AUGUST 10, 2026

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YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING

17 New BookLife Titles Reviewed

"Another American History Tale"

We talk to a hip-hop legend about publishing his story

BY MATIA QUERY

Ronald Brooks, better known as Money B of the hip-hop group Digital Underground, teamed with author and screenwriter Chad Coenso for *A DU Party Don't Stop: The Money B Story*. The memoir tells the story of Brooks's Oakland upbringing, the birth of hip-hop, and how he came to be a part of the legendary musical group.

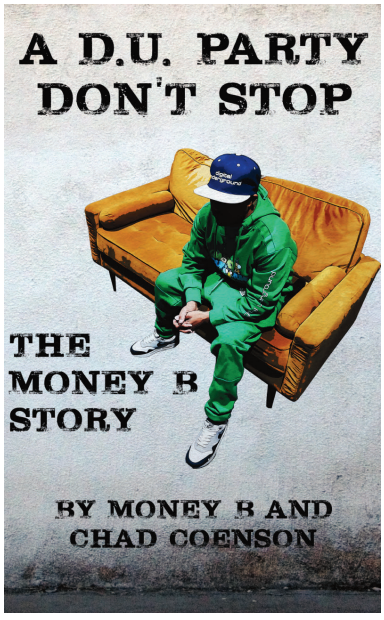


Money B

On the surface, you might seem like unlikely coauthors. How did you become friends, and what made you decide to collaborate on the book?

Money B: My friendship with Chad goes back about 10 years. We became very quick and close friends because we both shared a passion for what we were doing. I always believe that good people find good people. The energy that you put out there is the energy that you get back. Chad and I were meant to get together and do this book. And as far as Digital Underground, I think it worked in a sense because we were all from different places, but we all had the same love for the music and the funk. When you find people who have the same passions as you, it works.

Coenso: I was working on this film project that was more or less a parody of exploitation films from the '70s. We had some interest in making it into a feature-length film. We wanted a good funky theme song very reflective of Curtis Mayfield, Superfly, or Isaac Hayes and *Shaft*. It turned out we knew somebody who knew Money B's manager. He agreed to be featured on the track, and that's when Money B and I first met each other. He'd just gotten off the set of *All Eyes on Me*, the Tupac film. He told me, "There's a lot that's not in there. Tupac was my roommate on the road, and both our parents were in the Panthers." And he said he really needed to write a book about his life and tell these stories.



He just needed a writer. A couple months went by, and he reached out and said, *Hey, I think I wanna go ahead and collaborate with you.* I ended up meeting him at a Scarface show in Portland and we inked the deal. So our bond came from me being a fan. And from there, you know, having worked on this as long as we have and gone through the wringer together, we've become even closer. Our families know each other. And now he's one of my really close friends both creatively and personally.

Money B, how did your upbringing help shape your musical career?

Money B: My parents also were always playing music around the house. I would always pick up the records and read the credits to see who played this and what singer was on that. Also, my parents were in the Black Panther Party and I went to the Oakland Community School, so I grew up around a lot of party members. Curiosity was not frowned upon. We weren't taught what to learn; we were taught how to learn. I've always been a person who dives all the way into something new, and I ask all the questions until I fully understand it. Also, growing up in the Black Panther Party, it was always about what was best for the collective. So being in a group like Digital Underground, it was easy for me to fit into the type of setting where the best decisions were made for the group.

Chad, has your writing been influenced by music?

Coenso: I grew up outside of Washington, D.C., in Gaithersburg, Maryland. And we didn't have a lot of money, and neither did anybody in the area. And there was one kid who had cable. We used to go over there to see late night HBO and MTV, and specifically *Yo MTV Raps*. So I was actually there at his house for the world premiere of "The Humpty Dance." I remember seeing it and just being completely blown away by the humor of it and the funk. As time went on and hip-hop influenced me, I started writing poetry and doing spoken word performances. And I learned that rhyme and verse is a great way to convey ideas. I also realized what I was being taught in school, especially as it pertains to civil rights and those leaders and movements, wasn't necessarily the whole truth. There was so much more the Panthers were doing in the community to break down class barriers. Money B grew up in

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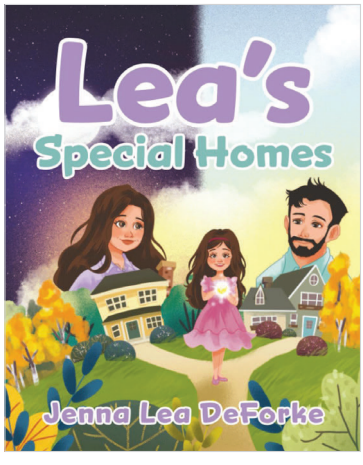
BookLife Talks with Jenna DeForke



DeForke's debut, a picture book titled *Lea's Special Homes*, follows a little girl as she moves between two homes and "encourages open conversations about family dynamics and reassures children that they can embrace change."

Like Lea, you're a child of divorced parents. To what extent did you draw from your own feelings and history to portray Lea's story?

As a child, I constantly wondered if it was me that caused my parents to fight and grow apart. Traveling back and forth between their two residences took a toll on my trust and the ability to share how it made me feel. I didn't see them effectively coparent, and when they spoke to each other, it was unhealthy and uncomfortable. As I grew, I realized that it was better that they didn't stay together



because that trauma would have been far worse. I almost wrote my book with the emphasis on negative coparenting but decided it would be better to give hope to those who are experiencing it and can see healthier outcomes. I hope that the parents who read it and are in similar positions of unhealthy coparenting can understand that it's time to put their differences, resentment, and anger aside. These things can and do cloud what's really important, which is showing the child that they can be kind, respectful, caring and cordial enough that the child can see positivity instead of negativity.

For more, visit **booklife.com/deforke**

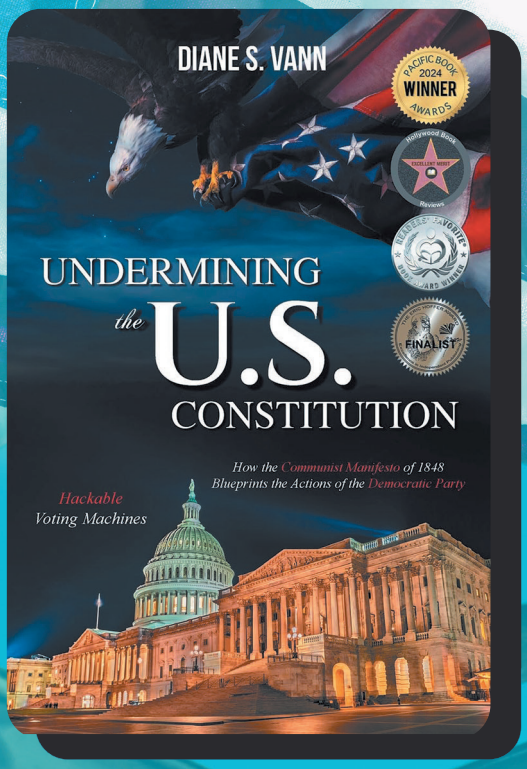
"The call is out now for the silent majority of taxpaying, hardworking Americans to become politically active without delay." - **US REVIEW OF BOOKS**

Diane Vann was also named a finalist in the **Eric Hoffer Book Awards.**

UNDERMINING the U.S. CONSTITUTION

DIANE S. VANN

As a nurse I have been in situations where patients learned very bad news about the state of their health, news that was not received well by them, their families, or even their medical team. When preparing this book, my feelings were much the same as when I was in those situations. The bad news about the health of our nation is, like cancer in a patient's body, communism (also known as "Marxism") has grown in the United States. Like cancer, it started with an unnoticed seed and grew insidiously with little sign or symptom. Now like cancer, communism is on the brink of overwhelming us. Because I know that knowledge of their cancer is essential to my patient's first step towards survival, I believe that knowledge of our communism is essential to the United States of America's first step towards survival. So within this book, I describe: how I learned about the symptoms (The Real Communist Threat Witnessed); the disease (the Introduction and Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Communist Manifesto); the signs and symptoms and the treatment and cure (Constitution versus Communist Manifesto: The War within America).



DIANE VANN, RN graduated with a B.S.N. from the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, Nebraska in 1974 and M.S.N. from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1986. She is married with no children. Her primary interests are nursing and health promotion. She is a Frederick Douglass Republican who joined the Constitution Party to fight against voting on hackable, plug-in voting machines.

In an advertisement in weekly and daily newspapers January, 2010, paid for by her, in which she announced her candidacy in the Republican primary for the U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, 8th District, Georgia, she wrote "that President Obama is a run-of-the-mill communist who has cloaked himself in a 'second Messiah' kind of mystique. She recommends that Americans read for themselves the 'Communist Manifesto' or 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' written by Karl Marx in 1848 and contrast it to our 'Declaration of Independence,' the 'Constitution of the United States of America' and the 'Gettysburg Address.'" She writes this book as an aid for fulfilling that objective."

★★★★★ REVIEWS

With meticulous research and analysis, the author presents a narrative which challenges conventional perspectives on the Democratic Party's alignment with historical ideologies. Undermining the U.S. Constitution engages readers in a thought-provoking journey, encouraging them to reconsider the political landscape through a lens which intertwines the past and present. A chronological examination of events, ideas, and political shifts guides the reader through the book's systematic structure. Commendation is warranted for the meticulous presentation of evidence within the work. A wide array of historical documents, quotations, and references are drawn upon to substantiate claims, enhancing the credibility of the arguments. The utilization of primary sources provides readers with a tangible connection to the historical context explored. The author's perspective is evident throughout the book, and Vann's background adds weight to the analysis.

-Irene Jacobs, Pacific Book Review

America was founded on the principles and ideas that the original planners laid out in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. One of the results is that capitalism is a major component and driving force in how America operates. Communism directly opposes capitalism's view that hard work leads to wealth which leads to owning property and improving one's position in society. Communism directly opposes private property ownership and working to make money for someone else, hoping that one day excess wages will allow the individual to get into a position where they can own a company and have others work for them. Communists see the working class as mere property for the wealthy elite who hoard all the best for themselves and want only the minimum necessary for the masses to keep a workforce generating income and goods for the wealthy. Clashes between these two ideologies often play out on a global scale. However, many Americans who are not political centrists but fall on the further extremes of the two parties often use these ideologies to attack their political opposites. Those far on the Republican path tend to see Democrats as elite communists who want a one-world government meant to cater to the elites. In contrast, some Democrats see Republicans as authoritarian and tyrannical. Each group continually claims that they represent the silent majority.

-Mark Heisey, US Review of Books

Are you well-versed in U.S. history and the Constitution, or do you just know the basics? No matter where you stand on your "interest-in-politics scale," Undermining The U.S. Constitution, by author Diane Vann, is in all probability going to leave you with food for thought. Undermining The U.S. Constitution pits the Communist Manifesto against the U.S. Constitution, and explores the consequences and repercussions of fanning communism, also known as Marxism.

The author, Diane S. Vann, recounts her experience as an Army Nurse and how she understood the threat posed by communism. Not only does she talk about the Communist Manifesto and its impacts, but she also discusses the ways the country can get rid of communism and ensure growth for all. She compares the spread of communism in the U.S. with cancer in a patient's body. As strong as her ideologies sound, readers would be surprised to see how convincingly she has put up the debate.

-Reyan Boris Mishra, Hollywood Book Reviews

www.booksidepress.com Book is available for purchase at the following: amazon BARNES&NOBLE



Chad Coenson

the depths of that community. The book is not just a journey through the evolution of hip-hop but a journey through American history.

Money B, in the book, you characterize the East Coast–West Coast rivalry as a myth rather than reality. Can you elaborate on that?

Money B: I'm originally from Philadelphia. I spent all my summers on the East Coast. It was just all bullshit. It was a beef between Suge Knight, Sean Combs, Tupac, and Biggie. That was it. And we, as a hip-hop community, allowed magazines, for sensationalism, to paint it as if there was this divide. (This is not the first time that this was introduced—you know, the COINTELPRO actually created a rift between the New York Panthers and then Huey P. Newton and the West Coast Panthers.) It was fabricated by a few hip-hop magazines owned mostly by white people who did not care about the culture. But most people that I knew in the industry knew it didn't mean anything. I was friends with Busta Rhymes and DJ Premier and Guru from Gang Starr and A Tribe Called Quest. We were still doing shows together. We were still, you know, I would talk to some of those guys on the phone and not once did we ever have a conversation about, *Hey, bro, you live in Oakland, I can't talk to you no more.*

What was the most cathartic aspect of working on the book?

Money B: So, in my book, I bring you from my childhood all the way up to my teenage years when I'm talking about, you know, how hard the crack epidemic hit our communities and me being of the age where I had to navigate through all of that. I think the most cathartic thing about writing this book was revisiting the relationships, and some of the ones I lost or that went sour along the way. Writing this book allowed me to rethink and relive. You open up that box and then reflect how you could have handled some things a lot differently. I really believe in what we've created and what we've done. I'm excited for everyone else to check it out and learn about me, how I grew up. It's another American history tale.



ISBN- 978-1778836879

GROWING YOUR NEST EGG

A PRIMER ON INVESTING FOR MY GRANDCHILDREN AND OTHER YOUNG ADULTS

BY: JOHN W. WEISER

Book Summary:

COVERING THE BASICS OF INVESTING, Growing Your Nest Egg offers tips and pointers to familiarize readers with the benefits of saving for retirement, especially through owning stocks and bonds. It provides the wisdom of expert Wall Street investors and shares the benefit of the author's own experiences-and his infectious enthusiasm for seeking and finding sound investments.

Author's Bio:

John Weiser serves on the Senior Advisory Council of the United Religions Initiative, the world's largest grassroots interfaith organization. He graduated from Harvard Law School and served as a partner of Shearman & Sterling, a Wall Street law firm, before taking the post of General Counsel of Bechtel Group, Inc., an international engineering construction firm. He and his late wife Maria had nine children, one of whom died as a toddler; they have twelve grandchildren. He is currently married to Susan Cony who has six children, twelve grandchildren, and one great grandchild. Weiser is the author of a memoir, A Thousand Kisses: A Family's Escape from the Nazis to a New Life and Grasp the Nettle: Appreciating the Bold Life of Bishop William E. Swing.



"AN ENTHUSIASTIC, EXPERT GUIDE TO DEMYSTIFYING STOCKS AND BONDS FOR CONFIDENT RETIREMENT SAVING."

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booklife REVIEWS

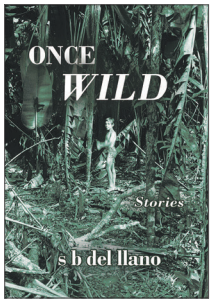
BookLife Reviews are paid reviews of independently published books. A lightning bolt (⚡) indicates an Editor's Pick, a book of outstanding quality.

FICTION

EDITOR'S PICK

Once Wild: Stories

s b del llano | High Frequency Press
262p, hardcover, $30, ISBN 978-1-962931-66-3



Dynamic collection spans realms of the human experience.

Great for fans of Tanuj Solanki's *Diwali in Muzaffarnagar*, Nishanth Injam's *The Best Possible Experience.*

This sinuous debut collection by del llano paints raw emotion with evocative prose and sharp imagery. The title story orbits a man's memories—of love, of friendship, and of trauma—while he speaks at his father's funeral, recalling both the selfless life his father lived and the tragedy of his childhood friendship that ended in a concealed suicide and fractured legacy. Tragedy returns in "Dragging Home," as the estranged Michael, dressed as "Rhapsody, a six-and-a-half-foot heap of hair and heels," travels home for Christmas, still tormented by the suicide of his younger brother. His unexpected entrance sparks rage but also opens a door to reunion.

In "dulzura" and "Bindweed," the protagonists try to make sense of and free themselves from relationships gone sour, while other selections adopt more unconventional approaches. "New Jerusalem" features a narrator who melds religion with alien encounters, marking a harvesting of souls as part of the Lord's Coming—"not flashes of lightning in clouds the whole world can see, but more private and gentle, for the believers." That kind of religious pondering crops up elsewhere in the collection, embodied as guilt in "Dying or Born"—where the intense passion of two male friends is acknowledged only under tragic circumstances.

Many of del llano's stories are intimately woven into diverse landscapes, foods, and traditions, offering readers a rich cultural mosaic. Descriptions of "jungled valleys" and "crashing waves that pummeled the rocks and reef" sit alongside more sobering visions of death, regret, and melancholy, as in Dale Swenson, the protagonist of "Flying on Instruments," who laments "the living hell that's invaded my life" while processing his spiraling mental health through journal entries. His astute observation on life—that "we run and run like crazy and there's no net to catch us"—lingers long after the collection's last page.

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

FICTION

For Love of Billie

Patricia Vido
228p, trade paper, $19.99, ISBN 978-1-971-16700-8



Moving story of a 12-year-old boy obsessed with the woman who loves his father.

Great for fans of Emma Forrest's *Father Figure*, Bronwyn Fischer's *The Adult.*

Vido's moving and surprising coming-of-age story subverts first-love stereotypes when a 12-year-old boy and his father become enamored with the same woman. In the summer of 1979, Finn Maguire's parents' marriage is so strained that even Finn can see it. Around this time, he meets Billie, his father's 25-year-old coworker, and his attraction is immediate—"she must be holy," he says. As Billie begins spending more time with the family, her presence stirs up a mix of confusing feelings for Finn: dread about his parents' marriage, excitement about his own attraction to Billie, and fierce jealousy over the flirtation between Billie and his father. When a sudden tragedy changes Finn's life, he must wrestle with unresolved feelings about Billie, his parents, and his future.

Though she is the title character, Billie does not play a direct role in Finn's adolescent awakening, remaining more of a fantasy in his mind. He is continuously aware of her presence in their small town and recalls the way she made him feel as a child even as he gets older. "Whenever I saw her car or we drove by the office or near her apartment, she popped into my head like she was coming around to say hi," he muses. In real life, Billie remains an enigmatic yet troubled character, fleshed out mostly through Finn's observations, showcasing how crushes can turn a person into an object to be idealized.

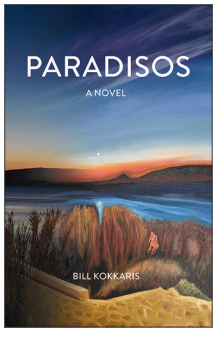
Billie's ambiguity seems mostly intentional, with her heady presence contrasting sharply with Finn's very real relationship with his high school girlfriend, Francine. When Francine enters the picture, readers see Finn formulate his own ideas and develop an identity as he confides in her and begins to make his own decisions. As Finn gets older, he also falls back on his faith to help him decide how to live. During his final confrontation with Billie, he must recognize the true nature of his obsession, leaving readers with a clear sense of how much he has grown.

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

FICTION

Paradisos

Bill Kokkaris | Atalanta Falls Publishing
351p, e-book, $30, ISBN 978-1-7645228-0-9



Ambitious family novel tackles intergenerational trauma and displacement.

Great for fans of Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland.*

With *Paradisos*, Kokkaris debuts a novel that is many stories at once: a domestic drama about the Politis family, a clan of wealthy hoteliers on the fictional Aegean island of Phaedros; a historical novel tracing the origins of an island community and ancient traditions of folk medicine; and a social discourse confronting cultural tensions between Greek citizens and refugees from nearby Muslim countries. When an unexpected hurricane upends a vessel carrying Syrian migrants, Emilio—the Politis family's successful elder son—becomes determined to deliver one of the survivors, a young mother named Maryam, from her trauma. Meanwhile, Phaedros must navigate its insular beliefs when a murder rocks the community and the "growing hatred towards refugees... turn[s] Greek compassion on its head."

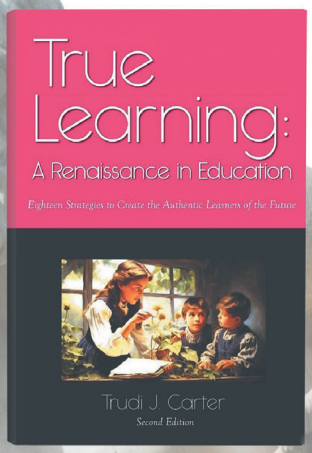
Kokkaris reaches for ambitious themes but capably rises to the challenge, delivering a rich ensemble cast that feels well-realized, distinctive, and charismatic. Emilio's family has its fair share of difficulties: his younger brother Dimitri is depressed and convinced he is "the runt of the litter—a weakling homosexual who had tainted the family's reputation"; his parents experienced a courtship rocked by trauma that led to devastating family secrets; and Emilio carries his own inner wounds from witnessing his cousin Christopher die by suicide.

Kokkaris knows enough about his migrant Greek parents' homeland and its present geopolitical troubles to believably dramatize clashes between citizens and refugees. Most vivid is the novel's portrayal of life as a refugee, with the comforts, traditions, and familiarities of home swept away and replaced by bureaucratic complexities, the pangs of grief, and the prospect of starting over, often in surroundings that feel cold and indifferent. Operatic in scope, *Paradisos* closely examines the intergenerational effects of displacement and trauma, exposing the illusion that happiness can come from burying the past while leaving readers with the hope of healing—through vulnerability, compassion, and human connection.

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

TRUE LEARNING:
A RENAISSANCE IN EDUCATION

BY: TRUDI J. CARTER



ISBN: 978-1778835834
PRICE: $25.99

It's not the university. It's the student. Not academics. The process.
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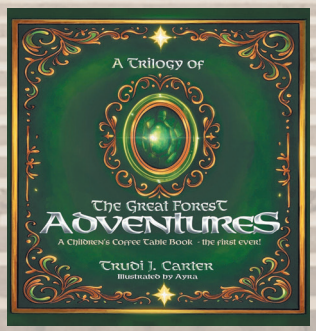
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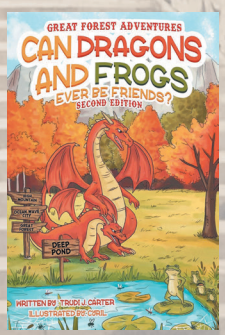


"When the heart of the child is touched by the love of the teacher, true learning takes place."
— Trudi J. Carter

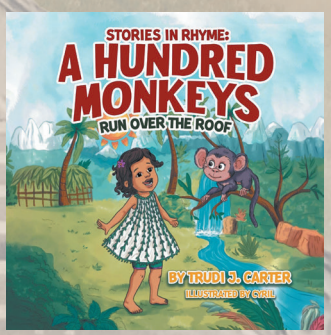
From New York to Iowa and Georgia, Carter's career in education spans decades. From teaching students in classrooms to teaching small group sessions for children in advanced programs, she discovers the true facets of learning. With creative adjustments, this high level programming proves effective with children in her tutoring business. All children benefit from becoming collaborative learners.



ISBN: 978-1778837739



ISBN: 978-1778835940

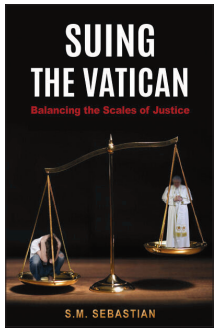


ISBN: 978-1778835926

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Suing the Vatican: Balancing the Scales of Justice

S.M. Sebastian | Make a Difference Publications
387p, mass market, $19.99, ISBN 978-0-9765246-4-9



Detailing willful ignorance of abuse, fictional trial offers real catharsis.

Great for fans of Stephen Rubino's *Act of Faith*, Mark M. Bello's *Betrayal of Faith*.

Sebastian turns his advocacy for sexual abuse victims into a legal thriller focusing on the Catholic Church's potential culpability in such crimes. Ninety-two-year-old defrocked priest Charles Murphy is serving a 50-year-to-life sentence for sexually abusing six boys—though he's been accused of molesting more than 50 children. Sebastian portrays Murphy as a serial abuser collapsing under the weight of his own sins. Now dying from cancer—and ruminating on his past actions—he initiates a civil trial against the Vatican, convinced it contributed to the "monster" he's become.

This tragic, guilt-ridden man recognizes the goodness in Drizzle, his new cellmate, who's woefully unprepared for the brutality of prison life. When Drizzle is murdered by another inmate, it triggers a reckoning for Murphy, who believes the Catholic Church helped create the culture of abuse and silence that allowed his crimes, much as the prison system enabled Drizzle's murder. Despite his age and failing health, Murphy becomes a plaintiff, turning to Vincent Vance—the prosecutor who convicted him—to lead the fight. No longer the fiery justice seeker he once was, Vance is now an alcoholic who stopped believing in the legal system—and himself. He takes the case hoping for a massive Vatican settlement, but the trial gradually reconnects him with the victims' suffering—and his own past.

Sebastian uses prisons, churches, and the courtroom as moral landscapes where questions of retribution and redemption collide. Using intimidation, psychological manipulation, and institutional authority, the defendant's ruthless attorney argues that abuse derives from individual failings rather than systemic corruption, while Murphy—represented by a manipulative, self-loathing attorney—"surrender[s] [his] sins over to God" and seeks a new path. Sebastian channels years of trauma, research, and empathy into this riveting courtroom drama, adding a powerful voice to the chorus of abuse victims pleading for long-delayed justice.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Architect: The Goodpasture Chronicles, Book 3

R.J. Halbert | Eald Talu House
258p, e-book, $9.99, ASIN B0GXNW6X9V



Panoramic narrative blends time travel, family drama, and destiny.

Great for fans of Jody Hedlund's Waters of Time series; Asa Bowers's *Mancala Moon*.

Halbert's final installment in The Goodpasture Chronicles, following *Servant*, unfolds through parallel storylines separated by thousands of years. In the ancient world, Akolo—a servant of a mysterious God with the ability to imbue objects with divine power—becomes a religious leader, husband, father, and eventually an immortal witness to the rise and fall of civilizations. In the present, the Keane family struggles to understand the impossible circumstances of their son Zach's sudden return after his weeks-long disappearance. As Akolo tries to interpret what his God wants from him and Zach attempts to make sense of his impossible journey into the past, Halbert weaves the two timelines together, revealing unexpected connections between characters, objects, and events across centuries.

The novel's characters hold this expansive, time-spanning narrative together. Akolo's growth from a young, confused boy into an immortal figure carrying the weight of faith, history, and memory feels heroic yet also tragic. His friendship with Esme, which gradually blossoms into a centuries-spanning love story, becomes the only constant in a life of change. Meanwhile, as Zach reconstructs his memories through journalling, therapy, and conversations with Marshall, the caretaker of the Keanes's unusual house, his sister Ariel emerges as an intriguing character. Her confusion surrounding Zach's return, her budding romance with Garrett, and her mounting resentment toward her parents carry the story's emotional weight.

Halbert creates two distinct worlds that operate on vastly different scales: an ancient world shaped by time and religion and a contemporary environment haunted by unexplained phenomena. That ambitious scope is both a strength and a weakness—the blend of time travel, religion, historical events, family drama, and supernatural mystery sometimes overwhelms the narrative, yet the book remains compelling largely due to its engaging characters. Beneath the prophecies, miracles, and magical artifacts lies a story about legacy—suggesting that what ultimately endures is not power or history, but love carried forward through generations.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Lies to Forever

Marlene M. Bell | Ewephoric
316p, trade paper, $15.95, ISBN 979-8-986-34098-2



Propulsive thriller of a too-nice woman's deadly awakening.

Great for fans of Laura Dave, Aimee Molloy.

In this quick, sharp, high-tension thriller, Bell captures the moment when a compassionate woman's life begins to collapse—and stirs real suspense out of whether someone who tends toward excessive niceness can turn it around. A relatable sense of panic drives April Manning's first-person narration as she visits her former workplace, desperate to restart her career as an interior designer. She took extended leave from the architecture firm to care for a man named Glenn Sutton, who was badly injured by an electrical explosion. Their connection was only tenuous: April wanted to buy the exquisite house he built. For eight months, she's lived rent-free in exchange for helping Glenn with his recovery. An eviction notice tacked to her front door is the first domino to fall. "I'm such an easy mark," April confesses to her acid-tongued best friend, Kelsey Clark, who is quick to note all the red flags about April's verbal agreement with Glenn.

The jolts continue as April goes to the home of her former boss, where she encounters a shocking scene—and soon discovers that she is being targeted on digital fronts as well. From there, Bell (author of the Annalisse series) piles on the catastrophes with ruthless pacing and high emotion, as the pathologically naïve April plays the role of the perfect patsy. Revealing this intricately plotted downfall from the perspective of a gullible protagonist risks irking readers who favor capable and self-aware heroines, but as the trap gets sprung Bell digs into the psychology of being manipulable, demonstrating why April is so concerned with outward appearances at the expense of her inner life. It will take a village to help the imperiled April—and leading the charge is her eager ex-boyfriend.

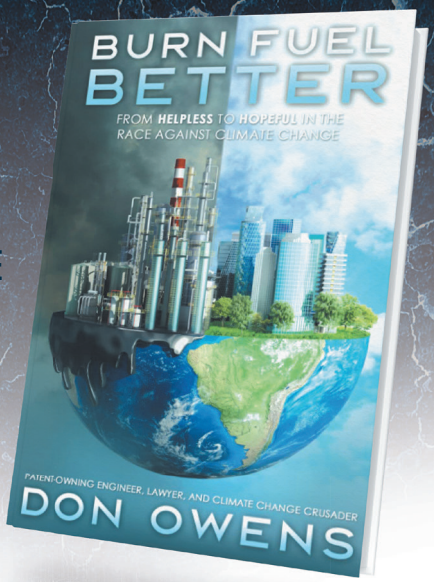
Bell vividly evokes the wintry contrasts of eastern Tennessee, from the glossy perfection of April's dream home to the wild beauty of Appalachian forests. Bell explores vulnerability and culpability in *Lies to Forever*, with a people-pleasing heroine who faces a sobering dose of calamity—and, perhaps, the agency readers crave. This one is hard to put down.

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

BURN FUEL BETTER

FROM **HELPLESS** TO **HOPEFUL** IN THE RACE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

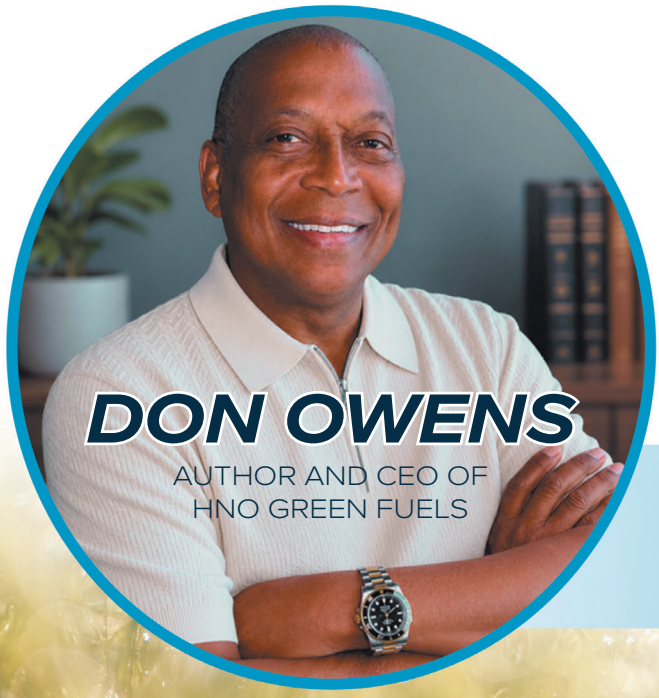
DON OWENS



The time for blaming, minimizing, or avoiding the climate crisis is over. We are in a critical ticking time bomb, and the Earth is in a perilous state. The effects of climate change are everywhere — for anyone to continue to deny it, is insane. From the extreme weather conditions like drought and fires to the devastation of our glaciers covered with black carbon — we are running out of time.

Burn Fuel Better will shed light on some of the unintentional mistakes we are making to address climate change and suggest practical solutions we can make to minimize and possibly reverse the impact — solutions that can be fully implemented today, not 20 - 30 years in the future, when it will be too late. With an accidental discovery of lowering certain types of emissions from diesel engines, this new way of burning fuel minimizes black carbon from entering the atmosphere and adds life-sustaining oxygen.

It may sound too impossible to believe and too good to be true. Still, once you discover the proven science behind the technology, you will see how easy it is to join the revolution to save our planet — one fuel-burning vehicle and application at a time. Go to BurnFuelBetter.com to get your free gift and join the revolution today.





Down to earth, easy to understand, & a truth-to-power read about how "black carbon" (a key contributor to global warming) is derived primarily from burning fossil fuels and can be reduced by technology and the collective efforts of human beings that care. The author (Mr. Donald Owens) addresses the issues with particular matter emissions, but explains it in common sense terms and practical remedies that mitigate these pollutants. He also gives an honest talk about electric (engine) vehicles and their applications in the "clean energy" transportation industry. Known by science, hydrogen is proven to help combustion engines burn fuel more efficiently, thereby reducing "black carbon" emissions. This book summarizes the hydrogen on-demand solution that evolved after many and plenty tests performed in their in-house lab and by an EPA approved emissions test facility. This newly designed device reduces fuel emissions! Called, "leefH2"...it's right on time! This book describes this available "now" technology with the optimism of taking us from "Helpless to Hopeful" in sustaining Mother Earth and all that resides within! Yes...you, me (We) have a "great news story in 2026" and beyond! Ganbatte!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don Owens, CEO, built HNO Green Fuels to move energy technology forward in an environmentally and financially sustainable way.

Frustrated by the lack of practical solutions, Mr. Owens set out his own – the first widely applicable hydrogen technology of its kind.

WWW.BOOKSIDEPRESS.COM

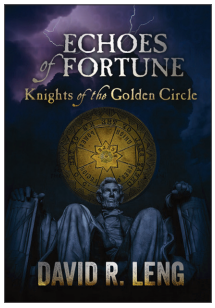
Book is available for purchase at the following:

amazon BARNES&NOBLE

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Echoes of Fortune: The Knights of the Golden Circle

David R. Leng | White Publishing
385p, trade paper, $19.99, ISBN 979-8-9910931-3-2



Epic thriller of Confederate secrets, treasure hunting, and an infiltrated America.

Great for fans of Steve Berry, Clive Cussler.

"You ain't huntin' treasure, Jack. You're huntin' the key to a war that never ended." So declares a not-necessarily-trustworthy associate of Jack Sullivan, the history prof/treasure hunter/Navy SEAL hero of the Echoes of Fortune series. This wildly ambitious third entry is a swaggering epic of conspiracies, treasure hunting, historical mysteries, and race-against-the-clock suspense, as Sullivan and his compatriots face a threat to the republic 150 years in the making. As flashbacks reveal early on, Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, hid away great reserves of gold to fund the rebels' ideals. In the novel's present, former SEAL and current history professor Sullivan discovers clues and ciphers pointing to stashes of Confederate loot but also to the conspiracy that gold has funded, to "hollow" out the republic from the inside, turn Americans against each other, and secure power for a shadowy organization named the True Patriots.

Leng again blends fascinating real history, tantalizing inventions, and teasing clues breadcrumbed throughout archives with high-stakes scenes of military and tech-thriller suspense. As Sullivan races across the American South unraveling clues presented as riddles in verse, Leng also weaves in a scheming cartel, home-grown terrorism, bleeding-edge stealth vehicles, SEAL team extractions, and burning questions that keep the pages turning: who can be trusted—and how far up does this go?

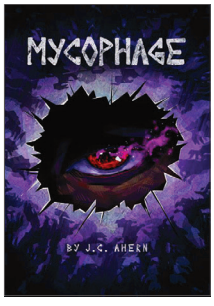
Supporting cast members get welcome time to shine, especially computer ace Priya Patel, who is given a potential romance and a well-earned new codename, and Sullivan's fiancée Emma, who, despite past trauma, demands to face danger with Sullivan. Leng springs many surprises while expanding the scope of the series. At times, the density of incident, flashbacks, and mystery antagonists can be exhausting, and the prose occasionally feels rote as the story hustles from beat to beat. Still, fans of the series will relish a final third in which the high-stakes, of-the-moment, infiltrated-America suspense simply does not let up.

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

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Mycophage

J.C. Ahern
359p, e-book, $2.99, ASIN B0GYF5198W



Promising debut pitting scientists and rebels against space zombies.

Great for fans of Peter Clines's *Dead Moon*, Ramsey Hudson's *Space Zombies*.

Ahern's tense and bloody debut unleashes zombies in the SF future of 2239. It's been 10 years since Dr. Joslyn Clutch made it off the *Quartermaster*, a starship whose crew began behaving strangely under the influence of an alien fungus. Now the resident doctor aboard the *Starfish*, Joslyn finds the past catching up to her when the ship is seized by the Global Republic (GR), a resistance group rebelling against the Earth's Allied Democratic Governance (ADG). The rebels' mission: to expose the truth of what happened on the *Quartermaster*. Joslyn is the only living witness to the likely cover-up of the risk of a zombie apocalypse on Earth—and the GR plans to take her back to the abandoned vessel. Joslyn's loyalties are tested as she learns the full truth of what happened, faces the horrors of the virus, and strives to prevent the infection of all humanity.

Ahern creates an ensemble cast of characters that readers will connect with and invest in as the mystery, action, and horror ramp up. *Mycophage* honors familiar beats of the SF subgenres it draws upon, staging the slow, suspenseful investigation of a derelict ship and springing grisly surprises as the pale, "purple-veined mycozombies" bite, cough blood, and generally go "aggro." The action is inventive, building to memorable beats, though the prose can be flat: "He allowed the first monster within two arm's lengths of him before he galloped down the first flight of stairs to the first half-landing, making sure the monsters followed him in the route he wanted to take." Still, the emphasis on geographic clarity is welcome.

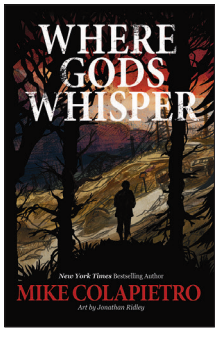
While the zombie plot—complete with surprise deaths, cat-and-mouse games, and the charged horror of having to kill bitten comrades—takes precedence, the underlying theme of government cover-ups and a brewing rebellion deepens the material. Ahern springs some fun twists, including some unexpected adversaries, and invests in the cast's humanity, so the deaths have weight. At its best, the novel stirs a feeling too rare in horror stories: that nobody, not even the protagonist, is truly safe.

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

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Where Gods Whisper

Mike Colapietro | Paradigm Publishing
264p, trade paper, $17.99, ISBN 979-8-9950645-0-3



Immersive near-future exploration of survival in a fractured world.

Great for fans of Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*.

In Colapietro's absorbing dystopian, Mencken Barnes wakes every day to the same three rooms, routinely visited by Chaplain Davis, who wades through five identical questions during each meeting. Though he used to bring her intermittent letters from her parents, those have stopped, leaving Mencken trapped in a perpetual, suffocating existence of waking, eating, and turning inward to examine her long-buried memories. When the chaplain's visits suddenly stop—and the muffled outside noises she's accustomed to hearing disappear—Mencken is left truly isolated, with a book called *Where Gods Whisper* as her sole companion. Terrified of what she will find, Mencken escapes, desperate to reunite with her lost parents. But what she encounters is a decimated world, strewn with abandoned vehicles and dead bodies.

Mencken's fortunes change when she meets Oslo Arguello, a mentally fractured man whose memories are as broken as hers. With his help, Mencken learns to hunt, cook, and fend for herself, all while learning snippets of the world's outcome from her book: global financial collapse, rebellion, artificial intelligence threatening humankind, and corrupt governmental overreach. As Mencken grows closer to uncovering the truth of what happened to the world and her parents, sinister powers manipulate the remaining population, resulting in a terrifying yet eerily familiar depiction of a near-future world teetering on the edge of extinction.

Colapietro builds tension through the novel's unique structure. Readers learn of Mencken's world as she does, through lived experience, splintered remnants of historical record, and a creeping awareness that darker forces are shaping what it means to be human. Colapietro sweeps readers into that immersive world through crisp scene craft and a sharp eye for the motivations that drive humanity: autonomy, connection, and the need for identity. The result is a realistic, deeply resonant portrayal of the costs of survival in a fractured world.

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

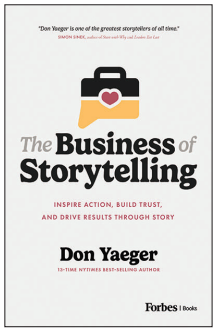
BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

EDITOR'S PICK

The Business of Storytelling: Inspire Action, Build Trust, and Drive Results Through Story

Don Yaeger

240p, hardcover, $29.99, ASIN B0H126X8ZW



Succinct, polished guide for honing the storytelling craft.

Great for fans of Lisa Cron's *Wired for Story*, Donald Miller's *Building a StoryBrand.*

"Storytelling is not a soft skill," former *Sports Illustrated* associate editor Yaeger declares in this polished guide—it's a useful tool for professionals in nearly every career. Inspired by his father's storytelling craft when he was young, Yaeger recounts a lifetime of studying the elements that make up a riveting story, landing on four "Universal Truths of Storytelling": the most interesting stories tap into the human experience; the how and why behind a story is what makes it memorable; stories are powerful drivers of meaning and value; and the storytelling process is intricate, varied, and never formulaic. He applies this wisdom through practical strategy and streamlined structure, drawing on illustrative case studies, neurobiology, and more.

Yaeger makes it clear that storytelling transcends communication and connection, breaking down how to apply the science behind it to trigger a stronger response. His suggestions include reversing the I/you ratio to involve listeners more directly, inviting an audience to use their imagination for active participation, and maintaining a crystal-clear focus on the purpose behind a story. He also delves into the early history of storytelling, marking it as a way to pass information on long before writing took shape. The same social and scientific factors that made storytelling evolutionarily useful still exist today, he declares, and understanding those influences can help us better communicate difficult concepts and persuade audiences.

The Business of Storytelling functions as a multi-dimensional digital document in addition to tailored guide. Yaeger integrates QR codes into the text, offering supporting video clips and other bonus freebies, while the detailed appendices include a sample template of his "Ten Elements of Storytelling" for practical application. The result is a clear-eyed, well-executed approach to "connect[ing] through the power of storytelling."

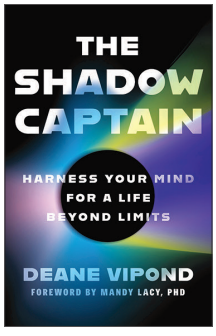
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

SELF-HELP

The Shadow Captain: Harness Your Mind for a Life Beyond Limits

Deane Vipond

200p, e-book, $9.99, ASIN B0DSZ53WKZ



Intuitive, practical ways to harness the mind's power for change.

Great for fans of Joe Dispenza's *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself*, Joseph Nguyen's *Don't Believe Everything You Think.*

Encouraging readers to reshape their life narratives, Vipond's debut explores the interplay between our conscious and subconscious, sharing anecdotes, well-known research, and practical strategies to building an intentional life. He delves into the benefits of visualization, meditation, and affirmations, emphasizes the mood-enhancing effects of laughter, and urges a letting go of negativity—while still striking the necessary balance between "managed, realistic expectations" and positive thinking. "A positive disposition inclines us toward success," he declares, but that doesn't mean hard work—and a little grounding—isn't just as crucial. Offsetting confidence with humility, patiently believing that success is in reach, and embracing life's challenges are just some of Vipond's many methods to achieving that balance.

Ultimately, what Vipond offers is a roadmap to controlling the most valuable tool any human possesses—the brain. He highlights the different ways the subconscious—which he terms "Sub"—can affect daily life, counting it as "the most important driver of every single action you take that doesn't require conscious thought," and offers an abundance of interactive exercises, scientific and philosophical theories, and personal vignettes to help readers activate awareness and retrain the mind. Black and white, cartoon-like illustrations detract somewhat from Vipond's overarching message—that "what we're given in life is often of less value than how we choose to use it"—but overall, his advice is inviting, open-minded, and easy to follow.

Readers seeking new ways to shed insecurities, tackle phobias, regulate emotions, and dream big will appreciate Vipond's emphasis on logical, step-by-step change: set a measurable goal, develop a present-tense mission statement (a "Personal Sub Statement"), commit to that statement by speaking it out loud and writing it down, and nurture the vision of its success. What will follow, he asserts, is a cognitive recalibration that, when paired with persistence and careful self-awareness, will eventually lead to "your best possible life."

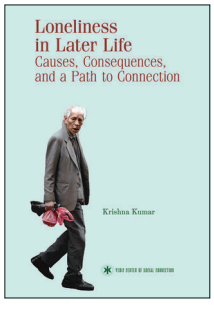
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **B** | Illustrations: **C+** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

SELF-HELP

Loneliness in Later Life: Causes, Consequences, and a Path to Connection

Krishna Kumar | Vedic Center of Social Connection

262p, trade paper, $16.99, ISBN 979-8-19559343-8-9



Practical, compassionate solutions to later-in-life loneliness.

Great for fans of Vivek H. Murthy's *Together*, Noreena Hertz's *The Lonely Century.*

Kumar's informative debut digs into the causes, consequences, and solutions to loneliness among older adults, marking it not as "how many friends one has," but "whether one's social relationships satisfy emotional needs." He presents loneliness as a complex condition impacting physical health, mental well-being, and quality of life, exploring how—through experiences such as chronic illness, loss of spouse and friends, financial insecurities, and mental health challenges—loneliness can develop and persist. Kumar argues that, while pervasive and devastating, loneliness can be reduced—through methods such as community involvement, volunteering, therapy, exercise, and more.

Kumar strikes a welcome balance between analyzing the origins of loneliness and outlining potential solutions. Disabilities can be addressed through physical and occupational therapy, to "hel[p] people participate as fully and independently as possible in the everyday activities"; bereavement from losing a spouse—which can lead to depression—is often ameliorated through social connections and a careful attention to building new routines; and changes like moving to independent living communities or social farming retirement communities can help aging adults rebuild social bonds, establish comforting rhythms, and feel confident that care is available if it's needed.

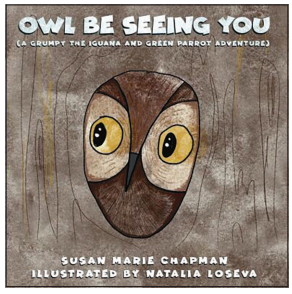
Beyond identifying how formal, therapeutic interventions can diminish loneliness, Kumar also touches on simple ways readers can support aging adults: phone calls, sharing a meal, regular visits, and active, attentive listening all make the list. The book's message is ultimately hopeful, insisting that, while loneliness can have a serious impact on people's lives, meaningful connections, purpose, and support will help older adults feel more engaged. Kumar's writing is touching and easy to follow, delivering research-based discussion and practical guidance as well as illustrative examples that show his ideas in action. Whether focused on rebuilding purpose, understanding and using technology, locating available community programs, or simplifying daily tasks, this is a useful, resource-rich solution to our world's distressing epidemic of later-in-life loneliness.

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

PICTURE BOOKS

Owl Be Seeing You: A Grumpy the Iguana and Green Parrot Adventure, Book 8

Susan Marie Chapman | The Gourmet Dog, LLC
38p, hardcover, $21.99, ISBN 978-1-736-80563-3



Adorable iguana helps star-crossed owls reunite.

Great for fans of Freya Blackwood's *The Boy and the Elephant*, Beth Lancione's Solomon Screech Owls series.

Returning Grumpy the Iguana fans will be delighted by this latest offering by Chapman (following the two-part adventure *Babies on Board*), as our favorite green iguana witnesses the touching romance of two screech owls. Since Grumpy's best pal and roommate, the Green Parrot, is away on a family vacation, Grumpy has their cozy tree house in Flamingo Park all to himself. He plans to while away the hours catching some extra shut-eye, but his peaceful reverie is interrupted one night by a loud noise that shocks him awake. Upon investigating, Grumpy discovers the lonely, heartbroken Screech Owl, keening into the darkness as he waits for his sweetheart, who promised a year ago to meet him there that night.

Grumpy tries his best to settle Screech Owl down so he can get some much-needed rest, but it's to no avail. While Screech Owl relocates to a nearby abandoned woodpecker hole, camouflaging himself inside and pining for his true love, Grumpy receives yet another shrieking nighttime visitor: the long-awaited Miss Screech Owl. She's beautiful—with long eyelashes, a fetching gold feather behind her ear, and mesmerizing yellow eyes—but she's just as loud as her mate, much to Grumpy's chagrin. Instead of dreaming about tasty snacks and exciting adventures, Grumpy finds himself playing matchmaker and comforting an owl in despair.

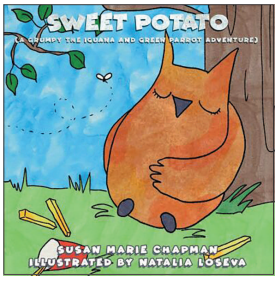
Kids will find that setup endlessly entertaining, and Chapman includes some interesting educational facts about screech owls as teaching points. Natalia Loseva incorporates small, amusing details into the story's twilight-flavored illustrations—like Grumpy's adorable pajamas and bedside slippers—while evoking vivid emotions through the owls' enormous eyes, and readers of any age will be pleased by the story's happy ending. Best of all, Grumpy makes two more good friends, which—for readers already familiar with the series—hints at the promise of more sweet reunions in the future.

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

PICTURE BOOKS

Sweet Potato: A Grumpy the Iguana and Green Parrot Adventure, Book 9

Susan Marie Chapman | The Gourmet Dog, LLC
44p, hardcover, $21.99, ISBN 978-1-736-80564-0



Unconventional young owl nurtures her sweet bond with found family.

Great for fans of Peter Brown's *Mr. Tiger Goes Wild*, Janell Cannon's *Stellaluna*.

Grumpy the Iguana plays adopted uncle to a free-thinking young screech owl in Chapman's newest series release. This story picks up on the previous *Owl Be Seeing You*, where Screech Owl and his wife, Miss Screech Owl, embarked on a fledgling romance. Since Grumpy had a hand in their courtship, he's been privy to the start of their family, including their unconventional youngest owlet, Sweet Potato—so named for her obsession with the tasty vegetable ever since her father gave her discarded sweet potato fries as a snack one day. But that's just one of many qualities that make Sweet Potato truly unique.

Unlike her brothers—who have "contests to see who [can] eat the most bugs"—Sweet Potato can't stand creepy crawlies. She also finds napping during the day boring, preferring instead to sneak out of the nest and team up with her Uncle Grumpy on his daytime adventures. Her parents are less than thrilled about that, of course, but Grumpy is happy to entertain "his little Screech Owl girl." Together, they pack a picnic and head to the park for a day in the sun, chatting about life, family, and the future, with Grumpy trying his best to inspire Sweet Potato to "always listen to your parents… they are here to guide you from danger and teach you all the life skills that will help you become a beautiful young lady."

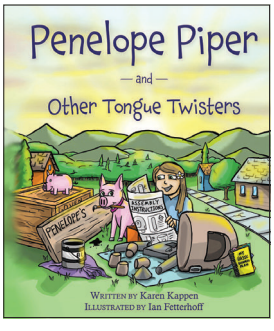
Natalia Loseva's brightly colored, minimalist illustrations capture the special bond between Grumpy and Sweet Potato, depicting their hugs, piggyback rides, and sweet moments of togetherness. Sweet Potato is undeniably "a rebel," but she's also the perfect example of a young one stretching her wings: she has "big plans" for the future and wants to be valued as unique, but she still treasures her loved ones' opinions. This is a special tribute to found family, autonomy, and growing up.

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

PICTURE BOOKS

Penelope Piper and Other Tongue Twisters

Karen Kappen | Tickled Fancy Publishing
65p, trade paper, $14.99, ISBN 979-8-9949838-0-5



Witty wordplay and imaginative illustrations encourage energetic reading.

Great for fans of Jon Agee's *Orangutan Tongs*, Lou Brooks's *Twimericks*.

Kappen expresses her love of language through lavish alliteration and tongue-twisting delights in her debut picture book, a collection of three stories that playfully reconfigure rhyming verse. The longest story, "Penelope Piper," introduces the sister of Peter Piper, known for picking a peck of pickled peppers. In Kappen's retelling, Peter's feat made him extraordinarily famous, which takes him away from Penelope and ends their carefree days playing together. Penelope responds by unleashing her inner overachiever, commencing a relentless pursuit of fame that would not only match Peter's, but also eclipse him. She learns that picking peppers is not enough.

"She pivoted promptly to plucking papayas // And pineapple, passion fruit, peaches, and pears," enthuses Kappen, keeping the focus on Penelope's favorite letter. A host of other businesses (portrait painting, penguin pajamas) and attention-grabbing stunts ("She rescued a princess from pillaging pirates!") eventually lead her to politics. President Piper achieves all her goals, but at what cost? Kappen makes Penelope a cautionary tale about overworking and under-planning while reminding young readers to enjoy their childhood and live in the present. The lighter "Mr. Quibble's Costume Shop" and "A Shocking Scene at Shirring" are full of fun twists and turns.

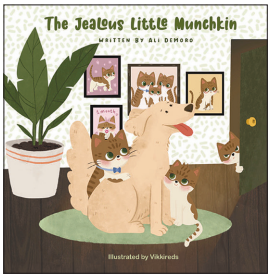
Starting with a variation of the lip-loosening exercise "red-lettered yellow leather," Mr. Quibble's Costume Shop offers a wealth of dress-up options, with each new item added to a cumulative list. The charming, eccentric Charlotte Silvershell reports that Sheldon is missing, and this "shocking" mystery goes down some unexpected paths. Ian Fetterhoff's bold cartoon illustrations, jam-packed with oddball characters, perfectly capture Kappen's heightened whimsy. He adds lively visual gags, like an oompah band reacting to Penelope's pet pig bathing in the town square fountain. Kappen introduces young readers to poetic forms in *Penelope Piper and Other Tongue Twisters* and encourages vocabulary-building in sentences loaded with tasty bon mots.

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

PICTURE BOOKS

The Jealous Little Munchkin: Second Edition

Ali DeMoro | Little Munchkins Press
31p, e-book, $4.95, ISBN 979-8991769914



Playful, encouraging story of a curious kitty learning to welcome a new sibling.

Great for fans of Susannah Shane's *When I Became Your Brother*, Patricia MacLachlan's *You Were the First.*

In DeMoro's comforting picture book, a curious kitty named Munchkin must learn to overcome jealousy to welcome a new sibling. Munchkin loves her parents, but when Mama and Papa Kitty bring home a puppy named Buttercup, Munchkin feels uneasy. Right away she notices how Buttercup is different—"she is tall, loud, pants, licks, and has a big bushy tail. But most of all, Buttercup loves Munchkin. Munchkin does not like Buttercup." As Buttercup settles in, Munchkin worries that her new sister is stealing her toys, encroaching on her space, and monopolizing her parents' affection, leaving her angsty and bereft.

When Buttercup gives Munchkin a slobbery kiss at dinnertime, the normally sweet kitty snaps. "This isn't fair," she shouts. "I wish she was never brought here." Papa Kitty responds by sending Munchkin to her room, where she "cries and cries through the rumbles in her tummy." This heartbreaking scene doesn't last long, as Papa Kitty quickly realizes his error and calmly approaches Munchkin to explain that their love for Buttercup does not diminish their love for Munchkin. This tender conversation will soothe the young readers who may feel jealous or uncertain after the arrival of a sibling.

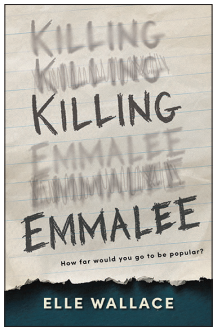
Vikkireds's playful illustrations place this feline family in a home that is distinctly human. The kitties sleep in large beds with comforters and pillowcases, they eat dinner at a table, and potted plants feature prominently in each room. The choice to include framed family pictures in some backgrounds that suggest a graphic novel's sequential panels clutters the pages and emphasizes a tendency toward repetitive perspectives. Expressive eyes and clear emotions make it easy to follow Munchkin's emotional journey. When she feels calm and inquisitive, her eyes are wide and smiling, but when she's angry, she furrows her brow and raises her paws in a gesture of protest. This will make it easy for young readers to follow the story and recognize the power of overcoming big feelings to welcome someone new into their lives.

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

YOUNG ADULT

Killing Emmalee

Elle Wallace | The Blue Door Books
304p, e-book, $7.99, ISBN 978-1-972-67200-6



Gripping series starter of wealthy friends and dangerous secrets.

Great for fans of Karen M. McManus's *One of Us Is Lying*, E. Lockhart's Ruby Oliver series.

In Wallace's gripping debut, 18-year-old Emmalee Sloane relocates to rustic Ravensville, Washington, after years of moving thanks to her mother Nikki's special ops career. Hoping to survive her senior year unnoticed after leaving a high school she considered a lonely "cesspool of wannabe influencers," Emmalee instead finds herself drawn into the world of Ravensville Academy's wealthy social elite. Vulnerable, grieving, and eager for connection, she's buoyed by "the thought of having popular friends again." As she becomes entangled with star quarterback Chase, seemingly perfect Britney, and their privileged inner circle, Emmalee is pulled into a web of secrets surrounding a tragic accident. The deeper she becomes involved, the more dangerous belonging appears to be.

Wallace's fast-paced, atmospheric prose effectively captures the emotional turbulence of adolescence through Emmalee's narration. Much of the novel's appeal lies in its portrayal of the universal desire to fit in during the fragile transition between adolescence and adulthood. "It's impossible to just waltz into a new school and make friends. I have to figure out what the school is like, what the other kids are like, how to fit in with them," Emmalee laments. Wallace also captures how digital spaces become tools of exclusion and reinforce social hierarchies, particularly when Britney weaponizes communication and uses social media to circulate disturbingly explicit images.

Through Emmalee's relatable observations, the novel explores the dangers of validation culture, class privilege, and social hierarchy. At Ravensville, wealth and popularity create divisions between insiders and those trying to navigate their orbit. Wallace further examines how jealousy becomes corrosive when intertwined with status and competition, as in Britney's declaration that "I don't get jealous. I get even." Though certain plot developments rely on familiar tropes, the novel's engagement with self-worth, belonging, and perception gives it greater resonance. Readers who enjoy YA psychological thrillers, dark academia, and coming-of-age narratives will find this an engaging read.

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



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