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QUARTERLY

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Editor's Note

Hiya!

I trust 2022 has been awesome so far.

Since we opened our doors in 2019, you have done nothing but show us love and support, and for that we are abundantly grateful. And because we don't take that for granted, we decided to put together a quarterly that spotlights all the best bits we've offered you in the past – and those that are to come.

Therefore, it's my pleasure to welcome you to the very first edition of Masobe Quarterly, a magazine dedicated to you, our dear readers. It's going to be chock-full of all the beautiful things that have made you pick up a Masobe book, and then some.

My team and I went all-out to serve you exciting interviews with our writers, captivating spotlights on some of our new offerings, insightful reviews by some of the best voices on the Nigerian literary scene, book-store information nationwide, and much more.

MASOBE is all about family, community and the best of African literature and the aim of this Masobe Quarterly, is simply to showcase community and Africa at its best. So, what are you waiting for? Turn the page, take it in and be part of the Masobe community.

Finally, like we say here: Let us read.

Cheers!

Theresa Ominiabo

Our Team

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Theresa Ominiabo
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Answers the Proust Questionnaire

Efua Traoré: My Nigerian roots make my stories magical

*Efua Traoré has every reason to be excited. The Nigerian-German writer has a hot new book coming from Masobe, 'Children of The Quicksands'. Married to a Malian-German, the mother-of-three writes in a most fantastical way, drawing readers into wondrous new worlds which are at the same time strange, and familiar. In the following interview with **Uzezi Theresa Ominiabohs**, the writer opened up about her beginnings, her methods, and other personal details.*

Masobe Quarterly: You write books, short stories and songs in English and German. How do you move from that headspace to write in English?

Efua Traoré: My brain usually switches sub-consciously, I would say. The first stage of writing usually comes with an idea. At this early stage my thoughts are visual and not clearly linked to a particular language. The idea grows and when it is ready I will sit down to write. This is when the words come in.

I have noticed that the setting or place of the story is what always triggers which language I will write in. If the setting of my story idea is Nigeria, or maybe even Africa, then I automatically find myself writing in English because this is the language I associate with Nigeria. If the setting is however Germany or Europe, then I tend to write in German, which is the language I speak since I moved to Europe. So, I do not actually consciously sit down and say 'today I will write a story in German or in English'. It all depends on the idea that is about to pop.

MQ: You began to notice an affinity for stories as a child. How was your childhood like, and how did it contribute you fostering your writing talent?

Efua Traoré: I grew up in Ekpoma, in the south of Nigeria, which was still a small town then, before later moving to Lagos and then to Europe to study. I definitely had a fun childhood with lots of adventures climbing trees, scaling fences and roaming the bushes with friends and siblings to search for mango or cashew trees. The place where we lived was at the edge of town and we discovered a lot of mysterious and eerie spots like an extensive stretch of dry land we named 'desert', where we had to watch out for snakes and scorpions. We also discovered an otherworldly red valley which became a mega-slide in rainy season and a mysterious lake with red water and banks like quicksand.

I was a very imaginative kid so you can already guess what a mesmerizing landscape like this did to my mind. I was also a very enthusiastic reader. We were very lucky to have an amazing public library in Ekpoma where I spent a lot of time. I was always particularly fascinated by any traditional tales and mythologies although it was difficult to find Nigerian folktales in books. I enjoyed watching *Tales by Moonlight*, a weekly TV show where Nigerian folk tales and fables were told.

I have always loved how the supernatural is a normal part of everyday life in Nigeria. How juju and superstitions will drift around modern structures and beliefs like whispery spirits that refuse to move on. Everyday





life sometimes still has a mythical feel to it. Growing up in such an environment gives so much food for imagination. My head was practically bubbling with stories.

MQ: After you moved to Europe, after a career as a market research consultant, and as your young family grew, your writing career began. How was the journey like?

Efu Traoré: I discovered my passion for writing at a time when I had a brief break from work life to set up a family. My head cleared itself of data sheets and numbers and for the first time in my adult life I had time to actually think and just let my mind wander. Suddenly my head was filling back with stories, just like in my childhood. This time I felt an urge to write down these stories.

My writing journey began as a kind of bridge connecting me back to my childhood. I think a lot of that was caused by missing home and my family back in Nigeria.

I spent the first years writing for myself. I never showed my stories to anyone, definitely feeling too shy. Until I began writing for my daughters. I remember reading the first few pages of a story to them one evening at bedtime. They absolutely loved it and immediately wanted more. So I had to write faster than ever to finish the book for them. It was such a wonderful process and their positive and excited feedback motivated me and gave me the confidence to send out my work.

MQ: You've written two brilliant, magical books for young readers. What makes you so comfortable working in that category?

Efu Traoré: I guess this was the category that inspired me most in terms of giving me the feeling that there was still important work needed to be done there. Nigerian authors have been very creative in the past years, writing great literature which has been highly acclaimed within Nigeria and world-wide. However, most of these fine pieces of literature addressed adults. Nigerian children whether in Nigeria or in the diaspora have still not been given a very large choice of books that represent them, their environment, their food, culture etc. And I mean adventure books, epic fantasies and magical worlds. Stories that captivate young readers.

When I was looking for children's books for my daughters, I was disappointed to find out that things had not changed so much since my childhood. I wanted my daughters to go on a fantastic, magical, Nigerian adventure. That was what inspired me to write 'Children of the Quicksands' for them.

MQ: Do you have any plans to write adult fiction?

Efu Traoré: Everything is possible. I have so many ideas. My problem has never been finding ideas; it has always been finding the time to write them all down. My current project is a Young Adult idea

which has been trying to edge its way out of me for quite a while now. I have finally agreed to let it out. But I love writing for children and will definitely continue doing that with all my heart.

MQ: You've described writing as the late-discovered second love of your life. What's the first?

Efu Traoré: Definitely my family! That would actually include not only my husband and my three wonderful daughters who inspire and motivate me, but also my siblings and parents. I am quite a family-person.

MQ: Which was the first prize you ever won?

Efu Traoré: The first prize I won (in writing) was the Commonwealth Short Story Prize. This was my first validation as a shy writer who never studied anything literature-related and who had only felt bold enough to send out a short story after writing in private for years. The commonwealth short story prize is one of the biggest possible prizes to be won for a short story, so you can imagine my disbelief at winning.

I have to admit that my reaction was not very elegant. I was in my back garden, reading in my hammock when I received the phone call and I actually fell out of the hammock! I still smile anytime I think of that day. I remember running into the house and screaming for my husband and kids to come and listen. We all started dancing and I broke down in tears.

MQ: When was the last time you visited Nigeria?

Efu Traoré: My last visit was in 2019, just before Covid broke out. I can't wait for things to normalise so I can see my family and my country again. And also so I can have my favourite food, which is pounded yam and banga soup.

FOR THE CHILDREN: MASOBE'S JOURNEY INTO KID LIT

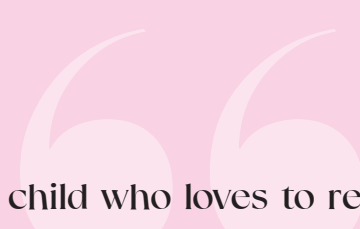
From fledgling publisher to major player in just a few years, Masobe continues to grow, making major moves into children's literature and Young Adult fare a no-brainer.

By Henry Okelue

Globally, books for younger readers – children's literature or Young Adult (YA) books – continue to soar in popularity. Some of the most diverse and exciting titles are on bookshelves today, even as Masobe, one of Africa's fastest-growing publishers, is making major moves into that particular demographic. Othuke Ominiabohs, CEO, says the publisher recognised from the onset that children are the adults of the future, and that the Masobe slogan 'Let Us Read' was coined with them in mind.

"This is why we also have an imprint called Oremaha, dedicated to children's literature. A child who loves to read becomes an adult who reads. So children's literature has always been a priority for us from the get-go," Ominiabohs says. That commitment is perhaps what ensured that lightning was caught in a bottle right at Masobe's first venture. The first YA book that called the publisher's attention was 'Sweet Sixteen' by Bolaji Abdullahi, which once published, went on to become approved JAMB text for two years, read by more than 4 million young adults. Fast-forward to now, and we have an array of compelling books for children and young adults coming from Masobe over the next few months. There is 'Children of the Quicksands' by Efua Traoré, a haunting, exciting adventure full of memorable

characters, and also 'Adanne' by Ukamaka Olisakwe, which follows a gifted youngster on a journey full of ancient gods and powerful entities. There is also 'Jummy at The River School' by Sabine Adeyinka, as well as Traore's second Masobe book, 'The House of Shells', all richly-woven, fantastical stories which will no doubt hold



A child who loves to read becomes an adult who reads. So children's literature has always been a priority for us from the get-go

young readers – or the young-at-heart – spellbound.

One thing is clear: Masobe is very serious about kid lit. But just how deep is interest in children's literature? Ominiabohs revealed that after research, it became crystal clear that there is a demand for well-written books for children, from parents, older siblings, schools and even from young adults themselves. "With the

arrival of such beautifully-written books – like the aforementioned 'Children of the Quicksands' by [Efua] Traoré, Wish Maker by Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike, and others – I can say quite confidently that it's going to be a whole new world for African children," he says.

As heartening as that sounds, however, the ratio of submissions for children's books against that of regular literature is not encouraging. "We get one children's story manuscript for every 100 regular literature submissions," Ominiabohs says. But he is quick to point out that it's not at all a deterring force. "Demand will one day be matched by supply, and we have made it a point of duty to rise to the occasion. Our children must be served, and served well."

That does not seem like a tall order at all, especially given the stellar roster of books which will be coming out of the Masobe stable for the rest of the year, and beyond. As far as children's books and YA literature are concerned, Ominiabohs says that in five years the publisher hopes to have a Masobe children's book in every home. "Achieving this is the key to building a better society, the like of which we currently wish for. Fixing our country begins with getting a child to get into a book. They always come out better."

What Happened to Janet Uzor

A Review By Oluwatosin Adesokan

I knew I wanted to read this book as soon as I saw the title. I mean, I already had questions like "Who is Janet Uzor?" "What happened to her?" and "Why do we care what happened to her?" going through my mind.

I got the answers to my questions, but I didn't see any of them coming. Miracle Emeka-Nkwor, thank you for putting my years of watching Criminal Minds to waste. Dr. Spencer Reid would be disappointed. (If you've never seen an episode of Criminal Minds, you need to get your life together, respectfully.)

Each year, a student at Afobiri secondary school mysteriously dies, and the latest victim, Janet Uzor, was reported to have drowned despite being an excellent swimmer. It's the Christmas break a year after Janet Uzor's death, and her two friends are still grieving. While Eberé is certain that there is more to everything going on, Pamela is simply trying to move on with her life until she starts receiving threatening letters. Fear sets in, and they must not only figure out who is sending these letters, but also find out if these unexplainable deaths are linked, and the only way to do so is to uncover what truly happened to their friend, Janet Uzor.

This book was well-written, and the fact that it is set in Port Harcourt drew me in. The Nigerian in me was pleased! I mean,



it's not every day we come across a YA mystery novel set in Nigeria and written by a Nigerian. I enjoyed the pidgin English and it was nice to pick up on the subtle jokes, but the funniest thing had to be the Nigerian police in this book genuinely trying to do their job. It was unrealistic, but I didn't mind it because if we can't have it in real life, we can at least read about it in a book. We deserve nice things abeg.

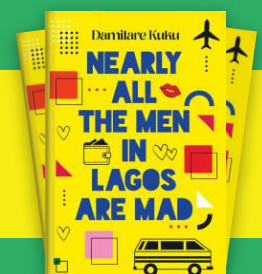
While the main focus was an unsettling murder mystery, I like how the author was still able to explore how Nigerian parents interact with their teenage children.

What Happened to Janet Uzor is a plot-driven novel, and it picked up right from the beginning. It had just the right amount of suspense, twists, and turns, and just when I thought I had it all figured out, the author decided to throw in the plot twist and big reveal. Nothing could have prepared me for the last 30 pages of this book. Absolutely nothing.

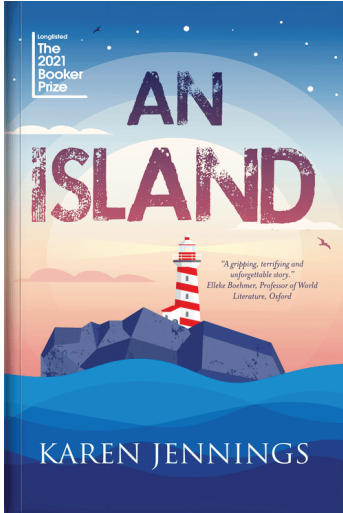
Overall, it was a really good read and a wonderful debut novel by Miracle Emeka-Nkwor. I look forward to reading more of her work. If you like a fast-paced YA mystery set in Nigeria that will have you playing detective in one minute and have your heart pounding in the next, all in less than 250 pages, this is for you.

**HOT
PICK**

'Nearly All The Men in Lagos Are Mad', by Damilare Kuku continues to fly off the shelves in bookstores nationwide, and it seems like everyone is talking about it. If you haven't dipped into this addictive collection of short stories yet, what are you waiting



Books of the Quarter



An Island
By Karen Jennings

A young refugee washes up unconscious on the beach of a small island inhabited by no one but Samuel, an old lighthouse keeper. Unsettled, Samuel is soon swept up in memories of his former life on the mainland: a life that saw his country suffer under colonisers, then fight for independence, only to fall under the rule of a cruel dictator; and he recalls his own part in its history. In this new man's presence he begins to consider, as he did in his youth, what is meant by land and to whom it should belong. To what lengths will a person go in order to ensure that what is theirs will not be taken from them?

"Thoroughly absorbing...a small but powerful book, with the reach of a more capacious work, compounding merciless political critique and allegory rendered in tender prose." – **Guardian UK**

Karen Jennings is a South African author. Her debut novel, *Finding Soutbek*, was shortlisted for the inaugural Etisalat Prize for African Fiction. Her memoir, *Travels with my Father*, was published in 2016, and in 2018 she released her debut poetry collection, *Space Inhabited by Echoes*. She also works with the mentorship programmes run by Writivism and Short Story Day Africa, both of which promote writing in Africa. She was a Miles Morland Foundation Scholar while writing this book.



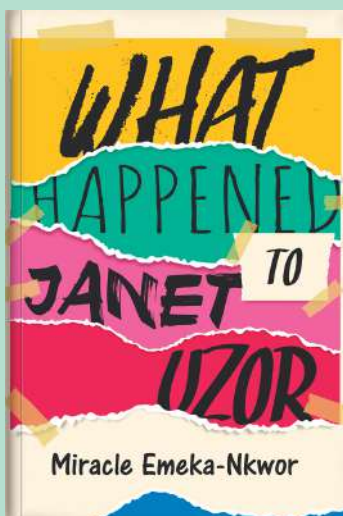
Bridges Are For Burning
By Bina Idonije

On the eve of Valentine's Day, Oghogho 'Gigi' Dempster wore her heart on her sleeve. At almost thirty-one, she was single and ready to mingle after nearly two years of relegating her love-life to the curb in favour of growing her fledgling social media company. Her beautiful best friend Alana was newly pregnant for the love of her life, Benjamin Halal, and her sister Efemena 'Fifi' was married to wealthy aristocrat, Lotanna Dike. But on that February 13th night, Gigi wasn't looking for what her best friend and sister had – not love or marriage – but a temporary connection and intimacy. How could she have known that that night would dramatically alter the course of her life?

"[Idonije's] writing is layered, clever, and funny even when the subject is weighty. Her characters are so well-developed that they will feel familiar to you by the end. This is part of what makes this book a cut above your average novel." – **Edify Yaku-sak, author of After They Left**

Bina Idonije has been writing since she was a child. Today, she is a lawyer by training, whose random interests, when she is not being a legal professional, include drooling over plant species, hosting friends for drinks at her home, and spending meditative time at the beach while listening transcendently to music from eras past. She resides in the chaotic coastal city of Lagos, Nigeria, with her husband and three children. This is her debut novel.

Books of the Quarter



What Happened To Janet Uzor

By Miracle Emeka-Nkwor

A year after their best friend Janet Uzor drowns, Pamela and Ebere are trying to cope and move on. Pamela buries her emotions, while Ebere has been on a mission to find out what really happened to their friend, an excellent swimmer, whose death does not make sense. When Pamela begins to receive letters threatening her life, she sets out to find out who is after her. She enlists on/off boyfriend Eche and good friend Daniel Kalio to help unravel the mystery behind Janet's death, before the clock runs out and Pamela finds herself at the mercy of a bloodthirsty killer.

"A remarkable story filled with so many twists and turns it will send you swiveling. And when the spinning finally stops, you're left astounded at a most unexpected finale." – **Victoria Afe Inegbedion, author of 'A-Files'**

Miracle Emeka-Nkwor was born and raised in Port Harcourt. She is a graduate of Biochemistry from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and has always likened herself to an overflowing drum of creativity. When she isn't sketching designs, drafting patterns and bent over a sewing machine, her nose is buried in the pages of a good book. This is her debut novel.



Children of the Quicksands

By Efua Traoré

In a remote Nigerian village, thirteen-year-old Simi is desperate to uncover a family secret. But it's when she's caught in the red quicksand of a forbidden lake that her adventure truly begins. Can she bring her family back together and restore peace to the village? The answers are in the pages of richly-imagined magical realist adventure set in West Africa by a prize-winning new voice in children's writing whose beautiful book explores themes of grief and belonging.

"A dynamic conjuring of Nigerian village life, its characters, food, fragrances, and customs. The 'overworld' and underworld were intricately imagined. I was transfixed from start to finish. A brilliant debut!" – **Patience Agbabi**

Efua Traoré began writing as a bridge reconnecting her to the place of her childhood, Nigeria. After an adventurous childhood, she moved to Germany, and her first stories were based on those childhood memories. She began to look for children's books that told fun or adventurous stories of Africa but to her dismay couldn't find any. Then one day her young daughter came home from school saying she learnt that children in Africa do not have food and water. Shocked, she decided to write a story that had been building up in her head, of Simi, a 13-year-old city girl with a haunting family secret. She is the winner of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2018.



MY FAVORITE THINGS *with*

Bina Idonije

Bina Idonije, a lawyer by training, has been writing since childhood. Today, her debut novel 'Bridges Are For Burning', is currently flying off the shelves in bookstores. She resides in Lagos with her husband and three children. Here, she shares with us a few of her favourite things.

Favourite fruit: Bananas are unequivocally delicious, strawberries are versatile, and apples are my go-to fruit to keep my appetite in check.



Favourite gadget: My phone. Because at this point it is no longer just a gadget, it's a companion.



Favourite city: Lagos. The energy in this city is unmatched, and despite its reputation for being ubiquitously chaotic, I am in this crazy city able to curate my own 'bubble of bliss'.



Favourite food: Rice. Because there's just so many options with it: Jollof rice, Fried rice, Ofada rice, White rice and stew, Coconut rice, Jambalaya, Black rice, Paella...name it.



Favourite perfume: Noix de tubéreuse by Miller Harris, because it's an ultra-sexy scent. The fragrance is very French (although produced by a British brand), and I have a thing for French perfumes.



Favourite book: Plum Island, by Nelson DeMille. Even though it was a thriller, it was equal parts funny and equal parts suspense – a truly sublime mix of suspense and humour, which is not an easy feat for a writer to accomplish by any means.



Favourite song: Lover, by Taylor Swift. Particularly the live version she played on Saturday Night Live in 2019. Because it's such a raw, heartfelt ode to love - and I love love.



Favourite movie: 'Legends of the Fall', starring Brad Pitt and other incredible actors. It's simply one of the best movies ever made, and brings me to tears every single time I have seen it (and I have watched it many, many times). The plot was simply incredible. A close second is 'The Last of the Mohicans'.



Favourite shoes: Sneakers. When it comes to shoes, I live by one rule: Shoes should never be uncomfortable – and a good pair of sneakers delivers on this every time.



Chimeka Garricks answers the Proust Questionnaire

Chimeka Garricks was born in Dublin, and raised in Port Harcourt. The author of acclaimed novel 'Tomorrow Died Yesterday' started out writing short stories, before penning the bestselling 'A Broken People's Playlist'. A lawyer by day, and a writer at night, he still dreams of being a professional DJ. He lives with his wife and three children in Lagos.



What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Time with my family.

What are your favourite qualities in a person?

Kindness, integrity, and a sense of humour.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

This answer is for God. And my therapist.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Cruelty.

What is your greatest extravagance?

Perfumes.

Which talent would you most like to have?

The ability to play all musical instruments expertly.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

'Omo!' and 'Erm...'

What do you consider the most overrated virtue?

I'm learning not to be cynical about virtue. This world is dark enough as is.

Who is your favourite hero of fiction?

Don Vito Corleone, for his full range of complexities and paradoxes.

What is your most treasured possession?

Physical possession? Nothing. Intangible possession? My faith.

What do you most value in friends?

Kindness.

Which living person do you most admire?

Currently, Tunde Onakoya (for his incredible life-changing work with chess in slums).

What is your greatest regret?

Again, this is for God and my therapist.

What is your most marked characteristic?

I've been told I'm courteous (except when I'm driving in Nigeria — naturally, it's entirely the fault of Nigerian drivers).

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Still a work in progress. Let's talk about it when it's done.

GUESS WHO'S BACK!



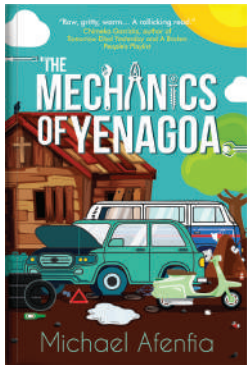
'I Do Not Come to You By Chance', by Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani is a must-read, and one of our all-time bestsellers. It's been out-of-print due to being sold out. Until now, that is. Grab your copy of this evergreen classic today!

LIST OF BOOKSTORES and ADDRESSES

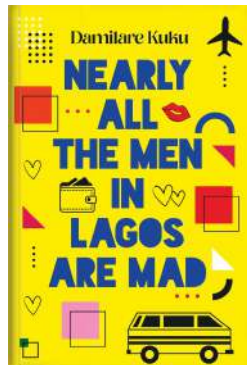
BOOKSTORE	ADDRESS	LOCATION	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL
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Spine and Label Bookstore	Spine and Labels Books, 3rd Floor, Rhema Mall, along NEXT CASH and carry road near NAF Centre, Kado	ABUJA	08103690399	sales@spineandlabel.com
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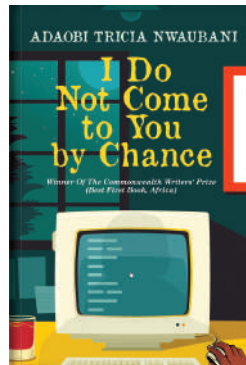
How many Masobe books have you read?



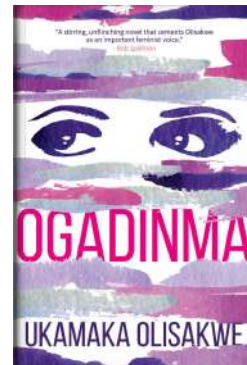
☐ The Mechanics Of Yenagoa



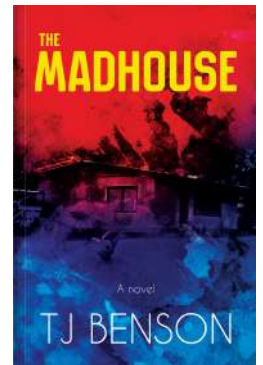
☐ Nearly All The Men In Lagos Are Mad



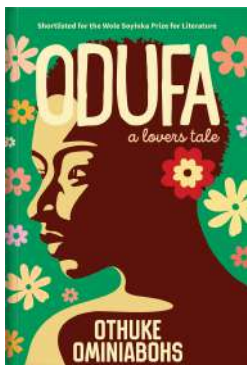
☐ I Do Not Come To You By Chance



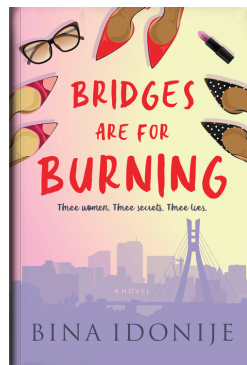
☐ Ogadinma



☐ The Mad House



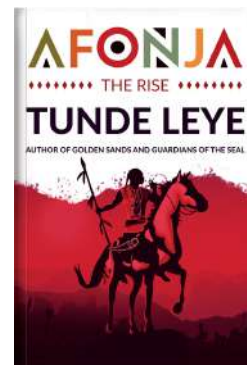
☐ Odufa



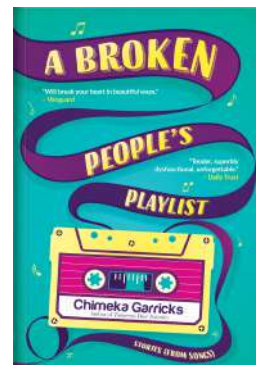
☐ Bridges Are For Burning



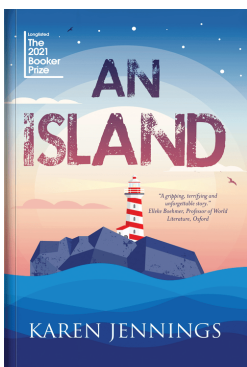
☐ What Happened To Janet Uzor



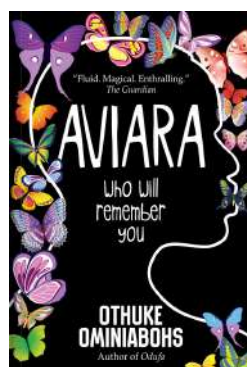
☐ Afonja The Rise



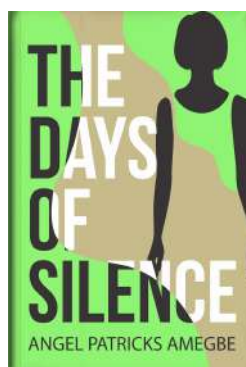
☐ A Broken People's Playlist



☐ An Island



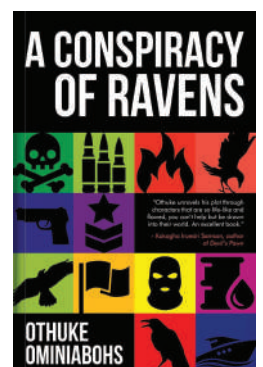
☐ Aviara



☐ The Days Of Silence



☐ Children Of The Quicksand



☐ A Conspiracy Of Ravens

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