

The New York Times

Book Review

SEPTEMBER 24, 2023



Mr. X

“Elon Musk,” Walter Isaacson’s biography of the billionaire entrepreneur, depicts a mercurial “man-child” with grandiose ambitions and an ego to match. BY JENNIFER SZALAI



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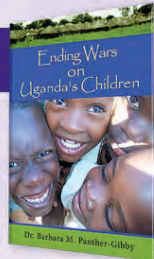
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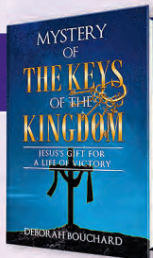
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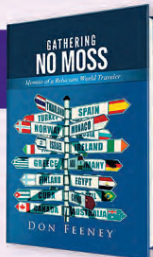
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Memoir of a Reluctant World Traveler
Don Feeny

Lived, worked, and played in more than fifty countries on five continents, Don Feeny penned a memoir as a reluctant traveler for three decades in *Gathering No Moss*.

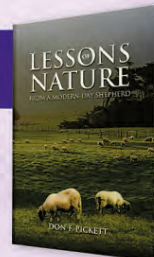
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From a Modern-Day Shepherd
Don F. Pickett

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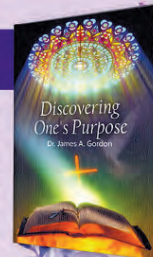
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Book Review

The New York Times
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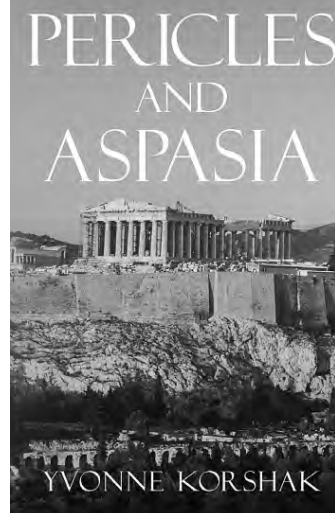
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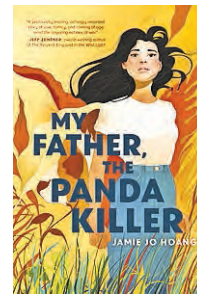


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Newly Published / Y.A.



MY FATHER, THE PANDA KILLER, by Jamie Jo Hoang. (Crown Books for Young Readers, \$18.99.) This Y.A. novel explores the lingering effects of war through two timelines: In 1999, a Vietnamese American teenager struggles to deal with her father's abuse, and then in 1975, that father, as a boy, embarks on a traumatic migration from a war-stricken Vietnam.



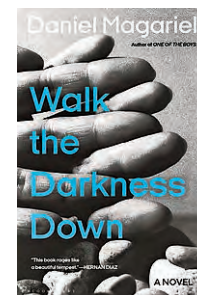
HOUSE OF MARIONNE, by J. Elle. (Razorbill, \$19.99.) A teenager with dark magic fears she'll be killed if her powers are discovered, so she decides to hide undercover as a debutante in a boarding school's secret society — but it poses more of a danger than she initially anticipated.

FOXGLOVE, by Adalyn Grace. (Little, Brown Young Readers, \$19.99.) The second book in Grace's gothic fantasy Belladonna series, this novel follows a young woman torn between Fate and Death as she fights to save the lord of Thorn Grove, who has been falsely accused of murder.

RYAN AND AVERY, by David Levithan. (Knopf Books for Young Readers, \$18.99.) Levithan's latest young adult novel follows two queer teenagers on their first 10 dates, as they fall in love and face a variety of personal and social challenges.

...Also Out Now

BEFORE THE MOVEMENT: The Hidden History of Black Civil Rights, by Dylan C. Penningroth. (Liveright, \$35.) A historian puts forth an in-depth study of the creative and resourceful ways Black people worked around the American legal system's racism before the civil rights movement.



WALK THE DARKNESS DOWN, by Daniel Magariel. (Bloomsbury, \$27.99.) Two years ago, Les and Marlene lost their daughter. Now, Les drowns his pain at sea as a commercial fisherman while Marlene attempts to mother Josie, a young sex worker in their hometown. This melancholy novel delicately charts their paths back to each other, and maybe forward.

UNRELIABLE NARRATOR: Me, Myself and Impostor Syndrome, by Aparna Nancherla. (Viking, \$28.) The stand-up comedian's sharp memoir recounts her experiences navigating impostor syndrome, creating art during the pandemic and grappling with her depression — named Brenda — in its many forms.

THE COURT AT WAR: FDR, His Justices, and the World They Made, by Cliff Sloan. (PublicAffairs, \$32.50.) This legal history takes stock of the Supreme Court during World War II, by which time Roosevelt had appointed seven of its nine justices. Sloan shows how a court hardly apolitical and largely loyal to F.D.R. was nevertheless divided on the issues of the day.



RAPHAËLLE MACARON

Appalachian Representation

TO THE EDITOR:

I read with great anticipation Barbara Kingsolver's "Read Your Way Through Appalachia" (Sept. 17). As the president of the Writers Association of Northern Appalachia, the co-chair of the Northern Appalachian Network and a writer from West Virginia, I was thrilled to see one of my favorite authors talk about fantastic books from the region. Her book "Demon Copperhead" was my favorite read of 2022 largely because of its deft and sensitive portrayal of Appalachians, which is rare for mainstream books.

Unfortunately, like so many others who recommend books from Appalachia, Kingsolver has largely forgotten about those of us in northern Appalachia, which is composed of parts of West Virginia, Ohio, Maryland, New York and Pennsylvania. It is unreasonable to imagine any list of Appalachian books to be exhaustive, but the absence of such canonical authors from the north as Rebecca Harding Davis, Thomas Bell, Stanley Plumly, Chuck Kinder, Jennifer Haigh, Tawni O'Dell, Donald Ray Pollock and Scott McClanahan is more of the same exclusion that northern Appalachians have experienced all along. My short list doesn't even begin to cover the robust literary scene that is Pittsburgh. (Yes, Pittsburgh is an Appalachian city.)

It starts, of course, with the pronunciation of Appalachia, which Kingsolver references: "For starters, outsiders call it 'Appal-AY-sha,' a mispronunciation that hurts our ears. It's 'Appal-achia.' As in, 'If you keep that up, I'll throw this apple atcha.'" For those of us who live in northern Appalachia, this is another reminder that because we pronounce Appalachia in a variety of ways — "Appal-AY-sha," "Appal-AY-cha," among others — that we are not true Appalachians, despite our

shared history and hospitality and benevolence to strangers.

I am hoping that my letter reaches readers who want to learn more about Appalachia and our literature. As an advocate for northern Appalachian writers, I often feel like we are Whos down in Whoville crying out to Horton: "We are here! We are here!"

CHRISTINA FISANICK
WHEELING, W.VA.

CORRECTION

The table of contents last Sunday misspelled the given name of the reviewer of the novel "Vanishing Maps." She is Gabriela Garcia, not Gabriel.

BOOKS@NYTIMES.COM

WHAT OUR READERS ARE READING

"**GENEVA**, by Richard Armitage, swept me right into its exciting, fast-paced mystery," writes Blair Boudreau. "It was difficult to put down and it had a satisfying ending, which many of us need in these difficult times."

Gregory Campora is reading **THE PURSUIT OF LOVE**, by Nancy Freeman-Mitford: "It's insanely good."

"My friend introduced me to the **AGATHA RAISIN** mysteries of M.C. Beaton," Shelley Levitt writes. "The main character is a wannabe detective living in the Cotswolds. She is always getting into trouble with local police detectives for meddling in the area's murder investigations, but often resolves the murders herself."

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10

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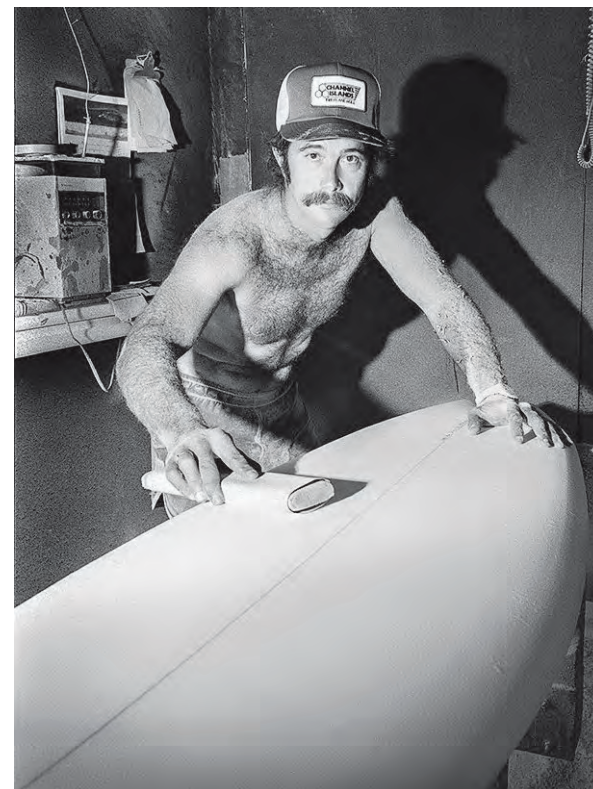
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You win some, you lose some, you break some. Sam George with a pair of casualties.



Al Merrick shaping a surfboard.



A great white shark gears up for a ride on a flatbed truck.



A live-in van parked near Santa Barbara's Hammonds Reef.



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