

writing vocation even as she marvels over its curious felicities. Young Constance began composing fantasy stories to support Gavin, her ne'er-do-well poet lover. Now a "wispy" new widow gamely venturing out into a ferocious blizzard, she is quite famous for her long-running, movie-adapted Alphinland series and seems to be acquiring the sort of supernatural powers she thought were confined to her imaginary realm. In "The Dead Hand Loves You," a feckless college student makes a devil's deal with his roommates concerning the seemingly dim prospects for his cheesy horror tale about a jilted lover's creepy revenge. Atwood's canny adventures with the macabre also involve a grisly discovery in a storage unit, a wry and clever "freak of nature," and, in the surprising and supremely satisfying title story, spontaneous retribution in the Arctic. Intimations of worsening environmental disruption appear throughout the collection, culminating in "Torching the Dusties," in which personal vendettas give way to mass vigilante justice. Atwood has the raptor's penetrating gaze, speed, and agility and never misses her mark. —*Donna Seaman*

**HD HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Ads and promotional efforts will inspire Atwood's ever-expanding and active reader base, including her hundreds of thousands of social media followers.

### Sweetness #9.

By **Stephan Erik Clark.**

Aug. 2014. 336p. Little, Brown, \$26 (9780316278751).

David Leveraux is an ambitious young flavor scientist (or flavorist) in 1973 when he is hired to conduct safety testing on Sweetness #9, a new artificial sweetener. To his dismay, his lab rats are exhibiting lethargy, compulsion to overeat, and "general dissatisfaction with life." Leveraux's company argues (before firing him) that he is simply observing universal afflictions, traits that comprise the American Condition. By 1998, Sweetness #9 is ubiquitous in consumer products from diet soda to toothpaste. Everywhere Leveraux looks he sees possible symptoms of Sweetness #9 poisoning, including in his aerobics-obsessed wife, his sullen teenage daughter, and his video-gamer son (who has stopped using verbs). When terrorists start bombing the packaged-food aisles of grocery stores and Leveraux's colleagues begin arming themselves for Y2K, could Sweetness #9 be to blame? He sets out to learn the truth and heal his family in the process. Part suburban family drama, part corporate thriller, Clark's first novel offers a hyperreal American fable that is tuned to our cultural anxieties about food, chemicals, and authenticity. —*Lindsay Bosch*

### The Sweetness.

By **Sande Boritz Berger.**

Sept. 2014. 306p. She Writes, paper, \$15.95 (9781631529078).

Despite the title, bitterness is the dark driving force in this stirring debut novel of Holocaust survivor guilt—guilt about being

safe. Told with candor and tenderness, there are two parallel stories of Jewish girls—one a teen, one an eight year old—from the same family but worlds apart during WWII. Mira in Brooklyn is into fashion design, and she causes uproar in her wealthy family when she elopes before her boyfriend is sent to boot camp. She does hear about the transports and camps in Europe, but she tries to block it out. Her father feels guilty about his brother's family, who refused to leave Vilna. Meanwhile, in Vilna, his brother's daughter, Roshka, survives, hidden in a root cellar by a Polish woman. There are flashpoint memories of heroism and surprise to the very end. With the truth about the horror, the rescuer and survival detail is heartbreaking and unforgettable, the big history told through searing detail, as when Roshka's caretaker back in Vilna is told to shoot a mother and son but shoots himself. Mira's baby is named for Roshka, believed dead, but when she arrives in Brooklyn, the word *godsend* provides an intense connection. —*Hazel Rochman*

**YA/C:** *The focus on teens in Vilna and Brooklyn makes this an excellent addition to the Holocaust curriculum. HR.*

### ★ The Thing about December.

By **Donal Ryan.**

Aug. 2014. 208p. Steerforth, paper, \$15 (9781586422288).

Johnsey Cunliffe is an only child so cosseted by his loving parents that he's naive about the ways of the world and called an "eejit" in his small Irish town. But when his parents die—his father from cancer, his grieving mother soon after—he's bereft, confused, and lonely, befriended only by a couple known to Johnsey, as they were to his parents, as Herself and Himself. Then the classmate who bullied him for years engineers a brutal beating of Johnsey, leaving him temporarily blind and hospitalized. Here he meets Siobhan, the enthralling nurse he calls the Lovely Voice, and the also-injured Mumbly Dave. Home from hospital, Johnsey lands in the midst of controversy precipitated by the rezoning of his family farm, leading to him being portrayed as money-grubbing when he wants only to protect his legacy rather than sell it to spur the town's economy and making him wonder whether his new friends are true. Written before Ryan's award-winning debut, *The Spinning Heart* (2013), this novel is set in the same town a decade earlier, capturing the spirit and vernacular of its place and time and taking readers into the mind of a man struggling to get along in a world he can't quite comprehend. Stunning. —*Michele Leber*

### ★ Three Bargains.

By **Tania Malik.**

Aug. 2014. 400p. Norton, \$25.95 (9780393063400).

Malik's debut is the story of an Indian boy taken under the wing of a powerful kingpin. In the early 1980s, when Madan is 12 years

old, his father brings their family to the town of Gorapur so that he can work for the powerful Avtaar Singh, a factory owner whose influence is felt throughout the town. While Madan's oafish father quickly runs afoul of Avtaar, the kingpin takes an interest in the quietly intelligent Madan and sends him to school to continue his education. Avtaar begins to groom Madan, and the boy becomes one of his most trusted employees until Madan takes up with the daughter of one of Avtaar's friends and gets her pregnant. When the transgression is discovered, Avtaar orders his men to beat Madan to death, and it is only the interference of Madan's best friend that saves him. Banished from Gorapur, Madan goes to New Delhi to start anew, but even as he makes his fortune, he cannot quite forget Avtaar or the child he left behind. Malik's first outing is an absorbing bildungsroman, a lovely and multifaceted tribute to the enduring bonds of family, blood or otherwise. —*Kristine Huntley*

**YA/M:** *Madan's yearning for a father figure, as well as his youthful forbidden romance, will resonate with many teens. KH.*

## Crime Fiction

### The 6th Extinction.

By **James Rollins.**

Aug. 2014. 448p. Morrow, \$27.99 (9780061784811).

A remote scientific research facility issues a frantic mayday: something has been let out of the facility, something that could potentially lead to the extinction of life on Earth. Now it's up to Sigma Force, the covert operations arm of the U.S. government's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), to find out what the facility was working on, why the chief researcher has gone missing, and why some centuries-old maps seem to be vitally important to the man's work. This is another fast-paced mixture of real science, real history, and wild speculation. Rollins' popular Sigma Force series is definitely formulaic, but it's a formula that works splendidly, like a well-oiled machine. We know who these characters are, we know there will be a mind-bending revelation about a historical mystery, and we know there will be plenty of race-against-the-clock action. Fans of the series and lovers of wall-to-wall action in general will have a great time. —*David Pitt*

**HD HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** For speed freaks (narrative speed, that is), Rollins always delivers the goods. Readers, start your engines.

### Autumn Killing.

By **Mons Kallentoft. Tr. by Neil Smith.**

Sept. 2014. 464p. Atria/Emily Bestler, paper, \$16 (9781451642674).

Linköping, Sweden, police superintendent

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