July 27, 2026

booklife®

YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING

58 New BookLife Titles Listed • 18 New BookLife Titles Reviewed

Indie Spotlight

In this edition of our monthly thematic roundup of BookLife titles, we feature fiction.

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

COMING-OF-AGE NOVELS

A Bad Hand



Harrison Jenkins
ASIN B0DYL48LNX
Author statement: "My primary motivation for writing *A Bad Hand* was to help reengage young men with good fiction. I actually wrote it specifically for teenage boys like my own son, who are more into sports and just aren't into science fiction or fantasy. With reading engagement among teenage males at an all-time low, it feels more important than ever to give these young men grounded stories they actually want to read, in the interest of helping them develop deeper empathy and resilience."

Forget Me Knot



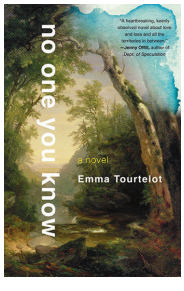
Tammie Adele
ISBN 978-1-922628-55-8
Author statement: "A story about the value of an equine friend to a girl as she navigates life's challenges and becomes a woman. I was inspired to write *Forget Me Knot* after having one of my horses put down and trying to rationalize the grief I felt. I only managed to finish writing *Forget Me Knot* because I fell off another horse, broke my ankle, and was laid up for three months."

Good Friends Are Forever



John P. Masterson
ASIN B0GNMKW921
Author statement: "*Good Friends Are Forever* has been percolating in my mind for nearly two decades. I wanted to create a story that would showcase the importance of friendship, living life to the fullest (regardless of one's age), and the importance of embracing every day. The book follows four main characters who have been friends since kindergarten. I hope readers find it to be humorous, filled with compassion, and heartwarming all at the same time."

No One You Know



Emma Tourtelot
ASIN B0FD8RP2MH
Author statement: "My book is a dual-narrative, mother-daughter story about a family unraveling in the wake of a huge loss. When my daughter was in middle school, her best friend moved away, and it was the first time something big happened to her that I couldn't fix. She didn't even want me to fix it—she wanted her friend, not me. That was the feeling I wanted to capture in this novel: when you understand that you can't protect your kid from the world."

Booksellers & Librarians:



How are you handling self-published books?

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

PW Reviews

look for "self-published" at the end of a review
publishersweekly.com/self-pub

booklife REVIEWS

paid reviews of self- or indie-published titles
publishersweekly.com/BookLifeReviews

PLUS

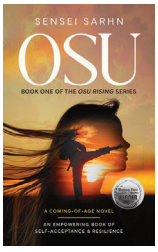
booklife PRIZE

PW reviewers critique thousands of self-published titles every year:
publishersweekly.com/BookLIfePrize

Let us help you find the best in self-published books!

All powered by *Publishers Weekly* reviewers.

OSU



Sensei Sarhn

ISBN 978-1-76363-122-9

Author statement: "My novel follows Olive, a 16-year-old protagonist, through the trials of identity and survival. I wrote *OSU* to give a fierce, compassionate voice to anyone struggling to find their place. Pulling from themes of personal empowerment, my goal was to craft a gripping story reminding readers that self-acceptance is our ultimate superpower."

Sangria, Sunsets and Second Chances



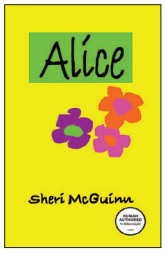
Loist Abarta

ASIN B0DYL48LNX

Author statement: "The inspiration for the story of my 22-year-old protagonist, Brynn–who becomes a runaway bride and chooses an adventure-filled escape to Spain and Greece instead of marrying her first serious boyfriend–came from my own experiences in the 1980s. At that time, I met many people who seemed determined to get married right out of college. I remember questioning that rush and wondering why they didn't want to explore the world first."

FAMILY SAGAS

Alice



Sheri McGuinn

ISBN 978-0-9855270-5-1

Author statement: "Alice is an uptight, cardigan-wearing French teacher whose program has been cut. She and the narrator, her teenage daughter Nina, are storing years of personal teaching materials in the garage when the hippie father Alice deserted at 16 drops into their lives. Against her better judgement, Alice lets him stay. When the bank threatens their home, Nina sees a new side to her mother, and this becomes a tale of individual backbone in the face of corporate greed. For teens and adults."

Nursing Her Fractured Family



Louis Tong

ASIN B0H3WLVLTL

Author statement: "Penny will do anything for her family, even if it means sacrificing her own dreams. After her father's death, the burden of caring for her psychotic mother and autistic sister falls solely on her shoulders. As she races against time to save her mother, Penny must



How can three distinct Persons be One God that we worship?



ISBN: 978-9-69-739227-8

This book is an attempt to reconcile the incomprehensible mystery of three Persons with the One biblical God.

also confront her own inner demons and learn to let go of the responsibility she's carried for so long."

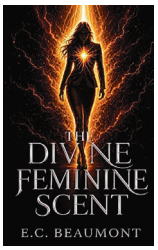
Those Coming Back



Alanna R. Clutter
ASIN B0GNSTKFGY
Author statement: "*Those Coming Back* is a fictional tale of four generations of a 19th-century American family. The story is primarily voiced by the eldest daughter, Catherine, via the letters and journal entries that track her personal successes and profound misfortunes. I was always certain that my first novel would be a contemporary gem with plenty of witty banter and plot twists. But then an authentic family journal from the late 1800s fell into my hands."

SUPERNATURAL AND SPECULATIVE FICTION

The Divine Feminine Scent



E.C. Beaumont
ASIN B0H1BY9DD5
Author statement: "Selene is a Harvard-educated impact investor who discovers she has an ancient power to harvest energy from men through sexual arousal. My debut novel blends elements that don't usually belong together: a brilliant female protagonist with a subtle paranormal ability, hypnosis, erotic power dynamics, charity investing, and neuroscience. Early readers and reviews have reported that these elements come together beautifully."

Her Past's Present



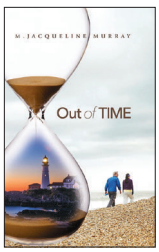
Michael Poeltl
ISBN 978-0-9813168-6-4
Author statement: "Unable to cope with a deteriorating existence, Tess checks herself into a mental health facility. Inside, she meets Tebor, another patient, who claims to know her from a previous life. Wondering if she can heal her present by making peace with her forgotten past, Tess becomes receptive to the idea of past-life regression."

Mancala Moon



Asa Bowers
ISBN 978-1-73294-818-1
Author statement: "Micah Thorne is drowning in grief, haunted by a family history he cannot outrun. When he is drawn into a mysterious forest where time bends and visions awaken, Micah finds himself guided by a silent fox and tested by forces he cannot see. Deep within the moonlit woods, an ancient game waits to be played. One choice may offer Micah the chance to break a generational burden–but only if he can face the darkness both around him and within."

Out of Time



M. Jacqueline Murray
ISBN 978-0-9991493-3-1
Author statement: "I came to fiction from a scientific background, which means I tend to begin with a question rather than a plot. For *Out of Time*, that question was simple but persistent: What if timing is powerful, but our choices shape the outcome, each one branching into parallel possibilities for the lives we might have lived? The novel grew out of my fascination with the idea that small shifts in circumstance can lead to entirely different outcomes."

Can Humanity Keep Pace with Its Own Progress?

International Educator and Researcher David L. Hawk Challenges Readers to Rethink Our Shared Future.

BY: Velmont Media

As the world grapples with accelerating technological advancement, environmental challenges, and growing social division, internationally respected educator, researcher, planner, and author David L. Hawk poses a timely and thought-provoking question: Are human values evolving quickly enough to keep pace with human progress?

In his compelling new book, *Hello, We Have A Problem: Human Beings, Being Human?*, Hawk invites readers on a powerful journey of reflection, urging them to reconsider humanity's relationship with one another, the natural world, and the technologies that increasingly shape modern life.

Drawing from a distinguished career spanning Europe, Asia, and North America, Hawk brings decades of experience as a professor, dean, city planner, designer, and organizational leader.

> *"Wisdom, compassion, and responsibility must evolve alongside our growing capabilities."*

Unlike many contemporary books that focus solely on today's crises, this volume explores the deeper human behaviors, assumptions, and values that contribute to those challenges. Through thoughtful analysis, Hawk encourages readers to examine what it truly means to be human in an age defined by rapid change, artificial intelligence, environmental uncertainty, and social complexity.

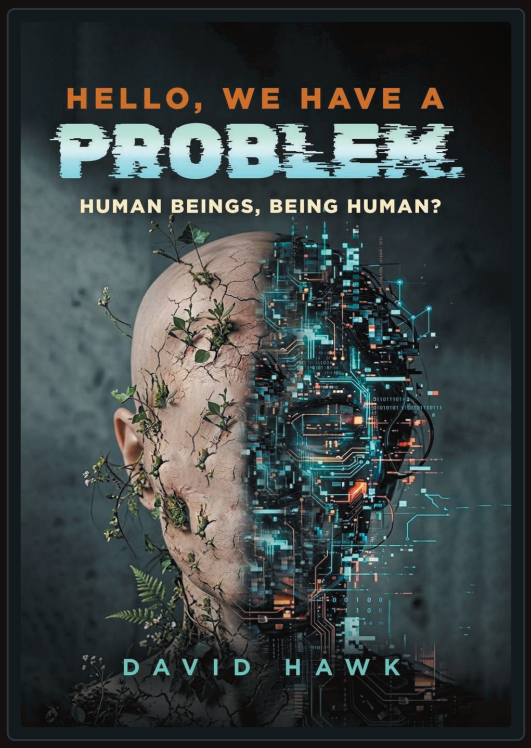
At its core, Hawk's message is one of hope. He argues that the future is not something that simply happens to humanity—it is something humanity actively shapes through its choices, actions, and willingness to work together. Hawk has pledged 100% of his author royalties from the book to support two vital nonprofit organizations: St. Joseph's Indian School and Children International.



Author David L. Hawk

Scan to view on Amazon





The book's striking cover features a decaying skull intertwined with artificial intelligence imagery, symbolizing the tension between technological advancement and environmental decline.

SUPPORTED MISSIONS

St. Joseph's Indian School

PO Box 326, Chamberlain, SD • www.stjo.org

Children International

800-888-3089 • www.children.org

BOOK ORDERING

Formats: Paperback ($13.99) | Hardcover ($24.99)

Author: David L. Hawk

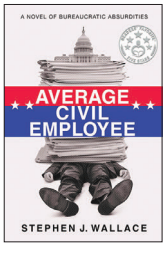
PW SELECT

New Titles from Self-Publishers

Booksellers, publishers, librarians, and agents are encouraged to look at the 58 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

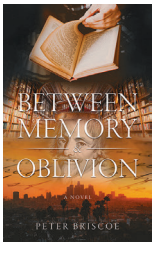
Average Civil Employee: A Novel of Bureaucratic Absurdities



Stephen J. Wallace. River Grove Books. $14.95 paper (194p), ISBN 979-8-90052-035-3; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-90052-036-0
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, Target

Frustrated Ace must keep a journal, which becomes an outlet for his rants. An unexpected promotion shows the only thing worse than working in a flawed bureaucracy is trying to fix it.

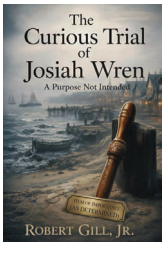
Between Memory and Oblivion



Peter Briscoe. Palo Verde Press. $12.95 paper (144p), ISBN 978-0-9634898-6-9; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 978-0-9634898-3-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

A young bookseller who hunts for rare books abroad must later fight to save them from being destroyed by librarians.

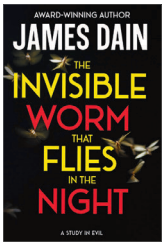
The Curious Trial of Josiah Wren: An Honest Deception from Carroway Island (The Carroway Chronicles)



Robert Gill Jr. Teaching Press. $24.99 (350p), ISBN 979-8-9960419-7-8; $16.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-9960419-7-8
IngramSpark

On Carroway Island, respected craftsman Josiah Wren faces trial after a well-intended act spirals into public scandal.

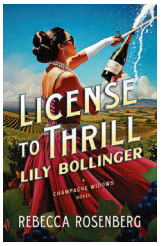
The Invisible Worm That Flies in the Night: A Study in Evil



James Dain. Michael Bender. $16.95 paper (330p), ISBN 979-8-9933753-3-5; $4.95 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9933753-4-2
Amazon

In this psychological noir set in a dying Pennsylvania mill town in 1964, a lonely boy befriends a fugitive killer desperate to reinvent himself, until their lives spiral together into disaster.

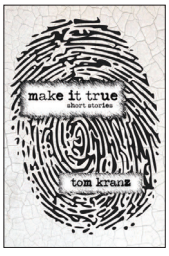
License to Thrill: Lily Bollinger



Rebecca Rosenberg. Lion Heart Publishing. $19.99 paper (318p), ISBN 978-1-7329699-8-8; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-7329699-9-5
Amazon, Bookshop.org

In 1944, Lily Bollinger outwits Nazi occupiers. Decades later, she partners with James Bond to protect her legacy while secretly crafting a masterpiece champagne the world has never tasted.

Make It True: Short Stories



Tom Kranz. TK Books. $14.99 paper (116p), ISBN 979-8-2547-6427-4; $3.99 e-book, ASIN B0GFG151LT
Amazon

The nature of truth and how it's manipulated is explored in these stories through fiction, speculative fiction, humor, and fear.

The Man Who Obviated Christmas



Richard Siciliano. Outskirts Press. $20.95 paper (146p), ISBN 978-1-9772-9099-1
Outskirtspress.com

What begins as a simple act of kindness on Christmas Eve leads a lonely man to confront his past, embrace connection, and find hope in unexpected places.

Nuka Bay



Stephen L. Graf. G&S Publishing. $7.99 paper (160p), ISBN 979-8-2662-7727-4
Amazon

A young high school English teacher who travels to Alaska in search of adventure works on a commercial fishing boat and gets much more than he bargained for.

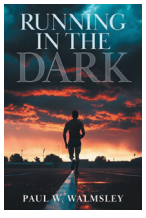
Nursing Her Fractured Family

Louis Tong. Louis Tong. $14.99 paper (278p), ISBN 979-8-233-34948-5; $3.26 e-book,



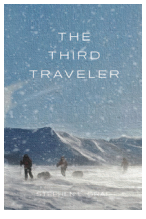
ASIN B0GG2MQ2RY
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Kobo
A struggling nurse from Singapore must choose between completing her hard-won mental health training and protecting her only parent, a psychotic mother, from self-destruction.

Running in the Dark



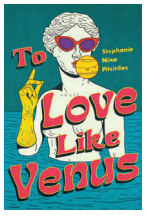
Paul W. Walmsley. Friesen Press. $18.99 paper (194p), ISBN 978-1-0383-5586-7; $5.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0383-5588-1
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Indigo, Kobo
Capturing the joy of running and the spirit of competiton, *Runnning in the Dark* is a story of determination, the pursuit of excellence, and overcoming self-doubt.

The Third Traveler



Stephen L. Graf. G&S Publishing. $11.99 paper (340p), ISBN 979-8-8794-4765-1; $9.99 e-book, ASIN B0CVL2264J
Amazon, Barnes & Noble
A historical novel that sweeps the reader away on an epic journey spanning three continents and four decades, depicting the triumphs and defeats of three generations of an Irish family.

To Love Like Venus

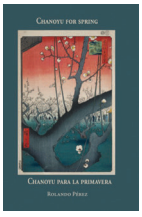


Stephanie Nina Pitsirilos. Janus Point Press. $27.99 (256p), ISBN 978-1-958077-11-5; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-958077-12-2
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, IngramSpark
Alita, a whiz at helping AI extract market-able trends from human sex behavior datasets, tries her hand at love in a near future of human sexuality, environmental decay, and love's myths.

Poetry

Chanoyu for Spring/Chanoyu para la primavera

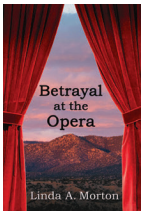
Rolando Pérez. Cool Grove Press. $19.95 paper (94p), ISBN 978-1-887276-42-9



Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark
Chanoyu for Spring/ Chanoyu para la primavera is the second volume of the quartet Chanoyu for the Seasons/Chanoyu para las estaciones.

Mystery/Thriller

Betrayal at the Opera



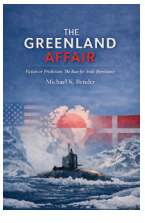
Linda A. Morton. Linda A. Morton. $15.95 paper (208p), ISBN 979-8-218-85282-5; $5.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-218-85283-2
Barnes & Noble
An opera is about to start when a love triangle unfolds outside the theatre and tragedy strikes. Local teacher Laura Bennett assists the FBI in finding a suspect.

The Closing Window



Gregg Roman. Middle East Forum Press. $18.99 paper (286p), ISBN 979-8-9967558-0-6; $8.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9967558-1-3
Amazon, Barnes & Noble
After a war with Iran ends in a fragile peace, a Washington institute turns its tools against its own government, and the sources it runs inside the regime pay the price.

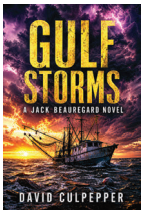
The Greenland Affair: Fiction or Prediction: The Race for Arctic Dominance



Michael Bender. Michael Bender. $13.95 paper (234p), ISBN 979-8-1989-0084-4; $6.95 e-book, ASIN B0H34L4MGF
Amazon
When CIA director Blake's operation spirals into regime change, a Danish officer and American journalist risk everything to expose the conspiracy and protect Greenland's sovereignty.

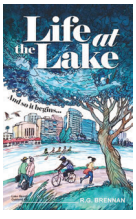
Gulf Storms: A Jack Beauregard Novel

David Culpepper. Digital Magnolia. $10.99 paper (320p), ISBN 979-8-9940242-5-6; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9940242-4-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble



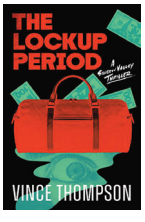
When a bullet-riddled shrimp boat drifts into Biloxi Harbor after a hurricane, U.S. Marshal Jack Beauregard follows a trail of corruption and murder.

Life at the Lake: A Whimsical Mystery, A Community, A Ghost Seeking Final Rest, The Local Rowing Team, Gossiping Asian Aunties, Gay First Love, An Irish-Italian Pastor and more!



R.G. Brennan. R.G. Brennan. $14.99 paper (234p), ISBN 979-8-2496-1286-3; $2.99 e-book, ASIN B0GQ6VM9LG
Amazon
When 21-year-old Kamil arrives in Oakland from Poland, he discovers the Lake Merritt community, a world far richer than he imagined, a community that holds secrets that transcend time.

The Lockup Period



Vince Thompson. Dubious Ventures Press. $17.99 paper (422p), ISBN 979-8-9953201-1-1; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9953201-2-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million
90 days to IPO riches–if they can just figure out what to do with the body! A fast, fun, and twisty ride through Silicon Valley, where everyone is chasing their cut.

Murder on the London Express



Barry Frost. Bell Bottom Press. $15.99 paper (368p), ISBN 979-8-2895-3623-5; $4.99 e-book, B0FFKR1BP5
Amazon
Two city gents are accused of murder on the commuter train to London. Police are relentless, so they go undercover to prove their innocence.



New Stanton

Maxwell Vagus. HeavySixer Productions. $19.99 paper (340p), ISBN 978-1-968485-78-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble
Harold Dean, a shady

alcoholic, wakes up in a town that doesn't exist and cannot escape until he finds his 1964 Chevy Malibu. The problem is he's not the only one hunting it.

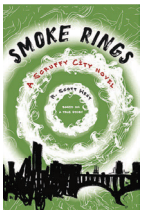
Outside Eden's Gate a Shadow Falls



Adam Kervale. Enochian Stone Press. $16.99 paper (340p), ISBN 979-8-9957223-0-4; $3.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9957223-1-1
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

Outside Eden's Gate: A Shadow Falls is an unclassifiable thriller of techno-conspiracy, supernatural fable, and political allegory. One woman uncovers a truth that could upend a nation.

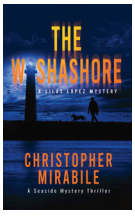
Smoke Rings: A Scruffy City Novel



R. Scott West. Scruffy City Publishing. $14.99 paper (404p), ISBN 979-8-9958116-0-2; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9958116-1-9
Amazon

Based on the true story of a modern-day Bonnie and Clyde, whose daring skunk weed exploits helped save their tumbleweed town.

The Washashore: A Seaside Mystery Thriller (Silas Lopez #1)

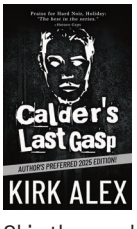


Christopher Mirabile. Slack Tide Press. $19.99 paper (430p), ISBN 979-8-89989-114-4; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89989-114-4
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org

Rancher turned beach town police chief Silas Lopez unravels a hit-and-run that is far more sinister than it looked. For fans of Michael Connelly, Louise Penny, and William Kent Krueger.

SF/Fantasy/Horror

Calder's Last Gasp



Kirk Alex. Tucumcari Press. $11.99 paper (206p), ISBN 979-8-9896592-8-9; $3.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9896592-9-6
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Kobo

Skip the cracker. This "Polly" wants blood! For fans of Dean Koontz and Shirley Jackson who prefer their fiction raw and gritty with a slice of twisted humor.

An Era in Anddemar



Maureen B. Roberts. Vandrassian Press. $22.99 paper (488p), ISBN 978-1-923512-88-7; $11.99 e-book, ASIN B0H5NGVK1H
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

A living spiral galaxy. An invasion of soulless Greyness. A colorful web of allies. A love like no other. A new myth for our time.

Everything That's Left Behind



Kelly Lydick. Sapphire Stories. $19.99 paper (300p), ISBN 979-8-9968064-0-9; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9968064-1-6
Amazon, Bookshop.org, IngramSpark

When Nichola Rodale finds information suggesting her father, a scientist and puzzle maker, may not have died in the Great Drought, she embarks on a perilous journey to discover the truth.

The Kikiloa Chronicles



Erik D. Larson. Kikiloa Press. $19.99 paper (418p), ISBN 979-8-9949828-0-8; $0.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9949828-7-7
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, Waterstones

Mitochondrial Eve is a 200,000-year-old time surfer and a freckled teen trickster. Her friend Hazel can defeat entropy. Probably. A literary sci-fi novel of deep time and stubborn hope.

The Moon Detente



Peter Policastro. Mount Lindsey Press. $19.99 paper (594p), ISBN 979-8-9948082-1-4; $6.99 e-book, ASIN B0GTJL6SKB
Amazon

In the near future, world order is disrupted by capitalist forces that seek control of the moon.

Rentsoc Book 1: The Wizard, The Pirate, and The Steampunk Librarian

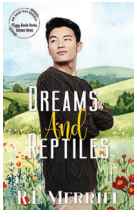


Scott Coon, illus. by L.S. Quigley. Scott Coon. $13.99 paper (308p), ISBN 978-969-1-09381-2; $2.99 e-book, ISBN 978-969-1-09380-5
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark, Powell's

A laugh-out-loud swashbuckling adventure full of heart and whimsy. Three unlikely heroes embark upon a quest to save the Steampunks. And none of their bosses are okay with any of this.

Romance/Erotica

Dreams and Reptiles: A MM Small-Town Romance (Foggy Basin Season Three)



R.L. Merrill. Celie Bay Publications. $16.99 paper (288p), ISBN 979-8-1823-5557-5; $4.99 e-book, ASIN B0GMKGYSRH
Amazon

An age-gap, hurt/comfort romance between a firefighter and a finance bro with bruised and battered hearts who are ready for a second chance at happiness in small-town California.

Men in Books Aren't Better (Plus One #1)

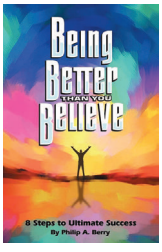


Amanda Nelson and Lisa-Marie Potter. Wild Rose Press. $5.99 e-book (370p), ASIN B0DH8H2WRB; $14.99 audio, ASIN B0FW6CDLPQ
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, Chirp, Google Books, Kobo, Spotify

For Jared, it's just another job. For Molly, it's a story of a lifetime. But somewhere between fantasy and reality, love is waiting to be written!

Nonfiction

Being Better Than You Believe: 8 Steps to Ultimate Success



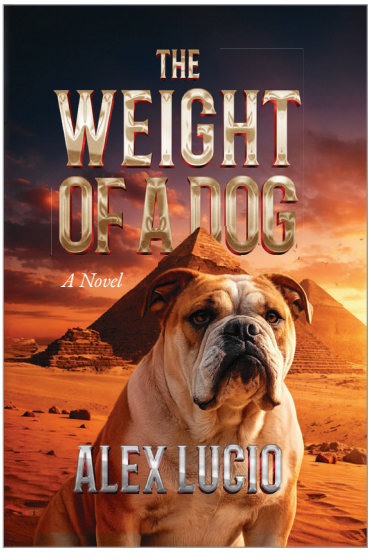
Philip Berry. Page Solutions. $18.99 paper (188p), ISBN 979-8-89633-151-3
Amazon

A practical guide to achieving higher performance and effectiveness through eight proven steps, with actionable insights and exercises for lasting personal and organizational growth.

BookLife Talks with Alex Lucio

Lucio calls his debut work *The Weight of a Dog*, "a grief manual disguised as a thriller." It also happens to feature an English bulldog who's much more than what he seems. We spoke to Lucio about how his interests came together to create a novel that spans centuries and follows the characters through the toughest moments of their lives.





What is the story behind your book?

The book came from three places at once. My family carried unspoken mysteries–fleeing Castro's Cuba, a grandfather lost to suicide–events no one discussed, yet three generations later I could feel how they had shaped me. That's Nick's inheritance in the novel: grief that arrives before the story does. The second thread was consciousness. A near-death experience permanently changed my lens, and I became convinced that non-human intelligence and consciousness meet at some deep nexus I could only explore in fiction. The third was reckoning. The novel began the afternoon I shut my laptop, got on the floor with my granddaughter and my bulldog, and realized presence was the only thing that ever mattered.

Your bio describes you as an "author who explores his passions of archaeology, physics, spirituality and technology." What sparked these interests for you?

As a child, I was fascinated by castles and cathedrals, which grew into a lifelong pull toward the medieval world and the structures we inherit without fully understanding them. At 16, I had the honor of sitting through a three-hour talk by Dr. Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb, which was my introduction to the mystery of the universe, and it never left me. Over the years those threads fused. The acoustics of certain ancient structures show an almost impossible precision, and in a way I still can't quite articulate, physics, consciousness, and theology sit in the same room in my head. The novel is my attempt to let them talk.

The novel spans several centuries and cultures. What kind of research did you do to ensure historical authenticity?

I built the world before I wrote the story. The engineer in me constructed the mythos first–the deep scaffolding of history, acoustics, and myth–and then wrote the novel that lives on top of it. I spent the better part of a year doing deep dives into archaeoacoustics and sites like the Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum and the Great Pyramid, less as research than as personal fascination, but all of it informed the world. The hard part was tension: the builder in me loved the scaffolding, but my writing gravitates toward the interior. The novel balances the interiority of a family drama against a cosmic storyline–and honestly, the full scaffolding is better suited to the screen.

Speaking of, you've also completed a treatment for a tv series based on *The Weight of a Dog*. What was that process like?

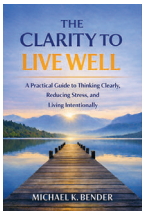
I loved the process, and I came to it with zero exposure to how anything is filmed. The novel presents a specific challenge: a dog who is not quite a dog–intelligent, ancient in his way of seeing, but not verbal. The moment Baloo speaks, the character is destroyed; depth becomes caricature. The breakthrough came from studying Steven Spielberg. E.T. barely speaks, yet he anchors the entire film. I watched it repeatedly and began to understand how the camera loves eyes growing wide, how music signals wonder, how presence can carry a scene without a word. Baloo communicates the way E.T. does–by being.

What is the one thing you most want to tell readers, booksellers, publishers, or agents about you or your book?

You can't fix grief, sorrow, or guilt. You carry it. You lighten it only by sharing it–and the person you share it with carries it with you. That's what Baloo does: he doesn't heal anything, he just puts his weight down and stays. That's the book's real proposition, a grief manual disguised as a thriller.

For more, visit booklife.com/lucio

The Clarity to Live Well: A Practical Guide to Thinking Clearly, Reducing Stress, and Living Intentionally



Michael Bender. Michael Bender. $15.95 paper (214p), ASIN B0H6K3JW7T; $6.95 e-book, ASIN B0H6JT7G8N
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

An insightful guide to clear thinking and intentional living, helping readers reduce stress, sharpen focus, and find calm in a noisy world.

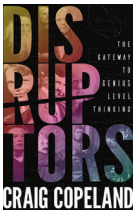
Cultures Colliding: Searching for a Way Out



Kao Saeteurn. Parker Publishers. $14.99 paper (264p), ISBN 979-8-9953169-4-7; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9960061-1-3
Searchingforawayout.com, Amazon, IngramSpark

The challenges faced by refugees in urban America, the entanglement of gang culture with economic hardship and cultural identity, and the transformative power of compassion and hope.

Disruptors



Craig Copeland. Evolve Life Systems. $17.97 paper (286p), ISBN 979-8-9854585-0-3; $18.08 audio, ASIN B0FDHH52SD
Amazon, Audible, Barnes & Noble

Explores the differences between rational and intuitive thinking, and how diverse cognitive styles shape creativity, innovation, and problem-solving.

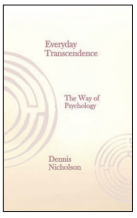
The Empty Envelope: Family Secrets and a Grandfather's Legacy



Rhona S. Weinstein and Harvey M. Weinstein. Advanced Publishing. $38.95 (300p), ISBN 978-1-63132-277-8; $24.95 paper, ISBN 978-1-63132-277-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Blackwells, Target, Walmart

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

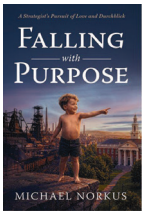
Everyday Transcendence: The Way of Psychology



Dennis Nicholson. UmBla. $11.99 paper (208p), ISBN 979-8-233-59689-6; $4.01 e-book, ISBN 979-8-235-65351-1
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble

Argues that the simple application of logic to some of the more obvious facets of human psychology offers the best path to enlightenment, transcendence, and realizng our true nature.

Falling with Purpose: A Strategist's Pursuit of Love and Durchblick



Michael Norkus. AM Publishing. $16.95 paper (262p), ISBN 979-8-9958915-5-0; $7.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9958915-1-2
Amazon, IngramSpark

How to see life clearly? A journey from postwar Germany to Harvard and lasting love, the clarity that lights a path through business, can also illuminate the terrain of the heart.

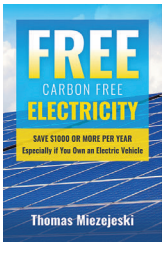
Forward Thinking for Future Entrepreneurs: Keys to Success in Owning a Business from People Who Have Actually Done It



Jennifer Layman. Global Book Publishing. $19.95 paper (182p), ISBN 978-1-964644-63-9; $4.99 e-book, ASIN B0G5XKDCJJ
Amazon, IngramSpark

Insights from people who have been where you are right now and have gone on to become successful business owners.

Free Carbon Free Electricity: Save $1000 or More Per Year Especially If You Own an Electric Vehicle



Thomas Miezejeski. Brookside Books. $14.99 paper (112p), ISBN 979-8-2594-0015-3; $6.99 e-book, B0GZ5F52Q3
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

Learn why solar is the best and is fast becoming the dominant and cheapest source of electricity worldwide, which will lead to changes in generation and distribution infrastructure.

Jailbirds in Flight: Everything You've Wanted to Know About Enlightenment in Prison but Were Afraid to Ask



Nicole Daedone. Soulmaker Press. $17.51 paper (340p), ISBN 978-1-961064-43-0; $8.99 e-book, ASIN B0G1KNVH6P
Amazon

Jailbirds in Flight is a love letter to human soul, the author's first-person journey into discovering beauty and freedom in the harshest conditions.

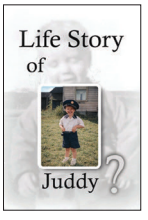
Leaving the Faith of Our Fathers



Lois Requist. Lois Requist. $16.95 paper (192p), ISBN 979-8-9958786-0-5; $6.95 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9958786-1-2
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

Why I left the church—the Nazarene and the Christian Nationalism groups—where I was raised. How that impacted my life and relationships with my family. My spirituality.

Life Story of Juddy?



Judson Woodward. Page Solutions. $15.99 paper (252p), ISBN 979-8-89633-162-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

Raised by another family, a man's journey from hardship to success takes a dramatic turn when DNA reveals hidden family secrets and his true identity.

Love at First Fall: A Stuntman's Journey



Aaron Crippen. CAA Publishing. $18.95 paper (264p), ISBN 979-8-9946434-0-2; $19.95 audio, ISBN 979-8-9946434-2-6
Amazon, Audible, IngramSpark, Spotify

Every scar tells a story. This memoir explores resilience, family, sacrifice, and the unexpected truth that sometimes the only way to rise is to fall.

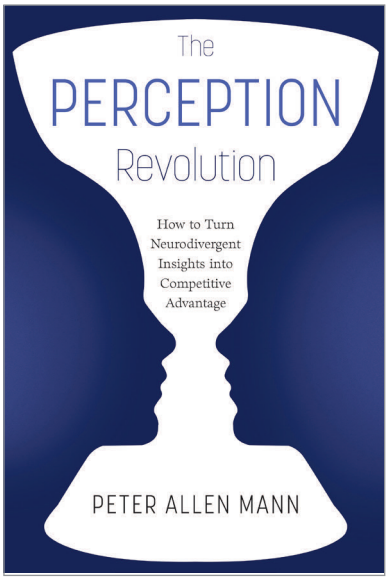
Making Safety Happen: The Roadmap to a Safe, Productive and Profitable Business

Brian Fielkow. MCP Books. $24.95 (306p),

BookLife Talks with Peter Mann

CEO Mann's debut tackles a growing problem in the employee section. Employers are losing perceptive workers due to toxic environments and manager miscommunication. We spoke to Mann about his personal workplace experience, AI's influence on the workforce, and his upcoming sequel.





Have you always been a writer or did the message of *The Perception Revolution* push you to pick up a pen?

I'm an operator and while I enjoy writing, I wouldn't say I've always been a writer. I was diagnosed autistic at 55 and had four years to process my life experiences through a new lens. I also met with dozens of neurodivergent adults to understand their experiences. Together, this was the push to write the book. Mapping the patterns from a silent kid to the leader I became, and hearing from talented people shut out of contributing their gifts, the tears came. So no, I didn't set out to be an author. The material demanded to be felt, and writing turned out to be the best instrument precise enough to do it.

Both employees and managers can get something from this book. Was that always the intention or did the focus shift during the writing process?

It was intentional. What's good for perceptive employees is good for innovation, what's good for innovation is good for retention, and what's good for retention is good for profit. That said, the center of gravity did move as I wrote. I started from the targeted employee; the perceptive person being managed out. The manager's case sharpened once I put numbers to it: toxic culture predicts turnover 10.4 times more strongly than pay. So, the book runs both tracks on purpose–a ninety-day playbook for the individual, an ROI-and-retention guide for the leader, because they're the same problem seen from two perspectives.

As someone who is neurodivergent, can you talk a little about your career and how you've handled managers who could have used the guidance in *The Perception Revolution*?

My career spans the military, a marketing executive at two Fortune 100 companies and founder of two successful entrepreneurial companies. I did this unaware I was autistic. I absorbed, masked, ruminated and eventually left when the environment became too toxic.

I've watched a naval officer become dysregulated and scream mid-crisis until the captain relieved him. I've saw a Fortune 100 executive drain the light out of an outstanding senior manager which then led to a domino of other people leaving. The perceptive people left first, the toxic ones got promoted. Corporate Darwinism, but backward. What I didn't have then was language for why I could sense problems before they happened, could see patterns across domains nor permission to treat my abilities as an asset instead of a deficit. The book is the guidance I wish those managers and my younger self had been handed.

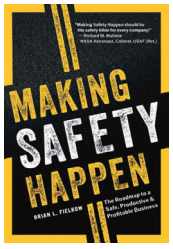
Why or how do you think this book is particularly relevant now?

Two forces are colliding. First, AI. The more machines process, the more valuable the thing they can't do becomes–sensing that a smile doesn't reach the eyes, that resignation is masquerading as acceptance, that a market need is emerging before customers can name it. AI does historical pattern-matching. Perceptive humans catch the pattern that hasn't happened yet. That's not a soft skill anymore; it's the scarce one.

Second, the talent math finally hurts. Organizations are hemorrhaging their most innovative minds and calling it "seeking new opportunities" on the exit form. In a tight market, you can't afford to keep promoting the people who destroy value and losing the ones who create it.

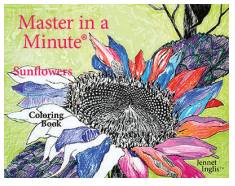
Put those together and human perception stops being a liability to manage and becomes the competitive advantage to protect.

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Safety isn't a priority, it's a core value. Brian Fielkow shows how building true safety culture drives leadership, performance, and competitive advantage.

Master in a Minute Sunflowers



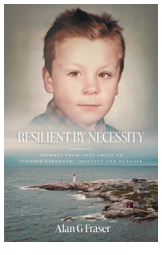
Jennet Inglis. Dragon Hill Publishers. $29.95 (104p), ISBN 978-0-9884470-4-2
Amazon, Baker and Taylor, IngramSpark
Original masterclass ink drawings for coloring. All ages.

My Life in Words and Pictures



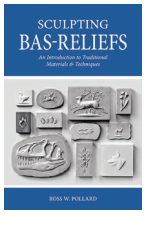
Gösta W. Iwasiuk. Cutting Edge Publishing. $14.99 (116p), ISBN 979-8-1973-9919-9; $14.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-1973-9919-9
Cuttingedgepublishing.com
My surgeon's career spans 50 years of complex problems, accidents. My military career was during Vietnam, I had challenging experiences, such as triumphing in a court-martial.

Resilient by Necessity: A Memoir of a Journey from Lost Child to Finding Strength, Identity and Purpose



Alan G. Fraser. Friesen Press. $47.99 (138p), ISBN 978-1-0383-6389-3; $27.99 paper, ISBN 978-1-0383-6388-6
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, FriesenPress, Indigo
This is my journey, a story of resilience, survival, and finding light in moments that felt impossibly dark.

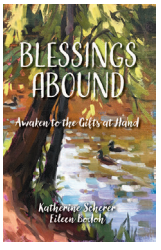
Sculpting Bas-Reliefs: An Introduction to Traditional Materials and Techniques



Ross Pollard. Canvas & Clay. $7.99 paper (36p), ISBN 979-8-218-73248-6
eBay
This 36-page booklet provides a concise introduction to traditional modeling, molding, and casting techniques. Staple paperback with black-and-white photos.

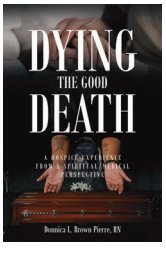
Religion/Spirituality

Blessings Abound: Awaken to the Gifts at Hand



Katherine Scherer and Eileen Bodoh. K & E Innovations. $8.99 paper (56p), ISBN 978-0-9748550-1-1; $2.99 e-book, BOFBSTLR27
Amazon, Barnes & Noble
A book that explores gratitude, personal growth, and the recognition of blessings in everyday life.

Dying the Good Death: A Hospice Experience From a Spiritual-Medical Perspective



Donnica Pierre. Christian Faith Publishing. $14.95 paper (176p), ASIN B0BHHFKWDP
A heartfelt, faith-based guide to end-of-life planning, hospice care, and legacy preparation, blending personal experiences, biblical wisdom, and practical advice for families.

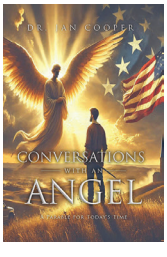
Children's/YA

The Answer Is 17



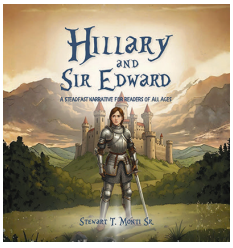
Julia Ash. Julia Ash. $14.99 paper (300p), ISBN 979-8-9960174-4-7; $5.99 e-book, ASIN B0H6QQRQ8D
Amazon
In the fight against aliens, survival is in the numbers. Will Addie make the right calculations to save humankind? If only she and her dog could reach the safe zone.

Conversations with an Angel



Jan Cooper. Lettra Press. $9.99 paper (126p), ISBN 978-1-64552-289-8
Amazon
When God sends an angel to mentor a young man, he discovers faith, purpose, and the extraordinary destiny awaiting him.

Hillary and Sir Edward



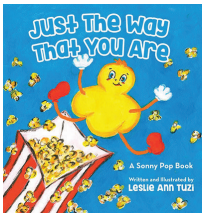
Stewart T. Monti Sr. Explora Books. $13.99 paper (44p), ISBN 978-1-83430-150-1
Amazon
In 12th-century England, 13-year-old Hillary excels at swordplay, chess, and horsemanship. When a knight seeks a page, she dares to defy tradition.

Home of the Brave: A Fina Mendoza Mystery



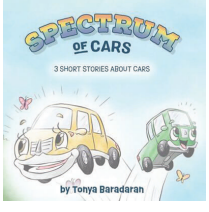
Kitty Felde. Chesapeake Press. $19.99 (224p), ISBN 979-8-9992864-1-3; $5.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9992864-2-0
Amazon, Bookshop.org, Follett, IPG, IngramSpark, Mackin, Perma-Bound, Target
Break-ins, vandalism, fires. Neighbors blame a homeless man they call the Bear. Everyone but Fina. Solving this mystery will take bravery she didn't know she had.

Just the Way That You Are: A Sonny Pop Book



Leslie Ann Tuzi. Gatekeeper Press. $19.99 (28p), ISBN 978-1-6629-6271-4; $10.99 paper, ISBN 978-1-6629-6272-1
Amazon, Barnes & Noble
Sonny Pop is the silliest little piece of popcorn who bursts through life creating out-of-this-world fun. He is buttery with just enough saltiness to spice things up in his day.

Spectrum of Cars: 3 Short Stories About Cars



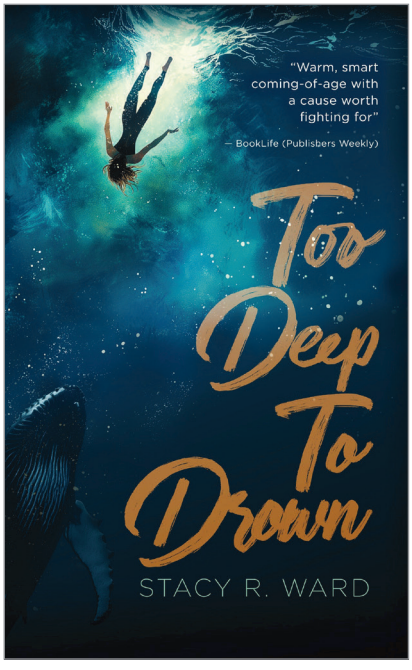
Tonya Baradaran. Fun Speech Journey. $24.99 (32p), ISBN 979-8-8229-3414-6; $18.49 paper, ISBN 979-8-8229-3415-3
Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark, Target, Walmart
Bring the speech pathology home with this children's picture book centered around a theme of cars that supports communication, speech, and developmental growth in neurodivergent kids.

Q&A SPONSORED

BookLife Talks with Stacy Ward

Ward's YA novel follows Meg, an emancipated teenager trying to escape her past, who discovers that she'll have to face it in order to heal and move forward. Mix in themes of ocean conservation and you have a debut that BookLife Reviews called a "warm, smart coming-of-age novel with a cause worth fighting for."





What inspired you to tell Meg's story?
Meg's story hit me from multiple directions. Initially, my stories generally present themselves to me in the form of a setting, which, in the case of *Too Deep to Drown*, is a research vessel at sea. After that, a character who needs that setting to heal something inside them takes shape. In Meg's case, she believes the ocean is a flawless place, an escape from her messy past. She finds out otherwise. For me, the story comes from a deep place of frustration at not being able to fix systemic ills. Of feeling overwhelmed as one small person in a world of great need. As a veterinarian, I'm a trained 'fixer.' There is so much I can't fix. What do you do with a feeling like that? Write a book!

In addition to prose, the book includes poetry, transcripts, and other elements in order to tell Meg's story. Did you always plan to include these nontraditional formats?
On the writing spectrum from pantser to plotter, I lean heavily panster, telling myself the story as I go. I cause myself a lot of frustration this way (I'm trying to be a better plotter). The very first thing I wrote for this book was the opening poem from the whale's point of view. It just kind of happened. I never considered those excerpts poetry, but that is how they have been described. The whale's POV became the ocean's voice, so to speak. In terms of the transcripts: As a reader, I am not someone who enjoys a ton of backstory. For me, especially if a book is backstory heavy, it takes me out of the current storyline I'm invested in. In Meg's case, her backstory is super important to her character arc. I think (I hope) the transcripts are a succinct, effective way to show what drove Meg into her story and what wounds she needs to confront.

Ocean conservation efforts are a big part of the story. What sparked your interest in the ocean?
I've always been fascinated by the ocean. I still have every newspaper article about whales and dolphins I collected as a child. I wrote away to Greenpeace and Save the Whales as a preteen for all their brochures and stickers. Serious nerd alert! As a veterinarian, I have served as a medical care provider for stranded marine mammals and seen the evidence of boat strikes, net entanglement, and plastic ingestion up close.

Who is your ideal reader and why?
Too Deep to Drown is a contemporary YA fiction novel. I am a mother of three young adult children, and I worry about the world my kids are inheriting, yet I want them to feel empowered. Fueled by hope. My book is for them. My book is for anyone it will touch emotionally. So far, most of my readers have been adults. The best compliment I have gotten was from a Goodreads reviewer, who said she googled the Great Pacific Garbage Patch to see how she could donate to help because she had never heard of it before. *Too Deep to Drown* is for her.

Can readers expect another book from you soon?
I hope so. I think so! I have other completed manuscripts. A rough plot and chapters for a new story. Writing is one of the hardest things I've ever done, and I survived respiratory physiology. The journey to publishing this book was rocky with many pitfalls along the way. But I find my brain plotting and writing my next book even when I am unsure what the future holds, so a new manuscript is growing inside me. Writing it feels inevitable.

For more, visit booklife.com/ward

booklife REVIEWS

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

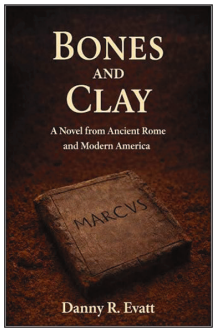
FICTION

EDITOR'S PICK

Bones and Clay: A Novel from Ancient Rome and Modern America

Danny R. Evatt

243p, trade paper, $12.99, ISBN 979-8-278-46287-3



Quiet, morally complex exploration of enduring catastrophic loss.

Great for fans of Robert Harris's *Pompeii*, Anthony Doerr's *Cloud Cuckoo Land*.

Evatt (*The Madam of Church Street*) pairs a contemporary archaeological excavation in Italy with the first-person testimony of a Roman baker living through the Crisis of the Third Century in this study on humanity's search for security and purpose when the world is falling apart. The novel follows Elias Harrington, a 72-year-old American archaeologist whose final, self-funded dig uncovers the remains of a provincial bakery. Interwoven with Elias's present-day narrative is the voice of Marcus, the baker who once worked that oven, recording grain prices, unpaid debts, and the slow erosion of trust as Roman currency collapses and violence creeps into daily life.

At the center of the novel is not catastrophe itself, but how ordinary people endure it. Marcus is neither hero nor rebel; he raises prices reluctantly, hides money to protect his household, and compromises his ideals in small, necessary ways. Elias, facing his own institutional abandonment, mirrors these choices centuries later, navigating bureaucratic corruption to preserve the dig and its fragile truths. Evatt's central claim that morality under collapse becomes situational rather than absolute is handled with restraint and sympathy. Survival is framed as improvisational, shaped by love, grief, and the need to protect what remains. The struggles of those in power remain distant, while the losses of ordinary people echo with quiet familiarity across eras.

What is most notable is Evatt's structural discipline. Everyday objects—the clothes, the coins, the bones—link past and present, and insights are built through evidence rather than sentiment. The story stays rooted in lived experience rather than theory, showing how catastrophic collapse can be felt in everyday places and experiences, like kitchens, markets, and private moments of reckoning.

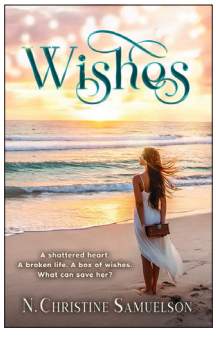
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

Wishes

N. Christine Samuelson | BookBaby

341p, e-book, $8.99, ISBN 979-8-3178-3418-0



Entertaining novel of romance, renewal, and healing from past trauma.

Great for fans of Hannah Bird's *The End and Then*, Terah Shelton Harris's *One Summer in Savannah*.

Samuelson's latest (following *Heart Storms*) is, first and foremost, a story of healing. When 28-year-old paralegal Callie Ward is abandoned at the altar by her fiancé, it breaks her, bringing back to the surface a lifetime of repressed trauma—from caring for her dying mother when she was just 12 years old to picking up the pieces for her father afterwards to the painful deaths of her first husband and their unborn baby. Propelled by her deceased grandfather's wishes, Callie sets out on a cross-country journey of recovery, a quest that is quickly interrupted by one distraction after another—or, rather, one man after another, from her friend Andrew to war veteran Jamie to the divorced Tyler. Are any of them the answer she's looking for?

As Callie undertakes the hard work of healing, she also embarks on a whirlwind romantic odyssey, fending off a line of suitors who are each dealing with their own oppressive issues. But, as the narrative progresses, readers can feel Callie overcoming her hostility to the outside world and carefully transforming into a more open, trusting person. That reshaping parallels the journeys of the men surrounding her, each one struggling to repair their broken pieces as well. "I'm still a work in progress, probably always will be," Jamie confides in Callie—a sentiment that feels relatable and insightful to her own recovery.

At times, the book's heavy focus on therapy-speak can feel forced, with characters routinely reminding each other they need to "resolve many issues," not wanting to "bring more harm and hurt into the world," and understanding when it's necessary to "withdraw from me for now." Still, that's all part and parcel of the healing process, and Callie's ultimate realization—that "the traumatic situations you've sustained won't magically dissolve"—also comes with a deepening awareness that what truly matters in life is worth the effort.

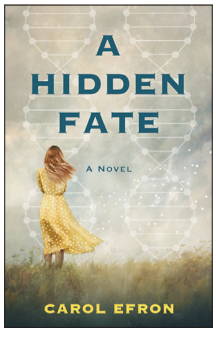
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

A Hidden Fate: A Novel

Carol Efron

366p, trade paper, $17.99, ISBN 979-8-896-36190-9



Searching story of genetics, motherhood, and courage for the future.

Great for fans of Lisa Genova's *Inside the O'Briens*, Abraham Verghese's *The Covenant of Water*.

Efron's thoughtful, emotionally charged novel explores genetic inheritance, family secrets, and the impossible moral questions that arise when the future is only partly known. In 1986, newly married Julia Sorenson leaves Manhattan for Baltimore, where her husband, Matt, will study plasma physics while she works as a graduate student in history at Johns Hopkins. The move is already fraught with simmering tension: Baltimore is the city where Julia's mother deteriorated from what Julia has always been told was multiple sclerosis-related psychosis. Then a postcard arrives from Anne Compton, a stranger claiming to be Julia's cousin, upending Julia's understanding of her family. Anne's arrival exposes a devastating truth: Julia's mother's illness was likely Huntington's disease, and Julia may have inherited the same risk.

Efron handles this premise with admirable seriousness, grounding the story in the era's emerging genetic-testing landscape and in Julia's deeply personal questions about marriage, motherhood, autonomy, and fear. The novel is especially strong when dramatizing the tension between Julia's desire to become a mother and Matt's terror of passing suffering on to a child. Julia's relationships give the book true emotional force, revealing how illness affects not just the person at risk but everyone who loves them. Efron also introduces Julia's academic fascination with Dorothea Dix and the history of mental health treatment, giving the novel a resonant intellectual frame.

At times, dialogue leans toward the expository, and the pacing can feel deliberate as characters revisit ethical dilemmas from multiple angles. Still, readers drawn to medically informed family dramas will appreciate the care, empathy, and moral complexity here. Efron resists easy answers, instead portraying uncertainty as something Julia must learn to live inside. This moving novel will appeal to fans of intimate, issue-driven fiction about women's choices, inherited trauma, and the hidden costs of love.

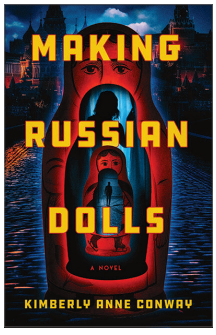
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **B** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

Making Russian Dolls

Kimberly Anne Conway | IngramSpark

280p, trade paper, $15, ISBN 979-8-994-95602-1



Soviet spy fiction with unusual heart and emotional depth.

Great for fans of Anika Scott's *The Soviet Sisters*, Suzanne Parry's *The Communist's Secret*.

Set against the turbulent decades following the Russian Revolution, Conway's historical novel follows Maya, a gifted recruiter for the Soviet government, and Foreign Intelligence official Dmitry, as they help build an espionage network to infiltrate the United States. Athletes, performers, orphans, and even expectant mothers become pieces in this bid for Soviet influence, but, for all its covert operations and political intrigue, the novel remains close to the personal lives of those carrying out these missions. Maya and Dmitry draw into their orbit a host of memorable characters whose lives become inseparable from the Soviet project. Among them are Raisa, an observant and ambitious orphan who later becomes their adoptive daughter; Nikolay, a talented sportsman; and Babushka, Nikolay's grandmother, whose directness would make even a hardened spy think twice.

What sets *Making Russian Dolls* apart is its surprising tenderness. Stories about Soviet intelligence often lean towards cold calculation, but Conway approaches her characters with unusual empathy, refusing to reduce them to villains or ideologues. Instead, they emerge as products of unstable governments, unending war, and unfavorable circumstances. Maya and Dmitry's relationship provides a softness in a world otherwise defined by secrecy and manipulation. At times, the novel's detours to new characters interrupt the momentum, but it always finds its way back to the unlikely family that Maya and Dmitry have built around themselves.

More than a spy novel, *Making Russian Dolls* offers a nuanced Soviet perspective on the 20th century that is rarely explored in English-language fiction. Espionage is Conway's entry point, but what she's really interested in is the personal cost of nation-building. The book highlights what ordinary people have to give up when patriotism demands extraordinary sacrifices, asking readers to understand the human beings who served the Soviet state. In doing so, Conway exposes the complicated price of believing the future of a nation matters more than your own.

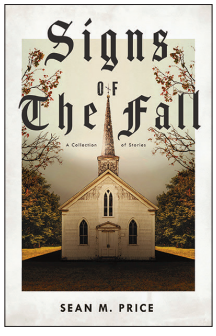
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

FICTION

Signs of The Fall: A Collection of Stories

Sean M. Price | Koehler Books

338p, trade paper, $20.95, ISBN 979-8-89747-300-7



Immersive portrait of an eerie town and its people.

Great for fans of Josh Malerman's *Goblin*, Gail Galotta's *Voices Carry Here*.

Price's mosaic collection consists of 10 interconnected stories set in and around Salem, Virginia, following a diverse case whose lives overlap through a mix of first-person, second-person, and experimental narrative styles. The result is a richly interconnected tapestry brimming with supernatural secrets. The collection is bookended by "Signs"—where foster child Hogarth Hughes, overworked and under loved, goes on an unexpected date that ends in disappointment before a mysterious encounter gives him a renewed sense of hope—and "The Fall," with youth pastor Peter Merritt watching his engagement, ministry ambitions, and sense of certainty collapse after being betrayed by his fiancée.

Peter often functions as the collection's connective tissue. He reappears as a minor but important presence in the third story, "Renegade," which follows Caleb, a cynical 28-year-old who hates trick or treating so much that he skips town on Halloween and encounters a mysterious red-haired woman performing a ritual in Foxhill Forest. That mystifying experience forces him to confront his own assumptions and recommit himself to his long-time girlfriend, Nadia. Elsewhere, readers see Peter in his younger years, as a teenager embarking on a boundary-blurring relationship with his younger cousin.

Price channels Salem as the collection's nerve center, bringing together characters whose lives intersect through places such as Crucible Church, Foxhill Forest, and Water's Church, while also serving as a home for the otherworldly. Most of the stories follow a redemptive arc: in "Players," Jade chooses a new direction in life; Ellen ("Predator") abandons suicide and reconciles with Jake; "Scripts" finds Rebba receiving a chance to start over; and Palmer, from "Taken," rebuilds his life and finds love. Across the collection, characters are unified as they confront personal failures, temptations, childhood trauma, and moral crises before emerging transformed. Price is an inventive writer who combines realism, supernatural fiction, and narrative experimentation to create a vivid portrait of a town and its people.

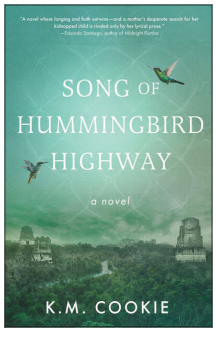
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

Song of Hummingbird Highway

K.M. Cookie | Koehler Books

521p, e-book, $24.95, ISBN 979-8-888-24992-5



Profound spiritual awakening and self-discovery emerge from adversity.

Great for fans of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dream Count*, Adrienne Young's *The Unmaking of June Farrow*.

Cookie fuses romance, survival thriller, and spiritual guide in this eclectic debut, as medical equipment saleswoman Terri—living in 1990 Laurel Canyon, California—ends her two-year relationship with Mark and, on impulse, walks into a reggae bar in Santa Monica. There, she meets Reynold, a guitarist from Belize with visions of making "the funkiest true music, beautiful and functional, ruminating, a storm threatening the silent sea." Love follows soon after, sweeping Terri into a journey of self-discovery and belonging that converges on a Maya ritual cave where a kidnapped child and decades of broken promises must be reckoned with.

Cookie has a strong feel for place and character detail, building the novel's setting from the ground up: Belize unfurls through cerasee tea brewed from dried herbs, cenote water pumped slowly into house tanks, howler monkeys screeching at dawn, and the whispers of ancient spiritual practices with Garifuna and Maya roots. The early courtship between Terri and Reynold crackles with the electricity of two people genuinely surprising each other, while their painful unraveling drifts across the pages in splashes of grief and heartache, giving way to a shocking climax that pits Terri's fierce love for their son, Jordan, against a scene of cosmic bargaining.

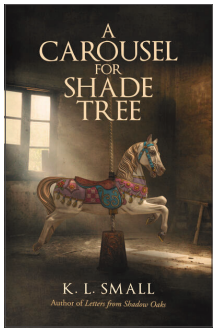
Though Terri eventually realizes that "she spent her life seeking approval from others because she had no faith in herself," her awakening comes at immense cost. The novel's spiritual framework serves as the backbone for those epiphanies, and Cookie draws on Maya cosmology, Garifuna traditions, Christian prayer, and music as a driving force behind it all. Some dialect choices distract, such as Cookie's portrayal of "Belizean Kriol" as this: "Weh mek yuh forlorn, mi princess" ; "Mi noh kidding. Mi know mi wa to wed you" ; and, "This place is gud fu notin'." Still, those drawn to spiritual fiction with vivid travel writing and a heroine who discovers herself through heartrending crisis will be pleased.

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

FICTION

A Carousel For Shade Tree

K. L. Small | Carousel Acres Publishing
412p, trade paper, $18.99, ISBN 979-8-990-08637-1



Small town tale of teamwork, perseverance, and healing.

Great for fans of Debbie Macomber; Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows's *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society.*

In this sweet, uplifting novel, Small (*Letters from Shadow Oak*) describes a declining New England town and five friends determined to save it. The participants of Shade Tree's Monday afternoon grief group, affectionately known as the Maggies, mourn the passing of loved ones, a business failure, and the loss of a home. When Gus Stewart, a former lineman, decides to reassemble a historic carousel to honor his beloved deceased wife, he enlists the others' help. Their goal: preserve Shade Tree's past while attracting visitors to invigorate the failing local economy. But lack of funds and myriad logistical obstacles threaten their dream. Can their stubborn hope and a little luck see them through?

Small, a member of the National Carousel Association, enriches the narrative with fascinating info–like characters who oversee horse sculpture rehab and carousel installation–that never sacrifices the pace. Details about the inner workings of a small town–from town council meeting conflicts to code compliance challenges to the tendency to resist change–feel realistic, balancing the gentle emotional arc of each character, and the losses (and recoveries) that the cast experience feel familiar and reassuring. "It's okay for us to keep living. It's okay to keep creating," Grace, a high-school drama teacher, explains to her students as they prepare to perform the musical Carousel.

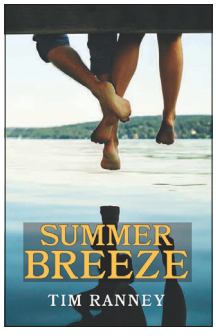
Accordingly, the cast is heartwarming and entertaining. Each member contributes to the project in their unique way: real estate agent Buck procures acreage for the carousel and manages difficult town dissenters; Marie, a master gardener, designs a landscape sure to engage families; and Grace, who at first believes she doesn't need to attend, becomes one of the project's most devoted fundraisers. Readers will find solace in the message of perseverance and teamwork, now more than ever. *A Carousel for Shade Tree* exemplifies community healing while safeguarding a small town's legacy.

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

FICTION

Summer Breeze

Tim Ranney | Palmetto
257p, hardcover, $25, ISBN 979-8-318-80868-5



Touching summer love story returns readers to a simpler time.

Great for fans of Jessica Anya Blau's *Mary Jane*, Cynthia St. Aubin's *The Summer of Perfect Mistakes.*

Ranney's sequel to *Summer's End* is another poignant slice-of-life set in the heart of 1970s America. Grant is now ending his sophomore year of high school, and he and his best friend, David, have big plans: both are hoping for grocery clerk jobs at the local A&P. Between that and Grant's newspaper route–which he completes six days a week, to the tunes of Joe Cocker and The Poppy Family on his bicycle's transistor radio–he's hoping for a grand summer. Unfortunately, his plans are forestalled when he's sent to work on his uncle's Vermont dairy farm. As he copes with leaving his old life behind, Grant's drawn toward young country girl Nellie Sullivan, launching him into a whirlwind summer romance.

Ranney's writing is humorous and lighthearted, with snappy dialogue that buoys the story. Both Grant and David feel like typical teenagers on myriad middle-American quests, and Ranney perfectly captures the spirit of small-town life. On his Uncle John's farm, the bookish Grant–immediately out of his element–teams up with his cousin, Bobby, finding entertainment in outdoor escapades in between trips to IGA for Fresca and tending to the farm's livestock. Adolescent pangs are portrayed with real heart, and Grant's budding relationship with Nellie feels tender as he teeters between both teenage hesitation and curiosity. Ranney lets the scenes breathe with a natural rhythm: Nellie and Grant's flirting is gentle, and the moments where they explore their mutual attraction are handled sensitively, with lush detail.

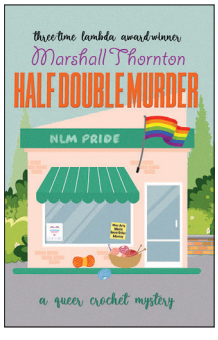
The novel's central romance blossoms alongside stark realities of rural life: the death of Uncle John's beloved horse Beckett is heartbreaking, as are the moments portraying John's failing health. Heartache and bliss come in equal measure as summer winds to an end, but Ranney chronicles Grant's adolescent transition with a gentle hand, resulting in a touching vignette of the challenges and charms of America in the '70s.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER
EDITOR'S PICK

Half Double Murder

Marshall Thornton | Kenmore Books
266p, e-book, $6.99, ISBN 978-1-965306-14-7



Crafty, queer mystery unites opposites and hooks readers.

Great for fans of Alan Cumming's *Tommy's Tale*, Kate Jacobs's *The Friday Night Knitting Club.*

Thornton returns to the setting of his Wyandot County whodunits for a standalone "queer crochet mystery" that blends insightful humor with small town corruption, giving voice to two wounded, resourceful outcasts. Runaway teen Brown is living in her Jeep, and gay senior citizen Chester (known as Chess) is adrift after a painful breakup. They meet at a convivial fiber arts group in the Northern Lower Michigan Pride Center. (Michigan once had a real Wyandot County, but it's since been absorbed into present-day Cheboygan County.) Brown and Chess each have specific goals for the group: Brown wants to improve her rudimentary crocheting skills, and Chess is trying to focus on a sweater instead of the separation from his long-term partner.

It's autumn 2016, and the presidential election is a hot topic in this conservative community, but the contentious culture war has already begun. The owner of a nearby hair salon posted a transphobic comment on Facebook, and national media has picked up the story. When she's found murdered, the prime suspect is NLMP's beleaguered executive director. Pursuing crochet projects suddenly becomes less important than investigating a crime that's scapegoating the most vulnerable citizens of Masons Bay. Brown and Chess's partnership has a special rhythm to it, and these mostly fearless amateur sleuths are determined to find the real culprit–even when their investigation reaches beyond the murder, leaving them covered in yarn and emotional barf.

Thornton (author of the Wyandot County Mysteries) underpins his cozy fiction with poignant reality, expertly alternating the first-person narration between the sharply observant Brown, who seeks safety by making herself invisible, and an overdramatic, big-hearted Chess, who realizes the value of going back to frog the mistakes of his quietly eventful life. By bringing this tough and tender duo together to seek justice, Thornton transforms *Half Double Murder* into a thoughtful, twisty mystery that's built from hard-won connections.

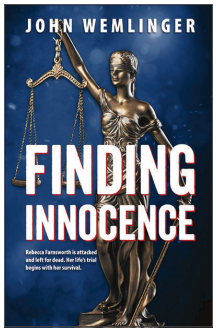
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations:– Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Finding Innocence

John Wemlinger | Mission Point Press

291p, e-book, $5.99, ISBN 978-1-968-76134-9



Brisk thriller pushes sexual assault justice reform within the military.

Great for fans of KJ Sutherland's *Uniform Scandal*, Barbara Longley's *A Change of Heart*.

Wemlinger (*The Road to Empire*) delivers a brisk military thriller following Army Sergeant Rebecca Farnsworth after a brutal sexual assault during a routine security inspection leaves her transformed from victim into accused. Injected with fentanyl by her attacker and left for dead, neither Rebecca's medical nor military teams believe she was raped, resulting in court-martial proceedings and the devastation of surviving in a system more concerned with preserving hierarchy than pursuing justice. The novel expands into a broader examination of institutional failure and systemic reform, tracing Rebecca's journey from survivor to advocate, as she helps reshape military justice procedures on sexual assault.

Wemlinger's military background lends authenticity to the legal procedures, chain-of-command dynamics, and bureaucratic tensions that drive much of the narrative. The novel moves rapidly between investigations, courtroom confrontations, political reform, and personal milestones, but its treatment of trauma often lacks the emotional depth readers may expect. Rebecca is raped, becomes pregnant, and undergoes systemic betrayal alongside years of fallout, yet the narrative rarely lingers within those experiences, choosing rapid pacing and a pileup of life-altering events over a deeper exploration. That choice keeps the novel suspenseful, if emotionally abrupt.

Still, Wemlinger's sincerity and moral conviction remain evident. The concluding sections, in which Rebecca returns to school to pursue a law degree, see her seeking military justice reform and gaining national recognition for her work. Her attacker—who brutalizes and even murders other women—is eventually identified and brought to justice, though not exactly as Rebecca hopes for. That ending provides a measure of emotional closure, transforming the story into a tribute to survivors and the many women who have fought to make military institutions more accountable. Though the emotional journey may feel compressed, readers are ultimately left rooting for Rebecca and the larger pursuit of justice her story represents.

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

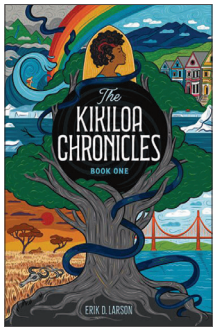
SF/FANTASY/HORROR

EDITOR'S PICK

The Kikiloa Chronicles: Book One

Erik D. Larson | Kikiloa Press

397p, e-book, $2.99, ISBN 979-8-994-98287-7



Moving, surprising time travel story of the fight against entropy.

Great for fans of Paul Di Filippo's *Vangie's Ghosts*, Micaiah Johnson's *The Space Between Worlds*.

This assured and surprising sci-fi debut, the kickoff entry to The Kikiloa Chronicles, bursts with memorable invention as it introduces a trillion year-old time surfer, Kikiloa, who believes she has found the key to overcoming the "relentless devouring of everything meaningful": 14-year-old Hazel, from present-day San Francisco. Kikiloa can travel back and forth in time, and see into the lives of her innumerable parallel selves. But not even a time surfer's powers can contest with entropy—a concept she explains through the example of vintage clothes stores—and the inevitable end of time. When she discovers that Hazel's choices have unnaturally expansive ripple effects, Kikiloa is certain she is the key, though not sure how. For the first time in (literal) ages, Kikiloa is flying blind, Hazel in tow, and must learn to accept uncertainty if she wants to make lasting change.

With sharp prose, warm characterization, and the literary chops to make the heady ideas resonate at a human level, Larson spins a deep, winding epic about hope, empathy, and living in the moment. Kikiloa has the full scale of time at her disposal. She uses it for impossible thrill-seeking and shrewd problem-solving, whether it's surfing the waters of an ice age on a glacier or pacifying a vengeful sniper by tracing their life back to its roots. She confronts philosophical ideas with rich detail for readers to chew on: the origins of humanity, the essence of life, the ramifications of choice.

The storytelling demands and rewards patient attention, but lovers of humane SF will find much to relish. At heart, this is a story of loneliness. Kikiloa has incredible, almost unfathomable power that makes her a perpetual outcast. She can see someone at any point in time and know them better than they know themselves, but they can never understand the world as she does. As she passes through life, from birth to apprenticeship, readers will bond with this tormented soul who is far more human than she appears.

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

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

I Knew Her Once: A Twisted Tale of Gothic Suspense and Romance

R. M. Carpus

326p, trade paper, $17.99, ISBN 979-8-9865679-8-3



Rich gothic romance, with a compelling sense of place.

Great for fans of H.D. Carlton's *Haunting Adeline*, Eve Silver's *Darkest at Dusk*.

In Carpus's preternatural gothic romance, novelist Rose Harper escapes to the sedate Pacific Northwest town of Griffin Bay after the death of her mother and a dangerous run-in with her abusive ex-boyfriend, Kyle. Taking up residence with a mysterious elderly woman named Carmella, Rose endeavors to start writing again, despite the strange events that begin almost immediately upon her arrival. The portrait of Carmen Maria DiSpaldo—an infamous stowaway who fled Griffin Bay years ago for a crime she didn't commit—in Rose's room exudes a supernatural presence; Rose's tires are slashed on her first night in town; and her belongings are disturbed, despite Carmella's insistence that no one has entered her room. Clearly, whatever Rose fled has followed her.

Carpus (*The City Wife*) reveals Rose's history layer by layer, paralleling her tragic past with the town's dark secrets. At a local bar, she befriends Scarlett—who offers her work after learning of her financial difficulties—while also finding herself drawn to Ethan, Scarlett's boyfriend. As her agent continues to pressure her for pages, Rose's growing attraction to Ethan lands her in a complicated triangle with Scarlett, who wields secrets of her own. Ethan and Rose recognize familiar wounds in each other, which deepens their connection, though he cautions her against becoming entangled in the town and its people.

The novel's premise compels—with a strong supernatural undercurrent and intriguing mystery—and Carpus's world-building creates a rich sense of place. Evocative descriptions—"a prowling thicket of fog"; "the tail of her black, beaded dress trail[s] in her wake, slinking across each carpeted step"—and the use of music as a recurring reference create a distinctive atmosphere, accumulating a steady sense of dread that creeps through the narrative. Readers will be swept into this immersive story, and Carpus's skill at creating a strong, grounded romance between Rose and Ethan gives the novel's darker edges a welcome emotional core.

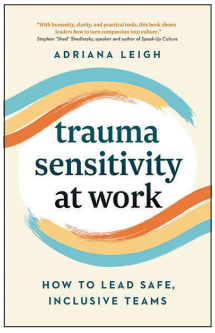
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

OTHER NONFICTION

EDITOR'S PICK

Trauma Sensitivity at Work: How to Lead Safe, Inclusive Teams

Adriana Leigh | Page Two
180p, e-book, $24.95, ISBN 978-1-774-58646-4



Thoughtful, practical guide to creating trauma-informed workplaces.

Great for fans of Anita Roach's *Safe & Sound*, Jeremy Henderson-Teelucksingh's *The Trauma-Informed Manager.*

"If leaders truly want to create safer, more inclusive work cultures where people want to stay, they must learn to lead with a trauma-sensitive approach," Leigh writes in this thoughtful debut. Beginning with a cautionary tale of supervisor Rosie and employee Nadia, who quickly burns out due to lingering effects of childhood trauma, Leigh illustrates how the conventional ways of helping a struggling teammate often fall short of what's really needed to prevent turnover and burnout: trauma-sensitive methods that "invit[e] us to notice, honor, and respond to our own needs and emotions, and those of others."

Leigh points out that not all stress is rooted in trauma, though she acknowledges that, globally, trauma is incredibly prevalent. She explains four main types of trauma—Big-T (war/assault); Small-t/Complex (cumulative effect of adverse life experiences); Vicarious Trauma (reactions triggered by others' suffering); and Intergenerational Trauma, while identifying common trauma responses and offering practical solutions for healing. Those tools, based on four principles, include values mapping, recognizing automatic thoughts, labeling emotions.

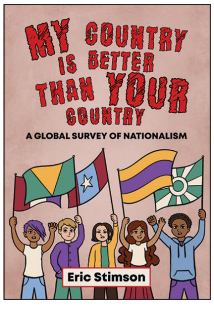
Leigh's discussion of how trauma may show up at work is particularly helpful. Whether it's difficulty concentrating, missing deadlines, irritable reactions to coworkers, boundary issues, or even physical symptoms, she draws from illustrative examples and her own professional history to argue for more holistic approaches to employee needs. Reflection questions—alongside Leigh's easy-to-follow suggestions (somatic calming techniques, workload collaboration)—lay the groundwork to create trauma-informed workplaces, and her argument that current workplace approaches to mental health are subpar hits home. Most importantly, her reminder that "becoming a trauma-sensitive leader... involves taking responsibility for your own healing as well as transforming workplace culture."

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

POLITICAL & SOCIAL SC IENCES

My Country Is Better Than Your Country: A Global Survey of Nationalism

Eric Stimson
435p, trade paper, $30, ISBN 979-8-218-50001-6



Sweeping, straight-talking history and survey of global nationalism.

Great for fans of Eric Storm's *Nationalism: A World History*, Richard Seymour's *Disaster Nationalism.*

This sweeping and opinionated global survey, Stimson's debut, examines centuries of global history and current events alike through the lens of nationalism, which Stimson identifies as one of the "main political forces of our times," often linked to war and the identification of "Other"s to "compete with, and ... hate." Covering centuries of upheaval and shifting ideas of nationhood in every region, Stimson demonstrates unsettling, all-too-human patterns of nationalist fervor leading to conflict and death. He favors clear definitions and embraces the nuances and complexities of national identities, distinguishing nationalism from uglier, often overlapping strains of ethnonationalism. For Stimson, nationalism is often steeped in nostalgia, resentment, and feelings of humiliation—and routinely nurtured and exploited by "ambitious, unscrupulous" politicians.

A history of nationalism, of course, is a history of nationhood itself, and Stimson's epic page-count reflects the scope of a project that offers précis of nationalism past and present in Asia, Europe, Latin America, India, and Africa. The good news: the text is learned, breezy, stripped of jargon, and unusually straight-talking. Stimson acknowledges and strives to avoid the failings of "quick and sloppy surveys written by foreigners," digging into each nation's regional, religious, and racial conflicts and committing to debunking misapprehensions, oversimplifications, and propaganda. He is especially good at linking popular culture to nationalistic feeling.

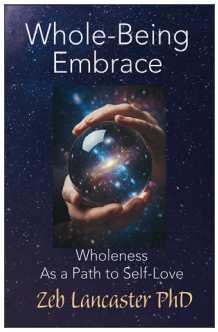
Western readers not steeped in grievances between China, Japan, and South Korea will find those chapters especially illuminating, though Stimson's conversational style, tendency toward broad-brush assertions, and only intermittent footnoting mean the book is more convincing on broad trends and repeating patterns (like Western imperialism fomenting nationalistic feeling abroad) than every particular. Stimson's prose is both justifiably charged and engagingly casual, though it sometimes proves flip or fuzzy. Overall, this is an impassioned, informative, provocative study that is never timid about calling out humanity's darkest motivations.

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

SELF-HELP

Whole-Being Embrace: Wholeness as a Path to Self-Love

Zeb Lancaster | Whole-Being Books
250p, e-book, $17.95, ISBN 979-8-218-88586-1



Thoughtful, heart-centered guide to embodied self-love.

Great for fans of Richard Schwartz's *No Bad Parts*, Tara Brach's *Radical Acceptance.*

Lancaster (*Nondual Chakra Awakening*) offers a compassionate, ambitious framework for healing in this reflective blend of spirituality, psychology, and embodied self-inquiry. The central argument is that emotional healing and spiritual awakening are not separate pursuits: true wholeness requires bringing the "evolving-self," shaped by attachment wounds and life experience, into relationship with the "unchanging-self," the steady inner ground Lancaster associates with nondual consciousness. Drawing from his work as a psychotherapist as well as his own meditation practice, Lancaster critiques spiritual bypassing, noting that detachment can sometimes become "fear wearing spiritual clothes," and urges readers toward a more integrated spirituality rooted in the body, relationships, and the Earth.

Lancaster respectfully explores the similarities and disparities between Western religion and Eastern spirituality, contending that in both, "something essential is missing: a deeply embodied, relational path to wholeness." His discussion of insecure attachment, emotional abandonment, and the fear of being imposed upon gives practical shape to the book's larger claims, especially for readers who have used meditation or self-analysis but still feel caught in old bodily reactions. Lancaster's trauma guidance is also welcome: he is careful to acknowledge that meditation can overwhelm trauma survivors and that skilled therapeutic support is an important part of recovery.

At times, the prose becomes repetitive and heavily conceptual, with terms such as "oneness," "wholeness," "unchanging-self," and "evolving-self" appearing so frequently that readers looking for a streamlined self-help guide may wish for more exercises earlier in the book. Still, Lancaster's tone is sincere, reverent, and deeply encouraging, and the later chapters explaining his Whole-Being Embrace framework and the three phases of healing—being nurtured, uncoupling, and authentic expression—offer a clear capstone to his approach. The wisdom peppered throughout resonates, and his declaration that "healing doesn't come from floating above our humanity but from embracing it with tenderness" is a timely reminder for contemporary readers.

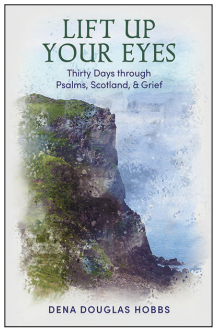
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **B+**

SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

Lift Up Your Eyes: Thirty Days through Psalms, Scotland, and Grief

Dena Douglas Hobbs | Aden Books

198p, trade paper, $15, ISBN 979-8-994-76180-9



Tender grief devotional paired with family, faith, and heritage.

Great for fans of DaySpring's *Grief's Unexpected Journey*, Margaret Nyman's *Hope for an Aching Heart.*

Hobbs offers readers a pathway to healing through Christian faith in this 30-day devotional, inspired by her own grief journey after losing both her mother and father within three months of each other. As she reflects on her time as a caregiver for her parents during their final years, she shares her odyssey to Scotland—alongside her husband and their two young adult children—to celebrate her roots as a form of healing. That trip brings a sense of reconnection to her family lineage, drawing her closer to moments of faith and sparking deep reflections on both life and death. She shares many of those insights here, with each chapter recounting moments from her voyage alongside biblical Psalms and spiritual lessons.

"The dead keep being dead, but somehow, my life goes on," Hobbs writes, evoking the profound confusion, sadness, and shock that accompany the loss of a loved one. Her feelings are vulnerable and transparent, delving into her uncertainty as a caregiver, the guilt when she experiences her first laughter after her parents are gone, and the haunting—yet comforting—moments when she can still sense their presence. Scripture often pulls her out of those dark times, and she imparts those revelations throughout the devotional: her first birthdays without her parents bring pain, but reading Psalms of lament remind her that "the bad parts won't last forever"; her tired soul is refreshed by the beauty of the world around her; and "a heart carved out with sorrow" is refilled with profound spiritual joy, gratitude, and praise.

Beyond the many epiphanies Hobbs experiences during her voyage, she also recounts Scottish landmarks and customs with fondness and respect, capturing the beauty and history behind the places she and her family visit. Her "earthly struggles" are heartrending, but they culminate in a tender knowing and comfort that one day she will be "reunited with my parents, friends, and God."

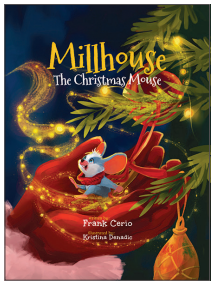
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A-**

PICTURE BOOKS

Millhouse The Christmas Mouse

Frank Cerio | GHDC Media, LLC

40p, hardcover, $29.99, ISBN 979-8-994-43260-0



Delightful Christmas mouse learns the season's biblical significance.

Great for fans of Lizzie Laferton's *There's a Lion in My Nativity!*, Melissa B. Kruger's *The Gift of All Gifts.*

Cerio both stirs and honors the magic of Christmas in this delightful picture book, as an unassuming little mouse gets a heavy dose of Yuletide cheer. In a cozy, snow-covered home, a family of four jumps into the holiday season, stringing lights, placing candles in windows, and hauling in the biggest pine tree they can find. But their resident mouse, Millhouse, can't quite understand what all the fuss is about. As Christmas tension builds—and Santa's visit draws nearer—Millhouse decides he must get to the bottom of this strange holiday celebration: he sets up a tiny chair high in the evergreen and patiently waits to ask Santa why he's "the reason the whole world loves Christmas so much!"

The answer will please Christian readers, as Santa patiently explains to little Millhouse the biblical story of Jesus's birth, emphasizing that "It's that Child who we celebrate on Christmas Day, the one who's the Truth and the Light and the Way." Millhouse is astounded and quickly wants to know if he, too, is important to Jesus. Santa lovingly reassures this adorable mouse, informing him that Jesus "cares even more for a mouse that's so bold." That solidifies the bond between Santa and Millhouse, prompting their agreement to meet every Christmas Eve for more stories about Jesus.

Beyond explaining the religious significance of Christmas, Millhouse's story invokes the warmth and comfort of the holiday season. Kristina Denadic's illustrations are textured and full of life, glowing with charming details: carefully placed ornaments, beautiful presents, and, most exciting of all for younger readers—Millhouse's tiny home is a treasure trove of pint-sized particulars. Kids will relish entertaining moments like Millhouse's phone call to his mice friends for help understanding the holiday, or his delightful glee at Santa's one-on-one attention. Cerio keeps readers connected with a closing nod to the possible Millhouse moments in their own Christmas celebrations.

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

YOUNG ADULT

EDITOR'S PICK

The Aeronauts' Daughter

Geraldine Burrows | Glenarvon Press

328p, e-book, $3.99, ISBN 979-8-233-18122-1



Bittersweet tale of young aeronaut's journey of self-discovery.

Great for fans of Melanie Crowder's *Audacity*, Jennifer Donnelly's *These Shallow Graves.*

Burrows's coming-of-age tale set in late 19th century New York soars delightfully high. Aurora Dawn Merryweather has grown up on Balloon Farm with her parents, devoted aeronauts who dream of conquering the skies. They firmly believe that balloons are the future of aviation and have dedicated their lives to making it a reliable mode of transportation. Meanwhile, Will Nolan, a brilliant juvenile parolee working at the farm, falls head over heels for the intrepid Aurora, though he remains painfully aware of the class difference dividing them. Aurora initially returns his infatuation, but she soon outgrows him, fancying herself in love with the dashing journalist, John Dyer Denning, instead. Defying the norms of society, she gradually evolves into an accomplished aeronaut herself, learning martial arts and standing up to anti-flying religious mania.

As the family business slowly declines, Young Aurora dreams of the high life. She goes from dutiful child aeronaut to infatuated adolescent to a mature adult, shouldering the responsibilities that come with her parents' legacy. The Merryweathers are the protofeminists of their times—they teach their daughter Japanese wrestling, fencing, and present her as the "Princess of Progress" while also ensuring her ladylike education. Aurora eventually comes to chafe under the yoke of social mores imposed upon women, presciently observing that "The people around her seemed to like it, but feeling like a caged bird was not for her." Will is her Dickensian foil; from working in a gambling racket and being incarcerated to becoming a lovestruck yet sexist aeronaut, he remains driven by the perceived injustices of his life.

Burrows (*Chick Grit*) writes eloquent prose that makes the technical, detailed descriptions of balloon flights enthralling. Each flight is shadowed by the specter of death, but the Merryweathers persevere against the tides of times. Complex characters and heavy themes make this a compelling read for young and older adults alike.

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

Ashes and Ruins

K. Lang-Slattery. Pacific Bookworks, $18.98 trade paper (400p)
ISBN 979-8-9862013-1-3

Lang-Slattery (Immigrant Soldier) delivers an authentic and affecting tale of a Jewish woman forced to leave her home in Germany during WWII. In the late 1930s, widow Clara Lang lives alone in Meiningen, her three children having immigrated to England and the U.S. She's only recently found happiness after a cold marriage to her now-deceased husband, having fallen in love with a physician. Then a friend warns her the Nazis will soon evict all the Jewish residents of the city. Devastated, Clara leaves for London to stay with her daughter, Edith. She helps care for her granddaughter and witnesses her son-in-law George's erratic behavior, which she chalks up to shell shock resulting from his combat at Dunkirk. As the bombing raids become more frequent and rationing ramps up, Clara and Edith increasingly rely on one another, especially after George returns to active duty. Slattery renders the wrenching effect of antisemitism on her characters as they desperately try to survive. Fans of WWII fiction ought to take a look.

A Cesspool of Spies

Linda Watkins. Argon, $5.99 e-book (354p)
ISBN 978-1-944815-22-6

Watkins (*Storm Island*) revisits the dawn of the CIA in this shrewd espionage thriller. In 1950, WWII veteran Simon Biggs is finishing his college degree at the University of Pittsburgh when the promise of grad school tuition for new recruits entices him to attend a presentation for the agency. He catches the attention of Major Bradley Sullivan, who's surprised to learn, after Biggs applies to be an agent, that the CIA's psych unit has eliminated him from consideration. Biggs's Navy commander informs Sullivan that Biggs's "callous disregard for the lives of his fellow sailors" stood in the way of his receiving a Silver Star. Sullivan, however, sees such ruthlessness as a positive and overrides the psych unit's decision. Before long, Biggs is trained as a spy and dispatched on a hazardous mission to assassinate a man in Turkey who's been aiding the Soviets. The mission proves more morally complicated than it appears, and Watkins supplements riveting spy craft with slow, crucial drips of backstory about Biggs and Sullivan that lend the proceedings emotional depth. The result is mesmerizing.

Goodbye, Sweetberry Park

Josh Green. Sager Group, $20.99 trade paper (366p)
ISBN 978-1-958861-52-3

Green (*Secrets of Ash*) delivers an acerbic and zany story of gentrification in 2018 Atlanta. It begins when deranged zookeeper Gerald McCaffrey lets 17 deadly snakes loose in the city. Reporting on the community response, freelance journalist Archibald "God" Johnson, nicknamed for his white hair and beard, describes gun-toting good old boys organizing hunting parties and forming militias. Meanwhile, unscrupulous developer Lawrence "Lotto" Livingston swindles many of the elderly home owners in the predominantly Black section of Sweetberry Park, known as the Flank, out of their shotgun-style houses. Lotto, who plans to relocate the houses 35 miles south of town and turn them into a museum, wants to develop the neighborhood into a subdivision for white millennials. God laments Lotto's scheme: "There's history and character under these roofs that can't be replicated." He rallies the eccentric holdouts of the Flank—blues singer Genteel, loud-mouthed gossip Americana Mama, and loose cannon Tall Walt—to shoo out the interlopers along with the black mambas, adders, and a giant anaconda unleashed by McCaffrey. Green diverges from typical heartwarming rally-the-community plotlines in the dramatic climax, as God takes drastic action in the name of preservation. Full of history, down-home rhythms, and unabashed hucksterism, it's a memorable slice of Americana.

The Line Between Us

Syreeta Harvey-Pasley. Sienna-Rose Press, $29.99 (312p)
ISBN 979-8-2186-4517-5

Harvey-Pasley explores the tensions of being a Black employee of a racist police department in her assured debut. Camden, N.J., has become the latest epicenter of anti-police protests after two white cops fatally shot Black college student Darius Porter when a neighbor mistook him for a burglar. With Camden's Black community up in arms and its police force on the defensive, Black police detective Jada Edgars is caught in the middle. Adding to Edgars's stress is a baffling missing persons case she's just been assigned, in which two Black women seem to have vanished into thin air. Her initial investigation leads her to fear the disappearances might mark the return of the Yellow Rose killer, an unidentified assailant who murdered several Black women in Camden years earlier and left a single yellow rose by each of their bodies. Harvey-Pasley conveys the pressures bearing down on her protagonist with empathy and skill, keeping the emotional stakes high as she brings the core mystery to a satisfying end. This bodes well for the author's future efforts.

Memoir of an Innocent Brat

Aaron Wang. Books in Color, $5.99 e-book (218p)
ISBN 978-1-0695064-0-5

In this cheeky satirical thriller from Wang (*Between Two Names*), gay Brooklynite Pete Chan's Charli XCX–informed transformation ends with the death of his ex-boyfriend. Pete is introduced driving back to Brooklyn from Chicago, only to be arrested as soon as he sets foot in his apartment and charged with murdering Toby Lu, whom he'd recently broken up with. With his freedom at stake, Pete recounts the weeks leading up to his visit to Chicago. After hearing Charli XCX's album *Brat*, he was inspired to quit his dull job as a communication coordinator and break up with painter Toby, whose aimlessness had been working on Pete's nerves. He took a job as a barista while figuring out his next move, only to go viral for a heated dispute with a customer that ended with Pete throwing a latte. He was subsequently labeled the "BRATista," a folk hero for beleaguered service workers. His sudden fame exposed him to online trolls, including the Chicago-based Frankie, whom the newly emboldened Pete drove cross-country to

confront. Wang tracks Pete's wild character arc with tongue firmly planted in cheek, bringing a sharp wit and an ear for dialogue to his tale. This is a blast.

Mt. Forgotten
Kevin Abrams. Bublish, $4.99 e-book (362p)
ISBN 978-1-64704-956-0

Glory Peak, a popular family-run ski resort in the Pacific Northwest, becomes a battleground for competing interests in Abrams's exciting debut. The resort was founded in the 1940s by WWII veteran William Jefferson Macklemore, who ran roughshod over the local Le'Echuwanna tribe, building on their ancestral land despite their protests. William goes on to fight his own family decades later, pulling strings to block his son, Bobby, and daughter-in-law, Annabelle, from starting a nearby alpaca farm. By 1988, Annabelle and Bobby plan to divorce. During one last hike together in the mountains, they're swept off the trail by an avalanche and disappear, presumed dead. The nonlinear narrative eventually focuses on their daughter, Clover, who was raised in town by her late maternal grandmother, who spearheaded a rival resort that's under construction nearby. Clover grew up at odds with both Bobby, who tried to make her a champion cross-country skier, and William, who once shot at her boyfriend. Disenchanted and despairing, Clover develops a ketamine problem and attempts suicide. Meanwhile, the Le'Echuwanna, led by brash elder He Who Eats Rabbit Tails, have long chafed at the Macklemore family's exploitation of the land. As the conflict draws toward a violent crisis point, He Who Eats and Clover form a murky alliance. Abrams keenly portrays his characters' animosity toward each other and their frustration with their circumstances. This will keep readers turning the pages.

A Series of Rooms
A.J. Barlowe. A.J. Barlowe, $26.99 (310p)
ISBN 979-8-3305-4967-2

Barlowe's promising debut kicks off with a meet-awkward between two young gay men in a bar bathroom. It's art student Liam's 21st birthday and he's attempting to clean a spilled drink off his shirt. Meanwhile, Leo is crying in one of the stalls and rebuffs Liam's concerned questions. The guys unexpectedly reconnect in a hotel room later that same night, when it's revealed that Liam's friends hired Leo, a sex worker whose real name is Jonah, as a surprise birthday present for Liam. Their night together is chaste, as Liam comforts a still upset Jonah. Afterward, Liam can't get Jonah out of his head and arranges a second meeting. Jonah eventually reveals that he ran away from his homophobic parents and was introduced to sex work by a terrible ex-boyfriend. Now he's living in a halfway house for recent parolees as an alternative to serving time for having killed a man, and working for a cruel pimp who is blackmailing him. Privileged, innocent Liam never judges Jonah's survival methods and the men share some tender moments, including Liam's first kiss. The drama ramps up when their relationship is abruptly severed by Jonah's handlers and a distraught Liam goes to the police. Meanwhile, Jonah learns a shocking truth that changes everything. The men's genuinely sweet connection balances out the grittier, more melodramatic, and occasionally contrived moments. Readers are sure to get invested in these two.

Tethered Spirits
Corinne Hoebers. OC, $25.99 e-book (430p)
ISBN 978-1-98983-356-8

Hoebers (*Call of a Distant Shore*) delivers an immersive if overwrought saga of the Seven Years' War in Nova Scotia. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1756, a young German settler named Christian was captured and adopted by a Mi'kmaq family, who gave him the name Bear Cub and taught him the tribe's language and customs. Christian's story intersects with that of his younger sister Hanna, who lives with her father, Michael, and sister, Elisabeth, on a farm near the colonial village of Lunenburg, and who has visions that Christian is still alive. Like her brother, she's deeply sympathetic to the Mi'kmaq. At 12, she urges a doctor to tend to a wounded Mi'kmaq man, shot by English troops. Years later, Michael scolds her for giving bread to a starving Mi'kmaq woman. When Christian returns to visit, hoping to make peace with Michael before marrying a Mi'kmaq woman, his attempts prove futile. While Hoebers's research into the language and customs of the Mi'kmaq people is stellar, the plot is choppy and the dialogue is a bit clunky ("Our passion was real but only for those two young innocents we once were," Elisabeth tells a former lover). It's a mixed bag.

The Sound of Murder (Musicals Are Murder #1)
Joseph Zellnik. Ziggurat, $9.99 e-book (415p)
ISBN 979-8-9923999-3-6

Theatrical composer Zellnik (the Libby Seale Mysteries) draws on his Broadway expertise for this promising series launch that pairs a clever whodunit with a tantalizing behind-the-curtain narrative. In November 1959, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music* opens successfully in New Haven, Conn. The following morning, Eva Rossi—understudy for lead actor Mary Martin—fails to show up for rehearsals and is found dead in a hotel room that's not her own. Next to her body is a Playgoer magazine pinned to the bedside table with a dagger thrust through Martin's photo; over the bed, the lyric "How do you solve a problem like Maria?" is scrawled in red. Shrewd assistant stage manager Lee Solomon assists the police in their investigation, which rules out suicide after they learn of an earlier attempt on Martin's life. Solomon, the real-life assistant stage manager for the original run of *The Sound of Music*, was Zellnik's uncle, and the author bases his characterization on Solomon's journals. Other delightful nuggets of Broadway trivia dot the narrative. Musical theater fans would do well to check this out.