

The New York Times

Book Review

FEBRUARY 21, 2021

HACK ATTACK The catastrophic threat of cyberweapons

BUILDING BLOCKS A physicist celebrates the elementary particles

THE ESSENTIAL OCTAVIA BUTLER Nine books to get you started



BIANCA BAGNARELLI

The New Not Normal

By Chanel Miller

IN MARCH 2020, paper signs were taped onto cafe windows: “We are committed to flattening the curve, see you in two weeks!” Overnight, shelves emptied as humans squirreled away toilet paper rolls like nuts for a long winter. Our calendars were wiped clean, indefinitely blank.

We worried each day that death would reach down its hand and pluck up a loved one. I saw an

old man with a maxi pad taped over his mouth and nose. We were confused and terrified, and did not yet understand the rules or the toll of our new world. We insisted on the language of “pause,” lives “put on hold.” In the beginning, we treated the pandemic as a suspended time between two realities, hoping we could hold our breath and wait for things to resume.

“Between Two Kingdoms,” by Suleika Jaouad, has arrived as a guide to another kind of in-be-

BETWEEN TWO KINGDOMS
A Memoir of a
Life Interrupted
By Suleika Jaouad

368 pp. Random House. \$28.

tween, with haunting similarities. For Jaouad, “it began with an itch.”

At 22, she graduates from college and moves to Paris, where she has a pink clamshell bathtub and a kindhearted, square-jawed boyfriend. She can play the double bass and speak French and Arabic; she is readying herself to be a foreign correspondent. Her life is a potent bud, but just

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

Congratulations

WE
ARE

Water PROTECTORS



2021 Caldecott Medal Winner... and New York Times Bestseller!

From acclaimed Indigenous author and illustrator team Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade comes a passionate rallying cry to protect our environment.

“One of the most beautiful and important picture books ever published – period.”

—Cynthia Leitich Smith, NPR

**BEST
BOOK
2020**

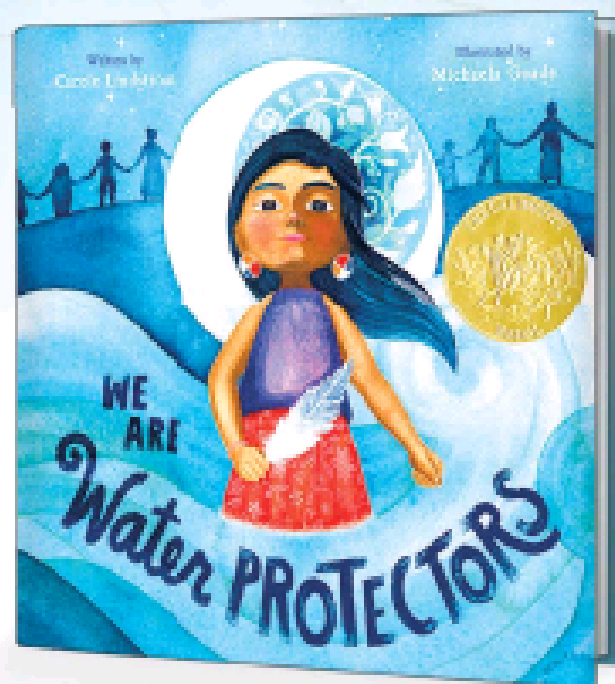
The Washington Post
NPR

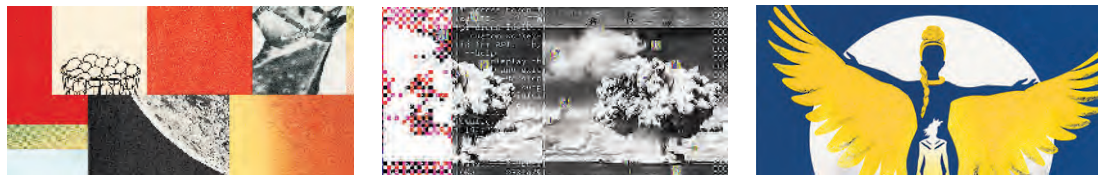
New York Public Library
School Library Journal
Kirkus Reviews

WeAreWaterProtectorsBook.com



Roaring Brook Press
An imprint of
Macmillan Children's Publishing Group





Fiction & Poetry

- 7 Historical Fiction**
Reviewed by Alida Becker
- 8 WE RUN THE TIDES**
By Vendela Vida
Reviewed by Molly Fischer
- 14 ZORRIE**
By Laird Hunt
Reviewed by Alyson Hagy
- 14 THE DELIVERY**
By Peter Mendelsund
Reviewed by Andy Newman
- 22 The Shortlist**
Poetry
Reviewed by Emilia Phillips

Nonfiction

- 1 BETWEEN TWO KINGDOMS**
A Memoir of a Life Interrupted
By Suleika Jaouad
Reviewed by Chanel Miller
- 9 THE BLACK CHURCH**
This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song
By Henry Louis Gates Jr.
Reviewed by Jon Meacham
- 10 DOOMED ROMANCE**
Broken Hearts, Lost Souls, and Sexual Tumult in Nineteenth-Century America
By Christine Leigh Heyrman
Reviewed by Caroline Fraser
- 11 THIS IS HOW THEY TELL ME THE WORLD ENDS**
The Cyberweapons Arms Race
By Nicole Perlroth
Reviewed by Jonathan Tepperman
- 15 FUNDAMENTALS**
Ten Keys to Reality
By Frank Wilczek
Reviewed by Nell Freudenberger

- 17 KAMALA'S WAY**
An American Life
By Dan Morain
Reviewed by Lisa McGirr
- 17 BUGSY SIEGEL**
The Dark Side of the American Dream
By Michael Shnayerson
Reviewed by Jenna Weissman Joselit

Children's Books

- 18 ANCESTOR APPROVED**
Intertribal Stories for Kids
Edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith
- THE SEA-RINGED WORLD**
Sacred Stories of the Americas
By María García Esperón
Illustrated by Amanda Mijangos
Reviewed by Aditi Sriram

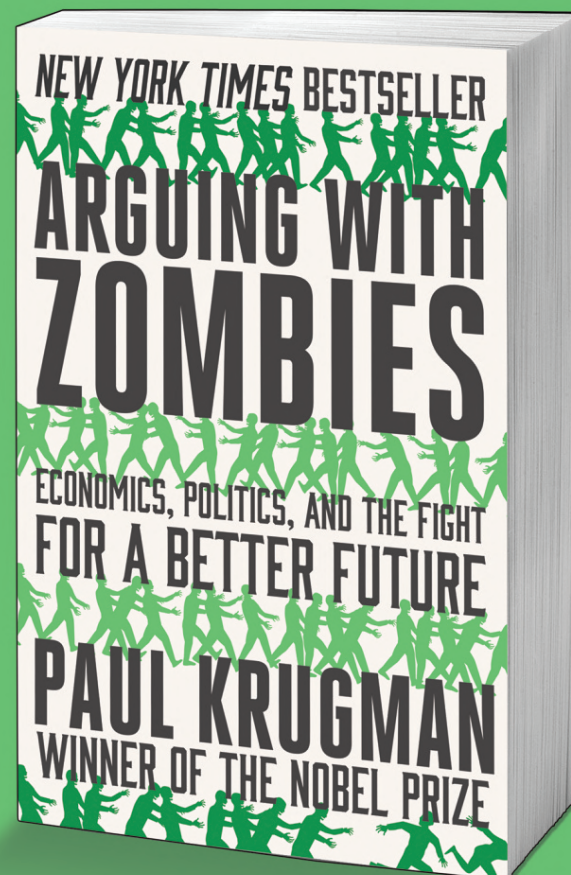
Features

- 6 By the Book**
Joe Ide
- 12 The Essential Octavia Butler**
By Stephen Kearsse
- 23 Revisited**
A History of the Comedian Memoir
By Jason Zinoman

Etc.

- 4** New & Noteworthy
- 5** Letters
- 19** Best-Seller Lists
- 19** Editors' Choice
- 20** Inside the List
- 20** Paperback Row

THE NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLER
NOW IN PAPERBACK



THE NOBEL PRIZE–WINNING
ECONOMIST'S ACCESSIBLE BRIEFING
ON TODAY'S MAJOR POLICY ISSUES.

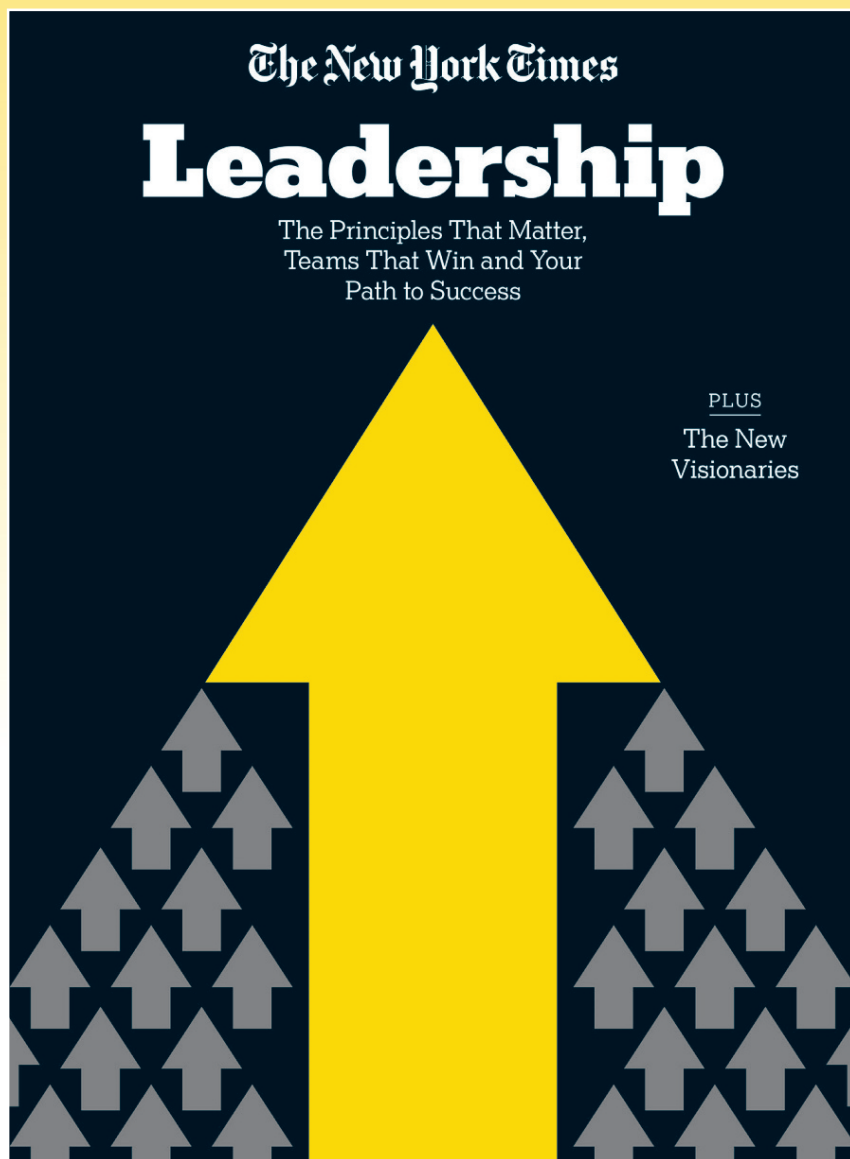
"In an era when facts are too often disdained and discarded,
PAUL KRUGMAN WIELDS THEM LIKE A RAPIER."
—DAVID AXELROD

"He avoids the herd mentality of most journalism.
Applying history, math, and humanity,
HE TRANSFORMS OUR
UNDERSTANDING OF GREAT ISSUES."
—DAVID CAY JOHNSTON



A Special Edition On Sale Now

Uncover Your Path to Success



With stories on building the ideal skill set, profiles in leadership and stirring examples of those who broke the mold, this special edition will help you be a motivator, build results and succeed.

The New York Times Leadership special edition is now available from your favorite retailer, magazine.store, or Amazon.com

©2020 Meredith Corporation. All rights reserved.

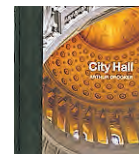
New & Noteworthy / Visual



TODAY'S SPECIAL: 20 LEADING CHEFS CHOOSE 100 EMERGING CHEFS, by Phaidon editors. (Phaidon, \$59.95.) Celebrated food industry veterans from Daniela Soto-Innes to Yotam Ottolenghi herald the greatest up-and-coming culinary talent from around the world.



TOM SACHS: HANDMADE PAINTINGS, by David Rimanelli with Naomi Fry. (Rizzoli, \$65.) The New York artist's first career retrospective traces his long engagement with American consumerism and popular iconography, as reflected in his paintings of everything from the flag to "Family Guy."



CITY HALL, by Arthur Drooker. (Schiffer, \$60.) In 88 photographs and stories of city halls around the country, from San Francisco to Philadelphia, in styles ranging from Art Deco to Beaux-Arts and beyond, Drooker connects architectural and municipal history with civic pride.



EBONY: COVERING BLACK AMERICA, by Lavaille Lavette. (Rizzoli, \$57.50.) Lavette, a children's book author and expert in educational marketing, here pays tribute to the magazine that was founded in 1945 as an outlet and podium for Black America.

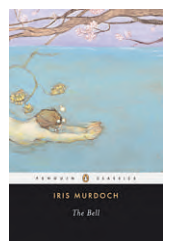


THE TAROT OF LEONORA CARRINGTON, by Susan Aberth and Tere Arcq. (Fulgur Press, \$50.) Carrington was a renowned Surrealist painter and novelist; this deck of tarot designs reveals a different side of her otherworldly art.

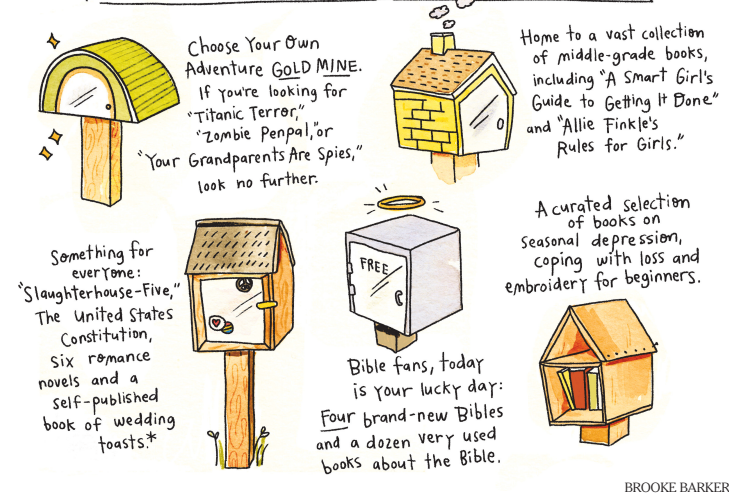
WHAT WE'RE READING

The British writer Iris Murdoch's fourth novel, **THE BELL**, is set in a lay religious community just outside the walls of an Anglican convent. The misfit central characters eye the abbey warily at times, and at other times reverently, as all prepare for the arrival of a huge new bronze bell to replace one lost centuries ago under mysterious circumstances. Published in 1958, the book has some weighty themes — religion, community, power, sexuality, regret, good and evil — but don't mistake it for a drag. "To say that 'The Bell' is a novel of ideas is to misdescribe it," A. S. Byatt writes in the introduction to the Penguin Classics edition. "It is better to say that 'The Bell' is a novel about people who have ideas." I picked it up recently on the recommendation of a dear old friend, and found myself immediately pressing it on other kindred spirits. In a dark season, sharing the existence of a story as propulsive and transportive as this one is practically a moral duty. And did I mention its impeccably satisfying ending?

—RUTH GRAHAM, NATIONAL CORRESPONDENT COVERING RELIGION, FAITH AND VALUES



Your Guide to My neighborhood's Little Free Libraries



BROOKE BARKER

Off the Shelves

TO THE EDITOR: The blurb for Brooke Barker's terrific Sketchbook of neighborhood "little free libraries" (Jan. 10) says that "you can still borrow books for free even when public libraries are closed." While the sketch is a wonderful advertisement for little free libraries — which I, as a librarian, fully support — I do want to correct the statement "when public libraries are closed."

Many public libraries did close. However, it was only the buildings that closed; library staff around the world have worked hard to find new ways to provide library materials for their patrons, schools and communities while implementing new health mandates to keep everyone safe.

Many libraries have found ingenious ways to keep their communities reading. Our library in Waldport, Ore., used the drive-through window of an old bank building through last spring and summer, where patrons were able to pull up and pick up their items (including summer reading giveaways with books and Take & Make kits). We continue to provide services back at the Waldport Public Library through porch pickup and monthly online programs.

Just as we are doing, libraries everywhere are working hard to continue serving communities through online programming, downloadable checkouts and appropriate ways to safely pick up books with little to no contact. So while many of the public

library buildings are closed, you can still borrow books from your library.

SUE BENNETT
WALDPART, ORE.

When Empires Collide

TO THE EDITOR: In his absorbing review of John Ghazvinian's "America and Iran: A History, 1720 to the Present" (Jan. 24), Abbas Milani writes that "Iran was a coveted prize in the 19th-century Big Game between Russia and England." It's a small terminological point, but the proper phrase is the "Great Game," which refers to the competition for control of Central Asia starting from the late 19th century, and was popularized by Rudyard Kipling. Of course the more telling fact is that these clashing imperialist powers could look upon their bloody rivalry as a form of gamesmanship.

BENJAMIN GEORGE FRIEDMAN
NEW YORK

Life Without Parole

TO THE EDITOR: Although I found Anand Giridharadas's review of Maurice Chammah's "Let the Lord Sort Them: The Rise and Fall of the Death Penalty" (Feb. 7) insightful and fascinating, it seems to me that the reviewer, and perhaps the author (I have not read the book), may have missed what could be the single greatest factor accounting for the declining use of the death penalty in the United States: the effect on jurors' minds of life without

parole (LWOP) statutes as an alternative to the death penalty. Before my retirement from the U.S. attorney's office in Los Angeles, I was the lead prosecutor in death penalty cases, including one of the first such cases in Los Angeles in more than 25 years, and a case in which we sought the deaths of members of the Aryan Brotherhood prison gang.

The death penalty was not imposed on any of those defendants. Some of the defendants offered to agree to a sentence of LWOP if the government withdrew the notice of seeking the death penalty. At trial, after being found guilty of a capital crime, some of the defendants argued to the penalty jury that a sentence of LWOP was punishment enough, and that such a sentence eliminated the future dangerousness of any murderer.

It is my own belief that the increased availability and use of LWOP sentences closely corresponds to the decreased use of the death penalty in America.

In the federal system, a vote of 11-1 in favor of death results in a life sentence, and the federal government, unlike prosecutors in some states, is not free to seek a mistrial and try the penalty phase again before a different jury.

STEPHEN G. WOLFE
PASADENA, CALIF.

Woman at Work

TO THE EDITOR: Michael Sims's essay on Charles Darwin's view of women (Feb. 7) is the best thing on Harriet Martineau to appear in a century.

Kudos to Sims for recognizing one of the powerful women of the 19th century. She played a major role in the abolition campaign that finally determined the outcome of the Civil War.

LYN PAUL RELPH
TUCSON, ARIZ.

CORRECTION

A picture caption with an essay on Feb. 7 about Charles Darwin, using information from Getty Images, misstated the date of a photograph of Darwin. It was taken around 1881, not "circa 1854."

BOOKS@NYTIMES.COM

NEW FROM THE EDITORS OF THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE



When reality is surreal, only fiction can make sense of it.

29 new stories from Margaret Atwood, Colm Tóibín, Karen Russell, Tommy Orange, Leïla Slimani, David Mitchell, Rachel Kushner, Edwidge Danticat, Charles Yu, and many more

ALSO AVAILABLE AS AN EBOOK AND AN AUDIOBOOK

 SCRIBNER  SimonandSchuster.com

BIG-TIME
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR SMALL-PRESS
PUBLISHERS



Independent publishers and authors of not-so-independent means receive special discounted advertising rates every Sunday in The New York Times Book Review.

For more information, please contact Mark Hiler at (212) 556-8452.

Reach an influential audience for less.

The New York Times
Book Review
nytimes.com/bookreview

By the Book



Joe Ide

The mystery writer, whose new novel is ‘Smoke,’ recently read ‘Frankenstein’ for the first time: ‘Edgar Allan Poe is often cited as the originator of both horror and science fiction. Mary Shelley beat him.’

You’re organizing a literary dinner party. Which three writers, dead or alive, do you invite?

Gore Vidal, Truman Capote and Ernest Hemingway. Vidal hated Capote and Hemingway. Hemingway hated Capote and Vidal. Capote probably hated Hemingway and Vidal. I like lively conversation.

What’s the most interesting thing you learned from a book recently?

That my back problems are emotional.

Are there any classic novels that you only recently read for the first time?

Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein.” The media versions of “Frankenstein” were so thoroughly ingrained in me, I had dismissed the book as dated and banal. A couple of writer friends told me I was completely wrongheaded. Sadly, not an unusual occurrence. In 1816, the celebrated poet, London’s Lord Byron, challenged his houseguests to write a ghost story. Mary Wollstonecraft (later, Shelley), the

daughter of intellectual radicals, wrote “Frankenstein” when she was 18 years old. Shelley’s orphan was far from the oft-seen lumbering brute. Her impossibly intelligent creation valued philosophy, social justice and natural beauty, and was influenced by Goethe’s “The Sorrows of Young Werther” and “Paradise Lost,” John Milton’s epic, 10,000-line poem which has intimidated anyone who ever attended a university. Shelley blamed humans for birthing evil. She imagined a creature spawned by scientific abomination, yet innately innocent; cruelty, abuse and abandonment transforming a child-like purity into rage and retribution. Her orphan reminded me of myself as a young man; my sorrow for the world and unresolved doubts with no expectation of everlasting comfort. Shelley never had much use for religion, in life and her books. Her notion that a human endeavor could create life mocked the whole idea of a sole creator. Her narrator, Walton, describes in his last letter the experience Shelley intended for her audience: “You have read this strange and terrific story,

Margaret; and do you not feel your blood congeal with horror, like that which even now curdles mine?” Edgar Allan Poe is often cited as the originator of both horror and science fiction. Mary Shelley beat him to the punch by 20 years.

Do you count any books as comfort reads, or guilty pleasures?

Before John le Carré’s death, I was among the many who wanted him to stop reading German poetry and wandering the Swiss Alps and write another book, with or without George Smiley. I’ve read and reread his books many times. The stories are now familiar, but they’re so densely written and intricately drawn, so sweeping and rich with incident and ideas, there’s always something new to ponder and appreciate.

Which books got you hooked on crime fiction?

Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. The world’s first consulting detective had no expertise in martial arts or computer hacking, he wasn’t wealthy or athletic and he didn’t slaughter his enemies wholesale with automatic weapons. Sherlock vanquished his enemies and pursued his destiny with just his intelligence. He could face his world and not be afraid. That was a powerful idea for a small kid in a big neighborhood. I didn’t realize it at the time, but the Sherlock stories represented hope and optimism. They said there was a way, even for a kid like me, to face his own world and not be afraid.

Do you distinguish between “commercial” and “literary” fiction? Where’s that line, for you?

The writing. Colson Whitehead’s “The Underground Railroad” and Delia Owens’s “Where the Crawdads Sing” were both very commercial and very literary. I’ve read many a literary novel that were neither.

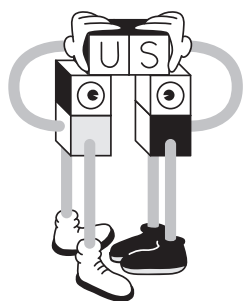
What kind of reader were you as a child? Which childhood books and authors stick with you most?

I didn’t become an avid reader until I was in college. There were children’s books in our house but little else except second-hand National Geographic and Reader’s Digests. My favorites were A. A. Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh stories and poems. My mom read them to me until she said a high school student shouldn’t be sitting on her lap.

What book are you planning to read next?

“These Women,” by Ivy Pochoda. “Wonder Valley” knocked me out. □

An expanded version of this interview is available at nytimes.com/books.



Wordplay, every day.

Subscribe to the
New York Times Crossword.
nytimes.com/solvenow

 **Crossword**

Time Machine

“WHATEVER YOU DO, whatever you call your form of government, you end up with a sultan at the top.”

When **LOVE IN THE DAYS OF REBELLION** (Europa, 496 pp., paper, \$19) was first published in Turkey in 2001, Ahmet Altan, the author who gave those words to one of his characters, was a free man and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the former mayor of Istanbul, was just beginning his rise to national prominence. But Brendan Freely and Yelda Turedi’s translation of Altan’s novel arrives under different circumstances, with President Erdogan in power and Altan behind bars, accused of crimes against the state for his activities as a journalist. Reading the newly released second volume of Altan’s Ottoman Quartet suggests that the death of his country’s old empire may shed light on the new ones that followed.

As in its predecessor, “Like a Sword Wound,” Altan’s lush swirl of intrigue is filtered through the consciousness of a modern-day citizen of Istanbul, holed up in his grandfather’s decaying mansion, channeling the stories of his ancestors and those who surrounded them. The action unfolds in the barracks of army officers and their troops, in the shadows of a monastery of Sufi dervishes and in the chambers of the sultan’s palace, where he indulges his fear of the dark and his hunger for gossip and rumor.

The sultan’s physician and son are among the main players, as are an army officer and a sheikh who never leaves his quarters but exerts his influence well beyond its walls. Yet the women are the ones who command their — and our — attention. The physician’s estranged Egyptian wife matches her beauty against that of her wayward daughter-in-law. The Polish-born widow of an elderly pasha amuses herself with casual affairs, then succumbs to the charms of a soldier lover. A new mother seethes with hatred for her husband while a teenager finds herself drawn to an older man. All must make their way in a city where “being victorious was as dangerous as being defeated.” Small wonder that the third volume of the series, next up for

ALIDA BECKER is a former editor at the Book Review.

translation, has been tentatively titled “Dying Is Easier Than Loving.”

GE FEI ALSO describes the collapse of a dynasty, but his Jiangnan Trilogy only burnished his status in the People’s Republic, helping to make him one of the most respected writers in 21st-century China. Canaan Morse’s translation of the opening volume, **PEACH BLOSSOM PARADISE** (New York Review Books, 392 pp., paper, \$17.95), showcases its deft mix of history, myth and invention, depicting a



SIMONE MARTIN-NEWBERRY

young woman’s emergence from her sheltered childhood to confront the realities of a land on the brink of violent change.

It’s the end of the 19th century, and Xiumi, the daughter of a wealthy landowner, is living at the family mansion in the village of Puji. This is a household of women; her father has wandered off, apparently disappearing into thin air. Is he an eccentric madman? Or is he just one of the many characters who’ve been led astray by their visions of a perfect society? One such is her mother’s lover, who leaves behind a diary disclosing revolutionary activities. Another is a bandit lord whose dream of creating a perfect refuge in a lakeside village will go up in flames. Might yet another be Xiumi herself?

Xiumi’s attempts to right the wrongs that have been done to her — and to others — take place in a vividly evoked array of settings. The inhabitants of Puji village offer an energetic chorus of background

voices, as do servants and hangers-on at the family home. And an interlude on a tiny island, where the kidnapped Xiumi awaits her fate, accompanied by a Buddhist nun, is properly foreboding. Wherever she finds herself, Xiumi will make an effort to chart her own course, but it seems inevitable that at times she will feel “like a fallen leaf caught in a river, trapped in the current and dragged through the water before she could even make a sound.”

THE TITLE CHARACTER in **OLAV AUDUNSSON: VOWS** (University of Minnesota, 336 pp., paper, \$17.95) expresses similar feelings at the outset of this novel of medieval Norway, the first in a four-volume saga that appeared almost a century ago — and, along with the better-known Kristin Lavransdatter trilogy, won the Nobel Prize for its author, Sigrid Undset. Tiina Nunnally’s new translation captures the dark imperatives of a land where clan loyalties and ancient codes of honor have become ensnared in the struggle between rising powers: the church and the royal court. Inevitably, orphaned Olav and Ingunn, the bride promised to him by his foster father, will find themselves caught up in the conflict.

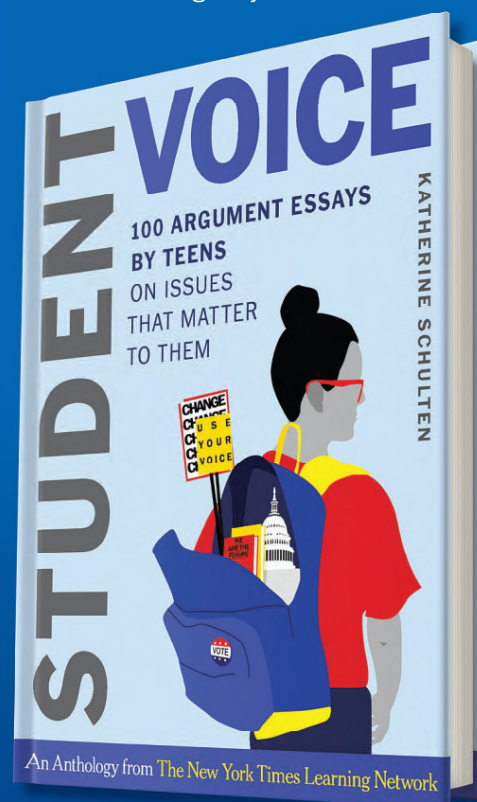
What resources do this pair of teenagers have except guile, courage and luck? Unfortunately, they’re also classic adolescents — impetuous, stubborn, self-absorbed. Until Olav comes of age, they’re at the mercy of Ingunn’s family. Flight to the security of a community of Dominican monks offers only a temporary respite. And when a murder takes place on this holy ground, exile for Olav is the only recourse.

As the years pass, Olav joins the retinue of a powerful earl fighting in Denmark and Ingunn is left to bide her time at a remote estate, a disgrace to her relations and, increasingly, to herself. The vows she and Olav have made to each other appear to be fraying. Ingunn may become tired of waiting and Olav may become too diverted by his life as a warrior. “For a man who insists on doing what he wants to do,” a wise prelate has warned him, “there will soon come a day when he sees he has done what he never intended to do.” □

NEW from Katherine Schulten and THE NEW YORK TIMES Learning Network

“The essays in **Student Voice** loudly proclaim what young writers are capable of: insightful opinions, thoughtful argument, compelling evidence, and—most importantly—lively writing.”

—Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, Executive Director, National Writing Project



Now collected for the first time in one volume, **Student Voice: 100 Argument Essays by Teens on Issues That Matter** spotlights the perspectives of 13-to-18-year-olds on race, lockdown drills, immigration, Covid-19, social media, and more.

Also available as a 2-book set with **Raising Student Voice**, a guide with classroom-ready activities, writing prompts, and a sample essay annotated by *Times* judges.

 **NORTON**
WWW.NORTON.COM/EDUCATION

The New York Times

**The Book
Review
Podcast**

We speak
to the books
that speak
to you.



Hosted by Pamela Paul.

"The Book Review" podcast leads the conversation on noteworthy books and the authors who write them.

The praise, the disagreements, the protests, the prizes. Join us for the latest in criticism and discussion, featuring Times editors and the biggest authors in the literary world today.



Download now at:

nytimes.com/TBRpodcast

Girl Group

A coming-of-age novel set in 1980s San Francisco.

By **MOLLY FISCHER**

IS THERE A better way to come of age than in the first-person plural? Teenage stories take well to a "we." Think of Jeffrey Eugenides's "The Virgin Suicides," narrated in an amorphous chorus of male adolescence, all those neighborhood boys speaking in a single voice of shared desire. The teenage "we" bespeaks an anxiety to belong, a craving for group identity that marks others as outsiders — but also a willingness to issue sweeping judgments and proclamations ("Everyone is going,

WE RUN THE TIDES

By **Vendela Vida**

254 pp. Ecco. \$26.99.

Mom!"). Maybe no one belongs with so much certainty ever again.

"We" is where the heroine begins in "We Run the Tides," the sixth novel from the Believer co-founder Vendela Vida, and the book follows her as she emerges from this first-person-plural embrace. An eighth grader at a San Francisco girls school in 1984, she bears the unlikely name of Eulabee. "My dad liked a painting of a woman named Eulabee Dix," she explains in one of the text's magpie assortment of cultural allusions, this one to an early-20th-century American painter of portrait miniatures. Vida's Eulabee lives in Sea Cliff, a neighborhood with views of the Golden Gate Bridge. She and her friends walk to school in pleated skirts and middy sailor blouses. They make plans to dress up as the Go-Go's for Halloween. They call dibs on the boys in a Connecticut school yearbook; they go to the beach in parkas and scramble over rocks between the waves.

"When I say 'we,' I sometimes mean the four of us Sea Cliff girls who are in eighth grade at the Spragg School for Girls," Eulabee explains. "But when I say 'we,' I always mean Maria Fabiola and me." Maria Fabiola is the inevitable Hot Friend, a role that is not strictly about looks (though Maria Fabiola is beautiful, and precocious) so much as charisma and danger. Eulabee says of herself and Maria Fabiola: "Separately we are good girls. We behave. Together, some strange alchemy occurs and we are trouble."

One day, a man in a white car stops three of the girls on their way to school, and asks the time. The encounter takes place at an unsettled moment: just as high school has appeared on the horizon, and in the wake of a friend's father's death by suicide. Eulabee checks her Swatch and says it's just after 8. "Did you see that?" Maria Fabiola asks, once they're out of earshot.

A version of events that nobody else saw

MOLLY FISCHER is a features writer at *New York magazine* and *The Cut*.



Vendela Vida

but that Maria Fabiola goes on to propagate (the man was touching himself, he threatened to return for them later) generates a flurry of attention, and leaves Eulabee an outcast when she declines to take up the party line. Then, in the days that follow, Maria Fabiola briefly vanishes. "We had a difference of opinion about what happened that morning," Eulabee tells the police who show up at their school. "I've never used the phrase 'difference of opinion' before and I like how it sounds," she thinks.

Not by choice, but not without a game sense of daring, Eulabee strikes out on her own, even after her friend returns. "We Run the Tides" tracks her efforts to navigate her own life without a protective band of peers. Vida captures the unstable sensation of early adolescent reality, that period teetering between childhood and young adulthood in which outlandish lies can seem weirdly plausible and basic facts totally alien. Eulabee's loving, unintrusive parents are an antiques dealer and a nurse who bought their house as a fixer-upper, and their 13-year-old daughter's awareness of the city's hierarchies is just dawning. She's startled to read a news report describing Maria Fabiola as an "heiress." Meanwhile, she learns that boys call her "Maria Fabulous." ("Maria Fabulist" comes to mind as another possibility.)

Vida's first novel, "And Now You Can Go" (2003), also turned on an alarming encounter with a stranger — the possibility of violence, the repercussions rippling across other relationships. The threat in that book was real and starkly rendered, if abortive; here it is a degree more remote. The true dangers in Eulabee's world are offstage, on the margins of Maria Fabiola's story, but

Vida captures that unstable period teetering between childhood and young adulthood.

suggested with a deft touch by Vida. Eulabee's own attention moves with lifelike vagary, dilating on anxieties and anticipation. Preparing for a concert — listening to records, wrangling permission to attend, buying a not-quite-affordable outfit — is an endless, engrossing project. The concert itself passes in a page and a half. Eulabee finds her way in and out of scrapes that manage to be neither traumatic nor necessarily edifying. She traverses drama large and small with wit. "I don't care about litter because I am immortal," she thinks, abandoning a Band-Aid on the ground after chatting with a boy she likes.

Vida's San Francisco is ramshackle and eccentric, home to heiresses but also tide pools of counterculture backwash. As the city becomes a metonym for tech wealth, its past — like a bygone youth — can seem a territory lost to time. Vida (who grew up in the city, and lives there now) hits this note a bit hard and a bit hastily in the book's final section, which leaps forward 35 years. Still, the affectionate specificity of the portrait she offers is one of the book's real pleasures. "The streets of Sea Cliff are no longer ours," Eulabee narrates in adulthood, near the book's end, returning to that nostalgic "we." "Our parents' generation laments the new money that's changed the neighborhood, and we and the rest of the world roll our collective eyes." The real estate may now be far out of reach, but memory holds its own claim. □

Glimpses of Heaven

Henry Louis Gates Jr. recounts the central role of religion in the Black struggle for freedom.

By JON MEACHAM

IN THE BEGINNING there were the “praise houses” — rudimentary sanctuaries constructed in places like Silver Bluff, S.C., Savannah, Ga., and Petersburg, Va. Products of the Great Awakening of the 18th century, the growing churches were built by — and for — enslaved people. “As the machinery of slavery churned on with no end in sight,” Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes in “The Black Church,” his engaging companion volume to a new PBS series, “enslaved Black people found their first glimpse of heaven on earth in the praise house.”

The lifting of souls, though, was not limited to the spirit but also helped shape society. “In slavery, you couldn’t go down the road and visit anyone,” the scholar Mary Rivers Legree tells Gates. “Gathering

THE BLACK CHURCH

This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song

By Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Illustrated. 304 pp. Penguin Press. \$30.

here, they not only prayed, but after the services were over, they could talk to each other about who might have had a baby up the road, who might have died, who was sold.” The church father Tertullian insisted that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Roman Catholic Church. To Gates, the Black church is the soil in which Black culture and political action flowered.

It is a commonplace but not uncontroversial argument. A tragic irony of the American experience is that faith has been deployed to suppress as well as to liberate; to exclude as well as to include; to control as well as to free. To tell the story of the Black church is something of a risk even to a scholar as secure as Gates, for voices in the arena of racial justice have long diminished religion as overly safe and accommodationist. Roughly put, the Bible is fine, but “Black power” is what’s needed; sermons have their place, but they are no substitute for revolution. Martin Luther King Jr. was dismissed as “Da Lawd” by younger activists, and as the 1960s wore on, John Lewis was sometimes seen as a Sunday-school pacifist whose commitment to Christian nonviolence was too old-fashioned.

Yet Gates writes here as a historian, and the historian can chronicle progress, assess its origins and commemorate its course while noting its incompleteness. “Violent insurrection would have been a form of racial suicide; insurrection meant death,” Gates writes. So Black Americans used what was at hand (faith and religiously based appeals and action) in the

JON MEACHAM is the author, most recently, of “His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope.” He is at work on a book about Abraham Lincoln.

struggle for freedom.

Gates himself is working within a biblical tradition. Remembrance lies at the heart of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In Deuteronomy, Moses says, “Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations.” At the Last Supper, Jesus said, simply, “Do this in remembrance of me” — a command, the Anglican monk Dom Gregory Dix once wrote, that’s arguably the most obeyed exhortation in history. To remember is orienting and illuminating, and we should always bear in mind that faith is an essential element of the nation’s story, for good and for ill. “It is . . . clear that the study of Negro religion is not only a vital part of the history of the Negro in America,” W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in “The Souls of Black Folk” (1903), “but no uninteresting part of American history.”

Relying heavily on the voices of myriad scholars and clergy members (often combined in the same person, like Kelly Brown Douglas or Jonathan L. Walton), Gates traces the story back even before Jamestown. “The foundation of the African-American spiritual journey,” he writes, “was formed out of fragments of faith that our ancestors brought with them to this continent starting 500 years ago” — not 400. He chronicles the Spanish New World and describes the strands of belief and practice — from Roman Catholicism to African religions to Islam — that created the basis for the Black church.

The stories of deliverance from the pharaoh and from sin held out that rarest of things for the enslaved: hope. “We have to give the church its due as a source of our ancestors’ unfathomable resiliency and perhaps the first formalized site for the collective fashioning and development of so many African-American aesthetic forms,” Gates argues. “Although Black people

Gates writes as a historian, chronicling progress while noting its incompleteness.

made spaces for secular expression, only the church afforded room for all of it to be practiced at the same time.”

At its best, biblical religion is about reversal and transformation — the most resonant of messages for Black people in a white-supremacist America. “Never confuse position with power,” the Rev. Otis Moss III, a Chicago pastor born in 1970, says in Gates’s epigraph. “Pharaoh had a position, but Moses had the power. Herod had a position, but John had the power. The cross had a position, but Jesus had the power. Lincoln had a position, but Douglass had the power. Woodrow Wilson had a position, but Ida B. Wells had the power. George Wallace had a position, but Rosa Parks had the power. Lyndon Baines Johnson had a position, but Martin Luther King

had the power. We have the power. Don’t you ever forget.” Moss’s homiletic riff is rooted in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus, too, used antithesis to urge listeners to build a new and better world.

The summons to close the gap between profession and practice, between love and hate, between freedom and slavery, lies at the heart of the troubled American journey. Framing the challenge to white Americans with fearlessness and clarity, Frederick Douglass said: “You profess to believe ‘that, of one blood, God made all nations of men to dwell on the face of all the earth’ and hath commanded all men, everywhere, to love one another; yet you notoriously hate (and glory in your hatred) all men whose skins are not colored like your own.” As Gates puts it, religious appeals, then, “gave them the moral authority to turn the mirror of religion back on their masters and to indict the nation for its original sin of allowing their enslavement to build up that ‘city upon a hill.’”

The critique of Christianity’s role cannot be ignored. To Malcolm X, for instance, religion had to be oriented toward action, not encourage passivity or justify a patient wait for justice. “When you have a philosophy or gospel,” Malcolm said, “I don’t care whether it’s the religious gospel or political gospel, an economic gospel or social gospel. If it’s not going to do something for you and me right here right now, to hell with that gospel.” King and Lewis would argue that nonviolence was about transformation on earth (and by the end of his life

Malcolm had greater sympathy with the Southern movement), but the urgency Malcolm embodied bears attention — then and now. “Malcolm is as much a part of the Black religious experience as anybody else,” Calvin Butts, the pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, told Gates. “He was a Muslim, but so what? He was a man empowered by God.”

In the era of Black Lives Matter and of continuing white-supremacist violence, the Black church faces a question that, as Augustine wrote, is ever ancient, ever new: What now? “Something has been let loose, and so religious folk must create a counternarrative to that,” Michael Curry, the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, tells Gates. “And I think the teachings of Jesus are just as clear that Christian folk and Christian leaders cannot abide or countenance anybody’s supremacy over anybody else, white or anything, and cannot remain silent. Silence is consent.”

In a memorial tribute to the Rev. Andrew Bryan, who had been born into slavery and became the minister of the First Colored Church of Savannah — a church that had begun life as a praise house — an admirer quoted the Book of Daniel: “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars, forever and ever.” In Gates’s telling, the Black church, too, shines bright even as the nation itself moves uncertainly through the gloaming, seeking justice on earth — as it is in heaven. □



“The Sanctuary,” by Edwin Forbes, 1876.

Enraptured

A sensationalized love triangle offers a window onto 19th-century evangelical ambition and hypocrisy.

By CAROLINE FRASER

THE HISTORIAN Christine Leigh Heyrman's "Doomed Romance: Broken Hearts, Lost Souls, and Sexual Tumult in Nineteenth-Century America" may seem at first like a charming confection, a droll tale of an early-19th-century New England love triangle involving moony aspirational missionaries who get all wrapped up in what we would now call their "feels." It is that. But in Heyrman's telling, it becomes far more, as she remorselessly dissects the

DOOMED ROMANCE

Broken Hearts, Lost Souls, and Sexual Tumult in Nineteenth-Century America

By Christine Leigh Heyrman

Illustrated. 282 pp. Alfred A. Knopf. \$28.95.



Bradford Academy, in Bradford, Mass., many of whose graduates became Christian missionaries.

fragile male selfhood at the heart of evangelical Protestantism and its "vexed relationship with ideals of manhood." Since the needs of that self are ever devouring the American body religious and politic, an exploration of its origins deserves attention.

"Doomed Romance" reads like a bodice-ripper, less "Bridgerton" than Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance." Fewer push-up bras, plenty of smoldering letters. Heyrman, who admits to "a taste for low gossip," was transfixed by her discovery of a cache of salacious documents, preserved as part of an extralegal investigation into a young woman who, in 1826, dropped one fiancé for another. She was Martha Parker, a comely middle-class lass "possessed of many charms." No portrait survives, but she seems to have inspired more than the usual ardor. She is "no Everywoman," Heyrman instructs us, yet representative of white Northern ladies serving as teachers and missionaries, enjoying a softer life than the lower classes who labored on farms or in mills.

Pursuing her were several self-righteously pious and overenthusiastic suitors: Thomas Tenney, studying to be a minister; Elisha Jenney, a Dartmouth student who takes disappointment poorly; and, finally, the stalwart and wonderfully named Elnathan Gridley, a Yale graduate preparing to minister to the heathen of Palestine. Part of a "culture of entitlement," Tenney and Jenney were connected to Dartmouth and all three to the evangelical community. Had Martha bruised the egos of lesser beings, her behavior might have passed without notice. But these were men of God.

Looming over all is a darker entity, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, then the "largest corporation in the early Republic," committed to overseeing the conduct of evangelists. Its

missionaries, some of whom perished abroad, becoming martyrs, attracted fervent admiration and significant donations, so any hint of scandal attaching to them was to be avoided. The board's officious members — as well as their consultants, including a president of Dartmouth College — would devote themselves to meddling in Martha's tangled affairs. Heyrman argues that their prying presaged a crack-down on female autonomy, betraying a core anxiety that makes this account so deliciously relevant: the fear that women, prodigious consumers of sermons, revivals and missionary narratives, might become so powerful within the movement that they would threaten male hegemony.

Martha's ambivalence regarding her beaux arose from an unsettled family life. Born in 1804, growing up in Dunbarton, N.H., she was one of eight siblings who lost their father when they were young. With two elder sisters, she attended the "deeply religious" Bradford Academy, in Essex County, Mass.; the eldest, Ann Parker, soon married and went to the Palestine mission in Beirut. Teaching at another such school, Martha was besotted with the idea of "forsaking all" for Christ. The curriculum she chose, involving "geography with the use of maps and globes," speaks to an ambition for female education on par with those of men.

All went well for her until, at 21, overwhelmed by a crush of courting during the summer of 1825, she made a series of romantic missteps. Fatefully, she dallied with Tenney, her second cousin, known to her since childhood, an earnest young man redolent of the "odor of sanctity" who had first courted another of her older sisters, Emily. His proposal rejected by Emily, he turned to Martha, proposing again and causing sisterly astonishment over his fickle affections. Martha turned him down twice but that summer changed her mind, dangling before him the prospect of winning his "highest earthly happiness." His

affections violently rekindled, he decided that "she loved me ardently." She and Tenney became engaged that December.

Then, as now, double standards were the rule. At the time, Heyrman tells us, one in five New England brides arrived at the altar pregnant, yet trifling with a man's affections was considered the height of female dishonor, especially if it involved sexual impropriety. "The Coquette," a popular 1797 novel by Hannah Webster Foster (one of America's first woman novelists), deplored those who doled out "caresses." Women were, however, allowed to change their minds about whom to marry; indeed, it was one of their few powers. So when Martha accepted Tenney but was then beguiled by Gridley and his promise of missionary glory, she was within her rights. She broke off her engagement by claiming that she had failed to reconcile Emily to it, a self-serving explanation that paved the way for the tempest to come. By April, she and Gridley were engaged.

Blindsided, Tenney rounded on her, branding her "a base girl, a deceiver, a liar," and letters began flying, questioning her Christian character. Behind it all lay the unspoken threat of Ye Olde revenge porn: public disclosure of intimacies they may have shared (lost to history, alas). A "self-righteous bully," Tenney, Heyrman writes, "had a religious duty to keep a woman so spiritually unfit from serving, of all places, in the Holy Land," and was aided by the treacherous testimony of Jenney, another of Martha's rejected suitors. Bennet Tyler, then president of Dartmouth, eagerly took Tenney's part, triggering an investigation in which the board grilled poor Martha like a trout. Some declared that she would be committing "adultery" if she married Gridley.

Under pressure, she broke off her second engagement, and Gridley resentfully took himself abroad alone, soon to die of a nameless disease in Turkey. Martha's sister and brother-in-law, in Beirut, exploded with defensive rage, declaring Tenney "de-

testable." But back home, Martha buckled, married Tenney and was silenced forthwith, one of countless devout women whose "romance with evangelicalism . . . filled them with dreams but then doomed their full realization."

Mining missionary records, Heyrman unearths some astonishing revelations. Even as church leaders were turning the screws on women, they were tolerant (given what would come later) of same-sex relationships. She quotes male partners in the mission at Beirut, Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons, who had pledged to "give ourselves to each other," "our hearts knit together as the heart of one man." A pair of Virginia Methodists went further, with one "covenant brother" telling the other that he dreamed of "kissing you with the kisses of my Mouth." She finds revenge too: The Tenneys' eldest daughter, Mary Eliza, grew up to join the ranks of foreign missionaries with her aunt Ann's help, fulfilling her mother's ambition. She became a popular writer, and Heyrman catches her, in her fiction, dissing the very prototype of her "unprepossessing" father.

"Doomed Romance" uncovers a boiling anthill of evangelical hypocrisy, seething with the same divisions that plague it today, including the debate over whether women should be allowed to preach, which rages on in the Southern Baptist Convention even as hundreds of its leaders have been accused of sexual misconduct. In the crowded annals of such scandal, the Baptists are hardly alone: Justin Bieber's hip former pastor, Carl Lentz, of the megachurch Hillsong, was recently fired for lying and extramarital boffing. Since the Puritans, American zealots have excelled, as Heyrman puts it, in "character assassination with anonymous letters and gossip, threats and blackmail, the promise of punishment in this life and the next." Elegantly written and hilariously astute, this gloriously indelicate history suggests that women's infatuation with evangelicalism has been a bad romance indeed. □

CAROLINE FRASER is the author, most recently, of "Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder."

The Greatest Danger

Cyberattacks against the United States are only likely to get worse.

By JONATHAN TEPPERMAN

SOMETIME LAST YEAR, a shadowy group of hackers — now thought to be Russians working for that country's foreign intelligence service — broke into digital systems run by Solar Winds, an American tech firm, and inserted malware into the code. When the company then sent out its next regular software update, it inadvertently spread the virus to its clients — more than 18,000 of them, including huge corporations, the Pentagon, the State Department, Homeland Security, the Treasury and other government agencies. The hack went undetected for months, until the victims started discovering that enormous amounts of their data — some of it very sensitive — had been stolen.

Solar Winds may have been the biggest cyberattack on the United States in years, if not ever. But it was hardly a singular event. In the last half decade or so, Ameri-

less-connected enemies. Cyberattacks are also relatively cheap, while cyberdefense is expensive and painstaking. And then there's the problem of attribution: Given how hard it often is to spot digital incursions in the first place (remember, the Solar Winds hack went undetected for months), and the tendency of countries to rely on private hackers only loosely connected to the government to do their dirty work, figuring out whom to retaliate against can be very difficult. Unlike nuclear missiles, hacks rarely come stamped with a clear return address.

In "This Is How They Tell Me the World Ends," Nicole Perlroth provides another

the start to scare us out of our complacency — and (on my part, at least) it succeeds. As a narrator, Perlroth comes at the reader hard, like an angry Cassandra who has spent the last seven years of her life (which is both the length of her career at *The Times* and more or less the time she spent working on the book) unmasking the signs of our impending doom — only to be ignored again and again.

As for who's most to blame for our current state of cyberinsecurity — in which all of us are targets and the tech we, our government and our infrastructure providers rely on is now penetrated at will by foreign actors — Perlroth has little doubt. Sure, the

a tech company finds such a flaw in its software or hardware, it has zero days to fix it or suffer the consequences.)

If enabling this market was Washington's original sin, its second catastrophic blunder, according to Perlroth, was Stuxnet: the computer worm the United States allegedly used to destroy a fifth of the centrifuges at Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment plant in 2009-10. While the worm, a stunning technological breakthrough, may have forestalled an Israeli attack on Iran, set back Tehran's weapons program and driven the mullahs to the bargaining table, it also shattered a basic norm: It was the first time one government had digitally infiltrated the networks of another and used its access not for spying — which everyone does — but to wreak physical havoc. Once that gentlemen's rule was broken, Perlroth argues, it became open season for America's enemies to try to do the same to it; and now it's only a matter of time, she concludes, till we face a digital Pearl Harbor.

This is all compelling stuff, and Perlroth makes a strong, data-driven case for action. Writing the story from Silicon Valley, as she does, gives her lots of advantages as an author: It means she has good access to the programmers, the hackers, the cyberarms merchants, the security experts and the tech firms that play central roles in the story and that are profiled in great (sometimes a little too great) detail. She also boasts a very good command of the technical details, which she's able to explain with admirable clarity. I wish, though, that she'd spent more time on the other coast, in Washington, D.C., which often feels like a black box located very far from her account. That distance forces readers to guess at or make assumptions about the choices the government makes — and that Perlroth denounces — in the course of her narrative.

The book's relative lack of access to policymakers and -making also proves an obstacle at the book's end, where Perlroth offers a few short pages on how to deal with the very scary problems she's highlighted in the preceding 400 pages. Many of her suggestions are sensible, but also feel like long shots — especially when she calls on the tech world to abandon its first-to-market obsession and slow down its product development so it can focus more on security. Knowing more about the rationale and decision-making processes behind the choices Washington has made so far — the reasons behind what it's done and hasn't done — would help us understand what kinds of solutions are practical and plausible going forward.

Still, Perlroth has done a valuable service in highlighting the need for big changes in how America approaches its cybersecurity — which, these days, means its security, period. Let's hope that the people charged with doing something about it read this book and are persuaded. □

THIS IS HOW THEY TELL ME

THE WORLD ENDS

The Cyberweapons Arms Race

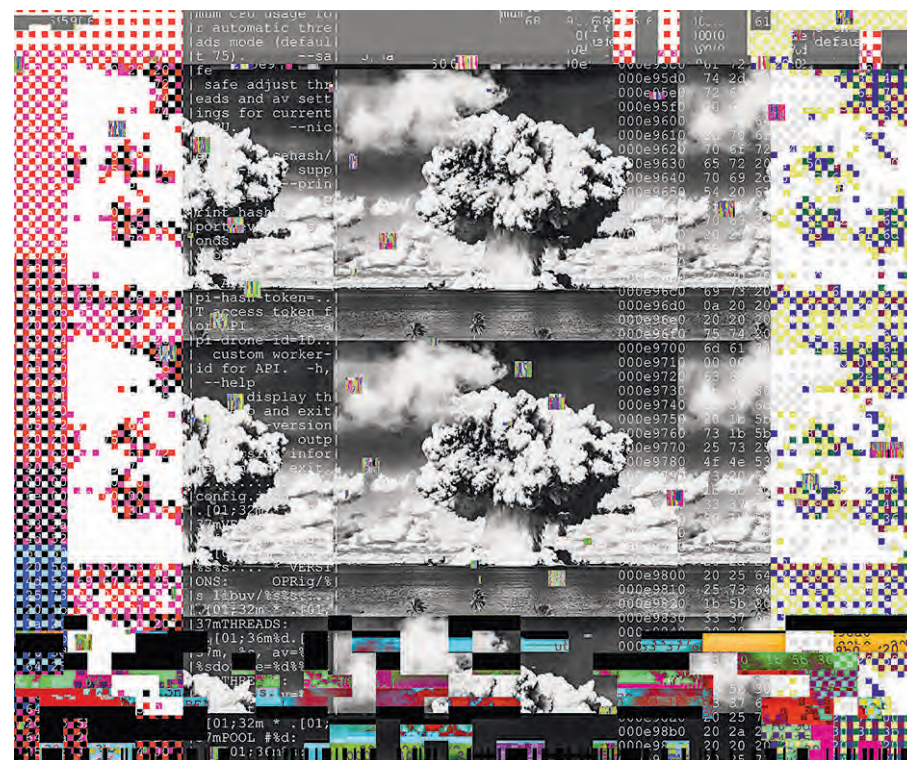
By Nicole Perlroth

528 pp. Bloomsbury. \$30.

can corporations have suffered billions of dollars of losses in similar incursions. Between 2019 and 2020, more than 600 towns, cities and counties were hit by ransomware attacks, shutting down hospitals, police departments and more. America's adversaries — Russia, China, Iran and North Korea — have by now thoroughly infiltrated the computer systems that run some of the United States' most important infrastructure, including not just power grids and dams but also nuclear plants.

All of which raises the question: Why does this keep happening? After all, the United States isn't just the most formidable and intimidating military power in the world; it's also the most sophisticated cyber power. The country's conventional arsenal has proved remarkably effective at scaring off any would-be attackers; these days, no nation on the planet would dream of going toe-to-toe with the United States military. So why doesn't the same logic work in the cyber realm, where Washington could just as easily inflict biblical vengeance on anyone who messed with it?

There are two basic answers. The first is that deterring cyberattacks turns out to be much, much harder than deterring conventional ones, for a long list of reasons. Among them: Despite all its offensive power, the United States, as one of the most wired nations on earth, is also more vulnerable to such attacks than many of its



YOSHI SODEOKA

explanation for the ever-expanding cyberassaults on the United States: the way that Washington, in its careless rush to dominate the field, has created and hypercharged a wildly lucrative, entirely unregulated gray market for insanely dangerous digital weapons that private hackers develop and then sell to the highest bidder. Which only sometimes is the United States.

Perlroth, a cybersecurity reporter at *The New York Times*, has written an intricately detailed, deeply sourced and reported history of the origins and growth of that market and the global cyberweapons arms race it has sparked. As she describes her book, "it is the story of our vast digital vulnerability, of how and why it exists, of the governments that have exploited and enabled it and the rising stakes for us all."

This is no bloodless, just-the-facts chronicle. Written in the hot, propulsive prose of a spy thriller, Perlroth's book sets out from

hackers who actually create all those nasty little tools and then sell them to whatever government will pay the most — no questions asked — bear primary responsibility. And sure, the foreign states who use these tools against us or their own people are guilty too. But none of this would have hap-

Deterring cyberattacks turns out to be much harder than deterring conventional attacks.

pened, Perlroth argues, if Washington hadn't decided years ago to neglect cyberdefense and focus instead on paying programmers around the world to find and weaponize vulnerabilities in existing software — gaps known as "zero days" in the industry — that grant those that wield them "digital superpowers." (The term "zero days" comes from the fact that when

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN is *Foreign Policy's* editor at large and former editor in chief. He is the author of "The Fix: How Countries Use Crises to Solve the World's Worst Problems."

She created vivid new worlds to reveal truths about our own. Here's where to start with her books.

Octavia Butler walked a singular path. Weathering rejections, dead-end jobs and her own persistent doubts, she committed her life to turning speculative fiction into a home for Black expression.

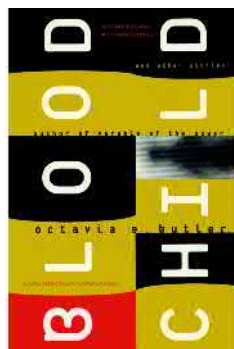
Her unsettling worlds, rendered in prose trimmed of sentiment and ornament, overflow with desperation and tragedy. She deeply distrusted utopias, saviors, power brokers and escapism. Accordingly, her works can be heavy and bleak, full of warnings and catastrophic failures to heed them.

Yet Butler was neither a pessimist nor a didact. Her recurring character archetype is the survivor, a figure of endurance, resourcefulness and compromise. To read her works and follow her wearied protagonists through badlands is to experience the treachery of change, its capacity to snatch away gains and proffer flashes of relief. There are few refuges in her 14 books, but there are always insights, always futures.



Rising from a poverty-stricken childhood to international prominence, Octavia Butler was the first science fiction author to be granted a MacArthur fellowship, and the first Black woman to win Hugo and Nebula awards. She died in 2006.

I WANT A SAMPLER OF HER IMMACULATE PROSE.

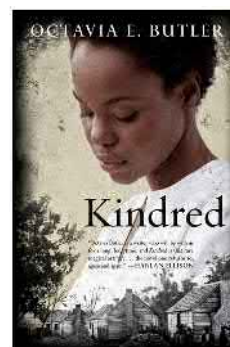


Published in 1995,
145 pp.

Butler didn't write many short stories, and many of them mirror the themes of her novels. But the short form served her economic writing style well. The stories collected in **BLOODCHILD** move quickly, often laying out their premises and conflicts in a single exchange or sequence.

Even better, each piece is followed by an afterword, offering insights into Butler's inspirations and writing process. She doesn't waste a word.

I DON'T READ MUCH SPECULATIVE FICTION AND DON'T PLAN TO START.



Published in 1979,
264 pp.

KINDRED will change your mind. Butler takes time travel, one of speculative fiction's oldest and most overdone premises, and infuses it with lasting depth and power. Where stories about American slavery are often gratuitous, reducing its horror to explicit violence and brutality, "Kindred" is controlled and precise.

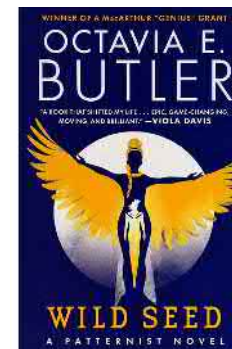
Butler stages slavery as a site of pain and violation as well as community and resilience. Dana, the protagonist, slips back and forth against her will between her life in 1976 Los Angeles and a Maryland plantation before the Civil War.

In Butler's hands, the slaves and slave owners Dana meets — and befriends, nurtures, protects and betrays — become individuals rather than historical abstractions. The book is a marvel of imagination, empathy and detail, speculative fiction at its best.

LET'S GO ON AN EPIC ADVENTURE.

Golden age sci-fi conceits like alien encounters and superpowered beings abound in Butler's work, especially the Patternist series, which spans five books (one, "Survivor," remains out of print at her behest). But the constant presence of drama shows she read penny romances as well as comics and pulp novels. Many of the tensest, most hair-raising moments in her books occur in conversations between romantic partners.

Spanning continents and centuries, **WILD SEED** details a tense courtship between two African immortals, one a psychic parasite who can switch bodies, and the other a shapeshifter. They traverse present-day Nigeria, the Atlantic Ocean and then colonial and antebellum North America, seducing and conning each other the whole way like competing spies. The book draws upon the extensive research on chattel slavery that Butler conducted for "Kindred," expanding on the institution's horrors — and forms of resistance — beyond the plantation.

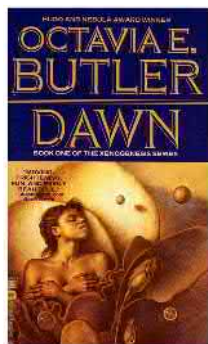


Published in 1980,
248 pp.

I WANT NUCLEAR ANNIHILATION AND ALIEN SEX.

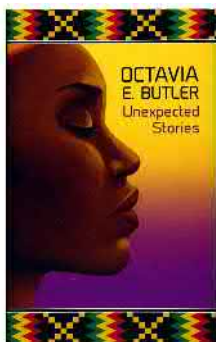
I appreciate your honesty. Lilith's Brood, a trilogy first published as Xenogenesis, details the long and seedy seduction of humanity by the Oankali, sluglike aliens that delight in genetic trade with other species. The story is set hundreds of years after the Cold War turns hot and obliterates the superpowers and most of humanity. The Oankali arrive after the war, abduct and resuscitate war-ravaged humans and plan to send us back to Earth — at the cost of merging our biochemistry with theirs.

DAWN is the core of the series, setting the stage for the Oankali's protracted and perverse colonization. Many critics read the Oankali as benevolent saviors and Butler certainly does not make them outright villains, but the first book renders clearly their manipulation. Chemical essentialists, the Oankali see reality in narrow terms that ignore verbal consent and are always patronizing. Despite the condescension of her captors, Lilith, a resilient Black woman, comes to accept a future with them, a fraught choice that Butler characterizes with haunting nuance. The book, researched in Peru, also features her most scenic writing.



Published in 1987,
264 pp.

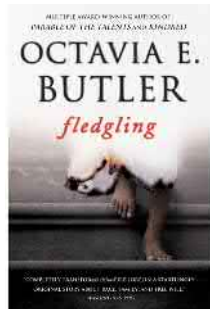
I WANT A DEEP CUT.



Published in 2014,
104 pp.

UNEXPECTED STORIES features two stories that went unpublished in Butler's lifetime. One, "Child-finder," was supposed to be Butler's big break. She sold it at a writing workshop for an anthology that was never released, a false start that haunted her early in her career as rejection slips accumulated. The other story, "A Necessary Being," takes place in the world of "Survivor," Butler's out-of-print third book, and was one of her many rejected stories. Both stories demonstrate how early she discovered her voice as a writer.

ALIEN SEX? NO THANKS! VAMPIRE SEX? SIGN ME UP.



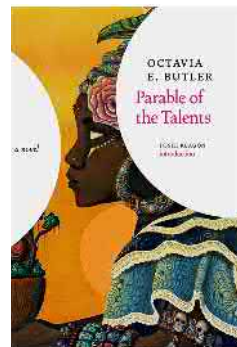
Published in 2005,
352 pp.

Butler's vampires are an unusual bunch. They are nocturnal and they drink blood, yes, but they also worship a goddess, own vineyards and farms, and form intimate harems with humans. Butler's vampires are more cultured than monstrous, and **FLEDGLING**, an action-packed whodunit that builds into a riveting legal battle, teems with ideas about the mechanics of relationships. In charged, erotic prose, Butler weaves a mystery that's as titillating as it is disturbing. "Fledgling" is a work of fantasy, but it explores many of the ideas of consent and desire that Butler broaches in Lilith's Brood. Even when she wasn't writing about aliens, she was.

I FEEL RIGHT AT HOME IN DYSTOPIAS.

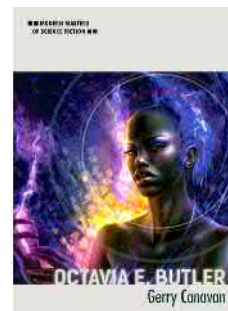
"Parable of the Sower," the first in a two-book series, is a slog. Lauren Oyamina, the teenage protagonist, offers few insights into the nightmarish setting of an America burning itself down, and the story is too shaped by her stilted, dry voice. **PARABLE OF THE TALENTS** is the masterpiece. The sequel retains the brutal atmosphere of its predecessor — severe economic inequality, climate disaster, lawless mayhem — without sacrificing momentum or texture.

By refining Lauren's voice, Butler found others scarred by the American apocalypse, from a rising fascist who wants to "make America great again" to new-age slave traders to children who are forcibly separated from their families — and are happy about it. The Parable series is known for its discomfiting prescience. But "Talents" shows that the series' true strength is its attention to the lives destroyed by fascism. There's less spectacle and inferno than "Sower," but far more sweat and anguish.



Published in 1993,
299 pp.

I'M FAMILIAR WITH BUTLER'S WORK BUT WANT TO KNOW MORE.



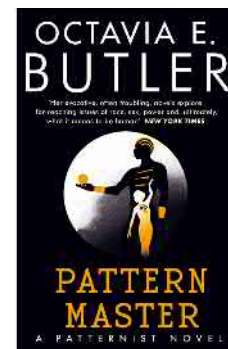
Published in 2016,
248 pp.

Butler's private papers are collected at the Huntington Library in San Marino, Calif. Drawing from the Huntington's archives, **OCTAVIA E. BUTLER**, by Gerry Canavan, covers Butler's career, life and works, teasing out the many overtones and themes in her books. Canavan is an excellent critic and formidable researcher, and this book, written in accessible, quick-moving prose, is rich with perspectives and ideas. The best sections detail the stories Butler didn't publish or complete, using those fragments to dive deeper into the texts that she finished. Like all good criticism, the book is both authoritative and invitational. Read it and you'll marvel at the arguments and feel invited to develop your own.

I WANT PSYCHIC DUELS AND FRATRICIDE.

PATTERNMASTER takes place in the same milieu as "Wild Seed," but is set far into the future, when the descendants of the immortals have overtaken the world through a psychic network known as the pattern.

Their ascension pitches much of society into slavery, and Butler follows two superpowered brothers as they vie to become the Patternmaster, the virtually omnipotent puppeteer of the pattern.



Published in 1976,
186 pp.

This is Butler's first book, and it lacks the range and gravitas of her later works. People without psychic powers, or mutes, are pawns at best and furniture at worst. And the mutant Clayarks, a third party seeking to usurp the pattern, are narrative fodder. But Butler's clash of titans is briskly plotted and starkly rendered. Though her books would turn pensive and philosophical, she could pulp with the best of them.

This Land

A fictional portrait of a stalwart life, and of America itself.



By **ALYSON HAGY**

ZORRIE UNDERWOOD, the titular character of Laird Hunt's lovely new novel, is a woman alone. Orphaned at an early age and forced to live with an aunt who has "drunk too deeply from the cup of bitterness," Zorrie cultivates an awareness of the natural world that anchors her grief-ridden life. By some measures that life might be considered insignificant. Zorrie spends all but a few weeks of her 70-plus years in Clinton County, Ind., a farming community where the women are "as scratched-up as the men." In Hunt's hands, however, this rendering of a woman lauded as "a giver of gifts and a gallant defender" becomes a

ZORRIE

By **Laird Hunt**

161 pp. Bloomsbury Publishing. \$26.

virtuosic portrait of midcentury America itself — physically stalwart, unerringly generous, hopeful that tragedy can be mitigated through faith in land and neighbor alike.

For Zorrie, since "being alone wasn't necessarily what she aspired to," what matters is connection. As a girl, she excels at cartwheels and arm-wrestling, yet her only true friend is a teacher who fuels her interest in nature. When the teacher is re-assigned, Zorrie is bereft. Yet as deep as her feelings are, she isn't inclined to indulge them. She strives instead to lean into her pain via hard work until grief "at long last breaks a way for the voice."

What gives Zorrie voice? Her homeland. Indiana is "the dirt she had bloomed up out of, it was who she was, what she felt, how she thought, what she knew." She leaves the state only twice. Both excursions come with consequences. After the death of her aunt, an impoverished Zorrie travels to Illinois seeking work. It's the Depression. She sleeps in barns and accepts handouts for meals. She's finally hired by Radium Dial Company to paint glow-in-

ALYSON HAGY'S most recent novel is "Scribe."

the-dark numbers on clock faces. There she makes the best girlfriends of her life, all of them licking their radium-dipped paintbrushes shift after shift, a carcinogenic practice that will result in tragedy. But as much as she adores Janie and Marie, beloved companions who nickname her "Ghost Girl" in honor of her ethereal reserve, Zorrie can't stay away from Indiana. She returns to Clinton County, where she forges a bond both true and fragile with Harold Underwood. Before long, another man also clasps her heart. The aching ebb and flow of love will mark the rest of her days.

Hunt is not shy about his elegant ambitions with this small novel. The epigraph is from Flaubert's "A Simple Heart." The chapter titles are from Virginia Woolf's "The Waves." This is not fiction as literary uproar. This is a refined realism of the sort Flaubert himself championed, storytelling that accrues detail by lean detail. "His face was flushed," Hunt writes of Harold. "Faint ovals of sweat darkened his white shirt at the shoulders as if someone who liked him a great deal had rested her palms there." Hunt's prose is galvanized by powerful questions. Who were those forebears who tilled the land for decades, seemingly without complaint? How did they fashion happiness, or manage soaring passions, in their conformist communities? He re-examines the pastoral with ardent precision.

While some may recall Willa Cather's monumental *Antonia* as they fall under Zorrie's spell, I was also haunted by William Maxwell's "So Long, See You Tomorrow" and Brad Watson's exquisite "Miss Jane." "He who can say how he burns," Hunt writes, quoting Petrarch, "burns little." Zorrie Underwood burns hot, and deep. She can't always put words to her tumultuous feelings. And, like Hunt, she distrusts mere nostalgia. Instead, she fashions an idiosyncratic resilience for herself even as love abandons her again and again. What Hunt ultimately gives us is a pure and shining book, an America where community becomes a "symphony of souls," a sustenance greater than romance or material wealth for those wise enough to join in. □

Cash and Carry

This novel follows a delivery worker through a busy cityscape.

By **ANDY NEWMAN**

A YOUNG MAN fleeing political upheaval arrives in a prosperous city with nothing but the clothes on his back and a debt to be repaid for his passage. What does he do to survive?

Because it is the present, he works as a "delivery boy" for a Postmates-like service, one of the legions of worker ants on electric bikes who make possible civilized urban life as we have lately come to know it. And because "The Delivery" is a novel (an often exquisite one) by Peter Mendelsund, the book-cover designer and author of the metaliterary meditation "What We See When We Read," the struggles of the unnamed delivery boy turn on questions of language: its hard-won acquisition, its inadequacies and its power to transport.

At the outset, the courier's world consists of little more than numbers — numbered packages on warehouse shelves, destination addresses, stars from

THE DELIVERY

By **Peter Mendelsund**

287 pp. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$27.

customers or lack thereof, tips. All else is mystery: "Customer 2 had smiled, and said something to him he hadn't entirely understood. She looked the delivery boy briefly in his eyes, before closing the door."

In lapidary chapters often just a few sentences long, Mendelsund conveys the worker's nearly wordless attempts to simultaneously learn a language, a culture, an industry, a cityscape and its dangerous streets, and, perhaps most puzzling, the laws of social interaction. We learn about his circumscribed life at the warehouse, where he lives with the other delivery boys — never delivery men, no matter what age — in a bunkroom off the packaging floor, all laboring vainly to work off the cost of their beds, meals, bikes and phones, as well as the fare for their harrowing trip to what they had hoped was freedom. (There are delivery boys of even lower caste who ferry packages only from one warehouse to another; their tipless world is "like a closed vasculature.")

The delivery boy has an ally, if a fickle one, in N., the dour, laconic dispatch girl from an "adjacent" homeland. When the mood strikes, she slips him more lucrative deliveries and feeds him tiny morsels of language, "only one sound at a time," that make him feel "as if N. had somehow pumped extra blood into him." He learns the rhythm of the streets: "I know when that car is going to pull out, he thought. / . . . now' / (And it did.)" He savors and shares tiny triumphs: "Before kicking off,

ANDY NEWMAN is a Metro reporter for *The Times*. In 2019 he wrote about what it's like to be a deliveryman in New York.

he took a moment to rub the bills between his fingers, enjoying their raggy suppleness." And he tastes moments of freedom: "The sun came out. Having rolled up his sleeves at a traffic light, the delivery boy felt the hairs on his forearm ruffle."

At the book's hinge point, the delivery boy, mustering his painstakingly accumulated linguistic, social and financial capital, speaks his heart to N., with catastrophic results. Still, he is entrusted with delivering a very important package to a distant location. As he heads out of the city on a boulevard that turns terrifyingly into a multi-lane highway, Mendelsund's contained language takes flight. The delivery boy, "unarmored, on his puny bike, the stage much too large for his pitiable conveyance," dodges "clanging metal giants" and a "muffler that one of the trucks had long



ago sloughed off onto the roadside like a prehistoric shoulder bone," until "the railings fell away, and he realized that he was on a ramp — no, a runaway."

Unfortunately, the novel picks up an annoying passenger: the narrator, who goes from unobtrusive chronicler to unruly guest at his own dinner party, sidetracking the reader with tales of his own unsettled

Simultaneously learning a language, a culture, an industry and dangerous streets.

adolescence and popping his head through the fourth wall to undercut his increasingly parenthesis-saddled account of the delivery boy's adventures. The book — each section of which opens with an epigram from Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations" — eventually bogs down in philological digression.

Despite the overreach, Mendelsund shines a piercing light on a bottom-rung existence. As delivery takes on a meaning closer to grace, you root hard for the deliverer. □

Electrons, Photons, Gluons, Quarks

A Nobel-winning physicist looks with wonder and excitement at the forces that shape our physical world.

By NELL FREUDENBERGER

WHETHER OR NOT you're accustomed to reading physics for pleasure, the Nobel laureate Frank Wilczek's "Fundamentals" might be the perfect book for the winter of this plague year. Early on, Wilczek quotes the 17th-century French physicist and philosopher Blaise Pascal's lament, "The universe grasps me and swallows me up like a speck." For Pascal, that thought produced intense spiritual anxiety, but for the contemporary reader it might actually provide a certain comfort: Whatever obscene amount of damage we've managed to do here on Earth is insignificant when seen on an astronomical scale. Wilczek has a more

FUNDAMENTALS

Ten Keys to Reality

By Frank Wilczek

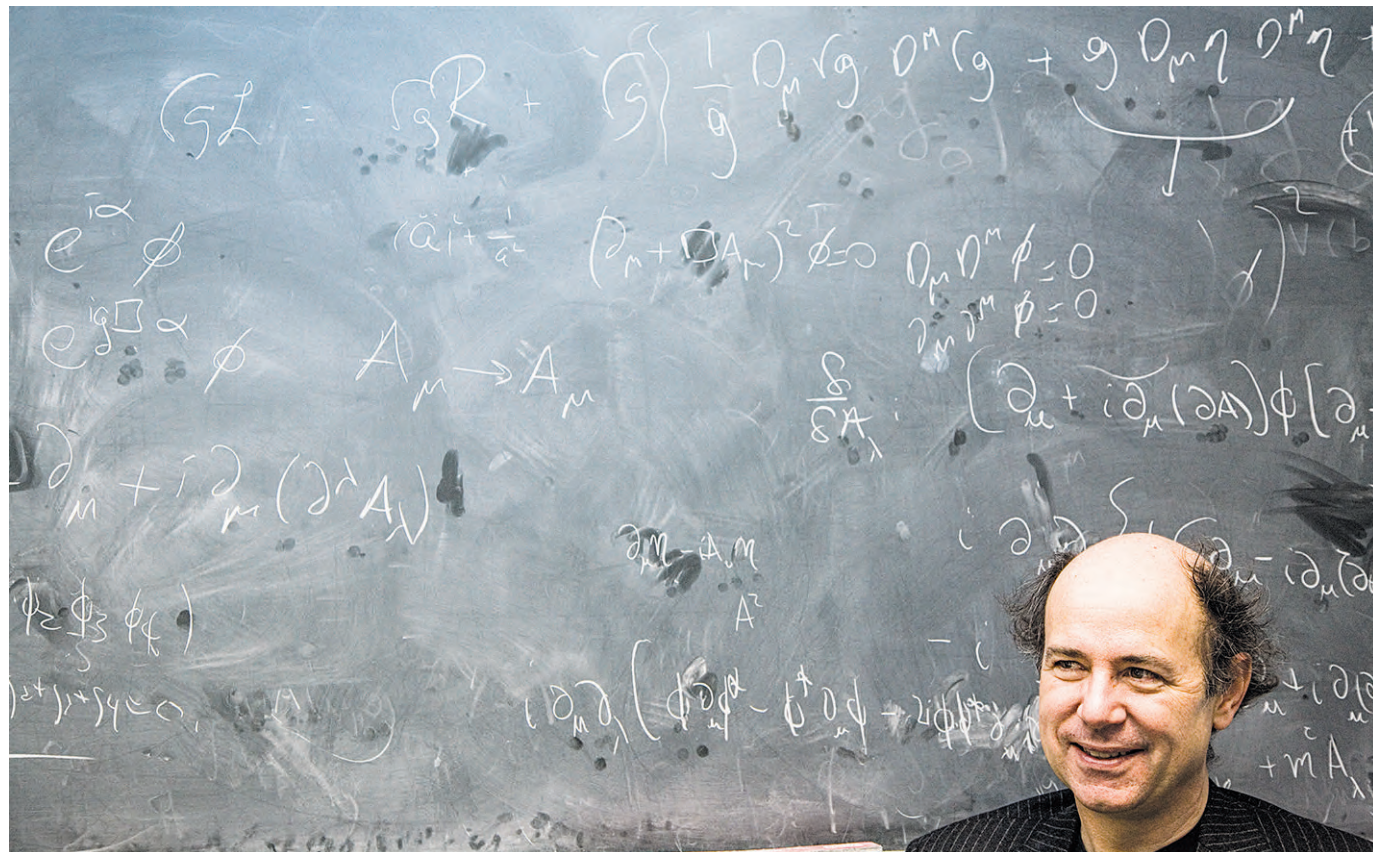
272 pp. Penguin Press. \$26.

optimistic take, though, based on quantifying the space inside us: The number of atoms in a single human body is roughly 10^{28} — 1 followed by 28 zeros, "a million times the number of stars in the entire visible universe." He sees potential in our inner vastness, too.

Another way to write that number is 10 octillion, and "Fundamentals" is filled with facts like these — the kind of question adults think they can answer until their children ask. How long until the Earth is swallowed by the sun? How does GPS work? How many thoughts can a person have in a lifetime? (Based on an average speech rate of two words per second, Wilczek estimates approximately a billion.)

Although Wilczek's voice here is endearingly humble, it's clear that his mind was never like that of most kids piping up from the back seat. He recalls that one of his "earliest childhood memories is of a small notebook I kept when I was first learning about relativity, on the one hand, and algebra, on the other." Wilczek grew up in New York City and attended public school in Queens, graduating from high school in two years. As a teenager trailing his mother in the grocery store, he was taken with the brand name of a laundry detergent called Axion, and promised himself that if he ever discovered an elementary particle, he'd give it that name. Incredibly, in 1978, Wilczek did identify a hypothetical particle — one that coincidentally solved a problem related to axial currents — and was able to fulfill that fantasy.

Wilczek was still a graduate student at Princeton when he and David Gross developed the theory of asymptotic freedom, an explanation for the way quarks inter-



Frank Wilczek in front of a chalkboard at his office at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

act with one another inside the nucleus of an atom, clarifying the workings of the strong force, also called quantum chromodynamics. The theory explained a seeming paradox in the behavior of these elementary particles — that they attract one another more forcefully at a distance than in proximity — a discovery that earned him and Gross, along with David Politzer, the 2004 Nobel Prize.

Wilczek writes with breathtaking economy and clarity, and his pleasure in his subject is palpable. He lays out the elementary particles of matter — electrons, photons, gluons and quarks — and their strikingly short list of properties: mass, charge and spin. He then defines four principles that characterize the four basic forces in nature: electromagnetism, gravity, the strong force and the weak force. Most people vaguely remember electromagnetic fields from high school physics, but Wilczek makes very clear the way that those "space-filling" fields are contiguous with the smallest building blocks of matter: "We now understand particles as manifestations of a deeper, fuller reality. Particles are avatars of fields." It's a beautiful description that would be especially evocative for today's game-fluent high school students.

Sometimes, to see if you understand a concept in physics, it helps to try to explain it to someone else. Wilczek points out that the elementary particles "aren't

even solid bodies. Indeed, though it's convenient to call them 'elementary particles,' they aren't really particles. . . . Our modern fundamental ingredients have no intrinsic size or shape."

In trying to paraphrase this enchanting idea for my husband, I realized that I didn't actually know how something with no size or shape could have mass. I thought Wilczek might not enlighten me, and then a chapter later he did, articulating the concept this way: "Quarks have very small masses, and gluons have zero mass. But inside protons they are moving around very fast, and thus they carry energy. All that energy adds up. When the accumulated energy is packaged into an object that is at rest overall, such as the proton as a whole, then that object has the mass $m=E/c^2$." That inverted version of Einstein's famous formula incidentally is one of the things Wilczek remembers writing down in his childhood notebook. What a reader gets in "Fundamentals" is the native language of physics — mathematics — precisely translated by someone who has spent a lifetime (about a billion thoughts!) on these forces that shape our physical world.

Beyond the facts, "Fundamentals" is full of the kind of heady ideas that keep laypeople reading about contemporary physics: the possibility that the mysterious "dark matter" that makes up 25 percent of the mass of our universe might ac-

tually be a remnant of theoretical particles called axions in the very early universe, an invisible cousin of the cosmic microwave background radiation, also a relic of the Big Bang; or the idea that with a biological engineering technique called "modulated self-reproduction" it might be possible to "terraform" a new planet. In a book this far-reaching, it's understandable that Wilczek spends only a few pages on climate change, focusing mostly on the enormous potential of solar energy. The optimism inherent in chapter titles like "There's Plenty of Time" and "There's Plenty of Space" can seem Panglossian next to the reality of what we're facing on Earth in the next few decades.

I think Wilczek might answer that criticism by talking about complementarity, an idea that he's elevated to an intellectual credo: "the concept that one single thing, when considered from different perspectives, can seem to have very different or even contradictory properties." He explains that in physics, when a model becomes too complicated, an alternative model can help answer important questions.

"Fundamentals" offers readers just that sort of radical shift: the way that energy, seen from another angle, is a particle; the way that space-time could be a form of matter; the way that stepping outside a catastrophe to look at it on a cosmic scale might actually be the first step toward a solution. □

The New Not Normal



Jaouad in the hospital before her chemotherapy trial, left, and home with her dog, Oscar Wilde.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

as it starts to bloom she begins scratching her skin until she bleeds crimson. She is gripped by constant fatigue. As her physical symptoms worsen, she is dismissed by doctors again and again, until her eyes are “bleached blank with pain.”

Finally, Jaouad receives a harrowing diagnosis: acute myeloid leukemia. She sounds out her diagnosis, observing, “It sounded like an exotic flower, beautiful and poisonous.” When she learns that, in addition to chemo, she’ll need a bone-marrow transplant, she writes, “Up until this point, the extent of my knowledge about bone marrow came from French cuisine — *boeuf à la moelle*, the fancy dish occasionally served with a side of toasted baguette.” She is hit by the cold, brutal newness of the world of illness, where handshaking is now forbidden, masks and gloves required of everyone who comes near. But she maintains that this will be temporary: “Initially, I’d clung to the hope of a short sojourn, one in which I wouldn’t have to unpack my bags.”

It is common instinct to insist that we can remain in place, intact, even as the world as we know it dissolves. It is harder to accept that we’re hurtling toward the unknown, changing in unsettling and permanent ways.

Jaouad is forced into isolation, subject to an onslaught of torturous procedures and bodily invasion. “Being poked and palpated and locked in a room for days on end without a release date was maddening,” she writes. “The windows didn’t open.”

For three and a half years, survival will remain her sole focus. She is saturated in fluorescent light, stabbed with needles, sponged, painted with bruises and scars. Death sits quietly as her roommate, as she stews hour after hour, month by month, in that maddening concoction of terror and boredom.

CHANEL MILLER is the author of “Know My Name.”



Jaouad maps her itinerary.

In lockdown, we are still learning how to stay sane in isolation. We stiffen, forgetting to stretch, mentally slipping, losing sleep, our time spent growing green onions in glass jars, thumbs scrolling to numb anxiety. To cope, Jaouad does not seek an escape from her agony; she seeks conversion — to make use of it, turn it into something meaningful. In the quiet she learns to hear herself. She begins to write, and as her body is ravaged, her voice strengthens. She starts a blog, which becomes a New York Times column called “Life, Interrupted.”

Jaouad writes: “What would you write about if you knew you might die soon? Bent over my laptop in bed, I traveled to where the silence was in my life.”

Silence becomes a sought-out destination. No longer turning away from change, she becomes attentive to its every fluctuation. Letters begin to pour in from her readers — strangers who may not have the same stories, but who identify with Jaouad’s ability to pair honesty with suffering. It might be easier to succumb and let other forces take over, yet she descends into pain with her eyes wide open.

Often survivors are praised as superhuman, vessels of strength and optimism.

Jaouad insists we hold our applause and bear witness to the true cost of surviving. We rarely hear how survivors are exhausted, sick of it and ready to give up. In our 20s, we are not asking to be inspirational mountaintop sages; we want the freedom to be reckless, to experience uncomplicated growth.

Jaouad serves us scenes of her weary red-eyed father, fights with her partner so vicious they scare the dog, and exposes the aching silence left by those who fail to show up. She works through the shame and disorientation of sexual health; no one informed her that infertility and menopause were side effects of her treatment. As she loses one young, brilliant friend after another to cancer, others rush to cushion their deaths — but Jaouad casts away neat endings, capturing their raging will to live. Even when she is “done” with treatment, she makes it clear that her healing has barely begun.

AT THE TAIL END of trauma, most people would prefer to hand the sufferer a bucket of silver paint and a brush, and say go ahead, paint the lining. Jaouad tosses the supplies and hops into a Subaru. On the road, she opts for slowness, finding the courage to marinate in unanswered questions and be alone with her thoughts. She drives a jagged constellation, 15,000 miles across the nation, visiting strangers who wrote to her. In each interaction, we meet someone who has encountered a lightless place — losing a child to suicide, living with chronic illness, a death sentence. There is a

deeply comforting element to these conversations. Grief is allowed to come out and sniff around; it’s treated like a gentle companion, never shooed away.

There are times the pacing plateaus, where length dilutes urgency, but I was immersed for the whole ride and would follow Jaouad anywhere. Her sensory snapshots remain in my mind long after reading: “caterpillar-thick lines of cocaine,” mouth sores like “milky full moons.” Losing hair is like “pulling weeds from damp soil”; illness is “some wet, starless savagery unfolding beneath my skin.” Not only can Jaouad tolerate the unbearable feelings, she can reshape them into poetry.

As re-entry to unquarantined life becomes visible on the horizon, as the vaccines are distributed into more arms, the gears of life will slowly begin churning. We may be tempted to move on quickly, to fall into old routines. I am nervous that when everything is in motion, I will not be able to keep up. It is impossible to unlearn how vulnerable we are to disruption, how swiftly and soundlessly life can deliver us into unwanted realities.

Jaouad would encourage us not to mute what we’ve been through, but to take inventory of all we’ve lost, how we’ve changed. To look at where trust has been broken, re-evaluate relationships that have frayed. She writes, “There is no atlas charting that lonely, moonless stretch of highway between where you start and who you become.”

Her writing restores the moon, lights the way as we learn to endure the unknown. □



Suleika Jaouad and Oscar Wilde, on the road.

The History Maker

How Kamala Harris rose in the swampy world of California politics.

By **LISA MCGIRR**

THE DAUGHTER OF a Jamaica-born father and India-born mother who met in the turbulent world of '60s Bay Area political activism, Kamala Harris has a social justice lineage that runs deep. In her 2020 Democratic National Convention acceptance speech as Joe Biden's running mate, she proudly re-

KAMALA'S WAY

An American Life

By **Dan Morain**

272 pp. Simon & Schuster. \$28.



Kamala Harris, October 2003.

called having “a stroller’s eye view of people getting into what the great John Lewis called ‘good trouble.’” Her maternal grandfather served as a prominent senior government official in the tumultuous politics of postcolonial India.

Dan Morain, for decades a reporter for *The Los Angeles Times*, recounts stories like these in “Kamala’s Way,” and his insider’s view provides a revealing portrait of the people and events surrounding Har-

LISA MCGIRR teaches American history at Harvard. Her most recent book is “*The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State*.”

ris’s rise to political stardom. Morain paints Bay Area Democratic politics as a swampy world where schmoozing with potential billionaire funders and sitting on the right boards were essential to climbing the rungs. He details Harris’s liaison with the self-described “Ayatollah of the Assembly” and former San Francisco mayor, Willie Brown. Harris dated Brown in 1994 and 1995, splitting with him after his election as mayor. He was 30 years her senior. But the numerous stories about Brown feel misplaced, distracting from what should have been a tighter focus on Harris herself.

Harris’s career took off during the 1990s in an era of bipartisan calls for tough-on-

crime measures. As the Alameda County deputy district attorney, Harris spent years as a courtroom prosecutor before she was recruited to a supervisory position with the San Francisco district attorney’s office and then the city attorney’s office. She was elected San Francisco district attorney in 2003, and attorney general of California in 2010, a position she held until she was elected senator in 2016.

Harris’s long tenure as a prosecutor in California, a harsh, punitive state, has drawn criticism. In her run for San Francisco district attorney in 2003, Harris called for improving conviction rates and prosecuting serious drug cases to clean up the streets. (The *San Francisco Chronicle* endorsed her candidacy under the headline “Harris, for Law and Order.”) But once elected, she took positions that cost her police support and came out strongly in favor of criminal justice reform. Her 2009 book, “*Smart on Crime*,” called for education, drug treatment and rehabilitation. As attorney general, she instituted first-in-the-nation programs to bolster police accountability. Undoubtedly, the most consistent through-line in her career is her unflinching championship of victims of sexual abuse, child trafficking and domestic violence.

These actions, and Morain’s admiration for Harris’s “skill and charisma, her intelligence and grit, and her willingness to fight

hard,” are tempered by Morain’s view that Harris’s ambition and national sights led her to “be both innovative and cautious,” sometimes acting as a trailblazer and other times holding her fire: “She took strong stands or she stood mute on the important criminal justice issues of her day.” Though balancing both sides, he seems to agree with the critics he cites who viewed her as “overly cautious.”

Morain paints Harris as a pragmatic, ambitious politician who “took positions when she needed to and when those stands might help her politically,” but who was also “adept at not taking stands when doing so was not politically necessary.” Despite his inclusion of stories that show Harris’s warmth outside the limelight, his biography is not fawning. Nor is it very personal. Morain was not able to interview Harris or her family, but says he relied on “dozens of sources” with “firsthand knowledge.”

This book is unlikely to satisfy readers enamored of the nation’s barrier-breaking vice president, who may find Morain’s judgments at times unduly critical, and his use of phrases like “brusque and antagonistic style” and “brash confidence” as distinctly gendered. At the same time, “Kamala’s Way” could appeal to aficionados of California politics who want a better understanding of the high-powered political world where Harris’s national star rose. □

The Supreme Gangster

An elegant hit man’s ruthless rise and rapid fall.

By **JENNA WEISSMAN JOSELIT**

THE HOLLYWOOD GOSSIP columnist Florabel Muir had him pegged as a “storybook gangster.” With his matinee-idol looks, expensive haberdashery and affable, honeyed manner, he was also likened to a

BUGSY SIEGEL

The Dark Side of the American Dream

By **Michael Shnayerson**

248 pp. Yale University Press. \$26.

“sportsman,” a playboy and an actor *manqué*. I’m referring, of course, to Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel, the underworld figure who, calling himself an “investment broker,” abetted the postwar transformation of a once sleepy Nevada town into that “American Gomorrah” known as Las Ve-

JENNA WEISSMAN JOSELIT is the Charles E. Smith professor of Judaic studies and professor of history at George Washington University. “*Our Gang: Jewish Crime and the New York Jewish Community*” was her first book.

gas. The man made for good copy and, based on Michael Shnayerson’s fast-paced and absorbing biography in the Jewish Lives series, he still does.

This latest account, written in a rat-a-tat style where money jingles and the American dream is in reach of “anyone with guts, good taste and a gun,” follows the entrepreneurial ne’er-do-well as he made his way from the dreary tenements of New York City to the elegant redoubts of Los Angeles and then Las Vegas. After a potted history of Siegel’s adolescence on the s Lower East Side, where, thanks to his quicksilver temper, the teenage tough acquired his nickname, the book picks up steam, recounting Siegel’s subsequent exploits during the interwar years as a bootlegger, bookmaker and occasional hit man. It culminates in his grand postwar plans for the “Fabulous Flamingo,” a swanky casino-cum-hotel in the Nevada desert. Designed to give Monte Carlo a run for its money, this ambitious venture proved to be his undoing.

Presently, Siegel persuaded his underworld confederates to finance the Flamingo, pointing to a confluence of local factors — legalized gambling, air travel, the presence

of large numbers of male factory workers with time on their hands and money to spend — likely to ensure a constant flow of paying customers. Not so wisely, he overspent by millions of dollars, giving them reason to suspect him of skimming off the top and rendering him a liability.

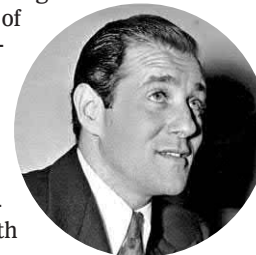
Shnayerson, a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, makes good use of the gossipy published memoirs of the many people, from paramours to attorneys, who consorted with Siegel, as well as of heavily redacted F.B.I. files, their pages smudged with black ink. With a keen eye for the amusing, and humanizing, detail, he enlivens the traditional rise-and-fall narrative.

With one eye on the scale and another on his public image, Siegel exercised like mad and monitored his daily diet, lest he gain a pound or two. He also made sure to expand his vocabulary by dipping nightly into the *Reader’s Digest* column “It Pays to Increase Your Word Power.”

Siegel’s image-making extended from his

person to his hotel, where he insisted that, to add a *frisson* of exoticism, real flamingos wander the grounds. He reluctantly gave up on that idea, and expense, when the creatures succumbed to the extreme desert heat and died prematurely.

Readers awaiting a new plot twist, a late-in-the-day revelation or, for that matter, a debunking of underworld mythology, will not find it in these pages, which hew tightly to conventional wisdom. But they will come away with an enhanced understanding of, and even sympathy for, the man who, according to at least one of his associates, was the “supreme gangster in the U.S., the top man . . . the big boss.” When, in the book’s concluding moments, Shnayerson reports that Siegel, age 41, was shot to death one June evening in 1947 while sitting quietly in the living room of his Beverly Hills home, and that his funeral was both sparsely attended and speedy — “It was all over in five minutes,” *The Los Angeles Examiner* reported — some of us may even feel a twinge or two of sadness. □



Bugsy Siegel

Kindred Spirits

Sacred stories provide comfort by bringing people together.

By ADITI SRIRAM

IF THE PAST 11 months have seemed illogical and unstoppable, consider these questions. What if the hummingbird darting from flower to flower is actually a nobleman eternally searching for his beloved maiden? Or the sun and the moon are an angry married couple destined to chase each other across the sky? These age-old myths unsettle everyday logic to reveal larger truths. Unpredictability is but a literary device that helps explain an increasingly bizarre world.

Mythology is not only the relic of ancient civilizations, but also the engine of contemporary cultures. Its stories provide comfort by bringing people together to make sense of strangeness through shared foresight.

Native American mythology, which stretches across North, Central and South America, transmutes from one tribe to the next. Fifteen thousand years old, it

ANCESTOR APPROVED
Intertribal Stories for Kids
Edited by Cynthia Leitch Smith

320 pp. Heartdrum/HarperCollins. \$16.99.
(Ages 8 to 12)

THE SEA-RINGED WORLD
Sacred Stories of the Americas
By María García Esperón
Illustrated by Amanda Mijangos

Translated by David Bowles
240 pp. Em Querido/Levine Querido. \$21.99.
(Ages 8 and up)

abounds with divine characters, celestial battles and natural manifestations of human behavior.

Its legends probe identity, origin and one's connection to Mother Earth — concepts that Native American communities in the United States and Canada gather together to celebrate.

"Ancestor Approved" is a Native American-themed short story anthology with one such gathering, a powwow, at its center. A powwow is a festive, bustling, multi-generational affair at which children and adults perform traditional dances in their tribe's regalia, sell handmade wares and enjoy Native foods such as fry bread. As expected in a book for young readers, the school-age protagonists of the stories make friends, honor their heritage and learn how to respect others.

ADITI SRIRAM teaches writing at Ashoka University. She is the author of *"Beyond the Boulevards: A Short Biography of Pondicherry."*



When commissioning pieces for the anthology, its editor, Cynthia Leitch Smith, asked the authors — a mix of new and veteran Native writers — to all set their stories at "the Dance for Mother Earth Powwow." The lenses through which they view the event, however, run the gamut, from a shy teenager nervous about his first dance to a grandmother in possession of a winning raffle ticket.

Newcomers learn what a powwow is all about, and what a boost it can be, while insiders take up the drumbeat that reverberates throughout the venue. Herself a citizen of the Muscogee Creek Nation and a best-selling author of Native American children's and young adult literature, Smith has curated the anthology with an eye to attracting both kinds of readers.

This kaleidoscopic perspective accentuates the intrigue of the powwow, for which the characters spend months preparing. By the time they (and we) pull up to the venue, all are ready to be amazed and transported. Consider the contributor Joseph Bruchac's "Bad Dog," in which a young boy chats with an unusual old man, who we later realize was his long-dead great-grandfather. Or Dawn Quigley's "Joey Reads the Sky," in which Joey is revealed to have superpowers that save his family from a tornado.

Smith and her authors are mindful of their readers' ages, and situate some of the powwow's miracles in more everyday plots. In Brian Young's stories, school enemies become good friends. In "Flying Together," by Kim Rogers, a mother deployed to the Middle East returns early — a miracle as far as her daughter is concerned.

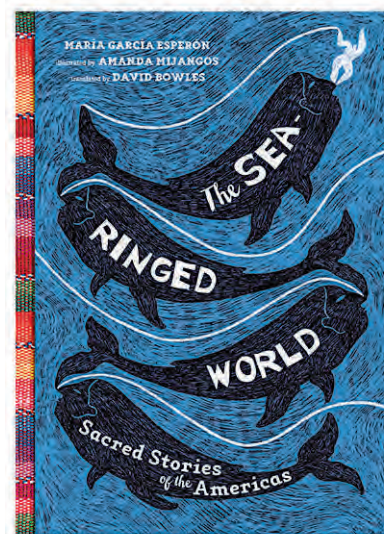
The first-person stories are the strongest. As these protagonists are figuring out new friendships, foster parents and relatives whom they've only just met or haven't seen in years, readers get to experience what they're experiencing.

But descriptions of the performances and tribal attire are consistently inadequate, and difficult to visualize. Illustrations would have enhanced each story, and shown readers more of the powwow.

In contrast, "The Sea-Ringed World," by the Mexican poet María García Esperón ("A Tortoise Named Harriet"), contains hypnotizing art, by Amanda Mijangos. Consistent with her cover design, Mijangos's illustrations are predominantly blue, with some white and black, and evoke the elements: sometimes benevolent, sometimes enraged.

The stories in this collection are differentiated by tribe. Esperón entreats her readers to "respect and admire the lore that has endured unto this moment and to weep for all that has been irrevocably lost."

Her tone is somber but also sacred; it signals that she is writing for slightly older



children, and for adults as well. Esperón wants her readers — again, gathered together in solidarity — in the right mind-space to receive stories that are at once devotional and defiant, hopeful and horrific.

These tales have been sourced from 18 Indigenous cultures, spanning two continents, from Argentina to Alaska. Readers hop from the wisdom of one tribe to the wisdom of the next, mostly across swaths of Central and South America.

There is no pervading moral about the triumph of good over evil, life over death,

gods over humans. Characters — in various forms — fall in love, seek revenge and attain salvation. Humans turn into animals; gods inhabit vegetation.

Some learn their lesson, others don't. Many of the stories end abruptly, brutally, sadly. Love is often cut short or left unrequited.

But the simplicity of the language, thanks in part to the collection's translator, David Bowles, is disarming. We feel compelled to turn the page and begin again, hoping that the earth can start afresh or that two characters can live happily ever after. Sometimes they do, but this unpredictability — inherent to mythology — has a humbling effect.

Native American mythology stretches across North, Central and South America.

The collection's structure prompts a similar reaction. Along with a story about the sun and the moon in love, readers will encounter one about the sun throwing ash in the moon's face, and another about the sun and the moon as half-siblings born of rival fathers.

"The Sea-Ringed World" is provocative as well. In "K'awil and the Prince," from the Mopan (Maya) tradition, K'awil (God of Lightning and Magic) and the prince are homosexual lovers. In "Aakulujjuusi and Uumarnituq," from the Inuit tradition, the first two humans to emerge "from mounds of earth on Igloodik Island" are men. They fall in love. One becomes pregnant and is transformed into a woman to give birth. Without being fussed over, sexuality and gender are presented as fluid.

In this way Esperón keeps readers wondering, wobbling. Her deliberate arrangement of this lore, a mixture of confusing plots and unexpected endings, tells readers to be patient about extracting meaning.

One of the later stories, "Universe," a Nahuan legend, lays out how the universe is structured and who controls it. A few others trace the origins of recognizable places such as Lima (the capital of Peru) and Mexico. These tales would have been helpful blueprints up front, but Esperón offers them at seemingly random intervals, as puzzle pieces that will form a coherent picture only after the entire book has been read.

Puzzle-making and bonfire storytelling feel like luxuries in a society moving at pandemic-spreading speed. Thank goodness for mythology, in which time is irrelevant and endings are unseeable; it is more relatable than ever before. □

Best Sellers

The New York Times

For the complete best-seller lists, visit [nytimes.com/books/best-sellers](https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers)

COMBINED PRINT AND E-BOOK BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF JANUARY 31-FEBRUARY 6

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Fiction	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	Nonfiction	WEEKS ON LIST
1		THE FOUR WINDS , by Kristin Hannah. (St. Martin's) As dust storms roll during the Great Depression, Elsa must choose between saving the family and farm or heading West.	1	1		THINK AGAIN , by Adam Grant. (Viking) An examination of the cognitive skills of rethinking and unlearning that could be used to adapt to a rapidly changing world.	1
2	2	THE DUKE AND I , by Julia Quinn. (Avon) Daphne Bridgerton's reputation soars when she colludes with the Duke of Hastings. The basis of the Netflix series "Bridgerton."	6	2		FOUR HUNDRED SOULS , edited by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain. (One World) A compendium featuring 90 writers covering 400 years of African-American history.	1
3		THE SURVIVORS , by Jane Harper. (Flatiron) Kieran Elliott takes his young family to his coastal hometown, where a body is found on the beach.	1	3		UNMASKED , by Andy Ngo. (Center Street) The former editor for the online magazine Quillette gives his perspective on the activist movement antifa.	1
4		SERPENTINE , by Jonathan Kellerman. (Random House) The 36th book in the Alex Delaware series. Sturgis calls on Delaware to help solve a decades-old cold case.	1	4	1	JUST AS I AM , by Cicely Tyson with Michelle Burford. (HarperCollins) The late iconic actress describes how she worked to change perceptions of Black women through her career choices.	2
5	10	FIREFLY LANE , by Kristin Hannah. (St. Martin's Griffin) A friendship between two women in the Pacific Northwest endures for more than three decades.	3	5	2	A PROMISED LAND , by Barack Obama. (Crown) In the first volume of his presidential memoirs, Barack Obama offers personal reflections on his formative years and pivotal moments through his first term.	12
6	4	THE VANISHING HALF , by Brit Bennett. (Riverhead) The lives of twin sisters who run away from a Southern Black community at age 16 diverge as one returns and the other takes on a different racial identity but their fates intertwine.	36	6	3	CASTE , by Isabel Wilkerson. (Random House) The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist examines aspects of caste systems across civilizations and reveals a rigid hierarchy in America today.	27
7	1	THE RUSSIAN , by James Patterson and James O. Born. (Little, Brown) The 13th book in the Michael Bennett series.	2	7	4	GREENLIGHTS , by Matthew McConaughey. (Crown) The Academy Award-winning actor shares snippets from the diaries he kept over the last 35 years.	16
8	3	THE VISCOUNT WHO LOVED ME , by Julia Quinn. (Avon) The second book in the Bridgerton series. Kate Sheffield gets in the way of Anthony Bridgerton's intent to marry.	6	8	5	UNTAMED , by Glennon Doyle. (Dial) The activist and public speaker describes her journey of listening to her inner voice.	48
9		THE SANATORIUM , by Sarah Pearse. (Pamela Dorman) Elin Warner must find her estranged brother's fiancée, who goes missing as a storm approaches a hotel that was once a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps.	1	9	9	THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE , by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin) How trauma affects the body and mind, and innovative treatments for recovery.	24
10	5	THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY , by Matt Haig. (Viking) Nora Seed finds a library beyond the edge of the universe that contains books with multiple possibilities of the lives one could have lived.	10	10		WHEN HARRY MET MINNIE , by Martha Teichner. (Celadon) The CBS Sunday Morning correspondent develops a bond with the ailing owner of a dog she agrees to adopt.	1

The New York Times best sellers are compiled and archived by the best-sellers-lists desk of the New York Times news department, and are separate from the editorial, culture, advertising and business sides of The New York Times Company. Rankings reflect unit sales reported on a confidential basis by vendors offering a wide range of general interest titles published in the United States. **ONLINE:** For complete lists and a full explanation of our methodology, visit www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers.

Editors' Choice / Staff Picks From the Book Review



THE COPENHAGEN TRILOGY: Childhood, Youth, Dependency, by Tove Ditlevsen. Translated by Tiina Nunnally and Michael Favala Goldman. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$30.) First published in Denmark in the 1960s and '70s, Ditlevsen's unstinting memoirs detail in luminous prose her hardscrabble upbringing, career path and merciless addictions: a powerful account of the struggle to reconcile art and life.



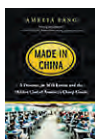
BLOOD GROVE, by Walter Mosley. (Mulholland, \$27.) In the 15th outing for his iconic private detective, Easy Rawlins, Mosley once again chronicles a part of America rendered invisible — and overpowered — by whiteness. The book is set in 1969, with Rawlins on the verge of 50, still struggling with professional and romantic and familial conflicts in a Los Angeles about to be beset by the berserk.



EXIT, by Belinda Bauer. (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$26.) In this thriller, suffused with intelligence and wit, things go horrifically wrong for a 75-year-old "Exit-teer," who sits with critically ill patients as they die. The plot is breakneck, but what lingers most is the hero's capacity for empathy at any cost.



SEND FOR ME, by Lauren Fox. (Knopf, \$26.95.) Inspired by a trove of letters written by her great-grandmother in 1930s Germany and incorporated into the text, Fox's latest novel spans four generations and two continents, offering a nuanced exploration of the burden of inherited trauma on a single family riven by the Holocaust.



MADE IN CHINA: A Prisoner, an SOS Letter, and the Hidden Cost of America's Cheap Goods, by Amelia Pang. (Algonquin, \$27.95.) Pang talked to activists and laborers, combed social media and followed trucks from prisons to factories for this powerful exposé of Chinese forced labor, in which inmates must produce goods under inhumane conditions.



SYBILLE BEDFORD: A Life, by Selina Hastings. (Knopf, \$32.50.) Hastings, the author of several previous literary biographies, elegantly relates the eventful life of a first-rate 20th-century writer who wished she had produced more books "and spent less time being in love." Bedford's works of fiction and nonfiction are dense, exotic and rich. One can only hope this biography will bring new readers to them.



THE SWALLOWED MAN, by Edward Carey. (Riverhead, \$26.) Amid a glut of "Pinocchio" spinoffs, the novelist and playwright Carey has had the inspired idea to focus on Geppetto, the lonely old woodcutter who carves a boy from an enchanted block of pine, giving him form and life — about as close as men get to immaculate conception, even in fantasy.



LET ME TELL YOU WHAT I MEAN, by Joan Didion. (Knopf, \$23.) The 12 previously published essays collected here (mostly) for the first time were written between the late 1960s and the year 2000. Revisiting Didion's work now provides a familiar joy, as well as a reminder of her prescience.



KINK: Stories, edited by R. O. Kwon and Garth Greenwell. (Simon & Schuster, paper, \$17.) Not quite erotica, this fiction anthology is more about the transformative nature of kink as a practice. Featuring works from a diverse selection of writers, the collection explores issues of power, agency and identity.

The full reviews of these and other recent books are online: [nytimes.com/books](https://www.nytimes.com/books)

Inside the List

ELISABETH EGAN

A Book in the Oven If you are a new parent with a few hours of child care on your hands, you may be inclined to sneak in a nap, take a walk or call a friend to talk about the baby you are so eager to escape.



Audrain hopes readers will 'ask different questions of women they love.'

Ashley Audrain chose a different path: writing. Starting when her son was 6 months old, she used every free moment to write "The Push," a thoughtful suspense novel about the dark side of motherhood that just spent three weeks on the hardcover fiction list. In a phone interview, Audrain recalled hunkering down in a

Toronto coffee shop, where she easily slipped into the mind-set of a woman who believes her daughter is a bad seed.

"What happens in the book is fiction, but I did draw from my own experience of certain emotions and the day-to-day life of motherhood," she said. Audrain had always enjoyed writing, but never found peace in the process until she was adjusting to life as a parent: "It wasn't hard for me to spend time in these difficult scenes because they became a creative outlet. I felt the most like myself when I was writing. And then it was very easy for me to close my laptop, leave the coffee shop and go home to my family."

Long before she had children of her own, Audrain was fascinated by motherhood, but "mostly from the perspective of wondering why women did it." She never played with dolls, hated babysitting and "wasn't a kid person in general." This former publicity director of Penguin Books Canada, who is the mother of two, explained, "I think I had children because I didn't want to regret not having them. Of course now I love being a mother, but I love it with the caveat that you can love your children while still having days when you wish you didn't have the responsibilities that come along with them. Nobody talks about this, and I think it's the in-between space where most of us live, especially now."

Audrain takes inspiration from a range of authors, including Leila Slimani, Celeste Ng and Alice Munro. She appreciates stories about the "quiet lives of women" and books, like Ng's, that are "less about what happened and more about why it has happened." In "The Push," she said, her goal was to "explore the expectation society puts on women to have a certain experience of motherhood, for it to look and feel one way. I wanted to hold a mirror up and make people realize how important it is to ask different questions of women they love, to have new conversations with the mothers in their lives." □

PRINT / HARDCOVER BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF JANUARY 31-FEBRUARY 6

Fiction			Nonfiction		
THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WEEKS ON LIST	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WEEKS ON LIST
1		THE FOUR WINDS , by Kristin Hannah. (St. Martin's) As dust storms roll during the Great Depression, Elsa must choose between saving the family and farm or heading West. 1	1		FOUR HUNDRED SOULS , edited by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain. (One World) A compendium featuring 90 writers covering 400 years of African-American history. 1
2		THE SURVIVORS , by Jane Harper. (Flatiron) Kieran Elliott takes his young family to his coastal hometown, where a body is found on the beach. 1	2		THINK AGAIN , by Adam Grant. (Viking) An examination of the cognitive skills of rethinking and unlearning that could be used to adapt to a rapidly changing world. 1
3	2	THE VANISHING HALF , by Brit Bennett. (Riverhead) The lives of twin sisters who run away from a Southern Black community at age 16 diverge as one returns and the other takes on a different racial identity but their fates intertwine. 36	3	1	JUST AS I AM , by Cicely Tyson with Michelle Burford. (HarperCollins) The late iconic actress describes how she worked to change perceptions of Black women through her career choices. 2
4	1	THE RUSSIAN , by James Patterson and James O. Born. (Little, Brown) The 13th book in the Michael Bennett series. 2	4	2	A PROMISED LAND , by Barack Obama. (Crown) In the first volume of his presidential memoirs, Barack Obama offers personal reflections on his formative years and pivotal moments through his first term. 12
5		THE SANATORIUM , by Sarah Pearse. (Pamela Dorman) Elin Warner must find her estranged brother's fiancée, who goes missing as a storm approaches a hotel that was once a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps. 1	5		UNMASKED , by Andy Ngo. (Center Street) The former editor for the online magazine Quillette gives his perspective on the activist movement antifa. 1
6	3	THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY , by Matt Haig. (Viking) Nora Seed finds a library beyond the edge of the universe that contains books with multiple possibilities of the lives one could have lived. 10	6	3	GREENLIGHTS , by Matthew McConaughey. (Crown) The Academy Award-winning actor shares snippets from the diaries he kept over the last 35 years. 16
7	4	THE INVISIBLE LIFE OF ADDIE LARUE , by V.E. Schwab. (Tor/Forge) A Faustian bargain comes with a curse that affects the adventure Addie LaRue has across centuries. 15	7	4	CASTE , by Isabel Wilkerson. (Random House) The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist examines aspects of caste systems across civilizations and reveals a rigid hierarchy in America today. 27
8		SEND FOR ME , by Lauren Fox. (Knopf) A woman in Wisconsin discovers a trove of her grandmother's letters that detail her experiences in Germany leading up to World War II. 1	8	5	UNTAMED , by Glennon Doyle. (Dial) The activist and public speaker describes her journey of listening to her inner voice. 48
9	5	WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING , by Delia Owens. (Putnam) In a quiet town on the North Carolina coast in 1969, a woman who survived alone in the marsh becomes a murder suspect. 127	9	8	BECOMING , by Michelle Obama. (Crown) The former first lady describes how she balanced work, family and her husband's political ascent. 104
10		GIRL A , by Abigail Dean. (Viking) When their mother dies in prison, Lex Gracie and her siblings confront their shared past and shifting alliances. 1	10	11	HOW TO BE AN ANTIRACIST , by Ibram X. Kendi. (One World) A primer for creating a more just and equitable society through identifying and opposing racism. 41

An asterisk (*) indicates that a book's sales are barely distinguishable from those of the book above. A dagger (†) indicates that some bookstores report receiving bulk orders.

Paperback Row / BY JENNIFER KRAUSS



DAYS OF DISTRACTION, by Alexandra Chang. (Ecco, 320 pp., \$16.99.) Our reviewer, Elisabeth Egan, called this "honest" fictional take on "what it's like to feel invisible" when you work remotely for a tech publication and your boyfriend doesn't understand "the loneliness of being Chinese-American in a sea of white faces" a "thunderingly wise" debut novel from "a writer to watch."



BECOMING, by Michelle Obama. (Crown, 464 pp., \$18.99.) "Those focused on sound bites will be missing the larger meaning of a serious work of candid reflection by a singular figure of early-21st-century America," Isabel Wilkerson noted in her review of the former first lady's "refined and forthright, gracefully written and at times laugh-out-loud funny" memoir. The paperback edition includes a new introduction by the author.



SPIRIT RUN: A 6,000 Mile Marathon Through North America's Stolen Land, by Noé Álvarez. (Catalpult, 240 pp., \$16.95.) The son of Mexican refugees (his father is descended from the Purépecha people), Álvarez "comes face to face with the many strands of his inheritance," in the words of our reviewer, Danielle Jackson, when he joins a six-month-long Peace and Dignity Journeys run to reunite Indigenous nations.



HIDDEN VALLEY ROAD: Inside the Mind of an American Family, by Robert Kolker. (Anchor, 400 pp., \$17.) "Six sons with schizophrenia — the curse of the Galvin family is the stuff of Greek tragedy," Sam Dolnick wrote in his review of this "fascinating and upsetting" look at "a family swallowed whole" by a disease no one understood. It was one of the Book Review's 10 Best Books of 2020.



RACE AGAINST TIME: A Reporter Reopens the Unsolved Murder Cases of the Civil Rights Era, by Jerry Mitchell. (Simon & Schuster, 448 pp., \$17.) Mitchell's account of investigative reporting he began in the 1980s that eventually led to long-overdue murder convictions for perpetrators of notorious 1960s hate crimes, including the killing of Medgar Evers and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., is "brave, bracing and instructive," according to our reviewer, Randall Kennedy.



DEAR EDWARD, by Ann Napolitano. (Dial, 384 pp., \$18.) Our reviewer, Angie Kim, described this "haunting," "understated" novel, loosely based on the headline-grabbing true story of a "Miracle Boy" who was the lone survivor of a plane crash that killed 103 people, as "a masterful study in suspense, grief and survival."

MONTHLY BEST SELLERS

SALES PERIOD OF JANUARY 3-30

THIS MONTH	Graphic Books and Manga	MONTHS ON LIST
1	CAT KID COMIC CLUB , by Dav Pilkey. (Scholastic) Stories within a story come to life as Li'l Petey, Flippy and Molly show baby frogs how to create comics.	2
2	MY HERO ACADEMIA, VOL. 26 , by Kohei Horikoshi. (VIZ Media) Eraser Head and Present Mic prepare for a villain attack by visiting Tartarus prison where training under Endeavor is underway.	1
3	BABY-SITTERS LITTLE SISTER: KAREN'S WORST DAY , by Ann M. Martin. Illustrated by Katy Farina. (Scholastic) Bad luck seems to get the best of Karen, who can't find her favorite jeans or get her cat to play with her.	1
4	NEW KID , by Jerry Craft. (HarperCollins) Jordan Banks, an artistically inclined seventh grader from Washington Heights, has a tough time navigating an upscale private school where diversity is low.	15
5	GUTS , by Raina Telgemeier. (Scholastic) Raina finds her tummy trouble might be more than it first appears to be when she goes back to school.	17
6	CLASS ACT , by Jerry Craft. (Quill Tree) Drew Ellis finds he must work 10 times as hard as his privileged classmates.	4
7	JUJUTSU KAISEN, VOL. 1 , by Gege Akutami. (VIZ Media) The athletic Yuji Itadori chooses to spend his time with members of the Occult Research Club, who unseal a cursed object.	1
8	THEY CALLED US ENEMY , by George Takei, Justin Eisinger and Steven Scott. Illustrated by Harmony Becker. (Top Shelf Productions) A memoir of Takei's experiences while imprisoned in a Japanese-American internment camp during World War II.	4
9	DEMON SLAYER: KIMETSU NO YAIBA, VOL. 1 , by Koyoharu Gotouge. (VIZ Media) A young charcoal seller must avenge his family by destroying the demon that slaughtered them.	6
10	ATTACK ON TITAN, VOL. 1 , by Hajime Isayama. (Kodansha) A group of survivors must go into hiding to escape giant humanoids.	2
11	SMILE , by Raina Telgemeier. (Scholastic) Raina experiences braces, boy troubles and other plagues of the sixth grade.	15
12	MY HERO ACADEMIA, VOL. 1 , by Kohei Horikoshi. (VIZ Media) Will Izuku Midoriya's chance encounter with a superhero change his fate? Most likely!	13
13	BABY-SITTERS LITTLE SISTER: KAREN'S ROLLER SKATES , by Ann M. Martin. Illustrated by Katy Farina. (Scholastic) After taking a tumble, Karen sets out to get her friends and someone famous to sign her cast.	7
14	MY HERO ACADEMIA, VOL. 2 , by Kohei Horikoshi. (VIZ Media) Midoriya can barely control the All Might's abilities he inherited.	6
15	DRAMA , by Raina Telgemeier. (Scholastic) Callie becomes the stage manager for her middle school's production of "Moon Over Mississippi."	14

THIS MONTH	Mass Market	MONTHS ON LIST
1	THE DUKE AND I , by Julia Quinn. (Avon) The first book in the Bridgerton series. Daphne Bridgerton's reputation soars when she colludes with the Duke of Hastings. The basis of the Netflix series "Bridgerton."	2
2	SHADOWS IN DEATH , by J.D. Robb. (St. Martin's) The 51st book of the In Death series. A hitman with possible connections to Eve Dallas's husband is seen near the scene of a crime.	1
3	THE INN , by James Patterson with Candice Fox. (Grand Central) A former Boston police detective who is now an innkeeper must shield a seaside town from a crew of criminals.	1
4	AN IRISH WISH , by Nora Roberts. (Silhouette) Two romance stories: "Irish Rose" and "Irish Rebel."	1
5	THE LOST AND FOUND BOOKSHOP , by Susan Wiggs. (Avon) Natalie Harper takes over the care of her mother's bookshop and her ailing grandfather.	1
6	A MINUTE TO MIDNIGHT , by David Baldacci. (Grand Central) When Atlee Pine returns to her hometown to investigate her sister's kidnapping from 30 years ago, she winds up tracking a potential serial killer.	1
7	MORAL COMPASS , by Danielle Steel. (Dell) Shortly after Saint Ambrose Prep goes co-ed, a student is attacked and the community falls apart.	2
8	FINALLY YOU , by Debbie Macomber. (MIRA) Two romance stories: "No Competition" and "All Things Considered."	1
9	PREACHER'S CARNAGE , by William W. Johnstone and J.A. Johnstone. (Pinnacle) Preacher is hired by a St. Louis businessman to seek justice for an ambushed wagon train on the Sante Fe trail.	1
10	BITTER PILL , by Fern Michaels. (Zebra/Kensington) The 32nd book in the Sisterhood series. Doctors in different parts of the world push questionable natural remedies.	1
11	UNSOLVED , by James Patterson and David Ellis. (Grand Central) A string of seemingly accidental and unrelated deaths confound F.B.I. agent Emmy Dockery.	2
12	THE VISCOUNT WHO LOVED ME , by Julia Quinn. (Avon) The second book in the Bridgerton series. Kate Sheffield gets in the way of Anthony Bridgerton's intent to marry.	1
13	BLOOD IN THE DUST , by William W. Johnstone and J.A. Johnstone. (Pinnacle) The second book in the Hunter Buchanan Black Hills Western series. A former tracker goes back into action when a saloon girl gets kidnapped.	1
14	THE WARSAW PROTOCOL , by Steve Berry. (St. Martin's) The 15th book in the Cotton Malone series. The balance of power in Europe is imperiled.	1
15	SISTERS BY CHOICE , by Susan Mallery. (MIRA) The fourth book in the Blackberry Island series. Three women seek to make changes in their lives that they find difficult.	1

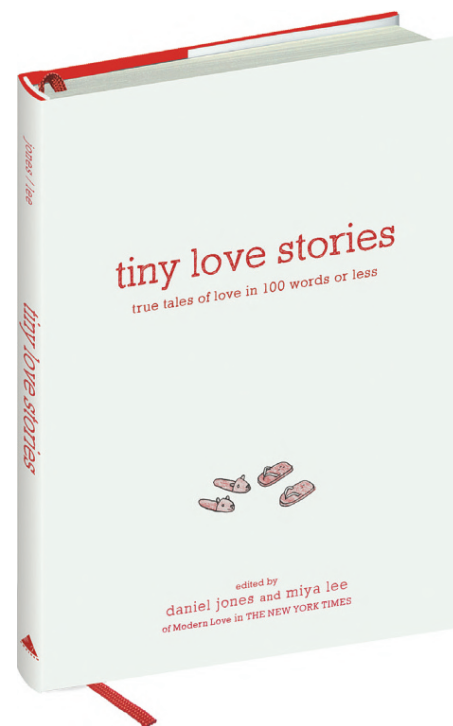
Sales are defined as completed transactions between vendors and individual end users during the period on or after the official publication date of a title. Graphic book rankings include all print and digital formats. Adult, children's, young adult, fiction and nonfiction graphic books are eligible for inclusion on the graphic books and manga list. **ONLINE:** For complete lists and a full explanation of our methodology, visit www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers.

The New York Times
The Morning

Sign up for the newsletter
nytimes.com/themorning



give the gift
of love



Here are 175 true stories of love, each told in 100 words or less. Romantic and platonic, sibling and parental, requited and unrequited, lost and found: The stories are tiny, but the loves they contain are anything but. Honest, funny, tender, wise, and always surprising, these ordinary moments burn so bright that they reveal humanity, and our own selves, in their light.

From the editors of the Modern Love column in The New York Times.



Available now wherever books are sold.

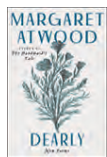


DEARLY

New Poems

By Margaret Atwood

124 pp. Ecco. \$27.99.



"These are the late poems," Atwood declares at the outset of her 16th poetry collection, ribbing readers about the ways the literary community treats the works of poets of a certain age. But she promptly divests the phrase of any clinging ceremoniousness with a pun: "Most poems are late / of course," she writes, "like a letter sent by a sailor / that arrives after he's drowned." Poems, Atwood argues, aren't the rhetoric of the immediate; they emerge slowly out of human understanding's glacial melt.

Much of the book is concerned with ecology and with time: most interestingly, with how the present moment, "our too-brief history," will look in the future. "Oh children, will you grow up in a world without ice? / Without mice, without lichens?" Atwood asks in one poem. But her preoccupation with our planet's ponderous apocalypse also highlights the paradox of human invention: We make things to preserve our memories, ideas and cultures, and we also make things to destroy them. "Did I do that?" asks the speaker of "A Drone Scans the Wreckage," a poem that anticipates the themes of "Spider Signatures," spoken in the voice of the titular arachnid:

*If you come across me suddenly
you scream: Too many legs,
or is it the eight red eyes,
the glossy blob of abdomen?
Drop of thumb's blood, popped grape:
that's what you'd aim for.*

Here we see Atwood at the height of her poetic powers: her imagery made tangible with sound, that "glossy blob" more globular through assonance, the "drop of thumb's blood, popped grape" literally popping in the mouth through the p's.

The more Atwood wields specifics, the more of the world she skewers with her fantastically sharp imagination. The "Siren Brooding on Her Eggs," for instance, sits on her "frowsy nest / of neckties" singing a lullaby to "hungry egglets" who will soon hatch into something "ravenous with song." Only Atwood could muster up that (literally man-eating) vision with such relish.

HOW TO FLY (IN TEN THOUSAND EASY LESSONS)

Poetry

By Barbara Kingsolver

111 pp. Harper/HarperCollins. \$24.99.



Kingsolver's second poetry collection feels padded with minutiae, like a daybook that occasionally arrives at moments of consequential epiphany (at best) and nugatory platitude (at worst). Even the book's title feels soggy, as if it's on the same menu as "Chicken Soup for the Soul." At times, the figurative language feels incongruous, as in "The tourists' bikinis touch down like witless butterflies / trying to suck nectar from the blazing sand" and "At the end of the long bowling alley lane / of a transatlantic flight, we crash and topple / like pins in the back of a Roman taxi."

The poet often bungles the representation of nonwhite people, usually because her approach is overwrought in its attempt to mean well. Take, for instance, "How to Love Your Neighbor," in which the speaker insists that one must love *all* of one's neighbors including "a woman / wrapping her hijab" and "Not just the morning shoppers" (read: who are presumed to be white) and "the man who walks his chortling dog" (white) and "the couples / with strawberry children" (white and, yes, white).

Elsewhere, in "My First Derby Party," Kingsolver recalls growing up in Kentucky where a thoroughbred was "important enough for a swimming pool" but the children's "schoolyard was gravel." Because of this disparity, she grew up hating horses. Now, as an adult, she has a realization: "freeborn, field-stained, I wonder / at my old envy for the well-shod mansion slave." Perhaps she's denouncing that old envy, recognizing her privilege, but it's not entirely clear how the "well-shod mansion slave" fits into the narrative. Is it a metaphor for the horse? If so, it's an incredibly dehumanizing figure of speech. If these moments had been removed and the book distilled further, readers could have had an evocative glimpse into a daily life ripe with the poet's curiosities.

AMERICAN MELANCHOLY

Poems

By Joyce Carol Oates

112 pp. Ecco. \$26.99.



A third of the way into Oates's latest poetry collection, readers are confronted with a poem whose title bleeds into the first line:

This Is Not a Poem

*in which the poet discovers
delicate white-parched bones*

*of a small creature
on a Great Lake shore*

From there, Oates catalogs all the things this poem is *not*: no "sere grasses hiss- / ing like consonants / in a foreign language," no "metonymic moon / time-harrowing for wisdom," lampoons of bad poetry. Instead, Oates writes, her poems are "a slew / of words in search / of a container." Repetition appears to be one of Oates's favorite containers, as one sees in "Doctor Help Me":

*Because they would hate me forever.
Because they would never forgive me for shaming them.
Because they would kill me.*

All are reasons to get an abortion, and it goes on for five pages. Oates, as always, has compelling insights about toxic masculinity and human brutality. Speaking through her characters, she often reveals the harrowing consequences of violence. In "Little Albert, 1920," the baby featured in John Watson's psychological experiments says: "Ask me did I adjust to life after the / infamous experiment. Ask me / did I overcome my terror of animals?" But for all of Oates's moralizing about people's inability to speak for themselves, her poem "Bloodline, Elegy: Su Qijian Family, Beijing" ignominiously constructs a singular voice for an entire Chinese family and portrays a whole nation as a homogeneous mass, as "creatures of the hive" who "do not question the hive." One must hope that, after publishing this poem, Oates asks herself what she asks in another poem:

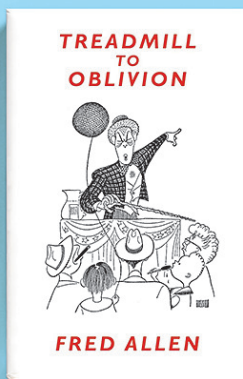
*why did it matter
so much
to have the last
word?
or any
word?*

Revisited / *A History of the Comedian Memoir in Eight Books* / By Jason Zinoman

A syllabus of sorts for exploring some of the funniest books of all time by the funniest people.

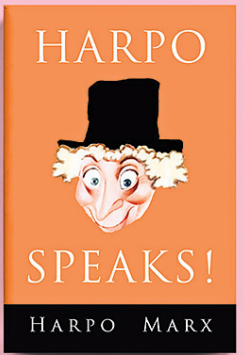
THE COMEDIAN MEMOIR has become one of the most crowded genres in publishing. Writing one these days is a nearly mandatory part of a successful comic's career. Among the yearly glut are usually a few best sellers and some gems. Many are funny, some are fascinating, even more are ghostwritten. This kind of book has deep roots, and long before stand-ups spilled stories on podcasts, these memoirs were where comedy nerds discovered the backstage history of an often ephemeral art form. To understand comedy in eight books, start with this list by some of the funniest people of the last century.

TREADMILL TO OBLIVION,
by Fred Allen (1954)




Allen, a giant of 20th-century comedy, left behind this splendidly cranky portrait of the golden age of radio comedy in the 1930s. He argues television ruined comedy, and almost convinces you. A pioneer of insult comedy and topical humor, Allen includes transcripts of his famous feud with Jack Benny, the roast battles of their day.

HARPO SPEAKS!, by Harpo Marx (1961)



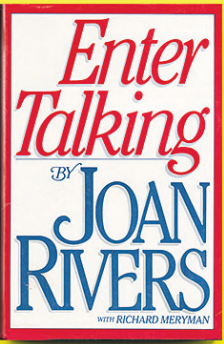
Taking readers on a glamorous trip from vaudeville to Broadway to Hollywood, Marx wittily exposes the chasm between public persona and private personality. In his act, he was all silent appetite and id. But on the page, he's a refined romantic, an intellectual who never finished the second grade. This is the gold standard of the comedian memoir.

HOW TO TALK DIRTY AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE,
by Lenny Bruce (1965)



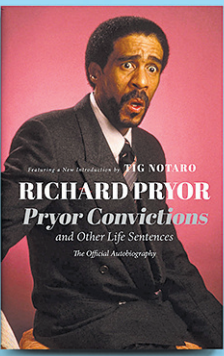
Writing in the tumultuous last years of his life, Bruce set the template for the antihero comic, cheerily mapping the birth of a rebel, raging against hypocrisy and moralism, mocking the comedy of the previous generation before becoming a free-speech martyr, sent to trial for obscenity. It's a master class in mythmaking, with Bruce's staccato delivery translating beautifully to the page.

ENTER TALKING,
by Joan Rivers (1986)



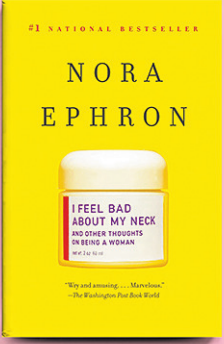
There's more raw terror in this book than in a thousand suicide notes. The ferociously funny Rivers wrote many books, but none distilled her warrior mentality as much as this account of her tortured childhood and early career. In her view, comedy is a by-product of suffering and struggle, requiring desperation, an unappeasable need to succeed and an unimaginable tolerance for humiliation and rejection. Sounds fun, huh? For the reader, it actually is.

PRYOR CONVICTIONS,
by Richard Pryor (1995)



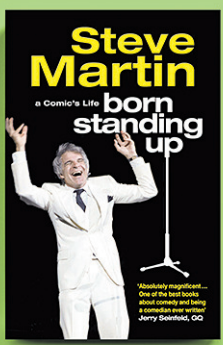
When Pryor was 5 years old, he accidentally stepped in dog poop. His mom laughed. So he did it again, this time on purpose. "That was my first joke," he writes. From these humble beginnings grew the career of the greatest stand-up comic who ever grabbed a microphone. The outlines of his now famous story have been chronicled many times, but never in more raw, blunt detail than here.

I FEEL BAD ABOUT MY NECK, by Nora Ephron (2006)



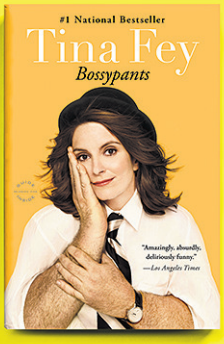
This witticism-packed book is not a memoir. Nor is it written by a comedian. So what is it doing on this list? Ephron defies easy categorization, but her massively influential prose has made her a titan of modern comedy. Her reflections on aging, parenting and New York are classic comic set pieces. She even gets her origin story down to two sentences: "I wrote a magazine article about having small breasts. I am now a writer."

BORN STANDING UP,
by Steve Martin (2007)



Most comedian memoirs are baggy, rambling affairs, but this elegant chronicle of the beginning and end of a meteoric stand-up career is the rare one with the precision of a joke. A ton of wisdom packs into this slim book. Martin breaks down the mechanics of the art with a rigorous analytic mind, then describes how he subverted them, choosing to make comedy without punch lines, to create tension but never release it, to bomb with a smile.

BOSSYPANTS, by Tina Fey (2011)

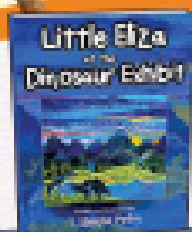


More than any other book, with the possible exception of Howard Stern's "Private Parts," this blockbuster created the modern comedy memoir boom. Many imitations have followed but what makes Fey so singular is her sharply self-mocking, wry voice and bountiful punch lines. What holds this book together is the sneaky density of jokes, one after another, some better than others, but very few duds — a ruthless feat of comedy.

NOW AVAILABLE!

GRAB THESE PAGETURNER BEST SELLERS!

T. STEELE PETRY



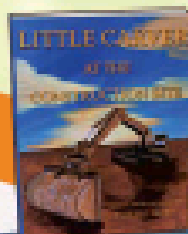
LITTLE ELIZA AT THE DINOSAUR EXHIBIT

PB: 978-1-64908-646-4 | \$12.99
Ebook: 978-1-64908-645-7 | \$2.99



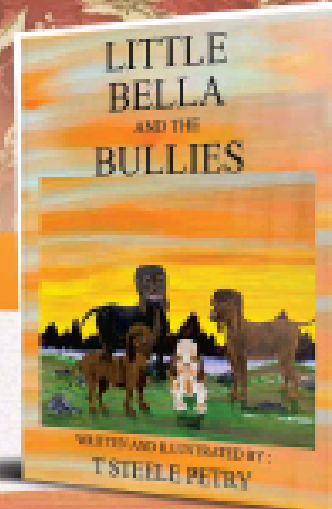
LITTLE BILLY AND THE BIRDS

PB: 978-1-64908-545-0 | \$10.99
HB: 978-1-64908-546-7 | \$20.99
Ebook: 978-1-64908-544-3 | \$2.99



LITTLE CARVER AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE

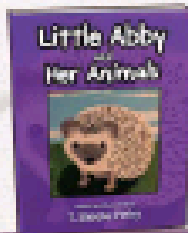
COMING SOON!



LITTLE BELLA AND THE BULLIES

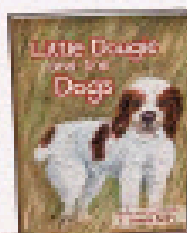
LITTLE BELLA AND THE BULLIES is the story of a new little puppy who gets picked on and bullied by three older dogs but ultimately finds a way to be accepted by the group.

COMING SOON!



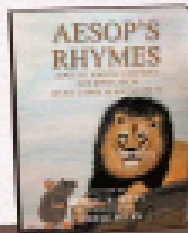
LITTLE ABBY AND HER ANIMALS

PB: 978-1-64908-578-8 | \$11.99
HB: 978-1-64908-778-2 | \$20.99
Ebook: 978-1-64908-577-1 | \$2.99



LITTLE DOUGIE AND THE DOGS

PB: 978-1-64908-581-7 | \$11.99
HB: 978-1-64908-580-4 | \$19.99
Ebook: 978-1-64908-590-0 | \$2.99



AESOP'S RHYMES

COMING SOON!



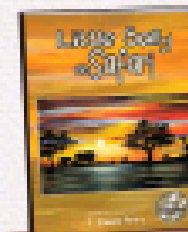
LITTLE JENNY IN THE JUNGLE

PB: 978-1-64908-588-7 | \$12.99
HB: 978-1-64908-589-4 | \$21.99
Ebook: 978-1-64908-587-0 | \$2.99



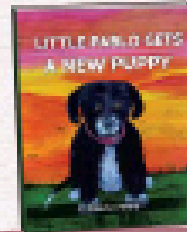
LITTLE SAMMY AND THE SEASONS

PB: 978-1-64908-576-4 | \$10.99
HB: 978-1-64908-779-9 | \$18.99
Ebook: 978-1-64908-575-7 | \$2.99



LITTLE SALLY ON SAFARI

PB: 978-1-64908-571-9 | \$10.99
HB: 978-1-64908-572-6 | \$18.99
Ebook: 978-1-64908-570-2 | \$2.99



LITTLE PABLO GETS A NEW PUPPY

PB: 978-1-64908-693-8 | \$13.99
HB: 978-1-64908-777-5 | \$22.99
Ebook: 978-1-64908-692-1 | \$2.99



LITTLE FREDDY IN THE FOREST

PB: 978-1-64908-580-1 | \$10.99
HB: 978-1-64908-581-8 | \$20.99
Ebook: 978-1-64908-575-5 | \$2.99

CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION



www.pageturner.us



1-888-447-9651



inquiry@pageturner.us



PAGETURNER
PRESS & MEDIA