

to a wide range of readers, and the underlying question of whether or not *The Beast* actually exists will pull the reader eagerly through to the end. (November) *Christine Canfield*



**King of Nod:  
Some Things  
Never Die**

**Scott Fad**  
Hooded Friar Press,  
Softcover \$17.99 (650pp)  
978-0-9817609-0-2

Anger and revenge long outlive their causes, revenants visit their venom on the descendants of people so long dead their origins may be impossible to discover. When Boo Taylor returns to Sweetpatch Island, South Carolina, for the first time in twenty years, the ghosts of his past and others' pursue him still. For the sake of his childhood sweetheart and her unborn child, he must untangle the riddle of his ancestry and the reasons those ghosts live on.

An extraordinary book, *King of Nod* is part spook story, part Southern Gothic, and part noir, cloaked in the language of lush imagery and fed on social consciousness. Its characters come alive in their quests to survive childhood, abuse, neglect, discrimination, and oppression, and to deal with the consequences of their choices.

Boo's hauntings are many: the girl he left behind; his parentage; the elusive but powerful magic of the good (Laylee Colebriar, a "guffer" doctor and his parents' former housekeeper) and the evil (the witch Mamie Stuvant, who murdered his young friend Hoss years ago). Sweetpatch has changed, at least on the surface. Now veneered over with tourist traps and fairways, it projects an aura of prosperity. Yet ancient prejudices live on, and the poverty and despair once the daily bread of the island's poor and black inhabitants have not gone away; they've merely seeped underground, waiting to resurface when the time is right.

Boo loved redheaded Gussie Dutton in their youth, and he still does. Sweetpatch, however, harbors secrets that nurture those twin evils, anger and revenge, and Boo has been a lightning rod for their attention from the very beginning. As Laylee Colebriar knows all too well, "...that was what they...wanted: him, a man, so they could take from him, have yet another generation to haunt, bleed, break, keep the misery breathing and themselves fat with it...It was all about punishment for long-ago sins."

Skin-stealers, witches, a mysterious Beast that devours boys and men alike, the fingers Boo lost as a teenager fighting with the Beast, surfacing in a jar twenty years later, bones found after a fire that are not who they seem—all these blend to weave a spooky narrative that jumps back and forth in time, and from person to person, to relate a tale of privilege and deprivation, loss and

reclamation, spanning generations. (November) *Marlene Y. Satter*



**The Master Planets**

**Donald Gallinger**  
Kunati, Softcover \$14.95  
(336pp)  
978-1-60164-159-5

In 1973, Peter Jameson was nineteen years old and preparing to conquer the world with his band, the Master Planets, when echoes of his Holocaust ancestry swept in. The ordeals of having to deal with rapacious, dope-addled music executives while simultaneously coming to terms with his Jewish mother's bloody past are the twin engines that drive this story. Here's the skinny: Peter's father, a Presbyterian doctor with the U.S. Army, rescues a woman who identifies herself as Rachel Arenberg from one of Hitler's death camps. The two marry and settle down in Sea Ridge, New Jersey, where he sets up a practice and she opens a flower shop. Their first child is a daughter, Penny. Three years later Peter is born. At the age of nine, he discovers the Beatles and ten years hence is fronting and writing songs for his own band.

Idyllic and All-American as this may sound, Peter sees ominous clouds. His mother drinks too much, keeps a psychological distance from her children and husband, and demonstrates a capacity—even a zeal—for violence, as when she expertly overpowers and then brutalizes a drug addict who attempts to rob her store. Just as Peter is immersing himself in ironing out a recording contract and a tour schedule for the Master Planets, a stranger appears at the family's door who seems to know his mother well and who refers to her familiarly as "Leah." The consequences of this incident will, in the long run, do more to mark the course of Peter's life than his beloved music.

Apart from Peter (who narrates the story) and his demon-haunted mother, Gallinger's most fully realized character is the patient, all-knowing Daniel Gilaad, now an Israeli ambassador but once a Polish resistance fighter alongside Peter's mother. Each new conversation between the two men reveals more of the mother's shadowy past. Gallinger deftly orchestrates this clash between the glitzy, egocentric rock world that first enchants Peter and the grim, self-sacrificing world his mother was forced to confront, without distorting or minimizing the significance of either. With smooth shifts from the balmy Jersey shores to the frozen Polish forests, this intriguing tale reads like a movie in embryo. (September) *Edward Morris*



**Only Son**

**Lafie Crum**  
Livingston Press, Softcover  
\$15.95 (183pp)  
978-1-60489-013-6

"We're never fully in the now, never free of the past and future. The only people who really live in the right-now are kids," realizes middle-aged Cora, as she watches her young grandson Billy catch lightning bugs one summer night. "I could tell by the way he moved he was thinking only of that instant, living in the now." Cora is one of four characters who take turns narrating this thoughtful, heart-breaking debut novel about the unraveling of a young family.

The story opens with her son Bill getting laid off from his carpenter job in their economically hard-pressed Kentucky town. When he and his high school sweetheart, now wife Martha, bump into her cousin, "one of those guys who goes off to work (up North) and stays away and now only comes back to visit," their lives change forever.

Once content living in the valleys of their forefathers, the couple pack up their meager belongings and with Billy in tow, move to a large Ohio city where nothing binds them. They flounder tragically both there and on their subsequent return home.

The book's title refers to the status of main protagonist, Bill, and also his namesake, Billy. As Bill's Aunt Dora points out, "The family name lays on him."

This is Crum's first work of fiction. A dean at a Kentucky college who's also written academic books, Crum grew up in the region he so poignantly describes here.

The four narrators—Bill, Martha, Billy, and Cora—each have a unique voice. Bill is straightforward, usually keeping his emotions hidden. Martha's whole world, at first, revolves around her son and husband. She waxes poetic about Bill's kiss in the dark: "But the kiss would be so much more, like we shared breath." Billy speaks with the comprehension and words of a five-year-old. Cora's ruminations are the best of all—she's a philosopher for the ages, whether reminiscing on her front porch at dusk with her photo albums or silently chastising mourners at a funeral.

This is a quiet, sad book with a lot to say, especially when Cora speaks: "[Young people] seem to always look ahead. Now that I'm older it seems I'm always looking back, living in the past. Life is funny like that." (October) *Robin Farrell Edmunds*