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Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Car (Beach Lane Books, 2018) Picture Book (for 1-4 year-olds)
by Kate Dopirak
reviewed by: Nori Morganstein, Youth Services Librarian/Assistant Director

This is a great book for all the kids who are obsessed with cars and other things that go. It’s also a great, easy read for the adults/parents who read it out loud. Who doesn’t know how to sing, “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”? The entire story can be sung to the melody of the classic lullaby.

The book/song is about a little car who needs to go to bed. Before he does, he travels the town, to say goodnight to all the vehicles around. He passes tractors, airplanes, other cars, trucks, taxis, buses, emergency vehicles, cranes, diggers, and boats. They all honk their goodnights to the little car. Finally, the little car’s tank is running low and he starts to slow. He goes home, to his garage and falls asleep.

The illustrations are bold and simple. It is fun noticing that the sleepy vehicles have drooping or closed eyes. The style of the pictures reminds me of Jon Klassen, Mac Barnett. I could see the simplicity of them appealing to a younger audience. They might be too simple for an older child who knows all the pieces of construction vehicles already. Also, the famous song might make the book seem too “childish” to an older kid. However, the book would be perfect for a younger child. Singing the words is a great way to establish the early literacy skill: phonological awareness. The more a child can take apart the sounds and syllables of words (through singing and rhyming), the easier learning to read will be for them in the future.

The book can also work as a nice substitution for a more classic going-to-bed book, like Goodnight Moon. Instead of saying goodnight to a great big room, you can practice saying goodnight to cars, and other people and things around your neighborhood, introducing new vocabulary to the typical patterns already set at bedtime. All in all, this is a great going-to-bed book for a younger child.
“Who?... Jane Franklin?... Never heard of her.”
That’s understandable. But I’ll bet you’ve heard of her big brother… Benjamin.

Both Benjamin (Benny) and Jane (Jenny) were born in Boston, he in 1705 and she in 1712. They were the 15th and 17th children of Joseph Franklin, an immigrant from England, and Abiah Folger, from Nantucket. The two children were very close. He spent much time teaching her to read. He was sent to Boston Latin at the age of seven, for two years, but Jane had no schooling except for what Benny taught her. “Everyone needed to learn to read, but there was no need for a girl to learn to write. Massachusetts poor laws required that boys be taught to write and girls to read. For most girls, book learning ended there. At home and at school, when boys were taught to write, girls learned to stitch. Boys held quills, girls held needles.” Jane always apologized for her inability to spell and write well.

At the age of 17, Benny ran away from home and his apprenticeship to his brother, James, to Philadelphia where he worked in print shops and started his career of publishing and writing. At the age of 15, Jenny was married, as she was pregnant – although no child was born. Her husband was Edward Mecom, a saddler, who had bouts of mental instability and was constantly in debt. He spent most of his life in debtor’s prison, leaving Jane to be the family breadwinner. Taking in boarders and making hats, as well as giving birth to twelve children kept her pretty close to home. This was Jane’s career.

Three years after he ran away from home, Ben wrote to Jane. “Dear Sister, I always judged by your behavior, when a child, that you would make a good, agreeable woman, and you know you were ever my peculiar favourite. “

This was the beginning of a long correspondence that lasted until he died in 1790. He sent her advice, encouragement, news, and suggested books for her to read. She then struggled to put her hands on the books. Lepore has pieced their stories together with very little information as Jane’s letters to Benjamin were not saved. Jane’s Book of Ages – an eight page book which she made herself – has survived. This listed her children and other family members. This was her life story.

Benjamin’s life story included printing, publishing, writing, civic accomplishments such as the establishment of the first subscription library. We are very familiar with his time spent in London working with the British Parliament and crowned with his participation on the formation of the US Government and the Constitution.

But, obviously very fond of Jane, he made sure through those years that she had enough money to manage. And when he died he left her the house that she lived in in Boston.

Lepore’s biography gives the reader a ring side seat on the customs of the times, the difference between the lives of men and women AND the lead up to and the years of the American Revolution. She tells of Benjamin’s years in London, of being accused of treason, of his return to America, the Committee of Correspondence, and so on. She contrasts it with Jane’s experiences during the siege of Boston, her escaping to Cambridge, then Providence, then Warwick, RI.

Indeed, “We’ve come a long way, baby”. There were precious few that escaped the life of toil that Jane endured. Those that were fertile gave over at least 20 years of their short life spans to giving birth and raising children. And the back seat that they were assigned, was not because they were in control of the carriage but that they had little control of anything.

Lepore’s book is an interesting mix of scholarly information, a very readable narrative and her personal comments. These all create a fascinating blend that kept me glued to the pages. I hope anyone that tries this will enjoy it as much as I did.
The story begins with a kid adrift. Mokhtar Alkhanshali is a typical teen, unfocused, undisciplined, always looking for trouble. But he's also a Yemeni-American living in San Francisco. The Yemeni part of his background means that Mokhtar has an extensive family network to support his endeavors while the San Francisco locale provides access to high tech and venture capital. It is a heady brew that Mokhtar concocts from this mix.

After finishing high school Mokhtar goes from job to job, always hustling and, apparently because of his charm and glib talk, successful. But there is always an empty and at times repulsive feeling associated with these jobs, the low point being selling cars at an auto dealership. When a girl friend points out a statue across the street from the Infinity building where he works, Mokhtar sees his calling: The statue is of a Yemeni coffee drinker. Yemen is the birthplace of coffee. He is Yemeni-American. Why not bring Yemeni coffee to the United States?

Bringing Yemeni coffee to the United States is not such an easy task. As we are all too aware, Yemen is in the midst of a horrific civil war in which proxy armies for Iran and Saudi Arabia (and by extension, through funding, and arming, the United States) are laying waste to what is often described as a beautiful country and people. Mokhtar lands in the middle of this, determined to find the best Yemeni coffee, to improve its growing, and to export its beans onto the world market. It is his desire that Yemeni coffees take their rightful place among the worlds best and that the Yemeni coffee growers, an exploited lot, be the beneficiaries of this enhanced supply chain. In a nutshell, that is the story.

The story of how Mokhtar attempts to do this is a harrowing one. Not surprisingly, he is caught in the midst of the war. Reading the story is a little like reading Indiana Jones. How will he extricate himself this time?

When I finished the book I wanted to know more. There is a Mokha Foundation, highlighted at the end of the book, whose mission is to improve “the quality of life in Yemen in a variety of ways that include supporting farmers and their families, preserving natural resources, and disrupting the refugee crisis at the front line.” A little burrowing on the Internet suggests that all is not well with this foundation and its Port of Mokha operation. Alkhanshali is charged with wire fraud in cutting out his former partners in Mokha Mill, the predecessor organization to his current Port of Mokha coffee. Further links lead the reader to an unflattering review of Eggers’ book in the New York Times and to Eggers' possibly conflicted role in sponsoring the Mokha Foundation. For me, it opens a whole host of questions about my role as a reader and reviewer and about Dave Eggers role in writing this story. I leave it to you, the reader, to decide what you think.

Is The Monk of Mokha worth the read? Definitely. But so also is noodling around the Internet. Is this a Russian doll story with layers inside layers inside layers? Where does the truth lie?
The Fifth Risk
by Michael Lewis
reviewed by Jim Mills

Through the years it has become popular for many politicians to deprecate the operation of the government and to belittle its contribution to the general welfare. An example is the famous President Ronald Reagan quote: “The most terrifying words in the English language are: ‘I'm from the government and I'm here to help.’” Michael Lewis goes a long way to dispel this misapprehension in his latest book, The Fifth Risk. This work follows in two major directions. One aspect is the discussion of the value to the nation of government enterprise illustrated by the operations of the Commerce, Agriculture and Energy departments exemplified by the careers of several outstanding government employees. The other thrust is the attitude of the incoming Trump administration to the operation of the Government.

Each government department during the last presidential transition had prepared detailed briefings for those who would be shortly taking over operations. In many instances, no Trump representative showed up at all. Little interest was shown in learning how each department worked. Their main interest seemed to be to undo anything that Obama had done and to eliminate any competition that the government might make to the profitability of private firms. In the first year of the new administration a significant number of positions below the Cabinet level had not been appointed or confirmed. Many programs were essentially left leaderless and faced possible budget cutting elimination. The newly appointed Secretary of Energy, former Texas Governor Rick Perry, had stated that the Energy Department, among others, should be eliminated.

Another major aspect of the book is describing the lives of several outstanding government workers and their dedication to providing information to the public and to come up with solutions to the many problems that our country faces. Most of us don’t appreciate the multitudinous programs that the government provides that support our way of life. Much of this is because the benefits are in things that don’t happen. Checking disease and the poisoning of the food supply saves countless disabilities and lives. Greatly improved weather forecasting provides expanded warning periods of hurricanes and tornadoes also saving untold number of lives and reduced property damage. The author covers many little known functions that these departments provide such as the major effort by the Energy department to stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons and eliminate possibilities of these weapons falling into terrorist hands. A crucial period followed the breakup of the Soviet Union there was a very real danger of the spread of nuclear weapons and weapon technology with many Soviet scientist(engineers being suddenly unemployed. Much of what the government does provides long term benefits that are felt long after the end of any particular administration. Any current cessation of these government functions will have long lasting effects that will be felt long after the Trump administration is history.

In The Fifth Risk, Michael Lewis has highlighted the potential loss of little known government activities that have increasingly benefited the country and the World. Political pressures continually push for actions that have short term benefits but are deleterious in the long run. A politician may not be concerned about long range problems that result from his actions since the repercussions may come well after he is out of office. A great example of this situation is the difficulty in dealing with Global Warming. The benefits of doing nothing are immediate in not having to limit or modify any current economic activity. Taking steps to address the problem may have short term impact on the profitability of certain industries while insuring the livability of our planet well into the future. Somehow our political processes must be modified to reward leaders who look to the future and who are willing to take actions that have benefits that will accrue in the decades ahead.

Michael Lewis
Mr. Trump’s Wild Ride: the thrills, chills, screams, and occasional blackouts of an extraordinary presidency,

by Major Garrett - CBS news’ chief White House correspondent
reviewed by Don Boink

Wild ride indeed. It all started during the extraordinary campaign of the real estate tycoon of New York City. He was able to identify the hot buttons of the so-called fly over portion of the country, and capture the electoral votes of enough states to win the election while being three million votes short in the popular vote. Garrett found some favorable things to say that endeared him to Trump and enabled him to get easy access to his President.

In that position in the White House press corp he had continuous opportunity to observe the day to day happenings of governmental operations. Other writers have also written about how things were so chaotic and Garrett confirms that.

His way of covering various issues is to take them one at a time and give a thorough account of just what went on. Trump has many advisors but relies mostly on his own “intuition”. He has supreme confidence in that intuition and claims he knows more than the generals of the armed forces. He does not take direction well, has a short attention span. and acts impulsively.

The net result of this approach is often contradictory. He often undercuts his own arguments by reversing himself in mid stream. This, of course, drives his administrators nuts because he often contradicts what they understood as his policy. I think it was Garrett’s intent to identify some underlying strategy in the apparent mayhem and he highlights occasional successes. One of the most frustrating things was the recusal of his attorney general from the Mueller investigation. Trump felt it was the attorney general’s duty to defend him. This rankled him until Jeff Sessions was gone.

A most interesting chapter is about the history of Jeff Sessions. A staunch conservative Senator from Alabama Sessions had a strong following. His being the first Senator to back Trump won him the role of supplying the campaign with advisors as well as a seat in the cabinet. Garrett tells an extraordinary tale of his trials and tribulations as Trump’s AG.

The next chapter, 10 days in May, is Garrett’s first hand account of the way the news by the major publications and Trump’s twitters brought to light the utter befuddlement that characterized the White House. No one seemed to be in charge and Trump acted on impulse as he saw fit. It is a fascinating story. Then Trump broke all precedent by making a first trip of his Presidency to Saudi Arabia. Jared Kushner had made friends with the Crown Prince (MBS) who was the designated successor to the King and made the arrangements. Here Garrett became quite colorful in his vivid description of the event. The visit was extremely opulent and grandiose, exactly the thing Trump reveled in.

The other side of the story is the import of the Trump foreign policy. Previous presidents have been leery of deeper involvement in the Middle East. Trump has a priority to DRIVE OUT ISIS. He’s willing to overlook what are seen as Human Rights and other problems to gain the support of Muslims to fight terrorism and the influence of Iran. In that respect he has done more than any previous presidents. This difference might just be the most effective strategy to break the Gordon Knot of the Middle East.

In the Epilogue Garrett wraps up his informed opinion of Trump; “…the reality is that Trump does not share, does not inspire, and does not lead nearly so much as he commands, demands, projects and brands. He is in every way exhausting to the soul and corrosive to the spirit”. In spite of the above, at least among those identified as Republicans, this behavior has had no negative consequences. This book is an excellent journey through two years of the Trump presidency. Each chapter contains useful information about what went on during the various episodes that have captured headlines from tweets to court cases.
Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"
by Zora Neale Hurston
reviewed by Doug Wilcock

As a young writer Zora Neale Hurston was sent by Dr. Franz Boas to Plateau, Alabama to get a firsthand report of the raid in Africa by the Dahomey people on the Tokkai tribe that resulted in the capture of Cudjo Lewis, the last survivor of the last slave ship to come to the United States. As a result of this trip Hurston published an article in 1929 in the Journal of Negro History. She then used her extensive interviews with Cudjo, known also by his African name of Kossula, to write his story. In her words this was her attempt to tell the story not from the perspective of the seller but from that of the sold.

In 1859 the ship Clotilda left Mobile Bay under Capt. William Foster headed for West Africa where it would pick up a load of slaves at Whydah. Among the slaves that were picked up was Cudjo Lewis. Seventy days after departing the Dahomey coast of Africa the Clotilda sneaked into Mobile Bay where its illegal cargo was spirited to farms owned by the three Meaher brothers who had been responsible for the voyage. By 1865, the cargo, African slaves, was freed as the Civil War ended. Cudjo and his newly freed compatriots, residents of what became known as Africatown, planned for repatriation back to their African homeland but, with no money for the return, they could only rent land from Tim Meaher, which they ultimately bought. And it was on that land in the late 1920's, almost seventy years later, where Zora Neale Hurston sat down with Cudjo Lewis to get his story.

Lewis's story spans his village life in Africa, village traditions, the story of his ancestors, the raid by the Dahomey and his capture, his time in the Barracoon (stockade), the Middle Passage, life as a slave, freedom, marriage, his family, and his life alone after his children and his wife have all died. It is a moving story. As Kossula comes to the end of the story of his capture and imprisonment, the emotional toll weighs heavily on him. "Kossula was no longer on the porch with me. He was squatting about that fire in Dahomey. His face was twitching in abysmal pain. It was a horror mask. He had forgotten that I was there. He was thinking aloud and gazing into the dead faces in the smoke. His agony was so acute that he became inarticulate."

Hurston's writing is as lovely as the exquisitely detailed story Cudjo tells. In his vernacular speech, punctuated often with "you unnerstand," he lays out his life story as if it were just yesterday. Images are vivid; he brings life to them in the telling. And when he finishes, Hurston summarizes. Cudjo, for all his years here, is still a man of Afficky. His thoughts are of "fat girls with ringing golden bracelets, … drums that speak the minds of men." Hurston is sure he does not fear death; he is too deeply a pagan for that. And in a melancholy final sentence she concludes that Cudjo is "full of trembling awe before the altar of the past."

There are many strands of this story that bear examination. Hurston had this ready for publication in 1931 but Viking wouldn't take it as written in the vernacular. Or maybe it was because, as Langston Hughes put it, blacks were not of interest in the Depression. Hurston is not above controversy either. Her journal article, the predecessor to Barracoon, borrowed heavily from Emma Langdon Roche's *Historic Sketches of the South*. According to editor and Hurston expert, Deborah Plant, of the sixty-seven paragraphs in Hurston's article, only eighteen are her own prose. The story that Cudjo told required the active complicity of African Blacks to enslave their fellow Blacks. His story also picked up on the divide between African-Americans and Africans. Cudjo was clearly the latter. There is also contemporary controversy about Africatown, best summarized by a January 4, 2019 segment of the NPR podcast, *On The Media*, and well worth listening to.

This short book, just fewer than one hundred pages for Cudjo's story, will stun you. While it may go back over one hundred and fifty years, it is as relevant and moving today as when Zora Neale Hurston wrote it in 1931. Take the time to read and reflect on this remarkable individual and his story. You won't be disappointed.
The Patch
by John McPhee
reviewed by Jim Mills

Through the years I have come to the conclusion that any book by John McPhee is worth reading and this, his latest work, does not disappoint. This Princeton author has been writing engaging non-fiction works since the 1960s. His total publications over that time number 32. McPhee’s eclectic interests range from the geology of various parts of our country, to sports, birch bark canoes, nuclear energy, the control of nature, commercial transport (oceangoing and river boats, trucking, mile long trains), fishing, writing and oranges. Regardless of topic, McPhee brings an inordinate energy and knowledge to his writing and is never dull.

The Patch is a collection of essays that the 87 year old writer and teacher has created over the years. The first third of the book covers sports (football, lacrosse, fishing, golf and bear tracking). The article on football mentions his father who was a physician to the Princeton team and, as the author relates, came close to inventing Gatorade which, as McPhee feels, would have put the whole family on easy street. Fortunately this did not happen and we have the pleasure of reading McPhee’s laborious efforts to open up hidden worlds to us all. McPhee ties his love of fly fishing with his advocation of finding golf balls around many local golf courses and on the bottom of many streams that he fishes which he then ties into the history of the game that produces so very many lost objects.

The final two thirds of the book cover a wide variety of subjects. There are several short portraits of film celebrities, Cary Grant, Richard Burton, Jackie Gleason, Marion Davies, and Peter O’Toole. Other celebrities covered include comedian Mort Sahl, folk singer Joan Baez, singer Jenny Lind, playwright Neil Simon and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein. Another section goes into the original names of many well known celebrities and the likely reason that they chose to make the change. One example is the British actor James Stewart who changed his name to Stewart Granger to not conflict with the better known American performer.

Other topics include the original geyser in Iceland and the origin of the word, the lure of the Alaskan back-country, the rapidly depleting water table under bone-dry Nevada, the massive gold storage in Manhattan’s Federal Reserve Bank, and the various interesting and repulsive insects that you can find in Natural History Museums. One episode that McPhee relates is a trip to Burning Tree Golf Course in Washington, checking out the license plates on the cars parked there and trying to identify the celebrity owners by their unique plates. Another interesting diversion is a look at Time Magazine covers that did not make the cut and were never used for various reasons. McPhee also investigates the organization Mensa which restricts membership to only those with the very highest IQs. There is no limit to the range of topics that Mr. McPhee explores and his engaging writing style will make you fascinated about what may have been previously obscure subjects. Past McPhee works that deserve special attention: Coming into the Country (Alaska), Uncommon Carriers (Ships, Trains, Trucks), The Control of Nature (floods, mud slides, earthquakes) and Heirs of General Practice (the education of GPs). No matter what the topic you cannot lose with John McPhee.
Woodhouse is one of my favorite authors and has a tremendous body of work associated with his name. Over all however he is best known by his stories of the very inept Bertie Wooster and his manservant, Jeeves. Jeeves is the extremely erudite individual who chooses to allow himself to be employed by the well to do aristocratic class. In this case currently, by an indolent, not overly bright nephew of tyrannical Aunts who are the the bane of his existence. His name is Bertram Wooster, scion of the aristocratic Wooster clan. There are several stories about the relationship between Bertie and Jeeves and the predicaments Bertie gets into and Jeeves manages to extricate him.

This novel is based on those two characters and the highly unlikely involvement they get into at the behest of the secret service of the British Crown. One of the unusual elements in Jeeve’s background is his membership in a group called the Junior Ganymeads. This organization is called upon to assist the British Secret Service on occasion. This story is about one of those occasions. The Ganymead organization is composed of a group of Gentleman’s Gentlemen. Because they are in intimate contact with very influential persons they are privy to important information. Because of some connections that Wooster has, he as well as Jeeves, has been recruited. When he is told he, at first, shies away from the idea and then thinks it would be a jolly good experience.

In the course of events Bertie’s predilection for getting involved in sundry odd complications, many occur. One such is the request by a friend, Madelyn Bassett, to whom he has been engaged a few times in the past, to select a suitable gift for her current fiancé. This is, none other than Lord Sidcup who happens to be the person the Secret Service is interested in regarding his Fascistic organization, known as the Black Shorts.

The ramifications of this request is then spun into a typical Wooster series of misunderstandings and incidents both ridiculous and hilarious. The connection to the book’s title does not appear until the very end. I enjoyed the book, nonetheless, I feel that Percival Granville Woodhouse is owed an apology.

In keeping with the Conan Doyle tradition of Sherlock Holmes the authors have submitted their creations of fiction in tribute to the great author. The various tales have some semblance to the format Doyle employed in his stories. Occasionally terminology mimics Holmes or Watson, such as “the game is afoot”, or “You look but you don’t see”.

One tale gets into mysticism, some almost occult. In some I’m sure I miss the connection. In general however it is a fun light read of interest primarily to Sherlock Holmes aficionados. The last story actually involves Holmes and Watson in “The Hounds of the Baskervilles” type narration. The new wrinkle is the introduction of modern contrivances such as GPS devices and a female operative almost as wily as Holmes. The locale is the treacherous Moors and their deadly quicksand patches as well as the baleful hounds.

All of the authors have a number of books to their credit. The book notes comment on the various series. It seems the publishers and editors enjoyed putting this collection together for fun. This is reflected in the title in the same way that horse racing is referred to as “improving the breed”
Let’s start with a quiz: Why read a book about termites?

a. Termites, despite being the bane of homeowners worldwide, are interesting creatures and the study of them shows how they fill an important ecological niche;

b. The scientists who study termites are a thoughtful, creative breed and their interactions in bringing together multiple disciplines gives a window into how contemporary science is done;

c. The study of termites and other altruistic creatures gives insight into how so-called self-organizing systems evolve and achieve homeostasis (a dynamic state of equilibrium that is the condition of optimal functioning for an organism), a topic that comes under the rubric of complexity theory;

d. Science does not exist in a vacuum. How science plays out in society is as important as the science itself;

e. All of the above;

f. None of the above.

If you gave any answer except f, you are a good candidate to read Lisa Margonelli’s *Underbug: An Obsessive Tale of Termites and Technology*. Whatever your experience with termites (which is probably no experience or a negative one), once you have read this you are almost certain to have a new appreciation of termites and of the scientists who obsessively follow and attempt to understand them.

On Lisa Margonelli’s first termite hunting trip to Namibia the scientist J. Scott Turner asks, “What is life? Is it genes? Or is it process?” For Turner life is the drive to homeostasis; in the specific case of termites it is the complex interplay of termites, fungus, microbes that live on the fungus, and the termite mound itself, all of which he sees as a complex cognitive organism. But, before we get all squishy over this idea of termite mounds as cognitive organisms and termites as neurons, there is some hard-core science in what is called complexity theory to deal with. If we could use complexity theory to come up with a viable theory for the way termites build, it could change the way computer networks run, how wars are fought, and how disasters get responded to. The emergent behavior that develops from local algorithms could change the world. This is a heady introduction to what will follow.

Margonelli often brings ideas full circle. On her first trip to Namibia she marvels at the straight road on which she travels but then learns that it is Hindenburg Street and that it was used by German tanks and troops in mass killings of the Himbe and Herero ethnic groups in 1907, killings widely viewed as the first genocide of the twentieth century. Much of the slaughter was accomplished using machine guns, weapons the Germans never imagined would make their way to fighting in Europe. Margonelli brings this idea forward to question why it is that drones are used for killing purposes in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Can we not imagine the day when they might be used elsewhere? A side note to this is that funding for termite research and RoboBees (autonomous flying micro-robots) is now increasingly done by the Army through DARPA while National Science Foundation funding has fallen away. Back at MIT and the Wyss Institute where many of these technologies are honed, a protestor, Reverend Billy, suggests that insect drone wars are an impossible moral decision. Science meets a backlash.

We often think of termites as tireless machines, an army of drones whose sole purpose is to consume cellulose. But to researcher Kirsten Petersen, if they were construction workers, most of them would be fired. They are not downtrodden drones of a totalitarian assembly line but something more like well-kept residents of a Danish socialist village. Some do nothing well so it could be a job description. This of course begs the question about how the group self-organizes and accomplishes the tasks it does. Margonelli shifts the subject to fish swimming in schools. They follow informed individuals but do so while aware of the group as a whole, what Margonelli describes as concentrating sensory awareness while damping down hair trigger reactions. She suggests that this sensing the group and damping reactions makes the system, in this case the school, sturdy and that it does not depend on a single leader. This, she reasons, reduces the likelihood of following a really eccentric fish with a bad idea, “something humans might want to look into.” (continued on the next page)
For readers interested in contemporary directions in scientific research and who might think of studying termites as a scientific backwater consider termite researcher Phil Hugenholtz. In 2007 he published a paper describing CRISPR (clustered regularly interspersed short palindromic repeats) as a funny feature of bacteria, five years before researchers determined that, in combination with an enzyme called Cas9, it could be readily used for gene editing. This foray into synthetic biology leads Margonelli to the production of artemisinin, the crucial component in artemisinin combination therapy (ACT), that could lead to a dramatic change in how effective malaria treatments are, an example of what she describes as responsible synthetic biology. I will leave it to the reader to see how that story unfolds. Suffice it to say that this is but one example among many of the entwined nature of science and society. 

Margonelli takes a termite expedition to Australia where she meets members of the Yolngu tribe that live in a remote part of the country called Gove Peninsula. Gove Peninsula also happens to be the site of a Rio Tinto bauxite mine. The interplay of Yolngu, the Rio Tinto mine, a German restoration ecologist, termites, and a petition written on the bark of a eucalyptus tree is yet another fascinating side story on Lisa Margonelli's meandering journey.

While *Underbug* is a story about termites, the termite story is part of a larger story about evolution, life, and altruism and it is embedded in the larger story of contemporary science and the scientists who practice it. Margonelli expresses great empathy for the work that they do, even to the point of confessing that if she were to go to college again she would become a microbial ecologist. But then she wouldn't have become a writer and those of us who are readers would not have had the joy of following her journey through the world of termites.

**Trumponomics : Inside the America First Plan to Revive Our Economy**

by Stephen Moore and Arthur Laffer, PhD

reviewed by Don Boink

In my attempt to find some redeeming virtue in the present Trump administration I was intrigued by the title. The name Laffer, an economist, goes back to the Reagan era when “trickle down economics” and “supply side economics” were catch phrases. One other name that was associated was Lawrence Kudlow. The latter is now Trump’s top economic advisor. These three were invited to Trump Tower early in the presidential campaign to consult with, then, nominee Trump.

This book is their account of how impressed they were with the Trump organization and their impression of Trump himself. It soon becomes apparent that they were smitten with the attention they received and they gladly contributed their services as in the countries interest. *Trumponomics* is simply a hagiography (adulatory writing about another person) of Republicans, mainly Trump, initiatives and boasts about questionable legislative measures that may or may not, be in the best interests of the country. As an example the Tax Exemption Bill that lowers corporation taxes and taxes on the wealthy while touting less percentage tax reduction for lower income earners (that expire in five years).

The promise is that the resulting increase in GDP will pay for the tax cuts. This same argument was made in previous administrations and never proved out. In the meantime the national debt is ballooning along with the increased interest payments for it. Ironically at the same time the book was being released the headlines were proclaiming outrage by the authors that they were not being consulted as the President was following Peter Navarro’s (the Assistant to the President, Director of Trade and Industrial Policy) recommendations instead of theirs. To their credit they stated that the President did not agree with their ideas on immigration but was at least willing to listen. Once Trump had an idea he strongly defended it and flatly rejected any changes.

I found myself arguing with many of the statements made. I also got the impression that a consensus of other economists was that the ideas being offered were tried and rejected or found wanting earlier. One being so bold as to state “Those guys haven’t been right yet”. It was found amusing that Kudlow had been selected by Trump as his senior economic advisor. This is not a book I would consider as having meaningful information.

There is only one thing in life worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. .....Oscar Wilde
Yuval Harari made the best seller’s list in 2014 with the publication in English of his first book, *Sapiens*. This book, which covers the history of our species, attracted the interest of the reading public, selling over one million copies. His latest work, with the rather cumbersome title *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, describes the prospects for humanity in the near future, continues Harari’s insightful analysis of human affairs.

Society faces many challenges in the upcoming years. One will be people being displaced as more rapid technology advances cause a reduced need for many of the job skills currently in place. The pace of these changes will make it increasingly hard for the education establishment to predict just which job skills to train young people entering the work force. Training will have to be more generalized and feature establishing personal traits that will allow the individual to adapt to change. Another cloud on the horizon is the widespread impact of Climate Change. Since little has been done so far to ameliorate the magnitude of this change, society will have to deal with the resulting costs and the displacements that will increasingly occur. Many low lying areas including many of our major cities will be flooded, dislocating millions of people, especially in third world countries. Agriculture will have to deal with climate impacts much greater than those of the past. Possible future change will bring increased drought to the American midwestern farm belt. The pressure of economically stressed migrants will only increase from what we experienced today. An example of this type of disruption was the drought in Syria, a factor in causing the Syrian war and the influx of migrants to Europe.

The effects of increased immigration has had the effect of influencing the resident populations towards more authoritarian responses. These effects have already had a big impact in the US and is increasingly upsetting Europe. The author discusses terrorism and concludes that the real threat is not directly from the terrorists themselves but from the impact of the colossal response made by the threatened nations changing the very nature of their societies. Eighty years ago President Franklin Roosevelt expressed the issue succinctly; “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Other changes along with the authoritarian trend is the characterization of news as being fake reducing the ability of the media to report on the behavior of the country’s leaders. No one knows what to believe and such a situation of disbelief can be fatal for a democracy.

Harari is not necessarily pessimistic on the future but he knows that we have to be able to adapt to changing situations and be flexible enough to deal with problems in a timely manner. One quote from the book: “Questions you cannot answer are usually far better for you than answers you cannot question.” In other words the open discussion sponsored by science allows for growth and improvement more so than the stagnation of a doctrinaire society where the direction of society cannot be questioned. We have had too many examples of the latter societies in the past including the Communist World, Nazi Germany, pre-renaissance Europe and some religiously dominated countries today. Open societies keep on giving, often in unexpected ways by opening up the creative potential of its members.

In less open societies leaders frequently need to create enemies and fears among the population that would allow the leaders to take severe actions that would not otherwise be tolerated by the population. The best check on such a trend is the existence of a free open and believable press that can warn the population to dangers well before they reach critical levels. Harari has the ability to express his views in a very clear and evocative prose. His understanding of history and current trends is comprehensive. In each instance he tries to present the views of contending opinions in a balanced way. In the opinion of this reviewer, this author has a great future in presenting and analyzing the issues that have faced and which still do face us and to do so in a very believable fashion.
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