

JULY 14, 2025

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37 New BookLife Titles Reviewed

Breaking the Silence

Activist Mary Fisher's new memoir seeks the truth

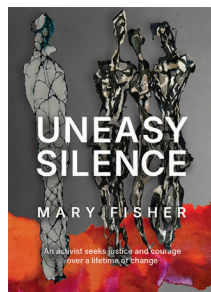
BY LEAH GRISHAM

Mary Fisher is an artist, author, and activist best known for her groundbreaking 1992 speech "A Whisper of AIDS," delivered at the Republican National Convention shortly after her HIV diagnosis, which is a landmark in American AIDS discourse. Her 1995 memoir, *My Name Is Mary*, received praise from such figures as former President Gerald Ford and the activist Larry Kramer. Over the decades, Fisher has continued her advocacy through global humanitarian work, authorship, art, and her role as a UN special representative.

Now in her 70s, Fisher addresses the most prominent political and social issues of our era in her latest book, *Uneasy Silence: An Activist Seeks Justice and Courage Over a Lifetime of Change*.

What made you decide to return to memoir as a format? How was the process of writing *Uneasy Silence* different from earlier forms of personal writing?

There are a lot of kinds of narratives we use, from poetry to novels, and from textbooks to policy analyses. But I wanted to communicate my own experience, and do it honestly. So a memoir, which is sort of like a public diary, seemed like the right format to communicate



what I wanted to say. Plus, as I near 80 years of age, which by itself seems impossible, I'm confident that I've learned who I am, so that knowledge becomes the basis of a memoir for better or for worse. And then there's this: I dedicated this book to my grandchildren. I want them some day to know that, in fairly dark hours, I not only loved them, but I tried to serve them with a big helping of the truth.

***Uneasy Silence* does not shy away from depicting your own insecurities, and it also does not give hard-and-fast instructions on what readers should do with the wisdom you provide. Can you say a little bit about these decisions?** At the highest levels of our nation, truth is being battered by campaigns fueled by nothing more than lies and self-interest. I needed to be willing to break out of my own uneasy

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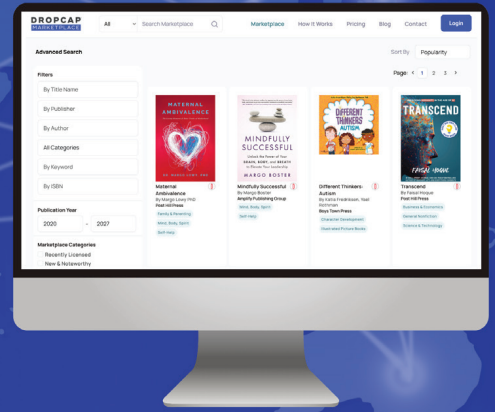
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silence and take a stand. At the beginning, the critical question was: how vulnerable do I want to be? I decided fairly soon to be as honest as possible, telling the truth, even if that truth was not especially flattering. I couldn't ask others to stand up and speak the truth if I didn't dare do it myself. And I also wanted readers, especially women of a certain age, to know that we don't have to be Superwoman to be an advocate for change, a member of the resistance. Anyone willing to put themselves on the line by voting, by joining protests, by writing Congressional leaders, by modeling the truth for our children and grandchildren can make a real difference in today's struggle for integrity. We don't need to be more than we are. We just need to respond to our own uneasy silence by speaking the truth and caring for the Other. That's enough.

On a related note, do you have any advice for writers who are struggling to write, edit, and/or publish their own memoirs? Did you learn anything in writing your most recent memoir that others might find useful?

As *Uneasy Silence* was coming together, I was continually reminded of that old piece of advice: write what you know. At my age, I have a pretty good idea of who I am, so that's what I offer the reader. The only real question, as I noted

"I dedicated this book to my grandchildren. I want them some day to know that, in fairly dark hours, I not only loved them, but I tried to serve them with a big helping of the truth."

earlier, is how vulnerable I was willing to be. Well, I suppose there was a second question: how interesting would this be to others? I didn't want to tell boring stories or self-promoting anecdotes—who'd want to read that? But the book is based mostly on my personal experience.

One of the most striking aspects of *Uneasy Silence* is the images that accompany the prose. Can you tell readers a little bit about these?

Art, in various forms, has always been how my soul expresses itself most truthfully. The book's words are important to me, but art is the language of my heart. I hope that, as readers come through the book, the images they see invite them to pause, to ask what it is that we're learning together, and maybe to imagine new ways to oppose injustice or to end hunger or to care for the suffering. Meanwhile, if you want to hear my most authentic voice, you'll listen with your heart to my art. 🎨

Leah Grisham is a Cleveland-based writer and book reviewer.

Q&A SPONSORED

BookLife Talks with Marie Kuipers

In *We're All Mad Here*, a "memoir brimming with bracing dark humor, unapologetic self-deprecation, and a proudly unfiltered voice," as BookLife Reviews called it in its Editor's Pick review, Kuipers relates her difficult childhood while tackling the absurdities of life.

Was there anything you wanted to include but didn't?

Names and addresses of my enemies. Kidding. But I really did want to include an "Enemies List" in the table of contents. Which would have just been a blank page with a little note saying that if you came here looking for your name, you're definitely on it. I mean—I'm petty, but I'm not that petty.

If you could pick anyone to give this book to, who would it be and why?



I'd give it to my 13-year-old self. To let her know that no, this is Not Normal. Not all families are like this. Don't believe everything they tell you, especially the things they tell you about yourself. Be proud of your bonkers ass; celebrate the things about yourself that they want you to hide. Find your people—preferably in places you're not allowed to go, like the roller rink. You will be fine and you will be fierce.

What's next for you?

I'm just out here making new memories that will eventually end up as hilarious, *slightly* embellished stories in my next book. Hanging out with my chickens and my chosen people. Working, laughing, celebrating my bonkers ass. Healing.

Life is alright.

For more, visit booklife.com/kuipers



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

The Myth of Romantic Love: A Story

Olivia Eielson | Lebedig Press
374p, e-book, \$3.99, ISBN 979-8-9925245-1-2

"A revolution had begun, but it was hard to know just what to do with it," writes Eielson at the start of this engrossing 1970s love story. Ph.D. student and aspiring painter Louise is living life on her own terms after leaving her emotionally distant husband and an academic career to pursue art. When she meets research scientist Philip at a bohemian party characteristic of the social scene at the time, the two feel an immediate connection. Despite Philip being married, they start a passionate love affair, one embodied by staggering sexual tension and a "drunken sense of unity," but that's just the start of their story. What follows is an often tumultuous relationship that exposes the cost of love—for women in particular—in the '70s.

Despite the title, Louise's belief in love couldn't be more evident, though she faces many challenges in its pursuit. Readers may find those struggles resonant:



Intricate, thoughtful study on love, set against 1970s feminism.

Great for fans of Dinaw Mengestu's *All Our Names*, Meg Wolitzer's *The Female Persuasion*.

women's reactions—often discounted and dubbed as "hysterical"—are deconstructed to show the careful thought just under the surface.

Though the novel is lengthy, readers will be rewarded with an immersive, dynamic give-and-take between Louise and Philip that's hard to let go of once started. Eielson delivers multilayered, complex characters who are flawed but profoundly human and engaging. What threads throughout is the concept of true love as a stripping away of the world's trappings, a laying bare that leaves a simple, remarkable knowing in its wake.

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

FICTION

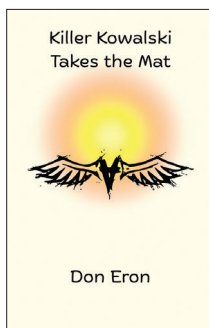
⚡ EDITOR'S PICK

Killer Kowalski Takes the Mat

Don Eron | Contingency Street Press, LLC
378p, trade paper, \$17.99, ISBN 978-1-958015-08-7

As charming as it is wise, this big-hearted, richly textured novel of growing up, falling in love, and discovering one's path and self at the dawn of the 1970s centers on Illinois high-school wrestler Dan "Biggie" Bluestone as he strives to make it through his senior year undefeated and unscored-on—and to get recruited—with a scholarship—by a major school. Despite his size and strength, Dan is shy and often quiet, resistant to confrontation and prone to apologizing for no particular reason. Yet he works hard enough to offset his sometimes indulgent eating. Motivating Dan in his relentless workouts and on-the-mat heroics is the mid-century Canadian professional wrestler Killer Kowalski, whose energizing example drives him to persevere.

Dan's senior year finds him facing challenges and tragedy, captured in brisk, compelling scenes and reflections that Eron (*And Go to Innisfree*) crafts to



Wise and moving novel of a high-school wrestler discovering unexpected love.

Great for fans of Benjamin Markovits's *The Sidekick*, Taylor Jenkins Reid's *Carrie Soto Is Back*.

those moments when unexpected disaster crashes into the everyday.

Despite much striking detail about wrestling, the novel's heart is in Dan's discovering life beyond the mat—and that he has more to offer the world than being able to bench 360. Guiding him through that journey is Gloria, a character as memorable as Dan himself, a young woman who grows close to him in surprising, off-kilter phone conversations, probing Dan with the incisiveness of an analyst and the hot-and-cold wit of a wounded flirt. Their slow courtship thrills and moves, a dance between guarded souls, wary yet drawn to their obvious connection.

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

FICTION

Amora

Grant J. Hallstrom | ClearStone Publishing
236p, trade paper, \$14.99, ISBN 978-0-9821503-3-7

Hallstrom (*Emotional Black Holes*) draws on Christian theology and a clear passion for Roman history in this novel based on the true story of Amora, a Roman noblewoman, and Maria, her slave, who were martyred for embracing Christianity. Amora and Maria are condemned to death for their Christian beliefs after denunciation by Leo, Amora's husband. Antonio, Leo's steward, who secretly loved Maria, vows revenge after Leo has him thrown into the quarries.

Antonio rises in rank from slave, becoming a personal attendant to General Sulla and being elevated to centurion status by Marcus Aurelius after proving his battle skills. After Antonio and his fellow soldiers weather a siege, Marcus Aurelius sends him to Rome, where Antonio plans to exact his vengeance on Leo. But unbeknownst to the former steward, Leo has suffered a reversal of fortune, adding an intriguing twist to the plot.



Readers enamored of ancient Rome and its warriors will be drawn in.

Great for fans of Francine Rivers's *An Echo in the Darkness*, Steven Saylor's *Roman Blood*.

Roman institution and its effect on those in bondage.

With intense focus on the intricately written battle scenes, depth of character is sacrificed. The author instead highlights the strength of relationships. Leo overcoming his disdain for his disabled son, Esteban, is a key aspect of his redemption as he begins to reflect on his life choices. Hallstrom's focus on the Roman persecution of Christians is laced with a healthy dose of theology that will likely appeal to Christian readers but may be too intensive for historical fiction fans. The fast-paced narrative, complete with real historical figures, will appeal to fans of ancient Roman culture.

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

FICTION

Consequence of Power: Isabella's Season

Sabrina Lund | Goose House Publisher
304p, trade paper, \$15.99, ISBN 978-1-0687879-2-8

Lund's debut, the first of a series, wrestles with the machinations of power in the hands of the aristocracy, set against the tapestry of 18th century London. Isabella Thornbury, egged on by her charismatic friend Lady Ingram and accompanied by her mother, thrills to her first London season. She immediately falls under the spell of the Duke of Winterbourne, though a chance reconnection with her childhood friend, Augustus Kant, son of the Earl of Cheltenham, leaves her mildly uneasy. But when a pocketbook belonging to Sir Francis Dashwood accidentally comes into her possession, Isabella is quickly thrust into the shady dealings darkening the glitter of high society.

Consequence of Power unfolds through multiple perspectives, though Isabella takes center stage, sweeping readers into the dazzling—but deadly—lives of society's high and mighty, while plumbing the hardships faced by less fortunate denizens. Lund sets a convincing stage, lavish with authentic characters, from the



England's 18th century high society is undone by its thirst for power.

Great for fans of Winston Graham's *Demelza*, Diana Gabaldon's *Lord John and the Private Matter*.

Though in possession of Dashwood's pocketbook for some time, Isabella curiously ignores it at first, leaving this more suspenseful plot point languishing until the story's building tension forces her to confront its contents. The revelations she discovers sour her adulation of society's upper crust, driving her to pursue her passion in the most unexpected of places. Lund builds the tension to a thunderous crescendo and shocking ending, sparking eager anticipation for the next in the series. This is a rich depiction of the lives of 18th century England's high society, as well as a thoughtful study on the hunger for power that drives many to destruction.

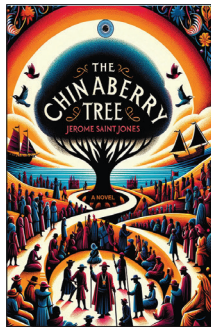
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

The Chinaberry Tree

Jerome Saintjones | Stillman Hill Press
252p, hardcover, \$24.99, ISBN 978-1-966519-00-3

Rich with vital voices, spiritual undertones, and urgent cultural and historical insight, Saintjones's novel explores Black life in America and delves into the hard topics of racism, oppression, and true allyship. As a professional at the local Black college in Ebonia, white professor and self-proclaimed "imperialistic anthropologist" Arnold Giovanni soaks in Black culture by eavesdropping on the patrons' stories and friendly banter in a local bar called The Chinaberry Tree. Thinking himself an ally and companion to the men and women of Ebonia, Giovanni's inner monologues reveal instead stereotyped judgment and sometimes resentment toward those he claims to understand. Through the narratives of The Chinaberry Tree patrons, Giovanni reflects on the history he's learned, passed on through characters who linger in the mind after the last page is turned: Vietnam veteran and bar co-owner Bo Willie; Crazy Hezekiah, whose ramblings whisper of the town's history and future; and Piper Lawrence, still swimming in the waters of his youth and time spent with Langston Hughes.



Moving, complex tale of a white professor at a Black college.

Great for fans of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, Dolen Perkins-Valdez's *Happy Land*.

As Giovanni reflects on their stories, he gains a better understanding of not only the people he is studying, but of himself and who he ultimately wants to be: "What do you do when you come to realize that the only devil in the world might have sprung from a lineage too close to you?" he muses.

Saintjones probes complex questions of intention, perception, and privilege, giving voice to generational Black pain and triumphs through Giovanni's unlikely perspective, in an America that "has been sold a bill of goods that national dysfunction can continue forever and that 'the world will wait on us as we work it out.'"

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

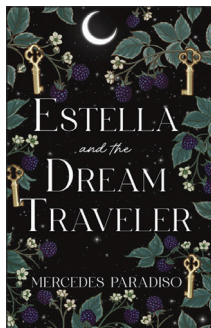
FICTION

Estella and the Dream Traveler

Mercedes Paradiso | Mercedes Paradiso, LLC
342p, e-book, \$5.99, ISBN 979-8-9912170-3-3

In a post-pandemic, AI-embracing Silicon Valley, Estella Larsen struggles to reconnect with the world. Still reeling from her husband's death, she searches for a home for herself and her two daughters, haunted by recurring, grief-fueled visions of a black-clad, faceless man. At the same time, she meets Caelum Di Rosa, a drum teacher whose stoic visage hides immeasurable knowledge: Caelum is a dream traveler, capable of exploring time and space while he sleeps. And he knows Estella intimately—because they were lovers in a past life. Just his physical presence rekindles embers in Estella's heart, and when half-souls from beyond the veil threaten to plunge the world into chaos, her connection with Caelum may be the only way to save it.

Paradiso delivers a romance that's simple on the surface but thrums with heart. Estella and Caelum's past lives enrich their present-day bond, sparkling with the intricacies that accompany years-long, trusting relationships—such as when Caelum plays a song that was "their song" in the far-distant past. While the comforting nuances of that romance are endearing, the conflict is harder to follow. Paradiso's antagonists



Endearing, philosophical romance transcending time and space.

Great for fans of Ann Brashares's *My Name Is Memory*, Elle O'Roark's *Parallel*.

Estella and the Dream Traveler is rooted in connections. Estella shares heart-warming moments with her daughters, revealing the depths of their grief and love, while even the staunchly independent Caelum develops steady friendships with his inner circle. Those bonds create team dynamics that are fun to read and easy to cheer for, resulting in a treasure trove of relationship-driven moments that romantasy fans will find appealing.

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

effervescent Lady Ingram to the pampered Reverend Fernsby, who spends his society visits indulging in teatime delicacies and endorsing Isabella's coming out. A delightful addition is Pudding, aka Mr Thornbury, the family's canine companion always on the prowl for a treat, and Isabella's bold, loyal maid Heloise will linger in readers' minds.

The tales Giovanni harvests from the bar patrons touch on childhood trauma, Black pain, and the plight, struggle, and resilience of Black Americans. Saintjones juxtaposes the Black experience with Giovanni's narrative—a "lone white man" who believes he belongs merely because of his incorporation into Black spaces (the town, the bar, the college, and the

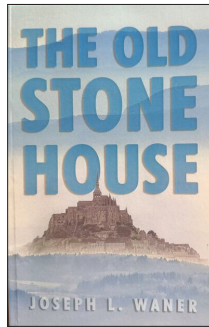
are less crystallized than the story's central couple, with their actions driven by motives explained too late to generate sustained tension. Still, Paradiso's distinctive worldbuilding enlivens the narrative, introducing creative terminology like the "in-between," a shadowy, ominous resting place where half-souls can be sent—and where no living being wants to go.

MYSTERY/THRILLER**The Old Stone House**

Joseph L. Waner | Dorrance Publishing, Co.
86p, mass market, \$29, ISBN 979-8-893-41491-2

This thrilling paranormal mystery novella, Waner's debut, centers on Nathan Gudin, an archaeologist tasked with overseeing renovations at the historic Le Beauvoir restaurant on the iconic tidal island of Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy, France. As the tide rushes in and traps unwary tourists in the island's treacherous mudflats, Nathan watches helplessly—until a mysterious figure, Harold, appears and seemingly propels the victims to safety without physically touching them. Nathan senses he has encountered not just a hero, but a true friend—and perhaps something more. Soon, the construction work reveals the kind of discovery that tantalizes readers of archaeological thrillers: not just the skull of a saint, but long-buried chambers beneath the island's surface, shrouded in mystery and echoing with ancient secrets.

Waner understands the awed appeal of such finds, and he brings welcome credibility to the storytelling through attention to process and practical reality. With



Smart archaeological thriller novella exploring paranormal secrets near Normandy.

Great for fans of Nalini Singh's Guild Hunter Series, Gary McAvoy's *The Magdalene Chronicles*.

also challenging Nathan's understanding of time, fate, and identity.

Dialogue and characterization are convincing. The storytelling is brisk, crisp, and assured. The compact page count means the mysteries never feel protracted, though the settings, dangers, revelations, and implications are intriguing enough that readers may wish *The Old Stone House* offered more opportunity to linger. The ending feels abrupt at first read, but it has a sneaky power and rewards contemplation. Connecting the supernatural and ancient legacies with strong imagery and gripping moments of peril, Waner encourages readers to consider what lies beneath the surface—of both land and soul.

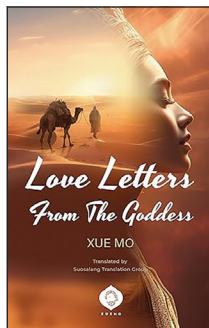
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **B+**

ROMANCE**Love Letters from the Goddess: The Forbidden Letters of a Nepali Goddess and a Tibetan Pilgrim's Quest for Freedom**

Xue Mo | Ruxue International Media Inc.
226p, e-book, \$2.99, ISBN 979-8-889-91026-8

Love Letters from the Goddess, written by one of China's most celebrated writers and cultural scholars and translated into English by the Suosalang Translation Group, breathes vivid life into ancient history, recounting a timeless love story between Tibetan monk Khyungpo Nalor and Saraswati, a dethroned Nepali Living Goddess. When Saraswati's father chooses Khyungpo as her future husband, Khyungpo is familiar with the Nepali belief that marrying a Living Goddess brings only bad luck; but he is Tibetan, and his culture holds no such belief. The two ultimately fall in love but face separation when Khyungpo must follow his life's call to spread Dharma throughout the world. Drawing from his earlier novel, *The Undying Diamond Heart*, Xue Mo renders Khyungpo's journey to reach transcendence against the backdrop of the couple's endearing love and sacrifice, depicted through their shared letters, poetry, and lyrics.

Through stunning prose and poetic language, Xue Mo paints Saraswati's



Captivating love story of a Nepali Living Goddess and a Tibetan monk.

Great for fans of Shelley Parker-Chan's *She Who Became the Sun*, John Shors's *Temple of a Thousand Faces*.

but keeps them spiritually connected for the entirety of both of their lives.

Readers will be enthralled by the story's cultural roots, as Xue Mo delves into the intricate details of Saraswati's life as a Living Goddess and explains the rich Nepali traditions related to this role. Deeply personal and emotive, Saraswati's letters forever immortalize her love and its impact, not just on Khyungpo, but also on the lives of those he was able to touch through her selfless sacrifice. Even as she bids goodbye to her temporal life, Saraswati's lyrical words resonate through time: "Don't you know// That the lifespan of true love is without terminus; // That love is the eternal subtext."

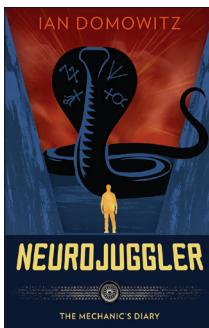
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR**Neurojuggler: The Mechanic's Diary**

Ian Domowitz | Casa Muerte Press
169p, e-book, \$2.99, ASIN B0F6YPH81R

Hanzi Boss, a 14-year-old homunculus "bred, not born," plans to live and work in an abandoned garage and seek the truth of his origins in this bold, thoughtful, genre-crossing second novella in Domowitz's *The Mechanic's Diary* series. This plan, however, is shattered when he meets Alois—a calm, articulate, and deeply unnerving homunculus. Alois admits to mutilating a biker gang for their rudeness, confirming Hanzi's instinct that Alois is "temptation and threat in an urchin's body supporting a mind that reveled in violent pandemonium." Hanzi, unlike Alois, seeks purpose: to understand himself and restore a spiritual order rooted in the prophetic Synodal Chronicles. His rare ability to cross the berm, "where virtual and real meet in continuous fashion," makes him capable of navigating the Void, a treacherous virtual realm existing beyond the intersection of realities.

As Hanzi cleans up the aftermath of Alois's violence, he forms strange alliances: a gang of hyper-efficient kids and the occultist Manfred Keynes with a library full of ancient secrets. More a metaphysical fiction than a techno-thriller gimmick,



Darkly inventive SF thriller of identity, prophecy, and virtual transgression in the AI age.

Great for fans of Greg Egan's *Permutation City*, Thomas R. Weaver's *Artificial Wisdom*.

The heady philosophical inquiry, plus some provocative contemplation of the human condition, strengthen the story's grip; while sometimes conceptually challenging, *Neurojuggler* moves swiftly, as Domowitz's crisp, often exquisite prose makes existential narratives and grotesque spectacles feel part of the same world. Grounded in the Paracelsian dictum that "we don't know ourselves what we are," *Neurojuggler* dares to map the disquiet between fractured selves in shifting realities, ultimately serving as a cautionary allegory for the psychological cost of having a digital existence.

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

the discovery comes the directive to halt all renovations, as the site and artifacts demand careful review. As Nathan, Harold, and allies delve deeper, they uncover connections to a secretive ancient order and a legacy intertwined with surprising names from history. The tale pulses with paranormal elements, both otherworldly and divine, not just adding suspense but

unwavering love and highlights her unflinching loyalty; with her financial support and constant assurance, Khyungpo follows his divine path and goes on to open 108 monasteries during his lifetime. Though tragic and star-crossed, Saraswati and Khyungpo showcase an unconditional devotion that stands the test of time, distance, and a divine calling—a calling that physically separates them

Domowitz asks a daunting question: Who are we in the age of Artificial Intelligence? Hanzi's quest for purpose and Alois's descent into chaos seemingly symbolize how identity is shaped in digital culture. Virtual spaces allow for fluid, performative, and often conflicting identities, yet they also invite manipulation and ethical erosion, as seen in Ariadne's fate.

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Order of the Chimera

Layla King

256p, e-book, \$3.99, ISBN 979-8-9985712-2-0

King debuts with a page-turning fantasy of political intrigue, secret societies, sumptuous academic settings, and enough mystery to keep readers guessing. Seere is the assassin queen, always on guard, framed for a crime she didn't commit, hiding from her past, until the day a seething, oddly familiar stranger, Orias Roderick, threatens to reveal her true royal identity as the long-lost princess of a neighboring kingdom. Her mission: protect Prince Felix of Noctivagus, the first person she ever kissed, from assassins. As the shadowy Order of the Chimera, a fanatical religious cult, grows in power, Seere makes the long journey to Malphas University, training ground for new nobles, where she must guard her identity and her heart.

King's setting is as lush as Seere—who has a reputation for deploring “lace,” “ruffles,” and “anything that sparkled”—is engagingly headstrong, resisting the young lords' habit of treating her as a “pawn to be used and discarded.” (She also



Compelling, subtly seductive fantasy of an assassin queen at a noble school.

Great for fans of M. A. Carrick's Rook & Rose series, Jennifer Fallon's Second Sons trilogy.

Orias that thrums with fierce energy and possibly threatens her mission.

Punchy dialogue, sharp confrontations, and moments of humor and magic—including cool shapeshifting—buoy the tale, as Seere and company go from classes to pubs to Seere's first-ever ball, “a great place for things to go utterly haywire.” Along with a compelling hero, King has crafted an original mythology, including a calendar system, for this world, and some of the freshest scenes find Seere challenging legends and lore. Readers of academic fantasy who enjoy social politics, hard romantic choices, and explorations of magical power (and powerlessness) will relish this first entry in a projected series.

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

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

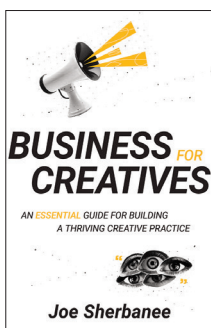
EDITOR'S PICK

Business for Creatives: An Essential Guide for Building a Thriving Creative Practice

Joe Sherbanee | Hangar Business Publishing

356p, hardcover, \$35.99, ISBN 979-8-9922054-0-4

Making a persuasive case that “integrating creativity with strategic thinking” is essential for creative people when it comes to “navigating some of today's most complex challenges,” Sherbanee's thorough, inviting guide has been crafted to “demystify” business plans, financing, marketing, value propositions, and other vital skills not taught in humanities departments. Sherbanee has crafted a guide to achieving success for writers, artists, musicians, dreamers, and others possibly predisposed to bristle at the thought of such a book, and he addresses the qualms of creatives with empathy and wisdom. The book's mission, he writes, is to show how to align creative passions with the practicalities of running a business, “ensuring your work not only reaches your audience but also sustains you as an artist.” Shrewdly, Sherbanee imposes no outside definition of “success” on his readers, instead offering clear-eyed advice on how individuals can determine their own ideas about what success entails—and then take the pragmatic steps to achieve it.



Fresh, practical advice for creative individuals crafting sustainable business plans.

Great for fans of Jeff Goins's *Real Artists Don't Starve*, Miriam Schulman's *Artpreneur*.

creative impulse and mastering the business end in a way that offers “a sustainable exchange where everyone benefits.” Even sections about un-fun topics like market structures and effective client communication pulse with fresh insights.

Especially helpful are passages about “building confidence in your pricing,” creating work that is “signal rich”—i.e., work “with emotional and intellectual resonance”—and breaking through the “clutter” of the “modern cacophony” that can snuff the spirit of so many creative souls. Sherbanee's thoroughness means the book is hefty; the occasional repetition is offset by excellent organization, making it easy for readers to dip in and out.

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

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

Forged in Fire: 50 Fight-to-Win Tactics to Help Your Business Succeed

Timothy Stout | Selfpublishing.com

192p, e-book, \$4.99, ISBN 979-8-89316-430-5

Stout (*How to Sell 100 Homes a Year*) offers readers an incisive approach to professional success based on 50 “fight-to-win” strategies designed to revolutionize your business mindset. Each tactic draws from his experience as a former kickboxer, wrestler, and mixed martial arts fighter, and he cleverly employs those demanding sports as analogies for succeeding in both personal and professional arenas—from embracing hard work and discipline to rejecting shortcuts and harnessing the power of positive thinking. Throughout, he underscores that meaningful change is often uncomfortable, but reminds readers that “no one has ever achieved greatness or high levels of success without first being uncomfortable.”

Some of Stout's chapters cover foundational advice—leading by example, managing aggression, the importance of discipline, starting the day early and prepared—while others venture into deeper territory, as in his observation that “sometimes people must come to the realization of issues on their own.” Helping others problem-solve requires patience and self-awareness; defensiveness only



Motivational guide to success based on 50 straight-talking strategies.

Great for fans of Derek Sivers's *How to Live*, Eric Jorgenson's *The Almanack of Naval Ravikant*.

Stout's advice is straightforward and well-organized, with key insights highlighted in bold for easy reference. His tone is direct and encouraging, with bursts of enthusiasm and humility, and he thoughtfully addresses the physical, emotional, and social dimensions of success. The overarching message—consistency and self-discipline pave the way for change—is underscored by his motivational nudge: “No one is holding you back except for yourself.”

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

makes relatable, self-justifying declarations like “If she felt provoked, that's her problem, not mine.”) With a love of speaking hard truths and stirring controversy, Seere clashes with her wealth-and-status-obsessed academic environment, even as she must keep a “tangled web of truths” from Felix. Among her secrets is a burgeoning romance with

Sherbanee is sensitive to his audience's deep need for flexibility, authenticity, and being able “to evolve while staying grounded,” even when it comes to concerns like establishing a consistent brand identity or working to “align your unique strengths with audience needs.” His guidance throughout is sound and illuminating, striking a balance between honoring the

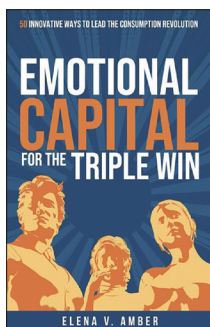
hinders growth. Instead, he urges leaders to guide others in teaching themselves how to resolve challenges. He also acknowledges that mistakes and setbacks are inevitable, offering practical strategies for recovery, such as maintaining a flexible mindset: “There is always another way to meet one's goal,” he writes.

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE**Emotional Capital for the Triple Win: 50 Innovative Ways to Lead the Consumption Revolution**

Elena V. Amber | Practical Inspiration Publishing
232p, e-book, \$19.99, ISBN 978-1-788-60701-8

Noting that overconsumption has led to a host of global crises, Amber (*The Gift of Sensitivity*) presents game-changing business strategies designed to reduce wasteful, impulsive consumption in favor of a “deeper alignment” benefiting “consumers, businesses, and the planet.” Structured like a thesis paper and replete with citations, Amber’s heavily academic second nonfiction work tackles responsible marketing, consumerism, and the unsustainability of “unlimited economic growth” in today’s capitalistic free-for-all. She calls for a “consumption revolution” to shape a better future. Her advice targets “for-profit firms,” offering “actionable business propositions” that support sustainable products and show how companies can be both “profitable and constructive forces within their communities.”

To that end, Amber presents “five emotional capital dimensions for social



Optimistic call for encouraging sustainable consumption while preserving profitability.

Great for fans of Peter McAteer’s *Sustainability Is the New Advantage*, Samantha Garcia’s *Regenerative Business*.

investments and business impact,” including fostering a “triple-win mindset” among consumers and businesses, balancing “environmentally driven consumption, socially driven consumption, and economically driven consumption” in pursuit of “universal prosperity.” These big-picture themes become more concrete in Amber’s 50 strategies for mitigating impulse buying

and achieving that “triple win.” Implemented at scale, her advice could prove transformative.

Still, Amber offers a place to start—and a blueprint, complete with a “triple-win sustainable consumption model,” for businesses, organizations, and entrepreneurs ready to prioritize “purpose over profit” and model that behavior for the greater good. Achieving meaningful change demands advocacy for new thinking and public demonstration that sustainability and profitability need not be mutually exclusive. Amber’s bold, optimistic vision is inspiring.

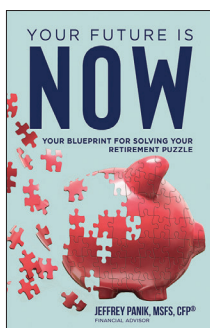
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE**Your Future Is Now: Your Blueprint for Solving Your Retirement Puzzle**

Jeffrey Panik | Amplify Publishing
390p, hardcover, \$26.99, ISBN 979-8-89138-541-2

Panik draws from client case studies and personal anecdotes—culled from nearly 25 years of experience as a financial advisor—in this detailed road map for life after retirement. From learning how to reduce debt to understanding how to protect against identity theft, readers will find his advice easy to understand and apply, no matter how complex the concept. “Informed choices allow you to retire on your own terms and avoid irreversible mistakes,” he writes, reminding readers that it’s never too early—or too late—to get started on planning for their golden years.

Panik’s frank, practical guidance ranges beyond the conventional, delving into topics like why trying out hobbies or volunteer opportunities early on will help down the road—or how being divorced or widowed can affect Social Security. He starts with 12 areas for goal setting in retirement—such as prioritizing family time, cultivating healthy living, and planning an effective exit from work—before offering readers a wealth of user-friendly tools, including his Financial Life Inventory Plan



Meticulous retirement planning guide, delivered in clear language.

Great for fans of Emily Guy Birken’s *The 5 Years Before You Retire*, Michele Cagan’s *Retirement 101*.

checklist that addresses real estate assets, insurance policies, and more. Particularly helpful is Panik’s breakdown of health planning for retirement, covering the ins and outs of Medicare and private insurance, as well as his summary of different ways post-retirement income can be coordinated for flexibility and financial freedom.

Thanks to Panik’s meticulous research, his writing leaves no questions unanswered, offering readers in-depth explanations of every aspect related to financial planning and retirement, all explained in layman’s terms for easy comprehension. Readers at any level of retirement planning will find the information useful, and Panik finishes each chapter with a brief summary of its main points for easy reference. The sheer range of topics covered can feel daunting, but the guide is well-organized and broken into manageable sections, with QR codes linking to online material for an added resource.

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

HISTORY & MILITARY

EDITOR’S PICK

Becoming JFK: John F. Kennedy’s Early Path to Leadership

Scott Badler
360p, hardcover, \$32.99, ISBN 978-1-610-88676-5

Badler brings heat and heart to the early years of former President John F. Kennedy’s rise to influence and power in this captivating study that dramatizes the formative period of the first Catholic U.S. president. Kennedy, one of nine children born to Rose and Joseph Kennedy, was profoundly shaped by his ambitious father’s expectations—especially after Joseph Sr. became ambassador to the United Kingdom under President Roosevelt. After Kennedy’s older brother, Joseph Jr.—whom their father had groomed for the presidency—was killed in action during World War II, Joseph Sr. shifted his towering expectations to Jack, pressuring him to run for Congress in 1945, a goal JFK soon achieved. But that was only the beginning of Joseph Sr.’s relentless ambitions.

Attentive to both pivotal historical context and the pleasures of narrative nonfiction, Badler weaves the story of the Kennedy family and their powerful circles into an immersive narrative that brings readers intimately close to the future president. Badler’s depiction of key episodes in JFK’s early life—his turbulent college



Illuminating, immersive portrait of JFK’s rise—essential for Kennedy fans.

Great for fans of Fredrik Logevall’s *JFK*, Christina Haag’s *Come to the Edge*.

years, a romantic entanglement with a suspected Nazi spy, and his heroic service as a Navy PT-109 commander determined to bring his crew home safely after a devastating Japanese attack—is rich with dialogue and evocative detail. The book also includes a trove of historical photographs.

The narrative concludes with Kennedy’s run for Congress, before his courtship of Jacqueline Bouvier. While acknowledging Kennedy’s reputation as a connoisseur of beautiful women—and his often libertine behavior—Badler infuses the story with a deep belief in JFK’s essential honor and integrity. Kennedy’s famed charisma likewise leaps off the page, whether he’s charming financiers in smoke-filled backrooms or a Romanian princess in a Moscow bar. Meticulously researched and sympathetically rendered, this compelling portrait illuminates the Kennedy family’s complex dynamics, outsized ambitions, and enduring love, making it essential reading for Kennedy devotees.

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

NONFICTION

EDITOR'S PICK

Drumming Up the Dead: My Paranormal ExperiencesJean Boomer Grenier | Boomerjnk Publishing
176p, e-book, \$4.99, ISBN 979-8-9916687-3-6

Musician Grenier crafts a portrait of a life catalyzed by his love for rock and roll, dedicated to his family and friends, and shaded by extraordinary experiences he finds difficult to explain. From a young age, he sensed that he was not alone, declaring, "I was never a believer in ghosts, but I can tell you today as I write this, there is something more going on than just our 'living' existence." Here, he shares stories of his experiences with the supernatural, from viewing his deceased Uncle Arthur during a family gathering to a run-in with unexplainable tribal drumbeats during an after-hours party in his youth.

Grenier's recollections inspire warm feelings as well as a tinge of foreboding, as not every experience is benign: in his teens, a casual experiment with a Ouija board opens a portal to an evil presence, while a later run-in sees unexplainable phenomena physically interacting with Grenier—unleashing his dog, opening and



Spirited, moving portrait of a life marked by the supernatural.

Great for fans of Steve Gonsalves's *A Life with Ghosts*, MJ Wayland's *50 Real American Ghost Stories*.

closing doors, and aggressively flipping him out of bed while he's asleep. The house Grenier shares with his wife, Kerry, brims with a supernatural presence—one that becomes violent toward Grenier at times, prompting him and Kerry to research the house's history in hopes of helping its presence move on.

Despite the collection's chilling energy, Grenier relays his stories with calmness and clarity, belying a great deal of respect for the souls, living and dead, that populate his life. His kind sincerity—spurred by succinct and compelling chapters—may open even the most uncertain readers to belief in the spirit world—a world that provides Grenier with comfort, mystery, and sometimes, answers to life's more complex questions. Regardless of readers' personal convictions about the supernatural, Grenier delivers a moving autobiography built from the love he was raised with and feels toward the outside world, making even the experience of death seem less coldly permanent.

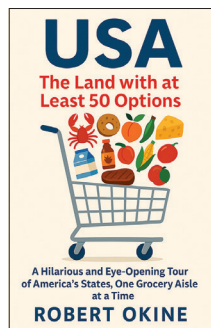
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

NONFICTION

USA: The Land with at Least 50 OptionsRobert Okine | Fifty Options Press
223p, trade paper, \$11.99, ISBN 979-8-998-65120-5

For Okine, American grocery stores—those "humble, beautiful, chaotic places where *real food meets real life*"—aren't just stores; they're experiences, stirring pride, confusion, and insights into the nation and its character. One such insight, about the "Wellness Meets Wealth" vibe of California's retailers: "You don't just choose what you eat. You choose who you are based on what you put in your cart." Going state by state, Okine playfully explores the country's culture through the lens of chain stores, bodegas, local favorites, and more, checking out New Jersey's pork roll, Georgia's peaches, New Mexico's chiles, and the "local religion" of Publix. His quick and funny looks at what's in stock are revealing. In the "grounded, hearty, and just a little nostalgic" groceries of Michigan, he notes, "Every aisle feels like it's prepping you for a road trip, a snowstorm, or both."

A light and winking read, the chapters are mostly bullet-pointed summaries and observations of the states, with plenty of jokes peppered in like the pickles in a pimento loaf ("In Florida, the only rule is: Stay hydrated and enjoy the chaos.")



Funny, often insightful guide to American groceries, state-by-state.

Great for fans of David & Susan Schwartz's *The Joy of Costco*, Benjamin Lorr's *The Secret Life of Groceries*.

The blend of comedy and sociocultural reportage may have some practical uses—anybody planning a road trip, moving to a new state, or parsing distinctions between Iowa and Idaho will discover what to expect. His account of Hawaii's obsession with Spam clears up misconceptions, while some claims may inspire debate: "You haven't seen frozen food until you've seen South Dakota in January," he writes, a claim Wisconsinites, with their acres-long frozen pizza aisles, may contest.

Of course, these generalizations can edge into stereotypes. Millions of Californians can't afford Erewhon or the Berkeley Bowl; most states have Whole Foods ("the cathedral of clean eating"); and canned soup, generic brands, Aldi, and Trader Joe's all transcend state lines. Still, Okine is sharp and amusing on clear regional differences, noting that "Pretzels in Pennsylvania are a food group" and asking, in a Dallas chip aisle, "Am I inside a store, or a ranch dressing museum?" In such moments, he reveals a nation.

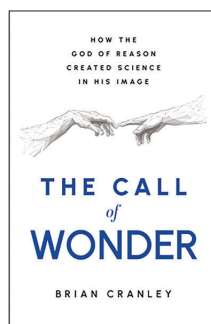
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

SCIENCE, NATURE, TECHNOLOGY

The Call of Wonder: How the God of Reason Created Science in His ImageBrian Cranley | Greenleaf Book Group Press
272p, hardcover, \$26.95, ISBN 979-8-886-45296-9

Cranley's spirited debut attempts to reconcile the long-divided realms of science and faith, beginning with a yard sign declaring "Science is Real" and building toward a consilient vision where philosophy, science, and scripture all share the same table. He structures his writing into three parts, first drawing from Plato, Aristotle, Maimonides, and Aquinas to present a God conceived through logic: eternal, necessary, and rational. From there, he examines the "three miracles" of science—the Big Bang, the evolution of life, and the human mind—before completing the arc with sacred texts, presented not as doctrinal counterpoints to science but as interpretive companions.

"It wasn't until I heard God described by the ancients in logical terms," Cranley writes, "that I also began to experience wonder in the world of faith." From his examination of the Big Bang—tracing its first cause through both historical and contemporary evidence—to evolution, which he contends suggests directionality and design, Cranley intertwines faith, philosophy, and science in a carefully constructed, well-planned analysis. Here, Aristotle's Unmoved Mover mirrors God as



Reasoned revelation uniting science, philosophy, and faith through wonder.

Great for fans of Francis S. Collins's *The Language of God*, Amir D. Aczel's *Why Science Does Not Disprove God*.

the "Creator of all things," while Plato's concept of a receptacle—a theoretical state of matter "completely separated from form" that continually receives impressions and is changed by what enters it—echoes God's actions in Genesis 1, which Cranley defines as "separat[ing] out new things from the original creation" (prime matter in Plato's terms).

Cranley's range is wide, but the simplicity of his prose makes the otherwise dense material feel accessible and less overwhelming, while the chapter-opening fables add levity and a reflective pause to what might otherwise feel like a non-stop wonderfest. At its heart, *The Call of Wonder* reclaims authentic wonder as something rigorous—not naive amazement, but an openness to mystery, sharpened by logic and softened by faith. Readers will be equally awed and challenged to discover truth where logic, science, and spirituality converge.

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

SCIENCE, NATURE, TECHNOLOGY

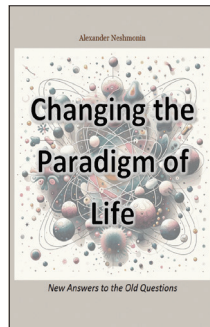
Changing the Paradigm of Life: New Answers to the Old Questions

Alexander Neshmonin | NAV

111p, mass market, \$19.99, ISBN 978-1-068-89322-3

This revolutionary debut aims to replace the reigning scientific worldview of the “Paradigm of the Great Graveyard”—a vision of an entropic universe—with the “Paradigm of the Great Life.” A daring response to the question “What is Life?”, Neshmonin’s brief yet intellectually stimulating book walks readers through a new dual reality model that splits reality into the objective Realm of Energy and the subjective Realm of Information. Neshmonin’s argument loops metaphysics, thermodynamics, artificial intelligence, quantum mechanics, and cellular biology into a grand puzzle of cosmic consciousness, ultimately defining life as an ongoing process of self-organizing cognition seeking a “Fully Adequate Model of the Universe.”

Neshmonin’s central insight is that life is not an accidental spark in a void but a recursive agent of universal understanding. “The inherent, irresolvable contradiction within Life ... forces Life to continuously cognize and change the Universe,” he



Bold, mind-expanding manifesto reimagining life, reality, and consciousness.

Great for fans of Adam Becker’s *What Is Real?*, Harry Cliff’s *Space Oddities*.

concludes. The book’s ambitions are far-reaching, delving into the essence of existence while championing the concept of life’s hierarchical nature, arguing that all matter possesses subjectivity and is organized into levels, from Proto-Living to Superintelligent Entities.

Though the narrative feels occasionally restive—Neshmonin acknowledges “It’s practically impossible to present a complex, interconnected, and interdependent system of concepts and ideas in a linear fashion”—the writing is commendable for its conversational style and easy analogies, such as thinking of a dog’s consciousness as “a cellular God... reigning over [the dog’s] entire cellular society.” The premise, at times, unapologetically conflicts with conventional science, but it remains unusually inviting for a manifesto that dares to touch metaphysics and entropy in one sweep, staunchly refusing to be confined. Scholars and conventional believers will be challenged just as much as intellectually curious readers will be invigorated and renewed in viewing the universe through this rousing new lens.

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

SCIENCE, NATURE, TECHNOLOGY

From Rebel to Radical Innovator: Leading the Transformation through Circularity

Albin Kaelin | Leaders Press

284p, e-book, \$6.99, ISBN 978-1-637-35286-1

Kaelin chronicles an inspirational fight to reshape modern industry from within—by replacing the wasteful linear economy with a circular approach grounded in the Cradle to Cradle philosophy. Developed by architect William McDonough and chemist Michael Braungart, Cradle to Cradle is a sustainable design framework that treats all materials as nutrients, eliminating waste and promoting regeneration. Kaelin’s journey begins at Rohner Textil AG, a Swiss textile firm that became the birthplace of the world’s first Cradle to Cradle-certified fabric. Facing regulatory, economic, and material challenges, Kaelin and his team sought materials that would comply with the Cradle to Cradle sustainability criteria, designing textiles so clean their wastewater “mirrored the properties of Swiss drinking water.”

Kaelin traces the chemical industry’s evolution from ancient glassmakers to the Industrial Revolution to more recent toxic disasters, such as Seveso, Bhopal, and Schweizerhalle, demonstrating how materials that play crucial roles in con-



Powerful call to action for industry sustainability and the circular economy.

Great for fans of William McDonough and Michael Braungart’s *Cradle to Cradle*, Geoffrey Jones’s *Varieties of Green Business*.

temporary living—synthetic dyes, artificial fibers, fertilizers, plastics—also degrade ecosystems by polluting rivers and soil. In response, Kaelin has helped to implement Cradle to Cradle concepts, designing products to be “sustainable, reusable, or safe for biological systems.” From the ground up, Kaelin moves through the manufacturing, quality control, and global expansion of those products,

exploring how the Cradle to Cradle standards interplay with current legislation and regulatory enforcement. He also dismantles the belief that environmental goals and profitability conflict, showing how circular innovation can drive economic success and ecological resilience. Vivid case studies along with clear timelines make the guide’s sometimes complex topics understandable, and Kaelin’s candid, honest tone opens the door to preventative, as opposed to reactionary, change. This debut surpasses standard business fare—it’s a call to action, delivering a powerful message: the future doesn’t lie in tweaking old systems, but in reimagining them entirely.

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

MEMOIR

EDITOR'S PICK

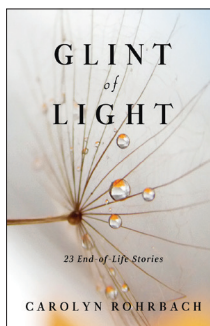
Glint of Light: 23 End-of-Life Stories

Carolyn Rohrbach

162p, e-book, \$14.95, ISBN 979-8-987-97873-3

In this moving collection of letters, former hospice volunteer and spiritual counselor Rohrbach pays homage to her patients through a deeply personal and emotional narrative of remembrance. As Rohrbach actively addresses those who have passed on, she recalls the connections she shared with each through conversation, prayer, personal effects, and “over nature and the rest of God’s creations.” Each chapter is affectionately titled after a fond memory or vital connection that reminds Rohrbach of her time with each patient and the life lessons she carried on with her—from her youngest patient, a 23-year-old who made it her mission to make the mall’s Black Friday sale every year, to Charlene, the only patient whose name Rohrbach shares throughout the entire book. Rohrbach writes movingly of moments shared as Charlene, over 10 months, faced the end of her life, “actively dying” yet still living: making amends, admitting her fears, sharing her love.

Rohrbach pens each chapter as if she is addressing a patient, inviting the readers to experience an outpouring of love and memories. Inviting and heartfelt, Rohrbach’s



A hospice spiritual counselor movingly honors and recalls her patients.

Great for fans of Hadley Vlahos’s *The In-Between*, Maggie Callanan’s *Final Gifts*.

impassioned words vividly paint the heartache, grief, and lump-in-the-throat love between hospice patients and their caregivers. Through these 23 briskly told stories, Rohrbach imparts valuable insights from patients who knew they were running out of time. Some faced this with grace and acceptance, others with fear and regret. She illuminates these

truths with straightforward prose: “If there is one lesson I have learned from the dying, it is this: we humans tend to die the way we live.”

Readers seeking wise, life-affirming accounts of people facing the end of this stage of existence will be moved by this touching memoir. Strong scenecraft prevails: “Any regrets?” Rohrbach asks a veteran who loved to talk about USO soirees. His response: “I would’ve asked more girls to dance.” Rohrbach’s empathy, compassion, and dedication will resonate with any reader ready to contemplate the reality of life, death, and what those final days will entail.

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

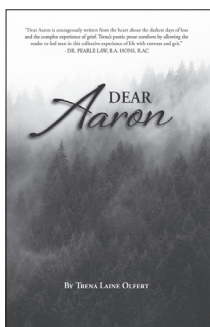
MEMOIR

Dear Aaron

Trena Laine Olfert | PPG Polished Publishing Group
132p, hardcover, \$22, ISBN 978-1-069-11360-3

This moving debut memoir chronicles Olfert's journey through love, grief, and healing after the sudden passing of her husband, Aaron. Far from being a prescriptive guide to grief, the book offers a raw and heartfelt exploration of the subtleties that drive intimate relationships, the toll that hustle culture can exert, and the path to rediscovering purpose amid pain. "I didn't just end up here randomly," Olfert writes, "I was focused on redirecting myself to my purpose." Part of that purpose is guiding others on their paths to healing, as Olfert delves into themes of emotional resilience, mental health, and self-love, making *Dear Aaron* a beacon of hope for anyone navigating grief or pursuing meaning from life's many setbacks.

Olfert's writing is honest and insightful as she recounts her 21 years with Aaron, marked by love, laughter, and shared dreams, but also by struggles with burnout, societal pressures, and emotional disconnect. Her candid discussion of Aaron's



Inspirational odyssey of healing from grief and overcoming life's adversities.

Great for fans of Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H Mart*, Geraldine Brooks's *Memorial Days*.

battle with work-related stress and substance use highlights the dangers of neglecting mental and physical health in pursuit of career success, and she also addresses broader societal issues, such as the stigma surrounding seeking help for mental wellness and the toxicity of hustle culture, urging readers to prioritize self-care. "High achievers never feel satisfied," Olfert declares, "when you do not have your priorities aligned, the things that truly matter begin to fall away."

What sets *Dear Aaron* apart is its balance between grief and gratitude. Olfert's reflections on her healing—gained through journaling, meditation, and listening to what her body needs—are inspiring, emphasizing the importance of vulnerability and a strong support system. This is not just a memoir but a call to action for readers to reevaluate their priorities and embrace their emotions, as Olfert reminds: "Grief is a journey with zero timeline that requires you to tune inward, be present, slow down, and honour YOU."

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

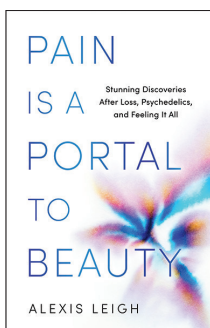
MEMOIR

Pain Is a Portal to Beauty: Stunning Discoveries After Loss, Psychedelics, and Feeling It All

Alexis Leigh | Jameo Publications, LLC
178p, e-book, \$9.99, ISBN 979-8-9927420-2-2

At just 12 years old, Leigh experiences the crushing grief of her mother's death. After discovering later that her mother was addicted to prescription drugs, Leigh's life is never the same. Repressing her emotions, she grows into an Ivy League graduate from the University of Pennsylvania, marries, and has a son of her own—then experiences a crashing down as trauma from her childhood surfaces, driving her to a path of self-discovery, forgiveness, and healing. Her transformation is hard-won, garnered from therapy and her exploration of psychedelic drugs—MDMA (also known as ecstasy or molly), psilocybin, and ayahuasca—that allow her to "access trauma with less overwhelm and stress." As Leigh uncovers who she is, she weaves the threads of her past into a future of her own making.

Leigh delves into the benefits and drawbacks of her psychedelic treatments in frank and honest detail, citing that this memoir is just as much for herself to reflect



Transformative, inspiring trauma journey of self-love and forgiveness.

Great for fans of Katherine MacLean's *Midnight Water*, Frank G. Anderson's *To Be Loved*.

on her odyssey as it is for others to heal from past trauma. Unwavering in her narrative, Leigh shares the pathway to learning how to fully express her true emotions, stop seeking validation from others, and find peace and acceptance to love herself just as she is—and for who she is becoming. "My life was the outgrowth of this legacy of tragedy," she writes, a legacy that, through hard work, alternative therapies, and a growing realization that losing herself was the biggest tragedy of all, Leigh overcomes with grace.

Readers who relish stories of awakening and reshaping will find Leigh's debut memoir both touching and inspiring, a tribute to self-love and forgiveness that offers a wealth of inspiring ways to heal. From spiritual tools like yoga and sound healing to a life of laughter and movement, Leigh offers something that will resonate with every reader: a gentle nudging towards an existence "filled with awe and beauty and love."

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

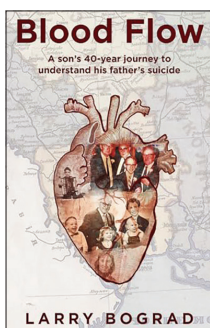
MEMOIR

Blood Flaw: A Son's 40-year Journey to Understand His Father's Suicide

Larry Bograd | Global Arts Press
254p, e-book, \$20, ISBN 978-0-998-43564-0

Bograd (*Los Alamos Light*) crafts a moving narrative propelled by vivid personal photographs, reproduced medical records, and illuminating interviews with friends and relatives, chronicling his lifelong struggle to understand why his father killed himself when Bograd was a teen, just days past his bar mitzvah. He pairs his memories of the events leading up to his father's death with a parallel narrative set 40 years later, when Bograd himself undergoes a coronary bypass and a grueling recovery. As he works through his emotions with his therapist shortly before the procedure, Bograd finds hope in her sage advice: "You have the opportunity to heal your heart. Something your father never had."

Exploring an era when mental health issues were rarely discussed, Bograd's narrative is a stirring examination of depression, anxiety, and the elusive markers of wellness. His father, Nathan, served in World War II, and his experiences inspecting displaced persons' camps left a lasting imprint on his psyche, leading him to question, in letters home, "What future do we have as a species?" While



Stirring memoir of unspeakable loss and a harrowing health narrative.

Great for fans of Gayle Brandeis's *The Art of Misdiagnosis*, Joan Wickersham's *The Suicide Index*.

Nathan was never able to clear the dark cloud of depression looming over his life (he "couldn't stand living in perpetual despair," a psychiatrist later tells Bograd), the author vows not to repeat history, musing, "Life chases life and remains strangely, wonderfully poignant." The memoir's flashbacks can feel disconnected at times, but Bograd's interviews with family and friends breathe life and suspense into the story, offering insights that layer depth and emotion into his father's absorbing history. From cousin Jerry touching on dysfunctional family dynamics and a medical system ill equipped to handle mental illness, to Bograd's mother reflecting on Nathan's endearing love for his children, this is a powerful portrait of love, grief, and the opportunity to free oneself from the past.

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

MEMOIR

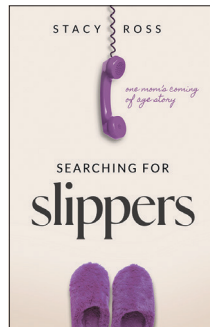
Searching for Slippers: One Mom's Coming of Age Story

Stacy Ross | Inspired Girl

232p, trade paper, \$19.99, ISBN 978-1-965-24009-0

"Now I know that happiness is a choice and fairytales can be rewritten," writes Ross in this deeply moving memoir. Her reflections on the complexities of raising a child with borderline personality disorder (BPD) are delivered with raw honesty, from moments of connection to crises that test the limits of her resilience. The story begins with Ross and her husband, Howie, struggling with infertility before deciding to pursue adoption, and moves through her joy at Molly joining the family as well as the challenges that arise as Molly grows into Fin, a transgender adult. Throughout, this is a testament to the enduring power of love and acceptance—and a powerful resource for families facing similar challenges.

Ross's writing is both poignant and relatable, offering readers an unfiltered look at the emotional toll of parenting a child with mental illness. Her ability to balance vulnerability with humor makes the narrative compelling, and the inclusion of Fin's



Heartfelt exploration of resilience, love, and the messy beauty of life.

Great for fans of Jan Stewart's *Hold on Tight*, Hillary Whittington's *Raising Ryland*.

happiness is possible—though it may look different from what they expected.

Ross's candid reflections on her own growth—learning to set boundaries, redefine peace, and embrace imperfection—are inspiring. Her journey underscores the importance of seeking help, building support systems, and finding calm in the moments when life feels uncertain. Ross's ability to weave personal anecdotes with broader reflections on BPD and gender identity makes *Searching for Slippers* a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the complexities of mental health, family dynamics, and identity.

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

PICTURE BOOKS

EDITOR'S PICK

The Rooftop Revelers: A Tale of Korean Japsang

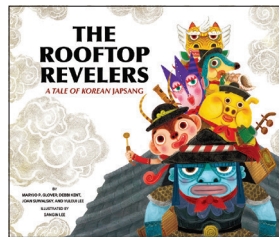
MaryJo P. Glover, Debbi Kent, Joan Suwalsky,

and Yuleui Lee | Seoul Selection

50p, e-book, \$19, ASIN B0F5NCPJQR

This culturally rich picture book by Glover, Kent, Suwalsky, and Lee takes place in the "2000-year-old city" of Seoul, the capital of South Korea, a captivating setting honored here with hints of magic, ancient beauty, and modern fun. The city's *japsang*—stone-carved guardians stationed on the royal palace rooftops and responsible for protecting the premises from danger—narrate the story, headed by The Rev, who corrals Monkey King, Pig Monster, Water Demon, Pangolin, and Dragon Head as they embrace Seoul's lively nightlife. The group takes their job very seriously, but they have a secret: when darkness falls, they sneak off to the Shadow Club to perform in their musical band, The Rooftop Revelers.

Children will delight in the unique characters of the *japsang*: Pangolin can't take two steps without a snack, Monkey King carries his own emergency stash of bananas with him, and Pig Monster worries that maybe their influence on Seoul's inhabitants is waning. The authors are careful to balance fun with learning, explaining important



Vivid and fun excursion into South Korea's cultural heritage.

Great for fans of Carole Lindstrom's *We Are Water Protectors*, Jon J. Muth's *Zen Shorts*.

tant drinking source for millions of people.

Sangin Lee accompanies the story's adventure with lavish, multi-hued illustrations that burst with energy, showcasing the city's brilliant colors, high-rise buildings, and swinging club scenes. Younger readers in particular will enjoy searching for fun objects that are explained in the back matter, such as the Haetae—a lion-like carved statue believed to protect buildings. The storyline pays homage to the weight of tradition, as the *japsang* decide their centuries-old role is too important to disregard, wisely musing that "some things are more important than money and fame."

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

PICTURE BOOKS

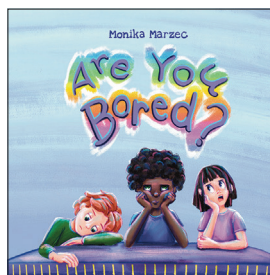
Are You Bored?

Monika Marzec | IngramSpark

42p, hardcover, \$27.99, ISBN 978-83-965199-2-4

Marzec (*How Many Hearts Do You Have?*) offers young readers an array of ways to beat the boredom blues in this entertaining picture book. Featuring a host of young, unnamed narrators, the story opens with a rundown of the three main causes of boredom: feeling too tired, feeling too lazy, and not being able to settle on interesting activities. From there, Marzec outlines creative solutions for keeping oneself entertained, from playing video games to catching some quick Zzz's to taking a luxurious bubble bath.

Any kid who's ever tried to pass unstructured time in a fun way will find plenty of appealing ideas here, each one accompanied by a bright, amusing illustration of the story's main characters engaging in that activity. Some of the examples feel more inspiring than others—like the young boy who suggests that watching flies can be a way to pass the time—but the sheer number of ideas is appealing. Marzec also recognizes situations that can be outside of a child's control, such as a rainy day or only having access to old toys, although she encourages children to make the best of what's on hand. Most exciting is Marzec's nod to reading as the ultimate



Entertaining and creative ideas for busting boredom.

Great for fans of Michael Ian Black's *I'm Bored*, Mac Barnett's *Extra Yarn*.

The vibrant graphics stand out against their stark white backgrounds, highlighting the facial expressions and nonverbal communication of kids who just can't seem to come up with anything enjoyable to do—whether it's a boy daydreaming on a couch or a child sprawled on the floor, brainstorming fun leisure pursuits. Young readers will jump at the chance to try these inventive ideas out at home.

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

perspective adds depth, showcasing the internal struggles of living with BPD and the positive impact family support can have. As Ross pursues understanding amidst chaos, Fin embarks on a quest for identity, searching for love, belonging, and purpose. Progress comes in fits and starts—often with a hefty cost—but, eventually, both Ross and Fin realize that

cultural themes and meanings as the group dashes through the city at night, trying to stay incognito but still show the world their special sound. Readers will learn about kimchi, special musical instruments—the gong, drum, bamboo flute, and more—and significant landmarks, like the Hangang River—a gathering place for recreation as well as an impor-

way to bust boredom—it "takes you on unforgettable adventures...or shows you something you've never seen before," she writes. That wisdom will resonate with adults encouraging kids to dive into the written word, and Marzec's illustration of a grandmother reading to her grandchild is heartwarming.

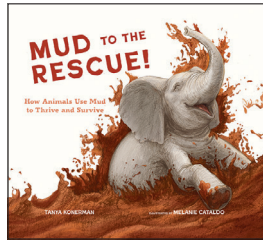
PICTURE BOOK

Mud to the Rescue! How Animals Use Mud to Thrive and Survive

Tanya Konerman | Web of Life Children's Books
32p, hardcover, \$18.95, ISBN 978-1-970039-09-2

Konerman's educational picture book for young children explores the many surprising ways animals use mud to build their homes, find food, and protect themselves. Each scene highlights the importance of mud for creatures from diverse climates, such as a turtle that hibernates beneath layers of ice and otters that nest in temperate riverside burrows. The African elephant, meanwhile, easily overheats, while a hippo's skin can crack if it gets too dry—both animals use mud as a kind of sunblock. The book also introduces more exotic species, such as the helmeted hornbill, which mixes mud with poop to build its nest and ward off predators.

For each animal, Konerman includes intriguing facts that kids will enjoy sharing with family and friends—for instance, the American alligator can lay up to 70 eggs at a time, and pigs love wallowing in mud for up to three hours each morning. These tidbits will appeal to young readers, especially those who still delight in playing in



Fun educational allow in the surprising ways animals use mud.

Great for fans of Katherine Hannigan's *Dirt + Water = Mud*, Annie Bailey's *Mud!: A Picture Book*.

Great for fans of Katherine Hannigan's *Dirt + Water = Mud*, Annie Bailey's *Mud!: A Picture Book*. Melanie Cataldo's detailed illustrations vividly demonstrate how each creature uses mud to its advantage. A painted turtle is shown snoozing underground while children in coats and hats play in the snow above; a duck-billed platypus splashes in a river as moonlight sparkles on the water. Flamingoes perch one-legged near their plateau-like nests, while Amazon fruit bats hang upside down in a moonlit tree with glowing branches. These pictures enrich the informative text, making for a fully immersive and engaging experience that will captivate young readers.

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

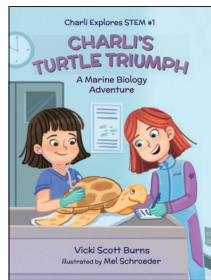
PICTURE BOOKS

Charli's Turtle Triumph: A Marine Biology Adventure

Vicki Scott Burns | Emmolly Books
96p, trade paper, \$12.99, ISBN 978-1-964845-01-2

A trip to the local aquarium sparks a young girl's dreams of becoming a conservationist in this inspiring tale from Burns (*Zamboni's Goal*). When Charli's school visits an aquarium, she, and her best friends, Emma and Molly, are eager to learn about—and potentially meet—new animals. Lucky for them, the center's head marine biologist, Dr. Grace Jackson, is an expert on saltwater creatures, with a soft spot for those in danger of going extinct. When Charli and her crew meet Lenny, a Loggerhead turtle Dr. Grace rescued, Charli is entranced—and immediately daydreams about becoming a marine biologist herself, exploring Bristol Bay while saving animals with her own program: STAR, the Sea Turtle Animal Rescue group.

Readers will treasure this homage to our ocean's wildlife, made more vibrant through Mel Schroeder's cool-hued illustrations that burst with energy. Charli's imagined beach adventures take place with her darling pup, Paris, who cheerfully drags her around the sand in search of an injured turtle—one whose sorrowful facial expression is heartbreaking. Thankfully, Charli springs into immediate action,



Inspiring aquarium adventure that teaches ocean conservation.

Great for fans of Angela Dominguez's *Stella Díaz Never Gives Up*, Jess French's *What a Waste*.

Developing Charli's story through her vivid imaginings is a clever tactic that will motivate younger readers to shoot for the stars themselves, and Burns offers them plenty of ideas on how they can help protect the ocean, from picking up trash to choosing glass over plastic. By the story's end, Charli resolves to make a difference in the world around her, safely informing Dr. Grace that "anything is possible!"

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

MIDDLE GRADE

EDITOR'S PICK

Springtime Miracles and Mud

James Segelstein
181p, mass market, \$9.95, ISBN 979-8-218-52691-7

Taking on timeless debates like which season is best and whether eating is a hobby, this chattily charming animal hangout tale from Segelstein offers a sweet and simple look at the lives of the beavers, muskrats, bats, toads, and more who live on and near a local farm. The story follows Leon the field mouse as he and his woodchuck friend Ralph go on a hunt for new hobbies. Segelstein crafts surprising encounters with a big cast of friendly creatures prone to sharing lessons and advice—a bat gives a beaver advice about handling anxiety—and making amusing pronouncements. Asked about his own hobbies, Wally the muskrat replies, "There's eating pondweed... and sliding. Either o' those strike your fancy?"

As the friends travel around their pond, they learn how to slide through the mud, make music together, try a bunch of new foods, and collect a pack of friends along the way. Segelstein brings a loving touch to each scene, creating thoughtful and caring characters that all have their own interior lives, interests, and opinions on topics like prime napping conditions and the tastiness of cattails. He's not afraid



Charming, chatty story of a woodchuck, a field mouse, and animal friendship.

Great for fans of Kate DiCamillo's *Orris and Timble* series, Wong Herbert Yee's *Mouse & Mole* series.

to shy away from emotions, exploring the ways embarrassment, guilt, and other negative feelings can bubble up in life, and letting his cast discuss, with empathy, how to deal with them. While written for younger readers, with occasional bursts of gently rude humor, these sweet, funny scenes feel like something a parent would enjoy reading to children. The language is playful and amusing, and it's a pleasure to read aloud scenes like the ones where Ralph reminds Leon he's "pretty amazing for being just a field mouse!" Perhaps best of all is Segelstein's attention to animal habits and habitats, preferences and states of mind, from the reason bats squeak quietly to why woodchucks don't munch on hibiscus. These animals delight, page after page. Also delightful: Larysa Maliush's cheerful yet understated illustrations, which capture each creature's essence without resorting to anthropomorphization.

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

MIDDLE GRADE

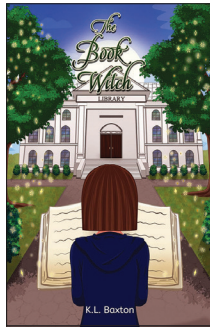
The Book Witch: An Urban Fantasy Coming-of-Age Novel

K.L. Baxton | IngramSpark

204p, trade paper, \$11.99, ISBN 979-8-992-23942-3

Full of time travel, family heritage, and magic, this action-packed middle grade story follows 12-year-old Natalia MacKenzie on a predestined journey—a course fated to change the future of her family and town forever. Natalia treasures her time reading—so much so, she’s teased in school and spends all of her spare hours at Serenity Library, a century-old pillar in her small town of Masterson, Michigan. When the mayor announces plans to demolish the library, Natalia resolves to save it, enlisting the help of her friends, her teacher Mr. Ellison, and her Aunt Katie, discovering in the process Serenity’s magical history—and her own connection to three sister witches, one of whom has cast an “unbreakable curse” on the library.

Natalia is a lovable, easy-to-root-for character who uncovers her family history in tandem with her efforts to save the library, learning important lessons about friendship, family, and her own supernatural abilities along the way. Baxton lovingly



Bewitching tale of a girl destined to save a historical library.

Great for fans of B.B. Alston’s *Amari and the Night Brothers*, Kayla Cottingham’s *Practical Rules for Cursed Witches*.

being unique—an important coming-of-age moment for Natalia, who often feels like an outcast because of her family’s financial difficulties.

Baxton shines at incorporating the real-life struggles preteens can face into this spellbinding debut, rendering Natalia’s slow realization that “not all problems [are] about money” relatable and compelling. Readers who relish being transported to bygone eras will find Masterson’s history riveting and Natalia’s complex family saga bewitching, as Baxton delivers the crucial lesson that self-love and confidence may be all that’s needed for truly meaningful connections.

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

MIDDLE GRADE

The Seven Thunders: Rise of the Twinkling Heir

O.C. Jaime

304p, hardcover, \$24.99, ISBN 979-8-989-70666-2

When Hermium Goodspeed receives not one, but two letters—one black and one red—to join the magical military academy known as the Thunder, he’s shocked: 12 years old, skin-and-bones, and plagued with terrible headaches and a penchant for sleep-walking, he’s about as far from an airjock—the elite soldiers who guard the skies—as you can get. But that’s just where he’s headed, in an unprecedented move that sees him training for air combat, winged suit and all. Meanwhile, the One Tree is dying, a sign of disruption in the Triunes’ celestial power—a disaster whose origins may stem from those mixing necromancy and transmutation. As dark forces unite, their sights turn to the Queen and the capital, putting Hermium—and everyone he loves—at risk.

Powerful demigods, phoenixes, necromancers, and the undead take center stage in this action-packed YA fantasy debut, pairing readers with a young hero whose destiny—and soon-to-be-revealed powers—will balance the fight in an upcoming



Hero’s origin story teeming with mythos, supernatural creatures, and magic.

Great for fans of Alison Croggon’s Pellinor series; Eliza Raine’s Olympus Academy series.

war of epic proportions. Hermium is wide-eyed and innocent as he embarks on this fish-out-of-water journey, struggling to find his place in an elite military academy where “hard as nails” isn’t just a descriptor—it’s a way of life. As he forms alliances and gains impressive supernatural mentors, Hermium’s placement starts to feel less accidental and more predestined, gradually transforming him into just the hero this world needs.

The Thunderlands is a riveting place of lore and supernatural creatures that will thrill YA readers. Jaime skillfully blends horror and fantasy in this sweeping hero’s journey, curating likable characters and imagery that bring the story’s impressive mythos to life. Just as immersive is the depiction of war’s gravity—its casualties, sacrifices, and moral perplexities—and the novel’s emphasis on self-belief, even when the odds are stacked against you. Fans of coming-of-age stories brimming with magical destiny will be eager for the next installment.

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

Booksellers & Librarians:



How are you handling self-published books?

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

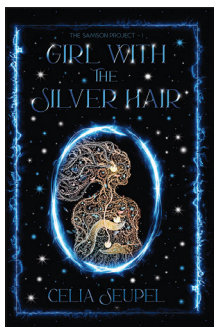
YOUNG ADULT

EDITOR'S PICK

Girl with the Silver HairCelia Seupel | SFF Publishing
414p, e-book, \$3.99, ISBN 979-8-9928504-1-3

Debut novelist Seupel launches The Samson Project series with a high-stakes dystopian sci-fi thriller that's overflowing with creativity and an intelligent, calculating protagonist. After a nuclear war rendered Earth's surface toxic, 16-year-old Eten lives in 2088 in an underground pod in North Carolina with her mother, Lt. Col. Monica Nowak, her father, Major James Hamilton, and her younger siblings. With silver streaks in their hair, the children all possess telekinetic and teleportation skills that they use as part of an elite government operation to kill terrorists remotely by controlling their blood vessels and hearts. Eten, though, begins to harbor doubts about killing—especially since her ability to manipulate organs and blood also makes her an excellent healer. Further complicating matters: during a training session with live prisoners, one captive insists he's not a terrorist but a climatologist ... and that Eten is fighting for the wrong side.

Eten faces even more jolting revelations about her pod and her world when she is shipped to Mongolia on an assignment to kill a political leader. With seamless



Fast-paced near-future thriller of a teen's rebellion against a fascist government.

Great for fans of Jill Tew's *The Dividing Sky*, Kate Dylan's *Mindwalker*.

transitions, Seupel maintains a suspenseful flow of hints and evidence about the truths that will shake Eten and inspire her to declare, "I would rather burn down the kingdom than be its slave for one more moment." Her rebellion propels her on an expansive journey that exposes the devastation of America's climate, the loss of democracy, and an enigmatic rebel faction called EVE. Seupel keeps the tension high with assassinations, kill orders, gas attacks, creepy experiments, and other sharply described horrors.

Seupel presents this prescient story in a well-earned gritty style. Harsh details, subtle emotion, and political machinations permeate this sweeping saga, which takes seriously the traumatizing impact of violence—even revolutionary violence. This emotional story of revelation and resilience will keep readers of all ages turning the pages. Future books in the series will be eagerly awaited.

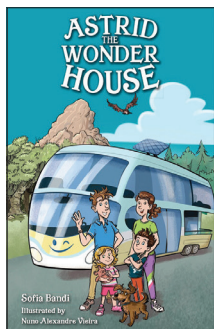
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

YOUNG ADULT

Astrid the Wonder HouseSofia Bandi | IngramSpark
160p, hardcover, \$30.99, ISBN 978-1-0369-1665-7

With fun family hijinks and episodic adventure-centered around an emergency road trip in a speaking, problem-solving, indestructible magic vehicle—Bandi creates a strangely cheerful middle-grade dystopian debut. When the Dawsons' home is threatened by a climate change-provoked tornado, the family hops into mobile home Astrid, a surprise gift built at work by AI robots under Dad's direction. From there, they encounter a mix of weather- and animal-related disasters, solved by the cleverness of five-year-old Elena, her seven-year-old brother Alex, and Milo, a stray dog they pick up on the way, along with Astrid's many unique capacities—including the ability to be a boat, fly, or launch drones.

Bandi's world is fraught with danger: it's embroiled in environmental disaster, food is scarce, lost animals are starving, and AI robots are threatening to enslave humanity—but the story avoids horror, maintaining a welcome sense of safety, with the drama being something the Dawsons can laugh about together at the end of



Fun, warm, high-tech family adventure in the face of environmental devastation.

Great for fans of Dan Gutman's *The Homework Machine*, Eve L. Ewing's *Maya and the Robot*.

the day. Adult readers may catch on to a family trying to navigate deep trauma as their world is upended, but Bandi keeps that hint of danger light for younger readers. Though the story's fast pace leaves little space for thoughtful reflection, the creativity and energy of the Dawsons' many narrow escapes will hold interest—and make for a lively setting. Nuno Alexandre Vieira's illustrations are tightly tied to the text's events, featuring the Dawsons in a series of tense situations, with bold, emotional facial expressions that add resonance and urgency. Kids will enjoy the novelty of a futuristic vehicle with a personality all its own, and Milo adds levity to even the most dangerous situations, as in his last-minute rescue of Alex from a starving wolf that nets him the moniker Milo the Brave. The wild string of events may stretch credulity, but for readers willing to exercise their imaginations, this is a fun ride.

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

YOUNG ADULT

The Constitution KidsGary Gabel | MASCOT Books
186p, mass market, \$16.95, ISBN 979-8-891-38390-6

In Gabel's YA debut, three small-town 15-year-olds in the American Midwest experience a summer they'll never forget. After witnessing a group of adults outside city hall protesting to ban certain books from the library, Kali, Roman, and Alex are surprised to see a man displaying a gun to his fellow protestors. When Kali confronts him, asking why he felt a gun was necessary at a protest about books, his response is "I brought it because it's my right under the Constitution." That sparks the kids' curiosity as to just what the Constitution entails, prompting a trip to the library for research. There, they discover a magical book that transports them back in time, to witness the actual creation of the Constitution itself.

So begins a spectacular journey through time and space to learn the truth of America's inception, viewed through the eyes of famous historical figures brought to life. When Kali first stumbles onto *The Living Constitution* in the library, the book pulsates with energy, and Benjamin Franklin himself rises from the pages, vowing



Entertaining time travel adventure bringing the Constitution to life.

Great for fans of Michael C. Harris's *What Is the Declaration of Independence?*, Rosemary Wells's *On the Blue Comet*.

Mundy Peterson, the first Black man to vote in the U.S. to Ruth Bader Ginsburg's teachings on the 5th Amendment—but he includes snapshots of other countries fighting against oppression as well, to remind readers why freedom was America's cornerstone from the start. YA fans will relish the book's exciting time travel elements and be inspired by this trio's passionate embrace of freedom, equality, and social justice.

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

to the trio that he must "bring the Constitution alive for each of you." From there, the group travels to a wide array of historical sites, starting with 1787 Philadelphia, where the Constitution is being signed into law.

Gabel's historical cast is diverse, each one serving a crucial part in America's formation—from Quaker Alice Paul's explanation of free speech to Thomas

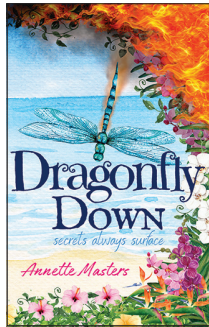
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YOUNG ADULT Dragonfly Down

Annette Masters | Barred Rock Books
307p, trade paper, \$14.99, ISBN 979-8-9898645-3-9

Sisters Laurel and Ollie Greenleaf are anticipating spending one last summer on their family's vacation island before their mother—a "leading authority on adolescent trauma therapy"—turns it into a healing center and residence for unhoused youth. Ollie has big plans for the future, but Laurel is struggling with the change encroaching on their lives: her sister wants to strike out on her own, she's ghosted her boyfriend, and she's still grieving the violent death of their father at the hands of protest group Defenders of Morality. When a massive explosion in their island residence leaves their mother hospitalized and Ollie presumed dead, Laurel suspects there's more to the story—and sets out to find her sister, no matter the cost.

Masters (*The Hennessy Lie*) builds up the strong bonds of sisterhood and family in this heart-racing thriller. Laurel is convinced that her sister is not dead, only missing, and, despite the entirety of her friends and family believing she's just



Satisfying YA thriller driven by intense family bonds.

Great for fans of Tiffany D. Jackson's *Monday's Not Coming*, Chelsea Icho's *Dead Girls Can't Tell Secrets*.

her traumatic past. Desperate for answers, and with evidence stacking against her, Laurel operates on the dogged sentiment that she "just can't accept Ollie's death," a heartening thread that drives her beliefs, actions, and the plot of this riveting story.

Fans of layered family mysteries with morally grey characters will find *Dragonfly Down* engrossing, and the addition of the paparazzi tracking every move of this infamous family—and their continued harassment by the Defenders of Morality—accelerates the pacing and suspense. The ending delivers satisfying closure and a reminder that life should be lived "holding tight to the things you love most."

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

YOUNG ADULT Scorpions Ascent

Hollisa Alewine | Morgan James YA Fiction
180p, trade paper, \$14.99, ISBN 978-1-636-98601-2

Thirteen-year-old Tzakhi, a silver-haired Jewish boy living in the Tamar fortress in the kingdom of Melekh Shlomo, yearns for a different path. His father, just like his father before him, works the mining trade, forging copper for the king, and soon it will be Tzakhi's turn to feed the fires. The problem is, he secretly dreams of being a soldier and riding horses, just like his friend and mentor Captain Avidan. When Tzakhi's father is kidnapped by a rival clan for his superior metal-working abilities, Tzakhi must brave the brutal desert to save him, with no one but his donkeys for help.

Set in and around the Israel of biblical times, *Scorpion's Ascent* revolves around Tzakhi's unconventional path. He loves the camels, donkeys, and horses who pass through the fortress in their caravans; he can communicate with wolves, who become his friends; and he feels strongly that his stepmother Shira should be free to do what she wants. Alewine capably renders him as the heart and soul of this YA debut, with only the desert itself—a formidable character with a personality and



Unconventional Jewish teen forges his own path in this adventuresome YA.

Great for fans of Hanna Alkaf's *The Weight of Our Sky*, Kimberley Griffiths Little's *Forbidden*.

will of its own—rivaling his presence. As Tzakhi grows into his own, he channels his special skills while facing danger, a harsh environment, and the dark maneuvers fomented by greed, never wavering in his quest to rescue his father—and carve his own way, even if that means going against his customs, family, and king.

Alewine pays heed to the story's ancient setting, often dipping into Hebrew words, names, and biblical anachronisms while examining ageless themes with strong relevance to contemporary times as well. Though the multitude of clans and kingdoms can be difficult to track, their intricacy whispers of the layered heritage and conventions that drive Tzakhi's choices, sifting his desire to forge a different path against the well-worn sands of tradition. The result is both compelling and inspiring.

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



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FICTION

Mit Out Sound

Rick Lenz. Chromodroid, \$16.99 trade paper (378p) *ISBN 978-0-9996953-7-1*

Former actor Lenz (*Hello, Rest of My Life*) delves into Hollywood film lore with his immersive latest, about a personal assistant's quixotic 1970s quest to complete an obscure unfinished film rumored to have costarred John Wayne and James Dean. Emily Bennett first hears about *Showdown's* 1955 production from a fellow extra on a 1973 TV shoot. A few years later, while working for an actor on the set of *The Shootist*, Wayne's final film, she works up the courage to ask the taciturn star about *Showdown* but fails to convince him to finish it ("I'm too old to play myself," Wayne says). After Wayne dies in 1979, she recruits Wayne impersonator Tom Manfredo and Dean impersonator Jimmy Riley to act in the film, and a love triangle develops as she falls for Tom while Jimmy nurses his feelings for her. Things get a bit unwieldy in the melodramatic third act with a pair of shoehorned and occasionally confusing Oedipal motifs (one character has killed his father and another may have had sex with his mother), but for the most part Lenz, who also appeared in *The Shootist*, offers a fascinating perspective on Hollywood's Golden Age and its pull on his cast. This is worth a look.

Paris Bohemian

Michelle Fogle. Legacy Imprints, \$9.99 e-book (386p) *ASIN B0D3FT35C5*

Fogle (*City of Liars*) offers an enchanting narrative of the tumultuous friendship between composers Erik Satie and Claude Debussy. In 1890, 24-year-old music school dropout Erik meets the older and more successful Claude in a Paris music shop. Claude, recognizing the young man's talent, invites him to become a Rosicrucian, and the order performs one of Erik's pieces at a salon. Still, Erik struggles to make ends meet until he finds success incorporating American popular music into his compositions, while Claude takes a break from his own work to care for his wife after a miscarriage. Their relationship turns sour after Erik learns that Claude, who has grown resentful of Erik's success, has used part of his work

without permission in the 1908 piece "Children's Corner." Some of the prose is awkward ("I never wanted to perform dreary sauerkraut to their standards of mechanical perfection," Erik narrates, describing his dismissal from a conservatory as a teen), but Fogle effectively captures the composers' innovations and respect for each other's work ("Somewhere between a chant and a recitative.... The music blurs the temporal boundaries, drawing me into another world," Erik remarks on Claude's 1902 opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*). Those with an interest in classical music will find this hard to put down

The Sullivan's Island Supper Club

Susan M. Boyer. Stella Maris, \$16.99 trade paper (374p) *ISBN 978-1-959023-29-6*

Boyer's second Carolina Tales mystery (after *Big Trouble on Sullivan's Island*) is another charming cozy set in the sleepy beach town of Sullivan's Island, S.C. At the outset, Sarabeth Boone has just thrown "the Titanic of all neighborhood parties" in hopes of mending multiple interpersonal rifts between her acquaintances, but the event quickly became so heated that the police arrested several guests. Hours later, a disappointed Sarabeth is awakened by a neighbor who reports that there's a corpse in her front yard. Initially, Sarabeth assumes it's a drunk stranger, but she eventually realizes that she knows the deceased, who was bludgeoned to death—possibly by one of Sarabeth's own shovels. Flashbacks to five years earlier flesh out the events leading up to the murder, which Boyer resolves with aplomb. En route to the solution, she keeps readers in the dark about who died for far longer than the typical cozy, without sacrificing suspense. It adds up to a unique and satisfying whodunit.

Wilde Abandon

Jennifer Ryan. Jennifer Ryan, \$16.99 trade paper (296p) *ISBN 9798991112031*

An emotional reunion animates bestseller Ryan's steamy third Dark Horse Dive Bar contemporary (after *Wilde for You*). As children, Fox Bridges and Melody Wilde were inseparable. After Melody's dad

stepped in to save Fox from his abusive parents, Fox ended up in foster care, taking him far from Blackrock Falls, Wyo.—but he's never forgotten Melody. Sixteen years later, Fox, now a successful computer programmer, is back in town to take care of his mother, who has terminal cancer. Though Fox has been messaging Melody online, she doesn't realize who he is until they meet up at the bar she owns. Their relationship quickly heats up, though Fox is initially worried that Melody is only attracted to him because of his money, having been burned before. Their evolving romance leads Melody to contemplate how they will work as a couple when Fox moves back to Boston. Meanwhile, a secret from Fox's past may land them both in danger. Sensuous love scenes and a touch of mystery will draw in returning readers and new fans alike. This is a winner.

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