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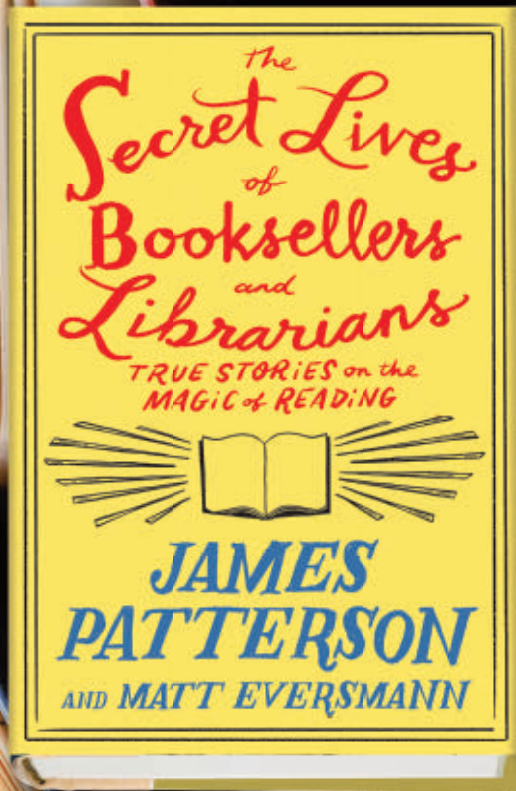
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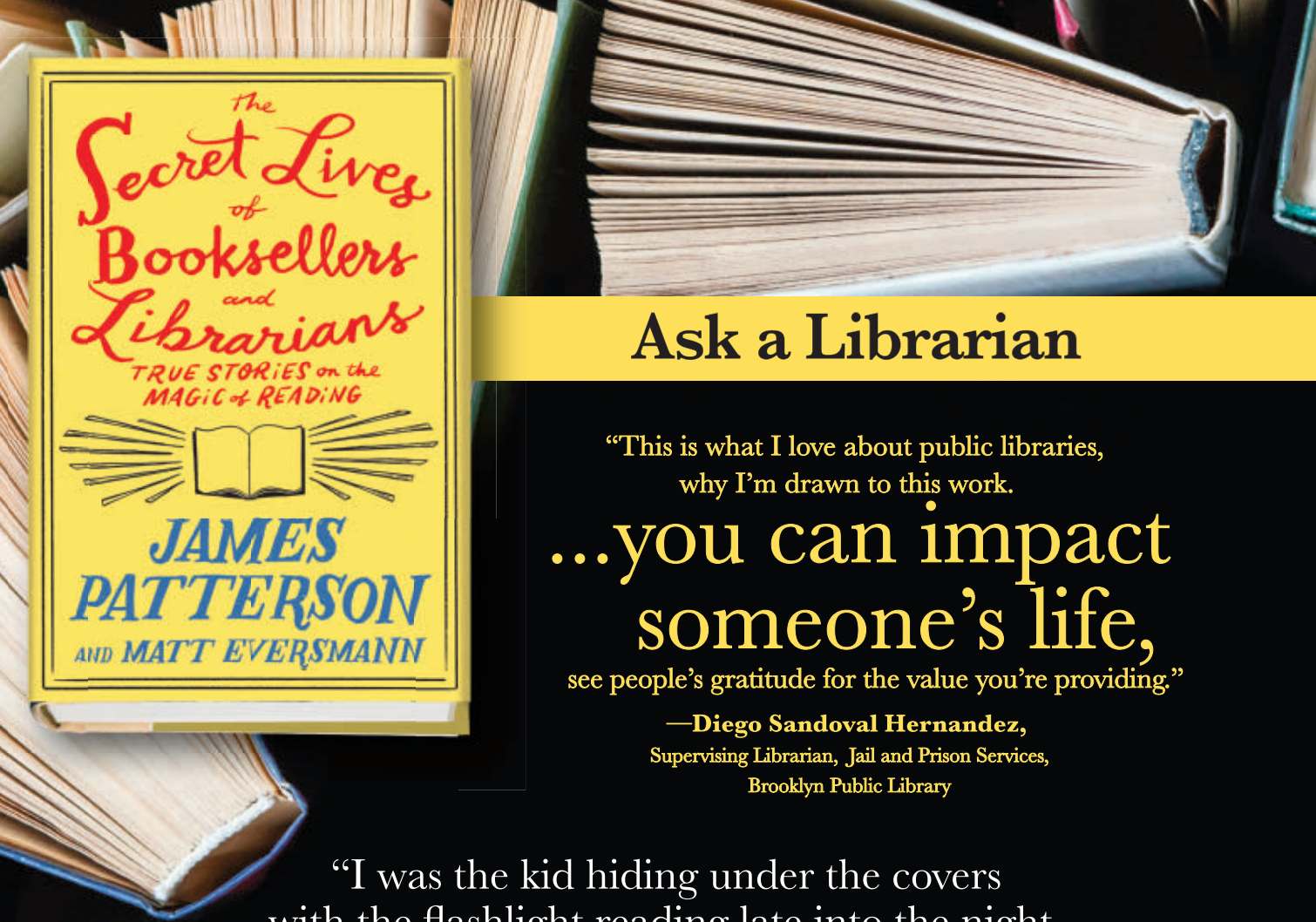
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healing place.”

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*Julia
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The National Book Award finalist mesmerizes in *Bear*, her wise and seductive sophomore novel. Read our review on page 51.

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Cover: Nina Subin

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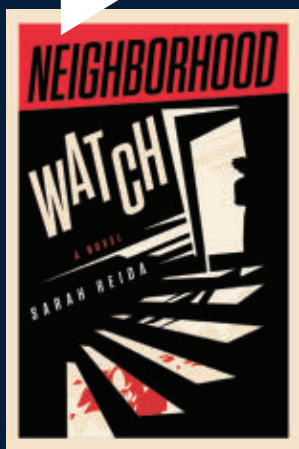
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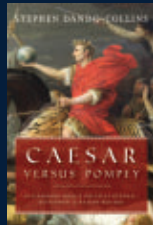
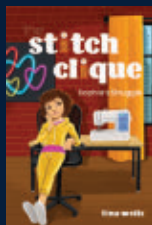
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The neighborhood of Oleander Court is the poster child for suburban bliss. But when a string of murders rips through the neighborhood, suspicions abound as new secrets come to light. And as more and more bodies are taken away, it becomes clear that the killer is strategically selecting each and every victim, picking off the shallowest the lot in spectacular fashion and leaving everyone in the neighborhood to wonder: **Who's next?**

Who's next?

"Transgender 12-year-old White details his challenges navigating his transition in this affirming autobiographical debut... a compassionate exploration of one trans child's experience and the invaluable impact that support has had on his life."
—Publishers Weekly



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Never Give Up!

Wall Street insider Lori Van Dusen shares a story of hope and resilience in her award-winning memoir *Running with Grace*.

When Lori Van Dusen was a young professional at Shearson Lehman Brothers, she encountered then-chairman Peter Cohen lighting a cigar while walking out of the elevator. Van Dusen had been building a strong client base, and her boss introduced her as an up-and-coming trainee.

"Cohen barely acknowledged me," she recalls. "He looked up from his cigar with what felt like open disdain—giving off a why-are-you-bothering-me-peasant vibe—and kept walking. I looked at my boss and shrugged."

Though the encounter was disappointing, it didn't stop Van Dusen from staying with the firm for 20 years and becoming one of its top producers. But *Running with Grace* is about so much more than a successful career. It's an invitation to reflect on resilience and the pursuit of a purposeful life. Described as a work of "great emotional power" by *Kirkus*, this deeply personal narrative is definitely not your typical Wall Street memoir.

"I wrote this book to inspire young professional women," Van Dusen says. "Women juggle a lot while building our careers—and I'm not just talking partners, friends, and families. There will be tragedies, unpleasant surprises, pressures, and failures. In the course of my career, I've experienced all of these on an epic scale."

With great candor, Van Dusen describes overcoming significant personal and professional hurdles, including navigating rampant sexism, surviving a sexual assault in graduate school, facing a life-altering medical diagnosis and a lawsuit from one of the world's most powerful banks, and coping with the devastating loss of her husband. "There were times when I didn't know if I was brave enough to publish this book, to put myself and all the intimate details of my life out into the world for everyone to see," she says. "But I'm so glad I overcame my fears. So many people have reached out and shared how

the book has helped and inspired them."

Van Dusen began her Wall Street career in 1986 and confronted the unfettered sexism that pervaded the industry at the time. "Even today, Wall Street is hardly a supportive environment for young women," she says. "You can only imagine how it was back in the 1980s and '90s. I didn't like the culture of Wall Street, but I did like my job. So, I ignored the crass remarks,

inducted into the prestigious Barron's Hall of Fame, among other accolades.

After the devastating death of her husband during the pandemic and her mother soon after, Van Dusen struggled to pick up the pieces once again. "Some people face more challenges than others, and I've certainly had my fair share," she says. "But I know I'm not alone. No life is without adversity. What defines our journey is how we react to it. Every day is still hard. But profound life events change you in unexpected ways. I'm deeper, more thoughtful, and more empathetic."

“

The world will always push against our dreams, our vision, our core values, and sometimes even our sanity—but we've got to push back.

— Lori Van Dusen

”

Publishing *Running with Grace* has been part of Van Dusen's healing journey. "I decided to share the good, the bad, and the ugly of my life," she says. "I wanted to show young women that I'm still standing, despite all of it. I hope that by watching me survive, they'll realize they can survive, too. The world will always push against our dreams, our vision, our core values, and sometimes even our sanity—but we've got to push back. We've got to put one foot in front of the other and keep moving forward. And while we're helping ourselves, it's important to share our hard-earned wisdom with others. This is what gives our lives meaning."



put my head down, and concentrated on the work. I learned to be comfortable, and very successful, as an outsider. But over the years, I became increasingly disillusioned with business as usual on Wall Street."

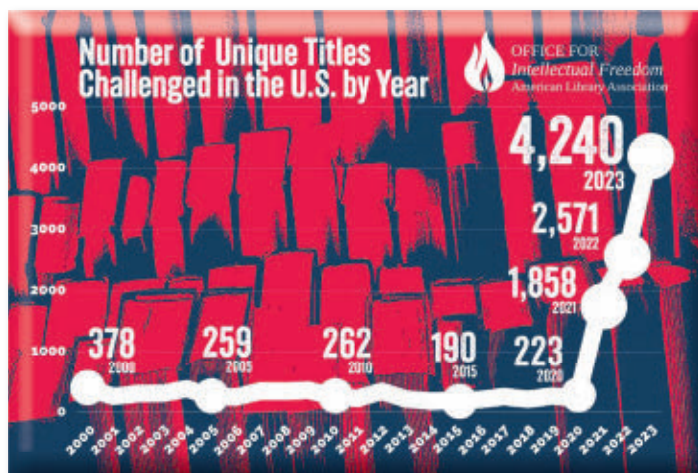
After rising to the role of managing director with Citigroup Smith Barney, Van Dusen left Wall Street and ultimately started her own independent investment advisory firm, LVW Advisors. She has been recognized as number 1 on *Forbes'* Best-in-State Advisors list and was

The Week *in* Publishing

BOOK CHALLENGES STILL SURGING

Despite some important legal victories by freedom to read advocates to start the year, the American Library Association delivered a stark reminder that the yearslong surge in book banning across the nation is far from over. In a March 14 release, ALA representatives said the number of unique titles targeted for censorship in 2023 surged a hefty 65% over 2022, once again hitting record levels.

With the 2023 data now in, ALA said that 4,240 unique book titles were reported as having been challenged in schools and libraries in 2023, a sharp increase over the 2,571 unique titles targeted by book banners in 2022 and the 1,651 titles targeted in 2021. Meanwhile, for the second year in a row, the data reflected another staggering jump in the number of titles tar-



geted for censorship at public libraries, with the challenges in public libraries up 92% over 2022. School libraries saw an 11% increase in challenged titles. Overall, titles representing the voices and experiences of LGBTQ and BIPOC individuals made up 47% of censorship attempts in 2023.

The release comes ahead of National Library Week, set to run April 7–13, when ALA will unveil its annual list of the top 10 most challenged books in the U.S., along with its full “State of America’s Libraries” report. “The reports from librarians and educators in the field make it clear that the organized campaigns to ban books aren’t over,” said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, in a statement. —AA

Rolling the Union On

Workers at the Barnes & Noble 82nd Street store on the Upper West Side of Manhattan have voted to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, with 85% of eligible workers voting in favor of joining after filing for



B&N workers at the Upper West Side store

a union election with the National Labor Relations Board in February. The store is the sixth location nationwide to vote to join the RWDSU, and the third in New York City. —JHM

RIP LibLearnX

After just three years, the American Library Association executive board has announced that it will shutter its LibLearnX conference in 2026. The news comes just weeks after ALA reported that the second in-person LibLearnX conference, held in Baltimore in January, drew just 2,006 attendees, down from the 2,659 who attended the first in-person event in New Orleans in 2023. Designed to replace the ALA’s long-running Midwinter Meeting (which usually drew around 7,000 attendees), LibLearnX was severely challenged by the pandemic, being forced to go virtual for its inaugural event in 2022. Despite many attendees praising the show for delivering some of what members had asked for in reimagining the Midwinter conference—fewer meetings, more educational offerings, and more time to connect with their peers—the show was unable to recover from its tough start. LibLearnX will close for good after the 2025 event, which is set for January 24–27 in Phoenix, Ariz. —AA



The opening session at LibLearnX 2024



CamCat Books Mourns Founder



Sue Arroyo

Sue Arroyo, founder, publisher, and CEO of indie publisher CamCat Books, died on February 26 following a fall at her home. She was 57. Arroyo founded CamCat in 2018 and published its first book, the novel *Dead Air* by Michael Bradley, in June 2020. CamCat has published more than 100 titles, including Arroyo's own mystery novel, *The Dead Won't Tell*, written under the pen name S.K. Waters. CamCat plans to keep publishing. "Sue brought a fresh perspective to publishing, and a strong desire to establish long-term relationships with both authors and readers," said editorial director Helga Schier. "Sue loved to make writers' dreams come true, her own and those of so many of her authors. We want to continue that legacy." —SMS

EIGHT YEARS IN THE MAKING...

The Rabbit hOle, an immersive museum of children's literature in Kansas City, Mo., has been in the works for the past eight years, and it finally opened its doors to the public on March 12, with more than 900 people visiting what the owners have dubbed the "exploratorium" on its



An exhibit based on Esphyr Slobodkina's *Caps for Sale*

opening day. Pete Cowdin and Deb Pettid, two former booksellers who used to own the Reading Reptile, an indie bookstore in Kansas City, conceptualized the museum, which celebrates children's literature along with three-dimensional exhibits and multisensory elements that allow visitors to step into their beloved books. The Rabbit hOle, housed in a 165,000-sq.-ft., four-story building in North Kansas City's Iron District, currently features 45 exhibits, plus the Rabbit hOle Bookstore. —CK

CALL FOR INFORMATION

FEATURE: FALL 2024 ADULT PREVIEWS **DEADLINE:** MARCH 27 **ISSUE:** JUNE 17

Needed: Information on adult trade titles (new titles only, no reprints) being published in all general trade formats (hardcover, trade paper, mass market, e-book) between Aug. 1, 2024, and Jan. 31, 2025. Enter title information at publishersweekly.com/fall2024previews. For more information and submission instructions, visit publishersweekly.com/fall2024info.



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Jolly Good Show

The 2024 London Book Fair was a busy, high-energy success

After moving the London Book Fair to March from April this year, organizers leaned into the idea that the change would allow the show, as the first major publishing event of 2024, to set the agenda for the industry for the coming year. Over three bustling days, marked by packed aisles and overflowing sessions at Olympia London, LBF, which closed on March 14, appears to have succeeded.

“I think it’s been the most exciting London Book Fair at least since Covid, if not before that,” said Penguin Random House global CEO Nihar Malaviya. “The number of people here, the amount of energy here, is absolutely amazing.”

Many of Malaviya’s colleagues—both at his company and in the industry at large—agreed. Dominique Raccach, CEO and publisher of Sourcebooks, called the fair “probably the busiest show I’ve seen since Covid,” and not just in London but out of all the international fairs. “International is vibrant,” she added. “It’s cooking.”

While official numbers won’t be in for some time, attendance was up, due in no small part to the return in force of American publishers and agents. “The rights center is jam-packed, our tables are packed,” said Brian Murray, CEO of HarperCollins. “There’s no seats at our stand. There’s a lot of business being done.”

U.K. fairgoers concurred with their American colleagues. “My schedule has filled up quicker than ever,” said Caroline Michel, CEO of Peters Fraser + Dunlop. “There is a complete lack of fear, both physically—people are not in masks—and commercially. The parties are back. And the dinners are back.”

Jonathan Lloyd, president of Curtis Brown, echoed her sentiments. “There is an air of confidence this year, and it is busy. We are having a lot of sensible meetings, and the key people are here,” he said. “This is a must-attend fair now.”

In terms of rights dealing, business at the fair was brisk. The International Rights Centre was full with agents, publishers, and scouts in nonstop meetings over the fair’s three days. And while there was no clear-cut book of the fair, fairgoers said, there were

many contenders. An untitled book by journalist and *New York* magazine writer Rebecca Traister had publishers scrambling. And a Japanese horror novel, *Strange Pictures*, also attracted significant interest.

“This year has been the best fair I’ve been at for years in London,” said Jamie Byng, managing director of Canongate Books and longtime fairgoer. “Last year, you could feel it coming back, but this year, there’s more American editors than I’ve ever seen here, but also just more people from around the world.”

This year’s fair also included a strong professional program, with industry leaders exploring topics including the rise of AI, the boom in digital audio, copyright issues, threats to the freedom

to read and publish, and the geopolitical forces affecting the book world, including the wars in Gaza and Ukraine.

In an opening keynote, Jonathan Karp, president and CEO of Simon & Schuster, spoke of the company’s new status as “the largest independent publisher” in the U.S. following its acquisition by private equity firm KKR last fall. Karp said that the new ownership has sent “a jolt of electricity through the business,” and that the publisher was now able to “reinvest” in itself, pointing to

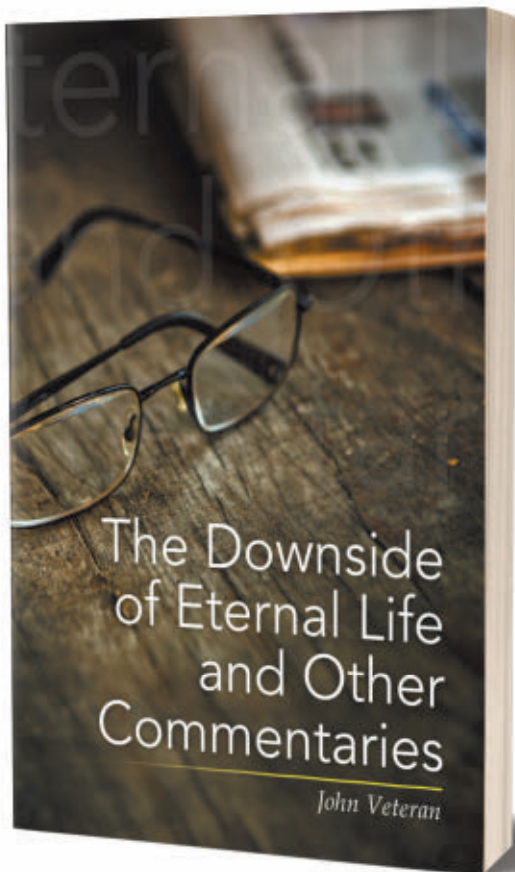
the recent relaunch of Summit Books and the hiring of several top editors in the U.S. and U.K. Karp also said that S&S was committed to international publishing, adding that the company’s Australian, Canadian, and Indian operations would all soon be growing.

An overflow panel on copyright and AI on the fair’s opening day reiterated a common conclusion from many regarding the technology: that it’s not a question of whether publishers will use AI but how. “AI, from a publisher’s perspective, is not without challenges, but there are also opportunities,” said Claire Harper, head of global rights and licensing at Sage. “We want to be using these responsibly in our publishing practices—finding that balance of using AI to save time, but also still making sure it’s responsible and ethical.”



From l.: PW’s Ed Nawotka, IPA president Karine Gonçalves Pansa, FEP president Ricardo Franco Levi, and incoming AAP chair YS Chi.

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News

The issue of AI was also prominent at another opening day panel that featured leaders of the International Publishers Association, the Federation of European Publishers, and Association of American Publishers. Incoming AAP board chair Youngsuk “YS” Chi said it is important that the publishers guard against being “bulldozed over by firms that have something shiny” but untested, and potentially unethical. “For centuries, the issue has been about being able to get access, to be able to read. Suddenly, we have enormous amounts of access. And during that process, we’ve forgotten that the things that we wanted to access were trusted. So we think that everything we get is also trustworthy—until we get burned.”

The surge in digital audio was also a hot topic at the fair, including the entry of Spotify into the space. A second-day panel on the global trends in audio—for which the line to get in was perhaps double the occupancy of the main stage room—spoke of the format’s growth. Spotify’s Owen Smith said that the streaming giant’s entry into the audiobook space was already yielding significant growth, stressing that Spotify’s intention is to bring new listeners into the market and drawing a parallel between the growth of the podcast industry and audiobooks.

But Spotify’s audiobook launch has not come without criticism. In London, a group called the Coalition of Concerned Creators issued a statement saying it is “underwhelmed” by Smith’s comments on the panel and concerned by a lack of transparency around Spotify’s “long-term ambitions.” The group bought several billboards around Olympia London that featured a stark message: “Don’t let Spotify do to authors what it did to musicians.”

Despite the general ebullience, conversations on the floor often returned to the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, with publishers expressing dismay over the ever-increasing death toll in both conflicts. The fair presented several seminar sessions, hosted by English PEN, that were dedicated to examining the wars from a book business perspective. Outside the fair, the activist group Book Workers for a Free Palestine held a vigil. Meanwhile, a number of Arab publishing associations that had pulled out of last year’s Frankfurt Book Fair, including the Arab Publishers’ Association and the Sharjah Book Authority, were present in London, as were some Israeli businesses, including the Jerusalem-based Deborah Harris Agency and the Tel Aviv-based eBookPro.

After a few challenging years in the wake of the pandemic, LBF director Gareth Rapley told *PW* that this year’s fair was a major success. “The words I keep hearing are *beaving* and *buzzy*,” Rapley said, noting that the renewals for next year’s fair, which will take place March 11–13, are already very strong. “I think this whole week has demonstrated once again that we are the essential spring fair for the industry.”

—John Maher and Ed Nawotka



AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

DR. BARBARA M. PANTHER-GIBBY

Born and raised in Woodburn, Oregon, Dr. Barbara M. Panther-Gibby is a proud lifelong Oregonian. She graduated as a nurse and studied to become a counselor. She furthered her educational background with a doctorate in psychology.

DR. BARBARA M. PANTHER-GIBBY

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With her passionate and unerring sense of history, Dr. Gibby put into writing the lives of her family members. Uncle Ted: A GI's Journal of World War II was one of her books. It chronicles the day her Uncle Ted was drafted into the army until the end of World War II.

Dr. Gibby has worked with several non-profit organizations. One of them was in Uganda, where she advocated for clean water in eight schools. Her team's visits and experiences in Uganda were documented in her other book, Ending Wars on Uganda's Children. She has also humbly received five Marquis awards, which include The International Peace Prize from the United Cultural Convention.

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DEALS

By Andrew Albanese

DEAL OF THE WEEK

■ Morrow Picks Up ‘Royal’ Rom-Com



Liz Stein at William Morrow has acquired North American rights to Omid Scobie and Robin Benway's *Royal Spin*. The deal was brokered by Albert Lee and

Scobie and Benway

Lisa Grubka at UTA, who described the book as “a fish-out-of-water romantic workplace comedy about a young American woman who leaves a press role at the White House for one at Buckingham Palace.” Benway is the author of nine novels for young adults, including the NBA-winning *Far from the Tree*, while Scobie's *Finding Freedom* is one of the fastest-selling royal books of all time. *Royal Spin* marks Scobie's fiction debut and Benway's first book of adult fiction. No pub date was announced.

■ Dutton Wins Wallace's Election Tome



After an auction, Dutton's John Parsley has acquired North American rights to CNN anchor Chris Wallace's *Countdown 1960: The Behind-the-Scenes Story of the 311 Days That Changed America's Politics Forever*. The deal was handled by Claudia Cross at Folio Literary Management. Dutton said the book will offer a “riveting perspective on the dramatic 11 months leading up to the presidential election between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon.” The book will be published in October 2024.

Wallace

■ Crown Buys Kelton's Inflation Mythbuster



Crown Currency's Leah Trouwborst has acquired North American rights to economist Stephanie Kelton's *The Inflation Myth*. The deal was negotiated by Melissa Flashman at Janklow & Nesbit following an auction. A follow-up to Kelton's bestselling *The Deficit Myth*, the book, Crown Currency said, is “a dismantling of the largest economic misconceptions holding us back as a nation, including a fundamental misunderstanding of what

Kelton

causes inflation and how to combat it.” Kelton is the former chief economist for the U.S. Senate Budget Committee. The book is tentatively scheduled for fall 2025.

■ Bicks Signs ‘Monster’ Deal with Hogarth



In a preempt, David Ebershoff at Hogarth has acquired world rights to Caroline Bicks's *Monsters in the Archives: My Year of Fear with Stephen King*. Elizabeth Kaplan of the Elizabeth Kaplan Literary Agency handled the deal. Hogarth said the book is an “incisive study of how King drafted some of his most iconic works, while telling Bicks's own story about facing her childhood fears—and getting to know the legendary writer responsible for them.” Bicks is the Stephen E. King Chair in Literature at the University of Maine, and the first scholar granted full access to his archives. No pub date has yet been set.

Bicks

■ Harper Books a Trip to St. Barths



Veteran author Michael Gross, whose bestselling titles have covered fashion, social history, and luxury real estate, has sold world rights to a book about the exclusive Caribbean island of St. Barths to Harper's Sara Nelson. Dan Strone, CEO of Trident Media Group, negotiated the deal. Trident said the book will cover “the rocky island's rise from abject poverty to immense wealth and worldwide fame as the resort of choice for the rich,” calling it “a tale of luxury, absurdity, class conflict and revelry” and “a window onto the world of high-end travel and leisure.” A fall 2025 pub date is planned.

Gross

■ Plum Sends ‘State Champ’ to Bloomsbury



Bloomsbury's Callie Garnett has acquired North American and open market rights to the novel *State Champ* by Hilary Plum. Plum is represented by Nora Gonzalez at the Gernert Company. Bloomsbury said the book is about “a stubborn young woman's bodily strike against the heartbeat law that shuts a Midwest abortion clinic and imprisons its lead physician, told in a voice both funny and furious.” The book is set for a spring 2025 publication.

Plum



AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

Angelina Charles

Born in the Commonwealth of Dominica, three-time published author Angelina Charles immigrated to London and worked as a nurse. Later, she decided to pursue her degree in education and moved to the USA. She worked as a special education teacher and assistant director at the NYC Department of Education for over twenty-one years. She has dedicated her life and work to championing children, especially those with special needs. Her passion for teaching and writing flourished as she continued helping her community.

The main character in her series is a boy who is born with a disability. In *James' Courageous Act*, he is on a mission to rescue his neighbor. In *I Was Born to Run*, readers follow James as he achieves his goal of joining the running team. Finally, in *James' Surprise Visit to Grandma*, readers learn about James' Mexican roots. Follow James' exciting adventures!



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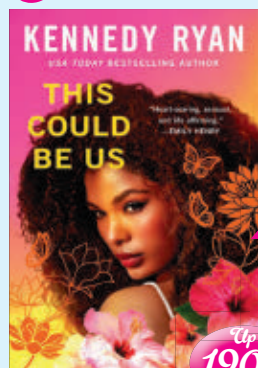


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BY CAROLYN JURIS

Second-Chance Romance

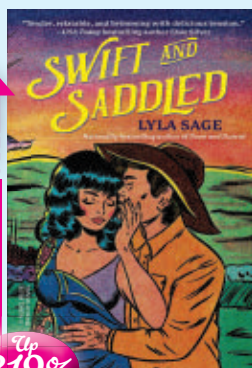


Up
190%

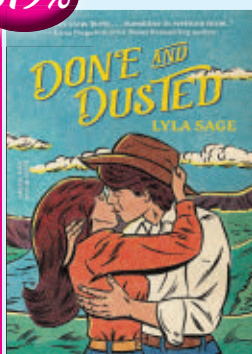
Kennedy Ryan's **This Could Be Us**, #9 on our trade paperback list, is the “raw and moving second installment of the Skyland series,” according to our starred review. “This sexy and mature romance is another hit for Ryan.” (In addition to the nearly 9K print copies that landed it at #9 on our trade paperback list, a B&N exclusive edition sold 5K print copies.) Like the new book, its predecessor, *Before I Let Go*, received a starred review from PW. It's sold 111K print copies since its 2022 release.



Lyla Sage self-published her first novel, *Done and Dusted*, in June 2023. It resonated with BookTok and with Dial Press, which scooped up the contemporary cowboy romance and three more books in the author's Rebel Blue Ranch series. Dial's edition of *Done and Dusted* pubbed in October; book two, **Swift and Saddled**, debuts at #10 on our trade paperback list, and November sees the release of book three, *Lost and Lassoed*.



Up
379%



THE LIGHT OF DAY

The Sunlit Man by Brandon Sanderson emerges at #9 on our hardcover fiction list. In spring 2022, the bestselling SFF author announced a Kickstarter campaign to fund the publication of four new titles, dubbed the Secret Projects, in formats including a premium hardcover edition. The initiative went on to raise almost \$41.8 million, the platform's most successful campaign to date, and the first books shipped in early 2023. In April that year, Tor began releasing commercial editions; *The Sunlit Man* is fourth in the quartet. Sanderson has a new crowdfunding project, on the BackerKit platform, where within days of launching he'd raised more than \$16 million.



NEW & NOTABLE

THE HOUSE OF HIDDEN MEANINGS



RuPaul
#3 *Hardcover Nonfiction*
The mononymous drag performer “excavates his childhood, early romances, and rise to fame in this unvarnished personal history,” per our review. “Fans looking for

dishy *Drag Race* drama will be disappointed—the volume ends well before the show's premiere—but readers eager for a peek behind RuPaul's glamorous persona will get just what they came for.”

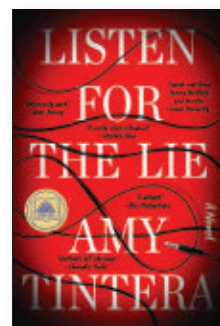
THE HUNTER

Tana French
#5 *Hardcover Fiction*
“Edgar winner French's slow-burn sequel to 2015's *The Searcher* underlines her knack for setting and character development,” according to our review. “While this isn't quite up to French's best—the gears of the plot take too long to start turning—it's a pleasure to spend time with her finely drawn characters.”



IN CLUBLAND

Good Morning America Book Club tapped **Listen for the Lie** by Amy Tintera as its March pick. Our review called the YA author's adult debut “the outstanding story of a young woman haunted by rumors that she killed her best friend,” predicting that “readers will be hard-pressed not to wolf down this intelligent page-turner in a single sitting.” It debuts at #14 on our hardcover fiction list.



TOP 10 OVERALL

RANK	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	UNITS
1	The Women	Kristin Hannah	St. Martin's	48,208
2	Green Eggs and Ham	Dr. Seuss	Random House	30,592
3	A Court of Thorns and Roses	Sarah J. Maas	Bloomsbury	30,042
4	It's Not Easy Being a Bunny	Sadler/Bollen	Random House	25,965
5	If Only I Had Told Her	Laura Nowlin	Sourcebooks Fire	25,330
6	The Prisoner's Throne (The Stolen Heir #2)	Holly Black	Little, Brown	24,572
7	One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish	Dr. Seuss	Random House	23,950
8	Fourth Wing	Rebecca Yarros	Red Tower	22,377
9	Blood Money	Peter Schweizer	Harper	21,718
10	The Inmate	Freida McFadden	Poisoned Pen	21,653



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Georgina Fatseas is a diverse writer. Her genre in adult fiction covers science fiction, crime/action and more recently World War 2. She has several children's books under the name of Gina Sano.

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Hardcover Frontlist Fiction

RANK	LW	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	1	The Women	Kristin Hannah	St. Martin's	9781250178633	48,208
2	4	Fourth Wing	Rebecca Yarros	Red Tower	9781649374042	22,377
3	–	Never Too Late	Danielle Steel	Delacorte	9780593498408	20,959
4	5	Iron Flame	Rebecca Yarros	Red Tower	9781649374172	19,950
5	–	The Hunter	Tana French	Viking	9780593493434	18,199
6	3	A Fate Inked in Blood	Danielle L. Jensen	Del Rey	9780593599839	15,522
7	2	Three-Inch Teeth	C.J. Box	Putnam	9780593331347	14,040
8	6	The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store	James McBride	Riverhead	9780593422946	10,351
9	–	The Sunlit Man	Brandon Sanderson	Tor	9781250899712	10,002
10	7	House of Flame and Shadow	Sarah J. Maas	Bloomsbury	9781635574104	9,802
11	9	First Lie Wins	Ashley Elston	Viking/Dorman	9780593492918	9,609
12	12	Gothikana	RuNyx	Bramble	9781250334206	7,664
13	10	Crosshairs	Patterson/Born	Little, Brown	9780316403382	7,445
14	–	Listen for the Lie	Amy Tintera	Celadon	9781250880314	5,936
15	8	Wandering Stars	Tommy Orange	Knopf	9780593318256	5,226

Hardcover Frontlist Nonfiction

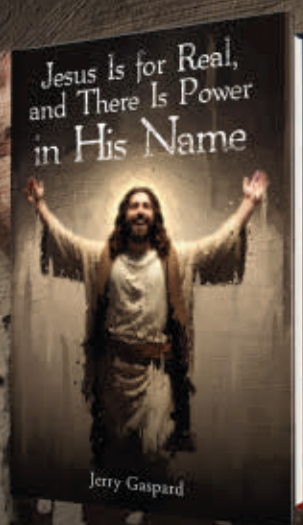
RANK	LW	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	1	Blood Money	Peter Schweizer	Harper	9780063061194	21,718
2	4	We've Got Issues	Phillip C. McGraw	Threshold	9781668061701	15,692
3	–	The House of Hidden Meanings	RuPaul	Dey Street	9780063263901	15,380
4	–	Protect Your Peace	Trent Shelton	Hay House	9781401973162	14,255
5	3	Mostly What God Does	Savannah Guthrie	Thomas Nelson	9781400341122	12,524
6	14	Bad Therapy	Abigail Shrier	Sentinel	9780593542927	9,765
7	–	Slow Productivity	Cal Newport	Portfolio	9780593544853	9,224
8	13	The Wager	David Grann	Doubleday	9780385534260	7,274
9	2	Worthy	Jamie Kern Lima	Hay House	9781401977603	6,858
10	6	Supercommunicators	Charles Duhigg	Random House	9780593243916	6,712
11	12	Outlive	Peter Attia	Harmony	9780593236598	6,562
12	7	The Holy Grail of Investing	Tony Robbins	Simon & Schuster	9781668052686	6,559
13	8	Burn Book	Kara Swisher	Simon & Schuster	9781982163891	5,812
14	25	Oath and Honor	Liz Cheney	Little, Brown	9780316572064	5,636
15	5	Joyfull	Radhi Devlukia-Shetty	Simon Element	9781982199722	4,584

Trade Paperback Frontlist

RANK	LW	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	–	The Inmate	Freida McFadden	Poisoned Pen	9781728296173	21,653
2	–	Happy Place	Emily Henry	Berkley	9780593441190	20,487
3	2	The Teacher	Freida McFadden	Poisoned Pen	9781728296210	16,377
4	1	Bride	Ali Hazelwood	Berkley	9780593550403	16,188
5	–	My Hero Academia, Vol. 37	Kohei Horikoshi	Viz	9781974743247	12,917
6	8	Super Fan-Tastic Taylor Swift Coloring & Activity Book	Jessica Kendall	Design Originals	9781497206861	10,445
7	3	Never Lie	Freida McFadden	Poisoned Pen	9781728296166	9,738
8	11	Weyward	Emilia Hart	Griffin	9781250842725	9,015
9	–	This Could Be Us	Kennedy Ryan	Forever	9781538706824	8,898
10	–	Swift and Saddled	Lyla Sage	Dial	9780593732434	8,629
11	4	Butcher & Blackbird	Bryne Weaver	Zando	9781638931737	8,449
12	7	The Housemaid's Secret	Freida McFadden	Mobius	9780349132617	7,957
13	5	Wildfire	Hannah Grace	Atria	9781668026274	7,941
14	6	The Five-Star Weekend	Elin Hilderbrand	Back Bay	9780316259187	7,328
15	10	King of Wrath	Ana Huang	Bloom	9781728289724	7,149



Jesus Is for Real, and There Is Power in His Name



Jerry Gaspard

Jerry Gaspard loves spending his time reading the Bible and inspirational books, worshipping, and watching inspirational movies. Depression, bipolar episodes, addiction, and being on the brink of death three times led him to become a student of the Word. This empowered him to pen his own inspirational book *Jesus Is for Real, and There Is Power in His Name*.

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Children's Frontlist Fiction

RANK	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	If Only I Had Told Her	Laura Nowlin	Sourcebooks Fire	9781728276229	25,330
2	The Prisoner's Throne: A Novel of Elfhame (The Stolen Heir #2)	Holly Black	Little, Brown	9780316592710	24,572
3	No Brainer (Diary of a Wimpy Kid #18)	Jeff Kinney	Amulet	9781419766947	10,440
4	Powerless	Lauren Roberts	Simon & Schuster	9781665954884	9,759
5	Influencers (Cat Kid Comic Club #5)	Dav Pilkey	Graphix	9781338896398	8,597
6	Winter Turning (Wings of Fire Graphic Novel #7)	Sutherland/Holmes	Graphix	9781338730920	8,528
7	Divine Rivals	Rebecca Ross	Wednesday	9781250857439	6,229
8	Twenty Thousand Fleas Under the Sea (Dog Man #11)	Dav Pilkey	Graphix	9781338801910	5,720
9	Claudia and the Bad Joke (The Baby-Sitters Club Graphic Novel #15)	Martin/Nopra	Graphix	9781338835502	5,493
10	This Means War! (Big Nate #30)	Lincoln Peirce	Andrews McMeel	9781524887490	5,178
11	Ruthless Vows	Rebecca Ross	Wednesday	9781250857453	4,923
12	Waverider (Amulet #9)	Kazu Kibuishi	Graphix	9780545828659	4,875
13	The Chalice of the Gods (Percy Jackson and the Olympians #6)	Rick Riordan	Disney Hyperion	9781368098175	4,809
14	The Girls I've Been	Tess Sharpe	Penguin Young Readers	9780593353820	4,795
15	Five Nights at Freddy's (Fazbear Frights Graphic Novel Collection #4)	Scott Cawthon	Graphix	9781339005300	4,488
16	Lightlark	Alex Aster	Amulet	9781419760877	4,397
17	The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes	Suzanne Collins	Scholastic Press	9781339016573	4,325
18	Ferris	Kate DiCamillo	Candlewick	9781536231052	4,167
19	A Thousand Boy Kisses	Tillie Cole	Bloom	9781728297088	3,729
20	Coyote Lost and Found	Dan Gemeinhart	Holt	9781250292773	3,545
21	Beach Pug (Diary of a Pug #10)	Kyla May	Scholastic	9781338877601	3,509
22	Evil Spy School: The Graphic Novel	Stuart Gibbs	Simon & Schuster	9781665931939	3,481
23	Heartstopper #5	Alice Oseman	Graphix	9781338807486	3,296
24	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	J.K. Rowling	Scholastic	9781338878929	3,230
25	Heartless Hunter (The Crimson Moth #1)	Kristen Ciccarelli	Wednesday	9781250866905	3,179

Children's Picture Books

RANK	TITLE	AUTHOR	IMPRINT	ISBN	UNITS
1	Green Eggs and Ham	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780394800165	30,592
2	It's Not Easy Being a Bunny	Sadler/Bollen	Random House	9780394861029	25,965
3	One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780394800134	23,950
4	How to Catch a Leprechaun	Wallace/Elkerton	Sourcebooks Wonderland	9781492632917	20,416
5	The Cat in the Hat	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780394800011	18,079
6	Taylor Swift	Loggia/Chavarri	Golden	9780593566718	16,714
7	Bluey: Hooray, It's Easter!	–	Penguin Young Readers	9780593750841	15,575
8	Little Blue Truck's Springtime	Schertle/McElmurry	Clarion	9780544938090	15,148
9	You're My Little Honey Bunny	Edwards/Marshall	Silver Dolphin	9781684126187	14,177
10	Happy Easter, Mouse!	Numeroff/Bond	HarperFestival	9780694014224	13,084
11	Fox in Socks	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780394800387	13,044
12	Chicka Chicka Boom Boom	Martin/Archambault/Ehlert	Little Simon	9781442450707	12,128
13	It's Better Being a Bunny	Sadler/Bowers	Random House	9780593434703	12,092
14	Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?	Martin/Carle	Holt	9780805047905	12,024
15	Oh, the Places You'll Go!	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780679805274	11,842
16	Bluey: Easter	–	Penguin Young Readers	9780593658383	11,465
17	Construction Site: Spring Delight	Rinker/Ford	Chronicle	9781797204314	11,382
18	The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle	Philomel	9780399226908	11,309
19	Dr. Seuss's ABC	Dr. Seuss	Random House	9780394800301	10,845
20	How to Catch the Easter Bunny	Wallace/Elkerton	Sourcebooks Wonderland	9781492638179	10,371
21	Bunny with a Big Heart	Sadler/Bowers	Random House	9780593480335	10,254
22	Never Touch a Grumpy Bunny!	Greening/Lynch	Make Believe Ideas	9781800582682	10,249
23	Hope Is a Rainbow	Kotb/Dominique	Flamingo	9780593624128	10,187
24	Hippity, Hoppity, Little Bunny	–	Cottage Door	9781680524772	10,047
25	Oh, Baby, the Places You'll Go!	Tish Rabe	Random House	9780553520576	9,478



Bill Kasdorf

Getting AI to Behave

And how to find out when it doesn't

A week doesn't go by these days without AI coming up with new ways to amaze us and alarm us—sometimes both at the same time. AI has actually been around a long time, and there are any number of things it does for us that are so useful we've come to take it for granted. We all gripe about autocorrect and predictive text, for example, but we all use it.

But when generative AI burst onto the scene a few months ago, the shock was on a different level. Generative AI can now generate text and images from a simple one-sentence prompt. It's even creating realistic videos. What next?

There's no denying the many implications around AI. But for this column, I'll focus on just one that represents a serious threat to authors and publishers: the creation of fake books. For the publishing business, concerns about a sudden tsunami of fake books clogging the marketplace are very real. AI today is capable of credibly emulating authors. But even awful fake books can compete with real books from real publishers.

The culprits are the large language models, or LLMs, that have been trained via breathtakingly large-scale web-crawling of online content—including such gems as the CommonCrawl (six billion web pages) and books3 (190,000 e-books, many of them allegedly pirated). These LLMs are not giant databases that simply regurgitate actual content; instead, they are prediction engines that use all that content they've been trained on to generate new content.

Despite what some claim is a somewhat sordid origin, LLMs are proving to be very useful in many ways. Writers, students, scholars, researchers, and businesspeople use them every day to streamline their work. But how do we rein in

“For authors and publishers concerned about AI fakes, there's a workable solution on the horizon—and the pieces are coming together rapidly.”

the irresponsible behavior without losing all that undeniable utility?

Two ways are top of the list. First, we must develop a way to document authentic content, including whether that content has been generated partially or entirely by AI. Second, we must develop a way to identify content that its creator wants to prohibit being used for training an LLM. Most importantly, these things must be tamper-proof or at least tamper-evident.

I believe the combination of three standards offers a potential solution. I've written before about C2PA, the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity. It's a technical standard for embedding provenance information into media assets, including text, images, and video. It's being widely adopted, not just by media organizations but recently by OpenAI, Meta, and Google as well.

Less well-known but extremely important is a W3C standard called Verifiable Credentials. It allows creators and rights-holders to properly attribute content by either embedding identity information in the media file or by binding the credentials externally, outside of the asset itself.

The glue that promises to hold it all together is the International Standard Content Code (ISCC), which enables associating product metadata, provenance information like C2PA, and the Verifiable Credentials to the ISCC itself,

even in cases where metadata is removed from a file.

The ISCC is not metadata in the conventional sense, and it is not embedded in an asset. Rather, it's generated from the asset, including, when applied, its C2PA information, certificates, and credentials. The ISCC is composed of four components that describe the content on various layers and allow it to assess metadata similarity, content similarity, data similarity, and data integrity between two instances of an ISCC.

Thus, a public declaration of an ISCC can enable the persistent binding of metadata, rights, attribution, and other information (such as “do not use to train AI”) to the actual digital asset. And by generating the ISCC on their end, AI providers can derive the embedded declaration including proper attribution from the ISCC, and respect the requirements set out by the legitimate rights-holders. All of this helps responsible players to play responsibly, and irresponsible players to be found out. For authors and publishers concerned about the rise of AI fakes, this means there's a workable solution on the horizon. And the pieces are coming together rapidly. ■

Bill Kasdorf is principal at Kasdorf & Associates, LLC, and a founding partner of Publishing Technology Partners.

All the Way Back

With a strong program and solid registration numbers, excitement is running high for the 2024 Public Library Association Conference, set for April 3–5 in Columbus, Ohio

By **ANDREW RICHARD ALBANESE**



**PLA 2024
Conference**

It's been a challenging few years for public libraries. After doing heroic work in their communities during the darkest days of the pandemic, librarians now face tightening budgets, surging workplace stresses and safety concerns, political attacks on library boards and library associations like the ALA, and most prominently, an ongoing politically organized attack on the freedom to read that has turned many library and school board meetings into cultural battlegrounds.

But in talking with librarians ahead of the 2024 Public Library Association conference, set to run Wednesday–Friday, April 3–5, in Columbus, Ohio, a theme emerges: the nation's public librarians have remained remarkably focused on their work.

"It's a tough time in libraries right now, without a doubt," says PLA president Sonia Alcántara-Antoine, director of the Baltimore County Public Library, a system that employs roughly 600 staff serving 19 branches. "I think the strong registration numbers for PLA demonstrate that people in the profession are committed and looking for community, and for affirmation that all the work we do matters. I think the PLA conference offers that. It offers practical tools and tips and resources that people



Sonia
Alcántara-Antoine

need to continue to be effective in their roles and to best serve their communities. And it offers hope."

PLA reps say registration for the conference is around 6,500 so far. And while that's still slightly below what a PLA conference might have drawn prior to the pandemic, it's a significant jump over the last PLA conference, held in Portland, Ore., in March 2022, which blew past expectations by drawing nearly 5,000 in-person attendees amid a spike in Covid cases. PLA says the high energy and strong attendance at the 2022 conference was a sign that PLA was getting back on track after the pandemic. And

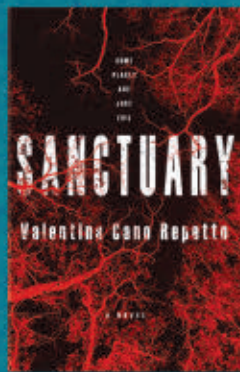
with strong registration numbers and a growing sense of excitement for Columbus, this may be the year PLA gets all the way back.

Prior to the pandemic, PLA conferences, which are held every two years, had shown a strong pattern of growth, earning the conference a reputation as a favorite fixture among librarians—including Alcántara-Antoine. "I never miss a PLA conference," she says. "I find that it is truly the best library conference around. There's always so much energy, and it never fails to deliver. It's about getting inspired, getting good ideas, and getting what you need to recharge your batteries so that you can live to fight another day."

At the same time, a look at the conference program—and a scan of the headlines on any given day—show that librarians in many communities are indeed in a fight. Last week, the ALA released its book ban data for 2023, which showed a 65% increase over 2022 in the number of unique book titles challenged. And, on a new front in the right-wing attacks on libraries, a number of states have recently introduced bills or rules seeking to cut ties with the ALA, of which PLA is a division.

Kelly Jensen, a librarian, author, and editor for the website *Book Riot*, says that librarians and library supporters must steel themselves for what's still to come. Despite a few high-profile legal wins in book-banning cases to start the year, Jensen, who maintains a comprehensive rundown of book bans as part of her weekly censorship column, sees no imminent end to the attacks on libraries.

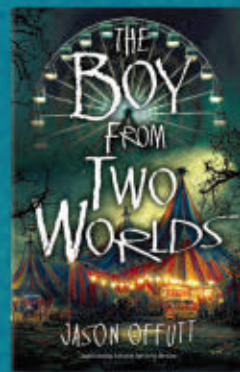
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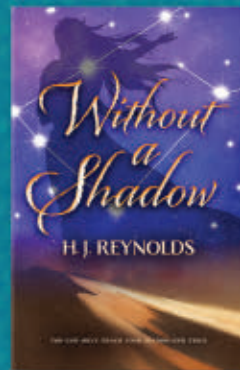
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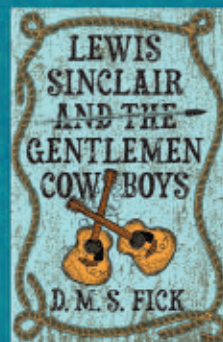
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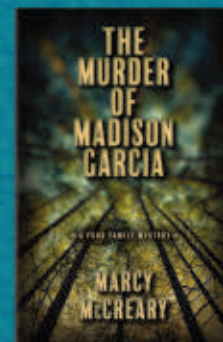
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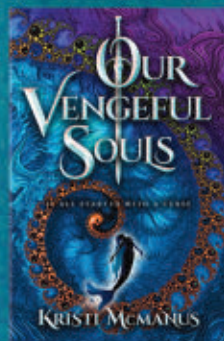
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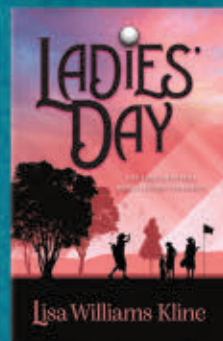
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MY HEART SINGS A SAD SONG

A tender
guide
through
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children.

May 2024
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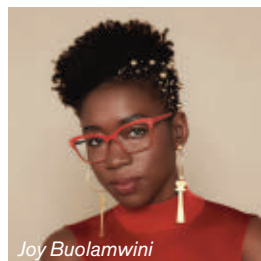
"I've heard from so many librarians who are like, 'Why am I showing up?' They love the kids and they love what they do, but they've been so beaten down for three and a half years. It's exhausting," Jensen says. "But I think it's worth emphasizing that this is far from over."

Furthermore, while the battle is often pitched as a fight over the freedom to read—which it certainly is—Jensen says the key to pushing back is recognizing what these attacks on libraries really are: an attack on people. "The higher-level stuff is really leaning into the fact that queer people exist, that Black and brown people exist, and that their stories deserve to be told," she says. "It is not racist to talk about slavery. It is not racist to talk about systematic discrimination in policing. And anybody who feels that it is, that's the one who needs help. But libraries can't help that. What libraries can do is continue to make sure that the resources are there for the people who are being targeted."

Alcántara-Antoine agrees, and she sees PLA as in a position to help. "We have core values that unite all of us as librarians—access to information, intellectual freedom, equity, and digital equity, making sure that we're serving everyone in our community and having diverse voices reflected in our collection," she says. "And it's helpful for people to have resources like the PLA conference to reaffirm our values and why we do what we do. We recognize that librarians face a lot of really daunting challenges, but also opportunities. And I absolutely do believe that there is strength in unity."

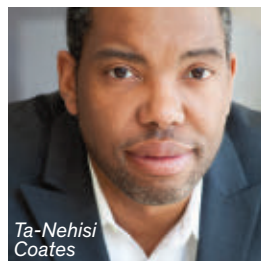
Speaker highlights

All of the speakers in the main PLA program will appear at the Greater Columbus Convention Center Hall A, and the program begins on Wednesday with a keynote by



Joy Buolamwini

Joy Buolamwini (8:30–10 a.m.). Buolamwini—an MIT researcher and the founder of the Algorithmic Justice League, a nonprofit chartered to raise awareness about the impacts of AI and to mitigate biases in the technology—advises governments at home and abroad on preventing AI harms. She is also the author of the recently published *Unmasking AI: My Mission to Protect What Is Human in a World of Machines* (Random House), which *PW*'s review called "urgent and incisive" and "a vital examination of AI's pitfalls."



Ta-Nehisi Coates

PLA's popular Big Ideas speaker series will open on Thursday with a talk by **Ta-Nehisi Coates** (8–9 a.m.), the author of, among other works, the 2015 National Book Award–winning *Between the World and Me*. His journalism career spans more than two decades and includes the National Magazine Award–winning 2012 essay "Fear of a Black President" and the highly influential June 2014 essay "The Case for Reparations." Coates also enjoyed a run writing Marvel's Black Panther (2016–2021) and Captain America (2018–2021) comics series.



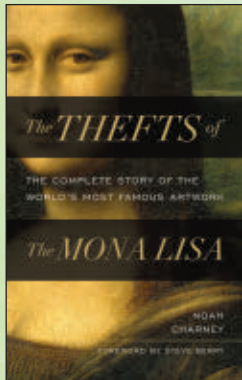
Mary Annai Heglal

The Big Idea series continues Friday with a talk with **Mary Annai Heglal** (8–9 a.m.), a writer who focuses on climate change, climate grief, and climate justice. The cohost and cocreator of the *Hot Take* podcast and newsletter (which she retired in 2022), Heglal has written for major media outlets and is the author of the just-published children's book *This World Is Yours to*

75
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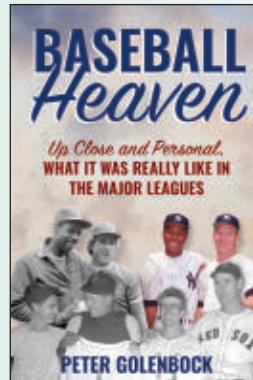
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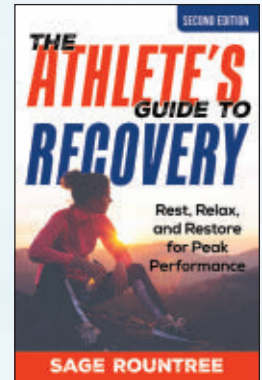
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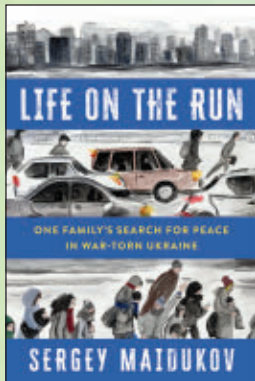
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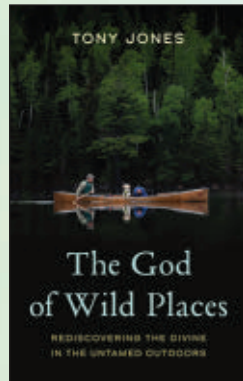
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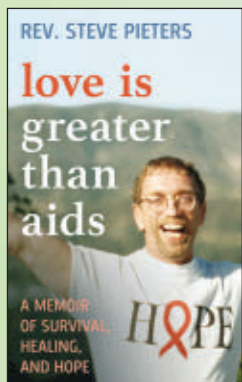
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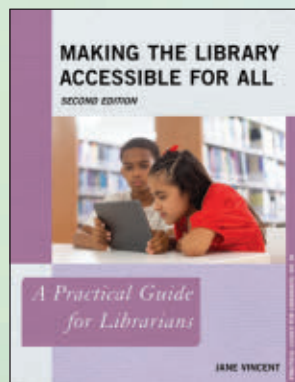
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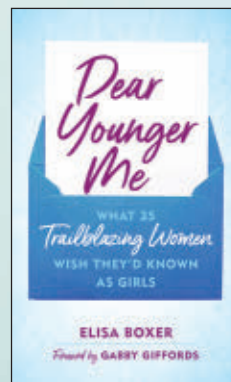
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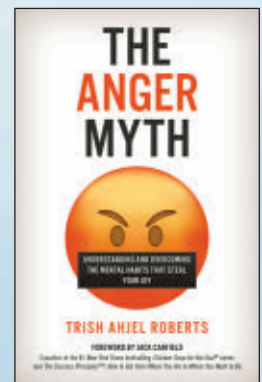
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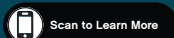
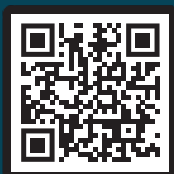
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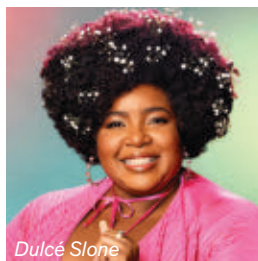


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PLA PREVIEW

Cberish, illustrated by Vivian Mineker (Random House Kids). Heglar is also the editor of the recently announced *Til Earth and Heaven Ring*—an all-Black climate anthology to be published by Pantheon Books.



Dulcé Sloan

The PLA main speaker program closes Friday evening with a talk with **Dulcé Sloan** (5–6 p.m.). Sloan has been a correspondent on Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show* since 2017. She is also the author of the just-published memoir *Hello, Friends!/: Stories of Dating, Destiny, and Day Jobs* (Andscape

Books), which *PW*’s review praised as a collection of “brash and funny reflections” on such topics as her love life, going to a predominantly white school, and the vagaries of establishing a career in comedy.

Exhibits and more

The PLA 2024 conference will feature an exhibits hall at the Greater Columbus Convention Center with hundreds of publishers and vendors. In addition to vendor booths, the show floor will have event spaces, including the popular Book Buzz stage, and the How-To stage, which will feature a lineup of 20-minute “hands-on” sessions provided by and for conference attendees.

The exhibits hall will open with a reception (Wednesday, 3–6 p.m.); the floor will then be open 9 a.m.–5 p.m. on Thursday and will close the following afternoon with another brief reception (1:30–2 p.m.). For a full list of vendors, visit the PLA website.

Ticketed events

In addition to the main speakers, education programs, and exhibit hall events, PLA also offers a range of ticketed events for attendees. Consult the PLA website for more information and to register.

The Columbus Metropolitan Library system is regarded one of the nation’s best, and those arriving in town early will have multiple opportunities to see for themselves. On Tuesday, April 2, there are two morning branch tours (8:15 a.m.–12:15 p.m.) and two afternoon branch tours (12:15–5:15 p.m.). That evening, the PLA Host City Welcome Reception will be held at the system’s main library, a renovated 114-year-old Carnegie library.



Pat Losinski

Though so many libraries are facing challenges, the Columbus Metropolitan Library has thrived in recent years. “We have built 14 new libraries since 2014,” says CEO **Pat Losinski**. “We’re really very fortunate to be in Columbus, a place that really values its libraries and has a deep love for the library.” Losinski

From one of the sharpest and fastest-rising voices in comedy,

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comes a collection of essays that are both wildly entertaining and culturally relevant.



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Those eager for a no-holds-barred glimpse of the reality of making it
in the entertainment world will be happy they picked this up.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

says Columbus has been eager to host a major library conference like PLA and plans to make the most of its opportunity. “I’ve been at this a long time, so it’s very rewarding to finally get it. I think the PLA folks will tell you that we didn’t sit on our hands. We got at it,” he says. Losinski is also eager for librarians to enjoy the city itself. “Skip Prichard from OCLC reminds me that I once said this: I’m in the Columbus business. I just happen to work in the library.”

The Children’s Author Breakfast (Thursday, 7–8 a.m) will feature **Gennifer Choldenko**, **Loren Long**, **Daniel Nayeri**, and **Maleeha Siddiqui**. The event is currently listed as sold out, but a waiting list is available.

The PLA author lunches offer attendees a chance to hear fascinating talks and meet and network with their colleagues from around the country. The first (Thursday, 12:30–1:45 p.m.) will feature **Rainbow Rowell**, the author of *Eleanor & Park*, the Simon Snow trilogy, and several other novels, short stories, and comics.

The second (12:30–1:45 p.m.) will certainly appeal to librarians. It features Louisiana school



Amanda Jones

librarian and freedom to read advocate **Amanda Jones**, whose book *That Librarian: The Fight Against Book Banning in America* will be published by Bloomsbury in August. A veteran school librarian, Jones was awarded the John Phillip Immroth Memorial Award at last year’s ALA annual conference, which honors those who show “personal courage in defending intellectual freedom,” and she has become the face of librarian resistance for her anti-censorship work.

This year’s Audio Publishers Association lunch will feature a panel of authors and audiobook narrators, including **Bettina L. Love**, acclaimed author of *Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal*; **Molly Knox Ostertag**, an Ignatz and Prism award-winning graphic novelist; and **Fiona Davis** and **Greg Wands**, coauthors of the upcoming audiobook *The Gimlet Slip*.

For those not able to be in Columbus, the 2024 PLA conference will once again feature an expanded virtual offering. For virtual attendees, the opening and closing sessions and the Big Ideas speakers will be livestreamed, and a selection of professional programs will be available for viewing for a year.

And for those heading to the show, as always, consult the PLA website for room numbers and any last-minute additions or changes to the PLA program.

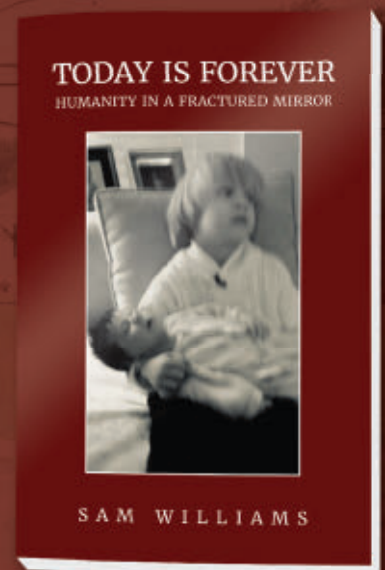
DIVE INTO A REALM WHERE WARHOL’S *REBELS* AND LYNCH’S *NIGHT OWLS* CONVERGE: A TRIBUTE TO THE MISFITS, THE DREAMERS, AND THE SILENCED SOULS.

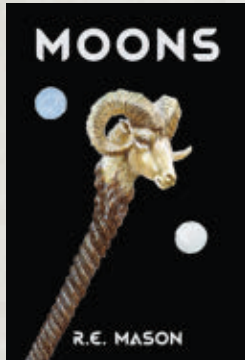
Navigating life’s fringes, this collection celebrates the misfits and dreamers who defy conformity. From the vibrant chaos of Warhol’s Factory to the mystique of Lynchian nights, these tales resonate with raw emotion and the quest for acceptance. An ode to the outsiders, it’s a journey of rebellion, passion, and the unyielding spirit that refuses to be silenced. Discover the beauty in the chaos.

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Stolen from the sea by monstrous Nightweavers, seventeen-year-old pirate Violet Oberon teams up with her captor to hunt her brother's killer, only to discover dark secrets that challenge everything she thought she knew about herself and her world.

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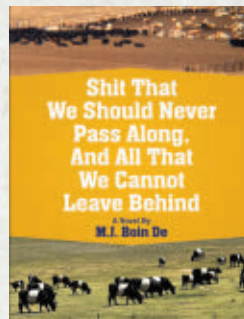
SHIRAZ AND SYRAH

Mina Abdi

Shiraz & Syrah, an exceptional cookbook of Persian and French cuisine, brings two worlds together to your kitchen, celebrating culture, food, love and the pure joy of exceptional food.

Hardcover: 9781662932335 \$59.99

220 pages, Nov 20, 2023, Nonfiction



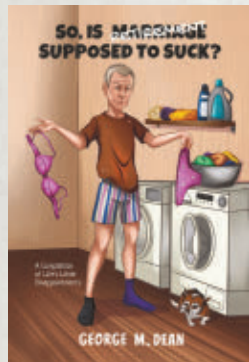
SHIT THAT WE SHOULD NEVER PASS ALONG, AND ALL THAT WE CANNOT LEAVE BEHIND

M.J. Boin De

A boomer and her Xer daughter's propensities towards calling each other's generational bullshit out in front of a rural town in the late 1980's, proves that the worst of us can still move the best of us forward in time.

eBook: 9781662939884 \$9.99

Aug 15, 2023, Fiction



SO, IS RETIREMENT SUPPOSED TO SUCK?: A COMPILATION OF LIFE'S LITTLE DISAPPOINTMENTS

George M. Dean

To the Gen-X-ers out there—rejoice, for retirement will soon befall you. Or should you be dreading it? Depends on you really. Misery prior to retirement, only begets misery during. Enjoy.

Paperback: 9781662936524 \$13.99

298 pages, Oct 12, 2023, Nonfiction



EASTERN STAR RISING: HOW SATAN'S EYE OF THE STORM WAS CREATED

LuciaBelia

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140 pages, Oct 25, 2023, Nonfiction



HOP, SKIP, JUMP!

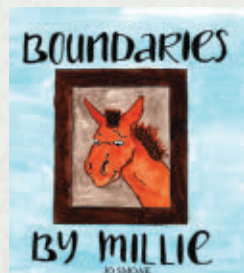
Mary Giammona, MD

It's a busy grandmother-and-granddaughter day! What shall they do together? Grandma explains how to go hopping, skipping, and jumping for fun and exercise. At the end of an active day, they enjoy a family picnic together.

Hardcover: 9781662929144 \$19.99

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34 pages, Oct 23, 2023, Picture Book



BOUNDARIES BY MILLIE

Jo Smoak

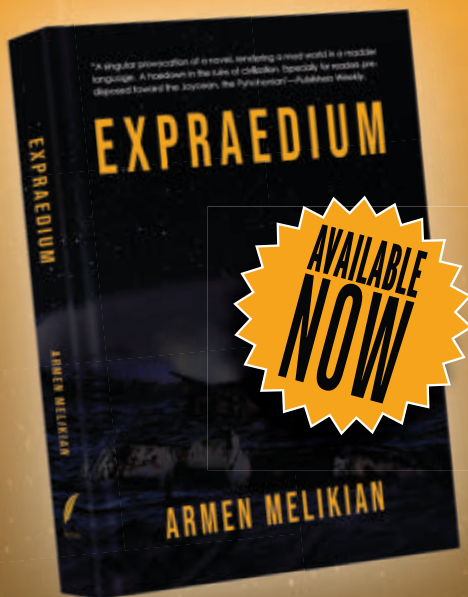
Boundaries by Millie takes you through the day-to-day life of a real donkey with some funny twists. How do you think that a donkey would communicate boundaries? Find out in this fun, yet meaningful, story about setting healthy boundaries.

Hardcover: 9781662939181 \$27.99

Paperback: 9781662939198 \$16.99

58 Pages, May 22, 2023, Picture Book

* Available through Ingram *



Program Picks

DEI, leadership, literacy, and, of course, defending and the freedom to read are among the themes represented in a strong PLA professional program

The 2024 Public Library Association conference will bring together an impressive array of librarians and library leaders in a professional program that addresses a wide array of issues facing libraries and librarians. What follows is a sampling of panels drawn from the more than 150 sessions. Consult the PLA program for room numbers and any last-minute changes.

TUESDAY, APRIL 2

For those arriving to Columbus early, this year's conference offers a host of paid workshops. These include two morning sessions to choose from, which run 9 a.m.–noon: **Building a Learning Organization within an Evolving Library Landscape** and **Media Training: When Your Library Is the Headlines**.

Afternoon workshops, which run 2–5 p.m., include **Empowered: The Unspoken Work of EDI and Take Away Strategies, In the Driver's Seat: Proactively Protecting Your Library and Staff in Challenging Times**, and **Public Libraries and Schools: Everything You Need to Know About the Science of Reading**.

Additionally, the inaugural **IndieLib: Librarian & Indie Publisher Summit** will take place 10 a.m.–5 p.m. at Open Air (2571 Neil Avenue). Though not officially part of the PLA program, the summit, a collaboration between the Independent Publishers Caucus and the Digital Library of America, aims to facilitate conversation between libraries and indie publishers. The day-long program will feature a keynote address by Rebecca Giblin, coauthor with Cory Doctorow of *Chokepoint Capitalism*, and panel discussions exploring collection development, e-book licensing, readers' advisory, and bigger-picture issues related to publishing and libraries.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

10:15–11:15 a.m.

ANTI-RACIST READER SERVICES: BEYOND THE BASICS

This session will delve into the questions around implementing actively anti-racist reader services, including how to deal with racist comments from patrons, whether every viewpoint deserves a spot on the shelves, and how to create one's vision of anti-racist collections and services.

THE SCIENCE OF READING IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES: SUPPORTING STRUGGLING ELEMENTARY-AGE READERS

Librarians from the San Francisco and Chicago public libraries will share strategies

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A singular provocation of a novel, rendering a mad world in a madder language.

—Publishers Weekly

Enter at your own risk! *Exptraedium* is intricate, dense, brittle, polyglot.

—Blueink Review

Exptraedium remains an unforgettable reading experience that has left a lasting impression on me.

—Maria Yinks, *Manhattan Book Review*

In the best sense, I am reminded of George Orwell's and James Joyce's classics, and other authors of similar stature, though there is no true parallel possible with a novel as unique in concept and execution as *Exptraedium*.

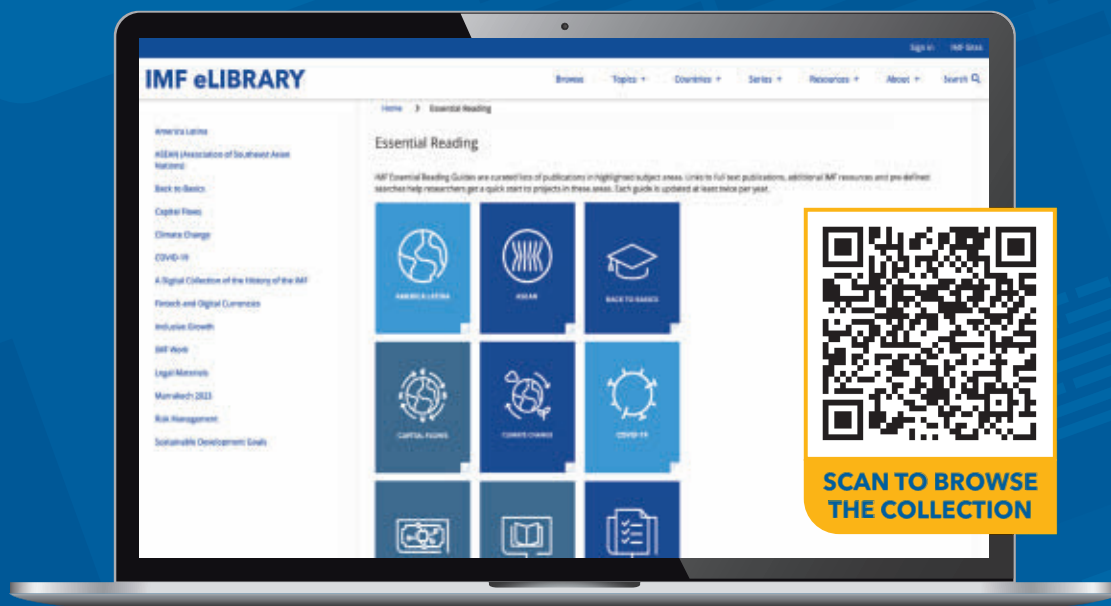
—Paul McCarthy, *Professor of English*
Former Senior Acquisitions Editor
at Simon & Schuster, Harper Collins,
and Doubleday

Armen Melikian lives in Los Angeles. He has won ten literary awards in Literary Fiction, General Fiction, Visionary Fiction, Humor and Comedy, including "The Written Art Award" and an Honorable Mention by *Foreword Reviews* annual book awards, all between 2010 and 2012.

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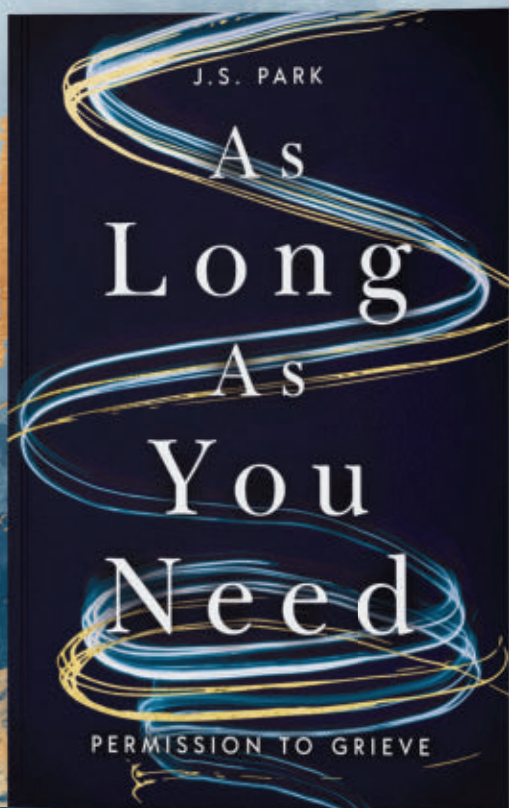
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—*Publishers Weekly*

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for addressing the needs of struggling readers in their communities, including through programming and collection development.

TELLING MEANINGFUL STORIES: SHARING THE IMPACT OF LIBRARY BUSINESS SERVICES

Libraries are leaders among the small business ecosystem, and this program will highlight strategies to help librarians better engage local entrepreneurs, partner organizations, and elected officials.

11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

BLACK MEN IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES



Felton Thomas

In the U.S., Black men hold less than 1% of all MLIS degrees. In this session, attendees will hear from Black men in library leadership positions about ways to diversify the faces of librarianship.

HOW TO WEATHER THE TURBULENCE OF A VIDEO AUDITOR

So-called “First Amendment audits” continue to occur in libraries, and they are often unsettling and stressful for staff and patrons. What can you do to prepare for having a camera shoved in your face? This panel will highlight case studies and share best practices for dealing with these intrusions.

2–3 p.m.

CHALLENGING TIMES: UNITE AGAINST BOOK BANS AND ALA'S POLICY CORP

Kent Oliver, senior fellow for ALA's Public Policy and Advocacy Office, will moderate a discussion with Policy Corp members who are working to change the narrative around book banning as part of the Unite Against Book Bans campaign.

THE LIBRARY AS STUDIO: WHY ORIGINAL CONTENT IS IMPORTANT FOR LIBRARIES TODAY AND TOMORROW

Libraries are information platforms, but can they also be better information producers? Here, librarians from the Calgary Public Library will talk about how their in-house production team is producing its own media to serve the community.

THURSDAY, APRIL 4

10:15–11:15 a.m.

BUILDING PATHWAYS TO DIVERSE LIBRARIANSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

In response to the long-standing lack of diversity in libraries and library education (86% of American librarians are white, and the majority are women), the Brooklyn Public Library

DESCEND INTO MADNESS MAD CAVE STUDIOS



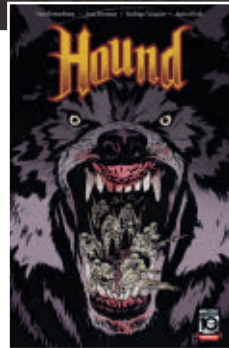
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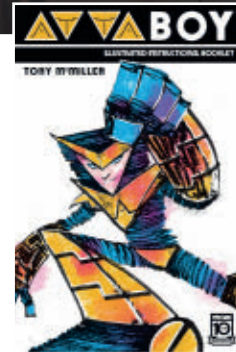
"A fantastical series-starter with sumptuous art, delightful dialogue, and lovable characters."
- Kirkus



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"A visceral and neatly executed graphic parable of war's dehumanizing power." - Kirkus Reviews
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- Booklist



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Attaboy is an action-adventure comic disguised as an illustrated instructional booklet for a video game. The "byte"-sized hero is forced to avenge the destruction of his father and creator, Dr. Atta, by the sinister rebellious mechazoid Motherboard.

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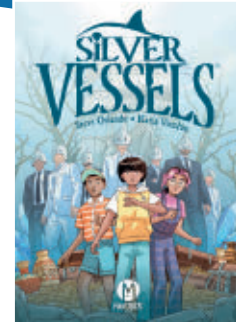


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PLA PREVIEW

implemented the Pathways to Leadership scholarship program. This panel will feature lead investigators from the project, which is dedicated to identifying the barriers marginalized people face in the profession.

REIMAGINING BRANCH LIBRARIES FOR COMMUNITY AUTHENTICITY

This panel will explore how library design can tap into and celebrate the cultural, historical, and environmental contexts that are specific and unique to each place.

UNBANNABLE: HOW LIBRARIES ARE ENSURING ACCESS TO BANNED BOOKS

With book banning on the rise and intellectual freedom under attack, this panel will include leaders whose library-driven projects are protecting critical access to knowledge for all.

11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

CORNERSTONES IN A CULTURE WAR: THE ROLE OF URBAN LIBRARIES IN DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

In 2023, the Urban Libraries Council issued a “Declaration of Democracy” and formed an advisory group that has developed a leadership brief, FAQs, a toolkit, and training series to provide a baseline for building policies and actions that protect democracy. This panel will feature those doing the work.

PUBLIC LIBRARY LEADERS SHARE PERSPECTIVES, LESSONS LEARNED, AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Hear from library leaders—including PLA president Sonia Alcantara-Antoine, ALA president-elect Cindy Hohl, PLA president-elect Michael Lambert, and PLA immediate-past president



Carla Hayden

Maria Taesil Hudson McCauley—as they reflect on their experiences and deliver personal calls to action.

2–3 p.m.

PLA PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM: THE BLACK PUBLIC LIBRARIAN IN AMERICA

PLA president Sonia Alcantara-Antoine welcomes library leaders Carla Hayden, Roosevelt Weeks, and Shauntee Burns-Simpson for a discussion on the achievements, legacies, and contributions of Black librarians.

4–5 p.m.

THE FUTURE'S SO BRIGHT: SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LIBRARIANS

This panel will explore how librarians from the Allen County Public Library in Indiana are recruiting and supporting future librarians beginning in their teenage years. Attendees will hear from program participants and staff about ways to implement similar planning for their own communities.



Reflecting the Voice and Vision of All Children

Featuring Award-Winning Authors and Illustrators from Underrepresented Communities



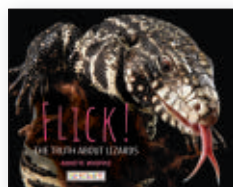
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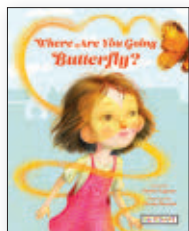
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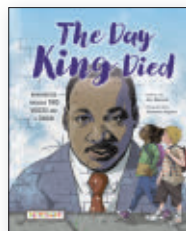
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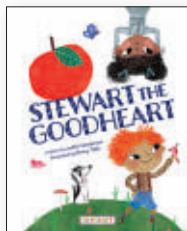
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Deborah Caldwell-Stone

FRIDAY, APRIL 5

10:15–11:15 a.m.

PIVOTING TO MEET NEW CENSORSHIP TACTICS

In addition to the rise in book-banning efforts, library workers are seeing attacks on libraries and the freedom to read from political groups, including attempts to subvert the formal book review process. In this session, ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom staff, including director Deborah Caldwell-Stone, will discuss ways library workers can handle these evolving challenges.

11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE: INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM EDITION

In this session, attendees will collaboratively navigate their way through multistep intellectual freedom–related scenarios and discuss why some choices and decisions are better than others.

IN THE TRENCHES: THE BATTLE AGAINST CENSORSHIP IN LOUISIANA LIBRARIES

As many observers have noted, Louisiana is ground zero when it comes to the political attacks libraries are now facing nationwide, going back to 2017 when a group in Lafayette went on a mission to defund the state's public libraries. This panel will discuss how that effort led to several threatening bills that are now pending in the state legislature, and explore how librarians and advocates in some parishes have been fighting back—and how to prepare one's own library (and community) for similar challenges.

2:15–3:15 p.m.

AFTER THE AUDIT: SUSTAINABLE STEPS TO MAINTAINING A DIVERSE COLLECTION

You've completed a diversity audit of your collection—now what? In this session, librarians from the Kent District Library in Michigan will go through the steps they took to ensure that all patrons were being represented in the library's collection.

WORKING TOGETHER: DEVELOPING NEURODIVERGENT AND IDD INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

This panel will lay out ways to adapt and enhance libraries' programs to support the workforce-related needs of neurodivergent and intellectually and developmentally disabled individuals, exploring how to establish partner relationships, develop staff training, and assess outcomes.

3:30–4:30 p.m.

EMPOWERING LIBRARIES: NAVIGATING THE AI ERA ACROSS ALL ROLES

Brandy McNeil, New York Public Library's director of branch programs and services, will offer insights and best practices for AI integration within one's library system, including the essential, ethical principles of responsible AI.

RETHINKING DEWEY (DEWEY OR DON'T WE?)

Maybe it's time to move past the Dewey Decimal System. This panel offers a vision for a cataloging system meant to be easily understood by patrons, is more equitable, and can be easily browsed.

SPANISH FOR LIBRARY STAFF: BRIDGING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Spanish-language readers are a large and growing public library constituency. This panel will offer insight for reaching Spanish-language users and getting to know one's community's Spanish-speaking populations.



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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- **Keynote address and Q&A:**
Rebecca Giblin, co-author of *Chokepoint Capitalism* and professor at Melbourne Law School
- **Introductory and Closing Remarks:**
Sonia Alcántara-Antoine, 2023-2024 Public Library Association President
Emily Drabinski, 2023-2024 American Library Association President
- **Panel sessions include:**
 - Library Collections**
Backlist Discovery on a Library Budget
 - Ebook License Landscape**
Encouraging Experimentation and Advocating for Access
 - Readers Advisory, Reviews and Awards**
Driving Enthusiasm for Frontlist
 - The Big Picture**
Librarian and Independent Publisher Perspectives and Why This Matters

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Business Unfriendly

Legislative attacks on state library associations are misguided, dangerous—and illegal

By JOHN CHRASKA

Earlier this month, the Georgia state senate made national headlines by passing SB 390, a bill that seeks to bar the expenditure of state funds on programs or materials involving the American Library Association or its affiliates—which include the Georgia Library Association. Georgia is not alone. In 2024, amid a yearslong surge in book bans and threats to the freedom to read, the library community is now facing a pernicious new threat: a wave of proposed legislation, agency rules, and executive orders in a growing number of states that seek to prohibit states and municipalities from engaging financially with library associations.

Every librarian as well their vendor partners—including publishers—should pay close attention to what’s happening here. If adopted, these state-sponsored restrictions would directly threaten the financial sustainability of state library associations—organizations that do vital work in their communities in support of literacy and access to books and information. As advocates, we cannot stand by while library associations are targeted with financial erasure for purely ideological and subjective reasons. We must fight back, and with every legal means at our disposal.

Traditionally, and especially in recent months, the library community, with the help of their professional associations, have had success in litigating against book-banning laws based on asserting their First or 14th Amendment rights. Effectively countering these new attacks on state library associations, however, may involve taking a novel approach. Because these unjust new bills and restrictions are targeting the financial viability of state library associations, we at EveryLibrary believe a restraint of trade action rooted in the Constitution’s commerce clause is a potentially more powerful cause of action than one centered on due process, free association, or equal protection rights. After all, these new laws and regulations do not dictate how individuals can spend their own money, and individuals remain free to join any voluntary membership association they wish. Rather, what’s being targeted with these actions is the ability of state library associations—which at their core are nonprofit corporations—to conduct their business.

To be sure, if the attacks on library associations are allowed to stand, the threat won’t stop there. The functions of a state library association are no different than those undertaken by state medical associations, bar associations, retail federations, restaurant associations, academic groups, or for that matter, author, bookseller, and publishing industry associations. This includes sending members and boards to conferences (such as PLA), purchasing training materials, caucusing across the sector to set standards, supporting professional development, shaping policy, networking, and issuing awards.

Certainly, none of these activities could be viewed in any way as illegal business activities that must be restricted by the state. Rather, it’s obvious that lawmakers in several states are openly targeting the ability of state library associations to conduct business for purely partisan political reasons. And if not confronted, such actions could very well undermine the foundation of all professional association activities and destabilize the collaborative networks and educational frameworks vital to the well-being of any profession.

Framing library membership associations as businesses with marketplace interests is a somewhat different approach to library advocacy—and one that may make some in our sector uncomfortable—but it can be effective. At EveryLibrary, we studied the issue ahead of issuing a policy paper last month (which you can download via our website). We believe the courts, federal or state, will have no trouble seeing these state actions for what they are: an unjustifiable interference by the state in a competitive marketplace, and a politically motivated, unconstitutional restraint on an association’s ability to conduct business in the public’s interest. ■



John Chraska is executive director of EveryLibrary, a political action committee dedicated to libraries.

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LITERACY NONPROFITS FORGE AHEAD

Two organizations further their mission to make books accessible for all young readers

BY SHANNON MAUGHAN

In the wake of pandemic interruptions, and in the face of a contentious climate around book banning, providing young people with access to books and authors has never been more urgent. *PW* checked in with two literacy organizations that are working to make sure kids and teens everywhere receive the books and encouragement they need to become successful students and enthusiastic readers.

Operation Literacy

Like many writers, Utah-based author Jennifer Jenkins found camaraderie and support when she joined a local writers group to learn more about building a platform for her work. What she hadn't imagined, however, was that the crew would become the core of something much bigger. In 2009, Jenkins and four like-minded writers in her tightknit group—Lois Brown, Margie Jordan, Jo Layton, and Tahsha Wilson—cofounded a nonprofit organization called Writers Cubed, now known as Operation Literacy, with the goal of helping aspiring teen writers to develop the skills to tell their own stories.

"We all live in close proximity to each other, and we had an interest in serving our community," Jenkins says. "The original idea was that maybe we should sponsor a writing contest for teens through the high school. We pondered that approach, and, looking back, I can't believe I had the audacity to think we could do something even better."



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School & Library Spotlight

Jenkins's confidence led her to contact nearby Utah Valley University about teaming up. "I walked into their community education department and said, 'You need us,'" she says with a laugh, recalling her pitch to develop a conference for teen writers. "Our motivation was nothing other than we all wish we had had something that would have supported our writing when we were younger. There are so many camps and clinics for athletes, for kids to express themselves in that way. But there are very few opportunities that provide community for young writers and artists."

To Jenkins's surprise, UVU was on board with the collaboration. "I can't believe they said yes," she says. Jenkins and her fellow authors shifted into high gear pulling everything together, and their Teen Author Boot Camp debuted in 2011 on the UVU campus, with 135 kids from surrounding cities attending. "We had great support from some awesome local authors, and it was wonderful," she says. "Then, that idea grew. Once you dip your toe into the world of serving outside yourself, it's kind of addictive, to be honest. We saw how grateful the kids were for what we had offered, and how when they walked into the room it was like they had found their people, their community," she says. "It was just magical."

The conference has increased in size each year, according to Jenkins. The event outgrew UVU's facilities several years back when it hit 800 attendees, and TABC now draws roughly 1,000 teen writers in person at the Utah Valley Convention Center in Provo, with additional teens across the country and internationally attending virtually. This year, the 13th annual Teen Author Boot Camp, with the theme "Gathering the Magic," is set for March 23, featuring Christopher Paolini and Darcie Little Badger as keynote speakers.

As its flagship conference expanded, so did the scope of Writers Cubed. Jenkins stepped into the role of executive director for the group and formed partnerships with nearby bookstore The King's English and Owl Hollow Press (which publishes an annual anthology of teen writing from TABC). She and her cofounders also leaned into learning how to fundraise, apply for grants, and meet the various business needs of the burgeoning organization. "The amount of work it takes to lift something like this off the ground is not inconsequential," Jenkins says.

With TABC steadily drawing more interest, the Writers Cubed team saw an opportunity to embrace younger kids and give them a conference of their own. In 2016, the Tween Author Boot Camp for aspiring writers ages nine to 12 was born. The half-day event is held in Provo in November and includes a First Paragraph contest in addition to activities and workshops with authors.

Once Tween Author Boot Camp was established, Jenkins says that Writers Cubed began requesting that participating authors give the nonprofit the rights to record and distribute their TABC presentations. The result is the TABC Classroom arm of the organization, now a database of nearly 100 curated videos offered to educators to help them teach writing. "We incentivize this program for Title 1 schools," Jenkins says. "In other words, we give it away. Even though we work with sponsors and donors to provide scholarships for about 10% of our conference attendees every year, there are still so many students who just can't afford what we are offering. TABC Classroom helps broaden that net." To accompany each video, Writers Cubed hired professional educators to create lesson plans that align with the national Common Core standards.

An energizing era

The Covid era of shutdowns and disruptions turned out to be a time of still more expansion for Writers Cubed, a development that recently prompted the group to change its name to Operation Literacy. "The program that I'm most proud of, the one that is closest to my heart, is a new one called Book Drop, which we started in collaboration with author Jennifer Nielsen," Jenkins says. "Jen and I are good friends, and when we first met at a writers conference, we realized that we had both been sitting on the same idea: that we wanted to reach kids from Title 1 schools, providing free books and author visits to them."

But she notes that this plan comes with some key challenges. "As authors, we're part of a business," Jenkins says. "When my publishers send me to do a book tour, they go to schools that can either pay my honorarium or that will reach a minimum book sale quota. But right now in our country, 63% of people live at or below the poverty

continued on p. 44



Authors (from l.) Christian McKay Heidicker, Jennifer A. Nielsen, Jennifer Jenkins, and Kristyn Crow.

JUNIA

THE BOOK MULE OF TROUBLESOME CREEK

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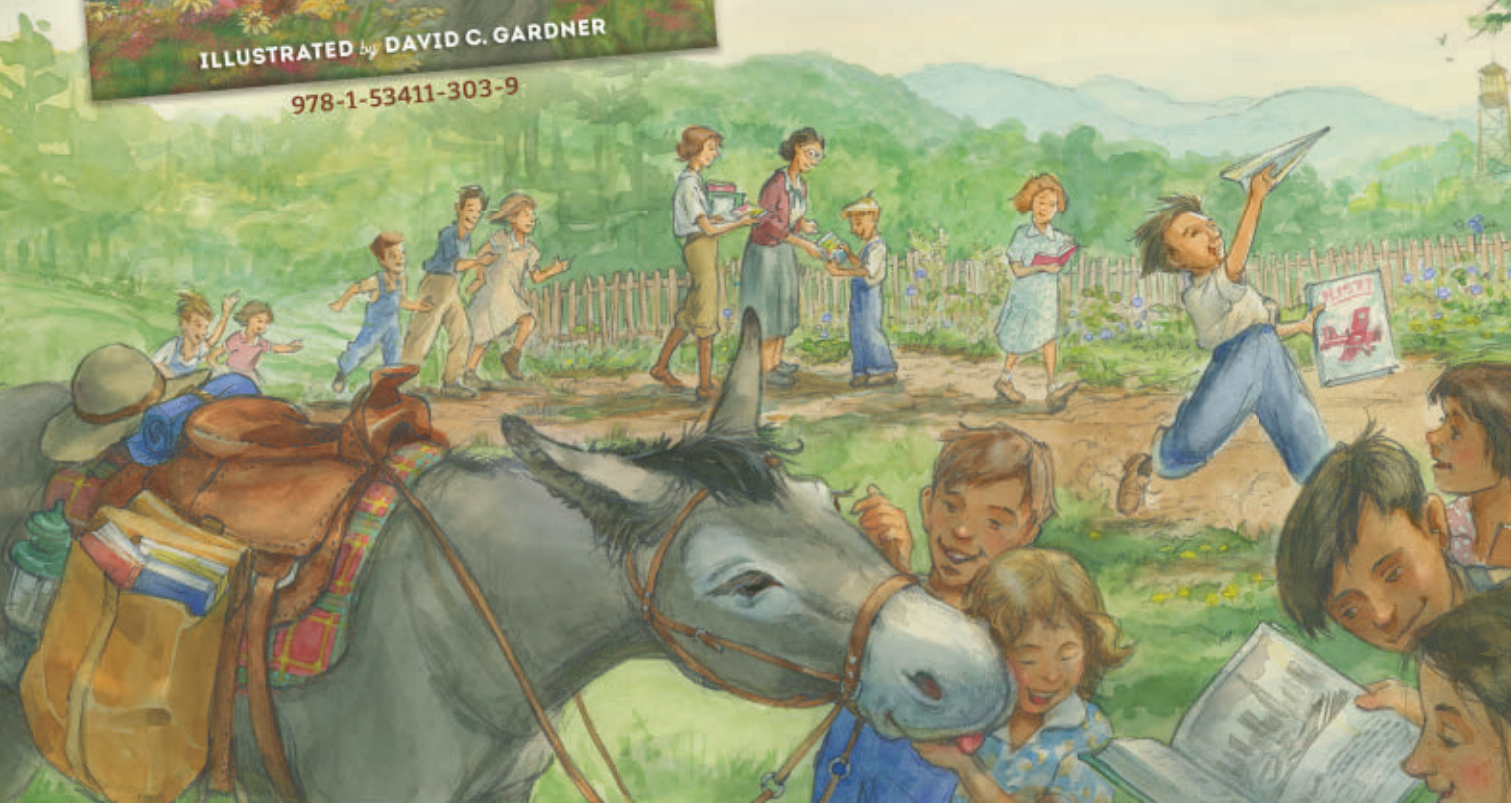
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— *Kirkus Reviews*



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Authors Weigh In

What's it like to do a visit for Writers and Artists Across the Country? Two authors discuss their experience.

Malia Maunakea, author of the *Lei* and the *Legends* series, had been working to find grant money to fund a Title 1 school tour and book giveaways across Hawaii. The resources were obtained with coordination between We Need Diverse Books and WAAC, and Maunakea visited 20 schools.

"I'm not exaggerating when I say it was one of the best experiences of my life," Maunakea says. "I got to go back to the elementary school where my dad was part of the first graduating class—with my dad!—and give books [copies of *Lei and the Fire Goddess*] to all of the students. I heard exclamations of 'We get to keep it?!' Some teachers

got teary in the back of packed gymnasiums, coming up after to tell me this was the first book many of their students own. Kids would examine the cover and say *Lei* looks like them. I'd tell them about some of the legends in *Lei and the Fire Goddess* and I didn't have to explain who Pele or Kamapua'a [a shape-shifting half man/half pig god of Hawaiian mythology] were because they already knew. One boy shared his own mo'olelo [story or myth] of when his dad saw Kamapua'a while out hunting. Being able to give this back to the children of Hawaii was the most incredible gift I could have ever asked for, and I'm forever grateful for the team at WAAC for helping make it happen."

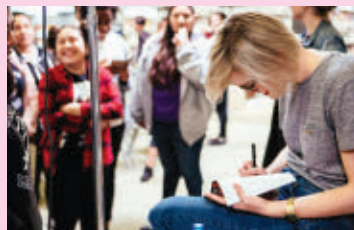
Author Veronica Roth knew she wanted to be involved with WAAC since the group's debut. "I'd done a school visit tour where at least one school a day was a Title I school, places where they had typically never hosted an author before," Roth says. "I found that more often than not, when you give a school that maybe doesn't have

the same resources the chance to host an author, they do a pretty awesome job—they just need someone to give them the opportunity. So, when I spoke to the WAAC founders early on about their mission to help schools connect to authors and facilitate those visits, I was excited about their work from the start. It

benefits every single one of us if kids of all backgrounds, in all places, get the chance to connect with authors and other creative people. The closer we can get to that goal, the better."

Roth has done two visits with WAAC, one in person and one virtual. "Both went really well," she says. "It's a privilege for an author to connect with readers directly. School visits are about making sure students have a good time, get more interested in reading, and do some dreaming about what creative work they'd like to do in their own lives. I certainly hope my visit helped with those things, even a little. And I wouldn't have gotten to meet those particular student groups without WAAC facilitating."

—S.M.



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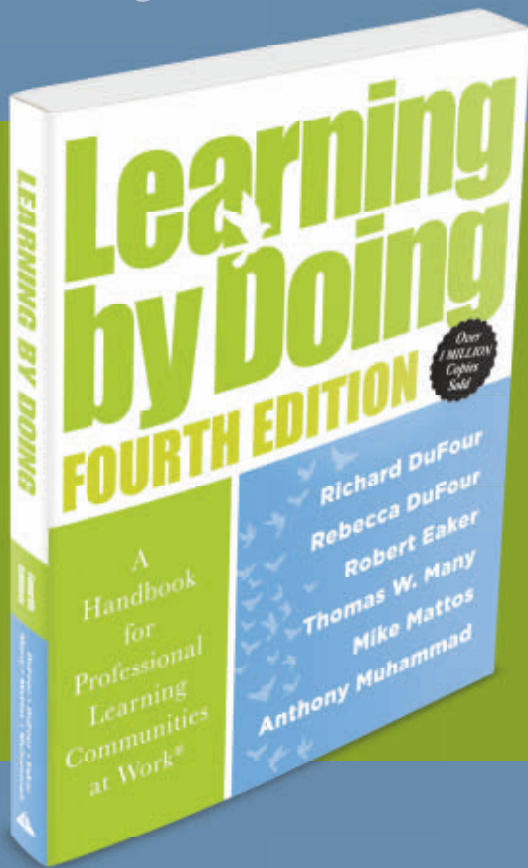
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School & Library Spotlight

continued from p. 40

“The funds we get from sponsors and donors are precious, and we have to be careful that we are using them in the schools that need them most.

—**Jennifer Jenkins**, Operation Literacy

line, and the children in those homes do not own a single age-appropriate book.” Book Drop is a way to reach more of those kids and their schools. “We bring in major authors to some of the poorest schools across the country and we provide a free author visit and free access to books,” she explains. “And the kids at these Book Drops don’t know until the assembly ends and the author tells them that they all get a free book. The reactions are amazing.”

The most recent Book Drop, on January 19, featured Christopher Paolini, who visited Orem Junior High and presented the 900 students attending his program with free signed copies of his book *Eragon*. Author Brandon Sanderson’s Lightweaver Foundation funded that event. On the same day, authors Brandon Mull and Frank Cole did a Book Drop assembly and giveaway at Northlake Elementary in Tooele, Utah, bringing the total number of kids receiving free books to 1,350. In 2023, Book Drop reached 10,572 children living at or below the poverty line.

Jenkins says that Operation Literacy pays attention to three metrics when selecting a school to receive a Book Drop: the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, state test scores and how they are trending, and the school’s English-language-learner population. “The funds we get from sponsors and donors are precious, and we have to be careful that we are using them in the schools that need them most.” As an example, she points to a 2021 Book Drop featuring Newbery Medalist Matt de la Peña, who gave a bilingual presentation at Guadalupe School in Salt Lake City, where 97% of the students were English learners, and where kids received free copies of his picture book *Last Stop on Market Street*.

For a typical Book Drop program, participating authors donate their time, speaking fee, and travel expenses, and Operation Literacy purchases their books with money from sponsors and donations. But Jenkins notes that some authors have stepped up to additionally fund an entire Book Drop. The program reaches beyond Utah as well. “We work with anybody who has a desire to elevate literacy in their city,” Jenkins says. “We go wherever we can get funding.”

Other recent additions to Operation Literacy’s programming slate include Teen Poet Society, a national group that has quarterly readings and annually publishes a teen poetry collection, and the Teen Readers’ Choice Awards, which invites teens to nominate their favorite books of the past two years in seven different categories and then vote on finalists and ultimately decide the winners. An awards gala where the winners are announced takes place on the eve of Teen Author Book Camp—this year it’s March 22.

Looking ahead, Jenkins envisions growth for all the endeavors under Operation Literacy’s umbrella. And there is a larger team in place to help achieve that goal. “We are spread across four time zones,” Jenkins says of the now 26-person staff, which includes the core group of cofounders, who are also executive board

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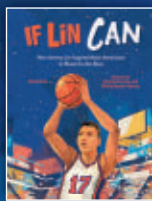
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School & Library Spotlight

members, and Nielsen, who is the founding director of Book Drop. “We’re a modern organization that lives on Zoom,” Jenkins adds. “We love TABC weekend, because that’s when all of our staff comes into town and we get to reunite.”

Writers and Artists Across the Country

Many people had varying reactions to the outcome of the 2016 presidential election, but for literary agent Sarah Burnes and YA author and Blackstone senior acquisitions editor Daniel Ehrenhaft, that point in time sparked the idea to launch a nonprofit. “The weekend after the election, Sarah and I were at YALLFest [in South Carolina] with Tori Hill, the festival’s organizer and author coordinator at the time, and there was a pervasive sense of urgency—to get involved civically somehow, to do *something*,” Ehrenhaft says. “All the attendees kept asking each other, ‘How can we make a difference?’ The festival itself was the initial inspiration for Sarah and me; we witnessed firsthand the magic that happens when young readers meet and interact with their favorite authors face-to-face. We figured if we could create a similar experience at under-resourced schools—well-resourced schools often have authors come to visit and didn’t need our help—we could make a difference.”



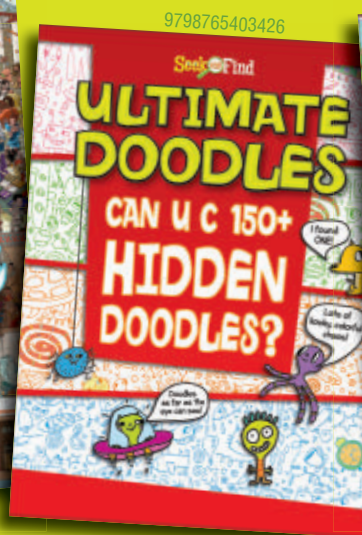
WAAC staff (from l.) Daniel Ehrenhaft, Sarah Burnes, Tori Hill, and Lily Dodd.

With that, Writers and Artists Across the Country began to crystalize, taking the first steps toward its stated mission as “a consortium of children’s books industry professionals who are building a nationwide network to facilitate author and artist visits in underserved schools.”

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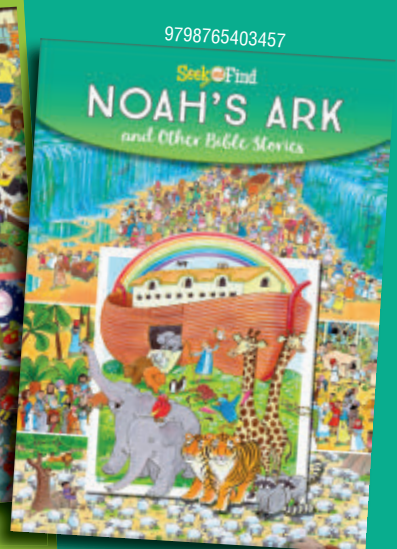
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School & Library Spotlight

The group stipulated that a key component of the organization would be providing a book for each child who attended a WAAC visit. “We felt strongly that students should get books to take home with them as opposed to providing a classroom or library set,” Ehrenhaft says.

WAAC surveyed educators from participating schools at the beginning of this year to gauge how the program is performing. Responses revealed that after a WAAC visit, 100% of educators said students had an increased excitement about books, 89% said students had an increased interest in writing and sharing their own stories, and 73% said the book their students received from WAAC was the first book some of the students had ever owned.

Visits are typically initiated by requests from authors, educators, and local school organizations who ask WAAC to help them connect with each other, purchase books, and figure out the logistics of an event. Examples of individual scenarios abound. Local nonprofits work together with WAAC, too, for added support. One project in the works is WAAC’s fundraising effort with Maine nonprofit I’m Your Neighbor Books so it can expand author-illustrator Omar Mohammed’s tour in the state and reach 1,000 more students.

When it comes to planning where authors will visit, the team says that schools with the greatest barriers to entry—rural,

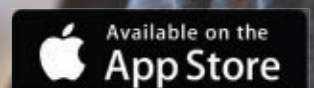
low-income, serving a demographic now represented by many authors—are prioritized. WAAC has a current roster of 150 authors it can draw from, and it additionally works with We Need Diverse Books and individual publishers to connect with other authors who may want to participate.

WAAC is funded solely by donations, with some of those contributions coming from publishing industry professionals or from authors, who offer to donate their time or defray the costs of a visit in some other way. But the WAAC team pointed out that in the organization’s early days, a board member raised the issue that BIPOC authors are often disproportionately asked to do school visits for free, so, WAAC offers an honorarium when they think it’s appropriate.

Since its launch, WAAC has teamed with communities in 40 cities in 17 states. The number of students WAAC has reached—and books it has given away—has doubled each year for the past three years, according to Ehrenhaft, and the goal in 2024 is to reach 10,000 students. The WAAC team states that other milestones in its sights include expanding the donor base to include institutional giving from foundations and corporate sponsors. “That would go a long way toward making our work even more far-reaching and sustainable,” Ehrenhaft says. ■

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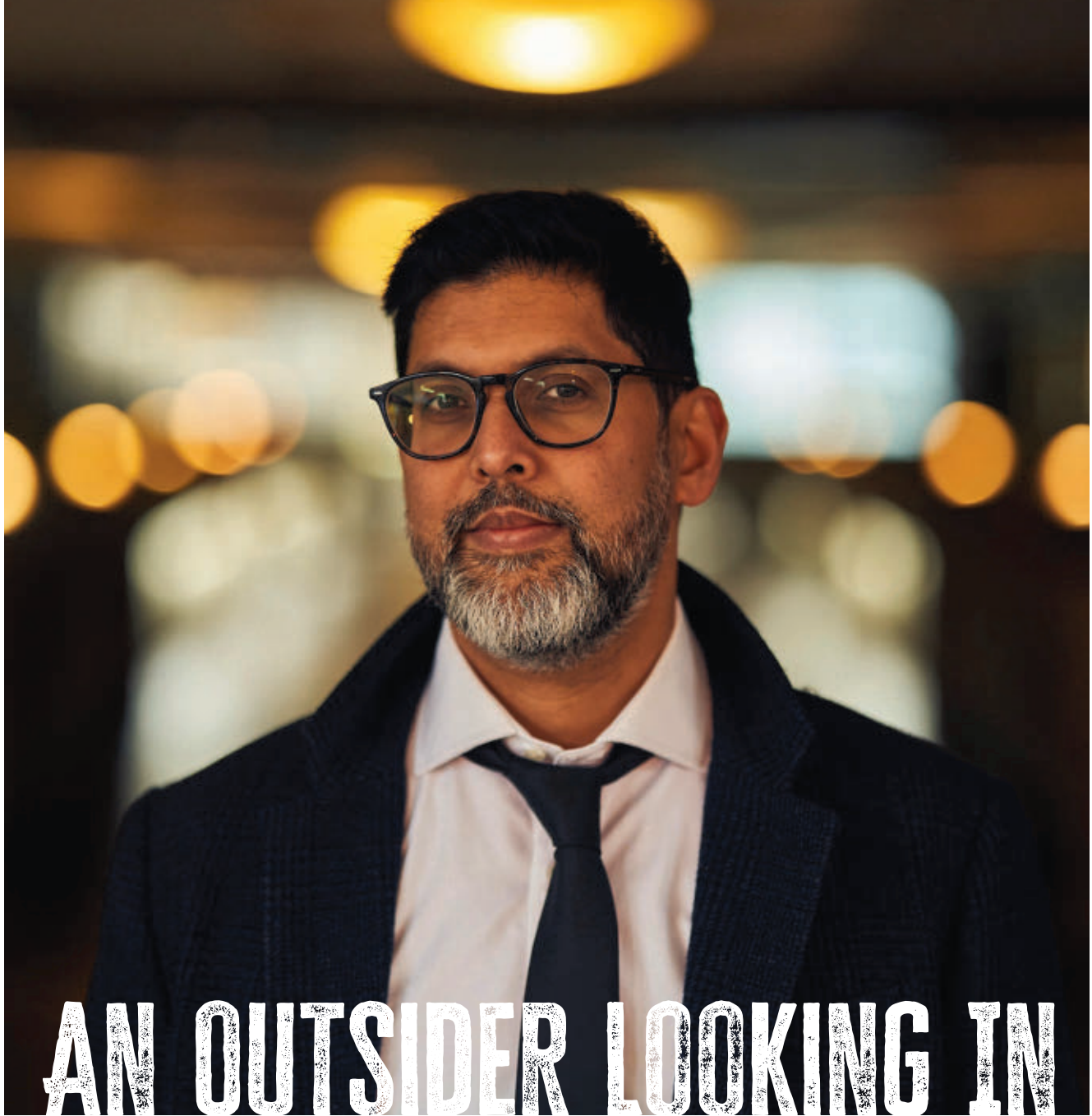
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AN OUTSIDER LOOKING IN

FOR ABIR MUKHERJEE, ABANDONING A LUCRATIVE FINANCE CAREER TO WRITE HISTORICAL MYSTERIES WAS MORE THAN A CAREER CHANGE—IT WAS A WAY TO SAVE HIS SOUL

BY CONNER REED

Abir Mukherjee wants you to know he's not a hero. The Indian Scottish novelist spent much of the 1990s and 2000s—before he became a breakout crime writer—working in finance and being, as he puts it, “a bit of a dickhead.” It's tempting to imagine that Mukherjee's irrepressible artist's soul moved him to blow up his life in spectacular fashion on the floor of the

London Stock Exchange one afternoon. The truth, he insists, is less sensational.

On days when Mukherjee, a London School of Economics graduate, felt especially disillusioned with his routine of “making a lot of money by making rich people richer” at firms including Deloitte and Abingdon Capital, he'd purchase lottery tickets or start writing novels. Neither effort bore much fruit. Then, in 2013, he stumbled across a *Telegraph* crime writing competition and decided to enter as a sort of personal litmus test. If he won, he thought, the reward—a £5,000 book deal with British publisher Harvill Secker—could launch a brave new future. But he'd never win, of course. And when he didn't, he'd finally put his writerly daydreaming to bed.

Except Mukherjee *did* win, and that fuzzily defined “new future” blossomed into a five-book historical mystery series that's earned him two Edgar Award nominations and sold more

Author Profile

than 400,000 copies. “The day I got the email, I was in the office, and I reacted the way anybody from Glasgow does when faced with good news: I started swearing my head off,” Mukherjee recalls on Zoom from his home in Surrey, peeking out from behind round tortoise shell glasses and a gray-flecked beard. It felt, to him, like an act of fate. “I was never heroic enough to say, ‘I’m not doing this anymore.’ If I hadn’t won, I’d still be losing bits of my soul every day.”

Five minutes with Mukherjee is enough to confirm that his soul remains intact. Like many of his cohorts in crime fiction, he counterbalances his macabre work on the page with buoyant extroversion. He’s eager to talk at length about his literary heroes, and quick with a self-deprecating jab about his own Scottish brogue. He often turns questions back on his interviewer, either genuinely curious or sufficiently media trained to butter up the person with the notepad. And he has no qualms about charging straight toward big ideas—particularly political ones—in conversations or in his books.

Mukherjee’s first five novels centered on Sam Wyndham, a former Scotland Yard detective reassigned to the British force in Calcutta in the 1920s, and Surendranath Banerjee, his Indian sergeant. The books (most recently 2021’s *The Shadows of Men*) use meaty whodunit plots to address the intricate tensions of early-20th-century British-Indian relations.

The format mirrors the tartan noir Mukherjee read in his youth—Scottish novels by writers like Val McDermid and Ian Rankin that couched critiques of Thatcherism in hardboiled crime tropes.

“Essentially all of my writing comes from anger, but shouting doesn’t achieve very much,” Mukherjee says. “You can’t just have a diatribe. You have to have a story there.”

In *Hunted* (Mulholland, May), Mukherjee’s latest novel, he uses a kaleidoscopic thriller plot to explore his anxieties about everything from his children’s safety to the durability of democracy as a form of government. The book had its origins when Joshua Kendall, Mukherjee’s editor at Hachette, asked him what he feared most, and Mukherjee replied with an answer that will feel familiar to many readers: the past decade’s worldwide uptick in political populism.

Hunted kicks off with a suicide bombing in an L.A. shopping mall. The attack attracts the attention of workaholic FBI agent Shreya Mistry, who nearly dies while investigating the mall’s ruins. From there, Mukherjee introduces a carousel of primary characters, each somehow linked to the initial explosion. There’s Aliyah Khan, a young Muslim woman from London living in a remote Oregon town with a group of political radicals; Greg Flynn, an Afghanistan veteran well-versed in explosives; Sajid, Aliyah’s modest father; and Carrie, Greg’s salt-of-the-earth mother. With more bombs exploding across the country, a shadowy Islamist group called Sons of the Caliphate starts taking credit for the attacks, and the chaos threatens to tip the balance in a close presidential race between a right-wing ideology and the milquetoast vice president. As the election

approaches, Mukherjee’s characters meet and join forces in various permutations, their individual motives unfurling slowly.

Hunted marks many firsts for Mukherjee: it’s his first standalone, his first contemporary novel, and the first in which he indulges his lifelong fascination with the United States. “To me, one of the major paradoxes about America is that everyone I’ve met there is so pleasant one-on-one.” Mukherjee says. “At the same time, I’ve never felt more scared someone’s going to shoot me.”

As he chewed on big ideas like Americans’ “talismanic” use of words such as *freedom*, he kept one eye on the ambient threat of violence that’s long characterized the national mood. The more he considered it, the more he came to see it as a question of economic decay. “Even if you were a working-class American in the ’50s or ’60s, you had a better lifestyle than 99% of people on the planet,” he says. “To go from those certainties to being a paycheck or an illness away from poverty—what does that do to people? And even more fascinating, what does that do in terms of identity?”

But *Hunted* is no pensive treatise on current affairs. Its ideas may have roots in Mukherjee’s experience growing up as “the local color” in West Scotland, but in execution, it’s a bang-up thriller—another first for the author. And while mysteries and thrillers are often grouped together in conversations and bookstore displays, Mukherjee found the mechanics to be wildly different. “With a thriller, you have to almost throw the kitchen sink at your characters in a way I never did in the Wyndham & Banerjee novels, because they’ve got British characters

from the ’20s in them, and we wouldn’t do anything so quite so ungentlemanly as to thrill people,” he explains. “Excitement’s for you Americans. Over here, we’re more cerebral.”

The mandate to “hit readers in the face with a frying pan every five pages,” as Mukherjee puts it, means *Hunted* is stuffed with sucker-punch twists and a stone-faced, breathless quality that ramps up as the novel enters its second act. While he had a lot of fun figuring out how to heighten the book’s action without straying into out-and-out insanity, he admits he missed the humor of the Wyndham & Banerjee novels. “I see a lot of absurdity around me,” he says, “and I think the best way you deal with absurdity is humor.”

His next book, due out sometime next year, will be a Wyndham & Banerjee mystery, but he’s also stewing on a satire about an Indian George Santos–like figure who moves to America and swindles his way to the upper ranks of the political system. He wants to get back in touch with his funny bone, continue working in the fertile playground of the American imagination, and further explore ideas about the difficulties and privileges of being an outsider.

Because for all his success, Mukherjee still deeply identifies as one. “I’m just an idiot trying to get through things,” he says. “There’s a degree of, ‘Fucking hell, how did this ever happen? I’m just a wee boy from Hamilton in Scotland, and now people ask my opinion on stuff? That’s mental.’” ■



Reviews

Fiction

Tehrangelles

Porochista Khakpour. Pantheon, \$28 (336p)
ISBN 978-1-5247-4790-9

Khakpour's wry latest (following the essay collection *Brown Album*) introduces the Milanis, a wealthy Persian family living in Los Angeles. The Milanis have courted fame ever since patriarch Al struck frozen food gold in the 1980s with Pizzabomme ("like Cinnabon but Pizza"), which led to a viral TV commercial. Their celebrity is taken to new heights when 18-year-old Roxanna, the self-assured second of four daughters, secures a deal for a reality show in early 2020. The news invites mixed reactions in the family—Al is thrilled for the publicity, but his depressive wife, Homa, is ambivalent. Violet, the oldest daughter and a model, goes along with the show, while shrewd third daughter Mina worries her newfound queerness may be exposed. Haylee, the youngest at "fourteen going on twenty-four," sees the show as her big break. Escalating events—first the fear of war with Iran after the U.S. assassinates an Iranian general and then the Covid-19 pandemic—threaten to torpedo the show, however. During lockdown, the Milanis cope with their stress by logging on to social media, using drugs, or pretending everything is fine, and stick largely to their own corners of the mansion. Khakpour's commitment to giving equal weight to each character means that the narrative structure occasionally feels diffuse. For the most part, though, she provides a vibrant sense of place and an indelible family portrait. This has plenty of heart. *Agent: Susan Golomb, Writers House. (June)*

★ Sipsworth

Simon Van Booy. Godine, \$26.95 (230p)
ISBN 978-1-56792-794-8

Van Booy (*The Presence of Absence*) offers an enchanting depiction of the surprisingly touching relationship between an elderly widow and a mouse. After building a life in Australia with her late husband,



R.O. Kwon returns with Exhibit, a story of art, a family curse, and a sapphic obsession (reviewed on this page).

retired physician Helen Cartwright returns to the English village where she grew up. There, her existence is uneventful, and she's at a loss over what to live for ("Each day was an impersonation of the one before with only a slight shuffle—as though even for death there is a queue"). Then one night she discovers a mouse in her home and offers it a sip of water from an upturned bottle cap. After the mouse takes a drink, she dubs it Sipsworth. Helen's quiet world expands thanks to Sipsworth's companionship as they watch TV and listen to the radio together. Then the mouse shows signs of breathing distress, and Helen, once a renowned pediatric cardiologist, goes into action to save its life. Material that could easily feel saccharine or twee is fresh and often funny, thanks to the author's artful prose and unsparing characterization of the cantankerous Helen, who at one point calls an animal shelter worker an "idiot" for not accepting mice. Van Booy takes the familiar trope of an aging person's unexpected renewal and makes it feel new. *Agent: Susanna Lea, Susanna Lea Assoc. (May)*

Exhibit

R.O. Kwon. Riverhead, \$28 (224p)
ISBN 978-0-593-19002-9

A female friendship embodies mythological and tragic dimensions in the haunting sophomore novel from Kwon (*The Incendiaries*). Jin Han, a Korean

American photographer and Christian apostate, is at a crossroads. On the surface, everything seems placid: she claims that she and her diffident but charming husband, Philip, don't want children, and that she's happy with their found family of arty New Yorkers, who compensate for the parents she barely knows in Seoul. However, Jin believes she's cursed by the unquiet spirit of an ancestor, a *kisaeng* paid to keep men company, who fell in love with the firstborn son of an illustrious Korean clan and died vowing revenge against the family that denied the couple's love. When Jin meets Lidija Jung, a star ballerina absent from the stage following a mysterious leg injury, the two forge an immediate connection. Their chemistry fuels an obsession in Jin, and as the women's growing intimacy begins to jeopardize her career, identity, and marriage, she considers her generational trauma and wonders, could Lidija be the *kisaeng*'s revenge? Hypnotic and disquieting, this slow burn will stick in readers' minds. *(May)*

Trust and Safety

Laura Blackett and Eve Gleichman. Dutton, \$28 (320p) ISBN 978-0-593-47368-9

Gleichman and Blackett (*The Very Nice Box*) satirize homophobia in their clever latest. When Rosie, 30, marries handsome tech lawyer Jordan Prawn, she hopes the partnership will bring her stability. Instead, she grows disillusioned with New York City and her job as a canvasser for an LGBTQ advocacy group. While browsing Zillow, she imagines a new life and convinces Jordan to put an offer on her dream house in Upstate New York. Jordan empties his savings to close the deal, then loses his job at a start-up after its personal assistant device courts controversy when it calls a straight user a "hot dyke," and the company tanks. They rent out their shed to Dylan and Lark, two attractive women who belong to a queer polycule. Rosie becomes fascinated with the new tenants, who enthusiastically help her and Jordan with renovation projects and lead an appealingly unplugged lifestyle (Dylan uses a flip phone and builds furniture by hand). As Rosie's desire for Dylan grows, she begins questioning her life's choices. Blackett and Gleichman expertly build suspense following a

bombshell revelation about Dylan's true nature, and Jordan and his business partner's attempts to consult with Dylan and Lark for a new family planning app are irresistibly cringeworthy. This intrigues and unsettles in equal measure. *Agent: Faye Bender, Book Group. (May)*

The Mother of All Things

Alexis Landau. Pantheon, \$29 (336p)
ISBN 978-0-593-70079-2

An art history professor gets initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries in Landau's uneven tale of Greek antiquity and modern-day female rage (following *Those Who Are Saved*). At 45, Ava Zaretsky is drowning in household chores and has too little time for the book she's writing about a woman's life in 415 BCE Athens. Kasper, her film producer husband, is in Bulgaria filming an action movie, and Ava visits him in Sofia for the summer with their two young children. There, Ava reconnects with Lydia Nikitas, her former mentor at Columbia University. Decades ago, Professor Nikitas destroyed Ava's chance to join Yale's art history graduate program after she chose to write her thesis on a different topic from the one Nikitas advised. Their bond is shaky, to say the least, but Ava confides nonetheless in Nikitas about her struggles, and Nikitas invites her to join a ritual for worshipping Demeter and Persephone in Greece. Landau lays bare the challenges facing a working mother, but the novel's climax, which is teased in a prologue where a group of angry blood-spattered women form a circle around a man and pelt him with stones, isn't quite coherent. Novels like Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* have tackled similar material to greater effect. *Agent: Alice Tasman, Jean V. Naggar Literary. (May)*

★ I Hope This Finds You Well

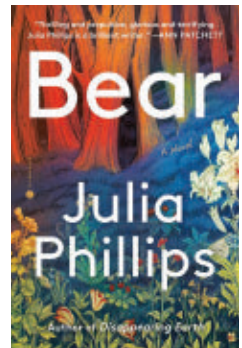
Natalie Sue. Morrow, \$28 (352p)
ISBN 978-0-06-332036-9

Sue debuts with a delightfully quirky

★ Bear

Julia Phillips. Hogarth, \$28 (304p) ISBN 978-0-525-52043-6

In the beautiful and haunting latest from Phillips (*Disappearing Earth*), two 20-something sisters contend with economic precarity and their mother's terminal illness on present-day San Juan Island, Wash. Sam, the protagonist, and her older sister, Elena, have spent their entire adult lives caring for their mother, a former manicurist whose lung disease was brought about by exposure to chemicals while at work. Faced with spiraling medical bills, the sisters have no choice but to take menial jobs (Sam as a vendor on the local ferries, Elena as a waitress at a golf club), the drudgery of which is leavened only by the expectation of a "better future" after their mother dies and they sell the house. That is, until they encounter an unexpected visitor to the island: a grizzly bear, which becomes a powerful symbol of hope for Elena, who believes the animal is magical; and terror for Sam, who considers it nothing but a dangerous menace. The bear provides a vehicle for the author's masterful characterization, as the sisters clash over their perception of the grizzly's meaning in their lives, and for the increasingly suspenseful plot. Phillips prefaces the story with an excerpt from the Brothers Grimm fairy tale "Snow-White and Rose-Red," about two sisters who play with a bear, which sets a simultaneously playful and ominous tone and contrasts powerfully with the novel's supremely executed realism. This is brilliant. *Agent: Suzanne Gluck, WME. (June)*



office comedy about a 33-year-old administrative assistant's interpersonal battles in a Canadian supermarket chain's regional office. Jolene's days consist of eight hours of mind-numbing work, followed by drinking to forget about the accidental death of her best friend, Ellie, when they were in high school. At the office, she adds cathartic notes in white font at the bottom of emails (after thanking "morale club" leader Rhonda for a reminder about a meeting, she invisibly adds, "Deep in my core, I find you insufferable"). When Jolene forgets to white out a nasty note to her nemesis Caitlin, who subsequently complains, she's forced to complete an antiharassment course and have her emails monitored. Instead of adding the restrictions to her computer, however, the HR

guy accidentally gives Jolene access to all her fellow employees' inboxes and direct messages. Among the funny discoveries is a thread between a coworker and his parents in which he sends photos of Jolene and claims she's his girlfriend. The workplace hijinks produce steady laughs, and Sue adds depth through the backstory of Ellie, with whom Jolene found solace as a fellow misfit. This is a must-read for fans of Joshua Ferris's *Then We Came to the End*. *Agents: Melanie Figueroa and Taylor Haggerty, Root Literary. (May)*

Kittentits

Holly Wilson. Zando/Flynn, \$28 (368p)
ISBN 978-1-63893-108-9

In Wilson's chirpy if wearying debut, a 10-year-old white girl seeks friendship

► Our Reviewers

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and adventure after a tragedy. In 1992 Calumet City, Ill., Molly lives with her dad in the House of Friends, a religious co-op, where she's homeschooled by an older woman she calls "fat Evelyn." Two of their fellow residents recently died in a blaze, including a nun whose ghost haunts their "fire-rotted" house. When 20-something Jeanie arrives on a dirt bike and moves in, Molly is immediately taken with the young woman: "right now Jeanie's the most supernatural thing to me ever." Jeanie is on the run from her vengeful twin sister (the reasons for this come out later), prompting her to fake her own death by staging a hot-air balloon accident. Molly, knowing Jeanie is still alive, runs away to Chicago to meet up with her pen pal Demarcus, who is Black, for help in tracking Jeanie down. Wilson has a knack for surreal imagery (she describes a cyclorama in Chicago as "a ghost-painted grid with glowing bars and square cells like a prison"). Unfortunately, she leans too often on the puerile insults of the period, including "asstard" (to which she adds "crotchtard" and "kittentits"), and awkwardly attempts to work through racial issues by having Molly say ignorant things and Demarcus call her out ("I can't tell if you're racist or just dumb"). In the end, Wilson serves up more fatigue than intrigue. *Agent: Kent Wolf, Neon Literary. (May)*

The Great State of West Florida

Kent Wascom. Black Cat, \$17 trade paper (256p) ISBN 978-0-8021-6284-7

The wacky and wild fourth adventure for the Woolsack clan (after *The New Inheritors*) finds lawless gunslingers and reactionary Christian nationalists facing off in a divided Florida. The year is 2026 and 13-year-old orphan Rally Woolsack is rescued from the abusive foster family who brought him to Louisiana by his long-lost uncle Rodney, who regularly responds to challenges of mortal combat on the app DU3L. Rally is thrilled to get away from his tormentors and return to Florida, although it turns out Rodney has pulled him from the frying pan into the fire. Troy Yarbrough, a state legislator whose family runs a creepy evangelical Christian college in its mansion on Florida's panhandle, has introduced a bill calling for the region to secede from the state.

★ Cinema Love

Jiaming Tang. Dutton, \$28 (304p) ISBN 978-0-593-47433-4

This resonant and textured debut traces the secret lives of gay men and their wives in 1980s China and their loneliness in contemporary New York City's Chinatown. As a young man, Old Second leaves his village in shame after his family discovers his sexuality. In the city of Fuzhou, he falls in love with a man named Shun-Er, whom he meets at the Workers' Cinema, which is known for showing war films to a gay clientele who meet for sex in the screening rooms. Out of convenience, Old Second marries Bao Mei, a woman who works at the cinema's ticket counter, and they immigrate to New York City in the 1990s. A parallel narrative follows Yan Hua and her marriage to Shun-Er, who dies by suicide in 1989 and whose ghost continues to haunt her after she comes to the U.S. as a "puppet wife" to Frog, the "discount-bin husband" her family paid in exchange for her green card. Tang laces the narrative with Dickensian details of Chinatown's underground economy (Frog and Yan Hua live in a cramped, six-dollar per night "motel" room shared by many others in bunk beds), and lyrically portrays Old Second's longing for same-sex intimacy ("A barrier has been erected around his heart, and though he can look past it like clean glass, he finds there are certain thresholds he can no longer cross"). Tang announces himself as a writer to watch with this unshakable story. *Agent: Kent Wolf, Neon Literary. (May)*



Rally, reckoning with the long-running bad blood between his family and the Yarbroughs, derides Troy's vision as a "Jesus-riddled white ethnostate with a beachside pastel tinge." With the bill on the floor of the state legislature, and with everyone packing firearms, the Florida Wars begin. Fans of pulpy dark humor will relish the climactic showdown between Yarbrough's henchmen and those loyal to an elusive figure called the Governor, as right-wing nutjob Troy is saddled by mad cow disease and Rally is rescued by his crush. Wascom's high-octane satire feels all too plausible. *Agent: Gail Hochman, Brandt & Hochman Literary. (May)*

★ Faraway the Southern Sky

Joseph Andras, trans. from the French by Simon Leser. Verso, \$17.95 trade paper (112p) ISBN 978-1-80429-171-9

In this eloquent and impassioned novella, Andras (*Tomorrow They Won't Dare to Murder Us*) charts a course through contemporary Paris in the footsteps of Vietnamese leader Hồ Chí Minh, who lived in the French capital in the 1910s and '20s, and reflects on the nature of revolutionary

movements. Andras affectionately and romantically describes Hồ as a "moneyless vagabond" who "changed names like he changed shirts, sweating in the hope, no less, of making us all equal at last." Under the name Nguyễn Tất Thanh, he left his home in the French protectorate of Annam and joined a socialist organization in Paris. As he began writing about Indochina for socialist and communist publications, he quickly gained the attention of his comrades—as well as of the French police, who began to surveil his every move. While visiting sites where Nguyễn lived and worked, Andras renders the city's daily rhythms ("A restaurant sign flickers; wheels toing and froing; the city growls, fawn gray, while the gutter scoffs down water") and reflects on the ways in which revolutionary idealism is often marred by violence ("Nothing casts a shadow over you quite like fratricidal blood"). Along the way, his flâneur's chronicle builds to a richly layered and emotionally honest reckoning with the promises and failures of a great leader. Andras's meditation strikes a nerve. *(May)*

The Hazelbourne Ladies Motorcycle and Flying Club

Helen Simonson. Dial, \$29 (432p)
ISBN 978-1-9848-0131-9

Simonson (*The Summer Before the War*) delivers a thoughtful and witty tale of British men and women adjusting to a new normal after WWI. Spunky and observant Constance Haverhill worked as an estate manager during the war. Now, she's reduced to serving temporarily as a lady's companion for Mrs. Fog, who is recuperating from influenza in a hotel in the seaside resort town of Hazelbourne. Here, Constance meets free-spirited spendthrift Poppy Wirrall and her attractive and morose brother, Harris, who lost his leg while flying a plane in the war. Constance, timid at first, gets involved with Poppy's effort to provide local woman with jobs as motorcycle drivers for sidecar-riding passengers. Constance even tries her hand at flying Harris's Sopworth Camel biplane, which Poppy bought to jolt him out of his rut. While Constance's bumpy romantic adventures with Harris form the spine of the book, Simonson neatly interweaves multiple plotlines involving the chauvinistic and condescending local gentry, the travails of a German waiter scorned because of his nationality, and the bad behavior of visiting Americans. Readers are in for a treat. *Agent: Julie Barer, Book Group. (May)*

Bird Suit

Sydney Hegele. Invisible Publishing, \$16.95 trade paper (272p) ISBN 978-1-77843-042-8

Mythological creatures and strange relationships shape this beguiling debut novel from Hegele (after the collection *The Pump*). Georgia Jackson was born in the vacation town of Port Peter, Ontario, where unwed mothers like hers are expected to give their babies up to the Birds, feminine sirens who dwell on the cliffs above the lake. Georgia's mother initially left her with the Birds, but changed her mind. Now, in 2008, 22-year-old Georgia has entered into a sexual relationship with Anglican priest Arlo Bloom, whose wife, Felicity, has given her consent. Felicity is a rare birth daughter of one of the Birds and was in love with Arlo's twin sister until her suicide. Felicity only stays with the violently abusive Arlo to protect

their son, Isaiah, a tender, poetry-loving 20-year-old. Georgia and Isaiah's friendship during her affair with Arlo leads to a shocking and tragic episode, which lays the groundwork for a final act set in 2019 that sees Georgia living a new life as a successful playwright in Toronto, having buried her traumatic memories because "what ceases to exist could not be painful." Hegele's distinctive style includes bulleted lists and wry observations ("Grief is a merciless matchmaker"). This unusual tale takes flight thanks to the beauty of its prose. *Agent: Zoe-Aline Howard, Howland Literary. (May)*

Poetry

Canadaigua

Donald Revell. Alice James, \$18.95 trade paper (100p) ISBN 978-1-949944-62-4

In these intellectual and precise poems, Revell (*White Champion*) explores the darker side of human progress with inventive language and apt allusions to myth and religion. In "Light, Zeal," he contemplates the damage done by "extravagance": "Out of Eden, future Edens, a dozen/ Names for every creature, and new green/ Buds on the dead willow. Impossible/ To find any harm in extravagance taking/ Refuge, undertaking the old purposes of/ Creation. But harm there was." Some of Revell's complaints veer dangerously close to elitism, as in his criticism of the summer blockbuster: "Disney and the Metaphysicals, men/ Equally impossible to emulate/ As our theaters fill with emptiness,/ As our poems go lame into the lean dearth/ Of their English." Elsewhere, though, his passion for his art form is profoundly and simply expressed, "Poetry/ Is the groundless belief in fearful/ Attention," as is his philosophy on love: "Romance is the kindergarten of savagery." Revell's elegies are especially successful, including those dedicated to fellow poets Jean Valentine and Yves Bonnefoy. Teeming with symbolism and metaphor, this collection is less grounded in the corporeal world than the poet's previous works. It's a pleasure to see Revell continue to evolve four decades into his illustrious career. *(June)*

★ Solutions for the Problem of Bodies in Space

Catherine Barnett. Graywolf, \$17 trade paper (96p) ISBN 978-1-64445-287-5

The stunning latest from Barnett (*Human Hours*) blends the witty and the philosophical to offer a study in "restricted fragile materials," or the bewildering condition of being alive. A sequence on loneliness runs through the collection, capturing the often ignored or unrendered sensations from life's earliest moments ("The doctors snip the cord. I don't know if that's when it starts") to its last in elegiac notes struck in poems for a father, and others for a friend. This is as much a taxonomy of "the science of love" as it is a thoughtful, literate, and discursive gathering of evidence as to how one might live deliberately, carefully, and honestly ("Flawed solutions are sometimes answered prayers," the speaker



remarks.) The voice is self-aware and open to the world, at times almost self-defeatingly so, like the moth "choosing transcendence/ over other basic needs." Like their speaker,

these poems "wander/ the Museum of Useful Life" making "mortal noise"—an unpacking, with comic timing, of the fact that "The human condition is made of moisture and heat." Urbane, perceptive, and starkly humane, these are poems of quiet alarm, at once companionable and singular. *(May)*

Holy Winter

Maria Stepanova, trans. from the Russian by Sasha Dugdale. New Directions, \$14.95 trade paper (80p) ISBN 978-0-8112-3514-3

This moving, polyvocal volume from Stepanova (*War of the Beasts and the Animals*) is a book-length snowscape sequence that blends voices of fracture and love, evoking Ovid in exile and other historical touchstones, from Baron Munchausen to Hans Christian Andersen. Skillfully rendered by Dugdale, the air in these poems is infused with such dangers as "Airborne particles of frost ash/ Tiny cavalry officers"

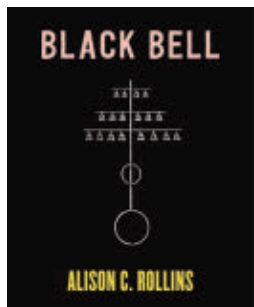
(noncoincidentally, the book was written during Covid-19 lockdowns). There is a feeling of arrest in these pages (“We, wrapped in snow for safe-keeping/ Like pictures overlaid with glassine,/ Suddenly came to a stop”), but there’s equally a difficult hopefulness, the voices reaching for “that place where misfortune is not known,” however forlorn their searching. It adds up to a finely woven exercise in vocalization that always looks toward redemption, or at least respite, from its shocking precarity: “if time has a pocket then place me in it, gently.” A political undertow—including mentions of “the god of anger” and “one/ Whose power is equal with that of the gods”—adds to the collection’s depth. Bound together by a gently thoughtful steeliness, these poetic utterances are at once plaintive and resolute. (May)



★ **Black Bell**

Allison C. Rollins. Copper Canyon, \$22 trade paper (136p) ISBN 978-1-55659-700-8

The astute second collection from Rollins (*Library of Small Catastrophes*) delivers an unsettling encounter with American history and its reverberations into the present. Taking its title from the practice of enslavers attaching iron bells on rods to enslaved people to prevent them from escaping, the collection plumbs the relationship between sound, Blackness, and performance as possible avenues for ongoing resistance and liberation. The first entry, “A Bell is a Messenger of Time,” suggests that the unjust entanglements of the past continue to haunt: “Barnacle bells. Irremovable attachments. Even when I ghost you, you still hear me.” Rollins draws on more recent technologies to call to mind current issues surrounding racial bias, as in the poem “Phillis Wheatley Takes a Turing Test,” which includes instructions for one of its two voices to be read “via a computer-generated or synthetic voice,” as though AI gets to determine whether the foundational poet of the African American



tradition is, in fact, human. Formally inventive poems incorporate diagrams, such as “Hymn of Inscap,” inspired by Harriet Jacobs’s and Henry “Box” Brown’s unconventional and harrowing escapes from slavery: “A nation is an open secret/ ...To escape is to sing.” The result is an unflinching and incisive compilation. (Apr.)



You Are Here: Poetry in the Natural World

Edited by Ada Limón. Milkweed, \$25 (128p) ISBN 978-1-57131-568-7

Gathered by U.S. poet laureate Limón (*The Hurting Kind*), this beautifully curated anthology of 50 previously unpublished poems challenges preconceptions about “nature poetry” as it meditates on humanity’s relationship to the planet. As Limón writes in the introduction: “these poems represent the full spectrum of how we human animals connect to the natural world.” The collection opens with Carrie Fountain’s wonderful “You Belong to the World”: “You belong/ to the world, animal. Deal with it. Even as/ the great abstractions come to take you away,/ the regrets, the distractions, you can at any second/ come back to the world to which you belong,/ the world you never left, won’t ever leave, cells/ forever, forever going through their changes.” Gabrielle Calvocoressi’s “An Inn For the Coven” provides a delightfully occult twist on the magic of life: “All our loves/ are witches too. Or warlocks. All/ our children and all our children./ Welcome. Water running in the/ brook.” In “To Think of Italy While Climbing the Saunders-Monticello Trail,” Kiki Petrosino offers a spare and haunting poem comprising four couplets that build to a devastating finale: “These mountains have given us/ so much & we// will not even give ourselves/ to each other.” Readers will find that this collection stands apart for the strength of its entries and the breadth of its superb meditations on a pressing theme. (Apr.)



★ **Invisible Mending**

C.K. Williams. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$25 (272p) ISBN 978-0-374-60839-2

This remarkable volume gathers essential work from Williams (1936–2015; *Falling Ill*), highlighting his ranging

thought and moral intensity as well as his transformations as a poet. In the introduction, Alan Shapiro describes how Williams’s shift to long lines in his later work allowed the poet to expand his ethical concerns into new territory: “In his hands, the long line itself becomes a remarkably flexible instrument, accommodating almost any kind of subject or experience.” Shorter, imagistic lines of early poems—“The twilight rots./ Over the greasy bridges and factories,/ it dissolves/ and the clouds swamp in its rose/ to nothing”—give way to Williams’s characteristic longer lines as he continues to search for answers that don’t easily come, as in this haunting realization from “The Shade”: “If this were the last morning of the world, if time had finally moved inside us and erupted/... I think I’d still be here,/ afraid or not enough afraid, silently howling the names of death over the grass and asphalt.” In “The World,” Williams’s late voice retains his concern for truth but trades anxiety for awe: “reality has put itself so solidly before me/ there’s little need for mystery... Except for us, for how we take the world/ to us, and make it more, more than we are, more even than itself.” Sensitive and humane, this dazzles. (Mar.)



★ **Ward Toward**

Cindy Juyoung Ok. Yale Univ., \$20 trade paper (100p) ISBN 978-0-300-27392-2

Winner of the 2023 Yale Younger Poets Prize, Ok in her refreshing debut uses language to push against the staid edges of the status quo, exposing the tenuous and often contradictory beliefs that seemingly undergird reality. With their capacious perspective, these verses bear witness to the hypocrisies of convention on the personal and global scale. A concrete poem titled “Before DMZ” takes the shape of the Korean peninsula before its split into North and South, formally echoing that geopolitical bifurcation in the piece’s two halves, while also exploring the speaker’s complex family ties and calling into question the forces continuing to ensure such a split: “My/ moth-/er sent/ a photo of/ the federal build-/ ing she was/ being naturalized in,/ writing Boring I/ love you. That winter,/ her father revealed he left/ behind a first wife, two kids, north/ before the war.”

Ok regularly makes startling connections that invite readers to reexamine their circumstances: "My country is broken, is estranged, is trying, we write,/ as though there is such a material as a country, as/ though the landlord doesn't charge rent for life lived/ outside the house." Ok's brave and idiosyncratic poems challenge institutionalized reality as they gesture toward the possibility of freedom.

(Mar.)

Mystery/Thriller

★ When We Were Silent

Fiona McPhillips. Flatiron, \$28.99 (304p)
ISBN 978-1-250-90823-0

A Dublin Catholic school's culture of silence proves deadly in Irish journalist McPhillips's searing debut novel. In 1986, 17-year-old Louise Manson enrolls at the prestigious Highfield Manor to avenge her best friend Tina, who got pregnant and killed herself after being repeatedly raped by Maurice McQueen, the school's gym teacher and swim coach. McQueen promptly molests Lou, but when she reports him to school authorities, nobody believes her. Desperate and furious, Lou hatches a plan to publicly expose McQueen that ends in someone's death. Thirty-plus years later, Lou—now a married professor with a teenage daughter—has worked hard to move past "the Highfield Affair." When an attorney asks her to testify on behalf of a 14-year-old suing Highfield for the "systemic cover-up of abuse in the school and the swimming club over decades," she reluctantly agrees. Then someone tries to extort her into staying silent, prompting Lou to again take matters into her own hands, with shattering results. McPhillips deftly alternates between past and present, maximizing suspense by playing multiple mysteries in each timeline off one another. With the added urgency of Lou's first-person-present narration, the author wrings her powerful plot for maximum impact. This is a triumph. (May)

The Return of Ellie Black

Emiko Jean. Simon & Schuster, \$27.99 (320p) ISBN 978-1-6680-2393-8

YA bestseller Jean (*Mika in Real Life*) makes a smooth transition to adult fiction

with an atmospheric and surprise-packed thriller. Missing and presumed dead for two years, Washington State teenager Ellie Black is discovered alive one night, wandering out of the forest near the small town of Coldwell Beach. Det. Chelsey Calhoun is assigned to the case, and has the dazed, underweight Ellie admitted to the hospital while she convenes with the traumatized girl's family. At first, the news thrills Ellie's parents. Soon, however, Ellie starts behaving strangely; without warning, she stops cooperating with the investigation, refusing to answer Chelsey's questions about where she's been. When Chelsey has the bloody sweatshirt Ellie was wearing when was found analyzed, the DNA turns out to match a different missing person. All the while, Chelsey muses on how Ellie's case might be linked to her own sister's decades-old disappearance. Is there something sinister lurking in the woods outside of Coldwell Beach? Jean deftly alternates Chelsey and Ellie's perspectives from one cliffhanger to the next, keeping the pages flying. With shocking twists and style to spare, this

confirms Jean as a writer worth seeking out. (May)

One Perfect Couple

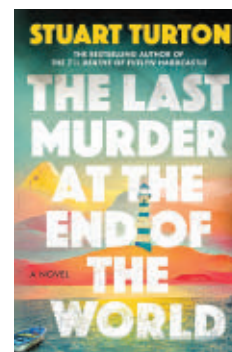
Ruth Ware. Scout, \$28.99 (400p)
ISBN 978-1-6680-2559-8

Bestseller Ware (*Zero Days*) fumbles a promising premise in this clever but slack closed-circle mystery. Biologist Lyla Santiago's postdoc research on mosquito-borne illnesses hits a wall when inconsistencies in her colleague's work threaten their grant funding. Rudderless, Lyla agrees to join her boyfriend, out-of-work actor Nico Reese, to film a reality TV competition called *Ever After Island*. On the *Survivor*-esque show, five couples complete in challenges on a remote island in the Indian Ocean and then vote to send one contestant home each week. Lyla plans to get eliminated quickly so she can return to London and sort out her future, leaving Nico behind to improve his career prospects. Her plan gets complicated, however, when a powerful storm sweeps across the island, isolating the contestants from the show's production crew. When

★ The Last Murder at the End of the World

Stuart Turton. Sourcebooks Landmark, \$27.99 (368p)
ISBN 978-1-7282-5465-4

Turton (*The Devil and the Dark Water*) continues playing fast and loose with genre boundaries in this dazzling postapocalyptic thriller that blossoms into a race against time whodunit. A small island in the middle of the ocean has become the last refuge against the deadly, insect-filled fog that's been covering the globe for the past 90 years. The 122 villagers who live and work on the island rarely question their regulated way of life, the elder scientists who keep them safe, or the disembodied voice named Abi beamed into their heads to coax them to sleep each night when the curfew bell rings. When the violent death of a teacher named Niema triggers a 12-hour memory wipe on all of the island's residents, plus a fail-safe that will shut down the island's defenses in 38 hours unless her killer is identified, villager Emory, armed with a curiosity nearly all of her peers lack, sets out to investigate. In the process, she unravels distressing secrets about the origins and operations of this supposed paradise. Turton smartly fortifies his themes of freedom and control by utilizing Abi, a manipulative HAL 9000 figure, as a semi-omniscient narrator, and he drops in enough clues for mystery fans to stay half a step ahead of Emory's sleuthing without undercutting the impact of each reveal. This dystopian detective story fires on all cylinders. *Agent: Harry Illingworth, DHH Literary.* (May)



people start turning up dead, Lyla has to decide whom to trust, taking the traditional stakes of reality TV alliances to nerve-shredding new heights. Ware has plenty of fun with her Agatha Christie–esque setup, but she fails to whip up sufficient suspense—the plot’s resolution is simply too easy to crack. Readers will hope Ware returns to form next time out. *Agent: Eve White, Eve White Literary. (May)*

Clive Cussler: The Heist: An Isaac Bell Adventure

Jack Du Brul. Putnam, \$32 (400p)
ISBN 978-0-593-71358-7

Du Brul’s dizzying latest Isaac Bell swashbuckler (after *The Chase*) finds the intrepid detective under fire from a barrage of potentially connected crises. The year is 1914, and Bell is attending a meeting of the newly minted Federal Reserve onboard a yacht with his father, Ebenezer, and President Woodrow Wilson. Shortly after Wilson is called away on an emergency, a mysterious aircraft attempts to bomb the boat. Bell shoots at the bomber until it flees and plans to begin an investigation into the incident. But first, he’s pulled into two seemingly unrelated cases. Socialite Jackson Pickett—a friend of Bell’s boss, Joseph Van Dorn—has been arrested for the murder of his wife, heiress Fedora Scarsworth-Pickett. Then the Federal Bureau of Engraving is robbed to the tune of nearly a billion dollars. Finding the money and ferreting out the cause of Fedora’s death takes plenty of first-class sleuthing, and Bell begins to suspect that the bombing, murder, and robbery are the work of a master criminal hoping to bring America to its knees. This entry provides a welcome contrast to Bell’s often cartoonish and predictable antics, indicating that the long-running hero may be evolving into a more sophisticated protagonist. Fingers crossed the series has more adventures like this one in store. *Agent: Peter Lampack, Peter Lampack Agency. (May)*

The Paris Affair

Maureen Marshall. Grand Central, \$19.99 trade paper (412p) ISBN 978-1-5387-5780-2

A young engineer in 1880s Paris weathers romance and danger while helping to build the Eiffel Tower in former high school history teacher Marshall’s

effervescent debut. The bastard son of an English earl, Fin Tighe can hardly pay rent in the apartment he shares with his cousin, ballet dancer Aurelie. When Fin’s not protecting Aurelie from lecherous patrons, he spends his time helping Gustave Eiffel find investors for his tower. In that capacity, he meets charismatic Gilbert Duhais, who insists he can help land investors if Fin is willing to claim he’s closer to his estranged father than he actually is. Meanwhile, Jody, the owner of a gay club Fin frequents, enlists the engineer to help find his missing sister. As Fin starts to investigate, he uncovers clues that the girl’s disappearance may be tangled up with Gilbert and his wealthy and unpleasant uncle. Then someone in Fin’s circle turns up dead, and his budding attraction to Gilbert becomes colored by a growing suspicion that his handsome paramour might be a killer. Marshall laces the novel’s first half with delightful characterizations and rich historical detail, then ratchets up the pace in the second, delivering a barrage of well-earned reveals. Francophiles, take note: this steamy slice of romantic suspense is *très bien*. *Agent: Caitlin Blasdell, Liza Dawson Assoc. (May)*

★ **A Lonesome Place for Dying**

Nolan Chase. Crooked Lane, \$29.99 (304p)
ISBN 978-1-63910-777-3

First-timer Chase’s standout procedural saddles newly minted police chief Ethan Brand with an overwhelming first few days on the job. When Ethan, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, takes over the depart-



ment from his friend and mentor, Frank Keough, he expects relatively smooth sailing in the sleepy town of Blaine, Wash.—an expectation quickly shattered when he receives a death threat at his home and is called to the scene of a possible murder during his first day on the job. His lack of allies doesn’t help: Blaine’s mayor thinks Ethan’s incompetent; Brenda Lee Page, the department’s top deputy, wanted his job for herself; and

Mal Keough, Frank’s loose-cannon cop son, proves difficult to rein in. Then another body turns up, after which a witness to the first murder goes missing, and locals report seeing a strange, unfamiliar figure stalking around town. As Ethan investigates—and tussles with a drug-smuggling local crime family in the process—he works to suppress his own scandalous secrets, lest they derail his career and stop him from preventing further violence. Chase throws a lot of balls in the air, and he juggles them like a seasoned pro, managing to carve out a distinctly memorable protagonist in the process. It’s an auspicious debut. *Agent: Cbris Casuccio, Westwood Creative Artists. (May)*

The Hunter’s Daughter

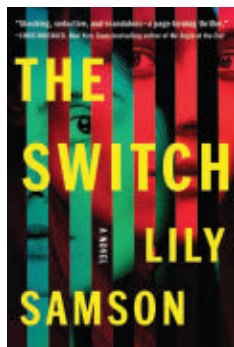
Nicola Solvinic. Berkley, \$28 (384p)
ISBN 978-0-593-63972-6

Criminologist Solvinic debuts with a propulsive thriller about a young detective’s harrowing family history. Anna Kory, a lieutenant with a rural Midwestern sheriff’s department, is a good cop—empathetic and efficient. One night, she’s called to a domestic disturbance, where she’s shot and wounded by a wild-eyed man. Anna fires back, killing him. The incident awakens long-repressed memories from her childhood: Anna’s father, Stephen, was the “Forest Strangler,” a serial killer who kidnapped young women and ritualistically killed them as offerings to the “Forest God.” After he was arrested, a nine-year-old Anna was adopted by a family in a different state and her memories were erased via hypnosis. Not long after the adult Anna is released from the hospital following the shooting, a young woman is found dead with her body arranged in a manner that echoes the Forest Strangler’s slayings. As Anna investigates, she starts receiving disturbing anonymous emails that raise a terrifying question: Is the young woman’s murder the work of a copycat, or has her father returned? Solvinic is remarkably assured for a newcomer, lacing the action with elegant descriptions of the rural landscape and enough valid suspects to keep the pot boiling. Readers will look forward to this promising suspense author’s next outing. *Agent: Caitlin Blasdell, Liza Dawson Assoc. (May)*

The Switch

Lily Samson. Viking/Dorman, \$29 (384p)
ISBN 978-0-593-65601-3

Samson makes her debut with a daffy tale of romantic suspense about a twisted game of partner-swapping between two London couples. Freelance proofreader Elena and her husband, IT support staffer Adam, are living rent-free for a season in the ritzy Wimbledon home of Adam's aunt. One morning, Elena meets Sophia, a beautiful artist, at a local café and gets



pulled into the orbit of her and her husband, Finn. Soon, Finn and Sophia's lavish lifestyle unleashes a flood of envy in Elena, leading her to stew on the flagging

passion in her own marriage and her distaste for Adam's overbearing mother. Per Sophia's suggestion, Elena agrees to secretly swap husbands for the night (a caper facilitated by blackout curtains) and feels an immediate, electric connection to Finn. What starts as a titillating game becomes something much stranger when Elena learns the precise nature of Finn and Sophia's arrangement, and begins to wonder if she can comfortably cut them off without risking her life. Samson swings for high melodrama, but uninspired prose and nagging implausibility make this a firm miss. For all its sex talk, this thriller generates little heat. *Agent: Cathryn Summerhayes, Curtis Brown U.K. (May)*

Still Waters

Matt Goldman. Forge, \$18.99 trade paper (304p) ISBN 978-1-250-32569-3

In this brisk and enjoyable mystery from bestseller Goldman (*A Good Family*), estranged siblings reunite to solve their brother's murder. Liv and Gabe Ahlstrom, now in their late 30s, have seldom spoken since they left northern Minnesota 20 years ago. Liv has a husband, a high-paying job, and a townhouse in New York City's West Village; Gabe is an L.A. bartender whose relationships rarely last a year. The two reconnect when they learn that their older

brother, Mack, has died of a stroke in Chicago. Though Mack was only in his 50s, little about his death seems to indicate foul play. Then Liv and Gabe receive an automated message from Mack's email account: "If you're reading this email, I am dead. I know this will sound strange, but someone is trying to kill me." Shocked, the siblings return to the Minnesota lake resort their late parents used to run to organize Mack's memorial, and hope the homecoming might provide some clarity about his death. There, Liv and Gabe face a disgruntled cousin who wants to flatten the resort and put up a wind farm, a shady businesswoman who wants to add it to her own portfolio, and persistent rumors about their own heritage that might shed light on Mack's demise. Three-dimensional characters and authentic dialogue elevate the familiar premise. Goldman's fans will eat this up. *(May)*

Blood Rubies

Mailan Doquang. Mysterious Press, \$26.95 (312p) ISBN 978-1-61316-521-8

A jewel thief faces an onslaught of obstacles in the undercooked debut from art historian Doquang. The action opens somewhere in upper Manhattan, with career burglar Rune Sarasin's wrists being zip-tied while her captors set fire to her surroundings. A flashback rewinds the plot six days: Sarasin has just broken into Bangkok's Mandarin Oriental hotel to steal blood rubies from notorious gem trafficker Charles Lemaire. She makes off with the stash, but not before Lemaire's henchmen spot her and vow to track her down. To make matters worse, Sarasin's boyfriend, Kit, reveals that his younger sister, Madee, has vanished somewhere in Thailand. The couple then tries to track Madee down while evading Lemaire's men, but when the crime boss catches up to them, he poses an awful ultimatum: Kit or the rubies. The problem? Sarasin seems to have misplaced the gems. Doquang comes out with her guns blazing, throwing everything and the kitchen sink at her intrepid antiheroine. Unfortunately, Sarasin never really comes to life, and there's little here to please any but the most die-hard action lovers. This caper is no diamond in the rough—it's mostly just rough.

Agent: Liza Fleissig, Liza Royce Agency. (May)

SF/Fantasy/Horror

Daughter of Calamity

Rosalie M. Lin. St. Martin's, \$29 (352p)
ISBN 978-1-250-28738-0

Cabaret dancers square off against gangsters, foreign businessmen, Mongolian shamans, and angry gods for control of Jazz Age Shanghai, "the Sin City of the East," in Lin's atmospheric if overwritten debut. Yue Jingwen's grandmother, Yue Liqing, makes her living attaching magical silver arms to members of the Society of the Blue Dawn gang, but Jingwen refuses to become her apprentice. A chorus girl in the East Sea Follies, her greatest ambition is to win a backroom contest among her coworkers to "bring the richest date to the annual Firefighters' Yuletide Ball." American doctor Bailey Thompson seems like her ticket to victory when he buys the East Sea Follies and promotes her to leading lady, but soon Jingwen is drawn into Bailey's schemes to export a rare drug that, when smoked, makes the inhaler feel like an ancient Chinese god. Jingwen and her fellow dancers come under attack by a mysterious magical force that steals their lips and eyes—and Jingwen's grandmother may know more about what's happening than she lets on. Unfortunately, the story often gets buried under purple prose ("But in the shadows of taxicabs and leafless plane trees, I sense a hum of nervousness, like violin strings pulled taut under my skin"), breaking the spell and making it difficult to follow what's happening. Readers will need a high tolerance for labored metaphor to get through this. *Agent: Kurestin Armada, Root Literary. (June)*

★ North Wind

Alexandria Warwick. Simon & Schuster, \$19.99 trade paper (352p)
ISBN 978-1-66806-516-7

Pairing an ice-cold god in exile with an alcoholic heroine possessed of a minor martyr complex, Warwick (the North series) weaves a heart-pounding, pulse-racing fantasy romance that draws from "Beauty and the Beast." Following her parents' death, Wren of Edgewood has devoted her life to protecting her twin sister, Elora, happily sacrificing so that

her sister can thrive in the cold wasteland that their homeland—once called the Green, now called the Gray—has become. So when the North Wind, Boreas, descends on Edgewood for his once-every-few-decades ritual of claiming a young woman as his captive, and sets his sights on Elora, Wren demands that he take her instead. Boreas, an exiled god, rules over the Deadlands that border the Gray, separated from the mortal world by a barrier called the shade—and now he’s got a rather feisty sacrifice to care for. Wren doesn’t make life easy for anyone, least of all herself. With the boundaries of the Deadlands fast fading and the residents of the North Wind’s true kingdom in peril, time is short for the pair to figure out how to save their world—and each other. Their enemies-to-lovers romance feels wholly earned, with just enough spice to keep the sparks flying, and the worldbuilding is fresh and distinctive, even with the clear fairy tale influence. Romantasy fans will swoon. (May)



Necrotek

Jonathan Maberry. Blackstone, \$27.99 (486p) ISBN 979-8-200-68840-1

Maberry (*Son of the Poison Rose*) puts a cosmic horror twist on a classic military sci-fi setup in this solid outing. An error while testing a new technology called the WarpLine gun teleports the entirety of Asphodel Station—formerly in orbit around Jupiter—to an unknown region of space full of eerie horrors and scientific impossibilities. Working alongside faith leaders and resourceful engineers, the Lost Souls, a small squadron of fighter pilots who happened to be docked on Asphodel Station, and marines under the command of Captain Croft display almost unbelievable adaptability and grit as they fight a threat on a scale so large it threatens the entire universe. Lt. Cmdr. Bianca Petrescu leads the Lost Souls with an indomitable spirit and incredible strategic prowess as they uncover the mysteries of this new region of space with the help of “cosmic philosopher” Dr. Soren and Lady Jessica McHugh, a necromancer known as “Lady Death.” Their adventures end with even greater dangers looming, promising a sequel. While the dialogue and plot beats are often predictable, fans of dramatic action sequences and charged emotional

scenes will enjoy the short military vignettes, and Lovecraft devotees will find the lore intriguing. This satisfies. (May)



The Silverblood Promise

James Logan. Tor, \$19.99 trade paper (528p) ISBN 978-1-250-34580-6

Positioned squarely in the tradition of fantasy caper novels, the winning debut and Last Legacy series launch from Orbit UK editor Logan pits a rogue with a heart of gold against a corrupt oligarchy. Lukan Gardova, disgraced ex-scholar turned card sharp, follows a mysterious note from his recently murdered father to the trading city of Saphrona, where his father’s ally, the wealthy Zandrusa, is being framed for a different murder. Following his instincts (“Passion before reason”), Lukan, who has never met Zandrusa, entangles a motley crew including a clever street urchin, an all-knowing beggar, and a cool fixer to rescue his father’s friend and squelch a coup plot. Logan has an evident fondness for both the choreographed crime of Scott Lynch’s *Gentlemen Bastards* series and the underdog politics of Seth Dickinson’s *Baru Cormorant* books, while adding hints of a deeper backstory of lost empires and legendary supernatural threats. Readers may be rattled by the occasional jarringly contemporary wording (“intelligence network”; “civil rights”) but will be entertained by the sincerity of Lukan’s quest. It’s a promising start to the series. (May)



★ **How to Become the Dark Lord and Die Trying**

Django Wexler. Orbit, \$19.99 trade paper (432p) ISBN 978-0-316-39220-4

By turning the themes of chosen-one fantasy on their head, this sardonic romp from Wexler (the *Burningblade & Silvereye* series) brings out the smiles. Davi, an exile from the human world, has been reborn 238 times over the 10 centuries she’s spent trapped in the fantasy land known as the Kingdom. She’s tired of trying and failing to stop the Dark Lord from conquering the land—so this time around, she switches teams. (“We have an expression back home concerning what course of action to take if you find yourself under no circumstances able to beat ’em. I intend to follow its advice.”) Using her past-lives’ knowledge, she convinces her former foes that she is destined to be

the next Dark Lord. Events snowball, and soon Davi has her own horde of orcs, stone monsters, and shark-toothed dwarves marching off to the Convocation that



anoints the next Dark Lord. (“I don’t know exactly how they pick the Dark Lord, but a major factor is personal charisma as measured in armed henchpersons.”)

Wexler balances the snarky asides with the angst of Davi’s repeating existence and evolving awareness that her actions have consequences. Under the flippancy, a truly touching grimdark story lurks, complete with hilarious footnotes. Readers will be wowed. *Agent: Seth Fishman, Gernert Co.* (May)



The Wolf’s Eye

Luanne G. Smith. 47North, \$16.99 trade paper (272p) ISBN 978-1-66251-017-5

Smith’s undeniable gift for description saves the day in her immersive if uneven second *Order of Seven Stars* fantasy (after *The Witch’s Lens*), which follows the insubordinate skulduggery of four magical irregulars during WWI: witch Petra, sorcerer Yanis, “moon-mad” Victor, and formerly human Josef. Fresh off the war’s front lines, they’re seeking an elixir that will reverse, or at least mitigate, the werewolf-style curse that Josef fell victim to in book one. This quest is complicated by a call from their military higher-ups to execute all such victims, and by Petra and Josef’s growing romantic attraction, spiced as it is with the risk that Josef might go berserk any moment. So far, so good: it’s a lively premise bolstered by vivid worldbuilding. The unstructured plot dampens the experience, however, as does Smith’s tendency to slide from storytelling into exposition. Cause and effect are not entirely absent—the group’s reliance on clandestine assistance creates situations ripe for blackmail and betrayal, which arrive in due course—but the amount of time and weight given to any particular event feels almost random, with some inconsequential moments expanded on at length

while others are glossed over. Still, it's easy to sink into Smith's world. Fans of book one will want to check this out. *Agent: Marlene Stringer, Stringer Literary. (May)*

★ Exile in Guyville

Amy Lee Lillard. BOA Editions, \$18 trade paper (138p) ISBN 978-1-960145-20-8

Each of these six enthralling speculative shorts from Lillard (*Dig Me Out*) explores female agency to powerful effect. Several offer dark views of the future. Women are imprisoned and subjugated in both "Blackbird," set in a gendered internment camp, and in the title story, about living women who are displayed in a museum and the new curator determined to effect change from within. The heroine of "Typical Girls" is implanted with an oppressive AI companion marketed as a tool to improve women's lives. "Corporeal" explores the idea of alternate realities and alternate selves, while the quiet "Wintersong" delves into the dissolution of a relationship. The final story, "Things You Say," sends the collection out on a slightly more hopeful note, showing women reclaiming their agency, inspired by their Riot Grrrl idols. Brief but mighty, this packs a hefty punch. *(May)*

The Belt

Dale E. Lehman. Red Tales, \$14.95 trade paper (304p) ISBN 978-1-958906-04-0

In this jam-packed science fiction thriller from Lehman (*The Realm of Tiny Giants*), ambitious Mars colony exobiologist Miguel Hernandez finally makes the discovery he hopes will cement his legacy: microfossils in Sinus Meridiani, proof that life evolved independently on Mars. But before he can collect more samples and publish his findings, he's branded an outlaw by Lowell Colony's mayor Andre Rand, who's long resisted Miguel's efforts to make Meridiani, a southern region of the planet most likely to have supported alien life, a research preserve. As Miguel flees deeper into the Martian wilderness, he and his four brightest students are pulled into a power struggle that extends out to the asteroid belt and beyond. Lehman jumps unexpectedly between points of view in fast-paced vignettes, pulling more and more characters into a vast political conspiracy. Who is behind this conspiracy, and what is their goal?

Perhaps inevitably, the answer is somewhat anticlimactic, but the struggle to survive in the lawless frontier and its effect on these complex and varied characters makes for an enjoyable read. Fans of the Expanse series will find the worldbuilding familiar and enjoy the multilayered political landscape. While not groundbreaking, this is sure to appeal to those looking for a gritty, action-packed Martian survival story. *(Self-published)*

Romance/Erotica

★ Look on the Bright Side

Kristan Higgins. Berkley, \$19 trade paper (432p) ISBN 978-0-593-54765-6

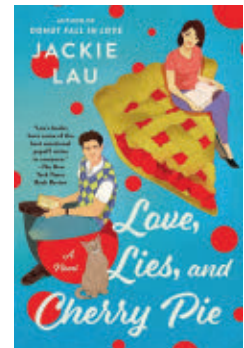
Bestseller Higgins (*Pack Up the Moon*) proves her mastery of the romance genre in this emotional tour de force. Lark Smith fell in love with her late fiancé, Justin, in kindergarten. Now, seven years after his death, she doesn't believe she'll ever love again and pours all her passion into her work as an oncology resident.

That's why she's so disappointed when she's demoted to the ER due to her overly emotional reaction to the death of her favorite patient. So when universally despised surgeon Lorenzo Santini (aka Dr. Satan) asks her to pose as his girlfriend at a family wedding to placate his grandmother, Lark reluctantly agrees in exchange for 25 grand and Santini's promise that he can get her back in oncology. While Dr. Satan lives up to his nickname, Lark falls in love with his welcoming Italian family—especially his brother Dante, who has a surprising tie to her past. Braided into this central romance plot are the stories of Lark's mother, Elsbeth, and her landlady, Joy. When Elsbeth discovers that her husband has had an emotional affair, Joy, who's spent a lifetime recovering from her father's psychological abuse, offers her a place to stay and the women heal together. Higgins balances tear-jerking moments with happiness and hope, and crafts strong female characters worth cheering for. Readers should have tissues at the ready. *(May)*

★ Love, Lies, and Cherry Pie

Jackie Lau. Atria/Bestler, \$17.99 trade paper (352p) ISBN 978-1-66803-076-9

Lau (*The Stand-Up Groomsman*) delivers a heartfelt and hilarious rom-com about a woman whose insecurities and assumptions blind her to the good intentions of the people around her. Now that both of Emily Hung's younger sisters have gotten hitched, her mother has turned the full focus of her matchmaking onto Emily—and the 33-year-old writer-slash-barista doesn't know how much more she can take. At her sister's wedding, Emily's mother pushes her at sweater vest-wearing family friend Mark Chan, forcing the two to make awkward small talk. Though Emily acknowledges that Mark, a successful engineer, is handsome, she insists, through snarky first-person narration, that he's not her type and, because he scrolls through his phone during their conversation, she assumes he's uninterested and judging her career choices and chaotic lifestyle. Despite this rocky meeting, Emily's mother is still determined to set the two up, and Emily, who just wants to focus on writing, realizes the only way to satisfy her is to make her believe her matchmaking has been successful. Emily presents this fake-dating plan to Mark, who agrees with surprisingly little fuss—but the deception becomes complicated when Emily's mother's prying leaves them no choice but to actually go on the dates they're lying about. The result is a funny and addictive take on a favorite trope complete with sincere family dynamics and a heroine who, while sometimes painfully un-self-aware, still proves easy to root for. Lau brings the goods. *Agent: Courtney Miller-Calliban, Handspun Literary. (May)*



Seven Summers

Paige Toon. Putnam, \$18 trade paper (448p)
ISBN 978-0-593-54435-8

This heart-wrenching romance from Toon (*Only Love Can Hurt Like This*) jumps between seven summers in the life of Olivia “Liv” Arterton. In the present day, Liv, who feels stuck in her small hometown on the Cornish coastline, finds herself drawn to her elusive new summer tenant, Tom Thorton—then a man from her past, Finn Finnegan, returns. Six summers ago, when Liv and Finn first met, life was different. Liv, who still dreamed of an art career, was immediately taken with Finn, an aspiring musician from L.A. Their connection was magnetic but slow-burning, culminating in a steamy night at summer’s end—a night that ended in personal tragedy for Liv, derailing her plans. With Finn returning to the States, they made a pact to reconnect every summer, as long as they’re both still single. Now Liv is caught in a gut-wrenching love triangle, forced to choose between her past with Finn or a potential future with Tom. The emotional roller-coaster of Liv and Finn’s relationship is made more intense by Toon’s nonchronological storytelling. Liv coming into her strength and recovering from grief is given equal weight to the romantic story line, but the relentless pain and tragedy of her life makes this not for the faint of heart. Readers who like their romances on the angsty side will want to snap this up. (May)

Second Night Stand

Karelia and Fay Stetz-Waters. Forever, \$16.99 trade paper (336p) ISBN 978-1-5387-5611-9

Karelia Stetz-Waters (*Behind the Scenes*) and her wife, debut author Fay Stetz-Waters, lay out their mission to “share our vision of a happy relationship through romance” in the acknowledgments that open this light lesbian romance. Unfortunately, the ensuing narrative becomes disappointingly bogged down in the protagonists’ mommy issues. Lillian Jackson is a Black ballerina, driven to pursue excellence by the mental soundtrack of her mother’s icy, perfectionist commentary. Meanwhile, white burlesque dancer Izzy “Blue Lenox” Wells only wishes she were the focus of such maternal concern. Instead, she was abandoned after a childhood of neglect. Each woman avoids relationships to better

manage their emotional chaos, but that doesn’t mean they can’t indulge in some casual sex when Lillian picks up Izzy at a Portland, Ore., dive bar. The women are unaware they’ve both auditioned for a reality talent show, meaning this hookup will be far from their final encounter. Lillian’s ballet company and Izzy’s burlesque troupe both make the cut, setting up a rivals-to-lovers trajectory that wallows in dysfunction for 15 chapters—Izzy even muses that she falls “for her mother in hot lesbian form every time”—before a green-room blackout thankfully spurs a break in their emotional logjam. The rest of the story unfolds as a warm, almost wish-fulfillment happily ever after, but it’s a touch less convincing after all the self-absorbed angst. This misses the mark. *Agent: Jane Dystel, Dystel, Goderich & Bourret.* (May)

Earls Trip

Jenny Holiday. Kensington, \$17.95 trade paper (336p) ISBN 978-1-4967-4507-1

Holiday (*Canadian Boyfriend*) makes the playfully anachronistic tone clear from the very first line of this fun Regency series opener: “What happens on Earls Trip, stays on Earls Trip. Usually.” Archibald “Archie” Fielding-Burton, the Earl of Harcourt, is stoked for his annual two-week vacation with his best bros, Simon Courteney, the Earl of Marsden, and Edward Astley, Viscount Featherfinch. En route to Scotland, Archie receives a desperate message from family friend Sir Albert Morgan. Sir Albert’s daughter, Clementine, whom Archie hasn’t seen in many years but remembers fondly and who recently ended her engagement to the odious Theodore Bull, is chasing after her impulsive sister Olive, who has eloped to Scotland with Theodore. “Please Archibald,” Sir Albert writes, “save my girls.” Now the men have a mission. After rescuing the women and bringing them to a friend’s vacant castle, however, the trio’s sacred male-bonding time is impinged upon. Though Archie asks the women to keep their distance, he can’t resist joining Clementine for bouts of late-night stargazing. When she asks him to show her that intimacy can be better than what she had experienced with Theodore, Archie realizes that agreeing to her request will forever change their relationship. Humor abounds and the pages turn at a brisk clip.

It’s a delightful romp. *Agent: Courtney Miller-Calliban, Handspun Literary.* (May)

Wish You Weren’t Here

Christy Schilling. Alcove, \$29.99 (352p)
ISBN 978-1-63910-707-0

This effervescent enemies-to-lovers debut whisks readers to the beautiful Italian city of Urbino. As American law student Ava Graham heads off to a European law seminar, she’s proud to have her life plan on track: “Father-approved job? Check. Mother-requested experience abroad? Golden check. Everyone-approved fiancé? Rapidly approaching platinum check.” But before she boards her plane, her boyfriend surprises her not with a marriage proposal but with the suggestion that they consider her time away as a break from their relationship. When her host parents’ nephew, James Massini, arrives an hour late to pick her up from the airport, he receives the brunt of her bad mood. In the face of Ava’s ire, James, a well-known local photographer and professor of art history, is both infuriated and attracted. After Ava’s program is canceled, the pair are further thrown together when Ava is assigned to be James’s teaching assistant. Schilling lets the sexual tension simmer as Ava and James wittily goad each other, making their compatibility obvious to everyone but the sparring hearts themselves. Readers will be eager for these two supposed opposites to put their fears and differences aside and recognize their true feelings. Schilling should win fans with this one. *Agent: Barbara Poelle, Word One Literary.* (May)

Summer Punchline

Betty Corrello. Avon, \$18.99 trade paper (320p) ISBN 978-0-06-332958-4

Set in the world of stand-up comedy, Corrello’s debut rom-com delivers a sturdy second-chance love story but lacks true laugh-out-loud moments. Comedian Delfina “Del” Silva-Miller vowed never to return to her Jersey shore home town after high school graduation, hoping to leave behind her deadbeat dad, the memory of her late mom, and Edgardo “Eddie” Rodriguez, the boy who stole her heart. Ten years later, on the cusp of fame, she’s forced to move back in with her grandmother to quickly develop a new set after losing her N.Y.C. relationship, apartment,

and job in one afternoon. It proves hard to avoid Eddie as he's pals with her grandma now and owns the only decent bar in town. Unfortunately, they both know how to push each other's buttons, reigniting old resentments—until Eddie offers an olive branch that Del wisely accepts and they start to relate as adults rather than teenagers. Given space to work, Del takes her comedy in a new direction, inspired by Eddie to incorporate songwriting to generate laughs rather than wholly relying on self-deprecation. The humor is mild and the love scenes are disappointingly stiff, but Eddie makes an appealing romantic lead and Del's kooky grandma adds welcome color. Corrello shows promise.

Agent: Claire Harris, P.S. Literary. (May)

Savor It

Tarah DeWitt. Griffin, \$18 trade paper (336p)
ISBN 978-1-250-32942-4

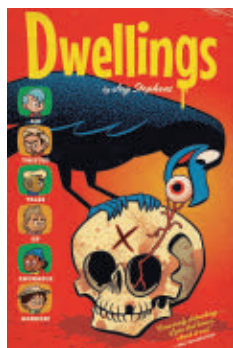
DeWitt (*Funny Feelings*) pairs a small-town teacher with a burned-out chef from the big city in this thoroughly enjoyable contemporary. Social studies teacher Sage Byrd has spent her life in tiny Spunes, Ore., raised mostly by her firefighter brothers after the death of their parents. Michelin-starred chef Fisher Lange lost his job in New York City when he gave a reviewer a face-full of his dessert—but he has the chance to redeem himself when his former boss asks him to supervise construction on her restaurant-to-be in Spunes. With his 15-year-old niece, Indy—whose mother, Fisher's sister, died three years earlier—in tow, he heads to the Pacific Northwest. After a memorable middle of the night first meeting, Fisher and Sage, who are now neighbors, agree to help each other achieve their goals: Sage will help smooth the way for the new restaurant by endearing Fisher to the hostile locals, and Fisher will help Sage win the top prize in a multipart competition that encompasses everything from canoeing to cooking at the town's annual festival. Soon their partnership gets passionate—but can their romance survive for more than a summer? DeWitt's sprightly narrative is by turns funny and red-hot, as Sage and Fisher, who share a love of puns, develop some serious chemistry. Readers will also be delighted by Sage's menagerie of lovable animals, particularly Gary the goose, who bonds with Indy. This is a charmer. (May)

Comics

★ Dwellings

Jay Stephens. Oni, \$34.99 (224p)
ISBN 978-1-63715-291-1

In the faux-serious introduction to this addictively squirmy collection of linked comics, Stephens (*Land of Nod*) claims the “tainted” town of Elwich has “more hauntings per capita than any other place in Ontario.” Drawn in the disarmingly perky style of an old Disney comic, where all the characters have adorably big eyes and plucky attitudes, the comics jump



from one gory, blood-drenched terror to the next. In the first entry, a teenager accosted by a man claiming the 19-year-old sold his brother out to the police nonchalantly kills the man with a rock (then pops his earbuds back in and strolls off), only to eventually find a gruesome vengeance that will put readers in mind of an Edgar Allan Poe story. In the volume's other tales, a crook goes on a killing spree before ending up in a torture chamber, an obnoxious influencer gets more than he bargained for when he opens a haunted house, a demonic cult sacrifices a child, and a cursed hand puppet causes mayhem. Though the pacing is zippy and the tone verges on tongue-in-cheek (retro-comics interstitials advertise a “Baby-AK 47 Kid-Lashnikov” and a “Memento Mori Funhouse”), the layering of dread is surprisingly effective. Stephens threads in recurring characters and Elwich lore, rendering a believably cursed hellscape. It's the kind of nightmare horror fans won't want to wake up from. (Apr.)

How to Baby: A No-Advice-Given Guide to Motherhood, with Drawings

Liana Finck. Dial, \$28 (272p)
ISBN 978-0-593-59596-1

New Yorker cartoonist Finck (*Passing for Human*) depicts her pregnancy, childbirth, and early parenthood in the form of a face-tious guidebook with no definitive answers

or advice but plenty of gentle snark. Spindly, abstracted female figures illustrate wry observations on such topics as the physical changes of pregnancy (“Is your bladder in on the sexist conspiracy that relegates women to the home?”), dealing with “In-Laws and Other Invaders” (“The walls of your home will dematerialize”), and figuring out baby products (“To my knowledge, there is no way to use a boppy pillow”). Finck's illustrations sometimes expand into striking expressionism; a pregnant woman's body is first depicted stuffed with random objects, then as a cage containing a baby, then as an enormous baby's head. She touches lightly but acerbically on political issues surrounding childbirth and childcare, including the infuriating bureaucracy of the American healthcare system (pretending to be a patient on hold with insurance is “good practice for parenthood”), the uneven gendered division of labor, and the isolation new mothers face. Parents will find plenty here that's both familiar and funny, and all of it presented with a refreshing lack of judgment.

Agent: Meredith Kaffel Simonoff, Gernert Co. (Apr.)

How War Begins: Dispatches from the Ukrainian Invasion

Igor, trans. from the Italian by Jamie Richards. Fantagraphics, \$29.99 (168p)
ISBN 978-1-68396-924-2

Italian cartoonist Igor (*The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks*) compiles in this harrowing work of graphic journalism “testimonies” from “people who led regular lives” during the first 98 days of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Drawing on transcripts of phone calls from his friends in Ukraine, Igor draws vignettes depicting people desperate to leave, the bleak realities of refugee camps, and widespread destruction and cruelty. (In one scene, Russian soldiers pillage stores, then offer the food they've looted to townspeople as “humanitarian aid.”) Nighttime scenes, drawn in impressive shadows, capture the tense uncertainty of people seeking shelter. Interludes that flash back to the 1999 invasion of Chechnya and the 2014 outbreak of fighting in the Donbas region, as well as the 1932–1933 Ukrainian famine, provide concise and illuminating background to the current crisis. An especially

[Q&A]

PW TALKS WITH JAY STEPHENS

Scary Cute

Stephens returns with *Dwellings* (Oni, Apr., reviewed on p. 61), a horror anthology drawn in the style of 1960s kids comic books.

I immediately think of your kid-friendly work when I see your name, so *Dwellings* was a real surprise. How did this turn come about?

It's really a pandemic-era personal project. I had been working steadily in kids' magazines, but people weren't able to go out and buy magazines in person. Schools and libraries, the biggest subscription market for kids' magazines, were closed.

Meanwhile, I'd been playing around with some horror scripts for local Canadian filmmakers—I do love the genre. I hit upon the idea to draw horror like I draw my cute stuff. It was kind of an instant, spontaneous cooking recipe. "What if I just threw this at it?" I went with the classic '60s American kid comic style, like the Harvey Comics specifically—Casper, Wendy, Hot Stuff. The macabre, vaguely supernatural characters that I grew up with—that sort of hint of horror, I decided to push it as far as I could. It's not as if cute horror hasn't been done before. It's quite common in manga.

I thought of the cute-scary manga by creators like Shigeru Mizuki, Kazuo Umezz, and Osamu Tezuka.

Umezz in particular is a huge influence. I found Maurice Horn's *World Encyclopedia of Comics* at my library early in my life. Most of that work had not been translated in any way in the 1970s, and even in the 1980s. But the handful of reproduced images in there

fascinated me. I spent decades trying to find that stuff again—and as soon as I got my hands on *Cat-Eyed Boy and Kitaro*, I felt, that's it.

Were there any particular films that influenced *Dwellings*?

The film version of *The Turn of the Screw*—*The Innocents*, from 1961. It's a ghost story that could be taken literally, or as an internal, mental break-

down. A story that works both ways? That's the best stuff.

I am, admittedly, a huge horror fan, to the point that I like to think I'm an aficionado. I watch a lot more than most people would, which also means that I watch a lot of garbage. Ninety percent of the

current slate of horror movies are pretty bad. But the psychological horror that A24 is doing is right up my alley.

Why do you think it made such a connection with readers, from when it was first crowdfunded and released as a series?

Honestly, the gimmick of it makes people pick it up. But for me, what readers are responding to is my passion for art-house horror. The stories aren't cutesy or comedic, they're told straight. But there's something about the cuteness that disarms, draws you in and attracts you to these characters, so that when the worm turns, it ends up a little more shocking.

—ANDREW FARAGO



powerful side-story profiles Evgeny Myazin, a Russian soldier whose suspicious death followed his request for discharge from the invasion force. The art shifts between improvisational, sketchbook-like compositions and realistic, fully backgrounded images with a somber, earth tone palette. The accounts are scattershot and disjointed in a way that conveys the messy, complicated, still-evolving reality of the situation. These dispatches make the scope of the war ("nothing epic, no glory: only misery") both easier to grasp and that much harder to witness. (Mar.)

Degas & Cassatt: A Solitary Dance
Rubio Salva and Efa, trans. from the French by Edward Gauvin. NBM, \$24.99 (96p)
ISBN 978-1-68112-324-0

Spanish cartoonists Salva and Efa follow up *Monet* with a stylish and stylized chronicle of the life of French impressionist painter Edgar Degas (1834–1917). Early in the narrative, Degas dedicates his fiery temper to discovering an aesthetic that stands out from both the radical bohemian style of Monet and Renoir and the canonical exclusivity of the elitist salon that rules the Paris art world. He sets his heart on becoming a master painter ("my goal, my destiny, my obsession")—claiming he'll burn bridges (and the Louvre) in pursuit of a fresh vision. Eventually, he finds his muse watching young ballerinas perform. From there, Degas commits to "painting men in the honesty of their true nature." He loves the American painter Mary Cassatt, yet never pursues her romantically, only opining on her art. Misogynist, curmudgeonly, and at times cruel, Degas dons a mask to visit brothels and take in the female form, then runs out. He fights for the independence of impressionists ("Death to the salon!")—then turns his back on them after gaining fame. Salva and Efa lend nuance to what might have been a stereotypical portrayal of a tortured genius with asides from Cassatt, who expresses her empathetic perspective on a "man defined by his loneliness." The small-stroke composition of the comics creates an intimate dual portrait of artists dueling with their own demons. This clear-eyed and holistic portrayal of a leading light of impressionism should appeal to art history buffs. (Mar.)

Nonfiction

The Supreme Court Footnote: A Surprising History

Peter Charles Hoffer. New York Univ., \$30 (240p) ISBN 978-1-479-83022-0

In this accessible account, historian Hoffer (*Clio Among the Muses*) ventures into the crowded history of the Supreme Court via a novel approach: the court's use of footnotes. He demonstrates that justices have often turned footnotes into powerful tools that offer insights into the court's opinions not found in the main text. Some have provided the foundational reasoning for an opinion, like footnote 11 in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which quoted studies that showed "separate but equal" schools for Black and white children damaged Black children and were therefore actually unequal. Others are notable for having appeared in obscure cases but created new, groundbreaking law, like the influential footnote four in *U.S. v. Carolene Products*, which provided the rationale for the court to apply a stricter standard of scrutiny when weighing the constitutionality of potentially racially discriminatory legislation. More recently, footnotes have become a means for justices to wage ideological battle; in their opposing opinions in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, Justice Samuel Alito weaponized footnotes, according to Hoffer, by quoting sources out of context and otherwise distorting the record, while Justice Elena Kagan's footnotes attempted to influence future cases. Hoffer's prose is elegant and entertaining ("Where in American law did [Horace] Gray find permission to plant Justinian in a Supreme Court opinion? Nowhere. He simply did it"). This is essential for dedicated court watchers and a fascinating new perspective for casual readers. (June)

Under a Rock: A Memoir

Chris Stein. St. Martin's, \$30 (304p) ISBN 978-1-250-28672-7

Blondie guitarist Stein (*Point of View*) chronicles in this knockabout personal history the colorful scenesters, grueling gigs, and desperate scrounging for drugs that have marked his musical career. Among other episodes, he recalls a Brooklyn boyhood in the 1950s and '60s;



Cheesy stuffed squash with kale and brown rice is one of the "exciting yet accessible" recipes featured in *Cooking in Real Life* (reviewed on p. 71).

coming-of-age as a hippie; his musical and romantic linkup with Blondie front-woman Debbie Harry in the early 1970s; the band's breakthrough with such hits as 1979's "Heart of Glass"; and the exhausting tours, creative tensions, and escalating drug use that partly led to the band's 1982 breakup. The last chapters slow down to cover Blondie's return to touring after a 17-year hiatus along with Stein's marriage and family life. The atmospheric narrative immerses readers in gonzo celebrity cameos ("Phil [Spector] came to the door... performatively drunk and doing a W.C. Fields voice"), grungy punk tableaux, and rock star excesses, though Stein keeps a clear eye on the consequences of such a lifestyle. In the book's heartbreaking epilogue, he discusses his teenage daughter's death from a heroin overdose in 2023 ("I thought that I presented my own drug experiences in a negative light to our kids... I'm wracked with guilt that any discussions might have been misconstrued"). The result is a candid if somewhat chaotic account of life in the spotlight. (June)

The Wrong Stuff: How the Soviet Space Program Crashed and Burned

John Strausbaugh. PublicAffairs, \$30 (272p) ISBN 978-1-541-70334-6

This buzzy yet unbalanced survey of the Soviet space race from historian Strausbaugh (*Victory City*) plays on the

title of Tom Wolfe's account of American astronauts, *The Right Stuff*. Strausbaugh opines that the Soviets—who launched the first man-made satellite, Sputnik, into space in 1957; the first man, Yuri Gagarin, in 1961; and the first woman, Valentina Tereshkova, in 1963—relied on the "wrong stuff." Drawing from published histories and memoirs (such as Mathew Brzezinski's *Red Moon Rising*), he relates a string of near-catastrophes, deadly flukes, and cover-ups. He portrays key players in the Soviet program as hard drinkers with "reckless bravado," who under unrelenting political pressure sent cosmonauts into orbit with glitchy equipment, and suggests the Soviet government kept its lead in the space race through subterfuge: when the first animal (a dog named Laika) was sent into orbit in 1957, "the Soviets issued false reports [she] was doing fine"; later, when a fire broke out aboard the aging space station Mir, Russian authorities "blandly lied" about how safe the highly flammable oxygen containers were. Though captivating, these anecdotes deserve scrutiny. Strausbaugh relies heavily on secondhand sources and familiar tropes of Russian bravery teetering on madness. He also issues generic criticisms of "a society rotten with corruption and almost guaranteed to underperform," and underassesses Soviet scientific achievements. Readers earnestly interested in the topic will want to explore elsewhere. (June)

Living a Conscious Life: How to Find Peace, Wholeness, and Freedom in a Chaotic World

Donald E. Johnson. Select, \$17.95 trade paper (208p) ISBN 978-1-59079-562-0

Leadership consultant Johnson debuts with a solid if somewhat scattered collection of life advice. Drawing from the 10 years he spent in an ashram, his professional career, and his personal relationships, Johnson offers lessons for inner growth that include dismantling limiting beliefs, practicing gratitude, and reframing challenges as sources of inspiration. Other sections tackle workplace upheavals (readers who feel they've "lost [their] identity" after being laid off should develop new skills and focus on the "process, not the outcome" of their next job search) and interpersonal dynamics (when

[Q&A]

PW TALKS WITH ZOË SCHLANGER

Botanical Brainiacs

In *The Light Eaters* (Harper, May; reviewed on p. 68), *Atlantic* writer Schlanger delves into the scientific literature on plant intelligence.

What were your literary inspirations for this book?

Robin Wall Kimmerer was a huge inspiration, as was Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, which I read early on in my writing career. She did exactly the thing I most hoped to do, which was to make the ordinary woods appear uncanny and alien through close observation. Another inspiration was Oliver Sacks's *Oaxaca Journal*, essentially his diary from a "ferning" expedition to southern Mexico. Like me, he was obsessed with ferns.

When did you decide to write this?

I was covering climate change for a newsroom job, and I was becoming depressed and a bit disconnected from the material. My editor recognized that and said, "Go write about something else for a little while." I started looking at botany journals because I'd always been intrigued by plants and thought of them as a source of calm. It just so happened that this was around the time the first fern genome had been sequenced. (Fern genomes are very large, and that's why it took so long.) There was a photo of the fern, and it was so little, with these perfect scallops, and bright green. Ferns exist in every possible ecosystem. I was struck by the fact that this ancient, and what most people would think of as quite simplistic, organism had found a key to living well under any circumstance.



Something about that steadfastness really captured me.

Do you think plants are intelligent?

At first, I was skeptical. The discoveries coming out of botany today are miraculous, but you can't quite connect to them on a personal level because the way that the plants respond is sometimes invisible to our senses. Writing this book gave me a much broader sense of what intelligence should

mean. When people hear the word intelligent, they hear everything humans have put on that word, but intelligence is something more fundamental. It's cleverness, strategy, creativity. These are all things I'm completely convinced plants have. Plants are finely attuned to their environment in a way we can't imagine because we have the gift of being able to move around. Think of a tree having to survive while rooted in place. That takes tremendous biological creativity!

What would be growing in your garden paradise?

I live in Brooklyn and want a garden so badly. I'd have huge squash vines. They look so ostentatious and ridiculous and bodily. They are the most creaturely plants. You can watch them climb over surfaces, strategize, make choices about how to get from A to Z. They twine in this beautiful way and are just very alive in a way that translates well to our perception of what living looks like.

—SUZANNE SHABLOVSKY

dealing with "difficult people," keep in mind that "life is not about being right"). An extended section on meditation puts things in perspective: "True joy is not derived from people, places, or things.... It comes from the soul." While the book's patchwork structure means that the general principles (practice gratitude, be honest with oneself) tend to repeat, Johnson's advice is effectively anchored by candid, vulnerable recollections of his failed relationships and marriages, the ups and downs of corporate America, and his winding spiritual journey, which included joining a cult after he graduated from college. Best dipped into and out of, it's a motley array of wisdom from a colorful life. (*June*)

What Are Children For? On Ambivalence and Choice

Anastasia Berg and Rachel Wiseman. St. Martin's, \$27 (336p) ISBN 978-1-250-27613-1

For today's millennials, having children "is a question more open-ended and fraught than ever before," according to this rigorous and wide-ranging debut study. Probing the generation's "ambivalence" toward having kids, Berg, an assistant professor of philosophy at Hebrew University, and Wiseman, managing editor of *The Point*, identify a "weakening of the motherhood mandate" and a shift to prioritizing one's career and friends as sources of fulfillment. Also considered are concerns about having kids amid a worsening climate crisis, though in many ways those anxieties are hardly new, the authors point out; some 19th-century artists and thinkers believed "humans were laying waste the earth" and had "caused too much damage" to expect its repair. (Gustave Flaubert, whose 1838 *Memoirs of a Madman* features an "eschatological reverie" filled with apocalyptic depictions of civilization's demise, wrote that "the idea of bringing someone into this world fills me with horror.") Resisting easy answers and—for the most part—concrete guidance ("Only you can determine" if having kids is "right for you"), the authors instead offer scrupulous analysis enriched by vivid personal meditations. For example, Berg writes that after giving birth to her first child, she noted a "curious sense that nothing really happened" alongside an awareness of the responsibility she'd assumed: "to choose to be a parent is... to become

inalienably vulnerable.” It’s an incisive look at a monumental life choice. *(June)*

Moving Pictures: A History of American Animation from Gertie to Pixar and Beyond

Darl Larsen. Rowman & Littlefield, \$40 (296p) ISBN 978-1-5381-6037-4

Larsen (*A Book About the Film* Monty Python’s *The Meaning of Life*), a film professor at Brigham Young University, presents a robust history of American theatrical animation from its newspaper comics strip roots to the present day. Starting at the turn of the 20th century, early animators borrowed “almost whole cloth from the printed page’s format, humor, and caricatures.” In the 1910s, the industry was propelled forward by such innovations as the rotoscope technique, which involved tracing over live-action footage, frame by frame, to create more lifelike cartoons. Those advances set the stage for Walt Disney’s rise from small-time ad man who churned out commercials in Kansas City, Mo., to founder of the L.A. studio where he developed his first animal-based cartoon, *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit*, in 1927. (The character’s “impish, schoolboy” qualities also turned up in Mickey Mouse, who debuted in 1928.) Larsen energetically traces the remarkable adaptability of the medium from Disney’s meteoric success, through the use of animation studios during World War II to produce public service films, to the advent of television, which undermined cinematic shorts yet offered an exciting new avenue for animators, and the growth of such powerhouse studios as Pixar and Dreamworks. It adds up to a lively chronicle of a perennially evolving medium. *(June)*

Chasing Hope: A Reporter’s Life

Nicholas D. Kristof. Knopf, \$32 (480p)

ISBN 978-0-593-53656-8

In this impassioned memoir, *New York Times* journalist Kristof (coauthor with his wife, Sheryl WuDunn, of *Tightrope*) looks back on a career spent exposing injustice. Kristof recaps his experiences covering 40 years of conflicts, social movements, and civil rights abuses, including reporting on communist Poland’s 1981 crackdown on Solidarity protests; the 1989 Tiananmen Square

massacre in Beijing, for which he and his wife won a Pulitzer Prize; the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq; the plights of child sex slaves in Cambodia; and the genocide committed by the Sudanese government in Darfur, for which he won another Pulitzer. Along the way, Kristof referees *Times* office politics and drolly considers the paper’s editorial whims (“If an editor’s dog is diagnosed with cancer, then prepare for a series about the scandalous cost of veterinary care”). The tone can slip into self-regard: Kristof preens over a college term paper that a professor called “extraordinarily well-written,” and is sure to mention that cider from his Oregon apple orchard has won gold medals. Still, Kristof’s powerful reportage makes for a gripping look at both the craft of journalism and the humanitarian disasters he’s witnessed. Photos. *Agent: Anne Sibbald, Janklow & Nesbit Assoc. (May)*

Joyful Recollections of Trauma

Paul Scheer. HarperOne, \$29.99 (256p)

ISBN 978-0-06-329371-7

Comedian and *The League* actor Scheer’s debut memoir-in-essays has all the thrills and pitfalls of an improv comedy set. After his parents divorced when he was seven, Scheer grew up on 1980s Long Island with his mother and abusive stepfather, who once choked him during a tense game of Monopoly. Seeking an escape from his



volatile home life, Scheer made short films and cultivated a hunger to perform in front of an audience. In high school, he landed a spot with the New York City-based comedy troupe Chicago City Limits, and became fascinated by long-form improv after watching Amy Poehler perform with the Upright Citizens Brigade, a group he eventually also joined. He dots the narrative’s main arcs—about his career in comedy and courtship of fellow comedian June Diane Raphael, whom he eventually married—with amusing celebrity anecdotes, including the gruff dismissal he received from Alan Alda when he sought

an autograph as a child (“No, kid. I bet you don’t even know who I am”). At another point, Scheer recounts the platonic lunch date he went on with a “beautiful young woman” while working accounts payable at a branding firm, whom he later learned was Britney Spears. While the results are a bit scattershot—Scheer’s funny, but there’s a lot of froth—they go down easy. This should satisfy comedy fans. *Agents: David Kubn and Nate Muscato, Aevitas Creative Management. (May)*

The Unvanquished: The Untold Story of Lincoln’s Special Forces, the Manhunt for Mosby’s Rangers, and the Shadow War That Forged America’s Special Operations

Patrick K. O’Donnell. Atlantic Monthly, \$30 (432p) ISBN 978-0-8021-6286-1

The earliest modern U.S. special forces first emerged during the Civil War, according to this rip-roaring account from bestseller O’Donnell (*The Indispensables*). He chronicles the spy missions and covert ops of the Jessie Scouts, Mosby’s Rangers, Blazer’s Scouts, the Confederate Secret Service, and other irregular units, highlighting their development of techniques that form the bedrock of today’s unconventional warfare. The Union Army’s Jessie Scouts were a handpicked unit who donned Confederate uniforms to go behind enemy lines for intelligence gathering and kidnapping missions. A squad led by Lt. Richard Blazer peeled off from the Scouts to hunt down the Confederate Army’s premier guerrilla unit, the Mosby’s Rangers; O’Donnell credits Blazer with the astute use of “shoe-leather detective work” to lead his Scouts to their quarry. Nimble intertwining the stories of these scouts and spies in brief and breezy chapters, O’Donnell emphasizes the innovativeness exhibited by the era’s unconventional forces despite a traditional military establishment who frowned on their “ungentlemanly” behavior. He also provides fascinating analysis of the sinister machinations of the Canadian-based Confederate Secret Service as they “hatched plots” to “rob Northern banks,” “burn cities to the ground,” influence the 1864 presidential election, and even kidnap Abraham Lincoln. It’s an entertaining history of the “shadow war” that defined the future of American special operations. *(May)*

College Girl, Missing: The True Story of How a Young Woman Disappeared in Plain Sight

Shawn Cohen. Sourcebooks, \$17.99 trade paper (272p) ISBN 978-1-7282-7299-3

Former Westchester, N.Y., *Journal News* crime reporter Cohen debuts with a chilling if inconclusive account of 20-year-old Indiana University student Lauren Spierer’s unsolved disappearance. In June 2011, Spierer vanished after a seemingly routine night of college partying. Back in New York’s Westchester County, her parents and friends took to Facebook and Twitter, made posters and wristbands, and rented billboards to track her down. Cohen first picked up the story for the *Journal News*, then traveled to Indiana to investigate further. There, the three men closest to the case—Lauren’s boyfriend, Jesse Wolff, and the two classmates who last saw her, Corey Rossman and Jay Rosenbaum—swiftly lawyered up. The

stories they told their attorneys, and then Cohen when he reached them, were riddled with inconsistencies. Cohen prods at several key mysteries: Did Lauren ever meet up with Wolff, whom she’d been texting the night of her disappearance? Did she actually leave Rossman’s townhouse, where she’d been partying? Might she have died of an accidental overdose, given her heart condition, or was it foul play? Cohen lays out a series of plausible scenarios, but the lack of concrete evidence puts a ceiling on how far he can take his theories. This has more questions than answers. *Agent: Connor Eck, Lucinda Literary. (May)*

Bite by Bite: Nourishments and Jamborees

Aimee Nezhukumatathil. Ecco, \$26.99 (224p) ISBN 978-0-06-328226-1

Poet Nezhukumatathil (*World of Wonders*) presents a smorgasbord of concise and

lyrical odes to foods linked to some of her most important memories. She associates saba bananas, a Philippine staple, with a vacation she took to the country, where she felt the kicks of her first baby in utero (“I’m convinced I had the quickening—this baby jumping—earlier than expected, because [he] was enjoying the delicious foods of his Lola’s country”). Mangosteen fruit—“a cage trap of lightning, a sheen of sugar in a bowl”—brings to mind a trip to Hawaii with her husband. Other pieces unravel foods’ complicated origins and histories, including an ode to vanilla and Edmond Albius, the enslaved boy who in 1841 developed a revolutionary technique for pollinating the plants (white botanists attempted to take credit for his method). The author’s dazzling prose is the highlight, though her loose and associative internal logic can sometimes make the connections she draws feel tenuous or underdeveloped (a brief entry notes the proximity between the Buffalo grocery store that was the site of a 2022 mass shooting and an orchard where she and her sons once picked apples, leading to the somewhat odd observation that “there are not apples enough to cure this country’s sickness”). Readers will find it to be an appealing if inconsistent banquet. *(May)*

The World Is Yours: The Story of ‘Scarface’

Glenn Kenny. Hanover Square, \$32 (320p) ISBN 978-1-335-44962-7

This raucous study from film critic Kenny (*Made Men*) examines the making and enduring cultural significance of Brian De Palma’s 1983 film, *Scarface*. Kenny describes how Al Pacino, impressed after watching Howard Hawks’s 1932 mobster flick of the same name, approached producer Marty Bregman about shooting a remake. Tracing the twists and turns of the film’s production, Kenny discusses how director Sidney Lumet left the project after being disappointed with screenwriter Oliver Stone’s script, and how De Palma marshalled the testimony of a narcotics officer and five psychiatrists when successfully appealing the MPAA to reduce the film’s initial X rating to an R. Extensive interviews with cast and crew offer a fly-on-the-wall perspective into the making of the film; costar Steven Bauer, for instance, remembers Stone on

★ Challenger: A True Story of Heroism and Disaster on the Edge of Space

Adam Higginbotham. Avid Reader, \$35 (560p) ISBN 978-1-9821-7661-7



In this captivating history, bestseller Higginbotham (*Midnight in Chernobyl*) recaps the Jan. 28, 1986, explosion that destroyed the space shuttle *Challenger* soon after liftoff, killing all seven crew members, and the tragedy’s roots in a culture of negligence and recklessness at NASA. He explores the flaws that plagued the fiendishly complex shuttle design, focusing on the rubber O-rings used to seal joints in the shuttle’s twin solid rocket boosters to prevent catastrophic leaks of hot gas during lift-off. Engineers at Morton Thiokol, the rockets’ manufacturer, noticed worrisome signs that the O-rings could fail, especially in cold weather—like the sub-freezing temperatures at Cape Canaveral on the day of the launch. Higginbotham narrates the tense conference at which Morton Thiokol’s engineers pleaded with NASA to postpone the launch, only to have NASA officials, determined to quicken the pace of launches for budgetary reasons, pressure them into green-lighting it. Higginbotham’s colorful narrative contrasts the eager idealism of *Challenger*’s crew, including schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe, with the arrogance of NASA honchos who dismissed warnings and casually gambled with the astronauts’ lives. His account of the engineering issues is lucid and meticulous, and his evocative prose conveys both the extraordinary achievement of rocket scientists in harnessing colossal energies with delicate mechanisms and the sudden cataclysms that erupt when the machinery fails. The result is a beguiling saga of the peril and promise of spaceflight. *(May)*

multiple occasions storming around the set after finding out scenes had been cut from his script. The trivia amuses (it was Lumet who had the initial idea to swap in the cocaine trade for the 1932 original's bootlegging), and Kenny provides a discerning inquiry into *Scarface's* legacy, crediting the film's fatalism and extravagance with making it a touchstone in hip-hop music and offering a neutral survey of criticism that the movie glorifies violence. Film buffs will be spellbound.

Agent: Joseph Veltre, Gersh Agency. (May)

Surviving the Daily Grind: Bartleby's Guide to Work

Philip Coggan. Economist, \$26.95 (208p)
ISBN 978-1-63936-435-0

In this chipper send-up, Coggan (*More*), who wrote the *Economist's* Bartleby column on work and management until 2021, provides an irreverent accounting of how overlong meetings, noisy office plans, incompetent managers, and other exasperating eccentricities of the modern workplace burden employees. "Bartleby's law states that 80% of the time of 80% of people in meetings is wasted," Coggan writes, blaming "Buzzword Bills" and "Cliché Charlies" for making vacuous comments that prolong such gatherings, and recommending that managers hold fewer meetings and specify their purpose in advance to keep participants on task. Corporate jargon's primary purpose is to create the impression of expertise, Coggan contends, devoting a full chapter to lambasting such buzzwords as "blitzscaling," "disintermediating," and "blue-sky thinking" ("This is the kind of phrase used by managers who have no idea what to do next but would like to demonstrate that they have intellectual flexibility"). Coggan sprinkles in some actionable guidance, advocating for the commonsensical positions that "treating... workers with fairness and empathy" is good for business and that "awayday" trainings should only be required if necessary. However, the focus is largely on ridiculing the inanities of contemporary work, and though the subject has been exhaustively covered by numerous other volumes, Coggan's cheekiness buoys the familiar criticism. The result is a pleasantly peppy lampooning of the plight of the modern professional. (*May*)

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PW Beyond the Book

James Patterson talks with *PW* about his latest nonfiction book, *The Secret Lives of Booksellers and Librarians*, in which he profiles his literary heroes.

In the popular imagination, librarians and booksellers are commonly seen as being mild-mannered introverts who lead quiet lives. What made you decide to take on this stereotype?

Reading may be a solitary act, but engaging with books and with readers is social. It takes confidence to select the books people will want to read. And it takes conviction to promote them—talking them up to store customers or library patrons or online and saying, "This is what you're looking for. Trust me. I think you're going to love this." Then readers come back and say, "Okay, what else you got?"

In researching this book, were any of your own ideas about the work these people do upended?

I've been to hundreds and hundreds of libraries and bookstores, and I can tell you this: keeping these places going takes an unbelievable amount of effort. The general public does not appreciate how hard librarians and booksellers work. What's also amazing is how they specialize. There are libraries that lend books by subscription, to students of the Holocaust, to prison populations. Many have unique approaches that aren't widely known. Each library, each bookstore, is its own

ecosystem fed by the stories they contain.

You say in the book that booksellers and librarians save lives. What's your favorite example of this?

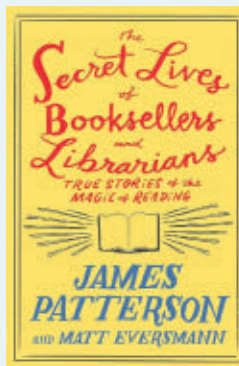
People often turn to books when they are facing a crossroads. A North Carolina bookseller tells of a widow who said: "This book club saved my life." Then there's the elementary-school-age reader who inhaled the pages of a book, asking, "Doesn't it smell great?" A Utah bookseller answered yes, all the while thinking, *You've got such a great life ahead of you. A life that is filled with books.*

What is "book joy" and how can we get more of it in our lives?

"Book Joy" is an expression coined by a librarian in northern Texas to describe that great feeling of matching readers with the books

that will bring them the most happiness. It's the feeling that was shared by so many booksellers and librarians, who told us that their favorite part of their jobs was putting the right book into the right hands at the right time—making the kind of match that inspired readers to come back again and again and again. To get more "book joy," keep turning those pages.

The full interview appeared on Publishersweekly.com on January 22.



preferable fate to the “rape, gun violence, and murder” that characterize the remaining human colonies on Earth. Elsewhere, Bérubé asserts that it would make more sense for humans in the Matrix and Terminator film franchises to cede their devastated worlds to the machines, who are better equipped to survive in the wastelands. Bérubé brings welcome humor to the proceedings (he qualifies his defense of the *Matrix*’s murderous Cypher: “I don’t want to fail to acknowledge that killing one’s crewmates is suboptimal. I would even go so far as to say that it is morally wrong”), though the extensive plot summaries sometimes overwhelm the unorthodox analysis. Still, sci-fi fanatics will appreciate Bérubé’s offbeat takes. (*May*)

All in Her Head: How Gender Bias Harms Women’s Mental Health

Misty Pratt. Greystone, \$28.95 (336p)
ISBN 978-1-77164-971-1

Misogyny takes a heavy toll on women’s mental well-being and results in inferior medical care, according to this incisive debut inquiry. Tracing the history of hysteria, health researcher Pratt argues that 18th-century physicians regarded women diagnosed with the disorder as “wanting in character, strength, courage, or gumption to pick themselves up by the bootstraps and get on with things.” Such bias continues into the present, Pratt contends, discussing how her grandmother was diagnosed with conversion disorder around the time it replaced hysteria in psychiatric usage in 1980, despite the fact the diagnosis couldn’t explain her grandmother’s “garbled speech, delirium, and tremors.” The “constant threat of sexual violence” affects women’s brains, Pratt posits, noting research showing that the frequency with which women have their stress response activated depletes their energy levels and reduces their “concentration, attention, rational problem-solving, [and] immune response.” Elsewhere, Pratt discusses her ambivalent relationship with antidepressants and suggests that though some women may find them helpful, the drugs shouldn’t be used to recast as chemical imbalances the social forces (“patriarchy and capitalism”) that may lie at the root of one’s symptoms. Artfully weaving personal anecdotes into her probing analysis,

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PW Beyond the Book

Stuart E. Eizenstat, former policy adviser in the Clinton administration and author of *The Art of Diplomacy: How American Negotiators Reached Historic Agreements that Changed the World* (Rowman & Littlefield, May), spoke with *PW* about why effective diplomacy is essential in our evolving new world order.

Your book recounts the United States’ most significant and consequential negotiations over the past 50 years. Why is it so critical for people to understand the nuts and bolts of how these negotiations come about?”

We live in a time of global turmoil and conflict that has profoundly challenged the world order that the United States helped create after World War II, and reinforced after the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. To successfully deal with these issues and avoid endless conflict, diplomacy is critical. My book explains to readers how U.S. diplomacy, backed by expert negotiators, can succeed and make the world a better place. It provides a quick history lesson but also a recognition of the qualities that successful U.S. negotiators must possess to reach agreements between countries with profoundly different goals.

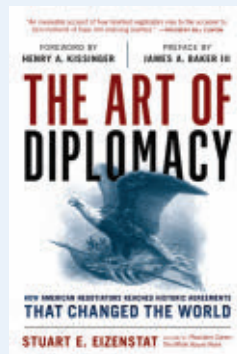
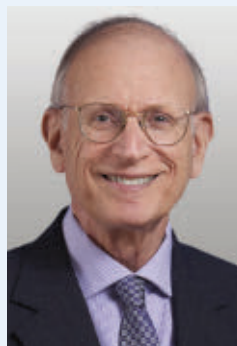
You personally interviewed more than 125 U.S. and international leaders for this book, including two presidents, eight U.S. secretaries of state, and prime ministers from multiple countries. What was the most common through line that you heard about what makes international negotiations succeed or fail?

The most important ingredients for success were the ability of the negotiators to be fully prepared on the details of the issues, to know their own bottom-line objectives, and, significantly, the ability to listen to the other side and understand their requirements for success—to put themselves in their opponent’s shoes.

We are in a moment of profound turmoil. What is the most important lesson that history can teach us in terms of using diplomacy to bring stability to the world in the years and decades ahead?

The United States must be fully engaged in international diplomacy to deal with conflicts that threaten our national interests as a global power, with maximum bipartisan support at home; relying upon our allies to assist us; maintaining preeminence in our economic and military power; effectively using our soft power commitments to democracy, international economic assistance,

the rule of law, and human rights; and employing military power only when it can be effectively used to achieve clear, realistic political goals that cannot be reached by other means. Retreating into a latter-day isolationism, as in the 1930s, will create a vacuum that will lead to an even more unstable, lawless world.



Pratt demonstrates how broad social and historical forces converge on the individual. It's a troubling assessment of sexism's persistent harms. (May)



Insatiable City: Food and Race in New Orleans

Theresa McCulla. Univ. of Chicago, \$32.50 (352p) ISBN 978-0-226-83382-8

Historian McCulla debuts with a fascinating dissection of the tangled links between consumption, food, and race in a city long known for its excesses. She contends that “plenitude grew out of the labors of people in bondage” in 19th-century New Orleans, both in the form of food harvested by enslaved people, and “slave auctions” held in coffeehouses, taverns, and hotels, where the combined “entertainment” of food, drink, and enslaved bodies were served to locals and tourists. With the rise of photography in the 20th century, images of Black Louisianans on sugarcane plantations fueled “nostalgia for the antebellum past” while promoting tourism to white visitors. McCulla also highlights how some 19th-century Black Louisianans—both free and enslaved—worked as street vendors or market sellers, though the work was not without its moral challenges, as it often depended indirectly on slave labor. McCulla’s excellent archival research dredges up vivid personal histories that energize her fine-grained analysis. For example, she recounts how Marie Françoise Borgia was enslaved to a New Orleans grocer, freed in 1817, and later became a street seller of *calas*, a fried food she’d learned to cook in Congo, where she was born. The result is a top-notch scholarly study of the complex relationships between entertainment, consumption, and Black life in the American South. (May)



Growing Up in the Gutter: Diaspora and Comics

Ricardo Quintana-Vallejo. Univ. of Arizona, \$26.95 trade paper (192p) ISBN 978-0-8165-5331-0

In this dry monograph, Quintana-Vallejo (*Children of Globalization*), an English professor at Rhode Island College, argues that coming-of-age graphic novels are uniquely able to “explain what it means to negotiate adulthood in communities of color.” He contrasts the linear approach of such classic European bildungsromans as

Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* to the fragmented flashbacks and fast-for-



wards in Thi Bui’s 2017 graphic memoir, *The Best We Could Do*, in which Bui depicts her family’s adjustment to life in California after fleeing Vietnam in the 1970s, contending that Bui’s approach attests to the complex ways in which the past shapes the present. Examining Elisa Amado and Abraham Urias’s 2019 graphic novel, *Manuelito*, which follows a young Guatemalan refugee who encounters violent border police while trying to reach the U.S., Quintana-Vallejo suggests that Urias’s illustrations depict the eponymous protagonist as indistinct to suggest he serves as an

everyman for countless unaccompanied minors caught up in America’s immigration detention system. Unfortunately, the analysis is at times superficial (“These novels evidence that becoming an adult is not easy for a displaced individual”), and general readers’ eyes will glaze over during densely academic discussions of the “polysemantic possibilities” of the graphic narrative form and the “heterodiegetic narrator” of Areli Morales and Luisa Uribe’s *Areli Is a Dreamer*. This is unlikely to hold appeal beyond the walls of academia. (May)



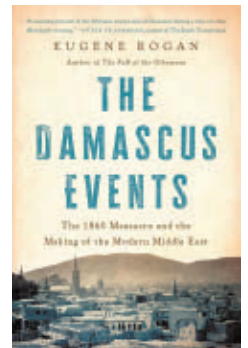
The Rolling Stones: Rare and Unseen

Gered Mankowitz. Welbeck, \$39.95 (256p) ISBN 978-1-80279-733-6

Mankowitz (*Goin’ Home with the Rolling Stones ’66*), who at 18 became the official photographer for the then newly formed Rolling Stones, gathers a rich and revealing trove of images from the band’s early

★ The Damascus Events: The 1860 Massacre and the Making of the Modern Middle East

Eugene Rogan. Basic, \$33 (300p) ISBN 978-1-5416-0427-8



A bloodthirsty mob sweeps through the Christian quarters of 19th-century Damascus, leaving thousands dead, in this propulsive account from historian Rogan (*The Fall of the Ottomans*). Drawing from firsthand reports of the July 1860 massacre as it was chronicled by U.S. vice-consul Mikhayil Mishaqa, Rogan frames it as the moment when the Ottoman empire’s multicultural coexistence began to break down. He traces developments that led to the violence, including local Muslims’ resistance to Ottoman reforms and their concerns about European influence; regional conflict between Druzes, Muslims, and Christians; and the erratic behavior of Damascus’s governor, Ahmad Pasha. In the blistering July heat, the arrest and punishment of several Muslim youths (they were ordered to sweep the Christian quarters, a particular insult) sparked a mania that engulfed the city for more than a week. Mishaqa himself was brutally beaten amid the frenzy of “plunder, kill, and burn.” Christian survivors were hidden by friendly Muslims until Ottoman reformer and statesman Faud Pasha arrived and restored order, punishing the guilty and rebuilding the devastated city while balancing Muslim and Christian interests and resisting European interference. The city’s resulting peace held for 150 years, even as, according to Rogan, the same pattern of sectarian violence emerged throughout the Middle East. A harrowing piece of storytelling with enormous insight, this is a must-read for Middle East history buffs. (May)

years. Capturing the group as they were “finding their style and... becoming themselves,” Mankowitz’s photos depict the rockers in motion onstage; in their homes and luxury cars; and in heated exchanges with concert security, incidents that underlined their reputation as a more boisterous and rowdy alternative to the Beatles. The portrait that comes together charts the band’s rapid ascent to superstardom, yet even as guitarist Keith Richards’s and singer Mick Jagger’s stars rose, Brian Jones became increasingly alienated from the group he founded—in one photo, he’s seen “hiding in his collar and looking like a malevolent goblin.” Such images seem to foreshadow Jones’s 1969 dismissal from the band and death the same year. Brief essays by the (London) *Times* rock critic Will Hodgkinson, culture commentator Peter York, and *New York Times* music and culture reporter Ben Sisario add context, as does a foreword by Richards and an afterword from longtime band manager Andrew Loog Oldham. Published to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the Stones’ debut, this is sure to give fans satisfaction. (Apr.)

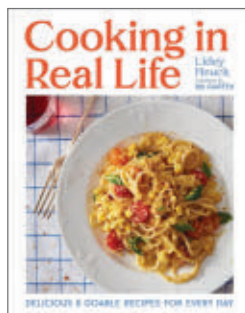
Lifestyle

Food & Cooking

★ **Cooking in Real Life: Delicious & Doable Recipes for Every Day**
Lidey Heuck. Simon Element, \$35 (288p)
ISBN 978-1-66800-215-5

In this winning debut, chef Heuck presents exciting yet accessible recipes that promise to “come together without much fuss” and “deliver big flavor in a small amount of time.” Simple ingredient modifications, such as canned beans in lieu of dried beans for the sausage and white bean soup with swiss chard and skillet croutons, and chicken thighs instead of pork for the spicy barbecue pulled chicken sandwiches, drastically cut prep and cook time. She also provides plenty of helpful substitutions, noting, for example, that in a pinch, a mixture of cabernet sauvignon and sugar can replace the tawny port needed for the braised short ribs with port, shallots, and cranberries. Vegetarian dishes—including kale salad with gouda, honeycrisp apples, and walnuts; escarole salad with cara cara

oranges, Marcona almonds, and goat cheese; and spaghetti with sweet corn pesto—are equally enticing. Heuck offers several feasible suggestions to



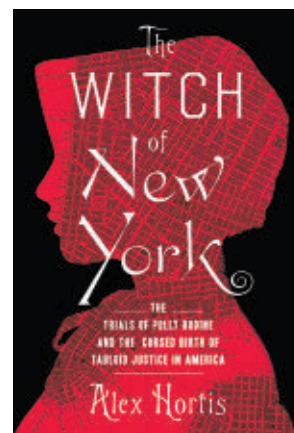
make lighter dishes heartier, such as adding sautéed shrimp or seared salmon filets to the shaved carrot salad with creamy sesame-ginger dressing. Readers craving something sweet will be tempted by the plentiful desserts and breakfast options, such as roasted pears with brandy and brown sugar, flourless chocolate cherry cookies, and plum, cardamom, and cornmeal muffins. This will be a new favorite for busy home cooks looking to enhance their weeknight repertoire. (Mar.)

Nosh: Plant-Forward Recipes Celebrating Modern Jewish Cuisine

Micah Siva. Collective Book Studio, \$35 (256p) ISBN 978-1-68555-327-2

Dietitian Siva (coauthor of *1,2,3 Nosh with Me*) shares vegetarian takes on classic Jewish dishes in this appetizing and enlightening collection. She addresses common questions those new to a vegetarian diet may have about everything from sources of protein and iron to egg and dairy substitutions and gives pointers on creating a Passover-ready kosher kitchen. The vast array of breakfast, soup, salad, main dish, dessert, and beverage options offers something to entice just about every palate. Lovers of matzo balls, kugel, latkes, and challah will not be disappointed, while those looking for more adventurous options will delight in hearty lentil goulash, savory pulled mushroom and tofu “brisket,” and everything bagel “fattoush” salad with za’atar cheeseballs. Siva promises her chickpea noodle vegetable soup is so flavorful that chicken won’t be missed, and her almond flour crepes and lemony blintzes are drool-inducing. A final chapter on essentials covers those small touches that make all the difference, including quick-pickled onions, hot mustard, and

Advertisement



★ The Witch of New York

Alex Hortis. Pegasus Crime, \$29.95 (336p)
ISBN 978-1-63936-391-9



In this excellent work of true crime, historian Hortis (*The Mob and the City*) examines the case of Polly Bodine (1810–1892), who became infamous after she was accused of murdering her sister-in-law and infant niece. In December 1843, someone killed 24-year-old Emeline Houseman and her daughter, Eliza, in their Staten Island home before setting it on fire. Emeline’s father pointed the finger at Bodine, the last person seen with his daughter, theorizing that she’d killed the pair while trying to steal their silver. After Bodine gave conflicting alibis to authorities, she was charged with the murders. Her first trial ended in a hung jury, and the case was moved to Manhattan for a second trial. That jury convicted Bodine, but the conviction was overturned on appeal. A third and final trial held upstate ended in Bodine’s acquittal. Newspapers including the *New York World* seized on the story, stirring up public interest in the crimes and villainizing Bodine for her supposed avoidance of justice during her multiple trials. Hortis’s fastidious historical detail makes the episode come to life, and he successfully evokes contemporary tabloid scandals like the Amanda Knox trial without stretching the point too far. Fans of Daniel Stashower will love this. *Agent: Scott Mendel, Mendel Media.* (Mar.)

—Publishers Weekly
December 15, 2023

pegasusbooks.com

Children's/YA

Picture Books

Help Wanted: One Rooster

Julie Falatko, illus. by Andrea Stegmaier.
Viking, \$18.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-451-47683-8

The Office meets *Chicken Run* in this workplace comedy, in which an “extremely cool and helpful sheep” reveals how a barnyard solves its productivity problem. When the farm’s rooster becomes distracted by a hobby and ignores his crowing responsibilities, the whole farm begins to oversleep. The farm’s cow (“She has a clipboard. This is a professional cow”) conducts interviews, dismissing each nontraditional candidate for replacement rooster. The first, dressed “in an inexplicable tuxedo,” wants to ring a bell instead of crowing; the second offers to wake everyone with “fresh, hot coffee”; the third, a small brown bird, wants to press a nonexistent button to do the job; and the fourth, a green, transparent blob, answers questions in its own blobby language (“Glarka-glarka-bloo”). It takes the warm cooperation of all four to get things moving, even if their distinctive gifts don’t shift the farm’s status quo. Alongside snappy narration from Falatko (*Rick the Rock of Room 214*), crisp-edged, graphical artwork by Stegmaier (*AAAL-LIGATOR!*) packs visual information into busy spreads in which a gardener rabbit dozes while the hose runs, and an audio speaker signals the rooster’s new interest. Ages 3–5. (June)

The Yellow Bus

Loren Long. Roaring Brook, \$19.99 (48p)
ISBN 978-1-250-90313-6

This thought-provoking story by Long (*Never Forget Eleanor*) models how a cast-aside object might endure. A spectacular aerial opening spread shows the yellow vehicle of the title as a single spot of color moving through a rural village in a river valley. In its earliest iterations, the yellow bus takes children, then older citizens, “from one important place/ to another.” Later, the parked vehicle shelters unhoused individuals in a quiet spot under a city bridge, then becomes a domicile for a herd of country goats and,



A music-making family creates a “twilight harmony” in Zea Kemp and Gutiérrez Hernández’s picture book (reviewed on this page).

following a landscape altered by construction, offers sanctuary in another, quite unexpected, place. In each new role, the individuals that inhabit the bus “filled her with joy.” Grayscale landscapes are rendered in sculpted and shaded pencil work, while the bus and the beings within it are painted in brightly colored acrylics, an effect that visually highlights the vehicle’s relationship with its inhabitants and surroundings. It’s a saga that paves way for discussions about utility and repurposing, social and structural priorities, change over time, and more. Human characters are shown with various skin tones. An author’s note concludes. Ages 3–6. *Agent: Steven Malk, Writers House.* (June)

Shake It Off!

Vanessa Brantley-Newton. Penguin/Paulsen,
\$18.99 (32p) ISBN 978-0-5255-1711-5

A winsome little white goat with a bright kerchief around her neck, this picture book’s protagonist loves to climb and sing nonstop—digitally colored drawings, rendered in bucolic sunny tones, show joyful notes cascading from her mouth. But the neighbors, portrayed with brown skin, are not charmed when the goat mounts their roof. “That goat is driving me nuts!” they complain, and when the animal falls down a well, they choose not to rescue her, instead filling the well with dirt while she’s still trapped inside. “CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?” bright typography asks as the goat looks straight at readers with incredulous eyes. With a refrain of “Shake it off. Pack it under!” the goat quickly begins to shift the accumulating shovelfuls of dirt beneath her feet, gradually lifting herself

to safety. Brantley-Newton (*Becoming Vanessa*) prefaces this folktale-feeling story of adversity overcome with the assurance that it will end happily, but the casual cruelty and visceral sense of peril may nevertheless alarm some readers, even if the goat is ultimately triumphant and wins the humans’ respect. An author’s note concludes. Ages 3–7. *Agent: Lori Nowicki, Painted Words.* (June)

Beach Hair

Ashley Woodfolk, illus. by Nina Mata.

Simon & Schuster, \$18.99 (40p)
ISBN 978-1-665-92098-8

Making a lively picture book debut, Woodfolk (*Nothing Burns as Bright as You*) pays homage to seaside ’dos of all kinds. When the child narrator and their family wake up “with the wildest bed head,” and Mommy calls it “beach hair,” the grinning trio packs up and heads to the shore. Upon arrival, the young protagonist uses comparative prose to describe various hair styles: Black-cued Mommy’s is “fluffy and big,/ like the fat white clouds,” while pale-skinned Daddy’s dark hair “is straight, going sideways with the wind,/ like the tall seagrass,” and the brown-skinned protagonist’s is “like the soft waves in the ocean.” Mata (*I Love My Spots*) employs brilliantly colorful digital art, portraying people of varying ages, body types, and skin tones interacting by the water: “I see BOUNCY beach hair/ and FLOUNCY beach hair/ WISPY and WOOLLY and/ UP-IN-THE-AIR beach hair.” After swimming, the family’s sun-baked ’dos change again, into “tiny spirals” like seashells for Mommy, “feathery and floppy” tresses like a seagull’s wings for Daddy, and “fat curls,/ the same shape as soft-serve” for the protagonist. It’s a well-observed celebration that’s a day at the beach. Ages 4–8. *Author’s agent: Beth Phelan, Gallt & Zacker. Illustrator’s agent: Christy Ewers, CAT Agency.* (June)

★ Desert Song

Laekan Zea Kemp, illus. by Beatriz Gutiérrez Hernández. Holiday House/Porter, \$18.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-8234-5392-4

A desert sunset cues a large family to make music alongside “the coyotes, the cicadas,/ and the giant barn owls...// a chorus in need of a band,” in this lyrical picture book written by Zea Kemp (A

continued on p. 78

ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER HERITAGE

Publishing in time for AAPI Heritage Month, 10 picture books emphasize cultural pride.

Kailani's Gift

Dorina Lazo Gilmore-Young, illus. by Lynnor Bontigao. WaterBrook, \$12.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-5935-7779-0

A girl overcomes doubt to learn a traditional dance for her grandparents' anniversary party in this sweet tale centering Filipino culture. Kailani, the youngest of five siblings, portrayed by Bontigao as smiling, pink-cheeked characters, doesn't want to be left out of the tinkling dance they are rehearsing for the celebration. Kailani's attempts to join result in sibling teasing, but Daddy says all she needs is a good teacher: "Me." Kailani struggles until Daddy compares tinkling to jump rope, and practices constantly until she's ready for her part in the siblings' collaboration. Moments between Kailani and her father model a joyous bond in this low-stakes family tale rendered in Gilmore-Young's friendly prose. An author's note and glossary conclude. Ages 3–7. (*Apr.*)

Simone

Viet Thanh Nguyen, illus. by Minnie Phan. Minerva, \$18.99 (48p) ISBN 978-1-6626-5119-9

Rooted, per a contextualizing end note, in the 2020 California wildfires, this evocative split narrative juxtaposes intergenerational experiences of evacuation. Awakened from a deep sleep by Má as bright fire rages outside, young Simone grabs a go bag and a favorite toy. The family's route takes them past firefighters in yellow as well as orange-clad prisoners from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, all heading "right into the fire." In the car, Má recalls her own childhood evacuation from a flooded Viet Nam: "I was only a little girl back then.... All I could bring was my crayons." Inside a school gym turned shelter, Simone devises a drawing project for all the children that speaks to their individual and collective backgrounds. Artfully weaving flashbacks and recent events, Phan's inventive illustrations intersperse b&w images with spot color that gradually introduces a full rainbow spectrum of experience. Supporting characters are portrayed with various skin tones. Ages 4–8. (*May*)

Tala Learns to Siva

Kealani Netane, illus. by Dung Ho. Orchard, \$18.99 (32p) ISBN 978-1-3388-5931-7

Netane's debut celebrates individual perseverance and connection to Samoan culture as a girl, Tala, learns to siva from her heart. Against an ocean backdrop, Tala watches in awe as Auntie Sina performs the taualuga, her hands dancing like rolling waves. When Auntie shows her the moves, Tala's "legs wobbled... wrists stiffened," and she cries in frustration. Acknowledging her own early struggles with the dance, Auntie advises, "Dance from your heart. The motions will come." Incorporating movements into her everyday activities, Tala makes progress but realizes that something's still missing: a glowing face, honoring both Samoa and the child's ancestors. Employing a tropical palette

and repeating stylized motifs, Ho's digital illustrations embody Tala's enthusiasm as the child practices for her stuffed animals, and eventually, her family, carrying tradition forward for future generations. A glossary and author's note conclude. Ages 4–8. (*May*)

Love Grows Here

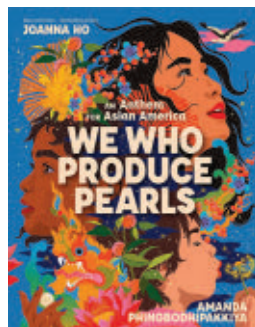
Chloe Ito Ward, illus. by Violet Kim. Albert Whitman, \$18.99 (32p) ISBN 978-0-8075-3124-2

A Japanese American girl responds to prejudice in this sensitive debut drawn from Ward's childhood. Akio is with her grandmother at the market, shopping for "mouthwatering makizushi, salty but sweet;/ fresh fuji apples, crisp and clean," when she stumbles into a man who mutters, "Go back to your own country." Confused, Akio asks Obā, "I was born here. Where would I go back to?" As the two drink a cup of tea at the ramen shop, Obā's friend tells Akio about when "my old home, Japan, began to fight with my new home, America." And upon encountering an implied incidence of anti-Asian hate, Akio works to respond through acts of kindness. Present events are rendered in primary colors, while the past appears in a sepia palette. Background characters are portrayed with various skin tones. A Japanese glossary and author's note conclude. Ages 4–8. (*Apr.*)

★ We Who Produce Pearls: An Anthem for Asian America

Joanna Ho, illus. by Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya. Orchard, \$19.99 (48p) ISBN 978-1-3388-4665-2

Bold, pop art–style graphics and lyrical phrasing distinguish this powerful picture book "inspired by specific figures, events, and movements in Asia and across the Asian diaspora," per an end note. Throughout, "we" statements ("We who dream... seek... cultivate") hint at a rich history described more granularly in dynamic lines and thorough back matter ("We who persist,"



for example, reflects on themes of empire and colonization). In reiterative, thoughtful text, Ho builds to the meaningful idea that "we... hold injustice in our mouths... and spit it out." Phingbodhipakkiya's crisp, bright-hued digital images possess a rich intensity, showing dozens of portraits depicted with various skin tones amid stylized bursts of flora, landscapes, and natural elements.

In-depth back matter, including guided questions, starting points, and creators' notes, concludes. Ages 4–8. (*Apr.*)

Aloha Everything

Kaylin Melia George, illus. by Mae Waite. Red Comet, \$19.99 (40p) ISBN 978-1-6365-5112-8

Lush illustrations by Waite and rhythmic quatrains from

Melia George paint the story of a Hawaiian girl who learns about her cultural heritage through via hula. A baby, born “where the ocean spray’s kiss meets the sky’s close embrace” grows into a child. To teach her the history of her people, adults “breathed life to the tales/ with each step and each song,/ generations of lore/ that the hula kept strong.” A repeating refrain—“What did hula teach her?”—forms a through line that introduces spreads about the islands’ formation, the girl’s voyaging ancestors, and “great tales of old,/ kept as records preserved/ to be lovingly told.” Combining intricate images of the natural world, people portrayed with various skin tones, and lore, acrylic and gouache paintings linger in the eye in this gossamer work that concludes with a question: “What did hula teach you?” A pronunciation guide and glossary conclude. Ages 5–8. (*Apr.*)

★ **Growing Up Under a Red Flag: A Memoir of Surviving the Chinese Cultural Revolution**

Ying Chang Compestine, illus. by Xinmei Liu. Rocky Pond, \$19.99 (40p) ISBN 978-0-5935-3398-7

Compestine’s childhood informs this tense account of 10 years under Mao Zedong’s oppressive rule. Born in Wuhan, China, the book’s narrator is three years old in 1966, when Mao declares a Cultural Revolution to regain power over the government. Her parents were doctors, her father a surgeon trained by an American who left Wuhan when the Communists began to rule China. Though she learns English and reads with her father, who “loved my curiosity and strong spirit,” such activities must be conducted in secret, and the Cultural Revolution soon encompasses electrical outages, food rationing and scarcity, mandated uniforms, and the removal of individuals who don’t conform. Her father is targeted following the receipt of a letter from the U.S., and the Red Guard storms their home, arresting him as an American spy. Debut illustrator Liu gives the ink and digitally colored artwork the feel of vintage Chinese art and design, strengthening an already gripping historical narrative. Ages 6–9. (*May*)

My Lost Freedom: A Japanese American World War II Story

George Takei, illus. by Michelle Lee. Crown, \$19.99 (48p) ISBN 978-0-5935-6635-0

Embracing a child’s wide-eyed perspective of historical events, activist and actor Takei details his family’s incarceration in Japanese prison camps during WWII. Takei is four years old during the 1941 Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, after which “the lives of all Japanese Americans were suddenly and drastically changed.” Following President Roosevelt’s declaration of war on Japan, a February 1942 presidential order forces the Takeis, along with all other Japanese Americans on the West Coast, from their Los Angeles home. Pages detail the family’s time at Arkansas’s swampy Camp Rohwer (“a strange and magical place” where the

author caught tadpoles in a drainage ditch) and Northern California’s Tule Lake, a maximum-security prison with “huge, rumbling tank patrols.” Lee’s crisp mixed-media illustrations echo the text’s childlike tone (when the family is held at a racetrack, Takei “thought it would be fun to sleep where the horsies slept”) in portraying individual, familial, and communal experiences throughout a “hard, terrible war.” A glossary and pronunciation guide, notes, and photos conclude. Ages 6–9. (*Apr.*)

If Lin Can: How Jeremy Lin Inspired Asian Americans to Shoot for the Stars

Richard Ho, illus. by Huỳnh Kim Liên and Phùng Nguyễn Quang. Charlesbridge, \$18.99 (40p) ISBN 978-1-6235-4372-3

At once affirmation and biography, Ho’s simple yet captivating overview of the life of NBA basketball star Jeremy Lin (b. 1988) begins with a series of call-and-response questions: “Have you ever been told that you *can’t*?” As the pages turn, three East Asian—cued children represent an aspiring athlete, actor, and leader facing moments of discrimination, bullying, and self-doubt. Lin is introduced as “someone who looks like you,” a line that hints at the importance of representation to self-image, before the book segues into a cursory overview of Lin’s life. Stylized digital illustrations from Huỳnh and Phùng build to a triumphant moment in Lin’s career before the second-person text asks, “Have you ever cheered for someone who shattered stereotypes, burst through barriers, and made you feel proud of who you are?” Background characters are portrayed with various skin tones. A biography, author’s note, and bibliography conclude. Ages 7–10. (*Apr.*)

Mami King: How Ma Mon Luk Found Love, Riches, and the Perfect Bowl of Soup Jacqueline

Chio-Lauri, illus. by Kristin Sorra. Millbrook, \$19.99 (32p) ISBN 978-1-7284-9235-3

A resourceful young man employs his cooking skills to make his fortune and assist others in this lively biography of entrepreneur Ma Mon Luk (1896–1961). In 1918, Ma leaves Canton, China, for the Philippines, after his courtship of Ng Shih is rebuffed by her wealthy parents. Aboard the boat, he witnesses how “the rich and the poor, like oil and water, didn’t mix.” After looking for work in Manila’s Chinatown, Ma becomes a street vendor, selling mee soup, a dish that he misses from home. Snipping noodles to different lengths with shears depending on how much the customer pays, he ensures that “everyone, rich or poor, could buy Ma’s noodles.” He soon earns enough for a noodle stall, then a restaurant, and gives away food to those in need, growing business “as word of his good deeds and good food spread” and creating a place where rich and poor, “unlike oil and water, mixed.” Sorra’s digital illustrations shift from cool blues and grays to yellows, golds, and oranges. Includes a pronunciation guide, creators’ notes, a recipe, and more. Ages 7–11. (*Apr.*)

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Crown for Corina). As a rich, warm sunset palette slowly gives way to the deep, beautiful blues of nighttime, Uncle Eduardo drums his hands on his jeans, Aunt Ofelia plays the flute, and other family members take up percussion and stringed instruments, until, “when my mother opens her mouth to sing, / a hush falls over the desert.” After the moon rises and Mami sings of memory, the child’s father acknowledges that the Latinx-cued family plays “your great-great-grandfather’s vihuela and my godmother’s ocarina. To remind us that they’re still alive between the notes. That when we sing to them, they’re listening.” Amid naïf-style scenes of the family collaborating with each other and the natural world, digitally finished acrylic gouache and colored pencil illustrations from Gutiérrez Hernández (*Benito Juárez Fights for Justice*) visualize the child’s forebears in this work about connection that ends with “the glittering sky overhead, an audience of our ancestors”—and a development that sounds like applause. Creators’ notes conclude. Ages 4–8. (June)

Garbage Gulls

Dorson Plourde, illus. by Isabella Fassler. Kids Can, \$21.99 (32p) ISBN 978-1-5253-0708-9

Debut creators Plourde and Fassler summon the feel of summer’s languor as they take readers to a car, seemingly abandoned and open to the air, parked in a semideserted strip-mall parking lot near a hotel called The Sea. Lolling and blowing bubbles in the back seat are two pale-skinned kids feeling summer’s heat (“We are microwave molten goo”). Though “we know all corners of The Sea... / we’ve never been to the beach,” and for entertainment, they scatter French fries splattered with ketchup and sauce around the vehicle and watch a “tangle” of gulls appear (“One thousand, TWO THOUSAND wings!”). The cloudless sky turns to psychedelic hues as the kids imagine the blue-winged birds hoisting the car over the strip mall signage (“We are weightless. / We are Deals! Deals! Deals!”) to the ocean, where the occupants splash with abandon. Both the language and the expressively textured drawings, rendered in digitally finished pencil, crayon, and graphite, strive for poetic heights. Though the result is occasionally more perplexing than transportive, it’s a

wild and wonderful seasonal tribute to the way that children, left to their own devices during a long summer’s day, can be immensely creative. Ages 4–8. *Author’s agent: Jen Newens, Martin Literary. (June)*

A Horse Called Now

Ruth Doyle, illus. by Alexandra Finkeldey. Nosy Crow, \$17.99 (32p) ISBN 979-8-88777-072-7

“Now” is the name Doyle (*You Are Part of the Wonder*) gives to a great white horse who stands in a daisy-studded field at the start of this picture book—a horse whose gift is being able to stay in the moment. Now notices “buds opening, dragonflies dancing” when Rabbit and her babies arrive, hearts racing, crying, “Fox is chasing us!” “Can you see him now?” the horse asks, before responding to further concerns (“No... but he might sneak up...”) with “Or he might not.... At this moment, all is well.” Hen and her chicks fear Magpie; Sheep and her lambs, the farmer’s new dog. When thunder booms and the frightened animals flee to the barn, they find unexpected visitors, and Now’s patient words help the animals wait in peace. Finkeldey (*When the Storks Came Home*) uses soft, pastoral shades and textures to capture the horse’s shaggy mane, and the fur and feathers of the smaller creatures, whose faces express believable emotion. Barnyard detail and background scenery ground the abstract nature of Now’s calming techniques (“I breathe in... and out...”) and mindfulness teachings (“even the wildest storms will always end”) in this evocative pairing of barnyard life and inward reflection. Ages 4–8. (June)

Fiction

Frankie D, Vegan Vampire

Sally Dutra and Brian Dutra, illus. by Tiffani Brown. Kids Can, \$15.99 (192p) ISBN 978-1-5253-0460-6

In this witty and whimsical early chapter book series launch, a debut by married collaborators the Dutrás, vampire Frankie D and his family—including his three-legged pet wolf—are excited to emigrate from Transylvania to America. To help Frankie blend in with his human classmates, his parents set special rules: no biting, no showing off his fangs, and no sneak attacks. Though Frankie’s

meticulously practiced human manners hilariously fail him on his first day of fourth grade (attempts to make small talk surrounding his taxidermy expertise result in peers’ confused staring), his idiosyncrasies soon net him new friends, each with quirks of their own. Only one classmate gives Frankie pause: Eddie, a bully who smells of “forest trolls.” Eddie’s attempts to torment Frankie test his resolve not to bite. But when Frankie discovers Eddie’s secret insecurity, Frankie does his utmost to help Eddie overcome his challenges. Eager to fit in and rarely deterred by perceived setbacks, Frankie is a fang-tastic protagonist whose many triumphs and foibles will immediately endear him to young readers, even those without sharp teeth or pet wolves. Movement-filled grayscale spot illustrations by animator Brown depict characters with varying skin tones. Ages 7–10. (June)

Countdown to Yesterday

Shirely Marr. Simon & Schuster, \$17.99 (272p) ISBN 978-1-66594-851-7

Channeling personal experiences of emigrating from China to Australia, Marr (*All Four Quarters of the Moon*) examines one 11-year-old’s desire to turn back time in this thoughtful read. James Greenaway is sent adrift when his parents announce that they’re getting a divorce. Within days, he’s splitting time between his white-cued father’s familiar house and his Chinese Australian mother’s dilapidated new apartment. Worse, his parents are having him



decide which parent he wants to spend his weekends with. At school, James befriends Yan Chen, a Chinese immigrant classmate who reads obsolete 40-year-old computer programming manuals for fun. When Yan says she invented a time machine, James scoffs. As he increasingly takes solace in memories of perfect days with his parents, however, he starts to believe that living in the past would be preferable to the present. But to do that, he’ll need Yan’s help. A subplot surrounding a school baking

competition that relies on classic Australian cake constructions leads to laugh-out-loud antics and touching insights. Discussions of time travel lean more toward wistful fantasy than hard science, and the tweens' desire to bend time provides a framework through which James gains new perspectives on his own memories. Ages 8–12. *Agent: Gemma Cooper, Bent Agency. (June)*

The (Mostly) True Story of Cleopatra's Needle

Dan Gutman. Holiday House, \$18.99 (224p)
ISBN 978-0-8234-5484-6

Employing even keeled pacing and distinctively rendered characters, Gutman (the *My Weird School* series) chronicles how *Cleopatra's Needle* became a New York City landmark in this delightfully fact-ional blend of history and adventure. In an introduction, the novel's unnamed contemporary narrator ventures through Central Park with their mother and younger sister. Upon arriving at their destination—the eponymous obelisk—their mother, “who makes her living as a storyteller,” regales her children with the history of the monument. Via varying POVs—including that of an Egyptian boy in 1460 BCE, a female inventor in 1880s N.Y.C., and others—Mom explains how *Cleopatra's Needle* was commissioned by Pharaoh Thutmose III in the granite pits of Aswan, Egypt, which she gleans from the hieroglyphics etched into the structure, and its subsequent removal from the country. Each successive event in the obelisk's history is rendered with keen attention to sociopolitical details, including housing insecurity and child enslavement. These weighty topics are counterbalanced by the protagonists' diary-style narrations, which ground this sweeping introduction to the lesser-known history of an iconic monolith. Ages 8–12. *(June)*

★ Red Bird Danced

Dawn Quigley. Heartdrum, \$18.99 (176p)
ISBN 978-0-0632-2362-2

Employing elegant verse, Ojibwe author Quigley (the *Jo Jo* series) crafts a story of two Ojibwe kids learning to cope with sorrowful life events. Eleven-year-old Ariel loves to dance ballet; it's something she has in common with her

beloved aunt Bineshiinh. But when Bineshiinh disappears, ballet doesn't feel the same. Trying to find comfort in movement again, Ariel practices traditional Indigenous jingle dancing and, in delving into its history, learns that Native women are “ten times more likely to/ be murdered.” Meanwhile, Ariel's 12-year-old neighbor Tomah uses humor to hide the fact that he struggles to read. Despite his academic insecurities, he discovers that he is a gifted storyteller and uses his talent to call attention to the disappearances of women in his Turtle Mountain community. Through Ariel and Tomah's steadfast resolve, this heartbreaking yet heartening story tackles themes of grief and the strength it takes to grow through adversity. Even as the tweens confront personal challenges, they remain committed to bettering their surroundings in a moving narrative that highlights issues relating to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women crisis while celebrating the healing power of art—including dance, folklore, music, and poetry—and the solace one can find in connecting with one's heritage. Ages 8–12. *Agent: Erin Murphy, Erin Murphy Literary. (June)*

The Spindle of Fate

Aimee Lim. Macmillan/Feiwel and Friends, \$17.99 (304p) ISBN 978-1-2508-8619-4

Twelve-year-old Chinese American Evie Mei Huang traverses the netherworld searching for her mother in Lim's imaginative debut. Evie always disliked helping her mother operate her tailor shop. But now that her mother is presumed dead following a drowning accident, Evie doesn't know how to feel about the empty building. While alone in the establishment, Evie startles when a mischievous yaoguai resembling a monkey arrives. He tells Evie that her mother was the head of a magical guild and possessed the power to command the Spindle of Fate and, as her eldest child, Evie must now take up the mantle. He also claims that Evie's mother is in Diyu, the netherworld, and that if Evie wants her back, she must go there to save her. Accompanied by Chinese and Icelandic American Kevin Chengsson, the son of another guild member, Evie hones her magical and innate strengths and battles her way through Diyu, a multilayered maze of hellish obstacles—“There's a mountain

covered with long swords and pits of excrement and flaming cattle”—populated by denizens intent on capturing her. Fast-paced action and dark humor combine with Chinese mythology to deliver an engrossing fantasy adventure about grief and healing. Ages 8–12. *Agent: Suzie Townsend, New Leaf Literary. (June)*

Of Jade and Dragons (Of Jade and Dragons #1)

Amber Chen. Viking, \$20.99 (480p)
ISBN 978-0-593-62275-9

Deemed beautiful but “too odd,” 18-year-old Aihui Ying shirks her responsibilities as her family's eldest daughter and



instead dreams of becoming a world-class engineer like her father. Following his murder and armed with only his journal and a black jade pendant dropped by the assailant, Ying makes her

way to the renowned, male-dominated Engineers Guild, the place where her father achieved great success—and where he stored his secrets. With help from an unlikely source—Aogiya Ye-yang, the eighth prince of the High Command—and using her younger brother's identity as an alias, Ying gains a spot in the guild's apprenticeship trial. Throughout the ordeal, Ying contends with guild masters who held contempt for her father, mechanical beasts on the prowl, and the killer, still at large, who seeks her father's journal. A growing attraction toward the prince complicates things further, especially as he has an agenda of his own. Drawing on inspiration from Qing dynasty China to craft complex worldbuilding, debut author Chen employs vivid and sensory language to cleverly set the stage for Ying's quest for answers—and revenge—in this gripping silkpunk fantasy that thrills from start to finish. Ages 12–up. *Agent: Laura Crockett, Triada US. (June)*

We Shall Be Monsters

Tara Sim. Penguin/Paulsen, \$19.99 (400p)
ISBN 978-0-593-40742-4

Hoping to gain the yakshas', or nature

spirits', favor to end the mysterious blight poisoning Dharati, the country's leaders routinely hang single women and girls for suspected connection to malevolent beings called rakshasas. In Dharati, teens Kajal and her sister Lasya lead a hardscrabble life as itinerant workers and petty thieves. After Lasya dies in an accident, Kajal embarks on an obsessive search for a way to resurrect her. Her already seemingly impossible quest is further jeopardized by Lasya's spirit warping into a bhuta, a hostile specter that kills indiscriminately until it's put to rest. Then, Kajal is blackmailed by insurrectionists into reviving the crown prince, who died in battle to the Usurper King almost 20 years prior. As political plots thicken and her sister's bhuta grows stronger, Kajal must face the consequences of her actions and decide what she's willing to lose to reach her goals. Borrowing liberally from Hindu folklore and utilizing evocative, moody prose alongside gruesome depictions of body horror, Sim (*Ravage the Dark*) explores themes of systemic misogyny, superstition, and morality. Though pacing occasionally flags, Sim delivers a twisted work of fantasy horror teeming with fascinating creatures and long-buried secrets. Age 12–up. (June)

The Ghost of Us

James L. Sutter. Wednesday, \$20 (336p) ISBN 978-1-2508-6976-0

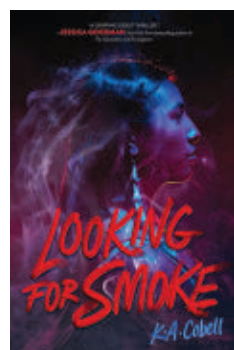
Due to past trauma surrounding peer reactions to her queer identity, Cara Weaver, 18, can't wait to escape Stossel, Wash. After receiving rejections from all the colleges she applied to, however, she's anticipating another year at home, and believes her only ticket out of Stossel is finding success with her ghost-hunting YouTube channel, Caranormal Activity. So, when she accidentally stumbles upon the spirit of deceased former classmate Aiden Reyes, she endeavors to use his presence to prove that ghosts are real. But Aiden will only help Cara if she takes his sister Meredith to prom, an act that he hopes will draw Meredith out of her grief-induced depression. What begins as an obligation blossoms into real romance, leaving Cara in an impossible situation—the happier she makes Meredith, the more at peace Aiden feels, causing his spirit to retreat toward the afterlife and taking Cara's dreams of escape with him. A key traumatic incident and examinations of grief are handled cursorily,

and snarky, pop-culture-packed prose by Sutter (*Darkhearts*) at times feels preoccupied with the girls' bodies, but character personalities are nevertheless intricately and distinctly rendered. The protagonists read as white. Ages 13–up. *Agent: Josh Adams, Adams Literary.* (June)

★ **Looking for Smoke**

K.A. Cobell. Heartdrum, \$19.99 (416p) ISBN 978-0-06331-867-0

Not seen for months, Blackfoot teen Rayanne "Charging at Night" Arnoux seems to be another missing Indigenous girl amid a series of disappeared teens gone uninvestigated. Rayanne leaves behind her Blackfoot Reservation peer group, including her young sister Loren "Different Black Bird," Eli First Kill, Samantha White Tail, Brody



Clark, and Mara Racette (who is of white and Blackfoot ancestry). But when Samantha is murdered during a celebration, and the group are the last to see her, they each become sus-

pects. The teens soon realize, however, that there's something worse than being under suspicion; as the case progresses, connections to Rayanne's disappearance become apparent, prompting fear that Samantha's death will become another instance of unsolved crimes against Indigenous girls. Her killer must be apprehended, even if it means they're forced to solve the case themselves, and even if it means condemning one of their own. Via four alternating POVs informed by the intricacies of reservation life, Cobell highlights the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women crisis and delivers a gut-punch of an ending in this timely debut thriller that is by turns spine-tingling and emotionally raw. Ages 13–up. *Agent: Peter Knapp, Park & Fine Literary.* (June)

London on My Mind

Clara Alves, trans. from the Brazilian Portuguese by Nina Perrotta. Push, \$19.99 (336p) ISBN 978-1-339-01489-0

Sweeping romance and family drama permeate this whirlwind queer love story

by Alves (*The Mermaid's Prophecy*). Brazilian 17-year-old Dayana Martins and her mother always dreamed of visiting England and seeing Buckingham Palace, home to Day's namesake ("Lady Di—now Queen Diana—after King Oliver's death") and Notting Hill, the inspiration behind their favorite movie. After her mother's death, Day's dream sours, prompting conflicting feelings when she moves to London with her estranged father, stepmother, and stepsister. Frustrated with her new family, Day wanders to Buckingham Palace, where she collides with a Portuguese-speaking girl fleeing the premises. Sparks fly between Day and the white-cued runaway, Diana, who keeps her connection to the palace a secret. Day, who is struggling to reconcile her anger toward her father and her growing closeness with her stepfamily, revels in her fledgling romance until a royal bombshell shatters the trust between the two teens, leaving her afraid that a *Notting Hill* ending isn't part of her story. While the narrative primarily focuses on Day's tabloid romance and her blossoming relationship with her stepfamily, flashbacks at chapters' ends measuredly expand the narrative's emotional resonance by exploring her bisexual identity and guilt over her mother's death. Ages 14–up. (June)

Love, Off the Record

Samantha Markum. McElderry, \$19.99 (416p) ISBN 978-1-6659-5572-0

College freshman Éowyn Evans needs to secure the only vacant reporter position at the campus newspaper to make her journalism school application stand out. Unfortunately, so does fellow intern and "suck-up of the highest order" Nathaniel "Three" Wellborn III, escalating their usual verbal sparring into vicious competition. After Three scoops her story on new campus dating app Buckconnect, Wyn embraces the "harmless, fun distraction" of anonymous online interaction, opening up to user hayes6834, with whom she forms a close connection. But when Wyn and Three team up on an investigative story about a campus drug ring that could make their college journalism careers, proximity and danger spark mutual attraction, making Wyn feel disloyal to hayes6834, even as she worries that her online crush might ghost her when he finds out that she's "plus-size." Hitting pitch-perfect if predictable

rom-com notes, Markum (*You Wouldn't Dare*) caters to die-hard genre readers in this banter-rich love story that probes online honesty and internalized anti-fatness. Parental pressures and friendship drama add classic teen vibes while a sensitively balanced portrayal of Wyn's body image elevates this journalistic-rivalry-turned-romance narrative. Main characters cue as white. Ages 14–up. *Agent: Lauren Spieller, Folio Literary.* (June)

Now, Conjurers

Freddie Kölsch. Union Square, \$19.99 (384p) ISBN 978-1-4549-5159-9

In November 1999, the rural town of North Dana, Mass., is rocked by the gruesome murder of beloved star quarterback Bastion Attia. Though he's devastated, fellow high school junior Nesbit Nuñez must grieve privately—Bastion was his secret boyfriend and the leader of their coven of witches. As increasingly disturbing events confirm that Bastion's death might have a supernatural cause, the North Coven, composed of queer high schoolers, convenes to investigate. Something sinister has been lurking under the town for centuries, and the coven is forced to grapple with the secrets that Bastion kept if they hope to survive its onslaught. Though narrative foreshadowing is occasionally transparent, this supernatural thriller takes characters and readers alike on an emotional roller coaster of shocking revelations, culminating in a cathartic, action-packed climax. Plentiful late-'90s cultural references and the heartwarming found family bonds of the North Coven prevent the heavy themes from feeling too grim as Kölsch spins together a web of hidden agendas, secret histories, a terrifying otherworldly antagonist, and real-world horrors of child abuse and homophobia into a dark and chilling debut. Characters are racially diverse. Ages 14–up. *Agents: Martha Perotto-Wills and Molly Ker Hawn, Bent Agency.* (June)

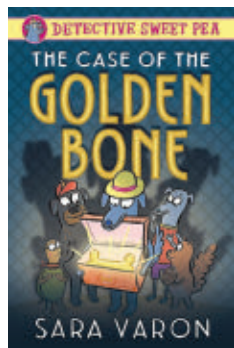
Comics

The Case of the Golden Bone (Detective Sweet Pea #1)

Sara Varon. First Second, \$22.99 (208p) ISBN 978-1-250-23637-1; \$14.99 paper ISBN 978-1-250-34840-1

Blue-hued pooch Sweet Pea lives a

carefree life in Parkville, where all species coexist peacefully. There, she indulges in her passions of creating art, spending time with friends, and dumpster-diving for hidden treasures. The arrival of canine newcomers Casper and Jelly sparks renewed excitement for Sweet Pea, especially since they're fellow art lovers; the newly-minted trio is excited to see the legend-



ary Golden Chew Bone on display at the Parkville Art Museum. While attending its unveiling, however, Parkville denizens are shocked to learn that the monument has

vanished. But with Sweet Pea's extraordinary sense of smell, she's the perfect pup to sniff out the perpetrator. She's accompanied by Wayne, a raccoon whose comedic rivalry with the pooch protagonist provides spirited competition, touching personal moments, and ample additional amusement in this already good-humored whodunit. Simple, cozy, and broadly colorful illustrations by Varon (*My Pencil and Me*) have an analog feel reminiscent of an old-fashioned Saturday morning cartoon. Brimming with visual gags and punny labels scattered throughout ("moldy bread slice," "soggy biscuit," "crumb-covered muffin wrapper"), this straightforward yet goofy graphic novel series launch will have young readers giggling into the next volume. Ages 6–10. (June)

The Tale of a Thousand Faces (Rune #1)

Carlos Sánchez. Flying Eye, \$15.99 paper (144p) ISBN 978-1-83874-121-1

After fleeing from bullies at their orphanage in Little Valley, besties Chiri and Dai stumble through a portal to Puddin, a land filled with strange beings, magical objects, and a pervasive fear of the Shadow King. Upon befriending druid Sophie and Oko the Ogroid, Dai trains with Oko to become a swordsman while Chiri—who wears a hearing aid—realizes that her sign language skills double as wizard speech. As the tweens

practice their new talents, the Shadow King prepares to escape Puddin, where he plans to wreak havoc in Little Valley and beyond. Spanish artist Sánchez utilizes vibrant primary colors and softly rounded *Adventure Time*-style artwork that features a kaleidoscope of oddities to evoke *Alice in Wonderland* vibes. The best friends' sign language conversations are rendered in prominent yellow and blue speech bubbles, and Chiri's way of expressing herself proves integral to the protagonists' adventure. Nuanced explorations of friendship, resilience, and the discovery of one's potential in the face of adversity add emotional depth to this sweet and charming fantasy graphic novel series opener. Chiri has red hair and pale skin; Dai wears glasses and has brown skin. Ages 8–up. (June)

Wolfpitch

Balazs Lorinczi. Top Shelf, \$19.99 paper (192p) ISBN 978-1-603-09539-6

A bass-playing werewolf with a temper, a milkshake-loving ghost keyboardist, and a disgruntled human drummer team up to compete in a musical tournament in this spectral *Josie and the Pussycats*-leaning graphic novel romp by Lorinczi (*Doughnuts and Doom*). Despite her untimely death, Geraldine still books nightly gigs playing her keyboard at a local café. But Battle of the Bands rules state that Geraldine's nonliving status means she can't go solo. So, when bassist Izzy gets booted from her band the Iguanoids, she and Geraldine team up to form Wolfpitch. After a confrontation between Izzy and Iguanoids drummer Delilah ends with Delilah also getting fired, desperate times call for desperate measures and Delilah becomes Wolfpitch's drummer. The trio struggle to form a cohesive unit, until Izzy and Delilah's feud gives way to romance. With Wolfpitch in harmony and a threat to the Iguanoids, Izzy and Delilah's former bandmates resort to nasty tricks to take them down. A pastel color palette and thin line art feel somewhat out of sync with the characters' electric chemistry and leap-off-the-page personalities. Characters are portrayed with varying skin tones. Ages 13–17. (June)

BookLife Reviews

BookLife Reviews are paid reviews of independently published books.

A lightning bolt (⚡) indicates an Editor's Pick, a book of outstanding quality.

MYSTERY/THRILLER

EDITOR'S PICK

Killing Johnny Miracle

J.K. Franko | Rum House Publishing
440p, hardcover, \$19.99, ISBN 978-1-8382759-4-5

Franko follows up the Roy Cruise Series with a pleasurably mean Texas thriller of love, revenge, and the law. Johnny and Mary Miracle are a young couple of means who have fallen out of love. Well, that's not completely true—Johnny is actually in love, just not with Mary, his wife. Once he learns Mary's darkest secrets, he plans to divorce her right away, and he has the leverage to make it hurt her—and profitable for himself. With nothing less than a vineyard and a Monet to lose, Mary must take action. Raising a glass to toast "motivated women," she hatches a plot of her own. She knows plenty of Johnny's secrets, too, and she's willing to kill to keep her lifestyle. From the grabber of a first page, she's committed to just what the title promises: she will see Johnny die.

No thriller worth its salt is that simple, of course, and it turns out that Mary isn't the only one who has beef with Johnny. Franko wrings



Captivating marital thriller of love, lust, revenge, and murder.

Great for fans of James Chandler's Sam Johnstone series, Alice Feeney's *Rock Paper Scissors*.

suspense from the questions of who will get to him first and who might get hurt in search of revenge, employing non-chronological storytelling from a variety of viewpoints to build to twists, turns, and revelations that will sweep up readers of dark suspense and leave them eager to guess at

how the pieces could possibly tie together in the end. Getting into the minds of these witty characters throughout is a poison-laced pleasure.

Love, lust, betrayal, and the complexities of securing a fortune keep the pot boiling. Fans can expect the brisk, purposeful pace that Franko has demonstrated in previous books, a plot whose surprises can't be gamed out, incisive attention to the legalities of it all, and a host of vibrant characters whose schemes, secrets, and chatter ("Gotta die of somethun'," the sheriff declares after being warned that his glazed donuts aren't good for his health) keep the pages turning.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MYSTERY/THRILLER

EDITOR'S PICK

Preacher Stalls the Second Coming: An Evan Wycliff Mystery

Gerald Everett Jones | LaPuerta Books and Media
330p, trade paper, \$18.99, ISBN 979-8-9860953-8-7

The standout fourth entry in Jones's Evan Wycliff mystery series sparkles, despite its protagonist, the one-time pastor of Missouri's Evangel Baptist, finding himself at his lowest ebb. "I'm unchurched, defrocked, and if it weren't for the boundless generosity of one Zip Zed letting me housesit a broken-down little trailer rent-free, I'd be homeless," Wycliff declares—and that's not even touching on his separation from his wife, Loretta, and the loss of his beloved dog, Murphy. Even the new friend he just met, an aged German who drags him out of that borrowed manufactured home for pancakes and heady conversation at the C'Mon Inn, is quickly ripped from Wycliff—and this mortal coil—by a passing F-150. But as Wycliff looks into the accident, plus a missing girl and the arrival in his patch of southwestern Missouri of a cultish end-times commune, he can't stop thinking about the German's warning:



Standout mystery of faith, corruption, and a minister at his lowest ebb.

Great for fans of Ann Cleeves, Julia Spencer-Fleming.

that someone out there could be planning to fake the Second Coming of Christ, this time through advanced digital technology.

Like its predecessors, *Preacher Stalls the Second Coming* blends unusually humane and thoughtful procedural sleuthing with a brisk pace, winning local color, and ace scenecraft and surprises, all powered by a strong undercurrent of moral and spiritual inquiry. It won't surprise readers of mysteries (or of newspapers) that Pastor Obadiah of the End-Times Retreat Center has secrets in his past and entanglements with politicians. But Jones's depiction of this milieu—of believers and belief, trailer parks and superstores, the tensions faced by a woman pastor—is always revealing and surprising, both warm and incisive.

Highlights abound, with a tense discussion of the Book of Revelation between Wycliff and Pastor Obadiah proving more gripping than many mysteries' shootouts. The same goes for a scene of faith healing. Both author and detective are touchingly open to people's better angels but not all that shocked by corruption, charlatans, and killers.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

EDITOR'S PICK

Who She Left Behind

Victoria Atamian Waterman | Historium Press
232p, e-book, \$28.99, ISBN 978-1-962-46500-7

This touching multigenerational story of women facing trauma over decades draws readers to the harrowing journey of Victoria Karadelian, a survivor of the Armenian genocide, as she navigates the challenges of displacement, loss, and the quest for a new life. Losing her father and brothers in the war, Vicky and her remaining family face exile to Aleppo, Syria, only to be further separated as she becomes a maid in the Yavuz household—a situation she needs to escape from. "That was how it was," observes Waterman's narrator. "People moved on, or they were moved along." Spanning continents and generations, the story eventually turns on the discovery of a pair of Armenian dolls buried in a gravesite, holding the potential to reunite lost families and begging to heal an enduring intergenerational trauma.

Historical authenticity is a standout feature of Waterman's debut, as *Who She Left Behind* expertly delves into Armenian heritage, while the



A generational story of exile, displacement, and motherhood in a foreign land.

Great for fans of Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Kate Morton's *The Secret Keeper*.

striking descriptions imbue this Aleppo with cultural richness and a vivid sense of the textures of life, from Ascension Day feasts to the intoxicating feel of a waltz. These ties connect the characters to the lost threads of generations over decades. Waterman brings insight and empathy to this cast, who emerge as complex and convincing people. Like her mother, Vicky shares the burden of shame from her fate in the Yavuz household. Determined to keep her secrets to her grave, she inadvertently creates an invisible divide between herself and her family—one that, decades later, her niece Rose is determined to resolve.

Distinguished by brisk storytelling and a deftly handled interplay between past and present, Waterman's novel portrays with power the dynamics of trauma and abuse faced by displaced women. *Who She Left Behind* is a moving story of a refugee's legacy and motherhood, extending beyond familial lineage to encompass the exploration of intergenerational trauma, displacement, and survival that readers of sweeping, thoughtful novels will find resonant.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

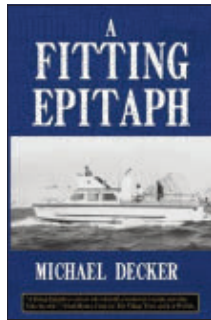
EDITOR'S PICK

A Fitting Epitaph

Michael Decker | Gate Five Publishing
128p, trade paper, \$14.99, ISBN 979-8-218-34723-9

Decker's briny, memorable debut, the story of three down-on-their-luck fishermen, revolves around a plan to sail to Mexico to fish for albacore. Things don't go exactly as planned, of course, but that's the way of the sea, and this beautifully told novel, like all journeys, is fundamentally about the experience—and, as the narrator notes, it's also about a "communion," of a sort, "the joining between the sea and the old sailor who knew her so well." That sailor is Ike, a blistering old salt who's been at sea all his life. He's joined in this undertaking by Tom, a neophyte with a penchant for adventure, and Bill, unemployed and broke after pouring all his money into the *Skate*, an old and worn-out boat whose apparent seaworthiness stirs a teenager to say "Either you're brave as hell or you're crazy."

The narrative is a little slow to pick up, and it may take landlubbers some time to get used to the slang and terminology—Decker knows and loves sailor speak. But once you settle into it, the story breezes along,



Marvelous sailing adventure, action-packed and meditative.

Great for fans of Peter Nichols's *A Voyage for Madmen*, Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone Around the World*.

flowing on its natural currents, distinguished by Decker's surehanded understanding of the work, rewards, and dangers of such an odyssey. Prose and dialogue are sparse and gruff ("Ain't nothin' on the land or in the sea stronger'n a shark," Ike notes). The elemental realism will hook lovers of adventure stories drawn from life, and Decker reels readers in deeper as his men reveal themselves, their vulnerabilities as engaging as their actions. And just when the seas seem comfortable, everything gets shaken up, with two strong climaxes back to back.

Lovers of the sea and sailing will really enjoy this book, which is attuned to beauty but also to danger. The meditative passages are rich in mood, character, and a stirring sense of the power of nature, as Decker's pacing reminds readers to live in the moment, aware that everything can change in an instant.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

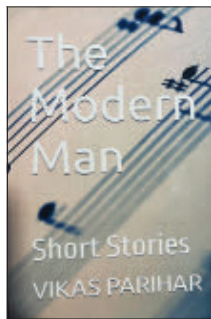
FICTION

The Modern Man: Short Stories

Vikas Parihar
80p, trade paper, \$8.99, ASIN B0CP292N7F

Parihar's debut short story collection, following last year's *Poems of Everyday*, offers a series of pointed, at times outraged narratives that seek to address the various ways in which humanity inflicts violence upon itself both in the interpersonal realm and the sociopolitical. From a partial retelling of Narcissus to a fingerless Holocaust survivor's death bed retrospections to a contemporary man's existential struggle, Parihar's stories explore humanity's worst crimes against itself, and question how global acts of violence have affected individuals and humanity as a whole.

Parihar's love of poetic form shows in one-sentence paragraphs, lines that purposefully repeat structures, with small alterations, building for effect, and an often detached, observational narrative voice: "Stink of their vomit persisted in the house like memories of the lost glories and the glorious past," the narrator reports, of the bacchanal at the center of "The Host." Uncertain editing and punctuation makes it hard for Parihar's occasionally striking insights to shine, and many sentences prove difficult to parse, sometimes because of Parihar's



Pained, unpolished post-colonial stories exploring trauma, abuse, and violence.

Great for fans of Dean Baldwin and Patrick J. Quinn's *An Anthology of Colonial and Postcolonial Short Fiction*.

inclination toward concision and surprise, and at times because of editing errors. The longest story, "The Daughter of Comradeji," which follows the marriage of Nepalese couple Seema and Mukesh, includes the most developed insights about colonialism, specifically in India and Nepal.

Towards its end, Seema visits a supermarket for the first time with her neighbors. The characters do not realize that "the god of profit, the prophet of grid, two saints named colonization and globalization danced inside out, outside in of the supermarket."

Though these stories prove challenging, on various levels, to read, credit must be given to Parihar for the power and insight of that sentence, plus others throughout. His insights into the genocide, colonialism, and humanity's zeal to abuse are urgent, presented in often vivid language, though sensitive readers should be aware that the stories plumb deeply into these horrors.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: – Editing: **C-** | Marketing copy: **B**

FICTION

Café de Sophia

M. A. Alsadah | BookBaby
201p, e-book, \$4.99, ASIN B0B75M9TGQ

A celebration of the power of ideas, this thought-provoking novella begins with Nate River, a 16-year-old who describes himself as a "lost soul with no passion in life," getting caught up in a surprising, clarifying colloquy that puts him on a new path. While waiting for his mother in Café de Sophia, Nate meets a retired educator nicknamed Plato, who invites him into an intellectually stimulating conversation that leaves a lasting impression in his mind. "At that moment, I felt that I needed the company of someone like Plato in my life," Nate says, aware of his need for guidance. This pivotal encounter propels Nate into a series of rendezvous with Plato and his circle of like-minded thinkers who he deems could set him in the right direction in life.

Rather than adhering to traditional story structures with peaks, twists, and suspense, Alsadah's thoughtfully compelling narrative follows Nate's apprenticeship in philosophical thought and living, revealing the young man's growth through discourse with Plato and his cohort. This philosophical and conversational approach persuades



Richly philosophical dialogues in an exquisite Parisian cafe.

Great for fans of Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World*, Muriel Barbery's *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*.

readers through examinations of justice, equality, morality, perfection, love, and many others. "I see the mind as the most valuable thing a human has," Plato declares, "and only through speech, along with writing, is it ever translated and known." That captures the essence of both his character and the story itself.

The dialogues are similar to each other, with formulaic structures and a lack of distinction among characters. But they serve as the driving force that Alsadah uses to explore compelling arguments, hypothetical scenarios, and intriguing conclusions that illuminate the significance of self-awareness, the diverse spectrum of human perceptions, and the challenges inherent in upholding one's ethical compass amidst the complexities of humanity. Through the lenses of knowledge, reason, and logic, readers are compelled to form their own hypotheses and conclusions, thereby actively participating in the intellectual and thought-provoking journey.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

MEMOIR

EDITOR'S PICK

Dead Dog Road: A True Story into the Dark World of an Abused Child

Diane N. Black | Black Flower Press

320p, e-book, \$17.99, ISBN 979-8-9887079-0-5

In this startling account, Black, a professional children's counselor in Texas, narrates her efforts to save three Russian children from an adoptive mother and father that she believes to be abusive. While running Roosevelt House, a home for children, Black receives a call in July 2008 to evaluate an abuse claim and goes on to meet three children: Alexey, Svetlana and Anastasia. The girls fearfully parrot good things about their adoptive mother, but Alexey tells Black that, in truth, they endure horrific abuse. Black believes her and is shocked to discover that, despite hospitalizations, attempts at running away, and reports to Child Protective Services, the kids are returned again and again to the home after the parents undergo Family-Based Safety Services sessions. Black continues to fight for the children, facing relentless obstacles which eventually include arrest and the possible loss of her license.

In her direct and unadorned prose, Black powerfully conveys the



A children's counselor fought to protect three kids from abuse.

Great for fans of Freya Barrington's *Known to Social Services*, Kathryn Anne Michaels's *Wednesday's Children*.

frustration she feels when she believes that the very agencies created to help children continue to fail them for inane and trivial reasons. She argues that the pain the children suffer doesn't seem to register with the officials, whose choices, as presented here, tend toward the farcical at best. As the title suggests, *Dead Dog Road* plumbs dark acts and motivations, as Black offers unflinching details of accusations of abuse and laments a system that makes it easy to turn a blind eye to such pain.

The author's persistence in pursuing the case shines through this tense and impassioned narrative, especially as she is herself a struggling single mother bringing up two daughters whom she is frequently forced to leave alone under several situations. Her determination to set up Roosevelt House and the surprising way the help that comes pouring in from unexpected quarters is heartening, a reminder of human decency. This sincere account of one woman's determination to save three children from abuse is a gripping and edifying read.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MEMOIR

EDITOR'S PICK

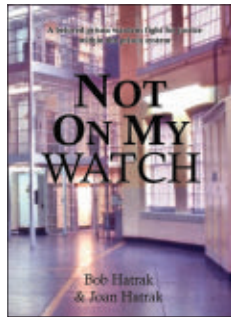
Not on My Watch: A Beloved Prison Warden's 30 Year Fight For Justice In The Prison System

Bob Hatrak and Joan Hatrak | Villa Magna Publishing

323p, hardcover, \$35.99, ISBN 978-1-940-17867-7

This uplifting, told-with-humility memoir centers on one warden's efforts to bring humanity to American prisons in the 1970s, and to reduce recidivism, encourage education, and change a punitive system. At New Jersey's Rahway Prison, Hatrak pioneered rehabilitation programs, vocational training, a wildly successful boxing association, and the program that eventually became known as "Scared Straight," setting the model for reform. Hatrak, writing with his wife Joan, tells an inspiring story of the upbringing that led to this humane approach to justice and his conviction that each inmate must be seen and treated as individuals whose potential needs nourishment. Especially important to him: encouraging each prisoner to envision and prepare for a life after release.

Written in a quick, engaging style, *Not on My Watch* makes Hatrak's upbringing as exciting as the reform stories that follow it. The authors



Rousing story of Bob Hatrak's efforts to reform American prisons.

Great for fans of Shane Bauer's *American Prison*, Nell Bernstein's *Burning Down the House*.

touchingly celebrate the "proud" city of Trenton, New Jersey, and its street sports, horse-drawn ice cart, and group of little rascals who called themselves, playfully, the Beatty Street Gang. He grew up shining shoes, delivering newspapers, and searching for what's next, from marching with his high school band in New York's St. Patrick's Day Parade in ill-fitting pants to getting scouted by the then-Philadelphia Athletics. As an education major at Rider college, he took a job in the mailroom at Trenton State Prison, where he was treated with unexpected kindness by the warden.

Hatrak's accounts of reforming Rahway, meanwhile, offer insight and surprise even for readers familiar with Scared Straight, the heartening effectiveness of Hatrak's reforms, or the rousing story of James Scott, the convicted murderer who, though Rahway's Boxing Association, became a real-world championship contender. Unflinching in the face of the violence and despair, Hatrak's story is a reminder of the difference dedicated people can make on issues of justice and equality. Near the end, Hatrak writes simply of the prisoners, "They did themselves proud."

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MEMOIR

Privilege Lost: How a Nice Jewish Boy Survived Five Years in America's Darkest Prisons

Joshua Elyashiv | Manhattan Book Group

234p, e-book, \$25.13, ISBN 978-1-962-98704-2

In this heated and pulsating memoir, Elyashiv recounts his five-year imprisonment for conspiracy to commit fraud—a RICO conviction, he reports, that came without evidence that he had actually committed a crime. "The reason the feds prevail [in RICO cases] is because they have created a law that eliminates the burden of proof," he writes, while painting a picture of being targeted by the vengeful husband of a woman with whom he had "a fleeting affair." Describing being "beaten to a pulp, even tortured" and wondering "why ... won't they just kill me?" while enduring solitary confinement, Elyashiv laments how someone like him, an educated and upright man from a law-abiding Jewish family, could wind up in the filth and stench of prison life, where one either dies prey or lives a predator. He recounts the move from jail to Century Correctional Facility, where he befriends and defies the worst of inmates, and gradually drifting away from his principles.

Elyashiv's account alarms as he describes being grouped with serial



Unfiltered, outraged account of survival in a harsh American prison.

Great for fans of Anthony Ray Hinton's *The Sun Does Shine*, Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*.

killers, rapists, and others despite being charged with a "conspiracy to commit" a fraud that hardly threatens humanity. Witnessing firsthand the maltreatment from both inmates and authorities, the abuse of power of officers, and the normalcy of violence breeding further violence, Elyashiv asks an

urgent question: "Wasn't prison supposed to be a place where criminals were reformed?"

The narrative seamlessly transitions between the intense, adrenaline-fueled conflicts—combat with the head of a criminal organization and a suicidal plea for mercy killing to a psychopath, among many others—and soul-searching reflections of survival within the harsh confines of the penal system. Life seemingly stopped for five years for Elyashiv, but there are certainly hard-earned lessons from the unexpected camaraderie formed and unresolved childhood and familial issues finally confronted, making up half the bulk of this book. The narrative occasionally lingers in explicit depiction of brutal prison life that readers may find mentally disturbing, but it serves as a raw and dogged testament to human resilience.

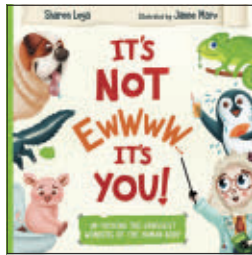
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

PICTURE BOOKS


It's Not EWWW...It's YOU!: Un-Yucking The Grossest Wonders of the Human Body
Sharon Leya | Orange Puffin Playgrounds
 28p, te-book, \$11.95, ISBN 979-8986947389

Leya's charming, hilarious picture book approaches the bodily functions that so often ick kids out from a clear-eyed, scientific perspective, using the titular maxim to encourage children to see our inner workings as natural processes required for optimal health. The distinguished narrator, Professor Ewe—who dons a shirt reading “everything is relative”—guides readers through eight of “the grossest things our body parts DRIP and SPEW,” including mucus, poop, gas, saliva, urine, ear wax, sweat, and blood. The good professor sets out to un-yuck the processes that result in these discharges by explaining the science behind each bodily wonder. “Mucus,” for example, “helps your nose stay clean and stops dust and germs from getting through.”

However, Professor Ewe is not the only instructor. Leya's illustrator, Janna Maru, depicts a whole menagerie of characters, featuring hippos, turtles, sloths, raccoons, dogs, birds, and more, that visually



Amusing, educational picture book that un-yucks the bodies' vital processes.

Great for fans of Kim Norman's *Give Me Back My Bones!*, Justine Avery's *Everybody Poops!*.

clever instance, Professor Ewe takes a canoe ride into an ear canal, armed with a lantern and Q-tips.

These details, along with Professor Ewe's rhymed narration, encourage engagement and repeat readings, but another stand-out component of Leya's book is the concluding “Prof. Ewe Explains” discussion guide that offers a more detailed overview of each of the bodily processes and helpful similes. For example, “sweat... acts like your body's own air conditioner,” and “poop... is like your body's own garbage disposal!” Young children (and those who read to them) will delight in Leya and Maru's combined brilliance and remember that “the next time mucus drips from your nose or you have a stinky fart” it's just the body helping you be you.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

PICTURE BOOKS

Everyone's Included at the Animal Party: The Little Girl Learns about Patience & Imagination
Catie “Aunt Kiki” Greene | Animal Party Kiki
 38p, mass market, \$14.99, ISBN 979-8-218-32704-0

In Greene's encouraging picture book, a little girl learns coping skills to deal with feelings of restlessness and impatience. Early one morning, the girl wakes up excited to leave for her family's beach day—but her father, Daddy B, informs her that they have to prepare first and suggests making a schedule to help her know what's coming. Having a predetermined list of tasks helps the little girl calm her wiggles and jitters, but on the way the family encounters heavy traffic, and she becomes distraught that her itinerary has been disrupted. That's when the girl's parents help her use the power of her imagination to envision the family at an underwater party with a wide array of animals.

This comforting story offers gentle guidance to help both young people and adults handle big feelings. K.K.P Dananjali's expressive illustrations show the curly-haired, bright-eyed little girl as she helps her fathers prepare for their trip, her excitement over their adventure



A little girl learns coping skills to deal with feelings of restlessness and impatience.

Great for fans of Rob Otte's *Lily Discovers People are Like Donuts*, Anne Wynter's *Everybody in the Red Brick Building*.

evident on her face. The most delightful images show the family's undersea gathering, with a grinning, brightly colored octopus, elephant, penguins, jellyfish, and other deep-sea denizens joining them for cupcakes and coffee on the ocean floor.

In keeping with this book's ethos of inclusivity and acceptance, the little girl is part of a two-dad family, with her fathers' affection for her and each other evident in their interactions. At the end of the story, Daddy B and Daddy Y share a quiet moment together on the beach, remembering a time when their loving marriage could have only existed in their imaginations. This will provide children and adults the opportunity to talk about the many different ways families can look. Each page also provides helpful questions for discussion, inviting readers to explore their own strategies for handling impatience and dive deep into their own imaginations.

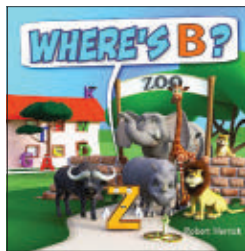
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **A-** | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

PICTURE BOOKS

Where's B?
Robert Herrick | No Drawing Required
 32p, mass market, \$12.95, ISBN 979-8-985-98687-7

The big concert is approaching, and all the letters of the alphabet desperately need to practice their rendition of the alphabet song—but when they kickstart the last practice session, “B” has gone missing, sending the letters into a tizzy and threatening their performance. At first, they attempt the song backwards, in hopes that B will show up unannounced when his turn rolls around, but when the song flops and B's still nowhere to be found, they vow to hunt him down. Herrick (*Ten Is Too Many!*) takes readers on a wild ride with the book's alphabet cast as they take over B's home and the local zoo in search of the elusive escapee.

Aside from giving young readers an entertaining opportunity to practice their alphabet, Herrick offers plenty of fun as well—particularly as the alphabet searches high and low in B's house. “P” of course makes a beeline for the playroom, joined by a few friends, to take up a game of pool, while “H” heads to the hallway, only to miss B waking up late in his room. As B realizes, much to his embarrassment, that he's missed concert practice, he quickly gets ready, taking care of a



Entertaining alphabet cast searches for a letter who's gone missing.

Great for fans of Nancy Lessard Downing's *My Alphabet Soup*, Audrey Wood and Bruce Wood's *Alphabet Mystery*.

morning routine that even includes some time on the toilet. The other letters continue their clumsy search in every nook and cranny, but to no avail.

Meanwhile, “Z” has zoomed off to the local zoo, convinced that B can be found in his favorite exhibits, but his mission's a failure too—and even puts him in danger of missing the concert performance. Herrick's computer-generated illustrations are a collage of brightly hued letters in very relatable situations for young readers, including “L” making a mess of B's laundry room and “K” raiding the fridge. Ultimately, they all manage to reunite just in the nick of time, giving this amusing story a well-earned happy ending.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **B+** | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

MIDDLE GRADE

EDITOR'S PICK

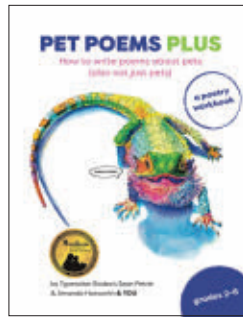
Pet Poems Plus: How to Write Poems about Pets (also not Just pets)

Sean Petrie | Burlwood Books

112p, trade paper, \$18.99, ISBN 979-8-985-07844-2

"Poems are word music," Petrie writes in this interactive follow up to *Pet Poems*, which has been crafted to shepherd younger readers towards writing fun, creative poetry. Rich with hands-on material and brilliantly hued watercolor illustrations by Amanda Hoxworth, the guide teaches the art of poetry on a beginner's level, explaining different types of poems—question, imagine, and describe—while delving into tips and tricks of the trade. Included in those pointers are ways to incorporate similes, metaphors, and personification into poems that are centered mainly on animal subjects but can be generalized to any theme.

Petrie delivers a striking balance between educating readers on the technicalities of poetry and allowing them creative space to construct their own poems. Opportunities for inspiration abound, as readers are coached on ways to make their poetry "sparkle," whether that's cleverly



Creative, inviting approach to poetry for younger readers.

Great for fans of Michael Rosen's *What Is Poetry?*, Marilyn Singer's *Follow the Recipe*.

[they] want," while spicing up a poem can be as simple as dropping an unexpected object into a verse.

From hints on how to master structure to understanding poetical rhythm, Petrie leaves no stone unturned, offering endless prompts that will transform poetry writing into an entertaining and worthwhile pastime for younger readers. Creative expression is key throughout, and Petrie includes opportunities to cut out Hoxworth's jewel-toned pictures for inspiration, as well as spare pages at the end for continued compositions. Particularly helpful are Petrie's eight possible ways to end poems—including a cliffhanger ending to "[leave] everyone wondering"—and sections of review sprinkled throughout the guide. This artistic, fresh approach to poetry will delight young writers.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MIDDLE GRADE

Pet Poems (also not just pets)

Sean Petrie | Burlwood Books

92p, trade paper, \$19.99, ISBN 979-8-985-07840-4

Poet Petrie (*Cracked & Broken*) and artist Amanda Hoxworth delight with simple, accessible poetry for all age readers that delves into the minds of dogs and a variety of other animals. The poet and artist came together during the pandemic to work off each other's talents in "a journey of accidents and experiments. Of delightful discoveries and inspiration." Hoxworth has their subjects in iconic poses in a splash of vibrant watercolors, lively, alive in their element, and some, especially the dogs, with expressive smiles. Petrie paired his poetry to the enigmatic creatures in a gamut of pet thoughts and activities.

Dogs dominate the pages. Some are playful, like the laser focused dog ready to play in "Ball Is ALL," and the one who accepts all the blame in "The Truth." Other poems reveal the emotional adjustments in a dog's life, from a pup determined to make a new location a home in "Foster," to an ode to the "Family Dog" whether they have a whole family to love or just a single owner, and a pit bull convincing you his breed doesn't deserve a "Bad Reputation." Other highlights include the snuggly kitten



A heartening celebration of animals in verse and illustration.

Great for fans of Julie Paschkis's *Flutter & Hum*, L.E. Bowman's *What I Learned from the Trees*.

in "Warmth," the mesmerizing cat's eyes in "Medusa," and a helpful rabbit in "Bunny Aid." Non-pets explore their environments. A wolf challenges his opinion of people in "Fear," a skittish fawn hopes you'll stand "right there" very still in "Clarification," a hippo swims cautiously in the river in "Beneath the Surface," "Sloth Secrets" reveals what these slow cuties really like to do, and don't ever call a mountain goat a sheep in "Perched."

These elegant, modest poems infiltrate the minds of anthropomorphized animals as we imagine them to be and hope they see us too. Readers will feel closer to their beloved dog or to animals in the wild with these brief, heartening, thought-provoking poems and dazzling artwork. This is a good, edifying book to keep handy to read over again.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MIDDLE GRADE

Closet of Dreams

Mark Ukra & Tara Mesalik MacMahon | Lanier Press

218p, trade paper, \$12.99, ISBN 978-1-6653-0165-7

Talking animals are a mainstay in children's stories, but Ukra and MacMahon's imaginative and inviting book for middle-grade readers takes it a step further—here, the critters also play baseball. The story centers on a fourth grader named Child, who has been raised by his Gamma since his parents died in a car accident. He faces typical challenges for a kid his age: he is terrified of the school bully, a boy named Eddie who can already grow sideburns, and he worries he's not good enough to make the little league team. But he also has a very distinctive advantage. Gamma works with an elephant, a hippo, and a bear at a local park, and they regularly help Child out of jams.

The ensuing conflict will feel unique and exciting to young readers. The animals are put to the test when Child's little league team doesn't have enough players and risks forfeiting the season. That's when the lively creatures agree to play—but Child's teammates worry this will only increase Eddie's teasing. Importantly, Ukra's empathetic storytelling makes clear that Eddie isn't a totally unredeemable bad guy,



A boy overcomes his fears to fulfill his baseball dreams, with some charming animal friends.

Great for fans of Lisa Mantchev's *Strictly No Elephants*, Julia Cook's *Tease Monster*.

either, as Gamma suggests, "Did you ever think something terrible might be going on in Eddie's life, and he's taking it out on you?" Gamma's patience is admirable, and worth discussing, especially when it becomes clear she's usually right about things. Throughout the story, Dyer's black-and-white ink illustrations show Gamma, Child, and their animal friends at the park, playing baseball, or sharing a meal in their cozy basement apartment. The main characters are only shown from behind, providing plenty of room for imagination when it comes to their expressions or exact appearances. Then there's the "closet of dreams," which is filled with memorabilia and where Child goes when he needs to feel safe. Ultimately Child learns that he can let go of his fears and live his dreams—no closet required.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MIDDLE GRADE

Sailing with the Wind of Freedom: Lascarina Bouboulis and the War for Greek Independence

Katherine Kaye | Damianos Publishing
153p, hardcover, \$23.95, ISBN 978-1-941-57338-9

Kaye's often thrilling historical novel, her debut, brings to vivid life 19th century Greek folk heroine Lascarina "Bouboulina" Bouboulis and her role in the Greek Revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire. The road to freedom was long, complicated and dangerous, as Kaye makes clear in a richly told story that engages with themes of love, families, war, and oppression. Bouboulina's life in crucial ways mirrors that of Greece itself. At fifteen, she lives in the small seaside village of Spetses where she's shunned by others for defying society's oppressive expectations of women with her love of sailing and thirst for knowledge and independence. She's encouraged by her loving stepfather Lazarou and cautious mother Paraskevi. Bouboulina also stands up to the taunts from the villagers about her biological father, whose identity is closely guarded by her parents.

Blending fiction with fact, Kaye emphasizes her subject's boldness. Entering a boys-only sailboat race, Bouboulina loses after stopping to



A Greek revolutionary's bold life, told for young readers.

Great for fans of Libby Carty McNamee's *Susanna's Midnight Ride*, J. Kasper Kramer's *The Story That Cannot be Told*.

rescue a drowning sailor, an exciting demonstration of her compassionate nature. Bouboulina wins the love of kindhearted merchant Captain Dimitri Bouboulis, but oppression weighs upon her life, as the Ottomans forbid any form of independence, including education, punishing the Greeks with heavy taxes, imprisonment, and executions. Young readers may find it challenging to keep up with the many historical figures in the tale (a dramatist personae helps), and accounts of atrocities, from both sides of the war, are frank and potentially upsetting, especially during the siege of the Monemvasia Island fortress.

Pacing is inconsistent, sometimes rushed and sometimes slow, with more than half the book surveying Bouboulina's life before the revolution officially starts, including lengthy descriptions of war preparations. The personal material is the strongest. Especially uplifting are Kaye's depictions of Bouboulina's family's closeness and her kindness while rescuing a Turkish harem. Dmitri Andreyev's illustrations, emphasizing clothes and culture, are eye-catching, suggesting the richness of the milieu.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A-** | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

MIDDLE GRADE

Amethyst, the Shallows

Kellye Abernathy | Atmosphere Press
296p, trade paper, \$12.99, ISBN 979-8-89132-104-5

Abernathy's middle-grade fantasy, the second installment of the Yellow Cottage Stories series (after *The Aquamarine Surfboard*), is an evocative coming-of-age tale following the inhabitants of sleepy California oceanside town Dipitous Beach as they grapple with the surprises fate has in store for them. When a Sickness disrupts the town's otherwise idyllic existence, the residents are predictably overwhelmed and bewildered, each trying desperately to navigate the treacherous waters of their new lives. When teen Lorelei, fighting to protect her mother from her worsening illness, stumbles across a fantastical ocean creature, it changes the course—and the fortunes—of the town's inhabitants forever.

Dipitous Beach's residents cope with the aftershocks of the town's Sickness on their own terms: Lorelei, an amateur oceanographer, finds solace in taking her purple surfboard, Amethyst, out among the hidden underwater caverns of the ocean; New York city transplant Isaac finds himself alone in a new world; Tad, Lorelei's quiet brother,



An imaginative coming-of-age tale rich with magic, adventure, and friendship.

Great for fans of Rebecca Stead and Wendy Mass's *The Lost Library*, Tahereh Mafi's *Furthermore*.

grows up too quickly as he confronts their mother's illness; Lorelei's boyfriend, Casey, chafes against his parents' overprotectiveness; Condi, granddaughter of a wise yoga teacher, grapples with the growing terror of isolation; and Irish expat Kait longs to leave the America she's feeling

increasingly trapped in. The tale brims with atmosphere, though the many varied viewpoints make for choppy storytelling at times. The cast is relatable for middle grade readers, and, despite the mishmash of traits and personalities, the story's framework—built on oceanography, marine biodiversity, and even magic—is intriguing. Abernathy's use of color as a recurring motif for Tad and Isaac is fully fleshed out and resonates, and the pair's blossoming friendship is a bright spot in the narrative. The storytelling evokes tranquility and mystery alongside coming-of-age transformations that probe the limits of love and adventure, making this a delightful testament to the forces of friendship and bravery.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **-** | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

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ENDNOTES*

*OUR WEEKLY ANNOTATED GUIDE TO HOW A BOOK IS MADE



AMANDA ENGLANDER
Editorial Director,
Union Square & Co.

"This project caught my attention right away: a memoir telling the story of people 'circumventing traditional fertility avenues and meeting up on their own terms to make a baby' is a pitch you reply to, even on a summer Friday in August!"



ELIZABETH LINDY
Cover Designer,
Union Square & Co.

"With an abstract take on insemination, we wanted a clean and direct cover to suggest a balance of the scientific, social, and emotional engineering required for a modern-day, unconventional pregnancy. The circle is ambiguous as a moving target, an entrance into a tube, and a destination into an egg. The title type treatment reinforces a successful penetration into the conception process."



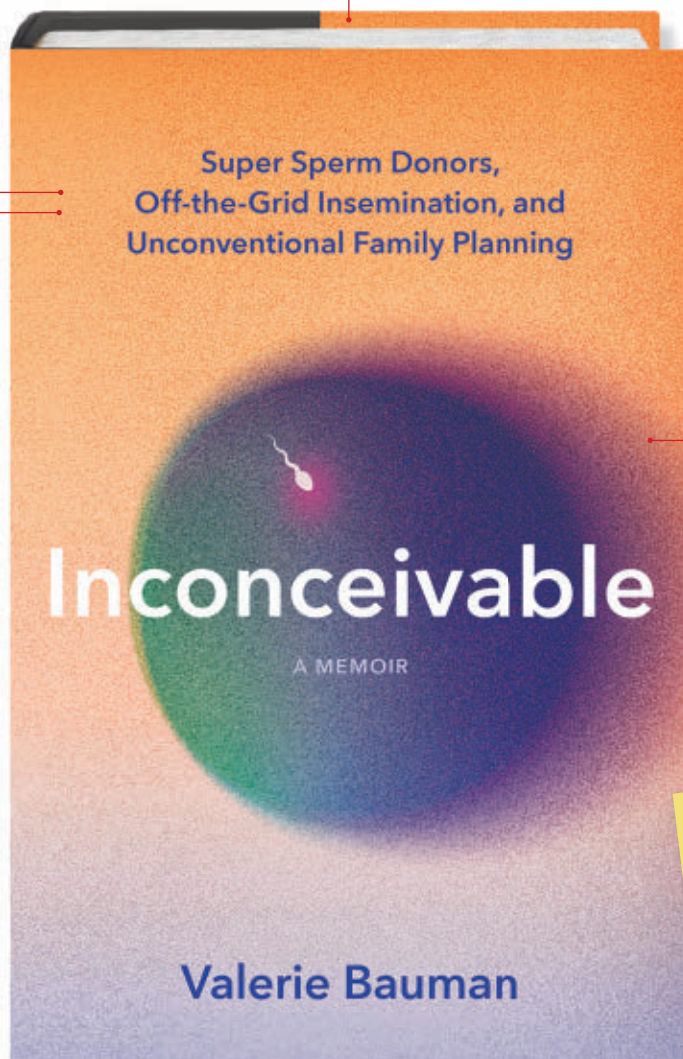
VALERIE BAUMAN
Author

"I knew this was a story I had to tell as soon as I stumbled upon the world of freelance sperm donation during my own quest for motherhood. From the characters and their motivations to the incredibly high legal and ethical stakes for everyone involved, everything about it was absolutely fascinating and unlike anything I'd ever seen before."



NICOLE TOURTELOT
Literary Agent,
The Gernert Company

"Valerie was recommended to me by Gernert's wonderful podcast agent Joy Fowlkes, and the first draft of her proposal was so compelling that my assistant and I were reading at the same time at opposite ends of the office and shouting to each other: 'Did you get to this part yet?' Her personal angle and special access to the characters of the fertility underground had us tearing through the pages."



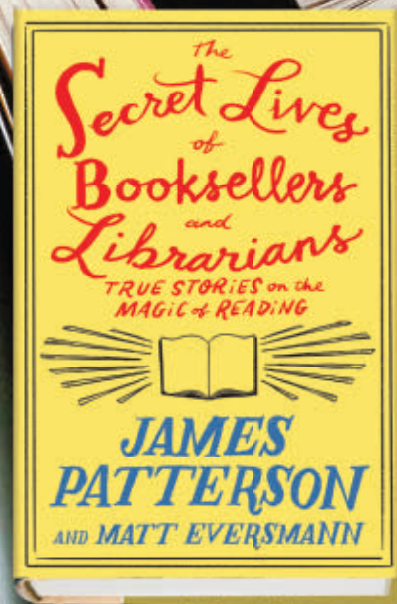
INCONCEIVABLE
Valerie Bauman
Union Square, Apr.
ISBN 978-1-4549-5143-8

ENGLANDER © SARAH JIN

“Armed with empathy, wit, and professional training, booksellers and librarians take the confused, the fearful, the frustrated, and help them become more keen-eyed, sharp-eared, and justice-attuned. What they do is crucial for this country, especially right now. They understand in their hearts and souls that in the beginning was

the word.”

—James Patterson



**“To be a bookseller,
you have to play detective.”**

—Jamie LaBarge
(Kansas City, Kansas)

“It doesn’t matter
what you like to read,
as long as you love
to read.”

—Jessica Claudio
(Staten Island, New York)

“In our minds, it’s ‘Oh yeah.
The bookstore,
I love going there.’

It’s possible we don’t really understand
why we love going there.
We just know that we do.”

—Cody Higgins (Dothan, Alabama)

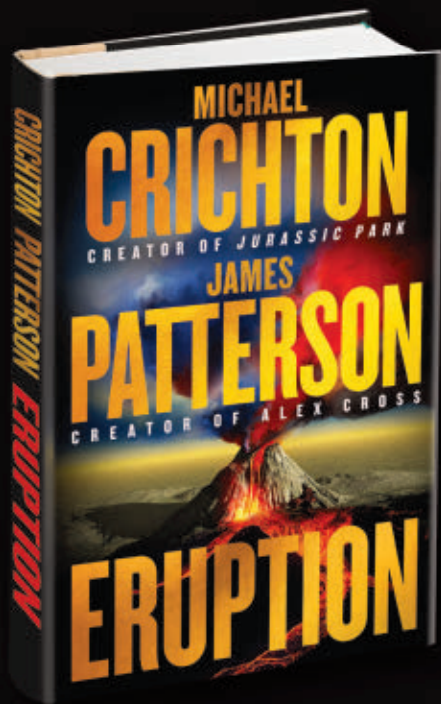
**“I can’t imagine what people do
without books in their lives.”**

—Nancy Moore (North Dartmouth, Massachusetts)



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