Brown Bag Book Review
Wednesday, January 10, 2024
12:00 PM-1:00 PM

Reviewers: Abby, Carly, Eve, Lauren H, Emma, Lee, Sarah, Lauren S, Caitlin

Shark Heart by Emily Habeck [Abby]
Spare by Prince Harry [Abby]
My Murder by Katie Williams [Abby]
Yellowface by R.F. Kuang [Carly]
Everything I Know about Love by Dolly Alderton [Eve]
Finlay Donovan is Killing It by Elle Cosimano [Eve]
Six of Crows by Leigh Bardugo [Lauren H]
Squad by Maggie Tokuda-Hall [Emma]
The Spirit Bares its Teeth by Andrew Joseph White [Lee]
The Monk and Robot Duology by Becky Chambers [Lee]
The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman [Sarah]
The Jackaby Series by William Ritter [Sarah]
Time to Sleep by Steve Jenkins & Robin Page [Lauren S]
Why Do Elephants Have Big Ears by Steve Jenkins & Robin Page [Lauren S]
Creature Features by Steve Jenkins & Robin Page [Lauren S]
Mama Dug a Little Den by Jennifer Ward, illustrated by Steve Jenkins [Lauren S]
The Socialite’s Guide to Murder by S.K. Golden [Caitlin]
Leave the World Behind by Rumaan Alam [Caitlin]
**Shark Heart by Emily Habeck**

For Lewis and Wren, their first year of marriage is also their last. A few weeks after their wedding, Lewis receives a rare diagnosis. He will retain most of his consciousness, memories, and intellect, but his physical body will gradually turn into a great white shark. As Lewis develops the features and impulses of one of the most predatory creatures in the ocean, his complicated artist’s heart struggles to make peace with his unfulfilled dreams.

At first, Wren internally resists her husband’s fate. Is there a way for them to be together after Lewis changes? Then, a glimpse of Lewis’s developing carnivorous nature activates long-repressed memories for Wren, whose story vacillates between her childhood living on a houseboat in Oklahoma, her time with a college ex-girlfriend, and her unusual friendship with a woman pregnant with twin birds. Woven throughout this bold novel is the story of Wren’s mother, Angela, who becomes pregnant with Wren at fifteen in an abusive relationship amidst her parents’ crumbling marriage. In the present, all of Wren’s grief eventually collides, and she is forced to make an impossible choice.

A sweeping love story that is at once lyrical and funny, airy and visceral, Shark Heart is an unforgettable, gorgeous novel about life’s perennial questions, the fragility of memories, finding joy amidst grief, and creating a meaningful life. This daring début marks the arrival of a wildly talented new writer abounding with originality, humor, and heart.

[Abby]

**Spare by Prince Harry**

It was one of the most searing images of the twentieth century: two young boys, two princes, walking behind their mother’s coffin as the world watched in sorrow—and horror. As Princess Diana was laid to rest, billions wondered what Prince William and Prince Harry must be thinking and feeling—and how their lives would play out from that point on.

For the first time, Prince Harry tells his own story, chronicling his journey with raw, unflinching honesty. A landmark publication, Spare is full of insight, revelation, self-examination, and hard-won wisdom about the eternal power of love over grief.

[Abby]
My Murder by Katie Williams

What if the murder you had to solve was your own?

Lou is a happily married mother of an adorable toddler. She’s also the victim of a local serial killer. Recently brought back to life and returned to her grieving family by a government project, she is grateful for this second chance. But as the new Lou re-adapts to her old routines, and as she bonds with other female victims, she realizes that disturbing questions remain about what exactly preceded her death and how much she can really trust those around her.

Now it’s not enough to care for her child, love her husband, and work the job she’s always enjoyed—she must also figure out the circumstances of her death. Darkly comic, tautly paced, and full of surprises, My Murder is a devour-in-one-sitting, clever twist on the classic thriller.

Yellowface by R.F. Kuang

Athena Liu is a literary darling and June Hayward is literally nobody.

White lies
When Athena dies in a freak accident, June steals her unpublished manuscript and publishes it as her own under the ambiguous name Juniper Song.

Dark humor
But as evidence threatens June’s stolen success, she will discover exactly how far she will go to keep what she thinks she deserves.

Deadly consequences...
What happens next is entirely everyone else’s fault.

With its totally immersive first-person voice, Yellowface grapples with questions of diversity, racism, and cultural appropriation, as well as the terrifying alienation of social media. R.F. Kuang’s novel is timely, razor-sharp, and eminently readable.

Everything I Know about Love by Dolly Alderton

The wildly funny, occasionally heartbreaking internationally bestselling memoir about growing up, growing older, and learning to navigate friendships, jobs, loss, and love along the ride.

When it comes to the trials and triumphs of becoming an adult, journalist and former Sunday Times columnist Dolly Alderton has seen and tried it all. In her memoir, she vividly recounts falling in love, finding a job, getting drunk, getting dumped, realizing that Ivan from the corner shop might just be the only reliable man in her life, and that absolutely no one can ever compare to her best girlfriends. Everything I Know About Love is about bad dates, good friends and—above all else—realizing that you are enough.

Finlay Donovan is Killing It by Elle Cosimano

Finlay Donovan is killing it . . . except, she’s really not. She’s a stressed-out single-mom of two and struggling novelist, Finlay’s life is in the new book she promised her literary agent isn’t written, her ex-husband fired the nanny without telling her, and this morning she had to send her four-year-old to school with hair duct-taped to her head after an incident with scissors.
When Finlay is overheard discussing the plot of her new suspense novel with her agent over lunch, she’s mistaken for a contract killer, and inadvertently accepts an offer to dispose of a problem husband in order to make ends meet . . . Soon, Finlay discovers that crime in real life is a lot more difficult than its fictional counterpart, as she becomes tangled in a real-life murder investigation.

Six of Crows by Leigh Bardugo

Ketterdam: a bustling hub of international trade where anything can be had for the right price—and no one knows that better than criminal prodigy Kaz Brekker. Kaz is offered a chance at a deadly heist that could make him rich beyond his wildest dreams. But he can’t pull it off alone...

Six dangerous outcasts. One impossible heist. Kaz’s crew is the only thing that might stand between the world and destruction—if they don’t kill each other first.

Squad by Maggie Tokuda-Hall

When Becca transfers to a high school in an elite San Francisco suburb, she’s worried she’s not going to fit in. To her surprise, she’s immediately adopted by the most popular girls in school. At first glance, Marley, Arianna, and Mandy are perfect. But at a party under a full moon, Becca learns that they also have a big secret.

Becca’s new friends are werewolves. Their prey? Slimy boys who take advantage of unsuspecting girls. Eager to be accepted, Becca allows her friends to turn her into a werewolf, and finally, for the first time in her life, she feels like she truly belongs.

But things get complicated when Arianna’s predatory boyfriend is killed, and the cops begin searching for a serial killer. As their pack begins to buckle under the pressure—and their moral high ground gets muddier and muddier—Becca realizes that she might have feelings for one of her new best friends.

The Spirit Bares its Teeth by Andrew Joseph White

Mors vincit omnia. Death conquers all.

London, 1883. The Veil between the living and dead has thinned. Violet-eyed mediums commune with spirits under the watchful eye of the Royal Speaker Society, and sixteen-year-old Silas Bell would rather rip out his violet eyes than become an obedient Speaker wife. According to Mother, he’ll be married by the end of the year. It doesn’t matter that he’s needed a decade of tutors to hide his autism; that he practices surgery on slaughtered pigs; that he is a boy, not the girl the world insists on seeing.

After a failed attempt to escape an arranged marriage, Silas is diagnosed with Veil sickness—a mysterious disease sending violet-eyed women into madness—and shipped away to Braxton’s Sanitorium and Finishing School. The facility is cold, the instructors merciless, and the students either bloom into eligible wives or disappear. So, when the ghosts of missing students start begging Silas for help, he decides to reach into Braxton’s innards and expose its rotten guts to the world—as long as the school doesn’t break him first.
The Monk and Robot Duology by Becky Chambers

A Psalm for the Wild-Built- Centuries before, robots of Panga gained self-awareness, laid down their tools, wandered, en masse into the wilderness, never to be seen again. They faded into myth and urban legend. Now the life of the tea monk who tells this story is upended by the arrival of a robot, there to honor the old promise of checking in. The robot cannot go back until the question of "what do people need?" is answered. But the answer to that question depends on who you ask, and how. They will need to ask it a lot. Chambers' series asks: in a world where people have what they want, does having more matter?

A Prayer for the Crown-Shy- After touring the rural areas of Panga, Sibling Dex (a Tea Monk of some renown) and Mosscap (a robot sent on a quest to determine what humanity really needs) turn their attention to the villages and cities of the little moon they call home.

They hope to find the answers they seek, while making new friends, learning new concepts, and experiencing the entropic nature of the universe.

Becky Chambers's new series continues to ask: in a world where people have what they want, does having more even matter?

They're going to need to ask it a lot.

[Lee]

The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman

Nobody Owens, known to his friends as Bod, is a perfectly normal boy. Well, he would be perfectly normal if he didn't live in a graveyard, being raised and educated by ghosts, with a solitary guardian who belongs to neither the world of the living nor the world of the dead.

There are dangers and adventures for Bod in the graveyard: the strange and terrible menace of the Sleer; a gravestone entrance to a desert that leads to the city of ghouls; friendship with a witch, and so much more.

But it is in the land of the living that real danger lurks, for it is there that the man Jack lives and he has already killed Bod's family.

[Sarah]

The Jackaby Series by William Ritter

Jackaby- Newly arrived in New Fiddleham, New England, 1892, and in need of a job, Abigail Rook meets R. F. Jackaby, an investigator of the unexplained with a keen eye for the extraordinary--including the ability to see supernatural beings. Abigail has a gift for noticing ordinary but important details, which makes her perfect for the position of Jackaby’s assistant. On her first day, Abigail finds herself in the midst of a thrilling case: A serial killer is on the loose. The police are convinced it’s an ordinary villain, but Jackaby is certain it’s a nonhuman creature, whose existence the police--with the exception of a handsome young detective named Charlie Cane--deny.

Beastly Bones- In 1892, New Fiddleham, New England, things are never quite what they seem, especially when Abigail Rook and her eccentric employer, R. F. Jackaby, are called upon to investigate the supernatural. First, members of a particularly vicious species of shape-shifters disguise themselves as a litter of kittens. A day later, their owner is found murdered, with a single mysterious puncture wound to her neck. Then, in nearby Gad's Valley, dinosaur bones from a recent dig go...
missing, and an unidentified beast attacks animals and people, leaving their mangled bodies behind. Policeman Charlie Cane, exiled from New Fiddleham to the valley, calls on Abigail for help, and soon Abigail and Jackaby are on the hunt for a thief, a monster, and a murderer.

Ghostly Echoes- Jenny Cavanaugh, the ghostly lady of 926 Augur Lane, has enlisted the investigative services of her fellow residents to solve a decade-old murder—her own. Abigail Rook and her eccentric employer, Detective R. F. Jackaby, dive into the cold case, starting with a search for Jenny’s fiancé, who went missing the night she died. But when a new, gruesome murder closely mirrors the events of ten years prior, Abigail and Jackaby realize that Jenny’s case isn’t so cold after all, and her killer may be far more dangerous than they suspected. Fantasy and folklore mix with mad science as Abigail’s race to unravel the mystery leads her across the cold cobblestones of nineteenth-century New England, down to the mythical underworld, and deep into her colleagues’ grim histories to battle the most deadly foe she has ever faced.

The Dire King- The fate of the world is in the hands of the detective of the supernatural R. F. Jackaby and his intrepid assistant, Abigail Rook. An evil king is turning ancient tensions into modern strife, using a blend of magic and technology to push Earth and the Otherworld into a mortal competition. Jackaby and Abigail are caught in the middle as they continue to solve the daily mysteries of New Fiddleham, New England — like who’s created the rend between the worlds, how to close it, and why zombies are appearing around. At the same time, the romance between Abigail and the shape-shifting police detective Charlie Cane deepens, and Jackaby’s resistance to his feelings for 926 Augur Lane’s ghostly lady, Jenny, begins to give way. Before the four can think about their own futures, they will have to defeat an evil that wants to destroy the future altogether.

Time to Sleep by Steve Jenkins & Robin Page

It’s time to sleep! Who dozes standing on one leg without falling over, snores while flying, or snuggles together in a big sleepy pile?

Why Do Elephants Have Big Ears by Steve Jenkins & Robin Page

Do you know why a camel has a hump? A Zebra has stripes? Or why wombats have cube-shaped poop? Find out the answers in this fun and beautifully illustrated book, and learn oodles of other intriguing facts about the animal world. It’s the perfect gift for any kid who loves animals and is always asking "Why?" because who doesn’t want to know why a flamingo stands on one leg? Steve Jenkins and Robin Page have written and illustrated almost 100 nonfiction children’s books that have sold over 5 million copies between them. Masters at making nonfiction entertaining and visually engaging, their books have won numerous awards and are favorites of kids, parents, and teachers alike.

Creature Features by Steve Jenkins & Robin Page

Dear axolotl: Why do you have feathers growing out of your head? Axolotl: They aren’t feathers—they’re gills! They let me breathe underwater.

Let’s face it. Even as babies, we humans pay close attention to faces. Observing another person’s features and expressions tells us whether they are happy, angry, excited, or sad. And when we look at
an animal, it's hard not to imagine that its face is communicating human feelings. This isn't true, of course. Squinty eyes, an upturned mouth, or another odd expression is probably there because, in some way, it helps that animal survive. Packed with many cool facts and visuals on where certain animals live and what they eat, this book captures twenty-five humorous—and very true—explanations of why animals look the way they do in order to exist in this world.

[Lauren S]

Mama Dug a Little Den by Jennifer Ward, illustrated by Steve Jenkins

This companion to Mama Built a Little Nest explores the many different kinds of dens animals build for their babies.

Perhaps you’ll come across a den, dark and deep and wide.
And it will make you wonder...
Who or what might be inside!

There are so many different kinds of dens that mother animals make for their babies, from desert burrows to snow caves to elaborate underground tunnels. Jennifer Ward introduces young readers to all sorts of animals and the cozy burrows they call home.

[Lauren S]

The Socialite’s Guide to Murder by S.K. Golden

It’s 1958 and Evelyn Elizabeth Grace Murphy has not left the Pinnacle Hotel in fourteen months. She suffers from agoraphobia, and what’s more, it’s her father’s hotel, and everything she needs is there. Evelyn’s always been good at finding things; she discovered her mother dead in a Manhattan alleyway fifteen years earlier. Now she’s finding trouble inside her sanctuary. At a party for artist Billie Bell, his newest work is stolen, and Evelyn’s fake boyfriend (and real best friend), movie star Henry Fox, is accused of the theft. But just as Evelyn sets out to prove Henry’s innocence, she finds Billie Bell dead.

The murder weapon links the crime to the hotel’s chief of security. But why would he use a knife with his initials on the handle? With her beloved home in disarray, Evelyn joins up with hotel employee (and her secret crush) Mac Cooper to get to the bottom of the case.

Evelyn’s knack for sleuthing—and her playful imagination—are always hard at work, and she throws an elaborate party at the hotel where every guest is a suspect. But will the killer emerge from the glamorous lineup? If not, Evelyn just might find herself...next in line for murder..

[Lauren S]

Leave the World Behind by Rumaan Alam

Amanda and Clay head to a remote corner of Long Island expecting a quiet reprieve from life in New York City, quality time with their teenage son and daughter and a taste of the good life in the luxurious home they've rented for the week. But with a late-night knock on the door, the spell is broken. Ruth and G. H., an older couple who claim to own the home, have arrived there in a panic. These strangers say that a sudden power outage has swept the city, and - with nowhere else to turn - they have come to the country in search of shelter.
But with the TV and internet down, and no phone service, the facts are unknowable. Should Amanda and Clay trust this couple - and vice versa? What has happened back in New York? Is the holiday home, isolated from civilization, a truly safe place for their families? And are they safe from one another?

[Caitlin]

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