



March 2025

Dear Reader,

Shortly after joining Astra House last year, I received E. Y. Zhao's astonishing debut *Underspin* and was incredibly taken by this kinetic and bruising feat of a novel. I immediately knew that I wanted it to launch my list here.

In aching, beautiful prose, *Underspin* opens with the funeral of a very young Ryan Lo, a prodigal Asian-American teenager who has died under mysterious circumstances. But there is a conspicuous absence from the crowd of mourners: Ryan's life-long coach Kristian. What follows is a frank and tender portrait of a young person, at once terrifically exceptional and obviously typical, as he navigates his adolescence under the demanding gaze of his formidable and obsessive German coach. Told through the eyes of his teammates, rivals, investors, trainees, and love interests, the details of the demise of his career and then ultimately his life come into relief.

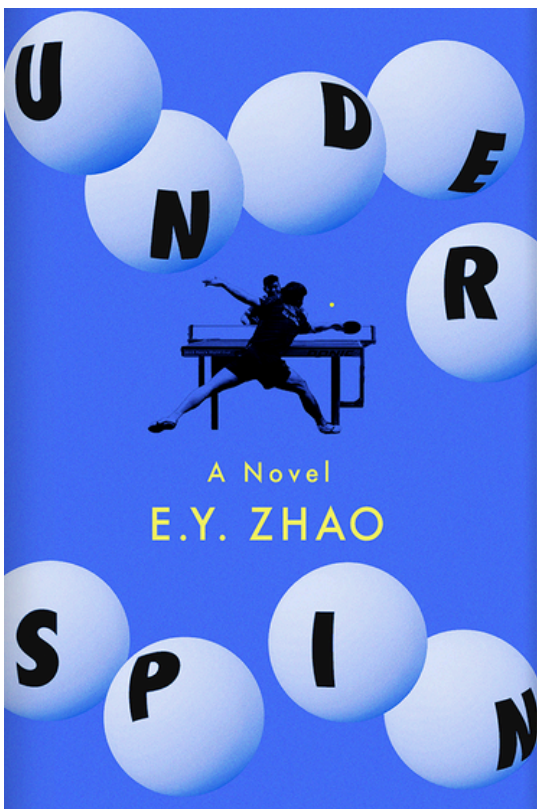
An exercise in niche worldbuilding and a love letter to an underdog sport; a literary puzzle with a tragic mystery at the center; and a classic coming-of-age novel and bildungsroman, *Underspin* is a triumphant take on the sports novel. This beautifully written entry to the genre carefully probes the arrogance of a talented adolescence, the indignities of ambition, and the often inconceivable injustices committed within our closest relationships.

Emily played table tennis as a child and teenager and it shows. This is a deeply researched and beautifully embodied novel, propulsive and electric, tender and tragic. I feel that Zhao is a true rising star and this has been an absolute dream title for me to inaugurate my time at Astra with. Thank you so much for reading. Cho!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'mraiford'.

Maya Raiford Cohen, Associate Editor
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UNDERSPIN

“A kaleidoscopic novel . . .

Zhao's prose is a marvel—sly, seductive, and cutthroat as a kill shot.”

—Rob Franklin, author of *Great Black Hope*

“An electric debut.”

—Jenny Tinghui Zhang, author of *Four Treasures of the Sky*

“Both tender and brutal, visceral and cerebral, [*Underspin*] will immerse you in its high-stakes world until the very last page.”

—Alina Grabowski, author of *Women and Children First*

PUBLICITY PLAN

- Early excerpt in *Defector* or *ESPN Andscape*
- Personal essays in *Dirt's* tennis vertical, *Strung*, and a more general outlet
- Podcasts: *Time to Say Goodbye*, *Debutiful*, *Books and Boba*, *Between the Covers*, *Little Atoms*, *Leaf by Leaf*, *TTDcast*
- Interviews in print and on podcasts and radio
- Pitch possible feature profile in major magazine
- Outreach to publications and reviewers focused on sports, Asian American narratives, coming of age stories, and debut fiction
- Pitch to book clubs: Book of the Month, GMA, Reese, Jenna, Belletrist



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