

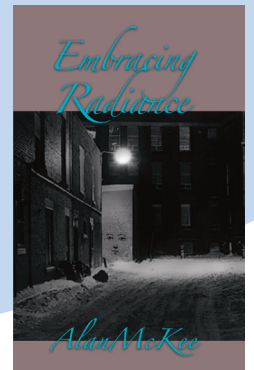
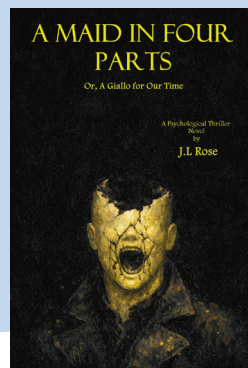
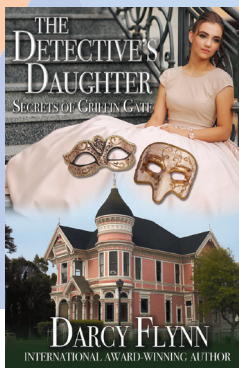
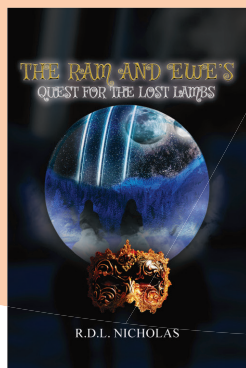
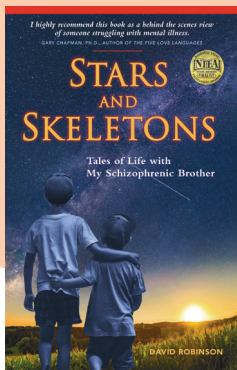
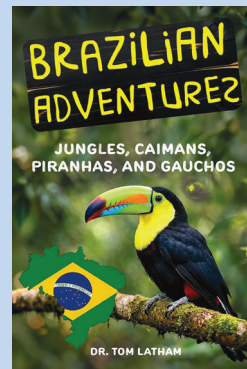
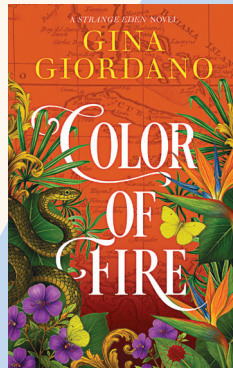
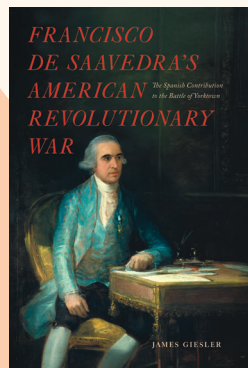
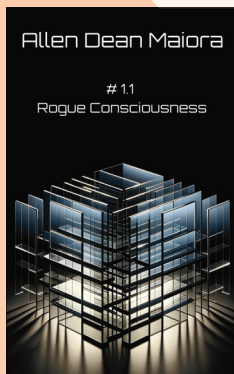
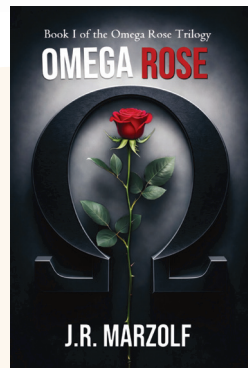
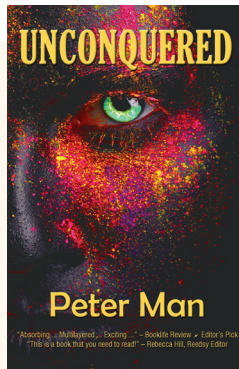
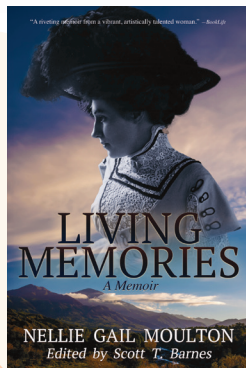
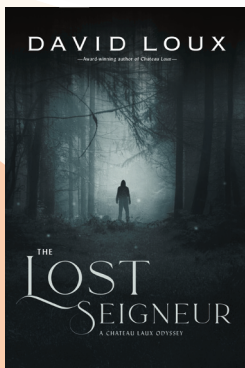
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“ Quotes from BookLife Reviews



The Lost Seigneur

by David Loux 978-1954065048

EDITOR'S PICK

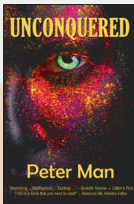
“ Compelling novel of a lost French aristocrat coming home to Colonial America.



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“ Riveting historical legacy from the perspective of a gifted pioneer.



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EDITOR'S PICK

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“ Ambitious SF packed with action, genetic engineering, and high stakes.



Through Bullets & Thunderstorms: A Holocaust Survival Pact

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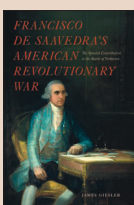
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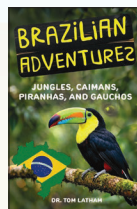
“ Fascinating account of the man behind the alliance that turned the Revolutionary War.



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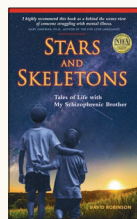
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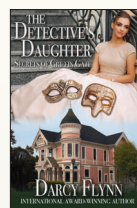
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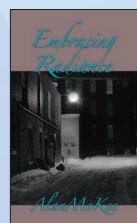
“ A daughter investigates her father's murder in this romance/mystery combo.



A Maid in Four Parts

by J.L. Rose 978-1067686413

“ Over-the-top gothic procedural linking witch hunts to age-of-consent laws.



Embracing Radiance

by Alan McKee 978-1035882847

EDITOR'S PICK

“ Symbolic narratives tap into emotional reservoirs of trauma and deliverance.

Start with a Bang

An author offers a tool for writer's block

BY E.L. TENENBAUM

Perhaps you've heard rumor of it—an abominable affliction affecting artists in all areas. Writers are particularly susceptible; it's why they named it for us.

Though it needs no explanation, and has possibly been experienced by almost anyone who's tried to write for more than a minute, writer's block is the broad

diagnosis describing that awful point when creativity screeches to a horrifying standstill. Like a vast desert, the mind becomes an unforgiving span of emptiness, though worse, because at least a desert may see some action in a scurrying scorpion or sandstorm. Writer's block is debatably worse than the latest rejection or bad review. If writers cannot write, then why are they wasting time staring at this screen?

In most cases, the question of why creativity has halted isn't about whether or not the writing itself is technically good, because what we discard today may easily be rediscovered tomorrow. Usually, you started to write this idea because you saw some value in it, even if at present you're stumbling to find the right words.

Some holistic remedies are already on offer. Go for a walk, take a shower, wash dishes, do other menial chores to keep the body occupied and the mind lulled into a false sense of non-creative busyness. Then, soon as a rhythm is found, the mind will awaken and share all the brilliant, resonant, witty treasures it keeps in storage for you.

But what if it that doesn't work? What if now is writing time, and if I don't get something written now that's a whole lot of precious time wasted?

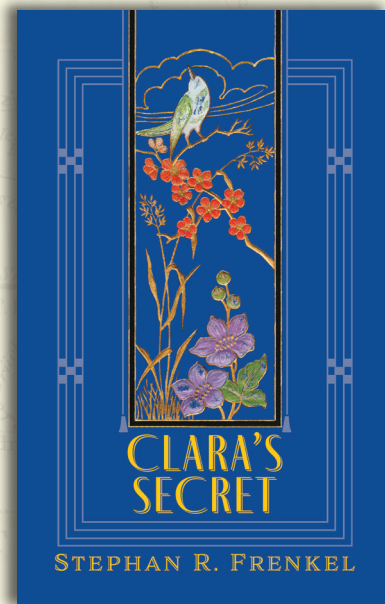
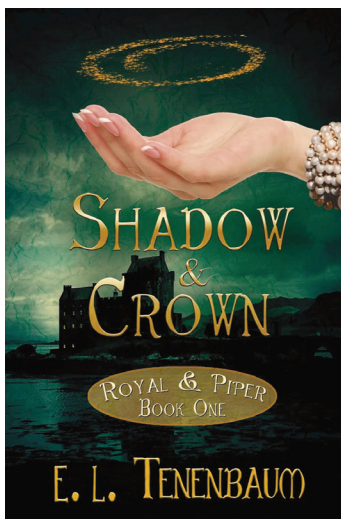
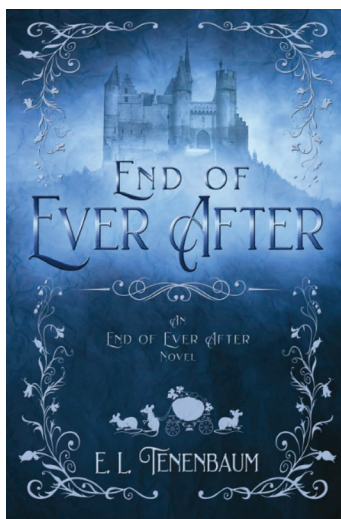
Grab the toolkit. Get out that flare. Go with a bang!

Open that document or notebook with the story that refuses to move forward. Then do something entirely unexpected. Drop a dodo from the sky. Set off smoke in the botanical gardens. Launch a grinning porpoise from the river.

Or write *BANG!*

Did you startle? Did you expect it? Did chaos ensue?

Don't focus on the story, but the sound. What went bang? A door? An item falling? A firecracker? A weapon? How different is that sound when heard in a room, in the sky, in a cave, in the mall? Does the sound fit in better than you thought it might?



“Rich personal and cultural history of a young woman in Berlin’s Belle Epoque.”

—Publishers Weekly/BookLife Reviews

booklife
EDITOR'S PICK

“A tender, personality-centered biography of golden age Berlin.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“A wonderfully composed portrayal that could be considered narrative Art Nouveau.”

—BookTrib

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If the above didn't work, consider one more thing: an unembellished, practical tête-à-tête with honesty.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the barren lands of writer's block because there is simply nothing else to say. We've run out of road, and we'll either have to sweat out the blazing of a new path or figure out where we could've turned onto a better road. We may have reached the point of the story too quickly, in which case we'll have to find ways to pad the beginning or accept a shorter length. There may realistically be nothing else to add, in which case we'll have to accept that anything more will only detract from what we already have.

Then again, maybe there is more to say, but we don't yet have the words for it. You're writing because you want to provide something fun, entertaining, thoughtful, or relay a state of being or a message. Can you articulate what it is? Is your writing in alignment with that? Maybe you can't write any more because you don't know where you're trying to go.

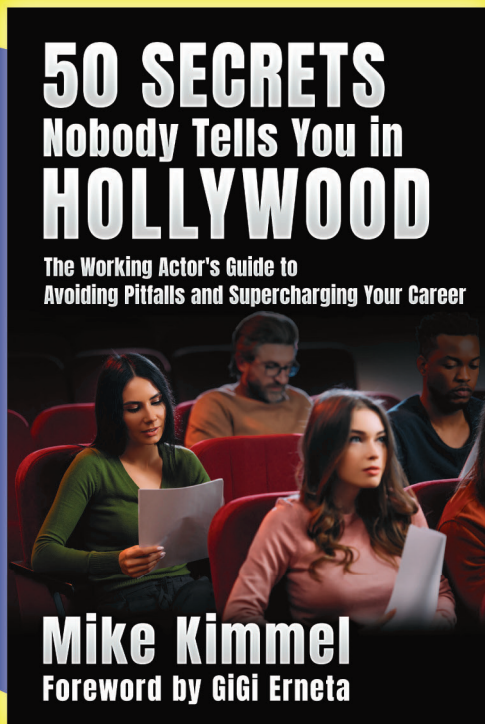
If this is the true issue, then review what you have and assess if maybe it really isn't as good as you can make it. It doesn't have to be the most original, most extreme, most unheard-of flourish, but there should be some nuance or texture that makes the reader want to see it, and the writer want to write about it. Perhaps you're stuck because you didn't lean enough into a character's quirks or emotions, so the underdeveloped, possibly too-familiar personality runs out of creative steam. Perhaps your setting is too generic, too under-

described, so there's nothing of interest to catch the eye? Consider tossing some bait to your creative mind. If you're writing a mystery, what will keep readers invested? Maybe they'd keep reading if the chef did it. Now see if your creative mind can figure out how to get you there.

There's one caveat. These tips and tricks may get you writing and thinking again today, but you might also erase everything when you look tomorrow. However, in wrestling with writer's block, there are two things to consider: did you write anything at all? Did you further the story?

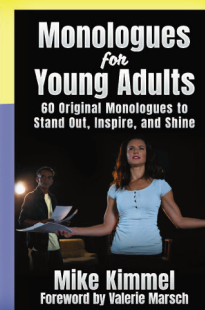
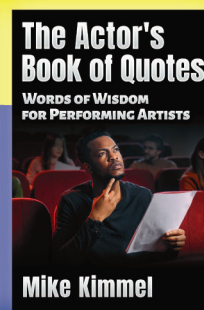
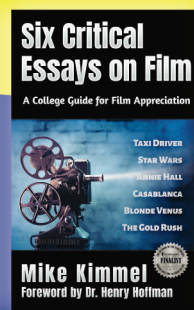
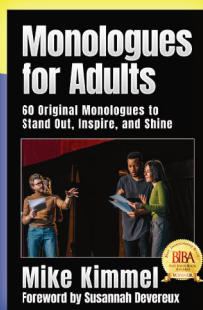
An answer to both can't be had without your creative mind churning again, and an affirmative answer to both would mean curing this bout of writer's block. Now your creative mind isn't an empty desert, but a plowed field, just waiting for the right seed to prompt what will be a bountiful harvest. An answer to only the first question means that at least this part of the battle was won. So, when staring down the empty horizon of writer's block, try doing something unexpected, not with a whimper, but a bang! 🍌

E. L. Tenenbaum is a writer, author, essayist, and educator.



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You can't win a fight you don't know you're in.



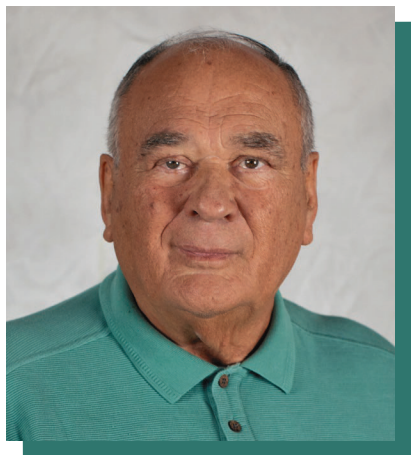
“With humorous and welcome candor, Kimmel provides a wealth of behind-the-scenes information and advice about auditions, interacting with agents, and prioritizing self-care, with actionable game plans for actors ranging in age from their 20s to their 50s.”

—*BookLife by Publishers Weekly Review*

“... the author guides would-be actors through lessons on dealing with managers, agents, and other performers, as well as the labyrinthine workings of the entertainment industry in general.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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A Real Fault Line

Harper Law's geopolitical thrillers address the impact of scarcity

For Harper Law, the key to a good thriller is creating a sense of urgency—and not just because the protagonist is caught in a fictional high-stakes scenario. With his Hans Adler Water Series—a six-book set of geopolitical novels offering an intelligence operative's perspective of the burgeoning water wars—Law takes a compelling look at one of the most pressing real-world consequences of climate change.

"Water is the faucet that doesn't run, the reservoir you can see dropping, the river your grandfather fished that isn't there anymore," he says. "It's the part of the climate story you can actually see, and it's where the geopolitical consequences are arriving first—not in 2050, but on today's front page, if you know where to look."

While the books are focused on water, they address a far broader set of concerns. "They're about what people do when something runs short—who reaches for it, who pays for it, and how seldom anyone in the room asks what happens after," Law says.

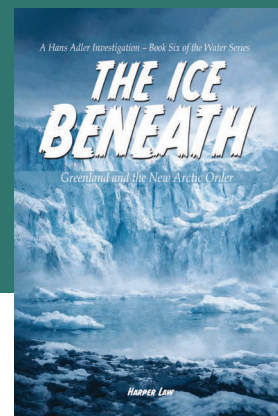
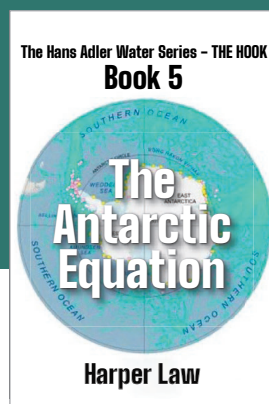
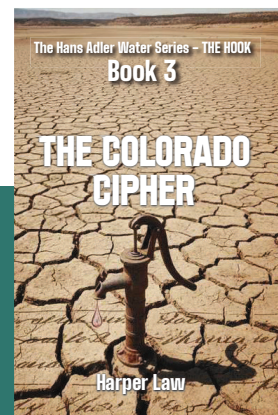
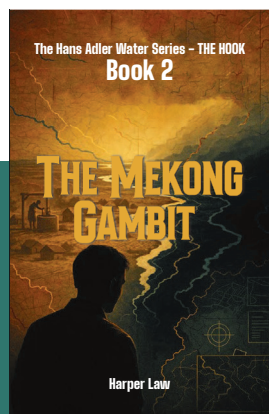
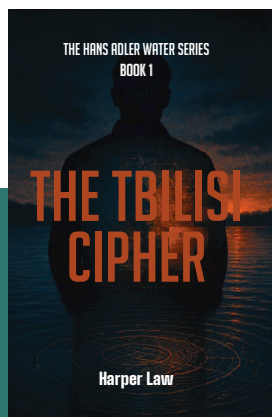
The Water Series follows former forensic accountant and academic Hans Adler as he travels the world investigating conflicts over the world's most precious resource. Each book plunges him into a different global flashpoint—post-Soviet Tbilisi, the contested Mekong, the collapsing Colorado River basin, the failing Antarctic treaty, the militarizing Arctic—and finally Greenland, where ice has become the latest point of contention in the water wars.

As with any good thriller, he encounters many ethically dubious individuals and institutions that are not what they seem. "I think of it as climate fiction for readers who normally reach for Daniel Silva or John le Carré—the tradecraft, the double-crosses, the moral ambiguity are all there," Law says. "Still, the MacGuffin isn't a nuclear code. It's a river, a reservoir, an ice shelf."

Like his relentlessly curious, order-loving

protagonist, Law found a new calling later in life. After working most of his career in law and finance, he turned to writing to process his grief after his wife passed away three years ago. Since then, his literary output has been prolific. "I sat down and started writing a memoir about losing [my wife], about grief, about rebuilding a self, and by

someone could devour on a long flight. But he also hopes his readers come away with a slightly different perspective on what's happening in the world. "Every one of these books started with a real story, a real contradiction, a real fault line," Law says. "I just gave Hans a passport and let him follow it. What I hope these books add is a kind of



the time I finished it, it was three volumes long," he says. "I haven't stopped writing since. The memoir taught me I could do it."

With his thrillers, Law hopes first and foremost to tell suspenseful stories that keep readers guessing—the kind of books

urgency: not despair, not lecture, but the kind of urgency a good thriller creates, where you turn the page because you have to know what happens next. And then you close the book and realize the clock in the novel is the same clock we're all living on."



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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

EDITOR'S PICK

Assassin's Mace: A Jake Palmer Novel

Ron McManus | Bublish

363p, e-book, \$0.99 ASIN BOGSSJ22Q1

McManus's fifth Palmer thriller works for both series fans and first-timers, offering both a suspenseful plot centered on a risky mission, undertaken at an inopportune time, and significant personal developments for his protagonist. Palmer and his fellow Delta Force operative Alona Green are part of a squad targeting a terrorist leader in Pakistan, but their success doesn't afford the pair any downtime. Instead, shortly before Palmer is supposed to get married in the U.K., they're assigned to a classic covert operation: the CIA has turned Dmitry Sokolov, Russian expert on hypersonic missiles, an armament that the Russians have enhanced well beyond America's capacities. Complicating matters: Putin's increased paranoia has inspired a witch hunt that's already led to the arrest of some of Sokolov's colleagues on bogus charges.

On perilously short notice, Palmer and Green are tasked with getting Sokolov



Suspenseful espionage thriller of a deadly Russian defection.

Great for fans of Chris Hadfield's *The Defector*, Brad Taylor.

stakes while paying welcome attention to tradecraft as the bodies pile up on trains, border stations, and in the scopes of snipers.

McManus makes a master assassin enemy compelling, and even readers anticipating how the plot will unfold are likely to be drawn into the sharply executed action. He also laces welcome humor and team camaraderie throughout and exhibits a gift for memorable prose; early on, Putin's chief aide is described as "a survivor who knew that loyalty was currency in the Kremlin, but fear was the smarter investment." McManus keeps the MacGuffin plausible even as it has sweeping implications and poses a serious threat.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

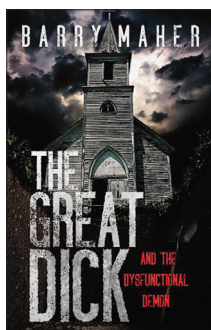
EDITOR'S PICK

The Great Dick: And the Dysfunctional Demon

Barry Maher | Crystal Lake Publishing

464p, mass market, \$16.99, ISBN 978-1-968-53213-0

A noirish literary thriller that edges into unsettling supernatural horror, Maher's sharply penned, wildly unpredictable lulu of a debut suggests its ambitions and *raison d'être* in a prologue: in 1968, a Harvard professor, stoned out of his mind, declares that *Moby Dick* and *The Great Gatsby* are the same story, "the half-assed struggle of the individual to put their world to rights in the face of" failure—and that any novel written for his generation should be called *The Great Dick*. The book that follows earns that title, as songwriter Gavin Kennan travels under a dead man's identity in 1982 and stumbles into a roadside attack. The woman he rescues is Victoria Fairchild, a wealthy and enticing widow whom he likens to "the Hope diamond on black velvet." Complicating matters: Gavin killed to protect her, and in the bruises on his forearm he sees the face of the dead man.



Wild, funny noir nightmare that edges into the supernatural.

Great for fans of Johnny Compton's *Dead First*, William Lindsay Gresham's *Nightmare Alley*.

writings of a dead sorcerer-pimp, and the seductive secrets of Victoria.

Maher commits to page-turning genre-fiction surprises while smartly conjuring the alienation felt by an Indiana outsider caught up in a vividly evoked California alive with (apparent) huckster spell-casters, eccentric revelations, inescapable junk culture, and discomfiting pleasures of the flesh. Dark, funny, propulsive, and powered by a witty spirit of surprise, *The Great Dick* reinvigorates the classic American theme of a protagonist undone by his own desire. Loads of dark fun.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

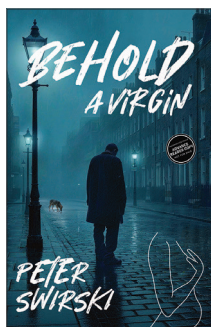
Behold a Virgin

Peter Swirski

308p, trade paper, \$17.95, ISBN 978-1-067-35484-8

In this gritty, high-concept mystery debut set against the post-WW2 soot-stained backstreets of London, Swirski fuses noir crime with science and theology, crafting a novel that tiptoes between faith, biology, and reason. Detective Inspector Alan Shepard—dog-tired, sharp-eyed, and methodical to a fault—is summoned to a dingy bedsit where a young polio-stricken woman has been brutally murdered by her medically infertile common-law husband. A grim domestic tragedy, it seems—until it isn't. The case unravels into a labyrinthine puzzle involving the scientific (im)possibility of virgin births. Four cases bear resemblance to the murder: a dead prostitute, a pregnant nun driven to suicide, a sheltered girl insisting on her virginity, and a welder's wife whose husband has long been absent.

Seeking clarity, Shepard turns to the coolly incisive biologist Genevieve Sisi-mond, who suggests he is not chasing a lone aberration but an ongoing syndrome that stretches beyond the tidy reach of police work. Together, they uncover a chilling



Cerebral speculative thriller explores virgin births in 1950s London.

Great for fans of Caleb Carr's *The Alienist*, Dan Brown's *Origin*.

been misunderstood across time. The atmosphere is richly rendered: London's smog drapes the city like the "skeletal remains of a recumbent dinosaur," while the dialogue—particularly between Shepard and the wry journalist Bernie—sparkles with a lively, hard-edged intelligence, veering from Plato and Dionysos to the blunt realities of police procedure.

At times, the novel's philosophical excursions threaten to stall its momentum, yet its prose—dryly witty and steeped in period texture—keeps the pages turning, from squalid bedsits to a chaotic hostage standoff freighted with institutional intrigue. Ultimately, *Behold a Virgin* offers a provocative meditation on the limits of human knowledge through the lens of history and evolutionary biology.

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

BookLife Talks with Benjamin Fletcher

Fletcher's debut novel, *Azalea: From Dream to Nightmare*, is the first book in a planned fantasy duology centered on its eponymous protagonist, who, after being born of a sentient tree, struggles to accept her destiny while falling for a human ranger. We spoke with Fletcher about his influences, his audience, and what he hopes readers take away from the book.

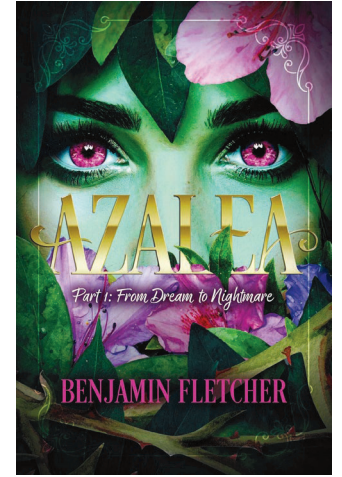
***Azalea* is your debut work. Have you always wanted to be a writer?**

I grew up immersed in science fiction and fantasy adventure stories, mostly through television series, movies, and video games. I have always been drawn to memorable characters and compelling stories. For most of my life, I didn't know I had any literary ambitions. I began writing in 2014, between taking my preliminary courses at my local college. In many ways, what inspired me to write was a yearning to find out if I could do it, to discover whether I could write the kind of story I always wanted to see, one that combined romance, fantasy, and adventure equally. To me, most romance stories seemed afraid to explore commitment and marriage. Most fantasy stories felt like they needed more realism and meaningful consequences. And most adventure stories I had seen made me crave characters with emotional depth who struggled with dark and noble desires.

What drew you to *Azalea's* story in particular?

Azalea began as a simple short story about a meeting between a mythical plant woman and a human ranger. That short story evolved into a struggle in the jungle, a chance meeting between two wayward souls who helped each other out of difficult circumstances and became friends. Then I began shaping that idea into an adventure that could move beyond the jungle encounter and venture into a larger world.

Nature is where I have felt closest to God. Ocean life, clouds in the sky, sunsets, trees, flowers, and especially the amazing beauty of bioluminescence have always offered escapes and powerful moments of reflection throughout my life. For me, nature itself was proof of a higher power long before I formally learned about God.



Did you always intend for this to be a young adult story? If so, why?

I always intended this story to be accessible and to appeal to adults and young adults alike. My goal was to present a fun, engaging romantic adventure I would be proud to share with my coworkers, friends, and family. I believe I have succeeded. *Azalea* features clean language, a character-driven plot, and a balance between dialogue and narrative. Young readers repeatedly say they can picture the world as if it's a movie. That's how I've crafted it. That's what my mind has done with every book I've ever read.

What is the one thing you most want people to know about you or your book?

I love characters with emotional depth who feel real and struggle with many of the same life challenges readers face. I like realism within fantasy: the world faces magic-devouring dragons, and the fate of the world hangs in the balance, but the characters also confront their own demons and rely on one another, banding together to survive. *Azalea* is about heart, personal growth, cooperation, and setting aside differences to find common ground.

When can readers expect the next book in the *Azalea* series?

As it turned out, my story kept growing until it became an epic-length grand adventure. That said, I did not feel right breaking it into more than two parts. The second half of *Azalea's* story is scheduled for release no later than 2027.

For more, visit booklife.com/fletcher

MYSTERY/THRILLER

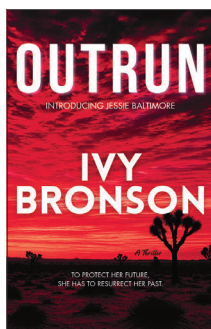
Outrun: Introducing Jessie Baltimore

Ivy Bronson

406p, trade paper, \$14.99, ISBN 979-8-999-34670-4

Bronson's high-stakes thriller blends espionage, domestic drama, and moral ambiguity into a fast-moving narrative that explores how past lives collide with present responsibilities. The novel's central premise—that one moment or decision can irrevocably alter the course of multiple lives—drives a story that interweaves covert operations with the fragile rhythms of family life. The opening prologue immediately establishes tension and tone, as it follows operative Alex on a mission that turns unexpectedly personal when she encounters a trafficked girl, forcing a split-second ethical decision with lasting consequences. From there, the narrative shifts to Jessie Baltimore, a mother navigating everyday pressures—teen drivers, neurodivergent parenting challenges, and lingering trauma—while unknowingly orbiting a dangerous criminal network centered on a missing flash drive.

That juxtaposition between the ordinary and the covert is one of the novel's strongest features, and Bronson excels at character grounding. Jessie's scenes—



Immersive thriller pairing domesticity with criminal dangers.

Great for fans of Laura Dave's *The Last Thing He Told Me*, Scott Smith's *A Simple Plan*.

particularly her interactions with sons Max and Sean—are rendered with specificity and authenticity, capturing both humor and strain in family dynamics. Sean's literal-minded dialogue and neurodivergence add depth and nuance, and the criminal subplot—featuring Papa, Victor, and their associates, as Papa searches for “some semblance of salvation” amid a life of violence and wreckage—introduces a parallel narrative of loyalty, grief, and escalating volatility.

Bronson maintains brisk pacing, though the story can feel uneven when transitioning between dual narrative threads. At times, the different perspectives diffuse tension rather than heightening it, and some character arcs would benefit from deeper development, but *Outrun* ultimately succeeds as an engaging, cinematic thriller with strong emotional undercurrents. Readers drawn to character-driven suspense, particularly those who enjoy stories where domestic life intersects with hidden danger, will find much to appreciate.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

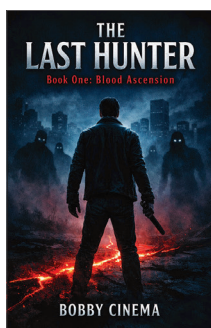
Blood Ascension: The Last Hunter, Book 1

Bobby Cinema

117p, e-book, \$5.99, ASIN B0GWB2CBLM

Cinema's debut novel comes packaged as the kickoff to an epic vampire-stomping horror-action series, but it reads more like the notes for what might one day be that book. *Blood Ascension* moves swiftly and boasts some inventive action and big moments that reveal a flair for action movie scenecraft, but it lacks many basics of characterization, scene-setting, interiority, and presentation that readers of novels expect. The short and simple story is told in brisk fragmentary sentences, usually with a hard stop after each; the text spills across the page like stage-direction poetry: “Alex ducked, drove a punch into his midsection, then followed through—stake. Dust. Silence.” (For good measure, Cinema tosses in a linebreak after the em-dash, too.) The briefest exchange of dialogue can take most of a page, as in this discussion, in which each sentence is its own line: “That confirms it! Marcus frowned. ‘Confirms what?’ Ryan closed the book slowly. ‘This isn’t feeding,’ he said. A beat. ‘It’s preparation.’”

That last bit—with that dramatic declarative inversion that sounds like a big revelation but upon closer examination doesn't actually mean much—will sting the



Thin first stab at a vampire thriller lacking the niceties of a finished novel.

Great for fans of Wayne Ince's *Sweetwater Reckoning*, Michael Shaffrey's *Nicholas*.

ears of readers familiar with the prose of chatbots. Throughout, the text suggests the influence of LLMs, which forever tell readers what things are not before bothering to state what they are. The text is studded with these: “For the first time—they weren't reacting. They were planning.” “The quiet wasn't peace. It was a warning.” Characterization is likewise thin. The hero, best-selling author/construction executive/vampire killer Alex Carter, spends the first chapter (“The Quiet Before the Night”) lamenting the dullness of “normal” life he has chosen—despite all those demanding jobs that would tax anyone's mental resources, he has nothing on his mind and, like the reader, is just waiting around for the action to start. Cinema obliges, soon disrupting “the calm before a storm” and setting a pack of vamps loose on an unsuspecting, mostly trait-free woman. So it goes throughout, with bloody action presented as in a screenplay, but with readers given little reason to invest in the cast. Cinema's passion is clear, but the execution—other than some spirited, cinematic action beats—does not in this form measure up.

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

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

EDITOR'S PICK

Rock Art: an American Story

Ateven Alvarez | Ancient Art Archive

160p, hardcover, \$80, ISBN 979-8-218-91880-4

National Geographic photographer Alvarez and his contributors have built a timeless, necessary catalogue of ancient North American art, carved into stone tens of thousands of years ago, that spans from California to Vermont. The founder of the Ancient Art Archive, Alvarez feels profoundly connected to the stories and messages left by Indigenous peoples, and he counts their impact as “human, immediate, enduring... [and capable of] lead[ing] us all toward a better future.” By pairing his own photography of the pictographs and petroglyphs he's encountered with a wide array of essayists, he grounds the artwork in historical and cultural significance, contextualizing these rock etchings within the rich framework of America's Indigenous lineage.

This curated collection features experts of every type: Deb Haaland, former US Secretary of the Interior, speaks on the importance of rock art for future generations, while Lyle Balenquah, an Indigenous archaeologist out of Arizona, touches on the dual ancestry in Hopi history. Meditating on the significance of a buffalo petroglyph carved a thousand years ago, Debra Magpie Earling, a Bitterroot Salish author in



Stunning, necessary celebration of American Indigenous rock art.

Great for fans of Scott Thybony's *Rock Art of the American Southwest*, Patricia McCreery's *Tapamveni*.

Missoula, writes, “What do we see when we look at ancient rock art? Do we see what we are meant to see? Do we hear the stories we are told?” Alvarez's photography, taken over the course of decades, immortalizes these ancient etchings, casting the burnt umber tones of massive boulders and canyons—each with their own breathtaking carvings—against searing landscapes and blazing skies. In his “Bighorn Sheep Petroglyphs,” from a site in Lincoln County, Nevada, he captures the familiar, carved depictions of bighorn sheep during a sunrise, with the sun's rays stretching to the tip of the rock as the sheep appear to bask in their warmth. This is a collection that understands, treasures, and preserves carvings as a testimony to “who we are, who we have been, and how we might think about our shared future.”

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

BookLife Talks with Meggan Hill

Hill, a classically trained chef, has spent over a decade building her food blog, *The Culinary Hill*, into a reliable source of “recipes that are easy to understand and work every single time.” June sees the release of her first-ever cookbook, the aptly named *The Culinary Hill Cookbook*. We spoke to Hill about the evolution of her brand, what the process of publishing a cookbook independently was like, and what a good cookbook should do.



What’s the origin story for *The Culinary Hill*?

I started *The Culinary Hill* in 2011 after years of collecting recipes, cooking for family and friends, and realizing how much I loved teaching people how to cook in a practical, approachable way. I grew up in Wisconsin in a very food-centered family, and many of those Midwestern comfort food influences still shape my recipes today. What began as a creative outlet slowly grew into a full-scale digital food brand reaching millions of home cooks each year.

Why did you decide now was the time for a cookbook?

For years, readers asked when I would write a cookbook, but I wanted to wait until I had something meaningful to say. After more than a decade of recipe development and building *The Culinary Hill*, I finally felt ready to create a book that reflected both the recipes my audience loves and the deeper personal stories behind them. The cookbook became a way to preserve family traditions, regional food culture, and the recipes that shaped me.

Publishing a cookbook is a uniquely creative endeavor. What was the process like for you?

Intense, rewarding, and far more emotional than I

expected. I self-published the cookbook, which meant I was involved in every detail: recipe selection, testing, photography, design, editing, printing, and distribution. There were moments where it felt overwhelming, but there was also something incredibly satisfying about building a book exactly the way I envisioned it. It became not just a cookbook, but a creative time capsule of my life, family, and career.

What should people look for when choosing a cookbook?

Reliability is everything. A beautiful cookbook means very little if the recipes don’t work consistently in a home kitchen. I think readers should look for authors who clearly test their recipes thoroughly and write instructions with clarity and care. Beyond that, the best cookbooks have personality—they tell a story, create a sense of place, and make you want to cook.

If someone has never heard of the Culinary Hill brand, what’s the one thing you’d most want them to know?

I want people to know that *The Culinary Hill* is built on trust. My goal has always been to create reliable, approachable recipes that make people feel confident in the kitchen. Whether someone is making a holiday meal, a weeknight dinner, or a nostalgic family recipe, I want them to feel like they have a calm, capable friend cooking alongside them.



For more, visit booklife.com/hill

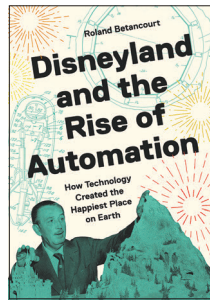
SCIENCE, NATURE, TECHNOLOGY

EDITOR'S PICK

Disneyland and the Rise of Automation: How Technology Created the Happiest Place on EarthRoland Betancourt | Princeton University Press
416p, hardcover, \$35, ISBN 978-0-691-25587-3

Walt Disney theme parks have long been seen as nexuses of magic, desire, and illusion. Betancourt, a professor at University of California, Irvine, who has written several books about the Byzantine Empire, considers the Happiest Place on Earth as “fundamentally a factory.” Betancourt’s perspective is critical but largely appreciative, as he charts the design and development of Disneyland, with a focus on rides like Peter Pan’s Flight and the roller coasters the Matterhorn and Space Mountain, all of which drew inspiration and technology from heavy industry. Betancourt examines explicit links between Disney and major manufacturers, from the Ford Magic Skyway, a Disney World’s Fair project, to the Goodyear Peoplemover.

The book’s heart is in Betancourt’s clear explication of connections between Disney diversion and industrial reality, from the “airborne” galleons on Peter Pan’s



Fascinating study of industrial manufacturing and Disneyland rides.

Great for fans of Sabrina Mittermeier’s *A Cultural History of the Disneyland Theme Parks*; Richard Snow’s *Disney’s Land*.

and audio-animatronics with similar depth and insight.

Combining a straightforward account of how Disney rides function with a more nuanced examination of the forces behind their creation, Betancourt has produced an entertaining, revealing, and at times unsettling work that views the theme park as “a critical site whereby guests stay up to date with automation through narrative form.” Disney fans and skeptics, as well as readers fascinated by the history of automation, will find much to consider here.

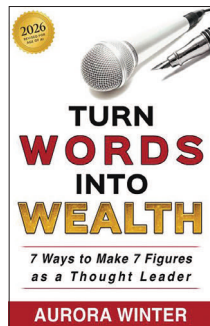
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** | Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

Turn Words Into Wealth: 7 Ways to Make 7 Figures as a Thought LeaderAurora Winter | Same Page, LLC
246p, trade paper, \$19.99, ISBN 978-1-951104-41-2

Media strategist Winter (*Marketing Fast Track*) launches a two-part series with this practical approach to becoming irreplaceable in a rapidly changing market, offering readers simple but insightful strategies to build memorable brands, create wealth, and hone leadership skills. “The market has split in two,” she declares, and just “being good at what you do” is no longer good enough. Accelerated advancements in artificial intelligence will require decisive leaders to set themselves apart as experts in their field, she contends, by harnessing their uniquely human abilities: story, presence, style, and leadership. With clear-cut assessments, step-by-step processes, and easy-to-follow methods, Winter helps readers identify their expertise and evolve from run-of-the-mill professionals to “Thought Leaders.”

Winter sets the tone early on, drawing from her own experiences to outline tried-and-true systems that work. Once you establish your brand—which Winter asserts is your “number one asset”—the guide outlines seven different pathways to



Strategic guide and practical tools for building success through words.

Great for fans of Donald Miller’s *Building a Story Brand 2.0*, Melanie Herschorn’s *Make a Big Impact with Your Book*.

Winter’s message that tools such as ChatGPT cannot “write a better book” is proven, perhaps inadvertently, by interjections of fragmented, repetitive prose—“The car didn’t change. The driver did”; “leaders who understand AI’s role don’t fear it. They harness it”—that suggest the influence of chatbots. Still, there is a wealth of valuable information here that readers will find useful—particularly Winter’s 10-step Thought Leader Launch Blueprint, the Hell-to-Heaven Transformation tool, and several QR code links for additional resources. Perhaps what’s most memorable is Winter’s sage advice that, “in the age of AI,” what creates the most success is “shining a spotlight on your unique qualities that AI cannot replicate.” Score one for humans.

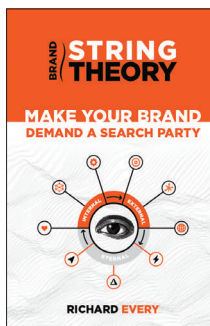
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: – | Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **A**

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

Brand String Theory: Make Your Brand Demand A Search PartyRichard Every | Search Party Books
244p, e-book, \$19.99, ISBN 979-8218759551

Every’s debut draws parallels between physics and marketing, contending that “every part of your brand connects through strings of intent” in the same way the universe is connected by strings of energy. Brands that last are built on structure, he declares, and, rather than start with external factors—logos, websites, slogans—companies who want a winning brand should dedicate their attention to internals first. That foundation, Every asserts, begins with Force—the true mission driving each brand—followed by Frame, a belief system that dictates business decisions and ensures choices fit purpose. From there, he covers the importance of making each impact count, understanding how customers interact with your brand, and more.

One of the book’s strongest messages is the advice for readers to “build something that comes from who you are.” That authenticity, Every asserts, will result in brands that customers trust, want to engage with, and miss when they’re gone. “You know your brand Works when people change their behavior because of it,” he declares—and he identifies customer behavior as the number one metric for



Passionate, structured guide to building lasting brands.

Great for fans of Mike Kim’s *You Are the Brand*, Allan Dib’s *The 1-Page Marketing Plan*.

brand measurement. Throughout, Every draws on his experience as a rugby referee to illustrate why marketing systems function best on clear-cut laws that “eliminate complexity” and demystify decision making. Readers will find many practical tips here, including Every’s one-sentence approach to crafting a powerful tagline as well as his end-of-chapter summary laws and field tests to personalize the content. The differentiation between internal, external, and eternal brand dimensions delivers a solid framework for readers to navigate, though the fragmented sentences and choppy writing style (“It is a structure. Not a style. Not a vibe. Not a trend” and “Each of these laws is an operational value, not a component of an operating system” are examples) sacrifice clarity. Still, the combination of case studies, interactive questions, and practical tips offers a helpful pathway to brand success.

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

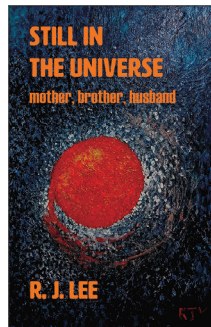
SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL Still in the Universe: mother, brother, husband

R.J. Lee

134p, trade paper, \$24.95, ISBN 978-1-963-69577-9

In this touching offering, Lee reflects on his relationships with three of the most impactful people in his life and the encounters he had after their deaths—encounters that helped him accept they were at peace and still existing, in some form, in the universe. He starts with the story of his mother's passing, where he experiences a visceral grief and unmooring, feeling "emotionally stranded" until an uncanny experience with a bird reminds him of his mother's continued existence beyond death. He frequently explores how memories can replay and pain can seem never-ending, but he ultimately settles on the belief that, after death, we become "a more embedded part of the universe."

The signs and interactions that Lee experiences are vividly described, pulling readers into an intimate grief journey and highlighting how these moments allowed peace, healing, and a deeper understanding of the universe. Readers will be moved



Gentle invitation to embrace metaphysical existence after death.

Great for fans of Pete Cossaboon's *Signs from Beyond*, Caleb Wilde's *All the Ways Our Dead Still Speak*.

ever been led to believe," he declares, "and choices have consequences both for and against our development as they accumulate."

Lee's experiences will resonate with those who are open to the complexities of life, death, and love. Whether discussing reminders after his brother's death of their enduring bond or the metaphysical occurrences that comforted him following his husband's passing, Lee delivers a thoughtful, welcoming invitation to readers to embrace the idea that "the universe is far more complex and surprising than any of us could ever imagine."

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

MIDDLE GRADE

The Bird Caper: The Crow's Tales, Book 1

Pannell & Sigfusson | VPTSWriters

198p, hardcover, \$24.99, ISBN 978-1-964-06401-7

Blending everyday coming-of-age challenges with an entertaining mystery plot, Pannell and Sigfusson launch their lively middle-grade series, The Crow's Tales, by upending the routine of nine-year-old bird lover Brandon Woodberry. When his parents announce that they're moving, Brandon is distraught at having to leave behind his pigeons and homemade coop, and possibly even being separated from Ralph, his beloved pet crow—not to mention abandoning the tight-knit friend group he's known since first grade, especially Josh, who's angry at losing his best friend. In boisterous first-person narration, Brandon processes this milestone event with a frenzied rollercoaster of emotions.

Things begin to look up when Brandon realizes he can still attend the same school, but his new neighborhood is home to a group of bullies known as the Beastie Bad Boys. Brandon has multiple run-ins with the BB Boys leader, Howie, and the situation goes from bad to worse when a clever thief targets the area. Small, precious items are disappearing from houses (even Howie's), and the neighbors begin to



Boisterous pet crow helps boy deal with coming-of-age upheaval.

Great for fans of Max Brallier's *The Last Kids on Earth*, Chris Grabenstein's *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library*.

responds to realistic problems with grandiose exaggeration but also a grounded thoughtfulness, working to resolve conflicts with the bullies, mend a fractured friendship with Josh, and maintain a connection with cherished avian companions—especially the mischievous and demanding Ralph. Pannell and Sigfusson's trilogy takes flight with *The Bird Caper*, a funny and twisty adventure that also explores the character-building bond between a boy and his bird.

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

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Charli's Pawsome Park

by Vicki Scott Burns 978-1964845043

EDITOR'S PICK

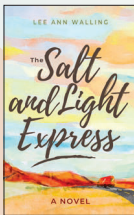
“ Young girl designs a dog park in this inspiring early reader.



Bebe and the Lost Kid Goat

by Angie McCourt 979-8995873914

Step onto the farm and join Bebe, a curious and fearless cat, and her loyal best friend Frankie the dog in this heartwarming 10 book series.



The Salt and Light Express

by Lee Ann Walling 979-8992812206

EDITOR'S PICK

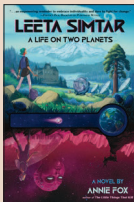
“ Touching love story exploring religion, friendship, and small-town prejudice.



The Mary: A Story of Light, Land, and the Women of East Africa

by Darci Dillin 979-8995298700

A beautifully illustrated story celebrating resilience, community, and the strength of women in East Africa.



Leeta Simtar: A Life on Two Planets

by Annie Fox 978-1943649129

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by Vicki Scott Burns 978-1964845012

“ Inspiring aquarium adventure that teaches ocean conservation.



Charli's Dorsal Device

by Vicki Scott Burns 978-1964845074

“ Empowering story of friendship, problem solving, and teamwork.

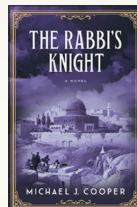


A Friend of Dorothy's

by Richard Willet 979-8992339819

EDITOR'S PICK

“ Powerful novel of queer self-discovery amid the AIDS crisis in 1980s New York.



The Rabbi's Knight

by Michael J. Cooper 979-8888248133

Fans of epic historical literature will love Cooper's interconnected storylines and nods to real historical figures.



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by Dave Tabler 979-8992166743

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by R.K. Harrington 979-8998605543

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by Margie Benedict 978-1954584525

“ Layered novel of grief, moving on, and second chances.



Anchors to Ashes

by David Caraccio 979-8218875268

EDITOR'S PICK

“ Grave, meticulously constructed family epic arguing inheritance as burden and blessing.

ALA Special

