

January 12, 2026

booklife®

— YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING —

19 New BookLife Titles Reviewed

Cover Crush

In this quarterly roundup of BookLife covers, we look at visuals that stand out both on screens and in print

BY MICHAEL SJOSTEDT

Digital browsing now shapes how most readers discover books. That means your cover has to make an instant impression—often at thumbnail size. Bold, readable typography, high-contrast colors, and a clear focal point help it stand out across Amazon listings, newsletters, social feeds, and everywhere readers browse for new books.

For indie authors, designing with the digital realm in mind isn't optional anymore—it's the quickest way to make a memorable first impression and invite readers into your story. Most readers now encounter book covers first as thumbnails, not full-size images. High-impact covers rely on clarity, contrast, color, and strong focal points, and digital-first design helps indie authors stand out in online stores, ads, and book giveaway campaigns.

A standout cover does more than look good—it has to stop the scroll. Whether working with a designer or designing your own, prioritize contrast, clear typography, and imagery that instantly communicates what your book is about.

That's why the covers in this edition of Cover Crush rose to the top as we searched through BookLife reviews and PW reviews of BookLife titles. Each author shares what inspired their design, the story behind the visuals, and how thoughtful collaboration led to covers built for impact at any size.

EXPRESSIVE

Finding Lalla's Anna

Anna Dao

Memoir

Author's statement: "My publisher Wordeee's design team created a



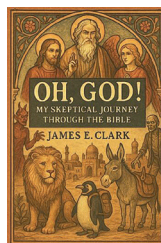
warm, luminous cover for *Finding Lalla's Anna* that reflects the emotional depth of my memoir—a transformative journey of self-discovery shaped by the unconditional love and wisdom of my late grandmother, Lalla. and the ancestral teachings of my home country, Mali. The design feels original and inviting, helping it stand out online and immediately draw readers in."

Oh, God! My Skeptical Journey through the Bible

James E. Clark

Nonfiction

Author's statement: "The cover captures the book's: reverence for the Bible's cultural and historical weight, combined with sharp humor and a willingness to challenge traditional ideas. The artwork nods to medieval religious imagery, then adds a donkey and a penguin with a backpack, because this journey is anything but ordinary."

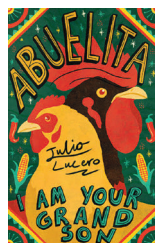


Abuelita, I Am Your Grandson

Julio Lucero

Memoir

Author's statement: "Initially I felt a chicken and rooster were essential for their cultural and familial resonance, especially in capturing frames of the restaurant life. Combined with Baris Sehri's taste and sixth sense for color, the result is a pitch-perfect harmony of playful and sentimental."



Booksellers & Librarians:



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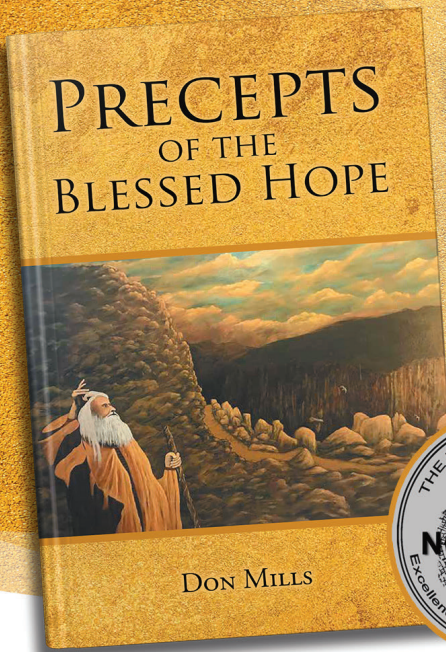
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PRECEPTS OF THE BLESSED HOPE

BY DON MILLS

ISBN: 9781684869695



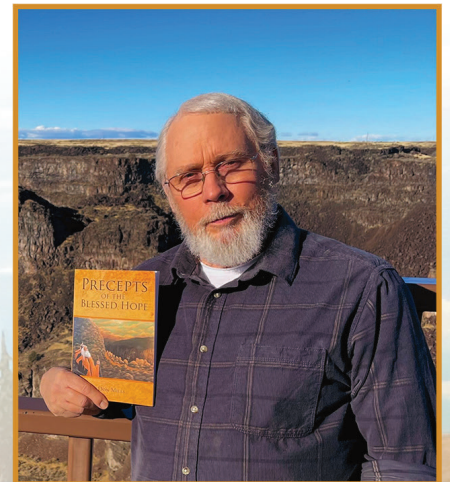
In *Precepts of the Blessed Hope*, Don Mills presents a concise, theologically rich examination of biblical prophecy through the lens of typology. Drawing from over eighteen years of study, Mills uses Scripture to illuminate how God reveals future events through Old Testament figures, making the complex doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture both understandable and spiritually edifying. This updated edition, published by URLink Print & Media, delivers a timely message of hope for readers seeking prophetic clarity without sensationalism.

The book's foundation lies in typology, the method of interpreting biblical characters as foreshadowings of New Testament realities. Abraham represents the Father, Isaac the Son, Rebekah the Church, and Joseph's marriage to Asenath as a symbol of Christ's union with the Gentile bride. These parallels aren't speculative, they are rooted in Scripture and laid out with pastoral clarity, forming what Mills calls "the Lord's photo album," offering a coherent view of God's plan from Genesis to Revelation.

Spanning just 162 pages, *Precepts of the Blessed Hope* is approachable for lay readers while offering depth for Bible teachers and students of eschatology. Its tone is both instructional and devotional, making it a fitting resource for personal study, small groups, or church teaching. Rather than aiming to shock, Mills emphasizes the consistency of God's redemptive patterns and the assurance believers can find in them.

The book has been well-received by leaders and laypeople alike. Dr. Woodrow Kroll, President of Back to the Bible International, commended Mills for not introducing new theology but rather giving fresh light to long-established truths. Anne Hughes of the Good News Club described the book as a "must-read," saying it clarified many scriptural questions she had previously struggled with. Online, the book averages over 4 stars from readers, who praise its clarity, spiritual insight, and faith-affirming tone.

In an age marked by theological confusion and global uncertainty, *Precepts of the Blessed Hope* is a vital resource. It reminds readers that prophecy was never meant to frighten, it was meant to prepare. Through careful exposition and reverent study, Mills offers a message that is both timeless and urgent: the Blessed Hope is real, near, and grounded in Scripture.



Available at:

[amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

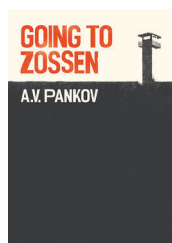
[BARNES & NOBLE](https://www.barnesandnoble.com)



*also in other major online bookstores

MINIMALIST

Going to Zossen



A.V. Pankov

Fiction

Author's statement: "There are a lot of boxes to tick when designing a cover—genre suitability, aesthetic appeal, text readability. I really enjoyed this journey of creating, with the help of David Hennessy, a cover that intrigues, reveals, and attracts readers at the same time."

Doctor Robert



Bobby Lopez

Fiction

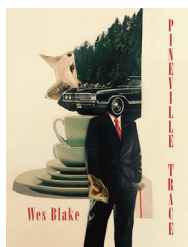
Author's statement: "Clair Fink's cover for *Doctor Robert* drew inspiration from Hitchcockian suspense and classic noir minimalism. The repeated doors create a sense of movement and psychological tension—inviting readers to question what's hidden behind each one."

COLLAGE

Pineville Trace

Wes Blake

Fiction



Author's statement: "When University of Indianapolis's Etchings Press began work on the cover for *Pineville Trace*, my editor Kevin McKelvey and designer Abigail Bailey partnered with Louisville artist Erik Rust to create something striking and true to the novel's atmosphere. Everyday objects like coffee mugs nod to midcentury Americana, while surreal touches hint at Frank's restless inner life."

Unfixed



Alisa Kennedy Jones

Memoir

Designer's statement: "Designing the cover for *Unfixed* was uniquely personal—I'm married to the author and witnessed the very journey she shares in her memoir. To the world, Kimberly appeared calm and composed, but I knew the storm beneath the surface. Capturing that contrast became my goal."

Distorted Perception

Jonathan R. Snowling

Fiction

Author's statement: "From the outset, the cover was designed with

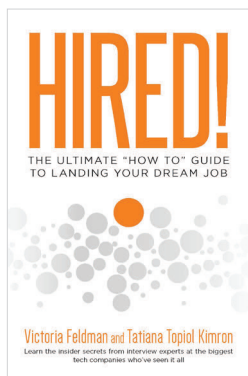
Q&A SPONSORED

BookLife Talks with Victoria Feldman and Tatiana Topiol Kimron

The job market today can be difficult to break into, no matter whether you're looking for your first job or are a seasoned employee switching careers, and it can be frustrating not knowing what you're doing wrong. With *Hired!*, two long-time job coaches have put together steps for readers to take with them into the tumultuous world of corporate job searching.

You both have extensive experience in the tech sector. Is this book exclusively for people looking for work in that industry, or can anyone use the steps in *Hired!*?

V.F.: While our main experience is working with the Big Five tech giants—the hardest companies to get into—the strategies we share are universal. Whether you are a recent graduate or a seasoned professional, the corporate world operates on a specific set of "unwritten rules." *Hired!* is designed for anyone aiming for a role in the corporate world who



needs to master the interview process. The methodology—from storytelling to negotiation—works just as effectively for a marketing manager as it does for a software architect.

What's the most common mistake you see applicants make during the job process?

T.T.K.: The biggest trap candidates fall into is the "performance paradox." They assume that being great at their job automatically means they will be great at interviewing for it. In reality, interviewing is a completely separate skill set. You can be the most qualified person in the room, but if you can't articulate your value or structure your stories effectively, you won't get the offer.

The secret isn't just talent; it's thorough preparation and practice. We teach you how to treat the job search like a strategy game—and we give you the winning cards.

For more, visit booklife.com/hired

BookLife Talks with Richard Fain

With *Delivering the Wow*, Fain, former CEO of Royal Caribbean, shares philosophies for building a company culture that improves not just profitability but customer trust and industry standards. We spoke with Fain about his decades as CEO and what he hopes readers will get out of *Delivering the Wow*.

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

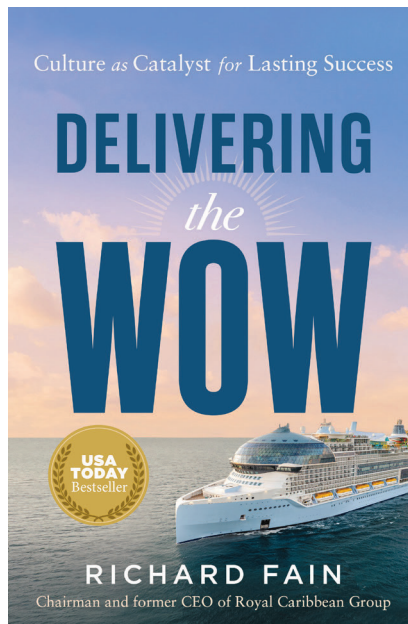
Over the years, I keep hearing the same thing: Royal Caribbean's culture is truly different. My goal in writing *Delivering the Wow* was to give readers, from cruise enthusiasts to professionals in the industry, a behind-the-scenes look at what makes every Royal Caribbean voyage special. I share stories from my 33 years as CEO that explain how we achieved a culture focused on unity and the ultimate customer experience. For our guests, I pulled back the curtain on how we arrive at the magic they experience; for leaders in any industry, I shared lessons on creating a unique culture.

You don't shy away from including your mistakes in the book. Was it hard to do so?

Absolutely not. True innovation means taking risks and accepting inevitable mistakes. You don't soar to success without hitting a few bumps in the road. It isn't difficult to share those bumps, or mistakes, because I learned something valuable from each one of them. I hope to inspire readers to view tough moments as opportunities to grow, and as an essential part of innovation.

What was the most difficult part of your career, and what do you think readers can learn from it?

One of the most difficult moments of my career—and simultaneously one of the most satisfying—was stepping down as CEO in 2022. I loved my job and the people I was lucky enough to work with. I was energized every day at the helm by new ideas and endless possibilities. I knew for years that the day would come, and I loved it to the very end. But even this



final step offered lessons. We prepared thoroughly for the company's next phase and looked for creative ways to protect our company's culture.

Who is your ideal reader and why?

My ideal reader of this book is a business leader looking for their next steps. I hope that whether they work in the travel industry or not, they can feel motivated to transform and clarify their goals and how to achieve them. The people you lead and the people you are serving are the most important pieces of any success story. Promoting constant growth, communication, and connection ensures your employees are aligned on how to best "wow" guests. If a fellow leader can use *Delivering the Wow* as inspiration for how to best show up for their business, I'll be grateful to have been a part of their journey.

You include many behind-the-scenes stories in the

book. Which one is your favorite?

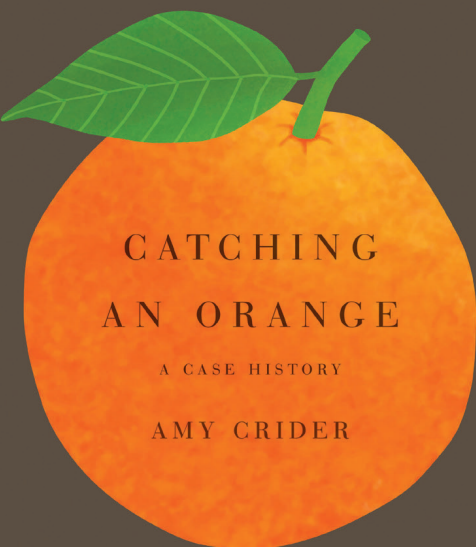
While I don't have a single favorite, one story stands out because it says so much about how people get motivated and create a culture organically. An architect presented an unusually bold design to a roomful of staid businesspeople. We were all so impressed with her concept that the room spontaneously broke out in applause. The next architect stood up and admitted that his design probably wouldn't earn the same reaction. But then he promised: "The next time we meet, my design will earn your applause." That focus on delivering the wow says it all.

For more, visit booklife.com/fain

Three days with a psychiatrist. Thirty years of letters. One extraordinary memoir.

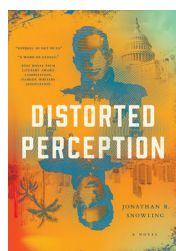
"Once you begin reading Crider's utterly transfixing, vulnerable, and honest memoir, you won't be able to stop. Crider's stylish sentences investigate the space where brilliance and mental illness collide. Her story is heartbreaking and important."

Amanda Eyre Ward,
NYT-bestselling author of
the *The Jetsetters*



A CASE HISTORY

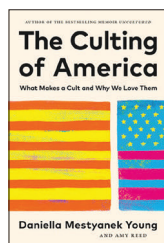
AMY CRIDER

GARRETT
COUNTY
PRESS

of propaganda, perception, and truth distortion, creating visual intrigue even at a glance."

PAINTERLY

The Culting of America

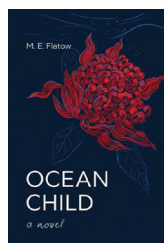


Daniella Mestyaneck Young
Nonfiction

Author's statement: "The pop art-inspired cover features split flags, bold colors, and textures that reflect how cult

dynamics are woven into the fabric of American identity. From the beginning, we wanted to show a brighter and more diverse America alongside the reality of our current fractured American identity."

Ocean Child

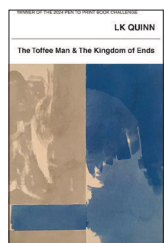


M. E. Flatow
Fiction

Author's statement: "Working with cover designer Zusa Miško, we designed *Ocean Child* to pop in digital spaces: a crimson

waratah on deep navy with large, clean typography that stays legible at thumbnail size and in dark-mode feeds. The composition uses high contrast and generous negative space to survive platform crops, and to stop the scroll."

The Toffee Man & the Kingdom of Ends



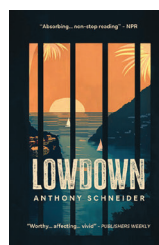
Linda Quinn
Fiction

Author/designer statement: "I was drawn to the work of the artist, Peter Joseph, early in my life. I was honored when he gave permission to

use this painting for the book cover—the subtle dynamics of which I felt captured the spirit of the young protagonist, April."

VINTAGE

Lowdown



Anthony Schneider
Thriller

Author's statement: "I wanted a cover that captures the crazy, contradictory lives of the novel's two main characters. For part of the

book, one character endures a cold prison cell in America, while the other is on the run in bountiful, beautiful Sicily. I hit upon the idea of looking out at an idyllic coastline through prison bars, and designer Katarina Naskovksy brought it to life."

One Ordinary Man



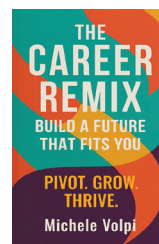
Steve Vesce
Historical fiction

Author's statement: "The cover's atmosphere—shaped by the colors, tones, and hazy images of the capitol, fighter plane, smoke-filled London, and

the two men walking—give readers a sense of the story's subject and time period."

GEOMETRIC

The Career Remix

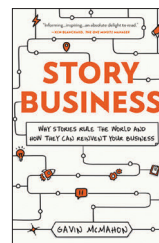


Michele Volpi
Self-help

Author's statement: "I wanted the cover to visually express the idea of reimagining one's career with energy and optimism. The bold

orange, teal, and purple palette symbolizes transformation and growth, while the clean, modern layout was designed to resonate with Millennials and Gen Z professionals."

Story Business



Gavin McMahon
Business

Author's statement: "The cover visualizes a core idea of the book: stories move people and people move business. The pathways and bright

orange icons form a simple but high-contrast map of how ideas travel and connect, with small details meant to pull the reader in."

BookLife Talks with Jeff Burgess

With “one of those college-dropout-to-CEO stories,” Burgess’s debut, *It Worked for Me*, explores his more than 40 years in the computer industry, many of which he spent as CEO of his own company. We spoke with Burgess about how he wrote the book and how he hopes readers will connect with it.

Did you always want to write this book?

Hardly. Frankly, I never was into reading books, unless they covered topics of interest to me—anything about the 1990s Michael Jordan—years Bulls, for instance, and anything about the 1970s progressive rock band Yes.

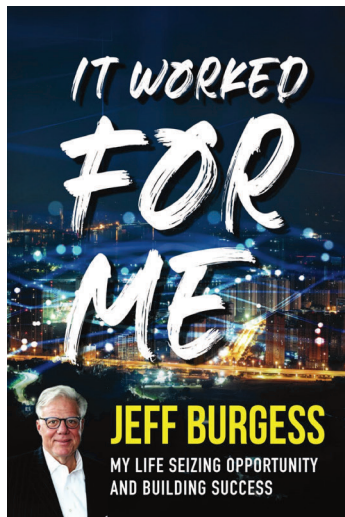
A few months prior to writing *It Worked for Me*, I retired after 45 years in the computer technology industry—one of those college-dropout-to-CEO stories. I’d had a few health issues years, mostly regarding my heart. Not knowing my potential longevity, I wanted to document my story for my three grown kids, so they’d have the story of “how in the hell did this happen for Dad, aka Mom’s fourth child?”

After 180,000 words and 450 pages, my wife sent it off to a local author, Michael Lewis, whom she knew from one of her book clubs. He liked it enough to send it off to a friend of his, Jamie Malanowski, a former editor at *Spy*, *Time*, and *Playboy* magazines. And the rest, as they say, is history.

What was the writing process like for *It Worked for Me*? Were you surprised by anything?

Jamie was a terrific coach. From day one, he told me that he did not want to be a ghostwriter. And he succeeded in that. Instead, he was a first-class pore opener.

He spent the first week diving through the initial manifest, trimming it down by 60,000 words, without losing any of the story. I guess I ramble when I write, too! Once the “manifesto” was trimmed of its fat, we collectively started moving sections around and coming up with chapter titles. That opening section where my dad calls me on the carpet began on



page 150 in the original edition. It was Jamie who envisioned that being the “hook” for the reader. Of course, he was correct.

The motivational business book genre is very big. What makes your book different?

It’s not a how-to book, and it’s not a “look at how smart I am” book. I never went to college. Well, I did for four trimesters, anyway—albeit with never going to a class, thus the four trimesters. It’s just the story of Jeff, who turned his life around thanks to a loving and needed kick in the ass from his father, and who two days later parachuted into a warehouse job at a small computer company. On day two, it clicked. I saw a future and seized on the opportunity.

How do you imagine readers at this moment will connect with *It Worked for Me*?

I like to think it is a generational book, and an everyman/everywoman book. There are life lessons along the way. People my age—68—will feel a historic familiarity with the companies and

brands mentioned, and today’s generation will find motivation in the story. I always felt that my “gift,” for lack of a better term, was my ability to scramble. It’s likely because I had so much practice at it.

What’s next for you?

I recently became a grandpa, and I’m enjoying spending time with my nine-month-old grandson, Johnny. I was also invited to teach a class for an hour at a local college’s business school. I really enjoyed that, and the students were an informed group, as their questions indicated. They kept me on my toes, as well. It looks as if there will be some repeat performances next semester. It hearkens back to my days coaching baseball and basketball. I really like being in front of younger people. Their youthful enthusiasm drives me.

For more, visit booklife.com/burgess



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

Exit Tickets: A Novel

Kenneth Chanko | Luminare Press
305p, hardcover, \$33.95, ISBN 979-8-88679-861-6

Chanko's powerful debut offers a pained, persuasive, and empathetic portrayal of the American public education system through the microcosm of a middle school on New York's Upper East Side. Surveying the 2007–2008 school year, the central narrative follows Martin Jordanowski, or Mr. J, a young writing enrichment teacher whose first-day optimism is slapped into reality by reckless students, disillusioned colleagues, and administrative barriers. With clear eyes and sharp everyday detail, *Exit Tickets* illuminates how individual struggles intersect with institutional dysfunctions.

Chanko crafts a polyphonic narrative in which a rich array of voices reveals interlocking, escalating failures of the system—and the hearts of those caught up in it. This includes Shirley Holmes, a weary veteran teacher balancing health, family, and job pressures, and Stephanie Slotnick, a teacher bullied by students. The dialogue is



Powerful, realistic portrayal of life in the American public education system.

Great for fans of T.L. Zempel's *Finishing School*, Charles Baxter's *Saul and Patsy*.

What's most striking about the novel is the honesty with which Chanko—a journalist and Manhattan schoolteacher—gives life to his characters. Neither students nor teachers are reduced to stereotypes. They are profoundly human, with flaws and contradictions, caught between exhaustion and compassion. At times, the fragmented perspectives make the narrative feel disjointed, much like educators' and students' actual days, and Chanko is too committed a truth-teller to offer false hope. Readers interested in realistic depictions of urban education will find this immersive story essential reading.

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

FICTION

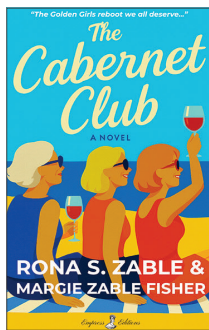
EDITOR'S PICK

The Cabernet Club: A Novel

Rona S. Zable & Margie Zable Fisher
380p, trade paper, \$18.99, ISBN 979-8-999-52706-6

YA author Zable (*Love at the Laundromat*), who died in 2023, and her daughter Fisher show off their literary chops with this engaging tale of a Boston-area single mother who retires to Florida to salvage her sanity. Debbie Gordon has grown tired of Massachusetts winters—and her daughter Lori's attempts to persuade her to move to Delaware with her family, where free babysitting for Debbie's grandchildren looms on the horizon. Instead, she takes a leap of faith and signs a temporary lease on a condo in a Florida "Active Adult Community" called Palmetto Point—and immediately finds a new group of friends who are every bit as determined as she is to live their later years to the fullest. They immediately dub themselves the Cabernet Club—inspired by their favorite beverage—and encourage each other to try new things.

Readers will immediately fall in love with Debbie and her quirky new pack of pals:



Charming—and empowering—tale of seniors living life to the fullest.

Great for fans of Debbie Macomber; Lori Foster.

Fran, who has a giant doll collection and a huge heart; Maria, an excellent cook and confidante, always ready to lend a helping hand; and Joe, a provider of superb homemade feasts who has the potential to be more than just a friend. The authors even inject an unexpected surprise: after decades of no contact, a person from Debbie's high school reappears, setting the record straight on a long-held wound.

Though written by two different authors, the narrative seamlessly unfurls, with characters who leap off the page and portray a realistic—and hopeful—future for the story's seniors. Debbie's journey—learning to put herself first after a lifetime of sacrificing for others—will ring true for readers of any age, and, whether enjoying their golden years or not, this engaging and laugh-out-loud tale will inspire fans to enjoy those "bright and fleeting window[s] of time when you can finally see what you never noticed before and be who you never were."

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

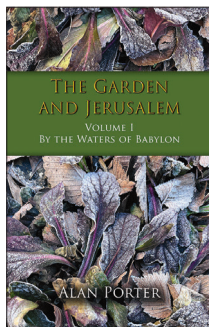
FICTION

The Garden and Jerusalem, Vol 1: By the Waters of Babylon

Alan Porter | Aporter Publishing
342p, trade paper, \$17.99, ASIN B0FVJYL1Q6

Porter's tightly focused 17th century bildungsroman charts, in fleet and inviting prose, the intellectual development of Roger Williams, the English minister and advocate for religious freedom who eventually founded the Providence Plantations that became the state of Rhode Island. A merchant's son gifted in languages and possessed of rare piety and an agile mind, Williams catches the attention of the storied jurist Sir Edward Coke as a young teenager, with a self-composed speech about "The New Jerusalem"—it's "the one that comes down from heaven" rather than a specific locale, and arriving there will demand "courage and discipline." Impressed, Coke takes on the boy as "a kind of apprentice," nurturing his talents, broadening his world, teaching him about the grand truth of the law and the grubby reality of politics.

Coke soon enlists Williams into the great conflict of their lives: the preservation of the right to live and worship freely, despite backsliding led by a corrupted monarchy



Invitingly told novel of the intellectual development of Roger Williams.

Great for fans of PJ Womack's *Darling of Kings*, Geraldine Brooks's *Caleb's Crossing*.

and a gentry of "Great Ones" who "consider themselves above the law, free to use it as it suits them." Through Williams's education, Porter illuminates both the principles that would soon shape the American idea and the practical dangers of pushing for freedom under the gaze of kings. Much of the novel concerns tensions between Parliament and Kings James and Charles,

with much ado about loans and bribes, schemes and scandals, and standing firm before accusations of treason.

Porter's storytelling is brisk, even chatty, an approach that illuminates but also sacrifices one pleasure of historical fiction: dramatic scenes rich in evocative, lived-in detail. Moments like Williams smuggling secret letters into a prison or exchanging heated missives after a thwarted courtship are breezed through rather than dramatized with emotional urgency. Still, Porter reveals the currents of change, and the ending—with Williams on the cusp of that New Jerusalem—will leave readers interested in the development of the American idea eager for more.

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

VIRTUAL
JANUARY 30, 2026



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Market Strategies by Channel
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FICTION

Meinbald

Juha Saarela | Stiernkos

377p, hardcover, \$24.99, ISBN 978-1-970-60103-9

This historical fiction debut follows the life of a man who rose from common origins through hardship and grueling effort to become one of the leaders of 13th century Finland. Meinbald—born in 1220 to merchant parents in Dresden, Germany—is only two years old when his family immigrates to Prague, under the promise of the ever-expanding Catholic Church and Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. As Meinbald grows—and “learn[s] compassion, fairness, justice, and tolerance”—the region’s religious and political tensions escalate. But when his parents die in a house fire, Meinbald and his sister Kunigunde are left orphans—until Abbess Agnes, sister to the Bohemian king, Wenceslaus, takes them under her protection. That turn of fate alters Meinbald’s destiny, as Agnes’s Order of the Red Star and Cross becomes his new home and identity.

Tasked with “protect[ing] the weak and the sick and fight[ing] against the heretical and aggressive forces that threaten [Christendom],” Meinbald applies his wits and



Sweeping historical fiction following 13th century European crusader.

Great for fans of Jon Byrne’s *Sword Brethren*, Janet Rich Edwards’s *Canticle*.

compassion to rise in the Order’s ranks, helping repel the Grand Khan’s Mongol army and establish field hospitals for friends and enemies alike. Saarela adopts the historical language and social constructs of the book’s time period to bring its events to life, as church and state unite and drive King Wenceslaus’s troops into a holy mission to conquer the “savages of the steppes.” The values considered praiseworthy during that era—faithfulness to the Church, patience, intelligence—bring immense success to Meinbald and to those around him, eventually creating a warrior nobility class in medieval Finland.

Saarela capably combines fictional detail with 13th century historic record, giving readers an insider’s perspective on how Meinbald’s leadership influenced future generations—and even the character of his nation. Crusades, power struggles between the church and the crown, debilitating poverty, and a brotherhood forged by war give this offering lively historical authenticity.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Dangling and Dangerous

K.M. Krenik | Knox Works

341p, e-books, \$6.99, ASIN B0FLSVK215

Krenik’s second Ranfurly Mysteries offering (after *Danger Lies Within*) throws readers straight into grave turmoil, as war has facilitated a takeover of PAX intelligence and a new, harsh regime rules the land. Prior characters make a repeat appearance, including Courtney, no longer just the nanny but now Lord Robert Ranfurly’s love interest—and a partner in the care of his children. In this entry, PAX agent Sean and his partner Jasmine are both serving undercover in Robert’s household, with strict orders to report on anything out of the ordinary. The stakes are high from the start, but when Robert’s five-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, goes missing, the manor erupts into chaos.

Though Krenik keeps the series’ core elements intact—familiar characters, PAX, the resistance group CAPE—Robert serves less as a haunted recluse this time around and more a desperate father willing to cross borders and laws to get his daughter back. The way Elizabeth’s disappearance steadily opens onto a larger, more dangerous world gives this installment a darker, structurally ambitious feel, and the novel tries to juggle



Fast, emotionally charged sequel of conspiracy, danger, and looming darkness.

Great for fans of Antonia Hodgson’s *The Raven Scholar*, Robert Jackson Bennett’s *The Tainted Cup*.

several weighty plot points at once: domestic scenes soaked in grief and tenderness; intense action sequences with wolves, sharks, and stealth planes; and a slowly unspooling conspiracy around PAX’s restructured regime. What holds *Dangling and Dangerous* together is Krenik’s clear handling of time, arranging scenes so precisely that the sequence never feels confusing, even when the geopolitics and acronyms start to pile up. Robert and Courtney’s developing relationship offers a hopeful base to the threads of peril, and Krenik leaves many of the subplots deliberately unresolved, tilting readers firmly toward the next installment. For readers already invested in Ranfurly Manor, *Dangling and Dangerous* delivers exactly what a second book should: a bigger canvas, a meaner antagonist, and the sense that these characters will not emerge unchanged from what PAX and its otherworldly dangers are doing to them.

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

ROMANCE

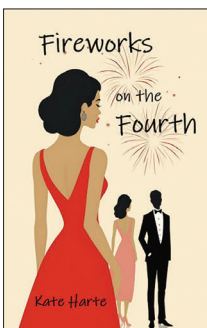
Fireworks on the Fourth

Kate Harte | LivRéve Press

266p, trade paper, \$18.99, ISBN 979-8-998-73660-5

“No etiquette book could tell Susan how to handle this unusually uncommon situation,” Harte writes at the moment everything goes awry in this unexpected, intergenerational comedy of clashes and connections on a Connecticut weekend in the summer of 1992. Susan is a bestselling romance novelist who doesn’t exactly know when she drifted apart from her daughter, Emma—maybe it was when Emma started lying, when her teen angst tugged her toward risky drugs and frisky men, or maybe it happened quietly, over years. Either way, Susan’s goal for the perfect Fourth of July weekend at her estate: get her daughter back. But when Emma, now 25, arrives with a much older beau in tow, Susan is jolted by a past she’s never quite forgotten. As Emma introduces the polished literature professor Richard, all Susan can see is the 20-year-old boy she once loved and lost—the one who got away.

With that delicious setup, Harte draws sharp parallels between past and present, weaving together the tender flashbacks from Susan’s torrid affair with Richard in France in 1966 and the relatable comic tensions of a weekend derailed by his return. As other friends arrive, with baggage and judgments, frank talk of politics and changing



Smart, surprising romantic comedy of mother-daughter conflict in 1992.

Great for fans of Roxana Robinson’s *Leaving*, Emily Henry’s *Beach Read*.

that can be destructive to both.

What lingers are the all-too-human moments of levity and insight—about aging, the burgeoning Clinton era, sexual mores, and harassment—within the emotional tumult. Harte keeps the story moving while finding resonance in complicated memories and truths in witty banter. Susan finds no easy answers, but Harte understands that love, whether maternal or romantic, tends to leave a mark, and that, despite distance and disappointment, it’s never too late to fix things.

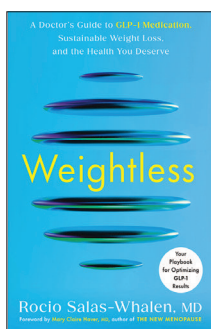
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

HEALTH & DIET

Weightless: A Doctor's Guide to GLP-1 Medications, Sustainable Weight Loss, and the Health You Deserve

Rocio Salas-Whalen | Rodale Books
288p, hardcover, \$29, ISBN 978-0-593-98120-7

Endocrinologist and obesity-medicine specialist Salas-Whalen offers a compassionate, clear-eyed primer on GLP-1-based weight management, demystifying what readers should expect and the challenges of changing habits and sustaining progress. She grounds her guidance in clinical research and experience but makes clear from the start that the treatment-without-shame approach of *Weightless* marks a break with the past, opening with an apology, on behalf of the medical community, for having treated “chronic conditions such as obesity as ‘willpower problems’ or moral failings.” With professional anecdotes, of-the-moment science, and an understanding that what matters is “real lives, not just numbers on the scale,” Salas-Whalen explains, in approachable language, how hormones, genetics, environment, brain-gut signaling drive weight gain, plus crucial topics like the criteria insurers have set for access.



Empathetic, clinically grounded guide to GLP-1 weight loss therapy.

Great for fans of Jason Fung's *The Obesity Code*, Joshua Hackett's *The GLP-1 Lifestyle*.

That practical approach also powers later sections that cover what readers can expect from life after rapid weight loss. With heartening examples and upbeat coaching, Salas-Whalen addresses energy dips, gastrointestinal issues, and changes in body composition, including loose skin. Her advice, rooted in patients' experience, extends to maintaining progress after treatment (she makes clear that returning to the medication is “not a failure”); providing brief, helpful scripts for responding to comments about body changes from coworkers, family, or partners; and handling the emotional and relational upheaval that can accompany a shrinking body. Systemic obstacles like cost and drug shortages receive less attention than individual tactics, but overall this is welcome, helpful roadmap.

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

SELF-HELP

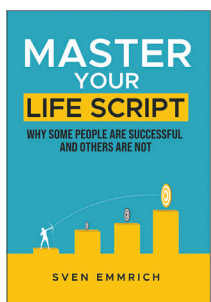
EDITOR'S PICK

Master Your Life Script: Why Some People Are Successful and Others Are Not

Sven Emmrich
259p, trade paper, \$12.99, ISBN 979-8-272-94412-2

Infused with personal history, self-deprecating humor, and hands-on activities, Emmrich's guide provides readers with an easy-to-follow path for overcoming challenges. Confident in his assertion that “there are patterns and principles for living a successful and fulfilling life,” he emphasizes behaviors that either limit or encourage forward progress, using practical exercises, personal anecdotes, and striking imagery to help readers personalize the meaning of success and create a rewarding, purposeful life. Through concepts like emergence—the idea that individual components can be broken down and rearranged, with results that are “greater than the sum of [their] parts”—and abduction, which he defines as “deriving meaningful connections from individual observations,” Emmrich teaches readers to retire old habits and craft new endings.

What makes Emmrich's writing stand out is his ability to distill complex topics and apply them in relatable ways. He transforms the laws of motion into self-help grist,



Expansive guide to achieving success, drawn from science, sociology, and psychology.

Great for fans of Adam Grant's *Hidden Potential*, Dan Sullivan's *The Gap and the Gain*.

encouraging readers to turn inertia into momentum by exerting force to achieve their goals—and exploring counter-effect as the “effort required to move forward” when struggling under the weight of exhaustion or drained energy. Those simple but key ideas provide a roadmap for readers to take action, recognize success, and accept setbacks as a natural part of forward movement. Though he offers much to reflect on, Emmrich pairs that complexity with real-life examples, useful exercises, and QR codes for further reading, applying not just scientific principles but also psychological theories to achieving success over failure. He touches on reward versus punishment, urging readers to “take every opportunity to increase rewards and reduce punishments,” delves into self-sabotaging behaviors, and explains four levels of learning to streamline change: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence (or flow). Emmrich's unique approach—melding sociological, psychological, and scientific perspectives—will leave readers with a “steady force in a clear direction... even in the face of uncertainty and the unknown.”

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

MEMOIR

EDITOR'S PICK

Little Edna's War: A True Story of Resistance and Hope

Janet Bond Brill | Amsterdam Publishers
364p, trade paper, \$19.95, ISBN 978-9-493-41863-9

Brill (*Cholesterol Down*) renders the life of her mother-in-law, Edna Stefania Brill (1934-2019), in vivid, emotive strokes in this riveting posthumous memoir. Born into an affluent Jewish family in Warsaw, Poland, Edna was just four years old when the Nazi Army began bombing Poland's Jewish communities. In a harrowing, first-person perspective, Brill recounts Edna's graphic and devastating story of survival, concealed identity, and staged uprisings, starting with her and her siblings' work as smugglers inside the Warsaw Ghetto to ensure their family's survival. When that becomes too unsafe, Edna and her older sister, Miriam, have no choice but to assume the identity of young Catholic orphans, taking refuge in churches and homes of compassionate neighbors.

Brill's writing expertly captures the horrendous impact of World War II on Jewish families, particularly on the children. Edna's journey is gut-wrenching and unforgettable, depicting neighbors who are willing to turn their friends into the Nazis for money, families splitting up, devastating starvation, and the never-ending specter of death



Extraordinary young Jewish girl fights in Polish resistance during WWII.

Great for fans of Marceline Lorian-Ivens's *But You Did Not Come Back*, Julian E. Kulski's *The Color of Courage*.

looming in the distance. When nine-year-old Edna is welcomed into the resistance by Major Wilk—to serve as a courier—she proves her resilience, strength, and bravery, becoming the youngest soldier in the Polish Home Army during the war. History buffs will be fascinated by Brill's chronicle of Edna as a soldier, following along as she memorizes maps, delivers messages under dangerous conditions, and even navigates sewers to escape capture. After the 1944 surrender of the Polish forces (which occurred on Edna's 10th birthday), Edna and Miriam become prisoners of war. Her steadfastness throughout those experiences is inspiring, and her observations on human nature, war, and survival resound with authenticity and wisdom. “I survived despite the hatred that infected nearly everyone around us,” she writes, marking her legacy as one of hope, freedom, and “resilience that spans generations.”

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

MEMOIR

EDITOR'S PICK

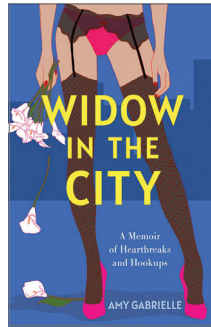
Widow in the City: A Memoir of Heartbreaks and Hookups

Amy Gabrielle

233p, trade paper, \$17.99, ISBN 979-8-896-36200-5

In her raw, witty debut, Gabrielle details her rediscovery of desire, identity, and self-love after devastating loss. She begins her chronicle of midlife reinvention with a bold prologue, recalling a sexual encounter with a man she met on a kink-friendly dating app. Diving into erotic choreography, Gabrielle captures her wandering thoughts during their rendezvous, narrating the way she snaps in and out of her body while trying to savor physical pleasure, her mind pulling her back into painful memories of her husband's death. "Was I going crazy," she reflects, "or was this some weird manifestation of grief?"

Grief—the organization of it, its rawness, the emptiness it leaves behind—threads throughout the memoir. Employing her usual sense of order, Gabrielle attempts to schedule grief's side effects and plan her healing while still completing everything expected of her. What she doesn't anticipate are her overwhelming emotional and



Widow's sexual reawakening is part of surprisingly complex grieving process.

Great for fans of Joan Price's *Sex After Grief*, Rebecca Woolf's *All of This*.

physical reactions—or the awakening of her long-dormant sexual desires. It begins with the familiar ache of loneliness, and, in seeking company, Gabrielle turns to one dating app after another. What she discovers is twofold: her desire is far more intricate than she'd ever realized, and grief still lingers beneath every new connection. With direct but evocative prose, Gabrielle reveals how her uplifting feelings are often met with painful counterweights: after her husband's cancer diagnosis, she spent three years as his caretaker, but when that heavy responsibility is finally lifted, she's hit with waves of mourning for the love that anchored her life; though grateful to build an even stronger bond with her son, Henry, she still feels gnawing resentment at having to sit with him every night until he falls asleep. As she documents her winding path to becoming a body-positive midlife influencer, Gabrielle tenderly but fearlessly acknowledges the messiness of grief, ultimately realizing that reclaiming her life is an ongoing process.

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

MEMOIR

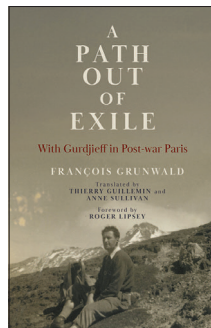
A Path Out of Exile: With Gurdjieff in Post-war Paris

François Grunwald | Red Elixir

194p, trade paper, \$24.95, ISBN 978-1-966-29310-1

This third part of storied psychiatrist Grunwald's memoir (published in France in 2017 and now translated by Thierry Guillemin and Anne Sullivan) begins where most books could end. It is 1944, and Grunwald is returning home as a wounded hero, an Austrian Jew who fought for the French against the Nazis. He returns to his adopted home in war-ravaged France, a nation that he has "paid dearly" for and that is eager to make him a citizen. He seemingly has everything that a man can ask for, yet Grunwald's exile is far from over. This intimate, engrossing account reveals the "black abyss" he felt "had been carved into my innermost self," and his embrace of the teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff, the spiritual teacher whose calls for self-knowledge and "purification"—for, as Grunwald puts it, "learning from one's stupidities and mistakes, and from all other experiences"—still resonate today.

Grunwald's spiritual yearning brings him to Gurdjieff, the central axis of this episodic memoir. Grunwald captures the excitement of discovering Gurdjieff and his



Moving, intimate account of studying the Work with G. I. Gurdjieff.

Great for fans of James Opie's *Between Two Worlds*, P. D. Ouspensky's *The Fourth Way*.

teachings (lessons on the "three types" of man; the "degrees of human infamy," and above all the imperative to "remember oneself!"), plus Gurdjieff's personality, Rabelaisian bent, and presence—in his company, Grunwald reports feeling "a goodness, a generous source of inner energy, free from sentimentality." Leading figures of the movement in Paris come to life in vivid portraits as Grunwald presents

a fuller view of the Work, the hushed evening gatherings, the meals that doubled as lessons, the painstaking movements, and the unspoken hierarchies binding the circles. The book is written as a confessional letter to Grunwald's friend, Richard Dill, contributing to the feeling of private disclosure but also the sense that the book is written for the already converted. Readers deeply familiar with Gurdjieff will find that this sings, but the uninitiated face jargon and spiritual discussions and concerns that mystify rather than illuminate or entice. Still, chapters dealing with Gurdjieff's and Ludolf Schild's deaths are deeply moving.

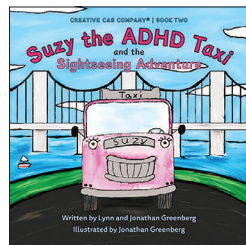
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: — Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **B**

PICTURE BOOKS

Suzy the ADHD Taxi and the Sightseeing AdventureLynn and Jonathan Greenberg | Empower Publishing, LLC
38p, hardcover, \$19.99, ISBN 979-8-998-68570-5

Lynn Greenberg and Jonathan Greenberg reunite for the second offering in their Creative Cab Company series, this time following Suzy, the ADHD taxi and newest member of Greensborough's Creative Cab Company. She's nervous, of course, but with the help of returning character Robby the Dyslexic Taxi and the company's leader Allison, Suzy gets the chance to master her new job in a way that makes sense to her: instead of memorizing the city's map, Suzy follows Robby's lead on a tour to get the lay of the land. The job still comes with some challenges—and Suzy learns the valuable lesson of asking for help when it's necessary as she copes with those—but her transformation from unsure to confident inspires.

Just like the series' first offering—*Robby the Dyslexic Taxi and the Airport Adventure*—the authors portray neurodivergence in a caring, understanding way. Both Suzy and Robby learn differently, and the Creative Cab Company excels at tapping into those unique abilities. Rather than being judgmental and harsh, Suzy's new working environment warmly welcomes her, and everyone understands that the success of each individual cab helps the company flourish as well. When problems arise, Suzy brain-



Charming exploration of neurodivergence, through a taxicab's perspective.

Great for fans of Brenda Li's *The Girl Who Makes a Million Mistakes*, Erin Schoenfelder Gonzalez's *Benji's Busy Brain*.

storms how to approach them with the rest of her team, building camaraderie while developing the agency needed to succeed at her job. Jonathan Greenberg pairs the book's important message with lively, hand-drawn illustrations that depict the company's transportation routes, the bustling big city, and Suzy's endearing expressions. Young readers will learn to recognize different types of vehicles—firetrucks, ambulances, and more—and appreciate the humorous details, like Suzy and Robby high-fiving their front tires in congratulations. The story declines thrills in favor of friendship and inclusivity, leaving Suzy "tired but proud, because she knows that if she takes her time she can solve any problem she might face."

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

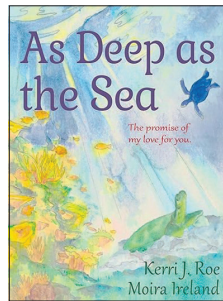
PICTURE BOOKS

As Deep as the Sea: The Promise of My Love for You

Kerri J. Roe and Moira Ireland | Quillflower Creative, LLC
38p, hardcover, \$20, ISBN 979-8-9917218-2-0

Roe's picture book debut is a soothing, lyrical tribute to the love between a parent and child, unfolding in whimsical verse and delicate watercolor illustrations by Moira Ireland. "My love for you is as deep as the sea, where the fish and turtles and creatures of the deep swim and sleep and dream," the story begins, flitting from scenes of nature to the cosmos to treasured family memories as Roe examines the many shapes and sizes of familial devotion. One scene recreates a child's drawing, tracing parallels between the crayons' bright colors and the rich palette of devotion; another shows young children beachcombing for treasures to take home; and elsewhere, a family's love infuses their holiday kitchen get-together with lush aromas and mouthwatering treats.

Kids and their adult readers will find this a heartwarming opportunity to express emotions that can sometimes feel too big for words. Roe's symbolism makes devotion



Touching tribute to the power of love and connection.

Great for fans of Sam McBratney's *Guess How Much I Love You*, Nicky Benson's *I Love You More and More*.

shimmering lakes, and simple activities—like breakfast for dinner—that make everyday routines special.

Ireland's wispy illustrations breathe warmth and familiarity into the story, from a young girl measuring her growth on the wall to kids "chasing foaming ocean waves" across the page, while Roe's touching declarations build a foundation of belonging, acceptance, and tender affection. "My love is always with you no matter where you go," the story professes, reminding kids that, whether young or grown up, living with parents or venturing far away, "my love for you will follow and always welcome you home."

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

PICTURE BOOKS

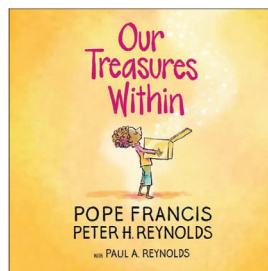
Our Treasures Within

Pope Francis, Peter H. Reynolds,
with Paul A. Reynolds

40p, hardcover, \$19.99, ISBN 978-0-829-46158-9

Inspired by the words of Pope Francis, Peter and Paul Reynolds's inspiring picture book encourages young children to discover their gifts and share them with the world. The story opens with a bold declaration: "We are all gifted. Each one of us has treasures within." This could be a creative pursuit such as making music, drawing pictures, or writing stories—or it could simply involve being kind and listening to other people in a way that makes them feel understood. Importantly, the authors mention that some gifts "are within easy reach," while others "are deep inside waiting to be discovered." This will help young readers avoid frustration if they have not yet found their own individual strengths.

Our Treasures Within has been crafted to uplift and comfort readers regardless of their religious background. In a message to young people, the pope encouraged everyone to "discover the treasure, develop it, give it to others, and receive from others the treasures they offer." The Reynolds brothers expand on this idea, showing how the



Inspiring picture book encourages children to discover & share their gifts.

Great for fans of Giles Andreae's *Giraffes Can't Dance*, Joanna Gaines's *The World Needs Who You Were Made to Be*.

work doesn't stop when children identify and develop their unique talents. The most important part, they assert, is to share our gifts—to sing our songs, tell our stories, and speak kind words. In this way, our gifts continue to grow—"the more we give the more the world fills with light."

Peter Reynolds's warmly evocative illustrations show children of different backgrounds as they reach for and develop their unique abilities. Shown in muted tones set against bright, monochromatic backgrounds, the enthusiastic children stretch toward stars in the sky, embrace their own inner light, and open boxes that release streams of musical notes, peace signs, and flowers. At first, the gifts appear esoteric and otherworldly, but when the children begin to sing, perform, or listen to others, these special talents seem to come from within each individual, making the world a more beautiful and inviting place.

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.

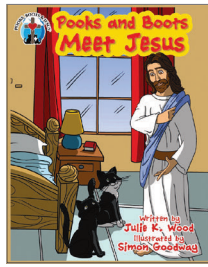
PICTURE BOOKS

Pooks and Boots Meet Jesus

Julie K. Wood | Pooks, Boots and Jesus, LLC
48p, trade paper, \$12.52, ASIN B0B3JK8W8P

Wood opens her Pooks, Boots and Jesus picture book series with this charming tale of two orphaned cats who find their forever home. The story opens with the nameless kitties—"left in the wilderness with no family, no mommy, no daddy, and no friends!"—desperate for food and shelter, wandering through the woods as they search for water. In their travails, they happen upon an injured cat—who is also lost and without a family—and quickly bond, bandaging his wounds and promptly naming him Bandit. For a short time, the trio forages together, playing and enjoying each other's company, until a kind stranger rescues them and drops them off at an animal shelter. But that's not the end for these fearless felines, and Wood portrays their road to adoption in compassionate, tender tones.

Christian readers will appreciate how Wood weaves biblical principles throughout this heartfelt narrative. When a kind couple adopts the two main cats—and names them Pooks and Boots—they take them to a comfortable, warm home where their every need is provided for—including their spirituality. Pooks and Boots regularly witness



Inspiring Christian story of two cats finding a forever home.

Great for fans of Bénédicte Delelis's *The Gospel Told by the Animals*, Tomie dePaola and Caryl Houselander's *Petook*.

Simon Goodway's expressive illustrations bring Pooks and Boots to life, vividly showing their emotions as they go from starving and alone to loved, accepted, and treasured. Kids and adults will relish that message of belonging, and Christian readers will welcome Wood's biblical references. The ending sets both cats up as close companions with Jesus, helping others in need and "reminding everyone that all things are possible with God!"

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

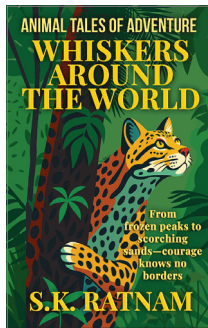
MIDDLE GRADE

Whiskers Around the World: Animal Tales of Adventure

S.K. Ratnam | Crimson Summit, Inc.
270p, trade paper, \$16.99, ISBN 978-1-963865-15-8

This engaging collection of stories by Ratnam traverses continents, exploring themes of courage, compassion, and the unbreakable bonds between humans and animals, each tale beginning with a charming black and white visual to spark readers' imagination. Sweeping children on adventures from the frozen peaks of the Himalayas to the vast Mongolian steppes, Ratnam introduces unique animal protagonists who face extraordinary challenges, ultimately discovering their inner strength and the power of connection. In "Feathers and Voyagers," Zemi, a curious grackle, builds a bridge of trust with humans despite the risks, showcasing the transformative power of bravery and understanding, while "Mountain Heart" tells the touching story of Yonten the yak and Norbu the snow leopard, who form an unlikely bond of kindness and survival in the harsh Himalayan blizzards.

Ratnam begins with a heartfelt prologue, sharing his inspiration behind these tales—a moment of reflection on a beach in Barbados, where he observed plucky Carib



Engaging animal tales celebrating love, courage, and nature's beauty.

Great for fans of James Herriot's *Treasury for Children*, Dawn Casey's *The Barefoot Book of Earth Tales*.

of family and belonging, as illustrated in "Bella's Wild Heart," where farm cow Bella discovers freedom and acceptance among a herd of wild bison.

Ratnam's storytelling is both poignant and inspiring, weaving lessons of bravery, empathy, and the interconnectedness of all living beings that will resonate with young readers. The epilogue, narrated by Altai—the Wild Horse of the Steppes—beautifully ties the individual tales together, reminding readers that every creature has a story worth telling and that we are all part of a shared world.

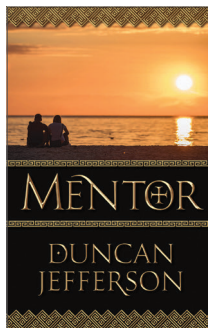
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: **B+** | Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

YOUNG ADULT
Mentor

Duncan Jefferson
243p, e-book, \$23, ISBN 978-0-648-38551-6

Jefferson's YA coming-of-age follows Greek immigrant teenager Telemachus Alysandratos, living in 1960s Australia, as he comes to terms with a life altered in a moment by his attempt at a good deed. When the town drunk, Chook Harris, makes a play for Tel's classmate, Julie, he tries to defend her—and ends up battered, with epilepsy resulting from a blow to the head. While navigating life with seizures, Tel finds a mentor in Kevin O'Ryan, the owner of a cement works business who offers him employment for the summer. But his seizures soon take on an otherworldly tinge, transporting him to the world of Homer's *Odyssey*—where he meets Telemachus, Penelope, Laertes, and Mentor, who curiously resembles Kevin. With Kevin's help, Tel—who is adopted—embarks on his own quest to find his birth parents.

Jefferson makes Tel's voice endearing, buoyed by an undercurrent of humor that lightens the gravity of his condition. During a seizure that takes him to the very shores of Ithaca, Tel recalls his childhood fondness for *The Odyssey*, musing that he "loved the bit about Calypso [and] wouldn't mind getting that lucky." Australian slang peppered throughout adds authenticity, and Tel, with his hormone-driven preoccupa-



Touching YA novel probing themes of belonging, acceptance, and purpose.

Great for fans of Karol Ruth Silverstein's *Cursed*, Leslye Walton's *The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender*.

tion with girls, conviction of being an irresistible Greek god, and love for his parents, emerges as both adorable and moving. Several other characters add interest—Kevin, Kath, Doc Buckley, Nana Alysandratos—and present compelling portraits of our universal need for belonging, meaning, and acceptance.

Jefferson smartly uses Tel's visits to the world of *The Odyssey* to slide in valuable life insights that give the novel weight. Tel's interactions with Penelope mirror his longing to meet his birth parents, while his conviction that the goddess Athene has cured him echoes his desire for a healthier life. The ending gifts Tel—and readers—with the lesson that love often springs up in the most unexpected places.

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

YOUNG ADULT

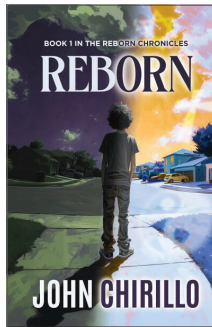
Reborn: The Reborn Chronicles, Book 1

John Chirillo

438p, e-book, \$2.99, ASIN B0FWYBM8WR

It's not easy being special in this first entry in Chirillo's Reborn Chronicles, which centers on a 16-year-old, Jonah Martinez-Cohen, torn between two faiths: his mother's Catholicism and his father's Judaism. Teased by classmates and prone to withdrawing from the world, Jonah finds an unlikely ally in new girl Dina, who becomes his friend and seems to get him. But then Jonah starts having visions predicting the future and discovers, like "something out of myth," that he has the power to heal people at will, his life transforms overnight. As he finds it harder to keep his powers hidden, his town turns suspicious, his parents fear he's possessed, and a secret society starts hunting him down.

For all the intimations of prophecy and divinity, Jonah's friendship with and admiration for Dina is the beating heart of the book. Far from judging him for not being normal, Dina seems to understand Jonah better than he does himself, serving as a rousing model of empathy. Chirillo leans into the discovery that is often the best



Exciting super-powered teen adventure aiming to unite all religions.

Great for fans of Tahereh Mafi's *Shatter Me* series, TJ Klune's *The Extraordinaries*.

part of superhero stories, as the duo experiments to understand the limits of Jonah's powers—and, spurred by Dina, to face the possibility that he is a leader prophesied to "unite divided faiths." The purpose of Jonah's powers seems to be to understand—and spread—the message of the commonality of all religions, a sort of interfaith chosen one, sent to save humanity from itself.

Jonah struggles with the immensity of that, but this first volume doesn't dig deeply into his spiritual state, especially as the book turns his powers outward, toward Marvel-esque spectacle, rather than inward, toward a spiritual reckoning. There's much to explore here in later volumes, and Chirillo has a feel for the epic—"a pulse that cracked the world open"—and the mysterious. Chirillo's background in technology and national security brings imaginative credibility to a second half that becomes a fast-paced action thriller, full of security-state antics, secret assassins, and hackers up to no good. That said, the book's vision of unity, understanding, and inter-religious peace rings with resonance.

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

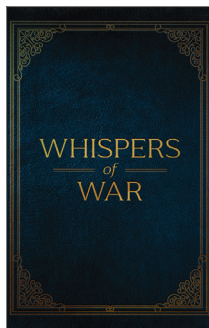
YOUNG ADULT

Whispers of WarT. B. Kreiser | *Whisper Stories*

406p, e-book, \$4.99, ISBN 979-8-9994651-0-8

In Kreiser's series opener, the world's balance is maintained by four fountains that grant miraculous abilities—called Favors—to their protectors, the Guardians. Set 10 years after the war in Abnor—where King Netir sought control of Abnor's fountain—the story follows Vincent Raine, the son of a Guardian executed for refusing to fight for Netir's greed. Vincent's mother, Fira, now marked as a Rogue for following her husband's lead, has trained Vincent and his three adopted siblings—Alexandra, Vera, and Barrik—to be fierce fighters. But when King Sentis' soldiers arrive to claim Vincent under a soul oath made by his father, the siblings refuse to leave him, traveling together to Meditas to fulfill his destiny.

What begins as duty quickly becomes a fight for survival, a hunt for a legendary sword, and a journey toward uncovering a fate-altering cosmic secret. Kreiser crafts a world shaped by star-forged fountains, a morally gray Guardian order, and deadly horrors born from corrupted magic. As Vincent grapples with his father's legacy and crippling self-doubt, his journey is relentless: bandits near Cayland, terrifying



Entertaining hero quest with dark magic, trials, and emotional depth.

Great for fans of Leigh Bardugo's *Shadow and Bone*, Kika Hatzopoulou's *Threads That Bind*.

nidbahks, and the lingering wounds of war offer no respite. During the Guardian ceremony, Vincent's bond with the fountain entity Larissa sparks a quest that pits the siblings against lethal operatives like Qrux and Alice, while King Sentis and his adviser Rayahan manipulate events from the shadows.

Kreiser balances humor with emotional weight, crafting an entertaining mix of YA adventure and coming-of-age epic. The large ensemble occasionally leads to certain characters slipping into the background, but the main trajectory pushes Vincent and his siblings into a confrontation with a power thief that leaves their group shattered—and the magic of Meditas permanently altered. Kreiser closes on a moment of sacrifice and awakening that ensures the stakes will rise in the next Tide of Raine installment, promising even darker challenges and deeper emotional revelations to come.

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



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