

JANUARY 13, 2025

booklife®

— YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING —

First Lines from BookLife Authors • 72 New BookLife Titles Reviewed

Going Indie

A traditionally published author forges a new path

BY CYNTHIA SWANSON

Wait, what? Indie publish after being published by the Big Five? Who does that? Isn't it the dream of indie-pubbed authors to write a successful book or series that leads to discovery by an agent or big publisher? From there on out, it's easy street—right?

It's an often-heard aspiration. And sometimes, it works. The “indie to big-time traditional” publication trajectories of authors E.L. James (*Fifty Shades of Grey*), Andy Weir (*The Martian*), and Lisa Genova (*Still Alice*), among others, are well documented.

For me, things moved in the other direction.

In the summer of 2013, shortly after I landed an agent, my debut standalone psychological suspense novel, *The Bookseller*, sold to HarperCollins in a pre-empt. With two HarperCollins editors competing for the manuscript, I was permitted to choose my editor and imprint. Harper, the imprint I chose, put its full marketing and PR resources into the novel, and buzz began building six months before the book's spring 2015 publication. *The Bookseller* made the Indie Next list, becoming a favorite among independent booksellers. Trade reviews were overwhelmingly positive, and my agent sold international rights in 18 countries. I'll never forget the day when she called to say Julia Roberts wanted to option the book for her production company, Red Om. Just as exciting was seeing *The Bookseller* hit the *New York Times* bestseller list.

I didn't quit my day job, but as a freelance writer and editor, I cut back my hours so I could write my next novel, *The Glass Forest*. By the time it was complete, however, my editor at Harper had retired. The editor assigned to take over the reins for *The Bookseller* was a lovely person, but nonfiction was her jam, and she passed.



Soon thereafter, my agent sold rights for *The Glass Forest* to Touchstone, an imprint of Simon & Schuster—leading me to believe I'd found a new, permanent publishing home. Touchstone did a fine job with *The Glass Forest*, which hit the *USA Today* bestseller list and received solid reviews. Rights were sold in seven countries.

But later that same year, Touchstone abruptly folded. *The Glass Forest*, along with other Touchstone titles, was farmed out to another Simon & Schuster imprint. The editors at that imprint, stretched thin like everyone in publishing, put no resources toward my year-old novel. In publishing, this is known as being “orphaned.” Although aware that it happens frequently, I hadn't expected it to happen to me. Twice, no less.

Undaunted, I began writing another novel—just as Covid was about to change the world. Isolated like everyone else, I accepted a wonderful opportunity: editing *Denver Noir*, part of Akashic Books' celebrated Noir series of location-specific mystery anthologies. Granted, *Denver Noir*, which published in spring 2022, wasn't a novel—but it got my name on the cover of another book, and I was grateful for the opportunity and experience.

By then, my third novel, *Anyone but Her*, was complete, and my agent took it out on sub that summer. While surprised by the passes from Big Five and midsize houses, I concluded that despite my street cred, the novel wasn't the best it could be. I completely rewrote it, top to bottom—but my agent didn't share my enthusiasm, and we parted ways.

I was fortunate to quickly sign with a new agent. She loved the book, but she was unable to submit it to any of the editors who had previously passed. Why? That's simply the way the business works. After an editor has passed on one version of your book, rarely will they give it a second look. My new agent put together an alternative list, but again the passes arrived. Many editors said they loved the book but "couldn't determine how to break it out in this market."

Both indie- and trad-pubbed authors can likely relate to the notion that, while "breakout" would be wonderful, what most of us aspire



to is simpler: respectable sales and a developing fan base. But editors at Big Five and midsize houses see it differently. Generally, they take on a book only if they can convince their sales teams that major sales are possible. Those numbers apply mostly to big-name authors, along with the occasional debut.

If, as an author, you have an ongoing relationship with a house or editor, the equation is slightly different: the publisher is often willing to accept more modest sales projections in exchange for working with a known quantity within their organization.

As a twice-orphaned author, where did that leave me? Time to give up, right?

Nope. Instead, I hired the developmental editor I'd worked with on *The Bookseller*. A former agent, she has a spot-on editorial eye, and I trust her completely.

I told her I was thinking about indie publishing the novel but would only do so if I could release a book that was as high quality as my Big Five-pubbed titles. Before fully committing to going indie, I wanted her editorial take on the manuscript. Her assessment resulted in a subtle yet important shift to the storyline. I made that shift, and *Anyone but Her* is significantly stronger for it.

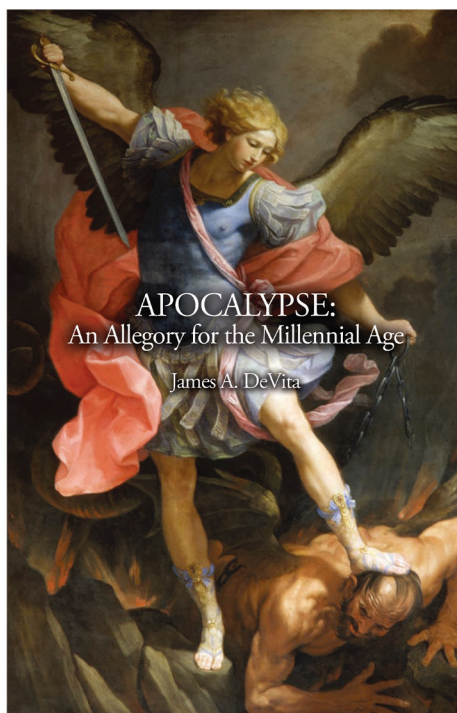
So, I decided to forge a new, indie path. In September 2024, *Anyone but Her* was published in print and e-book under my own imprint. My agent sold audio rights, and in November, Tantor Media released an audio-book. That same month, *Anyone but Her* won the Indie Author Project contest in the mystery/thriller category.

As all indie authors can attest, this path is not for the faint of heart. I've never worked harder to get a book into the world as I did in 2024. But I'm as proud of *Anyone but Her* as I am of my trad-pubbed titles. I'm thankful that I decided to trust my gut and keep going.

This year has taught me two important lessons. First, quality—in both content and production—will always be my top priority. If for any reason I can't put out a quality book, then I'm better off shelving the manuscript, working on something else, and seeing where that takes me.

Second, while I might return to traditional publishing, I'm not restricted to it. Indie publishing has come a long way, and I'm excited to have joined the ranks of successful indie authors. Going forward, I see indie as an effective publishing option.

I truly feel the sky's the limit. I hope you do, too. ☺



Apocalypse: An Allegory for the Millennial Age

by
James A. DeVita

The story of the epic battle between Heaven's Original Rock Star, Satan, who is trying to destroy the world, and the five Archangels trying to stop him.

Available at 800-788-7654 and your favorite online bookstore

Cynthia Swanson is the author of the psychological suspense novels The Bookseller, The Glass Forest, and Anyone But Her.

First Lines

This round, we've got murder, an unmarked grave, hitting rock bottom, and more

To submit a first line, email booklifeeditor@booklife.com with the book title, author name, and subject "First Lines."



Finding Dad, Paranoid Schizophrenia: An End to the Search

AMANDA LAPERA

"I fumbled in my purse for my cell phone and checked the caller ID: It was the Orange County Sheriff's Department."



Midnight of the Soul

NICHOLAS J. NAWROTH

"A flash of lightning. Then, darkness. The sky cries soft tears."



Never Murder at Home

MURRAY MOFFATT

"Standing on the sidewalk looking at his new home, Nate Gibson thought about how many times he had heard the veteran members of Alcoholics

Anonymous say, 'Sometimes you have to hit rock bottom before your real recovery begins.'"



The Rainy Night Stalker

DEBBIE SHANNON

"She was there to help her ex-boyfriend bury his mother in an unmarked grave."



Substantial Penalty

ROBERT RHODE

"I wonder if my grandmother seriously considered the risks that bright, balmy day in Biloxi when she asked me to rob the family bank."



Time Is Power: Create Space for What Matters Most

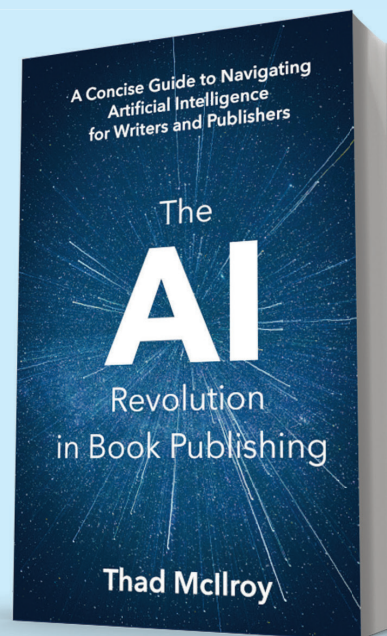
JANICE ROSTROM

"We need to stop making decisions about our time based solely on whether we will be making, saving, or spending money."

The AI Revolution in Book Publishing

In *The AI Revolution in Publishing: A Concise Guide to Navigating Artificial Intelligence for Writers and Publishers*, writer, technologist and *Publishers Weekly* contributing editor, Thad McIlroy offers an insider's understanding of how AI is impacting the entire publishing ecosystem—from authoring to editorial and marketing to sales and distribution.

It's McIlroy's decades of experience in publishing and technology that will help publishing professionals better understand hot-button issues like copyright and AI for translation to develop informed opinions and to better engage in the many ways that the technology is reshaping the publishing industry.



"A great overview of how AI might, or might not, fit into trade publishing. Thad's analysis of the current state of the business adds important context to how the new technology can be best utilized."

— Jim Milliot, Former *Publishers Weekly* Editorial Director and current Editor-at-Large



BookLife Reviews are paid reviews of independently published books. A lightning bolt (⚡) indicates an Editor's Pick, a book of outstanding quality.

FICTION

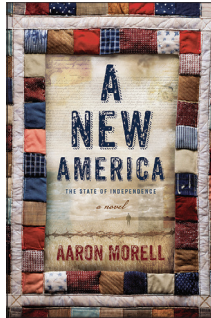
⚡ EDITOR'S PICK

A New America: The State of Independence

Aaron Morell | Unconscious Will Publishing
312p, hardcover, \$29, ISBN 979-8-218-98811-1

Debut author Morell masterfully delivers a frighteningly plausible dystopian tale in which much of Kansas and swathes of other states in the region secedes and declares itself a new country called Independence. When journalist Roman Wolfe, who has been chronicling uprisings and secessions across the globe, heads to report on this new country that claims to embody “the noble belief in the freedom to pursue life, liberty, and happiness,” he leaves a U.S. border crossing in Eastern Colorado to enter a world where the economy and basic services have collapsed. Vigilantes hunt “illegals,” citizens remain dissatisfied with their government, and distrust runs rampant, with the Latino population targeted. Then Independence experiences its first murder.

The victim is a local named Jesus Criollo. With tensions rising—a spate of burglaries and inevitable further deaths have citizens on a hair trigger—and Roman's



Bleak, urgent novel of the secession of Kansas is frighteningly plausible.

Great for fans of Omar El Akkad's *American War*, Craig DiLouie's *Our War*.

prickly ex-turned-current girlfriend Kat acting strangely, Roman begins to question his extended stay in the bleak nation. Morell's dialogue could be ripped from contemporary political discourse, with Independence citizens railing against immigrants, taxes, the media, and people “who can't seem to grasp our ideals.” A Kansas native now living in New

York, Morell skillfully portrays the realities and challenges of rural living, taking seriously the grievances (and diversity of opinion) of his Kansans, and the state's Free State ethos, while never letting characters off the hook for their actions. Although many dismiss this nation's increasingly violent political rhetoric as simply words, Morell's storytelling demonstrates, with skill and persuasive power, the possible results of reckless speech about secession. He explores these outcomes with a sharp reportorial eye, suggesting conclusions rather than stating them outright. A cautionary tale about the worst angels of our national character, this thoughtful work will stay with readers well after the final page is turned.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

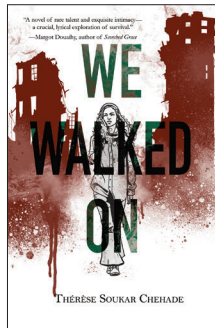
⚡ EDITOR'S PICK

We Walked On

Thérèse Soukar Chehade | Regal House Publishing
277p, trade paper, \$18.95, ISBN 978-1-64603-520-5

Chehade's deeply moving novel explores the devastating impact of the Lebanese Civil War through the eyes of two distinct yet interconnected characters, alternating between Hisham, a dedicated Arabic teacher, and Rita, his young student trying to make sense of the chaos surrounding her. In 1975 Lebanon, both Hisham and Rita use their love of books to escape from the violence and uncertainty of their reality, as their country slowly but inexorably marches toward destruction. But when their daily routines become more disrupted by protests, uprisings, and death, they can no longer ignore the tension simmering just under the surface while they “pretend that life was still normal.”

The novel's dual perspective provides a layered and insightful look into how war affects individuals across different generations and social backgrounds, and Chehade's prose is both lyrical and unflinching, painting vivid scenes of beauty and



Evocative rendering of a country fragmented by civil war.

Great for fans of Catherine Ryan Hyde's *Take Me with You*, A. Naji Bakhti's *Between Beirut and the Moon*.

redemption amid the destruction. Both Hisham and Rita seek solace and understanding through writing, a reflection of Chehade's own grappling with chaos through storytelling, and this meta-narrative approach enriches the novel, allowing readers to connect deeply as the characters navigate loss, hope, and the endurance of the human spirit.

Chehade's depiction of the Lebanese Civil War is both intimate and expansive, offering readers a personal lens through which to view the lives upended by the conflict, and her attention to sensory details—and skill in evoking the characters' lived experiences—make the novel immersive and strikingly real. The end result is a challenge to more simplistic narratives about war, as Chehade (author of *Loom*) provides a nuanced exploration of its complexities—and the often-overlooked personal stories behind the headlines. This is a compelling and thought-provoking work that, much as Hisham strives to do in his teaching, highlights the resilience of the human spirit while seeking to “make beauty out of the sordid world.”

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

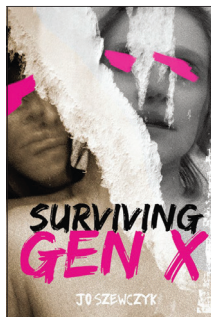
FICTION

Surviving Gen X

Jo Szcwzyk | Czykmate Productions
300p, e-book, \$5.99, ISBN 978-1-989-22541-7

Women, booze, and bars—the unnamed male protagonist revels in the sordid reality behind the faux glamor of 1990s Las Vegas, with his new friend, Gene, a little person who at first mistakes the narrator's Willy Wonka costume for Prince. “My name isn't Prince, and I am not funky, and I couldn't believe he just called me the name of some effeminate, lanky black dude,” the narrator muses, pretty much capturing the let-it-blurt spirit of the novel that follows. After one too many fights and far too many flings, he meets Annie, an abused housewife who puts up with her husband Tad due to her Mormon values. Annie and the narrator begin an on-again, off-again affair she's unable to resist because, as he puts it, “when I said there was nobody like you in my life, I didn't mean you had to prove me so right.”

At its core, Szcwzyk's pointedly bad-mannered novel challenges hypocrisy, the rise of the “politically correct,” and the “con” of religion—Annie's faith, the



Raw, wild, proudly shocking fiction of 1990s Vegas life.

Great for fans of John O'Brien's *Leaving Las Vegas*, John Gregory Dunne's *Vegas: Memoir of a Dark Season*.

narrator reports, is an “impossibly twisted thing” that “grew inside of her over a period of time in the sole hope of taking over and killing her.” His bottom line is freedom, especially in matters of the heart. He fiercely advocates for a woman's right to exit a relationship that lays its foundation in abuse, and, confronting Tad's homophobia, questions the categorization of gayness as a sin. “His crime was love,” he asserts.

Szcwzyk details sex and sexuality in raw, often darkly comic language, and he urges readers to bring an open mind to this “blemished and true” Vegas snapshot. Szcwzyk's prose pivots from literary fineness to defiantly filthy as *Surviving Gen X* surveys a tragic hedonistic world, where people treat sex like a disposable commodity that often blockades the way to true love. While the narrative occasionally objectifies women, referring to them as a mere “thing” and using repulsive bodily descriptions, it offers insight into the prevalence of sexist mindsets.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

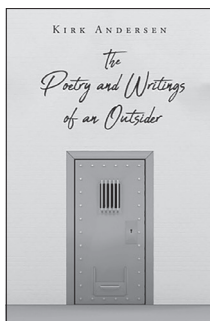
FICTION

The Poetry and Writings of an Outsider

Kirk Andersen | Page Publishing
104p, trade paper, \$13.95, ISBN 978-1-647-01048-5

This varied collection from board game designer, poet, and author Andersen is full of grave, moonlit poems, satirical, working-class-related short stories, and slice-of-life vignettes that together offer a multimodal appraisal of modern society. Though few in number, the poems Andersen includes are layered and substantive; though majorly forlorn, they emanate a shadowy brilliance: "Fate falls on the hard sidewalk // Too early for the sun // Darkness opens the window shade // To fly away into blue." The concept of night in these verses is a living character that transcends its cyclical nature and moves like a sentient shadow. His short stories, however, move from the celestial, abstract plane to the sociological.

"Jail World" describes an Orwellian dystopia where the world's population is confined in a correctional facility upheld by seven guiding "disciplines," which include principles like "Don't read" and "Live to eat." Other stories, like "Windmill" and "The Dwitter Note," imagine sci-fi futures, complete with flying cars and techno-communes, where governments have direct communication technology



Somber, yet biting poems and stories exploring social and spiritual isolation.

Great for fans of Alan Kaufman's *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*, Donald Ray Pollock's *Knockemstiff*.

Sam in his obsessive quest to reclaim the parcel he believes lost in the mail; he ventures to mail centers and warehouses, causing strife and mayhem in his effort to claim his package and relieve the "pang of emptiness" he feels in its absence. Humanity is sacrificed in lieu of material objects. Andersen's concluding vignettes—including an account of longing and drinking in military life, and an ambiguous memory of being sent to an adult man's workshop to learn about hard work as a child—and "Short Shorts" lack the compelling narratives of the longer stories, yet his poetry in particular has an enriching complexity that readers can revisit again and again.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **B-** | Marketing copy: **A**

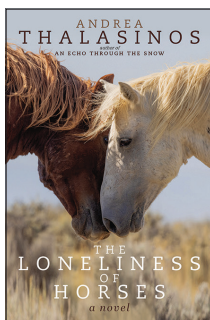
FICTION

The Loneliness of Horses: A Novel

Andrea Thalasinis | 12 Willows Press
325p, trade paper, \$16.99, ISBN 978-1-961-90512-2

Thalasinis (author of *Fly by Night*) explores touching and enlightening aspects of the bond between humans and animals with twinned stories of two women, separated by centuries and a continent, maneuvering through lives shaped by their love and commitment to horses. It's through this passion that Evie, a young single mother whom we first meet near Flagstaff in the 1970s, and Belle MacLeod, the daughter of a wealthy Scottish landowner in 1700s Nova Scotia, face and survive the challenges of their eras. Each discovers, in her own time, what truly matters, as they relish "the scent of animal fur, and the feel of ... mane under her hands" and perform edifying work like getting "yearlings ready to encounter the everyday things of life." Complicating matters, though, are the men in their lives.

Horse lovers who admire stories of independent women will be moved by Evie's immediate, intuitive bond with a wild mustang that turns up out of the blue—a charming scene that warms the heart and changes the course of Evie's life. Almost 200 years earlier, Belle, the youngest daughter of "Mr. Mac," also finds in her love of horses the courage to embark on her own journey toward what she believes will



Vital, nourishing story of two women, centuries apart, finding freedom in horses.

Great for fans of Maggie Stiefvater's *The Scorpio Races*, Elizabeth Letts's *The Ride of Her Life*.

The split narrative and fleetly lyrical prose inspire contemplation of perennial needs like safety, compassion, and connection. As the narrative crosses centuries, Thalasinis occasionally leaps ahead over courtships and other human developments without significant dramatization. Instead, the focus remains on the hearts of Evie, Belle, and their horses—and the many subtle and surprising ways these women are linked.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

FICTION

Goldberg Variations: The Redemption of the Damned

Jonathan A. Taylor | Amoland Press
380p, trade paper, \$19.95, ISBN 978-1-734-29570-2

This charged second entry in Taylor's series follows young Jamie Goldberg—who calls himself "a psychological alien, a soon-to-be-homeless person, and a reluctant pervert"—facing the dawn of the Reagan era as a rape survivor and queer man seeking to understand himself amid a sea of hormones, homophobia, and hollow pursuits. Assuming that coming out will make his life easier, Jamie instead earns the horrified contempt of his "progressive" parents, who promptly kick him out of their Detroit home, setting off the events of the book.

Taylor's prose is striking and vivid, showcasing Jamie's wry self-awareness as he takes the reader into these fraught years. With wit, intimacy, and fearless frankness, narrator Jamie shares his experiences, discoveries, pleasures, and trauma: the curiosity about sex, the experimenting, the ramifications, the self-loathing, the suicidal ideation, the specter of AIDS, the pain of hearing a man he's loved say "love" like it was a dirty word." Jamie's sharp humor and Taylor's even-sharper prose keep the storytelling irresistible, even as Jamie is let down by nearly



Sharply told, boldly inventive novel of coming-of-age queer in the 1980s.

Great for fans of Bill Konigsberg's *Destination Unknown*, Rasheed Newson's *My Government Means to Kill Me*.

everyone in his life (his derisive brother tries to persuade him to see an out-of-state Jewish psychiatrist to "cure" him). It's satisfying to see Jamie's innate spirit of love and decency win out. The novel is often bold and inventive in form, thrilling readers who favor character and innovation over narrative momentum: a set piece involving Wagner's *Parsifal* is wild, hilarious, erotic, and pointedly long. None of this distracts, though, from Jamie's essential dilemma: he yearns for a connection, not a quickie, and lives in fear of turning into someone who cares more about "the penis over the person." This is endearing, not least because Jamie's essential kindness and longing for love virtually guarantee he needn't worry. A coming (out)-of-age story both grand and gritty, Jamie's story will resonate with anyone ever lost in the morass of finding themselves.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

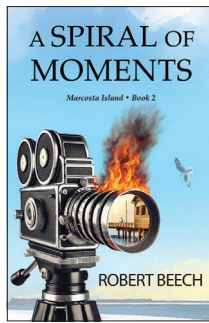
FICTION

A Spiral of Moments: Marcosta Island, Book 2

Robert Beech | PentaBeech, LLC
370p, e-book, \$2.99, ISBN 979-8-991-63570-7

Continuing the thoughtful drama of homecoming, preservation, and rapacious real-estate development that began in *A Span of Moments*, Beech sets this sequel in early 1997 as Jake Crawford, the scientist-turned-mayor of Marcosta Island along Florida's Gulf Coast, fights to protect his home, its environment, and its old Florida culture. Readers are advised to start with the first entry, as *A Spiral of Moments* hits the ground running, with billionaire resort developer Derek Nielson buying up property on the island while Jake seeks out surprising allies to help thwart him. The situation takes a turn when a famous Hollywood director, inspired by the story of a heroic World War II pilot who once lived on the island, comes to isolated Marcosta to shoot. Jake knows that "economic progress is the sole arbiter of the state's future, the environment be damned." Can he seize an opportunity to preserve the island?

Beech plunges readers into a complex ecosystem full of characters with their own motivations, capturing the tensions of a world on the verge of change—Marcosta



Compelling novel of a mayor fighting to save a barrier island from developers.

Great for fans of Patrick D. Smith's *A Land Remembered*, Peter Matthiessen's *Killing Mister Watson*.

Island can do little to stop the onslaught of developers, with even the town's referendum banning the state from building a bridge to the mainland being challenged, thanks to Nielson's connections in the legislature. But Jake and a slew of individuals around him are hell-bent on trying to stop what might seem inevitable. Beyond that urgent throughline, Beech relishes local color—shrimpers; pelicans;

a bicycle cop noshing donuts at the Spud Hut—and smartly explores themes of filmmaking, love, sickness, care, and piracy on the lawless sea. That expansive vision, along with some mystery and suspense elements, at times diminishes narrative momentum, but Beech ultimately reels in all the loose ends. And his central point—how to adapt to development without selling your soul—comes across admirably. Lovers of stories about islands, Florida, and development will enjoy this entertaining novel.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **B** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **B+**

FICTION

Gitel's Freedom

Iris Mitlin Lav | She Writes press
256p, trade paper, \$17.95, ISBN 978-1-647-42858-7

Lav's layered historical fiction revolves around a Jewish family who arrives in the United States from Belorussia at the turn of the century, in early 1900s Chicago. Gitel, just a young child when she lands in America, chafes against her mother's more traditional values, longing to fit in with her new peers and country. As she grows, her inquisitive nature leads her to question the family's faith and whether she wants to settle down to become a wife and mother—until she meets Shmuel, whose activism matches her energy. But, as the two marry and set out to create a life together, they are beset by problems at nearly every turn.

The story unfolds from Gitel's perspective, giving readers access to her most intimate thoughts and feelings as she and Shmuel embark on their future. Almost immediately after they settle down, emergencies pile up: their bank closes during the Great Depression and they lose all of their savings; the country goes to war; and Shmuel becomes chronically ill. Gitel quickly learns how difficult it is to be a woman—particularly a Jewish one—in early 20th-century America, as she is plagued by restrictions from her parents, husband, religion, and society at large.



Sprawling saga of a Jewish family making their way in early 20th-century America.

Great for fans of Alice Hoffman's *The Dovekeepers*, Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*.

Lav (author of *A Wife in Bangkok*) paints an intimate picture of Jewish life, smattering the chapters with Yiddish words, rituals, and religious lessons from the Torah that give the narrative both depth and authenticity. There's also a deep awareness of the historical forces that drive the plot, as the characters' personal events hold court with the political and economic developments of the time. That all adds up to a myriad of moving parts, but Lav juggles them well, sketching out how each generation processes, and transcends, the problems faced by the previous generation. The progress is incremental, but the results, when they do come, are beautifully rewarding.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A-**

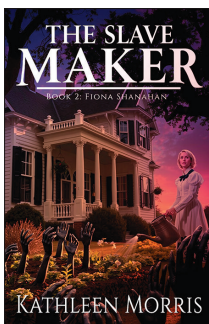
FICTION

The Slave Maker: Fiona Shanahan, Book 2

Kathleen Morris | Dunraven Press
270p, e-book, \$9.99, ISBN 979-8-987-45637-8

Morris once again brews a captivating blend of historical thriller, mystery, and the supernatural with the second installment in her Fiona Shanahan series, after *Fiona Rising*. Set in the vibrant but shadowy streets of 19th-century New Orleans, the novel follows Fiona, an investigator with a hidden past, and her steadfast partner (and lover) Michael Henley, on their latest quest—to locate a client's estranged lover. That assignment takes the couple down a perilous journey into the very heart of darkness, as what appears cut and dried on the surface transforms into a sinister plot involving malevolent voodoo priestess Annette Chambord and her army of zombies.

Morris's portrait of New Orleans is a tantalizing mix of shadows and glitz, and she skillfully captures the area's rich cultural heritage and underlying darkness, from the mouthwatering Creole dishes and evening sheen of the St. Louis Cathedral to the city's stringent social hierarchies and voodoo magic. Her meticulous research is evident throughout, giving the novel an historical accuracy that grounds the supernatural elements and pulls readers deeper into the story's richly textured world—a world underpinned by well-drawn, memorable characters. Fiona is both



A supernatural showdown threatens 19th-century New Orleans.

Great for fans of Deborah Harkness's *The Black Bird Oracle*, Rena Rosser's *The Sisters of the Winter Wood*.

compelling and resilient, brimming with courage that propels the narrative, and her interactions with the mysterious Comte de Saint Germain and loyal Henley bring both tension and depth to this enigmatic tale. From sharp, authentic dialogue to the novel's stunning atmosphere, Morris delivers evocative imagery and lavish sensory details that bring vivid life to every scene, particularly the otherworldly battle Fiona must undertake—with help from her friends and the legendary Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveau—to stop Annette's reign of terror. Themes of power, corruption, and redemption coil throughout, adding emotional weight and thought-provoking subtext, and Morris's well-timed twists will keep readers hooked. The seamless blend of historical fiction and supernatural intrigue makes this installment one to savor.

Cover: **B-** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

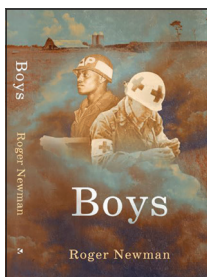
FICTION

Boys

Roger Newman | Koehler Books
334p, e-book, \$25, ISBN 979-8-88824-569-9

Newman's latest historical fiction, after *Will O' the Wisp*, follows the intertwined lives of Pete and Alex, two brothers bound not by blood but by circumstance, amid the harsh realities of mid-20th-century America. When the Barnes family discovers Alex—a young Black orphan—hiding in their North Carolina dairy barn, they take him in—not from kindness, but because they need an extra hand on the farm. As Alex grows, he's treated like an outsider by most of the family and society at large, though Pete—the second to youngest Barnes and Alex's same age—considers him a brother. As the boys grow, their separate narratives unfold, powered by themes of racism, identity, and resilience.

Newman's tale of brotherhood captures the deep bond between Pete and Alex—a bond that is tested as their journey expands. They attend segregated schools, each learning vastly different histories, with Pete steeped in white narratives while Alex soaks in the knowledge of his Cherokee teacher. Alex's journey to discover his self-worth and place in the world is both heart-wrenching and inspiring, and Pete's love for him offers a glimpse of hope in a story otherwise rife with challenges. Their



Two men raised as brothers confront racism in mid-20th-century America.

Great for fans of Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*, Kiley Reid's *Such a Fun Age*.

Vivid descriptions of rural life, military service, and racial tension add rich layers to Newman's narrative, immersing readers in the characters' struggles and triumphs while exploring war trauma, systemic discrimination, and gentle self-discovery amid the harsh cruelty of their world. *Boys* is a complex dive into human connection, an ode to finding strength in adversity, the enduring scars of racism, and the power of love and loyalty.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **B+**

FICTION

Listen To Me: The Women of the Bible Speak Out

Cordelia Frances Biddle | Vine Leaves Press
188p, trade paper, \$14.99, ISBN 978-3-98832-127-5

Biddle (author of *They Believed This Were Safe*) gives voice to women of the Bible in this unique reimagining, where God is described as the “nonbinary creator of the world” and well-knowns like Eve, Ruth, and Delilah set their records straight. Fittingly, the story begins with Eve, “supposedly the Earth's first woman,” as she explores the blame levelled at her over centuries, reflects on Adam's finer qualities (he “admired brawn more than brains” she muses), and recounts the painful outcomes for her children, Cain and Abel. That sets the stage for a high-spirited, often tongue-in-cheek revision of biblical stories that layers historical Christian events with contemporary travesties.

Biddle's reinvention of silenced, abused, and oppressed women provides a humorous—and at times cynical—take on biblical stories that have historically unfolded from a male perspective. Ruth reflects on her journey as an “alien” in a foreign land; Bathsheba shares her side of the love affair she was forced into when David took a liking to her; and Delilah defends her actions against Samson, yet defers judgment, writing “I was a serial floozy. Or a heroine. Your choice.” Biddle



Briskly told historical novel of France's brilliant 14th century woman poet.

Great for fans of Michal Lemberger's *After Abel and Other Stories*, Anna Solomon's *The Book of V*.

also incorporates a contemporary woman by the name of Moira—a 21st century descendant of Eve, who sees a correlation between herself and these biblical women and the treatment they faced at the hands of the men in their lives. Though entertaining, Biddle's writing also offers serious food for thought, advocating for women whose perspectives have been largely overlooked, as well as unapologetically calling out the lack of women's autonomy over their own lives and bodies within biblical stories. The narrative also invites some input from men in the Bible and touches on several of-the-moment issues like gun control and discrimination, while offering brief asides from God, who ruminates on the deteriorating state of the world and tells readers “I cannot rescue you from your current lunacies.”

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

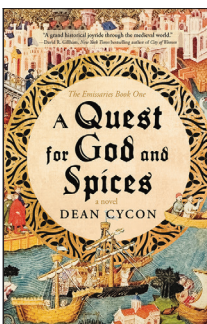
FICTION

A Quest for God and Spices

Dean Cycon | Koehler Books
302p, hardcover, \$22.95, ISBN 979-8-88824-515-6

A vibrant travelogue conjuring the rich complexities of the medieval world at the dawn of the 13th century, the first book in Cycon's *The Emissaries* series finds a naive young merchant navigating a tangle of church, courts, and commerce across Europe and the Byzantine Empire, as a robust mix of powers jockey for dominance. The Church is calling for a new crusade, kings from Rome to the Holy Land strive to protect their domains, and merchants, of course, forever seek new ways to buoy their bottom line. Convinced by a 35-year-old letter that a king named Presbyter John, whereabouts unknown, is the “key to recapturing Jerusalem and regaining the only relic of the True Cross,” Pope Innocent III tasks a devout monk, Brother Mauro, and eager young merchant Nicolo to seek out Presbyter John's kingdom.

Complicating matters is Nicolo's ulterior motive: to find out from Presbyter John the source of the valuable Eastern spices the West clamors for. Mauro and Nicolo's journey is episodic and filled with rich historical detail, their travels revealing the world to them and readers alike. Wonders abound, like the monastery San Giovanni of the Hermits, where Nicolo's head is turned by jasmine and orange blossoms, or



Vivid novel of a journey across cultures and commerce in the middle ages.

Great for fans of Elif Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice*, Jenny White's *Kamil Pasha Novels*.

power lies.

The biggest strength of the novel is the great care Cycon takes to show the social, economic, religious, and political circumstances in every city along the way, from Genoa (“controlled by hardheaded men of commerce”) to Constantinople (“a polyglot of races, accents, and clothing”). Some chapters move slowly, with the proportions of historic detail and lively incident not always ideally balanced, but the novel often proves an immersive, illuminating pleasure.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

a masked ball, where the young man's passions are ignited. Brother Mauro begins the story as a sheltered monk ripped out of his comfort zone, and his genuine piety contrasts with the ambition of religious officials who use their positions to increase their own influence. Concurrently, Nicolo's dealings with merchants suggest where the real

MYSTERY/THRILLER

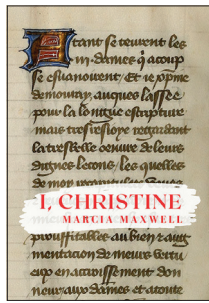
I, Christine

Marcia Maxwell

460p, e-book, \$3.99, ASIN B0CQKL8X4

Sprightly and sparkling despite its hefty length, this intimate epic of art and politics from Maxwell (author of *The Rogue Queen*) examines the life, mind, and choices of medieval poet Christine de Pizan, whose poetry made her the toast of France in the late 14th century. As her nation faces conflict from abroad and within, Maxwell's de Pizan is, at the novel's start, a widow liberated from financial deprivation by a surprising opportunity: she is invited to earn a living copying books in the king's library. De Pizan quickly comes to love this "peaceful life," working "high above the city's fray in the Falconry Tower." When she is encouraged by one of her several mentors to write her own poetry, however, she soon finds herself the center of the court's attention, earning admirers in dukes and even the queen—and the enmity of the poet she bests in a royal competition. De Pizan notes, tartly, that he "does not think that I, a mere woman, possess the wit necessary to write poetry."

Maxwell tells this literary tale with brisk authority, moving quickly through de Pizan's ascent and her growth as an artist, thinker, and person. Dramatic incidents



Briskly told historical novel of France's brilliant 14th century woman poet.

Great for fans of Coirle Mooney, Elizabeth Chadwick.

honed for clarity and ease of reading, tends to avoid a poet's lyricism.

What most fascinates is de Pizan's growing awareness of the injustice of women's position in society. The poet shrewdly maneuvers to secure stations for her children's future while honing her voice and arriving at pressing questions like "Why were so few books written about praiseworthy women?" Maxwell has written one, a lively rendering of a life and mind that inspires.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

MYSTERY/THRILLER

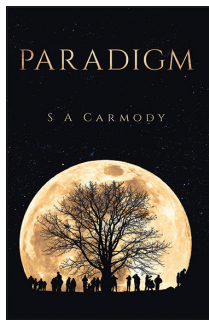
Paradigm

S.A. Carmody | KMCS Publishing

348p, e-book, \$4.19, ISBN 978-1-7398387-9-9

Carmody's debut takes on the difficult topic of child sexual abuse in a story that centers on the victim's healing. Running from the group home where young female residents have been groomed as "fresh meat" for sexual abuse at the hands of a gang connected to the facility, 14-year-old Megan Walsh is picked up by Joanne (Jo) McGloughlin, the Head of Youth Services who befriended her when the facility was first opened. Jo and her husband take Megan in to protect her while she begins to identify her abusers. As the investigation becomes increasingly complicated, Megan starts to integrate into their family as their four young adult children come home for a chaotic Christmas holiday.

Carmody is careful to balance enough description of Meg's traumatic experience to feel authentic without focusing on graphic detail. This keeps the story from feeling prurient, as Carmody emphasizes Meg's courage, growth, and new connections, even as she still faces danger from insiders in the scheme who would rather she not testify. Carmody makes Meg an extremely reliable witness who is believed by authorities. This humane, supportive treatment of abuse survivors is encouraging, though the thriller elements, seemingly by design, are never visceral nor especially



Optimistic, family-centered thriller of justice and support for victims.

Great for fans of Kimberly Brubaker Bradley's *Fighting Words*, Laurie Matthew's *Groomed*.

family banter makes a strong contrast with the stress that Meg is escaping. Carmody's background as a caregiver is clear in Jo's gentleness and practical support.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

MYSTERY/THRILLER

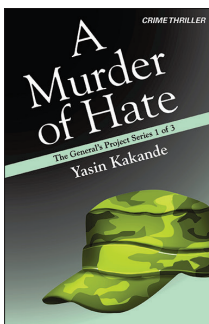
A Murder of Hate: The General's Project Series, Book 1

Yasin Kakande | Black Writers Ink, LLC

295p, e-book, \$6.99, ISBN 979-8-9909844-3-1

Racism, corrupt international politics, sex, and rape—these urgent themes converge in the murder of Sheila Musinga, the niece of Uganda's president and a student at Boston's Essex University. Kakande presents Sheila, who was born to a Ugandan father and Swedish mother, as more than just the impetus for the investigation that follows, delving into the young woman's struggles with her identity, which often aligns more with her European heritage despite her African roots. Sheila's only other Black classmate, Shawn Wayles, finds her perspectives on racism in America both fascinating and frustrating as their complex relationship unfolds against the backdrop of cultural and racial divides. When Sheila's half-naked body is discovered in a car, Detective Lisa Garcia and her partner, Detective Basudde "Bus," a Ugandan-American officer with CIA connections, zero in on Shawn as their number one suspect. But the truth runs much deeper than jealousy and unrequited love.

Journalist Kakande, author of nonfiction titles like *Green Card Brides: The Lives of Black Migrants in America*, brings a welcome repertorial eye to the story,



Smart, gripping mystery of murder, migrants, and international politics.

Great for fans of Wanda M. Morris's *What You Leave Behind*, S.A. Cosby's *All the Sinners Bleed*.

weaving a gripping thriller that is smart and revealing about gender, race, and identity. Through a mix of flashbacks, recordings, and interrogations, Kakande uncovers the pressures of privilege, the burden of expectations, political corruption across nations, racism, and the dangers and temptations of power. Vivid depictions of torture, sexual assault, violence, graphic language, and intimate

moments make the story strikingly visceral and authentic—and at times, deeply unsettling. Detective Bus's CIA connections and Ugandan heritage add layers of tension and conflict, while the portrayal of gender dynamics further deepens the story's exploration of power struggles and social inequities. As they search for the truth, the detectives build a relationship of their own, even as past intelligence work proves a complicating factor. The case resolves with an urgent reminder that nothing is ever as simple as it seems, and that you can't trust anyone—especially anyone in politics.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

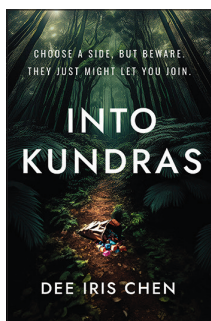
MYSTERY/THRILLER

Into Kundras

Dee Iris Chen | Barn owl Publishing
408p, trade paper, \$18.99, ISBN 979-8-9895824-0-2

Chen offers readers a sprawling mystery thriller debut set on the fictional island of Kundras in South America. The plot centers around two women: disgraced psychiatrist Reyna Manalaysay, on the loose after she was caught “selling scripts” for pain medication to patients, and Hollywood starlet Evelyn Moss, who has left Los Angeles to escape her opportunistic family. Their worlds collide when they’re both taken hostage and dragged to Kundras—where a delusional general rules, in the midst of a brutal battle with his combative rival. That thrusts both women into a life-and-death fight to escape Kundras intact, before the island’s tumult spells their doom.

Chen leads with intricate descriptions of violence and torture that drive the story, throwing readers—along with Reyna and Evelyn—into a foreign, ruthless, and dangerous world, where everything follows its own incomprehensible logic. Though Evelyn takes time to adapt to this new environment, Reyna, from the start, seems thrifter, intuitively understanding the power plays at work on the island. Her tactical knowledge at times seems far-fetched, but Chen does a good job of getting



Wild ride of hostages, politics, and jaw-dropping violence.

Great for fans of J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Jodi Picoult's *A Spark of Light*.

energy humming, right up until the novel's staggering last moments. Ultimately, this is a well-rendered sketch of the interecine, never-ending cycle of brutality that countries sometimes get caught up in—where a deficit of law and trust erodes all attempts at stability. Fans of twisty thrillers with a healthy dose of bloodshed and gore, alongside intricate politics and strong female characters, will relish this wild ride.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: – Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A**

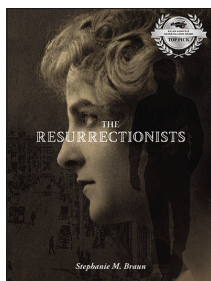
MYSTERY/THRILLER

The Resurrectionists

Stephanie M. Braun
337p, trade paper, \$14.99, ISBN 979-8-9877727-0-6

Sharp-witted Jessica Chase carves a precarious path of independence in the shrouded streets of 1890s San Francisco in this smart historical debut. Jessica has left her former confidant and lover, a manipulative con artist named Felix Rodgers, back in Boston, yet even the firmest convictions can be shaken by old threats. Felix has come west, prowling the streets of the booming city with his arrogance and predatory instincts. Soon, Jessica's wealthy Uncle Alfie announces, “My girl, someone is poisoning me.” Shaken, Jessica decides to stop running away and agrees, reluctantly, to participate in a self-serving scheme of Felix's purportedly crafted to expose the assailant: a staged burial to fake Alfie's death—a plan as risky as it is ingenious.

Braun's narrative crackles with tension, delivering a fun and thrilling ride as Jessica orchestrates her counterplay: she will con her conman, who is eager to possess her. Enlisting a diverse and quirky squad—her long-lost brother Bayer, a séance mediator named Rebecca, and the burly circus strongman Boris—she attempts to outmaneuver Felix at his own game. Jessica evolves from a neglected child who grew up seeking love in all the wrong places into an independent and



Thrilling 1890s San Francisco heist story—and a woman's journey of redemption.

Great for fans of Emma Donoghue's *Frog Music*, Karen Joy Fowler's *Sister Noon*.

resourceful woman reclaiming her agency against patriarchal dominance. Her character is empowering, defying the stereotypical representation of how “every successful woman is a man telling her what to do,” as Felix puts it, by proving herself a cunning architect of her own redemption.

The pacing flags during chapters focused on Felix's indulgent drunken escapades, but Braun compensates with a layered portrayal of his character—a man with an “unlucky” past whose vulnerabilities are masked by his narcissism—rather than a one-dimensional villain. The novel is rich in fascinating and evocative historical detail, especially concerning the ethical ambiguities of the Gilded Age, like grave robbing in the name of medical progress. With its mix of clever and playful heists, eerie spiritual theatrics, and the seedy taverns and sinister graveyards of the Barbary Coast, readers will surely delight in this book.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **A**

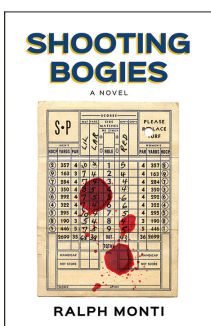
MYSTERY/THRILLER

Shooting Bogies

Ralph Monti
342p, e-book, \$8.99, ISBN 979-8-218-36892

Monti's organized crime thriller takes place in New Jersey, where big-money golf-hustler Rocky Delmonico accidentally disrespects local gangster Gino Lofaccio at his father's funeral, forcing Rocky to make amends—or else. Soon, Rocky finds himself entrenched in Gino's world, cavorting with ruthless gangsters, arms dealers, and duplicitous agents. The more he tries to repay his debt to Gino, the further he sinks into this new, dangerous game, all while the fate of a nefarious CEO and one of the top golf courses in New Jersey hang in the balance.

From the start, Monti's fiction debut evokes a typical New Jersey-esque mobster atmosphere, with Gino's right hand man, Vinnie, an “angry street thug who belted people around for kicks” on constant guard duty while Gino runs a side business at a club where “for two C-notes, the tie and suit guys get three drinks... and the chance to hound the best dancers this side of Las Vegas.” The humor-tinged perspective on neighborhood violence and politics, combined with snappy street slang and a handful of vicious hits, will keep readers entertained, topped off only by Monti's slew of peculiar characters, from Gino's mother Mrs. Lofaccio to golf course CEO/arms dealer Pincus Bogalinsky—each of whom harbor their own curious quirks. Golf



Mafia mix-up leaves a golf hustler repaying an unlikely debt.

Great for fans of Ed McBain's *Criminal Conversations*, Jon A. Jackson's *La Donna Detroit*.

also forms a central part of the narrative, with large sections of the plot dedicated to the ins and outs of the game. Monti's fast-paced twists and turns culminate in a speedy climax, that, when it comes, echoes the book's earlier themes, with sting operations aimed at Syrian-backed illegal arms dealings and a takedown requiring a multiple organization cooperative. That tidy finish allows Monti to nicely sum up each character's journey and leaves Rocky safe and sound—though his golf game is irrevocably affected. An adrenaline-inducing read, *Shooting Bogies* is filled with action, idiosyncratic characters, and snappy intrigue that will leave mafia fiction fans murderously entertained.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **A**

MYSTERY/THRILLER

EDITOR'S PICK

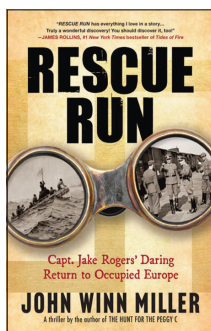
Rescue Run: Capt. Jake Rogers' Daring Return to Occupied Europe

John Winn Miller | Bancroft Press

352p, hardcover, \$27.95, ISBN 978-1-610-88643-7

This rousing thriller of a desperate chase across Nazi-occupied Europe picks up right where Miller left off in *The Hunt for The Peggy C*. After risking it all to help a Jewish family escape the Gestapo, Captain Jake Rogers has left his beloved Miriam Maduro safe in Palestine but must now set off to rescue her father, Solomon Maduro, from occupied Amsterdam. Surviving a shipwreck and some tragic losses, Jake must make his way to Holland overland, only to discover, upon finally finding the elder Maduro, that Miriam has made her own journey to visit her father—and has been missing for weeks. Now, as Jews are being imprisoned and killed, Jake must work with a team of allies, including Solomon, to track down Miriam and get themselves to safety once again.

Miller again delivers a page-turner with ample heart, tension, and engaging, lived-in historical detail, like hobnail boots sounding on wooden stairs as the heroes hide from the Gestapo. Jake and his allies must disguise themselves as they track



Tense World War II thriller of a desperate chase across Nazi-occupied Europe.

Great for fans of Alan Furst's *Spies of the Balkans*, Mark Sullivan's *Beneath a Scarlet Sky*.

group of heroes, cultures, and perspectives that readers won't soon forget.

Suspense is potent, with tense standoffs, interrogations, and border crossings, and the action, when it bursts out, proves explosive. Miller steeps this spirited fiction in historical fact, offering extensive chapter notes that provide key context on battles, locales, political situations, wartime inventions, and important figures, like a Resistance banker or a notorious German spy. The open-ended conclusion will please lovers of realistic but exciting World War II fiction who are hoping for more.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **A**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

EDITOR'S PICK

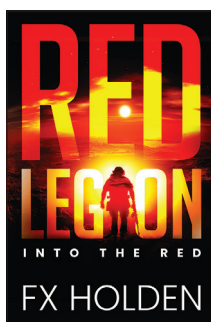
Red Legion: Into the Red

FX Holden | ProductPublisher

400p, e-book, \$8.99, ASIN B0DBLHLCR1

Blending tech-savvy science fiction with military action that soars, Holden (author of the Future War series, among others) launches this series-starter with the intergalactic adventures of Linus Vespasius, a former deep-sea fishing captain turned reluctant soldier. Facing life in prison for murder, Linus opts for service in the Red Army—as in, the army of Mars—enticed by the promise of freedom after completing his combat hours, a mere 99. But nothing is what it seems on Mars, with those hours exceedingly hard to accumulate, a brutal “Reduction process,” and the shocking revelation that the presumably alien enemy, the Lilin, with bodies “not made from elements known to humankind,” can pass themselves off as human. Demotions relegate Linus to the junior-most rank in Legion Praeda, or Legion of the Prey, infamous for its low survival rate. What follows this seeming death sentence is a surprise: the transformation of a self-interested man thrust into the harrowing Red War and a series of vividly drawn combat situations.

For all its action, described with both vigor and rigor, and its cool revelations about the enigmatic Lilin—a seemingly immortal species whose motives and



Gripping action-packed sci-fi thriller set around an intergalactic high-stakes war.

Great for fans of James S.A. Corey, Paul McAuley.

this war, told through Linus's journal entries, are deftly juxtaposed against the duplicitous “official history” of the conflict fed to Earth's population to sustain public support.

Lovers of military SF will sign right up, though the military jargon might pose a challenge to some readers. Still, Holden's meticulous world-building and well-honed action compellingly conjure the unforgiving realities (and imaginative possibilities) of future war, setting the stage for a sprawling, morally complex universe and more high-stakes, thought-provoking storytelling.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

EDITOR'S PICK

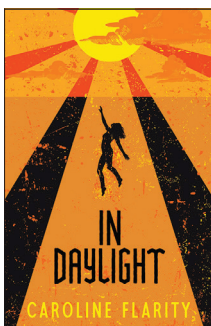
In Daylight

Caroline Flarity | East Side Press

241p, e-book, \$3.99, ASIN B0DBW1JSXG

Flarity's latest blend of psychological suspense and speculative science fiction invites readers to solve a tantalizing riddle. After her promising career in finance collapses when she has a panic attack during a major presentation, Mika Crane finds herself working midnight shifts at her family's 24-hour convenience store in the New Jersey Pine Barrens. When her ailing father reveals that he has discovered the location of her sister Naomi, who left the family nearly two decades earlier, Mika travels to New York to find her, hoping to restore their formerly close relationship and heal family wounds.

Flarity (author of *The Ghost Hunter's Daughter*) artfully infuses the Pine Barrens setting with a moody, atmospheric darkness, mirroring the Crane family's inner turmoil. Though the Cranes share a strong bond and long to have Naomi back, each member of Mika's family struggles with unresolved pain: her father is tormented by paranoid delusions, her mother's violent outburst led to a prison sentence, and her other sister Paige's seemingly happy marriage camouflages her toxic jealousy. When Mika reunites with Naomi, she discovers that it is not family dysfunction that



Haunting speculative sci-fi with psychological depth.

Great for fans of Blake Crouch's *Dark Matter*, Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow*.

drove her away, but rather Naomi's desire to protect them from the aliens that had abducted and tormented her. Though Mika initially rejects her sister's wild claims, the addictive twists and turns of the plot force her to consider if there have been otherworldly forces at work in her and her family's lives. When disaster strikes, she must decide if she is willing to open her mind to new possibilities—and new realities. Though Flarity's esoteric approach to the alien genre may challenge some readers, the relatable characters and their visceral relationships keep the story grounded. Far from a generic tale of little green men, this story's intelligent exploration of identity, family bonds, and generational trauma infuses empathy into the extraterrestrial.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

EDITOR'S PICK

Hair-Trigger Smile

Daniel James | Bottled Lightning Press
344p, e-book, \$8.99, ISBN 978-1-738-49562-7

Bursting with weird magic, conspiratorial intrigue, owl attacks, Post-Life Entities (PLEs), and a mad land where cackling mouths in the ground each look “like a titanic clown buried alive,” the third entry in James’s Hourglass series (after *The Ferryman’s Toll*) delivers an electrifying paranormal thriller that offers continual surprises and bursts of action while delving deep into the consequences of wielding dark powers. Clyde Williams, once a comic-book artist but now a necromancer who has accidentally bound the soul of his deceased best friend to his own, grapples with necromantic abilities that have earned him a position in Hourglass, the government’s paranormal intelligence agency, but also placed him under intense scrutiny from the authorities of the Median realm, “the dreaming kingdom situated halfway between sleep and the undead vistas of Erebus.”

The narrative kicks into high gear when violence erupts at a classified facility, forcing Clyde back into active duty despite concerns about his stability. James crafts a world where the line between protector and potential threat becomes



Superior paranormal thriller, rich with mad invention and moral urgency.

Great for fans of Paul Cornell’s Shadow Police Series, Charles Stross’s Laundry Files.

as James explores how past trauma and present circumstances can shape choices, for better or worse.

A spirited subplot following Russian necromancer Kozlov’s expedition through Erebus adds another layer of intrigue to an already complex plot while also weaving through the entire narrative, connecting seemingly disparate elements into a cohesive whole. James populates this hostile dimension with fresh, wholly original terrors and otherworldly entities that both delight and disgust. For all the visceral, inventive conflict and worldbuilding, James offers a haunting exploration of power and its corrupting influence, perfect for readers who enjoy their dark fantasy with psychological depth and moral complexity.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

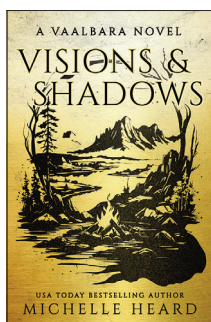
EDITOR'S PICK

Visions & Shadows

Michelle Heard | MA Heard
438p, e-book, \$2.99, ASIN B0DKYWMKX

Heard (author of *God of Vengeance*) delivers a pitch-perfect portal fantasy in the first of her Vaalbara series. When Jane mysteriously appears at age 13 beside a waterfall in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, she has no idea that she is actually Alchera, a princess from Vaalbara, “a planet clothed in its original splendor, just as when Earth took its first breath.” Now, at 17, she is living as an ordinary human named Jane, with no memories of Vaalbara, until her guardian, Raighne, comes to Earth to retrieve her, appearing as a new student at her high school, teenage heartthrob Ryan Jackson. (“Dear God, have mercy on my hormones,” muses Jane.) As the two grow close, Ryan/Raighne tells her of her true destiny and whisks her away to a new world—where Alchera is charged with saving 10 chosen souls from Earth as the apocalypse begins.

Lovers of romantic fantasy will quickly fall hard for Alchera and Raighne. As skillfully written by Heard, Alchera is by turns incredibly brave, sarcastic, and ultimately concerned chiefly with the ones she loves, including her guardian—to whom she is passionately attracted, though she doesn’t think he feels the same



Readers will eagerly devour this stellar romantic portal fantasy.

Great for fans of Hannah Levin’s *The Treasured One*, Roshani Chokshi’s *The Star-Touched Queen*.

building, and her fast-paced, surprise-filled, emotionally charged narrative is irresistible, rich in visions, fantastic detail, gushes of feeling, and the magic of waterfalls—all told in Alchera’s pleasingly direct voice and Raighne’s lightly loftier one. She bolsters her world with an engaging group of supporting characters. Readers may balk at the cliffhanger ending, but they’ll want to know what’s coming next in this author’s world.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

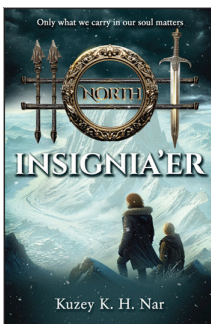
SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Insignia'er

Kuzey K. H. Nar
336p, e-book, \$17.99, ASIN B0DJM228BK

Scriptwriter Nar builds a complicated epic adventure of self-discovery about a sick young woman who finds salvation and purpose in a troubled future. Afflicted with premature aging, marked by wrinkled skin and failing organs, 16-year-old April has just months to live when Lord Kolbein from the North messages her phone, claiming he can help her. He tells her that a cure for her illness can be found on an iceberg—but he requires her aid in return. She accompanies him on the long trek, where he reveals his noble lineage of warriors from 11 regional territories that participate in symbolic fights intended to prevent war. These fights are initiated by the bearer of each lineage’s insignia, called the insignia'er, a woman with great authority. Kolbein reveals that April is a descendant of an insignia'er and a candidate to become one herself.

This fast-paced tale takes April through encounters with deadly animals, tense border crossings, a literal harbinger of death, and, above all else, a secretive, high-stakes world of politics and traditions, power and gamesmanship. Here, she must master the formalities of the insignia'er and contend with the jealousies of a princess commanding 200 archers. Much of this is energetic and inventive, especially April’s recovery from early aging. However, the pacing is uneven,



Teenage hero fulfills her destiny as an overseer of war games.

Great for fans of Charlie N. Holmberg’s *The Paper Magician*, Jeff Wheeler’s *The Queen’s Poisoner*.

diminishing the excitement of classic training sequences, while the convoluted rules surrounding insignia fighting slow down momentum and detract from the development of a promising relationship. April is an engaging protagonist, embodying perseverance and honor, and wittily quizzing Kolbein on why he can’t live a normal life. She remains relatable even as she experiences the fantasy of finding a handsome savior who sees value in her despite her ostracization. Her story would shine brighter, though, with another round of polish. The text is often repetitive, told in blunt sentences that often feel wordy despite their brevity. Fundamentals such as the presentation and punctuation of dialogue occasionally falter, getting lost as the story gushes forward.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **C** | Marketing copy: **A**

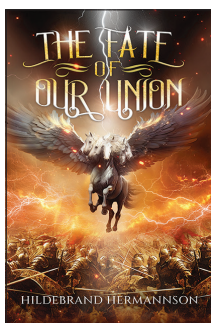
SF/FANTASY/HORROR

The Fate of Our Union

Hildebrand Hermansson | The Bull's Light
426p, hardcover, \$19.99, ISBN 978-0-997-02246-9

Hermansson's debut entry in the Fate series delivers a thought-provoking blend of philosophy and far-ranging mythologies. Three disparate youths—the Roman Stoic, Rufus; the Sarmatian warrior-priestess, Keresaspa; and the Saxon poet, Sunu—are united by the seven-headed winged stallion, Long Ears, to face a great evil sowing discord and disunity among mankind. The stakes are incredibly high, as “the balance and harmony of the world is in peril,” and the trio, bestowed with seven magical items to aid them, must first overcome their own weaknesses—and in so doing, uncover the commonalities within all of humanity to usher in an age of unity.

Energy and vivaciousness flow throughout *The Fate of Our Union*, with language and tone more in step with the myth-works of olde than most modern fantasies. Characters wear their philosophies and ideologies on their sleeves here; they are powered by them, desirous of greatness beyond measure and glory that “pleases the soul,” making them more confidently ambitious than relatable. Still, an earnestness lurks in Hermansson's approach, proving hypnotic despite somewhat



A thought-provoking fantasy epic that unites mythology and philosophy.

Great for fans of Poul Anderson's *War of the Gods*, A.E. Rayne's *Winter's Fury*.

using their inherited style,” which can be felt in the oft-painterly prose—“blood turned the spring forest autumn red”—and deep research undertaken to bring the various tribes of man, their beliefs, and the Stoicism rooted at its center to life. An ambitious undertaking, *The Fate of Our Union* overshadows mechanical issues with a dazzling refraction of ancient history and mythology through a philosophical prism, revealing compelling arguments for mankind's inalienable unity—a timely message sure to resonate with readers.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: — | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Divine in Essence: Stories

Yarrow Paisley | Whiskey Tit
200p, trade paper, \$18, ISBN 978-1-952600-55-5

Paisley (author of *Furious in the Expanse*) crafts ten nightmarish short stories sure to lodge—if not fester—in the minds of readers. With subjects ranging from the supernatural to the shockingly commonplace, Paisley's horrors are stomach-turning and grotesque, perfect for reading during a storm or under the covers by flashlight. Written in briskly archaic prose that's charged, incantatory, and unnervingly clammy, tales like “The Great Event” (the title refers to an occasion eagerly anticipated by a daughter haunted by her mother's ghost) and “Fever Dream” (the title couldn't be more apt) highlight primal fears of being trapped, feeling unsafe or unloved within our families, and facing forces bigger than ourselves. Cosmic and body horror are expertly woven throughout, though readers should be aware that some tales involve themes of child sexual abuse—never described in detail but still deeply unsettling.

While the taboo pervades, charm unexpectedly percolates in surprising places. Lovers of weird fiction will relish these characters' “torpor”s, “spasms of terror and sorrow,” and “whimsical” “hacking at my organs.” Highlights include the bittersweet final gathering of lovers who unite annually despite death, accidentally shedding



Darkly playful, unsettling horror stories in a classical vein.

Great for fans of Thomas Ligotti, Robert Aickman.

That charm lives in the antiquated verbiage, the raw emotion and host of striking details, and the matter-of-fact way the narrators address the supernatural. While it doesn't guarantee happy endings, there's joy in these grim stories that echo, in tone, the early greats of cosmic horror. Paisley seems to dance with them, the playfulness keeping readers on edge—it's never safe to get comfortable. This hard-to-forget collection offers many dark rewards.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

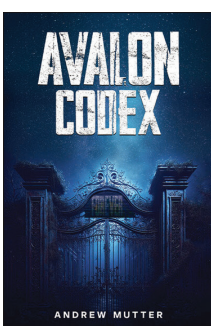
SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Avalon Codex

Andrew Mutter | Austin Macauley Publishers
234p, e-book, \$3.50, ISBN 978-1-035-86295-5

In Mutter's sword-slinging science-fantasy debut, the Alliance of Man must return to the place of its birth in the hopes of breaking free from a terrible servitude. Ill tidings have befallen Axel Starborn: Brond, of the Covenant of Nine and leader of the dark seraph, has revealed to the Five Races that he possesses the Avalon Codex—an ancient tome exposing the dark secret of Mankind's ancient blood oath to the Beast. Compelled to serve the Nine, Axel must assemble a cohort, including trusted allies: the compassionate Toth Valar, the roguish Redgar Silverheels, and the snake-skinned magic-man, Lorn Zeen. Together, they will risk Eden's trials in a desperate bid for freedom—or burn it to the ground.

Fans of pop-goth sword-and-sorcery thrillers with mythic themes, bloody demon battles, and jolting revelations about the secret histories of our planet and civilization will find much to enjoy in *Avalon Codex*. Crafted for big drama, larger-than-life adventure, and epic confrontations, the novel brims with energy. “Baleful hatred was written all over his features as the wind and lightning rebounded around his home,” Mutter writes, as the heroes face one haunting entity in its lair. The pace is



Sword-and-sorcery epic in a pulpy, gothic vein.

Great for fans of Stavros Saristavros's *The Tome of Syyx*, C.J. Pyrah's *Legacy*.

brisk, the world intriguing, and the violence inventive, though characterization can feel flat, and the cosmic stakes don't always resonate on a personal level. Still, Mutter takes a big swing with his compelling central premise and fascinating figures like Lorn or the enigmatic, age-afflicted Children of September. As the inspired proper nouns suggest (there's a City of Wailing Doom and a “giant fallen seraph called Mangol Mammoth”), a passion for pulpy, Warhammer-esque fantasy powers the storytelling. The novel features dark rituals, “Soulburn” powers rooted in an ancient bloodline, and horror-tinged set pieces, such as a scene involving a “living black wall of obsidian flesh.” Building to a promising cliffhanger, Mutter offers fresh takes on familiar ideas, including Amazonians and an angelic Silver Host.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **B**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

The War Devil: Spirit Tamer, Book 1

J.B. Medlin

297p, e-book, \$4.99, ASIN BOD786NHYZ

Medlin's action-packed first in their Spirit Tamer series pairs a desperate agent with a plucky alien soldier and deadly automaton on a war-racked world where there are no right sides. Overman Agent Black Dog has three weeks to pay off her debts to the company, otherwise they'll repo the implants keeping her alive. To do so, she contracts the aid of War Devil, a sentient battle suit, and its carrier, Zecona Giovanni, an Abot. Their mission: destroy the Rebellion defenses so the Federation can take the city of Korsecstan. But everything has a price, and nothing is as simple as it first appears.

SF fans will love the cool technologies Medlin displays, like weapons that generate their own ammo, the shape-shifting War Devil, and the nigh-invulnerable Black Dog, whose self-healing augmentations steal the spotlight after a slew of rousing action sequences. Medlin's straightforward plot is accentuated by character-centered detours, like Zecona looking for meds to treat his gravity sickness, or a promising early segment involving Black Dog and a girl named Nadia, who threatens to complicate Black Dog's life. However, loosely jointed prose and a lack



Conceptually vibrant SF brimming with action-packed sequences.

Great for fans of Drew Avera's *Damaged, Incorporated*, Richard K. Morgan's *Broken Angels*.

of focus across the board keep *The War Devil's* intriguing constituent parts from wholly forming into a truly lethal read. *The War Devil* is at its best when playing fast, loose, and cool, skimming over the more complex ideas and themes—like the racism faced by Zecona's displaced people or a late-game reveal for Black Dog concerning identity and self—while staying firmly entrenched in Medlin's dangerous world, where every day is a gamble and freedom is more of a slippery slope than an earnest vision. Conceptually gleaming but mechanically underdeveloped, this quick-fire debut still has the basic weapons needed to wage an exhilarating war on future-minded fans, and the main trio is endearing enough to keep attention buzzing for the next in the series.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **B** | Illustrations: — Editing: **C** | Marketing copy: **B**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

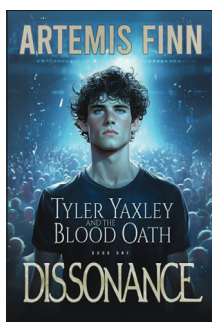
Dissonance: Tyler Yaxley and the Blood Oath

Artemis Finn | Chromatic Publishing

242p, trade paper, \$14.99, ISBN 978-1-763-75160-6

The first installment in Finn's debut series plunges readers into a vivid world where the boundaries of reality and illusion blur. Seventeen-year-old Tyler Yaxley has his fair share of problems: his stepfather is abusive, his mother emotionally absent, and his brother, Jordan, disappeared years ago. When he meets the unconventional Martin, and starts noticing odd phenomena shimmering in the world around him, Tyler questions whether he's losing it—or if something bigger than himself is taking shape. After bullies viciously attack him, Tyler wakes up in a mysterious place called Res—a haunting realm where he's immediately plunged into the ludicium, a series of trials that test his strength, morality, and resolve.

Tyler's trials are a brutal gauntlet of psychological and physical torment, where he confronts grotesque creatures, treacherous landscapes, and impossible choices, but they're just the start of his tortuous journey. As he faces fallout in Res and in the real world, Tyler also learns of his connection to an ancient inner energy—Vinculum—that feeds off a human host. While Tyler's Vi, called Kiih, grants him supernatural abilities, those come with a cost, serving as a source of power and a



Young adult faces tortuous trials to find his place in a fractured world.

Great for fans of Sarah J. Maas's *Throne of Glass* series; Maggie Stiefvater's *The Scorpio Races*.

symbol of his fractured sense of self. Throughout Tyler's awakenings, Martin functions as his mentor, keying him into the different dimensions of reality and his role as a chosen one. Though occasionally dense with lore, *Dissonance* balances introspective moments with action, especially in the climactic confrontation with Milo, whose elemental powers push Tyler and his team to their limits. Finn further complicates Tyler's journey with Jordan's reappearance, reopening old wounds of abandonment and betrayal, but, despite his harrowing struggles, Tyler emerges stronger and more determined than ever. That transformation sets the stage for an exciting sequel, where Tyler must face the looming threats of Res and beyond. Anyone who has ever fought to find their place in the world will be riveted.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: — Editing: **B-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

The Age of Shaman Warrior Professor Elroy: Shamanry Raised

J. George James

394p, e-book, \$8, ISBN 978-1-917336-28-4

Offering an expansive vision of humanity's future rooted in its past, this bold novel, the kickoff to an ambitious series, begins centuries after our species has settled into a new Fertile Crescent in the stars across 12 distinct "Unions." After 400 years, the Unions discover the lost colony of New Patagonia, shielded by radiation and asteroids that the locals call "Gifts." Soon, the Tehuelches (or "Fierce People") of New Patagonia repel a warship from the European Union, whose white "Highborn" are driven by "racist ideations and greed and technologies of war." Led by "chief treehugger Elroy," a brilliant shaman and strategist with an air of destiny, the Tehuelches press the fight against the EU, determined to thwart a colonization effort that echoes Europe's expansion into a "new world" centuries ago.

James's densely inventive novel follows Elroy, the Tehuelches, and hardboiled mercenaries as they target EU supply lines and hubs in preparation for taking Alpha Station. The novel balances attention to science, tactics, and the gritty texture of space warfare with deep worldbuilding, linguistic playfulness ("posdef"; "justczu"),



Bold but dense and challenging SF epic of humanity at war in the stars.

Great for fans of Alastair Reynolds, Yoon Ha Lee.

and philosophical and historical inquiry. Even seasoned readers of thoughtful SF will find this a demanding read, as the story starts in the middle of this "not-war" and challenges readers to keep up. James's inventions (like the Lungeshark species) and historical parallels are fascinating, as are the political machinations, but the prose can feel dense and

uninviting at times. The pacing occasionally frustrates: for instance, a thorough, pages-long account of New Patagonia's history comes after readers have already inferred much of it, interrupting the flow as Elroy races into the book's first battle. The action intensifies in the second half, especially in corridor-crawling chapters from the perspective of Lamb Cloudstalker, a mercenary who is proud of ancestral memories of fighting Nazis at Normandy. James's characterization is compelling, particularly in a pair of EU captives turned slaves, while the Tehuelche society—where slaves have rights and odors reveal emotions—adds rich layers to the narrative. Equally intriguing is Elroy's adherence to a cosmic shamanism rooted in science, which underscores the novel's ambitious blending of action, philosophy, and speculative worldbuilding.

Cover: **C** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: — Editing: **B-** | Marketing copy: **B**

ROMANCE

The Object of His Affection

Donald Proffit | Synthetic Prophetic
218p, trade paper, \$14.95, ISBN 979-8-985-60919-6

Proffit's debut novel, conjuring a sweet romance amidst a vividly evoked New Jersey beach town and boardwalk, tells the story of overcoming past misunderstandings that act as obstacles to true love. Struggling music teacher Billy Pine makes ends meet by playing piano at La Péniche, partnering with legendary drag queen Viktoria Sinclair. Attractive Pierce Talon, Billy's high school classmate, offers him a breakfast cook's job at the charming Sea Spray Inn, where Pierce is chef. There, Billy meets Thad Lambert, a music director in Marsha Morgan's dance company, and soon love blossoms—much to Pierce's chagrin. Thad offers Billy a chance to feature his composition in the fall season of the dance company, though Billy remains confused about Thad's feelings.

Attentive to wildlife, weather, issues of class, and the pressures and pleasures of mounting a show, Proffit's somewhat leisurely style matches the pace of life in the small town of Beachside, with evocative descriptions of beaches, old mansions, and a classic boardwalk filled with "arcades, fortune tellers, T-shirt shops, pizza stands and rundown beachfront vacation rentals." The cast's love of music and



Donald Proffit

Charming queer Jersey romance that sparkles with dance, music, and feeling.

Great for fans of Alison Cochrun's *The Charm Offensive*, James Acker's *The Long Run*.

on his silence and reluctance to take the relationship with Billy forward.

Refreshingly, the author paints a community that is very accepting of gay love, apart from Pierce's struggle with his father's opinions on masculinity and queerness. A touching incident with the lovely dog Finn functions as an apt metaphor for Billy's life, and in the end, there is hope—a break in the ice, a place to surface for air. A warm, relaxed, and energizing read.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

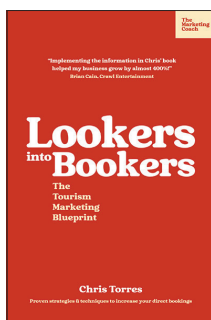
EDITOR'S PICK

Lookers into Bookers: The Tourism Marketing Blueprint

Chris Torres | The Marketing Coach
228p, trade paper, \$39.99, ISBN 978-1-916-14732-4

Built around a "Tourism Marketing Blueprint" and much hard-won insight, this clear-eyed guide from Torres—the founder and director of the Tourism Marketing Agency—offers a thorough, practical, and refreshingly frank guide to best practices for growing a tours and activities business, with an emphasis on digital marketing, referral strategies, and ongoing refinement of approaches. Torres extols the benefits of the "authentic marketing" opportunities unique to this industry, laying out how to apply "the sheer power of genuine storytelling coupled with strategic marketing" to crafting content, sites, and "personalised and authentic travel experiences" that will drive customers to a business. The goal is not to sell but to "captivate" prospects and convert them into customers, preferably the kind that comes back multiple times.

Torres's secret formula is to blend inspiration and imagination with practical guidance, such as highlighting the expertise of your team. He offers detailed accounts of his own work in building businesses and helping transform others, plus



Exemplary guide to building and marketing tour and activities businesses.

Great for fans of Matthew Newton's *Sell More Tours*.

fying traffic sources, utilizing Google Analytics, and understanding customer engagement. Torres shows how to turn customers into fans who rave about their experiences through reviews, recommendations, and social-media posts. Their often contagious enthusiasm is the fuel that grows the business.

Representing something of a new vision in marketing, Torres's business-growing philosophy goes far beyond aggressively pushing products. It's a hands-on approach focused on offering a steady stream of useful, inspiring content that builds trust, engagement, sales, and ultimately an army of fans. For those in the travel business, this is a must-read playbook. For others looking to grow their businesses while inspiring themselves and their staff with enthusiasm, many easily transferable lessons can be found here.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

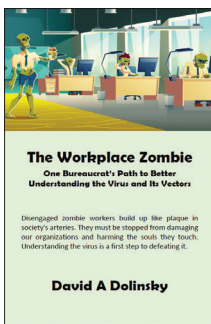
BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

The Workplace Zombie: One Bureaucrat's Path to Better Understanding the Virus and Its Vectors

David A. Dolinsky
150p, mass market, \$14.95, ISBN 979-8-9892928-8-2

With the sense of play and alarm that the title suggests, Dolinsky tackles the idea that bureaucracy is a deeply dehumanizing affair, too often encouraging workers to forget about those around them and embrace an anxious mindlessness. Like zombies in movies, he writes, "They don't see people but instead see *objects* to bite." Dolinsky's zombies gum up systems by losing touch with human interactions, causing "friction, injustice, and dissatisfaction" fueled by "a misplaced sense of urgency regarding what is essential." Worse, they spread the "virus" to others. Through anecdotes from his wide-ranging professional life in the military, government, and private sectors, Dolinsky illustrates how this zombification plays out in the real world and what can be done to shake workers and bureaucracies out of their stupors.

A useful read for those interested in finding more satisfaction and happiness in their work, *The Workplace Zombie* is filled with fresh stories from a wide array of workplaces, illustrating the costs and challenges of zombiedom, plus a host of



Thoughtful look at how to end zombie behavior in the workplace.

Great for fans of Marina Nitze and Nick Sinai's *Hack Your Bureaucracy*, Gary Hamel and Michele Zanini's *Humanocracy*.

Army bomb tech, a stockbroker, and a federal emergency management expert peppered throughout.

The abundance of quotes and references to writers, philosophers, and pop culture can distract from the central argument, and the anecdotal approach makes it read less like a guide for inoculating workplaces and more like notes from the front lines. While the zombie metaphor is itself dehumanizing, Dolinsky writes with compassion, giving grace to those who might, in simpler tellings, appear as villains by acknowledging them as victims of this workplace virus. His stories are framed as learning moments rather than indictments, and readers will find wisdom to pull from them.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

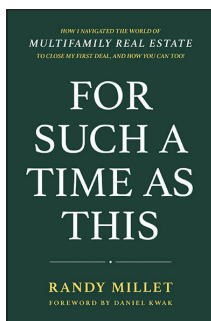
For Such a Time as This: How I Navigated the World of Multifamily Real Estate to Close My First Deal, and How You Can Too!

Randy Millet | Norstack Publishing

164p, trade paper, \$12.99, ISBN 979-8-991-52720-0

In this upbeat debut blending memoir, advice, and heartfelt expressions of faith, Millet recounts the steps—both personal and business-related—it takes to break into the multifamily real estate industry. A YouTube video inspired the Louisianan Air National Guardsman to seek greater financial independence, and then, through a series of courses, conferences, and reflective time spent in prayer, he gradually learned the steps, skills, and acronyms—HELOC, DTI, LTV, and even a literal ABC—that helped him finally close on his first deal in 2024.

Millet documents the relatable highs and lows of this endeavor, frankly admitting to feeling “wet behind the ears” while doing his best to sound professional. Getting his wife on board, raising capital, walking away from an early prospective deal during the due diligence period, and experiencing interest rate hikes during another purchase were all hurdles. Persistence, even after hitting what marathon runners call the “Wall,” proved essential, as did Millet’s faith and conviction that he is “worthy



An entrepreneur's frank account of growing a real estate business.

Great for fans of Alan Corey's *A Million Bucks by 30*, Jonathan Clements's *My Money Journey*.

of success.” Millet goes into detail about the personal changes he made to get into the right mindset for this career change, while sharing advice about finding deals, pitching (“it’s important to understand what your counterpart is feeling”), and addressing the fears of loved ones and stakeholders. Rather than a step-by-step guide to starting up in real estate, Millet offers readers a quick-paced, well-edited memoir of a young businessman navigating the hard work and everyday challenges of striking out in a new field. “You need to know what you don’t know and then strive to learn it,” Millet writes, his tone taking on the inspiring tenor of a coach who still finds the lessons fresh. The result is an inspirational tale about trusting a higher power and daring to work for one’s dreams, a motivational example of how working on yourself leads to rewards in other parts of life, a call not to be stymied by setbacks, and a reminder to fear “regret much more than failure.”

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **B+**

HISTORY & MILITARY

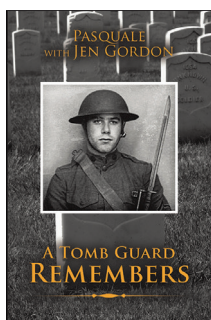
A Tomb Guard Remembers

Pasquale with Jen Gordon | AuthorHouse

224p, trade paper, \$20.99, ISBN 979-8-823-00786-3

Inspired by the 2021 centennial anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, this anthology presents poems and songs of the First World War, mostly penned by soldiers themselves. Varallo served as a guard at the Tomb in 1948; now, he and Gordon have collected verses that range from propagandistic, glorifying war, to resolutely anti-war poems, as well as heartrending testimony from “mothers, wives, brothers, and sisters.”

The range of poets and writers is broad. John McRae’s “In Flanders Fields,” one of the more famous poems of the era, is told from the point of view of the war dead, who rousingly urge the living to keep fighting. George M. Cohan’s song “Over There” was a rallying cry for the Americans in the war, cheering on the boys saving allies from the “Hun.” Familiar selections like Kipling’s “My Boy Jack”—mourning a son who died in the war but rejoicing that he “did not shame his kind” by avoiding combat—are joined by surprises like Ivor Bertie Gurney’s mournful “To His Love” or the hit 1919 tune “How You Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm (After They’ve Seen Poree)?” One heartening theme is writers praising the soldiers of a different country, such as Ella Wheeler Wilcox’s slightly



Rousing, mournful, thoughtful anthology of verse by soldiers in the First World War.

Great for fans of Lorrie Goldensohn’s *American War Poetry*, Rupert Brooke et. al.’s *A First World War Poetry Collection*.

other, who is out of ammunition, but is haunted by the act. Varallo asks simply, “Who wins?” That cuts to the essence of the experience: it lingers far beyond the battlefield itself. Biographical information for the poets is often sourced from Wikipedia.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **B**

LITERARY CRITICISM & BIOGRAPHY

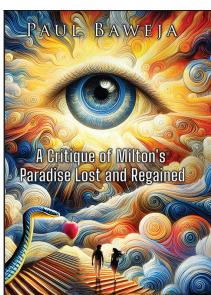
A Critique of Milton's Paradise Lost and Regained

Paul Baweja

392p, hardcover, \$40, ISBN 978-0-648-98186-2

Writing from a position of thoughtful faith, Baweja (author of *A Philosophical Treatise of Reality*) delves deeply into the theological underpinnings of John Milton’s “incandescent” epic poems, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, offering a perspective that is reverential, impassioned, and didactic. Baweja positions Milton’s poems as timeless affirmations of Christian doctrine, focusing on themes of divine justice, human disobedience, the redemptive power of Christ, and the obligation of “humanity to effectuate into practice the eternal principles and timeless lessons that God has established.”

Baweja’s exploration of *Paradise Lost* centers on Milton’s framing of the fall of Adam and Eve, presenting their disobedience as a cautionary example of the consequences of misusing free will. Baweja finds Milton’s treatment of divine foreknowledge and human agency to be a reaffirmation of the necessity of submission to God’s will. “The litmus test of our faith is to believe when we do not witness any results,” he notes. Similarly, Baweja’s analysis of Milton’s Satan emphasizes the destructive power of pride and ambition, positioning the archfiend as a tragic



Impassioned exploration of Milton's masterpieces, emphasizing matters of faith.

Great for fans of David V. Urban’s *Milton and the Parables of Jesus*, Hugh M. Richmond’s *The Christian Revolutionary: John Milton*.

figure whose rebellion serves as a warning against hubris. In detailed commentary on Satan’s infernal council, Baweja posits that moral and intellectual decay is inherent in defiance against divine authority. Considering *Paradise Regained*, Baweja highlights Christ’s triumph over Satan’s temptations as the pinnacle of moral strength and obedience, lauding Milton’s depiction of the crucifixion as the ultimate act of reconciliation between God and humanity—a testament to divine mercy and justice. Baweja presents Milton’s narrative as an affirmation of the transformative power of faith and humility. The critique also commends Milton’s use of blank verse and thematic unity as tools to convey the poems’ theological profundity. While the book offers a thorough theological reading, its focus on Christian orthodoxy may feel limiting for readers seeking a broader exploration of the literary or historical dimensions. However, Baweja’s expertise in theological analysis is evident, and he offers an enriching perspective that underscores the spiritual significance of Milton’s work.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **B**

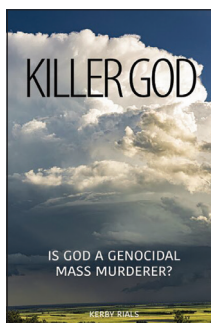
NONFICTION

Killer God: Is God A Genocidal Mass Murderer?

Kerby Rials | Abundance Books, LLC
87p, e-book, \$11.99, ISBN 979-8-985-74999-1

Rials (author of *The Three Great Churches*) answers the question "Is God a genocidal mass murderer?" with a resounding "No." That answer comes from historical, archeological, and biblical analysis of God's actions in the flood and God's commands to kill everyone in certain people groups in the Jewish conquest of Canaan. Rials urges us to consider these questions with an open mind: not to condemn God or make quick judgements without considering these questions deeply. Rials offers careful analysis of specific biblical commands from God, such as killing all inhabitants of a city and utterly destroying it or keeping the civilian population of a city alive, pointing out how the level of destruction corresponded to their relative wickedness and what was necessary to preserve the life of the Jews and thus the coming of Jesus as the Messiah.

Rials tackles his difficult subject with courage. Some of his analysis may strike readers as hard to swallow or even outlandish (such as his contention that some Canaanite tribes interbred with demons), but he takes care to support his reasoning



Study of the reasons behind God's violent Old Testament acts and commands.

Great for fans of Charlie Trimm's *The Destruction of the Canaanites*, Stanley Gundry's *Show Them No Mercy*.

Killer God recognizes that the core of objections to the violence of God's commands in the conquest of Canaan is not primarily philosophical or theological but is rather psychological and ethical. Thus Rials's ultimate argument rests on trusting God and the "preponderance of the evidence" rather than any increasingly elaborate attempt to justify God's ways to us. How convincing this attempt will be depends on the reader's existing trust in God.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A-** | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

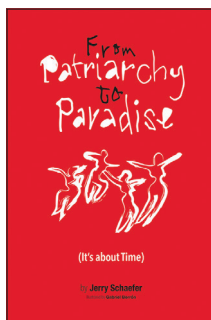
NONFICTION

From Patriarchy to Paradise: It's about time!

Jerry Schaefer | IngramSpark
80p, trade paper, \$17.95, ISBN 979-8-218-53895-8

With one foot firmly in the new age and the other in a mix of spirituality, history, and gender studies, Schaefer (author of *Isn't It Kind of Funny That*) aims big in striving to guide humanity to a higher state of consciousness and end the harms caused by patriarchal thinking throughout history. In 30 brisk chapters paired with clever red-and-white illustrations from Gabriel Berron, Schaefer playfully surveys the development of humanity—and our selfishness, cruelty, and patriarchal traditions—from hunter-gatherer societies to early civilizations ("A way of life that made [our ancestors] *quite uncivil* towards each other") and beyond. Our world, he argues, has been built "to patriarchal specs," limiting women's influence while encouraging men to "run amuck" and "put on an act" of swaggering invulnerability.

Under patriarchy, Schaefer notes, men "see nature as something to be conquered for profit" while women "identify with nature and respect it"—but, when it comes to leading humanity forward, their "input has never been sought." Schaefer sees hope, though, in a "paradigm shift" toward a new masculinity at a moment when "we're gaining momentum to transform the human species" into one that "is able



Upbeat call for liberating the mind and society from patriarchal beliefs.

Great for fans of Katayoun Shirzad's *My Journey of the Heart*, Lucia René's *Unplugging the Patriarchy*.

development before moving on. The result is more a loving vision of what could be than a roadmap, though Schaefer's testimony about his own journey should hearten men whose acculturated thinking distances them from strong connections with women. "What joy," he writes, "to be able to connect with half of humanity that had been closed off for me!"

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **B**

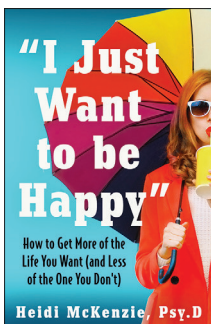
SELF-HELP

"I Just Want to Be Happy": How to Get More of the Life You Want (and Less of the One You Don't)

Heidi McKenzie | MindShift Press
183p, trade paper, \$11.99, ISBN 979-8-990-16911-1

Urging readers to sing more, embrace their inner fools, and be open about loneliness, psychologist McKenzie's spirited debut offers a fun, inviting guide to enhancing personal well-being and improving mental health. McKenzie notes the troubling decline in happiness levels in nations like the United States, Canada, and Australia, as highlighted in the 2024 World Happiness Report, before making the case that happiness is not a fixed state but a fleeting emotion—one that demands continuous effort and intentional action to sustain. With the conversational tone of a dear friend who happens to be a psychologist, McKenzie presents non-medication-based strategies (among many: getting hands dirty with plants, embracing the "warm glow" of giving) that can lead to lowered levels of stress and anxiety. While McKenzie argues that there is no such thing as a "happy pill," she recognizes the crucial role of medication for some people but notes that "75% of patients prefer the idea of therapy over medication."

The vibe is encouraging, as McKenzie shares a wealth of compelling science,



A psychologist's compelling, practical guide to happiness and mental health.

Great for fans of Sonja Lyubomirsky's *The Myth of Happiness*, Richard Beck's *The Shape of Joy*.

everyday activities: singing, for example, triggers the release of endorphins and oxytocin, chemicals linked to joy and stress reduction, while gardening boosts serotonin and lowers cortisol, alleviating symptoms of depression.

McKenzie's writing is engaging and approachable, breaking down complex psychological concepts into digestible insights. Her practical tips help readers integrate these strategies into daily life, emphasizing small, incremental changes that build lasting mental health benefits. This engaging, practical resource issues an inspiring and achievable call to action, demonstrating proven methods for taking charge of one's happiness.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **-** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

with scripture and history. The book includes graphics of scenes from scripture and history to further illustrate Rials' points as well as a brief bibliography of sources he cited for further research. Christian readers concerned or fascinated by these aspects of the Old Testament will find Rials's exploration of the problem of God's violent commandments and acts comforting.

to use our minds to think" rather than be controlled by fear, old beliefs, and propaganda.

Drawing on his own lightbulb moment when he transcended the "thought-controlled, ego-distorted reality" that limits men, Schaefer's prose is upbeat, searching, and tinged with humor. The book reads quickly, often posing big theories about key moments of human

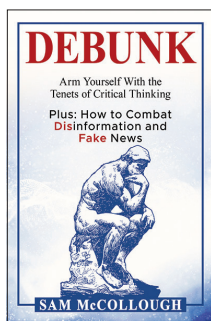
relatable personal anecdotes, hard-won wisdom, and smart advice (like "The fear of appearing foolish crushes opportunities for spontaneity, mastery, and joy"). Each chapter focuses on a specific activity proven to boost happiness, ranging from cooking to seeking awe to rearranging furniture. McKenzie bolsters her recommendations with up-to-date research that underscores the power of

SELF-HELP**Debunk: Arm Yourself With the Tenets of Critical Thinking**

Sam McCollough | Tenet Publishing
123p, hardcover, \$19.95, ISBN 979-8-9915610-0-6

In this compact guide to training the brain for the new era of digital media, McCollough introduces his “Tenets of Critical Thinking” and provides clear, practical guidance on how to avoid the “pitfalls” that even intelligent people can fall for, especially online: confirmation bias, logical fallacies, misinformation, pseudo science, deep fakes, and more. A champion of the scientific method and principled debunking of misinformation, McCollough lays bare the urgency of the problem—“The Internet helps lies to spread much faster, and AI makes it much harder to detect the lies.” Through detailed research and real-world examples, this resource provides clear definitions of the ways that nonsense gets passed off as truth plus actionable steps to stop simply accepting what we’re told—and to demonstrate, though time-tested steps, truth from falsehoods.

Writing in a personable tone, McCollough implores readers to apply logic and critical thinking skills to everything they are told, from the government, news outlets, in school curriculums, and especially any time we might feel pressed to



Clarifying introduction to critical thinking in the extremely online era.

Great for fans of Cindy L. Otis’s *True or False*, John Grant’s *Debunk It!*.

into everyday thinking. McCollough convincingly demonstrates the importance of parents learning this for themselves and also teaching it to their children.

Touching on conspiracy theories, faith and religion, and cause and effect, *Debunk* offers a quick, inviting introduction to the “real-world consequences” of misinformation and outdated science, providing multiple avenues—“Observe, Predict, Test”—to keep from being taken in. The book is not comprehensive, but readers new to the question of what we can do to shore our minds’ defenses up in this ever-evolving information age will find much here that is instructive and illuminating.

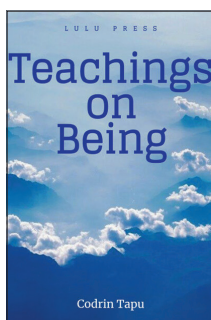
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

SELF-HELP**Teachings on Being**

Codrin Tapu | Lulu Press
154p, e-book, \$5.24, ISBN 978-1-304-05194-3

Making the case that “the love of the different will make the world reborn,” Tapu (author of *Psychology: Everybody’s Science*) shares his philosophy of life in a series of loosely connected aphorisms and reflections. His philosophy is broad, wide enough to “harmonize belief and unbelief” and remind readers that “differences of opinion can only enrich knowledge” without coming to a muddled compromise. One of Tapu’s major concerns is death and how to deal with the concept of an end to life. He argues that the proper way to approach this is to fully appreciate the illusion of time when one is experiencing life, and thus death is an end that does not erase what came before. His thinking blends big ideas with practical implications as he considers topics ranging from abortion (from a human-rights perspective) to the coming “obsolescence” of privacy. He shares advice, predictions (“Age and gender differences in human values ... will be narrowed by sharing values”), and poetry in a complex web.

Tapu emphasizes the difficulty of truly knowing anything—all his teachings are rooted in belief, as, he argues, are all ways in which people operate in the world. While he encourages openness to diverse opinions, that overarching conviction



Original thinking on big questions of life, death, and the future.

Great for fans of J.M.E. McTaggart’s *The Unreality of Time*, James Tarpey’s *The Meaning of Life*.

may leave readers uncertain about how deeply to engage with Tapu’s individual arguments, as they are ultimately a matter of faith. Although Tapu includes some references to external sources, the work would benefit from deeper engagement with other spiritual literature and a reference list for readers who wish to explore further.

Teachings on Being could also benefit from clearer structure to organize its wide-ranging advice. Tapu is an enigma within the text, laying out his ethics and philosophy but revealing little of himself as a person. Still, these fresh, humane, open-minded reflections are worth consideration. A dedicated reader exploring big questions of life and death will find much here to contemplate.

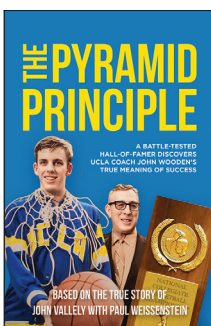
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **B+**

SELF-HELP**The Pyramid Principle: A Battle-Tested Hall-of-Famer Discovers UCLA Coach John Wooden’s True Meaning of Success**

John Vallely with Paul Weissenstein | Spirit Media
234p, trade paper, \$18.99, ISBN 979-8-89307-115-3

NBA star John Vallely shares his belief in the Pyramid of Success, a motivational model given to him by UCLA coach John Wooden, during his early days playing college basketball. When Vallely first hears his coach’s inspiring words—“the only one who will ever know if you’ve achieved your personal best is you”—he’s perplexed but curious. But once he jumps headfirst into Wooden’s material, he’s sold; throughout the rest of his basketball career, into his marriage, parenting, and Christian faith, he returns to Wooden’s principles to navigate a life beset by hardship—his nine-year-old daughter’s cancer diagnosis, his own subsequent diagnosis later in life, legal battles, and more.

“A worthy opponent brings out the best in me,” Vallely writes, and this emotive book takes that wisdom to heart. As he faces challenges both on and off the court, Vallely remains faithful to the tenants of Wooden’s pyramid, ultimately realizing that it led him to God, and that the “search for competitive greatness would lead us to faith.” He breaks the pyramid’s principles down step-by-step for readers,



NBA star shares life lessons passed down from a college coach.

Great for fans of David Grunfeld’s *By the Grace of the Game*, David Hollander’s *How Basketball Can Save the World*.

Whether coming up against a seven-foot-tall basketball opponent or a major corporation like Bank of America, Vallely highlights the importance of maintaining faith and fighting for just outcomes. His writing is infused with a striking balance of vulnerability and courage, a winning combination that lays the foundation for valuable life lessons, and his inclusion of personal photographs gives the book a close, familiar feel. This moving story of endurance, faith, and resilience will inspire.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

alongside intimate glimpses into how they played out in his own life, always with an uplifting, encouraging tone regardless of the crises he confronts. “When you’re facing the severity of the termination of your life, every affirmation of your survival is invigorating,” he pens—sentiment that will stir in readers a renewed sense of purpose for their own lives.

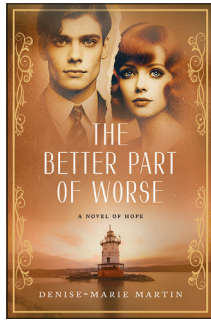
SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

The Better Part of Worse: A Novel of Hope

Denise-Marie Martin | Misericordia Publishing
310p, e-book, \$6.99, ISBN 979-8-991-44690-7

This sweeping love story by Martin (*Tangled Violets*) spans decades in its examination of family, first love, and mental illness. Jamie Murphy has seen his share of heartbreak and crushing family deaths, but that doesn't stop him from the whimsy of love at first sight when he meets Katie Houlihan. After a whirlwind courtship, the two are married and comfortably settled in the Murphy household with Jamie's mother and siblings—a home infused with warm affection and Christian values. But when Katie starts to exhibit signs of a mental breakdown after the birth of her second daughter, Jamie's idyllic world comes crashing down.

Martin perceptively catches life's tragic ups and downs in this layered saga, as the Murphys' fight for a life-changing miracle takes center stage against a historically memorable backdrop. From the end of World War I through the Great Depression in New York and a later move to California, Jamie and Katie compel in their battle to overcome devastating odds and restore Katie to her former self. When Katie's illness leads to a hospitalization at the Harlem Valley State Hospital to be treated for dementia praecox—commonly known as schizophrenia—the couple



Moving narrative of love, mental illness, and unbreakable hope.

Great for fans of Millen Brand's *The Outward Room*, Dolen Perkins-Valdez's *Take My Hand*.

face the unjust treatment of those diagnosed with mental illness, along with the bureaucracy and power struggles that plague hospital corruption. Soon, they must confront a lifetime of institutionalization for Katie—and what that means for her loving, grieving family. Katie is a well-crafted, tragic figure in Martin's writing, but Jamie also emerges as an evocative portrayal of a loving husband and father who works hard to raise his daughters while balancing his abiding love for a wife who is essentially lost to him in all ways—but still very much alive. Martin keeps the pace humming with heart-breaking plot twists and resonant emotional moments, transforming the narrative into a powerful rendering of the “true meaning of love.”

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

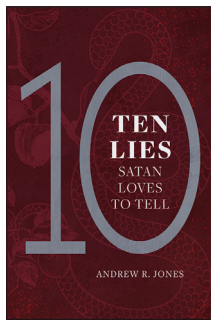
SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

Ten Lies Satan Loves to Tell

Andrew R. Jones | Concordia Publishing House
208p, trade paper, \$16.99, ISBN 978-0-758-67728-0

Parish pastor Jones showcases ten deceptions, such as “You are alone” and “Your value is based on your performance,” which he argues “the father of lies” uses to assault believers in an effort to dismantle God's kingdom and people. “Every time Satan appears in the Scriptures, he is lying, deceiving, and seeking the destruction of God's people,” Jones notes, guiding Christian readers to recognize this as the source of “fear, doubt, and reluctance”—and to embrace the first-principle truth that trust in God and Jesus is the defense against believing these attacks. Approachably structured and easy to follow, *Ten Lies Satan Loves to Tell* is an inspirational resource to arm readers against lies like “You should cover up your sins.” For each lie, Jones presents “Satan's Desired Outcome”—how the deception separates believers from God—and the relatable human fears that give these falsehoods their power.

Blending scriptural expertise with an understanding of contemporary anxieties, Jones roots his discussion in biblical precedent, such as the serpent's lies to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and Satan's attempts to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. By juxtaposing these two events, Jones highlights how Adam and Eve fell prey to



Practical spiritual guide for Christians facing doubts, fears, and lies.

Great for fans of Rosaria Butterfield's *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*, Andrew Farley's *Twisted Scripture*.

Satan's deception while Jesus endured through his unfailing faith. He links these examples to contemporary challenges, explaining why “false gospels” like “You will be better if you seize more control” resonate so strongly today: “We struggle so much in relationships when we work and strive and push and do our absolute best only to be treated with criticism, contempt, or—perhaps worst of all—indifference.”

Jones brings similar intimate understanding to all the lies covered here as he urges readers to draw closer to their beliefs and cast their fears away through love and faith. Each chapter offers practical and spiritual guidance for facing these feelings, building to reflection questions and scriptures to meditate on.

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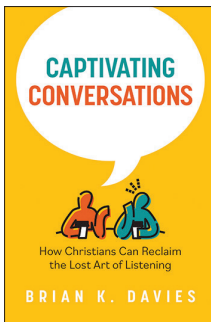
SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

Captivating Conversations: How Christians Can Reclaim the Lost Art of Listening

Brian K. Davies | Concordia Publishing House
224p, trade paper, \$17.99, ISBN 978-0-758-67434-0

Drawing from the example of Jesus, who “employed the art of asking good questions as a means to build bridges with people,” Davies (author of *Connected to Christ*) offers readers a Christian faith-based guide on effective listening. Jesus, Davies points out, utilized probing questions about others in nearly every interaction recorded in the Bible, and that style of communicating should be the golden standard for Christians: draw focus away from yourself and onto the needs, worries, and cares of others. Through biblical text and personal anecdotes, Davies reflects on moments in the Bible that showcase Jesus being an active listener while also delving into the communication skills he has learned from his years serving as a pastor.

“My main argument is this: listening is less a series of skills to master and more a mindset, attitude, and posture,” Davies writes, and that easy-to-use advice permeates *Captivating Conversations*. Davies breaks down how contemporary culture “promotes one-sided dialogue, combative language, and adversarial conversation,” arguing that modern technology disrupts relationships and impedes



Uplifting guide to active listening skills, geared toward Christian readers.

Great for fans of Randy Frazee's *Think, Act, Be Like Jesus*, Dave Sterrett's *Jesus Conversations*.

active listening. He offers readers an alternative, outlining 10 ways Jesus engaged with others—from challenging hypocrisy to modeling humility—as the archetype for positive, effective communication. “Jesus' questions opened the door for meaningful conversations in order to connect with people on a personal level,” he writes, “demonstrating care and interest in their lives.”

Jesus's hope was to draw all people to himself, according to Davies, and he argues that should be the same for Christians—to build connections and lasting relationships with their fellow man. He invites readers to start “living OCI... open, curious, and inquisitive” with the goal of even the most mundane conversations becoming “life-giving and memorable.” This interactive guide, complete with reflective questions at the end of each chapter and accompanied by biblical text, is perfect for Christian readers seeking more authentic connections with others.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

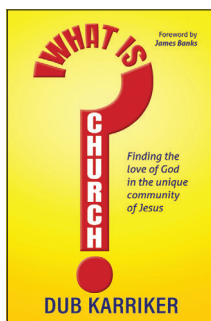
SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

What Is Church?: Finding the Love of God in the Unique Community of Jesus

Dub Karriker | Morgan James
240p, e-book, \$17.99, ASIN B0CRD777GJ

Retired pastor Karriker explores both the literal and metaphorical boundaries of the Christian Church in this spiritual debut, writing that “The Church was and is the living witness that the Kingdom of God exists now, here on earth.” His work seeks to answer two main questions for Christians: Is church involvement necessary? And, if so, what type of church should Christians attend? Delving into the “essence, function, [and] form” of the Church, Karriker draws from personal anecdotes and biblical teachings to explore how the Church’s duties, meanings, and believers have changed throughout the years.

Karriker writes with a fond devotion to his subject, declaring, “I have a confession. I love the Church. I love the Church in all her various forms and permutations,” while urging readers to seek God’s direction in their church lives, particularly in light of the “worldwide upheaval” occurring today. He covers the Church’s history, biblical teachings on what it is meant to be and represent, and how modern events (including the COVID-19 pandemic) have affected the way believers and non-believers view



Spiritual examination of the Christian Church’s function and meaning.

Great for fans of Edward W. Klink III’s *The Local Church*, Joseph H. Hellerman’s *When the Church Was a Family*.

church. In those discussions, Karriker notes a pattern of people engaging in on-again, off-again relationships with God. He advises Christians to doggedly pursue being worldly examples of Jesus’s teachings, writing that “our ability to make an impact on the world and those around us is dependent on our being positively different.”

Karriker’s main purpose for the Christian Church is clearly and candidly stated throughout as “Jesus’ plan to take His message of love and salvation by grace to all people everywhere in this hurting and dying world.” For that reason, he explores the Church not only as a place for Christians to gather and worship but also as the driving force behind Christians carrying out Jesus’s mission. This is an informative resource for readers seeking a deeper understanding of a well-known pillar in Christian worship.

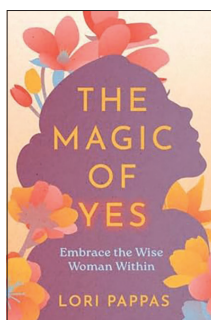
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **B** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL
The Magic of Yes: Embrace the Wise Woman Within

Lori Pappas | Koehler Books
260p, e-book, \$7.99, ISBN 979-8-88824-621-4

Pappas shares her inspirational journey toward recognizing and embracing the wise woman within to safeguard mental and physical well-being. *The Magic of Yes* blends encouragement for healing with stories of women overcoming challenges and often wrenching circumstances. Pappas describes a traumatic childhood, including psychological abuse and her mother’s attempt to exorcise Satan from her, and her father committing her to an asylum at age 16. She escaped and embarked on a lifelong personal journey of taking responsibility for herself. She determined the trajectory of her life by taking risks, embracing gratitude, engaging in continuous learning, and more. She taught herself to say “yes” to curiosity and “no” when necessary to establish boundaries and ensure self-respect.

In the confident tone of someone who has overcome significant hurdles and challenges, Pappas shares her mission of developing a sense of self-awareness and integrity, distinguishing between one’s personal and professional self, and making oneself a top priority with the power of WIIFM (what’s in it for me?). After each chapter, Pappas offers DREAM (desire, reflect, explore, acknowledge, mantra)



Advice and encouragement for women in healing and saying “yes” to wisdom and growth.

Great for fans of Karena Kilcoyne’s *Rise Above the Story*, Stephanie Foo’s *What My Bones Know*.

activities to help readers experience greater happiness and delight. Pappas also presents encouraging stories from a sisterhood of wise women, such as *In Your Own Skin* well-being facilitator Kathryn Trenshaw, and *Compost Happens* author and psychologist Diana Dean.

After becoming a successful businesswoman, Pappas worked in Ethiopia distributing medicine. Some of her stories about the inexcusable abuse that African women faced are difficult to read, but their courage to better their lives is captivating. The numerous stories of women overcoming abuse and adversity offer compassionate advice, reminding readers that they are not alone in their individual experiences—and serving as heartening reminders that cycles of abuse can be broken. Pappas provides contemplative wisdom, grounded advice, and practical lessons for women of all backgrounds who desire self-determination.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

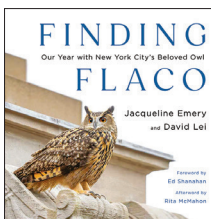
EDITOR’S PICK

Finding Flaco: Our Year with New York City’s Beloved Owl

Jacqueline Emery and David Lei | Owls of New York, LLC
225p, hardcover, \$50, ISBN 979-8-991-51050-9

This beautifully designed book captures, through text and inspired photographs, the journey of Flaco, a Eurasian eagle-owl who spent 13 years in captivity at the Central Park Zoo before unexpectedly finding freedom. When an unknown person tampered with his enclosure, Flaco—a bird who had never known life in the wild—ventured into the sprawling urban wilderness of New York City. His escape sparked a whirlwind of emotions: Who set him free? Could he survive without human care? Could he fly, hunt, and fend for himself in the wild? Emery and Lei delve into these questions, chronicling Flaco’s incredible story and demonstrating throughout how “smart, courageous, and resilient” he has proven to be in the face of challenges.

Initially, Flaco was seen walking on Fifth Avenue, seemingly unable to fly but still managing to evade attempts to recapture him. Despite the best efforts of the zoo, the Wildlife Conservation Society, other rescuers using baited traps, Flaco showed remarkable savvy and independence. He ultimately found a perch in Central Park itself, defying expectations of what a zoo-born owl could achieve. The authors were among the first to track Flaco nightly, watching anxiously to see if



A zoo owl’s once-in-a-lifetime adventure in New York City.

Great for fans of Jennifer Ackerman’s *What An Owl Knows*, Leigh Calvez’s *The Hidden Lives of Owls*.

he would adapt to his new life. Their excitement proves infectious as they recount how, against all odds, Flaco’s instincts took over: he flew across the park, hunting and exploring areas from the Lower East Side to the Upper West Side. His story captivated countless New Yorkers, uniting them in awe and admiration for this determined owl.

Flaco’s courage—choosing freedom over the safety of captivity—became a symbol of hope and resilience in the heart of the city. Stunning photography captures the thrill of spotting Flaco in the city (witness him perched on balconies, park benches, and construction equipment) while also vividly conveying the owl’s emotions, from curiosity to triumph. Emery and Lei’s narrative invites us to walk alongside them on the chase, sharing in their awe and wonder at this remarkable owl’s transformation.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MEMOIR

EDITOR'S PICK

When You Pray, Move Your Feet: How Loving Your Neighbor Can Create True ChangeTom Logan | Only Together Press
307p, trade paper, \$25, ISBN 979-8-218-50121-1

Logan pens a decisive call-to-action in this inspirational memoir, drawing from his years of experience as a philanthropist both in the United States and abroad to illustrate the biblical principle “love your neighbor as yourself.” He starts with his childhood and moves through his years as an activist during the Civil Rights movement—including memories from attending Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech in Washington, D.C.—and eventually delves into his nonprofit company, Marion Medical Mission, that, in the past 40 years, has built over 53,000 wells of clean, safe water in African villages.

Throughout his writing, Logan endorses the need for compassion combined with hard work. “In Africa there is a proverb: When you pray, move your feet,” he writes, encouraging readers to depend on their faith while also putting in the boots-on-the-ground work that is required to make a difference in the world. Logan’s details of his travels—a year spent in Africa at just 18 years old, meeting his future



Humanitarian lessons from a boots-on-the-ground nonprofit.

Great for fans of John E. Fleming’s *Mission to Malawi*, Juliet Cutler’s *Among the Maasai*.

uplifting words, how Marion Medical Mission is meeting needs around the world—and empowering communities by funneling the majority of its work to the people it serves: “All the wells built by MMM are built by Africans. They are the experts, and they are the best of the best. We truly believe in the people” he writes. That spirit of togetherness permeates this inspiring debut, making it a true exhortation to “right the wrongs of the world... [and] make your love your aim.”

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

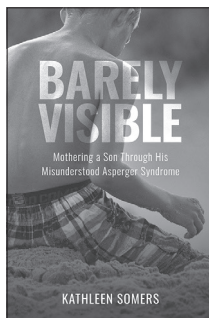
MEMOIR

EDITOR'S PICK

Barely Visible: Mothering a Son Through His Misunderstood Asperger SyndromeKathleen Somers | She Writes Press
319p, trade paper, \$17.99, ISBN 978-1-647-42882-2

In this vulnerable and candid debut, Somers chronicles her journey through motherhood with her son Jack, who, at age six, was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. She is frank and honest when sharing her struggles to understand Jack and his disability—“on the surface, he appears normal,” she writes, “and when he acts otherwise... people see him as being rude and assume he’s poorly disciplined”—as she invites readers into a world tinted by uncertainty and doubt. Somers details the early years of her marriage and motherhood, including the decision she and her husband Andrew made to abort their first child due to chromosomal abnormalities, before diving into Jack’s arrival—and sifting through the many ways his diagnosis changes their lives.

Somers’s writing reflects how varied the deep bond between mother and child can appear, as she walks readers through her initial joy at Jack’s arrival and later fear and anxiety when he shows developmental delays. She explores that bond in profound, tender language, reflecting on Jack’s obsessive behaviors as he grows,



Mother’s touching journey parenting a son diagnosed with Aspergers.

Great for fans of Kate Swenson’s *Forever Boy*, John Elder Robison’s *Look Me in the Eye*.

her struggles with whether she should disclose to people that her son is on the spectrum, and, always pulsing in the background, her vulnerability: “I couldn’t escape my feelings of inadequacy as a mother—the responsible party,” she writes, “Of all people, I should know how to fix him.”

The writing is both inviting and transparent, quietly reflective of the challenges that accompany a child with a disability that is not always apparent to outsiders. Readers will grasp the tension and stress of Somers’s rocky path ushering Jack through childhood and into adulthood—monitoring his school progress and helping him cultivate lasting relationships—just as she navigates her own life changes, including divorce from Andrew. Through it all, Somers remains unflinching in her love for Jack, leaving readers with the hopeful advice that “life has a way of working itself out.”

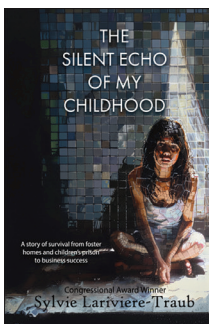
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MEMOIR

The Silent Echo of My Childhood: A Story of Survival from Foster Homes and Children’s Prison to Business SuccessSylvie Lariviere-Traub | Pink Umbrella Books, LLC
222p, mass market, \$14.99, ISBN 978-1-949-59829-2

In this urgent, ultimately healing memoir of resilience, the tragic passing of author Lariviere-Traub’s beloved husband, Daniel, triggers repressed memories from her harrowing childhood in the Canadian foster care system, “echoing the abandonment and the feeling of not belonging.” *The Silent Echo of My Childhood* explores her experience entering the system after a series of tragedies: her mother’s institutionalization with a rare bone disease and her father’s abandonment. Lariviere-Traub’s time under government guardianship becomes like a prison sentence as she floats from home to home and eventually different institutions “every two to three weeks,” enduring heartbreak, betrayals, and abuse from those meant to care for and protect her. From 14 to 16, she writes, her life was “whittled down to a series of locked doors and hushed whispers.” Eventually, inevitably, she became a runaway.

Through emotive prose, Lariviere-Traub tells and examines her story, drawing links between experiences in a full-circle narrative. She reflects warmly on the love



Poignant memoir of love, grief, foster care, and ending cycles of abuse.

Great for fans of Kathleen Glasgow’s *Girl in Pieces*, Beverly Engel’s *Raising Myself*.

she shared with Daniel while taking stock of the traumas of her childhood and her first marriage to a man who became physically abusive after the birth of their daughter, Melanie. She writes with welcome frankness about the “belief that my love could change him,” a conviction she now recognizes as rooted in the “power of an abusive man” skilled at “creeping into your mind, making you believe ... that you deserve the pain.” Eventually, she managed again to run away.

The result is an impactful story of resilience and growth, forgiveness and love, and finding the strength—and, in women’s shelters and other crucial sources, the support—to break cycles of abuse. Reminding readers that “healing is not a destination, but a journey,” *The Silent Echo of My Childhood* finds “glimmers of hope and new beginnings” in new connections, the act of writing, and, above all, in the strength of the human spirit and the healing power of love.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

MEMOIR

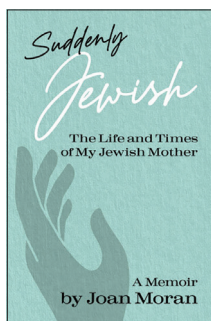
Suddenly Jewish: The Life and Times of My Jewish Mother

Joan Moran

288p, trade paper, \$16.99, ISBN 978-0-9854375-6-5

Moran (*Woman Obsessed*) shares her mother Estelle's story growing up Jewish in early 1900s San Francisco—and her decision, as an adult, to conceal that identity: “My mother made no apologies for the way she lived,” Moran writes. The book starts with a glimpse of Estelle's own mother Rose's immigration to America before delving into Estelle's childhood, defined by her abusive father and Rose's escape to San Francisco to start over. From a young age, Estelle questions her identity, longing for “a bigger world that was more exciting and less restrictive.”

Throughout Estelle's story, she grapples with frequent antisemitism in the world around her, balancing the constant pull she feels between her past and her future. Moran constructs Prohibition-era San Francisco through Estelle's young eyes, revealing the struggles women faced during the time—including restricted abortion access and society's harsh judgments for single women—while transporting readers through notable historical events that reverberate throughout Estelle's world. When Estelle meets her future husband, John, the couple quickly realize that her



Stirring memoir of a mother's complex relationship with her Jewish heritage.

Great for fans of Esther Amini's *Concealed*, Margaret K. Nelson's *Keeping Family Secrets*.

complex relationship with her Jewish heritage matters more to their friends and family than it does to them. “You can be what you want, believe what you want. It makes no difference to me,” John tells his bride-to-be.

Moran stays keenly aware of the vicious antisemitism her mother faced in her daily life, starkly portrayed against the backdrop of America's Great Depression and the Second World War. The memoir is at its best when tackling the more vulnerable and exposed aspects of Estelle's life, including her work in an OSS office during the war and her growing terror at Hitler's murder of the Jewish people. Some minor grammar issues distract from the otherwise evenly balanced narrative, but this is still a moving tribute to a mother who was “a force of nature, an extraordinary being, an abiding presence who lived her life with grace and goodness.”

Cover: **C+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **B-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

POETRY

EDITOR'S PICK

Dear Life

Shanta Acharya | LWL Books

120p, hardcover, \$26.95, ISBN 979-8-218-46524-7

Acharya's eighth book of poetry is a transcendent blueprint for healing in a ruptured world, drawing on the poet's experiences with marginalization as an Indian-English woman and the scars of colonization, police brutality, racism, war, the pandemic, and more. In Acharya's poems, presence is a pillar of that healing; for example, in taking notice of bees, “the peace of wild things descends like a mantle woven with blessings.” Yet this presence also makes space for grief, despair, and uncertainty. “Are there journeys without destinations, // pilgrimages that don't lead to self-discovery?” Acharya writes. Facing these questions, the poet looks to faith as her guide.

Spirituality appears as both a solitary venture and one of communion in Acharya's collection. In the heartening “This Is What It Means to Be Human,” the speaker recalls “the warmth of the rasoi” and the congregation of the family kitchen as the spiritual and cultural binding agents that allow humanity to transcend base impulses and strive for the best versions of itself. Some poems, like “Song of Praise,” “If,” and “Grant Us,” invoke the style of prayer and affirmation, addressing the spiritual needs



Rich collection exploring spirituality, oppression, and a path for healing.

Great for fans of Mary Oliver's “Wild Geese,” Joy Harjo.

of the present day, including those relating to the existential woes of the climate crisis.

In this vibrant collection that touches on so many fragments of global society, one illuminating thread throughout explores the poet's identity. An awareness of the self, along with spiritual presence, is essential on the quest for healing that Acharya so touchingly describes: “when I reconcile myself to the randomness // of the universe, everything falls into place.” Acharya's collection is the light in the darkness, a note of hope in the symphony of the world's sorrow, and it shows readers how to pull themselves from the depths of despair while asking them to “think of what you can do in the face of calamity, // not be overwhelmed by its immensity.”

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

POETRY

EDITOR'S PICK

Your Words Your Love

Louise Bélanger

136p, e-book, \$2.99, ASIN B0DM2R13G4

The fourth installment in Bélanger's *Your Words* poetry series offers a rousing, heartfelt interplay of nature photography and poems that explore the poet's Christian faith, particularly the threshold between heaven and earth, the spiritual plight of selfishness, and the practice of faith and theological contemplation. In “There's Room,” when Bélanger writes, “the sign on the door // In big bold gold letters // Reads Vacancy // There's room // Inside // Ample // Always,” the door is an opening to heaven, but it's also an invitation to enter a life of spiritual abundance based on a practice of faith.

For Bélanger, poetry is part of that practice; through her poems, she allows readers access to her world of faith: “I'm showing you part of mine // I write,” and in turn, she is able to reach God through her art. “Come close,” she writes in “The Traveling Bag”: “Do you see? Look how Louise is beautifully written on God's palm.” But in Bélanger's conceptualization of faith, it is not just her name written on God's palm—it is everyone's. As she writes in “I Matter to God,” “I matter to God // I matter to Jesus // Realize today // The same can be said // About you!”



Gorgeous collection of nature photography and inspiring Christian poetry.

Great for fans of David Lyle Jeffrey's “A Testament of Witnesses,” and Dana Gioia's “Pity the Beautiful.”

Between each poem, Bélanger also includes stunning original photographs depicting floral portraits, idyllic landscapes, and other picturesque flora from all seasons, plus surprises like rain streaking on a window. There is a quiet, simple brilliance in each of them, and they show how Bélanger's faith shapes the way she sees the world and the beauty she finds in it; each flower, and each petal in each flower, is a perfect creation of Bélanger's God, and all of them deserve attention and appreciation. Readers seeking a multifaceted, thought-provoking, and visually engaging poetry experience based in faith will find abundance in Bélanger's collection, which reminds the faithful that “We can choose // To be instrumental // To magnificent goodness.”

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **C+**

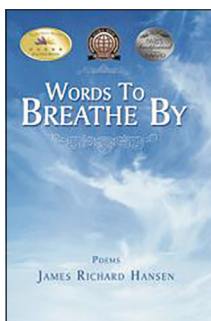
POETRY

Words to Breathe By

James Richard Hansen | AuthorHouse
66p, trade paper, \$10.99, ISBN 978-1-728-36381-3

Like his previous collections (*Skies and Chasms* and *Moonlight in My Eyes*), Hansen's *Words to Breathe By* offers a heartening homage to nature, the Earth, and love itself, culminating in a set of ecstatic "Love Poems for Kristen." Much of Hansen's poetry is observational, as stars, sunsets, flowers, and landscapes evoke such euphoria in the narrator that, while reflecting on them, "nightmares turn to gold, and I am young again." Though gratitude is a central focus, pain—emotional, existential, and psychological—also permeates the collection, though it is understated and implied. The subject matter of the poems ("Morning, in its abundant riches // greets me with the beauty of rain. // The pain I experience daily // does not dampen the joy of morning") and the act of writing, which prolongs the poet's encounters with nature, seem to offer healing.

"I try not to dwell on the darkness in life," Hansen writes in "Glorious Gifts," "but bask in the splendor of home." The meaning of "home" here is expansive: home is Earth, the universe, the soil, a house, California's coast, and the snowy memories of childhood. The recognition and appreciation of each, the poems suggest, enrich



Accessible, meditative poems addressing gratitude, the cosmos, and love.

Great for fans of Tyler Knott Gregson, Rupi Kaur

from contemplative reveries on the cosmos to love poems for his muse, Kristen. These entries often lack resonant specific detail, favoring reverent exclamations such as: "In your soul's light, I stop wasting time making war and look for peace, helped by your endless reserve." However, some lines achieve a substantive delicacy, as in "More Than Enough": "you are a diamond, but soft." Readers seeking mantra-like and meditative poems will find a calming set in Hansen's collection.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

POETRY/SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

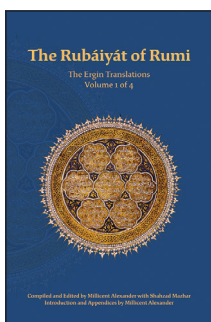
The Rubaiyat of Rumi: The Ergin Translations, Vol. 1

Rumi, trans. by Nevit O. Ergin | Powerhouse Publishing/IngramSpark

306p, hardcover, \$34.95, ISBN 978-1-947666-06-1

Spiritual, sensual, and relentlessly searching, the ecstatic poems of the 13th-century Sufi mystic Rumi have been shared, studied, and relished for centuries, enjoying a popular vogue in the West in recent decades, especially among seekers exploring the literature of love and divinity. For all that, significant portions of the Persian poet's extensive work have not appeared in English, certainly not in complete editions. This volume is the first of four compiling Rumi's complete quatrains (or rubais) in English for the first time, as translated by Nevit O. Ergin (1928–2015), the original translator of Rumi's complete *Divan-i Kebir* in 22 volumes and the coauthor of more accessible collections like *The Forbidden Rumi*.

Ergin's *Rubaiyat*, compiled and edited by Millicent Alexander with Shahzad Mazha, is invitingly direct in its language, making it edifying for browsers and completionists alike. Quatrain 258 (out of a total of 466) concludes with a heartsick parallelism worthy of Tin Pan Alley lyricists: "I ran from Your traps to the house of my heart. / But, the house of my heart became the trap for me." Despite



English translation of the complete quatrains of Rumi abounds in ecstasy and mystery.

Great for fans of *The Forbidden Rumi*, Rumi's *Divan-i Kebir*.

that breezy straightforwardness, Alexander's introduction, appendices, and notably sparse footnotes don't offer much in the way of guidance for readers eager to plumb the deeper mysteries of Rumi. One quatrain appears twice without explanation, and it's as good an example as any of the challenges this collection presents to contemporary readers. It runs: "The beguiling beauty of the idol who seized my heart / took me to the tavern of idols. / Those idols appear like pious souls. / But actually, they are blood-thirsty brigands." This edition offers no guidance for interpreting Rumi's terms like idol, tavern, or brigands, or insight into how their meanings might have shifted across centuries and languages. Ergin translated from Turkish to English, though Rumi wrote in medieval Farsi; Alexander makes the case that each of Ergin's quatrains is "matched in its essence" by Rumi's original. While their ambiguities would benefit from greater illumination, Ergin's verses still pulse with Rumi's passion and genius.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

PICTURE BOOKS

EDITOR'S PICK

The Lil' Player That Could

Ja'Marcus Ingram | Mynd Matters Publishing
28p, hardcover, \$22.99, ISBN 978-1-963-87427-3

In this inspiring children's book, based loosely on the life of Buffalo Bills cornerback Ja'Marcus Ingram, a young boy holds firm to his dream of becoming a professional football player. As young Ja'Marcus pursues the sport from elementary school through high school, his skills on the field steadily improve thanks to hard work and consistency. The story highlights the vital lesson of staying dedicated to a passion or goal and committing to the effort required to achieve it. Along his journey to the NFL, Ja'Marcus receives empowering advice, unwavering support, and motivating encouragement from the mentors in his life. This endearing, upbeat story will inspire young readers to take daily actions toward their dreams, no matter how far off they may seem.

Through flowing rhyme that encourages reading aloud and anticipation of the next couplet, Ingram showcases the benefits of perseverance, determination, and resilience in the face of setbacks. Describing an early ankle injury, Ingram writes, "Felt my world tilt and feared the fall // but inside a voice said, 'Stand tall.'" Being placed on the B team in middle school (because he wasn't big enough or fast enough)



Inspiring children's book of a young boy's journey to football success.

Great for fans of Ricky Sapp's *Dream Big*, Naomi Osaka's *The Way Champs Play*.

offering positivity and words of wisdom.

Ingram's direct, vernacular language ("Kirston, my brother, always in my ear, // 'Let your light shine, bro, and persevere'") is rousing, and Sandra Figueras's illustrations—alive with compelling and determined faces, exciting gridiron action, and warmly supportive mentor figures—bring the story to encouraging life. Focusing on themes of goal setting, overcoming self-doubt, and leaning on a support system, this children's book will captivate elementary-aged children with a protagonist who beats all odds.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

everyday living in ways that nothing material could. Through simple, direct, deeply personal accounts of moments of transcendence, the poems in *Words to Breathe By* blend literary craft with meditative practice: "river of peace within, help me find my way."

Each of Hansen's collections changes course in the final section. Here, he shifts

that breezy straightforwardness, Alexander's introduction, appendices, and notably sparse footnotes don't offer much in the way of guidance for readers eager to plumb the deeper mysteries of Rumi.

One quatrain appears twice without explanation, and it's as good an example as any of the challenges this collection presents to contemporary readers. It

runs: "The beguiling beauty of the idol who seized my heart / took me to the tavern of idols. / Those idols appear like pious souls. / But actually, they are blood-thirsty brigands." This edition offers no guidance for interpreting Rumi's terms like idol, tavern, or brigands, or insight into how their meanings might have shifted across centuries and languages. Ergin translated from Turkish to English, though Rumi wrote in medieval Farsi; Alexander makes the case that each of Ergin's quatrains is "matched in its essence" by Rumi's original. While their ambiguities would benefit from greater illumination, Ergin's verses still pulse with Rumi's passion and genius.

likewise doesn't diminish Ja'Marcus's winning attitude and spirit, reminding readers that success doesn't always come immediately. As his hard work begins to pay off, young Ja'Marcus maintains his belief that nothing is impossible and that he will see his dreams come true. Buoying that conviction is a strong family unit and a community of friends and coaches

PICTURE BOOKS

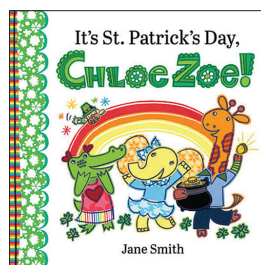
It's St. Patrick's Day, Chloe Zoe!

Jane Smith

34p, hardcover, \$19.99, ISBN 979-8-985-77986-8

Lovable elephant Chloe Zoe is back in Smith's picture book series (after *It's Thanksgiving, Chloe Zoe!*), and this time she's learning about all things Irish as St. Patrick's Day approaches. That includes hunting down four-leaf clovers with her sister, donning green clothes, and cheering for the annual parade—while nibbling on her favorite Charms O'Luck cereal, of course. But Chloe Zoe has more than snacks on her mind. She's determined to build a leprechaun trap like no other this year at school—and catch a leprechaun who, she is certain, will grant her a very special wish.

Smith once again entertains with whimsical characters experiencing life to the fullest. Young readers not already familiar with St. Patrick's Day will find plenty to learn about here, and the narrative is just part of the fun; Smith's brilliantly hued illustrations are bursting with lively, amusing details that add richness to the story. Chloe Zoe's room sports four-leaf clover bedding and folklore books, and even the colorful drawings hanging at her school ooze St. Patrick's Day charm. The leprechaun traps that each student crafts are appealingly unique, with some boasting alluring



St. Patrick's Day celebration that teaches kids to recognize difficult emotions.

Great for fans of Adam Wallace's *How to Catch a Leprechaun*, Lynne Rae Perkins's *Wintercake*.

gold coins ("use something shiny as bait" the trap instructions advise) and others, like Chloe Zoe's, depending on cereal to entice leprechauns their way.

Kids will love Chloe Zoe's wish—for "a new class pet" as the old one, a hamster named Marshmallow, has gone missing—almost as much as they relish the surprise ending, where that wish comes true in a delightfully unexpected way. Along the way, Chloe Zoe learns how to manage pins-and-needles excitement, nervous anticipation, and a little sprinkle of disappointment as well—all valuable emotional lessons for young readers, especially Smith's careful attention to how those feelings can play out in our bodies at times. This is a magical holiday treat.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

PICTURE BOOKS

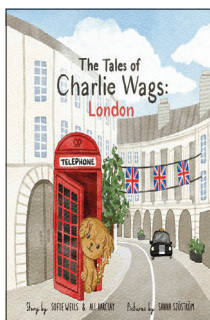
The Tales of Charlie Wags: London

Sofie Wells & Ali Barclay | Kendam Press

40p, hardcover, \$17.99, ISBN 979-8-9900050-2-0

In Wells and Barclay's charming book for young children, a magical pup named Charlie Wags uses his unique abilities to explore London. When Charlie wakes up, he's in the mood for adventure—but his realm extends beyond the backyard enclosures of most dogs. "Charlie is your average pup in every way but one: he loves to see the world and travels all around for fun," the authors explain in spirited, song-like prose. Adorably, he ventures to these far-flung locales with a simple wag of his tail. While in London, Charlie embraces the tourist life, enjoying fish and chips and visiting famous landmarks like Big Ben and the Thames.

At each location, the story provides simple, distinctive details that children will find easy to understand and captivating, such as the "shiny crowns and jewels and royal mysteries" at the Tower of London and the stoic guards at Buckingham Palace. This will get kids excited about all there is to discover while traveling, while also introducing a fascinating city to families who might not have the means or ability to go on vacation. The book includes a map of London and extended descriptions of each place Charlie visits, which will encourage kids to find what interests them



Charming story of a curious dog named Charlie traveling to London.

Great for fans of Sam Taplin's *London Sounds*, Lucy Cousins's *Maisy Goes to London*.

and learn more on their own.

Sanna Sjöström's detailed, dreamy illustrations offer an idealized perspective of London from Charlie's wide-eyed point of view, following the playful pup as he navigates the city. With shaggy, brown fur and starry black eyes, Charlie smiles gently as he goes sightseeing, with the most amusing images showing him wearing a suit and top hat to tea and riding a Ferris wheel under a deep blue sky glittering with stars. In the end, Charlie is eager to get back to his cozy bed: "He loves to see the world, but home is still his favorite place."

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

PICTURE BOOKS

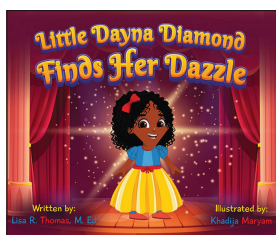
Little Dayna Diamond Finds Her Dazzle

Lisa R. Thomas | Book Butler Publishing Company

60p, hardcover, \$26.99, ISBN 979-8-990-85320-1

Being brave means something different to everyone, and in Thomas's inspiring picture book for young children, a little girl named Dayna Diamond discovers her own courage. Dayna lives in a mythical land called Shaperville, where people's heads resemble different geometric shapes—Dayna, for instance, is a chocolate diamond, while her best friend Sammy is a square. At school one day, Dayna's class discusses the things that scare them, rattling off a relatable list including spiders, the dark, and clowns. Dayna, though, is afraid of speaking in front of people, which stands in the way of her dream of being Snow White in the school play.

Then there's Dayna's snobby classmate, Crystal Diamond, who informs Dayna that chocolate diamonds can't be Snow White because they "don't even dazzle." Here, this story succeeds on multiple fronts. First, Dayna learns to identify what anxiety feels like in her body along with a helpful technique to manage it that kids can use in their own lives. Dayna also tries out for the play despite her fear and learns that "doing what she loves makes her light up from the inside out" — as well as the fact that kids shouldn't let stereotypes and prejudices stand in the way of



Inspiring story of a little girl overcoming fear to achieve her dreams.

Great for fans of Ashley Spire's *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*, Nicola Kinnear's *A Little Bit Brave*.

their goals. Finally, through Sammy's unwavering support, kids will see what it looks like to be a good friend.

Khadija Maryam's expressive illustrations follow Dayna on each stage of her journey, showing her learning in her classroom, playing on the playground, walking down the street, and laughing with Sammy. The illustrations aren't particularly immersive or detailed, but kids will relate to wide-eyed, good-natured Dayna, whose emotions are clearly visible on her face and easy for young readers to understand. In the end, Dayna's success will show kids that the key to their own dreams lies in overcoming other people's limiting beliefs and facing their fears.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: **B+** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

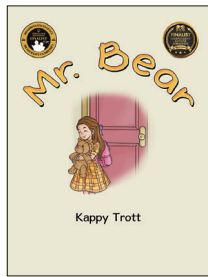
PICTURE BOOKS

Mr. Bear

Kappy Trott | Archway Publishing
26p, trade paper, \$14.99, ISBN 978-1-665-74394-5

Taylor Rose's best friend is a stuffed animal named Mr. Bear, who spends every second wrapped up in her arms. Gifted to Taylor when she was just two years old, Mr. Bear, with his "deep brown eyes and scruffy hair," is the quintessential childhood pal, always ready to tag along in Taylor's backpack on hikes, snuggle during nap times, and travel the world with Taylor and her family. Wherever he goes, Taylor draws comfort from his cuddly presence—until she starts school. During class, Mr. Bear has to stay inside a cubby, and, one day, a bully at recess makes fun of Taylor for bringing Mr. Bear to the playground.

Thus begins the decline of Mr. Bear's one-on-one time with Taylor—a childhood rite of passage that is heartbreaking to witness, though Trott handles it with gentle love and care. As Taylor slowly drifts apart from Mr. Bear, he remains staunchly loyal, waiting for her return every day and dreaming of the fun things they might do together. Still, the transformation in their relationship is poignant, as Mr. Bear sits in Taylor's bedroom on a chair, watching her "come and go" while he's left behind, feeling "sweet and understanding but a little sad"—emotions younger readers will



A young girl's bond with her stuffed animal is tested as she grows up.

Great for fans of Loren Long's *Otis*, Anna M.'s *Stuffed Animals Are for Everyone*.

capture Mr. Bear's delightful facial expressions and the endearing bond he shares with Taylor. Kids—and any adult who fondly remembers the well-loved toys from their youth—will find this debut a touching ode to childhood innocence.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: **B-** Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A-**

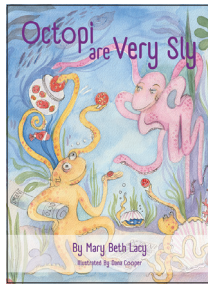
PICTURE BOOKS

Octopi Are Very Sly

Mary Beth Lacy | Mary Beth Lacy Publishing
22p, hardcover, \$24.99, ISBN 979-8-990-86852-6

Two octopi find their way to freedom in this adorable picture book debut by Lacy. Harry, a "very sweet" octopus who nevertheless "tries to be scary," lives at a zoo where he's famous for his nighttime escape attempts, much to the chagrin of the keepers. Harry may be well-loved and celebrated, but he has too much energy to be contained. Even as he desperately tries to keep himself busy by redecorating his tank and sneaking out for extra snacks, he still longs for the deep blue ocean. When a new octopus—the pretty Suzette—joins his tank, his dreams of freedom finally seem within reach.

Lacy's eight-tentacled star is a winning combination of mischievous and sweet, as eager to help Suzette adjust to her new surroundings as he is to wreak havoc when the zoo staff isn't watching him closely. When he finally builds up the nerve to get close to Suzette, Harry is stunned to find out he now has a partner in crime—and the pair quickly go about planning their getaway, with the help of Harry's entertaining "Octo Map" that details their possible escape routes. Dana Cooper accompanies those master plans with dainty watercolor illustrations that undulate with the colors and shapes of the briny deep, culminating in a final



Two octopi with a taste of freedom charm in this bubbly tale.

Great for fans of DJ Burk's *Gamba*, Tohby Riddle's *he Great Escape from City Zoo*.

home, though the rhyming structure used to deliver those lessons feels forced at times. Still, kids able to read between the lines will feel the strong pull of two caged octopi that "really just want to roam."

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **A**

MIDDLE GRADE

EDITOR'S PICK

Planet of the Cats

Hans Ness | Zira Press
246p, trade paper, \$11.99, ISBN 979-8-988-03715-6

This delightful, imaginative story by Ness centers on the intergalactic adventures of 13-year-old Rolo, a "juvenile male hooman" headed for Earth from his home planet of Blorx, where he's been raised as a pet. Accompanied by his quagling, Quiggles, Rolo is desperate to see if hoomans can really live "off-leash" on Earth, as the stories say. However, the pair immediately runs into trouble when they meet catlings—horse-sized cats that make up Blorx's police force—who arrest Rolo for illegal spacecraft parking and harboring an unlicensed pet. That spells disaster, as Rolo is sent to the pound and Quiggles is scheduled to be euthanized. But a daring escape and a chance encounter with earthling Ailey change their fortunes.

Middle-grade readers will embrace Ness's entertaining world, brought to vivid life by Sofia Komarenko's lively illustrations, where cats are in charge and humans are subjugated. Rolo and Quiggles meet a slew of colorful characters in their escapades as they find refuge on a flying circus ship, run into magical artifacts that promise them entrance to an underground world called Zorx (where Rolo's ancestors



Cats rule the universe in this lively intergalactic tale.

Great for fans of Nathan Hale's *Apocalypse Taco*, Carlie Soroosiak's *Leonard*.

may be living), and dodge the dangers of bounty hunter Wicks and her gang of apes. Rolo, who expected Earth to welcome him with open arms and point him to his ancestors, quickly learns the universe is a much larger—and more dangerous—place than he ever imagined. He sums up his frustration in pitch-perfect teenage lingo: "Quiggles, Earth sucks."

Though action-packed and loads of fun, Ness's follow-up to *Rolo the Pet Earthling* offers shrewd insights as well, drawn from the inhumane treatment of pet population practices hits home, but equally important is its message about found families and appreciating what you have, marking this series as one to watch.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

MIDDLE GRADE

Black Fashion Legends ABC

Shelby Ivey Christie | Haute Heritage Publishing
56p, hardcover, \$30, ISBN 979-8-218-49931-0

Fashion and costume historian Christie spotlights Black fashion trailblazers in this inspiring ABC picture book debut. From letters A to Z, style-conscious fans will glean fun, informative facts about celebrated Black models, designers, and influencers, ranging from costume designer Bill Whitten—who created Michael Jackson's iconic white glove—to photographer Kwame Brathwaite, the driving force behind the “Black is Beautiful” movement. Christie examines all aspects of the industry, from invention to modeling, in an educational format that serves as a perfect fit for those younger readers hoping to one day be part of the fashion community.

Pop culture, history, and trivia unite in this vibrant showcase, featuring such notables as the famed Beverly Johnson, the first Black model on the cover of American *Vogue*, trailblazing tailor Dapper Dan from Harlem, and costume designer Ruth E. Carter, the “first Black woman to win an Academy Award for Best Costume Design.” For each memorable figure, Christie shares a brief history of their accomplishments alongside wisdom drawn from their experiences. The letter “F” covers Fashion Fair shows that “celebrated beauty in all shades and sizes,” while Sarah



ABC book spotlighting Black icons of the fashion industry.

Great for fans of Zaila Avant-Garde's *Words of Wonder* from Z to A, Arlisha Norwood's *Black Heroes*.

inclusivity and diversity, with bright, bold illustrations by Ali Nasir Aziz bolstering that message. Readers will savor the book's uplifting theme, as Christie draws parallels between the fashion world and activism that resonate, including Malcolm X's glasses as a symbol of his battle for civil rights and Zelda Wynn Valdes's creations “break[ing] barriers and inspir[ing] change.” This is an important foray into Black couture.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **B** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **B-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

MIDDLE GRADE

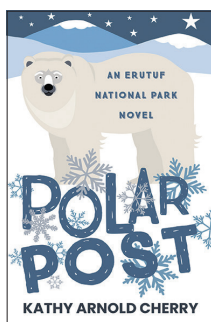
Polar Post: An Erutuf National Park Novel

Kathy Arnold Cherry | Grand Sunshine Press
145p, mass market, \$9.99, ISBN 979-8-9879231-3-9

Brother and sister duo Dean and Reese Walters return in Cherry's latest Erutuf National Park book (after *Bison Blog*), and this time they're trekking through the Arctic, in yet another wild attempt to protect the park from pirates. When the siblings run into Tyler, a polar bear with a penchant for magic card tricks, he tasks Dean, Reese, and their beloved golden retriever, Tutu—who is along for the trip to Erutuf for the very first time—with a critical mission: they must first locate, then conceal, a special Arctic map from dangerous pirates.

Cherry once again builds a unique world populated with talking animals who buzz with personality, making Dean and Reese's quest educational—and just plain fun. Snowy, an aptly named snowy owl, is surprised to find out that animals don't talk where Dean and Reese are from, and sled dogs Timber and Patch warn the siblings to be on the lookout for rogue dogs who are itching to help out the pirates. Tutu also gets her fair share of laughs, as she spends the majority of the story incessantly asking for treats at every opportunity.

Cherry keeps the adventure lively but informative, covering dog-sled teams at work and lessons on dinosaur life in the Arctic, and even Dean and Reese's enemies



Educational adventure transports a brother and sister duo to the Arctic.

Great for fans of Dan Bar-el's *The Very, Very Far North*, Gary Paulsen's *Northwind*.

come with a lighter side: this time around, the pirates are a trio of female social influencers, seemingly more focused on taking selfies than on stealing the park's map. As the siblings try to outsmart them, they must use problem-solving, math, and reading skills to work their way through entertaining activities like ice mazes and virtual reality games, all while Dean seeks to lighten the mood with a dizzying array of jokes and the more level-headed Reese strives to keep the mission on task. Cherry closes with entertaining facts and discussion prompts for Arctic fans.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

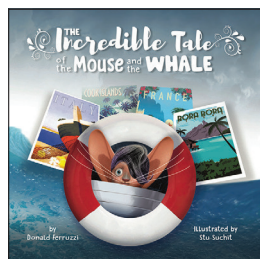
MIDDLE GRADE

The Incredible Tale of the Mouse and the Whale

Donald Ferruzzi | Bella Bambina Books
80p, trade paper, \$14.95, ISBN 978-0-978-79683-9

In this adorable children's book debut, Malcolm Mouse escapes the city in search of a comfortable, quiet life far away from the busy world he's always known—but his plans take a detour when the ocean liner he's sailing on hits rough seas, launching him overboard into a boiling, heaving mess. Thankfully, just as Malcolm is about to give up, he's rescued by Fred the whale, who has an interesting problem of his own: his “cavernous mouth” is clogged with plastic bottles and trash from the polluted ocean. Malcolm swiftly takes action, paying Fred back for his heroics with the help of a friendly dolphin named Donny.

Ferruzzi shines a light on oceanic pollution issues in this watery adventure, incorporating educational facts with a fast-paced storyline that teaches young readers the importance of environmental cleanup. Along the way, they'll learn fun facts about mice and whales from the additional resources included in the back half of this engaging story—like the tidbit that mice eat 10-15 percent of their body weight daily, or that blue whales hunt smaller prey because their throats are only a few inches wide.



An aquatic adventure with an important message about ocean pollution.

Great for fans of Stephanie O'Connor's *The Whale Who Ate Plastic*, Michelle Lord's *The Mess That We Made*.

Young readers will be drawn in by Stu Suchit's multi-textured illustrations, particularly Malcolm's flashy clothes (a plaid dinner jacket and mismatched bow tie complete his fine dining attire) and carefully side swept hair. The juxtaposition of a tiny city mouse with an immense whale highlights the heartfelt message that no matter how big or small, anyone can make an impact on the world, and, by working together, we can “find a solution for ocean pollution.” In the backmatter, Ferruzzi includes pointers for decreasing plastic waste, healthy eating tips, and a brief lesson on sustainability, accompanied by none other than a handful of Malcolm's favorite recipes, like a fruit and vegetable based super smoothie. This fun tale will spark creative problem solving in readers of all ages.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **B+** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

YOUNG ADULT

Stealing Time

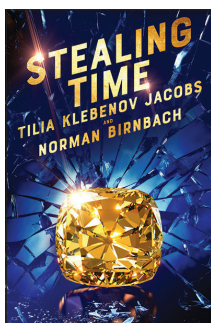
Tilia Klebenov Jacobs and Norman Birnbach | Linden

Tree Press

321p, e-book, \$4.99, ASIN BODFR8C8JH

Jacobs and Birnbach offer a classically surreal time-travel dilemma with this spirited coming-of-age adventure. Amid the chaos of the early COVID-19 pandemic, young Tori faces a personal crisis on top of the societal one—her parents are getting divorced, and they're all relocating from New York to Massachusetts in a frantic attempt to flee the virus. As if things couldn't get any more complicated, a reporter calls, asking for her father, and Tori discovers a bombshell family secret: her grandfather, Victor, once pulled off a high-profile jewel heist involving the legendary Desert Sun diamond. Being kept in the dark only drives a deeper wedge between her and her parents. She drifts off to sleep heartbroken—only to wake up in the same room, but in an entirely different decade.

Thrust into an alternate historical version of her own world, Tori finds her surroundings jarringly out of sync: outdated vehicles, anachronistic fashion, pre-digital tech. The authors have great fun with her confusion, even after a curiously monochrome newspaper reveals the truth: she's stuck in 1980. What's weirder: a



Fun time-travel romp pairing a 2020 teen with her 1980 dad to stop a heist.

Great for fans of Mike Chen's *Here and Now and Then*, Elan Mastai's *All Our Wrong Todays*.

momentum and driving toward an exciting climax. (Unlike one inspiration point, *Back to the Future*, Oedipal complexity is downplayed.)

The heart of the story finds the duo teaming up to stop the heist they believe is Tori's ticket back to 2020. Beneath the time-travel adventure, a more profound message about bridging generational gaps between parents and children and the long-lasting impact of choices resonates throughout. The mix of thrilling heist antics and comic drama ("Sometimes when you talk, I understand every word but none of the sentences") will keep time-travel enthusiasts hooked.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

YOUNG ADULT

Adele and the Whispering Garden

Polly Richards | Ceallaigh Publishing, LLC

49p, trade paper, \$10.99, ASIN BODCTRM11L

When young Adele moves to a new home, she's eager for the adventures that await her. As soon as she arrives, her curiosity is rewarded: outside the towering house sits an abandoned garden, complete with its own gnome, whom Adele promptly names Albert and adopts as her special friend. When she makes a wish one evening that her "garden could be magical again," Albert comes to life, informing Adele that he was once the head gardener and promising to help her restore the garden to its former glory.

Richards's love for nature is evident throughout this fanciful debut, in which fairies alight on lush flowers, "leaving trails of stardust in their wake," and playful spirits with "hearts of gold" cavort through the foliage. Adele has an eye for magic, and her ready willingness to spot it at every opportunity will resonate with younger readers. She quickly picks up on Albert's gentle nudging that a little bit of hard work and a lot of love can help even a neglected seed spring to life. Together, Adele and her gnome make a marvelous pair as they set off on the adventure of a lifetime: he is thoughtful and wise, while Adele is an enthusiastic learner who finds even the dreariest garden tasks a joy.



A young girl restores a garden, thanks to a little magic.

Great for fans of Pat Zietlow Miller's *In Our Garden*, Kate Messner's *Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt*.

That winning combination will warm hearts as the story builds to an uplifting restoration. Richards drops plenty of gardening tips for younger readers along the way, who can expect to learn pearls such as lavender's calming ability, the patience required for composting, and the role different creatures (an earthworm, ladybug, and majestic oak tree, to name a few) play in the garden. Whimsical black-and-white illustrations light up with brilliant pops of color, and Richards dedicates space at the end to sustainability, including a special composting recipe for readers to try at home.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

YOUNG ADULT

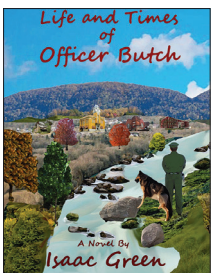
Life and Times of Officer Butch

Isaac Green | Politics and Prose

264p, e-book, \$16.99, ISBN 978-1-62429-508-9

Powered by themes of trauma, bravery, and persistence, Green's debut centers on a troubled West Virginia deputy, Carl Williams, and his turbulent relationship with his teenage son, James, and the half-wild drug-finding dog, Butch. After James's track coach overdoses on opioids, Carl and Butch must battle sinister drug dealers, indifferent authorities, a fickle public, and their own personal demons in fictional-but-familiar Stratfield, a small town stricken with poverty and crime. Occasionally aided by a mysterious informant, Carl follows the opioids from Stratfield to D.C. and back.

Carl finds some support in the community, forming a friendship with the town veterinarian, Gideon Boggs—who possibly knows more than he reveals—and a romance with the flirtatious but pushy waitress Del. Complicating matters is the fact that Carl is abusive to James and Butch, becoming violent with them when they don't immediately obey him, and repeatedly putting Del and his job ahead of James and Butch's safety and happiness. It's Butch, then, who emerges as the true hero of the story, repeatedly saving Carl and James's lives, fighting the drug dealers with superheroic determination and strength, and even sometimes proving more



A cop and a dedicated dog fight opioids and inner demons in West Virginia.

Great for fans of Liz Moore's *Long Bright River*, Paula Munier's *A Borrowing of Bones*.

of a caring dad to James than Carl can manage, offering comfort when the younger Williams is sad or injured. In the novel's second half, after a wild scene involving Butch, a church service, and a bottle of OxyContin, Green's emphasis shifts from Carl's relationships to the opioid crisis, showcasing the toll of addiction, contrasting the drug business with moonshining, and deftly demonstrating the fickleness of the public. More interested in local football games than the epidemic, the community both embraces and turns against Butch and Carl. A blossoming romance for Josh offers some relief from the grim realities of opioids, and a key scene in which Carl reveals a painful secret to James (and Butch) is heartbreaking, though it can't excuse his abusive, controlling behavior, and the frequent strong profanity makes this an uneasy fit for YA. The finale is bittersweet but realistic.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **B**

YOUNG ADULT

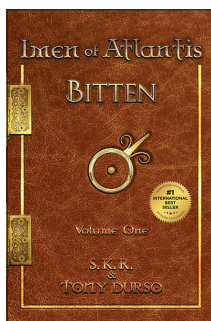
Imen of Atlantis: Bitten

S.K.R. & Tony Durso

266p, mass market, \$14.99, ISBN 978-0-9817679-2-5

Set in ancient Atlantis, a land that lay in the center of a world then known as Earthia, S.K.R. and Durso's warm, morally charged fantasy series starter concerns the secretive, subterranean Imen, a people possessed of rare healing and spiritual powers. "It is said," notes an Imperial Knight of Carron, that the Imen "can turn things to gold." That possibility leads to danger and adventure for Roni, the only child of the emperor of Imen-Hera, when the trees above her realm report that a man lies dying in the forest above. He is Prince Eyvind of Carron, wounded in a hunting accident. Beholding the "golden-haired" Carron men and helping them with a bit of Imen healing tempts Roni into violating Imen laws designed to keep their culture pure and untroubled by want.

Perhaps worse, glimpses of Roni's powers tempt an ogre named Bomo to strive to capture her. Soon, the "lust for gold" leads to conflict, as things asked of an Imen and not freely given come at a cost: one's own need for more. The authors adopt a tone that draws deeply from early fantasy and fairy tales while honoring contemporary fantasy's coherent worldbuilding. The tale opens with a clear, engaging



Classical, morally charged fantasy of greed, healing, and magic.

Great for fans of Jeannette Ng, Emily Lloyd-Jones.

survey of Atlantis and the waters that surround it, while the Imen people's history, including their atonement for a greedy warrior past, establishes simple yet resonant themes. Acts of kindness from Roni lead to unexpected consequences, such as her healing a blind man down on his luck and bestowing upon him a magical gold coin, a choice that sparks incidents of human (and ogreish) covetousness. Those moments have a familiar satirical edge, but scenes of Roni and Eyvind, who requests a way to regain his family's status, pulse with a more compelling temptation, as she fights the urge to gaze into his soul and memories. A cliffhanger ending feels somewhat abrupt, but the prose and world will delight lovers of classic fantasy.

Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

YOUNG ADULT

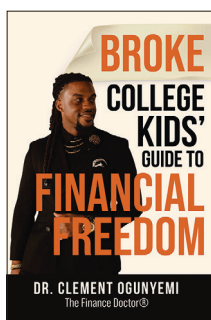
Broke College Kids' Guide to Financial Freedom

Clement Ogunyemi

130p, hardcover, \$26, ISBN 979-8-218-53084-6

Ogunyemi debuts with a candid guide seeking to demystify financial planning for college. Aimed primarily at high school graduates, his advice centers on how to tailor higher education to affordable colleges, particularly those that offer scholarships, financial aid, and work-study programs. Ogunyemi's steps are simple and straightforward, applicable to any reader willing to put in the hard work required for financial independence, and his encouragement that "You do not have to graduate with a mountain of debt and a bleak financial future. You can start your adult life with forward financial momentum" resonates.

The writing is direct and fast-paced, rich with practical advice that will hit home, whether Ogunyemi is explaining the basics—how to navigate the FAFSA, understanding different types of scholarships, and deciphering 529 plans for parents—or delving into more advanced areas, such as handy pointers for crafting a winning scholarship essay or how to glean valuable experience from internship opportunities. Ogunyemi touches on financial practices for general living as well, covering the dangers of credit cards, basic tax planning, and how to evaluate the



Simple money management advice for young adults planning to attend college.

Great for fans of Jake Cousineau's *How to Adult*, Cary Siegel's *Why Didn't They Teach Me This in School?*

necessity of purchases before making them. Preparation is key, Ogunyemi writes, and he offers a slew of hands-on checklists, tools, and reflection points to help readers take initiative when planning for their educational and financial future. Asserting that building a budget is the first step to managing money, he also includes common missteps as well as a sample budget worksheet to conquer this often-neglected area. Particularly helpful is the included glossary of related terms and Ogunyemi's equation for determining how much money to save per month for college expenses. His can-do tone permeates the guide, always focused on making dreams achievable through clear-cut, measurable goals, as he urges readers to "be vulnerable and ask questions"—and recognize that the sacrifices they must make will be worth it in the end.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: – Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A**

YOUNG ADULT

Little Dani Makes a Friend

Cassius Ali | McGilligan Publishing

28p, trade paper, \$15, ISBN 978-1-965-56002-0

Ali's picture book debut follows young Dani as she learns valuable lessons about friendship in elementary school. Dani loves kickball and playing charades with her brother, and though she admits to being shy in certain situations, she has a knack for reaching out to her peers when they need it most. Take Emily, a classmate suffering from a chronic illness that precludes her from enjoying more active recess activities; when Dani sees Emily miss out on outdoor time one day due to her health, she promptly decides Emily needs a friend—and invites her outside for safer activities, like cards and board games, that allow the girls to have fun without putting Emily at risk.

Dani's compassion for others bubbles up in nearly every interaction she has, and Ali fashions her into a positive role model for younger readers to learn how to build thoughtful relationships with peers. When she's caught between two arguing classmates during a learning activity, Dani seeks the teacher's help—a smart move for school-aged children to learn—to resolve the conflict. This allows her to conquer her own shyness and reach out to Chris, who, she discovers, has a special way of influencing her for the better. Exchanges like these are sweet to behold, and adult readers will find several opportunities for meaningful conversations about kindness,



Important lessons on friendship in a school setting.

Great for fans of Patty Brozo's *The Buddy Bench*, Lisa Moser's *A Friendship Yarn*.

friendship, and empathy in this story. Ali addresses several potential sources of conflict for children, including how to bridge differences across cultural divides. However, that section feels a bit awkward, as Dani's teacher compares students of different races to white and brown eggs, advising the kids in her class that "If you did not see the color of the egg, you would not notice a difference." Still, the illustrations are bright and lively, and Ali smartly includes a list of potential questions kids can use when getting to know their peers.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **C+** | Illustrations: **B** Editing: **C+** | Marketing copy: **B-**