

The Bookworm Presents the Indie Next List for June 2020

From: The Bookworm (bookwormomaha@shelf-awareness.com)

To:

Date: Thursday, June 4, 2020, 11:07 AM CDT



The best new books this month chosen by us and other independent booksellers across the country.

From Our Store

During times like these we're grateful for the solace and escape of a great book. We're grateful also for your support. We hope you and yours are all safe and sound, and we hope you love these books as much as we do.

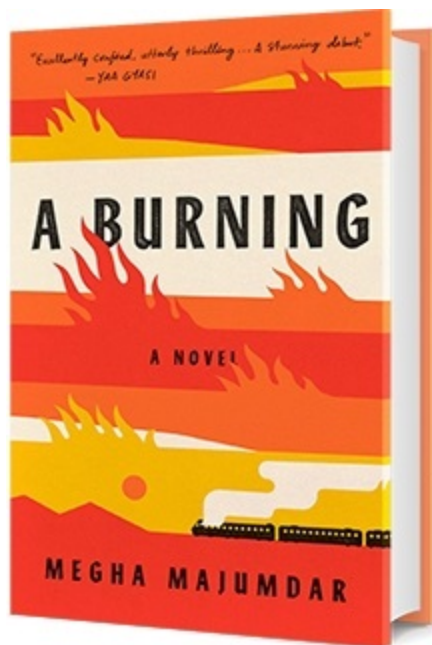
THIS MONTH'S #1 INDIE NEXT LIST PICK...

A Burning

By Megha Majumdar

(Knopf, 9780525658696, \$25.95)

"Majumdar's suspenseful narrative holds a mirror up to society at large, reflecting the lies people tell themselves to rationalize sacrificing morality for personal gain. Unintended consequences from an impulsive social media post explode against a backdrop of deep economic insecurities and centuries-old prejudices. A searing debut, this novel is timely and timeless. It packs a punch way above its weight. Brilliant."





THIS MONTH'S #1 INDIE NEXT LIST PICK AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Independent booksellers across the country have chosen *A Burning* by Megha Majumdar (Knopf) as their number-one pick for the June 2020 Indie Next List. *A Burning*, Majumdar's debut novel, follows three characters in contemporary India who each have different dreams: Jivan wants to rise to the middle class, PT Sir chases political power as his country barrels toward right-wing extremism, and Lovely seeks fame. After Jivan is accused of being connected to a recent terrorist attack, their loosely connected lives become intertwined in ways they never could have imagined, and all three must decide what it means to be complicit.



(photo: Elena Seibert)

Where did the idea for this book come from?

I was keeping track of the news and looking at what's happening in India, which is where I grew up. There's been a rise of the right wing in India, which, I think, is mirrored with the rise of the right elsewhere in Europe and certainly here in the U.S. I wanted to write from that place of fear and alarm and anger, while looking at this turn to the right. And I also wanted to explore how individuals pursue their dreams and hold onto who they are and what kind of life they want to have even when the systems and institutions around them defeat them at every turn.

Jivan's narrative touches on many current issues in the political world, from discussions of media corruption to the issue of effective counsel, all beginning with a simple post on Facebook. How did you craft her character?

I wanted to write about somebody who has a very earnest goal and is very determined to meet it. I also wanted to write about things that should be very simple, like getting a reliable water supply to your home or having a place to live that is not threatened and does not have to be guarded from demolition, which Jivan is not able to. She has to constantly fight to get these things and is defeated by the social institutions that are meant to serve her, like the water supply board and her lawyer who is assigned to her from the courts.

On the issue of effective counsel, did you have any recent cases in mind while writing?

A lot of this is inspired by what I read in the news, especially the lynching of people who are suspected of having killed a cow or eaten beef. A frightening thing that's happening in India is that Hindus consider the cow to be sacred, and they don't eat beef, but Muslims do eat beef; the sacredness of the cow has become this issue behind which Hindu nationalists have found themselves gathering with increasing fervor, so there's definitely been cases where people are attacked and killed because they're suspected of having eaten beef. I

wrote about a truck transporting cows being stopped and searched on the highway--that was inspired by stuff that was in the news.

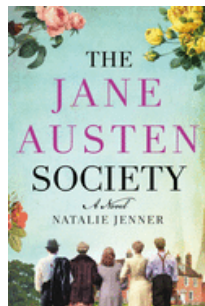
As an American reader, I couldn't help but notice the parallels between the society this book portrays and that of the U.S. Was this something you wanted to evoke?

Yes--while being very specifically about India, I also wanted it to ring true for an American reader....

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MORE INDIE NEXT LIST GREAT READS



The Jane Austen Society

By Natalie Jenner

(St. Martin's Press, 9781250248732, \$26.99)

"Utterly and wonderfully charming! The residents of Chawton, England, who seem to have nothing in common, come together by their love for the writings of Jane Austen. They quickly come to realize that true friendship depends on nothing but a caring heart and the willingness and courage to be open to others. This is a book to read again and again whenever your faith in humanity is threatened."

--Sandi Madore, Magnolia's Bookstore, Seattle, WA

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The Vanishing Half

By Brit Bennett

(Riverhead Books, 9780525536291, \$27)

"Brit Bennett's second novel broke my heart. She doesn't shy away from the sadness inherent in each character's life, yet she left me feeling better for having met all of them. I read *The Vanishing Half* with a sense of hope, despite my dread that terrible things might befall the characters. Desiree and Stella's story unfolds with a deft delicateness in a book that is astonishingly accomplished and sweeping, and yet so very intimate."

--Jamie Thomas, Women & Children First, Chicago, IL



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Beach Read

By Emily Henry

(Berkley, 9781984806734, \$16, trade paper)

"What do you get when you cross a disillusioned romance author with a Hemingway wannabe? A compulsively readable book where you kind of hope for your train to be delayed so you can spend a few more minutes with January and Gus. These two, saddled with writer's block, make a pact to write the other's genre. Literary snobbery is (rightfully) called out, and the two begin to navigate a friendship outside of writing as they explore the other's process. Reader, I loved it."

--Audrey Huang, Belmont Books, Belmont, MA

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The Second Home

By Christina Clancy

(St. Martin's Press, 9781250239341, \$26.99)

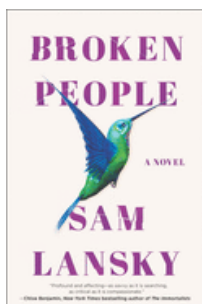
"While reading *The Second Home*, you can taste the saltwater of both the ocean and the tears of familial pain. Christina Clancy has written a beautiful story of family and the bonds that can be broken and somehow repaired again. The characters and location are so well-written, you'll feel like you've vacationed on the Cape for years with the Gordon family. Fans of Jane Hamilton and *We Were the Mulvaney*s will love *The Second Home*."

--Nancy Baenen, Arcadia Books, Spring Green, WI



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Broken People

By Sam Lansky

(Hanover Square Press, 9781335013934, \$27.99)

"*Broken People* tells one man's deeply personal story of confronting insecurities, obsessions, and frustrations while challenging many current cultural constructs. The pain and self-doubt will be recognized by many a reader, who will in equal measure cheer and thank Lansky for sharing a hopeful journey to forgiveness."

--Linda McLoughlin Figel, pages: a bookstore, Manhattan Beach, CA

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Catherine House

By Elisabeth Thomas

(Custom House, 9780062905659, \$27.99)

"Getting into Catherine House is the key to success. Spend three years here completely removed from the outside world, separate yourself from your life before Catherine House, and when the three years are over, you'll be unstoppable. That's the premise for this evocative and gripping gothic novel. Elisabeth Thomas' ability to create at once an elusive yet highly practical world makes her a stunning new literary voice. Inspired by secret societies, scientific experimentation, and the mysteriousness of finding ourselves, *Catherine House* is sure to haunt readers."

--Stephanie Skees, The Novel Neighbor, Webster Groves, MO



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Super Host

By Kate Russo

(G.P. Putnam's Sons, 9780593187708, \$27)

"What a delightful surprise! Instead of the usual woe-is-me, angsty, life's-got-me-down book, we have a fusty, recently divorced, middle-aged British artist who's forced to rent his house out on an Airbnb equivalent to make ends meet. But instead of feeling sorry for himself, he takes time to reassess things and slowly turns his life around. Told with great empathy and nice, droll humor, this is one we need for these crazy times."

--Pete Mock, McIntyre's Fine Books, Pittsboro, NC

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Pizza Girl

By Jean Kyoung Frazier

(Doubleday, 9780385545723, \$24.95)

"Jean Kyoung Frazier's *Pizza Girl* breathes honesty into narratives surrounding pregnancy and motherhood, and faces the desperate ambivalence that often accompanies these experiences but is left unspoken. We explore this through characters who cling to one another in an attempt to escape the disappointment and stresses of their own personal lives. *Pizza Girl* presents us with an important sentiment: You cannot outrun the fact that the people who created you will always be a part of you to some degree or another. But you can work to grasp the ways in which you manifest that into who you are as an individual."

--Jack Hawthorn, Raven Book Store, Lawrence, KS



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Something to Talk About

By Meryl Wilsner

(Berkley, 9780593102527, \$16, trade paper)

"*Something to Talk About* is an incredible debut about a Hollywood showrunner, Jo, and her assistant, Emma, who realize the tabloids may be correct in thinking there is something romantic between the two of them. The slowest of slow-burn romances in the best possible way, *Something to Talk About* touches on the #MeToo movement, the meaning of consent, and what it means to be a powerful woman in Hollywood."

--Isabella Ogbolumani, Buffalo Street Books, Ithaca, NY

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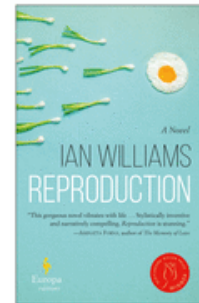
Reproduction

By Ian Williams

(Europa Editions, 9781609455750, \$18, trade paper)

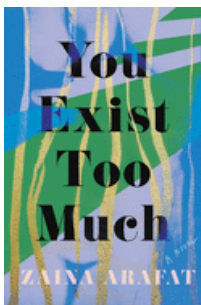
"I hardly know where to start with my need to talk about this book! *Reproduction* is a love story spanning three decades, from the early '80s to the 2000s, starting in Toronto, a city of vast differences in wealth and cultures. The unlikely couple (Edgar, a rich, idle German, and Felicia, a poor 19-year-old immigrant from the West Indies) meet and start an unconventional relationship, with lifelong consequences for them both. Don't let the 550-page count fool you: The writing style is the opposite of weighty and dense--it is mischievous, funny, moving, and full of stunning revelations about how strangers become family. Simply breathtaking!"

--Kelly Justice, Fountain Bookstore, Richmond, VA



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You Exist Too Much

By Zaina Arafat

(Catapult, 9781948226509, \$26)

"Zaina Arafat's *You Exist Too Much* is one of my favorite books of the year. This debut novel blew me away. Arafat's narrator is confident in her vulnerability; her desire to be seen and understood is visceral and uncomfortably familiar. The intoxication of unrequited love and the disconcerting feeling that can accompany settling down are recognizable, yet in Arafat's capable hands, I was transported. This book is for anyone who has struggled to fit into society's neat boxes, who has been frustrated when emotions don't follow a logical path, or who has been disappointed to find that sometimes the love of others isn't enough."

--Margaret Leonard, Dotters Books, Eau Claire, WI

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Red Dress in Black and White

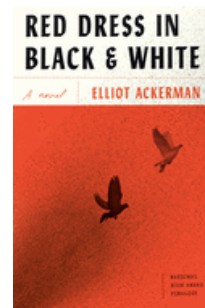
By Elliot Ackerman

(Knopf, 9780525521815, \$26.95)

"Over the latter half of the past decade, Elliot Ackerman has established himself as one of the great forces in modern literature. His novels and essays have provided

uncommon depth of understanding of a world in constant violent conflict, all written with a superb command of language. His newest novel once again delves into a world of corruption and deception, but this is done at a much more personal level as the crisis of a marriage in Istanbul reflects the underlying rot of society. Set in the course of one day and developed through flashbacks, the reader learns the toll on individuals and society in a world of deceit."

--Bill Cusumano, Square Books, Oxford, MS



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The Falling Woman

By Richard Farrell

(Algonquin Books, 9781616208578, \$26.95)

"Imagine finding out that you have terminal cancer and are faced with the decision of whether or not to seek treatment. The next thing you know, you are the only survivor of a plane crash and no one knows who you are or how you survived. Well-written and plausible, *The Falling Woman* is a story about a woman who decides to take control of the rest of her life in an unconventional way for the benefit of herself and her family."

--Lauren Zimmerman, The Writer's Block Bookstore, Winter Park, FL

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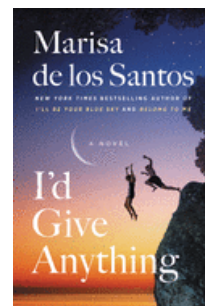
I'd Give Anything

By Marisa de los Santos

(William Morrow, 9780062844484, \$27.99)

"A beautifully written story of identity lost and found, friendship, the love of a mother for her child, and what happens when decades-old secrets are brought to light. Ginny is married with a teenage daughter when her husband's scandal threatens to bring her world crashing down around her. Strong female relationships take the lead as Ginny strives to protect her daughter and reckons with her past. Highly recommend."

--Jessica Nock, Main Street Books, Davidson, NC



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A Taste of Sage

By Yaffa S. Santos

(Harper Paperbacks, 9780062974846, \$15.99, trade paper)

"This book is a tasty, delicious treat! When you mix delicious food and hate-to-love romance in a book, you instantly have me hooked. Lumi Santana is a chef with the gift of synesthesia: She can feel a person's emotions just by tasting their cooking. When she opens a restaurant and it fails, she takes a sous chef position at a French

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restaurant with Julien Dax, a celebrated chef known for his good looks but bad attitude. Lumi can't stand Julien but tastes his cooking because it looks so irresistible, and when she's overcome with intense emotions she wonders if she wants more. If you are looking for something that's fun and tasty and will test your senses, you will enjoy this book."

--Deanna Bailey, Story on the Square, McDonough, GA



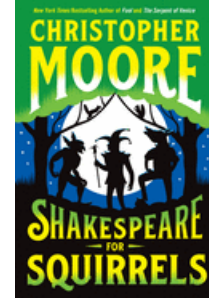
Shakespeare for Squirrels

By Christopher Moore

(William Morrow, 9780062434029, \$28.99)

"This is a crazy funny new take on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that will have you laughing out loud and getting goofy looks from the other people in the coffee shop. Christopher Moore is always entertaining, and this book is no exception--you will enjoy it from the first sentence to the very last. And, yes, there are squirrels in the story!"

--Julie Cameron, Beach Books, Seaside, OR



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The Lost Diary of Venice

By Margaux DeRoux

(Ballantine Books, 9781984819482, \$27)

"This narrative contains two different love stories, centuries apart, that are connected by both art and ancestry. It's hard to say which I preferred: the modern tale of an almost-reclusive book restorer and an artist client unhappy in his marriage, or the story from Renaissance Venice of the client's ancestor, a respected artist and a beautiful courtesan to one of the city's leading luminaries. Woven together, they form an intriguing tapestry of love, family, history, and art."

--Tanya Parker Mills, The Book Bungalow, St. George, UT

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Weird but Normal: Essays

By Mia Mercado

(HarperOne, 9780062942807, \$17.99, trade paper)

"I adored this book! I laughed until I cried, I cringed in shared embarrassment, and I read entire essays out loud to anyone who would listen. Although almost any reader will find something to relate to in Mia Mercado's writing, she will speak directly to the hearts of millennials who still remember their hilariously terrible first AIM screennames. For all the laughs, *Weird but Normal* also delivers heartfelt truths about issues ranging from racism in America to depression. Can't wait to see what Mercado does next!"

--Kate Storhoff, Bookmarks, Winston-Salem, NC



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The Dragons, the Giant, the Women: A Memoir



By Wayétu Moore

(Graywolf Press, 9781644450314, \$26)

"At the age of five, Wayetu Moore and her family were forced to flee Liberia on foot in the midst of a brutal civil war. As Wayetu's father and elders attempt to get her and her sisters to safety by traversing a deadly and unforgiving landscape, Wayetu's mother, who is attending college in New York, waits to hear from her family--until she can wait no longer. Moore makes brilliant creative choices with structure, voice, and point of view in this deeply moving, lovingly crafted, and unique memoir. Her story is both a thoughtful examination of the emigrant experience and an inspiring testament to the incredible power of familial love."

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--Brian Wraight, Wesleyan R.J. Julia Bookstore, Middletown, CT



Bunny

By Mona Awad

(Penguin Books, 9780525559757, \$17)

"Mona Awad tells a harrowing story of a writer trying to overcome her writer's block while simultaneously refusing to look deeper into herself or acknowledge her own needs or desires. This lack of self-knowledge leads her to a friendship with a group of young MFA students who are always 'workshopping'...with disastrous consequences. The writing feels cinematic at times, moody and illustrative. Home, identity, love (both romantic and platonic), inner (and outer) demons, and academic elitism all play a part in this spectacle of creation and destruction. Awad creates a kind of magic that changes with the wind, a contemporary Prometheus tale."

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--Katrina Feraco, The Toadstool Bookshop, Keene, NH

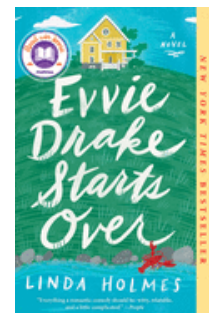


Evvie Drake Starts Over

By Linda Holmes

(Ballantine Books, 9780525619260, \$17)

"Evvie Drake is young and newly widowed, but no one knows that on the day her husband died, she had finally worked up the nerve to leave him. Dean Tenney is a major league baseball pitcher who has inexplicably lost the talent that made him a star. When Dean moves to Evvie's small town to escape the humiliating sports headlines, their friendship proves to be just what both of them need. This is an absolute treasure of a novel--big-hearted, funny, sweet, and utterly satisfying. I cannot wait to sell this charming gem."



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--Emilie Sommer, East City Bookshop, Washington, DC



Family of Origin



By CJ Hauser

(Anchor, 9780525565390, \$16)

"CJ Hauser has written a completely original novel featuring an eccentric cast of characters who distract themselves from the ignorance and squalor of the past, their failures and fears, and all the warning signs of imminent end times. It's also about a duck with joie de vivre. A comedy of maladaptive manners, *Family of Origin* is hard to pin down and even harder to put down. Hauser's uncommonly funny and moving novel transported me out of my day-to-day life while letting me see the world as it is but also anew."

--John Francisconi, Bank Square Books, Mystic, CT

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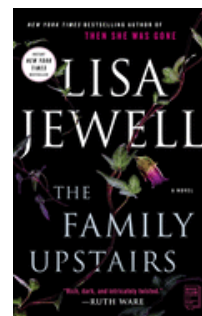
The Family Upstairs

By Lisa Jewell

(Atria Books, 9781501190117, \$17)

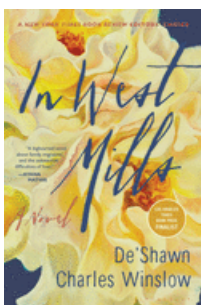
"Just having children does not make you a parent, and that truth is apparent in the pages of this book. A wealthy family in London seems to have everything--a great home, private schools, mentions in the press--but it is somehow not enough. Once you open the door to the unknown, can it really ever be closed? The influence of the charismatic egotist is told with flawless accuracy and stark images. In these situations, the children suffer the most; they are powerless and easy prey. This book details an unfolding family crisis where abuse can take many forms. Hard to put down and with several huge twists, *The Family Upstairs* will satisfy even the most discriminating fan. Lisa Jewell has exceeded all expectations!"

--Jackie Willey, Fiction Addiction, Greenville, SC



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In West Mills

By De'Shawn Charles Winslow

(Bloomsbury Publishing, 9781635575286, \$16)

"*In West Mills* is a beautiful and cohesive debut. Reminiscent of Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Winslow has written the character of Knot Centre, a woman who speaks her mind--for better or for worse--and who is passionate, intelligent, and stubborn to a fault. The events of the novel take place from the 1940s to the 1980s, allowing readers to watch as fateful decisions and their consequences play out for the city's citizens. In such a small town, secrets weigh heavy and threaten to tear people apart, but Winslow's writing is exuberant and full of life. His characters are never fully taken under by their sorrows--a rarity in literature today."

--Margaret Leonard, Dotters Books, Eau Claire, WI

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Inland

By Téa Obreht

(Random House Trade Paperbacks, 9780812982756, \$18)

"Man, I could live my whole life inside this novel and be perfectly happy. Téa Obreht is the real thing. *Inland* has the stern gorgeousness of *Blood Meridian*, the cinematic perfection of *Station Eleven*, the fantasia-like atmosphere of *Cloud Atlas*, and the

deep-heartedness of *The Winter Soldier*. This is the sort of novel that makes people want to get up and soldier on. I really loved this book."

--Erica Eisdorfer, Flyleaf Books, Chapel Hill, NC



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Leading Men

By Christopher Castellani

(Penguin Books, 9780525559078, \$17)

"Make yourself an Aperol Spritz (or an entire pitcher) and find a comfortable chair because you're going to spend the afternoon reading *Leading Men* by Christopher Castellani. Tennessee Williams was a genius--charming, brilliant, and powerful--but he was hell to live with and even harder to love, a challenge even for the man who loved him best, Frank Merlo. Castellani's fourth novel brings to life not only their fraught relationship, but also the gritty glamour of their time. It's a rich and gorgeous party whose guests include Truman Capote, Luchino Visconti, and you. Fortunately, you have that Aperol Spritz. Salut!"

--Michael Barnard, Rakestraw Books, Danville, CA



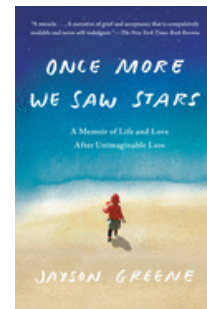
Once More We Saw Stars: A Memoir of Life and Love After Unimaginable Loss

By Jayson Greene

(Vintage, 9780525435341, \$16)

"Some memoirs transcend the author's experience and become universal--I always thought of those as the good ones. Then I read Jayson Greene's memoir of loss and grief and was forced to confront the fullness of his individual humanity in a way I hadn't experienced before. Grief is distinctly personal and Greene's story of the death of his two-year-old child is simply unfathomable to me, yet his honesty and willingness to sit in the fearfulness of this new life resonated deeply. *Once More We Saw Stars* is a wonderfully written memoir that connects on the most basic human level.

--Michelle Cavalier, Cavalier House Books, Denham Springs, LA



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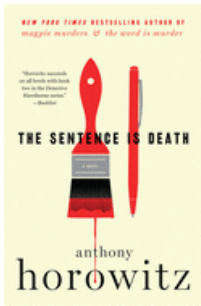


The Sentence Is Death

By Anthony Horowitz

(Harper Perennial, 9780062676849, \$16.99)

"I really love this series by Anthony Horowitz. The mystery behind the murders is so expertly plotted and layered that you could make a case for any suspect. In this book, a divorce lawyer is found dead in his home after being beaten over the head



with a VERY expensive bottle of wine, and the number 182 is painted on his wall. When Private Investigator Daniel Hawthorne drives onto the set of Horowitz's TV show shoot, Horowitz has no choice but to follow his lead and write about the case. As always, I'm anxiously awaiting the next in this series."

--Nichole Cousins, Still North Books & Bar, Hanover, NH

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This Tender Land

By William Kent Krueger

(Atria Books, 9781476749303, \$17)

"The work of a master storyteller about the making of a young storyteller, *This Tender Land* is a coming-of-age novel for the ages. It begins in an isolated Dickensian boarding school in Minnesota during the early years of the Depression, then morphs into the story of four runaways in a canoe à la *Huckleberry Finn*. On the run from their school headmistress and the law, they encounter other wanderers and escapees from life as they canoe towards St. Louis to find their only known relative and a possible home. Odie, his brother Albert, their schoolmate Mose, and newly orphaned Emmy are unforgettable characters in an unforgiving era. Epic, thrilling, and beautifully written, this is storytelling at its very best."

--Renee Barker, The Bookstore of Glen Ellyn, Glen Ellyn, IL



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The Whisper Man

By Alex North

(Celadon Books, 9781250318008, \$16.99)

"A creepy, sinister, can't-put-it-down story of a town that survives and then relives the crimes of a child serial killer. For those who love psychological thrillers (with the absence of gore but plenty of plot twists and turns), *The Whisper Man* is a grand ride into the minds of those who kill and those who are victims. You'll find yourself looking over your shoulder when reading this book. Don't stand too close to an open window..."

--Helen Gregory, Maria's Bookshop, Durango, CO

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Whisper Network

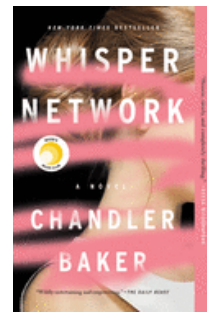
By Chandler Baker

(Flatiron Books, 9781250205360, \$16.99)

"It was inevitable that, with the #MeToo movement sweeping America, someone would pen a novel encompassing the realities of working women in our country. What I wasn't prepared for, however, was the degree to which I'd become involved in *Whisper Network*, racing home to finish it because I loved the story. I haven't felt this

strength of solidarity with other women since the march in D.C. I closed this book with a resounding, 'Oh, hell yes!'"

--Jill Miner, Saturn Booksellers, Gaylord, MI



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