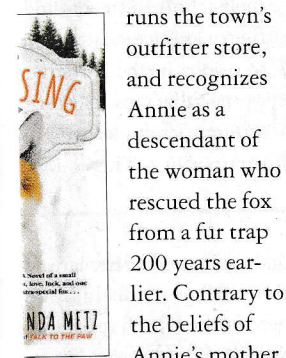


In "One Way It Could" psychiatrist looks back at the of addiction in her stepson, a defiant child whose biological father didn't teach him to respect boundaries. Metz's straightforward style is intimate with the stark circumstances. Each chapter is an uncomfortable journey, buoyed by a convincing (Nov.)



g (Kensington, \$9.95 trade paper, 1-4967-2809-8) features a legendary fox guides the hearted residents of a sleepy town. Metz's uplifting outing (see *Paw*). A common supply on the Appalachian Trail, the fox Crossing embraces the fate-tipped fox whose aid to grant good fortune. As Annie Hatherley, who



runs the town's outfitter store, and recognizes Annie as a descendant of the woman who rescued the fox from a fur trap 200 years earlier. Contrary to the beliefs of Annie's mother, Annie doesn't believe in having a fulfilling life. When she meets out-of-control, who is woefully wrong, the dangerous parts of the world end up saving his life with fox. Nick sticks around, rates, and the two explore traction to one another. Touches other lives in a series of engrossing stories. Banana gets a surprise stranger daughter and; Annie's friend Chloe is one too many times; and Shoo-Fly finds purpose in a used dog. Metz's stories of pack a genuine emotional *Robin Rue, Writer's House.*



Needs Work

John L. Sheppard. Paragraph Line, \$8.99 trade paper (186p) ISBN 978-1-942086-13-0

Sheppard (*Small Town Punk*) follows an ingratiating sad-sack hero, Phil Derleth, in this episodic outing about a man starting over. Phil's wife threw him out of their Chicago home, prompting him to move back to Cleveland with his widower dad, Larry, who calls him "dummy." At 27, Phil has been out of the Army for a few years, having spent most of his four years of service recovering from a traumatic brain injury suffered during deployment in Iraq. Phil gets a job doing an overnight shift at a discount department store, Buy and Bye, where mopping up a pool of blood in one of the bathrooms leads to a nightmarish flashback. Phil's injury continues to cause visions, which range from his recently deceased mother to a stray dog that shape-shifts into one of his army buddies. While Sheppard shines at locating telling details and during digressions, as when he depicts Larry's trip to Chicago or imagines a TV sitcom called *That Darned Dad*, the plot remains loose and meandering. Though the novel feels underdone, as if Sheppard is approaching a point, but has not quite reached it yet, there's ample evidence of the author's talent. (*Self-published*)



Mystery/Thriller

★ **Take It Back**

Kia Abdullah. St. Martin's, \$27.99 (304p) ISBN 978-1-250-27301-7

Barrister Zara Kaleel, the heroine of this riveting, thought-provoking legal thriller from British author Abdullah (*Child's Play*), is a rising star in a prominent London law firm, until she decides to do something more meaningful: become an advocate for sexual abuse victims. Her first case in this new role involves four teenage boys, all English Muslims from East London, accused by their classmate Jodie Wolfe, a 16-year-old disabled white girl, of rape. That Zara is an English Muslim herself advocating against Muslim boys guarantees front-page attention. Zara is torn by her family's dismay over her role and her firm belief in Jodie, even though Jodie's alcoholic mother and best friend don't believe the girl. The residents

of East London, immigrants and poor native born, each come across as distinct individuals. In the courtroom, shifting testimony and constant new revelations reveal the humanity—good and bad—of all participants. Readers may find themselves believing one side, then the other, up until the shocking ending. Abdullah is definitely a writer to watch. *Agent: Jessica Faust, BookEnds Literary. (Dec.)*



A Galway Epiphany: A Jack Taylor Novel

Ken Bruen. Mysterious, \$26 (400p) ISBN 978-0-8021-5703-4

At the start of Edgar finalist Bruen's overly busy 16th Jack Taylor novel (after 2019's *Galway Girl*), the former Garda and Galway PI is struck by a truck and ends up comatose in a hospital. Upon awakening weeks later, he finds Galway obsessed with miracles after the Virgin Mary seems to have appeared to a pair of refugee children on the city's waterfront. (That Jack comes out of his coma with no mental confusion or lasting physical damage is deemed another miracle.) When the "miracle children" disappear, the resulting public clamor leads a skeptical representative of the Vatican investigating the miracle to commission Jack to find the children. Meanwhile, a number of other cases—a California con artist, a cyberbully, a homicidal serial arsonist, and more—demand his attention. Throughout it all, Jack, disillusioned and angry at the world, struggles to pull himself together after his daughter's murder in *Galway Girl*, but the violent conclusion leaves him in a darker place than ever. The sheer number of individual plot threads means that none are fully developed, and their resolutions come too easily. The result is a readable but not particularly memorable entry in an otherwise strong series. *Agent: Lukas Ortiz, Philip G. Spitzer Literary. (Nov.)*



Hidden in Plain Sight

Jeffrey Archer. St. Martin's, \$28.99 (304p) ISBN 978-1-250-20078-5

Set in 1986, bestseller Archer's disappointing sequel to 2019's *Nothing Ventured* finds London police officer William Warwick promoted to detective sergeant and transferred to a new specialized unit, "whose sole purpose will be to track down one particular drug baron and take him

out." Though this drug Viper, controls half of the trade, the police know about him, including Warwick's new assignment to the trial of Miles Faulkner, previously convicted of fraud with cocaine with the intent happens, the Crown's co-warwick's father, Sir Julian, attorney, aided by Warwick. Meanwhile, Warwick is married. Faulkner shows and interrupts the ceremony. Warwick slept with his. Fortunately, Christina is that Warwick actually advances. More contrived thin characters do nothing implausible plot, and a doesn't help. This won't Archer's better works. (



Murder in Season: A Murder, She Wrote

Jessica Fletcher and Jonathan Lethbridge. Crime, \$26 (304p) ISBN 978-1-4735-1111-1

Land's satisfying sixth Wrote mystery (after *T*

★ **Moonfall**

Anthony Horowitz. HarperCollins, \$27.99 (304p) ISBN 978-0-06-290000-0

Bestseller Horowitz's *Magpie Murders* is her previous work, published by his publisher, discussing a struggling hotel in Lawrence and Pauline Hall, an upscale Suffolk finding their missing shortly after calling had been done. At Branlow Hall a decade was bludgeoned to Stefan Codrescu, was evidence. Cecily told innocence after read deceased Alan Conway fee and travels to Branlow Parris's death and a baffling puzzle with the reader and playing *Agent: Jonathan Lloy*

Reviews

Fiction

★ Sergeant Salinger

Jerome Charyn. Bellevue, \$28.99 (288p)
ISBN 978-1-942658-82-5

In this literary tour de force, Charyn (*The Perilous Adventures of the Cowboy King*) recreates J.D. Salinger's experiences during WWII. The book begins with a bravura set-piece in which Sonny Salinger goes on a date with teen debutante Oona O'Neill to the Stork Club, where he rubs shoulders with columnist Walter Winchell, gangster Frank Costello, and his idol, Ernest Hemingway, before returning home to receive his draft notification. Assigned to the Army's much-feared Counter Intelligence Corps, Sonny storms Utah Beach on D-Day, helps to liberate Paris, survives the Battle of the Bulge, and frees the inmates of a concentration camp, all the while carrying with him the work-in-progress that will one day become his masterpiece. One year after the end of the war and a nervous breakdown, Sonny returns home to his family in New York, accompanied by a German war bride and suffering from writer's block. Charyn makes a persuasive case for how America's most famous reclusive author endured the horrors of war and carried these memories into his postwar writing career. With standout scenes—Sonny's disastrous bar mitzvah, a confrontation with Hemingway at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, a breakthrough in Bloomingdale's bargain basement—Charyn vividly portrays Sonny's journey from slick short story writer to suffering artist. The winning result humanizes a legend. (Jan.)

Ordesa

Manuel Vilas, trans. from the Spanish by Andrea Rosenberg. Riverhead, \$28 (304p)
ISBN 978-0-593-08404-5

Ordesa, a park deep in the Pyrenees, looms over the psyche of Spanish writer Vilas's unnamed narrator in this vibrant English-language debut. The site of the narrator's childhood vacations, Ordesa is also home to Monte Perdido—"the lost



A London barrister prosecutes four English Muslim boys for rape in Kia Abdullah's *Take It Back* (reviewed on p. 36).

mountain"—a symbol for the loss of his larger-than-life father, who died 10 years earlier, when the narrator was 43. Now living alone in Barcelona, the narrator, whose mother died a year before, is divorced from his wife and estranged from his children, and clings to what he can: an unremarkable career as a writer, tenuous sobriety after years of heavy drinking, and vivid memories of his parents. Though crackling with life, his thoughts are morbid and dominated by a pervasive sense of loss as he reflects on the erosion of bodies and familial bonds, the material and spiritual decline of the Spanish middle class, and even the loss of memory itself: "My memory constructs a catastrophic vision of the world," he narrates midway through the novel. Despite lacking a central arc, the novel hums with magnetic and lively scenes. This is an indelible portrait of a man facing the costs of a life dedicated to remembrance. (Dec.)

Crossshairs

Catherine Hernandez. Atria, \$27 (272p)
ISBN 978-1-9821-4602-3

Hernandez's searing if heavy-handed blend of dystopian fiction and social commentary (after *Scarborough*) conceives of a near future in which environmental disaster leads to a white supremacist regime in Canada. Kay, born Keith Nopuente, describes himself as a "Queer Femme Jamaican Filipino man" and is one of the "Others"—including LGBTQ, POC, and disabled people—who are being marginalized in a campaign to

restore Canada to "order" and "tranquility" in the wake of floods and food shortages that caused mass displacement in the country. The Renovation, a government-sanctioned program, deploys special forces called the Boots to strip the Others of their rights in the name of providing food and shelter, rounding them up and forcing them to work in labor camps—or killing them for resisting. Kay hides out first in Toronto with Liv, a white, queer ally of the Resistance, and then at Beck's, another queer, white ally. As the characters band together, they take steps toward a drastic action to gain the country's attention. Hernandez takes a scathing look at discrimination and capitalism in her disturbingly familiar look at Western culture, but, unfortunately, this often reads more like a how-to-ally manual than a novel. While the premise is well-imagined, the story suffers from a lack of nuance. Agent: Marilyn Biderman, Transatlantic Agency. (Dec.)

Aphasia

Mauro Javier Cárdenas. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$26 (208p) ISBN 978-0-374-25786-6

Cárdenas follows up his wild and intelligent *The Revolutionaries Try Again* with an exercise in extreme navel-gazing narrated by Antonio Jose Jiménez, a Colombian immigrant to the U.S. who describes himself as "a moron who allowed himself to be conned by my mother." Antonio's ex-wife has left for the Czech Republic with their two young daughters, spurring Antonio into a long reconsideration of his circumstances. He's an analyst at an insurance company, and lately he's been using a dating website for would-be sugar daddies as a way to meet women. He also has to deal with his mentally ill sister, who is convinced her family is conspiring against her with Barack Obama. But mostly, Antonio reads to keep his mind off of things: Borges, Bruno Schulz, Silvina Ocampo, László Krasznahorkai, and Thomas Bernhard, a cavalcade of writers' writers that leads Antonio to transcribe their sentences and even attempt a style parody here and there. Finally, he hopes to unravel the story of his parents and childhood in Bogotá, but new memories complicate what he thinks he knows of his past. Few if any of these potentially intriguing plotlines are resolved, leaving