

# OVER THE WALL



SEVERAL RECENT WORKS of fiction reviewed by Kirkus Indie look at China in different eras and from different perspectives—providing windows into a culture that may be unfamiliar to many Westerners. Here are a few of the best we've seen this year:

The stories in Ho Lin's ambitious, sometimes-experimental collection *China Girl* touch on various aspects of modern China, including politics

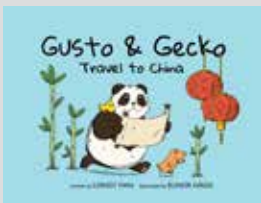
in the story "National Holiday," which features a Communist Party official acting as a "minder" to a visiting journalist, and larger cultural issues, as in the title work, about a model/exotic dancer in Beijing who yearns for more in life. Kirkus' reviewer writes that "these tales all feel very much of a piece, with shared themes of isolation, identity crises, and interconnectedness."

*A Call to China* by Jeffrey Meyer addresses religion in a story about the daughters of an American missionary stationed in China in the early 20th century. One, Victoria, is abducted as a child by members of a local religious sect; the other, Livia, eventually moves to the United States, converts to Catholicism, and returns as an adult to the Asian country to investigate her sister's fate. It's an "engrossing fictional exploration of family, culture, and what it means to belong in both China and America," says Kirkus' reviewer.

Kirkus awarded a star to Longy Han's picture book for children, *Gusto & Gecko Travel to China*, which features illustrations by Elinor Hägg. In it, two tiny dinosaurs use a fanciful machine called a "Rombom" to make the titular journey. There, the animals of the Chinese zodiac

face challenges from others for their places on the calendar. Gusto and Gecko urge a giant panda to compete in a culturally informative tale that, according to Kirkus' reviewer, "encourages cooperation in a way that's fun but never preachy." —D.R.

*David Rapp is the senior Indie editor.*



but a paltry affair and no more than a house abandoned." Readers who fancy Faulkner—both for his expressive prose and his authentic portrayals of the American South—are likely to find in Abrams a kindred literary spirit. The novel's pace plods a bit in the second half but never fully becomes slothful, and even that modest lethargy is more than compensated for by the intelligence and refinement of the prose.

**A sublimely sensitive war tale rendered in exquisite language.**



## DEAD RECKONING IN FREDERICK

Allen, P.J.

AuthorHouse (338 pp.)

\$34.99 | \$19.95 paper | \$3.99 e-book

Jun. 23, 2017

978-1-4808-5878-7

978-1-5246-9551-4 paper

A paranormal team's investigation into spirits in Maryland exposes nefarious deeds that come with a human

threat in this suspense novel.

When the Frederick County Landmarks Foundation suspects "something" is wrong with one of its historical buildings, the Dulany Paranormal Team takes the case. The 200-year-old home, Beacon's Way, is a hub of recent unexplained events, including a mysterious leak in the ceiling and a heavy armoire that seemingly moves on its own. Team member and photographer Kayla Dunn snaps some pictures of the house and is shaken by what appears to be a specter staring at her. Investigating with her colleagues Parker Troxell and Henry Marfoh, Kayla looks into other local hauntings, all eventually linked by trompe l'oeil paintings, works with three-dimensional optical illusions. At the same time, there's an equally unnerving human element, from a note that warns the foundation's vice president to steer clear of Beacon's Way to someone directly threatening Parker. There's also the body that Kayla stumbles on—a Jane Doe and an indisputable homicide. Unfortunately, more killings follow, and the possible presence of phantoms may not be the greatest danger for Frederick County or the Dulany Team. Allen's (*Lies Beneath Ellicott City*, 2015, etc.) novel is an engaging fusion of ghost story and thriller. The focus is primarily on the mystery: Humans are a definite menace but their objective is unclear, while the existence of spirits is initially vague. The intermittent merging of the two investigations—the Dulany Team's and Detective Nick Nucci working the murders—further deepens the mystery with probable connections. The author grounds the paranormal sleuths with signs of their expertise, like relevant terminology: *apport* (an object appearing through spiritual means) versus *asport* (an object that a ghost takes or moves). But along with the realism, there are wonderful instances of spookiness; when Kayla carefully peruses her photos of Beacon's Way, she spots a previously unseen individual who had been hiding.

**Taut, riveting story in which apparitions and corporeal baddies remain comparably terrifying.**