

New Fiction November 2009



100 Girls

By Adam Gallardo and Todd Demong

Adopted, supersmart, and bumped up two grades — it's no wonder Sylvia's always felt different. But recently she's been going through some major physical changes, and they're not of the typical teenager kind.

Sylvia has no idea why she can move like a gymnast and punch like a heavyweight, and the strange nightmares she's been having are completely freaking her out. But there are people who have the answers she's looking for, and Sylvia's determined to find them. Trouble is, they've already found her....*(From the Publisher, Barnesandnoble.com)*

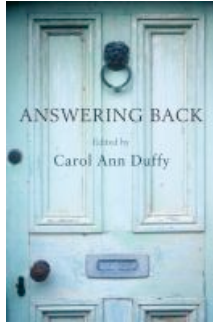


After the Moment

By Garret Freymann-Weyr

As in the Printz Honor Book *My Heartbeat* (2002) and other novels, Freymann-Weyr offers another rare, sophisticated exploration of love at the end of adolescence. After Leigh moves from New York City to Maryland to live with his father, stepmother, and adoring stepsister, he meets and falls deeply for Maia, a huge head case, who battles anorexia, along with a list of other challenges. Tracking back from a portentous first scene, set four years later when Leigh and Maia meet by chance at a Manhattan party, the story focuses on the teens' emotionally wrenching senior year, which begins in love before a possible date rape sets off escalating tragedy. Leigh's mother worries that he works too hard at being good, and Freymann-Weyr writes with extraordinary perception and depth about his yearning to act with integrity and care for everyone around him. Leigh's struggle to come to terms with the recent U.S. invasion of Iraq sometimes feel

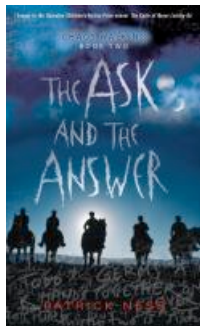
purposeful, but his response touches on broader themes of violence and how it permeates public and private worlds. Within this story's raw, honest, psychologically attuned scenes, older teens will find their own aching questions about how best to love, shape a future, and do the right thing. (*Booklist*)



Answering Back

Edited by Carol Ann Duffy

Carol Ann Duffy has asked some of the brightest writers in the poetry world to select a poem that is meaningful—or has meant something—to them, and write a response to it. With up-and-coming poets alongside more established names, and original poems alongside the new works they've inspired, *Answering Back* promises to be a truly unique and insightful anthology. (*From the Publisher, Barnesandnoble.com*)



The Ask and the Answer (Chaos Walking, Book Two)

By Patrick Ness

Ness brings the frantic chase of *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008) to a screeching halt at the beginning of this second book in the *Chaos Walking* trilogy. Todd and Viola have finally arrived in the town of Haven, only to find that their pursuers, an army led by the zealot Mayor Prentiss, have beat them there and set up a harsh new regime. Alternating chapters from both Todd's and Viola's points of view follow the two as they are separated and implicated into the schemes of both the oppressors and the resistance, both sides defined by the atrocities they perpetrate to achieve their goals. What results is an amalgamation of society's most brutal facets fascism, terrorism, torture, ethnic cleansing with all kinds of relevance to our world, even if the story is set on a made-up planet warring for identity as it awaits an influx of new settlers. While this book suffers from some of the same frustrating plot holes found in the first, Ness more than makes up for it with a relentless flurry of heavy-hitting issues, hinging on appeasement,

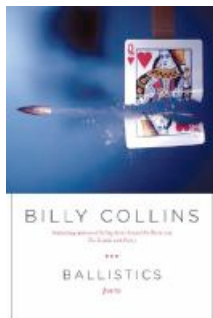
complicity, and maintaining one's morality in the face of impossible choices. And the concept of Noise, so brilliantly conceived and executed in the first novel, is given even more depth as it becomes both a tool and a weapon. A notch less exhilarating than the first, this book is far weightier and no less stunning to read. If *Knife* provided the cut, this follow-up provides the fester. (*Booklist*)



Asta in the Wings

By Jan Elizabeth Watson

In this extraordinary debut novel, seven-year-old Asta and her malnourished nine-year-old brother, Orion, who live in a small town in Maine, have long been isolated from the outside world. Told by their mother that a plague has devastated the world, they have not set foot outside the house in years, although the two have formed a deep bond based on their richly imaginative play. Then their mother fails to come home from work, and the siblings set out to look for her. Watson vividly renders their first contact with others, including a surly store clerk, a pack of mean-spirited schoolchildren, and a kindly bus driver, from Asta's awestruck perspective as she slowly comes to grips with the fact that everything her mother told her was a lie. She is unwilling to acknowledge, at first, that there was anything amiss in her family life, although she is quick to perceive that people do not treat her with nearly the same careful attentiveness as her brother does. Sensitive and intelligent, Asta struggles to reconcile her familial loyalty with her new reality. A cleverly constructed, beautifully written first novel from a gifted new writer. (*Booklist*)

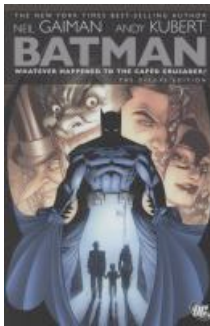


Ballistics

By Billy Collins

Collins is a jester and a double agent. A poet readers flock to, he gets the laughs and the applause, he paces and bows, concealing his weapons and serious mien. His self-

portraiture is mordant, his drollery preemptive, his insouciance camouflage, his intelligence of the stealth kind, and his intricately constructed poems detonate as they blossom in the reader's mind. Collins is fanciful and mindful, cocky and prayerful, blissful over ordinary things and intimate with dread and loneliness. Here he is morose in Paris, staring down a fish staring back on a plate in Pittsburgh, rain-harried in Dublin, awake and repentant at the fringe of night in a bright bathroom, loitering with intent in the kitchen. Collins' seductive poems are decoys drawing us into deep waters where memories waft like tangled weeds and death lurks in the cold spots. Wryly philosophical, caustically whimsical, disarmingly beautiful, Collins' covertly powerful lyrics deftly snare all that is fine and ludicrous about us, from the old habit of poetry itself to the spell of love and the long, rolling song of the self. *(Booklist)*



Batman: Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader (The Deluxe Edition)

By Neil Gaiman and Andy Kubert

After DC ostensibly killed off Batman (actually, Bruce Wayne bought it; the role has since been assumed by erstwhile Robin, Dick Grayson), superstar scripter Gaiman was commissioned to give the character an appropriately grand send-off. He tackled the assignment in unorthodox fashion by having an offstage Batman witness his own funeral. At the service, comrades and foes offer eulogies depicting contradictory versions of Batman, which cleverly allude to the inconsistencies of characterization that cropped up during seven decades of publication. The conflicting testimonials support the conception of Batman as a modern folktale and reinforce the idealized image of him as a hero who never surrenders. At the crux of Gaiman's treatment is a bedtime story a young Bruce's mother reads him a device subtly evoking Gaiman's comics chef d'oeuvre, Sandman. In many fans' eyes, Gaiman's rare return to the superhero genre is a more monumental event than Batman's apparent demise. Meanwhile, Kubert, a fan favorite for his lushly limned depictions of action-packed stories, proves as adept with the pensive tone of this scenario. *(Booklist)*

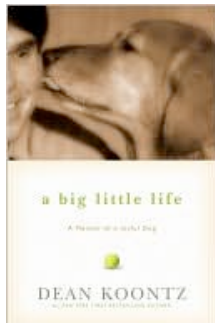


Best Friends Forever

By Jennifer Weiner

Best-selling Weiner's latest fun-to-read comedy of friendship and love begins with a high-school reunion. Not that artist Addie Downs, 33, has even considered attending, even though she still lives in the house she grew up in. Her long-lost best friend, Valerie Adler, now a TV meteorologist, puts in an appearance with revengeful intent, then ends up pounding on Addie's door, terrified that she has done something much worse than she intended when she left Dan Swansea naked and shivering by the country-club dumpster. The unceremoniously reunited friends become the unlikeliest of fugitives and embark on a crazy adventure that radically alters Addie's carefully ordered life.

Flashbacks, resplendent in their charm and poignancy, reveal that while Val was neglected and Addie was loved, it was Addie who became a pariah at school, suffered a family tragedy, and found catastrophic comfort in binge-eating. Back in the present, Weiner orchestrates a hilarious little caper that throws together reclusive Addie and Jordan Novick, the unhappily divorced and quirkily romantic police chief. Weiner handles sorrow with a deft touch, blossoms in beautifully descriptive passages, and keeps readers glued to the page with curiosity and delight. Sharp and caring, Weiner is a bright light on the popular-reading front. (*Booklist*)



A Big Little Life

By Dan Koontz

In 1998, after years of consideration, Dean and Gerda Koontz finally got a dog. Trixie was a golden retriever trained by the Canine Companions for Independence, which Koontz has plugged in the acknowledgments or afterwords in some of his books. Retired early from companionship by joint surgery, she was three years old, highly intelligent, good-humored, and a seemingly instinctive fit with her fastidious new owners she absolutely would not defecate on their property. She so quickly lightened everyday life

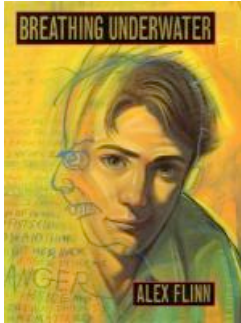
that, four months after she arrived, Koontz told her he knew she was actually an angel. That provoked the first and last time she wanted distance from me, which he doesn't interpret as confirming his suspicion, but which he does place in chapter 1 as a spooky moment around which the entire story revolves. That story is, to be sure, another memoir of a beloved pooch, but far from just another. Besides quite regularly manifesting her extraordinariness, Trixie made Koontz ponder the nature of intelligence, interspecies communication, sympathy, intuition, love and the loyalty it engenders, and other species' degrees of consciousness, including the knowledge of personal death. Koontz leavens his musings on such weighty themes with plenty of both self-deprecating humor and Trixie's comic élan to make this one dog book that everyone other than the most flint-hearted dog-haters will deeply enjoy. *(Booklist)*



Break

By Hannah Moskowitz

Seventeen-year-old Jonah is on a quest to break every bone in his body, and his best friend Naomi is there to film each attempt, as he crashes his skateboard or dives into an empty pool. His 16-year-old brother, Jesse, has deadly food allergies and their parents aren't vigilant about keeping the house safe, so that job has fallen to Jonah, who is weighed down by the responsibility. He breaks his bones so that as he heals he becomes stronger ("It's sort of a natural bionics thing. Break a leg, grow a better leg. Break a body, grow a better body"), a belief treated with almost religious reverence from some, like Naomi (who calls it a "revolution"), but that eventually results in his being institutionalized. Moskowitz, who wrote the story while a high school junior, paces the story well and creates in Jonah a believable and complex protagonist. Love interest Charlotte is one-dimensional, and Naomi strains credulity as she eggs Jonah on. But the brothers' relationship is poignant, and Moskowitz's depiction of Jonah and Jesse's respective traumas-and a family drowning in dysfunction-are viscerally real. *(Publishers Weekly)*



Breathing Underwater

By Alex Flinn

A diary format, an enticing locale, and the hot issue of abusive teen relationships combine in a quick and absorbing read. Key Biscayne High School sophomore Nick is rich, handsome, and a good athlete and scholar. He has finally found the girl of his dreams in Caitlin. Unfortunately, his father's physical and verbal abuse has shaped Nick's ideas of how to behave in a relationship: he bullies, tortures, and finally hits Caitlin. A restraining order and an anger management course result in the diary entries we read, with flashbacks that show how Nick got to this point. Noteworthy in this first novel is Nick's believable relationship with best friend Tom, full of awkward silences and shameful secrets. The situations and dialogue ring frighteningly true, perhaps due to the author's background as a lawyer who has tried domestic violence cases. No graphic sex, but realistic violence makes this more appropriate for high-school readers. (*Booklist*)

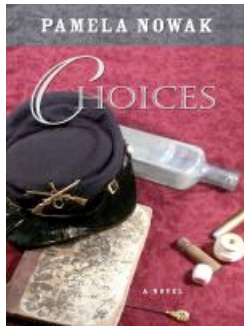


Burn

By Suzanne Phillips

Cameron, a high school freshman, becomes an easy target for the varsity bullies after a chance comment by a coach who notices his short stature and long hair from behind and directs him to the girls' gym. As the taunts of "gay" or "fag" drive most of his friends away, Cameron's anger escalates. When he is assaulted in the locker room and photos of his nude body are posted on the Internet, he begins to break down and his desire to retaliate is explosive. Only his mother's boyfriend, a police officer, is able to understand the post-traumatic stress disorder that Cam is experiencing and offer practical though unwanted support. This is an intense story with brutal descriptions of the abuse Cameron suffers. Phillips provides just enough nuanced details of sexual assault and violence yet masterfully avoids sensationalism. While *Burn* lacks the eloquence of Nancy Garden's *Endgame* (Harcourt, 2006) and the broad perspective of Walter Dean Myers's

Shooter (HarperCollins, 2004), it instead approaches the inner turmoil of the victim's "real time" during the taunting, humiliation, revenge, and remorse. As Cam's emotional state deteriorates, fantasy and reality blur, effectively conveying his pain and confusion. Reluctant readers will appreciate the fast pace of the book as the disturbing plot unfolds with short day-to-day vignettes. There is understanding to be gained for everyone who reads this timely title. (*School Library Journal*)



Choices

By Pamela Nowak

After five years of boarding school, all Miriam wants to do is to take off with her friend, Sarah, and see the world. But her mother and father, the commander of Fort Randall, have called her back home, and, like any other dutiful daughter in 1876, Miriam obeys. She returns to the Dakota Territory only to find that her high-strung, class-conscious mother has become even more capricious, snobby, and mean, aiming much of her hostility toward Miriam's superactive, mischievous, six-year-old sister, Franny. Miriam doesn't adapt well to military life, especially the rules that keep a commander's daughter from getting involved with a private. Then there's the problem of Lt. Robert Wood, the man handpicked for Miriam by her increasingly laudanum-addled mother. Nowak skillfully takes the all-too familiar topics of dysfunctional family relationships, class discrimination, and drug addiction and gives them a whole new dimension by setting them in the Wild West. (*Booklist*)



Cold Place in Hell

By William Blinn

In Salt Springs, on the Fourth of July, a young man took a bet—and ended up broken, battered and fighting for his life...But Billy Piper didn't die. He just came back to haunt Salt Springs—with all the book learning he did during his convalescence, with all the love

he had for a whore, with all the friendship he shared with an old cowboy who couldn't help see the difference between right and wrong...

In this extraordinary classic Western by award-winning Hollywood screenwriter William Blinn (*Gunsmoke, Bonanza*), the story of Billy Piper becomes a powerful tale of two men's undying friendship, of a murder and a fight for justice...With the town of Salt Springs buckling and booming under the flow of oil and the coming of a railroad, where one man's power and dark secret would tear Billy Piper apart—until he picked up a gun and changed everything forever...and Salt Springs would explode in violence and blood. (From the Publisher, Barnesandnoble.com)



The Complete Peanuts: The Definitive Collection of Charles M. Schulz's Comic Strip Masterpiece, 1969 to 1970

By Charles M. Schulz, Introduction by Mo Willems

These 1969-70 installments of the beloved strip are highly Snoopy-centric. Charlie Brown's pooch becomes the first beagle on the moon, goes on a quest to find his mother, gets involved in a riot at the Daisy Hill Puppy Farm, stays with Lucy's family while his owner is on vacation, and is reported to the Head Beagle for refusing to chase rabbits. More significantly, feathered foil Woodstock flies into Snoopy's life. The rest of the cast faces anguish as Linus' favorite teacher is fired and Charlie Brown's beloved Little Red-Haired Girl moves away. (Booklist)

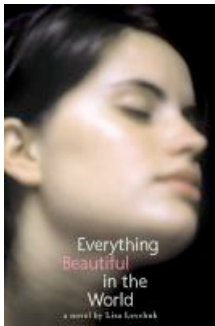


Every Man Dies Alone

By Hans Fallada

In the early 1930s, Fallada was one of Germany's most popular novelists; his most famous work, (*Little Man, What Now?*, 1933) was also well-known in the U.S.; his works have since fallen into obscurity. This selection, one of three Fallada works to be

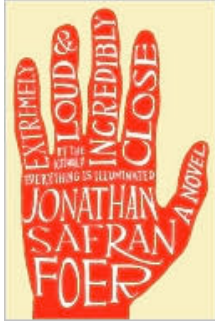
published in English this spring, tells the story of Otto and Anna Quangel, a working-class couple who start planting subversive postcards around Berlin after their only son is killed in the war. Sought by the authorities and beset by nosy and opportunistic neighbors, Otto and Anna find the happiest moments of their marriage. But such moments are fleeting: the couple's luck runs out, and they are sent to prison to await their execution. Based on the Gestapo files of a real couple, Fallada's story is powerful and bleak, an anguished lament that resistance is necessary yet futile. Penned in just 24 days, this was Fallada's final work before dying of a morphine overdose; it may also be his most honest memoir of his life under the Nazis. (*Booklist*)



Everything Beautiful in the World

By Lisa Levchuk

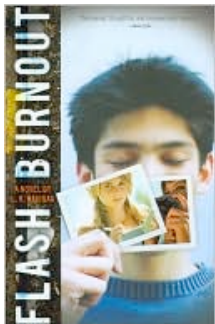
Seventeen-year-old Edna is in the midst of having a fight with her mother when a telephone call forces her mother to say, All fights postponed. She has been told she has cancer. So begins an interesting experiment in writing that gives this book a quite different sound from so many YA novels with their ubiquitous first-person voice. In a flat tone that's much more reportage than confessional, Edna relates how an affair begins with her art teacher, Mr. Howland, while her mother is in the hospital. Making it clear she will not visit her mother, and ignoring a father who ignores her, Edna is given a free pass to do what she wants. And what she wants is to live in the cocoon that surrounds her and Mr. Howland, eating lunches in seclusion, going to their secret spot for sex. Although this story has been done before, it is the way Levchuk writes it that is both startling and affecting. Reminiscent of Brock Cole's remote style in *The Facts Speak for Themselves* (1997), this technique allows readers to get farther inside Edna's head than she is herself. We see, more clearly than she does, how Mr. Howland can annoy her and how his neediness scares her. Her questions about a long-dead brother reveal more about her than she would be comfortable with anyone knowing. There are some flaws. Although the book is set in the 1980s, Edna's mother's long hospital stay seems necessary to accommodate the plot rather than her illness, and the end seems rushed. But, overall, Levchuk does a remarkable job of writing a novel that offers the facts on the pages; all the emotion is underneath. (*Booklist*)



Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

By Jonathan Safran Foer

This follow-up to Foer's extremely good and incredibly successful *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002) stars one Oskar Schell, a nine-year-old amateur inventor and Shakespearean actor. But Oskar's boots, as he likes to say, are very heavy--his father, whom he worshiped, perished in the World Trade Center on 9/11. In his dad's closet a year later, Oskar finds a key in a vase mysteriously labeled "Black." So he goes searching after the lock it opens, visiting (alphabetically) everyone listed in the phone book with the surname Black. Oskar, who's a cross between *The Tin Drum's* Oskar Matzerath and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time's* Christopher Boone, doesn't always sound like he's nine, but his first-person narration of his journey is arrestingly beautiful, and readers won't soon forget him. A subplot about Oskar's mute grandfather, who survived the bombing of Dresden, isn't as compelling as Oskar's quest for the lock, but when the stories finally come together, the result is an emotionally devastating climax. No spoilers here, but we will say that the book--which includes a number of photographs and some eccentric typography--ends with what is undoubtedly the most beautiful and heartbreaking flip book in all of literature. (*Booklist*)



Flash Burnout

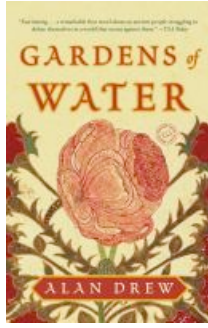
By L.K. Madigan

Fifteen-year-old Blake has a girlfriend and a friend who's a girl. One of them loves him; the other one needs him.

When he snapped a picture of a street person for his photography homework, Blake never dreamed that the woman in the photo was his friend Marissa's long-lost meth addicted mom. Blake's participation in the ensuing drama opens up a world of trouble, both for him and for Marissa. He spends the next few months trying to reconcile the

conflicting roles of Boyfriend and Friend. His experiences range from the comic (surviving his dad's birth control talk) to the tragic (a harrowing after-hours visit to the morgue).

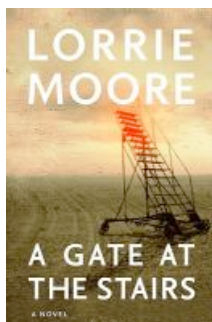
In a tangle of life and death, love and loyalty, Blake will emerge with a more sharply defined snapshot of himself. *(From the Publisher, Barnesandnoble.com)*



Gardens of Water

By Alan Drew

Drew's first novel takes readers to Turkey, a geographical location not common as a setting in American fiction, and his absorbing narrative is obviously derived from his own intense experiences in that place. A fresh reworking of the Romeo-and-Juliet theme, this version has on one side of the star-crossed equation a Kurdish family driven out of their native Kurdistan region of Turkey by a civil war, now resident in a town just outside Istanbul; on the other side of the equation is an American family living in the same apartment building, and the father is the director of a missionary school in Istanbul. The Kurdish father is anti-American because of his awareness that the U.S. helped the Turkish government destroy Kurdish villages. But he has a teenage daughter, and in the American family is a teenage son. The cataclysm that precipitates a domestic crisis involving both families is a huge earthquake that rocks the region, forcing people from their homes and into temporary camps. A richly detailed, finely plotted demonstration of culture clash. *(Booklist)*

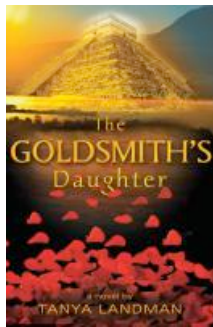


Gate at the Stairs

By Lorrie Moore

Readers of Moore's other works will feel right at home with this one, which recounts a year in the life of college student Tassie Keltgin. Although not completely part of her

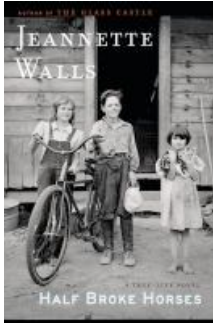
small Wisconsin farming community (her mother is Jewish, her father grows exotic potatoes), she feels adrift in the college town of Troy. She is hired as a child-care provider by Sarah and Edward Brink-Thornwood, sophisticated transplants from the East Coast who are in the process of adopting a child. The child they end up with is Mary, a biracial two-year-old. Sarah, owner of a high-end restaurant, and Edward, a researcher at the university, are curiously uninvolved parents, and Tassie and Mary are left to their own devices more often than not. Tassie herself is fresh from childhood, as she puts it, her head still stuffed with fairy tales. Through the events of the year, which include sexual initiation, brushes with racism, heartbreaking revelations, and family tragedy, she discovers that the adult world has grim and gruesome fairy tales of its own. Moore serves up disorder and disaster but also humor and a feast of recurring themes the way people use language; the changing of the seasons; food, from mashed bananas for babies to fennel-cured salmon noisettes. The unique vision and exquisite writing cast a spell. *(Booklist)*



Goldsmith's Daughter

By Tanya Landman

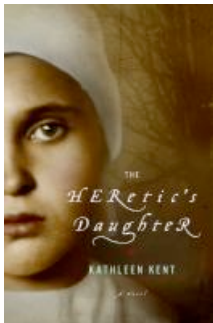
For any author taking on the fall of the Aztec Empire, the danger is not being up to the event's inherent drama and tragedy. But Landman vanquishes such doubts with this pulse-pounding yet sensitive saga of a girl's struggle for true freedom. Itacate, ill-favored by the gods since birth, is 15 when her goldsmith father becomes aware of her artistic gifts. She is overjoyed to be welcomed into his workshop anything to escape the drudgery of the kitchen and loom but her happiness is snuffed by the jealousy of her twin brother, who retaliates by getting himself chosen as the holy sacrifice in next year's Tezcatlipoca festivities. Itacate privately rages against Tenochtitlán's bloodthirsty gods, but soon there are more immediate nemeses with their own unquenched thirsts: Spaniards. Using sturdy, almost old-fashioned prose, Landman constructs an immersive world that acknowledges both the Aztecs' brutality and sophistication. The romance that dominates the book's latter half does carry a few false notes, but it perfectly distills a culture clash that could only lead to doom. Though harrowing in spots, this has enough restraint to capture female, male, and adult readers alike. *(Booklist)*



Half Broke Horses

By Jeannette Walls

In her best-selling memoir, *The Glass Castle* (2005), Walls chronicled her painfully enlightening childhood. She now loops back to tell the even more gripping tale of her maternal grandmother, the formidable horse-training, poker-playing rancher and teacher Lily Casey Smith. Because she patched the story together from reminiscences, used her imagination to fill in the gaps, and decided to have Lily narrate so we could all experience her sharp-shooter's directness, Walls wisely calls this a novel. Fact, fiction, either way, every tall-tale episode in Lily's rough-and-tumble life is hugely entertaining and provocative, while Walls' prose is as crystal clear and reviving as the water Lily cherishes in the high desert. Flash floods, tornadoes, blizzards, drought, con men, bigots, scum, and fools, unflappable Lily courageously faces them all. And why not? She was the smartest and toughest in her otherwise inept West Texas family. As she travels across the plains--winning rodeos, selling moonshine, marrying her soul mate, raising two kids, running a ranch, and teaching in remote one-room schoolhouses--Lily, proud, uncompromising, pistol-packing, and whip-smart, finds a lesson in every setback and showdown. Walls does her grandmother proud in this historically revealing and triumphant novel of a fearless, progressive woman who will not be corralled. (*Booklist*)



Heretic's Daughter

By Kathleen Kent

Kent, a tenth-generation descendant of Martha Carrier (who was hanged as a witch in Salem in 1692), personalizes the witchcraft trials in this fictional account by Martha's daughter. Sarah Carrier was just nine years old when she and her three older brothers also were arrested for witchcraft, spending months imprisoned under horrific conditions while following their mother's dictum of admitting the charges against them to escape death. But Martha gave her life maintaining her innocence in the face of lying

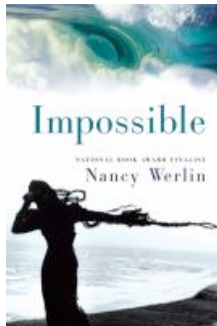
accusations that were fueled by her sharp tongue, her family's unknowingly bringing smallpox to Andover from their home in Billerica, family disputes (including tensions between a mother and her preadolescent daughter), and grudges between neighbors all at a time when any negative event was thought to be the work of the devil in human form. Kent brings history to life in this vivid, sometimes wrenching account of a child and her family sustained by love through the hysteria of the time. An illuminating literary debut. *(Booklist)*



I Know It's Over

By C.K. Kelly Martin

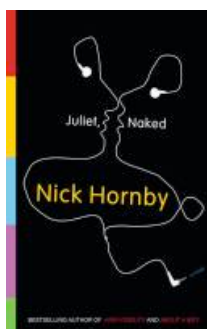
With heartbreaking honesty, Martin's debut novel gets into the mind of 16-year-old Nick Severson. Still dealing with the effects of his parents' divorce, he plans to have a vacation with no commitments. However, the summer takes an interesting turn when Sasha Jasinski enters the picture. Nick is intrigued by the connection they seem to share but also put off by Sasha's initial disappointment with his behavior. To the shock of his friends, Nick stops seeing Dani to pursue Sasha. They grow closer both emotionally and physically. When things start to get too complicated for her, she breaks off the relationship only to discover a few weeks later that she is pregnant. What raises this novel above the many other teen titles dealing with sex and pregnancy is the authentic voice and emotion of the protagonist. Readers struggle with Nick as he deals with the loss of his first love and the decisions related to Sasha's pregnancy. His story challenges stereotypical notions of reckless teen sex and careless abortions; teen boys will especially applaud this portrayal of a devastated and conflicted young man who makes the right decisions, but still finds that his mistakes have repercussions. Sex, drugs, alcohol, and abortion are each portrayed realistically, and the novel gives invaluable insight into the adolescent mind and the world in which teens live. *(School Library Journal)*



Impossible

By Nancy Werlin

Date rape, a pregnant teen, and a shotgun wedding (of sorts) must be a YA problem novel circa 1985, right? Not really. From a hidden letter, 17-year-old Lucy Scarborough learns all sorts of melodramatic, ridiculous, but true things about the circumstances surrounding her rape on prom night, her subsequent pregnancy, and why therapy and her signature pragmatism won't be much help against an ancient fairy's curse. By the Edgar Award-winning novelist whose thrillers include *The Rules of Survival* (2006), this tale, inspired by the song Scarborough Fair, showcases the author's finesse at melding genres. Although it's perhaps overly rosy that Lucy's devoted foster parents take the curse in stride, Werlin earns high marks for the tale's graceful interplay between wild magic and contemporary reality from the evil fairy lord disguised as a charismatic social worker to the main players' skepticism as they attempt to solve the curse's three archaic puzzles (We've formed the Fellowship of the Ring when really we should've all just gone on medication). Meantime, Lucy's marriage to childhood pal Zach, a development unusual in YA fiction but convincing in context, underlies the catapulting suspense with a notion that will be deeply gratifying to many teens: no destiny is unalterable, especially not when faced with tender love magic, weird and hilarious and sweeter than Lucy ever dreamed, worked by truly mated souls. (*Booklist*)

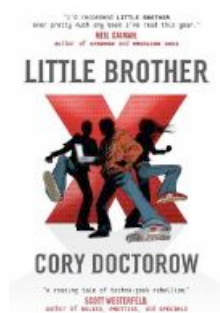


Juliet, Naked

By Nick Hornby

Hornby's characters may be marinated in melancholy, but there's always a ray or two of hope. He brings together a compelling, original cast in this sweet and sorrowful tale of rock 'n' roll and love on the rocks. Tucker Crowe is a has-been American musician, destined to fade into obscurity save for a handful of devoted listeners. Scholar Duncan Thomson is one of the loyal (a Croweologist, as it were). Duncan's dedication to his

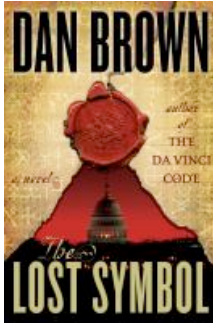
musical hero far exceeds his interest in his significant other, Annie, who wonders whether the 15 years she's spent with Duncan in a bleak English seaside town have been the biggest mistake of her life. The release of an acoustic version of Crowe's best-known album, *Juliet*, sparks an e-mail correspondence between Tucker and Annie, and the two strangers revel in a candor each is able to exercise for the first time in their lives. Annie starts to see her relationship with Duncan for the dead-end that it is; Tucker begins to acknowledge his failures both as a musician and father (he has children from several different women, mostly models, wouldn't you know?). Englishman Hornby, whose many best-selling and award-winning books include *A Long Way Down* (2005), is a master at rendering romantic relationships, particularly those that seem broken beyond repair. Fans of *High Fidelity* (1995), perhaps Hornby's most popular book, will enjoy this related take on the lives of the musically obsessed. A wise, witty, and bittersweet novel. *(Booklist)*



Little Brother

By Cory Doctorow

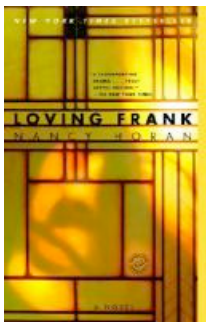
Seventeen-year-old techno-geek w1n5t0n (aka Marcus) bypasses the school's gait-recognition system by placing pebbles in his shoes, chats secretly with friends on his IMParanoid messaging program, and routinely evades school security with his laptop, cell, WifFnder, and ingenuity. While skipping school, Markus is caught near the site of a terrorist attack on San Francisco and held by the Department of Homeland Security for six days of intensive interrogation. After his release, he vows to use his skills to fight back against an increasingly frightening system of surveillance. Set in the near future, Doctorow's novel blurs the lines between current and potential technologies, and readers will delight in the details of how Markus attempts to stage a techno-revolution. Obvious parallels to Orwellian warnings and post-9/11 policies, such as the Patriot Act, will provide opportunity for classroom discussion and raise questions about our enthusiasm for technology, who monitors our school library collections, and how we contribute to our own lack of privacy. An extensive Web and print bibliography will build knowledge and make adults nervous. Buy multiple copies; this book will be h4wt (that's hot, for the nonhackers). *(Booklist)*



Lost Symbol

By Dan Brown

A mysterious clue leading to a series of puzzles; a ruthless villain who will stop at nothing; ancient secrets; mysterious organizations that link past to present Brown has taken the elements that made *The Da Vinci Code* a success and reworked them in this long-anticipated sequel. Robert Langdon, the symbologist hero of *Da Vinci Code* and *Angels and Demons*, is lured to Washington, D.C., where he believes he is to give a speech. Instead, he finds that an old friend has been abducted. Only Langdon can unlock the hidden mysteries that can save his friend's life. Brown combines Freemasons, the Institute of Noetic Sciences, Albrecht Durer, and various other ingredients to create a story that could be a mishmash but never quite loses cohesiveness. Readers who found the previous Langdon novels to be excessively wordy and much too slowly paced will level the same criticisms here, and Brown really needs to cool it with the amateurish overuse of exclamation marks, italics, and sentence-ending punctuation like ?! On the other hand, you can't deny that he knows how to put together an intriguing, if emotionally uninvolved, story: he keeps us guessing with his riddles and puzzles, and we move through the story in a cantering, orderly fashion. Other writers could have taken this story and really run with it Matthew Reilly, say, or James Rollins but fans of the first two Langdon novels will flock to this one and they won't be disappointed. One final note: Brown may have done himself a slight disservice by setting the novel in Washington: he's inviting comparison to the lighter, and livelier, *National Treasure* movies. (*Booklist*)

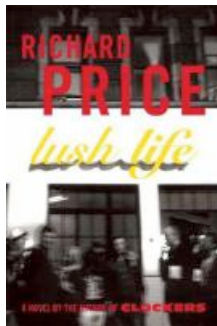


Loving Frank

By Nancy Horan

In the early 1900s, married architect Frank Lloyd Wright eloped to Europe with the wife of one of his clients. The scandal rocked the suburb of Oak Park, Illinois. Years later,

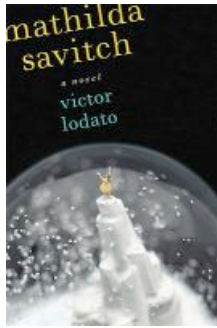
Mamah Cheney, the other half of the scandalous couple, was brutally murdered at Wright's Talliesen retreat. Horan blends fact and fiction to try to make the century-old scandal relevant to modern readers. Today Cheney and Wright would have little trouble obtaining divorces and would probably not be pursued by the press. However, their feelings of confusion and doubt about leaving their spouses and children would most likely remain the same. The novel has something for everyone a romance, a history of architecture, and a philosophical and political debate on the role of women. What is missing is any sort of note explaining which parts of the novel are based on fact and which are imagined. This is essential in a novel dealing with real people who lived so recently. (*Booklist*)



Lush Life

By Richard Price

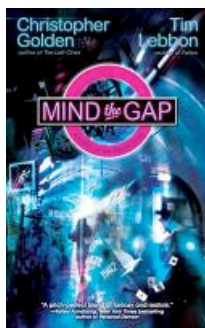
Price (Samaritan, 2003) is a respected writer, but if he hasn't won the literary acclaim he deserves, perhaps it's because he focuses so often on crime. Although his plots make him worthy of the most discriminating crime-fiction fanship, as a writer of acute social conscience, he uses misdeeds as a lens through which to view the way people navigate ethical terrain in the precarious urban landscape. In outline, *Lush Life* is deceptively simple. On New York's gentrifying Lower East Side, two boys from the projects hold up three men, killing one. Two cops investigate. But Price's investigation is no mere police procedural, scouring away layers of self-defense in all of his vividly drawn characters. Such is his talent that we care about them all equally, whether they are the cops whose interrogation reduces an innocent man to emotional wreckage; the kid whose abuse leaves him unable to comprehend the value of human life; the narcissistic artists whose self-absorption renders them blind to the true desperation surrounding them. Stitching it together is the route driven by the Quality of Life Task Force, an undercover team that threatens pot smokers with hard time if they fail to produce a handgun. Given the plummeting crime rate in most major cities, it might be argued that crime-driven social dramas are no longer relevant. But making the streets safe for the café crowd has its hidden cost and no one shows that better than Price. (*Booklist*)



Mathilda Savitch

By Victor Lodato

Living in the near future, when more 9/11-type attacks have taken place, and citizens, especially teens, are trying to make sense of the present while planning for the future, Mathilda Savitch has a more immediate cause for alarm. Her sister, Helene, has been dead for more than a year, and no one, not even her parents, who are mired in their own abysmal grief, knows what is going on in Mathilda's mind. There are mysteries surrounding Helene's tragic death: did an unknown assailant push her in front of that oncoming train? Was it one of her many boyfriends? Did she jump? Or was Mathilda herself somehow responsible? Ferreting out Helene's hidden e-mails, Mathilda recreates her sister's final days, a curious coming-of-age journey that culminates in a staggering revelation. Not since Sebald's *Susie Salmon* has there been a young woman whose attitude towards death and its effect on the living had such potential for beguiling readers of all ages. Lodato indelibly captures the fragile vulnerability and fearless bravado of adolescence through Mathilda's impeccable voice, one that rages with alienation, frustration, and confusion as much as it aches with hope, wonder, and desire. A phenomenal debut. (*Booklist*)



Mind the Gap

By Christopher Golden and Tim Lebbon

Jasmine Towne returns to her London home one afternoon to find her mother murdered and the killers searching for her. With a little guile and a lot of luck, she manages to slip away from her pursuers by plunging into the Tube and hiding in abandoned stations and forgotten bomb shelters. She falls in with a group of teenage thieves led by the Faginesque Harry Fowler. She takes to thieving quite quickly, and Fowler sends her out on the most difficult jobs. Emboldened by her new skills, Jazz sets out to rob the mansion of one of the very men who killed her mother. There she meets

Terence, who is breaking into the same house. Through him, Jazz learns that her mother's murder, the father she never knew, and even Fowler are all tied in to a secret society striving to revive the ancient spirits and magic hidden below the streets of London and use it for their own dark gains. The only way to avenge her mother's death and to guarantee her own safety is to help Terence set the spirits free. Jazz is the perfect teen heroine: capable, confident, and possessing both a love of trouble and enough smarts to get out of it. While more dark fantasy than horror, the story does have some small grisly sections. The basic setting recalls Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (Morrow, 1997). But the bigger story and the battle over London's magic-to either set it free or to usurp it-lend a fresh take on urban fantasy. (*School Library Journal*)



Museum Vaults: Excerpts from the Journal of an Expert

By Marc-Antoine Mathieu

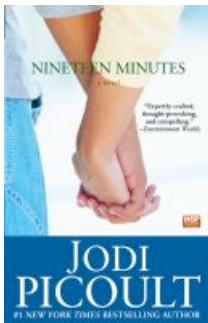
Like the first product of its publisher's intriguing collaboration with the Louvre, Nicolas De Crecy's *Glacial Period* (2007), the second plays out in the future, despite which the main characters appear casually Edwardian, while the ancillary ones would fit in any mid-twentieth-century-set French movie. The original name of the vast museum has been forgotten, but its functions haven't. They occur in the seemingly infinite layers of subbasement beneath what's visible at ground level, and Eudeus Volumer is just beginning to survey them and the collections they deal with as Mathieu's exquisitely rendered black-white-and-gray graphic novel opens. The chapter titles note the days of Volumer's progress and the departments visited; for instance, Day Forty-Six: The Flooded Gallery. Like Alice's progress through Wonderland, that of Volumer and his assistant becomes curiouser and curiouser and more and more fascinating, thanks to the variety of grotesque, quintessentially French faces Mathieu gives the characters (one's a Sartre clone, for sure) and the intricate architectural and art-reproduction detailing amid which he places them. Very droll, highly delightful. (*Booklist*)



New York Four

By Brian Wood and Ryan Kelly

As in *Local* and *DMZ*, indie superstar Wood shows great skill in writing extremely appealing and occasionally infuriating female leads. All four of the college freshmen at the center of this tale are well realized, but it's shy, sheltered Riley who is the focus of this girl-centric offering. Riley's life is packed with drama as she meets up with her estranged older sister and struggles to balance school, family, and a mysterious new boyfriend whom she has never met but texts to the point of obsession. Kelly's art, filled with expressive, idiosyncratic faces and figures, matches Wood's indie street cred with gritty depictions of the Lower East Side. He captures actual New York locations with nearly photographic accuracy, matching Wood's affection for the city, itself made obvious by the passages of hipster, travel-guide stuff packed into the story. Despite a disturbingly ambiguous ending, this graphic novel will delight readers on the cusp of discovering their own independence. (*Booklist*)

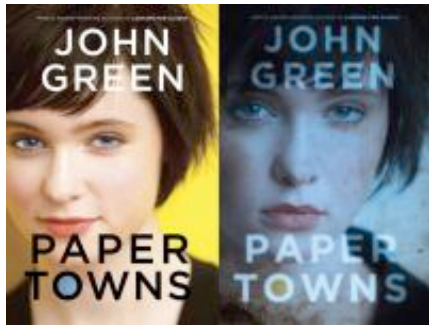


Nineteen Minutes

By Jodi Picoult

Many things can happen in the span of 19 minutes—fun things, mundane things, and downright horrific things. Best-selling author Picoult (*My Sister's Keeper*) shows just how quickly lives can be changed in this story of a school massacre much like Columbine that is told through the voice not only of the victims but also of the troubled teen who did the shooting. Readers will be pleased to see the return of two favorite characters. Patrick DuCharme, the detective from *Perfect Match*, is assigned to the case, while Jordan McAfee, the lawyer from *The Pact*, finds himself representing the shooter. Picoult has that rare ability to write about an unnerving subject in a way readers will find absorbing. What appears on the surface of a Picoult novel is never as it seems,

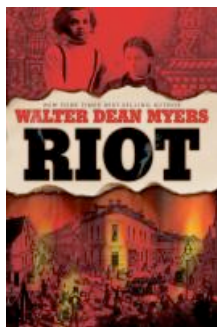
which is why her books are so popular with book groups. Her 14th novel, perhaps her best, is highly recommended for all public libraries. (*Library Journal*)



Paper Towns

By John Green

Quentin or Q. as everyone calls him has known his neighbor, the fabulous Margo Roth Spiegelman, since they were two. Or has he? Q. can't help but wonder, when, a month before high-school graduation, she vanishes. At first he worries that she might have committed suicide, but then he begins discovering clues that seem to have been left for him, which might reveal Margo's whereabouts. Yet the more he and his pals learn, the more Q. realizes he doesn't know and the more he comes to understand that the real mystery is not Margo's fate but Margo herself enigmatic, mysterious, and so very alluring. Yes, there are echoes of Green's award-winning *Looking for Alaska* (2006): a lovely, eccentric girl; a mystery that begs to be solved by clever, quirky teens; and telling quotations (from *The Leaves of Grass*, this time) beautifully integrated into the plot. Yet, if anything, the thematic stakes are higher here, as Green ponders the interconnectedness of imagination and perception, of mirrors and windows, of illusion and reality. That he brings it off is testimony to the fact that he is not only clever and wonderfully witty but also deeply thoughtful and insightful. In addition, he's a superb stylist, with a voice perfectly matched to his amusing, illuminating material. (*Booklist*)

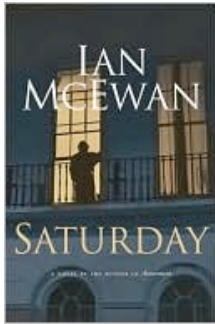


Riot

By Walter Dean Myers

In this fast, dramatic novel told in screenplay format, Myers takes on a controversial historical conflict that is seldom written about: the New York Draft Riots of 1863, when struggling Irish immigrants protested being called up by Lincoln to die for the darkies in the Civil War. The story focuses on 15-year-old Claire, the biracial daughter of a black

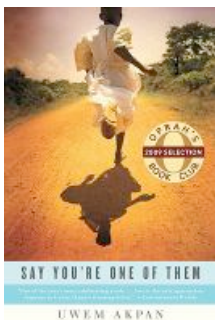
man and a white Irishwoman. The diverse voices, from all sides black, white, and mixed race; soldier and policeman; racist, looter, and victim will draw readers into the fiery debates. The swells are looking to send us off to fight for the Colored, says an angry Irishman who has nothing. Coloreds don't have nothing either, is one reply. There are no easy resolutions, idealized characters, or stereotypes, and the conflicts are unforgettable. A policeman does not want to shoot the looters. A weary soldier clean forgot what this war was about. Maeve, a bigoted white teen, does change in the end, but only a little. Great for reader's theater, this is sure to spark discussion about race, class, conflict, and loyalty, then and now. (*Booklist*)



Saturday

By Ian McEwan

In his triumphant new novel, Ian McEwan, the bestselling author of *Atonement*, follows an ordinary man through a Saturday whose high promise gradually turns nightmarish. Henry Perowne—a neurosurgeon, urbane, privileged, deeply in love with his wife and grown-up children—plans to play a game of squash, visit his elderly mother, and cook dinner for his family. But after a minor traffic accident leads to an unsettling confrontation, Perowne must set aside his plans and summon a strength greater than he knew he had in order to preserve the life that is dear to him. (*Synopsis, Barnesandnoble.com*)

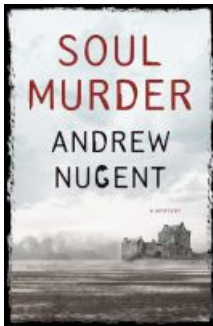


Say You're One of Them

By Uwem Akpan

With this heart-stopping collection, which includes the *New Yorker* piece, “An Ex-Mas Feast,” that marked Akpan as a breakout talent, the Nigerian-born Jesuit priest relentlessly personalizes the unstable social conditions of sub-Saharan Africa. Throughout, child narrators serve as intensifying prisms for horror, their vulnerability

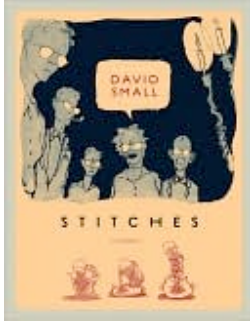
and slowly eroding innocence lending especially chilling dimensions to the volume's two most riveting entries: "Fattening for Gabon" (one of the book's three novellas), about the systematic grooming of a Benin 10-year-old and his sister for sale to a sex-slavery ring; and the collection's title story, a harrowing plunge into the mind of a mixed-race girl during the Rwandan genocide. From the slurp of machetes slashing into flesh to a toddler's oblivious stomping through blood puddling from his mother's crushed skull, Akpan tackles grisly violence head-on, but most of the stories, with the exception of the overlong, metaphor-laden "Luxurious Hearses," are lifted above consciousness-raising shockers by Akpan's sure characterizations, understated details, and culturally specific dialect. Don't expect to emerge with redemption delivered on a silver platter. The stories' tattered hope comes indirectly, from the thirst for broader knowledge about Africa's postcolonial conflicts they'll engender, and from the possibility that the collection's opening map, with the featured nations labeled (as helpful as it is a glaring symbol of most Western readers' woeful ignorance), will someday prove superfluous. *(Booklist)*



Soul Murder

By Andrew Nugent

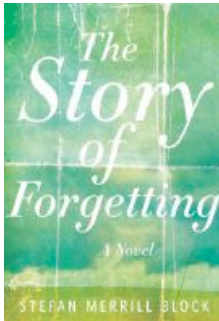
Third time's a charm for Nugent (after *The Four Courts Murder*, 2005, and *Second Burial for a Black Prince*, 2006). In their latest outing, Irish police superintendent Denis Lennon and sergeant Molly Power investigate a shocking murder at a boys' school. When seven boys at St. Isidore's in North Kerry return from a ritual midnight barbecue, they find their housemaster, Maurice Tyson, with his throat cut ear to ear. Police dismiss the theory that it was a kidnapping gone awry, especially after the would-be victim, student Bertrand Laporte, is actually kidnapped at his home in France. Then Sir Neville Randler, who once owned the castle-like mansion that became the school, is murdered in the same fashion as his friend Tyson. Benedictine monk and former lawyer Nugent is a fine storyteller, moving effortlessly from light banter to tear-inducing tenderness and displaying extraordinary understanding of, and empathy for, adolescent boys. This is a compelling mystery that illustrates the value of friendship, loyalty, respect, and love and the devastating result of betrayal and abuse by those one trusts. *(Booklist)*



Stitches: A Memoir

By David Small

Small is best known for his picture-book illustration. Here he tells the decidedly grim but far from unique story of his own childhood. Many teens will identify with the rigors of growing up in a household of angry silences, selfish parents, feelings of personal weakness, and secret lives. Small shows himself to be an excellent storyteller here, developing the cast of characters as they appeared to him during this period of his life, while ending with the reminder that his parents and brother probably had very different takes on these same events. The title derives from throat surgery Small underwent at 14, which left him, for several years, literally voiceless. Both the visual and rhetorical metaphors throughout will have high appeal to teen sensibilities. The shaded artwork, composed mostly of ink washes, is both evocative and beautifully detailed. A fine example of the growing genre of graphic-novel memoirs. (*School Library Journal*)

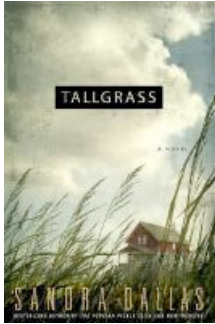


Story of Forgetting

By Stefan Merrill Block

This riveting novel features well-drawn characters engaged in the epic struggle of finding purpose and meaning in life. Early-onset/familial Alzheimer's disease (EOA) is the launching point for an exploration of memory and the human condition. Fifteen-year-old Seth and 70-year-old Abel alternate as sympathetic narrators of their family's stories. Although they don't meet until the end of the book, the connection between them becomes apparent early on. When Seth's mother is diagnosed with EOA, he assigns himself the task of learning all he can about the disease. Meanwhile, Abel reflects on his past, including his family's struggles with EOA, as he resists encroaching suburban sprawl and waits for the return of his long-gone daughter. The author effectively interweaves several writing styles: historical fiction (the imagined origins of the disease in a medieval English village and its subsequent spread to America);

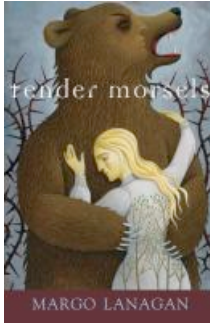
scientific inquiry (explanations of genetics and psychological studies of the brain); fantasy (tales of the mysterious land of Isidora, an alternate world known only to EOA families); Abel's reflective reminiscences; and Seth's coming-of-age in contemporary Texas. The narrators tell painful, funny, heartbreaking stories in authentic voices. An author's note indicates that the novel is semiautobiographical and provides resources for further information about the disease. In addition to being an excellent read, this book would be a wonderful supplement to a psychology class studying memory, or a biology class learning about genetics. (*School Library Journal*)



Tallgrass

By Sandra Dallas

In the acknowledgments page of her poignant new novel, Dallas tells readers how her late father inspired the character of Loyal Stroud, a self-deprecating farmer with an unflappable moral core. The tale itself is narrated by Loyal's teenage daughter, Rennie, who has mixed feelings about Tallgrass, the Japanese internment camp newly established at the edge of her tiny Colorado town. Rennie is bright, inquisitive, and wise beyond her years. She is unlike fellow town residents, who consider everyone interred at Tallgrass to be the enemy (even though many were born in the U.S.). Loyal Stroud isn't so quick to dismiss camp residents as degenerates; the three young Japanese boys he hires to harvest his sugar beets prove to be superlative workers. Simmering town tensions reach a boil when a disabled white girl is found raped and murdered. Meanwhile, Rennie's beloved brother, Buddy, a soldier in World War II, goes missing in action. Dallas (*New Mercies*, 2005) based *Tallgrass* on Amache, a real-life World War II internment camp near Granada, Colorado. (In her research, she learned that her journalism classes at the University of Denver were held in a former Amache barracks.) Here she renders a dramatic (and surprisingly droll) coming-of-age tale in which ignorance breeds malice, with brutal results. (*Booklist*)



Tender Morsels

By Margo Lanagan

After a horrific upbringing, 15-year-old Liga and her two daughters are magicked away into another world, which differs in one crucial aspect: it is utterly safe and free from surprise. In time, though, the old world intrudes upon their quiet heaven, and Liga and her daughters must face a painful reunion with reality. At its essence, this is a story about good and evil, not at all unusual for a fantasy, but there isn't a single usual thing in the way that Lanagan (who won a 2006 Printz Honor for *Black Juice*) goes about it. As in *Red Spikes* (2007), Lanagan touches on nightmarish adult themes, including multiple rape scenarios and borderline human-animal sexual interactions, which reserve this for the most mature readers. She employs a preternatural command of language, twisting it into archaic and convoluted styles that release into passages of absolute, startling clarity. Drawing alternate worlds that blur the line between wonder and horror, and characters who traverse the nature of human and beast, this challenging, unforgettable work explores the ramifications of denying the most essential and often savage aspects of life. It isn't easy, but this book is nevertheless a marvel to read and will only further solidify Lanagan's place at the very razor's edge of YA speculative fiction. (*Booklist*)

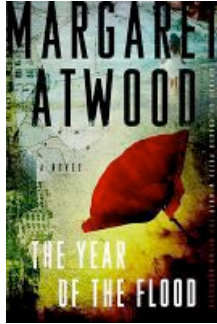


Through the Pale Door

By Brian Ray

The summer before her first year of college, Sarah leaves home without waking her mother and heads to Columbia, South Carolina, to work at a steel mill with her restrained and emotionally absent father. She intends to make cash for school and work on her painting, but her plans are quickly derailed by two events: she falls in love with Edgewood (a muralist and coworker), and her mother dies. Through her grief, confusion, and guilt, Sarah meditates on her mother's eccentricities and the mental break that sent her father away. Death permeates this stunning debut; it inhabits the grotesque works

of art described in disturbing detail, created by Sarah, her unstable mother, and her mysterious boyfriend. It also settles on everything in and around the mill and punctuates her interactions with her father a man willing to place her in immediate danger, all for few bucks. But even with the dark tones of death and lunacy, Ray finds comic moments, mainly in the dialogue, and holds nothing sacred when it comes time for a well-deserved laugh. Some events teeter on the overdramatic; however, wayward scenes are redeemed by the honest lyricism of the writing. Ray is a talent to watch. *(Booklist)*



Year of the Flood

By Margaret Atwood

Toby goes up on the roof to survey the still and empty city. Birds are singing, but have any other humans survived the Waterless Flood, a swift and devastating pandemic? Ren, a younger woman alone in another abandoned building, wonders the same thing. Atwood returns to the decimated world she first explored in *Oryx and Crake* (2003), paralleling and intersecting the story line. Toby and Ren had found sanctuary among the God's Gardeners, a resistance group that grows their own food and medicinal plants and keeps bees, while perched precariously on the ragged edge of a tyrannical corporate empire dispensing synthetic food, deliberately induced illnesses, and dubious hybrid creatures, such as the liobam--half-lion, half-lamb. Atwood's villains are despicable, while her heroes are thorny, resilient, and contemplative, and their adventures hair-raising. Add to that Atwood's playfully brilliant infusion of scientific knowledge and ecological and ethical insights into the Gardners' lively theology. The holiness of nature is celebrated and the precepts of sustainable living taught in funny and righteous hymns, while saint days honor Rachel Carson, Jacques Cousteau, and Dian Fossey. Atwood's mischievous, suspenseful, and sagacious dystopian novel follows the trajectory of current environmental debacles to a shattering possible conclusion with passionate concern and arch humor. *(Booklist)*