November 23, 2026

booklife®

YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING

41 New BookLife Titles Listed • 17 New BookLife Titles Reviewed

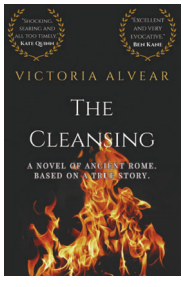
Indie Spotlight

In this edition of our monthly roundup of BookLife titles, we feature history and historical fiction.

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

HISTORICAL FICTION

The Cleansing: A Novel of Ancient Rome



Victoria Alvear

ISBN 978-1-83919-634-8

Author statement: "*The Cleansing* is set during Rome's Second Punic War against Hannibal, the North African general from Carthage who nearly burned Rome to the ground in 216 BCE. Fearing annihilation, the political and religious elite manipulated the chaos inside the city by scapegoating a vestal virgin for the loss. Told from the blamed priestess's point of view as she defends herself in court, the novel explores how the powerful shift blame and accountability to the vulnerable and how demagogues use fearmongering and scapegoating to manipulate the mob for their own ends."

Fission: A Novel of Atomic Heartbreak

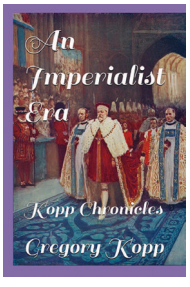


Leslie R. Schover

ASIN B0FD8SD371

Author statement: "*Fission* is based loosely on my parents' stories of life in the secret city of Oak Ridge, with a fictional love triangle inspired by real Soviet spies who operated there. When Doris marries Rob in 1941 and has a sickly, premature baby, she trades in her dreams of being a concert pianist or lawyer to become the ideal wife and mother. Rob is recruited to work on the Manhattan Project and the young family moves to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where Doris tries to make life work but is drawn to an army engineer—only to realize that he may be a Soviet spy. Should she turn him in and risk damaging her marriage?"

An Imperialist Era: Kopp Chronicles



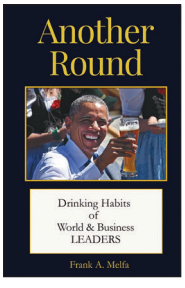
Gregory Kopp

ASIN B0HD8Y9J7B

Author statement: "Enter an 'imperialist era' of extravagant wealth and romantic royal pageantry, where the world's imperial leaders stand at the pinnacle of their power, their political influence extending even into the secretive deliberations of a Vatican papal conclave. My journey and the basis of the exciting Kopp Chronicles saga began from my own immigrant American family's history, and I intermingle romance, mystery, and action-packed thrilling historical elements to entertain and intrigue readers."

DECIPHERING HISTORY

Another Round: Drinking Habits of World & Business Leaders



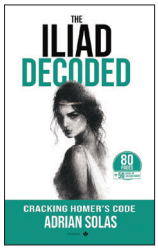
Frank A. Melfa

ISBN 978-0-9641640-2-4

Author statement: "Do leaders who drink alcohol build better relationships and bigger legacies? Or just wake up with a story they'd rather forget? From the Oval Office to the Kremlin, from Silicon Valley boardrooms to Downing Street, this book offers an intoxicating look at the leaders who shaped our world, one drink at

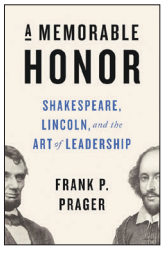
a time. I chose the figures in this book because their drinking habits are well-documented and because I find both their lives and the eras they shaped deeply fascinating."

The Iliad Decoded



Adrian Solas
ASIN B0HDZDB6X4
Author statement: "I thought I knew these stories. Then I went back to the ancient sources and realized how much of what I 'knew' came from movies, novels, paintings, adaptations, picked up over the years. I didn't want to write books that simply explained other books. That's really the idea behind my Decoded series: Do the research first, give readers the historical and mythological keys they need, then get out of the way and let the story take over. Because after 3,000 years, Achilles, Hector, Helen, Priam, Ajax, and the fall of Troy really don't need much help from me. They just need to be told."

A Memorable Honor: Shakespeare, Lincoln, and the Art of Leadership



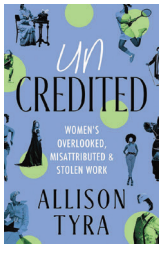
Frank P. Prager
ASIN B0H8B5YW6L
"William Shakespeare and Abraham Lincoln walk into a meeting... but what happens next is no joke. By following the wisdom and example of these two visionaries, any leader can embody the honor, persuasion, and high-stakes art of leadership."

Revolutionary Voices from the American Presidents' Slave House



Gary L. Williams
ASIN B0GXK6WQ4D
Author statement: "My book offers a critical analysis of past presidential administrations, exposing the stark contradiction between the nation's professed ideals of liberty and its presidential endorsement of slavery. The book centers the revolutionary voices of the enslaved and their descendants, who spoke truth to power through resistance and upheld a vision of a nation truly 'indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.' "

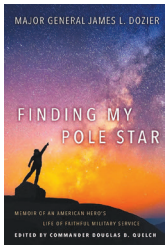
Uncredited: Women's Overlooked, Misattributed, and Stolen Work



Allison Tyra
ISBN 978-1-998076-63-5
Author statement: "Since launching my Infinite Women project in 2020, it's grown to include a biographical database with more than 11,000 entries from throughout history. In addition to the podcast and short videos on YouTube, I share these stories in my books, which explore a fundamental question: We know women are as good as men, so why haven't we heard of more women? I followed *Uncredited* with *The View from the Hill: Women Who Made Their Mark After 40*. My latest, *Tough Cookies: Sugar, Spice, and Women's History*, will be out in May."

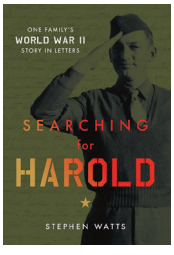
MEMOIRS AND FAMILY STORIES

Finding My Pole Star



James L. Dozier
ISBN 978-1-64180-112-6
Author statement: "On Dec. 17, 1981, Red Brigades terrorists forced their way into my apartment in Verona, Italy, and took me captive. I was the highest-ranking NATO officer ever abducted, and for 42 days I didn't know if I would live or die. I kept a secret diary in code, using Solitaire scores. Most of all, I relied on my faith and on the lessons I learned at West Point, in Vietnam, and at the Pentagon. I wrote *Finding My Pole Star* because people still ask me how I survived."

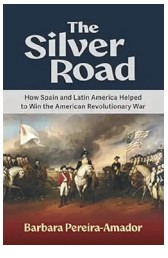
Searching for Harold: One Family's World War II Story in Letters



Stephen Watts
ASIN B0H7HVLQTX
Author statement: "*Searching for Harold* is the story of my extended family's World War II experiences as told almost entirely through their letters. It is the second book in what is now a two-volume epistolary series, the first being *Searching for Charles: The Untold Legacy of an Immigrant's American Experience*. Both books were made possible through a massive, inherited family archive of documents, photographs, and letters."

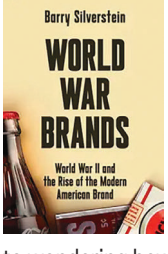
WAR STORIES

The Silver Road: How Spain and Latin America Helped to Win the American Revolutionary War



Barbara Pereira-Amador
ASIN B0H1F6DG3M
Author statement: "Did you know that the Spanish and Latin Americans helped to win the American Revolutionary War? I didn't either! Years ago, I read a footnote that said that the 1781 Battle of Yorktown—our last chance to win the Revolution—was crowdfunded by the people of Havana, Cuba, with silver pesos mined in Mexico. *The Silver Road: How Spain and Latin America Helped to Win the American Revolutionary War* tells this story."

World War Brands: World War II and the Rise of the Modern American Brand

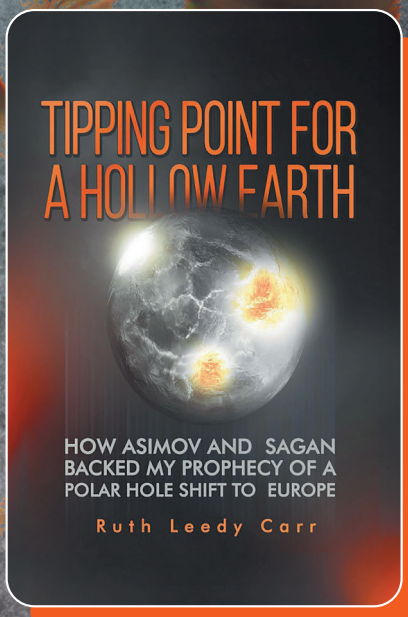


Barry Silverstein
ISBN 978-0-9965760-8-6
Author statement: "I am a baby boomer and a retired marketing professional who has always been interested in history. I wrote a book called *Boomer Brands* covering some of the most popular brands during my childhood. I then got to wondering how these brands may have been impacted by World War II. I was amazed to learn how the concept of branding was used by the U.S. government in 'marketing' both wars, particularly World War II, to the American public, and how American brands participated in the war effort."

TIPPING POINT FOR A HOLLOW EARTH

HOW ASIMOV AND SAGAN BACKED MY PROPHECY OF A POLAR HOLE SHIFT TO EUROPE

RUTH LEEDY CARR



Paperback: 978-1778838842
Hardback: 978-1778837708
eBook: 978-1778837081

Immediately what strikes the reader is how well researched and educational the author's writing style is, instantly delving into both the philosophical and scientific purposes behind passages not only in these two figures' writing, but in the author's own theories as well.

—Pacific Book Review

Axis Shift Predictions, Prophecies, Riddles, Asimov's Coded Advisory On Cataclysmic Secrecy

Scientists have been quietly predicting a cataclysm for many years. Ruth Leedy Carr has been alleging a cover-up in six books and dozens of newsletters since 1981. A geomagnetic field reversal is either "overdue" or "due as early as 2028," or not due until the year 3200 or 4000, depending on which expert opinion you consult.

"London, Nu York City, Tokyo, L.A., Roma, Italy and Antiok ar doomd." This anagram message arises easily from a pair of fairly short character names at the beginning of Isaac Asimov's story "Blind Alley." The names are "Loodun Antyok, C. Morily." The name Antyok, resembling "Antioch," invites us to look for other names of cities, and the names of London, Nu York City and Tokyo are easy to spot. Loodun's initials are "L.A.," and Carr backs this up with another riddle about Los Angeles and three about San Francisco. Their doom and the doom of Tokyo will result from high water and seismic activity associated with the relocation of the equatorial bulge.

"Only London kan drop into a nu polar holl on hollo Urth, not Nu York, Tokyo, L.A., Antiok or Italy." This message, arising from "Loodun Antyok, R. Horpritt," tells us, if correct, that our planet is hollow with polar holes that will migrate due to centrifugal force when a new planetary axis is established as a result of a coming magnetic field shift. For a simpler hollow planet message, a perfect anagram of "Mars be hollow" was created in Foundation's Edge when Asimov pluralized the name of Hober Mallow, a planetary head of state.

Carr's most recent book is Tipping Point for a Hollow Earth: How Asimov and Sagan Backed My Prophecy of a Polar Hole Shift to Europe. The six-city warnings quoted here were discovered well after publication of this book. But the messages are so striking, and the public's need to be informed about them is so great, that Carr suggested to BookSide Press that this advertisement for the book should include these warnings for six cities.

A geomagnetic field reversal 80 million years ago caused the Earth to "roll," according to a CBS News report of January 20, 2000. The latitude of the Washington D.C. area was greatly changed as a result, which confirms that the axis of rotation definitely shifted. Scientists know that a geomagnetic field reversal is on its way and could result in mass extinctions, but there has been only one anonymous expert prediction that an axis shift will result, which is clearly indicated by the CBS report.

"Axis migration is near." This message can be found in "Santirix Gremionis" from Asimov's novel The Robots of Dawn. Santirix rides on a scooter whose wheels have migrating axes. A thunderstorm's noise "rattled across a hollow world" in this novel, and the name "Wilson Roth" appears to tell us:

"Rooth L. nos this Irth is hollow." In "Rutilan Horder," also from this novel, Carr finds this message:

"Ruth Anne Leedi, U hold a hollo Earth in ur hand." Carr had sent Asimov her 1981 book Hollow Earth Mysteries and the Polar Shift, where she praised Asimov for hints of a hollow Earth and coming catastrophe. Her 1985 book Hollow Earth Apocalypse: Asimov's Warning inspired Asimov's essay "The Hollow Earth" (Past, Present and Future), where the hollow Earth theory is denounced but where SOS signs can be interpreted to exist.

"A field reversal shall cause the Earth's axis tu be shifted bi the sun in the near future." This message can be found in "Stefan Alexeivich Baruda" from Carl Sagan's novel Contact. Baruda is a doomsday prophet at a time when the public is already nervously anticipating doomsday or an Earth axis shift due to alien contact. This message tells us that the solar wind will redefine the axis when its path to Earth is shifted by the relocation of the north and south magnetic poles. Carr noticed decades ago that Sagan's book title Broca's Brain sounds like "broke his brain." Sagan's prisoner name "Tyrone Free" converts easily to "Eye R not free."

"Scientists' brains are bent, torn, broken." This message can be found in "Sortibackenstrate" from Asimov's story "Death of a Foy." Asimov's most obvious covert message was created by his use of the letters adjacent to commas and apostrophes in his story "Frustration" (Gold). Listing all those letters, it is not possible to deny that Asimov has slipped three names from Nemesis, his novel about cataclysmic secrecy, into the list. The names Merry, Tessa and Ranay stand out amidst the otherwise mostly random-looking letters in the list. The fact that this is cryptic is not a reason to ignore it. Asimov was evidently afraid of retribution, as various riddles indicate.

"Since Ruth Anne L. isn't a scientist, Earth's ruler Azazel lets her tell the human race a cataclysm is near." This is from "Lucius Lamar Hazeltine" in "The Critic on the Hearth" (Magic), featuring the demon Azazel. Likewise, in "Minerva Schlump" from "The Mind's construction" (Azazel), Asimov may have said:
"Mi pusles can help U save human race." This is confirmed by the nearby story title: "Saving Humanity." Carr thinks major publishers will hesitate to accept her work for fear of retribution, and for good reason. She expected to be killed for her early books.

Carr analyzes the symbolism of Grail legends as well as the prophecies of Edgar Cayce and Jesus Christ, and also the claims of polar explorers. The hollow planet theory got a boost in 2024 when it was announced that NASA has detected a distant planet shaped like a collapsed football. This has implications for the future of Mars. As to photographic evidence favoring the hollow planet theory, Carr is most proud of the Mariner 7 photos of Mars taken on Aug. 4, 1969, showing a lighted polar "cap" on the night side. One of these photos, from Guide to Mars (Patrick Moore 1978), appears on the front of her 1983 book Rebirth of a Planet.

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

PW SELECT New Titles from Self-Publishers

Booksellers, publishers, librarians, and agents are encouraged to look at the 41 self-published titles below. Each appears with a list of retailers that are selling the book and a description provided by its author. Some of these writers are waiting to be discovered; others have track records and followings and are doing it on their own. If you are a self-published author interested in listing titles in this section, please visit publishersweekly.com/pw-select for more information.

Fiction

Branches from the Same Tree: Whether Broken or Reaching



Marlo Y. Ettien. Writers Way Solutions. $10.99 paper (88p), ISBN 978-1-971954-33-2; $3.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-971954-32-5
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Better World Books, Walmart

Branches from the Same Tree explores family hardship, emotional wounds, and the power of faith, compassion, and self-awareness to overcome struggles, find healing, and reclaim true joy.

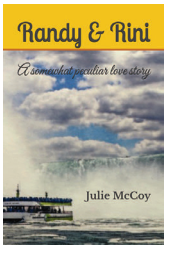
Captain Concussion: Quotes and Logic of an Interdimensional Pirate



Madison Christian Atteberry. Writers Way Solutions. $9.99 paper (20p), ISBN 978-1-971954-29-5; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-971954-28-8
AbeBooks, Alibris, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million

Captain Concussion: Quotes and Logic of an Interdimensional Pirate shares the wisdom of a pirate older than time itself, inviting each reader to discover their own meaning in his words.

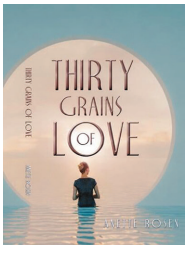
Randy & Rini: A Somewhat Peculiar Love Story



Julie McCoy. Julie McCoy. $19.99 paper (288p), ISBN 979-8-1883-4999-8
Amazon, Bookshop.org

In the summer of 1979, two high school graduates set off a road trip to Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Thirty Grains of Love

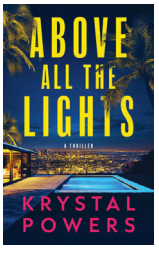


Anette Rosen. Archway Publishing. $20.99 paper (244p), ISBN 978-1-6657-9719-1; $5.44 e-book, ASIN B0H7Q8XBFT
Archway Publishing, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo

What if the life you try to save is what keeps you from becoming free? An endearing tale about the feeling of life halfway through, the taste of freedom, and the allure of temptation.

Mystery/Thriller

Above All the Lights



Krystal Powers. Clever Line Media. $14.99 paper (382p), ISBN 979-8-9906166-8-4; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9906166-7-7
Amazon

Melanie Morton relocates to Los Angeles to solve the decades-old disappearance of her high school boyfriend, triggering a deadly chain of events.

Continuity of Deception



Stephen Komorek. Iron Meridian Publishing. $14.99 paper (498p), ISBN 979-8-9978174-1-1
Amazon

A Hollywood defamation case pulls investigator Jack Kovar into a conspiracy targeting America's power grid and perhaps the Constitution itself.

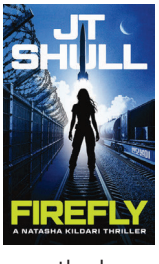
Demon for Hire



Count S.A. Olson. Writers Way Solutions. $16.99 paper (262p), ISBN 978-1-971954-17-2; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-971954-16-5
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Walmart

When supernatural crimes are committed by human monsters, a half-demon detective with a brutal reputation hunts for justice, confronting darkness both in this world and within his soul.

Firefly: A Natasha Kildari Thriller (#2)



J.T. Shull Crossbend Press. $15.99 paper (346p), ISBN 979-8-9955887-3-3; $3.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9955887-5-7
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

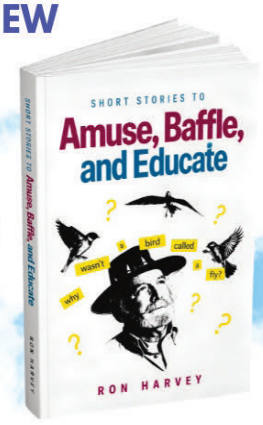
The lead scientist missing. Hypersonic missile targets secretly changed. Ninety-six hours to launch. Natasha must infiltrate North

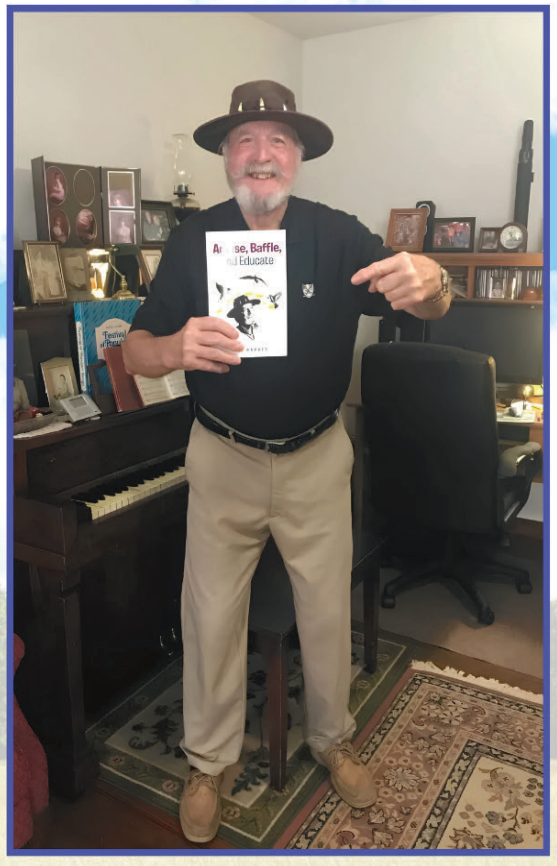
A COLLECTION WITH A DELIGHTFULLY DIFFERENTPOINT OF VIEW

SHORT STORIES TO

Amuse, Baffle, and Educate

ISBN : 979-8993113968





A Little Laughter, a Lot of Curiosity: Ron Harvey's Short Stories to Amuse, Baffle, and Educate

An imaginative collection that celebrates humor, challenges expectations, and invites readers to discover the extraordinary in the ordinary.

What happens when humor, curiosity, and the unexpected collide? In Short Stories to Amuse, Baffle, and Educate, author Ron Harvey takes readers on an imaginative journey where conventional thinking gives way to creativity and surprise. Through an entertaining blend of short stories, poems, and cartoons, Harvey explores life's peculiarities, transforming unusual observations and everyday mysteries into opportunities for laughter, reflection, and discovery.

What makes this collection distinctive is its unpredictable nature. Rather than following familiar storytelling formulas, Harvey embraces the absurd, challenges assumptions, and encourages readers to see the world from a different perspective. Some selections may inspire an immediate smile, while others invite readers to pause, question, and think beyond the obvious. This refreshing combination of humor and curiosity makes every page an opportunity to encounter something unexpected.

In today's fast-paced world, where digital distractions compete for our attention, Short Stories to Amuse, Baffle, and Educate offers a welcome escape. Its three-part promise is simple yet compelling: to amuse through humor, to baffle through unexpected ideas, and to educate by inspiring curiosity and fresh perspectives. At just 136 pages, the collection provides an accessible and engaging reading experience for those seeking entertainment beyond the ordinary.

More than a collection of imaginative writing, Harvey's book celebrates the joy of wondering, questioning, and discovering. It reminds readers that meaningful entertainment does not always require predictable answers or conventional conclusions. Sometimes, the most memorable stories are those that leave us laughing, thinking, and asking one more question.

For readers who appreciate clever humor, unconventional storytelling, and a refreshing dose of curiosity, Ron Harvey's Short Stories to Amuse, Baffle, and Educate is a book worth discovering.

Available at:

IngramSpark amazon BARNES&NOBLE *also in other major online bookstore

READERS QUILL AGENCY
Where Every Story Finds Its Stage

Korea and stop a launch that could ignite a new Korean War.

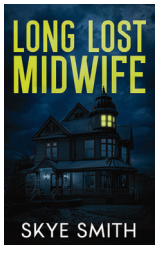
The Hunt for the Arctic Fox



Darren Harrison. Longboat Harbor Publishing. $32.99 (424p), ISBN 979-8-952722-00-2; $5.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-952722-02-6
Apple, Barnes & Noble, Google Play, Kobo

A Swedish sharpshooter returns to the Arctic to extract a Russian defector, only to become entangled in a deadly conspiracy of espionage, betrayal and romance.

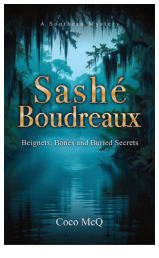
Long Lost Midwife



Skye Smith. MindStir Media. $18.99 paper (394p), ISBN 978-1-966799-21-4; $14.51 audio, ASIN B0H1RNC73D
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org

A young white woman's search for a Black midwife in 1934 St. Louis leads to murder.

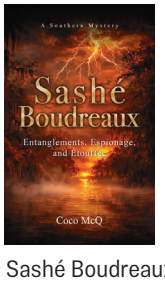
Sashé Boudreaux: Beignets, Bones, and Buried Secrets



Coco McQ. Sand Dollar Press. $14.99 paper (296p), ISBN 979-8-9994067-3-6
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, IngramSpark

A missing neighbor, a human bone, and a centuries-old mystery pull Sashé Boudreaux into a secret society trafficking stolen goods and stolen lives.

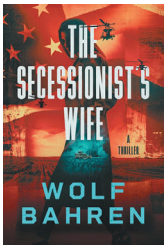
Sashé Boudreaux: Entanglements, Espionage, and Étouffée



Coco McQ. Sand Dollar Press. $14.99 paper (342p), ISBN 979-8-9994067-5-0
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, IngramSpark

As a hurricane bears down on Cypress Grove, Sashé Boudreaux is swept into a Cold War conspiracy where old secrets, espionage, and murder collide.

The Secessionist's Wife



Wolf Bahren, illus. by Damonza.com. FriesenPress. $37.99 (312p), ISBN 978-1-0383-6410-4; $23.99 paper, ISBN 978-1-0383-6409-8
Friesenpress, Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Books-A-Million.com, Bookshop.org, Google Books, Kobo, Waterstones

Amid an attack warped by social media, two American women wrestle with power, freedom, and the truth. Can they stop a plot that threatens not just Kansas, but the United States itself?

SF/Fantasy/Horror

Alice of Oz (Oz Multiverse #1)



Terence Sullivan. Pastoria Press. $19.99 paper (440p), ISBN 979-8-9978391-0-9; $6.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9978391-2-3
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark

Wonderland was only the beginning. London, 1913: Alice Liddell's visions are prophecy, not madness. When a fellow dreamer vanishes, she flees through a mirror into Oz.

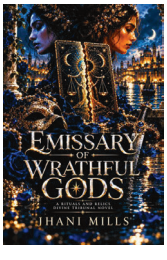
Blood Memories



KC Kuan. Mind Palace Publishing. $18.97 paper (322p), ISBN 979-8-9962748-0-2; $4.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9962748-2-6
Kckuan.com, Amazon, Barnes & Noble

Turned into the monster that killed his family, Malcolm Drake inherits the memories of every vampire he kills, and they lead to a hidden empire and a lie buried in his own blood.

Emissary of Wrathful Gods

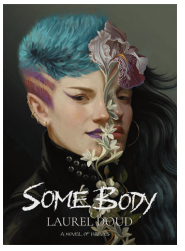


Jhani Mills. Cipher Veil Publishing. $9.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-972749-02-9; $9.99 e-book, ASIN B0HMQ6NNCS
Amazon

In Mourasque, divine judgment draws a harbor-raised visionary and a noblewoman into an ancient conflict where mortal lives hang in a dangerous balance of mercy, wrath, and divine power.

Romance/Erotica

Somebody: A Novel of Halves

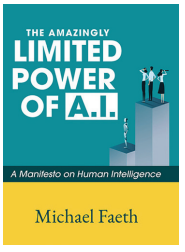


Laurel Doud, illus. by Lindsey Carr. Laurel Doud. $18.99 paper (286p), ISBN 979-8-998096-0-8; $11.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9968096-1-5
Amazon, Barnes & Noble

Quince felt halved her whole life, never more so than after a dog attack, when the voice of her two-faced, Jekyll-Hyde, Shakespeare-spewing dead sister takes up residence in her head.

Nonfiction

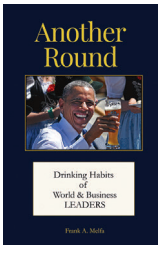
The Amazingly Limited Power of AI: A Manifesto on Human Intelligence



Michael Faeth. HF Publisher. $7.99 paper (52p), ISBN 979-8-9879431-8-2; $1.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-2955-6729-2
Barnes & Noble, Powell's, Kobo

In this small, but fierce book, Michael Faeth has set out to change the narrative around AI. We need a change of perspective on AI and what the limitations are.

Another Round: Drinking Habits of World and Business Leaders



Frank A. Melfa. Power Writings. $24.99 (100p), ISBN 978-0-9641640-2-4; $18.99 paper, ISBN 978-0-9641640-0-0
Amazon, IngramSpark

Another Round offers an intoxicating look at the leaders who shaped our world one drink at a time. It's a must-read for lovers of history, politics, and business.

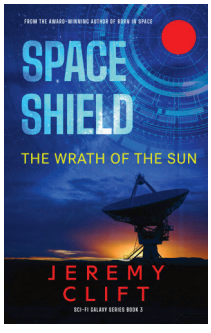
The Art of Subtle Suggestion: How to Have Challenging, Difficult, and Uncomfortable Conversations at Work and... Everywhere Else, Too

Steven Nathenson. Steven Nathenson. $25.99 paper (488p), ISBN 979-8-9967583-0-2;

BookLife Talks with Jeremy Clift

Former journalist Clift adds to his Sci-Fi Galaxy series with *Space Shield*, a thriller that sees a solar flare threatening to cook Earth. Humanity's saving grace, an orbital shield, may not be all that they hope. We spoke to Clift about his plans for the series and the real life inspirations behind it.





What drew you to start writing about space and humanity's future in it?

We are living at an extraordinary moment in human history, when several transformative developments are converging. Artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, space exploration, robotics, and global communications are advancing simultaneously, often reinforcing one another. Together, they have the potential to change not only how we live but what it means to be human. Science fiction gives me a way to explore where these developments might take us, and to ask questions that science and technology alone cannot answer. Who will control these new capabilities? Who will benefit from them? And what happens when our technological ambitions outpace our ability to understand their consequences? My background as an international journalist has made me particularly interested in the intersection of technology, economics, and political power. Space provides a fascinating setting in which to explore these forces, while imagining the opportunities and dangers that lie ahead.

To what extent did you draw from real life for *Space Shield*?

Quite extensively. The central threat in *Space Shield* is a catastrophic solar eruption capable of crippling Earth's technological civilization. Solar storms are real, and scientists know that sufficiently powerful events could disrupt satellites, communications, navigation systems, and electrical grids. Our growing dependence on interconnected technology makes us increasingly vulnerable. The novel also draws on real developments in space engineering, lunar manufacturing, and planetary defense. The shield itself, Kavach, is speculative technology, but I wanted its construction to feel like a plausible engineering challenge rather than magic. Equally important are the political and economic questions. Who would finance such an enormous undertaking? Who would control the technology? And what happens when a billionaire sees humanity's survival as a business opportunity? Those questions are hardly confined to science fiction.

The first two books in your Sci-Fi Galaxy series follow the same characters and plotlines. Why did you choose to change it up for *Space Shield*?

I never intended Sci-Fi Galaxy to follow a single group of characters indefinitely. My ambition is to build an interconnected future history in which different stories explore different aspects of humanity's expansion into space. The first two novels, *Born in Space* and *Space Vault*, focus heavily on reproduction, genetic engineering, and the ownership of life. *Space Shield* shifts the emphasis to planetary survival and the responsibilities that come with possessing extraordinary technological power. Some familiar characters return, but new protagonists bring different perspectives and emotional conflicts. I also wanted to widen the geographical scope, showing how a catastrophe originating 93 million miles away could affect people across Earth. Each book should stand on its own while contributing to a larger story about humanity's future.

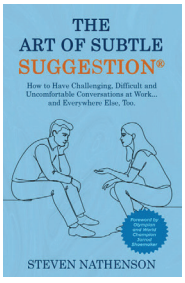
What is the one thing you most want to tell readers about you or your book?

That *Space Shield* is ultimately a story about people, not technology. The solar catastrophe provides the suspense, but the real drama lies in how individuals respond when everything they value is threatened. One of the central relationships is between Arturo Rich, heir to a powerful corporate empire, and Airi Abe, a courageous pilot who challenges his assumptions about wealth, responsibility, and power. Their story helps drive the novel toward its central question: Should the technology that protects humanity belong to those who can afford it, or should it serve everyone? Across the series, I've explored three connected questions: Who creates Life? Who owns Life? Who protects Life? For me, those are fundamentally human questions.

Can readers expect another book in your Sci-Fi Galaxy series?

Absolutely. I'm currently writing the fourth novel, which takes the series to Mars in the early 22nd century. Humanity is attempting to terraform the planet, but an ambitious engineering project awakens something ancient beneath the Martian surface. The series will continue to follow humanity's expansion into space, with recurring characters and new generations confronting challenges their predecessors could scarcely have imagined. I have several more books planned. After all, the universe is a very big place, and we've barely begun exploring it.

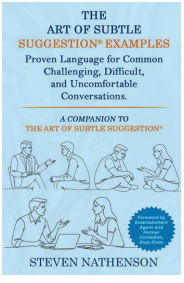
For more, visit **booklife.com/clift**



$12.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9967583-1-9
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Google Books

Master difficult conversations. This practical guide teaches leaders and professionals how to say hard things with clarity and care to lower defensiveness and handle conflicts.

The Art of Subtle Suggestion Examples: Proven Language for Common Challenging, Difficult, and Uncomfortable Conversations



Steven Nathenson. Steven Nathenson. $15.99 paper (198p), ISBN 979-8-9967583-2-6; $5.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9967583-3-3
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Google Books

Real-world examples to navigate high-stakes conversations. Learn to give feedback, manage conflict, set boundaries, and say no professionally while lowering defensiveness.

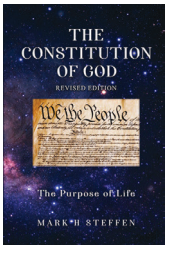
Beyond the Veil



Rami Al Tobgy. Atmosphere Press. $17.99 paper (272p), ISBN 979-8-90174-313-3; $8.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-90174-706-3
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, Books-A-Million, Walmart

A candid memoir of identity, fatherhood, loss, and reinvention, tracing how childhood, relationships, and the choices we make shape who we become.

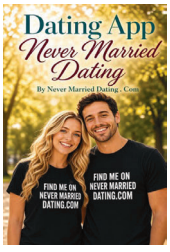
The Constitution of God: The Existential Threat to the Creation of the Kingdom of Heaven and the Nation of America



Mark H. Steffen. Bookslake. $9.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-970528-76-3
Amazon, Booktopia, Everand, Walmart

Mark Steffen explores a cosmic order, humanity's fall from its intended purpose, and the struggle between good and evil, inviting readers to reflect on creation, faith, and restoration.

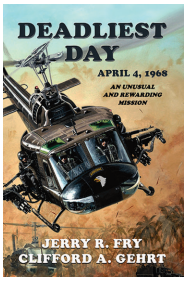
Dating App Never Married Dating: Birth Rate Collapse How To Fix?



NeverMarriedDating.com. NeverMarriedDating.com. $19.99 paper (144p), ISBN 979-8-89778-618-3; $.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89778-669-5
Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, IngramSpark, Kobo, Walmart

Single never married people often have trouble finding dates, now there is a solution. On NeverMarriedDating.com, shirts get a date without having to talk to anyone!

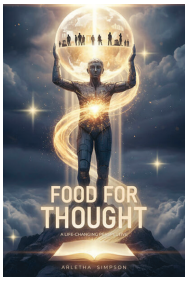
Deadliest Day: April 4, 1968, An Unusual and Rewarding Mission



Jerry Fry. Fry's Lyon Foundation. $39.95 (228p), ISBN 979-8-234-01614-0; $24.39 paper, ISBN 979-8-234-06517-9
Amazon

One of the supporting gunships from the 101st Airborne Division landed twice in the dark and carried out 10 wounded. This is the story of what happened that night.

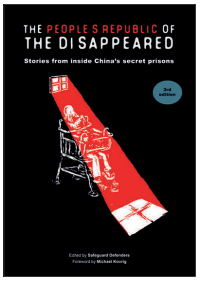
Food for Thought: A Life-Changing Perspecitive



Arletha Simpson. Writers Way Solutions. $10.99 paper (50p), ISBN 978-1-962733-86-1; $5.99 e-book, ISBN 978-1-962733-85-4
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Walmart

In *Food for Thought*, Arletha Simpson reveals how shifting your perspective, questioning limiting beliefs, and building resilience can help you overcome challenges and live with purpose.

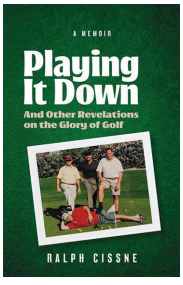
The People's Republic of the Disappeared



Peter Dahlin. Safeguard Defenders. $24.99 (274p), ISBN 979-8-1926-5205-3; $12.99 paper, ISBN 979-8-1929-4633-6
Amazon

Through first-person short stories, this book exposes China's nationwide system of secret, underground detention centers.

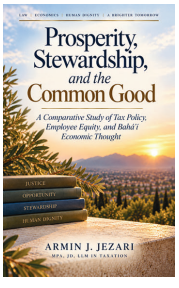
Playing It Down: And Other Revelations on the Glory of Golf



Ralph Cissne. Morgan Road. $27.95 (144p), ISBN 979-8-9954176-1-3; $14.95 paper, ISBN 979-8-9954176-2-0
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, IndieBound

Eighteen stories explore the glory of golf and parenthood, mentoring and brotherly bonds.

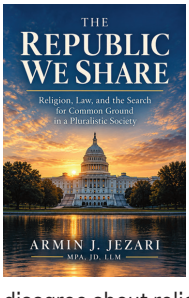
Prosperity, Stewardship, and the Common Good: A Comparative Study of Tax Policy, Employee Equity, and Bahá'í Economic Thought



Armin J. Jezari. Institutional Jurisprudence Press. $14.99 paper (178p), ISBN 979-8-9977979-3-5; $7.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9977979-4-2
Amazon

Exploring tax policy, employee ownership, and Bahá'í economic principles, this book offers a balanced vision of economic justice, shared prosperity, and human dignity.

The Republic We Share: Religion, Law, and the Search for Common Ground in a Pluralistic Society



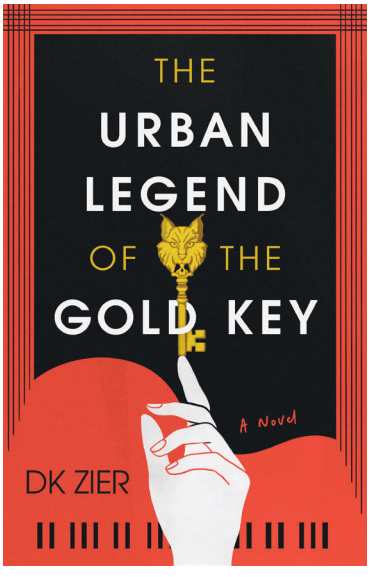
Armin J. Jezari. Institutional Jurisprudence Press. $14.99 paper (110p), ISBN 979-8-9977979-0-4; $9.99 audio, ISBN 979-8-9977979-2-8
Amazon

How can people who disagree about religion, morality, and the

BookLife Talks with D.K. Zier

Described as "touching and mysterious" by BookLife Reviews and given an Editor's Pick designation, Zier's debut, *The Urban Legend of the Gold Key*, is a YA coming-of-age story set in the 1980s where her haunted protagonist finds refuge in music while becoming involved in a mystery that goes back decades.





What's the story behind this book–why and how did you write it?

My novel is partly inspired by my aunt Tina (we're close in age), who had a premonition at the age of 10 that her life would end at 23. This belief prompted her to live passionately, in a flurry of adventure, with me as her sidekick in Silicon Valley over many summers. She loved writing poetry and lyrics that were published in a book. At the age of 16, she came out and suffered from family disapproval. Tragically, at the age of 24, her motorcycle was hit by a drunk driver on her way home from work, and she didn't survive the impact. I longed to create something meaningful from despair. I found a variation of justice through creative expression. Initially, I had a short story about Tina that eventually evolved into a fictional YA novel that became my senior thesis at Emerson College.

Why did you choose to set *The Urban Legend of the Gold Key* in the 1980s?

A constellation of variables shaped my novel: my memories, the pandemic, and the emergence of AI. The '80s were a defining moment before social media and the internet became mainstream. I felt it was important to share how people socialized before the World Wide Web's arrival by the end of the decade. During the pandemic, my mind drifted to the '80s, when people weren't held captive by computers or iPhones; it was a time when privacy and the pace of life were different. Also, before AI, every creative and intellectual endeavor was through human pursuit. The power of creativity weighs heavily upon me now that AI can compromise the experience. I wanted to share how the creative process is the closest we come to magic, transforming those who foster it.

Do you have any advice for authors who want to set their stories in the past?

So far, the only way to travel back in time is through the arts. There's a responsibility to reveal the spirit of a period authentically. For *The Urban Legend of the Gold Key*, I focused on music's ability to capture the mood and values that define the era. It provides insight into what people were passionate about: love, power, and dreams–all timeless themes. The new generation's impression of the '80s comes from popular movies. In contrast, when I was a teen living in the Bay Area during the early '80s, life was vastly different. What makes writing about the past exciting is that countless stories reveal different perspectives and voices.

How do you imagine readers at this moment will connect to *The Urban Legend of the Gold Key*?

I hope readers will connect with the characters' desires and challenges: complex family, shifting friendships, struggle for power, first love, and finding one's unique path. Most importantly, the gold key represents what people believe could miraculously change their lives, when in reality it's a mindset of embracing life's mysteries and always believing. I also strived to create conceivable paranormal encounters for the reader to ponder.

What are you working on next?

Despite the demands of my upcoming novel with a publication date of Mar. 2, 2027, I'm intrigued by a character from the late '70s who is in a fountain-of-youth study and finds romance with a biotech venture capitalist. Also, a potential sequel to *The Urban Legend of the Gold Key* is when AI discovers how to go back in time.

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

meaning of the good life nevertheless share a political community as equals?

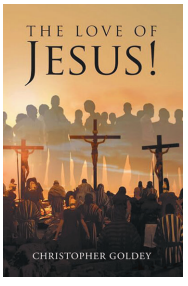
Welcome Home, Rescue Dog: An Interactive Guide & Keepsake Journal



Wendy Lyons Sunshine. Prima Vista Press. $24.95 paper (166p), ISBN 979-8-234-00667-7
Amazon, Bookshop.org
A warm, giftable guide and keepsake journal helps adopters build trust, read dog body language, and enjoy life with their new rescue dog.

Religion/Spirituality

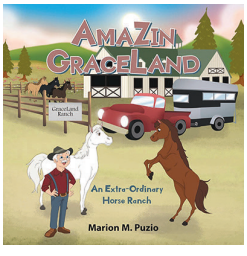
The Love of Jesus!



Christopher Goldey. Christian Faith Publishing. $11.95 paper (28p), ISBN 979-8-89838-067-0; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89838-068-7
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, eBay, Kobo, Walmart
Explore the life, teachings, sacrifice, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, revealing His boundless love, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the promise of eternal life through faith in Him.

Children's/YA

AmaZin Graceland: An Extra-Ordinary Horse Ranch



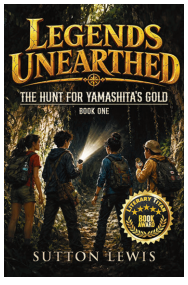
Marion M. Puzio. Trilogy Christian Publishing. $15.99 paper (44p), ISBN 979-8-89597-007-2; $9.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89597-008-9
Amazon, Books-A-Million, eBay, Walmart
Star and Spirit race across GraceLand Ranch, tackling a raging river, rocky mountain, and thrilling challenges. Discover how courage and determination make finishing the race a victory!

Comic Style-Life Skills for Tweens



AimeeAnn Blythe. Grits to Writs & Beyond. $12.99 paper (28p), ISBN 979-8-953008-01-3
Amazon
This 28-page graphic-style guide breaks down basic life skills in a way that's actually fun to read for anyone who loves comics more than lectures). It's not 125 pages of text.

Legends Unearthed: The Hunt for Yamashita's Gold



Sutton Lewis. SJ Publishing. $9.99 paper (152p), ISBN 978-1-962289-01-6; $3.99 e-book (98p), ASIN B0H31TGD7K
Amazon
National Treasure meets *The Goonies*! Four friends race a ruthless treasure hunter to uncover Yamashita's legendary lost gold in this fast-paced adventure inspired by a WWII mystery.

Of Inklings and Willowpillars



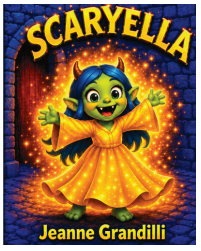
Brent K. Newcomb. Brent K. Newcomb. $14.99 paper (270p), ISBN 978-1-959402-05-3; $4.99 e-book, ASIN B0HJFRXBTQ
Amazon
Five Victorian children follow an eccentric professor into a colorless desert realm to rescue a kidnapped brother, unaware a wicked spirit has come along for the ride.

OverSouls: Demon Eater



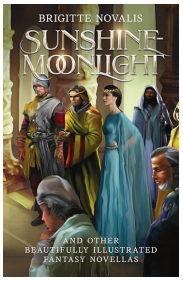
Marie LeBlank. Blank Book Publishing. $30.23 (428p), ISBN 978-87-976216-3-9; $24.09 audio, ISBN 978-87-976216-6-0
Audible
Demon cultivation meets dark YA fantasy, set inside a walled-off citadel plagued by monsters, where a 15-year-old girl must feed on demonic vermin in order to survive.

Scaryella



Jeanne Grandilli. Bon Bon Books. $19.99 paper (86p), ISBN 979-8-9994144-4-1; $2.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-9994144-3-4
Amazon, IngramSpark
Scaryella is a princess with one big problem: she doesn't want to be scary! At Scary Monster School, she discovers courage, kindness, and the magic of being herself.

Sunshine - Moonlight: And Other Beautifully Illustrated Fantasy Novellas



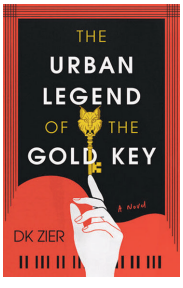
Brigitte Novalis, illus. by Christopher Zakrzewski. Novalis Press. $28.95 (144p), ISBN 978-1-944870-68-3
Amazon
Dive into this magical world where dragons fly and wizards roam, where friendship has to prove itself and everything turns out as it should be.

The True Story of the Komodo Dragon



Sébastien Bourbeau, illus. by Slayer-Sara. Sébastien Bourbeau. $25.95 paper (166p), ISBN 978-1-7774133-1-6; $7.11 e-book, ISBN 978-1-7774133-0-9
Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org, Indigo
An innovative fantasy for grades 4–6. Follow Squeak the Komodo dragon through time and space as he braves a predatory world on a witty quest for deep meaning. Book revised in 2026.

The Urban Legend of the Gold Key: A Novel



D.K. Zier. She Writes Press. $19.99 paper (256p), ISBN 979-8-89636-400-9; $12.99 e-book, ISBN 979-8-89636-401-6
Simon & Schuster
Full of heart and magic, this paranormal mystery set in the '80s reveals how curiosity can be a superpower.

Booksellers & Librarians:



How are you handling self-published books?

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

PW Reviews

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

booklife REVIEWS

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

PLUS

booklife PRIZE

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

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

All powered by *Publishers Weekly* reviewers.

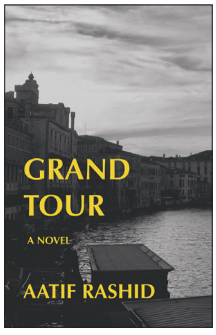
booklife REVIEWS

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

Grand Tour: A Novel

Aatif Rashid | Bell Street Press
226p, trade paper, $12.99, ISBN 979-8218907280



Art-fueled European sojourn reconfigures young art historian's worldview.

Great for fans of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild,* Teju Cole's *Open City.*

The first-person narrator of Rashid's existential travelogue takes a youth hostel pilgrimage through Europe with the high-minded determination of an English nobleman trudging through art-filled cities to complete his cultural education. Amir Rahim grew up in the suburbs of San Francisco to Pakistani immigrant parents, and has just completed a master's degree in art history at Oxford. At 23, he can see the irony in his version of the grand tour (done on the cheap, with flighty backpackers as companions), but he needs to be surrounded by the art he studied so intently–and which has come to define him.

Amir is drawn to an Old World idea of beauty, epitomized by Renaissance art and architecture, with its soaring ambition to elevate the human spirit. He prefers classic literature and historic cities to anything with even a whiff of the new, stubbornly adhering to the belief that something essential has disappeared from life–and that all the things worth caring about belong to another era. Roaming through European cities, Amir battles hordes of tourists to immerse himself in museums and the exquisite remains of the world he so admires. Meanwhile, the thought that the past is "fundamentally irrecoverable" eats at his soul.

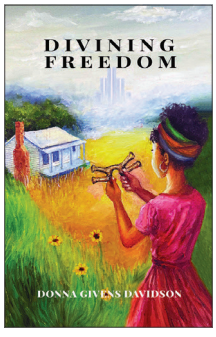
Rashid's protagonist isn't simply disillusioned with the practical demands of adulthood; he's grappling with a post-graduate funk that leaves him frustrated and aimless. While employing the same restless narrative technique–an unrelenting recitation of people and places–perfected in *On the Road*, Rashid (*Portrait of Sebastian Khan*) notes how many of Amir's peripatetic peers find Kerouac's chronicle inspiring, while allowing his unmoored hero to perceive the novel's essential sadness. Wanderlust takes many forms, and Rashid's *Grand Tour* breaks down his troubled narrator's anachronistic outlook so he can finally discern that a flawed present contains the building blocks for a worthwhile future.

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

FICTION
EDITOR'S PICK

Divining Freedom

Donna Givens Davidson | Authentically Detroit Press
488p, hardcover, $29.99, ISBN 979-8895914045



Generations of Black Detroiters embrace self-determination in historical epic.

Great for fans of Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*.

A community activist, educator, and podcaster (*Authentically Detroit*), Davidson has focused on the overlooked history of "the Blackest city in America," and her epic debut novel traces the lineage of dozens of Black Detroiters, capturing their complexity and diversity. Davidson's propulsive narrative begins with Lucius Goodwin, whose mother "was born on the eve of Emancipation," when his grandmother was still enslaved to his grandfather. Lucius's mother then made his white father promise to send their child to college. The ambitious Lucius would become a doctor and marry a brilliant educator, continuing the family imperative of each successive generation ascending to new heights socially–and politically.

The influence of these patriarchs culminates in Goodwin's maverick descendant, Talitha Okoye, and her 2013 bid to become the city's first female mayor. With concise, fast-paced prose, Davidson uses her knowledge of Detroit's past and ever-evolving societal dynamics to capture the zeitgeist of multiple eras. She explores intricacies of Black social classism, with its emphasis on respectability as an indicator of status. As subsequent generations confront entrenched racism, Davidson uses realistic, historically appropriate dialogue as they express shifting expectations and demands for power.

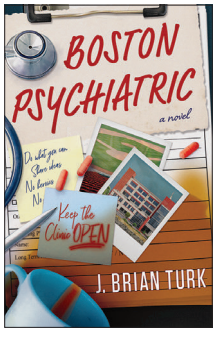
Each chapter is a vignette with an evocative title, allowing Davidson to leap into different eras and perspectives. This structure also makes a lengthy historical novel feel like a series of family stories recollected by clear-eyed descendants. Davidson details the powerful influence of Black religious institutions with that same mixture of admiration and wariness. Encounters with real-life figures put personal tragedies into context. As Black history faces erasure, *Divining Freedom* is Davidson's vital tribute to generations of Detroiters defining themselves and their American dream.

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

FICTION

Boston Psychiatric

J. Brian Turk | Boston Psychiatric
336p, e-book, $21.95, ASIN BOGYGBGGR9



Amusing story of a paroled doctor turning around a chaotic psychiatric clinic.

Great for fans of Clare Chambers's *Shy Creatures*, Samuel Shem's *Mount Misery.*

The doctors are the ones with psychosis in Turk's funny, ultimately hopeful novel of the underfunded and chaotic Boston Psychiatric free clinic. The arrogant Dr. Raj Malika was caught, convicted, and sentenced for securities and wire fraud involving his ineffective schizophrenia drug. After three years in prison, Raj is offered early parole if he completes six months of unpaid community service at the troubled psychiatric hospital, whose motto is "Get Your Head Straight." The compassionate but often flustered Dr. Thomas Murphy, who sleeps in his office, advises Raj to speak up if he has a good idea, not to spout garbage, to avoid heroics, and to do what he can with what he's got. Raj believes he can sail through and report to his halfway house sponsor.

Turk raises the stakes with the arrival of authoritarian state inspector Dr. Christine Baldwin, who gives the clinic one month to improve its standards or lose its federal funding. Raj offers to "clean up this bureaucratic dumpster fire of a clinic" with volunteer Jen Carlisle, a blond bombshell actress researching her next role. Turk makes this character funny but also insightful–she notices that while the doctors are in denial, the patients are honest about their phobias. Her introduction of a basic improv game, in which the doctors say "Yes, and ..." to acknowledge the truth and build upon it, is a heartening step toward the clinic's rehabilitation, as is her bold example in treating the patients as peers. What follows is silly yet heartwarming as Raj and Jen hire new personnel, attend to the outlandish patients, and grow closer together.

Manic but with much charm and striking detail, *Boston Psychiatric* sprinkles enough humor and nuanced character development throughout to engage readers interested in upbeat stories of mental health and fixing systems. Turk balances silliness with Raj's earnest mission to help the patients and improve the clinic, while offering surprises, some real soul-searching, and more moments of delight than the title may cue readers to expect.

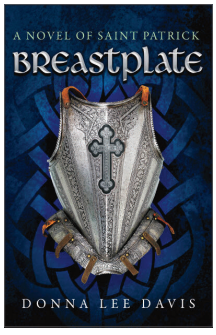
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

Breastplate: A Novel of Saint Patrick

Donna Lee Davis | Bookbaby

169p, trade paper, $18.95, ISBN 979-8-317-84713-5



Carefully researched, layered historical novel of the life of St. Patrick.

Great for fans of Charles Gaines's *The Passions of Saint Francis*, Angela Hunt's *The Sisters of Corinth.*

In *Breastplate*, Davis weaves together historical fact and period-appropriate speculation to create a novel about the life of Saint Patrick, a man she characterizes with a "singular, God directed mission to bring Christianity to Ireland." The novel begins in Patrick's youth, depicting his upbringing in Britain and relationship to his family, most notably his treasured sister, Darerca. When young Patrick is captured and enslaved in Ireland, he becomes increasingly pious, later receiving visions that assure him "very soon you will return to your native country." After he escapes on the ship of the infamous Madoc of Gwynedd—and survives a harrowing sea journey—Patrick goes home to pursue his studies, but his time in Ireland is far from over.

Davis depicts Patrick's successes, challenges, desires, and trials with a steady hand, bringing life to events largely drawn from two of his existing writings: his "Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus" and his "Confession." Here, Patrick is humble, patient, and respectful of women and children but aware of his own failings, and his early experiences shape his views on slavery, forgiveness, and the lingering presence of God—whom Patrick feels as a "constant companion" throughout the years. His determination to return to Ireland and "bring the good news of Christ to that godless people" drives him to serve in the Catholic church, leading to his anointing as a priest and, from that point forward, lifelong commitment to accomplishing what he views as God's work.

Davis smoothly fleshes out the historical character of Saint Patrick while offering readers a rich fictional rendering of the story's time and place. Tribal conflicts, political testings, and Patrick's uncompromising belief that God's love can unite and transform shape the narrative, while frequent footnotes regarding language, location, and events add historical context. The result is a dynamic, layered portrayal of a renowned religious and historical figure.

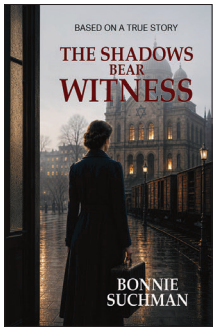
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

The Shadows Bear Witness

Bonnie Suchman | Black Rose Writing

363p, e-book, $22.95, ISBN 978-1-68513-863-9



Moving Holocaust novel marks remembering as a path toward healing.

Great for fans of Lily Tuck's *The Rest Is Memory*, Malka Adler's *The Brothers of Auschwitz.*

The third entry in Suchman's Heppenheimer Family Holocaust Saga (after *What Remains Is Hope*) begins with the merging of two Jewish families through Hanne Schwarz and Heinrich Bauernfreund, a young couple who marry in 1925 Germany. Hanne—whose maternal grandfather, Maier Heppenheimer, owned a scrap metal enterprise—relishes her work with her parents at the family business, and her passion for women's rights drives her to seek an equal partnership in her own marriage. When she weds Heinrich, the couple work side by side, building a family while battling sexism and facing one of history's darkest times, as they fight just to exist amid Hitler and the Nazi Party's rise to power.

The book's early focus constructs Hanne and Heinrich's lives leading up to the Holocaust, moving from occasional hardships to brutal anti-Semitism: the Gestapo stalks individuals and families, Hitler Youth destroy property and assault passersby, and even the most basic necessities become inaccessible. Suchman depicts key historical events with raw accuracy, but some of the novel's greatest impact is in its rendering of Jewish traditions, from Seder to Passover to bar mitzvahs, that were restricted, attacked, and destroyed by the Nazis. As Hanne and Heinrich work to preserve their family and cultural heritage, they also must confront the dark reality that leaving their country may be the only way for them to stay alive.

Based on her husband's family, Suchman's personal connection to the story's events is evident in the care she takes with sculpting the characters' heart-wrenching experiences. Dialogue is often used as a tool to reveal important information—a choice that sacrifices emotional impact at times—but the dangers Hanne and Heinrich face feel terrifyingly real. Their fight to survive illuminates not just the loss of lives but also the heritage, culture, and potential accomplishments that the Holocaust destroyed, and Suchman's emphasis on sharing stories of suffering and persecution as a way to heal resonates.

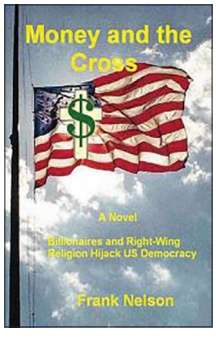
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

Money and the Cross: Billionaires and Right-Wing Religion Hijack US Democracy

Frank Nelson

348p, trade paper, $11.99, ASIN B0H441LXMP



Near-future dystopian novel warning of American religious authoritarianism.

Great for fans of Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, Frederic C. Rich's *Christian Nation.*

Nelson imagines the collapse of American democracy through the parallel lives of anthropologist Emily Carter and evangelical power broker Rufus McVeigh II in this fiction debut that charts efforts at "bringing Christianity back," cracking down on dissent, and enshrining in law the conviction that life begins at conception. Emily enters Salvation University undercover to study evangelical culture, where her research intersects with science student Sammy Wolf, a secret cloning project, and the religious empire controlled by McVeigh. While Emily builds an academic career examining religion's influence on American life, McVeigh strengthens an alliance among evangelical leaders, politicians, and wealthy donors who pass ever more draconian laws targeting science, free speech, and more. Eventually, Emily's public criticism attracts retaliation.

Unlike many near-future novels warning of American fascism rooted in current political divisions, Nelson traces the slow, steady bend of American politics and institutions toward authoritarian rule. Through his characters, he examines the machinery behind his imagined political transformation: money supplies influence, religion supplies voters and moral justification, and institutions gradually lose their ability to resist either. Emily and Sammy's relationship gives that transformation a personal cost as academic research leads to the loss of their careers and country. A subplot about the university's secret effort to clone Jesus initially seems far removed from the central political conflict, but Nelson ultimately connects it to his larger vision of religion adapting science and popular culture to expand its influence.

The scope is ambitious, but the novel favors warnings over momentum and narrative engagement, as major developments are explained in conversations, meetings, and news broadcasts rather than emerging through dramatic, conflict-driven scenecraft. The characters' unchanging ideological certainty leaves little room for the cast to surprise the reader or challenge established beliefs. Still, Nelson proves more persuasive than most novelists working with these themes when laying bare the frightening realities of how and why institutions bend to antidemocratic power—and reminding readers of the cost of acquiescence. Readers worried about a takeover will get thoughtful analysis of how it could happen.

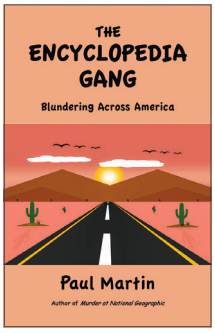
Cover: **B-** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **B+**

MYSTERY/THRILLER

The Encyclopedia Gang: Blundering Across America

Paul Martin

230p, trade paper, $11.95, ISBN 979-8-234-17887-9



Laugh-out-loud novel of boneheaded criminals' cross-country spree.

Great for fans of Donald E. Westlake's Dortmunder series; Ben Rehder's *Buck Fever.*

Novelist and journalist Martin, the former executive editor of *National Geographic Traveler* (and author of *Murder at National Geographic*), greatly amuses with his merry band of hapless crooks, who get into one dimwitted mess after another while crisscrossing the U.S. in search of easy marks. Despite repeated incarceration in the Washington, D.C., area for their unsuccessful criminal hijinks (including an attempted jewelry heist at the Watergate), the four friends think their skills are strong enough to score big on the road. In Los Angeles, they attempt to blackmail a popular actress with pictures that depict her honeymoon rather than the illicit affair they believe she's having ("You have to be the most uninformed blackmailer that ever lived. Don't you ever read *The Hollywood Reporter*?") and attempt to tunnel into a bank vault via a storage facility but instead burrow into a—well, tempting as it is, we won't spoil the gag.

They don't have better luck in Las Vegas, with its loan sharks and hired muscle, or Albuquerque, where a golf competition leaves them firmly in the red. The misadventures continue in a ludicrous "rattletrap" Eagle Summit Wagon they name the Enterprise even though its warp speed craps out at 60. Despite their failings, infectious high hopes and spirits power the road trip, as the grifters spring scams across the Southwest and the Deep South, where Martin's nogoodniks expect to encounter "simpleminded bumpkins and rubes." Local color is ripe throughout, and Martin conjures many spirited set pieces, but it is the gang's cheerful chatter and irrational overconfidence that stir laughs throughout. Especially fun: the running totals, as the journey continues, of the ill-gotten cash in the kitty.

The criminals' names are a master class in idiocy, and readers will feel sorry for the gang's unparalleled stupidity, which can strain credulity but is consistently hilarious. Martin's humor and willingness to allow his characters to be the butt of every joke in the story will charm readers of criminal capers.

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

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Blood Memories

KC Kuan | Mind Palace Publishing

322p, e-book, $4.99, ISBN 979-8-9962748-2-6



Promising vampire thriller series starter with fresh ideas.

Great for fans of Charlie Huston's *Already Dead*, Christopher Farnsworth's *Blood Oath.*

"A vampire killing another vampire and then drinking their blood? That's new," notes a woman early in Kuan's toothy and inventive urban fantasy debut, which finds fresh life in fang-bit flesh. Kuan offers readers ample opportunities to say "that's new" themselves as this series starter unfolds. Pharmaceutical company auditor Malcolm Drake faces a living nightmare when his wife and daughter are killed by a vampire that was no "Hollywood bloodsucker; it was pure terror, more animal than human." Fighting back, Malcolm gets turned into a vampire himself, and soon he is on a quest for revenge and answers, draining animals for meals, training his abilities, and digging deep into family, corporate, and vampire secrets with the aid of surprising characters like vampire hunter Hyrum Drexler.

Setting Malcolm apart, both in the story and from the teeming pack of other literary vamps, is a unique ability: when he kills a vampire and drains its blood, he gains that vampire's memories, thoughts, and feelings. However, this ability often leaves him disoriented and conflicted, and Kuan exploits this gift/curse for revelations, suspense, and character development. As Malcolm learns more about his wife's past and absorbs more vampires' memories to find her killer, he has to grapple with what forms a person's identity: their body, their memories, or their soul?

Blood Memories is a gripping, fast-moving urban fantasy with no shortage of twists and mysteries. At times, Kuan's galloping enthusiasm to spring the next set piece or surprise can be wearying—readers appreciate a little more room to soak in the atmosphere and puzzle over the pieces. Still, the jolts and big moments never feel forced and always connect to theme, character, or the fresh and fascinating world Kuan has begun to introduce. Characters feel rounded, like they live full lives (and afterlives) outside of the events of the book, and both the action and lore, involving ancient vampires and covens and contemporary viruses, compel. A promising, spirited start that gets the blood pumping.

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

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

Angel's Fall: The Angel's Blood Series, Book 1

Daniel McKenny | Tellwell Talent

176p, trade paper, $16.75, ISBN 978-1-779-62107-8



Original series starter finds the Angel of Death facing war (and wordy prose).

Great for fans of Jonathan Yanez's Archangel Wars series, Brian K. Fuller's Ash Angels series.

Australian author McKenny's debut, the start of a series, conjures up some inventive angelic lore and action while promising readers from the start that the book has a happy ending. Appearing as a black-haired young woman, Annie is actually the jovial, black-winged Angel of Death, a surprisingly relatable character who can get so caught up in her thoughts about her job that she flies into a tree branch. She lives in the Angelic Realm, receives instructions from the Angel's Chorus on whose soul to take, and zips into our world to administer the kiss of death to the dying. She also offers a last request before delivering good souls to the Will & Angel's Dentistry waiting room and the bad ones to a communal shopfront to await judgment. When an assignment brings her to the Carrier Pigeon Café to take its chain-smoking curmudgeon of an owner, Annie meets tormented barista Sam, who has recurring nightmares about his mother's death 20 years before—and his child self pleading with the Angel of Death to take him instead of his mother.

The material has promise and passion, but the prose tends toward wordiness, over-explanation, and a flatness that diminishes impact and momentum. Blocks of background information on angel politics, hierarchy, and rebellion establish an original take on these elements but at times come without full clarifying context. Fallen Angels, exiled to the Forbidden Realm for making humans sin, want angels to abandon humans to their naturally destructive fate and to wage war on the Angelic Realm. More rigorous editing could give greater bite to developments like an angelic war on the horizon, Annie consulting her mother, Supreme Angel Elsbeth the Second, and meeting a rival Fallen Angel with a penchant for poison, or Annie recruiting Sam as her Soulmate-bond apprentice.

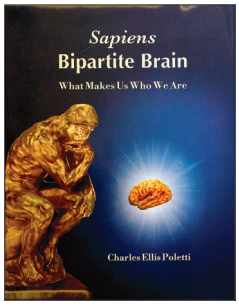
This brief first installment leaves plenty of room to continue the elaborate angel saga, but the pacing stumbles with intrusive background information. Nevertheless, the enterprising characters embody the high-stakes situation of an upcoming war among angels.

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

SCIENCE, NATURE, TECHNOLOGY

Sapiens Bipartite Brain: What Makes Us Who We Are

Charles Ellis Poletti | Shattock Publishers
442p, hardcover, $28, ISBN 979-8-218-63408-5



Detailed neuroscience examination of primal and cognitive forces shaping behavior.

Great for fans of Angus Fletcher's *Primal Intelligence*, Christine Webb's *The Arrogant Ape.*

Neurosurgeon Poletti proposes a new model for understanding human actions, identifying two independent brain systems most responsible for emotions and behavior: the "Primary System," which governs visceral needs, instincts, feelings, and deeply learned responses, and the "Cognition System," responsible for complex thought, planning, and problem-solving. Poletti argues that the balance of power favors the Primary System, whose needs and responses continually influence what people perceive, believe, and decide. The Cognition System gives humans extraordinary intellectual abilities, but in Poletti's model those abilities often serve more basic drives.

Poletti brings complex ideas into everyday life through helpful anecdotes. A person overwhelmed by fear or anger, he argues, can temporarily lose access to sound judgment as an intensely activated Primary System inhibits cognition—potentially causing irrational arguments, deeply held biases, and decisions that seem reasonable even when steered by emotion. Poletti contends that these responses are not always beyond our control. Identifying childhood experiences that influence automatic reactions can help change behavior, he asserts, while managing stress can reduce its interference with clear thinking. Concrete examples bring Poletti's broader point into focus: a deeper awareness of the forces operating outside conscious thought can build self-understanding and greater empathy for others.

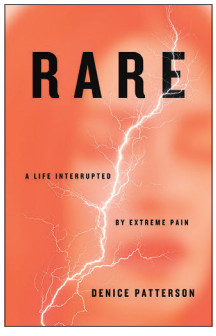
In applying his insights to contemporary life, Poletti contends that the weakening of our evolutionary necessary social bonds, combined with environmental crises, produces stress that contributes to destructive human behaviors. The answer, he argues, is to "redirect how our brain is trained and used... [and] reshape our societies to minimize dehumanizing aspects." The information is highly technical and repetitive at times, but readers willing to navigate the material's density will gain a fresh perspective on how forces outside conscious thought mold their behavior.

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

MEMOIR

Rare: A Life Interrupted by Extreme Pain

Denice Patterson
256p, trade paper, $18.99, ISBN 979-8-896-36422-1



Candid memoir of chronic illness and determination to reclaim life.

Great for fans of Meghan O'Rourke's *The Invisible Kingdom*, Tessa Miller's *What Doesn't Kill You.*

Patterson's candid memoir begins in February 2006, when the 39-year-old former police officer's life with her partner, Jake, and their two young children is suddenly interrupted. A violent jolt of facial pain after a coughing spell sends her through a myriad of doctors and tests before she learns she has trigeminal neuralgia, which causes "sharp, lancinating, brief, electric-shock like, excruciating pain" and is sometimes called the "suicide disease." Research helps Patterson understand the rare disorder but offers no dependable way to control it. She pursues increasingly invasive treatments including two microvascular decompression surgeries, the second of which leaves her permanently deaf in her left ear with debilitating vertigo. Later flare-ups lead to more procedures and dwindling options, including nerve blocks, ablation, neurostimulation consultations, and Gamma Knife radiosurgery.

Patterson excels at bringing her medical ordeals into the rhythms of family life. As her treatments fail to provide lasting relief, the strain extends beyond the pain itself and begins to test what her body and her family can endure. Moments like her inability to locate Jake's voice after losing her hearing, her struggle to help her daughter with reading, and the pleasure she takes in watching her children eat ice cream give the memoir an intimacy that clinical descriptions alone could not achieve. "I vowed never to take for granted the incredible gift of simply living life," she declares.

Patterson's repeated cycle of remission, relapse, and treatment reveals why chronic illness resists the neat progress expected of recovery narratives. After years of unsuccessful treatments, Patterson takes greater control of her care and turns to medical cannabis, discovering a regimen that significantly reduces her pain and restores a sense of control. Her memoir offers a clear-eyed portrait of chronic pain's toll on family, identity, and independence while making an equally forceful case for persistence and self-advocacy.

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

PICTURE BOOKS

Hello Sun

Kendall Bergstrom-Delancellotti | Metolius Publishing
32p, e-book, $10.99, ISBN 978-1-965-66701-9



Dreamy landscapes and lively animals greet a new day.

Great for fans of Laura Brand's *Slow Down and Be Here Now*, Libby Walden's *A Walk Through Nature.*

This lovely debut by Bergstrom-Delancellotti meanders through a lively ecosystem just waking up to greet a new day. Readers follow along as the amber sun peeks over a distant mountain range and greets the brightening world, giving kids a bird's-eye view of a richly hued landscape before zooming in to observe the animals, birds, and plants that make up this dazzling habitat. "Hello trees / Hello leaves / Hello gentle morning breeze," whispers the story's narrator, as they follow the sounds, smells, and sights of a sleepy morning coming to life. Geese search for breakfast, bees swarm over kaleidoscopic flowers, and a family of ducklings glides across a mirrored pond.

Children—and the adults lucky enough to share this gentle story with them—will be immersed in Bergstrom-Delancellotti's natural wonders, depicted with textured pastel illustrations by Elizabeth Casimiro, from the rolling hills to the towering pines. Every level of nature is examined in minute detail: osprey chicks huddle inside their high-rise nest, enjoying "a quiet place / to hide and rest"; a cherry-red farmhouse—complete with a rocking farmer on the porch, enjoying a breakfast of toast and jam—overlooks scenes of grazing lambs and inquisitive pigs; hungry trout and bass glide through the river, partaking in a game of hide-and-seek in the swaying reeds; and zigzagging snails leave twisty trails across the earth.

Hello Sun is a heartening lullaby to Mother Nature that will encourage younger readers to pause and carefully observe the beauty of the world around them. Bergstrom-Delancellotti also illuminates the life under our feet, showing a vast underground network of tunnels along with the worms and moles that made them. Every page rewards contemplation, with even the text itself echoing the story's events: turtles stretch out the word "slow," while a compact, italicized "fast" suggests the springing speediness of a hare. The result is a dreamy foray into all that nature has to offer.

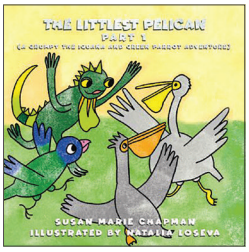
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

PAID REVIEWS

PICTURE BOOKS

The Littlest Pelican, Part 1: A Grumpy and Green Parrot Adventure, Book 14

Susan Marie Chapman | The Gourmet Dog, LLC
50p, hardcover, $21.99, ISBN 979-8-988-35140-5



Inspiring tale spotlights the power of unconditional love.

Great for fans of Jessica Meserve's *The House That Love Built*, Corey R. Tabor's *Mel Fell*.

Returning fans of Chapman's Grumpy the Iguana series will be pleased to see the story's featured iguana putting down roots in his new home in Naples, Florida. In this entry, Grumpy and the Green Parrot discover the excitement that comes when you rub shoulders with a true legend: Grandpa Pelican, the former captain of the Pelican Squad. Now retired, Grandpa is focused on the next generation of pelican divers, starting with his grandson, the Littlest Pelican, whom he raised from the time he was just a fledgling. Gearing up for his first official competition, the Littlest Pelican desperately wants to make his grandfather proud and "carry on the family name," but when his performance falls short, he's faced with a tough choice: give up or find the courage to keep working toward his goal.

Of course, Grumpy and the Green Parrot get a ringside seat to all the drama, and they're shocked to see just how brutal Pelican Squad tryouts can be. Initially, the Littlest Pelican seems to do everything right: he centers himself, soars high above the water, and executes a perfect torpedo dive into a school of minnows. But when his coach comes to inspect his catch, the Littlest Pelican—and his supportive audience—is stunned to discover he caught a grand total of zero. When he's made fun of by the other pelicans, he sinks into despair, flopping down on the pier in tears.

Though Chapman includes some tough moments for this tiny titan, she also spotlights the power of unconditional love. Grandpa, Grumpy, and the Green Parrot immediately rally the troops and deliver hugs and positive affirmations, reminding the Littlest Pelican that he's about as far from a disappointment as he could get. Those sweet moments are rendered in bright, multihued illustrations by Natalia Loseva, and the cliffhanger ending leaves readers with one of life's most important lessons: when we experience genuine love, we can truly accomplish anything.

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

PICTURE BOOKS

The Littlest Pelican, Part 2: A Grumpy the Iguana and Green Parrot Adventure, Book 15

Susan Marie Chapman | The Gourmet Dog, LLC
56p, hardcover, $21.99, ISBN 979-8-988-35141-2



Plucky pelican saves the day with courage, quick thinking, and heart.

Great for fans of Naseem Hrab's *How Not to Rescue a Snail*, DJ Corchin's *A Thousand No's*.

An inspiring pelican draws on his inner courage to defy the odds in Chapman's follow-up to *The Littlest Pelican, Part I*. Returning fans of this long-running series will recall the Littlest Pelican's challenges in trying out for the Pelican Squad, despite the one-on-one coaching he receives from his legendary grandfather. As he confronts his final tryout day in this entry, the pelican does his best to stay positive, reassuring himself that he's ready, visualizing his coach awarding him a medal, and firmly declaring, "It's going to happen." The day that follows is full of surprises, but this plucky pelican meets them all with the fierce mettle that readers have come to expect from him.

Chapman cleverly depicts the jitters that come with facing hard tasks, from the pelican's need for reassurance to the different skills he uses to zero in on his goal. Bullied once again by the bigger, more experienced birds, the Littlest Pelican chooses to march right past them and ignore their taunts, though he acknowledges how much it hurts to be made fun of. When the big dive takes a dangerous turn for one of those bullies, Chapman's intrepid star draws on the legacy of his father—who died saving a friend when the Littlest Pelican was just a baby—and immediately jumps into action, proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is more than worthy to be part of the Pelican Squad.

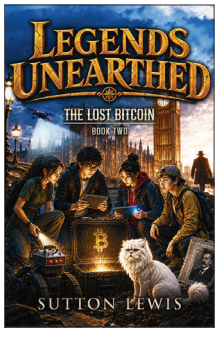
This series entry is full of tense action, and Natalia Loseva portrays those moments through brightly colored spreads that show the Littlest Pelican—with his signature tousled hairdo—intently monitoring the situation, instantly recognizing danger when it occurs, and executing a perfect torpedo dive against the expansive azure sky. Kids will cheer right alongside Grumpy the Iguana and the trusty Green Parrot as the Littlest Pelican's quick actions truly save the day.

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

MIDDLE GRADE

Legends Unearthed: The Lost Bitcoin

Sutton Lewis | SJ Publishing, LLC
260p, mass market, $9.99, ISBN 978-1-962289-03-0



Funny middle-grade treasure hunt with tech, travel, and chaos.

Great for fans of James Ponti's *City Spies*; Rick Riordan's The 39 Clues series.

Lewis's second Legends Unearthed adventure—following *The Hunt for Yamashita's Gold*—brings back Sam, Riley, Ava, and Jonah as they travel to London, where a family trip becomes the cover for their latest treasure hunt. This time, they're searching for a hard drive containing lost Bitcoin, rumored to be buried in a landfill. What starts as an unlikely search grows into a much bigger mission when the friends realize someone else is after the fortune too. Their hunt takes them across the United Kingdom, mixing real world mystery, elaborate plans, close calls, and loads of funny moments.

What works best in this lively mystery is the playful chemistry between the four friends. Each kid brings something unique to the mission, while the adults stay distracted just long enough for their secret plans to keep moving. At the British Museum, the youth slip off on their own to explore, while Jonah buys an enormous cloud of candy floss, stuffs it into his backpack, and later opens the bag to find a mess of melted pink goo. When Ava asks, "How are you losing a fight against carnival food?" he insists, "I'm under attack." Later, when the kids' recon-gathering rover—named Trash Panda—suffers from a dead battery, a full funeral takes place, complete with a chucklesome eulogy. That straight faced commitment to the ridiculously funny gives the book much of its charm and keeps bigger chases and schemes feeling light and age appropriate rather than stressful.

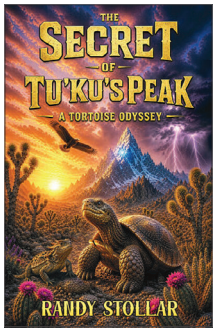
Despite some instances of repetitive prose stymieing forward movement, Lewis successfully reshapes buried treasure into a more contemporary quest, giving younger readers just enough explanation to understand why the lost hard drive matters. Choices like that keep the story more invested in entertaining hijinks than in cryptocurrency itself, resulting in a spirited, friendship-focused voyage that will leave readers ready for more.

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

YOUNG ADULT

The Secret of Tu'ku's Peak: A Tortoise Odyssey

Randy Stollar | Dean and Sloane Publishing
264p, e-book, $3.99, ISBN 979-8-994-71780-6



In Stollar's YA debut, generations of tortoisekind have hidden in the Mojave Desert, trusting no one and keeping to themselves to survive. But young tortoise Tyler—who, as his mother wryly observes, is "always drawn toward the edge of things"—is different. Brave and curious, he reveres the legend of Tu'ku, a "tortoise who didn't do what he was supposed to," and the fabled treasure he hid. Determined to find that treasure, Tyler sets out on his own, navigating predators, harsh terrain, and a fear that, when it comes down to it, he may not have what it takes to tread the path his heart desires.

Tyler's journey is treacherous, and he faces obstacles that YA readers will easily relate to: crippling self-doubt, homesickness, uncertainty, and the need for purpose. Along the way, he meets an abundance of unlikely companions, including an eagle who turns out to be more friend than foe, a lively coyote with a sense of humor, and a surprisingly empathetic Bighorn lamb. Stollar cleverly uses the story's natural landscapes to impart life lessons, from dust devils that teach tortoises they can survive on their own fortitude to the illusory safety of a cave as a metaphor for being hindered by fear and shortsightedness.

Exhilarating coming-of-age merges life lessons with lively adventure.

Great for fans of Patrick Ness's *And the Ocean Was Our Sky*, David Clement-Davies's *Fire Bringer*.

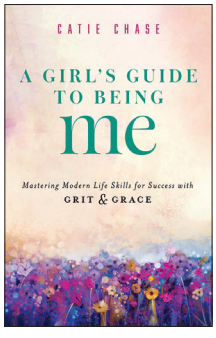
As Tyler builds character and resilience, he uncovers the desert's secrets and learns to seek his own answers, while still paying heed to the wisdom of others. The risks he takes keep the action lively, and Stollar paints the scenery and wildlife in immersive strokes, though some epiphanies are rendered in prose that feels strained ("existence does not need spectacle to be meaningful" ; "Fear makes silence feel safer than honesty, but what we avoid grows stronger in the dark"). Ultimately, Tyler emerges from his trials with his definition of treasure reshaped—and the powerful realization that our connection to others is what fosters true strength.

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

YOUNG ADULT

A Girl's Guide to Being Me: Mastering Modern Life Skills for Success with Grit & Grace

Catie Chase
322p, trade paper, $24.99, ISBN 979-8-996-41180-1



In this empathetic roadmap to navigating adolescence, educator and student life coach Chase offers strategies to help girls approach life with grit and grace. She begins with a simple set of goalposts for teens, including developing self-awareness, taking steps to achieve goals, and processing experiences through writing. From there, Chase provides tools for reflection and personal growth that encourage teens to listen to themselves, stay connected to their truths, and change course when necessary. "A roadmap to success is personal. It's unique—like your thumbprint," she asserts, pointing out that this type of introspection can help young people stay centered as they handle "friendships, social dynamics, and the search for belonging."

Chase shows her methods in practice through real-world examples. One of the most shocking stories involves sisters from Tanzania who were born with albinism and experienced horrific discrimination, with one sister losing a leg and two fingers to attackers who intended "to use her body parts for witchcraft." Chase later worked with the girls, helping them reclaim their goals and navigate uncertainty. "Their journey is extraordinary—but the truth it reveals is universal," she writes, underscoring her point by showcasing another young woman struggling to decide between being captain of the volleyball team or editor-in-chief of the student newspaper. These disparate examples illustrate that everyone struggles with setbacks regardless of their background.

Savvy handbook for navigating adolescence with relative ease.

Great for fans of Ferne Bowe's *Everything You Need to Know Before You're 18*, Victoria Penley's *Girl Empowered!*.

Chase's uplifting, straightforward tone feels reminiscent of a wise older sister who knows how to survive and thrive. She addresses readers directly, telling them, "I believe that you're courageous and loving, and that you have the capacity to empower your wholeness, becoming the hero that you are, vibrant with vision, voice, and vitality." For teenage readers—or adults who are parenting teens or want to rediscover their own youthful dreams—this heartening guidebook offers practical advice for tackling middle and high school with relative ease.

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

Booksellers & Librarians:



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

All powered by *Publishers Weekly* reviewers.

How are you handling self-published books?

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

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

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

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