

People & Places

Books

'Survive' a twisty thriller

Can the mighty FB control false info?

By Jeff Rowe

'An Ugly Truth,' by Sheera Frenkel and Cecilia Kang (Harper)

Authors Sheera Frenkel and Cecilia Kang in "An Ugly Truth" build a compelling case that Facebook has grown far past its origins as a sharing place for birthday parties, vacation pictures and news of family and friends into a delivery system perfectly suited for the propagation of extremist views and outright untruths.

It's worth keeping in mind that in signing up for Facebook, we all willingly surrender personal information that provides the fundamental net worth to Facebook's computer algorithms' ability to guide targeted messages to us.

How to curate and check the range of postings and ads produced by Facebook users, good and bad?

The book details how it took the company months to find the origins of some of the ads that Russian interests had placed during the 2016 presidential campaign. One ad, for example, featured a doctored image of Hillary Clinton in a hijab, a veil that Muslim women wear. You can imagine the reception to that ad among conservative Americans.

From the beginning, **Zuckerberg** envisioned an online site that would connect the world, a place where people could share their lives, hopes, favorites and news. No one seems to have anticipated that Facebook and other social media could become such powerful tools for disinformation campaigns. Recently, many have argued that it allows outright fiction about COVID-19 vaccines to flourish.

Facebook says it is promoting authoritative vaccine information. Moreover, Facebook says neither the FBI nor any US intelligence agency knew the extent of Russian interference efforts in the 2016 election.

Can Congress regulate Facebook and other social media giants? As the authors write, in a 2018 Senate hearing, many senators didn't seem to grasp the basics of how Facebook operated. It's tempting to conclude from Frenkel and Kang's book that Zuckerberg lacks the leadership and management skills to guide the colossus he created. Where would he get those skills? He started Facebook in college and has been the boss ever since then.

Did the ads with outright lies sway the 2016 presidential election? We don't know — yet. And we may never, but Frenkel and Kang offer a compelling argument that in the interest of preserving democracy, we must take steps to purge Facebook of outright falsehoods, hate and disinformation now.

No one has quite figured out how to do that yet.

'Survive the Night,' by Riley Sager (Dutton) Confused and depressed Charlie can't bear to stay at Olyphant University anymore — not since her best friend was stabbed to death by a serial murderer known as the Campus Killer. So she drops out, packs up her stuff, kisses her college boyfriend goodbye, and puts a ride share request on the school bulletin board.

That leads her to Josh, a somewhat older guy who says he is going her way. Charlie is unsure if she can trust him, but her need to get away is so strong that she gets into his car for the long drive from New Jersey to Ohio.

For a thriller that starts off with two strikes against it, Riley Sager's "Survive the Night" turns out to be a first-rate read. The strikes? First, Sager asks readers to believe that a young woman obsessed with her roommate's murder would get into a car with a stranger. Second, a young woman stuck in a car with scary stranger is an overused trope of crime fiction. We've seen this movie before.

That may be so, Sager seems to be telling us, but you haven't seen anybody do it like this.

The author (Riley Sager is a penname for New England author Todd Ritter) spins his yarn at a frantic pace. A sense of dread arrives the moment Charlie enters the car and never stops building. And the twists, few of which readers are likely to see coming, arrive in such abundance that they are head-spinning.

From moment to moment, neither Charlie nor the reader is ever sure how much danger she is in or whether Josh (if that is his real name), or perhaps someone else, is the person to be feared.

Compounding the problem is that Charlie, from whose point of view the story is told, has a tenuous grip on reality. A movie major, she is prone to sudden waking hallucinations that usually take the form of scenes from the noir films she loves. To stop them, she was prescribed some medication, but she stopped taking it. As a result, neither she nor the reader can be certain which events in the narrative are real.

The tale comes to a violent conclusion, or at least so it seemed. But then, with four final pages, Sager reveals a final surprise that is stunning yet somehow feels exactly right.

Also:

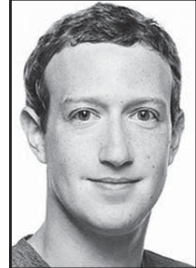
NEW YORK: Charles Oakley has a memoir coming out next year that includes a brief assist from former Chicago Bulls teammate **Michael Jordan**.

Gallery Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, has announced recently that it will publish Oakley's "The Last Enforcer" on Feb. 1, 2022. The book will be co-written by longtime NBA writer **Frank Isola**. Jordan is contributing a foreword.

"I want people to know that on and off the court, I always tried to do the right thing and protect those that I care about," Oakley said in a statement Wednesday. Throughout the years I've told my B and C stories. With this book, I brought my A stories."

Oakley, a power forward known for his rebounding skills and confrontational ways, played for 19 years in the NBA, the first three with Jordan. According to Gallery Books, Oakley will bring "his signature, unfiltered style to stories about dustups on the court and controversies off it."

"From indelible experiences fighting for rebounds and respect during the golden era of physical play to relationships and run-ins with Michael Jordan, **LeBron James, Charles Barkley, Patrick Ewing, Phil Jackson, Pat Riley, James Dolan, Donald Trump**, and many others, Oakley shares behind-the-scenes details that will solidify his status as a hard-nosed fan favorite who left it all on the court — and now puts it all on the page," Gallery Books said. (AP)



Zuckerberg



Chance the Rapper performs on stage at the Pre-Grammy Gala And Salute To Industry Icons on Jan. 25, 2020, in Beverly Hills, Calif. The Grammy winner is bringing a secret concert filmed four years ago to the big screen next month. Titled 'Magnificent Coloring World,' the film premieres Aug. 13, 2021, in select AMC Theatres. (AP)

Music

Eilish concert film coming

Chance to bring concert to big screen

LOS ANGELES, July 26, (AP) — When Chance the Rapper filmed a secret concert four years ago, he intended to make a movie for the big screen but ended up shelving the project after not knowing how to edit all the footage.

But while hunkered down in his home during the pandemic, the Grammy winner took the opportunity to educate himself about the craft of filmmaking. Chance hosted and performed in several virtual concerts including "Chi-Town Christmas" — which he wrote and directed — giving him enough confidence to revisit the idea of making his own film.

"I had a lot of editing notes and ideas, but I didn't know how to edit," he recalled. "But during the pandemic, I started doing virtual concerts and actually directing them myself. I picked up all these skills that filmmakers have — one of them was figuring how to edit and work with editors. I needed that."

Now, Chance's filmmaker aspirations are coming into fruition with his concert film "Magnificent Coloring World," which premieres Aug. 13 in select AMC Theatres. The concert was filmed in his hometown of Chicago during his Magnificent Coloring World Tour in 2017, shortly after winning three Grammys through his 2016 independent project "Coloring Book," which won best rap album. The project became the first streaming-only album to win the award. He also took home the best new artist trophy and best rap performance for his song "No Problem" featuring 2 Chainz and Lil Wayne.

The concert film will celebrate the five-year anniversary of "Coloring Book."

Chance could have gone the streaming service route, but he elected to pitch his concert film idea to AMC Theatres a few months ago with hopes of immersing moviegoers into his full concert experience.

"There's just something different about going to see something in theaters, instead of watching it in your bed or whatever," he said. "I always knew that I wanted this to be experienced in a group and on a huge screen with crazy surround sound."

Chance led the film's editing process and self-distributed the film through his House of Kicks umbrella, which reimagines music, film and virtual experiences. His partnership with the theater chain marks the first time a music artist has independently distributed a film through AMC.

Appreciation

"The appreciation for Chance's dazzling creation is a genuine demonstration of the power and emotional connection audiences have with Chance, and how they feel while watching his work on the big screens of AMC," said Adam Aron, CEO and president of AMC Entertainment said. "This is a reminder of the uncharted programming possibilities at AMC, and we are thrilled to blaze this path with Chance The Rapper and his team."

"Magnificent Coloring World" features a variety of stages designed by Chance and was filmed on a soundstage within three and a half weeks. The rapper said he wanted to tell a unique story with each frame with the help of director Jake Schreier, who directed the 2015 film "Paper Towns."

While developing the concert film, Chance said watching it made him eager to perform in front of a live audience. He'll make his first and only in-person performance this year at Summerfest in Milwaukee in September.

"It made me super thirsty," the rapper said before adding that watching the film also helped him tweak certain parts of his onstage performance. He said music festivals like Summerfest are needed for him and people who

"love the ability to experience live music."

"Watching a performance of mine from four years ago, I'm like 'I would have done this' or 'I would have done that,'" he said. "I'm saying to myself 'I can't wait to perform this particular song now. I'm looking at it as a performer, but also as a filmmaker.'"

Chance drew inspiration to create his project from other musicals and concert films such as "Roger Waters: The Wall" in 2014 and Michael Jackson's 1988 "Moonwalker." He thinks more musicians should look to directly distribute to theaters.

The rapper plans on stepping behind-the-camera more as a filmmaker.

"The climate makes us feel like we have to go straight to VOD or do a smaller festival circuit sometimes," he said. "But I think the theater business could use it. The industry of filmmakers could use it too."

Also:

LOS ANGELES: The Billie Eilish concert film "Happier than Ever: A Love Letter to Los Angeles" will premiere on the Apple TV+ streaming service on Sept. 3.

The film will highlight the July 30 release of "Happier Than Ever," Eilish's follow-up album to her smash "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?"

Directed by **Robert Rodriguez** and Oscar-winner **Patrick Osborne**, the film will also include animated elements, "taking viewers on a dreamlike journey through Billie's hometown of Los Angeles and its most iconic backdrops," according to the announcement.

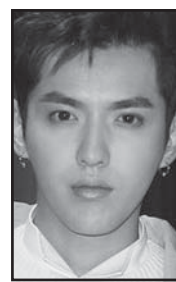
It will also feature her Grammy-winning producer-brother **Finneas**, the Los Angeles Children's Chorus and Brazilian guitarist **Romero Lubambo**, with orchestra arrangements by David Campbell.



This cover image released by Harper shows 'An Ugly Truth: Inside Facebook's Battle for Domination' by Sheera Frenkel and Cecilia Kang. (AP)



Batali



Wu

Variety

NEW YORK: Celebrity chef **Mario Batali**, his business partner and their New York City restaurant company have agreed to pay \$600,000 to resolve a four-year investigation by the state attorney general's office into allegations that Batali, restaurant managers and other workers sexually harassed employees.

The money will be split among at least 20 former employees of B&B Hospitality and their Manhattan restaurants Babbo, Lupa and the now-closed Del Posto, all of which Batali co-owned with **Joseph Bastianich** until March 2019. Attorney General Letitia James has announced.

The company must also revise employee training materials and submit reports to the attorney general's office for the next three years documenting harassment and discrimination training and policies.

Batali, whose high-flying career crumbled amid myriad sexual harassment and misconduct allegations.

Chefs and managers at the Batali-owned restaurants were accused of degrading women with misogynistic comments and showing favoritism to male employees.

Juliana Imperati, a former line cook at Del Posto, said in a statement that the restaurant's leadership made employees feel "as if it is a rite of passage to be harassed at work."

Messages seeking comment were left for lawyers for Batali and Bastianich. Both men's signatures appeared on the settlement agreement.

In a statement, James said Batali and Bastianich permitted "shameful behavior" in the workplace.

"Celebrity and fame does not absolve someone from following the law," James said. "Sexual harassment is unacceptable for anyone, anywhere — no matter how powerful the perpetrator."

Batali, known for his orange Crocs and ponytail, stepped down from day-to-day operations at his restaurant empire and left the since-discontinued ABC cooking show "The Chew" in December 2017 after four women accused him of inappropriate touching.

Batali apologized that month, saying the allegations "match up" with ways he has acted.

"I have made many mistakes and I am so very sorry that I have disappointed my friends, my family, my fans and my team," Batali said in an email newsletter. "My behavior was wrong and there are no excuses. I take full responsibility."

In 2018, New York City police said they were investigating allegations of sexual misconduct against Batali after a woman told "60 Minutes" he drugged and sexually assaulted her in 2005. Batali denied assaulting the woman and no charges have been filed. (AP)

BEIJING: A man has confessed to defrauding Chinese-Canadian pop singer **Kris Wu** over a teenager's accusation he had ... with her when she was drunk, according to

Beijing police.

The announcement added a bizarre twist to a scandal that cost Wu endorsement contracts with brands including Porsche and Bulgari. The former member of Korean boy band EXO has denied the accusation, which prompted an outpouring of support for the woman online and criticism of Wu.

Louis Vuitton became the latest brand to end its contract with Wu.

A man who saw rumors about the incident online contacted the woman in

June and obtained information that allowed him to pretend to be her in order to ask Wu's lawyer for money, the Beijing Public Security Bureau said in a statement. It said the man tricked both sides, indicating the woman played no part in the fraud.

Wu's mother sent the woman 500,000 yuan (\$77,000), and then the man, pretending to be Wu's lawyer, tried to persuade the woman to send the money to him, the statement said. It said he tried unsuccessfully to obtain an additional 2.5 million yuan (\$390,000) from Wu's real lawyer.

The man, identified only by the surname Liu, was arrested in **Nantong**, near **Shanghai**, after the singer's mother complained to police the family had been defrauded, according to the police statement. It said he confessed.

The woman had been quoted by the internet portal NetEase as saying Wu encouraged her to drink too much at a party in December and she woke up in his bed. In a statement on his social media account, Wu said he met the woman but denied encouraging her to drink and said other parts of her account didn't happen.

The woman was quoted as saying other women told her Wu seduced them with promises of jobs and other opportunities.

Police are investigating allegations Wu "repeatedly deceived young women into sexual relations," the police statement said.

Brands cut ties with Wu the day after the NetEase report, reflecting their sensitivity to public opinion after the ruling Communist Party stirred up anger at shoe and clothing brands in retaliation for Western reports of human rights abuses in the mostly Muslim region of **Xinjiang** in the northwest. (AP)



(From left), Edgar Ramirez, Emily Blunt and Dwayne Johnson, cast members in 'Jungle Cruise,' pose together at the world premiere of the film, Saturday, July 24, at Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif. (AP)