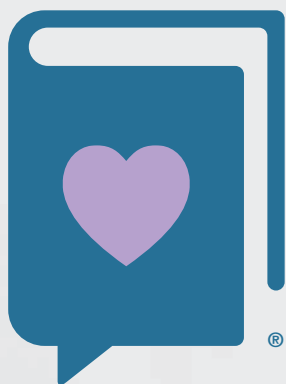


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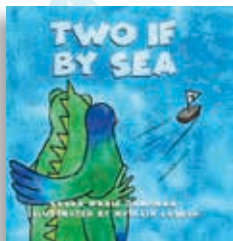
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MARCH/APRIL 2021

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Susan Marie Chapman

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About sea life and how they are affected by garbage and humans in the ocean.

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## Mansa Musa

The Richest Man Who Ever Lived

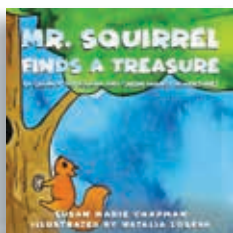
Bunmi Oyinsan

34 pages, \$10.99, 978-1777218225

The story of Mansa Musa, one of the greatest rulers of the Mali Empire.

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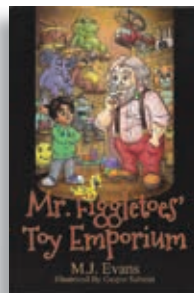
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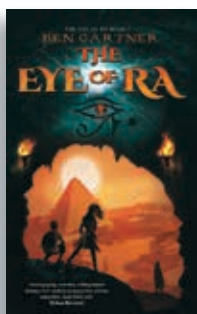
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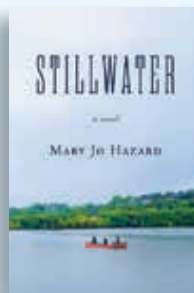
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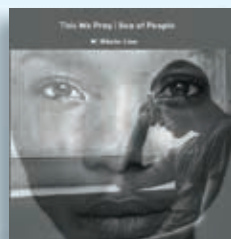
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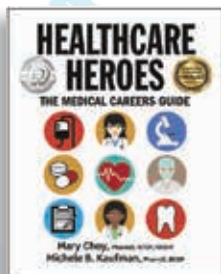
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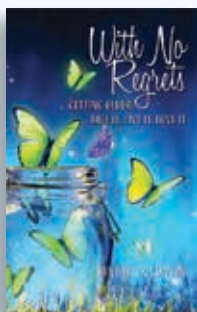
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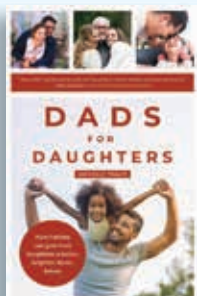
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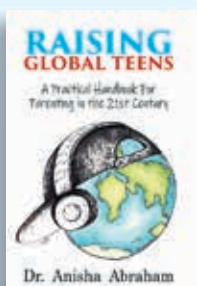
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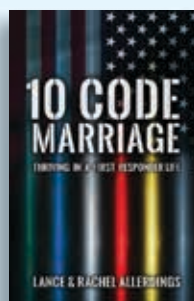
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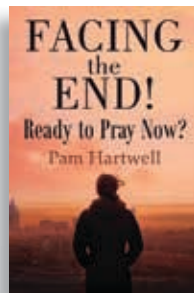
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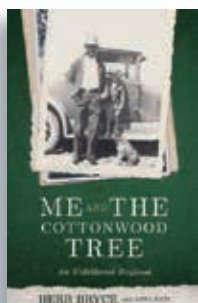
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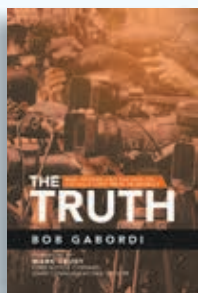
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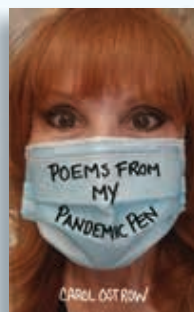
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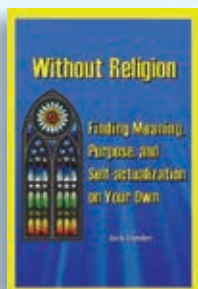
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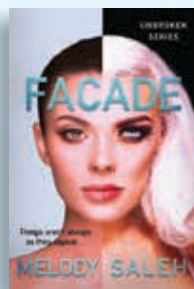
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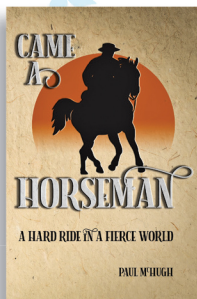
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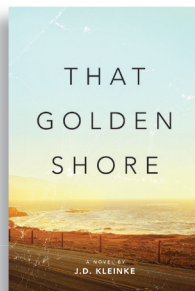
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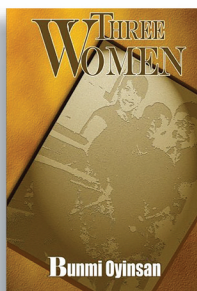
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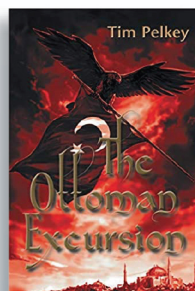
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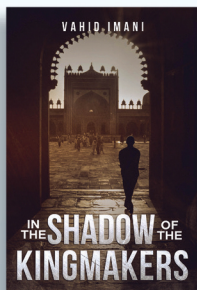
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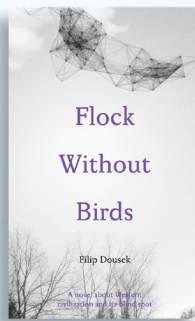
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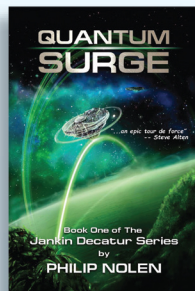
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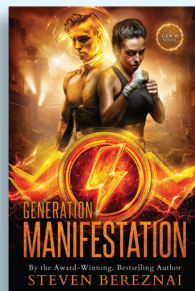
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# FOREWORD REVIEWS

MARCH/APRIL 2021  
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Image left: Caleb, the grandson of author Rochelle Riley, re-creates a portrait of Muhammad Ali in *That They Lived*, photographed by Cristi Smith-Jones. Used with permission from Wayne State University Press. Reviewed on page 33.

Image above from *Me + Tree* by Alexandria Giardino, illustrations by Anna + Elena Balbusso. Used with permission from Creative Editions.

Photo below: Louis Danziger Collection from *How Design Makes Us Think* by Sean Adams. Photo used with permission from Princeton Architectural Press.

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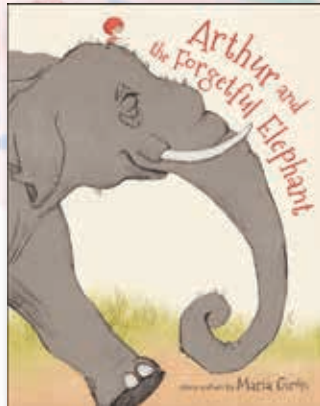


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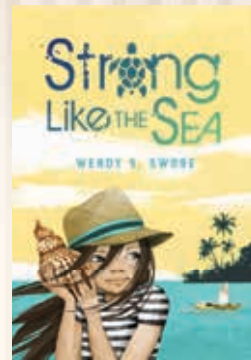
Carol Cujec and Peyton Goddard

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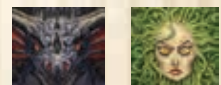


**Legend of the Dragon Slayer**

*The Origin Story of Dragonwatch*

Brandon Mull

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## CREATORS, SURVIVORS, WARRIORS, OH MY!

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

Every feature tells a story.

Sometimes, it's a story that even our editors, who select the books that make each feature up, don't fully understand in the early moments of an issue's creation. Sometimes, the structure and conclusion of the story only becomes apparent after the fact, when reviews return from their scattered readers and fall together to form a pattern. Sometimes distance reveals new angles.

In the case of our Women's Issues feature, we knew that each of the books chosen was powerful on its own, of course. We snapped up titles that approached feminism from unique cultural perspectives; we said fast yeses to fantasies centered around the elemental feminine, to resurrected women's fairy tales, and to true stories of women surviving war. Even so, the feature's full picture didn't emerge until we read their reviews in concert.

We were reminded that women are tough. Soft. Lovers. Warriors. Survivors. Creators. People who yearn. People who mourn. People who celebrate. People who try again.

The final story is a magical one.

This is the gift of books: they remind us of aspects of ourselves, and others, that we might otherwise forget, given the noise and distractions of our daily lives. But books pull us back. They draw our attention to infinitesimal parts of the whole, they demand our awe and delight at the true diversity and breadth of our being.

We are so excited to introduce these 130+ books to you. We know you'll find the same magic within them that we have. ♥



# EXCEPTIONAL GIFT BOOKS



## The Story of the Masters Drama, Joy and Heartbreak at Golf's Most Iconic Tournament

David Barrett, Tatra Press (MAR 18) Hardcover \$30 (340pp)  
978-1-73222-272-4, SPORTS & RECREATION

The Masters Tournament wasn't the first major golf event, but it's been one of the sport's centerpieces for the better part of a century. Former *Golf* magazine editor David Barrett has covered two dozen Masters in his sportswriting career, and his accrued knowledge comes through in *The Story of the Masters*. The book balances serving as a worthwhile omnibus for die-hard golf fans with a great narrative introduction to the tournament for the uninitiated.

This comprehensive book tells the story of each annual tournament from its 1934 founding by golf legend Bobby Jones through to its 2020 edition. It not only recounts the key moments in each Masters, with gripping retellings of some close finishes, but also tells larger career stories of superstars like Arnold Palmer, Jack

Nicklaus, and Tiger Woods through their annual exploits. Interesting sidebars and annual box scores populate the book; each chapter can function as a standalone story, making *The Story of the Masters* an all-in-one reference to one of golf's signature events.

JEFF FLEISCHER



## How Design Makes Us Think And Feel and Do Things

Sean Adams, Princeton Architectural Press (FEB 23) Hardcover \$60 (256pp), 978-1-61689-972-1, ARCHITECTURE

Design is ubiquitous: urging us to buy, suggesting how we should behave, and saying how we should think and feel. However, aside from designers, marketers, and psychologists, few are aware of this constructed messaging in human-built environments. Sean Adams strips off the blinders to deconstruct the design process with clear, clean visuals and snappy prose.

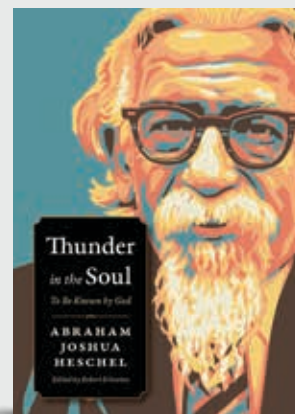
With chapters focused on emotions and intended design messages, prefaced by succinct descriptions of the science underlying human responses to various imagery and stimuli, the book's lively,

opinionated writing and bountiful illustrations demonstrate how successful designers communicate ideas, with examples traversing numerous design disciplines, cultures, styles, and eras.

Brilliant analysis of how humor is used to disarm and engage target markets shows that humans enjoy solving visual puzzles, and thrill at "getting the joke," so that designers can inject humor into sometimes difficult design challenges, like vegetable-themed condom packaging, and whimsical wine labels with anthropomorphic corks.

A playful, edifying addition to any design bookshelf, *How Design Makes Us Think* is an inspirational resource for beginning designers or graphic design firms. Reading it is like donning a pair of magic spectacles that empower non-designers to decode and critique the hidden messages that surround us.

RACHEL JAGARESKI



## Thunder in the Soul To Be Known by God

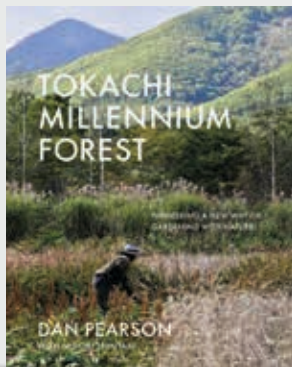
Abraham Joshua Heschel, Robert Erlewine (Editor)  
Susannah Heschel (Contributor), Plough Publishing  
House (MAR 2) Softcover \$12 (152pp)  
978-0-87486-351-2, RELIGION

The image of Abraham Joshua Heschel walking in pace with Martin Luther King Jr. to Selma is seared into the consciousness of every American Jew. Drawing on the Talmud, Jewish prophecy, and interreligious connections, he viewed God as vulnerable to the deeds of humans; as such, he also protested Vietnam, influenced *Nostra aetate*, formed a friendship with Reinhold Niebuhr, and became an inspiration to believers of all stripes.

*Thunder in the Soul* is a compendium of the radical rabbi's teachings, compiled with his emphases on social justice, prophecy, prayer, and spirituality in mind. It draws from, among other works, *The Sabbath*, *God in Search of Man*, and *The Prophets* (a translation of his dissertation, written before he fled WWII Europe for the US). Its dual introductions help to center Heschel's work in the concerns of today, including of racism, war, and poverty—ills credited with diminishing our humanity.

The book maintains the poetic cadences and relentless spirit of inquiry that dominated all of Heschel's work, but distills his lovely and provocative arguments into snack-sized helpings for the seeker on the go. "The world ... is crammed with marvel," Heschel wrote; the same is true of this humble introduction to his work.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER



## Tokachi Millennium Forest

### Pioneering a New Way of Gardening with Nature

Dan Pearson, Midori Shintani, Filbert Press (MAR 1) Hardcover \$65 (288pp), 978-1-9997345-4-1, GARDENING

*Tokachi Millennium Forest* is a gorgeous overview of the design and construction of the Millennium Forest, envisioned by entrepreneur Mitsushige Hayashi, who bought land to make his newspaper business carbon neutral. Over time, the space transformed, with Hayashi aiming to create a landscape that would be sustainable for 1,000 years.

Photographs and text from designer Dan Pearson and head gardener Midori Shintani illuminate the process of fulfilling Hayashi's vision for a beautiful space where visitors can engage with a variety of natural experiences, including the forest, meadow, mountains, a

kitchen garden, and a rose garden.

The nearly 600-acre site on Hokkaido is blanketed in snow half the year, but its vibrant growing season allows an unexpected and lush variety of plant life. The book's descriptions of site work and plantings get pretty geeky, but plant lovers will enjoy the beautiful photographs of the landscape and specimens, as well as the book's explorations of how the gardens were designed to fit in with the imposing Hidaka Mountain backdrop.

*Tokachi Millennium Forest* is a lovely book that tells an important story about what can happen when people work together to establish a legacy that will live long beyond anyone who built it.

SARAH WHITE



## Modern Americana

Max Humphrey, Christopher Dibble (Photographer), Chase Reynolds Ewald (Contributor), Gibbs Smith (APR 20) Hardcover 978-1-4236-5739-2, HOUSE & HOME

"Someone said that interior design is autobiography. For me, it's nostalgia," Max Humphrey notes in the opening to *Modern Americana*, a photographic tour through properties that the Portland, Oregon, designer has designed.

These are homey scenes with clean lines, fluffy textures, period pieces, and folksy touches. The book emphasizes a do-it-yourself approach: salvage wood and other fittings. Paint your own furniture—"the chippier the better." Gather baskets, cans, stoneware, old flags, or quilts for a custom-made display. "Three of anything is a collection," after all.

Inspiration comes from across the USA: a saloon counter and bandana prints recall the Wild West, sugar sack pillow cases and old maps summon the rural South, and rocking chairs and barn doors evoke Shaker New England. One can even "bring the outdoors in" via floral prints and vintage antlers mounted on foam deer heads.

The book's Instagram-ready images are its true star; a narrative is fashioned in the way that they move from materials to placement to in situ enjoyment. Cozy and quirky, these interiors bring to mind a relaxed, colorful *Magnolia* by way of Wes Anderson. Don your flannel and denim and curl up on a window seat to soak up the pages' rustic charm.

REBECCA FOSTER

Image from *Modern Americana*, by Max Humphrey, Christopher Dibble (Photographer), Chase Reynolds Ewald (Contributor). Used with permission from Gibbs Smith.

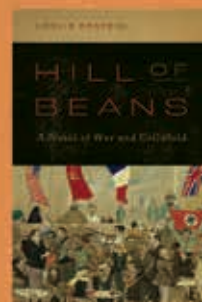
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# LIVES OF LASTING IMPRESSION

Extraordinary people who responded to the needs of their times in a way that goes far beyond what most would, or could, are the subjects of these biographies. All have made a lasting mark on our world: the woman who adopted and raised the child who would become the Buddha, and who had a pivotal role in opening access to the dharma teachings to women; a young woman, elected Prime Minister of New Zealand, whose call for kindness and compassion in government is changing her country's politics; two Black men, one a precedent-setting American journalist during the 1960s, and the other, called "Father of the Underground Railroad," who inspire with their courage and rightness for their times; and a multiple-award-winning writer from New Jersey whose work reflects the struggle with what it means to be a Jewish man in twentieth century America, with all its tumult and conflicts. Be inspired, and enjoy!

KRISTINE MORRIS



## JACINDA ARDERN

Michelle Duff, Allen & Unwin (APR 1) Softcover \$22.95 (288pp), 978-1-988547-57-2

Michelle Duff's *Jacinda Ardern* follows the political trajectory of the world's youngest woman leader, whose commitment to "relentless positivity" has changed the course of New Zealand's politics.

Ardern's 2017 election introduced New Zealand's hyper-macho culture to a more consensus-seeking leadership style. Her platform, based on kindness, inclusivity, social justice, and gender equality, and her commitment to tackle issues like housing and homelessness, child poverty, education, health, domestic violence, the increasing gap between rich and poor, and climate change, were a welcome breath of fresh air to a nation weary of trudging the same old path, year after year, and seeing little change. "It felt, for a short breathless moment, as though it wasn't just Ardern who had won the election. It felt as though it was all of us," writes Duff.

When shots rang out at two Christchurch mosques on March 15, 2019, leaving fifty-one dead and about fifty wounded, Prime Minister Ardern's response was decisive, immediate, and empathetic. Donning a hijab, she personally consoled survivors, called on New Zealanders to unite against evil and not against its victims, then had gun law reform passed within days.

The book highlights Ardern's strong, dignified response to the stereotypes that still color perceptions of women in power. That she won an election, negotiated a coalition, established a new government, attended to national emergencies, represented her country on the world stage, gave birth, continues to fulfill her role as a mother, and manages it all with wisdom and grace goes a long way toward refuting patriarchal gender stereotypes.

While it remains to be seen what Ardern's long-term legacy will be, Duff's engaging book shows her leading New Zealand to discover and live its "better self," and changing the whole game of politics for the better.





## PHILIP ROTH A Counterlife

Ira Nadel, Oxford University Press (MAR 10) Hardcover \$29.95 (568pp)  
978-0-19-984610-8

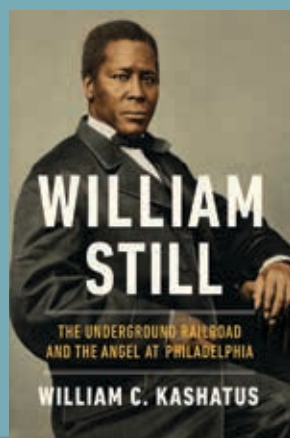
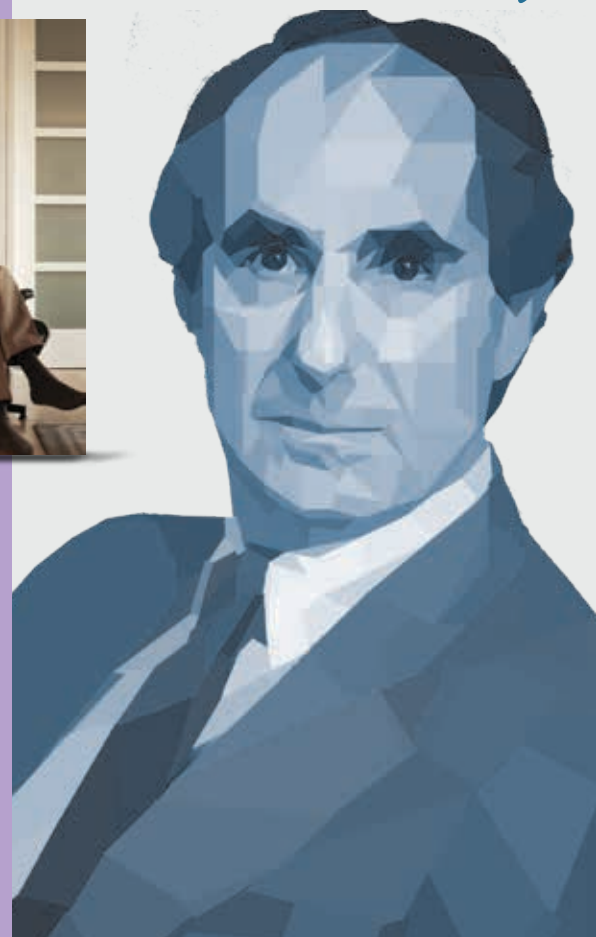
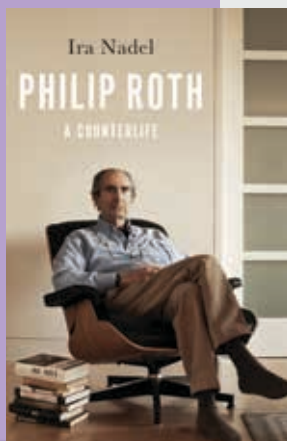
Ira Nadel's *Philip Roth: A Counterlife* is an intense and illuminating study of the life, times, and work of the Jewish man from Newark who became one of America's most original and provocative writers.

Nadel brings meticulous research, attention to detail, and extensive knowledge of Roth's work to his incisive and intimate portrait of the man whose writings, marked by dark comedy and a tendency toward acidic wit, explored the contradictions and neuroses of being a Jewish man in twentieth-century America. Drawing on interviews and archives, personal correspondence, Roth's own work, and never-before-revealed material, the book traces Roth's life, from his identity-shaping, Depression-era childhood in Weequahic, a Jewish enclave in Newark, New Jersey, throughout his fifty-plus-year career as a writer and educator.

Plagued by physical pain and illness, failed relationships, anxiety, and rage, Roth lived out his inner conflicts, and some of his wildest imaginings, in his writing. Exploring Roth's pleasure in creating a "counterlife" for himself, the book casts light on the stunning degree to which his work blurs the lines between truth and fiction.

Roth was awarded a Pulitzer Prize, three PEN/Faulkner Awards, the Man Booker International Prize, two National Book Awards, two National Book Critics Circle Awards, and a place in the hallowed Library of America, but his work was not universally well received. As Nadel reveals, some found his focus on Jewish men's sexual neurosis distasteful; others were troubled by his acts of revenge (he had a penchant for writing those who had offended him into his books); and several noted rabbis declared his work harmful to Jews.

Nadel's pointed analysis explores how Roth, who once said he "didn't want to be caged in by reality," exposed the realities that all face, but most seek to avoid.



## WILLIAM STILL The Underground Railroad and the Angel at Philadelphia

William C. Kashatus, University of Notre Dame Press (APR 1)  
Hardcover \$35 (356pp), 978-0-268-20036-7

In *William Still*, William Kashatus relates the story of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society (PASS) clerk who risked his life to help nearly a thousand escaped slaves reach freedom during the tumultuous years leading up to the American Civil War.

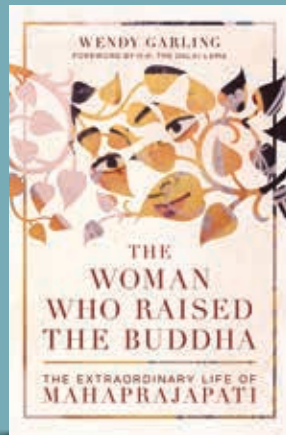
The book begins with the poignant story of Still's encounter with his older brother, one of two who had been missing since they were left behind when their mother and sister escaped from slavery. It details how Still, in defiance of the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, became a pivotal

Underground Railroad agent known as "The Angel at Philadelphia." Self-taught and ambitious, the free Black abolitionist and director of the Eastern Line of the Underground Railroad also became a writer, philanthropist, and early civil rights leader, but his anti-slavery work was ignored until the late twentieth century, as early accounts of the Underground Railroad were written by white abolitionists who tended to emphasize their own contributions.

Kashatus's account is the first comprehensive biography of William Still. It includes the records Still kept, listing the names, places of origin, dates of escape, genders, and ages of each of the fugitive slaves he helped, making it a valuable resource for scholars and Black Americans researching their ancestry. Still had also interviewed each of the fugitives and compiled their stories into a book; his *Underground Railroad* is regarded as the most authentic source of information on the clandestine route to freedom.

Kashatus's detailed biography of William Still, with its stories of courageous slaves plotting daring escapes, and moving accounts of free Black people who were kidnapped and taken into slavery, reveals the interracial cooperation involved in helping escaped slaves reach freedom, and honors the man who, at his death in 1902, was named "Father of the Underground Railroad."





## THE WOMAN WHO RAISED THE BUDDHA The Extraordinary Life of Mahaprajapati

Wendy Garling, Shambhala Publications (MAR 23) Softcover \$18.95 (272pp), 978-1-61180-669-4, WOMEN'S STUDIES

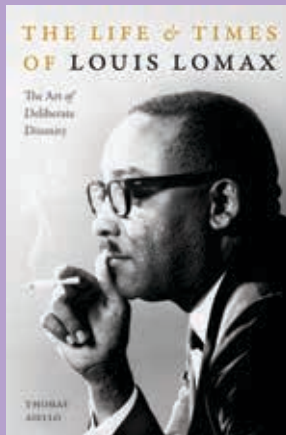
Wendy Garling's *The Woman Who Raised the Buddha* fills a gap in historical accounts of the origins of Buddhism, which, like most major religions, has erased or devalued the contributions of women.

When her sister, Maya, died seven days after having given birth to Siddhartha, Mahaprajapati, queen of the Sakyas, took the infant Boddhisattva to her breast, adopted him as her son, and raised him until he left home at the age of twenty-nine to fulfill his life's purpose. Part of that purpose was to establish an egalitarian fourfold religious community of nuns and monks, laywomen and laymen.

But with patriarchy and misogyny rampant in the ancient world, Garling reveals, men among the monastics took control of the Buddha's legacy upon his death around 400 BCE. Women's contributions, as well as the Buddha's intent for equality in access to the dharma, were diminished or erased from Buddhism's narrative and practice. While Mahaprajapati's pivotal role in forming the order of Buddhist nuns is known, accounts of her life were fragmentary and rare.

Garling's book helps restore balance to the Buddhist narrative, relying on early women's stories translated from Buddhism's first written languages (Sanskrit and Pali), translations from writings of other Asian cultures, and a surprising cache of women's literature sequestered within the Pali canon. It illuminates the turbulent life and times of Mahaprajapati, a woman who not only loved and nurtured her adopted son as her own, but had the courage and spirit of adventure needed to confront entrenched men's dominance.

*The Woman Who Raised the Buddha* not only reveals how Buddhism, after more than 2,500 years, is still marked by patriarchy and misogyny, but brings to light the courage and human love that lie at its root.



## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF LOUIS LOMAX The Art of Deliberate Disunity

Thomas Aiello, Duke University Press (APR 2) Softcover \$26.95 (264pp), 978-1-4780-1180-4

Thomas Aiello's *The Life and Times of Louis Lomax* is an incisive, engaging study of the out-of-the-box life and outspoken journalism of a man whose character and precedent-setting work mirrored the turbulence and dramatic change of 1960s America.

The book follows Lomax's rise from a Depression-era childhood in Georgia, with its national reputation for white supremacist violence, to become one of the twentieth century's most important Black journalists. Early exposure to the horrors and indignities of racism taught the Valdosta Baptist preacher's grandson that cunning and guile could keep him alive and be used as weapons against racists. Quick to see both the faults and strengths in an argument, Lomax was able to pivot, and even dissemble when

necessary, to gain his ends. And while he favored non-violence, he made an exception for dealing with American white men, calling them "a racist, violent people...who only understand violence."

A staunch ally of both Malcolm X and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Lomax defied categorization. The book's lively and often disturbing narrative reveals that the pioneering journalist and syndicated radio and television host was also a convicted criminal and a serial liar with a record of domestic abuse, four divorces, and two DUI arrests. He was a study in contradictions, and not above embellishing a story, especially if doing so put him in the spotlight.

Mystery surrounds Lomax's death in a car crash on July 31, 1970, at the age of forty-seven. A prominent psychic suggested foul play. Even in death, Lomax was an enigma.

Aiello's detailed, intense book honors Louis Lomax's contributions to Black journalism, to the civil rights movement, and to the ideal of a democracy that practices "the art of deliberate disunity," listening to, and valuing, a diversity of opinions. ♥

# JOIN THE HUNT



## THE STAR HUNTERS TRILOGY

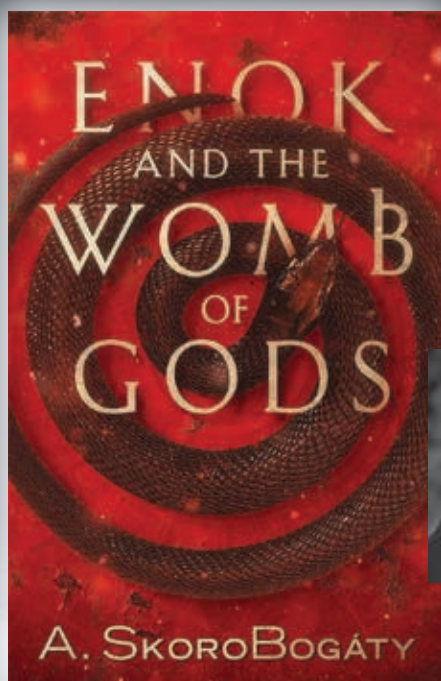


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*“A unique and thoughtfully conceived saga.”*—★★★★★ SELF-PUBLISHING REVIEW

*“... imagines a primordial world, before the Garden of Eden, in which the serpents are in charge.”*—FOREWORD CLARION REVIEW



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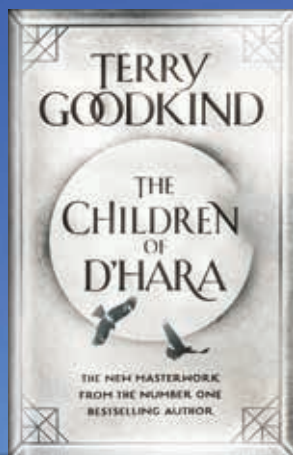
# INTO THE GUESSED-AT

DOORWAYS TO OTHER REALMS. MERCILESS GODDESSES. WEIRD, DANGEROUS LIFE FORMS. In some ways, science fiction and fantasy are the ultimate escape. They allow us to explore realities that never were or never will be, to explore new worlds or to see our own world in a new light. But what makes science fiction and fantasy special is not the strange, but the familiar: the wilder the worlds that they create, the more they reveal universal truths about ourselves—and where we could end up, if we are not careful.

EILEEN GONZALEZ

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## THE CHILDREN OF D'HARA

Terry Goodkind, Head of Zeus (FEB 4) Hardcover \$32.95 (912pp), 978-1-78954-133-5, FANTASY

A royal couple fights to preserve their magic and their way of life in Terry Goodkind's fantasy epic *The Children of D'Hara*.

The D'Haran Empire is finally at peace. Its rulers, Richard and Kahlan, risked much to secure that peace, and now they are confronted with the unintended consequences of their actions. Facing threats to both their family and their kingdom, Richard, Kahlan, and seven trusted associates undertake a perilous quest to protect everything they hold dear.

Goodkind has a vast, intriguing creative vision. His characters traverse many diverse locations as they seek to avoid—and later confront—the enemy. In the labyrinthine, trap-riddled catacombs of the People's Palace, Richard risks his life in the timeless underworld to save a beloved ally. The group then ventures into enchanted forests and putrid swamps on their way to safety. The climax takes place in a strange, red-tinged world dominated by humid wetlands and hazardous rock formations.

Each location has its own challenges for the characters to overcome. Otherworldly creatures lurk in the palace's shadowy corridors, striking whenever and wherever Richard and Kahlan are at their most vulnerable. A distant goddess, determined to “collect” D'Hara at any cost, can possess almost anyone, making trust a deadly luxury.

The worldbuilding is complex and intricate. Lengthy descriptions relay each setting's dangers, the characters' fears and doubts, and grisly scenes of battle and torture. In the end, it is not brute strength that wins the day, but intelligence and compassion. Sacrifices must be made, merciless foes slain, and unexpected allies persuaded to join this ultimate battle for the fate of two worlds.

Old villains resurface and new ones arise in *The Children of D'Hara*, an epic-length fantasy set in a sprawling world of magic and menace.



## DAUGHTER OF THE SALT KING

A. S. Thornton, CamCat Books (FEB 2) Hardcover (448pp), 978-0-7443-0048-2, FANTASY

In A. S. Thornton's romantic fantasy novel *Daughter of the Salt King*, a princess strives to find peace and happiness with the jinni she loves.

Just as Emel's dreams are about to come true, tragedy robs her of her last chance to marry and find freedom beyond the confines of her father's palace. In the midst of her despair, she learns the true source of her father's wealth and power: Saalim, a jinni imprisoned in a glass that never leaves the king's side. As their love grows, an impossible choice looms: one of them will have to sacrifice everything to secure the other's freedom.

Despite her royal status, Emel is as much a prisoner as Saalim. When she is not being forced to perform for potential suitors, she sneaks away to a nearby market to visit friends and learn about faraway places. After meeting Saalim, her world expands, and her desire to explore it deepens. The camaraderie between them blossoms, only to wilt under misunderstandings and jealousy before growing back, stronger than ever.

Sumptuous settings include the ruined but still beautiful city Saalim once called home, and the marketplace that grows ever quieter as mysterious brigands threaten the Salt King's domain. Intricate designs at the start of each chapter and ephemeral illustrations add to the story's atmosphere. As secrets are revealed and danger creeps ever closer, Emel keeps hope in a stranglehold, refusing to be cowed by her dire prospects and cruel father. Saalim's love emboldens her to take power where she can find it. But the most important lesson she learns is how to put herself first, even when the whole world tells her she is nothing.

*Daughter of the Salt King* is an unforgettable fantasy novel about love, freedom, and the discovery of self-worth.



## BLUE MAR

Francesca G. Varela, Owl House Books (MAR 16) Softcover \$18.95 (280pp), 978-1-947003-64-4 SCIENCE FICTION

Two sisters find very different destinies in Francesca G. Varela's novel *Blue Mar*.

Laurel and Paloma have never been to El Salvador, where their beloved Abuelo grew up; gang wars fueled by climate change have made Central America too dangerous to visit. After Abuelo's unexpected death, they decide to go anyway. While spending the summer on their family's farm—now endangered by flooding and extreme weather—both women find new perspectives on climate change, and new dreams to fight for.

The relationship between Laurel and Paloma is complex. While not estranged, they struggle to connect. Laurel is enthralled by a corporation's failed attempt to turn plastic waste into an island resort, and how the place has become a rallying point for environmental activists seeking to build a self-sufficient utopia. Meanwhile, Paloma, who thought she had her future all figured out, now questions her plans in light of worsening climate change. The gap between the sisters widens thanks to their differing views on cultural identity, the human toll of climate change, and what humans owe to each other and the world.

The story's poignancy is enhanced by its familiarity: though set in an unspecified future, the picture it paints of a world choking on plastic, droughts, wildfires, new diseases, and rising ocean levels is an eerie echo of current events. The world Laurel and Paloma inhabit—and the decisions they make—will very soon be a reality for too many people. *Blue Mar's* ultimate message, however, is not one of despair. On the contrary, it shows that, even in hopelessness, there is hope—but it must be earned, not given.

Filled with poetic turns of phrase and foreboding visuals, *Blue Mar* is a science fiction novel about awakening to the reality that everyone is responsible for humanity's well-being.



## UNITY

Elly Bangs, Tachyon Publications (APR 13) Softcover \$16.95 (304pp), 978-1-61696-342-2 SCIENCE FICTION

In Elly Bangs's science fiction novel *Unity*, two people, haunted by their past deeds, outrun an apocalypse to find new purpose.

Danae was already planning her escape from Bloom City, an underwater aquapolis, when the war started. She just barely makes it to the surface with the help of Alexei, a suicidal mercenary who can no longer stomach the thought of killing. As they make their way through what was once the Western United States, both Danae and Alexei confront everyone they have been, and everything they have done, before they end their lives—and are reborn.

Set in the 22nd century, *Unity's* immersive world has been ravaged—but not destroyed—by nuclear war, environmental decay, gang wars, and intrusive technology. Land-based countries have collapsed into wastelands where a few meager souls scrounge out a living, and underwater empires bring the entire globe to the brink of destruction again and again.

It is through this unforgiving world that Danae treks in search of her other selves, the people with whom she fused her consciousness in a revolutionary but costly process. Though she longs to rejoin them, she fears her sins are unforgivable. Alexei, bereft of purpose and filled with self-loathing, seeks only to fulfill his obligation to Danae before ending his life. They both keep their pasts to themselves until disaster strikes, sending all of their secrets tumbling out. In trying to save humanity, Danae has lost touch with it, while Alexei was never given the chance to be fully human. They cannot change what they were, but they control who they will become. It isn't much, but it might just be enough to live for.

*Unity* is a dystopian science fiction novel about what it means to be human, and what it takes to retain and reclaim one's humanity.



## WILD SUN Unbound

Ehsan Ahmad, Shakil Ahmad, Uproar Books (FEB 16) Softcover \$16.95 (376pp), 978-1-949671-13-1  
SCIENCE FICTION

Rebels fight to free their world from hostile aliens in Ehsan Ahmad and Shakil Ahmad's intricate science fiction novel, *Wild Sun: Unbound*.

Part of a series, *Wild Sun: Unbound* is set on Corvos, a world where the native people have been enslaved by alien invaders. After helping to free her fellow slaves from an alien-run mine, Cerrin finds herself the reluctant commander of a fractured, beleaguered rebel group. She leads them in their flight to safety, taking them deep into the forests her ancestors called home long before the aliens arrived.

Cerrin and her band are comprised of two different races with different sets of traditions and customs. They clash often, with Cerrin trusting in her gods and the safety of the forest, even when others do not. One of her number goes so far as to leave Corvos and visit a sprawling, interplanetary weapons market with an unexpected and unlikely ally. Meanwhile, Talazeer, the commander under whose watch the rebels escaped, is both eager and desperate to save his reputation. Their conflict culminates in a frenetic, explosive battle from which neither can escape unscathed.

The main characters are intelligent enough to formulate logical plans, but flawed enough to sabotage themselves. Talazeer's pride, arrogance, and thirst for vengeance trip him up again and again, while Cerrin's suspicious nature prevents her from accepting an opportunity to better the rebels' situation. Repeated losses and the stress of leadership take an additional toll on Cerrin, but she remains devoted to her goal of protecting as many rebels as she can for as long as she can—and if she can kill a few aliens in the process, all the better.

*Wild Sun: Unbound* is a science fiction saga that ponders themes of colonialism, racial prejudice, and gender roles.



## BUG

Giacomo Sartori, Frederika Randall (Translator)  
Restless Books (FEB 9) Softcover \$18 (320pp)  
978-1-63206-274-1, TRANSLATIONS

A lonely boy befriends a charming but dangerous robot in Giacomo Sartori's science fiction novel *Bug*.

After a horrible car accident leaves his mother in a coma, a disabled boy is left to fend for himself among relatives and teachers who make little effort to understand him. His only friend is BUG, a prankish AI created by his older brother. Even as BUG's attempts to help cause as many problems as they solve, the boy cannot bring himself to abandon the only friend he's ever had.

The narrator's world is, in many ways, a grim one. He lives in a refurbished chicken coop with his genius brother, his aloof father, and his grandmother's ashes. He does not receive proper accommodations at school, where the ableist principal wants him out. The few certainties of his life fall away piece by piece, with BUG the only remaining constant. BUG's friendship, however, is a double-edged sword. Despite an incredible capacity to learn and a genuine desire to improve the boy's life, BUG possesses a child-like logic that prevents him from understanding the full consequences of his actions.

The prose is lively, intense, and full of perceptive similes. The boy's voice is unique and memorable as he records his daily adventures at school and at home. The extent to which the creative young narrator can be believed is a matter of interpretation, but the truth is not the point. Whether real or imagined or both, the boy's adventures show him to be resilient, vulnerable, caring, and inquisitive—but above all else, he is a neglected child who wants his mother back.

*Bug* is a fanciful science fiction novel about how a child's optimism, imagination, and self-belief help him cope with hard times.



## PHOENIX FLAME Havenfall, Book Two

Sara Holland, Bloomsbury (MAR 2) Hardcover \$18.99 (400pp), 978-1-5476-0382-4, YOUNG ADULT

A teenage girl fights to save her family and an entire realm in Sara Holland's young adult fantasy novel, *Phoenix Flame*.

Maddie always thought that the inhabitants of Solaria were an evil, dangerous race. Now that she knows the truth—that they are no better or worse than anyone else—she is determined to save them from the soul trade, a terrible practice that forces Solarians to transfer parts of their souls into objects. To do this, Maddie must risk everything—and everyone—she loves on an impossible journey between worlds.

The stakes could not be higher: not only must Maddie shut down the despicable soul trade, she has to confront shocking truths about her family, who are all involved in stopping the trade in their own ways. As if that wasn't enough, Maddie's love life has hardly begun and it is already a mess. She has fallen for a handsome soldier from another world, but their differing ideals may spell the end of their nascent romance. Meanwhile, a girl whom Maddie thought lost to her returns, bringing Maddie's buried feelings for her back to the surface.

Part of a series, this entry can stand on its own and includes helpful summaries of places and events from the previous installment. From her magical home base in the Colorado Rockies, Maddie travels to the beautiful, snow-covered world of Fiordenkill, which is home to a wealthy soul trader. After a series of daring missions and surprise encounters, Maddie and her friends resort to a desperate gamble that will either reunite her broken family and bring her one step closer to ending the slave trade...or destroy worlds.

With action, adventure, and romance, *Phoenix Flame* is an epic young adult fantasy novel about the importance of doing what you know to be right. ♥

# POETRY

MATT SUTHERLAND



## Mere Extinction

Evie Christie, ECW Press (APR 6)  
Softcover \$19.95 (64pp)  
978-1-77041-546-1

Upon learning of her adaptive script-writing accomplishments, we can fix the explanation for Evie Christie's complex use of motivation, conflict, pathos, and trauma—humanity's theater writ large in her work. That she does it with Shakespearean wit follows unexpectedly. A resident of Ontario, her other collections include *Gutted* and *The Bourgeois Empire*.

## Our Mothers

Once carried a dog-eared Tolstoy  
in their bag. Hitchhiked out of little towns  
to slightly bigger towns and worked  
nights, studied and kept their hair neatly or not  
neatly on top of their heads. Before they met our fathers.  
And later sat passenger back to the smaller town,  
got fatter and had babies and got '80s thin again.  
Grimaced through half of their lives  
so much so we thought  
that was them smiling. So much so  
you squint and hold the rectangular photograph closer  
and ask your brother, is mom smiling here or crying?  
Our mothers behind the cellophane, in wedding dresses, lighting  
birthday candles, preferring one of us over another,  
graduating, standing in pantsuits with their siblings at a family dinner  
smiling or crying, we'll never know.



## Flying through a Hole in the Storm

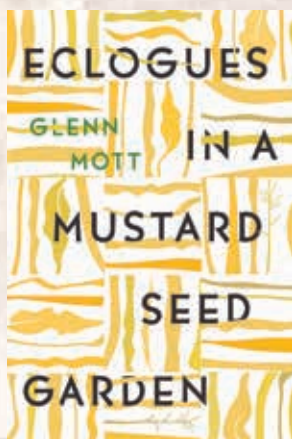
Fleda Brown, Ohio University Press  
(MAR 1) Softcover \$17.95 (96pp)  
978-0-8214-2444-5

It is easy to forget that only the rarest of people have something interesting to say about themselves. But Fleda Brown proves a mesmerizing exception—anything she cares to share is manna for our deepest needs. Brown is the author of thirteen collections, and in her prizepoeting role, she has won Pushcart, Felix Pollak, and Philip Levine prizes.

## Dear Frida Kahlo

Re: Self-Portrait

I see you, what you want: the world inside out, framed, a ceremony of sealing the door. Like Julian of Norwich in her nine-by-eleven cell, flint walls, dirt floor covered with aromatic leaves and rushes. So close to dying while alive, so everlastingly straight-on. Looking at you looking at me, Frida, is like dying. It is like gathering the taut men we've loved while our bodies broke, our hearts broke, gathering them to a mutual stillness. I half wish you would let me let go, let go of me with your colors, your shadow mustache, your bleeding soul. I have suffered enough, myself. I am okay here, now. Let us leave issues of the soul to Julian. Let God take her below her prayers to the tender core where the trembling gates stand open. Let her squeeze down into a lozenge of herself someone could take and feel better, throat and nose opened, a hint of eucalyptus. You and I, God help us, do not wish to be cured.



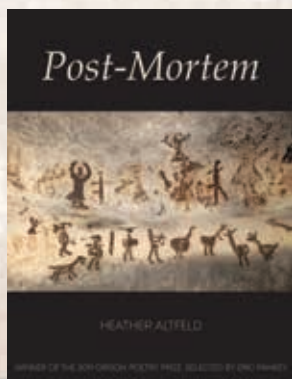
## Eclogues in a Mustard Seed Garden

Glenn Mott, Turtle Point Press, (MAR 23) Softcover \$17.95 (256pp)  
978-1-885983-85-5

In the age of pandemic, poetry refuses to budge in its commitment to hospitality for all, and with *Eclogues in a Mustard Seed Garden*, gleeful Glenn Mott arrives with a quiver of eclogues, couplets, Zen epigrams, and you-name-it literary mischief. The fun is all ours. A China scholar and translator, Mott was the recipient of a Davis Fellowship for Peace from Middlebury College, and was a Fulbright Scholar at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

## CEREMONY

A doyenne of the arts was offended. Her quickly drawn fantasy of my youth had not been accepted, and she would not withdraw it, continuing to assert that I had grown up as someone she had compared me to, flattering and aspirational. Not accepting her fantasy for me was an assault on modesty, but also on her imagination. She implied I was not clever enough to see that she had invented for me a past that I should adopt as being more plausible and attractive than the reality. Even if it didn't jibe, she knew the myth would carry me better, take me farther, make me more welcome to her group of believers. Who was I to refuse ...



## Post-Mortem

Heather Altfeld, Orison Books (APR 6) Softcover \$16 (100pp)  
978-1-949039-14-6

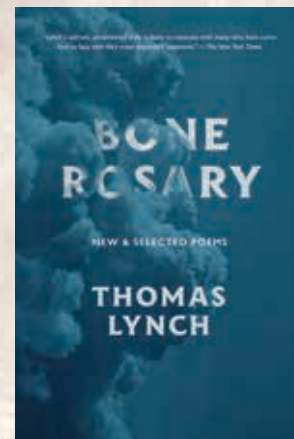
While the rest of us mumble, look away, and generally avoid matters of consequence, poets seek no such cover. Indeed, Heather Altfeld and others of her inquisitive ilk lead the interrogation of a mad world. Winner of the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry, in addition to the Poets at Work Prize for her collection *The Disappearing Theatre*, Altfeld teaches in the Comparative Religion and Humanities Department at California State University, Chico.

## 903

I.

Shame is the first death.  
It finds you at four,  
drawing your name on the dining furniture.  
Sex is the second. It is the room  
in the house you never knew about, hidden  
behind the closet, beneath the floorboards,  
a party dim as a whisper  
until you pull back the wood  
and see the giant open-air market,

with the flying monkeys and the fire throwers  
and the gaudy musicians and the trapeze  
you will climb and fall from, over and over,  
in a vaudeville of pleasure.  
Love is the third death, the great detour  
around the self, an improbable road  
straight up Everest that hobbles you in the knees  
and rolls you down, popping wheelies in the  
snow.



## Bone Rosary

Thomas Lynch, Godine (MAR 23) Hardcover \$25.95  
(256pp), 978-1-56792-701-6

Giddy with reverence for a master, this page is honored to call attention to this best-of collection—featuring one-hundred-forty poems from Thomas Lynch's five previous books, along with forty-three new works. A former undertaker taken to stringing animal bones into long strands of garland—bone rosaries—in hopes of scaring off would be intruders, Lynch lives alone with a dog on a remote northern Michigan lake and occasionally delivers spoken-word pieces for BBC radio.

## A DREAM OF DEATH IN THE FIRST PERSON

I'm coming the coast road into Moveen.  
This part replays itself, over and over  
to a standstill, until I'm hardly moving.  
Out in the ocean are islands I've never  
noticed in pictures I have of that place.  
I take this as a signal I'm dreaming.  
Within the dream, then, I begin to bless  
myself against such peril as these dreams  
in all their early versions put me in.  
In one, great soaring gulls keep coaxing me,  
by angles of their flight I understand,  
to join them in the air beyond the land  
and make my life with them diving between  
islands.

# GRAPHIC NOVELS

PETER DABBENE



## Adler

Lavie Tidhar, Paul McCaffrey (Illustrator), Titan Comics (MAR 30)  
Softcover \$16.99 (128pp) 978-1-78276-071-9

A cast of famous fictional and real-life characters navigates a high-stakes, Victorian-era adventure in the exciting graphic novel *Adler*.

Irene Adler, first introduced in Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, takes the lead role in this book. She's assisted by Jane Eyre, Marie Curie, and Lady Havisham. They battle against the machinations of Ayesha, a character from the 1887 novel *She*. Other characters include Carmilla, a vampire first introduced in a 1872 novella; Nikola Tesla; and a Queen Victoria kept alive by the skills of a certain Doctor Jekyll.

It's great fun identifying these players, but the plot, involving a large-scale threat to humanity, keeps the focus on their current actions, not their origins. The story is clever and fast-paced, and its emphasis on women is refreshing and inspired. There are a few

minor missteps in the storytelling and visuals, like abrupt transitions between scenes or movements that don't always track from one panel to the next, as in a scene where one character, Rudolf, pulls a sword from Carmilla. But these are forgivable trade-offs for the dynamic art and rousing action story.

*Adler* inhabits a unique world, melding the historical and the fanciful. Comparisons to *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, a comic book series that made similar use of fictional precedents, are inevitable, but with plenty of literary ground to mine, *Adler* feels fresh throughout. The book features a bonus gallery, but doesn't provide information on the characters' literary origins, a curious omission given the now-obscure status of some.

*Adler* is pure entertainment, establishing a strong, intelligent heroine and a foundation that leaves the door open for future (past) adventures.



## Monsters

Barry Windsor-Smith, Fantagraphics, (APR 13), Hardcover  
\$39.99 (380pp), 978-1-68396-415-5

Consummate craftsman Barry Windsor-Smith presents an epic tale of love, horror, revenge, and redemption in his outstanding graphic novel *Monsters*.

The story revolves around the fate of Bobby Bailey, a young man marked by family tragedy who enlists in the United States Army in 1964. He becomes a guinea pig in a clandestine project dubbed "Prometheus" that continues Nazi genetic experiments, and he's transformed into a massive, powerful, grotesque creature.

A recruiting officer who harbors less visible secret abilities of his own is plagued by guilt about delivering Bobby to Project Prometheus. Using flashbacks to jump across different time periods and settings, the book explores the intertwined paths of

the recruiting officer and his family, Bobby and his own family, and an intelligence officer-turned-local deputy, all of whom play key roles in the final denouement. Each character's story line is given the time, depth, and space to make them feel alive in every way.

The book's pen and ink artwork is exquisite, from its delicate shading to the way word balloons lead the eye up, down, and all around the page, maintaining a mesmerizing flow from one panel to the next. Despite plenty of grand, dramatic tension, some of the book's most memorable moments come via subtle expressions of family dynamics around a dinner table, through distinctive speech patterns, dialogue, and lettering. Also revealing and affecting are the handwritten letters of Bobby's mother, which show the measure of her desperation about her husband's change in personality after his duties during and after World War II.

Years in the making, *Monsters* is a graphic narrative masterpiece and a haunting examination of the lingering effects of evil.



## The Stringer

Ted Rall, Pablo Callejo (Illustrator), NBM Publishing  
(APR 20) Hardcover \$24.99 (152pp)  
978-1-68112-272-4

A reporter squeezed by the changing news industry decides to play by different, dangerous rules in *The Stringer*.

Mark Scribner is a seasoned war correspondent who risks his life to bring truth to the world. But as the world shows less desire for that truth, the employment options for Scribner and his colleagues grow bleaker. Unwilling to suffer the penurious fate prescribed for him, Scribner decides to use his extensive knowledge of hotspots around the globe to manufacture news, making himself a celebrity, but abandoning his principles in the process. Soon Scribner discards any journalistic pretense and becomes an outright arms dealer for almost any group that will pay.

Scribner is a classic antihero. His is a tale of power, temptation, and the hazard to society inherent in a landscape where "making news" through deepfake videos, and giving people what they want, rather than the truth, is more prevalent than ever. While Scribner's self-serving morality is distasteful, his actions are convincing, especially as he sees the journalistic integrity he once prized devalued, and the risks he and his fellow reporters take daily go unappreciated. Even at his worst, Scribner is capable of love; he finds it with a young Afghan woman, and feels the cost of his mercenary ways when she discovers what he's doing and witnesses the devastating consequences.

The book's full-color art captures scenes in New York, Afghanistan, and elsewhere with a high level of verisimilitude, a necessary complement to some of the bold and outlandish activities Scribner undertakes. A thoughtful story that's unpredictable to its end, *The Stringer* is an engaging thriller that strikes a resounding note of warning.



## Flash Forward

### An Illustrated Guide to Possible (and Not So Possible) Tomorrows

Rose Eveleth, Matt Lubchansky (Contributor), Sophie Goldstein (Contributor), Abrams ComicArts (MAR 30) Hardcover \$24.99 (272pp) 978-1-4197-4547-8

*Flash Forward* comprises a dozen thought-provoking glimpses into the future, from a variety of creators.

Inspired by the *Flash Forward* podcast, the book's twenty-page graphic stories illustrate current ideas, practices, and trends as extrapolated into a hazardous, but not quite dystopian near future. While there are some elements of *Twilight Zone*-style "getting too much of what you asked for" justice, there's also a healthy balance of good and bad; these characters are more products of their environments than they are victims of their own bad karma, and several stories showcase their chosen subjects in a positive or neutral way.

The most memorable plots center on the unchecked progression of technologies once perceived as boons, now advanced to a level where the costs of those benefits must be reconsidered. Pirates who liberate expensive therapeutic drugs; people who alter themselves to function with little or no sleep; and deepfake videos are included, all grounded in current science and society. Here, they function as both entertainment and lessons.

Each section is followed by a few pages of text analyzing subjects in greater detail, with references to experts in related fields and science fiction precedents. The full-color art changes styles with each story, helping to establish a visual sense of separate futures, each with their own problems.

Casting a wide net to cover machine-created art, the legalities of space crime, and a world of flexible gender identity, *Flash Forward* is a fascinating map to imagining the future and all it might deliver.



## You Died

### An Anthology of the Afterlife

Kel McDonald (Editor), Andrea Purcell (Editor), Iron Circus Comics (MAR 23) Softcover \$20 (260pp), 978-1-945820-63-2

Short stories about death—and what comes after—are the subject of *You Died: An Anthology of the Afterlife*.

The book includes twenty-four graphic stories from a variety of creators who draw on a wide range of cultures, styles, and tones. Most of the stories focus on the process of dying and the transition to an afterlife, as people and animals bid their farewells to the world of the living. Parents part from children, and children from parents, but it's not all heartbreaking emotion—there's room for humor, as shown in a lighthearted take on reincarnation. Sometimes, as in the story of a family scattering a man's ashes at an amusement park, humor and emotions are both present.

The book's diversity of creators and approaches means that there are surprises at every turn. The first story, "What Eats Us," upends expectations as a decomposer explains to a dead animal what will happen to its body. "Inanna's Descent to the Underworld" retells an ancient Sumerian myth, while the more science-oriented "Peat, Bone, Oak" probes the feelings that arise from discovering a well-preserved corpse from long ago. Another entry also looks to the past, analyzing Victorian mourning rituals; still others use the future and science fiction settings to tell their stories.

The book's pictorial storytelling is always satisfying. Its metaphors for life, death, and the departed involve flowers and birds, contributing to memorable, heartfelt expressions. *You Died* shows that although there are many different ways to address death, it remains a universal constant and the ultimate relatable experience.

Image from *Flash Forward: An Illustrated Guide to Possible (and Not So Possible) Tomorrows*, by Rose Eveleth, Matt Lubchansky (Contributor), Sophie Goldstein (Contributor). Image by John Jennings. Used with permission from Abrams ComicArts.



Fiction—Science Fiction

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Fiction—Science Fiction

### Rise & Shine

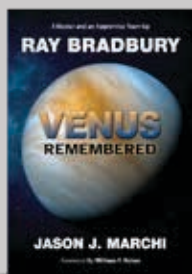
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Fiction—Science Fiction

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—Brett Kissel

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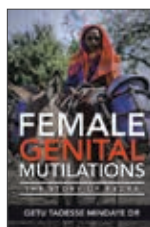


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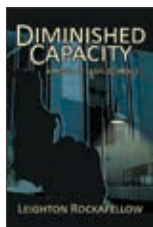


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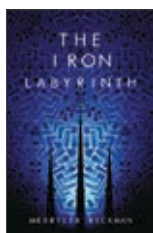
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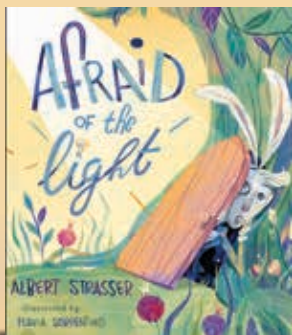


### A Beary Rainy Day

Adam Ciccio, Emilie Timmermans (Illustrator)

Clavis (APR 6) Hardcover \$17.95 (32pp), 978-1-60537-598-4

A blue bear named Wallow always gets gloomy when it rains, preferring to stay in bed, but a visit from his friend Little Cub has him donning his yellow raincoat and learning to find the silver lining of storm clouds. Mixed-media illustrations contrast the warmth of Wallow's cave with the dreary gray of the outdoors, while the rounded edges of the illustrations evoke a soft, organic feeling in this picture book about positive thinking.



### Afraid of the Light

A Story about Facing Your Fears

Albert Strasser, Flavia Sorrentino (Illustrator), Bala Kids (MAR 2)

Hardcover \$16.95 (32pp), 978-1-61180-814-8

In this quirky picture book that reverses a common childhood fear, Ditter is a bunny who lives in a hole, far from the sun; he's afraid of anything bright. But a waylaid shoe forces him to do the unthinkable: light a candle and look around. To his delight, he discovers a colorful world that's worth interacting with. The fun, rhyming, onomatopoeic text tracks Ditter's growth from a shadowed life toward one that's alive with details worthy of an attentive search-and-find approach.



### Arthur and the Forgetful Elephant

Maria Girón, Flyaway Books (MAR 2) Hardcover \$18

(48pp), 978-1-947888-27-2

A young boy befriends an elderly elephant in this tender tale that works to make the experience of memory loss accessible to children. Sparse language and illustrations make poignant use of void spaces, emphasizing Arthur's small stature and the elephant's girth. Starting with a muted palette of reds, grays, and greens, the story gains more color as the two new friends build a connection despite their differences, demonstrating that love and friendship are not things easily forgotten.

# CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER  
and DANIELLE BALLANTYNE



## Arno and His Horse

Jane Godwin, Felicita Sala (Illustrator), Scribble (MAR 2) Hardcover \$16.99 (32pp), 978-1-950354-46-7

Arno takes his treasured toy horse everywhere; it reminds him “of other, far-off days.” But one day, the horse is lost. Though his friends are glad to help him retrace his steps in search of the horse, their investigations come up short. In his dreams, Arno appeals to his grandpa, who carved the horse; in his dreams, he receives a comforting answer. Wide landscapes help to illustrate happy days past and present in this story about the sweetness of remembrance.



## Eat Up, Bear!

Terry Pierce, Nadja Sarell (Illustrator), Yosemite Conservancy (APR 13) Hardcover \$8.99 (14pp), 978-1-951179-01-4

Autumn campers and hikers peaceably coexist with hungry bears in this board book with a lesson for little nature-goers: all are kept safe when people remember to properly lock up, and dispose of, their foods in the wild. Bright scenes, set along streams, trails, and among orange-leaved trees, find happy bears chowing down on natural delights while wide-eyed human beings picnic responsibly, at a safe distance from the hungry furballs, making this a great introduction to enjoying nature without disturbing its rhythms.



## Hidden Planet

Ben Rothery, Tilbury House Publishers (MAR 2) Hardcover \$29.95 (96pp), 978-0-88448-875-0

Exploring hidden aspects of the animal kingdom, this oversized picture book brims with photo-realistic illustrations and descriptions of some of Earth's most interesting creatures and their unique abilities. Most useful for fostering a budding interest in animals with older children, the book examines hidden elements of nature in both a literal sense—such as the camouflage of the chameleon—and the figurative, like the process of convergent evolution. Younger children will enjoy the illustrations, which bring them face-to-face with everything from toads to lions.



## Journey Around the Sun The Story of Halley's Comet

James Gladstone, Yaara Eshet (Illustrator), Owlkids (MAR 15) Hardcover \$17.95 (32pp), 978-1-77147-371-2

Every seventy-five years or so, Halley's Comet bursts across the sky. Astronomers and observers in the past have used metaphors to understand the comet, comparing it to a hairy star, a flaming sword, and a planet with a tail. Scientific and historical footnotes pair with illustrations from across time to detail all the ways the comet has been approached; they also wonder about how it might be regarded in the future. *Journey Around the Sun* is a smart, meditative introduction to the astronomical phenomenon.



## Marvelous Machines A Magic Lens Book

Jane Wilsher, Andrés Lozano (Illustrator) What on Earth Books (FEB 2) Hardcover \$19.99 (48pp), 978-1-912920-20-4

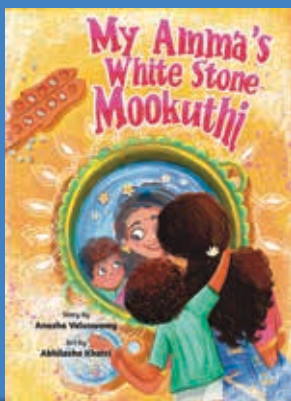
A magical magnifying glass reveals hidden objects in this primary-hued picture book that seeks to answer burning questions about common machines. From how fridges stay cold to the complex forces interacting to keep ships afloat, the book's accessible language enables children to understand the inner workings of everyday objects. “Find it” sections add a scavenger hunt element, and children will love poring over the pages with their trusty red lens in search of secrets.



## Me + Tree

Alexandria Giardino, Anna Balbusso (Illustrator) Elena Balbusso (Illustrator), Creative Editions (MAR 2) Hardcover \$18.99 (32pp) 978-1-56846-346-9

A young girl and an old tree come together to grieve for the past and turn toward the future in *Me + Tree*. Collage-like illustrations, swirled with textures resembling wood grain, depict a story of desperate refugees forced to abandon their homes for a tempest-tossed boat. Throughout her story, the girl emphasizes the wood that built her home and formed the boat that brought her to safety, giving the old stump a renewed sense of purpose and exemplifying the endurance of hope.



### My Amma's White Stone Mookuthi

Anusha Veluswamy, Abhilasha Khatri (Illustrator), Batani Books  
(APR 15) Hardcover \$18.95 (32pp), 978-1-68446-278-0

A little boy delights in his mother's beauty, comparing her jewelry to awesome sights like twinkling stars and dewdrops that catch the sun. That he invests so much meaning in his mother's baubles only underscores the beauty that he's most in awe of: his mother's ceaseless, generous, and careful love for him. Footnotes define cultural terms, and the illustrations' electric hues brighten the boy's whimsical meditations, in this warm tale about the worlds within a family's love.

### Opal's Greenwood Oasis

Quraysh Ali Lansana, Najah-Amatullah Hylton, Skip Hill (Illustrator)  
The Calliope Group (FEB 2) Hardcover \$22.50 (32pp)  
978-1-73364-744-1

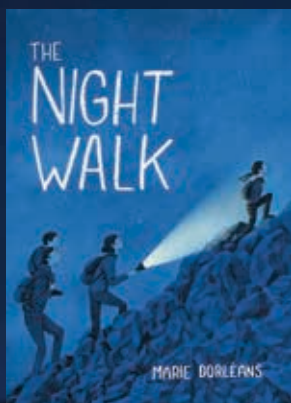
In this important picture book for historical fiction collections, Opal grows up in Greenwood, a Black neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma where everyone gathers on Sunday to hear the good word. Today, everyone's looking forward to the Memorial Day picnic. While there are rumblings of violent goings on beyond Greenwood, right now, none of that matters. Mixed media illustrations with bright pops of color help to showcase the rich activities of Opal's bustling world in the hours before the Tulsa Race Massacre decimated her storied community.



### The Amicus Book of Nature

Isobel Lundie, Amicus Ink (MAR 2) Hardcover \$9.99 (10pp)  
978-1-68152-759-8

Delivering the message that nature is something that human beings are a part of, not separate from, this board book devotes its pages to facets of the natural world: a haughty buck shares the animals page with a grinning narwhal and a stunned raccoon; cephalopods drift beside a boat on the page for oceans; and children run and fly kites on a page celebrating "you." Collage illustrations make use of maps and other found materials for their muted colors, making every page a visual feast.



### ★ The Night Walk

Marie Dorléans, Floris Books (APR 20) Hardcover \$17.95  
(32pp), 978-1-78250-639-3

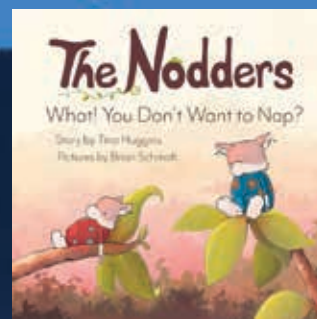
The night air smells like irises and honeysuckle when two children's parents wake them for an undefined adventure. They dress in the blue predawn and walk through the village as their eyes adjust. Here and there, there are signs of life: the lit windows of a passing train; the mooing of cows. Though their colors are few, the book's illustrations are lively and lovely, making the world feel awake even before light breaks over the hills in this story about chasing natural wonders.



### The Errand The Queen

Leo LaFleur, Adam Oehlers (Illustrator)  
Simply Read Books (MAR 30) Hardcover \$17.95  
(72pp), 978-1-77229-050-9

In this third installment of Leo LaFleur's fantasy series, an errand boy, having completed deliveries to a witch and a warlock, undertakes his most daunting task yet: to deliver a package to the fairy queen. Dreamy illustrations with flushes of color follow him as he shrinks, traipses through flowered fields, and rides a daisy through the sky, finally entering into fairyland with the help of a ghostly friend. Youngsters will be enthralled by this fantasy adventure that promises more yet to come.



### The Noddors What! You Don't Want to Nap?

Tina Huggins, Brian Schmidt (Illustrator)  
Beaver's Pond Press (MAR 20) Hardcover \$16.99  
(32pp), 978-1-64343-832-0

An ancient tree in the Beddy Bye Woods is home to the Noddors: small winged creatures who only wake up when children go to sleep. To encourage children to take their naps, the Noddors leave treats or toys in sleeping children's "NapPouches," a concept inspired by a trick the author's mother used. With fuzzy ears, patterned pajamas, and magic slippers that transform into everything from skates to rockets, the Noddors are sure to encourage any child to embrace nap time.



### ★ My Shadow Is Pink

Scott Stuart, Larrikin House (APR 1) Hardcover \$16.99 (32pp), 978-0-648-72875-7

A young boy wishes he was different until he is empowered by those around him to embrace his true self in this affirming picture book. All the men in his family have blue shadows, but the young boy's shadow is pink and enjoys things "not for boys"—something his father assures him is "just a phase." The palette is bright and playful, toying with clichéd, gendered colors—blue and pink—and sunny splashes of yellow that reflect the boy's path to self-confidence.

Image from *My Shadow is Pink*, by Scott Stuart. Used with permission from Larrikin House.



### ★ The Thingity-Jig

Kathleen Doherty, Kristyna Litten (Illustrator), Peachtree Publishing Company (APR 1) Hardcover \$17.99 (32pp), 978-1-56145-959-9

Though all of his forest friends are deep in dreams, little bear is wide awake and restless. He decides to wander into town, where, in an alleyway, he discovers a thingity-jig. Though others might dismiss his find as just a couch, he knows that it's a gateway to entertainment. He springs, bounces, and jumps his way to fun, generating a few complementary inventions along the way, in this intricately illustrated picture book that rejoices in creative play—and in imaginative takes on ordinary objects.



### The Story of Bodri

Hédi Fried, Stina Wirsén (Illustrator), Eerdmans Books for Young Readers (APR 13) Hardcover \$17.99 (32pp), 978-0-8028-5565-7

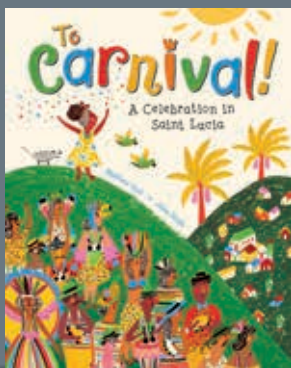
In this heartrending true Holocaust story, a girl's happy childhood changes overnight when an enemy who inexplicably hates everyone who's like her takes over the town. She and her family are forced from their home; they have to leave her dog, Bodri, behind. When the girl is finally freed, a warm surprise awaits her, proving that innocent love outlasts baseless hatred. Watercolor splashes mimic skies and flowers in the book's sparse illustrations; blunt strokes outline the book's living beings.



### **The Two Fridas** **Memories Written by Frida Kahlo**

Frida Kahlo, Gianluca Foli (Illustrator), Schiffer Kids (FEB 28) Hardcover \$18.99 (32pp), 978-0-7643-6116-6

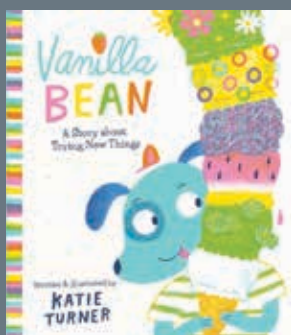
Illustrating an excerpt from the diary of Frida Kahlo, this whimsical picture book captures the imagination of childhood and the enduring power of art to inspire, transform, and provide comfort and escape. Frida's black-and-white world becomes awash with color when she visits her imaginary friend. The love and laughter the two share stay with her as she grows, continuing to bloom within her art. Children will be encouraged to explore their creativity, while adults may be inspired to rekindle it.



### **To Carnival!** **A Celebration in Saint Lucia**

Baptiste Paul, Jana Glatt (Illustrator), Barefoot Books (APR 1) Hardcover \$16.99 (32pp), 978-1-64686-161-3

When Melba oversleeps and misses her ride to town, she is worried she will miss Carnival. As she works to find a new way to the festivities, she collects her own parade of friends and discovers that the real celebration is the love that surrounds her. The vibrant rainbow of Carnival is reflected in illustrations that marry digital art with childlike drawings, and a section at the back educates children on the culture of Saint Lucia and the history of Carnival.



### **Vanilla Bean** **A Story about Trying New Things**

Katie Turner, Cottage Door Press (MAR 16) Hardcover \$9.99 (32pp) 978-1-64638-112-8

Bean is a picky puppy. He resists most dishes, and is sure that the only ice cream he appreciates is vanilla, in this peppy picture book that nonetheless encourages trying out new tastes. At the local ice cream parlor, Bean is encouraged to try rainbow, cactus, and cotton candy flavors, among others. He rejects each. But when Miss Sundae slips and showers rainbow sprinkles onto Bean's cone, he reluctantly dives in—and discovers that maybe, just maybe, there's more to life than plain.



### ★ **Music All Around**

Gema Sirvent, Lucía Cobo (Illustrator), The Secret Mountain (APR 1) Hardcover \$16.95 (48pp), 978-2-924774-86-1

Sofia leaves “every salty echo of the sea” behind when she goes to visit her grandparents' house in the woods, but just because the music changes doesn't mean it's lost, and she conducts new movements in the thumping feet of rabbits and the chatter of mice. The intricate illustrations are spellbinding, with every blade of grass and drop of rain rendered with precision. An included CD and digital download code provide a narrated version of the story with an accompanying theme song.



### **Zonia's Rain Forest**

Juana Martinez-Neal, Candlewick Press (MAR 30) Hardcover \$17.99 (40pp), 978-1-5362-0845-0

The devastating consequences of harvesting the Amazonian rain forest are brought to light for the next generation in this delicate picture book. Zonia is a member of the Asháninka, the largest Indigenous group still living in the Peruvian Amazon. In wispy scratches and waxy lines, Zonia's day unfolds on the parchment-like pages, following her as she hangs with sloths and plays hide-and-seek with crocodiles. Her sorrow over a destroyed portion of the forest will inspire young activists to call for change.

Image from *Music All Around*, by Gema Sirvent, Lucía Cobo (Illustrator). Used with permission from The Secret Mountain.

## MIDDLE GRADE



### Into the Wind

William Loizeaux, Laura Jacobson (Illustrator)  
One Elm Books (MAR 2) Hardcover \$16.99 (192pp)  
978-1-947159-42-6, GENERAL

*Into the Wind* is a poignant novel about an unexpected, enriching friendship between a young boy and an elderly woman.

Rusty lives with his family in a New England coastal town. During the summer before he enters sixth grade, he is in summer school, and is also burdened by the fact that his mother is in a psychiatric facility to treat her depression. While Rusty's father struggles to hold it together, his older sister unleashes her anger on him.

Rusty has few friends; his solace is sailing. Then he meets Hazel, an elderly woman in a wheelchair who surprises Rusty with an unusual request: to go out for a ride on his sailboat. Rusty accompanies her home, only to be invited inside for lunch and dessert. Hazel's instincts hone in on Rusty's loneliness, and she hires him to do odd jobs around her house in exchange for money, lunch, and company. The two form a tenuous connection that strengthens over the summer.

Featuring an advanced vocabulary, the book deals with heavy themes, including maternal depression, loneliness, sibling difficulties, and death. Its conflicts are resolved, even for Rusty's mother, though its ending is nonetheless somber. Despite its melancholy tone, the novel forms an uplifting whole, acknowledging that Rusty and Hazel's unconventional friendship was a gift needed by both. It balances the often confusing emotions that children grapple with well, thanks to its bold, honest storytelling. Soft, pencil-shaded illustrations are diffused throughout, helping to express and enhance elements of the tale.

*Into the Wind* is a tender middle grade novel about an unconventional, multigenerational friendship formed across one significant summer.

HILARY DANINHIRSCH



### Max and the Spice Thieves Secrets of the Twilight Djinn

John Peragine, Crumblebee Books (APR 20) Softcover  
\$14.99 (274pp), 978-1-73538-963-9, FANTASY

In John Peragine's boisterous middle grade fantasy, a boy undertakes an odyssey to reunite with his family.

Fourteen-year-old Max's father is missing, and his mother has just been abducted, so he joins Captain Cinn and his pirate crew to work as a cabin boy, and to seek answers with their help. Armed with his rare history book, *The Secrets of the Twilight Djinn*, Max and Cinn gather motley helpers as they cross challenging terrain. Friendships form while Max learns the truth about his parents, outrunning the Twilight Army and evil djinns that threaten them all.

The book's disparate fantasy elements draw from myths, medieval guilds, and an old world spice trade, resulting in characters who sometimes clash, including a witch and her harpies, a sultan, a northern queen, and shape-shifting snow bears. The islands they inhabit are a busy amalgam with painful back stories that unfold through detailed conversations.

Amid themes of regal power and those who fight it, seafaring scenes set on Captain Cinn's *Saucy Pig* steal the show, as does the book's witty banter, and everyone's penchant for improvising bumbling, thrilling escape plans that deepen their ties to each other. Throughout, culinary delights underscore how "bland food is a crime"; they are a fun background element.

When Max discovers untamed magic within himself, his sudden power helps to steer him closer to his goals. His gradual change from a sheltered farm boy to a brave pirate-in-training comes via brisk episodes that raise enough intriguing questions to spur the next installment of the series.

With its focus on ragtag, skilled fighters and renegade sentiments, *Max and the Spice Thieves* is an entertaining island adventure.

KAREN RIGBY

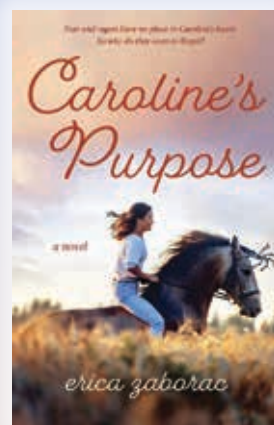


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Artwork from *Into the Wind*, by William Loizeaux, Laura Jacobson (Illustrator). Used with permission from One Elm Books.



## Bone Tree

Jenna Lehne, Uliana Babenko (Illustrator)  
Blue Bronco Books (APR 1) Hardcover \$18.99  
(188pp), 978-0-9979580-3-4, FANTASY

With an appealing mix of spooky suspense and comedy, *Bone Tree* tackles a serious, delicate subject: dealing with the loss of a loved one.

Sixth-graders Roman and Elsie are best friends. Tragedy strikes when Roman is diagnosed with leukemia. A visit to the local cemetery gets them acquainted with the legend of the bone tree, where an unlucky woman was buried centuries before. One can supposedly revive a dead person by burying heirlooms at the foot of the tree, so when Roman passes away, grieving Elsie buries her deceased grandmother's jewelry in the hopes of resuscitating him.

Roman's spirit does indeed appear, but Elsie's joy is short-lived; a vengeful spirit in the tree is tormenting not only his soul, but also the ghosts who owned the heirlooms that are buried under the tree. Soon Elsie is witnessing these souls' pain, as they're forced to relive the moments of their deaths again and again. With the help of a feisty librarian and Roman's older brother Jake, Elsie must set things right—with the potential risk of losing Roman forever.

Jenna Lehne's fast-paced, propulsive story includes a healthy amount of scares, humor, and pathos. Elsie makes for an appealing and relatable heroine. While *Bone Tree* might be an adventure, its true heart lies in Elsie's journey from grief to acceptance. With sensitivity and realism, Lehen depicts how the loss of one person can have an impact on a multitude of family and friends.

While its supernatural elements are entertaining and provide some spine-tingling moments, *Bone Tree* isn't just another creepy thriller-comedy. It ultimately makes a poignant, stirring statement about treasuring life, coming to terms with death, and moving on.

HO LIN



## Stella

McCall Hoyle, Shadow Mountain Publishing (MAR 2)  
Hardcover \$16.99 (176pp), 978-1-62972-901-5  
GENERAL

In McCall Hoyle's endearing novel *Stella*, a beagle searches for redemption—and her human being.

Stella is a service dog who failed to sniff out an explosive at an airport. She feels guilt because her handler suffered in the incident. After several in-home placements prove to be poor fits, Esperanza, an expert dog trainer, brings Stella to her sheep farm in hopes of rehabilitating her, with her daughter Cloe's help.

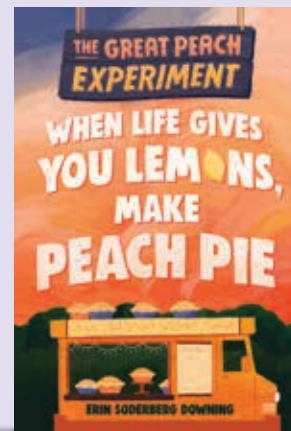
The story is told from Stella's sometimes cautious, sometimes eager, and frustrated canine perspective. From Esperanza's farm and its other dogs, to foods, objects, and even the scent of emotions, her sensory approach to interpreting environments is fascinating. When Stella detects a metallic scent that signals that Cloe is about to have an epileptic seizure, she grows determined to stick by her new friend's side.

Mild tension is generated over the question of whether Stella can become a house pet, propelling the novel's tender exploration of human-animal bonding. Background information about how trainers teach and communicate with animals is provided, though the book's well-meaning humans are often too distracted to notice Stella's cues. Cloe is a lonely, sweet, and peripheral character, known only through what she says and her signature scents; Stella's ties to her are instinctive.

The book's suspenseful final third focuses on Cloe's interactions with bullies, forcing Stella to relive her own traumatic memories, and to act brave despite them. This is a circular but satisfying means for Stella to resolve her fears. As Stella realizes that it is okay to have made mistakes in the past, and that love doesn't require working for approval, Esperanza develops renewed respect for Stella's loyalty, and Cloe's original beliefs are affirmed.

In the memorable novel *Stella*, a dog looks to heal—and find a home.

KAREN RIGBY



## The Great Peach Experiment

*When Life Gives You Lemons, Make Peach Pie*

Erin Soderberg Downing, Pixel+Ink (APR 6)  
Hardcover \$17.99 (256pp), 978-1-64595-034-9  
GENERAL

In Erin Soderberg Downing's winsome novel *The Great Peach Experiment*, a bucket list road trip upends the Peach family's typical summer plans.

Lucy is the sensible older sister of Freddy, who's ten, artistic, and loves to spout facts, and Herb, who's an eight-year-old math whiz. Ever since their mother died, she's taken care of them while her father has entrenched himself in his university job.

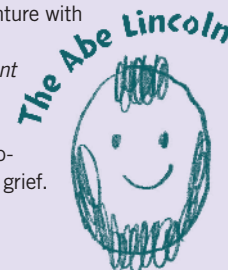
When their late mother's invention makes the family millionaires, Lucy's father buys a food truck to fulfill a dream. Lucy is skeptical, but Freddy hopes that it will knit the family back together. Herb, meanwhile, is game for anything. With the goal of winning an Ohio Food Truck Festival competition, the inexperienced Peaches try to sell as many pies as they can, camping their way through the Midwest.

Lucy's warm, offbeat, STEM-driven family embraces the pie theme with relish. Freddy provides sketches, his enterprising optimism an appealing surprise that helps Lucy to find what's good despite her doubts. Herb runs the gamut from trying his best to feeling useless and restless. Their father—whose narrow focus once made him overlook his children's emotional needs—learns the importance of paying attention.

There are implied lessons about turning the family's "mess into something truly delicious and beautiful." As circumstances force the quirky Peaches toward greater spontaneity, they rise to meet challenges, from figuring out how to streamline (and bake!) to learning how to band together. Memories and loss juxtapose with curious slices of American roadside kitsch, adding up to a life-affirming, nostalgic adventure with an uplifting finale.

*The Great Peach Experiment* is a cheering middle grade novel about a family's mad-cap project that includes subtle lessons about overcoming grief.

KAREN RIGBY





## Oddity

Eli Brown, Karin Rytter (Illustrator), Walker Books (MAR 30) Hardcover \$18.99 (368pp) 978-1-5362-0851-1, FANTASY

Eli Brown's *Oddity* is a delightful, action-packed fantasy featuring a colorful cast and magical trinkets.

All Clover knows about her mother is that she died when Clover was a baby, and that she was fascinated with oddities—objects with strange properties that Clover's father, Constantine, loathes. Constantine has tried to carve out a stable life for his daughter, but all of this is snatched away when he is murdered. Forced to flee, Clover hopes to find her mother's old colleague. Along the way, she is forced to uncover her past and face the most dangerous oddity of all.

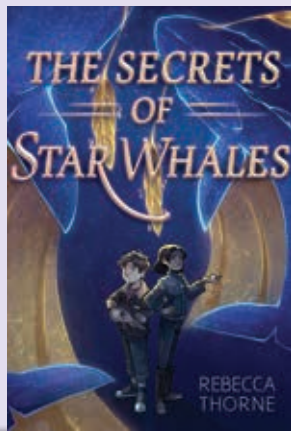
The frantic pace of Clover's flight mirrors her inner turmoil as she comes to terms with who she is. Other characters, including a hot-tempered doll, Susanna, and a pompous rooster, Hannibal, add comic relief while also providing Clover with a new, albeit untraditional, family.

While the focus is on Clover's self-discovery, the book also touches on sensitive subjects, including racism and dilemmas around making a living; dishonest behaviors raise the age-old question of whether the ends justify the means. Alongside Widow Henshaw, a former slave and a mother figure to Clover, Clover wrestles with tough questions to decide what it means to be who she is.

The book is set in an alternate America where territory disputes with France ended in war, rather than with the Louisiana Purchase. While the setting and names are changed, the American spirit, all about hard work and freedom, rings strong, along with less desirable elements, like a power-hungry senator who warmongers and who raises questions of what true patriotism entails, making the world believable, even as magic abounds.

A fiery heroine, a cruel twist of fate, and a few strange friends make *Oddity* a fantasy novel not soon forgotten.

VIVIAN TURNBULL



## The Secrets of Star Whales

Rebecca Thorne, Jolly Fish Press (MAR 23) Softcover \$11.99 (240pp), 978-1-63163-441-3, SCIENCE FICTION

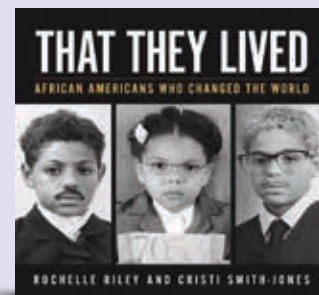
With a mesmerizing vision of life among the stars, wherein space's endless horizon only seems limited by the expectations of a small, blue-collar community, Rebecca Thorne's middle grade novel *The Secrets of Star Whales* is deft in addressing big dichotomies: engineering versus art, home versus the larger world, and following in your parents' footsteps versus forging your own way.

*Stella cetacea*, also known as star whales, are the only creatures thought to live in the vacuum of space, but they're elusive and perhaps mythical, having been sought by scientists and poachers alike for nearly 300 years without success. In the 5th star system, right outside the Kialoa Nebula, in the remote mining station of Azura, twelve-year-old Max wonders if such creatures are possible, much less accessible to someone like him. Then, a ship comes smoking into his station, bringing Mr. Hames, a substitute teacher who threatens to change it all.

This novel nails the nebulous and shifting group dynamics of classmates who've grown up together and are testing new configurations and social alignments as they take their first tentative steps toward independence, self-discovery, and the people they could become in adulthood. Friendships stop being based solely on shared proximity, and Max fears being left behind, both literally and figuratively. As life becomes a trajectory of individuation and change, his anxieties about friends embracing different futures and roles than the ones Max wants are portrayed with unique perception.

Here, growing up requires honesty, vulnerability, and accountability to others. *The Secrets of Star Whales* is a rollicking middle grade adventure with a subtle message about processing and expressing emotions, and the traps that await those who allow their sadness to masquerade as anger.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS



## That They Lived African Americans Who Changed the World

Rochelle Riley, Cristi Smith-Jones, Wayne State University Press (FEB 2) Softcover \$16.99 (160pp) 978-0-8143-4754-6, BIOGRAPHY

*That They Lived* pays tribute to Black American icons through black-and-white photographs that recreate their images. It is an elegant collaboration between photographer Cristi Smith-Jones and journalist Rochelle Riley, designed to remind young readers that their role models were once young, too.

Growing out of a Black History Month project that went viral, the collection features photographs of Smith-Jones's daughter Lola and Riley's grandson Caleb posing as people including Muhammad Ali, Shirley Chisholm, W.E.B. DuBois, Barack Obama, Rosa Parks, and Harriet Tubman. These sharp portraits convey the fun of dress-up, and their costumes and gestures are faithful in detail; similarities to the original photographs result in a vibrant dialogue across time.

Archival photographs of the children's historical counterparts accompany biographical essays that combine their personal details with occasional quotes and career highlights, yielding critical insights into their determination and courage. Multiple of the profiled people were the firsts at crossing color lines in government, sports, and music. The book covers the injustices that people faced, like segregation and barriers to voting, but also their activism.

The book's honest mentions of Jackie Robinson's early gang membership, Aretha Franklin's pregnancy when she was twelve, Martin Luther King Jr.'s suicide attempt, and other stark moments are effective at emphasizing resilience while making it possible for young readers to imagine that positive futures are possible, despite initial setbacks. Such sobering and inspiring facts add up to a motivational album that concludes with uplifting statements about each person's contributions to society.

Bringing influential Black American names from across disciplines down to earth, *That They Lived* is an educational, appealing photographic work that skillfully juxtaposes the past with the present.

KAREN RIGBY

# YOUNG ADULT



## Unravel

Sharon Jennings, Red Deer Press (MAR 21) Softcover \$14.95 (120pp)  
978-0-88995-619-3, GENERAL FICTION

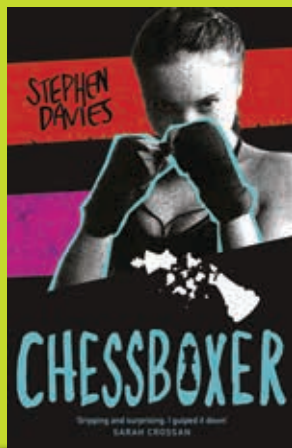
In Sharon Jennings's brisk, emotional novel *Unravel*, a young heroine finds the courage to separate herself from her father's lies and uncover the truth.

Though she is almost twelve, Rebecca has never attended school. She lives with her father, Joe, who is controlling, suspicious, insistent that the rest of their family died, and secretive, such that Rebecca knows little else, not even her father's birthday. He moves Rebecca whenever neighbors question their homeschooling methods, which entail Rebecca reading by herself. Now, Rebecca is reluctant to move again. When she expresses doubts about Joe's stories about their past, she finds a gradual escape, buoyed by friends and the knowledge that "the heroine never gives up" in the books that she likes.

Despite its dark, peripheral backstory, which involves the events that led Rebecca to her isolated life, the book's spotlight stays on Rebecca's present. Thanks to her love for her community, including a warm Italian surrogate family, and the kindness of Toronto strangers who surprise her, she thrives, even when her circumstances are tough. A glamorous adult recluse who employs Rebecca is a less realistic throwback to a bygone film era, though their connection inspires Rebecca's trust. Quirky characters and Rebecca's precocious, solitary wanderings across the city recall some of her literary favorites, including *Harriet the Spy*, further revealing how much reading has saved her.

Rebecca's growth from naiveté to self-awareness about her nomadic life is handled with sensitivity and depth; her defiance of Joe's rules as she tests out a more assertive identity results in tense, inspiring moments. Throughout, the novel wrestles with the mature topic of what it's like to leave an abuser, ending with a heartrending chance for Rebecca to find her roots.

KAREN RIGBY



## Chessboxer

Stephen Davies, Andersen Press (MAR 1) Softcover \$9.99 (320pp),  
978-1-78344-840-1, FICTION

Burdened by unresolved grief and hounded by her coach and her mother, Leah, otherwise known as Chessgirl, finds herself losing chess match after chess match. Suddenly, the very game that used to excite her brings only exhaustion. Eager to see what else is out there for her, the seventeen-year-old dives into getting a job, some new friends, and a new life. Along the way, she is arrested, beat up, and grows up in Stephen Davies's *Chessboxer*, a wired coming-of-age novel.

A mere twenty points from Grand Master status, Leah can't seem to close the gap and earn the title. Instead, she gets stuck in her own head game until it swallows her. She doesn't so much lose to her opponents as to herself, and the impact reverberates through her life, as chess is everything that she is. When she

discovers chessboxing, a strange mix of rounds of chess and actual boxing, Leah feels that perhaps she has found her place.

Davies makes vibrant the mind games of both chess and boxing, creating tension with swift phrasing and active language. Though the metaphor of chess and its machinations extends in many ways, it never becomes didactic or slow. The imagined board and its pieces all move with speed and determination. The use of the blog format gives Leah a platform for a specific public voice. It also gives her an opportunity to respond to the public that surrounds her. As a public figure, she responds to sexism and stereotypes in a cutting manner.

Funny and fast, *Chessboxer* and its heroine bridge the gap between board games and the boxing ring, seventeenth-century strategy and twenty-first-century blogging, in unexpected and fun ways.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH



## One Stupid Thing

Stewart Lewis, Turner Publishing Company (MAR 16)  
Softcover \$15.99 (304pp), 978-1-68442-532-7  
THRILLER

In the young adult mystery novel *One Stupid Thing*, three teenagers believe they caused a fatal car accident on a Nantucket summer evening.

Sophia, Trevor, and Jamie all have their lives change in dramatic ways after the accident. Their friendships fracture, and their plans spiral out of control. Each deals with the consequences of their one bad decision on their own.

Back on the island ten months later, the three reconnect as new information about the accident surfaces that might exonerate them. Joining them in their investigation is Violet, a girl with her own doubts about the accident. Their suspicion focuses on Violet's stepfather, Lester, an unscrupulous businessman. As the teenagers' case against Lester builds, each of them makes important discoveries about friendship, love, sexuality, class, and responsibility.

Told from the four main characters' alternating perspectives, the novel leans on some tropes, making it feel like *The Breakfast Club* set during a New England summer. Just as such movies crystallized 1980s teen culture, *One Stupid Thing* captures the nuances of power and self-doubt that shape the lives of today's text-obsessed youth.

The novel is gentle and compassionate when it comes to the characters' sexual comings-of-age, though Jamie's first night with his boyfriend is undernarrated, as is Violet's consummation of her relationship with Trevor, about which the book states that the couple "taught each other things between the sheets," foregoing the complexities of teen angst, passion, and sexual awakening. Where the mystery itself is concerned, the novel is short on surprises and sudden discoveries, working toward a climactic confrontation that's undercut by a deus ex machina.

In the young adult thriller *One Stupid Thing*, an island community's idiosyncrasies are represented in a skillful manner, as are the socioeconomic assumptions that linger just below the surface.

KLAY DYER



## Down World

Rebecca Phelps, Wattpad Books (MAR 30) Softcover \$10.99 (368pp), 978-1-989365-59-5  
SCIENCE FICTION

Rebecca Phelps's inventive novel *Down World* crosses multiple dimensions and timelines as a teenager searches for a way to heal her family and correct a tragedy that should never have happened.

Sixteen-year-old Marina recognizes some faces when she transfers to East Township High for her sophomore year, but she does not know anyone well. She went to elementary school with some of her new classmates, but when her brother Robbie died, her parents transferred her to private school, away from Kieren, the boy they blamed for Robbie's death.

On her first day at East Township, Marina meets Brady, a handsome, friendly senior who helps her to navigate the confusing building that once served as a military base. She develops a crush that leads her to a shocking secret about her town, and about Robbie's death.

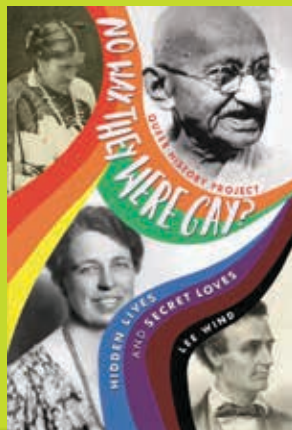
The story moves across multiple dimensions and timelines, requiring concentration. Scientific explanations for how and why the different dimensions exist are present, but unanswered questions remain, particularly concerning the existence of a train that travels between dimensions, seeming to defy the book's established rules.

Marina's setting is somber. Her town's economy was reliant on the former military base, and much of the landscape that surrounds her is abandoned. She and others deal with the fallout of unexpected deaths, and their emotions, even of love and attraction, are muted by grief, helping to make the fantastical plot more credible.

As the story progresses, the worlds that Marina visits, and the world into which she was born, change as a direct consequence of her travels. Marina is desperate to repair her family and restore her world, but she does not know how. She must decide what she is willing to sacrifice to make things right.

*Down World* is an imaginative work of young adult science fiction.

CATHERINE THURESON



## No Way, They Were Gay? Hidden Lives and Secret Loves

Lee Wind, Zest Books (APR 6) Softcover \$18.99 (296pp)  
978-1-5415-8162-3, LGBTQ+ NONFICTION

People can't see what isn't culturally visible—that's why queer history is so necessary, not just as a one-off, but as a perennial part of a culture's story. In *No Way, They Were Gay?*, Lee Wind revisits famous figures of US and world history, delves into primary sources, and reassesses what's made legible about people's sexual and gender identities when the present and past are allowed to collide.

The book is divided into three categories: men who loved men, women who loved women, and people who lived outside of gender binaries. Wind provides one of the best explanations for the necessity of these expansive categories: while his system acknowledges the problems of applying modern terms to the past, it also encodes the complexity of human experience around gender and sexuality

in ways that create continuity with the present, and that reverse queer historical erasure.

From Gandhi to Eleanor Roosevelt, Wind doesn't shy away from revealing his subjects in their full complexity. A fellow traveler and guide on a journey of discovery, Wind calls out the shadow sides of those profiled, as well as what's laudable. His book transmits rare facts and firsthand accounts with a sense of joyous wonder. It also encourages readers to come to their own conclusions about the facts provided. Each chapter closes with some iteration of the question, "What do you think?" Even in regards to his own book, Wind emphasizes that history is an interpretative place that requires critical thinking.

At a time where issues of social justice are often deemed either overinflated or "solved," Lee Wind makes a powerful case that queer historical erasure is an ongoing issue.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS



## The 27 Run Crush

Justin Zimmerman, Ethan Claunch (Illustrator), Russell Brown (Illustrator), A Wave Blue World, (MAR 23) Hardcover \$25 (136pp)  
978-1-949518-10-8, COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

A swarm of alien invaders threaten post-apocalyptic Earth in the action-packed graphic novel *The 27 Run: Crush*.

Beti, the pilot of a formidable Mech, is accompanied by her telepathic dog E.K. as she fights off a horde of aliens whom she's dubbed "Crawlies." Soon, Beti and E.K. find themselves alone, with just enough power to send a distress call; rescue comes from another Mech, helmed by a blinded, amnesiac pilot and his mechanical companion, Sid.

There's past history between Beti and the pilot, who has developed an ability to communicate with the twenty-seven giant monsters that survive on the earth. The pilot uses his power to summon help, and together the Mechs and monsters defeat the Crawlies. The book ends with an even deadlier potential threat looming: whomever or whatever sent the Crawlies to Earth.

The book is infused with adrenaline, and many of its pages are dedicated to well-designed battle scenes. Quieter moments are marked by entertaining banter between the pilots and their sidekicks, as well as deeper glimpses into the personalities involved. In the tradition of *Battle of the Planets* and *Voltron*, there's a nice moment in which the two Mechs combine to create one larger super-mech—a Mag (short for "Magnificent") Mech.

The art is given the space it needs to shine, with lots of full-page images that are rich in color and detail. An attractive bonus section includes a gallery of alternate covers, pin-ups, character designs, and profiles of the monsters.

Blending Mechs, Monsters and *Mad Max*-style action, *The 27 Run: Crush* is fast, furious, and fun.

PETER DABBENE

Image by Ken Lashley & Juan Fernandez (Illustrators) from *The 27 Run: Crush*. Used with permission from A Wave Blue World.





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## Delicates

Brenna Thummler, Oni Press (MAR 16)  
Softcover \$14.99 (320pp), 978-1-62010-788-1  
COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

Marjorie Glatt, the main character of the popular graphic novel *Sheets*, returns in Brenna Thummler's *Delicates*.

Marjorie lives a strange and secret life, attending school like a typical teenager, but also befriending the ghosts who congregate at her family's laundromat. In her attempts to keep those worlds separate, she begins to alienate her best ghost friend, Wendell.

Marjorie, who finds herself accepted among the popular kids at school, also keeps her distance from Eliza Duncan, an odd classmate who's into photography—photographing ghosts, in particular. But soon Marjorie reevaluates what it means, and what it costs, to be considered "cool."

The word "delicate" is used both as a reference to laundry and in Eliza's description of the film-developing process, but it also corresponds to the fragility of Marjorie, Eliza, and other adolescents finding their place in the school hierarchy and in life. The writing is sensitive and nuanced throughout, as Marjorie grapples with her problems and the aftermath of her mother's death. Convincing adult characters have their own struggles, and even the story's primary bully is dimensional, as the book reveals her home life and the insecurities that drive her behavior.

The book's full-color art is a treat, from detailed renderings of cameras and bicycles, to the marvelous, wordless, page-sized images that establish settings or moods. Wood grains on doors, reflections in puddles and on polished tile floors, Eliza's different-colored socks, and telephone lines connected to old houses all contribute to the realism and the beauty of the book.

*Delicates* is a sophisticated, beautiful graphic novel that gets to the heart of being a teenager.

PETER DABBENE

Image from *Delicates* by  
Brenna Thummler. Used with  
permission from Oni Press.



## Bixby Timmons and the Dragonthorp Riddle

Dwight D. Karkan, Tiny Fox Press (MAR 30) Softcover  
\$14.99 (284pp), 978-1-946501-27-1, FANTASY

A feisty teenager tries to solve the biggest puzzle of her life in order to bring a billionaire tech genius home in Dwight D. Karkan's engaging novel *Bixby Timmons and the Dragonthorp Riddle*.

When Bixby and her family move so her father can become the caretaker of Pinnacle Manor, she doesn't know quite what to think. But as the family settles in the former Dragonthorp estate, Bixby finds a home among the estate's personable robot staff. She makes a new friend at virtual school, Tipton, who wants to help her solve the mystery of Cody Dragonthorp's disappearance.

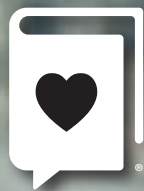
The entire estate is full of puzzles left behind by Cody, all of which lead to answers about why he vanished and where he can be found. With the help of her new friends, Bixby races against the clock and other players to discover the truth of Cody's whereabouts and win a prize that is promised to change her life forever.

Bixby is a sassy, clever, and believable main character who shows her strength when standing up to bullies. Her disdain for authority is balanced by her love for her family and her warmth toward her new friends—even if some of them are robots. Conversations between her and other characters—especially Tipton—are colorful and authentic.

The puzzles come with enough details to make Bixby's problem-solving interactive. Each new layer of the puzzle shows that Bixby is a force to be reckoned with. The book ends with a frantic race to the finish that wraps up most of the mystery but leaves plenty left to be solved.

An exciting story with a refreshing lead who continually surprises others with her capabilities, *Bixby Timmons and the Dragonthorp Riddle* is a delight.

ANGELA MCQUAY



A FOREWORD REVIEWS

# SPOTLIGHT

THE  
FUTURE  
IS FEMALE

## WOMEN'S ISSUES

WINTER 2021 TITLES



## BIRTH OF THE ANIMA

Ancient Language of the Earth: Book 1

Kelsey K. Sather

Theia Books (MAR 8) Hardcover \$29.99 (456pp)  
978-1-73552-050-6, FANTASY

In Kelsey K. Sather's powerful epic fantasy novel *Birth of the Anima*, generations of women fight to restore the planet to her natural balance.

More than two thousand years ago, Avni, the fifth Anima, helped to save her people from dire servitude. She was followed centuries later by Bazi, who stopped a renewed incursion of occupiers. Bazi was followed by Oili, a princess whose destiny was greater than being someone else's bride; and Oili was followed by Erie, who married above her station and had to flee her home.

Across millennia, these women assume the redemptive role of the Anima, an elemental feminine force with the power to defeat rapacious conquerors. Even when their enemies operate under different banners, each serves the same purpose: to sow disorder, and to separate people from the natural freedoms that are every being's inheritance.

Closer to the present, after the Imperium has claimed most land masses on the planet and squelched magic, a doctoral student, Freda, finds a scroll during an archaeological dig. It hints at the Anima's origins, and its secrets propel her into a quest to learn the truth about the ancient ways. She may even become the twelfth and final Anima herself—if fate doesn't have other plans.

The novel plays upon a painful dichotomy of empowered womanhood: even the Anima, who has the ability to change the world, makes considerable sacrifices to fill her role. The novel's women want to be mothers, lovers, daughters—even just free; the forces that they stand against prevent them from pursuing individual happiness, though. Generation upon generation, their wrenching sacrifices grow.

Though for the last Anima “the future remains unwritten,” *Birth of the Anima* is a feminist fantasy novel with a serious hook.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER



## GERTA

Kateřina Tučková

Véronique Firkusny (Translator)

Amazon Crossing (FEB 1) Hardcover \$24.95 (460pp)  
978-1-5420-4315-1, HISTORICAL

Kateřina Tučková's *Gerta* is a startling, significant historical novel set during and after the violent postwar expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia.

At the end of the WWII, Gerta—daughter of a disrespected Czech mother whom she loves, and a German Nazi father whom she despises—is shocked by the fervor with which ordinary Czech citizens decide to go after anyone with German blood. Her approach to politics has always been “live and let live”; nonetheless, she and her infant daughter are marched out of Brno with tens of thousands of others who are considered anathema to the newly reestablished Czechoslovakia, soon to become a communist state.

During the days-long march, many of the expelled citizens are beaten, starved, raped, and murdered. A diminished number reaches an abandoned concentration camp, where disease and deprivations further cut into their numbers. Gerta is among the few selected for farmwork. She has a few years of peace with a kind Catholic host. When she is finally allowed to return to Brno, it is a changed city. She realizes that she will always be punished for her paternity. When the subject of reconciliation arises in the 1980s, it sounds like a dream. Can the past be forgiven so easily?

*Gerta* is an unflinching story that gathers the brutalities of the postwar years with a sense of purpose. It avoids overt moral declarations. Instead, the abominable acts that Gerta and others are subjected to whisper, then shout, what officials won't consider: that blind retributive acts should never be allowed to take the place of discerning justice. The book's quiet exposure of the ironies of the Eastern communist states, which traded outside oppressions for their own forms of violence, is striking.

Written with empathy for the unsung innocents who suffer under the mechanizations of nationalist projects, *Gerta* is a powerful historical novel.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER



## LIBERTIE

Kaitlyn Greenidge

Algonquin Books (MAR 30) Hardcover \$26.95  
(336pp), 978-1-61620-701-4, HISTORICAL

In Kaitlyn Greenidge's powerful coming-of-age novel *Libertie*, a freeborn Black girl's hunger to define her own boundaries carries her across an ocean and back.

The darker daughter of a light-skinned, widowed homeopath, Libertie witnesses her mother saving runaways in New York. But then a man with a broken spirit dies, and her faith in her future in medicine wavers. The rift between she and her mother widens after the Civil War: Libertie's mother makes concessions for white patients, and Libertie bristles. Sent to Ohio for medical school while she's still angry, Libertie feels adrift.

Back home, Emmanuel—a passionate American Black man who lived in Haiti, and who studied under Libertie's mother—proposes to Libertie. She accepts out of a sense of rebellion. In Haiti, she discovers that marrying into a family full of secrets is more complicated than she anticipated.

Throughout, love reveals itself as fraught with expectations. Libertie and her mother exchange sometimes overlapping letters, writing between the lines to reveal the misunderstandings and potent wishes that mark their bond. Libertie's doubts about the roles that people want her to inhabit mix with her restlessness. Finally, motherhood empowers her to be at home within herself.

As she addresses rejecting her mother's dreams, fleeing, and finding purpose, Libertie's narration is thorough, tactile, and sharp. Her strong-willed temperament is a double-edged sword, both a hindrance and gift; her passion is clear and evolving. She employs intricate water and botanical images and music, while themes of colorism, identity, communities among women, and wrestling over life decisions result in an engaging portrait of growing up.

In the memorable historical novel *Libertie*, a young woman struggles with her mother and questions what freedom means to her.

KAREN RIGBY



## THE REBEL NUN

**Marj Charlier**

Blackstone Publishing (MAR 2) Hardcover \$27.99 (300pp), 978-1-09-409275-1, HISTORICAL

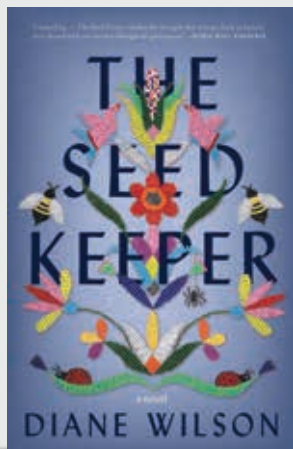
The story of a community of women in crisis and the power they found through their will to save themselves, *The Rebel Nun* tells the fictional truth behind the historical rebellion of the Holy Cross nuns in 589 CE, as recounted in her latter days by one of the rebellion's leaders, Clotild.

In order to escape the limited options available to her as a royal bastard, Clotild joins the Holy Cross monastery and discovers a space in which women can live simply, but with some safety and self-governance. All this changes when Holy Cross's founder dies. Once hopeful about becoming Holy Cross's abbess, Clotild instead finds herself leading Holy Cross's rebellion, which first consists of forty starving nuns breaking cloister to walk twenty miles a day for three days in order to claim sanctuary and appeal their living conditions. Ignored for months, the nuns are forced to choose between a living martyrdom or a final stand that could result in their excommunication or deaths, but that might preserve Holy Cross's future as a viable community.

The novel's characterizations are somewhat shallow, foregoing explorations of the women's motivations in favor of action and the timeline's demands. Situated in the shadow of the Roman Empire's withdraw and decline, the novel illustrates how shifting power structures were ruthless in exploiting women. Its events coincide with Christianity's decision to purge women from churches. Backed into a corner, reimagined Clotild finds herself losing her religion and rediscovering a pagan reverence for nature and women that drives her to challenge all she's known.

Rich in facts and foreshadowing, the historical novel *The Rebel Nun* finds in the nuns' rebellion, and in Germanic tribal paganism, an inspirational morality tale and historical precedent for modern women to connect with their own powers, no matter the stakes.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS



## THE SEED KEEPER

**Diane Wilson**

Milkweed Editions (MAR 9) Softcover \$16 (400pp) 978-1-57131-137-5, LITERARY

Told through the voices of strong, albeit fractured, women across generations, *The Seed Keeper* is a novel about legacies, generational trauma, and the inescapable call of one's roots.

Rosalie's mother died when she was four. She spent the next several years with her father, a Dakota man who raised her with deep reverence for the rugged, fertile land of southern Minnesota—land stolen from the Dakota people. When he dies, Rosalie is whisked into foster care, cut off from her family and her history.

Guided most by a desire for security, Rosalie marries a white farmer with whom she has a son, Tommy; cultural tensions define the next two decades of her life as she navigates being a Native woman in a white, Christian town that shuns her, despite being built on her ancestral home.

Upon her husband's death, Rosalie returns to the abandoned cabin she once shared with her father. Reconnecting with family friends and relatives, including her great aunt Darlene, Rosalie finds that the home that she was denied never stopped waiting for her, dormant beneath the soil, ready to spring forth.

The cyclical nature of trauma is a core theme: Rosalie's grandmother was kidnapped as a child and taken to a state boarding school; the abuse she endured left scars that she transferred to her daughter, Agnes, who committed suicide. Rosalie chafes against her husband's profit-driven farming practices and his desire to suppress Tommy's Native heritage, discouraging her from teaching him the traditional growing practices that were passed down to her. As an adult, Tommy is also caught between two poles: honoring his late father's wishes, and respecting his mother's roots.

With a focus on women who carry the scars of the past alongside hope for the future, *The Seed Keeper* is a profound novel about resilience and rebirth.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE



## EAT THE MOUTH THAT FEEDS YOU

**Carribean Fragoza**

City Lights Publishers (MAR 23) Softcover \$14.95 (144pp), 978-0-87286-833-5, SHORT STORIES

Blending the ancestral and the modern, the religious and the secular, the stories of *Eat the Mouth That Feeds You* come together to create something transcendent.

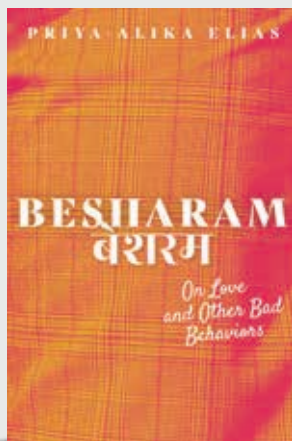
Women and women's bodies are centered throughout the collection. "Lumberjack Mom" finds siblings fascinated with the fierceness with which their mother gardens in the wake of their father's absence. Her hands become rough and her arms strong, externalizing a change that surely must be solidifying within. In the surreal "Me Muero," a young woman drops dead at a family gathering; she must dispense with her own innards before finding peace.

The title story sees a toddler take bites out of her mother and eat letters, photographs, and other ephemera from her grandmother and great grandmother. The body feeds her in more ways than one. In taking the nourishing relationship between a mother and child further than suckling at the breast, the story makes the passage of thoughts, emotions, and knowledge through generations a visceral, loving process.

There is a hidden sense of flow among the pieces. Following "Eat the Mouth That Feeds You" is "Mysterious Bodies," in which a woman attempts an at-home medical abortion with psychedelic results. "Ini y Fati," the story of a young girl saved from death via lightning strike by a child saint who questions the existence of God, is followed by "New Fire Songs," a story outside of time, in which a tribe of people living within a walnut grove, protected from the farmers who would hunt them, draw on their multiethnic ancestral roots for strength.

The collection revels in the unapologetic strength of the feminine, giving it a transformative quality. It reshapes the idea of Chicana womanhood as either meek or strong-willed, and shows that women are both and more. Fierce and feminist, *Eat the Mouth That Feeds You* is a soul-quaking literary force.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH



## BESHARAM

On Love and Other Bad Behaviors

Priya-Alika Elias

Chicago Review Press (APR 20) Softcover \$16.99 (208pp), 978-1-64160-507-6, ESSAYS

Feminist lawyer Priya-Alika Elias's excellent essay collection *Besharam* explores modern womanhood in two nations.

Elias grew up in India, came to the US for college and law school, and returned to India. Her strong, engaging voice unites the book's disparate essays, which are variously personal, cultural, and news related, though also topically divided into chapters titled Sex, Ugliness, Hurt, and Independence.

Elias discusses dating and hookups in frank, sex-positive terms. She also sensitively recounts the pressures that led to her disordered eating. Family stories of "the tyranny of aunts" from her hometown, who poked and pried to know why she was gaining weight, how she lost it, and when she was going to settle down, occur, as do analyses of pop lyrics and stereotypes from Hollywood to Bollywood. There are also takes on literature, including why Charlotte Brontë is more satisfying than Jane Austen, and of the horrifying ways that girls are described in the Sweet Valley High series.

Elias's lively essays also experiment with forms, employing lists, folk tales, poetic and lyrical language, and even a section appendix, "Some Types of Desi Fuckboys," that's scathing and funny as it forwards its critiques in the form of a field guide. The book's personal essays are sometimes vulnerable, sometimes gleeful and coarse, and sometimes laugh-out-loud funny; its most serious material is less personal, including its analyses of news stories about celebrity sexual abuses and gang violence against women. The book's final two pieces, "Story of an Air Conditioner" and "Closing Prayer: For My Strong Brown Women," are its stars.

The bold feminist essays of *Besharam* are smart, critical, and entertaining as they explore what womanhood entails in Desi and US cultures. MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS



## WHITE MAGIC

Elissa Washuta

Tin House Books (APR 27) Hardcover \$25.95 (432pp) 978-1-951142-39-1, ESSAYS

A collection of essays tackling addiction, sexual violence, mental illness, and the colonization of witchcraft, *White Magic* is a delight and a challenge.

Elissa Washuta is a refreshing narrator, her prose poetic and sparse. Describing her former draw to alcohol and current sobriety, she states, "Something was lodged in there, clawing. Today, I feel it holding my lungs in its fists, and I can't sob hard enough to cry it out." Dark humor is employed with a deft hand, as in a recounting of a hospital emergency: "They say you're supposed to sense doom when anaphylaxis hits, but I always sense doom."

Washuta describes her draw to the occult as both an extension of her Native heritage, and as a desire to bring some semblance of order to the chaos around and within her—"I google spells to take the PTSD out of me." Her criticisms of modern, Insta-worthy iterations of witchcraft are blistering and truthful, though she also acknowledges the difficulty and nuance of ethical sourcing and consumption of spiritualism.

Though not for the faint of heart, Washuta's frank confrontations with, and acknowledgments of, unhealed wounds are validating. A kinship forms in the shared brokenness, inviting a comparison of where the cracks may line up. "I haven't memorized the entries in the catalog of demons. I don't even know the name of the one inside me," Washuta says of her understanding of the occult, and of herself. Such open admissions of confusion and searching cultivate an intimacy throughout the text, evoking the sense of peeling open a letter from an estranged friend; Washuta's voice haunts by admitting to being haunted.

A poignant work by a rising essayist, *White Magic* speaks to the ongoing work of recovery that is anything but magic.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE



## WIFE | DAUGHTER | SELF

A Memoir in Essays

Beth Kephart

William Sulit (Illustrator)

Forest Avenue Press (MAR 2) Softcover \$16 (250pp) 978-1-942436-44-7, ESSAYS

Beth Kephart's multifaceted memoir *Wife | Daughter | Self* is about the relationships that shaped who she is and how she sees herself.

In these exploratory essays, Kephart writes about her marriage, her husband, her aging father, her students, and her son. Each entry peels at the truth of who Kephart is, giving glimpses of different parts of her life, until larger pieces of the entirety she chooses to show are visible. Though they are not always chronological and at times are tangential, the entries explore and explain how family ties shape and define women.

The memoir first tackles Kephart's identity as a wife; this is its shortest section, and also its most distant, though it includes portions of tenderness. In exploring Kephart's role as daughter, the book is more compelling, tackling what family means, and what it was like for her to care for her aging father, with the increasing demands and complex emotions that such care brought. The section is poignant and present, the book's most forthright and complete work. In exploring her self, Kephart again touches on her roles as a mother, a teacher, and a wife—still often addressing her being in relation to others.

The book evinces an eye for detail, though sometimes its prose is restrained. The book hits its stride when writing about Kephart's father's decline, about how their relationship evolved over time, and about the emotions involved in both. Glimpses of her childhood complement her present day well, adding depth and nuance to her story.

*Wife | Daughter | Self* is a resonant memoir in essays, in which Beth Kephart stops to wonder how others shaped her, and how the bonds of family make her who she is.

JAIME HERNDON



## THE ISLAND OF HAPPINESS

Tales of Madame d'Aulnoy

Baroness Madame d'Aulnoy

Jack Zipes (Editor, Translator)

Natalie Frank (Contributor, Illustrator)

Princeton University Press (MAR 16) Hardcover  
\$39.95 (240pp), 978-0-691-18024-3  
LITERARY COLLECTIONS

Brilliant illustrations and a powerful translation make Madame d'Aulnoy's seventeenth-century fairy tales feel just as immediate and necessary as when they were written.

D'Aulnoy's stories have their own perspectives when it comes to familiar tales like Cinderella. Their operative themes are entertaining and—though they were written in a feudal landscape—feminist, pushing the boundaries of womanhood to deliver fresh opinions on women's roles in society. D'Aulnoy's heroines take on the “masculine” roles of knights and protectors, as when, in “The Blue Bird,” Princess Florine seeks out and saves a *damoiseau* in distress, King Charmant, who is trapped in a marriage to someone whom he does not love. These women are their own agents of change, eschewing weakness and suggesting that no woman needs a man to save them. They are both heroines and villainesses, too.

Natalie Frank's stylized drawings work with the text to bring its heartwrenching and gruesome scenes to life, heightening the emotional impact of crucial moments, as when, on the last page of the titular tale, a princess is pictured crying over a prince's body; sharp, crude black lines almost scribble out the scene, conveying the darkness that now plagues her life.

Despite inventing the term “fairy tale,” d'Aulnoy's work defies the tropes used to define the genre. While children will be able to enjoy the stories on their surface, there is substance for adults to contemplate, too. Details, such as the drop cap, embellished first letters that begin each fairy tale, make the book appear to be an ancient religious text of high import.

*The Island of Happiness* is an enchanting collection of women-focused fairy tales—the perfect way to enter d'Aulnoy's magical world.

GEORGE HAJJAR



## WHO'S YOUR DADDY

Arisa White

Augury Books (MAR 1) Softcover \$16.95 (138pp)  
978-1-936767-61-8, POETRY

In an imagined letter to her father, Arisa White writes, “Do you remember, I bear the name you conjured, its attention turned to your shorelines, to the father missing in us both?” Though he never answers, White travels to Guyana, her father's homeland, as is covered in *Who's Your Daddy*, a painful and introspective exploration of parental absence.

In portions that read like vignettes, the book begins with the small moments of White's early life to establish its themes: a lack of protection, difficulty with trust, fear of abandonment, wanting to disappear, and wanting to be seen. In place of White's father are uncles, stepfathers, and a mother who claims, “you raise your daughters, and love your sons.”

As White's yearning to understand her father's absence continues, she uses a blended of poetry, prose, and collage to tell her story. Though most of the language is her own, some is borrowed from others with absent fathers, resulting in a kind of communal voice of abandonment.

Care and nurture play a central role as well. A poignant moment comes when White's lover welcomes her to sit between her knees and have her hair combed and braided, her scalp massaged, and her forgiveness granted. Welcoming images of water heal White, though they devastated her family in the past. Her ability to re-envision the metaphor is powerful.

When White rediscovers her father, she negotiates what to do with an absence that persists in spite of his presence. The clarity with which she characterizes his self-absorption is observed in keen terms, not without kindness. It takes the alchemy of poetry and metaphor to resolve his past with the present man and find forgiveness.

Stark in its honesty, emotional, and compelling, the cross-genre memoir *Who's Your Daddy* reconsiders forgiveness and who is worthy of it.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH



## THE SWEETNESS OF VENUS

A History of the Clitoris

Sarah Chadwick

Wild Pansy (FEB 14) Softcover \$21.95  
978-1-73629-883-1, WOMEN'S STUDIES

A fun, straight-talking history of the clitoris, *The Sweetness of Venus* is a win for feminism.

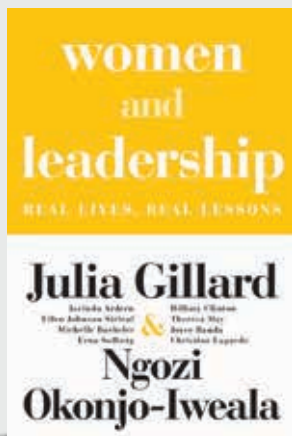
The book opens with the scientific history of the body part, from the infamous treatment of hysteria to lesser-known Greek and Roman medical texts that acknowledge the existence of the site of sexual pleasure. In Victorian times, Sarah Chadwick shows, “hysteria” was a catchall term for anything that ailed women, and was treated with direct stimulation of the clitoris until the patient reached “hysterical paroxysm”—a fancy way to say “orgasm.” And every few decades, a male doctor would “discover” the clitoris anew.

The book also covers the cultural history of women's sexuality as linked to the clitoris, from the Bible and classic literature to American politics and psychology. These observations are complete with sharp criticism: what would have happened if a woman president received cunnilingus under her desk? Why was Eve considered the reckless one in Eden? Noting that it's too big of a topic to cover within the book's context of Western culture, female genital mutilation is also discussed in brief, acknowledging another important facet of clitoral history.

Chadwick takes what could be a mundane history and adds flavor via biting commentary, mocking the ignorance of men about women's bodies, and the longstanding implications that women's bodies are lesser. Medical illustrations of anatomy are interspersed in the text, often shared with humor: the caption for an illustration of the Victorian interpretation of women's reproductive systems, showing a vagina as an inverted penis (a notion that prevailed for centuries), is simply “This is not what you think it is.” Various feminist cartoons add levity to the book's heavier topics of anatomical sexism.

*The Sweetness of Venus* is an exciting romp through the cultural history of the most taboo part of women's bodies: the clitoris.

ASHLEY HOLSTROM



## WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

Real Lives, Real Lessons

Julia Gillard

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

The MIT Press (FEB 2) Hardcover \$29.95 (336pp)  
978-0-262-04574-2, WOMEN'S STUDIES

Julia Gillard and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's *Women and Leadership* takes a global look at women in places of power.

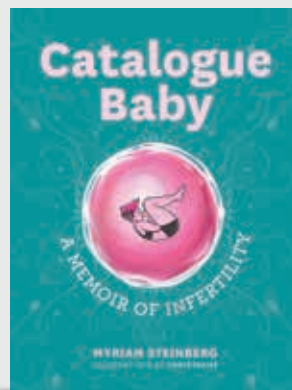
The book examines the lives of eight prominent leaders from a variety of countries and continents, including Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Michelle Bachelet of Chile, and Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand. Longtime friends Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala, who are international leaders from Australia and Nigeria, began talking about the vital role of women in leadership in the wake of Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2016 loss (Clinton is one of the women featured in the book). Their conversation led them to posit eight hypotheses about women and leadership; these form the backbone of the book. Each hypothesis addresses a pertinent topic, including hair and clothes, motherhood, and the seemingly inevitable b-word, and is examined through the lived experiences of the women they interviewed.

The authors leverage their positions for unprecedented access to powerful women, and they offer their own stories with humility and clear eyes. Their posture in the book is the perfect portrayal of women eschewing competition to support other women—one of the most vital themes examined in the book. Every page brims with admiration and respect for women in leadership, the difficulties they face, and the diverse gifts they offer.

Despite the grim statistics about how few world leaders are women, the book is hopeful and encouraging. It showcases the resilience and determination of women leaders and the impact they have, bringing wisdom from a variety of disciplines, including neuroscience, psychology, and economics, to bear. Its ending calls out specific lessons for men, too, calling them to a supportive role for women leaders.

*Women and Leadership* is an examination of the lived experiences of women in political and economic leadership.

MELISSA WUSKE



## CATALOGUE BABY

A Memoir of (In)fertility

Myriam Steinberg

Page Two Books (MAR 2) Softcover \$24.95 (272pp)  
978-1-989603-64-2, COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

"Sex is messy. Un-sex is just as infinitely messy," Myriam Steinberg writes in *Catalogue Baby*, her graphic memoir about five grueling years of fertility treatment. By the time she became a parent, she'd had 125 blood draws, 151 injections, and 483 progesterone suppositories—and shed an estimated twenty-five liters of tears.

Approaching burnout and age forty, Steinberg shut down the festival she had run for years and decided to pursue motherhood on her own. Between IUI, IVF, and a DIY at-home attempt, she had four failed pregnancies before the eventual birth of her twins. Choosing sperm and egg donors was mind-boggling, and the costs—and well-meaning friends' barbed comments—stacked up.

The process involved agonizing choices, such as terminating a pregnancy when tests confirmed Down syndrome. While Steinberg gives a clear sense of the physical and financial challenges, she also employs the language of a spiritual quest. As she became acquainted with and bade farewell to several potential children, she developed a mystical belief in the migration of souls.

The book's illustrations often render the book's metaphors as literal: Steinberg's biological clock is a cartoon watch face wearing cowboy boots and a pink cowboy hat; grief is a basket of water threatening to drown her heart; and the expense of IVF is depicted via toothed dollar signs. The style ranges from anatomical realism in the fertility clinic to whimsical, as in vintage computer game scenarios and a word cloud that becomes a cyclone. Against a mostly gray and brown palette, flashes of brightness stand out. Steinberg's shock of pink hair is a constant. Pink also captures the bodily reality of treatment, via organs, blood, and pain. The visuals are essential in this unsparing account of the practical and emotional burdens of infertility.

*Catalogue Baby* is an eye-catching, heart-wrenching graphic memoir of a long road to motherhood.

REBECCA FOSTER



## THE INCREDIBLE NELLIE BLY

Journalist, Investigator, Feminist, and Philanthropist

Luciana Cimino

Sergio Algozzino (Illustrator)

Laura Garofalo (Translator)

Abrams ComicArts (MAR 2) Hardcover \$24.99 (144pp),  
978-1-4197-5017-5, COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

Recovering from pneumonia, Nellie Bly accepts an intrepid journalism student's requests to meet and discuss her career in Luciana Cimino's graphic biography *The Incredible Nellie Bly*.

In 1921, to celebrate the Columbia University School of Journalism's ten-year anniversary, a call for articles went out for student writers to submit work for the college paper. Miriam, a student of the college, intended to write about Nellie Bly's undercover investigation at a women's mental institution thirty years prior, the first of its kind by a woman journalist. Though Nellie was not receiving guests, Miriam's persistence paid off, and Nellie agreed to see her. The aspiring journalist peppered the veteran with questions about her life and journalistic work.

With Miriam's conversations with Nellie as a framing device, the book allows Nellie to tell her own story. Though contrived, Miriam's imagined questions create a connection to Nellie that brings forward her personality. The introduction gives a more comprehensive account of her life than the book proper does, but the highlights shared within the story are still a complete portrait of the influential journalist.

Sergio Algozzino's full-color art complements and expands the story by illustrating specific aspects of it while filling in background information. The book's full-page renderings of articles written by and about Nellie Bly are well drawn, if confusing when dialogue boxes are superimposed on them. Double-page spreads highlight Bly's major accomplishments, as well as some moments she kept to herself, including the beginning of her trip around the world à la Phileas Fogg, and her assignment on the Serbian front in World War I.

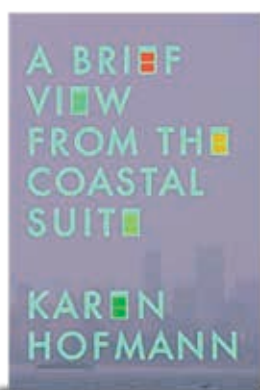
This graphic biography combines its artwork with an able narrative to show what made Nellie Bly so incredible.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH



Image by Natalie Frank from *The Island of Happiness: Tales of Madame d'Aulnoy* by Baroness Madame D'Aulnoy. Used with permission from Princeton University Press.

## GENERAL



### A Brief View from the Coastal Suite

**Karen Hofmann**

NeWest Press (APR 15) Softcover \$16.95 (312pp)  
978-1-77439-017-7

Karen Hofmann's skillful, visceral novel *A Brief View from the Coastal Suite* follows a family through the early days of a financial crisis.

Though the 2008 financial crisis strikes Vancouver hard, the Lund siblings find ways to survive; some even seem to thrive. Mandalay juggles her art career with single parenthood, striving to prevent her twin sons from adopting their father's flaws; Cleo seems to have it all, including an architectural design job and a close family, but is actually throwing herself into work to distract herself from her marital struggles. Cliff shrinks from increasing strife with his mail-order bride, and with the trials of running a landscape business; his brother Ben proves self-centered and conniving.

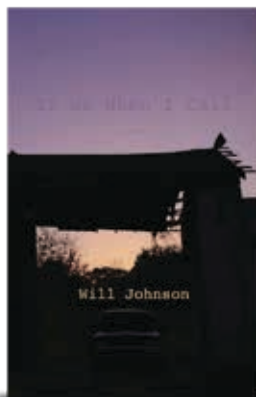
Hofmann's prose is captivating. She excels at writing everyday scenes. Some thrum with tension; others are characterized by warmth. Her characters' reflections are variously evocative and familiar, as when Mandalay thinks about a childhood vacation spot, which she remembers as a "calligraphic flourish of forest and sand," a place of "pale dunes and shoreline."

But the siblings' drive to achieve financial security, even as the market threatens to nosedive, forces them into painful situations. Mandalay tries to counter the excessive lifestyle of her children's father, only to drive a wedge between them. Cleo's diversions precede her slipping into an affair. Cliff's company begins to crumble, putting strain on his already tense relationship. Each endures their obstacles in their own ways; each is methodical in considering what they would count as a happy ending.

Set during the financial crisis of the aughts, the empathetic novel *A Brief View from the Coastal Suite* finds complicated siblings confronting their personal dramas.

JOHN M. MURRAY

## GENERAL



### If or When I Call

**Will Johnson**

Goliad Media Group (MAR 15) Softcover \$16 (266pp)  
978-0-9985554-6-1

Will Johnson's novel *If or When I Call* is a contemporary tale of addiction, love, and family, set in rural Missouri.

Parker and Melinda fall in love one Christmas; seven years later, their son, Ben, is born. After becoming a father, Parker starts to experience panic attacks and fits. He turns to alcohol to keep these terrifying episodes at bay, and he lives every moment on the edge of an undiagnosed disorder, via which he could lose himself and his family.

As Parker's relationship with his wife is threatened by his addiction, he watches their young love slowly die, until Melinda and he become "a couple of flatlining roommates." They eventually split up. Melinda's sister invites her and Ben into her home, silencing the talk of the town and offering them a safe place where they can find happiness again.

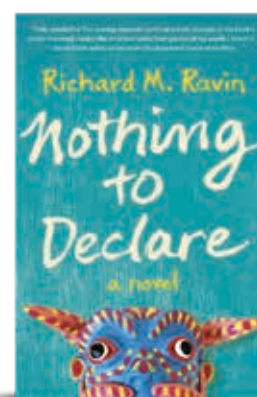
The novel alternates between its characters' points-of-view, following as their broken family learns how to live with loss and pain, and later undertakes a mad search for recovery and purpose. Its focus is on small, ordinary moments within their everyday lives. It jumps in and out of their pasts and present, giving each a distinct, clear voice. Ben's narration is particularly raw and touching; as a teenager, he learns to cope with his parents' failed marriage.

Johnson's prose is lyrical and evocative—not surprising, given his experience as a musician and songwriter. Beautiful, heartbreaking descriptions of otherwise mundane moments and memories make the novel even more engrossing.

*If or When I Call* is a tender novel about the brokenness of human nature, and about what it feels like to live with addiction and an undiagnosed illness.

ANNA MARIA COLIVICCHI

## GENERAL



### Nothing to Declare

**Richard M. Ravin**

16 doors press (FEB 2) Softcover \$15.99 (224pp)  
978-0-578-72297-9

In Richard M. Ravin's novel *Nothing to Declare*, the bonds and boundaries of a friendship are tested by the swirling counterculture of the 1970s.

When Jesse and Marty met in college, Jesse was an amiable, malleable art student; Marty was a wild hippie dropout who was never short of illegal schemes, and who intrigued everyone he met. He was the guy who got the girls—including the girls Jesse was interested in. An uncomfortable love triangle resulted.

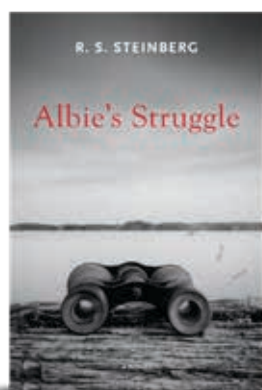
Twenty years later, Jesse is summoned to collect Marty's remains, though he hasn't seen his friend in years. The mysterious request, coupled with the dark pull of Marty's charisma, leads Jesse to recall the psychedelic seventies. His are a tangle of uncomfortable memories; he sorts through all that Marty left behind, leading up to a final reckoning with Marty's request. He works to lay old memories to rest and develop renewed appreciation for who he's become.

Here, characters are enlivened and defined by single acts, as when Jesse helps a pretty protestor who's distributing fliers, and she asks whether "a middle-class kid like him should be taking a job that could belong to a member of the working class." When Marty narrates, his thoughts come in fast, strobe-light bursts, and his observations are exuberant about the freedoms available to him. Both he and Jesse are prone to imaginative language, as when merengue music is characterized as having "a rhythm section like a howling jungle." Some of their leaps are abrupt, but they are always worth following.

*Nothing to Declare* is a rewarding novel that evokes and illuminates the grime and glory of the 1970s.

SUSAN WAGGONER

## HISTORICAL



### Albie's Struggle

**R. S. Steinberg**

Forsesi Press (MAR 31) \$19.99 (238pp) Softcover  
978-1-73602-860-5

*Albie's Struggle*, R. S. Steinberg's psychological novel about a ten-year-old at Camp Bear Lake, explores alienation and the fallout of casual cruelties.

In the book's enigmatic opening, Albie hides from his counselors. Hints at dark incidents swirl before the story backtracks to examine how Albie arrived at his lakeside standoff. The book's early, slow-burning chapters depict Albie's childhood in Golden Era New York. As he learns to read, dines in Chinatown, imagines escapes, and goes to school, Albie is revealed as a sensitive child. Intricate descriptions of his circumscribed world set him up for sudden shocks once his parents send him to the New Hampshire summer camp, where being an observer is no longer enough to survive.

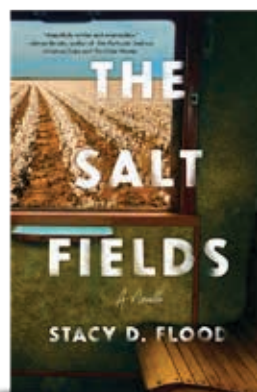
Deft in its mining of the ill fit between bookish Albie and the bullying environs of Camp Bear Lake, this character-driven tale gathers force through Albie's humiliations. His lack of athleticism and retiring demeanor make him an easy target. Raw talent at riflery further sets him apart from his peers, whom he longs to join, even while harboring misgivings about them. Suspense about Albie's ability to endure boyhood rituals, and about what happened to make him flee, results in a foreboding atmosphere.

Albie's keen intelligence strains under real and perceived expectations. He makes use of dense imagery, forensic impressions about people's words and actions, and continual self-examination. When he finds reprieve through friendship with a fellow outsider, the allure of rebelling bristles with danger. All of this crescendos in a tragic confluence of fate and remorseless righteousness involving another camper, after which Albie is left in an ambiguous state.

Through its careful buildup of emotional disturbances, *Albie's Struggle* is a haunting portrait of boyhood.

KAREN RIGBY

## HISTORICAL



### The Salt Fields

**Stacy D. Flood**

Lanternfish Press (MAR 9) Softcover \$14 (128pp)  
978-1-941360-49-1

In Stacy D. Flood's brooding historical novel *The Salt Fields*, a Black man migrates from the South and journeys inward toward reconciliation.

In 1947, Minister boards the Dawn Lightning to flee the Carolinas, where his ancestors were slaves, his wife was murdered, and his daughter drowned. Lanah and Divinion, a couple whose raw energy bristles against their outward refinement, and Carvall, a veteran, join him. With the train trip as a coiled, fascinating frame that branches to include character-defining stops in dreamlike locales that feel frozen in time, the travelers' ideas about starting new lives in the North change. They are aware that there's no escaping from the South, which is "nothing but a scar with some salt on it;" this becomes a poignant theme. Flood's fertile descriptions of the passing scenery are weighted with history, including visions of lynching.

Minister's intense impressions result in spare, charged dialogues with other passengers and dark, lingering puzzlement about their real intentions. Minister, who at first tries to stay out of the others' circles, is drawn in by light-skinned Lanah's confident allure. While revealing little about himself, he discovers that Lanah has bigger, secretive plans; Divinion hails from a lucky background; and Carvall, for all of his friendliness, is traumatized by an incident from the war. When Divinion's cavalier selfishness almost causes harm, mistrust simmers.

Later, in old age, Minister looks back on his own story, and on his travels by train, to discern that the world can, and does, survive everyone. In the ambiguous conclusion that hints at resignation and freedom, Minister's tragic experiences and deliberate separateness fold into a thought-provoking meditation about endurance.

Immersive because of its singular point-of-view and laced with astute observations about people, *The Salt Fields* is a bewitching, dangerous, and atmospheric novel.

KAREN RIGBY

## HISTORICAL



### To Zenzi

**Robert L. Shuster**

New Issues Press (APR 15) Softcover \$18 (344pp)  
978-1-936970-69-8

In Robert L. Shuster's gripping novel *To Zenzi*, eighty-four-year-old Tobias recounts his dark past as a member of the Hitler Youth, which he was pressured into joining when he was thirteen.

At first, Tobias believes he's fighting for a noble cause, but rumors keep swirling that the Germans are committing unthinkable atrocities against Jewish people. They are rumors so terrible he can't believe they could be true. As time goes on, though, he begins to wonder if he is fighting for the wrong side. For Tobias, life has been nothing but chaos and pain since the war began. One thing kept him going: Zenzi, a girl of Jewish descent with whom Tobias is desperately in love, and for whom he'd do anything.

Heart-wrenching and vibrant, *To Zenzi* is a masterful portrait of a war-torn world from the perspective of a teenager. It is a story of unending loss, but also of deep, tender, and enduring love. Tobias's world comes to life in glowing detail. His pain and loneliness are palpable, and his confusion over what he is fighting for, and the man whom he wants to become, is deep.

Though it is action-packed, the novel is not fast paced. It lingers over Tobias's memories. He describes each moment with precision and care, evoking the feeling that, for Tobias in his elder years, his memories—both horrific ones, and beautiful moments with Zenzi—are as fresh as if they happened yesterday.

*To Zenzi* is a moving portrait of what can be lost forever when one is forced to live through inconceivable circumstances. It delves into the psyches of both old and young Tobias, demonstrating how he was affected in real time as he experienced the traumas of war, as well as the many ways the war affected him later in life.

MOLLY SPRAYREGEN

## HISTORICAL



## Waterfall

Mary Casanova

University of Minnesota Press (APR 6) Hardcover  
\$22.95 (264pp), 978-1-5179-0174-5

In Mary Casanova's evocative novel *Waterfall*, a young artist readjusts to life after a harrowing stay at a mental institution.

Set in 1922, amid the lush Minnesota wilderness, the novel creates an idyllic, unique sense of place. Baird Island, owned by Trinity's family, offers "sublime" beaches and forests, along with boating, swimming, stargazing, and evening cocktail parties. Memories of these were of vital importance to Trinity after her sudden breakdown sent her to the Oak Hills asylum. Her time at Oak Hills was grim; she witnessed other women patients being sexually abused and receiving inept medical treatment. These women also lived with the chilling possibility of reproductive sterilization, sanctioned by the then-popular eugenics movement.

After convincing her family that she's cured, Trinity hopes to resume her art studies in Paris. But her parents disapprove of Trinity's creative "temperament," preferring that their daughter opt for a suitable marriage and motherhood instead. And even as they try to control her fate, Trinity's parents are revealed to be far from perfect: her unstable, aggressive mother has a laudanum addiction, and her jovial, affectionate father haggles over pennies despite his wealth; he's also an unapologetic antisemite.

While other women are becoming more liberated and have just won the right to vote, Trinity remains trapped in a maze of dependence: though her father is a millionaire, she has almost no money of her own. *Waterfall* develops this frustrating irony with skill. As the novel progresses, Trinity draws strength from her love of Baird Island. Her emotional and artistic confidence increases, and she takes greater control of her future.

With its glorious setting contrasting with the realities of the era, *Waterfall* details darker aspects of the Roaring Twenties, but also celebrates the reemergence of an individual spirit.

MEG NOLA

## HISTORICAL



## Wild Women and the Blues

Denny S. Bryce

Kensington Books (MAR 30) Softcover \$15.95  
(384pp), 978-1-4967-3008-4

Immersive and exciting, Denny S. Bryce's novel *Wild Women and the Blues* is set between Chicago's 1920s jazz scene and a film student's present.

In the 1920s, nineteen-year-old Honoree dances as a chorus girl in a speakeasy. She's a far cry from where she wishes to be, though, so she jumps at the chance to audition at a deluxe nightclub. She nabs the job. While the city holds promises of success for her, it has a darker underbelly, and is run by ruthless racketeers and gangsters. In 2015, while working on a film project, Sawyer uncovers unsettling truths after interviewing now elderly Honoree.

The novel is brilliant at blending significant themes, including of racism, poverty, and criminality. The status of Black people in the Roaring Twenties, and in Sawyer's time, is covered, as is the limiting nature of depression. But this is also an entertaining story. It involves a murder mystery after a Black man is killed in a chilling manner; it includes a shifty romance between Honoree and a childhood friend.

Honoree is intriguing. Ambitious and strong-willed despite her difficult childhood, she is determined to achieve success. She draws inspiration from Josephine Baker and Florence Mills; despite her tough exterior, she is devoted to those she considers friends. She surrounds herself with memorable people, including Ezekiel, her enigmatic, loyal love interest. Exhilarating performance scenes honor the sights and sounds of 1920s Chicago, as do Honoree's exciting encounters with artistic notables, including Louis Armstrong and Oscar Micheaux.

A film student proves to be a persistent researcher, though his work forces him to face his own pain, in *Wild Women and the Blues*, a vibrant novel that gathers elements of Chicago's jazz past together.

EDITH WAIRIMU

## LITERARY



## Ghosts of New York

Jim Lewis

West Virginia University Press (APR 1) Softcover  
\$22.99 (300pp), 978-1-949199-96-3

In Jim Lewis's wondrous novel *Ghosts of New York*, encounters among strangers result in unexpected relationships, and a montage that celebrates a city of manifold graces.

Lewis's observant, gradual stories are linked by recurrent characters and figurative ghosts, which arise in people's impressions of a city that's marked by history. From its Dutch roots, architecture, and timeless waterways, to its industrious lives and lost loves, outward signs of wealth, and personal memories, these New York remnants comprise a teeming backdrop that one woman likens to a "civilization that's been lost for thousands of years and then reappears."

Against this shifting vastness, surprising, intimate situations unfold. A man in debt, who was betrayed by his too-trusting nature, contemplates suicide. A former New Yorker returns as a visiting artist, their nocturnal wanderings inspiring passages that are both rhapsodic and elegiac. A West African guest speaker recalls her reception; years later, her son bears the weight of his family legacy. In a standout sequence that's spliced across time, a musically gifted boy is, in a prophetic twist, nicknamed "Caruso" and grows into a local celebrity.

Mixed in length, from a sketch comprised of a list of dead New Yorkers, to an extended, first-person departure set around a man who reminisces about love and loss during his academic years, these stories relish city seasons and backgrounds. They're unabashed in their extended descriptions of passersby, who often wear striking clothing and make photo-worthy gestures, such that peripheral details accrue into their own spectacle.

The stories omit realistic grit, but nonetheless delve deeper than a romantic paean would: they burrow into their characters' psyches with delicate, idiosyncratic deliberateness—wearying when it leads to too much introspection, and startling when it hits the right emotional notes.

*Ghosts of New York* is a subtle, dexterous novel in short stories.

KAREN RIGBY

## LITERARY



### Her Here

Amanda Dennis

Bellevue Literary Press (MAR 9) Softcover \$16.99  
(352pp), 978-1-942658-76-4

In Amanda Dennis's melancholy literary novel *Her Here*, a wounded graduate student translates the story of a fellow wanderer.

Since her mother died, Elena has shuddered her way through daily existence. She's assigned herself new tasks, but has no clear sense of purpose. Her introduction to Siobhán, an old friend of her mother's from her Parisian days, comes with an opportunity to escape this awkward, suspended state. Siobhán asks her to translate the poetic, near impenetrable diaries of her missing daughter, Ella, into something like a story.

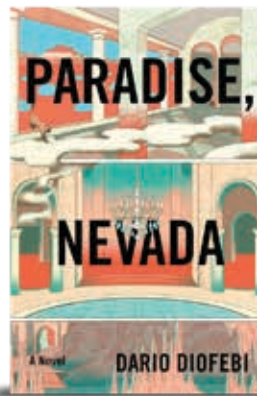
Years ago, Ella ran away to Thailand, escaping the searing revelation that she was adopted. But life in Thailand was no pure escape. She made new friends at her teacher's posting, all of whom were living with their own versions of deep pain. She fell into dangerous love with Seb, an expat afflicted with ennui and given to random acts of cruelty. In addition to monastic retreats, insightful discussions of Hemingway with her students, and long, hot, celebratory nights, Ella staggered her way toward new betrayals and disappointments. Eventually, the world lost track of her.

Immersing herself in Ella's diary, Elena becomes something of a vehicle for Ella's agonies and desires. She translates by night, and wanders the streets of Paris by day, seeing only the jungles of Thailand, hearing only the voices of Ella's coworkers and found friends. And somewhere between Ella's decision to relinquish the pain that is life, and the reemergence of her own buried memories, Elena is faced with a choice: to follow in the footsteps of the hurt women whose spirits she dwells among, or to choose vitality.

Wrenching and revelatory, *Her Here* is a novel about the barbs and possibilities that follow from the unexpected loss of what's familiar.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

## LITERARY



### Paradise, Nevada

Dario Diofebi

Bloomsbury (APR 6) Hardcover \$28 (512pp)  
978-1-63557-620-7

Dario Diofebi's novel *Paradise, Nevada* is as sprawling and colorful as its setting: the Las Vegas Strip, a four-mile-long cluster of hotels and casinos that attracts millions of tourists and gamblers from around the world.

The main characters of this mordantly funny tale of class warfare and greed all call Paradise home. Ray and Tom are both poker lifers who have descended upon Vegas (from California and Italy, respectively) to earn their keep through long hours playing Texas Hold 'Em. Their circuitous paths cross with Mary Ann's. She's a former fashion model, now serving drinks at the elaborate Positano Luxury Resort & Casino. They also encounter Lindsay, a local journalist who's on the cusp of breaking a blockbuster story concerning the Positano's mysterious owner, Al. The novel ably bounces between these four narratives, while dozens of secondary characters weave into each, all moving, slow and steady, toward a climactic event.

The novel's rich details are both its allure and its occasional undoing. The motivations and inner struggles of the main quartet are palpable. Each wrestles with personal demons and their decisions to remain in Las Vegas, even as the city's oppressive cheer fades beneath the double dealing and labor exploitation going on behind the scenes. How each comes to terms with, or pushes against, these issues makes the book prescient and powerful. At the same time, the story is larded by extraneous information, as of the minutiae of poker play. That it still manages to pack a sizable punch is due to the strength and depth of its tart narrative.

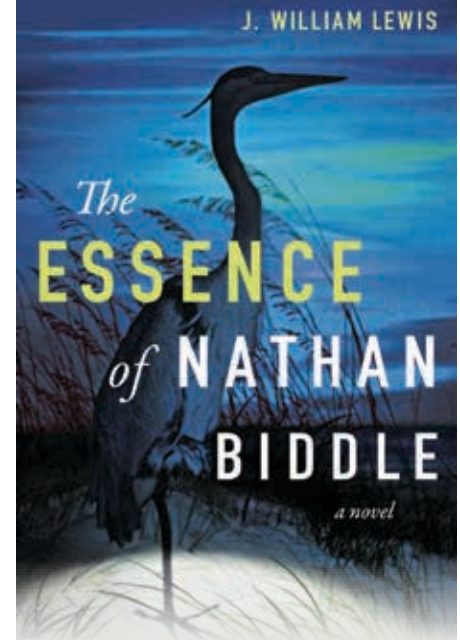
Sneaking sly wit and subtle profundities into its wide-ranging narrative, *Paradise, Nevada* is a wonderful saga that's both reflective of, and critical of, our modern age.

ROBERT HAM

## COMING SOON

### "Mesmerizing"

—SAN FRANCISCO BOOK REVIEW



A beautifully written,  
profoundly moving tale  
told in the literary style  
of a bildungsroman,  
*The Essence of Nathan  
Biddle* is unforgettable.



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## LITERARY



## The Groundhog Forever

Henry Hoke

WTAW Press (APR 27) Softcover \$16.95 (184pp)  
978-1-73298-205-5

In Henry Hoke's novel *The Groundhog Forever*, characters search for answers to questions both trivial and existential.

Two film students in early twenty-first-century Manhattan find themselves trapped in a time loop, repeating the same day over and over. It's a scenario that echoes the film *Groundhog Day*; the star of that film, Bill Murray, happens to make a guest appearance at their class's viewing of the movie, a process that repeats itself daily.

Around this framework, the students, Sam and Anna (called Thing 1 and Thing 2 because of their matching hair-swoops), spend their endless cycle of April 27ths experimenting, changing their decisions and movements each day. They follow Murray as he leaves the class; they create a plan to confront Thing 1's ex-girlfriend. After the novelty of minor adjustments has worn off, a traumatic event prompts them to reflect on mortality and the September 11, 2001, attacks, which they call "the long bad day."

The book is not bound to comedy like the film it's inspired by; its freer structure allows for deeper explorations of the ramifications of a time-loop scenario. *Written in a style that veers from quirky weirdness to deep contemplation, the book takes a daring, experimental approach, incorporating poetic verses and making extensive use of blank spaces.* While these methods sometimes tread close to preciousness, they succeed in revealing, by layers, the emotional resonance of the characters. The book delivers a literal, convincing message about the value of living in the present and making the most of every day: "We're all immortal, as far as we will ever know, and at some point we don't get to find out what happens next."

Unique and universal, *The Groundhog Forever* is a wild narrative ride: inquiring, intriguing, idiosyncratic, and entertaining.

PETER DABBENE

## LITERARY



## Two White Queens and the One-Eyed Jack

Heidi von Palleske

Dundurn (MAR 9) Softcover \$18.99 (304pp)  
978-1-4597-4678-7

*Heidi von Palleske's peculiar Two White Queens and the One-Eyed Jack is a novel in which nothing is incidental and aberrations abound.*

The audience is required, from the get-go, to do some of the driving in this story; the reader's early exposure to the distressing, compelling stories of the real-life inspirations behind the book ensure that there's no turning back. As fast as Johnny, as a child, falls from a tree, readers are plunged into unsettling scenes and relationships. Broad strokes indicate who's who and what's going on; these come through the perceptions, life experiences, and blind spots of whichever individual seems to be closest to the action at any given moment. The rest is left for the reader to fill in.

Over time, as new people and relationships are introduced, and familiar ones are revisited, readers are forced to modify their initial impressions, all in order to conform to the ever-expanding perspectives of a multitude of narrators, all of whom operate from different vantage points. Because of their freakish appearances, strange ways, and horrific pasts, these characters suffer from dysfunctions and agonies common to anyone who's cruelly rejected by their community's norms.

Albino twins and bound boys find themselves in believable relationships against historical backdrops that are rendered with integrity. Their physical afflictions and artistic endeavors inform how they perceive the world; they also become central to the story. As their lives weave in and out of one another's, and their alienation becomes the norm, each is forced to confront their abnormalities, and to choose whether to regard them as a blessing or a curse.

Quirky and meticulous, *Two White Queens and the One-Eyed Jack* is a literary novel of substantial merit.

LINDA THORLAKSON

## MYSTERY



## Later

Stephen King

Hard Case Crime (MAR 2) Softcover \$14.95 (256pp)  
978-1-78909-649-1

In Stephen King's entertaining new crime novel *Later*, an adolescent can see dead people.

After witnessing a bicycle crash and meeting the dead cyclist, Jamie's life turns into a self-described horror story. His mother Tia, the owner of a literary agency that has fallen on hard times, is the only one who knows what Jamie can do. She implores him to keep it to himself. But when her best client dies before finishing the book that will bail them out, she brings her lover Liz, a detective, in on the secret so that they can use Jamie's abilities to save the agency.

Liz and Tia's relationship degrades once Liz uses Jamie for her own purposes—to find out where Thumper, a now-dead serial killer, left his last bomb. After finding out Thumper has a dark force unlike any other ghost he's met, Jamie needs to extricate himself from the spirit, all while continuing to navigate his anything-but-ordinary childhood.

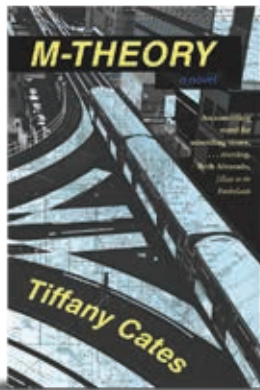
*Later is a touching story about a boy growing up without a father, and with talents that set him apart from everyone else.* It's also thriller about the darkness that lies under the surface of everyday life. Its characters, from Jamie's hard-drinking, curse-prone, yet affectionate mother Tia to wise-cracking, innocent, and good-hearted Jamie, brim with life, while mentions of television shows and other pop culture from the mid-2000s set a colorful atmosphere.

The plot progresses from Jamie's harmless yet disturbing encounters with ghosts to darker situations wherein Jamie is in peril. Tia and Liz's relationship turns from supportive and loving to brutal and life-threatening, culminating in a climax that is frightening yet tinged with heroism.

*Later* is a satisfying tale about facing demons—both those we can see and those that lurk in the darkness.

ANGELA MCQUAY

## MYSTERY



### M-Theory

**Tiffany Cates**

Baobab Press (FEB 9) Softcover \$17.95 (302pp)  
978-1-936097-34-0

The Chicago transit system is the nexus of two seemingly unconnected murders in Tiffany Cates's unsettling, satisfying novel *M-Theory*.

Donovan rides the train every day, taking note of the different people whom he sees on a regular basis. One day, he begins seeing a woman in a blue coat, Emily (called M by those close to her). He can't get her off of his mind. The two soon start a relationship that may be just a step up from strangers on a train—or, as Donovan hopes, something much more intimate.

But Donovan isn't the only one M has made an impression on during her daily commute. An artist with a generous spirit and a need for connection, M has befriended a number of passengers and transit workers. She searches for meaning in her life, which is marked by a lonely marriage and uncertainty about the future. When a boy M knows is murdered, and M is found dead shortly after, it falls to a detective to put the pieces together and find out how the cases connect.

Alternating between characters, as well as between the past and the present, *M-Theory* is a thrill ride that is never quite what it seems. Its events and characters converge in surprising, unsettling ways, illuminating a spider's web of interdependence that leads to violence.

As each character deepens, it becomes obvious that no one is truly good or bad; instead, they are all complex and human. Their motivations and actions ring true based on their pasts and personalities, yet there is still plenty of mystery surrounding what they will do next. The climax brings all of the novel's threads together in a way that is satisfying, but that still leaves room for interpretation. *M-Theory* is a tension-filled novel that provides no easy answers.

ANGELA MCQUAY

## ROMANCE



### A Gentlewoman Scholar

**Sarah M. Eden**

**Michele Paige Holmes**

**Nancy Campbell Allen**

Mirror Press (MAR 30) Softcover \$13.99 (298pp)  
978-1-952611-11-7

*A Gentlewoman Scholar* is made up of three historical romance novellas, all set in the 1800s, wherein women fight gender expectations and discover love.

In the first story, Winnifred becomes Fred, using ill-fitting clothing and a standoffish attitude to go undercover as a man and attend a medical school. With only weeks left to graduation, Winnie finds herself posing as Fred's sister when another student, Liam, starts investigating Fred's strange reputation. Their witty banter, endearing flirtations, and obvious attraction to each other threaten to compromise her ruse, her education, and her heart.

In the second story, Esther suffers imposter syndrome at a prestigious women's college, having grown up in poverty with an abusive father and brother. Esther's employer is determined to ensure that she'll never have to rely on men again; she pledges her vast fortune to Esther's education. But Esther becomes enamored of her literature professor, John. Their mutual pining is detailed in emotional inner monologues and scenes of romantic tension. Esther realizes that John is not like the cruel men she's known in her past, but hesitates to trust any man after all that she has been through.

In the final novella, Ellie is a dedicated educator who opens a school for orphans, despite the cultural conclusion that she is trespassing on men's territory. Ellie balances polite conversations with strict boundaries for the children she works with and the men she deals with, most of whom are more interested in her body than her brain. When Graham arrives, searching for the missing heir of his employer, Ellie is unprepared for the feelings that arise for him, especially when he values her intelligence and hard work.

This delightful romance collection highlights women who defy social rules and men who display supportive love.

DELIA STANLEY

***Our verdict: Get it!***

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## SHORT STORIES

**Big Bad**

Whitney Collins

Sarabande Books (MAR 16) Softcover \$16.95 (224pp), 978-1-946448-72-9

Whitney Collins's layered short story collection *Big Bad* concerns the dark impulses that lurk within.

In the ingenious cautionary tale "Big Bad," a woman gives birth to progressively wiser iterations of herself. In the atmospheric noir story "Drawers," brooding images evoke the melancholy of a recent widower; these are juxtaposed with the oddity of his hitting a horse during his reluctant drive to attend his grandson's circumcision party. In "Sunday," a teenage girl assumes a cynical attitude before deciding that her estranged father's often criticized naïve optimism feels more fitting.

Hints of sexual frustration, prolonged heartache, and repressed emotion run throughout. They are seen in a teenage boy's sexual awakening at summer camp; in a couple's efforts to revive their marriage, which has gone sour; when a bully is haunted by his failure to be one of the good guys; and in a repairman who succumbs to a seedy hookup, comforted by the illusion of something nobler.

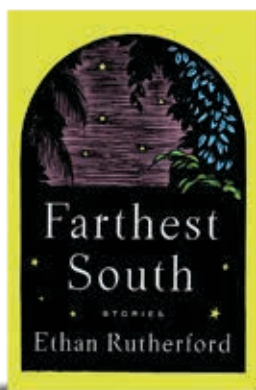
Playful titles that are imbued with double meanings are followed by startling openings that prompt questions from the audience. These lay the groundwork for clever metaphors, which in turn foster deeper insights. Elements of magical realism result in refreshing and hilarious angles on human foibles. Precise details help to convey the stories' amusing, lingering themes.

Collins's quirky characters wrestle with secret desires; they make irrational decisions that have long-lasting repercussions. Some entries highlight the moments that awaken fantasies and shatter illusions. Others center on characters' struggles with hope and cynicism, illusions and realities. Some of Collins's characters are inclined to nurse imaginary problems until they become real ones.

*Not a word is wasted in Big Bad, an unusual and masterful collection of short stories.*

WENDY HINMAN

## SHORT STORIES

**Farthest South**

Ethan Rutherford

A Strange Object (MAR 23) Softcover \$16.95 (184pp) 978-1-64605-047-5

Ethan Rutherford's *Farthest South* is a spooky, sweet, wondrous short story collection.

*Rutherford's stories possess undeniable darkness, and his collection maintains suspense throughout. But the thread that connects the stories is not scary, bleak, or supernatural—it's the presence and importance of family.*

The first and last stories exemplify the book's themes and delivery; both feature Soren, a young father, who narrates bedtime tales for his children. He relates gripping accounts featuring a horrid "Seal Lady," a magic fish, a diver whose body parts detach and reattach, and the diver's nemesis, an evil giant squid. Soren's stories are inventive and satisfying in and of themselves; just as enjoyable, and perhaps more telling, are descriptions and dialogue from the real world, as Soren answers questions from his boys and interacts with his wife. There's something larger at work in every story, and the fact that the entries rarely offer neat resolutions only makes them more haunting and beautiful.

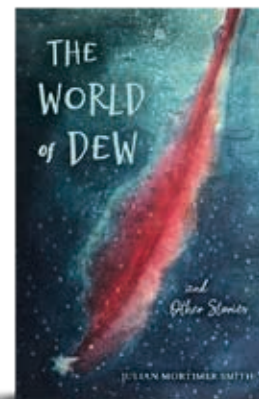
Other stories tell of a baby with gills; a man whose Antarctic voyage is accompanied by a talking penguin; and a pair of foxes who adopt a human child, also shared in a story-within-a-story narrative style that's used to haunting effect.

Rutherford's writing cuts to what's essential. His sentences are lean, but speak volumes nonetheless: a hospital has walls with "comforting paintings, fat ships in calm seas." Later, in a showcase of the book's ability to tantalize, two jittery boys on a boat look behind to see only "their own flat wake licking eerily away from them." There's variety in the subject matter, but also in style, while occasional black-and-white illustrations add to the enjoyment.

*Farthest South* is an imaginative, transformative, and delightful short story collection.

PETER DABBENE

## SHORT STORIES

**The World of Dew and Other Stories**

Julian Mortimer Smith

Indiana University Press (APR 6) Softcover \$18 (162pp), 978-0-253-05680-1

Otherworldliness informs the eighteen stories of Julian Mortimer Smith's *The World of Dew and Other Stories*, which range from traditional science fiction to speculative fiction, and from flash fiction to long-form short stories, inviting readers into wholly new universes.

Bedrock truths about human fallibility ground the book, in which children believe what their parents tell them, grown-ups play games and become dangerously competitive, and shy people keep to themselves, seeming "full of potential, undamaged somehow." Such human imperfections drive many of the stories, whose suspense is heightened by their alien settings.

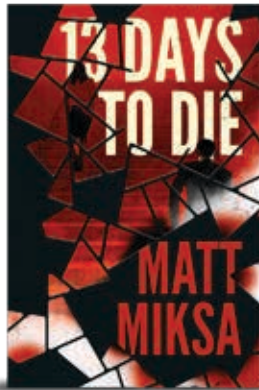
*As they span worlds and genders, the stories excel at keeping their characters, and their casual conversations, in line with their imagined worlds.* In "Barb-the-Bomb and the Yesterday Boy," the boy lives a day behind the rest of his world. "Don't touch him," another character warns, reinforcing his unusual predicament, "or you might end up when he is."

The book's imaginative elements arrive through both mundane details and literal flips of reality, as in "Come-from-Aways," when the narrator remarks, "I could see stars, a whole galaxy of them, spread out below me, underneath the water." Readers must acclimate to new worlds within most of the stories; some of their world building is abrupt, and some distinctions between what's literal and what's figurative are blurred. "That's where I live—that tiny splinter between your fingernails, that fragment, that almost nothing," one narrator says—a metaphor, but one that comes so early in the tale that it could be mistaken for fact.

The uniquely visualized tales of *The World of Dew and Other Stories* place traditional human struggles with mortality, love, and belonging into a panoply of new worlds.

MICHELE SHARPE

## THRILLER



### 13 Days to Die

**Matt Miksa**

Crooked Lane Books (MAR 9) Hardcover \$27.99  
(352pp), 978-1-64385-655-1

In Matt Miksa's political thriller *13 Days to Die*, American and Chinese agents work together as a deadly virus threatens to cause worldwide devastation.

Olen is used to working undercover in dangerous territories. But between the secretive Chinese government and a gruesome virus, he faces challenges in Beijing that he's never experienced before. Paired with Jo, a determined viral expert who may be the only person who can stop the virus from ravaging the globe, he soon realizes that there is more to the outbreak than their briefings have revealed.

Olen is a quintessential American spy. He's handsome, competent, and a touch naïve, despite his history of hazardous missions. Opposite him, Jo is intelligent, but has emotionally hardened; she's used to being underestimated because she is a woman. Olen and Jo are at first suspicious of each other—and about the intentions of their respective countries—but as schemes and collusions are discovered, they learn to trust each other. Their adversaries-to-lovers dynamic leads to increasing sexual tension and entertaining banter.

Populated by sexy spies, stealthy agents, and strong personalities, the novel is driven forward as much by character clashes as it is by problem solving. Geopolitical conflicts involving China, Taiwan, and the US are divulged in approachable, knowledgeable ways, including through the viewpoints of US and Chinese leaders. All struggle to uncover the origins of the virus. Some governmental staff and military personnel turn out to be engaged in clandestine plans with covert organizations, and the related twists and cliffhangers result in added momentum and hints of a deeper conspiracy.

*13 Days to Die* is an of-the-moment thriller about the multifaceted mysteries of a deadly virus.

DELIA STANLEY

## THRILLER



### Infinite Blues: A Cold War Fever Dream

**Gerald Brennan**

Tortoise Books (APR 6) Softcover \$27.99 (726pp)  
978-1-948954-18-1

The fate of Earth hangs in the balance in Gerald Brennan's alternate history novel *Infinite Blues*.

The year is 1968, and the Cold War is in a deep freeze. An astronaut arrives at a space station orbiting Earth. He is there on a secret mission to spy on the Soviet Union by photographing military targets from space. Soon after he arrives, he realizes that there is more than meets the eye to the job that he has been hired to do: his investigation reveals a plot that threatens the existence of the entire planet.

Returning to Earth, the astronaut struggles to fit in with his family life, even as the plot he stumbled onto draws him further and further in. Everyone is spying on everyone. The situation between the United States and the Soviet Union escalates at a steady pace. Still, no one seems to know who is pulling the strings; and, if no one can be held accountable, how do you stop a nuclear apocalypse?

The unnamed astronaut, by remaining anonymous, becomes a stand-in for everyday people. Because the astronaut is placed at the center of the tale, which is made to unravel at a slow but steady pace, and because everything takes place in an alternate timeline following World War II, the danger of real-life nuclear weapons is brought to the fore; all it takes is one person to make a decision, and Earth will be destroyed. No answer to the question of how to deescalate a nuclear threat is provided; instead, the ending becomes a choose-your-own adventure to decide the ultimate fate of planet Earth.

*Infinite Blues* weaves a playful intrigue about the threat of mutually assured destruction into a story set in an alternate Cold War America.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN

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## THRILLER



### Judgment at Alcatraz: A Danya Biton Novel

Dave Edlund

Light Messages Publishing (APR 27) Softcover  
\$15.99 (320pp), 978-1-61153-384-2

In Dave Edlund's breakneck thriller *Judgment at Alcatraz*, a wandering ex-assassin becomes embroiled in a harrowing extremist plot to regain Native American lands.

A peaceful protest group journeys to Alcatraz Island in the hopes of spreading awareness about the plight of modern Native American tribes. Unbeknownst to them, a splinter group has plans to initiate a hostage situation. Their demands are simple: Native American lands must be returned to their rightful tribal owners, or a fleet of drones carrying a deadly payload will assault San Francisco and its environs. It's up to an unexpected heroine to save the day.

Danya is on the run, as several countries have placed a price on her head. As an assassin at the top of her field, Danya grew disillusioned with killing when a series of missions revealed that she'd been manipulated and used as a precision weapon. In a small town, she befriended a young cashier who offered to bring her along to the protest on Alcatraz. Mustering up her impressive talents, Danya risks everything to prevent an unprecedented disaster.

The story tightens as Danya begins to break her own rules (that she will keep to herself and evade detection). Her story is near claustrophobic as she elects to take on the extremist group all by herself. Quick flashbacks to her past clarify her intense talents—and her reasons for abandoning her successful career.

This first series entry is captivating, not only because of its flawed, likeable heroine. Danya's talents have been used for the wrong reasons for far too long, and her drive to balance her past out with good deeds is compelling. The frenetic ending lays out teasers for future books.

*Judgment at Alcatraz* is a powerhouse thriller with an undercurrent of layered social commentary.

JOHN M. MURRAY

## TRANSLATIONS



### Everything Like Before

Kjell Askildsen

Seán Kinsella (Translator)

Archipelago Books (APR 27) Softcover \$21 (318pp)  
978-1-939810-94-6

Norwegian author Kjell Askildsen's story collection *Everything Like Before* delves into tales of marital unhappiness, conflicts between parents and children, and the struggles of the elderly.

In the collection's thirty-six stories, Askildsen evokes many forms of everyday despair. Married couples spar over bottles of wine while on vacation. Sons' visits to their fathers end in bitterness and accusations. Adults mull over painful stories from their childhood, and elderly men face lives of increasing isolation and loneliness.

The stories fit firmly in the realistic tradition, focusing on the details of daily life. Kitchens, decks, doorways, sidewalks, restaurants, and bars are charged with significance as spaces where characters negotiate relationships and appraise their lives. Mundane objects that carry emotional weight—raincoats, hair ribbons, cups of coffee—bring the stories alive.

A few stories contain dramatic action; in one, a boy watches his house burn down and afterward challenges the existence of God. In another, a man is accused of a violent crime and begins to behave erratically in misguided attempts to prove his innocence. Most stories are quieter, their drama emerging from changes in the characters' self-perceptions and emotional states. Askildsen frequently uses dialogue to capture the characters' feelings, communicating frustration, irritation, and mistrust through short but evocative exchanges.

At two to three pages long each, the shortest pieces are best understood as vignettes that capture static moments in time, without the depth of the book's longer stories, which better speak to the collection's interest in emotional drama within the spaces they make for meaningful description and details.

In the short stories of *Everything Like Before*, loneliness, despair, and longing are described with devastating nuance.

REBECCA HUSSEY

## TRANSLATIONS



### Mirror Lake

Andrée A. Michaud

J. C. Sutcliffe (Translator)

Arachnide (MAR 2) Softcover \$17.95 (384pp)  
978-1-4870-0583-2

*Mirror Lake* might appear to be a mystery at first glance, but Andrée A. Michaud's sometimes confounding, sometimes funny novel defies easy categorization. Recently relocated to an isolated lake in Maine, crotchety Robert and his dog Jeff would like nothing more than to be left alone, but their solitude is interrupted by neighbors from across the lake: a man named Bob, and his dog, Bill. Their reluctant friendship is interrupted by a mysterious stranger who steals Robert's boat and apparently drowns in the lake—but was this "John Doe" more than he appeared to be? And what's with the thriller novel that Robert is reading, which contains characters whom he bumps into in real life, including himself?

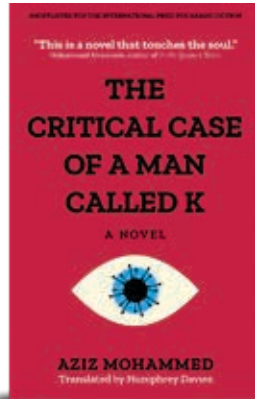
Presenting events from Robert's addled, maybe insane perspective, the book charges into existential and metaphysical territory. It is full of tortuous metaphors and visions, references to films, and obsessions with onions, Humpty Dumpty, and 400-million-year-old rocks. *Mirror Lake* comes to symbolize the thin line between reality and imagination in Robert's mind. He confuses himself figuratively, and eventually literally, with Bob, and identifies other characters by the celebrities they resemble: a cop duo looks similar to Tim Robbins and Indiana Jones, and a would-be girlfriend is called Anita, after the actress Anita Ekberg.

Soon events in Robert's book, including a murder, threaten to spill over into the real world, and the discovery of John Doe's body sets off a chain of bizarre happenings. The book's tone veers towards absurdist comedy. While its dense, often enigmatic prose can be difficult to parse, the book's outlandish plot turns end up leading to a strange, touching conclusion.

*Mirror Lake* is intriguing and perplexing in equal measure, with rewards for those willing to roll with its idiosyncratic rhythms.

HO LIN

## TRANSLATIONS



### The Critical Case of a Man Called K

**Aziz Mohammed**  
**Humphrey Davies (Translator)**

Hoopoe (APR 13) Softcover \$17.95 (266pp)  
978-1-64903-075-7

The inner world of a sick, antagonistic young man is the compelling focus of Aziz Mohammed's novel, *The Critical Case of a Man Called K*.

Narrated in direct, plain language, the book delves into the unsettled mind of a young man who is reading Kafka's diaries and attempting to write his own. As he writes, he realizes that, not only is his life void of excitement, but his abilities as a writer are meager in comparison to those of the authors whose classic novels he reads.

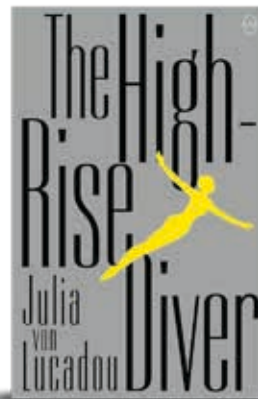
The narrator is from an unnamed Persian Gulf country, working in front of a computer screen all day as an IT person at a petrochemical company. He is often late to his job, and works from a large business tower, where a group of morning smokers huddles together outside each day, and where an "Old Man" (so called in homage to Hemingway's character) occupies the computer next to him. He's prone to allusions, a habit that his mother denigrates. His relationship with his mother is fraught; they live together, and she can't understand why he can't be more like his successful, married sister or engaged brother.

The man's observations about himself, and about those around him, are clear and snarky, though they do include some ill-conceived slurs toward LGBTQ+ people. His forty weekly entries become the book's chapters. They push forward at full steam, if with an overwhelming sense of disappointment that doesn't fully make sense until the revelation of his medical battle. Through this somber experience, the man's processing and reflective nature take center stage. He becomes more compassionate with others, and with himself.

Though his experiences are suffocating, the narrator maintains a clear narrative flow thanks to well-timed, humorous observations; his story progresses toward deeper understanding of the human condition.

MONICA CARTER

## TRANSLATIONS



### The High-Rise Diver

**Julia von Lucadou**  
**Sharmila Cohen (Translator)**

World Editions (MAR 2) Softcover \$16.99 (288pp)  
978-1-64286-076-4

A woman stands on a platform, suspended between two high-rise buildings. Then she is falling, somersaulting, creating beautiful sharp lines with her body. At the last possible moment, her arms open. She shoots into the sky, carried aloft by the prevailing winds. These are the first images in Julia von Lucadou's cerebral dystopian novel *The High-Rise Diver*.

Hitomi is a psychological business analyst. Her assignment is to observe Riva, a high-rise diver and media darling. Riva has refused to attend training sessions, follow her nutrition plan, or even speak more than a few sentences a day, risking fines for breach of contract. Hitomi's sole job is to diagnose and treat Riva so that she may return to her professional obligations. Under pressure to provide answers that will look good for investors, Hitomi delves into her subject.

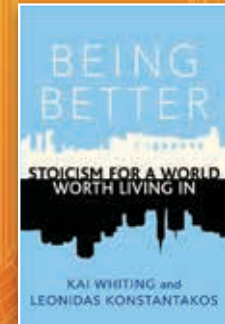
Riva no longer has any misconceptions about her life; she's become able to ignore the risks of noncompliance with her contract. Hitomi, in contrast, is thriving. She motivates herself with a list of failures and logs her daily physical and mental states. But watching Riva, and working to discover how her mental state turned without warning, takes a toll on Hitomi, who begins to understand that they are both being manipulated from all sides, and that their mentors only see their value if they perform and return results.

Piercing prose propels the story forward, making it clear that everything is not as it seems. There is an underlying, sinister current to the text as the eye is drawn to the trademark symbol next to common phrases; the realization sets in that the fitness tracker that Hitomi wears is monitored by her superiors.

*The High-Rise Diver* is a dystopian interrogation and critique of capitalism, whose concern for the health and well-being of people is revealed to be a punishing masquerade.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH

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## TRANSLATIONS

**The Seven Doors**

Agnes Ravatn  
Rosie Hedger (Translator)

Orenda Books (APR 1) Softcover \$15.95 (276pp)  
978-1-913193-38-6

In *The Seven Doors*, Agnes Ravatn's sinuous, taut Nordic noir, an academic pieces together the truth about her missing tenant's past to arrive at a devastating conclusion.

Sixty-one-year-old Nina faces the demolition of her beloved home due to light rail construction. Amid the complications of packing up her old house while hunting for a new one, Mari, a single mother and the tenant of Nina's husband's rental, vanishes. Plagued with guilt for having agreed to evict Mari just days prior, Nina conducts her own amateur investigation into whether Mari disappeared by choice or met with foul play.

The novel features isolated views of the fjords, simmering family rifts, and a lineup of suspects who are attributed with dark psychological motives, but its intellectual flourishes are what revitalize its familiar story of a woman in peril. These include Nina's entertaining hubris in declaring that literary academics should be investigators and her lecture about Greek tragedy, both of which prove prophetic.

Nina's penchant for mining texts results in a detailed explorations of the Bluebeard tale and of opera, as well as in read-alouds of Perrault's fairy tales to her granddaughter; the latter sparks a clever parallel with her present. Freudian ideas about transference unlock a critical sequence that's filled with suspenseful misdirection.

As Nina delves further into elusive Mari's fragility, all while dealing with her own everyday problems, the looming, background threat of demolition becomes an apt metaphor for irrevocable change. When the book's crescendo arrives, it floors the middle-aged sleuth, forcing an extreme choice whose aftermath is haunting.

Filled with chilling calm about people's secrets and the cruel ruses used to mask them, *The Seven Doors* is an understated thriller whose bleak twists are surprising.

KAREN RIGBY

## ART



★ **Princes of the Renaissance: The Hidden Power Behind an Artistic Revolution**

Mary Hollingsworth

Pegasus Books (MAR 2) Hardcover \$35 (504pp)  
978-1-64313-546-5

Mary Hollingsworth's *Princes of the Renaissance* is a revealing account of the city-state dynasties that created unimaginable wealth, cut-throat competitions, and lavish displays of patronage, resulting in some of the Western world's most sublime art.

Addressing the panoply of the Italian Renaissance, including its ambitions, betrayals, and the breadth of its material culture, the book reveals a dangerous competition for power through which ostentatious displays of wealth became the coin of the realm. The patronage system supported workshops, sculptors, and glass blowers—thousands of artists who created works to emphasize a patron's power, wealth, and discernment.

Intricate details and juicy tidbits reveal the era's personalities, including Cosimo I de' Medici (a snob whose family's mercantile origins fueled resentment for the D'Estes family) and Isabella Gonzaga, who maintained her own studio of artists and craftsmen. It was a time when women one-upped each other with jewels, musical talents, and social dexterity to cover infinite power plays; a period marked by wealthy business and religious power brokers (including Pope Paul III, who commissioned a Titian portrait of himself to advertise his prominence).

Insightful details reveal how life was lived. And beneath these accounts of wealth exist a group of rivals whose power-motivated intermarriages became so dense that strengthening one alliance started wars with others. There's a welter of similar names, titles, and relationships involved; a background in Renaissance history is helpful, but not essential. The book's full-color photographs of artworks and architecture are an added treat.

*Princes of the Renaissance* is a significant addition to Renaissance studies, and a delicious deep dive for those fascinated by the era.

SUSAN WAGGONER

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY &amp; MEMOIR

**Growing Up Bank Street: A Greenwich Village Memoir**

Donna Florio

NYU Press (MAR 9) Hardcover \$24.95 (240pp)  
978-1-4798-0320-0

Donna Florio's *Growing Up Bank Street* is a vibrant, heartfelt memoir, centered on one of Greenwich Village's most notable series of blocks. A lifelong New Yorker, Florio combines historical context with personal experiences in her kaleidoscopic account, which spans from the Colonial era to more recent gentrification.

Named after Alexander Hamilton's ambitious Bank of New York, Bank Street ends at the Hudson River. During Florio's 1960s childhood, its bustling blocks were flanked by stately brownstones and modern apartments, along with shops, bars, restaurants, factories, and tenements.

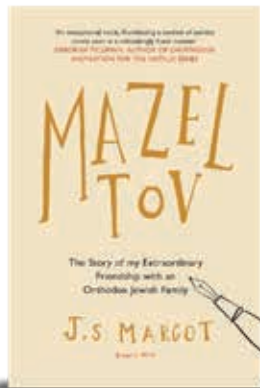
Here, actor Theodore Bikel painted his brownstone blue, in honor of the Israeli flag. Here, John Lennon's anti-establishment stances put him on the FBI's radar; he avoided deportation, but sometimes ventured out for a stroll with mercurial Yoko Ono. Here, in 1979, punk rocker Sid Vicious—"stork tall and emaciated," but rather affable and polite—died; a horde of reporters soon swarmed outside, eager for details about his heroin overdose.

Beyond these better-known names, Florio includes vignettes about her neighbors and friends, who are depicted with a compassion and intimacy, making their stories just as intriguing. A creative and intellectual hub, Bank Street and Greenwich Village attracted many diverse personalities. Bank Street's sense of local community was also fascinating; people socialized often and helped neighbors in need, with a collective presence that might seem invasive in our more individualistic era.

The daughter of two impassioned opera singers and a former child opera singer herself, Florio fills each chapter with verve and colorful observations. Her decades on Bank Street gave her access to "every social, cultural, and economic layer of American life"—a breadth reflected in her knowledge of New York, and in her love for the city as well.

MEG NOLA

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



### Mazel Tov: The Story of My Extraordinary Friendship with an Orthodox Jewish Family

J. S. Margot

Jane Hedley-Prole (Translator)

Pushkin Press (FEB 23) Softcover \$16.95 (320pp)  
978-1-78227-528-2

J. S. Margot's memoir *Mazel Tov* is the unvarnished account of how two clashing cultures led to lasting friendship.

In her student days, Margot answered an ad to be a tutor. The woman in charge of student jobs sent her to the interview with a warning: the family was Jewish (which, she alluded, meant "cheap"). It was the first cringeworthy moment in a working relationship that turned into a friendship—but not without a lot of misunderstandings along the way.

Margot's early encounters with the Schneider family are tinged by exoticism and some cultural insensitivity, as when, though she's aware of the Holocaust's impact on the local community, she marvels over the fact that Orthodox people separate themselves from other Belgians: "was there something I was failing to understand? To see?"

But Margot, despite bristling over her nagging perception that, to the Schneiders, "different" equals "better," is also compassionate and eager to learn. When Elzira worries that she'll never be cured of the condition that leads her hands to shake, Margot comforts her, and agrees to teach her to ride a bicycle. She tutors Jakov in advance of his history exam, leading to intense conversations. She is disturbed when she hears old friends recite old prejudices that now sound wrong. Four years in: she's invited to the Schneiders' Shabbat. A few years after that, she visits the children in Israel.

The text is notable for its authenticity. Though some of Margot's recollections include perhaps embarrassing missteps, she shares them as a matter of course, capturing what it's like for willing people to bumble their way toward unlikely connections. *Mazel Tov* is a fascinating story about what is possible when pretenses are dropped and true bonds are allowed to form.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



### Men I've Never Been

Michael Sadowski

University of Wisconsin Press (APR 27) Hardcover  
\$24.95 (232pp), 978-0-299-33090-3

There are many men that Michael Sadowski has never been, and they all fill the pages of this honest recounting of his personal failures—a heartfelt memoir that ends on a note of hope.

Schoolboy, athlete, hopeless romantic, family man: such tropes open each chapter of the book, which portrays the multiple personas and professions that Sadowski hoped to adopt, but couldn't. Ultimately, he became a teacher. His recollections of important scenes in his life, set in New Jersey, New York, and Chicago, are interwoven with his attempts to define himself, haunted by what could have been, and by the identities of those around him.

In choosing to focus on achievements he never achieved, the kind of family he never had, and the kind of person he never was, Sadowski produces a relatable tale of struggling with self-denial and rejecting the pleasures of being out of fear, shame, and sometimes both. The book ends on a note of positivity and comfort, leaving an opening for Sadowski to find peace.

*Men I've Never Been* is rarely proud or boastful; it hides Sadowski's successes in between his constant feelings of incompetence, grounding itself in the realities of the everyday. Sadowski's homosexuality is a backdrop to his memories, and slurs directed at him propel the story forward. When Sadowski tried to prove himself against such slurs, his semi-unconscious choice to either remain in the closet or come out of it became consequential to how he made life-altering decisions. Though the book does not revolve around Sadowski's identity as a gay man, it does show how his identity affected every aspect of his life.

Michael Sadowski's memoir is warm and welcoming—a comfort in a world that is often neither.

MICHAEL ELIAS

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



### The Thing about Florida: Exploring a Misunderstood State

Tyler Gillespie

University Press of Florida (APR 13) Hardcover  
\$24.95 (164pp), 978-0-8130-6687-5

Tyler Gillespie's memoir *The Thing about Florida* addresses the state behind the myth and memes.

Though he's a fifth-generation Floridian, Gillespie was once embarrassed to call the state "home." Now, he's able to survey the oddities that make Florida the butt of so many jokes with clear eyes. Childhood memories and personal experiences influence his observations of Florida's eccentricities, including its alligators, gator wrestlers, snake hunters, reptile smugglers and collectors, hurricanes, and drag queens. Profiles of people with intimate knowledge of these phenomena come throughout the work, as do observations from history, from early explorers, and from conservationists who note changes in Florida's natural habitat, wildlife, and culture.

Gillespie is lighthearted and chatty as he reports on bizarre encounters, including with Rambo, a gator in a Santa outfit who became a media sensation. He also faces down personal fears, daring himself to sample snake meat; to join the Great Python Challenge snake hunt; to sit on the back of an alligator; and to ask uncomfortable questions.

Serious observations arise, too, including that Florida is often overlooked as a slave-owning Confederate state. Gillespie questions its culture of Civil War reenactments and politics. He also talks about coming to terms with his sexuality, and his struggles with addiction. Once part of a strict Southern Baptist megachurch community, he shows that being gay made exercising his faith difficult before he found a more welcoming church. His story comes amid profiles of LGBTQ+ activists, notes about the challenges that the community faces, and comments on the heartbreak of losing a dear friend in the Pulse nightclub shooting, an event Gillespie covered as a journalist.

*The Thing about Florida* is a personalized, amusing book about what makes the Sunshine State so unique.

WENDY HINMAN

## BIOGRAPHY



### The Believer: Alien Encounters, Hard Science, and the Passion of John Mack

Ralph Blumenthal

High Road Books (MAR 15) Hardcover \$29.95 (352pp), 978-0-8263-6231-5

*The Believer* is the expansive story of John E. Mack, a preeminent psychiatrist whose exploration of alien abduction phenomena nearly destroyed his career and reputation.

Born in 1929 to wealthy German Jewish academics, Mack grew up in New York. His mother died when he was young; her loss caused a lifetime of abandonment trauma and inspired his interest in psychiatry. He entered Harvard in 1951 and later joined the faculty, founding the department of psychiatry at Cambridge Hospital.

In 1976, Mack published *A Prince of Our Disorder*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia); in the eighties, he became an antinuclear activist. He also turned to psychedelics and breathwork to assuage his psychological pain. Both opened him up to a range of psychospirituality, priming his belief in anomalous experiences.

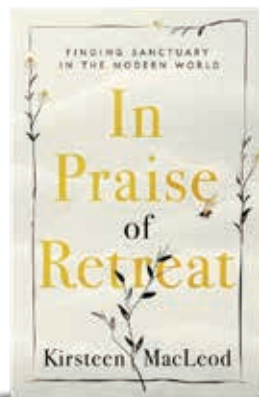
In 1991, Mack met Budd Hopkins, a pioneering UFO abduction investigator. Hopkins explained his use of hypnotic regression to unlock the suppressed memories of “experiencers” of alien encounters. Mack was hooked. He collected encounter stories that varied from benign abductions to the “forcible harvesting of...eggs and sperm for human-alien hybrid reproduction.”

Hard scientific proof was elusive, Mack acknowledged. He focused on the transpersonal, on experiencers’ authenticity and emotional intensity; he found that experiencers exhibited no psychopathology. But colleagues still derided him for “conclusion-jumping,” and Carl Sagan chided him with a quip: “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” Soon, Harvard came for a reckoning.

Based on fifteen years of research, interviews, and exclusive access to Mack’s archival material, *The Believer* is the story of a brilliant man whose breadth of interests generated a lifetime of achievements.

AMY O’LOUGHLIN

## BODY, MIND &amp; SPIRIT



### In Praise of Retreat: Finding Sanctuary in the Modern World

Kirsteen MacLeod

ECW Press (MAR 30) Softcover \$18.95 (320pp) 978-1-77041-473-0

*In Praise of Retreat* invites refuge away from the noise.

In today’s hyperconnected climate, wherein the idea of stepping away is unthinkable, this book calls stepping back an act of rebellion. This sense of brashness and determination ushers in the book’s exploration of the theory and practice of retreat, showcasing the deep, nourishing potential of time away.

The book examines the historical precedent for retreat, covering hermits, monasteries, and pilgrimages and drawing inspiration from the words of Romantic poets Henry David Thoreau and William Butler Yeats. Then it proceeds to modern incarnations of stepping away, including yoga and meditation retreats and camping in national parks. Along the way, MacLeod shares her own experiments with retreat. Both elements of the book—research and personal narrative—showcase the quest for wisdom, quiet, and rest. The balance of the two is intellectual, visceral, and inviting.

Narrated with a touch of warmth that is balanced with the detachment that comes from self-awareness and solitude, the book’s pace is smooth, and its diction is beautiful. Engaging intellectual curiosity pervades the book’s historical elements; its storytelling has a strong sense of place, with reverence for nature and meditation that finds deep resonance within inner lives. All of this is accomplished without glossing over challenging externals (bugs, boredom, and uncomfortable sleeping arrangements among them).

This balanced work eschews polarized thinking about retreat and engagement, and about mental and physical health. While it focuses on antidotes, the book also examines the perils of modern life, including distressing statistics about how noise affects health. The result is a considered choice to step away, rather than just running away.

*In Praise of Retreat* issues a deep, thoughtful, and experienced invitation to one’s mind, body, and spirit.

MELISSA WUSKE

## BODY, MIND &amp; SPIRIT



### Vibrant: A Groundbreaking Program to Get Energized, Own Your Health, and Glow

Stacie Stephenson

BenBella Books (MAR 23) Hardcover \$29.95 (320pp) 978-1-950665-82-2

Stacie Stephenson’s *Vibrant* paints a vision for holistic health, and plots a path to achieve it.

Here, lifestyle medicine, which is related to integrative and functional medicine, is all about empowering individuals to make daily choices that address the root causes of their unhealth. The book makes use of elements from a wide variety of therapeutic disciplines, including allopathic, ancient, and modern medicine. Its viewpoint defines health not as the absence of disease, but as vibrance—glow and energy.

Using the basic building blocks of food, movement, and connections with people, the book forwards advice that’s deeper than the conventional wisdom on diet and exercise. It teaches about understanding the body’s messages, using one’s senses. Taking health to the next level, it discusses the nervous, detoxification, and immune systems, helping people to learn to invest in the full functioning of their bodies, rather than troubleshooting surface issues. Its wrap up is practical: a thirty-day challenge to change one’s habits, with instructions for what to do, and what to think about, each day, and recipes for meals and snacks.

Engaging elements, including checklists, sample meal plans, and diagrams (as of the body’s energy pathways), arise throughout. The recipes at the end are for delicious, easy-to-make dishes with accessible ingredients: for berry parfaits, Mediterranean crustless quiche, and sliced blood oranges with shaved dark chocolate.

Empowerment is the book’s greatest gift. It will convince even reluctant audiences that health is possible and within their reach. After helping people to make honest assessments of their current health, the book names attainable goals, building small wins into a wholly changed lifestyle. Each page is bolstered by a compassionate, positive voice, inviting all to try new challenges.

*Vibrant* is a wellness book that promises to be life-changing.

MELISSA WUSKE



## Anthill Economics: Animal Ecosystems and the Human Economy

Nathaniel Gronewold

Prometheus (FEB 1) Hardcover \$26.95 (208pp)  
978-1-63388-652-0

Nathaniel Gronewold's *Anthill Economics* challenges human beings to view the economy as an ecosystem.

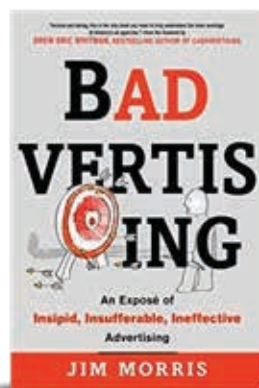
The economy, the book posits, is humanity's fundamental ecology; despite the mathematical nature of economics, it's truly a social science. Through this lens, Gronewold tackles complex human problems, using examples from the animal kingdom that are insightful and easy to visualize. The result **showcases the beauty, vulnerability, and interconnectedness of human life in its ecosystem.**

The book builds on concepts like energy return on investment (EROI), or the notion that creatures can survive if they obtain more energy from their environments than they consume. Applying such biological concepts, the book delves into human challenges, asking questions like: could the caribou on St. Matthew Island help to explain low human birth rates around the globe? Answers reside in the limiting, decimating factors that humans and animals face; the book calls out a powerful limiting factor that's left, even as humans have mastered so many.

Each chapter is methodical, featuring detailed, step-by-step examinations of the issue at hand to determine its causes and impact. This is a book that favors well-developed knowledge over pithy comparisons. Its narration is curious; Gronewold seems to enjoy ruffling the establishment's feathers, but holds true reverence for what every discipline can teach about humanity, the economy, and the earth—and the ways that all can thrive. He calls out failures of economics, and the mysteries of ecology, without judgment or hopelessness. As a well-trained outside observer, not a scientist or economist, he is clear-eyed and not protective of the disciplines he examines, though he expresses feeling indebted to wisdom from across disciplines, citing scientists and researchers throughout.

*Anthill Economics* suggests a new means of viewing large economic trends.

MELISSA WUSKE



## Badvertising: An Expose of Insipid, Insufferable, Ineffective Advertising

Jim Morris

Career Press (MAY 1) Softcover \$19.95 (272pp)  
978-1-63265-184-6

*Badvertising* is a marketing industry insider's **crabby compendium of the pitfalls that stymie advertising campaigns.** In these essays, "Agents of Stupidity" are not inept spies, but trends that caused terrible ads. Drawing on his decades as a copywriter and executive, Jim Morris uses pithy maxims to begin each chapter.

Ad agencies do a lot of informed guesswork when it comes to selling their clients' products and services—work that Morris calls "persuasive speculation." Much of the challenge of making memorable ads comes down to trying to prove persuasiveness, he asserts. His chapters cover methods like metrics, neuromarketing, and segmented marketing to show that none are fail-proof. And there are other downfalls that make most ads bad ones, too. Committees, focus groups, and lawyers are about mitigating risk, and are therefore anti-creative; and too many clients stick with unoriginal concepts, or settle for "good enough."

Morris's insights draw on his years working in agencies and freelancing. They account for the fact that email sped demand for creative turnaround; Morris says that, now, slimmed-down and design-oriented agencies just don't prioritize copy writing, or give creatives enough time.

This chatty work involves some repeating devices, but any smugness detected in its pages proves to be an act. Plentiful research is incorporated, both from within, and from outside of, the advertising sphere, including about how the brain functions. Despite the book's exaggerated, salty tone, and its topical focus on what's negative, Morris shows how ads contribute to culture, and proclaims a desire to see better ones.

*Badvertising's* insider's look at the advertising business calls for more creativity and discusses the many obstacles that get in the way of making great ads.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS



## Sumac: Recipes and Stories from Syria

Anas Atassi

Rania Kataf (Photographer)

Jeroen van der Spek (Photographer)

Interlink Books (APR 1) Hardcover \$35 (248pp)  
978-1-62371-897-8

Anas Atassi's inviting cookbook is named after a spice that is one of two keys to Syrian cuisine. The other indispensable element, Atassi contends, is figurative: "nafas," which literally means breath, but also connotes "the art of cooking where ingredients combine harmoniously."

Growing up in Saudi Arabia, where his parents found work, Atassi learned about world cuisines from television. His family spent summers back in Syria. When he left for university, he hankered after Syrian food. Now settled in Amsterdam, he finds that cooking dishes from his homeland is "a tangible, edible way of reminiscing." Breakfast might be eggs, flatbread, and labneh (yogurt cheese), while dips, drinks, pickles, salads, and stews adorn buffets alongside familiar Middle Eastern fare, including falafel, kebabs, and baklava.

With recipes whose ingredients and steps are kept to a minimum (unless a dough is involved), the book's dishes range from street food to unusual centerpieces like makloubé, a molded eggplant and beef pilaf that's served upside down. Atassi explains regional variations and conveys his mother's cooking tips. Most spreads include a personal note. Brief essays introduce each section with useful snippets of cultural context, including the fact that making hummus is considered a man's task, and a page on Ramadan meals.

Unusual combinations, like eggplant jam or lamb kebabs served with cherries, encourage broadening one's taste horizons. Jeroen van der Spek's photographs capture attractive plates and dinner table scenes. Pops of color are frequent thanks to the ubiquitous lemons, tomatoes, and pomegranate seeds, while the hand-embroidered Aghabani tablecloths that are unique to Syria are the perfect backdrops for mouthwatering meals.

*Sumac* is an appealing cookbook for foodies who are looking to expand their culinary repertoires while learning about Syria.

REBECCA FOSTER

## COOKING



### The Kitchen without Borders: Recipes and Stories from Refugee and Immigrant Chefs

**The Eat Offbeat Chefs**

Workman Publishing (MAR 2) Hardcover \$24.95 (232pp), 978-1-5235-0404-6

Compiling recipes from refugee chefs of scattered origins, *The Kitchen without Borders* is a bridge-building cookbook.

The catering company Eat Offbeat began in 2015, with the award of a seed grant from Columbia University to sister and brother team Manal and Wissam Kahi. Its aims were two: to provide refugees with a safe and steady place of employment, and to introduce New Yorkers to cuisines with which they were perhaps less familiar.

From the now popular company come recipes for more familiar dishes, like curries, daal, moussaka, and hummus. The chefs' instructions here are edifying. But the book also includes tempting recipes for less familiar plates, including mustard and lemon marinated chicken with cilantro; Sri Lankan coconut cabbage, featuring fennel and curry powder; and Afghani doogh, a blended yogurt drink with mint that's often used to break the Ramadan fast. A glossary leads the project to introduce less familiar ingredients; recommendations for substitutes and places to purchase them are included for ease.

The chefs behind the recipes are honored with spreads that share their happy memories from family kitchens and celebrations. These take care to center the joys of home, rather than the troubles that led each to emigrate. The profiled chefs include Mariama, who came from Senegal, and for whom Eat Offbeat was her first job; and Diaa, a Syrian who's owned and operated restaurants previously. Other chefs come from the Central African Republic, Nepal, and Venezuela—Eat Offbeat's chefs come from fifteen nations in total. What each chef shares is nostalgia for home, and a desire to see the traditional dishes that spark their fond memories be embraced by New York eaters, too.

*The Kitchen without Borders* is a mouth-watering tour of global cuisines the puts a human face to each tantalizing new taste.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

## CRAFTS &amp; HOBBIES



### Organza Hoop Art: Embroidery Techniques and Projects for Sheer Stitching

**Sarah Godfrey**

Landauer Publishing (APR 20) Softcover \$16.99 (96pp), 978-1-947163-61-4

Stitching on organza produces ethereal effects, and Sarah Godfrey reduces the intimidation factor in working with this sheer and slippery material in *Organza Hoop Art*.

The book includes an introduction to materials and supplies and an extensive stitch glossary with good descriptions and photographs that show how to form stitches on organza—helpful because it shows what the hand at the back of the work is doing, as well as what's happening on the front. Its are useful tips about working with organza, like to mark the fabric with the pattern, and about thread management, that should make it easier for stitchers to get started with this craft, though there is a learning curve even for people with some embroidery experience. Brand-new stitchers might want to try one of these projects on a non-sheer fabric first, just to get the hang of the stitches.

The sixteen patterns in the book are beautiful, representing a nice variety of projects for home décor, or that could be made as gifts for weddings, as with a floral wreath; for friends; or for a new baby, as with the blue flower lady. They are heavy on florals, and they use different stitches to add texture and dimension while building up stitchers' skills and confidence. The designs are shown in black outlines that can be copied and traced onto organza, and the stitches used are described in the pattern with large photographs to show stitch placement.

The finished projects in *Organza Hoop Art* are sure to inspire stitchers of all skill levels to give this fun medium a try, and to explore different techniques to make their own see-through works of art.

SARAH WHITE

## ESSAYS



### White Space: Essays on Culture, Race, & Writing

**Jennifer De Leon**

University of Massachusetts Press (MAR 26) Softcover \$19.95 (232pp), 978-1-62534-567-7

Structured around a life-changing trip to Guatemala, Jennifer De Leon's *White Space* is a lively collection of personal essays about becoming a writer and growing up the child of immigrants.

When she was a teenager, De Leon's father left her family to drive toward his home country, Guatemala, making it as far as Washington D.C. before turning around. *White Space* is divided into three sections: before, during, and after De Leon's own Guatemala trip, taken in her twenties to discover the country that almost lured her father away.

De Leon unifies the collection with frequent references to her Guatemala trip. At the same time, she covers a variety of subjects, including complicated family dynamics, body image, feeling out of place at an elite New England college, struggling to find footing as a writer, and the challenges of international travel.

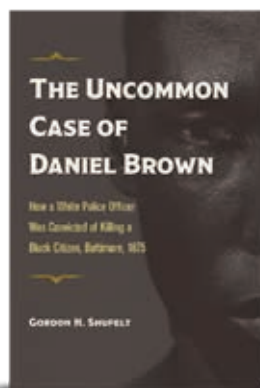
The title unifies the book as a powerful metaphor that captures the intersection of race and writing. Many of the essays describe De Leon's struggles as a woman of color working in a field—creative writing—that is dominated by white people. The book is, in part, a journey toward claiming her right to take up space, whether it be space on a page, in the classroom, or on the street as a world traveler.

The essays are engaging, funny, and thoughtful, written with an appealing ease and directness. Whether describing climbing a mountain in Guatemala, disobeying her father, or taking her first creative writing class, De Leon writes with honesty and warmth. Members of her family become memorable characters, particularly her mother and father, as De Leon describes their strengths and flaws with vibrant details.

Jennifer De Leon's *White Space* is an entertaining, thought-provoking personal essay collection that explores race and writing with humor and wisdom.

REBECCA HUSSEY

## HISTORY



### The Uncommon Case of Daniel Brown: How a White Police Officer Was Convicted of Killing a Black Citizen, Baltimore, 1875

Gordon H. Shufelt

Kent State University Press (FEB 16) Softcover  
\$24.95 (184pp), 978-1-60635-412-4

Historian Gordon H. Shufelt's true crime book recounts the 1875 murder of a Black man by a white policeman. While racial police brutality is still not uncommon, the grim distinction surrounding Daniel Brown's death is that, in late nineteenth-century Baltimore, this particular officer was convicted.

Shufelt details the socioeconomic backgrounds of Brown and Officer Patrick McDonald, along with their city's political climate. In the bustling, post-Civil War environment, Baltimore's Black American population competed with immigrants for jobs and status. Racism against Black people persisted, while prejudice from "native" white Americans was also directed toward new European arrivals.

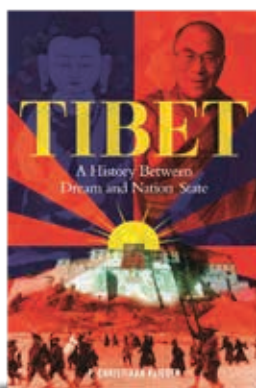
As Baltimore grew, so did its police force. Officers subdued mobs and street criminals, but abuse complaints regarding the police soon became frequent, from white and Black citizens. In this climate, Brown was hardworking, married, and well-regarded. Records indicate no previous arrests or confrontational events, beyond Brown's being, as his landlord noted, "a little strong" regarding "Civil Rights questions."

With factual suspense, the book reconstructs the fateful meeting between Brown and McDonald. A noise complaint regarding a small, non-alcoholic party somehow escalated into Brown being clubbed and shot in his own home. Witnesses recalled McDonald being angry and antagonistic. McDonald, however, insisted that he acted in self-defense.

McDonald was found guilty by a white jury—a verdict, Shufelt says, that was intended to quell police overreach, rather than support racial equality. Due to a sentencing error, he served little jail time. In this engrossing chronicle, however, Shufelt concludes not with disbelief that justice for Brown was miscarried, but that it was carried out at all.

MEG NOLA

## HISTORY



### Tibet: A History between Dream and Nation-State

P. Christiaan Klieger

Reaktion Books (APR 22) Hardcover \$40 (324pp)  
978-1-78914-402-4

P. Christiaan Klieger's *Tibet* is a complex, storied survey of the mountainous homeland of the Dalai Lama.

Klieger details Tibet's evolution from ancient, animistic beliefs with "deities and demons at every corner" to its eventual, integral adoption of Buddhism. Seventh-century leadership expanded Tibet's kingdom and made Lhasa its official capital. Tibet's impressive armies advanced into modern Burma and Nepal, conquering territory along the famed Silk Route.

With the epic sweep of a historical saga, *Tibet* chronicles subsequent centuries of invasions, geopolitical intrigues, assassinations, triumphs, and defeats. From Genghis Khan's Mongol Empire to Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Revolution, Tibet has flourished, adapted, or suffered intense devastations and loss. A fascinating profile of the present Dalai Lama is included; he, along with over 100,000 other Tibetan refugees, now lives in exile. Having held his title since 1940, the Dalai Lama represents a link to the former "free" Tibet and the modern world. The mystical process of choosing the next Dalai Lama is also covered: belief in reincarnation leads to visions, prophecies, and an actual search party dispatched to find the exalted successor.

The Dalai Lama has stated that, when his ninetieth birthday approaches, he will confer with the high Lamas of Tibetan Buddhism, along with "the Tibetan public, and other concerned people," to determine whether the "institution of the Dalai Lama should continue." *Tibet* concludes with this ambiguity, and with the irony that, while Tibet's plight has become a global concern, the current Dalai Lama may never return to the home he was forced from in 1959.

Engrossing, detailed, and enhanced by beautiful *thangka* paintings, photographs, and antique maps, *Tibet* reveals the glories and trials of a beleaguered yet enduring land.

MEG NOLA

## NATURE



### Bee People: And the Bugs They Love

Frank Mortimer

Citadel (MAR 1) Hardcover \$25 (304pp)  
978-0-8065-4083-2

Frank Mortimer's *Bee People* is an entertaining introduction to the world of beekeeping, drawn from Mortimer's extensive experience raising bees in suburban New Jersey.

The book's topics will appeal to novices, experts, and the "bee curious" alike, and include bee behavior; the role of the queen, workers, and drones; the cultivation of honey; the equipment needed for, and the seasonal challenges to, beekeeping; and efforts to combat colony collapse disorder.

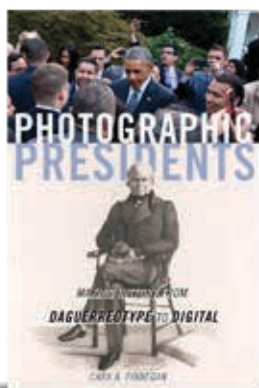
Mortimer is a playful storyteller, and his text is lively with the challenges and appeal of keeping bees. It notes his surprise when Sunrise Farms—the source for some of his first hives—was not an "idyllic farm with horse-plowed fields," but a couple of picnic benches in a suburban backyard. And joining a local bee club, Mortimer wonders whether he's going to learn "a secret bee handshake" or go through "some sort of insect initiation ceremony," but instead finds stale cookies and a group of eccentric "bee nerds," including the "one-eyed bee guy" who drives a 1959 Cadillac Eldorado painted bright bee yellow with black racing stripes—"bigger than some New York City apartments."

Mortimer's growth as a beekeeper, from an enthusiastic but bumbling beginner whose first hive died to his role as a recognized teacher, writer, and mentor in the beekeeping community, is detailed, too. *Bee People* is as much about beekeepers as it is about bees themselves, and those sketched include the Surgeon, who dons "full head-to-toe bee suits" and approaches his hives "the same way a surgeon walks into the operating room," and the Cowboy, "who doesn't wear any type of veil, usually has forgotten to bring his smoker, and just jumps in without any real plan."

*Bee People* is a compelling memoir that's filled with information about beekeepers and the tiny, fascinating creatures to whom they tend.

KRISTEN RABE

## PHOTOGRAPHY



### Photographic Presidents: Making History from Daguerreotype to Digital

Cara A. Finnegan

University of Illinois Press (APR 27) Softcover \$22.95 (296pp), 978-0-252-08578-9

Cara A. Finnegan explores the history of presidential photography in her informative, knowledgeable, and enjoyable book *Photographic Presidents*.

Described as a project that flips “the conventional script from ‘presidential photography’ to ‘photographic presidents,’” Finnegan’s text tells the story of advances in photography through how those advances were used to depict the presidency. These examples begin with the practice of taking daguerreotype images of painted portraits of George Washington, making iconic the images of the first president still popular today and foreshadowing the shift from painted to photographic portraiture.

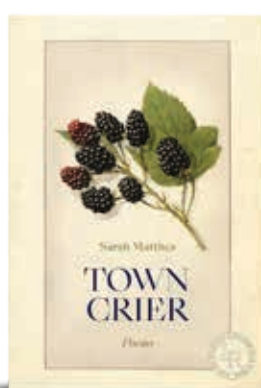
The book goes through its examples in detail, covering the experiences of John Quincy Adams as the first widely photographed president, and Dolley Madison’s routine appearances with new presidents; of Abraham Lincoln posing with an understanding that those images would help to define his legacy; of Franklin Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover managing photographers’ new ability to take candid, unposed images; and of Barack Obama’s innovative use of social media to distribute images.

All of these examples are fascinating, both because of the way that Finnegan uses them to tell the story of photography’s evolution as a technology, and for how they demonstrate the changing role that photography played in the American people’s relationship with their leaders. The book also includes numerous high-quality images for each example, giving context to the discussion of the photographic techniques and their powerful subjects, and makes use of presidents’ quoted reactions from the relevant periods.

By tracking that relationship between imagery and politics through both anecdotes and a big-picture view, *Photographic Presidents* is a valuable addition to presidential history.

JEFF FLEISCHER

## POETRY



### Town Crier: Poems

Sarah Matthes

Persea Books (APR 13) Softcover \$15.95 (96pp) 978-0-89255-527-7

Filled with reminders of human fragility, but still exalting life in vigorous tones, Sarah Matthes’s debut poetry collection, *Town Crier*, is a momentous introduction to a sensitive voice.

Dedicated to a friend and fellow poet who passed from cancer, the text is marked by the internal pivots required of someone reckoning with a beloved’s departure. Matthes dreams of an afterlife that is perhaps “just another planet. // Maybe it’s close. // Maybe I can see it from here.” Though her pain remains pellucid, she arrives at her friend’s *yahrzeit* by accident, and begins to live again without realizing it:

*Then one day a whole day goes by.  
You’re not in the tree. You’re not even  
in the bird.*

Whether concerned with this loss or other topics, Matthes’s poems are variously playful, mythical, mournful, and dreamy; many are combinations of these. Some reflect on missed connections, or on the unavoidable pull of memories. Cabinets of curiosity are constructed:

*I wanted to make a museum  
comprised entirely of relics  
from my most beloved friends.*

*I wanted to put strange fuzz  
under glass and keep it  
forever strange and fuzzy.*

Golems are a recurrent symbol: of resurrection, of protection—of life brought into being either through sheer force of will, or because a reconfiguration is imagined necessary: “Sometimes women like me are called golems, too. / Not human until another human beats inside us.” “613 Mitzvot” tracks a Tinder connection gone wrong because of an outpouring of Kabbalistic thoughts; “Coda” challenges tidy rabbinical explanations of human origins. But even when borrowing from extant folklore or practices, Matthes finds a way to make what could be dismissed as familiar all her own.

*Town Crier* is a daring and surprising debut poetry collection.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

## RELIGION



### #ChurchToo: How Purity Culture Upholds Abuse and How to Find Healing

Emily Joy Allison

Broadleaf Books (MAR 9) Softcover \$16.99 (200pp) 978-1-5064-6481-7

In November of 2017, the #MeToo phenomenon gave Emily Joy Allison the courage to tell her story about how sexual abuse has been tolerated by evangelical Christian churches, where victims are shamed into silence. In *#ChurchToo*, she argues that purity culture and abstinence-only sex education are damaging to young people.

A homeschooled pastor’s daughter, Allison was indoctrinated into purity values from an early age, including of total abstinence prior to marriage. Her parents’ bare-bones sex talk never mentioned consent. When, as a teenager, she was preyed on by a youth group leader, she didn’t know how to stand up for herself. Since studying theology, she has come out as gay, been diagnosed as bipolar, and become estranged from her family.

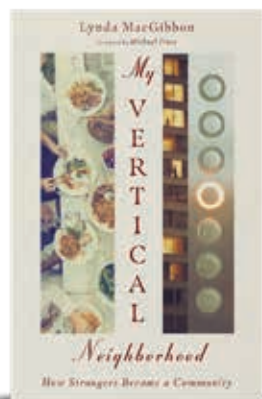
Allison argues that purity culture, like the pro-life lobby, represents not timeless doctrine, but a 1970s-onward political strategy, and is a means of sexual control. She gives numerous, often anonymous, examples of the victim-blaming that goes on in churches, leading people to not report harassment and to stay in abusive relationships. Scrutiny of Christian colleges’ codes of conduct reveals a conflation of consensual sex and assault. Higher rates of STIs and unplanned pregnancies among Christian youth imply that abstinence-only teaching does not work. And LGBTQ+ issues go hand in hand, she contends: “Nonaffirming theology is homophobia.”

The book does not engage in biblical exegesis per se, instead directing readers to the FAQs and resources in the appendix. It assumes familiarity with evangelical culture and espouses a secular worldview, and is geared towards those who have already started to question purity culture.

*#ChurchToo* opens up a vital conversation about how conservative Christian theology has left “a whole generation” suffering from sexual shame and religious trauma.

REBECCA FOSTER

## RELIGION



### My Vertical Neighborhood: How Strangers Became a Community

Lynda MacGibbon

InterVarsity Press (MAR 30) Softcover \$17 (157pp)  
978-0-8308-4740-2

In her bold, insightful spiritual memoir *My Vertical Neighborhood*, Lynda MacGibbon explores what it means to “love your neighbor” in a diverse, cosmopolitan city.

After living most of her forty-nine years in eastern Canada, MacGibbon sold her Cape Cod home on the outskirts of Moncton to move into a nondescript high-rise in Toronto, overlooking Lake Ontario. Though she relocated for work, she saw the move as a call to “open the door to strangers who were neighbors.”

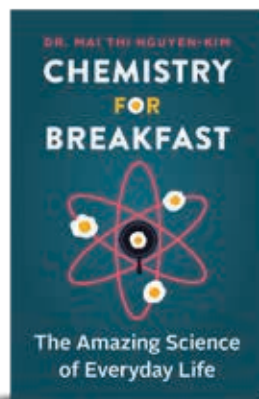
MacGibbon and a friend began hosting weekly dinners. Over time, they added a writers’ group and a weekly Bible study to their meetings. As she learned to free herself “from the fear of inviting strangers into my life,” her circle grew to include a wide range of neighbors: Croatians and Colombians; fifty-something Fran, whose smile and jewelry sparkled; and handsome Brian, a gay man with platinum blond hair and flip-flops. The group’s activities led to deepening bonds among the neighbors, all described in lucid detail: butter tarts, borscht, and gnocchi in shared meals; Christmas pajama parties; dances at nightclubs; and the search for a beloved parrot.

MacGibbon’s Christian faith is apparent throughout, and the book includes frequent biblical references. Still, she was determined not to impose her beliefs on others, or to limit her friendships because of them. In meeting people where they were, she discovered more about herself, and about the importance of self-acceptance, forgiveness, and vulnerability: “I’d come to understand that loving my neighbors was about a posture of preparedness, a readiness to cross a threshold; about being present to people and allowing them to be present to me.”

In a time marked by division and distrust, *My Vertical Neighborhood* is a gentle, thoughtful meditation on the value of opening the door, inviting people in, and celebrating together.

KRISTEN RABE

## SCIENCE



### ★ Chemistry for Breakfast: The Amazing Science of Everyday Life

Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim

Greystone Books (APR 13) Hardcover \$26.95 (240pp)  
978-1-77164-748-9

Dr. Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim’s *Chemistry for Breakfast* is a delightful, mentally stimulating popular science book.

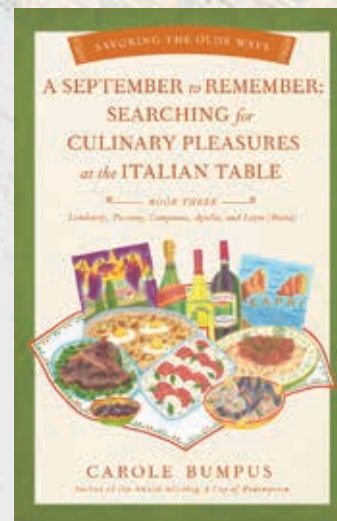
This chemist’s-eye view of daily life brings out curiosity that is both intelligent and childlike. Nguyen-Kim’s love for chemistry is contagious. This book shows that chemistry is not just relevant to life; it’s really, really interesting. Its is an insider’s look into scientists’ minds, social interactions, and laboratories that will change the way that readers view their lives, surroundings, and bodies.

The book explores science-y concepts like melatonin, polymers, neurotransmitters, and more using experiments and examples with commonplace elements like coffee, body odor, and drinking water—what’s more everyday than water? Each chapter centers on a particular exploratory journey, venturing from real-life scenarios down to the cellular level with deft transitions between life and science. The book delves into popular topics like whether sitting really is the new smoking, and gives advice that you didn’t know that you needed, like to follow the example of noble gasses when responding to sexual harassment (hint: they rise above everything). The in-depth explanations are made easy for anyone to understand without being the least bit belittling. Nguyen-Kim never compromises her respect for people or science.

The writing is impeccable and personable. Nguyen-Kim’s storytelling—which includes dialogue, scenes, and even her friends as characters—is a seamless complement to the book’s more explanatory work. Sarah Pybus’s elegant translation from German maintains the beauty and accuracy of the text, which features illustrations by Claire Lenkova that explain chemicals and processes in a clever, humorous, hand-drawn style. They augment both the voice and informative nature of the book.

*Chemistry for Breakfast* is an engaging, accessible, and downright fun science book.

MELISSA WUSKE



“Bumpus’s exploration as an American abroad will draw in those who hunger for travel as much as they hunger for flavor... brings the heart of Italy to tables around the world.”

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### Freddie's Last Ride

What Really Happened to Freddie Gray

Mary Anne Whelan Ph.D MD

Author Mary Anne Whelan Ph.D MD takes apart the process and testimony of the trial of Freddie Gray, a young black man who died in police custody in Baltimore as a result of a broken neck, from an informed medical point of view. The book reviews the important medical concepts necessary to evaluate what happened and the medical ethics which should (but did not) prevail in such cases. The message of this book is topical, enduring, and unique because of its authoritative medical perspective.

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## SPORTS &amp; RECREATION



### Racing for America: The Horse Race of the Century and the Redemption of a Sport

James C. Nicholson

University Press of Kentucky (FEB 24) Hardcover \$26 (226pp), 978-0-8131-8064-9

James C. Nicholson's *Racing for America* exposes the historical roles of politics, money, and corruption in horse racing.

The book profiles the key players, history, and hype surrounding the 1923 "Race of the Century" and its impact on horse racing. The contest pitted Americans against British racers, and helped revive a sport whose prospects for survival in the United States were uncertain. In alternating sections, Nicholson profiles the rags-to-riches story of corrupt oil tycoon and horse owner Harry F. Sinclair, cantankerous trainer Sam Hildreth, top young jockey Earl Sande, and the winning horse, Zev.

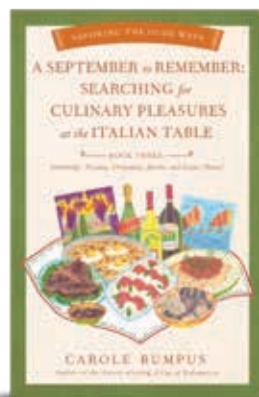
The book follows the struggles and successes that brought this cast together, forging them into a team against the backdrop of a sport plagued by corruption and the brewing Teapot Dome deal that scandalized President Harding's administration. It includes an instructive look at the political, cultural, and economic conditions that facilitated American horse racing's return from the brink of extinction, giving it a place of national prominence, even as the United States trended toward oligarchy and commercial mass spectacles.

Though its focus is on one race and its particular players, the book covers a period from 1895 to 1930 and beyond, its clear, concise reporting capturing atmospheres, eras, and the hope that Americans placed in a race. Nicholson's storytelling is layered, presenting events with enough historical details and texture to reveal the players' motivations. He conveys the minute-by-minute tension of horse races and their stakes, and **captures American horse racing, and the gambling and doping scandals that almost wrought its demise, showing the complex role that shady politics played in saving the sport.**

*Racing for America* is a contextual work of sports reporting whose compelling personal stories help to capture a 1923 horse race.

WENDY HINMAN

## TRAVEL



### A September to Remember: Searching for Culinary Pleasures at the Italian Table

Carole Bumpus

She Writes Press (APR 27) Softcover \$16.95 (245pp) 978-1-63152-727-2

Carole Bumpus's culinary travelogue *A September to Remember*, written as an American abroad, will draw in those who hunger for travel as much as they hunger for flavor.

For Bumpus, appreciating food requires a strong sense of people and place; in fact, she regards food and culture as inseparable. Her initial encounters with Italy began when she had very little sense of its language, but had a basic appreciation of its food, and a deep desire to learn the culture from the people she met. Her interest in learning about the culture and its cooking is the central, engaging element of her book. Her narration is open-minded and inquisitive, respectful and humble—and open-handed with all that's she's learned.

The book is organized by region, covering Lombardy, Tuscany, Campania, Apulia, and Lazio. Each section includes several chapters of travelogue, with a recipe per chapter at the end of the book. The narrative elements are strong, featuring well-paced scenes, real-life characters, and informative dialogue that harnesses the beauty of the two languages Bumpus engaged in, and reveals the challenges of cross-cultural communication.

The recipes include basics like Homemade Gnocchi; meat dishes like Bistecca alla Fiorentina (porterhouse steak, Florence style); desserts like tiramisu; and, of course, pasta dishes, like Orecchiette con Cime de Rapa (ear-shaped pasta with broccoli rabe). Their instructions are easy to follow for confident home cooks, with clear ingredient lists of items readily available outside of Italy, and thorough instructions. While some elements are simplified for typical American cooks, there are no shortcuts; Bumpus embraces authenticity over simplicity, encouraging cooks to rise to the challenge.

***A September to Remember* is a food narrative that brings the heart of Italy to tables around the world.**

MELISSA WUSKE

## TRAVEL



### Destination Wellness: Global Secrets for Better Living Wherever You Are

Annie Daly

Chronicle Prism (APR 6) Hardcover \$22.95 (240pp) 978-1-79720-278-5

As a wellness and travel journalist in Brooklyn, Annie Daly got tired of the version of health Americans are often sold: one centered on jumping head first into the latest diet and workout trends, taking prescription medications, and purchasing expensive products. *Destination Wellness* documents her investigation into how other parts of the world define health. It documents her **travels to Jamaican farms, Nordic hiking trails, luxurious Japanese baths, and India's Ayurvedic spas in search of the secrets to a long, happy, balanced life.**

These travel narrations are seamless about incorporating historical information for each location. They include interviews regarding locals' wellness philosophies and scientific research, too, to illustrate what people do for their health in various parts of the world. The storytelling is sometimes bogged down by trip details, but always comes back to actionable lessons gleaned from each trip. Chapters end with lists of actions that anyone can take to implement each location's wellness routines, wherever they are.

Concise, relatable, and entertaining, the text includes vibrant characterizations of those whom Daly met along her way. It also sprinkles in fun facts that will speak to science nerds and history buffs alike. Much of the knowledge it imparts is common sense, but made more interesting because of the stories of how people acquired their knowledge, and how they implement it.

In a world where what's common sense is often overlooked in favor of elaborate wellness rituals, it's helpful to have books like *Destination Wellness* to remind us what really works: connections to community and nature, in a nutshell. It will inspire action—getting down to the beach; texting family more often—which is more than most books can take credit for.

SUZANNAH WEISS

## TRAVEL



### Tokyo Junkie: 60 Years of Bright Lights and Back Alleys ... and Baseball

Robert Whiting

Stone Bridge Press (APR 20) Softcover \$19.95 (384pp), 978-1-61172-067-9

Robert Whiting's memoir *Tokyo Junkie* details his long-standing relationship with Japan's populous, quirky capital.

Whiting first arrived in Japan as a US Air Force soldier; he watched Tokyo emerge from its post-war malaise to become a global economic force. Though his story begins when he was a "callow young man" from rural California who spoke little Japanese and did not blend in with Tokyo's near-homogeneous crowds, he nonetheless expresses growing fascination with the city. His arrival coincided with Tokyo's massive preparations to host the 1964 Summer Olympics—represented by a "constant cacophony" of noise, as new buildings, roads, and subway lines were built to modernize the city, rebranding it as a peaceful yet powerful metropolis.

Whiting's initial interest in Tokyo developed into a lifetime vocation; he also wrote *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*, *You Gotta Have Wa*, and *Tokyo Underworld*. His keen, journalistic observations of Tokyo's "bright lights" and "back alleys" feature Japanese baseball players, sumo wrestlers, *yakuza* gangsters, businessmen, sex workers, and other unique characters. His personal experiences enhance the narrative, including of his early days in a tiny, drafty apartment; his marriage to a Japanese United Nations officer; and the more recent celebration of his seventy-seventh birthday with gifts of sake and chocolate. He praises Tokyo's distinct style, cleanliness, and politeness, as well as the delights of Japanese food, cinema, and literature. He also elaborates on issues of racism and conformity in Japan, and on Tokyo's surprising political corruption.

Whiting's love for his adopted home is enduring and accepting. A self-proclaimed Tokyo "junkie," his addiction results in a complex, captivating portrait of a city that is both insular and welcoming, and is now one of the world's top tourist destinations.

MEG NOLA

## TRAVEL



### Vidas: Deep in Mexico and Spain

Edward Stanton

Waterside Productions (MAR 1) Softcover \$17.95 (247pp), 978-1-949003-47-5

Edward Stanton's *Vidas* gathers his encounters with Mexicans and his travels through Spain in rhapsodic essays.

Stanton's interest in Latino cultures was initiated by a neighborhood gardener in 1955 Los Angeles, who regaled Stanton with folklore and wisdom. He learned more from his restaurant coworkers, who faced the threat of deportation, and from visits in Tijuana's red light district in the late 1950s. A mysterious raconteur took Stanton under her "tarnished wings" while he lived in a Saltillo boardinghouse. Stanton's teenage years are covered via lush, dreamlike descriptions—often addressed to the audience—that depict his coming-of-age as an evolution that was shaped by friendships.

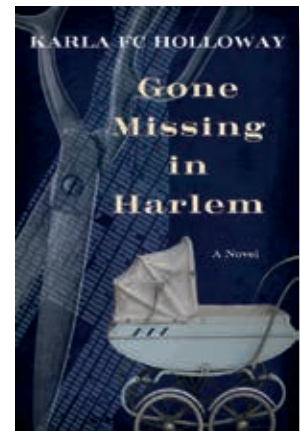
Though this celebratory portrait of midcentury Mexico (a playground for Stanton as he sought interesting experiences) is somewhat out of sync with Stanton's unexamined privilege, the book's early sections acknowledge people's hardships in passing, noting the conditions for women in brothels and the prevalence of boot shine boys on the streets. Mexicans, who are likened to "swallows migrating," are poeticized, and sights are cataloged with omnivorous zeal—sometimes empathetic, sometimes touristic. The result is a work of hedonistic nostalgia that's steeped in its era.

The book's second part, which is set in Spain from the 1960s to the present, continues exploring sensuality through sex and gastronomy. Its perspective is more nuanced, encompassing the Franco regime with depth. When Stanton admits that as a foreigner, he was freed from memories of such histories, it's an apt commentary on the difficulty for travelers to ever become more than observers. Later sections include intriguing portraits of friends, Ernest Hemingway, and local traditions; good food and good conversations help Stanton to find multiple true homes.

*Vidas* is a robust travelogue set on the fringes; it captures Mexico and Spain as alluring destinations.

KAREN RIGBY ♥

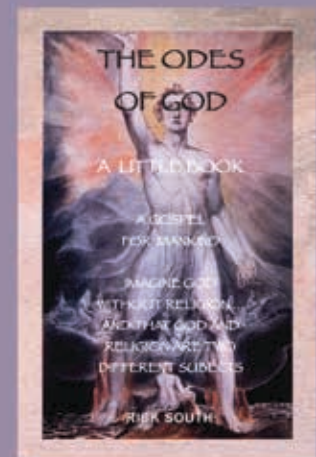
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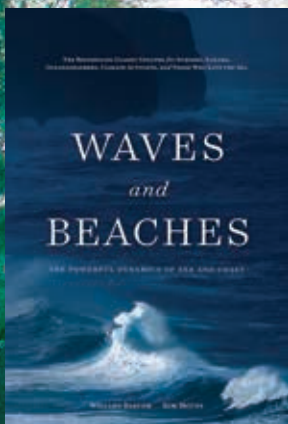
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Excerpted from *Waves and Beaches: The Powerful Dynamics of Sea and Coast*, by Willard Bascom and Kim McCoy. Used with permission from Patagonia.

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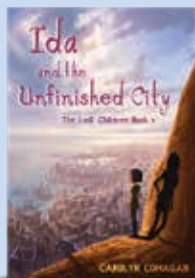
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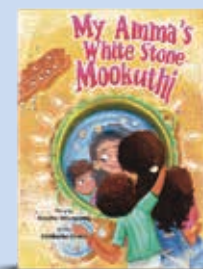
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