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THE
BEST
BOOKS
OF
2023

THE YEAR'S BEST POETRY

BY ELISA GABBERT



THE TERM “OBJECT lesson” hails from an 1830 book by the English educational reformer Elizabeth Mayo, “Lessons on Objects,” which suggests that close observation of, say, sealing wax or a thimble or a quill can unlock abstract knowledge of the world.

Much of the poetry I read this year depended on objects, loosely defined. The object might have been a totem animal, a move in gymnastics or a mountain ridge. These books explore ekphrastic possibility and the knowledge unlocked through obsessive attention to a Thing in the World. Here are five of the books I loved most in this mode in 2023.

THE COVER OF **AUCTION**, by Quan

ELISA GABBERT is the author of six collections of poetry, essays and criticism, most recently “Normal Distance.” Her *On Poetry* columns appear four times a year.

Barry (University of Pittsburgh Press, 83 pp., paperback, \$18), shows a translucent sculpture of a toilet by Do Ho Suh, made from polyester fabric, which was part of an exhibit of ghostly household objects lit like 3-D X-rays. In her poem about the work, Barry writes: “even an appliance is allowed to remember/that once it was infinite” ... “this room is souled, this toilet souled, the stove/souled, beyond good and evil.” This feels appropriate to her project. She takes the crap of existence head-on, and makes art despite it: “these empty and utterly human attempts/to build a perfection among the detritus.” It’s an inquiry into violence and passivity, the ease of doing nothing, doors “that we meticulously do not open.” It’s full of shame and disgust, but also unexpected hilarity, as in a sequence of ironic invectives inspired by the “sensational propaganda”

of field guides for soldiers in occupied lands, and also salvation, as in “Black Pastoral”: “Who unlocks the gateless gate?” “Who keeps us safe?/We keep us safe.”

FROM FROM: Poems, by Monica Youn (Graywolf, 147 pp., paperback, \$17), is a complex of different approaches. There are studies of figures from myth and history, as in “Marsyas, After,” a Glück-ian poem whose speaker identifies with the satyr who was flayed alive: “Dust loves me now” ... “I stain everything/I touch, it all stains me;/my raw surface is an unlidded eye.” Another, “Study of Two Figures (Agave/Pentheus),” recalls Anne Carson with its cute wit: “She cleared her dusty throat *ahem*.” There’s a series on magpies, parables and lists of “facts” about magpie culture: “Although magpies mate for life, a female magpie can ‘divorce’ a male in favor of one who holds a larger territory./So, upon meeting a single magpie, it’s polite to say: ‘Good morning, Mr. Magpie, and is your lady wife at home?’/Thus to suggest that even if the magpie has been rejected, at least this humiliation is not yet publicly known.” There’s a long essay-like poem about shark teeth, hatred, whiteness, poetry, so much. “The very hungry caterpillar is an exemplar of desire. An object lesson.” “From From” is rich and often deliciously bitter.

NEGRO MOUNTAIN, by C.S. Giscombe (University of Chicago Press, 85 pp., paperback, \$18), is a book-length fascination with the highest point in Pennsylvania, whose name comes from “an incident” that took place there in the 1750s; as Giscombe writes in a preface, when an enslaved man known as Nemesis was killed in a skirmish. An opening sequence of dream poems introduces recurring themes and images: the mountain, movement, wolves.

There are levels of framing: In “Second Dream,” he writes, “Typically, I dreamed and at the same time watched the dream” ... “as if from a car at a drive-in movie.” So the dream is already in quotes in the dream, and now again in the poem. Giscombe’s “speaker” (an idea he interrogates) glides between dream self and now self, between the scene and “real — that is, *waking* — life.” These poems have a bardish musicality that reminds me of Nathaniel Mackey: “there was *statuary*, there was/a mild nausea which, dreaming,/I’d mistaken for evil, and/also a jaguar.” Later pieces are more like essays, a combination of poetic elision and more prosaic rhetoric. The sections all comment and expand on one another, a multivocal text interrupting itself (“The mountain intervenes”) with sudden shifts that unsettle and destabilize — small landslides. “What else might a Negro *speaker* ask?” Giscombe writes, with contemptuous italics, and on the opposite page, “you — meaning the speaker and the reader as well.” Elsewhere he writes, “the wolves, the Negro ‘speaker,’ and the mountain are not one.” And yet they overlap, in the “transgressing moment.” I found it dazzling.

PHANTOM PAIN WINGS, by Kim Hyesoon (New Directions, 182 pp., paperback, \$18.95), translated from the Korean by Don Mee Choi, reads like a variety of horror — haunted, grotesque, futureless (“it’s time ... for the cymbals of silence to crash, to announce time’s funeral”). It starts with a series whose speaker is, or *does*, a bird: “This book is not really a book/It’s an I-do-bird sequence.” “Doing bird” is an escape from the sick world of people, perhaps, but involuntary, like death. “I end up doing I-do-bird even if I resist” ... “I take a step toward where I don’t exist.” I love the way scale works here; both

largeness and smallness can be forms of strength, the tiny and the epic. Large as in the book’s title poem: “My night feathers are infinitely, infinitely large” ... “Tonight, there’s no place for me to put down my poem.” And small as in “Little Poem”: “The little story is so little that it just keeps piling up like dust on the postwoman’s desk.” In Kim’s metapoetics, the apparent futility of poetry is part of its surreptitious power. “You say that you can bash my story whenever you want because it’s so little, that you’ll write my story instead.” And yet: “my little story crosses many bridges inside your brain,” it “sets up house on top of your Seahorse and in every dream you scream — that’s how little my story is.”

TIMMY STRAW’S FIRST collection, **THE THOMAS SALTO (Fonograf Editions, 105 pp., paperback, \$16.95)**, takes its name from a “very difficult and dangerous” gymnastics skill that was banned for causing several serious accidents, including Elena Mukhina’s paralysis — a move, like this book, that wears a “janus-face of enchantment and terror.” Beautiful, shivery, eerie, these poems have a surgical precision of sound, used to convey the vast mystery in an image (“A sun sets in a mirror, sets/in a killed sheep’s eye”), to dismantle time. These are poems about power and the possibility of forgiveness (“Forgiveness, the three-legged chair”) that sound absolutely sure and final, like vessels for a god voice; they filled me with awe. “The wave that will take us is very small/is hiding in the word itself.” (The *word!*) “The audience is crowded together like husbands in a canoe/none of whom know each other/though they are all married to the same wife.” ... “When she dies, it will be quiet/enough to hear pollen falling.” □

THE YEAR'S BEST THRILLERS

BY SARAH LYALL



THIS YEAR'S BEST THRILLERS come in various shades of suspense, dread and wonder. But each leads the reader down a twisty path toward an unknown destination.

Let's begin with Daniel Kraus's original, almost obscenely entertaining **WHALEFALL** (MTV Books, 336 pp., \$27.99), which concerns the efforts of 17-year-old Jay Gardiner to escape from a most improbable prison.

Jay's father, Mitt, recently drowned himself off the coast of Monterey, Calif., suffering from terminal cancer. But when Jay tries to help his grieving family by recovering his father's remains, he is slurped up by a passing whale, becoming an unexpected side dish to the whale's

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main meal of giant squid.

As he fights his way out, Jay has in his arsenal an hour's worth of oxygen and a lifetime of lessons, on whales as well as humans, imparted to him by his dad. Kraus, the author of numerous science fiction and fantasy novels — and, with Guillermo del Toro, of the novel version of the film “The Shape of Water” — infuses his prose with a scientist's rigor and a poet's sensibility.

You won't meet a more tortured or resourceful hero this year. And you won't meet a nobler or more surprising whale, either.

EVERYONE NEEDS A good legal thriller for Christmas. This year, it's Martin Clark's excellent **THE PLINKO BOUNCE** (Rare Bird Books, 270 pp., \$28), set in rural Virginia and starring a straight-shooting public defender named Andy Hughes, who's gearing up to take on a final case before

starting a fancy new job at a big law firm.

His client, accused of murdering a woman in a drug-fueled frenzy, is obviously guilty. But Andy is too conscientious to provide anything other than a top-notch defense, and he finds major holes in the prosecution's case. The courtroom scenes are authoritative — Clark is a retired Virginia circuit court judge — and compelling in a pleasingly unflashy way. Readers will feel they're in good hands.

They might also think they know what's coming, but they don't. As Clark explains, a “Plinko bounce” refers to the unpredictable behavior of the plastic disks dropped into a giant vertical peg board in a game on “The Price Is Right.” But this is not a game, and when the bounce happens, it's truly shocking.

MANY OF US have been unnerved by ubiquitous facial-recognition technology at places like airports. If one thing is clear from reading Anthony McCarten's high-octane **GOING ZERO** (Harper, 295 pp., \$30), it's that we have no clue how much of our private lives we've already given up.

The book begins when a megalomaniacal tech bazillionaire named Cy Baxter, an evil amalgam of Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos, recruits 10 people to test the Fusion Initiative, a state-of-the-art surveillance system he's devised with the U.S. government.

The volunteers are competing to evade the system for an entire month; anyone who remains unbound gets \$3 million. But one by one, they go down, puny adversaries for the formidable arsenal of drones, cameras, virtual-reality devices, satellites, A.I.-enhanced research techniques and other technologies brought to bear against them.

But a lone volunteer, a Boston librarian — “single, child-

less, nearsighted” — manages to elude the system. And then the book cranks into a new gear, as we learn who this remarkable woman is, what she really wants and the lengths she is prepared to go to get it. “Privacy is passé,” Baxter says. That's his opinion.

AS YOU BEGIN Sally Hepworth's sly psychological puzzle **THE SOULMATE** (St. Martin's, 327 pp., \$28.99), please understand that what you're seeing in the first few chapters is only part of the story, a sleight of hand perpetrated by the author. The book opens with Pippa Gerard watching her husband, Gabe, try to talk a woman out of throwing herself over the cliff outside their house, a notorious spot for suicides.

But why does Gabe seem to be reaching toward the distressed woman — something he had been instructed never to do — as she teeters on the edge, then falls? And why, if Pippa loves her husband as much as she claims, did she once take an online survey called “Is Your Partner a Sociopath?” Hepworth metes out her information slowly, expertly adding new ingredients to the pot as she transforms a simple broth into a complex stew.

The dead woman, Amanda, narrates some of the chapters from beyond the grave. She wants to make something clear. “Unlike the scores of people who have come to this spot before me,” she says, “I did not come here to die.”

WATCHING TWO DIABOLICAL women try to outsmart each other while maintaining their placid facades in the library where they work is one of the many pleasures of Laura Sims's deliciously unsettling **HOW CAN I HELP YOU** (Putnam, 240 pp., \$27). The book begins with Margo, a librarian with a big secret: In her previous job, she was a nurse with a knack for murdering her patients.

With her fake name and new identity, she seems to have gotten away with it. But she can't escape her insatiable hunger for killing. And with the arrival of a new research librarian, a failed novelist named Patricia who suspects that Margo is hiding something, Margo's tenuous grip on sanity begins to slip away.

It's no coincidence that both women admire Shirley Jackson's “We Have Always Lived in the Castle,” with its subversive belief that even murderous psychopaths deserve our sympathy, or at least our understanding. But is there room in the library — or, for that matter, in the world in general — for both Margo and Patricia? Probably not.

ANYONE WHO HAS yet to discover Mick Herron, author of the darkly hilarious “Slow Horses” espionage novels, is in for a treat. His latest book, **THE SECRET HOURS** (Soho Crime, 384 pp., \$27.95), isn't part of the series but exists in its larger universe.

The book begins with a bravura action sequence set in the English countryside. Who knew that a rotting badger carcass could be such a useful weapon? It's unclear how this chase through a bunch of back roads fits in with the rest of the story, but tuck it away in your mind, because Herron will return to it later.

We then switch to London, where an unnamed former prime minister of dubious morals has spitefully set up a far-reaching inquiry into historical wrongdoing at MI5, Britain's domestic security service. It's a deadly dull exercise until suddenly one of its members receives a classified case file about a botched operation in 1994 Berlin.

Herron is at his best when he's laying bare the petty rivalries of bureaucrats. It's not necessary to read his other books before reading this one, but once you start, you'll want to read them all. □



THE YEAR'S BEST AUDIOBOOKS

BY LAUREN CHRISTENSEN

IT BEGINS WITH a flat stone plucked from the earth and placed in a clearing at the base of a mountain. A kind of Genesis, giving way to an Edenic apple farm, followed by 300 years of corruption, sorrow, ambition, deception, isolation, love. Daniel Mason's **NORTH WOODS (Random House Audio, 11 hours, 5 minutes)**, read by a full cast, is a kind of Odyssean epic in which the hero doesn't leave home — it is one: a New England house and its inhabitants over the three-century history of America.

There's the story of an apple farmer, a Revolutionary War defector named Charles Osgood, rendered in all his gruff self-importance by the British narrator Simon Vance; the letters from the landscape painter William Henry Teale to a beloved "friend" that

escalate in desperation and longing, with Mark Deakins's placid and dignified reading giving way to a more tortured cadence; Mark Bramhall telling (among others) the heart-wrenching saga of Osgood's twin daughters, whose inseparable bond after their father's death is tested by temptation to explore the world beyond their property lines.

Like the unforgettable audiobook production of George Saunders's "Lincoln in the Bardo," Mason's historical fiction advertises a singular strength of the form: alchemizing an ensemble of distinct voices into a harmonious, deeply resonant whole.

AFTER HER STRICT Rastafari father threatens to kick her out of the family home for standing up to his verbal abuse, a teenage Safiya Sinclair looks out into the darkness of the Jamaican mountains, "the thick countryside

where our first slave rebellion was born," and sees the specter of a woman dressed in white, her dreadlocked head bowed "under the gaze of a Rastaman." The woman, she realizes, is herself, a harbinger of "the future that awaited me at my father's hands."

While "all the rage had been smothered out of" this recurring apparition in **HOW TO SAY BABYLON: A Memoir (Simon & Schuster Audio, 16 hours, 46 minutes)**, the same cannot be said of the author, who seethes and roars with emotion throughout this affecting account of growing up under her father's violent and controlling hand — and of escaping it to become an award-winning poet.

Hovering above the sadness and anger are Sinclair's vivid memories: of her mother Esther's laughter and her soothing touch as they "fold into each other in the living room" before school, of the golden rolling paper Esther carried for the ganja whose aroma "clung to me like I clung to Mom." She recalls her three younger siblings' greasy fingers and gleeful screeching, her father's repeated chant, "Fire bun Babylon!" which he "turned ... on his tongue like prayer."

Sinclair spins her own incantations out of the landscapes of her upbringing — first the fishing village lined with zinc-roofed shanties, hibiscus trees and cinder blocks; then the "towering blue mahoes and primeval ferns" farther inland, the "serried and vigilant" mountain ridge of her later childhood — her voice as sensuous as a siren song.

WHICH IMPOSTOR DOES the title of Zadie Smith's sixth novel, **THE FRAUD (Penguin Audio, 12 hours, 26 minutes)**, refer to? Is it a novelist, William Ainsworth, whose fame and social status belie the critical reception of his work? Is it his housekeeper, Eliza Touchet? Or is it the so-called Claimant, the man presenting

himself as Sir Roger Tichborne, the heir to a noble fortune who was believed to have died in a shipwreck, inspiring a trial that captures the maniacal attention of the English public?

With the virtuosic agility of an actor in a one-woman play, Smith as narrator fully embodies each of her many distinct characters — using exaggeratedly quaint Edinburgh brogue, Cockney, even Jamaican patois — who expose the ways in which every one of us misrepresents ourselves somehow or other. This is a novel of manners which — thanks to the author's ear for comic timing and eviscerating social commentary — is vigorously, insistently funny.

"THE UNCANNINESS PROVOKED by doppelgangers is particularly acute because the thing that becomes unfamiliar is you," Naomi Klein says in **DOPPELGANGER: A Trip Into the Mirror World (Macmillan Audio, 14 hours, 47 minutes)**, an elegant hybrid of memoir and social science that traces the motif of the double throughout history, literature and Klein's personal life.

Sick of being confused with the '90s feminist-turned-conspiracist Naomi Wolf, Klein uses her own exasperation as a lens onto the black-and-white bifurcation of almost every aspect of contemporary life: the economic inequality made even starker by the sacrifices of essential workers to protect the wealthy from Covid-19; the stigma of being on the autism spectrum and the parents who deny their children lifesaving vaccines in hopes of avoiding it; fitness influencers who condemn "less healthy" bodies for their susceptibility to disease.

Rather than alienating the "other side," as it were, Klein uses the doppelganger rubric to pull the unfamiliar closer, seeking out thoughtful context for how seemingly irreconcilable factions arrived at their extremes. "This

is the trouble with the Mirror World," she says, her tone very the-call-is-coming-from-inside-the-house. "There is always some truth mixed in with the lies."

INTERTWINING THE RECORDED parts of Korean colonization and American imperialism with speculative plots involving an underground rebellion and a parasitic tech company, Ed Park's second novel, **SAME BED DIFFERENT DREAMS (Random House Audio, 18 hours, 36 minutes)**, hits you over the head with the blunt force of its organizing quandary, again and again: "What is history?"

But thanks to the ingenuity of Park's storytelling and the prowess of the audiobook's narrators, Daniel K. Isaac, Dominic Hoffman and Shannon Tyo, the listener doesn't mind the repetition. If anything, we need all the signposts we can get in this intricate maze, which winds through alternate histories, dreamlike impossibilities and books within books.

Park's novel braids together three narratives that overlap in sometimes rewarding, sometimes confounding ways. Isaac reads "The Sins," about a Korean American tech employee who becomes obsessed with the titular unfinished manuscript that falls into his hands; Tyo reads the manuscript itself, a translated work of alleged nonfiction by Echo, the nom de plume of an elusive Korean writer who may or may not be alive; and Hoffman reads "2333," a science fiction series by a Black veteran of the Korean War. Characters, too, repeat, tempting the listener to draw connections that prove so tenuous they vanish as quickly as they arrive.

That's OK. The point isn't to grasp every detail. The fun in this audiobook is the hallucinatory joy of witnessing real life crash head-first into heartfelt, hilarious nonsense. As in art, so in life. □

THE YEAR'S BEST ROMANCE

BY OLIVIA WAITE



A QUICKSILVER VOICE and a balance of humor and brutality keep Samara Breger's vampire historical **A LONG TIME DEAD** (Bywater Books, 412 pp., paperback, \$23.95) perpetually on my mind. The new vampire Poppy's essentially buoyant nature makes her occasional descent into blood lust all the more horrifying, and gives her ingenuity and ultimate triumph an especially gratifying charge. This has become the No. 1 book I recommend to readers new to the genre.

MARY RENAULT'S MIDCENTURY queer classic "The Charioteer" lurks fitfully behind the scenes of **WE COULD BE SO GOOD** (Avon, 384 pp., paperback, \$18.99), Cat

OLIVIA WAITE is the Book Review's romance fiction columnist. She writes queer historical romance, fantasy and critical essays on the genre's history and future.

Sebastian's story of two reporters becoming friends and then lovers in pre-Stonewall New York. Irascible Nick avoids reading Renault for ages, convinced that all queer stories end in heartbreak. It takes Andy, hopeful and new to his bisexuality, to show Nick that happiness is within his grasp, if he's only brave enough to reach for it.

"THE CHARIOTEER" ALSO COMES up in **THE SLEEPING SOLDIER** (Independently published, 300 pp., \$12.99), Aster Glenn Gray's thoughtful queer historical novel. Russell Krause is a Civil War Union veteran magically cursed to sleep for a hundred years; he wakes in 1965 and has to learn to adjust to a mechanized world with vastly different ideas about romance and physical affection. His guide is the college sophomore Caleb O'Connor, who is hyper-conscious of being a gay

man at a time when men's queerness was highly stigmatized.

Like Sebastian's book, Gray's asks us to question what it means to either over-romanticize the past or condemn it as less fully human than the present.

IN CATHY YARDLEY'S **ROLE PLAYING** (Montlake, 333 pp., paperback, \$16.95), our main characters meet in an online video game forum. Aiden thinks Maggie is 20 years older than he is; Maggie thinks Aiden is 20 years old. In fact, they're both 50-ish and using "Blood Saga" to vent the pressures they can't escape in their offline lives.

Maggie is divorced and a bit of a hermit; Aiden moved home to help when his father died. Both prefer being alone — or at least, not being pressured to socialize in ways that feel shallow and awkward. Once they connect in real life, the friendly bond they've built becomes a wild, enveloping passion.

It's rare to see older romance leads treated with such complexity, and Yardley nails the way online relationships blossom.

FEW THINGS ARE more gratifying than a witty romance, and Rachel Lynn Solomon is becoming one of my favorite authors for contemporaries that blend insightful humor with unstinting emotion. In **BUSINESS OR PLEASURE** (Berkley, 384 pp., paperback, \$17), a ghostwriter gives her celebrity client sex lessons, and Solomon reaches a new gold standard for writing (deliberately) terrible sex at a relationship's outset. It's a grand contrast to the tender scene much later, where our leads are stranded in a motel with a single available bed and they have to actually sleep together for the first time. This book is intimate and unflinching.

SPEAKING OF LONGTIME favorites: Lucy Parker's newest,

CODENAME CHARMING (Avon, 384 pp., paperback, \$18.99), gives us a glorious romp in which a prince's personal assistant, Petunia De Vere, has to date the royal bodyguard Matthias to stave off rumors she's sleeping with the prince himself. Petunia's past includes a wealth of familial neglect, and Matthias has the kind of looks that cause small children to quite literally run away screaming; so romance takes them unawares. This is a book for when you want all the emotions at high intensity, deployed by a virtuoso at playing on the heartstrings.

I PICKED UP Alicia Thompson's **WITH LOVE, FROM COLD WORLD** (Berkley, 400 pp., paperback, \$18) after hearing raves from people whose tastes mesh with mine. And they were right: This tale of sparring co-workers (Lauren: restrained and precise; Asa: charming and secretly sensitive) is one of the most perfect books I've read this year.

Every moment of yearning is put down in exactly the right place, at exactly the right speed. This exquisite book doesn't feel like it was written: It's as though it slowly coalesced, words drifting down like snowflakes until, suddenly, the whomping weight hits you like an avalanche.

COLLINS CARTER, THE heroine of Alexa Martin's **NEXT-DOOR NEMESIS** (Berkley, 368 pp., paperback, \$17), has always had a temper, and thanks to that viral video, now everybody knows it. With her Hollywood writing career in ruins, she flees to her parents' home in Ohio to find her former-best-friend-turned-nemesis running for president of the H.O.A. How dare Nathaniel Adams still be hot after the way he treated her in high school? Impulsively, Collins announces she's running against him — but the sparks from their collision ignite more

than just her competitive streak.

Martin's prose is a live wire: There are little shocks of pleasure on every page. It's incredible how epic this contest feels, even though the stakes are so local.

MY PERSONAL CANON of romance reading contains multiple firsts: the first author I read, Johanna Lindsey; the first I read again and again, Julie Garwood; and Courtney Milan, whose books make me feel like I'm looking at the genre with new and wondering eyes, even after decades. Her latest, **THE MARQUIS WHO MUSTN'T** (Independently published, 370 pp., paperback, \$15.99), takes up a foundational romance structure — the hero with a secret, and the heroine who's close to unearthing it — and shines such a blinding light on it that the whole architecture permanently shifts. It is both an extremely good romance novel and an extremely effective critique of romance novels, an impeccable embodiment of loving something — or someone — and expecting the best from them.

IN A YEAR full of very funny books, Maria Vale's **MOLLY MOLLOY AND THE ANGEL OF DEATH** (Sungrazer, 273 pp., paperback, \$14.99) was hands down the funniest, as sharp and stunning as a slap to the face. Death as a love interest is not unknown in the genre, but usually it's a sexy Death, like Lee Pace from "Pushing Daisies" or the brooding Hades from "Lore Olympus." Death as Vale depicts him is an awkward, traumatized immortal struggling to understand humanity. This book creates its own language, and the romance beats are syncopated and complex, avoiding predictability while still offering the full-throated catharsis I'm in this for. Strange, sly and absolutely unforgettable. □



THE YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY

BY AMAL EL-MOHTAR

VAJRA CHANDRASEKERA'S **THE SAINT OF BRIGHT DOORS** (Tordotcom, 356 pp., \$27.99) is the best book I've read this year. Fetter, the protagonist, is one of several almost-chosen-ones who have shirked or sidestepped their destinies in favor of marginal lives in the city of Luriat. The city has many "bright doors" that seem to open onto nothing. Fetter's fascination with them draws him into a web of intrigue involving his godlike father, the Perfect and Kind — whom Fetter has been trained since childhood to kill. Nimble and dazzlingly original, "The Saint of Bright Doors" offers a grammar for comprehending atrocity without resorting to the bluntness of allegory.

AMAL EL-MOHTAR is a Hugo Award-winning writer and co-author, with Max Gladstone, of "This Is How You Lose the Time War."

FAMILY SECRETS ABOUND in **INK BLOOD SISTER SCRIBE** (William Morrow, 407 pp., \$30), Emma Törzs's astonishing and pristine debut. Two sisters, Esther and Joanna, have been raised to be secret stewards of magical books — tomes written in and activated by human blood. Joanna can "hear" magic books; Esther can't, and seems immune to their magical effects. But after the death of their father — exsanguinated by a book that wouldn't let him read it — the sisters become estranged, with Joanna rooted at home while Esther roams the world. Törzs's careful attention to the mundane physicality of bookbinding makes a well-trodden magic system feel fascinating and fresh. From a quiet beginning, "Ink Blood Sister Scribe" accelerates like a fugue, ably conducted to a warm conclusion.

INFINITY GATE (Orbit, 535 pp., paperback, \$18.99), by M.R. Carey, is an impeccably crafted book that makes several science-fictional concepts — the lone scientist trying to save the world, the multiverse, the war between organic life and machines — feel new. The unnamed narrator lays out the circumstances of its creation like a host setting a table. Three people were responsible for its sentience, it tells us: Hadiz Tambuwal, a scientist; Essien Nkanika, a rogue; and Topaz Tourmaline FiveHills, a ... rabbit? The narrator details their lives and the vast reach of the changes they catalyze. While the book technically begins and ends on a university campus in Lagos, Nigeria, its vaulting scope makes you feel as if you've taken a few steps up a mountain and ended up in outer space.

FRANCES HARDINGE'S HAUNTING and lovely **UNRAVELLER** (Amulet, 423 pp., \$19.99) is set in a world of magical marshlands full of dangerous gifts and beautiful threats. Among these are the Little Brothers, spiderlike creatures who grant some people the ability to curse others. A curse might make a wicked man's hands weep blood or turn a woman into a harp, all depending on the grief and fury of the curser. Kellen is an unraveller — someone who can undo curses. Nettle is a girl who was cursed to be a heron until Kellen unraveled her back into her human form. Their two points of view make the book into a kind of loom worked between them, a warp and weft intersecting to bring a richer image into view.

HEATHER FAWCETT'S **EMILY WILDE'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF FAERIES** (Del Rey, 317 pp., \$28) is a stirring exploration of mythography and storytelling, with a dark and twisted heart. Emily is a scholar singularly committed to "dryadology" in an early-1900s

world where the study of fairies is a branch of the sciences. Very close to completing the titular encyclopedia, she journeys to Ljosland, Norway, to "document an enigmatic species of faerie called 'Hidden Ones.'" Structured as entries in Emily's field journal, the novel lays out her aims, her curmudgeonly nature and her pestiferous relationship with one Wendell Bumbleby — a charismatic researcher and sometime rival who Emily suspects is a fairy himself. Fawcett's novel mixes winsome characters with real loss and deep feeling.

FONDA LEE'S **UNTETHERED SKY** (Tordotcom, 152 pp., \$22.99) combines falconry and Persian mythology into a short fantasy that punches well above its weight. In Dartha, man-eating monsters known as manticores stalk the countryside, unstoppable except by rocs, gigantic birds of prey. The people of Dartha defend themselves by capturing fledgling rocs and training them to hunt manticores. These trainers, or ruhkers, are rear their rocs in a mutually beneficial partnership. Ester is one such ruhker who recounts her training of Zahra, her first roc. At the heart of the story is Ester's knowledge that she has dedicated her life to a creature whose love she can't earn, but whose power she depends on for survival every day.

TITANIUM NOIR (Knopf, 236 pp., \$28), by Nick Harkaway, is a funny book full of fantastic sentences that show how much detective fiction has in common with poetry. In the near future, a drug called Titanium 7 allows patients to recover from life-threatening damage by turning their body clocks back to prepubescence and running them through adolescent development at speed, leaving them taller and stronger. Known as Titans, these people are secretive and ultrarich. When a man

with all the physical traits of a Titan is shot dead, the police turn to Cal Sounder, an investigator with ties to the drug's inventor. Twisting and turning between fun and melancholy, "Titanium Noir" is an exemplar of the genre.

WHITE CAT, BLACK DOG (Random House, 260 pp., \$27) is Kelly Link's fifth collection of short stories, and her first since "Get in Trouble" in 2016. While each of the seven stories is subtitled with the name of a famous fairy tale or ballad, these are not straightforward retellings or reworkings; rather, Link treats them as ingredients from which to prepare a delicate yet threatening feast.

MARTHA WELLS'S **WITCH KING** (Tordotcom, 414 pp., \$28.99) is a throwback to a beloved species of 1990s fantasy doorstep, full of intrigues between mostly immortal families. The Witch King, Kai, wakes from an enchanted sleep to find that he and his best friend, Ziede, have been imprisoned, and that Ziede's wife, Tahren, is missing. They escape and embark on a quest to find Tahren and root out the conspiracy that separated the couple. Kai is a demon, able to possess bodies; Ziede is a witch, able to converse with the elemental world. Wells is working at the height of her powers here.

MELINDA TAUB'S **THE SCANDALOUS CONFESSIONS OF LYDIA BENNET, WITCH** (Grand Central, 392 pp., \$29) is a delightful excavation of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice." What if Lydia Bennet — younger sister to Elizabeth, catalyst to her sisters' marital good fortune through her own ruin — were a witch? It's simply wonderful, a laugh-and-cry book. Taub's close reading of and research into Austen's work carefully threads a needle between invention and retelling. The result is a terrifically well-balanced novel blending romance, fantasy and mystery. □

THE 10 BEST BOOKS OF 2023



FICTION

THE BEE STING By Paul Murray

Murray makes his triumphant return with “The Bee Sting,” a tragicomic tale about an Irish family grappling with crises. The Barneses — Dickie, Imelda, Cass and PJ — are a wealthy Irish clan whose fortunes begin to plummet after the 2008 financial crash. But in addition to this shared hardship, all four are dealing with demons of their own: a long-kept secret, blackmail, the death of a past love, a vexing frenemy and more. The novel threads together the stories of the increasingly isolated Barneses, but the overall tapestry Murray weaves is not one of desolation but of hope. This is a book that showcases one family’s love and resilience even as their world crumbles around them. (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*)

EXCERPT: *Since the closure of the garage in the next town over, her father had stopped saying things would get better. They knew how bad things were; the whole town knew. Old ladies would come up to Dickie after Mass, and tell him they had said a Novena for him and for the motor industry in general. Others steered clear, as if his failure might be catching. Sometimes when Cass walked into a shop now everything went quiet, and she felt shame prickle over her, like a hideous second skin, a new adversity arrived to take the place of her eczema.*

CHAIN-GANG ALL-STARS By Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah

A dystopian satire in which death-row inmates duel on TV for a chance at freedom, Adjei-Brenyah’s debut novel pulls the

reader into the eager audience, making us complicit with the bloodthirsty fans sitting ringside. “As much as this book made me laugh at these parts of the world I recognized as being mocked, it also made me wish I recognized less of it,” Giri Nathan writes in his review. “The United States of ‘Chain-Gang All-Stars’ is like ours, if sharpened to absurd points.” (*Pantheon*)

EXCERPT: *This was sacred. The low roar of thousands waiting for her. An ocean of voices above, all around. She held her scythe in her hands. She told the guards to give her space and swayed left, then right. Warmed her spine. Energy flowed through her. She closed her eyes and entered her body. Her body didn’t always make her feel safe, but there, underneath the ocean of voices, it felt immaculate.*

EASTBOUND By Maylis de Kerangal

De Kerangal’s brief, lyrical novel, first published in France in 2012 and newly translated by Jessica Moore, follows a young Russian conscript named Aliocha on a trans-Siberian train packed with other soldiers. The mood is grim. Aliocha, unnerved after a brawl, decides to desert with the help of a civilian passenger, a Frenchwoman. Their desolate surroundings — de Kerangal describes the Siberian landscape as “a world turned inside out like a glove, raw, wild, empty” — only heighten the stakes. (*Archipelago*)

EXCERPT: *These guys come from Moscow and don’t know where they’re going. There’s a crowd of them, more than a hundred, young, white — pallid, even — wan and shorn, their*

arms veiny and eyes pacing in the train car, camouflage pants and briefs, torsos caged in khaki undershirts, thin chains with crosses bouncing against their chests; guys lining the walls in the passageways and corridors, sitting, standing, stretched out on the berths, letting their arms dangle, letting their bored resignation dangle in the void. They’ve been on board for more than 40 hours now, crammed together, squeezed into the liminal space of the train: the conscripts.

THE FRAUD By Zadie Smith

Based on a celebrated 19th-century criminal trial in which the defendant was accused of impersonating a nobleman, Smith’s novel offers a vast, acute panoply of London and the English countryside, and successfully locates the social controversies of an era in a handful of characters. Chief among them are a widowed Scottish housekeeper who avidly follows the trial and a formerly enslaved Jamaican servant who testifies on behalf of the claimant. Smith is a talented critic as well as a novelist, and she finds ample opportunity to send up the literary culture of the time while reflecting on whose stories are told and whose are overlooked. “As always, it is a pleasure to be in Zadie Smith’s mind, which, as time goes on, is becoming contiguous with London itself,” Karan Mahajan writes in his review. “Dickens may be dead, but Smith, thankfully, is alive.” (*Penguin Press*)

EXCERPT: *A filthy boy stood on the doorstep. He might be scrubbed of all that dirt, eventually — but not of so many orange freckles. No more than 14, with skinny, unstable legs like a mari-*

onette, he kept pitching forward, shifting soot into the hall. Still, the woman who'd opened the door — easily amused, susceptible to beauty — found she couldn't despise him.

NORTH WOODS By Daniel Mason

Mason's ambitious, kaleidoscopic novel ushers readers over the threshold of a house in the wilds of western Massachusetts and leaves us there for 300 years and almost 400 pages. One after another, in sections interspersed with letters, poems, song lyrics, diary entries, medical case notes, vintage botanical illustrations and assorted ephemera not normally bound into the pages of a novel, we get to know the inhabitants of the place from colonial times to present day. There's an apple farmer, an abolitionist and a wealthy manufacturer. A pair of beetles. A landscape painter. A ghost. Their lives (and deaths) intersect, but mostly layer over each other in dazzling decoupage. (*Random House*)

EXCERPT: *They had come to the spot in the freshness of June, chased from the village by its people, following deer path through the forest, the valleys, the fern groves, and the quaking bogs.*

Fast they ran! Steam rose from the fens and meadows. Bramble tore at their clothing, shredding it to rags that hung about their shoulders. They crashed through thickets, hid in tree hollows and bear caves, rattling sticks before they slipped inside. They fled as if it were a child's game, as if they had made off with plunder. My plunder, he whispered, as he touched her lips.

NONFICTION

THE BEST MINDS By Jonathan Rosen

An inch-by-inch, pin-you-to-the-sofa reconstruction of the author's long friendship with Michael Laudor, who made headlines first as a Yale Law School graduate destigmatizing schizophrenia; then for stabbing his pregnant girlfriend to death with a kitchen knife, after which he was sent to a maximum-security psychiatric hospital. Drawing from clips, court and police records, legal and medical studies, interviews, diaries and Laudor's feverish writings, Rosen examines the porous line between brilliance and insanity, the complicated policy questions posed by deinstitutionalization and the ethical obligations of a community. "The Best Minds" is a thoughtfully constructed, deeply sourced indictment of a society that prioritizes profit, quick fixes and happy endings over the long slog of care. (*Penguin Press*)

EXCERPT: *I found the violent energy of Michael's house thrilling. When my sister and I played Monopoly, she did not buy Park Place if I already owned Boardwalk. I left her the yellow properties because she liked them. In the Laudor house, the brothers wrote their names on items in the fridge, and someone was always shouting, "That better be there when I come back!" or "Who drank my Dr Pepper?" Michael was at the bottom of the food chain but could still threaten to piss in the orange juice to teach the others a lesson.*

BOTTOMS UP AND THE DEVIL LAUGHS By Kerry Howley

Howley's account of the national security state and the people entangled in it includes fabulists, truth tellers, combatants, whistle-blowers. At the center is Reality Winner ("her real name, let's move past it now"), the National Security Agency contractor who was convicted under the Espionage Act for leaking classified information to The Intercept and sentenced to 63 months in prison. Howley's exploration of privacy and digital surveillance eventually lands her in the badlands of conspiracy theorists and QAnon. It's an arc that feels both startling and inevitable; of course a journey through the deep state would send her down the rabbit hole. The result is a book that is riveting and darkly funny and, in all senses of the word, unclassifiable. (*Knopf*)

EXCERPT: *In our century we are accustomed to stories that carry us from the physical to the digital. Once, there was a person in an office you could visit to make travel arrangements. That person smelled of wood chips, and the brown envelope of tickets he handed you was rough to the touch. It's not that the world is no longer physical now that you engage only with pulses of light via plastic and liquefied crystal polarized glass; liquefied crystal is as wholly matter as the travel agent's tie. It's our sensual world that is radically diminished. What does a screen smell like?*

FIRE WEATHER By John Vaillant

In 2016, raging wildfires consumed Fort McMurray in the Canadian province of Alberta. In the all-too-timely "Fire Weather," Vaillant details how the blaze started, how it grew, the damage it wrought — and the perfect storm of factors

that led to the catastrophe. We are introduced to firefighters, oil workers, meteorologists and insurance assessors. But the real protagonist here is the fire itself: an unruly and terrifying force with insatiable appetites. This book is both a real-life thriller and a moment-by-moment account of what happened — and why, as the climate changes and humans don't, it will continue to happen again and again. (*Knopf*)

EXCERPT: *On a hot afternoon in May 2016, five miles outside the young petrocity of Fort McMurray, Alberta, a small wildfire flickered and ventilated, rapidly expanding its territory through a mixed forest that hadn't seen fire in decades. This fire, farther off than the others, had started out doing what most human-caused wildfires do in their first hours of life: working its way tentatively from the point of ignition through grass, forest duff and dead leaves — a fire's equivalent to baby food.*

MASTER SLAVE HUSBAND WIFE By Ilyon Woo

In 1848, Ellen and William Craft, an enslaved couple in Georgia, made a daring escape north disguised as a sickly young white planter and his male slave — Ellen as the wealthy scion in a stovepipe hat, dark green glasses and a sling over her right arm to conceal her illiteracy. Improbably, despite close calls and determined slave catchers, the Crafts succeeded in their flight, going on to tour the abolitionist speaker circuit in England and to write a popular account of their journey. Their story, which a leading American abolitionist called "one of the most thrilling in the nation's annals," is remarkable enough. But Woo's immersive

rendering, which conjures the Crafts' escape in novelistic detail, is equally a feat — of research, storytelling, sympathy and insight. (*Simon & Schuster*)

EXCERPT: *It is predawn in Macon, Georgia, and at four o'clock, the city does not move. The air is windless, chill, barely stirring the high, dark pines. Cotton Avenue is quiet too, the giant weighing scales suspended, for the moment, behind closed warehouse doors. But the Ocmulgee River flows along the eastern shore, and so too, an enslaved couple moves, ready to transform, in a cabin in the shadow of a tall, white mansion.*

SOME PEOPLE NEED KILLING By Patricia Evangelista

This powerful book mostly covers the years between 2016 and 2022, when Rodrigo Duterte was president of the Philippines and pursued a murderous campaign of extrajudicial killings — EJKs for short. Such killings became so frequent that journalists like Evangelista, then a reporter for the independent news site Rappler, kept folders on their computers that were organized not by date but by hour of death. Offering the intimate disclosures of memoir and the larger context of Philippine history, Evangelista also pays close attention to language, and not only because she is a writer. Language can be used to communicate, to deny, to threaten, to cajole. It can propagate lies, but it also allows one to speak the truth. (*Random House*)

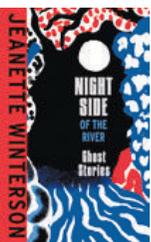
EXCERPT: *My job is to go to places where people die. I pack my bags, talk to the survivors, write my stories, then go home to wait for the next catastrophe. I don't wait very long.*

NIGHT SIDE OF THE RIVER

Ghost Stories

By Jeanette Winterson

Grove. 306 pp. \$27.



For Winterson, ghost stories are not old-fashioned or anachronistic in the modern world, but both cutting-edge and primal. In the introduction to her new collection, “Night Side of the River,” she recalls some of her own inexplicable experiences with the uncanny, from the ghost of a writer friend materializing on her computer screen to her childhood premonition of her grandmother’s passing. Religion, and specifically faith in an afterlife, “can be considered as humankind’s first disruptive start-up,” she writes. “What’s being disrupted is death.”

Not every story in the book is meant to be scary; some delight in the clever juxtaposition of ghost tropes and technology. In “Ghost in the Machine,” canny A.I. avatars represent unbodied consciousness, tempting humans with the promise of immortality in exchange for cryptocurrency. In the collection’s most tender and lyrical story, “The Undiscovered Country,” the dead narrator tries to reach out to his grieving male partner via shipping forecasts on the radio.

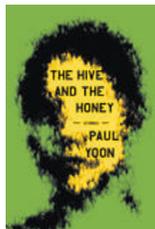
But Winterson’s strongest stories follow characters haunted not just by apparitions but by human bigotry and traditional, toxic gender roles. “The Door” is set in a 14th-century Scottish castle-turned-wedding-venue that’s inhabited by the spirits of a medieval queer couple who were killed by transphobic villagers. In a pair of linked stories, “A Fur Coat” and “Boots,” a young scammer couple swindle an earl into letting them live on his rural estate for the winter, rent-free — but their romantic “simple life” is interrupted by the property’s surly gardener, who teaches the indoorsy boyfriend how to hunt pheasant and “to keep an eye on that woman of yours.” The gardener, who may or may not be a ghost, goads Jonny’s misogyny (“She’s a whore,” he thinks. “Edwin’s right. Edwin’s with him, whistling softly”) until a climactic moment of violence. The ghosts hardly need to show up at all, Winterson knows; the terror’s already present in the misogyny of the living.

THE HIVE AND THE HONEY

Stories

By Paul Yoon

Marysue Rucci Books. 150 pp. \$26.



At first glance the seven stories in Yoon’s slim but exquisite collection “The Hive and the Honey” appear unrelated: A Korean American man from Queens is released from prison and travels to the rural hometown of his former cellmate looking for work; a woman who escaped North Korea decades ago is given one opportunity to send a message to the son she left behind; a

Korean immigrant couple who own a corner shop in London plan a seaside vacation. But each narrative is a piece of a larger puzzle that together form a portrait of Korean history and its diaspora that is breathtaking in scope, detailing the persistence of imperialism, war, poverty and dislocation across generations.

Throughout Yoon limns the tiny choices that ripple across his characters’ lives — a prison-yard fight, a refusal to help a mysterious runaway — before turning his lens on history. In the epistolary title story, set in 1881, a Cossack police officer stationed in a Korean settlement on the Russian border witnesses a local man’s brutal vengeance against his brother’s wife, who killed her husband after he raped and beat her night after night. But his action is not without consequences: A month later, the narrator writes to his uncle, “Almost every member of the settlement has been visited by what they are calling the apparition. It’s never the husband, always the wife. They describe her in the exact same way. A moving brightness. Anger. The same height and shape as the hanged woman.”

In “At the Post Station,” 17th-century Japanese soldiers in service to an Edo-period daimyo end up raising a Korean child whom their lord instructed them to kidnap in battle as an infant 10 years earlier, “a casualty of the invasion of Korea.” The final story, “Valley of the Moon,” is a masterpiece of emotional restraint in which a Korean War refugee returns to his home village in the South to start a farm, and takes in two orphans who are unaware of his murderous past.

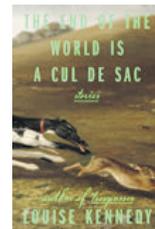
Criss-crossing the globe and the centuries, Yoon expertly telescopes between the long view and the close-up.

THE END OF THE WORLD IS A CUL DE SAC

Stories

By Louise Kennedy

Riverhead. 289 pp. \$28.



Injustice and harm, whether financial or interpersonal or both, loom over the lives of the working-class Irishwomen in Kennedy’s accomplished latest.

“In Silhouette” switches from second- to first-person narration as a manicurist reflects on the torture and killing of her older brother during the Troubles 40 years earlier; in “Belladonna,” a schoolgirl from Belfast delights in her job with an Irish herbalist until his wife’s erratic behavior and a mysterious bruise hint at trouble to come.

Kennedy knows how to ratchet up the tension by teasing out details. In the title story, a woman abandoned by her husband, a shady housing estate developer, is living off the dwindling supply of cash she’s found in his dresser. When a young man takes an interest in her (“You’re the gangster’s moll from down the hill,” he says), she can’t quite place where she’s seen him before, until it’s too late. On a date with him, she suddenly remembers the time her husband read about the young man in a local tabloid: “A kingpin, no less, he had said as he folded the paper up. The wee knacker is a kingpin.”

Occasionally the weight of the characters’ burdens threatens to overwhelm a story, teetering into hopelessness. “Brittle Things,” about a couple with a young neurodivergent son, feels suffocating in its depiction of the parents’ shame and denial. At a restaurant the mother worries constantly as she feeds her child breadsticks to calm him, feeling onlookers’ “eyes on her,” Kennedy writes. “It must have looked like she was training a puppy.” When she seeks answers online for why her son hasn’t started speaking at 5, her husband snarls, “Everything gets a label these days.”

But more often Kennedy’s droll wit and spot-on dialogue brilliantly illuminate her characters’ travails. The middle-aged friends in “Beyond Carthage” save up for an “exotic” vacation in Tunisia only to arrive amid torrential rains at “a purpose-built concrete resort arranged around a new marina, as neat and airless as an architect’s model.” Unable to get to the classical ruins of their dreams, they book a visit to what they think is a local spa, but turns out to be “a glorified brothel, with a clientele of desperate women who found themselves single at an age when being alone made them feel ridiculous,” Therese thinks. “She and Noreen fitted right in.”

Best Sellers

The New York Times

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

COMBINED PRINT AND E-BOOK BEST SELLERS

WEEKLY SALES PERIOD OF NOVEMBER 19-25

| THIS WEEK | LAST WEEK | Fiction | WEEKS ON LIST |
|-----------|-----------|---|---------------|
| 1 | 1 | IRON FLAME , by Rebecca Yarros. (Red Tower) The second book in the Emphyrean series. Violet Sorrengail's next round of training might require her to betray the man she loves. | 3 |
| 2 | 2 | FOURTH WING , by Rebecca Yarros. (Red Tower) Violet Sorrengail is urged by the commanding general, who also is her mother, to become a candidate for the elite dragon riders. | 30 |
| 3 | | INHERITANCE , by Nora Roberts. (St. Martin's) After the death of her mysterious uncle, a graphic designer receives an inheritance that stipulates she must live in a haunted Victorian house for at least three years. | 1 |
| 4 | | ALEX CROSS MUST DIE , by James Patterson. (Little, Brown) The 32nd book in the Alex Cross series. When a jet is gunned down, Cross goes back into action. | 1 |
| 5 | 6 | THE EXCHANGE , by John Grisham. (Doubleday) In a sequel to "The Firm," Mitch McDeere, who is now a partner at the world's largest law firm, gets caught up in a sinister plot. | 6 |
| 6 | 11 | LESSONS IN CHEMISTRY , by Bonnie Garmus. (Doubleday) A scientist and single mother living in California in the 1960s becomes a star on a TV cooking show. | 55 |
| 7 | 8 | THE HEAVEN & EARTH GROCERY STORE , by James McBride. (Riverhead) Secrets held by the residents of a dilapidated neighborhood come to life when a skeleton is found at the bottom of a well. | 4 |
| 8 | 14 | ICEBREAKER , by Hannah Grace. (Atria) Anastasia might need the help of the captain of a college hockey team to get on the Olympic figure skating team. | 23 |
| 9 | 3 | THE EDGE , by David Baldacci. (Grand Central) The second book in the 6:20 Man series. Travis Devine investigates the murder of the C.I.A. operative Jenny Silkwell in rural Maine. | 2 |
| 10 | | THE BALL AT VERSAILLES , by Danielle Steel. (Delacorte) Four young women are invited to an event, which may change their lives, at the Palace of Versailles in the summer of 1959. | 1 |
| 11 | 5 | THE LITTLE LIAR , by Mitch Albom. (Harper) The actions of an 11-year-old boy help facilitate the delivery of Jewish residents, including his family, to Auschwitz. | 2 |
| 12 | 9 | RESURRECTION WALK , by Michael Connelly. (Little, Brown) The seventh book in the Lincoln Lawyer series. Haller and Bosch team up to prove the innocence of a woman in prison for killing her husband. | 3 |
| 13 | | HOLLY , by Stephen King. (Scribner) The private detective Holly Gibney investigates whether a married pair of octogenarian academics had anything to do with Bonnie Dahl's disappearance. | 10 |
| 14 | 10 | ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE , by Anthony Doerr. (Scribner) The lives of a blind French girl and a gadget-obsessed German boy before and during World War II. | 87 |
| 15 | | TWISTED LOVE , by Ana Huang. (Bloom) The first book in the Twisted series. Secrets emerge when Ava explores things with her brother's best friend. | 4 |

| THIS WEEK | LAST WEEK | Nonfiction | WEEKS ON LIST |
|-----------|-----------|--|---------------|
| 1 | 2 | THE WOMAN IN ME , by Britney Spears. (Gallery) The Grammy Award-winning pop star details her personal and professional experiences, including the years she spent under a conservatorship overseen by her father. | 5 |
| 2 | 1 | FRIENDS, LOVERS, AND THE BIG TERRIBLE THING , by Matthew Perry. (Flatiron) The late actor, known for playing Chandler Bing on "Friends," shares stories from his childhood and his struggles with sobriety. | 20 |
| 3 | 5 | KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON , by David Grann. (Doubleday) The story of a murder spree in 1920s Oklahoma that targeted Osage Indians, whose lands contained oil. | 104 |
| 4 | 3 | MY NAME IS BARBRA , by Barbra Streisand. (Viking) The EGOT winner chronicles her journey in show business and reveals details about some of her personal relationships. | 3 |
| 5 | 9 | THE WAGER , by David Grann. (Doubleday) The survivors of a shipwrecked British vessel on a secret mission during an imperial war with Spain have different accounts of events. | 31 |
| 6 | 8 | PREQUEL , by Rachel Maddow. (Crown) The MSNBC host and co-author of "Bag Man" details a campaign to overthrow the U.S. government and install authoritarian rule prior to and during our involvement in World War II. | 6 |
| 7 | 10 | ELON MUSK , by Walter Isaacson. (Simon & Schuster) The author of "The Code Breaker" traces Musk's life and summarizes his work on electric vehicles, private space exploration and artificial intelligence. | 11 |
| 8 | 4 | MY EFFIN' LIFE , by Geddy Lee with Daniel Richler. (Harper) The musician known for his work with the band Rush chronicles his life as the child of Holocaust survivors and his time in the limelight. | 2 |
| 9 | | I'M GLAD MY MOM DIED , by Jennette McCurdy. (Simon & Schuster) The actress and filmmaker describes her eating disorders and difficult relationship with her mother. | 59 |
| 10 | 11 | THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE , by Bessel van der Kolk. (Penguin) How trauma affects the body and mind, and innovative treatments for recovery. | 170 |
| 11 | 7 | GHOSTS OF HONOLULU , by Mark Harmon and Leon Carroll Jr. (Harper Select) The story of a Japanese American naval intelligence agent, a Japanese spy and events in Hawaii before the start of World War II. | 2 |
| 12 | 15 | OUTLIVE , by Peter Attia with Bill Gifford. (Harmony) A look at recent scientific research on aging and longevity. | 35 |
| 13 | | BEHIND THE SEAMS , by Dolly Parton with Holly George-Warren. (Ten Speed) The country music legend shares stories about her favorite outfits she has worn on and off the stage. | 2 |
| 14 | | KILLING THE WITCHES , by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard. (St. Martin's) The 13th book in the conservative commentator's Killing series gives a portrayal of the events of 1692 and 1693 in Salem Village, Mass. | 7 |
| 15 | 12 | TEDDY AND BOOKER T. , by Brian Kilmeade. (Sentinel) The Fox News host gives an account of the relationship between President Theodore Roosevelt and Booker T. Washington. | 3 |

A dagger (†) indicates that some bookstores report receiving bulk orders. **ONLINE: E-BOOKS AND EXPANDED RANKINGS:** For more lists, more titles, more rankings and a full explanation of our methodology, visit www.nytimes.com/best-sellers.