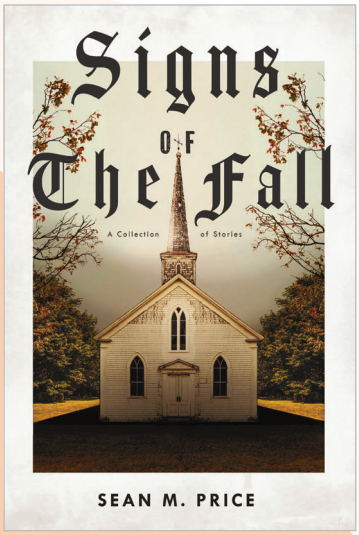
August 24, 2026

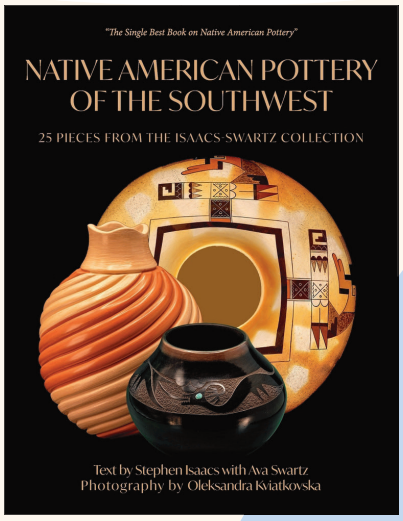
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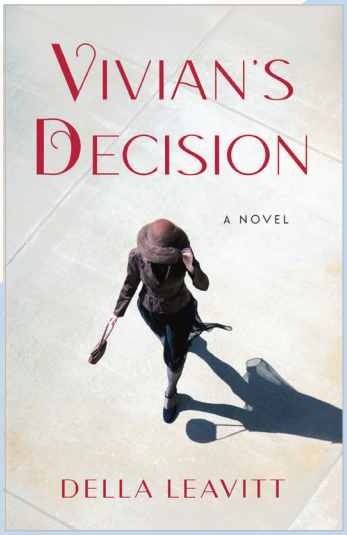
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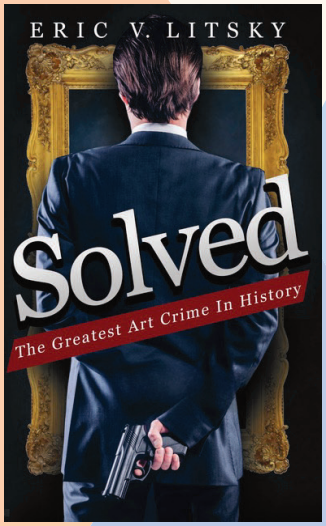
Fall Regional Trade Show Special

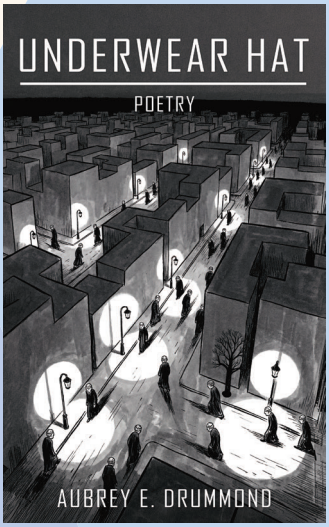


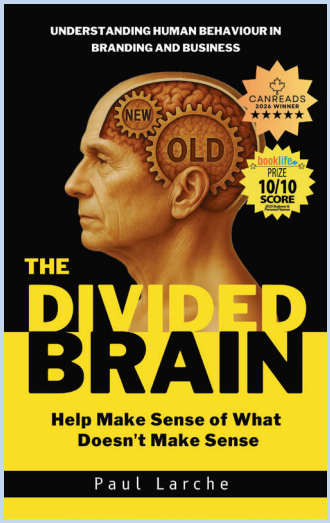












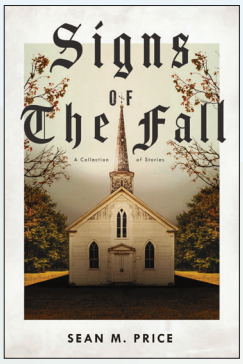
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Fall Regional Trade Show Special

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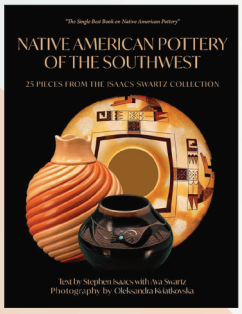
“ Quotes from BookLife Reviews



Signs of the Fall: A Collection of Stories

by Sean M. Price 979-8897473007

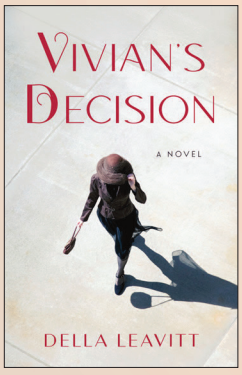
“ Immersive portrait of an eerie town and its people.



Native American Pottery of the Southwest

by Stephen Isaacs 979-8295542626

“ Striking tribute to beauty and cultural significance of America’s Southwest Indigenous pottery.

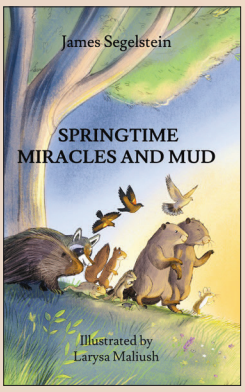


Vivian’s Decision

by Della Leavitt 979-88963613026

EDITOR'S PICK

“ Evocative portrayal of a woman’s 1950s abortion journey.

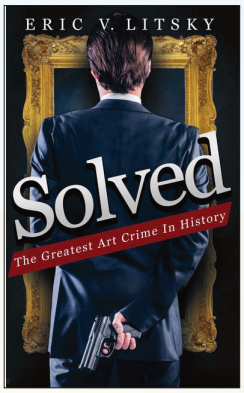


Springtime Miracles and Mud

by James Segelstein 979-8218526917

EDITOR'S PICK

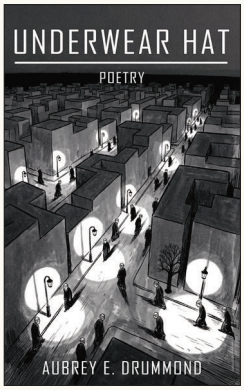
“ Charming, chatty story of a woodchuck, a field mouse, and animal friendship.



Solved: The Greatest Art Crime in History

by Eric V. Litsky 979-8988377665

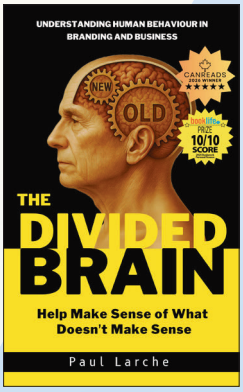
“ Brisk, entertaining thriller tackles the unsolved Gardner Museum robbery.



Underwear Hat: Poetry

by Aubrey E. Drummond 979-8235914001

Through humor, sorrow, melody, and memory, *Underwear Hat* becomes a living archive—one man’s testament to endurance, tenderness, and the sacred duty of honoring the woman he loved.



The Divided Brain: Help Make Sense of What Doesn’t Make Sense

by Paul Larche 978-1069411006

EDITOR'S PICK

BOOKLIFE PRIZE SEMI-FINALIST 10/10 SCORE

“ Informative, practical examination of the neuroscience behind brand marketing.

August 24, 2026

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YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING

59 New BookLife Titles Listed • 17 New BookLife Titles Reviewed

Indie Spotlight

In this edition of our monthly thematic roundup of BookLife titles, we feature sci-fi and fantasy.

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MIDDLE GRADE AND YA



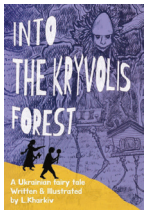
Gathering Storms

Lucas Fischhaber

ISBN 978-1-09-801531-2

Author statement: "I never expected a bedtime story to become more than seven years of my life. One cold night in January 2018, after telling my children one of our improvised adventures, I sat down at the computer intending to preserve a few ideas. Since then, I have rewritten the novel through three major versions, spent countless hours building its world and writing with my wife, and watched the three children—who inspired its animal tamer, craftsman, and wilderness ranger—grow alongside the story."

Into the Kryvolis Forest



L. Kharkiv

ASIN B0HB7DLGTS

Author statement: "*Into the Kryvolis Forest* is an illustrated middle grade novel in verse set in the world of Ukrainian folklore. After their home is invaded by monsters, Bronas and Solomiya must cross the treacherous woods to a magical village. They have 13 days to get to safety, before the Kryvolis Forest claims them and turns them into one of its beasts. I spent all of my childhood summers with my grandparents in a tiny Ukrainian village. The magic I found in those woods and fields, and the stories my grandmother shared about her life, now provide endless inspiration for my work."

The Tree of Ticket Leaves



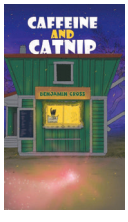
Larry Good and Meredith Good

ASIN B0GQ99PFJV

Author statement: "My father, Larry Good, is 86 years old and was born, raised, and still resides in Nottoway County, Virginia. In between working as an English teacher and librarian, and raising a family, he began writing a middle grade fantasy novel. Fast forward several decades and I found myself sitting at home, taking care of my mother, unable to work, and in great need of distraction. So, one day I picked up my father's book, wiped the dust off, and decided to see what I could accomplish. After a few months, with several adjustments, a lot of subtraction, and a surprising amount of addition, our collaborative version of *The Tree of Ticket Leaves* emerged."

FANTASY

Caffeine and Catnip



Benjamin Cross

ASIN B0GZL6T3K5

Author statement: "Madison Moss thought inheriting her aunt's cozy coffee shop would mean a quiet life in Happy Valley. Instead, she's juggling enchanted espresso machines, a talking cat with attitude, and a winged sprite whose caffeine habit should probably be illegal. I wanted to write about inheritance, not just magic passed down, but the secrets and silences families use to protect the people they love, and what happens when those silences finally break."

Chaos Gate



Robert Walton
ASIN B0F8RHT22R
Author statement: "I'm a great fan of *Candide*. I freely admit that Voltaire's picaresque tale inspired *Chaos Gate*'s ever-escalating series of fantastical encounters. Unlike Candide, however, main protagonist Claire learns and grows through her experiences. Magic and monsters abound, but Claire's path to healing gives purpose to all the action. I intended *Chaos Gate* to be a fantasy romp, but a romp with substance—friendship, humor, courage."

Lion Time



Barbara J. Moritsch
ISBN 978-0-9979862-3-5
Author statement: "*Lion Time* is a novel of Kenya that features telepathic communication with animals, time-travel, and a unique type of shape-shifting. This is my second book in the series Oracle of the Wild, after *Wolf Time*. The two books share the main protagonist, Sage McAllister. The idea for *Lion Time* came during a visit to Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve, when a well-loved wild lion named Scarface approached our vehicle and gave me a good long look, telling me without words that lions needed help."

Reigning Fire



Jasmine Kah Yan Loo
ISBN 978-0-645-89600-8
Author statement: "As a neurodivergent author of Chinese heritage, I wanted to write an ancient Chinese-inspired fantasy in which neurodivergence exists without modern diagnostic language: Xun simply experiences herself as fundamentally different in a world whose unspoken rules seem to come naturally to everyone else. Fantasy offered a way to depict that experience through the metaphor of Emberkin, while exploring identity, trauma, historical erasure, and the dangerous comfort of believing what we have always been told."

SCI-FI

New Stanton



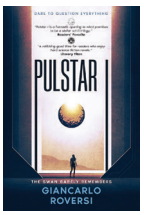
Maxwell Vagus
ISBN 978-1-968485-78-8
Author statement: "*New Stanton* is a speculative noir fantasy told through the eyes of Mister Harold Dean, a shady alcoholic, who wakes up in a town that doesn't exist, and his only means of escape is his missing 1964 Chevy Malibu. The origins of *New Stanton* are many and varied. It first came together as a NaNoWriMo project in 2014, which ended up being a 50,000-word pile of spontaneous prose. My main inspirations at that time were to tell a small-town story with an otherworldly glow about it. After many years, I returned to the project, adding to it, layering in new ideas, characters, and plot elements, and finally completing it as my MFA thesis in 2025."

Model 36



C.J. Ilex
ISBN 978-1-06-660280-3
Author statement: "I started *Model 36* about six years ago, watching a science program about planck length, the smallest possible distance in the universe. Nothing can be smaller; two things can't be closer together than that. It struck me that this sounded like a constraint you'd build into a simulation. The idea of twin sister characters, with one disappearing, came quickly after that. Then it took years before I knuckled down and got disciplined."

Pulstar I: The Swan Barely Remembers



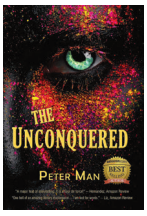
Giancarlo Roversi
ASIN B0BXJZ14P5
Author statement: "In 2014, my life shattered when my wife passed away. So I wrote for her a dystopian science fiction trilogy called Pulstar, trying to understand life, death, and our place in the cosmos. I also composed a soundtrack for each book. Although I believe Pulstar's theorems are worth considering, this doesn't mean they're a good thing for humanity or for anyone. The balance of society is so fragile that a single thing can shatter it. So Pulstar is also a reflection, a warning of what could happen if we don't change and evolve."

The Voyager



Charles Frederick Streckfus
ASIN B0GBWVG1ZQ
Author statement: "The story is about an astronaut that dies in his spaceship, and in his death throes, he slumps forward and activates the vessel's engine, which propels him into the vastness of space. Eventually, the gravitational attraction of a planet pulls his vessel into its orbit, and he is retrieved by the planet's inhabitants. The inhabitants, finding him deceased, resurrect him. I am a cancer researcher and I'm very knowledgeable about patient struggles with life-and-death situations. Consequently, I wanted to create a story of how an individual would cope with a new 'lease on life' while retaining the memories of his prior existence."

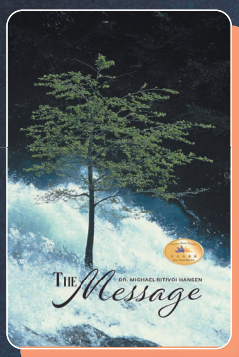
Unconquered



Peter Man
ISBN 978-0-359-60113-4
Author statement: "As a Chinese Canadian author, I try to share my stories based on real people, actual places, and personal experiences. *Unconquered* is about a Chinese Canadian girl from a small town in southern Ontario. Adopted from China as an infant, Victoria must embark on a perilous odyssey of discovery, travelling across Canada to China, where she realizes her biological mother was a warrior during the Shang dynasty and her father was the chief of a nomadic tribe during the Qin dynasty. Victoria further learns that she is the only person who can stop humanity's inexorable descent into darkness."

Dr. MICHAEL RITIVOI HANSEN

Born in Romania during World War II, I lived under Communist rule until leaving in 1978, thirteen years before the regime fell. Having known no other system, I judged communism by experience, not ideology. I watched my father and four uncles rise from poverty through education and hard work before the regime curtailed their careers and ambitions. When my own dreams as a young dentist began to fade, I chose to escape.



The Message
978-1990695841

The Message is a birds eye view of the origin of Marxism, how it came to be a political system, what kind of a society it is, its daily life, all woven around my personal experience. "The remarkable power of his "message" derives not from rhetorical devices but from the searing authenticity of his early life experience." "Without exception, the most potent critiques of Soviet Communism have been written by those who have had first-hand experience of it." "His [Dr, Michael Hansen] engrossing book **"The Message"** is both a history of his daily life under Communism and a philosophical and moral meditation upon Romanian Communism as a spiritual pathology."-Professor John Fleming, Professor Emeritus of literature at Princeton University, Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and Past President of the Medieval Academy of America. "The way the author was able to capture the stark reality of life under a Communist government, and the ways in which Communism strikes down the idea of individuality in those nations, was both heartbreaking and eye-opening to read about."-Pacific Book Review by Jack Chambers

amazon ★★★★★

In "The Message," Dr. Michael Ritivoi Hansen navigates the historical landscape of Marxism, unraveling its profound impact on society. The book offers invaluable insights into the political ramifications of this ideology, weaving a narrative that extends from its origins to its present-day implications. Author's personal experiences under the Romanian Communism regime add a poignant layer, humanizing the broader historical analysis. The comprehensive exploration not only sheds light on Marxism's evolution but also examines its contemporary relevance, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of how this ideology has shaped and continues to influence our world.

Wizard, Valuable Political and Social Insights

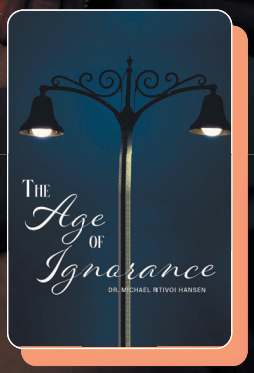
I really enjoyed reading about Dr Michael Hansen's experiences living under Communism. But not in the way that someone would naturally enjoy reading about someone's life, this one is different. It's always good to get different perspectives and Dr. Hanson's book has taught me a great deal. Early on, he says that he believed freedom was supposed to be something that everyone had in life and needed, in order to claim any sort of pride. As we read on, we learn how Communism basically strikes down individualism. Very sad, but educational at the same time.

Sachi, An interesting look at Marxism

Pacific Book Review
helping authors succeed!

Dr. Michael Ritivoi Hansen, very intricately explores the non-physical realities of the universe that one fails to notice. And the emotions that occupy most of our brains, such as feelings of pride, greed, and materialistic fulfillment, are not as significant as they might seem.

Reyan Boris Mishra, Pacific Book Review



The Age of Ignorance
978-1778835858

The Age of Ignorance is a sequel to my book The Message. After leaving Communism, I had to deal with another life defining philosophical question: what is life? How should I understand and approach it beyond work and eating? Common explanations did not satisfy my mind. After painstakingly examining my choices, I came with this book that answers my needs and, hopefully yours. Everything encountered in life has to make sense, be understood or it is a waste. Please, take this book seriously. Give it a chance. Your happiness is also mine.

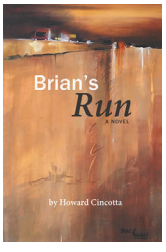
www.booksidepress.com Book is available for purchase at the following: amazon BARNES & NOBLE

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Fiction

Brian's Run



Howard Cincotta, illus. by Elaine Nunnally. Howard Cincotta. $12.99 paper (330p), ISBN 979-8-1971-2295-7; $4.99 e-book, ASIN B0H7QKG6QS
Amazon

On sleepless nights, Brian drives the Washington Beltway with the ghost of his dead wife, who died in an auto accident. But Brian must deal with much more than ghosts and memories.

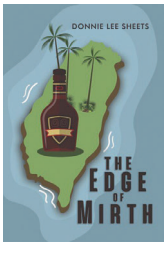
Brideen: The Journeys of a Famine Daughter



Kathleen McDonnell. AoS Publications. $26.49 paper (252p), ISBN 978-1-998662-60-9; $15.49 audio, ASIN B0FM8W4VYG
Amazon, Audible, Audiobooks.com, Spotify, Kobo, Libro.fm

An epic saga of the Irish diaspora and other upheavals of the 19th century. The author draws on the life story of her own ancestor, a survivor of the Great Famine.

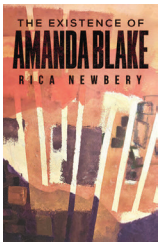
The Edge of Mirth



Donnie Lee Sheets. Dorrance Publishing. $18.99 paper (218p), ISBN 979-8-89499-075-0; $13.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89499-574-8
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance Bookstore

Comedic and heartbreaking, *The Edge of Mirth* is based on a true story of adapting to a new culture, the lure of vices in the Taiwanese nightlife, and devastating endings.

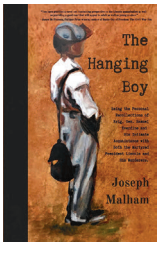
The Existence of Amanda Blake



Rica Newbury. Austin Macauley Publishers. $16.95 paper (254p), ISBN 978-1-3984-9118-2; $4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-3984-9309-4
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, WHSmith, Waterstones

Branded insane by her parents and locked in a 1957 mental hospital, a young woman struggles to reclaim her voice, identity, and future.

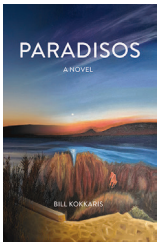
The Hanging Boy: Being the Personal Recollections of Brig. Gen. Samuel Everdine and His Intimate Acquaintance with Both the Martyred President Lincoln and His Murderers.



Joseph Malham. 3 Magi Books. $24.99 paper (388p), ISBN 979-8-234-07560-4
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

A young orphan boy in Civil War Washington is caught up in the orbits of both the Confederate conspirators in the Surratt boarding house and the Lincoln family.

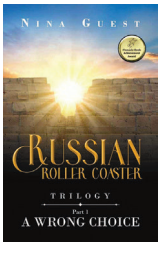
Paradisos



Bill Kokkaris. Atalanta Falls Publishing. $19.99 paper (362p), ISBN 978-1-7645228-0-9; $6.52 e-book, ISBN 978-1-7645228-1-6
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

On an Aegean island, a man's rescue of a refugee unravels family loyalties and awakens fear, myth, and violence beneath the surface of paradise.

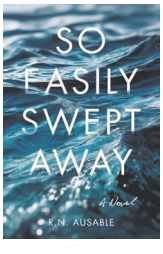
Russian Roller Coaster Trilogy, Part 1: A Wrong Choice



Nina Treadway. Guest Publishing. $14.99 paper (196p), ISBN 979-8-9972693-0-2
Amazon, IngramSpark

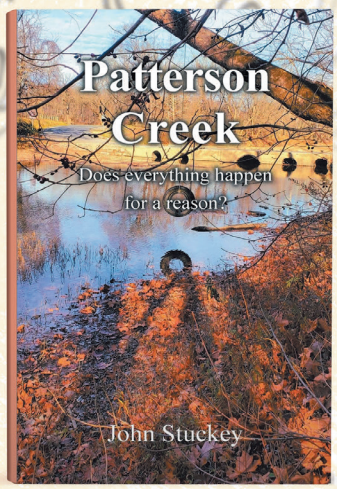
At 14, Margo's first love collides with betrayal, forcing her to survive a dangerous web of secrets in Soviet Russia.

So Easily Swept Away



R.N. Ausable. Archway Publishing. $17.99 paper (304p), ISBN 978-1-6657-8625-6; $12.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-6657-8626-3
Archwaypublishing.com, Amazon, Barnes & Noble

As an inland hurricane ravages their New England town, two men must face their own social isolation. *So Easily Swept Away* reminds us that there is beauty in our need to belong.



John Stuckey

PATTERSON CREEK

DOES EVERYTHING HAPPEN FOR A REASON?

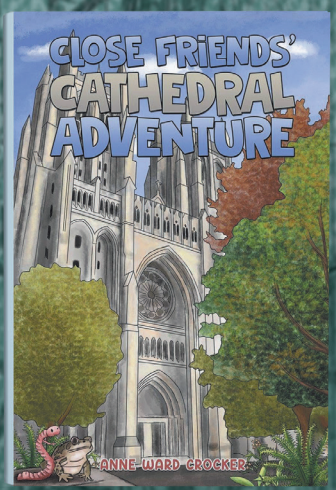
PB — 979-8897857166 HB — 979-8897857173

About the Book:

As a young Philadelphian, Anne's wit and heart warmed others, while she quietly suffered alone inside. But as a Marylander, working at the Finan Center, she began thinking suffering was meant to be. Finan was a low-security hospital ordered to take violent patients from the worst asylum in Maryland. Over-crowding made Anne a canary in the coal mine when the Cumberland Times-News cried: Finan Patient Faces Murder Charge. Eventually, all units got max-security, with census caps. Anne only got surgery, nursing care, rehab, and seizures. This story took 25 years to write, and it returns Anne's voice and honors her mettle, faith and heart. Also, thanks to a supportive friend who became a ray of hope, and lost love in the beauty of western Maryland in the deceptively peaceful hollows around Fort Ashby and Patterson Creek, West Virginia.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

When a quiet farmboy from Ohio—John Stuckey—met a free-spirited girl from Philadelphia—Anne, their marriage started out strong. But as they were slowly stalked and choked by a series of unrelenting problems, they relocated—like in a witness protection program—seeking a new life in the peaceful surroundings of mountain Maryland and West Virginia. But they found no peace. All they found was tragedy. Anne was violently attacked and seriously injured, and the family is devastated, so John wrote about it all to cope—questioning whether it all happened for a reason—re-examining his faith—and second-guessing every decision he had ever made.



Anne Ward Crocker

CLOSE FRIENDS' CATHEDRAL ADVENTURE

PB — 978-1638297987 HB — 978-1638298007 EB — 978-1638298014

About the Book:

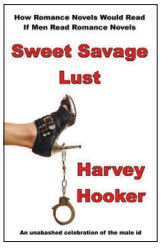
Peat, a toad, and Paul-Paulette, an earthworm, live in the woods beneath the roots of their friend, Christy, a Christmas fern. One day they are dug up and carried away. Christy is replanted in a pot large enough to hold Paul-Paulette but Peat has to hide under Christy's fronds. Together with their wildflower friends, they are taken to the Washington National Cathedral to participate in the annual Festival of Flowers. While the plants are being carried into the cathedral, Peat is discovered, picked up and left the the Garth - the small formal garden near the base of the stairs.

This is the story of the little toad's adventure as he tries to find his plant and animal friends in the huge building. It is a tour of the cathedral and an introduction to cathedral architecture inside and out. A short glossary of architecture terms is included.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Anne Ward Crocker is a native of Cambridge, MD, but has lived most of her life in Northern Virginia, currently in Winchester. After graduating from the University of Maryland in 1951, she was employed in DC for 10 years before retiring to raise a family. She has three children, five grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren. A lover of nature, she is a charter member of the Virginia Native Plant Society, was a Level Walker for the C&O Canal Association and a participant in many Audubon Christmas Bird Censuses. She has been involved in church activities throughout her life and, as a regular visitor to the Washington National Cathedral, witnessed much of its construction through its completion in 1990.

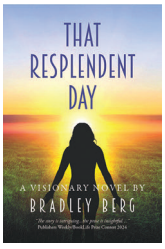
Sweet Savage Lust



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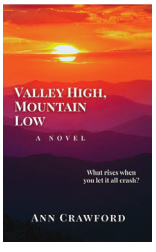
That Resplendent Day



Bradley Berg. Palmetto Publishing. $13.99 paper (214p), ISBN 979-8-8229-7590-3; $7.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-8229-7591-0 Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million, Powell's Books, Walmart

Zune journeys along the Infinite Highway of Life, revealing the imminent emergence of humanity's greatest Souls, our ultimate Muses. Neeya manifests her aspiration, and at civilization's existential crossroad, a momentous, uplifting global event unfolds.

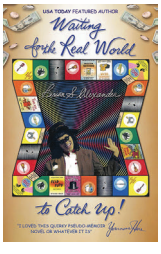
Valley High, Mountain Low



Ann Crawford. Lightscapes Publishing. $16.99 paper (236p), ISBN 978-0-9821690-5-6; $4.99 e-book, ASIN B0HBGYJ13C Amazon

After a Silicon Valley divorce, Mariella returns home to a fractured family, a conspiracy-fueled mother, and the chance to rebuild a life she never expected.

Waiting for the Real World to Catch Up

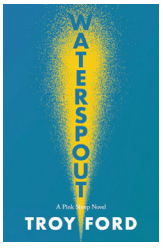


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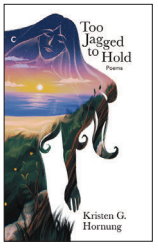


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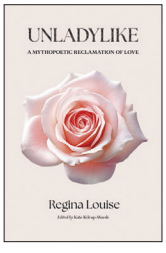
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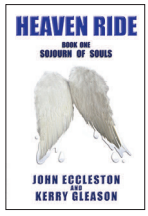
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Paige Thomas has no memory of her blackouts, but someone does. As anonymous emails expose her husband's lies and her mother's secrets, someone is watching them all.

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An Orphan of the Light

Frank Scozzari. Puerta Del Sol Books. $17.99 paper (392p), ISBN 978-1-7320253-3-2;

Patrick Fleming

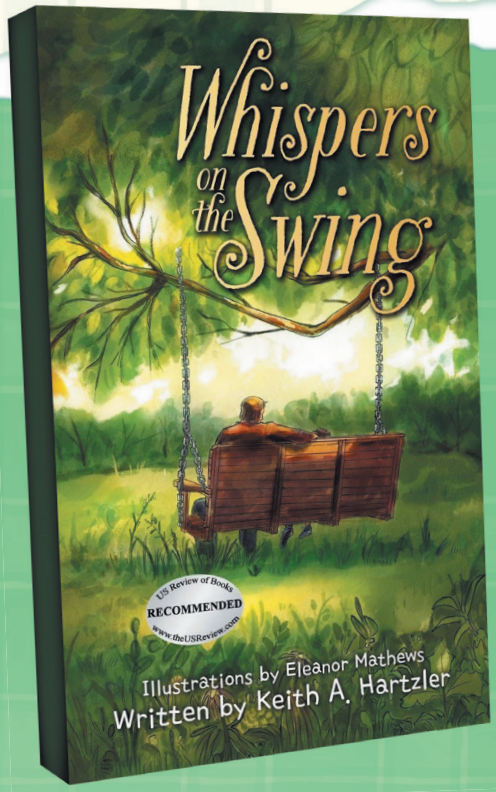
The Boy Who Could Smell Warming



978-1963844573

There was always something exceptional and different about ten-year-old Reuben Otis O'Brien, but no one, including Reuben Otis himself, can figure out quite what it is. All that he knows is that he can smell something very strange that no one else can, and sometimes it makes him sick.

The Boy Who Could Smell Warming is the story of Reuben Otis's quest to discover his special ability and its purpose. Since, as he describes himself, Reuben Otis is a "nerd in a cool guy's body," he does his own scientific investigation and finds out that he possesses a very unusual superpower which is vital for the whole world and will make him a true superhero. As he starts to use his superpower with the help of his family and two neighborhood friends, he learns he can change things vital to his hometown and to the entire planet. This gives Reuben Otis a newfound pride and a whole new direction to his life.



Keith A. Hartzler

Whispers on the Swing

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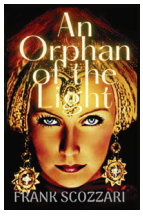
This book began as a collection of simple, heartfelt conversations with God—honest reflections written as prayers rather than formal devotions. After a friend read several of these entries and encouraged me to share them, I realized they might offer the same encouragement to others that they had given to me.

My hope is that these pages remind readers that God is neither distant nor indifferent, but present and eager to hear from us. Each reflection invites readers to speak with Him openly and honestly, with the simple trust of a child, finding comfort, hope, and a deeper personal relationship with Him.

Publishing this book was a step of faith and an opportunity I chose to embrace. If these reflections encourage even one person to draw closer to God, then sharing them has been more than worthwhile.

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Marshall Thornton. Kenmore Books. $28.99 (236p), ISBN 978-1-965306-15-4; $18.99 paper (278p), ISBN 978-1-965306-12-3
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Lambda Award winner Marshall Thornton takes you to early-20th-century Chicago, an era of developing queer awareness, a growing temperance movement, and a legendary detective agency.

Reality Betrays Us All



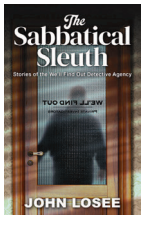
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This thought-provoking tale is a very human story of love, hate, and tragedy that explores the concept of post-transplant memory and man's desire to play God, whatever the cost.

Rusty Diamond



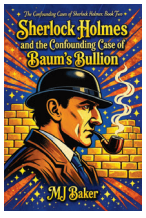
Austin Williams. Mossik Press. $18.99 paper (602p), ISBN 979-8-9992429-5-2; $6.99 e-book, ASIN B0H3DCGTYV
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Wendell Walsh is an investigator for the We'll Find Out Detective Agency. Follow his adventures as he pursues misbehaving husbands, frauds, thieves, and murderers.

Sherlock Holmes and the Confounding Case of Baum's Bullion



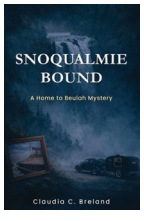
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A Holmes and Watson thriller. The duo must solve a 30-year-old cold case to exonerate Mycroft from prison or worse.

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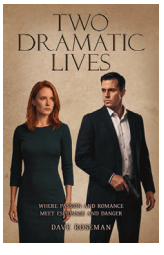
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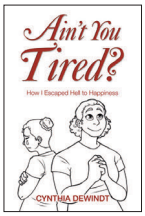
Wish I Didn't Want You

Moni Boyce. Love Snacks Publishing, LLC. $18.99 paper (320p), ISBN 978-1-952691-



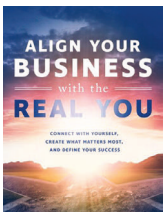
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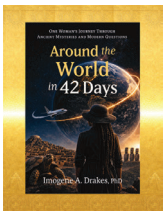
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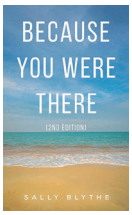
Jennifer Musser. PenRock Press. $31.99 (272p), ISBN 979-8-9915442-2-1; $19.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-9915442-1-4
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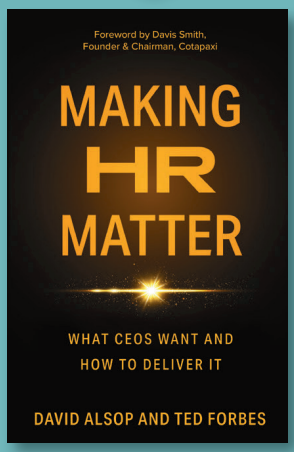
Sally Blythe. Austin Macauley Publishers. $7.95 paper (56p), ISBN 978-1-0371-2120-3; $4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0371-2121-0
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A moving and intimate account of bereavement, written from within the experience of loss itself, through letters and reflections to her late husband.

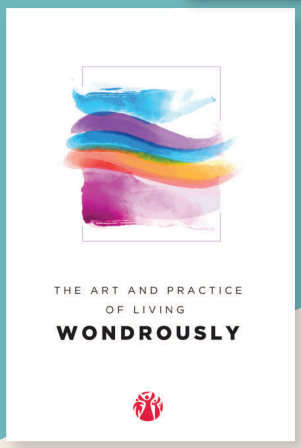
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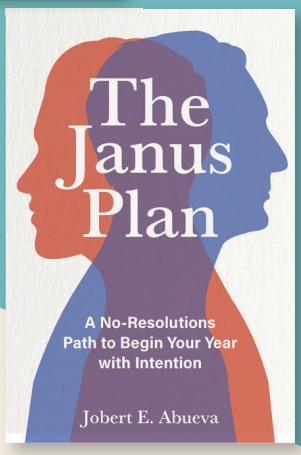


Roy Varghese. BlackBox. $17.99 paperback (204p), ISBN 979-8-2409-5021-6
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How We Lost Our Minds addresses the idea that AIs are conscious and the idea that human beings are neither conscious nor capable of beliefs or desires.

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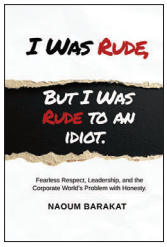




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If I'm a Sun and You're a Moon: What Ancient Mythology Teaches Us About Love, Healing, and Relationships



Jane G. Goldberg and Lochlainn Seabrook. Sea Raven Press. $39.99 (182p), ISBN 979-8-950389-13-9; $27.99 paper (182p), ISBN 979-8-950389-12-2
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If I'm a Sun and You're a Moon introduces Solar-Lunar Psychology, a methodology for love, healing, relationships, and human nature.

The Last Sunset



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This motivational memoir is as much the reader's as it is the writer's. Life's events laying heavy? Let this heal you. A beauty of a book celebrating life and love.

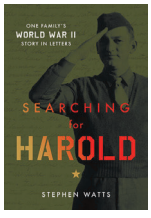
Michael Farmer: Adventures of a Meteorite Hunter



Aline Griffin. Dorrance Publishing. $31.99 (262p), ISBN 979-8-89978-069-1; $26.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89978-568-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Dorrance Bookstore

Part adventure epic, part survival tale, and part deep dive into the mysterious world of meteorites, this is a rare glimpse into a life lived on the edge.

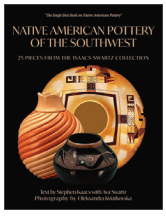
Searching for Harold: One Family's World War II Story in Letters



Stephen Watts. Charles Watts Press. $19.99 paper (422p), ISBN 979-8-234-03589-9; $8.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-234-03590-5
Amazon

Searching for Harold is the poignant, intimate portrait of a family caught in the crosswinds of history's greatest conflict, told through the letters that kept their hopes alive.

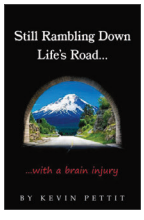
Native American Pottery of the Southwest: 25 Pieces from the Isaacs-Swartz Collection



Stephen Isaacs with Ava Swartz, illus. by Olexandra Kviatkovska. Stephen Isaacs. $28.99 paper (90p), ISBN 979-8-2955-4262-6
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

The essential guide to Native American pottery. Stunning photos and clear text explore Southwest history—pueblo culture, potters, and techniques—plus tips on buying and further reading.

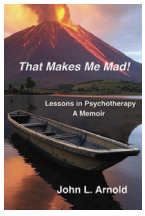
Still Rambling Down Life's Road...



Kevin Pettit. Authors' Tranquility Press. $12.99 paper (172p), ISBN 978-1-962859-09-7
Amazon

An inspiring firsthand account of surviving traumatic brain injury, finding purpose through recovery, and embracing life's unexpected challenges with hope and humor.

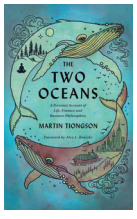
That Makes Me Mad!: Lessons in Psychotherapy; A Memoir



John L. Arnold. Giles Corey Press. $9.99 paper (120p), ISBN 979-8-231-06131-0; $7.99 e-book, ASIN B0FC5THQV1
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, IngramSpark

A new, evidence-based approach to anger control for the use and benefit of clinicians and laypeople, focusing on a cultural discrepancy between our language and neuroscience.

The Two Oceans: A Personal Account of Life, Finance and Business Philosophies

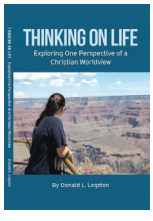


Martin Tiongson. Martin Tiongson. $21.99 (260p), ISBN 979-8-9920136-3-4; $14.99 paper (260p), ISBN 979-8-9920136-2-7
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

A collection of essays that blend storytelling and philosophical insight to offer accessible practical life wisdom and inspiration for entrepreneurship, personal finance, and growth.

Religion/Spirituality

Thinking on Life: Exploring One Perspective of a Christian Worldview



Donald Logston. Covenant Books. $16.95 paper (156p), ISBN 979-8-90013-349-2; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-90013-350-8
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble

The book explores a fresh theological framework of Christian ideas that allows them to be considered in relevance to each other. It provides an innovative look into Christian themes.

Children's/YA

Bella and Bird Explore Happiness

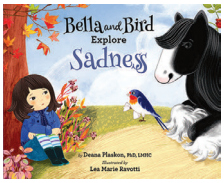


Deana Plaskon, illus. by Lea Maria Ravotti. Bella and Bird Books. $19.95 (32p), ISBN 979-8-9872684-6-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

This calls for a celebration! When Piper bounces into the pasture for her birthday, Bella

the wise horse and Bird the wisecracking barn swallow help her understand happiness.

Bella and Bird Explore Sadness

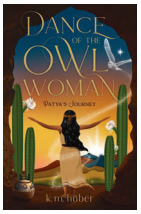


Deana Plaskon, illus. by Lea Maria Ravotti. Bella and Bird Books. $19.95 (32p), ISBN 979-8-9872684-5-2

Amazon

When Molly feels left out, Bella the wise horse and Bird the witty barn swallow help her understand her feelings and discover healthy ways to cope.

Dance of the Owl Woman: Patya's Journey

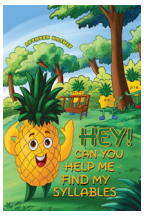


K.M. Huber, illus. by Cristina Stanojevich. SparkPress. $17.99 paper (264p), ISBN 979-8-89636-382-8; $12.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89636-383-5

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org

In an ancient world ravaged by crisis, drought, and personal tragedy, Patya transforms from a shy teenager into a mystical young leader willing to risk her life for what she believes.

Hey! Can You Help Me Find My Syllables?

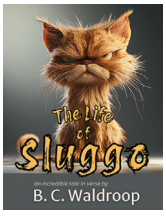


Afsheen Kashif. Austin Macauley Publishers. $9.95 paper (42p), ISBN 978-1-0358-9841-1; $4.50 e-book, ISBN 978-1-0358-9842-8

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, WHSmith, Waterstones

Syllable awareness helps children decode multisyllabic words effectively, improving reading accuracy, spelling, and pronunciation.

The Life of Sluggo

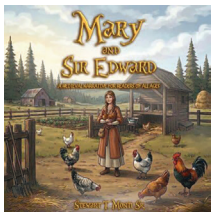


B.C. Waldroop. Buster and Bailey Publishing. $26.99 (198p), ISBN 979-8-9939524-0-6; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9939524-2-0

Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million

The Life of Sluggo, a novel in verse, is a touching tale of an abandoned kitten's survival, courage, and enduring bond with a human.

Mary and Sir Edward: A Medieval Narrative for Readers of All Ages



Stewart T. Monti Sr. Explora Books. $13.99 paper (32p), ISBN 978-1-83430-177-8

Amazon

A farm girl risks everything to protect a wounded knight carrying a kingdom-saving secret, proving courage can change the fate of a throne.

Remain Steadfast

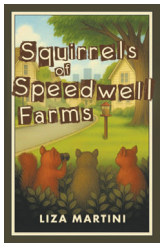


Ralph Gerald Oppenheim. Ralph Gerald Oppenheim. $9.99 paper (236p), ISBN 978-8273994140; $1.99 e-book, ASIN BOGDGGZCFP

Amazon

Stevie James wants to stay just a kid, but the world won't let him. 1969 was a year of momentous change. His life reflects those upheavals. But he's level-headed; he'll make out okay.

Squirrels of Speedwell Farms

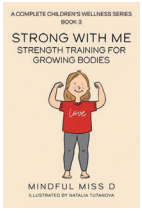


Liza Martini. Archway Press. $33.99 (188p), ISBN 978-1-6657-9022-2; $12.99 paper (188p), ISBN 978-1-6657-9020-8

Archway Press, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

A young squirrel seeks to uncover the mystery of his disappearing clansmen. Facing betrayal and heartbreaking secrets, he's on a rescue mission that will test his courage and loyalty.

Strong with Me: Strength Training For Growing Bodies (A Complete Children's Wellness Series #3)



Dulsey Stewart, illus. by Natalie Tutanova. Dulsey Stewart. $16.99 paper (70p), ISBN 979-8-3188-3386-1; $5.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-234-13010-5

Amazon

Strong with Me by Mindful Miss D is a fun and engaging book for basic cardio and body weight strength training with no equipment required.

One Scared Woman
A Short Story
by Danial Suits
ONE SCARED WOMAN
A SHORT STORY
DANIAL SUITS
B07RHG5K4M
"Lesson learned: never underestimate an author who can deliver thrills faster than a microwave burrito."
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FREE WITH kindleunlimited
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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.

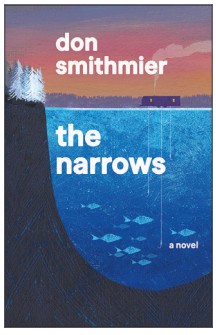
FICTION

EDITOR'S PICK

The Narrows: A Novel

Don Smithmier | Feather Moon, LLC

196p, e-book, $4.99, ISBN 979-8-9949477-4-6



A troubled man walks the long, winding road to redemption in this elegantly crafted debut from Smithmier. Cal Dunn is a contractor in Winter Lake, Wisconsin, a rustic locale known for its fishing and lake life. This small community is also the scene of the boating accident that tore apart Cal's family and destroyed everything he thought he understood, leaving "the most important part of Cal... frozen at the edge of that boat forever." Now five years sober, divorced, and disconnected from his family, Cal struggles to rebuild a life from scratch and develop the tools to maintain sobriety, find peace, and make amends in a town that won't let him forget the past.

The dual plot follows the contemporary storyline as well as the events leading up to the accident, giving readers an intimate understanding of Cal's psychology, though most of the tension exists in flashbacks. Cal's relationship with his eventual girlfriend, Denise, takes a backseat at times to the camaraderie between Cal and his longtime friends, and, while humorous to read, these interactions don't add much complexity to Cal's overall development. More intriguing are Cal's moments of inner reflection on his past, what he's lost, and what his future may hold.

Compelling journey of man rebuilding after tragedy.

Great for fans of Dani Shapiro's *Signal Fires*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.

As a whole, this engrossing story offers a thoughtful, compassionate look at Cal's life before and after the accident. His struggle with sobriety takes center stage, creating an empathetic look at the highs and lows of long-term recovery. Cal reflects that at one point he could have "swallowed his shotgun" or "climbed back inside a bottle and drank himself to death" but instead "here he sat, sober, alive, and eating ice cream." Particularly vivid are Smithmier's descriptions of Cal's unique lakeside community, using clean, simple prose to envelop readers in crisp winters that eventually thaw as Cal finds his way toward a new normal.

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

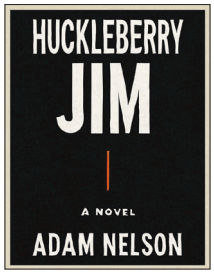
FICTION

EDITOR'S PICK

Huckleberry Jim: A Novel

Adam Nelson | Workhouse Editions

300p, trade paper, $18.99, ISBN 979-8-996-34500-7



Nelson's incisive, provocative, and robustly American debut is set in 1991 as starving artist Axel Emerson takes an on-the-road acting role in a two-man theatrical version of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* for schools. His primary motivation: flee a detective and probable arrest for his father's death. Axel acts opposite Moses Morton, a celebrated, middle-aged actor who brilliantly portrays Jim. His rage about the injustices that Black Americans endure, frequently aimed at Axel, infuses the atmosphere as they drive from town to town and sleep in greasy motels. When the racist citizens of a small New York town blackball the performers, their livelihoods are at stake, and Moses's anger boils over.

Integral to the plot and capturing the spirit of Twain, social commentary marks every page with a steady stream of cleverly worded aphorisms and elegant analogies. Nelson, an actor himself, so deftly depicts Axel's inner emotional rollercoaster, the hardships of a thespian's daily life, and the physical realm they inhabit. Twain fans and anyone who, when young, felt the world expand thanks to touring theater troupes, will recognize and love scenes set in the classroom. That said, at times Moses's incessant verbal violence toward Axel, who doesn't seem to merit it, is challenging to read.

Smart, incisive road-trip through Twain's classic and 1991 America.

Great for fans of Percival Everett's *James*, Paul Beatty's *The Sellout*.

Even though the novel takes place more than three decades ago, on the eve of the Rodney King riots, its debates about bigotry match today's: the use of racial slurs in art, pervasive antisemitism, and ignorance as a denial tactic, to name a few. Considering the frequent bans of *Huckleberry Finn*, from the right and the left, since its first publication and Trump-era elimination of Black history education in many US school curricula, *Huckleberry Jim* feels especially well-timed–but, sadly, wouldn't it always? Nelson honors the fathoms-deep American divisions that Twain marked and urges us to look closer rather than away.

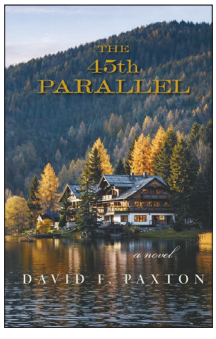
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

The 45th Parallel: A Novel

David F. Paxton

364p, trader paper, $19.95, ISBN 978-1-968-76153-0



Paxton's multiple perspective novel opens in 2003, with Clarice Vishnekova, an 80-year-old widow with a moneyed estate in western Maine, overseeing the harvesting of frozen grapes for ice wine. Wealthy, enigmatic, and connected to WWII dealings through her late husband, Franklin Vishnekova–a former member of the US Navy–Clarice has devoted herself to several ambitious projects that appear unrelated at first glance: a paired-array acclimator intended to influence Gulf Stream patterns; an investigation into what might be called acoustic archaeology; and a symphony she is determined to complete. As Clarice's past emerges–her work in WWII, her experience as a student in the Sorbonne, her passion for music, her yearning for forgiveness, even her formidable aunt–her various projects begin to suggest a larger ambition, one that is connected to extending life itself.

The novel shifts back and forth in time as each character pursues seemingly separate projects. Rachel, Clarice's brilliant grand-niece, excavates her aunt's remarkable lineage of women. Scott Cadence, a scientist whose social skills leave much to be desired, and historian Tag McQuimby pursue their own strands of research, while other characters move in and out of the larger narrative. As Scott and Tag come closer to the answers that Clarice seeks, a new player enters the frame: a retired agent looking into the years-ago, unsolved disappearance of Clarice's daughter as well as the circumstances surrounding her husband's death.

Engaging mix of science and history, buoyed by distinctive lead.

Great for fans of Janyre Tromp's *The Scorpion Thief*, Natasha Pulley's *The Bedlam Stacks*.

The 45th Parallel seeks to balance ideas and intergenerational drama, but the science and emotions do not always blend as naturally as they might. There is an underlying sense that all of these threads are converging toward a single revelation, but, when the puzzle finally comes together, it arrives after extensive speculation and uncertainty, somewhat watering down the denouement. What stands out most is Clarice herself: her history, her obsessions, and the ultimate revelations drawn from the sum of her disparate projects.

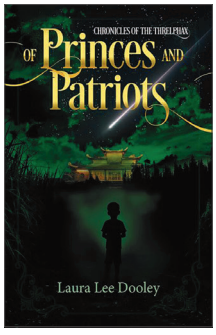
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

Of Princes and Patriots: Chronicles of the Threlphax

Laura Lee Dooley | Bookbaby

348p, trade paper, $19.95, ISBN 979-8-317-83704-4



Fascinating historical fantasy of Thai history.

Great for fans of Veeraporn Nitiprapha, Pitchaya Sudbanthad.

Dooley's sweeping debut, a fascinating blend of history and fantasy, opens the Chronicles of the Threlphax with the story of one man's life stretching across 19th and 20th century Siam, or Thailand. Born in 1860, Chanchai, an orphaned boy surviving in sugarcane fields, is inextricably bound to that of his nation. At age four, he witnesses a mysterious celestial event that leaves him changed in ways he cannot understand: he has a rare ability to heal, sees visions of "glittering, translucent tendrils," and sometimes encounters a silver-maned stranger linked to the ancient past, though the latter he immediately forgets. Dooley teases these mysteries while following Chanchai's life across decades and eventually centuries, from a street child in Bangkok into a scholar, soldier, royal adviser, and witness to Thai history—all while hiding his true age and trying to understand the alien presence that threads through the narrative.

For all its time-crossed surprises, the novel's emotional center is established early. Chanchai is rescued from isolation by a young woman named Prisana, whose disappearance becomes the wound that shapes much of his life. What follows is more life chronicle rather than a tightly plotted adventure, with historical transitions sometimes receiving more attention than immediate dramatic tension. Short chapters move briskly across decades of personal and national history as Chanchai studies in the U.K., fights for the Wild Tiger Corps, and eventually faces cool, tricky developments involving shared consciousness. Chanchai's bonds with Prisana, a Chinese fruit seller, and a succession of teachers, monks, princes, and kings engage and sometimes move, with Prisana's kindness giving the novel its moral compass.

These relationships consistently feel more compelling than the science-fiction mystery surrounding the Threlphax. Dooley excels at sensory detail, emotional directness, and exploration of how an extremely long life would shape a mind. Later, the story returns repeatedly to sacrifice and urgent questions of where Chanchai's responsibilities lie. The book will resonate with readers of historical fiction and coming-of-age character-driven speculative fiction.

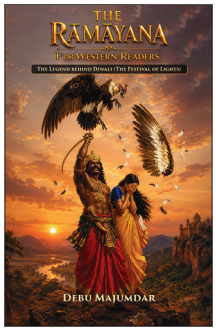
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

FICTION

The Rámáyan for Western Readers: The Legend behind Diwali (The Festival of Lights)

Debu Majumdar | Bo-Tree House

314p, trade paper, $18.99, ISBN 978-0-996-85168-8



Inviting introduction to the epic that has shaped Indian civilization for millennia.

Great for fans of Aurobindo Ghosh's *Introduction to the Ramayana,* R. K. Narayan's *The Ramayana.*

Majumdar presents a condensed retelling of the ancient Sanskrit epic originally composed by the sage Vālmīki, a text that runs to nearly half a million words, distilled here into an accessible volume aimed at readers not steeped in Indian culture and its foundational stories. The Ramayana, as always, follows Prince Rāma of Ayodhyā, who is exiled to the forest for 14 years when his stepmother Kaikeyī calls in two long-promised boons from his aged father, King Daśaratha. The young prince's wife, Sītā, insists on accompanying him, as does his devoted brother Laksmana. When the demon king Rāvana kidnaps Sītā, Rāma forges an alliance with the monkey king Sugrīva and his extraordinary general Hanumān, wages war on the island of Lankā, defeats Rāvana, and returns home to a city lit with earthen lamps—the origin of Diwali.

Majumdar treats his readers as adults who are capable of understanding ambiguities, morally gray characters, and the fundamental ways that ancient people and their motivations can surprise and challenge contemporary readers. No mere villain, Rāvana is presented with nuance, particularly in the war council scenes, where his righteous brother Vibhishana pleads for Sītā's return and is humiliated for it. Domestic chapters in Ayodhyā, tracing each family member's reaction to Rāma's exile, are moving. The author is also admirably frank about the troubling epilogue, arguing that Rāma's abandonment of the pregnant Sītā and the beheading of a low-caste man likely represent later additions inconsistent with Vālmīki's own goals.

The telling is clear and often spirited, alive with beasts, shapeshifters, marvelous characters, and all the human passions. Helpful explications of dharmic principles and cultural context enrich the narrative, though the pacing at times proves trying, as when extended battle sequences in Lankā compress many warriors into few pages, diluting the emotional stakes built with care in the earlier, slower chapters. Ultimately, this is a faithful, warmly written introduction to one of the world's enduring epics. On-point discussion questions and rich endnotes are rewarding.

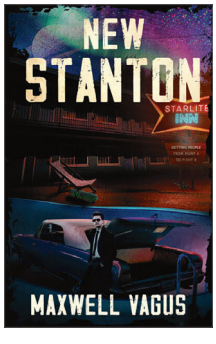
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

MYSTERY/THRILLER

New Stanton

Maxwell Vagus | HeavySixer Productions LLC

315p, e-book, $4.99, ASIN B0H3XVY153



Immersive vintage noir dials up genre's existential self-flagellation.

Great for fans of Jonathan L. Howard's *Carter & Lovecraft*, Kobo Abe's *The Ruined Map.*

This hallucinatory noir debut plunges readers into a roadside purgatory where memory, guilt, and identity blur beneath the green-tinged sky. Beaten up and hung over, Harold Dean awakens in the Starlite Inn, missing his blue 1964 Chevy Malibu and a sizable chunk of his memory. Vagus commences a hard-boiled excavation of addiction, shame, and Harold's terror of being stranded inside his unstable mind. Looking for answers, Harold explores New Stanton, an irradiated landscape of dead cars, eerie broadcasts, comic-book prophets, and ominous references of "point A to point B." The strange locals seem to know more about him than he knows about himself.

Vagus has a gift for grimy, neon-lit description and Harold's swaggering, self-lacerating voice. He's a very unreliable narrator, whose first-person diatribes are funny and cruel, vivid and wounded. Harold's recurring "reports" and dream fragments, along with comic/pamphlet motifs, radio transmissions, library/archive material, and vintage car imagery, establish New Stanton as both a physical place and metaphysical trap. The monologues and metaphors can easily become overstuffed, but maximalism is integral to Vagus's uncanny spell. His heady concoction mixes the existential road novel with a Lynchian small-town nightmare, and he tops it off with a metafictional splash of bitters and remorse.

New Stanton residents, including Mick Curry, comics-obsessed manager of the local print shop, "rockabilly rooster" Robert Tyre, and femme fatale Sonja Freytag, who owns the Starlite Inn (where "cigarettes are on the house"), function more as mythic signals than fully grounded people. Vagus laces Harold's absurdist encounters with pitch-black humor, and his pacing is intentionally looping and disorienting, resisting clean solutions. Unlike straightforward mysteries, noir emphasizes character over plot and digs into the bleak psyche of its antiheroes. The demanding *New Stanton* adds cosmic dread to that formula, and Vagus invites devotees to get lost in this surreal odyssey into the abyss.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Desperation Will Kill You

Samantha Hart | Wild Bill Publications
351p, hardcover, $24, ISBN 979-8-218-54278-8



Brisk, dishy Hollywood thriller of love, sex, power, and revenge.

Great for fans of Winnie M. Li's *Complicit*, Halley Sutton's *The Lady Upstairs*.

As that lipsticked script on the cover suggests, Hart's *Desperation Will Kill You* is a Los Angeles thriller of lust, power, and murder that's not afraid to revel in its trashiness. The come-on is irresistible: a steamy romance and lurid murder mystery set in the glossy, day-drunk world of 1990s corporate Hollywood, all written by a former studio executive. *Desperation Will Kill You* doesn't simply resort to the clichés of its genre–it piles them on until they elevate the material from cheap schlock to high camp. Franny Lane is a precocious A&R rep for a promising Southern California rock band, The Palominos, and Don Bradford is the collected, connected studio mogul who recruits Franny to feature an of-the-moment musical act in the "picture" that will "usher in the '90s." He wants something that "speaks to Gen X without alienating a slightly older demo"–an early demonstration of the precision with which Hart, author of the memoir *Blind Pony*, conjures the milieu.

Don likes Franny's pitch, but that's not all he likes–and he's especially enticed when Franny at first resists his advances. As she grows closer to the most powerful producer in town, Franny encounters red flags, alarming secrets, and the big man's enablers. The story inevitably turns dark–complete with a quack shrink who writes scripts (not screenplays) on demand, a dead body, a courtroom showdown, and even a negotiation with a Colombian drug lord.

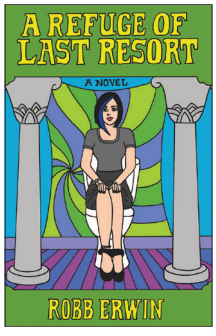
Outrage and revenge ultimately power a plot that satisfies even if it never quite surprises. What's most enticing: Hart's crisp, canny dialogue; spirited behind-the-scenes verisimilitude; and welcome attention to what it feels like to be a woman in Hollywood in general–an early passage contrasting Franny's and Don's preparations for a premiere is hilarious–and the particulars of trying to take down a man with such power and protection. Hart keeps it all fresh, frisky, and fun, offering sharp Hollywood dish and a clear-eyed appraisal of power while honoring the studios' zeal for economical, propulsive storytelling.

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

MYSTERY/THRILLER

A Refuge of Last Resort

Robb Erwin | Endora House
296p, e-book, $16, ISBN 979-8-9963127-0-2



All-too-real satire exposes an oppressive, dangerous America.

Great for fans of Helen Fielding's *Cause Celeb*, Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds*.

Erwin's fever dream of a debut follows relentlessly harassed office worker Lorelei, a 22-year-old whose German-born parents died in a house fire she accidentally started as a child. She detests her job at Saino-Blatt, where she endures abusive bosses and toxic working conditions, and her immediate supervisor, Reg Wilson–the bullying Vice President of Solutions Engineering–along with Director of Strategies Kirk Oedderman, both work overtime to make her life miserable. Adding to the mix is Lorelei's hyperosmia, an exceptionally acute sense of smell that leaves her in a constant state of sensory overload.

When Lorelei is assigned to a marketing experiment at Freshee's Provisions, the scheme ends in a riot, and, in the chaos, she runs into elderly grocery industry pioneer Bart Sampson. The two strike up an unlikely connection that quickly becomes the novel's emotional center, with Bart serving as both friend and somewhat of a protector for Lorelei, particularly after a shocking Saino-Blatt murder exposes how Lorelei has been a victim of labor trafficking. From there, the narrative follows Lorelei as she flees across the country, with the help of an anti-trafficking network, and eventually settles into a Massachusetts refugee shelter, where she lives under a false identity while authorities investigate the trafficking ring.

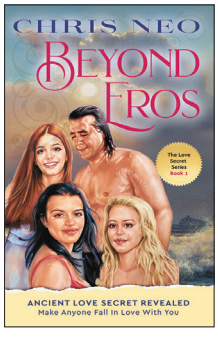
Erwin's exploration of immigration raids, deportation fears, sanctuary cities, refugee life, and the rising political tension in America is both persistent and pointed, as Lorelei repeatedly finds herself caught between corrupt institutions and the people trying to help her. Along the way, she befriends Camila, a young Venezuelan refugee whose friendship, loyalty, and shared struggles become one of Lorelei's few sources of comfort and hope. Though Lorelei's voice often feels much older than her years–and the plot requires readers to sprint from one frenzied disaster to the next–the novel remains an engrossing quest for refuge in a modern-day American hell.

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

ROMANCE

Beyond Eros: The Love Secret Series, Book 1

Chris Neo | CCNG Publishings
389p, e-book, $1.90, ISBN 9781739630218



Globe-trotting treasure hunt with romance elements and a hyper-capable hero.

Great for fans of Clive Cussler, Linda Howard's *Heart of Fire*.

Despite the "eros" in the title and a prevailing randy spirit, this leather-clad treasure hunt, the kickoff to Neo's "Love Secret" series, spices pulp adventure with romance rather than explicit erotica. The adventure resembles the classics, as Neo bolts Joseph Campbell's monomyth onto the frame of an international thriller about a Cypriot-born business magnate's midlife pursuit of a mythic, generations-old "secret" of how to make someone love you forever. Neo acknowledges this: hero Aris's origin-story chapter is titled "The Ordinary World," and, a few hundred pages later, Aris moves on toward the "Final Call to Adventure." As the flawless protagonist trots the globe, chasing a mythic MacGuffin encoded in oral tradition, action scenes like the cartel-and-assassination plotting sit somewhat uneasily against the parable-like chapters of Aris's childhood and some steamy scenes between Aris and his lovers, and readers coming for one register may find the others a distraction.

Neo's linking of the quest with the hero's own search for true love is original, and he keeps the pages turning while imbuing the material with clear sincerity. Settings are sketched rather than rendered, given only the briefest of outlines while the pacing never slows. This seems a deliberate choice, consistent with the author's stated aim of never wasting a sentence that doesn't move the plot, and Neo does produce brisk, page-turning momentum, especially when Aris is in action. The cost is immersion, while casting a hypercapable protagonist–one who always makes the right choices and succeeds–in the classic Hero Cycle narrative pattern flattens Aris, diminishes tension, and sacrifices the growth that is the payoff of monomyth storytelling.

The twists are befitting any pulp spy thriller but function less as revelations than as obstacles keeping the secret permanently one clue out of reach. The book will likely find its warmest readers among people who enjoy pulpy, globe-trotting adventure-romance in the Robert Ludlum–meets–Harlequin vein and don't mind a structure so overt it borders on the didactic.

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

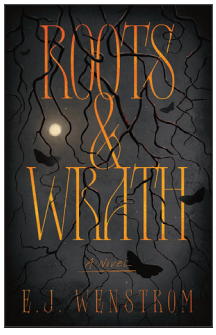
SF/FANTASY/HORROR

EDITOR'S PICK

Roots & Wrath

E. J. Wenstrom

397p, e-book, $3.99, ISBN 979-8990221499



Deliciously witchy tale of old wounds refusing to stay buried.

Great for fans of Bianca Marais's *The Witches of Moonshyne Manor*, Juno Dawson's *Her Majesty's Royal Coven.*

Wenstrom's *Roots & Wrath* opens with five witches hesitantly returning to their alma mater, Millinocket Preparatory School and Advanced Studies for Witches and Witching Craft, for the funeral of their former mentor—Professor Merritt Berriman. There, they discover that a blood oath they swore as a pentam still binds them to Berriman's unfinished research. Their search for a way out of it leads them to a chilling possibility: the oath may only be broken if the pentam itself ceases to exist, which means one of them has to die. Wenstrom methodically explores their fractured relationships in the present while gradually revealing the tragedy that tore them apart years ago.

Rather than centering the story on a single protagonist, Wenstrom passes the narrative baton seamlessly among the members of the pentam. Alicia, a formidable lawyer, looks for loopholes; Everyn, a successful artist and Alicia's ex-girlfriend, approaches the problem emotionally; the influential Isa focuses on practical solutions; Rachel, a devoted academic, tries to understand Berriman and her research; and Sybil is the least interested in any of it. Meanwhile, in the past, Wenstrom traces their years as students—their complicated relationship with Berriman, who views people as instruments in service of her research, the formation of their pentam, and the tragedy involving Bea—a lonely young witch who longs for friendship and acceptance.

Wenstrom's worldbuilding is immersive, but her greatest strength is the portrayal of unapologetic, ambitious women with distinct personalities—who often protect themselves at the cost of others. The mystery surrounding their oath is compelling, though the past timeline's leisurely movement beyond the setup slows tension. Still, the novel never loses sight of its greatest asset: the women whose shared history feels as magical as it is messy. Dark, dense and atmospheric, *Roots & Wrath* is a gripping tale of friendship turned poisonous, power abused, and old wounds that refuse to stay buried.

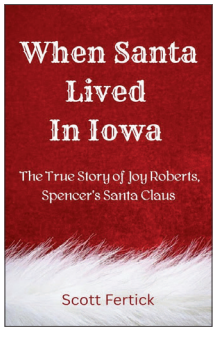
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

HISTORY & MILITARY

When Santa Lived in Iowa: The True Story of Joy Roberts, Spencer's Santa Claus

Scott Fertick | Fertick Publishing

162p, trade paper, $16.99, ISBN 979-8-993-70380-0



Touching tribute to an ancestor's embodiment of the Christmas spirit.

Great for fans of Alex Palmer's *The Santa Claus Man*, Ed Butchart's *The Red Suit Diaries.*

Fertick (author of *Fertig to Fertick*) crafts a heartwarming tribute to his great-grandfather Earl Joy Roberts, a man who derived his pleasure from "making others happy, from sharing his good fortune and sowing seeds of kindness wherever he happened to be on Christmas Day." Born in 1888, Joy often recalled a childhood spent eagerly awaiting Christmas morning, only to be disappointed by empty stockings and no presents. Those early life experiences planted a seed that he nurtured as an adult, expending great effort—and financial resources—to deliver toys to children who would otherwise go without on Christmas Day. That special quest sees Joy stepping in as Santa Claus in his hometown of Spencer, Iowa, from 1913 until his death in 1948.

Fertick carefully chronicles Joy's burning "desire to make sure no child ever felt the way he did during those lonely holidays of his youth," with many of his details gleaned from newspaper clippings the family saved over time as well as his own extensive research. He first covers the broader history of the legend of Santa Claus—tracing its origins back to Saint Nicholas, who was born in 280 CE—before delving into Joy's progression from an individual repairing and gifting toys to local children to a man backed by community aid and organized charity who, according to the *News-Herald* in 1925, "made more hearts throb with pleasure and more eyes shine with delight than any other man in town no doubt." That legacy continues long after Joy's death, as Fertick points out that the impact of Joy's work endures today.

Fertick's meticulous account of his great-grandfather's impact is inspiring and will infuse readers with the magic of Christmas. Based on Joy's lifelong dedication to children in need, Fertick declares, "if the spirit of Christmas is real, so is Santa Claus," leaving readers with the touching reminder that "we all have it in us to be Santa Claus to those around us."

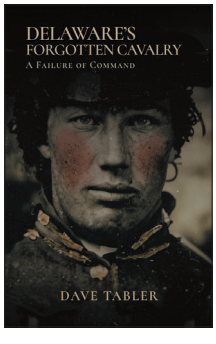
Cover: **B-** | Design & typography: **B** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

HISTORY & MILITARY

Delaware's Forgotten Cavalry: A Failure of Command

Dave Tabler

362p, trade paper, $24.95, ISBN 979-8-9921667-7-4



Authentic portrayal of Civil War soldiers' reaction to failing leadership.

Great for fans of Daniel Murphy's *Horse Soldiers at Gettysburg*, Will Gorenfeld and John Gorenfeld's *Kearny's Dragoons Out West.*

In this detailed blend of diary entries and historical record, historian Tabler (author of *Delaware Keepers*) gives his main characters—Civil War Union sergeants Harrison Vandegrift, Spencer Hitch, and William Townsend Downes—the space to express the untold story of the First Delaware Cavalry in their own words. In June 1863, this Union battalion was skirmished by Confederate soldiers. Their commander, Major Napoleon Bonaparte Knight, stayed behind rather than joining the advance, leading to an uncoordinated battalion clash that resulted in several wounded—and some killed—Union soldiers. As the story unfolds, Tabler examines Knight's actions and reports of his erratic behavior, frequent drunkenness, and "shirking duty under false pretenses," ultimately suggesting that Knight was appointed due to his powerful political connections more so than his competence.

The majority of Tabler's account consists of diary logs from Vandegrift, Hitch, and Downes, showcasing the thoughts of real men faced with the daily problems typical of an American Civil War soldier. "A man... soon learns to appreciate home and despise war," Vandegrift declares, documenting the constant death, disease, and discomfort of his surroundings. The days stretch on, many with "nothing of any interest Going on Here," as Downes notes, but tension builds as legal charges against Knight—and a general feeling of contempt—start to mount. Through court records, newspaper excerpts, offhand mentions, and more, readers piece together Knight's fate—and how Delaware's history of being a "political battleground territory" contributed to it.

The diaries, reproduced with original syntax and spelling, paint a portrait of the men's everyday personalities. Some entries and shorthand can be hard to decipher, and comprehensive summaries at chapter headings curb the suspense, but Tabler successfully illuminates the quiet humanity in men facing an unstable leader and a grueling war, adding context with maps, photographs, and footnotes. Readers seeking the stories that have fallen through the cracks of historical records will relish this narrative.

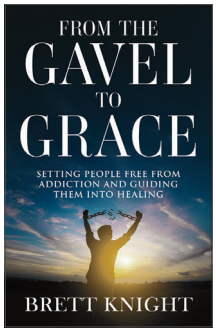
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **B-** | Illustrations: **B+** Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **B+**

SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

From the Gavel to Grace: Setting People Free from Addiction and Guiding Them into Healing

Brett Knight

234p, trade paper, $15.99, ISBN 978-1-971-94919-2



Empathic, expert-led study on addiction, faith, and the justice system.

Great for fans of Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, Johann Hari's *Chasing the Scream*.

Knight begins this impassioned blend of legal critique and Christian testimony with a pressing premise: "You can't punish the pain out of people." From there, he mounts a persuasive challenge to conventional approaches to addiction, arguing that substance abuse is more often rooted in unhealed trauma than in a simple moral failure. Drawing from his experiences as a prosecutor and criminal defense attorney to pastor and recovery advocate, Knight chronicles his growing disillusionment with a justice system that blindly and insensitively punishes addicts without aiming for restoration. Structured in five parts, the book moves from diagnosing the failures of the current system to examining the anatomy of addiction, outlining treatment-forward alternatives, sharing vivid testimonies, and ultimately challenging everyone to become agents of restoration.

Knight's prose is earnest, practical, and accessible. Particularly effective are his explanations of how addiction alters decision-making, why incarceration alone often deepens the problem, and how sustainable recovery requires addressing the pain beneath the behavior. Poignant case studies and wrenching stories of families—the often-overlooked casualties of addiction—lend emotional weight to the argument that accountability and mercy should go hand in hand. Knight's sincerity is admirable, especially his empathic call to "see addiction the way God sees it" and to be part of the healing.

The book leans heavily on inspirational repetition and evangelical phrasing, but it does not sacrifice the clarity of an experienced attorney. Because Knight's critique comes from someone who once participated wholeheartedly in the system he now questions, it carries considerable credibility. Throughout, he offers concrete guidance—including his seven "steps to freedom"—while maintaining a steady focus on dignity, responsibility, and hope. What emerges is a compassionate blueprint for long-term recovery.

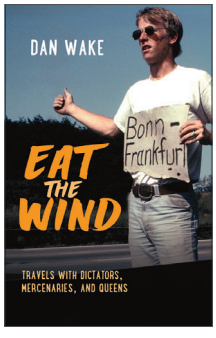
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

MEMOIR

Eat the Wind: Travels With Dictators, Mercenaries and Queens

Dan Wake | Torchflame Books

303p, trade paper, $19.99, ISBN 978-1-611-53641-6



Compelling memoir of wanderer throwing caution to the wind.

Great for fans of George Mahood's *Travels with Rachel*, Drew Binsky's *Just Go*.

Reflecting on his thrilling cross-continent adventures, Wake shares his 1970s and '80s travel exploits in this entertaining narrative, inviting readers along to locales like Athens, the Philippines (in the midst of political unrest), America's national parks, and more. The seventh child in a family of nine, Wake grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, "virtually never crossing a state border," and scrimped while in college to afford a summer trek across Europe at just 20 years old. That trip encourages him to fully embrace the unpredictable, and Wake sweeps readers into a journey overflowing with rich culture, enchanting landmarks, and once-in-a-lifetime adventure.

Wake's memories evoke the thrill of simpler times. He hitchhikes through America, experiences London's 1977 Silver Jubilee, inadvertently joins protesters in San Sebastián, and meets friends who disappear almost as quickly as he makes their acquaintance. His excitement for the spontaneity of solo-travel is infectious, and readers will be captivated by his tales of kind strangers, navigating travel planning before the smartphone era, and the tribulations of international journeys: passport checks that don't go as expected, lost baggage, cash shortages, and more. More weighty reflections also pepper the narrative, such as Wake's exposure to a riot in San Sebastián and his rumination that "It all seemed so wrong… Gunshots and tear gas don't belong in a train station…. Riot police and bloody girls don't belong in a train station."

Eventually the unpredictability of constantly being on the road starts to wear, and Wake finds himself admitting it's "time to go home." His personal photographs ground the narrative in time and place, and travel-hungry readers will relish his insightful observations on both the allure—and exhaustion—of experiencing the world. He rejoins the workforce (though not in the way he envisioned) and starts a family, but ultimately, the message Wake leaves for readers is the promise that travel will create lasting memories that will "never leave [your] soul."

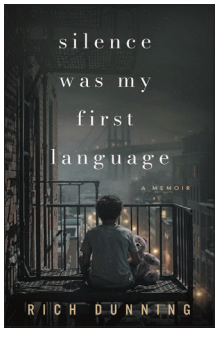
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MEMOIR

silence was my first language

Rich Dunning | richdunningbooks

357p, hardcover, $29.99, ISBN 979-8-9955872-1-7



Vulnerable memoir leaves hope for overcoming childhood trauma.

Great for fans of Neige Sinno's *Sad Tiger*, Barbara Godin's *Can I Come Home Now?*

"You are not what happened to you… You are not the child they failed to protect or the silence that was forced into your mouth," Dunning writes in this heart-wrenching memoir of abuse, violence, and, above all, survival. Growing up in a tumultuous home in the Bronx, Dunning recounts his parents splitting up and the later entrance of his cruel stepfather, Hector, whose brutal temper, addictions, and deep paranoia created a childhood spent silent and cowering, always trying to occupy as little space and attention as possible. As an adult, Dunning realizes that his real challenge is to avoid passing on that inherited baggage to his own wife and children.

Violence permeates every part of Dunning's recollections, and readers should expect particularly harrowing descriptions: Hector pushing Dunning's pregnant mother down a flight of stairs; Dunning's first-ever birthday celebration ending when his gift is a box containing a "fresh, adult-sized load of feces"; Hector pacing with a loaded gun in his hand as he mutters, "I should've killed all of you already." Debilitating poverty, neglect, addiction, and incest liberally spatter the narrative, and readers will sense it's a miracle that Dunning made it out of the house alive. What lingers beyond the physical pain is a destroyed sense of belonging that follows him into adulthood. "No amount of work, obedience, or sacrifice would ever make me theirs in any way that truly mattered," he declares.

Those powerful reckonings shed light on how children from fractured homes can internalize brokenness, but the prose tends to alternate between charged lyricism, attentive to striking detail, and flights of abstraction that strain for significance but too often prove vague: "In that moment, the commentary ceased without resistance, and the quiet that followed reflected the absence of any remaining authority it could claim"; "The sounds of resistance ceased, replaced by an absence that signaled depletion rather than resolution. What continued in that room continued without her presence." Despite that, Dunning's themes of inheritance—and how to overcome it—are compelling, as is his ultimate reason for writing such vulnerable material: "Hope that somewhere out there… patterns can be interrupted [and] generational damage can stop."

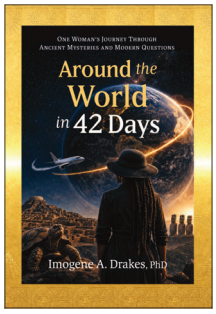
Cover: **B-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B-** | Marketing copy: **B+**

MEMOIR

Around the World in 42 Days

Imogene Drakes

266p, hardcover, $56.99, ISBN 978-0-9853704-3-5



Clear-eyed memoir rich with wanderlust and cultural immersion.

Great for fans of Mark Adams's *Turn Right at Machu Picchu*, Shannon O'Brien's *Stray*.

Hoping to visit ancient places "said to be touched or built by superhuman strength or skill," forensic scientist Drakes embarks on a global quest spanning six continents and 10 countries, sharing her detailed journey with readers as she discovers the majestic wonders the world has to offer. From the mummies of Nazca to the tortoise reservation in Galapagos Islands to England's Stonehenge, Drakes juxtaposes the unmatched thrill of seeing famed tourist destinations with the kindness of local strangers and connection with fellow travelers, pairing a once-in-a-lifetime adventure with a heartfelt, intimate narrative that recounts the highs and lows of solo traveling.

Mindful of Indigenous traditions and culture, Drakes's debut offers helpful travel tips alongside an anthropologic lens that carefully observes important customs and cultural norms. In Indonesia, she learns from a local tour guide that "Christians and Muslims live very peacefully together," sparking her reflections on how, in many places across the world, religion seems to divide more than unite. South Africa introduces her to a calm, steadfast guide whose understanding of the animals and landscapes surrounding him speaks of a deep connection to the Earth. Elsewhere, she quickly learns to depend on local pointers for the richest travel experiences.

Drakes's easygoing attitude treats this 42-day journey with buoyancy and a welcome sense of humor that sees her through the stressful moments intrinsic to international travel: waiting on last-minute visas, hiking with the wrong shoes, minor misunderstandings, and language barriers. She sprinkles reflections and personal photographs throughout to give readers deeper insight into local myths, sociocultural conventions, and more, often musing on the "quiet feeling of assurance" she experiences even when inhabiting unfamiliar places and facing intimidating travel schedules. The result is a gentle reminder that "curiosity and courage make the best travel companions," and wanderlust fans will appreciate Drakes's inquisitive sincerity.

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

PICTURE BOOKS

EDITOR'S PICK

A Tail of Learning: Kittina Ballerina and the Not-So-PURRfect Pirouettes

Once Upon a Dance | Once Upon a Dance

32p, e-book, $3.99, ISBN 979-8-89994-019-4



Warm introduction to ballet encouraging vulnerability and effort.

Great for fans of Allegra Kent's *Ballerina Gets Ready*, Barbara McClintock's *Emma and Julia Love Ballet*.

Continuing education is an unusual subject for a picture book, but the Once Upon a Dance duo charts the progress of an unlikely ballerina with this thoughtful exploration of humility and determination. They launched the Kittina Ballerina's Dance-Along Adventures series with *A Tail of Twirls*, which details an inquisitive cat's encounter with the magical Starlight Ballerina and the establishment of her new ballet studio. *A Tail of Learning* finds Kittina Ballerina teaching eager animals the basics of ballet and confessing to a frustrated Olive the owl that she also had difficulty pointing her toes properly for a tendu.

After the classroom clears out, Kittina expresses doubts about her dancing abilities, looking to the Starlight Ballerina for guidance. Her insecurity becomes panic when Bianca the swan asks for help with her pirouettes. Despite teaching ballet in Pirouette Pines, Kittina can't perform the foundational spinning maneuver. Finding a flyer for the Sterling Ballet Academy, Kittina swallows her pride and begins attending classes there. "Kittina's legs wobbled like jelly" when she tried more advanced movements like the relevé (moving from flat feet to demi-pointe or en pointe). The next step was harder: admitting to her students that she too needs to keep learning.

In dozens of picture books, the mother-and-daughter team who write as Once Upon a Dance seek to demystify ballet. Captioned photos of the friendly Ballerina Konora will help young readers expand their repertoire, and Stella Maris's delicate pastel and watercolor illustrations are warm and inviting, soothing yet lively. By revealing Kittina's dilemma, they demonstrate that ballet, which emphasizes precision in pose and movement, isn't ultimately about perfection. Once Upon a Dance showcases ballet as a rewarding practice, and by removing a barrier for young readers intimidated by the idea of perfection, *A Tail of Learning* encourages dancers to pursue individual goals and find joy in each of their accomplishments.

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

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