

tention of family enemies. The plot, while contrived, satisfies on the fashion-and-passion front, and, as always, at the heart of the action stands a determined heroine scrambling up the ladder of success supported by minor characters, each with a complicated backstory. Fans will not mind if the connections holding them together seem tenuous. (Oct.)

Mama Dearest

E. Lynn Harris. Simon and Schuster/Hunter, \$25 (438p) ISBN 978-1-4391-5890-6

Yancey Harrington Braxton returns in bestseller E. Lynn Harris's (*A Love of My Own*) sadly last novel (the author died in July) for another sex and betrayal-filled romp. Diva Yancey, fast fading into Z-list territory, is nearly broke and acting in a traveling production of *Dreamgirls*, reprising her role in the original theater production with a bunch of hacks. Then she meets and is immediately impressed by wealthy S. Marcus Pinkston, who wants to produce a reality TV show he claims will rejuvenate her career. Simultaneously, Yancey's mother, Ava, is released from prison with a devious plan for revenge. And when Ava's on the scene, it means deception, trickery and the revelation of Yancey's innermost secrets. Throw in some ex-lovers along with Madison, the daughter Yancy gave up years ago who's now back on the scene as her mother's major show biz competitor, and ride the wave of high drama to Yancey's redemption and ultimate happiness. Nobody ever said entertainment had to be plausible. (Oct.)

Americans in Space

Mary E. Mitchell. St. Martin's/Dunne, \$24.99 (304p) ISBN 978-0-312-37245-3

A guidance counselor is at a loss in her personal life in Mitchell's mediocre debut. Young widow Kate Cavanaugh has been going through the motions in the two

years since her husband died of a heart attack. At work, she does her best with a cohort of troubled kids, but Kate is at sea when it comes to dealing with her own children: preschooler Hunter has an unhealthy emotional attachment to ketchup bottles, and teen Charlotte blames Kate for everything, including her dad's death. Despite the support of her next-door neighbor and the possibilities offered by a new romance, Kate decides the only way to fix her family is to hit the road with them, though nothing, of course, goes as planned. Mitchell's prose is sterling, but her character work is less than stellar; she doesn't do anything new with the tired trope of the rebellious teen seeking solace online, while adorable Hunter is just a sideshow. Mitchell tries admirably to do something different with familiar grief material, but the frenzied antics and haphazard character development undermine the effort. (Oct.)

The Gates

John Connolly. Atria, \$24 (304p) ISBN 978-1-4391-7263-6

In this frothy fantasy thriller from bestseller Connolly (*The Book of Lost Things*), 11-year-old Samuel Johnson witnesses an inadvertent intersection of science and the supernatural while trick-or-treating at the Abernathy household in Biddlecombe, England. Something nasty reaches through an atomically engineered portal to Hades and possesses four suburban sorcerers. From that point on, Samuel finds himself battling hordes of invading demons and desperately trying to convince disbelieving adults that the impending end of the world is not a fancy of his overactive imagination. Connolly plays this potentially spooky scenario strictly for laughs, larding the narrative with droll jokes, humorous asides and the slapstick pratfalls of Nurd, an amusingly incompetent subdemon whom Samuel ultimately

befriends. Though billed as "an adult book for children," this light fantasy will strike even adult readers as divertingly whimsical. (Oct.)

The Ghosts of Belfast

Stuart Neville. Soho Crime, \$24 (336p) ISBN 978-1-56947-600-0

With this stunning debut, Neville joins a select group of Irish writers, including Ken Bruen, Declan Hughes and Adrian McKinty, who have reinvigorated the noir tradition with a Celtic edge. Gerry Fegan, a former IRA hit man haunted by the ghosts of the 12 people he killed, realizes the only way these specters will give him rest is to systematically assassinate the men who gave him his orders. Though those in the militant IRA underworld have written him off as a babbling drunk and a liability to the movement, they take note when their members start turning up dead. Meanwhile, Fegan is attracted to Marie McKenna, a relative of one of the newly slain men and a pariah to the Republicans. Can Fegan satisfy his demons and redeem himself, or will the ghosts of Belfast consume him first? This is not only an action-packed, visceral thriller but also an insightful insider's glimpse into the complex political machinations and networks that maintain the uneasy truce in Northern Ireland. (Oct.)

Snow Job

William Deverell. McClelland & Stewart, \$25.95 (424p) ISBN 978-0-7710-2722-2

In Arthur Ellis Award-winner Deverell's rambling third novel to feature crafty lawyer Arthur Beauchamp (after 2008's *Kill All the Judges*), Igor Muckhali Ivanovich (aka Mad Igor), the dictator of the People's Republic of Bhashyistan (formerly part of the U.S.S.R.), declares war on Canada after a diplomatic delegation from the Central Asian nation is blown to bits while visiting Ottawa. Beauchamp and

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