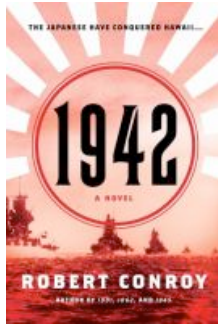


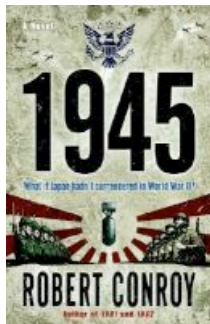
## New Fiction April 2009



1942

By Robert Conroy

A significant writer of alternate history turns here to the popular topic of Pearl Harbor, producing what is arguably his best book. The story begins with the crippling of Pearl Harbor as a fleet base and focuses on an army intelligence officer turned guerrilla and a navy widow surviving Japanese occupation. The cast also includes an American traitor, loyal Japanese-Americans, and exceedingly well-drawn historical figures, from FDR on down to J. Lawton Collins, chief of staff of the army's Hawaiian Department. There are lots of vivid action scenes from start to finish, although the climactic American victory involves stretching credibility to a degree that may raise eyebrows among serious students of military history though even they are more likely than not to enjoy this rousing historical action tale. *(Booklist)*



1945

By Robert Conroy

Conroy has Japan's surrender after the A-bombs short-circuited by extremists. That leads to a typhoon-battered U.S. invasion that encounters last-ditch Japanese resistance. There are a third of a million American casualties, and two more A-bombs are dropped on Japan. Realistic to the point of gruesomeness, 1945 recalls David Westheimer's classic *Lighter Than a Feather*. *(Booklist)*



### *Alis*

By Naomi Rich

This compelling debut novel is set in some other time, some other place, at the strictly religious Community of the Book. The Book, something akin to the Bible, has decreed, to her shock, that 14-year-old Alis is to marry one of the middle-aged Elders. So begins an engrossing saga that takes Alis away from the Community in a desperate effort to avoid the marriage. First, she leaves for a nearby Community to aid a friend, but the woman's fanatical husband becomes an enemy. With the help of a young man, Luke, she escapes to the city to find her brother; but she is not prepared for the squalid, dangerous environment, and it drives her back to the marriage she doesn't want. Eventually she's accused of murder when her husband dies. These are just some of the high points in a story so action-packed and filled with twists that readers won't anticipate the ending. First-timers usually don't attempt such multi-layered stories, especially with religion at their core, but Rich pulls it off. (*Booklist*)



### *All Souls*

By Christine Schutt

Set in a girls' school on Manhattan's Upper East Side, this book is a wonderfully written, touching story. Popular Astra Dell spends much of her senior year in the hospital with a rare form of tissue cancer. A young teacher visits Astra and considers her own brother who died young, while doubting her role as teacher and her potential relationship with a colleague who loves being unattached almost as much as he enjoys the students' crushes on him. Astra's friend Car is too busy with a multitude of issues to visit, but sends angst-filled letters that are

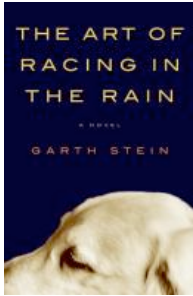
sometimes stolen by Marlene, the unpopular girl who visits every day and considers Astra her new best friend. Astra's widowed father finds it hard to speak with his own daughter. Like E. R. Frank's *Life Is Funny* (Puffin, 2002), *All Souls* is written from the perspectives of several characters. Schutt, who herself teaches at a New York girls' school, mines those hallways for an extraordinarily captivating take on the teachers', parents', and teens' troubled worlds. At times she evokes Virginia Woolf's style in the immediacy of her characters' thoughts. *All Souls* may at first remind teens of formulaic novels such as Cecily von Ziegesar's "Gossip Girl" series (Little, Brown), but they will quickly discover a style and depth to the writing that is refreshing for this genre. (*School Library Journal*)



### *Anatomy of Wings*

By Karen Foxlee

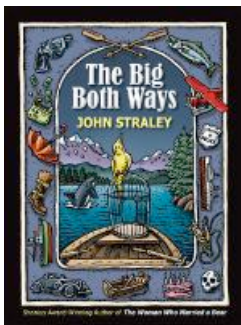
Set in a small Australian town in the early 1980s, this shining debut novel charts a young girl's grief after the death of her older sister. Months before Beth's fatal fall, 10-year-old Jennifer's beautiful singing voice disappears. When and why it got stuck forms a central mystery that unifies Jennifer's narrative, which loops fluidly between past and present. Each clue leads back to events from the tumultuous year before Beth died, and Jennifer's search for her voice becomes a larger search for how her beloved sister was lost and what it means to leave childhood behind. In this sensitive, original story, Foxlee explores familiar elements: the warmth and suffocation of living in Nowheresville; the chasm of misunderstanding between parents and adolescent children. Jennifer loves the comfort and solidity of facts, and she collects information like currency, but her observations are also poetic and washed with magic realism. Not all the plot's tangents are well integrated, but the story works as memory does, with skips, gaps, and sudden, piercing moments that are as illogical and illuminating as a dream. With heart-stopping accuracy and sly symbolism, Foxlee captures the small ways that humans reveal themselves, the mysterious intensity of female adolescence, and the surreal quiet of a grieving house, which slowly and with astonishing resilience fills again with sound and music. (*Booklist*)



*The Art of Racing in the Rain*

By Garth Stein

Enzo the dog feels sure that his next life will be spent in a man's body. In preparation, he closely studies human behavior, and it's from Enzo's observant point of view that Stein writes his moving third novel. Enzo is deeply jealous when his owner, Denny, falls in love with Eve, but after baby Zoe is born, Enzo assumes his role as the family's unconditional protector, particularly after Eve is diagnosed with brain cancer. After Eve's death, her parents drag Denny into a bitter custody battle for Zoe, and Enzo, despite his canine limitations, passionately defends Denny and even alters the course of events. Denny is a race-car driver, and Enzo, who has watched countless televised races, folds thrilling track scenes and driving lessons into the terse family drama. The metaphors may feel purposeful, but readers will nonetheless delight in Enzo's wild, original voice; his aching insights into the limitations and joys of the canine and human worlds; and his infinite capacity for love. A natural choice for book clubs, this should inspire steady demand. (*Booklist*)



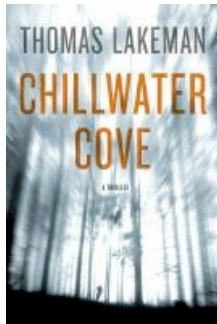
*The Big Both Ways*

By John Straley

Straley, author of the Cecil Younger series, starring a contemporary Alaskan private investigator, turns here to Pacific Northwest history, with a rich tale of labor strife in the 1930s. After quitting his logging job, Slip Wilson sets off for Seattle, hitching a ride with a bleached blond in a big car. Trouble? Of course, especially given the body in the car's trunk. Soon enough, there's another body, and Slip, Ellie (the blond), her niece, and a yellow bird are on the lam, sailing a dory up Puget Sound's Inside Passage, from Seattle to Alaska. What follows is

part mystery and part action-adventure tale, as the neophyte sailors battle weather, tides, and unfriendly locals, all the while pursued by a determined Seattle cop on his own kind of lam from a troubled life. Straley hits all the right notes here: vividly detailed scenes evoking the clash between emerging trade unions and more radical advocates of revolution, as well as almost Dickensian vignettes of the working conditions in the canneries and on the waterfronts of the Northwest, meld perfectly with a Jack London-like, man-versus-nature story in which two adults, one child, and one bird, huddled together in a very small boat, attempt to stay afloat and move ever northward. Labor fiction only works if the characters don't come across as stick figures, singing the union-label song on cue, and Straley nails that, too. Ellie spouts the party line, but she'd rather be Amelia Earhart, and Slip is uncertain about almost everything. If you want to read one novel about the Northwest in the grip of labor unrest, read this one.

*(Booklist)*



*Chillwater Cove*

By Thomas Lakeman

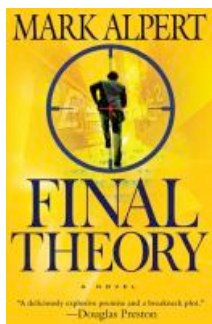
FBI agent Peggy Weaver returns to her hometown just as her childhood friend, who had been kidnapped when they were 10 years old, disappears again. At the time of the kidnapping, Peggy had been with her friend and had gotten away. Readers are drawn immediately into the horrific plot as the adult Peggy receives pornographic photos of 10-year-old Samantha, and it is revealed that Peggy's life is in danger as Lakeman brings the past horror into the present. Chillwater Cove is a remote area in the Tennessee woods. It is home to poor, racially mixed outcasts who have something many of the major players in the town want-badly enough to commit crimes to get it. Peggy's father, the redneck police chief, is less than supportive as they both work on the case; he also plays other roles as the plot twists and turns. In spite of occasionally awkward descriptions, the author draws readers into a story so terrible and so action-packed that they cannot put it down. Teens who like James Patterson and Dean Koontz will eat this one up. Give it to students who "don't like to read" and watch them reconsider that statement. *(School Library Journal)*



### *Contagious*

By Scott Sigler

In *Infected* (2008), Sigler crafted an intense thriller in which an alien species infects humans, inflicts them with nasty triangular growths, and turns them into murderous creatures. Apparently that was just the beginning. In this sequel, which, thanks to some nifty backfilling can be read as a stand-alone, the aliens are changing their attack plans, sending down to Earth a new version of the infection, one that can be transmitted by humans from host to host. The heroes of the first novel return: epidemiologist Margaret Montoya, gung-ho CIA man Dew Phillips, and Perry Dawsey, who, in the previous novel, dealt with his alien infection in a unique and somewhat grisly manner. Now Perry is attuned to the aliens, able to overhear their chatter and lead pursuers to their centers of activity, where the aliens appear to be building portals designed to let the first wave of invaders come to our planet. This is a gutsy, ambitious, and completely seductive novel, B-movie horror of the highest order, told with conviction and gusto. The characters are appropriately larger than life (but still recognizable as real people), and the author is clearly a talented storyteller who knows how to write scenes that are graphic, frightening, and memorable. Many veteran horror writers will be grinding their teeth in envy. A definite must-read, whether you've read *Infected* or not. (*Booklist*)



### *Final Theory*

By Mark Alpert

Although David Swift wanted to become a scientist like his beloved professor, Dr. Hans Kleinman, he couldn't manage the math. Instead, he wrote a best-selling

book about Albert Einstein. Now Swift is shocked to learn that his elderly mentor has been brutally tortured. With his dying breaths, Kleinman tells Swift that, contrary to common knowledge, Einstein did complete his unified field theory, but the consequences were so catastrophic, he kept it secret. Now the feds and the sadistic Chechnyan who attacked Kleinman will do anything to secure Einstein's secret formula. Accordingly, Swift must live up to his name, outrun his vicious assailants, and find Einstein's hidden notebooks. With the help of cool-under-pressure Monique Reynolds, a resourceful African American physicist, Swift leads a wildly choreographed chase. Alpert, an editor for Scientific American, laces his high-IQ doomsday thriller with clearly explicated and hauntingly beautiful scientific theories and delivers readers to such intriguing locations as Carnegie Mellon's Robotics Institute and the Fermi National Acceleration Laboratory. An ingenious scientist turned evil mastermind, a snake handler, a stripper, a video-game-obsessed autistic teen, and sly digs at a certain presidential administration add up to a strikingly sweet-natured yet satisfyingly barbed high-tech, high-stakes adventure. (*Booklist*).



### *Goldengrove*

By Francine Prose

An evocative, emotionally rich story of female adolescence and grief. Nico, the 13-year-old protagonist, lives a life of ease in her family's lake house. Her parents are well-intentioned and progressive. Her older sister is in many ways the center of Nico's universe-Nico is fascinated by Margaret's beauty, her cigarette habit, and her femininity. There is obvious love between the two of them, and a shared intelligence and wit that manifests itself in their conversation. Because Nico's awe of her sister is evident from the start, the situation is all the more painful when Margaret drowns. The narrative then focuses on Nico's grief, her attempt to reconcile her sadness with her growing feelings for Margaret's brooding boyfriend, and the family's attempt to redefine itself. As usual, Prose's writing is spot-on: she conveys the psychological turmoil of the situation with stark, simple language and tempers the sadness with moments of dry humor. Nico has a decidedly adult voice, but teen readers will nevertheless appreciate her wisdom and her confusion, her selfishness and her budding sexuality. The author taps

into the deepest corners of her characters' minds and spins a hook-filled plot around a complex protagonist. Fans of Sarah Dessen, Sara Zarr, and Deb Caletti will enjoy Goldengrove immensely. (*School Library Journal*)



### *Hater*

By David Moody

One day Danny McCoyne's life tends toward the humdrum: job, family, the usual. The next day, suddenly, without warning or explanation, people are turning into killers, murdering their loved ones, attacking perfect strangers. Soon Danny is trying desperately to keep his family safe, while all around him society seems to be self-destructing, as ordinary men and women turn into animals, filled with hate and violence. This is a truly frightening book because, like Danny, we're constantly scrambling to process what's going on. Moody, who self-published the novel in 2006, writes as though his novel were a zombie movie, and readers familiar with the genre will have no difficulty seeing, in their mind's eye, the rapid dissolution of society played out in front of them. (Is it purely a coincidence that the protagonist has the same first name as Danny Boyle, director of the movie *28 Days Later*, whose zombielike creatures were infected with something that filled them with uncontrollable rage?) It's a risky undertaking, giving literary form to a type of story that is traditionally told in pictures, but Moody completely pulls it off. The movie rights to the book have been sold, and it'll be interesting to see if the film is as good as the novel. It's hard to imagine how it could be. (*Booklist*)

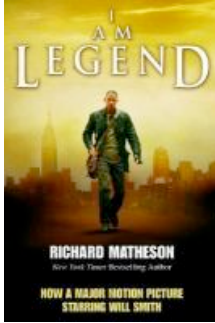


## *Host*

By Stephenie Meyer

You might assume that Meyer's best-selling *Twilight* series (published for YAs), about the intense love between a human teen and a vampire, takes the interspecies relationship thing about as far as it can go. There's where you'd be wrong. Meyer's ingenious adult-market debut, heavily but not tediously indebted to *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*, imagines the tangled web of attachments between an alien parasite and the colony of humans to which the alien's host body once belonged. Meyer boldly chooses to narrate from the perspective of the invading alien, a 1,000-year-old female soul named Wanderer, and it is a tribute to the author's skill that Wanderer is a sympathetic protagonist despite the fact that she tells her tale while clinging to the cerebellum of a human victim, 17-year-old Melanie. As Melanie's unusually resistant consciousness begins to seep into Wanderer's own identity, she finds herself seeking out one of the last outposts of human civilization to reunite with the people her body once loved. Some readers will find the opening scenes too hurried and contrived, and the unusually large number of humans willing to fraternize with the enemies seems idealized. But the view of the apocalypse from the vantage point of one of its horsemen makes for propulsive reading, laden with unforgettable, unsettling scenes that raise fascinating questions about distinctions between essential human identity and its physical vessel. Consider buying duplicate sets of Meyer's oeuvre, one for adults and one for YAs, since this entertaining, somewhat soft-focus sf saga will only serve to broaden the penumbra of Meyer's fame.

*(Booklist)*



### *I Am Legend*

By Richard Matheson

For all Robert Neville knows, he may be the last nonvampire in the world. He does know he is immune to the bacterium that has transformed seemingly everyone else. Assuming he can't be the only one who is immune, he reconnoiters for other normal humans by day and staves off the vampires in his barricaded house by night. If this plot sounds familiar, that is because George A. Romero adapted it to create the first postmodern horror movie, *Night of the Living Dead*. (Booklist)

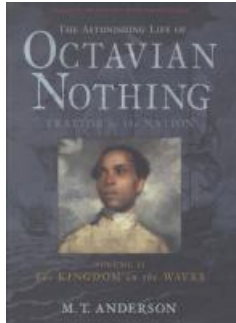


### *If I Stay*

By Gayle Forman

Forman (*Sisters in Sanity*, 2007) provides a compelling and highly textured account of the brutal 24 hours that may be 17-year-old Mia's last. Her day starts with a drive, with her loving and moderately punk parents and her effervescent little brother, to a bookstore. A collision with another vehicle leaves Mia's parents dead. The narrative is told in a robust first-person voice, with flashbacks, flash-forwards, and out-of-body reports on her immediate surroundings as Mia is transported, in grave condition, to the hospital. The story then follows the medical efforts to save her life, extended family and friends' efforts to provide emotional care, and Mia's coming to terms with what has happened and what might still await her. Mia, a gifted cellist, finds support from her alt-rock boyfriend and a best friend whose own mother is a hysteric. Mia's recounting of this critical day is laced with insight, good humor, and wonder, allowing the reader to enter the scene as fully as Mia herself seems to have, at least for now,

left her broken body. More developed and satisfying than a Lurlene McDaniel drama, Mia's story will engage readers willing to suspend their disbelief that the future can be seen in the present. *(Booklist)*



*Kingdom on the Waves: The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation; Volume II*

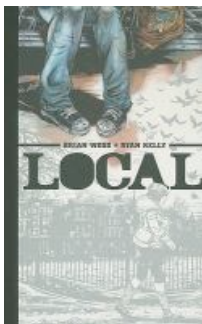
Octavian, the 16-year-old slave whose story began in *The Pox Party* (Candlewick, 2006), continues his search for identity in this brilliant, affecting, and philosophical sequel. Octavian and his tutor escape from Octavian's master to relative safety in Boston where Octavian finds work as a violinist in a military band. After hearing of Lord Dunmore's promise of freedom for slaves, he enlists in the Royal Ethiopian Regiment. Following a loss at Norfolk, they then take up quarters aboard British ships, barely fending off starvation and smallpox. Octavian's uncertainty and doubt are tangible throughout. His detailed first-person narration is written in the richly expansive 18th-century prose introduced in volume one. He records the story while reviewing (and revealing to readers) his diary entries from the past year, so that "none of this shall pass from remembrance." He endures abuse, shame, grief, and humiliation, and comes close to despair; however, he is ultimately hopeful that humanity can aspire to more than warring and despoiling. Teens will identify with Octavian's internal tumult, how he experiences events as being acted upon him, and his transition from observer to participant, from boy to man. More than fascinating historical fiction, this is also a thoughtful and timeless examination of the nature of humanity and a critique of how society addresses (or ignores) identity, freedom, and oppression. Anderson's masterful pacing, surprising use of imagery and symbolism, and adeptness at crafting structure make this a powerful reimagining of slavery and the American Revolution dazzle. *(School Library Journal)*



### *The Knife of Never Letting Go*

By Patrick Ness

Todd Hewitt lives in a world in which all women are dead, and the thoughts of men and animals are constantly audible as Noise. Graphically represented by a set of scratchy fonts and sentence fragments that run into and over each other, Noise is an oppressive chaos of words, images, and sounds that makes human company exhausting and no thought truly private. The history of these peculiar circumstances unfolds over the course of the novel, but Ness's basic world-building is so immediately successful that readers, too, will be shocked when Todd and his dog, Manchee, first notice a silence in the Noise. Realizing that he must keep the silence secret from the town leaders, he runs away, and his terrified flight with an army in pursuit makes up the backbone of the plot. The emotional, physical, and intellectual drama is well crafted and relentless. Todd, who narrates in a vulnerable and stylized voice, is a sympathetic character who nevertheless makes a few wrenching mistakes. Manchee and Aaron, a zealot preacher, function both as characters and as symbols. Tension, suspense, and the regular bombardment of Noise are palpable throughout, mitigated by occasional moments of welcome humor. The cliff-hanger ending is unexpected and unsatisfying, but the book is still a pleasure for sophisticated readers comfortable with the length and the bleak, literary tone. (*School Library Journal*)

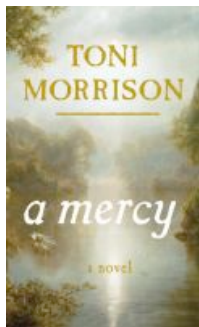


### *Local*

Written by Brian Wood and Illustrated by Ryan Kelly

Megan McKeenan, a very young woman, sits at the heart of these 12 interconnected stories that are pulled together in the final two chapters into a

well-worked, cohesive novel. Each story is set in a very specific North American place, from Portland, Oregon, to Richmond, Virginia, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Austin, Texas. In them, Megan is engaged in the multifaceted journey of finding herself as well as in the physical journey so many stops involve. Through them, Wood explores how she reworks her role from scene to scene and in her developing life again and again: practicing identities, shifting reasoning to protect ego, daring to remember and re-engage the past. Kelly's black-and-white art bursts with details that make each place as well as more immediate spaces, such as Megan's car, vibrant and multidimensional. Combining road saga, bildungsroman, and existentialism, *Local* has something to suit the tastes of readers who already like Capote, or Kerouac, or Albertine Sarrazin, and has the potential for leading others to explore such more traditional, equally nuanced storytellers. (*Booklist*)

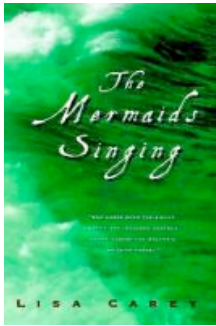


*A Mercy*

By Toni Morrison

In its first pages, Morrison's latest novel seems to be a retread of the author's old themes, settings, and narrative voice; however, it quickly achieves its own brilliant identity. The time is the late 1600s, when what will become the U.S. remains a chain of colonies along the Atlantic coast. Not only does slavery still exist, it is a thriving industry that translates into plenty of business for lots of people. These factors coalesce to provide the atmosphere and plot points for Morrison's riveting, even poetic, new novel. She has shown a partiality for the chorus method of storytelling, wherein a group of individuals who are involved in a single event or incident tell their versions of what happened, the individual voices maintaining their distinctiveness while their personal tales overlap each other with a layering effect that gives Morrison's prose its resonance and deep sheen of enameling. Here the voices belong to the women associated with Virginia planter Jacob Vaark, who has quickly risen from ratty orphan to a man of means; these women include the long-suffering Rebekka, his wife; Lina and Sorrow, slave women with unique perspectives on the events taking place on Vaark's plantation; and Florens, a slave girl whom Vaark accepts as partial payment on a debt and whose separation from her mother is the pivotal event

around which Morrison weaves her short but deeply involving story. A fitting companion to her highly regarded *Beloved*. (Booklist)

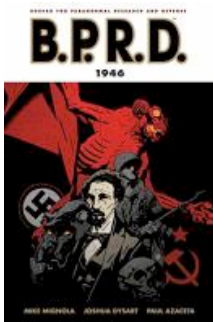


*The Mermaids Singing*

By Lisa Carey

Cliona, Grace, and Grainne, three generations of Irish and Irish American women, are revealed gradually through their interwoven stories and voices. The reader is taken backward and forward in time and place as each chapter is told from one woman's point of view. Cliona and Grace, long-estranged mother and daughter, have a true talent for not communicating with each other. Grace and Grainne, also mother and daughter, are said to be a perfect unit, though little evidence of that is seen, especially given the 12-year period of their lives between Grace's leaving Ireland and her eventual death from cancer. At the end of Grace's life, the two are reduced to communicating through typed notes left on the refrigerator. Death brings Cliona and Grainne together, and a move back to Ireland forces teenage Grainne to see a side of her mother she never knew and find a father she longs for. Three women, strong, independent, and sensual, struggle with each other, life, and their own natures in this flawed but satisfying first novel.

(Booklist)



Mike Mignola's *B.P.R.D. (Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense)*, 1946

Created by Mike Mignola

Turning the clock back again to reveal another B.P.R.D. cast member's early days, Mignola fills out a scenario by Joshua Dysart, calls in an artist, Paul Azaceta, new to Mignola's Hellboy world, and, man, does this baby burn. In the spotlight here

is Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense founder Trevor Bruttonholm, normally seen as a picture on the wall in B.P.R.D.'s main story. In Berlin shortly after the war, he and his assistant are looking for Nazi research into the occult. His Soviet analogue is also investigating, and he must cooperate with her to find anything. She, of course, is not what she seems, which is weird enough already, since she appears to be a little blond girl of the Victorian era who takes her dolly with her everywhere. Accompanied by soldiers of their respective nations who distrust their opposite numbers utterly, the investigators uncover the remains of a Nazi doomsday scheme involving nasty, ugly, stinking vampires. Unfortunately, the remains are revivable, and thereby hangs a tale that ranks with the best horror adventures in any medium. Azaceta's figuration perfectly embodies this tale that oozes the dual darkness of Nazis and vampires. *(Booklist)*



*Miles from Nowhere*

By Nami Mun

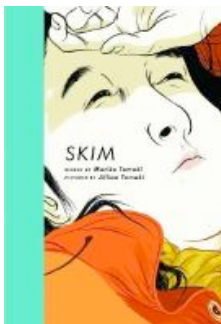
My mom turned crazy the night my father left for good, states Joon, the unflinching 13-year-old narrator in Mun's explosive first novel. The neglected only child of Korean immigrants soon runs away from her severely depressed mother and their 1980s Bronx home. Finding refuge in a shelter, Joon delicately negotiates a tempestuous alliance with a streetwise girl named Knowledge and a boy hustler called Wink. Pliant, watchful, and quietly courageous, Joon is fascinated by the struggling people she meets, from junkies to sex workers, drunks, thieves, and wackos. But for all the betrayals, beatings, and risky sex she endures; the heroin habit she acquires; and the chaos and terror of homelessness, jail, hunger, precarious jobs, and suicidal interludes, Joon remains inviolable, kind, and determined. Mun's gritty and empathic coming-of-age tale confronts the madness that lurks on the periphery of lust and love, the poison of racism, the suffering of the unloved, and the fierce survival instincts, adaptability, and radiance of young people. There is nothing simplistic or sensationalized here as Mun, a writer of gravitas, portrays the dispossessed and the cast-out, reminding us how quickly things can go disastrously wrong, how tough it is to live outside the margins. *(Booklist)*



### *Prince of Persia: The Graphic Novel*

By Jordan Mechner, A.B. Sina, LeUyen Pham, and Alex Puvilland

This book, based on the classic computer game (the latest version of the game is due to be released in November 2008), tells the story of multiple heroes and heroines. Fans of the original games may be better well equipped to understand the time shifts as the action flashes forward and backward between centuries, but any readers looking for adventure should enjoy the chases, fights, and political intrigue. There are several grisly scenes of leadership gone wrong, as multiple victims are decapitated or have their tongues cut out. And the divide between the haves and the have-nots is clearly illustrated by the battle over the precious water supply. The pages are filled with vibrant colors and stirring images; the palette begins with a spectrum of desert browns, which make vibrant hues like peacock blue and blood red stand out even more against the colors of sand and bone. In an insightful afterword, game creator Jordan Mechner writes about how this character has evolved over time in various incarnations. This is an excellent recommendation for computer gamers and the fan base that will emerge for the forthcoming (2009) *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* movie, and a good choice for everyone else. (*School Library Journal*)



### *Skim*

Words by Mariko Tamaki, Drawings by Jillian Tamaki

Kimberly Keiko Cameron-aka "Skim"-is a mixed-race high school student struggling with identity, friendships, and romantic yearning. After her parents' divorce, she turns to tarot cards and Wicca to make sense of life but finds herself disappointed with the lack of answers they provide. She finds herself increasingly

intrigued by Ms. Archer, her free-spirited English teacher. Her interest becomes obsessive and it begins to drive a wedge between her and her best friend, Lisa. Although Skim originally makes light of the half-hearted suicide attempts of popular Katie, whose ex-boyfriend committed suicide, the two of them begin to open up to one another. Skim soon realizes that "perfect" Katie is far funnier, more genuine, and more traumatized than she originally thought-particularly when it comes to light that John shot himself due to his homosexuality. Drawn in an expressive, fluid style and with realistic dialogue, this work accurately depicts the confusion of teenage years, with its rejection of previous identity and past relationships and search for a newer and truer identity; additionally, insider/outsider status is a reoccurring theme. Skim's internal monologue is diarylike, with an interesting use of "scratched-out" words. This is a good but somewhat standard work. (*School Library Journal*)



### *Smart Girls Think Twice*

By Cathie Linz

Linz takes us back to the small town of Rock Creek, Pennsylvania, for her latest romantic romp. Sociologist Emma, sister of Sue Ellen and plus-sized model Leena (*Big Girls Don't Cry*, 2007), has always been the smart sister, considered plainer and more reserved than her pretty, personable siblings. Sue Ellen and Leena are both getting married, and while Emma's in Rock Creek for the weddings, she figures she can do an academic study on the town's revitalization. When Emma approaches one of Rock Creek's newcomers, hunky bartender Jake Slayter, to interview him, she wishes for once that she weren't the ordinary-looking sister. Jake doesn't want to be interviewed for Emma's study: his reasons for coming to Rock Creek are secret. But when he watches the mousy sociologist deck one of the more obnoxious bar customers, Jake begins to view her in a different light. Readers will be captivated as they watch the introverted academic get in touch with her inner warrior and realize her true potential. Funny and poignant by turns, Linz's latest is sure to charm. (*Booklist*)



### *The Somnambulist*

By Jonathan Barnes

First-novelist Barnes throws an Edwardian magician at a noir world of undercover agents, hard-boiled cops, and dystopian cults; gives his hero some colorful, circus-character cohorts and a golem/avatar protector; and manages to produce in the process a remarkably entertaining horror/mystery/historical/comic novel that fans of any of those genres won't want to miss. Edward Moon, conjurer and part-time detective, and his silent somnambulist (that's the golem protector) are called upon to investigate two bizarre murders. Instead of identifying a crazed killer, they unveil a meshed system of government corruption and an underground cult devoted to bringing London to its knees and establishing a pantisocracy based on a utopian ideology created by poet Samuel Coleridge and his friend and fellow poet Robert Southey. An often nonsensical nightmare quality to the fast-paced action accentuates the characters' mystification as they plunge from fright to frightful in an effort to stem the gruesome and inexorable tide of evil. Like Poe and likewise Lemony Snicket Barnes begins his novel with a disclaimer about its lack of literary merit, and in some ways, he's right: underdeveloped characters and subplots, along with implausible and sometimes ridiculous premises do get in the way of all the energy. But not all that much. Barnes is up to something very special here. He's created a new genre, really, a graphic novel written in longhand, and it combines the subtle horror of Patricia Highsmith, the goofy gore of Christopher Moore, and the cartoon action of the TV series *Heroes*. Read for the sheer fun of it. (*Booklist*)



### *That Salty Air*

By Tim Sievert

No, this isn't a Classics Illustrated edition of *Moby Dick*, but it is a terrific graphic novel about an obsessive man battling large creatures from the sea. Dirt poor, Maryanne and Hugh live in a shack by the sea. Their only source of income is the fish Hugh catches each morning, a chore that seems to bring him much enjoyment. The news that Hugh's mother has drowned destroys his love of that salty air, and he turns to the bottle, leaving pregnant Maryanne pretty much alone. Sievert uses a monstrous squid to represent the bad news that storms into the couple's lives, and in the end the couple's battle with the creature symbolizes both humankind's struggle with the elements and Hugh's struggle within himself. Words are few and carefully placed. The crisp, black-and-white illustrations on slick paper do most of the work, taking readers right into the eye of the metaphorical and physical storm and giving them a taste of the intense emotions nature can elicit in those who interact with it. An amazing, strong, well-paced graphic novel about relationships and what we must be do to keep them on course while we are submerged in the complexities of life. This is as much for adults as it is for teens. *(Booklist)*

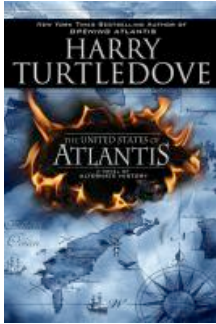


### *Tiger Moon*

By Antonia Michaelis

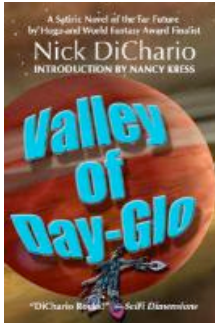
In this fairy tale of India set during the early 1900s, Raka, a young bride who is awaiting certain death at the hands of her evil husband, spins a story for Lalit, a servant in the Rajah's house. In her tale, a con man and a thief, Farhad, is

recruited to rescue the Hindu god Krishna's daughter from marriage to a demon king. He is aided by a sacred white tiger and carries a bloodstone that almost causes his death. As the two stories intertwine, the lines between fantasy and reality are blurred. The plot is fast paced and exciting, and the story gives an excellent overview of the conflicts of India at the time of British occupation, and of Hindu religious beliefs. The factual background adds to the overall feel of a wildly colorful and diverse country. The character development is also admirable, as readers see Farhad grow from a scared 16-year-old thief to a hero willing to die for his cause. What is most amazing about the story is the beautiful language and phrases that make readers feel as though they are sitting in India listening to Raka's story. A distinguished book for older fairy-tale fans. (*School Library Journal*)



*The United States of Atlantis: A Novel of Alternate History*  
By Harry Turtledove

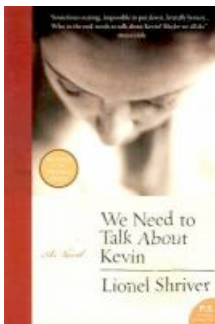
Victor Ratcliff would rather stay home on his farm, raise crops, and console his wife for the loss of their children. But his military leadership in expelling the French and Spanish from Atlantis makes him an obvious candidate to lead a rebellion against the British crown when it restricts Atlantean trade with settlements in Terranova (i.e., North America). The course of the ensuing war is very much like that of the American Revolution in terms of battles won and lost, shortages of everything, and complex nay, convoluted politics. Generals Howe and Cornwallis oppose Ratcliff, and the Marquis de la Fayette and the Baron von Steuben help him. But the marquis we recall didn't supply Washington with a colored bedwarmer, who in due course bore him a son, as Ratcliff's marquis does. The birth brings Ratcliff a whole new set of problems, private and public, not the least of which arise from the fact that his new fatherhood bolsters his inclination to push harder than ever for the abolition of slavery in Atlantis, though many fellow Atlanteans are determined to defend it unto death. Stay tuned for the third volume of Turtledove's admirable new alternate history to find out whether conflict is irrepressible. (*Booklist*)



## *Valley of Day-Glo*

By Nick DiChario

DiChario's postapocalyptic absurdist satire begins with mother Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf killing father The Outlaw Josey Wales over an argument about major-league baseball, the subject of the Gushedon'dada Tribal Bible. Asexual son Broadway Danny Rose narrates, first imparting the historical tidbit that cataclysm has destroyed the black and white and yellow people, and the Iroquois have inherited the land. He and his mother head out for the legendary Valley of Day-Glo, where death becomes life, hoping that there they can revive father. But you know what they say about best-laid plans. The journey is truncated by an encounter with Seneca League of Nations warriors, and through a bizarre chain of events, Broadway Danny Rose becomes a war hero involved in politics and finds true love, also the Valley of Day-Glo. DiChario's well-imagined postapocalyptic world containing only the strangest remnants of our society is a bizarre and funny facade that belies the fascinating depths of thought the novel makes readers plumb while enjoying a charming coming-of-age story. *(Booklist)*



## *We Need to Talk About Kevin*

By Lionel Shriver

In a series of brutally introspective missives to her husband, Franklin, from whom she is separated, Eva tries to come to grips with the fact that their 17-year-old son, Kevin, has killed seven students and two adults with his crossbow. Guiltily she recalls how, as a successful writer, she was terrified of having a child. Was it for revenge, then, that from the moment of his birth Kevin was the archetypal difficult child, screaming for hours, refusing to nurse, driving away countless

nannies, and intuitively learning to "divide and conquer" his parents? When their daughter, loving and patient Celia, is born, Eva feels vindicated; but as the gap between her view of Kevin as a "Machiavellian miscreant" and Franklin's efforts to explain away their son's aberrant behavior grows wider, they find themselves facing divorce. In crisply crafted sentences that cut to the bone of her feelings about motherhood, career, family, and what it is about American culture that produces child killers, Shriver yanks the reader back and forth between blame and empathy, retribution and forgiveness. Never letting up on the tension, Shriver ensures that, like Eva, the reader grapples with unhealed wounds.

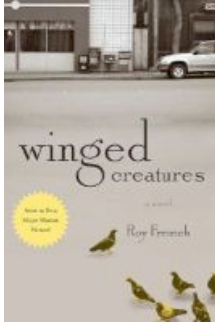
*(Booklist)*



### *What They Always Tell Us*

By Martin Wilson

The story is told in alternating chapters by two brothers. James is a popular, smart senior who awaits his acceptance letter from Duke. But there are several dark folds in his smooth life. He is in the process of breaking up with Alice, whose only attraction for him was their sexual relationship. Then there's his brother. What was he thinking when he swallowed Pine-Sol at a party? Alex is a junior and still trying to find his way back from an impetuous, potentially deadly act. His friends are gone, but one of James' buddies, Nathen, gets Alex involved in running, and slowly Alex sees there might be a life left for him. Soon it becomes clear that the life he wants is with Nathen, who returns his feelings. The writing, which at first seems straightforward, almost bland, becomes increasingly layered as it dispenses its information, gradually and ever more movingly. Adding both texture to the story and an element of mystery is the inclusion of a young neighbor boy, whose problems draw both James and Alex to his side and to each other. This is a strong debut, and Wilson shows admirable control of a complicated story that in less-accomplished hands could have spun out of control. The structure literally allows readers to see both sides. *(Booklist)*



### *Winged Creatures*

By Roy Freirich

A lone gunman enters a fast-food diner, kills two patrons, and then turns the gun on himself. From that depressingly familiar scenario, first-novelist and veteran screenwriter Freirich spins a highly emotional story of how the survivors deal with the tragedy. Two teens make a pact to keep silent about the way the incident played out, with one turning to God while the other falls mute. A thrifty driver's-ed instructor, drawn to the diner by a coupon, goes on a gambling binge; the restaurant cashier finds it increasingly difficult to care for her infant son; and the ER doctor who failed to save the gunshot victims plays a dangerous game with his wife's meds. Meanwhile, a trauma counselor patiently and persistently tries to help, while his clients just as adamantly resist. As the narrative flashes between the survivors' desperate attempts to cope and the fateful events of that day, Freirich employs a hyper, pop-culture-obsessed narrative voice to home in on the fleeting nature of existence. Soon to be made into a film, which will raise its visibility, this well-crafted debut packs an emotional wallop. (*Booklist*)



### *Wintergirls*

By Laurie Halse Anderson

The intensity of emotion and vivid language here are more reminiscent of Anderson's *Speak* (Farrar, 1999) than any of her other works. Lia and Cassie had been best friends since elementary school, and each developed her own style of eating disorder that leads to disaster. Now 18, they are no longer friends. Despite their estrangement, Cassie calls Lia 33 times on the night of her death, and Lia never answers. As events play out, Lia's guilt, her need to be thin, and her fight for acceptance unravel in an almost poetic stream of consciousness in this

startlingly crisp and pitch-perfect first-person narrative. The text is rich with words still legible but crossed out, the judicious use of italics, and tiny font-size refrains reflecting her distorted internal logic. All of the usual answers of specialized treatment centers, therapy, and monitoring of weight and food fail to prevail while Lia's cleverness holds sway. What happens to her in the end is much less the point than traveling with her on her agonizing journey of inexplicable pain and her attempt to make some sense of her life. (*School Library Journal*)