

Featuring 488 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA Books

KIRKUS

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REVIEWS

Tomi Adeyemi's bestselling YA novel, *Children of Blood and Bone*, is powerful, captivating, and raw. The novel is a fantasy that has a thoroughly modern resonance: The novel is about "real people, real pain, and the real problems that we are facing today," she says. "I don't get to just live in a fantasy, nor do the people who look like me."

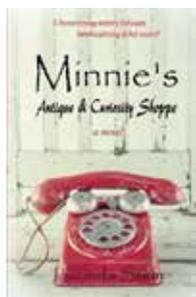
p. 176



and small-time criminals named Rodney and Eugene Rickart, realize who turned them in and begin taking their revenge on Grant with increasingly aggressive acts of destruction. Even worse, Lenore Patton—spurned by Grant’s rejections of her advances—agrees to represent them in a harassment complaint against Grant. What began as a simple matter of mailbox vandalism quickly balloons into something far more sinister, and it won’t end before multiple people are dead.

Smelser writes in clean, expressive prose that captures Grant’s increasing paranoia as the plot develops: “I suddenly realized I had no idea what kind of guys these were or what they were capable of. Irresponsible, hard-drinking rednecks, yes. But were they dangerous?” Grant’s insecurity is a great driving force of the narrative and lends some depth to a character who might have otherwise seemed contrived. The author has a knack for getting quickly at characters’ deeper motivations, allowing the reader to connect with them in a way that is not often seen in a legal thriller. Smelser is comfortable allowing his cast to be flawed in mundane ways, which lends the story a whiff of disturbing inevitability. The exception is perhaps the flat, manipulative Lenore Patton. Smelser guides the plot in interesting directions from start to finish, as small decisions and secrets compound to unleash unanticipated and tragic ramifications. Once the reader begins listening to Grant’s tale, they may not be able to walk away.

A controlled, entertaining legal thriller about a lawyer dragged into a lawless conflict.



MINNIE’S ANTIQUE & CURIOSITY SHOPPE

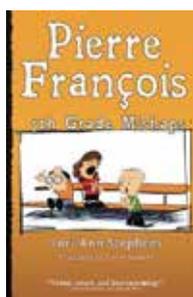
Stein, Lucinda
CreateSpace (346 pp.)
\$15.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book
Feb. 4, 2018
978-1-979935-02-9

In this novel, a young woman, her mother, and a little girl get a second chance at life in a fitting venue: a second-hand shop.

After divorcing her cheating husband, Liza Murphy leaves Minneapolis and returns in defeat to her hometown of Watertown, South Dakota. There, her hippie mother, Minnie, is living in the makeshift apartment above her business, Minnie’s Antique & Curiosity Shoppe. The shop was a source of embarrassment to Liza as a kid, and she’s not happy to be moving back in. But the customers and the assortment of knickknacks they find are charming. Her mother is especially taken with Raymond Standing Rock, a member of the Dakota Sioux tribe, who comes by to sell her handmade jewelry. While Liza saves up for her own place, she reunites with friends, takes up painting, and explores lukewarm feelings for several men, including her kind boss, Dr. Kent Swenson; her sophisticated art instructor, Beau Bartlett; and even her high school crush, Jim Bailey—though he’s married to her friend Julie. Meanwhile, her ex-husband, Taylor, makes a halfhearted effort to win her back. But Liza

ultimately gives her heart to a little girl she calls Sweetie. One day at the store, a teenager leaves the child there and doesn’t return. Liza takes Sweetie in, and while she waits for the chance to adopt her, the protagonist’s anguish at the thought of losing her to child protective services is truly heartbreaking. And this effective plot development deepens her complex relationship with her mother. When Minnie goes on vacation, leaving her daughter to deal with a major life event on her own, Liza appreciates her mother more. Minnie is full of platitudes, which she passes down to her daughter like the well-worn antiques in her shop. “Where you stumble, there lies your treasure,” she says. By the end of Stein’s (*Dry Run*, *Oklahoma*, 2017, etc.) engaging story, the protagonist understands just what Minnie means. Liza reimagines her future as if she is sifting through an assortment of treasures to find the perfect gift, and the end of her search is as heartwarming as it is rewarding.

A moving family tale with rich characters.



PIERRE FRANÇOIS 5th Grade Mishaps

Stephens, Lori Ann
Illus. by Yokochi, Trevor
Black Rose Writing (128 pp.)
\$14.95 paper | \$3.99 e-book | Jan. 4, 2018
978-1-61296-975-6

In Stephens’ (*Some Act of Vision*, 2016, etc.) first middle-grade novel, a fifth-grader can’t wait to go to Adventure Camp with his classmates, but staying

overnight might be a problem—because he still wets the bed.

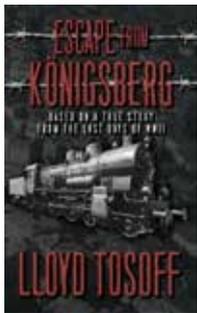
Young Texan Pierre François loves Minecraft, hanging out with his best friends Max and Bo, and listening to his French father tell jokes. But he desperately wants to overcome his bed-wetting habit, and although doctors have tried numerous remedies, from using “big-boy diapers” to wearing special hooks on his pajamas, nothing has worked. When he soaks his sheets during a sleepover at Max’s house, he surreptitiously stuffs the sheets in the washing machine and pretends that nothing happened. Unfortunately, Pierre can’t hide his secret for much longer, as a class trip to Adventure Camp is coming up. During the trip, he bunks with Max and Max’s father; although they have to share their cabin with the school bully, they all get to enjoy canoeing, eating new foods, and searching for wildlife. But just when everything is looking up, Pierre wakes up to a soaked sleeping bag. What’s a kid to do? Stephens crafts a well-realized school environment, replete with friends, bullies, and caring teachers. Pierre’s first-person narration has a sincere tone, and his antics are sometimes reminiscent of those in Pierre’s favorite comic strip, Bill Watterson’s “Calvin and Hobbes.” Debut illustrator Yokochi provides simple images to highlight larger events, in a style similar to that in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* or *Big Nate* series; however, the pictures aren’t the focus of the book’s humor. Pierre’s bed-wetting angst is the book’s major theme, but Stephens also focuses on Pierre’s smaller victories, such as staying up late with a friend to play video games or

Tosoff unflinchingly describes the darkest depravities without either bowdlerizing the grim details or laboriously trying to shock readers.

ESCAPE FROM KONIGSBERG

realizing that the girl he likes knows his name. This lends the book a slow-paced, slice-of-life feel as readers come to know and appreciate Pierre's world, and the resolution is both believable and satisfying.

A fun middle-grade novel with a winning protagonist and a charming setting.



ESCAPE FROM KONIGSBERG

Tosoff, Lloyd

CreateSpace (400 pp.)

\$16.00 paper | \$2.99 e-book

May 20, 2018

978-1-985067-00-4

At the end of World War II, a German teenager escapes the Red Army and seeks to reunite his family in this historical novel.

In the final year of World War II, 17-year-old Walter Heinrich's life in Konigsberg is increasingly imperiled. Germany is certain to lose the war, and the Red Army is rapidly advancing from the east, leaving a trail of destruction behind its relentless march. Adolf, Walter's father, who was conscripted into the German army and then disappeared, is now presumed dead. Then, Carl Forsythe, a British pilot, is downed nearby and seeks refuge in the Heinrich household, which Walter's mother, Lena, eventually provides. Carl and Lena develop romantic feelings for each other—a connection born out of fear and despair beautifully depicted by Tosoff (*Point of Return*, 2018, etc.). Walter discovers their relationship and is enraged by her act of disloyalty, especially when he learns Adolf is actually alive and being held in a French work camp for prisoners of war. Carl finally sets out on his own, but not before his presence is reported by a meddling

neighbor; when a German soldier comes to inspect the Heinrich home, Lena is brutally raped and murdered by him. Walter flees with his two sisters—6-year-old Mila and 10-year-old Brigitte—to Berlin, where his paternal aunt lives, but the three of them are intercepted by German authorities and sent to an orphanage. The author memorably portrays Walter's relentlessness—he escapes the orphanage and sets off for France in order to find his father and, despite finding love in a small French town near Luxembourg, refuses to surrender his quest.

Tosoff's research is admirably meticulous—his mastery of the geopolitical currents of the day, including the details of European geography, is indisputable. He captures the impossible predicament of so many Germans at the time—loyal to their native land but also left at the mercy of an insanely criminal regime. Walter experiences the moral degradation of his own people, made mean by their abuse, but he also understands their loss of esteem before the world: "Everywhere Walter went there were stories about beatings and even random murders perpetrated against innocent people just because of their Germanic ancestry. He wanted to get out from under the stigma foisted upon him and his countrymen because of Hitler's evil deeds." Tosoff's prose is lucid and crisp—the entire novel is narrated in the third-person—but lacks any poetical quality. It reads like a combination of personal anecdotes and professional history, as if the author is unsure of which to assume and unable to seamlessly combine the two. The power of the story is its quiet lack of sentimentality—Tosoff unflinchingly describes the darkest depravities without either bowdlerizing the grim details or laboriously trying to shock readers. The moral record, so to speak, is read out loud without maudlin embellishment, and readers are trusted to understand its meaning or devise their own. One could argue that descriptive restraint is itself a species of poetical accomplishment.

A realistic rendering of a horrific period in German history.

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TIMES SQUARE

Walls, Rich

Cunning Books (100 pp.)

\$8.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book | Mar. 7, 2018

978-0-9913762-3-0

An unexpected journey through the past leads a woman to reconnect with her present in Walls' (*One Page Love Story: Share the Love*, 2015, etc.) novella.

In a New York City hotel room, Angie Hart sits talking on the phone to her husband while he pages through their wedding album. The conversation is disjointed; they each occupy different emotional spaces, and Angie feels unsettled. During their call, the hotel manager unexpectedly shows up with a card embossed with a snowflake illustration and containing a mysterious message: "Do you remember falling in love? St. Dymphna's, 9 P.M." This sends Angie on a scavenger hunt through Manhattan, chasing down other clues, all marked with similar snowflakes. The quest