Peter found Pax, a fox, when he was an orphaned kit, and he has kept him as a pet since his mother’s sudden death, five years earlier. Now Peter’s stern father is bound for an unspecified war—one fought at least partly on domestic soil—forcing 12-year-old Peter to move in with his grandfather, and to release Pax. It takes less than a night for Peter to become overwhelmed with remorse—by morning, he is hiking hundreds of miles to the spot where he reluctantly abandoned Pax. The aftermath of that separation is told in chapters that alternate between the fox and the boy’s points of view. In an exceptionally powerful, if grim story, Pennypacker (Summer of the Gypsy Moths) does a remarkable job of conveying the gritty perspective of a sheltered animal that must instantly learn to live in the wild (“Orphaned before he’d been weaned, Pax had never eaten raw prey. His hunger rose at the blood-scent and so did his curiosity”). Both boy and fox encounter characters who drastically rearrange their worldview: after Peter is injured, he is taken in by Vola, a veteran who has lost a leg and has strong feelings about the true costs of war. The opening scene promises heartbreak that the rest of the story delivers, as boy and fox journey to reunite, each dramatically altered by what it takes to get there. Art not seen by PW. Ages 8–12. Agent: Steven Malk, Writers House. (Feb.)