

fiction

Bala, Sharon. *The Boat People*. Doubleday. Jan. 2018. 352p. ISBN 9780385542296.

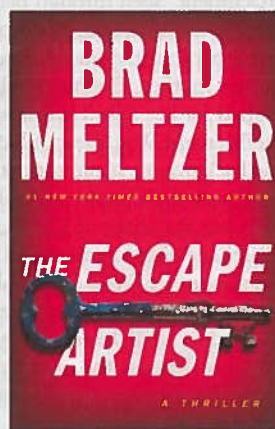
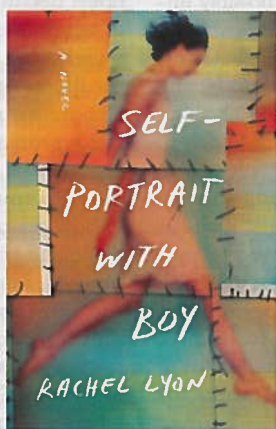
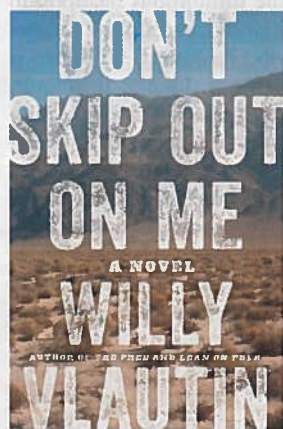
\$26.95; ebk. ISBN 9780385542302. F

DEBUT When a cargo ship loaded with several hundred refugees from war-torn Sri Lanka arrives in Vancouver, BC, both official and unofficial suspicion immediately arises. Might not potential terrorists be bringing their specific brand of violence to Canadian shores? As Canadian officials scramble to manage the crisis, debut author Bala capably establishes the interlocking narratives of three characters, each revealing a different, albeit compelling, perspective on the issues. Mahindan, one of the refugees, awaits judgment on his status while withstanding a prolonged separation from his six-year old son. Grace, whose Japanese grandparents endured both property forfeiture and internment during World War II, must sit in judgment of the “boat people” as

ISBN 978077831278. \$26.99; ebk. ISBN 9781488028090. F

DEBUT Set largely in Kenya, Benson's debut novel is essentially a story about mothers and daughters. Leona is an anthropologist working with the Maasai who avoids close personal connection owing to childhood trauma. When a one-night stand leads to pregnancy, she allows a childless Maasai woman, Simi, to adopt her daughter, Adia. Meanwhile, Jane, an elephant researcher turned diplomat's wife, struggles to sustain her bond with her husband. She turns her focus to their daughter, Grace, who eventually meets and befriends Adia. The harsh realities of life in Kenya during a period of drought and political upheaval lead to tragedy and redemption. The opening chapters often read like plot summaries of entire novels, relating a lot of background information about the characters without letting

a Catholic priest, stops by the Cloisters museum in upper Manhattan, troubled by an encounter at mass with a former friend. There he falls into conversation with Rachel, a museum docent. She's French, a Holocaust survivor reticent to talk about her past. She lends him her copy of the confessions of Abelard, the brilliant 12th-century philosopher whose forbidden love affair with his pupil, the equally brilliant Heloise, led to his emasculation and exile. Rachel's scholar father had been studying Abelard when the Germans occupied Paris in 1940 and his academic life came to an abrupt end. Medieval and 20th-century narratives intertwine in this novel of ideas, foremost among them that people at the top often abuse their power over others. In passing, the book discusses one of history's great what-ifs: what if Abelard's plea to love the Jews had been taken seriously by his church, a question Carroll (*Warburg in Rome*) raised earlier in his nonfiction *Constantine's Sword*. **VERDICT** The connection between the moral dilemmas of the two ages is muddy, and the alternating narratives slow the momentum. Still, this is a book of heart, with serious questions asked about faith, obedience, and love. [See Prepub Alert, 9/25/17.]—David Keymer, Cleveland



Leaving home to fulfill one's destiny; this debut is not easily forgotten; unlocking government secrets

adjudicator. Among her opponents is Priya, a young lawyer and second-generation Sri Lankan participating reluctantly in the proceedings. She represents the rights of refugees, though initially her heart had been set on establishing a career in corporate law. **VERDICT** By empathetically exploring each character's backstory, Bala presents the complex task of balancing a nation's desire to be compassionate with the need to identify threats to national security, providing a timely examination of the refugee crisis worldwide. Recommended for all fiction collections. [See Prepub Alert, 7/31/17.]—Faye Chadwell, Oregon State Univ., Corvallis

Benson, Adrienne. *The Brightest Sun*. Park Row: Harlequin. Mar. 2018. 336p.

the reader experience the story with them. It's not until midway through the book that the story begins to slow down and jell. And apart from the chapters from Simi's point of view, this is yet another story about white people experiencing a foreign culture. **VERDICT** The themes of motherhood have some universality, but there isn't enough of a sense of time or place conveyed to feel truly immersed in the setting. [See Prepub Alert, 9/25/17.]—Christine DeZelar-Tiedman, Univ. of Minnesota Libs., Minneapolis

Carroll, James. *The Cloister*. Nan A. Talese: Doubleday. Mar. 2018. 384p. ISBN 9780385541275. \$27.95; ebk. ISBN 9780385541282. F

On a whim, Father Michael Kavanagh,

Chen, Kirstin. *Bury What We Cannot Take*.

Little A: Amazon. Mar. 2018. 286p.

ISBN 9781542049702. \$24.95; pap.

ISBN 9781542049719. \$14.95. F

Set in 1957 China, this follow-up to *Sauce for Beginners* features the Ong family, who enjoy a rather lavish lifestyle, especially considering the place and the time. Nine-year-old San San takes piano lessons, and she and her 12-year-old brother, Ah Liam, come home to servants and nosh on chocolate eclairs. Aspiring to join the Party's Youth League, Ah Liam decides to report his grandmother's accidental smashing of the portrait of Chairman Mao in their home, initiating a chain of events that endangers every member of his immediate family. Chen's writing is fluid, and her storytelling ability is engaging. Readers are easily drawn to the characters and their perils, particularly plucky young San San, left in China while the rest of the family attempts to escape to Hong Kong to join the family's patriarch, who is already working there. **VERDICT** Though the characters and story lines could use

fighter pilot in World War II. His admirer is the arty son of a famous novelist. Their affair is brief, but repercussions linger. Although David returns from the war a hero and establishes a successful engineering company, the rest of the novel belongs to his son, Johnny, whose own homosexuality is only a little less difficult in the slightly more tolerant Seventies. Johnny's first flirtation with a cocky French exchange student is an exercise in teenage angst, and his later attempts at more satisfying relationships are hardly more successful. More troubling to Johnny is the long-lasting notoriety attached to his unusual surname from a sex scandal involving his father and two other men. **VERDICT** Hollinghurst's (*The Stranger's Child*) sprawling novel, suffused with lust and longing, movingly portrays the generational shift in gay experience and acceptance. Warmly recommended. [See Prepub Alert, 9/11/17].—**Barbara Love, formerly with Kingston Frontenac P.L., Ont.**

Iggulden, Conn. *The Abbot's Tale*. Pegasus. May 2018. 480p. ISBN 9781681777306. \$25.95; ebk. ISBN 9781681778082. F

Dunstan of Glastonbury, a bright but selfish young man, finds himself hanging from a cliff. Encouraged to fall by his tormentors, who are crushing his fingers as he dangles, Dunstan requests a priest for a final confession. Pulling this "man of the cloth" over the edge with him, he uses the cleric's body to break his impact. Such perceived miracles inform the course of his life until a childhood chum, a grandson of Alfred the Great, suddenly becomes King of England through an untimely death. Visions of a future united England come quickly once Dunstan has the king's ear. Now, a well-placed abbot, Dunstan can unleash his ambitions and raise the funds to build empires for God. However, perpetuated lies come with a consequential price. Best-selling historical novelist Iggulden ("War of the Roses" series) offers a well-paced, believable peek into the brutal and often outright cruel world of tenth-century Europe. His attention to detail is illuminating and never tedious. **VERDICT** This gripping saga will appeal to historical fiction buffs, fans of Bernard Cornwell's "Saxon Stories" series, as well as anyone who yearns for a compelling, well-told story.—**Russell Miller, Prescott P.L., AZ**

Kureishi, Hanif. *The Nothing*. Faber & Faber. Jan. 2018. 176p. ISBN 9780571332014. \$22; ebk. ISBN 9780571332038. F

Initially, there were two: aging filmmaker Waldo and his 22-years-younger wife of 20 years, Zee. Bed- and wheelchair-

bound for three years, Waldo has "been expecting to die any day," he admits. "I was enjoying my decline and slipping away cheerfully, and now this happens." Because now there are three: Eddie, "scamp, ligger, and freeloader" for 30-plus years, who's also a movie journalist and "self-avowed expert" on Waldo's work, seems to have moved in, not only into Waldo's London flat but into Zee's bed as well. Waldo improvises a revenge plan, which requires growing his players by two. So now there are five: Waldo's celluloid muse Anita and Eddie's manager, Gibney. With the help of whispering waiters, heavy BAFTA awards, and a final cup of scalding tea, Waldo relentlessly directs the scenes to ensure "posterity won't miss a moment." Writer/playwright/screenwriter Kureishi (*The Buddha of Suburbia*) enacts wicked vengeance on weakness and betrayal in a narrative starring a fading megalomaniac. **VERDICT** Libraries serving urban, cosmopolitan readers should prepare for ardent Kureishi fans; new readers, however, might opt for the author's earlier fare, as the characters here might prove too predictable, even downright tedious.—**Terry Hong, Smithsonian BookDragon, Washington, DC**

★Lyon, Rachel. *Self-Portrait with Boy*. Scribner. Feb. 2018. 384p. ISBN 9781501169588. \$26; ebk. ISBN 9781501169601. F

DEBUT While taking her self-portrait for the 400th time, photographer Lu Rile captures the very moment that her neighbors' young son Max falls to his death. When she enlarges the image, his blond curls and untied shoelaces are clearly depicted in the background. At the artists' loft in New York City where they live, all the neighbors unite to comfort grieving parents Kate and Steve, and Lu becomes close to Kate. She confides to Kate that Max haunts her, making tapping sounds on the glass and that sometimes she sees the image of his intact body coming through the window. Lu considers her photograph a masterpiece and with ruthless determination has it shown at a nearby gallery without telling Kate and Steve of her plan. "Self-Portrait with Boy" is a big hit, gaining favorable attention from the art world, but Lu's actions create awful repercussions. **VERDICT** Fabulously written, this spellbinding debut novel is a real page-turner. A powerful, brilliantly imagined story not easily forgotten; highly recommended.—**Lisa Rohrbach, Leetonia Community P.L., OH**

Mamet, David. *Chicago*. Custom House. Feb. 2018. 352p. ISBN 9780062797193. \$26.99; ebk. ISBN 9780062797216. F

In his first novel in more than two de-

acades, legendary playwright Mamet (*Glen-garry Glen Ross*) picks up where his Oscar-nominated screenplay for *The Untouchables* left off, with a panoramic portrait of the Chicago underworld during Prohibition. Mike Hodge, veteran of the Great War, is a 30-year-old newspaperman at the *Tribune*, working with his partner Parlow to find out who murdered mobbed-up restaurateur Jackie Weiss and courting the sweet Irish lass at the local floral shop, Annie Walsh. But when his beloved is killed in a post-coital ambush, Mike has more reason than professional curiosity to uncover the truth. The story is fast-paced and violent but often difficult to latch onto because of Mamet's infamously dense and jagged dialog, which is on ample display throughout. Like the late novelist George V. Higgins, Mamet prefers to let his characters tell the story with a minimum of omniscient narration, trusting the reader to work out the plot through the lies and banter. **VERDICT** A hard-edged, though elusive return to form from the Pulitzer Prize winner. [See Prepub Alert, 8/14/17].—**Michael Pucci, South Orange P.L., NJ**

★Meltzer, Brad. *The Escape Artist*. Grand Central. Mar. 2018. 432p. ISBN 9781455559527. \$28; ebk. ISBN 9781455559510. F

Jim "Zig" Zigarowski is a mortician at Dover Air Force Base, where he prepares the returning bodies of U.S. heroes so they can have proper burial, and thus providing closure for the families. Years earlier, a girl named Nola Brown saved his daughter from severe injury, and now her corpse arrives at Dover after a suspicious plane crash in Alaska that also killed other government operatives. Feeling grateful to Nola, Zig intercepts her body to prepare it himself. He quickly realizes the dead woman is not Nola and wonders about her true identity. This discovery sets Zig on a harrowing path of danger, subterfuge, and government secrets as he searches for Nola and tries to discover the secret that has made her a danger to the government she serves as the U.S. Army's artist-in-residence. **VERDICT** Weaving the past with the present and creating a conspiracy with connections to magician Harry Houdini, Meltzer's series launch is a gripping thriller that will not disappoint his many fans. A true page-turner. [See Prepub Alert, 9/25/17].—**Sandra Knowles, South Carolina State Lib., Columbia**

Nesbø, Jo. *Macbeth*. Hogarth: Crown. Apr. 2018. 464p. tr. from Norwegian by Don Bartlett. ISBN 9780553419054. \$27; ebk. ISBN 9780553419061. F