310
2	If Only I Had Told Her	Laura Nowlin	Sourcebooks Fire	9781728276229	15,518
3	Taming 7	Chloe Walsh	Bloom	9781464216053	15,420
4	Powerless	Lauren Roberts	Simon & Schuster	9781665954884	13,102
5	The Reappearance of Rachel Price	Holly Jackson	Delacorte	9780593374207	7,652
6	No Brainer (Diary of a Wimpy Kid #18)	Jeff Kinney	Amulet	9781419766947	7,113
7	Influencers (Cat Kid Comic Club #5)	Dav Pilkey	Graphix	9781338896398	4,794
8	Winter Turning (Wings of Fire Graphic Novel #7)	Sutherland/Holmes	Graphix	9781338730920	4,194
9	Five Survive	Holly Jackson	Ember	9780593374191	4,122
10	Lightlark	Alex Aster	Amulet	9781419760877	4,076
11	A Door in the Dark	Scott Reintgen	McElderry	9781665918695	3,808
12	Claudia and the Bad Joke (The Baby-Sitters Club Graphic Novel #15)	Martin/Nopra	Graphix	9781338835502	3,641
13	The Ballad of Never After	Stephanie Garber	Flatiron	9781250268433	3,539
14	The Girls I've Been	Tess Sharpe	Putnam	9780593353820	3,150
15	Ruthless Vows (Letters of Enchantment #2)	Rebecca Ross	Wednesday	9781250857453	3,003
16	Binding 13	Chloe Walsh	Bloom	9781728299945	2,989
17	A Thousand Boy Kisses	Tillie Cole	Bloom	9781728297088	2,811
18	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	J.K. Rowling	Scholastic	9781338878929	2,703
19	The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes	Suzanne Collins	Scholastic Press	9781339016573	2,672
20	The Chalice of the Gods (Percy Jackson and the Olympians #6)	Rick Riordan	Disney Hyperion	9781368098175	2,649
21	Waverider (Amulet #9)	Kazu Kibuishi	Graphix	9780545828659	2,530
22	To All the Boys I've Loved Before (anniv. ed.)	Jenny Han	Simon & Schuster	9781665951647	2,367
23	Heartless Hunter (Crimson Moth #1)	Kristen Ciccarelli	Wednesday	9781250866905	2,330
24	I Survived the Battle of D-Day, 1944 (I Survived Graphic Novel #9)	Lauren Tarshis	Graphix	9781338883046	2,311
25	Nightbane (Lightlark #2)	Alex Aster	Amulet	9781419760907	2,205

Children's Picture Books

RANK	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	Oh, the Places You'll Go!	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780679805274	19,044
2	Taylor Swift	Loggia/Chavarri	Golden	9780593566718	10,656
3	The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle	Philomel	9780399226908	9,990
4	Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?	Martin/Carle	Holt	9780805047905	9,466
5	Chicka Chicka Boom Boom	Martin/Archambault/Ehlert	Little Simon	9781442450707	9,348
6	The Night Before Kindergarten	Wing/Durrell	Grosset & Dunlap	9780448425009	8,823
7	Happy Birthday to You!	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780394800769	8,284
8	I Love You to the Moon and Back	Hepworth/Warnes	Tiger Tales	9781589255517	7,721
9	Green Eggs and Ham	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780394800165	6,908
10	One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780394800134	6,877
11	Goodnight Moon	Brown/Hurd	HarperFestival	9780694003617	6,456
12	The Rainbow Fish	Marcus Pfister	NorthSouth	9781558585362	6,278
13	Where's Bluey?	_	Penguin Young Readers	9780593385692	5,923
14	What Do You Do with an Idea?	Yamada/Besom	Compendium	9781957891347	5,846
15	Little Blue Truck Feeling Happy	Schertle/McElmurry	Clarion	9780063342705	5,819
16	Bluey 5-Minute Stories	_	Penguin Young Readers	9780593521908	5,702
17	Guess How Much I Love You	McBratney/Jeram	Candlewick	9781536210637	5,342
18	I Love You Like No Otter	Rossner/Hanson	Sourcebooks Wonderland	9781728213743	5,207
19	You're My Little Baby	Eric Carle	Little Simon	9781534474932	5,139
20	Love You Forever	Munsch/McGraw	Firefly	9780920668375	4,875
21	The Giving Tree	Shel Silverstein	HarperCollins	9780060256654	4,738
22	The Wonderful Things You Will Be	Emily Winfield Martin	Random House	9780385376716	4,712
23	Where's Spot?	Eric Hill	Warne	9780399240461	4,698
24	Everything Is Mama	Fallon/Ordóñez	Feiwel and Friends	9781250125835	4,688
25	Bluey: Sleepytime	Joe Brumm	Penguin Young Readers	9780593659588	4,597







Manga Goes Mainstream

Publishers here and abroad are pushing the boundaries of manga to meet surging demand among North American readers

BY DEB AOKI

ver the past four years, manga has established itself as one of the most popular categories of books in North America. Spurred by the success of anime streaming on services such as Crunchyroll and Hulu, manga sales in the U.S. have quadrupled since 2020. According to a recent report from the *Beat* based on BookScan data, of the 44.7 million graphic novels sold in 2023, "nearly 21.8 million were manga (almost 49%)."

While the rapid rise in sales that began in 2020 has tapered off, unit sales for the first nine months of 2023 remained 351% higher than those from the same period in 2019, per a presentation at ComicsPRO by Kristen McLean, executive director at Circana Bookscan. And though manga has been through a few

booms and busts in the past 40 years, recent sales trends, according to McLean, "accomplished a whole new market for manga in the U.S."

Such robust sales have encouraged large and small companies—whether established trade publishers forming new imprints or indie micropublishers—to enter the category. Also notable is the rise of comics from other parts of Asia and comics by global creators aimed at manga readers. Innovations are also emerging in how some series are created and marketed, with English-language readers as a primary target audience.

Manga beyond Japan

In the past, a vocal subset of fans insisted that "real" manga needed to originate from Japan. But today's manga readers are

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increasingly omnivorous, consuming manga, webtoons, and light novels originally published in Japan along with comics from South Korea, China, and elsewhere.

Manga's popularity has paved the way for more webcomics from South Korea to transition from digital products read on mobile devices to print editions. Ize Press, the Korean comicsfocused imprint of Yen Press, is leading the way with a mix of action, fantasy, and romance stories from the Manta, Tapas Media, and Webtoon apps. Other publishers with forthcoming Korean comics in English in 2024 include Drawn & Quarterly with Dog Days by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim, Ablaze with The Awl by Gyu-seok Choi, Seven Seas Entertainment with Reborn Rich by JP and BG, and TokyoPop with Maron the Magic Ocean by Mimi.

Publishers focused on Chinese comics include Paradise Systems and Aloha Comics, along with Media-Do, which recently debuted Three Seconds After Our Eyes Met, one of a quartet of new titles from Taiwan Creative Contents Agency, a nonprofit that supports the development and distribution of Taiwanese comics overseas. Seven Seas, which boasts a growing line of danmei (boys'-love novels and comics from China), is also putting out Kinnporsche, a boys'-love novel series by Daemi from

Penguin Random House made waves in 2023 when it launched Inklore, an imprint that features comics by global creators aimed at webtoon and manga readers. Led by the perennial bestselling Lore Olympus series, which first took off on Webtoon, Inklore's launch releases represent a mix of manhwa

There was a hunger for a variety of different kinds of stories, as we saw the entire manga industry see a boom."

Alvin Lu, Kodansha USA

(originating from South Korea) and manga (from Japan). Manhwa highlights include Cherry Blossoms After Winter by Bamwoo, a manhwa boys'-love romance originally published on Content First's TappyToon app, as well as the romantasy webnovel and webtoon hit Under the Oak Tree by Suji Kim from Manta. Leading Inklore's manga titles is gamer rom-com My Love Story with Yamada-kun at Lv. 999 by Mashiro, which got a boost from its anime adaptation airing on Crunchyroll.

This fall, Abrams ComicArts will launch its Kana imprint in the U.S. (a cousin to the Kana manga imprint in France owned by its Belgian parent company, Média-Participations), aimed at mature readers and specializing in higher-end packaging and

Independent outfits have also ramped up production, with many featuring up-and-coming creators from outside of manga's anime-driven mainstream. (For more on them, see "The Rise of Manga Indies and New Imprints," p. 22.)

Manga made for America

Japanese manga publishers and their North American partners have also been making bigger investments in marketing comics to the overseas market.

This has been apparent at fan cons, especially at New York Comic Con in 2023, where the exhibit hall floor was dominated by huge balloons featuring popular manga characters, including Luffy from One Piece and Goku from Dragon Ball. Japanese publishing giant Shueisha also showcased its Manga Plus app and Shueisha XR's immersive multimedia manga experience, Manga Dive.

Kodansha USA has taken a novel approach to courting the English-language market by publishing original series by Japanese manga creators first in North America via its Kodansha Reader Portal, and later releasing them in Japan. Among the works published under this program are the science fiction action series Re: Anima, the horror action series Blood Blade, and the fantasy-adventure series The Spellbook Library.

The goal of these ventures is to "help bring amazing Japanese creators and their stories directly to English-reading fans," says Alvin Lu, president and CEO of Kodansha USA. "The growth over the last three years definitely didn't hurt. There was a

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MANGA

hunger for a variety of different kinds of stories, as we saw the entire manga industry see a boom, not just the usual players or the usual stories. So, we felt that now was a time to experiment." Kodansha USA's new online serialization model allows stories to be introduced to readers the same way they are in Japan: as weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly installments, to build interest in series before the release of print editions.

A number of other publishers have launched mobile apps and subscription services—such

as Square Enix's Manga Up!, Kodansha's K-Manga, and Viz's Viz Media app-with many chapters released in English the same day as their publication in Japan.

Also notable is Viz Media's Viz Originals initiative. Besides publishing graphic novels-including e-gamer adventure Status Royale by Ru Xu and horror anthology Betwixt, which features new stories by Junji Ito and Becky Cloonan-Viz Originals recently solicited comics creators to submit one-shot short stories for consideration.

This approach follows "the successful methods that Japanese manga magazines use to discover new talent and support and







showcase aspiring mangaka," says Fawn Lau, executive editor of Viz Originals. Viz's move takes a page from the playbook that launched the careers of creators like Tatsuki Fujimoto, who spent several years submitting short stories to manga publishers before moving on to longer works like Fire Punch, Look Back, and Chainsaw Man.

Publishers are also catering to Western readers by releasing manga adaptations of genre fiction popular in the U.S. Manta, the webtoon app from South Korean e-book company RIDI, for example, has experimented with publishing comics based on

continued on p. 23



A powerful verse novel in which a rebellious teen poet grapples with life under a dictatorship

"Beautifully and fluidly written, Miller-Lachmann's memorable verse novel captures the setting splendidly, dramatizing the abysmal condition of women under the dictatorship."

-starred, Booklist

"The verse format allows Sónia's poetic voice to shine, drawing readers into the stark reality she's dealing with . . . Conveys harshness, beauty—and lingering hope."

-starred, Kirkus Reviews





The Latest Unicorn

Scholastic's first manga title updates a classic story for middle grade comics fans

Manga sales have boomed in North America the past several years, but there's one readership that has been left out of the party: children. Manga for readers 12 and under is still a small category in the U.S., but with Scholastic set to begin publishing manga under its Graphix imprint, that could be changing.

"We want to create content that kids have access to," says Graphix publisher and cofounder David Saylor. "We did that with comics back in 2005, and we want to do that for manga and other global forms of comics."

First up is Awakening (Unico #1), publishing in August, by American comics writer Samuel Sattin (Buzzing) and the Japanese

artist duo Gurihiru. It's an updated take on Osamu Tezuka's series first published in 1976. Tezuka conceived his tale of a time-traveling unicorn while visiting the headquarters of Sanrio (the company behind Hello Kitty) in Los Angeles, and he published *Unico* left to right and in color, like American comics, which was (and is) very unusual in Japan.

Sattin and Gurihiru have created new stories based on Tezuka's characters for a planned four-to-eight-volume series. PW talked with Sattin about crafting original English-language manga for a younger American audience.



I love Osamu Tezuka, and I wanted to reimagine Unico for a new generation of readers. In 2019, I started working with Tezuka Productions, and then with the Eisner Award-winning comics team Gurihiru out of Saitama, Japan. We launched a Kickstarter, which did pretty well, and ended up working with Scholastic to bring the story to a larger audience.

How has it been updated?

We built the original story out into a bigger universe, alongside Tezuka Productions, with a larger cast of characters and larger story lines. It's an adventure story about a fierce young unicorn who is kicked out of the heavens. Venus, the goddess of beauty, becomes jealous of Unico's ability to spread kindness and happiness and tries to have him destroyed. One of her former servants, the West Wind, takes pity on him and tries to hide him throughout time, wiping his memory so he forgets who he is. Whenever he







starts to remember who he is, his powers awaken and he attracts the attention of the gods. We set out to honor that original material and have this be a real collaboration between the U.S. and Japan, as opposed to just taking a story and trying to make it Western.

What's your own manga reading history?

I'm obsessed with it. I read tons of Osamu Tezuka himself. I love Naoki Urasawa, Hirohiko Araki. I love so much of what's been going on in the all-ages shonen space, and some of the more mature books as well. I especially love what Urasawa has done with Pluto [which is based on one story in

> Tezuka's Astro Boy series]. I would be lying if I said it wasn't a direct inspiration for what we want to do with Unico.



I don't see it as constraints as much as trying to really incorporate artistic and narrative elements from manga in general. We have some thematic

depth: it's a story about a young creature who's been robbed of his memories trying to get them back and under a lot of duress in order to do so. It's also about friendship. There are some interesting philosophical ideas in there.

You look at Hayao Miyazaki's films, and even though they are for kids, larger, more serious themes come through, about the environment, about emotions, about family and friendship. We're trying to really adhere to those larger thematics.

-Brigid Alverson

The Rise of Manga Indies and New Imprints

One indication that the North American manga market is flourishing is the number of new players publishing in the field. From micropublishers showcasing up-and-coming creators to larger companies adding specialty imprints, there's lots to discover on the edges of the manga mainstream.

ALIEN BOOKS



Alien Books' comics offerings can already be found in comic shops, but this indie has now entered the manga publishing arena with five new series licensed from Square Enix and Hero's Inc. Fake Rebellion, a sci-fi thriller by Yuchang Sasaki, and Kinryo Rock, a vampire action-horror tale with a rock 'n' roll twist by Bingo Morihashi and Manabu

Akishige, will both hit shelves later this year.

AZUKI MANGA



While Azuki Manga is primarily a subscription service and app, it carries exclusive offerings, with some now available as e-books, such as *My Dear Detective: Mitsuko's Case Files*, a Taishō-era romance/mystery series featuring a headstrong female sleuth.

DENPA BOOKS AND KUMA



Denpa Books and boys'-love imprint Kuma have a fiercely independent streak. The publisher champions manga with distinct voices, such as *Odd Taxi*, an animal-centric mystery, and *March Comes in Like a Lion*, about a young man who overcomes anxiety as he climbs the ranks of professional chess players.

GLACIER BAY BOOKS



This micro-press prides itself on publishing contemporary, artistic comics from Japan. Beside several volumes of its short story collection Glaeolia, Glacier Bay has also

debuted works in English like *Mothers* by Umi Kusahara and is currently crowdfunding four new titles for winter 2024.

IZE PRESS



Korean comics have been a part of Yen Press since day one, but with the popularity of webtoons, the imprint Ize Press was launched to showcase stories from South Korea, including action-fantasy *Omniscient Readers' Viewpoint* and *The Uncanny Counter*; romances with K-drama tie-ins, such as See

You in My 19th Life; and K-pop-inspired stories featuring bands like BTS, Enhyphen, and Tomorrow x Together.

LAST GASP



Best known for publishing underground comics from the 1960s and '70s, San Francisco–based Last Gasp stays true to its roots with its eclectic manga lineup, including Keiichi Koike's *Ultra Heaven*, a sci-fi adventure set in a world where hallucinogens are legal and mind-blowing. It's also released *I'm*

Enough by Tenten Hosokawa, a manga about self-acceptance that was cowritten with a therapist.

MANGASPLAINING EXTRA



What started as a podcast has branched out into a boutique publishing venture. (Full disclosure, the author of this article is a *Mangasplaining* podcast cohost and contributing editor.) Mangasplaining serializes manga via its Substack newsletter, then works with publishers including Fantagraphics and Udon

Entertainment to distribute print editions. Among its titles are dystopian sci-fi tale Search and Destroy by Atsushi Kaneko, along with Gigatown: A Guide to Manga Symbols, a whimsical explanation of manga iconography by Fumiyo Kouno.

ONE PEACE BOOKS



An offshoot of Japanese publisher Sanctuary Books, One Peace Books has published in an array of manga subgenres—from fantasy adventures with anime tie-ins such as *The Rising of the Shield Hero*, to slice-of-life boys'-love series like *I Hear the Sunspot*, to historical mystery series such as *Usotoki Rhetoric* by Ritsu Miyako.

STAR FRUIT BOOKS



Manga's rising tides allowed Star Fruit Books to expand from digital-only titles to print releases, including *Panorama of Hell* and *The Red Snake*, both cult classic tales by horror manga master Hideshi Hino. The press also announced *Comic Bright*, its first manga magazine, which will feature an eclectic array of comics,

essays, interviews and more.

—D.A.





romance novels by Western authors, such as Lyssa Kay Adams's *Bromance Book Club* and Samantha Vitale's *The Lady Alchemist*.

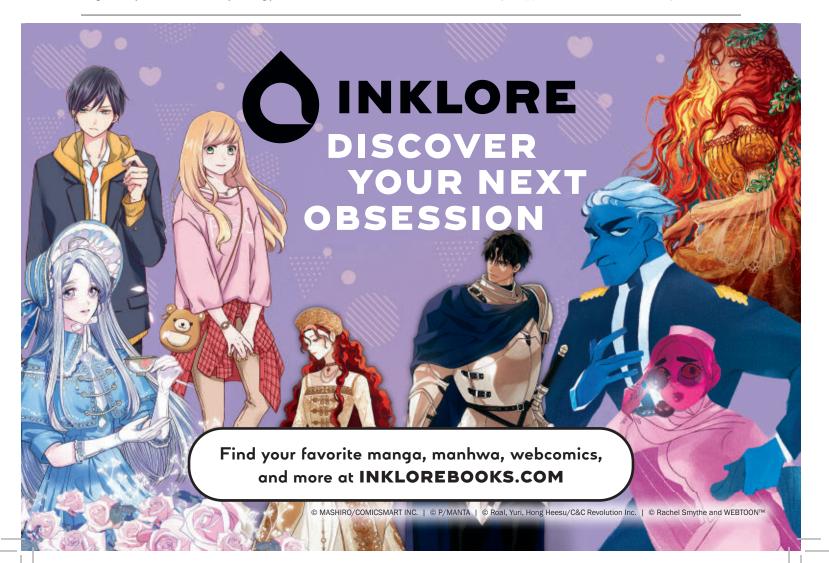
Forging new ground entirely are Quarto's Saturday AM and Tokyopop's Noir Caesar. Both imprints bring the "we need diverse books" mantra to manga by highlighting global creators with story lines that incorporate Black and Latinx characters—an area where manga from Japan has been relatively weak. Many of these are original English-language stories, such as *Mutupo*, a fantasy adventure by Kay Rwizi inspired by Zimbabwean mythology.

Children's publishers are ramping up their manga efforts, as well. In August, Scholastic is releasing its first manga title *Awakening (Unico #1)*—a revamp of Osamu Tezuka's classic manga, cocreated with American Samuel Sattin and Japanese manga artist team Gurihiru. (For *PW*'s q&a with Sattin, see "The Latest Unicorn," p. 21).

This focus on creating and marketing comics for overseas manga readership is extraordinary because the prevailing attitude of Japanese publishers has long been that their main priority is catering to their primary (and largest) audience: readers in Japan. And while this focus is likely to continue, manga's popularity in the U.S. is now undeniable. Series like *Spy x Family* regularly appear in the top 10 on BookScan sales charts alongside popular prose novels.

What's next? Perhaps new publishing and marketing initiatives in the American market will have an impact on readers, creators, and publishers back in Japan. As Lu puts it, increasing the publication of English-language-first stories "to include different kinds of manga creators from all over the world, and have it fly under the Kodansha banner in Japan, would be a grand next step."

Deb Aoki writes regularly for the Beat and PW about manga



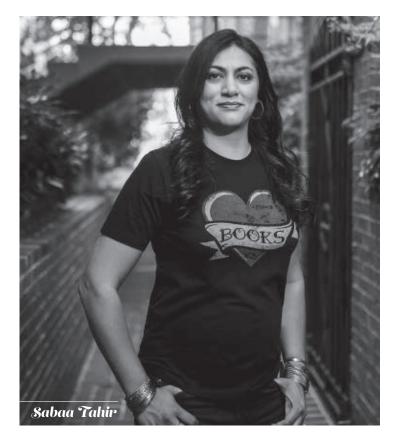


Publishers, agents, and authors reckon with readers' all-consuming passion for YA romantasy

BY JOANNE O'SULLIVAN

ot since the Twilight parties of the mid-2000s have YA readers been energized enough to show up en masse for midnight releases at bookstores. Instead of teens in homemade T-shirts declaring Team Edward or Team Jacob, today's crop of book lovers are largely women and teen girls with Fourth Wing friendship bracelets or dragon-themed temporary tattoos, fans of the impossible-to-ignore publishing juggernaut that is romantasy. This category has generated a level of excitement on par with the dystopian and paranormal romance days more than a decade ago. It's also selling at a staggering volume, leading Circana BookScan to dub 2023 "the year of romantasy." Sarah J. Maas, hailed by many as the doyenne of romantasy (and also now considered an adult author), has sold close to 42 million books worldwide, according to Bloomsbury, her publisher, and in the first quarter of 2024, she was the bestselling author in any category. But she's far from alone at the top.

While blockbuster fantasy-romance authors including Cassandra Clare (the Mortal Instruments series), Renée Ahdieh (the Wrath and the Dawn series), and Tahereh Mafi (the Shatter Me series) developed their followings long before the term romantasy was coined, authors such as Rebecca Yarros (Fourth Wing) and Lauren Roberts (Powerless) are at the forefront of the next wave, helping to make it a phenomena that has had transformational effects on the YA market and has further blurred the line between YA and adult titles. Often dismissed for its escapist quality, romantasy has become a category that demands to be taken seriously.



"Literary gatekeepers have always been reluctant to grant romance and fantasy legitimacy, probably because folks love trashing what girls and women love reading," says Sabaa Tahir, author of the bestselling Ember in the Ashes series, among the books considered to have helped popularize romantasy when it was published back in 2015. "It's nice to see that the success of the genre is sweeping a lot of that nonsense away."

What is romantasy, exactly?

"Romantasy has been around for a long time," says Tiffany Liao, executive editor at Random House Books for Young Readers. "It's the term that's new."

By the time the Frankfurt Book Fair took place in 2022, the catchy portmanteau for books combining a romantic plot with fantastical elements had gained purchase. While the term is now widespread, it's more of an "umbrella," Liao says. "Because it is elastic and flexible, everyone has their own definition."

"I think the term is appealing because it is a signal to a reader of what they are getting," says Eileen Rothschild, v-p and associate publisher of St. Martin's YA imprint Wednesday Books. By last fall, the label had transcended publishing circles and was being used more broadly in the media.

Romantasy narratives regularly feature tropes such as enemies-to-lovers and fated mates, and are distinguished by high stakes. "The characters are often in life-or-death situations that create tension between them—rivals in a tournament, rulers of different realms, witch and witch hunter," says Alex Aster, author of the Larklight series, adding that "choosing a love interest can sometimes decide the fate of the world."

Chloe Gong, author of the These Violent Delights series, says readers "love having something to root for," and that often the romance is a B plot. The characters "have so many other matters to attend to, like the end of the world or the looming big battle, but every step forward is entwined with a deepening relationship, too."

Romantasy readers "simply love love," says Bria Ragin, editor at Joy Revolution, an imprint of Random House Children's Books. "And they want to escape. What better way to do so than with hot vampires, brooding angels, or charming witches?"

Increasingly, though, the "spice" factor of the romantasy is part of the allure. "Listen, a lot of characters in these fantasies are hot," says Kendare Blake, author of the Three Dark Crowns series.

BookTok influencers have even popularized the use of a spice meter in the reviews they post, Ragin notes.

The BookTok boost

Much of the credit for the ascendence of romantasy has been attributed to TikTok, where #Romantasy-related posts have clocked more than a billion views. The "big sweeping



emotions" of romantasy are ideally suited to the platform, Liao says, noting that videos of readers with tear-streamed faces sharing their response to a book provide "a quick emotional connection and allow readers to share the emotional experience together."

Aster, who has more than a million followers on the platform, says that the BookTok community serves to "magnify the effects of word of mouth" and has helped to create readers out of nonreaders and persuaded readers of other genres to give romance and fantasy a try.

> Ragin says that in addition to observing the success of some of her authors on the platform, she has used it to discover authors. "There's some room to grow in the BookTok community as it relates to featuring and breaking out marginalized authors," she says.

Then, of course, there are the sales. For some authors, BookTok has revived backlist titles, often from many years past. For others, such as Aster, it has resulted in instant bestseller status. It's the platform's ability to build momentum quickly that has been a game changer, according to Liao.

Publishers are watching BookTok for more than just its sales potential. "BookTok has been an amazing feedback mechanism for publishers to see firsthand how readers are receiving and reacting to our books, and the language they use to describe

Alex Aster

Who's Reading Romantasy?



Tiffany Liao



Under the big tent of romantasy, there is space for many, including "young adults between the ages of 12 and 16, and female readers of all ages, especially millennials, who are drawn to the comfortable safe space of YA fiction as well as Colleen Hoover romance and Rebecca Yarros romantasy," says Wendy Loggia, v-p and senior executive editor at Delacorte.

YA romantasy readers tend to stay with the category into adulthood, says Kendare Blake, author of the Three Dark Crowns series. "The teen readers who discovered me from my first book in 2011 are now in their 20s

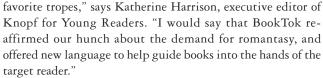
and 30s, and I'm lucky enough to know that some of them are still reading my books now. But I'm writing books for teens and aiming to capture the imaginations of that audience. So what is my target crowd? I want to write something my first readers will enjoy—I love that YA enthusiasm. What's the answer? 13 to 37 feels like a big range to straddle."

Laura Crockett, senior agent at Triada US, says that YA has been skewing older for years, reviving industry discussion about the new adult category and fueling interest in adult-YA crossover books. Anecdotally, she says she's seen an uptick in mature content in response to the popularity of romantasy. "In the early months of 2023, romantasy became more about heat and spice levels, and less about it being a speculative novel with romance."

Eileen Rothschild, v-p and associate publisher of YA imprint Wednesday Books, points to a rise in adult readers for romantasy titles. "Wednesday Books is a crossover imprint, so our main audience is older teens and younger adults," she says. "Adult romantic fantasy does really well in e-book. YA has historically been more of a print audience than e-book audience for us. Now we are seeing our YA fantasy titles sell more in e-book. This could mean that more adults are reading romantasy titles than they did before." —J.O.S.

Eileen Rothschild

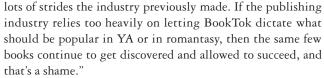
Kendare Blake



Still, Liao says, overreliance on BookTok is short-sighted. "It's very tempting to look at BookTok as a way to determine what readers want. But the job and responsibility of publishers it to analyze and tap into why something is resonating. There will always be diminishing returns when trend chasing and serving up more of the same."

For romantasy authors, the platform can be a mixed bag. "My relationship with BookTok is complicated," Gong says. "It was a life-changing tool for me when I debuted in November 2020. I owe everything to being in the right place at the right time: while the pandemic shut down most bookstores, my books were still moving online." But she echoes a frequently cited drawback to the platform: "I do feel that BookTok at large has a lack of diversity and is actively causing backward movement in

Katherine Harrison



The BookTok effect also draws comparison to empty calories. "It can be a lot of noise for a select few individual titles, and many times only for a short period of fame—viral one week, forgotten the next," says Laura Crockett, senior agent at Triada US. "Can BookTok create lasting influence or long, steady, focused attention on anyone other than Sarah J. Maas or, more

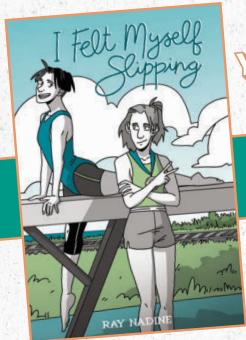
recently, Rebecca Yarros? That remains to be seen."

Meanwhile some authors—especially those with more established careers—have eschewed the platform. "I'm not on it," Blake says. "I'm sitting this one out, folks."

Romantasy fatigue

As with any trend, romantasy is causing knock-on effects in YA publishing, not all of which are necessarily positive. Agents report being inundated with submissions described as romantasy, though the label doesn't always fit.





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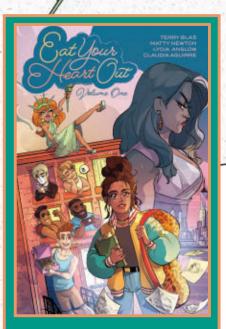
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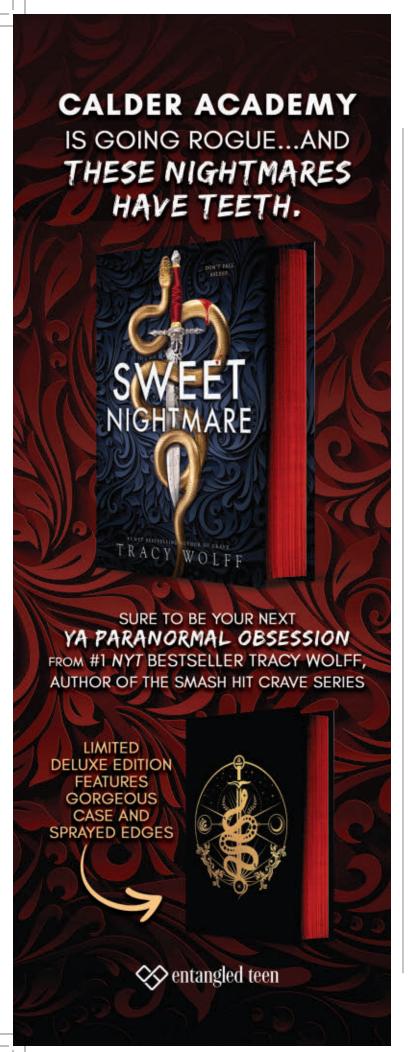
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YA ROMANTASY

"Books are being miscategorized as romantasy when it's really fantasy-horror, fantasy-adventure, or dark academia that just so happens to have a romance B or C plot," Crockett says. "Readers see a female author name on a fantasy cover and mislabel it as YA; readers see a female author name on a YA fantasy and mislabel it as romantasy. This miscategorization and mislabeling, from readers and marketing alike, is constant." She points to category killers of the past for comparison. "Imagine if *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent* came out today—I have no doubt they would be marketed as romantasy. But they all had a romance plotline second, speculative fantasy or dystopian elements first."

That's just branding, Harrison says. "Any time there's a big hit, the next influx of submissions will name-check the bestseller of the week as a comp title. A true breakout book needs to offer a distinct point of view or a hook we haven't seen before."

Gong suggests that because there are so many titles piggy-backing on the big romantasy success stories, a sameness is developing in the category. "Readers feel that they've already read a

bunch of books just like the latest coming out," she notes.

Crockett's experience supports that assertion. "I receive so much romantasy in my inbox," she says. "And they're pretty similar to one another: assassin or princess falls in love with soldier-partner or bodyguard, usually enemies-to-lovers trope, usually one of them is fae, the romance is white and heterosexual. The comps are usually Sarah J. Maas or *Fourth Wing*."

But some publishers are seeing submissions moving in new directions. "I am truly excited to see the



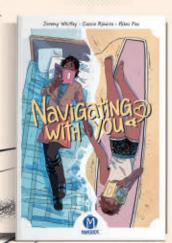
diversity of voices in my inbox, because it allows me to learn about different cultural experiences or show the many facets of my own as a Black editor," Ragin says. "I often see that debut authors have been inspired by Chloe Gong, Tracy Deonn, and Tahereh Mafi, who deserve their flowers, undoubtedly. Writers, across the subgenres of romance, will always put their own twist on Jane Austen, of course. And *Bridgerton* has opened the doors for this era of historical romance and historical romantasy."

While romantasy is thriving now, it's too soon to count out other YA categories such as contemporary realistic. "Romantasy definitely has the wind in its sails at the moment, but I wouldn't point to that as a cause for softening demand in any other category," Harrison says. "These things come in waves. I'm just as interested in acquiring the next great YA contemporary as the next great romantasy."

Ragin points to the recent success of YA titles such as Dungeons & Drama by Kristy Boyce, Highly Suspicious and Unfairly Cute by Talia Hibbert, and Fake Dates and Mooncakes



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YA ROMANTASY

by Sher Lee as indicators that "some contemporary romance titles just have the secret sauce" to break out.

Ultimately, the success of romantasy is contributing to a "rising tide effect," Liao says. "People who come to romantasy for the buzziness are new eyeballs we might not have reached otherwise."

Once hooked on romantasy, they're more likely to pick up another genre, such as thrillers.

A happily ever after?

Clearly romantasy isn't going anywhere any time soon. Wendy Loggia, v-p and senior executive editor at Delacorte, predicts the next big thing in romantasy will be subcategory hybrids, potentially including cozy romantasy, angel/vampire romantasy, and dark academia romantasy. "There's only one place romantasy is going," she says. "Up, up, up."

Crockett sees publishers "finally acquiring the BIPOC and queer romantasies that readers are craving," she says,

adding that readers can expect to see more space-based and futuristic settings rather than fae worlds, more paranormal elements, and "some near-future and dystopian narratives peeking in." She also notes that the level of spice in romantasy seems to be decreasing, with slow-burn romance on the rise.

"I hope that it continues to grow more inclusive," Tahir says, seeing encouragement in such new and forthcoming titles as Saara El-Arifi's Faebound, J. Elle's House of

Marionne, and Jordan Ifueko's *The Maid and the Crocodile*.

For Ragin, that future is already here. "The spectrum of storytelling and worldbuilding is wider than ever—with tales inspired by Persian, Mexican, Korean, and other mythologies," she says. "Everyone, no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality, has an opportunity to see themselves and their experiences authentically represented in main characters, not just supporting ones."

Liao is noticing more palace intrigue, enemies-to-lovers stories, and elemental magic in her submissions, and predicts an uptick in cozy fantasy narratives, as well as stories rooted in more diverse mythologies. She hopes publishers will challenge themselves to think more broadly about romantasy and embrace diverse

Wendy Loggia

stories that are also escapist and fun. "Anything that boosts readership is a positive," she says. "You're creating more readers, and those readers are going to want more books. It's up to publishers to come up with fresh and exciting ways to engage readers and keep them excited about this genre."

Joanne O'Sullivan is a journalist, author, and editor in Asheville, N.C.



Chris Whitaker traded a finance career to pursue fiction, and it just may have saved his life

BY CHRIS VOGNAR

n a Chris Whitaker novel, the decisions people make and traumas they endure early in life define who they become. In 2017's All the Wicked Girls, a model student disappears and her troubled sister risks everything to find her. His 2020 breakthrough We Begin at the End tells the story of a California police chief who once put his best friend behind bars, alongside that of a pair of adult siblings who've been scarred by their upbringing under a self-destructive single mother.

Whitaker's new novel, All the Colors of the Dark (Crown, June), follows suit, centering on two young children whose lives are upended when they cross paths with a serial killer. Whitaker's work gives credence to the idea—espoused by William Wordsworth and others—that the child is the father of the man. Like film noir heroes, Whitaker's characters are forever trying to outrun their pasts.

"It feels sometimes like there's a cloud, or a shadow is cast and you're constantly trying to get out from under it," Whitaker says via Zoom from his home office in Hertfordshire, just outside his native London. "I sometimes wonder if the same is true of me. Would I be here now talking to you as an author had things not happened to me? I'm not sure."

Whitaker, a boyish 42 in a black T-shirt, has survived his share of trials. When he was 10 years old, after his parents divorced, a

AUTHOR PROFILE

new man in his mother's life broke his arm and burned him with a cigarette, sending him into a spiral of sleeplessness and anxiety. The pain lessened with time, but when he was 19, he was stabbed one morning when he refused to hand over his phone to a mugger. And just like that, the pain and trauma of the past returned. As he wrote in a 2020 essay for the *Guardian*: "I stopped sleeping. I stopped eating. I so desperately wanted to shrug it off and move on, but I couldn't work out what was happening to me."

Drug and alcohol use followed. So did suicidal thoughts. "There was this bleakness—this feeling that there is absolutely no way out of this," he says. "That I'm not going to get better."

It was around this time that Whitaker started writing—not to get published but to regain his sanity. At the library, he found a book about the therapeutic value of putting pen to paper: write down what happened, change the principal players into fictional characters, change the setting to the last place you were happy, and then change the outcome.

"That got me through those nights where I felt like I could have done something really stupid or desperate," he says. "And then I didn't really think about writing much after that."

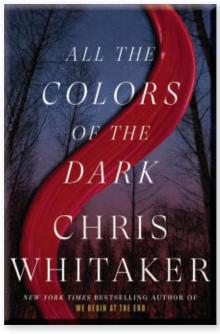
But Whitaker had yet another trial to endure—this one of his own making.

When he was in his 20s, he became a stock broker. He was good at it. He drove a nice car and made his bosses rich. Until one day, he made a disastrous trade, lost £1 million, and tried—and failed—to hide the losses. Instead of calling the police, his bosses agreed to let him work off half the debt.

Once again, the sleepless nights returned. Once again, he turned to drugs and alcohol. And once again, he found solace in writing. Except this time, Whitaker had burned down his life so thoroughly that he needed a new career. He had always liked crime fiction, and he stumbled upon an interview with one of his favorite authors, John Hart, who had left a successful law career to write. Whitaker wondered, why can't I do that?

Success didn't come immediately. His debut novel, *Tall Oaks*, was published in 2016, followed by *All the Wicked Girls*. But his third novel, *We Begin at the End*, was a bestseller and put Whitaker on the map in the United States, which is, coincidentally, where all his novels take place.

And setting—his choice of locales and the skill with which he renders them—is an intriguing aspect of Whitaker's work. How does an Englishman, who has ventured to the U.S. but a handful of times, crank out work steeped in Americana? And not big-city America; Whitaker captures out-of-the-way regions of the U.S. with eerie vividness through imagination and maniacal research. (Until recently, he worked as an assistant



at his local public library and loved every minute of it.) For example, in *All the Colors of the Dark*, one of the protagonists, Patch, works in a Missouri mine; Whitaker "spent a month, maybe two months reading about mines," he says. "And that's just for what will ultimately be cut down to a paragraph. I tend to do that for a lot of the book."

For Whitaker, the U.S. is a fully realized state of mind—a symbol of personal liberty and escape, even in its darker corners. "I can't imagine setting a book in London," he says. "I don't know if that's just because some of my bad memories are in London and I just can't disconnect from them, but America feels... There's a freedom to it. I can just create anything I want and any kind of character I want in

a way that I don't think I could here."

Whitaker's characters, meanwhile, also seek to escape. *All the Colors of the Dark* follows Patch and Saint, a boy and a girl from small-town Missouri. Patch is abducted by a serial killer who locks him in a dark room with a mysterious young woman whom he falls hopelessly in love with, though she may be a figment of his imagination. Saint rescues him, and Patch grows up to be a roguish man obsessed with finding the girl he left behind. Saint, meanwhile, falls in love with Patch despite the different trajectories of their lives.

All the Colors of the Dark is certainly a crime novel, with echoes of Hart's *The Last Child* and Dennis Lehane's *Mystic River* (another book that Whitaker adores). But it also pushes beyond genre—a quality that Amy Einhorn, Whitaker's editor at Crown, has come to appreciate.

"He's doing something where it's such a mix of different kinds of books in one," Einhorn said. "This book is a mystery. It's technically a serial killer story. It's a love story. It's a coming-of-age story. He's just not very easily classified. And for books that are about very dark things, there's a real sense of humor, and a tremendous amount of heart."

Today, Whitaker is a successful novelist, married, and has three children, ages 13, 10, and three. It was adversity that got Whitaker to this point—and that's what fuels his work. Transforming his life took pain and effort, but Whitaker now finds himself exactly where he wants to be.

"I don't really believe in fate or anything like that, but if everything bad that happened to me was leading me here, it feels like there's a bit of payoff," he says. "I get to do something that I love, and that in itself is quite hard to find, isn't it? I think you're lucky if you end up doing something that you love."

Chris Vognar is a freelance culture writer and was the 2009 Nieman Arts and Culture Fellow at Harvard University.

Fiction

★ Hombrecito

Santiago Jose Sanchez. Riverhead, \$29 (336) ISBN 978-0-593-54218-7

Sanchez debuts with a dazzling chronicle of a queer immigrant's coming of age in Colombia and Miami. In late 1990s Ibague, Santiago and his older half brother, Manuel, are raised by his single mother, a doctor who often neglects to pick Santiago up from school ("Today she forgot to be a mother," he narrates on one such occasion). After the family moves to Miami when Santiago is six, his mother struggles to find work. Manuel resents being dragged away from Colombia and begins to rebel, while Santiago comes to realize he is gay and has an active sex life by the time he's a teen. In his early 20s, after moving to Brooklyn and finding work as a waiter, Santiago joins his mother on a trip back to Colombia. There, he looks up his taciturn father, a former civil engineer who now drives a cab, and reconciles with the disconnection he feels from his birthplace. Santiago's sad and dreamy perspective immerses readers into his search for a sense of home, and the many raw and sensual sex scenes speak to his hunger for connection. This is a triumph. Agent: Jin Auh, Wylie Agency. (June)

. **All Friends Are Necessary**

Tomas Moniz. Algonquin, \$28 (288p) ISBN 978-1-64375-581-6

In the bighearted and introspective latest from Moniz (Big Familia), a 30-something Latinx bisexual man puts his life back together after his first baby is stillborn and his marriage falls apart. Efren "Chino" Flores, a high school biology teacher, returns from Seattle to his roots in San Francisco to recover from his grief. The narrative spans several years, beginning with Chino renting a sublet, reconnecting with friends, finding new lovers, and getting sober. During the Covid-19 pandemic, he forms a pod in Oakland with Metal Matt, who takes him to a nude beach for a bracing dip in the



Santiago Jose Sanchez's Hombrecito portrays a queer immigrant's self-discovery and reckoning with his roots (reviewed on this page).

bay; Metal Matt's girlfriend; and a mixed-race couple who offer food and hugs and dish on their secret OnlyFans account. He also reflects on the sexual encounters he's had with men and women since separating from his wife and tries to find a way to love again despite the longing he feels for her. Moniz's thoughtful narrative demonstrates the reparative power of friendship, and how it can even transcend the bonds of love. Readers will be entranced. Agent: Eleanor Jackson, Dunow, Carlson & Lerner. (June)

Role Play

Clara Drummond, trans. from the Portuguese by Daniel Hahn. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$16 trade paper (128p) ISBN 978-0-374-61130-9

Brazilian author Drummond makes a sharp English-language debut with an account of self-proclaimed "misandrist and misogynist" Vivian Noronha as she navigates her privileged life of designer goods, endless parties, drugs, and sex in Rio de Janeiro. She recounts her family's multigenerational history of serving as diplomats and her difficult teen years, when she was diagnosed with depression and heavily medicated. Now she's in her early 30s, and though her family is less well-off than it once was, she coasts on her upper-class status. One night at a rave, she watches as the police smash a street vendor's illegal caipirinhas stand and beat her. All the while, ravers continue filing into the club, unbothered by the brutality. As the party continues, Vivian considers the abuses and hypocrisies of Brazil's classist

and racist society. The book's power comes from Vivian's scathing assessment of the elite: rich people are painted as oblivious to the concerns of others, the artistic class as disingenuous in their calls for social equality, and even the protagonist herself as more interested in being glamorous and sexually desirable than anything else. Drummond's incendiary tale burns bright. (June)

Mouth

Puloma Ghosh. Astra House, \$26 (240p) ISBN 978-1-6626-0247-4

Ghosh debuts with a satisfying speculative collection about grief and desire. In "Desiccation," an Indian American teen named Meghna falls for the only other Indian girl on her figure skating team, whom she suspects of being a vampire. "The Fig Tree" follows a married woman who returns from the U.S. to her birthplace of Kolkata to scatter her mother's ashes. There, she glimpses a ghostly woman and wonders if her mother has returned. In "Leaving Things," wolves overrun a city and devour the women. Afterward, a lonely survivor shelters a wolf baby, unsure what will happen when it grows up. "Lemon Boy" and "Natalya" explore the consequences of revisiting past relationships through the stories of protagonists confronted by the ghosts of their ex-lovers. Some of the shorter entries feel underdeveloped, but for the most part, Ghosh sharply draws the contours of her invented worlds and evokes her characters' insatiable desires with vibrant imagery ("The whole apartment had turned into a gaping mouth, the [candle] wax its saliva pooling on the dining table"). Ghosh proves herself a skilled practitioner of the uncanny. Agent: Angeline Rodriguez, WME. (June)

* Russian Gothic

Aleksandr Skorobogatov, trans. from the Russian by Ilona Yazhbin Chavasse. Rare Bird, \$25 (128p) ISBN 978-1-64428-402-5

First published in 1991, the harrowing English-language debut from Skorobogatov centers on a Soviet Afghan war veteran driven to violence by a monstrous apparition. Nikolai, who is unemployed and living off his military pension with his actor wife, Vera, begins to hallucinate a mysterious sexual rival who takes up residence

in their home. At first Nikolai only hears whispers between Vera and an unidentified man, but his paranoia soon manifests as the phantasmagorical Sergeant Bertrand, who flirts with Vera and ceaselessly accosts Nikolai with stories of her infi-



delity. As his jealousy intensifies, Nikolai beats Vera and attacks other men he believes are after her, including an audience member at the theater where she performs, her costar,

and a visiting friend. Through it all, Vera remains devoted to Nikolai. He's eventually committed to a psychiatric hospital, but his delusions continue, and he escapes to assault Vera one final time. Skorobogatov's atmospheric horror story, smoothly translated by Chavasse, makes clever use of gothic conventions to build an allegory of the embittered psyche of a fallen empire, and to sketch a chilling portrait of PTSD. Readers won't be able to turn away. Agent: Markus Hoffmann, Regal Hoffmann & Assoc. (June)

Gretel and the Great War

Adam Ehrlich Sachs. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$18 trade paper (224p) ISBN 978-0-374-61426-3

Sachs (The Organs of Sense) lends a touch of the fantastical to Viennese life at the end of WWI in this inventive novel in stories. In a framing device, a mute young woman is being treated by a neurologist, who receives a letter from a sanatorium patient who claims to be the woman's father and who insists her name is Gretel. He proceeds to mail 26 "bedtime stories," alphabetically arranged, to be shared with Gretel. Starting with "A: The Architect" and ending with "Z: The Zionist," these

interlacing fables feature reappearing locations and characters, and evoke Vienna's artistic milieu of choirs, painters, composers, and stage performers, as well as the city's abundance of sanatorium residents and scientists. Stories of broken families, the gap between the haves and the have-nots, and revenge abound. Within each tale are short segments devoted to reminding Gretel of her mother's all-consuming commitment to her musical ambitions, which played a role in their separation. "N: The Neurologist," hints at Gretel's ailment with the story of a naturalist so obsessed with creating a lifelike taxidermied heron that he steals his daughter's voice. Throughout, Sachs keenly captures the pulse of a city on the cusp of immense change. This spirited volume lingers long after the final page. Agent: Amelia Atlas, CAA. (June)

. The Sons of El Rev

Alex Espinoza. Simon & Schuster, \$28.99 (384p) ISBN 978-1-6680-3278-7

Espinoza (Cruising: An Intimate History of a Radical Pastime) returns to fiction with the arresting story of an elderly wrestler's last days. Ernesto Vega is visited while in hospice by his son, Freddy; his gay grandson, Julian; the ghost of his wife, Elena;



and a manifestation of his lucha libre persona, El Rev Coyote. Elena and El Rey Coyote press Ernesto to reexamine his life and his competing devotions to wrestling,

his marriage, and his close childhood friend Julián Tamez. Meanwhile, Freddy, who once performed as El Rey Coyote Jr., agonizes over having to close his father's East Los Angeles gym, which never bounced back after the pandemic, and Julian, an underpaid community college professor, chafes at being fetishized by other men for the color of his skin. The seamlessly interwoven story lines bring each character to vivid life, and Espinoza shines in the lucha libre scenes ("The crowd gasping, unmoving as they witnessed the flurry of leaps and jumps, the swirling colors and lights, these men doing such incredible things, things no mortal was ever expected to do"). This is a knockout. Agent: Eleanor Jackson, Dunow, Carlson & Lerner. (June)

Moral Injuries

Christie Watson. Harper, \$28.99 (272p) ISBN 978-0-06-337859-9

In the propulsive if schematic latest from Watson (The Language of Kindness), three London doctors find their friendship and their ethics tested when they're confronted with a secret from their past. Olivia, a perfectionist, is a cardiothoracic surgeon, while Laura works as a doctor on a helicopter rescue team and Anjali is a general practitioner. Things become fraught after Olivia's teenage daughter attends a party with Laura's son, during which a boy named Joe Duggard falls down a flight of stairs and sustains brain damage. With Joe in a coma, Laura and Olivia try to guard their children's futures, even as Anjali presses for a different approach. Laura's position on the hospital's ethics committee becomes particularly thorny, as she's empowered to determine whether Joe will be kept on life support or the children will face involuntary manslaughter charges. The situation echoes a drug-fueled party during the women's med school days, when a classmate was accidentally killed during a brawl and they fled the scene to avoid being implicated. Watson's tendency to withhold key information can

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feel gimmicky, but she shines in her portrayal of medicine as an imperfect blend of art, science, and emotion. Fans of medical fiction will admire this. Agent: Grainne Fox, UTA. (June)

The Material

Camille Bordas. Random House, \$28 (280p) ISBN 978-0-593-72984-7

Bordas (How to Behave in a Crowd) sets her clever twist on the campus novel at the country's first MFA program for stand-up comedy. Everyone involved in the program is nervously anticipating the arrival of a controversial guest lecturer, recently disgraced comedy legend Manny Reinhardt. Dorothy, the only female faculty member, hopes to make a comeback in her comedy career, while her colleague Kruger dreams of quitting teaching and ascending to movie stardom. Among the students, Artie fears he's "too good-looking to be funny," while Jo is constantly on the lookout for Andy Kaufman, who she thinks is still alive. A subplot involving reports of an active shooter on campus feels unnecessary; more successful are Bordas's explorations of what a stand-up routine requires of its writer and what, if anything, is off-limits, either because the subject is too offensive or because the material belongs to someone else. Occasional moments of broad comedy, like an embarrassing bathroom scene, spice up the observational humor incorporated throughout. It's a winner. Agent: Jackie Ko, Wylie Agency. (June)

A Cage Went in Search of a Bird: **Ten Kafkaesque Stories**

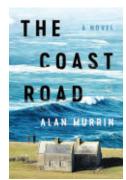
Elif Batuman et al. Catapult, \$17.95 trade paper (224p) ISBN 978-1-64622-263-6

This inspired anthology showcases the enduring appeal of Franz Kafka's fatalistic worldview and mordant humor. In the introduction, critic Becca Rothfeld muses on Kafka's "mystifying" aphorisms and recurring theme of imprisonment, suggesting that "we might begin to sympathize with the cage looking for a bird, for we, too, are desperate to catch the fugitive flutter of comprehension." Standout entries include "The Board," Batuman's amusing tale of a woman who goes through bureaucratic hoops to purchase a basement apartment, and Joshua Cohen's "Return to the Museum," written from the

★ The Coast Road

Alan Murrin. HarperVia, \$28 (320p) ISBN 978-0-06-333652-0

urrin's smashing debut follows two unhappily married women in a small Irish town as they test the bounds of independence. In 1994, Izzy Keaveney heads to mass after a night spent fighting with her husband, James, over his refusal to support her plan to reopen the flower shop she'd closed after the birth of their now-teenage son. At church, she encounters poet Colette Crowley, whose husband, Shaun, has banned her from seeing their three sons ever since she had an affair and announced she was leaving him some months earlier. When Colette starts a writing workshop, Izzy enrolls, and after class one evening, she agrees to



help Colette secretly meet with one of her sons. After Shaun learns what Colette's up to, he forbids her from making a promised Christmas visit, pleads with James to put a stop to Izzy's meddling, and intimates to him that Izzy is having an affair with the new parish priest. Heartbroken, Colette drinks heavily and stumbles into an affair with her married landlord; meanwhile, Izzy considers separating from James. Each of the characters is vividly rendered, and Murrin excels at portraying the rippling consequences of small-town gossip and intolerance. This is a marvel. Agent: Anna Stein, CAA. (June)

perspective of a Neanderthal on display at a natural history museum as it reopens after a pandemic. Lingering pandemic fears also pop up in Tommy Orange's "The Hurt" and Helen Oyeyemi's "Hygiene," though both fail to stick their landings. More successful is Yiyun Li's "Apostrophe's Dream," which takes the form of a play staged by various punctuation marks about the gradual abandonment of their proper usage. Charlie Kaufman's metafictional closer is equally clever, about an author whose life is upended after he learns he inadvertently copied Kafka's language in his latest book. These stories will do the trick for the Kafka curious and diehard fans alike. (June)

Familiaris

David Wroblewski. Blackstone, \$34.99 (976p) ISBN 979-8-212-19429-7

Wroblewski delivers a gratifying if overstuffed prequel to his 2008 bestseller, The Story of Edgar Sawtelle. In May 1919, 22-year-old Wisconsin automotive worker John Sawtelle witnesses his boss's murder and heads north with his wife, Mary, and their friends Ulysses Elbow and Frank Eckling out of fear he'll be falsely implicated in the crime. After the four settle on

a dilapidated farm, John works as a dog breeder, raises two sons, Edgar and Claude, and encounters some unsettling surprises in the woods surrounding the property. One plot thread features a neighbor who ages at half the normal human rate and can see into a person's future. Another involves a violent and tragic episode that results in the Sawtelles and their friends going their separate ways. The author tends to lose his way in lengthy sections of backstory and drawnout conversation pieces as the plot slowly approaches the events of the first novel. Still, there are beautiful passages on the bonds between humans and animals and plenty of folksy charm. Fans of the first book should take a look. Agent: Eleanor Jackson, Dunow, Carlson & Lerner. (June)

Jackie

Dawn Tripp, Random House, \$30 (496p) ISBN 978-0-8129-9721-7

Tripp (Georgia) offers an intimate portrait of Jackie Kennedy during her courtship and marriage to JFK. The story starts in 1951 when Jackie has just graduated from Vassar and hopes to break into magazine publishing. Friends and family members try to set her up with

Jack Kennedy, but initially she's uninterested in the boyish congressman, perceiving him as the type who "loves a game and will leave it once he's won." As the two keep running into each other, she falls for him and eventually breaks off her engagement to a stockbroker. She and Jack begin dating as he hits the campaign trail in his bid for the Senate and get married in 1953. Jack's infidelities, the death of their third child, and the stress of the Cold War cause fractures in their relationship, which are only beginning to heal in the months before their fateful trip to Dallas in 1963. Tripp brings Jackie and Jack's romance to life through carefully crafted scenes, and offers a humanizing portrayal of Jackie's complex love for her husband. Camelot devotees, take note. Agent: Kimberly Witherspoon, InkWell Management. (June)

The Last Song of Penelope: **A Songs of Penelope Novel**

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Claire North. Redhook, \$30 (464p) ISBN 978-0-316-44410-1

North concludes her Ithaca trilogy (after House of Odysseus) with an intelligent revisionist portrayal of Odysseus's return. The story opens with a gloomy assessment of the wayward hero's island kingdom: "Everyone concurs that Ithaca is the pits.... Her inland forests are scraggy, wind-blasted things, her one city little more than a spider's town of twisted paths and leaning houses that seem to buckle and brace against some perpetual storm." Odysseus, who has finally come back, incognito, from the Trojan War, receives a similar scouring; he's depicted here as a "somewhat short man with a remarkably hairy back," who had performed "many vile and bitter deeds." His return sets in motion a violent showdown with the legion of suitors pursuing both his wife, Penelope, and his throne. North adds satisfying new layers to the character of Penelope, whose loyalty to her kingdom takes precedence over devotion to her husband, whom she resents for disguising himself to gauge her faithfulness, and for failing to consider the "delicate political balance" she's worked to maintain. North closes out her saga on a high note. (June)

It's a Privilege Just to Be Here

Emma Sasaki. Alcove, \$29.99 (320p) ISBN 978-1-63910-783-4

A Japanese American private school teacher gets caught in a firestorm of racial politics in Sasaki's timely if muddled debut. Aki Hayashi-Brown teaches history at the prestigious Wesley Friends School in Washington, D.C., where her daughter, Meg, is a junior. After someone graffitis "Make Wesley White Again" on the arts building, Aki is dragooned into serving as interim director of a new DEI task force. Meg insists her mom find a way to punish suspected culprit Aaron Wakeman, son of the school's biggest donor, but Aki is torn between her desire for justice and the instinct her parents instilled in her to cope with racism by "ignoring, denying, or deflecting." Meg, on the other hand, is outspoken in her accusations against Aaron, and after she's suspended for slapping him, the pressures on Aki mount. Some of the satire feels a bit convoluted—Aki is understandably conflicted, but it's sometimes hard to tell whether Sasaki means to skewer the cloistered world of private schools or the cultural forces that make her characters believe such institutions are a necessary evil. Despite its occasional frustrations, this leaves readers with much to chew on. Agent: Melissa Danaczko, Stuart Krichevsky Literary. (June)

Things I Want Back from You Elizabeth Stix. Black Lawrence, \$22.95 trade paper (200p) ISBN 978-1-62557-074-1

Residents of a California suburb reckon with betrayals and unwanted visitors in Stix's offbeat debut collection. The drama kicks off with the title story, a 15-point list of items to be returned to Spirit Rosenblatt by her unfaithful lover. The stakes are higher in "Alice," which finds the narrator trying to free a Guinea worm embedded in his sister's stomach. Another bizarre incident occurs in "The Acorn," in which a man's nagging mother is reincarnated as a mole and torments him by perching on his shoulder. Spirit Rosenblatt resurfaces in "While I Am Away," which takes the form of instructions for her dog sitter while she's at a life coaching conference. "Party at the End of the World" revisits the theme of infidelity as doting wife Betty discovers her travel writer husband, Robert, cheating on her

★ Shelterwood

Lisa Wingate. Ballantine, \$30 (368p) ISBN 978-0-593-72650-1

ingate's stellar latest (after Before We Were Yours) explores a centuries-long legacy of missing child cases in Oklahoma's Winding Stair mountains. In 1990, the long-buried remains of three young girls are discovered in the newly created Horsethief Trail National Park. When recently widowed park ranger Valerie Boren-Odell learns her boss won't investigate how the girls died, she feels compelled to uncover their names and what happened to them. As the disappearance of a teenage boy and the discovery of an unidentified man's corpse complicate Valerie's investigation, Choctaw tribal police officer Curtis Enhoe offers insight and access



to tribal records that help link the cases. In a parallel narrative set in 1909, 11-yearold Ollie Radley's Choctaw foster sister Hazel disappears after being molested by Ollie's stepfather. When he turns his attention to Hazel's younger sister, Ollie decides they must flee. The pair evade pursuit by moving deeper into the forest, discovering to their surprise that other victimized children, most of them Choctaw, are also hiding there. Wingate's insightful depiction of her young characters' vulnerability and resourcefulness enriches the intricate plotting, and her portrayal of the region's history, culture, and landscape enthralls. This author is at the top of her game. Agent: Elisabeth Weed, Book Group. (June)

with a neighbor. In "Migration," Robert has a chance meeting with Spirit, who also lives in the neighborhood. The tonal shifts are sometimes jarring, though Stix credibly portrays the indignities of modern life. It's a solid first outing. (June)

Adam and Yves

Ed Cone. B&E Books, \$13.95 trade paper (258p) ISBN 978-1-73324-302-5

A 30-year-old closeted architect struggles with self-acceptance in this snappy if overwrought family drama from Cone (The Counterfeiter). In 2011, Adam Stover finds



love for the first time with French Canadian cellist Yves Montjour, who he meets by chance on a Manhattan street. A year later, Adam comes out to his family, most of

whom are accepting, and introduces them to Yves. Adam also tells one of his coworkers about Yves, though for the most part he allows his colleagues to believe he's straight out of fear of how they might react and of committing to an identity he's still unsure of. The couple's world is rocked when it turns out that Adam's younger sister is dating Pietro, who once had an intense fling with Yves. Meanwhile, Adam's older sister, who's convinced he's not actually gay, tries to set him up with her stunning Greek friend, Aphrodite. Still concerned about his boss's potential reaction, Adam invites Aphrodite on a work retreat, causing a rift with Yves that drives him back toward Pietro. Adam's continued questioning of his sexuality can be repetitive, and the timeline is a bit hard to follow. Still, Cone's dialogue has the zip of a clever stage play. This has just enough sparkle to carry readers through to the finish line. (Self-published)

Mystery/Thriller

Things Don't Break on Their Own Sarah Easter Collins. Crown, \$28 (272p) ISBN 978-0-593-79833-1

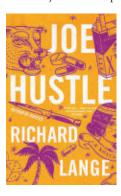
A stray comment at a dinner party proves seismic in Easter Collins's

devastating debut. After Willa Martenwood's younger sister, Laika, goes missing near their wealthy family's London home, a teenage Willa escapes the ensuing media circus by transferring to a boarding school. There, she becomes friends and secret lovers with her roommate, Robyn Bee. Twenty-two years later, Robyn is a happily married mother of three, while Willa is engaged to boorish cad Jamie and remains obsessed with finding Laika, whom she believes is still alive. When Robyn invites Willa to a dinner party she and her wife, Cat, are hosting, Cat bristles; she's jealous of Willa and fears Jamie will ruin the night. Still, the evening goes smoothly enough until one guest makes an offhand remark regarding the thesis they're working on about the corruptibility of memory, which sends Willa down a rabbit hole and eventually convinces her that Laika might be closer than she thought. In kaleidoscopic first-person narration that alternates between Robyn and Willa's perspectives, Easter Collins skips back and forth in time, imparting details about each woman's past and fleshing out their characters at a steady clip. Though the plot goes to some far-fetched places, evocative prose holds the whole thing together, and Easter Collins enriches the mystery with some thoughtful reflections on the rippling effects of domestic violence. It's an auspicious start. Agent: Felicity Blunt, Curtis Brown U.K. (July)

. \star Joe Hustle

Richard Lange. Mulholland, \$29 (272p) ISBN 978-0-31656-847-0

Lange's excellent latest (after Rovers) revolves around 40-year-old Joe "Hustle" Howard, an ex-Marine and ex-con wrestling with past traumas as he bounces between jobs and temporary living situa-



tions in L.A. While painting a house one afternoon, Joe meets Emily, a charming woman exiled from her wealthy family and fighting for custody of her daughter. Their whirlwind

romance gives him hope for a more stable future, but then one of his friends asks Joe to safeguard his truck and the heroin and gun inside it. Joe reluctantly agrees, which quickly puts him at odds with a violent drug dealer, and ultimately causes him to lose both his job and his home. With his life once again in shambles, Joe and Emily leave L.A. and head to Texas on a road trip to see Emily's daughter. But what first looks like a clean getaway might only cause Joe more trouble in the long run. It may be the best novel yet from the always reliable Lange: a harrowing and occasionally hilarious character study in resilience. This is a home run. Agent: Henry Dunow, Dunow, Carlson & Lerner Literary. (June)

The Midnight Feast

Lucy Foley. Morrow, \$25 (384p) ISBN 978-0-06-300310-1

Foley's scintillating latest (after The Paris Apartment) centers on the grand opening of a resort in the English village of Tome. Francesca Meadows, who summered in Tome as a child, has teamed with her celebrity architect husband, Owen Dacre, to build an ultra-chic retreat called the Manor. Their plans have angered some locals, who believe the Manor will encroach on sacred woodlands populated, according to folklore, by supernatural creatures known as the Birds. Despite protests, the Manor opens its doors for a summer solstice celebration. Attendees include Francesca's twin brothers, Hugo and Oscar, and Bella Springfield, a mysterious woman who seems to know Francesca from her childhood visits to the village. In the run-up to the opening celebration's marquee event, a bacchanalian midnight feast, the guests' past connections and secret motives come to light. The next morning, a dead body is discovered on the resort's grounds, and a question hangs in the air: is there a killer in the Manor's midst, or have the Birds taken their revenge? While keeping track of the book's five different narrators can be challenging, the chilling folk horror atmosphere and sucker-punch surprises more than compensate for any temporary confusion. Readers are in for a grisly treat. Agent: Alexandra Machinist, CAA. (June)

[Q&A]

PW TALKS WITH LYNNE AND VALERIE CONSTANTINE

The Talented Mrs. Ripley

The Constantine sisters follow up *The Last Mrs. Parrish* with *The Next Mrs. Parrish* (Bantam, June; reviewed on this page), which finds the emponymous schemer with a target on her back.



What made you want to return to these characters?

Valerie: We always intended *The Last Mrs. Parrish* to be a standalone novel. Then we wrote a short prequel called *The First Shot*, and we realized that Daisy, a woman from Amber's past, also had a story to tell. We felt like her backstory and her history with Amber would be something interesting to explore in a sequel.

Lynne: It was an intimidating prospect, because we didn't want to just serve up a sequel since the first one was popular; what we really cared about was making *The Next Mrs. Parrish* worthy of *The Last Mrs. Parrish*.

Both of these books center on the wives of the rich and powerful. What drew you to write about such women?

Lynne: The Last Mrs. Parrish was all about one woman coveting another woman's life. Amber was the struggling assistant writing the checks for this other woman's seemingly fairy-tale lifestyle, so she decided to seize it for herself without understanding the truth about the life she coveted or the

woman she wanted to supplant. That envy fascinated us.

Valerie: And then in the sequel, Daisy has a great husband, but he'd rather have her at the kids' tennis games than pursuing this justice against Amber that's very important to her. This time, it's about a woman trying to find her own way.

Speaking of envy, you don't skimp on descriptions of the characters' fabulous wealth in either povel

Valerie: The luxury goods are crucial to the envy that drives Amber in *The Last Mrs. Parrish*, and contribute, in both books, to the sense that these characters are up against clubs and societies that are very hard to penetrate.

Lynne: Researching that market was a lot of fun, if a bit mind-boggling. It's still hard to imagine paying \$10,000 for a robe that you would only use after you shower.

Amber is, quite plainly, a villain. How were you able to make her a well-rounded, three-dimensional character?

Valerie: Personally, we feel a frustrated fascination with all of these characters. They have so much talent. Why can't they just turn their powers to the good? We don't know if that's what motivates readers as well, but they love outrageously bad characters—like Tom Ripley. Here's hoping the world is ready for a Mrs. Ripley in the form of a Mrs. Parrish.

—ERICA OBEY

The Next Mrs. Parrish

Liv Constantine. Bantam, \$30 (336p) ISBN 978-0-593-59992-1

In this wicked sequel to The Last Mrs. Parrish, bestseller Constantine (the pseudonym of sisters Lynne and Valerie Constantine) resumes the scandalous story of Jackson Parrish, his scheming second wife, Amber, and his ex-wife, Daphne. At the outset, Jackson is completing a prison term for tax evasion, but he's yet to answer for his darker deeds, including fraudulently committing Daphne to a mental asylum. Daphne has found peace after divorcing Jackson and fleeing across the country, but when her children insist on seeing their father, she's forced to return to ritzy Bishops Harbor, Long Island. There, she readies herself to confront Amber, her ruthless replacement as Jackson's wife. Meanwhile, Daisy Ann Briscoe, the daughter of one of Amber's prior conquests, launches a revenge campaign after running into Amber at a New York City trunk show. Daisy Ann's rampage poses trouble for Jackson and Daphne as well, locking them and Amber in an uneasy alliance that's inevitably threatened by a slew of double-crossings. Constantine lays the glamour and nastiness on thick, resulting in an acidic thriller that delights with every twist of the knife. Fans of the first book will eat this up. Agent: Jenny Bent, Bent Agency. (June)

Trust Her

Flynn Berry. Viking, \$30 (304p) ISBN 978-0-593-49032-7

After nearly being killed for informing on the IRA, sisters Tessa and Marian Daly are finally settling into their new lives in Dublin when the past rears its ugly head, in Edgar winner Berry's harrowing sequel to Northern Spy. Over a sultry August weekend while her four-year-old son, Finn, is staying with her ex-husband, Tessa is snatched by IRA gunmen and given an ultimatum: reconnect with her old MI5 handler, Eamonn, and turn him into an informer—or else. The traumatized Tessa assents, forcing her to brainstorm a plan with Marian. As Tessa meets in turn with the attractive Eamonn and her menacing IRA contact, Eoin Royce, danger mounts. Then Marian vanishes during a solo mountain hike, and Tessa wonders if their old pursuers have struck again. Though some

of the hairpin twists are less convincing than others—a subplot concerning a Dublin detective who's determined to prove the Daly sisters belong to an IRA sleeper cell feels particularly forced-Berry's moving depiction of a fractured family whose love runs as deep as its rifts should please existing series fans and win her new ones. Espionage buffs will find much to enjoy. Agent: Emily Forland, Brandt & Hochman Literary. (June)

* Burn It All

Maggie Auffarth. Crooked Lane, \$29.99 (320p) ISBN 978-1-63910-752-0

A series of arson attacks lead to the discovery of a much deeper mystery in Auffarth's jaw-dropping debut. In the



small town of Riverside, Ga., police discover the scorched remains of a young woman at the latest in a string of deliberate blazes. After Dalia Wright identifies the body as

her daughter, Thea, who'd struggled with severe depression since she was a teenager, investigators come to suspect that Thea set all the fires, then died by suicide. But Marley Henderson, her next-door neighbor and best friend since childhood, doesn't buy it. When investigators find a positive pregnancy test in Thea's home, the mystery deepens, and Marley reconnects with an old flame to ferret out the truth. Little is as it first appears in this wily thriller, which unfolds across multiple timelines and alternates between Thea's and Marley's first-person perspectives. Along the way, Auffarth lands some stirring insights about love and loss. This catches fire early and burns bright to the end. Agent: Jess Regel, Helm Literary. (June)

The Paris Vendetta

Shan Serafin. Mysterious Press, \$26.95 (336p) ISBN 978-1-61316-527-0

Serafin (coauthor of Three Women Disap*pear*) underwhelms in this bland thriller about an investment banker whose boneheaded decision lands him in hot water.

Adam Macias is in Paris for a banking conference when he spots a "breathtakingly exotic aesthetic masterpiece" of a woman and grants her access to a rooftop party with his ID badge. After the stranger vanishes into the crowd before he can get her name, someone douses the CEO of Adam's bank in oil and sets him on fire, leaving him in critical condition. Adam's unusual badge activity makes him a suspect in the eyes of French authorities, so he sets out to find the stranger in hopes she can help clear his name. When he locates her, he stumbles into a sinister and sophisticated intelligence operation, and has to decide whether he can trust his beautiful new companion with his life. Serafin retreads familiar espionage tropes, and his characters never really come to life. North by Northwest this is not. Agent: Lisa Gallagher, DeFiore & Co. (June)

★ Don't Let the Devil Ride

Ace Atkins. Morrow, \$30 (384p) ISBN 978-0-06-329338-0

International intrigue and classic PI sleuthing combine in this deliciously complex thriller from bestseller Atkins (the Quinn Colson series). Addison McKellar has grown used to her husband Dean's frequent work-related absences, but after several days pass without a word from him, she worries something bad has happened. Though Dean's friends and associates at his Memphis construction firm assure Addison she's overreacting, she follows her father's advice and hires private investigator Porter Hayes. It doesn't take long for the former cop and Vietnam vet to discover that Dean is not the man he claims to be, kick-starting a globe-trotting adventure involving a B-movie actress, Russian mobsters, and a suave French criminal, each of whom are after a mysterious cache of holy relics in transit from



Turkey to Memphis. Atkins has loads of fun marrying his hardboiled sensibility to the gonzo espionage plot, and relies on his strengths as a storyteller to

keep the whole thing from running off the rails. This should win Atkins oodles of new fans. Agent: Dan Conway, Writers House. (June)

The Final Act of Juliette Willoughby

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Ellery Lloyd. Harper, \$29.99 (320p) ISBN 978-0-06-332300-1

Bestselling husband-and-wife duo Paul Vlitos and Collette Lyons, writing as Lloyd, follow up The Club with an overstuffed art world mystery. In the middle of giving a press conference about the lucrative sale of a long-lost painting by British surrealist Juliette Willoughby, Dubai gallery owner Patrick Lambert is arrested for murder. The action then flashes back to 1991, when Patrick met his wife, Caroline, at Cambridge, and the pair stumbled on the late Willoughby's journal in an unsorted box of memorabilia on campus. The journal's contents appear to shed new light on Willoughby's 1938 death in a fire, insinuating that someone close to her may have killed her as part of a long-running vendetta. Other mysteries—including the disappearance of Patrick and Caroline's classmate at Cambridge and a Willoughby servant who went missing in the '30scrowd the narrative. Though the various plot strands eventually tie back to the murder accusation that kicks things off, many readers will find that they're no longer invested in finding out who Patrick may have killed, and why. A too-convenient payoff doesn't help matters. This is a letdown. Agent: Hillary Jacobson, CAA. (June)

Do What Godmother Says

L.S. Stratton. Union Square, \$18.99 trade paper (384p) ISBN 978-1-4549-4748-6

Stratton (Not So Perfect Strangers) interweaves the stories of two budding artists living a century apart in this entertaining chiller. In 1920s New York City, Estelle Johnson's dream of becoming a successful painter appears to come true when she meets eccentric philanthropist Maude Bachmann. Maude becomes Estelle's patron, lavishing her with money and resources and insisting that Estelle call her "Godmother." But when Maude is found murdered in her home, Estelle vanishes. In a parallel story line set in contemporary Washington, D.C., aspiring writer Shan-

ice Pierce loses her magazine internship and is dumped by her long-term boyfriend. In the aftermath, she agrees to help her grandmother clear out her



house before she sells it. Among her grandmother's belongings, Shanice finds a painting by Estelle, which has apparently been in her family for generations.

Her grandmother insists Shanice take the painting home with her, and shortly after she does, a dealer comes knocking with a lucrative offer. Shanice turns him down, and before long, people she's discussed the painting with turn up dead, leaving her to wonder what makes it so sought-after—and what might have happened to its creator. Some readers may have trouble suspending disbelief as Stratton unveils the grand conspiracy behind the killings, but there's more than enough style and atmosphere on offer to keep the pages turning. This gets the job done. (June)

A Sudden Interest in **Shakespeare: A Seamus** O'Neill Mystery

Paul Breen. Dutch Hollow, \$3.99 e-book (270p) ISBN 979-8-9862083-2-9

Breen's clever second mystery featuring struggling musician-cum-investigator Seamus O'Neill (after Runner's Path) hits all the right notes. In 2000, Seamus's boss, Wisconsin PI John Ryder, is contacted by Mary Hoffman, who's concerned about her web designer brother, Tom. Not only has Tom inexplicably quit his private sector job for a lower-paying position at the State of Wisconsin Investment Board, he's suddenly obsessed with the works of William Shakespeare, despite never being much of a reader. What's more, on a recent visit to Tom's apartment, Mary discovered a shoebox filled with fake documents, cash, and a list of names. Ryder taps Seamus to help him investigate, and the puzzle gets more complex when someone close to the Wisconsin state government goes missing and his daughter reveals to the detectives that he, too, had developed a baffling new interest in the Bard. Breen peppers the investigation with plenty of well-tooled plot twists, and throws in some delightful Easter eggs for Shakespeare buffs along the way. Timothy Hallinan fans should check this out. (Self-published)

Montana Blues

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Ray Ring. Writers Canyon, \$17.99 trade paper (326p) ISBN 979-8-9869383-0-1

This white-knuckle whodunit from Ring (Arizona Kiss) chronicles the search for a killer from the perspectives of the victim's identical twin sister and the Black man wrongly accused of the crime. Five years ago, white Montana State University cheerleader Nikki Fontaine was strangled to death in her apartment. Her boyfriend, football star Dawson Koloko, was convicted and sentenced to life in prison after Nikki's twin, Rose, discovered him unconscious next to Nikki's body with scratches on his face. Now, Dawson's attorney has successfully argued that police mishandled DNA evidence and Dawson's conviction has been overturned. Determined to track down Nikki's killer, he forms a wobbly alliance with Rose, who's now married to the local sheriff, and the two uncover evidence that a white supremacist group may have been involved in Nikki's murder. Ring steadily ratchets up the suspense while developing a surprisingly potent emotional dynamic between his well-drawn leads. John Sandford fans will want to take a look. (Self-published)

SF/Fantasy/Horror

The Book of Elsewhere

Keanu Reeves and China Miéville. Del Rey, \$30 (352p) ISBN 978-0-593-44659-1

Reeves's collaboration with bestseller Miéville (The City and the City), based on the actor's BRZRKR comic books, disappoints. The U.S. government's secret Belief Systems and Ancient Technology Migration Unit is "dedicated to the collaboration with; study, decoding, and keeping secret of; questioning and protecting (laughable as that was) of; and performing necessary wetwork with an eighty-thousand-year-old warrior who

would not die." This immortal warrior is Unute, also known as B, who periodically loses his supernatural powers only to be reborn out of a large egg, and is eager to finally die. Diana Ahuja, who works with the Unit, investigates Unute's connection with the Life Project, a shadowy organization premised on the idea that society needs to be weaned off its addiction to death. She gets a lead on the project's members by searching the dark web for people who are "interested in ancient magic and who are also investigating the biology of echidnas and platypuses, and who are big fans of Solange Knowles and Millie Jackson, and who speak German and Polish and Farsi



and who are very keen on baking." That risible, random assortment of qualities is consistent with an overall tone that undercuts suspension of disbelief. Leaden writing

("Thereafter would come to her the fundamental rewritings of history and prehistory occasioned by her new subject") doesn't help. This is tedious. (July)

The Daughters' War

Christopher Buehlman. Tor, \$28.99 (416p) ISBN 978-1-250-88767-2

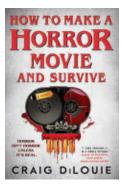
Buehlman builds on the lore of his Blacktongue series with this thrilling prequel to The Blacktongue Thief. It's presented as the journal of Galva dom Braga, who recalls her journey to and experiences in the goblin wars, dwelling on memories of late friends and lovers and supplementing her account with letters from family members. To save humanity from goblin occupation, Galva is off to join an all-female unit tasked with fighting the goblins using their corvid companions, large mutated attack birds. She marches across Gallardia with her brothers Pol, Migaéd, and Amiel, each of whom is in a different squad of the Western Army of the Illuminated Kingdom of Ispanthi. Readers know from the start that Galva survives, but all other lives hang in the balance, and Galva's unwavering love for her imperiled

friends and family keeps the stakes of the many battles high. The result is an introspective look into how Galva came to be a fierce warrior. Series fans looking for insight into Buehlman's badass heroine's psyche will be gratified. (June)

How to Make a Horror Movie and Survive

Craig DiLouie. Redhook, \$18.99 trade paper (320p) ISBN 978-0-316-56931-6

DiLouie (Episode Thirteen) remixes classic horror tropes into a harrowing thriller set in 1988. Middle-aged Max Maurey, known for his series of low-budget Jack the Knife slasher films, is appalled that audiences are cheering and laughing at the violence in his latest sequel. He feels like a hack, but his seedy producer, Jordan Lyman, won't let Max explore his true artistic ambitions. He's inspired, however, when he encounters Sally Priest,



an aspiring actor who believes, like Max, that "horror is only horror if it's real." At an estate sale for a reclusive director, Max buys the camera that recorded the infamous

film Mary's Birthday, which ended in tragedy when the actors were sliced to bits by a disabled helicopter. Despite the message scrawled on the case ("Never use this camera"), Max decides to try it outand discovers that people he points the camera at die gruesomely. It's just the kind of truth he's been searching for in his work, so he sets out to make a movie that will upend cliché, casting Sally as his final girl. The cursed object set up feels familiar, but readers will be pulled in by the morally twisted characters and serpentine plot. Film buffs will especially enjoy this paean to '80s slasher films and the people who love them. Agent: David Fugate, Launchbooks Literary. (June)

. **The Hermit Next Door**

Kevin Hearne. Subterranean Press, \$40 (96p) ISBN 978-1-64524-195-9

Bestseller Hearne (the Iron Druid Chronicles series) explores the limitations of running from one's feelings in this slight sci-fi novella. Recently widowed Tennessean Winnie Mae Chisholm hopes moving far enough away will help her and her teenage son, Pax, cope with their grief. Her only requirements while house hunting are quiet neighbors and a nearby river, leading her to a property in rural Oregon with a gorgeous stream and a notorious recluse named Mr. Fisher for a neighbor. When Pax meets Mr. Fisher, however, he learns the old shut-in is not what he seems: he's a talking, technologically advanced giant otter who explains he's "from this planet—just a different version of it." His species found a way to travel between parallel worlds using the water ways that connect all things, but Mr. Fisher has been trapped for decades—and he needs the Chisholms' help to finally get home, a task that's complicated by a busybody neighbor from down the road. The folksy charm of Winnie Mae's narration (she notes that "welcome cookies from new neighbors" and "sympathy casseroles from old neighbors" are both "offerings of calories to be deployed in times of uncertainty") does a lot to carry the narrative, though it still ends up feeling more like a precursor to a fascinating portal adventure than a complete plot unto itself. It's entertaining but undercooked. (June)

The God and the Gumiho

Sophie Kim. Del Rey, \$18 trade paper (416p) ISBN 978-0-593-59966-2

An infamous gumiho, a Korean ninetailed fox spirit, partners with a disgraced god in this enchanting fantasy from Kim (Reign of the Talon). In 1888, gumiho Kim Hani earns her title as the Scarlet Fox after greedily consuming the souls of 500 men. Now, over a hundred years later, Hani has retired and hides out from her past life by working as a barista, begrudgingly serv-



ing coffee to condescending customers like Detective Seokga, the fallen god of trickery. When two men attack Hani one night, she gives in to her killing instincts and

brings their livers to her young gumiho coworker, Somi, as a gift. Soon after, Detective Seokga identifies the murders as the Scarlet Fox's work, and Hani offers to assist in the investigation to ward him off her scent. Meanwhile, Seokga's brother, the heavenly emperor, offers him a dealkill the Scarlet Fox and the escaped demon that has been brutally murdering citizens, and he will reinstate Seokga's position and powers. Little does Seokga know that one of his targets is beside him—and with each passing day, he finds himself falling for her. With an intoxicating mix of action, mystery, and deliciously angsty romance, this reads like the most bingeable K-drama. Readers will be riveted. Agent: Emily Forney, BookEnds Literary. (June)

Unexploded Remnants

Elaine Gallagher. Tordotcom, \$16.99 trade paper (112p) ISBN 978-1-250-32521-1

Gallagher (Flotation Device) serves up a short but explosive novella about the last human remaining in the galaxy. In 1967, trans woman Alice stumbled upon the stargate network and fell "through the rabbit hole" into outer space. She watched from afar as her home planet died from climate change and war, but was able to extend her life by transporting through galaxies, making a living as a scavenger. Now, while combing through a market that serves countless species of aliens a unique variety of goods to trade, she comes across an item she doesn't quite understand. Possession of it, however, gets her chased through the market by a pack of Delosi, militaristic extraterrestrials who resemble elves, so she knows she has something valuable on her hands. After narrowly evading capture, Alice makes it to a safe house and works out what she's found: it's a weapon controlled by a human consciousness that has been trapped in its data core for thousands of years and harbors a grudge against the society it left. Alice names the data core Gunn. As she's pursued by parties that want to use Gunn for evil, she searches for a means to set the consciousness free. The impressive worldbuilding, replete with myriad references to Alice in Wonderland, could easily sustain a much longer adventure. Readers are sure to be sucked in. (June)

The Fall of Waterstone

Lilith Saintcrow. Orbit, \$19.99 trade paper (416p) ISBN 978-0-316-44053-0

The Enemy continues to pursue Solveig and her companions in Saintcrow's wellconstructed second Black Land's Bane f antasy. After the events of A Flame in the North, Solveig has found a measure of



safety in the Elder city of Waterstone, home of the ancient weapon that Elder Aeredh believes only Solveig can wield. She, however, is wary of the toll the weapon will take

on her magic. It soon becomes clear that she has other motives for coming to the city—and that Aeredh hasn't been honest about his intentions in bringing her there. With her faith in her friends and her own powers shaken, Solveig finds Waterstone to be a gilded cage. Meanwhile, though the Enemy cannot reach her within the city's walls, their dark forces continue to grow within the Black Land. The Norse mythology-inspired worldbuilding remains fascinating, and Saintcrow keeps the pages turning by weaving together danger and magic. This sets things up nicely for the epic conclusion. Agent: Lucienne Diver, Knight Agency. (June)

When I Look at the Sky, All I See **Are Stars**

Steve Stred. DarkLit, \$5.99 e-book (130p) ISBN 978-1-998851-31-7

Stred (The Father of Lies) delivers some graphic chills in this bite-sized work of psychological and supernatural horror. David Stewart, who claims to be 400 years old and possessed by an ancient evil, is the new patient of the acclaimed Dr. Rachel Hoggendorf in an unnamed institute. When her treatment of what she believes to be David's multiple personality disorder results in bouts of violence, she calls in both a trusted colleague and a priest for help. David tells cryptic tales, most eerily the story of Rachel's own rape and abortion, a well-kept secret he would have no reason to know. The longer Rachel works with David, the more she too begins to act

strangely, leading her coworkers to wonder if David's demon is real—and spreading. Uncanny rituals, corrupted religion, and erratic psychiatric patients are all timehonored horror staples, and while there's nothing particularly fresh here, Stred plays the hits with gusto. Though some of the expository dialogue feels stilted, the scenes of bloody violence are lush and cinematic. Readers in the mood for some old-school jump scares will be satisfied. (June)

Mevlido's Dreams

Antoine Volodine, trans. from the French by Gina M. Stamm. Woodhall, \$22.95 trade paper (352p) ISBN 978-1-5179-1714-2

This seething, sweltering postapocalyptic novel from Volodine (Black Village) follows the eponymous character as he navigates life as a double agent for both the corrupt state apparatus and the denizens of Henhouse Four, an underclass ghetto monitored by the government for possible revolutionary activity. Still mourning the death of his wife, Verena, 20 years prior, Mevlido stumbles upon a young woman who looks exactly like her—only to watch the doppelgänger, a possible terrorist, get her head crushed beneath the wheels of a tram. As he struggles to make sense of what he saw, Mevlido must hide his investigation from his autocratic superiors, and reality itself unravels as he attempts to reconcile the past, the future, and the completely impossible present. Translator Stamm does an admirable job of rendering Volodine's serpentine prose in English, and the noirish, surrealist story turns into an unlikely romp as it riffs on the absurdity of 20th-century political institutions and pop culture. The cumulative effect is frequently baffling but never dull. (June)

Romance/Erotica

Tangled Up in You

Christina Lauren. Hyperion Avenue, \$15.99 trade paper (320p) ISBN 978-1-368-09283-8

Bestselling writing partners Christina Hobbs and Lauren Billings, writing as Lauren (The Paradise Problem), spin another convincing romance, the fourth in the multiauthor Meant to Be series of contemporary fairy tale adaptations (after Zoraida Córdova's Kiss the Girl). For the first 22 years of her life, Ren Gylden was kept isolated and homeschooled in rural Idaho by her prepper parents, Steve and Gloria. But after she wins a scholarship to Corona College, Ren's parents reluctantly consent to let her experience the real world, as long as she comes home every weekend, stays off the internet, and doesn't date, wear makeup, drink alcohol, or go anywhere except to classes and the library. Among her new classmates is Fitz, who was adopted as a teen by a wealthy man who needed some good PR. Though everyone assumes Fitz is rich, he's working his own way through college and attempting to graduate at the top of his class to earn a judge's promised recommendation to seal his juvenile criminal record. After a class assignment involving a DNA test, Ren learns a shocking secret about her family and persuades Fitz to let her tag along on a road trip he's taking to Atlanta so she can investigate further. The road trip is fun and eventful with a satisfying twist awaiting Ren at the end. This is a delight. (June)

Finding Mr. Write

Kelley Armstrong. Forever, \$16.99 trade paper (368p) ISBN 978-1-5387-4274-7

Mystery writer Armstrong (The Boy Who Cried Bear) turns to romance with this sharply funny satire. Aspiring author Daphne McFadden is tired of agents rejecting her zombie romance novel and decides to try something radical. She goes back on submission using the male alter ego Zane Remington and calling the book a fantasy (though she doesn't actually remove any of the romance). The ruse works, landing her a \$500,000 book deal. Daphne's lawyer friend, Nia Paramar, helps her maintain the deception by roping in Chris Stanton, Nia's accountant,



to play Zane in Daphne's author photo. For a video shoot, Chris travels from Vancouver to Daphne's home in the Yukon, where he portrays Zane as macho and

arrogant, though Daphne gets glimpses of the sweet, nerdy man underneath. The novel becomes a runaway hit, and Daphne and Chris's mutual attraction ignites on a book tour where Daphne poses as Chris's assistant. But they must face the fallout together when Daphne's creepy neighbor threatens to reveal their deception. Armstrong packs in plenty of laugh-out-loud moments while driving home her point about gendered expectations and inequities in genre publishing. Add in believable chemistry between the leads, and the result is sure to please fans of meta rom-coms. Agent: Lucienne Diver, Knight Agency. (June)

Isabel and the Rogue

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Liana De la Rosa. Berkley, \$19 trade paper (352p) ISBN 978-0-593-44090-2

De la Rosa's satisfying second Luna Sisters Victorian romance (after Ana María and The Fox) allows middle sister Isabel her chance in the spotlight. Isabel and her sisters were forced to leave their native Mexico for England. Now, Isabel is determined to help her homeland fight against the French occupation. Undercover of the London Season's various social events, Isabel searches studies and bedrooms of the powerful for any British intelligence that might prove useful. Her amateur sleuthing is hindered by Capt. Sirius Dawson, a decorated war hero and Home Office agent who's after the same intel as Isabel and also hopes to keep her safe during her mission. Attraction ignites as the pair are forced into tight quarters to avoid being detected, but Isabel hopes to return to Mexico as soon as she can, which means their passion can only be temporary. De la Rosa expertly captures the Luna sisters' dynamic, exploring how, as the middle sibling, Isabel is often overlooked and highlighting her pluck and determination to find a purpose within a society rife with both gender and racial discrimination. Readers will have no trouble rooting for this worthy heroine to get her happy ending. (June)

Tunder Your Spell

Laura Wood. Atria, \$17.99 trade paper (352p) ISBN 978-1-66805-190-0

YA author Wood (the Poppy Pim series) makes her adult debut with an irresistible rockstar romance. Though PhD candidate

Clementine "Clemmie" Monroe remains close with her two half sisters, singer Lil and record producer Serena, she otherwise avoids all reminders of their famous rocker



dad, even going so far as forbid herself from listening to any new music at all. After her teaching gig and her relationship both end abruptly, she turns to her sisters for support

and lets them reenact the "breakup spell" they invented as teenagers. The women make three wishes for Clemmie: a onenight stand, a soul mate, and a job she loves. With no real expectation of wish fulfillment, Clemmie is impressed with herself when she does soon enjoy a onenight stand and happy enough when Serena finds her a temporary job "babysitting" a musician on a deadline. She's less excited when she learns that her random hookup was actually with global superstar Theo Eliott—and he's her new client. Shacked up in a rural beach house in Northumberland while Theo tries to finish his next album, sparks fly. Though Clemmie tries to keep things casual, Theo is determined to win her heart. He proves a swoonworthy hero, and it's endearing to watch Clemmie slowly let down her guard. The chemistry is electric and the quirky side characters add to the fun. This is one to devour. Agent: Louise Lamont, LBA Books. (June)

How to Align the Stars

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Amy Dressler. Egret Lake, \$18.95 trade paper (348p) ISBN 978-1-956498-10-3

Dressler draws from a classic enemies to lovers tale in her sparkling debut, a modern retelling of Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing. Bea Hayes, 37, is on the cusp of receiving tenure at Messiman, a small college in Washington State and her alma mater. Her career's on track, but her romantic life is stalled; she's still caught up in resentment about the perceived betrayal of her college friend Ben, who she once thought could have been something more to her. Meanwhile, Bea's beloved cousin, 22-year-old Heron

Hunter, is a starry-eyed undergraduate at the same college with a wealthy and seemingly devoted new fiancé, Charlie, and an unsure career path. When Heron and Charlie hatch a plan to get Bea and Ben together, the pair tentatively bury the hatchet. Things are looking up for both couples—until a malicious actor plots to ruin their happiness. Dressler's multilayered romance sensitively takes on a number of touchy topics, including misogyny and fat shaming, and easily draws in readers with its three-dimensional characters. This is a promising start. (June)

Curvy Girl Summer

Danielle Allen. Bramble, \$17.99 trade paper (368p) ISBN 978-1-250-33104-5

Allen's delightful latest (after 2022's Guidance) combines snarky one-liners with some serious spice. Aaliyah James, 29, hasn't found Mr. Right yet, but her family's putting pressure on her to settle down ASAP. It doesn't help that her eccentric uncle Al is sure her weight is the real problem keeping her from a relationship. To prove him wrong, she's determined to bring a boyfriend to her 30th birthday party—which is just seven weeks away. Despite some trepidation, she agrees to a blind date with a friend of a friend, which goes disastrously wrong. The only saving grace is that Ahmad Williamson, the very sexy bartender who watches it go up in flames, can't take his eyes of Aaliyah. She and Ahmad click when she tells him about her mission and he encourages her to try dating apps, promising to look out for her so long as she brings all her dates to his bar. Aaliyah takes him up on it, but as their friendship grows increasingly flirtatious, his presence becomes a distraction when she's supposed to be on dates with other people. Allen makes the



friends-to-lovers romance sing with a bodypositive message, some laugh-outloud moments, and charming supporting charactersincluding Aaliyah's enviable friend

group. Readers will hope for more time with these endearing characters in future installments. (June)

. Serendipity

Becky Chalsen. Dutton, \$18 trade paper (352p) ISBN 978-0-593-47472-3

A heartfelt reunion between high school friends animates this light, summery contemporary from Chalsen (Kismet). After college, Maggie Monroe followed her screenwriting dreams all the way to



L.A. and never looked back, distancing herself from her close friends in New York City. Six years later, after a significant career detour, Maggie returns to Manhattan and

receives an unexpected invitation to spend three weekends in a Fire Island beach house with her formerly close-knit high school friend group, including her old flame Mac and her estranged bestie Liz. Maggie left town at Liz's lowest point and her return reignites old anxieties, adding unease to Liz's recent engagement to her high school sweetheart. Over the course of the summer, Maggie, Mac, Liz, and their closest friends journey back and forth to Fire Island to spend some quality time in the sun, even as old memories and new drama bubble up. Maggie's personal growth as she reconnects with her past unfolds with a cozy and comforting vibe, and though Chalsen keeps things breezy, the emotions are real. This fast-paced and sun-filled romp is sure to brighten readers' spirits. (June)

The Fire Between High & Lo

Brittainy Cherry. Sourcebooks Casablanca, \$16.99 trade paper (368p) ISBN 978-1-72829-713-2

Trauma gets more airtime than romance in Cherry's dark and depressing second Elements contemporary (after The Air He Breathes). Best friends Logan and Alyssa weathered tough childhoods in True Falls, Wis., side by side. Alyssa wants to share her music with the world, but her verbally abusive and controlling

mother is determined to crush her dreams. Meanwhile, Logan's physically abusive, criminal father gets both Logan and his mother hooked on drugs. The pair find peace only in each other, and their adolescent friendship blossoms into deep love. But after a misunderstanding and a car crash tear them apart, Logan leaves town—and leaves a heartbroken Alyssa behind. Five years later, a sober Logan returns to True Falls to be with his ailing half brother and is forced to face his past demons. The abuse faced by both protagonists is very graphic and verges on trauma porn. It's hard to root for these characters to end up together when they frequently mistreat each other and both have much bigger problems to address. Even readers looking for high-angst romance will struggle with this. Agent: Flavia Viotti, Bookcase Literary. (June)

A Love Like the Sun

Riss M. Neilson. Berkley, \$19 trade paper (368p) ISBN 978-0-593-64049-4

YA author Neilson (*Deep in Providence*) makes the leap into adult fiction with this sweet tale of best friends with a soulmate connection. Laniah and Isaac bonded in their youth over their mutual losses. Laniah's father died when she was a teen and she has since become a self-proclaimed "hermit" to protect her heart. Meanwhile, Isaac was orphaned at 12 and neglected in foster care, but he's now finding success as an internet-famous model and artist. When Isaac learns that Wildly Green, the natural beauty company Laniah and her mother have poured their hearts and souls into, may be forced to shutter, he first tries to offer the women money. They're too proud to accept, however, so he comes up with a more radical scheme to save the company: he and Laniah will pretend to date for the summer, using Isaac's rising fame to generate publicity. Laniah agrees, but she's unprepared for the spotlight. As the pair navigate paparazzi and press releases together, the line between real and pretend blurs. The couple has serious chemistry, but some flashbacks to their past, exploring the history of their relationship, feel redundant and unnecessary. A moving subplot about Laniah trying to get a diagnosis for a mystery illness adds depth, though it sometimes jars with the frivolous fake dating scheme. Still, the pining and sexual

tension throughout this slow-burn romance will keep readers hooked. Agent: Jess Regel, Helm Literary. (June)

Comics

The Jellyfish

Boum, trans. from the French by Robin Lang and Helge Dascher. Pow Pow, \$22.95 trade paper (228p) ISBN 978-2-925114-30-7

"Miss, you have a jellyfish in your eye," an optometrist tells baby-faced 20-something Odette in the opening pages of this quietly courageous graphic novella from Boumeries cartoonist Boum. The jellyfish, a distracting floater in her left eyeball, appears hovering around Odette's head as she goes about her daily routine in an artsy French Canadian neighborhood: working at a bookstore, hanging out with friends, tending to her pet rabbit, and pursuing a romance with her mangaloving crush, Naina. She tries to ignore the darkness encroaching on her sunny existence—an approach that Naina, who



struggles to cut ties with her abusive father, has trouble understanding—but another jellyfish appears in her field of vision, and then another.

"I feel like my eyeballs are grinding in their sockets," she remarks to herself as they multiply, as do other problems in her and Naina's way of handling challenges, which won't simply go away, but may need to be lived through. Boum's sinuous artwork makes Odette's world pulse with life. The settings feel lived-in, and her charming characters are constantly moving, changing, and emoting. The result is a graceful and empathetic story about loss and learning to see what's important. (May)

Full of Myself: A Graphic Memoir **About Body Image**

Siobhán Gallagher. Andrews McMeel, \$19.99 trade paper (336p) ISBN 978-1-5248-6768-3

Part graphic memoir, part self-help manual, Gallagher's accessible debut

FICTION REVIEWS

draws on examples from her own life to explore how women are taught to see themselves. "To be a girl is to go from being an observer to being observed" she notes, recalling the messages she absorbed about womanhood through pop culture, the negative body image she developed from a young age ("If I were a Pokémon, I bet I'd be one of the ugly ones... like Psyduck"), her fear of being the "fat friend" in her social group, the sexual harassment she experienced in one workplace after another, and her struggles with depression, bulimia, and cutting. Though she doesn't shy away from dark confessions, she finds humor in her lifelong efforts to get comfortable in her body. With cheery art and wry humor, Gallagher draws her changing fashion choices over the decades (the '90s features "my most provocative scrunchie: red silk in black mesh") and depicts her first serious relationship as a TV rom-com. Throughout, her friendly cartoon avatar offers advice on unlearning harmful cultural messages and developing a healthy body image. Young adults in particular will appreciate Gallagher's agility at connecting her individual experiences to universal feminist issues.

The Sacrificers

Rick Remender and Max Fiumara. Image, \$16.99 trade paper (192p) ISBN 978-1-5343-9789-7

Remender (the Uncanny X-Force series) and Fiumara (the Amazing Spider-Man series) unite for a thrilling fantasy set in a kingdom whose prosperity relies on its terrible secret: every year, one child from each common family is taken from their parents and sacrificed. This ritual follows a religious law rigorously enforced by flame-headed King Rokos, though there's something much more sin-



ister at the heart of the tradition. Remender skillfully divides the narrative between those chosen to be sacrificed—among them the blue-feathered bird-being Pigeon and

pious, placid Noom-and the high court, including Rokos's rebellious daughter Soluna. Moments of profound sadness are mixed with weird, wonderful beauty thanks to Fiumara's phantasmagorical characters, who are both frightening and whimsical. The conceit will put readers in mind of The Hunger Games, Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," and scenes from The Wizard of Oz and Mulan, but Remender's keen attention to pacing and worldbuilding polishes it into a shining example of a familiar trope. Comics fans will eagerly anticipate future installments in the series. (Apr.)

Chad in Amsterdam

Chad Bilyeu. Scratch, \$29.95 (176p) ISBN 978-94-93166-80-6

Despite an action-flick cover design, Bilyeu's eclectic debut graphic memoir is full of thoughtful and introspective vignettes and depicts surprisingly little carousing. Raised in Cleveland, Bilyeu came to Amsterdam in 2009 for the weed but stayed for the city's "palpable" history. He touches on many subjects in Harvey Pekar-inspired asides, each of which is given its own look by a different artist. Styles range from French cartoonist Boyane's grungy Peter Bagge look to fellow American expat Eryc Why's crisp precision. Though Amsterdam's reputation as a nexus of debauchery isn't central to the narrative, it's still vividly depicted; Bilyeu alludes to his slides into "escapism" in a city where "your weekends can begin on Wednesday and end on Tuesday,"- while that line is narrated as he depicts himself with his collar up avoiding carousers, in another chapter he interviews an exotic dancer from a strip club front row seat. Dislocation is a theme, from his struggles with the language to the curious Dutch refusal to admit the racist nature of their "Black Pete" folk figure. While he satirizes the hedonistic culture, he also pokes fun at himself (he confesses to having "eschewed pursuing girls and playing sports for... the consumption of comic books and Hip-Hop music"). It's a witty and surprisingly intimate exploration of an artist trying not to be a stranger in a strange land. Agent: Inge Koks, Stichting Publieke Werken. (Apr.)



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Nonfiction

Van Gogh and the End of Nature

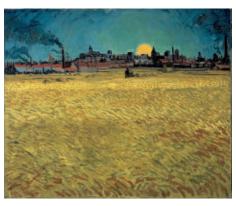
Michael Lobel. Yale Univ., \$45 (200p) ISBN 978-0-300-27436-3

Rapid industrialization profoundly shaped the "subjects, concerns, and... materials" of Vincent van Gogh's art, according to this revealing study from art historian Lobel (John Sloan). Focusing on the brief period between van Gogh's "retreat" from Paris to the French countryside in 1888 and his death two years later, Lobel explores how van Gogh used pigments derived from industrial waste, such as arsenic, for "vividness and intensity"; adorned his "natural landscapes" with factory smokestacks, railroad depots, and telegraph poles; and frequently depicted pollution and resource waste, as in his watercolors of abandoned quarries. Loebel suggests the latter paintings symbolize "our willingness to make use of the earth, leaving scars as we go, and then move onto other things," though he doesn't go so far as to claim that message as van Gogh's intended one. While readers will have to decide for themselves whether the author's interpretation reveals more about his own environmental concerns than van Gogh's, the fine-grained analysis and buoyant prose delight. Art history buffs will want to add this to their bookshelves. Illus. (*July*)

Harry Gruyaert: Morocco

Harry Gruyaert. Thames & Hudson, \$65 (208p) ISBN 978-0-500-02795-0

Photographer Gruyaert (Harry Gruyaert) delivers a striking visual ode to the people and landscapes of Morocco. Gathered from the author's visits to the country beginning in the 1970s, the collection includes images of grand expanses bathed in high-intensity reds, oranges, and yellow ochres; sparsely peopled scenes that are as mysterious as a de Chirico painting; walls cast with enormous, perspectiveskewing shadows that diminish the human figures next to them; and women whose faces are turned away from the camera, resulting in a wonderfully disorienting effect where silhouettes coalesce into abstract forms (the "impact of a human presence without a face" makes for a "different way of being present, with no



Vincent van Gogh's Summer Evening, as seen in Michael Lobel's study of the artist, Van Gogh and the End of Nature (reviewed on this page).

labels or identity," in Gruyaert's view). Aside from a brief introduction, the author lets the images speak for themselves, refraining from giving context even when some might be useful. Still, the streamlined approach bears fruit. It's a captivating peek into an enigmatic country. (July)

The Secret Language of the Body: Regulate Your Nervous System, **Heal Your Body, Free Your Mind** Jennifer Mann and Karden Rabin. HarperOne, \$19.99 (352) ISBN 978-0-06-338238-1

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Readers can use the "secret language of the body" to heal depression, insomnia, and other ailments, according to this insightful debut guide. Functional movement therapist Mann and somatic experiencing practitioner Rabin describe the nervous system as a "foreign country" that responds to daily stressors (paying bills, sending an difficult email) with stress-inducing survival responses. They suggest that readers better communicate with their nervous systems by noticing such stress symptoms as muscle tension and quelling them through breathing exercises and other techniques. Eventually, readers can retrain their stress responses by using their impartial "observing self" to witness harmful thoughts and emotions without getting caught up in them. With plenty of theories and strategies on offer—for example, how to tend to the emotional wounds of one's "inner child," and how to tune into each of the five senses to switch from a stressed mind into a more embodied state of being—the authors provide a sturdy

yet flexible framework for integrated mind-body healing. Those who feel overwhelmed would do well to check this out. (July)

The Bastard Instrument: A Cultural **History of the Electric Bass**

Brian F. Wright. Univ. of Michigan, \$24.95 (392p) ISBN 978-0-472-05681-1

Wright, an assistant professor of music history at the University of North Texas, examines in his lively debut study how the electric bass guitar helped to "fundamentally alter the trajectory of popular music." Tracing the instrument's roots, Wright explains the technological developments that led to the first generation of modern electric basses in the 1950s. Originally regarded as "at best a novelty, and at worst, a desecration," the instrument came into its own by the end of the decade, thanks to its popularization by touring rockers and a "critical mass" of amateur musicians who made playing the instrument a "middle-class leisure activity." Wright analyzes the cultural and musical significance of the bass guitar, and teases out the contributions of lesser-known figures, such as "top-call session bassist" Carol Kaye, who played with a "hard pick and a strong attack" for a "nuanced emphasis on groove and timbre," and Basie Robinson, who added a "propulsive energy" to Little Richard's live performances. The result is a vivid portrait of the instrument that gave Motown, rock 'n' roll, and funk their distinctive sounds. (July)

Art Monster: On the Impossibility of New York

Marin Kosut. Columbia Univ., \$26 trade paper (256p) ISBN 978-0-231-21613-5

New York City can no longer sustain any but the wealthiest artists and is suffering as a result, according to this uneven debut account from Kosut, a sociology professor at SUNY Purchase. She places much of the blame for the erosion of New York's artistic community on gentrification, which she herself experienced as housing costs pushed her from Williamsburg to Bushwick to Ridgewood ("I'm one of the gentrifiers who hung on long enough to get gentrified"). Profiling a number of artists trying to make it in the city, she identifies an "underclass" of

those who work in such "art-adjacent" careers as museum security and art handling. They provide the art world's essential labor yet often find their efforts to sell their own art or find representation undermined by condescending elites (as one art handler explains, "It's like, 'Oh, don't talk to the help' "). Ending on a mixed note, Kosut emphasizes artists' critical role in the city's ecosystem ("We need bees to pollinate the foods we've come to expect.... Likewise, we need artists to pollinate New York, to fertilize and piss all over it") while implying that efforts to reverse current trends may be in vain ("We may be coming to the end of an era in which artist is synonymous with urban"). Kosut digs into a pressing and complex social issue, though readers may be turned off by the unremittingly gloomy picture she paints ("In the new New York, mediocrity is the new black"). This misses the mark. (July)

Geoffrey Chaucer: Unveiling the Merry Bard

Mary Flannery. Reaktion, \$25 trade paper (224p) ISBN 978-1-78914-863-3

In this astute analysis, Flannery (Practising Shame), an English professor at the University of Bern in Switzerland, analyzes Chaucer's "reputation for mirth and merriment" and its impact on his legacy. She contends that Chaucer's first major poem, a lament for Prince John of Gaunt's late first wife, is delivered in a wryly self-deprecating tone that reflected the poet's "humble social position" as an administrator to nobility. While making diplomatic trips to Italy between 1372 and 1387 in service of kings Edward III and Richard II, Chaucer encountered the vernacular writings of Dante Alighieri and Giovanni Boccaccio, likely inspiring Chaucer to write in the English vernacular while also providing him with comedic fodder (Chaucer's The House of Fame reimagines the eagle that carries Dante to the heavens in the Divine Comedy as a talkative bore). Flannery's keen interpretations of Chaucer's poetry are bolstered by enlightening historical context, as when she explains that while modern audiences cheer on the sex-positive Wife of Bath for her outspokenness in

[Q&A]

PW TALKS WITH OLIVIA LAING

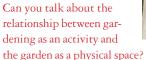
Paradise Found

In The Garden Against Time (Norton, June; reviewed on p. 52), Laing explores how gardens reveal a society's values.

You discuss restoring the garden at your Suffolk home. How did that experience inform your research?

I worked on the garden for two years and kept a garden diary. I thought about writing a book, but I didn't do any of the archival work that I would usually do for nonfiction because it

was the pandemic and everything was closed. That downtime facilitated an intense presence of being able to think about the garden, and then the research and writing process took place after that.



I think it's parallel to the relationship between writing as an activity and the book as a physical space. The gardener never really enters their garden, because for them it's always a work in progress. The garden is a thing that somebody else enters. That's similar to making a book. It's in your hands until the moment when it isn't, and then it belongs to other people. While it's in your hands, it's constantly malleable. But there comes a point when it's time for somebody else to come in, and they experience it as a finished product, whereas to the person who's making it, it's never a finished product.

You write that "the gardener is initiated into a different understanding of time." Could you elaborate on that idea?

For the gardener, everything is happening in a constant unfolding "now,"

which is a lovely antidote to the kind of time that we're caught up in as humans living through late capitalism. There's an explosion of growth and then a dying back, creating a sense that fertility and rot belong together. The idea that growth can be wrung out of the planet indefi-

> nitely is the illusion that's leading us into climate change. Witnessing garden time is a way to learn to live on the planet more harmoniously, ethically, and sustainably.

You discuss the profusion of wild flora at a WWII bombing site as if it were a garden. How do you

draw the boundary between wilderness and garden?

A garden involves human participation. Tomato plants were found in those bomb sites because office workers dropped seeds from their lunches there. One of the things that I found super exciting about this blurry edge between wilderness and garden is there's been so much interest in rewilding as the solution to ecological catastrophe, but research suggests garden space might be even richer if it's tended in a loose way that's in tandem with nature. The constant disturbances that the gardener makes create a habitat in its own right. That, for me, was deeply consolingdiscovering that our desire to make spaces that are purely beautiful might have positive effects for species beyond our own.

—Vicki Borah Bloom



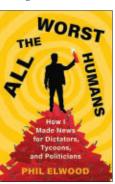
pointing out "the inconsistencies of the Church's teachings on marriage and virginity," medieval audiences would have recognized her as a familiar misogynistic caricature and laughed at "her vanity, her covetousness and her manipulation of her husbands." It's a revealing take on the much-studied poet. Photos. (July)

All the Worst Humans: How I Made News for Dictators. Tycoons, and Politicians

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Phil Elwood. Holt, \$28.99 (272p) ISBN 978-1-250-32157-2

A PR man with a newfound conscience recalls his propaganda campaigns in this raucous debut memoir. Elwood recaps his career at Washington, D.C., public relations firms and his strategies to promulgate spin concocted to serve his clients' hidden agendas. These included a campaign to procure a congressional resolution opposing America's bid for the 2022 soccer World Cup on the ground that the money should be spent on children's physical education instead—a ploy that convinced FIFA to let his client, Qatar, stage the Cup—and a successful effort to get Vogue to write a puff piece on the wife of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad that painted the country as "a place without bombings, unrest or kidnappings." Elwood hit bottom working for Psy Group, an Israeli company that peddled election-influencing services; his activities got him investigated by special counsel Robert Mueller, which provoked a nervous breakdown and suicide attempt. (Later chapters trace a redemptive upswing, which included doing PR for ketamine as an anti-depressant.) Elwood's picaresque features mordantly funny scenes (a standout chapter involves shepherding client Muammar Gadafi's deranged adult son Mutassim around Las



Vegas) and a savvy exploration of the machinery of public relations, including how astroturfed nonprofits and content-hungry journalists function as PR mouthpieces.

The result is an entertaining, wised-up account of the dark arts of reputation laundering. (June)

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★ Woman of Interest: A Memoir

Tracy O'Neill. HarperOne, \$28.99 (288p) ISBN 978-0-06-330986-9

Novelist O'Neill (Quotients) delivers a riveting account of her search for her birth mother. Fresh off a breakup in 2020, a 33-year-old O'Neill, who was raised by adoptive parents in New Eng-



land, became newly curious about her origins. She gave a private investigator the limited information she had about her birth mother, but after a promising start, the

investigator disappeared, leaving behind a tangle of loose ends. Determined to see the inquiry through, O'Neill used a DNA database to locate a blood relative, who then virtually introduced her to her mother's siblings in South Korea. Though Covid-19 cases were peaking at the time, O'Neill traveled to Korea on the advice of these relatives, who promised they'd introduce her to her mother. While O'Neill completed a 10-day quarantine, she reflected on how her search was related to her own doubts and fears about becoming a mother. The narrative culminates with O'Neill and her mother finally meeting at a tense dinner party, an experience that left O'Neill with more questions than answers about the circumstances that led to her adoption. In cool, noirtinted prose shot through with wit and compassion, O'Neill presents her inquiry as a sort of metaphysical detective story. Readers will be enthralled. (June)

Codename Nemo: The Hunt for a Nazi U-Boat and the Elusive **Enigma Machine**

Charles Lachman. Diversion, \$29.99 (352p) ISBN 978-1-63576-871-8

This sprightly history from journalist Lachman (A Secret Life) recounts the pivotal seizure of a German submarine and its Enigma cypher machine in 1944. The crews of two U-boats previously captured by the British had trashed their Enigma machines (the capture of which was a top Allied priority), so a U.S. naval task force devised, and rehearsed for three weeks, a plan that would prevent a U-boat crew from destroying its machine. Involving a nine-man boarding party conducting a rapid series of actions with flash-bangs and tear gas, the opening and closing of various vents, valves, and hatches, and the defusing of booby traps, the plan was successfully put into practice—somewhat off-script, as the Germans had already abandoned ship—on June 4, 1944, with the taking of submarine *U*-505. Setting the stage for the main event, Lachman illustrates the peril of the Atlantic theater by narrating several other high-octane engagements. He also provides jaunty character sketches of the action's key participants, including Hans Goebeler, a German who came close to foiling the plot by almost scuttling U-505 with a well-placed leak, and the Americans who boarded the damaged sub and managed to keep it afloat. Brisk yet evocative descriptions—the captured sub smelled like "diesel fuel" and "human body odor"—contribute a vivid sense of place. It's an exciting account of a daring military maneuver. (June)

Kissing Girls on Shabbat: A Memoir Sara Glass. One Signal, \$27.99 (288p) ISBN 978-1-6680-3121-6

Psychotherapist Glass debuts with a searing account of coming to terms with her homosexuality as an ultra-Orthodox Jew. At 19, Glass was teaching at a religious girl's school in Brooklyn's Borough Park neighborhood when she met and fell in love with Dassa. The pressures of secrecy snuffed out the women's brief romance, and Glass entered an arranged marriage with a man named Yossi in the early 2000s. The couple had two children, but Glass felt increasingly frustrated by their lack of passion, and she eventually left Yossi when he refused to let her pursue a PhD in social work. She enrolled in a graduate program, married another man, and carefully maintained her strict Hasidic community's rituals of observance so she could keep seeing her children. After obtaining her degree, Glass finally came out of the closet, divorced her second

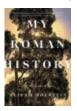
ON THE CONTINENT

Two new memoirs explore the transformative promise of European sojourns

My Roman History

Alizah Holstein. Viking, \$30 (368p) ISBN 978-0-593-49008-2

Historian Holstein elegantly interweaves academic inquiry and autobiography in this lush debut memoir about her love affair with Italy. Inspired to pursue a PhD on 14th-century Italian history by a high school teacher who introduced her to



Dante, Holstein studs her recollections of trips to Rome-both alone and with colleagues, for research and for pleasure—with stimulating tidbits on medieval literature, 14th-century religious squabbles, and Dante's life and work. There are also episodes highlighting her occasional cluelessness as a tourist (including a

memorable section on a visit to Venice, which reads to Holstein as "a different Italy, where words mean different things") and underscoring her passion for Rome's aesthetic beauty. After completing her PhD and teaching for a few years, Holstein got married, had children, and founded a baby supply company in Rhode Island, which pulled her away from her academic pursuits, and reminded her that she "wasn't, and could never be" truly Roman. While casual readers may find some of the scholarly references tough sledding, serious Italophiles are a shoo-in for Holstein's lovingly rendered tribute to one of the world's greatest cities. This sings. Agent: Bill Clegg, Clegg Agency. (June)

I'm Mostly Here to Enjoy Myself: One Woman's **Pursuit of Pleasure in Paris**

Glynnis MacNicol. Penguin Life, \$29.99 (288p) ISBN 978-0-593-65575-7

The jubilant latest from MacNicol (No One Tells You This) details a transformative summer in the City of Light. After spending the height of the Covid-19 pandemic anxious and



alone in her New York City apartment, a 47-year-old MacNicol jumped at the opportunity to sublet a friend's Paris apartment in 2021. She was eager for a change of scenery and an opportunity to live as "a woman who wasn't required to ask permission." In Paris, MacNicol ate indulgently, found lovers via

dating apps, made new friends, and eventually came to view the city as "a mirror that has allowed me to see my entire self and... tak[e] enormous pleasure in the wholeness of that person." By and large, MacNicol's escapades come across as empowering, though some may wince at her shallow description of the app-facilitated dating world as a "meat market." She's especially incisive when comparing dating in middle age to gaslighting—no matter how good one actually feels, she argues, "everyone and everything" insists that getting older means feeling worse. It adds up to an exhilarating account of finding a new lease of life. Agent: Lucy Carson, Friedrich Agency.

husband, and moved to Manhattan with her children. She suffuses the narrative with astonishing empathy for the people and forces that stood between her and liberation, and few readers will be unmoved by the depth of her struggle or the strength of her resistance. This leaves a mark. Agent: Harvey Klinger, Harvey Klinger Literary. (June)

Love in the Time of Self-Publishing: **How Romance Writers Changed** the Rules of Writing and Success

Christine Larson. Princeton Univ., \$29.95 (280p) ISBN 978-0-69121-740-6

The recent success of the romance genre can be traced back to the early efforts of the Romance Writers of America, a professional association founded in the 1970s, according to this enlightening inquiry. Journalist Larson (Influence) argues that the RWA's "unusually inclusive community" of mostly women writers was markedly generous compared to male-dominated author organizations;

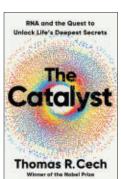
members swapped book industry intel and aided one another's careers. This cooperativeness was crucial for bolstering work that was "mocked... and mistreated" within the publishing industry, writes Larson, who tracks how strategy-sharing among members resulted in the genre's rewarding early adoption of self-publishing ("Romance authors' median income... grew an astounding 73 percent between 2009 and 2014"). However, the RWA's long-standing "color-blind" approach (Larson writes that for decades the organization "tolerated" relationships with "overtly racist editors" and had chapters that were "hostile to authors of color") brought about the organization's dramatic fracturing in 2019 with the expulsion of Courtney Milan, a champion of diversity within the RWA who was ousted for calling another member's book racist; her removal led to mass resignations and the organization's loss of prestige. Larson's eye-opening "cautionary tale" about the importance of inclusivity

and cooperation is built around tantalizing peaks into tense chapter meetings and informal hotel room parties. It's a rewarding deep dive into an influential microcosm of the publishing industry. (June)

★ The Catalyst: RNA and the Quest to Unlock Life's Deepest Secrets

Thomas R. Cech. Norton, \$28.99 (320p) ISBN 978-1-324-05068-1

Nobel Prize-winning biochemist Cech debuts with an entrancing primer on "the



vast capabilities of RNA." Recounting how his research in the early 1980s upended the long-held belief that RNA was a simple molecule that intermediated between DNA

and proteins, Cech describes discovering that RNA can catalyze biochemical reactions and perform jobs previously thought to be the exclusive purview of enzymes, such as orchestrating the construction of proteins. The author also delves into subsequent breakthroughs, telling how in the late '80s molecular biologist Carol Greider determined that RNA build out "chromosome ends to secure the integrity of the genome." Surveying the real-world implications of the research, Cech discusses the scientific advances that led to the development of the messenger RNA Covid vaccines and speculates on how a form of RNA capable of shutting down genes may one day help treat neurodegenerative diseases. The biological discussions are remarkably lucid, thanks to easy-to-understand analogies. For instance, Cech illustrates how RNA's selective omission of genetic information during protein production makes it possible to create a "wide[r] repertoire of potential proteins from the same set of genes" by noting how "You really smell nice today" and "You really smell today" use the same building blocks yet generate opposite meanings based on the exclusion of one piece. This fascinates. (June)

China in Seven Banquets: A Flavourful History

Thomas David DuBois. Reaktion, \$25 (256p) ISBN 978-1-78914-861-9

Historian DuBois (Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia) takes an energetic tour of Chinese culinary history. Ranging from the country's prehistoric agricultural systems to Western influences on 21st-century cuisine, DuBuois uses seven banquets to highlight the foods and cultural attitudes that defined different eras of Chinese history. For example, the Eight Treasures of Zhou feast—described in the Book of Rites, a second-century BCE Confucian textshowcases Bronze Age beliefs that food could help the body reach a harmonious equilibrium mirroring that of nature and the cosmos ("Just like the change in seasons, the human body sought a state of active equilibrium"). Elsewhere, a contemporary hot-pot delivery meal (frozen beef, servings of cabbage, and a "plug-in chafing dish") reflects how the nationwide spread of chains and franchises after

China's 2001 entry into the World Trade Organization popularized "a food experience that was cheaper and more convenient, but also less local." Throughout, DuBois debunks the idea that there is one "traditional" Chinese cuisine, explaining how ingredients, dishes, and techniques evolved as a result of imperial expansion, globalization, and industrialization. While Fuschia Dunlop's Invitation to a Banquet covers similar ground in more depth, the detailed recipes and chatty tone make this an accessible overview of Chinese cuisine. Readers will be satiated. (June)

Orwell's Ghosts: Wisdom and Warnings for the Twenty-First Century

Laura Beers. Norton, \$26.99 (240p) ISBN 978-1-324-07508-0

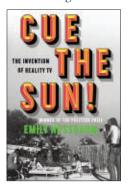
This invigorating study from historian Beers (Red Ellen) investigates what George Orwell's life and writings can teach contemporary readers about modern controversies. Tracking the development of Orwell's politics and philosophy, Beers notes that the author had become by his own account "a bit Bolshie" while attending the elite Eton boarding school, and that witnessing Britain's oppressive regime in Burma while enlisted in the Indian Police Service "awakened his social conscience." Evaluating competing ideological claims to Orwell's legacy, Beers argues that Orwell would have regarded skeptically individuals who invoke his name (and his dystopian novel, 1984) to complain about being de-platformed by social media companies for politically contentious views, citing Orwell's belief that his publisher had been within its rights to renege on their agreement to put out *Homage to Catalonia* in the late 1930s because it feared the report would undermine the anti-Franco cause in Spain. Beers has a knack for finding fresh angles on the much discussed author, highlighting both his overlooked sense of humor and the less savory aspects of his character, including his failure to consider the oppression of women in his writings on inequality and his disrespect for "women's boundaries and bodily autonomy" (he made "repeated unwelcome advances on women" and opposed abortion). It's a valuable exploration of what it actually means to be "Orwellian." (June)

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★ Cue the Sun! The Invention of **Reality TV**

Emily Nussbaum. Random House, \$30 (464p) ISBN 978-0-525-50899-1

In this boisterous chronicle, television critic Nussbaum (I Like to Watch) charts unscripted television's evolution from Candid Camera's 1948 premier through the first season of *The Apprentice* in 2003. Shedding light on the genre's progenitors, Nussbaum argues that the cinema verité PBS documentary series An American Family (1973), which chronicled the foibles of an affluent California family, established the reality soap opera format that MTV's *The Real World* (1992–present) later popularized. Nussbaum profiles the "amateur sociologists, gleeful manipulators and shameless voyeurs" who pioneered the genre, describing The Newlywed Game creator Chuck Barris as a braggadocious P.T. Barnum-esque figure with a tenuous allegiance to truth (one of his



memoirs implausibly claimed he'd been an assassin for the CIA). Detailed interviews with cast, crew, and producers provide juicy behindthe-scenes tidbits about the

making of such shows as Big Brother, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, and Survivor, whose inaugural season almost collapsed amid allegations that a camera operator attempted to tip the competition by dropping a Clif Bar for a contestant to find. The most shocking stories reveal the ethically dubious strategies producers use to gin up drama. For instance, one Bachelor producer recalls needling a bachelorette about her eating disorder until she cried, and then editing the footage to "make her look like a hysterical stalker." It's an entertaining and unsettling look at how reality conquered television. (June)

Balzac's Paris: The City as Human Comedy

Eric Hazan, trans. from the French by David Fernbach. Verso, \$24.95 (208p) ISBN 978-1-83976-725-8

Hazan (Paris in Turmoil), founder of

book publisher La Fabrique, presents a transportive study of the 19th-century French novelist Honoré de Balzac's relationship with Paris. Hazan notes that Balzac got to see much of the city during his peripatetic life, as he moved frequently in an effort to stay one step ahead of creditors, who sought repayment after his printing business failed in 1828, and even publishers, whom Balzac had sold purportedly finished manuscripts that in actuality "had been barely sketched out." Offering a detailed portrait of mid-19thcentury Paris rooted in passages from Balzac's magnum opus, The Human Comedy, Hazan suggests that the description of an exiled Polish nobleman's tawdry mansion, "built of stone decorated like a melon," is meant to represent "the luxury and bad taste of the nouveau riche established west of the Chaussée-d'Antin." As well, the various "students, aspiring writers, journalists, artists, [and] dreamy philosophers" who populate the Latin Quarter in Balzac's fiction attest to the neighborhood's contemporaneous reputation as the "territory of youth." Hazan's scrupulous readings of Balzac bring 19th-century Paris to life, shedding light on the social friction between old money and the nouveau riche that shaped the city in the wake of the 1830 July Revolution. Bibliophiles will savor this enchanting literary love letter to the City of Light. Photos. (June)

The Trolls of Wall Street: How the Outcasts and Insurgents Are **Hacking the Markets**

Nathaniel Popper. Dey Street, \$32.50 (352p) ISBN 978-0-06-320586-4

This incisive report from New York Times journalist Popper (Digital Gold) delves into the personalities behind the Reddit community WallStreetBets, which upended the financial world by kick-starting the 2021 GameStop stock market rally. Popper's account centers on finely observed profiles of Jaime Rogozinski, who founded the subreddit in 2012, and Jordan Zazzara, who joined as a moderator in 2016. Rogozinski is described as a finance professional from an affluent background who alienated himself from friends to hide his alcoholism and spent most nights posting on Reddit. Though Zazzara came from more

★ Miss May Does Not Exist: The Life and Work of Elaine May, Hollywood's **Hidden Genius**

Carrie Courogen, St. Martin's, \$30 (400p) ISBN 978-1-250-27922-4

ournalist Courogen (Go All the Way) delivers a vibrant biography of filmmaker Elaine May. Born in 1932,



May rose to prominence with the improv comedy act she developed with Mike Nichols. The duo became an overnight sensation after a 1958 television appearance, but May quit three years later, fearing the act had grown stale. She hadn't planned on becoming a director but was effectively forced to by Paramount after the studio only agreed to finance her first film, A New Leaf, which she wrote and was set to star in, on the condition that she direct so the studio could save money by paying her less than a male director. Depicting May as an auteur obsessed with creative control, Courogen describes how she allegedly hid film reels of the in-progress Mikey and Nicky to prevent studio interference. Courogen traces this tension between commercial concerns and May's uncompromising artistry through her major successes (she received acclaim for writing Heaven Can Wait and The Birdcage), as well as her infamous directorial bomb, Ishtar, and captures her larger-than-life spirit in lithe prose: "Elaine was a world-wise woman among children, with a mind that seemed to run only at high speed, a cruel wit that could be weaponized at a moment's notice, and an intimidating raw and unbalanced intelligence." This is a gem. Agent: Nicki Richesin, Dunow, Carlson & Lerner Literary. (June)

humble means, having dropped out of community college and struggled to hold down a steady job, he felt a similar sense of isolation and primarily interacted with people online. Popper covers the financial mechanics of the GameStop rally and Zazzara's successful effort to oust Rogozinski from WallStreetBets amid escalating discontent regarding his use of the community for self-promotion, but the author's main focus is on the subreddit's odious culture. While other journalists have portrayed WallStreetBets as the David to Wall Street's Goliath, Popper depicts the subreddit as a refuge for young men starved of connection whose disaffection deteriorated during the Trump presidency into a wellspring of racism and misogyny. Vividly reported and remarkably evenhanded, this stands out as one of the more critical assessments of the GameStop saga. Agent: Pilar Queen, UTA. (June)

Shareworthy: Advertising That Creates Powerful Connections Through Storytelling

Robin Landa and Greg Braun. Columbia Business School, \$35 (264p) ISBN 978-0-231-20826-0

In this useful guide, Landa (Strategic Creativity), an advertising professor at Kean University, and Braun, the retired chief creative officer of the advertising agency Commonwealth/McCann, expound on how to create effective corporate promotional campaigns. According to the authors, successful ads "are authentic to the brand's values" and should "change conversations" or "inform people about important issues." Emphasizing the need to address consumer sentiment, Landa and Braun share how Lysol overcame misgivings about whether its new laundry sanitizer would be too harsh by hosting a two-week "hospital for stuffed animals" that invited families to bring their children's toys for cleaning and

repair. Recommendations for crafting "advertising stories" are pragmatic and specific (a good ad might include "an inciting incident that requires the protagonist to change" and should make viewers laugh, cry, or cringe), but the book's highlights are the interviews with industry professionals that take readers inside campaigns for Hyundai, Visa, and other major brands. For instance, ad executive Susan Young recounts how she created a Microsoft commercial showcasing a company program that helps women patent their inventions. Advertising professionals will want to pick this up. Photos. (June)

★ The Garden Against Time: In Search of a Common Paradise Olivia Laing. Norton, \$27.99 (336p)

"A garden is a time capsule, as well as a portal out of time," according to this searching study. Critic Laing (Everybody) examines how historical British gardens reflect the periods in which they were designed and contemporaneous understandings of paradise on Earth. Some



ISBN 978-0-393-88200-1

tracts were "founded on exclusion and exploitation," Laing contends, describing how aspiring aristocrat William Middleton relied on funds from his American slave plan-

tations to build a garden on his Shrubland Hall property in the late 1700s, and how numerous estates in the early 19th century evicted entire villages to create the impression they were surrounded by untouched wilderness. Others had more inclusive, utopian ambitions. For instance, Gerrard Winstanley, the leader of a "breakaway sect of the English Civil War" called the Diggers, pursued his communitarian vision of society by growing carrots and corn that were shared among "all who laboured on it." The lyrical prose emphasizes the ways in which gardens connect individuals across history (Laing notes that the daughters of a famous Victorian socialist minister who once owned Laing's

house likely walked past the same mulberry tree that still stands in her garden), leading the author to muse that her attraction to cultivating plants stems from wanting "to move into a different understanding of time: the kind of time that moves in spirals or cycles, pulsing between rot and fertility, light and darkness." This is well worth seeking out. (June)

Why Would Feminists Trust the Police?: A Tangled History of **Resistance and Complicity**

Leah Cowan. Verso, \$24.95 trade paper (240p) ISBN 978-1-80429-303-4

Political analyst Cowan (Border Nation) makes an impassioned case for U.K. feminists to take up the cause of police abolition and overthrow "carceral feminism." She traces the history of the latter—a "pro-police and prison-forward" approach to women's issues—through 19th-century colonialism and upper-class suffragism, and into more contemporary manifestations like 1990s "stranger danger," the #MeToo movement (which was dominated by calls for punishment), and recent advocacy for prosecution-based solutions to sexual assault. As an alternative, Cowan spotlights a "non-carceral" feminism spearheaded by women of color in the U.K.'s Caribbean and Asian communities throughout the 20th century; these efforts-mainly comprising mutual aid groups—bolstered women's power rather than seeking punishment or extra policing. Delving into the recent fracturing of U.K. feminism along ideological lines relating to women's need for protection (including high-profile debates around the rights of trans people, whom prominent right-leaning feminists portray as a threat to women), Cowan makes a strong case that "carceral feminism" promotes fear for women's safety in order to drum up support for law enforcement, which, when the experiences of trans women and women of color are taken into account, actually harms more women than it helps. It's a persuasive call for feminists everywhere to reconsider how women's wellbeing is used to justify oppression. (June)

. **Any Person Is the Only Self: Essays** Elisa Gabbert. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$18 trade paper (240p) ISBN 978-0-374-60589-6

Poet Gabbert (The Unreality of Memory)

muses on the literary life in this invigorating collection. The opening essay celebrates libraries' "recently returned" carts, which Gabbert enjoys perusing as an alternative to recommendation algorithms and cultural tastemakers. In "Somethingness (or, Why Write?)," Gabbert surveys how authors have answered the eponymous question (Vladimir Nabokov aimed to bridge reality and fantasy through fiction, while Franz Kafka wanted "to cast out invasive thoughts") and concludes that she's motivated to write by the desire to improve the quality of her thinking. The lively commentary offers fresh takes on classic literature, as when Gabbert quips that rereading The Bell Jar made her realize that "Sylvia Plath doesn't understand how paragraphs work." She found Robert Louis Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde more profound than expected after reading it for the first time, suggesting the novel works "as a metaphor for aging or addiction or illness, the approach of death as a loss of the self." Elsewhere, Gabbert discusses how journaling shapes one's identity, how class hierarchy plays out in various novels' party scenes, and the relationship between truth and fiction. Gabbert is an original thinker, and the literary analysis is refreshingly unstuffy. Bookworms will appreciate these intelligent essays. Agent: Monika Woods, Triangle House. (June)

The Island: War and Belonging in Auden's England

Nicholas Jenkins. Belknap, \$35 (656p) ISBN 978-0-674-02522-6

This exacting study from Jenkins, an English professor at Stanford University, traces the artistic development of poet W.H. Auden (1907–1973) from his first stabs at poetry in 1922 to his departure from England in 1937. The horrors of WWI loom large in Auden's poetry, Jenkins contends, suggesting that his description of a mouse hiding from a raptor in "The Owl" is meant to evoke a soldier hunted by an enemy sniper. Jenkins's analysis tends toward the psychoanalytic, as when he expounds on how a phallic reference to a subject's "adult pen" reflects Freud's notion that "the fetish is an everyday object," and how the romance described in "Before this loved one..."

conforms with "the conventional Freudian idea that the homosexual falls narcissistically in love with an image of himself at an earlier stage in his sexual development." Contrary to Auden's later reputation as an urbane cosmopolitan, Jenkins argues that the young poet gradually turned from modernist iconoclasm to a conservative, nationalist sensibility steeped in Old English prosody. On more than one occasion, Jenkins devotes several paragraphs to unpacking a single twoword phrase in Auden's poetry, a level of depth that will strain to carry the interest of general readers. This is best suited for literary scholars. (June)

One Step Sideways, Three Steps Forward: One Woman's Path to **Becoming a Biologist**

B. Rosemary Grant. Princeton Univ., \$29.95 (272p) ISBN 978-0-691-26059-4

Evolutionary biologist Grant (40 Years

of Evolution) reflects on the challenges she's faced as a woman in science in this inspiring memoir. She traces the origins of her vocation to her 1940s upbringing in Northern England, where she discovered fossils in Arnside's "carboniferous limestone cliffs" and learned about birds from her family's gardener. Though college entrance exam administrators initially denied Grant's request to take the test (they claimed her tuition would be better spent on her brothers' educations), they relented in the face of her persistence and she went on to study zoology and genetics at the University of Edinburgh. After marrying biologist Peter Grant in the early 1960s, she postponed her PhD studies to raise their two daughters. She never lost her passion for biology, however, and even hired a babysitter every Monday so she could catch up on research trends at the library. (She eventually earned her PhD from Sweden's Uppsala

University in 1985.) Grant provides a detailed account of her groundbreaking fieldwork on Darwin's finches in the Galápagos, which revealed that interbreeding between species is a significant contributor to species differentiation, and her perspective on how she balanced motherhood and a pioneering scientific career uplifts. The result is an intimate look at a life spent in dogged pursuit of scientific knowledge. Photos. (June)

Religion/Spirituality

Second-Class Saints: Black Mormons and the Struggle for **Racial Equality**

Matthew L. Harris. Oxford Univ., \$39.99 (480p) ISBN 978-0-19-769571-5

Historian Harris (Watchman on the *Tower*) provides a fine-grained chronicle of the deliberations and pressures that led the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints to repeal its ban on the ordination of Black men and the presence of Black couples in Mormon temples in 1978. Focusing on the period between 1949, when the prohibition was canonized (it had been church policy since 1852) and the ban's repeal, Harris maps out the clashes between radical church leaders who preached that Black people were the "cursed" descendents of Cain, and the ban's opponents, including Black Mormons, civil rights activists, and LDS administrators eager to salvage the church's public image. Secular pressures mounted in the 1960s as a federal civil rights investigation looked into Brigham Young University's racist admissions policies, though Harris contends that such initiatives only caused LDS leaders to retrench. Ultimately, the church's hand was forced when president Spencer Kimball pushed to open temples in racially diverse countries such as Brazil, culminating in his "revelation" that the time had come to "admit Black people into [the church's] ranks as full, functioning members." Harris studiously dissects how the church's legacy of racism has persisted after the ban's repeal, noting that leaders have recently sought to "distance the church from antiblack teachings" without directly repudiating them. It's a nuanced account of the Mormon

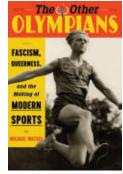
★ The Other Olympians: Fascism, Queerness, and the Making of **Modern Sports**

Michael Waters. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$30 (368p) ISBN 978-0-374-60981-8

ex testing of athletes has its roots in the Nazi influ-

ence on the 1936 Olympic games, according to this revelatory debut investigation. Journalist Waters recaps the early years of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), a subdivision of the International Olympic Committee established in 1913 to settle such "technical debates" as "how to... draw track lines." When the Olympics sought to absorb the Women's World Games in the 1920s, the IAAF got involved in its regulatory capacity; ostensibly concerned about women's "health," IAAF officials suggested shutting down the Women's Games' "masculine" sports like track and field. Other narrative strands trace the German Olympic Committee's 1932 takeover by the Nazis and the early 1930s female-to-male medical transitions of several record-holding European athletes in women's track and field. All this comes to a head with the 1936 Berlin games, when paranoia over men participating in women's sports, promulgated by Nazi propagandists railing against the highprofile athletes' gender transitions, prompted the IAAF to require female Olympians to "prove" their gender by being physically examined, a policy which continued until the 1990s and was succeeded by genetic and hormone testing. Waters's propulsive storytelling is bursting with insight, especially into the lives of trans men during the interwar period. The result is an eye-opening look at how

fascist philosophy undergirds gender regulatory regimes in sports. (June)



church's uneven progress toward social justice. (July)

Disbelief: The Origins of Atheism in a Religious Species

Will Gervais. Prometheus, \$29.95 (432p) ISBN 978-1-63388-924-8

How, and why, did atheism emerge within a "peculiarly religious species," asks evolutionary psychologist Gervais in his comprehensive debut inquiry. To answer the question, he first catalogs the cognitive adaptations (for example, the brain's ability to embrace "minimally counterintuitive" narratives that twist an idea just enough to make it memorable without provoking disbelief) and cultural values (an emphasis on teamwork and morality) that helped religion flourish in the first place. Yet, he explains, sufficiently stable societies foster a sense of "existential security" that can render religion "motivationally impotent" and pave the way for atheism. Such stability is often precipitated by strong nonreligious social

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institutions, Gervais suggests, noting that Scandinavian countries, which have good public health and welfare programs, tend to be among the world's most secular. Gervais distinguishes between atheists who eschew belief in God entirely and those who retain some degree of belief while forgoing church attendance and other observable indicators of religious identity. Even as religion's "overt markers" disappear, he contends, its influence persists in the form of morals that have been instilled over thousands of years. Gervais approaches his subject with abundant intellectual curiosity and grounds his study in accessible discussions of evolutionary theory and research on present-day increases in disbelief. It amounts to a trenchant study of a noteworthy cultural phenomenon. (July)

The Shape of My Eyes: A Memoir of Race, Faith, and Finding Myself Dave Gibbons. Worthy, \$27 (256p)

ISBN 978-1-546-00323-6

Leadership coach Gibbons debuts with a sincere account of the challenges of growing up between cultures. Born to a Korean mother and an American father in Maryland, Gibbons worshipped American culture and was eager to fit in, despite looking "100% Korean." After a fire destroyed their home when Gibbons was 10, the family moved to Arizona. There, they entered a church community of "mostly blue-collar hardcore fundamentalist believers," sparking Gibbons's complicated relationship with conservative Christianity, which peaked when he attended a Christian college whose prohibitions against interracial dating were "absurdly inconsistent with what I knew about God." Souring on Christian fundamentalism, Gibbons broke with the church as an adult and in 1994 helped found Newsong Church in Irvine, Calif., as a "haven" for those who felt like outsiders from Christianity. While the sections on Newsong's founding are somewhat rushed and a climactic revelation pertaining to Gibbons's family may leave readers with a sense of whiplash, the questions about what it means to be both a Christian and part of a "third culture"—not entirely Korean and not entirely American—are salient. This intrigues. (July)

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FICTION

★ The Goddess of Warsaw Lisa Barr. Harper, ISBN 978-0-06-338261-9, May

NONFICTION

The Age of Magical Overthinking: Notes on Modern Irrationality Amanda Montell. One Signal, ISBN 978-1-6680-0797-6, Apr.

★ The Infernal Machine: A True Story of Dynamite, Terror, and the Rise of the Modern Detective Steven Johnson. Crown, ISBN 978-0-593-44395-8, May

An Unfinished Love Story: A Personal History of the 1960s Doris Kearns Goodwin. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 978-1-9821-0866-3, Apr.

Kingdom Kindness: A Movement to Bring Calm to the Culture

Tony Evans. Bethany House, \$22.99 (160p) ISBN 978-0-7642-4199-4

Today's "virus of meanness" must be combated with faith and kindness, according to this impassioned outing from pastor Evans (Kingdom Politics). Reminding readers that God "calls us to love others for the glory of His name," Evans describes how small, tangible actions like mowing someone's lawn can cumulatively help to repair a culture dominated by a "me-first mentality." By practicing such kindnesses on a



daily basis, Christians can ultimately shape a world that centers "God's glory and the advancement of His kingdom agenda" while also reaping divine blessings themselves. Evans brings

plenty of his usual charisma to this upbeat reminder to do good even when it's inconvenient, though the profusion of strained metaphors sometimes confuse more than clarify ("Far too many Christians resemble the moon. We enjoy our lit side and want to shine.... But we also have a dark side. The dark side reeks of selfishness, secrets, and scandal. To avoid showing anyone our dark side, we wear a mask"). Still, it's a solid resource on the challenges and rewards of loving one's neighbor. (July)

Children's/YA

Picture Books

★ The Boy and the Elephant

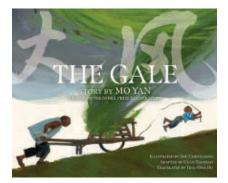
Freya Blackwood. Random House Studio, \$19.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-593-70766-1

This dreamy wordless fantasy by Kate Greenaway Medalist Blackwood opens with a series of vignettes that show a pale-skinned child climbing out of bed, donning a school uniform, then setting off for a starkly rendered city school, braving sidewalk crowds and sitting alone among throngs of children at recess. After school, the child takes two bowls out to a cramped patch of trees next door to their home, where they greet a friend: a stand of interwoven trees that make up the figure of an elephant. A spread shows the trees through the seasons, the child beneath, suggesting the bond's constancy. When a "SOLD" sign goes up in front of the grove's lot and big white X's mark the trees, all meant to be felled, decisive action is called for, and a middleof-the-night outing catalyzes a miraculous landscape shift. Blackwood's pencil and oil spreads lend softness and a sense of liveliness to the work; the child's small, often-solitary figure and the elephant's patient frame seem warm and tangible throughout this quiet tale of triumph over destruction. Background characters are portrayed with various skin tones. Ages 4–8. (Aug.)

Enola's Best Friend

Katie Kordesh. Rocky Pond, \$18.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-5936-2047-2

In this read for Sophie's Squash fans, Enola's grandmother, Mimi, radiates affirmation—whenever her granddaughter visits, "She let Enola stay up late. She made the best snacks," and she builds a sofa fort for Enola to sleep in. Grandma Mimi doesn't even blink when Enola becomes enamored of her first-ever hot dog and decides to make the "perfectly friend-shaped" comestible a chum. Acrylic ink and watercolor compositions, rendered in beachy colors and crisp lines, show impressively tattooed Grandma Mimi merrily obliging her granddaughter in the swimming pool, on the golf course,



Adapted from a novella of the same name, Nobel laureate Mo Yan's picture book adaptation is movingly illustrated by Zhu (reviewed on this page).

and even at bingo, where Hot Dog wins twice. But as the day draws to a close, Grandma's pet dog, Hoagie, finally devours Hot Dog in one gulp. "HOW COULD YOU LET THIS HAPPEN!" wails a redfaced and tearful Enola, refusing to forgive either her grandmother or the hound. Though the ending feels a bit drawn out, Kordesh (Sam with Ants in His Pants), making her solo debut, pushes a goofy premise far enough to establish an unconditional affection between generations and species, as well as allow Enola to credibly find her way back to relationships that clearly mean the world to her. Enola and Mimi are portrayed with pale skin. Ages 4-8. Agent: Rebecca Sherman, Writers House. (Aug.)

The Gale

Mo Yan, adapted by Guan Xiaoxiao, trans. from the Chinese by Ying-Hwa Hu, illus. by Zhu Chengliang. Simon & Schuster, \$18.99 (40p) ISBN 978-1-66593-062-8

At seven years old, a child goes for the first time to collect satintail grass with their grandfather, Yeye, in this picture book debut from Nobel laureate Mo Yan, adapted from a short story of the same name. A low mist hangs over the quiet journey as the pair make the long trek to a familiar meadow, which "Yeye cuts down every summer." Muted tones show sunrise, while a "nonsense" tune that Yeye sings, "happy, yet sad," sets the journey's mood. An innocent day of cutting grass, chasing grasshoppers, and napping under an awning takes a turn when heavy clouds loom: "Black clouds mean wind," Yeye says knowingly. The stoic figure keeps his cool as a tornado touches down in the distance ("Just wind," he says). But tears

form in his eyes after the gale scatters their crop and sends his grandchild briefly skyward, a moment shown in a breathtaking sideways spread that renders the grass in a whirling figure eight. Resigned, the youth and Yeye turn back. In sparse, pensive prose, the narrator muses on themes of endurance and acceptance in uncontrollable circumstances. Movement-filled acrylic on cardboard illustrations from Zhu (What I Like Most), meanwhile, steadily convey the Chinese-cued characters' experiences in the changing landscape. Ages 4–8. (Aug.)

Quill the Forest Keeper

Marije Tolman, trans. from the Dutch by David Colmer. Levine Querido, \$18.99 (32p) ISBN 978-1-64614-452-5

Around a stove, hedgehog grandchildren gather, reading cozily amid the smell of hot blueberry pie. "Grandpa, can you tell us the story about the Terrible Rush Era again?" one asks. Grandpa gladly acquiesces, recalling a time when "everything and everyone had to be higher, faster, further, bigger, prettier, more!" Tolman (Little Fox) fills a photographic image of a meadow with illustrated creatures: rhinoceroses moving pell-mell on their hind feet, a tapir and peacock running in the fray, a flock of red birds flying above. A lone hedgehog in an orange safety vest plods the other way: "Quill loved to feel the wind between his prickles. And warm sunbeams on his black nose." Every day, the hedgehog cleans up the running animals' trash, rendered as barely-there transparent shapes. At last, overwhelmed, he collapses and sleeps all winter. When he wakes, the fellow creatures have recognized his work and shared the burden—and they offer another surprise, too. It's a story about the environment, but also about community, seeing that help is needed, and pitching in. The animal characters' engaging expressiveness, their shy smiles and affectionate gestures, buoy this winsome story and give it warmth. Ages 4-8. Author's agent: Luciënne van der Leije, Querido. (Aug.)

Tiny Jenny: Little Fairy, Big Trouble Briony May Smith. Random House/Schwartz, \$18.99 (48p) ISBN 978-0-5936-5047-9

One of the hatching eggs in Mr. and Mrs. Wren's cozy nest is incongruously bright pink, and a small, human-like continued on p. 58

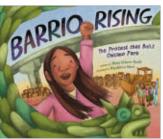
PICTURE BOOKS + PROTESTS

Eight children's titles confront discrimination and injustice.

* Barrio Rising: The Protest That Built **Chicano Park**

María Dolores Águila, illus. by Magdalena Mora. Dial, \$18.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-5934-6207-2

In this activist picture book, a child living in San Diego's Barrio Logan vividly narrates, in English and Spanish, a story of individual and collective strength. In their Chicane neighborhood, which now sits adjacent to a freeway and a junkyard, Elena



and Mami encounter jacaranda blossoms, close-knit neighbors, and a tiendita, as well as vehicle fumes and noise. Elena is excited to see construction, believing it's the start of a long-requested park, but the community soon learns that the workers

are breaking ground on a planned police station. Defying "men in hard hats, and police with squawking radios," the residents join hands and surround the equipment, and the bravery of a protesting neighbor inspires everyone to stand their ground—until their efforts, step by step, result in community-built Chicano Park. In a powerful work that celebrates community engagement at any age, Mora's pencil, charcoal, watercolor, and digital illustrations contrast hard-edged concrete and metal with cloudlike jacaranda blossoms and vivid hand-rendered murals. Background characters are portrayed with various skin tones. A history of the park and an author's note conclude. Ages 4-8. (June)

I See Color: An Affirmation and Celebration of Our **Diverse World**

Valerie Bolling and Kailei Pew, illus. by Laylie Frazier. HarperCollins, \$19.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-0632-3426-0

Acknowledging how "not seeing a person's color erases a big part of who that person is," Bolling and Pew highlight nearly two dozen nuanced tones in this intersectional work. An introductory page calls out how the misguided idea "I don't see color" ignores "the experiences of people of color, their humanness, and the everyday effects of racism." Freeverse text subsequently establishes that "color is history./ Color is our story./ I see color" before segueing into concise descriptions of activists, leaders, and allies. On one page, "SMOKY QUARTZ" introduces Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich "writing the words that would change history," while "WARM BEIGE" references Sue Ko Lee "striking against poor working conditions and demanding higher pay." Frazier's digital drawings lean into emotive portraiture, while backgrounds hint at the context behind the presented figures' actions, throughout this high-level work that underscores "all that can be achieved together." Authors' notes and more about

featured activists conclude. Secondary characters are portrayed in fanciful monochrome palettes. Ages 4-8. (June)

Let Us March On! James Weldon Johnson and the **Silent Protest Parade**

Yohuru Williams and Michael G. Long, illus. by Xia Gordon. Atheneum, \$18.99 (48p) ISBN 978-1-6659-0278-6

A "man of words" envisions a silent demonstration in this moving account of the Silent Protest Parade, a 1917 Manhattan civil rights march. In free verse that creates a rhythmic tug, a third-person narrative introduces lawyer and poet James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938), whose "Lift Every Voice and Sing" became known as the Black national anthem. Early lines explain that "white people had long hurt Black people," and how increased attacks—further discussed in back matter led Johnson to call for a march in New York City: "A big protest/ on the biggest avenue/ in the biggest city/ in the



country," featuring "just serious,/ somber/ silence." Explaining that silence can sometimes be more powerful than words, he conceives an idea that results in a march of 10,000, including hundreds of silent children alongside adults, all protesting the hatred and violence. Crisp prose from Williams and Long is matched by Gordon's

high-contrast digital illustrations in browns, oranges, and yellows, which mimic chalk and monoprint textures. An authors' note provides further context. Ages 4–8. (May)

Mamie Tape Fights to Go to School

Traci Huahn, illus. by Michelle Jing Chan. Crown, \$19.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-5936-4402-7

In a carefully researched account, Huahn traces a Chinese girl's attempts to attend school in 1884 California. As part of the only Chinese family in her San Francisco-area neighborhood, Mamie Tape (1876–1972) and her siblings grow up playing with neighborhood children, and "I thought school would be the same." When she and her mother arrive, however, they are stopped by the principal and told, "Your kind is not welcome here." Tape's parents push against San Francisco's policy excluding Chinese children from its schools. The saying "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step" repeats as the family takes step after step to ensure Tape's education. While the school board keeps institutions segregated, the family wins the right for Tape to attend classes—"because of the steps I'd taken, there was now one public school where we were welcome." A subdued palette of brown, maroon, and slate blue dominates Chan's sometimes-wooden digital illustrations,

which focus on classroom scenes as well as the Tape family's well-appointed home. An author's note and bibliography conclude. Background characters read as white. Ages 4–8. (May)

Free to Learn: How Alfredo Lopez Fought for the Right to Go to School

Cynthia Levinson, illus. by Mirelle Ortega. Atheneum, \$18.99 (48p) ISBN 978-1-6659-0427-8

A family works to ensure their son can attend school in the U.S. in this fictionalized account of a 1970s educational battle to secure education for undocumented students in a Texas district. Alfredo Lopez (b. 1949) is looking forward to second grade, but on the first day of school, he does not find "migas for breakfast, fresh laces for his sneakers, or a sharp number two pencil." Instead, he's kept home, waving to peers each day. In a flashback, the text outlines the protagonist's birth in Mexico, his parents' departure to find work in Texas and his eventually joining them there, and, after a year of classes in the U.S., a new state law: "If you do not have proper documents,/ you are illegal./ So,/ You cannot go to school." Without telling Lopez, his parents risk deportation for a court case claiming the law as unconstitutional. In Ortega's digital illustrations, inviting schoolroom images give way to the subdued brown palette of an intimidating courtroom setting. Background characters are portrayed with various skin tones. More about those involved, an author's note, and additional information conclude. Ages 4–8. (Apr.)

Signs of Hope: The Revolutionary Art of Sister **Corita Kent**

Mara Rockliff, illus. by Melissa Sweet. Abrams, \$19.99 (40p) ISBN 978-1-4197-5221-6

Just right for young creatives, this optimistic biography of artist Corita Kent (1918-1986) shimmers with the figure's energy and sense of possibility. The story launches with an art lesson explained by an unidentified narrator: "Sister Corita teaches us to SEE/ what everybody sees/ but doesn't see." Images depicting a group viewing the world through a "finder"—a piece of cardboard with a square removed—and experimenting with art in a classroom are interspersed with hand-rendered typography that quotes Kent's insights ("The commonplace is not worthless, there is simply lots of it"). Yellows, pinks, and oranges dominate Sweet's mixed-media collage illustrations, which pivot to b&w to portray a scene describing "injustice, inequality, prejudice, poverty" and back into color to convey Kent's eventual renown and departure from the church. Combining pop art and protest, the result is a joyous nexus of experimentation and creative responsibility that details a "small and quiet" figure whose art remains "big and loud." Creators' notes, an artist timeline, and a list of quotation sources conclude. Background characters are portrayed with various skin tones. Ages 4–8. (Apr.)

The Bridges Yuri Built: How Yuri Kochiyama **Marched Across Movements**

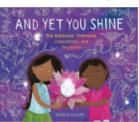
Kai Naima Williams, illus. by Anastasia M. Williams. Kaepernick, \$19.99 (40p) ISBN 978-1-9605-7100-7

Williams, making her picture book debut with a personalfeeling work about her great-grandmother, traces how Japanese American activist Yuri Kochiyama (1921–2014) became a civil rights ally, documentarian, and organizer. Born in San Pedro, Calif., Kochiyama was 20 when the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor occurred, after which her father was violently questioned and her family was sent to an Arkansas incarceration camp. There, she met Nisei soldier Bill Kochiyama and began corresponding with him when he went off to war. When other soldiers mentioned feeling lonely, the letter-writing campaign she organized reached thousands. After the war, the couple moved to Harlem, where Yuri joined the civil rights movement ("She knew how it felt to be denied freedom because of the color of her skin"). She attended meetings and protests, housed anyone passing through, and wrote letters to political prisoners, per a lengthy author's note, "making connections between movements and identifying common sources of oppression." Airbrush-style illustrations incorporate images of letters and envelopes, emphasizing the power of Yuri's correspondence in her activism. An author's note concludes. Ages 5–9. (Apr.)

And Yet You Shine: The Kohinoor Diamond. **Colonization, and Resistance**

Supriya Kelkar. Candlewick, \$18.99 (48p) ISBN 978-1-5362-2829-8

Lyrically told and dimensionally visualized in textural collage illustrations, Kelkar's tale—addressed to the world-famous Kohinoor Diamond—follows its centuries-long journey via two children who witness the historical events. In a vivid beginning scene, the children see "you sink in sandy sediment...// until a pair



of brown hands/ sifts through the grains/ and you emerge.// Look at your shine!" The gem's "shine" becomes a repeating motif of an object undimmed across a history of bloodshed and oppression. The diamond first sits "in the Peacock Throne, seven long years in the

making" before being looted, passed around via violent acts, and eventually taken and reshaped "to become a symbol/ of the power of your colonizers." Ending text considers the diamond's being told it "should look different to belong" and its "being cut down, torn down,/ like a piece of property just passing hands," hinting at a long human history extending beyond a single object—one that continues to shine. Extensive back matter includes "The Kohinoor Diamond: A History of Looting and Theft," plus details about colonization and stolen artifacts. Ages 8–12. (Apr.)

continued from p. 55

hand protrudes from it. "Oh dear!" says Blackbird, "Does this mean the fairies are coming back?" But the wingless creature that hatches out isn't a full fairy, and the kindly Wrens and their feathered offspring embrace her as one of their own, naming her Tiny Jenny. But her innate exuberance—"Well done, me!" she declares when she crashes to the ground after an unsuccessful attempt at flightalarms the Wrens' animal neighbors. Upon Owl's suggestion that she look into her possible fairy background, Tiny Jenny runs away to join the gossamer forest beings, only to discover that they're actually insouciant bullies ("They didn't forage for food or gather twigs or sing songs. They just... smashed and stole stuff"). Tiny Jenny is indignant but also torn—does she belong anywhere? Smith (The Mermaid Moon) combines elegantly rendered mixed-media images with whip-smart humor and an irrepressible protagonist—the result is a fractured fairy story with a distinctly contemporary sensibility. Tiny Jenny is rendered with pale skin; the fairies are shown with a range of skin tones. Ages 4–8. Agent: Charlie Bowden, Pickled Ink. (Aug.)

We Are Definitely Human

X. Fang. Tundra, \$18.99 (48p) ISBN 978-1-7748-8202-3

When their flying saucer crash-lands near Mr. and Mrs. Li's rural home at midnight, a trio of aliens tries their darndest to convince the couple that "we are DEFINITELY human." The three clearly resemble blue chess pieces with ovoid heads and huge eyes, but instead of challenging their story or sending them elsewhere, Mr. Li "did what kind humans do. He offered to help." The two welcome the aliens as guestsreferring to them as "y'all" and going along their stories of being "from Europe." (Asked what they do there, they reply, "I make business... I play sports ball... I wear hat.") After the group visits a local general store for repair equipment, neighbors prove curious but equally hospitable, and a barn-raising-style party ensues (one of the aliens applies a hot dog to its head). Digitally colored graphite tableaus lend a slyly funny vibe, and what starts out as a fishout-of-water comedy becomes a close encounter of straightforward acceptance. "Wherever they went next," writes Fang

(Dim Sum Palace) of the aliens as they fly away, "they would remember the kindness of humans, and do what kind humans dooffer help to anyone who needs it." Human characters are portrayed with various skin tones. Ages 4-8. Agent: Erica Rand Silverman, Stimola Literary. (Aug.)

Fiction

Rise of Pegasus (School for **Magical Monsters #1**)

Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, illus. by Toby Allen. Aladdin, \$17.99 (96p) ISBN 978-1-66591-771-1

Shenanigans ensue as mythical creatures attend school for the first time in this cozy chapter book series launch by collaborators Holub and Williams (the Little Goddess Girls series). Young Pegasus is excited for his first day at the School for Magical Monsters, where each student will discover their inherent magical power and learn how to control it. More than that, he's looking forward to making new friends. Once he arrives, Pegasus meets a courageous boy named Zeus as well as myriad other mythical creatures like himself, including Griffin, Minotaur, Hippocampus, Cyclops, and Sphinx. When the class is divided into groups, Pegasus takes the lead on their magical drawing assignment—but Pegasus's idea doesn't go according to plan, leading to personal disappointment and internal shame. Still, Pegasus continues to encounter surprising obstacles and adventures, eventually discovering his own innate power—and netting himself a trusted companion. Engaging language combines with elements of Greek mythology to present a lighthearted, charming story of self-discovery, new experiences, and open-mindedness. U.K. illustrator Allen's softly lined art depicts Pegasus's adventures throughout. Includes a glossary, discussion questions, and an author's note. Ages 5-8. (July)

Welcome to Scare School (Scare School Diaries #1)

Jarrett Lerner. Aladdin, \$17.99 (144p) ISBN 978-1-665-92209-8; \$6.99 paper ISBN 978-1-6659-2208-1

This frightfully fun book by Lerner (the Nat the Cat series) collects all the paranormal creatures of the night into a boarding

school setting. Quivering with dread, Bash, an insecure young ghost, enters Scare School, fearful that he will fail the classes meant to test his ghostly skills, including flying, invisibility, and intangibility. Bash isn't as proficient as his talented older sister Bella, and worries he'll be doomed to haunt small-time locations like closets or dresser drawers as a result. He's surprised to discover he (mostly) enjoys Scare School: the headless headmaster is kind and his roommate, Itsy Spider, is his first real friend. Still, the classes are just as difficult—and the teachers are just as fearsome—as Bash anticipated. Even with amateur hypnotist Itsy as his study buddy, Bash struggles. But while he fumbles his attempt to use his powers to rescue Itsy from bullies, Bash's actions provide a distraction that allows Itsy to scurry to safety. Via Bash's "TOTALLY PRIVATE" journal entries, Lerner utilizes howling humor and occasional b&w comics to depict timid Bash, who—with help from his new friends and an unexpected source—faces his fears and (mostly) succeeds. Ages 5–8. (July)

Welcome to Camp Croak! (Ghost Scouts #1)

Taylor Dolan. Union Square, \$6.99 paper (160p) ISBN 978-1-4549-5-4705

In the spirit of Lemony Snicket, Lexie-"the very best number one storyteller in Shreveport"—warns readers that they might be scared to learn that paranormal entities are real. She then chronicles the harrowing tale of how Grams signed her up for Happy Hollow Camp for Joyful Boys and Girls. Yet "somehow, something went very wrong": rather than dropping her off at Happy Hollow Camp, Lexie's gram leaves her at Camp Croak, a summer program for supernatural creatures run by a three-headed witch. At first, Lexie is scared she'll be eaten for dinner. Much to the mortal human's relief, Lexie instead befriends her cabinmates: a werewolf named Emmy LouLou, a skeleton named Bébé, a small ghost named Sweet Boo, and a zombie named Mary Shelley. Together, they earn Camp Croak badges, play games, and learn about their innate skills and powers both supernatural and mundane. Dolan's quickwitted first-person narration highlights Lexie's vigilance, creativity, and deepening love for her new friends. Intermittent lists of rules, ingredients, and more are rendered

via scratchy black, white, and yellow illustrations throughout, adding to the creepy atmosphere. Character skin colors match the white of the page. Ages 6–10. (*July*)

. Picture Purrfect (Bodega Cats #1) Hilda Eunice Burgos, illus. by Siara Faison. Holt, \$16.99 (144p) ISBN 978-1-25090-374-7

Burgos (The Cot in the Living Room) centers the relationship between a stray cat and a Dominican American boy who loves to draw in this family-oriented series opener about the bonds that make life sweet. On a cold winter night, Miguel Rosado rescues a hungry black-and-white cat outside of Blanca y Roja Bodega, his family's Washington Heights store. Urging from elderly Tío Diego ("Doesn't Miguel need a pet? Especially since the poor child doesn't have any siblings")



prompts Mami and Papi to reluctantly allow Miguel to keep the cat, which he names Lolo. Lolo happily settles in as the bodega's mouser and runs off feline interlopers, and

Miguel decorates his litterbox with drawings. He even creates comic books about Lolo despite Mami and Papi's protests that art is a waste of time. Miguel soon tricks his parents into permitting him to join an art club rather than the afterschool science club they'd prefer, but his subterfuge ends in near disaster. Faison's cozy illustrations, depicting Miguel, Lolo, and the surrounding community, buoy this lively portrayal of the many forms that bravery, kindness, and connection can take. Ages 7–10. (July)

The Great Zoodini

PJ Gardner, illus. by David Mottram. HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray, \$19.99 (208p) ISBN 978-0-06-313471-3

Silliness reigns in this caper about a lonely, fame-hungry fox who finds belonging within his reluctantly chosen family. Ever since his first skulk—humans who adopted him as a baby—broke his heart and surrendered him to an animal rescue, fennec fox Zoodini has lived up to his selfgiven moniker, doing his best to escape from any zoo he's taken to. Luckily his trusted sidekick Hoppy—a stuffed rabbit whose voice only Zoodini can hearsupports his efforts. When the duo is transferred to Twin Buttes Animal Sanctuary and Drive-In Movie Theater in Colorado, Hoppy thinks they've found a forever home with a group comprising an orangutan, tortoise, otter, flamingo, and grizzly cub who host game and movie nights. But financial troubles, miscommunications, and human family grudges waylay any potential home sweet home. Though some of the action, including Zoodini's cellphone use, strains credulity, Gardner (the Horace & Bunwinkle series) evokes belly laughs via clever naming conventions and incorporation of plot elements from musicals such as Grease. Readers will want to stay along for the ride and feel-good finale, ferried by a bighearted crew. Final art not seen by PW. Ages 8-12. (July)

I'm from Here Too

Kashmira Sheth. Peachtree, \$17.99 (288p) ISBN 978-1-68263-606-0

In this moving verse novel by Sheth (Nina Soni, Perfect Hostess), a 13-year-old boy navigates loss and threats of violence. Anoop is aware that his brown skin and patka headwrap make him stand out ("I am a first-generation Indian American Sikh,/ surrounded by mostly white students./ A brown crystal of sugar,/ in a bowl of white sugar"). The protection afforded by Jacob, "my friend from first grade," ends as they enter eighth grade; they don't have any classes together, which makes Anoop anxious. "Without him standing by me, for me, I feel vulnerable," especially when he remembers how a recent attack on Sikhs in nearby Oak Creek, Wis., resulted in "more than a half dozen dead." After he learns his beloved Baba is sick in India, Anoop and his father travel there for a visit. In his grandfather's serene presence, Anoop ponders how Baba, orphaned by the violent partition of India at the end of British colonial rule, holds fast to his Sikh faith. Sheth evocatively explains Sikhism in this compassionate story in which characters combat hate with reason. An author's note concludes. Ages 8–12. (July)

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Invisible Isabel

Sally J. Pla, illus. by Tania de Regil. Quill Tree. \$19.99 (208p) ISBN 978-0-06326-885-2

"Small, quiet" Isabel Beane doesn't feel like she fits in. She tries her best to please others, even practicing smiling at home, "so people would know she was nice/ and good and friendly." Attempts to befriend classmate Monica result in a cruel dismissal and claims by Monica that Isabel is too different. She's further crushed upon learning that she's the only girl in class who's not invited to Monica's birthday party. Isabel's mother insists that she's "too sensitive" and must learn to speak up for herself. She struggles trying to meet her mother's expectations, make friends, and do well in school, contending with heartbreak and disappointment when her efforts don't net success, but unexpected events soon change everything for Isabel and force Monica to face the consequences of her actions. Sensorial verse alternates between Isabel's and Monica's POVs. Though Isabel's experiences are at times framed as learning opportunities for Monica, the challenges that she faces in navigating mounting anxieties are sensitively depicted in this touching story by Pla (The Fire, the Water, and Maudie McGinn) that celebrates identity, friendship, and finding inner strength. An endnote offers "useful starting points, about anxiety and/or autism." Final art not seen by PW. Ages 8-12. Agent: Sara Crowe, Sara Crowe Literary. (Iuly) -----

Mind Over Monsters

Betsy Uhrig. McElderry, \$17.99 (304p) ISBN 978-1-6659-5053-4

White seventh grader Lena Lennox is a "champion worrier." When school administrators invite Lena and six of her similarly anxious Cranberry Bog Middle School classmates to participate in a mindfulness meditation trial meant to help reduce student stress via app, she's skeptical but hopes it proves beneficial. Though the tweens find the first part of the exercises— "Calming and Clearing Our Minds"—to be useful, strange things occur when they begin part two: "Finding and Facing Our Fears." Soon, their dread starts manifesting in the physical world as inky, tangible blobs. As the group try to uncover the app's origins and ascertain how their terrors are becoming real, they must also find a way to keep the administration from deploying

the program to the entire school. Uhrig (The Polter-Ghost Problem) keeps a steady pace and intertwines Lena's encounters with her fear monsters with interpersonal worries surrounding her best friend Gina—now going by Regina—who's "gone pretty" and started flirting with boys after returning from summer camp. Capably balanced humorous and heartfelt prose depicts kids finding the courage to face their demons, both internal and external. Ages 8-12. Agent: Ammi-Joan Paquette, Erin Murphy Literary. (July)

Finding Famous

Candice Jalili. Disney Hyperion, \$18.99 (416p) ISBN 978-1-368-09473-3

Iranian diasporic culture collides with Hollywood life in this over-the-top children's debut by Jalili (Just Send the Text, for adults). On Josie Lawrence's 18th birthday, she receives a letter from her "deceased estranged biological father" and learns that he was beloved reality TV dad Ali Mashad. The revelation leaves Josie reeling, partially because Ali was already married to the Mashad matriarch when he had an affair with Josie's late mother, and partially because agreeing to do just one season on the family's reality show could earn Josie \$40 million. Though "becoming tight with these mega celebrities feels even more fake than the money," she accepts, hoping to alleviate her stepfather's debt, save up for college tuition, and get to know her three half sisters. But Josie is caught unawares by the fame, a crush (that's "like, low-key incest"), and dramatic secrets that challenge her perception of her mother and the Mashads. Lines that casually pathologize characters' behaviors occasionally clash with Josie's otherwise conscientious narration. Still, Jalili ascribes depth and nuance to the Persian American cast and, as a treat for die-hard fans of media glamour, peppers the text with tongue-in-cheek nods to Keeping Up with the Kardashians, Gossip Girl, and The Princess Diaries. Ages 12-up. Agent: Amy Bishop-Wycisk, Dystel, Goderich, & Bourret. (July)

On the Bright Side

Anna Sortino. Putnam, \$19.99 (320p) ISBN 978-0-593-69786-3

When Ellie Egan's Deaf boarding school closes, it means she'll have to move home to Cincinnati, where she'll be forced to

complete her senior year at Amber High as the only Deaf student. It starts out poorly: one of Ellie's interpreters continually misrepresents what Ellie is saying, leading to an emotional outburst that sparks rumors that Ellie is "pretending to be deaf." Meanwhile, Jackson Messina doesn't understand the constant numbness in his legs or why he's feeling so fatigued. Following a disastrous outcome at his last soccer match, he's been avoiding his team, who are still angry. Asked to give the new student a school tour, Jackson agrees but fumbles when he realizes she's Deaf. However, Ellie's prickly personality intrigues Jackson, and he begins teaching himself ASL. Via Jackson and Ellie's alternating perspectives, Sortino (Give Me a Sign) details Jackson's health challenges and Ellie's conflicts at home taking downward spirals, which leave the teens wondering if they're better off alone. The pair's sweet courtship leans into missteps and aching human moments in this empathetic romance that intricately depicts Deaf and disabled experiences. Protagonists cue as white. Ages 12-up. Agent: Kari Sutherland, KT Literary. (July)

Near Misses & Cowboy Kisses Katrina Emmel. Delacorte, \$12.99 paper (288p) ISBN 978-0-593708-14-9

Sparks fly between handsome cowboy Colton Walker and exasperated West Coast transplant Riley Thomas in this lighthearted debut. After relocating to Nebraska, Riley's family insists on embarking on an Oregon Trail tour, an outdoorsy survival reenactment run by Colton's family. Though initially at odds, Riley and Colton soon grow closer as they traverse the trail; Colton realizes that Riley has survival capabilities he'd never suspect from a California girl, and Riley falls for Colton once she learns that his sweet, softspoken country gallantry is genuine. But there are plenty of perils on the trail, including buffalo stampedes, familial tumult, and the sudden appearance of Colton's loudmouth rival, whose competitive streak against Colton once again rears its head in his pursuit of Riley. Then lifechanging news from her mother forces Riley to decide whether Nebraska-and Colton—will be in her future at all. The Oregon Trail setting provides an evocative backdrop against which Riley and Colton's snappy banter and push-pull dynamic

plays out. Well-worn romance tropes delivered via tightly paced writing teeming with sunshiny vibes make this a swoony and uplifting read. Main characters read as white. Ages 12-up. Agent: Jordan Hamessley, JABberwocky Literary. (July)

* Sunrise Nights

Brittany Cavallaro and Jeff Zentner. Quill Tree, \$19.99 (400p) ISBN 978-0-06-332453-4

High schoolers Florence, a dancer, and Jude, a photographer, meet while participating in the traditional "sunrise night," the last day of art camp, during which campers stay out all night. Despite the



pair's individual challenges-Florence worries that a worsening eye condition will end her ability to dance and Jude struggles with heightened anxiety in the aftermath of his

parents' divorce—they make each other laugh, and think, and hope. They know there's something between them, but since Jude has a girlfriend, and he and Florence live nowhere near each other, they agree not to talk again until the next sunrise night. Coauthors Cavallaro (Manifest) and Zentner (In the Wild Light) employ spot-on banter to deliver a romance teeming with an ambiance of endless possibility on the precipice of devastating heartbreak. As the teens bond over their shared love and conviction for their craft, between them spins a love story that is truly suspenseful. The willthey-won't-they plot, ferried along by the duo's alternating perspectives, will have readers struggling between racing toward the ending and lingering over the luminous verse. Protagonists read as white. Ages 13-up. Agents: (for Cavallaro) Taylor Haggerty, Root Literary; (for Zentner) Charlie Olsen, InkWell Literary. (July)

★ Time and Time Again

Chatham Greenfield. Bloomsbury, \$19.99 (336p) ISBN 978-1-5476-1390-8

Two disabled former friends—both white and Jewish—reconnect and explore their feelings while stuck in a time loop

in this heartfelt, pitch-perfect debut. In Lewiston, Fla., 17-year-old Phoebe has been stuck reliving August 6 for nearly a month. She worries that a wish she made during an intense IBS flare-up is why she's trapped; now, she's forever waiting for her anticipated appointment with a specialist whom she hoped wouldn't dismiss her symptoms because of her weight. Everything changes when she encounters her former BFF, nonbinary and arthritic Jess, and discovers they're also stuck. Horrified to learn that Phoebe hasn't taken advantage of the "no consequences" aspect of the loop, Jess dubs themself a "certified fun guide" and pushes Phoebe into new activities, such as seeking revenge on a bully and hanging out with Jess's brother's band. As their time together blossoms into romance, Phoebe's comfort in the certainty of the loop's events chafes against Jess's sudden desire to break the loop. Via sparkling prose, Greenfield crafts a magnetic romance between two disabled teens that highlights the realities of their experiences, comforting reconnection, and ways in which anxiety can distort perception. Ages 13-up. Agent: Natascha Morris, Tobias Literary. (July)

The White Guy Dies First Edited by Terry J. Benton-Walker. Tor, \$20.99

(320p) ISBN 978-1-250-86126-9

Benton-Walker (Blood Justice) crafts a trope-bending horror anthology, collecting 13 loosely linked tales by authors such as Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé, Chloe Gong, and Mark Oshiro. Centering protagonists of



various body types, genders, and racial and ethnic backgrounds, each story dismantles racist tropes and casts "the white guy" as the first kill. Kendare Blake addresses East Asian ste-

reotypes in "The Golden Dragon," which centers a Chinese-restaurant-owning Korean American family and a Japanese ghost that avenges rape survivors. Meanwhile, "Gray Grove" by Alexis Henderson grapples with monstrous malevolence on a former slave plantation. Contributions showcase powerful storytelling through unreliable narrators (as in Tiffany Jackson's "Everything's Coming Up Roses") and skilled foreshadowing (in Lamar Giles's "The Protégé"). Scares are plentiful but always impactful: cannibalism becomes a metaphor for cultural appropriation in H.E. Edgmon's "Best Served Cold," told by a two-spirit narrator, and "Break Through Our Skin" by Naseem Jamnia conceptualizes the transgender experience through depictions of body horror. Pair this intense, riveting collection with The Black Girl Survives in This One and The Blonde Dies First for a deep dive into subversive contemporary horror. Ages 13-up. Agent: Patricia Caldwell, New Leaf Literary. (July)

★ The Great Cool Ranch Dorito in the Sky

Josh Galarza. Holt, \$19.99 (320p) ISBN 978-1-250-90771-4

Smuggling the newest issue of his selfauthored comic book, Kid Condor, into the school library is just one of the many things that Brett Isaias Harrison, 16, is up to. Some nights, he gets drunk and calls an Uber to take him "drunk drivethru'ing"; others, he stargazes at the top of Tumamoc Hill in Tucson, Ariz. What Brett won't do is dwell on such subjects as his eating habits, how he compares to best friend Reed, his fear that girls won't ever like him, or his adoptive mother's recent cancer diagnosis. When his food journal goes viral on school socials, Brett finds himself the center of unwelcome attention, which prompts a series of binging and purging. Refuge comes from an unexpected friendship with Mallory, "the fattest kid in school"; her assertiveness and confidence both fascinate and confuse him. Brett's quirky voice—a mix of selfconscious thoughts, Kid Condor mythology, and bro-isms ("You ready for some nuggs, bruh?")—tempers this funny yet bruising narrative about one teen's experience with grief and disordered eating in which debut author Galarza carefully touches on issues surrounding underage drinking, body dysmorphia, and internalized antifatness. Extensive resources conclude. Brett has Welsh, Spanish, and Mayan ancestry. Ages 14-up. Agent: David Dunton, Harvey Klinger. (July)

★ Grief in the Fourth Dimension

Jennifer Yu. Amulet, \$19.99 (344p) ISBN 978-1-419767-27-2

This richly rendered speculative novel by Yu (Imagine Us Happy) follows deceased high school seniors Kenny Zhou and Caroline Davison, who find themselves in pseudo-purgatory, a stark-white room outfitted with a television that shows them what's happening to their loved ones back in the land of the living. A mysterious entity seemingly able to read their thoughts sends them notes commenting on the scenarios playing out on screen, and the teens soon realize that they can influence situations occurring in the real world in small, surreptitious ways. They resolve to help each other accomplish personal goals: Kenny will save his family's struggling restaurant and Caroline will assist her family in finding justice and closure regarding the circumstances of her death. As the duo watch the events unfold, they learn more about their own hidden connections and come to terms with the impact that their deaths have on their communities. Yu's prose sings with lush and powerful empathy and makes good on the novel's wild premise by blending humor and pathos with fantastical worldbuilding and genuine emotional stakes. Caroline reads as white; Kenny is of Chinese descent. Ages 14-up. (July)

Joined at the Joints

Marissa Eller. Holiday House, \$19.99 (304p) ISBN 978-0-823-45621-5

Since her rheumatoid arthritis diagnosis two years ago, Ivy Harding, 17, has gradually isolated herself. Social anxiety has always made communicating difficult, and now Ivy barely has the energy to try. She spends her time recreating her grandmother's recipes as gluten-free dishes and managing increasingly frequent flare-ups that result in heightened pain and limited mobility. When her family insists she attend a support group for teens with chronic illnesses, Ivy is reluctant. At her first meeting, however, she encounters Grant Deluca, who also has RA. He's extraordinarily cute and he's interested in Ivy, and while Ivy isn't sure she wants to date, she can't deny their chemistry. But even as their relationship blossoms, Ivy's flare-ups worsen and her anxieties grow. Neatly paced, insightful prose punctuated

by text exchanges and sweet dates depict Ivy and Grant's slow-burn romance. Ivy's introspections about RA are realistic, nuanced, and informed by debut author Eller's personal experiences, as discussed in an endnote. Good-natured secondary characters, many of whom navigate their own autoimmune diagnoses, round out Ivy's lively, majority-white support network. Ages 14-up. Agent: Emma Nordstrom Higdon, Westwood Creative Artists. (July)

The Lost Souls of Benzaiten Kelly Murashige. Soho, \$19.99 (304p) ISBN 978-1-64129-574-1

Murashige's fantasy debut follows an outcast teen who, after striking a deal with a Japanese god of fortune, embarks on a transformative journey to discover life's beauty. Following a friendship fallout, 17-year-old Machi lost "the will to speak." Now, she ardently wishes she was a robot vacuum cleaner instead of a person: "They're treated like humans... but no one expects them to be anything more than what they are." Unexpectedly, the goddess Benzaiten appears and counters Machi's prayer with a plea that she "realize the beauty of being human and rediscover my voice." With each new encounter on Machi's quest—and each new question posed by her therapist throughout—Machi comes to accept her broken relationships as well as herself. This heartfelt and original exploration of one teen's reasoning for her way of thinking and her growth into a new version of herself focuses on connection and communication in fun, fantastical ways. Murashige's fresh blend of Japanese mythology and frank depictions of mental health challenges rendered via simple prose allow readers to relate to Machi's emotions and struggles and gain new perspective into the complexity of human nature. Ages 14-up. Agent: Savannah Brooks, KT Literary. (July)

Eighteen Roses

Shannon C.F. Rogers. Macmillan/Feiwel and Friends, \$20.99 (304p) ISBN 978-1-2508-4573-3

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Seventeen-year-old half white, half Filipino Lucia Elenemaria Cruz is grateful that her 18th birthday isn't going to be a traditional debut. It clashes with her casual style, the complexities of planning such a thing make her anxious, and after falling

out with her only friend, it's not like she'd have anyone to invite. When, during her cousin's debutante ball, Lucia learns that her mother has secretly started planning one for Lucia, she's furious yet skeptical. Lucia is constantly comparing herself to her more affluent relatives, and her Filipino mother works two jobs. With little money to pay for the event, how will it even happen? Things change when Lucia learns that her beloved grandmother will be arriving from the Philippines for her debut. Lonely and unsure of herself, Lucia joins her school's comedy club, hoping that writing stand-up material will help her express herself over this period of rapid change. Rogers (I'd Rather Burn Than Bloom) attentively depicts issues surrounding race, gender, parental responsibility, divorce, and self-esteem via Lucia's numerous relationships, particularly with her mother. Lucia's stand-up comedy seeds humor throughout this cathartic read. Ages 15-up. Agent: Serene Hakim, Ayesha Pande Literary. (July)

Nonfiction

★ Evidence! How Dr. John Snow **Solved the Mystery of Cholera**

Deborah Hopkinson, illus. by Nik Henderson. Knopf, \$19.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-5934-2681-4

"Welcome to Broad Street, in hot, stinky old London," begins this enthralling 1854set work focused on epidemiology, smartly pitched for younger audiences as an intriguing medical mystery. With urgent language and expressionistic drawings rendered in graphite and charcoal, and colored digitally, Hopkinson (Cinderella and a Mouse Called Fred) and Henderson (Trucks on Trucks) immerse readers in a close city neighborhood where deadly cholera has broken out: "Piles of horse dung line the streets. Sewage and human waste fill cesspools in yards and cellars." Dr. John Snow (1813-1858) has long investigated cholera—he's been "chasing it for years" and has a theory about the outbreak's cause. That theory, however, flies in the face of prevailing medical and popular wisdom, which holds that cholera is airborne. In spreads that vividly evoke Snow's relentless search across the city, he clearly becomes a "medical detective," mapping cases and interviewing residents. When his work results in the

www.publishersweekly.com

PICTURE BOOKS

The Dream Catcher Marcelo Verdad. Little, Brown, ISBN 978-0-316-33066-4, May

Just Like My Family Ashley Molesso and Chess Needham. Running Press, ISBN 978-0-7624-8450-8, May

Look Up! Fontaine the Pigeon Starts a Revolution Britt Gondolfi illus by Amanda Romanick. Paw Prints, ISBN 978-1-223-18808-9,

Sea of Constellations Melissa Cristina Márquez, illus. by Rocío Arreola Mendoza. Penguin Workshop, ISBN 978-0-593-52360-5, May

Basil & Dahlia: A Tragical Tale of Sinister Sweetness Joy McCullough, illus. by Shane Cluskey. Atheneum, ISBN 978-1-6659-4423-6, May

The Boo Hag Flex (Tales from Cabin 23 #1) Justina Ireland. HarperCollins/Balzer + Bray, ISBN 978-0-06328-782-2, May

Dusty in the Outwilds Rhiannon Williams. Hardie Grant, ISBN 978-1-76050-950-7, May

Emma McKenna, Full Out (The Kids in Mrs. Z's Class #1) Kate Messner, illus. by Kat Fajardo. Algonquin, ISBN 978-1-523525-71-3, Apr.

The Letters We Keep Nisha Sharma. Skyscape, ISBN 978-1-66250-073-2, May

Puzzleheart Jenn Reese. Holt, ISBN 978-1-250-78346-2, May

★ Safiyyah's War Hiba Noor Khan. Allida, ISBN 978-0-06335-186-8, May

Samira's Worst Best Summer Nina Hamza. Quill Tree, ISBN 978-0-06-302494-6, May

The Supernatural Files of CJ Delaney Carol Williams. Holiday House, ISBN 978-0-8234-5412-9, May

Sweet Nightmare (The Calder Academy #1) Tracy Wolff. Entangled, ISBN 978-1-64937-706-7,

The Word Mary G. Thompson. Page Street, ISBN 979-8-8900-3014-6, May

handle being removed from the contaminated Broad Street pump, it's a radiant, reverential moment, as befits "a milestone in science, a shining moment in the long fight against epidemics." Back matter provides further context. Ages 4-8. Author's agent: Steven Malk, Writers House. Illustrator's agent: Chad W. Beckerman, CAT Agency. (Aug.)

APRIL 29, 2024 OKIITE YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING

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Indie Spotlight

In this edition of Indie Spotlight, we feature humor and satire.

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COMIC ADVENTURE NOVELS

Crook Tales for Two



Ellen Byerrum ASIN BOCQHMXXW4

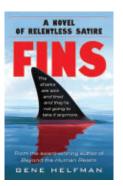
Author statement: "Comedy, mystery, and romance intertwine. Mere days before her first Broadway opening, playwright Esmé de LaForet discovers what happens when good deeds go awry: murder, mobsters, reporters, dangerous dames from high and low society, and nerve-wracking opening nights. My inspiration for Crook Tales for Two came in the middle of the

night, in the middle of the pandemic and quarantine, from the dark center of my dreams. I heard gunshots and breaking glass, and I found myself hiding in a utility closet in a closed elementary school, complete with the smell of chalk and freshly washed floors, facing a blue-eyed man who burst in with a gun, demanding to know what I was doing in there. When I awakened, I knew, somehow, that it all happened in 1934."

Fins

Gene Helfman **ASIN BOC9KCHNJJ**

Author statement: "Pirates catch sharks in a marine reserve, lop off their fins, and discard the sharks for dead. A series of puzzling,



apparently related shark attacks follow, suggesting that sentient, compassionate, maternal, and goal-oriented sharks are cooperating to exact more than revenge. I am an animal behaviorist turned conservation biologist turned novelist, and have authored reference books, peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and popular scientific and magazine articles. I wrote Fins to right a wrong, namely to counter the influence of the

hyped, sensationalist, grossly unfair portrayals of sharks in novels and too many sharksploitation movies. Fins is eco-fiction with a conservation message snuck in between the laughs. Consider it a beach read that just might keep you out of the water."

License to Die

Haris Orkin ISBN 978-1-68513-224-8

Author statement: "James Flynn believes he's an expert shot, a black belt in karate, fluent in four languages, and irresistible to women. But that's because he's a patient in a private Los Angeles psychiatric hospital. Flynn believes his locked ward is the headquarters of Her Majesty's Secret

Service and that he is a secret agent with a license to kill. Then he's sent to a state mental hospital that houses those convicted of violent

booklife.

criminal behavior and judged not guilty by reason of insanity. He meets mass murderers, serial killers, mad bombers, arsonists, and a fierce and beautiful woman who might be even more dangerous and delusional than he is. I wanted to create a modern Don Quixote and I decided that today's equivalent of a knight errant would be a superhero or someone like James Bond. That idea sparked the creation of James Flynn."



Magnus Opum

Jonathan Gould ASIN B007QGN01I

Author statement: "Magnus Mandalora never planned to go out into the big, wide world, but fate had other ideas. Before he knows it, Magnus finds himself smackbang in the middle of the long-running war between the fair and noble Cherines and the vile and despicable Glurgs. But the more he delves into the history behind

this conflict, the more he discovers things are not as they seem. This story is really about me wanting to have fun with the archetypes of classical fantasy-discarding the conventional character types, such as elves and dwarves and wizards, and creating my own unique and distinct world of creatures. I also wanted to dig a bit deeper into the idea of good versus evil. It's not always as clear as we think."



Zombie Turkeys

Andy Zach ISBN 978-1-5394-6675-8

Author statement: "Sam Melvin, an underachieving e-reporter from a small town, changes forever when he meets turkeys that won't stay dead. You can shoot 'em, chop 'em, burn 'em-they come back stronger. The undead plague of poultry spreads uncontrollably, rocking the whole

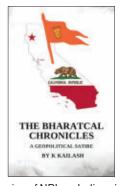
country. As Sam tracks down the zombie turkeys and how to eradicate them, his editor, Lisa Kambacher, nags him to turn his stories and expenses in on time. Lisa snipes at Sam for plebeian writing but uses her intelligence to pursue the lucrative carnivorous turkey story. Throughout the turkey apocalypse, they dare ravaged cities, plow knee-deep in gore and corpses, and upload streams of zombie turkey video news to the world."

The BharatCal Chronicles: A Geopolitical Satire

K. Kailash

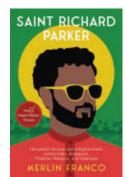
ASIN BOCK3XGC2J

Author statement: "The BharatCal Chronicles takes you on a whirlwind journey through the birth, rise, and eventual fall of a nation



like no other. When the United States grinds to a halt, a group of ambitious non-resident Indians, backed by India's political powerhouse, seize the moment to carve out their own sovereign state: BharatCal. The idea for the story of BharatCal came about when I was reading news about two things-first, the logjam in passing the U.S. budget, which threatened to derail the functioning of government agencies, and second, the

rise of NRIs or Indians in Silicon Valley to positions of leadership in leading U.S. technology companies. But as Silicon Valley becomes the heart of this new world, power struggles, cultural clashes, and international intrigues ensue."

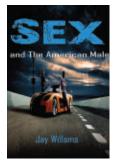


Saint Richard Parker

Merlin Franco ASIN BOCLJP5RV9

Author statement: "In this satirical reimagining of the Eastern odyssey trope, a Brown man faces colorism and racial prejudice when he travels to Southeast Asia in pursuit of love and enlightenment. In 2012, I boarded Malaysia Airlines MH 2592, headed to Miri in Malaysian Borneo. I had just quit a coveted position

in India for the allure of Sarawak. As I approached my seat, the lady occupying the seat next to mine pinched her nose and got up. Making sure not to touch me, she walked past and requested a seat change from the flight attendant, who wasted no time in obliging. Little did I know that this was just the first of many such experiences awaiting me in Southeast Asia. Saint Richard Parker is a satire inspired by such laugh-worthy experiences. I hope you'll also laugh along with the wannabe saint on this odyssey."



Sex and the American Male

Jay Williams

ASIN BOOQONKBFU

Author statement: "Once upon a time, Zack Hardiman, a typical American male, attempted to find a shirt for jogging that contained absolutely no advertising. This became the first step in his descent into insanity. When he recovered, he slowly began a more extensive trip along the

winding road we call American culture. This humorous book parodies everything from advertisements that use sex to sell massive gas-guzzling cars to mindless political parties and juiced-up science fiction conventions. When Douglas Adams died, I wanted to honor him with a sort of Hitchhiker's Guide to American Culture. I was also inspired by the crazy mass consumerism that seems to have consumed America (pun intended)."

A HARD DECISION

William and Zera were childhood sweethearts who married after high school. However, their joy was short-lived. William was deployed to Vietnam to serve his country, leaving behind a devastated Zera. Like many families affected by war, William and Zera's lives were forever changed. Despite their efforts to hold on, they were tom apart by the war. When Zera received news of William's death, the pain seemed insurmountable.

Time passed, and Zera eventually met Steve. Although hesitant at first, she began dating Steve and they eventually married. Many years later, Zera received an unexpected shock: William was alive. Reuniting with him forced Zera to make a difficult decision about her future. Who would she choose to continue her life with? Could you make such a choice?

The book explores themes of love, war, loss, family, friendship, and death, encapsulating the complexities of daily life. It serves as a tribute to the resilience and strength of the human spirit, delving into the motivations behind people's actions. With elements that resonate with every reader, the book offers a compelling narrative with a shocking conclusion kept hidden until the very end.





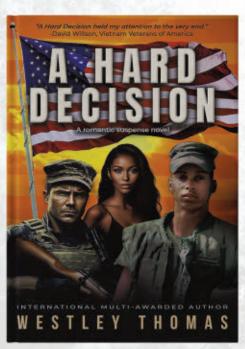






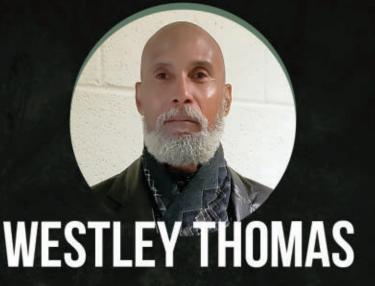






This book is available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, ATP Online Bookstore and major online resellers worldwide.

www.westleythomasbooks.com



AUTHOR

Westley Thomas, a native New Yorker was born in the Bronx and raised on Staten Island. After graduating from Port Richmond High School in 1965 he enlisted into the U.S. Marine Corps and served two tours in Vietnam 1966-1968.

On April 22, 1967, Corporal W. Thomas received a Letter of Appreciation from Commanding General, L.B. Robertshaw for serving as a member of the 1st. Marine Aircraft Wings Contingency Reaction Force

The Force had responded immediately on 24 December 1966, to an airplane crash in a populated village in the Hoa Vang District Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam.

120 Vietnamese Nationals were killed and 20 wounded. The Force provided assistance to the survivors and extinguished the blaze during conditions involving great individual risks.

The letter was awarded for professionalism, devotion to duty, and courage. Meritoriously, Mr. Thomas received his Sergeant Promotion while in Vietnam and was Honorably Discharged as a Sergeant (E-5) in 1969.

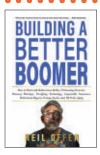
In 1975, years after his active-duty discharge Mr. Thomas joined the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves 6th Communication Battalion, Brooklyn Navy Yard, New York, until 1977. Today his service is memorialized on Building 92's History Museum Tribute Wall.

His military service awards are the following: Presidential Unit Citation, Navy Unit Commendation, Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal (w/3 Bronze Stars), Vietnam Campaign Medal (w/60 device), Vietnam Gallantry Cross Medal with Palm, Marksman and Expert Rifle Shooting Badges.

Westley Thomas has a B. A. in Dramatic Arts from the College of Staten Island. Besides writing, now he dedicates his time volunteering to help veterans as an Advocate for Veterans Rights.

booklife.

PERSONAL ESSAYS & **HUMOR COMPILATIONS**



Building a Better Boomer

Neil Offen

ISBN 978-1-08-790860-1

Author statement: "Building a Better Boomer is a humor book that offers tongue-in-cheek advice for the generation caught between ChatGPT and Betamax VHS. There's guidance on how baby boomers can better see, hear, eat, exercise, sleep, retire, and even remember

better-and maybe live long enough to see the launch of the iPhone 211 Pro. I've been a humor columnist for different publications for four decades and on two continents. The book started as a series of columns before I realized there was a common theme."



The Good Humor Man: Tales of Life, Laughter and, for Dessert, Ice Cream

Jerry Zezima

ASIN BOCPW41HB1

Author statement: "When the going gets tough, the tough eat ice cream. That's the theme of The Good Humor Man, in which I write about family foibles and the funny little things of everyday life. It's the kind of stuff

that millions of people can relate to. And it's a welcome respite from all the bad things going on these days. I write a syndicated humor column for Tribune News Service, which distributes it to 600 newspapers nationwide and abroad. The Good Humor Man is a themed collection of my latest columns. Humor is a tonic for troubled times and a way to celebrate life at any time. I don't believe in cruel or mean-spirited humor. Mine is good-natured and self-deprecating, a kinder and gentler answer to all the negativity and divisiveness in the world."



Mom & Dad Are Dinosaurs!: Humor for No-Tech Parents with High-Tech Kids

Frank Mastropolo

ASIN BOCK3QR2J8

Author statement: "Mom & Dad Are Dinosaurs! is told in the voice of a sardonic kid who doggedly-and unsuccessfully—tries to teach his parents the facts of tech life in the new century. Gripes about learning new technology are

heard in every social setting, online and off-especially in my circles. Rather than write a book full of rants, I thought it might be fun to call out tech illiteracy in the voice of those we turn to when the wi-fi goes out: our children. And why stop at the war with technology? There's plenty more that upsets me. The changing

world has given us cappuccino potato chips, electronic Monopoly, home treadmills, artisanal bread, and robot vacuums. Each of the 25 chapters highlights a new affront to the old guard."



A Paper Orchestra

Michael Jamin ASIN BOCR8L7S87

Author statement: "I've been a professional TV writer for 28 years. I think people are surprised to learn that I don't write what I want to write. I write what the studios pay me to write. I'm not complaining. Screenwriting is a tremendously fun way to make a living, but after a while, I longed to

write something just for myself, free from studio notes and constraints. I've always admired the writing of David Sedaris and was inspired to write my own collection of personal essays. Of all the terrific shows I've written for, this is the work I'm most proud of."

CANINE HUMOR



Maya and Waggers: I Have to Scoop What?

W.T. Kosmos

ASIN BOCMTR6HPC

Author statement: "Join Maya, her best friend Lily, and the rescue puppy, Waggers, as they bound through a wacky neighborhood to avoid scooping poop on Uncle Puddin' Head's perfect lawn, learning some unexpected life lessons along the way. A hilarious chapter

book for ages 8 and up, this book was inspired by my experiences as a parent, an uncle, and a proud dog owner. I've noticed the heartwarming joys and sometimes hilarious lengths that kids will go to avoid pet care responsibilities, including messier ones. It was also inspired by not-so-dog-friendly neighbors."



Ralph & Murray

Rick Glaze

ISBN 978-1-73729-513-6

Author statement: "Ralph & Murray is a humorous autobiographical story set in the late 1950s and narrated by a dog and cat. I wrote this book during the pandemic and took a chance with an unconventional approach of short, snappy chapters. My

book was influenced by Tuesdays with Morrie, in terms of its standalone chapters that are tied together by the characters. Humor can be subjective, and as I wrote and laughed my way through each adventure, I wondered if it would seep through to readers. I'm gratified that even at this early stage, the response has been very supportive."



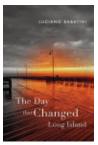


New Titles from Self-Publishers

Booksellers, publishers, librarians, and agents are encouraged to look at the 66 selfpublished titles below. Each appears with a list of retailers that are selling the book and a description provided by its author. Some of these writers are waiting to be discovered; others have track records and followings and are doing it on their own. If you are a self-published author interested in listing titles in this section, please visit publishersweekly.com/pw-select for more information.

Fiction

The Day That Changed Long Island

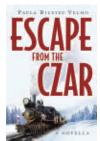


Luciano Sabatini. BQB Publishing. \$14.95 paper (200p), ISBN 978-1-952782-29-9 Amazon

A family's tranquil life in Massapequa, N.Y., is shattered by Superstorm Sandy.

Amid chaos, the family endures trials of survival and recovery, encountering both kindness and exploitation.

Escape from the Czar: A Novella



Paula Bilyieu Velho. Authorhouse. \$26.99 (114p), ISBN 978-1-6655-5396-4; \$13.99 paper, ISBN 978-1-6655-5395-7 Amazon Born in 19th-cen-

tury Lithuania,

Povilas Glamzo dreams of escaping serfdom. The looming threat of war forces him into the Russian navy, where he faces impossible choices.

Eternally Rose: A Tale of Undying Love

Lou Mastantuono, with Mary E. Davis. Lou Mastantuono. \$14.99 paper (290p), ISBN 979-8-9859756-1-1; \$3.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9859756-8-0



Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Target A man stirs up the past to solve the suspicious wedding-day death of the woman his father intended to marry instead of the man's mother. Based

on a true story.

The First Lights of Eventide: A Mystical Journey Through Time



Jaye Burke. Vintage South Books. \$14.99 paper (334p), ISBN 979-8-8643-0415-0; \$4.99 e-book, ASIN BOCMG98QRN Amazon In the enchanted world of the mystical eventide, an

esteemed historian hopes to prove that fiction can become fact. But can she do so without paranormal intervention?

The Identity Kit

J.T. Lions. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$11.35 paper (172p), ISBN 978-1-3984-8252-4; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-3984-8255-5

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith

Josh works in the high-powered world of finance. When a client meeting goes horribly wrong, he gets accused of fraud. Escaping from the police is his only option.

Long Journey Home



Michael R. Lane. Bare Bones Press. \$19.99 paper (290p), ISBN 979-8-9891948-2-7; \$14.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9891948-3-4 Michaelrlane.com This book takes the reader on winding

journeys through the astonishing complexities of the human condition.

Madam Josefina's Social House



Dan Jakel. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$15.14 paper (312p), ISBN 978-1-0358-1303-2; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-1305-6 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones,

In this historical thriller, a fallen aristocrat finds herself caught in the murderous

PW SELECT LISTINGS



conspiracy of a Buenos Aires police official.

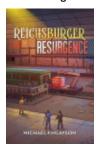
March of Fire



Charlotte Storm Olsen. Huldra Studio. \$34.99 (348p), ISBN 978-1-7391951-0-6; \$11.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-7391951-2-0 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Target In 1628, Scottish

noblewoman Lady Margaret Douglas is condemned as a witch. Thirteen years later, an ancient deed is stolen. Its fate may decide the rise or fall of kingdoms.

Reichsburger Resurgence



Michael Finlayson. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$17.76 paper (404p), ISBN 978-1-0358-2751-0; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-2753-4 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones,

WH Smith

A group of strangers is brought together by fate, all determined to prevent world domination by a sophisticated neo-Nazi plot about to be unleashed on society.

Running as Fast as I Can



John David Graham. Don Quixote Press. \$7.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9889808-1-0 Amazon, Barnes & Noble

Daniel is a punching bag for his drunk father, is ignored by

his mother, and is abused by his pastor. In the turbulent 1960s, he survives abuse and homelessness to find forgiveness and love.

The Stories We Cannot Tell

Leslie A. Rasmussen. Van Royen Press. \$15.99 paper (326p), ISBN 979-8-



9889712-1-4; \$6.99 e-book, ASIN BOCN62QGHZ Amazon

A strong friendship is born when two women from different backgrounds deal with pregnancy

complications. They find love, hope, family, and a surprising connection.

Try Before You Trust: To All Gentlewomen and All Other Maids in Love



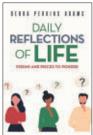
Constance Briones. Historium Press. \$7.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-962465-17-5 Amazon, Barnes & Noble

A young poet sets out to shake up London's

reading public by becoming the first Englishwoman to write poems about the deceptive practices of men in love.

Poetry

Daily Reflections of Life: Poems and Pieces to Ponder



Debra Perkins Adams. Xlibris US. \$28.99 (134p), ISBN 978-1-6698-3800-5; \$16.99 paper, ISBN 978-1-6698-3799-2 Amazon Adams offers a

poetic testament

to faith, spirit, and compassion. Her words uplift, inspire, and encourage, inviting self-discovery and touching hearts.



Red, White and Verse: Our Myths, Legends and Stories

Greg McNeilly. Ballast Books. \$24.99 (256p), ISBN 978-1-962202-22-0

Ballast Books, Amazon,

Barnes & Noble, Target, Walmart A family-oriented collection of 58 poems celebrating America's people, places, and events.

Wolf and Amaryllis



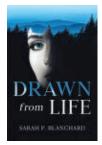
Sebastian Guyette. Dorrance Publishing. \$13.99 paper (92p), ISBN 979-8-88683-067-5; \$8.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-88683-927-2 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance

Bookstore

Guyette delves into themes of heartbreak, the duality of love, the human condition, and more. He explores what makes us all human.

Mystery/Thriller

Drawn from Life



Sarah P. Blanchard. Eagle Ridge Farm. \$18.99 paper (354p), ISBN 979-8-218-33228-0; \$1.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-218-33229-7 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org,

Kobo

A life-changing tragedy. Conflicting memories. Is Emma a killer or a victim? In this high-stakes mystery, dark themes combine in a tale of redemption and courage.

Embers of Shadow (Ages of Malice #3)



Lloyd Jeffries. Buckminster Publishing. \$2.99 e-book, ASIN B0CW13QSKW Amazon

What Emery and Rhyme failed to stop now grows

unchecked. As the Antichrist claims dominion, can unlikely heroes overcome impossible odds to thwart an evil that predicts every turn?

PW SELECT LISTINGS

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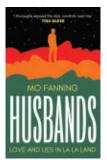
The Handyman



Maura K. Deering. She Writes Press. \$17.95 paper (280p), ISBN 978-1-64742-507-4 Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Google Play Dennis Griffin will do whatever it

takes to belong. He's obsessed with Brenna Riley and will go to any lengths to insert himself into her life and her family.

Husbands: Love and Lies in La La Land



Mo Fanning, Spring Street Books. \$15.99 paper (364p), ISBN 978-1-7392903-1-3; \$4.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-7392903-0-6 Books2read.com When wannabe actor Kyle

Macdonald receives a call claiming he married Hollywood director Aaron Biedermeier years ago in Vegas, a golden ticket turns out to be anything but.

Little Boy Blue



Daniel Conrad Rose. Dorrance Publishing. \$39.99 (362p), ISBN 979-8-88812-185-6; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-88812-685-1 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance Bookstore

This psychological thriller introduces sociopathic predator Little Leo and the small-town police chief battling to stop him. This tale showcases the bravery of victims.

Shady Rulers, Vol. 1

Ira Styrkur, illus. by Gustav Fogelström. Ira Styrkur. \$13.99 paper (326p), ISBN 979-8-8639-0154-1; \$6.11 e-book, ASIN



B0CKQ2NR9Z Amazon, Barnes & Noble A tale of revenge, alliances, and mysticism. Follow Terrack, Ray, and Silas on a transformative journey. Discover the

president's deepest secrets in this action-packed thriller.

SF/Fantasy/Horror

Has Anyone Seen My Doppelgänger?



T. Joseph Dwornicki. Dorrance Publishing. \$13.99 paper (96p), ISBN 979-8-88683-637-0; \$8.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-88683-638-7 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance

After a UFO crashes into their town and strange events begin to take place, four friends embark on a mission to help their home return to normal.

Jimbo's Assumption



Richard N. Philip. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$16.41 paper (350p), ISBN 978-1-3984-7496-3; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-3984-7497-0 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones,

WH Smith

A gangster, 50 geniuses, and a galactic computer during 48 hours in beautiful Edinburgh and the wider Milky Way.

Romance/Erotica

The Role of a Lifetime: A Woman Reinvents Herself... for Good... and

James B. Flaherty. iUniverse. \$28.95 (318p), ISBN 978-1-5320-3100-7; \$18.95 paper,



ISBN 978-1-5320-3099-4 Amazon, Barnes & Noble

A young woman reinvents herself, marries royalty, and faces challenges, love, loss, and redemption,

highlighting women's enduring strength and friendships.

Nonfiction

All I Ever Wanted to Be Was an Ad Man

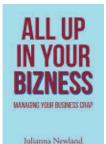


Anthony Eglin. Gatekeeper Press. \$29.99 (402p), ISBN 978-1-6629-4083-5; \$15.99 paper (402p), ISBN 978-1-6629-4084-2 Amazon, Barnes & Noble

A young Brit who

dreams of being an ad man succeeds beyond measure as an award-winning mystery writer, rock band manager, and filmmaker.

All Up in Your Bizness: Managing Your **Business Crap**



Fulton Books. \$12.95 paper (50p), ISBN 979-8-88731-364-1; \$8.99 e-book, ASIN

Julianna Newland.

B0CJ5V6YW7 Amazon, Barnes & Noble

This book is to be

enjoyed as a tongue-in-cheek look at many business circumstances, such as office kiss-ups and performance reviews, with practical and useful advice.

The Beautiful Defect: A Body in Crisis a Life in Renewal

Lilith Costa. Aligned Affiliate Press. \$19.99 paper (168p), ISBN 979-8-218-28420-6; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-218-32846-7

PW SELECT LISTINGS

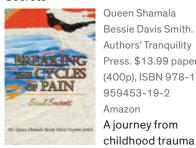
booklife



Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Target

A stay-at-home mom is forced to confront her life decisions after having a prophylactic mastectomy that will forever alter her reflection.

Breaking the Cycles of Pain: Soul Secrets



Queen Shamala Bessie Davis Smith. Authors' Tranquility Press. \$13.99 paper (400p), ISBN 978-1-959453-19-2 Amazon A journey from

to inner peace. Doris navigates a dysfunctional family, segregation, and self-discovery in the segregated South during the 1950s and 1960s.

Chance or Circumstance? A Memoir and Journey Through the Struggle for Civil Rights



James R. Mapp. iUniverse. \$16.99 paper (166p), ISBN 978-1-6632-5666-9; \$2.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-6632-5681-2 Jamesrmapp.com, Amazon

What compels an

individual to risk everything for justice and equality? Chance or Circumstance? is a unique blend of historical insight and personal testimony.

Elk Love: A Montana Memoir



Lynne Spriggs O'Connor. She Writes Press. \$17.95 paper (360p), ISBN 978-1-64742-640-8; \$8.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-64742-641-5 Amazon After O'Connor

moves to Great Falls, Mont., she delves into a world where loneliness transforms into wonder and opens her heart to a wild language that moves beyond words.

Ernst Kris: An Annotated Bibliography



Joan M. Wolk. Nook Press. \$29.99 paper (122p), ISBN 979-8-8556-7501-6 Barnes & Noble This annotated bibliography is based on the bibliography

"Writings of Ernst Kris," which appeared in the 1958 issue of The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child.

The Eternal Effo: How to Avoid a **Career in Aviation**

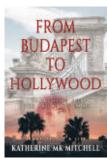


Steve Gatley, Austin Macauley Publishers. \$12.62 paper (216p), ISBN 978-1-0358-3230-9; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-3231-6 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones,

WH Smith

These recollections of a three-decade. less than brilliantly successful career in civil aviation are not meant to be taken too seriously.

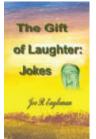
From Budapest to Hollywood: Searching for the Promised Land



Katherine M.K. Mitchell. The Three Tomatoes Book Publishing. \$28.99 (320p), ISBN 979-8-9884613-7-1; \$16.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-9884613-6-4 Amazon, Barnes &

An ordinary little girl is born into an extraordinarily violent world. From desperate to hilarious, her life story proves that success has no formula.

The Gift of Laughter: Jokes



Joe R. Eagleman. Joe R. Eagleman. \$9.95 paper (88p), ISBN 979-8-8787-8490-0; \$4.95 audio, Kobo ID 1230007148569 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo Dive into a world of

laughter with this new book. Enjoy an endless stream of clever humor and feel-good moments mixed in with a look at humor and how it is very beneficial to us.

Grand Unification of the Four Fundamental Forces of Physics



James Russell Farmer. James Russell Farmer. \$37.66 paper (392p), ISBN 979-8-6701-0228-5; \$2.99 e-book, ASIN B098R5M5VL Amazon.

Barnes & Noble

Explore a fresh take on QED. Derive Einstein's Planck law without quantum mechanics' rigors. Theoretical Higgs mass is revealed sans particle physics. Dark matter is demystified.

Half Moon Waking: Rising, Falling, and Walking Through Marriage, Motherhood, and Miscarriage



Liv Hunziker. Page of Notes. \$15.99 paper (180p), ISBN 979-8-218-29618-6; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-218-29619-3 Amazon, Barnes & Noble

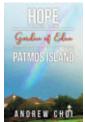
Blood, sweat, thirst, and calloused feet are tied together through poetry and prose in this elevating collection for new mothers and new fathers.

Hope from the Garden of Eden to the End of the Patmos Island

Andrew Choi. Mainspring Books. \$13.99

PW SFI FCT LISTINGS





1-64133-903-2 Amazon

This biblical guidebook offers insight into life's trials and the path to redemption through faith.

How Weather Shapes Human **Endeavors**

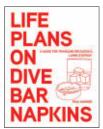


Joe R. Eagleman. Joe R. Eagleman. \$11.95 paper (118p), ISBN 979-8-8826-5782-5; \$2.99 audio, Kobo ID 1230007488542 Kobo

This book explores the profound impact

of weather on human activities, enlightening anyone eager to understand the forces shaping our daily lives.

Life Plans on Dive Bar Napkins



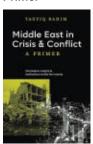
Paul Manser. Hardie Grant. \$29.99 (224p), ISBN 978-1-74379-746-4

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, Kobo

This is a collection

of on-the-road stories from a writer committed to making stupid choices and wildly ambitious travel insurance claims.

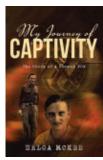
Middle East in Crisis and Conflict: A Primer



Taufiq Rahim. 2040 World. \$19.99 paper (152p), ISBN 979-8-9901347-1-3; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9901347-0-6 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org This primer is

intended to be a leading starting point for experts and observers alike on the events of October 7, 2023, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict overall.

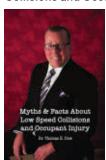
My Journey of Captivity: The Story of a German POW



Helga McKee. Leap Write Literary. \$2.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89376-010-1 Amazon Hans Gussmann, a German soldier, endured nearly three years of internment by the

Allies after World War II.

Myths and Facts About Low Speed Collisions and Occupant Injury



Thomas E. Dow. Dorrance Publishing. \$26.99 paper (80p), ISBN 979-8-88925-359-4; \$21.99 ebook, ISBN 979-8-88925-859-9 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance Bookstore

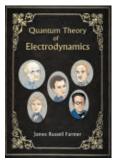
Drawing on years of experience treating those involved in motor vehicle accidents, chiropractor Dow offers essential insights into vehicle collisions and injuries, distinguishing common myths from facts.

Pain, Pumpernickel and Profound Forgiveness: A Daughter's Story of Her Punishing and Loving Relationship with Her Father



Rosanne D'Ausilio. Human Technologies Global. \$6.99 paper (146p), ISBN 979-8-9900160-0-2; \$0.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9900160-2-6 Amazon Rosanne has a

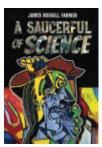
universal message of hope and redemption, inspires us to reflect on our relationships, and encourages us to embrace the metamorphosis that love brings.



James Russell Farmer. James Russell Farmer. \$45.13 paper (484p), ISBN 979-8-8339-4549-0; \$3.42 e-book, **ASIN** B0B35B1PM5 Amazon, Barnes &

This book unveils a groundbreaking approach to understanding wave packet spectra, Planck's law, and photon energy, reshaping fundamental perspectives in physics.

A Saucerful of Science



James Russell Farmer. James Russell Farmer. \$82.64 paper (806p), ISBN 979-8-8645-7541-3; \$4.99 e-book, ASIN B0CV4LQTT5 Jamesrussellfarmer. com, Amazon

Embark on a comprehensive exploration of the core sciences, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology, crafted over years of meticulous study and research.

Surviving Blake



Perpetual Survivor. Perpetual Survivor. \$12.99 paper (222p), ISBN 979-8-8634-3641-8; \$6.99 e-book, ASIN BOCLHBM4C8 Amazon

A gay martial artist barely survives a

marriage to a U.S. veteran. He experiences attempted gang rape, various assaults, attempted murder, and a real one.

They Call Me Jake: Life on the Ocean Waves and Other Stories

Jakob Smith. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$13.88 paper (260p), ISBN 978-1-0358-

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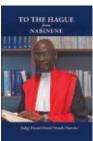
booklife



3156-2; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-3155-5 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith In many ways Jakob is a wanderer. Each day is new-

sometimes exciting, sometimes not.

To the Hague from Nabinene

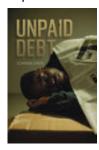


Daniel David Ntanda Nsereko. Dorrance Publishing. \$107.99 (418p), ISBN 979-8-88925-340-2; \$53.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-88925-840-7 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance

Bookstore

Judge Nsereko maps his riveting journey from rural Uganda to the Hague, the legal capital of the world. Examining his distinguished legal career, Nsereko explores how a life of hardship and resilience helped him achieve it.

Unpaid Debt



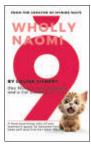
Johnnie Davis. Dorrance Publishing. \$14.99 paper (136p), ISBN 979-8-88925-469-0; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-88925-969-5 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance

Bookstore

Davis's memoir explores his journey with addiction and violence in New York, creating a portrait of Black life from the 1960s to the '80s and capturing his fight for redemption.

Wholly Naomi: One Woman, Nine Numbers, and a Cat Looking for Love

Louise Gilbert. Louise Gilbert. \$9.97 paper (230p), ISBN 978-0-473-70739-2; \$9.97 e-book, ISBN 978-0-473-70740-8 Amazon, Kobo



Gilbert invites readers to embark on a transformative journey to discover their true and best selves, in this blend of storytelling and life coaching through the symbolism of

nine numbers.

Religion/Spirituality

Escaping Our Fallen Nature

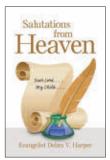


David Piper. Bookside Press. \$9.99 paper (250p), ISBN 978-1-990695-40-7 Amazon God always provides a way of escape, which

inspires us to

acknowledge the only way of us successfully escaping our fallen nature. Will outlast our temptations, our assurance of eternal life.

Salutations from Heaven: Dear Lord... My Child...

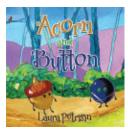


Evangelist Debra Harper. Xlibris. \$19.99 paper (172p), ISBN 978-1-7960-1440-2 Amazon Struggle with expressing emotions? Break free from past hurts

and find healing through personal letters and poetry. Transform your soul.

Children's/YA

Acorn and Button



Laura Petrisin. Book Locker. \$16.95 paper (402p), ISBN 978-1-958877-52-4 Amazon, Barnes & Noble,

Bookshop.org, Walmart

An unlikely friendship develops between a shy acorn and a boisterous button, but opposites attract. The dubious duo embark on all kinds of adventures.

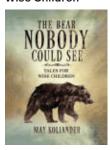
Arrow the Sky Horse: The Discovery



Melody Huttinger. Melody Huttinger. \$11.99 paper (262p), ISBN 978-1-7328715-0-2; \$6.99 e-book, ASIN B09V6YHPP5 Amazon The story of a girl, a wild stallion,

and a magical amulet. The adventure begins when Meadow stumbles upon a Native American cliff dwelling complete with priceless artifacts.

The Bear Nobody Could See: Tales for Wise Children



May Koliander. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$30.30 paper (162p), ISBN 978-1-0358-4082-3; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-4084-7 Amazon, Barnes &

Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith

Let the animals in these tales share their hard-earned wisdom with you, and trust them to lead you on the path of discovery.

Black Justice: The Awakening



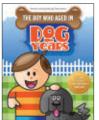
David Washington. Washington Comix. \$21.99 paper (108p), ISBN 979-8-218-18350-9; \$5.99 e-book, ASIN B0CVTVX7GB Washingtoncomix. com, Amazon An adventure

graphic novel about the search for justice.

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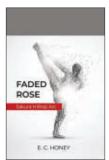
The Boy Who Aged in Dog Years



Todd Detering. Detering Publishing. \$19.99 paper (32p), ISBN 979-8-8821-8250-1; \$9.99 e-book, ASIN **BOCXKHFHGJ** Amazon

Oliver makes a birthday wish to age in dog years. What could go wrong? A humorous tale that teaches kids to enjoy each and every moment of their childhood.

Faded Rose: Sakura Hilltop Arc



E.C. Honey. Dorrance Publishing, \$16.99 paper (176p), ISBN 979-8-88604-677-9; \$11.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-88604-761-5 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance Bookstore

Ash Rose is a skilled young fighter and a master of martial arts. He enrolls at Sakura, an elite co-ed fighting school, to continue his mom's legacy as a legendary fighter. However, his plans are threatened when Satsuki Kushinada, the strongest student at the school, sets her sights on him.

Hop, Skip, Jump!



Mary Giammona. Gatekeeper Press. \$19.99 (34p), ISBN 978-1-6629-2914-4; \$10.99 paper (34p), ISBN 978-1-6629-2915-1

Amazon, Barnes & Noble

It's a busy grandmother-and-granddaughter day. Grandma explains how to go hopping, skipping, and jumping for fun and exercise. After an active day, they enjoy a family picnic together.

Nesta - The Earth Witch

Anna Sutton. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$10.16 paper (42p), ISBN 978-1-0358-



1672-9; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-1673-6 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith This beautifully illustrated contem-

porary fairy tale

blends magic with a potent environmental message. The protagonist sets off on a fantastical quest to restore the Earth with a message of hope.

Octo Tales: The Magical World of a Little Octopus Girl



Noreen Palmer. Noreen Palmer. \$16.99 paper (36p), ISBN 979-8-8845-7191-4; \$9.99 e-book, ASIN B0CY6BSD9J Amazon, Apple Books,

Barnes & Noble, Blackwell, Google Books, Indigo, Target, Walmart, Waterstones Pearl, a little octopus girl, and her friends take on a divine mission to protect and preserve the Earth's oceans.

Pedro and the Red Eyeglasses



Shelagh Needham. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$16.95 paper (40p), ISBN 978-

1-68562-572-6; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-68562-574-0

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH

Pedro is a short-sighted green turtle who lives in Mexico. His world is turned around when a little girl in a tourist boat falls into the water and loses her eveglasses.

Pieces of Me

Carrigan Richards. Carrigan Richards Publishing. \$12.99 paper (302p), ISBN 979-8-9858225-3-3; \$4.99 e-book, **ASIN BOCTHRBQCY**

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org

After losing everything in a moment, 17-yearold Corinne battles with nightmares, hallucinations, and panic. As she reluctantly confronts her past, she faces a pivotal life decision.

Sammy Skunk Gets an Invitation



Eula May Foote. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$15.14 paper (60p), ISBN 978-1398431898; \$4.50 e-book, ASIN BOCTX85HX1

Amazon

Hi, I'm Eula May Foote and I live in Smethwick, West Midlands. I am a qualified nursery nurse and general nurse. I wrote this book many years ago whilst on the nursery nursing course. I've had poems published before but this is my first book, I hope you enjoy it. This book was written in 1980 and that is when I designed the characters.

Some Dreams, You Can't Replace

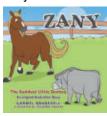


Ellen Dyer. Ellen Dyer. \$3.99 e-book, Kobo ID 1230007348198 Kobo

In 1980, a naive, romantic teenage girl becomes involved in a

damaging relationship and struggles to cope with the consequences.

Zany: The Saddest Little Donkey



Carmel Brudenell. XlibrisAU. \$11.99 paper (24p), ISBN 979-8-3694-9509-4; \$3.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-3694-9508-7

Zany, the little gray donkey, dreams of being as admired as Selwyn, the beautiful Welsh mountain pony. Will she realize her worth and find the admiration she seeks?

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BookLife Reviews



BookLife Reviews are paid reviews of independently published books. A lightning bolt $(\frac{1}{2})$ indicates an Editor's Pick, a book of outstanding quality.

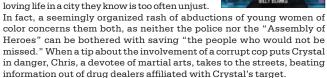
COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

EDITOR'S PICK

Black Justice: The Awakening David Washington | Washington Comix

108p, trade paper, \$21.99, ISBN 979-8-218-18350-9

This rousing superhero debut and origin story boasts a compelling cast, polished art, a savvy understanding of crime, cops, and media, and above all a welcome emphasis on what justice actually means—and what it takes to pursue it. The lavishly successful businessman/ sociologist/psychologist Dr. Chris Withers and his journalist wife, Crystal Withers, enjoy a



Soon his friend Alicia Johnson, genius CEO of Johnson Industries, presents him with a life-changing offer: a cutting-edge tactical combat Powerful superhero debut pitting Black Justice against corruption and kidnapping.

Great for fans of Devin Gravson's Omni. Saladin Ahmed's Abbott.

suit, complete with weapons, gadgets, and a motorcycle Alicia calls her "black beauty." Elements of this origin are familiar, of course, but Washington freshens the storytelling with memorable insights. Chris's discussion with students of the concept of "privilege" is pow $erful\,and\,illuminating, as\,is\,Crystal's$

outrage that the scant press coverage the missing girls have received invariably links them to street gangs. The tension in the second half isn't just in whether Chris will win the day—it's in how far he will go.

Zhengis Tasbolatov's art is crisp, clear, and compelling, whether characters are engaged in thoughtful colloquies or armed combat. Chris flipping on a rooftop to avoid gunshots is a striking enough image to linger over, but the sense of momentum from one panel to the next makes lingering a challenge—comics fans will be rushing to see what's next. Washington's characters may be accomplished, but nothing comes easy for them. Black Justice powerfully centers Black strength and genius, but also hard work, self-knowledge, and taking accountability.

Cover: A | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: A Editing: A- | Marketing copy: A

MYSTERY/THRILLER

EDITOR'S PICK

Night and its Longings

Philip Cioffari | Livingston Press 260p, e-book, \$4.99, ASIN BOCTD2T9TD

Cioffari's latest investigative thriller (after If Anyone Asks, Say I Died from the Heartbreaking Blues) plumbs the depth of love and betrayal through the eyes of New York City crime writer Jake Garrett. Jake's year-long affair with Vera ended 10 years ago, a time he chalks up to "youthful passion, heart-strong and heedless," but when Vera's husband, Norm, shows up on Jake's doorstep late one

night, informing him of Vera's disappearance and asking for his help in finding her, Jake couldn't be more shocked. Norm, convinced that Vera never stopped loving Jake, insists he's the

urgency, a tense exploration of devotion and loss that hits hard. Jake, of course, reluctantly agrees to help, launching him into an investigation that concerns Vera's friend Sue Quinn—who seems to be hiding more

A crime writer's tense investigation of the disappearance of a woman he loved.

Great for fans of Paula McLain's When the Stars Go Dark, Stewart O'Nan's Songs for the Missing.

than she reveals—and a possible connection to a sleazy bar and drug, both called the Blue Flower. Cioffari's clues tantalize, and the suspense ramps up with power when Jake stumbles onto the involvement of ruthless dirty cop Mike Monahan. Jake fears for Vera's life, but his investigation

reveals a very different woman from the one he loved and lost. Cioffari explores profound emotions in lilting, soulful prose, subtly illuminating the incremental ways that Jake and Norm have lost Vera over the years.

Readers may find the reasons for Vera's disappearance disheartening, but the intimacy between characters is well-crafted and memorable As Jake learns more about their time apart, he encounters Vera's love for her son, Devon, who died at only nine years old due to complications of Down's Syndrome—a different love story that's both beautiful and heartbreaking, one of many elements of Vera's life that Jake never experienced. The tension pulses just under the surface, reflected in Jake's musing "in matters of the heart we're all anarchists, aren't we?"

Cover: A | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: - Editing: A | Marketing copy: A-



key to unraveling what's happened to her. What unfolds is an urbane, existential mystery with emotional

MYSTERY/THRILLER

The Mole People

assault and other terrors.

Kevin Landt | Ryland Publishing

177p, e-book, \$2.99, ISBN 979-8-223-65311-0

Landt (author of Mvface) chronicles one woman's journey into an unhoused life when her schizophrenia leads her to distrust those closest to her. Despite fears of becoming zombie-like or losing "the good thoughts," Suzie Franks, a college student in her hometown of Portland, Oregon, agrees to take the medications prescribed for her when she's threatened with expulsion after throwing a chair at a fellow student. But Suzie stops her



Suzie's sense of isolation and certainty that Robbie has broken her trust

like Jazz and Judy make this dark refuge inviting, but Suzie soon faces

A student with schizophrenia faces danger in the tunnels below Las Vegas.

Great for fans of Ishmael Beah's Little Family. Matthew O'Brien's Beneath the Neon.

drive this pained story, which makes literal, in its subterranean escape, the figurative "deep, dark hole" that Suzie feels she has been "crawling into" ever since she chucked her meds. "Here one minute, and then. gone," she thinks, of the people in her life: Landt's intimate thirdperson account of her journey

plunges readers into a mind that is convincingly "grateful," in the darkness of the tunnels, that "she couldn't see the condition of the mattress, or the walls, or floors." Moments like that offer brief respite as Suzie faces escalating dangers, like flooding and discord among a vividly characterized group of mole people.

 $Landt\ provides\ a\ convincing, upsetting, but\ ultimately\ humane\ look$ at schizophrenia and how it complicates the lives of those who have the disorder as well as those trying to help them. And this view of Las Vegas $highlights\, the\, great\, contrast\, between\, those\, living\, in\, the\, glittering\, world$ of the casinos and those who find refuge in the "dark underworld" below.

Cover: A | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: - Editing: A | Marketing copy: A







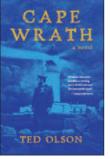
MYSTERY/THRILLER

Cape Wrath

Ted Olson | Story Road, LLC

426p, e-book, \$16.99, ISBN 979-8-218-04398-5

Olson's accomplished, time-crossed debut weaves together elements of mystery, romance, and the supernatural against the backdrop of desolate Cape Wrath in the Scottish Highlands. The time-crossed story centers on the lives of Andrea Sinclair, a theater actress, and Thomas MacAllister, a Royal Navy officer turned lighthouse keeper in the years after World War II. Andrea believes "If he loves me, he will leave" the Highlands, but soon



their love is overshadowed by secrets and tragedy. Olson skilfully constructs a dual timeline narrative that follows the intertwined fates of characters across generations, with the novel's first half focusing on Andrea and Thomas's love affair, the mysterious lighthouse, and Andrea's acting career, the narrative gradually unveiling layers of hidden truths. In the second half, Mary, an investigative reporter, and Evan, Thomas's nephew, join forces to unravel the mysteries surrounding Thomas's untimely demise and a possible supernatural presence haunting the abandoned lighthouse.

Decades-spanning story of romance, mystery, and a remote Scottish lighthouse.

Great for fans of M.L. Stedman's The Light Between Oceans, Hazel Gaynor's The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter.

Despite the lack of a singular protagonist. Olson's ensemble and his intricately crafted milieu propels the narrative forward. Andrea emerges as the connecting thread between the two narrative epochs, as she embarks with Mary and Evan on a quest for answers. The atmospheric setting of Cape Wrath serves as a character in itself, with

Olson's vivid descriptions (one light is "small but brilliant, and it hovered above the dark mass of the ridge, on a horizon separating land and sea") evoking the harsh beauty and isolation of Scotland's northern coast.

In the end, the lighthouse fittingly emerges as the center point of everyone's quest for answers, providing much-needed closure for Andrea. Olson's indulgent storytelling and rich character development will transport readers of richly emotional literary romances into a place caught between land and sea, past and present, and reality and the supernatural. Olson captures the essence of this place and these characters across decades, crafting a timeless romance rich with poignant reflections on the human experience and the complexities of grief.

Cover: A- | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: - Editing: A | Marketing copy: A

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Stavin' Alive

Susie McKenna | Archway Publishing

235p, trade paper, \$20.99, ISBN 978-1-665-75434-7

Deana Harris, now Deana Cooney, returns in McKenna's sequel to Last Tracks, and this time she's headed to rural Virginia with friends Cindy, Shelly, and Jean, in search of serenity and a peaceful round of golf, but when Deana stumbles onto a dead body while searching for a lost ball, their tranquil getaway is shattered. The body belongs to Kyle Dixon, a shady real estate agent working under the alias of Ken Draper in Washington, D.C., who swindled Shelly and Jean.



Whether you're a brother or mother, the disco-inflected mystery that follows will keep you on your toes as Deana and her dishy, sharply drawn crew face multiple suspects, from scorned lovers and their partners to. well, each other. Kyle is well-known as the philandering husband of the wealthy Jennifer Dixon, co-owner of the Monarch Estates, the swank $gated\ community\ where\ the\ body\ was\ discovered.\ Complicating\ matters$ is the fact that a major development is in the works for Monarch, and Kyle's opinions—and involvement—in the scheme may have put him at risk. Soon enough, more death follows, and as the friends begin to

Dishy mystery pitting friends against murder in gated-community Virginia.

Great for fans of Ellen Crosby's The Merlot Murders, Ella Barrick's Quickstep to Murder.

understand the danger they're in and local detective Greg O'Neill gets involved. Deana and co. are quick to jump in and offer assistance to O'Neill, along with their retired police officer friend Snooky, as the group works to overcome lies and betrayals.

McKenna brings the milieu, in

the shadows of the Blue Ridge Mountains, to engaging life—"this bucolic area certainly does remind one of the goings-on in the English crime shows" Shelly declares—as the story blends sleuthing, suspense, and complicated friendships. A touch of romance is welcome, despite the setting's decidedly dangerous happenings. This murder mystery is served with a slice of lightheartedness though, as the titular song functions as the story's theme song, playing every time Cindy's doorbell rings and offering comic relief, while still reminding the crew of their ultimate goal

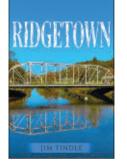
Cover: B+ | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: – Editing: A- | Marketing copy: A

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Ridgetown Jim Tindle

425p, e-book, \$14.50, ASIN BOCTW7NWHP

In his third outing, the mysterious agent Arsen heads to Georgia, on the trail of a violent militia known as the Ridgetown Riders, aka the Silent Mirage, a hate-fueled group similar to the Proud Boys and headed by the battlehardened Major Coker, Arsen's controller, Nils, tasks him with infiltrating the Silent Mirage and find out what connections they have. A veteran himself, Arsen easily slips into the group, thanks partly to his growing relationship with group member Crimson Fox, who



busts heads at the bar she co-owns and served as a hand-to-hand combat training instructor at Fort Benning. As the Silent Mirage's activities become increasingly deadly, Arsen must come to terms with his own bloody past, while Crimson questions her own loyalties. The final reckoning is cathartic—and surprising.

Tindle, a Vietnam veteran, is very much at home in the military milieu and rolls out the characters with a strong sense of their background. Fans of military thrillers will revel in the wide range of hardware and high-tech descriptions. And for those who like their violence graphic,

Explosive action as an off-the-books agent infiltrates a domestic hate group.

Great for fans of T. R. Hendricks's The Infiltrator, Jack Carr.

Tindle doesn't disappoint: a dead man's head looks "like a watermelon that had been dropped off a ten-story building." Readers may fear that the repellant Silent Mirage is out of control, but Arsen again proves as capable—and morally flexible—as James Bond.

Indeed, he refers to himself as a "contract assassin" and goes about proving that the title fits.

Although the focus is on plot and action, Tindle has a good ear for the coarse camaraderie of soldiers, including some macho strutting that is straight out of high school. Nevertheless, an occasional real emotion affects these tough guys. And the love affair between Arsen and Crimson is fun and sexy, rounding out the characters and serving as an effective break between action scenes. Interestingly, though, in this man's man book, the cleverest exchanges are found in the bromance between Arsen and his boss Nils. Overall, a good choice for action fans.

Cover: B | Design & typography: A- | Illustrations: - Editing: A- | Marketing copy: B+



MYSTERY/THRILLER

A Vengeful King Rises: House of Croft, Book 1

Sophie Barnes

486p, e-book, \$4.99, ASIN BOCK8J1N9V

This nimble series starter from Barnes (author of The Gentlemen Authors series, among others) prowls the dark streets and undercover activities in the London of 1817. When the latest young woman turns up murdered—the third victim of an increasingly vicious killer preying on society women-Chief Constable Peter Kendrick and his Bow Street supervisors face serious pressure over



their failure to solve the crimes terrorizing the city, and he's pressured, in the meantime, to score a victory, going after a wealthy family suspected of illegality. Enter Adrian Croft, son of a tyrannical father known for his powerful influence and shady business dealings. Set up to succeed his father as the "King of Portman Square," Adrian is in fact $disgusted\ with\ his\ family's\ gritty\ transactions\ with\ the\ London\ under$ world—but when the killings connect to his own life, his thirst for vengeance might undo him.

Barnes blends procedural and espionage elements with a vividly

Intrigue, romance, and murder combine in this lively old London series starter.

Great for fans of Nicola

Cornick's House of Shadows. Fllen Marie Wiseman's What She Left Behind.

evoked London of fog, jouncing hackneys, and churchvards where the gravestones suggest "crooked teeth in the darkness." A smart setup pits two savvy characters against each other, with a dash of romantic tension: as he strives to look out for his sister Evelyn, Adrian's targeted by a highly secretive ring of female spies known as The

Nightingale Project, with Samantha Carmichael, the star agent, tasked with infiltrating Adrian's life and securing his family's secret files.

Barnes maintains a steady clip, deftly combining mystery and romance elements to spin an enticing tale of intrigue, passion, and danger. As Samantha grows closer to Adrian and Evelyn in an effort to win their trust, she uncovers a side of Adrian that sparks a deeper connection between the two, even as they each continue to harbor distrust for each other. Barnes builds to a startling ending that leaves their future hanging in the balance. Readers will be eager for the next in the series.

Cover: A | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: - Editing: A | Marketing copy: A

Her Own War: Château de Verzat, Book 3

Debra Borchert | Le Vin Press 325p, e-book, \$9.99, ISBN 979-8-989-99310-9

In Borchert's third installment of her Château de Verzat series (after Her Own Revolution), Geneviève LaGarde returns, now married to Louis LaGarde and vigneron of her husband's celebrated family vineyard. The deeply passionate couple's livelihood is at stake, thanks to Napoleon Bonaparte's political machinations—and the Republic's schemes to seize their vineyard if they fail to pay their



escalating taxes. Adding to the intrigue, Louis is in hiding—masquerading as a mere vineyard owner when he's really a Noble of the Sword—to avoid being conscripted into Bonaparte's fight against England

Borchert covers much fertile historical ground in this emotional story, $surveying \, the \, tense \, French \, political \, scene \, (including \, fascinating \, trends \,$ like the Incroyables, "foppish dandies who dressed to mock the former aristocracy") alongside Louis and Geneviève's intense dedication to their way of life—and each other. The plotting illuminates a complex era that Borchert vividly conjures: when Geneviève is betrayed by a

Sweeping, passionate portrait of the everyday lives in Bonaparte's France.

Great for fans of Penny Haw's The Woman at the Wheel, Stephanie Dray's The Women Chateau Lafayette.

iealous worker for impersonating a man, and imprisoned in an asylum, the couple discover there's no end to their willingness to sacrifice all in the name of love, even when that means Louis must face the dread of a forced military campaign under that "self-serving war monger," Bonaparte. That leads to heart-rending choices as he must

leave behind a pregnant Geneviève, charged with keeping the vineyard and their close friends safe.

Geneviève is every bit the resolute, strong female lead of the other books in the series, but her pregnancy—and the shock of Louis's conscription in exchange for her freedom from the asylum—allow her a soft, vulnerable edge. That vulnerability, combined with her belief that restoring the monarchy is France's only hope, prompts her to dare to attempt acts of espionage herself. Readers of historical fiction with a strong current of love and loss will enjoy watching both Louis and Geneviève fight their own battles in hopes of reuniting—and reunifying their ravaged country.

Cover: A | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: - Editing: A | Marketing copy: A

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Fly in the Ointment: Book 1

Robert Cooper | Preaching Pumpkin Press 495p, e-book, \$11.57, ISBN 979-8-810-05495-5

Cooper's twisty debut, the kickoff to a series, centers on the secrets of a sprawling mansion some 70 miles outside of Pasadena. recently purchased by Kevin Swan, the wealthy thirty something son of a SoCal shipping magnate. Kevin lives for martial arts, classic cars, hang gliding, and travel—he's the owner/publisher of a magazine dedicated to it—and has vague plans of transforming the estate into a museum. But as soon as he tries to open the front door, he and his closest



companion—his German Shepherd, a rescue named Princess—face $uncanny\ strangeness, from\ a\ screen\ door\ blown\ into\ the\ upper\ boughs$ of a mighty cottonwood, to vile substances in a locked observatory, to a surprise library with titles like Necromancy: Pedigrees, Formulations, Analyses. Underhill, the local salt overseeing a rewiring project, warns him away from the central tower. Worst of all: Princess is acting up, even fighting with her human.

The novel is as sprawling and unpredictable as its subject, a mansion with more rooms and curiosities—like its bewildering abundance of

Sprawling, surprisingly comic novel of a possibly haunted estate.

Great for fans of Grady Hendrix's How to Sell a Haunted House, Edgar Cantero's The Supernatural Enhancements.

cupboards-than Kevin can count. Hints come early about elements that might power the mysteries (a chance encounter with a beautiful woman in China years before; the Swan family's connection to a cursed ancient knife), but even after Kevin brings some experts in supernatural weirdness, a Caltech prof and a "witch" named Spooky

who's "one fry short of a Happy Meal," this chatty, discursive novel never resists a joke or charts a straightforward storytelling path. Kevin engages in patter comedy routines with his friends and a pair of unhoused day laborers, and his excursions via Harley, Jaguar, and 1950 Pontiac Chieftain are lovingly detailed.

Readers interested primarily in the mysteries will find the pacing slow, with the comedy clashing with the darker material. When horror elements take center stage (as in scenes of exploration or a setpiece séance) Cooper demonstrates wicked inventiveness and timing. He can spring a jolt, a gross-out, and a surprise.

Cover: A- | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: - Editing: B+ | Marketing copy: A-



POLITICAL & SOCIAL SCIENCES, CURRENT EVENTS

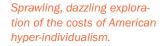
Our Worst Strength: American Individualism and its Hidden **Discontents**

James F. Richardson | Social Awareness Institute 434p, trade paper, \$19.95, ISBN 979-8-9887680-1-2

"Radical autonomy is terrific if you're trying to escape something horrid," Richardson notes in this incisive, illuminating debut, but in other cases the American ethos of individualism, especially as represented by the "overwhelming lifestyle choice of the modern urban world," can be confusing, over-

whelming, and anxiety-provoking, especially for young people finding their place in life. Richardson likens contemporary Americans' 20s and 30s to a sort of Rumspringa, a time of "exploring opportunities physical, intellectual, and income related" without "significant structural guidance, coaching, (and even therapy) from the broader communities in which we live and work," an approach that, understandably, yields "sadly unequal outcomes" that favor "neurotypical, white men from upper-middle-class backgrounds the most."

An anthropologist, Richardson persuasively explores the impact that



Great for fans of Robert D. Putnam; Peter L. Callero's The Mvth of Individualism.

an increasingly "hyper-individualistic" society has on careers, family life, personal happiness, and more. He examines tendencies toward loneliness, weaker friendships, over-consumption, and the costs of the "freedom to ignore the past." He does not promise academic rigor, and draws heavily on his own expe-

rience of neurodivergence creating challenges in navigating shifting societal rules. But as he considers telling examples like the rise of potlucks, the decline of formal club membership, and the waning influence of elders, Richardson takes welcome pains to avoid nostalgia and generalizing. Richardson's a shrewd, witty, sometimes outraged observer who urges readers to approach individualistic impulses more critically.

 $Richardson's\ life\ and\ anecdotes\ from\ interviewees\ illustrate\ his\ most$ striking arguments, such as the peculiarly American brand of individualism feeding the belief that "failures, traumas, and tragedy" are personal outcomes whose social context "fades into the margins of our moral memory." The book sprawls some, but the strongest sections—like a consideration of snack culture and the rise of obesity—dazzle.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

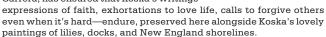
SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

Child of Light

Teresa Koska | Heir Media

218p, trade paper, \$22.99, ISBN 979-8-985-92542-5

This moving collection documents a believer's faith, wisdom, prayers, and challenges as she faced the final days of a life that ended, in this sphere, in 2015, at age 47. But as Child of Light demonstrates, through both Koska's rousing words and the book's very existence, that wasn't the end: "I know that I will enjoy an amazing eternal life after this earthly one, Koska writes. Koska's sister, Atlanta Marie Carrera, has ensured that Koska's writings-



Koska writes with disarming frankness about the challenge of remaining upbeat through chemotherapy and a hard diagnosis, and she will draw reader's tears as she notes that "Every bone in my body hurts from the inside out" and contemplates changing "my son's life forever by telling him that I most likely won't make it to Christmas. Her final entry is both wrenching and buoyant, as she contemplates the end and sets down the truths that she most wants those she's

Moving reflections from a Christian embracing God as she faced the end of life.

Great for fans of Edward Grinnan's A Journey of Faith, Cathie Young's Gold in the Road. leaving behind to understand, from working to know God to making time for good music each day to reaching out to others. "When you help someone else," she writes, "you heal your own wound."

That final dispatch crystalizes thoughts she explores in the many touching entries that precede it.

(These essays originated as blog posts.) The focus is on her relationship with God and with life itself, with each entry offering a prayer and often verses from scripture. She urges readers to recognize their worth, consider what they are the "source of" for others, and to understand "God will provide for us what we need, when we need it, and on His terms." Especially touching are accounts of her own growth, like reaching out to a volleyball rival to protect the joy of their shared pastime. This collection is an act of faith and of love.

Cover: A | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: - Editing: A | Marketing copy: A



MEMOIR

In This Altered Body: A Survivor's Story of Resilience and Love

Charlene Pell | Facing Forward Books

223p, e-book, \$9.99, ASIN BOCVF7X9JT In this moving, vulnerable memoir, Pell

offers an enduring contribution to the testimony of human resilience by recounting her experience as a burn survivor. Pell begins her story with the story of a "normal" day in 1994 with her fiancé, Roger, in their temporary home on Cat Island in the Bahamas, as they enjoyed a vacation from work. But they're caught in a harrowing accident when their

private plane, piloted by Roger, crashes upon landing, leaving 64% of Pell's body burned. Devastatingly, Roger did not survive. The recovery that follows is tense and moving, as months turn into years of reconstructive surgeries, therapies, rehabilitation, and discoveries ("music became the one medication that truly soothed my seared spirit and body") as Pell finds not only her physical self but the whole of her spirit forever altered.

Telling the story with visceral language and potent photographs, Pell stirs in readers the beyond-imaginable pain of her burns. "I was



Martinez's Full of Heart.

unaware of time or space. Sand went deep into my seared flesh and open wounds," she writes of her escape from the crash. She also digs deep to articulate the complex feelings that came with her long recovery: the demoralizing loss of

agency over her life, the guilt of feeling like a burden, a longing for intimacy, the insecurity of losing a hard-earned career, the grief of losing her fiancé, and the debilitating sense that she had lost her womanhood and her perceived attractiveness. She writes, with uncommon candor, "As the days and weeks passed, I felt like a mutant amidst a planet of 'normal-looking' people.'

Pell's bold, inspiring memoir challenges readers to deeper empathy and to confront preconceived notions and biases about disfigurement. Despite being shaken by people's stares as well as their refusal to look, Pell compels readers to peer beyond the skin to see the resilience of survivors who have not only reclaimed their beauty and independence but also rediscovered their identity and purpose.

Cover: A | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: A Editing: A | Marketing copy: A

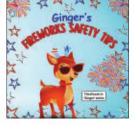


PICTURE BOOKS

Ginger's Fireworks Safety Tips AimeeAnn Blythe

34p, trade paper, \$12.95, ISBN 979-8-873-34964-7

Blythe's third story in her Ginger series (after Ginger Meets a Leprechaun and Makes a Wish) follows Ginger, a russetcolored deer inspired by a real-life animal, as she joins her pals for a July 4th parade. After convincing her forest friends that a hike to Bee Branchville is just the ticket



to celebrate the Independence Day holiday, Ginger and crew find the city's streets deserted, with closed signs hanging on the store windows. When the group spots a board advertising the town's 4th of July parade—and asking for helpers to man the Fireworks Safety float-Ginger promptly dons her customized holiday sunglasses and signs on.

The animal stars in Blythe's uncomplicated tale deliver a crucial message: fireworks may be fun, but they're serious business. As Blythe points out in the backmatter, there are "over 10,000 injuries yearly associated with fireworks," and many of those happen to young children. To promote a dazzling—and safe—4th of July, Ginger and her friends share safety rules on their float, ranging from "older children should use fireworks under close adult supervision" to "never point or throw fireAnimal friends share dos and don'ts for fireworks

Great for fans of Kate Riggs's To the Rescue!, Jenny Cable's PI the Flame.

works at another person." Each rule is accompanied by bright graphics with warning signs, allowing younger readers a visual representation of fireworks dos and don'ts.

Blythe's digital illustrations feel bland in places, sometimes static and repetitive, with varying styles for individual characters giving

some spreads an inconsistent patchwork look. Younger readers may find the bold colors and individual animals entertaining (particularly Ginger's squirrel friend, who vows to take an acorn on their walk into town, just in case hunger strikes on the road). The story's implication—that using fireworks without safety considerations can be deadly—sounds grave but is important, and Ginger's parade ends in a happy celebration, including a glittering outdoor fireworks display. Blythe's photograph of the real-life Ginger will delight younger readers, as will the suggestion to use glow sticks or silly string for a safer July 4th option.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **B** | Illustrations: **B-** Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **B**

YOUNG ADULT

EDITOR'S PICK

The Last Refuge: Stealing **Sanctuary Series**

Christina Bacilieri | Crescent Ink Publishing 312p, hardcover, tkprice, ISBN 979-8-988-66181-8

When she tries to skirt the rules to improve life for herself and her single mother, a student named Kiera on the "withering" planet of Atterah is thrust into a gladiatorial style magical competition in this coming-of-age fantasy, Bacilieri's promising debut and the kickoff to a series. When the draconian Ruling Board unexpectedly opens the gates to



Etabon, the only place left on the planet where magic remains, in advance of a grand festival, Kiera thinks she's only helping her well-off classmates sneak up to the borders. But the truth is someone else is scheming to get her out of the way. Soon, she's thrust unwittingly past the borders of the magical realm, a transformative act—she finds herself whiskered and "covered in midnight fur." Forced to agree to a magical bargain with the ethically dubious warden of Etabon, Kiera must fight in the arenas to generate magical energy.

Despite the magic, animal-shifting, and vivid sense of both dystopia and wonder, Bacilieri's cast and their motivations feel relatable and

Engaging fantasy of animalshifting, facing injustice, and kindness

Great for fans of Sarah Rees Brennan's In Other Lands, Rachel Vincent's Menagerie.

well-grounded as Kiera and company fight not just to protect themselves and each other but to retain their humanity and morals in the face of a brutal system. Characterization is strong as Kiera, ensnared by those who would use her, finds friends and allies in Etabon bold enough to take a stand

amidst increasing danger, chief among them the charming Attalin, long separated from her family, first encountered here tending bar among mermaids and sirens

Pacing is brisk, rewarding readers with twists, thrills, high-stakes deal-making, moonlit elk rides, and a charming touch of Sapphic romance. Bacilieri honors and sometimes upends genre expectations, and her creatures, spells, and mysteries are crafted with clear love. Kiera makes for an eminently likable heroine whose strength comes largely in her kindness, creativity, and determination, and she surrounds herself with others who exemplify these qualities despite challenging circumstances. This is a strong pick for YA fantasy fans looking for a magical new adventure.

Cover: A | Design & typography: A | Illustrations: - Editing: A | Marketing copy: A

Booksellers

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The following are reviews of self-published titles that have previously appeared in PW

Fiction

A Lot of People Live in This House

Bailey Merlin. Book Brilliance, \$18.99 trade paper (372p) ISBN 978-1-913770-64-8

Merlin's heartwarming debut follows a married woman who unexpectedly finds her family of choice during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thirty-something Rachel has worked hard to overcome loss in her life. Ten years earlier, her parents and two younger brothers died together in an RV accident. Recently, her first child, Siobhan, was stillborn. In early 2020, a few months after Siobhan's death, she and her husband, Job, embark from their home in Chicago for a globe-trotting trip as an attempt to recover from their grief. While they're in Egypt, Rachel is offered a job as grant manager for Harvard Medical School, and she returns alone to the U.S., where she moves into a 10-bedroom shared house in Boston, while Job continues alone to India with the expectation that he'll join her a few weeks later. Rachel, an intensely private person, at first questions if she can handle living with so many people, and eagerly awaits Job's arrival. When the pandemic hits, stranding Job in India, Rachel's supportive new roommates, many of whom are from other countries and know people around the world, attempt to help Job get back to the U.S. As the virus continues to spread, Merlin expertly keeps readers guessing which of the housemates will be affected, and her well-drawn characters demonstrate the strength that comes from community. Readers will want to see more from Merlin

The Anarchist's Wife

Margo Laurie. Calleia, \$2.99 e-book (174p) ASIN BOBJRRFQQ4

Laurie's compassionate debut revisits the 1927 execution of Italian immigrant and suspected anarchist Ferdinando "Fred" Nicola Sacco. The narrative opens with his wife, Rosa, recounting the history of their relationship in a letter to her seven-year-old daughter, Ines, written shortly after his death. Laurie then flashes back to 1911,

when Rosa first meets Fred at a dance in Milford, Mass. The two begin dating under the watchful eye of Rosa's grandmother, but their wedding plans are derailed when Fred refuses to get married in a church and informs her father that he lost faith in God after seeing how poorly workers are treated in the U.S. Despite her family's objections, Rosa and Fred eventually marry and start a family. The couple join a theater company, whose members, including fellow immigrant Bartolomeo Vanzetti, share Fred's leftist leanings and introduce him to the anarchist movement. After the fatal 1920 armed robbery of a shoe factory in Braintree, Fred and Bartolomeo's involvement with anarchists draws suspicion from the police, who charge them with the crime based on questionable eyewitness identifications. Laurie effectively conveys the emotional toll of the investigation, prosecution, and execution on Rosa, who remains unsure of the extent of Sacco's involvement with the anarchists. Readers will look forward to more from Laurie.

Montana Blues

Ray Ring. Writers Canyon, \$17.99 trade paper (326p) ISBN 979-8-9869383-0-1

This white-knuckle whodunit from Ring (Arizona Kiss) chronicles the search for a killer from the perspectives of the victim's identical twin sister and the Black man wrongly accused of the crime. Five years ago, white Montana State University cheerleader Nikki Fontaine was strangled to death in her apartment. Her boyfriend, football star Dawson Koloko, was convicted and sentenced to life in prison after Nikki's twin, Rose, discovered him unconscious next to Nikki's body with scratches on his face. Now, Dawson's attorney has successfully argued that police mishandled DNA evidence and Dawson's conviction has been overturned. Determined to track down Nikki's killer, he forms a wobbly alliance with Rose, who's now married to the local sheriff, and the two uncover evidence that a white supremacist group may have been involved in Nikki's murder. Ring steadily ratchets up the suspense while developing a surprisingly potent emotional dynamic between his well-drawn leads. John Sandford fans should take a look.

A Sudden Interest in Shakespeare: A Seamus O'Neill Mystery

Paul Breen. Dutch Hollow, \$3.99 e-book (270p) ISBN 979-8-9862083-2-9

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Breen's clever second mystery featuring struggling musician-cum-investigator Seamus O'Neill (after Runner's Path) hits all the right notes. In 2000, Seamus's boss, Wisconsin PI John Ryder, is contacted by Mary Hoffman, who's concerned about her web designer brother, Tom. Not only has Tom inexplicably quit his private sector job for a lower-paying position at the State of Wisconsin Investment Board, he's suddenly obsessed with the works of William Shakespeare, despite never being much of a reader. What's more, on a recent visit to Tom's apartment, Mary discovered a shoebox filled with fake documents, cash, and a list of names. Ryder taps Seamus to help him investigate, and the puzzle gets more complex when someone close to the Wisconsin state government goes missing and his daughter reveals to the detectives that he, too, had developed a baffling new interest in the Bard. Breen peppers the investigation with plenty of well-tooled plot twists, and throws in some delightful Easter eggs for Shakespeare buffs along the way. Timothy Hallinan fans should check this out.

Nonfiction

Creating Superfans: How to Turn Your Customers into Lifelong Advocates

Brittany Hodak. Page Two, \$27 (296p) ISBN 978-1-77458-078-3

Hodak, cofounder of the marketing agency Bright Ideas Only, debuts with a breezy program detailing how fledgling businesses can earn loyal customers. Her "SUPER model" encourages readers to "start with your story," "understand your customer's story," "personalize," "exceed expectations," and "repeat." Breaking down



each step, Hodak urges business owners to humanize their brand by sharing how life events or personal passions inspired them to start their company. As an example, she points to a metal business card producer whose automated responses to email inquiries recount how the company grew out of a model train manufacturing business the owner started as a teenager. Recognizing customers' desires is key, Hodak asserts, suggesting that readers focus sales pitches on the lifestyle transformation enabled by a product instead of the product itself (for instance, she notes that a tool for boosting productivity could be marketed as creating more time for family). The conversational prose is tinged with humor that enlivens the shrewd business advice (on the importance of personalizing customer service: "Is it annoying having to send a paper statement to that one guy who refuses to go paperless? Of course it is. But it makes Jeff happy, so keep doing it"). The result is an animated and pragmatic guide to how small businesses can convince customers to keep coming back for more.

Whole Dog Parenting: Everything You Need to Raise and Train an Urban Pup

Jennifer Wheeler and Ovidiu Stoica, illus. by Oana Stoica. Yellow Sky, \$16.99 trade paper (324p) ISBN 979-8-218-08610-7

Wheeler and Stoica, spouses who run a dog walking and training business in New York City, debut with a practical guide to helping canines thrive in big cities. Acclimating dogs to the hustle and bustle of urban life is best achieved through walks that expose them to the city's many sights, smells, and sounds, the authors contend. To overcome particular sources of anxiety, Wheeler and Stoica recommend playing near the fear-inducing stimulus, moving closer each day until the dog no longer feels anxious. They emphasize how undesirable behaviors often result from unmet needs, explaining that dogs will chew shoes and tear up furniture if they don't get enough exercise. Advice on training includes helpful tips for raising country and city dogs alike. For instance, the authors note that because dogs understand tone and posture more than words, it's important to be expressive when scolding or offering praise. Elsewhere, the authors outline "dog park etiquette" and suggest that "if you bring a toy, it's communal property." Wheeler and Stoica share keen insight into how dogs see the world, and city dwellers will appreciate the useful recommendations for raising their pets. This is well worth a look.

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ENDNOTES*

*OUR WEEKLY ANNOTATED GUIDE TO HOW A BOOK IS MADE



ERIC REYNOLDS
Acquiring Editor,
Fantagraphics

"I was knocked out by Kaneko's incredible fusion of Western influences, Osamu Tezuka's original story, and contemporary manga. But as I've lived with the project, working with Christopher, my respect and awe for it and for Kaneko's artistry have only grown."



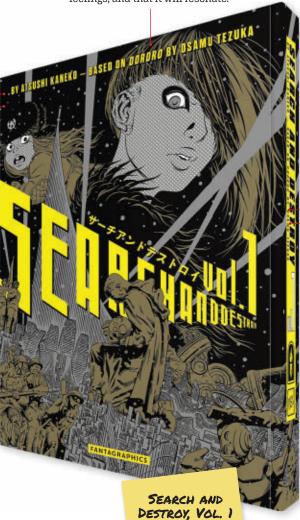
CHRISTOPHER
BUTCHER
Series Editor,
Mangasplaining

"Eric met our pitch with such incredible enthusiasm. When Ben heard we were publishing Search and Destroy, he contacted us, as he'd already translated the first book for fun in his spare time. A similar thing happened when I reached out to Phil, who was booked but squeezed in time to work on this because he loves Kaneko-sensei's work."



ATSUSHI KANEKO Mangaka

"Search and Destroy was drawn six years ago. At that time, fascism across the world had started to grow, so my anger against the spread of hate was woven into this work. Unfortunately, the world has become worse, and my anger has become more intense. I hope that my anger, which fills this story, will reach people with the same feelings, and that it will resonate."



Atsushi Kaneko Fantagraphics, July ISBN 978-1-68396-932-7



BEN APPLEGATE
Translator

"Kaneko matches peerless control over the composition and flow of visuals with an ear for the spoken word. The flamboyant yet disturbing monologuing of each villain was a twisted delight to render in English. But most striking are his sound effects. He assigns important elements signature sounds that remain consistent and repeat like percussion. I kept note of these so English readers would experience the same resonance."



PHIL CHRISTIE
Letterer

"In lettering the series,
I aimed to mirror
Kaneko's straightforward,
punk-rock aesthetic in
English. All of the sound
effects were hand drawn
before digitization to
preserve the authentic
punk vibe and give a
more unique feel."

LOVE AND LOSS: JAPANESE FICTION FROM

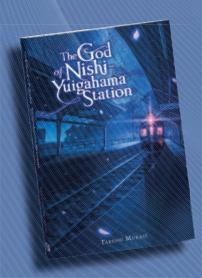


Mon Carif See the Snow By Rokudo Ningen

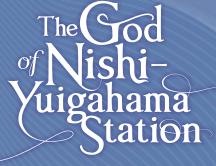
One summer night, Natsuki Uzume meets Yuki Iwato, an art student from the same university, and falls in love. They spend night after night together, but as autumn approaches, Yuki suddenly disappears from his life. Desperate to see her again, Natsuki visits her family home, but an unimaginable secret awaits him there: Yuki suffers from a mysterious illness that forces her to sleep through the winter each year. Is Natsuki willing to stay with her, even if it means spending every winter alone?



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By Takeshi Murase

At the beginning of spring, a train in Kamakura derails, causing numerous deaths. Two months later, rumors spread of a ghost at Nishi-Yuigahama Station with the power to send people back to the day of the terrible accident—on the very train that was doomed. The story attracts a woman who lost her fiancé in the disaster, a young man who lost his father, a teenage boy who lost his first love, and the late train conductor's wife. An opportunity to see their deceased loved ones seems almost too good to be true. What will they do now that they have it?



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