



# Foreword

REVIEWS OF INDIE BOOKS SINCE 1998



**100+**  
*new releases*

## *features:*

DEBUT FICTION

BODY, MIND & SPIRIT

TRAVEL

## *spotlight:*

LGBTQ+

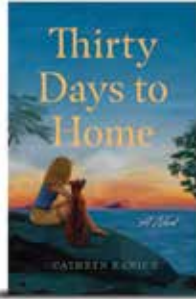
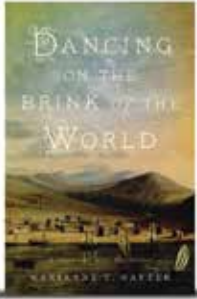
MAY/JUNE 2026



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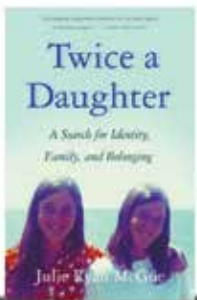
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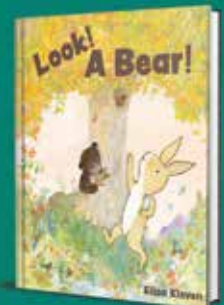
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# Foreword

REVIEWS OF INDIE BOOKS,  
SINCE 1998

May/June 2026  
Volume 29 • Number 3

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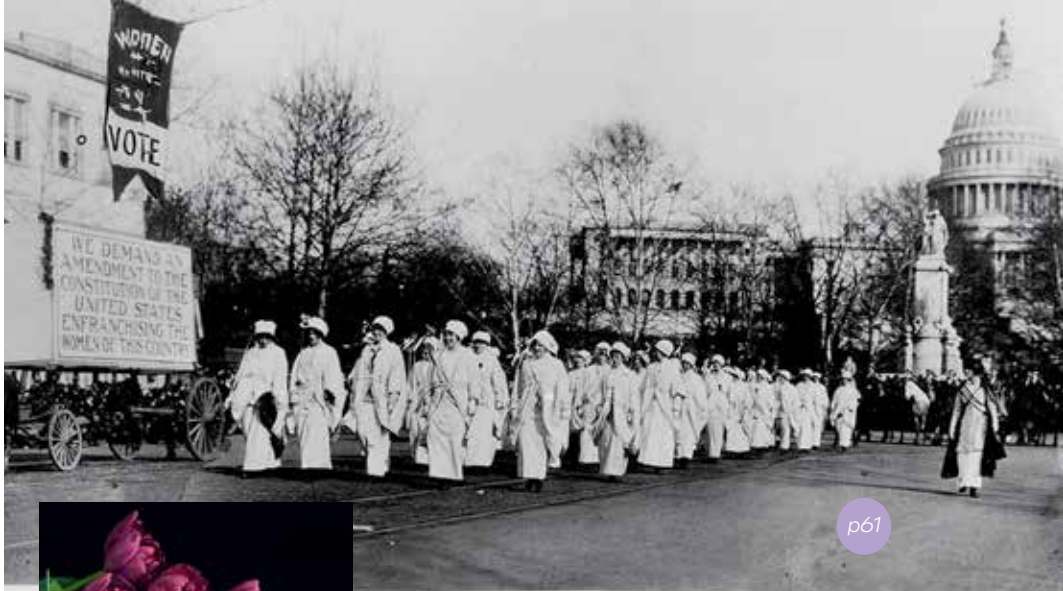
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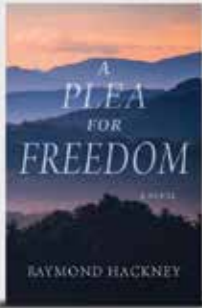
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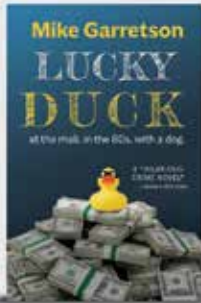
FICTION—HISTORICAL

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Raymond Hackney  
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A young Revolutionary War soldier journeys through Indian and British Captivity yearning for home.

[raymondhackneyauthor.com](http://raymondhackneyauthor.com)



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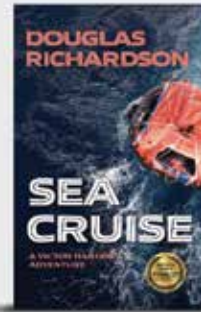
FICTION—MYSTERY

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Jack Luellen

292 pages, \$19.99,  
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[douglasrichardsonnovelist.com](http://douglasrichardsonnovelist.com)



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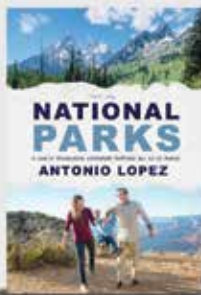
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Antonio Lopez  
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National Parks is filled with intriguing facts about our parks and reflections on their fragile future.

[lopeznationalparks.com](http://lopeznationalparks.com)



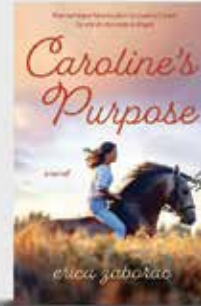
CHILDREN'S—YOUNG ADULT FICTION

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Erica Zaborac  
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CHILDREN'S—YOUNG ADULT FICTION

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Emily K. Bray  
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# Foreword

REVIEWS OF INDIE BOOKS,  
SINCE 1998

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## Reasons to Rejoice

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

**“L’Chaim!” Two hundred glasses raised in unison on a Saturday evening just before this issue went to press.**

The celebration had an air of the uncanny: it had to be relocated late in the planning process when the original site, the synagogue and school across the street, was attacked. We couldn’t see signs of the substantial damage when we pulled up, but were unnerved by the police barriers and national disaster service vehicles. Still, we’re a part of a community whose response to such attacks trends life-affirming. So on it all went, hope-filled and vivacious: the wedding, the celebration, the new beginnings.

I had an issue favorite on my mind throughout the evening: *Earth 7*, which is also about love in the midst of communal distress. It’s set in a futurescape scarred by climate change and additional pandemics, and centers a determined couple, Dylan and Melanie. Their futures circumscribed by circumstances beyond their control, they commit to each other with defiant ferocity. Their love persists beyond even Earth’s lifespan, with Melanie fading, over millennia, into a “soul globule” who still maintains her wife’s memory. Like all great books do, it stuck with me, affording the term “forever” added weight among the night’s buzzing proclamations of ever-after.

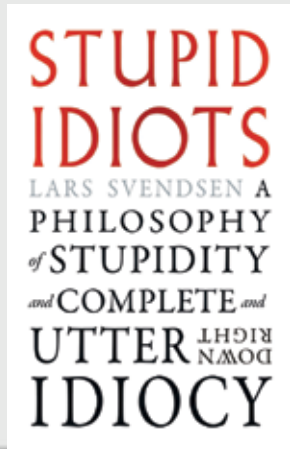
If you think about it, “L’chaim” is such a natural cheer in a reader’s mouth. “To life”: to challenging our inevitable impermanence with vibrant, animate art that breathes with and for us when we need it to. May I be so bold as to argue that this is why writers write in the first place. Each page reaches to make meaning in a world that often seems to resist it.

Herein, then, are 100+ reasons to celebrate. There are instances of spiritual searching in the body, mind, and spirit feature; the debut fiction feature elevates nascent voices that we’ll crave more from in years to come. The LGBTQ+ feature reflects authentic love in its manifold forms. Each title is its own reason to rejoice, to raise a glass and proudly say “to life!” ♥

Don’t miss out! Each Thursday in our *Foreword This Week* newsletter, we highlight the most compelling books from *Foreword Reviews* with a series of reviewer-author interviews, followed by a *Between the Issues* feature with fresh reviews of books you shouldn’t miss. Sign up and join the thousands of readers who relish these peeks at literary gems. Use this QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/3SJOjj3> to subscribe!



# GIFT IDEAS



## Stupid Idiots

*A Philosophy of Stupidity and Complete and Utter Downright Idiocy*

Lars Svendsen, Matt Bagguley (Translator)  
 Reaktion Books (JUN 5) Softcover \$20 (180pp)  
 978-1-83639-177-7, PHILOSOPHY

Lars Svendsen’s wry philosophical text treats stupidity as a persistent human condition that’s shaped by knowledge, belief, and social context.

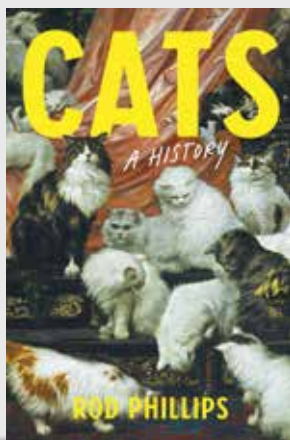
Drawing on philosophy, psychology, and cultural observation, the book explores how foolish thinking arises, why it persists, and how it can affect individuals, including Svendsen himself and accomplished figures like Steve Jobs, whose successes do not inoculate them against error. Framed around questions of how people know what they know, how certainty forms, and how problematic thinking persists, the book situates its argument in conversation with a wide

range of thinkers, including Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Its tone balances seriousness with self-awareness, positioning the inquiry as one of a broad human condition.

The book distinguishes among three varieties of stupidity, using examples to show how ignorance, overconfidence, and rigid thinking manifest. It introduces several concepts, including monomania—obsessive fixation on a single idea—to explain the coexistence of intelligence and poor judgment. Brief illustrative examples ground these abstractions, including professionals ignoring contradictory evidence because it conflicts with prior beliefs. It makes a tenuous case for maintaining aspects of the political status quo and issues a response to the contemporary political climate in the United States too.

A compelling philosophical study, *Stupid Idiots* probes the persistence of human folly as a shared condition rather than an individual failing.

PINE BREAKS



## Cats

*A History*

Rod Phillips, Johns Hopkins University Press (JUN 2)  
 Hardcover \$32.95 (464pp), 978-1-4214-5418-4. HISTORY

Rod Phillips’s *Cats: A History* is an exhaustive and engrossing survey of the millennia-long relationship between cats and people.

Humans first kept cats to protect grain stores from rodents, Phillips notes, while ancient Egyptians venerated cats and Greeks and Romans were more ambivalent. Medieval associations of cats with witchcraft provoked hatred and torture of the animals, and the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries involved cats “going global” on each continent except Antarctica. Still, while numbers of pet cats are on the rise in places like China, they have pla-

teaued overall: there may be one billion cats worldwide, but fewer than half are pets—the rest are stray or feral.

The book’s frame of reference is wide, covering archaeology, evolution, philosophy, and popular culture. It often draws clues from art history and literature. For instance, the cat at Eve’s feet in an Albrecht Dürer engraving could symbolize temptation. History threatens to repeat: Daniel Defoe reported that 200,000 cats (thought to carry disease in their fur) were killed to prevent the spread of plague in 1666. Later, in the earliest days of COVID-19, a rumor that cats were virus vectors led the United Kingdom to consider a large-scale cull. Negative stereotypes of cats as lazy and sexual persist, and environmentalist concerns over cats’ killing of birds—rather than rats, as might be desirable—prove polarizing.

Cats are “embedded in human culture,” and the historical survey *Cats* traces the process of their rise with aplomb, from Ancient Greece to Grumpy Cat.

REBECCA FOSTER



## A Little Feral

Maria Giesbrecht, Write Bloody Publishing  
 (MAY 8) Softcover \$18 (100pp)  
 978-1-949342-81-9, POETRY

A playful collection, Maria Giesbrecht’s *A Little Feral* invokes her religious background.

Born in Mexico and of Mennonite ancestry, Giesbrecht found release in writing: “A safe / rebellion. A poem. / It’s the way I have survived.” Herein, God and her violent, alcoholic father, with whom she has a love-hate relationship, appear as authorities whose joint power has waned: “Some days I want to crawl / into my throat and scrape out / all the hymns I sang / in reverence to a God / my father custom built / for me.”

The book’s metaphorical matrix is a sly blend of the material with the supernatural. Clothing, decor, food, and music are frequent points of reference (“the sun hangs grey and washed / like an old comforter / on a grandmother’s clothes-line”), but faith is always apt to pop up, too. A key pastime is described as “writing poems about flirting with God (which is really just living — there’s no difference).”

With a tongue-in-cheek tone, the book ponders the value of breaking the rules when settling on a personal identity. A borrowed Sylvia Plath line connects to the observance of sad-girl tropes on Instagram, while alliteration and slant and internal rhymes result in enduring sonic appeal.

Through sensual vocabulary and sibilance, the poems of *A Little Feral* capture a bittersweet, resonant religious upbringing.

REBECCA FOSTER ♥

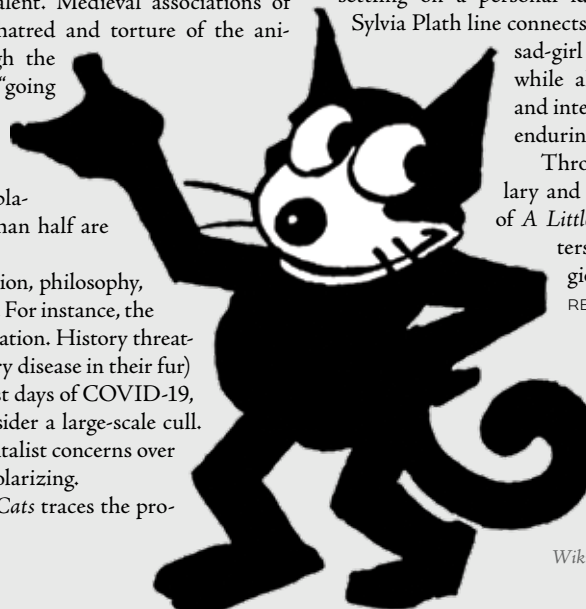


Image from *Cats: A History*, by Rod Phillips. Used with permission from Johns Hopkins University Press. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

# JOHN CARPENTER'S Cathedral



The first full-length graphic novel from Master of Horror John Carpenter is coming August 4th, 2026 wherever books are sold.

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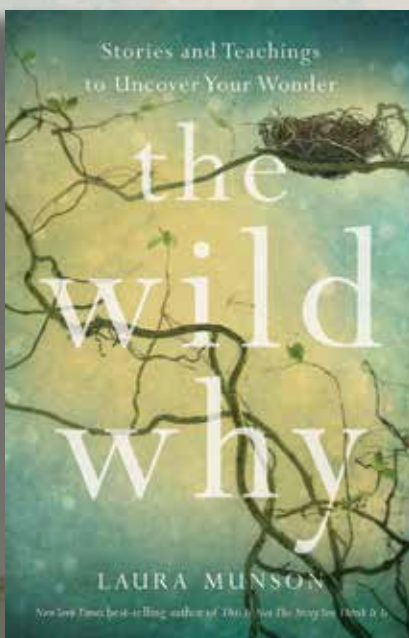
—Manhattan Book Review

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Founder of the acclaimed Haven Writing Retreat in Montana

Two decades in the making, and honored with 43 awards in national and international book contests, the poetry collection *Exits* venerates craft, celebrates sound, and plumbs the sublime.

“Pollock’s poetry is brilliant”

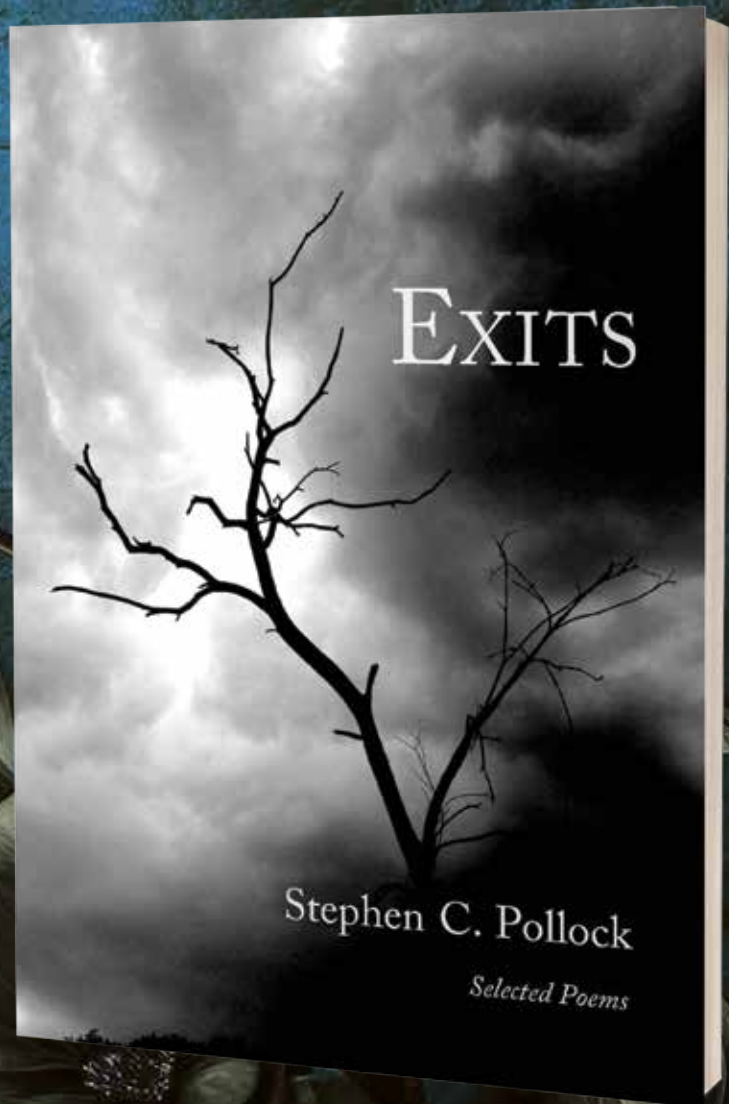
—Kristiana Reed,  
*Free Verse Revolution*

“*Exits* exemplifies the musicality of language”

—Camille-Yvette Welsch,  
*Foreword Clarion Reviews*

“A breathtaking collection of formal and lyrical poems”

—*Next Best Read Book Awards*



[exitspoetry.net](http://exitspoetry.net)

## AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Stephen C. Pollock  
*Exits: Selected Poems*

978-1-957638-68-3, Windtree Press, [exitspoetry.net](http://exitspoetry.net)

We're excited to hear more about this award-winning collection. What is the organizing principle of the book?

The poems in *Exits* explore the beauty and frailty of life, the cycles of nature, and the promise of renewal.

By definition, an exit is a departure, an act of leaving. But it also refers to a portal through which living things pass from one place to another. This latter sense calls to mind the transformations that occur throughout the natural world. There are many such transformations in *Exits*. Indeed, the title of the book is plural because the poems address a wide range of endings and beginnings.

How do you think your opening poem, "Arachnidæ: Line Drawings," introduces the primary themes of your collection?

My most common sources of inspiration are natural phenomena. This was true of "Arachnidæ." One warm August night, a beige and brown orb weaver spider built a web across the window of my exercise room. Winged insects seeking illumination encountered instead an invisible web and became entangled, inextricably, in its sticky silken threads. Each captive soon fell prey, and every night, death would choreograph a new ballet.

The web in the window led me to dwell on the prospect of my own demise. But the impetus to write only materialized when I started to see, embedded in the web's geometry, a raft of ways to cope with my own mortality. The aptness of web metaphors auditioning for parts inspired me to draft "Arachnidæ."

You've chosen to include drawings and photographs with the text. How do you think the use of images enhances the poems?

The decision to include visual art was an intuitive one. I sensed that many of the poems would resonate in interesting ways with visual imagery.

While a few of the images were selected solely for illustrative purposes, most were chosen because they offered alternative slants on the content of the poems. Though the sonnet "Nasal Biopsy" is ostensibly about a surgical procedure, a photo of a cathedral door was chosen to accompany the poem because the speaker perceives gothic architecture in the anatomy of the nose and because the poem is ultimately concerned with questions of faith.



Which poem do you think might serve as an *ars poetica* for you?

"Syringe" may be the most original and technically accomplished poem in the collection.

The poem was crafted as an independent work of art. It is, as the cliché goes, art for art's sake. It wasn't created for public consumption, and it eschews contemporary trends in poetry. During the writing process, the intended audience was always me, or, to be more precise, the facsimile of me that constantly looks over my shoulder and critiques every word I draft. The word *ecstasy* comes to mind. It captures the elation I feel when a line finally comes together, but it derives from the Greek *ek-stasis*—to stand outside of oneself.

"Syringe" draws on the Greek myth of Syrinx as recounted in Book One of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It also delves into the experience and pathophysiology of multiple sclerosis (MS). The poem begins with the speaker using a syringe to draw up medication:

*These marks, my metric  
of defiance and decline,  
gauge a meniscus as the lumen fills  
with fresh platoons of synthetic drug,  
game as ever to deploy.*

Part III opens with the carnage left behind by the disease:

*I return to burned-out husks  
the columns collapsed  
the cry of syllables buddled in shelters  
each vowel a child dragging its feet.*

The middle section defies conventional interpretation. Is it a drug-induced hallucination, a dream, or some other dissociative state? Many of the lines address both of the main themes simultaneously. For example, at the end of the first stanza, the poem seems to be alluding to the transformation of Syrinx into hollow reeds near the edge of a pond, but the identical lines can just as easily be interpreted as describing a lumbar puncture, a procedure often performed to confirm a diagnosis of MS.

The final stanza of Part II—configured on the page as a feminine silhouette—is similarly ambiguous. It ostensibly describes a scene of seduction, yet the same lines accurately describe the process of nerve fiber demyelination.



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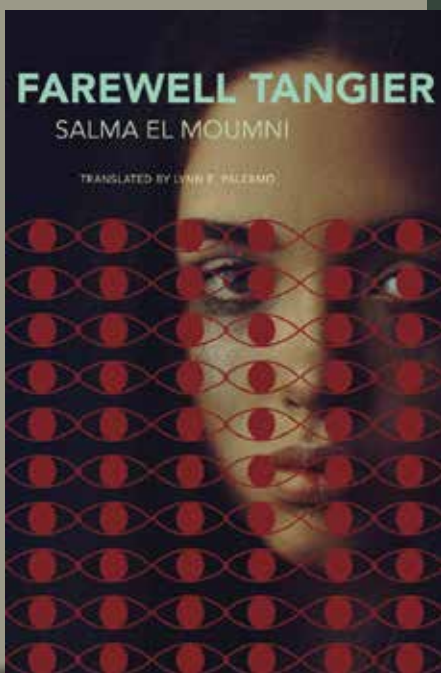
# ARRIVAL TIME

New literary faces grapple with race and class, shame and ambition, resistance and hope.

MEG NOLA



SALMA EL MOUMNI



## Farewell Tangier

Salma El Moumni, Lynn E. Palermo (Translator), Seagull Books (MAY 6) Softcover \$21 (112pp) 978-1-80309-620-9, TRANSLATIONS

In Salma El Moumni's sinuous novel *Farewell Tangier*, a young Moroccan woman struggles with self-doubt, body dysmorphia, and cultural and sexual repression.

From the age of ten, Alia notices men pursuing her with territorial aggression, as, in Tangier, men can fondle, accost, and sexually assault women with relative impunity. The leers and advances increase as she becomes more curvy and mature. Mystified by such behavior in her late teenage years, Alia uses her cell-phone camera to take intimate photographs of her body. The photographs are for her own contemplation; she does not share them. She also worries about Moroccan law, which prohibits "voluntary nudity" and punishes violators with imprisonment.

After a brief involvement with Quentin, a fellow student and French expatriate, Alia is shocked to discover her photographs on Instagram. Though she cannot verify whether manipulative Quentin posted the pictures, she watches as the view counts for the images increase with unnerving rapidity. Terrified of being arrested, she also dreads her father's impending wrath regarding the pictures.

Narrated with detached urgency, the taut and spiraling narrative conveys Alia's feelings of yearning and entrapment well. After moving to Lyon, she feels like she lives in "the crack" between "two worlds"; though she has more freedom in France, she is haunted by Tangier's "salty air" and "streets scented with incense." Further conflicted by neocolonial "inferiority" and her bisexual attractions, Alia's observation

of Lyon's Pride Parade is depicted with poignant intensity. Amid exuberant crowds and colorful flags, "bare-breasted women" march with confidence; Alia's eyes flood with tears as she realizes that liberation is "within reach," if she can "stop feeling shame."

A sensual and unsettling novel, *Farewell Tangier* centers a woman moving beyond cultural and technological subjugation to seek her true self.



## The Memory Museum

M Lin, Graywolf Press (APR 21) Softcover \$17 (272pp)  
978-1-64445-385-8, SHORT STORIES

The short stories collected in M Lin's encompassing book *The Memory Museum* concern the conflicts and commonalities experienced by Chinese nationals, who reflect upon the past, travel abroad, emigrate, or remain within their home country.

The stories progress with flowing surety, alternating between contemporary settings and dystopian visions. Both subtle and acute dissent against China's sociopolitical repression is used to question the control of fertility, speech, education, and economic opportunities. In one story, an elderly woman narrates from the late twenty-first century, describing an environment of climate change, war, and technological overreach. Part of China's "One-Child Generation," she also recalls the country's decades-long population control edict.

In another tale, a couple travels to Morocco despite their plans to divorce. Though she longs for an enchanting vacation, the wife finds herself arguing with her almost-ex-husband regarding China's severe COVID-19 containment measures. Elsewhere, an "Olfactory and Gustatory" specialist in the future works at an institution that preserves public and private memories. Accessing her late grandmother's remembrances, the specialist views herself as a four-year-old while watching her parents' fateful arrest for political activism.

Though the future-based works are compelling, the book's contemporary stories resonate most because of their immediate details and emotions. The stories are heightened by captivating language and imagery: the fragrant petals of Beijing's yulan flowers tremble "like the wings of idling butterflies." In one offbeat, sensual story, a Chinese accountant and a migrant masseur from Xi'an have an affair in Pittsburgh. In another story, beleaguered thieves ally with other troubled individuals and rethink their schemes after being treated with kindness by a café owner.

Integrating past, present, and future glimpses of China with cultural yearning and dissatisfaction, *The Memory Museum* is an insightful and adroit short story collection.

## When We Were Feral

Shasta Grant, Regal House Publishing (JUN 9) Softcover  
\$19.95 (220pp), 978-1-64603-738-4, LITERARY

Set in the early 1990s, Shasta Grant's riveting novel *When We Were Feral* follows three adolescent girls venturing through loss, exploration, and unsettling discoveries.

In a New Hampshire river town, Maggie and Sarah look forward to their summer vacation. Shock ripples through the community when a high school girl drowns, though. As the months pass, the impact of the tragedy wanes until it seems to have happened "a lifetime ago."

The following summer, Maggie and Sarah wear bikinis and try to act "cool," their self-consciousness concerted. They befriend Erin, the drowned girl's sister, who deals with her mother's disappearance and possible suicide. Maggie's free-spirited mother also left her family, offering vague explanations as she packed up clothes, "Jean Nate bottles," and "the good frying pan."

A perceptive narrator, Maggie expresses frustrated yearning regarding her mother's absence along with a sense of class consciousness. Maggie lives in a cramped trailer; Sarah's family owns a lovely home, and her father is an Episcopalian priest. While Sarah's doting mother fills a maternal void for Maggie and Erin, she is also judgmental toward any kind of unconventional or "wild" behavior.

During their search for clues regarding Erin's missing mother, Maggie and Erin become fascinated by the pagan mysticism of the local woods. Sarah also fixates on the exploitative attentions of three high school football players who pressure the girls into drinking alcohol and sexual activity.

Alternating between curious enthusiasms and disturbing moments of forced maturity, the novel captures the ambiguities and intensities of teenage emotions and relationships well. Primary and tangential characters are developed with subtle depth, and the conclusion leads to a surge of rallying, heartening girls' empowerment.

Three girls navigate the propulsive vulnerability of adolescence in the keen and compassionate novel *When We Were Feral*.



SHASTA GRANT

## Abundance

Hafeez Lakhani, *Counterpoint* (MAY 5) Hardcover \$27 (304pp), 978-1-64009-756-8, LITERARY

The matriarch of an Indian American family experiences an escalating health crisis in *Abundance*, Hafeez Lakhani's compelling novel.

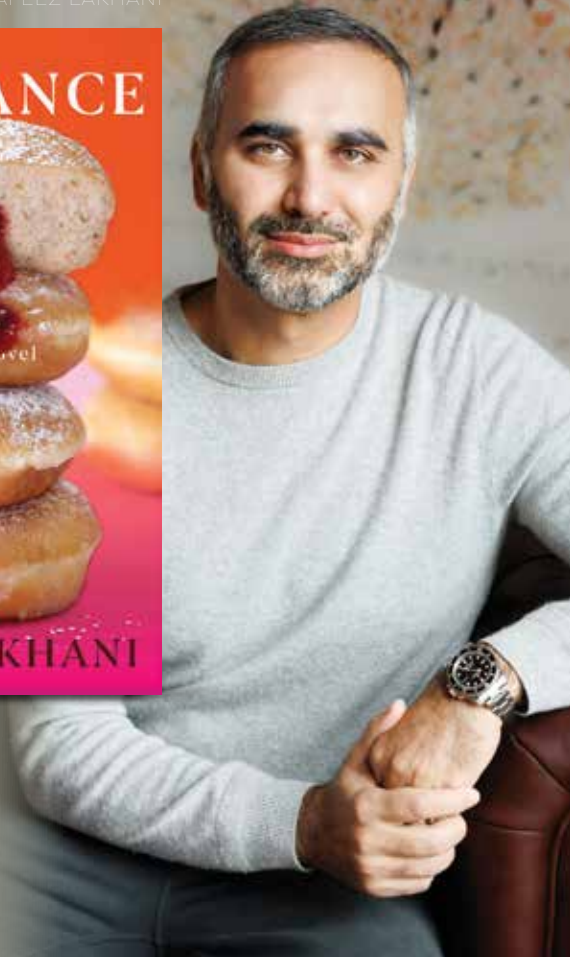
Across three decades, Indian immigrants Ramzan and Sakeena raise a family in South Florida while running a donut chain franchise. Then, sixty-year-old Sakeena experiences serious health troubles and learns that she is in dire need of a liver transplant. A devout Muslim, Sakeena believes in *naseeb*, or the idea that each person has a determined destiny. Though Sakeena decides that a transplant would defy her *naseeb*, Ramzan is desperate to convince his wife to have the operation.

Through shifting perspectives, the book relates the distinct yet intertwined backstories of each family member. The bond between Ramzan and Sakeena is enduring and intimate, from their youthful romance amid lush monsoon rains through years of shared commitment and economic challenges. Their eldest daughter, Fareen, works for a New York financial conglomerate; her musical talents are "buried" beneath more pragmatic ambitions. High-spirited yet nurturing Kawal lives near her parents, while Adnan is in Nigeria, trying to avoid the legal consequences of manufacturing counterfeit merchandise.

Tensions build as Sakeena's health worsens. Ramzan is overwhelmed with anguish; Fareen's career dissatisfaction increases; Kawal cares for her mother while awaiting the birth of her second child. And though Adnan attempts to continue his "crooked" overseas business ventures, his love for Sakeena leads to a poignant reawakening.

Evocative and yearning descriptions of India contrast with the complexities of cultural assimilation and the demands of franchise management. The family's Muslim faith is also conveyed with meaningful intensity: while at a mosque, Adnan contemplates the "common energy and affection in the heat of mutual breath" as he yields to the centering and sustaining power of prayer.

Spanning from Rawalpindi to Miami, the intricate novel *Abundance* is an immersive contemporary immigrants' saga.



JOE BOND



## Hope House

Joe Bond, *Hub City Press* (MAY 5) Hardcover \$26 (312pp), 979-888574068-5, LITERARY

In Joe Bond's outstanding novel *Hope House*, troubled teenage boys try to find community and a sense of purpose at a Kentucky group home during the 1980s.

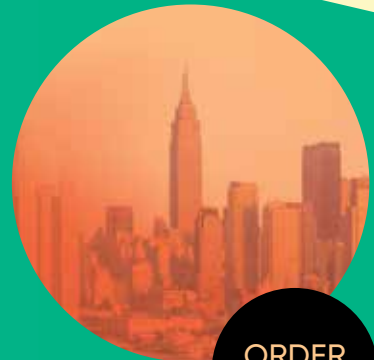
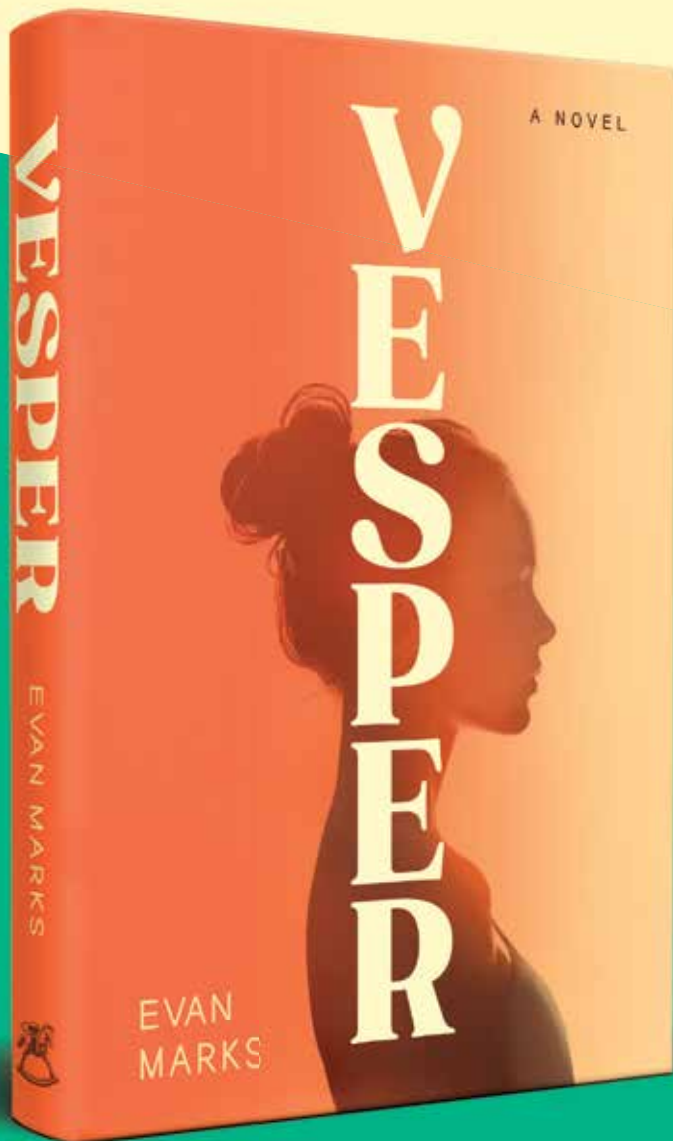
Fourteen-year-old AWOL lives in a rundown Victorian home, Hope House. It's part of a youth treatment program that involves daily chores, self-reflection, and interconnection. Though Hope House treatment is mandated for just nine months, AWOL can't seem to finish the plan. Each time he nears the end of his term, he runs away; after returning, he is required to start over again.

Hope House's Kentucky setting results in an influx of "street" and "hillbilly" youth from urban and Appalachian areas, and AWOL describes various peers as he narrates, including charismatic Karvel and childlike, voluble Peanut. After running his criminal father over with a truck, Bobby arrives barefoot and bleeding. He speaks with a mountain accent, in "quick, quiet bursts of language." Smoove was shot during a drug deal; an unknown woman remained by his side and prayed for his survival.

Each resident's backstory is detailed within an incisive, humorous, and at times poignant narrative that reveals not only what the residents did, but what was done to them, including abuse, neglect, and sexual molestation. Meanwhile, Hope House's staff members are fleshed out with compelling nuance: tenacious Mr. Watts helms the program and uses both straightforward and subversive motivational methods. As he helps the residents to develop a strong emotional core and moral compass, Watts realizes that life beyond Hope House—through the risk of recidivism, unemployment, or disconnection—presents a greater challenge.

With sinewy, loquacious eloquence, the novel *Hope House* explores the tenuous cycles of youth rehabilitation and the innate need for belonging. ♥

# *Sex and the City* meets Milan Kundera



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READERS' FAVORITE

# ARTFUL ALTERNATIVES



## Herbal Pharmacy

The Science and Magic of Preparing and Administering Plant Medicine

Betsy Bancroft, Chelsea Green Publishing (APR 7) Softcover \$44.95 (336pp)  
978-1-64502-277-0, HEALTH & FITNESS

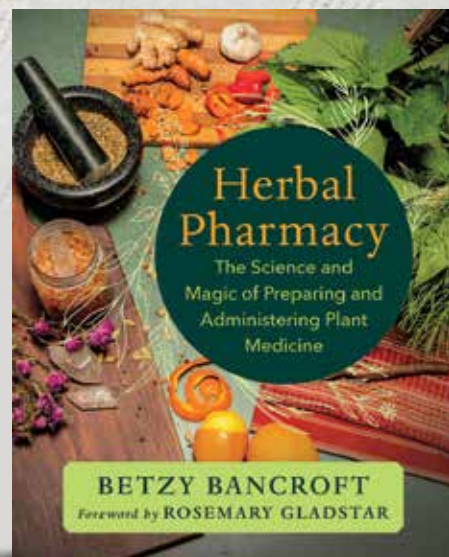
Industry veteran Betsy Bancroft's *Herbal Pharmacy* is a comprehensive, accessible guide to understanding, crafting, and utilizing plant medicine for human health and well-being.

Accessible to both professional herbalists and healers and beginners in the field, this book includes clear definitions and detailed instructions for sourcing, preparing, and administering herbal medicines. Alongside preparation tips for common herbs including fennel, peppermint, and yarrow come healthy recipes for herbal coffees, teas, and treats including Cherry, Vanilla, and Ginger Cordial; Rosemary Infused Honey; and herbal truffles.

The book's tone is warm and friendly, but it also takes a reverent, respectful attitude to all aspects of herbal craft, from the way plants are sourced and prepared to methods for calculating correct dosages and the length of treatment required for different conditions and ages. Tips for storing extracts and herbs and caring for the various implements used are included alongside considerations of the well-being of herbalists themselves. Indeed, the book suggests ways to make work processes safe, comfortable, and efficient, drawing attention to small, often overlooked details like posture while working and workspace arrangement.

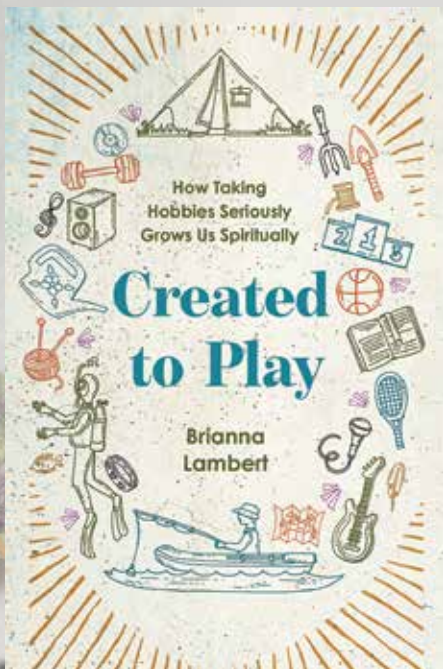
Esoteric practices bring a touch of magic to this practical text. Going beyond mere respect for nature, it treats plants as friends and allies and reveals how the effects of herbal medicine can be amplified by engaging in rituals and working in conjunction with astrological cycles and the principles of alchemy. Charts are included for keeping essential information, including business and client records, organized and handy.

*Herbal Pharmacy* brings science and a touch of magic to this comprehensive, detailed guidebook to crafting natural, effective plant medicines to benefit body, mind, and spirit.



# Wisdom and self-knowledge through herbalism, alchemy, magic, and play

KRISTINE MORRIS



## Created to Play

### How Taking Hobbies Seriously Grows Us Spiritually

Brianna Lambert, IVP (MAY 19) Softcover \$18.99 (192pp), 978-1-5140-1150-8  
CRAFTS & HOBBIES

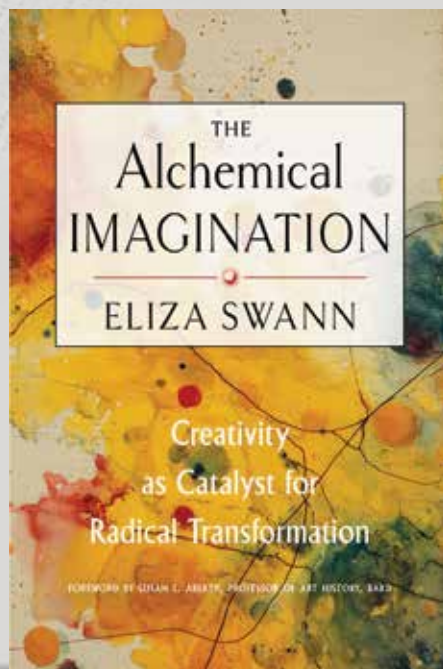
Brianna Lambert's holistic spiritual guidebook *Created to Play* is about spiritual formation via playfulness.

Rooted in Christian scripture, Lambert's book leads overworked, overwhelmed believers to discover how their lives might look if, instead of feeling guilty for taking time to play, making light of their creative passions, or calling them a "side hustle," they could see play as a form of worship and as a training ground for growing into the image of God.

Ten different types of hobbies and play are named, with a chapter describing each and the characteristics—positive, negative, and often overlapping—of those who revel in them. Examples include makers, who use their passion and skills to create, and nourishers, who delight in feeding and comforting others. How people express these types through their hobbies and passions is illustrated to speak to the innate gifts of the soul. Brief stories enliven the text and illuminate the ways in which people's gifts are shared, motivated for pure love of an art, craft, service, or sport.

The book ably supports its argument that playful, joyful steps to mastery of a hobby or sport can be likened to the steps in spiritual formation. Passages of scripture highlight God's own joy in creation, and the chapters end with suggestions and exercises to awaken awareness of God's love for creation as reflected in hobbies and play. Bible stories are included to underscore and validate the book's message that celebrating God's gifts with gratitude and taking time to enjoy those gifts, even when life is hectic, is akin to worship.

*Created to Play* is an insightful self-help guide to play and leisure as methods for building character and restoring the body, mind, and spirit.



## The Alchemical Imagination

### Creativity as Catalyst for Radical Transformation

Eliza Swann, Weiser Books (MAY 4) Softcover \$21.95 (256pp), 978-1-57863-901-4

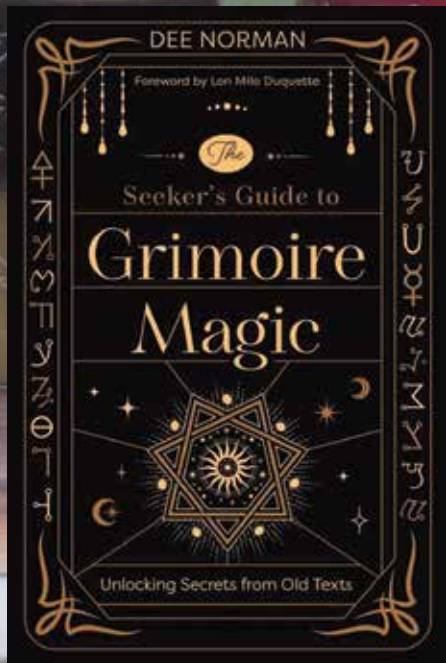
Artist, mystic, and teacher Eliza Swann's *The Alchemical Imagination* is about the history, processes, and magic of ancient and modern alchemy, affirming the value of its esoteric spirituality for creatives.

The result of years of research and distillation, and an embodiment of alchemy's secrets, this lively book includes stories of personal vulnerability and growth alongside brief biographies of noted alchemists and artists from antiquity to the present. In linking ancient practices with contemporary approaches to creativity, it reveals the degree to which alchemists and artists alike can become devotees of a higher, spiritual art and state of being, using rituals, practices, and exercises to foster attention to detail, patience, and humility.

The book's presentation of alchemy is singular, with Swann asserting "Alchemical work offers pathways forward in the face of our current ecological crisis . . . [It] weaves together the mystical, the scientific, and the philosophical to foster a more holistic, loving, and interdependent understanding of our world." The alchemistic quest for the Philosopher's Stone, inspired by a desire to turn base metals to gold, is also addressed, serving here as a metaphor for purifying, refining, and perfecting the human soul. The book asks probing questions and provides potent explorations and exercises to encourage contemporary alchemists and artists to bring forth their authentic inner truths, in turn providing material for their transformative creations. Queer and femme perspectives are highlighted too, as with the stories of seventeenth-century gender-nonconforming Queen Christina of Sweden and of Texas-born visionary painter Forrest Bess, both of whom transcended the boundaries of their eras.

A humane and engaging artist's guide, *The Alchemical Imagination* suggests that creativity rooted in an esoteric spirituality can purify, refine, and elevate both art and the human spirit.

*Images on this spread and next from Herbal Pharmacy: The Science and Magic of Preparing and Administering Plant Medicine, by Betsy Bancroft. Used with permission from Chelsea Green Publishing.*



## The Seeker's Guide to Grimoire Magic

Unlocking Secrets from Old Texts

Dee Norman, Llewellyn Publications (MAY 8) Softcover \$22.99 (336pp), 978-0-7387-7607-1

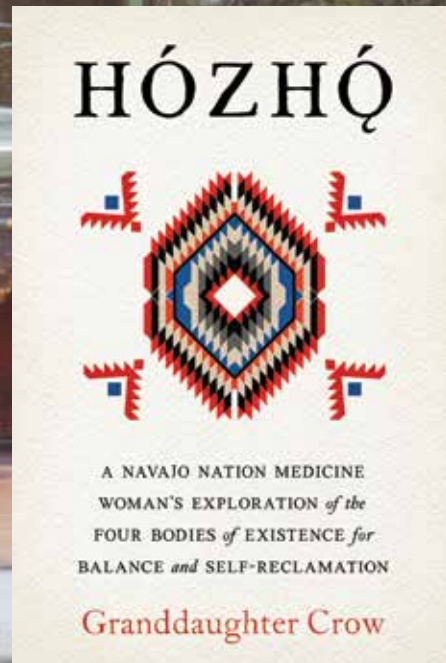
A guide for developing a personal magical practice, Dee Norman's *The Seeker's Guide to Grimoire Magic* shatters the fears and prohibitions surrounding esoteric spirituality and ancient magical texts.

The book's approach is natural, joyful, inclusive, rooted in the understanding that, long ago, common people saw all writing as magical. "Grimoire," a French term for "a grammar book," was then applied to books of spells, rituals, and healing remedies, shrouding them in mystery and rendering them accessible to the wealthy and powerful alone. Tracing the rich history of magic and magical texts from antiquity onward, the text reveals links to alchemy, astrology, tarot, and oracle cards—media that, then and now, add depth and expanded perspectives to any magician's craft.

The book encourages exploration, making the practice one's own, and adapting materials and processes to what's readily available. Creativity-unleashing exercises are included, like making collages and talismans and building a personal magician's altar that morphs and grows with its creator. The book also warns that magic involves "tinkering with the powers that shape and form reality" and that mistakes can cause harm. Building layers of protection is advised, with tools including meditation, divination, intuition, and relationships with spirit guides and other positive nonphysical entities.

The book demystifies complex manuscripts, gives clear definitions of terms, and describes arcane practices in plain language. Calling magic "a conversation between your deepest inner self and the universe" and "a means of accomplishing your intent through unseen or otherworldly forces," it declares that magic, when done correctly, is capable of transforming both the magician and the wider world.

*The Seeker's Guide to Grimoire Magic* is a comprehensive, accessible, and engaging guidebook to developing a personal spiritual practice rooted in ancient and modern magical arts.



## Hózhq

A Navajo Nation Medicine Woman's Exploration of the Four Bodies of Existence for Balance and Self-Reclamation

Granddaughter Crow, North Atlantic Books (MAY 5) Softcover \$20.95 (192pp), 979-888984199-9, SELF-HELP

Granddaughter Crow's self-help guidebook *Hózhq* juxtaposes traditional Navajo teachings on what it means to be fully human with the views of contemporary Western psychology and society.

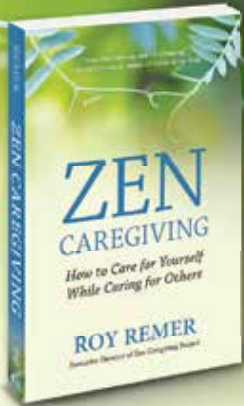
The book introduces the Navajo concept of the "four bodies of existence:" the physical (gut), emotional (heart), mental (mind/brain), and spiritual (soul), each of which possesses its own wisdom. Together, these constitute an individual's own "internal council." Drawing on these bodies, the book works to aid in the development of *hózhq*, or a state of being reflecting peace, balance, harmony, and the ability to "move through the world in a beautiful way."

There's a personal element to the text, too. Indeed, biracial Crow reflects what it was like to grow up in a world where "accepted" meant "white." Her father was one of many Indigenous children torn from their homes and subjected to abusive treatment in schools designed to eradicate Navajo culture from their minds and souls. As such, Crow spent a good part of her life living "between worlds," forced to deny her heritage and calling. Her book is a declaration of her self-reclamation and her commitment to bring knowledge of *hózhq* to the aching world.

Raw and moving, the book acknowledges life's difficulties and shares traditional stories of Navajo courage and resilience against incredible odds, including triumphs over soul-wearying subconscious beliefs and negative inner narratives. It recommends methods for transforming such circumstances, including the study of perennial archetypes and basic astrology. Potent exercises and prompts for journaling and reflection aid in identifying, fortifying, and living as one's authentic self.

*Hózhq* is a grounded self-help guidebook to personal authenticity and empowerment. ♥

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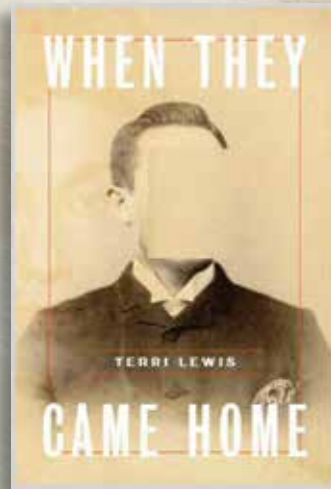
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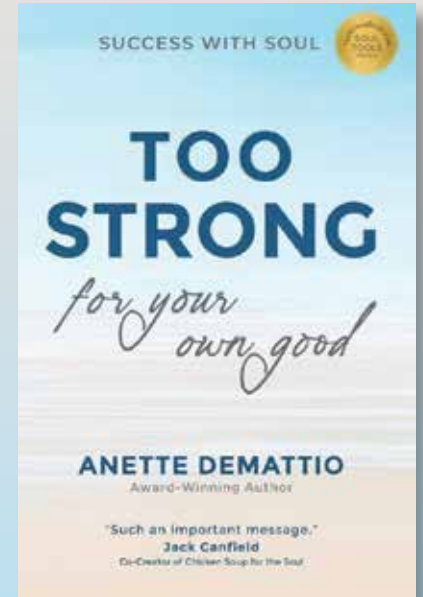
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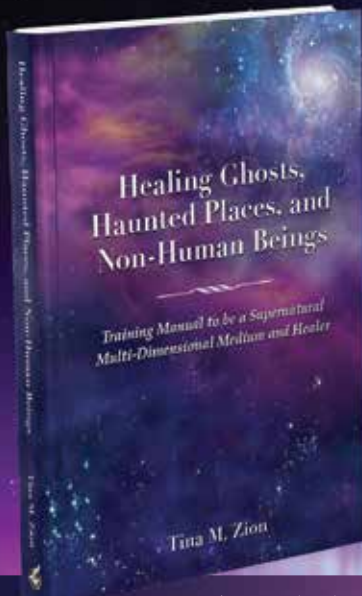
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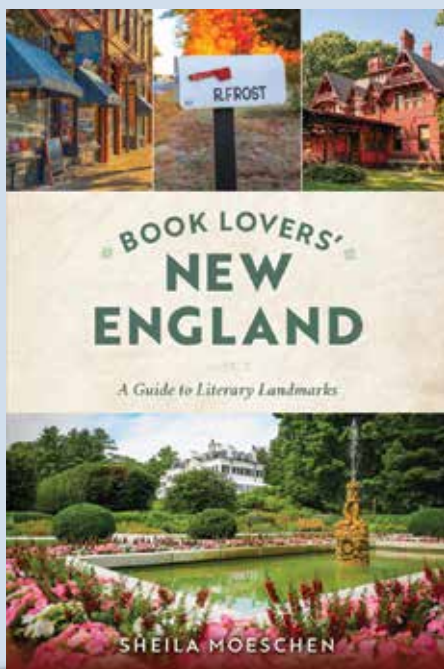
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# GOING PLACES

KAREN RIGBY



## Book Lovers' New England A Guide to Literary Landmarks

Sheila Moeschen, Globe Pequot (MAY 1) Softcover \$26.95 (256pp)  
978-1-4930-8943-7, TRAVEL GUIDE

Sheila Moeschen's celebratory travel guide *Book Lovers' New England* tours through the homes, museums, and sites that inspired local poets and writers.

New England has fostered numerous talents, including Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, J. D. Salinger, Rachel Carson, and Louisa May Alcott. On their legacies, the book builds a fun itinerary for history and literature enthusiasts, organized around the region's six scenic states.

Captivating profiles of homegrown and transplanted writers are accompanied by tasteful photographs that reveal their essences, as with sculptures of Dr. Seuss's famed book characters and of Edith Wharton's resplendent interiors. Reading lists conclude each state's section with suggestions for further exploration. Free of practical tips, such as websites and map directions, the focus is kept on people's lives.

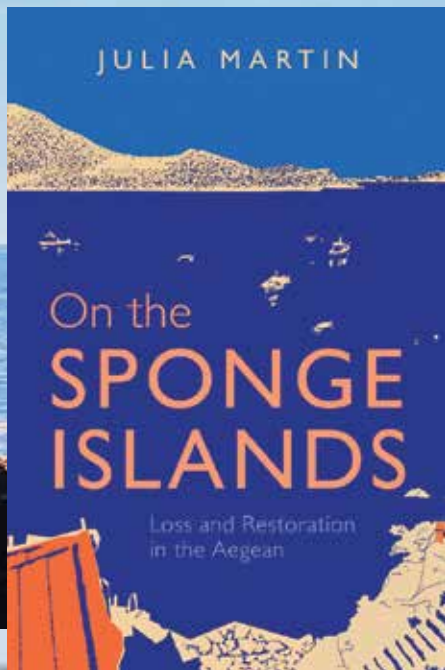
The conversational prose threads quotations with biographical highlights to introduce each writer with sometimes startling flair. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, for instance, is likened to a "rock star," and Edgar Allan Poe's scandals "would make a reality-TV show seem like a Disney cartoon." Curious tidbits about the writers' families and career milestones are included, too. Glimpses of people's desks and details about their notable works link several entries. Others share further commonalities: Several Transcendentalists lived near one another. And occasional setbacks, including of critiqued novels that later became classics, such as *Moby Dick*, undergird how writers sometimes trod unknowable paths.

Noteworthy passages tie specific authors to locales that remain iconic: Henry David Thoreau's walks around Walden Pond can be retraced, and H. P. Lovecraft's work drew upon various Providence buildings. Elsewhere, light remarks about varying styles elucidate bright photographs of cozy family homes and elaborate estates, thus doubling the book's value as an architectural tour.

*Book Lovers' New England* is an inviting travel guide and a refreshing, encyclopedic introduction to regional writers.

*Image above and on page 22 from Book Lovers' New England: A Guide to Literary Landmarks, by Sheila Moeschen. Used with permission from Globe Pequot.*

Leaving home for ancient history, mountainscapes, exotic flora, and New World road trips—if only in our minds.



### On the Sponge Islands Loss and Restoration in the Aegean

Julia Martin, Terra Firma (MAY 5) Softcover \$22.95 (320pp)  
978-1-59534-332-1, NATURE

South African scholar Julia Martin’s mesmerizing and evocative memoir covers sponge diving from an anthropological perspective.

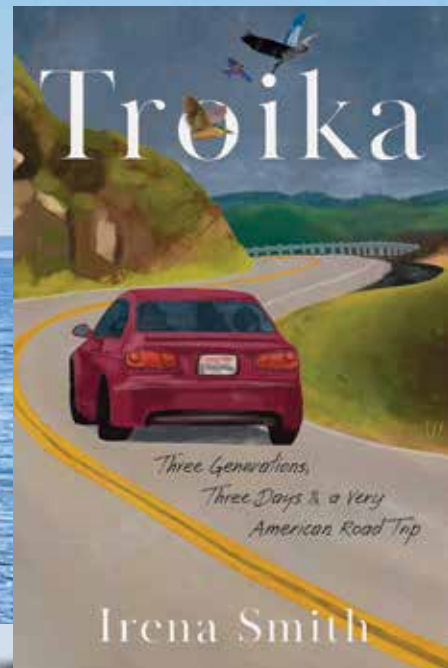
While on sabbatical, Martin traveled to the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea to study Porifera, whose porosity intrigued her as a “trace” or “metaphor, perhaps.” This book details her investigation of the sponge industry, which once employed naked divers and flourished after a cumbersome diving suit was introduced in the 1860s. Its sense of wonderment darkens with its coverage of the perils involved in using the helmeted suit, which was known by locals as “Satan’s Machine.” Later harvesting methods proved unsustainable.

Oral histories, including from former divers, are interspersed with facts, as of medical uses for sponges, their appearances in literature, and the clamor for bath sponges in Victorian England. Context is provided for why the humble marine invertebrates were so prized as “golden fleeces of the deep,” becoming a fascinating focal point for people across cultures. The sponge trade’s wealth is represented via stately buildings, too.

Martin’s island-hopping was also haunted by visual reminders of World War II and present-day migrant boats underscoring refugee hardships. Her book discusses Greek people’s willingness to help as well. In contrast, the poetry of picturesque wild herbs and rock roses is covered, as are the warm traditional practices of villages altered by tourism.

Avid curiosity permeates the prose; judgment is reserved when the ecological problems of sponge diving become clearer. References to past research, including to Russell Bernard’s work, fill in the background. A final section exploring green energy initiatives on the islands is hopeful.

A work of singular focus, the scholarly memoir *On the Sponge Islands* includes illuminating bits of natural history alongside its accounts of a tour through the Greek sponge trade.



### Troika Three Generations, Three Days, and a Very American Road Trip

Irena Smith, She Writes Press (APR 7) Softcover \$17.99 (256pp)  
979-889636108-4, AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Irena Smith’s intricate memoir-in-vignettes traces her Soviet Jewish family’s history during a memorable California road trip.

During an atypically wet California January, Smith, her seventy-seven-year-old mother, and her young adult daughter set out to visit two valley wine towns, Solvang and Paso Robles. With this three-day road trip as its throughline, the memoir also covers Smith’s grandparents’ wartime experiences, Smith’s immigration from the Soviet Union in the 1970s, and her life in Palo Alto. References to Henry James’s novels about American expatriates and to the *Odyssey* hint at the timeless appeal of journeying and storytelling in a “web of causality.”

Indeed, the self-aware, circling vignettes consider how generational stories fold into one another. As fragments from the past pair with stories from the road, momentum gathers. The rainy weather inspires caution and determination; the women’s rapport is set to an Edith Piaf playlist. A few ancestors’ anecdotes, handed down and repeated until they became lore, are shared: a grandmother’s lost clothesline comes to represent what people hold onto and what is torn away.

An ostrich farm is among the delightful stops along the way, the sketches of which range from a paragraph to two pages or more long. An eye for everyday images localizes them, as of stolen apples while visiting relatives at a dacha and multiple layers of clothing worn on a flight from Moscow to Vienna. With a keen balance between preserving privacy and disclosing just enough quirkiness to convey their essence, Smith’s family members are often revealed in terms of their favorite idioms or their warm, admonishing advice. All adds up to a kaleidoscopic account of a fun trip that was designed to strengthen her mother-daughter connections.

*Troika* is an eloquent, heartfelt travel memoir about the distances people cross to support one another.



## Lifelines

### Searching for Home in the Mountains of Greece

Julian Hoffman, David R. Godine, Publisher (APR 14) Hardcover \$30 (328pp), 978-1-56792-841-9, AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Bird-watching, meditations on wildlife, and a move to Northern Greece animate Julian Hoffman's poetic memoir *Lifelines*, about the varied meanings of shelter and survival on a changing planet.

Weary of commuting to hectic London, Hoffman and his partner moved to a village in the Prespa Lakes watershed to embrace a wilder rhythm. While there, Hoffman learned of COVID-19 lockdowns—a source of refuge for some; an impossibility for others. He weighed thoughts of how people must work together in tune with the “more-than-human world” to endure the future.

In this elegant series of interlinked essays, Hoffman's nature observations pivot around the belief that home, from the familial to the ecological, “should really be thought of as a verb—something that requires action for it to become real.” Told in reverent prose with lavish descriptions of plant knowledge and biodiversity, the memoir posits that people's lifelines depend on many histories, cultures, and factors. Likewise, fragile ecosystems are interconnected too. Indeed, through convincing and urgent examples, including a wildfire and the need to consider borders that extend beyond geopolitical ones, an appealing call for unity is developed.

Tender reflections on wrens, who wintered in an abandoned swallow's nest, prompt thoughts about adaptability and become a recurrent motif. In one ranging essay, wonderment over junipers and outer space is juxtaposed with the Greek Civil War and the problems with silencing people's stories. Elsewhere, uncommon permutations of the word “shelter” emerge: Language is compared to a house whose extinction is consequential, much like the loss of song is for birds. Throughout, Hoffman's adopted village is the still point around which fascinating meanderings converge, building toward hopeful resilience.

*Lifelines* is an insightful, conscientious memoir about exploring a new-found home and expressing appreciation for the wilderness.



## Beautiful Blooms

### A Photographic Celebration

Georgianna Lane, Gibbs Smith (MAY 5) Hardcover \$40 (304pp) 978-1-4236-6966-1, GARDENING

Poetic and whimsical, Georgianna Lane's soothing photography collection inspires contemplation through her favorite floral varieties.

Favoring “pastel prettiness,” fragrance, and roses most of all, Lane draws from her extensive archive as a professional photographer to tour through images that reflect specific emotional states. Encouraging viewers to move “as a dreamer” does, the book focuses on aesthetic botanical wonders as Lane reflects on her travels around the world. She recalls, for instance, meeting David Austin, a renowned English rose breeder. In her coverage of Pacific Northwest gardens, Château de Sourches, and a friend's private garden in Chile, there are hints that flowers unite people.

Scientific information, as about the high vibrational frequency of roses, is included to suggest that flowers bolster people's moods. Musings on topics including grace and serenity are featured, and references to the lighting in Dutch masters' paintings show that roses captivate people across centuries and disciplines. Still, the prose is delicate and romantic, with words like “gossamer” and notes of a “coquettishly” tilting iris; herein, roses are “miracles of form and hue” and a tulip is a “goblet of light.” Flowers' names are relished, too, including that of the “Top Brass” peony.

Photographs of tumbling profusions in arranged bouquets, pink and purple landscapes, flower carpets, and single blossoms appear alongside striking abstract close-ups that highlight colors and forms. A dahlia's petals progress from gradations of deep wine to red to fuchsia; a field tulip's curve is a near bass clef. An image of a poppy eschews showy drama, angled from behind, drawing the eye toward the bending stem. Tips on the equipment, composition, and lighting for photographing flowers are present to encourage beginners too.

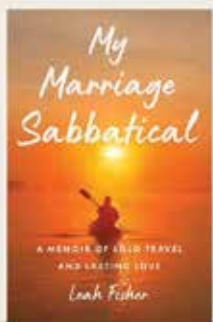
Celebrating gardens across the globe, *Beautiful Blooms* is a travel photographer's warm floral oeuvre. ♥



She Writes Press



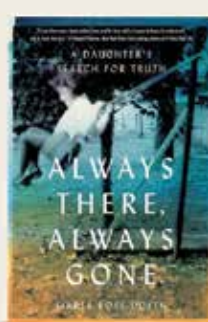
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A Memoir of Solo Travel and Lasting Love  
Travel  
Leah Fisher



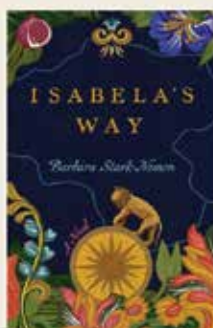
**A DANGEROUS FRIENDSHIP**  
A Novel  
General  
Robin Merle



**ALWAYS THERE, ALWAYS GONE**  
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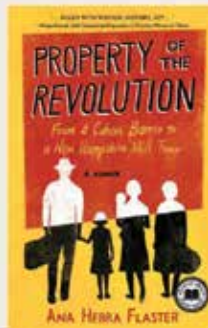
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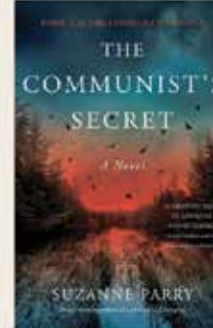
**ISABELA'S WAY**  
A Novel  
Historical  
Barbara Stark-Nemon



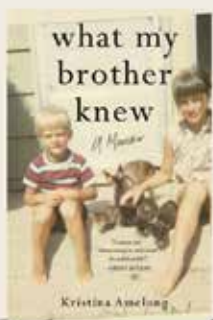
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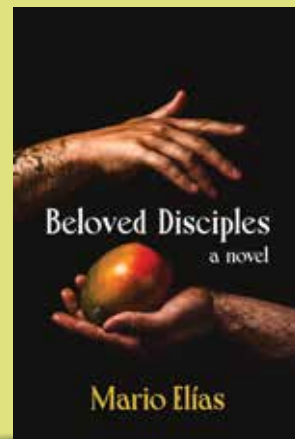


**KAT'S GREEK SUMMER**  
A Novel  
Young Adult Fiction  
Mima Tipper



**THE SONG OF SHELBY REY**  
A Novel  
Young Adult Fiction  
Rayne Lacko

# LGBTQ+



## ★ Beloved Disciples

Mario Elías, Amble Press (MAY 12)  
Softcover \$20.95 (320pp)  
978-1-61294-337-4, GENERAL

In Mario Elías's surreal, unflinching novel *Beloved Disciples*, a man grieves the death of his first love.

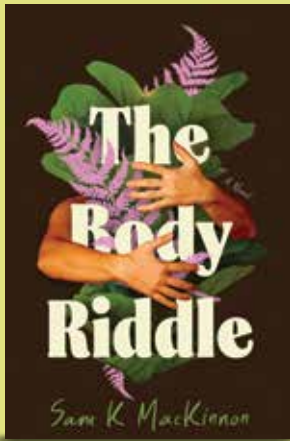
Simón experiences heartbreak after losing Albi, the love of his life. He sees visions in which Albi-clone corpses pile up around him and pictures himself as the fly dying on his windowsill. Waves both metaphorical and literal overtake him in his mind. As he tries to pull himself out of his grief and interact with his concerned loved ones, he cycles back and forth in time, delving into his childhood and his relationship with Albi, from their first joyful meeting to their more complex and painful later relationship.

Through Simón's fragmented perspective, grief is depicted in full color, in hues painful, macabre, and beautiful. The messiness of human relationships is also conveyed with nuance. Simón makes mistakes, hates himself for them, but repeats them anyway, with varying degrees of recognition. The aching prose thrums with a sense of his suffocating loss, and he asks existential questions of himself, as about regaining a sense of identity after having shaped himself around a relationship that is gone.

The men's relationship is seen from every angle, from their impassioned physical and emotional devotion to the moments of hurt stemming from rampant homophobia in their community and Albi's conflicted desires to be a priest. Simón's loved ones are also developed in terms of their many facets, from his best friend Lenita's fierce, protective exterior, which belies secret sensitivity, to his mother's ingrained prejudice and terrible dissonance when it comes to imagining what's best for her only son.

*Beloved Disciples* is an affecting novel about intense grief in which a man pays homage to his lost and greatest love.

NATALIE WOLLENZIEN



## The Body Riddle

Sam K MacKinnon, House of Anansi Press  
(MAY 19) Softcover \$21.99 (348pp)  
978-1-4870-1391-2, GENERAL

In Sam K MacKinnon's tender novel *The Body Riddle*, a transmasculine illustrator struggles with discrimination and self-doubt as they grow into a better version of themselves.

Lex is stuck. Their freelance work has dried up, their relationship has turned sexless, and, most troubling of all, their upcoming chest surgery fills them with uncertainty. Three years spent on waiting lists for gender-affirming care curdled their initial excitement into doubt. Now, they wonder if they are making a mistake. Lex's identity as an autistic person further complicates their ability to move through the world. Combinations of ableism and transphobia from others narrow their options for traditional work, pushing them toward social isolation.

The root of Lex's struggles is what their friend terms the body riddle: "In what form should my body exist so I can feel at peace in this world? So I can be my fullest self?" It is through relationships with other trans people that Lex starts to unravel the riddle, but not without conflict. Even as a support group and a new job start to bolster Lex's confidence, an unexpected attraction to their nonbinary coworker threatens to implode the precarious balance of nonmonogamy with their long-term partner.

Lex's narration is conversational, meandering between the present moment and the memories that inform it. They eschew the confines of respectability often placed on marginalized people. Lex makes mistakes that hurt them and other people, and they grow from it. It is through accepting agency over their life that they start owning up to their selfishness, and this makes them all the more human.

The powerful novel *The Body Riddle* puts the trans community at its center, rendering a portrait of self-actualization made possible only through relationships with others.

LUKE SUTHERLAND



## For the Love of the Quest

Alexandra Ammon Parthun, Alcove Press  
(AUG 11) Hardcover \$29.99 (320pp)  
979-889242549-0, ROMANCE

Alexandra Ammon Parthun's exciting romance novel *For the Love of the Quest* pays homage to the lore and fables of Camelot.

Lady Edith Darling is idealistic, kind, and shy. She embarks on a quest to find Excalibur and the lost treasures of King Arthur's Camelot in the lost world of Avalon. Mourning the loss of her grandmother, whom she longed to go on her quest with, Edith enlists the help of the leader of the most notorious crime syndicate in London—Thomasin, who is irreverent, sardonic, and hardened. Their quest requires that they combine their smarts, strength, and courage. Along the way, the two start to fall for each other.

The quest itself is filled with danger, from booby-trapped caves to unyielding puzzles. A bevy of references to the ancient tales of Arthur, Merlin, and Camelot play in. Thomasin and Edith decode clues, cultivate necessary new skills, and learn important lessons along the way.

A fun and whimsical romance novel that depends on the palpable chemistry between Edith and Thomasin, the book centers scenes of their earnest bonding. They share both senses of compassion and a bit of wildness, yearning for more than what life gave them. With each tended wound, each bit of comfort, and each laugh shared, they begin to chip away at each other's facades—for Thomasin, her ruthless killer persona, and for Edith, her prim and proper ladyship. The way they begin to share more moments of vulnerability and honesty with each other makes for an endearing progression.

*For the Love of the Quest* is an engrossing romance novel marked by adventure and love found in the most unexpected places.

NATALIE WOLLENZIEN



## You X Me

A Series of Modern Entanglements

Ayla Vejdani, Generous Press (MAY 26)  
Softcover \$18.95 (224pp)  
979-899875967-3, ROMANCE

An emotional collection of contemporary queer romance stories, Ayla Vejdani's book *You X Me* explores sexuality, self-discovery, and imperialism.

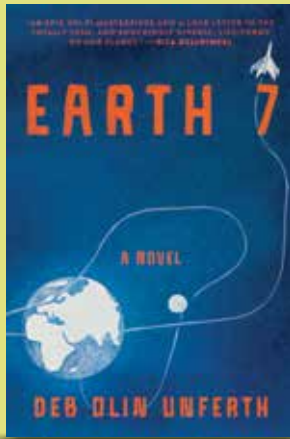
Set in the United States and Canada, these short stories follow various courtships, including relationship types beyond monogamy. Many of the narrators are divorced, sometimes from heterosexual relationships, before they take a second chance on love and enter the queer dating scene. Each tale is a trial in self-reflection, with romantic pairs situated in a web of friends, lovers, and family members. Zoya collides with Mako, who's part of a Los Angeles power throuple, and discovers her preference in relationship types. Takaya and Goli's worlds intersect when they get stuck together in a broken elevator. Hava and Birdie navigate a BDSM relationship after meeting on a blind date. A sense of discovery is established among the book's enmeshed queer communities.

The narrators' voices are rich and distinct, reflecting their ages, personalities, identities, and backgrounds with clarity. When each dynamic member of a pair comes together, their shared identities create the mosaic of their relationship—or they clash. Their narrations are candid; they express their vast internal lives while courting each other. The inclusion of supplementary texts, akin to artifacts pasted in a journal, deepens the intimacy of their tales.

Themes of land, place, and second chances arise, reflecting a strong anticolonial perspective. Individuals are displaced by imperialism and reckon with life in countries with their own colonial systems. As they live their identities with each other, the characters create a new sense of home together, resulting in hope.

A spiritual and expansive short story collection, *You X Me* is about culture, connection, and love between queer people of color.

VIOLET GLENN



## ★ Earth 7

Deb Olin Unferth, Graywolf Press  
(JUN 9) Hardcover \$27 (248pp)  
978-1-64445-394-0, SCIENCE FICTION

Near the end of Earth's life span, two women make meaning in each other's uncommon company in Deb Olin Unferth's dazzling dystopian novel *Earth 7*.

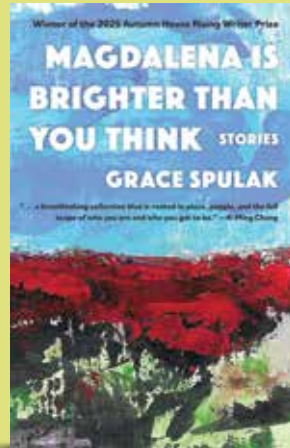
From an isolated pod on the seabed, a lonely, anxious girl, Dylan, sends messages to Martians. She hopes to lure them to her with the promise of her scientist mother's DNA stores for extinct animals. But Martians are more adept at leaving the trappings of Earth behind than Dylan is. No real rescue comes.

Relocated to her mother's former desert lab in young adulthood, Dylan is still stalked by irrepressible yearning. Resisting research tasks, she becomes a custodian to the sand. Her higher-ups, sensing her deep need, send her to a pleasure resort for vacation. Though Dylan is impervious to the forced raucousness of the nightlife, she does find an answer in Melanie, whose body was made perhaps deathless for the entertainment of bygone reality television crowds. Melanie is doubtful, though, so Dylan runs. In time, Melanie chases.

Set in "the end time, when "every part of the planet is done with us: the air, the ground, the water," this is not, the wry omniscient narrator warns, your typical love story. No: this is "Bubble Boy meets Plastic Girl," an improbable pairing eking out a version of forever when not even tomorrow is guaranteed. There are other "not"s in this enthralling dystopian novel, too: there will not be aliens (though Dylan's mother is certain that she met one), there will not be last minute saves, and neither science nor imaginative reconfigurations can stop what is coming.

Still, amid the death cults and the human abscondments in the defiant dystopian novel *Earth 7*, hope is found: in tardigrades in the sand; in a "soul globule's" persistence; in messages sent across time, lighting the way to the inevitable.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER



## Magdalena Is Brighter than You Think

Grace Spulak, Autumn House Press  
(APR 21) Softcover \$18.95 (216pp)  
978-1-63768-116-9, SHORT STORIES

Scrappy women are taunted by the abuses and violence of their pasts in Grace Spulak's blistering short story collection *Magdalena Is Brighter than You Think*.

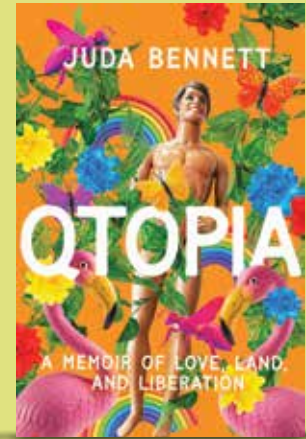
In the title story, a teenage girl is haunted by her brother's ghost; she forms a law-breaking partnership with the teenage boy her grandmother fosters for the money. In "Rid of It," Marisa, while working as a retirement home cleaner during COVID-19 lockdowns, confronts the crimes she committed to protect a loved one, as well as her own continued gravitation toward spilling blood in rage.

The prose is unflinching and raw. In "The Literal," a woman at a writer's retreat remembers how "she cut and cut at her own hair with scissors, trying to remove the sticky residue of the duct tape" her rapist bound her in. Elsewhere, in an intimate, graphic retrospective on childhood abuse, a woman hiking with her estranged sister recounts how they used to gather homemade weapons against their father, who would call their mother "stubborn, disrespectful, bitch" and beat her until she was "green, blue, a deep purple that was almost black."

Amid the women's painful, intimate instances of introspection, the stories refuse to oversimplify. There are no perfect victims here: The women can be abrasive and irascible themselves. Despite her own experience of childhood neglect, one social worker scorns and overlooks the clear suffering of the women and children she is supposed to protect, for instance, even stealing pills from one of her case sites. Elsewhere, a woman's cruel ex-husband is given full guardianship of their children; her frustrations and pitiful attempts to submit to various literary magazines are rendered with compassion.

*Magdalena Is Brighter than You Think* is a stark short story collection that centers complicated survivors.

ISABELLA ZHOU



## Qtopia

A Memoir of Love, Land, and Liberation

Juda Bennett, University of Wisconsin Press (MAY 26) Softcover \$18.95 (200pp)  
978-0-299-35704-7  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

The road to peace and love is paved with poise and self-discovery in Juda Bennett's coming-of-New-Age memoir *Qtopia*.

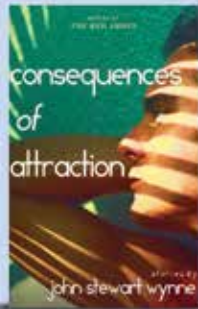
Bennett was expected and encouraged by his nuclear family parents to join the military upon his high school graduation in 1971. With the 1960s in the rearview, he instead took a one-way bus ticket to North Mountain Community, a homestead property full of hippies and free spirits. Their burgeoning communal living experiment embraced castaways in rural Virginia.

A gay man coming out in a new decade, Bennett continued to be guided by exploration and a desire for belonging. Seeking personal liberation and camaraderie with his extended family of off-grid characters, he found variations of home in scattered Shangri-Las. Indeed, he hitchhiked and walked his way through both dangerous and delightful circumstances until landing at the Lavender Hill commune in West Danby, New York. Insights into that commune, whose values helped to liberate LGBTQ+ people from the community's burgeoning identity struggles and seek acceptance in broader society, appear throughout, tracing its growth through the AIDS crisis and beyond.

The prose is witty and unflinching in covering Bennett's myriad travels. His road was not always sunny, nor were the pitfalls of fleeting romance healthy. Expressions of affection for, and critiques of, 1970s and 1980s commune life appear to situating effect. As social perspectives shifted, Bennett's own sense of identity became more nuanced and less naive. His tastes evolved, too, helping him discern the right place to stay after his years spent thumbing his way down American backroads.

*Qtopia* is a revealing coming-of-age memoir about a man's quest to find his chosen family.

RYAN PRADO



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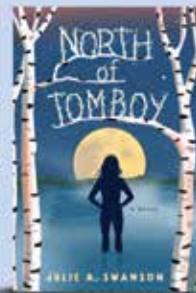
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## La Copine

New California Cooking from an Oasis in the Desert

Claire Wadsworth, Nikki Hill, Abrams Books (APR 28) Hardcover \$45 (304pp) 978-1-4197-7822-3, COOKING

*La Copine* is an enticing cookbook that captures the innovative menu and desert setting of Claire Wadsworth and Nikki Hill's California restaurant.

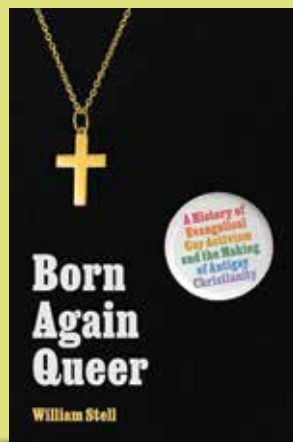
While running a catering business in Los Angeles, partners Wadsworth and Hill attended a sound bath near Joshua Tree National Park. A woman mentioned a local restaurant for sale; it "felt like destiny." In 2015, they opened *La Copine* as a queer-friendly desert mecca, with Hill as the chef and Wadsworth in the front of the house.

The book's Californian and New American cuisine is eclectic, reflecting the duo's desire to "find ways to elevate classic dishes that distinguish our place from the next." There are takes on famous sandwiches and salads, including the cheesesteak, banh mi, and a California Waldorf. The brunch dishes range from eggs to cold soups, and Southern influences are on display, too, via grits and beignets. Often, the dishes are photographed in the sun, with cacti as a backdrop; desert points of interest are enumerated, and a Spotify playlist is suggested too.

The mouthwatering recipes' instructions are thorough, and adaptability is their watchword. Many are vegan or gluten-free, or can be made so through simple substitutions. Multiple non-alcoholic spritzers are included, as are "winning" dessert formulas, as with panna cotta in four different flavors, in individual portions, that can be refrigerated until plating. Favorite kitchen tools and pantry ingredients are listed, as "the real secret of every restaurant is in the prep," making it a good idea to be 85 percent ready for a meal the day before.

Vivified by autobiographical pieces and essays on aspects of Wadsworth and Hill's approach, as well as a mixture of black-and-white and color illustrations, the lively cookbook *La Copine* tells the story of a destination restaurant with an inclusive attitude.

REBECCA FOSTER



## Born Again Queer

A History of Evangelical Gay Activism and the Making of Antigay Christianity

William Stell, Princeton University Press (MAY 12) Hardcover \$29.95 (336pp) 978-0-691-26894-1, RELIGION

William Stell's *Born Again Queer* is a focused history of gay and lesbian evangelism in the US.

After a half century of anti-gay stances in mainstream evangelicalism, the false perception that churches have always been that way solidified. This book corrects such misconceptions, telling the stories of those who worked to include gay and lesbian members in evangelical churches. In particular, the book focuses on the work of four individuals: Minister Troy Perry, the founder of the gay-friendly Metropolitan Community Church in 1968; Ralph Blair, the founder of Evangelicals Concerned; and scholars Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott, the coauthors of *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, published in 1978.

Various American Protestant attitudes are examined with rigor herein, including evangelical publications. For instance, *Christianity Today* magazine is indicted for introducing discussions of, and eventually condemning, homosexuality in the 1960s and 1970s. Ralph Blair's radio debate against conservative talking points is gestured to, and private bits of correspondence are also included to reveal the discord behind the scenes, with leaders and thinkers disagreeing with one another on the topic.

Pertinent subjects are returned to throughout the text, setting up a clear volley between the disparate arguments. The prose is fluid, and an important recurring paradox is identified: church leaders against gay people claimed "clear" readings of the Bible, but these arguments often depended upon single, ambiguous words, cherry-picked from specific stories that were made into mottos.

Exposing the tactics used to create an anti-gay evangelical majority, *Born Again Queer* is an important religious history text that lauds four evangelical activists who worked to make churches more accepting.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS



## ★ The Reaper and the Waiting

January Sun, WEBTOON Unscrolled (MAY 5) Softcover \$19.99 (192pp) 978-1-83411-008-0 COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

About the abiding love of two young men across lifetimes, January Sun's fantastical graphic novel *The Reaper and the Waiting* is steeped in Chinese culture, mythology, and history.

When Reaper first meets Waiting, he is cold and callous. But he warms to Waiting, whose patient, unwavering devotion centers their love. Indeed, their bond proves powerful enough to outlast death itself. But in subsequent lifetimes, Waiting, who remembers their past life together as imperial princes, is not allowed to reveal his true identity to Reaper, nor hint of their past together. If he does so, he could be erased from existence.

The ethereal illustrations are attentive to light, color, and form, blending crisp architectural edges with experimental, playful techniques wherein reality blends into fantasy in much the same way life crosses paths with death. The sweeping landscapes have emotional and tonal depth, and *Reaper and the Waiting* are drawn with wistfulness that complements the book's thematic elements.

The story balances tension and tenderness well, with loving moments between the characters interspersed with moments of action and heroic acts. Waiting almost sacrifices himself to save the Reaper in a pivotal moment. Flashback scenes are used to provide vital context and foreshadow future events.

Although Waiting is burdened by his secret and the memories of their previous deaths, his bond with the Reaper deepens as they travel together, collecting souls destined for reincarnation. And the book's conclusion is spectacular, weaving the threads of the story together in a way that is tender and cathartic—befitting a romance spanning centuries.

In this spellbinding graphic novel, two souls are bound across time by their enduring mutual love for one another.

CAITLIN CACCIATORE ♥

“

A stunning achievement.  
This genre-stretching biography moves fluidly between the mundane and the intellectual, the traumatic and the surreal.”

— Carol Sklenicka, author of *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life*

## AMERICAN TRICKSTER THE HIDDEN LIVES OF CARLOS CASTANEDA BY RU MARSHALL



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[RMARSHALLSTUDIO.COM](http://RMARSHALLSTUDIO.COM)

From the worlds of  
**graphic mundi**

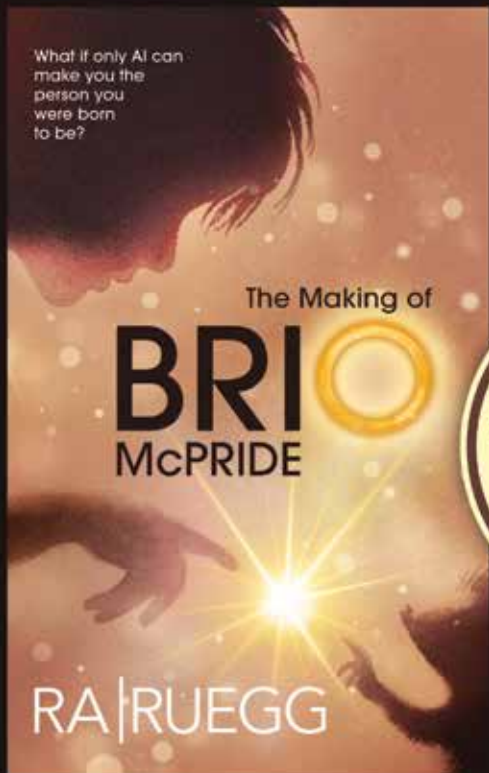


“Deeply personal and instantly engrossing—a story of family, and not just one’s connection to it, but the need to define it on your own terms.”

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 [graphicmundi.org](http://graphicmundi.org)

## The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time meets Life of Pi



The story  
of a neurodivergent  
fifteen-year-old boy  
in search of the  
father he never  
knew



[briomcpride.com](http://briomcpride.com)

- ★ Explores gender roles, neurodivergence, parenting and AI
- ★ Inspiration for two movies (see website)
- ★ 30% of royalties to mental health charities
- ★ Paperback finish includes soft-touch matte laminate, spot uv and embossing
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FOREWORD

# INDIES

2025 BOOK AWARD FINALISTS

## ADULT FICTION



FANTASY

## A Tale for the Shadows

A Novel of Death and Love

Joyce Sherry

290 pages, \$16.99, 9798998637803

A ghost and a vampire find love beyond death in a story of loss, healing, and second chances.

TAYLOR STREET PRESS

joycesherryauthor.com



FANTASY

## Cat People and Dream Memories of the Fifty Foot Woman

Peter Grandbois

322 pages, \$25.00, 9781963908800

This monster double feature takes its inspiration from two iconic films from the 1940s and 1950s.

SPUYTEN DUYVIL PRESS

spuytenduyvil.net



FANTASY

## Leave No Trace

Rande Dawn

290 pages, \$24.99, 9781647101619

"A killer story. Characters leap off the page with delicious moral complexities."—LJ Cohen, *Derelict*

CAEZIK SF &amp; FANTASY

randeedawn.com/books/leave-no-trace



FANTASY

## The Nga'phandileh Whisperer

A Sauúiverse Novella

Eugen Bacon

168 pages, \$13.99, 9798991441926

"... mythic and ancient, feverish and insistent, lyrical and atmospheric, eerie yet enchanting"—Ai Jiang  
Also a finalist in Multicultural.

STARS AND SABERS

starsandsabers.com/books/the-ngaphandileh-whisperer



GENERAL

## Lotusland

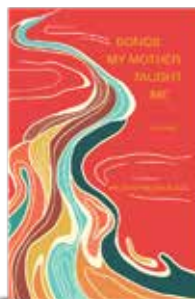
David Joiner

340 pages, \$14.99, 9780997715590

"A dynamic, deeply nuanced portrait of a nation in the midst of profound change."—Dana Sachs

PAINTED VEIL PRESS

david-joiner.com/paintedveilpress



GENERAL

## Songs My Mother Taught Me

A Novel

Helen Winslow Black

333 pages, \$18.99, 9798990418004

A young mother builds a new life, aided by the wisdom of the women in her family.

FOUR ELK PRESS

helenwinslowblack.com



GENERAL

## The Things They Didn't See

A Novel

Angela Shaeffer

358 pages, \$15.99, 9798992825206

A moving story of a young family struggling to rediscover connection after heartbreaking loss.

WANDER LANE PRESS

angelashaeffer.com



GENERAL

## Where You Come From Is Gone

A Novel

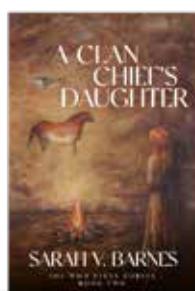
Christopher Johnston

221 pages, \$18.99, 9781962834353

A heartbreaking story about family, love of place, and the beauty and consequences of hard work.

CALUMET EDITIONS

christopherjohnstonbooks.com



HISTORICAL

## A Clan Chief's Daughter

She Who Rides Horses (Book Two)

Sarah V. Barnes

364 pages, \$24.95, 9798992769005

Naya, first person to ride a horse, must decide whether to sacrifice her heart's desire.

HEART SOUL HORSE PUBLICATIONS

sarahvbarnes.com



HISTORICAL

## The Rabbi's Knight

A Novel

Michael J. Cooper

393 pages, \$22.95, 979888248133

A Knight Templar. A devout rabbi. A beautiful Muslim woman. A journey to Jerusalem. A love story. Also a finalist in War & Military.

KOEHLER BOOKS

michaeljcooper.net



FOREWORD

# INDIES

2025 BOOK AWARD FINALISTS

ADULT FICTION



LGBTQ+

## Hysterical

A Novel

Amber Dean

298 pages, \$18.89, 9798994008911

A visceral journey into a woman's twisted psyche driven by love, obsession, and dark cravings.

AMAZON KDP

amberdeanauthor.com



LGBTQ+

## Racing Hearts

Sydney Lear

306 pages, \$13.99, 9781915009883

When a guarded heart meets life in the fast lane, love becomes the ultimate risk.

BUTTERWORTH BOOKS

mybook.to/RacingHearts



LITERARY

## The World That We Are

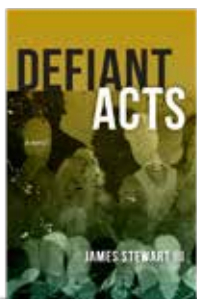
Andrew Furman

292 pages, \$20.95, 9781646036387

"A triumph of research and imagination."—Peter Orner, *The Gossip Columnist's Daughter*

REGAL HOUSE PUBLISHING

regalhousepublishing.com



MULTICULTURAL

## Defiant Acts

A Novel

James Stewart III

192 pages, \$20.00, 9781946724892

This debut novel follows an interracial blended family living in Chicago in the 1990s.

ACRE BOOKS

acre-books.com



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## 63 Hours in Hell

Susan L. Davis

350 pages, \$17.99, 9781963377231

Jesus sends flawed souls across time to find key pieces, fight evil, free captives, and find faith.

ABUNDANCE BOOKS

susanldavis.com



ROMANCE

## Marianne

A Sense and Sensibility Sequel

Alice McVeigh

288 pages, \$4.99, 9781738546169

"Marianne sparkles with heart and wit."—Foreword Clarion Reviews  
"Pitch perfect"—Kirkus Reviews

WARLEIGH HALL PRESS

alicemcveigh.com



SCIENCE FICTION

## Ice's End

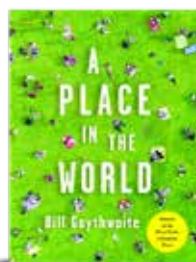
P. Finian Reilly

350 pages, \$18.99, 9781961905474

2123: Antarctica provides Earth's water, and much-needed hope lies in a secret from its icy past.

12 WILLOWS PRESS

12willowspress.com/ices-end



SHORT STORIES

## A Place in the World

Stories

Bill Gaythwaite

216 pages, \$24.00, 9780822948766

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UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH PRESS

upittpress.org



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## Lake Crescent and Other Spirits

Stories

Pamela Gullard

218 pages, \$18.95, 9780913123522

These eleven literary stories follow characters who try for love, often fail, but always try again.

GALILEO PRESS

freestatereview.com/product/lake-crescent-and-other-spirits



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Catherine Bush

226 pages, \$25.00, 9781773104317

Beautifully crafted stories that reveal people at their most vulnerable and their most dangerous.

GOOSE LANE EDITIONS

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FOREWORD

# INDIES

2025 BOOK AWARD FINALISTS

ADULT FICTION / NONFICTION



SHORT STORIES

## The Plan of Chicago

A City in Stories

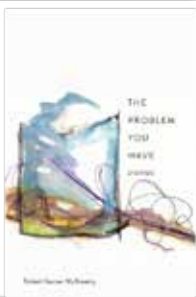
Barry Pearce

258 pages, \$25.95, 9781968148119

An absorbing debut of heartbreaking division, unexpected intersections, and dim but possible dreams.

**CORNERSTONE PRESS**

barrypearce.com



SHORT STORIES

## The Problem You Have

Stories

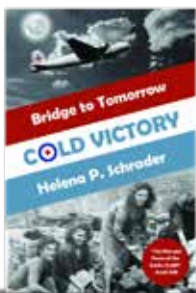
Robert Garner McBreaty

160 pages, \$16.95, 9780826367730

A short story collection by a Pushcart Prize and Sherwood Anderson Foundation Fiction Award winner.

**UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO PRESS**

unmpress.com/9780826367730/the-problem-you-have



WAR &amp; MILITARY

## Cold Victory

A Novel of the Berlin Airlift

Helena P. Schrader

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Standing up to tyrants isn't easy—but sometimes it is necessary. Meet Berlin's courageous women!

**CROSS SEAS PRESS**

helenapschrader.com



AUTOBIOGRAPHY &amp; MEMOIR

## Off Izaak Walton Road

The Grace that Comes Through Loss

Laura Julier

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In company with silence, snow, and birds, Julier begins to emerge from the dark corners of grief.

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BODY, MIND &amp; SPIRIT

## A Pilgrim's Guide to Walking Wisdom

11:11 Insights

Renee Baribeau

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**ENLIGHTENMENT PRODUCTIONS**

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## How Deep Is the Wound?

A Guide to Investigating, Understanding, and Resolving Your Emotional Pain

Antonieta Contreras

325 pages, \$23.44, 9798999326614

If you've ever wondered whether your struggles "count" as trauma, here is the clarity you need. Also a finalist in Self-Help.

**SENTIMENT PUBLISHING**

antonietacontreras.com/how-deep-is-the-wound-book



BODY, MIND &amp; SPIRIT

## The Oracle of Rewilding

Pathways to Renewing Our Kinship with All Things

Alexandra Eldridge and Sherry Salman

176 pages, \$24.95, 9781578638239

An exquisite bestiary oracle that combines vintage photographs with animal spirit paintings.

**WEISER BOOKS**

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BODY, MIND &amp; SPIRIT

## Written in Your Stars

Use Your Saturn Return, Pluto Square, and Other Planetary Cycles to Become Your Best Self

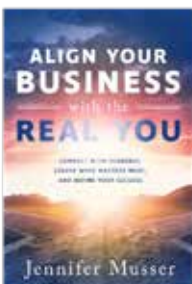
Narayana Montufar

208 pages, \$19.99, 9780760395493

The definitive guide to navigating your age-based planetary cycles and astrological patterns.

**FAIR WINDS PRESS**

naramon.com/books



BUSINESS &amp; ECONOMICS

## Align Your Business with the Real You

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Jennifer Musser

272 pages, \$31.99, 9798991544221

This award-winning strategic tool is a useful guide for a human-centered business approach. Also a finalist in Career.

**PENROCK PRESS**

jlmaconsulting.com/the-book



CAREER

## Imagine a Door

A Writer's Guide to Unlocking Your Story, Choosing a Publishing Path, and Honoring the Creative Journey

Laura Stanfill

518 pages, \$25.00, 9781942436652

Writers, if you want to get your manuscript published, read this book. Also a finalist in Reference.

**FOREST AVENUE PRESS**

forestavenuepress.com/bookshop/p/imagine-a-door



FOREWORD

# INDIES

2025 BOOK AWARD FINALISTS

ADULT NONFICTION



FAMILY &amp; RELATIONSHIPS

## Kids These Days

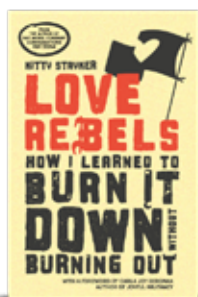
Understanding and Supporting Youth Mental Health

Will Dobud, PhD and Nevin Harper, PhD  
324 pages, \$24.99, 9781774060223

Practical strategies for building resilience, connection, and autonomy in the next generation.

NEW SOCIETY PUBLISHERS

newsociety.com/book/kids-these-days



FAMILY &amp; RELATIONSHIPS

## Love Rebels

How I Learned to Burn It Down Without Burning Out

Kitty Stryker

204 pages, \$19.95, 9781990869730

An exploration of how to balance activism and relationships without burning out.

THORNAPPLE PRESS

thornapplepress.ca



GRIEF/GRIEVING

## Look Mom, I Can Fly

Notes from the Wide Skies of Grieving My Only Child

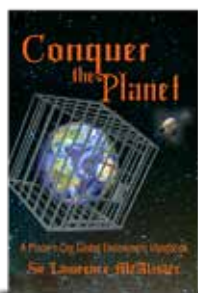
Luna Jaffe

359 pages, \$39.99, 9798992640304

A lyrical, relatable memoir of grief, creativity, and a mother's ongoing bond with her son.

FORTUNITY PRESS

lunajaffe.com



HUMOR

## Conquer the Planet

A Modern-Day Global Enslavement Handbook

Sir Lawrence McAlistair

431 pages, \$24.95, 9798218485047

Are you ready to go beyond the Epstein files? Learn the hidden secrets of the global elite.

INGSOC PUBLISHING

ingsocpublishing.com



MULTICULTURAL

## Daughter of the Leopard

True Stories From a Samburu Maasai Girlhood

Monique N. Leparleen and Ann Hendricks

288 pages, \$17.99, 9798992492903

An extraordinary girlhood, full of drama and humor, in a remote tribe on the cusp of rapid change.

SWALLOW AND QUILL LITERARY

daughteroftheleopard.com



PHOTOGRAPHY

## Hunter Gatherer

Salvaged Stories of American Culture

David Ricci and Cheryl Finley (contributor)  
152 pages, \$60.00, 9798987784594

Evocative images made at antique fairs across the US. "This work will blow your mind."—Lenscratch

MW EDITIONS

mweditions.com



PHOTOGRAPHY

## The Silent Song of the African Savannah

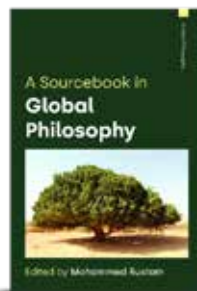
Ian Poh Jin Tze

200 pages, \$159.90, 9789819418190

Enter a majestic African odyssey—rare wildlife, opulent vistas, and timeless beauty in every frame.

MONK3YSEENDO STUDIOS

ianpohjintze.com



REFERENCE

## A Sourcebook in Global Philosophy

Mohammed Rustom

638 pages, \$50.00, 9781800505476

Anthology of 80 texts that are essential introductions to non-Western philosophical traditions.

EQUINOX PUBLISHING

equinoxpub.com



REGIONAL

## Fabulous Fountains of New York

Stephanie Azzarone

208 pages, \$44.95, 9781531511845

*Fabulous Fountains of New York* tells the stories of the city's most wondrous waterworks.

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS/

EMPIRE STATE EDITIONS

fordhampress.com



SCIENCE &amp; TECHNOLOGY

## Rushing Headlong

Health IT's Legacy and the Road to Responsible AI

S. Yin Ho

358 pages, \$19.99, 9798993537320

The legacy of health IT's unintended harms—and how responsible AI could finally close the gaps.

RIGANI PRESS

syinho.com

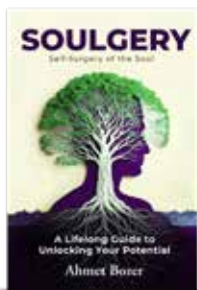


FOREWORD

# INDIES

2025 BOOK AWARD FINALISTS

ADULT NONFICTION,  
JUVENILE FICTION / NONFICTION,  
CHILDRENS PICTURE BOOKS,  
ANTHOLOGIES, POETRY



SELF-HELP

## Soulgergy

A Lifelong Guide to Unlocking Your Potential

Ahmet Bozer

166 pages, \$19.50, 9798998507205

Unlock your untapped potential with *Soulgergy*, a guide to deeper growth and a fuller life.

GROWTH COLONY

soulgergy.com/book-page



SELF-HELP

## Transforming the Shame Triangle

From Shame to Love Using Parts Work

Jessica Fern and David Cooley

336 pages, \$24.95, 9781990869709

A primer on using parts work to transform shame and self-criticism to authenticity and integrity.

THORNAPPLE PRESS

thornapplepress.ca



WOMEN'S STUDIES

## Dear White Woman, Dear Black Woman

A Tapestry of Letters for Hope & Healing

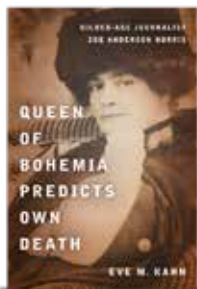
Bonita T. Hampton Smith

266 pages, \$19.95, 9798991898607

Heartfelt letters that show when women dare to speak across racial divides, healing is possible.

RIPPLES MEDIA

ripples.media



WOMEN'S STUDIES

## Queen of Bohemia Predicts Own Death

Gilded-Age Journalist Zoe Anderson Norris

Eve M. Kahn

304 pages, \$29.95, 9781531511678

Engaging bio of NYC reformer, writer & publisher Zoe Anderson Norris, who combated 1910s xenophobia.

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS/  
EMPIRE STATE EDITIONS

fordhampress.com



JUVENILE FICTION

## Bernard and the Blackguard

Eastside Series - Book Two

Maureen Young and Stephanie Stasiuk Monk (Illustrator)

162 pages, \$17.99, 9781038324955

The underground world of gophers and owls collide in this urban tale of mystery and friendships.

FRIESENPRESS

eastsideseries.ca



JUVENILE FICTION

## Orphanland

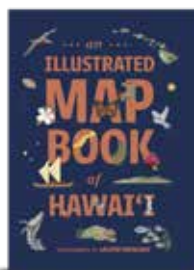
Lauren Fischer

304 pages, \$23.95, 9781965278765

Buried secrets from a small town's past will change the future for orphans of the opioid crisis.

MISSION POINT PRESS

missionpointpress.com/books/orphanland



JUVENILE NONFICTION

## An Illustrated Map Book of Hawai'i

Lauren Trangmar (Illustrator)

64 pages, \$35.00, 9781573066792

This map book showcases the flora, fauna, and geological features of the Hawaiian archipelago.

BESS PRESS

besspress.com



CHILDREN'S—PICTURE BOOKS

## After

A Survivor's Story

Hallee Adelman and Patrick Corrigan (Illustrator)

32 pages, \$18.99, 9780807530955

Moving forward after a traumatic event isn't easy, but finding community can help.

ALBERT WHITMAN &amp; COMPANY

albertwhitman.com/book/after



GENERAL—ANTHOLOGIES

## Coven of the East

Reimagining Asian Women's Magical Histories

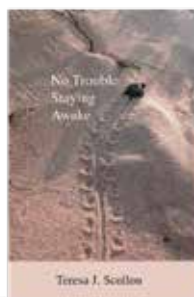
Angela Yuriko Smith and Pauline Chow (editors)

154 pages, \$22.22, 9781964733074

Twenty-two Asian diaspora writers reclaim divine feminine magic in this genre-bending anthology.

GHASTLY GOINGS-ON PRESS AND  
AUTHORITIES PRESS

ghastlygoingson.com/product/coven-of-the-east



GENERAL—POETRY

## No Trouble Staying Awake

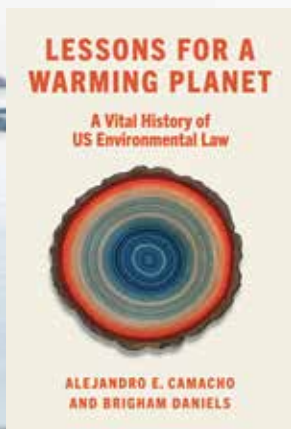
Teresa J. Scollon

108 pages, \$21.95, 9781960329899

"An outstanding collection."  
—Baron Wormser, author of  
*The History Hotel*

CORNERSTONE PRESS

uwp.edu/cornerstone



## Lessons for a Warming Planet A Vital History of US Environmental Law

Alejandro E. Camacho, Brigham Daniels  
NYU Press (APR 21) Hardcover \$35 (312pp)  
978-1-4798-0281-4, LAW

In their informative book *Lessons for a Warming Planet*, Alejandro Camacho and Brigham Daniels trace the history of environmental regulation in the United States from the colonial period through the early twenty-first century.

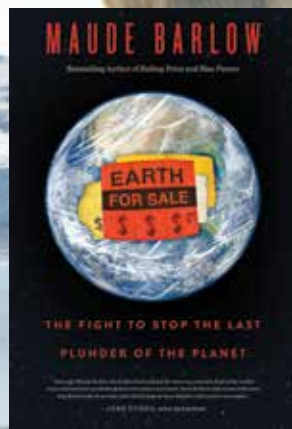
The book describes federal, state, and local regulations, looks at laws that damaged the environment, and considers laws passed to protect the planet. Throughout, it also shows how social movements and organizers have used the legal system and protests to shape laws across three centuries, breaking that history down into five distinct eras to indicate dramatic shifts in how the United States manages its land use and natural resources.

For example, when looking at the country's early days, the book discusses how Native Americans' burning practices changed the landscape, the impacts of federal westward expansion, and how common legal principles provided a basis for land disputes. When addressing the period since 1981, which the book names "the contested era," it explains various ways the Reagan administration undermined laws already on the books, showing how lawsuits by environmental groups managed to prevent some anti-environment changes.

By connecting historical dots, the book shows how environmental rules built upon one another with sometimes unintended results, and how often the country has needed new rules to address this. In this way, the book both suggests solutions via future legislation and points out pitfalls that such lawmaking should avoid.

Addressing environmental damages caused by climate change and artificial intelligence, among other challenges, *Lessons for a Warming Planet* is a thorough survey of environmental legislation throughout US history.

JEFF FLEISCHER



## Earth for Sale The Fight to Stop the Last Plunder of the Planet

Maude Barlow, ECW Press (MAY 5)  
Softcover \$21.95 (240pp)  
978-1-77041-866-0, SOCIAL SCIENCE

Maude Barlow's compelling book *Earth for Sale* is about the detrimental commodification of nature at the expense of biodiversity.

Herein, the "commons" is that which all humans use without a price: the air, the oceans, genetics, and the diversity of life. The book addresses multiple threats to these commons, including the displacement of Indigenous people, poverty, and green capitalism and greenwashing. Ways to combat green capitalism and fight for a more equitable future are also named.

Facts combine with storytelling in this engrossing text. In an example showing how Australia's water crisis was crafted in part by the Australian government's commodification of the Murray-Darling Basin, the book eases into the topic with a story about a woman watching her family's cows be taken away because her family farm could no longer afford water. Such anecdotes are persuasive, showing the harsh realities of the commercialization and destruction of nature.

Each chapter focuses on a different topic, though all are joined by the common thread of the environmental harms of capitalism. Subsections highlight the implications of colonization, carbon-trading, and industrial agriculture, offering a multitude of examples to further the book's claims. Comprehensive critical analyses appear throughout, helping to make complex material accessible.

In total, *Earth for Sale* is an immersive survey of the destructiveness of green capitalism. In closing with the assertion that inequities across the globe need to be addressed so that people can start working toward a more sustainable future, the book reiterates its previous points with fresh information, as with an exhortation to reject the "financialization" of nature that points to recent initiatives by Greenpeace.

JENNIFER MAVEETY



## My World Is Melting Living with Climate Change in Svalbard

Line Nagell Ylvisåker, Kelsey Camacho  
(Translator), University of Wisconsin Press  
(MAY 5) Softcover \$19.95 (188pp)  
978-0-299-35734-4  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

*My World Is Melting* is Line Nagell Ylvisåker's enlightening essay collection about climate change as observed on a small Norwegian island in the fastest-warming region on the planet.

Ylvisåker reports that temperatures near Svalbard have risen 3.8 degrees Celsius since 1898, melting glaciers, sea ice, and permafrost. The changing climate has had a dramatic impact on local communities too. In December 2015, a tragic avalanche crushed eleven homes and killed a man and a toddler in the city of Longyearbyen. In 2016, heavy rain caused multiple landslides and threatened a graveyard and other structures. In 2017, another avalanche destroyed two apartment buildings. The community responded by moving neighborhoods, erecting avalanche and mudslide barriers, and assessing buildings in the risk zones, including a church, school, and power plant.

Ylvisåker, who's lived in Longyearbyen for more than a decade, captures the appeal and challenges of living in this "harsh yet stunning" environment. With a population of just over 2,300, the island is known for its rugged beauty and iconic colorful, historic homes. Anecdotes about Ylvisåker's husband—a firefighter and rescue worker—her family, and her neighbors add texture. Also included are intriguing discussions about reindeer, polar bears, and foxes, as well as the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

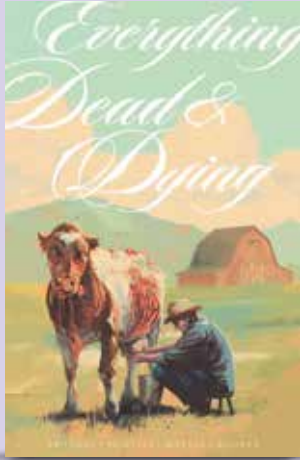
The book's explanations of climate science are clear and data driven, nodding to meteorologists and marine research vessels. Compelling depictions of the disruptions impacting human settlements, terrain, and wildlife underscore the urgency of addressing climate change while also acknowledging the complexity of finding solutions.

*My World Is Melting* is a fascinating essay collection about life on a remote Norwegian island and the startling impacts of climate change on Arctic communities and ecosystems.

KRISTEN RABE ♥

# COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

PETER DABBENE



## Everything Dead & Dying

Tate Brombal, Jacob Phillips (Illustrator), Image Comics (MAY 5) Softcover \$16.99 (160pp), 978-1-5343-3253-9 HORROR

A farmer attempts to save his loved ones during a zombie epidemic in Tate Brombal's haunting graphic novel *Everything Dead & Dying*.

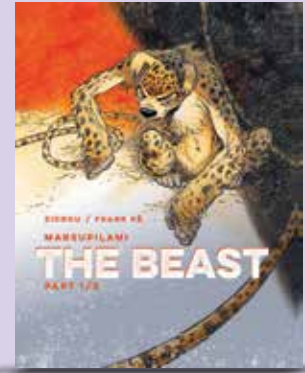
Jack is a farmer whose husband, Luke, and daughter, Daisy, are zombies. They and their neighbors contracted a strange sickness to which Jack seems to be immune. Jack feeds the zombies daily to keep them pacified. He also preserves the last remnants of their humanity by keeping to familiar routines, like asking his daughter, "What does a duck say?" When other human survivors show up, Jack fights to protect his farm and family.

Through frequent flashbacks, Jack's attachment to his family is established as both his driving motivation and his fatal flaw.

Indeed, the past and present blur together for him, resulting in narrative tension. For example, a memory of Luke saying "That's what it means to be alive" cuts to zombie Luke being shot in the present, while flashbacks of Jack and Luke teaching Daisy about the cycle of life stand in opposition to Luke and Daisy's neither-dead-nor-living reality.

The scenes are made indelible through the illustrations. In the latter example, successive panels are used to create a jarring contrast between a sweet, healthy Daisy and her later, zombified self. Indeed, the book's images are dynamic—variously gory and tender, as when it comes to Jack's goodbye to his dog.

Working toward a powerful, emotional conclusion, *Everything Dead & Dying* is a thrilling yet touching graphic novel in which a man struggles to accept the loss of his family.



## The Beast

Zidrou, Frank Pê (Illustrator), Magnetic Press (MAY 12) , Hardcover \$24.99 (156pp) 978-1-962413-59-6, HISTORICAL

A boy adopts a strange creature in Zidrou's stunning graphic novel *The Beast*.

Francois and his mother Jeanne live in Belgium, where they face ridicule and mistrust: Francois's father was a German *soldier* who returned home after World War II. Jeanne indulges her son's love for animals: their menagerie includes a three-legged dog, a wild boar, and a horse that drinks alcohol. When a mysterious creature earmarked for a zoo escapes, Francois finds it and takes it home. When he takes "Longtail" to school to show his classmates, chaos erupts: a child is bitten, leading the authorities to seize Longtail, along with Francois's other animals.

With his twenty-eight-foot tail, spotted fur, and appetite for toffee, Longtail is unforgettable. So, too, are his guardians—loving, lovable Francois and Jeanne. While there are moments of dark suspense and melancholy in the trio's tale, it is directed by an overriding sense of wonder and adventure. When Longtail is transported in a covered cage to and from a vet visit, for instance, Francois and Jeanne try to explain away the creature's loud cries of "Hooba!"

The illustrations are exquisite. Scenes featuring Longtail in action explode with kinetic energy, while heartwarming interactions among the cast also benefit from details and color. When Francois's classmates are told to draw Longtail, for example, one requests to use two sheets of paper "on account of the tail"; later, he admires his two-page, taped-together masterpiece.

*The Beast* is an endearing graphic novel about a troubled boy and the unique animal he adopts.

*Image left from The Beast, by Zidrou, Frank Pê (Illustrator). Used with permission from Magnetic Press.*

*Image right from The Roots of My Hair, by Lou Lubie. Used with permission from Helvetiq.*





## ★ The Roots of My Hair

Lou Lubie, Helvetiq (MAY 5) Hardcover  
\$24.95 (220pp), 978-3-03964127-7  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

A woman recounts the complicated history of her hair in Lou Lubie's fascinating graphic novel *The Roots of My Hair*.

On Reunion Island, near Madagascar, Rose lives among people from a number of ethnic backgrounds. Still, she never feels like she fits in because of her light skin and kinky Black hair. As Rose gets older, she endures painful, expensive treatments to emulate the dominant styles. After years of suffering, she reclaims her natural hair; in doing so, she achieves a sense of peace.

Rose's story is fused with research on hair. For instance, in a memorable scene, Rose's employer says that her hair "looks unprofessional"; it's a dev-

astating blow to her self-confidence. Alongside this, the book forwards arguments regarding the unfairness of the mental, physical, and financial costs demanded of women with coily hair.

Within the exemplary illustrations, Rose is seen at a variety of ages, with the crucial differences in her hair textures and styles made apparent. Clear, interesting infographics about hair and history appear too, including a step-by-step review of the process of hair growth and examples of powerful Black women who use hair relaxers to fit cultural ideals. Such historical context is both enlightening and disturbing: A striking visual array of popular styles during the twentieth century is used to illustrate that Black women have often faced prejudice for keeping their hair natural.

*The Roots of My Hair* is an engrossing graphic novel about the history and marginalization of Black women's hairstyles.



## The Last Watchtower

Karl Slominski, Black Panel Press (JUN 16)  
Hardcover \$29.99 (154pp), 978-1-990521-54-6  
SCIENCE FICTION

A lonely man at a remote moon outpost witnesses a catastrophe in Karl Slominski's introspective graphic novel *The Last Watchtower*.

Cal Ferris has manned his post on the moon for sixteen years, alone except for Blip, the AI robot that keeps him on task.

Cal's assignment is to watch, record, and log major violent events on Earth, including airline crashes, earthquakes, and wars. Cal lost his wife and child long ago and shuts himself off, choosing isolation as a coping mechanism. But then an empathetic superdimensional creature, Vaya, comes to the moon, attracted by the extreme sadness she's detected. Vaya helps Cal see what's been happening to him at the station; together, they witness the final fate of Earth.

Robots and aliens mix into this clear story about the human experience. Cal's attempts to escape the reality of his family's death, including through the letters he continues to write to them, wend into its moving meditation on love, loss, and solitude. The plot is brisk and compelling, with mysteries and twists introduced as the story progresses, keeping the outcome uncertain until the end.

The black-and-white illustrations are moody and masterful, using texture and contrast to create powerful images on each page. Careful, creatively composed panels and pages lend weight to quiet moments and excitement to action scenes.

*The Last Watchtower* is a thoughtful graphic novel in which a solitary man on the moon embraces his past.



## Gay Mormon Dad

Chad Anderson, Remy Burke (Illustrator)  
Graphic Mundi (MAY 5) Softcover  
\$21.99 (104pp), 978-1-63779-098-4  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Chad Anderson's inspiring graphic memoir *Gay Mormon Dad* is about coming out and breaking away from his childhood religion.

Raised in a large, devout Mormon family, Anderson grew up believing the tenets of the religion and its traditions. Suppressing his innermost feelings, he served as a missionary, went to college, married a woman, and had two sons. But at a point of crisis, Anderson came out at thirty-two years old. His brother-in-law accused him of lying to everyone, including Jesus. His father tried to help him overcome his "condition."

Nonetheless, he got a divorce and became a dedicated co-parent, free to live a happy life without toxic connections or undeserved guilt.

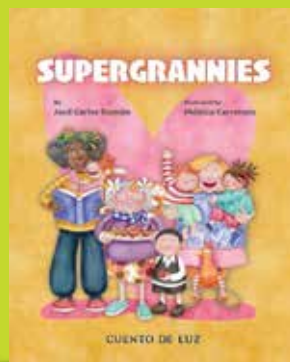
This is a layered and triumphant book, featuring poignant irony, as when Anderson is supported by his lesbian sister, who he denounced when she came out years before. Illustrated poems filled with rich imagery and wordplay complement the story's turns, as with mentions of "my heritage, equal parts handcart and homophobia" and quiet streets "full of newly-weds and nearly-deads."

The illustrations use different color palettes to distinguish between scenes set before and after Anderson's liberation—cold blues versus warm reds and oranges. These are resonant visual measures of his emotional state. Combined with detailed linework and facial expressions, they make the images as intimate as the story they tell.

An illuminating, exhilarating graphic memoir, *Gay Mormon Dad* is about escaping from a stifling, closeted life to achieve fulfillment and independence. ♥

# CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE



## Supergrannies

José Carlos Román, Mónica Carretero (Illustrator), Jon Brokenbrow (Translator)  
Cuento de Luz (JUN 2)  
Hardcover \$19.95 (32pp)  
978-841043827-9

Brimming with humor and imagination, this quirky picture book celebrates the extraordinary everyday superpowers of grandmothers. Supergranny Ethel makes magical croquettes,

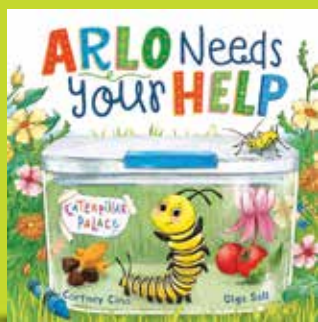
Agent Fairybel can chase all your fears away with a kind word and a song, and legend has it that Supergranny Francine has an endless fountain of French toast in her bedroom. Their grandkids aren't sure what to make of the stories, but when intruders break into their secret hideout, the Supergrannies leap, knit, and sauté into action.



## Find the Sun

Andy Harkness, Bloomsbury Children's Books (MAY 5) Hardcover \$18.99 (40pp)  
978-1-5476-1876-7

Eddie doesn't like Mondays or storms, let alone both combined; an unexpected visit from a larger-than-life friend helps him find the courage to seek out the sun in this inspiring picture book. Reminiscent of claymation media, the illustrations are layered with textures and blended colors, as of stars protruding from a night sky or a maze of delicate, intertwining leaves in marbled hues of green; readers of all ages will be won over by the unique style of this dreamy tale.



## Arlo Needs Your Help

Cortney Cino, Olga Sall (Illustrator), Whimsire Books (MAY 5) Hardcover \$18.99 (36pp), 979-899074225-3

This interactive picture book puts the reader at the center of the lifecycle of the monarch butterfly through engaging activities and charming narrators. Arlo the caterpillar has been trapped in a lunch box, interrupting his transformation to a butterfly; he'll need some help from the reader and an aphid with a knack for numbers to complete his metamorphosis. Charming details, as with the chocolate chips and goldfish crackers some well-intentioned children placed in Arlo's enclosure, enhance the educational illustrations.

Image above from Supergrannies, by José Carlos Román, Mónica Carretero (Illustrator). Used with permission from Cuento de Luz.



## Play Proud Fiercely Fabulous Queer Athletes

Rob Sanders, Izzy Evans (Illustrator)  
Beaming Books (MAY 5) Hardcover \$19.99  
(40pp), 979-888983491-5

Showcasing a diverse range of races and bodies, this affirming picture book shines a spotlight on queer athletes. Covering sports from football to figure skating, the book highlights notable queer athletes, past and present; brief biographies of featured athletes are provided in the back, along with a glossary of terms related to gender and sexual orientation. Colorful illustrations in soft, warm tones use inventive techniques and layouts to highlight the dynamic movement of equestrians, wrestlers, and everything in between.



## Lydia Loves Bugs

Heidi E. Y. Stemple, Yuliya Pankratova (Illustrator)  
Familius (MAY 19) Hardcover \$17.99 (32pp)  
978-1-64170-845-6

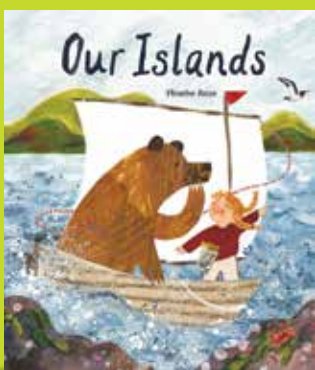
Budding entomologists and science lovers will delight in this whimsical story about a girl with an uncommon interest. Encouraged by her entomologist mother, Lydia studies, collects, and draws every kind of bug, from the stinky to the singing. Dynamic illustrations show Lydia wading in rivers and catching fireflies at dusk, her signature antenna headband a constant accessory. A list of featured bugs and fun facts rounds out the text and invites further reading and research for like-minded children.



## ★ Odds and Ends

Maija Hurme, Mia Spangenberg (Illustrator)  
Enchanted Lion (MAY 5) Hardcover \$17.99 (32pp)  
978-1-59270-479-8

At turns whimsical, thought-provoking, and heartbreaking, this sentimental picture book invites readers of all ages to celebrate the “lasts” in life, from the undesirable pieces of candy left in the bag to the final farewell to a loved one. Atmospheric pencil and watercolor illustrations form a scrapbook of memories and moments the child narrator collects, including “early morning lasts”—like the last bat to fall asleep—and the last chance to pick a mushroom before it snows.



## Our Islands

Phoebe Roze, Post Wave (MAY 5) Hardcover \$18.99  
(40pp), 979-889509049-7

Mixed-media illustrations track an adventure in this charming tale of home, friendship, and the intersection between the two. When Bear is swept away from his island home, he washes up on the shore of a strange new city; a girl, Isla, vows to help him find his way back. As they sail from island to island, they befriend birds, otters, dolphins, and one another before Bear finally finds his way home—and finds something is missing.

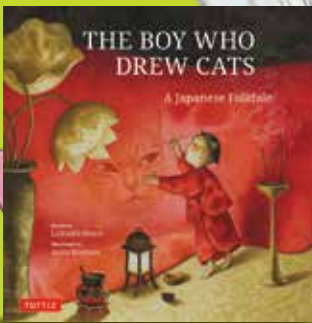


## ★ Rainbow Cookies

Lesléa Newman, Z.B. Asterplume  
(Illustrator), Levine Querido (MAY 5)  
Hardcover \$19.99 (40pp)  
978-1-64614-631-4

Cookie loves cookies, especially the cookies from the Cookie Cubby. But when the owner's Pride Month offering leaves a sour taste in some community members' mouths, Cookie rallies friends and neighbors into a sweet show of support in this poignant, positive picture book. Delicate, painterly illustrations utilize rainbows in inventive ways, such as in a subtle outline around characters or through the blended string of a balloon; an affirming variety of families and gender expressions are showcased, too.

*Image above from Play Proud: Fiercely Fabulous Queer Athletes, by Rob Sanders, Izzy Evans (Illustrator). Used with permission from Beaming Books.*



**The Boy Who Drew Cats**  
A Japanese Folktale

Lafcadio Hearn, Anita Kreituse (Illustrator)  
Tuttle Publishing (MAY 12) Hardcover \$16.99  
(48pp), 978-0-8048-5956-1

Dreamlike illustrations enhance the mystical atmosphere of this enchanting picture-book take on a beloved Japanese folktale. Unsited for the hard work his family farm requires, a boy is sent to train as a priest, but his singular passion for drawing cats gets in the way of his studies there, too. Searching for a place and a purpose, the boy is drawn into a supernatural battle wherein his unique skills are tested—and required.



**The Legend of Ban-Dal**  
A New Korean Folktale

Jessica Yoon, Seo Kim (Illustrator), Little Bee Books (MAY 5)  
Hardcover \$19.99 (40pp), 978-1-4998-1797-3

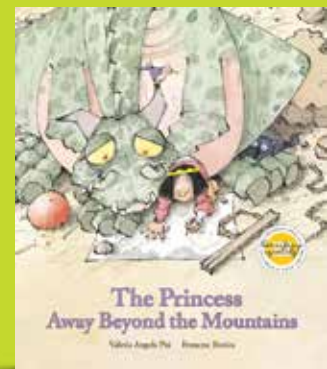
In a lovely village beneath a mountain, the people fish each day for the food they need. A visitor calls their practices into question, planting seeds of greed and gluttony; soon, the idyllic surroundings are depleted. A mythical bear helps them toward a transformative revelation; the bear is itself transformed for its kindness. This thoughtful folk tale's morals are complemented by dreamlike graphite-and-ink illustrations that honor the intricate grandeur of nature.



**The Muéganos**

Jaque Jours, Transit Children's Editions (MAY 5) Hardcover  
\$20.95 (40pp), 979-889338087-3

Personifying a traditional Mexican candy as a close-knit family in a sticky situation, this warm-hearted picture book honors family connections while leaving room for independence. The Muégano family is literally glued at the hip, and Julia wouldn't have it any other way—until warring interests at the museum lead to a rupture in the family unit. But just because Julia is off on her own doesn't mean she's alone.



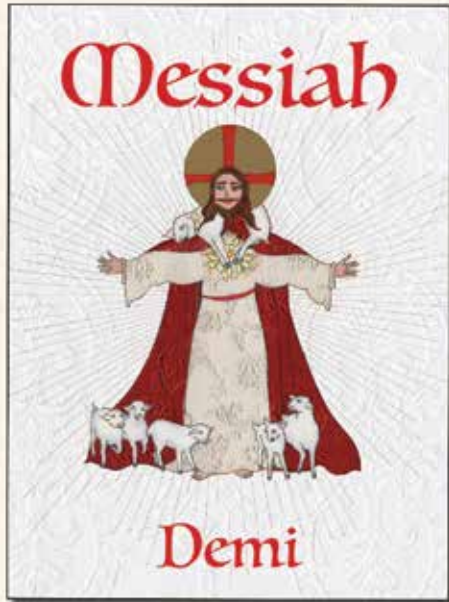
**The Princess Away Beyond the Mountains**

Valeria Angela Pisi, Francesc Rovira (Illustrator), NubeOcho (MAY 12) Hardcover  
\$17.99 (40pp), 979-1-387-83426-5

Whimsical watercolors accompany this high-flying tale of a girl's empowerment. A king sends his knights to rescue his daughter from the clutches of a dragon in a ruined castle, but this princess doesn't want to be saved; she rejects every offer of rescue with a swift karate chop. When a woman knight arrives, she recognizes a kindred spirit; with a docile dragon in tow, they take off in the princess's flying machine to rescue other damsels in perceived distress. ♥

*Image above from The Princess Away Beyond the Mountains, by Valeria Angela Pisi, Francesc Rovira (Illustrator). Used with permission from NubeOcho.*

# NEW from Demi



ISBN: 978-1-957670-17-1  
Pub. Date: January 1, 2026, Price: \$19.95

The Bible tells us that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Drawing on quotations from holy Scripture, award-winning author, Demi, weaves together the miraculous birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah who took upon himself the sins of the world, triumphed over death, and redeemed humanity.



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## Library Insights Summit

CONNECTING PUBLISHERS & LIBRARIANS

Pre-ALA, Friday, June 26, 2026, McCormick Place, Chicago

*Library Insights Summit is an informative day dedicated to bringing publishers and librarians together in an intimate setting just prior to the ALA Annual Conference.*



Jason Low, Publisher and Co-Owner of Lee & Low Books, will open with a keynote, “What Does It Mean to Lead with Purpose,” addressing the state of independent children’s publishing in a rapidly shifting cultural and political landscape.

Morning breakout sessions are tailored to three audiences: 1) established publishers, 2) author-publishers, and 3) librarians. From AI and supply chain pressures to metadata, marketing, and inclusive standards, these earlier sessions will examine the systems shaping how books reach libraries and readers, including discussion on the elusive goal of building a more transparent, equitable, and trustworthy ecosystem for discovery.

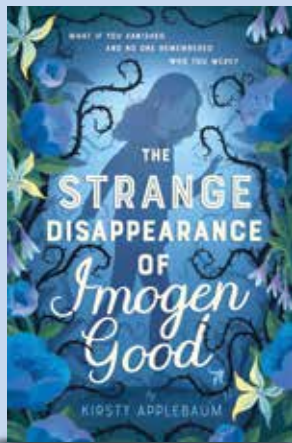
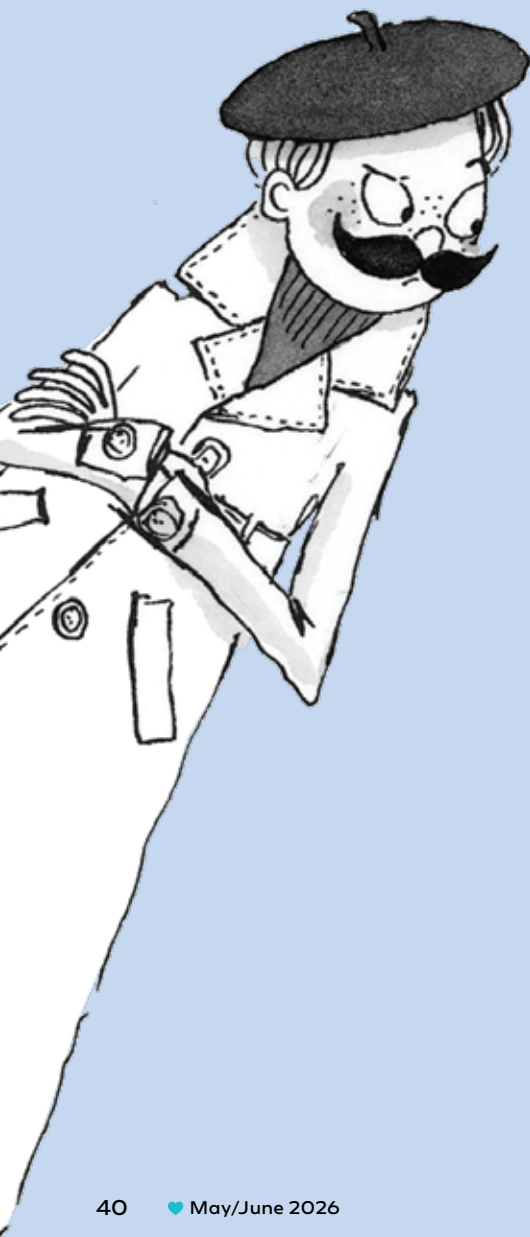
After a lively but purposeful lunch program dedicated to marketing pitches and editorial range, the afternoon then shifts to collaboration, with librarians sharing candid insights on what you should publish next.



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# MIDDLE GRADE



## The Strange Disappearance of Imogen Good

Kirsty Applebaum, Nosy Crow (MAY 5) Hardcover \$17.99 (288pp), 979-888777282-0, FANTASY

Kirsty Applebaum's delightful gothic novel *The Strange Disappearance of Imogen Good* weaves magic into a girl's search for her missing cousin.

Fran dreads visiting her aunt, uncle, and bossy cousin Imogen while her mother is away on a weeklong work trip. But when she arrives, everyone in town seems to be pretending that Imogen never existed. Her bedroom is intact, and pictures of her are still online, but it's as if everyone is under a forgetfulness spell.

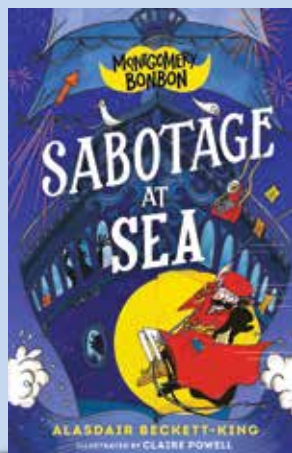
Fran reads the last entry in Imogen's diary and learns that she planned to sneak into the overgrown garden of the house down the street, which is rumored to be haunted, the day before she disappeared. Fran is determined to break in herself and find her cousin,

even though the strange woman who lives there, Ms. Quincey, warned her to stay far away.

Cliffhanger chapter endings and action scenes keep the plot gripping and suspenseful. Alternating between Fran's search for Imogen and a story within a story about the history of the haunted garden, the novel's two puzzle halves slide together in time, revealing an intricate, moving image of a house whose inhabitants yearn to heal from tragedies. However, the characterizations are quite archetypal: Ms. Quincey's coldness toward Fran reflects her knowledge of her garden's theft of children, for instance, but not enough is revealed about her beyond this. In the place of concrete details come elements of magical realism in the form of tangled brambles, wish-granting flowers, and grief-fueled gothic specters. And the prose is eloquent and enrapturing, following Fran as she navigates the thorny, overgrown garden of nightmares.

*The Strange Disappearance of Imogen Good* is a bewitching fantasy novel about grief, regret, and redemption.

AIMEE JODOIN



## Montgomery Bonbon Sabotage at Sea

Alasdair Beckett-King, Claire Powell (Illustrator) Candlewick (MAY 26) Softcover \$9.99 (288pp) 978-1-5362-4171-6, MYSTERY

In Alasdair Beckett-King's playful mystery novel *Montgomery Bonbon: Sabotage at Sea*, a shipboard death leads to a buoyant investigation driven by a disguise and a deductive performance.

When a sea captain dies and his body vanishes aboard the *Dreadnawt*, Bonnie adopts an alter ego as mustachioed detective Montgomery Bonbon. Wearing an oversized coat and a beret and speaking with exaggerated accent, she conducts inquiries alongside Grandpa Banks and her friend Dana. She conceals the ruse from her mother, who dismisses sleuthing as troublemaking. Still, Bonnie assembles a theory of the crime, using interviews with fellow passengers, physical clues, and rumors about sabotage

to shape her investigation. Indeed, each playful exchange reveals new clues, clarifying people's connections to the captain's disappearance.

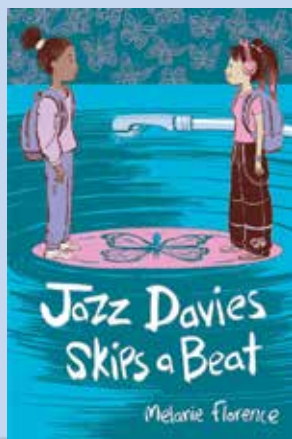
The book is narrated via comic set pieces built on wordplay, exaggerated personas, and the friction between Bonnie's age and Bonbon's authoritative manner. Its characterizations emphasize people's dual identities too. As Bonbon, Bonnie adopts a theatrical confidence that adults accept; her exchanges with Dana and Grandpa Banks reveal the improvisation at work behind her disguise. At her opposite is a gallery of eccentrics, including officers, travelers, and staff members whose speech patterns and habits are humorous while also informing Bonnie's investigation.

The book's illustrations feature visual gags that mirror the text's timing. These drawings highlight physical comedy, clarify chase and discovery scenes, and reinforce the pacing of the unfolding mystery, whose brisk prose and tight-staged scenes guide the investigation toward a gathering of suspects and a satisfying reveal of the saboteur.

In the spirited mystery novel *Montgomery Bonbon: Sabotage at Sea*, a girl solves a shipboard crime while disguised, thanks to her careful questioning of those around her.

BRANDON PAWLICKI

Image left from MONTGOMERY BONBON: SABOTAGE AT SEA. Text copyright © 2025 by Alasdair Beckett-King. Illustrations copyright © 2025 by Claire Powell. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA on behalf of Walker Books, London.



## Jazz Davies Skips a Beat

Lo and Jazz: Book 2

Melanie Florence, Orca Book Publishers  
(MAY 19) Softcover \$14.95 (192pp)  
978-1-4598-4095-9, LGBTQ+

A popular middle school student navigates family betrayal and a crush on another girl in Melanie Florence's heartfelt novel *Jazz Davies Skips a Beat*.

Jazz struggles with feelings of abandonment and loneliness after her mother leaves her father for a yoga instructor. Though she enjoys celebrity-level treatment at school, she dislikes how the other popular girls focus on boys. She also regrets ditching her unpopular best friend, Lo.

As Jazz and Lo repair their damaged friendship, Jazz struggles with her friends' expectations around dating. She also harbors anger and resentment toward her mother. With the help of her supportive therapist, Jazz begins to wonder if she really wants to be popular after all.

The novel, with its short chapters, is propulsive. Jazz's narration is assertive and witty, and she goes in-depth when it comes to her own complicated emotions. In particular, she both misses her mother and feels abandoned by her; this is captured in her diary entries, which appear between chapters, wherein she addresses her mother.

Despite feeling lost, Jazz has high self-esteem and sets firm boundaries. She calls out some of her friends' nasty behavior; in a memorable scene in the school cafeteria, she encourages their "minions" to eat carbohydrates while the head of the group watches in horror. But Jazz is also dynamic because of her interesting flaws—for example, her loneliness was the primary reason she wanted to be popular, but once in, she wrestles with the consequences of her choices. She wonders how to move forward, whether she wants to ignore her mother's calls forever, and whether fitting in is worth repressing her true self for.

A girl summons the courage to overcome her anger and fear in *Jazz Davies Skips a Beat*, a complex novel about preadolescent emotions and relationships.

LEAH BLOCK



## Unlucky Charm Summer

Alyssa Wilkinson, Chicken Scratch Books  
(MAY 5) Softcover \$12.99 (272pp)  
978-1-953743-59-6, MYSTERY

Intrepid sisters brave a secret-laden circus in Alyssa Wilkinson's splendid mystery novel *Unlucky Charm Summer*.

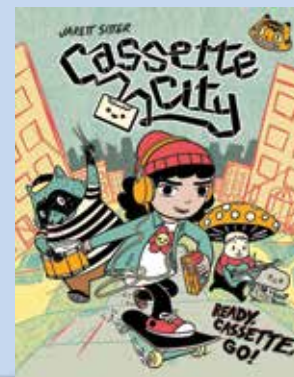
Left on the steps of an orphanage as a baby, eleven-year-old Duke is sure her parents are out there, waiting, somewhere. She has a mysterious charm bracelet and a note to prove it. When placed with a new foster family, Duke learns that she has a twin, Daisy, who was left with an identical bracelet. Together, the sisters set out to unravel the mystery of their origins.

Duke narrates with equal parts bravado and vulnerability. Her fierce independence belies her tender heart, which yearns for the family she cannot remember. Her longing complements the action scenes well, as when she dresses to meet the Winchesters and imagines that her soft new dress feels like "a mama's whisper at bedtime." She and Daisy are a winsome pair, with Daisy's cautious nature balancing Duke's impulsiveness. Daisy, too, wrestles with complicated, conflicting emotions, eager to find her biological parents while feeling disloyal to her beloved adopted family.

The Southern setting heightens the building tension. Lazy summer days set to the tune of buzzing cicadas are interrupted by jarring incidents including slashed bike tires; it becomes clear that someone is determined to stop the girls. Undeterred, the sisters approach the glittering Deveraux Brothers Circus, where a colorful cast propels their quest, including Hopscotch, a gentle clown "kept young by laughter," and Alastair, a ringmaster whose initial charisma hides darker motives. Symbolism—the planting of a new tree, the return of a pair of bluebirds—draws out the story's thoughtful themes of forgiveness and family, and a cheerful twist ending promises new beginnings for all.

Family secrets and circus chaos abound in the delightful mystery novel *Unlucky Charm Summer*.

VIVIAN TURNBULL



## Ready, Casette, Go!

Jarett Sitter, Annick Press (MAY 5)  
Softcover \$15.99 (208pp)  
978-1-83402-057-0  
COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

A girl learns to trust others and make friends in Jarett Sitter's delightful graphic novel *Ready, Casette, Go!*

Melody, a guitar player, has been pushing others away since her mother left. When she and her father move to Casette City, "The City of Play," Melody receives an offer to join a band and compete in a big contest. Though she hesitates, she joins in order to beat an arrogant bully, Styles. They also recruit a robot keyboardist, Atikus. But after Melody's indifference to her bandmates is exposed, the group breaks up. However, as the characters navigate concerns of trust, betrayal, forgiveness, and friendship, and as Melody realizes that she's found real friends, the book moves toward an epic conclusion.

The illustrations are wonder filled and feature a wide variety of character designs. Melody is human, Snackwich is a raccoon, and their bandmate Taki is a mushroom who speaks in an indecipherable language. Humor is prevalent too, in analog-era puns like in the town's welcome sign, which reads "Unwind in Casette City," and amusing concepts like the refridgowaver, a cross between a fridge and microwave that brings food to room temperature.

Other gags have visual elements, as when Melody's bandmate Snackwich puts a robot appendage on his head and laughs about getting "a leg up" on the competition.

In the sweet and lively graphic novel *Ready, Casette, Go!*, a girl is reminded that life is not a solo act.

PETER DABBENE ♥





## The Seller of Secrets

Sheri Yutzy, Keylight Books (APR 21)  
Hardcover \$35.99 (333pp)  
979-888798169-7, FANTASY

A girl uncovers the truth about her family and community in Sheri Yutzy's atmospheric fantasy novel *The Seller of Secrets*.

Bell is a scentmaker who lives on the island of Bardia, where some people have elemental magical powers. Bell has a powerful gift for controlling plants and creating magical elixirs. Meanwhile, her sister, Roza, contends with a deadly disease following a childhood accident.

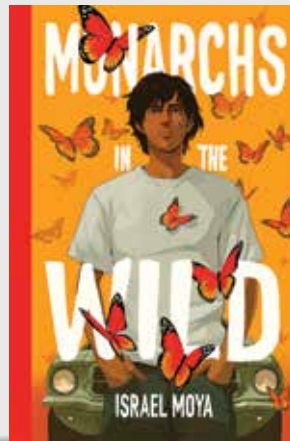
One night, Roza takes Bell to the Night Bazaar—a market where unauthorized magic users sell their wares. Bell overhears a suspicious conversation between Roza's fiancé and a guard for the mysterious Seller of Secrets. Hoping to heal her sister and save her from a controlling marriage, Bell teams up with one of the Seller's agents to learn secrets and search for a cure.

Bell's interactions with magic are described in evocative terms, as with descriptions of the smells of the elixirs, the clouds above them, and the feeling of Bell's gift in her body. As her strength grows, the descriptions of magic become more vivid. In time, Bell is able to parse through the different elements of an elixir by both sight and smell.

The characters are complex and well rounded, with layered motivations. Bell is sometimes confused about whom she can trust as a result. Her friend helps her get in touch with the Seller but also has a plan to leave Bardia that makes Bell wary. Bell's teacher wants Bell to cultivate her gift but does not want her to use illegal magic to find a cure for her sister's illness. These contending motivations add to the book's eerie atmosphere.

In the enigmatic fantasy novel *The Seller of Secrets*, a girl grows into her magical abilities amid a search for understanding.

JULIA DILLMAN



## Monarchs in the Wild

Israel Moya, Tu Books (JUN 2) Hardcover  
\$24.95 (338pp), 978-1-64379-752-6  
GENERAL

In Israel Moya's engaging coming-of-age novel *Monarchs in the Wild*, an aimless teenage boy living in a place with few options considers life after high school.

In a small California town in the 1990s, Cal is about to graduate high school. He lives with his religious mother, works bagging groceries, and spends most of his free time trying to keep his beloved, beat-up vintage Mustang running. He has anger and abandonment issues and a reputation in town that's made worse by the ever-present scars on his face. In a constant cycle of damage and repair that mirrors his experiences with his car, he neglects to plan for the future and ignores the personal relationships that could give his life more meaning.

When Cal finds a popular classmate's body near the train tracks, the police question him, and others are suspicious. He faces threats from neighborhood gang members and tries to avoid pressure from his mother's church. Shakeups at work also force Cal to deal with the changes around him and think about his future.

As he narrates, Cal confronts his mixed feelings about his circumstances. Through him, the desolation of small town-life is made palpable. He knows that even farm work is hard to find, and college is an unlikely outcome for most of his classmates.

Like Cal's life, the story gets a bit stuck in its middle section, when Cal's focus on car repair pushes more important concerns to the periphery. It gains momentum again as new challenges force Cal to question his stable, though not comfortable, situations and find new directions. Surprising obstacles keep the story moving, forcing Cal to confront a surprising past trauma.

In the memorable coming-of-age novel *Monarchs in the Wild*, a boy struggles to escape his small-town life.

JEFF FLEISCHER



## ★ Never Hide from the Devil

N.T. McQueen, Cennan Books (MAY 5)  
Softcover \$18.95 (325pp)  
978-1-947976-71-9, HISTORICAL

Centering an Armenian boy, N. T. McQueen's outstanding historical novel *Never Hide from the Devil* roils around a genocide, as Turkish forces surround the city of Van.

Most of the story takes place over one month in 1915, when the Ottoman government tried to eliminate its Armenian citizens. Fourteen-year-old Suren and his family hear rumors about nearby villages being attacked; his older brothers are drafted into the Ottoman army, and his uncle and father join secret meetings to prepare the city's response. From church to school, all is touched by discussions about what to do. Once the family decides to stay rather than evacuate, Suren decides whether to join his friends in the resistance.

Suren navigates the threat of armed forces that might attack any moment while he and his friends risk their lives delivering messages to the front. The tension graduates as, within a few days, the family no longer flinches from the sounds of gunshots. Suren's relationship with his Turkish best friend becomes strained, his friends clash, and he and his sisters share secrets, disobeying their parents to help the Armenian cause. These conflicts ground Suren's story, even as a refugee crisis and news about Russian advances in the east add urgency to the fight to protect Van's citizens.

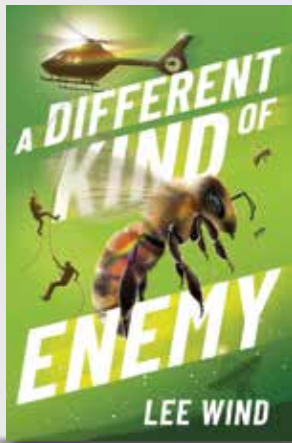
Capturing the stress of the situation, the book fleshes out each day in terms of its existential fights to make it to the next. Moments of quiet reflection mix with immediate peril, and Suren encounters historical resistance figures in his efforts. Sympathetic and complicated, he faces dangers he never expected, ones that are bound to change his life.

Set amid the Armenian genocide, *Never Hide from the Devil* is a gripping tale of love and survival.

JEFF FLEISCHER

*Image right from The End of the Arab of the Future: A Youth in the Middle East Volume 1, by Riad Sattouf. Used with permission from Fantagraphics.*

# YOUNG ADULT



## A Different Kind of Enemy

The Different Kind Series

Lee Wind, Duet Books (MAY 19) Softcover \$12.99 (302pp), 978-0-89733-644-4 LGBTQ+

In Lee Wind's exciting novel *A Different Kind of Enemy*, teenage spies scramble through an alien panic and a strained marriage.

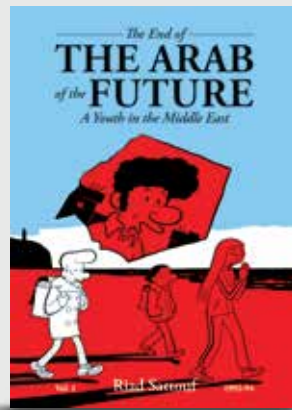
Nineteen days into their marriage, unbeknownst to each other's callings, Nico and Sam are separately recruited by the same intelligence agency. Nico is tasked with tracking a mysterious person of interest; Sam is assigned to an analyst desk in a Manhattan building that officially has no thirteenth floor. As their separate investigations converge, it becomes clear they are not responding to a crisis but working inside one.

A timestamp countdown injects tension into each chapter, with the chapters alternating between Nico and Sam. Text messages, agency bulletins, and journal entries punctuate their tense parallel stories. The dramatic irony of both husbands working for the same agency, unaware of the other's involvement, is milked for suspense and then complicated.

The James Bond films function as a shared vocabulary between Nico and Sam—used with self-awareness, including via Sam's vlog critiques of the franchise's homophobic and sexist moments. And Sam's journaling voice is conversational and self-interrogating, prone to sudden pivots between Bond-watch obsession and genuine fear. Nico and Sam's relationship is further defined by a single, specific asymmetry: Nico shows love through action; Sam needs it spoken. The book holds this contrast with patience, and the payoff in the final pages, wherein all the disparate threads converge with frenetic energy, carries significant emotional weight. Indeed, Nico and Sam's ultimate fate is left in question, suiting the book's thrilling build-up while making room for future series installments.

A resonant thriller that's full of thrills and sensuality, *A Different Kind of Enemy* frames a young romance through beloved spy films.

JOHN M. MURRAY



## The End of the Arab of the Future

A Youth in the Middle East Volume 1

Riad Sattouf, Sam Taylor (Translator) Fantagraphics (MAY 19) Softcover \$22.99 (184pp), 979-887500237-3 COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

Riad Sattouf's exceptional graphic memoir *The End of the Arab of the Future* is about when his brother went missing.

In 1992, Sattouf was fourteen years old. His father kidnapped his younger brother, Fadi, and took him to Syria. Sattouf's mother sought help, but legal aid was delayed by her divorce proceedings.

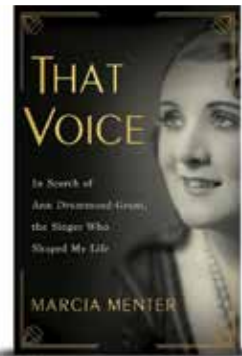
In the interim, Sattouf, whose interests included H. P. Lovecraft and comic books, developed romantic feelings for a girl and started down a path in art. His mother consulted a medium for news of Fadi. Later, Sattouf's grandmother spotted his father in a store in France, leading to a climactic confrontation over Fadi's custody.

The illustrations are whimsical, even in covering difficult scenes, as of Sattouf's mother's heartbreak. Contrasts between "good" and "bad" thoughts are marked by color changes from blue to red; when Sattouf muses about serious topics like religion, an image of himself as a horned Satan keeps the panel entertaining.

In this way, laugh-out-loud moments, as with arrows pointing to Sattouf's "Weird haircut to conceal egg-shaped head," are well juxtaposed to the drama inherent in the story. Even the lettering contributes to the fun: Sattouf tries "not to sound effeminate," and the all-capitalized text in his word balloon takes on a sudden, hilarious increase in size and weight.

*The End of the Arab of the Future* is a masterful graphic memoir about growing up in the space between two cultures.

PETER DABBENE ♥



Nonfiction—Autobiography & Memoir

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Marcia Menter

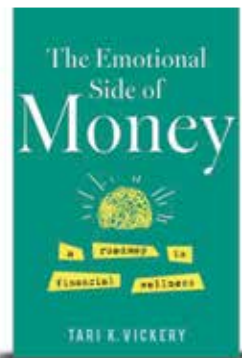
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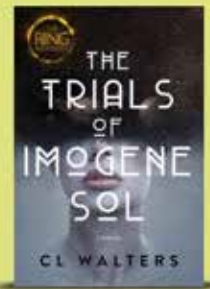


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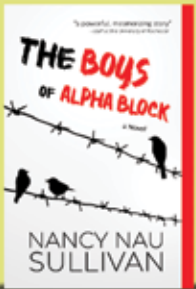
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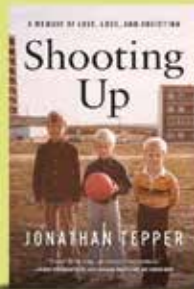


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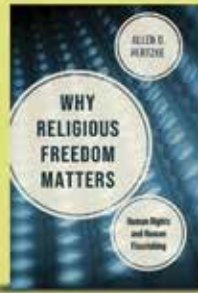


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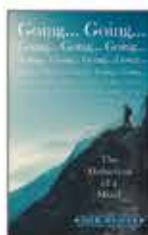


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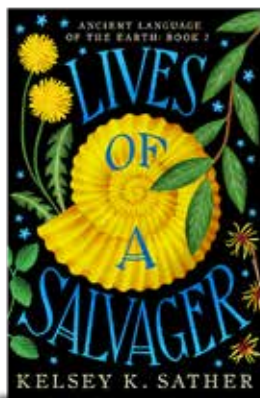
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## FANTASY



## Lives of a Salvager

Ancient Language of the Earth: Book Two

Kelsey K. Sather, Theia Books (MAY 12)  
Softcover \$18.99 (533pp)  
978-1-73552-054-4

After centuries of devotion, Kelsey K. Sather's epic fantasy novel *Lives of a Salvager* asks how devotion survives.

Laurel, a salvager, is one of three humans alive at any time with unique abilities. Her purpose is to support the Anima, a woman transformed into a bridge between humanity and the animal kingdom. The Anima is tasked with restoring the sacred balance that imperial expansion works to destroy.

Split into six parts covering distinct eras, with individual chapters titled after plants, the book transitions between centuries, reflecting accumulated grief and altered landscapes. Laurel herself remains consistent across these shifts. When she is in crisis, the storytelling is propulsive; during quieter centuries, her story itself is still true to its thematic concerns.

Botanical and sensory details ground the prose, which has a tactile quality, infusing “fire lilies and snakeroot, moonflowers and witch’s gloves” with grand meaning. The chapter titles function as a secondary register, connecting human dramas to the ecological philosophy at the novel’s core in a subdued manner. An exasperated declaration from Avni, the fifth Anima—“My happiness has nothing to do with it”—works because of the decades of cost behind it.

Spanning around two thousand years, the novel carries the structural weight of a chronicle. Still, its real preoccupations are intimate: the cost of sustained commitment to a cause in the face of centuries of loss; the question of whether a choice freely given remains free after a lifetime of consequences. Grief for those who outlive grand victories is well-conveyed.

In the multigenerational fantasy novel *Lives of a Salvager*, the lasting costs of ecological devotion are attended to with precise emotional weight.

JOHN M. MURRAY

## FANTASY



## Out Law

A Dresden Files Novella

Jim Butcher, Podium Publishing (MAY 12)  
Softcover \$16.99 (204pp)  
979-834703002-6

In Jim Butcher's riveting fantasy novella *Out Law*, a wizard faces a demonic enemy who seeks to feed on the world.

After the Windy City is decimated by the Battle of Chicago, Harry, a wizard, reunites with John, an underworld criminal kingpin known as the Baron of Chicago. John needs Harry's help with redeeming one of his men, Tripp, a lifetime criminal looking to become honest.

To help Tripp navigate his legal woes and get a second chance, Harry and his ragtag allies have to tangle with the Lurker, a supernatural force with slithering tendrils that possesses cats, lions, birds, and baboons. Indeed, the Lurker is a bloodthirsty nemesis whom Harry set loose when he took out the vampires of the Red Court to save his daughter.

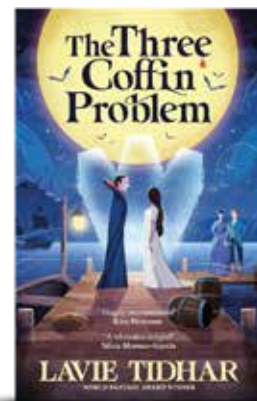
A mix of guns, cars, and criminal elements fleshes out this alternate world of castles, runes, and spell-armed leather jackets, whose fight scenes are cinematic and concrete. Magic and other supernatural elements are juxtaposed with everyday features like offices and court proceedings—for instance, Harry teaches his apprentice potions while wearing a robe procured from a thrift store.

Evocative descriptions, as of a demon's laugh that makes Harry want to scrape his eardrums until they burst, animate the story, as do its witty exchanges. Harry is a brash and endearing hero, though prone to some bravado: he dismisses the Lurker as “yadda, yadda, your basic Lovecraftian nonsense.” Irreverent humor enlivens the brisk and rollicking storytelling, whose various plotlines weave together and move toward a climactic confrontation wherein Harry deploys diplomacy and his wits.

One part of a bigger, ongoing battle against dark magic, the gripping fantasy novella *Out Law* follows Chicago's only professional wizard as he fights an ancient Aztec demon and a Las Vegas bookie.

JOSEPH S. PETE

## FANTASY



## The Three Coffin Problem

Lavie Tidhar, JAB Books (JUN 16) Softcover  
\$18.99 (290pp), 978-1-62567-798-3

In Lavie Tidhar's clever and amusing novel in short stories *The Three Coffin Problem*, a vampire judge and his otherwise unremarkable human sidekick travel through medieval Europe, solving a series of crimes involving the vampire community.

Judge Dee is an ancient vampire whom other vampires summon to rule on cases and enforce the law. In the nine stories of this novel, he and his helper, Jonathan, confront bloody crimes in gothic settings. They contend with multiple suspects with competing motives.

In “The Mystery of the Missing Manuscript,” Judge Dee is summoned to answer for a library book that has been overdue for centuries; he winds up solving a murder that takes place after his arrival. In “The Three Deaths of Count Wenderfels,” the judge is called to solve a vampire's murder, only to find too many people trying to take credit for it.

Each tale is strong on its own; recurring secondary characters result in clear throughlines, as do lessons learned that help in later cases. Judge Dee's investigative approach reflects those in closed-circle mysteries: He inspects the scene, questions the suspects, and reveals the culprit to all those present.

The interplay between the characters is quite engaging. Judge Dee is serious, brilliant, and a stickler for a vampire-specific moral code that few of his fellow vampires take as seriously. Jonathan tends to concern himself with what food the hosts have on offer and how much of it, though he sometimes provides the judge with a helpful human perspective on the proceedings. His humor blends well with the gritty noir of the crimes the duo investigates.

Following a series of memorable, complicated cases, *The Three Coffin Problem* is a fun, twisting detective novel.

JEFF FLEISCHER

## GENERAL



## Nice Places

Vincent Chu, Forest Avenue Press (JUN 2)  
Softcover \$18 (296pp), 978-1-942436-71-3

The adage that travel broadens the mind is tested in a comic, thoughtful fashion in Vincent Chu's novel *Nice Places*.

Feeling aimless, Georgie quits his dead-end technology job to travel the world for a year and learn about himself. His plans change after his belongings and passport are stolen, leaving him stranded at a ramshackle hostel only a few miles from home.

On a whim, Georgie takes a photograph of noodles at a local restaurant and posts it to Instagram, pretending he's in Thailand. When he gains hundreds of social media followers as a result, he devises a plot to travel around the world without leaving city limits. He does so with the help of Ant, an ambitious art student.

Clever and twisting, the story leans into Georgie's attempts to maintain his illusion, even as he struggles with existential questions about whether travel is an escape or a portal to enlightenment. Also included are the perspectives of adventurous guests at the hostel who swear by the romance of travel, influencers and cynical travel magazine editors who can only think in terms of likes and manifestos, and Ant, who grows fond of Georgie and debates turning their "project" into an art thesis.

While the characters' continuous pontification on travel and living leads to stilted moments, the story on the whole is enchanting because of its light touch. Peppering its heavier musings with brief chapters filled with travel haikus and self-questionnaires, it enjoys its premise even as it interrogates heady concepts including identity and self-fulfillment. Georgie proves to be an endearing hero, his quest for meaning both quixotic and sympathetic.

Embracing the paradox of a self-described "vagabond" who doesn't go anywhere, the jovial novel *Nice Places* finds philosophical gold beneath a surface of absurdity.

HO LIN

## GENERAL



## The Lifeguard

Laura Kasischke, Red Hen Press (MAY 12)  
Softcover \$18.95 (248pp)  
978-1-63628-287-9

Told via overlapping, time-jumping narratives, Laura Kasischke's fragmentary novel, *The Lifeguard*, centers small-town residents whose lives intertwine following a boy's drowning.

As the residents of Mission Hills, Michigan, grow older, they are forced to face the grim realities of the fateful day at the Jolly Rogers Swim Club in 1969, which is set against the backdrop of the *Apollo* program and moon launches. A lifeguard was regarded with suspicion following Richie's drowning, for instance; she later fled to California. Richie's mother, Marie, struggled in her marriage, while another child, Becca, dealt with her own complicated home life, leading to another death.

The flawed but dynamic cast includes Richie's brash, angry father, who lashes out at Marie for their money troubles and blames her for Richie's death. He also insists on leaving work to watch an *Apollo* launch with Richie, showing his love for his son. Likewise, the lifeguard insists that she hates children and is ambivalent about her job, but she is also careful not to embarrass groups of young girls at the pool.

Flush with sensory details, the sprawling, immersive prose includes both extensive information on how a lifeguard wears her swimsuit and evocative active images, as of Richie's drowning: "each of his lungs no bigger than a newborn mouse you might find damp and alone in a nest." Though many questions remain for the residents of Mission Hills at the novel's end, finality is achieved with Richie's final chapter, and with the image of the pool "buried under fill dirt," now a matter of folk legend.

An intricate historical novel, *The Lifeguard* traces the interconnected lives of Michiganders in the wake of a child's drowning.

JENNIFER MAVEETY

## HISTORICAL



## Duchess of the New Dawn

Kim Rendfeld, IngramSpark (JUN 16)  
Softcover \$16.99 (246pp)  
979-899854061-5

A noblewoman uses her wits to secure the man she loves, their child, and the future of her duchy in Kim Rendfeld's resplendent novel *Duchess of the New Dawn*.

In 740 CE, Lady Chiltrude is the only daughter of one of Francia's most powerful families. When she meets Odilo, the Duke of Bavaria, curiosity turns to passion, then love. However, Chiltrude's father, Charles, will not agree to his daughter's marrying Odilo. Chiltrude's older brothers, Karlomann and Pippin, are also against the union, which would threaten their own hereditary plans.

When Charles dies, Chiltrude's future is left in the hands of her domineering brothers. But Chiltrude and Odilo's love for each other is strong, and soon, an heir to the Duke of Bavaria is announced—Chiltrude's unborn child.

Spanning a decade, the story is a romantic adventure and a masterclass in medieval realpolitik. Told in Chiltrude's voice, the narrative limits action to what she sees and hears from her dedicated circle of maids, religious confessors, and loyal servants. The diplomatic and political machinations are explored in cerebral and illuminating terms.

A blend of historical and imagined characters are included among the internecine warfare of Francia in the 740s, where brothers war against brothers, alliances shift faster than the wind, and a noblewoman's role is to broker peace between adversarial factions. Reflecting on how the men in her orbit insist on her ability to "weave peace," Chiltrude wonders at their stupidity: They "keep ripping the threads."

In the gripping historical novel *Duchess of the New Dawn*, a woman works to protect her legacy against the violent vicissitudes of her era.

PEGGY KURKOWSKI



## The Missing Baroness

### The Inconvenient Heirs Series

Bianca M. Schwarz, Central Avenue Publishing (JUN 16) Softcover \$19 (256pp) 978-1-77168-451-4

Greed, violence, and true love fuel Bianca M. Schwarz's lively historical novel *The Missing Baroness*.

After a decade of hiding in the country from her murderous uncle, orphaned Georgina learns that he plans to have her pronounced dead in the courts and claim the baronetcy for himself. Georgina decides to act: the wealthy family that disguised her as their daughter's hired companion relocates to London, where the action ramps up.

Georgina's odious uncle makes a surprise appearance in London. Soon afterward, information about a newer will that replaces him as her guardian comes to light. Handsome and well-connected Lord Bertram is apprised of the mortal danger to Georgina and her identity as the true baroness, and he becomes her strongest advocate.

The story gallops through back alleys, ballrooms, and abandoned houses to the House of Lords, its plotting clever and precise from start to finish. Significant twists in characters' identities and motivations are revealed, and the chapter endings often resolve immediate matters at hand while propelling the story forward with promises of new complications.

Drawing rooms, horse-drawn carriages, priest-holes, and bonnets shelter the book's meaningful private exchanges. Adding depth to the story, the rigid British social class system is challenged by Georgina's masquerade as a paid companion, a social position somewhere between servant and gentlewoman. That experience alters her own class prejudices and makes a critical alliance possible.

Georgina claiming her rightful title would require a risky break with Regency conventions; the possibility of being murdered and erased is startling. Still, the novel's driving force is Georgina's realization of the integrity and resolve that she's had all along.

*The Missing Baroness* is a charming mystery novel in which a young woman risks it all to claim her identity.

MICHELE SHARPE



## Three Queens

Rebecca Connolly, Shadow Mountain Publishing (MAY 5) Hardcover \$28.99 (336pp), 978-1-63993-454-6

Three iconic women find sisterhood and strength in Rebecca Connolly's historical novel *Three Queens*, about friendship formed through correspondence and courage.

While Queen Charlotte manages an empire, a mentally ill husband, and a power-hungry son, Marie Antoinette tries in vain to stave off an inevitable revolution, even as her husband ignores the brewing dangers. Meanwhile, despite the end of the influence of monarchies in the US, Abigail Adams faces her own trials; after crossing the pond to reunite with her husband, she finds the European courts and customs overwhelming. Seeking allies to help her navigate society and bolster her budding democratic nation, she reaches out to the queens of England and France.

Throughout this witty and engaging narrative, the iconic women work to reconcile their senses of duty and their public images with their personal struggles. How they respond to their specific circumstances is telling. Indeed, they are distinctive heroines with singular ways of speaking, problem-solving, and interacting with their husbands. The men's and the women's sides also display their own leadership styles, though they are relegated to secondary positions herein. Indeed, they appear most to highlight the trials and triumphs of their wives.

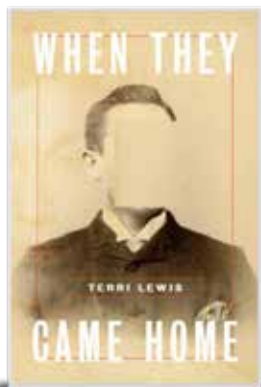
The traits that shape the leading women are revealed in an astute manner: they are decisive in the face of difficult political choices, but are masterful strategists when their personal lives require more finesse and compromise. By the conclusion of the story, love and loyalties have been tested; some are found wanting, while others come through stronger than ever, albeit in surprising ways that hint at what might have been.

An ongoing exercise in what-ifs, the musing historical novel *Three Queens* follows three formidable women leaders who form a friendship based on their shared burdens, hopes, flaws, and aspirations.

KATELYNN WATKINS



## HISTORICAL



## When They Came Home

Terri Lewis, Miami University Press (MAY 5)  
Softcover \$17 (152pp), 978-1-881163-76-3

In Terri Lewis's affecting historical novella *When They Came Home*, a shell-shocked soldier faces marital strain.

In Kansas in 1919, Edith, a farmer's daughter, is courted by Milton, a World War I veteran. Soon, they start a family in their hometown. But Milton, having seen combat in Argonne, France, deals with post-traumatic stress disorder. He has a thousand-yard stare, prolonged bouts of silence, and difficulty finishing a day's work. His distress tests the couple's home life.

The book's character studies deepen over the years; the book moves at a thoughtful, deliberate pace. Subtle observations about Edith's flinty resilience and patient love are juxtaposed with those of Milton's internal scars, reflected in the lighthearted nicknames he gave to weapons to counter the heaviness he felt. All of this interpersonal turmoil is set against a tranquil backdrop of the farm fields, resulting in a sweeping story about love and loss told through everyday reflections.

The prose is staccato and rhythmic, featuring palpable, situating references that are sparing but concrete, as with mentions of jars of jam, squares of fudge, and the sounds of soldiers' boots squishing while their socks molder. Scenes are further fleshed out with details, as of the sights of the countryside during a train trip, of endless military drills, and of tedious farm chores like chopping.

The book's progression is both intimate and epic. Edith and Milton come to seem a microcosm of their generation and of the early-twentieth-century US. Their struggles to get help from indifferent government offices, and with a psychologist who tells Milton to suppress his haunting memories, illustrate the enduring and lonely pains of their experiences.

A powerful historical novella, *When They Came Home* is about a rural home life marked by the lingering tolls of war.

JOSEPH S. PETE

## HORROR



## Muntu

### Ivory's Story

Eugen Bacon, Bad Hand Books (MAY 12)  
Softcover \$16.99 (154pp)  
978-1-967846-25-2

A killer is on the loose in Eugen Bacon's speculative novel *Muntu*.

Ivory heads an investigation into a possible serial killer who murders men, leaving behind ashes and the men's partners in catatonic states. With few leads and a superior breathing down her neck, Ivory turns to a medicine woman from a remote part of the country in the hopes that a spiritual approach will provide answers. The medicine woman's tactics guide Ivory in confronting the horrors of her childhood as an orphan, connecting her to the tradition that is her birthright.

The novella takes its time to get up to speed and exhibits drastic tonal shifts in its opening chapters. However, the layers build upon each other well until legend and reality combine, seeded by small details that gain significance over the course of the book. Ivory's opal necklace, which rejects people by burning them, is the most impactful of these. It connects her to the Valley of Dreams, a place ripped from time after Muntu, who also wore the necklace, was burned at the stake for loving the chief's daughter. His death becomes the catalyst for all that comes after.

The investigation is a vehicle to Ivory's self-understanding. While the mystery is given its due in both process and detail, it takes a backseat to the novella's exploration of Ivory's personal history through spiritual elements represented by the medicine woman and the Valley of Dreams. Ivory's embrace of these elements is made plausible because the novella presents spirituality as being on equal footing with traditional methods. The astral journey that Ivory undergoes is a particular standout in which colors, landscapes, and alien worlds collide.

*Muntu* is a surreal novel that brings together mysticism and murder.

DONTANĂ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH

## HORROR



## The Blood Year Daughter

G.G. Silverman, Creature Publishing (APR 28)  
Softcover \$18.95 (222pp)  
978-1-951971-41-0

G. G. Silverman's dark, inventive story collection adapts horror and fairy-tale tropes to explore motherhood and the repercussions of misogynistic violence.

Women's bodies herein are imperiled by sadistic men and acts of self-sacrifice. Blood is a symbol of desire or power. In a reversal of *Snow White*, an unloved narrator envies her perfect sister; drops of her blood curdle her sister's custard and curse her pregnancy. Another story is voiced by the dead wives of a wealthy Italian doctor who drank their blood. Yet another focuses on mysterious storms that sap people's souls; a new preacher believes that a baby might be traded for the lost.

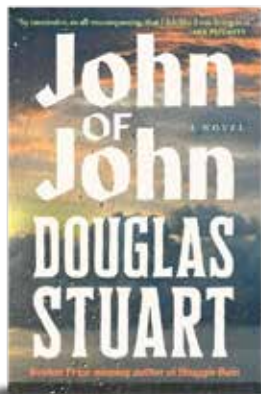
Motherhood and sisterhood are vital bonds in these tales. In one, a wolf-girl who was orphaned when hunters shot her mother is raised by Second Mother, who teaches her human language. Elsewhere, women band together for solidarity; in "All Hail the Boy King," Cat, Tia, and Letty demand the head of the boy who instigated Cat's gang rape. Resurrection and metamorphosis offer magical possibilities for revenge in stories like "And the First Shall Go Last," in which a woman avenges her own murder when she's reborn as the daughter of a medium. Elsewhere, an assaulted pole dancer morphs into a vengeful snake, and shape-shifting promises escape for an adolescent girl expected to tend fields and bear children for her elders.

Among bleak storylines come flashes of morbid humor, as in "Namesake Day," where teenagers reenact the torture and martyrdom of the saints and warriors they emulate. One rehearses her burning at the stake, while another decides that bloodshed is not for him.

*The Blood Year Daughter* is a remarkable short story collection that mixes feminist horror and twisted fairy tales into potent concoctions.

REBECCA FOSTER

LITERARY



## ★ John of John

Douglas Stuart, Grove Press  
(MAY 5) Hardcover \$28 (416pp)  
978-0-8021-6719-4

Douglas Stuart's ruminative novel *John of John* breaks through the surface of a dysfunctional family to expose deeper ties and shocking secrets.

After years of experimentation in his big-city art school, Cal returns to his Presbyterian father and their windswept croft on the Isle of Harris. His expectations are informed by his miserable childhood. His father, John, is an irascible preacher and shepherd, and his grandmother, Ella, is kind but distant, trying her best to ease the tension.

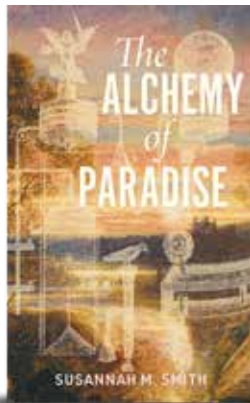
With an absent mother and family members whom he fears would beat him for being queer, Cal seeks out old friends. He also hopes to find another lonely man to ease his torment. However, as his relationships with his family members and the other islanders grow, secrets leak out, threatening to break the docile religious community.

The prose is restrained; the father and son duo evolve slowly. While Cal is easy to spot as a young queer man with a strong sex drive, John, his father, is strict, a hard worker whose identity takes most of the novel to surface. Cal opens up to others with speed, responding to a M4M newspaper ad, and his confusion leaves him plenty of room to change. In converse, John's doctrines and values shaped him into a man who still regards his past rule-breaking with deep shame. The two men's inner worlds rupture, spilling out onto the page; they cause one another to reconsider all that they cling to with desperation. And though they are as different as can be, they question if "We could be the same man."

In the contemplative, reverberating novel *John of John*, the outwardly simple family dynamics of a religious Scottish family are questioned and reevaluated.

NICK GARDNER

LITERARY



## The Alchemy of Paradise

Susannah M. Smith, Invisible Publishing  
(MAY 12) Softcover \$17.95 (216pp)  
978-1-77843-085-5

A luminous novel told in snippets, Susannah M. Smith's *The Alchemy of Paradise* considers how best to live in the face of loss.

An unnamed museum curator looks back on her idyllic childhood, wherein her father was an architect. While renovating a crumbling estate for his family, he dedicated a room to her collections. Her mother made every day special, too, with her fashion sense so theatrical that it elevated dressing to an art. But then the curator's father drowned in a Venetian canal, and her mother withdrew, leaving her alone in her grief. Her grandmother's loving attentions and mystic outlook helped her to move forward, but not forget. Now, decades later, the curator memorializes her father by assembling his left-behind belongings in an in situ exhibit, opening it with a grand party that rivals those of days gone by.

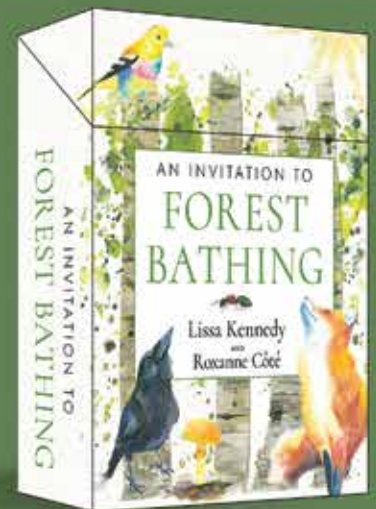
The unconventional prose is marked by immediacy and intimacy with the curator's thoughts. She is vulnerable and direct, as when she describes finding her husband in bed with another woman as resulting in "palpitations, my heart feeling like it was beating / in double time somewhere outside my chest. / Nausea. / Not sleeping, not eating, not crying." In fact, prose poems are a frequent occurrence in her narration, which shifts with ease between varying modes, including essays, ruminations, and imagined conversations with the dead. The latter acts as a way for her to alchemize her relationship with death from loathing to acceptance, a philosophy rendered via original realizations. "Death opens us up to life," her departed father says. "Think of how your life has expanded and deepened...Nothing has gone wrong here."

Metaphysical and insightful, *The Alchemy of Paradise* is an innovative novel in which a curator contemplates her father's death.

CAROLYN WILSON-SCOTT

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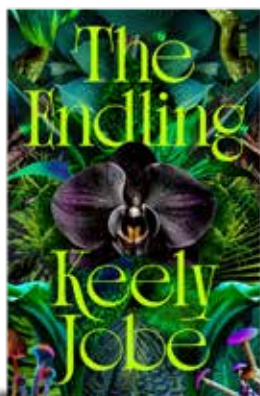
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## LITERARY



## The Endling

Keely Jobe, Scribe US (JUN 2) Softcover \$18 (256pp), 978-1-964992-33-4

An isolated feminist community falls short of its utopian ideals in Keely Jobe's intoxicating surrealistic novel *The Endling*.

A few springs into Frank and her niece Mila's tenure in a women's commune on a Tasmanian mountain, the community's hairline cracks widen. Frank is somewhat protected from these fractures by distance: she subsists in a treehouse that's a three-hour hike up the mountain, concealing her chainsaw, her meat-eating, and her dog, Chicken Midnight (all verboten), from the other women. She also hides her developing illness, which begins as selective blindness and becomes akin to melting into the earth.

Mila, meanwhile, is an up-close witness to the ideological gaps in the community's make-up. These worsen following a mass pregnancy event—because, in the bush, all life is sensual: the spores beneath a leaf, the trickle and rush of a stream, the caw of a bird. A glorious orchid nearing its kind's extinction sends desperate reproductive calls into the world; concurrently, nine of the women are wooed into the trees, left bending, straining, and panting in the underbrush. The odd children that result seem proof that “women don't need men.” Because Mila's baby is a boy, though, brutal lines are drawn.

The prose is heady, earthy, unabashedly salacious, and sometimes scatological:

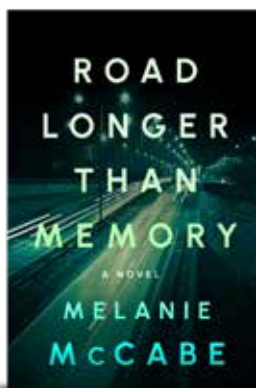
*utopia is shitting in a hole while midges feast on your cold bare arse... try finding consensus among a dozen hungry, isolated women when monogamy is forbidden and jealousy spreads like the clap... no one knows what they're in for until they're stranded at the top.*

The oppressive heat of the climate, paired with the roar of wildfires rushing toward the commune, adds to the tension of the situation, leading to terrible decision points and wild transformations.

An electric and unnerving novel, *The Endling* follows a radical feminist community's undoing.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

## MYSTERY



## Road Longer than Memory

Melanie McCabe, Oceanview Publishing (JUN 2) Softcover \$19.99 (298pp) 978-1-60809-652-7

A woman's homecoming stirs dark suspicions in Melanie McCabe's brooding historical thriller *Road Longer Than Memory*.

In 1976, Sara, a high school senior, witnesses a fellow student, Nina's, heated argument. Fear prevents her from intervening, though she makes an anonymous phone call to the police. A decade later, Sara, now a teacher at the school, encounters Mark, a fellow faculty member whose distinctive white forelock she recognizes from Nina's fight.

The slow-burning dual timelines advance through Sara's memories about her family, a fatal car accident, and the discovery of Nina's body. In the present, her doubts about whether Mark murdered Nina persist as she settles into her new job, resulting in coiling tension; she worries that he will recognize her, too. She also confides in a former classmate and reunites with a friend who desires a deeper relationship. Background about the controversial construction of Interstate 66 serves as Sara's personal, somewhat fragile metaphor for her own paved-over guilt as she engages in an anxious search for the truth.

The prose is unadorned. Mark is fleshed out via hearsay and Sara's presumptions, typecast as a sexually inappropriate teacher, while others are developed in terms of their ties to the interstate: some protested its construction, others were in favor of it. Indeed, the past permeates the present, reinforced by circumstance: Sara lives in her childhood home with her mother, amid reminders of past events.

The mystery advances through rumors that are at first tough to prove. Sara's amateur investigating is curtailed because of abrupt twists, including another death. As people make confessions, secrets spill toward the harrowing realization that sometimes exposing the truth pushes justice even further away.

In the contemplative thriller *Road Longer Than Memory*, a woman's recollections of a past crime complicate her new life.

KAREN RIGBY

## MYSTERY



## The Author Weekend

Laura Zigman, Blackstone Publishing (MAY 5) Hardcover \$29.99 (336pp) 979-822833040-5

In Laura Zigman's macabre novel *The Author Weekend*, an author with extreme insecurities faces a derailed promotional event and encounters the perils of fandom.

Faye is a prickly New Englander, just like the beloved sleuth in her famous suspense novels. She hosts a weekend retreat for her fans on Great Misery Island. The decision is based, in part, on her envy of Abby, a fashionable romantasy author whom she hopes to one-up. Meanwhile, Jade, an MFA graduate, thinks that working as Faye's assistant might inspire her own juicy novel. She is sometimes exasperated by Faye but also respects her. And beyond Faye's packed itinerary lies danger. People are murdered; still, Faye scrambles to keep the retreat going.

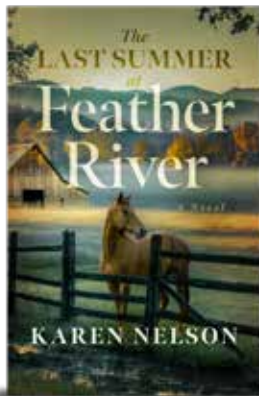
The cast's personal foibles are mined for humor. For example, Faye is an introvert, to the extent that no one on her team thinks that the author's weekend is a good idea. A pedantic superfan corrects people's grammar, and a publicist cares more about her cat's online popularity than she does about her work. Winking references flesh out the publishing industry, as do interludes focusing on Faye's agent and editor; gossipy group texts also have a situating effect. Practical discussions about writing as a craft fold into the story as well, resulting in perceptive metafiction.

Less a whodunit than a consideration of the dark psychological fissures that surface when people's loyalties are tested and their love is misdirected, the novel trades between the murder storyline and its lighthearted skewering of authors' dependency on their readers and readers' outsized expectations. The desperate measures that fragile Faye takes to cover up her lies make the story fascinating.

In the entertaining novel *The Author Weekend*, a bestselling novelist's fan retreat unravels because of unexpected crimes.

KAREN RIGBY

MYSTERY



**The Last Summer at Feather River**

Karen Nelson, Sibylline Press (MAY 19)  
Softcover \$20 (312pp), 979-889740018-8

In Karen Nelson’s coming-of-age novel *The Last Summer at Feather River*, a woman works to save her grandfather’s failing ranch.

In the summer of 1993, twelve-year-old Brooke navigates adolescent friendships and romance at Feather River Ranch, where her grandfather runs a summer camp. It’s a cozy, nostalgic atmosphere, wherein campers read *Nancy Drew*, swim in the lake, and drag their sleeping bags under the stars. She also faces too-grown-up concerns: her adolescent crushes escalate toward skinny dipping and physical intimacy.

Then a terrible incident cuts Brooke’s mostly idyllic summer short, and the camp is shuttered. Ten years later, Brooke returns to tend to the horses and help her aging grandfather with chores. She reconnects with a former camper, rekindles her love of riding, and uncovers the truth behind the accident, all while trying to set circumstances right.

Ranch life is well fleshed out in terms of the complexities of raising and riding horses, though some of the prose is overwrought, as with “Laugh lines radiated from the corners of his eyes and his weathered face looked as if the years of sun, wind and outdoor work had preserved him like a coat of varnish.” But Brooke’s family relationships and memories are attended to in a tension-sustaining manner: she struggles with her grandfather, mother, Feather River Ranch, and concerns about the accident that shut down the camp, all at once. The details of the critical summer are revealed piece by piece, with new information coming both through flashbacks and present-day revelations.

In the sometimes cozy, sometimes foreboding coming-of-age novel *The Last Summer at Feather River*, a woman returns to her grandfather’s ranch to learn the truth about her past.

HANNAH PEARSON

ROMANCE



**The Perilous Life of Jade Yeo**

Zen Cho, Homeward Books (JUN 16)  
Softcover \$18 (112pp), 979-899942492-1

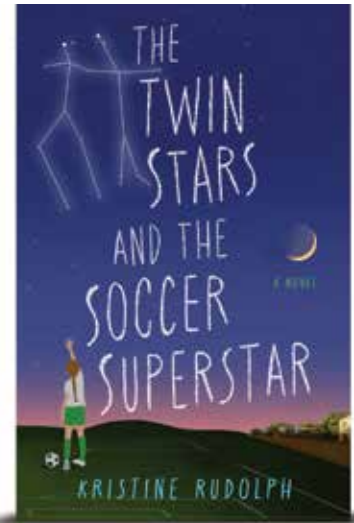
Zen Cho’s *The Perilous Life of Jade Yeo* is a witty historical romance about an up-and-coming writer’s entanglement with a literary legend in 1920s England.

Through sharp, lively diary entries, Jade recounts how a negative book review of famed author Sebastian Hardie led to an affair with the writer himself. Intrigued by her candor and charm, Hardie invites Jade to a party teeming with members of the British literary elite, including Jade’s publisher, Ravi. When Hardie explains the terms of his “modern” marriage and attempts to seduce Jade, she refuses—only to relent after a chance encounter in Paris a month later. Back in London and pregnant with Hardie’s child, Jade realizes her unrequited feelings for Ravi and moves into a convalescent home for women to await the birth. There, a psychiatric patient encourages Jade to reconnect with the love of her life before it’s too late.

The brief chapters assume a breathless pace. Key scenes, as of Jade sharing the news of her pregnancy, are truncated, as is Jade’s time with her true love interest, short shrifting their mutual affection. But the prose is well-stylized, paying homage to the period with wit, as with the observation: “When I am old, I shall become an itinerant poet and wear a straw hat and never worry about love again.” Frequent references to the Brontë sisters and Charles Dickens pay further tribute to classic English literature, while the book’s epistolary structure highlights Jade’s clever point of view and penchant for humor: “Cabbage is the most unexciting vegetable.”

*The Perilous Life of Jade Yeo* is a charming, sharp-witted historical romance novel set in Bloomsbury-era London.

HANNAH PEARSON



Children’s—Juvenile Fiction

**THE TWIN STARS AND THE SOCCER SUPERSTAR**  
A Novel

Kristine Rudolph  
208 pages, \$13.99,  
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“A taut mystery fueled by its well-drawn characters’ self-reflection and emotional depth.”

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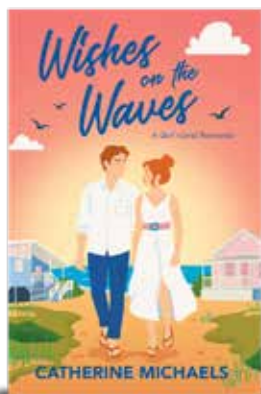
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kristinerudolph.com



## ROMANCE



## Wishes on the Waves

Catherine Michaels, Cool Breeze Books (MAY 5) Softcover \$15.99 (300pp) 978-0-9983372-5-8

In Catherine Michaels's sweet romance novel *Wishes on the Waves*, two love-scarred single parents discover that they still have the capacity for connection.

In an island setting marked by sea air and the lively antics of children, zealous friends, and family members, Annie, the third-generation owner of a local shop, spends her days trying to honor the legacy of her family. Her husband is deceased; she is raising their son, Dawson, alone, as family and friends flit around her.

Then a handsome stranger, Cal—who turns out to be Annie's new neighbor—saves Dawson from being mowed down by a speeding golf cart. A blocked writer, Cal seeks refuge on the island, hoping to finish his latest book and reconnect with his thirteen-year-old daughter after a difficult divorce. Past loves and present responsibilities impact the couple's burgeoning relationship. Still, they take hesitant steps forward, each facing their fears around parenting, lost love, and new trust.

The blossoming romance proceeds via kayaking dates, barbecues, and opportunities for families to grow and bond. The couple's extensive thoughts about each other's strength and fortitude slow the pacing, while supporting characters help to keep the story lively, including a spirited barista, Cal's standoffish daughter, Annie's earnest son, and Cal's controlling ex-wife, who variously contribute comic relief and initiate conflicts.

As the book progresses, Annie and Cal have intimate conversations and develop inside jokes, trust growing between them. Their children have honest reactions to their bond, revealing trauma and the difficulties of new people being introduced into their lives. Themes of blending families are handled with grace and emotional intelligence that is considerate of children's instincts.

In the thoughtful contemporary romance novel *Wishes on the Waves*, fun, family, and beach inform a mature love connection between two single parents.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH

## SCIENCE FICTION



## Absence

Andrew Dana Hudson, Soho Press (MAY 5) Hardcover \$29 (448pp), 978-1-64129-758-5

In Andrew Dana Hudson's unsettling science fiction novel *Absence*, unexplained disappearances strain people's faith in their institutions and reality.

In this future setting, the phenomenon of popping, or sudden vanishings marked by a sharp sound, breeds panic, violence, and spiritual fervor. Federal agents investigate incidents across the thinning nation. In rural Kansas, agents Shonda and Harvey are assigned to assess Gabriela, a woman who claims to have returned after multiple pops into other worlds. Meanwhile, new disappearances unsettle people, intensifying the scrutiny of Gabriela's account.

The prose is direct, controlled, and driven by incremental revelations. Sparing descriptions lead to a subdued atmosphere. Indeed, as it is built on interviews, field reports, and debates, this speculative story has a bureaucratic texture. As such, popping is seen through the lens of civic responses to it and the communal strain it leaves. There are extended discussions of theory and the credibility of people's accounts, diffusing the tension of the book's middle stretch. Moments of confrontation punctuate Harvey's investigation, though these spikes in conflict do not offset the story's deliberate pace in full.

Harvey, whose family vanished, is a composed hero who hides his grief behind his analytical focus. At his opposite, Shonda is guarded, and their dynamic shifts as the novel progresses and their professional identities shift. Gabriela herself is a persistent question mark, forcing others to confront their private convictions about absence and return. Beyond this central trio, society is seen to adapt to the popping, adopting new surveillance methods and experiencing altered relationship norms. Guarded scenes of public life reinforce the scale of the losses without diverting attention from Harvey's investigation.

A measured meditation on belief and institutional strains, this intriguing science fiction novel focuses on a government agent who searches for answers within a vanishing community.

BRANDON PAWLICKI

## SCIENCE FICTION



## The Coffin of Honey

Geoffrey D. Morrison, Coach House Books (MAY 12) Softcover \$18.95 (304pp) 978-1-55245-518-0

What is sweet can also immobilize you in Geoffrey D. Morrison's alarming, wondrous speculative novel *The Coffin of Honey*, a searing indictment of capitalist destruction wrapped in the pleasures of a first contact tale.

Amid the uneasy peace following a global war between capitalists and communards, interplanetary transport orbs appear. They open themselves to "the ambivalent and the unexpected" who yearn, inside, for fairer worlds—who have some innate sense of the better realms just beyond the veil. Stepping into their opened doors, these people become visitors in alien settings, walking among giant geode shards or singing under pink and yellow moons. It's a transformative experience for each—and something that the jealous hordes on Earth want to either experience for themselves or control. Indeed, those in power seek ways to exploit the distant planets for profit.

Narrated through official, redacted reports and academic responses sprinkled among particular observations, the story is centered by three people: the swimmers' first guest, a distant poet witness, and a surfer spy for "a garrison state premised on spite." The spy, who moves "through the world smelling cold steel and spilled blood," is ill-aware of his own flailing villainy. The poet—depleted; worried that poetry is "graveyards, dead princesses, ossified records of lost time"—finds reason to hope. And the first guest, as was always his truest ambition, comes to represent all who desire equanimity and want to move beyond.

The prose is elegant, philosophical, and introspective, though also pocked with reminders of human corruption. Indeed, as righteous vigor is expressed by those on all sides in reaction to the silent messengers from beyond, it is filtered through varying perspectives with skill: Many remain cynical; some nurture fresh dreams.

In the troubled future, a select few humans are given glimpses of interplanetary existence in the stimulating speculative novel *The Coffin of Honey*.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

## SHORT STORIES



## Lafferty, Looking for Love

Dennis McFadden, Cornerstone Press  
(APR 14) Softcover \$24.95 (220pp)  
978-1-968148-43-0

In Dennis McFadden's charming short story collection *Lafferty, Looking for Love*, an Irish ne'er-do-well gets himself into all sorts of trouble.

Lafferty is disinclined to overlook potential damsels in distress to whom he might bring comfort—or vice versa—despite the potential consequences. Always behind on the rent, with a weakness for drink and betting on horses, he is also forever scheming to redeem himself—either with his wife, Peggy, who funds their home and the car he drives, or with the latest woman who catches his eye. His hilarious misadventures take him from pubs to beds, graveyards, and pants-free gallivanting around the neighborhood. He is often on the run from angry husbands, boy-friends, and debtors, his poor judgment threatening to produce fatal consequences.

Their prose lilting and conversational, the stories build upon one another well. Moira, the girl with midnight hair and creamy skin from the first story, reappears, as do an antique ring and a rare coin that Lafferty covets and loses. Bemused descriptions of the women Lafferty meets and the places he visits are unflattering, yet he only sees hidden beauty, and his intentions are nothing short of heroic.

Dark humor is used to poke fun at Lafferty's deluded fantasies of grandeur and faulty logic as he eternally flirts with disaster. His flaws may be obvious to some, but they are not to him. He grows older, but not wiser. His failures to notice the telltale signs of impending doom or identify women who seem familiar fuel his downfall in amusing ways.

In the delightful novel in stories *Lafferty, Looking for Love*, interwoven black-comedy escapades reveal the folly of instant gratification for a man with much to learn.

WENDY HINMAN

## SHORT STORIES



## The Wallet and Other Thefts Stories

Kristen Gleason, Fonograf Editions (MAY 5)  
Softcover \$17.99 (183pp)  
978-1-964499-67-3

The strange and surreal take center stage in Kristen Gleason's beguiling short story collection *The Wallet and Other Thefts*.

The characters are often confused or detached, estranged observers of garden workers or weddings. In "The Wallet," an unnamed protagonist refuses to accept a found wallet, though the evidence indicates it could belong to them, leading to a fascinating series of questions and observations.

The prose is elusive and elliptical, making its points through the absence of expected descriptions and narrative turns. For example, when twins look at one narrator, they smile "like two nurses," and this slanted, oblique observation proves apt and memorable. Elsewhere, a waiter is said to be "always away but never sufficiently gone." Askew and entertaining humor appears in scenes of a girl announcing, with no warning or context, "We have a new Pope!" The girl, who has huge glasses and eyes, is said to have the look "of a wild goldfish caught between two rough fingers." And in "The End of the Party," the narrator's wife whispers to him while watching a film, "Oh! I think I know this director... *psychically*."

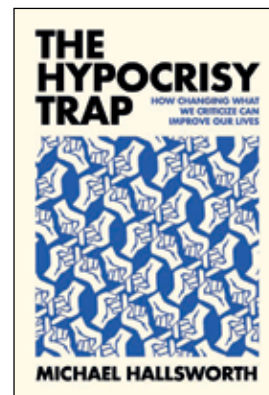
Surreal elements provide imaginative sparks, as with the living boats in "Mumbai" and bowls that grow in bodies in "Monument." The bowls are one of several ideas that pop up across more than one story, resulting in subtle links that enhance the book's overarching sense of otherworldliness. Other stories feature ideas that are less fantastic but no less intriguing, as with a place where uninvited guests are permitted to attend weddings after midnight, but only if they wear a costume.

*The Wallet and Other Thefts* is a weird, wonderful collection of slipstream-style short stories.

PETER DABBENE

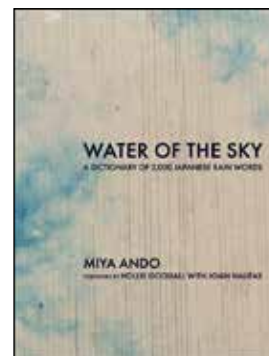


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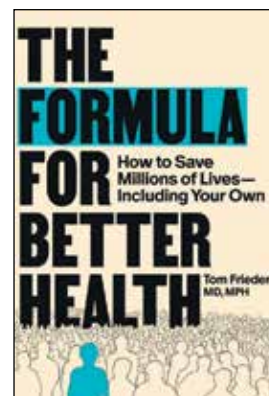
"Bracing, insightful, and quietly optimistic."

—Daniel H. Pink, #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *Drive*



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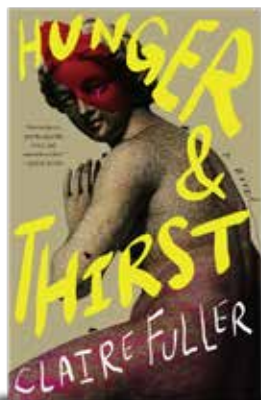
—Kirkus Reviews



"Clear solutions for today's deadliest health threats."

—Elizabeth Kolbert, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *The Sixth Extinction*

## THRILLER



## ★ Hunger and Thirst

Claire Fuller, Tin House (JUN 2)

Hardcover \$28 (320pp), 978-1-963108-72-9

In Claire Fuller's haunting thriller *Hunger and Thirst*, a teenager's isolation in a decrepit, abandoned house coincides with a grisly murder.

In the summer of 1987, sixteen-year-old Ursula moves from foster homes and a halfway house to the Underwood, a large, decaying house. Her coworker, Vince, whose upbringing makes Ursula wonder what her life would have been like if she'd been adopted, is a squatter there. Thereafter, Ursula's emotional state is depicted through her reactions to the Underwood, which she variously worries is haunted and sees as a sanctuary. This tangling up of Ursula's well-being with the house is masterful and macabre.

Vince's girlfriend, Sue, is an outspoken feminist who wants to be a film director. Socially awkward Ursula finds comfort in Sue's confidence and ambition. And while Sue begrudges her mother, Anita, for having too many children, Ursula takes comfort in Anita's maternal nature.

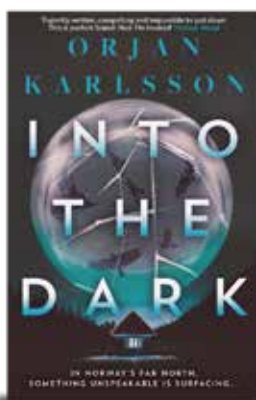
Indeed, Ursula's yearning for a family punctuates each scene, both sad and hopeful: "They swept me up into their family, a new arrival ... welcomed and accepted." Ursula also grows to care for Sue's older brother, Raymond, who is quiet and odd.

Then Ursula's and Sue's desires start to clash, and the novel takes a darker turn. Indeed, vignettes from a present-day documentary reveal that one of their coworkers was murdered, and that no one knows how Ursula was involved. Other secondary cast members act as foils to Ursula; their complicated relationships are as mysterious as the components of the murder. The heightened drama and tension carry through to the book's gratifying ending.

In the melancholy mystery novel *Hunger and Thirst*, an orphaned teenager attempts to fit in, with deadly consequences when she fails.

LEAH BLOCK

## THRILLER



## Into the Dark

The Arctic Mysteries Series

Ørjan Karlsson, Ian Giles (Translator)

Orenda Books (MAY 5) Softcover \$16.99 (276pp), 978-1-917764-04-9

Set in the hinterlands of Norway just above the Arctic Circle, Ørjan Karlsson's novel *Into the Dark* is both a literal and figurative chiller about a hunt for a deranged serial killer.

In this series-continuing title, Jakob, a police detective, feels haunted, though he has little time for healing. The mutilated body of a photographer washes up in the harbor of Kjerringøy peninsula; he and his crew are also investigating a wellness retreat for the rich and powerful that may be concealing appalling abuse. A suspicious suicide may be connected to these goings-on, too.

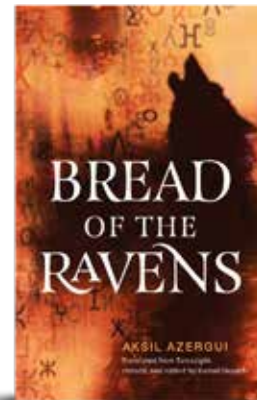
The storytelling is propulsive as Jakob and his colleagues draw closer to the truth. Multi-layered characterizations further contribute to the suspense, as all among the cast are dealing with emotional and physical pains. Jakob, a widower, juggles his personal life with his sense of duty; he gets involved with a crime reporter, and his partner Noora, who is recovering from wounds suffered in the line of duty, struggles to overcome her PTSD, taking pills to ward off her pain. Two junior detectives, Armann and Fine, contribute their points of view, too, revealing their complicated home lives and adding to the narrative's breadth and depth.

The setting is developed in terms of its isolated cabins, misty seashores, and dense forests, and the eerie autumnal atmosphere accentuates the book's more shocking moments well. Psychological terror and body horror are hinted at and handled with understated sensitivity.

Concluding with a surprising revelation and some unresolved threads that will no doubt be addressed in future installments, *Into the Dark* is a gripping thriller that is narrated with intellectual skill and visceral details.

HO LIN

## TRANSLATIONS



## Bread of the Ravens

Aksil Azergui, Hamid Ouyachi (Translator)

Georgetown University Press (JUN 2)  
Softcover \$19.95 (112pp)  
978-1-64712-679-7

An armed resistance breaks out in the mountains, and a journalist makes plans to document the stories of those fighting, in Aksil Azergui's rousing novel *Bread of the Ravens*, a literary exploration of life amid the indigenous Amazigh people of North Africa.

An unnamed journalist writes a newspaper article criticizing the government. Before the papers can be distributed, the military destroys all copies. The journalist, still committed to his mission, makes his way to the mountains. When he is stopped at a checkpoint, he is recognized, beaten, and imprisoned.

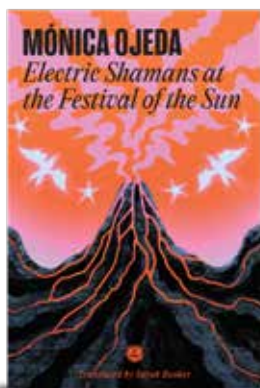
Between bouts of torture, the journalist takes solace in his dreams. In them, he searches the villages for a subject. But writing, for the mountain people, among whom oral traditions reign, has been declared sacrilegious; no one is willing to participate: "they monitored the sky and earth. They monitored their own words and their hand gestures. They live in another prison, without walls, but nothing like the one I knew."

Before the journalist is imprisoned, his words exhort resistance. As the novel continues, though, he endures physical and mental torment and becomes more melancholy and alienated from himself. His bouts of consciousness are brief, and he becomes "tired of fighting an enemy I cannot defeat alone. I am homesick and yearning for the beauty of a smile. I am trapped in this darkness."

The novel brings to the forefront the Amazigh poetic tradition—descriptive, infused with emotion, and evocative of place. Its scenes are rendered with clarity, even amid dream sequences. The realities of political imprisonment are made clear, though the journalist's escapist fantasies linger the longest.

*Bread of the Ravens* is a short, impactful novel about censorship and political repression.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH



## Electric Shamans at the Festival of the Sun

Mónica Ojeda, Sarah Booker (Translator)  
Coffee House Press (MAY 12) Softcover \$20  
(264pp), 978-1-56689-755-6

Two friends have a transformative experience in Mónica Ojeda's psychedelic horror novel *Electric Shamans at the Festival of the Sun*.

Nicole and Noa run away to Chimborazo to attend Solar Noise, an “experimental music festival” in the Andean páramo—a perfect place to escape the violence of their regular lives. While there, they join up with a drummer, Pamela, a musician, Pedro, and a dancer, Mario. Eight days of psychedelic drugs, music, mosh pits, and thunderstorms follow, making way for personal transformation. Indeed, each person uses their connection to the music to imagine a world different from the one in which they live.

The language is lyrical, as when the songstresses speak in flowing, poetic lines to tell stories of nature and legends. Even the descriptions of the inescapable violence of men and nature are measured, relaying action with clarity and emotionality.

Experiencing a gradual untethering from physical reality, the characters take philosophical views of love, friendship, music, and dance as a way to transmute emotion. Each is distinctive, telling their stories about celebrating the solstice at Solar Noise in terms of their relationships to themselves and to each other.

Noa is the only character who does not speak for herself. She is known through the others' observations of her and the changes she undergoes: “Noa found in music a language that helped her strengthen her love of life, a language I'd only found in our friendship.” Her metamorphosis is so complete that it reaches back to the past and toward the future. And around her, people's voices build upon one another in a chorus until a choice must be made.

*Electric Shamans at the Festival of the Sun* is a polyphonic, meditative novel about love, violence, fear, and courage.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH



## ★ Tata

Valérie Perrin, Hildegard Serle  
(Translator), Europa Editions (JUN 23)  
Hardcover \$30 (592pp), 979-888966182-5

Valérie Perrin's *Tata* is a bewitching novel about found family and the transformative power of love.

Agnes mistook her Aunt Colette for being a “simple and linear” woman whose life was “devoid of mystery.” She loved her summer visits to Gueugnon, where Colette, a favorite fan among the local football club, repaired shoes, but her musician parents seemed to lead more glittering lives. However, when Agnes—now a famous film director navigating divorce—receives word that her aunt, who was buried three years ago, just died, her preconceptions of Colette's “ordinary” life burst. Sent “on the most extraordinary voyage” to learn who her aunt's doppelgänger was, she uncovers a multitude of secrets that also explode her perceptions of herself and her family's past.

As the book progresses, Agnes proves to be “the child of several stories. Powerful stories.” Her aunt sacrificed a bigger future so that her father could become a concert pianist; her grandparents sacrificed it all so that her mother could live through the Holocaust; and her aunt sacrificed her dearest loves to protect others' senses of propriety and, later, a dear friend's life. She learns more about her childhood friends while searching, too, including about Lyèce, whose “wings [were] clipped one Wednesday afternoon” by a sexual predator, prompting several townspeople to contemplate homicide on the Riviera. Lyèce, though, blossoms toward love as truths are uncovered—one of many to find a second chance among unburied facts.

Perrin has a gift for excavating enchantments from the everyday, and does so here with her generous tale of circus girls, fated meet-cutes by piano, escaped monkeys, and hidden pregnancies. Villains lurk, proving that “hatred and madness are ageless,” but among the magnificent pages of *Tata*, love—among friends, family members, and parents by proxy—proves more lasting.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER



## ★ The Home of the Drowned

Elin Anna Labba, Elizabeth Clark Wessel  
(Translator), University of Minnesota Press  
(JUN 2) Hardcover \$28.95 (305pp)  
978-1-5179-1895-8

About home and migration in the face of displacement, Elin Anna Labba's haunting, elegant novel *The Home of the Drowned* memorializes indigenous Sámi culture in Lapland.

Three Sámi women—Ingá; her mother, Rávdná; and her Aunt Ánne—confront the devastation of their flooded homeland as they are forced to relocate on repeat. Rávdná exhibits fierce determination to build a permanent home, but her attempts to secure a housing loan are rebuffed. She calls in a reporter who describes her community as “Northern Sweden's East End.”

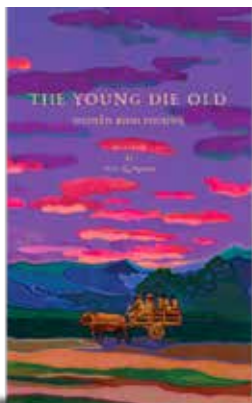
Perpetuated hegemonic violence is rendered in subtle terms herein: being nomadic and being forced to be nomadic are different, the book notes. Anne bears the symbolic burden through grief for her deceased daughter and for all that the Sámi lost due to economic expansion, colonization, and modernity. Ingá bears witness, heeding the inexorable call of the future even as she mourns the past, symbolized by the drowning of her father's grave.

Balance and human resilience are throughlines in this story about a community redefining its relationship with nature. The lake made by the dam is luminous, omnipresent, and menacing throughout, representing polysemous meanings. Against this backdrop, the disappearance of entire Sámi villages is heartrending. Still, the Sámi's relationship with land is witnessed in their daily lives: someone rescues a rabbit litter; people follow the reindeer migration. Elements of Sámi culture, including makeshift huts, clothing, handicrafts, fishing life, and joik singing showcased by interspersed prose-poems, are incorporated in a seamless manner, commemorating their vitality within the community.

*The Home of the Drowned* is an exultant, elegiac novel about the healing power of home, seen through a community's experiences in the wake of environmental challenges.

ELAINE CHIEW

## TRANSLATIONS



## The Young Die Old

Nguyen Binh Phuong, Khai Q. Nguyen (Translator), Major Books (JUN 30) Softcover \$20 (250pp), 978-1-917233-09-5

Nguyen Binh Phuong's earthy and fabulistic novel *The Young Die Old* is a multigenerational story set in Phan, a Vietnamese village.

The novel is a composite of exciting sketches involving Phan's residents, who are identified by their defining roles. One woman is a gossip; a teacher is rumored to have birthed babies who aged at incredible speed; a man is a martial arts expert. As these characters tumble into one another through curses, arguments, and sexual encounters, the village is fleshed out as a fraught collective of misfits. Nightmarish scenarios befall some of them: a woman turns into a snake; a banyan tree reclaims the scattered dead.

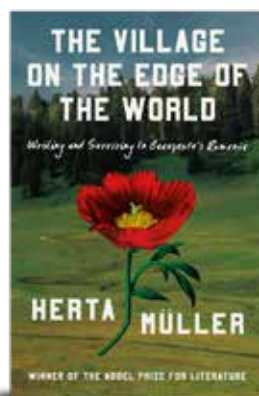
Because of his wealth and reclusive wife, Trong provokes speculation and envy in Phan. As he and his wife raise their maladapted son Liêm there, fires, floods, and other harbingers of change move in the backdrop. Later, Liêm, who is rumored to possess a buried treasure, has his own children, including a promiscuous daughter and a hot-tempered son. And later still, a veteran, the Man, returns to Phan by wagon, reflecting on his memories, including of fighting in the jungle.

Sharp contrasts mark the prose, which is blunt when it comes to exploring people's strained relationships but fertile with symbolism and delicate nature imagery elsewhere. Here, grass "would turn into a galaxy of thousands of shiny pearls made of small droplets of mist." As the plot splinters between murky, loose incidents that showcase the townspeople's greed and malaise and unexplained, haunting phenomena, an allegory about a postwar society is developed. In Phan, ancestral ties break, and the future feels distant.

Set in Vietnam, *The Young Die Old* is a revealing work of magical realism focused on the colorful residents of a troubled village.

KAREN RIGBY

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY &amp; MEMOIR



## The Village on the Edge of the World

Writing and Surviving in Ceausescu's Romania

Herta Müller, Kate McNaughton (Translator), Pegasus Books (MAY 5) Hardcover \$29.95 (256pp) 979-889710082-8

A harrowing memoir about artistic integrity under state repression, *The Village on the Edge of the World* collects Nobel Prize-winning novelist Herta Müller's reflections.

Müller grew up in a German-speaking Romanian household fissured by the horrors of World War II and postwar communist repression. Her father served in the Waffen-SS; her mother was one of tens of thousands deported to a Soviet labor camp as a teenager. Village life, Müller explains, was full of aching loneliness and isolation, but also sparked her first interests in language and storytelling.

In her adulthood, Müller migrated to the city and befriended like-minded artists and writers. There, she experienced the full brunt of the police state's manufactured paranoia. Her apartment was bugged; she was tormented for declining to be an informant; her friends, including Rolf Bessert, were manipulated into madness or suicide by the secret police; and she faced brutal interrogation and near-constant psychological intimidation. Amid these soul-dampening trials, though, she cultivated inner resilience, yearning to express the truths of her experiences through art.

Because the book is a collection of Müller's previous writings, built on conversations with her editor, Angelika Klammer, it unfolds in a nonlinear, associative manner, resulting in some missed dramatic progressions. Still, its prose strikes a winning balance between sober hindsight and raw directness. Müller's portrayal of paranoia is a particular triumph—a horrifying portrait of the Ceausescu regime's efforts to stymie all forms of private dissent and expression.

*The Village on the Edge of the World* is a masterful memoir that meditates on art, legacy, and the endurance of the human spirit.

ISAAC RANDEL

## BIOGRAPHY



## Sade's Wife

The Woman Behind the Marquis

Margaret Crosland, Pushkin Press Classics (APR 28) Softcover \$16.95 (176pp) 978-1-80533-062-2

Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil, the wife of the infamous French writer Marquis de Sade, is the subject of Margaret Crosland's illuminating biography *Sade's Wife*.

De Montreuil's 1763 betrothal to the marquis was orchestrated by her mother, Madame de Montreuil, who had connections to France's elite. What seemed a suitable arrangement benefiting both pious de Montreuil and the wayward, irreverent marquis soon became the backdrop for a maelstrom of licentious behaviors and the foundation for unbalanced wedlock.

The marquis's first imprisonment occurred mere months after their wedding; the slew of incarcerations that followed lasted for most of the couple's marriage. Through regular epistolary contact, the unwitting marquise assured her husband of her eternal devotion. She also arranged for him to receive the supplies that fueled his notorious collection of explicit, pornographic, and blasphemous works.

The book gives voice and form to de Montreuil, who played an underacknowledged role in supporting and corralling the marquis's extreme disregard for the boundaries of social and sexual norms. Indeed, it declares that "she was the only one who listened to him and tried to understand him." Still, its arguments are built on a relative lack of source material—pieced together from letters between the two, as well letters to lawyers and other family members. It sometimes asks more questions than it answers with regard to the marquise's motivations and the temperament that permeates the tone of her writings. Resilience is the cornerstone of the book's profile of the marquise; her acceptance of her husband, despite his legion faults, colors this fascinating, if often infuriating, study in marital acquiescence.

The compelling biography *Sade's Wife* is about the puzzling fidelity of the wife of a most scandalous French libertine.

RYAN PRADO



## The Seasonal Pantry

### 75 Recipes to Waste Less and Enjoy More

Benoît Castel, Tra Publishing (MAY 12)  
Hardcover \$29 (220pp), 978-1-962098-37-3

Pastry chef Benoît Castel's inviting cookbook *The Seasonal Pantry* combines organic garden produce with a sustainable perspective.

Castel's garden-to-table ethos involves seasonal eating and capturing the bounty of harvests by drying, pickling, or preserving produce to enjoy at a later date. "That's the spirit of my pantry," he explains. "Cooking high-quality ingredients for future use without wasting a crumb." Making vegetable broth is a good reason to save peelings. Baking croutons and Melba toast extends the life of stale bread. Old loaves can be ground to make the base of new ones; 30 percent of Castel's unsold bread is thus reused. This approach is "not revolutionary," he remarks, but rather "a return to common sense."

The book's versatile pastry recipes are a foundation for a range of dishes. A similar base could produce a quiche or a roasted apricot "pizza." Choux dough might be turned into profiteroles or ham-and-greens-stuffed buns topped with Parmesan. The steps are simple and reassuring, and the components and flavors are adaptable. Plant-based alternatives appear, as with a method for making pumpkin seed "milk."

The close-up shots of alluring plates alternate with photographs of the garden and a table spread for convivial meals. Summer and autumn ripeness is sustained in jam, poached pears, and a rainbow of jarred vegetables. Fascinating combinations include a green tomato, raspberry, and mint jam. Dried hibiscus enlivens drinks and cakes. Sauces balance savory and sweet: an eggplant and hazelnut dip; a prune and almond hummus that contains honey, olive oil, and chickpeas. A pistachio, pumpkin seed, and white chocolate spread is a homemade take on Nutella.

The cookbook *The Seasonal Pantry* introduces an appealing repertoire of fresh, colorful, zero-waste homemade dishes.

REBECCA FOSTER



## Thursday Night Tiki Lounge

### 52 Drinks that Bring the Tropics Home

Jennifer Newens, The Collective Book Studio (MAY 19) Hardcover \$19.95 (152pp)  
978-1-68555-602-0

Jennifer Newens's tiki cocktail guide *Thursday Night Tiki Lounge* includes drinks that are sweet, sour, strong, sometimes spicy, and mostly rum-based alongside gorgeous photographs.

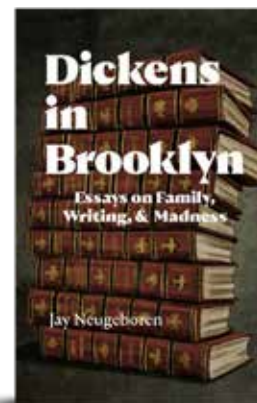
The book begins with a short history of tiki's boom after the Great Depression, its zenith in the 1950s, its fall, and its subsequent comeback in the early 2000s. The oft-referenced godfathers of tiki, Donn Beach of Don the Beachcomber bar and Vic Bergeron of Trader Vic's, are placed in the context of a tiki tradition that pulls most from Polynesian and Caribbean traditions. Tropical fruit that can be found year-round stars in the text in concession to home mixologists, while the book's early sections cover types of rum, mixing methods, glasses, garnishes, and hardware in thorough preparation for the recipes that follow.

Clear, attractive formatting makes it easy to move between reading and preparation, and each recipe is designed for a single drink. A quippy explanation prefaces each recipe and speaks to a drink's origin. Sharp photographs incorporate bright wheels of lime, light condensation on glasses, juices in vivid colors, and an array of expressive tikiware.

The book also features recipes for homemade grenadine, cream of coconut, and unusual simple syrups to add to the mixologists' repertoires. Traditional favorites including the Zombie, the Fog Cutter, the Bahama Mama, and Planter's Punch run next to the Fat Sailor, the Missionary's Downfall, and the Cobra's Fang, set to become new favorites. Most of the cocktails are strongly boozy; all are fun for celebrating a Thursday night.

Beautiful to look at and delicious to drink, the recipes in *Thursday Night Tiki Lounge* will make a fun tropical addition to any bartending library.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH



## Dickens in Brooklyn

### Essays on Family, Writing, & Madness

Jay Neugeboren, EastOver Press (APR 27)  
Softcover \$19.99 (265pp)  
978-1-958094-64-8

These fascinating, wide-ranging autobiographical essays are about civil rights, family, literature, and mental illness.

Neugeboren was raised by a strong but difficult mother and a depressed, half-blind father. In covering this, the book mixes poignant references to Charles Dickens's novels into Neugeboren's complex thoughts about his family and literary musings. In "Martha Foley's Granddaughters," Neugeboren explains his early struggles to publish his work and depicts his friendship with a brilliant, reclusive editor who shaped an era in American literature. In another essay, an imaginary posthumous conversation with Oliver Sacks includes captivating insights on the creative process.

Several essays focus on Neugeboren's brother Robert, who was institutionalized for most of his life after varying diagnoses of mental illness. With nuanced sensitivity, Neugeboren describes Robert as a "mirror" of himself and ponders what his brother taught him about resilience, courage, humor, and anger.

Social and political topics are also addressed. "My Cousin Many" summarizes philosophical discussions with a long-lost relative from Slovakia who survived Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen. "Riding with the Hourlies" is a lively account of Neugeboren's short stint as a management trainee at a Chevrolet plant in Indianapolis—work marked by "mundane insanity" that exposed him to systemic racism in the treatment of hourly workers. "Samaritan at Camp" chronicles his experiences as a Jewish teenager, and "One-on-One" recounts a pickup basketball game with his son, illustrating the challenges of single parenting and his admiration for the sacrifices mothers make. Across this remarkable variety of topics, the prose remains engrossing and animated, marked by insightful candor.

*Dickens in Brooklyn* is a scintillating personal essay collection concerned with pivotal moments and literary and social themes.

KRISTEN RABE

HISTORY



★ **Trinity**  
An Illustrated History of the  
World's First Atomic Test

Emily Seyl, Paul Ziomek (Illustrator)  
University of Chicago Press (MAY 15)  
Hardcover \$39 (344pp)  
978-0-226-84840-2

The heavens light up in Emily Seyl and Paul Ziomek's photographic history *Trinity*, which presents the testing of the first atomic bomb in a way heretofore unknown.

In 1945, the use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki astonished the general public; such catastrophic destruction didn't seem possible. But as early as 1938, scientists had predicted the vast capabilities of nuclear energy and its particular potential for military applications. In response, the Western powers formed a group whose aim was to research, develop, and test an atomic weapon. The members of the top-secret Manhattan Project trod into dangerous, uncharted territory with their monumental undertaking, which necessitated extensive, exhaustive documentation. Here, evidence of their work appears in comprehensive, stunning form.

To honor the complexity of the Manhattan Project, great care is taken to communicate the manifold, intricate procedures of the Trinity test in an inclusive, understandable fashion. Exceptional descriptions reveal the labyrinthine procedures and mind-boggling feats of logistics, forming digestible, enlightening paragraphs that respect the complexity of the operation itself.

Images of maps, schematics, laboratories, staff at work, the testing grounds, classified documents, handwritten notes, and leading-edge recording equipment can all be found within, each with its own informative caption. It is the most comprehensive visual record of the Trinity detonation ever assembled, containing restored images of the blast that have only just become public. This bounty of documentation promotes a new appreciation for the titan of human achievement that was the Trinity test.

*Trinity* is an amazing photographic history of the revolutionary test that kicked off the atomic age.

IAN DAILEY

MUSIC



**Do What You Fear Most**  
The History of the Velvet Underground

Richie Unterberger, Omnibus Press  
(JUN 16) Hardcover \$45 (816pp)  
978-1-913172-99-2

Everyone gets their flowers in *Do What You Fear Most*, Richie Unterberger's excellent history of the Velvet Underground, the beloved and iconoclastic New York rock band.

This biography of the influential band includes an exhaustive catalog of their music: four studio albums, live recordings, films, bootlegs, and selected solo work, spanning tunes from "Sunday Morning" to "Sweet Jane." Serious detective work is used to determine who played what, when, including during live shows. The book also highlights how Lou Reed's celebrated lyrics developed.

The Velvet Underground is portrayed as a tight-knit, principled group that wouldn't, or maybe couldn't, conform to people's expectations. In one rediscovered quote, singer Nico declares that the band's original lineup (Maureen Tucker, Sterling Morrison, John Cale, and Lou Reed) felt like a family that she was merely visiting. It's one of hundreds of great insights pulled from articles, books, and original interviews. The band is remembered by insiders, critics, and fans, and in horrified reviews that are a perverse delight in retrospect.

The book also includes rich original interviews with figures including Reed's first music business boss, Terry Phillips, and the funny, grudge-holding filmmaker Paul Morrissey, who worked closely with the band's first manager, Andy Warhol. Quotes from the Velvets themselves are sharp enough to pop Warhol's famous silver cloud balloons, as are insights from guitarist Doug Yule, whose pop knack smoothed out the band after Cale's departure. Band wives Bettye Kronstad and Martha Morrison also add valuable perspectives. The book has a classy, light touch regarding the band's drama and drugs, which are well documented elsewhere.

Some joys are too brief, but the short run of the Velvet Underground is well celebrated in *Do What You Fear Most*, a devout, expansive history of their music worth relishing.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS

NATURE



**Dead Bees Still Sting**  
Tales of Life at the Edge of Nature

Susan Cormier, Greystone Books (MAY 19)  
Softcover \$19.95 (272pp)  
978-1-77840-201-2

Susan Cormier's *Dead Bees Still Sting* is a poignant, often surprising collection of nature essays about rural life and beekeeping.

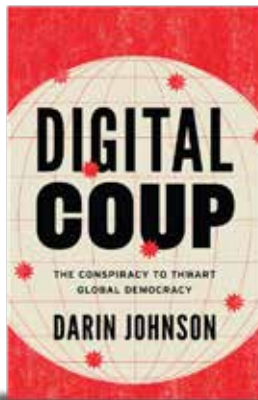
These essays concern five seasons on a small farm on the edge of suburban Vancouver. Several focus on the art of beekeeping, including the instincts that beekeepers develop over time about when a hive is thriving or beginning to fail. Also addressed are techniques for capturing a loose swarm of bees, bees' efficiency as pollinators, and bees' seeming indifference to their keepers.

The narratives are tight, suspenseful, and often humorous. In "Schrodinger's Sting," for instance, Cormier references quantum mechanics while describing an incident where a stinging insect crawled under her skirt. As the essay notes, it is pointless to retaliate against a stinging bee by poking it, but it is certainly "acceptable to yell at it."

Other farm creatures and natural features also receive attention. "Starfish" describes, in touching terms, a quail that Cormier raised from a hatchling, while "Rearview Mirror" is about attempts to capture and find a safe home for a Siamese sable domestic rabbit released into the wild. "Beyond Science" is about a beloved dog's final days, while "Bill" depicts a "stubborn curmudgeon" of an apple tree that started fruiting again after many barren years. The ancient geology of the area; changing landscapes as development spreads; and observations about human neighbors also wend into the book's meditations, which maintain an absorbing edge: "We wait for stability, for the disruptions to end—in nature, in our lives, in our human-built global systems—but that will never come. The act of existing is chaotic."

*Dead Bees Still Sting* is a delightful essay collection that celebrates nature from the vantage of life on a small farm.

KRISTEN RABE



## Digital Coup

### The Conspiracy to Thwart Global Democracy

Darin Johnson, Broadleaf Books (MAY 5)  
Hardcover \$24.98 (238pp)  
979-888983713-8

Law professor and Washington veteran Darin Johnson's urgent political science book *Digital Coup* calls for action against information warfare and foreign election interference.

Here, the digital coup represents attempts to “undermine, thwart, or overthrow democratic institutions, processes, or elections through digital means.” The book identifies authoritarian governments including Russia, China, and Iran as the main perpetrators of information warfare, the goal of which is to destabilize democracies like the United States. It also traces the origins of the digital coup, defines its tactics, examines pertinent examples, and issues proposals for democratic nations to fight back.

The sobering, provocative claim that authoritarian governments seek to weaken democracies by sowing division and casting doubt on democratic elections is well supported. Documented cases of digital warfare, including Russia's interference in the 2016 US presidential election and the misinformation campaign surrounding COVID-19, add credence to the book's central premise. In addition, the book engages with more controversial theories, as with assertions that Kamala Harris won the 2024 presidential race—a claim the book admits may or may not be true. Johnson details the “citizen-led investigation” in depth nonetheless.

The structural framework is logical, with the book first exploring the origins of the digital coup before examining such coups in action. It ends with Johnson's recommendations for democratic responses. However, internal jumps between timelines and events make the book somewhat episodic. Still, the book ably establishes information warfare as a formidable threat, building toward a clear call to action.

*Digital Coup* is an urgent, eye-opening political science book about how authoritarian governments weaponize social media to attack democracies.

HANNAH PEARSON



## Protest

### Respect It, Defend It, Use It

Annie Leonard, André Carothers  
Patagonia (APR 28) Hardcover \$30 (276pp)  
978-1-952338-33-5

Annie Leonard and André Carothers's insightful political science book *Protest* details the effects of protests throughout human history, into the present.

Through compelling photographs and descriptive historical accounts, a wide range of protests are covered, beginning with Benjamin Lay's denouncement of the Quakers in 1738 and ending with the 2025 Faith in Action protests, in which faith leaders joined immigrants at their court appearances, and the No Kings protests. Covering civil disobedience across the globe, the book argues that protesting is necessary for a healthy democracy, that there are many different ways to protest, and that protest itself protects access to free speech in the future.

Brief but powerful glances at the power of civil disobedience come via poignant images, as of Greta Thunberg being detained by Dutch officials during a protest against fossil fuels, and thorough descriptions, as of Shell No! protests in South Africa. The latter are placed in the context of the beauty and biodiversity of the region, information about which is followed by an account of the protests themselves and their outcome.

Mini essays from activists appear throughout, detailing their experiences with protesting and personalizing the book's claims about the effects of different types of activism. For instance, Isra Hirsi, a Barnard graduate who was put on disciplinary probation for protesting Columbia University's ties to Israel, advocates for community organizing and youth leadership while detailing the history of activism suppression among students: “From the fight against Jim Crow to anti-war to anti-apartheid, students have consistently shown efforts in every movement by taking up space and letting their voices be heard on campuses.”

*Protest* is a powerful political science book about the impact of different kinds of protests and the importance of protecting the right to peaceful acts of civil disobedience.

JENNIFER MAVEETY

A collection of short stories & poems focusing on life, death & trauma.

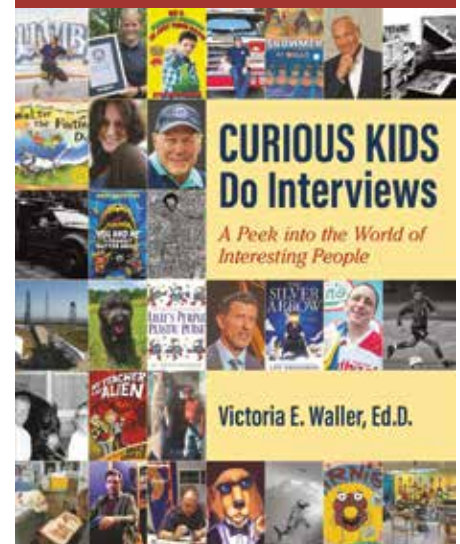


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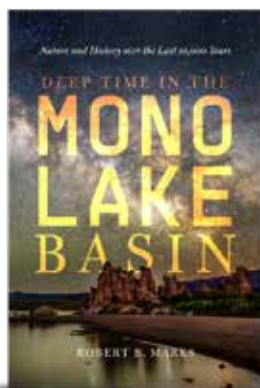


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## SCIENCE



## ★ Deep Time in the Mono Lake Basin

Nature and History over the Last 10,000 Years

Robert B. Marks, University of California Press (MAY 19) Hardcover \$28.95 (346pp) 978-0-520-42857-7

The Mono Lake Basin, at the edge of the Sierra Nevada, serves a vital ecological role as one of the largest saline terminal lakes in the West, the book asserts. Brine shrimp thrive among Mono Lake's unusual tufa towers, making it an essential habitat for threatened migratory birds, including Wilson's phalarope. The surrounding sagebrush terrain also supports pronghorn antelope and other desert grassland creatures.

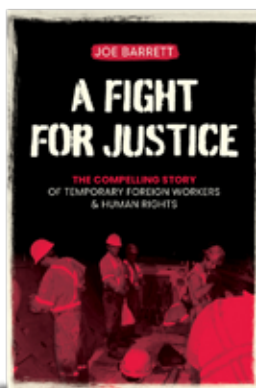
The book's in-depth history of the region includes descriptions of the ancient tectonic, glacial, and volcanic activity that contributed to its unusual geology. Also featured is an insightful discussion of the Indigenous people who occupied the region with minimal impact for thousands of years. The book argues that the significant environmental degradation caused by mining, ranching, and other development by Euro-American settlers, starting in the 1800s, paralleled the gradual displacement of Indigenous people. Further incursions in the twentieth century included the construction of hydroelectric dams and the diversion of the basin's water to Los Angeles via a 330-mile aqueduct.

The scope and detail of the research are remarkable. Hundreds of sources are cited, from leading scientific journals to census data and primary records like the handwritten accounts of "Bridgeport Tom," an Indigenous rancher whose family received a 160-acre allotment between Mono Lake and Yosemite. More than thirty maps, charts, and historical photographs are also included. And while the ecological damage recorded herein is extensive, the book closes on a hopeful note, summarizing government mandates and private actions focused on restoration, including a grazing moratorium and renewal of riparian corridors.

*Deep Time in the Mono Lake Basin* is a meticulous, fascinating natural history text about an extraordinary California lake region.

KRISTEN RABE

## SOCIAL SCIENCE



## A Fight for Justice

The Compelling Story of Temporary Foreign Workers & Human Rights

Joe Barrett, Ronsdale Press (MAY 5) Softcover \$26.95 (320pp) 978-1-55380-739-1

An intimate, human-scaled history of a landmark Canadian labor rights campaign, Joe Barrett's book offers a prescient perspective on the turbulent overlap between immigration and labor rights.

Barrett, a labor organizer, translator, and key witness, herein spotlights the stories of the migrant workers tasked with building the Canada Line SkyTrain in 2006. The construction project involved life-threatening and technical maneuvers in dangerous pressurized environments. It attracted temporary foreign workers from Costa Rica, Colombia, and Ecuador.

Upon their arrival, the workers realized that their promised pay was far below that of their Canadian and European counterparts. Frustrated with the disparity, and aided by organizers including Barrett, the workers led a successful, if fraught, unionization effort. They advocated for equitable pay rates and other standard compensations. Managers from the employer overseeing the SkyTrain project raised a bitter fight against unionization, engaging in intimidation and "sweeteners" to sabotage the workers' efforts.

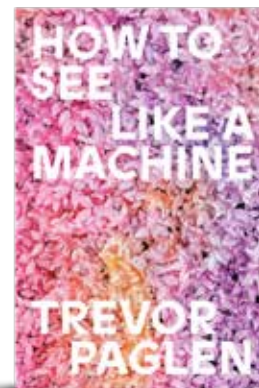
The book recounts the union's persistent legal battles for justice, culminating in a ruling by the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal that confirmed that the migrant workers were illegally underpaid, paving the way for future protections for all foreign temporary workers in Canada.

The book excels in humanizing the string of legal back-and-forths it covers, which involved multiple overlapping panels and committees. Micro-portraits of the workers result in a balanced and personal tone. The lengthy blow-by-blows of each of the union's confrontations with management sometimes dampen the story's dramatic thrust, but the book still conveys the trial's broader significance in the modern labor rights movement well.

*A Fight for Justice* is a clear, potent work of modern labor history.

ISAAC RANDEL

## TECHNOLOGY



## How to See Like a Machine

Images After AI

Trevor Paglen, Verso Books (MAY 19) Hardcover \$24.95 (192pp) 978-1-83674-216-6

Exploring humanity's relationship with, and dependence upon, technology, Trevor Paglen's prescient science text *How to See Like a Machine*, which is written from an industry insider's perspective, overviews generative AI to expose its history of psychological manipulation.

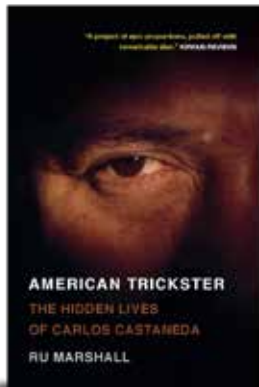
Grounded in research and interviews on the evolution of early image recognition software and content-generating algorithms, the book ably ties generative AI's manipulative abilities to Cold War-era psychological warfare methods. An interview with retired US Air Force veteran Richard Doty reveals the lengths to which governments go to keep top-secret projects under wraps, including by inventing and encouraging the spread of stories about UFOs.

Further, as computers became ubiquitous, data began to be used against people, the book states. It raises concerns about the formation of a vast digital surveillance state, reliant on image recognition software and intrusive data collection. Such digital invasions now occur at scales hitherto unimaginable, the book says, infecting domains once private and intimate, including the bedroom. Biometric statistics are measured for the purposes of raising insurance rates, the book notes, and digital footprints are analyzed to make hiring decisions; indeed, privacy in the digital age is not a straightforward matter.

With startling clarity, the book addresses the alarming implications of evolving machine visions. To explain the scope and nuances of digital surveillance threats, it notes that machines have a different way of seeing than biological organisms. Color, shape, and form give way to subcategories and labels, built upon a trove of past data to decode what an image contains. Further, this past data is shaped by human biases, which machines inherit and reinforce.

*How to See Like a Machine* is an insightful, urgent science text that critiques the emergent technologies of image recognition and generative AI.

CAITLIN CACCIATORE



## American Trickster

### The Hidden Lives of Carlos Castaneda

Ru Marshall, OR Books (MAY 5) Softcover  
\$29.95 (486pp), 978-1-68219-461-4

Ru Marshall's investigative literary biography *American Trickster* illuminates author Carlos Castaneda's life and the controversy over the truthfulness of his books.

Castaneda published a series of popular books from the late 1960s through the 1990s. His first book, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, gave him influence within literary culture. That book describes an enlightenment path that Castaneda allegedly took under the tutelage of a peyote-chewing shaman, Don Juan. Castaneda presented his books as nonfiction, but scholars later agreed that they were a patchwork of constructed narratives and borrowed ideas. This book looks back on his life in extensive detail, including his childhood in Peru, his migration to the US, and his manipulative relationships, especially with women.

Arguing that Castaneda's fabrications can be traced back to early life experiences that he sought to hide, the book analyzes his intellectual history and behavioral psychology at length. These details build a sense of empathy for Castaneda, though the book stops short of justifying his later machinations. The influence of his books aside, his personal life captured attention most, from his surrogate siring of a son to the women he deceived and the cult following he created.

The chapters are organized around time-based themes. Archival records wend into the book's erudite, often breezy prose, which sets Castaneda's story in the context of cultural and political forces, including a drug-fueled counterculture and cults of personality. How Carlos Castaneda fooled so many people with the audacity of his lies, the outsized influence it gave him in the broader culture, and the costs to many who fell prey to his deceptions are all handled in a deft manner.

*American Trickster* is the persuasive biography of an archetypal confidence man—a quintessential American tale.

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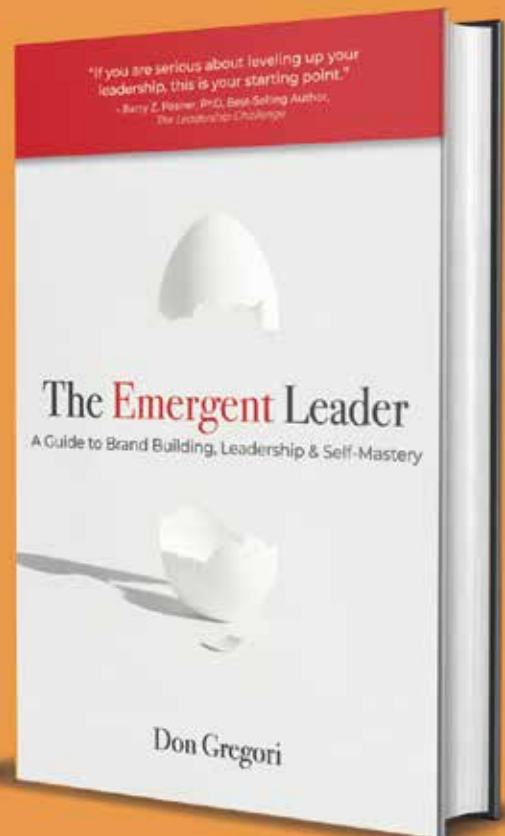
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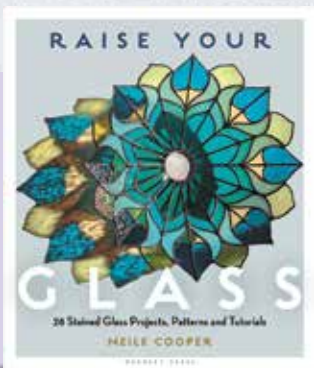
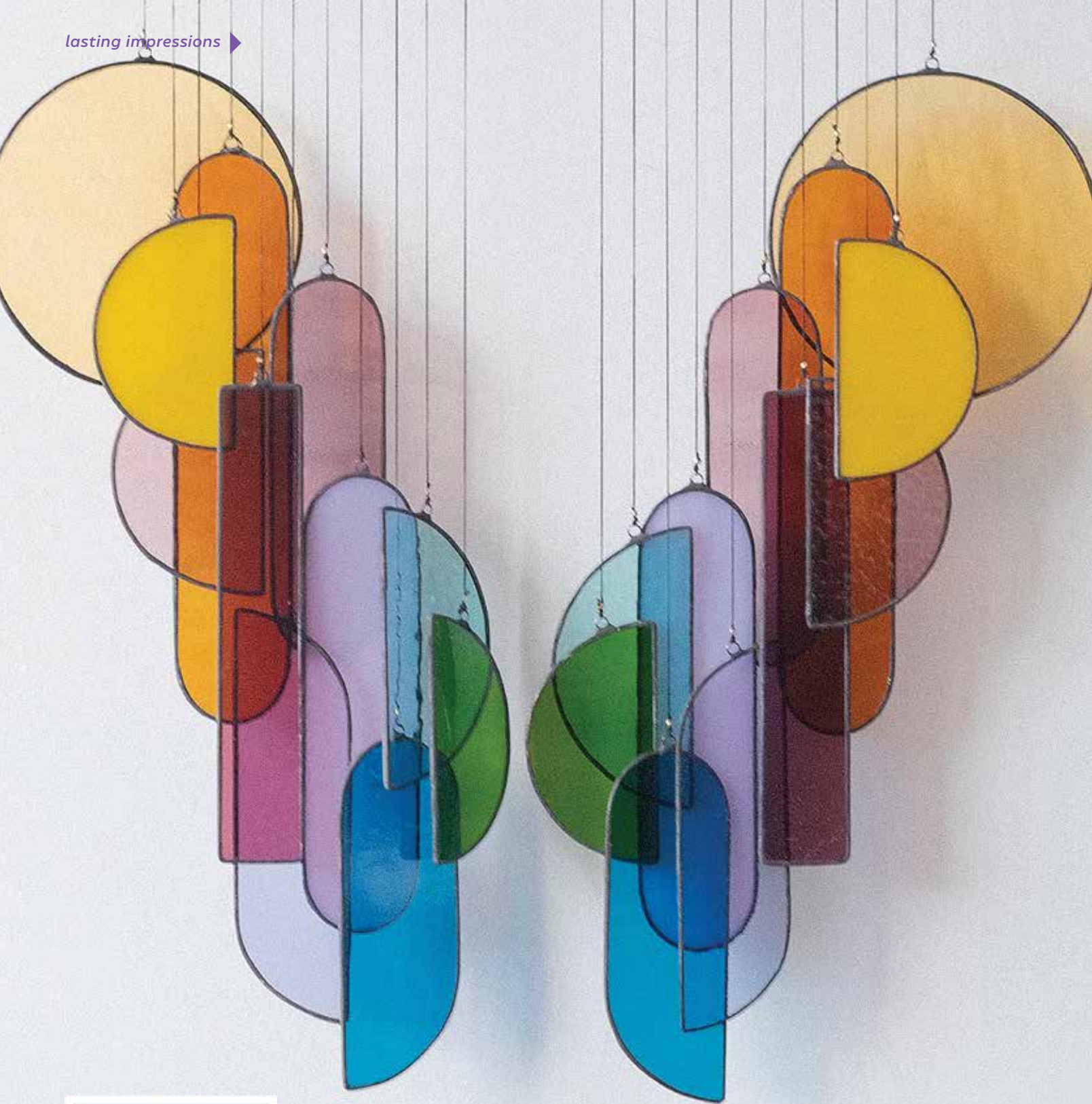
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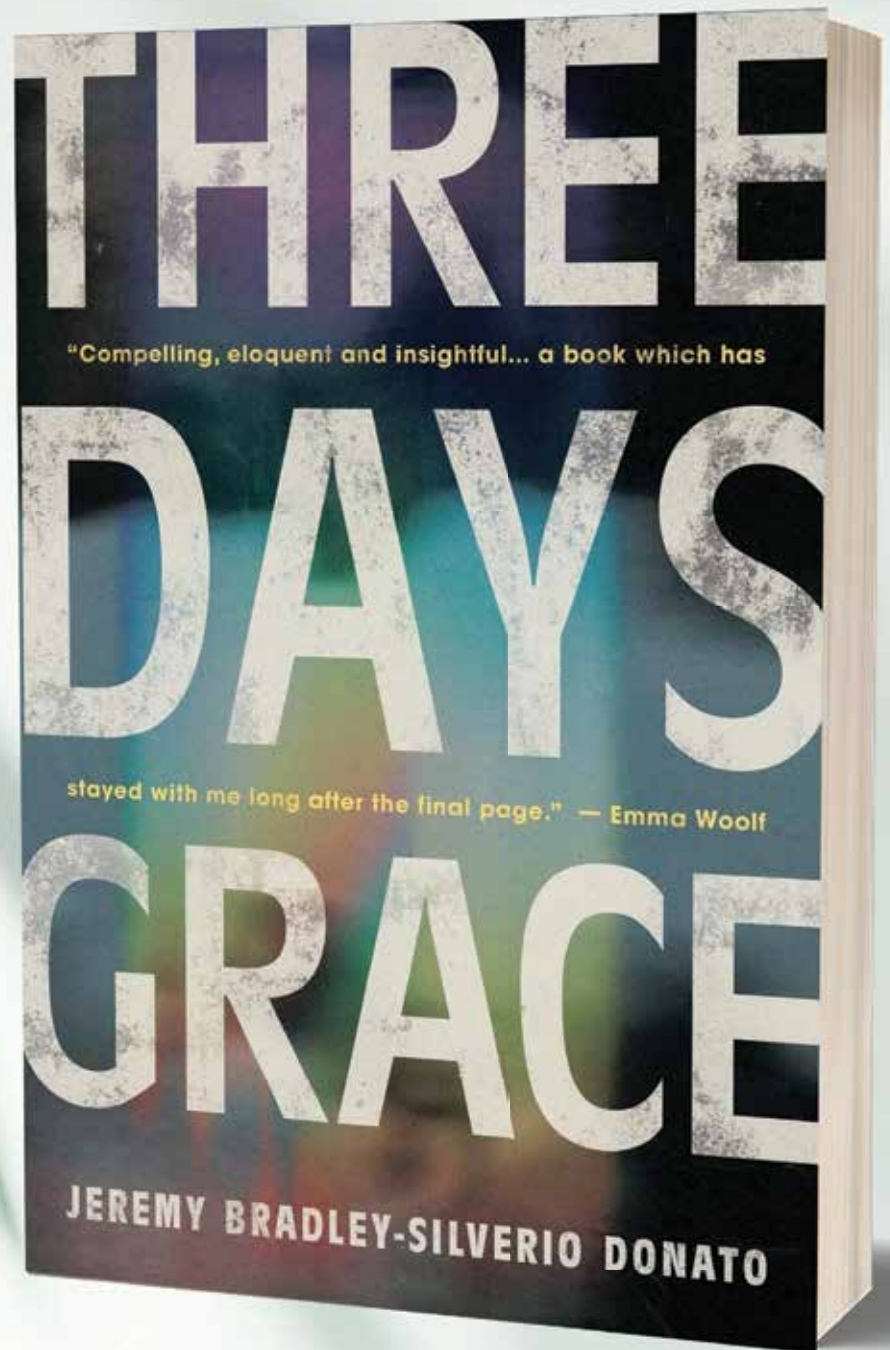
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