June 22, 2026

booklife®

YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING

33 New BookLife Titles Listed • 12 New BookLife Titles Reviewed

Indie Spotlight

In this edition of our monthly thematic roundup of BookLife titles, we feature mysteries and thrillers.

Want to see your book featured? Check out the Indie Spotlight calendar at booklife.com/indiespotlight.

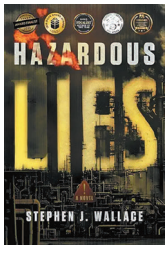
POLITICAL AND CORPORATE THRILLERS

Devil's News



Isabel Wells
ASIN B0DX7HKLKS
Author statement: "I was inspired to write *Devil's News* by my interest in narcissism, high-pressure work environments, and the hidden dynamics that exist behind the scenes. My writing process often begins with a personal experience, and for this story, it was a toxic job I left, which I reimagined into something more sinister."

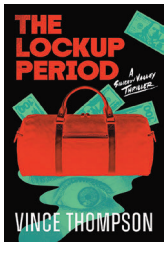
Hazardous Lies



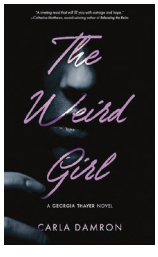
Stephen J. Wallace
ISBN 978-1-63299-793-7
Author statement: "As an engineer, I investigated many accidents in chemical plants. In *Hazardous Lies*, a new government investigator, Jon Barrett, uncovers a corporate cover-up involving powerful political allies, while dealing with his own past trauma."

The Lockup Period

Vince Thompson
ASIN B0GX314884
Author statement: "I've been a waiter on L.A.'s Sunset Strip, an executive at major media companies, a CEO, and a public-company board member. Along the way, I've done business with venture investors, celebrities, and–unknowingly at the time–a few crime figures. I like to write about startups, greed, and the underbelly of the business world. I find the characters who dwell in these areas quite entertaining. I don't like particularly dark content, and I try to leave my readers better off than when they joined me."



The Weird Girl



Carla Damron
ISBN 978-1-965733-79-0
Author statement: "Social worker Georgia Thayer battles to keep her foster kid safe from the deadly fentanyl epidemic. When a teen is badly injured and another disappears, Georgia takes on crooked southern politics, powerful families, and her own self-doubt to bring down a drug kingpin. As a social worker, advocacy is a core element of my profession. In *The Weird Girl*, I use suspense to expose the prevalence and dangers of fentanyl."

PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLERS

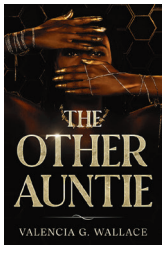
Anyone but Her

Cynthia Swanson
ASIN B0D94HSH3M



Author statement: "My publishing path is unusual. My first two psychological suspense/thriller titles were traditionally published by Big Five publishers. I'm also the editor of a small press anthology, *Denver Noir*, published by Akashic Books in 2022. Despite the success of all three titles, I chose to go indie for *Anyone but Her*."

The Other Auntie



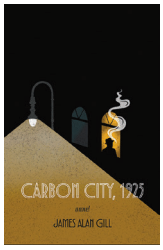
Valencia G. Wallace
ASIN B0GRN7PYDM
Author statement: "*The Other Auntie* is a psychological thriller about a mother entering rehab for a second chance. Instead, detox uncovers memories buried beneath a lie carefully constructed by her sister, Naomi. I started writing at a young age to create a safe space for me to express my pain. My mother wrote poems, became lost to addiction, and died before she could get a second chance. At its heart, *The Other Auntie* asks a question that first emerged while thinking on my own family history: Who benefits when one person is labeled bad and another is labeled good?"

Revenge Waits



Pamela Dunnam
ASIN B0GTYZ92YV
Author statement: "The heart of this story examines family loyalty and the ripple effects of revenge on everyone caught in its wake. I have always been fascinated by the quiet tensions beneath the surface of ordinary people and communities, where reputation and appearances can matter more than truth."

SMALL TOWN AND PLACE-DRIVEN MYSTERIES



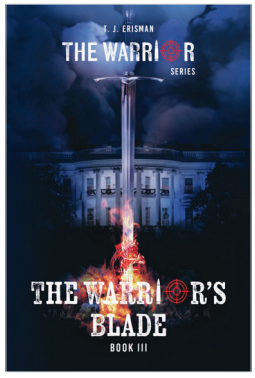
Carbon City, 1925
James Alan Gill
ASIN B0G64W5DQ5
Author statement: "I grew up in the setting of *Carbon City, 1925*, hearing stories about the Klan wars and the mine massacres and the gangsters who operated with impunity. I wanted to write about this history, but I also didn't want to retell the story that had already been told. I spent over 10 years researching the time period, but it wasn't until I created my fictional characters that *Carbon City, 1925* took shape."

Q&A SPONSORED

BookLife Talks with T.J. Erisman

This year, Armed Forces vet Erisman ended her military thriller trilogy with *The Warrior's Blade*, an action-packed tale that follows two battles: one in our world that Marine Peter Mercer fights, and another in the spiritual realm between demons and the Divine Task Force. We spoke with her about finishing the series and what she hopes any veterans take away from it.

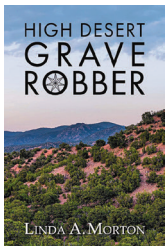




The thriller genre is large and wide-ranging. What makes your books stand out to readers?
My books do more than deliver high-stakes military action. They explore the brutal emotional and psychological cost of combat–the trauma, grief, and hidden battles that tier 1 operators face long after the fight is over.

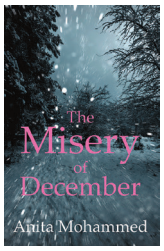
What truly sets the Warrior series apart is that it tells two stories at once: the visible war fought with bullets and blades, and the unseen war being waged for the warrior's soul. While elite operators engage the enemy in the physical world, a fierce battle rages in the spiritual realm between demonic forces and the Celestial Task Force. These aren't internal struggles or metaphors. This is real influence from the unseen realm–the moments when the hair stands up on the back of your neck, when something evil feels close, or when a miracle happens that defies explanation. My hope is that these stories reach combat veterans who are silently battling unimaginable trauma and suicidal thoughts. If this series can give even one warrior a sense of hope and remind them that they're not alone in the fight–maybe even help save a life–then it's done its job.
For more, visit **booklife.com/erisman**

High Desert Grave Robber



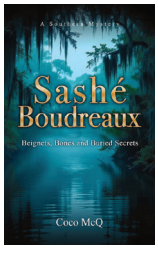
Linda A. Morton
ASIN B0FQTMTGFK
Author statement: "Having lived and worked in New Mexico for many years, I am familiar with the art and culture of the area. This story takes place in Santa Fe and is about a teacher who takes a summer job at a prestigious art gallery and finds herself in the middle of an FBI investigation. Native American art and local culture are woven into the mystery."

The Misery of December



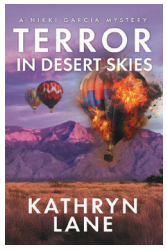
Anita Mohammed
ISBN 978-1-66297-286-7
Author statement: "An unknown gang disrupts the peaceful pact established decades ago between three crime syndicates and the police in Burlington, Vermont. A group of detectives are tasked with identifying and bringing down this new terror in town. I was born in Trinidad and moved to Montreal, Canada, when I was 11 months old. *The Misery of December* is my debut novel."

Sashé Boudreaux: Beignets, Bones, and Buried Secrets



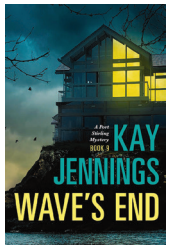
Coco McQ
ASIN B0G3826162
Author statement: "I wanted to write a Southern cozy-ish mystery that blended humor, history, and community with deeper themes of injustice and redemption. I hope that readers will come for the mystery, but stay for the people, the atmosphere, and the feeling of sitting on a Louisiana porch listening to a friend tell a story worth hearing."

Terror in Desert Skies: A Nikki Garcia Mystery



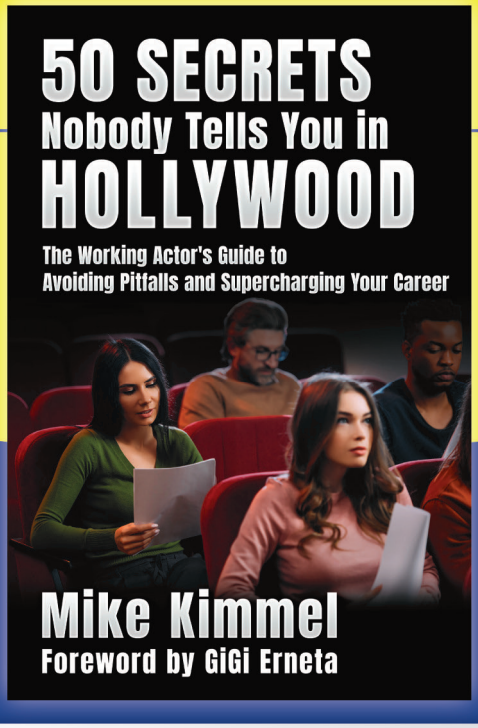
Kathryn Lane
ASIN B0FN43VPYQ
Author statement: "Private investigator Nikki Garcia's vacation becomes a nightmare when a hot air balloon crashes, leaving her sister-in-law dead and her brother fighting for his life. When Nikki uncovers evidence that the crash may not have been an accident, she races to catch a ruthless perpetrator. My love of adventure, art, culture, and the graceful beauty of balloons in flight inspired me to create *Terror in Desert Skies*."

Wave's End

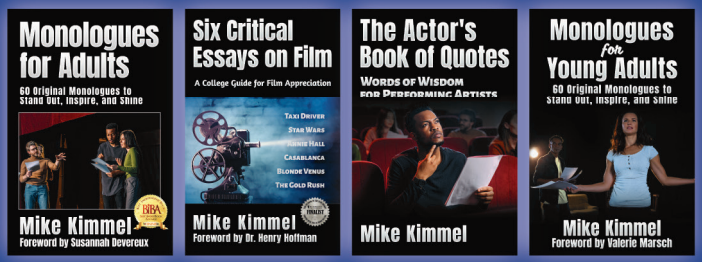


Kay Jennings
ASIN B0FRGF8D46
Author statement: "I grew up on the Oregon coast in a small town not unlike my Port Stirling fiction setting and began writing my mystery series with *Shallow Waters* seven years ago. Several of my books were inspired by real life stories, and *Wave's End* reflects current conflicts regarding land use issues throughout Oregon, and, especially, on the coast."

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



ISBN 978-1-953057-18-1 (paperback)
ISBN 978-1-953057-17-4 (hardback)
ISBN 978-1-953057-16-7 (ebook)



"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

Available from Ingram!

PW SELECT New Titles from Self-Publishers

Booksellers, publishers, librarians, and agents are encouraged to look at the 33 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

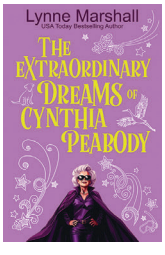
Conference Room Wars: A Workplace Novel on Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, and Building High-Performance Teams



Michael Cook, illus. by jcalebdesigns. MW Cook. $25.99 (300p), ISBN 978-1-970551-04-4; $5.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-970551-02-0
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark, Kobo

Workplace novel that tackles toxic culture and ineffective management through emotional intelligence and leadership development.

The Extraordinary Dreams of Cynthia Peabody



Lynne Marshall. Lynne Marshall. $11.99 paper (278p), ISBN 979-8-2492-1773-0; $3.99 e-book, ASIN B0GJ32NX2B
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Kobo

A reluctant hero, mysterious portals, inexplicable abilities! She must be off her trolley. Is becoming the unofficial guardian angel of her hometown worth risking her life?

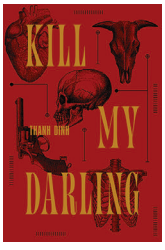
House of Dust

K.R. Elliott. Forensic Mythopolitik Press. $19.99 paper (430p), ISBN 978-1-972847-01-5; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-972847-01-5
Amazon



After the seventh farmer dies in his field, journalist Grace Washington returns to rural Pennsylvania to investigate a company forcing families off farms.

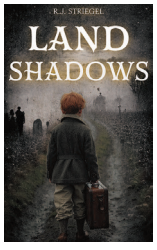
Kill My Darling



Thanh Dinh, illus. by Tiago Araujo. Writerly Books. $23.99 paper (286p), ISBN 978-1-0694998-9-9; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0694998-9-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Indigo

After killing her lover, Angela unravels through memory and obsession, where love erases selfhood. A dark, lyrical descent asking if devotion is salvation or annihilation in the end.

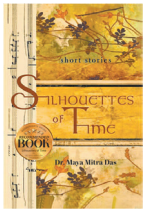
Land Shadows



R.J. Striegel. Open Instructional Narratives. $24.99 paper (356p), ISBN 978-0-9904141-6-2; $3.99 e-book, ISBN 978-0-9904141-8-6
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

Orphaned by the Scottish Clearances, Murdoch McNeil claws his way from a New York orphanage to a New Mexico ranch—only to face the same dispossession that destroyed his family.

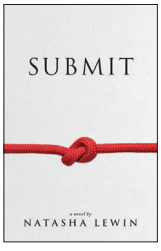
Silhouettes of Time



Maya Mitra Das. Bookwrights House. $14.99 paper (162p), ISBN 978-1-965552-33-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

Silhouettes of Time by Maya Mitra Das blends lyrical, multicultural stories of love, identity, and resilience across time, memory, and tradition.

Submit: A Novel



Natasha Lewin. Stage of Grace Press. $25.99 (202p), ISBN 979-8-9953003-1-1; $11.99 paper (202p), ISBN 979-8-9953003-0-4
Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, Bookshop.org, Walmart

A late coming-of-age literary novel about a Black woman's reckoning with menopause, marriage, and purity culture—and what it means to surrender to faith.

Top Dog



Kris Hoover. Dorrance Publishing. $19.99 paper (268p), ISBN 979-8-89499-370-6; $14.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89499-868-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance Bookstore

Top Dog is a wild adventure through the dog-showing life of the '70s, a unique tale of finding yourself and finding love in the most unexpected of places.

PERSISTENCE

ISBN : 979-8892285612



Persistence: *Living an Authentic Life with a Disability* by **Linda Dezenski** is a heartfelt and deeply reflective memoir that offers readers an honest examination of identity, perseverance, and the pursuit of self-acceptance in a world that often misunderstands difference. Born with Cerebral Palsy, Linda Dezenski invites readers into her personal journey with remarkable openness, sharing the emotional, physical, and social realities of navigating life with a disability. Yet what makes this memoir stand apart is that it never confines itself to a narrative solely about limitation or hardship. Instead, Dezenski creates a richly human story filled with humor, vulnerability, determination, and insight. She refuses to allow disability to become the defining feature of her life story and instead presents it as one element within a much broader journey of discovering purpose, confidence, and authenticity. Through candid storytelling and moments of both pain and triumph, she reveals the complexities of living in a society that is not always built for inclusion while also celebrating the strength that comes from embracing oneself fully. Her voice feels sincere and relatable, drawing readers into experiences that are deeply personal yet universally understood.

At a time when conversations surrounding representation, accessibility, and authentic voices continue to shape literature and media, Persistence arrives as both a timely and necessary work. Readers today increasingly seek stories grounded in truth, stories that move beyond stereotypes and offer meaningful insight into lives and experiences often underrepresented in mainstream narratives. Dezenski succeeds in doing precisely that by providing a perspective that educates without preaching and inspires without relying on sentimentality.

The memoir's themes of resilience, belonging, overcoming societal expectations, and redefining self-worth extend far beyond disability and speak to anyone who has struggled to find acceptance or identity in a world eager to place labels on people. The emotional depth and visual storytelling potential throughout the memoir also suggest strong cinematic possibilities. Linda's journey contains all the elements of a compelling film adaptation: a courageous protagonist, moments of heartbreak and humor, emotional transformation, and a powerful message capable of resonating with audiences across generations. Persistence ultimately stands as more than a memoir; it is a moving reminder that authenticity itself can nbe an act of courage. For readers seeking a thought-provoking, emotionally engaging, and socially relevant story, Linda Dezenski delivers a work that is not only memorable but necessary, offering a message that remains with readers long after the final page has been turned



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Mystery/Thriller

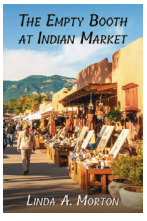
Brain Worm



Joel Canfield, illus. by A.J. Canfield. Joined at the Hip Worldwide. $15.99 paper (230p), ISBN 978-0-9975707-7-9; $5.99 e-book, ASIN B0GHPQ9D9X
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Google Books, Kobo

Max Bowman travels a trail of weirdness that shockingly takes him directly to the White House, where the president has big, beautiful plans for Max.

The Empty Booth at Indian Market



Linda A. Morton. Linda A. Morton. $13.95 paper (132p), ISBN 979-8-218-61454-6; $5.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-218-71823-7
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

It's busy Indian Market weekend in Santa Fe, New Mexico. A display booth sits empty. Local police discover a major crime near the market scene.

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

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.

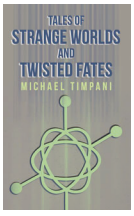
The Final Steep



A.K. Hayat. Steep House Press. $17.99 paper (406p), ISBN 978-9948-626-94-7; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 978-9948-634-89-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Blackwell's, Kinokuniya

A tea necromancer anchors a ghost prince for seven days before he becomes a monster, then hunts the royal conspiracy behind his death.

Tales of Strange Worlds and Twisted Fates



Michael Timpani. Dorrance Publishing. $13.99 paper (104p), ISBN 979-8-89978-136-0; $8.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89978-635-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance Bookstore

A collection of 50 original, thought-provoking short tales ranging from sci-fi to fantasy to horror.

The Von Chronicles: Forbidden



M.C. Jones. Dorrance Publishing. $20.99 paper (288p), ISBN 979-8-89649-065-4; $15.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89649-564-2
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance Bookstore

Against the backdrop of a secluded island, the fates of two young souls collide as their families, exiled from their homelands, clash over control of the island's resources.

Nonfiction

Ben Franklin 2026: His Views of America and the World



Robert Merz. Values of America Publishing. $9.99 paper (224p), ISBN 979-8-2475-0741-3; $4.99 e-book, ASIN B0GN4RHLJQ
Amazon

Explores how Franklin's 13 virtues, his understanding of the "burden of freedom," and his diplomatic wisdom provide actionable frameworks for revitalizing American democracy.

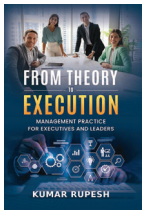
The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Housewife: A Memoir of Awakening, Healing Trauma, and Choosing to Live a Sacred Life



Heather Debreceni. Heather Debreceni Enterprises. $15.55 paper (178p), ISBN 979-8-9953313-0-8; $6.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9953313-1-5
Amazon, IngramSpark

A raw spiritual memoir of trauma, healing, awakening, and discovering the sacred hidden within ordinary life.

From Theory to Execution: Management Practice for Executives and Leaders



Kumar Rupesh. Kumar Rupesh. $21.99 paper (266p), ISBN 979-8-1951-5068-6; $9.99 e-book, ASIN B0GZDYX11R
Amazon

An integrated management framework connecting strategy, operations, forecasting, finance, and execution for executives and practicing leaders.

Health Basics for a Mismatched World: 10 Principles to Take Control of Your Health



David Bunn. Palmetto. $17.99 paper (310p), ISBN 979-8-3188-1348-1; $6.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-3188-1349-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

Reclaim your health with a science-based roadmap rooted in evolution and ecology. Bunn shows how to restore balance through food, movement, sleep, and environment.

The Hollywood Chronicles of a Female Tech Founder



N.D. Zerman. Deepstory Publishing. $21.99 (188p), ISBN 978-90-836672-0-1; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 978-90-836672-3-2
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

N.D. Zerman's business memoir chronicles a female founder building ScriptBook AI over seven years, exposing how Hollywood and venture capital reward loyalty over truth.

Life on the Ohio Frontier: A Collection of Letters from Mary Lott to Deacon John Phillips, 1826-1846

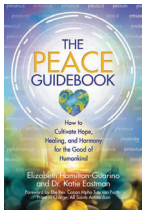


Jacqueline Miller Bachar, illus. by Paul Bachar Jr.. International Forum. $24.99 (150p), ISBN 978-1-886934-00-9; $14.99 paper, ISBN 978-1-886934-01-6
Amazon

These letters tell the story of Mary Phillips Lott and describe the sadness and tribulations of life on the Ohio frontier.

The Peace Guidebook: How to Cultivate Hope, Healing, and Harmony for the Good of Humankind

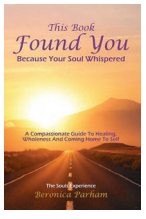
Elizabeth Hamilton-Guarino. Health Communications. $17.95 paper (304p), ISBN 978-0-



7573-2608-0; $12.99 e-book, ASIN B0FCG78FL9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, Bookshop.org, Target, Walmart

In a divided and noisy world, *The Peace Guidebook* invites readers to return to what matters most: compassion, connection, peace, and humanity.

This Book Found You Because Your Soul Whispered



Beronica Parham. Cheryl Taylor. $16.99 paper (196p), ISBN 979-8-9865872-4-0; $6.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9865872-3-3
Amazon

This reflective work explores the idea that personal transformation begins from within, examining how inner awareness, self-discovery, and spiritual insight can guide individuals toward growth. Through a series of contemplative passages, it considers the role of intuition, emotional healing, and purpose in shaping one's life direction.

Too Early, Too Late, Now What?



David Hawk. Brilliant Books Literary. $14.99 paper (326p), ISBN 978-1-64133-827-1; $2.99 e-book, ASIN B0B1PBKH55
Amazon

David L. Hawk revisits decades of research on environmental decline, regulation, and human choices, asking what can still be done before it is too late.

Religion/Spirituality

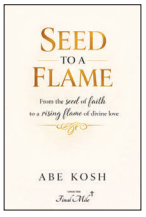
Clear Vision: Seeing What Matters Before It Cost You Everything



Freddie Floyd Jr. Floyd Legacy Publishing. $16.99 paper (104p), ISBN 979-8-218-93661-7; $3.99 e-book, ASIN B0GQGK4MN4
Amazon

Short, powerful chapters combining biblical wisdom, mindset growth, and practical life lessons to help readers regain clarity and direction.

Seed to a Flame: From the Seed of Faith to a Rising Flame of Divine Love



Abe Kosh. Upon the Final Mile. $11.99 paper (142p), ISBN 979-8-9959648-1-0; $2.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9959648-0-3
Amazon

This uplifting collection of poems, short stories, and relevant scripture verses invites readers on a heartfelt journey of hope, faith, and love.

Children's/YA

DayZee Discovers Her Purple Superpower



Ellen Rony. Alexander Works. $18.95 (32p), ISBN 979-8-218-76349-7
Dayzeethezebra.com, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

DayZee is a newborn zebra unlike any other. She faces social isolation, a rough introduction to Malawi's animal kingdom, and the lonely longing to fit into her herd.

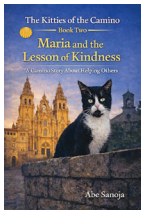
Fates Design



Abbigail Holton. Xlibris. $19.99 paper (160p), ISBN 978-1-5245-0733-6
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

Ten years after abandoning him, Michael's father returns with a dark secret. Alongside his friends Luna and Jeremy, Michael faces a battle between good and evil.

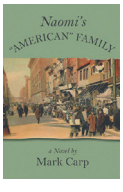
The Kitties of the Camino: Maria and the Lesson of Kindness



Abe Sanoja. The Kitties of the Camino Publishing. $16.99 paper (32p), 13 ISBN 979-8252085517
Amazon

Bilingual English-Spanish stories inspired by the Camino. The Kitties share values like kindness and curiosity. Proceeds support children, kitty shelters, and the environment.

Naomi's "America" Family



Mark Carp. Xlibris. $23.99 paper (486p), ISBN 978-1-5035-8751-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

Joseph Moshev, 17, arrives in 1903 America chasing dreams but faces hardship. Alongside cousin Naomi, 16, he pursues ambition. Can they succeed in a changing nation?

Never Forgotten



Suria Scapin, illus. by Lumina Pirilampus. Catavento Press. $19.95 (42p), ISBN 979-8-9865057-0-1; $14.90 paper, ISBN 979-8-8691-3858-3
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, IngramSpark

A young girl recalls her grandmother through images and stories, keeping her alive in memory. A poetic celebration of love, legacy, and the bonds that transcend loss.

Operation Midnight Rose



AimeeAnn Blythe. AimeeAnn Blythe. $9.99 paper (174p), ISBN 979-8-2553-5559-4; $9.99 e-book, ASIN B0H31W9GWB
Amazon

In Nazi-occupied Berlin 1945, siblings Liesel and Max uncover their parents' secret. The children must navigate codes hidden in an old leatherbound book.

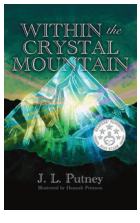
Reunion of Strangers



Steve Hobbs. Hatchet Mountain Press. $17.99 paper (214p), ISBN 978-0-9993177-4-7; $0.99 e-book, ISBN 978-0-9993177-5-4
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million

Henry Rawlings, a deadly gunfighter rescued by a family on a dimension-jumping ship, must protect them as teen Andy Banks in 1986 unlocks future memories that could save them all.

Within the Crystal Mountain



James Putney, illus. by Hannah Prismon. J.L. Putney. $12.97 paper (304p), ISBN 979-8-227-23929-7; $0.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-201-51571-3
Amazon

A simple farmer, one of the small folk from the land of Gen, is tasked with the deliverance of his village, which has been imprisoned by a mysterious enchantment.

booklife REVIEWS

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

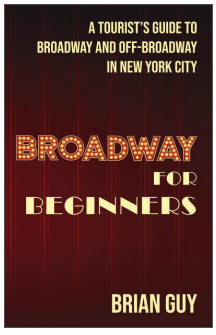
PERFORMING ARTS

EDITOR'S PICK

Broadway for Beginners: A Tourist's Guide to Broadway and Off-Broadway in New York City

Brian Guy | Preview Night Press

82p, trade paper, $16.99, ISBN 979-8-994-22730-5



Charming, comprehensive advice for the Broadway-bound audience.

Great for fans of Teale Dvornik's *History Hiding Around Broadway,* David Armstrong's *Broadway Nation*.

The title of this lively, informative guide is a bit of a misnomer, as the chances are excellent that even a seasoned theater hound will learn much from Guy's guide, a welcome and helpful introduction. Guy, co-producer of the award-winning hip hop musical Mexodus, invites readers behind the curtain of New York's most storied theaters. The emphasis is on the practical, with an eye toward the out-of-towner on a budget, as Guy lays out practical instructions for getting the most out of Broadway while prioritizing limited time and finances and purchasing tickets at discounted rates. Insider tips abound, like how to get last-minute house seats or secure a refund when a star has been replaced for the performance. Guy includes a seating guide for short people, how to research accessibility in older theaters and tackle a fear of heights, and the amount of leg room in different sections of the house.

Passages on etiquette inform and sometimes alarm, like a harrowing story of a patron who smuggled in an entire pizza. One of Guy's particular strengths is knowing the effects of sounds and smells on the cast and how to avoid distracting the performers in a live setting. Guy proves infectious when reveling in the humanity of performers and the anything-can-happen ethos of live theater, both celebrating and warning about Broadway's intimacy, like the dangers of the front row: "It is a literal splash zone, but we true Broadway fans agree you want to sit where you can get spit on."

Beyond that, *Broadway for Beginners* brims with helpful and fascinating tidbits. Guy's style is effusive and charming, and the reader will experience it like being on the end of a highly animated conversation with a fun in-the-know friend. This is a learned and engaging little book that will offer much to theatergoers.

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

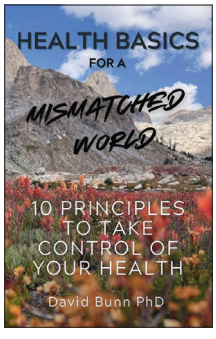
HEALTH & DIET

EDITOR'S PICK

Health Basics for a Mismatched World: 10 Principles to Take Control of Your Health

David Bunn | Palmetto

308p, trade paper, $17.99, ISBN 979-8-318-81348-1



Rousing ecological approach to full-body health and wellness.

Great for fans of Erin Clifford's *Wellness Reimagined*, Casey Means's *Good Energy.*

"Something fundamental is broken—not just in our food and health systems, but in the way we think about health itself," Bunn writes in this all-encompassing guide to healthy living. Drawing from years of experience in Ecology, he characterizes the human body as a highly tuned ecosystem that requires careful balancing of nutrition, movement, connection to others, physical strength, and more. Through 10 holistic health principles that range from minimizing dietary sugar to active social engagement, Bunn steers readers away from an overdependence on what he terms the "sickcare" system—one "primarily focused on managing symptoms, rather than keeping you healthy"—and into personal ownership of health outcomes.

Bunn's stats on the power of big food, big pharma, and the industries that shape public policy drive home how organizations work together to make change painstaking and arduous. He characterizes supermarkets as "highly engineered environment[s] designed to sell products—not nourishment." Bunn's argument against the ultra-processed Western diet and its negative impacts is persuasive, and his answers—routine exercise, resistance training, functional medicine, meditation, and more—are equally convincing, delivered in bite-sized, encouraging prose that elicits hands-on application.

"Real health starts when you decide to take charge," Bunn declares. He urges readers toward incremental change without sounding judgmental. Bunn has firsthand experience with these principles, which helped reverse his own chronic health issues. That boots-on-the-ground awareness, combined with extensive research and unique tools (apps to help analyze food hazards, steps to choose a functional practitioner) makes this a comprehensive, systematic approach to cultivating "a lifelong relationship with your own body and environment."

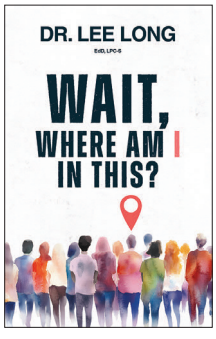
Cover: **B-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

SELF-HELP

Wait, Where AM I in This?

Lee Long | Novus Press Works

252p, e-book, $9.99, ISBN 978-1-963-36612-9



Heartening, original guide for self-discovery and facing one's patterns.

Great for fans of Mel Robbins's *Take Control of Your Life*; Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga's *The Courage to Be Disliked.*

Long debuts with a straightforward but profound premise: that putting the energy into the discovery of your inner world and finding the most authentic version of yourself is the foundation for understanding others and the key to connection in relationships. With an emphasis on recognizing our own patterns and their sources, on listening to our embodied responses to situations, and on discovering our true preferences, values, and priorities, Long centers individuals' unique circumstances and offers empathetic guidance on how to move from looking externally for solutions to acknowledging one's own fears and giving oneself grace.

Long's approach to the material is organized, flexible, and easy to follow. He makes an effective case for doing the inner work with "patience and persistence" and provides a balance between explanatory frameworks and encouraging stories of patient growth from his three decades as a therapist, structured as relatable dialogues. Long proves personable and caring while also maintaining a voice of authoritative mentorship rooted in hard-won experience. Especially heartening is his presentation of "progress" as an "ongoing commitment" to "growing" capicity to navigate dynamics and patterns, and of failures and setbacks as part of life as "a complex, evolving being engaged in an ongoing dialogue with yourself, others, and the world around you."

As this is not formally structured as a workbook,readers are encouraged to understand the underlying ideas rather than just complete exercises. Those ideas illuminate and edify, including Long's clear-eyed guidance for understanding our roles in persistently difficult interpersonal relationships and his reminders to check in with ourselves about how we really feel and not just whether we're fulfilling what is expected of us. Long is a compassionate, astute reader of people with much fresh, empathetic wisdom and practical advice.

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

FICTION

Unforgivable: Through a Child's Eyes

I. Caroline Crocker | Rambling Ruminations
428p, e-book, $4.99, ASIN B0CW1734LD



Poignant child's-eye view of trauma and recovery during WW2.

Great for fans of Corrie Ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*, J.G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*.

Crocker reconstructs the harrowing life story of her father, Frits Evenbly, beginning with a deceptive idyll in the Belgian Congo of the 1930s, where Congolese "houseboys" indulge him with affection. When Frits's father falls ill, the family is forced to return to the Netherlands for better medical care, only to learn his father suffers from an incurable disease. Facing financial ruin, five-year-old Frits and his younger brother Jan are sent to a children's home–*het kindertehuis*– in Nazi-occupied Holland, an easy decision made by their distant mother who never wanted children, let alone sons. There, the boys endure a triple-war: the terror of Nazi occupation, the abuse and neglect of the sisters tasked with their care, and the quieter but no less devastating agony of maternal rejection.

Crocker's greatest triumph lies in the way she filters catastrophe through the bewildered consciousness of a child: Frits witnesses a man beaten and executed, sees corpses discarded like refuse, fears being killed by a German soldier over a loaf of bread, and shoulders the responsibility of protecting his younger brother from a world gone feral. Particularly haunting is the sheer accumulation of suffering–Frits's father's death, the starvation winter of 1944, Jewish friends and family deported, and the grim image of children huddled in dank potato cellars while Europe collapses around them.

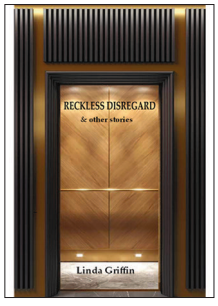
The narrative skillfully balances the imaginative speculation required to fill historical gaps with research from family letters, diaries, and memoirs. Frits's narration is painfully earnest, occasionally sharpened by a dry wit that keeps the novel from drowning entirely in despair. What sets it apart is how forgiveness is seen not as an erasure of the past but as an act that sets a survivor free from childhood wounds. By the final pages, what lingers is the astonishing persistence of tenderness amid the magnitude of cruelty a child endured.

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

FICTION

Reckless Disregard and Other Stories

Linda Griffin | Main Street Rag
241p, trade paper, $18.95, ISBN 978-1-964277-83-7



Ruminative collection tests need for human connection against self-reliance.

Great for fans of George Saunders's *Tenth of December*, Jamel Brinkley's *Witness*.

Griffin's pensive debut collection of 15 short stories ranges from a mini novella to briefer selections, touching on themes so whimsical they often border on the cryptic. In "Arlen Spencer," a strange "drea[m] within a dream" leads to vague reflections on life's opacity, while the first and titular story in the collection unfolds like a murder mystery of sorts, as Kristen helps Detective Cabral solve the hit-and-run that killed her boyfriend, Bobby. But that trajectory takes a turn midway, where, instead of resolving the central mystery, Griffin introduces another that completely changes the story's direction. The collection frequently takes such detours, picking up forsaken characters while spotlighting the mundane, the unanticipated, and the complexities of this thing called life.

Griffin sometimes plays with form and structure to underscore her themes, as in the widowed Emma's house remodel in "Home Improvement," where pages of logistical drudgery–room dimensions, tile samples, demolition schedules–parallel the difficulties of growing older while trying to reshape self-sufficiency. Emma, fearful that an elusive contractor viewed her as nothing more than "some crazy granny," harshly reassures herself that "Nothing at all was wrong with her or her life. She didn't want to change her life, only the color of her bathroom tile" while wondering "why must everything be so difficult?" Similarly, "When Carol Left Me" finds the narrator mired in a separation that rejuvenates his passion for his wife, while she casually informs him that "I want to be left alone." Griffin leaves their ending unknown, framed by familiarity, disappointment, and, against all odds, hope.

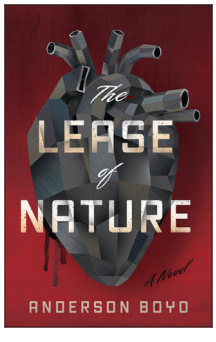
Most of Griffin's stories leave their outcomes open to reader interpretation, exploring a wide range of themes that all hover around a universal truth: with human connection comes pain, loss, beauty, and an enduring struggle between the lure of autonomy and the power of belonging to something larger than yourself.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

The Lease of Nature

Anderson Boyd | Greenleaf Book Group
368p, e-book, $27.95, ASIN B0G27M1414



Compelling novel pairs experimental medicine with organized crime.

Great for fans of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, John Hands's *The Serpent's Embrace*.

In Boyd's debut, he crafts an ambitious tale centered on the human body–its preservation, manipulation, and commodification–bringing together two seemingly disparate lives. Daiyu, a young woman born to working-class parents in Mao-era China and now an inductee in a high-level crime syndicate, and Maya, a cardiac surgeon at the forefront of experimental vascular engineering, inhabit worlds as far apart as possible. Yet both are shaped by early, formative personal loss and governed by external institutional forces. As their worlds begin to intersect, the novel traces how they navigate systems that seek to control human life–either to extend it or to exploit it.

At its core, the novel probes a timely if troubling question: how far can the human body be altered before something essential is lost–and who gets to decide the tipping point? By placing scientific innovation alongside organized, deliberate violence, Boyd draws out unsettling parallels between domains often seen as opposed: perhaps scientific innovation is necessary, or perhaps it sits too close to power structures that treat the body as something to be managed, improved, or even taken. Maya's efforts to perfect 3D printed hearts on the cutting-edge Panopolis machine are driven by personal emotions as much as they are professional ambition, just as Daiyu's decision to cross her dangerous boss, The Golden Mirror, springs from her deep-seated belief that "Kind hearts deserve protection. When that fails, they deserve more."

Boyd is not interested in easy answers. What he does instead is interweave profound questions with the lived experiences of his characters, allowing them to be worked out through human choices made under pressure. Though the wide cast and ever-shifting perspectives can sometimes distract from the novel's central focus, readers will appreciate the unexpected way Boyd ties Daiyu and Maya's arcs together–especially their joint connection to Jian. This thought-provoking offering will interest readers drawn to morally complex speculative fiction.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Killer

Gary Marcus | Verity Press, LLC
326p, mass market, $17.99, ISBN 979-8-9945018-0-1



Ambitious thriller of stolen identity and family dysfunction.

Great for fans of Sarah Bonner's *Her Perfect Twin*, Scott Reardon's *The Prometheus Man*.

In Marcus's action-packed thriller debut, Richard Zumwalt is driven by a lifelong jealousy of his twin brother, Henry. At 18, he devises a plan to kill his parents and frame Henry—a plan that shockingly works, landing Henry in psychiatric prison with a 25-year sentence. Desperate to get his life back, Henry—with the help of his first love and now sister-in-law Susan—pulls off an unbelievable escape, assuming the identity of Jake Johnson and building a new existence for himself. But when Susan reaches out to him with a distraught message about Richard making a powerful play for the presidency, Henry's faced with a difficult choice: enjoy the immense success of his ground-breaking, multi-million-dollar medical company as Jake Johnson, or reclaim his birthright to seek vengeance against his deadly twin brother.

Marcus crafts an ambitious plot swimming with intrigue: political agendas, identity swaps, forbidden romance, and intimate betrayals abound, with twisty reveals hidden around nearly every corner. Richard is a no-holds-barred, detestable villain, killing without compunction and thirsty for power, while Henry quickly learns that justice comes with a steep cost. Underlying their fraught relationship is an exploration of alcoholism and its perils, as the Zumwalt family has amassed their fortune in the beer industry. "Alcohol is a drug, and my family thrives off selling it," Henry muses, later declaring it to be "more destructive to the health, lives, and economy of this country than all the current illegal drugs combined."

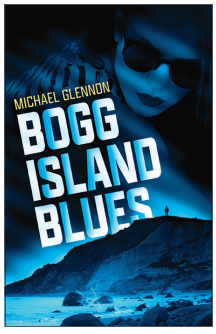
Violence, tragedy, and family dysfunction form the center of this dramatic tale, illuminating how identity can be impacted by mental illness, early life bonds, and the temptations of power. From the start, readers will root for Henry to make things right and earn a true new beginning, and Marcus delivers a climactic ending—of difficult choices, sacrifice, and high-stakes confrontations—that will leave readers pleasantly surprised.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Bogg Island Blues

Michael Glennon | Hardboiled Books
244p, e-book, $3.99, ISBN 979-8-31783-292-6



Witty PI and overpowering femme fatale power this brisk noir throwback.

Great for fans of Michael Craven, Charlie Huston.

Glennon (*Song & Dance*) delivers an entertaining private-eye caper, the second Frank Rotten book, a detective series as proudly scuzzy as its protagonist's name suggests. P.I. Rotten dreams of sleeping with Maggie Malloy, the foul-mouthed, unpredictable bombshell from his college days. After helping her evade mafia goons, Rotten follows her to Bogg Island, a picturesque New England tourist destination where he discovers that she is married to Bill Hackney. When Bill's father Harry Hackney falls off a cliff, Bill and Maggie stand to inherit a fortune. The police suspect foul play. Then the island's resident bird activist comes forward, claiming to be Harry's secret wife, entitled to half of his inheritance. Was it murder, and who will benefit financially? Perhaps the most important question is one narrator Rotten asks himself: "Was I hanging around just to maybe get laid, or did my actions serve a higher purpose?"

Bogg Island is a classic whodunnit with bullets flying from its first pages and a self-conscious hardboiled streak. Sometimes, it edges toward parody, and narrator Rotten's trivializing focus on women's bodies as their primary value will distance many readers. Still, wistful wisecracks, philosophical observations, and a feel for the East Coast's loneliest milieus power this sharply told page-turner. Maggie steals the show as a cunning, cold-hearted beauty who lures men into trouble; Frank jovially acknowledges his powerlessness in the face of Maggie's charms and takes her orders to hunt down clues (and tacos) or to hide incriminating evidence.

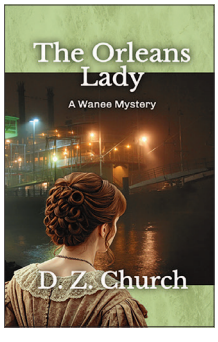
Glennon executes Frank's unique voice with jaunty flair. "[My] careless gullibility had almost gotten the leading lady killed. Boo-hoo. What a weeper." The fictitious island offers a colorful backdrop in which bluffs, ferries, and docks play essential roles. The reading of a much-anticipated will builds delicious tension, complete with an excellent plot twist. Impersonations, multiple identities, a miniature spy cam, and red herrings make the book a page-turner that noir and crime-caper fans will delight in.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

The Orleans Lady: A Wanee Mystery

D.Z. Church | Bodie Blue Books
337p, e-book, $3.99, ASIN 979-8-994-00131-8



Plucky heroine navigates lively mysteries in post-Civil War America.

Great for fans of Amy Stewart's *Girl Waits with Gun*, Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries*.

In 1877 post–Civil War America, Cora Countryman—headstrong and reputation-bruised—embarks on a Mississippi journey to uncover the whereabouts (and whyabouts) of her long-absent mother. Cora accepts the trip arranged by Mr. Kanady—local newspaper editor and potential lover—based on hearsay of a certain Marie Mae whose photograph resembles her mother. Their plan is coolly drawn: Cora and her chaperone, Mrs. Gibson, will pass as ordinary travelers, while Kanady plays the "pigeon," bait for the river's more dangerous gamblers. The scheme fractures when Cora encounters a woman who looks like her mother—poised and chillingly aloof—before the woman slips away, "deny[ing] recognition of her own daughter."

The story's central mystery—Cora's quest for the truth about her mother—gradually expands into a dangerous plot involving stolen jewels, blackmail, and a fatal plunge that leaves Cora questioning the bigger mystery of her mother's game. At its heart, Church's novel (the fifth in her Wanee Mystery series) is a study in female agency and the elusiveness of identity, as characters adopt various roles—gamblers masquerading as gentlemen, a British princess in disguise, a so-called "hoodlum king," and Kanady himself performing as a "French fop." Cora's refusal of marriage in favor of "a life of study, mystery, and adventure" marks her as a radical figure despite the prescribed positions available to women of her time.

Church writes with a keen eye for texture—the gleam of polished decks, lively Midwestern towns, the murmur of crowded saloons—and populates the story with a dynamic, eccentric cast. If the middle chapters occasionally wander through secondary mysteries such as the missing jewels of Mrs. Granville and the disappearance of Winston Small, they regain force in moments of crisis, when Cora, clad in borrowed trousers, stands shoulder to shoulder with Kanady amid flood and fire. The result is a steadily unfolding mystery that investigates the peril and promise of self-determination in a world reluctant to grant it.

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

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Daughters of the Mist

Chris Pugmire

185p, e-book, $5, ASIN B0GQ3CB39R



Three teens rebel against futuristic colony in this hopeful SF.

Great for fans of Ally Condie's *Matched*, Neal Shusterman's *Scythe*.

In Pugmire's adventurous YA debut, an isolated human colony inhabits a distant planet. Just 45 members strong, this group has managed to survive in the only home they've ever known—though "they still called it an alien planet," walling in their settlement to "keep the 'alien' stuff out." The lone outsider is Enlett, a teenager raised by her mother away from the community. When her mother dies, Enlett returns and makes her first friends: quiet, thoughtful Kethra, who prefers to keep her opinions to herself, and clever Zektrin, who is curious to learn how everything works. Together, the three rebel against the settlement's norms by venturing outside its borders.

Pugmire's fragile world is governed by a "wise but also foolish" AI called the Almanac that residents regard with cautious respect: "they didn't always pass on its orders directly, but in important matters, they followed it to the letter and likely survived because of it." The Almanac's self-awareness creates an undercurrent of tension, as it repeatedly declares, "I am most certainly faulty and no doubt dangerous too." These blunt observations serve as timely commentary on the dangers of relying on AI for human decision-making. Pugmire also highlights the social costs of censorship, with the settlement's digitized, heavily edited books leading residents to erroneously believe that Earth was once "besieged by ... evil wizards, dragons, and other things possibly much worse."

Perhaps most noteworthy: this distant colony has no men, which raises the stakes for Enlett after an interesting twist prompts questions about gender as a social construct. Watching Enlett awkwardly learn the rules of her new society makes her an endearing protagonist, particularly when she must come to terms with the real reason her mother hid her away. While serving as a warning about the rise of censorship and AI technology, this spirited tale also brims with youthful optimism and hope for the future.

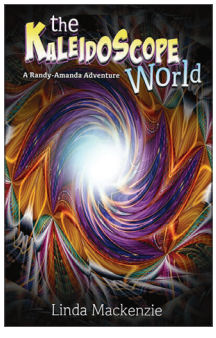
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A**

MIDDLE GRADE

The Kaleidoscope World: A Randy-Amanda Adventure

Linda Mackenzie | Creative Health and Spirit

218p, trade paper, $14.95, ISBN 979-8-986-71797-5



Lesson-driven fantasy fueled by power of positive thinking.

Great for fans of Bree Barton's *Zia Erases the World*, Jennifer Bell's *Magicalia*.

Mackenzie encourages young readers to embrace positivity in this lively series starter that challenges 11-year-old best friends to not only find their way home from a magical world, but also to confront their most paralyzing fears. The outgoing Manda (don't call her Amanda!) always pulls timid Randy out of his funk, and he admires her bravery and confidence. When Manda arrives at Randy's house and declares that she's dreamed something exciting will happen to them—and that it involves Melinda, the "Crazy Lady" who lives in a castle-like house—it sweeps the two into a fantastical odyssey that middle-grade readers will relish.

Melinda has transformed her childhood home into a soothing tropical oasis, and the centerpiece is a large, ornate kaleidoscope. When she purchased it, she was warned to "NEVER let anyone with a negative thought look into it," and she duly cautions her young guests, but Randy and Manda can't resist its mysterious allure. They gravitate to the kaleidoscope and are quickly transported into a mythical landscape populated by wizards, elves, unicorns, mermaids, and trolls. It's a realm ruled by Mr. Negative, and they join other humans trapped there by their pessimistic mindset, including Melinda's long-lost husband. Only positive thoughts can help them escape.

Immersing young readers in enchanted terrains like The Castle of Light, River of No Return, and Sea of Doubts, Mackenzie incorporates important lessons into her whimsical worldbuilding. On their way to the Morbid Mountains, Randy and Manda receive guidance from larger-than-life figures (including Babbling Barbara, Sammy Should, and Scary Mary McFairy) who introduce the eager, emboldened friends to the helpful traits that will help them defeat Mr. Negative. In *The Kaleidoscope World*, Mackenzie imparts her belief that the forces of positivity can overcome entrenched negativity, and that young readers can forge their own path to happiness by channeling their energy, engaging their curiosity, and adopting an optimistic worldview.

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

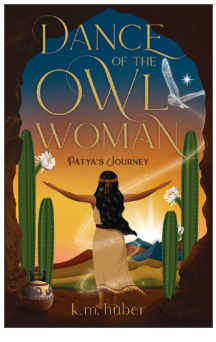
YOUNG ADULT

EDITOR'S PICK

Dance of the Owl Woman: Patya's Journey

K.M. Huber

264p, trade paper, $17.99, ISBN 979-8-896-36382-8



Luminous tale of resilience and destiny in 6th century Peru.

Great for fans of Jill Hedgecock's *Pizco*, Tanya Landman's *The Goldsmith's Daughter*.

In Huber's second series installment, Patya—of the Nasca people, in sixth century Peru—must work through trials that test her resolve against the evil forces confronting her family. After a horrible encounter that alters her girlhood, the death of her grandmother, paya Kuyllay, and a corrupt priest's attempt to sacrifice her brother, Tachico, Patya vows to do whatever it takes to keep her family safe. Caught in a web of deception spun from the revenge-fueled priest Achiq—who is working tirelessly to usurp Patya's power and her family's position as water-guardians—Patya's ordeals eventually push her into accepting—albeit reluctantly at first—her destiny as an Owl Woman.

YA readers will find a resilient and courageous protagonist in Patya, who—despite painful losses and her fear that "something is coming"—seeks answers in the only way she knows how: by bravely reaching out to the orcas, her guardian spirits, paying respect to her clan's traditions, and enveloping the soul of the Owl Woman to bring about "a portent of change." She often doubts her ability to guide others; however, her travelling companion, Waru, reminds her that "your heart may be wounded, but it is not poisoned," especially when compared to Achiq or his mentor, Pikaq—both of whom attempt many times to murder her loved ones. Despite being taught certain rules and beliefs, in the end, stretching beyond what she knows is what helps Patya reach her destiny.

Huber (*Call of the Owl Woman*) beautifully weaves ancient history and magic, transporting readers into Patya's world with lush descriptions and profound spiritual rituals. Like many chosen ones, Patya is hesitant, declaring, "I don't want any other world" when faced with relinquishing her past trauma. But by letting go, Patya fully transforms until she is "not a girl anymore, [as] a warrior has taken her place." Her strength will inspire any reader facing their own healing journey.

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

The following are reviews of self-published titles that have previously appeared in *PW*

FICTION

Bogg Island Blues
Michael Glennon. Hardboiled, $3.99 e-book (244p)
ISBN 979-8-31783-292-6

Glennon's clever second mystery featuring Frank Rotten (after *Song and Dance*) finds the Pittsburgh private eye helping out an old flame. When Maggie Malloy summons Frank to Bogg Island in New England, he answers the call, even though Maggie's previous entreaty ended with Frank's friend getting his thumbs broken by the mob. In college, Frank fell in love with Maggie at first sight, only to learn that she preferred his roommate. He's held a candle for her ever since. When Frank arrives on Bogg, he finds that Maggie is married to a man named Bill Hackney and in no rush to discuss her predicament. Before Frank can get a clear answer about why she's called him, Maggie's father-in-law, Harry Hackney, is found dead of an apparent drunken fall off a cliff, and Frank's job becomes figuring out whether Harry was murdered. Frank notices strange parallels between Harry's death and that of Bill's mother decades earlier, and he navigates his complex feelings for Maggie as the inquiry grows increasingly perilous. With some well-concealed plot twists and a sympathetic gumshoe at its center, this affable PI novel is easy to like.

Cayman Conundrum: A Liz Adams Mystery
Stacy Wilder. Wild Hawk, $4.99 e-book (200p)
ISBN 979-8-9907831-1-9

Wilder's lively fourth whodunit featuring PI Liz Adams (after *A Christmas Conundrum*) sees her tracking down her new husband's missing friend. Liz has just married her former client Brad O'Connor. After she helped Brad identify who was hacking his identity-theft protection company, he and his business partner, Tim Knight, sold the business. Tim has moved to the island of Grand Cayman to try his hand at writing, planning to fold his research about the area's history of money laundering into his first novel. Before he can complete his manuscript, however, he vanishes. When Liz and Brad, who are in Grand Cayman for their honeymoon, learn about Tim's disappearance, they determine to find him. Their probe is made more complicated when it intersects with that of Liz's old flame, JP, a French intelligence operative who's been assigned to investigate money laundering in the Caymans. Wilder's answer to the question of Tim's whereabouts is both logical and surprising, and the tropical setting offers plenty of pleasures for armchair travelers. Fans of Carolyn Hart's cozies will enjoy themselves.

Contesting the Wool: A Material Witness Mystery
Diane Vallere. Polyester, $8.99 e-book (300p)
ISBN 978-1-9545-7923-1

In Vallere's winsome sixth cozy featuring Southern California fabric store owner Poly Monroe (after *Sheer Window*), the death of a millionaire begets several mysteries. The tight-knit town of San Ladrón, Calif., is abuzz over the reading of Reginald Villamere's will, but Poly is surprised to be invited, since she never met the dead man. She assumes she's just a plus-one for her boyfriend, Vaughn McMichael, the executor of Villamere's estate, but to her shock, she turns out to be one of Villamere's beneficiaries, receiving a collection of textiles left over after the renovation of a historic movie theater that Villamere oversaw. When Poly goes to the theater to take stock of the textiles, she finds the bloody corpse of Ben Schaffley, the attorney representing Villamere's estate, in the storage room. Worried she's either being targeted by a killer or somebody is killing on her behalf, Poly digs through Villamere's past in search of plausible suspects. Vallere gives cozy fans everything they could want: a lovable lead, a small-town setting worth escaping into, and a witty resolution to the whodunit. It's a charmer.

Flagrant Fouls
Richard O'Connor and Glenn Stout. Sager, $35.99 (438p)
ISBN 978-1-958861-63-9

Journalist O'Connor (*Taking a Shot*) and biographer Stout (*The Young Woman and the Sea*) team up for a gritty, topical sports noir featuring wisecracking New York City PI Elgin O'Brien. The half-Black, half-Irish O'Brien was an NBA star for a decade. Since retiring, he's found a challenging second career as a gumshoe, drawn to the work in part because of the police's indifference to his father's murder when O'Brien was a teenager. His latest client is Pat Malone, who wants O'Brien to track down the gunman who fatally shot his son, college basketball player Teddy, outside of a Manhattan strip club. No obvious motive for the killing presents itself, and police seem content to call it a random act of violence, but Pat insists there's more to the story. O'Brien, meanwhile, is troubled by a feeling that Pat is holding back key evidence. His investigation touches upon endemic wrongdoing in college sports, where the lure of big money corrupts coaches and players alike. The authors combine their journalistic expertise with O'Connor's experiences playing college basketball to lend the proceedings authenticity, and O'Brien proves a gruff and charming lead. It's nothing but net.

Girl Unreserved
Tashia Hart. Not Too Far Removed, $23.99 (140p)
ISBN 978-1-7353453-3-8

A Native American girl discovers her sexuality and reels from sexual abuse in this frank outing from Hart (*Native Love Jams*). Winnow Sticks is five when she and her friends mimic a sex scene from a movie they glimpsed their parents watching. At 10, Winnow is sent by her parents, who are getting divorced, from their Red Lake Nation home in Minnesota to live with her aunt Shelly in Arkansas. There, she befriends a girl named Sarrah, who kisses her. Shelly gives Winnow a pornographic magazine to explain sex, which she and Sarrah look at. Then Winnow moves with her aunt to Texas, where Shelly forces her to attend a weekly Bible study session at a local church, during which Winnow regularly locks herself in the bathroom to masturbate. The narrative blends Winnow's coming of age with harrowing episodes of sexual assault, as when she's abducted as a preteen by two boys who threaten to kill her if she doesn't have sex with them. Here and elsewhere, Hart's

gritty and plainspoken chronicle glimmers with poetic insight—Winnow, humiliated by the attack, spends the night outside, "staring up at the stars, wondering how far my pain and fear stretched out beyond my body. It felt like it was traveling to at least the edge of the solar system." This bracing tale is worth a look.

The Many Seas to Guernsey
Catherine Taylor. Cameo, $6.99 e-book (516p)
ASIN B0GR9Q81LW

Taylor (*Beyond the Moon*) delivers an immersive tale of enduring love between a British woman and a German Catholic seminarian on the eve of WWII. In 1936, 16-year-old Kitty Garland-Fry moves to the island of Guernsey with her artist father, mother, and siblings. Not long after, she meets Lukas von Harnitz, who's visiting his British-born maternal grandparents. Lukas is drawn to Kitty and her free-spirited family but remains conflicted about his feelings for her and his call to the priesthood. Lukas's cousin Caspar, a German military officer, also visits Guernsey and is equally smitten with Kitty, though her heart belongs to Lukas despite his efforts to distance himself from her and remain true to his priestly aspirations. Brokenhearted after both men leave, Kitty accepts Caspar's invitation to visit him in Bavaria, eager to leave behind memories of Lukas, who has since returned to the seminary. When she arrives, Germany is on the brink of war and Caspar's family mocks her country's policy of appeasement. Taylor heightens the drama of Kitty's love triangle when the trio converge in Berlin amid Germany's escalating tensions, and Kitty, stuck in the country, faces the brutality of Hitler's regime. WWII fiction fans will be riveted.

The Pope's Jew
Eva Mekler. Manhattan Book Group, $14.59 trade paper (288p)
ISBN 978-1-963844-44-3

A ghostwriter uncovers her client's secrets and finds love and danger in this enticing tale from Mekler (Sunrise Shows Late). In 1980 Paris, wealthy industrialist Luc Kasten hires 30-something American journalist Diane Jameson to ghostwrite a memoir to share with his family. Diane accepts, intrigued by the charming older man, and agrees to spend the weekend with him at his home in the south of France. Despite Luc's claim that he wants to set the record straight ("My life has been half-truths for a very long time"), Diane has trouble getting him to disclose seemingly innocuous details, like the name of his childhood best friend. When she presses him, he redirects by flirting, and she begins to fall for him. She also starts digging into his past, casting doubt on his stated birth year of 1920 and discovering that Guy Thibault, an old enemy of Luc's who was responsible for sending him to a concentration camp during WWII, is now blackmailing him, having recently figured out his long-ago misdeed, which Mekler doesn't reveal until late in the novel. With Diane enmeshed in Luc's life and Guy after him, the narrative blends an enriching morality tale with a suspenseful game of cat and mouse. WWII fiction fans won't want to miss this.

Saturn's Favorite Music
Laura Lee. Elsewhere, $9.99 e-book (368p)
ASIN B0F4J5B34K

A rookie radio DJ pays her dues in small-town Michigan in this wry portrait from Lee (*Identity Theft*). It's 1992 and Clara Jane is fresh out of broadcasting school in Detroit and looking to lead a glamorous life as a DJ. Willing to do whatever it takes, she accepts a midday slot in rural Saturn and surrenders to the indignity of playing soft rock, despite her preference for grunge. Her first day is a disaster—she mispronounces a name while reading the obituaries and unwittingly plays a song with overt drug references. Another DJ, 37-year-old divorcé Seth Jones, tries to make Clara feel at home by having her as a regular guest on his morning show. Their friendship remains platonic despite everyone at the station thinking they're sleeping together. Meanwhile, the station owner starts cutting costs, axing on-air personalities and expecting Clara to handle administrative responsibilities in addition to DJing. Lee shines in scenes with Clara and Seth on air together, showing how their camaraderie develops through humorous banter. It's a crackling look at a medium in transition.

When We're Broken
Shawna Holly. Three Sparrows, $3.99 e-book (425p)
ASIN B0DD6VWCCR

Holly returns to small-town Alabama in the emotional companion piece to *The Stories We Keep*. Cat, 17, bonds with new student Glen Lewis in 1981 over the loss of their fathers—hers recently died in a work accident, while his abandoned the family. The pair start dating, but trouble brews during the summer months when their classmate Ally spreads rumors that Glen had sex with her. Glen then informs Cat that Ally is telling the truth, but that it happened before he started dating Cat. Later, Cat spies Glen talking with another girl at a Fourth of July party and then sees him hanging out with Ally outside of a bar. Cat chooses to ignore further rumors of Glen's infidelity and marries him immediately after graduating from high school. She gives birth to a daughter, Jenna, a couple of years later, but Jenna is colicky, and Glen becomes distant and neglectful, often spending time at a bar after work, and Cat wonders if she should have heeded earlier warnings. The narrative can feel repetitive, especially as Cat and Glen constantly pick at each other, but it builds to a satisfying and hopeful conclusion. Readers will be stirred by this bittersweet bildungsroman.

When the Dogwoods Bloom Again
Robert Hays. Thomas-Jacob, $4.99 e-book (244p)
ASIN B0F5JFQPMM

An Illinois couple's bond is tested by WWII in this emotional novel from Hays (*Darkening of the Light*). The reader first meets Army draftee Gil Bennett plowing his parents' field. Worried how a tour overseas will affect his relationship with his girlfriend, Annie, he proposes and she accepts. He then leaves for basic training in South Carolina, where he befriends fellow soldiers Jeff Bartlet and Henry Burnett. The "Three Bees" are sent overseas, where they have one another's backs on reconnaissance missions behind enemy lines in France. Meanwhile, back home in Illinois, Annie lives on her grandmother's farm, which Gil is expected to take over after they marry. Though she misses him, she's excited by her attraction to mechanic Howard, who fixes her flat tire.

Annie and Gil lead separate lives while he serves in the Army, and neither is fully prepared for how Gil's return will affect their relationship. A revelation near the end feels a bit rushed and underexplored, but Hays capably shows how Gil's fear of death creeps up on him before each battle, as when a dream of "beautiful southern Illinois" gives way to nightmare-induced "screams in the black of night." This will move readers.

Where's Jackson Pollock?
Jim Davidson. Jim Davidson, $5.99 e-book (324p)
ISBN 979-8-9998060-0-0

Davidson (the Chris Hamilton series) shines in this captivating comic thriller set in early-1990s Florida. Russell Henderson is in deep water after the SEC charges him with insider trading. Facing the loss of his freedom and the seizure of his assets, he's relieved when his girlfriend, former gallerist Victoria Scarsfield, recognizes that the paintings above his bed, which Russell took as collateral from an ex–business partner, are worth millions—one's a Rothko, the other a Pollock. Victoria finds buyers willing to pay in untraceable cash, then develops a ruse to keep the couple's pockets lined: after the sales are final, she'll swap out the genuine paintings for forgeries she's commissioned. Unfortunately, the brother of the broker who sells the paintings sends the police after Victoria and Russell before they can pull off their scheme. Then a pair of dead bodies turn up, raising the stakes. Davidson populates the narrative with well-shaded characters on both sides of the law, and complicates the seemingly straightforward plot with a number of canny wrinkles. Fans of Tim Dorsey's eccentric Florida noir should check this out.

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