

April 28, 2025

# booklife®

YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING

Avoiding Publishing Scams • 49 New BookLife Titles Listed •  
15 New BookLife Titles Reviewed

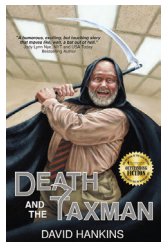
## Indie Spotlight

In this edition of our monthly thematic roundup of BookLife titles, we feature humor and satire.

Want to see your book featured? Check out the Indie Spotlight calendar at [booklife.com/indiespotlight](http://booklife.com/indiespotlight).

### NOVELS

#### Death and the Taxman



David Hankins

ISBN 978-1-962740-01-2

**Author statement:** “The Grim Reaper, trapped in an IRS agent’s dying body, must regain his powers before he dies and faces judgment for his original sin. Written in the witty styles of Sir Terry Pratchett and Piers Anthony, *Death and the Taxman* takes a lighthearted look at life through

the eyes of Death himself. I write lighthearted stories because that’s what I like to read—and this is the important bit—because there’s not nearly enough humor in the world. I intend to change that, one story at a time.”

#### The Goddess of Loneliness



John Straughn

ASIN B0DPT8DS52

**Author statement:** “I wrote *The Goddess of Loneliness* to explore my view that the being(s) who created our universe might not be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving. Maybe they are a bunch of bumbling, limited beings who stumbled through the creation and created a big mess (known as our universe). In addition to humor and satire, the book also takes a deep dive into the human condition.”

#### Ruby’s Revenge



Christine Gallagher

ASIN B0DTKDWJ8Z

**Author statement:** “When self-effacing Ruby Bixler discovers that her TV news anchor husband Brad is not only having an affair with his assistant but plans to snatch away her beloved home, she sets out to show him that she isn’t going to take it anymore. The idea for this novel came from work I did collecting real-life revenge stories for a humorous nonfiction book, *The Woman’s Book of Revenge*, which was published in several countries. The character Ruby Bixler became the perfect person to take charge of this material.”

#### The Spy Who Hated Me



Haris Orkin

ISBN 978-1-68513-445-7

**Author statement:** “CIA agent Caitlyn Valentine has disappeared in London and James Flynn is sure she’s in danger. Of course, as a heavily medicated patient in a Pasadena psychiatric hospital, no one takes Flynn seriously. Flynn escapes and makes his way to London with the help of his psychiatric nurse, Sancho. From a luxurious private casino in Mayfair to the Orient Express, Flynn follows Caitlyn’s trail and stumbles upon an audacious plot that threatens every country on Earth.”

# Booksellers & Librarians:



## How are you handling self-published books?

Every week, *Publishers Weekly* reviewers highlight self-published books that deserve your attention.

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Reviews

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BookLifePrize](https://publishersweekly.com/BookLifePrize)

Let us help you find the best in self-published books!

All powered by *Publishers Weekly* reviewers.

## BookLife Talks with Anthony Grove

Grove's first book, *Healthcare in the United States*, seeks to provide readers with an understanding of the financial side of an often-maligned industry drawing on the knowledge and personal experiences he gained in his more than 40 years in the healthcare financial sector.

### What inspired you to write a guide to healthcare?

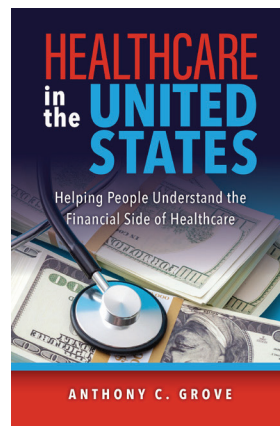
During my long career in the financial side of healthcare, I have witnessed many instances where the average individual simply did not understand how healthcare works. The only way I could help people understand the inner workings of the financial side of healthcare was to share my knowledge so that people could focus their energy in the right areas and avoid blaming individuals, agencies, and health plans when the problem does not originate with them. Healthcare delivery in the United States is, admittedly, complicated. My book demystifies the system so that people can make better decisions and better understand how to address their concerns.

### You started in the healthcare sector in 1984. What's had the biggest effect on the industry over the last 40 years?

The technology boom of the 1980s and beyond created life-saving, life-extending, and life-improving treatments. Those technologies, as well as the people who provide those services, add to the cost of healthcare. As the cost of healthcare has increased, we have had to look for ways to better manage the care delivery model and to force the adoption of clinical protocols that are statistically appropriate. We cannot operate like "the good ol' days," because patients, employers, health plans, government programs, and other entities expect the service delivery model to be efficient. Managing cost has brought about more changes, second only to the technology boom within healthcare.

### During the writing process, did anything surprise you or change how you view the system?

The single thing that I continued to reflect on was the human interaction throughout my healthcare journey. My experiences working with highly skilled and collaborative people reminded me of the sharp contrast between success and failure. I realized that



success comes from true collaboration, and failure comes from those who cannot work with others and cannot embrace change. I was able to see that the current system does work. It is not, as some would exclaim, "a broken system." It is a highly effective system that has become complex due to the boom in technology, increased costs, and the desire to manage costs appropriately.

### If you could snap your fingers and change one thing in the healthcare system, what would it be?

I would like people to have knowledge of the healthcare reimbursement system. Every day, I hear people ranting about how bad their insurance coverage is. When I explain to them that their insurance would cover a day

at the beach, a birthday party, or a night at the movies if the employer chose to do so, they go silent. They have no idea that most commercial plans are built with a certain financial model—and dollar cost per month, per employee—in mind. Once they understand that the insurance company is not "the big bad wolf," they become receptive. Too many people are stuck on the idea that insurance companies make money by collecting premiums and denying claims. With most employer plans, this is simply not true. The insurance is only being paid a fee to manage the plan and the actual dollars for claims comes from the employer's pocket, not from insurance.

### What's next for you?

I've been asked to write more about specific parts of the healthcare system. There are many areas where I could publish another book, not only in healthcare. It is my intention to be available as a guest speaker for various groups, events, and meetings, as time will permit. Whatever I can reasonably do to share the knowledge, that is what is next for me.

For more, visit [booklife.com/grove](http://booklife.com/grove)

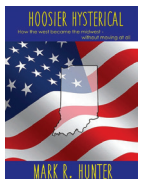
**White Rabbit: An American Satire**

T.C. Scott

ISBN 978-1-68513-445-7

**Author statement:** "Conservative zealot Martha Molder decides to run for public office to 'save America,' but she is thwarted at every turn by people she thinks are against her, including her progressive husband Jack, her immigrant gardener

Enrique, her gay son Max and his pet rabbit, and Max's unhinged high school teacher Miss Tutley, who runs against her. This book began years ago as a short horror script, evolved into a dark comedy screenplay, then into an absurdist, screwball political satire novel."

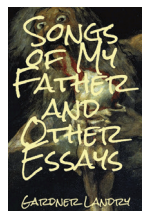
**NONFICTION****Hoosier Hysterical: How the West Became the Midwest Without****Moving at All**

Mark R. Hunter and Emily Hunter

ISBN 978-1-5331-2062-5

**Author statement:** "When Emily and I realized Indiana's 150th birthday was coming up, we used it as an excuse for two of our favorite activities: traveling and

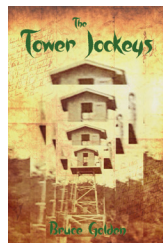
making fun of stuff. Along the way, much to our surprise, we learned a great deal, some of it even useful. We tried to pass that learning along in a way that was fun, and hardly painful at all. It was a great summer of touring—and then, of course, we had to write the thing."

**Songs of My Father and Other Essays**

Gardner Landry

ASIN B0DM6SG155

**Author statement:** "I wrote these essays over a span of several years, as a reaction to the antics of my father, Fred. I came to realize that my father's bizarre behaviors and proclivities were, if viewed through the lens of an arm's-length, diffident, and somewhat confounded essayistic eye, the stuff of real-life comedy. A combination of Willard Scott, Ron Burgundy, and Tolkien's Gollum is not an amalgam one encounters in the everyday world, but I like to think it struts, frets, and faints in this little collection in the person of my father, Fred Landry."

**The Tower Jockeys**

Bruce Golden

ASIN B0D8GRNZ4D

**Author statement:** "Part satire, part memoir, *The Tower Jockeys* is both hilarious and heartbreaking. Full of political and pop culture references from the early '70s, it tells the story of the last American military draftees and how they became part of the U.S. Army's most

infamous and uproarious unit while guarding nuclear missiles in the Republic of South Korea."

Q&amp;A

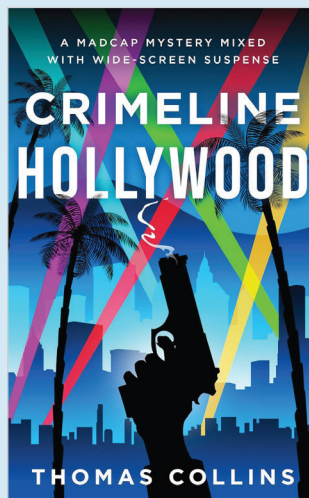
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**BookLife Talks with Tom Collins**

The start to Collins's pop culture-laden mystery series sees his main character, Dash Harwood, teaming up with a P.I. to search for an actress. BookLife spoke with Collins about *Crimeline Hollywood* and his plans for the series.

**What's the story behind *Crimeline Hollywood*—why and how did you write it?**

I started out with the notion of writing a mystery that would be steeped in pop culture. I wanted to infuse as much of it as I could to make the story as timely and colorful as possible. I began listing things associated with pop culture and one of the first was astrology. This required a bit of research in order to apply it correctly.

**Dash is an astrologer. What's your experience with astrology?**

Another good example of pop culture is Hollywood and the lives of the rich and famous. Therefore, I made Dash, "Hollywood's Astrologer to the Stars," a man with many well-known clients. Lurid headlines in tabloids provide another good example of pop culture. The tabloids love to feature famous movie stars, especially those involved with crime or scandal. I didn't have a lot of knowledge or experience with astrology, so I needed to do some research. It was a lot of fun. Dive deep into astrology and you'll find something in your own life that matches your astrological sign. My wife was a Virgo and she believed she was a perfect fit.

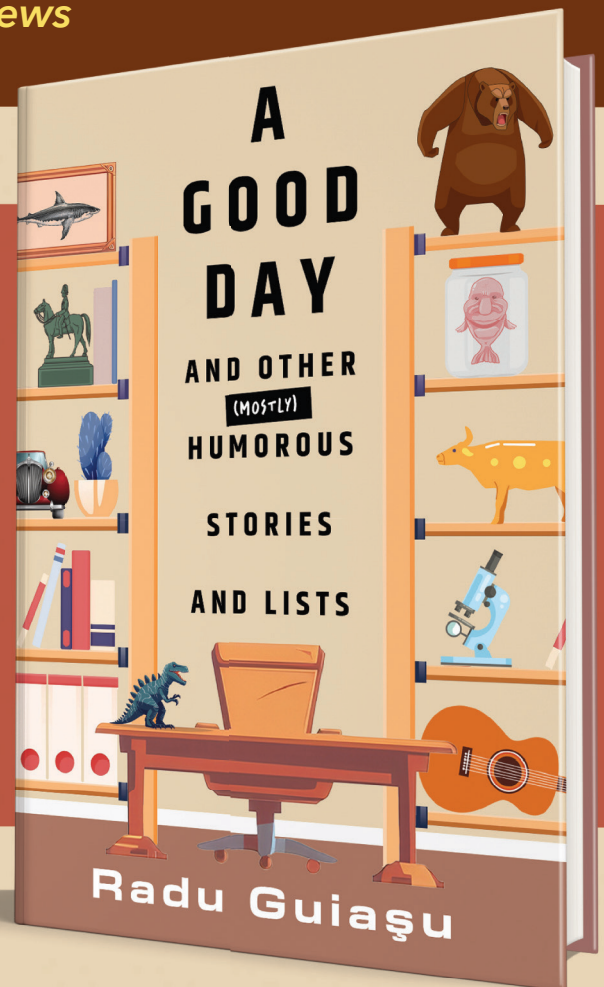
For more, visit [booklife.com/collins](http://booklife.com/collins)

**“Sharp writing that showcases a delightful sense of humor.”**

*–Kirkus Reviews*

**“The writing is rich with satire and wit, delivering laugh out loud moments and eccentric characters who jump from the page.”**

*–BookLife Reviews*



ISBN 978-1-03-919495-3

**“If you need a good laugh and enjoy humor in general, I highly recommend you pick up this book. You will not be disappointed.”**

*–Christina Boswell  
Los Angeles Book Review*

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# Red Flags for Indie Authors

Here are some tips for avoiding getting scammed

BY RAVEN BELASCO

**M**any of us authors set out into the world of independent publishing full of frustration with traditional publishing's very real limitations. We also have a belief in ourselves as artists, a desire to oversee our own fates, and a willingness to roll up our sleeves and do what it takes to "make it."

At some point, many indie authors hit a period of panic. After pouring sweat, blood, and tears into our passion career, we see disastrously low sales numbers. This is the moment when indie authors learn that it's not just about hard work: it's also about luck and having deep pockets. There are indeed ways to boost yourself—but they are going to cost you.



That's what unscrupulous companies are waiting for. These companies have one vital thing in common: they are trying to make money off your desperation. Authors who are panicking about keeping their businesses from failing are authors who will forget that "if it seems too good to be true, it probably is." For authors who are having trouble spotting the red flags, here are scams to watch out for.

The first you probably already know, but this article would be remiss without mentioning it: the vanity press (also termed a subsidy press) offers publishing services for a fee—which can grow to thousands of dollars as services are tacked on.

For an author concerned about how much work independent publishing is, vanity presses seem like a possible solution: they do the work you don't know how to do yet, and you just pay them for doing that work, right?

Not right at all. You'd be paying an outrageous fee for minimal (and often low-quality) effort on their part. For this dubious privilege, you assume all the risk while giving up the rights to your work. Their first communication may promise you literary glory and a deal for a Netflix series, but, after they have hooked you, the costs will just keep mounting and the results will not.

Here are some red flags to help you spot vanity publishers:

- They will charge you *both* fees and royalties. A real publisher will never demand that you pay to publish.
- They charge a "reading fee" just to review your manuscript.
- They reach out to you with excessive praise and promises that are too good to be true.
- Despite glowing testimonials on their site, you can't find those books in bookstores.

A vanity press may do your Amazon listing for you, but it's not worth the cost on any level. No matter how difficult it is to be an indie author, it's infinitely better than being scammed by a vanity press.

For authors who are already published, one huge red flag is companies that offer to help you grow your social media followings. One such company promises: "Affordable, Accelerated, Organic Instagram Growth. No bots. No fake users. Guaranteed results or it's free!"

Except, after they have charged your credit card, you discover that they have highly particular definitions of "bots," "fake users," "organic," and "guaranteed results." Their definitions are so wildly divergent from yours that you end up with thousands of fake "followers," which can mess up your algorithm so terribly that you have to delete your account and start from scratch. And that's only if Meta (which also has very different definitions of "bots" and "fake users") doesn't shut your account down first.

Because of those wildly diverging definitions, the company will insist that it has delivered the promised guaranteed results and absolutely refuse to give your money back.

Another red flag is companies that offer "Amazon bestseller programs." This is exactly what it sounds like: you pay your way (one

company offers this service for \$6,000, though many won't list the price on their sites at all) to get one of those nice little orange banners on Amazon.

What these companies deliver is you being a bestseller in one obscure Amazon category for an hour or so. You drop your book to 99¢ beforehand, so you don't even make much money in the process. They push just enough sales to get you to hit somewhere high enough in Amazon rankings to be considered a "bestseller" (one of the top 100 sellers in any category).

That little orange badge may be on your listing for an hour, and then it's gone. Your listing looks like it always has. If you haven't grabbed a screenshot of the magic moment, you can't even prove it ever happened. You paid \$6,000 for *that*. The company is laughing all the way to the bank.

Paid reviews are also a risky proposition. If you choose the wrong company, you get a bunch of garbage reviews, where people have clearly *not* read your book.

The best practice for choosing paid review sites (because reviews are indeed vital to sales) is to look at the reviews already on those sites, which books tend to get reviewed, and how much the review will cost. Also instructive is to search online for other writers' experiences of the review site.

Some predatory companies include the service of submitting your book for review to a reputable organization. Only, the fees they ask for are often hundreds of dollars more than what the actual review

platform would ever charge. It's a scam that also unfairly affects the companies that provide reviews at fair and reasonable rates.

Literary organizations such as the Association of Writers & Writing Programs, the Authors Guild, or professional associations for your genre—the Western Writers of America or Horror Writers Association, for examples—can provide real support. Rely on groups that have existed to help authors since before you started dreaming of writing your first book. Look for people volunteering their time coordinating tedious lists of resources and communities.

Success as an indie author is going to be not just hard work, but it's going to demand that you learn a lot of skills you never expected to need. One way to make it less hard is to be suspicious of companies trying to sell you services that promise to make this challenging and demanding goal easier.

Don't let greedy, unscrupulous people take advantage of your yearning to succeed. Watch for red flags! If you are offered a short cut, choose the reliable road. It's the only way you'll actually get where you're trying to go. 🙄

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*Raven Belasco is the author of the Blood & Ancient Scrolls series, among other works of fiction and nonfiction.*



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# New Titles from Self-Publishers

Booksellers, publishers, librarians, and agents are encouraged to look at the 49 self-published titles below. Each appears with a list of retailers that are selling the book and a description provided by its author. Some of these writers are waiting to be discovered; others have track records and followings and are doing it on their own. If you are a self-published author interested in listing titles in this section, please visit [publishersweekly.com/pw-select](http://publishersweekly.com/pw-select) for more information.

## Fiction

### Charity Trickett Is Not So Glamorous: A



#### Novel

Christine Stringer.  
Sparkpress. \$17.99 paper (320p), ISBN 978-1-68463-316-6; \$12.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-68463-317-3

Barnes & Noble, Books-a-Million, Bookshop.org

This behind-the-scenes tale of a young woman's calamitous adventures trying to break into the movie industry in 1990s Hollywood is based on a true story.

### Congleholme: A Wartime Romance



James R. Warren. Midland Tutorial Productions. \$54.99 (416p), ISBN 978-1-915750-11-2

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

In WW3, Dina Feng and Chuck Charmless fall in love and explore their shared Christianity, their erotic adventures, and their yearning for children.

### The Dead Mrs. McIntyre



Richard Watkins. XlibrisAU. \$17.99 paper (360p), ISBN 978-1-9845-0701-3; \$3.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-6641-0006-0

Amazon

In this gothic mystery novel, one man finds

himself followed by strange and quite mysterious occurrences after the death of his wife.

### Does the Woman of My Dreams Exist?



Phillip Parcheminer. Xlibris US. \$16.99 paper (190p), ISBN 978-1-6698-5105-9; \$3.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-6698-5106-6

Amazon

In his second book, Phillip Parcheminer shares his journey as he questions the existence of someone who would defy the odds of normal society to be the woman of his dreams.

### The Fallen: The Book of Jakiele



Denise Moran. Rushmore Press. \$12.99 paper (292p), ISBN 978-1-961227-33-0

Amazon, Barnes & Noble

The Great War in Heaven began centuries ago between angels loyal to God and those who sided with Lucifer over the fate of humanity.

### The Ghost of Tom Mix



Julian Doyle. Chippenham Books. \$12.50 paper (162p), ISBN 978-1-5467-2034-8; \$5.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0684369-0-1

Amazon, IngramSpark  
*Blazing Saddles* meets *The Producers* in this

hilarious tale of making a Western in Spain, with aging sidekick to the stars Joshua Johnson.

### Love on Tour

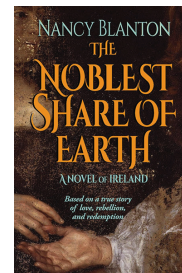


Lee Adams. She Writes Press. \$17.99 paper (304p), ISBN 978-1-64742-918-8; \$12.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-64742-919-5

Amazon

A debut contemporary women's fiction novel about a woman in the country music industry navigating the ins and outs of friendship, love, jealousy, and life on tour.

### The Noblest Share of Earth



Nancy Blanton. Ellys-Daughtrey Books. \$34.99 (276p), ISBN 978-1-7335928-5-7; \$19.99 paper (314p), ISBN 978-1-7335928-6-4

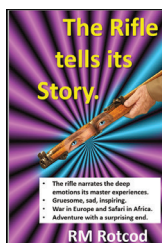
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Walmart

A young Irish chieftain and his English bride face loss, destruction, and even death when English, Scottish, other clans, and adventurers start closing in on their fertile lands.

### The Rifle Tells Its Story

R.M. Rotcod. R.M. Rotcod. \$12.99 paper (184p), ISBN 979-8-9858317-4-0; \$3.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9858317-6-4

Amazon, Audible, Kobo



A British military rifle tells its experiences in WWI and hunting in Africa. It senses human emotions, and one intrigues it. The answer is discovered at Christmas dinner on a farm.

**Starman After Midnight: A Novel-in-Stories**



Scott Semegran. Mutt Press. \$14.99 paper (236p), ISBN 979-8-218-41594-5; \$4.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-224-28989-9

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, Tertulia  
A quirky novel-in-stories about two beer-drinking neighbors, Seff and Big Dave, who team-up to track down a mysterious late-night interloper terrorizing their middle-class neighborhood.

**Subspace**



Stuart Stromin. EMP. \$19.99 paper (254p), ISBN 979-8-88596-190-5; \$19.99 e-book, ASIN B0D2S5YMT4  
Amazon

*Subspace* is a collection of kinky tales, exploring the deepest, darkest desires of the human psyche, crafted in in a high literary style that will leave you begging for more.

**Mystery/Thriller**

**Nightmare before Mardi Gras: 14 Days of Madness, Mayhem and Murder**

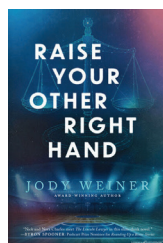


Robert Sterling Hecker. Robert Sterling Hecker. \$19.99 (254p), ISBN 979-8-218-54938-1; \$10.99 paper (254p), ISBN 979-8-218-49219-9  
Amazon

Sgt. Jeremy Porter investigates a possible child abuse case. While determined to get justice for the boy, Jeremy becomes entangled in a terrifying situation.

**Raise Your Other Right Hand**

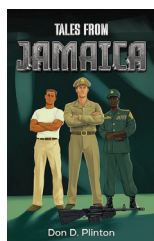
Jody Weiner. Speaking Volumes. \$16.95 paper (232p), ISBN 979-8-89022-250-3; \$6.95 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89022-249-7  
Speaking Volumes, Amazon, Apple Books,



Barnes & Noble, Kobo  
A darkly funny page-turner about justice, family ties, and the twisted road to redemption. A closeted superstar athlete on trial for murder searchest the deepest

reaches of his soul.

**Tales from Jamaica**



Bill Burnett. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$23.95 paper (380p), ISBN 978-1-3984-4431-7; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-3984-5562-7  
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith

A gripping tale of crime, corruption, and power struggles in Jamaica, where gangs rule, the police are compromised, and a ruthless commissioner fights to restore order amid chaos and deception.

**What We Say in the Dark**

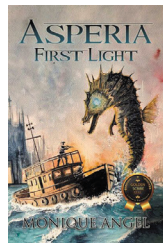


Gary Baysinger. See Square Press. \$15.99 paper (298p), ISBN 979-8-218-59494-7; \$5.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-218-59495-4  
Amazon

1944: Army officer Don Gibson is assigned to Lisbon, a city teeming with spies. When he crosses paths with the mysterious Isabelle, he finds himself caught in a deadly guessing game.

**SF/Fantasy/Horror**

**Asperia, First Light**



Monique Angel. Milton & Hugo. \$27.99 (318p), ISBN 979-8-89285-346-0; \$15.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-89285-345-3  
Miltonandhugo.com, Amazon, Barnes & Noble

In a fractured post-apocalyptic world, *Asperia: First Light* follows Eva, Terry, and Hannah as they safeguard Dustin.

**Everlasting**

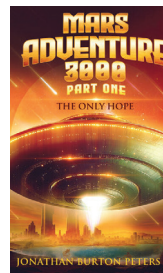
Sara Fanfarillo. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$14.95 paper (196p), ISBN 978-1-0358-7217-



6; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-7219-0  
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith  
Kendall's life changes unexpectedly when he finds himself in a secret world where events

mysteriously chain together. Under the wise master's guidance he discovers real truths. His destiny will change forever.

**Mars Adventure 3000 (Part One): The Only Hope**



Jonathan Burton Peters Jr. Armor Strong Books. \$24.99 paper (434p), ISBN 979-8-89704-139-8; \$0.99 e-book, ASIN B0CYBR2W9X  
Amazon

300,000 years ago a planet called Mars is dying. Once a rich planet full of life, now it's quickly heading towards extinction.

**Project Mind River (Techs Future Promise and Peril #1)**



Dave Spacer. Futures Point Press. \$14.95 paper (420p), ISBN 979-8-218-30712-7; free e-book, ASIN B0CW1B25KC  
Amazon, Apple Books, Google Play, Kobo

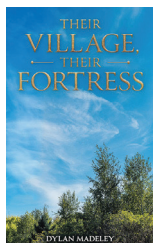
AI is an existential threat—but not in the way anyone imagined. A software developer joins the FBI to investigate mysterious deaths, uncovering a hidden conflict that will change the future of humanity.

**The Scroll of a Good Person**



Mo Axier. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$26.95 paper (450p), ISBN 979-8-88910-095-9; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 979-8-88910-098-0  
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith

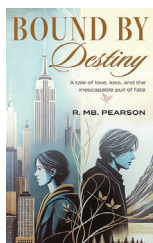
A bible about being a good person, that simultaneously spotlights the persuasive mechanisms of bibles, so the reader can think critically about how ethical those mechanisms are.

**Their Village, Their Fortress**

Dylan Madeley. Dylan Madeley. \$9.99 paper (140p), ISBN 979-8-3379-0877-9

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Google Play, Kobo  
A soldier warns his village that their fortress

has fallen and their defenders have fled. Villagers pool their skills and resources to resist, but it's uncertain whether they can win.

**Romance/Erotica****Bound by Destiny: A Tale of Love, Loss, and the Inescapable Pull of Fate**

R.M.B. Pearson. Rebecca Pearson. \$15.95 paper (412p), ISBN 979-8-9919595-0-6; \$4.95 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9919595-1-3

Amazon

Following her husband's shocking death and the dark secrets that shattered her life, a young widow finds love, healing, and the courage to trust in the magic of destiny that has been written in the stars.

**A Hard Decision**

Westley Thomas. Authors' Tranquility Press. \$9.99 paper (138p), ISBN 978-1-964037-88-2

Amazon

William and Zera's love was shattered by war. Believed dead, William returns years later, forcing Zera to choose between him and her new husband. A story of love, loss, and fate.

**My Plus One = You**

Angela Haas. Spotted Owl Publishing. \$16.99 paper (348p), ISBN 978-1-7361962-2-9; \$4.99 e-book, ASIN BODP7Y2993

Amazon

*My Plus One = You* is a steamy and humorous story about two people trying their hardest not to fall in love during Scottsdale's wedding season.

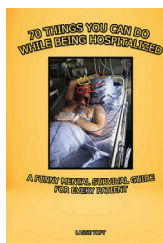
**See-Saw**

Arthur Day. Authors' Tranquility Press. \$12.99 paper (292p), ISBN 978-1-965463-69-7

Amazon

Dianne and MJ plan to marry but must solve a double murder first.

Unknown to Dianne, a hired killer is stalking her. A thriller of love, mystery, and danger in the Covid era.

**Nonfiction****70 Things You Can Do While Being****Hospitalized**

Lasse Toft. Lasse Toft. \$6.99 paper (120p), ISBN 979-8-3210-8311-6; \$2.95 e-book, ASIN BOCYTKTCFP

Amazon, Google Books, Kobo, Pohti, Xinxii

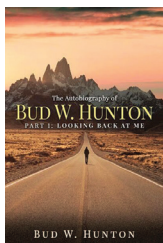
A funny mental survival guide for every patient. 70 crazy, funny proposals to kill time so you can survive!

**Are There Any Moral Truths?: A Philosophical Dialogue**

Thomas Østergaard. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$19.95 paper (314p), ISBN 978-1-0358-5498-1; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-6741-7

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith

The book guides the reader on a philosophical and illuminating tour through four different ways of looking at morality, explaining why we shouldn't ignore beliefs about right and wrong.

**The Autobiography of Bud W. Hunton: Part 1: Looking Back at Me**

Bud W. Hunton. Authors' Tranquility Press. \$7.99 paper (50p), ISBN 978-1-965463-49-9

Amazon

This is Bud's final book, sharing his 1940s Ohio farm life, facing instability, joining the Navy at 17, and the importance of a strong support system.

**Chatterbox: Stories from a Noisy Life**

Barbara Worton. Susan Schadt Press. \$22.50 paper (120p), ISBN 979-8-9894034-6-2; \$12.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9927413-1-5

Amazon, Bookshop.org

Mini-memoirs that offer observations, recollections, and a heartfelt and relatable exploration of growing up, navigating relationships, and the beauty, humor, and complexity of life.

**Don't Settle, Choose to Feel Good: 20 Keys to Achieve It**

Pablo Tricci. Pablo Tricci. \$12.84 paper (208p), ISBN 979-8-3344-1425-9; \$2.99 e-book, BODCP9Y5CL

Amazon

Life is short. Don't live on autopilot. This book inspires intentional living, prioritizing passions, growth, and loved ones through practical wisdom and actionable self-investment tips.

**How to Hold a Glue Stick: and Other Clues to Parenting**

Froukje M. Matthews. BalboaPressAU. \$11.99 paper (114p), ISBN 978-1-9822-9556-1; \$3.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-9822-9557-8

Amazon

This pocket book addresses 10 topics encountered by parents and grandparents alike. The examples and vignettes are true to life and based on nearly 30 years of observations and interactions with the very young.

**How to Win a Million Dollars and Beep Glitter!: A Mostly True Misadventure**

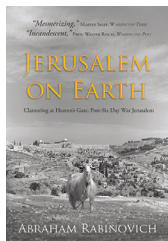
Luke Stoffel. Cinderly Press. \$14.99 paper (264p), ISBN 979-8-9917987-1-6; \$19.95 audio, ISBN 979-8-9917987-3-0

Amazon

What if the American dream they sold us was just a glitter-fueled lie? A raucously funny memoir about one misfit's wild ride from

gaming McDonald's to scrubbing toilets on Broadway!

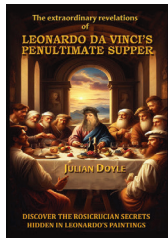
**Jerusalem on Earth: Clamoring at Heaven's Gate; Post Six-Day War Jerusalem**



Abraham Rabinovich. Abraham Rabinovich. \$19.99 paper (280p), ISBN 979-8-3262-6270-7; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-83978-680-8

Amazon, Barnes & Noble  
A depiction of the city that emerged from the 1967 Six-Day War, a view by a beat reporter for the *Jerusalem Post*. The book focuses on Teddy Kollek, who served as mayor for 28 years.

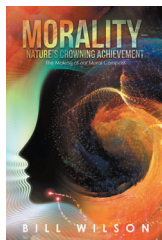
**Leonardo Da Vinci's Penultimate Supper**



Julian Doyle. Julian Doyle. \$35.55 (223p), ISBN 978-1-0687465-9-8; \$12.65 paper (226p), ISBN 978-1-0687465-8-1

Amazon, Ingram  
Uncover the details in Leonardo paintings that reveal his heretical Rosicrucian beliefs. From making John the Baptist seven years older than Jesus in the Burlington Cartoon to explaining the pointing finger thrust into Jesus's face in his Last Supper.

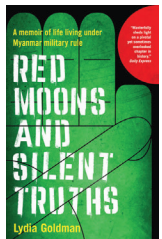
**Morality: Nature's Crowning Achievement: The Making of Our Moral Compass**



Bill Wilson. AuthorHouseUK. \$14.34 paper (130p), ISBN 978-1-7283-7660-8; \$4.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-7283-7661-5

Amazon  
Bill addresses the argument that without God there can be no morality. He explains how morality is part of our nature and is essential to our flourishing and indeed survival.

**Red Moons and Silent Truths: A Memoir of Life Living Under Myanmar Military Rule**

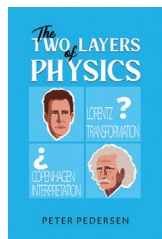


Lydia Goldman, illus. by Mecob Designs. Sleepy Lion Publishing. \$18.99 paper (338p), ISBN 978-1-917563-03-1; \$7.99 e-book, BODVHW5FWX

Sleepy Lion Publishing, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Blackwells

In the wake of Myanmar's 2021 military coup, a journey quickly spirals into a profound exploration of resilience as Lydia arrives in Yangon eager to start a new life.

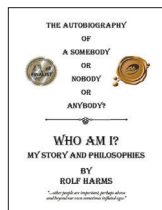
**The Two Layers of Physics**



Peter Pedersen. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$9.95 paper (112p), ISBN 978-1-0358-7112-4; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-7113-1

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith  
Imagine an all-penetrating layers of consciousness interacting with the known material world. On this basis the author makes alternative realistic formulations of quantum mechanics and relativity supported by simple experiments.

**Who Am I: My Story and Philosophies**



Rolf Harms. Rolf Harms. \$12.95 paper (294p), ISBN 979-8-3703-4634-7

Amazon  
This autobiography offers a compelling insight into the struggles and achievements experienced by this farm boy in postwar Germany.

**X Rubicon: Crossing Life, Sex, Love, & Killing in CIA Proxy Wars—An Indictment of**



US Citizens Sean Griobhtha, illus. by Sophia Rose. GP&R. \$20.86 paper (334p), ISBN 979-8-8309-7264-2

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Ingram  
2.5 years deception and death; 40+ years locking away emotions and truth.

**Religion/Spirituality**

**Divinely Touched: Transform Your Life**

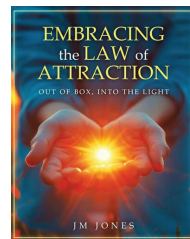


(2nd ed.) Mary 'Divine' DiSano and Dave DiSano. Mary 'Divine' DiSano and Dave DiSano. \$14.11 paper (386p), ISBN 979-8-3759-5717-3

Amazon  
*Divinely Touched* is a

true story of personal transformation. It chronicles Mary's spiritual awakening and how she was divinely saved, led, and transformed.

**Embracing the Law of Attraction: Out of the Box, Into the Light**



J.M. Jones. Authors' Tranquility Press. \$16.99 paper (98p), ISBN 978-1-965075-45-6

Amazon  
Your thoughts shape your destiny. The author emphasizes monitoring thoughts to create a fulfilling life. Controlling your mind leads to happiness, success, and transformation.

**Overwhelming Victories in All These Difficulties**

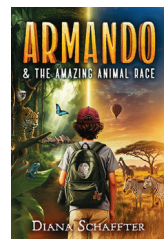


Tamie S. Johnson. Authors' Tranquility Press. \$12.99 paper (202p), ISBN 978-1-961908-82-6

Amazon  
This book is about life but in the form of poetry. I read a devotional one-day Proverbs 31 Woman Encouragement for Today, and I started writing.

**Children's/YA**

**Armando and the Amazing Animal Race**



Diana Schaffter. The Sea Otter Press. \$24.99 (350p), ISBN 978-1-0690795-0-3; \$12.99 paper, ISBN 978-1-0690795-1-0

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Walmart  
12-year-old Armando persuades his zany grandmother to join a continent-hopping race to photograph seven endangered animals in 70 days and solve a baffling family mystery.

**The Borealis Queen**

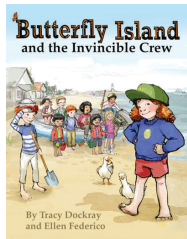


Henry Guard. Henry Guard. \$10.99 paper (194p), ISBN 979-8-9926065-0-8; \$2.99 e-book, ASIN BODXLV2N6Y

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Google Books  
After her tribe falls, Nin

survives the Ice Age wilds with wolves and a deadly Smilodon. Hunted by warlords and haunted by prophecy, she rises as the feared and fabled Borealis Queen.

#### Butterfly Island and the Invincible Crew



Ellen Federico, illus. by Tracy Dockray. BookBaby. \$24.99 (40p), ISBN 979-8-3509-4969-8

Amazon, Bookbaby  
Inspired by a true story, a group of island children band together to restore washed-away dreams and threatened monarch butterflies in a kid-sized adventure, finding strength in unity.

#### One to Two Bees and a Farmer



Cailyn Stevens. Austin Macauley Publishers. \$10.95 paper (32p), ISBN 978-1-0358-8151-2; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-8152-9

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Waterstones, WH Smith

Two tiny bees, Isla and Lio, with help from Farmer Otto, fight back against the concrete jungle, determined to restore colourful meadows, bright flowers, and safe homes for their kind.

#### Orphan's Quest: The Great Forget Fantasy Series



Terry Ironwood. Terry Ironwood. \$5.99 paper (108p), ISBN 979-8-3282-7281-0; \$0.99 e-book, BOD74QYJ78

Amazon

In this #1 Amazon fantasy bestseller in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K., a spurned orphan named Chip discovers his extraordinary destiny under the tutelage of the enigmatic wizard Xander.

#### The Storyteller from Balincia (Driftstone #1)

S.W. Kent, illus. by Yornelys Zambrano. Belquis &



Martel Publishing. \$36.99 (509p), ISBN 979-8-9915807-3-1; \$22.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-9915807-2-4

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

Two generations of witches fight over the fate of magic in a diverse, cozy YA epic fantasy.

#### Ündi Moonglider



Goddessy Dolls Books. Goddessy Dolls Books. \$27.99 (96p), ISBN 979-8-9889303-8-9; \$16.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-9889303-9-6

Amazon

Scandinavian

princess Andi Moonglider wants to be a superpowered Valkyrie when she grows up! Join Andi and her magical horse, Moonglitter, on their first (galactic and frosty) quest.

REAL FANS READ

THE  
FANATIC

BY PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

The Insider's Guide to Comics, Culture & Graphic Novels

Get your Fanatic on at  
[PUBLISHERSWEEKLY.COM/FANATIC](https://PUBLISHERSWEEKLY.COM/FANATIC)



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

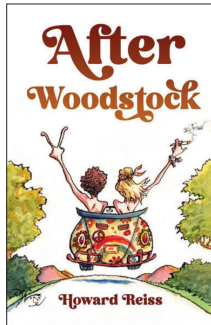
**After Woodstock**

Howard Reiss

275p, e-book, \$2.99, ISBN 979-8-9864284-4-4

"By the summer of 1969, Jacko was sure that it was up to our generation to save the Earth," declares Reiss's narrator, Bryan, of the dear friend, Jack (or Jacko), with whom he attended the epochal 1969 upstate New York concert before going on to live very different lives. The Earth, of course, never got saved, and through letters between these two men in the decades that follow, Reiss (*P Town*) reveals how time, maturity, and American life change both. While Bryan remains committed to an ambitious legal career, Jack embraces a more unconventional and introspective life, their relationship sustained through intermittent correspondence.

*After Woodstock* is a poignant meditation on friendship, personal evolution, and the long shadows cast by life-altering moments. As his high school's valedictorian, Jack urged his "generation to reject society the way it was—filled as it were with



*Reflective novel of friendship, idealism, life changing us over decades.*

**Great for fans of** Richard Russo's *Chances Are*, Cara Wall's *The Dearly Beloved*.

someone capable of deeper emotional connection.

That tension underscores one of Reiss's central questions: can intellect and logic truly shield someone from grief and human connection? Reiss's prose is smooth and personable, capturing both countercultural idealism and sobering realities of adulthood. The epistolary approach comes at the expense of scenic immediacy, resulting in a story that's reflected upon, but this is a novel that lingers, much like an old song from that iconic summer, capturing how people change, drift, and find their way back.

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

## FICTION

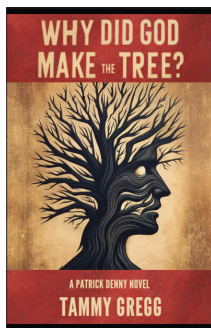
⚡ EDITOR'S PICK

**Why Did God Make the Tree?: A Patrick Denny Novel**

Tammy Gregg | Cemetery Hill Publications

306p, hardcover, \$28.99, ISBN 979-8-9923271-0-6

Saturated with fogs both atmospheric—"the Tower has wholly vanished behind the miasma"—and medical, Gregg's compelling debut, the kickoff to a planned series, explores madness, devil worship, human monstrosity, and the way stories and nature affect our own conscious reality. At its heart is a most human guide, dedicated to healing minds. Dr. Patrick Denny is a superstar horror author who has recently returned to his earlier profession, psychiatry, as he strives to make a positive impact on Waylingbrooke, a small New England town. In his work at New Hampshire's Everston Psychiatric Hospital, Denny encounters three individuals whose cases will challenge him. The first connects to the history of Waylingbrooke, as a traumatized teen orphan experiences horror that reflects experiences with the occult in the diary of a 19th-century architect.



*Honorable doctor faces smart, tense horror in a New England asylum.*

**Great for fans of** M.R. Carey's *Someone Like Me*, Victor LaValle's *The Devil in Silver*.

these braided tales into a psychological procedural suited for readers who relish humane scares. Gregg toys with expectations throughout, favoring suggestion and mystery, trusting readers to feel their way through the murk.

Denny excels as a horror protagonist, bringing empathy and clear thought to everything except his safety and relationships. His battles with doctors, families, his past, and nature itself, all for his patients, form a compelling through line. Especially urgent is his commitment to helping them face this world—even as Gregg primes us to wonder whether it pulses with blood, beasts, and surprises.

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

## FICTION

**Exile Exodus**

Ryan Fleming | Wellspring Books

189p, e-book, \$2.99, ASIN B0CZF9H9W58

Fleming's historical narrative chronicles the religious shift that occurs when Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep IV converts from polytheism to worshipping the god Aten. The story follows Amenhotep IV—who later changes his name to Akhenaten—from his time as a child to long after his death, with well-known historical figures like Nefertiti, Tutankhamen, and even the Hebrew Moses making appearances, all woven together in a tapestry of family betrayal and secret maneuvers to keep bloodlines intact. As the Egyptian kingdom simmers with turmoil and external threats, Akhenaten's family upends what has been known for centuries, setting the stage for a revolutionary new beginning.

Fleming (*Hail Judeas Caesar*) breathes life into Egyptian lineage, giving voice to well-known royals while exploring the impact of their rule on a nation, as each new pharaoh harbors differing opinions on whether their true god is Amun or Aten, causing conflict among the royal lines and the Egyptian priests. Queen Nefertiti is



*Suspenseful account of Egyptian royalty leading to the Jewish exodus.*

**Great for fans of** Rebecca Kohn's *Seven Days to the Sea*, Judith Tarr's *Pillar of Fire*.

depicted as calculating and self-serving in her bid to maintain status within the royal line, especially after she is unable to produce a male heir for Akhenaten, and Fleming builds tension throughout by highlighting the dynamics between the male rulers and the females working at their side.

Beyond the intrigue of Egyptian royals, Fleming draws parallels between Aten worship and the emergence of Judaism, working deep religious context into this suspenseful narrative as the story of Moses unfolds, from his discovery as a baby floating in the Nile to his role in the mass exodus of the Jewish population from Egyptian rule. The story focuses less on religious text and more on the human aspects of an entire nation converting to monotheism, and Fleming's skill at tying the royal Egyptian bloodline into biblical accounts delivers a compelling origin story rooted in well-researched historical context. Fans of Egyptian history and smart biblical retellings will find this both immersive and informative.

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

## FICTION

**Hail Judeas Caesar**

Ryan Fleming | Wellspring Books  
350p, e-book, \$2.99, ASIN B01MXEMSUO

"This cannot be true," muses Pontius Pilate upon receiving his transfer orders to Judea, the barren land devoted to monotheism and a faith Pilate finds laughable. Accompanied by Claudia, his compassionate and sharp-witted wife, he embarks on a political chess game of governing this so-called deviant region where faith is law, resistance is holy, and every compromise is a betrayal. The repulsion is mutual: when he leaves Caesarea on his way to Jerusalem, zealots attack with reckless abandon, despite being vastly outnumbered. Among them, a well-known man named Barabbas survives and is taken prisoner.

With a degree of detached observation, Fleming renders Pilate a man walking on a tightrope. His political maneuvers—beginning with hanging images of Emperor Tiberius Caesar throughout Jerusalem, an act that the Jews rebuke as sacrilege—and interactions with Judean leaders such as Antipas, Joseph of Arimathea, and the Sanhedrin depict him as a strategist. Still, his tenderness toward Claudia and



*Thought-provoking revisionist novel of Rome's influence on Christianity.*

**Great for fans of** Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Pär Lagerkvist's *Barabbas*.

This historical reimagining places political pragmatism at the heart of one of history's fiercest debates—whether or not Jesus was nailed to the cross. Though the novel invites further research into historical records, Fleming's revisionist audacity, in-depth characterization, and intricate worldbuilding stand as his triumphs. His demonstration of a balance between Roman imperial ambition and the sensitivities of the local population offers a compelling portrait of governance in an age where gods were made, unmade, and remade to serve empires. Pilate emerges as perhaps the story's most tragic figure, a man who sought control but instead helped birth a religious revolution that would outlast Rome itself.

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

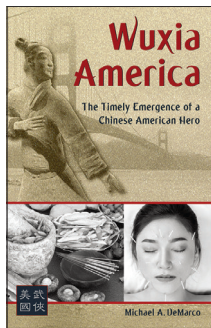
## MYSTERY/THRILLER

**Wuxia America: The Timely Emergence of a Chinese American Hero**

Michael A. DeMarco | Via Media Publishing  
148p, mass market, \$16.95, ISBN 978-1893765498

DeMarco fuses historical intrigue with high-stakes action in his fiction debut, as Jason Lou, a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine in modern-day California, becomes entangled in a web of international crime. When a newspaper profile on Lou—whose ancestors first arrived in California in 1863—draws unwanted attention, a home break-in leads investigators to uncover a shadowy organization, driven by "the value of gold and bone repatriation" for Chinese immigrants who perished during California's gold rush and railroad expansion. That prompts Lou and law enforcement officials to join forces, embarking on a daring ride to bring down the syndicate.

Lou is an intriguing protagonist—calm under pressure, unshaken by violence, and deeply tied to his family's long lineage of healers. His expertise proves invaluable as he works alongside law enforcement to untangle the mystery, making him not only a skilled doctor but an unexpected detective—and a highly trained martial



*Rapid-fire novel of crime, martial arts, and Chinese-American history.*

**Great for fans of** S.J. Rozan's *Paper Son*, Barry Lancet's *Tokyo Kill*.

arts master who can more than take care of his own. The novel spins on several action sequences that brandish his skills, with shootouts and home invasions that see Lou landing flurries of well-aimed strikes on unsuspecting intruders while waiting for backup to arrive. DeMarco keeps the pace frenzied and tensions high throughout, though the scripted prose and scattered stock images lack the emotional gut-punch needed to land edgier scenes. Several passages convey more martial arts how-to than suspenseful fight clips, as when DeMarco details an attempted mugging with phrases like "Jason's turning waist caused his left elbow and hand to torque the attacker's forearm, breaking his elbow." The most interesting passages are the novel's explorations of the experiences of early Chinese immigrants in America, detailing the harsh labor conditions and oppression they suffered while toiling for America's intercontinental railroad. That celebration of resilience and history, combined with action-packed storytelling, makes *Wuxia America* a lively read.

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

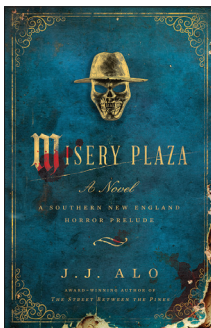
## SF/FANTASY/HORROR

**Misery Plaza**

J.J. Alo | SNE Horror, LLC  
487p, trade paper, \$19.99, ISBN 979-8-9923523-0-6

A bloody but intimate epic of the weird West, Alo's genre-bending thriller presents a classic premise—a one-time outlaw tries to lay low and protect his family in a frontier of bandits, marshals, and ever-looming trouble—and juices it with elements of horror and science fiction. The prologue covers the crash, in the American Southwest, of a flying craft piloted by something called the Antiquarian, so it's no spoiler to report that the novel's family-man protagonist, calling himself Potter, is in more danger than he knows when he endeavors to dig a well on the hardscrabble New Mexico property he and his two children have moved to after Potter gets spooked by a brush with his criminal past. Potter finds something, of course—a mysterious craft for which his only frame of reference are the ironclad gunships like the USS *Merrimack*. What they unearth will rock the small town of Missouri Plaza, a place where, Potter is told, "No one intentionally arrives ... and stays."

Alo has packed *Misery Plaza* with gory incident. As a bounty hunter closes in, and local fanatics see Potter's son as a sacrificial vessel for their own bizarre ends,



*Splatter epic mashup of western, SF, and horror.*

**Great for fans of** Andy Davidson's *In the Valley of the Sun*, R.S. Belcher's *Golgotha* series.

tries to find it in himself to protect and provide for his children. Regret and a sense of spoiled promise haunt both the protagonist and Alo's depiction of the West itself.

That sweep of storytelling comes at the expense of narrative momentum in the novel's ambling first half, as Alo introduces the various souls who inhabit Missouri Plaza, illuminates backstories through flashbacks and nightmares, and offers chapters from the perspectives of the various human threats targeting the hero's family. The back half, though, is brisk and brutal, alive with clever action, slasher horror, desperate showdowns, and the mysteries that (quite literally) lurk beneath town. Not for nothing is one character named Roswell.

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

## SF/FANTASY/HORROR

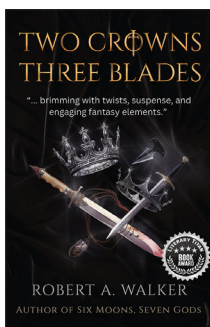
**Two Crowns, Three Blades: The Legends of Baelon, Book Two**

Robert A. Walker

393p, e-book, \$4.99, ISBN 979-8-9889232-4-4

Walker's second in The Legends of Baelon series (after *Six Moons, Seven Gods*) unfolds in a kingdom where war is waged not just on the battlefield, but in the shadows of power and betrayal. Fueled by vengeance, King Axil of Aranox declares war on The Guild of Takers, determined to eradicate the shadowy syndicate responsible for years of corruption and bloodshed. His trusted military commander, Erik Carson, leads the assault, while Sibil Dunn, whose mother once saved the king's life, copes with her family's death by seeking a place in his army. When turned down, she opts for a more dangerous path—going undercover within the Guild itself to bring down its elusive leader.

Walker weaves political machinations, epic battles, and personal struggles into a multi-layered narrative that shifts perspectives to capture the full scope of war. Sibil's journey is fraught with peril, guided by the wisdom of retired royal guard Rolft



*Multilayered fantasy of war, shifting alliances, and deadly intrigue.*

**Great for fans of** Emberly Ash's *Court of Vines and Vipers*, Robin Hobb's *The Tawny Man Trilogy*.

daughter into a warrior—and Erik's struggle between duty and morality.

*Two Crowns, Three Blades* balances deeply personal struggles with large-scale battles, enriched by authentic medieval tactics that lend a sense of realism to the action. Sibil's infiltration tests her loyalties and her bond with Tristan Godfrey, a knight haunted by survivor's guilt and his unspoken love for her, while Erik faces intrigue within his ranks. Both must navigate shifting alliances and deadly battles to survive. The payoffs are satisfying, and Walker leaves several mysteries unsolved, setting the stage for greater conflicts ahead.

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

## PARENTING

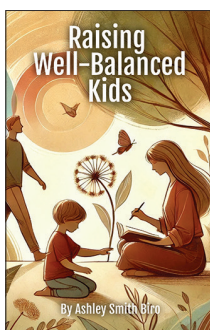
**Raising Well-Balanced Kids**

Ashley Biro

363p, hardcover, \$24.99, ISBN 979-8-330-58328-7

Holistic health practitioner Biro (author of *Massage for Couples*) breaks down the basics for parents seeking a more natural lifestyle for their children, sharing her own experience “raising children in harmony with nature and health-conscious choices.” After years of chronic health issues—and an eventual lupus diagnosis—Biro turned to holistic treatments when the medical system failed her, discovering in the process that not only did she feel better, but her symptoms were eliminated—results that far exceeded those she received from prescription medication alone. She blends that personal story with raising her two children, offering readers lists of home remedies, herbs, supplements, and lifestyle changes to “support the growth and wellness of the next generation.”

Biro acknowledges that her advice is meant to supplement standard healthcare, not replace it, and she fully embraces the idea of being a “crunchy mom”—discovering natural alternatives to healing the body and harnessing robust wellness. Her guidance is well-organized and itemized, as she tackles hot button topics like



*Comprehensive and practical resource for holistic living.*

**Great for fans of** Deborah MacNamara's *Nourished*, Ava Green's *Raised Naturally*.

vaccinations in addition to nutrition, diet, and a slew of informational tidbits, including a fascinating breakdown on Iridology (understanding potential health tendencies by studying the colored part of the eye). Other notable discussions address biofeedback, muscle reflex testing, gut health, and environmental

pollutants. For readers who favor real-life examples, Biro includes a handful of testimonials from other “crunchy moms” she's worked with.

Though the information is extensive, Biro's personable tone and organized layout keep it user-friendly, and readers will appreciate her practical advice, from quizzes to kid-friendly recipes to scripts parents can use when communicating with healthcare providers. Worksheets at the end of the book curate a personalized blueprint for any family, drawing from Biro's three wellness pillars—diet, lifestyle, and community involvement. Throughout, Biro stays inviting and informative, opening the door for families to explore a holistic lifestyle and build a supportive community of like-minded individuals.

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

## MEMOIR

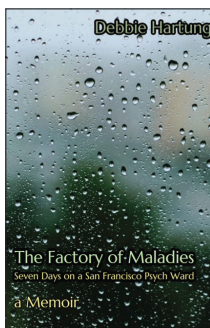
**The Factory of Maladies: Seven Days on a San Francisco Psych Ward**

Debbie Hartung

170p, trade paper, \$19.99, ISBN 979-8-9912615-0-0

This layered, emotional memoir finds a young woman seeking answers to questions locked away in her mind. Amid a disoriented haze of prescribed medication and confusion, Debbie Hartung wakes to find herself admitted to a psychiatric ward. As she pieces together the events that led to her 72-hour hold at Pacific Heights hospital—and realizes her chances of being released are dwindling every day—Debbie immerses herself in the facility's daily routines, desperately seeking anyone who will help her return home. When her memories start to return, and spark cloudy recollections of what led to her placement, Debbie's growing awareness that those closest to her are keeping her institutionalized for their own gain is chilling.

Hartung shares her story of mental illness in suspenseful and riveting tones, through candid writing that details her suicide attempt, family betrayal, and despair. Woven intricately into her own tale are the doctors, nurses, and patients she interacts with every day during her time at the hospital, and, though the narrative reflects on a short time span of just one week, even readers will lose track of the



*Tense, riveting story of one woman's week spent in a psychiatric ward.*

**Great for fans of** Abi Morgan's *This Is Not a Pity Memoir*, Norah Vincent's *Voluntary Madness*.

days amid the repetitive, mind-numbing routine of life in the psych ward. Hartung sketches her anguish as she's stonewalled by doctors and brushed off by her aunt, who holds her medical power, forcing her into a frenzy for freedom—and a frantic search for answers.

Tense emotion and snappy humor push the narrative of this introspective debut, as Hartung touches on mental health and

multilayered family dynamics, all concealed within her terrifying sense of powerlessness and feelings of being trapped. Hartung's story is so palpable, readers, too, will feel the weight and fear of a young woman who has essentially lost control over her own life. This will transfix—and leave readers rooting for a woman determined to take back her voice and power, even when everything is stacked against her.

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

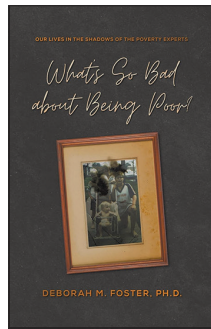
## MEMOIR

**What's So Bad About Being Poor?: Our Lives in the Shadow of the Poverty Experts**

Deborah M. Foster | D & D Publishing  
418p, e-book, \$8.99, ISBN 979-8-9897633-0-6

"For way too many people, we were so poor we didn't deserve to eat," Foster writes in this clear-eyed, point-proving memoir of growing up in poverty with "ultraconservative, fundamentalist parents" with mental illness. That pained line—describing the family's "nightly tour of churches offering free suppers" in Waterloo, Iowa, during the Reagan era—burns, like much of this debut memoir, with hard-won insight about how Americans think about poverty. Foster reports her parents' feelings of shame at relying on government programs whose help was meager even before the 1980s cuts.

Amid wrenching memories of food insecurity, parental neglect, and experiences of being groomed and sexually assaulted by older boys and men, Foster conjures memorable portraits of her parents, religious seekers whose lives on the margins, she writes, "reinforced" their "negative beliefs about the medical establishment,



*Clear-eyed memoir of rising from poverty and the power of good social programs.*

**Great for fans of** Sarah Smarsh's *Heartland*, Matthew Desmond's *Poverty, by America*.

Institute's Charles Murray—Foster fired off a blistering response, confounding her professor but setting her on a lifelong mission to prove Murray wrong.

Foster writes movingly, with urgent detail and feeling, about growing up too "cold, too hot, too hungry, too dirty, too pained, too overworked, and too stigmatized." She digs into the project, led by AEI and others, to convince Americans that "social programs were too large and were eroding incentives" to work. Foster's heartening account of pulling herself from poverty, earning a PhD, and seizing control over life is sprawling and shaggy but has heartbreaking power and wisdom.

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

## PICTURE BOOKS

**Watch Me!: A Celebration of Big Dreams, Endless Possibilities, and Who You'll Become**

Kimberly Schmit | IngramSpark  
46p, trade paper, \$18.99, ISBN 979-8-218-57015-6

Schmit debuts with an uplifting yet curiously repetitive celebration of the many different careers women can master in this engaging picture book. The story centers on a magical mirror that allows young girls a glimpse of themselves as adults, flourishing in their chosen professions, with Schmit reminding readers from the start that the "future is shaped not only by what [you] want to be but also by the kind of people [you] choose to become." Whether it's Emma learning she will become a scientist who searches for cures to deadly diseases, Maya pirouetting her way into professional dance, or Sienna starting her own restaurant, each girl featured here discovers not just her future career but also inspiring life lessons along the way.

This is an intriguing approach to empowering young female readers, and Schmit highlights aspects of female leadership that deserve attention: jobs that have historically been given to male workers—like firefighting, aerospace engineering, and architectural design—can be pursued by women as well. Just as crucial is



*Sweet but repetitive picture book encouraging young girls to imagine big futures.*

**Great for fans of** Victoria Tentler-Krylov's *Building Zaha*, Monica Clark-Robinson's *Standing on Her Shoulders*.

Schmit's theme is compelling, and the uncredited digital images of each young girl gazing at her adult self are bright and reverent, though their textures and styles change abruptly throughout, creating a sense of disunity even as the poses themselves prove repetitive. Also repetitive is the phrasing and scenarios in each girl's section, a choice that diminishes the later scenes' power, as each hits the same beats in similar language, inviting readers to skim. Still, the variety of careers Schmit describes is motivating, offering young readers a panorama of possibilities for what their futures could be.

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

## MIDDLE GRADE

**Charlie's Adventures in Sock Junction**

Michael S. Newman | Global Publishing  
185p, e-book, \$6.99, ASIN B0DV4VQJM8

Newman introduces young readers to the wonders of science, and theoretical physics, in this charming tale that finds cosmic possibilities in a most everyday mystery: what happens to lost socks? Six-year-old Charlie is lucky to have a dad who is a Caltech professor of astrophysics and a cosmologist mom who encourages his creativity, saying, "Charlie, you're always thinking outside the box!" As everyone has done, Charlie one day loses a sock—in this case a prized one he needs for soccer practice—in the clothes dryer. One night, Charlie is surprised and intrigued when two talking socks appear in his bedroom via a wormhole. They are Charm and Strange, subatomic particles from the Sock Junction dimension who, to communicate with Charlie, have taken on the form of socks.

Treating science as fun and relatable, Newman cleverly blends everyday kid activities (like soccer, working as a team, and playing with the family dog) with real science (the story touches on the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, the Fermi Paradox, the multiverse, muons, and more) and entertaining fantasy elements, like magic crystals that make children feel special and useful. The revelations get goofier as



*Witty story of interdimensional socks, championing science fact and fiction.*

**Great for fans of** Jon Scieszka's *Frank Einstein...*, K. Tempest Bradford's *Ruby Finley...*

when pregnant mom Miranda and her best friend Claudia plan a heist to borrow a crystal from the new age crystal shop so that Sock Junction scientists can clone it.

The science fact and fiction enchant, but a lack of editorial polish and an abundance of over-descriptive dialogue tags ("NO, NO!" the socks exclaimed, their voices urgent, almost pleading) distracts. Nevertheless, the high-spirited creativity and championing of science will spur curiosity.

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

## YOUNG ADULT

EDITOR'S PICK

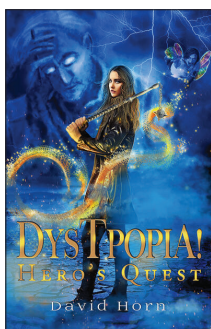
**Dystpopia!: Hero's Quest**

David Horn

480p, trade paper, \$12.99, ISBN 979-8-9885430-9-1

Pirandello and Mel Brooks go YA in this hilarious meta-fictional fantasy split between our world and the Kingdom of Dystpopia, named for a typo from Murray, a 45-year-old writer who, in the face of alimony payments, wants to break into the YA fantasy genre. "Are you a teenager? Do you even know any teenagers?" Murray's agent asks, and when the best response he can come up with is "the pizza delivery boy was recently a teenager," Murray abandons the idea. But not so fast. Because Hero, the 17-year-old "take-no-prisoners, nails-for-breakfast" protagonist Murray had dreamed up, won't let herself be killed off that easy. Hero has notes—and she's disgusted that her creator has a cat.

Hero has woes: she must save the Kingdom of Dystpopia and defeat the Queendom of Fant, daunting tasks made impossible if she can't persuade Murray, the hapless weaver of all things, to let her exist. Murray would rather write a musical



*Side-splitting YA fantasy whose hero demands her author finish the book.*

**Great for fans of** Delilah S. Dawson and Kevin Hearne's *Kill the Farm Boy*, Rainbow Rowell's *Carry On*.

than a story of swords, sorcery, and revolution, but he persists at Hero's urging, even as she hectors him at every step. But a funny thing happens as they snipe and scratch at each other across the pages of Horn's formally inventive novel. Somehow, Hero gains the ability to control her story, a development Murray finds both alarming and fascinating—and that leads to more conflict. Horn also intro-

duces a dazzling cast of characters and creatures to help or hinder Hero: winged half-zombie girl Pesto, pal Toaster, love/hate interest Rodolfo, flying zombies, and "three-foot zorcs with their dark-green skin and sharp teeth," sometimes organized into literal bands. ("Author, stop this nonsense," Hero snaps. "Still not a musical!")

With some welcome dark humor and satiric insights into YA tropes, the playful hilarity doesn't let up for nearly 500 pages, which is a bit much—the novel is fun and surprisingly emotional, but its length feels protracted. Still, *Dystpopia!* delights. Bring on the sequel.

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

## YOUNG ADULT

**Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches From Outer Space! (A 21st Century Fairy Tale)**

I. S. Noah | Fulton Books

249p, trade paper, \$18.95, ISBN 979-8-887-31691-8

When aspiring teen journalists and best friends Violet Wilson and Pamela Edison head to the woods for writing inspiration one summer day, they quickly discover more than they bargained for. Along for the ride are Violet's younger brothers—13-year-old Brad and six-year-old Willys—who compound the trouble both girls stumble into when they chance upon eccentric science teacher Dr. Harrison and, later, a UFO that, when opened, reveals a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Despite being warned by his sister not to, Willys promptly eats part of the sandwich, inadvertently sparking intergalactic tension when Goobexes—sandwich-like aliens—arrive on Earth and demand the return of their missing son, Goobex 3.

Noah delivers an amusing mix of satirizing science fiction clichés and pop culture references in this playful debut, from hints of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* to comic books to an elaborate trip through a secret government base. While Willys desperately hopes the sandwich will endow him



*Sharp, playful satire on humankind's darker attributes.*

**Great for fans of** Libba Bray's *Beauty Queens*, M.T. Anderson and Eugene Yelchin's *The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge*.

with special powers, wondering if he can control weather patterns or turn into animals, the adults in the story are strangely nonchalant about the whole situation, ping-ponging between defensive weapons discussions and sharp commentary on America's political landscape. As Violet and Pamela's families unite with the FBI to search for Goobex 3—and Dr. Harrison, who's also gone missing—the Goobexes put their "undigester" device into play, forcing Willys to repeatedly vomit up what they believe to be the remains of their son.

Classic setups like that entertain, while squabbling between characters, miscommunication, and the hypocritical actions of many of the main players lay bare humankind's darker attributes; astute YA readers will recognize the story's conflict could have been avoided with some calm resolve instead of emotional reactivity. Noah closes with a nod to alternate dimensions and savvy advice from Dr. Harrison: "A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference."

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

## YOUNG ADULT

**The Storyteller from Balincia: The Driftstone Series, Book 1**

S.W. Kent | B&amp;M Publishing, LLC

461p, e-book, \$22.99, ISBN 979-8-991-58072-4

This warm fantasy debut unites the cozy—lots of rabbit stew, edifying embraces, fae revels, and vows to "protect the hearts I love"—with the classically epic as a young man of mysterious origins dares to venture into the wider world, moved by a surprising new impulse: curiosity. "I'm ready to be the author of my own story," declares Birk, a storyteller in Balincia, the tiny, apparently utopian kingdom ruled by twin sisters Edi and Pan, representing order and chaos. Before this, Birk has happily recited, with marionette accompaniment, upbeat stories of the past from the twins' library, but an encounter with a mysterious woman who gives him a blank-paged book inspires him to start asking hard questions, like why the sisters erase the memories of those who venture into the surrounding mountains. Birk soon finds himself confronted by Edi and Pan—and daring to leave Balincia, guided only by visions and that book.

From there, Kent conjures a fantasy travelogue that emphasizes charm, friendship, and self-discovery. With a relaxed pace and many characters to introduce,



*Character-rich fantasy of leaving a false utopia to discover the world and love.*

**Great for fans of** TJ Klune, T. Kingfisher.

magic-eating arcanivores, or an aquatic dragon that serves as a royal chariot; conversations that illuminate backstories and wounded hearts; the development, through games and practice, of the powers the protagonist didn't understand he possessed.

The slow-developing vagueness of Birk's quest and a prevailing lack of narrative urgency will frustrate readers who prefer tighter adventures, but Kent offers something more rare: a deep, heartening humanity. The tender relationship that Birk develops with the wild man Grey is moving, and other characters—like the twins, Shayvonne, and Princess Zara—reveal rich depths and unexpected graces. They're a pleasure to discover. Appendices are detailed and inviting.

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