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50 New BookLife Titles Listed

Javier Marín Wins the BookLife Prize

'Live from America' scores
the top honor

BY MARYJANICE DAVIDSON

This year's BookLife Prize winner, *Live from America: How Latino TV Conquered the United States*, tells the extraordinary story of the rise of Spanish-language media in the U.S. Javier Marín's book, which he published through a hybrid partnership with Planeta Books, was selected from among hundreds of other submissions to the 2025/2026 BookLife Prize Nonfiction Contest, an annual writing competition for self-published authors. Packed with history, ruthless double dealings, soaring ambitions, and family feuds, *Live from America* was a standout in the business/personal finance category.

In 2000, Marín immigrated with his wife and children from Venezuela to the United States, where he graduated from the owner/president management (OPM) program at Harvard Business School, eventually founding Tiempo Company and El Planeta and becoming a force to be reckoned with in Spanish media.

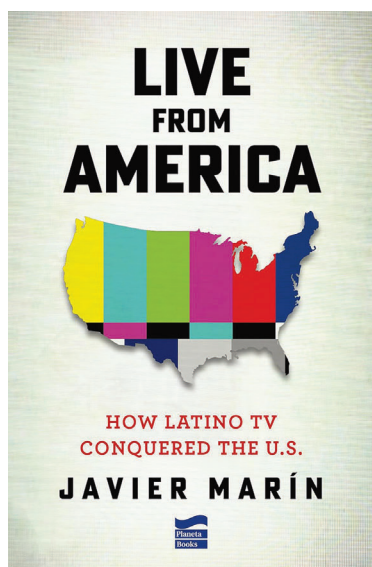
"I didn't grow up thinking I would become an author, but I was drawn from an early age to institutions that shape how societies understand themselves: first religion, and then the media," Marín says. "What I didn't anticipate was that this journey would lead me into a story that had remained largely untold, not because it was invisible, but because it had been treated as if it were."



As *Live from America* argues, Latino audiences are fundamental to the media landscape in the U.S. Marín explains that this audience has "long existed outside the mainstream narrative, but never outside the attention of power. From Kennedy to Reagan and today Donald Trump, its influence has always been relevant. My book emerged from that realization, and at a certain point it became clear that telling this story rigorously was something I was uniquely positioned to do."

In addition to its historical richness, *Live from America* offers a unique perspective on characters like Emilio Azcárraga Milmo (who earned the moniker of "El Tigre"), the leader of Mexican media empire Televisa.

"Anyone who chooses to work in the business of information develops a relationship with storytelling, through constant exposure to writers, journalists, and



business leaders. You learn by admiring, correcting, debating, and collaborating,” Marín says.

The author’s influences also go beyond journalism. He’s been inspired by artists like Francisco Goya, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Shepard Fairey, and Os Gêmeos, whose work he describes as “a form of commentary and denuncia.”

Marín began writing *Live from America* in 2021, but the seeds were planted before that. “I had been studying and covering immigration in the U.S. for years,” he says. “The turning point came in 2016, when the first Trump administration removed the Spanish-language version of the White House website on its first day in office.”

Marín found further developments (“the border crisis during the Biden years, the stronger rhetoric in Trump’s campaign against immigrants”) both significant and ominous.

Yet, in 2026, when the political seemingly infuses everything, Marín insists that doesn’t apply to *Live from America*: “The purpose

of the book is not political. It’s to remind all of us, especially younger and future generations, that this is a cycle. These tensions have happened before, and they will happen again.” More broadly, *Live from America* highlights the power and resilience of the Latino community in the United States, one that, Marín emphasizes, was present long before 1776.

“The United States is the second-largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, and that reality needs to be understood, accepted, and embraced. I’m not saying everyone needs to be bilingual, but this community is a key economic and political force,” Marín says. He adds that “less than 3% of Hispanic literature is translated into English. That means most English-speaking readers in the U.S. don’t have access to voices like mine.”

El Tigre saw that and capitalized. Javier Marín saw that and decided this was a story that must be told. That story is America’s: people who were shut out of the club built their own clubhouse and changed the game. 🇺🇸

MaryJanice Davidson is an author who lives in St. Paul, Minn., with her family. Her newest release is The Reluctant Reaper.

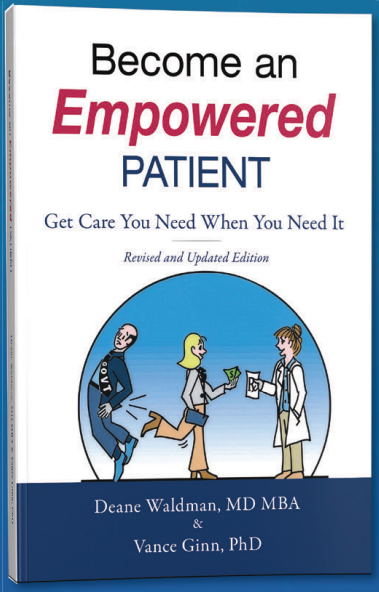
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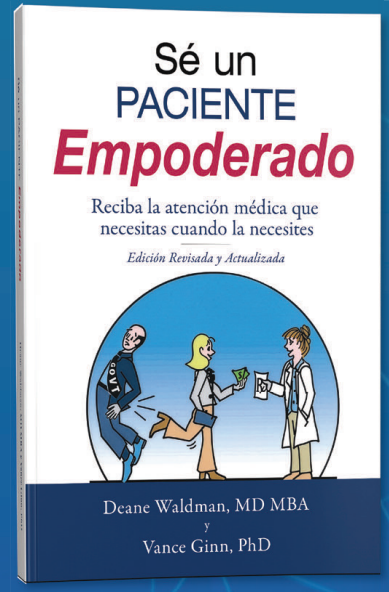


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First Lines

In this roundup, we include opening lines from our BookLife Prize finalists and more

To submit a first line, email booklifeeditor@booklife.com.

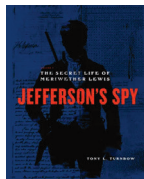
Ideas to Action



RICK TUCCI

“Your employees could have solved your biggest challenge last week—if you’d known how to tap into their potential.”

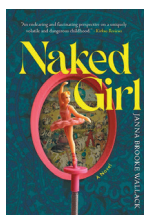
Jefferson’s Spy: The Secret Life of Meriwether Lewis



TONY L. TURNBOW

“One of the few certainties in the mystery surrounding Meriwether Lewis’s death at age thirty-five is that its gruesome details shocked the nation.”

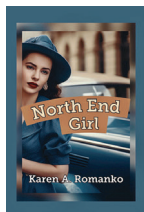
Naked Girl



JANNA BROOKE WALLACK

“I only have five pictures of my mother, and she is naked in three of them.”

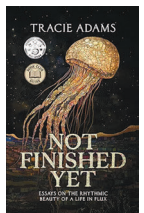
North End Girl



KAREN A. ROMANKO

“Philip had asked her for the favor. Not just any favor, but the one her mother had told her never to do for anyone outside the family.”

Not Finished Yet



TRACIE ADAMS

“This is where our stories begin.”

Olive Groves & Alibis



L. G. REED

“Riding shotgun in a police car, next to a young officer, had not been on Rose MacGillivray’s wish list.”

Patriots in the Shadows



KRISHNA KUMAR

“On the morning of the fourteenth of April, the SS Imperial River suddenly caught fire at the Victoria Docks.”

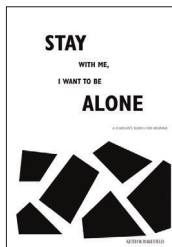
Safe Haven: Where Hope Lives



ELIZABETH STILES

“On the eve of Michael Russo’s fortieth birthday, his life would take a turn.”

Stay with Me, I Want to Be Alone



KEITH WAKEFIELD

“‘The man is dead,’ the nurse says.”

Through a Ravaged Land



DARREN RUMBOLD

“It was the horrible smell that told me I’d made a mistake that could get us both killed.”

Unshrink Yourself



THANH NGUYEN

“True self-confidence is more than a fleeting feeling.”



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New Titles from Self-Publishers

Booksellers, publishers, librarians, and agents are encouraged to look at the 50 self-published titles below. Each appears with a list of retailers that are selling the book and a description provided by its author. Some of these writers are waiting to be discovered; others have track records and followings and are doing it on their own. If you are a self-published author interested in listing titles in this section, please visit publishersweekly.com/pw-select for more information.

Fiction

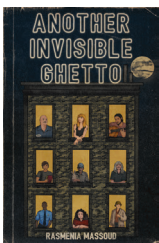
Aging Is Murder



Joan Cohen. Joan Cohen.
\$17.99 paper (246p),
ISBN 979-8-9943892-0-1;
\$8.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-
9943892-1-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble,
Bookshop.org
Four residents of Heyday

Assisted Living decide they're the ideal age to rid the country of hypocrites and liars in politics and government. What do they have to lose?

Another Invisible Ghetto



Rasmenia Massoud. One
More Hour Publishing.
\$16.99 paper (310p),
ISBN 979-1-0681987-0-0;
\$3.99 e-book, ASIN
B0FWRV1SWF
Amazon
A character-driven

examination of outsiders and casualties of a failed American dream who find purpose in unexpected places while being ignored by mainstream society.

Forgiveness: Another Philosophy Novel



Douglas Thiel. Douglas Thiel.
\$13.95 paper (274p),
ISBN 979-8-3727-0293-6;
\$5.95 e-book,
ASIN B0FJH13ZPL
Amazon
Wrongly accused at 17, a
Kentucky boy drafts into

the Marines for Vietnam, later joins the LAPD, faces family estrangement, and ultimately pursues philosophy education toward post-police community college teaching.

The Glass Ceiling Chronicles: Payne Construction



Judith A. Perkins. Explora
Books. \$9.99 paper (158p),
ISBN 979-1-997587-06-4
Amazon, Barnes & Noble
Sylvia Payne, a young
heiress, battles her
manipulative mother and
a hostile industry to protect her father's
company and prove her strength as a
leader in a male-dominated world.

IBLT with the Missing Party at the Party: Ideal Bouquet Lickinness Taste: An Ancient Alien Fighting Technique



Tye Wildncool. RoseDog
Books. \$25.99 (94p),
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5; \$8.99 e-book, ISBN 979-
8-88812-822-0
Amazon, Barnes & Noble,
RoseDog Bookstore
Taking place 100 years

in the future, this story includes everything from spies, pizza deliveries, spaceships, and music!

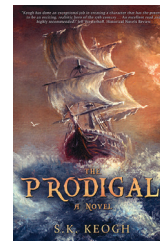
If Walls Could Talk (The Dunmara Series #1)

Jean Grainger. Gold Harp Media. \$16.99 paper (320p), ISBN 979-1-917732-50-5; \$8.99 e-book, ASIN B0G3Z5J34H
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org,



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Standing since 1689,
stately Dunmara House in
Ireland has seen life in all
its guts and glory. Now,
as two women's lives
entwine across time, the
house slowly reveals secrets.

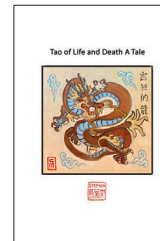
The Prodigal



S.K. Keogh, illus. by Annette
Ahner. Leighlin House
Publishing. \$9.99 paper
(232p), ISBN 979-0-
9906774-7-5; \$4.99
e-book, ISBN 979-
9906774-6-8
Amazon

Jack Mallory is determined to rescue his mother and kill her kidnapper, pirate James Logan. But Logan has no intention of losing what he treasures more than life itself: Jack's mother.

Tao of Life and Death: A Tale



Stephen McDonough.
Stephen McDonough.
\$12.99 paper (72p),
ISBN 979-8-8655-5317-5;
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Amazon

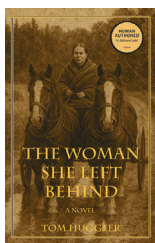
This tale, set in ancient China, braids the stories of Zhong Kui and Happy Willow—two poor but talented boys who left their villages with their eyes set on officialdom.

The Ultimate Quest



Antonio Mataban. Bookside Press. \$4.99 e-book, ISBN 979-1-77883-807-1
Amazon
The Ultimate Quest by Dr. Antonio Mataban is an epic historical fiction that spans five generations, beginning at the tail end of the Spanish colonial era in the Philippines.

The Woman She Left Behind



Tom Huggler. Sunacumen Press. \$19.99 paper (396p), ISBN 979-8-218-77561-2; \$6.99 e-book, ASIN B0FNY9P4N5
TomHuggler.com, Amazon
The untold true story of a widowed mother who traveled alone for 600 miles into a Civil War battle zone to save her fallen son.

Mystery/Thriller

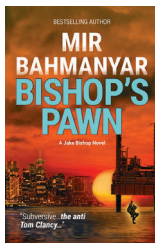
Adapt and Overcome, Dear: Oh, Victoria!



Brendan Bey. Readers Magnet. \$31.99 (318p), ISBN 979-8-90000-120-3; \$19.49 paper (316p), ISBN 979-8-90000-116-6
Amazon
In 1970s America, a Kentucky woman and a

New Yorker forge a passionate bond through letters amid OSS trials, crime, and danger, testing love, careers, and survival against all odds.

Bishop's Pawn



Mir Bahmanyar. Sua Sponte Press. \$29.99 (326p), ISBN 979-1-0674482-0-2; \$18.99 paper (326p), ISBN 979-1-0674482-2-6
Amazon, Barnes & Noble
A spec ops mission in the Gulf of Mexico ends in

disaster, leaving Major Jamshid "Jake" Bishop barely alive. Seeking justice, he leaves a trail of blood across the globe.

Death by Chaos

Renaii West. Renaii West. \$5.01 paper (166p), ISBN 979-8-6669-4561-2; \$0.99 e-book, ASIN B08K478KYM



Amazon
Thirty years after a college murder shatters four women's charmed lives, long-buried secrets, suspicions, and a mysterious stranger push one of them to finally confront and uncover the truth.

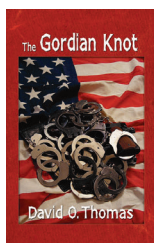
Founders' Fear



Chris Gunderson. Chris Gunderson. \$14.99 (390p), ISBN 979-8-218-88766-7; \$4.50 e-book, ISBN 979-8-234-00917-3
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble

Founders' Fear is a sardonic, edge-of-your-seat thriller of a cautionary tale about what happens when Constitutional checks and balances fail, and kleptocratic autocracy runs amok.

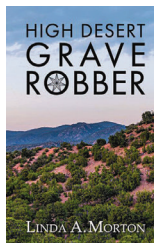
The Gordian Knot



David O. Thomas. Readers Magnet. \$29.50 (478p), ISBN 979-1-60693-706-8; \$15.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-90000-040-4
Amazon

Veteran detective Frank Spencer and rookie Mike Estrada chase a brutal serial killer while battling personal demons, departmental pressure, and family turmoil, testing their partnership and resolve under extreme stress.

High Desert Grave Robber

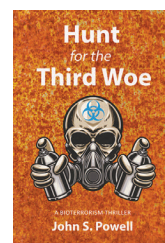


Linda A. Morton. Linda A. Morton. \$19.95 (150p), ISBN 979-8-218-78858-2; \$14.95 paper, ISBN 979-8-218-61247-4
Barnes & Noble

A Santa Fe teacher takes a summer job at a popular art gallery and finds herself in the middle of a police investigation.

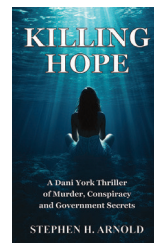
Hunt for the Third Woe

John S. Powell. Hawfields Press. \$14.95 paper (270p), ISBN 979-0-9629899-2-6
Amazon
When terrorists attempt to spread



smallpox under the guise of Biblical prophecy, a Homeland Security team races to stop them. The countdown to prevent a catastrophic pandemic begins.

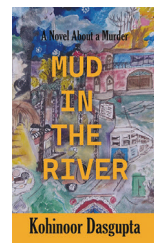
Killing Hope



Stephen H. Arnold. Stephen H. Arnold. \$24.95 (326p), ISBN 979-8-2919-8086-6; \$9.99 e-book, ASIN B0FGZHJQ88
Amazon

After a plane wreck surfaces in a Tennessee lake, TBI agent Dani York uncovers a brutal murder tied to secrets, power, and a conspiracy someone will kill to keep hidden.

Mud in the River



Kohinoor Dasgupta. Kohinoor Dasgupta. \$9.99 paper (298p), ISBN 979-8-2411-1714-4; \$4.99 e-book, ASIN B0GCTZ31B8
Amazon

Human desires and compulsions clash with oppressive social conventions in this unconventional mystery novel set in Calcutta, India, in 1979.

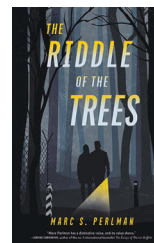
New Quantico Files: The Misfits



Ruby G. Ruby G. \$25.99 (456p), ISBN 979-8-3053-0280-6; \$15.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-3053-0280-6
Amazon

Aether must decide where her loyalties lie. Will she obey New Quantico, or save her family from a fate worse than death? A story exploring what it means to be human.

The Riddle of the Trees



Marc S. Perlman. Koehler Books. \$19.95 paper (302p), ISBN 979-8-89747-040-2; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89747-041-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org



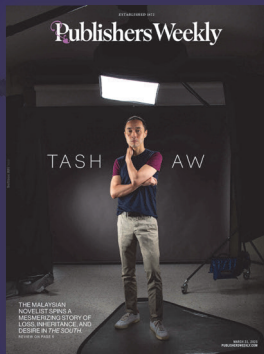
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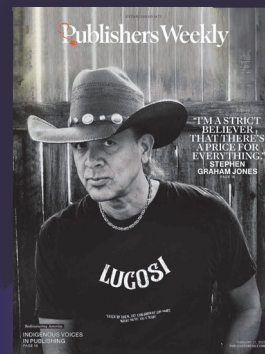
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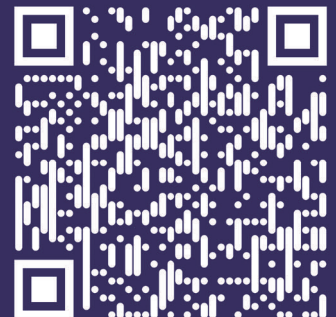
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The Seventh Wonder



Andrew Siditsky, illus. by Matt Siditsky. Andrew Siditsky. \$10.99 paper (234p), ISBN 979-8-9926233-1-4; \$2.99 e-book, ASIN B0DZF4LYCY Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble

A lost Pharos relic resurfaces, unleashing a deadly secret. Archaeologist Matt Elliot races a ruthless billionaire across continents before it ignites a global catastrophe.

Trouble's Turn to Lose: A Carolina Tale



Susan M. Boyer. Stella Maris Books. \$16.99 paper (316p), ISBN 979-1-959023-37-1; \$7.99 e-book, ISBN 979-1-959023-36-4 Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble,

Bookshop.org

Sullivan's Island PI Hadley Cooper and her SLED agent boyfriend have one rule: never work the same case. But a dead socialite, a framed single mom, and Hadley's heart change everything.

SF/Fantasy/Horror

A Fairy Story: Saving the Green



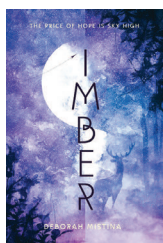
Levanah Shell Bdolak, illus. by Ched. C. Readers Magnet. \$19.99 paper (314p), ISBN 979-8-90000-034-3; \$5.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-90000-035-0 Amazon, Barnes & Noble,

Readers Magnet

Merrilee learns she has Fae blood and joins a mysterious stranger to save his kingdom, launching a global adventure revealing hidden realms, ancient beings, and the true, unseen Fairies who protect nature.

Imber

Deborah Mistina. Moon Bear Books. \$15.99 paper (330p), ISBN 979-8-9903531-1-4;



\$5.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9903531-0-7 Amazon, Bookshop.org With Earth unlivable, humanity prepares for a new home. But the government is hiding the truth. Four strangers

with an unusual link race to uncover it before it's too late.

The Last Hunter: Book One: Blood Ascension: English

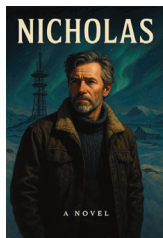


Bobby Cinema. Pristine Press and Media. \$5.99 paper (138p), ASIN B0GWB2CBLM; \$5.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-233-93522-0

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Target, Walmart

A retired monster hunter living a quiet life is forced back into action when a ruthless vampire warlord builds an army in a small California town.

Nicholas



Michael Shaffrey. Michael Shaffrey. \$3.99 paper (164p), ISBN 979-8-2794-5239-2 Amazon

A reclusive engineer and the analog AI he raised intercept a

distress signal no modern system can hear and must risk everything to answer it.

Poetry

Inspirational Cues

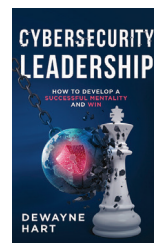


Ex_Turpi. Trafford Publishing. \$9.99 e-book, ASIN B0791MW21R Amazon, Barnes & Noble Poetry collection inspired by everyday conversations in New York, exploring themes like love, loneliness, and life's journey from childhood to death.

Nonfiction

Cybersecurity Leadership: How to Develop a Successful Mentality and Win

Dewayne Hart. Semais Consulting. \$24.95 paper (242p), ISBN 979-8-89747-089-1



Dewaynehart.com In a world of evolving cyber threats, the greatest risk isn't technology—it's leadership. This book equips leaders with the strategies to become decisive.

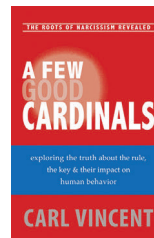
The Empty Envelope: Family Secrets and a Grandfather's Legacy



Harvey M. Weinstein. Advanced Publishing. \$38.95 (300p), ISBN 979-1-63132-277-5; \$24.95 paper, ISBN 979-1-63132-277-8 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Target, Walmart

A compelling blend of historical mystery, biography, and memoir, this haunting narrative explores intergenerational trauma, buried truths, and the redemptive power of storytelling.

A Few Good Cardinals: The Rule, The Key & Human Behavior



Carl Vincent. PurposeDay. \$19.99 paper (304p), ISBN 979-0-9978166-7-9; \$7.99 e-book, ISBN 979-0-9978166-1-7

Amazon

For the toxic narcissist, life is essentially war.

Here you discover what makes a narcissist toxic and where it comes from.

Football 1



Geoffrey Brown. Geoffrey Brown. \$9.99 paper (76p), ISBN 979-8-3129-7806-3; \$9.99 e-book, ASIN B0DJ66B8H Amazon

Football 1 takes a bold look at society, identity, politics, and belief as Geoffrey Brown shares honest, humorous views on life and the world around us.

A Girls' Road Trip: from Texas (U.S.) to Prince Edward Island (Canada)

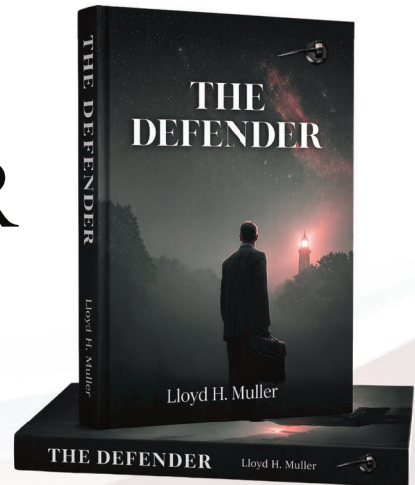
Eula Woodyard McKown. Xulon Press. \$10.60 paper (84p), ISBN 979-1-6628-5653-2; \$3.99 e-book, ISBN 979-1-963851-25-0



THE DEFENDER

Lloyd H. Muller

ISBN : 978-1970617078



*In *The Defender*, Lloyd H Muller delivers a tightly constructed legal thriller that probes the uneasy space between justice and victory. Set against the high-stakes backdrop of criminal defense, the novel follows Bill Ginn, a former prosecutor turned elite defense attorney whose career now centers on representing cartel figures and clients accused of violent crimes. Though he consistently secures wins in court, each triumph comes at a growing personal cost, straining both his marriage and his conscience. Opposing him is Joe Bradley, an idealistic public defender committed to upholding constitutional rights, even when defending those widely presumed guilty. When a high-profile murder case tied to organized crime draws both men into its orbit, their professional and moral philosophies collide, forcing each to confront what justice truly demands.*

Muller distinguishes his narrative through a dual-protagonist structure that resists easy moral binaries. Rather than framing one character as hero and the other as antagonist, the novel presents two deeply human figures navigating a legal system that often rewards outcomes over ethics. The courtroom scenes are sharp and deliberate, driven less by theatrics and more by the psychological and ethical tensions that underpin each exchange. The author's grasp of legal nuance lends authenticity to the proceedings, while the emotional arcs of his characters provide the narrative's true weight. Themes of moral compromise, professional duty, and the personal toll of legal practice unfold with a steady intensity, inviting readers to question whether justice is defined by winning or by doing what is right.

*The book's growing visibility was underscored by its recent promotion at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books 2026, held April 18–19, 2026, where it was introduced to a broad audience of readers, industry professionals, and media attendees. This appearance highlights the novel's expanding presence within the literary marketplace and signals its appeal beyond genre readership. With its layered characterizations, timely subject matter, and built-in dramatic momentum, *The Defender* also lends itself naturally to screen adaptation. Its parallel character arcs and high-stakes courtroom confrontations offer strong cinematic potential, while its exploration of institutional trust and moral ambiguity aligns with the kind of character-driven storytelling increasingly favored by studios such as A24 and platforms like Netflix. Ultimately, Muller's novel stands out as a thoughtful and engaging entry in the legal thriller genre one that extends beyond suspense to examine the enduring complexities at the heart of the justice system.*

Available at:

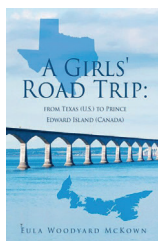
amazon **BARNES&NOBLE**

*also in other major online bookstore

[Website](#) [Book Trailer](#)

Rights and film adaptation inquiries are welcome

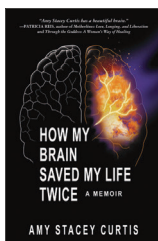




Amazon, Walmart
Four Texas women set out on a road trip to Prince Edward Island, sharing friendship, sightseeing, and adventures across the northeastern U.S.

and Canada.

How My Brain Saved My Life Twice:



A Memoir

Amy Stacey Curtis. Amy Stacey Curtis. \$19.99 paper (416p), ISBN 979-1-7362719-0-2; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-1-7362719-1-9

Amazon, Barnes & Noble,

Bookshop.org, Books-A-Million

A dual-timeline memoir detailing how the author and her brain survived a traumatic brain injury and psychosis by drawing on past resilience. A story of recovery and creative spirit.

If You Create the Dream, God Will Give You the Wings



Violeta Martin. Jovenes Escritores Latinos. \$26.68 paper (242p), ISBN 979-1-961083-34-9; \$4.44 e-book, ASIN B0CP5DRZKF
Amazon

A memoir of faith and healing that shows how divine guidance, influential people, and overcoming trauma help align personal dreams with God's purpose, affirming that every life holds meaning truly.

Land the Perfect Job in an Imperfect Market: Strategies to Help Break through the Job Search Clutter

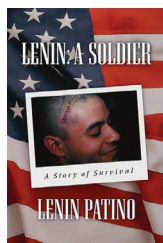


Joseph A. Ortenzi. Joseph A. Ortenzi. \$24.49 (114p), ISBN 979-8-90000-067-1; \$11.49 paper, ISBN 979-8-90000-066-4
Amazon

Ortenzi redefines job hunting as marketing,

offering practical guidance for anyone pursuing career growth, better opportunities, or their dream job.

Lenin: A Soldier: A Story of Survival

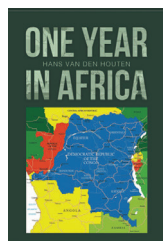


Lenin Patino. Lenin Patino. \$9.99 paper (122p), ISBN 979-8-8804-4947-7

Amazon, Barnes & Noble
A young man with dreams of college and athletics, joined the U.S. Army but tragically had

his life cut short when a fellow soldier shot him in 1993.

One Year in Africa

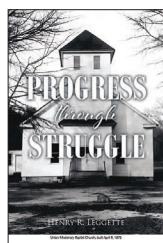


Hans van den Houten. Westwood Books Publishing. \$14.99 (194p), ISBN 979-1-68536-493-9

Amazon, Barnes & Noble
A vivid memoir of Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda capturing one man's

adventurous year balancing work, culture, danger, and personal discovery in 1964-65 Africa.

Progress through Struggle

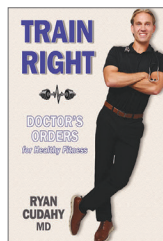


Henry R. Leggette. Readers Magnet. \$31.99 (320p), ISBN 979-8-90000-018-3; \$20.18 paper, ISBN 979-8-90000-014-5
Amazon

Through faith, prayer, and perseverance, the

author overcame segregation and setbacks, excelled in electronics with the U.S. Army Signal Corps, and built a successful FAA career through dedication.

Train Right: Doctor's Orders

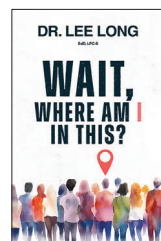


Ryan Cudahy. Cudahy Books. \$19.95 paper (260p), ISBN 979-8-9944754-0-9
Amazon, IngramSpark, TrainRightBook.com

Dr. Ryan Cudahy cuts through the noise of fitness myths and quick fixes to reveal what actually works with clarity, humor, and clinical precision.

WAIT: Where Am I in This?

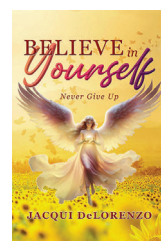
Lee Long. Novus Press Works. \$19.99 paper (256p), ISBN 979-1-963366-11-2; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-1-963366-12-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark



Do you feel lost in your relationships, trapped by self-doubt and unmet needs? Reclaim your power by unlocking emotional clarity, setting boundaries, and building meaningful connections.

Religion/Spirituality

Believe in Yourself: Never Give Up



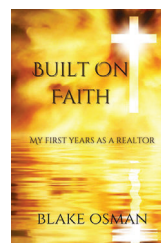
Jacqui DeLorenzo. Readers Magnet. \$8.99 paper (94p), ISBN 979-8-89091-800-0; \$2.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89091-801-7
Amazon

Inspirational and uplifting: never give up. Believe in

yourself. If you think you can, you can.

You are not alone, you are loved. Explore stories and poems offering hope, resilience, connection.

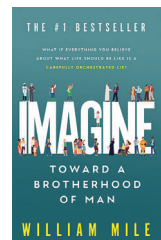
Built on Faith: My First Years As a Realtor



Blake Osman. Krypton Publishing. \$14.99 paper (96p), ISBN 979-8-9986948-4-4; \$24.99, ISBN 979-8-9986948-6-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, Walmart

Blake shares how God rebuilt his life into purpose as a realtor, husband, father, and believer. A faith-based memoir blending testimony, career guidance, and hard-earned wisdom.

Imagine: Toward a Brotherhood of Man



William Mile. American Real Publishing. \$11.99 paper (54p), ISBN 979-1-966283-95-9; \$0.99 e-book, ASIN B0FRN7TRWL
Amazon

This book provides foundational knowledge about what the last, most epic technological human disruptive advancement, community, can be built on.

Children's/YA

Angels and Dragons

Harry Hutchins. Writers Republic. \$39.99 (350p), ISBN 979-8-89100-880-9; \$29.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-89100-879-3



Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Writers Republic
Angels and Dragons blends biblical inspiration with fantasy, portraying angels influencing humanity and dragons symbolizing power and change, offering imaginative stories that explore faith, mystery, and spiritual reflection and wonder.

Child of the Mango Tree: Growing Up in the Countryside of Haiti



Denize Lature. Hawes & Jenkins. \$17.95 paper (178p), ISBN 979-8-89601-158-3
 Amazon, Barnes & Noble
 A young peasant boy who wants to be a voodoo priest but will become a poet unfolds tenderly, revealing an understanding that progress is cyclical.

The Door in the Carnegie Library

V.C. Williams. Outlaws Publishing. \$14.83 paper



(294p), ISBN 979-8-233-86671-5; \$1.99 e-book, ASIN BOGPFVFN8
 Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Kobo
 A shy, unhappy 1967 teenager is pushed by a Native American spirit into the Wild West of 1907, where she must learn to trust others and face her fears if she wants to go home.

Marna



Jason Hauger. Dorrance Publishing. \$38.99 (74p), ISBN 979-8-89649-409-6; \$24.00 paper, ISBN 979-8-89649-408-9
 Marnaadventures.com, Amazon
 Lonely David befriends Marna, a magical butterfly girl, and discovers courage, wonder, and the bittersweet lesson of loving something enough to let it go.

The Tree of Ticket Leaves

Meredith Good. Sleds Publishing. \$13.95 paper



(352p), ISBN 979-8-234-00607-3; \$7.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-234-00609-7
 Amazon
 A sad little girl, a worn-out tackling dummy, a cast of whimsical characters, a set of dangerous lands... and a mysterious ticket tree. Will 8-year-old Meri ever find her way home?

Treehouse Rescue



Veronica Puig, illus. by Jessica Cooper.
 BookBaby. \$22.99 (32p), ISBN 979-8-3178-3317-6; \$9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-3178-3318-3
 Amazon, Apple Books,
 Barnes & Noble, BookBaby
 A trip to the supermarket turns into an adventure when Mike, sent for peanut butter and jelly, unexpectedly becomes a hero saving nature's beloved creatures.



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FICTION

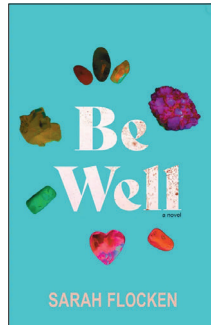
⚡ EDITOR'S PICK

Be Well

Sarah Flocken | Heliotrope Books
272p, trade paper, \$20, ISBN 978-1-956474-81-7

A satirical snapshot of the early days of the Great Recession, Flocken's humorous debut introduces recent college grad Ann Ward—or is it Anneliese Pfefferman? Desperate to stay in Los Angeles despite her useless English degree and a dearth of job interviews, Ann finds herself running out of time. She won't be going home to Blanco Valley, where she'll be the "unemployed, awkward failure child of sad evangelical desert people." There she'd have to pick between her megachurch pastor father or her car-saleswoman mother on the brink of losing her home. Both paths come with uncertainty and desperation—emotions familiar to anyone who lived through the Great Recession.

It's nothing short of a miracle when Ann meets Tori Azura, "chief visionary" at the Sagebrush Holistic Wellness Collective. She finds herself welcomed into a community of ultra-supportive women who come to know her as her alter ego,



College grad chases purpose amid recession in this witty story.

Great for fans of Jennifer Close's *Girls in White Dresses*, Liane Moriarty's *Nine Perfect Strangers*.

Anneliese. She needs all the support she can get, even if it comes in the forms of crystals, colonics, and energy healers who say, "Trust me, I went to medical school for a year." Under Tori's guidance, Ann feels she's on the brink of manifesting the life she deserves, a delusion that readers will recognize long before she does.

Even with financial pressures mounting, Ann maintains a funny, surprising worldview laced with relatable self-consciousness—she says job interviews, for instance, make "the nervousness cascade slowly down like raindrops from my frontal lobes to my toes." The sharp narration tells on Ann without drawing her attention to her unreliability, evoking both the incertitude of 2009 and the perils of dishonesty, both within so-called wellness institutions and within ourselves. Flocken's light-hearted skewering of the real-life communities Ann moves between provides laugh-out-loud moments in an era known for its bleakness.

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

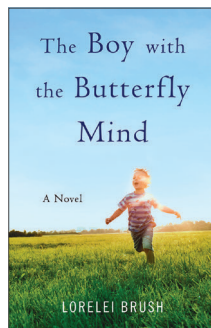
FICTION

The Boy with the Butterfly Mind

Lorelei Brush
312p, trade paper, \$17.99, ISBN 979-8-896-36364-4

Drawing on personal experience, Brush delivers an emotionally searching portrait of family life strained by neurodivergence, generational wounds, and the quiet skirmishes within marriage. Julie Crawford, an algebra teacher in Arlington, Virginia, attempts to inspire a roomful of disengaged students while her home life grows increasingly turbulent. Her four-year-old son Patrick—bright, mercurial, and impossible to corral—ricochets from daycare disputes to public meltdowns, his restless energy stirring Julie's growing suspicion of ADHD. Husband Luke fiercely resists labeling Patrick's condition, fearing Patrick will face the same stigma that once defined his own youth: of being branded a "problem child."

Brush proves especially adept at capturing the untidy theater of domestic life with a neurodivergent child: spilled blueberries scattering across a Safeway floor, a drowned cell phone in the bathtub, and a beloved plush camel named Omar serving



Compassionate story of parenthood, cycles of trauma, and ADHD.

Great for fans of Jodi Picoult's *House Rules*, Kim Edwards's *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*.

as Patrick's emotional lifeline. Julie's days become a careful balancing act as she juggles work and child-rearing, mediates the widening gulf between her and Luke's parenting philosophies, and absorbs the barbed judgment of others. The cruelty of another parent who calls Patrick "disturbed" and the harsh words of her own devout father claiming Patrick has "the devil in him" land like a public indictment.

Through robust, empathic prose and Julie's self-scrutinizing monologues, Brush explores how cycles of harm echo across generations and persist through fear, shame, and the desperate hope to protect one's child from the same wounds. The novel ultimately suggests that breaking such cycles requires both willpower and courage to expose raw emotions and childhood hurts. With quiet conviction, Brush leaves readers with a hopeful proposition: that neurodivergence, when met with patience and support, may evolve from perceived burden into unexpected strength.

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

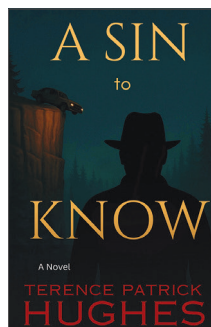
FICTION

A Sin to Know

Terence Patrick Hughes | Yes Let's Go Productions
204p, trade paper, \$12.99, ISBN 979-8-994-84371-0

Blake Buskin regularly deals with bears and rowdy teenagers in his stint as sheriff of Rock Hollow, a small Maine community, and with a failed marriage only holding together for the sake of their son, he usually prefers the bears. But a call one morning concerning the hit and run of a local teen, Philly, threatens to upend everything. The salt-of-the-earth sheriff promises to find who did it, but Philly's mother—and her dangerous brothers, who plan to "heal hurt with more blood"—is out for vengeance, not justice. Now, Blake must investigate the crime while dealing with Philly's ruthless family, even as he learns that the culprit might be closer than he thinks.

Hughes nails the small-town vibes of close-knit communities, nosy neighbors, and the fear of angering other residents simply by telling the truth, giving *A Sin to Know* a sequestered, secretive atmosphere that adds to the tension. He also chooses to reveal crucial clues early on, allowing suspense to build until the third



Small town thriller with powder keg ending.

Great for fans of S.D. House's *Dead Man Blues*, Mike Walters's *The Good Sheriff*.

act—which quickly becomes a powder keg. The characters are realistic, relatable, and starkly divided between the haves and the have-nots, and readers will enjoy watching Blake wrestle with the ethical and moral implications of what his investigation uncovers while still handling the mundane, day-to-day duties of his job—like scaring bears out of houses and dealing with ego-driven town board members.

The work does shift tone, going from a hard-boiled crime novel in the beginning to an ending that ties everything up a bit too neatly, but it propels Blake into profound soul-searching as he reflects, "All my life, everything I'd ever learned, loved, or accomplished had brought nothing but tragedy and confusion to those around me." That shift happens so gradually, the events feel like a natural escalation of the plot. Thriller fans who relish moral ambiguity and vulnerable protagonists will find much to love here.

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

FICTION

Battery Revolution: A BizOps Chronicles Novel

Jeff Pierson | BizOps Media, LLC
452p, trade paper, \$18.99, ISBN 979-8-9940659-0-7

Budding materials scientist Amelia Chen makes a ground-breaking discovery that may change the electric industry forever in Pierson's first BizOps Chronicle offering. Partnering with her mentor, Toshi Yoshida, and savvy businessman, Mark Levinson, the three build a team to create QuantumCell Technologies, a company on the verge of making quantum energy storage a reality. When it becomes apparent that self-learning AI using "readily available public data" may be the missing component to achieving the ultimate grid battery storage source, some parties begin to worry those developments could eventually eliminate the need for human instruction—and take over grids on a global scale.

Pierson infuses the novel with detailed scientific research and jargon, launching readers directly into a world of breathtaking discovery—and a potential catastrophic takeover "using the power grid for a super-intelligent quantum computing network." Amelia must choose between grasping the long-awaited payoff for her brilliance and



Brisk thriller where tech brings a too-high cost.

Great for fans of Dave Eggers's *The Circle*, R.J. Cole's *The Day AI Took Over*.

The narrative is fast-paced and realistic, vividly depicting how one innovative technological invention can change the world, and sci-fi fans will relish Pierson's behind-the-scenes particulars. As the stakes amp up—and it becomes clear that global interest in Amelia's pioneering research could become more threatening than supportive—the morality of technology versus humanity takes center stage. Genre-blending, rich with well-developed characters, and boasting a brisk plot, *Battery Revolution* skillfully walks the line of technology's ability to both advance and potentially destroy humankind, creating a world with no off-switch, where "Every human need will be identified... But not necessarily met."

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

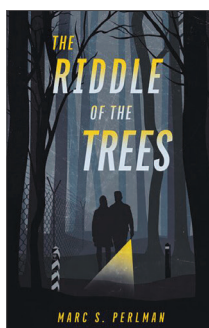
The Riddle of the Trees

EDITOR'S PICK

Marc S. Perlman | Koehler Books
302p, trade paper, \$19.95, ISBN 979-8-897-47040-2

Espionage is the furthest thing from Jack Miller's mind when he travels to Belarus to uncover family history, but in Perlman's layered debut thriller, the guileless American receives a harsh lesson in political expediency and personal compromise. Like many Americans who view the places their relatives fled as being trapped in amber, Jack is interested in Belarus as the World War II battleground of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. How did his Jewish grandfather manage to get their family out? And why would Jack's father insist that no one reveal any details and "only tell him we survived"?

Perlman doesn't render Belarus's war experience as historical anomaly, but part of an ongoing struggle of resistance movements, and Jack must make the leap from hypothetical what-ifs to decisions with life-or-death consequences. He is immediately drawn to Anna Petrova, his guide from Jewish Genealogy Tours, who's also a research scholar in physics—and a member of the Belarusian underground. When she approaches him to aid their cause, Jack's willingness stems from the revelation



Crisp thriller explores political resistance on a human scale.

Great for fans of Lisa Lieberman's *Burning Cold*, Jason Matthews's *The Kremlin's Candidate*.

of his grandfather's war crimes. Using his status as a heritage tourist, they visit the Belavezskaya Forest and uncover a large, hidden stash of missiles. When Jack agrees to get a coded flash drive to the American government, he's targeted by Russian intelligence, who also use Anna as a bargaining chip. While Perlman's central couple drives the action, he also explores the many layers of spycraft, from well-trained government agents to amateur true believers, like the quiet philosophy student Leonid whose heartbreaking fate is a reminder that nations are built on the endurance and sacrifice of countless resistors, unnamed and forgotten. As Perlman's unwitting spy is transformed from detached observer to active participant, *The Riddle of the Trees* captures his education in global intrigue, detailing the stark truth of how every new tyrant reinvents totalitarianism in their own image.

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

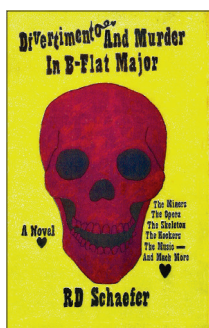
MYSTERY/THRILLER

Divertimento And Murder In B-Flat Major

RD Schaefer | Vaad Press
370p, e-book, \$4.99, ISBN 979-8-2307-4641-6

Schaefer's debut opens in the dark depths of a mine, where two miners stumble upon a dead body, only for it to disappear moments later. This strange encounter sets the tone for an unusual mystery that moves between two unlikely worlds: the claustrophobic mine of Stump Town, and the long-standing McNabb Opera House suddenly alive with unexpected buzz. At the center of it all is Rusty, a music student and aspiring composer, and his fellow ragtag crew of bawdy miners—Tony, Rex, CK, Chief, and others—who find themselves entangled in a mysterious death—though "nobody had turned up missing."

As the story unfolds, Rusty's journey becomes the novel's emotional spine. From a gullible new hire, he evolves into the commanding conductor of a full-fledged opera—writing "a little divertimento, stirring, in some far-off corner of the universe"—while persuading hyper-masculine miners to participate in something far more vulnerable than they are used to ("Music soothes the savage beast," Rusty observes). Alongside them is Ginger, a perceptive sex worker, who becomes an integral part of this rough and ready troupe, particularly after a mining accident



Punchy mystery with immersive setting and colorful cast.

Great for fans of Gigi Pandian's *A Midnight Puzzle*, Jamie L. Adams's *Murder at the Mine*.

the integrity of Schaefer's worldbuilding remains immersive.

Schaefer achieves colorful characters and punchy dialogue—especially vivid in the mining moments—that feel distinctly alive, shining with gallows humor that cuts through the darkness of both the setting and the crime. By the end, readers will feel as if they have spent an eternity underground in the mine—slightly disoriented but oddly amused by a story that is trying to find music in the most unlikely of places and people.

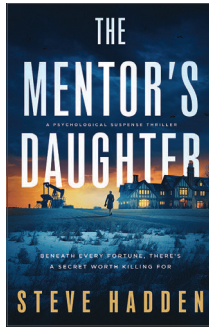
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: – Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **B+**

MYSTERY/THRILLER**The Mentor's Daughter: A Psychological Suspense Thriller**

Steve Hadden | Mahogany Row Press
362p, e-book, \$5.99, ISBN 978-1-963-58406-6

Hadden takes readers through the depths of what greed and power can move people to do in his latest thriller. When Jim Munro—an oil magnate who surprised the industry by turning his attentions to green energy—goes missing, Eli Scott, who considers Jim a surrogate father and mentor, must do what he detests to find his friend: team up with Jim's "sociopathic" daughter, Hope, an infamous attorney known for her dishonesty. Eli's own history—a traumatic childhood, troubled relationship with his father, the devastating unraveling of his career—prevents his ability to trust others—a problem that compounds with someone like Hope in the picture. Though she swears she had nothing to do with Jim's kidnapping, Eli can't help but wonder: what, if any, of this shocking situation is real?

From the start, Hadden (*The Victim of the System*) paints Eli into a corner: he'll do anything to save his mentor, but Hope confounds him at nearly every step. Eli is



Brisk thriller of greed, ambition, and mental illness.

Great for fans of Elizabeth Kaufman's *Ruth Run*, Liv Constantine's *The Last Mrs. Parrish*.

dependent on his therapist and consultant, Lizzy Beauregard, to guide him through the pitfalls of working with someone like Hope—and the reemergence of Eli's former professional nemesis, Lucian Blackwood, the man who spearheaded Eli's almost-downfall, adds to the drama. Lucian's role makes Jim's disappearance even more personal for Eli, especially after Eli joins forces with Lucian's daughter, Sarah, a capable woman intent on bringing her unethical father down.

Money drives the book's events. When readers learn that Jim may have a stake in a possible organic replacement for the rare earth metals in lithium batteries, the motive for his kidnapping becomes clearer—and the stakes exponentially higher. Eli's perspective is the main focus, but Hadden's scenes between Eli and Lizzy—as they try to decipher the meaning behind others' actions—form the bulk of the novel's emotional depth. Thriller fans will enjoy Hadden's ability to keep them guessing—and the surprising twist at the novel's end.

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

SF/FANTASY/HORROR**Infernal Tramps: Tales of Weird Terror**

Alex Grass | Dickinson Publishing Group
228p, e-book, \$0.99, ASIN B0GSN4BX4Y

Grass (*A Boy's Hammer*) delves into the horrors that humans inflict on themselves and others in this chilling collection. Each story explores the perils of vanity, the violence of vengeance, and the disturbing pangs of hunger—for justice, carnal satisfaction, and even human flesh. In the titular offering, a self-styled "boozehound" gives in to unlikely compassion, seizing on his chance for connection—though not of the human variety. "A New World Basement" features a woman stumbling into an ominous basement after being released from the hospital, while "Ever Shall They Feed" taps into a darker subterranean world: a curious son finds his father has been feeding a ravenous entity in the catacombs under their funeral home. Through creepy perspectives and chilling circumstances, Grass explores humankind's darkest desires and actions.

At times disturbing yet satisfying in their delivery of payback, Grass's stories offer plenty of shock value for horror fans. A cheating husband who can't keep his food down in "The Eguisto Zanosi Fast" quickly finds his "limitless appetite" at the mercy of his vengeful wife, who advises him to "Eat only of yourself if you are not



Sinister blend of horror, science fiction, and fantasy.

Great for fans of Agustina Bazterrica's *Nineteen Claws* and *a Black Bird*, Eric LaRocca's *Things Have Gotten Worse Since We Last Spoke*.

filled with your life's portion." That scene involves a nauseating, forced meal—though it gets the job done and he leaves feeling infinitely better. Each tale is more gruesome than the last, as Grass reveals what lurks in the shadows while keeping readers guessing as to how each character's journey will end. *Infernal Tramps* is fast-paced—with several stories concluding in just a few pages—and cryptic, tackling sinister themes and experiences while leaving plenty of space for readers to draw their own conclusions. Morally gray characters add a layer of complexity and tension, and readers will be torn between rooting for them—or cheering their deserving endings. This blend of fantasy, horror, and science fiction is a visceral punch to the gut.

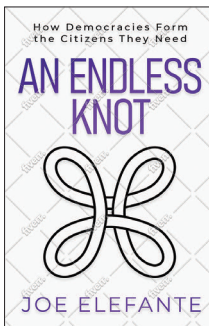
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: – Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

POLITICAL & SOCIAL SCIENCES**An Endless Knot: How Democracies Form the Citizens They Need**

Joe Elefante
212p, trade paper, \$16.99, ISBN 979-8-254-05907-3

In his debut, music educator Elefante posits that the measure of a life is not what a person accumulates, but the impact they have on others—and how they contribute to the much-needed return to civility in today's ultra-polarized atmosphere. A major principle he draws from is interdependency, a point driven home to the author after his wife Caryn died from breast cancer, when her former students delivered an outpouring of love via notes and emails, showing the impact she had—and continues to have, even after her death—on those she taught. Using Buddhist principles, Elefante sets out to prove that many political problems emerge from a failure to learn from the experiences of others.

"Generative listening is essential to preserving a sustainable democracy," Elefante opines, delivering a call to action for readers who feel powerless in today's fraught times. He urges his audience to stand up and do their part in a world where democracy feels especially fragile, encouraging healing through connecting with the arts—which he views as ritual, shared practices with the power to unite the



Well-reasoned, clear-eyed roadmap for democracy's healing.

Great for fans of Doug Teschner et al.'s *Beyond the Politics of Contempt*, Kenneth Barish's *Bridging Our Political Divide*.

he does declare joy, love, and compassion to be the real treasures of life.

To encourage readers to incorporate the necessary skills, Elefante wraps up with helpful discussion guides—one meant for individuals, the other for groups looking to fuel productive discussion. No matter how one identifies, politically or otherwise, Elefante's advice and principles help establish common ground—and offer much-needed empathy in these tumultuous times.

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

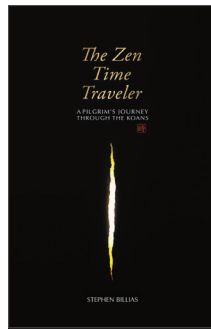
SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

EDITOR'S PICK

The Zen Time Traveler: A Pilgrim's Journey through the KoansStephen Billias | Discovery Publisher
236p, hardcover, \$44.90, ISBN 978-1-788-94698-8

Billias (*A Book of Fields*) launches readers into a sweeping saga following modern-day Zen student Stephen Maine—self-described as “everymanish”—who finds himself unexpectedly transported into Song Dynasty China while meditating. When Stephen fixates on a haiku during Zen class one day, he’s propelled into the body of a 13th century monk named Wūkōng. As he walks ancient monastery halls, encounters masters, and grapples with paradoxical koans, Stephen struggles to balance these experiences with his real-life responsibilities, particularly his modern-day marriage to Joanna.

Billias drops readers into the contemplative world of Zen then peels back layers to show the challenge of living with awareness while caught between realities. Stephen’s immersion into koans forces him to confront Zen principles like detachment, presence, and the illusory nature of time. Stephen’s obsession with Yabaku,



Speculative journey into ancient Zen koans and self-awareness.

Great for fans of David Guy’s *Jake Fades*, Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*.

the mysterious sword-maker, probes human attachment and desire, while the story’s shifts through time and space eventually reveal that Stephen’s host happens to be Dogen—the monk who established Japanese Sōtō Zen. That revelation carries the potential to change history.

The story is at once a journey, spiritual exploration, and meditation on the ways time, perception, and devotion intersect. Billias’s style draws readers directly into Stephen’s experience, with immersive prose that paints vivid scenes of Song Dynasty monasteries and Zen rituals. Readers experience Stephen’s bewilderment, awe, and attachment as his disorienting episodes leave him wondering how he can have “the time of my life back there while my twenty-first-century life was slowly unraveling, disintegrating.” Though the narrative occasionally slows in reflection, the rhythm mirrors meditation itself, resulting in a seamless exploration of presence, awareness, and human longing.

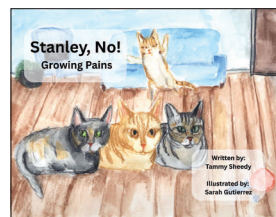
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

PICTURE BOOKS

Stanley, No!: Growing PainsTammy Sheedy | TSD Publishing
36p, hardcover, \$29.99, ISBN 979-8-295-65640-8

In Sheedy’s playful picture book, following *Tails of a Brave Kitten*, an orange tabby named Stanley learns the ropes of indoor living. Adopted by his new family, Stanley is excited to live in a house for the first time. He discovers many exciting activities—he can climb the drapes, pounce on the plants, run with abandon, and tackle his new feline siblings. There’s only one problem: it turns out none of these things are allowed indoors, and each time Stanley tries to have fun, his human mom reprimands him with a cry of “Stanley, no!” Frustrated with these mundane rules, Stanley begins to wonder if being an indoor kitty is really all it’s cracked up to be.

This is when Stanley’s mom comes to an important realization: “I forgot what it was like to be so young and curious,” she says, vowing to let him explore more. While this book aptly captures the experience of adopting a new pet, it will resonate with young readers who are often expected to sit still and be quiet when they would rather run and play—and it reminds adults that the kids in their lives need the freedom to be loud and messy. Told in singsong prose, children will enjoy hearing this book read out loud, even if the rhymes at times feel strained.



Feisty young cat adjusts to living indoors in this playful story.

Great for fans of Charlotte Voake’s *Ginger Finds a Home*, Heidi Mckinnon’s *Floof*.

Sarah Gutierrez’s lovingly rendered illustrations follow feisty, pumpkin-colored Stanley as he tests his boundaries in his cozy new home. His mom finds him peeking out of the cabinets and cuddled up in her plant before he finally decides to consult the other cats. They perch on a cat tree in a sunny room and remain calm and well behaved, often shown sprawled

on the floor or peering out a window. In the end, Stanley’s mom accepts that he is a kitten who is still learning—a comforting realization for both children and adults.

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

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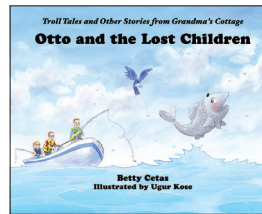
PICTURE BOOKS

Otto and the Lost Children: Troll Tales and Other Stories from Grandma's Cottage

Betty Cetas | Windy Sea Publishing
40p, hardcover, \$18.95, ISBN 978-1-956-27720-3

A trickster trout saves the day in Cetas's delightful picture book, the fifth fable (after *Moe and the Tree Climbers*) inspired by her timeliving in a cottage "nestled in the magical woods of Finland." This mischievous fish appears in *Oscar and Otto* (2023), where he cleverly avoids capture by a wily troll, and he's still playing mind games here. While staying at their grandmother's cottage, Jeremiah, Nathaniel, and Adriana decide to go fishing in the nearby lake. Despite their grandmother's warning, they neglect to check the gas tank, and Otto sees an opportunity for some fun at their expense.

Otto pops out of the water, flashing his tail and making ripples to get their attention, and Jeremiah steers the boat in his direction. He lures them further into the lake with promises of a good catch, but there are no fish to be found. Watching as the bored kids give up on fishing and start to entertain themselves, Otto catches the worms Nathaniel drops into the water, listens to Adriana tell stories, and is



Tricky fish takes heroic turn in charming picture book.

Great for fans of Phillip M. Hoose and Hannah Hoose's *Hey, Little Ant*, Kevin Lovegreen's *Fish On!*

delighted by the shapes Jeremiah makes by twisting reeds. But when storm clouds appear, the children realize that they are lost and begin to panic. Cetas delves into summer fun and water safety, tackling problem-solving skills and outdoor survival, but she focuses primarily on the effect the kids' peril has on Otto. Ugur Kose has illustrated the entire *Troll Tales and Other Stories from Grandma's Cottage* series, and his expressive watercolor drawings superbly blend fantasy elements with recognizable scenarios. He captures Otto's regret with a subtle shift in expression, showing how the cunning trout switches from deceitful pranks to helpful guidance. Cetas and Kose celebrate the relationship between humans and animals in *Otto and the Lost Children*, a nostalgic and inviting tale that focuses on kindness, compassion, and the importance of being prepared.

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

PICTURE BOOKS

Ava and Maya: The Enchanted Lake

Medha Bhaskar | Fantasy Fiction
64p, hardcover, \$26.99, ISBN 979-8-992-40203-2

This second installment in Bhaskar's *Ava and Maya* series (following *The Fairy Dragon*) sees the steadfast Ava paired up once again with her magical fairy dragon friend—but this time, Maya is in serious trouble. "The Enchanted Lake is losing its magic," Maya ruefully informs Ava one night, "And if the magic fades, my kind may lose our powers." Ava wastes no time in offering her assistance, and the two fly into the night together, soaring over cobalt skies until they reach the Enchanted Lake itself—and run headfirst into a danger neither sees coming.

Young readers—especially those who see their own fantasy creatures outside their windows at night—will relish this whimsical tale of friendship, loyalty, and courage. When Ava arrives at the lake, she quickly discovers a lurking evil threatening Maya and her fellow dragons: both Ava and Maya's faces reflect their fear when they spy the menacing Shadow dragon creeping through the forest. But Bhaskar incorporates an important lesson into this adventure, as Ava refuses to let her fear decide her actions. She bravely vows to save Maya's magic, no matter what, and



Whimsical story of magic, mayhem, and enduring friendship.

Great for fans of Adam Lehrhaupt's *I Will Not Eat You*, Serena Geddes's *Rosie and Rasmus*.

sets off across the lake with her best friend in tow to find the Crystal Flower, the key that Ava needs to show the Shadow dragon who's boss. Ava and Maya's quest is rendered against a backdrop of turquoise waters and inky forest trees, heightening the suspense of their slippery trek across the lake, and the Crystal Flower—when they reach it—infuses the pages with bright, sparkling color. "Love, Kindness, and Bravery" save the day, restoring a gentle peace to the lake and its surrounding woods. As Ava and Maya bask in the budding flowers and springy grass, Ava promises to safeguard the Crystal Flower, and Bhaskar smartly closes with hints of more adventures to come.

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

YOUNG ADULT

EDITOR'S PICK

Deficient

Michael Solis | Mintaka Press
235p, e-book, \$4.99, ISBN 979-8-9985455-2-8

Solis offers YA readers an intricate world of magic, mayhem, and self-discovery in this striking debut. At the Achewon Academy—a school for children with supernatural abilities—Alé Aragón is singled out amongst his peers. Known as a Deficient—someone with no magical abilities of their own—he's mercilessly teased, overlooked by his instructors, and treated like an embarrassment by his father and brothers. The only people he feels truly understand and love him are his mother and his best friend, Yalamba Koroma, who is a Feral—students with random abilities who "sit at the bottom of the hierarchy." But when Yalamba goes missing after a shocking confession that alters her and Alé's friendship, Alé becomes the prime suspect in her disappearance.

Alé is a strong, appealing character who is vastly underestimated by the majority of the book's characters. Determined to prove his innocence—and rescue his best friend—he's drawn deeper into the mystery when attacks on other Ferals begin, resulting in several deaths and heightened scrutiny for Alé. Solis delivers plenty of



Striking YA dystopian of identity and self-acceptance.

Great for fans of Aiden Thomas's *Cemetery Boys*, Leyla Suzan's *Giften*.

suspense and action as Alé goes head-to-head with fellow students who have the ability to fly, read minds, become invisible, and shift through solid objects—despite having no powers of his own. As he fights for his reputation and searches for Yalamba, he forms unexpected alliances along the way, learning that even without the prescribed magic, he's a formidable force—and has everything he needs inside to save his best friend.

Solis's immersive world explores elitism, stereotypes, and classism, tackling the adolescent need for self-identity through Alé's attempts to build inner confidence, even as he's constantly told he's not enough. Skillfully merging fantasy and mystery, Solis weaves together a vivid coming-of-age blended with believable conflict, centered on a protagonist that must overcome bias and the harsh judgments of others to ultimately find self-love and acceptance.

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

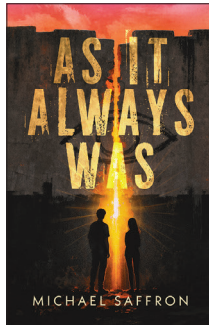
YOUNG ADULT

As It Always Was

Michael Saffron | Mystery Theater Works
342p, e-book, \$3.99, ISBN 979-8-9929053-0-4

Decades after a devastating nuclear war, the remnants of humanity live within the city of Palpine. To protect from radiation, they inject the experimental medicine, LEEF. But 16-year-old resident Damon Baxter is on the verge of outgrowing the treatments, as he possesses one of the highest recorded variations, manifesting in moments of longing and daydreaming that mark him different from his peers. One day, he discovers a book in his locker, and with it, a horrifying truth: LEEF desensitizes humanity, dulling their senses and emotions. When Damon stops taking LEEF, he suddenly uncovers novel experiences: colors, sounds, scents, and feelings. But this new life also comes with new dangers, with the powers-that-be viewing Damon's independence as a threat to the established order.

Saffron smartly deconstructs typical life experiences, with sensations that readers are well-accustomed to described in strange, visceral ways: scents "crawling in [the] nose," heartbeats "pecking at [the] ribs," and a scarlet drop of



Gripping plunge into an emotionless society, with a powerful reclaiming.

Great for fans of Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, Jasper Fforde's *Shades of Grey*.

blood brilliantly contrasting Damon's otherwise monochromatic world. Saffron also emphasizes how raw and significant those feelings are in such unusual circumstances, though Damon's interiority becomes verbose at times: "I know to expect the unexpected," he ruminates, "as much as I can expect it, and to also keep a watchful eye out for everything I don't know is there." Regardless, the novel's heart shines through, making for a narrative with surprising emotional weight.

The conflict in Damon's world isn't as simple as it first appears, as there are remarkably reasonable arguments for the usage of LEEF. Saffron highlights both the best and worst of the human experience, including pain, fear, stress, and despair, delivering antagonists who aren't supervillains but just people trying to provide an easy escape from humanity's missteps. The result is a fascinating dive into what it means to be human—the good and the bad—and how life is still worth living in spite of it all.

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

YOUNG ADULT

The Tales Of The Old Hut: Stories from the Fairy Tale Nook

Olwen Bardow | Olwen Bardow Publishing
133p, hardcover, \$39.99, ISBN 979-8-9902843-3-3

Bardow's enchanting collection of 15 fairy tales is full of magic, adventure, and cunning, and he respectfully injects a modern sensibility into this classic genre. From commoners to royalty, these characters encounter trickster fairies in a mythical realm, and the intricate worldbuilding will sweep young readers (and adults) into each captivating story—and have them rooting for the resourceful protagonists to triumph. Incorporating familiar elements—a magic spinning wheel, a prince with a heart of gold, young women pining for true love—he explores romance, identity, and independence while steering these imaginative offerings to their well-deserved happy endings. Readers will sense Bardow's wholehearted affection for fairy tales throughout.

"The Maidens of the Lake and the Miller's Daughter" combines popular tropes, but Bardow's inventiveness quickly becomes apparent. After a duplicitous stepmother uses Margery's compassion against her, the young woman is submerged into a watery sisterhood. Her distraught fiancé, Tancred, eschews the typical hero



Throwback tales swap retrograde clichés for self-determination.

Great for fans of Teya Evans's *Fairy Tales from Around the World*, Shannon Hale's Books of Bayern series.

role in favor of unwavering love and determination that net him—and Margery—a magical reward in the end. Set ups like that—and the dramatic midnight escape Gwendolyn makes in "Gwendolyn and the Fairies of the Forest"—keep readers engaged, using brisk pacing to propel the storyline while delivering satisfying resolutions.

As both writer and illustrator, Bardow (*The Whispers of the Heather*) fills this collection with the wonder and urgency of classic fairy tales while highlighting ingenuity and courage. These strong heroines and charming heroes face a host of conflicts that combine magical elements with problem-solving quests, and parents who enjoy the nostalgic quality of fairy tales—but don't want to perpetuate stereotypes like the damsel in distress—will appreciate Bardow's earnest approach. Digital illustrations recreate haunting forest scenes amid high castle walls, and Bardow's focus on individual growth as much as spellbinding magic creates a fairy tale collection that celebrates strong characters who find a way to save themselves.

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



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