

FANTASY



The Last One

Rachel Howzell Hall, Red Tower Books
(DEC 3) Hardcover \$32.99 (496pp)
978-1-64937-440-0

Rachel Howzell Hall's fantasy novel *The Last One* is a tale of magical creatures, mysterious magics, budding romance, and self-discovery.

In a forest in the realm of Vallendor, Kai wakes up injured and in the process of being robbed by Olivia. Meanwhile, Vallendor is on the precipice of being torn apart by an unstoppable sickness, the Miasma, and by power-hungry Emperor Wake, an authoritarian who names himself the supreme of all the land, exiling all other deities and magic. Kai remembers nothing from before and is plagued by questions about her identity, including about who she might become. What follows is an action-packed trek in which Kai and her allies run from and fight Wake's men, otherworldly beasts, and dangerous Elyn, all of whom are determined to catch or kill Kai for reasons unknown.

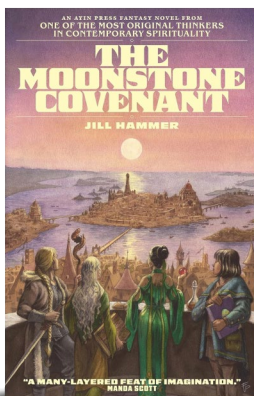
Vallendor is fleshed out in fascinating detail as Kai awakens to its particulars, fighting her way through a world that she's forgotten. Its rich histories, intriguing creatures, and magical systems make it lush with intrigue. The mages and their different lineages are covered, as are otherworldly beasts like giant, flesh-eating battabees and giant wolf burnu.

Kai is a complicated heroine—confident but uncertain, strong but sensitive, and always grappling to fit the puzzle pieces of her previous life back into her present. Her interactions with others are the catalysts for her developing theories and knowledge about herself. She flirts with Jadon, and their relationship grows. She also feels deepening affection for Jadon's sister Olivia; Olivia's love, Philia; and other people and creatures whom she meets. She oscillates between the opposing forces within her, weighing temperance against revenge and rage against peace, resulting in a compelling and very human tale.

The fantasy novel *The Last One* introduces an intriguing universe full of love, intrigue, and revelations.

NATALIE WOLLENZIEN

FANTASY



The Moonstone Covenant

Jill Hammer, Ayin Press (NOV 12) Softcover
\$22.95 (350pp), 978-1-961814-15-8

Formidable wives contend with persecution and past treacheries in Jill Hammer's intricate fantasy novel *The Moonstone Covenant*, set in a cosmopolitan principality.

Moonstone is a place marked by simmering religious and cultural divisions and conspiratorial politics. In this medieval land of gondolas and magic, bridges are “lit with lanterns”; there are stories of demon innkeepers, ghost cats, and winged books. Here, Istehar, an illuminatrix of texts, works on a book with a “moss-silk cover” and “roots woven into it for texture; flowers and syssyrup bark and willow leaves are pressed into its pages.”

Istehar is from the Sha'an forest tribe and speaks the language of trees and books. In Moonstone, though, she's viewed as a foreign witch, despite the fact that her people healed the archprince. Her polygamous relationships receive ire, too. Accompanied by her three wives—Annlynn (a warrior librarian), Vasmine (a beguiling ink merchant), and Olloise (an apothecary whose parents were murdered)—Istehar vies with the archprince's power-seeking, Sha'an-hunting son in order to save Moonstone.

The book shifts between the strong, wise women's present stories and stories from their girlhoods. That they are Othered in Moonstone makes them cautious. The particulars of their fascinating crafts—they court favors, recreate a historical poison, and search the labyrinthine, rule-bound library's restricted areas—highlight their savvy determination to anchor themselves as indispensable to the townsfolk even while they protect their own household. Their fertile considerations of loyalty mix with concerns that they could be exiled. Throughout, their relationships with one other, which are passionate and resounding, ground them.

In the romance-laden, mysterious fantasy novel *The Moonstone Covenant*, a women quartet's collective gifts alter their homeland's future.

KAREN RIGBY

GENERAL



Prodigal

Phyllis Gobbell, Histria Books (NOV 19)
Softcover \$19.99 (200pp)
978-1-59211-478-8

Phyllis Gobbell's novel *Prodigal* tells a parabolic story of homecoming in a Southern small town.

Connor, a preacher's son, is cast adrift after becoming an accomplice in the Independence Day shooting of a convenience store clerk. He goes on the run and stays away from his Tennessee hometown for a decade. The Fourth of July, which he once loved, becomes a dreaded anniversary; its popping sounds evolve in meaning.

Then Connor's grandmother dies and names him in her will. Haunted by what happened and still blamed by the townspeople for the death, he is forced to confront his past and face family secrets. He hangs drywall, lives in motels, mends relationships, and settles his debts before seeking forgiveness and finding an opening for it.

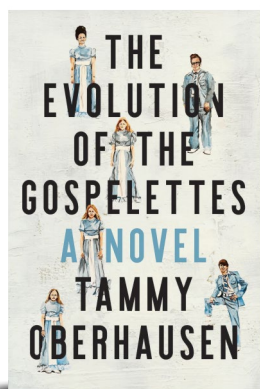
The chapters are narrated from the points of view of different characters, including generations of Connor's family members: the ornery matriarch Lady; academic Ivy; and Connor's mother, Kitty, an unlikely preacher's wife. Their stories form a patchwork of varying perspectives through which thorny family secrets, lies, and betrayals are revealed.

The book is steeped in place, with the South vivified in details of the summer, supper tables, sweet tea, preachers, and prison tattoos. People's conversations reflect the local dialect, further grounding the story in its setting of languid afternoons and declining courthouse squares. Rich observations about meddling in others' affairs, penning vehement letters to the editor, and putting on a pastor face result in added depth. Themes of shame, guilt, and ostracism are explored with psychological acuity leading up to the book's ending, in which Connor stumbles upon a crime and an opportunity for the redemption he pines for.

In the affecting novel *Prodigal*, a lost son finds his way home.

JOSEPH S. PETE

GENERAL



The Evolution of the Gspelettes

Tammy Oberhausen, Fireside Industries (NOV 5) Softcover \$30 (304pp) 978-1-950564-45-3

In Tammy Oberhausen’s piercing, entertaining historical novel *The Evolution of the Gspelettes*, a religious Kentucky family spends decades performing together.

In the 1970s, the Holliman patriarch, Garland, is inspired by his daughters’ perfect harmonizing to form the Gspelettes. He tells them that they’re singing for the glory of God—not themselves. They comply, though they bristle over postponing their own desires. Only one daughter, Jeannie, aspires to stardom.

As the gingham-clad troupe gains notice, their hypocrisies surface: Junior, an eventual prodigal around whom a prophecy roils, drinks and smokes; one daughter yearns to break free; another is curious about a handsome nonbeliever. The family’s occupation reveals itself, in time, to be based more on following absorbed ideas than on enlivening faith.

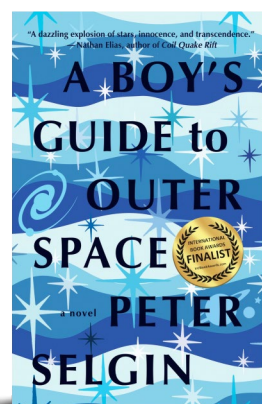
Told most from Jeannie’s perspective, this humorous novel focuses on the Holliman family’s dedication to their craft. They sport beehive hairdos, endure straitlaced road trips, and stir up congregations with their music. But quiet fractures form, driving the siblings apart. Soon, only Jeannie remains dedicated to the Gspelettes.

Fringe permutations of Christianity are lamponed throughout in a knowing but humanizing way, from the 1980s’ “name it and claim it” prosperity gospel and televangelism to people who mask their own misbehaviors while making note of “backsliding” in others. Secondary characters, including skeptical bystanders and genuine believers, lend perspective to Jeannie, who sheds her naivete in time. When she’s disillusioned after a startling loss, her attempts to pull her family away from a harmful preacher result in heartbreaking reconsiderations of loyalty and her own provincial hometown.

In the poignant novel *The Evolution of the Gspelettes*, a daughter’s faith is deconstructed but not extinguished as she works to glorify God.

KAREN RIGBY

HISTORICAL



A Boy’s Guide to Outer Space

Peter Selgin, Regal House Publishing (DEC 11) Softcover \$19.95 (308pp) 978-1-64603-511-3

The malaise of a small New England town in the 1960s is given an undercurrent of the infinite in Peter Selgin’s inspired novel *A Boy’s Guide to Outer Space*.

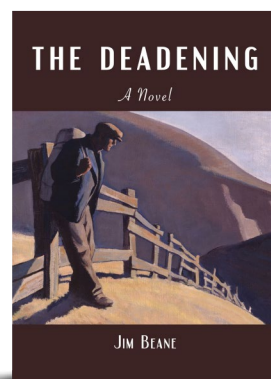
Half is a junior high school student with a mentally ill stepbrother, a hat store-owning stepfather, and an alcoholic mother. His perspectives are bounded by Hattertown, Connecticut, a hat industry town with only one active factory left. Prone to curiosity and longing for a career as an astronaut, Half is guided by the specter of his father’s voice commanding him to follow his fears. As a result, he begins to reconsider his place in society, pull away from his crew of friends, and reassess the limitations of his prospects. To boot, Half is drawn in by a mysterious denizen with a sordid past, dubbed the Man in Blue, who lives in a bucolic cottage on the outskirts of town. With his stepbrother in tow, and with the blossoming of a complicated relationship with the strange resident of the cottage, Half faces existential quandaries and adolescent snares that bring his place in his community and beyond into blurred focus.

Its prose equal parts humorous, poignant, and observational, this is a sharp-toned story about small-town upbringings. Half is as ram-bunctious as he is confused and as inquisitive as he is somewhat damaged. His wish to explore the cosmos seems blunted until the realization that despite the facade of his predicaments, Half’s explorations and epiphanies make him but one articulation of the courageous voyager he pines to become.

In the comforting, truth-filled bildungsroman *A Boy’s Guide to Outer Space*, a boy is more than where he is from. Outer space may be just outside his door, if he looks with the right eyes.

RYAN PRADO

HISTORICAL



The Deadening

Jim Beane, Mandel Vilar Press (NOV 4) Softcover \$18.95 (160pp) 978-1-942134-94-7

In Jim Beane’s thrilling novel *The Deadening*, two scarred World War I veterans clash on the home front.

Hickman and Redd are damaged after the war, though they handle with their wounds in different ways. Hickman works as an itinerant on a ranch and copes with shell shock by using drugs and alcohol; he ends up responsible for two murders. Redd, who lost an arm and an eye in the war, became a family man and the town’s mercantile owner and sheriff; he investigates the killings, bringing him into conflict with Hickman.

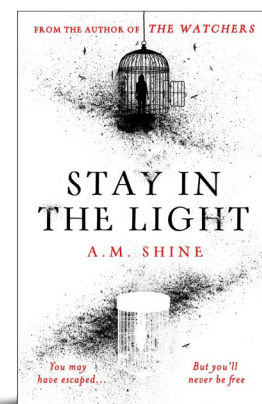
The book evokes its 1920s setting with details of laudanum addiction, riding the rails, and restless nightmares of trench warfare on the rough prairie landscape, where people are fast discarded. Hickman’s flashbacks to machine gun fire, commands to attack, and battle buddies’ deaths are emotive too. Indeed, the prose is sensory throughout, as with the sound of nickels dropping on lunch counters, the hardness of the frozen ground while men try to dig posts, and the wide view of the open land from a boxcar. Such details reveal the characters’ states of mind well: Hickman stares inside his coffee cup, avoiding looking at “the man [with] a belly to match his big mouth.”

After Hickman shows up outside his store, Redd feeds the drifter, finds him odd jobs, and helps him service his laudanum addiction, respecting his need for silence but remaining wary of him. The two men are presented as a study of contrasts united by a deep, unspoken wartime bond before circumstances pit them against each other in the book’s climactic battle, which is written with real gravitas.

In the gripping historical novel *The Deadening*, two World War I veterans suffer major wounds, veer off on different paths, and find they cannot escape violence back home.

JOSEPH S. PETE

HORROR



Stay in the Light

A. M. Shine, Head of Zeus (OCT 22) Hardcover \$28.99 (320pp) 978-1-80454-793-9

In A. M. Shine’s captivating fantasy novel *Stay in the Light*, people attempt to outrun frightening and powerful creatures called the Watchers.

The Watchers are changelings who take on the appearance of human beings and hide out in the secluded woods of Ireland. After escaping a Watcher entrapment, Mina is left reeling; she grapples with guilt from her past. Her allies are Ciara, who grieves her husband, John; Madeline, who only tells Mina to stay away or be caught; and “the yellow one,” the bird she loves.

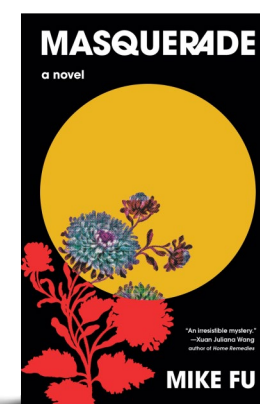
Elsewhere, a lonely researcher, Sean, mourns the loss of his father, David, a brilliant academic who disappeared three years previous. While attempting an awkward romance with his research partner, he funds the drilling of an archaeological site called the Burren on the west coast of Ireland. Continuing David’s obsession and legacy, Sean hopes to discover tangible proof of the existence of changelings. However, he is on the precipice of a far more dangerous discovery that links the Watchers to the legendary Tuatha Dé Danann.

Oscillating between fascinating mythologies and Mina’s fear, the novel exudes melancholy and isolation, evoking dread over the ancient and unstoppable Watchers. The descriptions of loss are sharp: Ciara makes John’s favorite meals even in his absence; Mina drinks and scours the internet for evidence of the Watchers. The horror that the Watchers inflict is made palpable as Mina makes note of their ruthlessness toward human beings; with her experience, she is left quaking at each possibility that they are near.

In the terrifying fantasy novel *Stay in the Light*, those who escaped the Watchers live with the consequences of their survival.

NATALIE WOLLENZIEN

LGBTQ+



Masquerade

Mike Fu, Tin House Books (OCT 29) Softcover \$17.95 (352pp) 978-1-959030-84-3

An enigmatic discovery is the impetus for a faltering man to rethink an old friendship and a recent, raw breakup in the sinuous, surprising novel *Masquerade*.

Once, Meadow planned to become a doctor in the humanities; now, he works at a bar. After growing up between the rural US and Shanghai, he feels rootless. His friends anchor him, but they keep disappearing, too—one into a committed relationship, another to a gallery in Oregon.

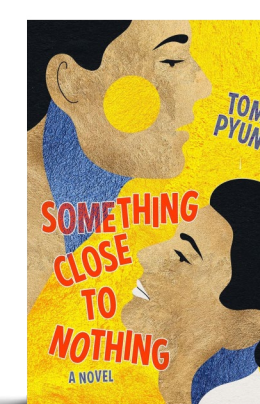
Charismatic Selma is Meadow’s recent constant—an artist whose work both shocks and enraptures him, an “organism that [keeps] evolving for the pure pleasure of transformation.” She’s given him her apartment rent free for the summer, affording him space to recalibrate. But when Meadow finds an aged, unknown book in a drawer, and when Selma disappears in Shanghai just after, he begins to wonder just how much of what he knows of their lives is true.

“We use stories to make sense of the senseless,” the book notes. Selma, before vanishing, tells Meadow that he lands himself in the same story on repeat, alluding that he prefers heartbreak to constancy. But as he delves into her book—a 1940s work of magical realism directed by subterfuge at a decadent party—Meadow begins to wonder if Selma hasn’t been the one writing his tale, shaping it as the latest piece in the performance art of her life.

Truth is a malleable concept in this intoxicating novel, wherein mirror surfaces morph to pull people in and masked figures deliver explosive secrets in whispers at parties. A Cape Cod mushroom trip results in potential revelations, and a trusted relationship is exposed as a possible act. Meadow lopes and lurches toward rebirth, or at least a recentering, in the book’s electric last portions, making *Masquerade* a novel of illusions and warped reflections worth getting lost in.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

LGBTQ+



Something Close to Nothing

Tom Pyun, Amble Press (NOV 12) Softcover \$19.95 (250pp), 978-1-61294-299-5

In Tom Pyun’s biting novel *Something Close to Nothing*, two exes learn to accept the imperfect but wonderful world as it is.

Wynn and Jared seemed to have it all: a nice house, a successful long-term relationship, and, thanks to a Cambodian surrogate, a baby on the way. But at the last minute, Wynn bails to fulfill his lifelong dream of being a professional dancer, leaving shocked Jared to face parenthood alone. Navigating grief, anger, and regret, each of the men comes to an important realization about his life.

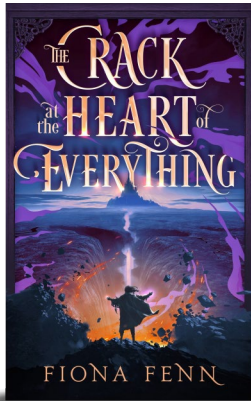
Moving between Jared and Wynn and the continents that separate them, the wry yet candid prose unearths the factors that combined to destroy their once-passionate love. Their class and racial differences are widened by a mutual sense of entitlement and a lack of self-awareness, preventing either from understanding the other or attempting honest communication. Illuminating flashbacks—some touching, some horrifying—reveal their differing personalities and the depths of their dysfunction as people and partners. Sometimes unlikable but always fascinating, they never cease to grow and reveal more about themselves.

In the months following their dramatic break-up, Wynn and Jared learn painful but necessary lessons about living mature, meaningful lives. Through fleeting, ill-fated romances and public errors both amusing and catastrophic, they come to see their relationship in a new light and accept that aspirations, as fortifying as they can be, are not reality. With this relatable, universal truth at last in hand, they try to live by the implications: that the realities they tried so hard to ignore are all they can depend on.

Something Close to Nothing is a poignant novel in which two expectant fathers learn that letting go of their former dreams doesn’t have to be a tragedy.

EILEEN GONZALEZ

LGBTQ+



The Crack at the Heart of Everything

Fiona Fenn, Tiny Fox Press (NOV 12)
Hardcover \$29.95 (276pp)
978-1-946501-71-4

In Fiona Fenn’s romantic fantasy novel *The Crack at the Heart of Everything*, a dark wizard in exile finds unexpected warmth and love amid the desolation of an apocalyptic world.

Orpheus once stood by the side of Empress Lore and channeled a spell that cracked the world, summoning an army of beasts from the depths of hell. The spell also cast the world into fiery darkness and brought a death curse on Orpheus. Worse, the empress (a childhood friend of his) betrayed him, casting him into the wasteland that his spell brought forth.

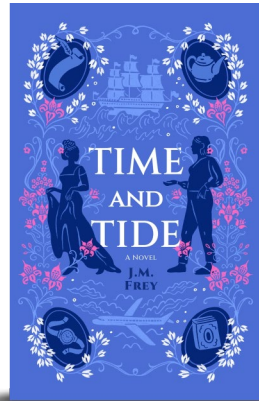
The wasteland is a bleak, intense place where the stench of brimstone is pervasive. There, Orpheus is accompanied by Fenrir, a former general who now works against the empress. Orpheus works to undo the death curse, to learn why Lore betrayed him, and to understand why Fenrir is eager to help him. And though he’s focused on these pursuits, he also finds that the wasteland isn’t just home to fire-breathing dragons and monsters, but to people who care and who connect with each other, knowing that giving into constant warfare would be untenable.

The story is anchored by the intense longing between Orpheus and Fenrir. The latter is patient with his tragic-hero counterpart, injecting warmth into their bickering. Above all else, Fenrir’s heart belongs to Orpheus, even if the dark wizard is too closed off to see it.

An unlikely hero must decide between his magic and rescuing the world in *The Crack at the Heart of Everything*, a charming fantasy novel in which two men strive to fix the brokenness around them.

JOHN M. MURRAY

LGBTQ+



Time and Tide

J. M. Frey, W by Wattpad Books (NOV 12)
Softcover \$18.99 (360pp)
978-1-998854-55-4

Queer romance and time travel blend together in J. M. Frey’s novel *Time and Tide*.

After a painful breakup with her girlfriend just before a planned trip to Spain, Sam boards the flight alone. The plane crashes. When Sam wakes in the middle of the ocean, she is rescued by a ship’s crew, only to discover that she has traveled back in time to England in 1805.

Stranded in an unfamiliar era, Sam navigates her new surroundings without revealing too much about the future. As she adapts to life in the nineteenth century, she meets Daisy, whose yet-to-be-published manuscript will become one of the most revered queer books in history. While Sam and Daisy get closer, Sam considers the potential consequences their relationship could have on history itself.

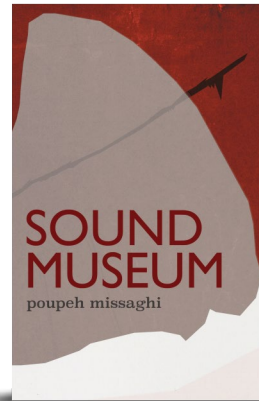
Interweaving historical, romance, and science fiction elements, the story is immersive and surprising. Sam’s modern sensibilities create tension, often clashing with the norms of her new era and resulting in laughable moments. Her contemporary expressions, including “cross my heart and hope to die” and “shake a leg,” baffle her nineteenth-century companions until she settles into easier conversations with them, her language evolving to complement the two-hundred-year age gap.

Engaging a spectrum of emotions, the novel transitions between steamy scenes as Sam searches for a suitable partner in marriage and tough conversations, as when one suitor takes advantage of her through physical abuse and manipulation. It maintains suspense by leaving the impact of Sam and Daisy’s relationship on future events unresolved until the final pages; it holds attention through its entirety.

Time and Tide is an exciting queer romance novel about the the effects of choices made over the course of time.

ALLISON JANICKI

LITERARY



Sound Museum

Poupeh Missaghi, Coffee House Press (OCT 22) Softcover \$14.95 (136pp)
978-1-56689-699-3

In Poupeh Missaghi’s literary novella *Sound Museum*, an enthusiastic curator celebrates the aural elements of torture.

Before an exclusive tour of her museum, an Iranian curator delivers an opening speech to the invited foreign journalists. She details the rationale behind featuring the sounds of torture and the process of working with her women-centered team to assemble her archives. Drawing attention to her own breakthroughs as a woman torturer within a space dominated by men, she argues that her museum is central to the creative, interactive, ongoing innovation of interrogation techniques, rather than a memorial to past violence.

A passionate host, the curator narrates with energetic warmth, delivering an uncensored monologue on torture. She’s proud of her achievements; she champions torturers’ humanity and the pursuit of inclusive scientific inquiry. At the same time, she engages in the bold, shocking embrace of humanity’s darkest propensities. With open lust for subjugation, she asserts

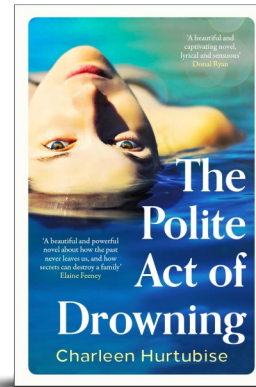
We mainly interrogate ... to show ... that we have full control over not only [prisoners’] bodies but also their internal states.

Despite the curator’s moral dubiousity, she refuses to grant her audience a comfortable sense of superiority. She twists the words of opposing activists, scholars, and artists to serve her zealous study of torture sounds. She also makes reasoned feminist critiques about the self-righteousness of her challengers: “We women in the Middle East are suffering on both fronts, from the patriarchal men here and the Western gaze, which orientalizes and diminishes us.” She notes, in particular, the US’s complicity in torture at infamous prisons like Abu Ghraib, deriding its hypocritical attempts at secrecy.

Espousing dark curiosity about the human desire to command and violate bodies, a charismatic curator issues a thorough manifesto in the troubling novella *Sound Museum*.

ISABELLA ZHOU

LITERARY



★ **The Polite Act of Drowning**

Charleen Hurtubise, Eriu (NOV 19)
Softcover \$15.99 (288pp)
978-1-80418-491-2

In Charleen Hurtubise’s novel *The Polite Act of Drowning*, a small-town accident reawakens past traumas, forcing a girl to reckon with the chaos of her dysfunctional family and come to terms with her evolving identity.

On a family beach day on Lake Michigan, sixteen-year-old Joanne witnesses a young woman’s last moments before she is swept away by the current and drowns. The traumatic event sends ripples through Kettle Lake and reawakens old rumors about a past tragedy involving Joanne’s mother. At home, Joanne notices her mother becoming more unstable, disappearing into the woods for hours at a time and slipping away from reality and her family.

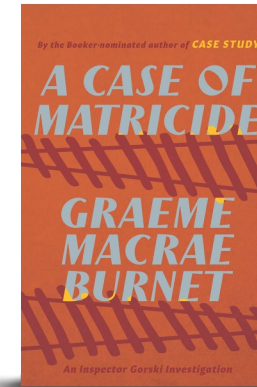
When the neighbors drop by with their new foster children, Joanne is ecstatic to discover a new friend in reckless and alluring Lucinda. The two fast become close. Lucinda draws Joanne into a new world of rebellion, independence, and sexual exploration. As the summer drags on, their relationship grows tense, though. And as Joanne learns more about her family’s secrets, she searches for a sense of safety and acceptance, her hope waning. These multifaceted pressures come to a head in the novel’s thrilling climax, wherein Joanne confronts her mother’s demons head-on.

Sensory and dynamic, the prose revels in the natural beauty and claustrophobic social dynamics of Kettle Lake, all narrated from Joanne’s limited point-of-view: she observes the water as a “boundless plain of mercury rolling like wind through wheat” and how her neighbors are wasted in their limiting jobs and relationships. She also conveys the anxieties and thrills of early adolescence well.

Interweaving themes of trauma, identity formation, sexuality, and grief with delicacy, *The Polite Act of Drowning* is a coming-of-age tale that cuts to the heart of human experience.

BELLA MOSES

MYSTERY



★ **A Case of Matricide**

Graeme Macrae Burnet, Biblioasis (NOV 12) Softcover \$18.95 (288pp)
978-1-77196-647-4

In Graeme Macrae Burnet’s kaleidoscopic novel *A Case of Matricide*, an inspector’s investigation into doppelgänger circumstances forces a confrontation with morality.

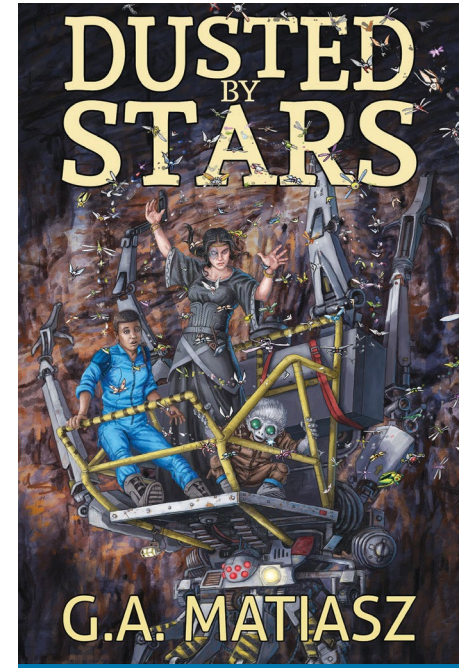
Masquerading as a translation of a French novel whose author, Raymond Brunet, killed himself after publishing it, this twisting tale follows Gorski, the chief of police of Saint-Louis, France. Gorski lives with his mother after his divorce, and her worsening dementia leaves him stonewalled. His observations lead him to judgments, fear that others watch him, awkwardness, and overanalyzing. And his opinions about himself fluctuate between smugness and self-hatred: without irony, he makes excuses for weaknesses that he doesn’t allow in others. Balancing his distasteful personality, Gorski’s wisdom is used to foreshadow coming developments: “All but the most habitual criminals crumble when faced with a lull in conversation.”

Gorski is called upon to investigate a not-quite-crime: an elderly woman claims her caretaker son threatened to kill her. The woman’s son, Robert Duymann (an anagram of “Raymond Brunet”), is a novelist whose own singular book disparages Saint-Louis. Like Gorski and Duymann, Duymann’s hero “lived with his mother and spent his days drifting between the town’s bars, eavesdropping on the inconsequential conversations of the townsfolk.” None of the three men intended for their lives to turn out this way.

Addicted to following procedure and worrying about how he is perceived, Gorski scrutinizes the threat—and confronts his feelings about his own mother. In this plot filled with mirrors, Gorski wonders who he’d be if he’d acted differently, even though his ultimate decision is influenced by bureaucratic and personal corruption.

A Case of Matricide is a probing metaphysical novel that asks whether an act that is both selfish and merciful is wrong or right and whether, therefore, its consequences are a punishment or a reward.

AIMEE JODOIN



Science Fiction/Fantasy

Stacy Jones battles thieves, highjackers, mercenaries, and death squads across a galaxy swarming with aliens and riddled with danger.

“[P]acks a lot of information into a small space—it’s a virtual singularity, one might say—but it doesn’t stop it from snapping into action-packed fight scenes in the blink of an eye.”

—Kirkus Reviews



62milepress.com

MYSTERY



Call Me Carmela
A Dot Meyerhoff Mystery

Ellen Kirschman, Open Road Media (NOV 26) Softcover \$21.99 (292pp) 978-1-5040-9575-4

In Ellen Kirschman’s stunning mystery novel *Call Me Carmela*, a police psychologist helps a teenager find her birth parents, exposing secrets that endanger everyone involved.

Dot, a contract psychologist with the police department, stops for her usual breakfast at Fran’s Diner. The owner is distraught: Her eighteen-year-old goddaughter Ava is missing after having discovered the name of her birth mother. Ava wants more information, but in response to her prodding, her adoptive parents, Dan and Sharon, go “ballistic.”

When Ava shows up at the diner, Fran asks Dot to mediate. Despite her misgivings, Dot agrees, seeing herself in the brash, insecure teenager. She contacts Ava’s birth mother, Iliana, who is reluctant to discuss the brutal circumstances of Ava’s conception. Still, after mulling it over, Iliana agrees to meet Ava.

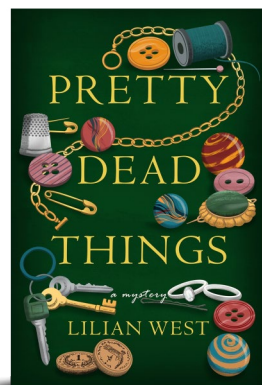
Ava presses on with Dot’s support. However, in her indignation for herself and Iliana, she often acts without considering the consequences of her choices. The relationships around Ava implode, with the adults resisting forward movement: Dan returns to destructive habits, and Dot keeps revisiting her decisions with a previous client, a rookie police officer who committed suicide.

The story is tense and realistic, focused on people’s inner conflicts and harmful and self-serving reactions. The short, urgent chapters often end with piquing questions. And Dot puts Ava’s story into greater context by discussing California’s adoption process, her own experiences as a teenager, and her professional responsibilities and ethics.

Call Me Carmela is a thrilling novel in which a police psychologist and an adopted teenager face betrayals and threats while digging into circumstances of the younger’s birth.

LYNNE JENSEN LAMPE

MYSTERY



Pretty Dead Things

Lilian West, Crooked Lane Books (DEC 10) Hardcover \$29.99 (272pp) 979-889242002-0

In Lilian West’s mystery novel *Pretty Dead Things*, a bride-to-be works to solve a peculiar cold case buried and forgotten about for decades.

Newly engaged Cora relocates to Hickory Falls, the small town where her fiancé grew up. At an estate sale, she purchases a jar of trinkets containing two wedding rings. Determined to return the rings to their owners, Cora embarks on an investigation that leads her to one of the town’s most prominent families, uncovering a mystery dating back seventy years. In 1953, Clarity had a connection with a married man who left his life to build a new one with her. Their relationship began on a high note but soon unraveled; Clarity disappeared without a trace.

With vibrant descriptions, as of “white wooden folding chairs, four on each side of a narrow grass strip leading up to the oak tree,” the novel is atmospheric. Its dual timelines enrich the story, bridging the connection between the past and the present. Cora’s storyline is the more limited of the two: details about her relationships are sidelined, as is the history of her fiancé’s family in the town, despite its significance to Cora and her story. Accounts of Cora experiencing a tornado for the first time are drawn out and act as fillers in between chapters. But in the past, Clarity’s story is told with full transparency, with revelations about the affair, the feelings of the married man’s daughters, and why the disappearance was swept under the rug. Occasional plot twists keep the suspense high until the final moments.

Pretty Dead Things is an exciting mystery novel in which a family’s secrets are exposed and a small town’s hidden truth comes to light.

DANICA MORRIS

MYSTERY



The Gonif
An Amos Parisman Mystery

Andy Weinberger, Prospect Park Books (NOV 19) Softcover \$17.99 (236pp) 978-1-68442-130-5

With noir pacing, a laid-back sensibility, and a touch of humor, the newest book in Andy Weinberger’s Amos Parisman detective series, *The Gonif* finds the elderly detective navigating a crime impacting the Jewish community of Los Angeles.

In this entry, a rich woman hires Amos after a thief breaks into a local synagogue, hoping to steal a Torah rescued from North Africa during the Holocaust. Amos sets out to discover who knows that the scroll is in Los Angeles and who has designs on it. Then, a security guard is killed during the second failed robbery attempt; later, the Torah is stolen from the rabbi by armed men. Amos now needs to figure out who’s behind the crime and get the Torah back.

Working with a younger, bolder assistant investigator, Amos—a fan of the Los Angeles-based classic detective stories that his work mirrors—takes advantage of a wide network of connections as he tries to solve the case, connecting with local police and a suspect’s possible love interest and receiving insider tips about a possible international crime syndicate’s involvement. “You live here long enough,” he says, “you get to know the neighborhood. That’s just how it is. Nothing magical about it.” Meanwhile, in his personal life, he juggles making sure his ailing wife, Loretta, receives the care she needs, trying to keep his aging body going, and making time for a good deli lunch when possible.

The Gonif is a breezy mystery novel in which a quirky older detective’s hunches about people and their motivations, willingness to skirt the rules, and ability to get suspects talking all prove critical to solving a crime—and learning why the culprits took such great risks.

JEFF FLEISCHER

SCIENCE FICTION



Ageless

Renée Schaeffer, CamCat Books (DEC 3) Softcover \$18.99 (336pp) 978-0-7443-1002-3

In Renée Schaeffer’s distinctive novel *Ageless*, an immortal woman struggles through centuries of tremendous social, scientific, and political changes.

Naissa is born into a loving family in 1850, but she loses them to shellfish poisoning at a family dinner. The poison doesn’t affect her, and once she becomes a woman, she realizes that her body doesn’t age either. This anomaly becomes dangerous when others grow old and notice that she does not. Forced to change identities every few decades, she suffers serial losses of loved ones, demonstrating immortality’s cruel monotony. Naissa vows to stop loving to avoid being hurt—unless she can find other ageless people.

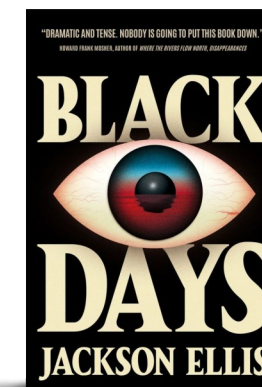
Naissa narrates most of the novel; the chapters are assigned a date range and are prefaced by summaries of each era’s major events, helping to contextualize Naissa’s long personal history. Brief interludes from other perspectives are scattered throughout; these breaks from the immortality dilemma include notes on scientific experiments and missives from Rys, a person shrouded in mystery. Questions about how these outside interludes connect to Naissa’s story drive the plot forward, as do questions about the value of eternal life.

The prose changes with the centuries, moving from ornate, upper-class Victorian diction to idioms from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and then to technology jargon that reflects Naissa’s scientific accomplishments. By the time she becomes a part of space travel, Naissa is in worldwide demand as a genetics expert; exposure could place her body and soul in peril, and this realization builds intrigue, as does the fact that aberrant but lasting love seems within her grasp.

Ageless transforms from a Gothic orphan tale to a gripping story centering women’s power.

MICHELE SHARPE

SCIENCE FICTION



Black Days

Jackson Ellis, Green Writers Press (OCT 22) Softcover \$19.95 (202pp), 979-898917845-2

In Jackson Ellis’s provocative science fiction novel *Black Days*, a despondent Vermont man’s inspired plan leads to disaster, raising questions about the consequences of unchecked human ambition.

Daniel is divorced, unemployed, and reeling from the effects of a recent car accident. A close encounter with a bear inspires an “insane idea” that he can’t resist: he wants to spend the winter in hibernation. Daniel’s friend Dr. Butcher is tantalized and certain he can pull it off. When word gets out about Daniel’s successful hibernation, he and Dr. Butcher are deluged with applications from hibernation aspirants, including the town pariah, a convicted child rapist. They begin running a hibernation business out of a shed in Daniel’s backyard. However, a conflict between Daniel and the doctor endangers the lives of one of the patients.

The novel confronts challenging issues, such as the question of whether perpetrators of heinous crimes can earn forgiveness. It unfolds with deliberateness and is somewhat sluggish until about three-quarters of the way through, when one character pulls a gun on another, leading to a foot chase and a deus ex machina ending featuring the arrival of a person who had been referenced but never seen.

At first self-pitying to the point of being intolerable, Daniel transforms after his hibernation into a more hopeful and assertive person. His sensitivity is appealing when applied to others; he even finds empathy for someone when others cannot. Dr. Butcher undergoes a transformation of his own, from kind country doctor to someone galvanized by success. The friction between the two characters is compelling.

A Vermont man and a doctor team up on a scientific experiment that triggers disastrous results in *Black Days*, an arresting science fiction novel.

DAVID BUSHMAN

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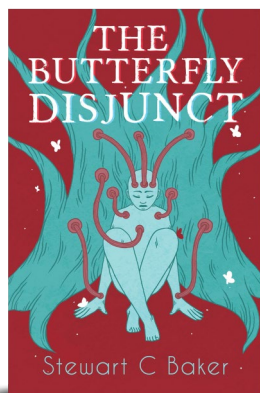
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SCIENCE FICTION



The Butterfly Disjunct
And Other Stories

Stewart C Baker, Interstellar Flight Press (NOV 4) Softcover \$17.99 (232pp) 978-1-953736-36-9

Stewart C Baker's *The Butterfly Disjunct* is an intriguing short story collection in which characters navigate futuristic worlds and fight to survive unjust and tyrannical systems.

The collection makes intriguing use of story forms, using how-to guides and a troubleshooting guide, among other formats, to structure its tales. The effect enables quick leaps into high-stakes scenes. For example, one entry is an action-filled lesbian romance whose heroine fights robots alongside her love interest. Each section in her tale is annotated with commands like "Dust'em" or "Bust'em"; these punctuate the combat scenes well as the characters fight their way from room to room, daring each other to kiss.

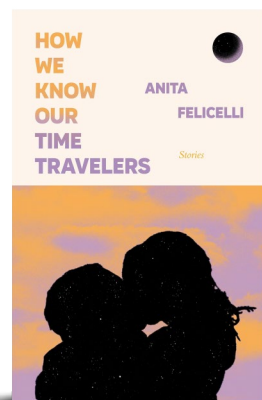
Throughout *The Butterfly Disjunct*, such containers create immediate tension and intrigue. One story is also split across the collection: "The Future, One Summer Behind" concludes before its main characters attend a Martian lights festival, and its protagonists return fifty pages later in "Festival of Lights" and again one hundred pages later in "Maricourt's Waters, Quiet and Deep." Footnotes at the end of the first two stories denote that the story continues and where to find it, bridging the significant distance between each piece.

The stories unfurl with speed; their world-building and character development take a back seat to plot twists and action. Nevertheless, they are entertaining, playing with myriad forms, settings, and concepts. They center women in a way that is refreshing and muse through motifs including the loss of memory, recovering from calamity, and attempts to reclaim agency, all set against the backdrop of futuristic worlds in which technology has become an extension of humanity's foibles.

The short science fiction vignettes gathered in *The Butterfly Disjunct* traverse planets, stars, and time.

MIKE GOOD

SHORT STORIES



★ **How We Know Our Time Travelers**

Anita Felicelli, WTAW Press (DEC 3) Softcover \$18.95 (197pp), 979-898771977-0

In Anita Felicelli's stunning short story collection *How We Know Our Time Travelers*, technology and the supernatural are rival routes to understanding time, loss, and memory.

These speculative stories are set in California in the near future and are marked by environmental anxiety. Many of their characters have South Asian backgrounds. A nascent queer romance between co-op grocery colleagues defies an impending tsunami. A painter welcomes a studio visitor who could be her estranged husband traveling from the past or his double. A study-abroad student boards a plane to the future and is aghast to find her boyfriend a staid family man. A scientist incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital for seeking an immortality elixir exchanges letters with a former love interest.

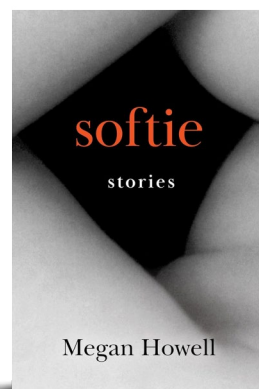
Mysterious "fog catchers" recur in multiple stories. Other subtle links appear; a sense of the uncanny weaves throughout. Sometimes, realistic situations are upended by paranormal activity: In "The Moment," Valentine disappears while test-driving Ezekiel's car on their first date; she's no common thief, but a time traveler. Other times, magical experiences have logical explanations: Amrita's vision of movers absconding with her belongings is a sign of dementia.

Memory bridges the human and the artificial, as in "The Glitch," wherein a coder, bereaved by wildfires, lives alongside holograms of her wife and children. But technology, though a potential means of connecting with the dead, is not an unmitigated good. In the outstanding, Bluebeard-inspired "Assembly Line," a man preserves his late girlfriend via automata. Other creative reinterpretations of traditional stories and figures involve urban legends, a locked room mystery, a poltergeist, and a golem.

In the grief- and regret-tinged speculative stories of *How We Know Our Time Travelers*, heartbroken people can't alter their pasts, so they'll mold the future instead.

REBECCA FOSTER

SHORT STORIES



Softie Stories

Megan Howell, West Virginia University Press (NOV 1) Softcover \$19.99 (266pp) 978-1-959000-31-0

Megan Howell's *Softie* is a series of thirteen short stories that plumb the harrowing struggles and dark corners of womanhood and girlhood as "all hell breaks loose" with regularity.

Firm and unflinching, the stories navigate heavy themes—including teenage pregnancy, abuse, poverty, suicide, and sexual violence—from intimate perspectives, trapping attention within their characters' hardships. Herein, jaded narrators struggle and rage against the brokenness of their societies and families until reaching their boiling points. Their bleak and unrelenting circumstances are lightened by keen observations, as with "sometimes when he talked, he got so invested that spittle formed in the corner of his mouth."

These stories know that no one chooses from a slate of limitless options and that people's behaviors and actions are patterned by their environments, childhoods, and applied systemic pressures. Reflective of this, the narratives are steeped in realities including poverty, racial inequity, and generational trauma—elements only sometimes brought to the fore of the prose, though they are omnipresent in the slow, menacing strictures that hem characters in. Economic pressures face a teacher turned nanny for a man who ages in reverse when he gets upset in "Vacuum Cleaner" and for a divorcee in "The Upstairs People," pushing them and other women into fraught situations beyond their control. Oppressive, claustrophobic, and bitter tones are present in all but a few stories, as with the outstanding entry "Vacuum Cleaner," which turns toward magical and absurd realms for a welcome change of pace, helping to balance the book's atmosphere out.

Cynical, envious, and resentful characters populate the resonant short stories of *Softie*, in which those who face the darkest parts of themselves can reach catharsis.

SÉBASTIEN LUC BUTLER

SHORT STORIES



The Man in the Banana Trees

Marguerite Sheffer, The University of Iowa Press (NOV 5) Softcover \$18 (160pp) 978-1-60938-995-6

Marguerite Sheffer's short story anthology *The Man in the Banana Trees* centers on wreckage and restoration.

Many of the stories evince interest in the psychology behind science. In "Rickey," a teacher struggles to regulate a robot "puppet student"; their forceful attempts to integrate it with the human children are destructive. Elsewhere, supernatural elements are used to sympathize with persistent historical loss. A ghost in "En Plein Air" haunts the island where her artists' colony was based; her determined attempts to force acknowledgment of her existence and forgotten artwork on its visitors unearths her own blindness to others' secrets.

These sensitive vignettes grieve castaways and stolen people. In "The Man in the Banana Trees," a woman mourns her miscarriage of twins, envisioning a malicious demon that snatches away joy. Fragmented introspection and self-referential documentation narrate her loss—a submersion in the rejuvenating but aching potential of creation and storytelling: "I prick my finger on the spinning wheel of my thoughts ... to spin it into this story, give it a glint, offer it up as something worthwhile: an artifact, a thing that is buriable because it is at least written down, more or less corporeal."

Always humanistic, some of the stories are cautionary and angry. "At the Moment of Condensation" satirizes a greedy corporation's faux benevolence when demanding the arraignment of water thieves, though the natural resource is essential to life. Criticizing irresponsible application of inhuman algorithms, "In the Style of Miriam Ackerman" follows a man's sabotage of a photography exhibition where artificial intelligence reduces the eccentricity and subjectivity of his aunt's work into unfeeling, reproducible patterns.

Combining fantasy, history, futurism, and contemporaneity, *The Man in the Banana Trees* is a mesmerizing and eclectic short story collection that experiments with fabrication, discovery, and human nature.

ISABELLA ZHOU

SHORT STORIES



Three Alarm Fire Stories

Juan Carlos Reyes, Hinton Publishing (OCT 22) Softcover \$19.99 (286pp) 978-1-60944-156-2

In the bold, experimental stories of Juan Carlos Reyes's *Three Alarm Fire*, reading is a riddle that results in salvation.

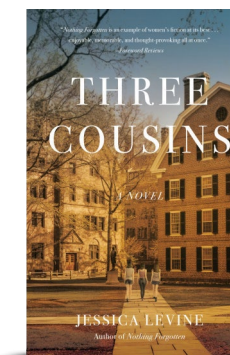
Shifting in register from abject horror to cool irony and featuring slippery, compelling details, this is a book filled with sudden, slicing truths that takes challenging the act of reading itself as its raison d'être. Emotions roar out of its pages, pure, raw, and bristling. Long, meandering sentences are placed at the fore, with the prose doubling back on itself, bounding forward again, and experimenting with language and meaning. Conversations run without punctuation marks or tags; different consciousnesses bleed together.

Peopled by vague, sometimes unnamed characters and elusive moments, the collection is structured in several sections, each containing a set of stories connected by themes. "Three Alarm Fire" features the harrowing insanity of violence; in it, a vlogger chases down a victim's family for his live feed. And in a story in "All Apologies," a woman mourns after her fiancé is gunned down by the police. "The Reviews Are In" has a self-referential, tongue-in-cheek story about a reviewer reviewing this very collection, offering keys to unlock its mysteries. Another review provides metacommentary on the act of writing as spectacle.

In "Elements of a Bystander," the act of witnessing blurs into complicity; terror sits in the throat without the wherewithal to grasp a situation. And the novella "A Summer Lynching" is haunting: its interlinked stories, told in thirteen loops, are about a man dying by hanging. There are witness accounts from the woman who discovers his body, neighbors, ambulance workers, and police. "And Of Hearts and Minds" centers love between women and men, as where a couple discusses imaginary books, dancing between "obstruction and flirtation."

Surreal and unsettling, *Three Alarm Fire* is an intrepid hybrid collection that highlights how people and relationships are riddles.

ELAINE CHIEW



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Jessica Levine,
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TRANSLATIONS



The Bishop's Villa

Sacha Naspini, Clarissa Botsford (Translator), Europa Editions (NOV 19) Hardcover \$28 (192pp), 979-888966052-1

In a remote Italian town, an unassuming cobbler is drawn into helping partisans fight against fascists and Nazis in Sacha Naspini's novel *The Bishop's Villa*.

Despite missing several fingers, René is the cobbler of Le Case. He's in love with his neighbor, Anna, whose partisan son is executed by the authorities. Grief-stricken, Anna joins the partisans, asking René to cover for her. This subterfuge propels him into a dangerous game with the Italian fascists running Le Case and the Nazis who subsequently occupy it.

René is incarcerated in a villa used as a prison for partisans and Jewish families; the villa is also being rented as a residence by a bishop who is aware of its goings-on. With the Allies advancing, the Nazis begin deporting the Jews and destroying the evidence of their crimes. Meanwhile, the partisans prepare to liberate their own from the villa. René has one wish: to find Anna, who he believes is imprisoned with him.

Narrated with immediacy, the book makes palpable its complex themes of collaboration versus resistance. Amid widespread collusion, including by the Church, some are compelled to resist the Nazis, as with a prison guard who becomes René's friend. And René's "secret weapon" is sabotaging soldiers' boots, demonstrating that even small acts of resistance matter. With most of Le Case's inhabitants refusing to acknowledge the horror in their midst, ideas of collective responsibility and guilt also hang over the story.

A poignant tribute to the memories of victims of the Nazi regime, the historical novel *The Bishop's Villa* is set in an Italian seminary that served as a prison during the Holocaust.

YELENA FURMAN

ART



Portrait in Red
A Paris Obsession

L. John Harris, Heyday (NOV 5) Hardcover \$35 (320pp), 978-1-59714-649-4

In his memoir *Portrait in Red*, L. John Harris pursues multiple avenues (and delightful detours) in an attempt to solve an art mystery in Paris.

Harris, who attended art school at Berkeley in the 1960s, arrived in Paris on magazine assignment, having been asked to assess the croque-monsieur. On his first day there, he stumbled upon a discarded painting of a girl with a red head covering. Recognizing the artist's skill, he took the portrait home. This painting, dated January 12, 1935, but not signed, presented several mysteries: about the girl, about the artist, and regarding whether the painting was even finished.

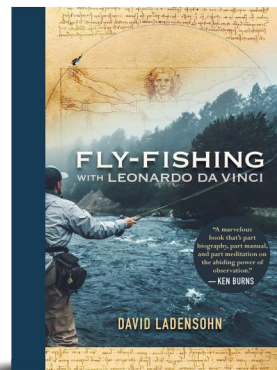
This account of Harris's search is digressive by design—both a record of his quest to satisfy his curiosity and a detailed account of his fixation on the painting. Humorous sketches of Harris's long-past art school "happenings" complement his quest, as do his ranging discussions of art, food, and literature, with the text making nimble shifts from topics like apple strudel to Gustav Klimt paintings.

After his initial queries failed to unlock the painting's provenance, Harris began staging events which were themselves a kind of performance art. He hosted an unveiling at his home in California—a formal "first viewing" suitable for a masterpiece. He created and disseminated "wanted" posters across Paris. Even the writing of this book became a part of the "happening." Forays into numerology and references to Wikipedia, Facebook posts, and Pliny the Elder enliven the book further.

With photographs to illustrate its search, the memoir *Portrait in Red* is about how a stranger's trash became an inquisitive writer's treasure—a free-wheeling, fascinating dissertation on a found object with infinite worth.

SUZANNE KAMATA

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



Fly-Fishing with Leonardo da Vinci

David Ladensohn, Terra Firma (NOV 5) Hardcover \$29.95 (208pp) 978-1-59534-305-5

In a compelling, conversational style that brings together two unlikely subjects, David Ladensohn's book explores fly fishing alongside the life and legacy of Leonardo da Vinci.

The book follows da Vinci's life with admiration, including his unlikely rise to prominence despite his humble beginnings. While da Vinci is known for his contributions to Western thought as an artist, inventor, and engineer, Ladensohn argues that the ways da Vinci fixated on the flow and movement of water in rivers were perhaps his greatest obsession. Thus, tracing a day of fly-fishing, Ladensohn fixates on how water moves over a rock in a Colorado trout stream. Through these observations, he comes to see how da Vinci's explorations of river currents' motion around objects might also inform where the fish he targets are likely to be hiding. These thoughts become the springboard for a text that is part sporting memoir and fishing guide and part biography.

Filled with vibrant images of idyllic streams, drawings by da Vinci, and fishing concepts, this self-deprecating, jocular text includes lofty, poignant explorations of life and nature, as when Ladensohn expresses joy over catching a fish: "To be attached to a trout by hook and line ... is to feel pure wildness." Concise chapters shift between the central subjects, either looking at a fishing challenge or an aspect of da Vinci's life, each complementing and building on the other. Ladensohn's research trips and insights, including seeing famous works in person like da Vinci's *Codex Arundel*, add insight into his joyful personal process.

Approachable and inviting, *Fly-Fishing with Leonardo da Vinci* combines biographical research and memoir elements to deliver charming exploration of water, invention, and lives led by curiosity.

MIKE GOOD

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



No Credit River

Zoe Whittall, Book*hug Press (OCT 29) Softcover \$18 (78pp), 978-1-77166-907-8

In Zoe Whittall's prose poetry memoir *No Credit River*, heartbreak seeps through the cracks of everyday experiences.

Covering a period of close to ten years, this hybrid memoir details the time prior to, during, and after a transformative romantic relationship in Whittall's life. Its autofictional narrative works to elucidate these queer experiences in short, slice-of-life prose poems. Whittall discusses her younger years in lesbian communities, her years-long relationship with a trans man, and her experiences with pregnancy, miscarriage, and isolation during COVID-19.

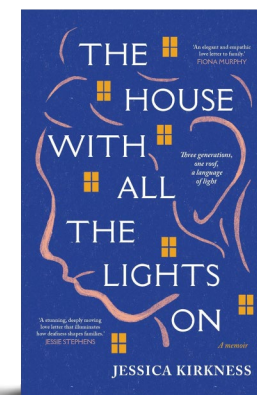
Their lines at once punchy and lyrical, the poems render the lived reality of heartache palpable as they explore how the past and present intertwine to color mundane experiences in. The poems are intense and personal, but they also traverse broad territory as they question how to talk about relationships that fall outside of the structures of heteronormativity.

Whittall shares both joyous and sorrowful memories of her time with her boyfriend and describes their domestic life in which she also became a stepmother to his two children. In later poems set after their breakup, she investigates her own identity as a bisexual femme woman, including as it relates to the experience of pregnancy and motherhood. She also touches on the unconventional nature of making a living as a writer, describing attending conventions, residencies, and retreats and interacting, often uncomfortably, with other authors. Throughout, the book engages the autofictional mode to traverse large swathes of time, using poetic devices such as refrain and motif to emphasize the cyclical and repetitive nature of heartbreak.

In intimate vignettes that weave back and forth through time, the memoir *No Credit River* covers the aftermath of a life-altering breakup, addressing themes of queer relationality and sexuality, aging, pregnancy, and loss with intelligence, wit, and devastating candor.

BELLA MOSES

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



The House with All the Lights On

Jessica Kirkness, Allen & Unwin (NOV 5) Softcover \$18.99 (240pp) 978-1-76106-907-9

Elegiac in tone, Jessica Kirkness's *The House with All the Lights On* is a touching family memoir in which language and technology enable connections with deaf grandparents.

Kirkness grew up next door to her grandparents, immigrants who were deaf from childhood. It fell to Kirkness to convey her grandfather's fatal prognosis to him as his Auslan (Australian sign language) interpreter. Losing this bond and inheriting his archives prompted her to learn more about deaf upbringing and community involvement. She also attained a PhD in Deaf and Disability Studies; for her, research became personal.

That intimate connection to the subject results in warmth throughout, even when the book is dealing with facts. It imparts a clear sense of the range of international deaf education strategies over time. Some aspects have been slow to change: on a visit to her grandmother's deaf school in England, Kirkness discovered it still operates a contentious oralism policy: teaching is only via spoken English; students must rely on hearing aids and lip-reading.

In addition to expressing disappointment over enduring oral bias, the book addresses the controversy surrounding cochlear implants, an Australian invention. Deafness is introduced as an identity as well as a disability; some view implants as an existential threat. For others, the loss of one sense seems to enhance others, a phenomenon known as "Deaf Gain."

Through the example of Kirkness's grandparents, other technologies are posited as a lifeline, including closed captions, large-screen televisions, and social media. There is equal weight given to technology and the arts. Kirkness learned that deaf people can feel music, and her grandfather adored movies.

The House with All the Lights On is a poignant memoir about disabilities, family relationships, and a "dance between pride and shame."

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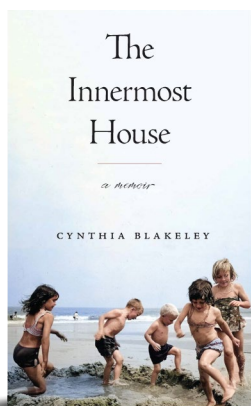
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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR



The Innermost House
A Memoir

Cynthia Blakeley, Bright Leaf (NOV 26)
Softcover \$22.95 (256pp)
978-1-62534-814-2

Cynthia Blakeley’s poignant memoir *The Innermost House* explores her dysfunctional upbringing and family life in working-class Massachusetts.

Born in 1958, Blakeley grew up along the shores of Cape Cod, a longstanding summer tourist attraction marked by changeling winds, star-filled skies, and beckoning ocean waters edged by “bayberry, beach plums, and golden-rod.” But after the annual Labor Day exodus, only the native “Cape Codders” like Blakeley’s family and neighbors remained in the “off-season’s shivery quietude.” They cleaned out rental cottages, grateful for any groceries left behind. Though close-knit, their aspirations and economic realities were often limited.

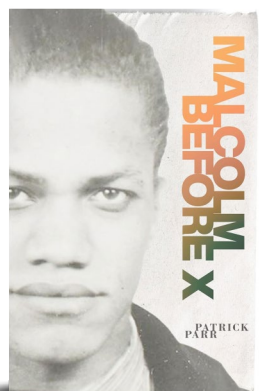
The book is eloquent on the subjects of remembrance and healing. Beyond its regional revelations are compelling and faceted portraits of Blakeley’s parents, siblings, and other family members, from her grandmother’s “pale Puritan eyes” and thrifty tenacity to her charismatic mother, Shirley, who was the center of her household.

Blakeley describes herself as a “scrappy” yet “earnest” child who emerged from conflicted sexual molestation encounters and a chaotic home environment into a broader, more cohesive world. Deep considerations of the subjective fluidity of memory include how strong emotional impressions can alter memories, just as time and experience influence the evolution of perspective. Blakeley makes note of the concept of “forgetting,” memory’s “conjoined twin,” showing how the “curation and co-construction of the past” shapes the present and future.

Brimming with personal and historical details, *The Innermost House* is a distinctive memoir with a keen sense of place and renewal.

MEG NOLA

BIOGRAPHY



Malcolm Before X

Patrick Parr, University of Massachusetts Press (NOV 26) Softcover \$29.95 (352pp)
978-1-62534-816-6

Malcolm Before X focuses on the early years of Malcolm X’s life and the experiences that shaped the man he became.

Though its biographical portions cover only the first twenty-seven years of Malcolm’s life, the book spans decades, going back to tell the story of Malcolm’s great-great-grandparents. Both maternal and paternal ancestors are followed, tracing the sides of Malcolm’s story to establish both the family and sociopolitical contexts he was born into.

After navigating a tumultuous childhood in Lansing, Michigan, Malcolm moved to the East Coast as a teenager, finding work as an emcee and doing side jobs to earn money. He also broke into several homes, stealing jewelry and fur coats to pawn. Those break-ins lead to his arrest; he was sentenced to eight to ten years in prison. While in prison, he turned to education and then religion in search of a new path forward.

The book often pulls from Malcolm X’s autobiography for his perspective on his situation. These excerpts are supplemented with accounts from his family and friends, providing external perspectives that at times conflict with his own. The multiple accounts are managed well, adding layers and widening the scope of the narrative. The backstory of each key player in Malcolm’s life is told, and these establishing details emphasize the impact that Malcolm X’s community had on him. Similar space is given to the three prisons Malcolm stayed in during his incarceration. Each facility’s origin story is shared, as well as the schedules of the incarcerated people there to give a sense of daily life.

Expansive descriptions of the different settings and people who shaped Malcolm X’s coming-of-age make the biography *Malcolm Before X* holistic.

JULIA DILLMAN

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT



Everyone’s Trash
One Man Against 1.6 Billion Pounds

Duncan Watson, Peter E. Randall Publisher (NOV 15) Softcover \$25 (184pp)
978-1-942155-77-5

Using humor as an educational tool, Duncan Watson’s charming memoir *Everyone’s Trash* reveals recycling secrets and stories about detritus.

After earning a master’s degree in resource management in the early 1990s, Watson started a job at the Keene, New Hampshire, dump, whose access road was lined with litter. The dump itself was an open pit hosting thousands of scavenging seagulls. Luckily for Watson (and everyone else), the US was at a turning point for policies on solid waste disposal, rendering the Keene dump part of “a dying breed.” The history and remediation of the site are treated as a microcosm of American trash management.

The book takes a nonlinear approach, skipping between trash management’s earliest days, profiles of long-time employees, Watson’s first weeks on the job, eccentric anecdotes, and coverage of the twenty-first-century construction of Keene’s state-of-the-art transfer station. Throughout, Watson emphasizes people over technological progress to enjoyable effect. He also pokes fun at his own idealism, explaining how tossing items that “should be recyclable” into recycling bins works against the process: “The wishful (overzealous) recycler is the pest of recycling professionals everywhere. My name is Duncan Watson, and before I knew better I was a wishful recycler.”

Shocking descriptions and local history wend in as Watson documents bizarre phenomena like “floating tires” that rose up through heavier trash and rubber baby dolls that did the same, if in a more harrowing way. The dump’s social functions are emphasized as Watson recalls talking with neighbors and employees and listening to long-term residents brag about great dump finds back in the day, when attendants would set aside trash with potential for re-use.

With good-natured humor and serious statistics, the ecologically-minded memoir *Everyone’s Trash* defines recycling as a community affair.

MICHELE SHARPE

ESSAYS



Twenty-Two Impressions
Notes from the Major Arcana

Jessica Friedmann, Scribe (NOV 5)
Hardcover \$25 (272pp)
978-1-957363-12-7

Jessica Friedmann’s essay collection *Twenty-Two Impressions* sheds novel light on the potential of the tarot to guide how people move through and experience life.

The text opens with an in-depth exploration of the history of the tarot, which has its roots in playing cards; its connection to occultism did not come until centuries after its inception. Friedmann pulls from multiple sources to track the creation and development of the tarot. Details surrounding the illustrations across time are of particular interest, as they reflect shifts in social attitudes and popular culture. Friedmann’s own introductory deck was a reproduction of the Tarot de Marseilles, originally printed in fifteenth-century Italy using woodcuts.

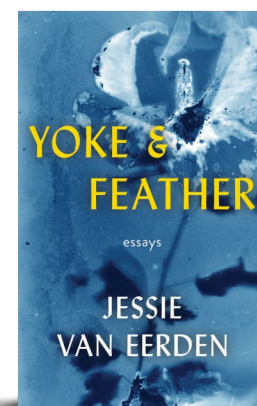
Using the major arcana—the twenty-two named cards within a seventy-eight-card tarot deck that are ascribed higher influence within a reading—as their structure, Friedmann’s essays draw connections between the cards and broader concepts, world events, and personal experiences. Some connections are straightforward—the bad luck of a burglary is related to the Wheel of Fortune—while others demand deeper consideration. Friedmann ably maneuvers through these unexpected turns, drawing every essay to a salient point before its close.

Friedmann is an honest narrator who acknowledges and relates to spiritualism skeptics. She admits to having relegated the tarot to a “spectacle” of “purple crushed velvet and pentagram necklaces” at first. “When something is simply *not for you*, it is easy to dismiss it,” she remarks. But Friedmann does not demand belief in the tarot; she only urges openness to the universal lessons and shared human history it represents.

A misunderstood cultural phenomenon is used as a window to the human experience in the personal essay collection *Twenty-Two Impressions*.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE

ESSAYS



Yoke & Feather
Essays

Jessie van Eerden, Dzanc Books (NOV 19)
Softcover \$17.95 (212pp)
978-0-9842133-6-8

Jessie van Eerden’s glittering essay collection *Yoke & Feather* is a work of exquisite longing marked by keen reflections on biblical tales.

Beginning after van Eerden’s divorce, these intimate essays trouble through relationship shifts, unrealized goals, and connections between people across time. A foray into online dating becomes an opportunity to reconsider how we present ourselves to the world; van Eerden notes the limitations of digital checklists when it comes to capturing a person’s whole being. A rafting trip down a desert river just after a snowstorm solidifies a developing relationship alongside sightings of hieroglyphs on cliff walls and a felled mountain lion. Magic abounds, found in ordinary prayers, everyday practices, and ongoing growth; the very act of being becomes a symbol of deep religiosity.

Among the book’s throughlines are reconsiderations of the stories of women from the Bible, their lives reimaged in contemporary Appalachian contexts. Mary and Martha adopt a child, loving and forming her in their individualized ways; Elizabeth longs for the child she has not yet had. These are exercises in empathy, reconstituted stories of melancholy and desire in which the “currents” of the present can be “sense[d].” They run alongside van Eerden’s own confessions: she, too, dreams of the daughter she never had, envisioning the girl dancing along her porch and wondering if it’s too late to start.

Prayers run throughout the book, too, taking the form of panging love for neighbors and strangers and dreams unrealized. “We are defined by the unwritten, the unpossessed,” van Eerden writes, “by this that we want which we did not know we wanted because it is unseen.” Herein, such “blessings do not lead you out, but lead you in,” toward spiritual transformation that makes space for new possibilities.

The essays in *Yoke & Feather* are gorgeous exercises in faith-filled, interconnected being.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER

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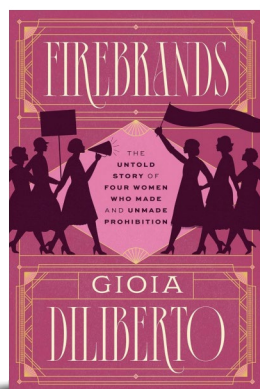


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HISTORY



Firebrands
The Untold Story of Four Women Who Made and Unmade Prohibition

Gioia Diliberto, University of Chicago Press (OCT 30) Hardcover \$30 (336pp) 978-0-226-81967-9

Gioia Diliberto's *Firebrands* visits the Roaring Twenties and beyond.

When American women won the right to vote in 1920, some politicians assumed they would vote as a bloc. The story of how Prohibition rose and fell shows this to be untrue: some women upheld banning alcohol as a feminist move that would be the salvation of women and children, while others opposed the ban as an unenforceable hypocrisy. By tracing the lives of four women at the center of these debates, Diliberto shows how women were always central to one of the largest shifts in the nation.

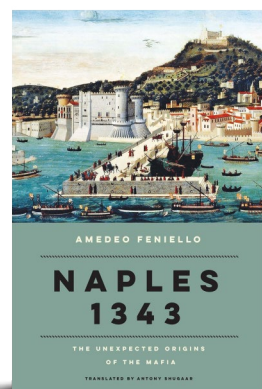
Ella Boole led the Women's Christian Temperance Union, influencing presidents and delivering speeches about the evils of alcohol. Mabel Wilker Willebrandt was a pioneering lawyer, charged with enforcing the legal branch of Prohibition. Texas Guinan was a hustler and speakeasy host whose capers kept her in the public eye while she eluded the law. Pauline Sabin was a wealthy activist who leveraged her power, and the new ability of women to vote and organize, to see Prohibition to its grave.

Though each woman occupied her own sphere of society, not encountering the others often, their combined efforts expose the conflicting undercurrents of US society at the time: the nation was rife with racism left from the Civil War and Jim Crow, ongoing arguments about federal versus state rights, and the continuing discussions of women's places in society. Excerpts from diaries, letters, public speeches, and newspapers are used to construct a compelling account of how Prohibition came to be—and of the thirteen-year-long shadow it cast on commerce and crime.

Set against a familiar backdrop of flappers and mobsters, *Firebrands* retells history anew, demonstrating the crucial contributions women made to a fascinating time in the US.

JEANA JORGENSEN

HISTORY



Naples 1343
The Unexpected Origins of the Mafia

Amedeo Feniello, Antony Shugaar (Translator), Other Press (NOV 12) Hardcover \$29.99 (336pp) 978-1-59051-103-9

Amedeo Feniello's cutthroat book *Naples 1343* reconstructs life and crime in Neapolitan history.

Personal and inviting, with language that trades between academic and direct, this is a book built on the idea that the past reverberates in contemporary Italy. It covers aspects of Naples' social hierarchy via time loops, with chapters and sections addressing different topics in the region. There's focus on wars, which changed the region's borders and rulers; on physical changes to the city; and on infighting between noble families.

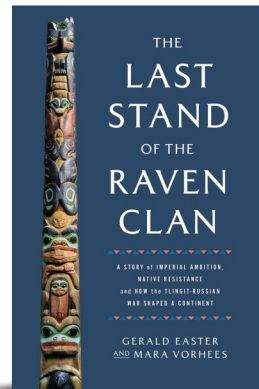
In 1300s Naples, Feniello shows, the ruling families were consolidated into five clans. They governed a region wracked by waves of famine. When there was grain or wine, it was taxed, sold, and shipped away. Citizens starved. Early ripples of organized crime began in response to these privations. There's an example of the murder at sea of a Genoan ship captain—an outsider with edible cargo who was in unfortunate proximity to a hungry city.

Stories are used to introduce individuals and instances of trade and crime within the period, with the glossary proving handy for tracking nobles' titles and job functions. Period accounts are a source of additional excitement, as with a Giovanni Boccaccio short story that is a vehicle for commenting on the era's dangers: in its frightening, madcap scenes, a hapless young man falls victim to one scheme after another on his payday. Elsewhere, a woman warrior's story is told with relish: she lifted "a large boulder and a metal beam, and invited the knights to do as she had done," convincing a poet witness that Amazons existed in the process.

Naples 1343 is the history of a dynamic seaport in the fourteenth century, when leadership changed in the wake of wars as the elite scrambled to retain power.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS

HISTORY



The Last Stand of the Raven Clan
A Story of Imperial Ambition, Native Resistance and How the Tlingit-Russian War Shaped a Continent

Gerald Easter, Mara Vorhees, Pegasus Books (NOV 5) Hardcover \$29.95 (320pp) 978-1-63936-736-8

Gerald Easter and Mara Vorhees's *The Last Stand of the Raven Clan* is an engrossing history of the Tlingit-Russian war, its causes, and its impacts on North America.

Written from the perspective of the Tlingit, this refreshing narrative explores a war long ignored in white settler history. The Tlingit are introduced in the present day as proud, reflective, and perhaps a little foolhardy. This stature echoes back in time, with the book covering cultural practices of the Tlingit precolonization and showcasing their unbroken cultural spirit. The Russians are then introduced on the Great Northern Expedition. Their exploitation of the otter, mixed with their desire to participate in Europe's colonial expansionism in the Americas, drove them to explore, expand, and conquer. Next came the Tlingit resistance.

The prose is gripping, propelled along by lyrical flourishes even through information-dense and violent.

The beauty of the prose is supported by accounts from native people who witnessed the massacres and battles, giving a complete and rare look into how these events were seen at the time:

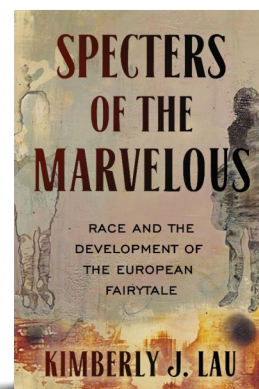
I was a boy of nine or ten, when the first Russian ship, a two-master, arrived. We had never seen a ship before, we did not know white men.

As a tribe without gunpowder and other modern European weaponry, their successes against the Russians are an astounding tribute to their skill as warriors and their unbroken will. Theirs is a triumphant historical account of a success forged in the face of tremendous odds.

Captivating and poetic, *The Last Stand of the Raven Clan* is a resonant history of Indigenous resistance whose lessons are far-reaching.

AHLIAH BRATZLER

LITERARY CRITICISM



Specters of the Marvelous
Race and the Development of the European Fairy Tale

Kimberly J. Lau, Wayne State University Press (DEC 10) Softcover \$34.99 (256pp) 978-0-8143-4134-6

Spanning literary criticism, social science, and the study of the fairy tale, Kimberly J. Lau's *Specters of the Marvelous* foregrounds race in often whitewashed European fairy tales.

Prior to cinema, fairy tales were collected, written, and edited by European literary figures including Giambattista Basile in Italy, Madame d'Aulnoy in France, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in Germany, and Andrew Lang in England. In her compelling rereading of this history, Lau locates race in the tales and their contexts, asserting that even stories that don't seem to be about race, like "Beauty and the Beast," contain references to contemporary debates about French attempts to civilize the residents of their colonial holdings.

Anti-Blackness and antisemitism also appear in many classic fairy tales, from Basile's *Tale of Tales*, wherein Black slave girls are depicted as lazy and treacherous, to the Grimms' fairy tales, which contain multiple stories of Jews being greedy and deserving of punishment. Lang's colored fairy books naturalized the story of British imperialism while asserting the proper domestic role of women in education, since Lang's wife translated and compiled the bulk of those tales while Lang got the credit. Against this backdrop, fairy tales furthered European notions of race and racism, naturalizing ideas about which bodies are beastly and which are deserving of love and riches.

While the book struggles to condense centuries of European scientific and popular thinking on race and colonialism into its short space, its meticulous citations and far-reaching connections are persuasive demonstrations of the idea that racism and the fairy tale constitute one another, such that conversations about them should remain intertwined.

Specters of the Marvelous is a compelling history of race in literary European fairy tales.

JEANA JORGENSEN

POLITICAL SCIENCE



Dodge County, Inc.
Big Ag and the Undoing of Rural America

Sonja Trom Eayrs, Bison Books (NOV 1) Softcover \$24.95 (326pp) 978-1-4962-3499-5

The devastation wrought upon US farming communities is tracked in Sonja Trom Eayrs's courageous book *Dodge County, Inc.*, in which the family farm that Eayrs grew up on becomes a microcosmic example of the ills afflicting thousands of rural towns and private farmers.

From the frontlines of the fight against factory farming, the book delves into the harrowing details of how "Big Pork" pushed small towns to the brink of ruin, corrupting the political and regulatory bodies meant to protect them. In little more than a decade, concentrated animal feeding operations sprang up and polluted the air, water, and soil that generations had cared for. Eayrs indicts this as an intentional campaign to make areas unlivable and says that millions of gallons of animal waste were poured on fields abutting family farms when their residents called attention to the CAFOs' health violations.

The book braids such local stories into its intrepid reportage, resulting in a portrait of a country in crisis. Facts and figures about the environmental repercussions of keeping tens of thousands of livestock producing more waste than major cities within a three-mile radius are threaded into Eayrs's stories of her family going up against the "hog gang." Revelations of regulators going on vacation rather than addressing malpractice complaints, and of a business leader vacating his position one day before being served to derail a lawsuit, illuminate the issues further. Still, against such enormous odds and tragic losses, the book articulates an optimistic vision of a more just, regulated future, celebrating the significant victories eked out in places like Winona County, Minnesota, where a concerted local outcry halted a large industrial operation.

Rooted in the intimate experiences of Sonja Trom Eayrs's farming family, *Dodge County, Inc.* is a powerful manifesto against the excesses of factory farming.

WILLEM MARX



Fiction—General
Elephant Touch
A Novel

Susan R. Greenway
160 pages, \$14.95, 9781684632688

"A touching tale about a parent's death and the birth of a passion for animals."—Kirkus Reviews

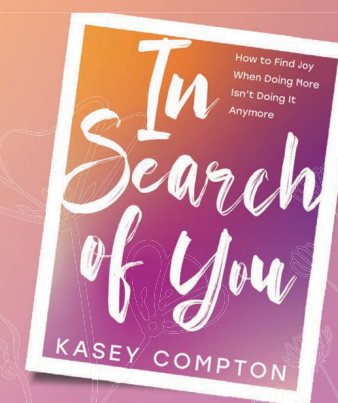
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POLITICAL SCIENCE



Night Train to Odesa
Covering the Human Cost of Russia's War

Jen Stout, Polygon (OCT 31) Hardcover \$28.95 (288pp), 978-1-84697-647-6

Reporter Jen Stout's *Night Train to Odesa* is a heartbreaking memoir about the Ukrainian people's fight to survive a relentless war.

Offered a journalism scholarship in Moscow, Stout arrived in Russia during Putin's regime. When Russia invaded Ukraine and war broke out, she experienced first-hand how state propaganda turned her Russian friends into hostile strangers with upside-down worldviews. With no connections, no money, and no news outlets to publish her reporting, she headed to the border between Romania and Ukraine. Once there, she pitched a story to BBC Radio and began to give voice to the exodus of refugees arriving across the Danube River. Soon after, she crossed the border into Ukraine to report from the front.

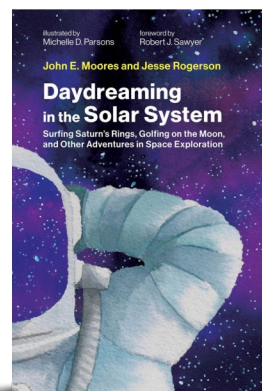
Night Train to Odesa chronicles the early stages of Russia's war against Ukraine through easy-flowing, immersive prose that's filled with evocative images. Each on-site encounter is rendered in sharp detail, presented in the format of written pantomime. There is a fixer who can get hold of the most rare objects at a moment's notice; a death-defying daredevil poet who shuttles journalists across army front lines; an anxious hostess who preaches both-siderism while pleading with her guests not to talk about the war; and people picnicking in a city park while ignoring the air raid sirens with sardonic defeatism.

The narrative is as relentless as the war: new people are introduced, familiar individuals are killed, crises and emergencies appear without warning. The ending is open-ended. The war continued while Stout left for the safety of home, recognizing that this was a privilege that Ukrainians did not have. Left on the page is a vague promise to return and never forget.

Relentless in its narrative fortitude, the memoir *Night Train to Odesa* is filled with detailed reportage from the front lines of Russia's war against Ukraine.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN

SCIENCE



Daydreaming in the Solar System
Surfing Saturn's Rings, Golfing on the Moon, and Other Adventures in Space Exploration

John E. Moores, Jesse Rogerson, Michelle D. Parsons (Illustrator), The MIT Press (OCT 22) Hardcover (256pp) 978-0-262-04929-0

Combining entertaining scenarios with fascinating facts, *Daydreaming in the Solar System* is a clever, accessible scientific exploration of the planets, moons, comets, and other celestial bodies orbiting the sun.

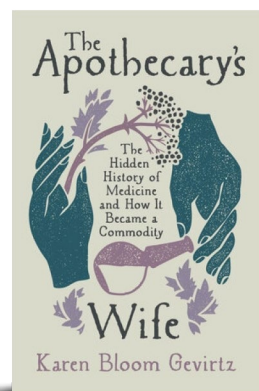
Each chapter begins with an imaginative adventure story, or "daydream," that exemplifies the unique qualities of a particular location in the solar system—such as the experience of golfing on the dark side of Earth's moon; rappelling a canyon formed by volcanic forces on the surface of Mars; skydiving through the exotic, red- and blue-tinted swirls in the bottomless clouds of Jupiter; sailing the wine-dark methane-ethane-nitrogen sea of Saturn's moon Titan; fossil hunting on Venus where life seems possible despite a dense atmosphere and temperatures exceeding 400 degrees celsius; listening to the "high-pitched ricochets" of sound reverberating on icy Europa; and attempting to grow roses on the barren surface of the asteroid Benu.

The ingenious scenarios are paired with breezy, engaging scientific explanations of the history, chemistry, physics, and geological features of the celestial objects in question. Topics addressed include the formation of moons, planets, comets, and asteroids; the implications of circular, eccentric, and synchronous orbits; calculations for determining the surface gravity of objects; and the nature of visible light in various atmospheres. Dozens of informative illustrations—depicting, for instance, the chemical composition of asteroids—add clarity and insight.

Loaded with intriguing information that's presented in a playful, conversational style, *Daydreaming in the Solar System* is an engrossing introduction to the astronomy and physics of the solar system.

KRISTEN RABE

SCIENCE



The Apothecary's Wife
The Hidden History of Medicine and How It Became a Commodity

Karen Bloom Gevartz, University of California Press (NOV 12) Hardcover \$28.95 (340pp). 978-0-520-40991-0

Karen Bloom Gevartz's compelling history book *The Apothecary's Wife* covers the commodification of medicine and the sidelining of women in medical history.

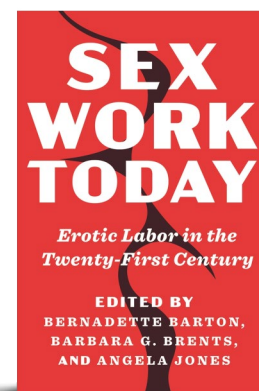
In the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, the Scientific Revolution transformed how medicine was practiced in a way that left out people in need. Medications made at home were replaced by prescribed medications with consequences leading into the present. To capture this transformation, the book introduces historical figures including Mary Trye, who practiced medicine under the title of medicatrix, and Joanna Stephens, who had a real cure for kidney stones in the eighteenth century. They and other women were sidelined in the new era of medicine, though, as remedies began to cost money, required a physician's prescription, and were supplied by apothecaries.

Personal recipe books and medical prescriptions are used to illustrate how medicine changed from work that housewives did at home into a specialized practice. Newspapers, poems, and plays are used to show how the public's perception of medicine and its practitioners evolved in tandem with these shifts. Lay language is used to elucidate the book's scientific topics, and touches of whimsy and dry humor enliven it: mansplaining, the book suggests, began early in human history. In addition, an imaginary time-traveling patient is used to illustrate changes to medicine across the centuries, with the book suggesting that such a patient would be shocked to be expected to pay for medications and would be baffled by the change from homemade medications to prescribed treatments.

The Apothecary's Wife is a stunning history book about the effects of the Scientific Revolution on the practice of medicine.

CAROLINA CIUCCI

SOCIAL SCIENCE



Sex Work Today
Erotic Labor in the Twenty-First Century

Angela Jones, Barbara G. Brents, Bernadette Barton (Editors), NYU Press (NOV 19) Hardcover \$35 (432pp) 978-1-4798-2134-1

The fresh, informative essays collected in *Sex Work Today* concern challenges faced by those engaging in modern erotic labor.

According to the authors in this collection, the stigma and stereotypes surrounding erotic labor often obscure the truth about the industry and those who work in it. These essays shed light on different kinds of sex work, from sugaring (dating a wealthy, older individual for gifts and money) to full-service work and pornography. They support the collective thesis that deconstructing harmful myths helps marginalized individuals both within and outside of the industry.

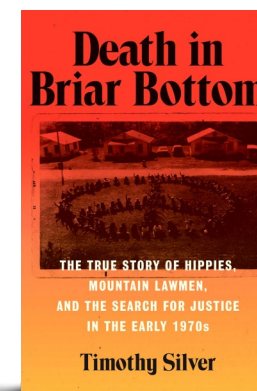
The essays are written by academics and activists, many of whom either have personal experience with sex work or have conducted extensive interviews with those who do. Their studies cover an array of fascinating and pertinent topics, from how new technologies have altered sex work to the reasons behind the high rate of job satisfaction among dominatrices. All essays strive for inclusivity, examining how factors like race, gender, and sexuality influence workers' ability to make a living in a safe environment. Others confront the persistent threat of hostile political groups who conflate sex trafficking with sex work.

With clear care for the people they write about, the essayists suggest possible solutions to various problems, such as finding ways to promote cam performers of color and providing a guide map for strippers to attain workplace protections. The book's broad variety of topics and its commitment to the sex workers' rights slogan cited by multiple authors—"Nothing about us without us"—make this an indispensable volume.

Sex Work Today is a revelatory, in-depth essay collection that allows sex workers to speak for themselves about the benefits, risks, and complexities of modern erotic labor.

EILEEN GONZALEZ

TRUE CRIME



Death in Briar Bottom
The True Story of Hippies, Mountain Lawmen, and the Search for Justice in the Early 1970s

Timothy Silver, The University of North Carolina Press (NOV 12) Hardcover \$27 (208pp), 978-1-4696-8286-0

Set against cultural and generational tensions in the American South, historian Timothy Silver's gritty true crime book *Death in Briar Bottom* covers a 1972 incident involving free-living hippies, conservative law enforcement officers, and a tragic death.

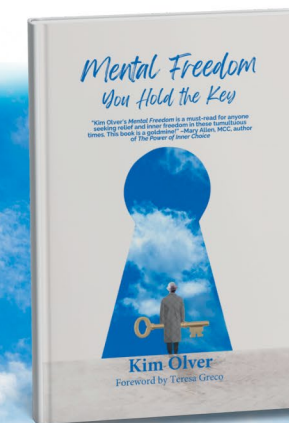
On the surface, the death of Stan Altland seemed straightforward: he, along with a few dozen friends from Florida, camped illegally in North Carolina's western hills en route to a Rolling Stones concert in Charlotte. In response, local sheriff Kermit Banks and several deputies raided the campground, using excessive force to rouse the campers. In the ensuing confusion, Altland was killed by a shotgun blast—a crime that no one was ever convicted of due to a lack of hard evidence.

Compiling witness interviews, trial reports, and FBI documents five decades later, Silver builds a meticulous chronicle of the incident and its aftermath, questioning whether justice was served. Through personal recollections, a sampling of local and national headlines, and inside information on the judges and lawyers who brought their own biases to the situation, his book documents national divisions too: countercultural youths were eyed by rural communities as "longhairs" who indulged in drugs, promiscuity, and violence.

Taking an evenhanded approach, the book acknowledges the rambunctious behavior of Altland's group while making a compelling case that the local police's prejudices and malice escalated an already tense situation. And while the death of Stan Altland occurred half a century ago, Silver argues that the issues at the heart of the case—adversarial policing, courts shielding authorities from prosecution—are still germane today. By finding the universal dimensions in a local tragedy, *Death in Briar Bottom* shows how a true crime story from the past says a lot about persistent national problems.

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